

Memory, Trauma, Dissociation
and Amnesia;
Myth and Reality in Cinema and
Real Life

OLLI at Illinois
Spring Semester 2020

Next week? A potpourri

- A brief history of trauma and its deniers
- The Controversy around Sybil
- The Memory Wars
- The False Memory Syndrome / the Freyd family
- Video: Am I Crazy? My journey to determine if my memories are true
- Robert Oaxnam and his book: A Fractured Mind

A Century of Changes

Freud's talking cure combined with input from behaviorism in the 40s and 50s resulted in Cognitive Behavior Therapy, the dominant mode in our profession still to this day.

At the same time, research in psychopharmacology led to the ascendancy of the disease model of mental illness and today all of us work in a system in which this is the prevailing paradigm. However, as Bessel points out, there are drawbacks and research is waning as the industry realizes there may not be any new magic cures out there.

The cutting edge research in mental health is now in neurology. Scans, implants, and other new technology is going to change the field in the next few decades.

An Aside / A brief history of the interest in trauma

- After the Civil War, veterans were described as having '*soldier's heart*'.
- Charcot and Janet in Paris in the late 19th / early 20th Century
 - Freud went there to study with Charcot in 1885
- Freud became very interested in trauma due to reports by female clients of childhood sexual abuse. Then he backpedaled when the medical community in Vienna reacted negatively and criticized him. As a result we have the Oedipal Complex theory.
- WW I created an interest in *shell shock*, particularly in England
 - Charles Myers in England eventually postulated **the structural dissociation model** based on his work with WWI soldiers

History, cont.

- Interest renewed with WWII '*combat fatigue*'. Then it subsided again. The 50s attempted to return to normalcy and denial.

-
- Finally: after all the upheaval of the 60s and 70s:
 - Vietnam, the first war to be televised, brought trauma to the attention of the public in new ways.
 - In the 70s and 80s, the women's movement empowered victims of childhood sexual abuse to speak out
 - The 20th Century saw studies of survivors of the Holocaust and other genocides that delineated the nature of that trauma.
 - These three developments came together in the 80s to create the field of traumatic stress studies. PTSD become a diagnosis.

Sybil

- a Study in how a narrative gets shaped
- and what Hollywood does to that narrative

Joanne Woodward as Dr. Cornelia Wilber

Sally Field as Sybil Dorsett / Shirley Mason

Shown on Network Tv on November 14-15, 1976

Made for Tv by Lorimar Productions

Teleplay by Stewart stern

Distributed by Warner Brothers Television Distribution

Won 5 EMMYS IN 1977 AND A PEABODY AWARD

• Afterlives

- The therapy ended in Sept 1965
- Sybil/Shirley's lease was up the end of the month and she spent two week staying with Flora
- In mid October, Shirley left for Pennsylvania where she had gotten a job as an occupational therapist
- At the same time, Cornelia moved to West Virginia for a job in a state prison
- Later she taught at the University of Kentucky in Lexington
- Then Shirley moved to Lexington and taught at a community college in Ohio
- Flora Schreiber continued to live and work in New York

• End of lives

- Flora Schreiber died in **1988**
- Shirley was diagnosed with cancer in 1990, declined treatment, and it went into remission
- In 1991, Wilbur developed Parkinson's and Shirley moved in with her and cared for her till her death in **1992**
- Shirley died in **1998** in her own home in Lexington
- When Her house was being prepared for an estate sale, a cache of over 100 painting was found in a locked closet in her basement. They spanned the years from 1947 to 1965. They became known as the hidden paintings. There is a website where prints of the paintings are available for sale.

The bad and the Ugly

According to Parick Suraci: (article on huffposst, where suraci is described as a contributor)

Attacking the veracity of *Sybil* published in 1973 did not begin until April 24, 1997, when Dr. Herbert Spiegel gave an interview to the *New York Review of Books*. He stated that Sybil was not a multiple, but rather an hysteric. He claimed to have hypnotized her, performed regression studies and filmed her for the class he taught at Columbia University, thus, discovering that Sybil's therapist, Dr. Cornelia Wilbur, had been: "helping her (Sybil) identifying aspects of her life, or perspectives, that she then called by name. By naming them this way she was reifying a memory of some kind and converting it into a 'personality'..." In fact, he accused Dr. Wilbur of implanting false memories, giving credence to this developing fanatical movement.

SOSybil was a 'Brilliant Hysteric' and was not multiple. This terms was later used in many of the allegations against Wilbur and Schreiber. What does that mean?

Does being an hysteric rule out having DID?

• More of the ugly / Suraci

- When I asked Dr. Spiegel for the film hypnotizing Sybil, he said he could not find it. When asked why he had waited 24 years to report this so-called fraudulent case, he said no one had ever asked him about Sybil. He made no mention of the American Psychiatric Association's code of ethics requiring us to immediately report any grossly distorted, fraudulent research.
- These facts were omitted from the report on Dr. Spiegel in an article "A Girl Not Named Sybil" about the book *Sybil Exposed* by Debbie Nathan in the *New York Times Magazine* of October 16, 2011.

- Audiotapes of recorded conversations between Schreiber and Wilbur were examined by [Herbert Spiegel](#) and later by [John Jay College of Criminal Justice](#) academic Robert W. Rieber.
- Both professionals concluded that Wilbur suggested multiple personalities to her client, whom they saw as a simple "[hysteric](#)". Their "[smoking gun](#)" proof of this claim is a session tape in which Wilbur is heard describing to Mason the personalities she has already seen Mason exhibit.
- Spiegel and Rieber also claim that Wilbur and Schreiber fabricated most of the book, which is not a psychiatric case history as would appear in a [peer-reviewed journal](#) but a fictionalized narrative. Many details of the real case were changed or removed to protect Mason's privacy.^[4]

Debbie Nathan / author of sybil exposed

(here's where it gets really ugly)

- Debbie Nathan is an investigative reporter whose book was published in 2011. She wrote at least three books with a focus on cultural and criminal justice issues concerning abuse of children, particularly accusations of [satanic ritual abuse](#) in schools and child care institutions. She also writes about immigration, focusing on women and on dynamics between immigration and sexuality. Nathan's writing has won a number of awards
- She appears in the 2003 Oscar-nominated film [Capturing the Friedmans](#). She has been affiliated with the [National Center for Reason and Justice](#), which, among other things, provides support to persons who may have been wrongly accused of sexual abuse.^[6]
 - Wikipedia page

Questions about Motives and technique

- Why would Cornelia Wilber spend 14 years on one patient (much of which was pro bono work) if her primary motive creating a sensational story of MPS to enhance her professional reputation and make a lot of money by publishing a book?
- Was she deluding herself? And Sybil? And Flora?
- What's wrong with having a discussion with a client/patient about what you have learned so far?
- Is hysteria a valid diagnosis
- Does being a hysteric rule out the possibility of having DID/MPD.

What's motivating the Spiegel and Nathan attacks on Sybil

- The **memory wars** / a battle that raged during the 1990s and is still going on in certain circles
- At the center of the controversy is The **False Memory Syndrome foundation**, which came into being around the experiences of the freyd family
- Around 1990, Jennifer Freyd, a research professor at the university of Oregon, severed ties with her parents, stating that she had uncovered memories of her father, mathematics professor [Peter J. Freyd](#), abusing her during her childhood. Her parents, Pamela and Peter Freyd, disputed Freyd's claims of sexual assault, and co-founded the [False Memory Syndrome Foundation](#) in 1992, which has been described as a US "advocacy group for people claiming to have been wrongly accused of physical and sexual abuse.". Three years after its founding, it had more than 7,500 members.¹
- The False Memory Syndrome Foundation was dissolved on December 31, 2019.

Jennifer Freyd

- Freyd has researched and written extensively on [sexual abuse](#) and [memory](#). Freyd's initial empirical discovery of [representational momentum](#) led to her further explore the relationship between [trauma memories](#) and the element of betrayal. Freyd introduced the following original concepts to the trauma literature: Betrayal Trauma, DARVO, Institutional Betrayal, and Institutional Courage.
- [Betrayal trauma](#) is defined as a [trauma](#) perpetrated by someone whom the victim is close to and reliant upon for support and survival. In betrayal trauma theory (BTT), a betrayal trauma occurs when people or institutions on which a person relies for protection, resources, and survival violate the trust or well-being of that person. BTT emphasizes the importance of betrayal as a core antecedent of dissociation implicitly aimed to preserve the relationship with the caregiver. BTT suggests that a child who is dependent on their caregiver for support will have a higher need to dissociate traumatic experiences from conscious awareness.

• More of Freyd's research

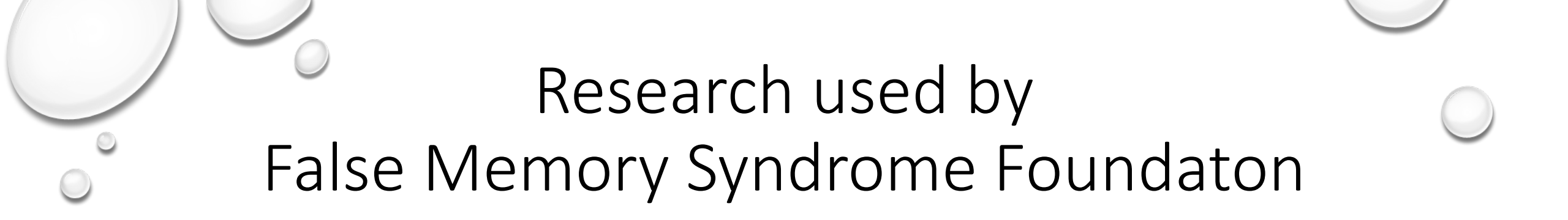
- DARVO is an acronym used to describe a common strategy of abusers. The abuser may: **D**eny the abuse ever took place, **A**ttack the victim for attempting to hold the abuser accountable; and claim that they, the abuser, are the real victim in the situation, thus **R**eversing the **V**ictim and **O**ffender.
- Institutional betrayal refers to "wrongdoings perpetrated by an institution upon individuals dependent on that institution, including failure to prevent or respond supportively to wrongdoings by individuals (e.g. sexual assault) committed within the context of the institution" It is an extension of betrayal trauma theory. In a 2013 study, Carly P. Smith and Jennifer Freyd documented the psychological harm caused by institutional betrayal. Freyd and Smith developed the Institutional Betrayal Questionnaire (IBQ), now in its second edition, to measure institutional betrayal across a variety of institutional context

More of The really ugly

Suraci Reports: “After Ms. Nathan received many negative criticisms over her inaccuracies and fabrications in *Sybil Exposed*, a fact checker from the *Times* claimed she had verified the documents in the Schreiber archives in the Special Collections Library at John Jay College. The sign-in book, which is meticulously guarded, requires a person’s signature and date. There is no such entry from this fact checker.”

Nathan’s book was published in 2012. In 2014 the NYTimes produced a Retro report video entitled: Sybil: a brilliant hysteric? The reports on this whole controversy and seems to slanted to favor the Herbert Spiegel / Debbie Nathan crowd but also has interesting footage of an interview with Herbert’s son is does research on DID.

WE will watch the video if time permits.



Research used by False Memory Syndrome Foundaton

Elizabeth Loftus/ Cognitive Psychologist and Memory Researcher



Elizabeth F. Loftus (born **Elizabeth Fishman**, October 16, 1944) is an American cognitive psychologist and expert on human memory. She has conducted research on the malleability of human memory. Loftus is best known for her ground-breaking work on the misinformation effect and eyewitness memory, and the creation and nature of false memories, including recovered memories of childhood sexual abuse. As well as her work inside the laboratory, Loftus has been involved in applying her research to legal settings; she has consulted or provided expert witness testimony for hundreds of cases. In 2002, Loftus was ranked 58th in the *Review of General Psychology's* list of the 100 most influential psychological researchers of the 20th century, and was the highest ranked woman on the list.

Am I Crazy:

My Journey to determine if my memories are true

A film by Mary Knight

Guest appearances by:

Elizabeth Loftus / Cognitive researcher

Eleanor Goldstein / author of

Creating Memories: Destroying Families


Bessel Van der Kolk / Trauma Researcher and Clinician

Author of The Body Keeps the Score

Historic film footage of Marilyn Van Dorn / Miss American 1956



Collateral Beauty

- Written by Allan Loeb
 - Starring Will Smith, Edward Norton, Deira Knightley, Michal Pena, Naomie Harris, Jacob Latimore, Kate Winslet, and Helen Mirren
 - Released December 2016
- 

Collateral Beauty / Magical realism

Magical realism, magic realism, or marvelous realism is a [style](#) of [fiction](#) that paints a realistic view of the modern world while also adding magical elements. It is sometimes called **fabulism**, in reference to the conventions of [fables](#), [myths](#), and [allegory](#). "Magical realism", perhaps the most common term, often refers to fiction and literature in particular, with [magic](#) or the [supernatural](#) presented in an otherwise real-world or mundane [setting](#), commonly seen in novels and dramatic performances. It is considered a subgenre of [fantasy](#).

- Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Jorge Luis Borges, Isabel Allende, Salman Rushdie

Summary of PTSD Criteria

- Traumatic event
- Intrusive re-experiencing
- Pattern of avoidance of trauma related stimuli
- Negative alterations of thought and mood
- Alterations in arousal or reactivity

Bessel Van der Kolk on Dissociation

Body Keeps the Score / p. 121

- Dissociation is knowing and not knowing at the same time.
- How can this happen?
- Isolated neural networks / huge spider webs in the brain with no connecting links
- Isolated memory networks / like rooms in a building with no openings between them / If you are in one room, you can't know what's going on in another room.

The creation of Narrative Memory

- Primarily a left brain function
- Uses the brain's mastery of language
- Narrative memory is compromised if the left brain is not functioning
- An area in the left brain called Broca's area creates words and controls our ability to speak
- Scared speechless is literally true / Trauma can shut down Broca's area

The importance of Language

◆ Language as vehicle for narrative

- When we have an explicit narrative, we have power over the experience that is lacking when the memory is only implicit.

◆ The Power of Naming

- Biblical precedents
- Personal experience

