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Frontiers in the Psychotherapy of Trauma & Dissociation

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Study of Trauma and Dissociation*

**How Are Memories of
Entrapment in Abuse Born?**
Andreas Laddis, MD

Frontiers in the Psychotherapy of Trauma & Dissociation

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EDITORIAL

How Are Memories of Entrapment in Abuse Born?

ANDREAS LADDIS, MD

Editor for Frontiers in the Psychotherapy of Trauma and Dissociation

KEYWORDS *entrapment in abuse, recovered memories, veracity*

This month, *Frontiers* presents a collection of articles related to the paper Colin Ross published in our journal last year (Ross, 2018). That article's purpose was "to discuss the similarities and differences between maladaptive daydreaming and dissociative identity disorder (DID), and then to discuss possible implications ... in the treatment of complex cases of DID, particularly those with ... reported histories of satanic ritual abuse....[to consider that] maladaptive daydreaming, combined with the principle of therapeutic neutrality ... can help in the management of counter-transference..." (p. 161). The term "therapeutic neutrality" refers to the therapist's judgment about the veracity of memories of satanic ritual abuse (SRA).

Ross's article moved Alison Miller to write a commentary, which critiques his understanding of therapeutic neutrality as insufficiently neutral. She argues that Ross's illustration of his response to hearing memories of satanic ritual abuse shows implicit bias; it "sets up a dynamic that a therapist will believe and affirm some aspects of a client's story, but not others, which may put pressure on the [suggestible] client regarding what to believe." With her own brief illustration, Miller continues the 30-year old debate about our role as therapists in discerning which components of

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clients' memories were born of having experienced events that really constituted the practice of satanic ritual abuse. She reminds us that the debate was about balancing (a) the purpose of empowering clients to make sense of that themselves, with (b) protecting ourselves from the danger of speaking outside the office about believing clients' particular allegations, with implications for criminal justice and making social policy.

Seeking such a balance created much tension in the International Society for the Study of Trauma and Dissociation (ISSTD) over many years. It often led members to simplistically and pejoratively labeling one another as "believers" and "non-believers." That polarization found a formal expression when Special Interest Groups (SIGs) were created in ISSTD about eight years ago, one of them addressing the understanding and treatment of victims reporting ritual abuse and mind control (RAMC). In the past two years, ISSTD took effective measures to mitigate that polarization. It created opportunities for new debate, which are now grounded on recent progress made in (a) investigative and judicial findings about the reality of pervasive and clandestine organized abuse, sometimes in mystical settings; and (b) findings about the psychological laws of reconstructing memory of events over time. Reconstruction includes composing event-like memories from developments in various events, whether experienced in reality or in imagination (e.g., from suggestion or during maladaptive daydreaming).

In the same spirit of promoting reasonable and scholarly debate, I welcomed Miller's commentary and Ross's response that followed. In that response, Ross summarizes his concepts and technique of therapeutic neutrality from his original article to address Miller's concerns. He points out that the section about therapeutic neutrality was necessarily succinct because his article's primary object was how memories of satanic ritual abuse in persons with DID might reflect co-occurrence with maladaptive daydreaming.

I invited Eli Somer, who has pioneered the study of maladaptive daydreaming, to contribute a second commentary, in regard to Ross's treatment of the topic in the context of understanding memories of persons with DID. Both Somer's commentary and Ross's response expand from the co-occurrence of maladaptive daydreaming with DID to the co-occurrence with various kinds of dissociative experiences, for example, children's experience of seeing and touching an imaginary companion. Somer and Ross carry on an informative discussion about typologies of "dissociation" and what constitutes the passage from useful dissociation to disorder.

On the occasion of hosting Miller's commentary and Ross's response to her, I invited commentaries from two colleagues, Warwick Middleton and Michael Salter, who had played leading roles in the recent initiatives to mitigate the polarization in ISSTD. I asked them to write an account of their own personal experiences in the controversy and how they envision

progress. Their commentaries are eloquent and exemplary for thoughtfulness and collegiality.

I see this collection of articles as a measure of maturity for *Frontiers*, for two reasons. The first is that commentaries, along with the authors' responses, greatly amplify and clarify the original article's purpose. Miller's and Somer's commentaries are the first since *Frontiers*' birth in the fall of 2017. A second reason is the opportunity to showcase the quality of debate in ISSTD on this very polarizing issue. We all understand that memories of organized abuse may be mostly inexact, inconsistent, even surrealistic, however, still indicative of having really suffered abuse by particular perpetrators and accomplices, who intended to terrify and harm the child. We all strive to understand what in the nature of entrapment in abuse and exploitation makes victims have inexact and inconsistent memories of it. All therapists among us strive to help clients ascertain the veracity of those particulars, as it may matter for their current lives.

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