SPEAKING ABOUT LIFE EXPERIENCES:
PERSONAL NARRATIVIZING AND SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

DISSERTATION

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* * * * *

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INTRODUCTION

"In the form a particular narrator gives to a history we read the more or less abiding concerns and constraints of the individual and his or her community." (Rosenwald and Ochberg 1992b, 4)

"When people tell their life-stories, culture speaks through their mouths." (Isabelle Bertaux-Wiame 1981, 260)

From Personal Experience to Cultural Truth

Since this is a dissertation about personal experience, storytelling, and the social construction of reality, I thought I would begin by telling a personal experience narrative about a traditional story that concerns the construction of both reality and society. This traditional tale has contemporary significance to my topic, and it has become personally meaningful to me.

My sister, Virginia Crosby, called me on the phone one day. She was excited about a story she had heard over the weekend, and she wanted to pass it on to me. "You're gonna love this," she said, "it's right up your alley."

She had heard the story only once, when it was told by a Jewish rabbi at a conference she had attended, but she was so impressed by it that she wanted to share it with me, and she retold it as best she could remember it. I heard it only once, but I, also, was so enchanted by the tale that I will retell it here, as best I can remember it. I am sure this version is nothing like the first nor even much like my sister's. The story "spoke" to each of us differently. Each of us, whenever we re-speak it, will do so according to the "meanings" (rather than the words) we have heard and in a form that will correspond both to our personal reasons for retelling it and to the specific contexts of our performances. My version--at least for today--goes like this:
"The Ten Wisest Men"

Once, long ago, God gave the people of the earth a Code of Law containing holy statutes as well as social and personal rules for daily living. Whenever there was any dispute as to whether or not a person was behaving properly, the people would consult the Law, settle the dispute quickly, and the community would return to living in harmony with God and with each other.

One day, a great disaster fell upon the people, and in the destruction and confusion the only copy of the Law was destroyed. "No matter," said the people. "We have lived by these words for so long that they have become a part of our very beings. They are written on our hearts and engraved in our minds forever."

Soon, however, the people's memories appeared to delight in playing tricks on them, and this was especially noticeable whenever disputes arose. Some remembered the Law one way, some remembered it another. Small conflicts quickly escalated into large ones; animosity and confusion replaced order and accord. Finally the people cried, "We must have the Law before us to consult!" So they chose their ten wisest men to produce a new written copy of the Law.

The task was great and took longer than anyone had anticipated, but when they had finally finished, the ten wise men presented the Law to the community, and the people celebrated. All but one, that is. One man read over the codes and teachings the wise men had so proudly recreated, and he declared, "But that's not how the Law was written before."

"Of course it is," exclaimed the wise men. "Oh, we had a few disagreements, at first, about how we each remembered the different parts, but we soon worked those out. And we are all agreed now that this is exactly how the Law was before."

"But it is not," said the One. "I have the kind of memory that if I see something even once, I remember it forever exactly as I saw it the first time. These are not the same words; the Law does not say the same thing now that it did before." And he carefully pointed out where the new copy differed from the original.

The people were not impressed with the One's claims, and the wise men were offended. "We are the ten wisest men in the whole community," they said. "Who are you to challenge us?"

"But these are God's laws!" exclaimed the One. "You can not change them just because you say you are wise."
"We have not changed the Law," said the ten wise men. "Your memory is what is at fault here, not our integrity."

The One pointed to a tree in the distance. "If the Law is as I have said," challenged the One, "may lightning strike that tree over there and cause it to burst into flame."

And lightning struck the tree, and it burst into flame.

"That signifies nothing," said the ten wise men. "The Law is as we have said, as we have written it down."

The One pointed to the river running close by. "If the Law is as I have said, may the river run backwards up into the hills."

And the river ran backwards up into the hills.

"Even miracles will not persuade us," said the ten. "We are in agreement; you are wrong."

Quietly, and with confidence in the rightness of his claim, the One said, "If the Law is as I have said, may a voice come out of heaven and declare it so."

And a voice called out from heaven, "The Law is as he has said."

"Not even a voice from heaven can change our minds," said the ten wise men. "We know what we know." And they turned away from the One.

Up in heaven, the angels, who had been watching this little exchange, began to jump up and down and cry, "God, God, they are changing your Law! Why don't you do something?!"

God shrugged. "They are ten; I am but one."

Virginia was not clear about where the tale came from—other than the immediate source. She thought the rabbi had said it was from Jewish folk tradition. I haven't tried to track it down. I'm happy with the tale as I've told it, and neither folktales nor life stories should be confined to set scripts. Even stories written in stone will change sooner or later. She was right; I "love it" as a story because it is "right up my alley." The story has "meaning" for me in a number of ways, some of them very personal. It resonates with my own childhood of "imposed" stories that didn't always "fit" what I was perceived I was experiencing. It is also extraordinarily metaphoric of the relationships and interactions between individual experience and social discourse, which is the topic of the present discussion.

"The Ten Wisest Men" (which is the title I have given this tale) is a story about "truth" and about "Truth." It is about both objective and subjective versions of reality and
about how perceptions and perspectives influence and create those categories. It speaks
of relationships between individuals and collectives. It hints at how the Many—once they
have reached consensus—may behave toward those in their midst whom they perceive to
be deviant, even while it illustrates why consensus may be necessary in the first place. The
tale is not as openly expressive concerning what happens to the One whose version of
reality does not align with that of the Many. It does suggest that humans actively make at
least some of the world they live in and that they may get stuck with the consequences of
the world they make. This story is about the created nature of "reality," as is this
dissertation.

Personal Experience and Social Constructionism

It is easy to accept religious myths, folktales, legends, and parables (such as the one
presented above) as culture carriers and social message bearers. Such stories embody the
ontological and ideological concepts of "who we are." As the women of the "Personal
Narratives Group" (PNG) assert, knowing "how and why" the stories of one's culture are
"true" is part of the enculturation, socialization, and maturing process of any individual
within a culture (1989, 261). It is perhaps more difficult to conceptualize our individual
life stories, particularly our tales of everyday happenings, as equally reflective of, and as
constructive of, cultural and social frameworks. Still, it is only when we understand our
own lives in light of our cultural stories, and can then tell our own stories in terms of the
"truths" embodied in those cultural tales, that we become "full participant[s]" in our
"particular culture" (PNG 1989, 261). Our individual, everyday stories are made of, and
make up, our social and cultural realities.

Folk parables aside, the notion that "reality" is socially "constructed" is not new. In
their 1966 work, The Social Construction of Reality, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann
define reality as a "quality" of life that is perceived to be independent of individual volition;
that is, reality can not simply be thought or wished into or out of being. While both
"objective" and "subjective" forms of reality are categories based on human perception,
any social order embraces and embodies only certain versions of each. Objective reality is
believed to have an existence that is independent of human perception. Subjective reality,
on the other hand, is born of human perception and ratified through social consensus.
Once particular versions of objective and subjective existence are combined into a
coherent, workable composite, this composite begins to establish itself as the primary
determinant of what counts as "real." According to Berger and Luckmann, this dominant
version of "reality" (established and maintained through social interaction) manifests the communally-accepted norms for knowledge and behavior into which any individual is inducted and which must be internalized by the individual in order for her or him to become a full and proper "member" of the society. In Berger and Luckmann's terms, society is best understood as an "ongoing dialectical process" between the individual and the collective for the purpose of maintaining (i.e., continuously re-creating) a particular version of reality (129). "Society," however, holds the upper hand.

Most of us spend much of our lives in ordinary, "everyday" reality (as opposed to, for example, philosophical, scientific, theological, or phenomenological approaches to perceiving life). We simply take everyday reality for granted as reality. We accept its existence and its facticity as self-evident and as commonsensical. We assume we know what "everybody knows" and that everyone else knows what we do. We rarely question, seriously, what counts as "real" and what does not, and we almost never ask who decides what "counts," or who decides who gets to decide what counts. This for-all-practical-purposes, taken-for-granted version of daily living is "reality par excellence" according to Berger and Luckmann (1966, 21), and we maintain it, they assert, primarily through the "reality-generating potency" of everyday "conversation" (1966, 153).

Because their emphasis is primarily on the collective aspects of society and on its maintenance, Berger and Luckmann do not discuss the various aspects of everyday conversation in any depth, but had they attempted to locate the most effective and influential reality-making element within ordinary conversation, they might well have chosen personal narrative. "Lived experience," according to Edward Bruner in his introduction to The Anthropology of Experience, is our "primary reality" (1986a, 5). "Narrative," according to Donald Polkinghorne, is "the primary from by which human experience is made meaningful" (1988, 1). Organizing experience into narrative-based forms allows us to "make meaning" of our lives. Yet even as we create and perform those expressive compositions (whether only for ourselves or with others), we "re-experience, re-live, re-create, re-tell, re-construct, and re-fashion our culture" as a whole (Bruner 1986a, 11).

It is not surprising, therefore, that "narrative" has become a focus of investigation in many and diverse disciplines. Sociologists talk of social roles and cultural politics and want to know how the biographies of prominent and exemplary people provide scripts for our lives. Those in minority and women's studies promote "real-life" narratives as a way of empowering the disenfranchised. Psychologists relate cognitive and developmental
theories to narrative structure, and they use their clients' own stories as therapies to help them. Historians validate the use of oral histories and private diaries to re-story the past. Philosophers look to narrative as a source of Truth and as the basis for structural paradigms in all disciplines. Anthropologists familiarize us with "exotic others" by letting representatives of such groups speak to us through individual and personal voices. And folklorists study personal narratives as traditional, artistic, and expressive elements of culture and society.

What has been largely missing from this eclectic interest in narrative has been discussion of the crossover between public discourse and private narrative, despite the fact that we all agree that no one creates a narrative in a vacuum. I would contend that because of its fundamentally dual nature as both intensely personal and inherently social, personal narrative is an essential mechanism in the ongoing dialectical interchange between "society" and "the individual" that is necessary for the continuous re-creation of social reality. This, of course, raises the question of what constitutes a "personal" narrative.

**Personal Experience, Narrative Forms, and Social Constructionism**

Except for the "frame" telling how I became acquainted with "The Ten Wisest Men" and what it means to me, most folklorists would be reluctant to label the account I offered earlier a "personal narrative." It would certainly not fit Sandra Stahl's 1977 definition of personal narrative as "a prose narrative relating a personal experience," which is "usually told in first person," and which contains mostly nontraditional content presented through traditional forms and themes (20). Still, the categorical distinctions reflected in Stahl's definition--personal versus communal, traditional versus non-traditional, innovative versus imitative--have been widely accepted as standard dichotomies by many scholars in the humanities and social sciences. However, such conceptual separations of life into spheres and processes that are public and private, past and present, individual and corporate ignore, and even mask, the interconnections and interactions between the One and the Many of any society. Categorical dichotomies artificially compartmentalize experience. Narratives, on the other hand, plot the "versus" elements into constructs that speak of relationships, of interactions, and of the on-going nature of socio-cultural reality. We all arrive in the middle of life's story and leave before it is finished, according to Walter Fisher (1984, 7; and he cites many others who hold the same notion). A "good" personal narrative situates the individual "in the stories of those who have lived, who live now, and who will live in the future" (Fisher 1984, 6).
Even Linda Dégh would not likely categorize my account as a "personal" narrative despite the fact that she argued extensively in 1985 against Stahl's emphasis on "personal" and "prose." After all, except for the frame on the above tale, I did not "claim authorship," play a role as a "participant," claim to be the "central hero entering the limelight for the moment," (105) or even claim to be reporting on someone else's "eyewitness" account (107) of something that actually happened, or at least, "could have happened to anyone" (105); factors which Dégh does consider important for a narrative to qualify as "personal." Yet we all know that people sometimes "divorce" themselves from their own stories for the explicit purpose of telling them without claiming either authorship or central character status. "Doctor, I have this friend who . . ." is so familiar a ploy that it now serves as the comic euphemism for such efforts.

Dégh does, however, recognize the genre overlaps between prose, poetry, traditional tales, and "people's own reflections on experienced reality" (101), and Richard Bauman is more likely to have sympathy with the claiming of a traditional parable as a personal "life" story. His 1987 reflections on the Texas storyteller, Ed Bell, led Bauman to conclude that Bell used a variety of genres "as expressive transformations for the same life" (198). Bell employed practical jokes, Märchen-like renditions of personal experiences, and first-person tellings of tall tales as well as traditionally-recognizable personal experience narratives in his expressions of self, choosing and adjusting his genre to fit his audience, performance, context, and mood. Still, Bauman recognized and categorized these various forms as personal expression largely because they were all told in the "first person."

Not all "lives" are "narratable" in the "first" person, as Mark Workman pointed out recently. Not all people possess "identities which may be represented, however artful such displays may be" because any representation of the self is essentially a "function of community" as well as of the individual (Workman 1992, 99,102). Both thematic restraints on what is "storyable" and performance constraints on what is "tellable" limit the application of first-person narrative in personal meaning-making processes and in social negotiations of self identity and interests (Shuman 1986). Legalities of social transaction and good manners of social interaction "stigmatize" some roles and channel the voices of those who play them into other forms, or into silence. Yet some stories (and perhaps all stories) must be told, and "lives" may themselves become "lived stories" when there is no opportunity to "recount" experiences in other ways. In situations involving severe trauma, such as among survivors of the Holocaust, Henry Greenspan contends that the survivors
live out their stories in texts of psychiatric symptoms; their very lives become "a mode of recounting even further from the 'public domain' than the privatization of memory because of survivors' conscious decisions (in response to outward sanctions) to constrict or suppress their retelling" of their experiences in other ways (1992, 163).

What is important about personal narratives, therefore, cannot be first-person verbal performance, nor explicit central casting, nor prose structure, nor social acceptability. What is important about a personal narrative is that it is "about" the self, and that it expresses the self in some "necessary" way. A "good" story, according to Fisher, is both internally coherent and "rings true" with the other stories in our lives (1984, 8). A good story situates the individual in the socio-cultural dialectic.

"With out the other there is no self," writes Stephen Tyler (1978, 141). "Shared stories provide significant ways of understanding the world," write the women of the Personal Narratives Group (1989, 261). Barbara Myerhoff suggests that story creating and story telling provide us with opportunities to "re-member" ourselves. Through creating personal stories we "remember" our own lives; through sharing our stories, we reestablish our "membership" with our heritage and with our present community (1984). In this process of "re-membering," writes Myerhoff, we search for and create "enduring patterns, sense, and coherence" (1984, 321), and our storytelling becomes "myth" and "ritual" for both personal and communal continuity.

Stories of personal experience do more, however, than simply allow individuals to recount experiences, to express self identities, or to situate themselves socially. Such accounts are culturally formed and socially enacted, and these contextual parameters are far from benign. George Rosenwald and Richard Ochberg suggest that it is time to move beyond the assumption that "the explanations individuals offer of their lives are inevitably shaped by the prevailing norms of discourse within which they operate" (1992b, 4-5). "Social influence," they contend, "shapes not only public action but also private self-understanding," and in the process, such shaping becomes a potentially "ominous" form of "social control" (1992b, 5).

On the other hand, much of the "social influence" Rosenwald and Ochberg refer to is actually built on personal narratives conscripted into the service of particular segments of society to serve their own agendas. Those who wish to change the status quo engage in "claims-making" activities, insisting that some area of social life is a "problem" in need of public "fixing." Claims-making is nearly always supported by--and sometimes even
premised on--personal experience narratives, some of which then serve the claims-makers as "typifying" examples (Best, 1990) of the "problem." Once established as an area of social concern, others may begin to "speak out" about the issue. Individuals lend personal experience "testimony" to support the existence of, and to define the scope of, the perceived problem. For those involved in the problem, sharing their accounts of personal experience becomes a source of "liberation" (Kalcik 1975). Voiced publicly, these accounts become a "consciousness raising tool" (Anguiera 1988) to invite others to join in finding a solution.

In the "dynamic chorus" of competing styles and voices addressing any issue, some voices will claim "authority" over the "story" and "attempt to fix meanings and stabilize order" (Bruner and Gorfain 1984, 56-57). "Challenging voices" are forced into subordinant and less effectual channels of influence--or even silenced (Bruner and Gorfain 1984, 59), at least until the next successful claims-making cycle. In this process of "dialogic narration" (Bruner and Gorfain 1984, 56), a particular version of reality will begin to assert authority. Language, themes, motifs, definitions, and meanings will coalesce into an abstract, symbolic "set of relationships" forming a "dominant story" (Bruner 1986b, 153). Only after the new paradigm becomes dominant, according to Bruner, "is there a reexamination of the past, a rediscovery of old texts, and a recreation of the new heroes of liberation and resistance. The new story articulates what had been only dimly perceived, authenticates previous feelings, legitimizes new actions, and aligns individual consciousness with a larger social movement. What had previously been personal becomes historical; a `model of' is transformed into a `model for'" (Bruner 1986a, 143--citing Geertz 1973). I would argue, however, that personal narratives are an integral part of the creation process of the dominant story as well as reflections and embodiments of it once it has become established. Geertz himself contends that "cultural patterns have an intrinsic double aspect; they give meaning, that is, objective conceptual form, to social and psychological reality both by shaping themselves to it and by shaping it to themselves" (Geertz 1973, 93). The symbolic representations of cultural patterns (models of) become reified in a circular process as the "reality" built from the "model of" blueprint becomes the evidential basis (the model for) used in creating the blueprint. On the other hand, I fully agree with Bruner's statement, "Narratives are not only structures of meaning but structures of power as well" (1986b, 144).

The stories that individuals tell about their own experiences, then, involve more than simply transferring the "lived through" aspects of life into words arranged in a particular
generic fashion. Narrativizing is a transformative process. In order to construct a personal narrative, an individual must recognize and understand how and why any experience fits (or does not fit) into the various frames of social and cultural reality currently in force. We do this "naturally" (Fisher 1984, Polkinghorne 1988, Sarbin 1986a). To tell such a story, the individual must also know how the tale fits (or does not) into the interactive norms of social behavior. This we learn during enculturation and through practice (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Personal Narratives Group 1989). When the story does not fit, there may be ways to disguise or adapt it so that it may still be told, or, alternatively, the story may be used as the basis for changing what counts as "fit." However, whether "successfully" told (confirmed and affirmed as socially and culturally valid) or rejected as "unfit," narratives encapsulate culture. As units of organized, illustrative, and demonstrated reality, narratives participate in the daily re-creation of social structure and cultural consciousness.

Social Construction and Childhood Sexual Abuse

As a focus for discussing the interdependent and reciprocal connections among personal experience, personal narrativizing practices, and social discourse, this dissertation will consider the experience of childhood sexual abuse, that is, child sexual abuse from the "remembered" perspective of adults who are now recounting their childhood experiences. Two primary sources of information will be examined: first, a sampling of the public discourse that currently surrounds this issue; second, the personal accounts of fifteen women who participated in tape-recorded interviews for the purpose of speaking about their childhood experiences with sexual abuse.

Due to the nature of the topic, I feel it is important, at the very start, to establish both my approach to and my perspective on this discussion of childhood sexual abuse. Sexual abuse is both a topical social issue and a personal experience. As an experience, child sexual abuse can be a horrific and traumatizing episode in an individual's life. It can leave physical, emotional, and psychological scars. It doesn't always, but the potential is always there, and at no time during the following discussion am I attempting to suggest otherwise. Persons who maintain that they have been sexually abused should be taken seriously; their claims should never be ignored, their feelings never trivialized.

At the same time, "sexual abuse" is a definition as well as a perception. Individuals will "experience" sexual abuse individually. Social discourse, however, promotes certain constructions of the experience and not others. I do not agree with victim advocates who
claim that any examination or critique of survivors' stories amounts to "blaming the victims" and is a re-victimization of them. All life stories are "makings." I am attempting to find out what stories relating to this particular experience are currently being made out of. What resources are available in late twentieth-century America for constructing a personal account of such an experience? Why these and not others? Which elements are being chosen, and why? How is public discourse facilitating and/or limiting the process of personal recounting? How are personal experiences appearing in and/or being used to construct public discourse?

Child sexual abuse (both as a contemporary practice and as a past experience) has become the basis of a variety of public claims-making activities and social-cause activism. Authors, scholars, scientists, psychologists, feminists, public lecturers, clergy members, lawyers, talk-show hosts, news commentators, and many other have all addressed and/or exploited the topic in a variety of ways. Print versions of the experience have appeared in self-help manuals, scientific journals, feminist pamphlets, and religious tracts, to name only a few. Often this rhetoric takes place in an atmosphere of high drama and extreme emotions. Anger, pathos, grief, pain, outrage, blame, shame, horrific details, and sometimes outrageously implausible claims fill the media narratives of victims and survivors. A wide variety of responses greet the stories: denial, doubt, accusation, pity, counter-blame, sympathy, compassion, skepticism, voyeurism, ridicule.

It is within this cacophony of voices (both those which are conscientious, well-intentioned, and attempting to provide legitimate "information" and those which are exploiting and sensationalizing the topic) that individual victims and survivors must create their own accounts of their personal experiences. The social discourse provides language, meanings, and models as well as direction and limits on how personal meaning-making may be done and how it "should" be done. Any experience that is "spoken" about in any way is "constructed." Accounts of sexual abuse experiences are no different. An individual may adopt elements from the social discourse, adapt the rhetoric to personal needs, or reject some or all of the public offerings in the process of creating a personally meaningful account of his or her own experience. Whether or not any individual's account is "true" in an objective and externally verifiable sense is not the primary issue of the present discussion. The intent of this dissertation is to investigate how individuals narrativize their experiences in their attempts to "make meaning" out of them.

The emergent nature of sexual abuse as a topic for personal narrativizing also provides a unique opportunity for examining the relationship between personal recounting
and social discourse. The subject of childhood sexual abuse has only recently become speakable in as a "personal" experience outside the confines of the religious confessional or the therapist's office. In the absence of traditional models for speaking openly about such experiences, the processes and products of personal narrativizing, as well as some of the social and cultural influences on such efforts, are exposed or highlighted. At the same time, the stories that are "voiced" quickly become the models for the next attempt. Such stories then participate in the construction of "dominant" versions of the experience, which, in turn, contribute to the overall construction of social "reality." Both the public and the more privately-spoken versions of this experience are reflective of, and constitutive of, social values, attitudes, and norms. Meaning is an "activity," declares Polkinghorne (1988, 4). Meaning is always culturally and socially created. Meaning is always culturally and socially creative. How then do "ordinary" individuals make meaning of, and speak about, involvement with this experience?

The perspective from which I approach this issue and material cannot help but affect what I perceive. I am writing as a member of both "mainstream" American culture and, more specifically, as a middle-aged, middle-class, Anglo-American female. I make no claim to represent or to speak for any segment of American society. I can only suggest what I think I see "going on" in American society. In the process, I, too, will engage in the activity of making meaning.

Organization

Chapter I will examine in more depth the constituent role of personal narrativizing in the construction of social categories, attitudes, and community. This chapter will also outline some folkloric approaches to the forms and uses of personal narrativizing. I will consider, as well, some of the ways that adult attempts to recount experiences of childhood sexual abuse complicate the accepted notions of "personal narrative" forms and processes.

Chapter II will provide an historical background into the development of "child sexual abuse" as a social category. This chapter will also consider some of the institutional and social voices that are vying for control of the sexual abuse "story."

Chapters III and IV will examine some of the public versions of the childhood sexual abuse experience that are currently available to individuals who are attempting to make meaning of their own similar (or not-so-similar) experiences. These two chapters will focus primarily, but not exclusively, on first-person versions of the experience as they
appear in a variety of public settings, including TV talk-shows, news documentaries, movies, and self-help "recovery" manuals. What explicit meanings do these treatments suggest? What implicit ones? What models do they provide in terms of language, images, emphasis, meaning?

With the apparent wealth of available models and encouragement to "speak out," it would seem that individual survivors of childhood sexual abuse would have little difficulty transforming their remembered abuse into contemporary narratives. Indeed, some individuals find the public rhetoric highly applicable, and they merely have to adopt the language, metaphors, and meanings of the social discourse to their own situations. Others, however, find the fit less comfortable. Chapters V and VI will examine the transcripts from fifteen, one-on-one, tape-recorded interviews conducted with women between the ages of twenty and sixty and will discuss how these women have adopted, adapted, or rejected various elements of the public versions of the childhood sexual abuse experience.

This particular population began as a convenience, became a trend, and ended as an arbitrary category. I make no claim that these people are in any way especially "representative" of Americans who have been sexually abused as children. They were, however, willing to talk to me about a subject that, despite the almost daily public appearance of some "survivor," is still not spoken about as freely as such performances would suggest. Their accounts reflect, and reflect on, much of the social discourse surrounding sexual abuse. Their accounts also provide some unexpected insights into limitations on this new freedom to "speak out" on the subject.

Not all tales can be told, not all experiences spoken about. Society places limits on what may and may not be done, and does so for a variety of practical reasons. Issues of entitlement and authority will also be considered in Chapter VI and revisited in the Conclusion.

Some Matters of Terminology

Sandra Stahl, who documented the connection between personal narrative and tradition, and who has continued to write extensively about personal narrative, has also contributed to much of the confusion surrounding exactly what constitutes "personal narrative" and what possible functions are performed by any of the variously-named representatives of that species. Her original (1977) discussion of the genre defined personal narrative both as an individual, somewhat idiosyncratic, traditional-based,
"folkloric performance" and as a specific form of folkloric text: a first-person narrative-based account, developed from "unexamined traditional resources," exhibiting a traditional plot and theme, and conveying traditional values and attitudes (13). Although she uses the term "experience" frequently throughout the article, and speaks as well of the "true experience story" (22) and of "narratives of personal experience" (20), it is clear that Stahl conceptualized "personal narrative" as only those tales that constituted repeated and repeatable, stable "repertoire" items "easily available for use by a teller in any number of communicative situations" (1977, 24).

Her emphases on "real" storytellers, on "performance-piece" formats, and on genre markers such as self-orientation, well-organized structures, and polished and entertaining performances have further muddied the issue. First-person accounts that are "other-oriented," dialogic, or belief-centered, she feels, are better classified in other terms (Stahl 1983, 270-275).

While Stahl has remained fairly faithful to this narrow interpretation of personal narrative (if not to her own terminology), others have seized on the "experience" and "identity" aspects of her definition to expand the range of personal narrative study. This has resulted in a variety of approaches and terms representing often-overlapping concepts such as "personal narrative," "personal experience narrative," "life story," "life history," and "personal experience story," to name only a few. I will employ the following terminology for the duration of the paper. This may necessitate translating someone else's terminology into mine to avoid using terms interchangeably.

**Account**. Since much of the "talking about" childhood sexual abuse that occurs in the interviews (and indeed in life in general about any given subject) does not appear in formal "narrative" structure, I shall refer to the general material of any interview, or from any media source, as an "account" of the experience. Within this account there may or may not be identifiable "narratives." Variations of the terms "account," "talk about," "recount," and "report" will be used interchangeably.

**Narrative**. "Narrative" will be used to refer to an identifiable (frame-able) portion of an account of experience in which someone tells someone that something happened in a way that implies a cause-and-effect relationship among the elements of the reported experience, and which states or implies a "point" or "evaluation" of the experience. (This definition is a composite of Barbara Herrnstein-Smith's 1980 definition of narrative, Richard Bauman's 1986 work on the structuring of events, and Victor
Turner's 1986 writings on experience. Labov's 1972 linear structure may or may not be present in such examples.)

**Personal narrative.** I will use this term to designate a concept similar to Oring's definition of "personal document": "expressions that can throw light on the individual and his world" (1987, 241). I will, however, consider as "personal narrative" only those expressions that are narrative-based and expressed (generally) through the first-person. These would include autobiographies, diaries, letters, dream reports and life histories, according to Oring. Bauman (1987) extends this concept by including as "self-narratives" any narrative told by an individual that involves "first-person framing" as well as first-person performances (such as pranks). All such forms reveal and involve the individual's "sense of self" (identity) in terms of his or her personal worldview and as a participant in social reality. However, I do not consider this "identity" to be in any way fixed. Personal narratives tend to be repeated over a period of time (perhaps even most of the lifetime), but they are not necessarily "stable" in Stahl's "fixed repertoire" sense of the term. "Personal narrative", "self-narrative", and "personal document" will be used interchangeably as will "self" and "identity".

**Personal experience narrative.** I will adopt the most widely held definition: autobiographical, told-as-true, structured accounts (i.e., "narratives") about specific, identifiable, single-episode, real incidents in one's own life experience. Personal experience narratives may become "personal narratives" or may disappear quickly, after being told once or a few times. They are more focused on recounting the experience than on representing the self, although all narratives unavoidably represent the teller's self.

**Idionarrating.** I will follow Marjorie Bard's (1992) use of this term to designate intrapersonal narrativizing. Self as teller, self as audience.

**Tale.** An all-purpose "pronoun" for variety's sake. As with other pronouns, usage will be determined by referent.

**Story.** "Story" will be used to designate any cognitive, symbolic, "socially constructed units of meaning" (Bruner 1986a, 7). Stories represent a type of metaphorical shorthand for paradigms of knowledge and understanding. Livia Polanyi's abstracted, composite representation of middle-class characteristics and aspirations as "the American story" (1989) is a good representation of this concept, as is the
common phrase "that's the story of my life" when used to refer to the seemingly inevitable patterns of one's experiences. Narratives are stories, but stories are not limited to the verbal and structural constraints of narratives.

**Personal Story / Life Story.** While a "life story" may, and probably will, contain individual "personal narratives" and "personal experience narratives," the "life story" is an attempt to make sense of the "whole" (or some major portion) of life rather than of the parts (individual experience narratives). Because "stories" are symbolic constructs, life stories are not necessarily in narrative, or even verbal, form. This usage would accommodate Oring's (1987) argument that paintings and other self-referential but non-verbal items should be considered personal documents. A "life story" is a "self-contained fiction" as Jeff Titon suggests, "not a lie but a `making'" (1980, 278; 280).

**Experience / An Experience.** "Experience" is that which is received by consciousness. "Experience" is unframed, continuous, undefined. "An experience" is experience that has received conscious attention, and has undergone framing (it has a defined beginning and ending), interpretation, and expression (to self and/or others).

**Event.** Following Bauman (1986) and others, I will use "event" to refer to a framed-off segment of the ongoing flow of "experience" as represented by and created in the act of narrativizing. An event has a beginning, middle, and end, and an implied or specified cause-and-effect relationship among the identified elements of experience. "Event," "happening," and "occurrence" will be used interchangeably.

**Narrativize / Narrativizing.** "Narrative" has traditionally been used to designate an organized scheme of words that recount an incident--a happening: something that did, or might have, or could yet, happen. However, narrative involves more than simply the story, tale, history, or fantasy product; "narrative" is also a process. Indeed, narrative is a series of ongoing processes comprising making, performing, response, and re-assessment. The verbal forms "narrativize" and "narrativizing" better represent this holistic and interactive concept of process and product, and I will use these terms in this way.
CHAPTER I
PERSONAL NARRATIVIZING AND SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

"Personal experience stories are our folklore of social relations."
(Joann Berlin Bromberg 1982, 3)

Creating Consensus

Donald Polkinghorne's assertion that "narrative is the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful" (1988, 1) reflects a now widely accepted cultural paradigm. In recent years, personal narratives have provided data for investigations into mechanisms of social control and cultural politics (Personal Narratives Group, 1989; Rosenwald and Ochberg 1992), issues of social identity formation and maintenance (Sarbin and Scheibe 1983), concepts of literacy (Fishman 1988; Shuman 1986), relationships between history and memory (Rosenthal 1991;), "national character" stereotypes (Polanyi 1989), community formation (Erikson 1976; Fine 1987; Kalck 1975), psychological and sociological studies on clinical practices (Sarbin 1986a), and human development and aging (Cohler 1982; Mullen, 1992). The texts cited above are only a few of the many works that have explored the relationship between personal narrative and human life. There has even been an attempt to bring these eclectic approaches together in a new journal under the general heading of The Narrative Study of Lives (Josselson and Lieblich, 1993).

Narrativizing seems to be a fundamental human strategy for living. Indeed, Walter Fisher (1984) has suggested "homo narrans" as the proper designation for the current manifestation of our species. Because it involves symbolic categories and metaphoric representation, cognitive activity and social behavior, cultural frameworks and personal perception, any personal narrativizing activity is a gestalt of one's self and one's culture. Transforming the ongoing activities of our daily lives into narrative patterns allows us to "make meaning" of our lives, to create a sense of coherency out of the randomness of experience. Telling such stories allows us to explain and justify--both to others and to
ourselves—the actions we have performed and the meanings we have assigned to our experiences.

No one narrativizes in isolation; the meanings we may make of our lives are dependent upon the resources we have available for doing so. We construct ourselves within, and as participants of, a specific socio-cultural context. Our narratives become the embodiment of this cultural construction, and, at the same time, actively (re)create the cultural framework itself.

This simultaneous co-creation of self and socio-cultural framework becomes most apparent in the formative stages of meaning-making, as experience is transformed into (and by) narrativizing activities. The following hypothetical scenario, which I have developed over the past several years for introducing students to some of the complexity of personal narratives, will illustrate this process. At the same time, the scenario will provide a convenient vehicle for a discussion of some of the scholarship pertaining to personal narrative.

The Paper Clip Scenario

Imagine for a moment that you are a corporate executive in a large, prestigious business firm. The sun is shining outside your window; it's a beautiful day. At five o'clock, you pack your briefcase as usual and start toward the door to go home. On your way to the door, you notice a paper clip lying on your plush office carpet. You stop, bend down, and pick up the paper clip. You place the paper clip in your pocket, finish crossing the room, go out the door, and go home.

You have "experienced" (in the loosest sense of that term) a sequence of activities. You could translate that experience into verbal form—just as I have here. You could make a "story" out of it, so to speak.

Now, don't get overly creative at this point. Stick to the sequence I've given you. Are you likely to make a story out of this experience?

Students say "no, of course not." When challenged to explain their response, they begin to suggest why they don't think this sequence of activities is "worth" making into a story. It's too "ordinary"; it doesn't "mean" anything; there's no "point" to it. What they define is a lack of "storyability" in the sequence of activities I have described. I then ask them to return to their imaginary corporate-executive selves.
Now let's say that on the same evening you find the paper clip, you go to a large social gathering. Some of your friends are there, as are some of your corporate colleagues, superiors, clients, and a few strangers. Social gatherings are a good time to "impress" people. Are you going to tell them about finding the paper clip?

Students are usually laughing by this point, and they are quick to point out that most people wouldn't construct a story about such experience in the first place, much less try to tell it to anyone else. After all, we have names for people who tell such "point-less" stories--most of them are not flattering. Whatever significance paper clips might have for the teller (and we are assuming he/she is not an executive in a paper clip company), finding a random paper clip on an office floor does not have widespread importance in twentieth-century America. Under normal circumstances, this sequence of activities I have described is not worthy of notice either by individuals or by the collective of individuals we call society. Stray paper clips are neither socially nor culturally significant, and talking about finding one serves no symbolic, emotional, attitudinal, instructional, entertaining, subversive, playful, explanatory, validating, or revealing purpose.

The experience described above is not readily "storyable" in terms of narrative structure. There has only been "mere experience," that is, a "passive endurance and acceptance" of the flow of life, rather than "an experience," that is, activity that "stands out from the evenness" of the ongoing flow (Turner 1986, 35). While it is possible to create a temporally-ordered verbal sequence to match the sequence of the experience as I have done above (thus fulfilling one of the primary attributes of minimal narrative structure), the sequence fails to meet any of Labov and Waletzky's (1967) other basic (if much contested) criteria for narrative. There is no "complication," no disruption of the flow of ongoing experience that would cause one to take notice (Labov 1972, 359-60). Such action as I have described above could (and probably would) be done "mindlessly." Without complication, there is no need for resolution, much less any evaluation of the situation. Indeed, there is likely no "situation", no "point" even of personal interest (Labov and Waletzky 1967, 32-42).

Under normal circumstances, the above sequence is not storyable in social terms either. According to Polanyi, a story must have some "point" consisting of some "culturally salient material generally agreed upon by members of the producer's culture to be self-evidently important and true" (1979, 207). On the other hand, since "what is interesting is culturally, socially, and personally determined" (Polanyi 1979, 211), the case
could be made that within the proper "performance context" the activities of the scenario 
would have a "point" of personal interest, one which would also be understood by the 
audience. A possible scenario for narrating this experience might involve dinner with a 
spouse or intimate friend. In such a context the implied "meaning" of the account would 
be supplied by the listener on the basis of an already established context of related and 
communally-understood meaning: "Guess what happened to me at work today?! I found 
a paper clip on the floor on the way out the door just as I was leaving to come home!"
Possible responses: "Bad day, I take it?" or "Things were really that slow today, huh?"
Either response would indicate awareness by the listener that finding the paper clip was in 
some way the "high point" of teller's day. In this scenario the recounted experience 
becomes a segment of an on-going story. Stories don't necessarily have to be about 
unusual or unexpected happenings, especially among intimates (Robinson 1981, 60-63). 
But stories based only on personal interests will have a very narrow audience appeal 
(Polanyi 1979, 211).

After some discussion about why they wouldn't construct or tell a narrative about 
finding the paper clip, I ask student to return to the original scenario, but this time suggest 
that I will make one "slight" change.

Imagine for a moment that you are a corporate executive with a large, prestigious 
business firm. The sun is shining outside your window, it's a beautiful day. At five 
o'clock, you pack your briefcase as usual and start toward the door to go home. On your 
way to the door, you notice a paper clip lying on your plush office carpet. You stop, bend 
down, pick up the paper clip, stand up, and put the paper clip into your pocket. As you 
take the next step toward your office door, a bomb goes off in the hallway just down the 
corridor from your office. You are uninjured, and when the smoke clears, you go home 
and then to your party later that evening. Are you likely to make a story out of this 
sequence?

"You bet!" they declare, and students are quick to list the reasons. Not only is this 
experience highly "storyable" by most people's criteria, it is also extremely "tellable."\(^1\) 
At least in America, bombs do not go off in hallways often enough to be regarded as

\(^1\) Issues of storyability and tellability have been addressed in a variety of ways by Bennett 
1987; Georges 1987; Hufford 1982a; Polanyi 1979, 1981; Robinson 1981; Shuman 1986; 
unworthy of note; consider the amount of media coverage after the New York World Trade Tower explosions in 1993.

Most people at the party will be eager to hear about your experience. Indeed, they will hang on your every word. Which will be a good thing for you because you will probably be dealing with a great deal of psychological trauma; talking about your experience will allow you to "replay" the experience until you are able to organize it into meaningful terms (Goffman 1974, 503-504).

Still, the experience as presented above is not yet a "complete narrative." While the sequence has an orientation, complication, and resolution (if you consider being alive to talk about it a kind of immediate resolution), the account still has no "meaning," no "evaluation" in culturally salient terms. You will need to find the meaning, and if you can't determine one on your own, others will be eager to help you do so by suggesting or imposing their meanings on your experience. Unless you attach your own meaning, talking about your experience is an "invitation to cooperative problem solving" (Robinson 1981, 69), and proposals and counterproposals will be offered until either a consensus or an acceptable range of possible meanings is reached (Robinson 1981, 69-73; Polanyi 1979, 214-227).

The first "meaning" is implied: bombs going off in hallways are significant enough to warrant talking about. (When I first started using this scenario, bombs didn't go off in hallways in this country at all--or at least hadn't for a long time.) Another meaning which may be stated or simply implied is that there is more than a coincidental or a temporal "connection" between picking up the paper clip and your being unhurt. With this implied connection, evidenced by the paper clip's very inclusion in the telling, the paper clip changes status from insignificant office equipment to element of fate. But you must still decide how the bomb and the paper clip "fit" together, and none of the meanings which might be chosen are culturally neutral. Indeed, the "meaning" which is assigned to this (or any) story will reflect the social organization and cultural worldview of the teller(s) and/or the listener(s).

One meaning that might be assigned to this event is "God was certainly watching out for me (you)"--the pronoun depends on whether you are the teller or listener. Such a meaning suggests an ordered universe under the control of a deity that can and will interfere in the daily lives of humans.
This is significantly different from "Wow, this sure was your lucky day!" Even though these two meanings sound similar, the second changes the "order" of the universe to "chance"; not totally random, but the odds are you were in the right place at the right time--this time. "Luck" and a watchful and/or deterministic "God" are potentially incompatible worldviews; they are certainly not identical.

Consider several other meanings that might be offered by listeners:

"Tom (or Jane) always was a `detail' person; I guess it really paid off this time. Maybe I should start paying more attention." Premise: People are in control of their lives, at least to some extent, if they learn the important skills necessary to survive.

"You know, anyone else in his position would have just left the paper clip for the cleaning crew. But Tom is just that kind of guy: so thoughtful." The implication here is that Tom "deserves" to live because he is "worthy" of life. This meaning does not work, however, for Jane. Women are not generally considered "thoughtful" for simply picking up after themselves. The meanings assigned to experiences are often gender-biased.

Two meanings that are neither likely to be suggested, nor likely to be found acceptable if the teller tries to offer them, are: "Oh, it was no big deal" or "It didn't mean anything; it was just a coincidence." Bombs exploding in hallways in office buildings do mean something (at least in present-day America); bombs are instruments of destruction and death. The survivors--especially those who were in close proximity to the explosion--must explain how they came to survive, especially if others didn't. And the teller must explain not only to others, but also to him or her self.

It is easy to see how the meaning chosen for the event reflects cultural values and attitudes as well as social roles and expectations. What may be less obvious is how the process of arriving at that meaning contributes to a social construction of reality (determining what "counts" as real and right) and to community formation, maintenance, and/or control (determining who gets to decide what "counts" and who decides). Polanyi writes, "Americans tend to model their listeners after themselves: `If I'm interested in this, my listeners will be'" (1979, 211). She goes on to suggest that this "self-interest" test will probably be adequate for matching story to social telling situation so long as the teller remains within shared-culture, socially-familiar settings. What she is suggesting is that if teller and listeners share a model of what the world is like, and should be like, the telling will be "successful"; the "meaning" will be affirmed because it confirms the accepted cultural and social concepts. Or, as Sandra Stahl put it: "To be a complete and
'successful' performance, a personal narrative must make some statement about the topic in terms of traditional attitude" (1977, 24, my emphasis).

Even in such a situation of mutual agreement, however, this successful performance does more than simply "illustrate" already-established values, attitudes, and behavioral patterns and expectations. Even if the meaning is so culturally salient as to be chosen and applied to the experience in a perfunctory manner, the culture is "re-made" and "re-emergent" in the affirmation. This is not stasis; new input has been received; the world of the teller and listeners is slightly changed, even if it only seems "more right" than it was before.

The notion that personal narrative performance situations are interactively creative of continuously emerging contexts is even more pertinent in situations where there is not a consensus of cultural or social interests. Discussing one's personal experience (in narrative form or not) in a unknown context is risky, however. In speaking of material that has interest only to the teller, or adopting a meaning for one's experience that does not align with the views of others, "a narrator is taking a serious risk of being misunderstood, disliked, or socially ostracized" (Polanyi 1979, 212).

Consider the paper clip scenario once more. If Tom or Jane arrives at the party with a meaning already chosen for the experience, this will likely be incorporated into the initial telling or tellings of this personal experience narrative. However, if Jane or Tom voices a meaning that listeners find counter to their own understandings of how the world works (or should work), they may begin suggesting that the "real" meaning of the story is something else. For example, if Jane says that the reason she survived was just "blind luck" but everyone else in the room says that her survival is a definitive sign of a divine force working in her life (sparing her for a purpose which she must now seek out and fulfill), Jane has several options open to her. First, she may become convinced that the others are right, and she can adopt the proffered meaning, the implied worldview, and the social behaviors it generates. She is likely to be embraced by the group as one of them now that they feel they have a convert, now that she has demonstrated and affirmed her alignment with their worldview.

Second, Jane can maintain her own interpretation of the experience, remain silent, and let the others think she adopts their meaning. Jane, however, will know that she does not, and she will need to maintain this deception if she wishes to remain in good standing with the group, especially if they are significantly opposed to her own interpretation, even
more so if they are significantly important to her life. On the other hand, if they have little control over her life in other ways, Jane might remain silent simply out of courtesy for them while maintaining her own interpretation of her experience.

Third, Jane might chose neither to change her view nor to remain silent. If her society tolerates multiple interpretations of life's happenings, there will likely be little problem. If she tries to impose her meaning onto others who are reluctant to share it, she risks alienating them. Moreover, if she is the only person with a particular worldview in a room full of others who share a consensus, she risks eventual condemnation and exclusion from this "community" of shared attitudes and agendas.

Both what is storyable and what is tellable are "culturally constrained," as Polanyi puts it (1979, 207). One's personal experience may be of little interest to others, and a narrator "dare not misjudge what is worth telling a story about too often, lest he [or she] be punished by being considered boring, overly talkative, or generally socially inept" (Polanyi 1979, 211). In addition, many topics do not lend themselves to comfortable listening. "Some topics," writes Polanyi, "are too personal or too serious for any 'story' in any ordinary social situation. . . . Still other topics may well be narratable but not to particular persons or at particular occasions because someone might be hurt of upset" (Polanyi 1981, 98).

A rules approach to social interaction postulates that a properly enculturated individual possess "communicative competence" and will know, or at least have a fairly good sense of, when, where, and how to tell any given story (Saville-Troike 1989,2). Ritual interaction theory presumes that if a person does attempt to tell a story which strays beyond the borders of social acceptability, others will exert pressure on the culprit to return to group standards and limits (Goffman 1974). A culturally competent individual will respond to the cues and pull back within familiar boundaries.

This esprit de corps approach to narrative performance might work well within a culturally and socially homogenous situation. Indeed, such a context appears to be the presupposition behind some personal narrative studies. As Lauri Honko points out, however, a "pure language" linguistic semantics approach to the study of folk narrative is akin to positing ideal speakers and listeners who have perfect technical and social knowledge of communication, who are operating in a homogeneous speech community, and who are consciously applying their skills to the communicative interaction. Such an
approach is deplorable and can't possibly apprehend the full "meaning" of the communication, much of which takes place extra-textually (1985, 37-41).

In reality, no one lives in an ideal performance context. The explanations for what is "tellable" and what is "untellable" offered by narrowly contextualized performance studies are too simplistic to reflect what happens in the communicative interaction of personal experience narrative telling. When stories are "successfully" shared, listeners appreciate (they accept, acknowledge, and concur with) the significance (meaning, point) which the teller assigns to the story. Such stories reveal common ground between teller and listeners, and establish or re-create an agreed-upon worldview. Among those who participate "successfully," shared narratives produce a sense of "commonality," a sense of "belonging," a sense of both individual and group "identity."

At the same time that stories create common ground, however, they may also create common boundaries and enforce the limitations of agreed-upon notions of how the world should work and should be understood. Boundaries of commonality act to identify both the insiders and the outsiders of a community ("us" and "them"), and such boundaries, intentionally or inadvertently, isolate those who do not fit comfortably into the mold of "us". Agreed-upon notions establish what is acceptable and eventually what is familiar and comfortable, and they deny the acceptability, and sometimes even the reality, of what is not familiar, what is not comfortable.

The stories we tell will either align or conflict with any particular community's standards and expectations, with its agreed-upon sense of "the really real" (Geertz 1973, 124). If our stories align, we will have the security of being embraced and accepted by the community. If our stories conflict, we face the threat of rejection by, and isolation from, the community. If our experiences and/or our accounts concerning them are so deviant that they fall at the margins of, or entirely beyond, the community's limits of acceptance, understanding, or believability, we may be labeled as sick, eccentric, insane, criminal, immoral, or simply socially undesirable.

Narrative Management of Commumality

All Americans belong to both a variety of small, particular-interest "communities" as well as to the generalized, national community-complex we call American society. Personal narratives operate at both levels of complexity to build, maintain, and adapt such community "in-groups" to the needs of the members (and the members to the needs of the group). Collectivities of common interests and shared agendas build around a wide
variety of foci, including occupations, organizations, age groups, social clubs, geographic locations, institutions, ethnic and racial identities, political agendas, hobbies, and even around "stigmas." Gary Alan Fine describes the use of personal narratives in community formation and boundary building even among mushroom collectors as they attempt to "cement members into a subculture" by creating a "positive and continuing self-identity" for the individual members and for the group as a whole (1987, 231). Through their personal narratives, the mushroom collectors claim their legitimate places as "insiders," share and test knowledge, create insider and outsider lore, entertain themselves, build camaraderie, attract and indoctrinate new members, develop classifications to distinguish between serious and amateur collectors, and generally turn themselves into "exotic others" for their own enjoyment and group maintenance.

While nearly any interest, activity, or attribute could potentially become the source of in-group building, not all factors of commonality make such attractive or desirable focal points as does mushroom collecting. An individual who possesses "an attribute that is deeply discrediting" in terms of social "norms" possesses a "stigma," an undesired "differentness" from what the majority find comfortably acceptable. Such people are often "marginalized," that is, they do not "count" as fully human beings (Goffman 1963, 3-5). Yet even among such individuals, personal narrativizing can produce community. Goffman suggests that an individual who possesses an unconcealable, or already-known stigma (a "discredited" person), has a number of available options for dealing with life as a marginalized human. Among these are using the "disadvantage as a basis for organizing life," and sharing with other similarly-afflicted individuals narratives of lament, trickster tales of survival among the normals, atrocity stories of mistreatment, and autobiographical hero versions of the self (Goffman 1963, 9-25).

An individual with an "invisible" or unrevealed stigma, on the other hand, is a "discreditable" person. Such an individual can "pass" as normal (and, therefore, "fully human") so long as the difference remains concealed. Such a person is not likely to talk about the undesirable attribute at all, except among those sworn to confidentiality or among those with whom it is "necessary" to discuss the problem, such as physicians or parole officers. Stigmatization is an effective (and probably essential) form of social control over behavior; it prevents people from getting lulled into thinking that "anything goes."

I would suggest that in addition to developing "coping" strategies, or to remaining hidden, both those who are already discredited and those risk being discredited have
another option open to them. They can try to change what "counts" as normal. Such a strategy will likely be undertaken only if the stigmatized come to believe for themselves—and if they can convince others—that their treatment is "unfair" in terms of publicly stated social policies of "human" standards for acceptability. In the process of challenging the taken-for-granteds, they attempt to expose the discrepancies between stated policy and social practice. If they are successful in achieving political gains, they set the stage for the next attempt to change what "counts"—officially. Changing public "attitudes" is a different matter; attitudes cannot be legislated away. Only when something is taken for granted does it truly count as "normal."  

When Erving Goffman wrote Stigma in 1963 he listed, among other stigma-producing attributes, divorce, advanced age, obesity, and physical handicaps, and he included among the stigmatized: "the ileostomied and colostomied . . . . the ex-alcoholic and the ex-addict," and the "ex-mental patient" (22). He discussed, as well, some stigma-related aspects associated with religious, ethnic, and racial groups, and with criminal activities. Stigmas relating to sexuality are barely mentioned. Clearly, what counts as deviant and/or undesirable has begun to change over the last thirty-one years. Divorce is widely practiced and fairly openly admitted. The "aged," the "obese," and the "physically handicapped" may still be discriminated against in many ways, but certain individuals within each of these categories are actively working to change public attitudes—or at least public policies. These, and many other groups of people claiming they are being (or have been) "victimized" by social practices and/or attitudes that relegate them to the margins of society; they are beginning to "speak out" on their own behalves; they are demanding that society change what counts as well as who decides what counts in contemporary American society. This is especially true of one particularly-stigmatized group Goffman does not even mention—those who have been victims of sexual aggression.

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2 How successful any group of stigmatized individuals will be in changing public attitudes involves far more than getting the public's attention. The American mainstream worldview assumes that any proper individual is in control of his or her life, is eager to be "successful," and will be with sufficient effort and unswerving perseverance. This attitude is firmly entrenched in American consciousness: consider the famous "I think I can' lesson of The Little Engine That Could, since failure and suffering are ideologically tied to "sin" and "just deserts," the stigmatized can be seen as "subversives as well as immoral" (Polanyi 1989, 123). The process of de-stigmatization may well be a multi-generational one. The sense of "undesired difference" must be eliminated from daily interaction and perception before it can be "taken for granted."
The strategies these groups are using for changing social reality are the same ones Goffman describes as coping strategies used by stigmatized people to create community among themselves. Now, however, they are demanding that their atrocity stories be heard by "normals" and be received as indictments of what has been allowed to count as customary and common (if not simply acceptable), while hero accounts of their "kind" depict "survival" rather than "adjustment." Narratives are as fundamental to changing social reality as they are to creating and maintaining it because they deal with both the pragmatic interactions of everyday reality and the symbolic universe which underlies it.

Re-making Reality: Claims-making and Consciousness Raising

Two principal mechanisms for changing what counts and who decides are claims-making and consciousness raising. The processes often overlap and interact, and personal experience accounts are instrumental and key elements in both. Claims-making defines some particular aspect of an area of life as a "problem." For example, once the notion that children should be "safe" is generally accepted as an agreed-upon social norm, "child abuse" becomes a "problem" around which claims may be built that children are not actually safe, or at least not "safe enough." Once accepted as valid, such a claim alters (expands) the definition of "safe enough," and the "domain" of the original claim may be further expanded by other would-be claims-makers, such as those who mount campaigns to track and rescue "missing" children, anti-abortionists, activists against "pornography," and those who would protect children from the corruption of "rock" music. Any issue that can be linked (in any way) to the "safety" of children can benefit from the social territory already conquered by "child safety" claims (Best 1990, 74-86).

"Claims-makers want change; they want others to do something," writes Joel Best who has detailed the rise of the "child-victim" in America since the early 1980s (1990, 13). The trick, of course, is getting the "others" to "do" what is wanted. The strategy that seems most effective involves a combination of exaggeration and typification. Claims-makers must present incontrovertible evidence that the condition they want to change pervades society. Statistics work well, writes Best, and they are particularly apt to be accepted when "there is nobody to speak for the other side" (63). Numbers, especially large ones, provide the "evidence" that the "problem" must be taken seriously. What appears to be "widespread" is potentially a threat to everybody. Even people tangentially related to the problem begin to fear they will become involved or affected, and they begin
to put pressure on institutional forces (governmental, social, educational, religious) to address the problem.

Even better than statistics, however, are the "compelling examples"--dramatic tales of "heroism or villainy"--used to "typify" the problem. Such stories both illustrate the problem and help shape reactions, not only to "just those cases" depicted in the tales but also to "the larger problem they supposedly represent." "It is easy to see why the initial claims about the battered-child syndrome were successful," writes Best. "It was a novel topic, one which had received minimal attention for several decades. Presented as a medical discovery--a new disease--it fit neatly into a standard frame for news and public policy. And, typified by stories of parents' extraordinary physical brutality against tiny children, it was the stuff of high drama" (1990, 79).

"Consciousness raising" is the social-activism partner of claims-making. If claims-making narratives illustrate the problem, consciousness-raising stories suggest the root social cause which has allowed the problem to exist in the first place, and which will allow it to continue unless something is done. While simply "an increasing of concerned awareness" by formal definition (Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary), in the hands of social activists, "consciousness raising" becomes a way to create a "reality crisis" for both individuals and society. In relationship to social "movements," consciousness raising often entails attempts to "dis-confirm" the "self-evident" nature of established assumptions of everyday interaction. Consciousness raising works on both the individual and the communal level at the same time. Consciousness raising changes the enculturated-and-accepted notions of one's own understanding of one's self and of one's place in the world, even while it creates and provides the new definitions, conceptual paradigms, and legitimacy for doing so. Contemporary "ills" can be held up as proof of the need for "change" when they are reexamined retrospectively against "traditional" constructions of reality. "The reconstruction of the past serves present needs, as it clarifies or justifies the contours of present reality" (Elizabeth Fee 1974, 86, qtd. in Bromberg 1982, 61-62).

As conceptually and behaviorally patterned illustrations of reality, personal experience accounts provide "how-to-do-it (and how not to do it)" working models in which social and intellectual problems are solved according to the new precepts. At the same time, such narrative models reveal and detail the erroneous, limiting, and damaging factors of the past (Bromberg 1988, 43). Bromberg relates consciousness raising (C-R) to Thomas Kuhn's (1962) concept of "paradigm" as both community shared worldview and as the procedures and models by which the worldview is created. Bromberg writes: "In
the case of C-R, the scientific phenomenon under scrutiny is social proprieties, the concrete puzzle-solutions are the personal experience stories which detail social encounters, and the constellation of images under review are the expectations members hold regarding own and others' expected, actual, or hoped for behaviors" (31-32). C-R story "plots, themes, subjects, values and relations inform the new pedagogy. They do the teaching required for the reformulation process" (Bromberg 1982, 44).

When they are exchanged within groups of like-minded (or at least similarly situated) others, such personal stories become the means of re-socialization, of identity and community building. When used as "testimony," such accounts become "tools" to change attitudes and social structures, as Katherine Angueira writes in her article discussing the use of personal narratives as consciousness-raising elements both for victims of sexual aggression and for societal organization as an implicit co-victimizer (1988). Here again, the most horrific stories are often the most effective for gaining attention and public sympathy. Consciousness raising is an attempt to change (and/or to support the changing of) a "dominant story" about some fundamental aspect of what counts and who decides what counts in a society.

Claims-making and consciousness raising come together most dramatically in "childhood" sexual abuse stories. Consciousness raising has long been a tactic of the Women's Movement for altering public notions of what it means (or at least should mean) to be a "proper" woman (Bromberg 1982, 4-5). Much work has been done on social attitudes toward rape, wife-battering, job discrimination, sexual harassment, and a host of other gender-related issues. With the rise of the "child victim" as a central cultural image for social ills, the domain of "child" sexual abuse quickly expanded into "childhood" sexual abuse. With this shift, the current perception of "abuse" has been retroactively applied to past experiences, and these experiences have been "contextualized" in terms of particular social structures that allowed such abuse to occur in the past and which (according to the claims-makers and consciousness raisers) are the structures that must now be changed to prevent such abuse from continuing to occur. The "traumatic affects" of the contemporary survivors "prove" the severity of the problem and justify the demands for change. Admittedly, sexual abuse is not a gender-specific activity (victim or perpetrator). Still, women are more often the targets and less often the aggressors, and consciousness-raising activities are often aimed at, and used by, women to further their own agendas in
terms of challenging and reforming the traditional "patriarchal construction of reality" (Angueira 1988, 68-70).  

"The language adopted by claims-makers is meant to be persuasive," writes Best (1990, 17). "Claimants want to convince others that their concerns about particular social conditions deserve attention, that their assessments of those conditions are correct, and that their proposals offer solutions that should be adopted as social policy" (17). Stories based on the lives of specific individuals are ideal for both claims-making and consciousness- raising activities. If those individuals are "just like us," the problem will seem less remote from our own lives; we will find it easier to identify with the sufferers, and we will have sympathy for their plight. On the other hand, the most dramatic examples are often the ones used, and when especially horrific tales of personal experience are used to "typify" the problem, they affect public perceptions and definitions of the problem as a whole (Best 1990, 22-41). The extreme may be perceived as the norm, as what counts most as "real."

**Narrative Management of Self**

Personal narratives do more than simply define and negotiate our relationships within community. As individuals, we create narratives to order our experiences and to create a "self"--a personal identity. If we cannot create narratives which imbue our experiences with meaning because there is no ready-made, socially-acceptable meaning which accurately reflects the reality of the experience we believe to be true, we are seriously hindered in our attempts to make "sense" of our lives and to create a coherent self. If we cannot share our narratives with others because they conflict with common comfort levels for tellability, we may be cut off both from the support and protection of the community and from a sense of confidence in our own abilities to know and to interpret the world around us.

When an individual "successfully" shares an account of a personal experience, listeners either explicitly, or implicitly confirm the experience: "It really did happen." In addition, listeners affirm the meaning assigned: "You interpreted the experience correctly."

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3 I am not suggesting that this is not a valid or beneficial undertaking; personally I'm very supportive of such demands for changes. I am only trying to point out the process as it relates to childhood sexual abuse experience. I would contend the basic process is the one that occurs during the changing of any dominant story--social or personal.
The teller's behavior and sense of social identity will be validated as well: "You did the right thing in that situation." "Successful" narrative interaction demonstrates the teller's legitimate place within the community; socially "unsuccessful" tellings demonstrates non-compliance with the community's agreed-upon expectations, values, and attitudes. In the latter case, if listeners express disapproval by questioning the content or evaluation of a narrative, the teller is not likely to repeat the performance of the tale—at least not to this audience. Listeners "monitor the coherence and meaning of narratives and will interrupt seeking clarification when either quality is lacking or ambiguous"; they may seek to "reformulate the speaker's view of the event," or they may simply refuse the "role" of listener (Robinson 1981, 71-73; see also Polanyi 1979). Only if the meaning can be successfully negotiated will the tale be "successful."

In her 1992 work on intrapersonal narrativizing, a process which she has labeled "idionarrating," that is, "self-as-storyteller and self-as-listener" (63), Marjorie Bard refutes the notion that individuals are particularly sensitive to audience "feedback" when the audience is other than the self. Narrators, according to Bard, will continue to tell about a particular experience in a particular way once they have worked out the tale in their own minds to their own satisfaction. While she claims "performance" (in terms of "dramatic representation") as the "root metaphor" for narrativizing (63), she contends that the feedback from the "first audience" of the "self" (the one which allows the narrative to be "refined, recast, and stylized" to the satisfaction of the teller) supersedes any subsequent audience feedback from others in terms of influencing how, or whether, the tale will be told (64). Interruptions, obvious lack of interest, or disapproval on part of listeners will not deter or alter the content, form or expression of the "set piece" of the already self-validated story according to Bard (67).

While I agree that self-to-self narrativizing has more independence from social control and less need for structure or coherency than interpersonal communication, I feel that Bard overestimates the "freedom" which idionarrating enjoys. The examples she premises her theory on are relatively "tellable" tales—at least by current standards. She cites Holocaust narratives, crime victims stories, and reports of newsworthy items of wide interest, such as a spectacular fire in an apartment building. The telling constraints she refers to in connection to these stories is mostly a lack of opportunity to share the account with others. When the opportunity to tell arises, the tales get told. Indeed, she even suggests that formerly untellable tales, such as "stories which depict experiences of incest or other personal trauma" are just waiting to be told, and when "the ability and/or
opportunity to repeat them in a perceived positive social setting arose, the necessity to share experiences outweighed all negatives" (1992, 68, emphasis in original).

Bard suggests that "the obsessive need to repeat the details of traumatic experience to oneself often creates self-acceptance." Such self-acceptance, she claims, then allows the individual to "participate in an alternative but equally supportive scenario: a group session in which all share stories of similar experience. Then the obsessiveness transfers to a constant need to tell these 'unchanged' stories no matter what any member of the group verbally or non-verbally expresses as a challenge to veracity" (1992, 68).

While such "obsessed" tellers may not appear to be highly sensitive to audience response in the immediate performance context, they are obviously very "feedback sensitive" in terms of the larger culture if they choose to wait (or feel they must wait) until they have a social setting which they "perceive" as "positive" before they even begin to disclose their experiences. Prevention is often less costly that damage-control after the fact. What is not (and perhaps cannot be) said is as constitutive of social reality as is what is said.

While I agree with Bard that the effects of interpersonal feedback during storytelling are undoubtedly more complicated than the simplistic self-conscious teller eager and willing to please (adapt to) an actively (and unambiguously) responsive audience that seems too often premised by some scholars of performance, I feel that Bard has underestimated the effects of interactive telling. In her scenario of idionarrating prior to interpersonal narrating, the self-narrator creates the "positive" response at the same time he/she creates the performance. The tale has been affirmed and confirmed in the telling. Such a tale is likely to be retold. The anticipation of similarly positive response from others may temporarily override the actual response, creating a lag in "adjustment." It may well be that stories are often told as adjusted for an audience previous to the one currently hearing the tale.

Bard's scenario of sharing personal experience narratives with others who have had similar experiences returns the situation even more to the community-building use of narrative that I premised earlier. Commonality makes the stories acceptable; at least at first. However, even obsessive tellers often become feedback sensitive. If they don't, they begin to engage in "inappropriate" speaking, and they risk being ostracized by those who are not interested in, or willing to listen to, their tales, as I will demonstrate later. Bard's notion of feedback-resistant "set pieces" is highly reminiscent of Sandra Stahl's notion of
personal narratives as stable "repertoire" items (1977). Bard's work, however, does indeed begin "to fill a scholarship gap between an incident and the story (or multiple stories) which it eventually engenders in social interaction" (1992, 71).

Personal Experience Narrativizing from a Folkloric Perspective

If Bard underestimates feedback, Sandra Stahl (who established personal narrative as a legitimate genre and one worthy of interest to folklorists) essentially ignores it. Several concepts have remained consistent in Stahl's work on personal narrative over the years: an insistence on dramatic structure, the notion of stable repertoires, and a concept of the personal narrative as the reflection and demonstration of a stable identity and the embodiment of "culturally shared and thus traditional" values and attitudes (1989, 13). Granted, her primary interest in the tales is a "literary" one, but her claims that personal recounting is an "invitation to intimacy" (1989, 37), and her argument that the narratives reflect traditional themes and values, move her scholarship (if not her assumptions) into the area of social construction and interaction. In these areas, Stahl's methodology clearly affects her conclusions. Unfortunately, her conclusions have often been the taken-for-granted basis of other studies in personal narrativizing.

Both Stahl's definition of personal narrative as a "link of intimacy" (1985, 57) and her list of "traditional themes" (1989, 28) result from an after-the-fact formation of those concepts based on already "successfully received" narratives. Indeed, all of Stahl's (and many other folklorists') theories are based on "successful" (i.e., socially tellable and told) personal experience narratives. She posits herself as the "ideal" listener/critic/interpreter of the narratives she analyzes because, she claims, the most qualified person to elucidate the full personal meaning of a personal narrative (in literary folkloristic terms) is the intimately-acquainted literary folklorist to whom the tale was told in a context of intimacy. This probably is the "ideal" situation for analysis. But to use a context of pre-existing intimacy as a basis for her claim that personal narrative is an "invitation to intimacy" (Stahl 1989, 37) amounts to a tautological fallacy. Such a premise denies the interactive, teller-listener complicity in both text construction and narrative performance when the tale is "successful," as well as the possible rejection of intimacy when the tale is "unsuccessful." An "invitation" is not the same thing as a "command performance." "Invitations" can be turned down.

In addition, if the "basic assumption" behind her claims is that "anyone's response to a personal narrative told in its natural context is to regard the story as a reflection of the
teller's personal philosophy and stable identity" (1985, 54-55, emphasis added), then her paradigm for personal narrative is based on a premise that relegates both teller and listener to a kind of developmental "stasis" and denies them both dynamic possibilities for "growth." At the very least, such stability of narrative (i.e., variations might occur in the details but not in the meaning) implies a "closure" on the teller's life, a sort of "finished story." I would contend instead that if the personality is, indeed, "stable," it is because it is being stabilized as much by the listener as by the teller. The contract of meaning must be re-negotiated each time the tale is told. The invitation to intimacy must be accepted or rejected with each performance, and just because it was accepted once does not mean it will be accepted the next time as well.

It is easy to imagine situations in which the rejection of even a previously-established and taken-for-granted meaning occurs. A grown child returning from several years of living away from parents might, for instance, say, "I always used to love hearing you tell that story when I was a kid, but now it sounds so racist (sexist, ethnocentric, etc.) to me. I just don't want to live that way, or even think that way, any more. And I don't want my kids growing up that way, so please don't tell that story any more when we're around."

While the above is a hypothetical case, my own experience yields an instance of "re-negotiation" of an oft-repeated personal narrative's meaning. One day, a close friend recited a particular personal narrative that she had told me a number of times over a period of several years. When she finished, I confessed that this tale had always bothered me, and I had finally figured out why. I then articulate my personal response to her narrative, in terms of both the motifs she was using and the conclusions she was drawing about the incident. I suggested to her that the "meaning" she was assigning to the recounted event was functioning as an obstacle to some of her stated goals in life, and I offered her another possible meaning to the same scenario.

I don't know whether she ever changed her mind about her interpretation of the event. I do know she stopped telling me the tale. I know that she has since achieved several of the goals that seemed (to me) related to the motifs of the narrative and hindered by her assigned meaning. I also know we are still good friends. The "personal narrative," then, neither created nor destroyed the "intimacy" of our relationship. The intimacy already existed, and my keeping quiet about my reaction to the narrative posed a barrier to my feelings of intimacy toward her and misled her into a false sense of having an
"intimately-shared frame of reference" (Stahl 1985, 57) with me concerning her interpretation of her experience.

Despite her contention that such tales are also "the primary means" by which cultural values and attitudes are transmitted (1977, 22; 1989, 19), Stahl's other main premise is that the primary function of personal narratives is to "express and maintain the stability of an individual personality rather than an entire culture" (1989, 21). Such a claim ignores the "emergent" natures of both individuals and of cultures, and Stahl unwittingly provides her own example of the innate potential within personal narrativizing activities for the simultaneous creation of cultures, societies, and the individuals within them.

Stahl's 1987 article recapping personal narrative research within the field of folklore suggests that "the interplay between tradition and individual creativity" as well as the extent to which the narrative reveals "the storyteller's character, his true self, his identity and personal values" (1987, 390-391) are readily accessible through a literary-folkloristic method of analysis. Such an approach, she argues, can reveal both the "influences and sources of content" the teller has drawn upon in creating the tale, as well as the link between personality and narrative, so long as the narrative is recorded in the "seemingly perfect laboratory situation" of performance in context. Since the personal narrative allows the "storyteller maximum control over the creative content of the story," Stahl insists, "the effective manipulation of resources" is more openly apparent than in other traditional narrative genres (Stahl 1987, 395). "Thus literary strategy becomes a matter of imposing a high level of coherence between the `text' and the environmental context, the verbal context, and the cultural context" (Stahl 1987, 395). She demonstrates her claims using a transcript of a narrative performed by a middle-aged man (Larry) in one of his "favorite hang-outs"; his tale involves an incident that occurred sometime before Larry was ten (Stahl 1987, 391). Stahl bases her conclusions on the premise that "one advantage in studying a personal narrative rather than a traditional story is that we can identify with some precision the social groups or cultural boundaries that have `given' the storyteller resources that make the cultural allusion meaningful, including in this instance Larry's family situation, his Catholic upbringing and schooling, his socio-economic status as a child and the Mid-West community of Huntington, Indiana" (1987, 396). Her task, she concludes, is simply to exploit the "ready coherence among the text, the event, and the storyteller's cultural and rhetorical background" (Stahl 1987, 396), in order to `discover' evidence of the social influence in the text, and this is made easier by the fact that the story is still located in its originating context" (Stahl 1987, 396, emphasis added).
Claiming that this (or any remembered experience) story "is still located in it's originating context" implies a kind of historical/temporal collapse. Such coherence of event and telling can be assumed only if

1. the story is told soon after the experience--which precludes Stahl's established, polished, stable repertoire definition of personal narrative;
2. the storyteller hasn't changed any of the story extensively to reflect psychological or experiential input or socio-cultural changes since the narrative was formed;
3. the cultural influences affecting the listeners haven't changed significantly;
4. the story is still being told in its originating socio-cultural context.

What if Larry moves from Indiana to New York City? If the personal narrative is to function as an invitation to intimacy, as a display of cultural competency, it has to adapt to its current telling situation. Even when a story is performed for "performance sake," a story-audience match is crucial to full acceptance. The personal narrative "tests" for feedback, for confirmation and for affirmation of values and attitudes, whether it intends to or not.

There is, at best, a limited way to assess, years after the fact, the "cultural inputs" at the time the experience occurred, and that is by "historicizing" the text. This process is tedious, to say the least, as Stahl herself admits (1987, 396).

This is not to suggest that attempting to document the relationship between the available input from multiple sources in the originating climate and the expression of those inputs in the resulting narratives is a waste of effort. Indeed, Stahl's examination of Larry's story goes a long way toward identifying the "social groups [and] cultural boundaries that have `given' [him] resources" for creating his narrative (1987, 396). Such socio-cultural "structures of signification" which give "coherence to events"--to use Richard Bauman's terminology (1986, 5)--are not static, however. Contemporary tellings are as likely (if not actually more likely) to reflect contemporary climates as "originating" ones.

While I concur with Stahl that personal narratives reveal and transmit socio-cultural values and attitudes, I disagree with her notion that they are relatively exempt from feedback, or that the "personal" outweighs the "social" in their construction. The cultural context of a narrative's telling is only briefly (and loosely) the "same" as the context of the experience and/or the text's original creation. If Larry is "insensitive" with regard to his relationship to his audiences and continues to tell the same story, unchanged, for years, he
will indeed risk revealing some "hidden message" (Stahl, 1987, 398) about himself: he is either oblivious to, or uncaring about, how he is "coming across" to others. Or he has, indeed, not changed any of his attitudes or understandings about life over the years. On the other hand, it is also possible that his listeners "re-accept" his tale each time it is told; therefore, the tale does not need to change in obvious ways. Larry has a "publicly tested and found acceptable" self to present, and as long as it works, there is no need for him to change this version of himself. Such continued acceptance implies as much about the listeners as his continued (and unaltered) telling does about Larry. Either they participate in a comfortably-shared reality, one which they willingly recreate with Larry in each performance, or they are being tolerant of any mis-match for other reasons.

Stahl's own "subjective response" to Larry's narrative is to lay claim to being one of the "official voyeurs" of human life (1985, 51), a status she asserts folklorists are privileged to hold when analyzing a narrative performance. Thus she consciously positions herself as outside the "audience" to Larry's story. Even so, Stahl reacts. Larry's story, Stahl admits, reveals to her "an unfortunate tendency to stereotype women" (1987, 398). She goes on to say that "we can see how he came to hold such an attitude, but aside from empathizing with him in that we all are to some extend [sic] products of our culture, we do him no favor in offering this interpretation of his story. I can only assume that he would not want to know that I (or anyone else) regard him as failing to relate to women as individuals" (1985, 399). If she had to be around Larry on a regular basis, in a position that did not allow her to "hold herself apart," I wonder how long Stahl would be able to avoid letting Larry know--one way or another--what she really thought about his tale, and about him?

When she is dealing with situations of established intimacy, where she is, indeed, the "ideal" listener/analyst, Stahl's analyses are undoubtedly more comprehensive and more discerning than any outsider's could possibly be. Unfortunately, by overlooking both the influence of the audience and the role of the narrative in the construction of a shared culture (or not shared--as in her own reaction to Larry's account), Stahl does not recognize that she is dealing only with "successful" narratives, only with "tellable" tales. Personal narrative do not "facilitate the creation of intimacy" (Stahl 1985, 47) if the invitation is ignored or rejected as she, herself, reveals.

Much of Stahl's work is creative and insightful, and I have dwelt on the limitations of her approaches and conclusions only to emphasize the hazards of assuming that what is already there is somehow naturally there. Many studies of personal narrative seemed to
have been conducted in tacit agreement with Stahl's notion that because of (or as evidence of) their connection to "tradition," as well as of the need for the tale to say something culturally "relevant," that personal narratives will form around only certain "themes." By definition, what qualified personal narrative as folklore originally were the "traditional" elements of such stories. Personal narrativizing practices appear to draw upon learned patterns of narrative formation (traditional plots, characterizations, idioms, and attitudes), and the finished products are performed in socially-recognizable situations and through culturally-familiar modes of presentation. Personal narratives reflect traditional ways even of perceiving experience, according to Stahl (1989, 23-28).

The most common themes for personal narratives, as Stahl lists them, include honesty, integrity, bravery, cleverness, practicality, and generosity. In addition, a variety of other themes appear to be acceptable also: embarrassing, ironic, or poignant situations, and even cruel or unjust situations from which moral lessons can be extracted (1989, 28). These themes undoubtedly appear to be the most "traditional" and most acceptable ones; they are, after all, the ones that appear in the "successful," and, therefore, most commonly told narratives (which then, of course, become the ones most available for analysis). In a personal narrative, the "hero" of the story is understood to be the teller. At the very least, the teller is "sadder but wiser" after having learned a valuable social or moral lesson, and in the process of becoming wiser, also becomes the "hero" of the tale. Experiences in which the teller, the "I" of the tale, is not the hero but actually the victim, have been generally accepted as "untellable" in terms of first-person narrative. As John Robinson puts it: "Experiences of victimization have an ambivalent status as candidates for narration. Criminal assault, racial abuse, sexual harassment, and political or military imprisonment are typical instances of victimization. Characteristically, such experiences produce shame, anger, often guilt in the victim, and are regarded as secrets rather than as stories to tell" (1981, 63).

Such experiences were once all but "unspeakable." Now many are being discussed through novels, plays, televisions documentaries, published autobiographies, and talk-show confessionals. All these forms, however, imply some situational and relational

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4 Not coincidentally, this list also fairly well exhausts the possible themes for myths, legends, and fairy tales. This not only emphasizes the "traditional" nature of these themes but also supports the notion that the "I" of the personal narrative is implied to be a cultural "hero." My thanks goes to my son, Derek, for calling this relationship to my attention.
"distance" between teller and listener so that the immediacy of performance interaction is reduced and obscured. How, then, now that experiences such as child abuse are "in the open," are individuals speaking about their experiences? "Tradition" would seem to offer no appropriate or conveniently applicable pre-existing guidelines for turning such experiences into personal narrative. The experience does not lend itself to interpretation through traditional "themes," and, according to previous folklore studies, if an individual attempts to create a personal narrative around a non-traditional (therefore, unacceptable) theme, listeners will exert pressure, in one way or another, to suppress repeated tellings, interrupt or stop a current telling, or attempt to re-configure the teller's understanding of the experience into familiar, established, and more comfortable meanings. There seem to be no "safe" creation or performance possibilities for these experiences outside the confines of idionarrating and counseling sessions or recovery groups. With no clear, traditional guidelines for creating a narrative of personal victimization, and little or no chance to develop (rehearse, practice, improve) such a tale, how does an individual learn to encode and express such an experience when the social restrictions against such narratives are eased?

Discussions of tellability and storability have often been limited to an acknowledgment that some experiences just don't warrant being turned into narratives in the first place, and that even among experiences that are logically significant to spur the creation of narratives, some are not going to be recounted for one reason or another. Robert Georges maintains that tellability too often has been attributed to "culturally-mandated 'rules' that members of the collective in question somehow learn and then unconsciously or slavishly follow" (1987, 115). Instead, he suggests, an examination of tellability might lead to understanding how and why individuals determine when it is or is not "timely or appropriate to tell a particular story to some specific other or others" (Georges 1987, 115, emphasis in original). Still, Georges posits a "like begets like" paradigm of (assumed) common interest and second-storying as his explanation for the formation of, and reasons for telling, certain tales in particular situations. The foundation of common interest is still taken for granted, although Georges does incorporate a number of socio-cultural factors into his argument for timeliness and appropriateness.

Fortunately, folkloric studies have begun to move away from such taken-for-granted, community-prevalidated starting points. Gary Alan Fine's work on mushroom collectors demonstrates the use of personal narrative in the creation of corporate and personal identities within a community. Both Eleanor Wachs' (1988) work on crime-
victim narratives and Gillian Bennett's (1987) text on revenant accounts address the relationship between talking about such experiences and social factors that attempt to limit such talking. Both Bennett (1987) and David Hufford (1982) have written on common-but-scoffed-at experiences, and they have discussed the power (and traditionality) of cultural "disbelief" as a contributing factor in what may, and may not, be openly spoken about in self-referential fashion. Disbelief (often called scientific skepticism) is highly influential in public concepts of what counts as "real" as well as in decisions involving who gets to decide who decides. Such works as those listed here serve as more useful models for examining "untellable" experiences than those that overlook the fact that "tradition" simply means socio-cultural "continuity": "the way we've always done it."

Speaking About Childhood Sex Abuse: Complicating the "Narrative" Picture

Attempts by individuals to narrate personal experiences of childhood sexual abuse expose the process of creation in a way that no stable "repertoire" narrative of "self" can because these "narratives" are, in many cases, still in the formative stages. On one level, the experience would seem to be both highly storyable and widely tellable. Sexual abuse is not considered to be an ordinary event, or at least no one wants to believe such experiences could be common in our society. The first step in moving an experience into the realm of tellability is to make it "speakable": to create/develop a vocabulary, syntax, and grammar through which the experience may be expressed. Language intended for other purposes must be adapted to the experience, and most of the language available for discussing childhood sexual abuse is either clinically sterile (and thus incapable of expressing the depths and the complexity of the psychological, physical, and emotional experience), or consists of euphemisms that have been commonly employed expressly because sexual activity is a taboo subject in polite company. Such linguistic constraints, according to Katherine Angueira, force victims of sexual aggression "to use words that historically have named sexual acts." In doing so, "the speaker is still using sex as the reference point to provide significance to the act," which detracts from the actual aggressive and criminal nature of the behavior she or he has suffered (1988, 77). As one of the project interviewees for this dissertation (Lara) said, just talking about one's abuse experience puts one in "a sexual arena."

The further leap to full "narrative" requires a "meaning" for the experience, presumably in socially acceptable terms. Attempting to speak about a personal experience of sexual abuse immediately moves the speaker into the "uncomfortable to listen to"
category of narratives. For such tales to be "successful," either the experience must be configured within the established thematic parameters, or the audience will need to adapt, or be changed, to receive "non-traditional" themes and meanings.

The "uncomfortable to listen to" category is often, also, the "we'd rather not know" category. The exception to this involves narratives in which the listener might have a vested interest, where hearing serves a valuable (albeit different) function for the listener than for the teller. The stories Eleanor Wachs (1988) collected from crime victims deal with some of the unpleasant, but unavoidable realities of living in a big city. Although they report personal victimization, these narratives are reasonably "tellable" because they convey socially valuable information. While victims talk out of their own needs to "make sense" of their experiences, their tales also convey warnings for the uninitiated as well as strategies and standards for behavior in threatening situations. The narratives thus give expression to common fears while, at the same time, reduce feelings of anxiety and vulnerability; they function both as cries of outrage and as training manuals. After all, the teller "survived" the experience; therefore, life in the city is survivable. On the other hand, life in the city can only be comfortable if it is relatively predictable, and the tales are mostly collaborative attempts to explain the violence and to impose "meaning" on what would otherwise be senselessness.

Even though these narratives are tellable because of their shared value, Wachs found that it was fairly common for listeners to blame the victim as a way of rationalizing the violence. Such victim blaming allowed listeners to distance themselves from the events of the story and, perhaps, from the teller as well: victimization might be "contagious." If individuals "get what they deserve," then the world is just and orderly, and violence is avoidable by simply not committing the same mistake the victim did. Wachs' crime victim narratives are fairly tellable because they do serve a useful public purpose in addition to their private function of expressing personal experience.

Crime victim narratives make uncomfortable listening because they provide evidence of a less-than-benign world and of the fragility of our efforts to protect ourselves from the intentionally imposed behaviors of others, but we will listen to them if we feel we can improve our chances of avoiding becoming the next victim. Such stories have obvious socially redeeming value. By contrast, narratives of childhood abuse would seem to serve an ambiguous social function. They can hardly be training manuals for future behavior when the victimization happened in childhood and the story is told by an adult to other adults. We will not become such victims if we are adults; our childhoods are past.
Talking to adults to make them aware of the extent of the problem implies that they are supposed to "do" something with the information. But what? There are, and have been, for many years, laws prohibiting such behavior. Talking to children about sexual abuse makes sense, they are the most likely ones to become victims of such crimes. But talking to children about sex in any form makes many adults in our society uncomfortable, and they are willing to leave such "instruction" to the schools—which need few, if any, adults recounting their own personal experiences in order to make children aware of sexual abuse. What about all the many others who have had such experiences? If they have indeed survived a significantly unusual life and/or psyche threatening event, we would expect them to need to find a way to make meaning of the experience. While these tales are also attempts by the victims to voice outrage, there is, again (as in Wachs' narratives), a need for both the teller and the listeners to find appropriate "meaning" or "meanings" as well. Talking to children will not help the adult survivor find that meaning, although it may help the survivor find a "purpose" for the experience.

The very definition "sexual abuse" turns the sequence of activities experienced by these individuals into a socially-recognized and value-laden "category" of experience. Having been "victims," these "survivors" are implicitly entitled to claim both storyability and tellability for the experience. But whom will they tell? Who will and who won't listen, and why? And most important of all, what is the "meaning" of childhood sexual abuse for the victim, in socially acceptable terms? "God was watching out for you"? "I guess you were just in the right (wrong) place at the right (wrong) time"? "Well, at least you're wiser (if sadder) now"? "I guess it happened because of the kind of person you were"? "I guess you're the kind of person you are because of what happened"? "People get what they deserve"? "It doesn't mean anything"? What "moral lesson" can be extracted from such an experience? Who gets to decide which meaning or meanings will be acceptable? What meanings are available? Which are being adopted; which imposed? What social "values" and "attitudes" are being expressed through the tales that do get told? Robinson's statement that "experiences of victimization have an ambivalent status as candidates for narration" is an understatement—to say the least.

Where does one hear the "untellable" tale that will provide the model for one's own narrating? In her work on the choices individuals make when they attempt to speak about their personal experiences with the supernatural, Gillian Bennett writes: "Because no one will talk about their experiences of the supernatural there is no evidence for it, and because there is no evidence for it no one talks about their experience" (1987, 13). In order to
express our experiences to others, we must first be able to characterize the situation and behavior of the participants in an experience. This requires that we "understand" the experience, that we are able to make some sort of "meaning" out of it. Experience structures expression; expression structures experience; the relationship is dialogue and dialectical. We understand others and their expressions of experience on the basis of our own experiences and self-understanding (Bruner 1986, 6). If no one speaks about a particular type of experience, there is no "model" for narrative creation. No language, no structure, no meaning. Indeed, there may be no valid "experience" beyond the perceptions of the individual, and the individual has only so much "authority" to validate the "self."

Robert Georges claims that "unpleasant" experiences (about self or others) "are not the source and subject of stories told indiscriminately to one and all. One must have similar experiences to be considered qualified to hear such tales . . . Only then is it timely and appropriate to tell them" (1987, 119, emphasis added). But if one feels constrained to discuss an experience only with mental health workers, or with those in "recovery groups" who do, indeed, have "similar experiences" but who have been sworn to confidentiality; or to that small group of people who already know but are willing to listen anyway, does one really have a "tellable" experience? The opportunities for speaking that I have just suggested here were, and often still are, the only ones considered by many to be the few "timely" and "appropriate" venues for sexual abuse stories. Are such decisions determined solely by the individuals with such experiences as Georges (1987, 120) contends? Cultural "rules" may not be determining such restraint, but cultural factors certainly are involved.

Some survivors are demanding the right to speak out, now, everywhere. In doing so, are they are finding others with "similar experiences," or are they creating those "others"--or creating "similar experiences" so as to be found and embraced into community? Or both? By speaking out, these survivors, do, indeed, "portray to and for others events in ways that enable those others to experience those events vicariously by perceptualizing 'what happened' and by responding to their own perceptualizations of the events that others depict" as Georges argues (1987, 120). I have to agree with his assessment that "people obviously narrate more often to influence, inform, teach, reinforce, empathize, confront and reassure, than they do to entertain, amuse, or pass the time" (1987, 120).

Some childhood sexual abuse survivors are beginning to talk publicly and are providing models for others. The sudden shift in attempting to move this experience into a form of expression reserved for individual personal experience is both a result of and
constituent of the ongoing emergence of American culture. It also reflects the increasingly important role that personal experiences and personal expression play in the creation of social reality. In his introduction to The Anthropology of Experience, Edward Bruner summarizes several of the themes of that volume in his assertion that a wide range of culturally expressive forms give structure to our experiences. Bruner includes "dominant narratives of a historical era, important rituals and festivals, and classic works of art" as forms that "define and illuminate inner experience" (1986, 6). He (and the other authors of this collection) might also have considered some of the less "classical" works or art, some of the more "daily" rituals and festival that are at least as constitutive of social reality as are the formal works and activities Bruner suggests. I would add television talk-shows, self-help manuals, "recovery" groups, magazines, newscasts, movies, and personal experience accounts to the list. These are only a few of the many everyday forms of expression that are giving structure and shape to the issue of childhood sexual abuse. The topic of sexual abuse has suddenly become highly visible; it is being exploited by the media and employed by activist's groups. In speaking out, in refusing to be silenced by the discomfort of listeners, those who have "gone public" have provided at least some models for speaking. They have provided language, a frame of reference, validation of the "reality" of the experience, license to speak, and "meanings" for the experience.

An Ethnographic-Folkloric Approach

The relatively-stable sense-of-self expressions of identity that constitute the "personal narratives" of the future concerning experiences of childhood sexual abuse (if, indeed, any such accounts survive to this status) are currently in the process of formation, beginning life as "personal experience" accounts. Even these are struggling through the ambiguities of creation searching for tellable form. However, the need to narrativize this experience is currently a wide-spread--or so the pervasive public discourse would have us believe. Many individuals are talking about the issue, adopting and rejecting language and meanings from the pool of available resources, adapting public voices for their private experiences, and sometimes speaking their private experiences in public forums. "The task of the ethnographer of a self which exists is relatively simple," writes Workman; "the task of the ethnographer who attempts to chronicle, enact, or evoke the contemporary self is in a considerably more difficult position" (Workman 1992, 101). Still, attempting the task may reveal a great deal about how individuals are going about the process of creating "selves", but the job will require some adjustment in the 'traditional' folkloric approach to vernacular performance.
Folklore's need to carve an identifiable niche for itself in cultural studies resulted in an initial emphasis in folk-narrative scholarship on aspects of orality, tradition, form, and function. These guiding principles carried over into the early days of personal narrative scholarship--if any field less than 20 years old can be said to have "early days." Although embracing, in the early 1970s, a "performance" paradigm for examining folklore as "the interplay of tradition and innovation in the actual conduct of social life" (Bauman 1992, 33), folklorists initially resisted a comprehensive ethnographic approach to the investigation of personal narrative, preferring instead to address the question: "Is this item folklore, and, if so, how is it functioning here?" to the more global and holistic question: "What is it that's going on here?" (Goffman 1974, 8). An ethnographic-folkloric approach to personal narrativizing, however, can more fully explore the dynamic interactions of vernacular performance and emergent culture.

Two things have prevented folklore studies involving personal narrativize processes and products from moving into full social and cultural contextualization, and both of them involve our much-argued definition(s) of folklore. Even today, the lingering emphasis on traditionality as a "criterial attribute of folklore" (Bauman 1992, 30) and a continuing reluctance to expand the definition of folkloric performance beyond small-group, face-to-face interaction limit explorations of how various elements of expressive culture interact with each other. The vernacular text is at once both the unavoidably-altered pattern carried forward and the certain-to-be-altered pattern available to be carried forward; the individual performance is never isolated from socio-cultural influences, repeat individual performances are rarely stable. More importantly, we can not begin to understand the full range of how narrativized personal experiences and personal experience narrativizing function in society--traditionally or innovatively--if we seek to frame them off from aspects of "contemporary" culture.

While there has been a reorientation of definitions of "tradition" from "a cultural inheritance rooted in the past" and toward "an understanding of tradition as symbolically constituted in the present" (Bauman 1992, 31-32), there remains the issue of what constitutes "tradition." To re-conceptualize tradition as "emergent" according to Bauman, is to see it as "a selective, interpretive construction, the social and symbolic creation of a connection between aspects of the present and an interpretation of the past" (32). This still leaves questions: How long ago, how distant from the present, must a practice have been for it to qualify as "the past"? How many times must an item be repeated before it
transcends questions of "the genuine and the spurious, the authentic and the concocted"? (Bauman 1992, 32).

Most limiting is a tenacious prejudice against examining elements of "popular culture" and mediated communication because of their apparent, non-traditional and mass (non-interactive/group-less) aspects. Such biases become increasingly untenable as identifiable "communities" of shared interest and shared agendas are created through the cyberspace of electronic communication. Such communities quickly develop "traditions" of interaction as well as a core of accumulated shared experiences. If the term 'folk' "can refer to any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor" in such manner as to generate shared traditions reflecting their shared identity (Dundes 1977, 6), then the lower limit of a folk group is obviously two, but no upper limit is clearly definable nor is the means of creating shared traditions any longer dependent on face-to-face interaction. "American folklore" is widely recognized both intra-nationally and internationally. Mass media has too often been excluded from the domain of folklore because it is perceived as not rooted in, not arising from, "community life," but as something imposed from outside the community; as authored, copyrighted, and commodified rather than widely replicable and readily available; and as fixed-form rather than relatively variable. Such distinctions may be useful in identifying and labeling a particular element of social life as either "folklore" or "not folklore," but they do little to promote an investigation of the interactions between folk elements and other forms of communication and cultural expression within a society, and they may obscure identification of folk practices and the recognition of folk performance.

Folklore has established personal narrative forms and practices as tradition-based. Ethnographic approaches to social communication have exposed the need to examine all communicative events in the complexity of situated interaction as both reflections of a group's culture and as constitutive of its social interaction. Indeed, communicative practices structure both how we "see" and how we "say" our worlds, and how we maintain and construct social "reality." A full ethnographic investigation of a communicative act requires description of the immediate context of the performance under study as well as acknowledgment of surrounding and antecedent influential cultural factors. Too often, many of these "cultural influences" have been glossed over. The is not surprising; as Sandra Stahl so aptly states, "demonstration of cultural context in even a single text is a rather tedious exercise" (1987, 396). Without such reference to the larger
cultural picture, however, context analysis may presume more coherence within the "situated" performance than actually exists.

In his 1993 article on the "therapeutic motif," Peter Ehrenhaus details the effects of the current "dominant cultural narrative" (78) concerning Vietnam veterans. This abstract but socially-coherent and influential "story" exists, according to Ehrenhaus, in "no one place" but is "constituted from fragments of public discourse; from print news and feature stories in the press; from popularized feature and documentary accounts of the war and its human consequences in books, televisions, and film; and from specialized and scholarly treatments of the cultural legacies of Vietnam for American society and its Vietnam veterans" (78). It is the "responsibility of critical analysis in a postmodern world," according to Ehrenhaus, "to construct texts from diverse fragments and then explain how interpretive communities are able to imbue those fragments with coherence. In so doing the critic can begin to shed light on the processes of social signification by which symbolic, social formations emerge and shape public consciousness and social arrangements" (79).

I would contend that elements of such dominant social rhetoric can be seen operating in the "fragments of public discourse" surrounding the issue of childhood sexual abuse. "It is important to stress that, in America at least, no matter how small and how badly off a particular stigmatized category is, the viewpoint of its members is likely to be given public presentation of some kind," writes Erving Goffman. "It can thus be said," he argues, "that Americans who are stigmatized tend to live in a literarily-defined world, however uncultured they might be. If they don't read books on the situation of persons like themselves, they at least read magazines and see movies, and where they don't do these, then they listen to local, vocal associates. An intellectually worked-up version of their point of view is thus available to most stigmatized persons" (1963, 25). Social discourse is readily available to sexual abuse survivors; indeed, it is almost unavoidable, and it is from its fragments (and within its dominance), that individuals are attempting to create personally-meaningful "texts" of self, which are then often shared in (potential) community-building situations. Chapters II, III, and IV will discuss the voices behind, and the forms through which, the social discourse of childhood sexual abuse is taking place.
CHAPTER II
INCEST AND SEXUAL ABUSE:
A SOCIO-CULTURAL SHIFT IN EMPHASIS

"... that which one must keep silent about is banished from reality as the thing that is tabooed above all else." (Foucault 1990, 84)

Breaking the "Silence"

"Sexual abuse" has recently become one of the most talked-about "social issues" in America, and everyone seems to be trying to get in on the conversation. Self-help "recovery" texts fill bookstore shelves to serve the needs of adult "survivors," and their authors and publishers launch promotional tours. The psychological community seems inundated with (and sometimes accused of creating) incest "victims," while the medical community's star practitioners entertain and instruct their colleagues and the populace with seminars and lectures. Public "12-Step" programs, and other "support" and "recovery" groups, provide various levels of professional and pop-psychology counseling as well as experience-sharing/experience-comparing opportunities for victims, for families of victims, for victims and their partners. TV talk shows promise interviews with "Men who were Molested," and people who had "Sex in the Name of Satan," while TV news and documentaries carry titles such as "Innocence Lost" and "Secret No More." Made-for-TV movies and first-run theater offerings dramatize the experience. The daily papers and evening news present a continuing saga of accusations, denials, criminal trails, and civil suits as fathers, neighbors, clergy, scout masters, teachers, day-care workers, and religious cults become the focus of suspicions and investigations. Exploitation, theatrics, and pathos seem to follow the issue. Meanwhile, statisticians, psychologists, religious leaders, health organizations, and governmental task forces study the issue and file reports documenting its damaging effects and claiming its social pervasiveness.

Childhood sexual abuse has been blamed for feelings of shame and helplessness, low self-esteem, phobias, and perfectionism; for sexual dysfunction, homosexuality, obesity, bulimia, and substance abuse; for pelvic pain, gastrointestinal disorders, multiple (and a
host of other) personality disorders; for depression, suicide, self-mutilation, and nightmares. Sexual abuse has been used as an explanation of, and an excuse for, perpetrating sexual abuse. It has been successfully used as a defense in trials of children accused of patricide, and attempts have been made to use it as a self-defense argument or justification when adults commit murder or manslaughter.

Everyone is talking about it: psychologists, newscasters, writers, physicians, social workers, religious leaders, lawyers, TV personalities, government investigators, criminologists, politicians, statisticians and even, occasionally, folklorists. The intensity and volume of public discourse on this issue would make it appear that America is in the midst of a sexual abuse "crisis." Indeed, in many ways it is. How much of this crisis pertains to objectively verifiable occurrences and how much is the result of social rhetoric, is an (often hotly) debated subject, as is what sexual abuse "means" in psychological and sociological terms, and what "should" be done about it.4

It is, however, within the fervor and complexity of this public discourse that "personal" accounts of experiences with childhood sexual abuse are beginning to emerge. Much of this social discourse is based on, and supported by, such personal accounts. Just, exactly, what is all this discourse about?

Incest as a transitive verb

In the made-for-TV movie The Shari Karney Story the protagonist declares at one point: "My father incested me!" Precisely what the father's actions were is left largely to the imagination of the viewer. On the other hand, the terms "incest" and "sexual abuse" are frequently used interchangeably in contemporary American discourse. For instance, "Incest Survivors' Anonymous" (a public 12-Step "recovery" program based on Alcoholics' Anonymous) insists that its members are in the process of "recovering" from childhood sexual abuse when they can finally use the "I" word. Indeed, meetings begin with an adaptation of the familiar AA introduction: "Hello, my name is . . . .and I am an incest survivor." Incest Survivors' Anonymous, however, is not necessarily limited to "incest" survivors (in the traditional sense of that word) but is open to all "survivors" of

4 Richard J. Gelles and Donileen R. Loseke have recently edited a volume entitled Current Controversies on Family Violence (1993). Articles in this volume present various arguments and stances on issues of conceptualization, definition and measurement, causes, effects, intervention, solutions, and over- and under-reporting of sexual abuse.
child sexual abuse—regardless of the legal relationship between the perpetrator and victim and regardless of the particular form of sexual aggression. Inclusive usage such as this is often intended to differentiate between "rape" as the (usually single) violent attack of a stranger, and any form of "abusive" sexually-oriented behavior perpetrated by a known (and "trusted") individual, that's is, someone in the "role" (physically and/or psychologically) of a family member. It is the "betrayal" of this "trust" which qualifies the behavior as a form of incest. More usually, however, the term "incest" is reserved for sexual abuse by biological or legal relatives, and "Sexual Abuse Survivors' Anonymous" groups now fill the gap for those who don't think the label "incest" applies to their experience.

On the other hand, "sexual abuse" is often being defined as everything from "rape" to "sexual harassment": the "use of gender, status, and power differences to intimidate or control a victim, or to require sexual involvement." Even "rape" has been redefined in terms of sexual abuse: "violence, anger, and power expressed sexually in an attack on a victim. It may involve penetration of body openings (oral, anal, and vaginal) but does not have to." These definitions are from Wendy Maltz's 1991 work, The Sexual Healing Journey (32-33), but they are fairly typical of most recent definitions. Maltz, on the other hand, limits "incest" to traditional "family members" such as parents, cousins, aunts, uncles, and grandparents (1991, 32), reflecting the most common usage of this term. Incestuous sexual abuse is considered to be the most prevalent form of child sexual abuse although the actual percentage of incestuous cases among sexual abuse in general is as disputed as the statistics on sexual abuse itself.5 Meanwhile, Public Law 93-247, the Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act of 1974, defines sexual abuse as:

"A form of physical abuse ranging from rape, incest, and intercourse to exposure and seduction; also sexual exploitation, which refers to the use of

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5 Finkelhor (1987) gives ranges from 6% to 62% for women and 3% to 38% for men who report (as adults) having been sexually abused during childhood. The percentage of abuse by relatives among these statistics equals 23% to 50%, and all others (friends, neighbors, child care workers and other authorities) equals 32% to 60%. Clearly these figures represent a wide (and conflicting) range. The only agreed-upon factors are that the perpetrator is usually someone known to the child—sexual abuse by a "stranger" is the least common type—and that incest is the "most common form of child sexual abuse" (Maltz 1987, 3). On the other hand, Russell (1986) found that father-daughter incest may actually be one of the least prevalent forms of incest. This, however, is the form that often comes to mind when the term incest is used.
children and teenagers in pornographic films or as prostitutes" (quoted from public flier, North Side Child Development Center, Columbus, Ohio, 4/89).

The confusion about what is (and is not) "incest" and/or "sexual abuse" is pervasive. Diana Russell, who conducted an interview-based survey on incest among 920 women in San Francisco, California, spent much of her resulting book (1986) dealing with terminological issues. Was "incest" any sexual contact between relatives, or should "children's play" be excluded? Was incest "abusive" by definition or only when perceived as such? Should she base her categories on the "feelings" of the "victims" (the term she prefers over "survivor")? David Finkelhor, one of the more prolific sociological writers on child abuse, has claimed that the victim's "feelings" are not a good basis for determining whether or not she/he was abused. "Many people," according to Finkelhor, "react strongly against the idea of seeing themselves as victims under any circumstances" (1979, 51). "Self-perception" is "just too subjective," he argues; such self-image considerations have nothing to do with the "objective circumstances of their childhood sexual experiences" (51).

Russell's choice is to divide the incest into "abusive" and "nonabusive" categories. "Abusive incest," in Russell's definition, becomes "any kind of exploitive sexual contact or attempted contact that occurred between relatives, no matter how distant the relationship, before the victim turned eighteen years old" (41). Later in the book, however, she finds herself further needing to sort out "sexual abuse" from "sexual trauma": "Sometimes sexual trauma does not involve sexual abuse. For example, a child may be traumatized because she witnesses her parents engaged in sex. Such an incident would not be a case of sexual abuse" (53). But it probably would be according to Ellen Bass and Laura Davis who wrote The Courage to Heal (1988), and who claim that "violation is determined by your experience," not any definition. This statement would seem to stand in direct contradiction to Finkelhor's assertion, but Bass and Davis devote a great deal of space in their text to defining what qualifies as sexual abuse and telling their readers how to experience their "feelings." Bass and Davis (along with many others) also assert that "forgetting" is a common coping strategy, so they advocate starting from the present "symptoms" and working backwards. If someone has "symptoms" that indicate past "trauma"--whether or not that individual has any memories of abuse--then the individual should believe, accept, and deal with the "fact" that she or he was abused (Bass and Davis 1988, 86-88). The "symptoms" Bass and Davis list cover nearly every facet of personal and social "failure" by American standards of "success" and normalcy (1988, 33-39).
Some of the project interviewees (whose transcripts will be discussed more fully later) voiced some of this terminological confusion. (All names are pseudonyms, see appendix A for list of interviewees; see appendix B for transcription key.) Lara began her interview by describing the type of "abuse" she had experienced from her brother in the following way:

1:035
L:  Well I'll say molested me and I was thinking gee I could find so many different ways of (laughs) saying that you know
    um
    basically he sort of, forced
    intercourse on me
    um, ah
    vaginal intercourse^... (1:037)

Clearly, by any standard definition, this action by her brother constitutes "incest." Still, later in the interview, Lara attempts to clarify terms she has avoided using earlier. Part of this confusion is indicative of Lara's attitudes toward the behavior (reflected in her immediate switch to her own choice of terminology: "abusive occurrences"), but part of the confusion also has to do with her sense of ambiguity about the definitions of the terms themselves.

1:178
L:  But in^, this is to make a long story longer you-know
    in therapy sessions^
    we talked about+
    the
    ah is it rape or incest? I guess it's both, right?
    It's not just father, father--daughter that's incest but, family^? (I nod) ok
    so abusive occurrences. (1:182)

Rachael, on the other hand, had no doubts about the definition of her father's behavior. However, she participates in public "consciousness raising" programs, and she is keenly aware of the confusion which surrounds the terminology of sexual aggression. She discussed this confusion several times during her interview.

1:180
R:  In regard to sex there's like slang and there's scientific and there's like legal and things like that and^+
    I think something like sexual abuse doesn't fit into any of them.
    And it's, it becomes very difficult to
you-know try to explain what happened to people, you-know using
these loaded words like "raped", and
you know saying something like "sexual abuse"
(2sec)
doesn't mean raped
but, I don't know.
Raped isn't usually for children and+. . . (1:186)

Later Rachael admitted that such confusion sometimes interferes with consciousness-raising efforts. Even among the "victims" the choice of terminology and the meanings assigned to their experiences varies widely.

1:224
R: It's very difficult sometimes like since+ you-know
(very rapidly and laughing) there's the whole a lot of us up there trying,
to speak to these people and we're all personally confused about,
what we should call our experience and then
trying to communicate it to a bunch of other people is very difficult it's
like
you-know all of us use different terms and+
different meanings for words. . . (1:228)

Historically, the term "incest" referred to a concept somewhat different from its current usage in relation to "child sexual abuse." While incest has always carried a connotation of deviancy, until recently most references to it have also carried implicit notions of sexual maturity between the participants and, to a certain extent, "consensuality" (both participants consenting to the behavior) and/or "mutuality" (both participants not only consenting but also of sufficiently similar social status--age, power relationship, etc.--to be able to "consent"). "Rape" has often been stereotyped as something done by "a stranger in a dark alley"; "incest" evokes images of "all in the family." This implicit sense that incest is a sexual activity engaged in by not-necessarily unwilling partners (i.e., that "incest" is not necessarily "rape") lingers at the highest institutional levels of American society. Recently, the US government decided to provide financial assistance to poor women who choose to undergo abortions when the health of the mother is endangered and/or in the case of "rape or incest" (my emphasis). Incest, of course, may be rape, but the historical sense of merely guarding against defective progeny persists in such wording. While it is true that incestuous behavior is, at times, mutually welcomed by both partners, it is important to this study to understand why the terms incest and rape have not been considered fully interchangeable in the past as well as to
consider the effects of recent attempts to intermix the concepts of childhood, abuse, sexual activity, and incest.

Incest in Literature and Tradition

Incest has been a fairly common theme within the lore and literature of Western tradition for centuries. It is not necessary to scrutinize traditional materials for "hidden" signs of Freudian impulses as Otto Rank did in the early part of the twentieth century. Rank revealed the presence of elements of the "Oedipal complex" in countless myths, legends, and literary works representing thousands of years of Western development (1922, 223-299)\(^6\). Such heroic efforts, however, were largely unnecessary; incestuous acts or threats appear undisguised in numerous works. In Greek cosmology, the anthropomorphized female earth, Ge, brought forth the male heaven or sky, Uranus. Ge then joined in physical union with this "son" to produce the next step of creation. The concept of "sacred marriage," is common in Greek and other classical mythologies, and it often involves parent-child or sibling unions (Morford and Lenardon 1977, 26). Classical literature, as well, presents blatant accounts of incestuous relationships; Sophocles' Oedipus cycle forms the basis of Freud's description and concepts of infantile sexual conflicts while nineteenth-century comparative mythology studies form the basis of his justifications for claiming the "universality" of such psychological impulses. Biblical accounts clearly describe acts of incest between Lot and his daughters (Genesis 19:30ff), and medieval saints' legends present convoluted tales of intentional or unwitting intergenerational coupling. Folktales such as Grimms' No. 65, "Allerleirauh" (AT 510B), need no symbolic interpretation for one to understand that they are about the threat of sexual imposition, and Scottish ballads, such as "Brown Robyn's Confession," (Buchan 1875, 1:108; qtd. in Rank 1922, 275) make little or no attempt to disguise incestuous behavior.

\(^6\) After finding traces of incest as well as the revolt of the child (son) who drives away and/or kills the father in nearly all "myth of the world parents" (225) stories, Rank commands the reader to "observe in these myths the simple extension of the infantile Oedipus complex to the universe" (226). He also detects oedipal conflicts, incest, and the "castration complex" in its various disguises of "dismemberment" in ancient mythologies, medieval fables and Christian legends as well as in more contemporary folk tales. His Freudian interpretation of these tales, however, means that he holds the described actions to be "symbolic" representations of "repressed," "dampened," or "projected" impulses of the unconscious, never indications of real-world behavior (1922, 223-299.)
Most folklore about incest implies that the sexual contact is between sexually mature persons (i.e., not before puberty) and that it is at least somewhat consensual. The Marchen female who does not wish to engage in incestuous relations with her father, for example, has a choice: flee. Such a scenario occurs, for instance in "The Dress of Silver, Gold, and Stars" (AT 510B; which includes also Cox's 510-type B1: Cat Skins; and Cox's 510-type C: Cap o' Rushes). Indeed, this "choice" could be read as an obligation. While the desire for such behavior on the part of the folktale father (or father figure) is clearly deviant, the burden for preventing fulfillment of his aberrant impulses falls to the female. In his discussion of the relationship of this tale to Shakespeare's King Lear, Alan Dundes labels the protagonist of this tale the "daughter-heroine" and sees the story as one of feminine strength (1983b). On the other hand, according to Rank, mother-son or sibling incest (which is more common in medieval saints' legends) was often engaged in unwittingly, and the action was "fated" to occur. Such a pattern reflects the Oedipus' tale on which many medieval legends were modeled. Still, whether inadvertent or intentional, the incest took place between sexually mature persons, the evidence of which was the child such couplings almost inevitably produced.

Confession, penance, and absolution were important elements in saints' legends according to Rank (271-299). The sociological paradigm premised in these tales is quite interesting. "Speaking out" (confession) not silence was the promoted in these tales. Penance implies seeking forgiveness for having engaged in (and being guilty of) sinful behavior, and intention or conscious complicity apparently had little to do with culpability. Absolution grants forgiveness from outside--from a socially-recognized authoritative source. Of these elements, the notion of sinful complicity seems to be the most persistent. Indeed, misplaced notions of complicity are currently being held responsible by many recovery advocates for the sense of "stigma" that prevents sexual abuse survivors from "speaking out" and for the "guilt" that allegedly causes the victim so much suffering. On the other hand, "confession" has simply taken on a new, public role in claims-making and consciousness-raising activities, while "absolution" is provided by the "authorities" of self-help manuals and group-therapy co-members.

On the other hand, Dundes, true to his usual approach to psychoanalytic treatments of folklore, sees AT 510 and other related tales--Cinderella et al.--as a Freudian-style "projection" of incestuous desires. Dundes claims that these stories are about "a daughter's disguised incestuous love of her father" (238) as opposed to the more frequent interpretation of them as a father's incestuous desire for his daughter.
More recent documentation of folk traditions involving incest include Vance Randolph's *Pissing in the Snow*. Five entries in the 1976 publication of his collection of Ozark folktales deal directly with incest. In one case (No. 39), incest is just the "vehicle" for a "son" who plans to get revenge on a local "preacher" by acquiring a venereal disease that the son can pass to his sister, who will pass it to their father, who will give it to the son's mother, who will pass it on to the preacher. Other tales in this collection describe casual engagement in, or casual attempts to avoid, incestuous behavior. One account (No. 53) includes versions of two still-common jokes told about sexual attitudes believed to be held by "hillbillies"; both involve the premise that a girl's first sexual contact will be, even should be, with her own kin. I have collected contemporary versions of these jokes from folklore students in the past two years. Incest is always presented as somewhat "deviant" in this material, but rarely as anything to get too upset about. Even so, it is always the extremely stereotypical and fictional "other" who is the perpetrator of the behavior, not a member of the teller's in-group.

Immoral, or at the very least uncivilized, incest, according to folklore, is something to be avoided. Keeping track of the players, unfortunately, is not enough; fate may still prevail. Incest, however, is rarely a "forced" behavior in folklore, and it does not involve "children"--at least not in the folklore most likely to circulate openly (pornography may hold other plots and images). Until very recently, the "incest" of folklore has been not been--by and large--"child abuse."  

Anthropological Approaches to Incest

In his historical tracing of human sexuality in the Western world, Michel Foucault begins his discussion by claiming that up until the seventeenth century, sexual frankness was the order of the day. "It was a time of direct gestures, shameless discourse, and open transgressions, when anatomies were shown and intermingled at will, and knowing children hung about amid the laughter of adults . . . " (1990, 3). Whether or not this represents an accurate picture of common European sexual attitudes and practices before the modern era, Foucault is certainly correct to note that by the advent of the Victorian

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8 Florence Rush provides yet another look at some of the folklore and popular culture images of children (particularly as they relate to constructions of children and femininity, children and sexuality) in "Chapter 8: Myths, Fairy Tales and Films" of The Best Kept Secret: Sexual Abuse of Children. 1980, 105-122.
era, when the subject was sex, "silence" was the "rule" for most segments of the population (1990, 3), or, at least, silence appeared to be the rule for "ordinary" people (folklore aside). At the same time, however, certain segments of the social order (particularly church, state, and the medical professions) seemed obsessed with talking about, and regulating, human sexuality--and its discourse.

According to anthropologist, George W. Stocking, Jr., the "whole repressive pattern of purity, prudery, and propriety that was to condition sexual behavior for decades to come," often assumed to be the product of the Victorian era, was already well in place when Queen Victoria was still in her formative years (1987, 199). This pattern renounced "all sexual activity save the procreative intercourse of Christian marriage", demanded "the education of both sexes in chastity and continence; required "secrecy and cultivated ignorance" in all areas of sexual behavior; necessitated "the bowdlerization of literature and euphemistic degradation of language"; and encouraged "the general suppression of bodily functions and all the `coarser' aspects of life" (Stocking 1987, 20).

By 1830, religious doctrines and economic structures had combined with middle-class ethics of self-discipline and sexual restraint to produce a social climate that not only advocated delayed gratification and sexual repression but also valorized such attitudes and behaviors into the normative standards for all human interaction (Stocking 1987, 216). When joined with nineteenth-century theories of cultural evolution, Victorian monogamy and it's progeny--sexually naive children--were held up as shining examples of the most "civilized" form of human interaction. (Stocking 1987, 167-68).

Once reduced to the single, utilitarian story of legitimate reproduction, all other forms of sexual expression were "driven out, denied, and reduced to silence," indeed, to a form of implied non-existence, according to Foucault (1990, 4). The words and gestures of "illegitimate" sexual practices, or of "necessary" sexual discourse, were relegated to the domains of prostitution, social welfare, medical science, and the church. "Everywhere else, modern Puritanism imposed its triple edict of taboo, nonexistence, and silence" onto matters of sexuality (Foucault, 1990, 4-5).

Long part of the discourse of Catholicism, sexuality now became a primary focus of attention and a common topic of discussion within Protestantism and the human sciences as well. It was as though once forbidden to speak causally of it in terms of "natural" processes, the institutions of Western culture became obsessed with "discussing" sexuality. Hence, the social dialogue of sex took place, not in terms of the "natural" but in terms of
the "sinful," the "abnormal," the "deviant," and the "exotic." And all discussions—of course—were conducted in the interest of scientific curiosity and social welfare. Church, science, and medicine decreed when, where, and how sexuality would be spoken about. In the process, they further "silenced" the populace. (Foucault 1990, 17-49)

Early anthropologists focused their discussion of sexuality on mating patterns as part of human evolution. They were fascinated with both "primitive promiscuity" (defined as the earliest form of human mating, a pattern which resulted in matrilineal kinship structures) and with the development of human "marriage" through all its later, more "civilized" forms. Edward B. Tylor concluded that an "incest taboo" arose from a need to force marriage choices outside established familial units. Such behavior, he argued, would procure alliances with potentially hostile groups, and thus improve both groups' chances of survival. The need to "marry out or be killed out," claimed Edward Tylor, was the primary mechanism responsible for the invention of "society," which evolved as isolated groups merged (1889, qtd in Cohen and Eamas 1982, 66). Incest was understandable when humans had existed in a "state of nature"; marriage and the incest taboo marked humankind's transition into "cultural" beings. Marriage, many anthropologists argued, was the primary civilizing force of human development. (Cohen and Eamas 1982, 66)

By the 1920's, the problem of "primitive promiscuity" had been replaced by the "universality" of the "incest taboo," a concept which acknowledged that some form of prohibition of sexual relations between "designated relatives"—blood or otherwise—occurred in all societies. These prohibitions were arbitrary and culturally specific, and they did not necessarily overlap with marriage prohibitions, which might involve caste or racial issues. Still, such universality suggested that the incest taboo was (and is) somehow crucial to the development (and to the maintenance) of human culture. (Cohen and Eamas 1982, 66; also, Stocking 1987, 204)

While the incest "taboo" has been considered universal, the actual practice of incest (because of the taboo) has been considered rare (at least until recently). Robin Fox begins his 1980 book-length discussion of incest from a standpoint that the wide-spread occurrence and continuing presence of incest taboos in civilization requires an explanation. After all, claims Fox, very little incestuous behavior actually occurs. Therefore, he contends, the question is not why we have incest taboos but "Why do human beings not want to commit incest all that much?" (7). Clearly, as Fox points out: "If mothers or fathers wished to have sex with their immature children, there would be little physiological to stop them, and the parent at least knows what it is all about. Again, we are up against
the fact that there is, proportionately, very little of it, and this lack cannot be explained solely by sanctions, since these are often nonexistent or inoperative" (1980, 53). Fox affirms his stance repeatedly, in a variety of ways, throughout the book: "There doesn't seem to be all that much committing of incest in proportion to total numbers" (1980, 7).

While he may be accurate in his assessment that incestuous behavior is rare in many societies, his justification for believing that it is also rare in Western society is that "People say that they don't" engage in incest" (1980, 7). Ultimately, Fox falls into much the same trap he accuses his incest-exogamy predecessors of: he confuses incest with mating, sexual behavior with procreation. Indeed, Fox's entire argument is a combination of Freudian oedipal theory, a cognitive anthropology approach to social development, and an evolutionary theory of human development. According to Fox, oedipal repression and genetic selection combined in "mating" behavior to produce modern humans. Only once in the entire volume does Fox mention the phrase "sexual abuse." In connection with a Swedish proposal to change marriage laws he states:

The only real opposition to the proposed (and as yet unimplemented) changes, came from those who were afraid of genetic defects. . . . For cases of sexual relations outside marriage, it was argued, these come under the general laws of such relationships. Thus a father's liaison with an underage daughter was covered by the laws against sexual abuse of minors and needed no special statue. No one ever seemed to think it worth considering mother and son! The general attitude to adult incest is that what adults choose to do in the privacy of their bedrooms has nothing to do with the state." (1980, 216)

Fox may, perhaps, be excused for his insistence in 1980 that incestuous behavior is rare. This stance was fairly prevalent and actively promoted by such voices of scientific and institutional authority as the "Kinsey" reports (1948, 1953). Still, his work perpetuates the notions that incest, when it does occur, is usually both consensual and

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9 On the other hand, statistical exaggeration by claims makers works to blur the "proportional" aspects of the incidence of sexual abuse as well. I have heard the most widely cited (if poorly substantiated) figure "one in three American women is (was) sexually abused before the age of eighteen" casually translated into "nearly everyone." The inverse of this statistic (that two-thirds of American women are not sexually abused before the age of eighteen) is submerged in emphasis on the apparent "frequency." On the other hand, even the more conservative figures of "one in four" or "one in five" are far from "rare" by any definition.
relatively benign, and that it is so "unnatural" that no "normal" human would engage in such activity.\textsuperscript{10}

Incest and Freud

Many twentieth-century notions of incest, such as Fox's, have been significantly influenced by (and often even premised on) the concepts and writing of Sigmund Freud. In Totem and Taboo (1913), Freud combined anthropological concepts of incest avoidance, particularly those of Sir James Frazer as presented in Totemism and Exogamy (1910), with his own ideas of the causes of obsessional guilt in neurotics. "Savages," children, and neurotics weren't all that different from one another according to Freud; all were concerned with overwhelming unconscious desires to commit incest and with the need to avoid doing so. In the case of children, the emotional ambivalence of the child toward the parent (who was desired but forbidden) was reflected in primitive taboos, in the myths of early civilizations, and in the Oedipal complex of modern, civilized man.

Before developing his theories of infantile sexuality and repression as reflected in the Oedipus complex, however, Freud had reached a quite different conclusion about the cause of some psychological problems. Freud decided that hysterics suffered from "reminiscences"--memories of psychically or emotionally traumatic experiences that had been repressed from conscious awareness. When his female patients began "remembering" having been molested as children by adults, Freud premised the "seduction" theory, which

\textsuperscript{10} Diana Russell (1986) provides a brief but comprehensive critique of the Kinsey reports (and subsequent writings by Wardell Pomeroy and Paul Gebhard, the two authors of these reports), Freudian influences, and Fox's anthropological approach to incest. She chides Fox for lending support to notions that incest is rare, consensual, and of little consequence when it does happen. My own response to Fox's work is that it is fascinating, thought-provoking, and, occasionally, even insightful. Much of what is worthwhile, however, is undercut by Fox's assumption that incest is rare--although admittedly this is the underpinning of his whole argument. Since "we hear less of the female case," he says, he is left to speculate about women's roles in, and perceptions of, incest: "suspect," "doubt," "may be," "unlikely," "hard to say," "theoretically" (164). His attitude toward women is generally flippant, dismissive, male-chauvinistic, and Freudian-bound. He holds women responsible for incest when it does happen (they are acting out their sexual impulses), and he contends that if incest is a social problem, this is also women's fault and that it is their responsibility to provide the solution. Taking into account that "men's egos are frail" (195) will help women find a way to "liberate" themselves and still "accommodate" men's "natural" desires to possess and control female sexuality (193-215).
attributed to these early sexual encounters the cause of adult neuroses, phobias, and hysteric. Already marginalized within the Viennese medical community by his Jewish heritage and commitment to psychoanalytic procedures, Freud became nearly isolated after his announcement of this socially offensive theory. (Hunt 1993, 166-207)

In his 1984 work, The Assault on Truth, Jeffrey Masson credits Freud with being "the first psychiatrist who believed his patients were telling the truth" when they claimed to have been sexually assaulted during their childhoods. These women, Freud asserted, were sick, "not because they came from 'tainted' families, but because something terrible and secret had been done to them as children" (Masson 1984, xviii). It was quite logical that Freud would acknowledge at least the possibility that his patients were describing "real" events from their pasts when they told about sexual encounters, "a whole literature of legal medicine existed in French devoted to the topic of child abuse (especially rape), and Freud had this material in his personal library, though he did not refer to it in his writings" (Masson 1984, xx). In addition, Masson claims that there is good reason to believe that Freud "may have attended autopsies performed on raped and murdered children" (1984, xx).

Even so, Freud eventually abandoned as "erroneous" his beliefs about "seduction," replacing them with the Oedipus complex based on concepts of internal fantasy and infantile sexuality. On September 21, 1987, a little less than two years after Freud presented his seduction theory in a paper to the Society for Psychiatry and Neurology in Vienna, he wrote in a letter to Wilhelm Fliess: "Surely such widespread perversions against children are not very probable" (qtd. in Masson 1984, 108). "Freud's preoccupation with seduction "seemingly came to an abrupt end," writes Masson (1984, 107).

Under pressure from multiple sources Freud reached a new conclusion about his patients' sexual "memories." What he had formerly accepted as hostile actions by the parent toward the child, he now viewed as "hostile impulses" on the part of that child and directed toward the parent (Masson 1984, 113). Such "hostility" would have been natural had the assaults actually occurred, but once Freud concluded that this was not the case, he could only further conclude that his patients were "making up" their tales of victimization. The aggressive acts attributed to the parent were then interpreted by Freud as fantasies conjured up by the child during adolescence as a defense against assuming sexual maturity. The patient did this, according to Freud, not to escape or relieve painful memories of a
real past, but because of her own weak sexual "constitutional disposition" (Freud 1905, Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality. qtd. in Masson 1984, 122).

In 1905 Freud explained his earlier misunderstanding of the sexual molestation tales:

At that time my material was still scant, and it happened by chance to include a disproportionately large number of cases in which sexual seduction by an adult or by other children played the chief part in the history of the patient's childhood. I thus overestimated the frequency of such events (though in other respects they were not open to doubt.) Moreover, I was at that period unable to distinguish with certainty between falsifications made by hysterics in their memories of childhood and traces of real events. (Freud 1896, "My Views on the Part Played by Sexuality in the Aetiology of Neuroses." qtd. in Masson 1984, 129)

Clearly, Freud acknowledges that some reports of sexual abuse were real; however, he reduces the theoretical importance of these by calling them "accidental influences" in the onset of neuroses. Not only did he not believe the reality of some accounts, but he was also beginning to obtain information "relating to people who had remained normal" despite the fact that "the sexual history of their childhood did not necessarily differ in essentials from that of neurotics, and, in particular, that the part played by seduction was the same in both cases" (1905; qtd. in Masson 1984, 129-130, emphasis in original). Neither was actual abuse a prerequisite for psychological problems nor did it automatically lead to such problems. Eventually Freud advocated a middle ground, claiming that whether the abuses had actually taken place or whether they were merely the patient's fantasies was immaterial to the diagnosis or treatment of the neurosis. The psychological effects were the same because the patient believed the abuse to have taken place, and it was these effects which concerned Freud.

As a psychoanalyst, Jeffrey Masson takes umbrage with this position on behalf of the patient. Masson writes:

To tell someone who has suffered the effects of a childhood filled with sexual violence that it does not matter whether his [sic] memories are anchored in reality or not is to do further violence to that person and is bound to have a pernicious effect. A real memory demands some form of validation from the outside world--denial of those memories by others can lead to a break with reality, and a psychosis. The lack of interest in a person's store of personal memories does violence to the integrity of that person." (1984, 133)

I have argued elsewhere (Wyckoff 1990) that similar detrimental effects occur on a social level when a personal experience becomes "untellable" because listeners find the
account uncomfortable or unbelievable. If the reality of the experience is not "confirmed," the teller may be labeled insane or considered to be lying for personal gain. If either the teller's conduct within the experience (i.e., whether the teller did the "right" thing in the situation being reported) is not confirmed or the interpretation (i.e., the "meaning") assigned to the experience is not "affirmed" by the listeners, the teller's behavior, values, and attitudes are called into question. In either case, the teller may be subtly, or openly, isolated from full support of a "community" of shared interests and agendas into which he or she might otherwise be incorporated. At the same time, an experience which cannot be talked about becomes, for the community, a situation which does not need to be addressed. What is "untellable" is also subtly "non-existent."

On the other hand, a different reading of Freud's remarks (quoted above) may indicate that he was accurately perceiving the presence of "fantasy" in at least some of the abuse accounts. Unfortunately, his own lack of awareness of narrative formation processes caused him to misinterpret the ways and the reasons some of his patients might have been "making up" their accounts of childhood abuse. Even Masson, in 1984, could not have fully understood the relationship between socially available paradigms and personal experience narrativizing; much of the work on these processes has been undertaken only within the last few years.

Lamentably, the limitations inherent in Freud's work served to reinforce the already prevailing notion that women who accused their respectable fathers of having sexually abused them years earlier were either lying or sick. Originally countering such beliefs, Freud eventually accommodated them; if the women were not simply perpetrating vicious lies for their own purposes, their accusations represented the false fantasies of hysterical delusion. Either way, the women were creating stories for which there was no objective basis or verification. This assumption became a prevalent aspect of modern psychotherapy. "It was a comforting view for society," according to Masson, "for Freud's interpretation—that the sexual violence that so affected the lives of his women patients was nothing but fantasy—posed no threat to the existing social order. Therapists could thus remain on the side of the successful and the powerful, rather than of the miserable victims of family violence" (1984, xxii-xxiii).

From Incest to Child Abuse

In her 1991 article, "The Blood Libel: A Motif in the History of Childhood," Magdalene Schultz argues that anytime there has been a significant change in social
concepts of childhood and parenting, a social crisis has ensued. Such a crisis may well have begun brewing in America during the post-World War II years. The "boom" of babies born in the years following the war, and those who were coming of age during this time, became the objects of "scientific" scrutiny and social concern as people turned their energies away from the destruction of warfare and into the tasks of returning life to "normalcy." Individually, and in groups, children of this era were probed, prodded, studied, analyzed, and statisticized by medical, dental, psychological, sociological, and educational authorities in their efforts to develop and test theories of intellectual, social, and psychological developmental processes and to eliminate all childhood's ills. Many of the resulting theories challenged nearly every traditional parenting practice from demand feeding schedules to disciplinary styles, and widely-read authors such as Dr. Benjamin Spock handed down new guidelines for raising "healthy" and "well-adjusted" children.\footnote{Bentia Eisler provides an entertaining and revealing look at the lives of the 1950s children in her 1986 volume, Private Lives: Men and Women of the Fifties. She covers much of social climate of both those who came of age during the fifties and those born during this decade--who came of age during the 1960s.}

One theory developed as a result of this intense focus on children and child raising practices was the "battered child syndrome" by C. Henry Kemp in 1962. Originally designed to alert medical practitioners to situations of physical brutality, the "battered child" classification was later redefined to include any form of child "maltreatment," including physical, sexual or emotional abuse as well as neglect of the child's basic health, welfare, or safety either by parents or by caregivers such as baby-sitters and day care workers (Gelles 1987, 26-46). This latter modification in definition both benefited from and helped to support investigations into other forms of "domestic violence."

All contemporary conceptions of domestic violence, however, are indebted to dramatic shifts in attitudes toward violence in general that occurred during the anti-war, anti-violence social climate of the 1960s. The "hippie" movement with its "communal" families and its love-promoting, back-to-nature lifestyles provided ideological and symbolic support for wider "peace" (if not always "peaceful") demonstrations and social symbolism. These interrelated social phenomena received extensive media coverage and, thus, an implicit form of social sanctioning and authorization. With such catchy slogans as "War is bad for children and other living things," and "Make love, not war," these movements heightened awareness and changed attitudes towards violent behavior, calling
into question the necessity, or inevitability, of physical reactions to conflict (or at least state sanctioned corporately practiced forms of violence).

Continuing media focus on civil "protests," on "crime," and, eventually, on child sexual abuse itself have kept concerns about violence, and particularly concerns about violence toward children, in the public eye. "Violence" itself, as Richard Gelles points out, is an ideological and often political concept "used to attract attention to undesirable behaviors or situations" (1987, 32). In the US, everything from Aid to Families with Dependent Children, to abortion, to the entire capitalist system has been derided as "violent" at various times by one faction or another (1987, 32). Once established, the issue of violence against children quickly became politicized as the task of "explaining" such deviancy required someone or something to blame, necessitated the development of guidelines as to when and whether to interfere, and emphasized the need for strategies for preventing future occurrences.

During the sixties, however, most published work on child abuse appeared only in medical journals. Not until the Women's Movement in the mid-70s refocused public attention away from race demonstrations and anti-war rallies and onto gender issues did the subject of child sexual abuse explode into the public sector, to be joined there by discussions of "wife abuse" and later by issues of husband, elderly, and parent abuse as definitions broadened (Gelles 1987, 27-28). Before the mid-1960s, instances of serious domestic violence had been considered to be aberrations, rarely occurring and "caused by individual pathologies" (Gelles 1987, 14). Vague and conflicting definitions of child abuse, when combined with unsystematic reporting, resulted in statistics which supported such notions. Even though both anecdotal and historical discussions of child-rearing practices and marital life were full of descriptions of child neglect, of beating and mutilation, of infanticide, and of wife battering (Gelles 1987, 13), the seriousness and extent of such behaviors were often masked by social and legal attitudes that held that the ways people chose to act toward one another, in the privacy of their own homes, was their own business.

Consequently, the nation was in shock after the institution of uniform reporting laws in 1968 made it seem as though there had been "an exponential leap in child abuse . . . as more and more cases of abuse were actually reported" during the early seventies (Gelles 1987, 27). Child abuse suddenly became a high-priority social issue as medical, social, and governmental authorities and agencies struggled to sort out "legitimate" uses of force
in child-rearing practices, cultural "norms" for physical interaction, and definitions of harmful behavior.

But why all the fervor now? Part of the answer has to lie in the new concepts of what constituted a "normal, healthy, well-adjusted" child that were developed during the 1950s and 1960s as well as in changing concepts of what constituted "appropriate" sexual behavior by, and toward, children. After all, as Florence Rush points out, "incest," "rape," and "child abuse" can only occur where they are defined as such. The Hebrew Talmud, for instance, "held that a female child of `three years and one day' could be betrothed by sexual intercourse with her father's permission. Intercourse with one younger was not a crime but [simply] invalid" (1980, 17). It certainly wasn't "rape" or "abuse." (By the same law, rape of a male under the age of nine was also invalid since he wasn't old enough yet to "count" as a man.) In a world where a female and her sexuality were property, "rape" was a crime of theft (of a girl's value-laden virginity). Such theft could be compensated for either by marrying her or by paying her father for the loss of her full value in future marriage negotiations. Gradually, over the years, the age and the definition of what counted as "rape" changed. By the middle of the sixteenth century, for example, English law decreed ten as the minimum age at which a female could "consent" to sex. (Rush 1980, 17-35)

Another part of the answer to why "now" lies in the "claims-making" activities which Joel Best describes in his book Threatened Children: Rhetoric and Concern About Child-victims (1990). The public furor over child sexual abuse seems to be both the result of, and a focus for, "domain expansion"--a process whereby groups with related interests seek validation based on their claims to be "one more example of," or "one more kind of," an already-established "problem." For example, "within the women's movement" writes Best, "initial claims about rape led to more specific attacks on marital rape and date rape, and the definition of sexual harassment became broader and more subtle" (78).

Best traces the history of contemporary child-victim claims through the various social disruptions caused by the ongoing "civil rights" movements that began in the late 1950s, when a variety of social and cultural energies began to come together. Demands for an end to racial discrimination quickly refocused on demands for an end to discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation, age, and disabilities. (Although racial justice and women's rights have been partners in social causes since before the Civil War, women's concern's have frequently been side-lined by other issues.) More and more, formerly disenfranchised groups began to demand an equal share of the "American
Dream." By the mid-1970s the social and political climate had reached crisis proportions. The anti-war rallies and racial demonstrations of the 1960s had raised issues of who would guide America's destiny. White, male, Euro-centric hegemonic social and political dominance came increasingly under attack as the Women's Movement and a swelling array of minority activists joined forces, all demanding inclusion in decision-making processes and calling for alterations in established patterns of social interaction. With the legislation of "civil right" for minority populations, the license of established authorities to dictate personal behavior and social policy was doubted and challenged. One by one, the hallowed institutions of Western culture have been accused of self-interest and charged with wrong-doing. Increasingly, such attacks have come in the form of accusations of sexual abuse.

Best views the establishment of child-safety as a "cause célèbre" as no accident. He writes:

The early 1970s saw a series of major shocks to the social system—defeat in Vietnam, the Watergate scandal and Nixon's resignation, flagging income growth, and the oil embargo and energy crisis. By 1980, Americans could choose among several apocalyptic visions of the future. There was a fresh, widespread movement against nuclear weapons, fueled by graphic warnings about the consequences of nuclear war. There was growing sense that the American economy could no longer compete in the international marketplace and that the United States was—and would remain—in economic decline. Warnings about the terrible ecological consequences of populations growth, resource depletion, and pollution continued. By the mid-1980s, there were claims that AIDS would become an uncontrollable global epidemic. As the end of the millennium came into sight, the only question seemed to be which bang or whimper would mark the world's end. (1990, 172)

Children make particularly good symbols for claims-making according to Best. While currently they are "economically worthless" (in terms of general family and social finances), they are "sentimentally priceless," and with the reduction in the birth-rate, they are also take on aspects of "endangered species." Children represent the future, and (currently at least) they are considered vulnerable: "small, innocent, weak, inexperienced; they need protection" (1990, 171). In addition, children are perceived as "blameless, "innocent victims" when crimes are committed against them; they never share "complicity for their fate" (1990, 34).

The more recent shift to childhood (past/remembered) sexual abuse is more complicated. Clearly, this version of the issue operates as supporting "evidence" for the
claims by the Women's Movement that child sexual abuse is severely damaging. On the other hand, it may also be fulfilling some of the functions of "projection" of social guilt arising from changes in child raising and parenting concepts, such as Schultz describes in the "blood libel" cases. This current situation has been made significantly more complex, however, by the lack of a "fundamentally weak" but conveniently available "minority population" against which, historically, society has exorcised its anxiety and guilt (Schultz 1991, 283). The "happy days" of the 1950s nuclear family, so widely popularized by magazines and television shows such as Ozzie and Harriet which held this version of family life and child-raising up as the "ideal" (even while implying it was the already-accepted norm), did not represent the experiences of many of its children. On the other hand, it was the "dominant story" of family life we were encultured to believe "should" be the norm (Oakely 1986). I would modify Schultz's version of the childhood and parenting crisis to suggest that it is the "transitional generation(s)"--those caught in the dissonance of two "dominant versions" of family life--who are both the most angry at not having experienced the new standards and who feel the most guilt for not having practiced them on their own children (as a result of repeating what they experienced rather than what they now know they "should" have experienced, what they should have practiced.)

In late twentieth-century America, however, it is not generally socially acceptable to attack minority populations as a way of venting one's own social anxiety or guilt; indeed, it is "politically incorrect" to do so. Many "childhood" sexual abuse stories seem curiously targeted against "invisible" or "absent" or "personally specific" villains. The "satanic" version of this story invokes a "nowhere, yet potentially hidden everywhere" villain, hidden by the satanic conspiracy and/or by the death of the perpetrators. The "feminist-recovery" version, while sometimes naming specific agents, often cites only an amorphous "patriarchy" as the primal cause. "Repressed memory" versions are often aimed at the

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12 "Blood libel" (also "ritual murder") is the term given to a "sacrificial murder" by one (social/religious) "group" of a member of another group. The blood of the victim is then (it is claimed) used in the rites of the murdering group. The "victim" is usually a child, and the group accused of committing the "murder" is a socially-marginal minority population. Rumor-panics resulting from this accusation have been traced to the early centuries of the Common Era when the Romans accused Christians of using the blood and flesh of non-Christians in their religious ceremonies. With the rise of Christianity, the legend shifted to mostly Jewish villains and Christian victims, and since the twelfth century this legend has sparked (and been used to justify) pogroms against Jews and other vulnerable social populations.
victim's own family, and accusations seem more intended for recovering monetary "damages" than for imputing guilt. "Social drama" seems to be a common factor in all these versions, and there is a relationship between such manifestations of the experience and the ways that individuals express their own accounts of childhood sexual abuse. These texts are now in the service of the various "movements" that have built "claims" on child sexual abuse. Many institutions now have vested interests in the story, and all are trying to create "dominant narratives" (to use Ehrenhaus' 1993 term) to guide individuals in recounting their personal experiences. Unfortunately, real individuals have perpetrated acts of sexual aggression against real victims, and no "public" story of experience is likely to accurately reflect any single individual's experience. Charlotte Linde's concept of "explanatory systems" (1987) will be used to discuss how individuals mediate between their personal experiences and the "dominant narratives" of social discourse.

Explanatory Frameworks

A wide variety of "causes" and "solutions" have been proposed since 1962 for all forms of domestic violence and particularly for child sexual abuse. Scientific hypotheses have ranged from psychological theories of individual pathology to socio-cultural explanations that view domestic violence as ethnic and/or sub-culture patterns of learned behavior. Socio-political responses have been equally varied. The Women's Movement has often cited Western "patriarchy" as the root of domestic violence in general and of child abuse in particular. As the "umbrella constituency" for a wide range of causes" (Best 1990, 7), Women's Movement activists have claimed that male-dominated family structures with their narrowly ascribed roles, limited earning potential by women, and lack of social protection and judicial recourse for injury accorded to women and children are the results of unequal distributions of social power based on gender and age. Fundamentalist religious organizations, meanwhile, have placed the blame for the crime of sexual abuse on "satanists," while also citing a breakdown in traditional social and political virtues and values as the reason "satanic cults" are able to operate with impunity. "Missing children" advocates point to child sexual abuse as simply one more example of why it is essential for society to take "missing children" claims seriously.

All such institutional and social voices have vied for influence if not outright supremacy in the right to "make meaning" of and from this experience. Each voice, in turn, reflects and promotes a particular ideological stance, and each calls for a specific pattern of response. Even psychological studies and the hypotheses developed from them
concerning the "treatment" of deviant individuals become the basis for social action (or inaction) policies. If child sexual abuse is the act of an individual who suffers from some form of psychological pathology or sickness, that is, if sexual abuse is perpetrated by someone who is mentally ill, who has severe emotional problems or some defect of character structure, who is impulsive and immature and exhibits poor emotional or aggression control, who is depressed, pervasively angry, dependent, egocentric, narcissistic, demanding and insecure, who is sadomasochistic or has a perverse fascination with punishment of children, or who is recreating his or her own upbringing, then the focus of response will be on the treatment or control of the individual (Gelles 1987, 50-51). Those not directly involved can click their tongues, shake their heads, and stay uninvolved. If, on the other hand, ethnic or sub-cultural behavioral "norms" are seen as the problem, the issue is somewhat more socially complicated, but, again, the problem and response can remain somewhat distanced from dominant-culture members. "They" will have to learn new behavior patterns or suffer the consequences. If the individual child "victim" becomes the focus of attention, little may be done to alter the factors which led to the abuse or are likely to lead to future abuse. The "sanctity of the family" encourages courts to return children to abusive situations. Meanwhile, targeting children in sexual abuse awareness programs may be both unfair and somewhat unrealistic. Such "prevention" programs make children little more "powerful" than they were before but implicitly makes them responsible for their own safety (Kaufman and Zigler 1993). If, however, child sexual abuse were to be seen as a pervasive social and cultural problem created and supported by wide-spread "cultural norms which tolerate and approve of violence and the particular social organization of the family," then real and lasting change would occur only through wide-spread and concerted efforts "to eliminate the norms and values which legitimize and glorify violence in the society and the family" (Gelles 1987, 19).

Institutional discourse has been influential in many ways. Mass media has incorporated various aspects of these "expert" systems into popular discussions and portrayals of child sexual abuse; these, in turn, have become part of the language of "ordinary" folk as they attempt to understand their own and others' experiences. Charlotte Linde has postulated the term "explanatory system" for popular applications of institutional philosophies. Defined as "a system of beliefs derived from some expert system but used by someone with no corresponding expertise or credentials," explanatory systems fill the gap between expert manifestos and common sense (Linde 1987, 343).
Such semi-expert systems, according to Linde, carry more authoritative weight than personal speculation, while still making "sense" within the worldview of the social interactors. While Linde's use of the term is problematic in some ways, the general concept of explanatory systems will be useful to the discussion of childhood sexual abuse as a sociological phenomenon. Three major explanatory systems have developed to cope with the social trauma of child sexual abuse. Each is based on a corresponding institutional system--religious, medical, legal--which in turn serves to validate the popular discourse; each attempts to create a "dominant story" of child (and childhood) sexual abuse.

The earliest institutional response was religious based. During the 1970s, the breakdown of traditional conservative religious and family values, as discerned in widespread social violence and political liberalism, resulted in the formation of a "Moral Majority" movement spearheaded by religious fundamentalists. The combination of these conservative philosophies with the satanism and cult scares, led to accusations in 1985 of satanic cult activity involving child-molestation and murder. These allegations (nearly always unsubstantiated) mimicked the diffusion patterns, pervasiveness, and resistance to counter-suggestion of contemporary legends, to which they have been compared. (See, e.g., Richardson, Best, and Bromley 1991a; Victor 1993.) As with such legends, satanic cult reports reflect pre-existing social anxieties. At the same time, they have indoctrinated Americans at all levels of social responsibility, including legal, social, and medical "gatekeepers," the persons responsible for diagnosing injuries as accidental or abusive and family situations as safe or harmful (Gelles 1987, 35; Richardson, Best, and Bromley 1991b, 12-13).

At the same time that fundamentalist religious factions were blaming ungodly forces for social ills, a number of social problems ranging from alcohol abuse to maladaptive behavior by war veterans were undergoing a process of "medicalization" by a different set of social experts. Medical interest in sexual abuse, formerly concerned primarily with the psycho-pathology of the perpetrator, quickly moved to a focus on the victim, borrowing and adapting the post-traumatic stress disorder model which lists "problems with memory" and "recurrent intrusive recollections" among the characteristic long-term effects of traumatic experience (DSM III, American Psychiatric Association 1980; qtd. in Finkelhor 1987, 349). Such lingering consequences emphasized the seriousness of childhood sexual abuse, which could result in "dissociative states," "multiple personality disorders," and otherwise "dysfunctional" adults. No longer considered hallowed or mysterious, the
language of a wide variety of psychological theories has become standard fare in American discourse; psychology-based self-help books regularly top the best-sellers' list.

Lastly, throughout it all, childhood sexual abuse has become the subject of highly visible legal battles. Religious witch-hunts, damage suits based on "repressed memories," and counter-suits charging "false-memory" syndromes have been fought out in courtrooms across the country under the glare of news coverage and media exploitation. Nightly news broadcasts, daytime talk shows, made-for-TV documentaries, and fictionalized dramas have brought the issue of child sexual abuse into every American home.

The various explanatory frameworks which have grown up around child sexual abuse have interacted with each other in multitudinous ways (and with a hodgepodge of other metaphoric constructs including the symbolism of "natural disasters") at both the "expert" and the "popular" levels of meaning making. Certain "dominant stories," certain "implicit narrative structure[s]" (Bruner 1986, 139) underlie and are embodied in each of these explanatory frameworks. Each "frames" the social problem in specific ways, defining what counts, who decides what counts, who is indicted, and who is exempt from culpability. Each also constructs the problem in a way that creates at least some degree of tacit "distancing" of the problem from "normal" life and social responsibility. When framed as post-traumatic stress disorder, medical responses and social attitudes towards child sexual abuse reflect a variety of social predicaments similar to those surrounding the Vietnam War and its aftermath. While clearly the "survivor" (both of the Vietnam experience and of childhood sexual abuse) was at one time "victimized" by circumstances beyond her/his control, the damaging experience occurred in the past; nothing can be done to change that past. Such "medicalization" of the victim does nothing to alter social attitudes or behaviors which led to the circumstances which allowed the "wounding" to occur in the first place (Ehrenhaus 1993). Shouldn't efforts now be concentrated on "healing" the wounded "survivor" so that she or he may "get on" with life? On the other hand, is the Women's Movement, which promotes the "recovery" story, better off keeping the victim permanently in the "healing" stage as a way of uniting women against Western patriarchy? When religious, political, or social factions declare that sexual abuse is perpetrated by deviant "others," attention is focused away from the possibility that in-group members may also be engaging in such deviancy. Such framing of the problem as action taking place "outside" the group however, validates and stabilizes the values, attitudes, and expectations of the in-group. Is it to the in-group's advantage to maintain the story to keep the norms and boundaries of their group-identity secure? Legal actions,
meanwhile, assign blame; they "prove" who is "at fault" and extract penalties, implicitly absolving everyone outside the courtroom of guilt and/or responsibility. All these various responses to childhood sexual abuse—the costly litigation, the satanic panics, the feminist rhetoric, and the pop-psychology—may be mostly distractions and metaphoric scape-goats useful for avoiding larger social issues.

These explanatory systems, however, are also the ones most readily available to individuals who are currently attempting to "make meaning" of their own unique experiences with childhood sexual abuse. Such social discourse provides essential language and symbolism for the endeavor; one cannot speak of something for which one has no words. At the same time, this discourse also channels and, potentially, limits the formations of individual narratives. The next chapter will examine a sampling of public expressions involving childhood sexual abuse.
CHAPTER III
PUBLIC DISCOURSE

"To study culture is to study ideas, experiences, feelings, as well as the external forms that such internalities take as they are made public, available to the senses and thus truly social." (Ulf Hannerz 1992, 3)

"If ideology is a wholesale form of culture as power, professional expertise is a retail form." (Ulf Hannerz 1992, 121)

Institutional Frameworks and Explanatory Systems

No one creates a personal story, not even within the internal dialogue of idionarrating, in true isolation or freedom from one's societal influences. Call it what you will--culture, worldview, folk ideas, dominant stories, ideology, cultural assumptions--all stories are created within and/or against the socio-cultural backdrop of certain concepts and constructs of what counts as real, what counts as normal, and what counts as proper. I would agree with Marjorie Bard's assertion that it is the "silent self who can be a dissenting voice in society [and] pursue wish fulfillment." I do not agree with her, however, that there is any "true freedom of expression" in idionarrating, or that "honesty is not threatened by the desire to be believed, nor are ideas held in reserve because of intimidation" (1992, 65). The self-narrative may indeed express more disagreement with social norms, but this reflects rejection of--not freedom from--such norms. Even self-narrations are more than simply "influenced by," and reflective of, "collective or societal values" (Bard 1990, 65); such stories are created as a result of such elements. While the individual does have more freedom to consider alternative plots for life's experiences, it is primarily because the "performance situation" is more controllable: he or she can create the audience feedback (prior-knowledge intimacy, patience, tolerance, confirmation, and affirmation) as well as tell the story. Idionarratives become a "starting point for social change" when the "self" creates "self-acceptance" based on the values and attitudes of the "self narrative" (Bard 1990, 70, 68). Social change, however, only occurs once such
stories are exchanged and validated by the larger society: when they join with each other to create and/or support a "dominant" version of some area of social life.

As an "implicit narrative structure" (Bruner 1986b, 139), a dominant social story serves the needs of a particular historical, socio-cultural ideological stance. Bruner, for instances, suggests that the "dominant story" constructed about Native American culture has recently shifted from a 1940s version of "the past as glorious" and "the future as assimilation" to the current version of "the present . . . as a resistance movement, the past as exploitation, and the future as ethnic resurgence" (1986b, 139). Ehrenhaus (1993) uses a similar concept (which he terms "dominant cultural narrative") to discuss the current construction of stories about Vietnam veterans, which he contends are the "sites of ideological struggle over national consciousness--struggle over the meaning of that war and the lessons to be drawn from it" (78). Both of these works argue that "dominant" social stories are shifting, socially-created constructs of what any particular, wide-spread, socially-referential "experience" means--and should mean--to both those individuals who were personally involved in the experience and to those individuals (everyone else) who inhabit the socio-cultural world within which this experience "took place" and is now "taking place" through the stories told about it. Such dominant narratives, according to Ehrenhaus, embody a symbolic, value-laden "storyline" and are constituted within, and transmitted through, the competing, intersecting and mutually-contextualizing voices of public discourse (1993, 80). According to Bruner, a new dominant story "articulates what had been only dimly perceived" before; it "authenticates previous feelings, legitimizes new actions, and aligns individual consciousness with a larger social movement." In the process of dominant story creation, the "personal" becomes social and historical; the resulting social paradigm guides the construction of future personal accounts (Bruner 1986b, 143).

Child sexual abuse is currently undergoing the process of "dominant story" construction as private experience moves into and through the public discourse. Sexual abuse has been the subject of movies, documentaries, newscasts, numerous TV talk shows, and both scientific and popular-audience books for the past several years. The "story" of the "victim," the narrative of the "survivor" has been presented, in one form or another, through a variety of mass media conduits almost daily. No single, discrete public narrative concisely or exactly represents any of the explanatory constructs currently employed by adults in their attempts to "make meaning" of their past experiences with childhood sexual abuse. Nor has one "dominant story" achieved ascendancy. However,
as I suggested in Chapter II, three primary institutional-based areas of American society are influencing the creation of such a story. This chapter will examine selections from the public discourse in each of these areas (medical, religious, and legal) to explore the ways that meaning is being created and channeled within each. In addition, the relationship between personal and public forms of expression also demands consideration. Charlotte Linde's (1987) basic concept of "explanatory systems" will be useful to the discussion of both of these interactive processes.

Linde defines an "explanatory system" as an intermediate level of discourse "derived from some expert system but used by someone with no corresponding expertise or credentials" (343). According to Linde, "explanatory systems" lie midway between "expert" systems and "common sense," that is, midway between systems considered rational, scientific, and institutionally validated and 'folk' systems based on "what everybody knows" as a result of having grown up in a particular socio-cultural order.

Linde developed this concept through textual analysis of responses acquired during interviews soliciting information about how a person came to be in a particular profession—a common, and commonly talked about, life experience. Based on these responses, Linde considers "I have precise mind, and I enjoy getting all the little details right" (343) an explanation that any American would recognize as a legitimate and "common sense" explanation as to why someone would choose to become an accountant. On the other hand, she claims one would need familiarity with an "expert system" (in this case Freudian psychology) in order to understand or accept "Well, my mother started toilet training me when I was six months old" as a valid and understandable answer to the same question (243).

For the current discussion, I feel it is necessary to modify Linde's concept somewhat to include an emerging form of "expert" that her system was not designed to accommodate and an emerging usage of explanatory systems Linde's research didn't consider. Linde based her definition on "career choice" explanations, and she herself acknowledges that an individual's "profession is public knowledge," and it "plays a major role in the definition of self" for the middle-class professionals who were the subjects of her interviews (346). Indeed, she claims, it is considered "anomalous" and perhaps even "sinister" among this segment of the population not to know the occupation of someone with whom one was acquainted (364). On the other hand, disclosure that one has been a victim of childhood sexual abuse involves "justification" and "accusation" as much, or more, than "explanation." There certainly can be no "explanation"--expert or otherwise--
of why one "chose" this course. "Expert" systems, however, are involved in why any individual chooses this experience as a "definition of self" and in why any individual chooses to speak about it. "Common sense," that is what "everybody knows" in regard to childhood abuse (especially if one considers it to be "too late now" to do anything about it), has long been that one "doesn't talk about such things." "Common sense" explanations have as much to do with performance sagacity as with cognitive constructs, a point I don't think Linde's research considers.

I am also uncomfortable with Linde's implication that an individual will employ only one explanatory system in the telling of a life-story experience (364). While it may be true that any individual will draw upon the motifs and tropes of only one explanatory construct for a specific telling of a particular life experience, this does not mean the individual is unaware of, and unable to use, other systems, at will, on other occasions. The Freudian explanation of how one came to be in a particular profession that was so popular among Linde's interviewees in 1987 could well turn into a spiritual/mystical "I was guided into this course" explanation as New Age philosophies increase in popularity. Indeed, Linde's notion of explanatory systems might prove useful for examining the relationship between social history and worldview. What, for instance, prompts an individual to change (or to resist changing) explanatory systems for a given experience?

Even more to the point for the current discussion is the question, "Where do popular explanatory systems come from?" For it is the popular versions of the expert systems that the ordinary individual encounters, not the expert systems themselves. The average person is unlikely to distinguish the theories of Freud from those of Lacan or Jung, Erikson's from Piaget's. What many people do know are the adaptations and/or exploitations of these and other theories; they know Beattie, Peck, Buscaglia, or Bradshaw, to name a few of the more popular authors of modern-living advice. Or they know 12-Step programs, The National Inquirer, Geraldo, Oprah, and Women Who Run With the Wolves (Estés 1992). I would contend that most people are not tapping into

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13 Linde defines a "life story" as "All the individual stories and the relations drawn between them told by an individual during his or her entire lifetime that satisfy [certain] criteria." These criteria include: 1. the stories are directly relevant to the speaker, rather than commentary on the way the world is; 2. stories "are tellable over the course of a long period of time." The life story is constantly being added to and changed; new individual stories enter, old ones drop out, and it is "temporally discontinuous, and therefore, less coherent than an autobiography crystallization (1987, 345)
"expert" systems to make meaning of their lives as much as they are citing semi-experts, pseudo-experts, and self-appointed experts, or even "legitimate" experts mediated through popular-culture, common-language "explanations" of what the expert "really said." "Intermediaries" such as "reviewers, popularizers, critics, translators, commentators, [and] course instructors," according to Ulf Hannerz, are only too happy to "tell you how to become an instant expert" (1992, 166). This mediation of expert theories into usable concepts and constructs is particularly true in the present situation involving sexual abuse. Psychological and medical theories are translated into the vernacular, or they are adapted into new, intermediate-level constructs, and the resulting products are disseminated through a variety of media forms and conduits targeted at different segments of the population. I am not suggesting that there is anything intrinsically subversive or stupefying about 'interpretive' products. We must all rely, to one degree or another, on intermediaries for information at various times; no individual can recreate all knowledge or access all primary data in even a single field of knowledge. When we are unwilling or unable to engage in additional inquisitive exploration and in critical reflection, however, we are at the mercy of the scholarship and integrity (and the agenda) of the intermediary. Intermediaries, argues Hannerz, may "reformulate an alien complex of meanings in the terms of a more familiar one" and thus "build bridges of understanding" between laymen, intelligentsia, and intellectuals. Alternatively, they may simply "convert ignorance into misunderstanding" (1992, 166-167).

Currently, the most prevalent explanations designed to deal with the personal and social angst of childhood sexual abuse are combining elements from multiple expert and institutional systems with a melange of semi-expert assertions to form a variety of composite constructs. In some cases, these frameworks are built on decontextualized statistics and/or disputed cognitive and psychological premises. In other cases, the constructs represent an almost complete reversal of the folk/expert hierarchy; new explanatory hypotheses are being predicated on, and claiming validity from, the experiential narratives of individual victims/survivors, even when these personal narratives are uncorroborated and unconfirmable by outside evidence. In these instances, the tales themselves, despite their sometimes fantastic claims, are serving as the empirical evidence of a manifest reality. These "expert by experience" claims are particularly evident in the "satanic ritual abuse" claims and in the "self-help/recovery" industry--two of the most powerful (and successful) attempts to dominate the story of the sexual abuse experience. Both of these will be discussed in more depth later, but for the moment it is worth noting
the formation process behind one of the best-known of all the "recovery" texts: *The Courage to Heal* (1988) written by Ellen Bass and Laura Davis.

This book emerged as a result of interactive "workshops" premised on the notion that speaking and writing about their abuse experiences was an essential part of victims' "healing" process. Bass had encountered her first abuse narrative in 1974 in a writing workshop, and a few years later, she and Louise Thornton edited a collection of "literary" works on the theme of sexual abuse garnered from these early workshops: *I Never Told Anyone: Writings by Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse* (1983). By the time *The Courage to Heal* was published in 1988, hundreds of women had participated in similar workshops and had shared their personal stories—many of which appear in this later book (Bass and Davis 1988, 9). Many of these same women had undoubtedly also read Bass and Thornton's 1983 work, and had likely encountered various other popular versions of the sexual abuse experience as well, before they ever got to the workshops. Even for those who hadn't, in the exchange of narratives that took place within such workshops, language and themes were modeled and responded to and negotiated. The workshops became a testing ground for tropes and themes, motifs and meanings, theories and frameworks. The most successful (useful) of these (individually or in composite forms) became the starting point for many of the stories of the childhood sexual abuse experience that followed, whether "expert" validated explanatory systems, mass media treatments, or personal narratives. In the process, a fairly strong consensus seems to have developed as to the "meaning" of the childhood sexual abuse experience and of the proper way to narrate that experience, and *The Courage to Heal* encapsulates this composite construct. This book is considered by many to be the "bible" of sexual abuse recovery; it is used both by individuals and within group-therapy sessions as a "guide" to the "healing" process. All of the project interviewees knew about *The Courage to Heal*; most had read it. The book reflects a particular "dominant narrative" (which will be discussed later), and because of its current status as the definitive popular voice, I will use it as a general reference.

Regardless of their sources or the veracity of their claims, these new, popular, semi-expert systems (like Bass and Davis' book) are often achieving their own "expert" status, and they are as likely to be cited by ordinary individuals as any other system. I will, therefore, employ the term "popular explanatory systems"—which Linde herself suggests (361)—for referring to explanatory constructs in wide-spread usage at a particular historical time and which employ the language and metaphors of "expert" systems whether these "experts" are formally recognized by traditional institutional hierarchies or are
designated as such by self-proclamation, and/or media proclamation, and/or by general acceptance. Whether or not any particular account or group of accounts, any manner of narrating, or any explanatory system used in referring to the experience of childhood sexual abuse is objectively factual or not, or is more or less appropriate for making meaning of that experience, are issues of less importance to this particular study than are the choices available to, and employed by, individual speakers as they narrate their experiences--either publicly or privately.

Lastly, while I will leave the "popular explanatory system" in the intermediate category of cultural meaning systems Linde has defined for individual usage (i.e., between "expert" and "folk"), I feel her tripartite framework for the organization and employment of socio-cultural knowledge implies more division among these socio-cultural strata than actually exists. Any schema that does not make sense at the "common sense" level of cognitive and cultural awareness is not likely to catch on to any noticeable degree, no matter how "scientific" or "expert" it is (that is, it is not likely to become "popular"). Likewise, any explanatory model that cannot point to some authority for verification and validation--even if only to folk wisdom--is suspect as a resource for making meaning of one's experience, interactively or to one's self. Where any explanatory system falls on the continuum between folk and expert depends on what counts as "expert" at any given time. What is most interesting in contemporary America is that individuals appear to be accruing "expert" status to themselves. "Personal narratives" and "personal testimony" of personal experience are currently the social and scientific "data" and evidential "proof" of many theories and movements. America would appear to be undergoing a vast "democratization" of authority to make meaning, to make reality. Ultimate authority appears to be accruing to the individual. I would suggest that this appearance is somewhat misleading, an issue I will return to later.

**Dominant Stories and Media Models**

If, as Hannerz (1992, 121) suggests, professional expertise is a "retail form" of cultural power, then mass media is the marketing division of this enterprise, and this informational conduit has been highly influential in the formation and the dissemination of many of the schematic models currently surrounding child sexual abuse. Once considered unspeakable, and often denied as anything more than sporadic deviancy, sexual abuse has been one of the most popular scandal topics of the "next-on-Geraldo" TV tabloids for several years. When packaged as a consumer product, as a commodity, sexual abuse is
subtly (and sometimes not so subtly) distanced from real-world human interaction and from direct social activism. Media versions of this experience are, at times, little more than voyeuristic entertainment. Indeed, sexual abuse has even been the subject of a least one deliberately fictional movie: Prince of Tides.

The larger-than-life, melodramatic (if not downright histrionic) style and tone of much of the media exploitation divert attention from sexual abuse as a personal experience of real-world individuals. No one callously claims their sex-abuse product as entertainment, although much of what is touted as "informative" more often seems designed for that purpose than for social or individual enlightenment. Even so, all media discourse, no matter how outrageous or incredible, functions educationally. Mass media has created social "phenomena" (both observable facts and exceptional wonders) of the sexual abuse experience. There is a strong sense among many people that anything that "rates" media treatment "must be important." In addition, mass media is always an implicit form of "expert authority"; "I read it in the paper," "I saw it on TV" are claims to veracity and validity employed by many people everyday. As mass media creates "external forms" of this heretofore unarticulated experience, and these forms "are made public, available to the senses" (Hannerz 1992, 3), they provide cognitive constructs and linguistic means for individuals to discuss their own, or other people's, involvement with sexual abuse. Mass media treatments of sexual abuse experiences are also "public manifestations" of "the collectivization of meaning" (Hannerz 1992, 269); they are the "fragments of public discourse" (Ehrenhaus 1993, 78) that constitute attempts to create a "dominant story" of childhood sexual abuse.

Numerous studies have demonstrated that humans engage life through what Sarbin (1986) has labeled the "narratory principle," that is, "human beings think, perceive, imagine, and make moral choices according to narrative structures" (8). Still, the narrative of any experience must be formulated within the general "frames of intelligibility" appropriate for the particular experience (Rosenwald and Ochberg 1992, 2). "Most

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14 Sarbin refers to a variety of `meaning making' studies in which subjects were presented with pictures and then asked to describe what was "going on" in the picture as the basis for his "narratory principle." Even when the stimulus material depicted only geometric shapes (e.g., triangles, squares, etc.), the interviewees' responses reflected narrative structures, i.e., meanings based on "the implicit or explicit use of plot" and referring to "recognizable human sentiments, goals, purposes, valuations, and judgments" (Sarbin 1986, 8-9).
narratologists," claim Rosenwald and Ochberg, "assume that the explanations individuals offer of their lives are inevitably shaped by the prevailing norms of discourse within which they operate" (1992, 4). Once created, conforming narratives lend supporting evidence for existing standards. The narrators are thus both constructed by, and constructive of, their culture. However, since human perceptions of experience are not static, some individuals will occasionally attempt to create narratives that challenge established standards in subtle or dramatic ways. If these are socially validated, they will, in turn, contribute to the formation and transmission of a new set of slightly or radically altered "prevailing norms" within which most individuals will then construct their stories. Culture does, indeed, as Hannerz suggests, exist in the two loci of "human minds" and "public forms" (1992, 7). It is through the interactive flow of cultural information concerning values, standards, and perceptions that social reality is constructed--and reconstructed.

Recently, some experiences (such as those involving sexual abuse, AIDS, and homosexual life-styles) have challenged socio-cultural discourse in a different way. "When a person confronts a novel occurrence for which no ready-made category or class is available, the occurrence remains uninstantiated, unclassified, or unassimilated until a class or category is located or invented" (Sarbin 1986, 4). Until lately, there were no established models available for guiding the construction of narratives of personal experiences concerning childhood sexual abuse. Indeed, the "prevailing norm" for this experience was "Don't talk about it at all." The only meaning attached to this experience was that it was "a secret to be kept." With the socio-cultural shift that has placed this experience into public consideration has come the need to develop language for speaking about it and the need to claim a new meaning or significance for this experience. Transmitted through mass media channels, certain expressions and interpretations have gained credence and popularity, while others have been virtually ignored, either intentionally or inadvertently. The themes and tropes that have accumulated reflect three primary cultural frameworks for the organization of knowledge: religion (including issues of spirituality and the supernatural), medicine (health and healing), and judiciary (legal codes and systems). While most of the interpretive systems privilege one of these frameworks, there is often a conspicuous attempt to gain additional validation by incorporating elements from the others. Indeed, many of the explanatory models for childhood sexual abuse merge components from all three frameworks in an attempt to form explanatory systems "with some reasonable claim to completeness" (Linde 1987, 351). The more realms of daily living an experience touches, the more significant it
becomes in terms of broad cultural ideology and the more likely it is to become involved with, and receive support from, legal, political, educational, welfare, and other socio-cultural systems, institutions, and authorities.

All of the popular explanatory systems have appeared in an assortment of media forms at one time or another, and I will discuss the medicalization, legalization, and spiritualization of the experience through a variety of selected examples of the mass media material. Unfortunately, due to the expense involved, most examples will involve only textual elements; printed transcripts of TV talk shows cost considerably less than video reproductions. This clearly limits discussion of performance to what is readily discernible from the text, e.g., word choices, juxtaposition of comments or themes, interruptions, repetitions, etc. In the cases where I am working from a video or movie I may include commentary on additional performance elements, but the primary focus, in all cases, will remain on textual elements (words, motifs, cause and effect assertions, narrative meanings, etc.) as they contribute to the creation of "dominant stories."

The "Religious" Versions

Child sexual abuse, as a social phenomenon, has been tied to issues and themes of religion and spirituality almost since it became defined as a public issue. Perhaps most consequential to ongoing media involvement, however, have been the imagination-gripping and socially-inflamatory accusations of "satanic" and "ritual" abuse of children by members of "cults." The satanic cult/ritual abuse story represents a dramatic confluence of child-saving activism, fundamentalist religious interests, emerging psychological theories, and folklore. The focus of wide-spread media coverage beginning in 1984, these fantastic stories are only now beginning to wane in media attention as religious interest shifts to more prosaic accusations against priests and other religious officials. Although interpretative frameworks not based within organized religions often include strong references to the "human spirit" and to the need for "spiritual healing," it was the horrific accounts of "satanic" rituals that initially aroused public concern, that assured continuing public interest in sexual abuse, and that colored and shaped much of the public story of this experience.

The first documentary accusations of ritual/satanic abuse appeared in Michelle Remembers (Smith and Pazder, 1980), a "case study" based on Michelle Smith's
"testimonial" account. Smith and Pazder's book combined motifs of multiple personality disorder, psychiatrist-assisted reconstruction of the patient's past, post-traumatic stress disorder (survivor syndrome), sexual abuse, and religious cult activity. Following the publication of this book, many other "occult survivors" quickly came forward to tell their stories as well (Richardson, Best, and Bromley 1991b, 11; see also Victor 1993). The development of sexual abuse qua satanism as well as the relationship of this particular public manifestation of the sex abuse phenomenon to contemporary legend and rumor panics, to historical demonologies, to psychotherapy and law enforcement practices, to adolescent imitation, and to dissemination and exploitation by the mass media have been documented by a variety of scholars and other investigative writers, including: Bennett (1991); Ellis (1991, 1990); Nathan (1991); Richardson, Best, and Bromley (1991b); Rowe and Cavender (1991); Stevens, Jr. (1989); Victor (1993); and Wright (1993a, 1993b.).

Perhaps most important to the continuation and credibility of this story, however, were the arrests of suspected cult members (often child-care workers) and the highly publicized legal trials that followed the McMartin Preschool case that began in 1983. The accusations of child sexual abuse and bizarre ritual practices made against seven teachers in the McMartin preschool escalated into allegations of wide-spread community conspiracy and satanic rituals. During 1984 and 1985, reports detailing the children's descriptions of animal killings, ritualistic sex acts, and graveyard visits to corpses "were widely discussed at child protection conferences nationwide . . . and were detailed--virtually always unskeptically--by journalists," according to Debbie Nathan, who has examined the construction of the ritual abuse scare (1991, 75). The McMartin trial finally ended, with no convictions, when the two remaining defendants were found innocent in 1990 (Victor 1993, 15).

Between 1983 and 1989, however, at least 50 people went to trial and half of these were found guilty, despite the fact that "investigations . . . uniformly failed to turn up the adult witnesses or physical evidence that would be associated logically with ongoing group rites, extreme violence, and pornography production alleged in these cases" (Nathan 1991, 76). Evidence, in fact, relied on "the consistency of children's stories as strong proof," and defenders of the children's accounts attributed the lack of other evidence to the depth and strength of the conspiracy that allowed the satanists to cover their tracks

15 This novel-like account was so widely popular that it commanded a place on the state of Ohio's "book mobile" program for several years.
(Nathan 1991, 77). The "consistency of the children's stories," and the ways that these stories had been procured, eventually came under attack, and led to investigations of the interviewing techniques of the psychologists, social workers, and law enforcement agents involved in soliciting testimony from the children. However, the court trials--especially those which ended in convictions--essentially reified the assertions made in the claims.

Fundamentalist religious groups have been instrumental in the formation and dissemination of the satanic cult/ritual abuse model. Building on existing beliefs, the stories confirmed Satan as the source of evil and corruption in contemporary society. Guest revivalists and parish preachers recounted astounding tales of cult activities (perverted religious rituals, drug use, sexual abuse, and human sacrifice) to warn the faithful and to attract new converts. In the process, many became self- and publicly-acclaimed "experts" on cult activity, and the paradigm quickly spread throughout the authoritative institutional structure of the country as law enforcement officers, social service agencies, and mental health workers turned to these new experts for information (Victor 1993, 23; 78-101). Meanwhile, under the guise of keeping the public informed, daily coverage of the accusations against alleged perpetrators and detailed accounts of the purported abuses appeared in papers and on TV news broadcasts. Each day's coverage began with a brief recapping of the "facts" for those who might, somehow, have missed any previous coverage. With daily exposure, the bizarre became familiar, the incredible became a possibility--if not an outright likelihood. Surely, if there was this much smoke, there must be a fire somewhere. What everybody was talking about was well on its way to becoming what everybody "knew" for a fact; America was experiencing "common sense" knowledge in the making.

The most recent development in this long saga of the link between child sexual abuse and satanism are the stories told by adults who claim to have experienced sudden flashes of previously "repressed" memories. While the 1980 publication Michelle

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16 One such informational seminar took place at Harding Hospital, in Worthington, Ohio, in March 1990. The main speakers, a social worker and a clinical psychologist, "each presented information about Satanic cults and the ritual torture of children. The structure of the seminar did not allow the audience to critically cross-examine speakers or to engage in dialogue with them." The main source of the evidence offered came from "the testimony" of patients with multiple personality disorders. After the talk, one psychiatrist argued that the "evident emotional pain" of her patients and the "internal consistency" of their accounts "proves that they are true." (Victor 1993, 96-99).
Remembers contained this motif, the earliest public accusations, not surprisingly, focused on contemporary child victims. Michelle's account of her childhood trauma during the 1950s might make interesting reading, but her experience would seem to have little current social relevance unless such incidents where still happening. However, if children were still being abused in such fashion, something drastic needed to be done—and done quickly. Eventually, the sensational trials (relying primarily on the statements of children) began to bog down in questions surrounding the lack of corroborating evidence and the reliability of children's testimony. On the other hand, adult testimony (as witnesses to their own childhoods) commands more respect than the notoriously unreliable assertions of children. In addition, these new accusations are more often directed against family members than against day-care workers or other public figures. Recent court trials have more often involved civil suits than criminal ones; monetary awards are sought rather than prison sentencing. Often a unanimous decision is not required for the jury to find in the interest of the plaintiff, so the burden of evidence is different from that of criminal trials. Nevertheless, many of the themes and tropes of the earliest accusations remain the same in these later accusations.

The dominant story of satanic ritual abuse involves themes of utterly helpless victims, perpetrators so "ungodly" as to be inhuman, worldwide intergenerational conspiracies, and evil forces hidden in our midst and operating just out of sight. The operational motifs of this story are conspiracy and brainwashing (which guarantee the cult's ability to dominate the individual's behavior, to eliminate or control cognitive memories, and to hide any evidence of its own existence); horrific and unnatural sex acts (rape, sodomy, forced breeding); "ritual" practices involving torture, cannibalism, and animal and human sacrifices. The latest versions of this construct involve statements by survivors that they have nothing to gain by speaking out now and avowals that they wish the memories weren't true. The memories are "true" according to the tellers' defenders (psychologists, clergy, and child activists) because "no one could make up this kind of thing." Satanic ritual abuse "survivors" often claim they had never read or heard similar accounts, nor had such material been suggested to them by their therapists before the survivor began to have memories. Survivors usually report long-term emotional or psychological problems, and the newly-regained cognitive memories (which their bodies also remember in other ways) explain the sources of the symptoms.

These latter motifs (no prior contact with satanic stories and no therapist prompting) have resulted from two recent augments. First, can patients "pretend" to have been
abused to get attention by repeating a story they have heard elsewhere? Second, can overzealous or inept psychologists plant "false memories" in their clients? Or could contact with satanic ritual abuse stories produce such "false memories"? The primary arguments against such fabrications and false memories have often been: How could anyone possibly tell such a convincing story if the experiences had not actually occurred? How would they even know about such things? And isn't the fact that so many of the stories are so similar 'proof' that these cults exist? Adult "sudden-recall" or "recovered memory" accounts also rely heavily on the medical theories of post traumatic stress disorder to explain why these people are only now recalling their childhood experiences with the cult—although "brainwashing" serves as a back-up explanation.

While there is no current evidence of any widespread satanic cult engaging in horrific rituals of sexual abuse and cannibalism, there is a great deal of evidence that stories about such activities have been around for centuries. Gillian Bennett recently offered for consideration a detailed account of satanic ritual abuse activity written during the year 1050; it almost exactly parallels the present accounts (1991). Phillips Stevens, Jr. has traced folk demonologies from the Classical era through the medieval period to the present day; little has changed over the centuries in terms of images and motifs (1989). Stevens includes in his article examples of comic-book style material on satanism published by a fundamentalist Christian literature corporation (10-11), and he details numerous other media and public expressions of such material. Clearly, such stories are still in wide circulation. Bill Ellis (1990), meanwhile, has described the course of one local rumor panic involving satanism. No "satanists" were found, no murders were committed, and the panic died down eventually. However, the commonly-held knowledge of how satanists "behaved" lent fuel to the panic and allowed some teenagers to increase the social anxiety by leaving "signs" for the community members to find.

The satanic ritual abuse story has been freely available to anyone who wanted or needed it. I do not suggest, however, that all accounts that describe "ritual" abuse activities are necessarily false. As Bill Ellis points out, social narratives are "normative definitions of reality, maps by which one can determine what has happened, what is happening, and what will happen" (1989, 202). Narratives can be imitated, and these tales have been around for a long, long time. Still, the lack of objective evidence would seem to indicate that many of the "narrative" elements of recent satanic ritual accounts are simply currently-validated "explanatory constructs" through which an individual is able to "make meaning" out of an experience that may well have been "horrific" in other ways.
Such story themes and motifs also serve the interests of the fundamentalist religious community, which has lent its institutional support and expertise to this version of the childhood sexual abuse experience. More will be said, in the next chapter, about religious interests in attempting to dominate this issue.

**Ritual Abuse and the Media**

While TV talk shows are not the originators of the ritual abuse claims (or any other form of the experience), they have long been instrumental in their dissemination. In presenting such accounts to the public, this forum has contributed "authoritative" validation to such accounts. In 1991, two stylistically different talk shows, Larry King Live and Geraldo, dealt with some of the more recent versions of the ritual abuse story. In both cases the shows "construct" a "text" of the satanic ritual abuse story with--or in spite of--their guests. In a very real sense, these shows attempt to force a "dominant narrative" onto the experience, obviously to serve their own agendas. In the process, however, they also "serve up" the story to the public.

**Larry King Live: "Sex in the Name of Satan"**

The Larry King Live episode which aired May 13, 1991, featured two women, Bonnie and Patti, who had just completed a civil suit in the state of California against their 76-year-old mother, charging her with having subjected them to ritualistic sexual abuse during their childhoods. After "regaining" their memories of the abuse, the daughters had sought monetary damages; the jury found 10-to-2 in their favor but declined to award the daughters any money. On the other hand, the women insisted their primary goal was not to gain money but to force their mother and Bonnie's daughter into "therapy" because they were both in "denial" about the abuse. The women themselves avoid using the term "satanic" in relation to their own experiences throughout the broadcast, claiming instead only "ritualistic," and "intergenerational" abuse. For example, Bonnie's explanation of why she and her sister sued their mother is carefully couched in medical/psychological terms and in child protection issues. The sisters' concern was that Bonnie's daughter needed "therapy" because she "also has multiple personalities and she needs help" (Bonnie). Bonnie makes only indirect references to satanic or other cult experiences: "being drawn into groups" and "ritualistic practices." Bonnie insists that the women's reason for the suit was that "my daughter who is now 11 had been involved up until three years ago with her grandmother," but she does not explain the nature of this involvement. Bonnie tries to
keep the conversation focused on the trial, claiming that "it seemed like the only recourse we had to begin to make this known so that it could begin to stop was to go to the courts. So that was the purpose, much more than any kind of monetary consideration."

The segment, however, was entitled "Sex in the Name of Satan," clearly indicating the theme of the broadcast, further emphasized by the announcer's opening statements, which included the line, "Two sisters say they were caught in a sex ring for Satan." Larry King reinforced the segment's focus by introducing his guests as "Two sisters [who] accused their 76-year-old mother of sexually abusing them as part of a ritualistic satanic cult."

Clearly, the media agenda for this show was satanic ritual abuse. It could as easily have been about the legal battle the women had just won. In one sense they now had legal "proof" that their memories were accurate and valid. How they managed to turn vague memories into a jury award in their favor would have made an interesting discussion. But as is often the case in the social construction of childhood sexual abuse, legal motifs become part of the supporting cast, not the main issue. In this instance, the legal issues were forced into the background partly by the horribly fascinating claims of the familiar satanic story and partly by media gatekeepers who chose to focus on the satanic motifs.

The medical framework also serves a supporting role here. Medical motifs form a large part of the women's explanatory systems, and their accounts are replete with the language of popular psychological theories of repressed memory: "dissociated," "dissociative capacities," "dissociative disorders," "multiple personalities," "multiple personality disorder," "outer conscious personality," "denial," "therapy." They refer, as well, to a variety of other common psychological motifs: flashbacks, body memories, recovered memories, lack of childhood memories, and spontaneous memories. It is unclear from their words just what the women would consider their explanatory system--religious (ritual/cult activity), legal, or medical. The medical language here, however, seems more supportive of their accounts of "ritual abuse" than their primary focus, just as the trial is more an attempt to validate their narratives than to gain justice. The frameworks, however, are intricately intertwined, and the legal and medical frameworks lend validity and authority to the satanic ritual abuse accounts.

It is King who continually reintroduces the satanic issues and language and who seems to be most interested in pursuing that topic, which is not too surprising as the show's other guest is Jeffrey Victor--billed as a "Satanic Cult Specialist." King turns the
discussion away from the women's law suit and to the topic of a child Bonnie claims she bore when she was eleven years old as a result of cult activity and was then forced to murder. Even then, Bonnie avoids using the term satanic. The child, she claims "was sacrificed within the cult when she was about six months old. . . . By being stabbed, and I was coerced into doing the act myself with my own child."

At first glance, it is King who seems to be trying to force a connection between the women's experience and satanic cult rhetoric. It becomes evident, however, that satanic ritual abuse is closely related to, if not the stated definition of, what the women had been claiming all along. Immediately before the commercial break, courtroom scenes from the March 1991 trial of Bonnie's and Patti's mother are shown. The trial lawyer asks the women's mother: "Are you a participant in any cult?" "Do you worship Satan in any fashion?" When the mother responds to this latter question: "Pardon me?", the question is repeated: "Do you worship Satan in any fashion?" And when the talk-show segment returns, King begins by stating that "there are many other things that were introduced at this trial by the plaintiffs . . . that are very hard to describe on television, but trust me. . . . Lots of weird things were charged happening to these two ladies." He will not describe these "weird things," however, because "[t]his is a family show. . . ." During the second commercial break there are more scenes from the trial, further hinting at the nature of the women's allegations:

Lawyer: [in court, March 1991] There was a pentagram on his chest. Now was that a pentagram painted on? Was it carved on?

Bonnie: [testifying] It was cut. He was to my right -- and the knife was in my right hand -- and I just held it -- and someone else put their hand on mine and raised the hand up and went -- through the pentagram [stabbing motion] -- down through the pentagram. (Italics in transcript)

Jeffrey Victor's presence on the show lends additional evidence to the notion that the women's claims had involved satanism. Why invite a "Satanic Cult Expert"-especially one whose agenda is clearly to debunk claims of the existence of such cults--if this issue had not been part of the women's case?

Victor raises the issue of the validity of therapy-assisted memories. While he is careful not to deny the possibility of actual childhood abuse, and he emphasizes that the women undoubtedly believe their "memories" to be true, he proposes that these have been created by the therapist's guidance. King immediately relates this process to "As was the case in the fraud of that person who regressed childhood . . ." (my emphasis). The women
are, of course, forced into defending their own integrity and that of their therapist, and they rely on the widely-used pop-psychology language of post traumatic stress syndrome and spontaneous memory recovery, both common elements of recent satanic ritual abuse narratives. The "memories came back spontaneously" while she was in therapy for another problem, claimed Bonnie; no one guided her or led her into remembering. "And during the course of the trial this was made very clear even by witnesses for the other side. There was not one shred of evidence by anyone that he [the therapist] ever suggested these things." Bonnie then adds the other common claim of veracity: "Plus, I'd never read about them either, heard about them, or anything." Patti later affirms this stance: "[W]e can't be making these things up. . . . I've never even been to a horror movie because they terrify me. I've read nothing about this. . . ." This sort of 'proof by prior ignorance' is rarely challenged--and not challenged here, despite the fact that by May 1991, even if sources of information were limited to national media news coverage, an individual would have had to have been in a coma for seven years not to have heard about such things. Indeed, Bonnie seems to know quite a bit about cults; later in the show, while responding to a sympathetic caller who asks "how do these cults tend to cover up their activities?" she says:

"I know the evidence is often burnt. It's hidden away. It's extremely important that it not be known about. I assume there are some burials, but I can't give you a really accurate answer about that; only that it needs to thrive in the dark on denial to keep going."

Earlier in the show, following the Bonnie's claim that she became pregnant at age eleven as part of the cult activity and then killed the child in a ritual sacrifice, King asked: "The police never found out about this?" Bonnie had explained the lack of evidence in this instance in terms that are almost identical to the ones she uses to talk about cults in general, even though here she is talking about her "personal" experience:

"The groups are extremely careful to cover up all evidence through using crematoriums and things like that -- at least that's how I understand it -- that, obviously, this can only flourish in silence and in darkness and so they're very careful about conducting themselves in a way that they can't be discovered."

Both Bonnie and Patti cite their still-incomplete memories as the reasons for their vague replies. At the same time, they claim their incomplete memories as evidence of their abuse. Again, these are all common motifs of satanic abuse/spontaneous memory narratives. "When I went into therapy I didn't remember anything from the first seven and
a half years of my life," says Bonnie; she had developed "dissociative capacities." Faulty memories reflect both the trauma of the abuse and the power of the cults to control cognitive functions through brainwashing according to the satanic ritual abuse framework. On the other hand, returning memories, no matter how vague and incomplete, are evidence that the women are now "getting free" of the cult's power: "I do know that as soon as I started having memories that I was no longer part of the group because at that point they could not control me" (Patti).

When Victor challenges the source of the women's memories, King is quick to offer implicit support for Bonnie's assertion that these are real memories of actual events by asking what seem to be "set up" questions that allow Bonnie to make her point: "Don't you wish that Jeffrey is right-- . . . that this is nobody's fault?" Of course she does, says Patti. Patti has already stated earlier "I wish this wasn't true," and this sentiment will be expressed several times, in various terms, by both women. "Why not lean the way Jeffrey suggests, rather than go around thinking that you killed your own daughter when maybe you didn't?" asks King.

The women's responses include familiar rhetorical devices employed by survivors of satanic/cult activity who experience flashback memories: The memories can't be wished away; they are real memories "relived in every part of the body" (Bonnie). The experiences have caused a lifetime of "tremendous emotional difficulties"(Bonnie), "horrible symptoms all my life . . . two nervous breakdowns" (Patti). The memories are valid: "We can't be making these things up" because there was no prior exposure to horror movies or printed sources (Patti).

Bonnie and Patti also seize several opportunities to express standard challenges to disbelief. Patti can "really recognize" the "courage" of the jurors in their trial for listening and "in even being able to go so far as to believe our story." She attacks the resistance of disbelievers, claiming that it is their responsibility "to break . . . denial down and look at it," rather than hers to provide corroborating evidence. She likens their disbelief about satanic sexual abuse to "just like we were with incest 10 years ago -- no one wanted to believe that fathers were molesting their daughters -- we're there now with these kinds of things."

On one level, it would seem the episode was intended to debunk the satanic cult-ritual abuse framework. Victor is given an inordinate amount of uninterrupted time (at least by talk show standards) to make his case. The show's "agenda adversary," that is,
the "expert" who is invited to provide a counter argument to the segment's primary focus, is often interrupted before he or she can make anything that even resembles a complete or coherent statement. Victor, however, is allowed his say.

At the same time, King often plays Devil's advocate on his show (no pun intended), asking thought-provoking questions on both sides of an issue. When the women claim their memories are real, King turns to Victor: "They think it happened. You can't prove it didn't. You can't prove this negative." In doing this, however, King also gives Victor the opportunity to assert that "the onus is on people who claim that they have been victimized by Satanic\textsuperscript{17} cults to provide concrete verifiable evidence." Still, after Bonnie's final assertion that "it" (her still-undefined topic) "needs to thrive in the dark on denial to keep going," King turns back to Victor: "Jeffrey, you're keeping all your options open, right?" Phrased this way, his "question" is really a statement that Victor hasn't made up his mind yet, and it implicitly supports the women's claim to veracity. At best, the "options" (of belief; or of proof; or of explanation, interpretation, or construction of reality) are back in Victor's court. Even though Victor tries to regain some ground by stating, "I think that this is the folklore of the age," the positioning of King's statement at the end of the program seriously undercuts Victor's previous attempts to define the women's memories as induced and the products of collective behavior.

The show is obviously "constructed." Inclusion of footage from the trial was clearly planned before the show aired. The women could choose their words as carefully as they wished; the trial scenes would establish the context of their claims. Shown immediately before the second commercial break but after Victor's statement about the need for corroborative evidence, for proof outside the narrative, the sensational description of the pentagram and knife-stabbing incident undercut Victor's stance. The "final positioning" of both the trial footage and of King's "keeping your options open" comment to Victor, means these elements stick more effectively in the mind than anything that came before: last in, last out. The show is ultimately about what the title sequence said it would be: "Sex in the Name of Satan." The women could hedge their on-the-air comments (for whatever personal or legal reasons they might have) any way they liked; between them, \textsuperscript{17} When the word "satanic" or "satinism" appears in a quote, I will use the case of the initial letter as it appears in the quote; otherwise, I will use lower case initial letters for these terms.
the women and *Larry King Live* recreated--and recirculated--an almost classic version of the satanic ritual abuse story.


If *Larry King Live* is the *Newsweek* of TV talk shows, Geraldo is *The National Inquirer* perhaps even the *Star*. *Larry King Live* is notable for its public-figure guests, issue probing, and attempts at balance. *Geraldo* is notorious even among TV tabloids for its exploitation and glorification of the bizarre. The orchestration and manipulation of guests and audience members on *Geraldo* are profound; entertainment and sensationalism, not exploration of issues, are its objectives.

On September 10, 1991, the show aired an episode entitled "Investigating Multiple Personalities: Did the Devil Make Them Do It?" Geraldo opens the show with the claim that he has "more than 1,200 guests on my panel today, all embodied in these three women, women with terrifying tales of multiple personality disorder, of human sacrifices and of other unspeakable acts. These ladies say the Devil made them this way. . . . Our first guest . . . has an incredible and terrifying story of alleged child abuse and cult activity that has shattered her in many more ways than one."

Geraldo's introduction establishes the tone of the entire episode. The two most commonly used descriptive terms during the show's hour--employed almost equally by Geraldo and his guests--are "horror" (and variants including, horrific, horrifying, horrifically: 13 times) and "terror" (terrifying, terrible, terrified: 7 times). In addition, Geraldo uses "heinous," "traumatic," "tragically," "shattered," and "incredible" as well as a wealth of other evocative terms to dramatize his guests' experiences while sparing the audience from most of "the gory details" (Geraldo) of what actually happened; sensational rhetoric becomes both context and evidence.

Geraldo's guests include "Kathleen," "Jane," and "Kayla/Ellie" (two "alters" of the same person who both "appear" during the course of the show). All three women have "multiple personality disorder," and all three claim "ritual abuse" as the origin of their current condition. Several "professionals" appear on the segment as well. Each of the women is accompanied by her respective psychologist-therapist (Drs. Orcutt, Hill, and Mayer). Dr. Mayer is also the author of the book based on the issue du jour, and his book *Satan's Children: Case Studies in Multiple Personality* is promoted several times during the segment. Also on the show is the Dr. Underwager--the voice of the opposition--who
claims that there is no objective evidence of wide-spread satanic cult activity nor any scientific verification of "multiple personality disorder."

While the show is ostensibly about multiple personality disorder, much of the discussion involves satanic ritual abuse (the "common denominator" among the women as Geraldo puts it), and this combination of explanatory frameworks in some ways is the reversal of the processes that formed the construct described in the Larry King Live episode. There, the medical and legal frameworks were brought to the aid and support of the satanic story; here, the satanic story is used (sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly) to validate the medical hypothesis. The episode contains a number of standard satanic cult (now, also, multiple personality) rhetorical elements. The women's memories are still fragmentary, and their memory-flashbacks began as a result of therapy that was begun for other reasons (usually when the woman was in her thirties). These motifs establish the "depth" of the trauma (post stress disorder), reveal the power of the cults to control cognitive functions, establish the women's reasons (excuses) for not speaking out earlier, and imply that the memories were "spontaneous"--not "planted" or "sought" by the therapists. "Satanic cult" descriptions conform to the standard pattern: child and/or other human sacrifice is mentioned by all three women; the bodies of victims were burned, "incinerated," or "buried in far away places"; the cults used "sophisticated" brainwashing techniques to control the women; cult members were "pillars of their respective communities" (Kathleen); and at least one of the women (Kathleen) explicitly denies any prior knowledge of "satanism."

The women are considered "courageous" and "brave" for speaking out, and the women's stated reasons for doing so involve altruistic agendas (child-saving, public awareness). The sacrificial victims were "homeless people . . . neglected and abandoned children . . . illegally adopted children," according to Kathleen. This increasingly popular "source" of sacrificial victims represents a shift away from former claims that thousands (sometimes hundreds of thousands) of children were born (through forced breeding) to cult members and sacrificed each year, while still allowing ritual abuse claimants to continue to make assertions that "thousands" of children (and others) are "sacrificed" every year (although Kathleen claims to have personally "lost seven children" to the cult). At the same time, the "homeless people" etc. source of the sacrificial victims has a decidedly in-the-public-interest social-activism appeal as well. Kayla counters audience skepticism by appealing even more directly to child-protection concerns while still implicitly supporting the satanic ritual abuse story: she hopes the audience's "minds will
be open to it [multiple personality] and that maybe the next kid . . . can get diagnosed" earlier. The cause of multiple personality disorder has already been established (on the show at least) as satanic cult activity.

Geraldo is typical of many TV talk-shows in its one-sided emphasis, and the show presents a characteristic imbalance of guests. In this case, the three women and their therapists present the argument for multiple personality disorder (and for satanic ritual abuse in the process) while a single individual represents the counter position. Underwager is already out-numbered seven to one (counting Geraldo among his opposition), before he begins to make his case. His position is inherently unsympathetic not only because he is in the minority but also because Geraldo has already entreated his audience several times, one way or another, to "keep an open mind" and has twice referred to Underwager as a "naysayer" before Underwager even begins to present his case.

Geraldo carefully orchestrates the show to create the desired effect--sensationalism and a voyeuristic look at "unspeakable acts." To his credit, Geraldo sometimes gets caught up in his own discussions, and occasionally argues against illogical statements from even his majority-side guests. More often, however, he voices the skeptical questions he knows the audience would ask if given the chance, but he does so in a way that will allow the guests supporting the issue of the day to win the point. Dr. Mayer (author of Satan's Children) counters Underwager's claim that there is no "objective evidence" for satanic cult activity by arguing that many of the people he's treated for "this syndrome" have "gone to doctors" who "found multiple fractures that have never been repaired." In addition, Mayer declares that he thinks "it's really disgraceful that this society will not look at child abuse" and that refusing to believe the patient amounts to "blaming the victim" and implies that the "patient is faking and the implication is that the patient is doing this for some reason other than being horrifically abused." Geraldo responds: "No, no, no, no. Let's not confuse things." While Geraldo is eager to admit that "something happened," he is also willing to suggest that the women have developed "an artifice of multiple personality" to deal with ordinary--albeit severe--abuse. Mayer admits that this is a good argument, but "to make a categorical denial that this stuff exists doesn't allow for the treatment." He believes his patient, and that is apparently good enough also for Geraldo, who immediately goes to a commercial and, essentially, gives Mayer the "last word" on the subject.

This argument that "denying" the reality of satanic ritual abuse "doesn't allow for treatment" of "this syndrome" represents a now-common, undoubtedly unintentional echo
(if strange reversal) of Freud's stance that while childhood sexual abuse claims were more than likely "fantasy," it was the symptoms that were the important factor. Some late twentieth-century therapists undoubtedly do believe the satanic ritual abuse claims of their clients. None, however, can afford to get caught in the recent attack on Freud's position of 'treat the symptoms--but assume the stated cause is an imaginary and symbolic displacement of the real cause'. Sorting out the "real" from the "unreal" (which is what symbolic representation is too often considered) leaves therapists in a catch-22 situation of either "believing" their clients' accounts or being accused of denying the "reality" of their patients' suffering.

Geraldo's guests demonstrate the problem and the common solution: "treat the symptoms" now, worry about the "proof" later. For instance, Kayla's therapist, claims only to be working from "a therapist's point of view. My patients showed fully documented signs of post-traumatic stress disorder, which multiplicity is really part of..." (Dr. Orcutt). Orcutt also contends that the additional proof Underwager calls for will be forthcoming. When "the law enforcement officials do their work and the others who are concerned with objective evidence do their work, then the whole picture will come together eventually," she declares. Dr. Hill, Jane's therapist, concurs: "These brave women have come out to describe their stories and experiences today... perhaps this is the beginning of starting to investigate, in a proper way, the possibility of this evidence." Not "believing" the women, they all agree, amounts to "blaming the victim" and serves no useful purpose--at least from a clinical therapist's point of view.

In order to maintain such a "doesn't matter" stance toward the "reality" of satanic ritual abuse, the possibility of such a reality must be sold to the public. By 1991, when the show aired, the public was beginning to become skeptical about such "reality." Geraldo helps the process along is a variety of ways. He controls the course of the discussion by changing or reinterpreting (and therefore, misdirecting) dialogue and meanings. Underwager contends that there is no way a wide-spread conspiracy of the type the women describe could exist without someone finding some objective evidence for it. "And when there is... a conspiracy of this nature... we know about it. The Ku Klux Klan, for example, is such a conspiracy" (Underwager). Geraldo responds by referring back to a statement made earlier by Kathleen that there is "no such thing at the Devil... only evil people." "And while it [the KKK] may be Satanic in terms of the people being evil, it's not--the Devil's not making people burn crosses," says Geraldo. That, of course, is not Underwager's point, and when he again tries to attest that "You simply can't have an
organized conspiracy of that nature... without somebody saying something and some
evidence being found and not--", Geraldo interrupts and turns to one of the women's
therapists: "Dr. Orcutt, do you believe your patient? Do you believe--." Underwager's
point had been about the lack of "objective evidence," not about "belief," but "belief" wins
the day.

In addition, several segments within the show seem almost pre-rehearsed; at best
they are semi-improvised "theater." While these segments are designed to "prove" the
"reality" of multiple personality disorder, by implication, they also provide support for the
existence of satanic cults (that is, after all, what the show is about). Near the beginning of
the episode, Geraldo announces that he has pre-arranged with "Kayla" (pseudonym) to let
one of her "alters" (alternative personalities) appear on stage. Kayla "coughs, removes her
glasses" and six-year-old Ellie suddenly appears, reaches behind the chair, and "retrieves
stuffed bear" (italics in transcript). Both Ellie and Geraldo quickly shift to "child talk."
Ellie asks Geraldo to hold Kayla's glasses so she won't break them. When Geraldo asks
Ellie whose glasses they are, Ellie responds: "Those are--they used to be Lynn's, but
Kayla's wearing them today 'cause she don't want to wear her regular ones because she
don't want anyone to see her." Geraldo then asks Ellie if is she is frightened, "being with
all these grownups here?" Later, before Ellie changes back into "Kayla," Geraldo tells
Ellie, "Bye, honey. I'll see you later... Bye bye."

Near the end of the broadcast, Geraldo uses Kayla's glasses to "test" the validity of
the women's claims to have truly "multiple" personalities, i.e., to be hosting separate and
differently-constructed identities--virtually different beings--within their bodies. In what is
designed to appear to be a spontaneous moment, an on-the-spot response to audience
skepticism, Kayla says, "The only thing I'd like to say is if anyone wants to check out my
glasses, I need prescription glasses to see. That's a reality... Ellie has 20/20 vision. If
anyone wants to hold up fingers back there, I can guarantee you, with my glasses, I can't
see it [sic]." Geraldo then helps "prove" that Ellie and "Kayla" are really two different
people within the same body. He goes to the back of the studio, "80 feet or so away" and
holds up some fingers which Kayla can't see even with her glasses on but which Ellie (who
then reappears) can see just fine without any glasses at all. Geraldo also assures the
audience: "These are her glasses and they are prescription glasses, I guarantee you that.
So, I don't know. Put that in your pipe and smoke it."

This demonstration of so-called "proof" has less sophistication than the average
sleight-of-hand magic trick, and Geraldo's implicit "there, we've proved it" assertion
smacks more of snake-oil salesmanship than of the proverbial wisdom it cites as validation. These segments clearly frame the show: the glasses are introduced early in the show and Geraldo does, indeed, "see (Ellie) later." However, while this is obvious from the transcript, so many gruesome, startling, and conflicting claims by the numerous guests have intervened, that the set-up fades into the melodrama. The audience is left with a "seeing is believing" experience; a "common sense" verification of the experts' claims.

The proof of "Kayla's" alternates and Geraldo's "Put that in your pipe" statement appear at the very end of the hour and are immediately followed by Geraldo's announcement of the address for the "International Society for the Study of Multiple Personality Disorders," a plug for Dr. Mayer's new book, Satan's Children: Case Studies in Multiple Personality, and Geraldo's thanks to "all 1,249 of you ladies for being here." Geraldo then makes the declarative statement (if the transcript notation is to be accepted as accurate) that he hopes "we have been sufficiently sympathetic about this enigma, multiple personalities and was it caused by abuse, Satanic abuse." The terminal positioning of the eye-glasses segment, book plug, and implicit affirmation by Geraldo seriously undercut what little counter-argument there has been about the "realities" of either multiple personalities or of satanic ritual abuse during the episode. The show has been, all along, an exploitation of the issues, not an exploration of them.

Ritual Abuse: Paradigm Shift

In both these 1991 Geraldo and the Larry King Live episodes, some of the guests attempt to divorce their accounts from the "satanic" terminology that the shows' hosts are so insistent on using. For example, the Geraldo show title, "Investigating Multiple Personalities: Did the Devil Make Them Do It?" is repeated, in one form or another, either before and/or after three of the six commercial breaks. Commercial one--before: "We are 'Investigating multiple Personalities.' Did the Devil make them this way?"; after: "'Investigating Multiple Personalities,' the thing our three ladies share in common, the allegation that, in every case, it was extreme child abuse that led them to this fragmentation, specifically child abuse that was in some way fostered by cult activity, cult activity involving Satanic cults." Commercial two--before: "We are investigating multiple personality disorders and this whole connection with Satanism. Did the Devil make them this way?"; after: "Satan's children--are they?"

After the second such announcement, and the introduction of his third guest, "Kathleen," who "says that she was born into a Satanic cult and that is the common
denominator of these three women, the Satanic aspect" (Geraldo), Kathleen takes
exception to Geraldo's terminology and attempts to qualify his claims: "I want to say
something that's been bothering me here. You've been saying, 'Did the Devil make us do
it?' There is no such thing as the Devil, in my experience. There is [sic] only evil people.
My parents and the other people involved in the cult were and are very evil people. That's
the only thing that there is. They used the idea of the Devil to cause immense fear in me
and to take away any sense that there was any good anywhere in the world that I could
relate to." Kathleen calls the organization responsible for her abuse, "an intergenerational,
large cult" rather than a satanic one. This does not seem to concern--and certainly does
not influence--Geraldo. Immediately after the fifth commercial break he says, "Multiple
personality disorders--did the Devil make them this way?"

On the Larry King Live episode, Bonnie tries also to separate her story from any
explicit reference to "satanic" cults. In her introductory statement, for example, Bonnie
says only that "Well, we were suing mother for sexual abuse in a ritualistic kind of setting.
..." In response to King's request for some "history" Bonnie explains:

... the abuse began when I was just an infant... There were many different
kinds. Sexual abuse was involved. There was some physical abuse that
included some scalding and things like that... [I]t included child prostitution
and things like that as well as actually being drawn into groups where there
were ritualistic practices going on. [Quote is not continuous, but is
interrupted only by short, question prompts from King.]

Later in the broadcast, Bonnie again carefully avoids making explicit connections
between her and her sister's experiences/claims and the term "satanic," and between their
claims and the commonly-made assertion that satanic ritual abuse is part of a wide-spread
conspiracy.

The point that I would really like to make is that I don't believe either my
sister or I--or during the trial were we claiming there was any kind of
nationwide conspiracy. Our point is that this kind of abuse goes on within
families and then families band together passing down pain from generation to
generation.

All five accounts of personal experience on these two shows attempt to emphasize
the psychological/therapeutic language of medicine. On Geraldo, both the women's
therapists and the author of Satan's Children also claim to be interested only in the
therapeutic aspects of their clients' psychological problems; whether or not the stories are
accurate is, for them, beside the point (as we may assume it is for the sisters' lawyers).
Both shows, however, are clearly designed to promote the story of satanic ritual abuse. It is apparent, however, that the "explanatory" frameworks are not discrete and that the women can, and do, choose between "systems" when constructing their accounts.

If the therapists (and apparently the lawyers) are willing to accept the possibility of satanic cults, and the mass media gatekeepers are eager to present this version of the sexual abuse story, why then are three of the five women reluctant to be associated with this construct? None of them hesitate to use the term "cult" or even "intergenerational," and it is clear that what they are describing is identical in almost every other way to pervious accounts which did emphasize the satanic connection. Indeed, two of the women on Geraldo, Kayla and Jane, are eager to use the terminology and motifs of this earlier model as well as the language of multiple personality disorder. I would suggest that de-emphasizing the satanic connection and placing increasing emphasis on the medical/psychological agendas are actually deliberate (but not always necessarily conscious) attempts to divorce the story from its fundamentalist religious origins.

In the first place, the satanic story itself was coming under increasing attack by 1991. The fundamentalists had insisted that this was an ongoing practice and, as such, was evidence of Satan's presence and power in contemporary society. Yet little hard evidence was forthcoming even after everyone was alerted and on the lookout for it. If, on the other hand, multiple personality disorder was, as many therapists maintained, the direct result of extreme, reality-disrupting forms of long-term sexual abuse, then the "evidence" was the patient herself (or, more rarely, himself). The corroborating evidence was long gone and of little concern in the present. Audiences, as well, could enjoy the horrific and bizarre details of the accounts without any pressing need to respond since the activity took place long ago. In the second place, satanism--as a religious concept--is a narrow-interest issue. Still, the satanic cult stories are attractively repulsive, startling and titillating at the same time. The newer accounts move the tales out of a supernatural/spiritual realm and into a still bizarre but more worldly realm of possibility: just "evil people" who have practiced ritual abuse for "generations."

In the second place, control of the "dominant" version of the satanic ritual abuse story is shifting. The expert systems involved in the satanic cult version of childhood sexual abuse, intricately interwoven from the start, are beginning, in these accounts, to drift more decidedly toward medical and/or legal frameworks and away from the service of the fundamentalist religious groups and child-saver interests. On the other hand, many of the rhetorical elements of the earlier explanatory system, which emphasized religious
motifs, still appear. All the women discuss "rituals" and "ritualistic" experiences, many involving human "sacrifice." Jane (Geraldo) describes a "ceremony called 'rebirth'," a form of baptism in blood. The women on Geraldo claimed they were being trained and groomed for the position of "priestess" within their cults or already were "Satan's princess" (Jane). Two of the three women, Jane and Kayla, clearly state that they were part of "satanic" cults. Kathleen quibbles only about Geraldo's emphasis on claiming that the Devil "made" people do things; she maintains that "they [only] used the idea of the Devil to cause immense fear" to control her.

"Satan," "satanism," and the "devil" are still, obviously, present in all these accounts; however, it is a non-denominational, secularized Satan that is invoked, one that takes, perhaps, less stretch of the imagination to accept. As backlash against the witch-hunt trials of the 1980s continues and as accusations of "false memory syndrome" escalate, the prevalence of these grotesque tales of the occult is likely to fade and be replaced by increasingly mundane versions of child sexual abuse. In the mean time, the satanic ritual abuse story is preserved through mass media conduits such as these two shows. In the process, satanic cult rhetoric receives implicit institutional validation and enjoys continued circulation.

The satanic ritual abuse story continues.

Talk shows are not the only institutional or media participants contributing to the continuation of the satanic version of child sexual abuse. The American Bible Society released a video in 1993 called Out of the Tombs. This work is ostensibly designed to introduce young people to the biblical story of Jesus casting out demons (whose name is "Legion") from a "possessed" man (Mark 5:9). The video, "reminiscent of Stephen King horror movies," features characters in modern-day roles and dress: a teenager in "blue jeans [and] muscle shirt," the demon-possessed man in a "baseball cap," and a "clean-cut, short-haired welder" as Jesus (Brooks, Columbus Dispatch, May 22, 1993). The video and the news coverage--complete with photo--keep notions of demonic possession before the American public, and, by implication, the "legion" of multiple personalities caused by the devil.

Concepts of "cults" as deviant religions have remained alive through the disastrous Waco, Texas, Branch Davidian standoff and subsequent fire, April 19, 1993, which killed all but nine of the cult members still in the compound at the time. The rumors and allegations of child abuse, and particularly of sexual abuse, that had surrounded the cult
from the beginning, lingered long after the fire. An Associated Press release several weeks later claimed that "no evidence exists that any of the children released before the fire were sexually abused," although the article also reported that "girls as young as 11 were inducted into wifehood with Koresh" (The Columbus Dispatch, May 3, 1993). Still, the connection between the "cult" and sexual abuse didn't go away. Six months later still, as legal trials began against the survivors of the cult, AP released an account in which "Joyce Sparks, former investigative supervisor of the cult case for Children's Protective Services in Waco" accused the county's sheriff's department of "sabotaging" her efforts, claiming that "she and other caseworkers didn't get the access they needed to verify allegations of physical and sexual abuse" (The Columbus Dispatch, October, 11 1993).

Continuing to fuel notions that cults engage in deviant sexual activities as well as in deviant religious practices were September 1993 reports of police raids on the "Children of God," a Buenos Aires religious group "known for preaching sexual freedom and sexual activity among children." The wire reports assured readers, however, that "the children were [being] placed in court custody and were being examined by psychiatrists and doctors for signs of sexual abuse" (The Columbus Dispatch, September 3, 1993).

Sexual Abuse and Mainstream Religion

Cults and satanism have not been the only connection between religious themes and interpretive constructs of the childhood sexual experience. Nor have all allegations been fantastical and unsubstantiated. Mainstream religious organizations (especially the Catholic church) have been the target of numerous highly-publicized sexual abuse "scandals" and successful damage suits. Following the pattern of the later satanic allegations (with which they coincided), most accusations against mainstream church officials concern abuse that took place years ago. The similarities end there, however. While in both instances "religious" institutions are involved in the formation and promotion of the explanatory constructs, the differences in the institutional structures, ideologies, and agendas produce dramatically different dominant stories.

Accounts of abuse within "mainstream" religious organizations are more prosaic than those developed within fundamentalist frameworks, and they are often corroborated by multiple victims and/or witnesses in a single case, by investigations into the allegations, and sometimes by the confession of the perpetrator. These tales also have a distinctively different flavor. The actions of the perpetrators are not described in terms of "rituals," nor are perpetrators' motivations attributed to anything other than sexual exploitation for
personal satisfaction. Words such as "victimized" and "seduced" replace "tortured" and "sacrificed." The primary theme of the mainstream religion story is the abuse of power and authority; the dominant motifs are the "betrayal of trust" and the "stolen childhood." The primary issues reflected in these stories (particularly the Catholic versions) are hierarchical power structures (which allow abuse to happen and which discourage effective "solutions"), homosexuality and pedophilia. Often the stories seem to be more about church politics and "justice" than about sexual abuse.

In 1989, numerous Canadian men came forward to accuse priests in the Christian Brothers School in Ontario, and in the Christian Brothers Orphanage in Newfoundland, of having sexually abused them years earlier. Meanwhile, Americans were beginning their own Catholic Church sex scandal; the founder of a famous New York shelter for trouble and runaway teenagers, Father Bruce Ritter, had been accused of having sexually abused numerous boys over a period of years. Once again, Geraldo was one of the first TV talk shows to exploit the issue. An episode entitled "Catholic Church Sex Scandals, Part II: The Betrayal of Trust" aired on September 12, 1990 (and was rebroadcast June 27, 1991). The show mixes the Canadian, New York, and other geographically-miscellaneous cases in a three-ring circus of diverse guests and agenda. In addition to eleven studio guests, the one-hour segment includes three film clips; frequent citations of impressive-sounding statistics; a phone interview with a former perpetrator; and references to one major "study," to multiple reports and investigations, and to several past and yet-to-be-held conferences.

Geraldo's choices of words, as well as the show's issues, are quite different in this episode from what they will be in the satanic cult episode, which was discussed earlier in this study but which aired later than this episode. ("Investigating Multiple Personalities: Did the Devil Make Them Do It?": September 10, 1991.) Geraldo uses the term "horrifying" only once in this episode on the Catholic church scandal. And while he uses the term "sexual abuse" often, he also refers to the experience of victims as having been "seduced" and to the actions of perpetrators as "sexual misconduct" and "misdeeds by individuals." It is not that the thrilling and astonishing story of satanic abuse suddenly emerged to replace the prosaic one of clergy "misconduct." Media exploitation of the satanic version of the sexual abuse experience preceded the media uproar surrounding accusations against church officials by several years (beginning with the McMartin preschool accusations in 1983). What is exploitable about sexual abuse in 1991 in connection with "satanic" abuse are the issues of medical multiple personality disorder and
recovered-memory processes. What is exploitable about sexual abuse in terms of "religion" in 1990 are internal scandals within Catholicism and issues of homosexuality and pedophilia. Ultimately, neither of these Geraldo episodes is "about" sexual abuse; sexual abuse accounts become, in both cases, merely vehicles for other agendas.

Geraldo begins the Catholic scandal show by citing statistics: a "25-year-long study of the priesthood," "26 percent of priests surveyed admit to homosexuality," "6 percent of the priests surveyed confess to having engaged in sex with children or teenagers." He then quickly moves to define the topic for the day: "homosexuality and pedophilia." This show is "about" litigation, cover-ups, and the politics of sexuality. The emphasis is never on the "victims" but on the "perpetrators." Are these perpetrators suffering from "a weakness," or a "sickness" (Padovano)? Are they "criminal[s]?" Are such individuals "someone that we should loathe?" (Geraldo). Are they themselves victims of an outdated policy of celibacy? Are they abusers of, or are have they been abused by, the church "hierarchy"—a word that nearly everyone on the show employs at one point or another? Or are these perpetrators simply convenient pawns of "people in the church who want to use these instances to overturn a very cherished discipline of the church, one that is conducive to its health and vitality, namely, celibacy" (Likoudis). This internal conflict leaves many Catholics feeling "betrayed," claims Geraldo.

The most commonly used term on this episode is "scandal," thus appropriately fulfilling its primary definition: "discredit brought upon religion by unseemly conduct in a religious person" (Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary). The most commonly used metaphor is "betrayal of trust," the show's title, which Geraldo voices four times. While the metaphor was not coined by Geraldo, it would rapidly become one of the most commonly used phrases in connection to sexual abuse by church officials, both on the show and since.

Whatever Geraldo meant by "betrayal of trust" (which is never completely clear), his guests quickly pick up the phrase and use it as a rallying cry for their own various causes. James Likoudis, a member of a conservative lay organization calling for a return to "priestly priests" and for adherence to papal directives claims "the church has suffered a betrayal of trust." This has resulted, he asserts, from "a betrayal of trust on the part of theologians who have run amuck . . . who have tried to undermine the church's teaching on contraception as well as abortion, sterilization, test-tube babies, masturbation, name it." Therefore, he says, "we should not be surprised that these aberrations are taking place . . .
the world of flesh and the devil" join with "human weakness" to bring about such "aberrations."

Several other guests consider the betrayal to be by the church, demonstrated by its unwillingness to deal with the issue of celibacy. Dr. Padovano, a now-married former priest, argues, "We're dealing with an institution that can no longer attract people who are psychologically as normal as they might be because you are eliminating every single person who wants to be married from the system." The result, he claims, is that the priesthood is attracting "people to the system who have higher percentages of problems." It is the priesthood, Padovano implies, who have been betrayed: "because priests feel trapped between a Pope and a hierarchy asking them to do things and to say things that they know are only hurting their people." Another guest, Dr. Pedigo, a therapist who treats sex offenders states, "I think that celibacy is a big factor in the sexual abuse of the children." Jason Barry, a Catholic reporter, claims that "the problem [is] that they won't discuss, celibacy. They're willing to tolerate pedophiles [sic] and homosexuals" rather than "move toward a married clergy, where the values of the nuclear family were planted in each parish. . . ."

Later in the show, when one Canadian guest, David McCann, begins to describe his abuse, Geraldo interprets: "Hold it! Hold it! Hold it! . . . Stop! There's something that has to be said. I said this yesterday and let me say it again. These are horrifying charges, but anyone who faults any one particular religion because of the acts of any miscreants, any immoral or vile people, does himself and that and all religion and religious freedom a grave disservice. This is not about religion. This is about anti-social, selfish, greedy, abusive, dysfunctional people. . . ."

Another alleged victim, David Figueroa, however, takes offense at Geraldo's words: "these people are in control of such power that is has to be dealt with insofar as--". Geraldo interrupts again, "But in that sense, they are no different than a social worker or a police officer or a day-care center worker."

Figueroa refuses Geraldo's analogy: "They have a lot more power, deal with a lot more money and go through a lot more--". Yet another alleged victim, Darryl Bassile, claims that for him "this [is a] trust issue. It's bad enough to be abused, but when you're abused by a priest, those are the people that society looks up to . . . And when you get abuse by a priest, that trust is gone."
Even the "victims" on this show seem to consider the issue to be more "about religion" than "sexual abuse." Sexual issues are merely a vehicle for discussing church policy, hierarchy, and other theo-political arguments. When Geraldo can't win his point about priests being just like day-care workers, he directs his next question toward Likoudis: "[I]s it possible that the priesthood and brotherhood is attracting precisely the wrong kind of person? Is it possible that they are becoming priests to put themselves close to those that they would victimize?"

Likoudis is delighted to agree. He has already maintained earlier in the show that "a failure of the screening process" is responsible for priests "who act as sociopaths and psychopaths and engage in sodomy, child molestation, other forms of child abuse." In response to Geraldo's promoting, he contends that "the layity [sic] in seminaries has actually been in favor of homosexual candidates. Citing a "big seminary investigation" that he doesn't "know the exact results of," he claims, "good, solid Catholic boys are eliminated from entrance into seminaries by defective, psychological profiles in favor of wimps and homosexuals."

If "scandal" is the most commonly employed word, "litigation" and "alleged" run close seconds. Some of the day's guests are lawyers for the victims or alleged victims, and labels are carefully delineated on the basis of whether or not a case is still in litigation. The term "cover up" appears frequently as well. According to Geraldo, "the theme that is repeated, aside from the wrongdoing of the specific priests or brothers involved, is one of institutional cover-up. Jason Berry [an investigative reporter] has characterized it as a sexual Watergate." Jeff Anderson, an attorney, claimed to be "involved in litigation involving sexual abuse by Catholic clergy and the cover-up of it . . . in at least 10 states. I am also aware that it's in litigation in at least 43 states in the USA." When Geraldo asks another attorney, Jack Harris, if he alleges that there was "a cover-up" in Canada, Harris answers less directly, confirming Geraldo's suspicions by instead co-opting a well-established metaphor of sexual abuse: "Well, there's certainly a conspiracy of silence," says Harris. Harris' use of the term to mean cover-up, however, is far different from the "conspiracy of silence" usage by feminists who claim the "silence" has been imposed on the victim, not chosen by the perpetrators.

The Catholic Version: Struggling for Dominance

If attempts by various religious interests to dominate the story of the sexual abuse experience produce different results (satanism versus scandal, for instance), attempts by
divergent factions within the same religion produce dissimilar stories as well. The "Catholic version" of the childhood sexual abuse story is clearly one of "betrayal." How and why that "betrayal" has come about, who has been betrayed, and what should be done now are clearly in question, however, as the Geraldo segment demonstrates. When sexual abuse is considered an "issue" to be dealt with, the explanatory construct is built on socio-political language, themes, and experts: "reports," "studies," "hierarchies," "screening processes," "celibacy," "lawyers," etc. On the other hand, if the story of abuse is told as "experience," the language and motifs are quite different, as I will demonstrate shortly. Still, both approaches are seeking the same objectives: an end to the "abuses," and "justice." Controlling the story determines what counts as "abuse" and who gets to decide how (and to whom) "justice" will be served. Television coverage has been instrumental both in presenting the argument to the public and in supporting certain factions in the struggle.

While the Geraldo episode just discussed is primarily an exploitation of a newsworthy topic, the PrimeTime Live episode presented next is clearly an attempt to create a specific "narrative" of the Catholic "betrayal" story. (Granted, a lot of "constructionism" is going on in Geraldo, but this seems always designed to meet the show's own agenda, not those of its guests.) And while it is not my intention to delve deeply into mass media theory, a few words do need to be said.

"Mass media" includes not only the devices (media) and products of message transmission but also the organizations in control of these communicative channels and the social institutions such organizations represent. Any ostensible goal, such as "informing the public," may be the starting point for a variety of approaches, depending on the target audience and the desired effect. The style, form, and content of mass media productions are as varied as the communicative and artistic genres they are extensions of, and mass communication decision-making begins by determining what medium, format, and code will most effectively communicate a specific message to a particular audience. Television is a particularly effective medium for transmitting content intended for quick consumption by a large, widespread, and relatively impersonal audience. There are, however, ways of making the "message" seem more "personal."

Once divided principally into single-purpose, identifiable genres (such as, news, entertainment, commentary, education, and public relations and advertising), television genres have drifted, in recent years, toward blurred and ambiguous forms. What is framed as "news" may now be essentially social commentary in disguise. Unfortunately, what is
viewed as news may well be received as news, as Orson Wells' 1938 radio broadcast of War of the Worlds demonstrated. As a result of the public panic that ensued from Wells' program, "the code of the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) adopted a resolution forbidding dramas to be presented as news programs" (Hiebert, Ungurait, and Bohn 1990, 9-10; 418).

While it may be easy to prevent a strictly fictional, literary production from being presented in a distinctive news-broadcast format, it has not been possible for the NAB to prevent the rise of docudramas--the "dramatization of current newsworthy events and trends rather than creative reportage"--or of other mixed-message formats (Hiebert, Ungurait, and Bohn 1990, 460. All further citations in this paragraph are from this work as well). "Documentaries," from which docudramas have developed, were originally defined by John Grierson (one of the early twentieth-century creators of the genre) as "a creative treatment of actuality" (459). Since the advent of television, through programming clearly labeled as "educational" and aired over "public broadcasting stations" (PBS) known for their educational missions, many audiences have been informally enlightened about varied aspects of history, culture and daily living, and documentaries have play an essential role in this public education. Data on "The All-Time Most-Watched Public Affairs Programs on PBS" lists "Child Sexual Abuse; What Your Children Should Know: 'A Program for Parents'" (9/84) as the seventh most-watched PBS show as of 1988 (461).

While the documentary's point of view is fairly apparent, the "docudrama" presents a more complex situation. "Although the makers of docudramas insist that their films are dramatizations of fact, not fiction, the line between 'docu' and 'drama' may sometimes be difficult for the viewer to draw" (Hiebert, Ungurait, and Bohn 1990, 461). This is especially true when the dramatization is done in such a way that fiction begins to prevail over fact or the evaluative biases are intentionally obscured. One such production will be considered later.

Recent mass media productions, such as daytime talk shows and prime-time pseudo-news broadcasts and pseudo-documentaries (documentaries which take advocacy stances), complicate matters even more. Daytime talk shows, such as Geraldo, Sally Jessy Raphael, and Oprah have enjoyed increasing popularity in the past few years--as evidenced by the expanding number being offered to viewers. Yet in the 628 pages of text of the 1990 edition of their text, Mass Media VI: An Introduction to Modern Communication, Hiebert, Ungurait, and Bohn devote fewer than 100 words to discussing this format.
What they do say is that "[t]he key to the success of such programs is the host's manipulation of the relationships among guest, audience, and host" (260). A form of "infotainment" (428), such daytime talk shows often combine information on timely, emotionally-charged, human-interest issues with the inflammatory style of supermarket tabloids.

The primary difference between the newspaper tabloids and the TV ones is that the people depicted on TV are sitting "in plain sight" in front of the audience. It is much more difficult to ridicule their claims or to mock the pathos of their situations when the stories are told "face-to-face." The weight of eyewitness testimony and experience narratives, which are first-person both in their assertions and in their performances, combine with the institutional authority of television and the celebrity status of the show's host to enhance the overall validity of the claims presented. This is not to suggest that all viewers of Oprah or Geraldo are naive, uncritical, or credulous; many viewers enjoy the outrageousness and sensationalism. Still, such shows do educate, intentionally or not, and they contribute both to public information and to the formation of public opinions--if only in the same way that contemporary legends do, as passed on sensation narratives that listeners must accept on faith.

Even more insidiously constitutive of social reality than Geraldo's or Oprah's daytime talk-show circuses are the prime-time pseudo-documentaries and pseudo-news "investigative reports" such as 20/20 and PrimeTime Live. According to the authors of Mass Media VI, news reporting is supposed to be "truthful--objective, accurate, and balanced or fair"; it should represent a "factual report of an event as it occurred, without the bias of the reporter or an attempt on the part of the journalist to make any one view more influential than another." They also noted that there are "a number of genres special to the areas of analysis and interpretation, forms of communication that allow a mirror to be held up to society in a way different from reporting" (415, 432), and that there is a growing trend for documentaries to take an advocacy position and/or a crusading stance (Hiebert, Ungurait, and Bohn 1990, 439-441).

Broadcast during more "serious" viewing hours than the daytime talk shows, and framed as news broadcasts or documentaries, the biases of these news/expose productions may be subsumed by genre association and viewer expectations. PrimeTime Live, an ABC News production, aired a segment July 2, 1992, that demonstrates this combination of "investigative reporting," dramatic presentation, and reporter advocacy. The show documents accusations made by Frank Fitzpatrick (and a host of other individuals) against
James Porter, a former parish priest of North Attleboro, Massachusetts. Many of the scenes are clearly constructions: pieced-together, pre-recorded clips of interviews, and commentary about years-old home movies and photographs (which also become part of the broadcast) showing the "happy childhoods" of the now-adult accusers. What is easily overlooked in this "reconstructed" drama of how Frank Fitzpatrick moved from vague feelings of unhappiness, to "reawakened memory" (Sawyer), to mobilizing the other alleged victims of Father Porter in 1989, and finally, to his confrontation of Porter, is that recording devices were present at moments when they could not have been if all the scenes shown on the broadcast had actually been "reconstructed" after they occurred. Documentation of the events as they happened indicates that this broadcast was filmed over a period of months. For instance, Fitzpatrick phones the former priest to confront him; the conversation is recorded as it happens. The call is attributed to "Fitzpatrick, private investigator" (Sawyer). The segment aired later during the show, however, was not aired as a "re-enactment," nor is there any suggestion that Porter knew he was being taped or that he gave permission for the recording to be used during the broadcast. Following the airing of the first call, Sawyer says: "So several months later, Frank Fitzpatrick dialed that phone number again." These back-to-back phone conversations, with only a brief intervening discussion between Fitzpatrick and Sawyer concerning the first call, obscure the "several months" in between, and, again, there is no indication that Porter knows he is being recorded for public broadcast. Finally, when "Frank Fitzpatrick tracks down their abuser," PrimeTime is along, filming the confrontation.

PrimeTime Live and its host, Diane Sawyer, assist Fitzpatrick and the other "former children of St. Mary's" (as Sawyer labels them) in creating a highly-emotional, pathos-laden, victim-oriented version of the "Catholic" sexual abuse story. Throughout the segment, information is revealed mystery-plot fashion, with Fitzpatrick in the role of "private investigator," as Sawyer twice defines him. Mixed among Sawyer's commentary, a "composite" story of the alleged abuses emerges through short multi-vocalic segments (usually single sentences--sometimes only phrases--offered by different individuals): one "story" spoken through many voices. It is as though the twenty-five accusers featured on the show are all telling the same, single story. In one sense perhaps they are; their experiences--in terms of activity sequences--appear to be very similar. In another sense, however, through their group-telling of a "single" story, their experiences become also a single interpretation--a single "meaning" assigned to the experience. Again, perhaps all the alleged victims are, in a some real way, telling the "same" story; they all appear to be
comfortable with the version generated, even though more of the "evaluative" elements are supplied by Sawyer than by the victims. At any rate, this composite of multiple "eyewitness testimonies" of individual personal experiences exponentially intensifies the effect of each account; the whole is far greater than the sum of the parts.

It is not my intention to make light of any of the accusations against James Porter. Porter admits to having abused numerous children over a period of years; there can be no doubt that he caused a great deal of pain to many people. Perhaps the production and staging choices, the multi-vocalic composite storytelling, the then-and-there is here-and-now sense of time and space created through often vague geographic and temporal references, the motifs emphasized and the metaphors chosen are the elements best suited for conveying the suffering of Porter's victims. The emotive power of the segment is undeniable. What I do wish to point out is that even a serious "investigative report" can be manipulated to achieve specific results in support of particular goals. However, these goals may not be the readily apparent or stated ones.

In this case, the ostensible aim of the show is to "keep this from happening again" (Sawyer). Admittedly, making the public aware of the potential for abuse when authority figures are considered "something . . . high above . . . normal mortal human beings" (Fitzpatrick) is the first step toward reducing the likelihood that such power will continue unchecked or at least unmonitored. Certainly the Catholic church has had to begin dealing with its errant priest more rigorously and more openly since the airing of shows such as the Primetime Live and Geraldo episodes discussed here. But Porter had already been "dealt with" before this show aired. He had received counseling, left the priesthood, and he claimed to be "cured"; indeed, he was married and had four children of his own. The goal of getting the church to supervise its own appears to have been accomplished, at least to some degree, and as least in this case. On the other hand, these "former children" had apparently filed a class-action suit for damages, but the courts had denied the suit on grounds that the statute of limitations against Porter had run out. This secondary issue may well have been the primary impetus behind the broadcast.

The segment is aired under the guise of exposing this crime "to keep this from happening again" (Sawyer), and the 'this could be you' atmosphere is carefully contrived. On the other hand, what the story is actually about is indirectly revealed in Sawyer's opening statements: "Now those children are grown up and tracking him [Porter] down, led by a man who says he's going to see justice done." "Tonight we take you there
(defined to this point only as "a New England town") as the children of St. Mary's school 30 years later take on that priest and the church that did nothing to stop him."

The "single story" that the show generates is always heavy on pathos when it concerns the "victims." However, it is only specific about geography and dates when these refer to James Porter. The multi-vocalic technique is used throughout the episode, and, eventually, all the elements of the composite narrative are told through this multiple-voice storytelling. The story is not revealed in linear fashion to emphasize "plot" but is told to highlight the emotive elements. Evaluation first--setting last is a common sequence throughout the show; we always know what the story "means" before we know what the story "is." Each of the following segments is continuous within itself; the segments are in the order in which they appear in the show, although there is intervening material between them.

Evaluation: (segment is internally continuous)

1st ACCUSER: It became our secret for 30 years.
2nd ACCUSER: We were all ashamed. We were all ashamed.
3rd ACCUSER: I see an innocent child living with the secret that was about to destroy his life.
4th ACCUSER: It was the whole towns' terrible secret.

Complicating action: (segment is internally continuous)

5th ACCUSER: And I remember him pressing himself up against me.
6th ACCUSER: His hands went up my legs.
7th ACCUSER: He was sweating and shaking.
8th ACCUSER: --gasping and shaking. He shook.
SAWYER. [voice-over] One by one, the former children of St. Mary's decided to come forward.
9th ACCUSER: He threw me on the floor and raped me.
10th ACCUSER: --once or twice a week.
11th ACCUSER: He kept telling me that God was watching.
Setting: (segment is internally continuous)

SAWYER: "... at the little school called St. Mary's there was no place a child could be safe from Father Porter—not the playground, not the rectory, not the sacristy, not the altar.

JOHN ROBITAILLE: In his office in the rectory, in the basement of the rectory, in the vestibule of the church.

MS. WILSON: In the corridors at school, in the schoolyard, at the town pool, at the playground—wherever we were.

Common motifs:

The constructed story is full of "child" imagery. Sawyer's "children of St. Mary's" statement will be echoed in a wide variety of ways throughout the segment as images of childhood are repeatedly evoked: "innocent child" (3rd Accuser), "innocent days of St. Mary's grammar school" (Sawyer), "Porter, overseer of the altar boys... organized games for the children" (Sawyer), "unsuspecting little boy" (Sawyer), "a 10-year-old little girl" (Sawyer).

Admittedly, the episode is about the childhood abuse of the people involved in the segment, but it is primarily Sawyer, the commentator, who emphasizes carefree and innocent images of childhood, and in doing so, she creates a specific emotional climate. It is Frank Fitzpatrick, however, who voices a metaphor now commonly associated with child sexual abuse: the destroyed or stolen childhood: "This guy destroyed hundreds of children's childhoods. He took the child right out of them and ripped it out." Another participant in the show, John Robitaille, puts it this way: "Diane, as far as I'm concerned, Porter committed murder. He psychologically murdered every one of us when we were 10, 11, 12 years old."

Other elements common to many adult (remembered) accounts of childhood sexual abuse appear during the show. These include the motifs of post traumatic stress disorder: repressed memory and the belief that the current emotional and/or other life problems of the "victims" are the direct result of sexual abuse experienced during childhood. (The following segment is continuous.)

Mr. FITZPATRICK: No, I wasn't happy, but I should have been and that's what started to make me remember was that I realized that something was wrong. [sic]
SAWYER: /voice-over/ As Fitzpatrick tells it, a dark shadow kept flickering over his picture-perfect life.

Mr. FITZPATRICK: "Somebody I love is doing something horrible to me," was the first thing that came back to me, the pain, and my brain said that.

Also appearing during the show was the most frequently-used metaphor of all mass media sexual abuse productions: Speaking out is considered an act of heroism, a sign of "courage." (Segment is continuous)

SAWYER: (referring to Fitzpatrick) You're a hero.
Mr. ROBITAILLE: He's my hero. He really is.
Mr. FITZPATRICK: You're my hero now, too.
Mr. ROBITAILLE: He's a very, very brave man and--
Mr. FITZPATRICK: So are you.

A number of motifs and metaphors prevalent in the "Catholic" version of the sexual abuse experience appear in the account(s) as well: the "betrayal of trust," "pedophilia," and "scandal." ("Betrayal of trust," and the "stolen childhood" are now widely common among childhood sexual abuse accounts in general.)

The metaphor "betrayal of trust" nearly always appears in sexual abuse accounts involving traditional institutional hierarchies, particularly the church. And, especially because traditional authoritative structures are involved, this "betrayal" is often viewed as extending beyond the specific abuse victim. (Quotes are not continuous with each other.)

J. MICHAEL WHALEN: That's what this story's about. It's about trust. It's about--it's about what happens when people betray trust. . .

. . .

SAWYER: In a sense, those parents were victims, too, not just of one priest, but a church that protected itself from scandal. . . .

The relationship between pedophilia and child sexual abuse is particularly emphasized when the abuse involves clergy. This show deals with pedophilia in several ways. Sawyer cites statistics (an appeal to "science" and "authority" common to many accounts regardless of conceptual framework), and she describes the action that the Catholic church took toward James Porter: removal from the priesthood and treatment. Porter claims he is cured. His accusers react with contradictory statements: both the commonly-held belief that pedophilia is incurable ("experts" do not agree on this as
demonstrated in the Geraldo discussion), and that he should receive treatment (an absurdity if, indeed, pedophilia were incurable). (Segment is continuous.)

SAWYER: You know, he said on the tape that nothing has happened, that leaving the priesthood was a kind of cure for him.

Mr. JOHNSON: If you talk to the experts around pedophilia, it is a non-curable disease.

SAWYER: If you get that apology, will that give you all peace?

ACCUSERS: No. No.

13th ACCUSER: He's got to be put away.

14th ACCUSER: In jail. [crosstalk]

15th ACCUSER: Treatment in jail.

This segment (presented above), which appeared near the end of the show, emphasizes the primary agenda of the broadcast. This purpose has been carefully set up during the course of the episode through biased usage of time and place elements. Both indeterminate geographical references and a lack of precise chronology are employed when they involved the abuse and the victims; specific and repeated references to both are used when they apply to Porter.

Although the name of the town where St. Mary's is located--North Attleboro--was mentioned several times during the show, the fact that North Attleboro is in Massachusetts is less clear. "North Attleboro, Massachusetts" appears only once in the transcript; "North Attleboro" and "Massachusetts" appear one other time in the same paragraph. It is never established what state (or states) Fall River or New Bedford--the "neighboring parish[es]" (Sawyer) to which James Porter was sent after he left North Attleboro--are in. Mention is made late in the show that the "former children of St. Mary's school . . . determined to get action" had "turned to the Rhode Island district attorney" for assistance (Sawyer); although, why the were appealing to this authority or what the connection is between the accusers and Rhode Island is never made clear. On the other hand, Sawyer, specifically and repeatedly, refers to the current whereabouts of James Porter: "Oakdale, Minnesota" [twice], "Minnesota" [twice].

Likewise, few specific dates of any kind are used during the show, and most of those--as with the specific geographical designations--are in relation to James Porter. The time frame of the abuse is referred to by the show's participants as "thirty years ago." This phrase appears eleven times during the segment; Sawyer speaks it eight of those times.
The phrase is used less to create a perception of history, however, than to generate a sense that this "thirty-years-ago" past is overwhelmingly consequential in the present, thus echoing and re-validating one of the most commonly held understandings concerning childhood sexual abuse: childhood sexual abuse causes permanent and life-long damage. Indeed, Sawyer asserts "the victims tell of lives wrecked by addiction and depression."\(^5\)

The anytime/anyplace atmosphere of the presentation lends itself to the "people just like you" relevance and to the sense of social outrage the show contends is its purpose. Ultimately, however, this show is about "justice"--or at least revenge.

Denied "court justice," these "former children" aided and abetted by PrimeTime Live, exercise media justice. While, according to Sawyer, Porter admits to having "molested 50 to 100 children," she derides this claim and recontextualizes his past crimes into the present: "His victims scoffed, saying that's just a fraction of the real number. And their constant fear is it didn't stop when he said it did" (Sawyer). This latter opinion is a recurrent and increasingly emphasized theme throughout the course of the segment. Porter's current residence is repeatedly mentioned. PrimeTime Live cameras and reporters "go to Minnesota to see if we could get James Porter to say something to the victims he left behind" (Sawyer). When Porter declines to speak with the reporters, they chase after him. When he yells for the police and pushes back, Sawyer says in a voice-over, "Porter slammed our cameraman and our camera so hard that the camera shut down. It took two men to pull him off us," as though they were the innocent and injured parties. Immediately following this sequence the camera shifts to John Robitaille who says, "He's not dealing with a helpless 12-year-old now. He's dealing with a very angry 43-year-old and I'm not going to stop until that man is prosecuted, until he is dealt with. . . ." The show continues to "prosecute" Porter. Sawyer repeats an earlier statement: "As we said, the Rhode Island district attorney says he will not prosecute. Massachusetts officials are undecided." Her final words--unsubstantiated accusations--are delivered in the guise of a public-interest message: "And what about Father Porter in Minnesota? Well, The Boston Globe

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\(^5\) Sawyer also notes--almost in passing--that one of the victims is "a single mother who works with emotionally disturbed children" and that at least some of the others are "businessman [sic] now, teachers, adults" (although this is a rather curious combination of achievements). Even Fitzpatrick "became an investigator for an insurance company and created a family life like the one he knew growing up"; indeed, he had a "picture-perfect life" (Sawyer). Obviously, not all the lives had been "destroyed" in quite the way this term implies.
ran an article today which confirms something that we had heard. William Hutton, an officer in the police department in Oakdale, Minnesota, Porter's community, said he has now heard from three people raising questions. They say about 10 years ago, Porter abused them as youngsters in the Midwest. But all three cases would exceed the seven-year statute of limitation."

What his victims could not achieve through the courts--public sentencing and punishment of Porter--they manage to accomplish through the media. In the process, they reiterate and reify many of the commonly-held notions concerning the experience and meaning of childhood sexual abuse. They also claim dominance over the "Catholic" version of the story--at least for the moment.

The Continuing Catholic Version

The connections between religious institutions and the construction of the sexual abuse story continue. While not the only clergy members to be accused of sexual misconduct, Catholics have come under attack most often recently (suggesting evidence of a motif pattern). In June 1993: "The nation's Catholic bishops, buffeted by a series of reports of priestly pedophilia, established a committee ... to address the problem of clergy sexual abuse" (Associated Press; Columbus Dispatch (CD), June 18, 1993). This did not, however, stop the accusations. In November 1993, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops voted "to make it easier to dismiss priests who sexually abuse minors" (CD November 18, 1993) a bare week after yet another of their own, Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago, was accused by a former student of sexual abuse (CD November 17, 1993). The case against Cardinal Bernardin, which was based primarily on a photo of the alleged victim standing with the then Bishop Bernardin and on the accuser's claim to have suddenly "remembered" the abuse, was later dropped as unsubstantiated. That the accusation could have been taken seriously in the first place was at least partly the result of numerous, highly publicized, confirmed cases of such abuse following the ones cited above. (Admittedly, the "sudden recall" motif worked--at least briefly--in this accuser's favor, also.) The emphasis remains primarily on pedophilia and homosexuality.

Childhood Sexual Abuse: Spiritual Healing and Forgiveness

One other way in which religious frameworks and childhood sexual abuse interact is through the concepts of "spiritual healing" and "forgiveness." Spiritual healing (and/or forgiveness) most often occurs as a sub-text within the general theme of "recovery," and it
is treated as a part of a holistic approach to life or personal "healing." The other place these issues most often occur is within religious organizations. There, the treatment is dependent on church doctrine, but the emphasis is often on "forgiveness" in terms of one's overall religious health (for example, obeying the injunction to forgive one's "debtors" as God forgives one's own "debts"). Religious versions of forgiveness are usually group-specific, and do not generally appear in mass-media discourse. In the general media "recovery" discourse, "forgiveness," is a much-disputed concept. Frequently it is discouraged for anyone but the victim, who must "forgive" herself (himself) for having been a victim, and "give up trying to get anything back from the abuser" (Bass and Davis 1988, 150). The need to control the rhetoric of "forgiveness" is tied to the overall agenda of those attempting to create a dominant story of childhood sexual abuse.

Promoting forgiveness

I have encountered only one specific instance of the spiritual/ forgiveness theme as a primary text in a TV talk-show (although there could well have been many others I missed). On March 26, 1992, Sonya Live, a daytime talk show (during which the guests often get into screaming matches) hosted by Dr. Sonya Friedman, aired a short segment called "Childhood Wounds." This segment shared the one-hour time slot with another, longer segment entitled "Why Men Batter," which involved a discussion with several men who openly admitted to having been--at one time--wife batterers. "Childhood Wounds" featured Wayne Muller, minister, therapist, graduate of Harvard Divinity School, and author of Legacy of the Heart, The Spiritual Advantages of a Painful Childhood.

In his opening statement, Muller claims that if individuals would stop asking "Why me?" they could turn their childhood pain into adult happiness. He refers to people whose childhoods involved "parents [who] were alcoholic or abusive or sexually abusive or clumsy or hurtful in any way" as people who grow up having "poignant, deep scars, in their body and their mind and their heart and their spirit." On the other hand, he claims, children of such parents learn "to watch things very, very carefully and they learn to listen for things that people might not be able to hear and to listen for what's true behind things that seem confusing. They learn to develop an intuition and creativity and a wisdom just to survive. And these can be tremendous gifts that sit right next to the wound."

So, what do you do with "the hurt, the pain, and the anger," Sonya asks. Muller suggests forgiveness and letting go. Sonya claims she "loved [his] meditations about letting go," which she has read, but she wonders "about Jews forgiving Hitler for the
holocaust." She mentions, as well, "the Cambodians today having to consider the Khmer Rouge," and the Middle East hostages. Is it possible or right to "forgive" in such cases, she asks?

Muller suggests that "when we look for the person to blame for our pain, very frequently, we continue to perpetuate that violence in our lives." "If we name ourselves by the shape of our wound," Muller contends, "then we really limit the fullness of who we can be as human beings." "I thing a lot of self-help groups and therapies make the assumption that childhood pain was so insidious and came at such a tender and fragile age that it actually broke people. I think that our spirit is so strong that it can't be broken."

I've included this segment because, while members of the audience (at least those who get on the air) seem willing to embrace Muller's philosophies, these sentiments are not prevalent in most mass media constructs of childhood sexual abuse; they are more often restricted to religious institutional responses. On the other hand, the rhetorical elements used in this argument are common to many mass media treatments of childhood sexual abuse. The Holocaust is often alluded to when issues of sexual abuse are discussed. Indeed, the Holocaust seems to be the standard against which all contemporary evils are gauged. At the same time, when this historic event is referred to, there is an implicit (and sometimes explicit) message that the "horror" of the Holocaust (which many of its survivors find difficult to talk or even to think about) is highly analogous to certain kinds of childhood pain and trauma. Even the term "survivors" has also been borrowed, and many survivors claim their experiences were as--or were nearly as--"horrible" and as difficult to remember as the Holocaust; some sexual abuse victims' memories have even been completely blocked out by the trauma of the experience. This seems to be a popular misinterpretation of the Holocaust survivors' (former) silence. It is not necessarily that they couldn't remember; sometimes they didn't want to, and, for a long time, no one wanted to listen when they did.

Women (and many other "victim" groups) have based much of their rhetoric, as well as their claims to validity, on the motifs of "survivor" narratives from a variety of widely-publicized catastrophic events (including, and most particularly, the Holocaust and the Vietnam war). "[T]hose who remain after mass destruction of their fellows become 'seekers after justice,' devoting themselves to careful examination of their own lives and of history, trying to find evidence of something aside from chaos to account for their sufferings," writes Barbara Myerhoff of the Jews who survived Hitler (1984, 318). Similarly, childhood sexual abuse victims sometimes become obsessed with procuring
"justice," and they often claim that their reasons for speaking out are "to make sure that this never happens again" or "never happens to another child." "Survivor's guilt" (the common process whereby the survivor must account for not having been destroyed also) is transformed in childhood sexual abuse rhetoric into the "shame" of having been involved (which this rhetoric insists the victim feels), while the "guilt" is assigned to the perpetrator, and the label "survivor" is the victim's badge of honor. This badge of honor can be enhanced by claiming that "it's a miracle I turned out as normal as I did" as one of the project interviewees did (Kay), but this is always implied whether stated or not.

Muller goes even one step further than Holocaust rhetoric; he starts relating difficult American childhoods to crises of human existence all over the contemporary world. Causing human suffering is "never excusable as an act," he says. "But the fact that suffering came to us in the form of our parents is not wholly unlike the suffering that comes to children in Africa who don't have enough food or that people in our generation who are getting AIDS and who are getting cancer . . . . Pain is sometimes a legacy of simply being human, and if we can just pan the camera back a little bit and feel our pain as a portion of the pain shared by all the children of the world, unfortunately, then we can begin to forgive the way that it came to us," he claims.

He adds other examples of these notions of 'universal suffering' and 'universal resilience.' He tells of "the barrios of Lima, Peru, where there are 15 children to a room and broken glass everywhere and open sewage running down the streets . . . and little children would come up to me and smile at me and take my hand and say, 'Ola, Padre!,' and give me flowers and look at me with such love and such tenderness." He speaks, as well, of "children in the ghettos, in the slums, in Africa . . . in the homeless shelters . . . ."

The audience is able to chime right in, echoing Muller's words and images. Caller number one suggests that world problems are caused by "fear and anger and people get caught up in it like the Nazis." Another caller asserts that "you do develop a heightened sensitivity because of these experiences." The third caller, whose father was an alcoholic and violent, "learned to get out in the world and forget about his disease."

On the one hand, Muller's universalizing seems an inclusive effort: we're all in this together; Americans should understand suffering because we've been there and we didn't like it, so we should have empathy for others. He at least resists the old "Stop complaining, there are lots of other people worse off than you" message that belittles suffering, regardless of its intensity. On the other hand, does growing up with an alcoholic
parent really compare to mass starvation, genocide, or overwhelming poverty? I think he
tries to have it both ways and perhaps fails on both accounts. The audience, however,
seems to be comforted by his (admittedly positive) "we forget how strong the spirit is"
message. Whether this is from their own need to be reassured that they can overcome
their own problems, or because they wish to be absolved of responsibility to do anything
about anyone else's problem, is not entirely clear from the discussion included in the brief
time allotted to the segment (although at least two people "illustrate" this theme of
resilience for the audience). While the "universal suffering" theme common to many
frameworks, the "universal resistance" theme is not.

The common sexual abuse theme that childhood trauma produces life-long effects is
transformed here. Muller credits the "wounds" (common terminology in many "childhood
recovery" issues) of childhood for the positive attributes of adulthood. This motif is
almost as taboo in contemporary stories of sexual abuse as speaking about the experience
at all was just a few years ago. The reason is obvious: if the "victim" benefited, why all
the complaining? And the corollary of this is equally unspeakable: if you want to produce
a highly sensitive and successful adult, abuse the child. This reasoning is, of course,
totally spurious, but cause-effect arguments concerning child abuse and its aftereffects
can't always bear close examination in other treatments of childhood sexual abuse either.
This is also why life-long "damage" is emphasized in much of the sexual abuse discourse,
and why any adult successes achieved by former child victims are considered nearly
"miraculous."

Discouraging Forgiveness

The Courage to Heal (Bass and Davis, 1988), a widely-read and extremely popular
self-help book geared toward the "recovery" process, touches on spiritual issues as well as
on "healing" concerns. The authors, Ellen Bass and Laura Davis, advise their readers that
"[f]inding the spiritual part of yourself can be an important aspect of your healing process"
(155). They, too, caution that "comparisons of pain are simply not useful" (21), that
playing the "my childhood was worse than yours" game is divisive at a time when
survivors should, instead, be bonding together in their efforts to heal the wounds of
childhood. Their handling of "forgiveness"--quite different from Muller's--stands in direct
opposition to the wishful thinking of non-victims that the victim will just "forgive and
forget." Many mass media treatments seem to simply try to ignore the issue of
"forgiveness" altogether.
The language of "spirituality" that Bass and Davis use is taken directly—and intentionally—from twelve-step programs such as Alcoholics' Anonymous and Al-Anon rather than from any mainstream religious teachings. They do not to mislead readers into thinking that "spirituality" means "people with shaved heads, forced processions to church, [or] the hypocrisy of piety in an abuser who molested you" (155). They also wish to disassociate their discussion of "forgiveness" from the tenets of any institutionalized religion. Borrowing the notion of a "higher power" from Alcoholics' Anonymous, they define spirituality as "a passion for life, a feeling of connection, of being a part of the life around you." This concept includes intimacy with other human beings, arts, and "nature": the "life force that makes things grow, that makes thunder storms and mountain ranges and perfect avocados," and an active concern for the environment (156).

They also caution that "spiritual healing" does not necessarily mean "forgiving" the abuser, nor does it mean stoicism or mystical denial of the importance of everyday life. "It is insulting to suggest to any survivor that she should forgive the person who abused her," they write. "This advice, they claim, minimizes and denies the validity of her feelings." Women (to whom this book is primarily aimed) should resist well-meaning religious doctrines that tell them that it is their "sacred duty to forgive." "This just isn't true," assert Bass and Davis. "If there is such a thing as divine forgiveness, it's God's job, not yours. . . ." Forgiveness "is not the grand prize" of healing. "It is only a by-product. And it's not even a very important one." The only person an abuse survivor needs to forgive, they maintain, is herself (Bass and Davis 1988, 149-151) [Other elements of this book will be discussed in more depth later.]

**Legal Themes**

The other primary frameworks—legal and medical—(as well as numerous secondary ones) sometimes appear in the same mass media forms as those I have described above, and when they do, their treatment within such productions is very similar. Therefore, I will not dwell at any length on such examples. While nearly all popular constructions of the childhood sexual abuse story contain legal and/or medical sub-texts in support of the essential framework, explanatory systems based principally in legal and medical paradigms lend themselves better to other media and social forms than TV talk shows. Medical/healing issues are frequently part of self-help books, public workshops and seminars, and 12-Step programs such as Incest Survivors' Anonymous, which is very similar in structure to Alcoholics' Anonymous. Legal motifs appear most successfully as
stories—in their own right—in documentaries such as the Frontline treatment of the Little Rascals Day Care Center case ("Innocence Lost", May 7, 1991) or in docudramas, such as in the made-for-TV movie "Shattered Trust: The Shari Karney Story" (ABC, Sept., 27, 1993). In both cases "impression management" becomes an important "strategy," as it always does when "winning" is the agenda. Creating "possible" or "imaginary" doubt may be enough to get a court (or social) conviction even when no corroborating evidence is available.

"Innocence Lost"

"Innocence Lost", the May 7, 1991 episode aired by Frontline ("a presentation of the Documentary Consortium" designed to provide "educational" and "public" TV programming) is similar in some ways to the July 2, 1992, PrimeTime Live segment already discussed which involved the "former children" of St. Mary's school in North Attleboro, Massachusetts. Both deal with accusations of child abuse and attempts to seek legal recourse; both exhibit evidence of media manipulation to support a particular point of view. This show, however, deals with contemporary rather than remembered claims of misconduct, divides its focus between the problems of the accused and the assertions of the accusers, and focuses on questions of legal and investigative procedures (such as the acquisition and validity of children's testimony) rather than on the aftereffects of child abuse. Finally, the coverage in "Innocence Lost" is considerably more even-handed and decidedly less sensationalized than the PrimeTime Live segment. Still, the "Announcer" warns the viewing audience that they are about to see "a disturbing portrait of a town divided," and the "Narrator" emphasizes the "atmosphere of rumor and speculation" that surrounded the case from the beginning.

The case described during the show involved accusations against seven staff members of the Little Rascals Day Care facility in Edenton, North Carolina, beginning with the arrest of Bob Kelly (co-owner of Little Rascals) in April, 1989. The defendants were eventually charged with "429 separate criminal offenses" (Narrator) involving ritual abuse, sexual abuse, and child pornography based on the accusations of "90 children that have been involved in therapy and . . . [who] disclosed some form of abuse" (Bill Hart, Special Prosecutor). At the time of the broadcast, Bob Kelly had been imprisoned for two years; two of the other defendants had been imprisoned for 20 months, and two more had finally been released on bond. All were still awaiting trial despite the fact that there had been, at no time, any corroborating evidence to support the children's stories.
That these defendants are more-than-likely innocent of the crimes of which they are accused is clearly the stance of the Frontline coverage. Even so, there is obvious sympathy for the fears and confusion of the parents of the children as well as understanding of the parents' desire to trust the medical and legal "experts" who have guided them into believing that their children have been abused. In fact, presented as a historical reconstruction rather than as a composite personal narrative, this show details the processes that led from what was possibly a vindictive accusation on the part of a single individual, through vague rumors, to multiple accusations, to firm belief on the part of many of the town's people that the charges are true. At the beginning some people reacted to the accusations as "a bad joke"; someone's "way to get at" Bob Kelly, the owner of the day care center; probably based on some "grudge against him" (Susan Dixon). By the time of the Frontline coverage, three years later, many people shared Dillard Dixon's view: "I believe they're guilty in the bottom of my heart. I mean, I know they're guilty." Many share, as well, Ms. Marby's conviction that an individual they had known for years as friendly, open, and trustworthy (Betsy Kelley--wife of Bob and co-owner of Little Rascals and co-defendant), "either never existed or has died. She's just not the person that [we] knew. She's someone else."

Were the children "badgered" (Debbie Forest--parent) during the questioning or led during "therapy" into claiming that someone had abused them? Despite the outrageous nature of many of the claims, many parents felt that they could "see" the effects of the abuse on their children once they had been told that their children's behavior was a sign of child abuse. Besides, they believed, what so many of the constructs of child sexual abuse assert: children don't, and can't, make up such things.

Other common motifs that appear in the episode include notions that children are at great risk outside their homes, especially in situations where the person in contact with the children has authority status--particularly "in loco parentis" status. In addition, the case is premised on the acceptance of bizarre sexual practices and the ability to control and manipulate children so that they will not tell their parents anything that happened. An element of this "ritual abuse" scenario includes, as well, the conspiracy by, and ability of, the alleged perpetrators to maintain absolute secrecy over their activities. Despite the fact that people walked in and out of the day care facility--at will--during all hours of its operation, and despite the fact that many of the employees were long-time acquaintances and friends of the parents of the children involved, still many of the people of Edenton were convinced that the outrageous activities described in the accusations could have
taken place for an extended period of time without anyone noticing or finding out. Their willingness to believe this demonstrates the power of the ritual abuse story: that no one can be trusted anymore when it comes to children; that people may not be what they seem to be--not even people you've know all your life. It demonstrates, as well, the power of "experts" and dominant stories to change what counts as "reality." What "common sense" told the people of Edenton was a "joke" or someone with "a grudge" was transformed into absolute "conviction" that cult-like ritual-abuse activity was taking place right before their very eyes and that the children exhibited "signs" of abuse.

The segment also depicts the parents' (and other accusers') own need for vindication once legal and medical authorities involve themselves heavily in highly public issues, and for the parents' need to have their emotional investment and the "reality" of their (children's) claims validated (this time through court decree). That "vested interests" are powerful driving forces in this case is clearly one stance of the Frontline treatment.

The show concludes with a roundtable discussion focused on the "profound questions" that linger around such cases (Cynthia McFadden, Frontline commentator), particularly the reliability of children's testimony and the ways in which such testimony is solicited. The focal point of the discussion is the role of therapists, social workers, psychologists, and law enforcement professionals in interviewing children to find out "what really happened" in any specific situation.

McFadden also brings up related legal issues, including the possibility that a jury might be influenced because the "prosecutors decide, both based on investigation and also on a sense of what the jury might buy, which charges to include and which ones not to include." In the Little Rascals case, some of the children's "testimonies" were not included in the indictments and so might never be mentioned in court. "Emily", for instance, had claimed that she had been cooked . . . in a microwave" (Narrator). By leaving out such information, McFadden asks, "do we make the children more credible, do we make what they've said more credible, by choosing to include things which sound more--." The issue is really two-fold, admits psychologist Dr. Steven Ceci: "[O]ne level is, how do we best get at the truth. The other level is what a case is all about, and it's really about impression management and packaging. And were I a strategist on one side or the other, of course, and I want to win, I'm going to present it in the most optimal way. . . . I don't believe either the defense or the prosecution is about getting the truth by the time a case comes to the court. They want to win at all costs." Dr. Ceci also describes a study that demonstrated that children were, indeed, highly suggestible, easily manipulated into saying
what the interviewer expected to hear, and extremely creative in expanding on the planted
suggestions.

How then to reconcile "the adversarial nature of the system" (McFadden) with the
need for people to have faith that the legal system will convict the guilty and exonerate the
innocent? Should law enforcement officers and prosecutors be child advocates or merely
fact finders? What is the role of the therapist or social worker in soliciting testimony? If a
jury's doubt is based on "reason", on "an abiding conviction to a moral certainty of the
truth of the charge," the verdict will be "not guilty," according to Judge Pounders. On the
other hand, "[i]f you have doubt based on possible or imaginary things, then that means
there's a conviction." Corroborating evidence, Pounders suggests, is the key to justice.

"Impression management" from another angle

On September 27, 1993, ABC broadcast "Shattered Trust: The Shari Karney
Story." This made-for-TV "docudrama" movie depicts the story of a young female lawyer
who discovered through hypnosis and flashbacks that she had been sexually molested by
her father. As a result, she begins a (successful) campaign to change the statute of
limitation laws of California to allow childhood sexual abuse victims to sue after they
"remember," no matter how much time has elapsed since the abuse. During the course of
this "dramatic documentary," many "facts" concerning (the stereotypical version of)
childhood sexual abuse are offered.

The process of "remembering" begins for Shari when she is prosecuting a child sex
abuse case. As the case progresses, Shari becomes more and more agitated. But the
show also reveals that she has long had trouble sleeping, suffered nightmares and anxiety
attacks, and that she has been afraid of "intimacy," and that she has been sexually
dysfunctional for some time. The case only exacerbates her preexisting problems. Her
marriage begins to suffer, but she won't give up the case, and her husband finally leaves
her. When she eventually begins having sensory hallucinations, and she physically attacks
the defendant in the case she is prosecuting, the judge orders her to seek "treatment."

During treatment--and under hypnosis--Shari remembers; she "sees" her father's
hands coming toward her as she lies crying in her crib. "He incested me" from age "six
months," she claims. Her father denies it, of course, and her mother and sister do not
believe her. "He couldn't have done it"; "he doesn't fit the profile," according to them. Besides, he took a lie-detector test.19

These motifs of "fitting the profile" and passing a lie-detector test are emphasized several times through the course of the movie, beginning early in the show in connection with the young man Shari is prosecuting for allegedly having sexually abused his young daughter. During this trial the judge says, "I don't believe this man is capable of such an act." Shari shouts back, "Why? Because he looks good in a suit?!" By the end of the drama, viewers may well have the impression that there is a sexual abuse perpetrator "profile" or stereotype: intelligent men who wear three-piece suits, have college educations, go to church, are considered morally upright individuals, and who can pass lie detector tests when accused of sexual abuse.

Viewers are also exposed to a variety of other stereotypes related to sexual abuse victims and claims, including that any woman who doesn't wear make-up was a victim. In the beginning of the movie, Shari is dressed in sloppy, loose-fitting clothes, she is wearing no cosmetics, and her hair is basically "unstyled"—hanging loose or pulled back into a ponytail. By the end of the show, she is wearing fashionable, carefully-tailored clothing, her hair has been styled, and she is wearing cosmetics and jewelry—supposedly obvious marks of her "recovery." All her psychological, social, and personal-aesthetic "problems" have obviously (the drama would have us believe) been the result of her alleged abusive childhood. This perpetuates still other aspects of the current lore of sexual abuse that formerly abused women have trouble accepting their "femininity"—both in terms of body image and in terms of sexuality.

What is most important about this docudrama is that it emphasizes the need for individuals to seek legal recourse. Much of the movie involves Shari's fight to get the California legislature to change the statute of limitations in sexual abuse cases so that survivors can file suit after they "remember" the abuse. The show ends with the announcement that she was, indeed, successful: On September 30, 1990, the California law was changed to eliminate the statute of limitations on child abuse claims. At no point during the movie, however, is there any mention made of any need for corroborating evidence. Viewers are instead reminded that "two and a half million cases of child abuse

19 All quotes and descriptions are from personal notes taken while I viewed the movie and may not be precisely accurate, although I have cited only material of which I feel fairly certain
and molestation are reported each year." Such statistics, when combined with the dates that flashed on the screen during the movie, lend an air of "historical documenting" to this highly dramatized account.

Are such movies influencing individuals in any significant way? At one point during the movie, Shari says, "If I can survive being raped by my father, I can do anything." This line was recited to me the next day during one of the taped fieldwork interviews I conducted. The interviewee had adopted it to validate her own efforts, struggles, and intentions to continue her own recovery-from-abuse process. She also cited the "hands coming toward me" scene in the movie as having triggered new, similar memories for her after the movie.

Even more important, perhaps, are the "stereotypes" put on "trial" during this docudrama. It is difficult not to "believe" Shari's "memories." We have, after all, seen the "hands" coming toward her. We have witnessed her "transformation" from "damaged victim" to "healing" survivor before our very eyes. The impression "management" is subtle, however; leaving only the "impression." The stereotypes promoted and learned by both future claimants and future jurors, on the other hand, may well influence the course of real-world future trials.

The Medical Framework

While the scientific medical community has been busy theorizing and arguing amongst itself about the causes, effects, frequencies, treatments--and occasionally the prevention--of deviant sexual behavior toward children, another body of material and practices, which might well be labeled "folk medicine" or "folk psychiatry," has grown up to deal with the aftermath of the experience. Self-help manuals; survivor workshops; Incest-Survivors' Anonymous; religious-based, professional, and/or public-outreach "support groups"; and less-visible coffee-club and lunch conversations are among the many resources available to adults attempting to "recover" from, or to "heal," the damages caused by a wide variety of childhood experiences, including childhood sexual abuse. This need to heal the "wounds" of childhood had its origins in the family-systems and co-dependency theories of Adult Children of Alcoholics, an offshoot of Alcoholics' Anonymous. Now common to many personal-growth philosophies, healing the wounds of "the inner child" in order to repair the lingering damage caused by a less-than-perfect childhood is both a theory and a metaphor that came of age in the popular rhetoric of sexual abuse survivors.
The dominant story of "medical research" and the dominant "healing" story overlap but they are not identical. The story of healing is the "popular explanatory system," informed by medical research but relying primarily on a great deal of "experiential expertise": "what we all know because we've been there." However, "we all" doesn't mean "just anyone." The popular version of the medical "story" of childhood sexual abuse is dominated by the popular-culture self-help/recovery industry, and its principal representative is The Courage to Heal (Bass and Davis 1988).

The Hollywood Version

More suited to self-help manuals, support groups, and individual narratives than to fiction, the basic medical framework still managed to appear recently in one highly-popular 1991 movie, The Prince of Tides. The movie illustrates in "living color" a number of common themes and motifs of the "medical" (healing and recovery) story: post-traumatic stress disorder, suicide attempts ("cutting"/self-mutilation), repressed memories, body memories, and flashbacks.

Technically, this movie is not about "sexual abuse"; it is about family secrets. "I was a champion at keeping secrets. . . . The man who never talked," declares Tom Wingo (Nick Nolte). The plot is an unfolding of a "family" narrative, told through the reminiscence of one of its members--Tom, an out-of-work high school English teacher and football coach in his mid-forties. These memories are, of course, clearly visible to the audience through cinematic flashbacks. As Tom tells it, he and his sister and brother were the subjects of a great deal of verbal and psychological abuse; "prisoners" in their parents' "war against each other." Tom is telling all this to Dr. Susan Lowenstein (Barbra Streisand), a New York psychiatrist who is trying to help Tom's sister, Savannah (Melinda Dillon) after Savannah's attempted suicide. Since Savannah either won't or can't tell what happened to cause her psychological problems, Dr. Lowenstein tells Tom, "I need to hear the stories of her childhood. And she can't tell me because there are whole portions of her life she's blocked out. Blotted out. I need you to be her memory, in a sense, and ah, to fill

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in the missing details." Tom responds, "I've spent my life trying to forget those missing details."^21

What Tom eventually reveals during these sessions with the psychiatrist—a "series of confessional days" as he calls them, "when I spun out the history of Savannah's past in order to keep her alive," is a memory that he has "repressed": that he, as well as his sister, and their mother (Kate Nelligan) were all raped one night by a gang of escaped convicts. His brother, Luke, who had not been in the house when the convicts arrived, shot and killed two of the men; their mother killed the other. The mother then insisted that the children help her bury the bodies, clean up the house, and pretend that nothing had happened. She also forbade them to ever speak about the incident again.

This movie is very clearly about a "dysfunctional" family and about the destruction caused to an individual's psychological and emotional health and well-being when he or she is prevented from speaking of a significant life experience. It also manages to incorporate a number of elements common to sexual abuse rhetoric—medical framework or otherwise. In addition to the repressed memory motif and the "breaking the silence" metaphor, the movie promotes the idea that long-term emotional problems are the direct—and necessary—result of an unhappy family situation during childhood; all three siblings (including the one who was not raped) suffer varying degrees of adult emotional and/or psychological pathologies. Tom's rape memories initially return in "flashes", and he "denies", at first, that he had been involved in the incident even though he clearly remembers his mother and sister being raped. Memories that return initially in brief flashes and the victim's denial of involvement in the abuse and/or of its significance are both common elements of many constructs. Tom also exhibits "body memories", that is, he physically reacts to the memory even while he is trying to deny the fact that he was raped, and these body memories reappear later when he tries to downplay the emotionally and psychologically importance of the experience. Dr. Lowenstein, however, encourages Tom to admit the significance of the experience. "It takes courage to feel the pain," she tells him; speaking out and working through the "pain" of one's memories are acts of "courage" in all popular "recovery" versions.

To give the scriptwriters credit, both the most and the least severely affected siblings (in terms of coping strategies and achieving "normal" adult lives) were also both rape

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^21 All quotes from the movie are based on personal transcription from viewing this movie on videotape.
victims; they present no absolute correlation between sexual experience and the intensity of subsequent problems. Tom does, however, suffer from a commonly-believed consequence of his experience; he has at least some difficulty with sexual intimacy and expression. These difficulties disappear once Tom begins to "deal with" his experience, and they disappear quickly. In good movie fashion, Tom has worked through his problems in a matter of six weeks. In this respect, the movie differs greatly from most medical-framework hypotheses that assert that victims will need years of support and counseling to deal with their trauma, grief, shame, intimacy, and self-esteem problems.

The movie was extremely popular, and it was repeatedly recommended to me whenever I told people that my dissertation topic involved adults talking about childhood sexual abuse. In addition, one of the interviewees in my study credited seeing this movie with triggering his own attempts to verbalize his experience of ongoing childhood sexual abuse.

I was surprised when I finally saw the movie. After several years of personal indoctrination into the rhetoric (and research) of child sexual abuse, the movie did not seem to me to be about "sexual abuse" as I had found it most often described. Each child is raped, once, by a stranger. I am not suggesting that rape is not an abusive sexual act, child or otherwise; certainly it is. Absent here, however, are the elements of familiarity between perpetrator and victim, and the ongoing, repeated abuse so often associated with child sexual abuse in many popular explanatory constructs. This is obviously sexual assault, an act of violence, and it would be thought of as such (and defined as rape) in the case of an adult. It was interesting to me, therefore, that so many people recommended it as a movie about "sexual abuse." Is it still easier for the majority of people to believe that children are more in danger of being sexually assaulted by strangers than to accept that most sexual abuse is perpetrated by persons familiar to the children--and most frequently by family members? Very possibly, yes, according to Joel Best who was investigating whether or not people tended to typify child-victim issues in terms of the dramatic cases initially used to present such problems to the public (1990, 163). Best cites two survey-studies on social attitudes and understandings about child sexual abuse that found that "respondents tended to view child sexual abuse as the work of non-family members who compelled victims to cooperate" (1990, 165). This typification was even more pronounced among people who had never been victims of child sexual abuse. Those who had been abused tended to typify child sexual abuse as an act of a family member. (The study, incidentally, also revealed that the "ongoing, repeated" typification of child sexual
abuse may also be erroneous: "The great majority [of respondents who claimed to have been abused] described a single incident of abuse" [Best 1990, 165].

Would sexual assault by a family member have been a theme too socially unacceptable for a fictional movie in 1991? Or do people now just define any sexual act involving a juvenile as "sexual abuse"? Or was the "repressed memory" of a sexual incident the relational key in the minds of those who recommended this movie to me when I said I was studying the way people talk about childhood sexual abuse? Would the movie have made as much sense if the repressed incident had not involved such obvious sexual trauma but only the family's "dysfunctional" nature? Undoubtedly it is easier to illustrate trauma through one dramatically violent act than through ongoing, more subtle--though possibly more insidiously damaging--multiple acts. Whatever the answers, the movie perpetuates the typification of stranger violence.

Self-Help Healing: Getting it All Together

All the common tropes and conceptual elements of the medical/healing framework (with nods toward ritual abuse and legal options) appear in the most popular of all self-help books for "survivors" of child sexual abuse, The Courage to Heal by Ellen Bass and Laura Davis (1988). This book, "based on the premise that everyone wants to become whole" (14), grew out of a series of sexual abuse survivor workshops ("I Never Told Anyone" workshops) which Bass developed because of the enthusiastic response to a volume of literary stories and poems by the same name (Bass and Thornton 1983). Not an academically trained psychologist, Bass acquired her counseling skills "primarily through practice" as a counselor and group facilitator (Bass and Davis 1988, 14). This on-the-job, I've-heard-it-so-often-I-know-what-I'm-talking-about claim to expertise is common to many popular explanatory systems. Bass states that none of what is presented in this self-help volume is "based on psychological theories" (14) -- although a lot of such theories are incorporated and/or created in the process. Instead Bass bases "the suggestions, the exercises, the analysis, [and] the conclusions" of the "healing" process described in the book on what she has learned from workshop participants. Her hypotheses, it would seem, are essentially pre-tested, having been developed from the narratives she cites as supporting evidence. She "solidified [her] understanding of what it takes to heal from child sexual abuse" by working with "hundreds of survivors across the country," facilitating workshops "for partners of survivors," and offering "training seminars for professionals who work with survivors" (14). Though not a sexual abuse survivor herself,
she is a "partner of a survivor" and she claims her own "pain [she has] had to heal from" (14). Bass says that "the opportunity to be a part of women's healing feels a little like assisting at a birth" (15).

Davis, on the other hand, is an incest survivor. Davis begins her account of herself in the preface. She relates (among other things) that, shortly after she "first remembered" her incest, she had said to Bass, "Half the time I don't even believe it happened, and the other half I'm sure it was my fault." Bass, however, had assured her that "It did happen, Laura. Look at what you're going through [now]. Would anyone willingly choose to go through this torture? Why would you ever want to invent something this bad? . . . The only way out is through, honey, I'm sorry" (15). Reassured, Davis joined Bass in her efforts to "gather other women's stories," and "the honesty and courage of these women continually gave [Davis] hope" (16).

Thus, before they even begin the main body of the text, indeed within the first three pages of the preface, the authors have already invoked a number of the most common and the most pervasive rhetorical elements of childhood sexual abuse constructs: that speaking about sexual abuse is an act of courage, that no one would (or could) "make up" the memories, and that no one would want to experience the emotional angst of the "recovery" process because it is analogous to "torture." Present also is the proverbial expression adopted from 12-step recovery programs such as Alcoholics' Anonymous: "The only way out is through."

In the final two pages of the preface, Davis recounts another personal narrative. This time she describes her mother's first reaction to Davis' accusations that her grandfather had sexually abused her as a child: "She [Davis's mother] was screaming. . . . 'My father would never have done anything like that! You've just jumped on the incest bandwagon. . . . It's all because you're a lesbian. . . . You couldn't have done anything worse if you'd shot me.'" (17). In this short tale, Davis voices several more widely held notions about sexual abuse survivors, that victims are lying or making up their accusations for vindictive purposes, that victimhood is a fad, and that the survivors are homosexuals. Davis implies that these notions are obviously "misguided," and she refutes them by voicing them through her mother's disbelief. Bass (through Davis's first narrative) has already categorically declared that Davis must be believed. After using the word "terror" four times in less than two pages, Davis concludes the preface by referring to the most prevalent of all sexual abuse metaphors: "This book had been a way for me to break silence"(18).
This is an extremely powerful book. The format of the book makes it both accessible and authoritative. The pages are laid out in double-columns with multiple-style, eye-catching headings, double-indented quotes, and lots of "white space" to guide readers' eyes and to keep them oriented to the subject. Frequent "boxes" of information encapsulate "additional" information and/or summarize chapter topics. The book looks very much like a modern, user-friendly textbook or instruction manual. In addition to its (ostensible) primary function as a "self-help" manual, the book contains sections of information and instructions for "Family Members," "For Partners," and "For Counselors." Not only does this book define their experience for victims and tell them how to "heal," it also tells victims and everyone connected with the victims how to think and how to behave as well. By "instructing" the "counselors," Bass and Davis also claim authority to "teach the teachers." This book implicitly sets Bass and Davis up as the ultimate authorities over the childhood sexual abuse experience. The use of personal narratives throughout the book to present, illustrate, and validate the concepts and hypotheses presented adds pathos and "real people" validation to all of Bass and Davis' assertions.

Despite the obvious stance and biases evident even in the preface, The Courage To Heal is, in some ways, one of the more even-handed approaches among the popular treatments of the issues and meanings of childhood sexual abuse and recovery. Balancing statements, however, are often overwhelmed by the personal experience "evidence" of the main stance; balancing statements are rarely illustrated through personal narratives. Because of the influence this work has had on the popular construction of childhood sexual abuse, it is worth examining in some detail, both for content and for the way the "story" of abuse is constructed. In addition, this text is fairly concise yet comprehensive summation of most of the discourse of recovery, and I will cite it as a general reference when referring to this discourse.

The first theme of the story constructed in this volume is similar to Muller's concept of universal suffering (in Sonya Live 1992; as discussed above). Bass and Davis declare that the practice of sexual abuse is independent of "class, culture, race, religion, and gender" (20). On the other hand, they assert that, for women at least, the experience of having been sexually abused is essentially the same regardless of race, culture, class, religion, or nationality (16). Less than twenty pages later, they admit that "[n]ot all survivors are affected in the same way," that "sexual abuse is just one of many factors that influenced your development," and that "it isn't always possible to isolate its effects from the other influences" such as racism, having an alcoholic parent, or growing up "in a
culture that devalues women" (34). They also acknowledge that the resources women have available to them for healing and the options they have for remaking their lives are often constrained by race and/or class (54, 63). Such counter-messages, however, are brief and infrequent, and they tend to get lost in the overwhelming testimony of how truly awful it really was, the constant instructions on how to deal with the damage that's left, and the insistence that, "if you were abused as a child, you are probably experiencing long-term effects that interfere with your day-to-day functioning" (20). For instance, the quote partially cited above that makes reference to multiple influences on development—to the "interplay of hundreds of factors that make you who you are today" (34) is preceded by this account on page thirty-three:

People have said to me, "Why are you dragging this up now?" Why? WHY? Because it has controlled every facet of my life. It has damaged me in every possible way. It has destroyed everything in my life that has been of value. It has prevented me from living a comfortable emotional life. . . . I haven't been able to succeed in the world. If I had a comfortable childhood, I could be anything today. Jennierose Lavender, 47-year-old survivor. (33)

And followed by this one on page thirty-four:

As far as I'm concerned, my whole life was stolen from me. I didn't get to be who I could have been. I didn't get the education I should have gotten when I was young. I married too early. I hid behind my husband. I didn't make contact with other people. I haven't had a rich life. It's not ever too late, but I didn't start working on this until I was thirty-eight, and not everything can be retrieved. And that makes me very angry. (34)

On the same page that the authors suggest that many factors influence life, and that the above account which seems to attribute many results to the single cause of childhood sexual abuse appears, Bass and Davis caution readers: "As you read . . . you may find yourself nodding your head--'uh-huh, me too'--recognizing, perhaps for the first time the ways in which the abuse affects your life. Look at the following list and ask your self how you've been affected. Such recognition will probably be painful, but it is, in fact, part of the healing process" (34). What follows in the next few pages (and off-and-on throughout the rest of the text) are descriptions of symptoms which indicate "damage" and questions designed to help the reader determine if she was, in fact, sexually abused. The following are examples from the first series of questions:

Do you feel powerless, like a victim?
Do you feel different from other people?
Do you have a hard time nurturing and taking care of yourself?
Do you find it hard to trust your intuition?
Do you have trouble feeling motivated? Are you afraid to succeed?
Do you feel you have to be perfect?
Do you have trouble expressing your feelings? (35)

Do you value feelings or see them as an indulgence?
Do you have a hard time loving and accepting your body? (36)

Do you often feel taken advantage of? (37)

Are you satisfied with your family relationships? Or are they strained and difficult? (39)

Admittedly, I have been rather selective in the questions I included here; many others appeared, some more directly referential to sexual abuse, some not. The ones I have presented, however, could also result from the ordinary female enculturation process—at least in the United States in recent years. In our culture obsessed with bodies, with sexuality, and with a narrowly-defined aesthetics of appearance, it is more difficult to find a woman who is happy with her body than to find one who has difficulty "loving and accepting" it. Expressing "feelings"—being emotional—has long been a "female" and therefore devalued activity, and even having "intuition" has been, until recently, defined—and derided—as part of feminine inferiority. As to "taking care of yourself," many women have been carefully taught to nurture everyone and anyone else before themselves. Could they all have been abused? Indeed, this text is, in many ways, as much an indictment of the enculturation of females and the patriarchal system as it is a construction of the sexual abuse experience.

The "coping strategies" supposedly developed during (and as a result of) the abuse are also problematic. Bass and Davis list a variety of methods that they claim victims have used to deal with abuse and the aftereffects: rationalizing, denying, forgetting, splitting, dissociation, control, chaos, humor, busyness, and hyper-awareness, as well as lying, stealing, gambling, workaholism, eating disorders, suicide attempts, self-mutilations, and addiction. Some coping behaviors, they admit, can have positive sides. "Control," for instance, can also result in good organizational skills, "an asset if you're a manager, a mother, or a worker." Still, they premise "control" as mostly negative: "lack of flexibility, and difficulty in negotiating or compromising" (44-45). Thriving on chaos is a natural for survivors; "[n]ot only are they familiar with it, they handle it beautifully." This means the survivor might be a "good emergency-room worker or ambulance driver"; unfortunately, "it can also be a way you keep yourself from feeling. If you are addicted to intensity and
drama, you might [also] make a dynamic, charismatic performer, but you may also be running from yourself" (45). Being "super-alert" (hyper-aware) "can be an asset. Survivors have become excellent therapists, sensitive doctors, ground-breaking reporters, perceptive parents, compassionate friends." On the flip side: "this state of constant alertness can be wearing" (46). Humor may keep the survivor from dealing with the pain. Reading and fantasizing are forms of escape even though they "can be the source of a rich creative life" and result in successful careers in the arts (47). Even playing it safe apparently is not good: "While some survivors have felt compelled to go out and overcome every obstacle, others have chosen security. They are the obedient daughters, honor students, good wives, and selfless mothers. . . . Opting for security can provide you with grounding and stability, but it may mean giving up your ambitions and dreams" (51). The authors do suggest that readers "pick and choose" among coping behaviors, discarding ones that "no longer work for you and keep the positive skills you've developed" (54), but having developed the coping behaviors in the first place (even the positive ones it seems) is an additional indication of the abuse.

Their definition of sexual abuse also makes it easy for readers to identify themselves as possible victims. In addition to the obvious and common categories of rape, child pornography, prostitution, and being "[f]orced to take part in ritualized abuse" involving physical or sexual torture, Bass and Davis ask readers to remember whether they had ever been: "Fondled, kissed, or held in a way that made you uncomfortable? Bathed in a way that felt intrusive to you? Objectified and ridiculed about your body?" (21). Again, I am being intentionally selective, but only to point out that the questions indicate no sense of age differential between participants, such as between the person that performed the "ridicule" and the person whose body is being "ridiculed." Adolescents are notorious for making fun of each other's bodies; does this constitute "sexual abuse"? Nor is there any sense that an action was undertaken for sexual gratification on the part of the abuser and not just the result of parental clumsiness or of traditional behavior patterns. Aunt Mildred's or Uncle Joe's over-zealous greetings, for instance, can count as "abuse" if you felt "uncomfortable" about them. Saying you didn't like Uncle Joe's hugs because he had bad breath, however, is quite different from claiming you were "sexually abused" because you felt "uncomfortable" when he hugged you. But you wouldn't know that from these questions. You don't, in fact, even have to remember for sure why you didn't like Uncle Joe; if you felt uncomfortable, that was enough to define your experience as sexual abuse. As Bass and Davis write: "There is also abuse on the psychological level. You had the
feeling your stepfather was aware of your physical presence every minute of the day, no matter how quiet and unobtrusive you were. Your neighbor watched your changing body with an intrusive interest" (22).

"If you are unable to remember any specific instances like the ones mentioned above but still have a feeling that something abusive happened to you, it probably did," according to Bass and Davis (21). "Children often cope with abuse by forgetting it ever happened. As a result, you may have no conscious memory of being abused. You may have forgotten large chunks of your childhood. . . . You may think you don't have memories, but often as you begin to talk about what you do remember, there emerges a constellation of feelings, reactions, and recollections that add up to substantial information. To say 'I was abused,' you don't need the kind of recall that would stand up in a court of law" (22). The authors are insistent on this point, and they reiterate it often. "Often the knowledge that you were abused starts with a tiny feeling, an intuition. It's important to trust that inner voice and work from there. . . . So far, no one we've talked to thought she might have been abused, and then later discovered that she hadn't been. . . . If you think you were abused and your life shows the symptoms, then you were" (22). "There are many women who show signs of having been abused without having any memories" (71). "As media focus on sexual abuse has increased, more and more women have had their memories triggered" (75). "If you don't remember your abuse, you are not alone. Many women don't have memories, and some never get memories. This doesn't mean they weren't abused" (81). "To heal from child sexual abuse you must believe that you were a victim, that the abuse really did take place"(86). "If you see the effects of abuse and then, as you begin the healing process, you see your behavior change, even slightly, you can trust that your belief is sound" (88).

This circular 'if you were abused you will exhibit certain symptoms--if you exhibit certain symptoms you were abused' reasoning is demonstrated through the account of a "thirty-eight-year of survivor [who] described her relationship with her father as 'emotionally incestuous""(82). Her story is considered a "good model" for people who "don't have specific pictures to draw from" (82) because this woman was able to "come to terms with her lack of memories" of any physical contact between her and her father. The account includes many of the motifs Bass and Davis promote: the strength of having "survived," the "courage" demonstrated in speaking, a "willingness to believe" in the abuse despite lack of memories or corroborating evidence, that not believing amounts to
'blaming the victim,' and the sense of identity and belonging created through speaking out and participating in incest support groups.

The woman uses the analogy of coming home to find her house robbed; she couldn't pretend it hadn't happened just because she hadn't seen it happen, not when the evidence was all around her. So she decides to live "as if" the abuse had happened and go from there.

I think you have to be strong enough to know. I think that our minds are wonderful in the way they protect us, and I think that when I'm strong enough to know, I'll know . . . I had the symptoms. Every incest group I went to I completely empathized. It rang bells all the time. . . . Part of my wanting to get specific memories was guilt that I could be accusing this man of something so heinous, and what if he didn't do it? How horrible for me to accuse him! That's why I wanted the memories. I wanted to be sure. Societally, women have always been accused of crying rape. But I had to ask myself, "Why would I be feeling all of this? Why would I be feeling all this anxiety if something didn't happen?" . . . I'm left with the damage. . . . I've been very ill as a result of the damages, and at some point I realized, "I'm thirty-eight years old. What am I going to do—wait twenty more years for a memory?" I'd rather get better. And then maybe the stronger I am, the more the memories will come back. . . . Maybe I've remembered as much as I'm able to remember without breaking down. I don't want to go insane. . . . There is a survivor in here and she's pretty smart. So I'm going with the circumstantial evidence, and I'm working on healing myself. I go to these incest groups . . . and nobody ever says, "You don't belong here." (82-83)

Bass and Davis account for "occluded memories," that is, memories "blocked from the surface" (72), both in terms of trauma and in terms of right-brain/left brain theories: "If you were abused when you were preverbal, or just as you were learning to talk, you had no way of making sense of what was happening to you" (71). Such memories, however, will probably return eventually, but will most likely be "vague and dreamlike," return "in bits and pieces," in "flashbacks," in "sensory" memories, or in "body memories" (72-75). Multiple accounts illustrate these processes. "Jennierose," for instance, tells about experiencing her first memory while watching a TV program about sexual abuse (75-77). Memories, according to Bass and Davis, are likely to return during major life transitions such as during recovery from addiction, becoming a mother, or after the death of someone who has been significant in one's life (78-80). Readers are enjoined not to fight the memories but to accept and believe them. Readers are also cautioned that one
memory may lead to others, but they are also reassured that, in the long run, this will be beneficial. As one woman tells:

The more I worked on the abuse, the more I remembered. First I remembered my brother, and then my grandfather. About six months after that I remembered my father. And then about a year later, I remembered my mother. I remembered the "easiest" first and the "hardest" last... For a long time I'd felt worse than the initial memories should have made me feel, so remembering the rest of the abuse was actually one of the most grounding things to happen. My life suddenly made sense. (80)

Ultimately, Bass and Davis present a single, unified version of the sexual abuse experience, despite the multiple variants of the illustrative accounts. To have been sexually abused means having suffered terror and betrayal, trauma and angst. To have been sexually abused means--automatically and unavoidably--feeling shame and guilt. To accept that one was abused; to admit to the guilt, the shame, and the inevitable damage; to speak out--all this is an act of courage, a demonstration of strength. To do anything else is an act of "denial." To suggest that the person claiming to have been abused might tell the story any other way, or to doubt the validity of the claims, are forms of "blaming the victim."

Bass and Davis are as clear about how the story may not be told as they are about how it should be, and they provide clear guidelines for former abusers, family members, partners, and counselors on how to talk to, and how not to talk to, "victims." The first commandment is, of course, "believe the survivor" (347), "be willing to believe the unbelievable" (345), even if the victim herself doubts her feelings or her memories. As Bass and Davis suggest repeatedly: "Doubting is part of the process of coming to terms with abuse..." So far, among the hundreds of women we've talked to and the hundreds more we've heard about, not one has suspected she might have been abused, explored it, and determined that she wasn't. Unfortunately, a feeling that you might have been abused usually leads to stronger feelings and eventual confirmation" (347). Bass and Davis don't say how anyone could possibly have "determined that she wasn't" abused when it only takes a "feeling" to determine that she was. Nor do they offer any notions of what constitutes "eventual confirmation" other than the evident "damage," stronger feelings of certainty, or the emergence of a "memory."

What they do offer--under the heading of "Don't Buy the Bullshit"--is a check-list of responses that survivors should not accept. Bass and Davis attribute all non-supportive comments by others as "most likely based on the fact that they are uncomfortable with
what you are doing and want you to stop" (301), and they suggest if listeners are "particularly anxious, angry, or upset" when the issue comes up, this may well indicate that they are abuse survivors also (319, 320). The authors list a series of "stock lines [that] don't have anything to do with reality" (301) and which survivors should reject when they are presented. These include:

It happened a long time ago. Why don't you leave it behind you and go on? 
Your father (uncle, brother, grandfather) would never do such a thing.
You're just jumping on the incest bandwagon.
What do you expect me to do about it now?
We only call those experiences to us that we need to grow.
Are you going to hold on to this forever?
Now honey, it wasn't that bad.
Why didn't you tell me?
Forgive and forget.
You must be a lesbian because your mother (father) molested you. (301-302)

The behavioral checklist for non-victims includes:

Believe the survivor. Women don't make up stories of abuse. (316)
Join with the survivor in validating the damage.
Be clear that abuse is never the child's fault.
Educate yourself about sexual abuse and the healing process.
Don't sympathize with the abuser.
Validate the survivor's feelings: her anger, pain, and fear.
Express your compassion.
Respect the time and space it takes to heal.
Accept that there will very likely be major changes in your relationship with the survivor as she heals.
Resist seeing the survivor as a victim. Continue to see her as a strong, courageous woman who is reclaiming her own life. (316-317)

There is nothing particularly wrong with this list of guidelines Bass and Davis suggest for members of families of origin, partners, or counselors when interacting with survivors.22 It is, however, completely one-sided and premised on the total innocence and

22 The advice to former abusers (298-290), however, is little more than a complete reversal of the power differential between abuser and abusee that allowed the abuse to occur in the first place. This inversion of power provides no more controls designed to prevent the former abusee from abusing such power than there were over the abuser in the first place. But then, most abusers won't try to make real amends anyway, according to Bass and Davis, and they don't really advise the abusee to try to "mend the rift" even

(note continued on next page)
absolute truth of the alleged victim and her claims. There is no place in their theories or suggestions for degrees of suffering; such comparisons are part of "the gross minimizing of abuse done in our society" (21). There is no room for doubt, even by the alleged victim; such doubt is clearly a form of "denial." "Yet even if your memories are incomplete," they write, "even if your family insists nothing ever happened, you still must believe yourself. Even if what you experienced feels too extreme to be possible or too mild to be abuse, even if you think 'I must have made it up,' or 'No one could have done that to a child,' you have to come to terms with the fact that someone did do those things to you" (87).

Bass and Davis do promise that "it is possible to heal. It is even possible to thrive." They define thriving as "enjoying a feeling of wholeness, satisfaction in your life and work, genuine love and trust in your relationships, pleasure in your body" (20). To its credit, The Courage to Heal offers new ways to understand and categorize the experiences of childhood, new meanings and definitions of formerly accepted or ignored inter-personal and social behaviors, and of socially taken-for-granted attitudes (particularly toward women). The book also offers a variety of practical advice for re-conceptualizing one's self as strong, determined and self-determining, active, assertive, proud, competent, and confident. On the other hand, Bass and Davis repeatedly caution: "Healing from child sexual abuse takes years of commitment and dedication" (20); "The healing process is a continuum" (57). "There is no such thing as absolute healing. You never erase your history. The abuse happened. It affected you in profound ways. That will never change. But you can reach a place of resolution. . . . You need to accept the fact that the healing process will continue throughout your life" (167).

How much of their "meaning" both of abuse and of recovery were Bass and Davis "reading out of" the accounts they base their theories and advice on, and how much were they "reading into" the accounts from their own agendas? There is no way to know for certain, of course, and if I had begun with the same narratives, I might well have reached many of the same conclusions. But because I started by comparing versions of constructs of the sexual abuse experience, I see choices and stances, exclusions and biases in Bass and Davis's story as well as in the individual accounts they use to illustrate their positions. In the first place, none of the categories or meanings Bass and Davis (or anyone else for

though "trying to come to resolution with the abuser can be useful one for the survivor" because such effort "rarely results in a healthy relationship" (298).
that matter) deem valid or invalid are necessarily intrinsic to the experience. Much of what appears in this and all constructions developed in direct opposition to the taboo against speaking about the experience of sexual abuse. In the absence of previous models to work from, survivors had to adapt language from other uses to even describe their previously unspeakable, and unspoken-about, experiences. Such adaptation and learning have taken place within the attempts to create "dominant stories" of the childhood sexual abuse experience. More will be said in the next chapter about who is trying to control the story, and about possible motives for doing so.
CHAPTER IV
DOMINANT STORIES

"No doubt when . . . cultures come into contact, it is the conflict of folk ideas which causes the most difficulty. Yet inasmuch as these folk ideas are unconscious, unstated premises, it is almost impossible to place one's finger on the specific details of the conflict." (Dundes 1971, 103)

"To control the discourse means locating the ground of individual concerns in social power relationships; it implies that the voice assumed be that of the collective." (Angueira 1988, 90)

At the most concrete level, public stories of childhood sexual abuse have been instrumental in developing and dispensing vocabulary, definitions, tropes, themes, and meanings through which individuals may describe and discuss a personal experience of childhood sexual abuse. Such elements are fundamental to the narrativizing of any experience, and they have been tried, tested, negotiated, and agreed-upon in various ways—publicly and hastily—in a cauldron of media hype, public outrage, and social upheaval. This developmental celerity reflects the sudden shift of this experience from unspeakable to speakable; once freed to speak, individuals needed ways and means to do so, as well as confirmation and affirmation of their efforts. At the same time, much of the rhetoric that has accrued to childhood sexual abuse is noticeably characteristic of various contemporary social agendas, some of which are often only tangentially related to sexual abuse. At the most abstract level, much of the social discourse may have little to do with the personal experience of sexual abuse at all. To paraphrase Kathleen Angueira, the individual voice can be useful in changing the "consciousness" of a society, if it can be perceived as representing the "collective" voice of a formerly (and wrongfully) disenfranchised segment of the society. In order for the individual voice to be "used," it must be made "useful."

At the base of all public stories (symbolic constructs) of childhood sexual abuse are themes of social disruption and category pollution. Ultimately, all attempts to dominate the story of child (and childhood) sexual abuse concern issues of what counts as "real" and who get to decide what "counts," not only in terms of this specific topic but also in terms
of general American social structure and control. As pointed out earlier, Best suggests that children currently represent the future hopes of a discouraged people as well as a vulnerable and precious resource through which a more secure and more equitable future can be achieve (1990, 171-72). It is not surprising, therefore, that "child-victims" have become the symbolic representatives of many social movements, nor that the "victimization" should take "sexual" form. Americans have often fought social battles (e.g., racial justice, gender equality, life-style morality, etc.) with sexual weaponry. Appending "innocent" and "defenseless" children to the casualty list generates additional sympathy and support and lends an air of righteousness to any cause. For example, the Women's Movement has recently added "date rape" (often experienced by adolescents) to its bodies of evidence and rallying cries in issues of social gender inequality outside the home. Adding incestuous assaults against children to its arsenals enhances arguments about inequalities that lead to "domestic" (in-home) violence as well. Meanwhile, advocates of strict public-censorship laws have gained support for their position through clamor about child pornography scandals whether the product in question deals with explicitly-sexual material or not. Other groups that advocate moral "conservatism," such as fundamentalist religious groups and "the New Right," find stories that combine day-care centers and child molestation motifs useful for promoting "family values" and traditional (women in the home) gender roles (Best 1990, 180-83). One after another, the authoritative domains of the white, masculine, traditional, Western hegemony of American dominant culture, and attempts to disrupt that dominant tradition, have come under attack. Accusations of child sexual abuse have been levied against clergymen, Big Brothers, Boy Scout leaders, teachers; against both male and female child-care workers, numerous "marginal" religious organizations, and homosexuals. Clearly, this "national scandal" of child sexual abuse concerns more than simply "child safety." It also embodies wide-spread social anxiety concerning the value and validity of traditional institutional authorities, and it reflects a variety of interrelated contemporary issues.

Social Disruption and the Rise of Child Sexual Abuse

Beginning in the late 1950s, disenfranchised groups within American society and liberal elements within the federal government of the United States began actively campaigning for racial equality for all Americans. While achieving barely more than lip-service legislation at first, this egalitarian impetus quickly spawned a variety of movements promoting the enhancement of various minority groups' rights and status. Each new movement built on the successful claims of the one before; each in its turn expanded its
own original focus to address "a growing range of issues" in a process of "domain expansion" (Best 1990, 78). What started as an attempt to procure civil rights for Blacks evolved into efforts to gain social equality for women, ethnic minorities, and the elderly; to acquire legal sanctioning for life-style and sexual-orientation choices; to insure social "justice" for the homeless, poor, and infirm; and to guarantee everyone an equal share of the decision-making power. The "construction of social reality" is (or appears to be) suddenly up for grabs in America, and a variety of social interest groups have decided to vie for control of the resulting product.

What has been deemed "politically correct" for all, however, has been socially and culturally uncomfortable for many. Some who had been in established positions of power or deference have feared (sometimes justifiably) that multi-cultural diversity simply means a shuffling of the hierarchical deck: same old game, different suit named trump. For many, the disruption of the established social order means also a disruption of the fundamental moral order, as male and female "roles" seem to blur and sexual norms deviate from the familiar. Meanwhile, those who, traditionally, have been relegated to inferior positions are finding that they must acquire the "mind-set" of power as well as spout its language. To make matters worse, some group interests and situations (such as those of the Women's Movement) fall, in various ways, at various times, into categories of both dominant culture and minority status. In folkloric terms, nearly every "group" in America society is in the midst of a "worldview" crisis.23

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23 I am expanding Dundes' 1971 concept of "worldview" to include elements of cultural norms, values, ethical standards, etc. as well as the cognitive and existential aspects Dundes defines as worldview. Ulf Hannerz's concept of "perspective"—that people "understand" their worlds and "manage meanings from where they are in the social structure" (1992, 65)—is perhaps closer to my own understanding of "worldview" as an individually-held attribute that includes the existential cultural underpinnings, the demands and expectations of social interaction, and the accumulated life experiences of the individual. Individual worldviews (perspectives) are developed within, and contribute to, the interactive flow of cultural information and negotiation of a group culture. Overlapping worldviews result in some degree of "felt" communality (including shared aspects of identity definition and of vested interests); successful negotiation of divergence among the diverse worldviews allows for the establishment of groups norms and the suppression or elimination of undesirable attributes (and possibly their representative agents). Thus it is clear that individuals are not simply passive "users" of an explanatory system but active constituents of it as well, and they may intentionally or inadvertently introduce change into the explanatory system even as they employ it for their own purposes. As Hannerz puts it, "the perspective exists in a tension zone between culture (note continued on next page)
The situation is analogous to trying to cope with a mid-life identity crisis while living in the midst of disruptive, dysfunctional family--only on a national level. Childhood sexual abuse is, in a sense, the "identified patient" that allows us to focus attention away from ideological angst of trying to determine who "we" (any in-group) are, this time, in this world; what "baggage" from the past must be jettisoned for survival; what new survival skills must be learned; and how to relate to those of our national or own in-group who don't want to change, to those who do, and to those who injured us in the past. Meanwhile, everyone else in our "dysfunctional family" is focusing attention on the "designated patient" also.

Different social factions are caught in the "leadership-democracy paradox" Alan Dundes describes in the children's game of "Find the Leader." The successful leader is one who can "artfully conceal" the leadership, while those who follow, must appear to do so artlessly; egalitarianism is the primary directive any American can ill afford to defy openly (1971, 100). (Or at least, one must be careful about challenging the "politically correct" version of "egalitarianism" currently in effect.) Members of the traditional hegemony can't use their now "politically incorrect" power or status straightforwardly to maintain established forms, while newly-empowered minorities often still do not have the social or political clout to instigate change directly. All factions, however, hold that "someone" is to blame for the current social "problems" (however this term is defined), and that "someone" must be held accountable. Our "American" worldview (at least in its most general manifestations) will not accept a "fate" or "karma" explanation for the occurrence of social ills or technological failures; we are barely willing (if at all) to credit "accidents" to "bad luck." Even in a disaster labeled an "act of god," assertions are made that someone should have done something beforehand to lessen the resulting damage. Whether it is a space shuttle exploding, crime in the streets, a breakdown of "family values," illegal drug use, AIDS, teen pregnancy, earthquakes, floods, or sexual abuse, when things go wrong, someone is to blame, and something must be (and should have

and social structure, insofar as there is no assured congruency between situational experiences and demand on the one hand and available, ready-made meanings on the other" (Hannerz 1992, 65). Individuals are differentially involved and influential at various sites of the externalization of meanings.

Dundes' notion of "folk ideas" as empirical and ethically neutral descriptions of "reality" is still a useful concept within this expanded framework, the moral aspects of usage being added situationally and independent of the idea itself.
been) done! This seems particularly true when what "breaks down" are cultural category boundaries.

What can't be said openly is being said surreptitiously through symbolic displacement. Sexual abuse makes both a viable rallying point from which to publicly advocate multi-cultural tolerance (we're all in this together) and a socially acceptable vehicle through which to voice outrage about the "terrible state" of the nation as a whole—all the while advancing a particular approach to solving the "nation's" problems. The result is that sexual abuse discourse has become an indirect, manipulative, sometimes covert, sometimes accidental vehicle for many purposes. Many sexual abuse constructs are more ideological than practical, more legend than personal narrative, more theatrical drama than happenstance.

A modified version of Charlotte Linde's notion that any individual will ultimately make use of only one popularly available explanatory systems when narrating an experience may be useful at this point for understanding the corporate nature of these constructs. An individual will use the "expertise" of the explanatory system most closely aligned with her or his existing worldview to conceptualize, support, and validate personal experience. The personal narrative, in turn, incorporates, reflects, and perpetuates (and modifies to greater or lesser degree) the worldview that underlies the communally-validated and institutionally-supported explanatory system employed. In this instance, however, the public, "expert" explanatory systems and the personal narratives are actively co-creating each other—and at least appear to be doing so equally in terms of power and status. Indeed, many of the popular explanatory systems are premised on the first-person accounts of the survivors themselves, and the constituent "experts" who develop and promote the formal, mediated versions claim their authority on the grounds that they are representative spokespersons for what these eyewitnesses reveal in their testimonies. At the same time, there is nothing ideologically neutral about either the expert or the person claiming the experience, at least not once they have interacted and reached certain implicit agreements on how this experience may—and may not—be told. Nor, I would contend, are individuals really as "powerful" to constitute the social rhetoric as the "experts" appear eager to let it seem. Large-scale group interests are at stake, and the story is being manipulated to serve those interests. The various explanatory constructs surrounding childhood sexual abuse communicate subtle and implicit messages about the values, attitudes, and norms of the groups that develop and/or employ them, even as they serve to
reaffirm and defend group norms and test for conformity, punish deviancy, and proselytize ideologies.

The Satanic Version

While the satanic version of the childhood sexual abuse story is beginning to fade from dominance, it has been extremely important to the construction of all other versions. Not only was it "first on the scene" in terms of public awareness, but the satanic version also established several important precedents. First, it may have been the initial sexual abuse based reaction to the recent nation-wide disruption of social categories and boundaries, as well as one of the earliest attempts to "dominate" the story of the sexual abuse experience. Second, the media exposure and legal wranglings of the McMartin and other trials firmly established the concept of "repressed memory" in the "scientific" literature of child sexual abuse and in the minds of ordinary people. (In the process of the trials, both satanism and repressed memory received implicit--and sometimes explicit--"legal validation." They were, after all, "tried" in a court of law.) "Repressed memory" would quickly spawn a number of related (and often equally apocryphal) hypotheses of how the mind works. Finally, these tales of satanic abuse established both in the public sector and in the scientific community a pattern of "believe everything." So long as no one could provide "proof" that the claims were not valid (i.e., that satanic cult conspiracies--or any other cause or manifestation of child sexual abuse--did not exist) then the lack of corroborating evidence was to be ignored; evidence would be forthcoming when society began to face up to, and began to deal with, the problem of child sexual abuse. This response indicates both the power of the satanic-cult rumor-panic and the growing backlash against "Freudian" dismissal of sexual abuse claims (and Freudian constructs of women in general).

Covert Dissent

Magdelene Schultz, who combined depth-psychology with history in an analysis of the "blood libel," makes a compelling case for the relationship between ritual-murder legends (rumor-panics), historical changes in concepts of childhood and parenting and attacks on minority populations. The rise of satanic ritual versions of childhood sexual abuse--especially those involving contemporary child victims--exhibits many similarities to Schultz's findings both in terms of historical timing and social response. The satanic ritual abuse construction has one important dissimilarity to the traditional story, however. In
Schultz's scheme, the guilt and anxiety of the community is projected onto, and exorcised through, attacking a fundamentally weak but identifiable minority population (1991, 283). In the contemporary satanism panics, the villain is either curiously inaccessible (hidden by the power of the conspiracy or usually removed from prosecution by death or intervening years) or subversively present inside the community itself (with day-care workers as the favorite local representatives of Satan). When the attack is directed outward toward "satanists," it is often purely rhetorical--a manifestation of social panic potentially definable as "contemporary legend." When the aggression is directed inward, the social behavior more closely resembles the self-group cleansing of heretics and dissidents commonly labeled a "witch hunt" than it does traditional blood-libel panics. Both situations indicate high levels of social uncertainty and anxiety and the need for some sort of stabilization ritual (see, e. g. Wuthnow 1987).

Much has already been written concerning the connections between fundamentalist religious use of satanic cult/ritual abuse rhetoric and their conservative social attitudes--particularly those concerning women (e.g., Victor 1993; Richardson, Best, and Bromley 1991a). Less has been said about the "nowhere, yet potentially hidden everywhere" nature of the satanic villain. Yet such elements of specifically named but amorphous or inaccessible villains, of present and hidden dangers (in our own "back yards" no less), pervade much of childhood sexual abuse experience discourse. I believe the key to understanding this lies in the broader social dynamics of state-ordered and socially promoted multi-culturalism and in the resulting problems caused by disruptions of worldviews.

While fundamentalists might not be able to completely prevent the shocking course of "moral decay" they believe the nation is experiencing, they can at least explain it by claiming that "Satan's evil influence is behind much of the moral corruption" (Victor 1993, 23). This way, at least the majority of the threat can be kept outside the community, through symbolical displacement. However, more is gained than merely socio-psychic comfort in the act of blaming Satan for society's ills. The satanic ritual abuse story works to "hold the line" on social change both by punishing nonconformists (mothers who are not home where they belong and those who make such behavior possible) and by permitting diverse social and political groups to unite their power against a common enemy--and a politically correct one at that. While it is not socially acceptable to hate or blame any racial, ethnic, or religious group for one's ills, it is still perfectly acceptable in American society to abhor "evil." The satanic abuse story has allowed conservative
elements within formerly antagonistic sects (Catholic, Protestant, Mormon) to unite with each other and with the "New Right" in a shared effort to fight "moral decay" and work to maintain (or restore) "traditional" American social structures and legal statutes. Such efforts have been focused, for example, on trying to get prayer back into schools and sex education out; promoting censorship of sexually explicit media material; and opposing the Equal Rights Amendment and legislation to legalize abortion (Richardson, Best, and Bromley 1991b, 6). (Interestingly, in the process, the groups also move slightly closer to the national ideal of a multi-diverse but peacefully co-existing society--at least amongst themselves.)

This version of the sexual abuse experience does more, however, than validate and revitalize a particular set of cultural norms and enhance fundamentalists' efforts to stabilize their preferred social structures and to reinforce control over their members. Satanic "possession" can also be used to explain how one of their own members could perpetrate sexual abuse, that is, how a "good" person could perform a "bad" deed. This distinction between wanting-to-do-good and forced-to-do-evil is important not only for potentially-discovered perpetrators, it may be useful for some survivors as well. In her discussion of sexual abuse through the centuries, Florence Rush writes of the relationships among the Catholic church, witchcraft trials, and sexual abuse. She comments: "In a society where sexual abuse went unhampered and people believed in evil sprits, it was not difficult to attribute a sexual offense to a supernatural spirit" (1980, 39). Such "attribution" worked not only for males who wanted to deny personal wrong-doing or responsibility for social structures that permitted such sexual assaults but also for women who needed to explain (to themselves or others) having been assaulted--either to name a "namable" source of a pregnancy or to preserve their own sanity after sexual abuse attacks in an era when religious officials held them morally responsible, in the name of "original sin," for the attack (Rush 1980, 36-47). Neither would have been necessary, of course, if the abuse hadn't taken happened in the first place. Similar dynamics may be at work in the contemporary satanic abuse accusations--both in terms of "explanations" and in terms of maintaining the structures that allow such abuses to continue.
Constructing Models of the Mind

Remembering Abuse

In the early trials involving children several important notions about memory processes began to evolve. Those supporting the satanic abuse and conspiracy claims maintained that the children couldn't "remember" what had been done to them because of the "trauma" they had suffered; they were "blocking" the memories as a form of self defense—a kind of psychical survival. This concept grew out of the post-traumatic stress disorder syndrome identified with Vietnam war veterans. The "cults" were further preventing the children from speaking about their experiences through mind-control techniques implanted during the abuse. All subsequent constructs of child (and childhood) sexual abuse rely heavily on post-traumatic "repression" of memory as a central (often implicit) motif. Later adult "remembered" versions of satanic and/or ritual abuse also claimed "brain-washing" and other mind-control techniques used by the perpetrators to "repress" memories. In more prosaic cases, the repressed-memory hypothesis has been used to enact changes in the "statutes of limitation" to extend the time limit on filing "damage" suits (and sometimes criminal suits) to a fixed period of time beyond the point when the alleged victim first "remembers" the abuse ("sudden-recall"), no matter how many years have passed between the crime and the "first memory" of it.

The "sudden-recall" form of repressed memory has spawned several variations of its own. Sudden recall often involves "flashbacks" ("intrusive recollections") a form of "sensory" memory which is often described as suddenly "seeing" brief glimpses (flashes) of the abuser (and sometimes of the self being abused). It may also involve strong, sudden, emotional "feelings" and physical reactions to "the abuse," which is the "body's" way of remembering. The body can also "remember" in other ways, according to some claims, and the body can show "symptoms" of the abuse even when the victim has no cognitive awareness of the former abuse.

There is no "scientific" consensus on any of this; "sudden recall" is particularly disputed and has produced its own counter-hypothesis: "false memory syndrome." On the other hand, there is a great deal of apocryphal evidence for "repressed memory" constructs. Childhood sexual abuse claims have been largely responsible for challenging what counts as "real" in terms of experience/memory paradigms.
The Freudian Legacy and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

Repressed memory is at the base of nearly all contemporary stories of childhood sexual abuse, regardless of explanatory framework. This social-cognitive hypothesis advances the notion that even multiple incidents and activities, experienced over a long period of time, can be instantly and completely blocked from conscious awareness, that is, "forgotten," if the experience is of a "traumatic" nature. These "buried" memories may later return, suddenly and spontaneously, often in "flashes" of imagery and affect. Also called "delayed memory" and "traumatic amnesia" (and now widely accepted as a completely normal phenomenon in connection with adults who "discover" they have been sexually abused as children), "repressed memory" combines the language of Freudian psychology with concepts borrowed from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), particularly the notion of "intrusive memories" which appear as "flashbacks." The DSMIII (American Psychiatric Association, 1980) includes as components of PTSD: a recognizable "stressor" of the kind that would produce significant symptoms of distress in almost anyone; the re-experiencing of the trauma through recurrent and intrusive memories, dreams or feelings; a numbing of affect and responsiveness to, or reduced involvement in, the external world; and a variety of other symptoms including sleep problems, survivor's guilt, and memory or concentration problems (Finkelhor 1987, 349).

"Putting sexual abuse into the framework of PTSD has had a number of important salutary effects" on the field of psychiatry according to David Finkelhor (1987, 349). The designation relates sexual abuse conceptually with other types of trauma, and it has generated increased interest in and lent credence to the importance of the problem of sexual abuse (349-350). This designation also suggests that the "after-effects" of sexual abuse constitute a "syndrome" with a "core etiology, rather than just a catalogue of symptoms" (1987, 349). "Finally," Finkelhor suggests, "considering the effects of sexual abuse as a form of PTSD may act to reduce some of the lingering stigma that clings to victims. . . . [It] clearly places sexually abused children in the company of the victims of devastating and uncontrollable disasters, such as wars and earthquakes, and thus challenges the idea that the trauma is self-inflicted" (1987, 350).

Still, Finkelhor cautions, the PTSD designation has limitations when applied to sexual abuse. It doesn't account for all symptoms in an adequate fashion, it does not apply to all victims, and it does not explain the dynamics of how the abuse led to the symptoms that are present. PTSD focuses on the affective realm: "on the intrusive imagery, the
nightmares, and the numbing and deadness in affect and social relations." Sexual abuse researchers, on the other hand, emphasize a mixture of affective and cognitive symptoms, including fear, depression, self-blame, sexual dysfunction, substance abuse, distorted beliefs about the self and others, sexual confusion, low self-esteem, and tendencies toward re-victimization and suicide. In addition, "for many victims of sexual abuse, the PTSD symptoms are absent" (1987, 351). Indeed, Finkelhor admits, the "fit" between the symptoms and the clinical designation are "somewhat forced" (1987: 350). Actual PTSD in sexual abuse survivors is statistically infrequent (351) even though some sources insist that most (if not all) victims of child molestation develop this disorder (Finkelhor cites Frederick 1986; and Goodwin 1985 as sources supporting this "exaggeration" of the occurrence of PTSD in sexual abuse victims 1987, 351).

What Finkelhor doesn't say (and may not even be aware of) is that these claims that "all victims" of childhood sexual abuse develop PTSD may well be based on the narratives of adults who have themselves been influenced by accounts describing PTSD in Vietnam veterans (the original source of the syndrome's designation), by stories of "satanic cult" victims, and by tales of persons claiming "multiple-personality disorder" resulting from the trauma of childhood sexual abuse--all of which are (and have been) in wide circulation. This is not to suggest that none of these stories are "true" (indeed, in some ways they are all "true"), but rather to suggest that such accounts have become the source of interpretation for individuals who are trying to understand their own feelings, attitudes, memories, and behaviors (past and present), and that these individuals adopt the themes and tropes of these socially-present, popular, and validated-by-experts stories to their own situations. Their accounts, in turn, reinforce for psychological researchers the notion that PTSD is common and causally related to childhood sexual abuse. All are participants in the interactive construction of social reality and in the construction of interpretations of empirical reality, which assumes, perhaps erroneously, that there is a verifiable, factual, more-than-merely-personally-experiential "objective" reality outside our interpretations of it.

Meanwhile, the "repressed" part of "repressed memory" syndrome refashions "repression," the cornerstone of Freudian theory, into a convenient mechanism for rewriting one's past to make it the cause of one's present situation. In Freudian psychoanalytic terms, what is most important in proper human psychological adjustment are instinctive urges, "primitive" desires, forbidden impulses--particularly sexual ones. Certain experiences and acts, as well as impulses, thoughts, or memories, might be pushed
out of consciousness because acknowledging them would cause intense anxiety. Freud eventually connected this "repressed" material to wishes and impulses that arose in early childhood and which, if properly dealt with, presented the adult with no obviously damaging or maladaptive problems. Repression could result in neurosis, but more often the psyche would find adaptive ways to handle the socially-unacceptable material, employing defense mechanisms such as rationalization, reaction formation, exaggeration and display of a trait opposite to the repressed one, displacement, intellectualization, projection, and acts of sublimation that would allow the unacceptable wishes to be transformed into more psychically--and therefore more socially--acceptable forms. Intended by Freud to deal primarily with the pathological symptoms that resulted from unresolved anxiety due to incomplete sublimation of human instinctive urges and drives, the term "repression" currently refers--at least in popular psychological explanatory systems--to a variety of defense mechanisms against remembering and dealing with the results of actual experiences due to the traumatic nature of the experiences.

Much has been made, of late, of Freud's abandonment of his "seduction" theory, and his decision that the "instinctual urges" of infantile sexuality, rather than actual experiences of traumatic abuse, lay behind the neurotic symptoms he was seeing in his patients. The seduction theory, based on his belief of the reports from his (mostly) female patients that they had been molested during childhood, eventually became socially, politically, and, perhaps, personally untenable for Freud. How could he believe that so many women had been sexually molested, some by men he respected and admired, if there were any other possible explanation? Freud eventually decided that "wishful fantasies" formed the basis of their accounts of childhood sexual trauma.

What is often overlooked in Freud's reassessment of his patients' stories (which is often seen as an act of capitulation to male, dominant-culture influences and/or a blanket denial of women's accounts of sexual assault) is that he knew that some cases of sexual abuse were undeniably factual. Freud had witnessed autopsies performed on children who had died as a result of physical and sexual abuse, and he had in his personal library "a whole literature of legal medicine... devoted to the topic of child abuse (especially rape)" (Masson 1984, xx). Freud knew that sexual abuse of children existed. Still, he would eventually decide that he had "overestimated the frequency of such events" in the general public, and that he had erred in his analysis of believing that molestation was the primary cause of neurosis because he had previously been "at that period unable to distinguish with certainty between falsifications made by hysterics in their memories of childhood and
traces of real events" (in Masson 1984, 129, emphasis added). Freud claimed to have overestimated the incidence and to have overrated the influence of childhood sexual abuse because "it happened by chance" that the material on which he was basing his theories included "a disproportionately large number of cases in which sexual seduction by an adult or by other children played the chief part in the history of the patient's childhood" (in Masson 1984, 129, emphasis added). This is not a denial of the occurrence of child sexual abuse (although it would eventually amount to as much). Instead, Freud is criticizing his own research methodology and theorizing processes for the same limitations and failings that are currently being levied against many contemporary child sexual abuse studies and hypotheses today: reliance on clinical and police reports as primary sources of data and statistics which results in class, ethnic, and racial statistical misrepresentations and over-generalizations of the effects and causes of abuse; low base rates of sample surveys; overly-simplistic theoretical models based on retroactive hypothesizing; lack of clear assessment of the relationships between causes and effects (standard-practice hypothesis testing is unrealistic because such "control group"/"study group" situations are impossible in this instance); and unsubstantiated (and often not investigated) social assumptions, for instance, that sexual abuse is intergenerational, that is, that violence (always) begets violence (Gelles 1987, 26-46; also, Beshorov 1993; Kaufman and Zigler 1993; Reppucci and Haugaard 1993).

Freud has also been criticized for eventually deciding that whether the abuse reports were factual or fanciful mattered little; the effects were the same, and he would treat the results. This stance, however, is exactly the position many contemporary clinicians and authors have taken in regard to reports of satanic ritual abuse, multiple personality claims, and delayed memory recovery. Talk-show "naysayers" such as Dr. Underwager who appeared on the Geraldo (September, 1991) segment discussed earlier, could try all they wanted to argue that there is "abundant research, scientific research that the human memory simply does not work the way it's being described" in relation to multiple personality, recovered memory hypotheses, satanic cult activity, etc. Such voices have been consistently overwhelmed by more popular claims that "there is no research that totally proves" that such things don't exist. In the absence of proof to the contrary, the patient must be believed. [Geraldo, September 1991: Dr. Hall: "the implication . . . that the patient is faking" is a form of "blaming the victim"; Dr. Mayer: the "therapist's point of view" is that if the patients "showed fully documented signs . . . I treat her according to that"; Dr. Orcutt: the cause of the symptoms is immaterial, what counts are the
symptoms.] Contrary to what Freud claimed, everyone now "knows": "No one fantasizes abuse" (Bass and Davis 1988, 347).

Freud was clearly a product of his culture and times. While it is understandable how he could, and why he would, eventually abandon his seduction theory, the subsequent formation and popularity of his Oedipal hypothesis has caused untold suffering for women. What seems to have started as a nagging doubt that all his patients' reports of childhood sexual abuse were factual, in due time became a working assumption that all such accounts were fanciful products of unresolved urges and desires. Somewhere in between, Freud must have held some opinion (or at least wondered) about the source of his patients' "fanciful" accounts. The Oedipal Complex theory was based on the (perceived) omnipresence of "mythic" narratives of incest, and such folk narratives (myths, Marchen, saints' legend, etc.) were widely known (see "Incest in Literature and Tradition, Chapter II, this volume). Even more readily available to Freud's patients were contemporary accounts of sexual abuse and deviancy; the newspapers were full of such stories. In his 1912 edition of The Incest Theme in Literature & Legend, Otto Rank cites "a few case histories" from contemporary European popular-print sources to demonstrate "how often such relationships between father and daughter must occur, given that they become known with such comparative frequency" (332). Rank includes thirteen "characteristic cases: from his "reading of the newspapers in recent years" (333), some of which he relates to Christian legends and to social-gossip legends of the kind that surround and survive famous figures such as Molière (333-337). Freud's patients would have had some of the same sources for motifs and metaphors for their personal narratives of sexual abuse as late twentieth-century individuals do: both an ancient and active folklore of incest and contemporary accounts of "real world" incidents.

I am not suggesting that all of Freud's patients, nor even most of them--nor most of today's claimants--are merely "fantasizing" abusive attacks. What I am suggesting is that all narratives are "makings" and that they must be "made" of what is available to the teller, or the teller must adapt what is available or invent new constructs to suit personal needs. Mass media offerings such as talk shows, tabloids, books, and magazines of all categories of "sophistication" including comic books, and even more casually available sources such as conversations, provide socially-validated fodder for personal experience interpretation and narration. This does not mean that many--or even most--of the accounts of childhood sexual abuse (or any other experience) are not grounded in objective "fact." Neither does it mean that all accounts of such experiences are incontrovertibly based in fact. Nor does
"making it up" necessarily mean that even those accounts not based in empirical reality are somehow not "true," or that their tellers are insane, lying, deluded, gullible, or naive. Once a woman (or man) has been told, categorically, by respected authority figures that the "problems" (behaviors, attitudes, anxieties, neuroses, etc.) that she manifests are the direct result of childhood sexual abuse (whether or not she can remember the abuse), why wouldn't, why shouldn't she create a narrative based on such assertions? Indeed, not fashioning such an account (and using readily available themes and tropes in such circumstances) would need almost as much explaining as the creation of one. The resulting stories may be "true" in a variety of possible ways: in terms of reasonable accuracy of correlation between experiential activity sequence and descriptive terms (adjusted, of course, for interpretive perspective), in terms of close-fit symbolic representation of experience when the terms or meanings available don't quite fit the personal experience but no other terminology is readily accessible, perhaps even in terms of loose-fit symbolic representation when the personal experience is too painful to deal with directly but must be dealt with on some level. Expression of a "symbolic" story will at least garner attention and aid.

Freud (and many psychologists since) looked at the evidence of childhood sexual abuse stories and drew a particular conclusion: the stories represented a "cognitive" process. The legacy of Freud's conclusion has been to "discount the reality of incestuous abuse and, where discounting is impossible, to blame the [former] child for being the one who wanted the sexual contact in the first place" (Russell 1986, 6). It is little wonder, Diana Russell argues, that so few women even tried to tell their stories of childhood trauma to psychologists (1986, 4). Most psychologists today look at the same evidence and draw a different conclusion: the stories represent a "real" physical and psychological "experience"--one which causes pervasive and lasting "damage" that must be "healed." It is little wonder so many psychologists are hearing such stories today. Psychologists of Freud's day absolutely refused to "believe" the reality of their patients' stories; psychologists today are being told to "believe" everything. While the current practice is undoubtedly more humane toward sexual abuse victims, this "construction" of reality (at least on the part of the "experts") is based as much in "belief" as Freudian attitudes were. In both cases, the expert-determined, expert-validated belief then participated in the overall social construction both of the issues and of social structures in general.

One psychologist told me recently that any story a patient tells in therapy that helps him or her to understand, and to get on with, his or her life in a healthy fashion is a valid
story. I heartily concur. These "stories", however, are not remaining in therapy sessions, nor are therapists keeping these stories in the "symbolic representation" category suggested by "any story that helps." Even the psychologist cited above stated that she firmly "believed" her patients' accounts of satanic cult/ritual abuse, despite the lack of any corroborating evidence. Indeed, she did not think that getting any such corroboration was necessary since her patients were so emphatic, and provided such detailed descriptions, concerning their experiences. This psychologist, and others I've talked to, have also said that they believe their clients because the client is too well-educated, too poorly-educated, too sophisticated, or too naive to be making up the story or to have had contact with (i.e., read), or been influenced by, any of the material on satanic cults. Some of these psychologists have also said that they believe that their clients are relating factually-based experiences because so many of these clients (in some cases, siblings) are all telling "the same story" and citing the same details. In turn, these psychologists are citing their patients' stories outside the therapeutic setting as evidence of the existence of satanic cults. (The same process is now occurring with non-satanic repressed memory versions of the childhood sexual abuse story and with other social stories such as "past lives" constructs).

This is a strange "rejection" of Freudian psychology. The whole premise underlying psychoanalysis is that the stories a patient tells are "symbolic representations" of the objective reality of the patient's psychological angst (resulting from uncompleted "ego" processes and integration). Now, while still often categorizing story creation and telling (inside the therapeutic session) as "symbolic processes" that allow a client to "get on with" life, the therapists are repeating these stories outside the therapy sessions as evidence of an objective reality. It is as though there has been a wide-spread need to "reframe" as "real" what might otherwise have been considered by many to be "only fantasy" (satanic possession) in order to reframe accounts of childhood sexual abuse as "real" and "consequential" and not "fantasy."

Toward a New Paradigm of Memory

What is perhaps most interesting about many of the contemporary stories of childhood sexual abuse is that they violate certain basic paradigms of what previously constituted "reality. In a circular process, these stories begin with premises of human cognition and memory that repudiate some commonly-held ideas of how the mind works, then the new models are used to justify the aberrations. In "A Folk Model of the Mind," Roy D'Andrade suggests that "[e]xcept in pathological cases, what one sees, hears, and/or
senses is understood to be caused by various events and objects external to the mind. What one knows or believes is usually considered to be a creation from within, a result of the operation of the mind itself" (1987, 117). Perceptions should and will reflect the "real" world unless one is in some natural, or induced, abnormal mental state. "Feelings," we all understand, may "color" thinking and distort or confuse judgment, but, except in pathological cases, "thoughts are considered to be under control by the self. One can choose what one wishes to think about" (119). In other words, most of us believe that there is a "real" world out there, that we "really" experience it, and that we really know what is going on.

Quite to the contrary, however, many theories of childhood sexual abuse are based on the postulate that the individual does not know her or his own mind; that somehow, the individual could have lived for years without "knowing" that she or he had been abused. In fact, the depth of the repression of conscious awareness that one was abused is considered a symptom of the severity of the trauma, and not having many clear memories of one's childhood is declared to be a reliable indication that one was abused--which, of course, is the source of the trauma that causes the repression of the memories. Thus, if one exhibits "symptoms" of abuse (ranging from multiple personality disorder to migraines to pre-menstrual syndrome to low self-esteem), but one can't "remember" ever having been abused, then one must have been thoroughly traumatized, either by the severity of the abuse or by mind-control techniques such as those used by "satanic cults."

Some "recovered memory" accounts even express, directly, the sense of reality disruption this supposition entails. "Jane," one of the multiple-personality guests on Geraldo, admitted: "And in the beginning, I thought, 'This can't be real. These are nightmares. This is too horrific. No one could possibly do this to someone.'" (Geraldo. September 10, 1991). Laura Davis claims in the preface to The Courage to Heal: "I felt my whole foundation had been stolen from me. If this could have happened and I could have forgotten it, then every assumption I had about life and my place in it was thrown up for question" (Bass and Davis 1988, 66). Davis eventually readjusts her "assumptions," and she and Bass require their readers to cast off their doubts as well, even when everyone around them "insists nothing ever happened," even when what they "experienced feels too extreme to be possible," even when they think to themselves, "I must have made it up" (1988, 87). Lack of memories, followed by outrageously improbable ones, are due to the "long term effects of child sexual abuse," which is "so pervasive" that it "permeates
everything: your sense of self, your intimate relationships, your sexuality, your parenting, your work life, even your sanity," according to Bass and Davis (1988, 33).

One man, Paul Ingram, the chief civil deputy of the Thurston County, Washington, sheriff's department bought into this model of the mind so thoroughly that when his daughters, twenty-two-year-old Ericka and eighteen-year-old Julie, accused him in 1988 of having molested them when they were children, he confessed even though there was no physical evidence, and despite the fact that Ingram himself could not remember ever having molested his daughters or anyone else. "I can't see myself doing this," he said, but admitted that "[t]here may be a dark side of me that I don't know about" (qtd. in Wright 1993a, 60). Later, after extensive questioning, Ingram decided that he probably had abused his daughters, "and probably for a long period of time," but that he had "repressed it." When asked why he was confessing if he couldn't remember molesting his daughters, Ingram said that his daughters "wouldn't lie about something like this." He also cited as evidence of his guilt, "[t]he way they've been acting for at least the last couple years and the fact that I've not been able to be affectionate with them," that is, he had not been able to hug them or tell them that he loved them (qtd. in Wright 1993a, 61). Eventually, he experienced "memories" as well.

Over a period of months, Ingram "confessed" to the ever-growing and increasingly-bizarre allegations his daughters continued to produce. In a self-induced, trance-like state, Ingram would "see" himself and others performing acts of sexual abuse and satanic rituals that involved murdered babies, forced abortions, stabbings, rapes, sodomy, and bestiality. Despite the lack of any corroborating evidence, Ingram eventually pleaded guilty to six counts of third-degree rape. He was convicted and is currently in prison, serving a twenty-years sentence, although he as since come to believe that he was not guilty. Even the other early defendants in the case, Ray Risch and Jim Rabie (charges against them were later dropped), seemed ready to accept the possibility that they might have performed the alleged crimes and then "blocked" them out. Rabie said, "I can't figure out why, if I did this, I wouldn't remember it happening," but he also admitted, "If I saw a picture of that I would have to believe it had occurred" (qtd. in Wright 1993a, 73). Risch claimed, "I wasn't present that I know of, unless I blocked it out of my head" (qtd. in Wright 1993a, 73).

When Ingram's son, Chad (then twenty years old) was encouraged to "remember" the sexual abuse that his father was beginning to "remember" having inflicted on him as a child, Chad described some vivid and disturbing "dreams" he had had as a child. His
accounts involved train whistles, flying witches, and what amount to a classic description of sleep paralysis (as described by David Hufford, 1982a). Chad insisted that these episodes had been just dreams. However, the psychologist who was questioning Chad, Richard Peterson, insisted that Chad had been "programmed not to remember anything," and that Chad's belief that his experiences had just been dreams resulted from, and were evidence of, a "[d]estruction of his sense of reality" and a "[d]estruction of any ability to feel. Total, absolute obedience and subservience to the [satanic cult] group." Chad's interrogators told him that he had been "conditioned to accept the abuse and then to repress the memories" (qtd. in Wright 1993a, 76).

The criminal investigation team, the religious counselors, and the Ingram family were all well-versed in this particular notion of how the mind worked. In addition, "[e]very member of the Ingram family was primed to believe in the existence of satanic cults," declares Wright. "Still, their belief had as much to do with popular culture and tabloid television as it did with their church" (1993b, 76).

On December 2, 1991, the Ingram case itself became part of tabloid TV. Ericka Ingram appeared on Sally Jessy Raphael. Ericka described for the audiences some of her alleged experiences at the hands of the satanic cults and then stated: "I spent most of my life in the hospital. And that is true. And I have scars. And, I mean, doctors were just, like, looking at my body, just going--ugh!" (qtd. in Wright 1993b, 75). According to Wright's reconstruction of the case, however, physicians investigating Erika's claims had been able to find nothing but an appendectomy scar (1993b, 63). The talk-show audience, however, heard only Ericka's undisputed claims. Her story has now become part of the mixture of public language, themes, tropes, and meanings available to others who need--for one reason or another--to form their own accounts of childhood sexual abuse.

To date, Paul Ingram is the only nationally known figure (that I am aware of) to have confessed to accusations of having participated in satanic ritual abuse and to have been subsequently convicted and jailed. Sudden resurgence of memories of having participated in ritual abuse as a perpetrator, and admitting as much, seems to be legally important only some of the time. "Kathleen," who claimed her memory was suddenly released from its satanic cult captivity while she "was watching a police documentary several years ago," also claimed to have participated in "40 murders" while she was a member of the cult as a child (Geraldo, Sept. 10, 1991). While many of the audience members expressed horror at this disclosure, no one (at least not during the show) suggested that Kathleen should be held accountable for her "crimes." Of course, the
alleged murders had been committed while she was a child and under the cult's "influences." Still, no one questioned her right to be walking around free and unfettered. Why would a jury convict Paul Ingram (and a number of day-care workers) of a crime he allegedly committed while under the influence of the "cult" but a talk-show audience not even question Kathleen's "murders"? Did the audience not believe her claims to have committed the murders? Or did they consider her completely exempt from responsibility because she had been "brain-washed" and fully believe her claims to now be "free" of the cult's influences? Do the different responses result from the fact that someone was actively accusing Paul Ingram of satanic cult activity (rape, incest, murder, etc.) while no one was around to "accuse" Kathleen? Or was it simply because these two instances were serving two different social "purposes"?

To accept Kathleen's, Paul Ingram's, his daughter's, and many other individuals' stories of satanic ritual abuse as reflections of objective reality means also accepting the premise that there are world-wide conspiracy groups made up of individuals who appear to be normal, respectable, even upstanding citizens, but who also practice (and have practiced for generations) heinous acts of torture and murder in the name of a clandestine religion, yet who are capable of hiding all traces of their activities. It is at least as important that accepting these accounts as objectively valid means also accepting that the cult could have developed mind-control techniques that can completely alter one's sense of reality to the degree that one would, repeatedly, suffer torture and/or commit murder, and then instantly and completely "forget" about it for years.

Human memory doesn't work this way, according to increasing numbers of "scientific studies" such as those described by Dr. Stephen Ceci (Frontline, May 7, 1991) and Dr. Ralph Underwager (Geraldo, September 10, 1991). Human memory doesn't work this way, according to the False Memory Syndrome Foundation (FMSF), a Philadelphia-based organization founded in 1992 to challenge the claims of adults (mostly middle-class females) who accuse others (primarily their parents) of having sexually abused them during their childhoods (abuse they are only now remembering) and to support the alleged perpetrators while they "fight back." FMSF claims that these "memories" are inadvertently instilled in the alleged victim's mind through inept questioning by mental health workers, lawyers, social workers, or criminal investigators, or that they are actually planted there to reflect and support the convictions of such authoritative figures (FMSF, organization pamphlet, no date).
According to Lawrence Wright (1993b), Paul McHugh, director of the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Johns Hopkins University claims that "most severe traumas are not blocked out by children but are remembered all too well." McHugh cites examples of documented childhood trauma: children who survived the concentration camps of World War II remembered "all too well" the horrors they had experienced, and the school children of Chowchillas, California, who, after having been kidnapped and buried for many hours in sand, "remembered their traumatic experience in excruciating detail." These children in California required psychiatric assistance "not to bring out forgotten material that was repressed, but to help them move away from a constant ruminative preoccupation with the experience," asserted McHugh (qtd. in Wright 1993b, 70).

Paul Ingram and his wife, Sandy, both reported their doubts about their "different kinds" of memories. They both had "normal" memories about such things as daily activities and family vacations, but they had both begun experiencing a different sort of memory once the questioning began. Not like dreams, these new memories were extremely vivid, if somewhat fragmented. They could "see" and "feel" and "hear" and even "smell" themselves doing things and experiencing things being done to them (Wright 1993b, 66-76). Two months after pleading guilty to rape charges so that his daughters would not be forced into taking the stand against him—an experience that Paul's own attorney had told him might "emotionally damage them for the rest of their lives" (Paul Ingram, qtd. in Wright 1993b, 74), Paul Ingram began to question his memories and to sort out the "normal" ones from the "visualizations" (Wright 1993b, 74). He decided that his visualizations of having been abused and having committed satanic ritual abuse were "false" memories. It was too late; his attempts to withdraw his guilty plea were rejected.

Later, while sitting in prison, Paul Ingram developed his own theory of how he could have come to believe so firmly that he had committed the crimes he had confessed to. He "remembered" the sexual and satanic abuse, he decided, because it "helped him explain to himself why a man who was ostensibly a good Christian and a loving parent could have mistreated his children. I wasn't a good father, I know,' he admits. 'I wasn't there for the kids. I wasn't able to communicate with them as I should have. I never sexually abused anybody. But emotional abuse—you don't like to admit it, but somebody has to. A child is a pretty delicate creature. I did a lot of hollering as a father, and I think that must have intimidated the kids. One time . . . I slapped [Julie]. Another time, she tried to run away . . . I ran out and caught her and pulled her hair and said she was coming
. . . I hollered. There was a lack of affection they should get from a father figure" (qtd. in
Wright 1993b, 76).

Despite Wright's justified assertion that much of what was responsible for the
Ingrams' "memories" were media influences, Paul Ingram's own statement that he had been
assured that he would "remember the abuse once he had confessed to it" (1993b, 76,
emphasis added), and his comment on trying to explain how "a good Christian" could fail
to be a "good father" emphasizes the religious dominance of this version. Regardless of
the source, however, what might have been a "good story" in a therapeutic setting or in a
confessional had been turned into "factual evidence" in the context of a criminal
investigation.

Repressed memory, however, is not limited to "satanic" and/or "ritual" versions of
childhood sexual abuse. Repressed memory and sudden recall notions are at the basis of
many recent assertions by adults who claim they were victims of childhood sexual abuse,
whether these accusations deal with satanic, ritual, or with more prosaic forms of abuse.
"False-memory" advocates argue intentional or unwitting wrong-doing on the part alleged
victims and their therapists and lawyers. "Recovered-memory" advocates, on the other
hand, dismiss "false-memory syndrome" and FMSF's claims as evidence of society's
unwillingness to believe the scope of childhood sexual abuse, the parent's efforts to protect
their own guilt, and just another example of "blaming the victim." Individuals who have
experienced sudden-recall flashes claim the images and feelings are too vivid, too "real"
not to be. Dr. Richard Ofshe, social psychologist from the University of California at
Berkeley, Pulitzer Prize winner, and consultant on the Ingram case, suggests that the
allegations against Paul Ingram and others are a kind of "mass folly--something that would
be suitable mainly for folklorists if is were not that innocent people's lives [are] being
crushed" (qtd. in Wright 1993b, 69).24

24 Many claims of "satanic cult" abuse now deny the involvement of a supernatural
"force" or any nation-wide or world-wide conspiracy. Instead, the claims are increasingly
moving toward a less sensational, but supposedly more believable, "intergenerational"
context for the "ritual" practices. The attempt to make the transition to this more
plausible version is clearly evident in "Bonnie's" statements on the May 13, 1991, Larry
King Live segment discussed earlier. Claims of a widespread "conspiracy" (though not
necessarily the "satanic" nature of the abuse) are increasingly being perceived as
implausible in the continuing absence of corroborating evidence. People are still,
apparently, quite willing to accept the notion that there are "families" who have established
(note continued on next page)
Clearly, significantly different versions of "reality" are being constructed by those supporting all repressed-memory/sudden-recall accounts and those refuting the very existence of sudden recall. Critics of the repressed memory hypothesis claim that the vivid images and feelings that "flash" into the minds of alleged adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse are a form of "hallucination" or "illusory memories" insinuated into the mind of the alleged survivor by the therapists' suggestions (Loftus 1993). Advocates of "sudden recall" claim the "hallucination" is that there was "nothing" to remember; "remembering" brings the survivor into a more authentic and valid relationship with reality, they assert.

Both sides use the same tactic of resorting to "as yet unexplained phenomena," a stance that Hufford defines as "safe from argument since it is not open to empirical disconfirmation" (1982b, 52). Critics of sudden recall and doubters of the existence of satanic conspiracies maintain that there is no evidence (other than a few instances of behavior imitating the stories) to support the accounts, and they admit that, of course, they can't "prove" that there are no satanic cults. "You cannot prove a negative" (Victor, Larry King Live, May 13, 1991). But any "rational" person would understand that it would be impossible for a world-wide conspiracy to operate for centuries--or even decades--without leaving any evidence behind, claim the cult doubters. Something else, some sort of "collective behavior," or some mechanism of the mind, must be behind the "memories"--although just what that is or how it works can't be explained, definitively, just yet.

Satanic cult devotees and other advocates of sudden recall claim that "rational" individuals have too long dismissed as simply imaginary any phenomenon they couldn't explain away by any other means--and have been wrong too often. Sudden-recall advocates, especially those describing satanic/ritual abuse, argue that the "proof" will be forthcoming as soon as society takes their claims seriously (Dr. Orcutt, Geraldo, September 10, 1991). In the meantime, there is a completely logical and rational explanation for the current lack of evidence: that's how the cult works.

patterns of behavior ("traditions," if you will) of ritual abuse. This family-oriented, small group, clandestine form of "cultural heritage" is, perhaps, very credible in the present socio-cultural context; "family systems" hypotheses which assert that violent behavior is always "passed on" to the next generation have combined here with "ethnic heritage" impulses.
Both sides cast aspersions on the other's integrity and competency, suggesting hidden agendas and narrow-minded thinking about causes and effects when sexual abuse is involved. And it is not just on TV talk-shows that the argument is being waged. In 1993 The Harvard Mental Health Letter (HMHL) ran opinions from "experts" on both sides of the issue. "It is remarkably easy to plant illusory or distorted memories," according to Elizabeth Loftus, who thinks the concept of "repressed memory" should carry a hazardous warning label. "Fabricated memories of abuse not only destroy families and damage the reputations of innocent people," she claims, "but divert the course of therapy from the patient's real problems" (March 1993). Judith Herman and Mary Harvey disagree:

The notion that therapists can implant scenarios of horror in the minds of their patients is easily accepted because it appeals to common prejudices. It resonates with popular fears of manipulation by therapists and popular stereotypes of women as irrational, suggestible, or vengeful. It appeals to the common wish to deny or minimize the reality of sexual violence. In actuality, false claims of childhood sexual abuse are demonstrably rare, and false memories of childhood trauma are no doubt equally so. The evidence comes from epidemiological research, investigations of sexual abuse reports, and studies on the nature of traumatic memory. (April 1993)

These familiar rhetorical claims and counter-claims, disclaimers and denials do not explain, however, why these stories are suddenly so popular and so prevalent. Both sides seem to be working from the position that Hufford defines as "the a priori exclusion of one whole class of hypotheses . . . as necessary to consider" (1982b:53). In one case, this has meant the rejection of the possibility that wide-spread and outrageous acts of violence could have occurred for years without anyone noticing, or that the human mind, for its own defense, is capable of selectively, or completely, forgetting years of such violence or of (relatively) lesser forms of unpleasantness. Hufford calls this approach the "It can't be so; therefore, it isn't" (1982b, 53). The other side, meanwhile, maintains that "It seems be so; therefore, it is" and denies even the possibility that "forces operating on narrative and beliefs through many repetitions" may, indeed, "give rise to many traditions and traditional accounts" (Hufford 1982b, 49). Both sides have forgotten that the way others have spoken (especially if such speaking is validated) influences the way that we speak.

Richard Wright suggests that both Paul Ingram and the investigators of his daughters' claims succumbed to "the perils of a fixed idea." In the Ingram case, Wright locates this "fixed idea" in acceptance that "the truth of human behavior, and even of one's own experience, can be cloaked by a trick of the unconscious mind [i.e., repressed
memory], which draws a curtain of amnesia over a painful past" (1993b: 76). "Whatever the value of repression as a scientific concept or a therapeutic tool," argues Wright, "unquestioning belief in it has become as dangerous as the belief in witches" (1993b, 76).

Hufford disparages glib dismissals by "disbelievers" that accounts of personal experiences that are not quickly and easily verifiable by familiar and accepted scientific means are "either fictitious products of tradition or imaginary subjective experiences shaped (or occasionally even caused) by tradition" (1982a, 14). His own work on the "Old Hag" experience convinced him of the need for investigators to consider actual physiological sources for claims of supernatural experiences. There may well be empirically-grounded explanations for the sudden recall phenomenon, ranging from self-induced trance states, to therapist-induced imagery, to that is the way the mind works.25

Clearly, once engaged in dichotomous thinking, advocates on either side would have to suffer the consequences of acknowledging and accepting that they may be misperceiving the world and admitting that what they thought was true is not true before they could abandon their stance. Both sides seem to be missing, or intentionally ignoring, a wide variety of other possible explanations. The most promising one, from my point of view, is the possibility that at least part of 'what is going on here' is the construction, negotiation, and dissemination of a socially necessary story.

Trial by Jury

Whatever their source, individuals are having "experiences of memories" (sudden-recall) whether or not these "memories" are based on prior (childhood) "experiences." The legal arena in which the hypothesis of repressed memory is being debated is at least partly responsible for the 'dug in and not budging' stance taken by many advocates on

25 The "Old Hag" is the Newfoundland folk term given to a phenomenon that also has been described by such terms as "incubus, nightmare, and witch riding" (Hufford 1982a, ix). David Hufford's investigation into this experience led him to the conclusion that this is a form of "sleep paralysis with a particular kind of hypnagogic hallucination" (1982a, 246), and is a fairly common occurrence. The experience frequently involves a sense (or belief) that one is "awake," a sensation (or visual image) of an "evil presence," and a feeling of being "paralyzed" and/or "crushed" (e.g., heavy weight on chest, can't move, can't cry out). The symbolic interpretations and the folk explanations which form around such an experience are culturally determined and socially transmitted, and people often hesitate to admit having this experience in cultures that look askance at self-disclosure of "supernatural" encounters.
both sides. Both scientific and social theories of what counts as "real" and who gets to decide what "counts" are being argued by lawyers and decided by jury trial. Is the much-maligned legal system, then, the last institutional authority we Americans are willing to trust? The legal trial at least determines who "wins" and who "loses," and trial by jury has long been our promise (if illusion) of "justice." Jury trials also allow for the individual, eyewitness voice to be heard. The courtroom "drama" of storytelling (with attentive audience) may serve its own role in the social and personal "healing" ritual.

In a four page "note" (307-310) in The Courage to Heal, Mary Williams, an attorney for adult survivors, writes that in her experience "most survivors aren't thinking primarily about the money they might get. Their main motive is a desire to get the abuser to take responsibility for what he did. They want him to have to face up to it, and they feel the court system will do that" (308). Williams admits, however, that "a lawsuit is not a great vehicle for getting someone to take responsibility for something. What lawsuits are best able to do is get money" (308). While a lawsuit might not make the defendant suddenly feel guilty or inspire him or her to apologize, it at least publicly "exposes" the defendant to social embarrassment. The court trial, also, "is often a cathartic experience for victims" (308). Meanwhile, "[m]onetary compensation, even if it cannot undo the damage, is a form of justice, of being vindicated by society while the abuser is blamed and punished" (309). These settlements "typically ... are paid by the abuser's homeowner's insurance policy" on the basis that "liability insurance protects the homeowner for damages he might cause by his own negligence" (309). "[I]f insurance coverage is not available at all," admits Williams, "many deserving cases will never get to court, because no attorney will take on a case where there is no possibility of getting paid" (qtd. in Bass and Davis 1988, 309-310).

Lawyers are getting paid, however, and many contemporary suppositions about childhood sexual abuse are being publicly "legalized" by these court trials, not only established into the legal code as "precedence" but also validated in cultural patterns of thinking. Williams herself has argued both the existence of repressed memory and the inevitability of certain symptoms, claiming that "survivors" should be able to file law suits based on "delayed discovery" even after the statute of limitations has expired because "the psychological effects of incest causes the victim to develop internalized guilt and shame, and to keep it a secret. Those dynamics continue to operate long after the abuse stops, and prevent the person, even after she's turned eighteen and can legally sue, from being
able to understand that she'd been injured by what happened" (Williams, qtd. in Bass and Davis 1988, 307).

The courts are also becoming unofficial treatment centers. "In my experience," writes Williams, "nearly every client who has undertaken this kind of suit has experienced growth, therapeutic strengthening, and an increased sense of personal power and self-esteem as a result of the litigation." Clients, she claims "get strong by suing. They step out of the fantasy that it didn't happen or that their parents really loved and cared for them in a healthy way." Indeed, the court trial even functions as a ritual: "It produces a beneficial separation that can be a rite of passage for the survivor." Williams also justifies the court trial on the same grounds that all sexual abuse disclosure advocacy groups use: "it's educational for society" (310). Williams argues:

The legal system is so important to the American consciousness. If you can take it to court, there's a way in which you symbolically get vindicated that doesn't happen in any other way. If victims of sexual abuse use the court system, then people can no longer accept abuse and not talk about it. Abusers can no longer count on not being confronted. And society cannot just sweep it under the rug. (Williams, qtd. in Bass and Davis 1988, 310.)

Both the construction of empirical reality and the construction of social reality are being conducted by jury trial; the trials themselves have been instigated and supported by information disseminated through mass media conduits. Mass media, in turn, exploits and sensationalizes the trials and the decisions. Much is at stake. Old power hierarchies and social attitudes toward women and towards women's "place" have been challenged. Issues of privacy and of family sanctity have been complicated. Theories of the mind have been offered as evidence, questioned and challenged.

The "Feminist" Version

If the satanic/ritual abuse version of childhood sexual abuse represent one form of response to an identity crisis, the "feminist" version of the experience represents another. However, while certain conservative elements within American society have used the satanic version of childhood sexual abuse to help "hold the line" against the social changes and to reaffirm established structures, feminists (i.e., the "Women's Movement") have used the experience to hasten change. What I will call, for convenience sake, the "feminist recovery" version of the childhood abuse experience (and which I will refer to by either of these terms) advocates those cognitive attributes and social behaviors often labeled as "feminine" or as "women's ways" of being and doing. This version implicitly--and
sometimes explicitly—advocates significant alteration (and sometimes outright destruction) of many of the guiding principles and premises underlying "Western patriarchy."

The very rhetoric of Herman and Harvey's contention that the notion that therapists can implant memories "appeals to common prejudices" and calls to mind "popular fears" and "popular stereotypes" of women (HMHL, April 1993) posits "sudden-recall" as a "women's issue" and calls to mind those very stereotypes. Indeed, it is not surprising that many of the arguments about what constitutes sexual abuse, how often it occurs, what types of effects result, and of what significance this experience is for both victims and society should surround and involve issues of gender. Despite the controversy over actual statistics, all studies agree that women are the victims in an overwhelming majority of cases of sexual abuse and that perpetrators are nearly always male. The problem is clearly a "women's issue"—not just a "social" issue—according to many people. Yllö, for instance, contends that "domestic violence" is never a "gender neutral" issue, and that the "patriarchal system" is a "complex and multidimensional" structural system of social "power" designed to keep men in "control" (1993, 48-49). (She also says that "feminism" is not a "sufficient" orientation for conceptualizing the problem--1993, 60. More well be said about her remarks later.)

Connections between sexual abuse discourse and "the Women's Movement" (using this term loosely) are easily discernible in The Courage to Heal, since it is written principally "for women" (Bass and Davis 1988, 26). As stated earlier, this book incorporates nearly all the currently-active themes and motifs of the sexual abuse; the primary focuses, however, are the "medicalization" of women's experience of childhood sexual abuse and the rejection of the "patriarchal" worldview. As "teachers" to the "professionals" who counsel the women, and as presenters of "testimony" concerning the "real" experience, Bass and Davis claim themselves (or at least their book) as the ultimate authority on the sexual abuse experience from a women's perspective. In many ways, the book encapsulates the "dominant story" of the feminist perspective.

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26 Interestingly, these same (female) authors cite "the well-publicized case of Father James Porter," which involved male victims, as "proof" of the occurrence and veracity of delayed recall. In doing so, they not only call to mind the "imagery of violence that inundates our culture [which is masculine violence]" (Yllö 1993, 50), but they also use "male" victimization and experience to justify and validate "female" claims. Thus, they (undoubtedly unintentionally) uphold social hierarchical patterns involving gender: "men" are what "counts."
Throughout the volume, Bass and Davis validate and promote as essential to the survivor's "healing" (or condemn as detrimental to healing) the same "epistemological perspectives from which women know and view the world" that Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule contend are part of women's unique "ways of knowing" (1986, 15, emphasis in original). Among these epistemological categories that form the basis of women's conceptual perspectives are "silence, a position in which women experience themselves as mindless and voiceless and subject to the whims of external authority; received knowledge, a perspective from which women conceive of themselves as capable of receiving, even reproducing knowledge from the all-knowing external authorities but not capable of creating knowledge on their own; subjective knowledge, a perspective from which truth and knowledge are conceived of as personal, private, and subjectively known or intuited; procedural knowledge, a position in which women are invested in learning and applying objective procedures for obtaining and communicating knowledge, and constructed knowledge, a position in which women view all knowledge as contextual, experience themselves as creators of knowledge, and value both subjective and objective strategies for knowing" (Belenky et al. 1986, 15, emphasis in original). Most disparaged by these authors, by Bass and Davis, and by the Women's Movement in general are "silence" and "received knowledge," both of which are considered the instruments, and the evidence, of women's subservience to patriarchal authority. Lauded are "subjective," "procedural," and "constructive" knowledge." These are held to be the attributes and processes through which women can best come to understand and to construct themselves and their world based on their own personal experiences, intuition and non-linear thinking, and non-competitive, inter-dependent social interaction.

The taboo against speaking--even silence itself--is rejected, "breaking the silence" is a primary metaphor for sexual abuse recovery as it is for many Women's Movement agendas. Learning to "speak out" is the first step toward becoming "healed"; gaining a "voice"--speaking up and speaking out rather than meekly listening--liberates women from a male-dominated linear worldview and a zero-sum, hierarchical social order argue the authors of Women's Ways of Knowing (Belenky et al. 1986, 155-189). "Telling is transformative," according to Bass and Davis (1988, 95). They encourage writing; it is "an important avenue for healing because it gives you the opportunity to define your own reality," they tell their readers. They suggest journaling and sharing what is written by reading it aloud, if only to the self. "[A]t least you will be reading to one attentive listener. Just saying the words out loud can make them more real" (1988, 27-28, emphasis added).
Bass and Davis do caution that when "breaking the taboo of secrecy" women must remember: "you are emerging from a context of severe cultural and personal repression." "You are challenging the secrecy that is the foundation of abusive family structures." Women, however, should not hesitate to speak out, they say: "You are taking revolutionary steps toward self-respect and respect for all children. You are exercising your power" (133).

This process of speaking out, of making the world that women experience "more real" through verbalizing it is often considered the first step in achieving social, legal, and political equality for women. Katherine Angueira's article "To Make the Personal Political" (1988) discusses the use of personal "testimony"--oral or written--in consciousness-raising activities. "The process of recovering and using, as both socially and politically valid and valuable, the knowledge obtained from the subjective experience of daily life" (67) forces "social actors to confront their own constructions and therefore their interpretation of reality" (72), according to Angueira, who focuses primarily on rape stories, another area where women "violate traditional social norms by speaking out" when they testify publicly (68). By doing so, she asserts, women "make public what has traditionally been restricted to the private sphere" (70). These rape stories, when moved out of their traditional 'place' of "the individualized realm of the private," (72) contaminate and threaten male dominance by "making political that which is personal" (70, emphasis in original). Angueira intentionally and admittedly employs a variation on the familiar feminist slogan "to make political that which is personal" (78).27

Testimony, Angueira argues, is most effective as a tool when it combines "cognitive and emotional information" in "emotionally charged" texts (1988, 73) because "the emotional impact of testimony also pushes the collective to confront its own fears, insecurities, and most elemental feelings" (1988, 90). The need for, and validity of, an emotional component in personal experience recounting is emphasized by Bass and Davis as well: "Strong feelings are part of the healing process" (1988, 23). These authors consider emotional involvement to be an essential element of the process, and they claim

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that separating one's intellect from one's feelings is a negative "coping" mechanism learned during abuse and, therefore, is potentially a "symptom" of having been abused (1988, 23).

An emotional, subjective, intuitive, non-linear, interactive, cooperative approach to the task of childhood sexual abuse recovery is emphasized repeatedly, and endorsed unequivocally, throughout The Courage to Heal. These approaches to reality construction are the same ones validated as women-oriented by Belenky et al., who emphasize self-generated, experiential knowledge gained through listening to one's "inner voice": the "I just know" subjectivism of intuitive processes and personal experience. Bass and Davis also stress co-operative, communal negotiation of social relationships as an important source of women's strength (52-58). All this is set in opposition to the analytical, linear, objectified abstractions and competitive interactions frequently associated with "male" thought processes and hierarchical social construction (Belenky et al. 1986, 68-75). "Healing is not linear," Bass and Davis contend; "it's like a spiral. You go through the same stages again and again" (1988, 58-59). "Often the knowledge that you were abused starts with a tiny feeling, an intuition. It's important to trust that inner voice and work from there." (22) "If you don't have any memory of it, it can be hard to believe the abuse really happened. You may feel insecure about trusting your intuition. . . . The unconscious has its own way of unfolding that does not always meet your demands or your timetable." (82). "Memories are stored in our bodies" (74).

Speaking out is viewed as an act of rebellion against the "taboos" surrounding talking about deviant (or even normal) personal sexual experiences and a defiance of the traditional patterns that have prevented women from achieving full participation in public discourse. Speaking out in this manner is (or at least appears to be) a rejection of male worldview and rhetoric as well, and it repudiates also many of women's traditional ways of speaking as described by Joan Radner and Susan Lanser (1987) in "The Feminist Voice: Strategies of Coding in Folklore and Literature" even while it upholds others. Radner and Lanser contend that women (consciously or unconsciously) "encode feminist meanings in their texts" (415) to protect themselves from the consequences of openly stating "ideas, beliefs, experiences, feelings and attitudes that the dominant [male] culture" --and perhaps even the women themselves-- "would find disturbing or threatening if expressed in more overt forms" (414). Radner and Lanser list as encoding strategies: "appropriation" ("adapting forms or materials normally associated with male culture"); "juxtaposition" (ironic or ambiguous arrangements of elements to convey different levels of meanings); "distraction" ("strategies that drown out or draw attention away from the subversive
power of a feminist message); "indirection" or "distancing" (including metaphors); "trivialization" and "self-deprecation"; and dramatic "incompetence" (1987, 415-421).

Bass and Davis "appropriate" and combine two well-established formats (the textbook and the do-it-yourself manual). They refuse, however, to restrict themselves to objective data or to dispassionate and analytical discussions of the issues or processes of healing. They use highly emotive personal stories to illustrate and justify every assertion; "intuition" is considered an authentic and conclusive cognitive process; "feelings" are deemed essential. Emotionally-oriented words and concepts appear on virtually every page and include (in diverse forms) anger, frustration, shame, confusion, depression, withdrawal, relief, suffering, horror, cruelty, terror, happiness, love, pain, fear, and a host of intensified terms such as self-hate, self-critical, self-destructive, and self-esteem.

Uses of "indirection" or "distancing," on the other hand, are mixed. "Hedging," either by talking around the issue or through "impersonation" in the form of third-person narration, is clearly rejected, but metaphors appear continuously, beginning with the implied notion that sexual abuse is an "illness" or disease from which one needs to be "healed." Tropes are often curiously ambiguous, however. Following current, widespread practice, Bass and Davis prefer the term "survivor" to designate those who experienced childhood sexual abuse. "Survivor" often evokes (or at least used to evoke) situations of natural disaster, but the term has recently become closely associated with the man-made disasters, particularly the Holocaust, and sexual abuse discourse has borrowed imagery and terminology from this historical phenomenon. The term "victim" more clearly indicates the human source of sexual abuse, but sexual abuse sufferers now frequently reject this label because of its connotations of helplessness and subservience. On the other hand, to claim the title or label "survivor," is also (perhaps unwittingly, perhaps intentionally) always an invocation of the status of "victim." Diana Russell prefers the term "victim" because of the "extremely severe connotation of the word 'survivor'," which, she claims, "suggests that merely to have survived [sexual] abuse is a remarkable achievement" (1986, 14).28 This, however, is precisely the position of Bass and Davis's text.

28 Russell prefers "victim" because it more clearly covers "less severe forms of abuse" as well. "A girl who has once been touched on the breast by an uncle or a brother," she says, "might well feel alienated by the term 'survivor'." Besides, she argues, the dictionary definition of "victim" is "someone destroyed, injured, or otherwise harmed by some act or circumstance," while the definition of "survivor," "is a person who survives." "Victim,"

(note continued on next page)
Still, the most dominant trope is "healing," which implies that one is in the process of getting "well." On the other hand, Bass and Davis (in agreement with much sexual abuse survivor discourse) caution readers against thinking that they will ever be done healing. This assertion echoes Alcoholics' Anonymous and other twelve-step recovery programs. Alcoholics' Anonymous is based on the premise that while someone can be a "recovering" alcoholic, he or she is always an alcoholic; the underlying "disease" is incurable. Bass and Davis reflect this "permanent condition" syndrome in their commentary:

There is no such thing as absolute healing. You never erase your history. The abuse happened. It affected you in profound ways. That will never change... You need to accept the fact that the healing process will continue throughout your life" (167).29

Nevertheless, Bass and Davis must negotiate carefully between the "damage" and the "healing," between claims that childhood sexual abuse is a significant and ongoing experience (evident in the social and psychological "symptoms" of its now-adult victims) and the need for those victims to avoid being viewed as permanently weakened, socially inferior, or simply--and therefore dismissably--mentally ill. In order for "victims" to sustain indefinitely a condition of permanent "victimhood" and still enjoy public sympathy and support, the discourse asserts that in cases where the sexual abuse victims--male or female--are currently "incompetent" or "incomplete" in any personal or social way, this is only because they have been prevented, by the abuse, from reaching their full potential. It's a "miracle" they are as "normal" as they are--or rather--appear to be since the childhood sexual abuse "permeates everything" (33) in their lives. In Bass and Davis's terms (at least as far as the women for whom this text is intended are concerned), "everything" involves "your sense of self, your intimate relationships, your sexuality, your parenting, your work life, even your sanity" (33). Eventually, they contend, these victims of child abuse will be superior individuals. In the meantime, allowances should be made because the recovery process is long, arduous, and "permanent." Childhood sexual abuse is, at once, the perfect excuse and the ultimate success story. In some ways, the "feminist

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29 Curiously, two pages later Bass and Davis write, "Now imagine all women healed. . . ." I will discuss this quote later.
recovery" story can be a very useful and "necessary" story, at least temporarily, for women. It may also be a very limiting one, in the long run.

A Necessary Story

Many contemporary American women (particularly the middle-class women who appear most involved in speaking out and in filing civil suits against parents) find themselves caught between two, conflicting, dominant social narratives. On the one hand, many post-W.W.II women were enculturated into Cinderella passivity with its emphasis on beauty, dependence, and fulfillment through marriage. As we came of age, however, we were being told to incorporate the Horatio Alger paradigm. That story says that any man can grow up to be president, own his own company, or even discover a new medical syndrome. With the advent of equal-opportunity legislation, we women were told that the playing field had been leveled, and we, too, could do, and become, anything we wanted, just like men. These two stories are anything but compatible.

The mainstream cultural construct of the "proper American" that Livia Polanyi offers in her book Telling the American Story captures, for many of us, the essence of what it means to be late-20th-century "proper" Americans. A "proper" American is one whose life corresponds to the script of the "American Story" according to Polanyi: Proper Americans are "ADULTS . . . who know how TO do what they MUST DO; CAN DO what they MUST DO; and DO it" (1989, 181, capitals in original). In more specific terms, the proper American is one who "is adjusted, in charge of his life, successfully married, and a winner who knows how to be angry, have friends, be free of poisonous personal relationships, and is himself" (Polanyi, 1989, 110-111). Polanyi compiled this list from the most commonly expressed attitudes and expectations of "popular psychology and sociology books--the 'how to run your life and know how to feel and relate to other people' books" that serve as 'guides for living life 'right'." The use of the masculine pronoun is intentional; Polanyi also notes that "the 'unmarked' person is male. Therefore, the truly proper American is a male who is knowledgeable, capable, talented, healthy, intelligence, competent, successful in both his professional and personal life, is in charge and control of his life, is married, and happy (Polanyi 1989, 110-111, 181).30

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30 For a second opinion, consider the following quote from Erving Goffman: "For example, in an important sense there is only one complete unblushing male in America: a young, married, white, urban, northern, heterosexual Protestant father of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight, and height, and a recent record in (note continued on next page)
A truly proper American female, as too many of us know (check any magazine on any newsstand), is expected to be all this and good looking, well-groomed, sexy, a competent hostess, and a nurturing care-giver to her own children and to all others who might require her services as well. Any failure or lack of conformity, by either men or women, to this widely-recognized and ascribed-to story of personal competence and success (or generic, composite "grammar of possible stories" as Polanyi terms it [1989, 181]) indicates "personal inadequacy." This "stigma" can be partially ameliorated if one can explain such failure in terms of overwhelming, uncontrollable, outside forces. Fortunately, for many women, the feminist-recovery version of the childhood sexual abuse experience (based largely on "repressed memory" hypotheses) does just that.

The recovery story advances the notion that even multiple incidents and activities, experienced over a long period of time, can be instantly and completely blocked from conscious awareness and return later (if at all), suddenly and spontaneously, as profound memories. In fact, the depth of the "repression" is considered a symptom of the severity of the trauma, and not having many clear memories of one's childhood is often declared to be a reliable indication that one has suffered childhood trauma. Thus, if one exhibits "symptoms" of abuse but one can't "remember" ever having been abused, then one must have been thoroughly traumatized. Since the definition of sexual abuse includes nearly every "uncomfortable" childhood experience, and the symptoms range from migraines, over-eating, low self-esteem, having "a hard time loving and accepting your body." "trouble feeling motivated," not getting a "good education" and marrying too young (Bass and Davis 1988, 34-35); to addiction and depression (PrimeTime Live, 1992); to marital problems (Larry King Live, 1991); to producing children at a "younger" age, divorce, religious disaffiliation, lower socioeconomic status, and living the "life of a traditional woman in terms of economic dependence as well as maternal and marital status" (Russell 1986, 386-387), it is nearly impossible not to be able to construct a story of childhood sports. Every American male tends to look out upon the world from this perspective, this constituting one sense in which one can speak of a common value system in American. Any male who fails to qualify in any of these ways is likely to view himself--during moments at least--as unworthy, incomplete, and inferior; at times he is likely to pass and at times he is likely to find himself being apologetic or aggressive concerning known-about aspects of himself he knows are probably seen as undesirable. The general identity-values [sic] of a society may be fully entrenched nowhere, and yet they can cast some kind of shadow on the encounters encountered everywhere in daily living." Goffman does not mention women at all in terms of the American "norms." (Goffman 1963, 128-129)
sexual abuse as the "primal cause" of one's contemporary "situation" if one wishes to do so. This sudden-recall--'now I understand why I'm not prefect'--version of childhood sexual abuse is socially validated and available to serve as a "necessary story" for anyone who needs it, and it is being used. Several examples of this theme will be demonstrated in the discussion of the interview texts, in the next chapters.

Let me reiterate, many people who were sexually abused as children have never forgotten the experiences, and many of them have had ample confirmation of the abuse--sometimes even from the perpetrator. And there is no reason to believe that even all sudden-recall claims are objectively groundless. Still, there does seem to be some other mechanism working in at least some of these claims, and I would contend that it is the power of a received and necessary story that is in operation. Because the definition of sexual abuse is so broad and "consequences" are synonymous with nearly all categories of personal "inadequacy" (including failure to be "happy"!), childhood sexual abuse becomes the perfect explanation for many of one's imperfections.

It is understandable how and why this version "works" for women. Caught between the demands of an achievement-oriented society and continuing social pressures to be more than simply "good enough," this narrative construct serves to explain perceived inadequacies and real failures, even as it makes any actual achievements seem that much more significant. Just having "survived" is, after all, a "remarkable achievement" according to the recovery story. In addition, by first blaming and then attempting to negate the patriarchal tradition, women seem to be claiming for themselves a new set of rules for approaching life, or at least a fresh starting point. It can be a very therapeutic story, at least temporarily.

Women dare not appear incompetent in terms of the "male success" story any longer without a really good "excuse"; otherwise, they implicitly validate the very definition of women as inherently "inferior" that was formerly used by men to justify keeping women in their "place" (i.e., that a woman can't do a man's job because she's naturally incapable of doing so). On the other hand, since some women at least appear to be fulfilling the "super-woman" (do it all) role, women who have not succeeded in male-defined terms must justify to men, to these successful women, and to themselves, why--in an era of equal opportunity and affirmative action--they have not been successful, or, at least, become as successful as they "should" have. The pressure on males to explain their inability to achieve the American dream is also great, but women are doubly vulnerable; they must not only become "successful" but must do so in ways that contradict (at least what feminists'
claim are) women's "natural" ways of thinking, relating, and being. Furthermore, women are not allowed to use these "women's ways" as excuses for not succeeding in a "man's" world. Blaming their "incompetence" on childhood sexual abuse indicts the patriarchal social order for perpetrating and/or allowing the abuses that caused their failure, while it absolves the survivors for not achieving equal success with their more capable sisters. Unfortunately, this double exoneration implicitly upholds the male standard even as feminists attempt to promote the new "women's ways."

Changing the rules

Radner and Lanser suggest that "coding allows women to communicate feminist messages to other women; to refuse, subvert, or transform conventional expectations; and to criticize male dominance in the face of male power." "At the same time," they caution, "because ambiguity is a necessary feature of every coded act, any instance of coding risks reinforcing the very ideology it is designed to critique" (1987, 423). The "healing" story both undermines and implicitly supports much of traditional male-oriented worldview. This recovery story appropriates some aspects of the male "hero quest" of self discovery and achievement. Women must struggle, actively and with determination, to do battle with inner monsters of self-doubt, shame, and destructive "coping" strategies (which are often male "successes," e.g., excelling at work). Women who "speak out" are constantly defined as "courageous" and "strong." Achieving this new feminist strength also means rejecting "male" definitions of "feminine" attributes; forgiveness and compassion toward the abuser are totally optional for the victim, claim Bass and Davis, and reconciliation is an unrealistic goal. On the other hand, traditionally "unfeminine" qualities and behaviors such as anger, assertiveness, and a certain amount of stubbornness are essential. Anger, in fact, is "the backbone of healing" (Bass and Davis 1988, 59).

At the same time, much of the "healing" story is a strange mixture of the "folk ideas" suggested by Alan Dundes in 1971 as typically American (therefore "male" according to Polanyi) and the newly touted "women's ways." There is significant emphasis on "the process of becoming"; the "recovery" is never actually achieved. Implicitly, the "frontier/wilderness" is never gone or completely "tamed." More explicit is the struggle-to-overcome-the-odds story, and the "Puritan ethic" of hard work (Dundes, 1971). "Healing from child sexual abuse takes year of commitment and dedication," write Bass and Davis. "But if you are willing to work hard, if you are determined to make lasting changes in your life, if you are able to find good resources and skilled support, you can not
only heal but thrive. We believe in miracles and hard work" (1988, 20). Also implied here, however, is that no woman can actually become "self-made," nor will she compete against anything but the "odds" of coping with the damages caused by the sexual abuse (which are there, of course, only because of what men did to put them there). Her ultimate goal is to become a real "woman"--emotional, intuitive, child- and relationship-oriented, able to feel good about herself and her body, and to have healthy sexual relationships. (See also, The Sexual Healing Journey, Maltz, 1991, for emphasis on healing one's "sexuality.")

There are tacit threats to both men and women in the apparent disruptions of the male hegemony: of women leaving their "place," of women no longer being willing to be "defined" by men, of women's rejection of male-oriented ways of knowing. These threats are partially obscured by the but-we'll-all-be-better-for-it messages that act as "distractions." Radner and Lanser claim that women use distractions as "strategies that drown out or draw attention away from the subversive power of a feminist message" (1987, 417). Such distractions may also divert attention away from the underlying "so we can be just like men, only better" messages that are implicit--and probably unintentional--in the discourse as well. Bass and Davis extol the ultimate social and communal benefits of recovery. Individual success (competitive male worldview) is not (or at least not admitted to be) the ultimate goal of recovery. Men, therefore, have nothing to fear from "proper American females" because such women will be living a different story from the male-dominated one Polanyi notes. These new proper women will still have those familiar compassionate and nurturing qualities so often classified as "female": concern for children and for nature. Once women are "healed," however, these attributes will have a new-found strength behind them and, therefore, will be more effective; women will still be women, just politically active -- in women's-issue areas (which will now, if you look closely, cover everything). Bass and Davis, for instance, contend that "[h]aving gained awareness, compassion, and power through healing," sexual abuse survivors "will have the opportunity to work toward a better world" (59). In fact, Bass and Davis sanction all the personally-uncomfortable and socially-disruptive aspects of the childhood sexual abuse recovery process by claiming these as precursors to the healing of nearly every contemporary social ill:

Now, imagine all women healed--and all that energy no longer used for mere survival but made available for creativity, nurturing relationships, freeing political prisoners, ending the arms race. The effect on the world would be monumental. . . .
Although your responsibility toward healing begins with yourself, it does not stop there. Child sexual abuse originates from the same fear, hatred, deprivation, selfishness, and ignorance that lead people to abuse and assault in other ways. These attitudes are woven into the very fabric of our society and oppress on a large scale. We get nuclear waste, inhuman conditions for migrant farm workers, the rampages of the Ku Klux Klan.

Part of your healing is the healing of the earth. If you don't make it a priority, there is little hope for the world. By and large, it is not the abusers who are going to write letters to our government, imploring them to stop funding slaughter in El Salvador. It's not the mothers who are too terrified to hear your pain who are going to fight for changes in the legal system to make it easier for children to testify. And how many pedophiles care about toxic waste?

It is you—who know something about both justice and injustice, about abuse and respect, about suffering and about healing—who have the clarity, courage, and compassion to contribute to the quality, and the very continuation, of life. (169)

Drowning in this "all that energy . . . available for creativity, nurturing . . . [and] healing" message are condemnations for why the world is a mess to begin with. We all "know" that "men" are responsible for "nuclear wastes" (nuclear energy is a side-product of W.W.II); men are behind the "inhuman conditions for migrant farm workers"; it is men who engage in the "rampages of the Ku Klux Klan." And it will not be men—the "abusers" and the "pedophiles"—who will stop other men from committing or abetting "slaughter in El Salvador."31

Slipped into this 'one world of love, peace, and prosperity' message is also an indictment of women who refuse to 'join the cause.' "It is not the mothers who are too terrified" (emphasis added) who are "going to fight"; it is the women who have joined together in a community of "courage" who will create a better world.

31 This 'men aren't fit to run the world and we women know it' message has been voiced openly many times by women—but only to each other. Rosemary Joyce, for instance, recorded the following during her study of a "rural Ohio grandmother," Sarah Penfield: "There isn't anything younger than a man! [agreeing with daughter] Why are men running the world when women are much more capable, thoughtful, and stable?" (1980, 293). Now, it seems, women are saying the same thing publicly, only very carefully.
Community building

In addition to exposing the problem to public scrutiny, the dissemination of personal accounts of childhood sexual abuse has relieved the sense of isolation for many survivors, allowing them to "identify" with others who have undergone similar experiences. In the process of exchanging stories (either in support groups or through artificial encounters with others through their narratives in self-help books, talk shows, docudramas, and awareness rallies), many sexual abuse survivors have received solace and have learned coping strategies. They have, also, sometimes created for themselves and each other a new "in-group," complete with values, attitudes, expectations, beliefs, boundaries, categories of meaning, and norms of behavior.

The "community" function is evident in the ideologies and practices of self-help groups such as Incest Survivors' Anonymous, which provides its users a set of beliefs and practices to live by, a particular way to think about their experiences, a forum for exchanging and transmitting information, and sometimes even a social life (Harvard Mental Health Letter, March, 1994). These community-affiliation and personal-identity aspects of claiming "incest survivor" as a personal appellation are also clearly discernible in the writings of Bass and Davis and other media treatments of the sexual abuse experience. They are evident as well in the "consciousness raising" activities of many "awareness" programs.32

"Telling" is "transformative," according to Bass and Davis, because through disclosure "you join a courageous community of women who are no longer willing to suffer in silence" (1988, 95). Their writings illustrate the community-building aspects of successful personal narrative sharing: "Being in a group with other survivors can be a powerful way to vanquish shame. When you hear other women talk about their abuse and are not disgusted, and when you see those same women listen to your story with respect, you begin to see yourself as a proud survivor rather than as a conspiring victim. As one woman said, 'When your counselor says, It wasn't your fault,' that's one thing. But when you have eight people saying it to you, it's a lot more powerful.'" (1988, 108-109).

32 Several of the interviewees commented on both the positive "not alone"/"not the only one" aspects of story sharing as well as on the sense of identity acquired through the label "sexual abuse survivor." The "identity" factor was not always welcomed, however, as will be shown later.
defined 'properly,' having been sexually abused might even be seen as a positive attribute: "After telling in a group, you may feel as though being a survivor, with all its difficulties, is not all bad. As one women said, "We're a beautiful, courageous bunch of women--and I'm proud to be one." (Bass and Davis 1988, 98). Bass and Davis do caution that identifying one's self as an incest survivor has potential drawbacks and limitations: "There may be times in the healing process when sexual abuse is all you see, times when you lose touch with the fact that you are investing all this time and energy in healing so you can move on to something else in life. There may even be a part of you that doesn't want to get through it... there is an identity in being a committed survivor of sexual abuse. That identity has been closely linked to your survival, and it can be hard to give up" (1988, 163, emphasis in original).

The special-interest group community provides members a safe platform for self-disclosure. "[T]o understand their own oppression requires social actors to control the discourse, to exercise their right to establish a dialogue with their own reality," writes Angueira (1988, 69). Perhaps more importantly, the community also serves as a power base for spreading the group's message and achieving its agenda. "[S]peaking out is not enough to convert experience into social change," admits Angueira. The effective use of "testimony" requires that "once the testimonial narrator has overcome the social hurdles to dare to speak out about the forbidden, she must also possess the capacity to understand and deal with the consequences--to elaborate a schema that defines and organizes both the event and its implications" (Angueira 1988, 75). Dealing with the "consequences" of speaking out and creating a socially-meaningful schema also requires controlling the discourse outside the confines and safety of the support group. "Consciousness raising" among like-minded individuals is one thing; consciousness raising in other-minded and perhaps resistant audiences is tantamount to conversion. To make "political" that which is "personal" has required women to "formulate categories that enable them to name and create symbolic representations for their perspective, thus allowing outsiders to understand the construction of reality of those who experienced the event" (Angueira 1988, 69). This involves nothing less than persuading others to join in a construction of social reality from the victim's stance rather than from socially established, and accepted, traditional perspective of male dominance.

Reality re-construction must be undertaken carefully. According to the healing-recovery story, there is no need for women to give up the familiar story of themselves as women if they don't want to; sexual abuse has provided a way of legitimating this very
story. Because of their experiences, women who have survived sexual abuse can become even better versions of 'mother nature' (environmental activists), stronger protectors of children, and more creative nurturers both of life and of relationships than ever before. At the same time, childhood sexual abuse provides the ultimate excuse for not achieving success in the "male-oriented" structure of the contemporary "American Dream," and absolution from the co-creation of the "fear, hatred, depravation, selfishness, and ignorance that lead [and led] people to abuse and assault." These 'still women--only better' messages help to counter-balance the recovery-healing story's requirements that women behave in some ways that traditionally have been labeled "male": women need to put themselves first, to get in touch with their anger, expressing it and directing it where it belongs (Bass and Davis 1988, 122-132), and they need to be directive and assertive about what they will and won't put up with in any relationship. In addition, in their attempts to liberate themselves from the dominance of men and from the limitations of their own pasts, women are, in a sense, also "betraying" their own mothers who lived (and who often still live) their lives within the old paradigm. The women who are unwilling to listen to the "pain" are often the survivors' mothers who don't want, even now, to hear about what happened in the past (or who don't believe the claims of childhood abuse are based in objective reality). Even those mothers of victims who are willing to listen and join the "cause" are implicitly indicted as co-constructors of the social system within which the child sexual abuse took place.

The potential socio-psychic ambivalence (individual or group) caused by being caught in "what appears to be a shattering reality," or of being faced with "choices [that] must be made between what comes to be seen as 'preferred' versus 'conventional' social expectation," requires the development of some sort of coping strategy (Bromberg 1982, 47). "Something like ritual learning processes must be invented and invoked," writes Bromberg, "if movement participants are to be successful in their efforts to revitalize society" (1982, 9, emphasis in original). Recovery-healing discourse provides the text for such a liturgy of reality re-making.

It has been particularly beneficial, of course, that men are also coming forward to expand the scope of the problem beyond just a "women's" issue. Still, sexual abuse has been primarily a women's issue, and the language and motifs of "recovery" are highly reflective of the larger Women's Movement discourse. This "identity crisis" of "women"--both personal and social--has required a ritual of response equal to the extreme nature of the crisis. The "brave and courageous" women who have spoken out (and, in the process,
claimed solidarity with the cause of social reconstruction) have also pointed their fingers at the culprits, at those who are to blame for their sufferings and/or for the social ills that have allowed such suffering to occur. If fundamentalists resorted to satanic "witch hunts" to test loyalties, punish "deviants," and re-authorize their definitions and boundaries, the Women's Movement has simply started a new "church"--and is now doing much the same thing.

Testimony

Perhaps the most complicated element in the present construction of dominant stories of childhood sexual abuse is the issue of personal "testimony." All of the scientific, social, religious, and familial issues and hypotheses surrounding childhood sexual abuse deal primarily with the source and the content of the account, and less often with the teller's motivations or right to speak out. On the other hand, all these arguments are based on the very "eyewitness testimony" in question: the personal narratives of ordinary individuals who are claiming that what everyone thought was so, wasn't so, and that the "experts" and authoritative powers-that-be, were, in one way or another, either wrong about, or simply ignoring, the issue of child sexual abuse for their own convenience. As Hufford points out (as many others have also), "culture heavily determines the ways in which the experience is described (or withheld) and interpreted" (1982a, 245). If the frequency of the Old Hag experience seemed "surprisingly high" (1982a, 245) to Hufford, perhaps it was because it had simply not been talked about. Indeed, he raises the question how "something so common can be so unknown" (1982a, 247).

Gillian Bennett, working on another "hidden" tradition (encounters with revenants), suggests that some traditions "never break surface on the official, or public, level" even when these traditions are maintained through face-to-face communication patterns because they are "never newsworthy or commercial enough to be exploited by the popular media, nor quaint and striking enough to be taken up and re-worked by men of letters" (1987, 75). When such hidden or "submerged" traditions do emerge into public awareness, "they appear to be entirely unfamiliar and strangely new" (Bennett 1987, 75).

This is, undoubtedly, part of the same reason why sexual abuse suddenly seems to be so prevalent in contemporary American society. After having been not talked about for so long, the seeming explosion of occurrence is overwhelmingly distressing. The fact that it was not talked about for so long, but is now being talked about so much (at least in some quarters) may also have much to do with the attractively-repulsive, politically-
inflammatory ways that this experience is being expressed. Hufford cautions against facile explanations for bizarre or exotic-sounding experiential accounts. To say that they are simply the products of easily explainable psycho-social forces such as projection, or only cultural category constructions, or attempts at social control, or the products of "creative urges," prevents investigators from considering other explanations. Refusing to give due credit to these explanations, however, is just as limiting. Hufford suggests that "the role of cultural models can be determined empirically." For example, a Jehovah's Witness should not speak of near-death experiences in the same terms and images as those found in "standard experience" accounts because the theological teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses contradict the motifs and meanings of the standard account (1982a, 253). In other words, the explanation should be consistent with the worldview (perspective) of the teller, the "explanatory system" employed should reflect the "experts" known to, and honored by, the teller.

At the same time, the particular theological teachings of a person's religion are only one of many overlapping "cultural models" available for interpreting and constructing narratives about personal experience (even in the case of a Jehovah's Witness, to some extent). Mass media communication practices enhance and extend "cultural flows" (the externalizations of meanings). According to Ulf Hannerz, "media have extended human experience and social life in many ways beyond the strictly local." "The distributive implications of media" have resulted in a situation where "the production of meaningful overt forms can occur in one place, their consumption in another... and... meanings can be stored for later use. Cultural flows can thus be extensively managed in space as well as in time" (1992, 28). Ultimately, this means we can now take each other "into account," without ever "encountering" each other. We can begin to form "relationships" with such media contacts, and create "imagined" or "felt" communities of shared worldviews. Thus even traditions of "community" are disrupted. We are now all part of a culture that has made childhood sexual abuse an acceptable explanation for a variety of social and personal "ills," and we have traded our stories face-to-face in a wide variety of ways.

Personal experience stories of childhood sexual abuse claim "eyewitness" validity: "I know what I know because I was there." "Testimony," on the other hand, "bears witness to" a contextualized "meaning" of an event, as well as to its occurrence, and is always in the service of a "cause"--personal or otherwise. When multiple "eyewitness" experiences are contextualized by social factions for their own purposes, a "collective
"experience" is created. To paraphrase some of Barbie Zelizer's (1992) concepts of communicative practices in public discourse: such public usage of eyewitness accounts capitalizes on the insecurity present in the social disorder, "names" the problem by transforming the experiences through concepts and meanings designed to shape moral consciousness in a particular way, all the while seeming to provide an egalitarian means of, and forum for, personal expression. While Zelizer's work focuses primarily on shamans and journalists as mediators between the worlds of "others" (otherness) and the world of "us" (normalcy), part of Zelizer's intention is to raise concerns about mediated experience and the social construction of reality: the relationships among impulses toward self-externalization, public discourse, and the control of meanings. Interestingly, her paradigm of mediated experience corresponds closely to Angueira's model of "controlling the discourse" to create effective "consciousness raising" testimony: name the problem, narrate the experience and its effects, ground both the narrative and the act of testifying within theoretical frameworks and social power relationships, justify testimony as an educational instrument, provide a forum for the expression of individual experience but imply that the individual speaks for the collective (1988). In both cases, the resulting "dominant story" of an experience turns "what I know" into "what everybody knows," and into that which we now all "take for granted." The next chapters will consider some of the ways that individuals employ and/or reject the dominant stories currently surrounding childhood sexual abuse.
CHAPTER V
PRIVATE VOICES

"The narrative frame is the typical story to which an idiosyncratic account of events tends to accommodate itself. As a story is repeated what is unusual in it is tamed by repetition and that which is typical and therefore fits the standard frame remains." (Robert S. Steele 1986, 270)

"That it calls for courage to disclose oneself to the world is self-evident, since untrammelled self-disclosure is rare." (Sidney M. Jourard 1971, 182)

From Public Discourse to Personal Experience

When, in 1977, Sandra Stahl established the personal narrative as a common practice/product of human communication worthy of consideration by folklorists, she noted that such tales resulted from a combination of innovative, individualistic input and "traditional" elements such as "narrative form, stylization, function, and even some elements of content" (19). Needing to emphasize the traditional aspects of such tales in order to legitimize them as folklore, unfortunately led to an implicit stance that socio-cultural guidelines provided benign, indeed, actually advantageous, forms within which communicatively "competent" individuals were relatively free to narrate their lives (24). Stahl even cites the "safe creation" (15) paradigm promoted by Henry Glassie in his 1971 work on folksongs. Despite her passing reference to the social functions of personal narrative ("the personal narrative, or at least the true experience story generally, is the primary traditional narrative genre for expressing traditional attitude" [22]), Stahl quickly backed away from the "experience" aspects of such tales. Stahl declared tales that were merely "topical," to be annoying and generally of no real interest to anyone but the teller (24). She promoted, instead, the personal narrative as an established and repeated item employed primarily in the expression and maintenance of a stable identity (24), a position she has continued to maintain (1989, 21).

Seventeen years and a lot of theoretical water under the bridge later, we are still learning to appreciate the full complexity of relationships comprising personal narrative
practices and the development and maintenance of socio-cultural collectives. Rosenwald and Ochberg, for instance, introduce *Storied Lives* (1992b) with the claim that the essays in their volume begin from the premise that the stories we tell to ourselves and to one another about our personal life experiences have power both to form and to deform our personal identities—a major expansion of Stahl's notion of the personal narrative as the reflection and expression of a "stable" identity. Rosenwald and Ochberg echo Stahl's (1977, 22) assertions that the "shared attitudes" of an individual's "reference groups" underlie the creation of any personal narrative when they note that personal narratives are created and told within the constraints of the narrative "frames of intelligibility" available within a particular culture (1992b, 2). On the other hand, they now contend that such frames also "determine and limit the power of personal narrative" as well as guide its formation and performance (1992b, 2).

Still, Rosenwald and Ochberg (1992b) are able to "imagine" that "it is possible, though surely difficult, to enlarge the range of personal narrative." Such alteration of the social parameters of acceptable narration might occur, they premise, if individuals and communities "become aware of the political-cultural conditions that have led to the circumscription of discourse" (2). If a widespread critique of such conditions occurs, they suggest, "it may alter not only how individuals construe their own identities but also how they talk to one another and indirectly the social order itself" (2). On the other hand, because they focus on the psychological aspects involved in the fashioning of personal identities, Rosenwald and Ochberg (as well as other authors in their volume, 1992a) are primarily concerned with "formal vulnerability of personal narratives to cultural strains" (1992b, 4). Since they "assume that the explanations individuals offer of their lives are inevitably shaped by the prevailing norms of discourse within which they operate" (4-5), they fail to appreciate the role of personal narrative as a major force in, and a mechanism through which, such prevailing norms are created, maintained, and, potentially, critiqued.

The interaction between public discourse and personal stories of childhood sexual abuse reflects many of these concepts—both Stahl's and more recent ones—and demonstrates, as well, the socially formative power of personal narratives. Personal "identities" are indeed involved; individuals who now wish to speak about childhood sexual abuse need to have their "selves" confirmed as sane, rational, believable, truthful, and worthy. In order to do that in the present circumstance, however, they must un-make and re-make both their own and other's previously held concepts concerning incest and other forms of child and adult sexual abuse. The tropes, themes, structures, and
performance contexts of the stories they tell serve those who "speak out" (in public forums or more private ones) as examinations and illustrations of the "theoretical problems" of creating storyability and tellability for their narratives, as propaganda for reality re-making, and as a way to form community consensus (and therefore group support) for their viewpoints. Story creation and story telling become ways "of giving social shape to private experience" (Bennett 1986, 432).

Rosenwald and Ochberg (1992b) do wisely caution against uncritical examination of narratives, since it is possible for "any system of discourse . . . to enshrine within itself the traces of its fealty and thereby to restrict the enlightenment and development of a community" (6). This is true, they note, even of recently developed systems of discourse such as those promoting gender or minority equality, even though such systems often pride themselves on having severed their "bondage" to other discourse systems such as "Western patriarchy" and "cultural imperialism" (5-6). What, at first, appears to be an emancipating endeavor on the part of such groups, Rosenwald and Ochberg warn, may simply result in a different set of limitations on what may, what should, and what ought to be said, and what not.

In the last section, I have attempted to demonstrate some of the sources, processes, and results of the contemporary public discourse surrounding childhood sexual abuse. In this section, I will examine some more "private" expressions of this experience (while acknowledging, of course, that participants came to the project understanding that their words could, and likely would, be made "public"). These personal accounts reflect the shaping forces of the public discourse within which they were created and told. In addition, some of the interviewees' subversive resistance to, or outright rejection of, the public discourse reveals some of the constraints they perceive on what should or should not be said despite the current apparent "freedom" to speak out about childhood sexual abuse.

The Interviews

The material that forms the basis for discussion in this section came from seventeen, one-on-one, tape-recorded interviews conducted between June 10, 1992, and December 6, 1993, and one earlier session that took place April 4, 1991. Altogether, sixteen females and two males were interviewed. The first interview was used to formulate the questions used in the later interviews (see appendix E), and while it diverges somewhat from the later ones (being a bit more random in nature), the same basic issues were covered, and I
have decided to include it in my discussion as well. Of these eighteen interviews, only
fifteen will be included in the present discussion; the two interviews conducted with male
informants will be left for future consideration. In addition, one individual requested to be
dropped from the study after the interview took place. I will also be discussing some of
my own childhood experiences and some anecdotal material acquired during the course of
the study.

Interviewees were obtained through a variety of sources. The initial interview was
arranged after the individual had openly acknowledged her childhood experience with
sexual abuse in a group we were both involved in for reasons other than the particular
discussion of sexual abuse. When I told her about my intentions to begin a dissertation
project involving interviews with adults about their experiences of childhood sexual abuse,
she immediately volunteered not only to be part of the study but also to be my trial
interviewee. Some later interviews resulted from similar dynamics: someone would
disclose an experience of childhood sexual abuse, and I would approach the individual
later, privately, to ask if he or she would be interested in participating in the project.
Several additional interviews resulted from a call-for-participants notice I placed in
Folklines, the newsletter of the Ohio State Center for Folklore Studies. Most resulted,
however, from queries about my dissertation topic. When asked, I spoke openly about the
project, explaining that I was studying the kinds of stories adults tell about their own lives
and that I was particularly interested in how people speak about childhood sexual abuse
because it was an experience that, until recently, could not be spoken about at all.
Occasionally, after the ensuing discussion (which usually involved both the subject of
sexual abuse and more general concepts of personal narrative as well), someone would tell
me that he or she knew someone else who might be willing to participate in the study. I
would request this third party to act as intermediary, arranging for the potential
interviewee to call me or asking whether it would be acceptable for his or her name to be
given to me so that I might instigate contact. While third-party contact was not essential
to finding interviewees, having a mutual acquaintance act as intermediary reduced some of
the uncertainty for interviewees who had not already met me in some other context, and
I'm sure that I would have had much more difficulty without such referrals. Once contact
had been made, however, the third party dropped out of the picture entirely; no third-party
contact ever heard back from me whether an individual actually participated in the project
or not. In one case, an interviewee also became a third-party contact; in another, the
third-party became an interviewee.
Many of the interview sessions required repeated arrangements; interviewees canceled because of schedule conflicts or failed to show up or to be at home for scheduled interviews. The first time or two that an interview arrangement fell through, I persisted gently, letting the interviewee control as much of the situation as possible as to when and where we would meet. If attempts to arrange an interview met with failure three times, I interpreted this as a sign of underlying reluctance to participate in the project, and I simply thanked the potential interviewee for his or her interest in the project and suggested he or she contact me—at a more convenient time—if still interested in participating later. Not surprisingly, to date no one who was thus "dropped" from the study has re-established contact. While the almost constant media portrayal of sexual abuse discussion and disclosure would suggest that everyone is talking about sexual abuse these days, my own experience is that most individuals are still very selective about where and when they reveal their past involvements with sexual abuse.

Interviews took place in a variety of private settings—in my home, in the interviewee's home or place of work, in a private office at the university made available for my use; I encouraged interviewees to choose the place and time. Interview sessions lasted from as little as half an hour to over two hours. Tape lengths vary from approximately twenty-five to around one hundred minutes, with most running about forty-five minutes.

All taping session began with some casual chit-chat and an informal explanation of the project even though all of the interviewees had received previous explanations of the study prior to scheduling the recording sessions. If there were no questions about the project, I asked the interviewee to read the disclosure form (see appendix C), then asked again if there were any questions about the study. If not, the interviewee signed the consent form, and I asked for permission to begin taping.

The primary consideration in the interview process (from first contact through follow up) has been to insure as much confidentiality and anonymity as possible. Some interviewees were quite willing to have their names used, but, in several cases, legal considerations restrict this option. Others were willing to participate only after being assured that every attempt would be made to protect their identities. Several indicated that having been involved in childhood sexual abuse is still a "discreditable attribute" (to use Goffman's 1963 terminology) in most contemporary social circles. For these reasons, I have decided to use pseudonyms for all participants. Names have been assigned at random to correspond to the first twenty letters of the alphabet to facilitate the use initials
for the transcripts. No name corresponds to the letter "I," which is used to indicate the "interviewer," nor was the letter "Q" used as so few common names start with this letter. The names assigned to interviewees are gender specific, but there is no other relationship (personality, ethnicity, order of participation, age, etc.) between interviewee and the name assigned. Only generalized background information will be given about the interviewees (see appendix A), and all identifying markers that appear within the transcripts have been altered whether this appears evident in the text or not. On the other hand, all data is representative of an individual's biography; for example, ages given reflect appropriate ranges, no one's parents are listed as dead if this is not the case and vice versa, and no composite identities were created. All proper names have been changed, locations have been generalized into appropriate geographical areas, and occupations have sometimes been generalized into categories of work. Some interviewees actually performed this service for themselves during the interviews by intentionally deleting names and other specifics.

No one was speaking about the experience for the first time; all had previous "practice" to one degree or another. All stated explicitly, or implied indirectly, that they had also "rehearsed" the experience through self-contemplation in a form of journaling and/or idionarrating--telling the story to the self. All of the women had "experienced" sexual abuse in one form or another. (The reason for the quotation marks around the word "experienced" will become clear later.) Of the two men, one (Frank) had experienced childhood sexual abuse as a victim, the other (David) was the brother of one of the female interviewees. I decided to interview David because he had expressed enough interest in my project to put me in touch with his sister and because he presented another aspect of the need to talk about and make meaning of an "experience" with sexual abuse, in this case of finding out that his father had abused his sister. After interviewing David, I had hoped to solicit more such "secondary" participants. While I did not accomplish this goal for purposes of the current study, I consider it one of the long-range possibilities for expanding the project.

Participants ranged in age from early twenties to almost sixty; nine were in their forties. All were White and college educated; many were still actively engaged in pursuing degrees. All were basically middle-class in socio-economic terms and were living in central Ohio at the time of the interviews. Most had been born and/or raised in the midwest. I do not suggest that they are in any way "typical" of sexual abuse survivors. In some cases, interviewees chose to participate because of their own academic activities;
several called in response to my advertisement in *Folklines* even though they did not know me personally, volunteering their services in support of a fellow-student's dissertation project. On the other hand, I never asked whether or not a person had attended college before I conducted an interview. It may well be that most of the participants were responding to the dissertation-research aspect of the request, although a few seemed to be availing themselves also of the opportunity for "protracted autobiographical discourse" that Elliott Oring claims folklorists provide for their informants (1987, 252).

Some participated because they feel such research into sexual abuse or into narrative processes are important. Some participated because they want to get the issue of child sexual abuse discussed as widely as possible so that society will begin to "deal with" this specific issue, with other forms of child abuse, and with detrimental socio-cultural attitudes towards women and/or sexuality. Some stated explicitly their reasons for participating. "I respect the need to get data," commented Lara; Elizabeth considered the interview part of her healing process.

At any rate, these were the individuals who were, initially, most accessible to me and most willing to take the "risk" of participating. They are also the population most likely to "self-disclose" according to Jourard (1971), who found that Whites, females, and American college students in general are more likely to disclose personal information about themselves than the other populations he investigated. Middle-class females are also the segment of the American population most likely to openly accuse family members of childhood sexual abuse according to the False Memory Syndrome Foundation. Indeed, the contemporary social rhetoric of child sexual abuse--from attacks on day-care workers to law suits against parents--has been largely a middle-class phenomenon. The particular population of my study was also highly self-aware and fortuitously articulate. These attributes, when combined with the fact that several people in the study are also engaged (or have been engaged) in similar or related areas of academic study and with the fact that a few had heard me discuss some of the concepts behind the project before they participated, resulted in some very self-reflexive or project-reflexive comments. On the other hand, the project questions were designed to encouraged such reflexivity, and all interviewees became ethnographers as well as informants.

As I neared the end of the interview stage of the project, I was presented with an opportunity to expand into a different population: lower socio-economic class, minimally educated, and more diversity in terms of race and ethnicity. While I consider the issue of demographic "populations" problematic at best, I would be interested in pursuing this
option at a later time. Texts from such a group might reveal socio-cultural differences in attitudes toward childhood, toward sexual abuse, toward narrativizing practices, or toward susceptibility to media influences. Strong similarities between such texts and the ones I collected, on the other hand, might indicate the power of the media and/or narrative drift towards consensus within "American culture" for any particular contemporary life experience.

Self Disclosure

"Disclosure begets disclosure," Jourard decided (1971:27) after an experiment that revealed that self-disclosure by an interviewer increased willingness by an interviewee to disclose personal information and enhanced the depth of that disclosure. When an interviewer spoke briefly, subjects also spoke briefly and vice versa, particularly when the interview involved sensitive or intimate subjects. I had originally planned to reveal my own status as someone who had experience with childhood sexual abuse prior to the interviews (see appendix D; phone contact script). After conducting the first interview, however, I realized that the interviewee had never asked if I, also, were a sexual abuse survivor. Whether this was not as important to her as my willingness to listen to her story or whether she was simply too shy to ask, I do not know, but after listening to her tape I realized that she had spent a great deal of time and effort making sure I would understand her experience. Because she could not assume that I knew what she was talking about, she could not simply say, "Well, you know how it is" to avoid articulating or explicating her own situation. For this and other reasons to be discussed later, I decided not to preface interviews with any self-disclosure, and I deleted this information from the telephone contact form and from other pre-interview discussions. As one interviewee pointed out in our chat after the formal phase of her interview, this undoubtedly changed what I was told to some degree.

Preliminary anecdotal information suggests this--at least until very recently--has been the case. Three individuals, working in separate educational and/or "support" groups for minority and poverty-class women, claimed that most of the women they encountered came into the groups accepting sexual abuse as an unavoidable, if not necessarily pleasant or desirable, part of growing up. While these women did not suggest that their experiences were "no big deal," their attitudes did reflect a "life stinks; so what else is new?" pragmatism that often seems to be missing from the public discourse with its attempts to fix blame and to create innocent "victims" and "damaged" survivors.
Perhaps most interesting is that few interviewees asked me whether or not I had any personal experience with childhood sexual abuse, and those who did asked only at the end of their own disclosure. I was never asked about my own experience, or lack of it, when I discussed the topic of my dissertation in any public setting. According to Erving Goffman, in contemporary American middle-class circles, even when we suspect that an individual may be concealing information about a personal deviancy that "should" be revealed, we still do not have the right to ask any sort of question that will force that individual to disclose the facts or to tell an intentional lie to avoid disclosure. "When we do ask such a question a double embarrassment results," writes Goffman. First we are embarrassed for "being tactless," second, the other individual is embarrassed both for having been caught concealing a social stigma and for having put the rest of us "in a position to feel guilty about embarrassing him [or her]." "Here, the right to reticence," asserts Goffman, "seems earned only by having nothing to hide" (1963, 64). Self-disclosing information about sexual abuse, however, violates traditional taboos in several categories: speaking about one's own sexual activities (abusive or not) transgresses cultural categories of modesty; having been involved in deviant sexual activity (willingly or not) leaves one vulnerable to the social stigma that surrounds sexual deviancy; and "remembering" often involves a great deal of psychological and emotional pain, which the speaker may not be able to keep under socially acceptable "control." Under "normal" circumstances, apparently, such information can't even be volunteered much less requested. Project interviewees who did ask either must have felt they had, in a sense, "bought" the right to ask by their own disclosures, or their need for reassurance that I did have a sense of their experience and sensitivity toward their situation outweighed their reticence.

I have great admiration for the willingness of all the interviewees who took the risk of talking to me. The phrase "Speaking out is an act of courage" is, indeed, often a most appropriate metaphor for sexual abuse survivors' willingness to discuss their experiences. The disclosure of a discreditable secret may prejudice "not only the current social situation, but established relationships as well; not only the current image others present have of [an individual], but also the one they will have in the future; not only appearances, but also reputations" (Goffman, 1963:65). Some of the interviewees speak fairly openly about their experiences. Others prefer to be highly selective about when, where, and with whom they reveal their "unusual pasts," and they do not wish--for one reason or another--to have their experiences revealed in a such a way that they can be identified with them, preferring instead to "pass" as "normals" by "the management of [the] undisclosed
discrediting information" about themselves (Goffman, 1963:42). Still others would prefer no association with the label at all, feeling that the designation of sexual abuse survivor either does not represent their experiences or fit their perceptions of their experiences.

These individuals accepted the risk of speaking to me even though I could not give them specific details concerning how I would analyze the material, both because such information would have influenced what they said and because I was still in the research phase and truly did not know exactly what sorts of conclusions I would draw. Nor did they demand mutual disclosure--and the mutual vulnerability that is gained by reciprocal disclosure in risk situations--as a guarantee of my willingness to guard their confidentiality. Although I never hesitated to confirm an interviewee's suspicion if asked, in only a few instances did I actually disclose any details of my own experiences. When I did, it was because my own experiences seemed to reflect aspects similar to those of the interviewee's, and interactive discussion seemed mutually beneficial. My reticence in the other situations resulted partly from a desire not to get involved in any "my experience was worse than yours" situations; comparison of "trauma" levels was not the point of the study and would not have been beneficial to anyone. In addition, I wanted to encourage each individual to use her or his own language and to discuss whatever she or he thought was most important to the experience.

Both Elliott Oring (1987) and Gabriele Rosenthal (1993) comment on interviewees' understanding that the interviewer has a preconceived agenda. Rosenthal comments that "Narrators do not simply reproduce prefabricated stories regardless of the interactional situation, but rather create their stories within the social process of mutual orientation according to the definition of the interview situation" (64). Oring captures this phenomenon succinctly when he writes: "The way we make informants talk about their lives profoundly alters the lives we document" (246).

I spent a great deal of effort trying not to influence the rhetoric of the interviewees. For instance, I tried never to use the words "story" or "narrative"; instead I promoted the study as an investigation of how people "speak about" life experiences. Discovering what forms, motifs, tropes, and meanings interviewees would employ while talking about their experiences was part of the subject of the investigation. I did, in fact, state during a couple of interviews (when the interviewee was clearly expecting a response) that I was being intentionally careful not to comment because I did not want to model language or to influence what the interviewee was saying or might say next, and this seemed to be accepted as part of the parameters of the situation. During the interviews, I engaged in
"attentive listening" practices: focusing visually on the interviewee, nodding frequently, providing non-committal acknowledgment that I was following what the person was saying ("um-hmm"), laughing when it seemed appropriate. This was not interactive conversation; I avoided evaluative comments and engaged in no second-storying except in those few cases where my own situation seemed closely aligned with the informant's and, even then, only after the main interview had been concluded. Interviewees, however, came to the study with fairly strong notions of "interview" behavior and seemed to expect little interactive conversation. The interview-context mind-set may also be part of why so few asked about my own experiences.

Originally, the project had been conceived as an investigation of some of the mechanisms that control speaking about particular life experiences, and to this end I developed a series of interview questions that dealt specifically with speaking about childhood sexual abuse: did the individual try to tell about the experience as a child; who did she or he try to tell; what sort of responses were received; if the individual did not try to tell, why not; etc. (Appendix E). As a "grounding" for my understanding of this information, however, I asked interviewees to "tell me as much or as little about the childhood experience" as they wished. Responses to this initial request varied dramatically, ranging from extended, detailed descriptions of the experiences to a simple disclosure that said little more than "I was sexually abused by my father till I was fourteen." (Rachael). I tried to ask questions during this phase only to clarify points that I had not followed. Instead, when the interviewee hesitated, I would begin to count, thinking that if I reached ten I would ask a question. I rarely reached ten; the interviewee nearly always continued. On the other hand, when transcribing the tapes, I realized that when I did resort to asking a question, I sometimes must have been counting pretty fast; we Anglo-Americans are notorious for our dislike of "silence" when we are "talking" with each other.

While the questions on the set list had been intended to reveal secondary social processes, they often became the basis for more primary details—an interview paradigm confirmed and demonstrated by Rosenthal (1993). Certainly I received a great deal more information than if these questions hadn't been used, but the choice of what to reveal was always up to the interviewee since she or he could have simply answered questions with narrowly-focused response statements, and this sometimes happened. More often, interviewees used stories to illustrate their answers. Still, I did not want to invade the privacy of the interviewee unnecessarily, and originally I felt that I must leave the
interviewee as much control over the discourse as possible to satisfy both the intentions and the integrity of the study. I now believe that I may have been unnecessarily cautious about asking questions, and I will discuss some of the reasons for and the effects of that caution a bit later.

I used a variation on Dexter's "elite" interviewing techniques, letting the interviewee decide as much as possible what was relevant. I was willing, indeed eager, "to let the interviewee teach [me] what the problem, the question, [and] the situation" was (Dexter 1970: 5); therefore, I kept questions to a minimum until after the interviewee's initial self-generated material. Even though I always started the taping by repeating the project description format that first I would like the interviewee to tell me as much or as little about the childhood experience as he or she chose and that I would then follow this with some questions about talking about the experiences, interviewees often wanted me to direct the interview. Some simply needed a starting point or encouragement to begin.

Kay, for example, needed help getting started even though she claimed that she talks "very openly about the incest experience." She asked me how specific I wanted her to be, warned me of the "graphic" nature of her experience, and requested my assurance that I would let her know if she were being "too graphic." When she resorted to "Why don't you ask me some questions," I tried: "When did the incidents start?" "Can you remember how old you were?" Since she could not "remember," my attempts at non-directive questioning failed completely. She eventually declared that "maybe it'd be easier if I just, OK, well, I'll just tell you. . . ." (1:006--020). She then launched into what amounted to a life history. Kay simply needed "permission" to say whatever she chose.

Others, like Lara, wanted some parameters and guidelines (for transcription key, see appendix B):

1:004
L:  Um+, can I ask you a question first^?

I:  Um-hm sure!

L:  >>I'm glad you have the tape recorder on, I will tend to, say, you might want to have, some of my concerns, um<<

(3sec)
I guess I'm interested in what you're studying.
now
only--only because
it gives me, a frame--I could approach this so many different ways^+
but in a situation like this it's so³ incredibly artificial because you never talk³ about something like this unless say you're a doctor³

I: um-hm

L: That I almost have no way of approaching it. it's like  
(laughing) I, I need a starting point!  
Um³ um³ can you just tell me a little bit about yours--and that leads³ me into mine³, a little / bit /

I: /OK/ /OK/  
L: / about your project? / 1:004-012

While this interaction seems primarily oriented towards Lara's awareness of and desire to fulfill my project needs, her request for guidelines also expresses another, underlying source of concern, which is revealed in the comments following my attempts to expand on what she has already been told without providing too much language or direction. (Sections are continuous.)

1:012
I: Basically what I'm, I'm looking at is, is how people speak³ about this experience.

L: Um³-hm

I: Um³  
/what/  
L: /all kinds of/ sexual abuse? or /just/ particular?  
I: /yea/  

Any kind, in fact people will say "I'm not sure that this is sexual abuse³" And I'll say "well do you think it is?" "And if you think it is³ then that's what I'm interested in".  
Ah³ and then a lot of it deals with your attempts to speak about the experience.
L: OK

I: Um+  
   >> do you talk about it^ don't you talk about it^ who do you talk about it with and so forth:<<

L: OK

I: So I'm very interested in--in, how people speak about the experience, and who+
   and what kinds of responses / they've gotten. /

L: / OK that very much / answers kind of my question in a way because um (2sec)
   I do talk about it
To people but
I don't, just, talk about it, and so
when I do it's for a purpose and, and although
to being a student, myself^ (2sec)
I respect the need to get data it's also very hard cause to
start talking about it, it's
it's almost like you don't talk in a clinical situation and this is like, very clinical^

I: Um-hm

L: Um, OKs , so that thank you that (rapid and some overlapping talk)
   [answers some things so I can tell you about it now]
   um
   um
   but how? (2sec)
   OK um+, I guess to set the stage m--, when I was+ um+
   as I recall I think I was 10^ and my brother . . . (1:012-028)

The interplay between Lara's use of "talk" (by which she means "inter-personal," rather than simply verbal, communication) and the assertion that the interview situation is "artificial" and "clinical" reveals several issues and concerns. Since the setting is very "clinical," it is, potentially much like a therapist's or doctor's office where everything is expected to be "revealed." Indeed, Oring suggests that folklorists are much like
"psychiatrists" (as well as like anthropologists and fortune-tellers) in that we are all "primary providers of arenas" for individuals "to talk about themselves for extended periods of time" (1987, 252). Unlike the psychiatrist, however, what is revealed to us will likely be "exposed" publicly, and Lara and several others in the project expressed their needs to know what the expectations were, possibly to relieve them of saying "too much."

Gabriele Rosenthal (1993) suggests that, in a thematically-based interview situation, the interviewee may hesitate to offer certain information not only because she or he does not understand what is expected or may not know what is relevant but also because he or she may not wish to reveal personal involvement with the issue in question, may believe that the issue at hand is personally irrelevant, or may wish, consciously, to evade the subject to avoid revealing stigmatizing information (78-79). Several of these elements (clearly evident in this introductory section of Lara's interview) appeared to be determining factors to one degree or another in all the interviews; Lara was simply the most openly articulate about such issues. On the other hand, even though I had thought my response to her opening question was not "directive," Lara used this information to focus and structure nearly everything she told me. She returned, often spontaneously, to the notion of "talking about" throughout the interview, and, in the process, established she has more than one concept of "talk": talking to a therapist is quite different from "just talking" about her experience.

L: So ah those the, two time that I brought them up were to professionals. (3sec) And that, it's kind of interesting because it's like once you, once you mention it once you do+ talk about it, then it opens the gates.

I: um-hm

L: Not+, flood gates necessarily but but then you're able to, I'm, it sounds+ strange+ I don't know how to say it another way but until you talk about it you can't talk about it.
(2sec)
Yea and it--it's odd but
you keep it quiet until there's a
there's a real reason to talk about it, and then when you do though, it's
easier and easier!
despite the
preface to this
on the tape
it is easier and easier to talk about it.

I:  um-hm

L:  Um, if this+
    had been sent to me
    maybe after talking to the first therapist
    (laughing) Hah
    >>I wouldn't have done it, you-know "what business is it of yours? I
don't care if you are studying it, you-know this isn't, this isn't for
your knowledge" << (1:221)

Later:

1:288
L:  See it's+ come out < more and more >
    the story of it has come out in different situations
    when it's appropriate to the situation, and that's+ the thing that's hard,
    what
    it's very easy to remember the clinical ones^

I:  um-hm

L:  And+, the big outbursts^, but when it's
    in a conversation where it could help somebody else+
or where

    you're sort of second-storying someone saying "yea me too that's
    happened to me"
    those are harder to remember . . . (1:294)

While therapists and clients exchange "knowledge" through talking, inter-personal
relationships require a somewhat different kind of "talking," and disclosing information in
such a context has a different purpose. Even when the setting wasn't "clinical" (such as
when the interview took place in someone's living room), the situation was still not simply
"inter-personal" in the sense of two friends sharing life stories. There can be no doubt that
these factors, along with knowing that whatever was disclosed could be made public, affected what was said. Different contexts require different strategies, and the interview questions encouraged informants to comment extensively on how, when, why they would be inclined to reveal information concerning their involvement with childhood sexual abuse and when and why they would not. More of these comments will be considered later.

Dexter suggests that interviewees must "get something" out of the interview (1970: 36-38). Many people, he contends, will not open up as much with a novice or ignorant interviewer as with one who is at least moderately knowledgeable in the subject area of the interview (Dexter, 1970:35-36), and my unrevealed status may have inhibited some of the informants. Jourard also contends that mutual disclosure is the first step to intimacy, while one-sided disclose is a form of reducing the other to the "status of an object" (181). It is true that in studies involving expressive performances that there seems to be a distressing tendency to reduce individuals to texts. Yet the accounts of their experiences as stories to be told are often as important to the individual as the experiences themselves are. Simply undertaking the study indicated that, at the very least, I was in the process of becoming informed, and interviewees were given the "opportunity to teach"--one of the possible return-on-investment rewards that Dexter posits as reasons why people are willing to participate in such interviews (37).

The ability to separate text from personality does have at least one positive aspect--protection of an informant's identity. Self-disclosure produces consequences as both Jourard (1971) and Goffman (1963) are quick to point out. "Possibly, then, persons disclose or fail to disclose themselves in accordance with the consequences that they expect to follow," writes Jourard (17). I tried to reassure participants, particularly those I would be likely to encounter in other situations, that what they told me during the interview situation, I would not "know" in any other context. My own attempts to separate the information from the personalities involved were sometimes more successful than even I had intended. I was chatting with a woman one day in a large-group situation, and I kept thinking that I knew her from somewhere else. I quickly "placed" her in the context where we are most likely to encounter each other, but it was not until about an hour later that I suddenly remembered that she had also been one of the interviewees on the project several months earlier.

According to Jourard, "We seek to have a true being in the experience of others under two conditions: when we experience it as safe thus to be known; and when we
believe that vital values will be gained if we are known in our authentic being, or lost if we are not" (1997, 181 emphasis in original). At the very least, interviewees had a chance to talk to a willing listener in a relatively safe environment.

One final note. I have chosen to indicate at least some verbal performance style (inflections, emphasis, phrasing, etc.) in cited transcript sections rather than just present the words of the interviewees because the "meaning" of what is being said is often conveyed more through such performance elements than through the words themselves. In addition, I wanted the women to be "speaking" their own stories as much as possible, and while no key can accurately represent human speech patterns, I believe that some "voice" is due the speakers represented here.

Analyzing the Texts

Subjective data is notoriously situational. It reflects: both who is and who is not present, the agendas and expectations of both the interviewer and the interviewee, barriers to spontaneity such as concerns for confidentiality and embarrassment, social norms about emotional expression and language usage, notions of academic and social purpose, a desire to be well thought of by the interviewer and any subsequent audience for the material, attitudes toward the subject of the investigation and the questions asked, and the influence of extraneous factors such as noises, interruptions, room temperature, etc. Thus, as ethnographic researchers everywhere now acknowledge, in any interviewing situation, what we are getting is only the informant's current picture of the world, in the form he or she is able and willing to present it, within a particular contextual setting. What is revealed under other circumstances or to other listeners may be very different indeed.

To complicate matters further, as John P. Dean and William Foote Whyte (1970) point out: "The difficulties in interpreting informant's reports of subjective data are seriously increased when the informant is reporting not his present feelings or attitudes but those he recollects from the past. This is because of the widespread tendency we all have to modify a recollection of past feelings in a selective way that fits them more comfortably into our current point of view" (122).

Whether or not the "current point of view" may actually be a more comfortable "fit" is a contestable point. Still, interview texts may reveal information about the "organizing principles" that underlie an interviewee's "opinions, attitudes, and behaviors" (Dean and Whyte, 1970: 120-121). Since, it is, in fact, these "organizing principles" involved in the
interviewees' attempts to speak about their experiences (primarily as they appear in their choices of terminology, metaphors, and motifs) that is focus of investigation here, how closely the information presented during the interviews does or does not reflect objective reality, or how far it diverges into purely subjective and/or fanciful interpretations of experience, is mostly tangential to the current study. What interviewees told me, I will assume is based, for the most part, in an appropriately-significant objective reality. How they told me what they told me is a different matter.

The interviews, and the resulting texts, could be analyzed in many different ways. Psychological theories of narrative use in personal identity formation are clearly relevant, as are narrative theories of texts as presentations of self. Contextual performance theories are also applicable. One interviewee, for instance, was sitting in a rolling-style office chair and literally backed away from the interview as far as she possibly could, first running into a waste basket, which she moved out from behind her, and finally backing up against the wall of the room we were sitting in. Decisions--stated and/or implicit--about how much to tell and how best to tell it are also evident. Proper names of towns or individuals, for instance, went unspoken in some cases or were slurred through in others so that they are not easily transcribed, and this seems to have been done as often to protect others as to protect the interviewee's self. However, such considerations are, for the most part, outside the scope of the current study.

In addition, while I did not ask for life histories, this is often what I got, and the texts would be well worth analyzing for their structural features. For the present, I will limit my observations of this aspect of the accounts to simply noting that the narrative processes and products often resembled Susan Stewart's (1978) insights into "nonsense"--"the overlapping of two disparate domains" (35) more than they did Labov's (1967) tidy linearity; Linde's (1987) demands for linguistic, philosophical, and semi-expert "coherence" within any given "life story" (346), or even Stewart's own definition of "realism" as the "proper conclusions" developed within the interactions (including personal experience narratives) of an "everyday lifeworld" premised on the historicity of intersubjective time and bound by "common-sense reasoning" (19). Interviewees were often still in the process of negotiating the "discontinuity" of their lives (Linde, 350), and still looking for the "causality" (Stewart, 138-143) that would allow them to make sensible stories. The accounts were often "disorganized" even when the interviewee claimed to be trying to provide a chronological history; "I'm probably mixing up my stories here," commented Rachael. Some circled back repeatedly to pick up what they viewed as
important threads, engaging in a sort of "infinity of digressions and returns" as though they were trying to get to "a place that can only be reached by exhausting all possible pathways" (Stewart 132). Kay was consciously aware that her account was not linear:

1:116
K: . . . and I'm skipping around here
   trying my best to
   keep it as chronological as possible however
   I do have a tendency to veer off to try to
   fill in some of the
   some of the important things that happened in my childhood\^ (1:118)

Not only were there multiple narratives embedded within the accounts, as would be expected, there were often narratives embedded within narratives--multiple nesting (Stewart, 123-129). "Flashbacks" (and consequently flash-forwards) served as common plot devices, possibly reflecting the "flashback" memory processes claimed to be common among sexual abuse survivors. On the other hand, they may have been employed simply as narrative strategies of "adequate causality" (Linde 349) as interviewees attempted to create explanations that were neither "too thick" nor "too thin" so that their present selves would seem neither "overdetermined" nor "accidental" (Linde 347-49). "I'll back up," offered Judith. "I need to back up here," Kay commented repeatedly. "So this is jumping fast forward," stated Lara as she attempted to relate an early-childhood situation to an early-adult one. "Simultaneity," also appeared in the accounts in the sense that some interviewees considered past experiences to be more "present" now than they had been when they happened originally, and they expected these experiences of the past to continue throughout their lives in the form of lingering effects, a notion firmly maintained and vigorously promoted by many authors and "experts" on childhood sexual abuse, and transmitted through a variety of popular channels.

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34 Stewart uses these phrases in her discussion of funhouses and labyrinths, places with "empty centers" (132). I am not suggesting any sort of "non-story" by the use of the image but rather referring to the making and remaking that seems to go on in many sexual abuse survivors' lives and accounts--trying to get to a satisfying "story" by constantly circling back to incorporate new memories and loose threads. The image is also highly analogous to the familiar "recovery" injunction that "The only way out is through," a common 12-Step program saying and one which appears in The Courage to Heal as well (Bass and Davis 1988, 15).
How much of this is the result of—and how much the source of—the influences of public versions is impossible to say. That accounts of childhood sexual abuse resemble each other could possibly mean that the experiences are, indeed, intrinsically similar. It is also possible that linearity is a very privileged "male" and/or "Western" form while anything else has simply been discounted as being "not narrative," and that what I recorded reflects "women's" quite normal ways of organizing and recounting experience. Still another possibility is that the tendency for researchers to extract and publish identifiable "narrative" structures means that they have inadvertently focused on those parts of life accounts which are, in fact, the well-rehearsed (often repeated to self or others) tellable tales of commonly-spoken about life experiences and, in doing so, have reinforced notions that these are the "normal" forms. In a very real sense, the entire account was the narrative (story) of the interviewee's life—at least as it related to childhood sexual abuse. Attempts to separate the transcripts into descriptions, settings, evaluations, definitions, historical chronicles, chat, facts, answers, narratives, or any other structural categories, overlooks the collaboration among these elements as they conspire to create unity within these "life-texts." The project theme called forth, framed, and undoubtedly structured, to some extent, the information presented. On the other hand, each woman "fleshed-out" that framework in her own fashion, and each consistently returned to certain personal themes and concerns. While I will admit that standardly-defined "narratives" appeared often (frequently as evidential support for some personal assertion), I will not limit my discussion to "narrative" aspects of the texts. I will, however, still use the term "narrative" only when it applies in the more traditionally established definition.

Clearly, sexual abuse victims/survivors could not speak out at all, in any format, had they not been given tacit permission to do so from the current socio-cultural climatic gatekeepers and had they not received, mostly via mass media, rhetorical models for encoding their experiences. To use a contemporary analogy, they have (intentionally or incidentally) down-loaded a freely-available, highly-promoted software program into their personal

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35 Bennett's research supports the notion that there may be a "women's way" of storytelling. Bennett noted women's preferences "for letting events cluster loosely round some key idea or image rather than developing the plot-line in straightforward chronological progression, their fondness for backtracking and repetition, and their failure to resolve the story" (1989, 168). Bertaux-Wiame (1981), Gergen (1992), and Speer (1992) also contend that women's storytelling strategies are different from men's.
computers, and they are now being encouraged to use it to manage their personal accounts. Sometimes this program is just what they need; sometimes it requires alterations before it can effectively process the personal data. For the present, I will focus on the inter-play between the public stories and the private accounts, exploring how the interviewees attempt to negotiate a balance between the input of public "experts," media models, and their own private experiences, that is, how they seem to be trying on what fits and adopting and/or adapting what works to personal advantage. And what they try when what is "available" does not fit. Simply noting correlation between public and private versions is not sufficient, however. The publicly-available software of social discourse is, at least partially, constituted from and supported by individual stories, and these women are also--to varying degrees--returning their individual versions of the program back into the larger system, "re-making" that system in one sense or the other. Therefore, how, when, and why they react to the public discourse is as important as their awareness of it.

The Interview Accounts

Some elements within the interviewees' accounts are clearly indicative of their awareness of and attempts to adopt or adapt the public discourse surrounding childhood sexual abuse to their own experiences and situations--or to reject it when it doesn't fit. Unless otherwise specified, such elements within the individual accounts will be cross-referenced to page numbers in The Courage To Heal (CTH). Of the eleven (of fifteen) interviewees who said they are likely to read material related to childhood sexual abuse, eight named this book by title. Of these, one (Elizabeth) quoted extemporaneously from the volume and another (Patricia) said that it had been used as a formal basis for discussion in a recovery group in which she had recently participated. Of the seven women who did not specifically name this volume as one they had read, two claimed they were not likely to read books specifically about childhood sexual abuse at all (even though such material would apply to their situations), and for two others childhood sexual abuse was a tangential issue in their lives, and they, also, tended not to read such books. (Three of these four women who did not read extensively--or at all--about sexual abuse said they were not likely to watch television treatments of the issue either). One of the interviewees, Helen, does some counseling work with sexual abuse survivors, and she mentioned The Courage to Heal as a book she would give or recommend to clients specifically because it had "stories in it" and was not as "clinically oriented" as formal, theoretical texts.
Besides being widely popular among the interviewees as well as among the public at large, The Courage to Heal encapsulates the most common elements of nearly all current rhetoric on "healing" from childhood sexual abuse. (While it deals mostly with non-satanic discourse, it does include some specific material on "Satanism" and "ritual abuse"—417-21. Satanic abuse is not currently as active in public discourse as in "recovery" rhetoric.) Therefore, whether or not the women had actually read it, this volume reflects most of the themes, attitudes, and language they would have encountered in American discourse on the issue. The page numbers given are not meant to imply that these were the only places where a certain element appears in The Courage to Heal; once an issue or term was established as important, it came up repeatedly in a variety of ways throughout the book. Page citations are merely indications of occasions when an element received some focused attention. While Bass and Davis are always careful to provide balancing statements (for instance, that some perpetrators are cured of their deviant impulses) such statements tend to be glossed over quickly, while the primary message receives much more space and attention. In addition, all presentations of issues and themes in The Courage to Heal included at least one personal experience narrative (PEN) as demonstration and supporting evidence: theoretical explanation and practical model appeared side-by-side. I will occasionally reference a PEN or a particularly salient phrase where they seem especially germane to the interview material being discussed.

Citations

The most obvious reflections of 1990s public sexual abuse discourse were direct citations of media material, including statistics. Numerous "secondary" citations appeared, as well, in language and thematic choices and in the form of pronoun shifts from first to second and third person. Such shifts suggested that the interviewee was citing taken-for-granted "facts" that "everyone knows" and employing "they say" style references to invisible-but-indisputable "experts" even when such constructions were not used explicitly.

Direct Citations

Patricia referred, by title, to the made-for-TV movie Shattered Trust: The Shari Karney Story the day I spoke with her on the telephone to arrange an interview. She asked if I had seen the show, and when I acknowledged that I had, Patricia quoted Shari's line "If I can survive being sexually abused by my father, I can survive anything," which she claimed was pertinent to her own situation also. While this conversation was not tape
recorded, and Patricia did not repeat this phrase when we met, she referred to the movie again in other ways, citing "the hands," law-suits, and financial reimbursement for "damages" done during childhood. (These passages will be presented later.) Patricia also referred, by title, to The Prince of Tides. After a brief narrative recounting her "first experience" of sexual abuse, which took place around age nine and is one that she "actually remembered," Patricia quickly moved into the following segment:

1:036
P It was just in the last couple years
um+ that
after I started having some flashbacks
um, there was
a+ situation
(2sec)
where I had
watched the movie called The Prince of Tides
and+ I watched that movie+
uh+ I was going through a lot of uh+ upheaval as far as my life—which I
still am^
Um+ you-know financial
stability^ um
work
situation health wise
you-know a whole lot of things.
Uh after viewing--watching that film^ I went to bed+
and+ apparently my--I had body memories.
and I was in such excruciating pain^ in the
vaginal area um
pelvic
and
it was like, my body was remembering that I had been
apparently penetrated
in^ the vaginal area where and I mean I went through the whole night! in
extreme pain, and ah
I mean I was
crying and
and then I re--
finally it dawned on me
When I was little
my mother use to boast about the fact that
"Oh, well you used to have your nights and days mixed up and we used
to, give you beer^ in order to
get you to sleep."
And it dawned on me
that
this had--had to have happened when
at some time where they had given me beer
because I would not have been
conscious
but my body would have remembered.
and that
the association^
uh because I have some
a couple of pictures where
as a baby
there I am
with a beer bottle
and it just all fit!
the fact is, that my mother you-know made that boasting
it's like, "oh, you-know, we had to feed you beer" and I thought
(2sec)
the ignorance
(2sec)
the absolute ignorance
of
my folks
not knowing that
for them
drinking the beer is ok^, but here I am as the little person
beer could possibly kill me^ 
so they had total disregard
a lack of understanding
awareness
and poor--poor parenting skills (1:068)

For Patricia, this specific media model (which deals extensively with "repressed" memories) allows her to fit together the otherwise puzzling pieces of her life. [CTH, PEN of response to TV presentation (75-77); PEN involving "jigsaw puzzle" (72)]. The "body memories" (CTH, 74-75) make no "sense" without "conscious" memories. However, when the body memories are put together with her mother's comment that "we used to give you beer in order to get you to sleep" (verified by the baby pictures of Patricia holding a beer bottle), Patricia is able to understand how she could be having the one kind
of memory without the other. She is also able to begin making sense of how the parents who should have loved her could have abused her: their "poor parenting skills" were at least partially responsible.

Patricia returns to the theme of movies as vehicles for making sense both of her own experiences and of childhood sexual abuse in general several times during the interview. In the next passage and in the one following, although she does not recall the name accurately (substituting "Turner" for "Karney"), she is referring in both cases to the movie she had mentioned to me on the phone a few days earlier, Shattered Trust: The Shari Karney Story. She returns to the theme of "body memories" in the first of these two passages, this time indirectly referencing the ("they say") public discourse that validates such "flashbacks" as evidence of growing personal strength: "they say that when you are ready for them or prepared for them these memories will come up when you are able to handle it or something" (CTH, 82). She acknowledges, however, that these flashbacks require "an adjustment in [her] memory." In the second of these passages, she echoes the stance both of the movie and of most current recovery rhetoric, that sexual abuse leaves severely debilitating results (CTH, 33-39). In addition, Patricia promotes the "court suit" solution to the problem (CTH, 307-311). (She had told me a bit earlier about unsuccessfully trying to get her parents to pay for her therapy.) [The following quotes are from CTH: "my life suddenly made sense" (80); "framework to fit new memories into" (81); "strong enough to know" (82); "I'm left with the damage" (82).]

1:080

P: So, um, a lot of things just kind of started to click
and apparently
what I remember's
more than likely that I may have been under the age of two years old
when thing had occurred
where the body memories
um
(2sec)
and
(2sec)
um periodically+ when I
view a film^
or see a movie--like for instance this last
this last
Monday when there was film about the
um
about Shari Turner I believe her name was
um
(2 sec)
where she saw hands
ah, that shadowy hands and--and a vision of her as being a little girl
(3 sec)
that
caused flashbacks for me because I remember the hands.
that's all I remembered were
the shirt
rolled up shirt sleeved
hands, coming at me and I remembered
periodically
the one time I woke up and
a
in a sleep
and I saw those hands
^ coming at me
and I immediately
got up
and I think to hit (hand motion--hitting something in front of her)
"No
you can't do that".
And a sometimes
right now I'm afraid of those
those flashbacks.

I: um-hm

P: Um
but apparently . . .
ah+
I guess they say that when
you are+
ready for them or prepared for them that these memories will come up,
  come up
when you are able to handle it or something.
there's some folks
right now my life's a mess and I'm having a hard time trying to survive
  and with these flashback

huh
I don't know?

um, but I remembered that
as far as
(3 sec)]
I guess it's an adjustment in my, memory
that things occurred even before the age of nine possibly two, possible one years old I--I'm not sure but I do know my body remembered and it was such a painful experience. (1:108)

1:700

P: That's why I lo--I really appreciate that program last Monday, {few words garbled} the fact that getting legislation and having (2sec) it was interesting how the court system was in--was looking (dramatic, deliberately spoken) "Well we'll keep victimizing the victim" and we'll you-know save", and it's like (2sec) wait-a-minute. (3sec) what they did^ like for instance what's--what my father did to me^ has affected me ^ (3sec) < immensely > (3sec) And yet--and it's like "you've got to take responsibility." I mean the if he hadn't of done what he had done^ maybe I wouldn't of had {two/three words mumbled}. I have spent money, as far as therapy^ ah+ medication^ ah+ as far as relationships^ ah . . . (side one of tape ends) (1:726)
Citation of statistics

I expected to find more statistics than I did; however, most women simply referred to the scope or source of the problem in generalized terms, such as, "everywhere," "the system," or "society." Still, the now-famous "one in three" statistic (CTH, 20) came up a couple of times. Rachael slips it in as "I know so many women, you-know, and I really think it is like a third of my friends who have been raped" (1:125). ("Rape" is Rachael's term-of-choice for sexual abuse.) Olivia, on the other hand, cites it specifically while explaining her reasons and motivations for wanting to write about her experience:

1:495
O: To help other survivors
   and to help
   well, PARTLY to tell my story\^c
and partly to make the world aware that one in three
women is sexually abused by the time she's eighteen. (1:499)

Noreen, who claims to read more "fact sheets" than books, quoted numerous other statistics, among them the following:

1:218
N: You-know the statistics say that
   80% of all of our
   ac--um
   incarcerated people in the United States have been abused either
   physically, mentally, or sexually, or all three. (1:221)

1: 229
N: The statistics that I've become aware of say that 80% to 90% of all
   women who are alcoholics were abused as children. (1:230)

Secondary Citations

Secondary citations constitute less direct referral to the public discourse but are still clearly indicative of an individual's awareness of it. Such indirect referencing often occurs through pronoun shifts from first person to second and/or third.

The phrases "you know" (often sounding like a single word) is a common verbal filler in American speech patterns. I have indicated this usage in the transcripts by typing such fillers as a single term (you-know) whenever I was fairly confident that it was intended as such. On the other hand, "you know" is sometimes an indirect attempt to
solicit agreement. I tended to ignore "you-know" where it seemed a normal pattern in an interviewee's account unless the rhythm of the phrase changed, that is, if, after repeatedly having been spoken quickly and indistinctly (as a filler), the phrase suddenly became two distinct words. I also considered the phrase rhetorically significant when it was a noticeably infrequent aspect of the interviewee's account.

Other shifts from first to second person, while also common in American verbal communication habits, often seemed more indicative of rhetorical strategies than simply of individual speaking patterns. Pronoun shifts allowed the interviewee to "educate" me through the indirect dissemination of "factual" material, while still not claiming herself as the authority.

Pronoun shifts served other purposes as well. They allowed some interviewees to demonstrate, indirectly, that they had adopted a public discourse position or principle, such as was shown in the "they say that when you are ready" passage from Patricia's transcript above. For others, such shifts became a way of expressing reluctance to adopt fully the public models and meanings. Sometimes both were happening at once. Shifts back and forth from first to second and/or third person emphasize such personal adoptions of, and/or ambivalence towards, the public input and climate. The following excerpts demonstrate these processes.

When I asked Helen about when and to whom she was likely to talk about her experiences, she replied:

1:240
H: Well this, actually my answer may have an impact on trying to look at some of your data on other people too \(^\text{part of the problem in being an incest survivor is that you don't have very good boundaries.}\)

I: Um-hm

H: So that \(^\text{probably}\) when I had identified what it \(^\text{was, it's like, I+}, \text{inappropriately spoke about it to a lot of people.}\) \(^\text{Now that I understand it and I've healed my boundaries are much stronger so I don't talk about it as freely.}\) (1:246)
Helen's use of the second person in "you don't have very good boundaries" seems to be not only an indirect usage (rather than a direct address to me specifically) but also a plural usage, and, as such, implies a group norm among incest survivors, even though Helen uses the singular term "survivor." Her shift back to first person allows her to emphasize the "facticity" of weak boundaries as "part of the problem in being an incest survivor" while, now, distancing herself from this "problem."

This now partially-separate stance of Helen's implies both experiential verification and eyewitness testimony to the "fact" that weak boundaries are--as often stated--a fundamental part of the sexual abuse survivor experience. At the same time, the implicit distance she creates through the pronoun shifts also suggests that it would not be appropriate for me--or anyone else--to connect her with any negative or stigma-laden connotations associated with childhood sexual abuse, since she has now "healed." There can be little doubt, however, that Helen has adopted the premise and the language of too-often-transgressed and therefore underdeveloped boundaries common to childhood sexual abuse discourse (CTH 34, 182-184, 276-281).

When I asked Helen to clarify her use of the term "inappropriate," she again employed pronoun shifts to instruct me in both sexual abuse theory and her own now-"healed" position. This time, the use of third person pronouns, such as in the phrase "adult survivors when they're going through healing. . . . they want people to take care of them," further emphasizes the extent of Helen's "healing" and, therefore, of her distance and objectivity--and thus of her authority to speak. (CTH. 99-101: need to find the right people to help; 161-166: wanting to be taken care of).

(Section continues uninterrupted from last section cited.)

1:246
I: You used the word "inappropriate", how?
do you mean?
you spoke inappropriately?

H: Oh to people who, who really had no need to know^ um probably revealing+ more+ than I needed to to people certain people, um where you know they just
(3 sec)
not necessarily
I don't think it was a factor they didn't want to know but it was just not
(2 sec)
something they needed to know to deal with me
in the relationship we had.
So

I: So you're more?
you're more
um
particular or?, selective, now?

H: Um-hmm (yes), part of it has to do with the fact that you-know
adult survivors when they're going through healing are so needy they
want people to take care of them.

I: Um-hm

H: And part of getting people to take care of you is letting you know
just
how bad you've had it, you-know?

I: Um-hm

H: Um
but once you've healed and you're able to take care of yourself you don't
have that need to do that.
So basically when--when you're
when you're that open about telling your story
where you're not just really discriminatory at all
< It puts a, burden on other people who don't need to carry that
burden>

I: Um-hm

H: You're
you know
for the most part, it's your burden, to carry
and you need to find the right people to help you with it.
(last few words spoken very softly) (1:267)

These same themes returned later when I asked Helen about her attitudes towards
media (specifically television) treatments of childhood sexual abuse. This time her shift to
first person allows her to make an indirect comment on media disclosure. If her
experience is in any way typical, and she suggests it is by ending with the generic second-
person pronoun), then her account suggests as well that those who do appear on TV may
have motives for doing so similar to the ones Helen knows she would have had, motives
which she states would have been "inappropriate."

1:317
H: Huhhh, I see a need, to make
you know this
this
accepted at a--at a wider level, so
so people
feel
more comfortable about
(2 sec)
you know
beginning their own healing and
being able to repair+
damage in the family, um
but^, so much of it is just
further
trauma^,
it creates further trauma.
And some of them turns it into a circus^, um
I think a lot of people don't take it as seriously as they would if it was
if it was treated with
a different
air (laughs)
Um
One that's (three/four word indecipherable)
um
(3 sec)
I can honestly say probably I would have
when I first figured this out and, and stuff like that
strangely, I probably would have been willing to do one those shows^
you know? but now+ it's like I
I know my reasons for wanting to do it
would be, for, revenge^, you-know, pointing the finger saying
you-know, "you're wrong", and a, you-know
"poor me"^
um
(4 sec)
Again it would have been, inappropriately trying to have other people you-know like this time the entire nation! (we both start laughing) trying and take care of me. It, it just really depends where you are in the healing process. (1:339)

Catherine, Patricia, Ginger, Olivia, and Kay also volunteered narratives concerned with speaking "inappropriately" during what Kay called the "talking syndrome" stage of "purging" oneself of the secret. Olivia called it the "broken record" and "telling to people on buses" stage. Olivia also cites this "first stage" motif common to most accounts of "inappropriate" speaking and explains why she stopped. (Betsy recounted a personal narrative involving a single, different and more personally-defined episode of "inappropriate" disclosure, which will be considered later.)

1:460

O: And then I used to I went through the stage the first stage of working with all this stuff that you've just remembered is to tell everybody^ and+ I would tell people and it would turn them off^ I lost < one friend > that I had had since I was like nine or ten because she just couldn't, handle it when I was talking about it. And she's gone^ . . . (1:467)

Later I returned the discussion with Olivia to this issue:

1:622

I: So so you said that you don't, you don't attempt really to talk about this as a part of your life to most people anymore.

O: No and I have dealt with the < initial horror > of the memory so that I'm not (laughing) talking to people on buses any more (we are both laughing) yea, um (5 sec) I--I did mention to a professor
at work about a month ago.
and
I was
my childhood abuse makes it hard for me to do some things
and he said "Oh, Olivia quit being a, broken record about your abuse"
you-know
"Go on with your life^"
"nobody ever said life was going to be easy".

I: Um-hm.
O: And

I: How do you feel about that /advice/?
O: / I felt / hurt.
I felt hurt--I'm not a broken record--I WAS! a broken record (laughing)
four years ago when I was talking to everybody
but I, I mention it very rarely now
I felt stepped on.
(very softly) Didn't want to share any feelings [any more]

I: Um-hm
O: But I try not to mention it much, now
I know people don't want to hear--it's an untellable story. (She is
employing my terminology here.) (1:648)

These comments on "inappropriate" speaking out both demonstrate and contradict
Bard's assertions about "idionarrating." Bard argues that "the obsessive need to repeat the
details of traumatic experience to oneself often creates self-acceptance" (1992, 68), and,
indeed, such idionarrating seems to be serving much the same purpose for many of the
interviewees. Bard also contends, however, that this "obsessiveness transfers to a
constant need to tell these 'unchanged' stories no matter what any member of the
[support] group verbally or non-verbally expresses as a challenge to veracity" (1992, 68).
She also insists that such narrative constructs are highly resistant to audience feedback
even outside "support" groups, and that a teller will continue to tell a story as though he
or she were relatively oblivious to gestures or comments by listeners that the story is
uninteresting or inappropriate in some way (1992, 67).

The segments presented above (and additional comments by the interviewees and
others I have spoken with) indicate that the tellers did become "obsessed" with their tales
at some points. Still, Olivia clearly indicates that she "adjusted" her story to meet the
expectations of the group she was in. (This segment will be presented later. Olivia's comments even indicate she was "learning" her story in this group--and from this group.) All the segments reveal that the tellers did notice that others "didn't want to hear" their tales and that they eventually responded by not telling them so freely. While their accounts may not have been adjusted to the audience-of-the-moment, they clearly have been adjusted for "next" (possible) audiences, both textually and contextually. All of the interviewees who commented on the "obsessive" talking stage considered such behavior somewhat pathological. Olivia also considered attempts by others to keep victims/survivors from talking an additional form of "abuse," a stance supported by much of the recovery discourse.

Implicit citations

More subtle than either explicit references or pronoun shifts are themes and language choices. It is impossible to assess accurately the presence of public discourse terminology in the accounts. For example, while six of the eight women who claimed that some member of their family (or society in general) was in "denial" named The Courage To Heal as a book they had read, much of the language that has been used to discuss childhood sexual abuse has been borrowed from and/or been shared with other contemporary personal and inter-personal "problems" such as "dysfunctional" families, "co-dependency," and other forms of child abuse and domestic violence. The term "denial," for instance, can be traced back through co-dependency theories of how non-alcoholic family members are involved in alcoholism, through the "stages" theory of death and dying made popular by Kubler-Ross (1969), to Freudian psychology. Meanwhile, "stages" itself reflects both theories of human development (e.g., Erikson 1959) and the "steps" of "recovery" or "healing" so closely associated with Alcoholics' Anonymous and other 12-Step programs (such as Incest Survivors' Anonymous). All such terminology is indicative of the current impetus towards the "medicalization" of social problems and inter-personal relationships (which need to be "healed"), and these and other psychological and medical terms are now commonly applied to broad spectrums of American life. Usage of such terminology at least indicates the interviewees' contact with and awareness of the public discourse, and the accounts are replete with the "language" of childhood sexual abuse (e.g., denial, healing, dissociation, stages, inner-child, repressed, victim, survivor, boundaries, flashbacks, body memories, shame-based, disassociative, etc.).
While the specific source is rarely identifiable (since there is so much overlap in the public rhetoric), certain elements do seem to "hang together." Those who claimed to watch the most television treatments of the subject or who identified themselves as active readers of popular culture books on sexual abuse were also the ones who most often included specific references to such sources in their personal accounts. In addition, the six interviewees who said they were still involved in, or who said they had recently been involved in, "group" or other interactive therapy/counseling situations for childhood sexual abuse (either as a client or a counselor), used the greatest volume and the widest variety of current, pop-psychology terminology as it appears in social discourse on "healing" (Kay, Helen, Elizabeth, Patricia, Noreen, Catherine). By contrast, while both Rachael and Ginger are readers of CTH, they are also involved in public rape-awareness programs, and they tend to use the language of "Women's Studies" (e.g., rape, domestic violence, sexualization, sexual assault) as much, or more, than they do the psycho-medical language of recovery. In general, those who have never participated in group counseling situations used the least amount and variety of pop-culture childhood sexual abuse language, indicating perhaps that such language is (as is any language) "learned" more readily and more effectively in social interaction.

What is more interesting than simple usage is how language was used—or not used. Some of the most common terms, such as "incest," could only be employed comfortably when speaking about others or as part of a general discussion. Self-referential terminology was often vague, generic, unique, and/or highly euphemistic. For example, by the contemporary definition that incest is sexual abuse of any sort by a blood or by-marriage relative, twelve of the fifteen women could have used the term "incest" when referring to their own situations. In the self-generated portion of the interview, however (i.e., prior to directive questions), only three women directly claimed the label (Olivia: "incest survivor"; Lara: "incest"; Catherine: "incest victim"). Three other cases of self-referential labeling appeared through indirect usage of the term. Kay started one segment of her account with "I had my first incest memory..." Noreen commented that the odds of becoming a perpetrator increase "if you're an incest victim yourself"—a fate she had avoided. Elizabeth approached this term even more indirectly:

2:128
E:  , It's funny this older friend that I have
will never refer to
ah, what happened to me as incest
um is almost it's like it's a four-letter word or something and I-I find that almost amusing at this point in my life. (2:131)

Part of this ambiguous self-labeling may have to do with the confusion about the terms "incest" and "sexual abuse." Even Lara, who stated that her brother had "forced... vaginal intercourse" on her, expressed confusion about terminology: "Is it rape or incest? I guess it's both." (See also, "Incest as a Transitive Verb," pages 50-55, this volume).

On the other hand, confusion can not be the only determining factor here. Only seven of the women categorically used even "sexually abused" in a self-referential way in the self-generated part of the interview even though all but two were self-identified as such by having responded to my call for participants who had experienced "any form of childhood sexual abuse." The reluctance to use the commonly-available and publicly-encouraged terminology of "sexual abuse" (either as a "victim" or a "survivor") in an explicitly self-referential way must, therefore, reflect either discomfort with disclosing personal involvement with this plight or with the vague and ambiguous nature of the public use of these terms, which creates a sense that one's personal involvement must be specifically qualified. Sexual abuse (both term and experience) is still laden with negative connotations for individuals, regardless what the media would have us believe. The creative and varied euphemistic terminology used to describe their experiences may also bear witness to these women's resistance toward considering childhood sexual abuse as a fully-tellable personal experience or to a perception on their parts that it is not accepted thus by others.

Elizabeth, for instance, who eventually applies the incest label to herself indirectly, as shown above, initially describes her abuse as "a lot of experiences of touching and feeling and also things that were sexual connotations..." Catherine, even thought she claims to have been sexually abused by four different male relatives and, therefore, obviously qualifies for the term "incest" (when applied generally to sexual abuse by relative), begins instead by stating that "Both my father and my brother offended me." Catherine briefly defines the "kind of offending" engaged in by her father and then describes her brother as a different "kind of offender." A bit later in the interview, she begins to use the term "sexual abuse" instead of "offended," and once she makes the shift, she does not return to the earlier terminology.

Other initial definitions of their experience were equally as creative. Ginger claimed to have been "transgressed," and worried about a cousin being "initiated" into the same
world of male transgression. Anne described her experience as a relative "bothering me." "The experience" and "the incident" were popular euphemisms, and these terms were often used--by nearly everyone--after the initial definition of experience. Judith, who used virtually no pop-culture jargon and who claimed to have gotten "screwed literally and figuratively" by her experience, simply referred to her experience as "it." The two women who didn't originally view the label "sexual abuse" as even applying to themselves defined the experience as the "situation" (Susan) and the "happening" (Meredith).

Pop-culture terms other than "incest" were often adopted quite casually. In the process of answering the "tell me as much or as little" prompt, Catherine stated--almost in passing--that there were "definitely ritualistic types of thing involved, um animals were involved and things like that..." (1:033). A bit later, I asked her to clarify her usage of the term "ritualistic." In her reply, which follows below, Catherine demonstrates that this term is broad enough to cover both satanic ritual claims and more prosaic situations. However, dropping the term into her account without elaboration leaves much to the interpretation and imagination of the listener. On the other hand, while Catherine seems to back away from defining the activity as satanic ritual abuse (suggesting that it was only "something in the neighborhood" of such practices), her emphasis on the "ritualistic," "rote," and "systematic" mode of the behavior as well as on its connection to "some big whole," leaves the listener with the impression that it may well have been satanic ritual abuse without her having to openly state this position.

1:063

I: You used the term "ritualistic" could you be a little more could you tie-in that term?

C: /Yeah yeah/

I: /what you mean by that/

C: Well I THINK (3 sec)
Yea I think if I had to say it like it fell under some big heading in terms of a category something in the neighborhood of satanic ritual abuse, um I mean I don't think it was like anything like belonging to a coven I don't think it actually technically falls under that, but my brother < and+ his friend > were very ritualistic in what they did, um
Adoption, Adaptation, Rejection, Commentary

Even minimal usage of common sexual abuse language and motifs (they were never completely absent) can not be taken as indicative of any lack of awareness of the public discourse. The subject itself is nearly inescapable; it has played a major role in the evening news, morning papers, and daytime talk shows for several years. In addition, all the respondents had watched at least some sort of televised presentation of the experience and the issues surrounding it, and all had read some sort of printed material on the subject. The decision, conscious or unconscious, not to use the most readily available forms and meanings, therefore, indicates some level of rejection of the public discourse, or some lack of "fit" between the publicly-touted versions of this experience and the individual's experience.

More indicative, therefore, of the interviewees' relationship to the public models are the ways they adopt, adapt, or reject specific attitudes or claims of the public discourse. These relationships are most evident in the interviewees' thematic choices and in their treatment of these themes when speaking about their experiences. Adoption was demonstrated through supporting narratives, through pronoun shifts, or in explicit statements of agreement with the public rhetoric. Adopting a public model would seem to necessitate little more than applying its elements to the personal experience. Public models and the elements that make them up are already "validated" thus making any individual's use of such materials much like "second-storying." Still, the personal experience has to be re-conceptualized and newly verbalized no matter how good the "fit" between the received model and the personal experience. Therefore, even clear instances of adoption often included markers of adaptation as well, and adoption and adaptation often overlapped considerably. Evidence of rejection and of extensive adaptation of
available material to fit personal situations and needs--past and/or present--was more subtle. Again, adaptation and rejection often happened together, while explicit, outright rejection rarely occurred. Rejection necessitated citation (direct or indirect) of the expected norm--the "should be thought/said" of the systems of discourse now surrounding childhood sexual abuse and then some sort of explanation and/or demonstration of how and why the individual came to think otherwise. In the example presented above, Catherine's hedging when she is pushed to define her terminology indicates some sort of ambivalence. While she drops the term "ritualistic" into her account casually (indicating at least some desire to adopt this construct), she also knows that such language carries a great deal of "baggage" with it, and she glosses over it quickly. Catherine's attempts to qualify, when I ask her to say more about the word "ritualistic," may reflect her attempt to "adapt" material that either she is reluctant to use and/or which doesn't actually fit. Her verbal negotiations may also indicate that she is afraid that I will challenge or scoff at her assertions of having experienced "ritual abuse," especially if she uses the term "satanic" too directly or emphatically. Other elements in her transcript indicate that this terminology has been suggested, and possibly even encouraged, by persons Catherine has come to respect greatly, and that she has adopted (or is in the process of adopting) the "ritual abuse" construct and has fairly well adapted its language to her experience (and her experience to it). During the interview, she is simply being cautious of my potential disbelief.

"Commenting" on issues represents yet another type of response. The interview questions encouraged both reflection and commentary about specific issues and about childhood sexual abuse in general as well as about the social discourse surrounding this experience. Such responses permitted (and reflect) more "distance" than the women's personal accounts, and they often critiqued the discourse quite openly. The range of responses can be demonstrated through the theme "emotional involvement is essential to healing" (sub-text: "intellectualization of the experience is bad"), which is particularly prevalent in the rhetoric of material that has a "feminist" orientation (CTH, 23). For instance, while Davis and Bass condemn "separating" one's intellect from one's feelings, and imply--in passing--that "thoughts" will indeed be needed during the healing process, they emphasize "feelings" throughout the text. Breezing through the book, they claim, means one isn't "feeling safe enough to confront" necessary issues (23).
Adopting

Olivia has clearly adopted the "feelings are important" injunction of sexual abuse survivor discourse. Early in the interview she gets excited when she begins to have an emotional response to what she is disclosing:

1:022
I: Now the
    um, molesting by your parents was an ongoing? thing in your
    childhood?

O: Uh, yea, my
(2sec)
    Oh I'm getting feelings, it's wonderful
    cause I used to do this like a, weather report, you-know no feelings.
(1:024)

Olivia returns to this theme later in the interview. Within the course of the brief segments that follows she: 1) indicates that she has read "incest books," 2) claims that she had "very inappropriate responses" (which indicates that she has accepted an outside critique of her response--one given by others she considers more qualified to know what her response "should" be, 3) has adopted the stance that emotional involvement is essential for adults dealing with childhood sexual abuse, 4) identifies the source of her enlightenment/education, 5) assesses her own progress in terms of this stance, 6) employs a pronoun shift to reference the truth and validity of the stance as well as to educate me as to how (7) sexual abuse victims "survive" during childhood and why emotional responses are so important to their attempts to "deal with it" now.

1:298
O: I had very inappropriate responses to
    um
    I would read the incest books
    that you're supposed to be horrified at and I would get turned on [you-
    know] by them.
    Then I would feel like more of a failure.
    and a horrible person.
    and
(2sec)
    I had divorced my feelings
    from myself, so that I had trouble
    feeling anything [connected with it]
Um
(2sec)
I wrote a lot of poems+ that were rhymey+ and

cute+
and+
didn't have the right of
emotional
feeling in them
to
go along with, the horribleness of what was happening.

I: Whose?
whose assessment is that, is that your assessment
/or is that somebody else's? /
O: / Oh!!+++ That's the assessment / of other people.

I: Of other people, OK.

O: Yea, that the tone
didn't fit
me. . . . (1:312)

(recites a poem she had written during this stage)

1:324
O: I've since gotten more feeling into the poetry
um
everyone said it was like weather report when I talked to them
there was no feeling in it.

I: Who's everyone?

O: I went to incest
meetings
group meetings.
And+
this was the
the first stage you go through^
When you start to deal with it-- you've divorced feeling from it^
so many time--so many years in order to survive it that you just can't
feel feelings connected to it. (1:332)

(side comment)

1:337
O: I hope to get
so I feel
enough
that I can write. (1: 338)

Adapting / Rejection

Ginger also directly addresses the issue of feelings, again demonstrating through her (implied) personal "failure" the emotional/rational dichotomy of proper life-issues healing. In this case, in order to legitimize the stance that emotional responses are superior to intellectual ones, Ginger must downplay and appear to discount her "intellectualizing" and theoretical training even though "it's been really helpful." Ginger demonstrates that "How people talk about ... sexual abuse" is an activity that should not be merely intellectual: "the counselor picks it up right away and ... we work with that just to stop the intellectualizing." What is also implied, however, is that Ginger feels that it shouldn't be just an emotional activity either: intellectualizing has been helpful for her own understanding and "that's the way [she] usually help[s] people."

1:257
G: Well um
when I was thinking about your
your theme of+
how people talk about+
you know um
a--abuse--incest.
For me,
I know
that one of my+
main defense mechanisms was intellectualizing? of course
"degree in {the humanities}"?

I: Um hmm

G: But and--and it helped me
in one way to get through
a lot of stuff but, you know also^
when I have gone to counseling, on other issues^
one of the first things that comes up is^ the intellectualizing^ and
um, you-know the--usually the, the counselor
picks it up right away^ and, um
you know, and we work with that
just, to stop it at times that [make me use it to realize]
I've been working on that for a while so.
I guess when I think about it, I've done a lot of theory I mean I went right into Women's Theory, um.
{my other degree} was mostly theory
and um.
it's been really helpful! for me to gain an understanding.
>for me to put my experiences into, and then to help other people do that so I guess that's the way I usually help people<
on the other hand I also, um
have trouble saying that "I feel"
and that's a big, issue, so
I suppose when I thought about your title I said "you-know "my big issue of talking about it"
largely {I guess} that would be the one big (one/two words indecipherable) I can think in terms of. (1:273)

Commentary

While none of the women suggested that "feelings" were inappropriate, some remarked that they get tired of, or can take only so much of, the public histrionics of some media coverage. The following comments by Catherine, who is still very much involved in her own healing process; by Lara, who feels she has put the experience more or less comfortably behind her; and by Rachael, who is an outspoken social activist, are representative of the range and tone of responses to interview questions about whether or not the women watched television movies or documentaries about childhood sexual abuse. (Any individual's comment concerning TV talk-shows were generally more negative than her comments about dramas and documentaries.)

Catherine:

2:325
I: Um, TV movies
documentaries? that sorts of thing
are you likely? to watch them? or?

C: (begins laughing gently)
It depends on how I'm feeling, sometimes I'm very interested in them. But sometimes I'm just like "Oh God I've had enough of this shit in my life" (laughs) I don't need to watch someone else's (we are both laughing). (2:327)
Lara:

2:132
L: Documentaries is no problem at all.
Because, I'm, then I'm fascinated with it to find out the
what the newest research, and I guess maybe it's the, privileging of
science too
over, art, you-know if, if it's done+ for art then, maybe it should be
covered up but, "science will help us know, science will set you
free" (laughs) and all that stuff we've been fed.

um
Then I am, interested.
It may be hard to watch but I might still watch it^ on
the other hand^ if there's a, if there's a wild life special on TV I might
watch that instead (we are both laughing) (2:135)

Rachael:

2:133
R: I think if it increases visibility then it's probably a really good thing+.
You know but if it's+
I don't know it's kind of funny at the same time it's, >>you know "flip on
the channel oh incest survivors again, alright what's on the other
one"
"not again!"
"God they it put on three times this week already"
"why don't they just shut up". (laughs)
And a lot of people have that reaction it's just like
and a lot of it is--it's really emotional material and you just can't seeing
that all the time, um but at the same time I feel like
>>it makes less of an impact that way but at the same time--if you see it
every day--I mean if there's something in the news about it every
day you might actually think it's a problem <<(she laughs) (2:141)

Many other themes and positions common to the public discourse were incorporated
into the interviews as well. The ones that appeared most often will be listed below,
occasionally with representative examples (with contextualizing information only where it
seems essential). Instead of analyzing each theme (or even each example) for how the
public input was adopted, adapted, or rejected, I will simply list who addressed the theme
in any significant fashion and whether she was "supportive" (adopting and/or adapting),
"non-supportive" (rejecting and/or questioning/doubting--unless otherwise specified) of
the common socially-promoted stance, or whether she simply acknowledged the issue in a
self-referential fashion. "Support" or "non-support" as it appears in the examples is sometimes explicit but more often it is merely implied. "Acknowledgment" reflects a more complicated pattern. Saying that "I guess I was lucky that _X_ never happened to me" is, at once, acknowledgment of social input, evidence of both awareness and implicit validation of the "truth" of _X_ as the norm, and demonstrable evidence that this norm is not universally true; and all this without the woman having to refute the "truth" of the discourse, which is implicitly valid under any "normal" circumstance, barring the intervention of some miraculous force such as "luck". The absence of any name under a thematic heading indicates that this theme did not appear in a particular woman's account.

Many themes also have sub-texts, which grew out of the theme but have not yet achieved enough dominance in social discourse to be considered as separate entities. Motifs, meanwhile, help to provide structure and focus to the theme. Motifs (often appearing as metaphors) and sub-texts will be considered as well when they were noticeably present. Without question, the elements often overlap. In such cases, a particular woman's name may appear in several categories unless the emphasis of her account seems to align it more closely with some aspects of the theme than with others. Some of the themes will be treated more extensively under a later heading. The only universally supported theme was that "society" (particularly as a result of its "patriarchal" structure) is to blame--past and present--for child sexual abuse.

**Dominant Themes and Motifs**

**Theme 1:** Repression (i.e., denial or loss) of memory is a common and/or expected coping mechanism and/or result of childhood sexual abuse. (CTH 42; 58; 70-85; 22: "Children often cope with abuse by forgetting it ever happened.")

Supportive: Kay, Patricia, Catherine, Olivia, Helen

Non-supportive, i.e., "never forgot": Sarah, Anne, Betsy, Lara, Meredith, Elizabeth, Ginger, Judith, Noreen, Rachael

**Sub-text 1-A:** The absence of clear (or of any) memories during a period in childhood is an indication of childhood sexual abuse. (CTH 22; 70; 80-83)

Supportive: Helen
Related motifs:

1-a: Flashbacks (CTH 73)
   Supportive: Kay, Patricia, Catherine
   Non-supportive: Sarah

1-b: Body Memories (CTH 74-75)
   Supportive: Kay, Patricia

1-c: False Memories
   Supportive, i.e., there may be/probably are such things as "false"
   memories: Sarah
   Non-supportive, i.e., there are few--if any--"false" memories [CTH 87-
   94; 345-347]: Kay, Patricia, Catherine, Noreen

Acknowledgment: Ginger

Example of Text 1: Repression of Memories -- Olivia, supportive

1:220
O: I've always wondered why I was depressed and I could never set goals^  
   I had all the, incest survivor  
   problems^ but  
   no memories of it (1:222)

Example of Sub-text 1-A: Absence of Memories -- Helen, supportive

1:009
H: In terms of telling you enough I mean there's  
   I can't tell you  
   a whole lot because  
   there's 6 years of my life that's totally gone  
   from about age 12 to 18. (1:011)  
   (1:011-020 deleted)  
   So as far as, I mean what actually occurred^  
   um  
   I mean something definitely had to occur for me to like blank out that  
   many years^ (1:021)
Example of Motif 1-c: False Memories -- Catherine, non-supportive

2:248
C: I think  
on the reverse side of that though  
there's a scary aspect that  
you--you turn on Donahue you turn on Oprah  
>>now we have the, we don't have just the sexual abuse stories we now  
have the debunking sexual abuse story.  
and I think that  
one thing comes out in the open  
it opens it up to all that kind of stuff and it's not that\(^\wedge\) <<  
it's not that \(<\) there isn't, really bad counseling and bad therapy out there  
that \(>\)  
>>creates sexual abuse in peoples' minds and blah blah--blah I think  
that that happens <<  
but I don't think it happens nearly as much  
as  
(2sec)  
some of that whole  
(2sec)  
kinds of groups of people say\(^\wedge\)  
and I think so I think it's kind of a mixed bag  
in that way.  (2:257)

Example of Motif 1-c: False Memories -- Ginger, acknowledgment

1:224:  
G: >>I really haven't had anybody ever tell me you-know that I'm making it  
up or any of the<<  
the terrible reactions that people talk about I've never had that  
so I've been kind of lucky too.  (1:226)

Example of Motif 1-a: False Memories -- Kay, non-support (see also, Motif 7-1:  
Inner child)

1:380  
K: you-know a lot of people want to say this kind of thing doesn't happen  
this false memory and this and this  
and I'm sure that probably there are some [eientogenic]  
um  
memories induced by unethical therapists and this and that.  
however  
um  

that's not the case with me
(3sec)

um

my therapist
didn't mention anything! (1:389)

Example of Motif 1-c: False Memories -- Noreen, non-supportive

2:108  (speaking about a magazine she has read)
N:  . . . I think it comes from Denmark^ and it's this organization that um
it's advocating that pedophilia, be, legalized and that
and there's this group+ in the United States that has formed, very recently
and their names has escaped me too but its in the article um
it's the--the group that just recently formed coming out <saying that
all of this is a hoax^ this is false memory syndrome+^ and all of that>
and I bet if I spoke the acronym you'd probably even be familiar with it but
it's a group of men basically that have gotten together and are trying
to say that abuse and+, incest is all a big lie and that
you-know women are using it < as tools to get back at men and um > . . . . (2:120)

Example of Motif 1-c: False Memories -- Susan, supportive

1:446
S:  . . . so as these stories surface
    I think we're all
    getting other knowledge and then it raises the question of this
thing--is anybody making this up to get attention or
to settle a wrong^ or something. (1:452)

Theme 2: Addictive-compulsive behaviors are the result and/or evidence of childhood sexual abuse. (CTH 49-54)

Supportive: Kay, Patricia, Helen, Catherine, Olivia
Theme 3: Childhood sexual abuse results in and/or is responsible for "failures" in adult life, e.g., failure to "achieve," to be "successful." (CTH 40-54)

This is a very complicated theme. In a sense both those who suggested that childhood sexual abuse had influenced their career choices positively and/or who consider themselves to be stronger as a result of the abuse and those who failed to address the issue one way or another (thereby implying that sexual abuse had not affected their success/failure in life) could be said to be Non-supportive of the theme. This also means that some names belong on both lists. However, I will indicate as Non-supportive only those who directly dealt with the theme.

Supportive: Olivia, Kay, Patricia, Helen

Non-supportive: Catherine, Rachael, Ginger, Noreen, Helen, Kay

Example of Theme 3: "Failure" -- Olivia, supportive (see also Theme 2: Addictive behavior)

Olivia demonstrates this theme twice. She tried to tell a relative about her childhood experience and asked if the aunt had seen any "signs" (see Theme 4) of the abuse when Olivia was a child. The relative said, "Just put it behind you; just forget about it" (1:377). I asked Olivia how she felt about this (see response below, 1:384-391). She returns to the theme spontaneously later in the interview (below, 1:700-710).

1:384:
O: And I felt
  Discounted
  And I didn't matter, and my pain didn't matter
  my healing didn't matter
  my--my living a miserable! life
  didn't matter
  cause I type I was
  Phi Beta Kappa in English
  (one/two words indecipherable)
  degree in
  summa Cum Laude in English (one/two words indecipherable)
  and I had this
  life as a typist (laughs ironically) you-know
  and that didn't matter or changing that didn't matter and I came
came home feeling very very--ate everything in sight. (1:391)
1:700
O: Because I have a lot of years
   I didn't feel anything
   but depression, cried myself to sleep^
   at night, um
   >>I wondered why I was depressed I wondered why I was fat, I
   wondered why everyone else got married and had children and
   careers^<<
   And I was an editor at {company name} for 2 years, I've done editing at
   {company name}, but I haven't had a real career of it, I've been a
   secretary mostly. (1:710)

Example of Theme 3: "Failure" -- Patricia, supportive

1:436
P: ... there's, I mean I've, I have, <my own little, library of books^> that are in storage, because I had to
   move quickly from
   one place to this place.
   Cause I got evicted.
   I had nev--
   I'm college educated!
   I had then, um, management position. (1:440)

Theme 4: Childhood sexual abuse results in identifiable lingering affective and behavioral
"symptoms." Corollary: a survivor/victim can be identified (by self or others) by
noting the "symptoms." (CTH 33-39)

Supportive: Olivia, Catherine

Non-Supportive: Betsy, Judith

Sub-text 4-A: Child sexual abuse produces "warning signs"; a child can be identified
as a sexual abuse "victim" from the warning signs.

Supportive: Rachael, Kay, Olivia--see also Theme 3: "Failure", above.

Example of Theme 4: Symptom -- Betsy, non-supportive

1:289
B: (quietly) So I'm.
   Probably still somewhat debilitated by it but not in an open way.
   Not that anybody would know that I didn't tell
   about it. (1:290)
Example of Theme 4: Symptoms -- Catherine, supportive

1:134

C: WELL I ACTUALLY < ended up telling him >
In a letter (laughs)
before I went {out there} to visit him
um
this is before we were--actually in between our romantic involvements
cause we were
dating in high school and+ broke up and [then there was] college and
that kind of stuff.
And+
(2sec)
I told him that in a letter^
and--
then I saw him after that
you-know when I--when I {went to visit him}
And+
(2sec)
he said that when he first, you know read it, that it was like somebody
punched him in the stomach.
but that when
(2sec)
he thought about it^
>> he had this response that's very funny because, I have the three,
really important people in my life had the same response to this <<
(laughs)
He said < "Oh, now everything makes sense". >
And--and one of my very good friends Cindy
was the same way she said
"Catherine, now everything makes sense"-- << cause at first, when
(1sec)
the possibility of anything was brought up in counseling and I was just
like^
really freaked out and thought my counselor was nuts^
(1sec)
and then when I actually did a little bit of reading on it+ and looked, at
some of the symptoms I'm like
(dramatic whisper/laughing) "shit". (1:146)
Example of Subtext 4-A: "Signs" -- Rachael, acknowledgment/supportive (i.e., if there are "signs," you should be able to see them because I'm exhibiting the signs you claim are the markers of sexual abuse.)

2:223

R: I remember this one time
(3sec)
My mother who had just gone back to college and she's trying to be a social worker.
Um, and she, huuuh (sound of exasperation).
Huhhh, and talk about absurd experiences, she was taking this class, on child sexual assault.
And like telling me all about this material and stuff and like telling me all the signs to look for and, and I'm just like (waving hands across face= "are you there? "are you blind?" motion)
(ironically) I suppose then would have been a good time to tell her but (we both start laughing) I was just you-know overwhelmed by the absurdity of the situation.
And it's was just like you-know "How can you not know"^!!
(evenly and quietly) "How can you not know." (2:230)

Theme 5: There is an "intergenerational" aspect to child sexual abuse. (CTH 282-288)

Supportive: Helen, Patricia, Kay, Catherine, Olivia

Example of Theme 5: Intergenerational -- Supportive, Helen

1:123

H: At that point I was, I was at the point in healing where I could actually find a lot of positive in my dad^, and he had had a terrible childhood--he was abused himself. (1:125)

Example of Theme 5: Intergenerational -- Catherine, supportive (also Theme 4: Symptoms)

1:212

I: But you think you can see her behavioral characteristics as, as an outgrowth of?

C: < I really think I can. >
 yea.
 yea.
>> And I mean--you-know it even makes me question about<< my mother
and her sister^

I: um-hmm

C: I mean I think it is the kind of thing that it, it does
it's a generational kind of thing I mean
that even Biblically
you-know the gen--the sin of the father
passed on+ and+
and all that kind of stuff. (1:217)

Example of Theme 5: Intergenerational -- Noreen, acknowledgment

1:067

N: . . . so there was just total upheaval in our family.
   And when I look back and think I was still able to get almost all As and
   Bs on my+ report card I was+
a pretty remarkable little kid^
   and it's taken
   the process of healing for me to be able to realize that I was
   an exceptional person^ to get through that and still be kind-of-heart
   today
   and that I'm not a perpetrator I'm so thankful that I'm not a perpetrator
   because
   know-know the statistics show that that+ probability increases a lot if
   you have been
   an incest
   victim yourself. . . . (1:072)

Example of Theme 5: Intergenerational -- Kay, supportive

1:066

K: . . . the incest was all through my family
   ah I believe that
   um
   (5sec)
a person who acts out sexually is--is really not just weird pervert down
the street^
I mean you-know it--its--it runs in families^ (1:070)

(1:070-096 specific example)

I'm sure as I'm sitting here that my grandmother
was an incest survivor and
if there is overt incest in one generation there will always! be covert incest in the next generation.
unless they've dealt with their stuff and since people didn't talk about this stuff up until recently
people have not dealt! with this stuff. (1:100)

Theme 6: Perpetrators don't and/or can't quit once they have begun abusive behavior.

(CTH 140-141; 282-288; 282: "In the rare case when an abuser has sought therapy and has truly transformed his life. . ."). ("Ann Landers", The Columbus Dispatch, July 8, 1994: "Meanwhile, if there are any great-grandchildren, do not leave them alone with Grandpa. Pedophilia is not outgrown.")

Supportive: Anne, Betsy, Catherine, Elizabeth, Ginger, Helen, Kay, Olivia, Patricia, Rachael

Non-Supportive: Lara

Example of Theme 6: Perpetrators don't stop -- Catherine, supportive

1:192
C  I mean I think my parents < could be really good grandparents. >
< I do know that I will never put my children in a situation alone^ with them >.
I think that if
>> you-know I think I mean it's going to come down to the point where
   either I'm going to have to talk to them <<
directly, straight out about it
or+
I'm going to have to just lay out some direct boundaries that
I will never allow to be crossed--because I wouldn't do that to my children.
Um
>> you-know even if that was a period of time when my dad was never
doing any other kind of abuse
which it isn't even likely <<
Even if that was the case though I could never trust him with my
children--my parents have
>> I mean they've lost that opportunity . . . (1:200)

Example of Theme 6: Perpetrators don't stop -- Lara, non-supportive

1:305
L: For one thing, I really feel very strongly that
that was the only occurrence for him
although I feel he's the type that would easily have an affair on his wife.
(1:307)

**Theme 7:** Recovery is a life-long process. Childhood sexual abuse, regardless of "severity," causes significant and permanent psychological--developmental damage. Corollary: once "damaged" one can never be completely "healed." (CTH throughout; 167: "There is no such thing as absolute healing . . . You need to accept the fact that the healing process will continue throughout your life."

Supporters: Helen, Patricia, Catherine
Non-supporters: Lara, Sarah, Meredith, Rachael, Lara, Noreen
Ambiguous: Anne, Betsy, Elizabeth, Ginger, Judith

**Sub-text 7-A:** The character-trait "strengths" of a sexual abuse victim are the negative evidence of childhood coping behaviors, i.e., the affect is always negative, despite appearances to the contrary (CTH 40-54).

**Related Motif**

7-a: "Inner child" (CTH 58, 111-115; 348)

Supportive: Helen, Patricia, Elizabeth, Kay--see also Motif 1-a: False Memories, above)

**Example of Theme 7, Motif 7-a:** Life-long damage; Inner child -- Helen, supportive

1:502

H: I mean what this does^ is it re-orient your entire life.

I: Um hmm.

H: Um
so basically it's like
your learning experience what you should have learned in a healthy family
to [base yourself on]
becomes an issue for you
throughout your entire life^ so+
>that's why they talk about the inner kid< Um
as a healthful way to look at it. (1:505)
Example of Theme 7: Life-long damage -- Kay, supportive

2:425
K: . . . most of the people that have^ the kind of history that I have um are either dead permanently institutionalized in prison or out working the streets^ as a prostitute. (2:430)

Example of Theme 7: Life-long damage -- Noreen, non-supportive

1:137
N: So+ I've been abused by+ several people^ really but the major abuse what I think in my own mind as major is the rape and sodomy. And I mean it's taken me long+ long+ time and I'm still still very much upset by it and I'm coming to the realization that I'll probably be upset by it for the rest of my life just like if you're in any kind of traumatic situation you're going to feel^ the scars forever. But it's+ what the wonderful news about incest is that you can heal. You can heal. (1:144)

Example of Theme 7: Life-long damage -- Rachael, non-supportive

1:616
R. . . . and of course another thing I always read that you know "it takes, the rest of your life to get over it and you'll never be whole again^ and^+" (laughs ironically) (2 sec) So and I mean, it has seemed like a < long time > to me, but at the--at the same time I've gotten over a lot of things I think. (1:622)
Theme 8: Child sexual abuse is inherently (and always) a "traumatic" experience. (CTH 82; 87; 90-91)

Supporters: Helen, Kay, Patricia, Olivia, Catherine, Elizabeth, Noreen, Anne, Judith

Non-supporters: Ginger, Susan, Meredith, Lara

Ambiguous: Betsy

Example of Theme 8: Always traumatic -- Lara, non-supportive

But the thought was that
I, >> and that's why I didn't think about it again too I told my father and
he was going to do what he was supposed to do^ <<

Now adults do
adults take care of children right?
So I told him and then
and it was >> out of my hands <<
(laughs)
I went on
My merry little way. (1:601)

Summary

Philip Burnard and Paul Morrison suggest that "self-disclosure" involves "the process of putting our self-images into words. The language that we chose will reflect both our views about ourselves and our views of the world as we experience it. If Sapir and Whorf were right, caution Burnard and Morrison, we are also 'imprisoned' by words--our knowledge of language and the extent of our vocabulary may serve to limit our view both of ourselves and or[sic] our world" (1992, 44). Clearly, Sapir and Whorf were not entirely right; what words "mean" is a social (ideological and political) function. Meanings change to interact with the socio-political needs and climate, and individuals (particularly through their disclosure practices) are instrumental in the creation of those meanings.

The other side of the self-disclosure equation, as Burnard and Morrison argue, is the implication that someone is listening. If that someone is the self (idionarrating) there may be little confusion about what is "meant" by what is "said." On the other hand, if the
listener is "someone else," then, as Burnard and Morrison suggest, "[i]t cannot be assumed that [simply] because we can self-disclose that we will be understood" (1992, 44). Since the "objective of telling about the experience is to be 'understood' by some other" (and "even our inner dialogues have this character" as Tyler point out), then the teller must find a way to communicate effectively (Tyler 1978, 141). Such efficacy, as Bennett contends, involves not only finding words to "explain the experience" but also ways to "protect [one's] version of the truth" and to "guard it from hostile criticism" (1986, 432). The strategies employed by the interviewees as they disclosed their involvement with childhood sexual abuse demonstrate their search for meaningful terms, their direct and indirect appeals to expert authority for validation, their attempts to use their own experience as "authority," and their strategies for negotiating a "fit" between their own experiences and the public discourse through eyewitness testimony and experiential verification of the discourse itself, all of which serve to "guard," to "protect," and to create "understandable" accounts of their experiences.
CHAPTER VI
WHOSE STORY IS THIS ANYWAY?
AUTHORSHIP AND AUTHORITY

"Discourse mediates between the fate of the individual and the larger order of things."
(Rosenwald and Ochberg 1992b, 2)

"But new genres do not invariably empower."
(Rosenwald and Ochberg 1992b, 13)

Widening the focus

While all of the themes discussed in Chapter V interconnect, Themes 7 (Recovery is a life-long process) and 8 (Child sexual abuse is inherently a traumatic experience) are the fundamental, intertwined claims that appear in nearly all media-promoted adult accounts of childhood (i.e., remembered) sexual abuse and on which much social activism concerning child (i.e., contemporary) sexual abuse is premised. The adult accounts provide the "proof" of the depth and of the extent (as well as of the types) of the damage that occurs (has occurred/will occur) when a child is sexually abused. However, it is these two themes which received the most varied treatment within the interview accounts as a whole and which revealed the most lack of "fit" between the public input and the private experience. This warrants a closer look. The struggle to adapt the public discourse to the self (or the self to the discourse) and sometimes the outright, albeit often hesitant and carefully couched, rejection of the public discourse highlights several components of the women's personal narrative processes: the ongoing sense of stigma associated with sexual abuse; the women's reassessment of their pasts and of the impact of social discourse on this process; and the issues of entitlement and authorship that underlie all their interpretations and responses. Again, all processes are interrelated, and concerns and themes are often interconnected. For example, a passage addressing a specific topic may also reveal authorization (permission, license) to interpret and speak about an experience in a certain authoritative (sanctioned) way as a result of an entitlement claim to expertise.
by some outside force or by the interviewee herself. The following example from
Catherine's interview, while it might fit best in the category of "reassessment," shows this
fundamental interaction well.

1:018
C:  >> And it--just the whole issue of boundaries in my family there really
never << were+ any kind of
protective boundaries for anybody
in the family.
You know
you-know nudity boundaries things like that^
>> there just wasn't--and I think I grew up and thought that that really
<<
normative^
and
found out later that that probably wasn't very good and it
wasn't normative at all^ (1:021)

This passage appears early in Catherine's interview. She began the interview by
disclosing that she had been "offended" in a variety of ways (from "gentle" to "violent") by
several relatives when she was between the ages of four and thirteen, most of which she
remembered only after entering counseling after the age of twenty (1:005-017). In the
above passage, she identifies the underlying source (and context) of the abuse she
experienced: "the whole issues of boundaries." Evidence of her reassessment of her
childhood experience and of her recent shift in understanding of what her experiences
during this time meant (and now mean) can be seen in the statement that she thought the
lack of "boundaries" was "normative" then, but "found out later that that probably wasn't
very good and it wasn't normative at all." This particular passage doesn't reveal the source
of this new definition/interpretation of her experience (nor does she make this explicit
anywhere in the interview), but Catherine herself is not the source. This new
understanding is not something she just "figured out" by herself. This is "received"
information, and she obviously credits this source with more knowledge and/or entitlement
to "make meaning" of her categories and of her life experiences than she claims for herself.
The passage immediately preceding the one quoted above as well as some appearing
elsewhere in the transcript hint that this source is at least partially located in the
"counseling" she received and in the books she has read.

On the other hand, less formal social feedback contributed support to the input from
the contemporary discourse. The "nudity boundaries" issue returns later in the interview
in response to the questions about her attempts to speak about her experience. Here Catherine claims her own doubts as the starting point for her reassessment and cites a "friend" as providing implicit support for her attempts to re-categories the family "norms." How much of her current sense that her family's behavior is not normal began with the incident narrated below, and how much this supporting example is itself a product of her present reassessment, is impossible to tell. Clearly, the final decision to categorize her family's behavior as not "normative" did not come until whatever she "found out later."

1:111

C: No+ I really don't! remember trying to talk to people, I do remember
Um, and this is something that had never been repressed.
>> that when I grew up of taking a shower like 12 or 13^ <<
that my dad was like in the bathroom there, and with me.
and I do remember, like at one point talking to a friend
and+ kind of seeing if that was as weird as I thought it was?, and
>> not even I mean trying to bring it up in a really <<
(1 sec)
like round about way^+ and
>> my friend really seemed to feel that that was really weird, and that
was <<
kind of something I just filed away and thought
maybe that is really weird but then just kind of
pushed it aside.
because I think I was
< I was always a very good student and+ >>
was very successful in school and+
I think, you know, took so much identity from that that^
(1 sec)
it was in some ways I think
not easy to put it aside but
It was like almost necessary for me and >> I tended to << put it aside.
(last few words spoken very quietly) (1:121)

Reassessment

Instances of reassessment within the interview accounts are worth examining for the processes involved because, as shown in the passages from Catherine's transcript cited above, it is within such passages that the explanatory systems being employed in the creation of self-meaning and the source(s) of permission for choosing and using any particular construct(s) are revealed. The "voice(s) of authority" represent both "expert" and ideological systems; noting one may reveal or hint at the other.
Reassessment involves issues that are both subtle and currently much-argued about. "Remembering" is a complex process of "re-thinking" the past, both in the sense of "thinking again about" and "re-evaluating" the memory in light of new "information" obtained through life-stage changes or through new social and scientific theories and concepts of inter-personal behavior.

Obviously, all the women who had "repressed" the abuse from their memories had to undergo "reassessment" of their childhoods (Catherine, Helen, Kay, Patricia, Olivia). Patricia comments explicitly that her "body memories" required an "adjustment in my memory" (1:104). Those who never forgot, however, also often developed new understandings (meanings, interpretations) regarding their childhood experiences and/or new ways of talking about them as they encountered the new input. Some evidence of reassessment appeared spontaneously in the self-generated portion of the interviews. Other examples arose in response to my question "When did you begin to label this experience sexual abuse?" Some occurred when I followed up on an earlier comment that had suggested reassessment. Olivia's comments (previously cited) on not having enough "feeling" in her poetry and the passages from Catherine's transcript (cited above), demonstrate both spontaneous disclosure and follow-up expansion. Similar processes can be seen in the following passages from Ginger's interview.

Early in the interview, Ginger volunteered the following information, which includes not only how she came to label her experience as sexual abuse but also her testimony (intentional or inadvertent) to her lack of any sense of "trauma" at the time of the incident.

1:030
G: I remember um
really not thinking a lot about it until
um
I mean I remember feeling fine about that actually--I mean she's like
(motions--waving hands: anger/excitement; referring to mother) everyth
um, I didn't have terrible traumatic memory about it and
years later when I got involved: in >domestic violence^ which is my,
um<
my field of work--I do counseling with
with women in abusive relationships.

um
>>I started thinking about it, when I started learning more about abuse
   and so on I started thinking about my own life and realizing that
   that was an abusive incident<<
   and thinking well that's really interesting
   that
   how Mom took care of it--in a way I feel like I was real lucky
   because a lot of people, do not have, did not have parents
   that helped them out, and so in one way I--I sort of remember that with
   a lot of pride that my mom she took care of it and
   I felt protected and I always felt like
   I could go to mom with anything and she could protect me. (1:038)

Later I asked her to expand on this and received not only confirmation that her
academic studies had influenced her thinking about many past experiences but also the
ways that she had incorporated this reassessment into her current attitudes about social
structure and interaction.

1:105

I: You said you began to look at these incidents then
differently after you got into counseling {as a study/profession}. How
do you feel about them now?

G: Well, um.
(6sec)
When I got in--involved in domestic violence
the field I started to
you know look at the whole system
>>actually I was looking at it before then but I really started, getting a
   better understanding, theoretically about it.<<
   So
what I do I guess
when I think about it in that+ way+ that there's a
it angers me, in this, in just that

>>any other time+ that I've, felt that a man has trans--transgressed me
   some where in my life, that it is, an unfortunate inevitability, in our
   society that<<
you-know, in moments when you are alone with, with men at some
many men not all of them but

>>you-know, at some point they're going to transgress because they
   have just been taught that that's--that's not--and we've been<<
women have been taught that that's normal, and, you know that you
expect it and
(slight falsetto) "Oh you, you've got--you know what to expect and
boys are boys" and all that kind of garbage. (1:116)
Helen claimed the sexual abuse survivor label for herself even though she admitted to no conscious memory of abuse. Indeed, it was because she had "blank[ed] out" a six-year period of her life that she believes she was sexually abused. The "one incident" she can remember had been labeled "normal" at the time; the "full impact" came only later. When I asked Helen what had prompted her to label her memory gap (and the one incident she did remember) as "sexual abuse," she replied:

1:150
H: I just thought it was normal
(2sec)
Why, I knew I had always been mad at that one incident um
I never+
quite+
understood the full impact of it
and probably
(3 sec)
I guess I'd always labeled it as abuse but connected it to sexual abuse wasn't until I was, maybe 24? or 25?

I: Do you remember what prompted that connection?

H: Um
(6sec)
I think it was reading a book but I couldn't tell you which book it was.
(1:158)

Helen has read extensively in both sexual abuse and family dynamic's theory as a part of her education and training toward a career which will involve counseling. On the other hand, she mentions, by title, The Courage to Heal, as being a book she has found meaningful. She also suggested that book like The Courage to Heal, which have stories in them, are the kind she would give to anyone she might be counseling because "clinically oriented" texts are something "you don't just give . . . to somebody . . ." (1:193)

Some interviewees were both openly self-reflexive and explicit about their thought processes. Lara spontaneously offered the following observation early in the interview.

1:071
L: I don't think I talked about it for a long time, to anybody at--strangely enough at the time I mean
(2sec)
some of these things--the thing that
what I'm about say in some++ senses+
(2sec)
is part of the analysis which had come much later but
but
I--at the--at the time^ I had a sense,
of why he was doing it, I felt
I felt like I understood, exactly! what was going on
>> and that he was doing it because he and my mother had a difficult
time and my mother was out of the house^ and I was the spoiled
brat << (laughs) (1:078)

(1:078-088: side comments about family dynamics)

1:089
So I thought at the time I
I assessed it at the time^ that he was getting back at her, he wasn't doing this to me at all--that
could have been said to be "denial"
but I+ look back at now and I still+ think that that's a pretty right-on
assessment that
>> she was out of sight and he couldn't get at her but he could get at her
through me^ << (1:092)

Lara declares that she had "understood exactly what was going on." Still, her emphasis on
"at the time," her warning that what she is "about to say in some senses is part of the
analysis which had come much later," and her suggestion that her childhood sense of
understanding the situation "could have been said to be 'denial'" all expose her self-
reflexivity, her awareness that she has engaged in (is still engaging in) re-thinking the past,
and her somewhat ambivalent attitude toward the discourse that is encouraging and/or
pressuring her to think in certain ways and to draw certain conclusions. She returned,
repeatedly, throughout the interview to the antithetical nature of her early perceptions and
the "shoulds" and "oughts" of the current discourse surrounding this experience. More of
her comments will be considered later.

Rachael, likewise, was extremely articulate about her thought and meaning-making
processes. She encapsulates both her self-reflexivity and the faddish nature and ephemeral
effects of social discourse input in the following segment. More of Rachael's comments
will be considered later as well.

2:354
R: I guess I'm probably pretty bad at like relating past dilemmas I've had but
um, you-know how you just
you go through certain
stages and theories and stuff like that.
And I think as soon as they're gone^ I--I don't remember them at all.
(2:356)

Reassessment was not always linked to social input. Judith, who used almost no
childhood sexual abuse discourse language at any time during her interview, cites her own
experience as a parent as at least partially responsible for her current understanding of her
childhood experience. The first passage provides necessary context for understanding the
second segment.

1:057
J:  It was probably fifteen years+
or so before I told anyone about it.
(2sec)
THAT was one of the dilemmas for me because+
I didn't know what was going on, I knew I didn't like it I knew it wasn't
right
but
I didn't feel there was any way I could talk to
because+^
I had this
image
that
(3 sec)
suddenly with the death of my mother, that+
a five year old was a problem
not an asset
and
so
it was up to me to do whatever I could not to be a problem.
And+
(3sec)
I'm very independent
and I felt
that this was my--my problem and I needed to deal with it
and so I
developed ways to try to deal with it^ and I when I failed+ it was
devastating
but I considered them my failures.
I: Uh-hm.

J: Um I consider this whole thing my probl--MY!+ error not+ anybody else's um, not even his. Um, that I should have been smarter^ more clever, in my avoidance techniques whatever. (4sec) I wasn't going to let anybody down by telling them that I had this tremendous failure and I didn't (1:076) (I ask when, why, and to whom she did begin speaking about the experience, she begins to comment -- 1:080-099)

1:100 J: The advantage I had the first fifteen years in not talking about it < was that > (2sec) I accepted the blame for it and I accepted my response to it um (3sec) It's adult that I, only as an adult that I've begun to realize that all of that was not!+ um (2sec) I'll back up, AS A PARENT^ I know that somebody that age could not be responsible for that and it's only as an adult that I've been able to understand+ that I basically got screwed < literally and figuratively > and and it's at that point then everything starts+ going up and needs an outlet (speaking, counseling).
As long I thought I was dealing with my own error
it was a different issue. (1:114)

Stigma

Much of the feminist-recovery version makes use of ordinary "stigma management," as this process is described by Erving Goffman (1963). Stigma, according to Goffman, involves both an "attribute that is deeply discrediting" (3) and a process whereby those not possessing this attribute "tend to impute" to the stigmatized individual, "a wide range of imperfections on the basis of the original one" because the stigma represents "an undesired differentness" from accepted and expected norm (5). "The normal and the stigmatized," however, "are not persons but rather perspectives," argues Goffman (138). Such "perspectives" involve issues of social control, stereotyping, and, often, political agendas. For instance, Goffman suggests, "the stigmatization of those in certain racial, religious, and ethnic groups has apparently functioned as a means of removing these minorities from various avenues of competition" (139). On the other hand, stigma can also be used as a basis for self conception and community formation. It can become, as well, a power base for collective action. The childhood sexual abuse experience has produced all three aspects of stigma management: identity, community, and collective action.

Stigma management involves efforts by the stigmatized (discredited or discreditable) individual and/or group to correct, to compensate for, or to hide the attribute (Goffman 1963, 9-11). One form of compensation is to "break with reality" and to "and employ an unconventional interpretation of the character of [one's] social identity" (1963, 10). The re-making of the "meaning" of childhood sexual abuse is one attempt to create a large-group ideological break with the taken-for-granted reality of the Western patriarchal social structure, and in the process, to "correct" the stigma: the victim is neither to blame nor deserving of shame; the stigma belongs solely on the perpetrator. Other stigma-management strategies involve enhancing one's status by doing the seemingly impossible (for one so affected) or adopting the problem as "a blessing in disguise" (Goffman 1963, 11). All of these compensatory strategies can be seen in the social discourse of recovery and in the interview passages cited previously.

"Representation" of the stigma occurs each time someone with a particular stigma comes to public attention. Those "who share the noted person's stigma," argues Goffman, "become subject to a slight transfer of credit or discredit to themselves. Their situation thus leads them easily into living in a world of publicized heroes and villains of their own
stripe, their relations to this world being underlined by immediate associates, both normal and otherwise, who bring them news about how one of their kind has fared" (27-28)

Despite social discourse efforts by feminist to create clear "heroes and villains," to place the "blame" clearly on perpetrators and/or social factors, to eliminate the notion that the victim should feel shame or guilt, and to honor the "courage" and "strength" of the "survivors," no strategy, to date, has been able to eliminate the sense of stigma which surrounds involvement in childhood sexual abuse. Not even "representation" by such "famous" women as Oprah Winfrey, Roseanne Barr, Miss America Marilyn Van Derbur Atler has been able to remove the stigma of childhood sexual abuse.35 Many of the interviewees expressed their sense of this lingering disgrace that is, or could be attached, to anyone who is known to have been involved in childhood sexual abuse in any way. Such perceptions influence what, when, and to whom the women are willing to speak and how they are likely to encode their experiences when they do speak. About this subject of "what people will think," Catherine is explicit:

1:160

C: And I've got some childhood friends from my neighborhood that I grew up in and a (1sec)
one, one woman in particular >>um she was real young<< that I would be--I would like to talk to in a way^ >>but I've always sort of put off every really talking to her about it-- which is really stu--it's--it's not stupid but it's<< it's really hard because, you-know this is this huge chunk of important thing in my life^ >>and I'm really afraid to talk, to her about it, she--she seemed to grow up<< in this very < perfect, Catholic happy family >

35 Both Oprah and Rosanne have been subjects of magazine and other public presentations of their involvement with childhood sexual abuse. Rosanne presented her story in People Weekly magazine, October 7, 1991. This article also mentions former Miss America Marilyn Van Derbur Atler as an incest survivor. Oprah was the focus of an article in Ladies' Home Journal, February 1994.
of my family—or what she'd think of me
or what she would say to her family and the neighborhood—you know
there's all these implications.

So I've never really talked to any of those people. (1:168)

Lara's comment about when and to whom she is likely to disclose information about
her childhood sexual abuse experiences reveal her perception of the social climate. She is
explicit about the notion of on-going stigma and why this is so difficult to eliminate or to
avoid: any woman viewed as being in a "sexual arena" risks being considered a "sex toy."

2:206
L:  < There would be individuals that I would >
    want to be sure < did not know > about it
    at certain times.
    And the times I do think of would be
    at the beginning of anything
    (brief side comment deleted)
    starting a job.
    starting {a professional} career.
    < There is a stigma >
    I think there's a
    there's an
    (2sec)
    once you've presented
    (2sec)
    not+ a stigma+ that you've done something wrong necessarily+
    although for some people I think there is, um
    but there's this
    it puts you in the sexual
    arena.
    And at the beginnings of lots of thing in life
    sex is not appropriate.
    So, at starting a job
    sexual is certainly not appropriate in the work place
    as
    and
    it's not appropriate as a term for hire+
    and it's not appropriate as a
    condition for, um
    for
    promotion, et cetera (2:222)
2:235
You don't want people to
always have an image of you ^
as a sexual+ toy
or something.
Because you don't want people to have^
Like an image that just
that anything other than
"Hey here's a person we want in our {company} ", there's
there's some images you just don't want to be coming in at some point.
(2:245)

Other comments, such as Betsy's cited below, indicate that the very rhetoric which is
supposed to be freeing the victims is sometimes actually discouraging them from adding
their own voices and stories to the social discourse. The intense promotion and media
prominence of stories involving extreme cases of child sexual abuse tend to make anything
less seem like "no big deal" despite efforts by activists to claim that there are no "minor"
occaurrences of such abuse.

When I asked Betsy where she is most likely to talk about her experience now, she
said "a work setting." Her work involves occasionally conducting sexual abuse awareness
programs for children, and she uses her own experience--in general terms--to encourage
the children to tell someone if they are being abused. Still, this does not mean that she
readily discloses her experiences to adults. After one of the children's session, however,
she and some other women began to acknowledge to each other--again, in very general
terms--that they had all been abused as children. Betsy decided that "it must happen to
everybody almost in some way or another," but none of them had ever "told on the
person" or "had this person called on the carpet." Betsy suggested that maybe they were
all partially responsible for allowing sexual abuse to continue by not speaking out. (More
about this comment later.)

Despite her assertion of responsibility, her contention that "one tiny incident" she
had told me about was still "impacting" her life, and her claim that she really "encourage[s]
openness in terms of discussion of sexual abuse--minimal or not--because [she feels] like it
all impacts in ways we don't understand" (1:247-250), Betsy is still hesitant to disclose her
experience. At least part of the reason for her reluctance is revealed in the two passages
that follow in which she illustrates her conflicting sense of social stigma/social status in
regards to childhood sexual abuse. These mixed messages have put her in the ambiguous position of having been involved at all but of not being able to "compete" with the "real thing." (I am not able to discern if the segments that follow are two halves of the same story -- with the second representing the experience narrative which led to the stance described in the first, or whether she is speaking about two separate occurrences.)

1:324
B: I don't think
  I probably haven't discussed it
  any more than that
  for two reasons, because after {awareness training} realizing it was um
  (2sec)
  minimal, compared to, abuse that can occur
  and I didn't want to
  hurt anybody else's feelings by saying
  this has caused me a--some problems and difficulties
  and them replying, "Wow you think you had a problem
  that was nothing"
  you know I didn't want
  I didn't want somebody minimizing it
  to me.
  Because it was important to me.
  And so I kept it
  basically to myself except for those people very close to me who
  (2sec)
  wanted to know. (1:333)

1:532
B: >> I just remember one time at an {awareness training session}, um, the
  lady asked straight out, how `many people have been abused' and
  I remember being shocked that she asked+ it<<
  and I remember after+ um
  some hesitation I raised my hand
  and um
  (2sec)
  and talked about it briefly
  but it was--it was
  it was brief and no
  < no specific details at all. >

I: Can you remember if anyone else, also talked
B: Yes
  but not many.
It was a big room and I guess that’s what surprised me, there were people I didn’t know it wasn’t a small training session— it was very big and I was—I remember feeling extremely embarrassed I remember being proud I had the guts to put my hand up

I: um-hm

B: Then I remember being extremely embarrassed that I had done so and wished that I hadn’t. And so I spoke to it in—in very uh+, broad+ terms and I didn’t share much at all. >> And again for two reasons—one I didn’t know who was in the audience who had experienced a lot of << something of this nature and may have thought I was um not being causal about something they considered casual? and— and secondly also (very quietly) [it was] kind of you-know awkward. (1:559)

Judith was not only highly context-sensitive about speaking out but also needed a reason that was an overwhelmingly important reason (by her definition) for doing so. Talking about her experience for the sake of sharing/comparing experiences simply wasn’t something for which she could see any point. Her reluctance in other cases reflects her sense of stigma still surrounding the issue, reinforced for her by a personal experience, narrated below.

1:167 J: As far as talking about the experience itself no. I don’t, I mean I don’t see+ a lot of reason in that. The way it comes up in the other regard I remember a conversation a group of us were talking and there were (3sec) two females and two males in the group and it was a time when they were doing (2sec) talking about (Anita) Hill and you know whether she was molested and and one of the men said talking about
"women can prevent this" or something "if they wished too". And one of them piped up with "Yes I know my wife tells that, what--the techniques she uses to avoid this and she's always been very successful" and (2sec) that's not the button to push. And so+ my+, I piped up and then said "Well I'm very grateful for you wife but from someone who's been raped, I (very deliberately) <know that> <women> <are not always> able to do anything about it^ (2sec) "And I wish her well but" and (2sec) >> after I did it I wish I hadn't of because there was such this sort of <<stunned+ silence. um (5sec) but that's (3sec) that's a concept that I'm willing to fight and if the issue comes up I'll say "Now hey wait a minute, I know from my own experience that's not the case"^ and most people who know me these are people I professionally deal with would you-know they may make a comment about women bringing it on, but I don't think most people, have that concept of me and I think it really took these people aback, I mean these people did not know what to say. (1:190)

The closing frame of this narrative comes when she returns to this incident later in the interview. Her comment emphasizes that it was not simply embarrassment on her own part that led to her perception of lingering stigma.
I would say it was a year before that relationship got back on footing again . . . (1:319)

I have dealt here at some length (if not in much depth) with the issues of stigma and reassessment to demonstrate both the women's sensitivity to social/situational responses when they or others have disclosed personal information about childhood sexual abuse experiences and the women's abilities to articulate their perceptions and/or to illustrate them through their personal experiences. In addition, their accounts of stigma perception begin to demonstrate how such "negative" responses are limiting their willingness to be open. They are all aware (if sometimes only intuitively) of the "coulds" (range of possibilities), the "shoulds" (the social expectations), and the "oughts" (the moral obligations) of public discourse. What they feel uncomfortable saying is not likely to be said very often, very publicly, or very widely. But what they say rarely, or only within "closed circles," limits and reduces what they contribute to the mix of stories in the social discourse.

Childhood sexual abuse rhetoric suggests that the reluctance to speak out is the result both of the "shame" (CTH, 92) that inevitably results in all cases of child sexual abuse and of "learned silence." According to the recovery discourse, victims have learned not to speak about their experiences because when they tried as children they were not believed, were threatened with personal harm, blamed for letting it happen, accused of "asking for it" and/or "wanting it," or because they thought they were protecting someone else by their silence (CTH, 92-93). Indeed, supporting evidence for several of these arguments appears in the interview transcripts. Once "learned" and then "practiced" for years, this silence becomes difficult to overcome, which is why, survivor and recovery activists promote "speaking out" and why they consider talking openly about the abuse "transformative" (CTH, 95). While the discourse rarely articulates the concept that simply verbalizing an experience creates a level of "reality" that was not there before, it implicitly address this issue through the notion that "telling one's story" is an important and effective way of accepting and processing the experience. Telling, the recovery discourse contends, is also "transformative" in another important way: "When you hear other women talk about their abuse and are not disgusted, and when you see those same women listen to your story with respect, you begin to see yourself as a proud survivor rather than as a conspiring victim" (CTH, 108). "After telling in a group, you may feel as though being a survivor, with all its difficulties, is not all that bad" (CTH, 98). "You join a courageous
community of women who are no longer willing to suffer in silence" (CTH 95). This
discourse does not, however, suggest what happens if a survivor tells a story and "those
same women" who are listening fail, or refuse to "respect" and support that story of
experience as it is told, nor what happens if listeners insist that the style or tone of the
account be changed (as in Olivia's case), or the meaning be changed, as will be seen in
some passages that will be presented in the next section.

There are many reasons for not speaking about an experience; stigma is only one of
them. As Goffman has argued and I've tried to demonstrate here, stigma is a complex
phenomenon involving more than simply "don't speak about this subject." It may also
involve, "don't speak about this subject in this way." However, what is not spoken (as
sexual abuse victims for centuries have found) at some level does not exist. The need to
have a single "story" of "trauma" and "significant" after-effects may not limit the tellability
of childhood sexual abuse to the same degree as the oppressive silencing of the past, but it
does affect what may be told and how. This raises questions of whose story is actually
being told when any person speaks. The individual's? Or the "courageous community's"?

Issues of Authority / Issues of Authorship

During stigma "management," a "professionalization" of the stigma will sometimes
occur, according to Goffman, and he cautions that "those who professionally present the
viewpoint of their category may introduce some systematic bias in this presentation." This
is especially true of those "sufficiently involved in the problem to write about it" (1963,
27). At the very least, professionalization endorses the stigma as something worthy of
note and discussion. In turn, this attention and validation increase both the potency and
the legitimacy of the stigma as a basis for self-conception.

Stigma management often includes efforts by those who claim to "represent" the
group to control the attitudes and behaviors of those they claim to represent. In a process
Goffman calls the "politics of identity" (1963, 123), formerly stigmatized individuals
attempt to establish in-groups standards for conduct, for attitudes toward both in-group
members and outsiders (pride and prejudices), and for self-presentation. "It should be
plain," writes Goffman, "that these advocated codes of conduct provide the stigmatized
individual not merely with a platform and a politics, and not merely with instruction as to
how to treat others, but with recipes for an appropriate attitude regarding the self. To fail
to adhere to the code is to be a self-deluded, misguided person; to succeed is to be both
real and worthy, two spiritual qualities that combine to produce what is called "authenticity" (1963, 111).

"Professionalization" of "stigmas" seems to have become an American passion; many (formerly) stigmatized categories of individuals (racial, ethnic and religious groups, the aged, the handicapped, etc.) now have professional social and political "representation." Childhood sexual abuse has created "experts," "official" spokespersons, and representational celebrities at a phenomenal rate. Religious experts reveal the secret workings of satanic cults, medical experts theorize on "trauma" and memory, sociological and legal experts argue over "false memory," and, individual experts narrativize their "own" experiences. Not all experts are created equal, however, as Goffman points out. What counts as an "authentic" experience--what counts as "real" and "worthy"--is too important to be left to chance, or to just any individual's ability or whim.

The public discourse of childhood sexual abuse has authorized certain "versions" of this experience. Categories of meaning, platforms and politics, and recipes for perception and behavior abound, especially in recovery discourse. At the same time, individuals are attempting to lay claim to "ownership" of their own experiences of childhood sexual abuse by creating and telling personal accounts. Through "authorship" narrators assert (or at least try to assert) their right to understand, to make meaning of, and to "tell" their experiences in certain ways.

No author ever has full "say" over a story. What one is able to say about a personal experience of childhood sexual abuse depends on available resources (words, meanings, concepts) and on opportunity. In addition, a story of experience must align with social categories of credibility and plausibility or the teller risks being labeled insane, or a liar. The story must also be coherent; the point is, after all, to be "understood"; the story must be lucid and "meaningful" to the listener. The story must also meet social standards and norms of telling-context propriety. "Authorship" (who may create and tell a story) of experience is also constrained by "authority," a culturally and socially constructed category that sanctions who may "authorize" (license, give permission for) such efforts, who may "authenticate" the story (pass judgment on its validity and confirm its "truth"), and who may "endorse" the story (affirm the worth of the individual and extend support and protection on behalf of the "community"). In childhood sexual abuse, the individual and the "politics of identity" discourse (and the "experts" represented through it) compete for status of "good authority." What one may say about a personal experience of childhood sexual abuse is dependent on the interactions among these factors.
In "Authority and Power in Dialogic Exchange," Bruner and Gofrain discuss the effect of the "authoritative voices" and "authoritative tellings" which "dominate official public performances" of any nationally-significant, currently-active story (1984, 59). Dominant story voices, speak in the tones and language of the "fathers, adults, leaders, and teachers" (and in the case of child sexual abuse, the "sisters"), and such voices establish versions of the story that then serve as sanctioned models. Individuals who choose to employ such models have the advantage of creating "pre-validate" accounts, while their new tales "second-story" the dominant versions, thereby increasing the supremacy of the dominant constructs. "Challenging voices," Bruner and Gofrain contend, must choose other channels or modes of expression; challenging voices often remain "individualized" and are "always uttered in reaction to the dominant tellings" (1984, 59).

Authority and authorship always interact in any personal experience narrative performance, including idionarrating. We all engage in acts of authoritative authentication. By listening, we authorize telling (or we "silence" such efforts). We authenticate (confirm) the teller's perception of the experience, accepting that what the teller claims happened really "did happen" more-or-less the way the teller claims it did. If we have doubts, we may encourage narrators to re-think the situation: "Do you really think he meant . . . ?" "Don't you think maybe she was just trying to . . . ?" We affirm the teller's interpretation of the experience either directly or through second-storying, or we withhold our endorsement from the meaning (values and attitudes) expressed in the story, and, possibly, from the teller. All three processes interact in the creation of a socially acceptable story. Sometimes, as tellers, we resist the suggestions of others and lay claim to authority as well as to authorship. If the pressure to conform is great, however, we may lay claim very quietly, or even in silence.

Issues of Authority

Creating a personal account of a childhood sexual abuse experience is a highly complex situation. In granting permission to speak about the experience at all, the authorizing agent (whether social discourse or individual therapist) also grants permission to "remember," to assess the resulting memories, to construct those memories into narrative-based accounts, and to give voice to those accounts. And, at each step of that process, to do so in certain ways, and not in others.
One of the most recent entries into childhood sexual abuse discourse has been the controversy over what constitutes a "valid" memory. The False Memory Syndrome Foundation claims that "false memory syndrome" involves "distorted and confabulated" memories. The "syndrome" becomes so "deeply ingrained that it orients the individual's entire personality and lifestyle, in turn disrupting all sorts of other adaptive behaviors" (Kihlstrom, no date). Advocates of "false memory syndrome" have suggested that unethical or inept therapists have planted memories of (and/or encouraged their clients to "remember") experiences the clients did not actually have during childhood, or to remember experiences the clients did have in ways that do not accurately reflect any verifiable evidence. The counter position is based on the notion that because children "often" forget such abuse the "sudden recall" of long-suppressed memories is only logical, and that the "symptoms" that the adult is presenting are a better indication of childhood sexual abuse than any lack of memory.

The Paul Ingram case discussed earlier is an excellent illustration of this process as it involves the satanic/ritual abuse story. The basic process, however, is essentially the same whether the "memories" produced are satanic, ritual, or (merely) ordinary childhood abuse. The television docudrama Shattered Trust: The Shari Karney Story, also discussed earlier, presents the legal aspects of "delayed recall" (the sudden lifting of long-term memory repression). The movie Prince of Tides suggests some of the psychological trauma that could be associated with repressed memories, and the need for such memories to be "recovered" before the "victim/survivor" can "heal." Much of the recovery discourse is premised on repressed memory and delayed recall, and individuals who suspect they may have been abused are often encouraged to try to "remember," or at least to "believe" the abuse happened and to "trust" that the memories will follow as "strength" is gained. I do not wish to engage, at the moment, in the argument over whether or not a "false memory syndrome" exists (although I feel that an increasing weight of evidence, from a variety of sources, supports indications that it does), nor do I want to enter the debate over whether therapists can or cannot "create" (intentionally or otherwise) such "false memories." I would like to point out that individuals sometimes do begin to "remember" only after they receive "suggestion" and/or "permission" to do so from sources they consider legitimate "authorities" on childhood sexual abuse. As "Patricia's" transcript (cited earlier) demonstrates, even television and movie accounts can "trigger" memories. Patricia clearly considered Shattered Trust a source of "valid" information, and she seemed to treat this docudrama as a legitimate and expert "voice" of the childhood sexual
abuse experience. Several other instances of "permission to remember" appear in the interviewee transcripts as well.

Authorization

Catherine received permission from her counselor to remember her formerly-repressed experiences after entering counseling for bulimia. The counselor suggested that sexual abuse was something "we should consider" in light of Catherine's poor body image and bulimia (possible symptoms of childhood sexual abuse according to recovery discourse). Catherine said her memories "just came up from there." There is no guarantee that Catherine wouldn't have "remember" these incidents on her own, eventually, but she credits the counselor's question and suggestion, and the 'space for remembering' created by the counselor, as the stimuli and context for remembering when she did.

1:050

C: Well
it came up actually
in light of the bulimia
um
talking+ about+ body image.
(few words of side comments on body image)
And so
in light of the bulimia+^>> my counselor just at one point asked me the question^ "Have you
ever been sexually abused?"<<
And I said < "Well if I have I don't remember it" >
And I was like (stage whisper, laughing) "Oh my god who said that?"
and she really didn't
pounce on that
too much I mean she's just
was saying that you-know that would be something that we should
consider.
And+, it was really good because that was such a
a scary thought that maybe even it could be true+
that her really backing off of it
and just sort of letting it lie+^and then the memories just sort of came up from there. (1:058)

Olivia, likewise, remembered after entering therapy for reasons other than sexual abuse, in her case, the death of a parent. By getting Olivia into a group for "incest survivor" whether she had any "memories or not," Olivia's grief counselor authorizes a particular version of Olivia's "grief" symptoms, which Olivia's memories then confirm. (In
a passage presented earlier, Olivia illustrates other aspects of authority. Group members refuse to "authenticate" Olivia’s story because she did not have enough "feelings" in her account, nor will they "endorse" her resistance to having those feelings.)

1:044
O: Well this came out in therapy.
   Yea, I remembered nothing
      until I was about forty, four, and my dad died
      and I went to a hospice grieving's counselor (while living on the West
      Coast; brief explanation of situation deleted)

1:050
   And a hospice grieving's counselor
   said she thought I was an incest survivor whether
   I had any, any re-memories or not
   so um, she got me into a group out there for
   incest survivors
   and they started me reading and then I got my first memory.
   So I had no, no real memory just a suspicion
   that it had happened
   up until then. (1:055)

Kay is insistent that her memories are valid despite what "a lot of people" would prefer to think. She vehemently denies the notions of false memory and therapist influence, contending instead that her therapist had to be "talked into" the possibility that Kay had been abused. Kay prefaces her discussion with an assertion of "no profit" to legitimate her claims. Her transcript, however, indicates that she has received at least some authorization for her memories both from her therapist and from the author (as expert) of the book which listed the "symptomology." (Her discussion on the subject of "memories" is widely dispersed throughout the course of the interview; she continually side-tracked to include relevant information, often engaging in full narratives in the process, but always returning to the issue. Counter numbers provide some indication of relative appearance of the passages included below.)

1:379
K: ... everybody in my family is dead I'm the oldest member of my family
       I have < no earthly gain >
       out of quote-quote "dredging up!
       this
       stuff!"
       other than the fact of my own healing
       and my own peace of mind.
I have no benefit!

ah

you-know a lot of people want to and this and this

and I'm sure that probably there are some eirentogencic

um

memory induced by unethical therapists and this and that.

However

um

that's not the case with me

my therapist

didn't mention anything!

ah

about

you-know-I-mean in fact I kept saying to her "well if I didn't know

better I would swear that I had been sexually--I read this check

list in Janet Greeson's book

and it says

you-know and I fit all of that . . ." (1:394)

2:213

K: So I started seeing counselor

and+ in+ Greeson's book it was this

she has thirty-one things that lists

ah the symptomology

and 28 of the 31 I could unequivocally answer yes

the other ones were qualitative answers where they use

"always" "never" that+ type of

ing: thing.

(2sec)

and I kept saying to not only to+

my therapist but other people

"read this isn't this amazing", you know

"if I didn't know better" . . . (2:220)

2:239

K: . . . and so uh+

1--I said this and

one day on the way out of the office

{Susan} the therapist said to me she said

"You know Kay

you, you may have very well have been abused"--you-know sexually

abused as a child and that's all she said. (2:242)

Those who suspect they suffered sexual abuse as children may not have. What

becomes "permission" for one person could easily become encouragement and even
pressure for another to try to remember something that never happened. The present saturation of public discourse with information emphasizing "repressed" memories and marker "symptoms" is itself an urgently compelling and powerful form of encouragement. Sometimes individuals require authorization not to remember. I learned of one such instance after I had talked briefly in a group about some of my research. A woman, in her twenties, told me that she had gone to a hypno-therapist not long before our conversation to find out if she had been sexually abused as a child. Her father had been hospitalized, and she had begun to experience a great deal of anxiety; more, she thought, than was appropriate to the non-life-threatening nature of his problem. Suddenly she realized that she couldn't remember very much of her childhood, and she began to fear that this meant that she had been sexually abused as a child. She begged the therapist to hypnotize her so that she could remember and confront her father because, you never know, he could take a turn for the worse and die, and then she might never know for sure.

There is nothing foolish about the above scenario. The young woman had reached a perfectly logical conclusion based on the information available to her. Fortunately for her, the therapist declined to hypnotize her before they had explored some other options for her "lack" of "many" childhood memories. The therapist suggested that possibly her childhood had simply been pleasantly even and ordinary, that is, relatively uneventful, and that what usually stood out in anyone's memory were only the really great or really awful times. On the other hand, he offered, if she insisted on a "traumatic" explanation, why not consider that something extremely wonderful had happened and had "wiped out" any relatively-minor unpleasant memories. After all, she admitted she couldn't recall anything particularly horrible. The woman was not only relieved but also excited by the possibility that maybe her childhood really had been pretty good. She said to me, "It was like being given permission to not have to remember something bad."

Authority and Endorsement

No story of personal experience is truly "successful" until it is "endorsed." Endorsement can take place only after the account has been "authorized" into existence and the listener (even if it is the self) decides that the story reflects appropriate objective and subjective "reality." Endorsement passes judgment on the worldview underlying the tale—and reflected in it. Unless the worldview passes muster, the support of the "community" is not likely to be extended to the teller. Different people require different degrees of "community." It is possible that the "self" will do for some, but most people
need someone outside themselves to confirm and affirm their worth and rightness for them. Once in a community, the individual is likely to continue to be supported even if she or he tells an occasional "bad" story. The situation is riskier when attempting to "get in." Which is why we often put up with more personally irritating versions of reality from our blood relatives than we do from those attempting to join the clan. Endorsement turns "I" into "We." The power to endorse, like other aspects of authority, is not equally distributed; most of us feel that some sources of endorsement "count" more than others.

A situation involving endorsement arose during Betsy's interview. In response to my question about when and where she was likely to speak about her experience now, Betsy told the following personal experience narrative:

1: 374

B: . . . >I do recall one time
    I was walking down the hallway of {the} school and I think this was
    two years ago--we had had an abuse\(\text{^\text{\textdagger}}\) program, we had had a
    report\(\text{<<}\) (of an incident by one of the kids)
    I had mentioned
    to the kids about my\(\text{^\textdagger}\) incident, and i don't go into detail but
    I just tell them that something like this happened to me and
    I had a funny feeling in my stomach and uh
    I should have told, da da dah.
    And I usually tell them that I waited until i was really old to tell my
    mom and my mom
    told me even when I was thirty which they think is ancient right\(\text{^\textdagger}--that\)
    she would have taken care of it if I'd told her.
    Of course you have to always add on "maybe you mom wouldn't
    maybe somebody would, somebody would.
    Um, what did you ask me? I lost my train of thought.

i: I just asked who you were likely to speak about this to

B: >>Oh yea, well at any rate we were walking down the hallway and there
    were eight women--eight staff women\(\text{<<}\)
    and+ we starting talking about it and of the eight
    all eight of us had experienced some sexual abuse.
    < All eight of us ! >
    Uh, of which none of us had really discussed openly
    except
    for what I had said in
    in this auditorium that day.
I: Did that surprise you?

B: Not really
but it did surprise them^ not really, and I'm sure^+, we didn't discuss any specific incidents, but, I am positive that some of those people's was of a much more serious nature than mine because of the tone. But--well--I guess it did surprise me too that all of us that all of us had had this happen and that it must happen to everybody almost in some way or another hopefully not serious ways.

I: um-hmm.

B: Yea we're all adults, and none of us had really talked to anybody about it very much. None of us--I don't think--if I'm recalling right had ever told on the person. Even if we'd talked about it we'd never had this person called on the carpet. (2sec) I suppose we're at fault! For allowing it to perpetuate. (1:408)

She paused at this point, waiting for me to agree or disagree with her comment. When I realized she was expecting me to act as an "authority" and to pass judgment on her intimation of being "at fault" (confirm her interpretation) and to endorse (as "worthy," or not) the hesitantly-stated declaration of social responsibility, I was embarrassed. I tried to laugh it off by explaining to her that I didn't want to comment because I was trying to keep my opinions out of what she was saying. That she was doing more than simply soliciting conversational person-to-person agreement and support for the correctness of her own assessment of the situation is manifest in the pauses before and after her evaluative comment and in the "suppose" of the position stance. The comment itself, however, is an indication that, to some extent, Betsy feels pressured by some sort of
"authoritative" message-sender to speak out or to feel guilty for not doing so. The "freedom" to speak out has become a "moral obligation"--that she "ought" to do so.

Authentication

Authority involves issues of the way one remembers or speaks about the experience as well as permission to remember or to speak. How one interprets the events of childhood and what meanings one assigns to the experience reflects deep and subtle aspects of authority. The "story" that is encouraged and/or imposed may not fit the experience. The anecdote related earlier about the woman who wanted a therapist to hypnotize her so that she could "remember" hints at such possibilities for imposition. That young woman was able to sidestep most of the problems. She had, really, neither memories nor symptoms other than anxiety (which, she discovered, was not actually all that inappropriate for her situation), and she had encouragement to resist applying inappropriate solutions to her problem. A more hazardous situation occurs when there really are "memories." I will use a situation from my own life as illustration.

A personal narrative

When I was about five years old, near as I can figure, a man took me and at least one other child (and there might have been two others, but I can't remember for sure) into an enclosed stair well of a building. There were other people in a different part of the building at the time. I couldn't begin to tell you how old he was, but he was "grown up."

He exposed his erect penis to us. I can't remember feeling "ashamed" or even "embarrassed" beyond the five-year-old, giggling, seeing someone's "wee-wee" or underpants sense of that word.

He suggested some things we might do with his penis, and somewhere along the way, we began "daring" each other to do what he suggested. I don't remember whether he started the daring or we did, but I do remember I knew what such a challenge meant. I had an older brother, and I knew that only "sissies" turned down a dare. This was a bad enough problem for boys, but, being a girl, I was a sissy by default unless I could prove otherwise. I accepted the challenge; I did what he suggested. Nothing terrible happened. In fact, I remember feeling quite proud of myself for having accepted--and successfully fulfilled--the dare, and also feeling smug for having gotten away with it. I didn't feel "abused." I felt "ornery," a term that was applied locally (dictionary definitions aside), with a sort of grudging admiration, to children who were creative and determined, likely
to get into minor sorts of trouble, and suspected of taking great enjoyment in doing so, that is, being "bad" and loving every minute of it.

I knew some other things about "dares" which helped to determine what I did next. I kept my mouth shut about what had happened. I knew that dares among kids usually involved something we probably shouldn't have been thinking about doing in the first place or we wouldn't have started daring each other to try. It was usually something that adults would have some sort of minor or major fit about--if they found out about it. So the second stage of a dare, assuming you were successful in the first place, was to try to exercise some control over who knew. Such control involved 1.) trying to keep anyone who was a participant in the activity from "telling" on you (mutual blackmail was the strategy of choice) and 2.) exercising a little discretion over who you yourself told. Of course, I couldn't have articulated this when I was five, but I had already had enough practice to have a sense of how the process worked. The only person I might have told would have been my older brother; after all he was the one who was usually issuing the dares and was the one I was usually trying to impress. But I don't remember telling him. Maybe the opportunity didn't arise. Besides, I had the sense that what we had done in that stairwell was one of those things my mother would have a fit about because I "should have known better" (although I never could figure out how I should have known better before I did something). Someday, my brother might want to "get even" with me for something and would tell on me, so the fewer people who knew the better.

At any rate, I didn't talk about the experience. Consequently, it began to fade from my memory and took on a dream-like quality for a number of years. It wasn't until the recent excitement over childhood sexual abuse began that I pulled that (never totally gone) memory up for examination. What I discovered was that I think differently about this experience now, but I feel the same. I know, now, that what happened should never have happened, and that such a situation is potentially dangerous. I know now that, by definition, what the man did was clearly "sexual abuse." What I experienced, however, was not.

On the other hand, I have been told, frequently, by a variety of persons whose claims to expertise range from those with psychological theory training, to people who have-been-abused-and-so-they-know, to people who have read or heard "all about" childhood sexual abuse and so they, too, know, that any and all forms of childhood sexual abuse are traumatizing, and, therefore I must have experienced some level of trauma. I've been told that the reason I didn't tell anyone was because I felt "ashamed"; this being, after
all, an inherent part of any childhood sexual abuse event. I have been told that I am "in denial" because I refuse to admit that I was traumatized, or at least seriously affected, by this particular experience. I have been told that I have lingering "problems" as a result of this event even though I can trace the identified "problems" to several other more personally-meaningful sources. I have been told that I cannot consider or treat this experience as a "non-event" in my life nor should I treat it lightly. I have been told by all these other people that they know more about my "experience" than I do. My version, I've been told, does not reflect what "really" happened. My version of "reality" (at least in this case) doesn't "count."

The new discourse surrounding sexual abuse attempts to break through the imposed-silence and guilty-victim story of past years and offer new ways for interpreting and understanding such experiences. In this sense, it has been a liberating force; the more options an individual has for "making meaning," the more likely she or he will be able to "make sense" of any event. If I knew only "guilty victim" and "shame-based survivor" options for my experience then, perhaps, the other versions suggested would be invaluable. But when they are imposed, indiscriminately and emphatically, they are as much a "denial" of my experience, and as limiting and as potentially silencing as any discourse from the past. Child sexual abuse prevention activists and childhood recovery advocates have lost sight of the difference between what is done to the child and what is experienced by the child. The first may be defined objectively by outsiders, what is experienced can be (or at least should be) defined only by the one who had the experience. What is experienced in any given situation may or may not be "sexual abuse." I know. The incident described above was not my only encounter with child sexual abuse; I "experienced" different situations in different ways. But I know that I felt then--and still feel--"ornery" about having accepted that dare. And I know this is a very "politically incorrect" story.

When I began this study, I had accepted much of the current rhetoric as the natural denouement of the accumulated, finally-heard voices of sexual abuse survivors. Most of the negative feedback I have had about my attempts to talk about the incident described above came after I began the project, and they heightened my interest in the "constructed" nature of the discourse. Because of my own experiences, however, I was aware that there might be other versions of the childhood sexual abuse story "out there," and when I encountered them I both recognized them and resisted "correcting" them. If I had insisted that these other versions were "incorrect" in some way, there would have been little
chance that I would have considered them important (and not simply aberrant) and, possibly, would not have been told them at all. As it was, I must have broadcast my own ambiguous attitudes toward such stories, people started telling me their own cases of confusion about definitions and of distress over imposed versions of what sexual abuse "meant" and "means." I was able to convince two such individuals to participate in the interviews after I had implicitly "authorized" their own stories. I will discuss these situations at some length because they involve multiple issues of authority and authorship. In addition, even some of those who came to the project on their own discussed their struggles with the "shoulds" and the "oughts" of the public input, and these will be discussed a bit later.

Meredith

Meredith approached me one day after she heard me talking about my dissertation research. She said that she had had an experience which had disturbed her quite a bit. Once, when she was participating in an awareness discussion for parents and teachers of young children, she had told about an incident from her own childhood. Several of the group had later commented that they were shocked that she would be willing to share her experience of childhood sexual abuse so publicly. The problem for Meredith was that she had never considered the childhood incident to be "sexual abuse." She had only brought up the incident because the scope of the current definition of child sexual abuse had surprised her. She realized that it would have covered even this experience from her own childhood, an occurrence that she considered fairly harmless and neither sexual nor abusive. Her adult experience, however, left her feeling "strange." A few months after our conversation, I persuaded her to be interviewed and asked her to repeat the story she had told me.

1:004
M: Um
when I was younger, I'm assuming, um
around 5 years old^+
I+ had gone to visit an elderly
neighbor couple
and um, the older man
had asked me to come over
by him
and+ he wanted to give me a hug which was fine^+
and then he lifted up my top and+, said he was going to kiss my tummy.
and he pulled my pants down a little bit
and kissed me around my navel and--and
and it, huhh as I recall it felt
a little unusual, um
and I went home
and told my mom about it
and she said OK, didn't make any big deal about it and said she'd go
down and talk to him, and I
believe that was the last, the
situation was ever discussed at all other than
she did tell me
a few days later that Mr. Bassett was going to a rest home because he
was getting old.
and that was the last of
the "happening" I guess.

I: um-hmm

M: Then um
oh I don't know
probably thirty+ five years later, 30--35 years later
I was teaching preschool {at the time}
and we had a sexual abuse person come in to talk to the parents
and during the talk I realized part of what they were saying was sexual
abuse could be, as
what I thought was as little as, Mr. Bassett kissing my tummy.
And I was shocked by it and I shared the story
and afterwards
the director came up to me
and said that her and her husband were shocked that I would share such
a story
with them.
And I was surprised because I didn't see the sexual abuse
I saw it just as a situation that happened.
And +
That's the story I related to you.
(we both laugh gently)
Um
I guess since then I've thought about it
even since our conversation
and+, I even mentioned it to my mom
and at first she didn't even remember the situation
at all
but i+
it was interesting to me that I remembered it
not as something negative but I remembered it at all because
(2sec)
I don't have a lot of memories of my youth at all and
that's the only one I can remember, probably the earliest one of my
childhood I can remember.
And+
so it must have had an impact on me for me to remember it.
I--I don't see it as negative. (1:033)

I asked her to describe the situation a bit more:

1:039
People looked at me when I said it^
um
and I was kind of surprised by that^, cause I was (begins blushing--volume drops)
wondering if I should have even shared it at (resumes normal volume)
but I--I'm glad I did
I-mean
it's really made me think about um
I always thought sexual abuse is probably um
(3 sec)
more intense, than that.
And+ I'm as--assuming because+ my+ mother never made a big deal out it it was never
labeled sexual abuse that uh it was just an incident, that happened.
and it was uh
I guess
in my mind I wrote it off it was and older man that
having difficult time
and+
it wasn't an acceptable behavior^ but it wasn't I hadn't been violated! I didn't feel (fades out) (1:049)

I asked her to say a little bit more about the other people's reactions.
1:051

M:  They were just really shocked, they viewed it as sexual abuse
    uh, right away I
    even I can remember we discussed it
    when
    the director's
    mentioned that her husband was shocked that I would share such a
    personal thing^<
    < it didn't seem + that personal^ >
    (we both start laughing)
    it was like
    Uh, you-know it was no big deal^ it was just an old man getting old and
    his behavior wasn't appropriate.
    and^+
    huhh
    She made me--I guess sh--for the first time^(
    (stutters, trying to find words)
    Well--I, she put a label on in.
    and^+ um
    that, I probably though more about it the last few years than I had in the
    30 years before^+

I:  How?+ do you feel about that label being put on?

M:  (shyly, embarrassed, whispering) I don't like it.
    (we both start laughing)
    And even talking about it now it seems real strange+ um
    (5 sec)
    by putting a label it makes it happen!
    < it was sexual abuse >
    (2 sec)
    (softer)
    Kind of
    (we both laugh)
    Um
    cause it is a label.
    I didn't, I really didn't see--I, even now I can recall that it didn't feel
    right it--the--com, it was very uncomfortable
    you know
    but, huhh
    not violated, totally.
    It
    perhaps if it was a
    different part of my body^ or something, you know^
I guess I didn't think of my tummy as sexual at that time. You know, what I thought sexu--why I don't even know if I knew what sexual was at that time. (1:068)

Meredith notes the power of the sexual abuse label: "it makes it happen." Her present tense usage is illuminating; she is "experiencing" sexual abuse now, as a result of the label, even though she did not experience it as a child. In an attempt to examine the processes and forces behind this sense of "then and now" more deeply, I asked Meredith how her experience had affected her attitudes and feelings toward the old man, toward herself, and toward her relationship with the people she had worked with. Did she feel differently about Mr. Bassett now that the label of "sexual abuse" had been put on her experience?

1:071
M: No, I think, I've
(4 sec)
Course, what an old man then might have been, might have been 60
years old then, (laughing) you-know might not have been it
I guess I still think about it is, that
if I, remember correctly
there might have been, other incidences in the neighborhood.
Um
I can remember my mom saying
he was going to a home^
that older people went to sometimes.
and+
I felt really bad because I thought I might have caused it because of
what I had told my mom and she said that no that there
you-know just sometimes when you get old^
you-know
you need people to watch after you more, and that
other people had made comments about things^
so um
I, I guess I just+ still even assumed an older man that, had lost, um
control of reality or something.
But I still don't like the label sexual abuse (laughing). (1:082)

Meredith resists changing her assessment of Mr. Bassett. The former definition, the one her mother had helped her create at the time: a man "getting old" and losing "control," was still adequate for her own understanding as well as more accurately reflective of her attitudes concerning the experience and the behavior. I asked if the new label had changed how she felt about herself. She is a bit more ambiguous here; her new understanding has
altered her thinking, but she resists letting it alter her feelings. She cites her mother's handling of the situation as reason for, and proof of, her lack of "trauma" at the time of the incident. In doing so, she reveals as well some of her feelings and attitudes toward the ways that child sexual abuse is being handled now, an issue she returns to later.

1:085
M: No^, no^ I really admired the way my mom handled it looking back um because, nothing was made of it--it wasn't you-know she didn't hug me and say "Oh you poor child, you've been sexually abused" (we are both laughing) I think that would have been a more traumatic it was like "oh+, you know you're right for not (sic) telling me it wasn't right", but um I still don't think I--if anyone ever asks me if I was sexually abused, I don't think I would think this in my mind but I don't think I'd share it. because (3sec) < deep down I don't feel it was sexually abuse--ive to me^ > < but I think > I can see where people put the label on it. (1:091)

While the adult label has not changed her assessment of her childhood experience to a large degree, it has altered her relationship with co-workers. She again emphasizes the lack of fit between the new label and her experience: her childhood experience had not been "abusive"; it had given her "confidence" that she had a "right" to tell if something "didn't feel right," and a sense of assurance that an adult would intervene--calmly--on her behalf. She also notes, however, the "silencing" effect of the new rhetoric.

1:094
M: I think I watched what I said more^ (we both laugh) I just wasn't as open^ Uh, that I was--accepting so innocently! because it just until the, presenter to the uh evening's talk
until she
mentioned you-know sexual abuse could be as little, as someone kissing
you that doesn't want
you don't want them to
it never entered my mind^,
< it never had that label at all. >
So+ I, uh
made me
think that I'd better watch what I say from now on (laughing)
a little bit more
things we're talking
or sharing as much.
I wasn't embarrassed by it
because I thought
I even shared with them that
you-know the way it was handled
it wasn't something dirty
so
I don't think it left a scar on me.
You know
if anything, it made me feel, uh
gave me confidence^ that if something didn't feel right
I had a right to tell my mom
and she wasn't going to make a big deal out of it. (1:106)

Meredith returned to the issue of adult response to a child's disclosure that she or he
is being abused. The response, she suggests, may leave a "scar" even if the experience for
which the child seeks feedback or intervention does not. The "we" in this next passage
refers to a group of older women friends (none had young children and none were co-
workers) with whom she had discussed the responses of those in the preschool awareness
session.

1:135
M: You have+ children
you want to protect them and stuff
that--that in this day and time the situation might be different and we
don't know if we could just
handle it so casually+, or appear to be so casual about it.
That we might be
the type of person to hug our child and say "Oh my gosh! you've been
sexually abused!" (laughing)
ad I think that's wrong.
I think um
it's--it's really kind of changed me
how I
just, working as a teacher and things.
it's really affected me^
to see, how much
impact my reactions have on situations.
that^
if my mother would have
reacted, very negatively and
scared--I, that would have left a
a scar on me I think. (1:145)

I asked Meredith a number of the standard interview questions just for the sake of consistency. One, fortuitously, revealed her attempts to get endorsement for her version of the situation. I asked if she had ever sought "counseling" for her experience. "No," she hadn't; well, then again:

1:268
M: Other--the presenter, of the, sexual abuse thing
when the
(2sec)
director had said this to me I went up to her, and told her the situ--you-
know, I said
"Do you--did you feel that was sexual abuse"?
and she um
I believe she is a professional counselor.

I: um-hm

M: And+, she+ said "Well what di--how did you feel about it"? and I said
well I didn't think it was^
I said
you know
and I still don't other than, that's what appears what
you-know I could label! it that
and she said
she said
"You know! if it's sexual abuse"
and just left it at that.
(quietly and shyly) And so I'll just let you know it wasn't.
(we both laugh) (1:276)

My endorsement (backed and illustrated by my personal experience) seconded the counselor's, and I think Meredith left the interview a bit more confident that she did
"know" that she hadn't been sexually abused. The most fanatical advocates of the "trauma" theory would say, however, that Meredith was obviously more negatively affected by her childhood experience than she lets on. Feminist-recovery adherents would say that she wouldn't have remembered it at all if it hadn't made a significant impression on her, and even she admits that it this is one of her "earliest" memories, that it is "interesting" that she "remembered it at all," and that "it must have had an impact" (1:026-033). Perhaps even more revealing of childhood trauma is her statement that, "I don't have a lot of memories of my youth at all" (1:031); lack of clear memories is one "symptoms" of childhood sexual abuse.

Other interpretations are possible, however, and the evidence lies partly in some of Meredith's other comments: first, that she "felt really bad" because she thought she might have been responsible for Mr. Bassett having to go to the home (1:077), and second, that she "really admired" the way her mother had handled the situation (1:085). After the tape recorder was turned off, Meredith and I continued to chat. In a way Meredith has been "traumatized" by "sexual abuse," but by the label and the "Oh my gosh" overreaction of her adult coworkers rather than any childhood experience. She seemed to need all the reassurance she could get that she was "OK" and that her interpretation of her childhood "happening" was "OK" as well. I shared with her some of my own experiences with pressure to adopt the public interpretation even when it didn't fit. We also continued to talk a bit more about Meredith's situation. At one point, she commented that her mother's handling of the situation was actually very unusual. Her mother's normal response to anything that "went wrong" was to rant and rave a bit and to blame Meredith, i.e., it was her fault for being there in the first place, etc. I speculated that perhaps the "unusualness" of her mother's response may have been at least partly why the incident left such an impression on Meredith, why she "remembered" it at all. She agreed that this may well be the case, and many of Meredith's comments during the interview, which often focus on how sexual abuse is "handled," support such a "reading." Certainly something about what Mr. Bassett did "felt a little unusual" to Meredith even at the time, but she was negatively affected by this experience to a much lesser degree (if at all) than she was by her disclosure in the awareness training session. But then the two situations were "handled" quite differently.
Susan

I wish to deal with one other situation of "re-thinking" at some length. Susan and I had known each other for several years before I even began considering work on the subject of childhood sexual abuse accounts. When I first mentioned my intentions of working on this subject to Susan, about four years ago, she said, "Oh you don't want to do that. Nobody wants to hear about that stuff." (These are, of course, loose quotes from memory, but they represent the tone of what was said and at least some of the actual words.) Over the past three years, whenever I've spoken about the theoretical aspects of my work and of some of what I was finding (in a general way), Susan continued to voice resistance toward my research and the subject of childhood sexual abuse in general: "Can't you find something more pleasant to work on?" "Do you really think they're [the interviewees] telling the truth?" "Don't you think people are just making this stuff up?"

Her initial resistance was understandable. She is over fifty, and a member of a generation that didn't talk about "sex" at all, much less about deviant forms of it. However, her ongoing attempts to "silence" me surprised me because she seemed to be incorporating into her thinking some of the current discourse concerning gender inequality, domestic violence, and child sexual abuse as a result of reading books about "women's issues," an area she was becoming increasingly interested in. The reasons became clear one day when I suggested that I was starting to work on some stories that "didn't fit" with the current discourse and had encountered some people who didn't want any part of the "label" at all. "Oh," she said, "well, I had an experience when I was a girl that some people would probably label sexual abuse." I got her to tell me the story, then "authenticated" her version (validated it on the basis of my "expert" status), "authorized" her telling of it (gave her license/permission to tell), and "endorsed" her efforts (affirmed and confirmed her interpretation and her stance).

Several weeks later, I asked if she would be willing to participate in the study. By the time we were able to arrange the interview her feelings toward both my project and toward sexual abuse disclosure narratives had changed considerably. Moreover, she was beginning to alter the way she told her story (not changing the content but finding new meanings for it) to support her new attitudes and understandings about how and why people would tell such narratives. She was beginning to see them as "tools" in the power struggle between men and women.
Susan's Story

1:004
S: Now obviously this as I recall it
and I hadn't thought about for a long time
until we had a conversation.
But um
when I was
when I had a baby-sitting job
and I < recall+ I was >
eleven or twelve
um
I had the experience where+, I had been baby-sitting for this family
in their home^, and then they had a summer cottage.
and+
so+, it sounded like great fun to go+ and I went for a week and they
paid me by a--the day instead of the hour^ and I stayed overnight, and played with the kids, and had some free time
to myself and
helped a little with the meals and the housework
and I generally remember that it was
a lot of fun
I, the kid--I really didn't like the kids a lot
I liked the mother a lot.
And then I had the experience
that
one night, I was sleeping^ and um
I woke up to find that the+ man of house was
um, < lying on the bed >
now I was under covers
he was on the top of the covers
but he was lying there+ hugging^ me.
< And I had no >
absolutely no context for (begins laughing ) dealing with this situation.
And+
um
so+
I+ um+
I certainly
didn't do what
somebody should have done which was to yell or say "get out of here"
or something which
women are just being taught to do now
but um
anyway I
just
told him that I thought he should--they had some guests down
stairs and he was obviously
had been drinking and+
who knows how far along he+ was but he
wasn't
ah real clear-headed
and+ so+ um+
I just sort of tried to
use my wits
to get him to leave^,
and then he'd say
you-know "I'm not going to do anything I'm just going to lie here and"
"a minute" or something like that
and+ um+ I really have
I don't have a lot of recall
< of exactly what went on > I remember the incident
and um
then I had
I put it to the back of my mind
and because I really was enjoying having this money
it wasn't very much but I was enjoying having the money
>> so I suppose it's like a lot a women you-know the whole thing of
sexual harassment and whether you loose a job<<
so um somewhere
very shortly after that
I found myself telling my mother about it and that was the end of the job
absolutely .
And I wasn't sorry
I mean I really didn't enjoy the kids and, and this thing
threw me off a little bit but I was stuck there
for a week
and then just really
no way to deal with it I did not
and I guess I-I just didn't think about it because
where--how was I going to deal with it I had no context for it
whatsoever. (1:040)

When Susan first told me about her experience (and these comments and quotes are
from my memory of that telling, which was not recorded), the emphasis was on the loss of
future jobs with this family because of the incident. Susan remembered being "mad at my
mother because I was loosing all that money." There was no mention in this first, brief telling of the core incident of items such as "context," "sexual harassment," of the strategies which "women are just being taught to do now" for handling such situations as the one in which Susan found herself, all of which appear in the later, recorded version presented above.

Recording sessions, by their very nature, change what will be said. The teller is encouraged to be expansive, to go beyond the simple core of the narrative, and she knows that the interviewee wants more and is not likely to interrupt. In addition, I had "pre-validated" Susan's narrative both by establishing that there were other, similar cases (which I considered "valid" versions of the childhood sexual abuse experience) and, to a lesser extent, by having already received her tale once as a "successful" personal experience narrative. Thus she was even more comfortable and willing to talk by the time of the recording session. Such considerations explain only part of the emphasis changes, however. While Susan has been able to (or has chosen to) reassess her experience, deciding that she "wasn't sorry" that her mother ended the job and admitting that "this thing threw me off a little bit," much of what appears in the transcript bears more witness to changes in Susan's attitudes towards those who speak out than to changes in Susan's understanding or feelings concerning her own experience. While she now (potentially) is willing (but still reluctant) to have a label of "sexual abuse" attached to her experience, this willingness is premised on her concept of the "usefulness" of such a label. The ways that her narrative could now be "useful" are beginning to appear even as she tells me the story for the second time. It could serve as an example of the kind of awkward situation a young girl might find herself in and be used to open a discussion about strategies for "dealing with [such] situations," that is, as a form of "pre-contextualizing" possible future encounters with men. Her story could provide both an example of "sexual harassment" and evidence that this can happen at any age or in any job. Indications of her changing attitudes toward people speaking about such experiences appear later in the interview. After some more discussion of the childhood incident, I asked Susan if she remembered discussing this with anyone other than her mother.

1:068

S: You know that is really a hard question
I think
somewhere along the way
I have mentioned it to my husband >>in recent years when we've been
talking about all the sexual imposition and rape and everything<<
trying to get him to understand what it's like being a woman going your whole life
with this fear, this anxiety, this um awareness
that you're vulnerable on this one issue
and I do think that I mentioned it somewhere along the way just to you-
know quickly, in passing. (1:070)

Even though Susan knew my research was on childhood sexual abuse, up to this point, she had been consistent in her use of "adult" terminology, that is, "sexual harassment," "sexual imposition and rape," "what it's like being a woman," etc. When I asked if she would label her experience as "sexual abuse," a term more often applied to children, her response (after a four second pause) reveals her on-going ambivalence with the label. Like Meredith, Susan finds that the technical definition accurately fits her experience, but the affective definition does not fit quite as well. However, since Susan has "committed" to the label, to some extent, she manages her ambivalence by prioritizing the technical definition. It was not until I encouraged her to use a non-technical basis to compare her own interpretation at the time of the incident (based on memory, of course) to her present understanding (based on her readings), that she was forced to examine her own discourse processes.

1:070
I: Would you label that?
experience as sexual abuse?

(4sec)

S: Oh--yea I guess I would now+ um knowing
I mean I've--spe--I've read-
in the--in the last few years I've read about this enough
that I would certainly call that sexual abuse
and it was a dangerous, dangerous situation^
I mean he--he could have raped me I don't know what I would have done he could have raped me

I: But at the time?
did you feel that is was sexual abuse?
or?
S: Oh no
    no I wouldn't have
    I had no way to label it that
    I don't think that term was ever used at that age
    you-know at that time.

I: Looking back on the experience now
does it feel like sexual abuse?

S: No, because um
    again it was in a context
    that did not include that label
    it wasn't described like that, I didn't process it like that
    I just--I
    it was, sort of um
    what? amorphous
    there was no\^ ah context with words
    I--I knew--I really knew a lot
    I knew it was wrong
    I knew
    ah, I didn't want him there
    but
    as far as having a context with words, to be able to discuss it with
    anybody umn-unh (no)
    and in fact looking back
    um
    I don't know why I told my mother
    maybe it was a defense
    maybe I was
    more afraid than I wanted to admit
    and I really wanted to end that
    experience
    but I
    I have no way of knowing that now. (1:095)

What she decides is that "context" is the issue. Having declared that the label fits,
she can now speculate that the reason she told her mother at all was "a defense, maybe I
was more afraid that I wanted to admit." Perhaps Susan can now even stop being "mad"
at her mother for cutting off Susan's source income (which Susan claimed she had been
"enjoying" when she first told me her story). It is impossible to tell how much of Susan's
account reveals simply an articulation of her childhood experience that is more profound
and relevant to her perceptions and memories because she now has more serviceable language available to her, and how much her account reveals a reassessment of her experience to make it "fit" with the current discourse. In Susan's case, as long as she is "comfortable," the question is relatively inconsequential. Still, the "I guess I would now" and the "maybes" and the "I have no way of knowing that now" as well as the reversal of her several-year-long resistance to my project all speak to the power of the social discourse to alter Susan's interpretation and understanding of her own experience and of her sense of needing to do so. She even admits as much later in the interview:

1:360

S: ... and my daughter thinks that
   I've moved
   you-know moved along or something (we are both laughing)
   certainly I'm talking about it in different ways and I'll, I'll acknowledge
   that
   you-know that I have
   moved
   in some ways.
   But again it's the context isn't it?
   It's um
   um
   words and phrases and
   ah metaphors and images
   that are being used^...^ (1:368)

Since most of Susan's reversal was based on her concept of the usefulness of childhood sexual abuse narratives (and adult abuse narratives), I asked the following question:

1:096
I: If somebody
   if you were in a group
   and
   some
   body said, "How many of you have had
   an experience with sexual abuse"
   would you identify / yourself with that sort /of thing?
S: / ab absolutely / (1:099)

Susan immediately launched into telling a story about someone else telling a sexual abuse narrative. In a women's group situation that she had participated in about two years
prior to our conversation, she and some other women were trying to start a discussion on the subject of sexual abuse (adult or child). "And they weren't ready to deal with subject," Susan said. So one of the women told a story about having been abused by her grandfather. "Boy did that open the flood-gates. And I guess more than anything else that one experience has showed me that we have to have the courage to discuss these things," Susan asserted. Clearly this experience was influential in changing Susan's attitude toward such stories, and perhaps this, more than anything she had read or any of my comments over the years, was the most instrumental. She had not, however, followed the other woman's testimony with her own, although it seems more likely she would now. She can see that it would be useful and appropriate in "any situation where women are talking about violence against women." In fact, she decided that "probably this interview will make me more conscious that I have something to say, you know we shouldn't be quiet about this stuff" (1:135). She returned to this position several times during the rest of the interview.

1:200
S: And I certainly feel that if women don't talk about these things the situation is going to get worse our silence is our worst enemy (1:203)

1:215
S: And ah+ since+ we're talk--you-know since we're talking about it in this way maybe I'll+ see+ that there's some power in ah, bringing this personal experience narrative into as--as a way to say you-know all of us you-know we can't avoid it. (1:221)

Susan's primary sources of information on sexual abuse and the strongest influences on her perspective (counting me as a minor and tangential), result from her affiliations with Women's Studies, her acquaintance with members of the rape crisis center, and her sense of herself as an "activist." She, therefore, sees sexual abuse as primarily a women's
issue, and this stance and her background are evident throughout her transcript. She used the phrase "violence against women" increasingly as the interview turned away from her own experience. On the other hand, she has repeatedly made comments over the past several years about sexual abuse survivors "making it up." I decided to follow up on this issue during the interview. Her comments reflect both the current climate of doubt and some of it's source in past social rhetoric, which often claimed that rape accusations by women were false.

1:304
I: Since you brought it up (in previous discussion and over the years) how do you feel about this notion of repressed memory?
where you

S: Oh I think it's so tricky.
I think it's so+ tricky.
and I do believe
that
this whole+, business, of professions
making money
counseling somebody
is it like a lawyer
ah looking for an accident?
so that they can make some money I don't know
but it's--it terrifies men.
I mean the--the whole idea that a
that a husband can be accused of rape by his wife is terrifying to men
what a strange
concept that is
(5sec)
I mean men--men
certainly are victims too (1:317)

A bit later in the interview, Susan told me a story about a friend of hers who had received a letter from a woman friend of hers who was writing to everybody who'd ever been kind to her to tell them she'd just been through counseling and for the first time felt free to talk about her father abusing her while she was growing up. She was trying to start a new life--moving and changing her identity--and she wanted to thank everyone who'd been kind to her before she did.

1:440
S: . . . and I made a copy of it, and had--shared the copy
with a number of people
I made my
ah‡, husband and my son read it^ (1:446)

This exemplary narrative would seem to support the "victim must be believed" stance of much current discourse. Susan's comments that she copied and shared it with friends and family, that she "made" her husband and son "read it" indicate that she believed the claims of the letter. On the other hand, it may be that it was merely "useful" for making a point and so long as it was believable, that was enough. More likely, in this case, Susan felt that there was no doubt about the veracity of the claims. It does, however, conflict somewhat with her earlier claims about how "tricky" it is to know what is and what is not an accurate assertion in such cases. Indeed, her doubts are not allayed even here, even with a letter from a "friend of a friend," even though she used the letter to support her own beliefs and attitudes about violence against women. Immediately after this story and her comments about sharing the copy of the letter, Susan paused for a few seconds and the added:

1:446
S: (3sec)
so as these stories surface
I think we're all
getting other knowledge and then it raises the question of this
thing--is anybody making this up to get attention or to settle a wrong^
or something (1:452)

Susan's account reveals several aspects of Marjorie Bard's concept of "idionarrating" (storytelling between the "I" and the "me" of the self), particularly her assertion that "stories to the self are often a plan for and prelude to action--in particular in regard to social change" (61). Such self-telling, unlike inter-personal performance, allows an individual to work out strategies for narrating that include adequate and sufficient cause-and-effect sequences and justifications for feelings, attitudes, and positions. Bard also suggests that the story isn't told publicly until after it has been idionarrated "and has been an ego-enhancing experience" (65). I would contend that in most cases a told-to-the-self story relating to social issues (particularly controversial ones) is unlikely to go "public" unless it has been an "ego-enhancing experience" in terms of the social discourse during self-narrating. Susan may now choose to tell her story publicly because she sees how it aligns with the discourse of contemporary "women's issues," and because she has now succeeded in composing (through idionarrating and through interpersonal practice) a version of her experience which can, as Bard suggests, be used as "a strategic tool for interpersonal persuasion" (69). Meredith, on the other hand, is unlikely to tell her story
very often or widely; the version she has chosen to tell herself still does not align comfortably with the current discourse. While Meredith's idionarrative is "ego-enhancing" in the sense that it adequately reflects and supports her own views of herself to herself, it does not support the views of contemporary child sexual abuse discourse. Meredith knows this, but she has chosen not to alter her narrative to meet the demands of that discourse.

Because Susan has received endorsement for a non-traumatic version of her own childhood experience, she is now able to narrate that experience, at least to me, knowing that the label (and all its baggage) will not be imposed on her in ways she does not wish. In seeing for herself the relationship of this narrative to issues she cares deeply about and understanding its usefulness as an illustration, she has granted herself license to tell the story, if she so chooses. She is unlikely to run into serious attempts to deny the authenticity of her (current) version of her own experience, since she is careful to "contextualize" it to both her immediate audience and to the social discourse. She feels "restrained in a lot of situations about talking about violence against women," and if she mentions "issues like this and there's a . . . a flat or negative response" she "would not pursue it," she wouldn't "push it where somebody's very uncomfortable with it" (1:210). Within the transcript, the commentary surrounding the story shows evidence that she is beginning to frame it to support the social discourse: "it was a dangerous situation . . . I mean he could have raped me." Now that she has a clear sense of the "context," Susan can use her narrative if, and when, she sees fit.

Authority: Control and Sanction

The Fragile Victim

At one point in this project, I considered writing a dissertation on obstructions to research. Originally, I had hoped to observe and tape record an on-going group of some sort, either an informal support group or, better yet, a counselor-led one. I wanted to explore the ways, and the mechanisms through which, accounts might "drift" toward similarity or even consensus as members of the group exchanged language and meanings. Several times I tried to arrange such an opportunity with professionals counselors. In every case, after lengthy negotiation, the answer was "no." The project would be too "invasive" of the privacy of group members. It would "interfere" with the "work" the members needed to do. There was too much "risk" for the members who worried about
compromising their anonymity, a claim which speaks volumes about the current state of the stigma still surrounding childhood sexual abuse—to say nothing of the stigma of professional counseling.

I understood the hesitations and concerns. What I could not understand was the reluctance, and sometimes refusal, of the professionals to even ask the members of a group if they would consider such a request. In one case, I was able to convince a professional counselor—after weeks of negotiation—to present the possibility of such a study to her group. However, neither she nor they (she claimed although I’m not sure she ever asked them) could accept the possibility of me coming to the group to explain the project before they made any sort of commitment. (Again, confidentiality issues seemed to be the primary concern.) The counselor suggested that she should present the project to them, but since I wished to control the actual language used in the explanation (to avoid certain words such as "narrative," "story," etc.), I declined her very reluctantly-given offer. What I began to sense was that this and other counselors considered their clients to be "fragile." There were extremely "protective" of them; they would even make their decisions for them.

I have talked with many other professionals as well during the course of my research, and I encountered the "fragile victim" concept and the "protective professional" stance repeatedly. I was cautioned, by many of these professionals, that I could easily cause further trauma and might even drive interviewees into disassociative states if I asked too many invasive questions. Most of them, I began to sense, assumed that a "folklorist" couldn’t possibly know what she was doing. Gabriele Rosenthal comments on the

36 For a counselor to propose to an individual client that she or he participate in my research involves a somewhat different set of problems. That situation is much more fraught with "power" and "authority" issues than a group setting where the members are ostensibly "in charge" of what happens and the counselor is (only) the "leader." Obviously, authority issues are present in such group situations as well, but counselors often claim that the members have primary control over determining what happens in the group.

37 I did attend one public 12-Step Incest Survivors’ meeting and, after talking it over with those present, decided not to pursue that option for group observation either. In such a situation, where people came and went, the ethical considerations were too great, and my presence would truly have been invasive to their work, and useless to my intentions, if I had had to keep reminding everyone what I was doing there. In addition, in some ways, these people were potentially more "fragile" from my point of view because they weren’t necessarily under the guidance and support of a professional.
"therapy-phobia" suffered by many in the humanities who use ethnographic approaches to research (1991, 37). Rosenthal seems to consider this behavior a form of misplaced good intentions. She argues that when we sense resistance on the part of an interviewee to speak about a particular subject, rather than probe more deeply we change the subject, quickly move on to the next question on our lists, or offer the narrator comforting (and silencing) inanities. While I would agree with her that this is a common, learned-behavior for being "polite" and/or for avoiding having to hear unpleasant things, this "therapy-phobia" on the part of ethnographers is being carefully stoked by some therapy "professionals." While there are, indeed, legitimate issues of interviewee needs and rights, a great deal of the therapists "concerns" that I encountered seemed to involve territorial rivalry at least as much as they involved client safety. Still, my decisions about what to ask and what not to ask (particularly my decisions not to ask "follow-up" questions in many instances) were mostly based on the "you're not an expert, so don't mess around in stuff you don't understand" messages I was getting from so many "experts." While I don't regret erring on the side of caution, I now feel that I was vastly over-cautious about what I did and did not ask.38

While I am quite willing to admit the limitations of my knowledge, many of these professionals didn't try to find out what I did know; they just presumed pervasive ignorance on my part. This was not always the case. I am fairly certain that one of the interviewees (Helen) decided to participate in the study primarily so that she could check it—and me—out. She also planned to compensate for my (assumed) ignorance and naiveté; she came to the interview with a prepared list of questions she wanted to ask, having "jotted down some notes" before we met. She presented these after the formal part of the interview was over when I asked her if she had anything additional that she wanted to add.

On the other hand, Helen engaged in subtle forms of instruction about the nature and processes of childhood sexual abuse and its victims several times even during the "interview" phase of our session together, sometimes through pronoun shifts and sometimes through direct comments as I have discussed earlier. (For example: "My

38 I do not wish to imply that all the professionals I encountered were obstructive. Quite to the contrary, many were extremely helpful. In response to my concerns, two offered to receive emergency "referrals" if I did get into a situation that seemed to require professional intervention. Several others answered questions, volunteered information, suggested books, or simply shared excitement and listened to me talk. Many enthusiastically encouraged my endeavors.
answer may have an impact on trying to look at some of your data on other people too. . . . Part of the problem . . . is that you don't have very good boundaries . . . 1:240-ff.) Later, however, she simply "taught." Her running theme was the fragile victim, and she managed to pack quite a bit of contemporary sexual abuse theory into the discussion.

Her first question involved what I did when someone, like her, came to the project identifying themselves as incest survivors but not being able to "remember" any specific instances of abuse. I responded that I was, among other things, interested in such self-identification and that this was why one of the interview questions involved when and why the interviewee began to label the experience as abuse. Helen wanted me to clarify my position:

1:383
H: Are you simply interested in the fact that they identify themselves without whether it has any basis in reality or not?

I: Yea, yea, why would you identify yourself this way. Yea it's part of um I'm assuming! that if they've identified themselves as an incest survivor there was some experience somewhere that--or they are at least convinced there was which is close enough to being the same thing, as far as I'm concerned. Um that what I'm looking at then is, is--is how they talk about the experience about the life experience with that as--with that as a an important element in their life experience. Ah so yea, you're not the first person I've talked to that says you-know, "I, I don't remember" years of this." But there's still, there's still something about something happened that that you identify happened. Which I think that's the important thing. (1:397)

Even so, she wanted to make sure I understood the situation. Here she openly admits to being "protective" of "this group of people."

1:404
H: A lot of
people who haven't started the healing process^ 
or haven't been in therapy 
some how think that they have to remember in order 
to heal, in order 
and I, I, I, guess what to a 
being one myself, and being that this is my--my specialty, it's like I'm 
really protective of (she laughs) 
of this group of people and when I don't know^ 
and 
I just want to make sure that they 
they don't come away+ from+ this 
with the feeling like somehow+ they have to really remember and+ that+ 
they can heal and--and 
do what they need to do, without having to have those memories. 
(1:414)

I related, in very general terms, one instance where I hadn't been perhaps explicit 
--- enough that lack of memory was OK. I had seen the interviewee a few days after the 
interview and she had apologized for not remembering things very well, (for leaving things 
out, and confusing things). I had assured her that "no one remembers everything" and 
that I had thought the interview had gone great and would be very useful to my project 
(1:415-424). Helen was only mildly reassured. She also wanted me to know how fragile-- 
and how damaged--the interviewees were likely to be.

1:425 
K: Cause it's real important for them to know that wherever they are right 
now is OK. 
Because 
they'll have like 
oh you'll get anywhere 
like I wrote down some of the 
um 
types of issues you might be encountering? 
especially of people who 
haven't started, therapy or victims 
I mean you're going to get like borderlines, 
borderline schizophrenics and you're probably 
you're going to get um 
possible multiple personality disorders. 
you're going to get um 
bipolars^ 
um, I mean it's being proven now that this kind of experience is the one 
of the main
main
impetuses for developing, any
um, um
problems-- I mean even if you don't get to the point where you get
those kind of people
Um, you're going to like have people who can
be, like pushed over into major depressive episodes
um
so it's--it's really important to make sure that they know that you-know
it's OK where they are.
Cause part, part of the whole issue is control--they haven't had control,
and that was--that's going to be my issue till I die.
Is control (1:445)

(few personal comments)

1:450
H: And you get perfectionists, like cause you figure if you were there must
to have had to have been something wrong with you, and if you were
more perfect, then this wouldn't have happened or
stuff like that--and you're going to get people in like throes of some
really spiritual+
um, spiritual
um depression
not even, just
emotional but at the spiritul level where
like their whole concept of meaning
in terms of of God and why there here and what it all means
and like really turn you off (we both laugh)
So, um
that would be my only concern especially for the people who aren't in
some sort of healing already. (1:466)

She also instructed me on how to recognize and deal with "disassociative" states, making
sure I knew such techniques as "regounding" (1:467-499).

I have used Helen's transcript material as illustration because this was the only time I
actually got such material on tape. It is, however, eminently representative of many of my
encounters with professionals. While I am deeply grateful for the information they
offered, their "protection" of their clients borders on "ownership," and it suggests attempts
to "control" quite well. The power of therapist-granted "permission" to tell (and
sometimes to produce memories) has already been discussed. The suggestion that the
"average" sexual abuse survivor will have the kinds of severe psychological problems Helen lists above, which many other psychologists warned me about as well, and which are represented in many of the theories, themes, and narratives of the publicly-available information/self-help books, borders on certifying such responses as the normal cause-effect recipe of childhood sexual abuse. What might be merely "descriptive" among psychologists, may well be assumed to be "prescriptive" to someone attempting to "make meaning" of her or his experience. Such expert-validated formulae of experience begin to take on aspects of social "sanction": formal, agreed-upon, coercive, and moral. Not all psychologists are above relying on, or encouraging, the "recipe" version of the experience, either.

Authorship: Reasserting Control over the Story

While survivors who end up in care of psychologists may sometimes be as severely affected and as fragile as Helen and others suggest they are, the "average" childhood sexual abuse survivor, fortunately, is not. Or at least, the "average" of those who volunteered for my project were not as severely affected as I was led to believe they would be. Of those who did volunteer, most not only displayed quite normal behavioral patterns but were also living very "normal" and "successful" lives. Most of these individuals also reject the public input to some degree. Sometimes, however, rejection involves an ongoing struggle against the discourse. Several interviewees are still trying to figure out where the social versions of the childhood sexual abuse experience fit their own experiences, and where they do not.

Amy Shuman suggests that "[t]he right of an author to own a story and control its uses is as essential to storytelling in everyday life as it is to writers who copyright manuscripts prepared for publication" (1986, 1). All of the interviewees are attempting to "author" their own stories; many are demanding "copyright" privileges as well.

Rachael's struggle with the public discourse reveals both its damaging effects and her resistance to letting someone else "write" her story. It is not that she isn't willing to study the issue and to borrow concepts and language from others, but she has learned the hard way that not everything "fits" and that she must go exploring for new concepts and language occasionally. Rachael often speaks in public forums about her experiences, and her reasons for speaking out involve both her attempts to educate the public about the seriousness of sexual assault (child or adult) and her desire to correct some of the widely-held "misconceptions" about survivors of child sexual abuse. (In this sense she also hopes
to "author" others' stories as well.) Some of these misconception are clearly folklore (Rachael calls them "myths") and some of them represent current "scientific" and "feminist" theory. As she offers examples from her own experience as corrections for what she believes are some of the misapprehensions and outright fallacies surrounding child sexual abuse, she also illustrates some of the damaging power of even the more "enlightened" sexual abuse discourse. The "things she read" while growing up were mostly "medical books sort of, or at least, supposed to be factual--based on studies or something" (1:114). I will present several of her comments below; they speak well for themselves. Later I will consider some of the "folklore" she and others have encountered.

1:068
R: I try to emphasize is that, you-know you can survive this experience. And I guess
detailing
you know
how
I have survived and why I consider myself a survivor
and some other people did that too
Because I think too often
people
want to see you as
you-know just the victim and
you're wounded for the rest of your life and you can never can never recover from it, and things like that and I think it's it's really good to, try to present a positive image
of survivors because
I mean what do you see on the news? (laughs ironically) (1:075)

1:081
R: We try to say you know that we're strong and stronger for the experience or at least getting over the experience. (1:082)

1:094
R: It's interesting because I think you can lose sight of that, sometimes how other people see you you know, that (2sec) that once you're if--if you've been raped then you can never, have a normal life again and
you hate men and (laughs ironically)
you're going to kill yourself or you're a drug addict and, I don't know.
I guess it just--it reminds me of like all the things I
read secretly while I was growing up.
Once having figured out
what was going on wasn't normal^
> I used to work in this one library and I'd like always sneak over there
and read this and, you-know<
horrified I
I realized that
since I
was an incest victim I would either have to
become promiscuous
kill myself or become a drug addict and
you-know and I just^
> I mean because that's all the information there really is--it doesn't say
that you can survive and become you-know<
as you
as you were or stronger than you were.
So it's been, kind of like I've been trying to find my own way to do that^
(1:105)

Lara, meanwhile, who often seems very in control of her own story, still struggles at
times with the current rhetoric for her rights of authorship.

1:335
L: And so, there's kind of a
(2sec)
and I say alright^
you-know he didn't do me that much damage^
and maybe he did, maybe my first marriage was
you-know maybe I married {the man I did}
because of that^
I don't think so^, I think it was just
ah+ there are some other things
I probably married the guy
to get back at mother (we both start laughing), everybody gets back at
mothers
I do so look forward to (we are both still laughing)
to that but

I: Your turn will come

L: Yes I'm sure^
(stops laughing)
Um+ and who knows I mean I think that's
that could have played a part but I
I don't feel negatively um
impacted
at all^.
because I don't know what the alternative is, for one thing.
Who knows^, I might have ^
you-know had a
>> I might have been a very different person in relationship to my body
and my relationship with men^ <<
< But honestly > I really don't think so, I don't think that
it
it was so+
(3sec)
short-lived
(2sec)
and I
could see a reason for it. (1:351)

For the most part Lara can laugh off the pressure from the public rhetoric which
says she must have been seriously affected in some way. However, she returns to this
issue of public entitlement/personal authorship several times during the interview. In
response to questions about when she began to label her experience as "sexual abuse" and
whether or not she had ever sought counseling for dealing with her experience, she offered
the following comments. Clearly, she is aware of what "people say" and what the
"literature about rape survivors" contends (including that she will become a perpetrator),
but she can not see in her own life the "devastating consequences" the literature demands
even if everybody seems to be supporting the "traumatic" scenario of the childhood abuse
experience. She also refuses to get caught in the catch-22 trap of "if you're not admitting
that you are suffering you must be repressing." But authorship is not a one-time thing, as
Lara demonstrates; authorship must be maintained.

1:680
L:  >> And not having talked about it after I talked to my father^, between
that time and <<
and ah+
seeing the therapist^, even
even though I had not talked to anybody, I didn't really spend a lot of
time dwelling on it.
Or thinking about it even.
It was just, something
that happened and it was
it was gone, either denied or repressed or
or just not+ very significant really in the flow of things.
Um+
that I don't know if; I don't remember any click you-know that said
(stage whisper) "Wow you know I went through an abusive
situation"
>> So I think it must have been immediate because I recognized it was
inappropriate it was not acceptable and that the authorities had to
be <<
sought^ (1:696).

(Some comments about her parents and about when and where
she is likely to talk about her experience.)

2:054
L: It never occurred! to me to go (to counseling) for
the
sexual abuse ^

I: Um hmm

L: Ah, I don't know why
whether it's just that
I did so much just consider it
this is {Brian}, he's getting back at my mother^
she came back ^
that stopped^, he was obviously getting back at my mother he didn't find
other ways to <get at me>
you know?

I: Um hmm

L: Um
>> I know the situation I know what happened I know exactly why
happened <<
no problem I've got it <all figured out.>
I may not have.
But
I thought I did and so I just sort of
shelved that and said "OK" ^

I: You're comfortable with?
the / way you ? / made meaning /out of it .
L: / yeah / yeah /
It's weird because then you think well
(laughing)
you must be suppressing something.
But I feel really comfortable with it and I always have^ you-know ?

I: Do
do you get a
sense that
you should
think that you're suppressing something?

L: (laughs) Yeah

I: And where do you think you're getting this sense from?

L: Oh because, people say, "well it's such a traumatic, thing^" you-know and

um
< the literature about rape survivors^ and >
< Oh my gosh > you-know and it's traumatic and it
it affects you for life and < if you've been molested you're going to molest and >
there's a, it's such a traumatic kind of scenario it is so taboo
(2sec)

um
that obviously you going to have suffered
(2sec)
devastating consequences. (we both begin laughing )

>> And so if I'm not suffering I must be repressing <<<
And I don't think that's the case really but
but I mean you, then say to yourself
(very seriously)
"well"
"of course"
(laughing through next section)
"of course you don't think that's the case"
you-know it's this never-ending cycle of
(mock drama) "me thinks thou dost protest too much^"
(we are both laughing) (2:073)

"Protesting" in their own interests

The area of most resistance to the public input, and of most claims to personal rights to authorship, involves the notion that any experience that fits the label "childhood sexual
abuse" will involve a negative perception of the experience and that the incident(s) will always produce long-term traumatic consequences. Meredith's account has already demonstrated that what is "experienced" may not have been "abuse" at all. In such cases the "meaning" of the experience may be quite positive, as in Meredith's claim that she learned "confidence" in her right to seek adult feedback and protection if she were in doubt about a situation. Lara sorts out the "damage" and can't see that she has suffered that much. Rachael, who was without question or doubt--by her definition or anyone else's--"abused," rejects any "absolute" or "permanent" sense of the damage; she's "gotten over a lot," she is already "strong," she can become "stronger." Noreen echoes Rachael sentiments; the "good news" is that "you can heal." Catherine claims her life would not be the same. While she says, "it's not something that I would I have ever wished on myself," she also asserts, "but I definitely grew into the person that I am today [and have] the interests that I have, and just you-know the way that I am; I . . . definitely wouldn't be the same person today" (1:318-320). She voices the dilemma all the women face: "It's hard to see . . . my life without it" (1:321). None of them know what "the alternative is" as Lara put it. If it happened, it happened; now the only thing to do is to find or make some "meaning" of the experience. And the meaning can not, for any of these women, be "permanent damage." For Catherine, the ultimate meaning lies in her relationship with God.

1:335
C:  >> I guess there's--there's meaning in that because you-know sometimes
    I think well I, I wish I could change this but
    well my relationship with God wouldn't be the same <<
    you-know the--the kinds of ministry I'm doing wouldn't be the same.
    And it's not that I'm glad it's happened but
    I think that God can made good come out of that
    nonetheless. (1:340)

Even Helen, who clearly "buys into" nearly all of the contemporary recovery-discourse theories of survivorship, resists when the rhetoric doesn't fit. Helen knows that forgiveness is not encouraged for anyone except the victim who must forgive herself; having read The Courage to Heal, she knows forgiveness is not in all the "books" (CTH 149-154). Still, "forgiveness" is important enough to Helen that after "putting things together" for herself, she is willing to take a stance in favor of forgiveness. She hedges though: her stance is valid because it is in "some of those books," and no matter what
"they" say, Helen considers the "complications" of childhood sexual abuse steps toward forgiveness. She also implies that this is a standard, and well-known "pattern."

1:519
H: The other pattern your going to find out is
   (1 sec)
   and this is+
   something I've, I've come to myself by putting, things together I've seen
   it {1-2 words} in some of those books
   but not in others, but the whole pattern of healing
   OK? from this
   is working through forgiveness.
   I mean whatever they say in terms of complications^+
   You-know how they label all these things
   each one!
   is a point in, in the whole
   spectrum of getting to that point of forgiveness. (1:527)

She has also, like several of the others, found at least some positive meaning for her experience.

1:353
H: Um
   I believe there are no accidents.
   OK?
   >> I also believe in reincarnation^+ and <<
   things like that^ and
   (deliberately) < for what I need to do^ >
   to be of service in this life I needed to go through
   (2 sec)
   to+ perform^ at the level of confidence I'm performing at. (1:358)

Their willingness to resist the public discourse does not mean that they are comfortable doing so. The women who felt they had not suffered severely found ways to declare themselves "lucky." It is not always clear in their accounts whether the women believe they were lucky, or whether they feel they need to say they were lucky. More often than not, however, the evidence points to their understanding that they need to frame their lack of trauma (or of any worse trauma than they did experience) in terms of good fortune; such assertions appeared in all the accounts of women who most rejected
the public discourse. Susan says, "It was a dangerous situation . . . he could have raped me." Meredith, who doesn't see her situation as "sexual" at all, feels she as to admit that even though "I had been agreed to it, and felt that it was safe enough," that "it could have become sexual abuse . . . or had a tendency towards it." Lara declared that "it was over, and fortunately for me, I didn't have repeated experiences." Betsy contended that, "It's almost embarrassing for me to say I've been sexually abused when [I know there are] people who are physically molested and raped for years, and by relatives and all kinds of things." She knows about such people mostly from her awareness training, from television, and from the books she has read. Betsy was "only" forced to engage, repeatedly, in sexual play with a boy who was about ten years older than herself, and she was later "attacked" by another teenage boy who tried to force his hands down her pants-- an experience she defines (elsewhere) as "one tiny incident." Betsy's comments on this incident, however (both in the passage quote below and elsewhere), center on the boy's threat to "kill" and her overwhelming sense of "fear" (which Betsy says is also the lingering aspect of this incident). Still, she is so highly conscious of the possibilities, that she must declare herself "lucky" and manages to do so without ever saying the word.

1:307
B: I think my mother approached me one time and asked me did years later and said Was I OK about that^ and she wasn't really sure what had occurred? cause she never thoroughly check it out at the time? and she kinda wanted to know more about what specifically happened^ and to let me know again they believed^ me^ (1:312)

(few side comments)

39 The one exception to this pattern of framing rejection of the recovery discourse in terms of "good luck" occurred in Judith's interview. Judith does not embrace recovery discourse at all, nor does she consider herself "lucky" in any particular way. In her terms, her experience was "devastating." Still, she has told me since the initial (recorded) interview that she does not wish to see her childhood sexual abuse experience as the source of all her current physical, psychological, emotional, and/or spiritual issues. Nor does she want to have "sexual abuse survivor" as her primary identity label.
And she said.
She said "how"
"what did happen in the barn?"
"Were you raped?"
Because I would understand that at that point and I said "No" that it was more fear of my life although had my mother not called out I don't know. Maybe I would have been raped. I don't know. (1:319)

Fighting the folklore

In addition to having to wrangle with the "scientific" versions of the child sexual abuse experience, several of the women also found themselves struggling against both ancient and recent "folklore," the stuff "everybody knows" to be true because "everybody says" it is. Ginger voices one recent theme that pertains directly to "speaking out" and which may well have gained popularity in response to the recent spate of public disclosure. On the other hand, the lore in question—that men will "go after" women who are known to have been raped—is quite old and relates to fallacies of women "asking for it" and/or "enjoying it."

Um
I, I absolutely do not believe in hiding it because I--and even if I don't understand it well I mean even in the case of {Uncle Jeffrey} or whatever--I mean I--I have no problem saying to people--even though I still haven't said anything to anybody about that because I think that's just the more that all comes out (2sec)
the better I think that people
>>you-know may say that (softly) "somebody will try to hurt you badly]<<
>>first of all it's never happened--nobody's tried it<< and secondly I really don't care, I mean my vision is that, the more this kind of energy that's
honest that gets out into the system the more that it will encourage
other energy, out there in the system so^ (1:189)

Rachael is well aware of the varieties of "information" people are using to construct
their understandings of childhood sexual abuse. She tries to combat anything she
perceives as "misinformation."

1:122
R: And I guess a lot of the programs are really just designed to^
Try to take some of the
myth^ out of the information I guess and like
>you-know that it doesn't happen that often+ and+<
it only happens to certain kinds of people+ and+
and stuff like that because . . . (1:125)

1:139
R: ... you-know just, try to break down some of those stereotypes, about
people (1:140)

Rachael not only has to deal with the fallacies and widely-held assumptions surrounding
child sexual abuse; since she "came out" as a lesbian, she now also has to confront the
misconceptions involved with that identity, including assumptions that her abuse "caused"
her to become a lesbian. Her comments, presented below, demonstrate Rachael's intense
self-awareness of her thought processes, of the social discourse, and of her frustrations of
trying to understand how what she is being told and what she is experiencing fit together,
or don't. This passage follows immediately after her assertion (cited earlier) that she has
gone through "certain stages and theories and stuff like that" and that "as soon as they're
gone I don't remember them at all."

2:358
R: Um, the most recent dilemma I'm having recently is
(2sec)
You know just, again showing absurd my life is, um
I recently came out as a lesbian
and this has been, like the < greatest source of conflict in my life now >
especially with my mother
< Who is
convinced >
that the one reason that I am a lesbian is because I was sexually abused
and, trying to
trying to sort out the feelings for myself
you-know, and
trying to explain to her that
(2sec)
I just can't separate that experience from my life and say it's a cause for anything because
I mean that's largely who I am and--and trying to explain this to her and I think that's--that's something a lot people don't understand that's not
(2sec)
I guess especially if it happens for that long of a time it's not something that happens to you it's something that forms you and it's you know who you are and it's not something you get over ^

it's something I guess you integrate.
Um
so, that's been my most amusing, thing lately.
Just having a, constant discussions with her about that, um < Not being able, to quite figure out I guess >
where the two things fit together for me either.
Um
so that's--that's my most most recent confusing complicated thing to think about [laughs]
I haven't really, come to any, real conclusion about it I guess which is, at--at the beginning I was just
sort of saying things to my mother like "It has nothing to do with it" you know, and then
and then thinking "Well, it has everything! to do with it" and thinking (smacks hand on forehead--begins laughing) "There has to be something in between you know, like
I don't know it's part of me it's not the only part of me it's
I don't know, and it's--it's kind of funny it's
< I don't know > and--and you-know, fighting with my aunt about her telling me that
all gay and lesbian people+ were abused+^ as children^ and+ you-know a bunch of stuff like that and--and trying, to tell her that
of course with the idea that along with my mother if I went through more therapists and--and did something more and worked a little harder that
I wouldn't be a lesbian^ and obviously it's because I hate men and
(2sec)
on and on and it's--it's, huhhh, very frustrating. (2:397)
Summary

"Personal" narrativizing is both influenced and constrained by communal models and expectations. At the same time, it is concerned with the needs of the individual to "make meaning" of experience, to be "understood," and to be affirmed and confirmed as a proper and worthy member of some community. Perhaps what the personal narrative does best is to reveal the tensions among these elements. The women who participated in the study came (or were invited) to it because they were all, to one degree or another, self-identified participants in "childhood sexual abuse." As such, they were--and are--obliged to "deal with" the public discourse, whether they wish to or not. Their attempts to do so reveal a variety of strategies. Simple adoption works well when the "authoritative" version of this experience seems to "fit" the personal case. When the public story almost fits, it can be adapted into service in a variety of ways. Such adaptation is tricky, however. What deviates too far from the sanctioned forms may not receive endorsement. When the authoritative version chafes too much, it must be forced into submission, or at least negotiated into endurable co-habitation -- a "very frustrating" undertaking, at best. Choosing rejection, on the other hand, may also mean choosing silence and continuing self-doubt.
CONCLUSION

"But narratives change, all stories are partial, all meanings incomplete."
(Bruner 1986b, 153)

"New genres do not invariably empower."
(Rosenwald and Ochberg 1992b, 13)

Stories of Meaning: The Many and The One

A few months ago, a woman told me about an experience her husband had had. He was working in a corn field one day when the crows began to talk to him. Not squawk or caw, mind you, but talk. He could understand their words quite clearly.

He decided that he knew only two explanations for why he could understand the crows, and why they were talking to him. One, he was insane. Two, he was having a "shamanistic" experience.

He chose not to be insane.

If the parable related at the beginning of this dissertation illustrates the needs of the Many to live in a structured and ordered society of agreed-upon meanings, the anecdote presented here symbolizes the relationship between the versions of reality sanctioned by the Many and the needs of the One who must determine the meaning of a personal experience. It is not difficult to think of more possible explanations for why the man heard the crows talking. He could have been fantasizing a conversation with the birds to help him work out some personal problem of his own or to assist him in considering some social problem from his own perspective. Perhaps he had been out in the sun too long and suffered an hallucination brought on by temporary dehydration. Hearers of this account might even decide that the incident had never "happened" and that the man had simply invented the story to entertain his listeners, to illustrate a point he was trying to make, or, simply, to get attention.
None of these possible interpretations of the man's experience, nor his own explanation of it, are socially or culturally "neutral." The man perceived that the incident had actually "occurred" (that he had not been fantasizing). The two possible meanings he knew for such an experience reflected his understanding of "reality" at the time, and he chose the meaning he found more personally and socially "affirmable." Suggesting that one has had a "shamanistic" (or "religious") experience is currently more acceptable (at least to some extent) than admitting that one has suffered hallucinations, which are often viewed as marks of "insanity." While either disclosure may produce a social "stigma" (a state of undesirable "otherness"), a shaman may come to be revered and (as this man did) start his own religious center; a person labeled insane is more likely to be scorned and isolated on the fringes of society.

Obviously the more story elements we have to work with, and the more liberties we may take to manipulate those elements to "fit" our individual experiences, the more options we will have to create personally meaningful stories. Even so, our "self-accounts" must reflect and align with the accounts "others give of us" and with those they give "of themselves," according to Rosenwald and Ochberg. Story creation, they write, is "constrained" both by the models provided by those with whom we interact and by their expectations of what counts as real and what counts as proper (1992b, 9). This is not to suggest that we all tell the same story, argue Rosenwald and Ochberg, or that we speak with "one voice"; nevertheless, "a harmony must be audible," and "the ensemble of voices must add up to a workable whole" (1992b, 9). On the other hand, as many social activists have discovered, many people must appear to be speaking with one voice, and seem to be telling the same story, in order for claims-makers and consciousness raisers to "control the discourse" of an issue (Angueira 1988, 90).

Changing Stories of Meaning

While what is considered a "workable whole" within any culture is constrained, no social system is entirely static and socio-cultural expectations are constantly being "re-made." Such remaking, according to Bruner, can happen gradually; a new story evolves into dominance through incremental changes that emphasize continuity with the past. On the other hand, change may occur in revolutionary fashion in response to a "rupture in the social fabric" (1986b, 151). However, as Rosenwald and Ochberg argue, in no circumstance does a single narrator have "carte blanche to create coherence in any fashion whatsoever" (1992b, 9). The survival of any individual's identity is "tenuous," as
Workman points out, "when it is underwritten by no authority other than the self" (1992b, 104). In order to sanction a new version of reality, to create a new dominant story of experiential perception and social interaction, a narrator must find, or create, the security of like-minded others. Together they may form the social base that will provide the legitimating apparatus for conceptual transformations and for the re-socialization of others (Berger and Luckmann 1966, 150-163).

Childhood sexual abuse has recently become a weapon in a battle to remake frameworks of American socio-cultural reality. The two most dominant stories that have formed around this experience serve the vested interests of groups promoting vastly different ideologies: the "feminist-recovery" version is in the service of the Women's Movement revolution; the "satanic/ritual abuse" version has been used to defend the traditional order of conservative America and fundamentalist religion. Both factions have used personal experience accounts of childhood sexual abuse in their claims-making activities, and the Women's Movement has found ideologically-grounded "testimony" of abuse useful for consciousness-raising activities as well. Both groups have constructed their versions on the medical hypotheses of repressed memory and post-traumatic stress disorder; both have used the courts to legitimize their attempts. Both have attempted to re-create reality so that certain taken-for-granted social categories and definitions are made more visible and others less noticeable. Such activities have been supported by the creation of collective versions based on the most exaggerated cases, which then have been used both to "typify" what the sexual abuse experience "means" and to establish dominant stories about how and why sexual abuse occurs. Both have used mass media forms and conduits to spread their messages. In actuality, both of these "stories" of childhood sexual abuse are merely subtexts in the larger discourse of social "equality"—of what (and who) counts in "America," of who gets to decide what (and who) counts, and of who gets to decide who decides.

The satanic/ritual abuse version tells the experience of childhood sexual abuse through a cast of ancient and familiar characters that move the story to the edges of experiential reality. The satanic version seeks to "de-naturalize" child sexual abuse. It is not really people like "us" who commit such heinous acts, the story says. Such things are done by only in secret, by sick and sacrilegious people. While the tale has otherworldly implications, the accounts don't necessarily emphasize a "supernatural force" behind the behavior. Still, the satanic framing contributes an added layer of horror to the mind control, covert conspiracy, and perverted religion motifs of these tales of unspeakably
"evil" people. Indeed, the framework provides a metaphorically-appropriate way of "speaking" about something that still seems to many people to be an almost inconceivably "unspeakable" crime.

The satanic version has also allowed conservative elements within American society to engage in witch-hunt activities, both symbolically through the tales and overtly through the public dramas of legal accusations and trials of alleged social "deviants," with child-care workers and middle-class parents now filling the role of "witches." As rituals of social cleansing, witch hunts are most likely to occur during times of social upheaval, when group values and norms are challenged—as those of the "moral majority" currently are. Such rituals of scapegoating assign blame for the disruptions of the standards and practices of the collectivity (or threats of disruption) and symbolically purge the community of the threat. In our era of legislated "civil rights" and multi-cultural diversity, the satanic/ritual abuse story supplies "politically correct" villains on which the community may safely vent its anxieties. In the process, loyalties are tested, shared values are affirmed, and authority structures validated (Wuthnow 1987, 155-118). The community does not prevent change by such action, only slows the pace of change and manages it in such a way that fundamental hierarchies are preserved (at least for the moment).

The feminist-recovery version, on the other hand, participates in an attempt to overthrow the established hierarchical structure. If the satanic version tried to "de-naturalize" the issue, the recovery version has been an attempt to "normalize" the stigma-laden victim and to "naturalize" claims that there is an inherent relationship between the cause (child sexual abuse) and the effect (post-traumatic stress symptoms): childhood sexual abuse does (not could, not might) produce specific types of life-long "damage."

Much of the recovery story is a combination of social claims-making, consciousness-raising activities, and stigma management politics. Claims-makers brought the issue of child sexual abuse to public attention and insisted that this practice was a social "problem." Consciousness-raisers took these claims one step further and contextualized this problem in terms of the social power structure (Western patriarchy) which, they argued, created the problem in the first place and which allows sexual abuse to continue in the present. The personal narratives of adult survivors of childhood victimization have served to illustrate the relationships between ideologies, gender/power politics, and child sexual abuse. Professionalization of childhood sexual abuse has created "expert" spokespersons and has sanctioned certain patterns for conceptualized and disclosing involvement with this issues.
There can be no doubt that feminist texts such as The Courage to Heal and the use of women's personal narratives in public consciousness-raising efforts have been instrumental in, and essential to, remaking the "reality" of childhood sexual abuse in terms of power politics (particularly gender politics). The "expert" voices have provided recipes for proper healing and norms for, speaking, thinking, and feeling. Public personalities such as Roseanne Barr, Oprah Winfrey, and former Miss America Marilyn Van Derbur Atler have enhanced public awareness and lent "celebrity" status to the cause. Media treatments such as daytime talk shows, primetime news coverage, and docudramas have further contributed to the creation of a dominant "recovery/power-politics" narrative of childhood sexual abuse, particularly as it advances the concerns of women. The public dramas created by these media events have endorsed a readily adaptable cast of "heroes and villains" for anyone needing to narrativize an experience of childhood sexual abuse, or needing a story to explain and justify the symptoms so often attributed to this experience. The same is true, of course, for the satanic/ritual abuse version as well.

While personally I much prefer the recovery version to the satanic story of child sexual abuse (since I support the basic ideologies of the Women's Movement), there can be no denying that the recovery story is as constructed, as agenda-based, and as biased as the satanic version of this experience. Moreover, the recovery story carries as much potential for avoiding "doing" anything other than talk as does the satanic version, and as much potential for narrowing the range of acceptable personal experience narrativizing when people do talk. In addition, the therapeutic framework threatens to marginalize the victims of childhood sexual abuse, especially when the story is told as an "incurable" problem. If Ehrenhaus' work on the use of the therapeutic motif to "contain" Vietnam War veterans is adapted to the childhood sexual abuse survivor, then it is possible to read the recovery version of this experience as a potential "containment" of these survivors as well. "Once healing is reified to the national level," writes Ehrenhaus, "we tend to view all variety of issues pertaining to [the identified population] in terms of the therapeutic motif" (1993, 81). The victims are "reduced to a clinical challenge," and "survivors" may be rendered politically "dysfunctional" by the very rhetoric intended to instigate change (1993, 81). Once such therapeutic rhetoric achieves dominance, it also "mitigates against the emergence of alternative interpretive frameworks and oppositional readings of the discourse" of the experience (1993, 83).

The therapeutic framework and illness analogy may unintentionally confirm lingering social attitudes that sexual abuse is an ailment that it is carried by incurable perpetrators
and inflicted upon unfortunate individuals who are left permanently damaged. But if it is only these perpetrators and those victims who need treatment, then the rest of society can stay relatively uninvolved. Angueira cautions that "the therapeutic assumption" that survivors of sexual aggression "need to be helped to build up their strengths to regain ... control of their lives" ignores the problem that sexual aggression is deeply "rooted and perpetuated in gender politics" as well as in other pervasive mechanisms of social inequality. Sexual abuse is a political and societal problem, argues Angueira, not a medical and individual one (1988:78). Although she is writing about adult rape victims, her words are salient to child sexual abuse as well.

In addition to medicalizing the victim, the recovery version of childhood sexual abuse seeks to avoid presenting the survivor as "normal," but does so in contradictory ways. The term "survivor" echoes Darwinian "evolutionary" concepts. Indeed, the (female) survivor of childhood sexual abuse is premised as the "fittest" to lead the world into an era of peace and prosperity. There is nothing socially or culturally egalitarian about this stance; women are still separate from, and still not equal to, men in this worldview. One fundamental postulate of childhood sexual abuse discourse has been that "breaking the silence" allows formerly disenfranchised voices to participate in social (re)constructionism. However, if such speaking out merely posits a world with women "on top," it largely maintains the same old hierarchical structure, just different "authorities" in charge. This is more social revolt than existential revolution. (And it is certainly not "evolution" of any sort.) "[F]eminists deepen the chasm" between themselves and other authoritative voices, "by dismissing nonfeminist insights too quickly and hastily deciding who gets it' and who doesn't," argues Yllò. "If our mutual goal is to understand the violence," and to stop it, "then we must welcome the challenges other viewpoints pose and give them respectful consideration" (Yllò 1993, 59-60). "Women's ways" may have been too long devalued, but disparaging "men's ways" is not the path to equality.

At the same time that "survivor" discourse advances women's agendas, much of it also emphasizes the interminable effects of the "damage," despite the fact that many "victims" of childhood sexual abuse appeared to have been (and are now) living relatively "normal" lives in many respects. Many of survivors also appear to have coped with life as well as anyone else for years before they revealed (or even "discovered") they had been sexually abused. Much of the recovery literature does attempt to present a somewhat balanced picture of childhood sexual abuse, either by taking an "investigative" stance or by advocating "healing" rather than simply promoting victimhood. Still, most personal
narratives used in claims-making and in consciousness-raising activities (and even in much of the literature of healing) present, and represent, the "most damaged" cases (never the least damaged cases, or claims of only temporary effects). Books such as The Courage to Heal (and this is certainly not the only one to do so) have taken the process one step further and have attempted to "naturalize" the possible consequences of child sexual abuse. "Symptoms" are the body's irrepressible (natural) way of "telling the story" of child abuse even when the mind "forgets" or the personality seeks to "deny" the abuse or the resulting "damage." Qualifiers such as "might," "could," "sometimes," and "can" are often removed from the discourse, and cultural interpretations of the experience are presented as inherently "human" processes. "When children are sexually abused, their natural sexual capacity is stolen," write Bass and Davis. "You never had a chance to explore naturally, to experience your own desires from the inside"(37). "The abuse humiliated you, gave you the message that you were of little value" (34). "You felt isolated and alone" (35). (All quotations from Bass and Davis 1988, emphasis added.) Admittedly, such rhetoric serves to "make real" the experience, which, in turn, also makes real the possibility of "dealing" with it. In addition, absolutes and superlatives work in the survivors' interests during the healing process as well as during the identification phase. "You have survived against formidable odds" (Bass and Davis 1988, 39, emphasis added).

Public disclosure by some victims of childhood sexual abuse has benefited countless other individuals who also experienced sexual abuse during their childhoods. Such openness has forced the topic into the public discourse and demanded that the issue be taken seriously. Testimonies of personal experience have helped others know they are "not alone." Such public stories pre-validate private ones, making them at least easier to create if not always to tell. Talking with others who have shared similar experiences has also allowed victims to form communities of support and to create bases from which they may begin to un-make and re-make the stigma categories surrounding this experience. If this leads also to enhancements of women's social status and to increased rights for children, then the discourse will have proven socially beneficial as well, at least in my opinion.

Still, the need to speak with "one voice" in order to control the discourse has led to many of the same sorts of entitlement problems that advocates of "speaking out" often claim they are trying to end. While encouraging women to "speak out," recovery discourse requires them to speak (and even to think about) their experiences only in certain ways. Some versions of this experience are still "untellable." Certainly, feminists
would not appreciate "Lara" widely publicizing that she considers the incestuous rape that took place in her childhood neither "traumatic" nor particularly influential in her overall personality/identity formation. In addition, some women don't wish to see their childhood abuse as the "primal cause" of all their current physical, psychological, and/or social challenges, nor do they wish to have "childhood sexual abuse survivor" (and/or "victim") as their principal identity. Some, such as "Meredith," don't want any personal identification with childhood sexual abuse, and they don't think the label fits their "experience" even while it may fit what was done to them. "Meanings" are particularly constrained by recovery discourse. In a magazine article on Oprah Winfrey, Miriam Kanner writes:

Even as late as 1988, Oprah insisted that the abuse "was not a horrible thing in my life. There was a lesson in it. It teaches you not to let people abuse you." (But when she finally realized it was, in fact, a "horrible thing," Oprah began to speak out actively against child abuse, even testifying before the Senate Judiciary Committee on the National Child Protection Act, informally called "The Oprah Bill.") (Ladies' Home Journal, February 1994, 98)

It is evident that the "meaning" Oprah applies to her experience has changed over the past few years so that it now reflects the dominant story. "Susan" also has altered the way she speaks about her experience; it now serves the needs of the feminist agenda she supports. There is nothing particularly insidious about changing one's "understanding" of a life experience. Previous meanings were based on what was "available" at the time. As new possibilities for interpreting experience arise, more options become available for creating more personally-satisfying, more personally-meaningful, stories of the self. At the very least, such personal story changes reflect "keeping up" with social story changes, and they serve to support social reconstruction in the process. On the other hand, many (myself included) do not always wish to, or feel a need to, re-narrativize a past experience simply to fit the current fashion. But we may implicitly support ideologies we don't champion (being "part of the problem instead of part of the solution") if we insist on openly voicing our preferred versions. We risk feeling inauthentic if we keep quiet. If the non-standard version can not be returned to the mix, however, the mix remains biased and Rosenwald and Ochberg's fears are realized: the emancipatory impetus becomes simply a differently-formulated gag rule on dissenting voices (1992b, 6).

One other thing concerns me about using a childhood sexual abuse in the war on social equality. It keeps women in a "sexual arena," as "Lara" puts it. Part of the objective of recovery discourse is to remove the stigma of childhood sexual abuse from
the victim (usually female) and place it exclusively on the perpetrator (usually male). Contrary to their own interests, the models and methods employed by some feminists may end up merely "consolidating a public image of [their] differentness as a real thing," and establish a notion of those who have survived childhood sexual abuse constitute "a real group" (Goffman 1963, 114). Creating group solidarity and a high profile is a surer path to political goals in the short term, but group "image" must be created carefully if it is to be beneficial in the long run. Having "survived" childhood sexual abuse is a state of being; what having survived "means" is a cognitive, ideological, and social construct.

"Narratives are not only structures of meaning but structures of power as well," argues Bruner (1986b, 144). As social constructions, dominant narratives have social consequences. "Public opinion and social policy depend upon how issues are defined," writes Best. "A society which is mobilized to keep child molesters, kidnappers, and Satanists away from innocent children is not necessarily prepared to protect children from ignorance, poverty, and ill health" (1990, 188). Likewise, a society that is willing to label women permanently "damaged" by childhood experiences will not readily see those women as "stronger" and capable of leading humanity into a better world. Nor will a society that makes allowances for the social inadequacies or deviant behavior of "survivors" (male or female) be likely to change the conditions that created the situation that had to be "survived" in the first place.

Towards New Dominant Stories of American Society

According to Bruner, when "the old narrative can no longer be stretched to encompass the new events," or "when the social arrangements are so different that the old narrative no longer seems adequate," new stories arise to explain and promote a new "reality" (1986b, 151, 152). Such change is made possible by, and achieved through, a "rupture in the social fabric" that opens up new spaces in discourses that "arise precisely from the gaps and silences of the previous era" (1986b, 151, 152). The freedom for childhood sexual abuse victims to "speak out" resulted from a variety of social transformations building on the racial-justice movements of the 1950s and 1960s. The Women's Movement, in turn, has reinforced the shifts this movement began. "Breaking the silence" on sexual assault and gender injustice has both benefited from and help to support various "rights" movements, all designed to overthrow or undermine established power and authority structures. To the extent that "common" knowledge has been validated, and that claims by "ordinary" folk that they are capable of accurately perceiving
and insightfully interpreting their own experiences have been acknowledged, the "speaking out" impetus has expanded the categories of what counts and who decides what counts in American society. The extent to which the "common" is also the "authoritative," however, is far less than the popularity of "tells her own story" advertising pitches would have us believe.

Nevertheless, personal narrativizing is taking on increasing importance as a negotiator of social reality. Many Americans are moving away from reliance on outside authorities such as church and state as arbitrary bestowers of values, attitudes, and behavioral codes and moving toward an increasing emphasis on individuality and self-determination of moral standards (Abrahams 1986, 45-46). At the same time, more cultural patterns from which to custom-build both personal authenticity and social standards are being suggested. In such a climate, personal narrativizing becomes an opportunity to test for common ground, to negotiate worldviews, and to create "communities" of commonality, of political strength, of social comfort, of physical and emotional support.

Such a climate also enhances the competition for control. "The social problems marketplace puts a premium on emotionally charged issues, but it also values novelty," writes Best. "Problems surge to the top, are redefined as boring and overexposed, then fall from view, to be replaced by fresh topics" (1990, 185). If we are not simply to become a nation of social-crisis junkies, addicted to and distracted by the intensity and histrionics of ever-new accounts of "injustice," we will need to become discriminating consumers of claims-making activities and media exploitation of those claims. Even Bass and Davis warn against getting "used to the tangible anguish and turmoil of healing." "Being in constant crisis," they write, "means that you don't have to look at the changes you need to make in your life" (Bass and Davis 1988, 165). The ultimate goal, after all, is seeing "yourself as whole, not compartmentalized" (Bass and Davis 1988, 164).

Still, when "everyone is saying the same thing" something is going on. Indeed, a lot of "somethings" are going on, and it is time for us to listen. To paraphrase Bruner, it is only when the discrepancy between the previously accepted story and the new situation is perceived that we begin to question the old narrative (Bruner 1986b, 153). Kai Erikson described his early frustration with transcript material from the Buffalo Creek flood this way: "What makes these data so frustrating is that one reads and hears the same remarks again and again, almost as if a script had been passed around the creek" (1976, 198). Eventually, he decided that the use of "common expressions" was not a sufficient
explanation for the script-like similarities. "Listening" more closely led him to conclude that "disasters" are frequently processed in a particular way and that disaster trauma produces a common set of "symptoms": the ones we now call "post-traumatic" symptoms. By listening to what everybody was saying, David Hufford found that a common physiological phenomenon was either being mislabeled or being dismissed as fantasy by the scientific community simply because of the folk terminology used to describe the experience (Hufford, 1982). By listening more carefully to what everybody was saying and to how they were saying it, and by noticing what they were trying to avoid saying, Gabriele Rosenthal discovered that not even a war is a necessary or sufficient reason for an event to be turned into a narrative. "Collective trauma" does not guarantee the formation of narratives. But then, neither does such trauma guarantee the suppression of personal narrativizing. It is a combination of social entitlement to speak about an event, encouragement to do so, and "constructive listening" that gets people--traumatized or otherwise--talking, Rosenthal decided (1991, 37). She found, however, that when members of a particular socio-cultural group do speak openly about a "common" experience, they do so in a "collective thematization of historical phases" (40) designed to promote a particular ideological perspective.

If many individuals are "saying the same thing" about childhood sexual abuse, then a great deal of what they are saying may well be "objectively" true as well as "subjectively" valid. A great deal of what they are saying may also be collective thematization. Either way, it is time to listen, to listen carefully, and to listen critically. "What is going on here" is going on in the story, around the story, and through the story. If we forget this, we may leap to the same sorts of "one story" versions of reality that the Women's Movement claims in its "meaning" for the childhood sexual abuse experience, that Fundamentalists argue in their "cause" of such abuse, and which anthropologists, sociologists, folklorists, and numerous other social and cultural investigators promote in their "representations" of cultures or groups.

How do we know when we have listened enough? When Daniel Bertaux decided to study the "bakers' trade" in France, he decided that life stories would enhance his study and would provide insights into the "underlying sociostructural relations" between bakers, their wives, bakery workers, and French society in general (1981, 36). Bertaux found himself "confronted with a population of about 160,000 people (90,000 bakers and bakers' wives, 70,000 bakery workers." He began collecting life stories of bakery workers. "By the fifteenth", he writes, "we had begun to understand the pattern of sociostructural
relations which makes up the life of a bakery worker. By the twenty-fifth, adding the knowledge we had from life stories of bakers, we knew we had it: a clear picture of this structural pattern and of its recent transformations. New life stories only confirmed what we had understood, adding slight individual variations. We stopped at thirty; there was not point going further. We knew already what we wanted to know" (1981, 37). But what did they "know"? The story they "wanted" to hear? The one they expected to hear? The version the interviewers thought they should tell? The most locally acceptable version? Did they try to solicit other versions of life as a bakery worker? Would they have "heard" other stories of experience had they been offer? Bertaux doesn't say. Thirty probably were more than enough, as he suggests, for his purposes of looking for structural patterns. But would I have heard the stories Meredith and Susan told if I hadn't already been listening for the pattern misfits? Would they have told me if I hadn't let them know that I was receptive to their versions of the childhood sexual abuse experience? That which breaks the pattern is also part of the whole.

"Every act of saying is a momentary intersection of the `said' and the `unsaid','" according to Tyler. Every act of saying takes place against the "background of unspoken presuppositions and implications," both "those created conventionally by the `said' and those created intentionally by the speaker and hearer" (1978, 459). Every dominant story allows certain things to be said, certain voices to be heard. Every dominant story silences certain voices as well. Still, we perceive, contemplate, rationalize, moralize, and come to know ourselves and each other through our stories. We discuss our differences, find our commonalties, and manage our relationships through our stories. (Fisher 1984). We are "ourselves" only because we have and know each "other." (Tyler 1978). To know ourselves truly, and to hear others sincerely, "calls for a courage and a willingness to let the world be what it is, to let the other be who he [or she] is, and to let oneself be whom one is," contends Jourard. To achieve such "transparency" of being known and knowing others demands also, Jourard insists, "a commitment to truth, as it changeably presents itself. It calls for a readiness to suspend concepts and beliefs about self, others, and world and to perceive what is. It calls for a readiness to suspend imagination, wish, and fantasy, a readiness to inform and revise concepts with fresh inputs of perception. That it calls for courage to disclose oneself to the world is self-evident, since untrammelled self-disclosure is rare. (Jourard 1971, 182). Of all "dominant" stories, "those that assert self-worth" may indeed be the "least harmful, the least hegemonic" (Abrahams 1986, 46). Such stories are heard only when someone listens.
Footnote

In October 1994, *The Courage to Heal* appeared on the close-out table of a major local bookstore. The novelty has worn off. The dominant version of the childhood sexual abuse is once again changing.
APPENDIX A
PROJECT INTERVIEWEES

Anne

Mid 40s, Masters degree. Anne has an established career in religion and counseling. She is the oldest of four siblings. She suffered from "inappropriateness and acting out" in the form of "sexual touching" by a grandfather, who also "bothered" her sister and several female cousins. Her sister complained, and Anne's parents put a stop to the behavior—at least as far as Anne and her sister were concerned.

Betsy

Early 40s, M.A. Betsy has an established career in counseling. She is the oldest of four siblings. A male relative who baby sat and who later lived with her family for a year made her "fondle his genitals." She suspects he may have done the same to her sister as well, but she has never asked her. Betsy never forgot about these incidents but never told anyone about them until she was thirty years old. Betsy was also involved in "one tiny little incident" with a neighbor boy several years after the incidents involving her relative. She considers herself "somewhat debilitated" by the second experience, more because her life was threatened in a very memorable and convincing way than because of the sexual nature of the incident; she has difficulty staying alone and is "mistrusting of men in general." She now uses her experience in sexual abuse programs for children to demonstrate the value of telling.

Catherine

Early 20s, M.A. in progress. She has been a teacher and is now upgrading her skills. She finds her religion a source of comfort. She was "offended" in various ways between the ages of four and thirteen by her father, her older brother, other relatives and a neighbor boy. She remembered most of these abusive incidents after she entered counseling for bulimia.
David

Early 20s, M.A. in progress, aiming for career in education and/or writing. David is the brother of one of the other interviewees. He found out that his father had been abusing his sister for many years only after he was grown. He has had to come to terms with both his understanding of what his father’s actions mean to his sister and with what they mean to his relationship, now, with his father.

Elizabeth

Early 40s. Temporarily suspended career in health professions. Elizabeth experienced "a lot of touching and feeling and also things that were sexual connotation of things" from her father. Her father convinced her when she was a child that she had to "protect her mother" by not telling. She has since confronted her father, but she has still not told her mother because her brothers (whom she has told) have asked her not to.

Frank

Early 20s, B.A. in progress. Frank was raped by a male baby sitter, repeatedly over a period of several years. He did not speak about (or deal with) this until he was watching the movie Prince of Tides and the rape scene triggered a response. Frank has made peace with the experience by labeling it his "first homosexual experience."

Ginger

Early 20s, Masters in social work, Ph.D. in progress. The eldest of four siblings, Ginger has been a mental health and substance abuse counselor and plans to continue doing some for of social work. She talked about "one specific incident" involving a baby-sitter and about "yucky" feelings associated with an uncle who was "just too friendly, as an uncle" and who gave adult-type gifts to his young nieces. She considers herself "lucky" for the assertive way her mother handled the baby-sitter incident but regrets that the subtlety of the uncle's actions means that her sisters have been "initiated into this too."

Helen

Late 30s, Ph.D. in progress. After a career in business, Helen is now establishing herself in a career in counseling. She remembers being "raped" by her alcoholic father when she was twelve; the next six years, however, are "totally gone." She considers
herself close to being healed. She has one younger sibling who was "pretty . . . buffered" by her and who was not sexually abused.

Judith

Mid 40s, Ph.D., established career in teaching. Beginning around age eight or nine, a neighbor boy--described by Judith as "a teenager out of control"--began abusing Judith. The abuse went on long enough that she "developed coping strategies" which included "joining organizations" so that she wouldn't be home after school. She holds the adults in both their lives responsible for "being so unaware" of what was going on. As far as talking openly about her experience, she said, "I don't know what the point of that would be." But she would not hesitate to let people know what happened, in a general sort of way, if it would support "a concept I'm willing to fight" such as the notion that women bring rape or sexual harassment on themselves or can prevent such things from happening.

Kay

Mid 50s, B.A., R.N. in progress. Former (now-suspended) career in business, retraining for new career in counseling/health professions. Kay was abused in a variety of ways by her mother and step-father--who also abused Kay's sister. Kay remembered her abuse after entering counseling for other reasons. She considers herself seriously affected but well on her way to being healed. She plans to use the insights she has gained from her own experience to help others heal.

Lara

Early 40s, Ph.D. in progress. Lara's sixteen-year-old brother "forced vaginal intercourse" on her when she was ten while their mother was out of town. She complained to her father, expressing herself in "immature" and imprecise language, but her father at least got the message that her brother was doing something she didn't like, and he put a stop to whatever it was going on. Lara had a sense, even then, that her brother was trying to "get at" their mother for some perceived injustice, and she still interprets his behavior that way. She does not consider herself seriously affected by the experience.

Meredith

Early 40s, B.A., M.A. in progress. Established career in teaching. Meredith joined the project at my invitation after she had told me about some surprisingly (to her) negative
feedback she received after telling about a childhood incident during a sexual abuse awareness training session. An elderly neighbor man had "kissed" her "tummy" and she had felt "uncomfortable" about this and had told her mother, who took care of the situation. The people in the training session had been "shocked" that she would talk so openly about having been "sexually abused." Meredith had been shocked that they put that label on it, and she was—and is—very uncomfortable with the label.

Noreen

Early 40s, B.A. Established career in teaching and counseling. Noreen was "raped and sodomized" when she was seven by a male cousin who was living in her home after Noreen's mother died. The cousin also raped her brother. Noreen uses her experience, and the strength she has gained from working through the healing process, to help other women face their own issues and "get stronger." She is an outspoken advocate of women's and children's rights.

Olivia

Early 50s, B.A., M.A. in progress. Established career in business, feels under-employed. Olivia is an only child. She was "molested" by both parents and an uncle and "sexually abused" by a man on a bus—an experience which she considers "especially shattering" because "it showed me that what went on in the home . . . would go on in the outside world. And I would never be protected from it there either, so I gave up hope for the world being any different from my home life." The abuse by her father (including rape) continued until she left home for college, at which point she "blanked" everything out in the interest of thinking of herself as normal. She recovered most of her memories during grief counseling after her father died.

Patricia

Late 40s, B.S. Suspended career in business. Patricia was abused in a variety of ways by her father. She has been suffering "flashbacks" for the past couple years, and is currently struggling to put all the pieces of the puzzle together to make a coherent picture. She has one brother, who is in "denial" about her abuse.
Rachael

Early 20s, B.A. in progress. Rachael is the younger of two siblings. She was "sexually abused" in a variety of ways by her father until she was fourteen; he ceased his activities after she attempted suicide. Rachael reported the abuse when she was seventeen, and her father confessed to and was convicted of child sexual abuse. She considers herself a "survivor," and she is an outspoken advocate of women's rights. She participates in public rape and sexual assault awareness programs.

Susan

Late 50s, Ph.D. in progress. Teacher (upgrading skill levels). Susan joined the project at my invitation after she had told me about an incident involving a week-long baby-sitting job she'd had when she was a young girl. The man of the family lay down on the bed beside her one night. Susan told her mother about the incident after she got home; her mother put an immediate ending to Susan's contact with the family. Susan is still sorting about what this all "means" to her.
## APPENDIX B

### TRANSCRIPTION KEY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Expression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comma</td>
<td>very brief, but noticeable break between words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line break</td>
<td>&quot;normal&quot; speaking pauses, approximately one second</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(all pauses longer that one second are timed, e.g., 3sec, and indicated in parenthesis)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period</td>
<td>marked down shift in intonation, as though ending a &quot;sentence&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question mark</td>
<td>strong upshift in intonation, as though asking a &quot;question&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underline</td>
<td>word is emphasized slightly, &quot;leaned on,&quot; but does not become any significantly louder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclamation point</td>
<td>word is emphasized moderately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Exclamation points and underline are used in a &quot;cumulative&quot; fashion: together they indicate strong emphasis; doubled exclamation point with underline indicate extreme emphasis.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAPITAL LETTERS</td>
<td>strong increase in volume</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; &gt;</td>
<td>words in phrase between indicators are spoken more slowly than the person's normal rhythm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;&gt;&gt; &lt;&lt;&lt;</td>
<td>words in phrase between indicators are spoken more quickly than the person's normal rhythm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;quotation marks&quot;</td>
<td>speaker changes tone to indicate that he/she is reporting someone else's words or terms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ (addition sign)</td>
<td>indicates word is &quot;stretched out,&quot; elongated beyond what would be normal for the person's speaking rhythm (sign may be doubled to indicate even more temporal length to the word)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>^ (up arrow)</td>
<td>indicates upward intonation on the word, not as strong as upward intonation indicating question</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Transcription Key (continued)

. . . (three spaced periods) used at beginning of a passage to indicate that the passage is a continuation of an on-going segment by the speaker

. . . . (four spaced periods) used at the end of a passage to indicate that the same speaker continued speaking beyond the end of the segment presented

{} words between such brackets are reasonably equivalent substitutions for words which might compromise the anonymity of the speaker

-- (two hyphens) words spoken very quickly together (stuttering), also often used for a quick reversal of content direction

( ) (parentheses) used for transcriber's comments

/ / words between slashes are indicated as overlapping speech

[ ] word (or words) between square brackets represent a "best guess" of what the interviewee is saying in a situation where words were slurred, spoken too softly, laughed through, or where background noise interferred. These were not used unless the transcriber was fairly confident that these were the actual words spoken

Digit:digits tape counter numbers are given to indicate relative positioning of material within transcripts. Counter numbers beginning a segment appear without parentheses immediately before a segment. Counter numbers appearing in parentheses mark the end of a continuously quoted segment of transcript, unless otherwise indicated.
APPENDIX C
DISSE...
DISSESSATION RESEARCH:
Speaking About Life Experiences: Childhood Sexual Abuse

Project Description to Accompany Written Consent Form.

The purpose of this dissertation research is to gain some insight into the human process of speaking about life experiences. This particular part of the study will examine how a variety of individuals talk about the experience of having been sexually abused during childhood.

The research you are being asked to participate in involves an interview of approximately one-and-a-half hours. During this interview you will be asked to tell the interviewer about your experience of childhood sexual abuse. You may choose what you will say and how much you will tell about your experience. The interviewer will also ask some questions about your experiences with trying to talk to others about the abuse. (For example, you will be asked whom you tried to talk to about this experience when you were a child, and whom you normally try to talk to about this experience now.) The researcher may contact you for permission to conduct one follow-up interview of equal or shorter length if questions arise. You do not have to consent to a follow-up interview just because you agree to participate in the initial interview.

With your permission, the interview will be audio tape recorded (or video tape recorded). The tape(s) will be kept and used only by the researchers listed on the consent form. You may choose to end the interview at any time.

You will also be asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire. This will ask some general questions about your background such as your age, your education level, religious affiliations, etc. This information will be used to look for patterns between the ways that individuals talk about childhood sexual abuse and other life experiences.

The information you give to the researcher will be used, along with information from many other interviews, to develop some general theories about how people talk about the experience of childhood sexual abuse. Some of the words you speak may be quoted, but a pseudonym will be used.

Every care will be taken to insure that your identity is kept confidential. None of the information you give will be used in such a way that you can be identified. Pseudonyms will be used for all participants. [This promise of confidentiality cannot apply, of course, if you indicate that you are currently engaged in any sort of illegal activity.]

Participants will receive no remuneration for their parts in the study. However, this study may eventually aid counselors and others working with those who have experienced sexual abuse to help such people deal with their experiences.
APPENDIX D
DISSEarrow tion PHONE SOLICITATION SCRIPT
DISSERTATION RESEARCH:  
Oral Solicitation Script

Speaking About Life Experiences: Childhood Sexual Abuse

I am conducting research for my Ph.D dissertation at Ohio State. Recently, I have become very interested in the ways that people talk about their life experiences. This particular part of my study is focusing on how different people talk about the experience of having been sexually abused during childhood. You have indicated through (source) that sexual abuse was part of your childhood and that you would be willing to talk to me about this experience.

First, let me assure you that your identity will be kept confidential. Nothing you say to me now, or at any time, will be used in such a way that you can be identified. I also experienced sexual abuse as a child, and I know that many people are reluctant to have other people know about their experiences.

I would like to arrange a time and place where I could interview you for approximately one to one-and-a-half hours. During this interview, I will ask you to tell me about your experience of childhood sexual abuse. You may choose what you will say and how much you will tell about your experience, and you may choose to end the interview at any time. I will also ask some questions about your experiences with trying to talk to others about the abuse. For example, you will be asked whom you tried to talk to about this experience when you were a child, and whom you normally try to talk to about this experience now.

I would like to audio tape record (or--video tape record) the interview so that I can concentrate on what you say rather than on taking notes. The tape(s) will be kept and used only by me and my dissertation advisor.

You will also be asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire. This will ask some general questions about your background such as your age, your education level, religious affiliations, etc. This information will be used to look for patterns between the ways that individuals talk about childhood sexual abuse and other life experiences.

The information you give me will be used, along with information from many other interviews, to develop some general theories about how people talk about the experience of childhood sexual abuse. I will be asking for permission to quote some of your words, but I will be using pseudonyms for everyone who participates in the study.

You will not be paid for your part in this study. However, eventually, this study may aid counselors and others working with those who have experienced sexual abuse to help others like yourself deal with their experiences.
APPENDIX E
Dissertation Interview Script and Questions
DISSERTATION RESEARCH
Interview Guide Script

The purpose of this study is to gain some understanding of how people speak about childhood sexual abuse, who they talk to about this experience—and who they don't talk to and why, and what happened in the past and what happens now when they talk about their experiences.

To help assure you that I understand how difficult it may be to talk about your experience, I will tell you that childhood sexual abuse is part of my own life experience. But I am not here to tell you about my experience because it is your perception of your experience that I am interested in for this study. You may tell me as little or as much as you want about the actual abuse—about what happened and how you felt about it, and how you feel and think about it now. Later, I will ask you some questions which deal specifically with talking about this experience.

There is no right or wrong way to talk about this experience and no right or wrong answer to any of my questions. I am interested in your perspective. I know that some of these things may be difficult for you to talk about. Take your time. You are free to choose what you will say and which questions you will answer. If at any time during this interview you wish to stop, please say so. I will certainly respect your decision to stop, if you chose to.

With your permission, I would like to tape record this interview and just make a few notes during our conversation so that I may concentrate on what you are saying. If at any time during the interview you wish me to turn off the tape recorder, I will respect your request.

I will ask you to fill out a form with some specific information such as your name, age, etc. on it for my own records, but this information will be kept confidential. In my written report about this study, none of the information that you give me will be used in such a way that you may be identified. All names will be changed, and any specific details which might identify you will be left out or changed enough to conceal your identity.

I'd like you to begin wherever you want in telling me about your experience. I may ask a few questions along the way to help me be sure that I understand what you are saying. It is your experience that I want to understand.

(When the interview is over.) Thank you for your time. All your comments have been very helpful. I would now like you to fill out a brief demographic information sheet. Again, all answers are optional.
Interview Questions Guide

It is likely that many of the following questions will be answered during the respondents initial discussion of her/his experience. The following questions will, therefore, be modified or expanded in response to the information volunteered by the interviewee.

Age?

Occupation? Full or part time? If not currently working outside the home, what other kinds of outside activities, if any?

Education?

Family structure? Number of siblings? Birth order in family?

Parents living?

Siblings living?

Who was (were) abuser(s)? Is abuser(s) still living?

Nature of the abuse?

When did this occur?

How long did this go on?

When did it stop? Why did it stop?

When did you begin to "define" your experience as "sexual abuse"? What led you to define the experience this way?

Who, in your opinion, "knew" about the abuse while it was going on? Who do think might have "suspected" the abuse was going on? What indications led you to believe this?

Did you ever try to speak to anyone about the abuse while it was going on? If you did speak about what was happening, what was this person (these persons) reaction(s)? What happened as a result of speaking about the abuse?

Did anyone ever try to prevent you, when you were a child, from speaking about the abuse? How?

Whom else have you spoken to about the abuse--since the abuse stopped? What reaction(s) have you experienced? Whom do you speak to about your childhood experience now?
Whom don't you speak to about this experience? Why not?

Have you spoken about your experience with the abuser(s)?

Have you spoken about your experience with members of your family (nuclear or extended)? Why? or Why not? What reactions have you received?

Does anyone ever try to prevent you from speaking about your abuse experience now? How?

With whom are you most likely to talk about your experience now?

Is there anyone you would never want to know that you were sexually abused?
Do you think this experience, which took place during your childhood, still affects your life? If so, how?

Have you ever spoken with a professional counselor--a psychiatrist, psychologist, clergy person, or other counselor--about this experience?

Have you ever participated in a discussion group which had sexual abuse as its focus?

Are you currently involved in any sort of counseling situation or discussion group?

Who tells you, if anyone, about their sexual abuse experiences?

Have you read any books or articles which discuss sexual abuse? If so, which ones?

Have you ever seen any television shows which deal with the issue of sexual abuse in any way? If so, which ones?
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