

A History of Ritual Abuse 2

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A History of Ritual Abuse: Abstract

This two-hour presentation traces the history of ritual abuse, and critically evaluates the chronology and evolution of this topic in the scholarly literature. We will review and discuss the definition of ritual abuse from the APA Dictionary of Psychology along with other definitions and conceptualizations. We will consider ritual abuse allegations in the context of the backlash movement to including the false memory syndrome and sociocognitive theories. We will review contemporary international allegations of ritual abuse, also exploring historic accounts of ritual abuse. We will examine the frequently noted psychological sequelae of ritual abuse.

Conflict of interest statement

I have no conflicts to report. I do publish on this topic and earn small royalties from book sales.

Definition of Ritual Abuse (APA)

“organized, repetitive, and highly sadistic abuse of a physical, sexual, or emotional nature, perpetrated principally on children. The abuse is reported as using rituals and symbols from religion (e.g., upside-down crosses), the occult, or secret societies. It may also include the creation of pornography or the selling of sexual access to children. Victims may be forced to engage in heinous acts, such as the killing of animals, as a means of coercing their participation and silence. The prevalence and even existence of ritual abuse have been the subject of much controversy.”

American Psychological Association. (n.d.). *APA dictionary of psychology*. Retrieved March 1, 2022, from <https://dictionary.apa.org/ritual-abuse>

A History of Ritual Abuse

Introduction: The Problem

Clinicians sometimes encounter clients who tell narratives describing ritual abuse.

Clinicians who hear these stories are often unprepared for them.

This is something rarely taught in graduate school.

My initial clinical experience: The case of “Bill” (1979)

USAF Regional Hospital, RAF Lakenheath, England (1978)

From Chapter 1, “The Church in Thetford Forest” (Noblitt & Perskin, 1995; Noblitt & Noblitt, 2000; Noblitt & Noblitt, 2014).

My initial clinical experience: The case of “Bill” (1979)

I had no psychological training to prepare me for Bill and his trauma narrative.

However, I remembered that in one of my undergraduate history classes, the “Hellfire Club” in England was mentioned where orgies and devil worshipping were said to occur, but the instructor emphasized that these not authentically Satanic, and were only an excuse for sexual license.

Later when I began seeing clients with DID in my private practice many talked about ritual abuse. I was curious about the history of such narratives.

Carl Raschke's (1990) *Painted Black* and the Hellfire Clubs

Provided more information about the history of the Hellfire Clubs of England and Ireland.

Professor Carl Raschke has a PhD from Harvard, and was head of the Religious Studies Department of the University of Denver before he retired.

I expanded my own reading in this topic ultimately producing a book with my wife Pam published by Praeger, *Cult and Ritual Abuse: Its History, Anthropology, and Recent Discovery in Contemporary America* (1995).

The Hellfire Clubs of England and Ireland

<https://www.heritagedaily.com/2020/08/the-secret-hellfire-club-and-the-hellfire-caves/134801>

The Hellfire Clubs of England and Ireland (continued)

“The Hellfire Club was an exclusive membership-based organisation for high society rakes, first founded in London in 1718 by Philip, Duke of Wharton and several of society’s elites.

Wharton was a powerful Jacobite politician, writer, wealthy peer, and Grand Master of the Premier Grand Lodge of England, who led a double life as a drunkard, a rioter, an infidel, and a rakehell (meaning a man who was habituated to immoral conduct such as womanising, and wasting his fortune through acts of gambling and debauchery).”

<https://www.heritagedaily.com/2020/08/the-secret-hellfire-club-and-the-hellfire-caves/134801>

The Hellfire Clubs of England and Ireland (continued)

“Wharton’s club was considered a satirical “gentleman’s club” (although women are also purported to attend), intended to shock and ridicule religious beliefs through the act of mock religious ceremonies with the supposed president of the club being the devil.

The club came to an end in 1721 due to political manoeuvring by Wharton’s enemies, who pushed through a political bill against “horrid impieties”, resulting in Wharton being removed from Parliament and the club being disbanded.”

<https://www.heritagedaily.com/2020/08/the-secret-hellfire-club-and-the-hellfire-caves/134801>

The Hellfire Clubs of England and Ireland (continued)

“The club was reformed by Francis Dashwood, the 11th Baron le Despencer under the name of the Order of the Knights of St Francis (although the club also went under the names of the Brotherhood of St. Francis of Wy, the Order of the Friars of St Francis of Wycombe and the Order of Knights of West Wycombe) around 1746.

Dashwood commissioned the construction of a complex series of tunnels and chalk and flint caverns for the club’s meetings on the Dashwood estate of West Wycombe Park in Buckinghamshire, England. Known today as the Hellfire Caves or the West Wycombe Caves, the complex extends for 0.25 miles beneath the church of St Lawrence and the Dashwood family Mausoleum.”

<https://www.heritagedaily.com/2020/08/the-secret-hellfire-club-and-the-hellfire-caves/134801>

The Hellfire Clubs of England and Ireland



The Hellfire Clubs of England and Ireland



The Hellfire Clubs of England and Ireland



The Hellfire Clubs of England and Ireland

“Each of the cave’s chambers are connected by a series of narrow passageways, consisting of the Entrance Hall, the Steward’s Chamber, the Whitehead’s Cave, Lord Sandwich’s Circle, Franklin’s Cave, the Banqueting Hall, the Triangle, the Miner’s Cave, and the Inner Temple – the latter of which was accessed by crossing a faux river meant to represent the River Styx (a river in Greek mythology that forms the boundary between Earth and the Underworld).”

The Hellfire Clubs of England and Ireland

“Members of the club included prominent 18th-century figures such as John Montagu (the 4th Earl of Sandwich), William Hogarth (an English painter, printmaker, pictorial satirist, social critic, and editorial cartoonist), John Wilkes (a journalist and politician), and Thomas Potter (a politician and Vice-Treasurer of Ireland).

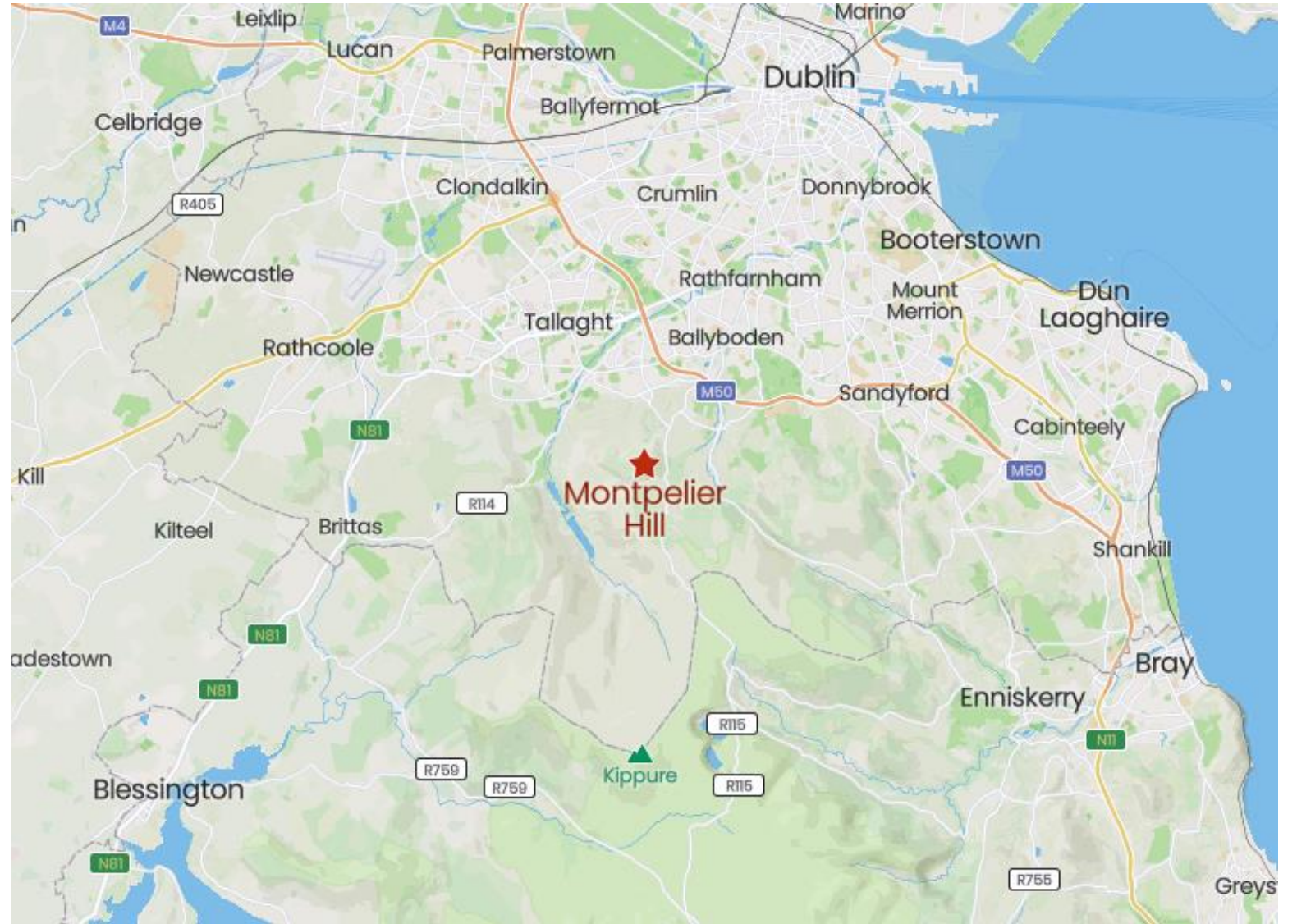
It has also been claimed that Benjamin Franklin, one of the Founding Fathers of the United States, and a close friend of Dashwood visited the caves on more than one occasion.

Many rumours of black magic, satanic rituals and orgies were in circulation during the life of the club, with the notable English writer Horace Walpole stating that “practice was rigorously pagan: Bacchus and Venus were the deities to whom they almost publicly sacrificed; and the nymphs and the hogsheads that were laid in against the festivals of this new church, sufficiently informed the neighbourhood of the complexion of those hermits.”

The Hellfire Clubs of England and Ireland

- “By the early 1760’s, the club began to decline and would eventually be dissolved, possibly due to Dashwood’s appointment as Chancellor of the Exchequer which ended in failure, or him taking a role of greater respectability in society with his elevation as the 11th Baron le Despencer.
- Various branches or legacy incarnations of the Hellfire Club continued to carry out meetings, such as the Beggar’s Benison in Scotland which dissolved in the 19th century, and some supposed branches argued to meet at various historic educational institutions of Ireland and Britain today.”

The Dublin Hellfire Club (Montpelier Hill)





The Dublin Hellfire Club Ruins (Montpelier Hill)

The Dublin Hellfire Club (Montpelier Hill)

“The Irish Hellfire Club quickly gained notoriety by their open mockery of the church, that took the Enlightenment’s questioning of organised religion to a new level. An interesting letter from 1738, that purported to be written by a member of the club who used the pseudonym ‘Molock’, describes the Hellfire Club and its practices, including ‘the sacrifice of maidens’...”

<https://debateireland.wordpress.com/2019/01/27/the-hellfire-club/>

The Dublin Hellfire Club (Montpelier Hill)

“The Hellfire Club soon became notorious for its excesses, which were often conducted in public. Its heavy drinking sessions were sometimes attended by sexual assault and violence, ending in murder on at least one recorded occasion”.

<https://debateireland.wordpress.com/2019/01/27/the-hellfire-club/>

Theories About Ritual Abuse Narratives

Ritual abuse narratives may reflect actual experiences of abuse

Sociocognitive theory (e.g., false memory syndrome)

Ritual abuse narratives reflect actual abuse experiences.

- Clinicians should not assume that clinical narratives are either true or untrue on an a priori basis.
- Clinicians should be competent to evaluate the variety of interpretations of clients' narratives, and should conduct a thorough evaluations.
- Possible corroborating factors should be considered:
 - External or collateral evidence: Extreme caution should be used in questioning collaterals as this may put the survivor at risk of harm.
 - Internal evidence: Psychological testing, clinical signs and symptoms, etc.
 - Converging evidence

Sociocognitive theory (e.g., false memory syndrome)

- This theory has been propounded especially by the False Memory Syndrome Foundation (1992-2019) in the U.S.
- This was a 501 3c nonprofit organization, although Kendall (2021) reported that the FMSF “received a total of nearly \$8 million in donations before it was dissolved in late 2019.”

The status of memory recovery in clinical practice before the founding of the FMSF

- Sigmund Freud and the repudiation of the “seduction theory” (Masson, 1992).
 - Freud’s awareness of documented cases of child abuse.
 - The case of Emma Eckstein.
 - Emma Eckstein described a mental image in which the devil “sticks pins into her finger and puts a piece of candy on each drop of blood” (Masson, 1992, p. 103). Freud wrote to Fliess in 1897, “Imagin, I obtained a scene about the circumcision of a girl. The cutting of a piece of labia minora (which is still shorter today), sucking up the blood, following which the child was given a piece of the skin to eat” (p. 105).

The founding of the FMSF amid personal conflicts and controversies.

- Private accusations of abuse by Jennifer Freyd, Ph.D. (1990).
- Pamela Freyd writes, “How Could this Happen?”(1991).
- The FMSF is founded by Peter and Pamela Freyd along with other individuals (some also accused) in support of the FMS concept (1992).

The founding of the FMSF amid personal conflicts and controversies.

- Underwager and Wakefield's 1990 interview in *Paidika* (Geraci, 1993; Underwager & Wakefield, 1994)

False Memory Syndrome: Paidika Interview

- The *Paidika* interview with Underwager and Wakefield:
- Interviewer: “Is choosing paedophilia for you a responsible choice for the individual?”

False Memory Syndrome: Paidika Interview

- R. Underwager: “Certainly it is responsible. What I have been struck by as I have come to know more about and understand people who choose paedophilia is that they let themselves be too much defined by other people. That is usually an essentially negative definition. Paedophiles spend a lot of time and energy defending their choice. I don’t think that a paedophile needs to do that.”

False Memory Syndrome: Paidika Interview

- R. Underwager: (continued) “Paedophiles can boldly and courageously affirm what they choose. They can say that what they want is to find the best way to love. I am also a theologian. I believe it is God’s will that there be closeness and intimacy, unity of the flesh, between people. A paedophile can say: ‘This closeness is possible for me within the choices that I’ve made’.”
- (Geraci, 1993, pp. 3-4)

False Memory Syndrome

Paidika Interview

- “It would be nice if someone could get some kind of big research grant to do a longitudinal study of, let’s say, a hundred twelve-year old boys with loving paedophiles. Whoever was doing the study would have to follow them at five year intervals for twenty years.” (H. Wakefield, cited in Geraci, 1993, p. 12)

False Memory Syndrome Foundation

- In addition to Dr. Ralph Underwager, the False Memory Syndrome Foundation was organized by Peter and Pamela Freyd after Peter was accused of abuse by his daughter Dr. Jennifer Freyd, a Professor of Psychology at the University of Oregon.

William Freyd criticized the media about their portrayals of the FMSF (1995).

Letter from William Freyd

Peter Freyd is my brother. Pamela Freyd is both my stepsister and sister-in-law. Jennifer and Gwendolyn [Freyd] are my nieces. There is no doubt in my mind that there was severe abuse in the home of Peter and Pam, while they were raising their daughters. Peter said (on your show, "Divided Memories") that his humor was ribald. Those of us who had to endure it, remember it as abusive at best and viciously sadistic at worst. The False Memory Syndrome Foundation is a fraud designed to deny a reality that Peter and Pam have spent most of their lives trying to escape. There is no such thing as False Memory Syndrome. It is not, by any normal standards a Foundation. Neither Pam nor Peter has any significant mental health expertise.

Letter from William Freyd

That the False Memory Syndrome Foundation has been able to excite so much media attention has been a great surprise to those of us who would like to admire and respect the objectivity and motives of people in the media. Neither Peter's mother (who was also mine), nor his daughters, nor I have wanted anything to do with Peter and Pam for periods of time ranging up to more than two decades. We do not understand why you would "buy" such an obviously flawed story. But buy it you did, based on the severely biased presentation you made of the memory issue that Peter and Pam created to deny their own difficult reality.

- From W. Freyd. (1995, May/June). Raised voices: No doubt. *Treating Abuse Today*, p. 38.

What does empirical research say about the credibility of RA narratives to clinicians?

Seven studies were identified and reviewed (listed chronologically)

- Perry (1992)
- Goodman, Qin, Bottoms, & Shaver (1994); and Bottoms, Shaver & Goodman (1996)
- Andrews, Morton, Bekerian, Brewin, Davies & Mollon, (1995)
- Schmuttermaier & Veno (1999)
- Norcross, Koocher & Garofalo (2006)
- Becker, Karriker, Overkamp, & Rutz (2008). Rutz, Becker, Karriker & Overkamp (2008); and Becker, Karriker, Rutz & Overkamp (2013)
- Ost, Wright, Easton, Hope & French (2013)

Perry (1992)

- In a survey of members of the International Society for the Study of Multiple Personality and Dissociation, Perry (1992) found that 88% of 1185 “respondents reported belief in ritual abuse, involving mind control and programming” (p. 4).
- Strengths: a survey of qualified professionals
- Weaknesses: possible biases of respondents

Goodman, Qin, Bottoms, & Shaver (1994);
and Bottoms, Shaver & Goodman (1996)

- These researchers conducted 5 studies that were summarized in Goodman, Qin, Bottoms, & Shaver (1994);. Only the first of the studies addressed the question of perceived credibility.

Goodman, Qin, Bottoms, & Shaver (1994);
and Bottoms, Shaver & Goodman (1996)

- In a national survey of 2,709 clinical psychologists who were members of the American Psychological Association, the authors investigated the frequency of RA allegations made to psychologists. This study showed that within their sample of psychologists, 70% denied and 30% acknowledged seeing at least one case of “ritualistic or religion-related abuse since January 1, 1980” (Bottoms, Shaver, & Goodman, 1991, p. 6). (Cited in Noblitt & Noblitt, 2014, pp. 53–54)

Goodman, Qin, Bottoms, & Shaver (1994); and Bottoms, Shaver & Goodman (1996)

- Strengths: Large samples, well designed, multidisciplinary clinicians
- Weaknesses: Bias evident in failure to cite authors with alternate data or perspectives, interpreting their outcomes critically of RA credibility when they could be interpreted as supportive, and their stating:
- *“Most clients who allege ritual abuse are diagnosed as having multiple personality disorder or post-traumatic stress disorder, two increasingly popular, but controversial psychological diagnoses” (Bottoms, Shaver & Goodman, 1996, p. 1)*

Andrews, Morton, Bekarian, Brewin, Davies & Mollon, (1995)

- The researchers collected data from 810 British Psychological Society practitioners who had seen sexually abused clients. Regarding these psychologists' "belief in essential accuracy of reports of SRA," 3% reported never, 54% sometimes, 38% usually, and 5% always. Fifteen percent reported that they had worked with clients reporting satanic ritual abuse (SRA). Eighty percent of the psychologists who had seen one or more individuals with a stated history of SRA believed the allegations.
- (Cited in Noblitt & Noblitt, 2014, p. 55)

Andrews, Morton, Bekerian, Brewin,
Davies & Mollon, (1995)

- Strengths: Appears unbiased, used a Likert scale rather than dichotomous belief or disbelief
- Weakness: ?

Schmuttermaier & Veno (1999)

- They surveyed 74 Center Against Sexual Assault (CASA) workers, 48 psychologists, and 27 psychiatrists in the state of Victoria, Australia. (Cited in Noblitt & Noblitt, 2014, p. 55)
- Eighty-five percent endorsed the belief that ritual abuse is “an indication of genuine trauma” (Cited in Noblitt & Noblitt, 2014, p. 55)
- Strengths: Appears unbiased, multidisciplinary participants
- Weaknesses: ?

Norcross, Koocher & Garofalo (2006)

- This article begins by asking,
- Which psychotherapies are effective? Psychologists have been inundated with lists of treatment guidelines, empirically supported therapies, practice guidelines, and reimbursable therapies. (Norcross et al. 2006, p. 515)
- Paradoxically, John Norcross played a significant role in an American Psychological Association's policy statement that "different forms of psychotherapy typically produce relatively similar outcomes" (APA, 2013a, p. 321; also see APA 2013b, Campbell et al., 2013).

Norcross, Koocher & Garofalo (2006)

- The title of this article is “Discredited Psychological Treatments and Tests: A Delphi Poll.”
- The authors selected a panel of 100 psychologists who were considered experts to rate a long list of psychological approaches 59 treatments and 30 assessment techniques (that included sand tray therapy, dream analysis, etc.) and “Treatments for mental disorders resulting from Satanic ritual abuse” (p. 518).
- On a 1-5 Likert scale (represented as 1 *not at all discredited*, 2 *unlikely discredited*, 3 *possibly discredited*, 4 *probably discredited*, 5 *certainly discredited*) the SRA question was rate as 3.98 the first round and 4.28 the second round.

Norcross, Koocher & Garofalo (2006)

- Strengths: The panel consisted of prestigious psychologists
- Weaknesses: I reviewed the names of the experts on the panel and saw no one whom I recognized as having expertise in dissociative disorders or RA. The panel was likely biased, no other research was cited that was remotely associated with RA other than one article by a well-known FMS apologist. That article criticized treatment for DID as being inherently dangerous. It is not clear why an Adelpi method was used. If people are indeed suggestible as is proposed by the sociocognitive model this method would seem inappropriate due to its overt use of suggestion.

Becker, Karriker, Overkamp & Rutz (2008); Rutz, Becker, Overkamp, & Karriker (2008), and Becker, Karriker, Rutz & Overkamp (2013)

- Developed the Extreme Abuse Survey (EAS) and collected data online.

Becker et al. (2008); Rutz et al.(2008),
and Becker et al. (2013)

- An international study of helping professionals was conducted by Becker, Karriker, Overkamp, and Rutz (2008) and Becker, Karriker, Rutz, and Overkamp (2013) and is part of their Extreme Abuse Survey (EAS) research series (<http://extreme-abuse-survey.net/>). The Professional Extreme Abuse Survey (P-EAS) is an online questionnaire with 215 questions (and 53 optional ones) that was available from April 1 to June 30, 2007. Four hundred fifty-one (451) helping professionals from 20 different countries responded to at least one of the questions.

Becker et al. (2008); Rutz et al.(2008),
and Becker et al. (2013)

- This survey shows that 86% of helping professionals who have worked with at least one extreme abuse survivor report having in their caseload at least one survivor of SRA.

Becker et al. (2008); Rutz et al.(2008),
and Becker et al. (2013)

- Some of their other findings are as follows: 61% saw clients who reported ritual abuse by clergy, 85% said the majority of adult ritual abuse/mind control (RA/MC) survivors with whom they worked were diagnosed with DID, 63% said that they always take a neutral stance regarding the truth of an adult survivor's memories of RA/MC, 65% said that some of their clients' reports of RA/MC were based on continuous, rather than dissociated, memories.

Becker et al. (2008); Rutz et al.(2008),
and Becker et al. (2013)

- Regarding belief in their clients' stories, 3% of the helpers do not believe any of their clients who report RA/MC experienced ritual abuse, the rest reported belief in varying degrees concordant with the previous findings of Andrews et al. (1995) and Ost et al. (2013). There was a similar pattern where 5% did not believe any of their clients who report RA/MC experienced MC and the rest of the respondents indicated belief in varying degrees.
- (Cited in Noblitt & Noblitt, 2014, p. 56)

Ost, Wright, Easton, Hope & French (2013)

- Ost, Wright, Easton, Hope, and French (2013) collected responses to an online survey of 183 chartered clinical psychologists and 119 hypnotherapists. Among the chartered clinical psychologists, 37.9% indicated that they had seen one or more cases of individuals with satanic or ritualistic abuse. The researchers found that 24.5% of the hypnotherapists had seen one or more satanic/ritual abuse cases. Along the lines of the Andrews et al. (1995) study they asked, “Are reports of Satanic/ritualistic abuse essentially accurate?” Among the chartered clinical psychologists, 1.6% responded never, 11.5% rarely, 27.3% sometimes, 29.5% usually, and 2.7% always. The hypnotherapists answered 10.1% never, 15.1% rarely, 21.0% sometimes, 12.6% usually, and 5.0% always.
- (Cited in Noblitt & Noblitt, 2014, p. 55)

Ost, Wright, Easton, Hope & French (2013)

- Strength: In spite of their bias, the authors produced data that were more consistent with the other studies.

More history

- In 1979 when I saw “Bill” there was no psychological literature on ritual abuse.
- In 1980 Michelle Smith and Lawrence Pazder published *Michelle Remembers*. I did not read it at the time.
- Critics representing the sociocognitive perspective generally interpreted this book as the event that precipitated what they called the “Satanic Panic.”
- But in my case I saw Bill before this *Michelle Remembers* appeared.

More history

- I did not witness any such moral panic. I saw a general societal backlash to these reports similar to the denial associated with the #MeToo movement. The discrediting of these allegations typically consisted of hyperbole and straw man logic by individuals not qualified critique the narratives of individuals seeking psychological assessment and treatment.

Similar stories, similar psychological experiences

People who identify as survivors are often credible, accomplished members of society.

Is it ethical to assert their abuse stories are untrue?

Dr. Lynn Brunet's *Answer to Jung* (2019) and Dr. Shelly Kolton's (2021) *Brain Storm* are two recent authors with similar abuse histories and dissociative experiences.

Numerous individuals have "come out" as RA survivors, but many also conceal their abuse stories.

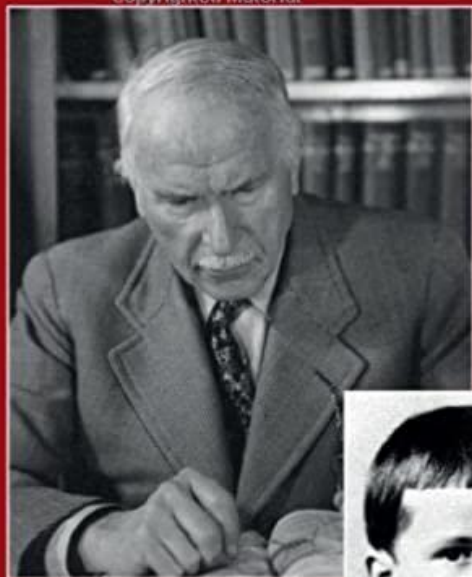


BRAIN STORM

*a
life
in
pieces*

Shelley Kolton, MD

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Answer to Jung

Making Sense of 'The Red Book'

Lynn Brunet

Copyrighted Material



Dr. Brunet speaks and writes about being a ritual abuse survivor.

- She shared with me an electronic version of a catalog from 1930 that sold equipment and supplies to various fraternal organizations.
- DeMoulin Bros & Co, Greenville, IL.
- On page 77 of this document, it depicts a branding and whirling table with an adult man tied to the table and another adult man in a devil costume officiating.
- <http://www.phoenixmasonry.org/masonicmuseum/demoulin/index.htm>

Contemporary RA narratives can also be better understood by examining them in the context of culture and history.

The notion of spiritual possession is reported historically numerous cultures.

Now the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-5) treats “possession” as dissociative identity disorder.

Many with this diagnosis also describe narratives of RA.

In the past these individuals were sometimes labelled as “witches” and persecuted or blamed for their “possession.”

Contemporary RA narratives can also be better understood by examining them in the context of culture and history.

Now there are humane and supportive options for these survivors through peer support and therapy.

We can understand those individuals as trauma survivors and treat them with kindness and respect.

What are some historical examples of traumatic rituals that may have been used to create dissociative experiences?

- Some may have been outlawed in their cultures of origin. Others may have been treated with respect and solemnity. For example, the sun dance?
- What were some cultures that were known to use traumatic rituals?
 - The cult of Dionysus?
 - The mystery cults of the Roman Empire?
 - Juju as described by Isiah Oke (1989)?
 - Others?

Contemporary RA survivors often describe rituals that include historic pagan or other religious themes.

- Greek/Roman gods
- Egyptian gods/spirits
- Africa gods/loa
- Germanic gods and heroic figures
- Celtic gods/spirits/saints

Questions? Discussion?

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