Sexual Violence and the Problem of Belief:

Trauma in Theological Perspective

By

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Dedicated to my sisters

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Introduction: Sexual Violence, Belief, and the Traumatic Alchemy of Reality into Incoherence

This dissertation is about sexual violence and the problem of belief – who to believe, what to believe, when to believe, and most importantly, what it means to believe survivors. This dissertation is shaped and motivated by real stories of struggle born in the aftermath of sexual violence, stories of my own and stories of countless others. Because the compass I use to map the various parts of this dissertation and weave them together is oriented not by the North Star but by a constellation of survivors' lived experiences that I have held in mind while working on this project, I want to begin by recounting two such stories. I offer them as points of entry into the problem of belief that I pursue throughout the next five chapters. Together, they suggest what is at stake in our approaches to belief in the wake of sexual violence, and as we will see later in this introduction, why theology matters.[1]

Orienting Stories

Ten years ago, I sat in a library lobby across from someone important in my life, preparing to tell them for the first time that, though neither my memory nor my knowledge of the events was complete, I thought I was sexually abused as a child by a person we both had trusted. I had been working up to this day for years. My nerves were so amped it's a wonder my bones didn't rattle apart right there and drop to the floor. For as long as I could remember, I had lived with the traumatic repercussions of sexual abuse without ever feeling confident that my life had, in fact, included this violence. I had coped with the abuse by convincing myself I had made it up. Nothing had happened

[1] The first orienting story is autobiographical. I changed or left out information that might identify the other person in the narrative. Otherwise, this is a true story that, from my perspective, happened as I describe. The second story is a composite narrative, meaning that I wove experiences I have had with a number of survivors of sexual violence through my work in this area into one narrative. As such, while the circumstances I describe in the second orienting story are real in the sense that they are based on circumstances I have observed, the composite story did not itself happen in the way I present it. Neither do the characters in the story correspond with single individuals. They are composite characters.

to me. It was silly children's make-believe. The egregious nature of its content was evidence that I was a terrible child. A terrible person. It didn't and could not mean that the nightmares in my head were put there by someone beloved.

Several months prior to walking into that library, I had coaxed myself to consider for the first time that, just maybe, I felt traumatized by sexual violence because I was. It was a new and strange idea.

One afternoon, sitting on the couch in a close friend's living room, I had noticed that my mind began its familiar routine of flipping frantically through still frames of childhood memories that, though innocent enough, always left me with a chill. For twenty-odd years my habit had been to push them out of my mind as quickly as possible and pretend that there was nothing significant about the fact that this exact collection of frozen frames kept repeating itself across my vision. That afternoon, however, I changed my pattern. I closed my eyes and concentrated on one of the frames. I tried to remain open. I didn't push it away.

The frozen image – of child me in a place I knew well, toys scattered about – began to move. A door opened and a man stepped into the room. I saw his shoes.

Then, with a swift crack, my vision blurred. Eyes open or closed, all I could see was the color red, every direction was a flood of red. I felt my mind splitting down the middle, like it would rather self-destruct than stay in that room with that man. Something (someone?) in me I had not met, and over which I had no control, took the reins and shut the moving still frame down. I was sure that I would be obliterated in the process. I thought I was going to die.

The next I remember, I was standing on the opposite side of my friend's living room, a blanket wrapped around my shoulders, my friend in front of me, looking concerned, hands on my arms, telling me in a soothing voice that I was alright. I don't know how much time I lost or what happened in the interim. I never asked.

As truly terrifying as this experience was, the gift it gave to me was that I could no longer explain away the repercussions of violence in my life as the result of my own, simple, childhood make-believe-run-amok. At that time I still did not have clear declarative memory of abuse, but I knew that I did not fabricate the near split of my psyche. I did not pretend to dissociate. And this was a piece of reality that felt concrete enough to grasp and hold to for stability while, at a pace that didn't threaten my sanity, I faced the voice in my head long-determined to convince me that I had made it all up and to keep me from knowing what I knew.

That's how I found myself at the library, months later, finally ready to tell someone who mattered that I was newly, precariously of the mind that the violence I thought I had imagined was real.

They listened to me. They were quiet for a moment. And then they said, "You could be having false memories. In the 90s lots of people thought they were sexually abused as children, but their memories were wrong. Couldn't you be wrong?"

My bones didn't just drop to the floor. They broke into tiny, jagged shards and blew away like sand. All of the confidence I had built in my knowledge of the violence in my life disintegrated on the spot. This person who mattered to me didn't believe me, and immediately, as if the work I had done to know myself had been of no thicker a substance than vapor, I could no longer believe me.

As survivors of childhood sexual abuse go, I am remarkably unexceptional. In my academic, ministerial, and advocacy roles (to which I will speak momentarily), I partner with more survivors than I can count whose stories mirror the one I just told.[2] The reason I begin this dissertation with a small piece of my own life is because it is a piece that offers a glimpse into a phenomenon

[2] Some of the survivors to which I refer have published accounts that can be read online through Into Account at https://intoaccount.org/blog/ and through Our Stories Untold at http://www.ourstoriesuntold.com/ and http://www.ourstoriesuntold.com/stories/.

experienced by innumerable others: Sexual violence can obliterate survivors' confidence in our own ability to discern what is real from what is not, what happened from what didn't. One important reason that survivor advocates emphasize the need for hearers to believe survivor accounts of sexual violence is that belief mediates action. A survivor's access to safety, care, support, and justice is measured in no greater proportion than the degree to which they are believed. Another reason, however, is that those who live with the traumatic, reality-bending, world-upending repercussions of sexual violence often struggle to believe *ourselves*. Disbelief from friends, family, employers, communities of faith, intellectual discourse, and culture writ large exacerbates this dynamic of sexual violence trauma: the alchemy of reality into incoherence.

Here is the second orienting story I want to tell. A 17-year-old girl, Francesca, attempted suicide. She survived, and her terrified parents learned in the aftermath that Francesca was being regularly sexually abused, forcibly incapacitated, and statutorily raped by her considerably older youth pastor named Rick. There was a lawsuit. The youth pastor was convicted and sentenced. He spent one-and-a-half years in prison. Meanwhile, Francesca struggled to stay alive. Her theologically moderate church acknowledged the court's findings, but Francesca's parents sensed that the community quietly regarded Francesca, and not the youth pastor, with disdain. Francesca's parents confronted the church leadership and learned that, yes, the pastors and elders were frustrated that their daughter had tempted a good man and temporarily derailed his life. They believed a sexual relationship had developed between Francesca and the youth pastor and that this was wrong, but they did not believe Francesca was the primary victim. Francesca's family left the church. They lost their community, their faith, and their sense of Christian identity as they worked to support their daughter whose struggle to survive continued.

It was a few years later that I was introduced to them. Another survivor of sexual violence, Alexis, had just published an article giving account of her experience, and I was listed as the contact

for those interested in getting in touch with the author. Both of Francesca's parents were on the other end of the phone, frantic. They had recognized something of their own daughter's story in the article and wanted to know if the person who assaulted the author was the same person who abused Francesca. We discovered that it was.

"But if this had already happened to someone else, how could the people who knew let it happen again? *How*? They could have stopped this. *Why* didn't they stop this?"

I could hear a chasm of betrayal and pain opening through Francesca's parents' tears. And they were right. Another community of faith had had a chance to at least try to intervene in Rick's violence, and they had not taken it.

When Rick assaulted Alexis he was not in a ministerial role. He and Alexis were both young adult members of the same church. It was a small, progressive, predominately white peace church. Rick was white and known as an up and coming leader in local movements for social justice. Alexis was black and new at the church. She decided to attend because she saw that the congregation was invested in the wellbeing of the neighborhood that they shared. Rick took an interest in her. He welcomed her. They became close. And then, one evening, he drugged and raped her. Parts of Alexis's memory were unclear, but she was confident in her memory that he raped her, and she confronted him. He outright denied that any such thing had happened. He expressed concern that she was, perhaps, having a mental breakdown. He offered to assist her in finding help. Alexis went to the church and told them what happened. Initially horrified, they confronted Rick too. But after hearing his side of the story they began to wonder: *Was* Alexis mentally stable? After all, the level of rage she was expressing alarmed them. They hadn't known her long, and she was accusing Rick of something that ran fundamentally against who they were sure they knew him to be. Ultimately, the pastors told Alexis that they cared for her but thought it best that she make an appointment for evaluation at a mental health clinic. Undeterred, Alexis went to the police. Initially, they took her

report seriously. But after a conversation with Rick and with his pastors they chose not to proceed with an investigation. His story seemed more plausible than hers, and Alexis had no evidence to back up her claims. Alexis left the church, and no one wondered why. Rick eventually earned a ministerial degree and took a job as Francesca's youth pastor.

The Problem of Belief

Neither Francesca nor Alexis had, like me, faced an internal crisis around whether or not they had fabricated their memories of sexual violence. They each knew with confidence that sexual encounters with Rick had occurred. But Francesca struggled to believe that she was not to blame for what she suffered. Like the leaders in her community of faith, she worried that she was responsible for the fact of sexual contact with Rick, for ruining her pastor's life, and for bringing pain to her community of faith and shame to her family. She struggled to believe that what had happened to her counted as sexual violence and that she was not its cause. For the next five years, as Francesca's friends transitioned to college, graduated, and started their adult lives, Francesca transitioned in and out of in-patient treatment centers, fighting for her life against the invasive symptoms of complex PTSD and the continuing threat of suicide.

Alexis, on the other hand, had strong confidence that what happened to her was rape and that Rick was the responsible party. The problem of belief that most impacted her was that those in a position to help her hold Rick accountable did not share her confidence and instead interpreted it as a sign of her mental instability. Both Alexis's pastors and the police were more willing to believe that Alexis's righteous rage marked her as psychologically detached from reality than they were willing to believe that her testimony truthfully represented Rick's behavior. Alexis felt that Rick's whiteness, his public devotion to the peace tradition, and his reputation as a trusted leader in community movements for social wellbeing played a role in her pastors' decision to extend their

belief to his story. Alexis felt that her relative newness to the community of faith, her blackness, and particularly the way her righteous rage may have made the racist trope of the angry black woman available to her white pastors as a means for her dismissal, played a role in their decision not to believe that what she said happened did, in fact, happen. The experience of not being believed is what had the most devastating traumatic impact for Alexis. She names this as even more damaging to her life than the rape itself. Because what she knew to be true was denied by figures of authority in her community, she came to feel that the reality in which she lived was a reality that was neither shared nor valued. She became intensely isolated and describes the psychological, spiritual, and material ramifications of that isolation as life-long.

For me, for Francesca, and for Alexis, the problem of belief took different forms, and yet, for each of us, belief and its withholding were central to the experience of sexual violence, to the character of the trauma it opened, and to the shape of its lasting impact on our lives. The presence of the problem of belief in one survivor's story also has the capacity to directly impact another's. If Alexis's pastors had believed her, or if the police had believed her, Rick's violence against Francesca might have been prevented. The orienting stories I have told only begin to scratch the surface of the problem of belief. In truth, the problem has as many forms as there are survivors. This dissertation begins, therefore, with the understanding that stories like those I have just told abound. The traumatic struggle to survive and be well after sexual violence tends, in its contemporary western manifestations, to involve one or more crises of belief at its center.

I have called the capacity of sexual violence to upend survivors' fundamental sense of what is real and true *the traumatic alchemy of reality into incoherence*. We can see this alchemic power of sexual violence at work variously in each of the orienting stories I told. In my story, this alchemic power called historical reality into question. For Francesca, it threatened to replace the reality in which she was a victim with one in which she was a perpetrator. For Alexis, it split the reality she lived in apart

from the reality shared by the rest of her social world and left her isolated on the lonely side of the chasm. This alchemic power of sexual violence demands our attention not only because it threatens the lives of individual survivors, although it does do that. It demands our attention, also, because it is one of the sly mechanisms through which sexual violence perpetuates itself. If survivors are not, or at least not always, sure of themselves; if survivors who are sure of themselves are rendered suspect; and if the world requires non-suspect surety as a foundation for intervention, then resistance to a form of violence that does its work through blurring the lines between fact and fiction is ill fated.

One way that we can think about survivors' attempts to secure belief, both internally and from others, then, is to consider such attempts as among survivors' strategies of resistance to sexual violence's alchemic power. *That* belief is fundamental to resistance seems clear. And yet, a solution to the problem of belief is not readily available. In today's social landscape, discourse on sexual violence often includes anxiety around what it means to believe survivors, which survivors ought to be believed, what kinds of evidence are or are not necessary as preconditions for belief, and how an ethical insistence on believing survivors interfaces with legal, congressional, workplace, Title IX, and other kinds of procedures for addressing sexual violence.

Some recommend that the solution to the problem of belief is, simply, *to believe.* If withholding belief exacerbates the traumatic repercussions of sexual violence on both individual and systemic levels, then this position supposes that making an extension of belief to survivors' testimonies automatic is the solution. Others worry that this kind of attempt at a solution will have unacceptable repercussions for the accused. In the moment that a survivor comes forward, those individuals or communities to whom they have chosen to disclose their experience are made to take a concrete position in a raging societal debate. It is my argument, however, that the terms of this debate are not attuned to the problem of belief as it manifests in survivors' lives well enough to

offer the resources we need for securing belief in resistance to sexual violence's alchemic power. Therefore, in one sense, the problem of belief *is* the traumatic impact of belief's withholding in the lives of survivors. In another sense that is important for this dissertation, however, the problem of belief refers to the cultural intractability of social negotiations around whether and under what conditions extending belief to survivors' testimonies is warranted. This dissertation, thus, sets out with the aim of tracing the trajectory of the problem of belief's relationship to sexual violence through particular iterations of western discourse that I will soon articulate. I do not propose to solve the problem of belief or even come close. Rather, I intend this dissertation to help build a better map of the problem, and I hope that improved tools of navigation will be a resource for future attempts at a constructive solution. Mapping the problem is a theological task, in part, because I am interested in attending specifically to the shape of the problem in communities of Christian faith. However, it is also a theological task insofar as belief is a theological category. Though the need for belief with respect to testimonies of sexual violence has not typically been cast in theological terms, this dissertation argues that developing a thorough map of the problem of belief with respect to sexual violence trauma will be advanced by attending to belief's theological dimensions.

Defining Sexual Violence

One term that needs to be defined at the outset of this project is *sexual violence*. There are important debates regarding the terminology that best describes the categories of violence at issue in this dissertation. Terms that have proved useful in one context or another include, domestic violence, intimate partner violence, violence against women, sexual assault, and abuse. In this dissertation I have decided to use the term *sexual violence* as an umbrella term that includes all of the above and more. While the vast majority of the instances of violence I address in this dissertation could be

described as sexual assault, rape, or sexual abuse, I take sexual violence to be any mode of interpersonal or systemic abuse, coercion, manipulation, silencing, or outright violence that has a sexual form of expression, a sexual logic, or both.

Sexual violence is always, simultaneously, both interpersonal and systemic. Its interpersonal dimensions come to the fore when, on one hand, the parties involved are primarily conceived as individuals – i.e. individual perpetrators, survivors, or enablers of sexual abuse – and on the other hand, when attention is focused on the motives and repercussions of sexual violence as they manifest in the lives of these specific individuals. Intellectual discourse emphasizes sexual violence as a systemic phenomenon when it is primarily concerned with, for example, the patterned ways that sexual violence is perpetuated and enabled with respect to broad collectives – institutions, religious groups, eras in history, dimensions of culture, and within discourse itself. While the interpersonal and systemic dimensions of sexual violence are always intertwined, the interpersonal is often and problematically emphasized to the exclusion of the systemic. As Meredith Minister argues in *Rape Culture on Campus,* this is characteristic of the criminal justice approach to rape.[3] Because insufficient attention to the systemic dimensions of sexual violence itself leads to the systemic perpetuation of that violence, a sufficient understanding of sexual violence requires a systemic lens.

This means that understanding sexual violence involves sustaining critical attention on dynamics of social power. Gender may be the most widely recognized category that mediates social power in sexual violence. Traci West, Shawn Copeland, and Meredith Minister, however, are among those who articulate the raced dimensions of sexual violence.[4] Andrea Smith speaks to the intersection of sexual violence with colonialism.[5] *Women and Genocide* is a volume that breaks ground

[3] Meredith Minister, *Rape Culture on Campus* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018).
[4] Traci C. West, *Wounds of the Spirit: Black Women, Violence, and Resistance Ethics* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1999); Shawn M. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010); Meredith Minister, *Rape Culture On Campus.*
[5] Andrea Smith, *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).

in its analysis of sexual violence as constitutive of political struggle, war, and genocide.[6] Each of the disciplines and discourses represented in these texts have proved critical for developing an understanding of sexual violence as a kind of violence formed by and formative of a wide range of social systems of domination. It is out of the scope of my dissertation's focus to explore these trajectories of scholarship in detail, but they do contribute to my understanding of what sexual violence is, and they ground my conviction that to address the intersection of sexual violence with theology well, one's foundational concept of sexual violence must be both cognizant of its interpersonal dimensions and cultivated through a systemic lens attentive to the landscape of social power.

Approaching Belief

There is no one, cohesive definition of belief that accounts for all of the ways that belief shows up in this dissertation. (Indeed, I would argue, that is part of the problem.) Rather than starting with a clear definition of belief and using the space of this project to interrogate that concept, what I start with is, more simply, a confidence that the word *belief* represents something that is important to survivors. I am interested in what that something is and the degree to which *that something* does or does not track with what broader modes of discourse on sexual violence are talking about when they use the word belief.

One of the problems at this dissertation's core is that, while belief is critical to movements of support for sexual violence survivors, and while it is at the center of our discourse on sexual violence, what is meant by the word often remains elusive. For example, does believing survivors mean affirming that survivors' memories of abuse are historically representative? Does it mean affirming a relationship of correspondence between survivors' testimonies and the histories to which

[6] Elissa Bemporad & Joyce W. Warren, *Women and Genocide: Survivors, Victims, Perpetrators* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2018).

they speak? To what degree does believing survivors involve making a moral judgment in addition to a historical one? Is it possible for the demands of belief to be satisfied by moral solidarity with survivors without being accompanied by a historical judgment? And what kind of thing is belief? Is it an epistemological position that results from a conscious process of rational deduction? Is it more like a feeling or a sense of confidence that arises from one's preconscious orientation to the world? Or, is belief more like a practice or a discipline? To what extent is the mandate to believe survivors interested in what we *do* as opposed what we *know*? And to what extent does what we mean when we say "believe survivors" draw on what we mean when we say we believe in God? Does the texture of religious belief at all inform how we approach the appropriateness of extending belief to survivors' testimonies of sexual violence? And, is there anything to be gained by turning this direction?

Within discourse on sexual violence, questions like these are largely left unattended, and I do not propose to answer them within the scope of this dissertation. Rather, to contribute to a more thorough map of the problem of belief, I pose questions like these to various iterations of western discourse on sexual violence in order to sustain attention on what those who are shaping the development of the conversation are talking about when they use the term, *belief*. In other words, I track belief. I follow it around as it is shows up in popular discourse, in psychoanalytic discourse, in survivor advocacy, and in theological treatments of sexual violence. I ask what belief is at each location, and whether the approach to belief that is offered is one that contributes or detracts from sustaining programs of solidarity with survivors and resistance to sexual violence.

However, as I track and follow belief in its myriad forms, there is one approach that shows up with consistency across this dissertation. That is, particularly in the absence of intentional thought about what belief is, a simplistic definition tends to structure discourse on the subject, and that definition is this: To believe x is to accept that x is true. Because "accept" and "true" are not

defined, it is difficult to say much more about the contours of this approach to belief except that it takes each of its components at face value. It tends toward a notion of belief as a primarily cognitive and rational process as opposed to an embodied one. It tends to put truth forward as more objective than it is subjective. It places belief in closer proximity to fact, law, and scientific method than it does to religion and faith. While this is not an approach to belief that I endorse, it is one that I frequently engage.

Questions, Method, Chapter Outline, and Belief as a Theological Problem

As I have said, this dissertation's goal is to make the contours of the problem of belief more visible. Rather than solving the problem, I aim to learn something about its shape, its relevance to theology, and what kinds of resources show promise for working toward a solution. My primary proposal is that theology is one such resource. The map of the problem that I draw suggests that thinking about belief theologically is one element of that which is needed in order to address the problem that belief poses to sexual violence survivors well.

I have also said that tracking is the primary method I use to do this. I follow belief though specific iterations of western discourse on the appropriateness of belief's extension to survivors' testimonies of sexual violence. I trace the shape of the problem in each instance, and I observe repeating patterns. Thus, each of this dissertation's chapters inquires about the problem of belief from a different angle. Chapter one asks what we learn about the problem of belief from sustaining attention to its shape in contemporary popular discourse. Chapters two and three consider the problem of belief as it shows up in Freudian psychoanalysis and in contemporary scholarly arguments about the relationship of Freud's thought to the problem of belief today. Chapter four looks at the problem of belief as it plays out in theology's concrete attempts to respond to sexual violence when that violence occurs in communities of faith. Chapter five attends to the problem of

belief as it shows up in constructive theological literature that takes up the subject of sexual violence trauma. Whereas all five chapters work to articulate the problem of belief, chapters four and five also specifically focus on the resources that theology offers for intervention. I chose the particular location of each chapter's reflection because these are loci that are pressing in the lives of survivors who I care about. The treatment of sexual violence and the problem of belief in pop culture, Freudian psychoanalysis, survivor advocacy, congregational practice, and constructive theology matter for the survivors with whom I work.

In more detail then, this dissertation's first chapter asks what we learn about the crisis of belief by tracing its shape in popular, western discourse. Since the explosion of #MeToo in late 2017, whether and under what conditions survivor accounts of sexual violence ought to be believed has been a topic of constant angst. Popular discourse on the subject has taken on the shape of a trenchant dualism. One side is characterized by what I call *due process* culture. This lens says we should not believe a survivors' testimony of abuse if we do not have corroborating evidence that would be admissible in a court of law. For as long as such evidence is lacking, this lens says it is unethical – even outside of court – to believe an allegation of sexual violence because doing so amounts to socially convicting the accused without affording them a fair trial.[7] The second side of the dualism is constituted through what I call the *believe all women* lens. This lens treats the automatic and immediate extension of belief as ethically necessary in response to every allegation of sexual violence. It argues that since we know that false allegations are statistically rare and that not believing survivors both enables continued abuse and inflicts further traumatic harm on the one whose testimony is denied, all who disclose experiences of sexual violence should, as a rule, be believed.[8]

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[7] An example of the due process argument engaged in chapter one is Caitlin Flanagan, "The Conversation #MeToo Needs to Have," *Atlantic*, January 29, 2018, https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/01/the-right-conversation-for-metoo/551732/.

[8] An example of the believe all women position engaged in chapter one is Jenny Hollander, "Why 'Believe Women' Means Believing Women Without Exception," *Bustle*, November 21, 2017, https://www.bustle.com/p/why-believe-women-means-believing-women-without-exception-5532903.

Given the narratives with which I opened this introduction, the reader will not be surprised that I consider the believe all women lens unquestionably preferable to the due process lens. However, while diverse and nuanced variations of these two positions exist, in their most culturally ubiquitous forms I am concerned that neither enables the kind of solidarity with sexual violence survivors necessary for a thick resistance to the harms of abuse. The due process lens is incapable of validating the majority of sexual violence experiences, because the kind of evidence it requires for belief tends to be unavailable in situations of sexual violence. Only one week after the fact, Alexis could not produce material evidence that would persuade her pastors or the police to believe her, much less a court of law. Because the due process lens cannot validate experiences of sexual violence in the absence of such evidence even when no legal proceeding is at issue, its ability to hold perpetrators accountable and motivate systemic change is weak. Its potential for aggravating the trauma of sexual violence by further undermining survivors' sense of reality is high.

The believe all women lens, on the other hand, holds validating survivors' experiences of sexual violence as its explicit intention. Perhaps, if the person I spoke with in that library lobby had been more committed to its mandate, our conversation would have had somewhat better prospects for success. But the believe all women lens can only validate survivors' sense of reality in general for as long as no example of a false or mistaken testimony is available to invalidate the idea that all accounts of sexual violence are inherently historically accurate. When one survivor's testimony is called into question, as happened in 2015 when *Rolling Stone* retracted a story it published on an alleged rape at the University of Virginia, the believe all women lens inadvertently calls all survivors' testimonies into question.[9] My library conversation partner used exactly this logic to throw my self-

[9] For a summary of the UVA case, see Margaret Hartmann, "Everything We Know About the UVA Rape Case [Updated]," Intelligencer, *New York Magazine,* July 30, 2015, http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2014/12/everything-we-know-uva-rape-case.html. For an example of this case being used in arguments against believing survivors, see Marc Randazza, "Should We Always Believe the Victim?" *CNN*, December 7, 2014, http://www.cnn.com/2014/12/05/opinion/randazza-uva-rape-allegations/index.html.

knowledge into doubt. In the 90s, a collection of people who thought they had experienced childhood sexual abuse had, according to popular media, been wrong; so why wasn't I?[10] In chapter one, then, I engage in critical analysis of the #MeToo movement and the False Memory Syndrome movement of the 1990s in order to flesh out the believe all women and due process lenses, demonstrate their dualistic opposition, and draw attention to what about their approaches to belief leaves belief in crisis.

This dissertation's second and third chapters focus on the problem of belief as it stands in relation to Freudian psychoanalysis. The move from popular discourse to Freudian psychoanalysis may not be an obvious one, but I make it for at least two reasons. My own interest in Freud was sparked by a particular narrative about his thought that I encounter with regularity among sexual violence specialists, namely that Freud built psychoanalysis on a denial of sexual violence survivors' testimonies. In his lifetime, Freud composed two basic and fundamentally incompatible theories of the link between sexuality and psychological neurosis: the seduction theory and the Oedipal theory of childhood sexuality. Whereas sexual violence specialists read the seduction theory as affirming that the sexual abuse of children was a pervasive, traumatic social problem and that memories of such abuses ought to be believed, they regard the Oedipal theory as promoting the opposite claims. The critique identifies the heart of psychoanalytic thought as fundamentally opposed to survivors'

[10] In the early 1990s, childhood sexual abuse gained massive media attention as several high profile survivors came forward and reported to have repressed and recovered memory of the abuse they experienced. In response, a group of psychologists and other interested parties developed what is now called the false memory syndrome movement. They argued that repressed memory is universally false and mounted campaigns to discredit claims of recovered memory (and the survivors who made them) in popular, legal, and psychological discourse. Trauma research now affirms multiple forms of traumatic memory in which memory might be lost and regained at different periods, but the false memory syndrome movement remains culturally influential. The crux of its argument can be found at the website for the False Memory Syndrome Foundation, accessed January 25, 2019, http://www.fmsfonline.org/. Elizabeth Loftus popularized the argument in her writings, for example, *The Myth of Repressed Memory: False Memories and Allegations of Sexual Abuse* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994). An early argument against the claims of the false memory syndrome movement can be found in Lenore Terr's *Unchained Memories: True Stories of Traumatic Memories, Lost and Found* (New York: BasicBooks, 1994) and collections of relevant research on traumatic memory are referenced throughout Bessel van der Kolk's *The Body Keeps the Score* (New York: Penguin Books, 2014). Himself a trauma and abuse specialist, van der Kolk was fired from his position as medical director of the Brookline Trauma Center in 2018 for bullying and denigrating employees. Chapter one of this dissertation engages the false memory syndrome movement more thoroughly.

interests and tells a version of intellectual history that puts considerable responsibility on Freud for contemporary western culture's tendency to withhold belief from survivors' testimonies and blame victims for what they suffer. I became concerned that, without wholly denying the usefulness of psychodynamic paradigms for thinking about sexual violence, this critique calls into question the wisdom of relying on psychoanalytic thought in projects that seek to construct conceptual and practical systems of solidarity with sexual violence survivors. Quite a bit of the literature that theology has produced for thinking about and practically addressing sexual violence uses psychoanalytic tools. If it is true that psychoanalysis is constructed and maintained through logics that refuse survivors' testimonies belief, do we not risk inadvertently reproducing these logics when we lean on psychoanalytic theory in our attempts to support survivors? One of the reasons I am motivated in chapters two and three to construct a careful account of the relationship between the contemporary problem of belief and the problem of belief as it surfaces in Freud's thought, then, is that the character of this relationship has repercussions for how programs of care for survivors are best organized. If the narrative of Freud's abandonment of sexual violence survivors is accurate, and if the logics of this abandonment are built in, so-to-speak, to psychoanalytic theory, theologians seeking to support survivors today would be wise to reflect carefully on the use of psychoanalytic tools. If, on the other hand, the narrative is not accurate, then why, I wanted to know, is it so pervasive among sexual violence specialists? What is it doing for us? What might we learn about ourselves by giving it our attention?

My second reason for pursuing Freudian literature in this dissertation is that, regardless of whether or not Freud's thought itself undermines survivors' interests, survivors who I care about are being silenced in his name. I began to notice a trend in the experiences of survivors who told me their stories. A striking number who had experienced childhood sexual abuse spoke of encounters with therapists, pastors, family members, and friends who drew on Freud's Oedipal theory as a

warrant for challenging survivors' memories of abuse. Freud's Oedipal theory of childhood sexuality is the theory that, according to certain sexual violence specialists, represents Freud's abandonment of sexual violence survivors. As the narrative goes, Freud used the Oedipal theory to interpret what were supposedly his patients' memories of sexual abuse, not as *true* memories at all, but as a-historical fantasies that represent a child's own sexual desire rather than an actual experience of abuse. One survivor told me that when, after months of struggling with symptoms of PTSD, she finally met with a therapist to express her growing awareness that she was sexually abused as a child, the therapist said, "Well, you know, it is common for children to make up memories of being sexually abused in order to fend off guilt for feeling turned on." Another survivor told me that when she disclosed to her pastor that her father had sexually abused her when she was growing up, her pastor reassured her that it is normal for children to have sexual fantasies about their parents and that this does not mean sexual abuse actually occurred. Each time survivors talked about experiences in which Oedipal logic was invoked to question their memories of abuse they described feeling utterly silenced by the exchange.

Regardless of whether or not Freud really did abandon sexual violence survivors, then, it struck me as curious that allusions to a highly technical, century old theory were being made with such ease and frequency in dismissive responses to survivors' disclosures of sexual abuse in childhood. Even more striking was the power that these exchanges seemed to have over survivors' own confidence in their knowledge of themselves. I sensed that the power at work here was in some way similar to that which I experienced in that library years ago when the person who mattered to me invoked 1990s false memory syndrome debates to challenge my memories of abuse. I became curious about whether there might be a connection. I wanted to know what about these two theories, separated by nearly a century, made them available and powerful tools for denying survivors' testimonies belief today. In chapters two and three, then, I relate Freud's shift between

the seduction theory and the Oedipal theory of childhood sexuality to contemporary approaches to sexual violence. I argue for a resonance between the contemporary dualism and the opposition between Freud's two theories. I read the contemporary believe all women lens as resonant with the kind of thought that characterizes Freud's seduction theory. I read the contemporary due process lens as resonant with the kind of thought we find in Freud's replacement of the seduction theory with the Oedipal paradigm. I am not arguing that Freud is responsible for the configuration of the contemporary dualism or that the two sides of today's debate are identical replications of Freud's two theories. Rather, the resonance between them helps us to see that something of the dualistic frame I set forth in chapter one is more broadly characteristic of western formulations of thought regarding the appropriateness of belief in the wake of sexual violence testimony. In other words, my argument is that the opposing positions put forward in Freud's two theories, on one hand, and the opposing positions expressed in believe all women and due process debates today, on the other, are two instances in which larger patterns of western thought on the appropriateness of belief as a response to survivor testimony are visible. In Freud's time and now, the dualistic frame of the conversation fails to produce approaches to belief that support the possibility of solidarity with survivors.

Whereas the first part of this dissertation (chapters one through three) focuses on belief as it shows up in culture, part two (chapters four and five) turns its attention to belief as it shows up in theological literature on sexual violence. The problem of belief that I trace in the first half of the dissertation is a theological problem, in part, because theology is not beyond the reach of the dualism. But it is also a problem into which theology is positioned to speak a unique word because it is, ultimately, a problem rooted in concepts and practices of belief. And *belief* is theological concept. A theological approach is not guaranteed to avoid the dualism. However, part two of this dissertation argues that when the theologically minded among us bring the tools of the discipline to

bear on the task of constructing belief as a practice of resistance to the alchemy of survivors' reality into incoherence, we have the potential to take a critical step toward resisting the power of sexual violence to perpetuate itself.

Chapter four, then, looks at the problem of belief as it plays out congregational settings when a survivor comes forward to report that someone in the community has perpetrated sexual violence against them. More specifically, it shows that the problem of belief that is tracked in the first half of this dissertation also manifests in how leading resources advise communities of Christian faith to respond when survivors report sexual violence within the church. Specifically, the resources I engage are those offered by Marie Fortune in the two editions of her book *Sexual Violence: The Unmentionable Sin*, by Toinette Eugene and James Poling in their book *Balm for Gilead: Pastoral Care for African American Families Experiencing Abuse*, and by FaithTrust Institute in their manual for congregations *Responding to Clergy Misconduct: A Handbook*. Each of these texts aims to provide guidance to faith communities on best practices for receiving and responding to reports of sexual violence. While my engagement with them is to some extent critical, it is important for readers to know that I routinely and enthusiastically recommend each of these resources to congregations. I have deep appreciation for the work that Fortune, Eugene, Poling, and FaithTrust Institute have done on the intersection of Christian community life and sexual violence. Thus, even as I work to trace the reproduction of the problem of belief in these texts, I maintain strong affirmation for each of them as resources that have the potential to motivate positive, practical change. It is important to me to hold critique and affirmation together because my engagement with this literature is motivated by a desire to think with the wider community of advocates whose work addresses sexual violence in communities of faith about what kinds of resources we might envision for the future. Maintaining respect and support for these resources that have carried us far, I am interested in thinking creatively

and expansively about their limitations so that we as a community of scholars and advocates can together equip ourselves to add new conceptual and practical tools to our catalogue of resources.

In a way, this chapter is the heart of the dissertation. My pursuit of this project is energized to a significant degree by my desire to support survivors' prospects of experiencing solidarity from their communities of faith, and this chapter aims to articulate both continuing obstacles within theological programs of response to sexual violence that render the possibility of solidarity precarious, and opportunities this same literature makes available for the hope of solidarity to be realized. One might think of this chapter as taking the pulse on the problem of belief in the church.[11] It asks what those faced with the task of ministering to Christian communities impacted by sexual violence are likely to find should they seek out theologically informed resources for guidance. To what extent do theologies that give practical counsel reproduce the dualistic approach to belief represented by contemporary believe all women and due process frames? To what extent do approaches to belief available to the church import the terms of the Freudian opposition? And, what can we learn from theologically rooted attempts to address sexual violence in congregational life about what theology as a discipline might have to contribute to wider efforts to construct robust solutions to the problem of belief? In chapter four, I pose these questions to Fortune, Eugene and Poling, and FaithTrust Institute. By reading these resources in connection with the shape of the problem of belief discerned in the first half of the dissertation, I am able to add theological contours to the map of the problem constructed in chapters one through three, and I begin to lay ground for

[11] Though, it does not do so comprehensively. To stick with the metaphor, we might think of the different methods one could use to take a pulse. The most reliable method, I assume, is to have one's pulse measured by professional medical equipment. The next best option may be to set a timer for sixty seconds and count the number of beats that occur within that timeframe oneself. In high school gym class, we were taught to count the number of beats that occurred within ten seconds and then multiply that number by six. This latter method offers a reasonably accurate reading quickly, but in order to be quick it loses some precision. I think about my own method of pulse taking in chapter four as this latter kind. It does not offer precision, and it is not comprehensive. It does, however, give us a reasonably representative, ballpark reading of the church's leading recommendations for addressing sexual violence in U.S. congregational life.

the claim that there is both need and warrant to address the problem of belief by approaching belief as a theological category and practice.

The fifth and last chapter of this dissertation moves from the lived reality of congregational engagements with sexual violence to constructive theologies that aim to speak a healing word into the trauma of sexual violence. Specifically, I focus on Flora Keshgegian's treatment of sexual violence in *Redeeming Memories: A Theology of Healing and Transformation*, and Serene Jones's work on sexual violence in *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World.* Reading these texts in light of the problem of belief as I have tracked it through contemporary western discourse, the Freudian problem, survivor advocacy literature, and practical recommendations for congregational responses to sexual violence, I continue to map the problem of belief as it shows up in Keshgegian and Jones. However, a significant focus of this chapter is to tend just as closely to the resources that Keshgegian and Jones offer for approaching belief outside of the dualistic frame. In other words, while in chapter four I begin to lay the groundwork for proposing that there is something to be gained by thinking about belief theologically with respect to sexual violence trauma, in chapter five this becomes a central task. Neither Keshgegian nor Jones themselves explicitly engage belief as a theological concept or practice, but they do approach the problem of sexual violence using theological resources. Rather than proposing that Keshgegian and Jones offer a ready-made solution to the problem of belief – which, I do not think that they do – what I try to show is that the theological resources they bring to bear on the broader, traumatic crisis of sexual violence create deep enough cracks and fissures in the dualistic framing of belief that efforts to more intentionally pursue belief in theological terms are warranted and wise. Approaching the problem of belief as a theological problem bears promise for constructing responses that better ground the possibility of consistent solidarity with survivors and resistance to sexual violence.

Departures from the Proposal

In the proposal for this dissertation, I envisioned this project as more centrally organized around Freud's approach to sexual violence. The questions that now motivate chapters two and three were the guiding questions of the project. I wanted to gain clarity around what in the theoretical paradigms at play in Freud's theory switch might be continuing to inform dismissive responses to survivors' disclosures of sexual violence today. I intended to articulate an answer and then trace the ways that this problem is either carried through or constructively addressed in trauma theory and in theologies that focus on trauma. My hope was to support theology's prospects for intervening in the problem rather than reproducing it.

At that time, I expected that the categories I would most need to attend would be testimony and witness. Among both trauma theorists and theologians, it is widely argued that the transformation of traumatic fracture into whatever comes next requires testimony on the part of the survivor and witness from a social other. Testimony and witness are also concretely involved in survivors' experiences of dismissal. In the way I was thinking about it, dismissal occurs when survivors give testimony and that testimony is *not* witnessed. I wanted to think about the Freudian problem in terms of the relationship of his theoretical paradigm to testimony and witness, and then I wanted to articulate testimony and witness in theological terms that would resist the patterns of dismissal that are so common in survivors' experiences. I planned to use resources from trauma theory, from constructive theological engagements with trauma, from liturgical theology, and from qualitative research with sexual violence survivors to do that work.

As I proceeded with this project it occurred to me that what I was attempting to track through attention to testimony and witness was, in fact, belief. But reorganizing the project around belief had other implications. Freud was still relevant to the problem but no longer stood alone at its center. I needed to situate the Freudian problem within a frame that recognizes the problem of

belief as pervasive throughout western culture and use Freud to learn about the shape of the broader cultural dilemma. While it still would have been worthwhile to write a chapter on trauma theory, it became more pressing to focus on theological literature that engages sexual violence and the problem of belief directly. While I had hoped to conclude this project with a constructive proposal, the task of mapping the problem of belief proved large enough that I decided the constructive project would need to wait.

This means that certain bodies of literature that I had planned to center are not as present as my proposal suggested they would be. I draw on figures and concepts from trauma theory to help me do the work of this dissertation, but I do not engage trauma theory in a direct or focused way. Since I limit the theological literature upon which I focus to that which engages sexual violence, there are a number of significant theological texts on trauma with which I do not deeply interact. Since I had imagined liturgical theology as primary conversation partner in the constructive portion of this dissertation, it is far less present than I had originally intended. Likewise, the qualitative research portion of the project was meant as a part of its constructive portion, and thus, is not present in the final form of this dissertation that stops short of making a constructive proposal.

Even so, each of these bodies of literature remain important to the dissertation I have written. On one hand, they shape the ways I have approached the questions tended in this project. On the other, throughout the dissertation and especially toward its end, I place and rotate these bodies of literature around the material that is central to my arguments such that we can see in a new way how they might be used as resources for a future constructive project that intervenes in the problem of sexual violence trauma and belief. My hope is that this dissertation works as a foundation upon which I can build that future project.

Naming My Investments

I trust it is clear by now that I do not come to this project as a neutral party. In *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century,* Ada María Isasi-Díaz opens with a section that she calls "Locating the self in mujerista theology."[12] Here, Isasi-Díaz aims to disclose her own subjectivity so that the reader gains a sense for the way her thinking is contextually situated. She sees this kind of foregrounding of one's subjectivity as essential to the theological project because it allows one's theologizing to be understood in relationship to the social parameters that shape it. In other words, because mujerista theology takes lived experience as a primary source for doing theology, Isasi-Díaz finds it essential to say something about her own lived experience in relation to her theologizing in order to make her thought intelligible. For Isasi-Díaz, self-disclosure and contextualization are methods of guarding against the risk of one's thought becoming unreflectively or oppressively universalized. Though I am not a mujerista theologian, I do find Isasi-Díaz's methodological practice of self-disclosure instructive, particularly since my project, too, is one that takes lived experience as a primary source for doing theology. I name lived experience as a primary source in the sense that both my questions and my efforts to address them are grounded in my knowledge of the lived experience of people struggling to survive and be well in the aftermath of sexual violence. To guard against the unreflective or oppressive universalization of my thought, then, I will say a word about who those people are.

The survivor whose experience is most present to my thought is, no doubt, myself. Multiple experiences of sexual violence have contoured my life, including childhood sexual abuse, sexual harassment, verbal, emotional, and sexual abuse in intimate partner relationships, and sexual assault. I am a survivor of sexual violence in myriad forms, and the struggle to continue to survive and be well is one that indelibly marks my existence. The traumatic form of the crisis of belief that I work

[12] Ada María Isazi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996).

to address in this dissertation is a crisis that I live. It has repercussions that ripple across the personal, professional, spiritual, and political dimensions of my life. I am, thus, unavoidably influenced to articulate and address the crisis of belief in this dissertation in a way that bears relation to its manifestation in my own experience.

I am also, however, invested in addressing the problem of belief in ways that validate others who, like me, consider themselves survivors of sexually violent and traumatic assaults, but whose experience may nonetheless be quite unlike mine. I am committed to producing scholarship that makes life more livable for survivors in all of our difference and multiplicity. And yet, it is also true that I am more attuned to certain modes of difference than I am to others. The communities of survivors with whom I most regularly interact are those whose lived experiences are most present to me, and during the development of this dissertation my primary point of contact with survivors of sexual violence is through my role as Director of Theological Integrity for Into Account.

Into Account is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to providing solidarity, advocacy, and strategic support to survivors of sexual violence in Christian contexts. We also consult with leaders in Christian settings who want to make their administrative policies, theological vision, language, worship, and religious practices more trauma-informed, mindful of sexual violence survivors who are members of the community, and wise with respect to members who are perpetrators. The majority of our clients, however, are survivors. They are survivors whose efforts to protect themselves, protect others, or hold those who perpetrated or enabled harm accountable have been met with resistance from Christian institutions – congregations, regional ecclesial bodies, denominations, Christian social service agencies, Christian secondary schools, Christian colleges, and seminaries. Our clients are survivors of campus rape, stalking, harassment, grooming, childhood sexual abuse, ministerial sexual misconduct, sexual assault, forced (i.e. drugged) incapacitation, and multiple forms of abuse (sexual, racial, gendered, emotional, spiritual, physical, financial, etc.). They

are students, college athletes, members of congregations, ministers of congregations, clients of Christian therapists, therapists, employees of Christian mission agencies, and members of populations (abusively) served by Christian mission agencies. They are Evangelicals and ex-Evangelicals, members of and defectors from mainline Protestant denominations, people who bear connection to Amish and Mennonite communities, and more. Disproportionately, they are survivors with a connection to the denomination Mennonite Church USA, because this is the ecclesial community in connection with which Into Account originally developed. Into Account's clients include survivors of color, but the majority of our clients to date are white. Our clients include men and nonbinary persons, but the majority have been cis women. A significant percentage the survivors with whom we work are LGBTQIA. We have clients who are parents and caregivers of survivors who are currently children, and we have adult clients who experienced sexual violence as children, but we have not had clients who are, themselves, children.

As Director of Theological Integrity for Into Account, I am a professional advocate for the survivors who are our clients. At Into Account, to be a professional advocate means to offer strategic support through any phase of a client's struggle for survival, justice, and wellbeing in which support is requested, whether that is two weeks or twenty years after the event(s) of violence took place. In practice, this advocacy work takes on diverse forms. For example, depending on the case, it may mean that we locate, read, interpret, and walk clients through their university's Title IX policies or their congregation's procedures for reporting ministerial misconduct. It may mean that we research and think creatively about a survivor's outside-the-box options for addressing the harm they experienced, and then help that survivor consider each option's risks and benefits. Sometimes, it means providing a platform for survivors to tell their stories publicly. Sometimes, it means working with them to create rituals of empowerment. Very often, it means that we communicate and negotiate with religious leaders and institutional administrators on our clients' behalf when they

are feeling intimidated or overly burdened by processes of reporting and institutional accountability after an instance of harm. Our advocacy work requires that we interface with legal teams, police detectives, therapists and crisis networks, pastoral teams, sexual violence policy centers, HR departments, university deans and presidents, and authorities in ecclesial administrative structures. Our goal as advocates is to do what we can to give our clients the experience of solidarity and to creatively construct at least a little bit of justice for survivors in otherwise devastating circumstances.

As Director of Theological Integrity there is another layer to my work as an advocate. In this role, I listen to survivors and pay special attention to the explicit and implicit theological dimensions of investigatory procedures, community practices, social patterns, modes of communication, worship, and rituals in survivors' stories so that the religious dimensions of survivors' experiences of violence and survival can be named, validated, and – when need be – addressed in the communities that produced them. For survivors whose experiences of sexual violence are in some way connected to the Church, attending to the theological and spiritual dimensions of their experiences is often important to survivors' processes of working toward survival, justice, empowerment, and wellbeing. In a very real way, then, my role as Into Account advocate and Director of Theological Integrity puts me in a position in which I cannot accept an easy bifurcation between Christian communities' administrative and investigatory procedures of response to survivors' reports of sexual violence, and more pastoral responsive practices that take place through relational and ritual mediums. For survivors of campus rape at a Christian university, the Title IX office's interpretation of a complainant's right to confidentiality is fundamental to whether or not a survivor experiences spiritual betrayal in the aftermath of her assault. When, at a defense attorney's request, the pastors of a congregation attempt to remain neutral with respect to a legal case unfolding against a member of the church for child sexual assault, the pastors' decision has theological ramifications that threaten to reanimate the traumas of other sexual violence survivors who call that congregation home. Whether

a church's own investigatory procedures for following up on a survivor's report of ministerial sexual misconduct are guided by a theology of liberation or something else entirely will have a direct impact on that church's prospects for maintaining solidarity with survivors and practicing resistance to sexual violence. Thus, I regard Christian institutions' engagements with legal, educational, and other administrative procedures of response to survivors' reports of sexual violence as theologically laden and in need of theological reflection. While theology cannot and should not replace law, Title IX, human resource procedures, and the like, communities of faith do need to be able to think theologically about them. My advocacy work with survivors through Into Account influences me to resist a full and complete distinction between theological responses to survivors' testimonies and investigatory modes of response, even as I affirm that these also cannot be fully collapsed. The influence of this commitment is present throughout the dissertation, but it is, perhaps, most apparent in chapter four where I directly apply a theological reading to investigatory procedures designed for use in congregations.

I expect that the work of this dissertation is most relevant to survivors of sexual violence who share the kinds of life experiences and traumatic experiences that are common for the survivors I work with at Into Account. Insofar as this dissertation is relevant and helpful to them, it also makes a claim on the communities to which they belong, religious and otherwise. Though I take the scope of this dissertation's relevance to be, thus, quite significant, I do not propose that what I offer here represents all survivors' interests or speaks to all survivors' experiences. Though I hope to add clarity to our collective map of the problem of belief, mine is one contribution of many that are needed in order for our map to be complete.

Chapter 1: Belief and its Contestation in Contemporary U.S. Discourse on Sexual Violence

When a person comes forward to disclose that they were sexually abused or assaulted, on what grounds ought those to whom that testimony is given believe that the sexually violent event disclosed is an event that happened? Is belief warranted on the basis of a survivor's testimony alone? Or, ought it follow from, say, forensic evidence? Whose account is authoritative for determining what, historically speaking, did or did not occur? The one who remembers the violence done to their own body? The accused who insists that no such thing ever happened? A medical doctor who interprets a rape kit? The psychologist who treats the survivor in the alleged aftermath of the violence? If there is agreement that a sexual encounter did, in fact, happen, who has the authority to say whether what one experienced in that encounter does or does not *count* as sexual assault? The survivor? The accused? A pastor or priest? Law enforcement? A jury? An administrator interpreting a company's relevant HR policies? The general public? How we answer these questions makes a material difference to whether those who have experienced sexual violence are able to keep their jobs, pay rent, finish their degrees, secure protection from future violence, and find support in their families and communities. If survivors' memories and interpretations of their experiences are considered authoritative, survivors are more likely to be believed, and being believed is crucial to every step a survivor must take in pursuit of safety, justice, and recovery.

It is impossible for survivors to tell of what they have lived without making themselves vulnerable to the emotional, spiritual, psychological, and material consequences of today's debate over whether and under what circumstances survivors' testimonies of sexual violence ought to be believed. In today's landscape, the shape of that debate is characterized in large part by a gridlock between two fundamentally opposed positions. One side, grounded in what I call *due process culture*, contests the appropriateness of extending belief to survivors' testimonies. Its argument is that we should not believe a survivor's testimony of abuse if we do not have corroborating evidence that

would be admissible in a court of law. This lens says that to believe a survivor's allegation of sexual violence without legally persuasive evidence is unethical even outside of court, because doing so amounts to socially convicting the accused without affording them a fair trial. The second side of the dualism, characterized by what I call the *believe all women* position, takes form in reaction to due process culture. This approach treats the automatic and immediate extension of belief as ethically necessary in response to every allegation of sexual violence because testimonies of sexual violence are, as a rule, credible. It argues that since false allegations are rare and since withholding belief from survivors' testimonies causes those who have been sexually victimized greater harm, people who disclose experiences of sexual violence should be believed right away and without precondition. Both due process culture and believe all women culture treat belief as a kind of response that is appropriate when there is a high degree of correspondence between a survivor's narrative and the history to which it attests. Thus, whereas due process culture is skeptical that survivors' testimonies are historically correspondent, the believe all women position's confidence in correspondence is high.

While I will argue in this chapter that neither the believe all women position nor that of due process culture provide a framework for belief that grounds the possibility of robust solidarity with survivors, I do not consider these positions ethically equal. Due process culture actively undermines the believability of survivors' testimonies and is constructed through forms of denial that contribute to the perpetuation of sexual violence both in the lives of individual survivors and at a systemic level. The believe all women lens, on the other hand, attempts to support survivors' interests and does so with some success. Thus, I consider the believe all women position unquestionably preferable to that of due process culture, even as I argue that it does not get us as far as it intends (or as far as we need) toward supporting survivors and resisting sexual violence.

My goal in this chapter is to gain clarity around the nature and limitations of both due process and believe all women approaches to believing survivor testimony in contemporary, popular discourse on sexual violence in the United States. I do this by tracing the shape of each approach to belief through two recent historical moments in which the topic of sexual violence caught and held public attention: The ongoing #MeToo movement and the False Memory Syndrome Movement of the 1990s. I sustain attention on how, in each historical moment, due process and believe all women approaches to believing survivor testimony operate, the kinds of arguments that they make, what belief becomes through each frame, and ultimately, how survivors fare as a result. I argue that due process and believe all women approaches to believing survivor testimony tend to stand in dualistic opposition, creating a gridlock around the concept and practice of belief that threatens to close discourse off to more expansive notions of belief that have greater potential to fund practices of resistance to sexual violence and support for survivors. In other words, I propose that while the believe all women approach is preferable to that of due process culture, neither enables the kind of solidarity with sexual violence survivors necessary for making cultural strides toward effective resistance to the harms of abuse.

Throughout, I will also be tracing the religious undertones of due process and believe all women approaches to belief. I maintain in this dissertation that belief is, inextricably, a religious category in addition to a legal and political one. In the western context, what it means to believe in one thing or another is shaped by modernity's negotiations of what does and does not warrant belief in God in the face of scientific uncertainty. I contend that there is, as a result, a latent theo-logical dimension to the broader cultural politics of extending or withholding belief from survivor testimonies of sexual violence, and that identifying the work that theological reasoning is doing for due process and believe all women arguments will be important to conceiving of how theology

might constructively intervene in the problem represented by the opposition of these two frames. I begin this chapter, then, by considering the case against belief.

Against Belief: Sexual Violence and the Culture of Due Process

#MeToo

The beginnings of #MeToo caught the world by storm in the fall of 2017. Accounts of sexualized forms of harm normally not spoken aloud all of a sudden flooded social media at such a roar that they caught and held the attention of mainstream media for at least a full four months. In that time, scores came forward to report harassment, assault, and cover-up by big names across a spectrum of industries. As a result, entertainers, politicians, and other high profile public figures who formerly enjoyed apparent immunity from consequence for their sexually coercive actions were fired or resigned. A bill was passed that reforms procedures for preventing sexual harassment and responding to reports within the U.S. Congress.[1] Hollywood celebrities initiated a "Time's Up" campaign to advocate for anti-harassment legislation and gender parity in the entertainment industry. Since its January 2018 inception, "Time's Up" has raised tens of millions for a legal defense fund to support lower income women seeking to hold employers accountable for sexual harassment in the workplace.[2] Even so, the #MeToo moment did not prove particularly powerful for initiating shifts in law or policy. It has, arguably, had relatively little impact at the structural level. The headway made by #MeToo had largely to do with raising collective consciousness of the ubiquity of sexualized forms of harm and the mechanisms regularly used to protect perpetrators and silence victims. The power of #MeToo was its empowerment of routinely silenced masses to come forward, speak, and be heard.

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[1] Li Zhou, "Congress's Recently Passed Sexual Harassment Bill, Explained," *Vox*, December 20, 2018, https://www.vox.com/2018/12/20/18138377/congress-sexual-harassment-bill.
[2] National Women's Law Center, "Time's Up Legal Defense Fund," Accessed April 2, 2019, https://nwlc.org/times-up-legal-defense-fund/.

If one took care to look for them, criticisms of #MeToo could be found as soon as the hashtag went viral. But for #MeToo's first three months, the dominant public attitude toward those using the hashtag to tell their experiences of harm was overwhelmingly positive. For many survivors of sexual violence used to almost immediate criticism and dismissal, the autumn days of 2017 had an eerie quality to them. Elated that survivors' voices were all of a sudden being met with affirmation and respect, those with the most at stake in the conversation simultaneously braced for blowback. Shifts in social consciousness as drastic as would be needed to sustain fall 2017 levels of affirmation for sexual violence survivors do not happen as quickly as the initial popularity of #MeToo promised. And, sure enough, an abrupt change in public attitude happened at the turn of the year. Critics of #MeToo gathered momentum and took the mainstream media spotlight following at least three nearly simultaneous events: the public revelation that some women in the media industry kept a shared list of "Shitty Media Men" in order to warn each other about potential sexualized risks in their workplaces, an article published in *Le Monde* by more than one hundred prominent Frenchwomen criticizing American #MeToo and its French counterpart, and a heated controversy over one woman's accusation of sexual assault against world-renowned comedian Aziz Ansari.[3]

In mid-January of 2018 the media outlet *Babe* published an article in which a woman using the pseudonym Grace is interviewed about an encounter she had with Ansari.[4] Grace says she met Ansari at an awards show after-party and was excited when he asked her out on a date. *Babe* reports that at the end of the date, however, Ansari began to make sexual advances that made Grace uncomfortable. Grace reports that he kissed her, quickly moved his hands to her breasts and

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[3] Moria Donegan, "I Started the Media Men List My Name is Moria Donegan," *The Cut*, January 10, 2018, https://www.thecut.com/2018/01/moira-donegan-i-started-the-media-men-list.html; (Collective authorship), "Nous Défendons une Liberté d'Importuner, Indispensable à la Liberté Sexuelle," *Le Monde*, January 13, 2018, http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2018/01/09/nous-defendons-une-liberte-dimportuner-indispensable-a-la-liberte-sexuelle_5239134_3232.html#meter_toaster; The controversy over the accusation of sexual assault made against Aziz Ansari is referenced in the paragraphs that follow.

[4] Katie Way, "I Went on a Date with Aziz Ansari. It Turned into the Worst Night of My Life," *Babe*, January 13, https://babe.net/2018/01/13/aziz-ansari-283552018.

undressed both himself and her. When Ansari suggested getting a condom Grace remembers voicing her discomfort, saying, "Whoa, let's relax for a sec, let's chill." In response, she says Ansari resumed kissing her, performed oral sex on her, and asked her to perform oral sex on him, which, though uncomfortable, she briefly did. She says she kept getting up to move away from him and that he kept following her, putting his fingers down her throat and reaching with his other hand to finger her genitally. She says he repeatedly pulled her hands to his penis after she repeatedly moved her hands away and that she gave a variety of verbal and nonverbal cues to express her discomfort. After taking time to collect herself in Ansari's bathroom, she reports coming out and saying to him, "I don't want to feel forced because then I'll hate you, and I'd rather not hate you." Seeming initially to understand and respect the boundary she was setting, she describes Ansari saying, "Oh, of course, it's only fun if we're both having fun," and, "Let's just chill over here on the couch."

Once on the couch, however, Grace felt shocked when Ansari motioned for her to again give him oral sex. Feeling disoriented and pressured, she did. Implicitly identifying this act as one that crossed the boundary Grace had set when she came out of the bathroom, she remembers Ansari saying afterward, "Doesn't look like you hate me." Grace says Ansari then led her to another room, thrusted himself against her and again proposed intercourse. At this point, Grace reports telling him, "…no, I don't think I'm ready to do this, I really don't think I'm going to do this." By Grace's account Ansari again seemed to accept the boundary, suggesting that they put their clothes on and chill. But after turning on an episode of Seinfeld, Grace says Ansari again started kissing her, put his fingers down her throat, and tried to undo her pants. She resisted, expressed her anger verbally, and his immediate response was, in her description, to kiss her forcefully. At this point, Grace leaves, and it is after she leaves that the gravity of what has happened sets in. By the time Grace was interviewed by *Babe*, she described her encounter with Ansari as one in which he repeatedly pressured her for sex and ignored her attempts to communicate nonconsent. She names

Ansari's actions as assault tentatively but clearly. In her words, "It took a really long time for me to validate this as sexual assault," and "I believe that I was taken advantage of by Aziz. I was not listened to and ignored."

Given its timing, the article positioned itself as a contribution to the quickly growing number of #MeToo stories that call out harassing, abusive, and assaultive behavior in powerful men. The article did not interrogate whether Grace was right or wrong to name her experience assault. Rhetorically and performatively, the absence of this kind of interrogation signaled that Grace's interpretation of her experience—not *Babe*'s, not Ansari's, not a jury's—was the interpretation that carried the strongest weight. Because *Babe* published Grace's story without further comment or contextualization, it affirmed Grace as a privileged authority to interpret the events she experienced in Ansari's apartment, intrinsically suggesting that she ought to be believed. The article expressed journalistic belief that the events Grace says she experienced *happened* and that the kind of encounter Grace describes having with Ansari ought to be included in that against which the #MeToo movement is aimed. The article, thus, took what was perceived by many as a position of solidarity with survivors, and this was not lost on its readers. It found strong resonance with countless survivors of the kind of sexual assault Grace describes. Millennial and generation z women who identified with Grace felt empowered by *Babe's* coverage of Grace's story to insist that they too ought to be heard and believed—that their voices, like Grace's, were authoritative.

Babe published Grace's account on January 13, 2018. The very next day, January 14, Caitlin Flanagan, a contributing editor at *The Atlantic*, published a scathing rebuke that would open space in mainstream public discourse for a firestorm of resistance to Grace's brand of #MeToo and the countless survivors of sexual harm like Grace whose voices the hashtag raised.[5] Flanagan, identifying herself as a feminist, paints a questionable portrait of history in which while girls and women of her

[5] Caitlin Flanagan, "The Humiliation of Aziz Ansari," *The Atlantic*, January 14, 2018, https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2018/01/the-humiliation-of-aziz-ansari/550541/.

day may have been ill-prepared to pursue the corner office they were perfectly capable of avoiding unwanted sexual advances. Irritated that Grace did not simply leave Ansari's apartment the moment she felt uncomfortable, Flanagan accuses women of Grace's generation of being "weak" when it comes to resisting men who pressure them for sex, quipping, "Apparently there is a whole country full of young women who don't know how to call a cab."

Flanagan's disgust with Grace and her ilk is palpable. She calls the language Grace uses to speak about her assault "revenge porn," insisting that, "The clinical detail in which the story is told is intended not to validate [Grace's] account as much as it is to hurt and humiliate Ansari." Asserting that Grace had no justifiable reason not to leave Ansari's apartment as soon as she sensed his intentions, Flanagan suggests that Grace shares significant responsibility for what she suffered and therefore has no business accusing Ansari of assault. Flanagan is outraged that Grace has had the audacity to do so anyway. The result, in Flanagan's view, is that Ansari — who, Flanagan emphasizes, is rightly beloved for raising consciousness around issues of gender and race in his popular TV series *Master of None* — has been, " — in a professional sense —assassinated, on the basis of one woman's anonymous account." But Flanagan is outraged not only because she believes Grace and *Babe* have wrongly destroyed a good man's career, but also because she thinks that calling the kind of behavior the article attributes to Ansari *sexual assault* is wrong and destroys the potential #MeToo could have had to root out the real "monsters" who perpetrate the kind of assault she sees as worthy of being called as such. Describing #MeToo as having become, instead, a project primarily serving college-educated white women who are angry and dangerous, she continues,

> I thought it would take a little longer for the hit squad of privileged young white women to open fire on brown-skinned men. I had assumed that on the basis of intersectionality and all that, they'd stay laser focused on college-educated white men for another few months. But we're at warp speed now, and the revolution—in many ways so good and so important—is starting to sweep up all sorts of people into its conflagration: the monstrous, the cruel, and the simply unlucky." [6]

[6] Caitlin Flanagan, "The Humiliation of Aziz Ansari."

Ansari, in her view, is the simply unlucky. He is the victim. Grace is the one who crossed a line.

Flanagan's interpretation of the racial dynamics at play is revealing in light of the observations that Grace's racial identity is not disclosed in the *Babe* article or anywhere else, and the journalist, Katie Way, who wrote it is biracial. As Nadya Agrawal quickly observed following the publication of Flanagan's criticism, Flanagan's unfounded confidence that Grace and Way are white reflects a presumption long made by White Culture — that white women are at least the quintessential victims of sexual violence, if not the only possible victims.[7] In agreement, Rae Gray argued that, far from offering a reading of race that challenges the presumptions of White Culture, Flanagan operationalized Ansari's race and used it as a tool to steer the #MeToo movement toward White Feminist goals.[8] In Flanagan's rebuke of Grace for calling her experience with Ansari assault, Flanagan's White Feminism aims to define sexual assault narrowly enough that mounting a full resistance need only evict a few "monsters" from otherwise acceptable systems of American labor, law, and politics. The goal White Feminism of this kind holds for #MeToo is that the movement address sexual violence in a manner that increases the degree to which women are able to benefit from the social structures that undergird White America. A definition of sexual assault that could include Ansari's actions — and therefore the actions of countless men who do not fit the "monster" category and who are indispensible, as a collective, to the preservation of the 'American Way' — is a threat to that goal.

Flanagan's criticism of Grace and *Babe,* together with her framing of that criticism as a rooted in *feminist* concern*,* became representative of a wider strategy that was developing for opening space within public discourse for the legitimacy of #MeToo accounts of sexual harassment and assault to be widely and hotly contested. Flanagan followed her initial January 14 article with two

[7] Nadya Agrawal, "It's Time to Talk about Race and the Aziz Story," *Huffpost*, January 15, 2018, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/opinion-agrawal-aziz-race_us_5a65f7c0e4b0e5630071b7aa.
[8] Rae Gray, "No Invisibility Cloak: White Feminism Won't Save Aziz Ansari from Himself," *bitchmedia*, January 23, 2018, https://www.bitchmedia.org/article/aziz-ansari-white-feminism-south-asian-women.

more before the end of the month, each accusing *Babe* of turning the formerly promising #MeToo movement "into a racket" by granting interpretive authority to alleged survivors before systems of due process had taken their course.[9] Far from being dismissed as a disrespectful detractor from the #MeToo moment, Flanagan's position was taken seriously by the American news media. NPR's *All Things Considered* featured her as an authoritative voice on the matter two days after her initial criticism of Grace's account was released.[10] Articles with titles like "Aziz Ansari Is Guilty. Of Not Being a Mind Reader," and "It's Time to Resist the Excesses of #MeToo" ran across the gamut of mainstream media platforms, each one mounting a sharp challenge to #MeToo suggestions that survivors who come forward ought to be believed prior to formal investigation. Such articles advanced an image of *Babe*'s version of #MeToo as bad not only for America, but for women.[11] The letter prominent Frenchwomen published in *Le Monde* denouncing the #MeToo movement carried strong resonances, accusing the movement of having stepped outside the bounds of reason by conflating awkward sex with assault and encouraging puritanical moral rigidity that falsely accuses innocent men of wrongdoing and undoes women's liberation by supposing that women do not have the ability or responsibility to simply decline sexual advances they do not want.[12]

Flanagan's fundamental charge against Grace is that Grace's interpretation of her experience *as sexual assault* is wrong. And Flanagan's frustration with *Babe* is precisely that the outlet treated Grace's interpretation of her experience *as authoritative* for believing Grace's claims. This, Flanagan

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[9] Caitlin Flanagan, "*Babe* Turns a Movement into a Racket," *The Atlantic,* January 19, 2019, https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2018/01/how-a-movement-becomes-a-racket/551036/; Caitlin Flanagan, "The Conversation #MeToo Needs to Have," *The Atlantic*, January 29, 2018, https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/01/the-right-conversation-for-metoo/551732/.

[10] "The Fine Line Between A Bad Date And Sexual Assault: Two Views On Aziz Ansari," hosted by Ari Shapiro and Kelly McEvers, All Things Considered, *National Public Radio*, January 16, 2018, https://www.npr.org/2018/01/16/578422491/the-fine-line-between-a-bad-date-and-sexual-assault-two-views-on-aziz-ansari.

[11] Bari Weiss, "Aziz Ansari Is Guilty. Of Not Being a Mind Reader," *The New York Times,* January 15, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/15/opinion/aziz-ansari-babe-sexual-harassment.html; Andrew Sullivan, "It's Time to Resist the Excesses of #MeToo," *New York Magazine*, January 12, 2018, http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2018/01/andrew-sullivan-time-to-resist-excesses-of-metoo.html.

[12] "Nous Défendons une Liberté d'Importuner, Indispensable à la Liberté Sexuelle," *Le Monde*, January 13, 2018, http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2018/01/09/nous-defendons-une-liberte-d-importuner-indispensable-a-la-liberte-sexuelle_5239134_3232.html#meter_toaster.

argues, was a costly mistake that threatens the role of due process in adjudicating cases of sexual assault. For Flanagan, the privileged authority to interpret when sexual assault has or has not occurred ought to be granted not to survivors, but to legal and journalistic processes of investigation.

While this wave of criticism did not shut down the #MeToo conversation, it did slow #MeToo's momentum and shift its focus. The early 2018 onslaught of resistance to #MeToo effectively moved back into silence the stories like Grace's that the 2017 days of #MeToo had brought to voice – stories in which the term *sexual assault* was applied to all manner of sex without consent and not limited to those acts that Flanagan is willing to call monstrous. No account of the kind of assault Grace described – the kind perpetrated through mundane and ubiquitous gendered power relations – has gained public attention since, and the pace of all other kinds of #MeToo disclosures – those Flanagan does recognize as assault – has steadily slowed.[13]

Flanagan and her fellow critics accomplished this shift using, not new ideas, but old ones. Though packaged in contextually relevant details, their basic argument was that belief is not an appropriate response to reports of sexual assault and harassment because it subverts journalistic, scientific, and legal modes of due process.

To make the argument persuasive, critics first insisted that #Metoo had no clear concept of what sexual violence even *is*. They insisted that its proponents conflated harassment with assault and punished both with equal severity in the court of public opinion. Daphne Merkin's Op-ed in *The New York Times*, represents this charge well. She suggests that while good, feminist women support #MeToo in public to meet social expectations, in the safety of privacy they express serious reservations about the range of sexualized behavior the movement condemns. On board with

[13] It is true to my knowledge that no disclosure of the kind of sexual assault that Grace described has gained mass public attention in the United States since the *Babe* article. However, so as not to inadvertently contribute to silencing such accounts if they do exist, I hold open the possibility that I am mistaken.

#MeToo's repercussions for "heinous sorts," a category she reserves for Kevin Spacey and Matt Lauer, Merkin thinks #MeToo's repercussions for others, such as Garrison Keilor, Jonathan Schwartz, Ryan Lizza, and Al Franken, have been overblown. With this latter group in mind, she remarks,

> And what exactly are men being accused of? What is the difference between harassment and assault and "inappropriate conduct"? There is a disturbing lack of clarity about the terms being thrown around and a lack of distinction regarding what the spectrum of objectionable behavior really is. Shouldn't sexual harassment, for instance, imply a degree of hostility? Is kissing someone in affection, however inappropriately, or showing someone a photo of a nude male torso necessarily predatory behavior?[14]

Like Flanagan and the Frenchwomen who published the *Le Monde* letter, Merkin's definition of sexual violence is that an act counts as such only if it is done with explicit hostility and intention to harm. The difference, for Merkin, between those who have behaved heinously and those who have not comes down to hostility, or an understanding of violent acts as those that are maximally and intentionally coercive. For her, the only kind of sexual violence that warrants recognition and censure is predatory sexual violence, or in Flanagan's terms that committed by monsters.

#MeToo's identification of acts that do not fit this definition as acts, nonetheless, of sexual violence causes Merkin to believe that #MeToo is thoughtlessly casting its nets too widely. This is similar to Flanagan's charge that #MeToo is sweeping up together the monstrous, the cruel, and the simply unlucky. The message is that it was not wrong for Franken, Ansari, Keilor, etc. to treat women the way they did. Rather, it was wrong for women to experience the acts of these men as harmful. Critics of #MeToo portray those who are out of step with their preferred definition of sexual violence as unreflective, confused, chaotic, and dangerous – as Eve who causes Adam's destruction.

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[14] Daphne Merkin, "Publicly, We Say #MeToo. Privately, We Have Misgivings," *The New York Times*, January 5, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/05/opinion/golden-globes-metoo.html.

Next, critics argued that #Metoo is doing away with due process and suppressing free speech by making the social consequences of voicing a dissenting opinion too harsh. They liken #MeToo to a contemporary revival of McCarthyism and charge those claiming to be survivors as a threat to American law, equality, and democracy. As already noted with Merkin, they describe the climate around #MeToo as one that requires affirmation of survivors' testimonies of harm and tolerates nothing but swift condemnation of those accused. Because dissent is not tolerated, they say, in the world of #MeToo "to be accused is to be convicted."[15] Merkin cautions her readers that, "due process is nowhere to be found."[16] Flanagan argues that due process is denied the accused when reports that have not been professionally verified are shared publicly, especially when the names of those making the report are kept out of the news. In his article for *New York Magazine*, "It's Time to Resist the Excesses of #MeToo," Andrew Sullivan proposed that this climate, together with #Metoo's practice of "anonymously disseminating serious allegations about people's sex lives," marks the movement as no less than a contemporary version of McCarthyism.[17] Sulivan's comments were made in response to another January 2018 #MeToo controversy that paralleled *Babe*'s publication of Grace's account both in its timing and in the heated response it received — the public revelation of the list of "Shitty Media Men" kept by women in the industry for their protection.[18] Careful to point out that "monsters" must be toppled, abuses of power must be stopped, and that

[15] Daphne Merkin, "Publicly, We Say #MeToo. Privately, We Have Misgivings."
[16] Daphne Merkin, "Publicly, We Say #MeToo. Privately, We Have Misgivings."
[17] Andrew Sullivan, "It's Time to Resist the Excesses of #MeToo."
[18] Originally, BuzzFeed broke the story: Doree Shafrir, "What To Do With 'Shitty Media Men'?" *BuzzFeed News*, October 12, 2017, https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/doree/what-to-do-with-shitty-media-men#.slDOWbPM5D. It gained growing attention as rumors spread that the creator of the list would be outed (Jaclyn Peiser, "'Media Men' List Creator Outs Herself, Fearing She Would Be Named," *The New York Times,* January 10, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/10/business/media/a-feminist-twitter-campaign-targets-harpers-magazine-and-katie-roiphe.html?_r=0), as the creator of the list identified herself (Moria Donegan, "I Started the Media Men List My Name is Moria Donegan"), and as one of the men named on the list sued its creator for $1.5 million (Debra Cassens Weiss, "Lawyers On Opposite Sides of #MeToo Litigation Face Off In Suit Over Crowdsourced Accusation List," *American Bar Association Journal*, October 17, 2018, http://www.abajournal.com/news/article/lawyers_on_opposite_ sides_of_ metoo_litigation_face_off_in_suit_over_crowdso).

he himself "routinely believe(s) women in specific cases," his comparison of the #MeToo climate with McCarthyism is worth quoting at length.

> Sure, [the people who created the list] believed they were doing good — but the McCarthyites, in a similar panic about communism, did as well. They believe they are fighting an insidious, ubiquitous evil — the patriarchy — just as the extreme anti-Communists in the 1950s believed that commies were everywhere and so foul they didn't deserve a presumption of innocence, or simple human decency. They demand public confessions of the guilty and public support for their cause … or they will cast suspicion on you as well…And just as McCarthyites believed they had no other option, given the complicity of the entire federal government with communism, so today's McCarthyites claim that appeals to the police, or the HR department, or to the usual channels, are "fruitless" — because they're part of the patriarchal system too! These mechanisms, Donegan writes, have "an obligation to presume innocence," and we can't have that, can we?[19]

Survivors who tell their stories anonymously, who attempt to warn others about the behavior of those who have harmed them, or who expect to be believed when they tell others about what happened to them are cast as fanatics who ought to be resisted in the way McCarthy ought to have been resisted from day one. Sexual violence survivors are seen here as a threat to due process, to democracy, and to the American vision of all persons being equal. Publicly made testimonies of sexual violence are brought within proximity to treason.

While making a personal attack on the character of a sexual violence survivor was a move that the early #MeToo climate did not allow, casting sexual violence survivors as a threat to America paved the way for #MeToo critics to engage in character criticism of sexual violence survivors successfully. For example, Flanagan was not alone in accusing assault survivors of giving testimonies through pornographic manners of speech. The suggestion made by those who read sexual violence testimony as pornography is that freely describing the acts involved in an event of assault lacks modesty and renders the one giving testimony morally and sexually suspect. Repeatedly, critics suppose that the kind of suspect woman who would speak plainly or in genital detail about her

[19] Andrew Sullivan, "It's Time to Resist the Excesses of #MeToo."

assault is using #MeToo as a platform for self-promotion. She is something other than a true victim. Women like her are presented as imposter survivors hurting the cause that real survivors of modesty, integrity, and sound mind have worked hard to bring into public awareness. Through this kind of argument #MeToo critics transform themselves into protectors of the cause, and a certain class of alleged survivor is made the villain.

Wrapped up in this argument is an idea we already saw Flanagan espouse – that the definition of assault is dangerously waffling under pressure to suit the illegitimate needs of younger generations of women who are not willing to take responsibility for protecting the boundaries of their own bodies and are too weak-minded to know how to take reasonable measures to resist unwanted sexual attention. Here, #MeToo is accused of infantilizing women by denying both women's agency and responsibility in sexual encounters. It is supposed that #Metoo promotes a Victorian or victimology paradigm that encourages women to see themselves as victims to such a degree that they will falsely accuse men of assaulting them simply to keep up their victim identities. In order to interpret themselves as victims these women are portrayed as having a warped, unrealistic, or delusional worldview. In other words, they are portrayed as out of touch with reality. The realities in which they live are denied as legitimate.

The problem with the widespread public support enjoyed by #MeToo, critics argued, is not that legitimate claims of sexual harassment and assault should go unsupported, but that we as a society are believing those who claim to have had that kind of experience too quickly. Claims of sexual violence, critics say, need to be corroborated by evidence external to the alleged survivor's testimony before it is ethically permissible to believe what an alleged survivor says is true. That people who speak up through #Metoo think they ought not be expected to produce material proof of the claims they are making against others before being believed is evidence that they have an entitlement issue. Thus, so the argument goes, #Metoo has taken on the character of irrational,

emotionally-driven religious fanaticism. It has become more about women expressing indiscriminate rage without care for the consequences than about making lasting change. Women's rage, evidenced by how quickly it can destroy the lives of good men, is portrayed as dangerous and in need of containment.

False Memory Syndrome Movement

The general shape of the argument made by #MeToo critics rang in public discourse at an even louder volume in the early 1990s. Just as 2018 criticism of #MeToo was a reaction to a sudden break in silence around sexual harassment and assault, the 90s version of this criticism was given in response to another flood of survivor voices into popular discourse. This time, those coming forward were largely adults who had experienced sexual abuse as children, repressed the experience, and recovered memory of it in adulthood. Those cautioning society against believing what those identifying themselves as survivors of abuse had to say were led by PhD clinical researchers studying memory and by family members of the accused.

Elizabeth Loftus is a cognitive psychologist, trained in mathematical psychology, who studies memory. Currently, she holds the titles Distinguished Professor of Social Ecology and Professor of Law, and Cognitive Science at University of California, Irvine. Loftus describes her life's work as helping people to understand that memory does not represent truth in a historically correspondent sense. She believes that the common view of memory in contemporary America is that memory works like a video recorder, taking in and preserving the input of experience in forensic, unchanging detail, then recalling this detail in its historical actuality upon demand. Along with the majority of memory researchers in both the humanities and the sciences, Loftus takes this view of memory to be incorrect. In its place, she proposes a reconstructionist model in which memories are understood as

"creative blending of fact and fiction."[20] For her, that which is fiction ought to be exposed as such. That which is fact must be discerned by external, forensic corroboration.

Loftus's work focuses on the ways that memory is malleable and vulnerable to distortion. She interprets the results of her lab research to indicate that even those memories in which we have the strongest confidence may be revealed as partial or complete fabrications if external evidence to determine the memory's relationship to history is available. For example, she designed a study of the influence of leading questions on reported memory. In this study subjects were shown a video of a car crash. Those asked how fast the cars had been going when they "smashed" into each other reported higher speeds than those who were asked how fast the cars had been going when they "bumped" into each other. The test subjects who had been asked the question that included "smashed" verbiage reported seeing broken glass in the video at higher rates than those whose interviewer had used the word "bumped" instead of "smashed."[21] Another of Loftus's lab studies demonstrated that suggestion could result in some test subjects reporting to remember seeing a barn in a video scene that did not, in fact, include a barn. Thirteen of the seventy-five subjects to whom a barn was suggested said that they remembered seeing one. In the control group of seventy-five test subjects to whom a barn was not suggested, two, when asked, said they remembered seeing a barn.[22] When Loftus tested for the influence of stress on the accuracy of recall, she found increased stress correlated with decreased accuracy.[23] Loftus's studies, whose test subjects were usually volunteer college students, seem to show that memory can be altered and made less historically reliable through particular uses of language, suggestion, and as a result of stress. Loftus infers from the

[20] Elizabeth Loftus and Katherine Ketcham, *The Myth of Repressed Memory: False Memories and Allegations of Sexual Abuse* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 5.
[21] Elizabeth Loftus and John Palmer, "Reconstruction of Automobile Destruction: An Example of the Interaction Between Language and Memory," *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior* 13, no. 5 (1974): 586.
[22] Elizabeth Loftus, "Creating False Memories," *Scientific American* 277, no. 3 (September 1997): 70-75.
[23] Elizabeth Loftus, *The Myth of Repressed Memory*.

results of her lab studies that eyewitness testimony of alleged criminal activity is far too unreliable to serve as deciding evidence in a courtroom.

Notably, other studies have contradicted Loftus's findings. For example, when Cutshall and Yuille interviewed witnesses of a shooting four to five months after the event, they found high levels of accuracy in witnesses' recall, and greater accuracy was correlated with higher levels of stress during the shooting. Interviewing the witnesses with suggestive and misleading information did not alter the accuracy of the witnesses' memory.[24] Studies like this one suggest that the lab conditions Loftus uses for her experiments may not have ecological validity. In other words, the conditions of the lab do not replicate the conditions of witnessing a stressful event in real life closely enough for Loftus's lab findings to apply.

While Loftus is far from alone in proposing a reconstructionist model of memory as opposed to a literalist, video recorder model, her version of the reconstructionist position is not the only one available. Particular to Loftus's view of memory is an especially intense skepticism, in which accepting that it is possible for memory not to perfectly correspond with history means that memory ought not be relied upon to discern history. Forensic and scientific observation are the tools needed to determine what has happened. This is especially the case when what is remembered incriminates another person. In Loftus's view, memory is too vulnerable to distortion to be relied upon for determining a given person's guilt or innocence with respect to an accusation of wrongdoing.

For this reason, Loftus has been sought out by hundreds of defense attorneys to serve as a consultant or expert witness in cases in which eyewitness testimony – the memory of a witness – was crucial to their client's conviction. A number of the cases in which she testified for the defense were high profile, including, to name a few, the trials of O.J. Simpson, Ted Bundy, Timothy

[24] Judith Cutshall and John Yuille, "A Case Study of Eyewitness Memory of a Crime," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 71, no. 2 (1986): 291-301.

McVeigh, Oliver North, the officers accused of beating Rodney King, the McMartin preschool trial, and the Bosnian War trials at the Hague. In her view, since memory is malleable and vulnerable to distortion, even the most convincing eyewitness testimony remains open to doubt. It was Loftus's role to explain to a jury how it is that a witness who fully believes, for example, that they saw the defendant at the scene of the crime may be mistaken.

> I try to impress the jury with the mind's vulnerability, its inherent permeability. I think up metaphors, hoping to better convey my point. "Think of your mind as a bowl filled with clear water. Now imagine each memory as a teaspoon of milk stirred into the water. Every adult mind holds thousands of these murky memories…Who among us would dare to disentangle the water from the milk?"[25]

Loftus accepted invitations to serve as an expert witness for legal defense teams because she wanted to help ensure that those falsely accused by eyewitnesses were not sent to prison. Loftus viewed her work in the courtroom as scientifically based resistance to the injustice of wrongful conviction.

On several occasions, the cases she participated in were cases in which charges of sexual abuse were made against the defendant by an adult who claimed to have recovered formerly repressed memories of harm. In these cases, Loftus's job was to persuade the jury that the person claiming to remember being abused was likely not remembering an event that really happened, but had developed the sense of a memory that, though convincing to the one who held it, was more likely, historically speaking, false. Just like college student participants in her lab studies can be made to think that they had seen a barn in an image of a field that contained no building of any kind, she argued, so too can otherwise reasonable children and adults come to believe in false memories of sexual abuse.

To demonstrate that an entirely false memory of a stressful event could be implanted in a person's mind, Loftus directed a lab study designed to implant in test subjects a false memory of having been lost at a mall around age five. Two weeks after the event of being lost at a mall as a

[25] Loftus and Ketcham, *The Myth of Repressed Memory*, 3.

child was strategically suggested to twenty-four participants, six purported to remember something of the fictitious event. Though other memory researchers oppose her interpretation, Loftus argued that this study proves that the belief that one has real memories of a traumatic event can come to exist in a person even though the event purportedly remembered did not happen.[26] Where false memories of a barn were implanted through intentional suggestion in a lab, she argued that false memories of sexual abuse are implanted by therapists, self-help books for abuse survivors, and pop-culture fictional narratives about repressed and recovered memories of a similar kind.

After gaining public visibility through her participation in a number of high profile cases of alleged sexual abuse, Loftus describes finding herself inundated, on one hand, with pleas for help from those allied with persons accused of similar abuses, and on the other hand, with sharp criticism from the allies of those who had been abused as children. Startled by this response and persuaded that those claiming to be falsely accused were telling the truth, her research focus shifted toward the concepts of traumatic memory and repression. She wanted to understand what repression was and how it was involved in what she saw as an epidemic of false accusations of childhood sexual abuse. In 1994, she published the culmination of her investigation in a book titled, tellingly, *The Myth of Repressed Memory: False Memories and Allegations of Sexual Abuse*. In it, she argues that repression, scientifically speaking, is a farce. Anticipating the core of #MeToo criticism, the thesis of Loftus's argument is that testimonies of childhood sexual abuse ought not be believed without external, corroborating evidence that would be persuasive in a court of law. The steps she takes to undermine the believability of survivor testimony mirror those taken by #MeToo critics two-and-a-half decades later.

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[26] For example, in her book *Unchained Memories: True Stories of Traumatic Memories Lost and Found* (New York: BasicBooks, 1994), memory researcher Lenore Terr points out that being lost at a mall, while distressing, is not a parallel experience to the trauma of being repeatedly sexually abused at age five or of witnessing a murder. Psychologist Kenneth Pope asks how Loftus can be sure that her test subjects did not, in fact, have an early childhood experience of being lost, as well as how Loftus has determined that the verbal reports of experiment participants represent actual memory and not social pressure to report a memory that they do not really have. See "Memory, Abuse, and Science: Questioning Claims About the False Memory Syndrome Epidemic," *American Psychologist* 51, no. 9 (September 1996): 957-974.

Denying survivor experience

One of the clearest ways that Loftus undermines the believability of survivor testimony is by denying that a common feature of survivors' experience exists. By arguing that repression is not, in fact, real, Loftus renders the testimony of every sexual violence survivor who would use the concept to make sense of the loss and return of their memories immediately suspect. Loftus talks about repression as the idea that memories perfectly recorded in the mind become inaccessible for a period of time due to traumatic stress. She understands the idea of recovered memory to be the sudden retrieval of perfectly intact and historically representative memories formerly repressed. This definition of repressed and recovered memory is not quite right.[27] Those who study repressed and recovered memory do not claim perfect correspondence between what is remembered and what occurred, but this is the definition against which Loftus builds her argument in her 1994 book.[28]

Here, Loftus argues that the mental process of repression, theorized as a psychological defense against the impact of intolerable experiences, has not been scientifically proven to be a process that, in fact, happens. Recognizing that repression has been widely used to theorize the inner workings of the mind since Freud, no clinical trial has, to her satisfaction, proven that under traumatic circumstances the mind can and does, in fact, simultaneously store and wall off from consciousness accurate (or any) records of the precipitating traumatic event. Likewise, she argues that no controlled scientific study has proven that such memory records, should they exist, could be

[27] For example, Freud's approach to repression will be discussed in chapters two and three. Briefly, Freud understood repression to be a process by which threatening memories were thrust out of consciousness for the sake of self-protection. Though consciously inaccessible, repressed memories were not thought to be benign. Rather, from their place in the unconscious mind Freud theorized that they continued to exert a certain psychological pressure on the person holding them. This pressure could manifest in myriad life-interrupting forms, and the repressed memories exerting this pressure could, through psychoanalysis, be recovered to consciousness. At no point, however, did Freud consider repressed memories to be preserved and recoverable as pristine data identical with a video recoding of the event being recalled, though he was closer to this position earlier in his career than he was later on. Central to Freud's approach to repression was the idea that symbol mediates memory (a claim that runs throughout his thought) and modifies it (a claim central primarily to his later work).

[28] In a version of this argument published a year earlier in the *American Psychologist*, Loftus does not emphasize the "perfect" nature of repressed memory and leaves open the possibility that some occasions of repressed and recovered memory may be real, emphasizing, simply, that based on current scientific research we cannot know for sure. See Elizabeth Loftus, "The Reality of Repressed Memories," *American Psychologist* 48, no. 5 (May 1993): 518-537.

brought back into consciousness at all, much less without distortion. Without definitive scientific laboratory confirmation that the human mind can repress and recover memories associated with trauma, Loftus thinks it is intellectually irresponsible to believe those who claim to have experienced the phenomenon. After all, she would point out, before the advent of modern medicine, people believed demon possession was to blame for mental illness. By nature, human beings reach for explanations, but if those explanations have not been scientifically substantiated, Loftus warns we are in dubious territory.

For Loftus, the answer was not simply that adequate studies had yet to be conducted. In her view, a scientific study on the existence or nonexistence of repression could not ever be designed because the concept itself is composed such that empirically proving or disproving it is impossible. "A scientific theory has to be falsifiable," she states,

> But how does a scientist search for evidence to prove or disprove an unconscious mental process involving a series of internal events that occur simultaneously, without warning and with no external signs to indicate that something is about to happen, is happening, of has already happened? And how can a scientist prove or disprove that a spontaneously recovered memory represents the whole truth and nothing but the truth rather than some creative blending of reality and imagination or, perhaps, just plain and pure invention?[29]

The concept of repression is, by Loftus's estimation, unavailable to scientific method.

Loftus's suggestion that repression does not exist, together with her claim that its existence cannot be tested scientifically, applies suspicion to all testimony of sexual violence in which the harm experienced was not consistently remembered. In an ironic turn, given Loftus's view that memory does not work like a video recorder, it is those whose memory of violence presents most mechanically – always available for recall – whose testimony is spared doubt.[30]

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[29] Loftus and Ketcham, *The Myth of Repressed Memory,* 64.

[30] Loftus, herself, is a survivor of childhood sexual abuse. She was sexually abused when she was six by a babysitter. She never lost memory of the incident, and she describes the event as "not that big a deal." Multiple references to Loftus's experience of sexual abuse, sustained memory of the event, and attitude toward it are available. The quote I include here is from Jill Neimark, "The Diva of Disclosure," *Psychology Today*, January 1, 1996, https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/articles/199601/the-diva-disclosure.

Survivor testimony as irrationally religious

Having argued that repression is not real, the second way that Loftus undermines the believability of sexual violence survivors' testimony is by aligning belief in repression and recovered memory with irrational religious belief and casting both as a threat to modern society. Noting that studying repression puts researchers "in the odd position of asking people about a memory for forgetting a memory," Loftus categorizes repression as a philosophical concept rather than a scientific one.[31] She likens the task of disproving its existence – a task she would like to accomplish – to the task of disproving the existence of God. Reflecting on her experience of being cross-examined during a case involving recovered memory of sexual assault and murder, she interprets the challenges posed to her argument against the existence of repression and recovered memory this way:

> As I sat in the witness box answering the prosecutor's questions, I began to sense the power of this thing called repression. I felt as if I were in a church arguing with the minister about the existence of God.
>
> "You have conducted no study, have you, in which you were able to prove or disprove the existence of God?"
>
> "No, I have not conducted such a study."
>
> "Your findings, which deal with the real and verifiable, do not apply to the unknowable and unverifiable. Would you agree?"
>
> "I would have to agree."
>
> "Your studies focus on discrete details, not the larger picture, the grand idea. Correct?"
>
> "Yes, that is correct."
>
> I was beginning to realize that repression was a philosophical entity, requiring a leap of faith in order to believe. For those willing to take that leap, no amount of "scientific" discussion would persuade them otherwise. Science, with its innate need to quantify and substantiate, stood helpless next to the mythic powers of repression.[32]

Loftus's comparison of belief in repression with belief in God is meant to demonstrate the irrationality of those who think repression is real. Relying on the modern idea of there being a dualistic opposition between science and religion, she equates belief in repression and the possibility

[31] Elizabeth Loftus, "The Reality of Repressed Memories," 522.
[32] Loftus and Ketcham, *The Myth of Repressed Memory,* 64.

of recovered memory with religious blind faith and casts each as a danger to rational society. Commenting on the courtroom testimony of the expert witness, Lenore Terr, brought in by the prosecution in the case Loftus is discussing to substantiate the existence of repression and the reliability of recovered memory, Loftus says that she had no way to win a logical argument against Terr's theory of traumatic memory. Again relegating notions of trauma, repression, and recovered memory to the arena of religious myth, Loftus laments, "My laboratory studies and experimental findings were a thin paper shield against the twin-headed dragon of traumatic memory. How could anyone hope to fight such a creature?"[33]

Recognizing that the findings of her lab studies could not invalidate the work of memory researchers studying individuals who had survived real traumatic events, Loftus interprets this not as an indication that her work has limitations with respect to its relevance for traumatic memory, but as an indication that the game was rigged against her. Science, and Loftus as its representative, is presented as a noble victim, ill-equipped to resist the brute irrational force of philosophy, myth, and religion.

Loftus's alignment of irrational religion with the idea that repression is real runs throughout her work, perhaps most repetitiously in the term she uses for people who affirm the reality of repression and recovered memory: True Believers. Through this kind of culturally coded comparison of belief in repression with puritanical blind faith, on one hand, and with mythic Greek monsters ("twin-headed dragon"), on the other, Loftus casts sexual violence survivors whose testimony includes loss or return of memory as unthinking beings, wrapped up in modes of (un)reason that have long been put to rest. Believing this kind of sexual violence survivor testimony, in Loftus's view, threatens a social regression to a time when religious myth was the highest form of truth and religious fanaticism had more authority than reason.

[33] Loftus and Ketcham, *The Myth of Repressed Memory,* 59.

Survivors as fascist

Another way Loftus emphasizes this perceived risk is by routinely making comparisons between those she dubs True Believers and fascists. In *The Myth of Repressed Memory*, she suggests this connection by beginning a number of chapters with weighty quotes from *The Crucible* – a play that dramatizes the Salem Witch Trials as an allegory for McCarthyism. Sexual violence survivors who name the person responsible for their abuse after repressing and recovering memory of that abuse are here cast as making accusations that are as unfounded, unjust, and as fanatically inspired as the literal accusations of witchcraft that cost women of the Boston Bay their lives. As we saw in #MeToo critics' arguments against believing testimonies of sexual violence, survivors' accusations are here considered as suspect and dangerous as McCarthy era accusations of communist collusion that resulted in imprisonment for social and political dissent. Loftus goes, perhaps, further by depicting her work as inspired by Eli Wiesel's resistance to the injustice of Nazism. Sexual violence survivors and their supporters who believe accounts of abuse that involve repression and recovered memory are read as advancing accusations that are life-destroying and unfounded in some way parallel to Nazi accusations against Jews.

Loftus is, of course, not a lone voice. Her work was influential in the academy and was popularized through news coverage of the cases for which she served as an expert witness and through the work of the False Memory Syndrome Foundation. The False Memory Syndrome Foundation (FMSF) was started in 1992 by researchers aligned with Loftus's views and a collection of individuals who believed they or their loved ones had been wrongly accused of child sexual abuse by a family member with a false memory. The foundation exists in large part to offer support to the accused and to help parents understand how it is that their adult children could come to believe in the historical reality of a memory of abuse when such an event, according to the foundation and the

accused, never happened. The FMSF continues to operate to this day and includes thirty-three active members on its board, twenty-eight of whom are academic researchers and/or medical doctors.[34]

In his award address to the American Psychological Association on the topic of the false vs. recovered memory debate within the APA, Kenneth Pope observed that dismissing sexual violence survivors and their supporters as fascist is not accidental, but constitutive of the views promoted by the false memory movement.[35] He notes that psychologist Claudette Wassil-Grimm, replacing Loftus's term *True Believer* with *radical feminist* said in her 1995 book on the subject, "Hitler had the Jews; McCarthy had the communists; radical feminists have perpetrators."[36] The FMSF Executive Director Pamela Freyd had a habit of describing such persons as "gestapolike."[37] And a *Boston Globe* article reports this of an interview with Loftus herself in which she reflected on her work in support of legal teams defending those accused of sexual abuse by persons reporting repression: "'I feel like Oskar Schindler,' Loftus muses, referring to the German financier who rescued doomed Jews from the Nazis. 'There is this desperate drive to work as fast as I can.'"[38]

This strategy for undermining the believability of sexual violence survivors' testimony works by linking those whose testimony involves fluctuations in memory with the most culturally recognizable enemies of modern American democracy, which, not coincidentally, also function as quintessential examples of evil. Therefore, belief in repression is presented not simply as irrationally religious, but as religiously evil and politically treasonous.

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[34] "Advisory Board Profiles," About FMSF, False Memory Syndrome Foundation, accessed May 18, 2018, http://www.fmsfonline.org/?about=AdvisoryBoardProfiles.
[35] Kenneth Pope, "Memory, Abuse, and Science."
[36] Claudette Wassil-Grimm, *Diagnosis for a Disaster: The Devastating Truth About False Memory Syndrome and Its Impact on Accusers* (Woodstock: The Overlook Press, 1995), 91.
[37] J. Mitchell, "Memories of a Disputed Past," *The Oregonian*, August 8, 1993, L6.
[38] Joseph Kahn, "Trial by Memory: Stung by daughters' claims of abuse, a writer lashes back," *The Boston Globe*, December 14, 1994, 80.

Scientific naturalism

What can save us in the face of this threat is, in Loftus's system of thought, strict adherence to science and law as privileged arbiters of truth. Loftus's confidence in these, however, is itself more of a philosophical, religious, and political position than one that follows from the standards of objectivity she recommends. In *Christianity and Science*, John Haught distinguishes between, on one hand, science as a method for discovery, and on the other, systems of meaning-making associated with science but not themselves a result of scientific inquiry. Whereas the former is properly the domain of science, the latter, disciplinarily speaking, is not. One of the beliefs, or worldviews, associated with science that Haught articulates is scientific naturalism – the belief that science alone can provide all of the needed explanation of the world, or that scientific method is the single most authoritative method for discovering truth.[39]

Loftus tends toward scientific naturalism. On the dedication page of *The Myth of Repressed Memory* we get our first glimpse. It reads: "Dedicated to the principles of science, which demand that any claim to 'truth' be accompanied by proof." For Loftus, scientific method is not one method among many for discovering truth, with limits and disciplinary relationships with other such methods. For her, scientific method is *the* method. The form of truth she privileges is what she calls the "literal." It is a truth of correspondence with an objective conceptualization of history. This truth requires proof. And what qualifies as proof is limited to that which qualifies by scientific standards. Accordingly, forensic and data-driven science is the method privileged in determining what of sexual violence survivors' testimonies of harm is and is not true.

[39] John Haught, *Christianity and Science: Toward a Theology of Nature* (New York, Orbis Books, 2007), 7.

Legalistic truth

Loftus's particular form of scientific naturalism is inflected too by a commitment to truth as legally determined. What is true must be determined both by scientific method and legal method. Only those forms of evidence that contribute to determining truth in a lab or courtroom are accepted as capable of determining the Truth.

Truth, here, can only be that which has achieved scientific certainty and is legally beyond a reasonable doubt. In Loftus's laboratory studies, it is consistently a significant minority of subjects who report alterations in memory after being subjected to suggestion. While some may review this data and be impressed by the ability of the majority of subjects to resist the influence of suggestion, Loftus interprets her data through a legal framework and so concludes that since alteration is *possible*, memory cannot be trusted to reveal truth beyond a reasonable doubt. Likewise, though myriad forms of evidence of repression and recovered memory abound, because this evidence has not been produced through lab research it does not qualify as authoritative evidence at all in Loftus's view. Presenting scientific method as that by which all truth must be discerned renders the forms of evidence available to support survivor testimony ineffective. Making the threshold for believing survivor testimony the legal standard of criminal trials (beyond a reasonable doubt) and requiring evidence from survivors that would be admissible in court renders, again, the kind of evidence available to support survivor testimony irrelevant.

Of course, Loftus's argument is not simply that jurors for a court case involving sexual abuse allegations and recovered memory ought to believe survivor testimony only when it can be corroborated with scientific proof admissible and persuasive in a court of law. She is urging everyone everywhere to hold to the same standards: parents, teachers, therapists, ministers, friends, watchers of the evening news. Anyone to whom an account of sexual violence involving repressed and recovered memory is disclosed is advised not to extend their belief before conclusive evidence

has been secured. To believe in the absence of proof, Loftus argues, would be uncaring of the alleged survivor (since their memory of abuse is assumed likely to be false) and unjust with respect to the one accused of wrongdoing (because Loftus supposes the accusation is most likely unfounded).

In everyday life, it is rare that proof is required for belief. When a friend tells stories from their childhood we do not withhold belief in the absence of proof. In insisting that believing survivor testimony is warranted and ethical only when that testimony is corroborated by legally persuasive proof, Loftus sets belief as a response to sexual violence testimonies apart from other kinds of belief. Sexual violence is presented as a context in which a stricter set of rules around what warrants belief is ethically necessary. As was the case in the arguments against belief made by #MeToo critics, the testimony of sexual violence survivors is cast as uniquely suspect and uniquely dangerous.

The impact of the movement that Loftus's thought inspired is difficult to quantify and difficult to overstate. With influence in law, the academic field of cognitive psychology, the American Psychological Association, and mainstream American discourse, Loftus became the public face of a broad movement to dismiss sexual violence survivors' testimonies as tragic fabrications made by troubled souls who could not tell the difference between reality and fantasy. Therapists, accused by False Memory Syndrome advocates of implanting false memories of abuse into their clients' minds, grew wary of working with sexual abuse survivors for fear of being sued for malpractice by those their clients accused of abuse while under their care. The movement's skepticism of repressed and recovered memory had an impact on therapists' views of their clients' memories of abuse as well. Some therapists were no longer sure their clients' memories of abuse could be trusted, which put the therapeutic alliance between sexual abuse survivors and the

professionals from whom they sought psychological support under considerable strain. For survivors of sexual abuse needing the reality of their abusive experience to be affirmed and the isolation imposed by abuse broken, therapy became less sure an option for support. Likewise, and with perhaps even greater consequence, the movement's reach into popular discourse influenced friends, family members, and ministers to whom sexual violence survivors disclosed their experiences of abuse to respond with emboldened skepticism and denial.[40] In my work with survivors I routinely hear stories in which a survivor's memory of abuse was challenged as a false memory by a loved one. This, together with my own experience of being challenged in this way more than two decades after Elizabeth Loftus's research faded from the public spotlight, has suggested to me that the False Memory Syndrome movement achieved cultural staying power.

Defining Due Process Culture

Those who have argued against believing survivor testimony, both in the 90s and today, generally advocate what I like to call the argument for due process. The argument tends to go like this: Sexual assault is a crime. If it has occurred it should be prosecuted, and the perpetrator should be convicted and sent to prison. Sending someone to prison, however, is a serious act that should be taken only when we can be certain beyond a reasonable doubt that the one accused of a crime did, in fact, commit that crime. It should be a general rule in all legal disputes that a single individual's personal testimony is not enough to convict someone of any crime, and certainly not a crime accompanied by a lengthy prison sentence and lasting social repercussions. We do not want a legal system that counts one person's lone testimony as sufficient for locking up the accused, because a system like that is vulnerable to corruption, malice, bias, and error that will surely result in criminal convictions of the truly innocent. The crime of sexual assault warrants no exception.

[40] Kenneth Pope, "Memory, Abuse, and Science."

This is where the argument identifies a crucial problem. To believe an alleged sexual assault survivor's interpretation of her experience based on her account alone is to believe on the basis of a single person's testimony that the accused has earned criminal conviction. Therefore, the argument would suggest, we are ethically constrained to *not* believe alleged survivors' accounts of sexual harm unless we have procured evidence external to the survivors' narratives, which can and would prove their account to be true.

The argument for due process says, further, that this ethical constraint becomes even more urgent when we remember that memory—and an alleged survivor's memory, in particular—is not infallible. Those who wield this argument also frequently insist that sexual relationships are inherently messy and involve myriad misunderstandings that may result in an alleged survivor being confused or mistaken about what really happened. Or as we see in Flanagan's critique of Grace, some who take this position worry that alleged survivors could be using accusations of assault as mechanisms for refusing to take responsibility for their own failures to make their nonconsent clear or to remove themselves from the situation. Although the emotional toil of alleged survivors is to be sympathized with, as we saw many who voted to confirm Bret Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court say of Dr. Ford who testified that he sexually assaulted her in high school, the only way to protect the integrity of our legal system and prevent convictions of the innocent is to refrain from believing survivor testimonies until we have corroborating evidence that can satisfy normal legal standards. And if such legal standards cannot be met, the claims should, at the very least, according to Flanagan and her ilk, be shown to stand up to the standards of rigorous investigative journalism.

Even though the context of legal adjudication is rarely relevant in discussion of sexual violence, as only one percent of sexually violent acts are ever brought to court, the argument for due

process takes its cues from the kind of knowledge that is needed for criminal conviction.[41] It calls survivors' interpretive authority into question and grounds the appropriateness of believing such accounts in legal and forensic data alone. It does this in all circumstances, not just with respect to survivors' testimonies that are, indeed, being adjudicated in a court of law. One significant problem with this approach to belief is that it fails to take seriously the kind of knowledge of sexual violence that is and is not available to those of us who were not present to witness the event. None of us who are witnesses of sexual violence testimony have the ability to know with rigorous legal or forensic certainty the degree to which a survivor's testimony corresponds with the historical circumstances from which it arose. Sometimes, external corroborating evidence is available. If we have access to a recording, photographs, text messages, or DNA evidence, we can corroborate or challenge particular aspects of a survivor's testimony, but even these forms of evidence do not offer certain proof of a survivor's claim. In light of a video that appears to depict rape, the accused can argue that the footage shows consensual role-play. DNA evidence can prove that genital contact occurred, but the accused, again, can argue that his accuser consented in the moment and changed her story after the fact.

I share these examples not to suggest that we should be skeptical of forensic evidence in cases of sexual violence as much as to demonstrate the unlikelihood of certainty even after considering this kind of evidence. Defenses like these are common enough to reveal that, in the majority of instances of sexual violence, our access to strict certainty with respect to survivor testimony is limited. Sexual violence is a kind of event that typically does not lend itself to the type of knowledge we have been formed to desire. Due-process culture wants definitive evidence and

[41] Citations for this statistic can be found at RAINN's website: "The Criminal Justice System: Statistics," Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN), Accessed May 3, 2019, https://www.rainn.org/statistics/criminal-justice-system. RAINN reports that its statistics are drawn from 1. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 2010-2016 (2017); 2. Federal Bureau of Investigation, National Incident-Based Reporting System, 2012-2016 (2017); 3. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Felony Defendants in Large Urban Counties, 2009 (2013).

certainty with regard to any specific instance of sexual harm. It tends not to admit, however, that reaching objective certainty is impossible.[42]

For those who take due process culture as authoritative for determining whether and under what conditions belief ought to be extended to testimonies of sexual violence, belief is deemed appropriate when it follows from proof. The kind of proof that counts is that which meets scientific and legal standards. Survivors' testimony is held with skepticism until these conditions are met, and that skepticism is built through modes of thought that cast survivors as fascists, as unAmerican, and as religious fanatics who threaten to draw society backward and unravel the democratic and scientific advances of modernity.

[42] I want to clarify that in pointing to both the epistemological limits of actual systems of due process and to internal logical problems within the argument for due process (two different things), I am not arguing that there is no place for due process. I am arguing, rather, that that place is far more limited in scope and power than the argument for due process claims.

For Belief: Sexual Violence and "Believe All Women"

Figure 1: *The New York Times*, September 28, 2018

On September 27, 2018, Dr. Christine Blasey Ford gave public testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee that Supreme Court Nominee Brett Kavanaugh had sexually assaulted her when they were both in high school, some thirty years prior. Kavanaugh followed Ford's testimony with his own, which hotly and resolutely refuted her claims.[43] The hearings captured national and international attention. Here was, it seemed, a litmus test for whether the influence of #MeToo in the previous year could shift the way decisions were made with regard to the structure of U.S. political life and its intersection with sexual violence. For #MeToo proponents, a decision by the Senate Judiciary Committee not to advance Kavanaugh's nomination to the Senate floor for a vote would signal the possibility of social change that mounts a serious resistance to sexual violence and

[43] Video footage of Ford and Kavanaugh's testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee can be found at *C-SPAN*, "Supreme Court Nominee Brett Kavanaugh Sexual Assault Hearing, Professor Blasey Ford Testimony," 3:04:21, September 27, 2018, https://www.c-span.org/event/?451895/judge-kavanaugh-professor-blasey-ford-testify-sexual-assault-allegations; and *C-SPAN*, "Supreme Court Nominee Brett Kavanaugh Sexual Assault Hearing, Judge Kavanaugh Testimony," 3:00:27, September 27, 2018, https://www.c-span.org/event/?451895/judge-kavanaugh-professor-blasey-ford-testify-sexual-assault-allegations.

makes life more livable for survivors. For opponents, that same decision would signal the erosion of America's foundations on principles of freedom, equality, and due process. The stakes were palpably high. A number of the survivors of sexual violence who I know decided to take the day of the hearings off, either because they felt a need to give attention and bear witness to what would unfold, or because they felt a need to withdraw and protect themselves from being inundated with retraumatizing media coverage and painful comments from well-meaning coworkers in the break room. In the morning, following Dr. Ford's testimony, it seemed that belief in her credibility was high enough that Kavanaugh's nomination might not succeed. As the day wore on, after Kavanaugh had testified, the pendulum swung hard to the right, and it seemed inevitable that he would be confirmed.[44]

The next morning, Bustle, a women-centered dating app, took out a full-page ad in *The New York Times* that included just two words: "BELIEVE WOMEN."[45] The hashtag #BelieveWomen exploded on Twitter.[46] After Republican Senator Jeff Flake, considered a swing vote on the Senate Judiciary Committee, announced he would be supporting the advancement of Kavanaugh's nomination, two survivors of sexual violence cornered Flake in an elevator and passionately implored him to change his mind. Maria Gallagher challenged Flake's support for Kavanaugh on the grounds that it meant Flake was choosing not to believe women:

> I was assaulted and nobody believed me. I didn't tell anyone, and you're telling all women that they don't matter, that they should just stay quiet because if they tell you what happened to them you're going to ignore them. That's what happened to me, and that's what you're telling all women in America, that they don't matter…Look at me when I'm talking to you. You're telling me that my assault doesn't matter. That what happened to me doesn't matter and that you're going to let people who do these

[44] An article by Jason Schwartz in *Politico* captures the sense of the day as one that swung from left to right with a dizzying centrifugal force: "Conservative Media's Analysis of Hearing Gets Rosier as Day Goes On," September 27, 2018, https://www.politico.com/story/2018/09/27/trump-kavanaugh-ford-hearing-fox-news-847899.
[45] See figure 1.
[46] The hashtag had already been in use when the Ford and Kavanaugh hearings prompted its renewed popularity.

> things into power. That's what you're telling me when you vote for him. Don't look away from me…[47]

Gallagher's interjections – "Look at me when I'm talking to you," "Don't look away from me" – expressed something fundamental to what #BelieveWomen was coming to stand for. Those who used the slogan were demanding to be seen in ways that affirmed their reality as a reality that is socially valued, shared, and authoritative. Gallagher's insistence that Senator Flake not look away from her brought home to the body the growing call for survivors to be centered in national discourse on sexual violence. "Look at me when I'm talking to you." See me. See us. Do not look away.

To be seen, here, is linked with what it means to be believed. Being seen and believed, in turn, have everything to do with what it means for those against whom sexual violence is perpetrated to *matter*. In Gallagher's address to Senator Flake, *belief* and *mattering* are interwoven. The choice to believe or disbelieve Dr. Ford's testimony, represented for Gallagher by Flake's decision to vote against or for the advancement of Kavanaugh's nomination, is a choice that Gallagher casts as having social consequences for the believability and the mattering of all American women's testimonies of sexual violence. The desire that swells behind Gallagher's plea for Senator Flake to believe women is a desire for the wellbeing of people harmed by sexual violence to be a priority in the construction and deployment of the social systems that structure life in the United States.

Following Gallagher's plea for Senator Flake to believe women, Ana Maria Archila, who was the first of the two women to address Senator Flake in the elevator, pressed Flake to be clear about whom, exactly, he did believe and whom he did not:

> Senator Flake, do you think that Brett Kavanaugh is telling the truth? Do you think that he is able to hold the pain of this country and repair it? That is the work of justice. The way that justice works is you recognize hurt. You take responsibility for

[47] Suzanne Malveaux and Veronica Stracqualursi, video imbedded in "Flake Confronted by Two Female Protesters After Announcing He'll Back Kavanaugh" *CNN*, September 28, 2018, https://www.cnn.com/2018/09/28/politics/jeff-flake-protesters-kavanaugh-vote/index.html.

> it and then you begin to repair it…You are allowing someone who is unwilling to take responsibility for his own actions to sit in the highest court in the country…Do you think that he's telling the truth?…Do you think that he is telling the truth to the country?[48]

Archila offers Senator Flake a vision for what justice and repair might look like in the wake of sexual violence, and as she holds this vision out to him she packages it in a repeating refrain: "Do you think Brett Kavanaugh is telling the truth?" "Do you think that he's telling the truth?" "Do you think that he is telling the truth to the country?" It is not clear whether Archila delivers these words in the spirit of a question or a challenge, but she does disclose what she takes to be the correct answer. According to Archila, Kavanaugh has given an account of his behavior that, in one way or another, critically fails to take responsibility for the harm he has caused to Dr. Ford. His testimony, accordingly, should not be believed. We can hear in Archila's address to Senator Flake an insistence that the version of reality Kavanaugh has presented ought not be shared by the Senate Judiciary Committee or taken as authoritative for the decision the full Senate is about to make with regard to whom will become the next Supreme Court Justice.

Neither Gallagher nor Archila clarify the relationship between believing Dr. Ford's testimony and affirming the historical veracity of particular details in her narrative. Likewise, it is not clear whether they regard Kavanaugh as wrongly convinced of his innocence or as lying about it. Questions that focus on precisely how and why Kavanaugh's testimony and Dr. Ford's testimony tell historically incompatible narratives are not as urgent to Gallagher and Archila as those that center the political repercussions of extending or withholding belief from the testimonies that sexual violence survivors do, in fact, tell. Within Gallagher and Archila's challenge to Senator Flake's support of Kavanaugh I discern at least four questions of this latter kind: Are you committed to resisting sexual violence? Will you prioritize that resistance and the wellbeing of survivors even when

[48] Suzanne Malveaux and Veronica Stracqualursi, video imbedded in "Flake Confronted by Two Female Protesters After Announcing He'll Back Kavanaugh."

doing so comes with legitimate risk? When a decision must be made between competing versions of reality will you take on the reality in which survivors of sexual violence live as your own? Will you pursue a form of justice that has the potential to meet sexual violence with a praxis of acknowledgement and repair? Consistently, what belief *does* socially and politically is core to Gallagher and Archila's sense of its necessity. While their address to Senator Flake does not suggest that the historical or forensic details of a particular case are unimportant for belief, these are not what Gallagher and Archila center.

Immediately upon release of the video footage from the elevator encounter, resonance with Gallagher and Archila's address to Senator Flake bloomed. #BelieveWomen shot into the spotlight of national debate around sexual violence. Within the glare of that light, however, the conversation changed. This was not the first time that "believe women" had been used as a #MeToo slogan and it would not be the last. Each time the phrase became the subject of popular debate, the expansive sense in which *belief* carried grassroots resonance among, for example, survivors who identified with Gallagher and Archila, became obscured.

For example, on the appropriateness of believing women who come forward to report sexual violence Lena Dunham tweeted this: "Things women do lie about: what they ate for lunch. Things women don't lie about: rape."[49] Dunham's tweet potentially makes a valid rhetorical point that the majority of sexual violence accusations are, in fact, not lies.[50] However, Dunham makes this point in such a way that belief becomes reduced to a process of lie detection. Whereas the kind of

[49] The tweet was made on August 4, 2017 and is quoted in Jenny Hollander's article "Why 'Believe Women' Means Believing Women Without Exception," *Bustle*, November 21, 2017, https://www.bustle.com/p/why-believe-women-means-believing-women-without-exception-5532903.

[50] Statistics vary and are methodologically difficult both to gather and to assess. However, a widely cited 2010 study estimates that "the prevalence of false allegations is between 2% and 10%" (David Lisak, Lori Gardinier, Sarah C. Nicksa, and Ashley M. Cote, "False Allegations of Sexual Assault: An Analysis of Ten Years of Reported Cases," *Violence Against Women* 16, no. 12 (December 2010): 1318). False accusations are defined as those that are reported to law enforcement and are subsequently found by a court not to be substantiated. Given that an allegation may not be substantiated for a variety of reasons, we can presume that the numbers of those who lied about being sexually assaulted are likely lower than 2% - 10% of reported cases.

belief that Gallagher and Archila implored Senator Flake to extend left the relationship between truth, historical reality, and one's motives for giving testimony open, Dunham's take on belief closes the concept in around determining which of the two parties involved on either end of an accusation has lied and which has not. The historical incompatibility of the testimonies given by the accuser and the accused is attributed to conscious deceit on one of their parts. And, it turns out, the process of lie detection that will identify the appropriate direction of our belief turns out to be quite simple. Women do not lie about rape. If a woman says she was raped, she was raped. In this framing, belief is *itself* simple. It follows from the self-evident truth that women do not lie when is comes to sexual violence.

Another common and related refrain that echoes around popular discourse on believing women is that believing women with regard to sexual violence means believing *all* women. In an article for *Bustle*, Jenny Hollander expressed this position succinctly: "What also needs to be made clear is that when you believe women on principle, you *believe all women*. No exceptions. No 'what if's.'"[51] Hollander wrote these words as a part of her critique of a statement that Lena Dunham made defending Dunham's colleague and friend, Murray Miller, from an accusation of rape.[52] Against the spirit of Dunham's tweet that women do not lie about rape, her statement in defense of Miller suggested that at least one particular woman – Aurora Perrineau, Murray's accuser – did exactly that.[53] Speaking jointly with her colleague Jenni Konner, Dunham said in her statement, "While our

[51] Jenny Hollander, "Why 'Believe Women' Means Believing Women Without Exception."
[52] Aurora Pirrineau filed a police report and took a polygraph test alleging that Murray Pirrineau raped her when she was 17 and he was 35. The allegation was first reported in Matt Donnelly and Tim Malloy's "'Girls' Writer Murray Miller Accused of Raping Underage Actress Aurora Pirrineau (Exclusive)," *The Wrap*, November 17, 2017, https://www.thewrap.com/girls-murray-miller-aurora-perrineau-harold-perrineau-lost-oz/.
[53] Here is Dunham's statement, issued jointly with Jenni Konner, in full: "During the windfall of deeply necessary accusations over the last few months in Hollywood, we have been thrilled to see so many women's voices heard and dark experiences in this industry justified. It's a hugely important time of change and, like every feminist in Hollywood and beyond, we celebrate. But during every time of change there are also incidences of the culture, in its enthusiasm and zeal, taking down the wrong targets. We believe, having worked closely with him for more than half a decade, that this is the case with Murray Miller. While our first instinct is to listen to every woman's story, our insider knowledge of Murray's situation makes us confident that sadly this accusation is one of the 3 percent of assault cases that are misreported every year. It is a true shame to add to that number, as outside of Hollywood women still struggle to be

first instinct is to listen to every woman's story, our insider knowledge of Murray's situation makes us confident that sadly this accusation is one of the 3 percent of assault cases that are misreported every year."[54] In response, Jenny Hollander argued that Dunham's support for Murray compromised Dunham's commitment to believing women. Hollander's concern is that a commitment to believing women ought not to be conditioned by the identity of the person who is accused, by the positive relationship one has with the accused, or by the disruption that believing the accusation would impose on one's personal, professional, political, or religious world. Hollander thinks that Dunham chose not to believe Pirrineau because Dunham was close to and thought well of Miller. Dunham, Hollander proposes, could not imagine that a man who had been good to her could have been something other than good to another. And there is some reason to think that Hollander's interpretation is appropriate. On the day that Dunham issued her statement in defense of Miller, she also tweeted in explanation, "I believe in a lot of things but the first tenet of my politics is to hold up the people who have held me up, who have filled my world with love."[55] Miller was a positive figure in Dunham's life and so she would choose to stand by him. Perhaps with good reason, then, Hollander's critique of Dunham calls attention to the reality that many who affirm believing women's reports of sexual violence in principle and at a distance turn out not to grant belief to specific women whose testimonies of sexual violence have disruptive consequences for their own sense of self, other, and world.[56] At its best, the kind of argument that Hollander makes reveals the

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believed. We stand by Murray and this is all we'll be saying about this issue." [Originally printed in Ryan Parker, "'Girls' Writer Murray Miller Accused of Sexually Assaulting Actress Aurora Pirrineau," *The Hollywood Reporter*, November 17, 2017, https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/girls-writer-murray-miller-accused-sexually-assaulting-actress-aurora-perrineau-1059660.] On its own, this statement leaves open the possibility that Pirrineau falsely reported sexual assault without necessarily lying in a conscious or deliberate sense. What I mean to propose is that Dunham's statement suggests that Pirrineau lied insofar as this statement is read together with Dunham's earlier tweet that reduces the problem of belief to a problem of lie detection.

[54] Ryan Parker, "'Girls' Writer Murray Miller Accused of Sexually Assaulting Actress Aurora Pirrineau."

[55] Quoted in Constance Grady, "Lena Dunham Accused a Woman of Lying About Her Rape. It Fits Her Controversial Past." *Vox*, November 21, 2017, https://www.vox.com/culture/2017/11/21/16679078/lena-dunham-accused-woman-lying-rape-murray-miller-aurora-perrineau.

[56] The kind of argument that Hollander made here has been made repeatedly by figures who advocate believing women. For example, Monica Hess, writing for *The Washington Post* said it this way following the Ford/Kavanaugh Hearings: "It's

staggering degree to which extending or withholding belief from survivor testimony is influenced by what the one doing the believing has to gain or lose from doing so. And yet, Hollander draws attention to this legitimate problem with statements that link the necessity of belief in principle with the necessity of believing every woman's testimony of sexual violence: "Let's be clear: If you choose to believe women, you choose to believe *every woman*. Even when it's uncomfortable."[57]

Hollander and those who pursue the argument for belief in these terms unite the necessity of belief as an ethical principle with the necessity of believing women's specific, individual testimonies of sexual violence – *all* women, *all* testimonies of sexual violence. Of course, the claim that women categorically do not lie about rape is wrong. A minority of women have lied about rape.[58] Conscious deceit aside, it is also possible for a person to misremember or be mistaken about sexual violence. When arguments in favor of the necessity of believing survivor testimony are organized around

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easier to say you "believe women" when there are 60 of them and they're all telling the same story about being drugged by Bill Cosby or assaulted by Harvey Weinstein. Can you say you believe women when there are only 10 accusers? Only five? Can you say you believe women when there is one accuser, and her account is 35 years old, and she says she doesn't remember certain details, like the address of the party or who else was there? Can you say you believe women when it's deeply inconvenient for you to do so? When your decision to believe her could hinder you from getting other things you want?" "Would you find this accusation credible if it were levied against Colin Kaepernick? Bill Clinton? A boss you loved? A boss you hated? If your answers would change depending on these circumstances, you're not really interested in believing women. You're interested in how their pain can be useful to your politics." Monica Hess, "Do We Really 'Believe Women'? How the Kavanaugh Accusation Will Put a Slogan to the Test," *The Washington Post*, September 17, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/do-we-really-believe-women-how-the-kavanaugh-accusation-will-put-a-slogan-to-the-test/2018/09/16/c8a7405e-b9f2-11e8 a8aa860695e7f3fc_story.html?utm_term= .42b6e0c9e98d.

[57] Jenny Hollander, "Why 'Believe Women' Means Believing Women Without Exception," emphasis added.

[58] In the U.S., any discussion of false accusations of sexual violence ought to center the role that false accusations of this kind played in the history of lynching in this country. For a significant majority of the black men who were tortured and murdered by lynching in the U.S., white aggressors justified their actions by falsely claiming that the black man they targeted posed a sexual threat to a white woman. Thus, when white women made or cooperated with false accusations of sexual violence against black men they directly enabled racist torture, terror, and murder. One of the reasons that movements against sexual violence cannot be built solely on the claim that testimonies of sexual violence are inherently credible is that this argument fails to recognize and contend with lynching history. By the definition of sexual violence I gave in the introduction to this dissertation, lynching qualifies as sexual violence insofar as it is a form of violence perpetrated according to a sexual logic (namely, the claim that black men posed a sexual threat to white communities). A robust system of resistance to sexual violence must, therefore, be able to acknowledge the role that false accusations of sexual violence played in the racist and sexually violent program of lynching. It must be able to support the extension of belief to survivors' testimonies while also defending against racist deployments of belief that misidentify who is and is not a victim. It is, perhaps, telling of due process culture's investment in whiteness that it tends not to build its argument against the appropriateness of immediate belief on the legitimate history of false accusations that were made to justify lynching. Whereas due process culture is eager to offer examples of false testimonies of sexual violence in order to support its claim that accusations of sexual violence ought not be believed without corroborating evidence, it chooses not to use examples that would bring attention to white, racist violence.

insistence either that this is not so or that it does not matter, they are deeply vulnerable to legitimate criticism.

Arguments that insist in a sweeping way on the necessity of believing every woman's testimony of sexual violence without exception are also an easy target for due process culture's opposition. All due process culture needs to do to rile popular angst around believe all women's approach to believing survivors is offer one counterexample in which the testimony of a supposed survivor of sexual violence is false. And, in fact, this is precisely the kind of debate that often does characterize popular discourse on sexual violence. Proponents of a disposition of belief cite statistics that suggest the overwhelming majority of reports of sexual violence are credible accusations and argue on this basis that all reports ought to be believed. Critics point to the fraction of examples in which the one claiming to have been sexually assaulted was wrong or lied and argue that a system of due process is needed to separate true claims from false ones before a decision about the appropriateness of belief is made. At different moments, one or the other side of the debate gains an upper hand, but for the most part the fight over whether and when it is appropriate to believe survivors' testimonies remains in gridlock.

Observing that due process culture seems to gain traction through the practice of offering counterexamples to the position that all women ought to be believed, some advocates for sexual violence survivors are concerned that the argument for belief is backfiring. For example, speaking to a reporter at *Vox*, Amy Swearer, a survivor who is a legal policy analyst at the Heritage Foundation's Meese Center for Legal and Judicial Studies said that "'The presumption of belief really damages everything' if claims turn out to be false…because it encourages people to doubt future claims."[59] Likewise, Sandra Newman, who has studied false rape allegations, suggested that the slogan "Believe

[59] Anna North, "How the Jussie Smollett Case Became a Part of a Larger Controversy Around Believing Survivors," *Vox,* February 21, 2019, https://www.vox.com/identities/2019/2/21/18232219/jussie-smollett-believe-survivors-me-too-empire.

women" is "not meant to replace the presumption of innocence." Rather, in her view, "It's a political slogan that asks us to foreground the vast majority of cases where women are telling the truth."[60] While those like Swearer and Newman correctly identify a vulnerability of the believe all women position, they respond to it by relativizing the necessity of believing survivors rather than building a more successful foundation upon which belief can be established.

Defining the Believe All Women Approach to Believing Survivors

One critical point to clarify is that when I refer to the believe all women approach to believing survivors, I am referring to a specific approach to belief that is widespread in popular discourse on sexual violence. I am not referring to every kind argument in favor of believing survivors. I am not necessarily, for example, referring to the arguments that Gallagher and Archila made to Senator Flake in favor of belief. And yet, the believe all women approach to believing survivors is more difficult to define than due process culture. Its edges are not as crisp and it is not as internally coherent. This is not necessarily a criticism. Rather, we might say that the believe all woman approach to believing survivors is flexible because its motivation is pragmatic. It wants to support survivors' prospects for being believed and it will do so by whatever method seems likely deliver success. Even though the believe all women approach to sexual violence survivors' testimony to some extent shifts in order to accommodate its desired end, there are some things that we can say about its character.

One way to get at what I mean to highlight when I use the term "believe all women" is to think of this framework in terms of the approach to belief that we see take form through Dunham and Hollander's arguments regarding the appropriateness of believing survivors. These are

[60] Anna North, "How the Jussie Smollett Case Became a Part of a Larger Controversy Around Believing Survivors." See also, Sandra Newman, "What Kind of Person Makes False Rape Accusations?" *Quartz*, May 11, 2017, https://qz.com/980766/the-truth-about-false-rape-accusations/.

arguments in which belief is reduced to a tautology: We ought to regard survivors' testimonies of sexual violence as historically representative because accounts of sexual violence are inherently historically representative. And here, it becomes apparent that the believe all women position is constructed largely on due process terms. Both sides of the dualism treat belief as properly extending from the results of a fact detection process. The difference between them is that the due process lens gives authority to external, legally persuasive evidence for determining facts, whereas the believe all women lens locates that authority in survivors' testimonies. Either way, *belief* is rendered fairly hollow. The opposition between believe all women and due process arguments gets popular discourse on the appropriateness of believing survivors caught in a place where it retains little power to ground sustained and substantial solidarity with survivors. The tautology on which the believe all women position is built is thrown into crisis when opponents challenge the inherent credibility of sexual violence testimonies with examples in which survivors' claims were shown to be false. The extremely rare occasion of a historically unrepresentative accusation of sexual violence should not have the power to derail arguments in favor of belief. And yet, because the believe all women position builds the appropriateness of belief on the premise that survivors' testimonies are inherently accurate, this kind of challenge hits hard.

Another way to get at what I mean to highlight when I use the term "believe all women" is to think of this framework as one that is organized primarily in resistance to due process culture. The goal of the believe all women framework is to promote (against due process culture) the likelihood that survivors will be believed. It is more committed to that end than it is to any particular kind of argument about why survivors should be believed (including that represented by Dunham and Hollander). Thus, when confronted with evidence that the tautology upon which the believe all women argument tends to be built is not entirely defensible, proponents of the believe all women framework tend to shift to a pragmatic argument in favor of belief. This argument admits under

pressure that when held up to a strict rubric we cannot maintain that survivors' testimonies are inherently and always correspondent with the histories to which they point, but it says we still ought to believe them because believing survivors is less likely to inflict harm than withholding belief. The believe all women framework shifts back and forth between asserting the tautology and arguing for belief on pragmatic terms depending on which of these has the better chance to gain traction against due process culture's resistance to believing survivors' testimonies. While there is merit to the pragmatic argument, I would argue that it puts belief in even great crisis than the tautology. If belief is to follow from a pragmatic need and does not require confidence that what is being believed is, in fact, true, it is not clear that belief's extension remains sincere. Whereas this kind of pragmatic belief may be able to motivate material intervention in crisis situations (which is valuable, to be sure) it does not stabilize a survivors' reality as a reality that is shared.

What these two dimensions of the believe all women framework hold in common – the pragmatic argument and the argument for inherent correspondence – is that they treat belief as an unqualified, necessary given without giving much attention to what kind of thing belief *is*. In other words, the problem with the believe all women position is not its insistence on belief. The problem is, rather, that the kind of arguments it makes about *what* belief is and *why* we ought to believe survivors evacuates belief of at least some of the meaning the concept has for survivors. Whereas survivors' pleas for belief give the impression that belief in some way represents a rich, complex, open and active position of solidarity, belief in believe all women hands becomes reduced either to fact detection or to crisis care.

Even so, the believe all women position is not without value. It does provide some resistance to due process culture's skepticism of survivors' testimonies. It increases the possibility that survivors' disclosures of sexual violence will be met with a compassionate, supportive response. And, it also increases the likelihood that a survivor's disclosure will prompt a material response that

resists sexual violence and works toward justice and wellbeing. While, for these reasons the believe all women position is far preferable to that of due process culture, its approach to belief is not robust enough to tackle the problem of belief as it manifests in the lives of survivors.

Due Process, Believe All Women, and Belief in Crisis

Survivors of sexual violence continuously express that being believed is critical to their wellbeing and that an attitude of belief toward survivors in general is fundamental to society's prospects for resisting sexual violence. Yet, in the United Sates, and in the West more broadly, we are embroiled in controversy over whether and under what circumstances believing survivors' testimonies is appropriate. The popular form of the controversy tends to function as a dualistic opposition between two positions that remain at an impasse. While believe all women side of the debate has some capacity to interrupt the perpetuation of sexual violence and support survivors, neither it nor the due process position (which is considerably more hostile to survivors) approaches belief in a way that grounds the possibility of robust solidarity with survivors. With respect to sexual violence, belief is in crisis. For the wellbeing of survivors and for the health of our communities, the problem of belief demands intervention.

Chapter 2: Freud's Seduction Theory and the Believe All Women Approach to Believing Survivors

The first chapter of this dissertation argues that discourse on sexual violence in the West, and the U.S. in particular, is stuck in a trenchant dualism. One side of the dualism constructs itself through what I call the due process culture. This lens says we should not believe an alleged survivors' testimony of abuse if we do not have corroborating evidence that would be admissible in a court of law. For as long as such evidence is lacking, due process culture says it is unethical to believe an allegation of sexual violence because doing so amounts to socially convicting the accused without affording them a fair trial. For due process culture, belief follows from evidence. The second side of the dualism is constituted through what I call believe all women culture. This lens treats the automatic and immediate extension of belief as ethically necessary in response to any and every allegation of sexual violence. It argues that since we know that false allegations are statistically rare and that not believing survivors both enables continued abuse and inflicts further traumatic harm on the one whose testimony is denied, all who disclose experiences of sexual violence should, as a rule, be believed. For proponents of the believe all women position, belief follows from the inherent credibility of survivors' testimonies. In chapter one, I used critical analysis of the #MeToo movement and the False Memory Syndrome movement of the 1990s to flesh out these two lenses and demonstrate their dualistic opposition. I argued that while the believe all women argument is preferable to the that of due process culture, neither enables the kind of solidarity with sexual violence survivors necessary for making deep enough cultural strides toward resistance to the harms of abuse.[1]

Chapters two and three of this dissertation turn to Freud. In his lifetime, Freud composed two basic and fundamentally incompatible theories of the link between sexuality and acute

[1] See chapter one for an account of how this is so.

psychological distress: the seduction theory and the Oedipal theory of childhood sexuality. The task of chapters two and three together is to relate Freud's shift between the seduction theory and the Oedipal theory to contemporary approaches to sexual violence such that today's dualism becomes legible as a contemporary iteration (i.e. a replication with a difference) of the opposition between Freud's two theories. I argue that the believe all women approach to believing survivor testimony can be read as resonant with Freud's seduction theory whereas the due process approach to believing survivor testimony can be understood as resonant with Freud's replacement of the seduction theory with the Oedipal paradigm. In each case, I trace the point of resonance to the ways that the Freudian and contemporary positions theorize the relationship between memory, history, and experience with respect to sexual violence trauma and the believability of survivors' testimonies.

My argument is not that Freud's thought is responsible for the existence or the shape of the contemporary opposition between believe all women and due process frameworks, as if the seduction theory caused believe all women culture and Freud's shift to the Oedipal paradigm caused due process culture. Rather, I trace the connections between the opposition in Freud's thought on believing survivors and the opposition in contemporary thought on believing survivors in order to suggest that western culture is, broadly speaking, disposed to to reproducing this kind of opposition in modern attempts to think about what it means to believe survivors' testimonies of sexual violence and the conditions under which belief is warranted.[2] If, as I am proposing, there is a tendency in western culture to replicate (with a difference) thought that manifests as the seduction theory and believe all women culture on one hand, and Freud's transition away from the seduction theory and due process culture on the other hand, becoming clear on Freud's theoretical engagement with

[2] Chapters two and three of this dissertation do not *prove* that this tendency is, in fact, an inherent characteristic of western culture. A project that does do so would require a more comprehensive study of the modern history of thought on the appropriateness of believing survivor accounts of sexual violence. Rather, by holding out two contemporary moments and one at the turn of the twentieth century in which similar patterns of thought can be discerned, I aim to create a warrant for considering what it means for theological scholarship *if* western culture does tend to promote thought on sexual violence that falls into the oppositional frame represented by #MeToo discourse, the 1990s debates over false memory, and Freud's transition from the seduction theory to the Oedipal paradigm.

sexual violence in the seduction theory and in his transition to the Oedipal theory of childhood sexuality allows us to better diagnose the contemporary dualistic problem, trace its reproduction in theological engagements with sexual violence, and build a more helpful map of the problem of belief moving forward.

I will begin with a brief introduction to hysteria – the condition in response to which Freud's thought originally took shape. The next step will be to articulate Freud's seduction theory as he presented it in 1896. While I will strive to represent the theory in full, the priority of this section of the chapter will be to give us a foundation on which we can build our understanding of the relationship between memory, history, and experiences of sexual violence trauma in Freud's seduction theory. After tracing the contours of this tri-fold relationship, I will argue that their shape opens onto the shape of these relations in the contemporary believe all women approach to addressing sexual violence. This will conclude chapter two.

Chapter three will then turn to Freud's shift away from the seduction theory. Rather than map the Oedipal theory of childhood sexuality in full, I will focus attention on those dynamics of Freud's changing thought that mark conceptual shifts away from the seduction framework. Doing so will pave the way for us to reflect on how Freud's conceptualization of the relationship between memory, history, and sexual violence trauma changes after he sets aside the seduction theory. After articulating the new contours of the tri-fold relationship, I will argue that the model of memory's relation to history and sexual violence trauma that appears in Freud's disavowal of the seduction theory mirrors that reflected in contemporary approaches to sexual violence that advise skepticism in response to survivors' testimonies rather than belief.

Given the number and volume of feminist critiques of Freud, I will say a word about why I have chosen to ground this project in reflection on Freudian theories and their import for contemporary problems. I want to challenge the idea that we – in the humanities, in the study of

religion, in psychological disciplines, or in the West in general – have moved beyond Freud to the extent that it is no longer necessary to ask ourselves how our ways of thinking are impacted by the influence of his thought. Freud is largely responsible for giving shape to the frame from which modern, Western reflection on the psychological dimensions of the human develops. Surely, novel advances beyond Freud abound, but I am committed to the position that we are fooling ourselves if we believe that the bulk of these innovations in no way carry forward the trace of Freudian frameworks. Precisely because Freudian thought has, first, been so widely appropriated into modern, Western worldviews, second, been central to the development of scholarship on trauma and to theological treatments of sexual violence trauma, and third, revealed as highly problematic in certain ways by feminist, womanist, queer, and other critics, excavating the Freudian foundations of contemporary crises is an important step toward disciplinary and cultural self-awareness that can fund the kinds of interventions we now need.

A Brief Note on Hysteria

> Hysteria is a pathological condition with a fascinating and tortuous medical and cultural history. If the malady seems to change its shape and its form over the centuries, who can be surprised? For here is a disorder that even those who insist on its reality concede is a chameleon-like disease that can mimic the symptoms of any other, and one that somehow seems to mold itself to the culture in which it appears.[3]
>
> — Andrew Scull, Sociologist of Psychiatry

Hysteria is a term that comes from the Greek word for *uterus*. It was first associated with a belief in ancient Greek medical thought that unexplained maladies in women were caused by the uterus leaving its customary place in the lower abdomen and wandering about in the body.[4] From that point on, the diagnosis was applied over the ages to a wide range of symptoms, the unifying

[3] Andrew Scull, *Hysteria: The Disturbing History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 6.
[4] Kira Walsh, "Hysteria" in *Cultural Sociology of Mental Illness: An A-Z Guide*, ed. Andrew Scull (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2014), 404.

principle usually being that these symptoms were seen to be women-specific. Kira Walsh tells us that in the modern era, the list of symptoms the diagnosis covered included, among others, "convulsions, irregular speech or mutism, loss of hearing, sexual dysfunction, and gastrointestinal or genitourinary complaints."[5] Freud's early work on hysteria affirms these symptoms as among hysteria's possible manifestations and adds several more – catatonia, hemorrhages, paraplegia, and panic attacks, to name a few. Not least because its possible symptoms seemed both endless and untraceable, the condition was confounding for generations of physicians.

Though hysteria was so consistently ill-defined that historians have explained it as "a dramatic medical metaphor for everything that men found mysterious or unmanageable in the opposite sex," it remained a strong enough concept that the notion of hysteria as a distinct illness persisted through twenty-five hundred years of medical inquiry.[6] Hysteria was often associated with insanity. This is likely, on one hand, because those who suffered it tended to have intense emotional reactions to seemingly average circumstances, and on another, because a physiological explanation for hysterics' mental and physical impairments was elusive. Andrew Scull writes of an eighteenth century case in which an adolescent girl fell into fits of awkward convulsions that left her impervious to pain. The town debated whether the girl ought to be considered a hysteric or a victim of witchcraft. Both explanations seemed plausible. The stereotypical image of demonic possession, perhaps best represented in contemporary times by iconic images from *The Exorcist*, mapped well onto the diagnostic expectations of hysteria.

Judith Herman tells us that it is likely because hysteria so powerfully evoked the idea of demon possession that nineteenth century European physicians took interest in rendering the condition scientifically legible. The post-Revolution early democracy of France was fragile. The

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[5] Kira Walsh, "Hysteria," 403.
[6] Mark S. Micale, "Hysteria and Its Historiography: A Review of Past and Present Writings," *History of Science* 27 no. 4 (December 1989): 319.

influence of the Catholic Church was a continued threat to enlightenment ideals, and European intellectuals were eager to show that this mysterious condition that plagued Europe's women could be better understood and treated by medical professionals than it could by the Church. As stated by one of the French democracy's founders, Jules Ferry, "Women must belong to science, or they will belong to the Church."[7] French neurologist Jean-martin Charcot headed up the nineteenth century medical investigation into this mysterious women's disease, and by Herman's estimation,

> His modernization of the Salpêtière in the 1870s was carried out to demonstrate the superior virtues of secular teaching and hospital administration. And his investigations of hysteria were carried out to demonstrate the superiority of a secular over a religious conceptual framework. His Tuesday Lectures [featuring hysterical patients] were political theater. His mission was to claim hysterical women for science.[8]

Thus began a two-decades-long, politically urgent quest in Western medicine to, once and for all, explain the origins of hysteria, what causes it, how its symptoms are determined, and what constitutes an effective cure. The identifying characteristic of the disease would come to be understood as somaticization, or as John-Hopkins psychiatrist Philip Slavney puts it, a process by which, "an affliction of the mind … was expressed through a disturbance of the body."[9] Freud would be instrumental in leading the nineteenth century West to this conclusion, but we are getting ahead of ourselves.[10] Our interest in Freud's work on hysteria begins before that consensus was reached, when the etiology of hysterical symptoms was a matter of hot debate.

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[7] Quoted in Patrick Kay Bidelman's Pariahs Stand Up! The Founding of the Liberal Feminist Movement in France, 1858-1889 (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1982), 17.
[8] Judith Herman, Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror (New York: BasicBooks, 1992), 15.
[9] Philip Slavney, *Perspectives on "Hysteria"* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 1–2.
[10] Though this detail is beyond the scope of the current discussion, I trust it will be interesting for some readers to know that Hysteria was included as a diagnosis in the first, second, and third volumes of the DSM (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*) published by the American Psychiatric Association as the official guide to medical diagnoses of mental health disorders. It was removed in the fourth revision of the manual, published in 1994.

Freud Enters the Scene

Freud's 1896 publications proposed to definitively end this debate. His answer to the question of hysteria's origin was to claim that the disease was caused by a complex psycho-somatic reaction to early childhood sexual experiences. Freud was by no means the first to suggest a sexual etiology. In the decade preceding Freud's announcement of the seduction theory, during which he received training from several notable physicians treating women with hysteria, including Charcot, it was commonly believed that hysteria was a disease brought on by genital overstimulation. Masturbation was thought to be the immediate cause, and a patient's inability to refrain from masturbating was thought to follow from having been genitally stimulated by adult caregivers and older children earlier in life. The preferred medical treatments for hysterical women and girls included applying a cocaine solution to the vaginal opening, sewing the vaginal opening closed, cauterizing or surgically removing the clitoris, and surgically removing the ovaries, even if the tissue was physiologically healthy.[11]

The practice of castrating hysterical women was first introduced by Alfred Hegar in Europe and by a physician named Battley in North America in the year 1872.[12] Though the medical reason given for castration was "pathological changes of sexual organs," it was written in 1896 that Hegar himself did, "not withdraw from the extirpation of apparently healthy organs."[13] In fact, Carlo Bonomi cites correspondence between Hegar and Breuer, another of Freud's teachers, in which Breuer requests that Hegar not castrate a patient scheduled for the surgery. Hegar responds that the surgery will proceed and bases his judgment entirely on the patient's reported hysterical symptoms without having examined the patient physically.[14]

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[11] Carlo Bonomi, "'Sexuality and Death' in Freud's Discovery of Sexual Aetiology," *International Forum of Psychoanalysis* 3, no. 2 (Dec. 2007): 69.
[12] Carlo Bonomi, "Sexuality and Death," 74.
[13] Carlo Bonomi, "Sexuality and Death," 75.
[14] Carlo Bonomi, "Sexuality and Death," 75.

Physicians considered the castration of hysterical women not only medically but also morally necessary. In his study of this history, Bonomi stresses that masturbation and sexual stimulation of children were both considered morally reprehensible, saying, "the characteristic of this period seems to have been the non-differentiation between active and passive acts in childhood, both falling under the same medical judgment and moral condemnation."[15] In nineteenth century medical parlance, *active* was a term that described self-initiated sexual experience, like masturbation, whereas the term *passive* indicated sexual stimulation imposed on one person by another. Physical stimulation of children's genital organs was the object of moral concern irrespective of the conditions under which that stimulation occurred – abusively or as an act of self-pleasure.[16] Since the common medical opinion was that hysterical symptoms were linked to compulsive masturbation prompted by experiences of sexual passivity, and since ongoing masturbation was cause for grave moral concern, castration as a medical intervention gained moral urgency.

Prior to putting forward the seduction theory in 1896, Freud explicitly rejected sexual etiologies of hysteria. Toward the end of "Aetiology of Hysteria," one of the three 1896 publications in which he outlined what would come to be known as the seduction theory, he says:

> …the expectation of a sexual neurosis being the basis of hysteria was fairly remote from my mind. I had come fresh from the school of Charcot and I regarded the linking of hysteria with the topic of sexuality as a sort of insult.[17]

In opposition to the medical trends of his time, Freud originally aligned himself with his teachers: Charcot, who claimed that hysteria was a hereditary disease, not an illness acquired by sexual overstimulation, and Breuer, who opposed surgical treatment as a remedy. However, beginning in 1893, Freud began to shift his position, and by 1896 he had developed such confidence in his own

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[15] Carlo Bonomi, "Sexuality and Death," 66.
[16] Notably, genital stimulation by way of married, heterosexual intercourse was an exception not considered cause for medical or moral concern.
[17] Sigmund Freud, "Aetiology of Hysteria" (1896), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud* volume 3 (S.E.) 3, ed. & trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1962), 259-60.

sexual etiology of hysteria that he declared his articulation of the seduction theory the definitive end to the quest for hysteria's origin. He believed that he had both discovered the cause of hysteria and definitively articulated its cure.

It was in a letter written in October of 1895 to his close colleague and confidant, Wilhelm Fliess, that Freud first suggested he had made a clinical discovery about the root causes of hysteria and obsessional neurosis:

> Have I revealed the great clinical secret to you, either in writing or by word of mouth? Hysteria is the consequence of a presexual *sexual shock*.[18]

In 1896, Freud published three papers in which he announced to the scientific and medical communities to which he belonged that he had found, once and for all, the etiological source of hysteria. While his primary focus was on hysteria he hypothesized that his findings with respect to hysteria's etiology would account, likewise, for the etiology of obsessional neurosis and paranoia, or to put it more generally, to all psychoneuroses of defense. In effect, though Freud articulated his argument through sustaining attention specifically on hysteria, he believed he had likely discovered the root of all significant psychological dysfunction.[19] In another letter to Fliess, he described this discovery as an unparalleled intellectual accomplishment. Lamenting that a lecture he gave on the subject was poorly received by the gatekeepers of his field, he wrote of their incredulity, "And this after one has demonstrated to them a solution to a more than thousand-year-old problem, a 'source of the Nile'! . . . They can all go to hell."[20] The position Freud took in his 1896 papers – the position in which he was doggedly confident and to which his colleagues responded with ridicule and dismissal – was that hysteria (and, ultimately, all psychoneuroses of defense) had its etiological root in premature, passive sexual experiences during early childhood. This is the thesis that would come

[18] Sigmund Freud, *The Origins of Psychoanalysis: Letters to Wilhelm Fliess, Drafts and Notes, 1887-1902*, ed. Marie Bonaparte, Anna Freud, and Ernst Kris (London: Imago, 1954), 127.
[19] This point will become significant for contemporary critics of the seduction theory, such as K.R. Eissler, whose critique will be introduced later in this chapter and discussed at length in chapter three.
[20] Quoted from the letter as translated and printed in Max Schur's *Freud Living and Dying* (New York: International Universities Press, Inc., 1974), 104.

to be known as Freud's seduction theory. Freud arrived at this position based on his clinical work with hysteric patients. In the year in which he was testing the seduction hypothesis he treated eighteen patients who suffered from hysteria, twelve women and six men. In every case, he found that his patients' hysterical symptoms stemmed from a traumatic, passive sexual experience in childhood. Freud's attempts to trace his patients' symptoms back to a root cause led all eighteen patients not only to remember sexual seduction but to *relive* the childhood trauma in the present.[21]

For ease of writing and clarity of argument, I have chosen to use "Aetiology of Hysteria," the third of Freud's three 1896 published essays on the subject, as my primary point of entry into the seduction theory Freud put forward in this phase of his career. This is the essay now considered by Freud's interpreters to be the choice representative of his thought at the time, and it is certainly the most comprehensive. Where necessary, I will supplement my reading of this essay with notes from Freud's other two major publications on the same theme, "Heredity and the Aetiology of Hysteria" and "Further Remarks on the Neuro-Psychoses of Defense."[22] References to relevant material in Freud's letters to Wilhelm Fliess – those letters published outright and others translated and published in secondary literature produced by Jeffrey Masson and Max Schur – will occasionally supplement my reading of Freud's published work.[23]

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[21] See, for example, S.E. 3, 199: "If you submit my assertion that the aetiology of hysteria lies in sexual life to the strictest examination, you will find that it is supported by the fact that in some eighteen cases of hysteria I have been able to discover this connection in every single symptom, and, where the circumstances allowed, to confirm it by therapeutic success."

[22] Sigmund Freud, "Heredity and the Aetiology of the Neuroses," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud* volume 3 (S.E. 3), ed. &trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1962), 141-156; Sigmund Freud, "Further Remarks on the Neuro-Psychoses of Defense," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud* volume 3, Ed. & trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1962), 157-185.

[23] See Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson, *The Assault on Truth: Freud's Suppression of the Seduction Theory* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1984) and Max Schur's *Freud Living and Dying.*

The Seduction Theory

Originally read as a paper at the April 21, 1896 meeting of the Viennese Society for Psychiatry and Neurology, and subsequently published in *The Viennese Clinical Review* that same spring, "Aetiology of Hysteria," is organized in three parts.[24] The first part recounts the steps the field had taken, so far at that point, in its attempts to discern the cause of hysteria. It invites the audience to journey with Freud along the path of reason and observation that led him to his discovery of hysteria's origin. Part two begins by delivering Freud's thesis, the apex to which part one builds – that passive childhood sexual experiences are, as a rule, the efficient cause of hysteria. It then unfolds into a detailed exploration of the objections Freud anticipates from his colleagues. Part three embarks on a more focused discussion of the psychic apparatus and its role in producing hysteria's symptoms following passive childhood sexual experiences.

Freud thinks of his quest to find the cause of hysteria as analogous to any doctor or scientist's effort to identify the source of a patient's illness. In each case, the method of inquiry begins by observing the patient's symptoms and then reasons from those symptoms backward to a cause. Freud's starting point for making the symptoms of hysteria "heard as witnesses to the history of the origin of the illness" is his mentor Josef Breuer's discovery that hysteria's symptoms are the psyche's mnemic, symbolic reproductions of a patient's traumatic experience.[25] Whereas symptoms of an illness like the flu suggest the presence of a virus in the body of the patient, symptoms of an illness like hysteria, according to Breuer, suggest a trauma in the patient's experience. By studying the traumatic scenes to which hysterical symptoms can be traced, Freud argues we can discover in these scenes the specific etiological cause of the symptoms. Just as clinicians are not satisfied to know that the flu is caused by *a* virus but seek to know, also, *which* virus is responsible for the illness, so too,

[24] Sigmund Freud, "Aetiology of Hysteria," *Wiener Klinische Rundschau,* 10 (1896), no. 22 (May 31,1896): 379-81; no. 23 (June 7, 1896): 395-97; no. 24 June 14, 1896): 413-15; no. 25 (June 21, 1896): 432-33; no. 26 (June 28, 2896): 450-52.
[25] S.E. 3, 192.

Freud believed, clinicians ought not be satisfied with Breuer's knowledge that hysteria is caused by *a* trauma but must press on to discover *which* kind of traumatic experience is responsible and *how* that experience is transformed into hysteria's symptoms. This was necessary, Freud believed, if methods for prevention, vaccine, and cure were to be reliably pursued.

The method Freud uses to trace hysteria's symptoms to the traumatic experiences from which they stem is the process he eventually puts forward as psychoanalysis. He assumes as a rule that the patient will not consciously know the reason for their symptoms when they begin analysis, because a constitutive dynamic of hysteria is that the traumatic circumstances responsible for the illness have been repressed by the patient. A patient may, however, remember something about the period of time in which her symptoms first arose. The analyst, therefore, meets individually with a patient and directs the patient to reflect aloud on the circumstances under which she first noticed her symptoms. The analyst encourages the patient to report whatever comes into her mind in response. As the patient moves from one association to the next, what Freud calls a memory chain of the patient's relevant experiences comes into view. He likens this chain to a genealogical family tree in which some members of the memory family intermarry and each is connected to the others through multiple specific and complex relations. The job of the analyst is to bring each component of this genealogical tree into view and then to read the tree as a map to the patient's original (or, to keep up the metaphor, parent) trauma. Under the premise that the chain of associations made by the patient is not random but is determined, instead, by the patient's psychic apparatus – particularly, the psychic dynamics of repression holding the patient's knowledge of the source of her illness out of reach – the analyst's job is to interpret the patient's free associations for what they reveal about the material being repressed. Eventually, as the process of analysis unfolds, the original/parent trauma will be brought into consciousness. It is at this point that the possibility of the illness's cure opens.

The complex genealogical tree of memory chain associations includes quite a number of the patient's experiences. Though each provides its own clues about the source of the patient's illness, only certain of these can be considered the origin of the patient's hysterical symptoms. Freud proposes that there are two criteria an analytically reproduced scene must meet in order to be considered the source of a particular hysterical symptom. First, the experience must be what Freud calls *suitable*. By this, he means that the experience must have qualities about it that bear connection with the kind of symptom it has produced. For example, Freud suggests, an experience suitable to produce the hysterical symptom of vomiting would be one that includes a strong element of disgust, such as viewing a decomposing body, whereas an experience that was in some other way negative but not associated with disgust would not be suitable to produce the specific symptom of vomiting. The second criterion Freud names is that the experience under consideration must include sufficient *traumatic force* to be responsible for the symptom in question. While the experience of eating a piece of partially rotten fruit may be suitable to produce the symptom of vomiting insofar as it provokes disgust, Freud says this kind of experience ought not be considered the cause of hysterical vomiting because it lacks the traumatic force necessary to justify the severe character of the symptom. Whereas, again, the traumatic force of coming upon a decomposing body would correspond better to the severity of the symptom. Certainly, as is the case for nearly all of Freud's theoretical work, determining which of a patient's experiences do and do not meet these two criteria is highly analytically subjective.

For as long as the patient's associations link to scenes that lack either the suitability or traumatic force necessary to bring about the patient's symptoms, the analyst must continue tracing the patient's associations back through the patient's memory to earlier, more significant experiences. "We must ask ourselves," Freud says to his audience,

> where shall we get to if we follow the chains of associated memories which the analysis has uncovered? How far do they extend? Do they come anywhere to a

> natural end? Do they perhaps lead to experiences which are in some way alike, either in content or the time of life at which they occur, so that we may discern in these universally similar factors the aetiology of hysteria of which are in search.[26]

Freud's answer is, emphatically, yes:

> Whatever case and whatever symptom we take as our point of departure, *in the end we infallibly come to the field of sexual experience*. So here for the first time we seem to have discovered an aetiological precondition for hysterical symptoms.[27]

In each case of hysteria Freud has observed, the patient's chain of memory associations has led, in the first place, to sexual experiences in the years of puberty. But, even these scenes on occasion lack either suitability or traumatic force to be considered determinative of the patient's symptoms. For example, Freud presents the case of a patient whose symptoms were traced to a memory from adolescence in which a boy once tenderly stroked her hand and another time pressed his knee against her dress with an expression on his face that communicated sexual arousal. This memory, Freud argues, is too innocuous to produce hysterical symptoms on its own. Thus, analysis presses back from memories of puberty into a patient's early childhood, and when it does so it finds, universally, that each patient's hysterical symptoms have as their root cause a bodily, genital experience of sexual stimulation in early childhood that is both suitable to produce hysterical symptoms and of adequate traumatic force. The etiological cause of hysteria is thus, Freud declares, "sexual experiences affecting the subject's own body – of *sexual intercourse* (in the wider sense)."[28] Freud states as evidence that in each of the eighteen cases of hysteria he analyzed during the period in which he was testing this hypothesis, a scene of early childhood, bodily sexual abuse suitable and of adequate traumatic force to produce the patient's symptoms was recalled by the patient. And, in fact, it was through discovering consistency in the root of hysteria in these eighteen cases that Freud developed his 1896 position on hysteria's etiology.

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[26] S.E. 3, 197-198.
[27] S.E. 3, 199, emphasis original.
[28] S.E. 3, 203, emphasis original.

This thesis, and the theoretical scaffolding that supports it, has come to be known as Freud's seduction theory. *Seduction* is a technical term Freud uses to refer to a particular kind of sexual experience in early childhood. In his 1896 publications he seems to use the word as a catchall for any bodily sexual stimulation passively experienced by a young child. In describing seduction as a passive experience, Freud means that it is a bodily sexual experience imposed on the child by someone else. In "Aetiology of Hysteria" Freud imagines that the active party responsible for the imposition of seduction fits one of three descriptions: 1) an adult stranger who sexually assaults the child, 2) a parent or adult caregiver who carries on an extended sexual, and in some cases emotionally romantic, relationship with the child, or 3) another child who aggressively reenacts on a peer sexual scenes to which they have been previously subjected by an adult who fits the first or second description. The range of acts Freud includes in that which constitutes seduction extends from genital, anal, and oral rape to the, then, apparently common practice of nursemaids putting children to sleep by stroking the child's genitals.[29] In other words, the term *seduction* encompasses what we would today call rape, sexual assault, molestation, adult-child sexual abuse, and child-child sexual abuse. At this point in his career, Freud did not have a concept of children's nonabusive sexual play. Nor is it entirely clear the extent to which he differentiated the practice of putting children to sleep by stroking their genitals – which we would today call abusive – from, for example, the accidental stimulation of a child's genitals a caregiver might trigger while changing a child's diaper or giving him a bath – acts to which we might today attribute psychological significance but not categorize as abuse. For this reason, it would be incorrect to consider the contemporary concept of abuse a direct parallel to Freud's meaning of the word *seduction*. And yet, it is quite clear that Freud's 1896 theory understood the kind of childhood sexual experience etiologically responsible for hysteria as traumatic, frightening, dominating, and characterized by the absence of the child's consent. In his

[29] Carlo Bonomi, "Sexuality and Death," 69.

1896 publications on the subject, he used the words *abuse* (Missbrauch), *rape* (Vergewaltigung), *assault* (Attentat, the French term), *attack* (Angriff), *aggression* (Aggression), *traumas* (Traumen), and *seduction* (Verführung) interchangeably to describe the infantile scenes etiologically responsible for hysteria.

Freud's responses to three of the objections he thinks his colleagues might mount against his thesis add further clarity to the shape of the seduction theory. The first response considers the objection that the memories of early childhood sexual experience Freud claims to have discovered in each of his hysterical patients are not memories at all, but are, rather, intentional lies told by hysterics or fabrications foisted upon them by their doctors. In other words, the concern Freud takes up here is that his patients' memories of childhood seduction are not historically representative. In response, Freud argues at length that scenes of childhood seduction reproduced in analysis should be considered memories of historically accurate experience – of real events, not fabrications. Here, thus, Freud takes a position distinctly counter to that which Elizabeth Loftus and false memory advocates would argue in the 1990s.

To the latter portion of the objection – that Freud has implanted the idea of seduction in the minds of his patients and influenced them by his own suggestion to reproduce scenes of an experience that did not, historically, happen in the patient's life – Freud gives a succinct answer. "I have never yet succeeded in forcing on a patient a scene I was expecting to find, in such a way that he seemed to be living through it with all the appropriate feelings. Perhaps others may be more successful in this."[30] He admits his position is one he cannot prove but considers the objection nonetheless untenable, because he does not believe a memory implanted by an analyst could be accompanied by affect appropriate to the experience being recalled. Freud takes it as a sign of a memory's historical authenticity that a patient not only reports cognitive knowledge of the experience but appears to relive the moment being recalled in its full emotional intensity.

[30] S.E. 3, 205.

To the former part of the objection – that Freud's hysterical patients have lied to him and claimed to have been seduced in childhood when no such thing ever happened in a historical sense – Freud gives several rebuttals. First, Freud tells his audience that patients are, as a rule, resistant to the idea that they have had any such childhood experience of abuse. Hysterics' memories of these events emerge in tandem with incredible resistance and at great cost to the patient. Freud explains,

> While they are recalling these infantile experiences to consciousness they suffer under the most violent sensations, of which they are ashamed and which they try to conceal; and even after they have gone through them once more in such a convincing manner, they still attempt to withhold belief from them, by emphasizing the fact that, unlike what happens in the case of other forgotten material, they have no feeling of remembering the scenes.[31]

Freud reasons that it would not be to the advantage of a person intentionally fabricating a memory to simultaneously put up such resistance to the idea that the memory was real. Therefore, the patient's own reluctance to accept the memory *as memory* should be taken by analysts as evidence that the memory is, in fact, historically representative.

Freud's wording here ("…emphasizing the fact that…they have no feeling of remembering the scenes") has been the subject of considerable debate. Some have taken this line as indication that Freud foisted the label of "memory" onto his patients' analytic reproductions of childhood sexual experiences when listening more closely to those very same patients would have allowed him to see right from the beginning that treating these recollections as memory was an error. If his patients were insisting all along that these reproductions were not memories, critics argue, Freud's seduction theory – founded on the claim that his patients' reproductions of seduction in analysis absolutely were memories of historically real experiences – was always compromised. Not only that, the seduction theory, in this view, represents an analytic and clinical method that fails to adequately attend to and respect patients as a source of knowledge about what ails them.[32]

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[31] S.E. 3, 204.

[32] See, for example, K.R. Eissler, *Freud and the Seduction Theory: A Brief Love Affair*, (New York: International Universities

There is another way, however, to read the clinical situation Freud describes. Confirming something quite similar to Freud's conjectures about the relationship between trauma and repression, contemporary traumatic memory researchers have demonstrated that some survivors of childhood sexual violence either repress or dissociate from their memories of that violence, and that in some of these cases, memory of the abuse later returns to consciousness. In these cases, it is common for survivors to feel conflicted about the memory, to feel crazy for considering that something they had not remembered for years of their lives – something so horrifying, no less – may have truly happened. It is not uncommon for survivors in this position to do all they can to avoid the idea that what has been recalled represents historical experience. This is what happened, for example, in Eileen Franklin Lipskur's case, according to Lenore Terr. In her twenties, Lipskur began to remember scenes in which her father sexually abused her and scenes in which he raped and killed Lipskur's childhood friend, Susan Nason. Though Lipskur's father, George Franklin, was eventually convicted of Nason's murder, Lipskur spent months after the return of her memory doubting that the scenes she recalled were real. It was easier for her to dismiss the contents of her mind than it was to consider that what she was remembering had happened.[33] We might also think of this dissertation's opening anecdote in which I describe my own incredulity in my memories of child sexual abuse and the long and complex process by which I came to accept my memory as genuine. Freud's description of his patients as being reluctant to believe that their memories were really *memories* can be interpreted as quite fitting of what one might expect to hear from a trauma survivor recalling terrifying experiences that, until the moment of the memory's return, had been banished from consciousness.

Press, Inc., 2001), 115-116. For rebuttal, see Judith Herman's first chapter in *Trauma and Recovery*.

[33] Lenore Terr, *Unchained Memories: True Stories of Traumatic Memories Lost & Found* (New York: BasicBooks, 1994), 32-60. Interestingly, the legal case against Frank Lipskur was one in which both Terr and Elizabeth Loftus testified as expert witnesses, Terr for the prosecution and Loftus for the defense. Loftus writes about her reasons for doubting the genuineness of Eileen Franklin Lipskur's recovered memory in *The Myth of Repressed Memory:False Memoties and Allegations of Sexual Abuse* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), and Terr writes of her reasons for confidence in Eileen's memory in *Unchained Memories*.

In truth, Freud's comment that his patients "had no feeling of remembering" the scenes of seduction that they recalled can be interpreted both for and against him, depending on whether the reader is inclined to believe that Freud's patients were or were not survivors of childhood sexual trauma. Nonetheless, Freud's position at the time was that because it was clear to him from the patient's affect that the patient was reliving a past traumatic experience as she reproduced the scene of childhood sexual abuse in analysis, and because he did not believe that all eighteen of his patients should be able to convincingly appear to relive a scene they had no basis for in experience, the analytically reproduced scenes ought to be considered memory. The fact that patients were reluctant to treat these reproductions as memory signaled to Freud that the traumatic impact of these experiences was severe and convinced him that his patients, at the very least, were not intentionally trying to trick him into believing they had been abused when they had not.

Freud is emphatic on this point and repeats it in his other 1896 publications. In "Heredity and the Etiology of the Neuroses," he addresses those who supposed that his hysterical patients had lied to him about their childhood experiences this way:

> How is it possible to remain convinced of the reality of these analytic confessions which claim to be memories preserved from the earliest childhood, and how is one to arm oneself against the tendency to lies and the facility of invention which are attributed to hysterical subjects?...The fact is that these patients never repeat these stories spontaneously, nor do they ever in the course of a treatment suddenly present the physician with the complete recollection of a scene of this kind. One only succeeds in awakening the psychical trace of a precocious sexual event under the most energetic pressure of the analytic procedure, and against an enormous resistance. Moreover, the memory must be extracted from them piece by piece, and while it is being awakened in their consciousness they become prey to an emotion which it would be hard to counterfeit.[34]

What we can take away from Freud's repeated defense of his patients' honesty is that by the time he had constructed his 1896 theory, he had thought deeply about whether he ought to consider his patients' recollections historically genuine or fabricated. So deeply, in fact, that his answer to those

[34] S.E. 3, 152.

who would doubt his confidence in the genuineness of his patients' recollections is robust enough that it is still used by clinical psychological professionals today. Jeffrey Masson said it well. To the question of how we can feel confident that reports of abuse are historical memory and not falsifications, Masson says,

> The answer that Freud provides is as true today as it was then – namely, that the feelings evoked by such memories could not be the product of invention. Long-lost affects, which belonged to the original event and have been locked away for years, surface.[35]

A second reason Freud argues that patients' recollections of childhood seduction ought to be considered historically genuine is that he finds telling similarities between the recollections of different patients. The best explanation for these similarities, in Freud's opinion, is that the patients have, in fact, experienced the same kind of event. Were this not the case, the consistencies between accounts would suggest – absurdly, in Freud's opinion – that the patients (who did not know one another) had rehearsed their fabrications together to assure consistency. The appearance of a consistent pattern in the dynamics of how sexual abuse is perpetrated and how it is experienced by victims attests, for Freud, to the likelihood that his patients' reports are historically true.

Freud's third reason that patients' memories of seduction ought to be considered real is that he finds patients will often recount disturbing details of these memories as if they were harmless. Freud reasons that if patients were intentionally trying to deceive him into believing a horrible event had occurred to them that, historically speaking, had not, they would emphasize the terror of such details rather than downplay their significance. Notably, those who study false accusations of sexual violence today agree. A 2012 study of policing and sexual assault in Los Angeles found that, "More than three-quarters of the false reports involved allegations of aggravated rape," thus suggesting that "complainants who file false reports believe that their accounts will be viewed as more credible if

[35] Jeffrey Masson, The Assault on Truth, 91.

they conform to the stereotype of a 'real rape.'"[36] Characteristically, fabricated reports of sexual violence tend to emphasize the egregious nature of the encounter.

More convincing than all of this to Freud, however, is the analytic suitability of the scenes of abuse that patients recall. He uses a child's picture puzzle as a metaphor, observing that when such a puzzle is nearly finished there comes a point when it is clear that only one piece is the right shape to fit in the remaining gap and complete the picture. "In the same way," he argues, "the contents of the infantile scenes turn out to be indispensable supplements to the associative and logical framework of the neurosis, whose insertion makes its course of development for the first time evident, or even, as we might often say, self-evident."[37] Thus, memories of childhood seduction recalled in analysis ought to be considered historically representative because they and they alone suitably explain the hysteric's symptoms. This, Freud tells his audience, was exactly the case for each of the eighteen patients on whose analysis Freud's seduction thesis is based.

The very last defense Freud gives of his decision to take his patients' recollections of childhood seduction as historically genuine is that he has managed to corroborate his patients' analytic reproductions with a third party in three of his eighteen cases.[38] This, he considers, is unassailable proof that the childhood sexual experiences these patients recalled in analysis did happen. While it would not be reasonable to think that analysts will always have the opportunity to confirm patients' memories of seduction with a third party, that corroboration spontaneously presented itself in one sixth of Freud's cases is further reason for him to believe that memories of seduction reported in his other fifteen cases are true in a historical sense as well. Therefore, in

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[36] Cassia Spohn and Katharine Tellis, "Policing and Prosecuting Sexual Assault in Los Angeles City and County: A Collaborative Study in Partnership with the Los Angeles Police Department, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, and the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office," National Sexual Violence Resource Center, Accessed April 3, 2019, https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/237582.pdf.

[37] S.E. 3, 205.

[38] Freud says he has confirmed patients' reports of seduction in two instances, not three. I have said three, here, because in one of the two instances to which Freud refers, two separate patients reported abuse perpetrated by the same man. Freud counts this as one case of corroboration. I am choosing to describe it as two cases of corroboration since two survivors' experiences of abuse were substantiated.

response to the objection that Freud has mistaken his patients' false memories for genuine ones, Freud shapes the seduction theory into a framework built on the premise that people who recall sexual abuse ought to be believed, and that their memories are reliable reflections of what happened to them historically.

Another set of objections Freud addresses focuses on the relationship of his thesis – that childhood sexual seduction is the etiological root of hysteria – to the actual prevalence of seduction in European homes and societies. One form of this objection is that seduction is not a common enough occurrence to account for the prevalence of hysteria. If seduction is rare, and seduction is the etiological cause of hysteria, hysteria should be at least as rare if not more so. The number of hysteria cases far outpaces the rate of sexual abuse of children, these critics claim, and so childhood seduction cannot account for hysteria. Freud flatly retorts, "It seems to me certain that our children are far more often exposed to sexual assaults than the few precautions taken by parents in this connection would lead us to expect."[39] Freud is insistent that sexual assault against children is a much more common occurrence than most of bourgeois European society is ready to admit.[40] He attributes the high prevalence of child sexual abuse, in part, to assaults perpetrated on children by

[39] S.E. 3, 207.

[40] I believe it is correct to presume that what Freud means by the term *sexual assault* is not quite equivalent to the term's contemporary usage. On one hand, against Caitlin Flanagan's argument for using the term only to apply to "monstrous" and maximally hostile instances of sexual coercion, Freud clearly does include under the umbrella of sexual assault forms of seduction that are characterized by a seducer's affect of love or affection. Overt hostility is not requisite for sexual assault as Freud uses the term. On the other hand, though he does recognize that lack of consent contributes to the fear and domination a child feels in response to sexual assault, Freud does not have the contemporary framework of consent in mind as he structures his own definition of sexual assault, so it would be going too far to fully identify Freud's usage with contemporary notion of sexual assault as "a sexual encounter that lacks consent." As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, it is not clear that Freud differentiates at this time in his career between an adult's intentional and accidental genital stimulation of a child, though in many ways his analysis gravitates toward an understanding of sexual assault that at least deemphasizes accidental stimulation if it doe not explicitly reject accidental stimulation from sexual assault's definition. Later in Freud's career, he would, on one hand, dramatically reduce the frequency with which he used the term *sexual assault,* and on the other, he would draw far less of a distinction between accidental and intentional genital stimulation. The fact of sexual arousal would displace the means by which that arousal occurred as the central focus of analysis. In any case, it is at least possible that the definition of sexual assault was part of what was at issue in the objection that the seduction theory required the occurrence of seduction to be more frequent than it, in reality, was. In other words, if Freud considered the practice of putting children to sleep by stoking their genitals to be sexual assault and if this practice was considered acceptable by his colleagues, it is possible that the debate over whether or not the seduction theory posited sexual assault in greater or lesser proportions than sexual assault was happening in society was at least in part a debate about how sexual assault ought to be conceived.

other children, but he holds adults ultimately responsible in each case, arguing that children who are sexually aggressive toward peers are always prompted to such behavior by prior abusive actions they have endured from adults. Freud all but chastises his colleagues who are reluctant to consider that such a number of adults could be treating children so harshly. He indicts their incredulity as motivated by denial rather than observation.

The other form of this objection Freud imagines some in his audience will put forward makes the opposite claim. This objection asserts that childhood sexual experience is far more common than hysteria, so that taking seduction as the etiological root of neurosis would require a much higher number of hysterical cases than is true to the clinical landscape. It reasons that if each case of sexual abuse in childhood were to develop into hysteria the number of hysterics would be dramatically higher than it is. In response, Freud says those who would make this objection have misunderstood what it means to declare something the etiological root of an illness. Freud makes an analogy between hysteria and tuberculosis that warrants close attention:

> Is not the tubercle bacillus ubiquitous and is it not inhaled by far more people than are found to fall ill of tuberculosis? And is its aetiological significance impaired by the fact that other factors must obviously be at work too before the tuberculosis, which is its specific effect, can be evoked? In order to establish the bacillus as the specific aetiology it is enough to show that tuberculosis cannot possibly occur without its playing a part. The same doubtless applies to our problem. It does not matter if many people experience infantile sexual scenes without becoming hysterics, provided only that all the people who become hysterics have experienced scenes of that kind. The area of occurrence of an aetiological factor may be freely allowed to be wider than that of its effect, but it must not be narrower. Not everyone who touches or comes near a smallpox patient develops smallpox; nevertheless infection from a smallpox patient is almost the only known aetiology of the disease.[41]

The point Freud has in mind to make here is that the objection misunderstands what it means to designate childhood sexual assault the etiological cause of hysteria. Doing so does not claim that every person who experiences sexual assault in childhood will develop hysteria as an adult. It

[41] S.E. 3, 209.

establishes, more simply, that when hysteria does occur, every case can be traced to the presence of a sexual experience of seduction in the hysteric's childhood years.

While this is an apt defense against the stated objection, it opens Freud to a series of more contemporary objections such as those articulated by K.R. Eissler. Representing a significant consensus among psychoanalysts, it is Eissler's view that because the seduction theory posits that all psychological neurosis stems from premature, passive sexual experience, it implicitly claims that no experience except for early childhood sexual abuse can adversely affect the psyche.[42]

> The world of the seduction theory is a simple one…A virtually Leibnizian pre-established harmony is believed to apply to human development, apart from the well defined, narrow reef of sexual abuse. Parents may die prematurely, go to jail, be drunkards, get divorced – nothing can threaten the growing child's future mental health. It is impossible for children to succumb to neurosis in later life if adults honor their unpreparedness for sex up to puberty.[43]

And to an extent, Eissler is correct. Read in its strictest sense, Freud's seduction theory posits not simply that *there are* adverse psychological repercussions *when* children are sexually abused, but also – and this is Freud's point of central emphasis – that *every case* of hysteria (and, if we take seriously Freud's tentative suggestion that the seduction theory applies more broadly, *every case* of psychological neurosis) stems from a childhood experience of seduction. Freud's seduction theory does not, therefore, leave room to trace the etiological roots of neurotic symptoms to any other kind of childhood trauma or to traumas of a sexual or other nature that occur after childhood. Other traumas may exacerbate the impact of sexual abuse experienced before puberty. A diverse array of

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[42] Recall that though Freud put forward the seduction theory as an answer to the etiology of hysteria he also hypothesized that the seduction theory could account for the etiology of obsessional and paranoid neuroses – for all psychoneuroses of defense. Freud did not argue definitively that this was the case, but he did suggest that this is what he expected would be found if the seduction hypothesis were tested with obsessional and paranoid patients. It is based on this expectation of Freud's that Eissler interprets the seduction theory as positing that *all* psychological neuroses can only be the result of sexual abuse in childhood. While, if Freud had carried his seduction theory through, and if he had come to the concrete conclusion that it did account for the etiology of all psychoneuroses of defense, Eissler's critique would be spot on, Freud did not test the seduction theory with patients who suffered from non-hysterical neuroses, and he actually never put forward the argument he expected would follow. Eissler's critique, then, reads to me as both revealing of the seduction theory's limitations and as premature. Eissler does not acknowledge that Freud's extension of the seduction theory beyond hysteria was only ever tentative.

[43] Eissler, Freud and the Seduction Theory, 280.

traumas may be linked in a patient's genealogical tree of memory chains that lead patient and analyst together back to an original seduction trauma, but none of these except for seduction can be the root *cause* of the patient's distress. If a person does not experience sexual abuse in childhood, other kinds of traumatic experience cannot alone produce neurotic symptoms. That is what it means for Freud to say that early childhood, passive sexual experience is the etiological ground of hysteria and of, more generally, the psychoneuroses of defense.

I will return to Eissler's critique of Freud's seduction theory in chapter three, which focuses on Freud's own disavowal of the seduction theory and replacement of it with the Oedipal paradigm of childhood sexuality. Eissler is a vocal supporter of this move. For now, what this snapshot of Eissler's critique helps us to see clearly about the seduction theory is that the analogy Freud draws between hysteria and tuberculosis was, for Freud, quite a tight one. Freud saw the relationship between childhood sexual abuse and adult hysteria as parallel to the relationship between coming into contact with the tubercle bacillus bacteria and developing tuberculosis. Just as a physician who diagnoses a patient with tuberculosis can be logically certain that, as long as the diagnosis is correct, the patient inhaled the tubercle bacillus bacteria, an analyst who correctly diagnoses a patient with hysteria (and, by Freud's tentative hypothesis that the seduction theory explains more than just hysteria, an analyst who correctly diagnoses a patient with psychoneurosis in general) can be certain, according to the seduction theory, that the patient experienced sexual abuse in childhood.

Here, Freud's intention to establish psychoanalysis as a science also appears. In Freud's use of the tuberculosis metaphor to describe what it means to say that the etiology of hysteria is rooted in an experience of sexual seduction in childhood, the degree to which Freud was, disciplinarily speaking, intent on establishing psychoanalysis as a legitimate medical science comes through. Though the status of psychoanalysis as a science has always been contested and has largely been rejected by contemporary scientific disciplines, Freud scholars agree that Freud, himself, "claims

consistently that psychoanalysis *is a science* of the mind."[44] Particularly in the early years of his career, Freud saw his research as a contribution to science and sought for psychoanalysis to be accepted by the medical establishment as a scientific innovation in the field of psychiatry. Thus, while Freud's work is now read and used far more by humanities scholars than by medical doctors and scholars of science, the logic and structure of scientific method is integral to, though not exhaustive of, his development of the seduction theory and his understanding of the theory's implications.

The last of Freud's comments on the seduction theory that we will review come in response to Freud's anticipation that some of his colleagues will reject his thesis based on skepticism that a childhood experience can lie dormant for a long period of time, producing no ill effect, and then develop into neurotic illness years or decades later. What, this objection asks, accounts for the time delay between hysteria's etiological cause and the onset of its symptoms? How can it be that, as Freud says it, "the *memory* of infantile sexual experiences produces such an enormous pathogenic effect, while the actual experience itself has none"?[45] In another place, he states the problem this way:

> It is true that we cannot help asking ourselves how it comes about that this memory of an experience that was innocuous at the time it happened, should posthumously produce the abnormal effect of leading a psychical process like defense to a pathological result, while it itself remains unconscious.[46]

Here is another moment in Freud's articulation of the seduction theory that has invited contemporary scrutiny. Much has been made Freud's description of childhood sexual experiences as initially "innocuous." Eissler, for example, interprets this comment as evidence that, first, Freud's seduction theory did not understand how severe experiences of sexual abuse are for children *as children*, and second, that Freud's seduction theory was internally inconsistent because his insistence

[44] Volney Gay, *Reading Freud: Psychology, Neurosis, and Religion* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), xii.
[45] S.E. 3, 213.
[46] S.E. 3, 213.

that childhood abuse is innocuous seems at odds with his description of such experiences as causing children great fright.

I would argue that those who take Eissler's position have misinterpreted Freud's use of the term *innocuous*. Freud does not mean to suggest that sexual abuse in childhood does not intensely or adversely impact children. He is clear that it, in fact, does. What Freud means when he calls such experiences initially innocuous is strictly that hysterical symptoms do not immediately manifest. To go back to the analogy Freud makes between hysteria and tuberculosis, Freud is making the point that there is a period of time in which the tubercle bacillus incubates in the body before producing symptoms of tuberculosis. It is this period of incubation that he is calling innocuous. Passive sexual experiences in childhood are innocuous insofar as they do not immediately produce symptoms of hysteria. Though Freud's comprehension of the traumatic impact of sexual abuse on children was certainly incomplete (we know now that many abused children *do* manifest traumatic symptoms in childhood), it is only with respect to the onset of the specific symptoms of hysteria that he can be read as describing such an experience as innocuous for a child.[47]

The most direct answer Freud gives to the objection that asks how the etiological cause of hysteria can lie dormant for years or decades before it produces the onset of hysterical symptoms is that he does not yet know the answer. Hypothesizing that an adequate answer would be found in greater understanding of how normal human psychology works in general, he assures his audience, "this problem may be allowed to remain unsolved for the time being, without detracting from the

[47] Freud also says in this section of "Aetiology of Hysteria" that, "…there is nothing we could have done or need to do about the fact that (children) have had such [sexually abusive] experiences" (p. 211). It is unclear what this comment suggests about the degree to which Freud does or does not see the sexual experience itself as being psychologically damaging. He could be read as saying, simply, that what has happened in the past cannot be undone. Or, he could be indicating that the experience of sexual abuse ought not be the psychoanalyst's primary concern. Certainly, later in his life, the latter interpretation would be appropriate. It is not clear to me that it is as appropriate an interpretation of his thought in 1896. In any case, Freud's clear denunciation of child sexual abuse as an experience that is frightening and dominating and destructively repercussive for children must be held in tension with his pronouncement that there is nothing analysts could have or need to do about the fact that such experiences have been had.

value of the insight we have so far gained into the aetiology of hysterical phenomena."[48] It is not necessary, he argues, to know the precise mechanism by which an experience in childhood is able to produce hysterical symptoms in adulthood without doing so in the years immediately following the experience in order to have confidence that it is, in fact, *that* childhood experience that produced the adult symptoms. And yet, though he is not ready to claim complete knowledge of this mechanism, he reflects at length throughout his 1896 writings on how he suspects it works. Drawing together Freud's musings on the process by which hysterical symptoms are produced will prepare us to say a direct word, at long last, on the relationship between memory, history, experience, and sexual violence trauma in Freud's seduction theory.

We know by now Freud believes the first step in the development of hysteria is an experience of genital sexual stimulation in childhood. The observation that this particular kind of experience lies at the foundation of the illness is the *caput nili* discovery Freud announced in his 1896 publications. Freud identifies a variety of immediate effects such an experience has on a child. He describes isolated instances of sexual assault perpetrated by an adult on a child as causing the child intense fright, and he suggests that the child's lack of consent in the encounter is fundamental to the fear it engenders. Abusive relationships that adults carry on with children for some time have the complication, Freud adds, of entangling the child in a sort of "love relationship." And though he does not expand on the details, Freud says that sexual relationships between two children have, "the most far-reaching consequences for the pair."[49] In any case, Freud argues that the dynamics of the particular way in which the child was sexually abused, including, for example, the dominating power of the abuser, the helplessness of the child, the child's dependence on the abuser, the experience of being used for the abuser's pleasure, the vulnerability of the child to punishment if they resist, the lack of control the child has over their own sexual arousal, and so on, are, "stamped upon the later

[48] S.E. 3, 213-214.
[49] S.E. 3, 208.

development of the individual and of his neurosis, in countless permanent effects."[50] In a moment I will return to this point – particularly, what it means for the dynamics of sexual abuse to be "stamped" onto the development of the child in a way that comes to characterize that individual's neuroses. First, a word about the chronology of hysteria's development from the time of the original abuse to the onset of these "stamped" symptoms.

Though a child will be frightened or otherwise disturbed by the experience of sexual abuse at the time that it occurs, Freud does not consider this reaction of the child's psychologically pathogenic. The fear does, however, constitute a threat to the child's developing psychological system, and in some cases a child's reaction to this threat is to repress memory of the abuse. At this point in Freud's career, he understood repression to be a process by which threatening memories were thrust out of consciousness for the sake of self-protection. Though consciously inaccessible, repressed memories were not thought to be benign. Rather, from their place in the unconscious mind Freud theorized that they continued to exert a certain psychological pressure on the person holding them. This pressure could manifest in myriad life-interrupting forms. Freud believed that not all children who experience sexual abuse do repress memory of the event, and in 1896 he could not say what leads some children to repress and others to retain conscious memory of the abuse.[51] However, he is clear that it is *only* those who repress the memory who are at risk of developing hysteria. Thus, if step one in the development of hysteria is an experience of sexual abuse in childhood, step two is the child's repression of her memory of the abuse.

Even when these two conditions are met, hysterical symptoms do not develop right away. Freud reasons that because a child's sexual system is underdeveloped, repressed memories of

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[50] S.E. 3, 215.

[51] Here is a point at which Elizabeth Loftus's perspective sharply breaks from Freud's. Whereas Freud, even though he could not explain the reason for the difference, maintained that some survivors of childhood sexual abuse *do* repress memory of the event while others *do not*, Loftus takes the fact that memory of childhood sexual abuse is not *always* repressed as reason to suspect that this kind of memory is *never* repressed.

childhood sexual experiences are kept hidden fairly easily through the remainder of childhood. In other words, Freud believed that the sexually immature child encounters no internal or external stimuli that activate (or, in contemporary parlance, *trigger*) the unconscious memory. For the remainder of childhood, according to Freud's seduction theory, the memory is allowed to rest quietly. However, at puberty a child's sexual system matures. An adolescent, unlike a child, has numerous occasions – through their own internal sexual excitation, through romantic courtships, and through initiation into the world of adult conversation and sociality – to become reminded of their earliest sexual experiences. Thus, it is at this time of life that unconscious memories of childhood sexual experience have the opportunity to be aroused. The third step in the development of hysteria, therefore, is for a child who was sexually abused and who repressed memory of that experience to mature into adolescence and encounter circumstances that activate the unconscious memory.

Hysterical symptoms arise, then, when such a person comes into contact with a set of circumstances that threatens to bring a repressed traumatic memory of childhood sexual experience into consciousness. Ideas or thoughts that have a logical or associative relationship with a person's unconscious memories of childhood sexual abuse are the kind that threaten to bring the unconscious memories of abuse into consciousness and so are too, themselves, repressed for the sake of keeping the childhood experiences repressed. The psyche defensively "thrusts" threatening ideas into unconsciousness and creates hysterical symptoms in their place. In this way, the original traumatic memory is kept hidden from consciousness. Its energy is transformed into hysterical symptoms and discharged through their expression. Thus, sexual *experiences* in childhood, according to the seduction theory, exert a pathogenic psychical effect through their *memory-traces,* through the pressure exerted on the psyche by the unconscious memory of abuse and through the network of connections the mind makes between that threatening memory and other benign memories and

experiences in the adolescent or adult's ongoing life. The specific form of hysteria's symptoms that develop in any particular person are, thus, determined both by the childhood experiences themselves and by the experiences in puberty and later on that threaten to bring childhood experiences of sexual abuse into consciousness. Freud's most concise summary of this complex idea is to say, simply, that "*Hysterical symptoms are derivatives of memories which are operating unconsciously.*"[52]

How does this work in the lives of real people? Freud gives a number of examples. In one case a man who, as a child, was forced to sexually pleasure an adult woman with his foot, in early adulthood developed neurotic fixation on his legs and hysterical paraplegia. Unaware of the abuse he experienced in childhood, through a chain of memories and associations his unconscious self-reproach for having complied with his abuser's sexual demands manifested as simultaneous fixation on and dissociation from the part of his body that betrayed him. In another instance, a woman developed severe anxiety attacks that would resolve only when a particular sister of hers came to her side and stayed with her. It was discovered through analysis that this woman was sexually abused as a child and that her abuser would ask her each time he was about to begin an assault if this sister was home. The sister's presence or absence made the difference between whether or not the abuser would carry out his plan. Thus, when unconsciously reminded of her childhood abuse, this sister's presence was all that could produce a sense of safety in the patient.[53]

This, then, is what it means to say that the original dynamics of a child's sexual experience are "stamped upon the later development of the individual and of his neurosis." Particular features of the abuse – the part of the body most directly involved or the conditions that made the difference between danger and safety – come to characterize the shape of the specific hysterical symptoms that develop in that person's eventual neurosis. And, it is this sure link between the hysteric's symptoms and the repressed memory responsible for her illness that enables an analyst to do the careful work

[52] S.E. 3, 212, emphasis original.
[53] S.E. 3, 215.

of moving backward through the patient's associations to uncover the source of the patient's plight. This process is made both possible and unendingly complex by the fact that, according to Freud, the specific ideas, thoughts, memories, or experiences that in adolescence or adulthood trigger hysterical symptoms are those that arouse the childhood unconscious traumatic memories from multiple directions simultaneously. In other words, Freud says, "*hysterical symptoms are overdetermined.*"[54] They are determined multiply. They relate to more than one experience and come about through strongly reinforced chains of association.

Freud notes that to an outside observer, hysterical symptoms seem to be exaggerated reactions to circumstances that most would consider harmless. For example, the girl whose hysterical symptoms were triggered when a boy brushed his hand against hers may be supposed to simply be of a fragile psychological constitution. For Freud, one's psychological constitution refers to the structures of the psyche that are biologically inherited and therefore not within one's control.[55] It is possible, Freud grants, that some hysterical symptoms may occasionally result from constitutional issues like a chemical or other kind of imbalance in the brain. But, he argues, this is not usually the case. It is not, in general, true that hysterics are ill because they have a sensitive constitution, either due to heredity or to degenerative atrophy. In most cases, rather, hysterical persons are not overreacting but only appear to be doing so to the outside observer who does not know the conditions that warrant the strength of the reaction. Freud says that hysterical reactions,

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[54] S.E. 3, 216, emphasis original.

[55] It is not clear in Freud's 1896 papers what he thinks the relationship is between the brain, the rest of the physiological body, and the psyche. The term *psychological constitution* suggests a view of the psyche as in some sense a material structure of the body, and this is unsurprising given Freud's medical training in psychiatry and given that the dominant lens for investigating hysteria at the time was that of medical psychiatry. Freud was, as we have discussed, interested in establishing psychoanalysis as a legitimate science, particularly at this early point in his career. When he speaks in terms of heredity, then, he means genetics and not, for example, the contemporary notion that psychological tendencies can be passed through social relations (i.e. generational trauma). The importance of Freud's argument that hysteria is *not* hereditary and *not* the result of a weak psychological constitution (as osteoporosis might be the result of weak bones) is that rejecting a physiological explanation for hysteria opens the door for Freud to interpret particular forms of experience as constitutive of hysteria's symptoms. This, in turn, grounds Freud's argument that hysteria's cure is not to be found in surgical treatment but in the talking cure – an intentional discursive method for processing pathogenic experiences.

when put into context of the individual's experiences, are revealed as reasonably proportionate to those experiences: "In reality, this reaction is proportionate to the exciting stimulus; thus it is normal and psychologically understandable."[56] Freud asks his audience to understand that when they encounter a reaction that seems extreme, it is better to assume that genuine motives of which they are unaware are triggering the severity of the reaction than to assume that the reaction is truly exaggerated. Hysterics are not constitutionally abnormal or overly sensitive. They are reacting to serious injuries hidden from conscious view – their own view as well as that of observers.

Hysteria, then, is a condition that arises from a particular relationship between past experience, memory, and present life: "One has the impression, indeed, that with hysterical patients it is as if all their old experiences – to which they have already reacted so often and, moreover, so violently – had retained their effective power; as if such people were incapable of disposing of their psychical stimuli."[57] This is, indeed, what Freud believes is happening. Past experiences "come into operation in the form of *unconscious memories*"[58] in such a way that hysterical persons are unable to transform them into powerless memories. It is as if past experience has come to life in the present, without making itself consciously known. Accordingly, Freud proposes that hysteria is to be cured by transforming the intrusive yet unconscious memories of childhood sexual abuse into conscious, powerless ones. In the seduction theory, hysteria is theorized as a memory illness, and psychoanalysis is presented as a memory cure.

History, Experience, and Memory

History, *experience*, and *memory* are terms that have each figured prominently in my discussion of Freud's seduction theory so far. They are terms that he has used to describe his own thought as

[56] S.E. 3, 217.
[57] S.E. 3, 218.
[58] S.E. 3, 219, emphasis original.

well. Before we turn our attention to how these concepts are working in Freud's seduction theory, I will spend a moment clarifying what I mean when I use them.

When I use the term *history* I am directing our attention to land on the question of what did and did not happen in the past. This is not the only way the word can be used, and I would argue that it is also not the best way the word can be used. The philosophy of history includes approaches to history as an unfolding process,[59] as hermeneutic or narrative construction,[60] as conceptual,[61] and as will be discussed in connection with Flora Keshgegian's theological project in the second half of this dissertation, as memory.[62] But for the purposes of the problem I am tracing, I need a word that calls up a sense of event-based factuality. Hillary Clinton did not win the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Donald Trump was inaugurated as the 45th President of the United States in January of 2017. This happened. The Holocaust happened. Chattel slavery happened. Lynchings happened. These are events that, historically speaking, occurred. They are, therefore, in the sense in which I am using the term, events of *history*.[63] When I direct attention to Freud's concept of history in the

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[59] The quintessential representative of this tradition would be Hegel's approach to history in his 1807 text *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller, ed. by J. N. Findlay, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).

[60] For example, see Wilhelm Dilthey, *Hermeneutics and the Study of History* (1860–1903), (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

[61] For example, see Koselleck's contributions to Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck's edited collection *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, 8 volumes (Stuttgart: Klett, 1972–97). For an English language discussion of Koselleck's notion of conceptual history, see Niklas Olson's *History in the Plural: An Introduction to the Work of Reinhart Koselleck* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012).

[62] Flora Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories: A Theology of Healing and Transformation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000).

[63] This way of approaching history raises a host of questions around the degree to which history can or cannot be considered objective that I will not be able to thoroughly engage within the scope of my argument. For example, discussing the manner in which the philosophy of history has posed such questions, Daniel Little asks: "Is there a basis for saying that events or circumstances in the past have objective, fixed characteristics that are independent from our representation of those events? Is there a representation-independent reality underlying the large historical structures to which historians commonly refer (the Roman Empire, the Great Wall of China, the imperial administration of the Qianlong Emperor)?" To bring these questions home to my approach to history in this chapter we might ask, Is there a representation-independent reality underlying Donald Trump's inauguration? The Holocaust? Or any specific instance of lynching in the United States? More to the point, Is there a basis for saying that the event a person describes as a past experience of sexual assault has objective, fixed characteristics independent from that person's representations of the events? Little's treatment of these questions represents the way I have chosen to handle them in this dissertation:

> We can work our way carefully through this issue, by recognizing a distinction between the objectivity of past events, actions and circumstances, the objectivity of the contemporary facts that resulted from these past events, and the objectivity and fixity of large historical entities. The past occurred in precisely the way that it

seduction theory, then, I am fundamentally asking: In what way does it matter for Freud's seduction theory that the instances of childhood sexual abuse recalled by his patients happened or did not happen?

When I refer to *experience* I am speaking of the manifold impressions made on a person or group when that person or group encounters the world.[64] Whereas the question of history leans toward an inquiry into the objectivity of the past, to ask about experience is to inquire about something more subjective, even as objective-leaning history and subjective-leaning experience are inseparably linked. In other words, *experience*, in the way I am using the term, derives from history but implies particularity, impact, and interpretation. When I direct attention to Freud's concept of experience in the seduction theory, then, I have in mind to ask: What role does the subjective experience of sexual abuse have in Freud's seduction theory, and how is that experience related to history and memory?[65]

When I use the term *memory* in this dissertation I have at least two senses of the word in mind. In the broader sense, I mean quite simply the links that connect the present to the past and

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> did—agents acted, droughts occurred, armies were defeated, new technologies were invented. These occurrences left traces of varying degrees of information richness; and these traces give us a rational basis for arriving at beliefs about the occurrences of the past. So we can offer a non-controversial interpretation of the "objectivity of the past." However, this objectivity of events and occurrences does not extend very far upward as we consider more abstract historical events: the creation of the Greek city-state, the invention of Enlightenment rationality, the Taiping Rebellion. In each of these instances the noun's referent is an interpretive construction by historical actors and historians, and one that may be undone by future historians. To refer to the "Taiping Rebellion" requires an act of synthesis of a large number of historical facts, along with an interpretive story that draws these facts together in this way rather than that way. The underlying facts of behavior, and their historical traces, remain; but the knitting-together of these facts into a large historical event does not constitute an objective historical entity (Little, 2017).

Thus, what I am primarily interested in when I use the term *history* in this chapter is *the way that the past happened*. And one of the central problems this dissertation traces is how thought on sexual violence conceives of the relationship between the way that the sexually violent past happened and our access to knowledge about that past through survivors' testimony.

[64] Here, I mean for "world" experience to be inclusive of, and not in opposition to, "self" experience.
[65] I acknowledge that this way of approaching experience raises just as many questions as my approach to the concept of history. Though I will not offer a thorough philosophical treatment of the category of experience here, one fruitful trajectory for continued research may be to bring the work I have done in this chapter into conversation not only with the philosophy of history but also with phenomenology and with broader philosophical approaches to the problem of perception.

open the possibility of a connected future. In this sense, fat cells and neurons and muscular tissue have memory. Cultures have memory. Migrations and seasons and Christian liturgical celebrations are expressions of memory in this broad sense.[66] In my discussion of Freud's theories, however, I often have a narrower sense of memory in mind, a specific kind of memory that psychologists and neurobiologists study as distinctive of human cognitive and developmental processes. There are a number of different taxonomies used to discuss this narrower sense of memory. For consistency, I will use the taxonomy presented by Lenore Terr, whose work has and will continue to show up periodically throughout this dissertation, while referencing aspects of taxonomies more common to philosophical discourse.

Most memory researchers, regardless of disciplinary location, distinguish between *declarative* and *nondeclarative* memory. These are also called, respectively, *explicit* and *procedural* memory. Philosophers of memory and cognition, John Sutton and Kourken Michaelian, explain that declarative/explicit memory is that which involves, "the encoding, storage, and retrieval of content that the subject can, at least in principle, bring to consciousness," whereas nondeclarative/procedural memory is that which does not.[67] Declarative memory involves the storage and retrieval of, for example, the name of one's third grade teacher, where you were when you found out that the Twin Towers had been attacked, what it was like to participate in your sister's wedding. Each of these examples can, at least in theory, be explicitly recalled and declared. Nondeclaritive memory, on the other hand, is called procedural memory because it has more to do with remembering *how* than it does with remembering *that*, *what,* or *where*. If you are remembering nondeclaratively, or procedurally, you are remembering *how* to walk, *how* to read, or *how* to operate a

[66] This approach to memory is at issue primarily in the second half of this dissertation that focuses on engaging theological texts.
[67] Kourken Michaelian and John Sutton, "Memory," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2017 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/memory/.

microwave, not *that* you walked to the gym today, *what* you read for class, or *where* the microwave is in your office.

Lenore Terr discusses six further categories of memory, each of which involves either declarative memory, nondeclarative memory, or both. The first is what she calls *immediate memory*. We might think of immediate memory that which enables us to go about our days without cognitive interruption. It involves quick associations. For example, immediate memory is what makes it possible for us to finish our sentences, remember why we walked into a room, and remember that when we (who are consumers of animal products) order eggs we might want to consider whether we also want a side of bacon.[68]

Short-term memory, Terr's second category, involves event-based memories that are relatively new but not the sort needed for immediate cognitive functioning. Short-term memory allows a person to remember what they did last weekend, what they had for breakfast yesterday morning, and whether or not their mom called them earlier in the day. Short-term memory is what holds a person's recent experiences in mind. It is what is attacked first in Alzheimer's disease.[69]

The next four types of memory Terr discusses are all considered long-term. She calls the first of the long-term types *memory of knowledge and skills*. This kind of memory is fairly permanent, barring brain injury or disease. When a person learns how to type on a keyboard, tell time, play an instrument, or ride a bicycle, it is unlikely that these skills will ever be entirely forgotten. Knowledge and skills memory is what makes it possible to read without having to re-learn the alphabet every time you pick up a book.[70]

Priming, then, is the kind of memory that enables a person to use knowledge and skills they have already learned to help them learn new things more easily. For example, if a person has already

[68] Lenore Terr, *Unchained Memories*, 48.
[69] Lenore Terr, *Unchained Memories*, 48-49.
[70] Lenore Terr, *Unchained Memories*, 49.

learned one secondary language, priming memory is what enables that person to use their experience of having learned that language to more easily pick up another one. If you know how to play violin, priming memory makes it easier for you to learn to play the cello. Priming memory enables a transfer of knowledge and skills from one area that is familiar to another that is not.[71]

The fifth kind of memory Terr describes is *associative memory*. This is that which is operative in social conditioning. She explains, "If you have been conditioned to do something, such as to be mannerly, to open doors for girls, to curtsy for the Queen – whatever it was you were conditioned to do, you don't have to think about it. You just do it."[72] When we are rewarded or punished for conducting ourselves in a specific way under specific circumstances, we eventually come to associate those circumstances with the kind of conduct we are expected to have in that setting. We remember how to behave without thinking about it and we use that associative memory as a guide for our behavior.[73]

The reason I have rehearsed this extended taxonomy of memory is to help us become clear about the kind of memory that is primarily at issue in my discussion of Freud. This is the final category of memory left to discuss: *episodic memory*. Episodic memory is what we are concerned with when we contemplate adult memories of sexual experiences in childhood. By Terr's description, episodic memory is, "the remembrance of things that happened in your life: the happy episodes, the sad ones, the miserable things, the scary things, the wonderful things, the grand things – or just plainness."[74] Episodic memories are declarative as opposed to procedural. They can, in theory – so long as they have not been repressed – be recalled and declared. They are memories of *that* and *what*

[71] Lenore Terr, *Unchained Memories*, 49.
[72] Lenore Terr, *Unchained Memories*, 49.
[73] Lenore Terr, *Unchained Memories*, 49-50.
[74] Lenore Terr, *Unchained Memories*, 50.

and *who* and *where*. Episodic memories are those that have to do with the events of our past. They are what make up the stories of our lives.[75]

Freud's Seduction Theory and Believe All Women Approach to Believing Survivors

What are we prepared to say, then, about the relationship between memory, experience, history, and sexual violence trauma in Freud's seduction theory? We have seen that Freud is concerned to convince his audience that his patients' memories of sexual abuse in childhood are, in the English translation, "genuine" or "real." And we have seen that what he means by this is that the scenes of sexual abuse remembered and reproduced in analysis are scenes that *happened*. They are representations of the patients' past *experience*. And what a patient experienced is taken to meaningfully reflect what, *historically* speaking, occurred. In a sense, this is a fairly straightforward thing to say: "The events my patients remember are events that happened." For Freud, it is on this basis that the scenes of sexual violence that hysterics reproduce in analysis ought to be believed.

The relationship between experience and history, here, is a tight one. Experience is history happening to a person. While this does not necessarily make history and experience fully one in the same, Freud does not reflect on the possibility of a substantive difference between the two categories. And since the encounter between a particular person and a particular historical event is assumed to produce experience in a straightforward way, a person's experience can be taken as historically representative. An important claim implicit in Freud's seduction theory, then, is that experience *corresponds* with history. Memory, too, is taken by Freud to be meaningfully representative

[75] To clarify the scope of episodic memory further, consider its difference from what philosophers of memory call "semantic memory." Semantic memory is memory about the world that is not memory of an episode one has personally experienced. Therefore, one has an episodic memory of visiting the Eiffel Tower in Paris, but one has a semantic memory that Paris is the capital of France. Likewise, one has an episodic memory of speaking at a conference in Melbourne but has a semantic memory that one's colleague spoke at a conference in Prague on the same day. A memory of an event in the past is semantic, therefore, when one was not present to experience that event oneself, and is episodic when one was. Philosophers' concept of semantic memory is related to psychologists' concept of knowledge memory but is, perhaps, more vulnerable to disintegration. Whereas you may not forget easily that Paris is the capital of France, forgetting that your colleague spoke in Prague on the same day that you spoke in Melbourne is more likely.

of history. Freud sees memory as a person's present point of access to past experience. Memory testifies to experience, and since experience is considered reliably reflective of the historical events to which it corresponds, memory, by proxy, is correspondent with history as well.

Freud does make a distinction, however, between memory and experience that is important for his development of the seduction theory. Recall that not everyone who experiences sexual abuse in childhood develops hysteria. Only those who, 1) have such an experience, 2) repress memory of the event, and 3) later encounter unconscious psychic conflict in association with the repressed memory develop hysterical symptoms. The *experience* of childhood sexual abuse is necessary for hysteria to develop but not sufficient. The experience is the etiological root of hysteria but there is distance between the experience and the onset of the illness. Memory mediates the manifestation of the disease.

Nonetheless, Freud considers memories of seduction reproduced by his patients in analysis as historically accurate reflections of historically representative experiences, and those experiences are taken to be the etiological cause of traumatic psychological neurosis later in life. The memory, history, experience triad, then, is projected as a framework that stabilizes each of its three legs by constructing a correspondent, causal relationship between its parts. Memory corresponds with and is caused by experience. Experience corresponds with and is caused by history. Access to any one leg of the triad scientifically reveals the content of the other two. Since the seduction theory takes history, experience, and memory of childhood seduction to together cause hysterical symptoms, a medical diagnosis of hysteria definitively indicates patterns of history, experience, and memory that accord with surviving sexual violence in childhood.[76]

[76] While I am emphasizing that Freud drew a causal and correspondent relationship between the three points in the memory, history, experience triad it is worth noting that he is doing so perhaps less directly than his contemporaries who left no room in their understanding of hysteria for the involvement of the psychic apparatus at all. In his historical context, by claiming that the psyche transforms memory into "symbols" of trauma prompted by history Freud can be seen as creating a degree of separation between memory and trauma in his seduction theory even as the formal relationship between the two categories remains correspondent.

The seduction theory infuses survivors' memory with authority, but that authority depends on a nearly impossible standard: that survivors' memories of sexual abuse will, in fact, correspond tightly with history. This kind of strict correspondence is a consequence of Freud's argument, not one that he explicitly defends. It is the approach to memory's relationship to history that his seduction theory implicitly recommends. The problem, then, with Freud's seduction theory is that it takes the categories of history, experience, and memory at face value. Freud leaves the categories uninterrogated, and it is his undertheorization of the relationship between history, experience, and memory in sexually traumatic circumstances that makes the theory unable to ultimately support robust solidarity with survivors of this kind of violence and resistance to its perpetuation.

In the contemporary believe all women approach to sexual violence discourse, we can discern a similar problem. Survivors' memories of sexually violent experiences are to be accepted as meaningfully correspondent with the historical events to which they refer. Like Freud's seduction theory, this lens intends to authorize the testimonies of sexual violence survivors as reliable sources of knowledge about history. And yet, because the believe all women approach to believing survivors' testimonies of sexual violence does not interrogate the way that traumatic memory works in the lives of survivors or articulate the kind of truth it reveals about history and experience, any instance of a false or mistaken report made by one alleged survivor calls the authority of every survivor's testimony into question. If one woman can be shown to be undeserving of belief, the appropriateness of believing survivors is in jeopardy. If memory is shown *not* to be historically representative in a correspondent sense then, in the seduction theory and believe all women frameworks, it becomes difficult to continue to talk about that memory as authoritative at all. Since traumatic memory has been shown to be far more complex than a lens of correspondence can support, both Freud's seduction theory and the believe all women position end up unable to fully account for and authorize sexual violence survivors' testimony.

Chapter 3: Freud's Disavowal of the Seduction Theory and the Due Process Approach to Believing Survivors

To say that Freud's seduction theory was received poorly by the scientific community would be an understatement. For reasons widely debated in psychoanalytic history, in September of 1987 Freud confessed to Wilhelm Fliess that he had lost confidence in his seduction theory.[1] After several years of relative silence on the topic, Freud published *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* in which he formally distanced himself from the seduction theory, first attempted to explain the reasons for its error, and laid the foundation for a new theory that would endure prominently in his thinking and practice for the rest of his life: the theory of infantile sexuality framed in terms of the Oedipus Complex.

Freud explained his move away from the seduction theory, in part, by claiming that the hysterical patients who he had previously believed were sexually seduced in childhood were, in fact, not seduced. He proposed, rather, that his patients' reproductions during analysis of scenes in which they were sexually engaged were reproductions of their own fantasies and not historically representative. Centered around the Oedipus myth and articulated in terms of a cis, binary, and heterosexual conceptualization of gender and sexuality, Freud's new theory proposed that the development of the psyche is shaped as children grow to sexually desire their parent of the different sex and competitively revile their parent of the same sex. However, since incest is taboo, Freud theorized that the child may come to banish conscious knowledge of her desire for her father and replace it with a fantasy in which she is the passive recipient of his active sexual attention. Hence,

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[1] For a review of the debate on this history, I affirm Michel Good's recommendations: Frank Sulloway, *Freud : Biologist of the Mind: Beyond the Psychoanalytic Legend* (New York: BasicBooks, 1979): 206-07 & 513-18; Jeffrey Masson, *The Assault on Truth: Freud's Suppression of the Seduction Theory* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1984); Bennett Simon, ""Incest—see under Oedipus complex": The History of an Error in Psychoanalysis," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 40, no. 4 (1992): 955-988; Michael Good, "Karl Abraham, Sigmund Freud, and the Fate of the Seduction Theory," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 43, no. 4 (August 1995): 1137-1168; and K. R. Eissler, *Freud and the Seduction Theory: A Brief Love Affair* (New York: International Universities Press, Inc., 2001).To this list, I would add the first chapter of Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror.* (New York: BasicBooks, 1992).

Freud argued, a number of his patients who he had believed during his development of the seduction theory were remembering real experiences of sexual abuse had simply been remembering the fantasy form of their own repressed sexual desire. The Oedipal theory's interpretation of childhood sexuality, thus, drastically revised Freud's thought on the relationship between traumatic sexual experience, memory, history, and hysteria. Freud's disavowal of the seduction theory marked his theoretical disavowal of the idea that what presents in hysterical patients as memory of childhood sexual abuse is necessarily correspondent history.

Freud's replacement of the seduction theory with the Oedipal paradigm was largely well-received by Freud's peers and by the subsequent psychoanalytic tradition that developed as a result. In the 1980s and 1990s, however, Freud's replacement of the seduction theory with the Oedipal interpretation of childhood sexuality became contentious, particularly in the wake of that period's focus on recovered memories of childhood sexual abuse discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation. The broad affirmation that Freud's theory switch enjoyed up to that point was challenged by a minority group of social workers, feminists, psychoanalysts, and psychologists allied with survivors of sexual violence, and a debate broke out between the majority who continued to view Freud's renunciation of the seduction theory as the scientifically and clinically right choice for him to have made and a new minority who argued that this choice amounted, in one way or another, to an abandonment of sexual violence survivors.

The first part of this chapter rehearses the three most prominent positions in the debate: the standard view taken by the psychoanalytic majority, a critique of that position first articulated by Florence Rush and represented in this dissertation by psychoanalyst and former director of the Freud Archives, Jeffery Moussaieff Masson, and a more recent critique of the standard view offered by trauma specialist Judith Herman that, along with her renown, is currently growing in strength

among trauma and sexual violence specialists across disciplines.[2] The debate has two foci. The first concerns whether Freud was right or wrong to revoke the seduction theory, and the second concerns whether Freud was suitably or problematically *motivated* to do so. In other words, one focus of the debate revolves around the intellectual question of the seduction theory's strength *as a theory*. The other focus of the debate interrogates Freud's internal reasons – conscious, unconscious, intellectual, personal, economic, systemic, and so on – for changing his clinical and theoretical approach to hysterics' memories of sexual abuse in childhood. It will become apparent as I rehearse each position that those who have been vocal in this debate tend to make their arguments in a manner that obscures the distinctions between these two foci. All parties, Freud's supporters as well as his critics, tend to treat the degree to which the seduction theory retains intellectual merits as coextensive with both Freud's personal and intellectual integrity. Because participants in the debate have made their defenses and critiques of the intellectual strength of the seduction theory inseparable from their defenses and critiques of Freud's person, it is necessary for me to present and engage the arguments for and against Freud's integrity in order for me to also discuss the import of the theoretical debate for my project.

My goal in engaging this literature, however, is not to assess Freud's personal integrity. My goal is twofold. First, I aim to read the literature of this debate for what it reveals about the

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[2] Florence Rush is a social worker who is considered instrumental to the 1980s and 1990s increase in public awareness about childhood sexual abuse. She is considered one of the figures whose work opened the way for adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse (particularly those with some form of recovered memory) to come forward and speak about their experiences. It is against the work of those like Florence Rush, then, that Elizabeth Loftus and the False Memory Syndrome Foundation aimed their arguments. The fact that Florence Rush was both the first of this time period to criticize Freud's rejection of the seduction theory and was also instrumental to the believe all women side of the popular debate on sexual violence in the 1980s and 1990s adds to the warrants for reading Freud's theory switch with an eye toward what it can reveal about cultural dynamics of believing or maintaining skepticism toward survivor testimony that persist. In other words, one way to describe part one of this dissertation is to say that it is interested in articulating the series of reasons that it *made sense* for figures like Rush and her resistors to harken back to Freud to construct their arguments. To my knowledge, Rush first put forward her critique of Freud's disavowal of the seduction theory in her book *The Best Kept Secret : Sexual Abuse of Children* (Englewood Cliffs N.J: Prentice-Hall, 1980). A reproduction of the relevant chapter was subsequently reprinted as "The Freudian Coverup" in the journal *Feminism & Psychology* 6, no. 2 (1996): 261-276. Rush wrote again on the subject in an affirming review of Masson's *The Assault on Truth*, titled "The Sins of the Fathers," *The Women's Review of Books* 1, no. 7 (April 1984): 3-5.

relationship between Freud's changing approach to believing survivor testimony and the contemporary believe all women and due process approaches to believing survivor testimony. Those who voice the strongest critiques of Freud in this debate are also figures who represent and have considerably influenced the believe all women position.[3] Those who defend Freud and his decision to replace the seduction theory tend also to express elements of due process culture.[4] This being the case, paying attention to how Freud's critics and defenders each interpret his theory switch in support of their own position offers an opportunity for us to observe the nature of the relationship between Freud's theory switch and the contemporary emergence of believe all women and due process approaches to belief. Tracing the resonance between Freud's two approaches to believing survivors and the two contemporary approaches dominant in popular discourse also allows us to begin to articulate the dualistic shape of the problem of belief as both characteristic of and persistent through modern, western culture.

Second, I do intend to use select portions of the arguments put forward by various parties in this debate as scaffolding upon which to construct my own take on what is at stake in Freud's theory switch for survivors of sexual violence. I will argue that Freud's shift away from the seduction theory was critically important for survivors' interests insofar as it contributed to the possibility within psychological and intellectual discourse for survivors' memories of sexual violence *not* to be expected to correspond with history in a perfect, comprehensive, or detailed manner. In other words, to the degree that Freud's shift contributed to the development of an approach to traumatic memory that

[3] See footnote 2 on Florence Rush's connections with both a critique of Freud and development of the believe all women position. In addition, Jeffrey Masson is a clear representative of the believe all woman position as it took shape in the 1980s and 1990s. Others who both critiqued Freud's disavowal of the seduction theory and were instrumental to giving shape to the believe all women perspective during the 1980s and 1990s include, to name only two of several, Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (Toronto: The Random House Publishing Group, 1975); and Louise Armstrong, *Kiss Daddy Goodnight: a Speak-Out on Incest* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1978). Though I consider Judith Herman's position on believing survivor testimony more nuanced and thought through than many popular expressions of the believe all women lens, her work, and particularly her book *Trauma and Recovery*, is a significant influence for current iterations of the believe all women position.

[4] For example, as we will see, this is true of K.R. Eissler. Though Elizabeth Loftus views her own position as at odds with Freud, I will also make the argument that her method for casting doubt on survivors' memories of sexual violence reproduces important elements of the logic Freud used to shift away from the seduction theory as well.

can bear witness to the truth traumatic memory tells even when that truth is not one of strict historical correspondence, Freud's shift away from the seduction theory creates greater opportunity for survivors' testimonies to be affirmed as true.[5] In this sense, it supports survivors' prospects for being believed.[6] However, I will also argue (and with greater emphasis) that the particular strategies Freud used to distance himself from the seduction theory have done quite the opposite. Freud's own justifications for his rejection of the seduction theory open space for survivors' memories and testimonies of sexual violence to be denied. In other words, the logic he used to persuade his readers that his replacement of the seduction theory was warranted is logic that in numerous instances preserves and carves out space in which due process culture and the broader, systemic dimensions of sexual violence can flourish. To make this argument, the second part of this chapter reflects on the specific passages in Freud's work in which he articulates his reasons for abandoning the seduction theory. It does so in order to more thoroughly trace the connections between the kind of logic Freud uses in these passages and the kind of logic constitutive of contemporary due process skepticism toward survivors' claims of abuse.

The Standard View of Freud's Theory Switch

The standard view of Freud's theory switch among psychoanalysts and historians is that Freud had definitively decided against the seduction theory by no later than September 21, 1897, just one-and-

[5] Perhaps, the best evidence that Freud's theory switch has born fruit in this regard is that trauma theory – a discipline intentionally concerned with bearing witness to the truths traumatic memory tells – is built in large part on the shoulders of the work Freud did in the latter portion of his career, work that took an approach to memory that is not compatible with that recommended by the seduction theory.

[6] Note, however, what is meant by *belief* here has shifted from what was meant by the term in the previous chapter. Belief is made more possible because the kind of truth it affirms has changed. In this instance, belief does not necessarily require affirming survivors' testimonies as historically true, and this can pose as many problems for survivors as it solves. For example, it opens the possibility for one who hears survivor testimony to say that they believe the survivor experienced something traumatic but that the survivor's recollection of who was responsible may be wrong. This form of belief, then, continues to function as denial insofar as the identity of the one responsible for harm is central to the truth a survivor understands her testimony to proclaim. These are dynamics that will be discussed later in this and the following chapters.

a-half years after "Aetiology of Hysteria" was originally published.[7] Though Freud did not make formal revisions to his seduction theory for years to come, a letter he wrote to his colleague and confident Wilhelm Fliess on this date suggests to a number of prominent Freudian scholars, his daughter Anna Freud among them, that he had, in fact, come to the firm conclusion that the seduction theory was incorrect quite soon after he put it forward. Here is the pertinent section of Freud's September 21, 1897 letter:

> And now I want to confide in you immediately the great secret of something that in the past few months has gradually dawned on me. I no longer believe in my neurotica [theory of the neuroses]. This is probably not intelligible without an explanation; after all, you yourself found what I was able to tell you credible. So I will begin historically [and tell you] from where the reasons for disbelief came. The continual disappointment in my efforts to bring any analysis to a real conclusion; the running away of people who for a period of time had been most gripped [by analysis]; the absence of the complete successes on which I had counted; the possibility of explaining to myself the partial successes in other ways, in the usual fashion – this was the first group. Then the surprise that, in all cases, the father, not excluding my own, had to be accused of being perverse – the realization of the unexpected frequency of hysteria, with precisely the same conditions prevailing in each, whereas surely such widespread perversions against children are not very probable...Then, third, the certain insight that there are no indications of reality in the unconscious, so that one cannot distinguish between truth and fiction that has been cathected with affect. (Accordingly, there would remain the solution that the sexual fantasy invariably seizes upon the theme of the parents.) Fourth, the consideration that in the most deep-reaching psychosis the unconscious memory does not break through, so that the secret of the childhood experiences is not disclosed even in the most confused delirium. If one thus sees that the unconscious never overcomes the resistance of the conscious, the expectation that in treatment the opposite is bound to happen to the point where the unconscious is completely tamed by the conscious also diminishes. I was so far influenced [by this] that I was ready to give up two things: the complete resolution of a neurosis and the certain knowledge of its etiology in childhood. Now I have no idea of where I stand because I have not succeeded in gaining a theoretical understanding of repression and its interplay of forces. It seems once again arguable that only later experiences give the impetus to fantasies, which [then] hark back to childhood, and with this, the factor

[7] The date of the letter and its close proximity to the date that "Aetiology of Hysteria" was published is emphasized by those who put forward the standard view because it suggests, they propose, that Freud came to his senses and realized the seduction theory's inadequacy quite quickly.

> of a hereditary disposition regains a sphere of influence from which I had made it my task to dislodge it – in the interest of illuminating neurosis.
>
> If I were depressed, confused, exhausted, such doubts would surely have to be interpreted as signs of weakness. Since I am in an opposite state, I must recognize them as the result of honest and vigorous intellectual work and must be proud that after going so deep I am still capable of such criticism. Can it be that this doubt merely represents an episode in the advance toward further insight?[8]

At the time that Freud wrote this letter, his once palatial confidence in the seduction theory seems to have disintegrated, and he gives several reasons for this change.

Freud's first cluster of reasons has to do with his dissatisfaction with the manner in which his analyses tended to end. Some clients who he thought were committed to the process terminated their analyses earlier than he wished. Others who stuck with analysis did not reach a point of complete remission with respect to their symptoms. As evidenced in his discussion of tuberculosis as etiologically analogous to hysteria, Freud had believed that hysteria was the kind of illness that should be completely cured if its origin was properly classified and treated. The fact that Freud's analytic method did not seem to have a total curative effect suggested to him that he had not, after all, succeeded in correctly tracing the etiology of the condition. For reasons he does not here reveal, he seems convinced that the error was in his analysis of hysteria's etiology and not in his method of treatment or in his classification of hysteria as a condition that can, in fact, be wholly cured.[9] In any case, the failure of Freud's method of treatment to act as a reliable and total cure contributed to his waning confidence in the seduction theory of hysteria.

Freud says that his second reason for beginning to doubt the seduction theory was his realization that this theory implicated a great many fathers, including Freud's own. His comments

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[8] Quoted here from the letter translated and reproduced in full by Masson in *The Assault on Truth,* pages 108-109. Another English translation is available in Sigmund Freud, *The Origins of Psychoanalysis: Letters to Wilhelm Fliess, Drafts and Notes, 1887-1902*, ed. Marie Bonaparte, Anna Freud, and Ernst Kris (London: Imago, 1954): 215-218.

[9] At this point, then, Freud regards trauma as curable. This position reveals quite a distance between Freud's early career concept of trauma and that which is common today. Though the medical diagnosis of PTSD is regarded as a condition in which symptoms sometimes fully resolve, trauma is more generally treated in philosophical, psychological, and theological discourse as a phenomenon that continues to mark the lives of those affected even as the texture of its impact changes over time.

suggest that at the time he wrote his September 1897 letter he had developed the opinion that the number of men who would have to be perpetrating sexual violence against their children in order to account for the prevalence of hysteria was far too high. He believes it more likely that the seduction theory is wrong than that it is accurate in revealing a disturbing level of sexually coercive behavior in the fathers of Western Europe. It is curious for Freud to express confidence here that "widespread perversions against children are not very probable" considering that he argued explicitly and at length for the reality of a high social prevalence of sexual abuses against children in "Aetiology of Hysteria." Although, he did not in 1896 attribute the high prevalence of abuse *to fathers*. Nonetheless, in September of 1897 he had decided that fathers could not be a sexually abusing their children as frequently as the seduction theory suggested.[10] Though we can only speculate, scholars have argued that Freud's late 1890s self analysis, his anxiety that the seduction theory suggested that his own father was sexually abusive, and his eventual conclusion that his father was innocent, played into his opinion on the innocence of fathers in general and on the seduction theory's error.[11]

The third reason Freud gives for moving away from his seduction theory is that he no longer believes it is possible to reliably distinguish between fact and fiction, or history and fantasy, in the unconscious. Whereas he had previously been confident that intense affect (i.e. a patient's reliving of the traumatic scene) suggested that a scene presenting as a memory was, in fact, a memory of a historical event, he begins to suggest here that he is coming to think it possible for this kind of affect to attend fictional fantasies in the same way, making it impossible to conclusively determine which

[10] It could be that Freud had changed his mind at this point about the general prevalence of seduction in European societies, but I think it more likely that what changed for him had to do with the role of fathers in seduction. While he did affirm that seduction of children was widespread he tended even in 1896 to name other children and women as perpetrators, indicating men as perpetrators sometimes, but usually not fathers. It seems that by the time Freud wrote this 1897 letter he had realized that maintaining the seduction theory would require him to assert that fathers, specifically, were often perpetrators of seduction against their children, and I take it to be this point that Freud names in the letter as reason for his growing incredulity.

[11] Ernst Kris, for example, suggests this view in a footnote to Freud's September 21, 1897 letter to Fliess in *The Origins of Psychoanalysis*, 216.

scenes reproduced in analysis happened and which did not.[12] He no longer considers affect a sure indicator of historical genuineness.

The last of Freud's stated reasons for doubting his seduction theory is that he no longer believes that the content of the unconscious ever fully crosses into consciousness in cases of severe psychosis. If this is true, the root of such a person's symptoms would not be reliably accessible through the analytic modes that Freud used to construct his seduction theory.[13]

There are a whole variety of objections we could make to the arguments that Freud sketches here, and indeed, scholars have put many of them into writing. Our goal, for the time being, however, is to understand, first, what Freud thought about the seduction theory in 1897, and second, how the psychoanalytic tradition has regarded this history. Indeed, what we can now say is that the standard view of Freud's renunciation of the seduction theory is the view that Freud himself takes in his September 1897 letter. It reads Freud's seduction theory as a genuine but flawed step forward in a long and sincere process of developing what would eventually become the central tenants of psychoanalysis. Freud's ultimate disavowal of the seduction theory is viewed by the psychoanalytic mainstream as an admirable admission of error that demonstrates the integrity of Freud's commitment to the intellectual enterprise, and likewise, to his patients. Freud commends himself for being so genuinely devoted to honest discovery that he is capable of walking away from

[12] Whereas in his 1896 publications Freud used the term *scene* to refer to that which a patient recalls of historically real events, his use of the term begins to shift as he moves away from the seduction theory. Increasingly, while *scene* will continue to refer to what a patient presents in analysis, Freud's use of the term will cease to assume the existence of a historical referent (or, at least, a historical referent that matches).

[13] I must say that what Freud means here by *severe psychosis* is not entirely clear to me in the sense that I cannot say for sure what Freud takes to be the relationship between severe psychosis and hysteria. If Freud means to include all hysterical cases under the umbrella of severe psychosis then we can interpret this part of the letter as saying that the etiology of hysteria (in terms of the exact experiences, scenes, memories, or fantasies that give rise to the condition) is not reliably accessible. If Freud only means to include some hysterical cases under the umbrella of severe psychosis, this portion of the letter seems to suggest Freud is concerned that the fact he cannot be certain about the root of all hysterical cases compromises the seduction theory even for less severe cases where he can be certain. It seems to me that the former reading makes better sense of Freud's decision to list this as a reason for finding the seduction theory unsalvageable.

a theory he had previously believed would earn him scientific fame, and the psychoanalytic mainstream agrees. K.R. Eissler, for example, says it this way:

> With a few changes, denials, modifications, and whatnot, a lesser man than Freud could have maintained the seduction theory for the rest of his life…Open admission of error is difficult for many, be they scholars, scientists, or politicians. Since Freud had committed himself in 1896 to the theory in public – indeed, identified himself with it almost irrevocably – he deserves admiration for his courage in disowning it publicly in 1905.[14]

For Eissler and those who take his view, Freud's rejection of the seduction theory was intellectually warranted and necessary. That Freud admits the need for theoretical revision positions him as principled and courageous.

Freud wonders in his 1897 letter if his doubt in the seduction theory might not be an end to his work but a step along the way toward greater discovery, and the standard view of Freud's theory switch answers with a resounding "Yes." Freud's discovery of fantasy life, made through his subsequent development of the Oedipal theory of childhood sexuality – the theory with which he replaced the seduction hypothesis – is regarded as his most substantive contribution to contemporary understanding of the human being, and giving up the seduction theory is viewed as necessary for Freud to have arrived at this discovery. Eissler opens his monograph on Freud and the seduction theory with precisely this argument: "One of my intentions in writing this book has been to demonstrate that a return to Freud's etiological theory of hysteria of 1896 would entail the loss of many of the riches with which his oeuvre is replete."[15] And, in a 1981 letter to Jeffrey Masson, Anna Freud affirmed the standard position on Freud's theory switch, saying this: "Keeping up the seduction theory would mean to abandon the Oedipus complex, and with it the whole importance of phantasy life, conscious or unconscious phantasy. In fact, I think there would have been no

[14] K.R. Eissler, *Freud and the Seduction Theory*, 282.
[15] K.R. Eissler, *Freud and the Seduction Theory*, 3.

psychoanalysis afterward."[16] According to the standard position, the seduction theory is a foil to psychoanalysis itself. Psychoanalysis, in turn, is to a significant degree identified with the Oedipus complex and its emphasis on the import of fantasy for psychological life over and against the seduction theory's emphasis on historical memory.

The standard view of Freud's theory switch is, thus, that Freud's motivations were scientific, and that his loss of faith in the seduction theory was warranted by his clinical observations. He is admired for having the intellectual integrity to admit that he was wrong, and his decision to put the seduction theory to rest is viewed as necessary for the vital work he did later in his career to unfold.[17]

A Critique of the Standard View: Freud's Disavowal of the Seduction Theory as an Abandonment of his Patients

In the 1980s Florence Rush, a leader in that decade's growing awareness around childhood sexual abuse, made the argument that Freud's rejection of the seduction theory was neither scientifically warranted nor virtuously motivated. Rather, she argued, Freud turned away from the seduction theory because doing so benefitted him. She interpreted his decision to renounce the seduction theory as having disastrous social results with respect to the sexual abuse of children.

> Sigmund Freud, whose theories have enormous influence on modern thinking, knew that the sexual abuse of children existed, but he could not reconcile the implications of that abuse with either his self-image or his identification with other men of his class, and thus he altered the telling of reality. Eventually, he succeeded in gaslighting an age into ignoring a devastating childhood reality and a very serious social problem.[18]

Rush's argument was picked up and expanded upon by Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson, who for a time was the director of The Sigmund Freud Archives. In that role, he had access to Freud's library and

[16] Jeffrey Masson, *The Assault on Truth*, 113. Masson presents this quote from Anna Freud as an excerpt from a letter she wrote to him on September 10, 1981 in response to Masson's view that Sigmund Freud was wrong to move away from the seduction theory.
[17] This view is presented, for example, by the editors of *The Origins of Psychoanalysis,* Ernst Kris, Anna Freud, and Marie Bonaparte, and by the three volumes of Ernest Jones's *Life and Work of Sigmund Freud* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953, 1955, 1957).
[18] Florence Rush, "The Freudian Coverup," 262.

unpublished writings, and he became convinced on the basis of much of this material that Rush was right. The central thesis that Masson puts forward in his 1984 book on the subject, *The Assault on Truth: Freud's Suppression of the Seduction Theory*, is that Freud's disavowal of the seduction theory was an abandonment of sexual violence survivors, including those survivors who were Freud's patients. Against the standard view's position that Freud's disavowal of the seduction theory was made for the sake of scientific, theoretical, and clinical integrity, Masson argues that Freud's decision to move away from the seduction theory ought to be interpreted as a personal failure of courage. Masson rereads the formative years of psychoanalytic history and tells the story of Freud's theory switch this way: The seduction theory put prospects for Freud's own professional success and the professional success of his closest confident, Wilhelm Fliess, in direct jeopardy. Both prestige and economic security were at stake. While the professional repercussions – isolation and ridicule – of having put forward the seduction theory in 1896 were difficult for Freud to bear, Masson suggests that the theoretical and social repercussions of the theory may have been even more threatening. They implicated too large a cross section of the bourgeoisie men upon whom Freud's social and professional ideals depended, including Freud's father and, perhaps, Freud himself. Masson argues that Freud, and the psychoanalytic mainstream after him, subsequently went to great lengths not only to replace the seduction theory but to actively suppress it so as to quash the threat it posed to him personally, to western, heteropatriarchal social values, and to psychoanalysis's prospects of success in such a social and professional environment. Preceded and supported by Rush's argument a few years prior, Masson's view of Freud's theory switch gained a strong following in the 1980s and 1990s, particularly by those committed to the work of resisting sexual violence in theoretical and clinical arenas. This view of Freud's theory switch maintains that the seduction theory is largely accurate and that psychoanalysis is, together with Freud, invested in suppressing that truth to the direct injury of those who suffer childhood sexual abuse.

At times, Masson gets quite close to arguing that Freud knew consciously all along that the seduction theory was correct but renounced and intentionally suppressed it anyway. Masson does not come out and say so as succinctly as I have just put it, but his momentum pushes his argument in this direction. More often and explicitly, however, what Masson argues is that Freud *himself* failed to see the truth of the seduction theory after it was met with strong resistance from his peers, and that as a result of relational, professional, and economic pressures, he became erroneously, though *genuinely*, convinced that his patients' recollections of their childhood sexual experiences were, historically speaking, false. In other words, Masson presents Freud as unconsciously motivated from multiple directions to distance himself from the seduction theory. He suggests that in succumbing to these pressures Freud abandoned both his patients and all others who have experienced sexual violence. It is Masson's position that the psychoanalytic mainstream became likewise invested in suppressing the seduction theory and did so in order to preserve both Freud's legacy and the form of psychoanalysis he built on the back of the seduction theory's disavowal.

Masson's argument takes shape around at least four moments in psychoanalytic history, three of which I will briefly review: 1) Freud's clinical treatment of his patient Emma Eckstein, 2) the professional fallout Freud experienced following his announcement of the seduction theory, and 3) the psychoanalytic community's decision not to publish writings of Freud's that challenge what came to be the standard view of his theory switch.[19]

[19] The fourth subject that Masson treats is Freud's reaction to the last paper that his student and fellow psychoanalyst Sándor Ferenczi gave before he died, "Confusion of Tongues Between the Adult and the Child." This paper suggested that psychoanalysts return to the seduction theory. Masson argues that Freud directly intervened and worked with other gatekeepers of the discipline to keep this paper from being published. The reason I am not giving this portion of Masson's argument sustained attention is that its thesis is the same as that which I do address in my review of Masson's argument that the psychoanalytic community decided not to publish those writings of Freud's that give credence to the continued theoretical significance of the seduction theory. Namely, that thesis is that both Freud and those who led the psychoanalytic movement after his death conspired to keep the seduction theory out of the discipline's discourse. Originally delivered in 1933, Ferenczi's "Confusion of Tongues" is included in appendix C of Masson's *Assault on Truth* (291-393), translated by Masson and Marianne Loring. The standard English translation can be found in Julia Borossa's *Sándor Ferenczi: Selected Writings* (London: Penguin Books, 1999): 293-303.

A Conflict Involving Emma Eckstein and Wilhelm Fliess

Emma Eckstein was one of Freud's patients during the years he put forward and then distanced himself from the seduction theory. In his correspondence with Fliess about Eckstein's case, Fliess suggested that Freud allow him to operate on Eckstein's nose. A physician and budding surgeon, Fliess believed that masturbation caused bodily damage that could result in hysterical symptoms and that this damage was physiologically displaced from the genitals to particular regions of the nose. By operating on the nose, he thought he could correct hysterical symptoms provoked by sexual stimulation. Freud allowed Fliess to operate, and Eckstein developed a series of life threatening hemorrhages in the aftermath of the surgery. When it was discovered that Fliess had accidentally left a startling amount of gauze in Eckstein's nasal cavity, Freud's first reaction to this information was to be agonized by Fliess's mistake and name it as the clear cause of Eckstein's hemorrhages. As time went on, however, Masson traces a shift in Freud's thinking on Eckstein's bleeding. Increasingly, Freud comes to Fliess's defense, and one of the ways Freud does so is by shifting blame for Eckstein's hemorrhages to Eckstein herself. In a May 4, 1896 letter to Fliess, Freud explains his new interpretation of Eckstein's post-operative bleeding:

> As for Eckstein…so far I know only that she bled out of *longing*… She has always been a bleeder, when cutting herself and in similar circumstances; as a child she suffered from severe nosebleeds…She described a scene, from the age of 15, when she suddenly began to bleed from the nose when she had the wish to be treated by a certain young doctor who was present (and who also appeared in the dream). When she saw how affected I was by her first hemorrhage while she was in the hands of Rosanes [a doctor Freud called to check on Eckstein], she experienced this as the realization of an old wish to be loved in her illness, and in spite of the danger during the succeeding hours she felt happy as never before. Then, in the sanitarium, she became restless during the night because of an unconscious wish to entice me to go there, and since I did not come during the night, she renewed the bleedings, as an unfailing means of rerouting my affection. She bled spontaneously three times, and each bleeding lasted for four days, which must have some significance. She still owes me details and specific dates.[20]

[20] Quoted from Freud's May 4, 1896 letter to Fliess as printed in Jeffrey Masson, *The Assault on Truth,* 101. The reference

Again on June 4, 1896: "Her story is becoming even clearer; there is no doubt that her hemorrhages were due to wishes."[21] On January 17, 1897, in a letter in which Freud links Eckstein, witchcraft, and the beginnings of what would become his Oedipal theory, Freud assures Fliess once and for all that Fliess was, in fact, *not* responsible for Eckstein's nearly fatal hemorrhages following surgery: "As far as the blood is concerned, you are completely without blame!"[22]

Through Freud's exchanges with Fliess on the subject of Emma Eckstein, Masson, thus, paints a picture in which Freud's allegiance to his personal and professional confidant came into conflict with his allegiance to his patients. Masson reads Freud as having resolved the conflict by allying himself with his friend and adopting a theoretical paradigm that would protect both Fliess's professional standing and Freud's relationship with him. Masson reads the development of Freud's thought on Emma Eckstein's case as directly connected to Freud's eventual renunciation of the seduction theory:

> From 1894 through 1897, no subjects so preoccupied Freud as the reality of seduction and the fate of Emma Eckstein. The two topics seemed bound together. It is, in my opinion, no coincidence that once Freud had determined that Emma Eckstein's hemorrhages were hysterical, the result of sexual fantasies, he was free to abandon the seduction hypothesis.[23]

Freud makes to Eckstein owing him "details and specific dates" indicates Freud's intent to investigate whether Eckstein's hysterical bleeding can be explained by Fliess's theory of periodicity. This theory maintained that important events in people's lives and significant biological and psychological processes (both normal and pathological) are organized by cycles (periods) of twenty-eight days for women (referring to the menstruation cycle) and twenty-three days for men. Here is an example of Fleiss's application of this theory of periodicity: "I have many times observed that the mother's last breath is taken at the exact time as her daughter's monthly period sets in, even when the latter had no idea of the [impending] death. And, conversely, in cases of chronic disease which approached the final stage, I have been able to predict the dying day by tying it to such a day [menstruation]. 'The mother will die on the day her daughter has her period.' And then she died" (Fliess, quoted in Masson, *The Assault on Truth*, 96). Fliess seems to have expected that Eckstein's bleeding could, likewise, be explained by his theory of periodicity, and Freud indicates here and in a following letter that he is looking into it.

[21] Quoted from Freud's June 4, 1896 letter to Fliess as printed in Jeffrey Masson, *The Assault on Truth*, 102.

[22] Quoted from Freud's January 17, 1897 letter to Fliess as printed in Jeffrey Masson, *The Assault on Truth*, 105.

[23] Jeffrey Masson, *The Assault on Truth*, 107.

Professional isolation following Freud's announcement of the seduction theory

Masson stresses that in addition to putting significant stress on his relationship with Wilhelm Fliess, the professional repercussions of the seduction theory for Freud were catastrophic. "Aetiology of Hysteria" was immediately rejected and mocked by the gatekeepers of the medical community. Leading psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebbing called it a "scientific fairytale."[24] Freud, himself, described the impact of his subsequent professional isolation in a letter to Fliess, saying "I felt as though I were despised and universally shunned."[25] Freud's prior colleague and mentor, Josef Breuer, with whom he published his first major work, *Studies on Hysteria*, is said to have "joined the ranks of those who believed Freud was losing his grip on reality."[26] Other notable psychiatrists argued openly that Freud's writing on the seduction theory merely revealed that, indeed, hysterics are chronic liars. They thought Freud had been naively taken in by what reasonable men of the profession knew to be tall tales.[27] Masson provides this excerpt of psychiatrist Conrad Rieger's formal review of Freud's essay "Further Remarks on the Neuro-Psychoses of Defense":

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[24] We learn this from Freud's own reporting of the event. In a letter to Fliess started on April 26 and continued on April 28 of 1896: "A lecture on the etiology of hysteria at the Psychiatric Society met with an icy reception from the asses, and from Krafft-Ebing the peculiar evaluation: 'It sounds like a scientific fairy tale.' And this after one has demonstrated to them the solution to a more than thousand-year-old-problem – a 'source of the Nile'!" [Max Schur, *Freud: Living and Dying* (New York: International University Press, 1972): 104].

[25] Quoted from Freud's April 21, 1896 letter to Fliess as printed in Jeffrey Masson, *The Assault on Truth*, 134.

[26] Jeffrey Masson, *The Assault on Truth*, 135.

[27] Here, Masson cites Adolf von Strümpell and Conrad Rieger. It is notable, however, that von Strümpell's critique was published in response to *Studies on Hysteria*, a text Freud published before he had formalized his seduction theory. Masson holds this to be the relevant sentence in von Strümple's review: "I am afraid that many hysterics will be encouraged to give free rein to their fantasy and invent stories" (Masson, *The Assault on Truth,* 230). Leaving aside the observation that this sentence, while critical of Freud's approach to seduction, does not explicitly express the opinion that Freud had been deluded by his hysterical clients, Masson's use of this quote is questionable for another reason. Elements of the seduction theory are foreshadowed in Freud's work in *Studies on Hysteria*, but the theoretical proposals made by this text do not equal those of Freud's 1896 three essays in which he formally put forward the seduction theory. It seems misplaced, then, for Masson to reference von Strümple's review of *Studies on Hysteria* as evidence of the medical community's response to the seduction theory. Though something of von Strümple's critique may be transferable to the seduction theory, he does not seem to have been speaking to it directly. I. Bry, A. H. Rifkin, and Allen Esterson claim that Masson also misinterpreted Rieger's criticism. They propose that it was not a criticism of Freud's seduction theory but of what Rieger saw as Freud's failure to differentiate between between hysteria and paranoia. See Allen Esterson, "The Myth of Freud's Ostracism by the Medical Community in 1896-1905: Jeffrey Masson's Assault on Truth," *History of Psychology* 5, no. 2 (2002): 115-134. See also I. Bry and A. H. Rifkin, "Freud and the History of Ideas: Primary Sources, 1896-1910," in *Science and Psychoanalysis* volume 5, ed. J. H. Masserman (New York: Grune and Stratton, 1962), 6-36.

> I cannot believe that an experienced psychiatrist can read this paper without experiencing genuine outrage. The reason for this outrage is to be found in the fact that Freud takes very seriously what is nothing but paranoid drivel with a sexual content – purely chance events – which are entirely insignificant or entirely invented. All of this can lead to nothing other than a simply deplorable 'old wives' psychiatry.[28]

Masson's point is that Freud's guild forcefully rejected the seduction theory, and that this rejection constituted a real threat to Freud's professional (and, with it, economic) future. This, Masson argues, constitutes another of Freud's motivations for replacing the seduction theory, which Masson reads as "at odds with the entire climate of German medical thinking," with the Oedipal paradigm, which Masson reads as allowing precisely for one specific and important element of the common medical climate to prevail: the idea that hysterics were liars.[29]

The Psychoanalytic Community's Publishing Decisions

Throughout *The Assault on Truth*, Masson brings attention to particular documents and sections of documents written by Freud that those in the psychoanalytic community who had decision-making power chose not to make public. Masson's prime example concerns a volume critical to Freudian scholarship titled *The Origin of Psychoanalysis: Letters to Wilhelm Fliess, Drafts and Notes, 1887-1902*, edited by psychoanalyst and daughter of Sigmund Freud, Anna Freud, fellow psychoanalyst, Ernst Kris, and the owner of the letters published in the volume, Marie Bonaparte. In their editorial role, Anna Freud and Ernst Kris decided which of Freud's letters to Fliess would be included in the published collection, as well as which sections of letters that were included in the publication would be omitted. Masson, who gained access to the unpublished letters when he was Director of the Freud Archive, shows that there were indications in them that Freud continued to hang on to parts

[28] Conrad Rieger's review of Freud's "Further Remarks on the Neuro-psychoses of Defence," in Centralblatt for Nervenheilkunde Psychiatrie und gerichtliche Psychopathologie 7 (1896): 451-452, as translated and quoted in Jeffrey Masson, *The Assault on Truth*, 135.
[29] Jeffrey Masson, *The Assault on Truth*, 137. To be clear, this is Masson's assertion, not mine.

of the seduction theory well after the date he is said to have given it up according to the standard view, and that Anna Freud and Ernst Kris opted not to publish any of these references. For example, in a previously unpublished letter to Fliess dated December 12, 1897, three months after the September 21 letter that is said to represent Freud's dismissal of the seduction theory, Freud wrote this:

> My confidence in the father-etiology has risen greatly. Eckstein treated her patient deliberately in such a manner as not to give her the slightest hint of what will emerge from the unconscious, and in the process obtained, among other things, the identical scenes with the father.[30]

By "father-etiology," Freud means the seduction theory, and we see here that he believed he had new clinical evidence of the seduction theory's accuracy in late 1897.[31] That same month, in discussing another case involving a sexually violent father, Freud affirms his belief in the "genuineness of infantile trauma" and announces that as a result of the devastating violence that neurotics are forced to endure at such a young age his clinical work has a new motto: "What have they done to you, poor child."[32] By Masson's reading of these unpublished letters, Freud continued to consider the seduction theory's take on neurotic illness as prompted by historically *actual* early childhood sexual trauma a compelling answer to the question of hysteria's etiology.

Masson finds it more than curious, then, that all indications of Freud's sympathy with the seduction theory after September 1, 1897 were excluded from published record. He argues that this was not a coincidence, but rather, that Anna Freud and Ernst Kris made this omission intentionally, in order to protect the standard view that Freud's September 1897 move away from the seduction theory was definitive. Masson asked Anna Freud about the choice she and Ernst Kris made to omit evidence to the contrary. He describes her as responding, on one hand, that she did not remember

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[30] Quoted from Freud's December 12, 1897 letter to Fliess as printed in Jeffrey Masson, *The Assault on Truth*, 114.
[31] We also learn that Emma Eckstein went on to become an analyst herself and that her work at least momentarily suggested to Freud that memories of sexual abuse in childhood were historically genuine and not the result of suggestion.
[32] Quoted from Freud's letter to Fliess on December 22, 1897 as printed in Jeffrey Masson, *The Assault on Truth*, 117.

why the decision was made. On the other, Masson says, "Miss Freud indicated that, since her father eventually abandoned the seduction theory, she felt it would only prove confusing to readers to be exposed to his early hesitations and doubts."[33] Masson takes issue with this response, insisting that protecting Freud's interpreters from confusion is not only a thin justification but is disingenuous to Freud's astute readers. Masson argues, instead, that evidence of Freud's fluctuation on the usefulness of the seduction theory was kept from public view because it was feared that showing the extent of Sigmund Freud's own fluctuation on the truth or falsity of the seduction theory would open the door in the psychoanalytic community for the legitimacy of the seduction theory to be revisited. Masson argues that Freud himself worked to prevent a colleague's attempt to revive discussion of the seduction theory late in his career, and that this set the stage for a strong commitment in the analytic community to dissuading members from reconsidering the wisdom of seduction theory.[34] Masson proposes that the second generation of psychoanalysts took Freud's lead and, likewise, made a concerted effort, more politically than scientifically motivated, to prevent the seduction theory from again gaining traction.

It is especially this component of Masson's argument in which he at times seems to veer into suggesting that the psychoanalytic community (and Freud as its founding member) consciously and intentionally suppressed the seduction theory, knowing all the while that it remained plausible. But, that is not the dominant or only kind of argument that Masson sustains here. Alongside it, he maintains the line of thought more common in his book that views each step away from the seduction theory as the result of Freud and his intellectual partners becoming unconsciously and disingenuously motivated to overlook the strengths of the seduction theory in favor of a theoretical paradigm more politically capable of securing the future of psychoanalysis.

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[33] Jeffrey Masson, *The Assault on Truth*, xxv.

[34] Masson's argument refers to Freud's role in preventing the publication of Sándor Ferenczi's paper "Confusion of Tongues Between the Adult and the Child." See footnote 19 of this chapter.

Herman's Critique of Freud's Theory Switch: A Political Matter

Judith Herman describes Freud's 1896 account of the seduction theory as evidence of Freud's original empathic commitment to his women patients. In her words, "His [early] case histories reveal a man possessed of such passionate curiosity that he was willing to overcome his own defensiveness, and willing to listen."[35] Upon hearing from his patients that they had endured major traumatic events in early childhood, such as sexual assault, abuse, and incest, it is Herman's opinion that Freud articulated a "brilliant, compassionate, eloquently argued, closely reasoned" theory of seduction which she summarizes as the claim that premature sexual experience in early childhood is the source of hysterical symptoms. For Herman, the genius of the seduction theory is that it is grounded, first, in closely listening to and believing patients' claims of abuse, and second, in insistence that real experiences of early childhood sexual trauma drastically impact psychic functioning. In other words, she finds the seduction theory to be valuable because it treats memory as reliably representative of history and history as causally related to trauma.

Citing Freud's infamous September 21, 1897 letter to Fliess, Herman attributes Freud's quick loss of confidence in the seduction theory to his growing discomfort with its social implications. In her estimation, hysteria was so widespread that if the seduction theory were correct Freud would have been forced to conclude that the sexual abuse of children was pervasive throughout all of Europe, from the proletariat of Paris to the bourgeoisie of Vienna. This, Herman concludes, was too morally reprehensible for Freud to accept. Thus, she argues that in order to avoid the social implications of the seduction theory Freud was motivated to believe that his patients must not have been telling the truth after all, and he "stopped listening to his female patients."[36] Reading Freud's replacement of the seduction theory with the Oedipal paradigm as predicated on an undue dissociation of memory from history and history from trauma, Herman concludes, "the dominant

[35] Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 13.
[36] Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 14.

psychological theory of the next century was founded in the denial of women's reality."[37] In her view, psychoanalysis informed by Freud's Oedipal destabilization of the memory, history, trauma triad risks retraumatizing people who do, in fact, suffer from sexual trauma. If Herman's analysis of Freud's theory switch ended here it would in many ways duplicate Masson's critique, but Herman adds a political dimension to her reading that makes her position something more than an indictment of Freud the individual or even of psychoanalysis as a discipline.

Herman argues that the intellectual and clinical study of trauma can only flourish when it is done amidst political conditions that render the subject of study legitimate:

> The study of war trauma becomes legitimate only in a context that challenges the sacrifice of young men in war. The study of trauma in sexual and domestic life becomes legitimate only in a context that challenges the subordination of women and children. Advances in the field occur only when they are supported by a political movement powerful enough to legitimate an alliance between investigators and patients and to counteract the ordinary social processes of silencing and denial.[38]

Sure enough, she says, just this kind of political movement did exist in late nineteenth century France where cutting edge developments in the study of hysteria led to Freud's composition of the seduction theory. The Third Republic was established in 1870 as a new and fragile democracy in France. Seven forms of government had been overthrown in the country in less than a century, and the long term political viability of the Third Republic depended on winning popular support away from the Catholic Church. Hysteria, Herman says, provided an opportunity.

> The solution of the mystery of hysteria was intended to demonstrate the triumph of secular enlightenment over reactionary superstition, as well as the moral superiority of a secular worldview. Men of science contrasted their benevolent patronage of hysterics with the worst excesses of the Inquisition.[39]

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[37] Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 13.
[38] Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 9.
[39] Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 16.

By explaining hysteria scientifically and humanely treating the condition through modern medicine, proponents of the Third Republic sought to demonstrate the superiority of the secular over the religious worldview. Herman argues that Charcot, the father of the scientific study of hysteria and an active supporter of the Third Republic, investigated hysteria with such determination in the late nineteenth century precisely in order to "demonstrate the superiority of a secular over a religious conceptual framework." The motivation that drove his medical innovations was, Herman says, "to claim hysterical women for science."[40] Indeed, Charcot's mission was blessed by the leaders of France's democracy. Jules Ferry, one of the founders of the Third Republic, said it plainly: "Women must belong to science, or they will belong to the church."[41] Herman presents Freud as the one who most successfully fulfilled this mission of claiming women for science. Having devoted himself to listening carefully to women's experiences he had developed a theory that made remarkable sense of their hysterical symptoms. "Aetiology of Hysteria" is so theoretically and therapeutically adept, Herman says, that "A century later, this paper still rivals contemporary clinical descriptions of the effects of childhood sexual abuse."[42]

The political motivation for scientific inquiry into hysteria was explicitly not, however, women's liberation or empowerment. Thus, at the turn of the twentieth century, when France's republican government had enjoyed security for a generation and the political threat of the church had waned, it became less advantageous for men of democracy and science to take women's concerns to heart. Freud's colleagues scoffed at the seduction theory and increasingly dismissed even Charcot's work with hysterics which, a decade prior, had earned him renown. Ultimately, Herman

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[40] Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 15. While Freud did most of his work in Austria the political context of France remains relevant to the shape of his career. Recall that prior to formulating his seduction theory Freud studied under Charcot in Paris. In addition to the direct contact between Freud and Charcot, because Charcot's work was, for a time, leading the way for the study of hysteria throughout Europe, the political context that influenced his work likewise had some degree of influence on the study of hysteria more broadly.

[41] Quoted from P.K. Bidelman, *Pariahs Stand Up! The Founding of the Liberal Feminist Movement in France, 1858-1889* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), 17 as presented in Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 15.

[42] Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 13.

sees Freud's replacement of the seduction theory with the Oedipal paradigm as a product of the changing political climate:

> To hold fast to his [seduction] theory would have been to recognize the depths of sexual oppression of women and children. The only potential source of intellectual validation and support for his position was the nascent feminist movement, which threatened Freud's cherished patriarchal values. To ally himself with such a movement was unthinkable for a man of Freud's political beliefs and professional ambitions. Protesting too much, he dissociated himself at once from the study of psychological trauma and from women. He went on to develop a theory of human development in which the inferiority and mendacity of women are fundamental points of doctrine. In an antifeminist political climate, this theory prospered and thrived.[43]

Herman's analysis suggests, further, that Freud succumbed not only to professional pressure and political momentum, but to the vicissitudes of trauma itself. Of perpetrators of traumatic harm, Herman says this:

> Secrecy and silence are the perpetrator's first line of defense. If secrecy fails, the perpetrator attacks the credibility of his victim. If he cannot silence her absolutely, he tries to make sure that no one listens. To this end, he marshals an impressive array of arguments, from the most blatant denial to the most sophisticated and elegant rationalization. After every atrocity one can expect to hear the same predictable apologies: it never happened; the victim lies; the victim exaggerates; the victim brought it upon herself; and in any case it is time to forget the past and move on. The more powerful the perpetrator, the greater is his prerogative to name and define reality, and the more completely his arguments prevail.[44]

If we think of trauma as a phenomenon that ripples, that repeats itself in a pattern of concentric circles as it moves out from an individual perpetrator and victim through the myriad layers of community and society, and if we bear in mind Herman's warning that traumatic circumstances force bystanders to take a side, her reading of Freud suggests that Freud's disavowal of the

[43] Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 19.
[44] Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 8.

seduction theory was not only a theory switch, but Freud's own switch of sides.[45] Though not a direct perpetrator of sexual violence, Herman presents Freud's renunciation of the seduction theory (argued with some of the most nuanced and sophisticated rationalization the western world has seen) as promoting the idea that the victim lies; that she exaggerates; that she brings her suffering on herself.[46] Freud was a masterful interpreter, and therefore, definer, of reality. By Herman's estimation, his arguments – primarily those developed to explain the error of the seduction theory – have shaped discourse around sexual violence for generations.

Freud's Theory Switch, Then and Now

What is at stake in the contemporary debate is, namely, belief with respect to sexual violence. What was at stake for Freud was, first and foremost, the medical interpretation of hysteria. Sexual violence and the problem of belief were secondary to his primary focus on hysteria's etiology and clinical treatment. That the contemporary debate has latched onto Freud suggests that there is resonance between Freud's two theoretical paradigms and the two primary positions with respect to the problem of belief today. We saw in chapter two that the terms of Freud's seduction theory are resonant with the believe all women position insofar as each affirm correspondence between memory, history, and traumatic experience. The remainder of this chapter seeks to articulate what is resonant between Freud's disavowal of the seduction theory and the due process frame for approaching survivors' testimonies of sexual violence.

[45] On the very first page of *Trauma and Recovery*, Herman says that those who bear witness to survivors' testimonies of traumatic events "are caught in the conflict between victim and perpetrator. It is morally impossible to remain neutral in this conflict. The bystander is forced to take sides."

[46] It is up for debate whether or not Herman's reading of Freud is accurate. However, these terms – *lies, exaggerates, brings upon herself* – take on a meaning that is somewhat different from their colloquial use when Herman uses them in connection with Freud. Typically, for example, we think of a lie as conscious, intentional deceit. For the term to be at all appropriate as a descriptor of Freud's argument, it would have to be interpreted to mean a person's unconscious self-deception, or the lies a person tells to themselves to guard against consciousness of repressed knowledge that is threatening. Herman is not proposing, then, that Freud's disavowal of the seduction theory involved a claim that people who say they remember sexual abuse in childhood are giving testimony that they know to be false. Rather, what Herman's analysis suggests is that Freud's thought mimics that of bystanders who choose to take the side of perpetrators, and that it does so in a way that opens Freud's theoretical framework to being used against survivors.

I turn now to a collection of excerpts from Freud's voluminous corpus – some intentionally published by Freud and others recorded and published by his peers – that offer a point of entry into reflection. I have chosen these specific excerpts because I see evidence in each one of a particular element of Freud's theoretical shift that is relevant to the contemporary discussion of sexual violence and belief. Each excerpt upon which I sustain reflection functions as a window that frames and clarifies Freud's relationship to the contemporary problem of belief in the wake of sexual violence trauma. But each is a window that brings only part of the full landscape of Freud's theoretical thought into view. In other words, my method in this chapter is slightly different from that which I used in chapter two to read Freud's seduction theory. There, I sought to articulate the seduction theory in full. I do not do the same here for the Oedipal theory. In part, the reason is pragmatic. Whereas Freud's development of the seduction theory can be accounted for by a close reading of the three brief essays he wrote on the subject in 1896, Freud developed his Oedipal interpretation of child sexuality over decades and through a much larger collection of writing. Within the scope of this chapter, I cannot perform a comprehensive reading. But, perhaps, the more substantive reason that I opted not to do so is that, whereas the seduction theory was organized around the subject of sexual violence and focused on the psychological impact of traumatic experience, the Oedipal theory of child sexuality does not center sexual violence or traumatic experience. Though the Oedipal theory is relevant for explaining and treating psychological neuroses, its focus is on the normal (i.e. non-pathological) patterns of human psychological development. Since what is most relevant about the Oedipal theory to this dissertation is its relationship to sexual violence and the problem of belief, I have chosen to focus on those places in Freud's work where that intersection is evident. That means that what follows is less an argument about the Oedipal theory than it is an argument about how, in Freud's disavowal of the seduction theory, space is opened for due process culture to make use of Freud's transition.

Excerpt 1: Screen Memories

Though Freud did not publish a clear renunciation of the seduction theory until 1905, there are signs in the essays he published in preceding years that foreshadow the conceptual shift he would eventually make. "Screen Memories," published in 1899, is one such essay. Freud begins this essay by observing that, starting around the age of ten years old, memory seems to have a continuous feel to it, as if it fluidly connects a relatively unbroken stream of events. In earlier childhood, however, he says this is not the case. Before the age of ten, memory is more difficult to retain, and what memory does exist seems to lack a continuous feel. Early childhood memory has the sense of clustering in infrequent spurts that tend to be more isolated from each other than not. Freud says that, in adulthood, we remember the things that have a significant impact on us and we tend not to remember that which we consider insignificant. Thus, he reasons, just as we would be suspicious of an adult's vivid memory of an event that seems trivial in content, we should hold this same suspicion of seemingly insignificant childhood memories. However, it is common for adults to have vivid childhood memories of apparently trivial importance. And so, Freud asks, how can that be? If memory collects around significant events, how ought we regard childhood memories that do not conform to this rule? To answer this question, Freud recounts a conversation with a client about that client's childhood memories that seemed trivial in content and were, therefore, suspect qua memory.[47]

In dialogue form, Freud argues that this client's vivid yet trivial memories retained their vividness not because of anything particularly important about the historical basis for the memory, but because there were elements of the memory that were well disposed to mediating fantasies the client developed later in life and did not want to bring into consciousness. In other words, the trivial memory contained elements that made it a good hiding place for an objectionable fantasy to be

[47] Scholars expect that this conversation is a didactic literary devise and not one that actually occurred. Scholars further expect that the dream Freud analyzes in this conversation is his own.

hidden by the psyche. This kind of memory is what Freud calls a *screen memory*. It persists in order to *screen out*, or assist in the repression of a wish, longing, or fantasy that the keeper of the memory cannot tolerate. He describes the process working this way:

> (T)wo psychical forces are concerned in bringing about memories of this sort. One of these forces takes the importance of the experience as a motive for seeking to remember it, while the other – a resistance – tries to prevent any such preference from being shown. These two opposing forces do not cancel each other out, nor does one of them (whether with or without loss to itself) overpower the other. Instead, a compromise is brought about, somewhat on the analogy of the resultant in a parallelogram of forces. And the compromise is this. What is recorded as a mnemic image is not the relevant experience itself – in this respect the resistance gets its way; what is recorded is another psychical element closely associated with the objectionable one – and in this respect the first principle shows its strength, the principle which endeavours to fix important impressions by establishing reproducible mnemic images. The result of the conflict is therefore that, instead of the mnemic image which would have been justified by the original event, another is produced which has been to some degree associatively displaced from the former one. And since the elements of the experience which aroused objection were precisely the important ones, the substituted memory will necessarily lack those important elements and will in consequence most probably strike us as trivial.[48]

In this way, Freud articulates screen memories as a product of the process of repression and explains that, as a result of that process, these memories are likely to be falsified in some capacity or another in order to allow them to better do their job of screening out memory of the unconscious, unwanted fantasy. He goes on to propose that a great percentage of childhood memories are, in fact, screen memories, and therefore may or may not be historically representative:

> It may indeed be questioned whether we have any memories at all from our childhood: memories relating to our childhood may be all that we possess. Our childhood memories show us our earliest years not as they were but as they appeared at the later periods when the memories were aroused. In these periods of arousal, the childhood memories did not, as people are accustomed to say, emerge; they were formed at that time. And a number of motives, with no concern for historical

[48] Sigmund Freud, "Screen Memories" (1899), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* volume 3 (S.E. 3), ed. & trans. James Strachey and Anna Freud (London: The Hogarth Press, 1962), 306-7.

> accuracy, had a part in forming them, as well as in the selection of the memories themselves.[49]

Freud is challenging a notion of childhood memories as reliably or thoroughly historical. Yet, he intentionally stops short of suggesting that memories of trivial content from childhood are wholly divorced from history.[50] Rather, he emphasizes that history and fantasy commingle in memories of this kind. While he finds reason to believe that certain elements of screen memories spring from a historical source, he is concerned to convey that we simply cannot know what of our childhood memories are historically accurate. Because screen memories develop, Freud says, usually later in life when the need to repress objectionable fantasies becomes urgent, he reasons that much of what we consciously (think we) remember of childhood was constructed at that later time of life when the memory came into consciousness – usually quite some time after the event in question is portrayed by our minds to have happened. That being the case, the reason screen memories are so commonly tied with childhood, then, has to do with the cultural notion that childhood is a time of innocence. Fantasies too objectionable for consciousness, Freud says, will attach themselves to and alter a childhood memory, as opposed to an adult memory, not because the mnemic images we ultimately retain are actually formed in our childhood years, but because locating themselves in our childhoods better achieves the goal of making the intolerable fantasy seem innocent enough to be expressed in

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[49] S.E. 3, 322.

[50] In this article, Freud does suggest criteria by which one might discern whether a screen memory contains historically representative content and what of its content ought to be thought as genuine. He says that the genuineness of a memory (its rootedness in historical experience) is likely under two conditions. The first condition that suggests to Freud that a memory has some genuine qualities is that the person holding the memory has a subjective sense of the memory as really having happened. The second condition that suggests historical genuineness to Freud is that the screen memory contains elements that cannot be explained by the fantasy that has transformed it. Those elements that cannot be explained by the demands of the repressed fantasy are, according to Freud, likely present in the screen memory because they trace back to a historically genuine memory. There is, in Freud's view, no other explanation for their appearance in the screen memory. Alternatively, Freud argues that memories whose visual content is not in first person view but that zoom out and frame the scene as an outside observer would see it cannot be an "exact repetition of the impression that was originally received" (S.E. 3, 321). A number of those who research traumatic memory today would describe memories that contain visual content in the third person as, potentially, the result of traumatic dissociation during the event being recalled.

an indirect way. The fantasy, in other words, borrows the innocence of childhood by hiding in a (supposed) childhood memory.

And, here is the primary connection Freud makes between screen memories and hysteria. Hysterics, he subtly suggests, are particularly prone to developing screen memories. This marks a shift in Freud's thinking on hysteria from his 1896 position. Freud theorizes screen memories *not* as screening out terrifying or overwhelming experiences, like sexual abuse, but as screening out a person's own internal sexual wishes and fantasies. By linking hysterics with screen memories, Freud can be read as implicitly proposing that a repression of sexual desire, as opposed to sexual experience, is common to the hysterical condition. In this frame, hysterics would be viewed as tending to let their repressed sexual fantasies slip into childhood scenes in order to allow the innocent childhood nature of that scene to calm the sense of guilt the hysteric has about the intolerable nature of their sexual fantasy. Freud has previously emphasized that the content of hysterics' childhood memories universally includes sexual abuse. Thus, Freud's cursory linking of hysteria with screen memories opens the door for hysterics' memories of childhood sexual abuse to be reinterpreted through a lens of fantasy instead of historical reality.

In this 1899 essay, Freud does not expound on the theoretical implications of linking screen memories with hysteria. However, when "Screen Memories" is read in light of Freud's later, interpretations of hysterical memories of childhood sexual abuse *as* screen memories for hysterics' own taboo sexual fantasies, this essay becomes legible as one that lays the groundwork for what will eventually become a widely held position in psychoanalysis: that hysterics' memories of childhood sexual violence are best interpreted as something more like screen memories for their adolescent sexual fantasies than as genuinely repressed memories that represent historical events of abuse.[51] It is in this regard that "Screen Memories" marks a decided shift away from Freud's approach to

[51] See, for example, pages 155 and 156 of this dissertation.

memory in the seduction theory, which took childhood memories, particularly childhood memories of sexual abuse, as historically representative.

Excerpt 2: Freud according to Leopold Löwenfield

Though "Screen Memories" hints at early shifts in Freud's thought on the seduction theory, Freud did not acknowledge in the essay that the theoretical ground of his thinking was in flux. Masson has observed that the first published, explicit reference to Freud's turn away from the seduction theory was made by a colleague of Freud's, Leopold Löwenfield. Discussing Freud's seduction theory in a book he published in 1904, eight years after "Aetiology of Hysteria" and five years after "Screen Memories," Löwenfield reports the following:

> …it is not known to me at this moment to what extent [Freud] still holds to his views published in 1896… [but] I believe that I may mention here that he no longer attributes to infantile sexual experiences the same meaning with respect to compulsion neurosis as he did earlier. According to the current views of the author, the symptoms of compulsion neurosis do not originate directly from real sexual experiences, but from fantasies which attach themselves to these experiences. The latter accordingly form important intermediary links between memories and pathological symptoms.[52]

To support this claim, Löwenfield quotes from a letter Freud wrote to him on the subject, attributing the following to Freud: "As a rule, it is the experiences of puberty which have a harmful effect. In the process of repression these events are fantasied back into early childhood, following the pathways of sexual impressions accidentally experienced during the illness or arising from the [sexual] constitution."[53] The experiences of puberty that Freud references are, he will later clarify, the hysteric's experiences of their own sexual arousal coupled with an internal feeling of shame that this arousal prompts. Screen memories, recall, are said to be formed at the time of life that they come

[52] Leopold Löwenfield, *Die Psychischen Zwangserscheinungen: Auf Klinischer Grundlage Dargestellt* (Bergmann, 1904): 296.
[53] Leopold Löwenfield, *Die Psychischen Zwangserscheinungen*, 296. Reprinted in Jeffrey Masson, *The Assault on Truth*, 121.

into consciousness, regardless of the time of life that is referenced in the content of the memory. We know from Freud's 1896 writings that he believes hysterics' memories of childhood sexual abuse come into consciousness far after the time the abuse is supposed to have happened – either during puberty or adulthood. The groundwork has, then, been laid for hysterics' memories of childhood sexual abuse to be interpreted as screen memories for their pubescent sexual wishes.[54] The process of repression at the heart of hysteria is read here as one that fantasies the hysteric's sexual desire back into their childhood in a way that makes the hysteric appear innocent of that desire. Freud will eventually say that the scene of sexual seduction accomplishes the task of making a hysteric's sexual desire appear innocent insofar as seduction positions the hysteric as a passive recipient of sexual attention rather than an active, willing, desiring player in the sexual scene.

As Freud begins to privately articulate how his 1896 thinking is shifting, the first major feature of the shift that becomes clear is that he has changed his mind about what it is that is being repressed in connection with hysterical symptoms. In the seduction theory, he argued that memory of a frightening, dominating sexual experience was repressed. In his movement away from the seduction theory, Freud proposes that it is memory of pubescent sexual fantasies and childhood incestual desire that are repressed in the hysterical condition. Memories of sexually dominating experiences in childhood are not considered universally false, but they are, as a class, cast under suspicion.

[54] Though the concept of screen memories does play a significant role in Freud's developing interpretation of childhood memories of sexual abuse as residues of Oedipal fantasies rather than recollections of historical events, at least one element of screen memories as Freud articulates the concept in 1899 resists application to memories of childhood sexual abuse. In the 1899 essay, Freud specifically defines screen memories as vivid recollections that are trivial in content. It would be difficult to argue that any recollection of sexual abuse is trivial in content, and Freud does not do so here. Rather, as his thought continues to develop, this theoretical discontinuity is one that he overcomes through strengthening the interpretive role of Oedipal logic.

Excerpt 3: Renunciation and Replacement in *Three Essays*

Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality, released by Freud in 1905, was the first publication in which Freud, himself, discussed his changing thought on the seduction theory. Still, his explicit commentary on the subject was quite brief. Freud's most direct comment in *Three Essays* on the relationship of his 1905 views to those he expressed in 1896 is this brief statement:

> I cannot admit that in my paper 'The Aetiology of Hysteria' (1896) I exaggerated the frequency or importance of that influence [seduction], though I did not then know that persons who remain normal may have had the same experiences in their childhood, and though I consequently overrated the importance of seduction in comparison with the factors of sexual constitution and development.[55]

In a footnote he explains that narratives in which a person who experienced seduction in childhood "remains normal" later in life (i.e. does not develop hysteria) contributed to his decision to modify his theory of the hysteria's etiology. The observation that not all people who experience sexual seduction in early childhood develop psychological neuroses following adolescence leads Freud to reason that seduction is not a suitable etiological explanation for such neuroses.[56]

Freud's statement that he did not know in 1896 that there existed persons who experienced seduction in childhood and did not develop hysteria is curious, given that Freud spoke directly to precisely this phenomenon in "Aetiology of Hysteria."[57] There, recall, he imagines that his critics will object to his thesis that sexual seduction is the etiological cause of hysteria by maintaining that "it is easy, by making a few enquiries, to find people who remember scenes of sexual seduction and sexual abuse in their childhood years, and yet who have never been hysterical."[58] In 1896, Freud finds this objection to have no traction whatsoever: "Our first reply is that the excessive frequency of an

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[55] Sigmund Freud, "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" (1905), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* volume 7 (S.E. 7), ed. & trans. James Strachey and Anna Freud (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953), 190.
[56] S.E. 7, 190-191 (Freud's footnote).
[57] Sigmund Freud, "Aetiology of Hysteria" (1896), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* volume 3 (S.E. 3), ed. & trans. James Strachey and Anna Freud (London: The Hogarth Press, 1962), 209-11. See also the discussion of this text in chapter two of this dissertation.
[58] S.E. 3, 207.

aetiological factor cannot possibly be used as an objection to its aetiological significance."[59] In other words, freely admitting that there are plenty of people who experience sexual seduction in childhood and who do not develop hysteria, Freud argues that this does not matter for his etiological argument as long as every person who does develop hysteria has, in fact, experienced seduction in childhood.

This curious discrepancy aside, we learn from Freud's 1905 comment that he does not think his 1896 position exaggerated the frequency of childhood seduction. This implies that in 1905 he continued to believe that his patients who claimed to remember being sexually abused were, historically speaking, so abused. Thus, while the theoretical shifts he has been making in the years since he announced his seduction hypothesis remove the etiological significance of the experience of sexual seduction in childhood for the later development of hysteria, Freud does not call the historical genuineness of his clients' specific memories of abuse into question. Rather, he explains his theoretical shift in *Three Theories* by noting that at the time he put forward his 1896 thesis he had overestimated the *etiological significance* of seduction and underestimated the significance of sexual constitution and regular patterns of child development to which the content of *Three Theories* speaks.

The larger significance of Frued's *Three Theories* for our investigation is that it is this text in which Freud first lays out the foundation of the theory of childhood sexuality that would ground his new perspective on the cause and treatment of hysteria and other neuroses. Freud's general theory of infantile sexuality put forward in *Three Theories* proposes that sexuality is at the heart of human psychological development, beginning already in infancy, and that a range of psychological neuroses, including hysteria, can be explained as resulting from improper psychic resolution of the conflicts of human psychosexual development that every person must pass through on their way to maturity.

[59] S.E. 3, 209.

Freud would go on to classify the Oedipal conflict as constituting one such critical developmental phase.[60]

Following the plot of the Greek myth of Oedipus Rex, in which Oedipus murders his father, marries his mother, and is, for a time, unconscious of his own patricide and incest, Freud envisions the Oedipal conflict that marks child development as one of incestual desire and competitive aggression. According to Freud's Oedipal theory, which reads gender in fixed, binary, and heterosexual terms (though Freud's own views on gender and sexuality were more complex), children pass through a developmental phase in which they grow to sexually desire the parent who is their heterosexual complement (the boy desires his mother and the girl desires her father) and competitively revile the parent who shares the child's gender (the boy wants to kill his father, and the girl wants to kill her mother). The competitive aggression develops because the parent who shares the child's gender has the sexual affection of the parent whom the child desires. In short, Freud's Oedipal theory proposes that children want to replace the parent who shares their gender so that they can become the primary sexual object for the other parent. While most children, Freud argues, confront and resolve the Oedipal conflict in ways that lead to what he would call normal adult functioning, some – due largely to particularities of their sexual constitutions – do not successfully resolve the conflict and, instead, find themselves on a path toward the development of neurotic symptoms later in life when the process of puberty reignites the subject's unresolved Oedipal fantasies.

In connection with this new theoretical paradigm, hysterical symptoms were to be understood as the result of the libido's (i.e. sexual drive's) negotiation of an internal psychosexual

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[60] Freud first introduced the Oedipus Complex in "The Interpretation of Dreams" (1900) in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* volumes 4 & 5 (S.E. 4 & 5), ed. & trans. James Strachey and Anna Freud (London: The Hogarth Press, 1962), ix-627. He developed the concept in *Three Theories* and across several of his writings, including, notably, "Analysis of a Phobia In a Five-Year-Old Boy" (1909), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* volume 10 (S.E. 10), ed. & trans. James Strachey and Anna Freud (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), 1-150.

conflict. Such conflicts arise from the interfacing of a person's sexual constitution, understood in large part to be hereditary, with accidental experiences in early childhood upon which the libido becomes fixated.[61] This way of understanding the etiology of hysteria posited that neurotic symptoms (including hysterical symptoms) are manifestations of the compromise that the libido strikes to resolve the internal conflicts it confronts.[62]

Excerpt 4: Freud's New Views on the Role of Sexuality in the Etiology of Neuroses

Freud next spoke directly to his replacement of the seduction theory with the Oedipus framework in an essay titled, "My Views on the Role of Sexuality in the Etiology of the Neuroses," published originally in 1906.

> At that time [1896] my material was still scanty, and it happened by chance to include a disproportionately large number of cases in which sexual seduction by an adult or by older children played the chief part in the history of the patient's childhood. I thus over-estimated 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. Since then I have learned to explain a number of phantasies of seduction as attempts at fending off memories of the subject's own sexual activity (infantile masturbation). When this point had been clarified, the 'traumatic' element in the sexual experiences of childhood lost its importance and what was left was the realization that infantile sexual activity (whether spontaneous or provoked) prescribes the direction that will be taken by later sexual life after maturity. The same clarification (which corrected the most important of my early mistakes) also made it necessary to modify my view of the mechanism of hysterical symptoms. They were now no longer to be regarded as direct derivatives of the repressed memories of childhood experiences; but between the symptoms and the childish impressions there were inserted the patient's phantasies (or imaginary memories), mostly produced during the years of puberty, which on the one side were built up out of

[61] See footnote fifty-five in chapter two of this dissertation for a comment on what Freud means by *psychological constitution* and *hereditary*.

[62] Freud discusses this in multiple places. *Three Theories* sets the primary terms of the framework which Freud, then, expands upon throughout his corpus. A concise summary of Freud's thought on the etiology of neurotic symptoms (after his disavowal of the seduction theory) can be found in Lecture XXIII of Freud's *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* volumes 15 & 16 (S.E. 15 & 16), ed. & trans. James Strachey and Anna Freud (London: The Hogarth Press, 1963), 358-377.

> and over the childhood memories and on the other side were transformed directly into the symptoms. It was only after the introduction of this element of hysterical phantasies that the texture of the neurosis and its relation to the patient's life became intelligible; a surprising analogy came to light, too, between these unconscious phantasies of hysterics and the imaginary creations of paranoics which become conscious as delusions.[63]

Here, there are two primary steps to Freud's explanation of his replacement of the seduction theory with the Oedipal paradigm. First, he says that among his early patients there was a disproportionately large number who did experience childhood seduction. This led Freud to assume when he formulated the seduction theory that childhood seduction was more pervasive than he is willing in 1906 to believe is accurate. Having argued directly and at length in "Aetiology of Hysteria" that childhood sexual abuse and seduction were disturbingly common, Freud does not disclose in this essay what convinced him to change his mind. He simply states it as a matter of fact that he now knows that childhood sexual abuse occurs less frequently than the seduction theory requires.

Second, Freud says that he was not yet able in 1896 to differentiate between historically genuine memory and false memories that reference a patient's sexual fantasies rather than real events. In the passage quoted above, Freud, for the first time, explicitly articulates that he now believes it appropriate to interpret at least a significant portion of patients' memories of childhood seduction as fantasies (which Freud also here calls 'imaginary memories') instead of memories of events that historically occurred. He explains that he has come to understand that the purpose of such fantasies is to fend off memory of the subject's own sexual desire and corresponding masturbation. Freud suggests, then, that recollections of childhood seduction are often best interpreted as something like screen memories conjured by the psyche to protect the subject from the sense of guilt they feel in connection with knowledge of their own sexual desire. Freud's two new convictions presented here – the first, that memories of childhood seduction do not necessarily

[63] S.E. 7, 274.

indicate corresponding historical experience; and the second, that seduction is not, in reality, as common as he had believed in 1896 – are mutually reinforcing. It is impossible to know which came first or if they evolved in tandem. Freud does not present clinical evidence here to support either position.

These are two of the primary shifts that characterize Freud's replacement of the seduction theory with the Oedipal framework. Psychologist Carlo Bonomi describes this move as a theoretical shift from reality to fantasy and "from 'passivity' to 'activity' in the understanding of the aetiological element implicated in the early sexual experiences."[64] In other words, Freud no longer traced the etiology of hysteria to real, passive experiences of sexual abuse, but to the ways that fragmented memories of childhood sexual experiences (passive, as in abuse, or active, as in masturbation) are actively reshaped by that child's own fantasies. While Freud would still admit that some hysterical patients experienced seduction as young children, this fact no longer held etiological significance in the Oedipal explanation for the development of hysteria. The causal relationship developed in the seduction theory between seduction (history) and neurosis (trauma) was severed.

Because the Oedipus myth suggested that children had a frustrated sexual desire for the parent whose sex differed from their own, Freud would soon regard the source of neurosis as the way that a one's fantasies, specifically one's incestual desires, interacted with memories of early childhood sexual stimulation performed by either one's own self (masturbation) or another (seduction/abuse). In either case – seduction or masturbation – a child's incestual desire (and its psychic banishment) was etiologically responsible for the symptoms of neuroses the child develops later in life. Reflecting the common mentality toward genital stimulation among Freud's peers, the conditions under which a child's genitals were stimulated – the degree to which the context of

[64] Carlo Bonomi, "'Sexuality and Death' in Freud's Discovery of Sexual Aetiology," *International Forum of Psychoanalysis* 3, no. 2 (Dec. 2007): 81.

stimulation did or did not constitute childhood sexual abuse by today's standards – were no longer significant to his theory of hysteria's origin.

This means, further, that hysterical symptoms were no longer to be considered derivatives of repressed memories of real experiences of sexual abuse in childhood. Rather, hysterical symptoms are from here forward understood in Freudian psychoanalytic theory as derived from sexual fantasies. Symptoms cannot, as the seduction theory insisted, be traced back to external events as their source. Rather, the analyst is to trace symptoms back to the originary and repressed internal sexual desires of the patient who is suffering.[65]

Excerpt 5: A Meeting of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society

At a meeting of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society in January of 1912, where the topic of conversation centered on masturbation, Freud articulated a precise connection between his shifting views on patients' alleged memories of childhood sexual abuse and the theoretical framework of the Oedipal theory that makes use of this new etiology of the neuroses:

> Since childhood masturbation is such a general occurrence and is at the same time so poorly remembered, it must have an equivalent in psychic life. And, in fact, it is found in the fantasy encountered in most female patients – namely, that the father seduced her in childhood. This is the later reworking which is designed to cover up the recollection of infantile sexual activity and represents an excuse and an extenuation thereof. The grain of truth contained in this fantasy lies in the fact that the father, by way of his innocent caresses in earliest childhood, has actually awakened the littler girl's sexuality (the same thing applies to the little boy and his

[65] Freud here again offers the realization that not all people who experience seduction in childhood become hysterics as motivation for losing confidence in the seduction theory: "Further information now became available relating to people who had remained normal; and this led to the unexpected finding 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" (S.E. 7, 276). He does not tell us what that "further information" is, but Freud seems to have fundamentally changed his mind from 1896 as to whether the fact that some people can experience seduction and *not* become hysterical calls seduction into question as the etiological cause of hysterical neurosis. By 1905, for a reason I have not been able to trace, Freud no longer stands by his tuberculosis analogy for hysteria (used in 1896 to argue the opposite of what he's arguing here). He is convinced that historical experience is not a distinguishing matter in the development of hysteria: "Accidental influences derived from experience having thus receded into the background, the factors of constitution and heredity necessarily gained the upper hand once more" (S.E. 7, 275).

> mother). It is these same affectionate fathers that are the ones who then endeavor to break the child of the habit of masturbation, of which they themselves had by that time become the unwitting cause. And thus the motifs mingle in the most successful fashion to form this fantasy, which often dominates a woman's entire life (seduction fantasy): one part truth, one part gratification of love, and one part revenge.[66]

Here, we see that interpreting women's recollections of childhood sexual abuse by their fathers (and men's recollections of sexual abuse by their mothers) as fantasies, rather than memories of historical events, was considered wholly justified – and even necessary – by Oedipal logic. The theory provided a rule by which memories of incestual childhood sexual abuse should be interpreted by an analyst as evidence of the subject's Oedipal desire for the person who her memory – falsely, according to the Oedipal theory – tells her is her abuser.

At this point in Freud's thought on patients' recollections of childhood sexual abuse several things stand out. First, Freud speaks of the seduction fantasy – what he describes as the imaginary idea that one was sexually abused by her father – is common to *most* women who are treated in analysis. By 1912, he is of the opinion that having, first, a memory childhood sexual abuse, and second, symptoms of psychological neurosis – including those we now associate with complex PTSD – was a combination that marked its sufferers not as traumatically impacted by actual experiences of abuse, but rather, as stuck in an intrapsychic Oedipal conflict of sexual desire and aggression. The implication that seduction fantasies were to be expected in hysterical women primed analysts to interpret recollections of childhood sexual abuse as Oedipal fantasies, and not as historically genuine experiences.

Second, while Freud hinted previously at a connection between screen memories, supposed recollections of childhood seduction, and Oedipal fantasies, he puts concrete structure to his vision of the relationship between these here. Recollections of being seduced by one's father in childhood

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[66] Vienna Psychoanalytic Society meeting, January 24, 1912. Proceedings published in *Minutes of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society*, vol. 4 (1912-1918), eds. H. Nunberg and E. Federn, trans. Marianne Nunberg in collaboration with Harold Collines (New York: International University Press, 1962-1975).

are presented precisely to *be* psychically motivated fantasies functioning as a kind of screen memory to fend off genuine memory of the subject's repressed sexual desire for her father.[67] In such recollections, the psyche hides the subject's memory of her incestual desire in a falsified childhood scene that depicts the subject as wholly innocent of her desire insofar as she is the passive recipient of her father's sexual attention. What is successfully repressed by this kind of fantasy-presenting-as-screen-memory, according to Freud, is the subject's wish that the content of the fantasy had truly taken place. Thus, a pattern of connection is theorized between the content of the subject's fantasy and that which the fantasy functions to repress: that of which the subject is rendered innocent in the fantasy is theoretically presented as revealing the subject's active desire. The subject is judged to want precisely that which her fantasy presents as done to her outside of her control.

Excerpt 6: Freud's Telling of the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement

In his 1914 publication, "On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement," Freud frames the seduction theory as a mistake that could have permanently derailed the development of psychoanalysis had Freud not corrected it. In his recounting of this history, we can trace a specific logic by which Freud's theoretical replacement of the seduction position is entwined with his loss of confidence in the historical veracity of his clients' memories of sexual abuse in childhood.

> On the way [to the creation of psychoanalysis], a mistaken idea had to be overcome which might have been almost fatal to the young science. Influenced by Charcot's view of the traumatic origin of hysteria, one was readily inclined to accept as true and aetiologically significant the statements made by patients in which they ascribed their symptoms to passive sexual experiences in the first years of childhood – to put it bluntly, to seduction. When this aetiology broke down under the weight of its own improbability and contradiction in definitely ascertainable circumstances, the result at first was helpless bewilderment. Analysis had led back to these infantile sexual traumas by the right path, and yet they were not true. The firm ground of reality was

[67] More specifically, to fend off genuine memory of the connection between her masturbation and her sexual desire for her father.

> gone. At that time I would gladly have given up the whole work, just as my esteemed predecessor, Breuer, had done when he made his unwelcome discovery. Perhaps I persevered only because I no longer had any choice and could not then begin again at anything else. At last came the reflection that, after all, one had no right to despair because one has been deceived in one's expectations; one must revise those expectations. If hysterical subjects trace back their symptoms to traumas that are fictitious, then the new fact which emerges is precisely that they create such scenes in phantasy, and this psychical reality requires to be taken into account alongside practical reality. This reflection was soon followed by the discovery that these phantasies were intended to cover up the auto-erotic activity of the first years of childhood, to embellish it and raise it to a higher plane. And now, from behind the phantasies, the whole range of a child's sexual life came to light.[68]

In this telling of Freud's transition from the seduction theory to the Oedipal theory, it was Freud's apparent discovery that his patients' memories of childhood sexual abuse were fictitious that prompted the need for the theoretical foundations of psychoanalysis to be revised. This version of events appears to be at odds with Freud's 1905 and 1906 affirmations that his original patients had, in fact, experienced seduction, but he is clear here in 1914 that the discovery that his patients' claims were fictitious played a central role in his motivation for abandoning the seduction theory. Here again, Freud gives no clinical or scholarly evidence that his patients' memories of abuse were false, but his conviction that what his patients reported to him could not, historically speaking, have happened is presented as the premise upon which the rest of Freud's theoretical revision falls into place: "And now, *from behind the phantasies, the whole range of childhood sexual life came to light.*"[69]

Confident that his patients' recollections of childhood sexual abuse did not derive from historical reality, Freud describes himself as reasoning accordingly that his patients' must have fabricated these traumatic recollections themselves. Such a conclusion requires an explanation. Why would a person give themselves the idea that something so upsetting had befallen them? Freud's

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[68] Sigmund Freud, "On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement" (1914), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* volumes 14 (S.E. 14), ed. & trans. James Strachey and Anna Freud (London: The Hogarth Press, 1957), 17.
[69] S.E. 14, 17 (emphasis added).

answer is that what appears on the surface to be upsetting – memory of being sexually abused by a caretaker – is, in actuality, soothing to the person who fabricates it, because this scene protects the person from a historically genuine and significantly more disturbing memory of that person's own sexual desire for the caretaker they fantasized had abused them. This conclusion – that young children universally have sexual desire and regularly take their caretakers as the objects of that desire – becomes the foundation for the theoretical position with which Freud replaced the seduction theory. In other words, Freud's theory of children's broad sexuality set forth in *Three Theories* and his Oedipal interpretation of children's sexuality developed throughout the course of his work are frameworks logically derived from the seduction theory's disavowal. They came into existence as the logical conclusions of considering adult memories of childhood sexual abuse to be, as a class, fictitious.[70] This does not mean that these theories are wrong by necessity. In fact, the notion that children have sexuality is a basic and, according to subsequent psychological literature, accurate insight. It does suggest, however, that the contours of Freud's positions need to be examined in light of the degree to which they reinforce skepticism of sexual violence survivors' testimonies.

Excerpt 7: Sexual Violence, Fantasy, and Reality in Freud's Introductory Lectures

It would be wrong, however, to assert that Freud rigidly held each individual case in which a patient had a memory of sexual abuse in childhood to the general rule that this kind of memory was rooted in fantasy rather than history. Through to the end of his life, Freud continued to insist that the sexual abuse of children was a real kind of event that did happen occasionally in the early lives those who sought psychoanalytic treatment. This excerpt from Freud's 1916-17 "Introductory Lectures on

[70] When I say *as a class* I do not mean to suggest that Freud thought every memory of childhood seduction was fictitious. As we will soon see, he maintained throughout his career that sexual abuse is a real phenomenon and that some patients' memories of sexual abuse in childhood are true memories of historical events. Thus, what I mean when I say that adult memories of childhood sexual abuse were considered fictitious as a class, is first, that this kind of memory was treated as a specific class of memory, and second, that this kind of memory was regarded as especially subject to fabrication even as some individual instances proved to be genuine.

Psycho-Analysis," represents the way he tended to address the historical reality of childhood sexual abuse in connection with his theoretical shift toward interpreting such recollections as fantasies.

> Phantasies of being seduced are of particular interest, because so often they are not phantasies but real memories. Fortunately, however, they are nevertheless not real as often as seemed at first to be shown by the findings of analysis. Seduction by an older child or by one of the same age is even more frequent than by an adult; and if in the case of girls who produce such an event in the story of their childhood their father figures fairly regularly as the seducer, there can be no doubt either of the imaginary nature of the accusation or of the motive that has led to it. A phantasy of being seduced when no seduction has occurred is usually employed by a child to screen the auto-erotic period of his sexual activity. He spares himself shame about masturbation by retrospectively phantasying a desired object into these earliest times. You must not suppose, however, that sexual abuse of a child by its nearest male relatives belongs entirely to the realm of phantasy. Most analysts will have treated cases in which such events were real and could be unimpeachably established; but even so they related to the later years of childhood and had been transposed into earlier times.[71]

Freud clearly insists that, sometimes, recollections of sexual abuse are memories of historical events. Note, however, that by 1916 Freud's rhetorical emphasis has flipped its direction in relation to his earlier writings. What Freud is pained to express to his readers here is that seduction *fantasies* are, on occasion, *real memories*. The concept and reality of seduction fantasies takes precedent over that of historically genuine seduction memories. The point of clarification needed is that there are times when what presents as a fantasy by way of its content may, in fact, be a genuine memory rather than a scene conjured by psychic motivation. In attesting to the possibility that recollections of childhood sexual abuse may in some cases have a historical referent, Freud is encouraging his readers to understand that there are exceptions to the theoretical rule that memories of this kind are to be interpreted as fantasies. The rule, though not the emphasis of this particular excerpt, is nonetheless rhetorically and logically reinforced.

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[71] S.E. 16, 369.

In addition, though Freud grants that seduction occurs, he sandwiches this point around an insistence that when a girl or woman accuses her father of such abuse it is certain that her recollection is a fantasy and that the events referenced by her recollection did not occur in historical reality. This argument demonstrates Freud's defensiveness of fathers – a defensiveness that is discernible as far back as Freud's career can be traced. In the 1924 edition of *Studies in Hysteria,* originally co-published with Breuer in 1895, Freud added a revealing footnote. Regarding a case originally described in the 1895 edition of the volume as a sexual assault against a girl, Katharina, by her uncle, Freud says this:

> I venture after the lapse of so many years to lift the veil of discretion and reveal the fact that Katharina was not the niece but the daughter of the landlady. The girl fell ill, therefore, as a result of sexual attempts on the part of her own father [described as the landlady's husband in the narrative]. Distortions like the one which I introduced in the present instance should be altogether avoided in reporting case history.[72]

We find out that it was not Katharina's uncle who sexually assaulted her. It was her father. This 1924 correction to the clinical narrative suggests that Freud had been inclined as early as 1895 to protect against the notion that fathers were responsible for the abuse their daughters attributed to them. In Freud's September 1897 letter to Fliess that is widely considered to announce Freud's turn away from the seduction theory, recall that Freud included among his motivations for rethinking his position, "…the surprise that, in all cases, the father, not excluding my own, had to be accused of being perverse."[73] Even during Freud's seduction theory days he shied away from publicly attributing the abuse from which patients suffered to their fathers, routinely naming other children, mothers, and nursemaids as common aggressors in his published work. Freud's 1917 insistence that recollections of abuse that depict fathers as responsible were undeniably fantasies, then, simply codified his career-long defensiveness of fathers in the form theory. Even so, the wrestling Freud

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[72] Sigmund Freud, "Studies on Hysteria" in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* volume 2 (S.E. 2), ed. & trans. James Strachey and Anna Freud (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), 134.
[73] Sigmund Freud, *The Origins of Psychoanalysis*, 215-218.

does here – first, "if…their father figures fairly regularly as the seducer, there can be no doubt either of the imaginary nature of the accusation or of the motive that has led to it," and then, "You must not suppose, however, that sexual abuse of a child by its nearest male relatives belongs entirely to the realm of phantasy" – foreshadows his decision to correct the record on Katharina's case in 1924.

Excerpt 8: An Autobiographical Study and Seduction's Final Renunciation

Despite his periodic reminders to his readers that the sexual abuse of children did, sometimes, truly occur, Freud's commitment to the notion that he had been wrong in 1896 to believe that his early clients had experienced the childhood sexual abuse that they recalled persisted through the remainder of his career. In 1925 he described his initial willingness to believe the testimony of his early patients as regrettable naiveté: "I believed these stories, and consequently supposed that I had discovered the roots of the subsequent neurosis in these experiences of sexual seduction in childhood….If the reader feels inclined to shake his head at my credulity, I cannot altogether blame him."[74] Freud could not more definitively express the confidence he held at the end of his career that his patients had fabricated their memories childhood sexual abuse: "…I was at last obliged to recognize that these scenes of seduction had never taken place, and that they were only fantasies which my patients had made up."[75] Thus, while we cannot be sure precisely when or why Freud decided that his original patients' testimonies of sexual abuse in childhood ought not be believed, the momentum of his theoretical shift from seduction theory to Oedipal paradigm moved him from an intellectual defense of belief to its rejection.

[74] Sigmund Freud, "An Autobiographical Study" (1925), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* volume 20 (S.E. 20), ed. & trans. James Strachey and Anna Freud (London: The Hogarth Press, 1959), 34.
[75] S.E. 20, 34.

Due Process Culture and Freud's Shift Away from the Seduction Theory

The reading that I have just offered of Freud's transition from the seduction theory to the Oedipal theory is not the only kind of reading that can be made. It is certainly not a reading that seeks out or accounts for the merits of the Oedipal theory on its own terms; it does not assess the strength of the theory in terms of its power to explain patterns of normal human psychological development. As I said earlier, my goal in this chapter has not been to offer a comprehensive reading of the Oedipal theory. Rather, I have attempted to draw out the ways that Freud's explanations for renouncing the seduction theory are relevant to the contemporary problem of belief with respect to sexual violence. In other words, I have sought to name the dynamics of Freud's renunciation of the seduction theory that open space for due process culture to take root. And, indeed, the dynamics that I have described show up as integral to due process logic.

To summarize the theoretical shifts entailed in Freud's replacement of the seduction theory with the Oedipal paradigm that are relevant to this dissertation's focus, we can start by naming several reversals.[76] First, the Oedipal theory reversed the seduction theory insofar as it made children aggressors and parents victims. Whereas the seduction theory viewed children as vulnerable to parental abuses, the Oedipal theory presented children's aggression and sexual desires as posing a fundamental threat to their parents. Fathers accused of sexual abuse by their daughters were cast by the Oedipal theory as innocent victims of their children's hostile self-deceptions. This reversal of familial roles extended to the level of society as well. Whereas society was imagined as hostile to children in the seduction theory, the Oedipal theory presented society as a benevolent force that chastens and works to sublimate children's natural hostilities into socially adaptive habits. Something similar can be said of, for example, Elizabeth Loftus's view of children, their parents and society.

[76] There are *many* other dynamics of Freud's theory switch that could be named if the goal were to give a comprehensive account of the theoretical differences between Freud's seduction theory and his Oedipal theory of childhood sexuality. As I stated earlier, my goal has been much more limited. Namely, it has been to address those dynamics of the theory switch that are immediately relevant to the problem of belief with respect to sexual violence.

For Loftus, parents, and specifically fathers, are fundamentally loving and innocent figures who are victimized by their children who falsely accuse them of acts of sexual abuse that they did not commit. The role of society in relation to this conflict is less clear. While, in her perspective, society ought to be a benevolent force in children's lives, she is concerned that certain sectors of society (namely, those that promote the idea that repressed memory is a real phenomenon) are contributing to children's misplaced hostility against their parents.

Oedipal logic also constituted a reversal to that of the seduction theory insofar as it suggested an etiology for hysteria rooted in children's sexual *act*ivity as opposed to *pass*ivity. In the seduction theory, hysteria develops as a consequence of children being sexually acted upon by an Other in opposition to their desire and outside of their control. The Oedipal theory proposes exactly the opposite: that hysterical symptoms are linked to the sufferer's active sexual desire and to the sufferer's own sexual acts of self-pleasure. Whereas the seduction theory conceives of hysterical symptoms as, to some degree, imposed by external events and actors, Oedipal logic proposes that the cause of such symptoms is primarily internal to the one who bears them. Literally, it is children's path of human development in connection with conflicts that arise out of a particular child's internal sexual constitution and desires that map the course of neurotic illness. The hysteric, in other words, gives rise to her own misery from within.

It may be especially pertinent to note, here, that none of these dynamics of the Oedipal theory are problematic inherently. There is nothing necessarily wrong with active sexual desire and self-pleasure or with suggesting that these may be relevant to the shape of one's neuroses. Attributing psychological distress to internal factors, likewise, need not necessarily cause alarm. Rather, these dynamics of the Oedipal theory become problematic when applied within the cultural and psychological context of sexual violence in the West. They open space for due process culture to interpret survivors of sexual violence as themselves responsible for what they suffer.

Perhaps the most important reversal for our inquiry concerns the roles of reality and fantasy in Freud's thought. Freud was at pains in the seduction theory to convince his audience that his patients' memories of sexually traumatic events in early childhood were memories of historically genuine experiences. The scenes of seduction that patients recalled were taken to reveal events that had, in reality, happened. In the Oedipal framework, the etiological and interpretive importance of reality is renounced and shifted onto fantasy. On one hand, the actual experience of childhood sexual abuse becomes inconsequential for psychoanalytic interpretation of hysterical symptoms. Even if a patient was so abused, this fact is rendered unimportant for the development of their psychological distress, and attention to the experience of abuse is regarded as unnecessary for its resolution.[77] On the other hand, a patient's sexual fantasies – imagined in the form of faux memories that simultaneously express and conceal a patient's sexual desires – become both etiologically and clinically paramount.

Another way of getting at the shift of theoretical emphasis from reality to fantasy is to think of reality in connection with experience and fantasy in connection with desire. The seduction theory identified the object of repression as sexually traumatic experience and the Oedipal paradigm proposed that the content of repression was not sexual experience but sexual wishes. This is the logic by which the Oedipal paradigm can, then, propose that hysterical symptoms derive from an internal conflict in connection with the subject's repressed sexual desire. And this is how hysterical symptoms become in the Oedipal theory a transformation of fantasies instead of a transformation of repressed episodic memories. Rather than tracing back to traumatic sexual experience as the seduction theory proposed, the Oedipal paradigm traces symptoms back to the subject's early acts of

[77] It was Freud's opinion that the fantasy vs. reality question was irrelevant for properly pursuing therapeutic ends with patients: "…up to the present we have not succeeded in pointing to any difference in the consequences, whether phantasy or reality has had the greater share in these events of childhood" (S.E. 16, 369). Whether a patient's recollection of sexual abuse referred to a historical event or an imagined one, investigating the patient's repressed fantasies and sexual wishes was the clinical course to be taken according to the Oedipal paradigm.

masturbation and to the incestual desire supposed to have motivated sexual self-pleasure. This means that it is a desire to be innocent of one's own sexual longing that the Oedipal paradigm theorizes to be at the heart of seduction fantasies and hysterical neuroses. Consequently, that of which a childhood seduction fantasy suggests a person *is innocent* is theorized as exactly that about which the subject *fantasizes*, or, in other words, *wants*. Though all context and nuance with respect to this theoretical framework is lost in contemporary hands, due process culture mimics a blunt version of this logic when it supposes that people who claim to have experienced sexual violence are giving their testimonies (consciously or not) in retaliation against the accused for denying them a sexual experience that they had, in fact, wanted.[78]

While in Freud's earlier thought memory offered a reliable point of entry into experience and history, Freud's renunciation of the seduction theory severs the tight correspondence by which he previously conceived of the relations between these three legs of our triad. Without divorcing the three from one another entirely, Freud opens up space between them and fills that space with fantasy as a mediating component. Memory no longer reliably reveals experience and history because what presents as memory may, in fact, be falsified to greater or lesser extent by fantasy. What feels to a subject to be memory may be a screen concealing experience and history – the exact opposite of the common notion of memory as the preserver and revealer of history as it has impacted a particular subject. In the Oedipal approach to patients' recollections of childhood sexual abuse, memory becomes a place for objectionable experiences to hide. Whereas the seduction theory posited memory as an antidote to the form of repression that lies at the root of hysterical symptoms, the Oedipal framework images memory as repression's partner and ally. What is retained by a patient as a mnemic image, then, is interpreted not as an image that corresponds with a historical scene but

[78] The alternative version of this form of due process skepticism is to suppose that the one claiming to have been sexually assaulted did (consciously or not) want and consent to the encounter but denies this out of a feeling of shame for their sexual desire.

as the outcome of creative psychic mechanism for resolving internal conflict. And that outcome-as-mnemic-image may or may not be coextensive with events as they historically occurred.

On one hand, this reversal opens space for the problem of belief at issue in Freud's seduction theory to be helpfully addressed. Conceiving of memory, experience, and history as fully correspondent does not allow for the reality that traumatic memory does not always correspond. A theoretical framework built on correspondence is not able to support the appropriateness of believing survivors' testimonies of sexual violence when those testimonies change over time or when details of a survivor's memory are shown to be inconsistent with the historical scene. By loosening the relationship between memory, experience, and history in his shift away from the seduction theory, Freud opened a possibility for developing new theories of memory that would better account for the way memory works in the lives of survivors. And yet, Freud used denial of memories of sexual violence as the means by which he would open the memory, history, experience triad beyond strict correspondence. In doing so, he creates an opportunity for due process culture to associate the rejection of full correspondence between memory and history with the appropriateness of denying survivors' memories. In other words, the method of his argument preserves and carves out space in which due process culture and the broader, systemic dimensions of sexual violence can flourish.

Conclusion

I said in my introduction to this dissertation that I was motivated to pursue the subject matter of this and the previous chapter because my own experience and my work with survivors of sexual violence had made me curious about whether there might be a connection between Freud's disavowal of the seduction theory and false memory syndrome arguments against believing survivors' recovered memories of sexual violence. I had observed that both were invoked somewhat frequently in survivors' experiences of dismissal, and I wanted to know what about these two

intellectual events, separated by nearly a century, made them available and powerful tools for denying survivors' testimonies belief today. I have now proposed in this chapter that there are, in fact, multiple points of connection between Freud's renunciation of the seduction theory and due process culture, of which the false memory syndrome movement is a part. I suspect that it is these points of connection, or resonance, that generate the power of each intellectual event to promote patterns of withholding belief from survivors' testimonies. More specifically, I suspect that these points of connection are also resonant with broader habits of thought and mind within western culture that promote denial, and that it is their resonance with these broader features of western approaches to sexual violence that invest them with power to promote logics and habits of denial today.

Another reason I named in this dissertation's introduction for pursuing the subject matter of this chapter and the last concerns the relationship of the seduction theory to the believe all woman framework. I had a hunch that survivor advocates' tendency to propose that Freud should never have abandoned the seduction theory was only a reflection of the theory's strength in part, and that something else, culturally and politically speaking, was at play in the urgency of this claim. I have now suggested that while the seduction theory gets quite a bit about sexual violence right, it drew too correspondent a relationship between memory, experience, and history to ground an approach to believing survivors that has staying power, and I observed that this same problem attends contemporary believe all women approaches to sexual violence as well. I noted also that while the import of the seduction theory for understanding sexual violence trauma is significant, a strict reading of the seduction theory as implying that all acute psychological distress stems from sexual abuse in childhood is (clearly) not accurate and not helpful to people who have experienced sexual violence in childhood or otherwise. What I expect drives survivor advocates to, nonetheless, latch tightly onto the seduction theory is that it offers a theoretical framework that supports belief in the

shape that belief is most commonly conceived by the believe all women framework. As I have said previously, the believe all women framework does do some degree of important political work on survivors' behalf. It is the most culturally ubiquitous (and therefore powerful) form of resistance to due process culture's skepticism of survivors' testimonies. It has the potential to increase the possibility that survivors' disclosures of sexual violence will be met with a compassionate, supportive response. And, it supports the likelihood that a survivor's disclosure will prompt a material response that resists sexual violence and works toward justice and wellbeing. And yet, belief in the seduction theory and in the believe all women framework remains hollow. In each case, to *believe* is to affirm that what a survivor says happened did, historically speaking, happen. Belief is taken to follow from rationally deduced confidence that survivors' memories and/or testimonies are inherently correspondent with history.

What we need in order to stage a transformative intervention into the problem of belief, I propose, is not to strengthen the force with which we stand behind belief as it is put forward by the seduction theory and the believe all women framework. For belief to become a concept and practice that is robust enough to, on one hand, gain real traction against due process culture, and on the other, support sustained solidarity with survivors, we need to find a way out of the dualistic bind.

Chapter 4: The Problem of Belief in Theological Recommendations for Responding to Sexual Violence in the Church

The work of this chapter is to bring the problem of belief discussed in part one of this dissertation to bear on theological recourses that give practical counsel for responding to reports of sexual violence in Christian ecclesial contexts. It asks what those faced with the task of ministering to Christian communities impacted by sexual violence are likely to find should they seek out practical theological resources for guidance. In particular, this chapter is interested in how such persons are advised to negotiate the theological, ethical, political, and pastoral dimensions of extending or withholding belief in response to testimonies of sexual violence. In other words, I aim to sustain attention on how practical theological approaches to believing survivor testimony reinforce, challenge, or open a way beyond the problem of belief represented by the opposition of due process and believe all women frameworks.[1]

In this chapter, my thought is especially influenced by my role as an advocate for survivors of sexual violence in Christian contexts. As a reminder for the reader, I am the Director of Theological Integrity for the organization Into Account, which is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to providing solidarity, advocacy, and strategic support to survivors of sexual violence who are connected to Christian communities of faith. Into Account works with survivors to organize for needed transformation within survivors' communities toward solidarity with those who have experienced sexual violence, accountability for those who have enabled harm, and systemic resistance to the continuation of sexual violence in the future. As a part of my work with Into Account, I direct a project called Our Stories Untold, which offers a moderated, survivor-centered online platform through which survivors of sexual violence are welcomed to speak and supported in

[1] When I describe the resources I have in mind as both *practical* and *theological* I do not necessarily mean to suggest that these are resources proper to the literature of *practical theology* as a discipline, although there is certainly overlap.

doing so.[2] In this dissertation's introduction, I described this chapter as the heart of the dissertation. I said that my pursuit of this entire project is energized in large part by my desire to support survivors' prospects of experiencing solidarity from their communities of faith. And, this chapter aims to articulate both continuing obstacles within theological programs of response to sexual violence that render the possibility of solidarity precarious, and opportunities this same literature makes available for the hope of solidarity to be realized. As we prepare to enter this reflection on the problem of belief in theological recommendations for responding to sexual violence in the church, I would like to remind the reader the I regard each of the texts engaged in this chapter as having made needed and positive contributions to efforts to resist sexual violence within the church. I chose them as conversation partners because I think they represent the best of what theology currently has to offer by way of practical guidance for congregations. Whether critical or affirming, the reading of these texts that I offer here is given in hopes of thinking together with the authors, and the broader collective of those concerned about sexual violence in the church, toward improving our conceptual and practical tools for intervention.

What follows, then, is a discussion of three foundational texts that recommend plans of engagement with survivors in the church. The first text I discuss is Marie Fortune's *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited* (and the first edition of this text, *Sexual Violence: The Unmentionable Sin*).[3] The second is Toinette Eugene and James Poling's *Balm For Gilead: Pastoral Care for African American Families Experiencing Abuse.*[4] And the third is FaithTrust Institute's *Responding to Clergy Misconduct: A Handbook*.[5] I selected these particular texts to reflect upon because they are texts designed to be read by

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[2] Our Stories Untold can be accessed at ourstoriesuntold.com or through its parent organization, Into Account at intoaccount.org.

[3] Marie M. Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Unmentionable Sin – An Ethical and Pastoral Perspective*, (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1983); Marie M. Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited*, (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2005).

[4] Toinette M. Eugene and James N. Poling, *Balm For Gilead: Pastoral Care for African American Families Experiencing Abuse*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998).

[5] Marie M. Fortune, Kimberly Day-Lewis, Mark Dratch, and Aleese Moore-Orbih, *Responding to Clergy Misconduct: A Handbook*, (FaithTrust Institute, 2009).

ministers and theological educators looking for guidance regarding the intersection of Christian life and sexual violence. Each of these texts aims to provide direct counsel to the church regarding theologically and ethically robust practices for receiving and responding to disclosures of sexually violent experiences.[6] I will read them, here, with an eye toward how caretakers of communities faced with sexual violence will be advised to respond to survivors' disclosures if these texts were to serve as guide. More specifically, and to bring my reflection on this question into relationship with the guiding questions of this dissertation, I will pose two others in addition. First, where does each text fall in the believe all women / due process frame that I have articulated in chapters one through three? And second, what options, if any, does each text open for constructing an approach to belief outside of this frame? Loosely, while each of the three texts I read in this chapter has a practical focus, the chapter is organized to move from texts that give more theoretically framed recommendations to those that give more applied recommendations. In organizing the chapter this way I aim to show that the transition from abstract to concrete recommendations for responding to sexual violence in the church is accompanied by a parallel shift in the literature from the believe all women approach to belief to that of due process.

Marie M. Fortune

Marie Fortune is a critical figure in the landscape of theological engagements with sexual violence. An academic, an advocate, and an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ, she was an

[6] With more space, a number of other texts might also have been included in this chapter. Certainly, numerous volumes from James Polling's oeuvre would be appropriate, particularly *The Abuse of Power: A Theological Problem* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991). The same can be said of Pamela Cooper-White's work, including *The Cry of Tamar: Violence Against Women and the Church's Response*, second edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012). I recommend Cooper-White's 2011 article "Intimate Violence Against Women: Trajectories for Pastoral Care in a New Millennium," as a more comprehensive point of entry into practical theology and pastoral caregiving literature that engages the subject of sexual violence. I want to highlight one text referenced in Cooper-White's article that may be especially relevant to those looking for practical resources for addressing sexual violence in ecclesial contexts: Monica Coleman, *The Dinah Project: A Handbook or Congregational Response to Sexual Violence* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004). A noteworthy addition to the literature since 2011 is Stephanie Crumpton's *A Womanist Pastoral Theology against Intimate and Cultural Violence* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

early instigator of contemporary theological reflection on sexual violence in the United States. Fortune has authored and edited over ten books on the subject. In 1977 she founded FaithTrust Institute – a pioneering organization committed to confronting sexual violence in communities of faith.[7] She served as the organization's executive director for twenty-two years. Fortune's work on the intersection of sexual violence with theology and Christian practice developed in conjunction with the wider societal focus on sexual violence of the 1980s and early 1990s. Her writing and advocacy opened opportunities for the development of broader theological scholarship on sexual violence, and Fortune's work significantly shaped the frame from which theologians, ministers, and advocates would encourage Christian communities of faith to engage both survivors and perpetrators of sexual harm. Today, the influence of Fortune's thought and the impact of her advocacy remain strong.

In 1983 Fortune published *Sexual Violence: The Unmentionable Sin – An Ethical and Pastoral Perspective*. In 2005, she published *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited* – a version of her 1983 text updated to account for the intervening years' developments in the way sexual violence is understood and addressed. Of the titles in her oeuvre, I take these two texts to together represent the core of Fortune's thought on the problem of sexual violence, its relevance for the church, and theology's best recommendations for responding to survivors' testimonies of harm. It is through engagement with these two texts that I will both situate Fortune with respect to believe all women and due process approaches to believing survivor testimony, and consider what new resources Fortune makes available that may offer a way beyond the dualism.

The thesis shared by Fortune's two texts is that sexual violence is a sin. Thus, Fortune argues, sexual violence ought to be understood as a religious issue that demands just and comprehensive theological, pastoral, and practical attention from the church. For Fortune, *sin*

[7] FaithTrust Institute was formerly known as the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence.

describes "a state of alienation, brokenness, and estrangement" from self, others, and God.[8] As a sin, sexual violence has personal dimensions, relational dimensions, and social dimensions.[9] Fortune understands sin to be not so much the breaking of a religious rule as it is a rupture of the right relationships for which God created the world. As Fortune articulates the ways that sexual violence creates such a rupture, she points to the Hebrew Scriptures as a source for reflection. Using the story of Dinah to talk about rape, the story of Tamar to reflect on incest, and the story of Bathsheba to discuss how social power dynamics inform sexual violence, Fortune reveals the Hebrew Bible as a powerful witness to sexual violence. It serves as this kind of witness for Fortune in at least two ways. The Hebrew Bible is a witness to sexual violence insofar as it offers a window into the suffering of victims. But often, as Fortune is careful to point out, the suffering of victims is not the priority of the text. Therefore, she presents the Hebrew Bible as also a witness to sexual violence insofar as the text itself performs, and in doing so reveals, deeply problematic ways of interpreting and responding to sexual violence, many of which, Fortune argues, continue to impact survivors today.

To address sexual violence well, Fortune contends, the church needs strong resources for understanding what it is, and Fortune devotes the first portion of her book to offering precisely this. For example, she identifies the western cultural tendency to conflate sexual activity with sexual violence as a primary impediment to understanding sexual violence. Tracing the conflation of sex with sexual violence to dominant western cultural norms that wed male sexuality to dominating power over women, Fortune says, "The confusion of sexual activity with sexual coercion and violence has become the core of male sexual socialization. The implications for society are far-reaching."[10] Thus, Fortune recommends an approach to sexual violence that understands the phenomenon in social terms, and not merely as a private, personal, or individual kind of harm. A

[8] Marie Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited*, 13.
[9] See Marie Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited*, 66-69.
[10] Marie Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited*, 27.

significant contribution of Fortune's work is that she links the western conflation of sex with sexual violence to Christian history, doctrine, and practice, showing how the church and its theology have helped to shore up and shape the contours of the problem. For example, she points to how this is accomplished through the church's traditional interpretations of biblical stories like Sodom and Gomorrah and the Levite and his concubine. These are stories that feature sexual attacks on guests staying the night in towns that are not their own, and yet both are traditionally interpreted as referring to and condemning same sex sexual contact (sexual activity, by Fortune's definition), *not* sexual violence. For Fortune, this reading is shaped by and promotes the confusion of sexual activity with sexual violence. "This misinterpretation," she says, "and its influence on Christian teaching has resulted in silence on the sin of sexual violence and inaccurate information and confused ethical teaching on homosexuality."[11] In other words, because the traditional interpretation reads acts of sexual violence as acts of sexual activity, it both silences the fact of sexual violence and wrongly displaces moral condemnation away from sexual violence and onto (same sex) sexual activity. Another contribution of Fortune's work is that, in response to the problematic tendency for sexual activity and sexual violence to be collapsed together, she proposes concrete mechanisms for drawing careful and, she argues, necessary distinctions between them.[12]

Next, Fortune articulates what she calls *a new sexual ethic*, one that prepares Christians to approach sexual activity in ways that resist sexual violence. Fortune's guiding question is this: "If persons are created by God to be in relationship, then what is the *norm of a just relationship*?"[13] She proposes that such a norm is one characterized by a context of agape love in addition to, "mutuality,

[11] Marie Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited*, 33, 66.
[12] See, for example, pages 38-46 in *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited*. Here, Fortune proposes two continuums, one for sexual activity and one for sexual violence. She proposes these continuums as mutually exclusive, thereby separating sexual activity from sexual violence while preserving the notion that both terms describe a range of socially influenced behaviors and experiences.
[13] Marie Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited*, 93, emphasis original.

equality, shared power, trust, choice, responsibility, and respect for bodily integrity."[14] She suggests, further, that a sexual ethic interested in offering "principles and parameters [that] would support authentic consensual sex between persons" is one that must emphasize exactly that: authentic consent, which Fortune describes as consent that is "fully informed and freely given."[15] Accordingly, this kind of sexual ethic must be attentive to the ways that unequal distributions of power in relationships can limit the possibility of authentic consent. Particularly in the church, a sexual ethic that resists sexual violence must understand why sexual activity between a minister and someone under that minister's care is wrong: "It is wrong," Fortune explains, "because sexual activity *in this context* is exploitative and abusive."[16] It is necessarily so, Fortune argues, for four reasons: it is a violation of role, it is a misuse of authority and power, it is taking advantage of vulnerability, and it is inherently characterized by an absence of meaningful consent.[17]

As she articulates the kind of sexual ethic she proposes for the church, Fortune describes her proposal as one that departs significantly from the traditional tendency of the church to think about sexual ethics within the frame of what Fortune calls the "who, what, where, when, and why approach to sexuality."[18] Whereas the church has long been primarily concerned with questions around whether persons of the same gender should engage in sexual activity (who?), whether certain kinds of sexual activity should be prohibited (what?), whether persons should engage in sex before marriage (when?), whether persons should engage in nonprocreative sex (why?), and so on, Fortune urges Christians to focus their sexual ethics on the qualitative substance of the relationship in which sexual activity is at issue. Offering careful interpretations of scripture as one of her warrants, she

[14] Marie Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited*, 93.
[15] Marie Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited*, 74, 79.
[16] Marie Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited*, 89.
[17] Fortune expands on these four reasons on pages 89 and 90 of *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited.*
[18] Marie Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited*, 79.

proposes that a Christian sexual ethic that resists sexual violence is one that promotes relationships in which persons are able to answer the following questions in the affirmative:

- "Is my choice of intimate partner a peer, that is, someone whose power is relatively equal to mine?"[19]
- "Are both my partner and I authentically consenting to our sexual interaction?"[20]
- "Do I take responsibility for protecting myself and my partner against sexually transmitted diseases and to ensure reproductive choice?"[21]
- "Am I committed to sharing pleasure and intimacy in my relationship?"[22]
- "Am I faithful to my promises and commitments?"[23]

Within this frame, a Christian sexual ethic that resists sexual violence is one focused primarily on the quality of the relationship between sexual partners. Interest in the who, what, where, when, and why of sexual activity is appropriate only insofar as these details are relevant to a qualitative focus.

The final emphasis of Fortune's book, to which its entire second half is devoted, considers what the church ought to *do* about sexual violence. She asks, for example: What constitutes a just response? What makes for healing? In what ways does Christian doctrine matter? In the aftermath of sexual violence, what kinds of Christian practices might help? What do we do with the Christian ideals of forgiveness and reconciliation? What is the role of the church leader in responding to sexual violence? What is the role of the pastoral caregiver? And, what is the role of the congregational community? These are questions that Fortune strives to address with practical thought that can guide a Christian community's response when survivors of sexual violence come forward to disclose their experiences of harm. The remainder of my engagement with Fortune's work will be primarily concerned with this portion of her text, because it is here that whether and how communities of faith ought to believe survivors' testimonies of sexual violence is most directly at issue.

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[19] Marie Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited*, 97.
[20] Marie Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited*, 98.
[21] Marie Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited*, 98.
[22] Marie Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited*, 99.
[23] Marie Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited*, 99-100.

Let us return our attention, then, to the problem of belief. For Fortune, the problem of belief is paramount. Acknowledging that the problem is often, to an extent, internal to the survivor, Fortune explains to her readers that, "The initial reaction of a rape victim is *shock and disbelief*. Victims seldom believe that such a thing can happen to them."[24] However, because Fortune is writing primarily for those who are in a position to respond to sexual violence as representatives of a survivor's faith community, her focus is on the problem of belief as it manifests for those to whom survivors disclose their sexually violent experiences. When a survivor comes forward and gives testimony to what they have suffered, "Most people," Fortune says, "even those who are most aware, have a lingering question as to whether a rape victim is not somehow responsible for the assault."[25] Thus, while one temptation for those who listen to survivors is to blame the victim, Fortune names another. The second temptation is "to minimize or not believe what is being said so as to soften its impact on one's psyche."[26] For Fortune, these two temptations are nearly universal, they are self-preserving, and they are disastrous for both survivors of sexual violence and survivors' communities. Like virtually all other survivor advocates, and consistent with the believe all women argument in favor of believing survivors' testimonies, Fortune sees the withholding of belief as an act that restricts survivors' access to safety (i.e. one's ability to leave a violent home or get appropriate medical care), as an act that compounds the trauma of the original violence by increasing survivors' isolation from their communities, and as an act that impedes processes of justice and healing that are critical for survivors' long-term wellbeing.

Fortune affirms, then, that belief is fundamental to the kind of response one ought to give when confronted with a survivors' disclosure that she has experienced sexual violence. Fortune names belief, in fact, as one of the most critical responses a member of a survivor's faith community

[24] Marie Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited*, 210, emphasis original.
[25] Marie Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited*, 220.
[26] Marie Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited*, 191.

can give. "The two most key positive responses," she says, "are *believing the victim/survivor* and providing her or him with someone with whom to talk. *Unconditional acceptance* is an important early step in reducing psychological distress and moving toward healing."[27] As Fortune discusses the need for belief throughout the book, she does so without ever suggesting that its extension have preconditions. And here, she is clear to link belief with unconditional acceptance, a position to which the due process approach to belief would articulate clear opposition.

Fortune's recommendation that faith communities believe survivors' testimonies promptly and without precondition marks her approach to belief as one that leans definitively more toward the believe all women position than toward that of due process culture. Recall, however, that what I have articulated as the believe all women position is characterized not only by an insistence on immediate belief, but also by a particular interpretation of what it means to believe. The next question that needs to be asked of Fortune, then, is what she means by belief and what constitutes its practice.

One way to think about what Fortune means by belief is to consider what she has to say about its opposites, denial and avoidance. For Fortune, *denial* operates primarily on the societal level. She uses the term to talk about the widespread refusal to believe that sexual violence is, in fact, a serious and ubiquitous social reality. Notably for this dissertation, Fortune portrays denial as a common feature of western culture and traces the source of its strength to psychoanalytic theory and, specifically, to Freud. I will come back to this shortly, but what is important to highlight about Fortune's thought on denial at this point is that she takes denial to be an unwarranted, politically and psychologically motivated rejection of the truth that sexual violence is real. If denial is the opposite of belief, we can think about Fortune's approach to belief as, at least in part, concerned with one's willingness to accept sexual violence as a pervasive social reality. In this sense, belief has to do with

[27] Marie Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited*, 192, emphasis added.

one's broad orientation toward the world and the lenses through which one interprets social life. Just as denial is a cultural product, cultivated and deployed through particular kinds of thought and practice that structure western life, so too is belief, in this sense, a cultural product. To say that belief is ethically necessary is, then, to say on some level that it is incumbent upon us to cultivate the kind of culture that promotes it. This kind of belief is not so much, or at least not only, cognitive assent to a truth position. It is also a political, ethical, and cultural *claim*. It works as both an investment in the truth that sexual violence is a social problem and as a return on such investments previously made.

In Fortune's view, denial, which operates on the social level, also plays a role in refusals to believe survivor testimony that operate at the interpersonal level. For Fortune, maintaining an orientation toward the world that denies the broad reality of sexual violence paves the way for one to, then, justify withholding belief from specific accounts of its manifestation. Fortune uses the term *avoidance* to talk about the withholding of belief from survivors' testimonies at this interpersonal level. As a response to specific survivors' claims of sexual violence, Fortune says avoidance tends to be achieved in one of two ways. The first method of avoidance denies that a survivor's claims are historically true. In this instance, the one receiving the survivor's testimony withholds belief that what the survivor says happened did happen. Withholding belief involves a denial that a survivor's memory (as represented in her testimony) corresponds with the history to which it attests. The decision not to extend belief to the historical truth of a survivor's testimony tends to be justified in this form of avoidance on the grounds either that the survivor's memory is mistaken or that the survivor is lying.

The second method of avoidance accepts that a sexual encounter occurred but blames the survivor for the fact that it happened or minimizes the harm the experience caused.[28] Here, while a

[28] Marie Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited*, 113.

correspondence between a survivor's memory and the history to which it refers is maintained with respect to the claim that a sexual event happened, belief is withheld regarding the moral character of that event and the meaning of the experience for the survivor. In other words, the assignation of responsibility is disputed, and the impact of the event on the one harmed is denied. For Fortune, then, believing survivors requires more than a willingness to affirm that what a survivor says happened did happen. One cannot be said to believe a survivor's testimony unless one can also affirm the moral significance of the experience for the survivor and attach responsibility for the survivor's harm to the one who the survivor discloses as having perpetrated the sexually violent act. Within Fortune's discussion of avoidance, belief registers as having both cognitive and moral dimensions.

In addition to considering what Fortune's critiques of withholding belief from survivors' testimonies mean for the shape that belief takes on in her work, we can also approach the question by considering her descriptions of belief's positive extension. Fortune's framework for enacting a theologically robust and restorative justice in response to survivors' testimonies involves seven steps: a survivor's truth telling, the community's acknowledgement, compassion, measures taken to protect others vulnerable to harm, a process by which the offender is held accountable for his actions, a process by which the offender offers restitution, and a process by which the survivor is vindicated.[29] While each of these steps bears relationship to the extension or withholding of belief, at least the first two steps of the process, *truth telling* and *acknowledgement*, relate directly.

For Fortune, truth telling is the process of a survivor telling their story in a way they choose and feel is affirming. Acknowledgement occurs when the story such a survivor tells, including its

[29] Marie Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited*, 135. While there is need for some of these steps to precede others (for example, a survivor would usually need to give testimony of their experience before the community's acknowledgement could follow), these steps need not follow a precise order and, in practice, will likely overlap.

historical, experiential, and moral qualities, is "heard and understood by someone who matters."[30] Truth telling, then, describes a process by which a survivor gives testimony. Acknowledgement describes a process by which a survivor's community bears that testimony witness.[31] In her words, acknowledgement "suggests not only passive listening ("I hear you"), but active response ("I believe you") and moral solidarity ("This was not your fault; it should never have happened to you")."[32] She gives the following as an example of the kind of acknowledgement that has the potential to offer a survivor an experience of (partial) justice:

> [A] teenager finally reveals to a teacher whom she trusts that her father has been sexually abusing her for six years. The teacher believes her and acts to try to protect her from further abuse.[33]

Fortune's use of the term *belief*, in this case, indicates that to believe a survivor's account of sexual violence means to accept as true the survivor's claim that the sexually violent event to which she attests is an event that, in a historical sense, happened. The teacher's belief indicates that the teacher regards the student's testimony as representative of history insofar as the major components of the student's story – the fact of violence and the identity of the one responsible – are treated as historically accurate. To acknowledge a survivor's testimony does, then, involve interpreting a survivor's account as meaningfully representative of history and as, in certain respects, correspondent with history. This example of belief's extension, thus, reinforces what we learn about belief from Fortune's critique of its withholding.

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[30] Marie Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited*, 144.
[31] Fortune cites Judith Herman (*Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited*, 135) as using the term *testimony* to describe what Fortune means by truth telling. Fortune does not, herself, speak of acknowledgment in terms of *witness*. However, given Fortune's familiarity with Herman's work and Herman's centrality to trauma theory discourse that conceptualizes the process of telling and responding to trauma narratives in terms of testimony and witness, it makes sense to read somewhat of a parallel between Fortune's truth telling/acknowledgement dyad and trauma theory's testimony/witness dyad. However, this marks Fortune's choice not to use testimony/witness language as likewise significant. In addition to articulating truth telling in terms of Herman's concept of testimony, Fortune unfolds what she means by truth telling in connection with Traci West's description of breaking silence as *resistance*. Both Herman's *testimony* and West's *resistance* inform Fortune's *truth telling*.
[32] Marie Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited*, 145
[33] Marie Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited*, 134.

However, significant to Fortune's description of acknowledgement is also what comes after the "and" in her description of the teacher's belief: "The teacher believes her and *acts to try to protect her from further abuse*." Acknowledgement, thus, is a product not of belief alone, but of belief paired with ethical action. Defining acknowledgement in terms of both belief and ethical action suggests that the kind of belief that Fortune finds necessary in response to survivor testimony is a kind that informs behavior. Belief and action, for Fortune, are inextricably linked in the sense that when one believes a survivor's testimony, action based on the content of that belief and characterized by a stance of solidarity with the survivor must follow. Within this frame, we might think of the teacher's protective action as born from and as an expression of her combined beliefs that her student is being abused, that this is wrong, and that the harm of abuse warrants urgent intervention. The first of these – the teacher's belief that her student is being abused – treats belief as an affirmation of correspondence between a survivor's account of violence and the history to which it attests. The teacher's belief that sexual violence is wrong treats belief primarily as a moral matter. And the teacher's belief that the moral wrong of sexual violence calls on her to take protective action suggests the inseparability of believing survivors' testimonies and acting in solidarity with survivors' interests. For Fortune, to give acknowledgement to a survivor's testimony is, necessarily, to give an active response. It requires belief on both a historical level and moral level, and it requires that this belief give shape to the active, social, embodied dimensions of one's continued response.

We ought to notice, however, that there is some slippage starting to seep into the discussion. On one hand, I have said that Fortune's notion of acknowledgement includes belief and ethical action, whose union equals acknowledgement. On the other hand, I have started to propose that the necessity of this union between belief and ethical action is so pronounced in Fortune's work that we should think about the kind of belief that Fortune recommends as itself including ethical action. Here, the distinction between belief and ethical action blurs and, by my reading, Fortune's term

acknowledgement comes to stand for a kind of belief that simultaneously carries historical, moral, and active ethical dimensions. To be clear, this is my argument. When Fortune herself uses the term *believe* she does not expect the reader to come to the word already having a concept of belief as inclusive of ethical action, and she does not present herself as consciously intending or attempting to broaden belief's definition. Rather, she offers a different term, *acknowledgement*, as representative of belief's union with a stance of active solidarity with survivors, and one could argue on this basis that *belief* ought to be read in her work as precisely *not* the ethical action with which it must be paired in order to constitute acknowledgement. After all, why would she need to add ethical action and acknowledgement to the equation if belief already sufficiently includes these things? I accept and think it right to say that a strict reading of Fortune's use of the term *belief* marks some degree of separation between belief and solidarity. Fortune assumes that when she speaks of *belief* readers will call to mind not embodied action but cognitive affirmation of a truth position. Even so, I propose that this is not the only or the most generative way to read Fortune's work on belief. While the strict reading I have just rehearsed distinguishes between belief and ethical action in Fortune's work, we can just as well read her as emphasizing their inseparability.

Continuing to think in this direction, if belief is a kind of activity that has to do with affirming truth in both cognitive and embodied modes, we ought to inquire about what kind of truth Fortune takes to be the object of belief's affirmation. For Fortune, the truth of a survivor's testimony that belief must affirm *is* a truth of correspondence insofar as a survivor's claim to have experienced sexual violence must be taken to be historically accurate. However, as we will soon see, the object of belief's affirmation is not a truth of *detailed* correspondence. In other words, one need not affirm that a survivor's memory or testimony of a sexually violent experience maps together with its historical referent in every sense – for example, the color of the perpetrator's shoes, the sequence of events leading up to the attack, words exchanged after the fact, and so on. Belief, for Fortune,

affirms a general correspondence between memory and history but not a detailed one. Fortune makes the distinction and its necessity clear when she says the following:

> But telling the story is not only about the "facts"; it is also about feelings and meaning. The victim/survivor needs a safe, private place to "tell the story." The "facts" may shift and change as memories return. What matters at this point is the truth of someone having been victimized by another.[34]

Fortune allows for the reality that during a survivors' telling of her story the details of the narrative might change and shift, especially if the survivor is telling of her experience during a period in which the survivor's memory is in the process of returning. The truth of the survivor's testimony that belief must affirm is the truth that the survivor was harmed, the validity of the survivor's feelings, and the sense of meaning that the experience has had for the survivor.

On one hand, this gets Fortune out of a bind to which the believe all women position tends to be vulnerable. When the believe all women position suggests that to believe is to affirm every aspect of a survivor's testimony as historically accurate it fails to account for the general fallibility of memory and for the specific ways that trauma can interfere with a survivor's perception and recall. Because discrepancies between a survivor's account and forensic data (for example) call into question the appropriateness of one's initial belief regarding the narrative's details, the believe all women position tends to render belief brittle. It cracks easily against the hard surface of the historical record. By allowing for the details of a survivor's narrative to change over time, Fortune works to create a foundation that can sustain belief on otherwise shifting ground. This seems to be an advantage that Fortune's approach to belief has over the believe all women position. However, it is not clear to me that Fortune's attempt is entirely successful. How, for example, does one decide which elements of a survivor's narrative are essential to its historical truth and which are not? If, as Fortune says, what is crucial to affirm is *that* a survivor was violated by another, it seems the door is

[34] Marie Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited*, 135.

open for a listener to dispute a number of components of the survivor's testimony that the survivor regards as essential, including the identity of the perpetrator. My sense of Fortune's approach to belief is that she would call such a dispute *avoidance*. And yet, she does not give an account for why disputing the details of a survivor's testimony constitutes avoidance if affirming the historical correspondence of such a testimony's details is neither necessary for belief nor recommended.

What comes into view, then, is that Fortune's approach to belief both takes certain departures from the believe all women position and that her departures are met by returns. One salient return occurs in Fortune's engagement with Freud. In light of the links I have both traced and worked to forge in the first half of this dissertation between the problem of belief and Freud's early twentieth century replacement of the seduction theory with the Oedipal theory of childhood sexuality, it is striking that Fortune begins her chapter "Responding to Child Sexual Abuse" by telling a now familiar version of Freudian intellectual history.[35]

> Many people have a difficult time imagining that an adult would willfully exploit a child sexually, especially an adult related to a child. As a result, this common childhood experience is frequently overlooked. Freud was so dismayed by the frequency with which his clients reported sexual abuse as children that, rather than face the reality that they expressed, he decided that it was largely fantasy. From this erroneous and unscientific conclusion, Freud developed his theories of female sexual fantasy. His conclusion that the reports from his female clients of sexual abuse by fathers were untrue provided a pseudoscientific basis for the collective denial that children are sexually abused in their families. No one wants to admit the reality of child sexual abuse, so eyes and ears are closed to its victims who seek help. If no one "sees" it, then it does not exist.[36]

This narrative plays an important role in Fortune's recommendations for how communities ought to respond to reports of sexual violence. Its usefulness, for Fortune, is that it helps to build her

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[35] In 1983, when Fortune published *Sexual Violence: The Unmentionable Sin*, neither Masson's *Assault on Truth* nor Herman's *Trauma and Recovery* had yet gone to print. Fortune's original source was, rather, Florence Rush's 1980 text *The Best-Kept Secret: Sexual Abuse of Children*. However, in Fortune's revision of her book for its 2005 publication as *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited,* Judith Herman's work is heavily cited. It seems possible, then, that while Rush was Fortune's original source, Herman's reading of Freudian history may contribute to Fortune's use of this narrative in the 2005 edition.

[36] Marie Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Unmentionable Sin*, 164.

argument that *withholding belief*, or denial, is a primary problem in societal responses to sexual violence, one that must be overcome in order for sexual violence in general, and sexual violence against children in particular, to be confronted and resisted. If Freud, an authority on psychological matters and a relative genius, succumbed to the pressure to deny the reality of sexual abuse, the narrative Fortune tells implies that this must be a pressure that threatens all of us, including those who hope to do right by victims of terrible harm. On one hand, then, the reader is prompted toward self-reflection. On the other, the reader is introduced to the notion that there is a cultural tendency toward opposition to the believability of survivors' testimonies. By bringing Freud's internal and unconscious motives for disbelief to readers' attention and criticism, Fortune calls all who would argue against the necessity of belief to account.

Fortune's critique of Freud, constructed through brief addresses here and there throughout the two editions of her book, is actually much sharper. Fortune presents Freud as among those responsible for constructing "what amounts to an elaborate apologia for male sexual aggression."[37] Reading Freud as a defender of the idea that violence is natural to (and therefore acceptable for) male sexuality, she attributes western culture's tendency to conflate sexual activity with sexual violence, at least in part, *to* Freud and to psychoanalysis more broadly. Quoting the work of Kathleen Barry, Fortune suggests that psychoanalysis is characterized by "an ideology of cultural sadism." She affirms Barry's argument that "there is a conspiracy among such [figures] as Sigmund Freud and Havelock Ellis to justify male sexual aggression" and to protect men from accountability for their sexually violent behavior (xvi). Fortune interprets Freud's replacement of the seduction theory with the Oedipal theory as the central component of that conspiracy. Her reading of Freud is consistent with the kind of reading promoted by figures like Masson, Herman, and Rush whose work I have presented as influential for the believe all women frame, and Fortune cites both Rush

[37] Marie Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited*, xiii.

and Herman explicitly. Thus, as Fortune's approach to extending belief to survivors' testimonies of sexual violence expands beyond the bounds of the contemporary believe all women take on the relationship between memory, history, experience and sexual violence, she also carries its framework forward.

After framing Freud's denial of his clients' experiences as both problematic and representative of western cultural modes of responding to survivors' disclosures of sexual violence, Fortune constructs a counterargument in favor of belief. Statistics on sexual violence are the form of evidence she uses to persuade readers that belief is warranted.

> "Thirty-eight percent of females and one in ten males will be sexually molested by age 18 years. A least fifty percent of all child sexual abuse occurs in the family as incestuous abuse. Seventy-five percent of female teenage prostitutes on the street have experienced rape, incest, or molestation earlier in their lives."[38]

The argument she is constructing through the use of these statistics is that sexual violence *exists* and is *pervasive*. The kind of belief she is advocating for here, then, is a belief in the widespread societal reality of sexual violence and the urgent fact of its harm. In much the same way that advocates for environmental wellbeing are, today, having to confront those who "do not believe in" global warming with arguments that climate change is real, Fortune's engagement here with the necessity of belief in connection with sexual violence comes in the form of arguing that sexual violence is real. She does so by insisting, rightly, that because social science research indicates that sexual violence occurs regularly and frequently, it is not defensible to deny its reality in general.

However, we might pause for a moment and take notice of what it says about Fortune's thought on belief that she turns to statistics at this point in her argument as the warrant for building her argument in belief's favor. Though statistics is as fallible a science as any, there is a way in which calling on statistics as a warrant for one's argument implies to an audience untrained in quantitative

[38] Marie Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Unmentionable Sin*, 164.

method that the reality to which one speaks is objective and absolute. Though, in truth, both the construction and deployment of statistics toward any given end involves interpretation, the rhetorical impact of citing statistics in the way Fortune does here is often that the data they present comes across as both impartial and certain. Fortune's argument seems to imply, then, that one must believe in the reality of sexual violence because that reality is an objective, measureable, historical certainty. This kind of argument – *believe* in x because x is *certain* – again returns Fortune, at least for a moment, to believe all women logic. History is read in terms of objective factuality, a mechanism is put forward as having the ability to give us direct and reliable access to that factuality (here, statistics instead of memory), and the act of extending belief is rendered uncomplicated because it follows in a logically certain way from our point of reliable access to the past. Because Fortune's argument on the basis of statistics rhetorically mimics the logic of the believe all women frame, it is vulnerable to the same critiques.

How, then, will caretakers of communities faced with sexual violence be advised to respond to survivor disclosures of sexual violence if Fortune's work serves as their guide? Summarizing, we can say that they will be advised, first, to take stock of their own preexisting attitudes toward sexual violence. Fortune asks readers to become aware that western society nurtures a culture of disbelief that is scientifically unwarranted and biases members of society unfairly against survivors. To correct this bias, one must first cultivate an orientation toward the world that affirms sexual violence as a problem that is socially pervasive. When it comes to responding to individual survivor testimonies of harm, Fortune warns against denial and avoidance. Caretakers of communities faced with sexual violence are advised *not* to dismiss a survivor's claims by considering them historically untrue and *not* to minimize a survivor's claims by placing blame on the survivor or supposing that what happened is insignificant.

The kind of response that caretakers of communities faced with sexual violence ought to take is one that involves, by Fortune's recommendation, a survivor's truth telling, the community's acknowledgement, compassion, measures taken to protect others vulnerable to harm, a process by which the offender is held accountable for his actions, a process by which the offender offers restitution, and a process by which the survivor is vindicated. In the texts examined here, Fortune does not articulate what each of these steps looks like in detail. It is not clear, for example, what constitutes a process of accountability for a perpetrator or a process of vindication for the survivor. In addition, Fortune does not speak to whether and in what way investigatory processes guided by principles of due process are to play a role at any point, though it certainly seems possible that they might. Fortune does make it clear, however, that the processes of truth telling and acknowledgement call for belief to be extended to the survivor's testimony. A cognitive investment in the truth that the survivor experienced sexual violence is fundamental to what it means, for Fortune, for acknowledgement to be practiced. But acknowledgement is more than cognitive assent to the historical veracity of survivors' claims. It is historical belief that what the survivor says happened did happen.[39] It is moral belief that what happened to the survivor was unjust. It is validation of what the experience has meant to the survivor. And it is an orientation of active solidarity with the survivor that follows. One who takes Fortune's work as a guide for responding to survivor testimony of sexual violence is advised to believe the survivor's account, to create space within that belief for the details of a survivor's account to fluctuate, and to respond to the survivor's testimony

[39] I am differentiating one's (1) "historical belief that what a survivor says happened did happen" from one's (2) "cognitive investment in the truth that the survivor experienced sexual violence" because the latter (2) can be maintained without the former (1). I will discuss this later in the chapter and use the Kavanaugh-Blasey Ford hearings as an example. One common conservative response to Blasey Ford's testimony was to affirm that she had experienced sexual violence (2) but suggest that it happened in some way other than that which her testimony proposed (a denial of 1). Thus, while believing that, historically speaking, what a survivor says happened did happen could be described as a cognitive investment in the truth of the survivor's testimony one can still maintain some degree of that cognitive investment without extending historical belief to a survivor's testimony.

with action that holds those who contributed to harm accountable and works toward justice and empowerment for the survivor.

If we were to try to place Fortune somewhere on the map of believe all women and due process terrain, she would be considerably closer to the believe all women position than she would be to that of due process culture. Fortune presents lack of belief in the reality of sexual violence and in the veracity of specific survivors' testimonies as a fundamental western problem that must be overcome in order for sexual violence to be ethically and effectively resisted. She squarely frames extending belief to survivor testimony of sexual violence as an ethical necessity, and while she does not rehearse the believe all women argument that survivors' memory provides a reliable point of access to historical events, she does criticize responses to survivor testimony that deny the historical truth of survivors' memory or cast it under suspicion (i.e. denial and avoidance). In these ways, Fortune's thought aligns with the believe all women framework for responding to survivor testimonies of sexual violence.

However, at some points in Fortune's argument, counter to the believe all women frame, Fortune seems to suggest a view of history, of memory, and of their relation as mutually constructed. For example, she seems to take this view when she affirms that though there will likely be inconsistencies between a survivor's memory and the history to which it speaks, it is still possible and wise to think about survivors' testimony as representing history truthfully. Truth, here, refers to a subjective reality that is grounded in and warranted by a survivor's experience. At other points in her argument, however, Fortune seems to posit history in terms of objective facticity that can be accessed through the use of particular methods, if not through a survivor's memory. For example, this approach to history is expressed when Fortune presents statistics on sexual violence as sole warrant for, first, believing in the socially pervasive reality of sexual violence, and second, interpreting Freud as having been internally motivated to obscure this reality. The two different

orientations toward history that Fortune takes are not reconciled in her work. The latter – the notion of history as discoverable in objective terms – carries forward the terms of the believe all women and due process debate while the former – the notion that history and memory are co-constructed *and* can remain meaningfully true – prompts us toward a potentially different landscape for discourse.

Toinette M. Eugene & James Newton Poling

In 1998, Toinette Eugene and James Poling coauthored a book that was way-paving for practical theological literature that would take up the intersection of sexual violence and race: *Balm for Gilead: Pastoral Care for African American Families Experiencing Abuse*. The book developed out of Eugene and Poling's experience of teaching a course together on racism and sexism at Colgate Rochester Divinity School in New York.

> In the crucible of our classroom, where the praxis wheel of experience, analysis, reflection, and preparation for action was regularly spun, we were forced to reflect together from the experiences of our students. We discovered that the predominant experiences from which they entered the arena of our course on racism and sexism were far too often the violence generated in their family life. This phenomenon of a violent family life seemed to occur with unfailing regularity. The complexities and particularities added by the layers of pain reported by black students in class made us wonder what it was about the violence they knew that could be examined and perhaps eradicated by an attentive ethic of care and pastoral care praxis.[40]

Motivated, on one hand, by a commitment to thinking with and through the lives of their students, and on the other, by a commitment to producing scholarship that is accountable to survivors of domestic and sexual violence, Eugene and Poling organized their book around the thesis that "an informed and authentic ethic of care, provided by pastoral, prophetic, and therapeutic leaders in the

[40] Toinette M. Eugene and James Newton Poling, *Balm for Gilead*, 15.

black faith community, is the principal means for transforming the pain of family violence into redemptive black love."[41]

At the time of the book's publication, James Poling was Professor of Pastoral Theology, Care, and Counseling at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary. Throughout his career, Poling's scholarship, teaching, counseling practice, and ministry focused heavily on the intersection of pastoral theology, abuse, sexism, and racism, evidenced at least in part by his having authored, coauthored, and edited over eight volumes in this area. Specifically, Poling was an active contributor to practical and pastoral theology's 1990s effort to address sexual violence. His text, *The Abuse of Power: A Theological Problem*, was a critical addition to that literature for its close analysis of the power dynamics of the pastoral role with respect to sexual violence.[42] Poling, then, brings to *Balm for Gilead*, considerable intellectual and practical expertise in addressing family violence through the mediums of pastoral care and counseling.

Toinette Eugene is a Catholic, womanist social ethicist whose research interests engage sexual and domestic violence and whose professional experience gives her expertise in pastoral leadership. Having previously held an appointment as Associate Professor of Christian Social Ethics at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, she was Formation Director of the Pastoral Leadership Placement Board and Director of the African American Pastoral Center for the Diocese of Oakland, California at the time of *Balm for Gilead*'s publication. Particularly in the 1990s, Eugene focused her scholarship on womanist ethics and black women and children's experiences of sexual and domestic violence. Her 1995 contribution to the volume *Violence Against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Sourcebook* was one of the early contemporary theological treatments of sexual violence that centered black women's practices of resistance in the construction of a womanist ethical

[41] Toinette M. Eugene and James Newton Poling, *Balm for Gilead*, 12.
[42] James Newton Poling, *The Abuse of Power: A Theological Problem* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991).

response to abuse.[43] Eugene's work helped to shape ethical and social analyses now critical for confronting institutional and personal violence, particularly with respect to the gendered and racial dynamics of these injustices. As a lay leader in the black church and Catholic church, Eugene brings to *Balm for Gilead* not only her expertise in womanist Christian social ethics, but also professional experience with respect to the intersection of sexual and domestic violence with issues of pastoral leadership as these are relevant to the black church and family.[44]

Though not explicitly indicated this way by the book's organizational markers, *Balm for Gilead* can be read as having three main parts. The first part of the book (chapters 1-3) aims to provide a framework for thinking about sexual and domestic violence in black families. Eugene and Poling begin by describing the systematic destruction of the black family as one of the most fundamental white American strategies for maintaining slavery. During slavery, black families were routinely separated by force not only to satisfy the economic interests of slaveholders, but also as a means of weakening the kinship ties that people who were enslaved might otherwise draw on for strength and

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[43] Toinette M. Eugene, " 'Swing Low, Sweet Chariot!': A Womanist Ethical Response to Sexual Violence and Abuse," in *Violence Against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Sourcebook*, ed. Carol J. Adams and Marie M. Fortune (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1995), 185-200. Other important contributions Eugene made to thought on the intersection of sexual violence, womanist ethics, and theology in the 1990s include "There Is a Balm in Gilead: Black Women and the Black Church as Agents of a Therapeutic Community," *Women & Therapy* 16, no. 2-3 (1995): 55-71; and "While Love is Unfashionable: Ethical Implications of Black Spirituality and Sexuality" in *Women, Knowledge, and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy*, ed. Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall (New York: Routledge, 1996): 454-470.

[44] A brief technical note. As I engage *Balm for Gilead*, I will strive to refer to its authorial voice as "Eugene and Poling." Sometimes, however, I will attribute the authorial voice to Eugene without also naming Poling. I have made this decision for a few reasons. The simplest is that there are instances in my own writing in which repeating "Eugene and Poling" makes the structure of my sentences congested and hard to read. In a few cases, then, I name only Eugene for the sake of readability. In these cases I have chosen to name Eugene rather than Poling because Eugene's name is listed first in the text's list of authors. However, in addition there is another reason I sometimes leave Poling's name out my reference to the book's authorial voice. There are times when the book uses the first person language of "we," "us," and "our" when relating to the black church, the black family, and black life more broadly. Whereas Eugene, a black womanist Catholic, belongs to these social institutions, Poling, a white Presbyterian, does not. Because it would seem odd to attribute portions of the text that express a first person relationship with blackness to Poling, I have chosen not to do so. There are also portions of the text that, based on my knowledge of Poling's and Eugene's areas of expertise and broader scholarship, seem to be drawing clearly on Eugene's voice rather than Poling's. In this case too – Eugene's scholarship seems to be driving the conversation – I also refer to the authorial voice as "Eugene" rather than "Eugene and Poling." I acknowledge that there are risks opened by this decision. Thus, I want to alert the reader before moving forward that when I refer to *Balm for Gilead's* authorial voice as Eugene without also naming Poling, I do not mean to disconnect Poling from my analysis or to attribute the content of the book that I am discussing solely to Eugene. Regardless of which author's voice or scholarship is foregrounded in the text itself, Eugene and Poling have presented this text as mutually written, and its content is rightly attributed to both of them.

resources to resist. Emphasizing further that white supremacy is funded by a number of sexual logics, Eugene and Poling point out that white people tended to justify the enslavement of black people by promoting the racist belief that black people were "insatiable sexual beasts" who must be carefully controlled.[45] While Eugene and Poling name and celebrate that black people learned resilience, perseverance, creativity, and faith during slavery, they also stress also that, "The experience of slavery, in conjunction with these other sentiments, provides fertile ground for the expectation and tolerance of violence in black lives."[46] In part, then, Eugene and Poling situate the pain of contemporary violence in black families as enabled and contoured by the traumatic social legacy left by slavery and by each following era's racist and sexist conditions of white supremacy. Still today, they suggest, one of the repercussions of historic and ongoing racism is that black individuals and communities are often hesitant to talk about family violence because doing so may provide fuel for overt and systemic forms of white supremacist violence against black persons. The fact that white researchers and helping professions have notoriously promoted racist and sexist explanations for the existence of violence in black families (the Moynihan Report being a prime example), compounds this problem.[47] Accordingly, Eugene and Poling argue that discussion about violence in black families must include efforts to counteract racist views of the black family and of black sexuality. A commitment to holding individual perpetrators of family violence accountable for their actions must be held together with both an analysis and a set of practices that understands that violence within the context of racism and sexism that affects the lives of black people in the United States.

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[45] Toinette M. Eugene and James Newton Poling, *Balm for Gilead*, 35.
[46] Toinette M. Eugene and James Newton Poling, *Balm for Gilead*, 36.
[47] The Moynihan Report is the colloquial name for a report authored by Daniel Moynihan in 1967 titled *The Negro family: The case for national action* (Cambridge: MIT Press). It is well known and widely critiqued for using racist and sexist logics to attribute black family violence to what it calls the matriarchal organization of black families and to an absence of father figures in black homes.

The second part of the book (chapter 4) presents six vignettes of black survivors' experiences of sexual and domestic family violence. Eugene and Poling describe this chapter as the book's centerpiece, designed to give detail and description to the rest of the book's contents. Eugene and Poling also intend for the six vignettes offered here to act as mirrors of family abuse that, on one hand, make visible the myriad ways that racism and sexism contour abuse in black families, and on the other, are "revelatory of the ambiguous role of the black church in responding to the pain and suffering which these members of black families endured."[48] In other words, while Eugene and Poling see the black church as central and necessary to the task of providing a healing balm for "transforming the pain of family violence into redemptive black love," the vignettes they offer also reveal the black church as too often failing to live up to its possibility.

The third part of the book (chapters 5-9) focuses on articulating pastoral and congregational practices for preventing and responding to sexual and domestic violence that the authors would like to see the black church embrace. Eugene and Poling present the black family and the black church as deeply united institutions of black life, proposing J. Doetis Roberts's term "domestic church" as a metaphor for the black family and speaking of the black church as a form of black extended family life.[49] Particularly because of the close relationship between the black church and the black family, Eugene and Poling make the case that the black church must be an active and central part of bringing a healing balm to the violence suffered in black families. As was the case for my engagement with Fortune, this latter portion of Eugene and Poling's text that speaks to how the church ought to respond to survivors' disclosures of sexual and domestic violence is the portion that I will address as I trace the shape of belief in their work and situate *Balm for Gilead* with respect to the believe all women and due process landscape.

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[48] Toinette M. Eugene and James Newton Poling, *Balm for Gilead*, 19.
[49] J. Doetis Roberts, *Roots of a Black Future: Family and Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980).

The crucial necessity of belief in Eugene and Poling's work becomes a point of emphasis in their discussion of the black church's response to black women and children's testimonies of family violence. By their account, the six vignettes of survivors' experiences of family violence presented in chapter 4, "illustrate the tendency of churches to believe the rationalizations of perpetrators when they are in trusted positions of leadership and to dismiss the complaints of victims who have been betrayed."[50] With a sense of righteous indignation, Eugene protests against what she sees as the church's pattern of refusing to believe survivor testimonies.

> What kind of world did God create that vulnerable black women and children are raped and battered without the protest of the black church? How can the church believe the perpetrators of violence and refuse to hear the horrible pain of those who are victims of abuse?[51]

What is objectionable, to Eugene and Poling, is not just that the black church withholds belief from survivors' testimonies but that, so often, in doing so, the church actively grants belief to defensive lies told by perpetrators of harm. Eugene and Poling emphasize that those who perpetrate sexual and domestic violence are often skilled manipulators and practiced in the art of deceit. Eugene and Poling are transparent and direct with readers that believing survivors within the context of pastoral care means disbelieving perpetrators who claim to have done no wrong.

> Pastoral care of perpetrators of black family violence is a challenging task because the principles of pastoral care need to be revised in this aspect of the church's work. For example, normal pastoral care is based on the assumptions that people tell the truth to the best of their ability and that they are willing to go through the discomfort and pain of necessary changes to become better Christians and human beings. In contrast to this model, perpetrators of family violence often mislead others about the true nature of their attitudes and behaviors, minimize the consequences of their violence upon others, and have little motivation for change unless there are serious consequences for their violence.[52]

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[50] Toinette M. Eugene and James Newton Poling, *Balm for Gilead*, 113.
[51] Toinette M. Eugene and James Newton Poling, *Balm for Gilead*, 109.
[52] Toinette M. Eugene and James Newton Poling, *Balm for Gilead*, 133.

Pastoral care for perpetrators, thus, requires a suspension of the usual assumption that the one identified as a perpetrator is representing themselves truthfully. Eugene and Poling recommend that belief is to be extended to those who come forward as survivors of abuse and withheld from those accused of perpetrating that violence. This recommendation suggests that maintaining a position of neutrality between a survivor and the accused is neither possible nor advisable.

Eugene and Poling's explicit instruction to ministers regarding best practices for responding to survivors' disclosures of sexual and domestic violence is this: "Our responsibility as religious leaders is to believe the story of the most vulnerable person when he or she complains about abuse so that further steps of evaluation and prevention can be enacted."[53] They continue, explaining why an immediate extension of belief to survivor testimonies of harm is both ethically necessary and procedurally wise:

> If the person in authority dismisses the complaint and defends the perpetrator, the abuse continues and the victim loses faith in her or his own judgment about good and evil. So it is important to believe the story of the victim for the moment. There will be time later to do a more thorough evaluation of the facts. If the first adult to hear the complaint chooses not to hear, the safety of the victim is jeopardized and the integrity of the church is questioned.[54]

On one hand, for Eugene and Poling, the reason belief is necessary is because lack of belief shuts down a process of getting to the truth and accounting for harm that has, in fact, been done. When a survivor is telling the truth and is not believed, this does such a degree of harm that a religious leader ought not to risk it. Eugene and Poling indicate that it is more likely that a perpetrator is falsely maintaining their innocence than that a survivor is making a false accusation. Observing that perpetrators are often skilled manipulators Eugene and Poling suggest, without saying outright, that it is usually incorrect for religious leaders to believe the defenses made by those who are accused.[55]

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[53] Toinette M. Eugene and James Newton Poling, *Balm for Gilead*, 114.
[54] Toinette M. Eugene and James Newton Poling, *Balm for Gilead*, 114.
[55] Toinette M. Eugene and James Newton Poling, *Balm for Gilead*, 133-134.

Eugene and Poling's recommendation to immediately extend belief to survivor testimony seems to be, to a significant extent, a pragmatic one. For Eugene and Poling, similarly to Fortune, one only has two responsive options to a survivor's disclosure of a sexually violent experience: belief and denial. Because denial poses an incredibly high risk for deepening the trauma of survivors and failing to protect others who may be vulnerable to similar harm, belief becomes the better of the two choices. To the extent that the believe all women position that survivors ought to be believed is also pragmatic in this way, Eugene and Poling's thought is well-placed within the bounds of believe all women terrain. However, their thought does not necessarily cohere with the larger believe all women framework in that Eugene and Poling's insistence that survivors be believed is not necessarily based on confidence that survivors' memory opens reliably and accurately onto the history to which it attests. Eugene and Poling do not have much to say about the historical reliability of survivors' memory or the conceptual relationship between memory and history. Again in pragmatic terms, they do think that it is more likely that a survivor's testimony will truthfully represent history than will the defenses of the accused, but their confidence that this is so is based on a sociological conviction that people who perpetrate sexual violence tend to be manipulative and deceitful in greater proportions than those who claim to have experienced sexual violence. Accordingly, Eugene and Poling read the extension of belief to survivor testimony as the kind of responsive action that is most likely to minimize harm, and therefore, is the most appropriate response for a caretaker of a Christian community to give in the wake of survivor testimony. Their approach to belief, like Fortune's, creates a strong link between belief and ethical action. However, there is a stronger sense of distinction between belief and action in Eugene and Poling's work. Leaders have the obligation "to believe the story of the most vulnerable person… *so that* further steps of evaluation and prevention can be enacted." The "so that" in this statement stands between belief and action as both their link and a marker of their separation.

Eugene and Poling do not advise that caretakers' responses to survivor testimony follow the kind of immediate responsive framework that the culture of due process would recommend. Eugene and Poling do not, for example, suggest that members of the church ought to remain neutral or skeptical about a survivor's testimony prior to the gathering of external evidence that can dispute or corroborate that survivor's claims. However, Eugene and Poling do allude to the appropriateness of a community's extended response involving an investigatory process. We see this already in the text I previously quoted as demonstrating their insistence on the extension of immediate belief. Here it is again:

> If the person in authority dismisses the complaint and defends the perpetrator, the abuse continues and the victim loses faith in her or his own judgment about good and evil. So it is important to believe the story of the victim *for the moment. There will be time later to do a more thorough evaluation of the facts.* If the first adult to hear the complaint chooses not to hear, the safety of the victim is jeopardized and the integrity of the church is questioned.[56]

Ministers are to extend their belief to the survivor's testimony right away. But they are also to extend their belief *for the moment*. This "for the moment" caveat suggests that the initial extension of belief is not necessarily expected to remain permanent. Rather, it is one step – the first step – within a larger process of responding to survivors' disclosures of sexual or domestic violence, and it is a step that may or may not be rescinded as subsequent steps of the responsive process unfold. That "there will be time later to do a more thorough evaluation of the facts" suggests that one of the subsequent steps of the larger responsive process that Eugene and Poling find appropriate is an investigation that works to collect and assess evidence that corroborates or challenges the survivor's story. Presumably, the allocation of belief may change as a result of that investigatory process if the evidence gathered suggests a survivors' testimony incorrectly attributed acts of violence to the accused. By describing that which will be evaluated at this point in the responsive process as "facts,"

[56] Toinette M. Eugene and James Newton Poling, *Balm for Gilead*, 114, emphasis added.

and by to some extent differentiating these "facts" from the survivor's testimony which has already been received, Eugene and Poling rhetorically suggest that the results of an investigatory process have an objective quality that is both missing from survivor testimony and important for determining the truth of what has happened.[57]

Because Eugene and Poling do not expand on how, exactly, an investigatory process concerned with "evaluating the facts" will interface with a community's immediate extension of belief to the survivor's testimony, it is difficult to parse out the degree to which this portion of Eugene and Poling's thought might represent due process culture. Eugene and Poling's language of *facts* and *thorough evaluation* certainly calls up due process culture's skepticism of survivors' memory and ability to rightly interpret their experience. However, because Eugene and Poling argue extensively elsewhere against church leaders taking a stance of skepticism toward survivors' testimonies, it would seem wrong to read them as turning around and recommending skepticism when an investigatory process begins. What Eugene and Poling emphasize in their approach to belief and its relationship to a subsequent investigation, is that immediate extension of belief is necessary *if* a larger responsive process is to follow the initial disclosure at all. Whereas due process culture worries that extending belief to survivor testimony subverts due process measures of establishing the facts of the case, Eugene and Poling suggest that an initial extension of belief is necessary precisely for that process to unfold with integrity. Thus, while departing sharply from due process culture in their understanding of how an investigatory process most effectively achieves an accurate assessment of "the facts," Eugene and Poling can be read as sharing due process culture's sense that facts and objective forms of evidence outside of a survivor's testimony are both accessible and important for determining, not the appropriateness of immediate belief in a survivor's testimony, but the *final* direction of belief's extension. Here again, we see that the immediate

[57] However, Eugene and Poling's distinction between "facts" and a survivor's testimony is not absolute. The survivor's testimony is relevant to an investigation's fact-finding process even if its content is not regarded "fact" on its own.

extension of belief is, in large part, pragmatic. It works as a tool that opens the door to a community's deeper grappling with a survivor's testimony, and it is presumed that this deeper grappling will likely be shaped by frameworks of due process.[58]

In a sense, then, belief is showing up in this discussion in terms of a minister's affirmation that, in a historical sense, what a survivor says happened did happen. When Eugene and Poling advise pastoral leaders to believe survivors they are recommending that upon hearing a survivor's testimony, pastoral leaders should, at least in the short term, regard the survivor's account as opening onto the history to which it points to the extent that the major instances of violence that the survivor describes are taken to be events that happened. However, Eugene and Poling's pragmatism conditions their approach to belief. The fact that they take care to reserve space for the allocation of belief to change as a result of a subsequent investigation suggests that the kind of belief that one extends in immediate response to a survivor's testimony does not necessarily make the claim that the person extending belief has, in doing so, accessed truth in an absolute or final way. The kind of immediate belief that Eugene and Poling recommend comes with brackets. It is put forward as an appropriate disposition for the here and now but it does not reach very far beyond the context that is immediately present. This bracketed belief does not, for example, work as a solid or stand alone foundation for imposing permanent or life-altering measures of accountability on the accused. Measures of due process are called upon for that. A question we might pose to Eugene and Poling, then, is this: If belief is necessary primarily because it pragmatically opens the door to ethical action, could its necessity be replaced by a policy that requires and guides a community's responsive

[58] When I say that Eugene and Poling have *presumed* that a community's larger responsive process to a survivor's disclosure of sexual or domestic violence will include a due process investigation, what I mean to emphasize is that since Eugene and Poling are writing with the intention of supporting the possibility of helpful responses to survivors' disclosures in actual communities of faith, and since due process measures are the current cultural standard for what responsive action to survivors' disclosures looks like, Eugene and Poling's presumption that such measures will be a part of a community's response is practical. I do not read Eugene and Poling to be starting from a blank slate, so to speak, and *recommending* such measures so much as they are writing to and from within a social context that itself assumes and requires them.

action? In other words, couldn't that action be taken without the precondition of belief? And in what way, then, does belief in its epistemological dimensions remain important? Viewed this way, Eugene and Poling's pragmatism may reinscribe the crisis of belief rather than mitigate it.

On the other hand, we could think of Eugene and Poling's pragmatism as offering a potential way out of the believe all women / due process opposition. It is their pragmatism, after all, that makes it possible for Eugene and Poling to recommend both immediate belief and a subsequent process of investigation according to the parameters of due process. To the degree that Eugene and Poling's approach to belief is pragmatic, their insistence on immediate belief is not so much an insistence that survivors' memories or testimonies ought to be treated as having inherent qualities that make them historically reliable so much as it is a pragmatic strategy for minimizing harm. By their estimation, the best path for minimizing harm is to consider the survivor's word to be representative of what has historically transpired until there is convincing reason from a follow up investigatory process to think otherwise. An investigation seems, then, not to be a neutral process as recommended by due process culture. And if it is acceptable for the investigatory process not to be neutral, it is possible, or at least imaginable, that a community's solidarity with a survivor need not necessarily be delayed or compromised by that process. If solidarity with the survivor is possible to sustain through the investigatory process, it may also be possible for that process to serve as an additional mode of affirmation for the one who has brought forward their testimony of harm. The fact of this kind of investigation need not threaten the appropriateness of the community's immediate extension of belief to other survivors in the future, because the community affirms that no matter the results of any individual investigation, extending immediate belief to survivors' testimonies remains a best practice. However, for an investigation in response to a survivor's testimony not to be conditioned by due process culture, its procedures would need to be thoroughly re-envisioned, and this is not a task that Eugene and Poling take up.

There is at least one last observation to make about belief as it is presented in *Balm for Gilead*. Each of the six vignettes of survivors' experiences of abuse that Eugene and Poling present in chapter 4 tells of inadequate and hurtful community responses to survivors' disclosures. However, withholding belief from the historical truth of survivors' accounts happens in only two of them. More often, the vignettes reveal that those in a position to respond to survivors' testimonies were ready to grant that what a survivor says happened did happen. Where their belief more consistently failed was in its ability to motivate those receiving a survivor's testimony to take just, protective, or empowering action in response. We saw in Fortune's work a clear sense that the kind of belief needed in response to survivor testimonies is a belief that includes ethical action. However, Eugene and Poling's *Balm for Gilead* shows more concretely that splitting cognitive belief apart from ethical action and extending the former without the latter does considerable harm. In other words, it is not only that extending cognitive belief to a survivor's testimony as historically accurate is insufficient for a fully just response to hearing a survivor's testimony. It is also the case that when given in isolation from a wider commitment of solidarity, extending belief that what the survivor says happened did happen can deepen the trauma of sexual and domestic violence and cause new injury. This is because accepting a survivor's account as historically accurate and not taking action in the interest of the survivor's wellbeing expresses that the wellbeing of the one being harmed is not valuable, and thus, that the survivor herself is not valuable – not worth the effort of intervention.

With this observation, the racist and sexist context for understanding sexual and domestic violence in black families that Eugene and Poling work to articulate in the first part of the book becomes relevant for thinking about belief and its withholding. "Cultural prejudice," Eugene says, "has meant that child sexual abuse has come to be regarded, as Marlene Bogle and others have pointed out, as the norm [in black communities] by some within and many outside of black

communities."[59] Stressing that this racist perception (projected by white culture and sometimes internalized within black communities) is untrue, Eugene and Poling help to identify that when black families and black men are cast as inherently violent, and when black children, black women, and black communities are socially devalued, the cultural dynamics of racism both support the believability of black survivors' testimonies in a historical sense (i.e. belief that what survivors say happened did happen) *and* dismiss black survivors' testimonies as unworthy of responsive action. While a lack of responsive action nearly always communicates to survivors that their wellbeing is not valued, within black communities a lack of responsive action can be motivated by a felt need to keep quiet about any instance of violence that risks exacerbating racist perceptions of black families and the material consequences of those perceptions for the members of black communities. Thus, Eugene and Poling show that the social politics of race condition and complexify the problem of belief as it manifests for black survivors. Eugene and Poling's reflection on the racial politics of belief offers a potentially generative opportunity for constructing an approach to survivor testimony that takes into account the ways that belief, as a concept, as a practice, and specifically as a practice of the church, is textured by the social politics of race. To this end, their work suggests that when we talk about belief it is incumbent upon us to include not only its cognitive/historical dimensions, but also its moral and active dimensions if we want the conversation to be relevant to the problem of belief as it often manifests for black victims and survivors.

FaithTrust Institute

Founded in 1977, FaithTrust Institute is "a national, multifaith, multicultural training and education organization with global reach working to end sexual and domestic violence."[60] It is, arguably, the

[59] Toinette M. Eugene and James Newton Poling, *Balm for Gilead*, 105. See also Marlene T. Bogle, "Brixton Black Women's Center: Organizing on Child Sexual Abuse," *Feminist Review* 28, no. 28 (Spring 1988): 132-135.
[60] "About Us," FaithTrust Institute, accessed February 22, 2019, https://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/about-us.

first organization in the U.S. of its kind and remains a leader among nonprofits that intentionally focus on the intersection of religion and sexual violence today. FaithTrust Institute's *Responding to Clergy Misconduct: A Handbook* (here forward referred to as "*Handbook"*) was originally published in 1992 under the title *Clergy Misconduct: Sexual Abuse in the Ministerial Relationship*.[61] It aims to provide concrete guidance to faith communities on best practices for receiving and responding to reports of sexual violence perpetrated by figures of authority in communities of faith and their institutions. This is the text that FaithTrust Institute uses in the trainings it offers to religious bodies on the same subject, and in fact, my formal introduction to the *Handbook* was in just such a training.

In 2016, a woman publicly identified as L. Shifflett published her account of sexual violence through the platform that I direct, Our Stories Untold.[62] When L. Shifflett published her story, she named her perpetrator, Luke Hartman, publicly.[63] At the time, he was in a role of administrative leadership at Eastern Mennonite University, and in response to Shifflett's public testimony, Eastern Mennonite University and the wider North American Mennonite community fell into crisis. I and several of my colleagues acted as advocates for Shifflett through what became a painful, retraumatizing, deeply complex process of investigation and response that involved several Mennonite institutions at the local and national levels. Ultimately, that process did not grant justice

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[61] The *Handbook*'s current form represents two full revisions since the first edition, one in 1997 and another in 2009.
[62] While Our Stories and Into Account were cooperative partners in 2016, Our Stories Untold was independent at that time.
[63] Since its original publication, Shifflett's narrative was unpublished on Our Stories Untold and moved to a new web location at the author's request. It can be accessed here: L. Shifflett, "Now We Are Free," Survivors Standing Tall, Accessed April 13, 2019, https://www.survivorsstandingtall.org/single-post/2017/11/06/Now-We-Are-Free. A nonexhaustive list of additional commentary on Shifflett's case includes Marissa Buck, "Good Intentions Aren't Enough: How Church Authorities Slid My Sister's Sexual Abuse Under the Rug," Survivors Standing Tall, Accessed April 13, 2019, https://www.survivorsstandingtall.org/single-post/2017/12/29/Good-Intentions-Aren%E2%80%99t-Enough-How-church-authorities-slid-my-sister%E2%80%99s-sexual-abuse-under-the-rug; Barbra Graber, "A Timeline of What Happened in Harrisonburg in 2016: My View," Survivors Standing Tall, Accessed April 13, 2019, https://www.survivorsstandingtall.org/single-post/2017/09/02/A-Timeline-of-What-Happened-in-Harrisonburg-My-View; Stephanie Krehbiel, "When Damage Control Does Damage," *The Mennonite*, Accessed April 13, 2019, https://themennonite.org/opinion/damage-control-damage/; Hilary Jerome Scarsella, "We Are the Answer We've Been Waiting For," Our Stories Untold, Accessed April 13, 2019, http://www.ourstoriesuntold.com/we-are-the-answer-weve-been-waiting-for/; Tag: Luke Hartman, Mennonite Church USA, Accessed April 13, 2019, http://mennoniteusa.org/tag/luke-hartman/; The Mennonite Staff, "Yoder's Credentials Terminated," *The Mennonite*, Accessed April 13, 2019, https://themennonite.org/daily-news/yoders-credentials-terminated/.

or healing to the survivor. It revived and compounded the pain of many survivors connected to Mennonite communities who watched as the process unfolded. One positive outcome, however, was that Mennonite Church USA (the denomination involved) decided in connection with this case (and at the recommendation of Shifflett and those of us serving as her advocates) to contract with FaithTrust Institute to provide trainings to Mennonite leaders for how to respond better in the future to reports of sexual violence alleged to have been perpetrated by leaders in Mennonite churches and institutions. As a representative of those advocating for survivors of sexual violence among Mennonites, I was invited to the first training. Over multiple days, FaithTrust Institute trainers led participants step-by-step through the text I am about to engage: FaithTrust Institute's *Responding to Clergy Misconduct: A Handbook*.

I share the context of my introduction to the text because, as will soon become clear, my reading of it within this dissertation is critical. Without context, one might interpret my criticism as an indication that I do not support the *Handbook* or, perhaps, that I stand in opposition to FaithTrust Institute as an organization. To the contrary, I think it is important that the reader approach my engagement with the *Handbook* with the knowledge that in my roles as Director of Theological Integrity for Into Account and Director of Our Stories Untold, I routinely and enthusiastically recommend FaithTrust Institute's services and resources, including its *Responding to Clergy Misconduct: A Handbook*. I remember clearly the 2016 phone call I had with a Mennonite Church USA administrator in which I all but begged the denomination to hire FaithTrust Institute to equip Mennonite leaders with the protocols the *Handbook* outlines, and I remember the sense of relief that I and fellow survivor advocates experienced when we learned that Mennonite Church USA had indeed done so. FaithTrust Institute's *Handbook* is one of very few comprehensive, survivor-centered resources available to support communities of faith in responding to survivors' disclosures of sexual violence. Its protocols, while imperfect, call for a method of response that is in

many cases a drastic improvement over the kinds of responses communities of faith tend to give without guidance.

I am aware, as well, that change in communities of faith often happens slowly and in small increments. Advocates who want to support the possibility of material change with respect to sexual violence must often hold back from recommending sweeping programs of transformation when these have little chance of taking root. We – and I include myself because I often operate in this mode in my advocacy role – sometimes choose to make recommendations that we know to fall short of the ideal, because any amount of progress, relief, or justice for survivors of sexual violence is better than none. I do not assume to know the degree to which this dynamic influences the content of FaithTrust's *Handbook*, but I do think it appropriate for readers of this dissertation to allow for the possibility that it is a present one. Regardless, it is clear to me that FaithTrust Institute's *Handbook* is an instrument of needed change that has since its publication impacted communities of faith in ways that make the lives of sexual violence survivors better.

Thus, my critical engagement with the *Handbook* can only be read as I intend if it is held together with the fact of my deep support for FaithTrust Institute's work, and my strong affirmation for the *Handbook* as a resource that has the potential to motivate positive, practical change. What sits at the root of my critique of the *Handbook* is a desire to think together with FaithTrust Institute (whose employees and trainers are my colleagues) and the wider community of advocates whose work addresses sexual violence in communities of faith about what kinds of resources we might envision for the future. Maintaining respect and support for these resources that have carried us far, I am interested in thinking creatively and expansively about their limitations so that we as a community of scholars and advocates can equip ourselves to add new conceptual and practical tools to our catalogue of resources. This is, as I have indicated elsewhere, the spirit with which I engage each of the texts addressed in this chapter and the next.

The content of Faith Institute's *Handbook* is attributed to Rev. Dr. Marie M. Fortune, who is FaithTrust Institute's founder and former executive director, Kimberly Day-Lewis, Rabbi Mark Dratch, and Rev. Dr. Aleese Moore-Orbih. For simplicity, because this text was published by and represents the ongoing training position of the organization, I will refer to the authorial voice of the text as FaithTrust Institute.[64]

The *Handbook* has three parts. Its first section aims to clarify what sexual misconduct is, its particularities when perpetrated by persons in roles of ministerial leadership, and how best to conceive of what it means to be a victim or a perpetrator. The second section, titled "Ethical Analysis – Power and Vulnerability," works to equip readers with tools for understanding ministerial sexual misconduct through lenses attuned to the various dynamics of social power that shape it. Throughout both the first and second section of the *Handbook,* its content is framed by and tied to biblical narratives interpreted in support of practicing resistance to sexual violence. The third and largest section of the *Handbook* presents a concrete, step-by-step, process for communities of faith to follow when faced with the need to respond to a survivor's disclosure that she has been the victim of sexual misconduct by a leader in the community. As was the case with my engagement with Fortune and with Eugene and Poling, the latter portion of the *Handbook* that recommends a program of response to survivors' disclosures is the section of the text on which I focus as I work to articulate its approach to belief, place it in relation to the contemporary believe all women and due process frameworks, and suggest the opportunities it offers for moving beyond the dualistic frame.

A caveat before I proceed. The *Handbook* presents itself as addressing sexual misconduct perpetrated by ministerial leaders. Its protocols are certainly intended to address complaints of such behavior made against pastors, priests, and other religious leaders who are formally employed by a

[64] It is instructive to bear in mind that Marie Fortune, whose individual work I have already discussed, contributed this text's development. The *Handbook* is both indebted to her work (for example, it adopts an adapted version of her seven steps of just response to survivors' disclosures of sexual violence) and departs from it significantly (for example, in its alignment with due process culture).

community of faith in a ministerial role. During the training I participated in, however, it was made clear to us that the *Handbook's* protocols are meant to apply not only to those who occupy formal, paid ministerial roles, but also to any paid member of a religiously affiliated institution (i.e. an administrator at a Christian university who is not a minister) and any nonpaid, informal leader in a community of faith (i.e. a volunteer Sunday school teacher). In other words, what makes the policy protocols applicable is not the employment or clergy status of the person accused of sexual violence. The *Handbook's* protocols are applicable whenever the person who is accused of sexual violence can be reasonably perceived to have authority within a community of faith or within an institution that maintains a religious affiliation.

At the beginning of the section of the *Handbook* that recommends best practices for responding to clergy misconduct, a survivor's perspective is highlighted. In her own words, Rebecca Bell tells of her experience of abuse, of disclosing that experience to her church, and of what it takes for communities of faith to respond well to survivors' testimonies. She names belief as paramount.

> The most critical and crucial component in helping a survivor of clergy abuse is *to be believed*. It is vital to their existence. Love them back into existence by hearing their story and believing what you have heard and learn to become an advocate. At the time I disclosed to my new pastor with my husband present, it was he who named it an abusive situation. We had no understanding of that prior. The lay leader believed me immediately and met with us and the pastor to discuss strategies for our safe and continued participation there.[65]

The kind of belief Bell recommends is a kind offered as an immediate response to receiving survivor testimony. It is belief that what the survivor says happened did, historically speaking, happen, belief that what happened was morally wrong, belief that the survivor has been unjustly harmed, and belief that action must be taken in solidarity with the survivor to address this harm in the community. The warrant for belief is the survivor's testimony. In Bell's description, the kind of belief that she

[65] FaithTrust Institute, *Responding to Clergy Misconduct*, 53.

received and that she finds crucial for survivors' wellbeing is a kind that precedes the results of any formal or informal investigation prompted by a survivor's disclosure. It is an approach to belief that fits fairly well within the believe all women frame.

The fact that Bell's words open the *Handbook*'s section on responding to survivor reports of sexual violence suggests that FaithTrust Institute affirms them in some capacity. The *Handbook*'s explicit recommendations for responding to survivor testimony, however, do not neatly accord with Bell's. The *Handbook* does not offer clarity around what, pastorally speaking, one's immediate response to a survivor's disclosure ought to be.[66] What it does emphasize is that the disclosure of sexual violence calls for a response that is consistent with a faith community's policies on sexual misconduct. The *Handbook* goes on to outline the broad strokes of what such a policy ought to look like. A policy that follows FaithTrust's best practices stipulates that the appropriate response to a disclosure of abuse is "an investigation (i.e. a gathering of facts and information) and an adjudication process in which the evidence is weighed and a judgment is made by the committee authorized to carry out this function."[67] The goal of the investigation is for an adjudicating committee to make two judgments. The committee is to decide whether what the survivor has reported would, if true, violate the community's sexual misconduct policy ("Does the alleged conduct by the faith leader represent misconduct as defined by the policy itself?"), and if so, whether the survivor's report is indeed true ("Do you believe this actually happened?").[68] If the investigation's process of collecting facts and weighing evidence leads the committee to answer both questions in the affirmative, the

[66] It is possible to regard articulating what one's immediate, pastoral response to a survivor's disclosure ought to be as outside of the scope of the *Handbook*. This is true, at least, in the sense that the *Handbook* is not a text on pastoral care specifically. At the same time, the *Handbook* works to resist the notion that a distinction can be drawn between a faith community's acts of care for a survivor and a faith community's methods of working toward justice and accountability. In this regard, the absence of attention in the *Handbook* to immediate care leaves the question of what that care should look like open.
[67] FaithTrust Institute, *Responding to Clergy Misconduct*, 85.
[68] FaithTrust Institute, *Responding to Clergy Misconduct*, 85.

survivor's report is to be substantiated and the one who perpetrated harm is to be held accountable according to the policy's stipulations.

In seeming opposition to Bell's recommendation that survivor testimony be immediately believed, those adjudicating the survivor's complaint are not advised by FaithTrust to believe the survivor's testimony. Instead, FaithTrust recommends that a community's policy for responding to reports of sexual violence ought to "assume good faith on the part of the complainant and innocence on the part of the accused until the matter is investigated and adjudicated."[69] By FiathTrust's understanding, to regard the complainant as acting in good faith means to assume that they made the report with an honest and respectable motive, and not with conscious deceit or a malicious agenda. The intent of this recommendation is to preserve the fairness of the investigatory process to both the complainant and the one who has been accused of perpetrating sexual violence. Believing that the survivor's complaint is true before its truth is substantiated by evidence external to the survivor's testimony is taken to be an obvious breach of fairness to the accused. However, believing that the survivor's testimony is *false* while the investigation is in process is not taken to pose a similar threat to fairness toward the one who has brought forward the complaint.[70] For, presumably, to assume that the accused is innocent, as FaithTrust recommends, *is* to believe that the survivor's report of harm is in some way or another false. This approach constitutes a reversal of that which was recommended by Eugene and Poling.

FaithTrust's recommendation that a policy regard the complainant as "acting in good faith" has the material effect of making sure that a survivor's testimony is not denied outright and that an investigation that is inquisitive about its claims does, in fact, take place. If the adjudicating

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[69] FaithTrust Institute, *Responding to Clergy Misconduct*, 65.

[70] To say that a survivor's testimony is *false*, of course, could mean that the testimony was made with conscious deceit. But this need not be the case. *False* can also describe testimonies of sexual violence that are historically inaccurate but that the one giving testimony regards as true. This is, for example, the way that Elizabeth Loftus used the term *false memory*.

committee were advised to regard the accused as innocent without also being mandated to regard the complainant as acting in good faith, it is likely that those considering a survivor's claims would feel justified in denying that the survivor's testimony is true, defending the accused, and taking the matter no further. This is, indeed, what very often happens when survivors come forward to report sexual violence in their communities of faith. With this in mind, FaithTrust's recommendation that an adjudicating committee regard the complainant as acting in good faith acts as a guard against a community's complete avoidance of the survivor's testimony. It means to ensure that a community must, at the very least, seek out and consider evidence external to both the survivor's testimony and the accused's defenses that has potential to corroborate or challenge each. However, the "at the very least" caveat I just introduced is not explicitly represented in the *Handbook*. Rather, its recommendation to regard the accused as innocent and the complainant as acting in good faith is represented as ideal.[71]

Either way, however, the recommendation calls up the very problem of belief. Simultaneously maintaining a presumption of the accused's innocence, on one hand, and confidence that the survivor has made her testimony in good faith, on the other, is what we observed in conservative engagement with Dr. Christine Blasey Ford's 2018 testimony of surviving sexual violence perpetrated by Brett Kavanaugh. In sweeping numbers, conservatives affirmed that Blasey Ford's testimony was credible and that her emotion was not contrived. They believed she was speaking earnestly, with respectable intent, and that she was representing herself as honestly as she was able. They also believed that Kavanaugh was innocent and that Blasey Ford's testimony that Kavanaugh assaulted her was incorrect. They believed that while she spoke in good faith, or with honest and admirable intent, she was mistaken about who attacked her and was, perhaps, confused

[71] Here is an instance in which I wonder whether, if asked, FaithTrust Institute would affirm their recommendation as ideal or describe it as one aimed at strategic and incremental progress toward a non-identical ideal. Whereas I would take strong issue with an assertion of the *Handbook*'s position as ideal, I do readily grant that there are times when it is strategic.

about the night it happened.[72] Because Dr. Blasey Ford's testimony was so widely regarded as credible, conservative willingness to affirm that she offered it in good faith helped to create political space for Kavanaugh's confirmation to the Supreme Court to move forward. Casting Blasey Ford as making a false accusation maliciously – as lying – would likely have ramped up the already intense political opposition to the confirmation process. Casting Blasey Ford as acting in good faith, while potentially a sincere expression of the conservative perspective, was also politically expedient and enabled the confirmation of a justice to the Supreme Court of the United States whom a credible survivor of sexual violence is sure sexually assaulted her.

In light of this, what do we make of FaithTrust Institute's assertion that regarding the accused as innocent and the complainant as acting in good faith ensures that the investigative process is fair? Though the chasm of difference between U.S. conservative political engagement with sexual violence survivors' testimony and FaithTrust's engagement with survivor testimony is wide, the kind of fairness that conservatives were concerned to have maintained with respect to Dr. Blasey Ford's testimony and the kind of fairness that FaithTrust's policy recommendations advise, appear quite similar. It is a sense of fairness conceived in tandem with broader cultural and legal notions of due process. Speaking more directly to the role of due process in responding to survivor testimony of sexual violence, FaithTrust's third component of effective procedures for "dealing with complaints of sexual abuse" says the following:

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[72] A number of sources could be cited here. For example, Senator Susan Collins expressed this view in her announcement that she would vote in support of Brett Kavanaugh's nomination. In that announcement, she said, "Mr. President, I listened carefully to Christine Blasey Ford's testimony before the Judiciary Committee. I found her testimony to be sincere, painful, and compelling. I believe that she is a survivor of a sexual assault and that this trauma has upended her life." Collins went on to describe her reasons for not being convinced that Ford's sexual assault was perpetrated by Kavanaugh. For a full transcript of Collins's speech, see Stavros Agorakis, "Read the full transcript of Sen. Collins's speech announcing she'll vote to confirm Brett Kavanaugh," *Vox*, October 5, 2018, https://www.vox.com/2018/10/5/17943276/susan-collins-speech-transcript-full-text-kavanaugh-vote. The video footage of the speech is available at "Senator Susan Collins to Vote to Confirm Judge Brett Kavanaugh," C-SPAN, October 5, 2018, https://www.c-span.org/video/?c4753790/senator-susan-collins-vote-confirm-judge-brett-kavanaugh.

> **Procedures must provide for due process** in assessing a complaint. "Due process" means that the steps of the procedure are reasonable and fair. The procedure must be unbiased and protect the rights and interests of both the complainant and the accused.[73]

A number of questions might be raised of this statement. In what sense is an investigation that recommends an initial disposition of belief in favor of the accused's innocence and against the survivor's testimony *fair*? How does one maintain this epistemological standpoint and remain *unbiased*? FaithTrust's notion of due process disagrees with Rebecca Bell that a *reasonable* response to survivor testimony is an immediate extension of belief. Who determines the shape that reasonableness ought to take? What are the *rights* of each party? How do we think about *rights* in the church? In cases of a report made against a ministerial leader employed by a community of faith and in cases that involve law enforcement, a community's response to a survivor's disclosure will need to be conditioned to some extent by legal and HR standards. But in situations of reported sexual violence in which neither employment nor law are at issue (which, in my experience as an advocate for survivors in Christian settings, is quite often the case), to what extent is it appropriate or wise for a faith community's response to a survivor's disclosure to continue to follow legal and HR standards anyway? Is it *possible* to "protect the rights and interests of both the complainant and the accused"? Putting the question of rights aside for a moment, the *interests* of a survivor and those of one who perpetrated sexual harm are likely to be fundamentally at odds. It does not seem that survivors' interests in safety, empowerment, wellbeing, and justice can be protected without being given priority over a perpetrator's interests in, say, avoiding detection and accountability. When we try to protect the rights and interests of the complainant and the accused equally, are we not bound to slip into operating in modes that privilege one or the other party without self-awareness or reflection about our slippage? What I mean to express by rehearsing this barrage of questions is this: I am

[73] FaithTrust Institute, *Responding to Clergy Misconduct*, 70 (emphasis original).

concerned that if we were to press on these terms – reasonable, fair, unbiased, rights, interests – they will disappoint us. FaithTrust's *Handbook* does not take up the questions I have posed here or any number of others that could be asked along these lines. Its use of these terms, rather, evokes an American cultural notion of due process that is not so much articulated as it is presumed. It is a cultural notion of due process that follows from a whole constellation of western modernity's most problematic investments: in the possibility and promise of individualism, objectivity, absolute truth, and a notion of equality separable from power.[74] To the extent that FaithTrust Institute's invocation of due process reflects these same investments, its recommendations for responding to survivor testimony are vulnerable to many of the critiques that we might make of the due process frame.

One impact of FaithTrust's emphasis on due process is that FaithTrust Institute frames belief as a result of an investigative process, not something immediately given in response to a survivor's initial disclosure. The *Handbook* names seven elements of justice-making in the wake of sexual violence that follow closely on the framework Fortune put forward in her solely authored books. "Truth-telling" and "Acknowledging the violation" are the first two steps FaithTrust recommends. The next five are listed as "Compassion" (defined as suffering with victims), "Protecting the vulnerable," "Accountability" for the abuser, "Restitution" for the survivor, and "Vindication" (defined as setting the survivor free from the suffering caused by abuse).[75] Whereas Fortune described acknowledgement as a response that could be given immediately to a survivor, FaithTrust Institute describes acknowledgement as made possible by an investigation's adjudicatory process insofar as the end result of the process is to pronounce the original complaint ultimately substantiated, unsubstantiated, or inconclusive. Acknowledgement is to be offered in the form of the complaint's formal substantiation if, indeed, the adjudicating committee decides substantiation is

[74] For a more thorough discussion of the relationship between these investments, sexual violence, belief, and theology, see the section on Flora Keshgegian in chapter 5 of this dissertation.
[75] FaithTrust Institute, *Responding to Clergy Misconduct*, 61-62.

warranted on the basis of the investigation's evidence. For FaithTrust Institute, belief, then, is conceptualized as a response made available by a system of due process.

FaithTrust does not, however, presume that the judgment made by the adjudication committee will be correct in an absolute or objective sense. The *Handbook* is clear about that in its recommendation that the adjudicating committee use the standard of evidence common to legal civil proceedings (a preponderance of evidence) rather than the standard common for criminal proceedings (beyond a reasonable doubt) to make its judgment. In its recommendation that an adjudicating committee assess the evidence collected in the investigatory process by the preponderance of evidence standard FaithTrust affirms that an adjudicatory committee should find the survivor's complaint substantiated as long as more than half of the evidence supports the survivor's testimony.[76] In other words, if it is more likely that the alleged abuse happened than that it is likely that the abuse did not happen, the survivor's testimony is to be affirmed, believed, and in the formal sense *acknowledged*. It is not the case that an adjudication committee's substantiation of a survivor's testimony presumes or posits certainty that what the survivor says happened did happen, much less that a survivor's memory corresponds precisely with the history to which it attests. Though this does not resolve the problems of due process culture's approach to survivors' testimonies, it is an improvement within the frame.

FaithTrust also issues guidelines for interpreting evidence. The most convincing form of evidence is described as the accused's admission of guilt: "Certainly, the acknowledgement by the faith leader that he/she engaged in this activity is the best evidence available."[77] The existence of multiple complaints is also described as convincing evidence, as is evidence of a pattern consistent with the patterns one would expect of those who perpetrate abuse. On assessing a situation of "he

[76] FaithTrust Institute, *Responding to Clergy Misconduct*, 87.
[77] FaithTrust Institute, *Responding to Clergy Misconduct*, 84.

said she said," the *Handbook* recommends, first, that the committee still has to make a decision, and second, that the committee should factor in the possibility of future misconduct by the accused:

> When it becomes of matter of the complainant's word against the accused's word, **do not stop the process.** You must reach a judgment based on the **"preponderance of evidence"** and based on the **possibility of future professional misconduct** by that minister. Remember, your first obligation is to protect those who are vulnerable to clergy and other ministers.[78]

In these ways, though FaithTrust fully recommends that a faith community's response to a survivor's disclosure of sexual violence be guided by principles of due process, the organization is considerably more reflective about the risks associated with a culture of due process than common popular expressions of due process culture tend to be. FaithTrust even flags the potential for due process principles to be misused in the kinds of investigatory processes it recommends. The *Handbook* makes a cautionary note to readers arguing that though sincere forms of due process are critical for responding to reports of sexual violence with integrity, "Concerns about 'due process' can sometimes become a smokescreen for inaction."[79] The *Handbook* warns that a concern for due process is deployed inappropriately when it is used to give the person accused of sexual misconduct control over the process or outcome of the investigation. Fairness to the accused does not include granting them direct power with respect to the community's investigatory procedures. Likewise, the *Handbook* says, a concern for due process ought not be used to argue that the risk of an investigation damaging the accused's reputation is reason not to pursue a survivor's complaint at all. Fairness to the accused does not include protection from the potential impact of an investigation into allegations that they have behaved violently.

How, then, will caretakers of communities faced with sexual violence will be advised to respond to survivors' disclosures of sexual violence if FaithTrust's work serves as their guide? Summarizing, FaithTrust Institute recommends that a community ought to have formal policies

[78] FaithTrust Institute, *Responding to Clergy Misconduct*, 88.
[79] FaithTrust Institute, *Responding to Clergy Misconduct*, 70.

regarding sexual violence and that its response to survivors' disclosures ought to follow those policies. FaithTrust advises that a good policy will respond to a survivors' testimony of sexual violence by initiating an investigatory process that collects facts and evidence with which an adjudicatory committee is to evaluate the survivor's claims. While the investigation is ongoing, the accused is to be believed innocent and the complainant is to be regarded as having made their testimony in good faith. Due process principles of fairness, reasonableness, equality, and mutual protection are to be followed as the investigation unfolds. An adjudicating committee is to use a preponderance of evidence standard to judge whether what the survivor says happened is more likely than not to have happened. If the committee's judgment is the affirmative, the survivor's testimony is to be substantiated. Belief in the historical and moral truth of the survivor's testimony follows, as does the ethical action of acknowledgement, compassion, protection, accountability, restitution, and vindication.

If we were to try to place FaithTrust Institute somewhere on the map of believe all women and due process terrain, the organization would be considerably closer to the due process position than it would be to that of believe all women culture. While FaithTrust's *Handbook* highlights the voice of a survivor who expresses the believe all women position that those who receive a survivor's disclosure of sexual violence ought to extend belief immediately and on the sole basis of the survivor's testimony, FaithTrust's own explicitly stated recommendations run squarely against this kind of response. For FaithTrust Institute, a survivor's testimony is not sufficient for belief that what she says happened did happen. For belief to be ethical it ought to follow, instead, from evidence that is gathered and weighed in a process that looks something like due process culture's notion of a fair trial. FaithTrust's recommendations for how such a process ought to unfold take their cues from legal and HR standards both when law and employment are at issue in the broader scope of a specific survivor's disclosure and when they are not. The kind of investigation that

FaithTrust Institute recommends in response to a survivor's disclosure of sexual violence is not itself a legal process, even when it addresses a claim of sexual violence that initiates a legal response outside of the community of faith. In the FaithTrust Institute training that I attended, our trainers emphasized to participants that the investigatory process outlined by the *Handbook* is meant, rather, to be a theological practice and intervention. Thus, the protocols set forth in the *Handbook* represent FaithTrust Institute's recommendation for how communities of faith ought to take up their theologically rooted moral responsibility to respond to survivors' disclosures "justly and fairly to repair the brokenness caused when a faith leader betrays the trust of his/her people."[80] One dimension of the *Handbook* that suggests due process culture as a significant influence, then, is that it recommends that the theological and moral process of extending belief to a survivor's testimony be guided by legal frameworks and, more generally, by the American cultural notion of due process that centers the possibility and promise of fairness and objectivity.

Where FaithTrust departs from operating within the cultural framework of due process is in its acknowledgement that the legal dynamics of due process (and, therefore, the dynamics of due process recommended by FaithTrust to communities of faith) do not guarantee or even suggest certainty with regard to historical validity of a survivor's testimony. FaithTrust does not presume that following due process procedures will result in an adjudicatory finding that represents or expresses absolute truth with regard to the historical veracity of a survivor's claims. In other words, against the culture of due process, FaithTrust does not present due process as a foolproof means for determining what is and is not true. It does, however, present due process as the best available means for doing so, or at least, as the means communities of faith ought to use.

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[80] FaithTrust Institute, *Responding to Clergy Misconduct*, 5. While those who led the FaithTrust Institute training that I attended emphasized the theological nature of a community's investigatory response to survivors' reports of sexual violence, exactly *what* about this response is theological was not as clearly specified. It is a worthwhile question to pose in a future project that works at theologically addressing the problem of belief in a way that works to support processes of response that maintain solidarity with survivors.

Conclusion

In each of the three texts I have engaged in this chapter, texts that aim to give Christian communities of faith guidance for confronting sexual violence and responding to survivors' testimonies, the problem of belief has been paramount. Whether, when, and by what procedures those who receive survivors' disclosures of sexual violence ought to extend belief to survivors' accounts have been central concerns. Fortune, Eugene, and Poling emphasize the necessity of extending belief immediately and without precondition, where the survivor's testimony stands as sole or central warrant. In doing so, they show a tendency toward the believe all women approach to the problem of belief. FaithTrust Institute leans toward due process culture's approach, recommending that a community's belief follow a careful investigatory process that uses evidence external to the survivor's account to judge the likelihood that the survivor's testimony is historically true. And yet, while each text's approach to belief is influenced by those put forward through the believe all women and due process frames, none of the texts examined here represent one position or the other in its purest form. Rather, each text stages departures from the believe all women and due process approaches to belief, and in each text these departures are met by returns. Conceptual gaps and fissures persist. Though each text resists the dualism in some way, none of them seem to have fully escaped the pressure to think within the terms of the believe all woman and due process opposition. I take this to suggest that theology's practical recommendations for addressing sexual violence tend to carry forward the dualistic frame in which western culture's thought on sexual violence seems to be caught, even as these recommendations also offers glimpses of ways beyond the bind.

One of the areas in which theology's practical recommendations for responding to sexual violence can be said to both carry forward and contest western culture's dualistic frame for approaching belief in response to sexual violence survivors' testimonies is with respect to the

content that this literature gives to the term *belief*. Fortune, Eugene, Poling, and FaithTrust Institute each carry forward the terms of the dualism in the ways that they overtly use the term. In their explicit, narrow uses of the word *belief*, each text expects the term to call up one's cognitive orientation to the historical truth of a survivor's claim. This expectation, unarticulated but present in each text, carries forward the emphasis on belief as a cognitive process concerned with truth in historical and objective terms that is shared by Freud, by Masson and Herman, by Loftus, by Flanagan and by contemporary #MeToo proponents of the automatic extension of belief to survivors' accounts of harm. However, each text, to varying degrees, can also be read as motioning toward a sense of belief that also includes moral and embodied dimensions, each of which approach truth as plurifom. While neither Fortune, Eugene and Poling, nor FaithTrust Institute take up this task themselves, their work offers resources for rethinking contemporary discourse on believing survivors' testimonies of sexual violence through belief framed as a moral discernment or as ethical, embodied acts of solidarity with people who have experienced sexual harm.

In addition to offering resources for approaching belief in moral and embodied terms, elements of Fortune, Eugene, and Poling's work suggests there may be a generative opportunity in approaching belief as a cultural product. Fortune presents the extension of belief to specific survivors' testimonies as an act that is made possible, in part, by one's pre-established belief that sexual violence is a real and urgent problem. This latter kind of belief has to do with one's broad orientation to the world. It requires the active cultivation of certain lenses for interpreting social life over against others. Along these lines, Eugene and Poling's approach to the problem of belief as it intersects with race suggests that in order to articulate belief as a cultural product attention to the social politics of race that structure sexual violence in the West is essential.

Another area in which theologically rooted, practical recommendations for responding to sexual violence can be read as both carrying forward and contesting western culture's dualistic frame

for approaching belief in response to sexual violence survivors' testimonies is with respect to its negotiation of the correspondence between survivors' memories and the history to which these attest. To varying degrees, the texts examined in this chapter make an attempt to distinguish affirmation of a general correspondence between memory and history from affirmation of a detailed correspondence. Each oppose a view of detailed correspondence. To varying degrees, Fortune, Eugene, and Poling do, however, preserve a notion of general correspondence. Drawing the distinction helps to curb the risk that their recommendations to extend immediate belief to survivors' testimonies without precondition will raise skepticism of survivors' testimonies in the event that historical inconsistencies are later discovered. While FaithTrust Institute does not emphasize an affirmation of general correspondence between survivors' testimonies and history, it too discourages the expectation that survivors of real events of sexual violence will demonstrate perfect recall of the experience and so intervenes in due process culture's expectation that true testimonies will be characterized by a detailed correspondence between what a survivor says happened and the narrative told by forms of evidence external to the survivor's testimony. The distinction that the literature addressed in this chapter draws between a general and a detailed correspondence between a survivor's memory and the history to which it attests opens a potential way beyond the terms of believe all women and due process debate. However, this potential needs to be nurtured if it is to bear fruit. None of texts I have engaged successfully articulates where one ought to draw the line between which components of a survivor's memory or testimony should be taken as general and which should be regarded as details. The role of survivor's opinion in determining where this distinction ought to be made is not addressed. The move to affirm a general correspondence between memory and history instead of a detailed one, thus, remains promising but underthought. Without continued care to contouring the shape of the distinction it threatens, in practice, to collapse and make way for the terms of the dualism to return.

Continuing to summarize the departures and returns that the literature engaged in this chapter stages with respect to the believe all women / due process frame for approaching belief, it is noteworthy that all three texts I have addressed work to minimize due process culture's anxiety that survivors' memories are false, are fantasies, are implanted, or are otherwise unreliable. They do this, in part, by refusing to indulge the anxiety with sustained, direct attention and this is itself, perhaps, a departure from the terms of western discourse on sexual violence. None of them, for example, devote considerable energy or space to engaging scholarship on memory in order to pose a developed counterargument to due process culture's skepticism of memory's historical reliability. But, a return to the shape of the western conversation occurs as, in the intellectual tradition of believe all women critiques of psychoanalytic history, theological approaches to responding to sexual violence in the church analyze this concern as itself a mechanism for denying the reality of sexual violence.

Tracing the patterns within these texts of departure from and return to the western dualistic frame for approaching belief as a response to testimonies of sexual violence leads me to a final observation. The texts I have engaged in this chapter are theological texts, but they do not frame belief in theological terms. In other words, while they affirm and challenge the approaches to belief that are put forward by believe all woman culture and due process culture, what the kind of arguments they construct do not do is grapple overtly with belief as a complex epistemological process that is also a *theological* process. Belief is, inextricably, a religious category in addition to an epistemological, legal, and political one. In the western context, what it means to *believe* in one thing or another is shaped by modernity's nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first century negotiations of what does and does not warrant belief God. It would seem, then, that theology's resources for conceptualizing belief and articulating its practices with respect to sexual violence extend deep and wide, perhaps quite far beyond the terms of the believe all women and due process debate. It does

not seem to me that the texts I have engaged in this chapter explore or take advantage of these resources. They do not propose belief as a theological category or practice. This absence may perhaps be the strongest indication that these texts remain to some extent caught within the conceptual bounds of western dualistic discourse on sexual violence and belief. And yet, though caught, they bear within them generative prospects for new directions.

Chapter 5: Theology, Sexual Violence Trauma, and the Problem of Belief

The fifth and final chapter of this dissertation moves from the lived reality of congregational engagements with sexual violence to constructive theologies that aim to speak a healing word into the trauma of sexual violence. In this chapter I engage two theological texts that take up sexual violence trauma, Flora Keshgegian's *Redeeming Memories: A Theology of Healing and Transformation*, and Serene Jones's *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World*.[1] One of this chapter's goals is to continue to map the problem of belief as it shows up in theological discourse on sexual violence trauma. To do this, I read Keshgegian and Jones in light of the problem of belief as I have tracked it in previous chapters of this dissertation through popular western discourse, the Freudian problem, survivor advocacy literature, and practical recommendations for congregational responses to sexual violence. However, in addition to continuing to map the problem of belief, a significant focus of this chapter is to tend just as closely to the resources that Keshgegian and Jones offer for approaching belief outside of the dualistic frame. In other words, while in chapter four I began to lay the groundwork for proposing that there is something to be gained by thinking about belief theologically with respect to sexual violence trauma, in chapter five making this argument becomes a central task.

I proposed at the end of chapter four that belief is not only an epistemological, legal, and political category, but a theological one as well. In the western context, it is difficult to separate what it means to *believe* in general from modern notions of what it means to *be a believer* or *to believe in* God. Given the degree to which contemporary western culture is shaped by both current and historical Christian investments; Given the weight that modern western Christianity has placed on the

[1] Flora Keshgegian, Redeeming Memories: A Theology of Healing and Transformation (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000); Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).

centrality of belief to Christian life, we cannot presume that a full account of belief in relation to sexual violence or any subsection of western life can be made without sustaining attention on belief's theological dimensions. And Christian theology offers a variety of ways that belief might be conceived.

One of the approaches to belief that some within modern Christianity have taken is to treat belief as a conscious, cognitive affirmation of a declarative truth that has not been rationally proved, such as "Jesus is the one and only savior," "the mother of Christ was a virgin," or "The heavens and the earth were created in six days."[2] We have seen in the early chapters of this dissertation that those who are skeptical of survivors' testimonies sometimes invoke a caricatured and simplistic notion of this kind of religious belief as a means of dismissing calls to believe survivors' testimonies. Elizabeth Loftus, recall, mocks those who recommend believing survivors' recovered memories by calling them "True Believers." In doing so, she equates the practice of believing survivors with unthinking religious fanaticism, casting belief as a practice that is detached from reason. Judith Herman observes that the late nineteenth century medical effort to account for the etiology of hysteria was motivated by an ambition to replace the social and political power of religious belief with that of rational science and democracy. Here too, religious belief and rational deduction are opposed. The equation of religious belief with unthinking foolery is not a fair one. But it has been effective in efforts to challenge the reasonability of believing survivors.

Christianity offers other options for understanding belief as well. There are traditions in which belief might best be described in terms of discipleship or a life lived in service to God.[3] In this case, belief is not so much a matter of what one thinks as much as it is a matter of what one does

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[2] For example, I often encounter this approach to belief in my first year college students who are coming to the study of religion from Christian Evangelical communities of the South.

[3] For example, my own Mennonite tradition emphasizes living like Jesus as central to what it means to believe in Jesus. This approach is exemplified in Alan Kreider's *The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1999) and in C. Arnold Snyder's *Following in the Footsteps of Christ: The Anabaptist Tradition* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004), particularly chapter seven, pages 138-58.

and why. Belief in this frame takes on the shape of one's body, one's relationships, and one's daily work. Other traditions might be more inclined to think about belief in terms of one's participation in Christianity's sacred rituals, such as communion, confession, or daily prayer.[4] In Christianity's contemplative and mystical traditions, belief may be better conceived in terms of the process and experience of dwelling in the presence of God.[5] In none of these frames can belief be reduced to one's affirmation or denial of a particular truth position. And yet, in each, truth is at issue.

For much of Christian history, belief has been a component of religious life that is as complex as it is fundamental. So far, however, we have not encountered in this dissertation any instance in which rich, complex theological frames for belief have been used as tools for contemplating belief in conversation with what it means to believe survivors. While the texts read in chapter four do challenge the parameters of belief that are put forward by believe all women and due process culture, they do not construct arguments for or against belief that grapple overtly with belief as a complex epistemological process that is also a *theological* process. They do not propose belief as a theological category or practice. And as we will see in this chapter, neither Keshgegian nor Jones explicitly explore belief as a theological concept or practice either. But they do offer resources for approaching the problem of belief theologically that, I'll suggest, could be helpful in this context. Rather than proposing that Keshgegian and Jones offer a ready-made solution to the problem of belief – which, I do not think that they do – what I try to show in this chapter is that the theological resources they bring to bear on the problem create deep enough cracks and fissures in the dualistic framing of belief that efforts to more intentionally pursue belief in theological terms are revealed as both warranted and wise. What we see, through the reading of Keshgegian and Jones I perform in

[4] We might think, for example, of certain monastic communities as modeling this approach to belief. I also have in mind certain streams within liturgical theology. For example, in *Symbol and Sacrament: Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1995), Louise-Marie Chauvet describes the questions that guide his theological reflection in part two of the book as the following: "What does it mean for the faith that it is woven together out of sacraments? What does it mean, then, to believe in Jesus Christ if such a belief is structured sacramentally?" (159).
[5] Here, I have in mind Teresa of Avila's 1588 *The Interior Castle* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979).

this chapter, is that approaching the problem of belief as a theological problem bears promise for constructing responses to the problem that better ground the possibility of solidarity with survivors and resistance to sexual violence.

Flora A. Keshgegian

Flora Keshgegian's *Redeeming Memories: A Theology of Healing and Transformation* is about traumatic violence and memory in its wake. It presents memory as both problem and resource for individuals and groups that have survived traumatically violent circumstances. Keshgegian holds two contexts of traumatic violence up as primary loci for reflection: childhood sexual abuse and 20th-century genocide, particularly the Armenian genocide and the Holocaust. The problem of memory as she traces it through these contexts is at least twofold. On one hand, it is that traumatic memory is often incomplete, leaving survivors grasping for the parts of themselves, their communities, and their cultures that are missing. On the other hand, the duty never to forget atrocities perpetrated against oneself or generations past, while a rightful and necessary duty by Keshgegian's read, can threaten to reinscribe patterns of victimization in oneself or in a community's cultural ethos that run against one's prospects for life.[6] Here, Keshgegian reflects on her own experience as a child of some who survived the Armenian genocide and others who did not. "The last defense against annihilation became oddly the stories of annihilation, and the proof of our existence lay in the repetition and the

[6] Keshgegian uses this language (i.e. prospects for life, enabling life, threatening life) often without using qualifying words that specify what kind of life is being jeopardized or made possible. On one hand, I read this decision as leaving space for the reality that forms of memory that reinscribe trauma have the capacity to threaten lives in a literal sense. The risk of premature death (by suicide, by stress-induced disease, by violence) accompanies prolonged, acute trauma. On the other hand, it is clear that sheer livingness is not all that Keshgegian is after when she speaks of life. One of Keshgegian's central claims is that our memorative practices have an impact on the kind of life that is made possible for us. When I describe her as saying that the duty to remember the violence one has survived "can threaten to reinscribe patterns of victimization…that run against one's *prospects for life*," then, I take her to be suggesting both that lives are literally threatened and that one's access to a full life, a better life, a post-traumatic life, or simply a life that feels worth living is diminished.

remembering of our victimization."[7] Remembering, then, can pose a threat to survivors when it is done through repeating narratives of victimization to the exclusion of developing memories of oneself and one's group as empowered. For Keshgegian, memory remains a vital resource, however, insofar as remembering *is* a practice that defends against annihilation. As such, it can be a means toward fuller life. The practice of remembering is one that Keshgegian suggests has redemptive potential but no redemptive guarantee. One of the central aims of *Redeeming Memories* is to articulate where memory's redeeming potential lies.

Keshgegian's framework for understanding what it means for the traumatized to remember stands as an alternative to those frameworks that suggest that remembering is a task that can be counted upon to always move survivors toward integration and healing. Keshgegian talks about remembering as a practice that can also insist upon and revive traumatic disruption.

> Instead of the memories of survivors helping them to establish meaning, purpose, and connection, to integrate the sequence of the events of their lives, most memories function in the opposite way: remembering witnesses to the persistence of disruption and injury and loss. Indeed, for survivors, Langer suggests, memory is "the reverse of redemption."[8]

Lawrence Langer, who Keshgegian references here, is a scholar of Holocaust literature. Keshgegian uses the typology of traumatic memory that he develops to reveal the problem of memory alongside the potential of its promise.[9] If the problem of memory is that it threatens to reinscribe trauma, the kind of memorative practice that Keshgegian recommends as having potential to support the political and personal cultivation of life in the aftermath of violent trauma is one that does three things. More specifically, it is a practice that remembers with three foci. It remembers suffering and loss. It remembers resistance and agency. And it remembers connection with life and wholeness not defined by suffering.

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[7] Flora Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 13.
[8] Flora Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 75.
[9] Lawrence Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

Within this frame, Keshgegian begins her discussion of sexual violence by recalling an interfaith women's retreat that she ran as chaplain for Brown University. During one of the exercises she led at the retreat she asked students to recall times in their lives when they felt powerless as women. Keshgegian expected the students to name experiences in which men's voices dominated in the classroom or in which professors overlooked them while giving attention to their male colleagues, but overwhelmingly, they named experiences of sexual harassment and assault. One woman who had been quiet during the exercise came to speak with Keshgegian privately afterward, telling Keshgegian of her experiences of sexual abuse in childhood. For a good part of this student's life she had not retained conscious memory of the abuse, but as she told Keshgegian her story she described the series of moments in which her memory had returned, prefacing each instance with the words, "and then I remembered."[10]

That is the title of Keshgegian's opening chapter devoted to sexual violence: "And Then I Remembered." Its focus is on childhood sexual abuse, the wave of survivors who recovered lost memories of abuse during the 1980s and 1990s, and the countermovement led by Elizabeth Loftus and the False Memory Syndrome Foundation that called survivors' recovered memories of childhood sexual abuse into question. One of Keshgegian's goals is to articulate the relationship between sexual violence, trauma, social relations, and memory such that the warrants for believing survivors' memories of childhood sexual abuse are strengthened.

Keshgegian talks about the process of recovering childhood memories of sexual violence as a process of "coming to memory" that, while rife with risk for re-injury, is essential for survivors.[11] She says that for survivors of childhood sexual abuse, memory can become obscured (or, in Keshgegian's terms, *threatened*) in at least two ways. On one hand, through psychological processes of denial, repression, or dissociation, a survivor can lose internal access to conscious awareness that the

[10] Flora Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 36.
[11] Flora Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 36.

sexually violent events occurred. Keshgegian describes this as an adaptive response to the abuse that victims employ to try to protect themselves from the terror and threat of the experience. But ultimately, Keshgegian says, losing memory that the abuse happened silences the survivor and threatens to obstruct her future wellbeing. Keshgegian notes that this kind of "forgetting" and the silencing impact it has on survivors is especially likely to occur when a child tries to tell someone what happened and is not believed.[12] Being told by a trusted adult that, indeed, no such thing happened can influence a child to adopt as their own the reality insisted upon by the adult. After all, children depend on trusted adults to interpret the world to them and to explain which monsters are real and which are make-believe. We might pause here and think back to the orienting stories I told in this dissertation's introduction. In the story I told of my own experience, my childhood strategy for fending off memory of the abuse was precisely to consider such memories make-believe. I don't know if I ever tried to tell an adult of the abuse while it was happening, but I did experience something like what Keshgegian describes when, as an adult myself, I shared the experience. In the instant that it became clear to me that the person I told did not believe me, I could no longer believe myself. It wasn't that I thought about their argument, considered its merits, and judged that it might be a better interpretation of history than my own. If I had to describe it, I would say that their sense of reality simply overtook mine. It invaded. It evacuated whatever it was in me that had slowly enabled me to believe that the abuse I thought I had imagined was real. It reignited the will of repression within me instantly and as if I had no say in the matter. If not being believed can have that kind of impact on an adult, it should not be hard to imagine that it can reorganize a child's memory and sense of reality with equal or greater force.

[12] Here, I join many who study traumatic memory in using quotation marks around the word *forgetting* to call attention to the failure of this word to fully account for the psychological processes of denial, repression, and dissociation even as it works to unite these concepts. Keshgegian uses this linguistic convention as well (for example, on page 36 of *Redeeming Memories*).

Keshgegian describes the second way that memory can become obscured as also having to do with belief, this time in wider social terms. At a Take Back The Night event at Keshgegian's school, students stood up one after the next and for four hours continuously told of their experiences of sexual assault. Following the event, one student came to Keshgegian and told her that as she was listening she had started to feel ill and realized for the first time that what student survivors were describing as sexual assault matched experiences of hers, too. Before hearing other survivors speak she had not had language to name what her stepbrother had done to her as sexual abuse or what happened one night with a previous boyfriend as date rape. "Only as she had heard others speak about their experiences," explains Keshgegian, "was she able to understand her own."[13] Prior to her experience at Take Back The Night, this student's social environment obscured her ability to remember these experiences *as sexual violence* because it denied her the resources for doing so. Whereas coming to memory can mean gaining conscious access to declarative, event-based memories of which one was previously unaware, it also means learning to name the known events of one's past in a new way. For Keshgegian, the process of remembering sexual violence in either sense requires a social environment that supports memory's possibility. And Keshgegian describes the kind of social environment that does so as one that is characterized by a *culture of belief*.

> Abuse does not occur on a blank canvas, but in a social context that allows for and encourages it. Remembering is not only a personal and interpersonal process of retrieval and transformation, but a social and political one. Remembering toward healing and recovery is enabled by a culture of belief and validation. It is disabled by societal denial.[14]

For Keshgegian, a culture of belief describes a broad social ethos that is organized to promote the recognition, naming, and validation of survivors' experiences of sexual violence. Though western societies tend not to be characterized by a culture of belief, she points to social movements that raise consciousness about the experiences of women, children, and other

[13] Flora Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 36.
[14] Flora Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 45.

traumatized persons as nurturing a kind of subversive "believing climate," or a subculture of belief, we might say, within the western cultural norm of disbelief.[15] For example, the Take Back The Night event was, for the student who came to speak to Keshgegian afterward, an instance of a believing climate carved out from within the culture of disbelief that more broadly characterized that student's life experience. Keshgegian also credits the 1980s and 1990s increase in feminist literature and sexual abuse awareness with creating a cultural shift toward belief that made the recovery of memory more possible for adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse during that time. For Keshgegian, the wave of recovered memories that occurred during that period was prompted by the emergence and growth of a political climate that could tolerate the truth. Thus, it is not only necessary to believe survivors' memories. It is also necessary to believe *so that* survivors can remember. Whereas due process culture is suspicious of social and psychological influences on memory, Keshgegian puts cultural influence forward as critical to the possibility of remembering rightly.

It is a significant concern to Keshgegian, however, that western culture, as she reads it, has predominately cultivated disbelief. Like other survivor advocates, Keshgegian traces the dominant culture of disbelief in western societies to Freud. Consistent with Herman's view discussed in chapter three of this dissertation, Keshgegian rehearses a reading of Freud that connects his transition from the seduction theory to the Oedipal paradigm of childhood sexuality with western culture's tendency to wrongfully deny the reality of sexual violence. In Keshgegian's view, "Whatever the motivation, in seeking to hold on to a world that he could live in, Freud discounted the real experience of many of his patients. In fact, he seems to have stopped listening to them."[16] And Keshgegian's indictment of Freud does not stop here. She links what she views as Freud's denial of sexual violence survivors' testimony with what she sees as a pattern that justifies denial to the detriment of survivors seeking help ever since.

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[15] Flora Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 44.
[16] Flora Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 47.

> Neither did the problem end with Freud. Because the theories of infantile sexuality and the Oedipus complex were enshrined as the very foundations of psychoanalysis, psychoanalysts and other therapists and counselors were trained not to believe the experiences of their clients, and to interpret their reports of trauma and memories as fantasies. Children have been dismissed as credible witnesses to their own lives. Memories have been lost, discounted, manipulated, and distorted because of psychoanalytic orthodoxy; other interpretations have been imposed. The Freudian legacy can thus be read as one of institutionalized distortion and even erasure of the memory of those who suffered abuse in childhood. This legacy has not encouraged remembering in a way that can heal and transform. It has made it difficult for survivors to find help and reliable witnesses. It has discouraged theoretical approaches or ideological stances that recognize women's experience.[17]

Insofar as it repeats the same meta story about how and why belief is denied to survivors of sexual violence in western societies, Keshgegian carries forward the believe all women frame. Tellingly for this dissertation, Keshgegian goes on to link her critique of Freud to the False Memory Syndrome movement of the 1990s. Whereas she reads Freud's theory shift as founding psychoanalysis on the denial of sexual violence survivors' memories of harm, she reads False Memory Syndrome proponents as carrying the culture of disbelief promoted by psychoanalysis forward in terms amenable to a new era.

> Freud was not the only one, however, to come to the conclusion that reports of childhood incestuous sexual abuse were not accurate representations of past events. More recently, the False Memory Syndrome Foundation has been promoting the idea that many adults who say that they are retrieving repressed memories of abuse are actually manifesting False Memory Syndrome.[18]

For Keshgegian, both Freudian and False Memory Syndrome instantiations of a culture of disbelief must be resisted. As she makes this argument, Keshgegian aligns herself with the believe all women perspective, but she does so with a twist. By framing each end of the opposition in cultural terms she reveals that neither is built on certainty, objectivity, or direct access to history. In the popular form of the dualistic debate, both believe all women proponents and due process proponents attempt to win adherents to their side by positioning themselves as more objective, more certain,

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[17] Flora Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 47-48.
[18] Flora Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 48.

and more grounded in sheer historicity than the other. For example, Elizabeth Loftus bases her resistance to belief on the argument that memories of sexual violence can be changed or fabricated through social influence. Since memory is neither certain nor objective it ought not to be trusted to open reliably onto history. The common counterargument in favor of belief argues that memory can be trusted to open reliably onto history because it is objective and certain. Keshgegian, however, makes a lateral shift in the conversation by showing that *failure* to remember sexual violence can also be the result of social influence. If the social conditions of a child's life can influence them to "forget" the abuse they lived, then, by the terms of Loftus's argument, there is no more reason to believe testimonies of *not* having been abused in childhood than there is to believe the testimonies of those who consider themselves survivors. Neither the presence nor absence of memories of sexual violence can be trusted to represent history truthfully as long as belief requires that memory be insulated from social influence. By starting from the standpoint that both memory and history are socially constructed, Keshgegian prompts us to build new ground upon which to found belief, ground that is stabilized not by objectivity and certainty, but by something else. To gain a handle on what Keshgegian takes to be the substance of that ground, a closer reading of her approach to memory and history as socially constructed phenomena will be useful.

Memory, History, and Belief

Here is what Keshgegian has to say on the relationship between memory and history: "Implicit in my arguments is the claim that history is memory."[19] What does it mean for Keshgegian to say that history *is* memory? If I had not already disclosed that Keshgegian aims to resist regarding either concept as absolute, we might be compelled to think that Keshgegian's thought here aligns with the believe all women position or with Freud's seduction theory – frameworks in which what

[19] Flora Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 96.

one recalls is taken to represent the circumstances of history at face value. To say that history *is* memory in this sense would be to claim that what historically happened *is* what a person will remember, or from the other direction, that what a person remembers *is* what happened. But neither is what Keshgegian means when she says that history *is* memory.

We learn about what history means for Keshgegian by reflecting on the way she thinks about history's denial, which she discusses most directly in the section of her book that addresses genocide. For Keshgegian, Turkey's denial of the Armenian genocide is expressed in Turkey's official position that, "given the exigencies of wartime, alleged insurrections by Armenians in Turkey, and Armenian alliance with enemy Russian forces, the government found it necessary to put down such uprisings and to relocate most of the Armenian populace."[20] What Turkey denies is not that Armenians were killed or that Armenians were forcibly relocated; it is that what happened constitutes genocide. Keshgegian presents Holocaust deniers, similarly, as those who argue that "though Jews died, there was no plan to annihilate them; though Jews were put into camps, these were comfortable settings where the Jews were treated well."[21] What is denied, again, is not that Jews died or that concentration camps existed; it is that Jewish death and conscription to concentration camps is rightfully read as genocide. In other words, there is a basic level of agreement from such deniers that certain events of history *happened*. What deniers dispute is how the happenings of history ought to be interpreted, or more apt for Keshgegian's conversation, how those happenings ought to be remembered.[22]

There is a generative parallel we might strike with how history's denial manifests with respect to sexual violence. Within this frame, a rape survivor's history is denied when one admits that genital

[20] Flora Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 61.
[21] Flora Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 83.
[22] The distinction I am attempting to draw here is not founded on the (incorrect) idea that all who deny the Armenian genocide or the Holocaust admit the fact of Armenian and Jewish deaths. There are, indeed, those who deny that Jews were ever sent to concentration camps and those who claim that the entire notion that Armenians were killed by Turkey or that Jews were killed by the Nazis is a hoax. What I aim to argue is not that genocide denial always admits history's happenings but that it *can do so* and still be denial in Keshgegian's terms.

penetration between the survivor and the accused perpetrator *happened* but argues that the event ought to be interpreted as consensual (albeit bad) sex instead of rape. Thinking back again to the orienting stories of this dissertation's introduction, this is, for example, the manner in which Francesca's community of faith denied her experience of sexual abuse. The leaders of her church admitted that sexual contact between Francesca and her youth pastor occurred but placed moral responsibility on Francesca. This is also the kind of argument that Caitlin Flanagan made against Grace's claim to have been sexually assaulted by Aziz Ansari. As discussed in chapter four, Marie Fortune talks about this kind of denial as the second form of avoidance, or, as a refusal to believe a survivor's testimony in terms of its moral significance.[23]

Whether with respect to rape or genocide, the sense in which history is being denied in these instances focuses on the denial of a particular narrative about how a given series of events ought to be interpreted and what that series of events means. When Keshgegian uses the word *history*, then, she is speaking in large part about narrative and interpretation. History, she says, is "construction and reconstruction, from a particular perspective, and is to serve certain interests."[24] For Keshgegian, history is the meaning we make of happenings. This is the sense in which she can say that history *is* memory. If memory, for Keshgegian, is the practice through which we put ourselves in relation to the past, then it too is constructive, narrative, interpretive, and political. For Keshgegian, our interpretations of the past are a product of our memorative practices. "Historical memory, then, is not fixed." Whereas, for Keshgegian, "it is dependent on and grounded in evidence, it is also always ideology."[25] Framing memory and history as each constructed and co-constructed pushes against the dualism constructed by the due process and believe all women

[23] Marie Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited,* 113.
[24] Flora Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 95.
[25] Flora Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 95.

frameworks at least in the sense that it levels the playing field between them.[26] This alone, however, does not resolve the problem of belief. Rather, if anything, it raises the stakes.

To say that historical memory is grounded in evidence calls our attention back to the due process framework for responding to survivor testimony. But Keshgegian is decidedly not a due process proponent. In fact, she positions the culture of due process as central to the strategies used by Holocaust deniers to promote their positions:

> Those employing these strategies and tactics invoke the principles of free speech and fairness: if a newspaper or a school is committed to free speech, it ought to let all voices [including those of Holocaust deniers] speak. If a school or community wants to practice fairness, then each side should be represented.[27]

The culture of due process is invested in the idea that neutrality exists, is an ethical priority, and is the best position from which to determine truth, usually in objective terms. We have seen this investment surface throughout this dissertation and most recently in the previous chapter's engagement with FaithTrust Institute's *Responding to Clergy Misconduct: A Handbook*.[28] By contrast, Keshgegian views the truth of memory and history as always – like memory and history themselves – contingent, political, and constructed from particular, nonneutral standpoints. The role of evidence in the construction of historical memory is to keep us accountable; not to ensure that we arrive at an unbiased, pure truth.

Though Keshgegian does not develop it, here is another opportunity for opening the terms of the dualism beyond themselves. How might we shift discourse on sexual violence away from the limitations of due process and believe all women positions by thinking about the role of evidence as keeping us accountable rather than presuming that the role of evidence is to reveal truth to us in

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[26] Because I have addressed this dynamic elsewhere in the dissertation, I will only add a footnote here to name that it is also true that by approaching history this way, Keshgegian risks losing resources for affirming survivors' memories as representations of events that, in a historical sense, happened. While Keshgegian's emphasis on the constructed nature of memory and history is instructive, she does not tell us how we are to approach the relationship of memory to history's happenings.

[27] Flora Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 82-83.

[28] Marie M. Fortune, Kimberly Day-Lewis, Mark Dratch, and Aleese Moore-Orbih, *Responding to Clergy Misconduct: A Handbook* (FaithTrust Institute, 2009).

objective or certain terms? If we were to conceive of evidence this way (which, in the greater scheme of western thought, is not particularly novel) we would have to start by asking ourselves to *whom* or to *what* different kinds of evidence make us accountable. By asking this question, the impossibility of neutrality would come to the fore, and an opportunity would arise to design non-legal processes of response, inquiry, or investigation around the ethical priorities a community decides upon for itself. A community of faith committed to maintaining solidarity with survivors of sexual violence would be encouraged to write its procedures of response to value forms of evidence that keep the community accountable to its commitment of solidarity. What this would look like in practice needs to be worked out, but it seems there is at least potential for the results to model an approach to responding to survivors' reports of harm that, on one hand, holds pastoral and investigatory practices together, and on the other, resists the believe all women / due process divide.

Keshgegian's approach to truth and its appropriate defense shows potential for subverting the dualistic debate around believing survivors' testimonies of sexual violence as well. For Keshgegian, the destruction of memory is a destruction of truth. It is, likewise, the destruction of the people to whom that memory belongs and from whom it is passed down. Keshgegian sees the denial of memory as a practice of annihilation. For example, the goal of Holocaust deniers, she says, "is to destroy the memories of the Holocaust" and thereby fulfill the Nazi mission of extermination.[29] Those who deny survivors' memories of sexual violence likewise contribute to the destruction not only of memory but of the one to whom it belongs. For Keshgegian, denial of histories of violence poses a serious threat to survivors and must, for this reason, be strongly resisted. However, Keshgegian takes issue with certain strategies for mounting this resistance. Namely, she resists defenses against denial that make their case in a way that treats histories of violence as representing a truth that is objective and absolute. Deborah Lipstadt and Harold Kaplan

[29] Flora Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 82.

are among those who Keshgegian sees as getting the kind of truth available through Holocaust history wrong. For them, resisting deniers and bearing witness to the Holocaust means insisting on its objective nature.

> For Lipstadt, that witness is to the "truth" of the Holocaust, which retains for her an absolute status, rooted in fact and reason. Yet her distinctions seem at times too absolute for those who seek to witness to the awful reality and the narrated meanings of history. Harold Kaplan similarly argues for truth that is not relative or reduced to power. He roots his perspectives in a fundamental commitment to human rights. Both Lipstadt's and Kaplan's approaches are grounded in liberal commitments to rationalism and ethical humanism. But it is precisely faith in reason and ethical human action that is so shaken by the Holocaust.[30]

Because the Holocaust brings reason and ethics into crisis, bearing authentic witness to the Holocaust cannot, according to Keshgegian's thought, be done through strategies that reinscribe ways of engaging history that the Holocaust itself casts under suspicion.

Keshgegian makes a similar argument with respect to sexual violence. Survivors' struggle to resist the dominant western culture of disbelief "sometimes brings about a tendency in survivor literature, especially popular texts and self-help books," she says,

> to overemphasize the absoluteness of experience and to read any ambiguity or doubt as a sign of weakness of lack of support. I see this as another pole of the quest for certainty shared by those who want scientific and evidentiary proof. It is a stage that has to be left behind if abuse is to be fully faced.[31]

For Keshgegian, neither history nor experience is absolute. Neither survivors' experience nor their memories of that experience can be treated as correspondent with history. Thus, appeals to the certainty of memory or experience are not able to give belief the solid foundation toward which proponents for belief, with good reason, sometimes want to grasp. Keshgegian turns to James Young's work in genocide and Holocaust studies to elaborate her point. Young says, "none of us coming to the Holocaust afterwards can know these events outside the ways they are passed down

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[30] Flora Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 84-85. See also Deborah Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993) and Harold Kaplan, *Conscience and Memory: Meditations in a Museum of the Holocaust* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).
[31] Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 52.

to us."[32] The same can be said of memories of sexual violence. No one who receives a survivors' testimony of sexual violence has access to the experience apart from the testimony through which a witness's knowledge of it is received. For Keshgegian, this means that, "In that sense, there is no absolute truth, no history that is not interpreted, no memory that is not shaped by ideology."[33] Authentic witness, Keshgegian, concludes, "needs to embrace these uncertainties and complexities, and affirm multiple, even conflicting truths."[34] Keshgegian maintains that memories of traumatic violence "cannot be used to certify belief, establish closure, or achieve certainty,"[35] and that witnesses to testimonies of that violence must be "prepared to forsake our understandings of order and meaning, morality and purpose, in order to see the unhealed wounds and lack of unified selves that are revealed in the oral and written testimonies of survivors."[36] The latter suggests confidence that survivors' testimony truthfully represents history at least in the sense that history has included violent injustices against them.[37] But memory, in this frame, is not *certifying* belief. It is, rather, acting as a *warrant* for belief.

I said when I began to trace Keshgegian's approach to the relationship between memory and history that doing so could help to uncover what, by Keshgegian's estimation, stabilizes the ground on which belief in response to survivors' testimonies is to be founded. Against the tendencies of western discourse on sexual violence to link the appropriateness of believing survivor testimony with the degree to which the memories on which it is based can be regarded as historically correspondent or certain, Keshgegian's approach to memory affirms memory not as having the capacity to certify history, but as a warrant for constructing one narrative about history as opposed

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[32] See Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 85. See also James E. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).
[33] Flora Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 85.
[34] Flora Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 85.
[35] Lawrence Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, 157 (quoted by Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 75).
[36] Flora Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 75.
[37] As we saw in chapter four, Marie Fortune also makes this point explicitly. She says that while a survivor's memory may fluctuate and change, what is important is for the one receiving that testimony to affirm the truth "of someone having been victimized by another" (*Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited*, 135).

to another. One question a constructive project might center, then is this: How does the difference between memory's certifying and warranting capacities impact the kind of ethics available for grounding theologically robust forms of belief in response to survivors' testimonies of sexual violence? Keshgegian offers some direction. Following Young, Keshgegian describes authentic memory as that which has the "capacity to sustain and enable life itself."[38] Those who deny the Holocaust and seek in doing so to perpetuate social threats to Jewish existence are, according to this framework, "practicing inauthentic memory, which disables life."[39] Those who deny survivors' testimonies of sexual violence, likewise, are practicing inauthentic, life-disabling memory. The authenticity of memory and its strength as a warrant for history, is traced not to its correspondence with an objective read of history's happenings, but to the capacity of particular memorative practices to support the possibility of life for survivors and resist the continuation of violent trauma. In this frame, the appropriateness of extending belief to survivors' testimonies becomes, to at least a significant extent, contingent on that which would make for life-affirming solidarity with survivors.

At this point, we might wonder whether we have traveled this far only to find ourselves back on believe all women terrain. After all, the believe all women position seeks to secure the extension of belief to survivors' testimonies in the first place because it considers belief essential to survivors' safety and wellbeing. Its proponents' tendency to treat memory as correspondent with history is, to some extent, a pragmatic route toward this end. In other words, for the believe all women position *how* belief is secured is secondary to the primary goal of, simply, securing belief. By defining authentic memory as that which supports the possibility of life for survivors, has Keshgegian not, then, returned to the believe all women argument that we ought to believe all survivors' testimonies because doing so has the best odds of minimizing harm? And in staging this return, has she not left

[38] See Flora Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 85.
[39] Flora Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 85.

an opening for the simplistic form of belief built on an assertion of correspondence between memory and history at work in the believe all women position to return as well?

By my reading, Keshgegian is not immune to this concern. Without a more thorough treatment of belief itself, the path toward belief that Keshgegian is trying to forge through memory and history is vulnerable to the pressure of the dualism. If solidarity and "the possibility of life" are conceived in personal, individual, or uncomplicated terms one could read Keshgegian's work as, in the end, reaffirming the believe all women position that belief that what a survivor says happened did happen ought to be automatically extended to all survivors' testimonies without precondition. Through the opening that Keshgegian leaves for the believe all women position to return, simplistic notions of belief threaten to return as well.

But I do not think that this is the only or the best way to read Keshgegian. Keshgegian's emphasis on thinking about both traumatic violence and belief in systemic, political, and cultural terms suggests that a commitment to remembering in ways that open "the possibility of life" for survivors must likewise be conceived through a lens that situates solidarity with individual survivors within a broader, more complex commitment to solidarity at the cultural and social levels. One of this dissertation's central claim is that programs seeking solidarity with survivors require a thoughtful, complex understanding of belief. Simplistic notions of belief, while potentially helpful to some survivors in the short term, do not provide the full set of resources needed for tackling the problem of belief as it manifests in the lives of survivors. Neither does it equip communities to respond to survivors' testimonies in ways that create the kind of solidarity that survivors are often looking for. Thus, while Keshgegian does not get us all the way to a mode of belief that could support this thick kind of solidarity, the social, cultural, and political emphasis of her work on sexual violence, memory, and history exposes ground that could be cultivated in its pursuit.

Witness and Belief

As I worked through Keshgegian's approach to memory, history, and belief, we saw Keshgegian speak of authentic memory and of authentic historical narratives as cultivated in the presence of a witness. A final opportunity that Keshgegian offers for approaching the problem of belief, then, comes through her discussion of what it means to bear witness to traumatic testimony.

For Keshgegian, the remedy to threats posed to memories of sexual violence "is not to assert the absoluteness of truth over 'myth,' fact over narrative, but to strengthen witness."[40] And here is what Keshgegian says it means to bear witness:

> [Witnesses are] those who will recognize the trauma, hear, hold, and affirm the suffering and the surviving, and accompany and share in the process of remembering. Indeed, bearing witness is precisely about hearing and accompanying; it is fundamentally a relationship. Through these relationships and through sharing in community, it becomes possible to imagine connection and transcendence of trauma toward a flourishing of life.[41]

For Keshgegian, witnessing is the answer to trauma insofar as it is a practice that forges connection, understanding, and solidarity between those who are separated from the world by traumatic violence and others who have the capacity to contribute to trauma's transformation. By Keshgegian's read, witnessing is political and relational, spiritual and epistemological. It describes an act and process that reorients one who receives a survivor's testimony and aligns them with the survivor's interests and perspective. For Keshgegian, witnessing means not only hearing and affirming a survivor's testimony, but undergoing a kind of conversion such that one comes to prioritize that which enables survivors' prospects for flourishing and work against that which would enable the repetition of traumatic harm.

Keshgegian describes the process of bearing witness to a survivor's testimony of sexual violence as one that also involves belief. Speaking to the need for witness, she says, "It is vitally

[40] Flora Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 85.
[41] Flora Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 124.

important that the survivor be believed and her testimony be received. The role of witness entails such validation, as well as a receiving and holding of the testimony."[42] Here, Keshgegian uses the terms *belief* and *validation* interchangeably, presumably expressing in each instance that to bear witness to a survivor's testimony involves affirming that testimony as, in some capacity, true. For Keshgegian, witnessing is intimately related to belief insofar as extending belief to survivors' testimonies is a necessary part of the witnessing process. But witnessing is also more than sheer belief. It is an act that creates a holding environment for a survivor's testimony, a womb-like space where a survivor's story can safely dwell as it takes form. And yet, these two components of the witnessing process are intertwined. Belief acts as the yarn with which the holding environment is knit. Here again, we are reminded of Keshgegian's concern that we not only believe the testimonies of sexual violence that survivors give, but that we also believe *so that* survivors can remember. In this frame, the relationship between traumatic memory, testimony, and belief is not linear but reciprocal.

Keshgegian envisions the witnessing process as bridging the personal and social dimensions of sexual violence. "The witnessing relationship," she says, "stands in for a larger social context that recognizes and hears the survivor's testimony. This need for witnessing and support operates both interpersonally and societally. Indeed, the personal and the social reinforce one another."[43] Keshgegian's notion of the witnessing relationship as standing in for a larger social context brings us back to her argument that remembering rightly requires the cultivation of cultures of belief. It would be ideal, in Keshgegian's terms, for our societies to become believing climates. But, by her reading, western societies are predominately characterized by a culture of disbelief, and so we need to continually strive to create countercultural pockets within society in which a believing climate can flourish. The witnessing relationship – whether manifest between two individuals or between survivors and their communities – can function as this kind of countercultural believing space. As

[42] Flora Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 43.
[43] Flora Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 43.

such, it is also a model for what a culture of belief, if expanded to the societal level, looks and acts like. In the absence of a societal culture of belief that provides the conditions necessary for survivors to remember the violence done to them in a manner that promotes their wellness, participating in a witnessing relationship has the potential to give survivors an experience (even if limited) of living, testifying, and remembering *as if* such a culture were the norm.

This *as if* calls us back again to this dissertation's orienting stories. Recall, in the story I told of my own experience, the episode I described in my friend's living room in which frozen, contextless, still frame images I had long held in memory suddenly came to life. Here is how I described what precipitated that event: "I had coaxed myself to consider for the first time that, just maybe, I felt traumatized by sexual violence because I was. It was a new and strange idea."[44] What made way for my memory to move from rigid retreat to (admittedly terrifying) life was that I had "coaxed myself to consider" a new reality in which the terrors rattling around within me were telling the truth. It would be wrong to say that I had accepted this reality or chosen it as my own. Rather, I had moved into an in-between space in which I was intermittently trying on this reality *as if* it were mine. It was not certainty, objectivity, or external evidence that offered me the conditions necessary to begin to remember. It was the act of dwelling in the space of this *as if*. And that space became available to me in the first place through what Keshgegian would call witnessing relationships: personal, communal, spiritual, and scholarly relationships that held open the possibility – the option – of belief.

The presence of this *as if* in the witnessing relationship suggests that liturgical theology, in particular, may be a useful conversation partner for projects that seek to address sexual violence and the problem of belief through a theological lens. Liturgical theologians have shown us that religious ritual can, in one sense, be understood as constructing an alternative world and inviting participants

[44] See page 2 of this dissertation's introduction.

to inhabit that world *as if* it were their own.[45] The liturgical world does not become identical with the world of participants' ordinary lives, and yet the act of participating in the reality conjured by the liturgy makes the conditions performed in the liturgy, in a meaningful way, real. Thus, liturgical participation can be conceived as a method of constituting reality. In a limited rather than absolute way, it can challenge or resist the conditions that determine the social reality of ordinary life. It can open space for those conditions to be transformed. It can creatively weave together forms of social relation that manifest reality anew. We may or may not want to cast the witnessing relationship as itself ritual or liturgical, but the presence of the *as if* in the witnessing relationship suggests that there may be something to gain by turning to liturgical theology as a resource for thinking theologically about witnessing as it interfaces with the problem of belief.[46] Serene Jones's work on theology, liturgy, prayer, trauma, and sexual violence, offers us an opportunity to further explore this trajectory.

Serene Jones

Jones opens *Trauma and Grace* with a narrative about a sexual violence survivor whose lasting trauma was triggered by participating in the Christian liturgy of communion. As Jones tells the story, Leah was preparing to join the congregation and had asked Jones to be her church-appointed sponsor through the membership process. One service, Leah was sitting next to Jones in the pew when it

[45] I am taking this "*as if*" language from Adam B. Seligman, Robert P. Weller, Michael J. Peutt, and Bennet Simon's *Ritual and Its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). While this is a text of ritual theory, not liturgical theology, the concept that this "*as if*" language represents is one that I find to be prevalent and richly articulated (with some variation, of course) in liturgical theology. For example, in Alexander Schmemann's *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1963) and Louise-Marie Chauvet's *Symbol and Sacrament*. Likewise, it is at work in the liturgical elements of Serene Jones's *Trauma and Grace*, which I am about to explore.

[46] Given her focus on theology and trauma, her engagement with liturgy, and her in-depth engagement with the practice of witnessing, Shelly Rambo's two volumes would be a particularly appropriate for a future project that negotiates the relationship between liturgy, theology, witness, and belief with respect to sexual violence trauma: *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010) and *Resurrecting Wounds: Living in the Afterlife of Trauma* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2017).

came time for the pastor to begin the communion ceremony. Describing this part of the service as her own long-time favorite, Jones says,

> But as the pastor began talking about the night "before Jesus' death," Leah's body grew rigid. Her nail-bitten fingers began to twist the folded order of worship paper in her lap, her face assumed a frighteningly blank look, her fear was cold and palpable. When the pastor then invoked the words of Jesus, "This is my blood, poured out for you," she slid out of the pew and left the sanctuary. As I turned to see the back doors close softly behind her, I heard the pastor intone, "And this is my body, broken for you."[47]

Jones followed Leah to the bathroom and found her there seeming disoriented. Leah could not remember which faucet on the sink was hot and which was cold. Jones turned on the hot water for her. Running the water over her wrists helped Leah to come back to herself.

Later, Leah told Jones that she had been sexually abused as a child and that she had been raped by a supposed friend in high school. Trying to explain what had happened during the communion liturgy at church, she said,

> It happens to me sometimes. I'm listening to the pastor, thinking about God and love, when suddenly I hear or see something, and it's as if a button gets pushed inside of me. In an instant, I'm terrified; I feel like I'm going to die or get hurt very badly. My body tells me to run away, but instead, I just freeze. Last week it was the part about Jesus' blood and body. There was a flash in my head, and I couldn't tell the difference between Jesus and me, and then I saw blood everywhere, and broken body parts, and I got so afraid I just disappeared. I thought the bathroom might be safe, but even it scared and confused me. I forgot my name. I forgot the hot and cold.[48]

Both in the church bathroom when Jones had gone to check on Leah and now, as Leah tried to explain what had happened that day, Jones describes herself as falling silent and feeling frozen. She did not know what kind of response could help. What Jones did know, as Leah's mentor, was that encountering God's grace and love was important to Leah and central to what drew Leah to the church. The week before the service Jones and Leah had talked "long into the evening about grace and God's desire that (Leah) flourish and know the fruits of life abundant."

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[47] Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 4.
[48] Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 7.

> This week, however, a story-ritual about Jesus' love for her, grace incarnate, had thrown her into a cold, frightening place where violence seemed to stalk her. How could this be? How might the church not harm her in the very same moment it is trying to convey to her the treasure of love unending?[49]

This last question is one of the central questions to which Jones's book seeks to respond. Jones is troubled that participating in the worshiping and community life of a church can exacerbate the trauma of sexual violence as it did for Leah. She is concerned that the church learn to offer the grace of God in ways that can be received by those who are traumatized. To a significant extent, Jones is interested in the potential of Christian theology and practice to contribute to survivors' internal processes of healing. Whereas Keshgegian approaches survivors' prospects for wellbeing in the aftermath of sexual violence as deeply political, Jones approaches healing from sexual violence trauma as a primarily personal, spiritual, and relational task.

In *Trauma and Grace*, Serene Jones asks how it is that divine grace meets, encounters, and meaningfully transforms traumatic experience, particularly, though not only, the traumatic experience that attends sexual and gender-based forms of violence. The book is a constructive theological project written in conversation with trauma theory. Jones conceptualizes the task of "theologically engaging the traumatized mind" as a "challenge of *healing imagination*."[50] Imagination figures prominently in the text. For Jones, the term refers to the constellation of narratives and perspectives that organize our worlds and animate our experience.

> I use the word to refer to the fact that as human beings we constantly engage the world through organizing stories or habits of mind, which structure our thoughts. Our imagination simply refers to the thought stories that we live with and through which we interpret the world surrounding us.[51]

While, for Jones, human internal and social worlds are always ordered through imagination, there is an incredible multiplicity of imaginaries through which this ordering work can be done, each with a

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[49] Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 5.
[50] Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 20 (emphasis original).
[51] Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 20.

different influence on the ways in which we will experience and engage with the world(s) in which we live.

With this in mind, Jones posits trauma as a phenomenon that disorders imagination, interrupting one's ability to tell stories about themselves and their world that make life livable.[52] As a disordering force, trauma incapacitates imagination such that one's ability to tell stories that facilitate their flourishing is affected. Trauma threatens not only the specific ways that one formerly made sense of the world, but the possibility of making sense and constructing meaning at all. Jones's idea of trauma as disordered imagination presents the traumatic imaginary not as one more internally coherent imaginary in a multiplicity of alternatives, albeit an undesirable one. Rather, trauma as disordered imagination fails as an imaginary because it cannot produce a world that coheres. For Jones, trauma is more like the incapacitation of the human faculty of imagination than it is like a meaning-making world of its own. With the disordering of imagination goes the dissolution of meaning, and with the dissolution of meaning goes the glue of connection and relationship. Trauma unravels one's carefully woven world, which places the very possibility of continued existence – certainly of a life that feels worth living -- at risk.[53]

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[52] Jones's use of the term *disordered imagination* is novel with respect to contemporary trauma research. It does owe, however, to the seventeenth century physician Johannes Hofer's introduction of the term in his 1688 dissertation to articulate the impact of traumatic experience on survivors. There, he described the result of traumatic experience as a "disease that is due essentially to a *disordered imagination*." Jones reproduces the relevant section of Hofer's dissertation on page 20 of her text. It is reproduced, as well, in the article by G. Rosen, "Nostalgia: A Forgotten Psychological Disorder," *Psychological Medicine* 5 (1975): 342-47, http://www.psychosomaticmedicine.org/cgi/reprint/55/5/413.pdf.

[53] In theology, traditions built around negative theology, asceticism, and kenosis each in some way value the undoing of the self as a vital part of the process of bringing the self into authentic relation with God. Classic examples abound and would certainly include the ascetic theology of the dessert fathers, the published works of the Cappadocian fathers, and Martin Luther's articulation of the doctrine of justification. There is a conversation to be had between trauma theorists who conceptualize the undoing of the self as catastrophic and theologians who would maintain that self-undoing is an essential practice for intellectual, ethical, or religious life. However, what each are and are not doing with the concept of self-undoing warrants careful and considerable treatment, more than I can afford to offer here.

I will, however, say a brief and preliminary word on the subject, because it is one to which Jones herself speaks. For those who value processes of self-undoing as central to one's ability to think or feel or know or relate or pray *well*, the self is conceived in primarily (though not exclusively) social terms. What is to be undone is not the fabric that enables a person to experience a basic level of psychological coherence and relatedness to the world, but the facets of that person's being that have been constructed through problematic social systems in such a way that they close that person off to the Other, to God, to the possibility of wellbeing, liberation, conversion, or what have you. This form of undoing is not what Jones has in mind when she uses the language of unraveling, undoing, and erasure of the self as an

The way that trauma disorders imagination is, at least in part, according to Jones, by throwing one's relationship to the past into disarray. Speaking to this concern, Jones discusses a number of ways that memory, our link to the past, is affected by trauma. For one, she says, traumatic experiences can leave a survivor with a profound sense of disbelief in what they do remember. Jones reflects on her own experience of watching the second plane hit the Twin Towers on 9/11 to articulate what she means.

> As I continued to watch, the most powerful initial response these images triggered was incredulity, a sense of disbelief that anyone could actually be seeing this happen. The violence was stupefying. That is how trauma often feels in the space of its occurrence: It cannot be happening.[54]

The experience of disbelief that Jones describes can be so strong that it throws a survivor's own sense of their memory's relation to history into doubt. A memory can begin to feel not like a memory at all, but like a fantasy conjured by the survivor's own mind. Whereas the first three chapters of this dissertation followed the tendency for others to question the relationship between a survivor's memory and the history to which it attests, what Jones's use of trauma theory here

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effect of trauma. What Jones and I and the other thinkers who speak to trauma in this dissertation mean by the traumatic unraveling of the self is violent disintegration that effaces the possibility of personhood and existence however these are put in relation to social the social world.

In her earlier text, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), Jones speaks to this point without directly referencing trauma. Rather, she takes up the issue of desirable and undesirable forms of self-undoing within the scope of Christian doctrines of justification and sanctification and their needed revisions in light of feminist theory. For Jones, the tension between justification and sanctification creates the space in which Christian identity unfolds. This is a tension created precisely by being undone (the process of justification as defined by Luther) and then remade (the process of sanctification as defined by Calvin). Christian identity is forged in the tension of the justification/sanctification drama by having one's self decentered and then redeployed anew, by having the substance of one's identity judged and then replaced with new givens. Jones argues that feminist theory, however, demonstrates that woman cannot simply be placed into the justification/sanctification drama as it is laid out in this traditional frame, because woman is always already undone by society. Thus, the process of justification only exacerbates her oppression. In light of this, Jones proposes that the traditional order of justification and sanctification in Christian doctrine must be reversed if we hope it to be generative for the figure of the woman. For woman, sanctification must come first, because it is sanctification that gives woman *skin* in Irigaray's terms – a space in which she is free to become herself ["Divine Wisdom," in *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (New York: Colombia University Press, 1993)]. Because sanctification first gives woman skin, Jones argues, it then becomes possible for the process of justification – or undoing – to liberate rather than oppress. I propose that Jones's logic here is somewhat transferable to our discussion of the undoing of the self in trauma. Through this frame, we might say that like Jones's woman the traumatized person is always already undone. She is catastrophically and excessively undone, in most immediate need not of exfoliation but of skin.

[54] Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 28.

emphasizes is that trauma can upend a survivor's *own* sense of the usual relationship between what they remember and what happened. Whereas Keshgegian named the primary threats to survivors' memories as, first, the potential loss of memory, and second, the inability to name what is remembered as violence, Jones draws attention to yet another way that, as we've seen, survivors' memory can be threatened. Survivors can retain conscious memory of the event of violence and yet feel overtaken by disbelief. For Jones, the relationship between memory and history can become dis/ordered within the one who is traumatized.

Like Keshgegian, Jones recognizes trauma's impact on memory as possibly impairing or destroying memory. But she is less optimistic than Keshgegian about memory's retrieval. "In trauma theory," she says, "we learn that for survivors, the originating event of violence often goes unremembered."[55] Where we would expect a memory to be, we find an empty expanse. Sometimes, memory that is lost in trauma can be recovered, but Jones writes that often,

> the events themselves cannot be "accurately" retrieved because in the original experience of violence, one's usual mechanisms of cognition and memory may have been disabled or overwhelmed by the magnitude of the event. When this occurs, the events do not mentally register. Hence, there is often no straightforward memory to excavate; there are only gaps, silences, and a vast range of emotions and vague, dreamlike images that move in and out of one's consciousness.[56]

In both cases, when memory is lost temporarily or when the traumatic force of the event prevents declarative memory from being formed in the first place, Jones follows trauma theory in positing that though declarative memory of the event is absent, the trauma "remains constantly present to

[55] Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 78.

[56] Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 59. Psychologically speaking, there are different mechanisms through which memory of traumatic events can be obscured. What Jones speaks to here best describes memory that is obscured through dissociation. The dissociative defense mechanism separates a victim's consciousness from their surroundings during the event of harm, which often means that the event does not register in a way that would make it available to memory at any point. Repression, however, describes a situation in which awareness of the event does initially register, but the victim's psyche thrusts it out of consciousness because it imposes too large a threat. Repressed memories are, at least potentially, available to future recall even if they are lost for a time. The description of traumatic memory that Jones gives here is specific to dissociation. For a description of the various psychic mechanisms that affect traumatic memory, see Lenore Terr, *Unchained Memories* or Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*.

the self in the mind, in the form of nightmares and unnamed anxieties."[57] Thus, when survivors' memory is dis/ordered by trauma, either through an overwhelming sense of disbelief in what is remembered or through memory's impairment, Jones affirms trauma theory's insight that survivors who may have lost access to memories of the traumatic events often still experience a "compulsion to repeat the violence."[58]

> The mind keeps going over the scene of violence, again and again, often unconsciously, in an attempt to process it, but it is not able to do so. The mind's meaning-making structures have collapsed, so it simply repeats and recycles.[59]

In addition to merely repeating the experience in one's mind, Jones explains that a survivor may also unconsciously repeat the circumstances of the trauma in the daily structure of their lives.[60]

In each of the possible ways that trauma affects memory, Jones is concerned to maintain that trauma wrenches what is or is not remembered apart from the possibility of meaning. Trauma orients a person to the past in such a way that the past cannot make sense with the present or become integrated with the future. One has the sense that the past is like one piece of a three-part puzzle. Its edges are so sharp and jagged that it can hardly be held. When placed next to the puzzle pieces of present and future, attempts to rotate the past, turn it, and find a space where it fits in relation only result in the present and future becoming shredded against the past's sharp edges. The process of remembering, thus, cannot be a process simply of retrieval. It is always also a process of reorganization that takes time, deep care, and intention.

To a significant extent, Jones' treatment of traumatic memory takes the consensus of trauma theory on the subject as authoritative, particularly that consensus represented in the work of Judith Herman. What is particular to Jones's analysis is the framework of order and disorder through which she reads the traumatic vicissitudes of memory. For Jones, what leads to the repetition of the

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[57] Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 78.
[58] Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 29.
[59] Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 29.
[60] Here, Jones is invoking the Freudian concept of "repetition compulsion."

traumatic past in the present, and what is critical to observe about a survivor's loss of memory, memory impairment, sense of disbelief in what they do remember, or inability to situate their memories in a meaningful frame, is the dis/ordered relation between past, present, and future that characterizes trauma's impact on imagination.

Because traumatic experiences injure and bring disorder to one's imaginative faculties, Jones conceptualizes trauma recovery as a process of reconstituting a meaningful and ordered imagination. The remedy that Jones proposes to apply as balm for the disordering impact of trauma is an imaginary that has the potential to re-order the relations that trauma has scattered. For Jones, the imaginary that has this healing potential (or, at least, *one* imaginary that has this potential) is the Christian imagination.

> Though different strands of Christianity may form imaginations somewhat differently, there is a common imaginative landscape that most Christians inhabit. In that landscape agency, embodiment, diachronic time (the time of our real histories), coherence, and interrelation are central. A Christianly formed imagination thus tells stories about people who are agents in their own lives, with God-given grace to act, moving through concrete embodied history in time, coherently connected to their own pasts and the stories of others who came before them, related intimately to other people and to the good creation that sustains them, and looking forward in hope to a flourishing future.[61]

Jones proposes that the Christian imagination has the potential to reorder and heal imagination that has been thrown into disarray by violent trauma. The Christian imagination, as Jones understands it, seeks to bring order to disorder, to weave traumatic fragments of memory and meaning together in a way that heals.

For resources to articulate how the Christian imagination has the potential to meet trauma with ordering, healing, divine grace, Jones turns to John Calvin's *Commentary on the Book of the Psalms*.[62] Calvin wrote the *Commentary* when he was a pastor for a community of refugees forced to

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[61] Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 21.
[62] John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Psalms* (1557), trans. James Anderson, 5 vols. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845).

flee France, their homeland, due to violent political and religious persecution in connection with the Protestant Reformation. As Jones says, "The list of atrocities they suffered was long: they were 'maimed, executed, tortured, burned, and assailed on all sides by the wicked.'"[63] And Calvin, having fled from France himself, knew these atrocities firsthand. The reading of the Psalms that he offers in his *Commentary* is, thus, meant as a pastoral and liturgical resource for those who live in a world "knocked out of kilter" by social violence. As Jones reads it, he aims "to offer his readers a set of 'imaginative practices' (stage scripts) designed to help them cope – visions crafted to strengthen them, and most crucially, to make grace alive for them as they dwell in this terrifying space."[64] Rather than try to explain violent suffering, Calvin offers his readers a practice for holding their suffering that he is confident has power to soothe them even as they continue to live in a violent world. The practice he offers is the practice of prayer set forth by the Psalmist who, likewise, lived in a world assailed by violence.

What Jones strives to show through her reading of Calvin is that "when we read Calvin's writings with the Bible in one hand and the work of trauma theorists in the other, we are able to identify certain resonant patterns of meaning that might not otherwise come to the foreground of our theological reflections."[65] The pattern that Jones identifies is a three-stage process for healing the imagination that is disordered by trauma. Leaning on Judith Herman's articulation of that which is necessary for trauma recovery, Jones says that there is a general consensus in trauma theory that healing must include 1) the establishment of safety, 2) remembrance and mourning, and 3) reconnecting and integrating with ordinary life.[66] There is resonance, Jones says, between this account of the healing process and Calvin's division of the Psalms into three types of prayers:

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[63] Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 47.
[64] Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 49.
[65] Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 49-50.
[66] This trifold approach to trauma recovery is that which Judith Herman puts forward in *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: BasicBooks, 1992).

psalms of deliverance, psalms of lamentation, and psalms of thanksgiving. For Jones, in his reading of the different functions that the three types of psalms perform in the lives those who pray them, "Calvin describes a mode of divine presence and human response that resonates with Herman's tripartite typology of recovery from trauma."[67] Jones's intention is to show how this is the case.

To begin, she reads Calvin's commentary on psalms of deliverance together with Herman's description of trauma survivors' need to establish safety. Calvin describes psalms of deliverance as those in which the psalmist directly beseeches God for rescue from violent atrocities. In them, God is imaged as powerful, compassionate, and sovereignly in control of the world that seems to have descended into chaos. Because psalms of deliverance create an imaginative landscape in which God has both the power and the will to protect those under God's care, Jones reads them as having the potential to offer traumatized persons "a profound sense of safety" and to stabilize such a person's "seemingly unstable reality by bringing order into the midst of their experiences of profound disorder."[68] There is, perhaps, an obvious objection that could be made, namely the problem of theodicy. On what grounds can a person besieged by violence affirm that God has both the power and will to protect them? If God can be trusted to offer safe haven, why was safety not offered sooner? Jones does not take up these questions, but neither does she discount them. Instead, she gives the reader the sense that prayers of deliverance work to establish a sense of safety internal to a traumatized person that is not necessarily dependent on securing a safe environment externally. Through Calvin's commentary on prayers of deliverance, "It becomes possible," she says, "to imagine that the deepest truth about oneself is that God loves you. Such love creates a new sense of order and thus relativizes the disorder that violence created around you and within you."[69] An

[67] Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 55.
[68] Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 56.
[69] Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 57.

internal sense of safety and order does not reduce the need for external safety and order, but for Jones, it is nonetheless valuable.

Jones reads Calvin's commentary on psalms of lament in connection with Herman's description of survivors' need for healing processes of remembering and mourning. Jones agrees with Herman that once a basic sense of safety, order, and trust has been established, those who are traumatized need to work through the arduous process of remembering what they survived, telling the stories of the violence that haunts them, and grieving for all they have lost. Jones does not consider this "a straightforward process of simply recollecting previously known subject matter."[70] Rather, because clear, sure, declarative memories of traumatic experiences are often unavailable to survivors, in the process of remembering that Jones envisions, "the act of speaking involves actively creating a new discursive awareness of something previously unknown," and this is where she sees Calvin's *Commentary* sounding a note of resonance.[71] For Calvin, praying the psalms of lament is a practice that awakens us to a sense of our maladies. Entering into the world of the Psalmist and hearing the Psalmist give voice to his pain enables those who pray these psalms to find language for the suffering they have endured. Where violent encounters have left gaps, silences, and what Calvin calls "lurking corners," praying the psalms of lament can help the traumatized to draw the harm done to them into consciousness, give voice to their suffering, and begin to mourn.

Finally, Jones reads Calvin's commentary on psalms of thanksgiving in connection with Herman's description of survivors' healing need for processes of reconnecting with ordinary life and integrating their traumatic experiences with life's daily and ongoing rhythms. Jones describes Herman's third stage of trauma recovery as one that often unfolds over the span of a lifetime.

> It consists of things like learning how to remember the violent death of a friend and still enjoy tasks such as baking bread, caring for children, or attending a Sunday morning Psalm sing. To do this integrative work is difficult, not only at a practical

[70] Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 59.
[71] Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 59.

> level, but also and perhaps even more important, at the level of imagination. It requires having an interior world capable of managing images of both haunting violence and of kneading bread, each envisioned in its fullness as well as in its relativized relation to the other. It is only when one's imagination has been so capacitated, Herman suggests, that the trauma survivor can begin to hope and to act in personally empowering ways.[72]

Jones sees this kind of integration at work in Calvin's commentary on psalms of thanksgiving. Calvin draws attention not only to the praise that these psalms give to God for deliverance from violent enemies, but also to the mundane elements of everyday life that are likewise worthy of praise. Calvin uses imagery of "eating, feasting, resting, walking safely, sleeping peacefully, of life lived in a web of secure relations and hope" to remind readers that the God who is with them in the midst of unspeakable suffering is also a God who, as Jones says, "offers us a future" – a future in which the traumas we have lived need not determine reality, "because God gives us food, sleep, daily work, and the bonds of human community."[73] For Jones, Calvin's commentary on psalms of thanksgiving offers to readers a concrete spiritual practice for reconnecting and reintegrating the traumatized self with the ordinary world. Doing so involves cultivating a sense of hope without shielding oneself from the force of violence one has survived. "In these psalms," Jones says,

> hope returns not because evil is explained or immediate justice is invoked, but because through the activity of thanksgiving, the goodness of God is publicly attested to and reaffirmed. By invoking such goodness, the world in all its complex wonders returns as a gift of God.[74]

Throughout her reading of the resonance between trauma theory approaches to healing and the resources offered for healing in Calvin's *Commentary on the Book of the Psalms*, Jones highlights the role that testimony and witness play in each. Speaking to the role of testimony and witness in trauma theory, Jones says that as the trifold process of healing unfolds, "there needs to be an ongoing, dynamic conversation taking place between a testifier and a witness – between a survivor who offers

[72] Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 62.
[73] Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 62-63.
[74] Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 63.

testimony to the harm endured and the person who, having helped to establish a sense of safety for the survivor, witnesses the traumatic speech."[75]As the survivor gives voice to what was previously unspeakable, the witness confirms that the survivor's voice is heard and that their testimony is "affirmed as a reality worthy of sustained lamentation and possible redress."[76] Through the reciprocal process of testimony and witness, the two parties create anew a narrative about the survivor's traumatic experience that enables the survivor to come to terms with their loss and authentically reinvest in the possibility of a full and meaningful life.

In light of the importance that acts of testimony and witness take on in trauma theory Jones highlights that both terms are frequent in Calvin's language as well, particularly as he describes what happens in prayer. In prayer, he says, one "testifies" to God about the unspeakable horrors they have lived. One strives, in other words, to put what is impossible to say into words that will be heard by God. And God, Calvin says, "witnesses" the story. By Jones's reading,

> Calvin further insists that when this dynamic of testifying and witnessing transpires in prayer, a person's own story undergoes a transformation as it is pulled into and redefined by the divine story of God's constant presence with us, and God's promise to ultimately redeem the harm done to us and thus make "all things right."[77]

Through the practice of prayer, Jones suggests, people who are traumatized can participate in a divine-human process of testimony and witness that, like such processes that take place between two (or more) people, opens the possibility of trauma's healing transformation. However, given that God's capacity to receive, hold, and bear witness to human suffering is without limit, engaging in this process with the divine through prayer can offer the traumatized a safe(r), low(er)-risk point of entry into the arduous task of confronting the violence one has survived, remembering, mourning, reestablishing a sense of order, internal safety, and constructing the possibility of a meaningful future in the midst of ongoing human vulnerability.

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[75] Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 53-54.
[76] Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 54.
[77] Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 54.

In the upcoming and final section of this chapter, I will come back to the work Jones does to situate the theological and liturgical dimensions of testimony and witness as relevant to their transformative power. By bringing Jones's attention to prayer and imagination together with Keshgegian's emphasis on the cultural and political dimensions of cultivating healing memory in the aftermath of traumatic violence, I hope to show that their work together creates an opportunity to think theologically about the relationship between bearing witness to sexual violence testimony and confronting the problem of belief. First, however, a brief word on the problem of belief as it manifests in Jones's work.

Toward the believe all women end of the terrain, Jones recommends that it is important that survivors' emerging memories and testimonies "not be negatively judged or criticized as inappropriate, false, immoral, or incoherent."[78] However, unlike the believe all women position, she does not insist on a positive judgment of survivors' testimonies as historically true. In fact, she does not explicitly recommend *belief* as a response to survivors' testimony at all. Jones holds the act of bearing witness to survivor testimonies as essential for trauma healing, but she does not directly recommend that witnesses take survivors' memories to be historically representative, nor does she spell out the relationship between bearing witness and extending belief.[79] Trauma's disordering impact means, for Jones, that memory's relationship to history, is sometimes, if not quite often, indiscernible. For Jones, what is more important than determining memory's relation to history is for a survivor to be able to tell a story (give testimony) that is heard (witnessed). The meaning of a survivor's memories is co-constructed between a survivor and their witnesses in the process of the survivor's telling. Jones describes this process as an intimate and personal one.

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[78] Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 59.

[79] However, though Jones does not articulate the relationship between witnessing and believing, I do think that something of their relationship can be drawn out from Jones's treatment of what it means to bear witness to traumatic testimony. In the next and final section of this chapter, I aim to speak to this point.

Jones's notion of remembering as a creative and constructive process accepts that a survivor's memory will not and cannot be fully correspondent with the details of the history to which it attests. Based on this acceptance, the process of bearing witness to survivor testimony of sexual violence in no way requires that survivors' testimonies first be corroborated by scientific or forensic evidence. Insight into the objective circumstances of history is not the goal. Thus, even more clearly, Jones's thought does not replicate the terms of the due process frame. Her project is not interested in trying to get at a certain or absolute sense of historical truth with respect to the events that produced a survivor's trauma.

The reason that Jones is not worried about whether survivors' memories and testimonies correspond with history is that she is not approaching the conversation on sexual violence with the goal of supporting processes of social accountability for the harm that has been inflicted. Jones's goal is to provide theological resources for survivors' healing. And, as I have said already, she approaches healing as an inward process that does not necessarily require or involve social forms of accountability or justice. Thus, by focusing on survivors' inward healing and maintaining a relative disinterest in the relationship between survivors' memories and the histories to which they attest, Jones largely avoids reproducing the terms of the western, dualistic framework for judging the appropriateness of extending belief to sexual violence survivors' testimonies.

There is something to be said for healing practices that survivors of sexual violence trauma can perform on their own or in the limited company of intimate supporters. It is often the case that wider communal, social, and political processes of redress are not available to survivors in the wake of sexual violence. Especially when this is the case it can be empowering for survivors to define healing work as that which they are able do internally and within close circles of support. For some survivors, approaching healing as an inward process that they can do without the cooperation of

larger social structures is a way to deny power over their ultimate wellbeing to those who reject their testimonies. Jones's work offers potentially critical resources toward this end.

However, in doing so Jones separates healing from politics. Jones brackets the problem of belief by choosing to focus on individual and inward modes of healing in relative isolation from social and systemic modes of healing. Approaching healing as a personal and internal process treats healing from sexual violence as a process that does not involve political action or the enforcement of accountability protocols for those who have caused harm. It loses sight of the fact that healing in its fullest sense does require justice and social transformation. If Jones's methods for relating memory to history and trauma in a way that avoids replicating the believe all women and due process opposition are to be useful for a project that attempts to construct approaches for responding in robust solidarity to sexual violence testimony outside of the dualistic frame, they will need to be revised such that they can support political action in addition to survivors' internal processes of healing.

I have proposed that Jones's argument does not itself reproduce the shape of either believe all women or due process discourse. Though Jones does not reproduce the dualism, she also does not overcome it. She offers us resources for addressing the problem of belief, but a bridge has yet to be built from what Jones offers to a successful intervention. And, an interesting thing happens as a result of Jones's choice not to engage the problem of belief overtly. Because she does not speak to what it means to believe, to whether and under what terms extending belief to survivors' testimonies is warranted, or to what role belief plays in the exchange of testimony and witness, we are left to interpret these matters for ourselves. It is difficult to imagine Jones's notion of witnessing without thinking of the act as in some way validating survivors' testimonies as true. Thus, in the absence of a direct treatment of belief in connection with the witnessing process, the believe all women framework for approaching belief is likely to impose itself. In other words, because the believe all

women framework is one of two default options culturally available to us for thinking about belief in the wake of survivors' testimonies, and because Jones's position leans toward the believe all women position (as opposed to the due process position) at least in the sense that both Jones and believe all women proponents intend to be allied with survivors, the gap in Jones's work around belief creates a space that believe all women assumptions can readily inhabit.

Resources from Jones and Keshgegian for Approaching the Problem of Belief in the Wake of Sexual Violence

In this dissertation's introduction I described sexual violence as a traumatic, reality-bending, world-upending form of harm that often involves one or more crises of belief at its center. That crisis can take innumerable forms, each of which poses a substantial threat to survivors' prospects for life. If a survivor's testimony is not believed by others, her access to safety, care, support, and justice is threatened. If a survivor is not able to believe herself, all of this and more is at risk. The power of sexual violence to disrupt and destroy is, to a significant extent, an alchemic power; one that dis/orders and disturbs, that prompts an alchemy of reality into incoherence.

Serene Jones is right to gather her thought around the impact of this incoherence in the lives of the traumatized insofar as it is in their lives that the alchemic power of sexual violence threatens to do the most focused harm. She observes well that sexual violence throws those who survive it into a chaotic, often terrifying imaginative landscape that obscures the possibility of meaning and disrupts survivors' sense of connection to God, to the world, and to those whom they love. Whereas Jones's focus is on transforming survivors' disordered imaginative landscapes, Keshgegian's emphasis on the social dimensions of sexual violence and the trauma it renders suggests that we need to attend equally to transformations that are necessary in the imaginative landscapes that structure survivors' social worlds – what, using Jones's language, we might call *ordered imaginaries*. If the broader community's ordered imaginary is ordered in such a way that it refuses to recognize the

realities in which survivors live, affirm them as legitimate, and consider them authoritative, then it contributes to survivors' trauma and isolation.

While the traumatic imaginative landscape is a chaotic one that limits the possibility of life for those who dwell in it, it is also true that survivors of sexual violence have good reason to be terrified in settings that others find mundane. To live through sexual violence is to be brought face to face with the reality that ordinary life is dangerous. Most experiences of sexual violence take place within the regular rhythms of victims' lives: at work, at school, at home, on date night, in youth group. I know of one instance in which a girl was sexually assaulted by a peer at a youth church retreat in a room full of people. She was in her bunk in a cabin with her youth group and their adult sponsors. While most were playing a game of cards on the floor, a supposed friend jumped up into her bunk, maintained eye contact and conversation with the adults in the room and, out of their view, molested her. The trauma of sexual violence stems, in part, from the intolerable nature of survivors' knowledge that people who ought to be trustworthy sometimes, without warning, are not. People who say they love you may turn and try to kill you. In this sense, trauma is what happens when a person is violently confronted with the truth that the ordinary world of their everyday lives is not safe. The struggle to be well in the aftermath of sexual violence is a struggle to come to terms with this truth, to believe it, and to continue living anyway.

Part of what creates survivors' traumatic sense of isolation is that *this* truth, *this* knowledge, is not shared by those who make up their communities. In fact, in the ordinary landscape of the western imagination, the truth of human vulnerability to catastrophic harm is repudiated. Those who proclaim this truth, in word or in body, are often silenced so that the order of the everyday imaginative landscape can be maintained. Thus, the order that governs the imaginative landscape of society and culture is one in which there is no space allotted for the reality in which the sexual violence survivor lives. Recall Alexis, whose narrative I told in this dissertation's introduction. After

being raped by her supposed friend, Rick, her confidence was high that what happened to her was rape and that Rick was responsible. Her own internal sense of reality was intact, but it was not shared by those in her community who were in a position to help. Because what she knew to be true was denied by figures of authority in her community, she came to feel that the reality in which she lived was a reality in which she was fundamentally alone. It was as if the ground where she stood split away from the ground of her community and a chasm opened between them. While everyone else could continue their lives with relative ease, the impact on her life was devastating. She was on an island, split apart from the world inhabited by everyone else around her.

Jones talks about the Christian imagination as having the potential to bring order to traumatic disorder, to weave the traumatic fragments of memory and meaning together in a way that is internally healing for survivors. Whereas a survivor's dis/ordered, unraveled, traumatic imagination needs to be knit into a fabric that can hold and sustain life, a survivor's community likely needs the reverse. The fabric of its imaginative landscape is tightly woven. Its gauge needs to be loosened so that the truth and legitimacy of a survivor's reality can be acknowledged, affirmed, and so some extent, shared. A Christian imagination that brings order to chaos is valuable for survivors, but its healing potential is limited unless it also has the ability to undo the forms of social order that depend for their coherence on the repudiation of the truths that survivors know.

Jones describes the task of remembering as a process of internal reorganization for survivors. If we follow Keshgegian's insistence that remembering authentically in the wake of violent trauma is a social task in addition to a personal one, then we might say that processes of remembering authentically after sexual violence will demand time, deep care, and intention not only of the traumatized, but also of sexual violence survivors' communities. It will require reorganization not only of the survivor's imaginative landscape, but of that inhabited by a survivor's community as well. In other words, if sexual violence is a social problem, it needs a social response. The kind of

transformation that has the potential to disrupt sexual violence and enact solidarity with survivors is one that answers the problem of traumatic disconnection not, or not only, by bringing the survivor back into the ordered reality of the community, but also by bringing the community into the disordered reality of survivors. This is not to say that the community should itself become traumatized. Rather, the community's task mirrors that of the survivor's. If a survivor's struggle to be well in the aftermath of sexual violence is a struggle to come to terms with a violent truth that has been forced upon them, a survivor's community is faced with the task of coming to know this truth voluntarily – that truth being that ordinary life is not safe. To be well, both the survivor and the survivor's community must come to terms with this truth, believe it, and continue living into the fullness of life anyway.

What, then, does this process of mutual transformation have to do with belief and with the witnessing relationship that both Jones and Keshgegian centered in their theological projects?[80] Jones affirms that there is a multiplicity of imaginaries through which one's perception, experience, and thought about the world can be structured. We might, therefore, propose that two of these possible imaginative landscapes are what Keshgegian calls cultures of belief and cultures of disbelief. Whereas a culture of belief orders thought and experience through stories and habits of mind that promote the recognition, naming, and validation of survivors' experiences of sexual violence, we can think about cultures of disbelief as imaginative landscapes that order thought and experience through stories and habits of mind that discourage recognition, naming, and validation of survivors' experiences of sexual violence.

[80] The concept of witnessing has played a critical role in the work of both Jones and Keshgegian. Both are taking the concept from trauma theory, and in fact, trauma theory's literature on witness would be a vital conversation partner for a future project that seeks to pose an intervention into the problem of belief with respect to sexual violence trauma. Two texts I have specifically in mind for this purpose are Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routlage, 1992) and Kelly Oliver's *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

Jones talks about the witnessing relationship primarily in terms of its potential to transform survivors' traumatically disordered imaginations, but if it is true that sexual violence calls on communities' ordered imaginations to be transformed as well, Keshgegian's approach to witnessing can help us to think about how that can happen. Keshgegian talks about the witnessing relationship as a process that reorients those who receive survivors' testimonies of sexual violence and aligns them with a survivors' interests and perspectives. We can think of the witnessing process, thus, as a method for transforming the social imaginary, not just as a method for transforming the traumatic imaginary. In this sense, we can think of witnessing as a process of conversion for the witness. It is a process of conversion from one's ordinary reality to the reality in which the survivor stands. Jones gives us an indication that witnessing has to do with negotiating realities that interface and compete when she describes the witnessing process as one in which the witness confirms that the survivor's voice is heard and that their testimony is "affirmed as a reality worthy of sustained lamentation and possible redress."[81] As a process of reorientation or conversion, witnessing is a practice through which a community establishes a survivor's reality as authoritative for the group. It is a method of resistance to the traumatic alchemy of reality into incoherence insofar as, through witnessing, the reality in which the survivor lives is taken on by others in their social world.

Jones gives us a liturgical scheme for reordering the traumatic imaginative landscape. If it is possible to use the Christian imagination and Christian liturgical practices to bring healing order to the chaotic imagination of a survivor, might we also use it to open and loosen the restrictive imaginative landscape of a survivor's community? Can we use it to cultivate cultures of belief that are organized to recognize the realities in which survivors live, to affirm these realities as real and legitimate, and to position survivors' realities as authoritative for their broader community's interpretation of the world? To use the Christian imagination to unwind and restitch the fabric of

[81] Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 54.

community life toward this end we would have to draw on narratives and emphases within the Christian tradition different from those Jones puts forward as capable of bringing order from disorder. We would need to articulate the Christian imagination in such a way that practices for participating in it could call comfortably structured communities toward imaginative landscapes that make room for the truth to which the disorder of survivors' realities testifies. I do not intend to offer such an articulation of the Christian imagination here, but the distance we have traveled in this chapter suggests that its pursuit would be worthwhile for a future project.

Jones's liturgical scheme for reordering the traumatic imaginative landscape followed a three-step process that she saw reflected in both Calvin's commentary on the psalms and Judith Herman's clinical approach to trauma recovery. A future project focused on cultivating cultures of belief as a mode of social solidarity with survivors and resistance to sexual violence might explore whether an inversion of this liturgical scheme may contribute to processes of transforming the imaginative landscapes of survivors' communities. Whereas the first stage of healing for traumatically disordered imagination is establishing safety, we might propose that the first stage of healing community's rigidly ordered imagination is establishing unsafety or creating space for the reality of disorder to be named and known. Whereas a survivor's second task is to remember the violence done to their person and mourn what has been lost from their lives, a community's second task is to remember its own social and political history in a manner that affirms the pervasiveness of sexual violence in that history and mourns its impact. A necessary part of this process of remembering would be the development of a stance of solidarity with survivors. Jones describes the third stage of healing as a process of reconnection in which the imaginations of the traumatized become capacitated such that the violence they have survived can be integrated with living into the positive potential of ordinary life. We might say, then, that in this third stage of social healing the imaginative landscape of a

survivor's community needs to be capacitated such that its prevailing sense of ordinary life is integrated with the traumatic reality that life's potential is often and violently derailed.

There is continued conversation to be had about the degree to which believing survivors does or does not entail the affirmation of survivors' memories and testimonies as historically correspondent, accurate, or in a broader sense, true. The question cannot be entirely put to the side because the answers we give matter for survivors. But the resources offered to us by theology's engagements with sexual violence suggest that there is something to be gained from shifting the conversation about belief toward interest in how we negotiate competing social realities. To be in solidarity with someone is to walk to where they are and affirm that place as authoritative for understanding and engaging the world. This, perhaps, is one way to think about what it means to believe. To believe, in this sense, is to become a guest in a survivor's world.

I want to end with a brief reflection on one final tool that Keshgegian gives us for pursing this trajectory for engaging sexual violence and the problem of belief through a theological lens. Keshgegian opens *Redeeming Memories* with a meditation on the Word of God.

> "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). These words, long familiar to Christians, introduce the Gospel of John. The evangelist writes of Jesus Christ as the Word, the *logos*…The Gospel of John proclaims that in the beginning is the speaking, is the word. And this word makes God present to us. [82]

Against the spoken Word of God, Keshgegian casts the lost words and memories of victims and survivors of sexual violence and genocide, "those who have been victimized by history."

> In the beginning is silence. This silence is not empty, but pregnant with meaning; it is filled with yearning. Indeed, this silence screams words of pain, of ignorance, of evil unacknowledged, and of desire unfulfilled. These words have been denied or rejected; they have been rendered mute. [83]

[82] Flora Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 21.
[83] Flora Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 21.

And yet, the Word of God and the words of those who have been silenced meet in the activity of redemption.

> "The Word was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through the Word, and without the Word not one thing came into being. What has come into being in the Word was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the deepest night, and the night did not overcome it" (John 1:1-5). Christianity claims redemptive power and effectiveness for its word: Jesus Christ, the Word of God, is Savior, the promise of life. The Gospel of John is a celebration of this savior as life-giving Word. The Gospel's intent is to present signs and wonders, testimony and proclamation, *that we may believe, and by believing, be saved*. At the heart of this proclamation is the declaration that it is through Jesus Christ, the Word of God, that salvation is realized.
>
> The silent and silenced ones stand, however, as a challenge to Christianity's claim to effective redemptive power. Their suffering testifies to the unrealized promise. If the promise of Christianity's redemptive Word is to be kept for those who suffer, then that Word must include their words and their memories in a way that actively shapes redeeming truth. Indeed, we must begin with listening to and receiving these memories. New words will constantly come forth in this process of hearing and speaking, of witnessing and proclaiming.[84]

Keshgegian describes her project as an invitation to "pay attention to memories of suffering and to listen for the word that emerges from those who struggle to remember."[85] It is in *this* word that the saving power of *the* Word, Jesus Christ, might be encountered and, if believed, its potential realized. Keshgegian links the Word of God with the words of the traumatized. One cannot get to the Word without hearing and heeding the words of those who have been traumatically, violently silenced. One cannot get to the Word without hearing and heeding the words of rape survivors, sexual assault survivors, survivors of childhood sexual abuse, and all others against whom sexual forms of violence have been waged.

If it is true that the Word of God is allied with those who are vulnerable and suffering and silenced; if it is true that believing in that Word brings life, then believing in the Word of God means *something* for us in terms of the necessity of believing survivors. If belief is important to how we develop our sense of relationship to and participation in the life of the Word, and if the Word is

[84] Flora Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 22-23, emphasis added.
[85] Flora Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 125.

concerned about and takes into itself the words of those who have been silenced by sexual violence, then believing in the Word has to have something to do with believing the words of survivors. A project that aims to address sexual violence and the problem of belief theologically must get at what that relationship is. It must ask how we ought to think about the relationship of believing survivors to what it means to believe in the Word of God who gives voice to those who have been silenced.

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