



Dear Reader

We have been busy of late - with a number of new cases reporting to the Society over the last few months. Most new members learn about the BFMS after trawling the internet for information in a desperate attempt to understand how to make sense of the predicament they are facing. The shock, bewilderment and sheer powerlessness of the situation is, as you are aware, life-changing. While all cases are complex, it is immediately apparent that some are 'textbook' cases of false or distorted memory. By textbook, I am referring to a situation where an adult accuser sought out a therapist for help with a problem - often depression, anxiety or relationship breakdown - and, following therapy, then claimed to 'recover' alleged 'buried' memories of historic child sexual abuse (CSA).

In some cases, the police and CPS are taking no further action, yet, sadly, in a significant number of cases, our members have entered the daunting journey into the criminal justice system. One such case was Ben Herman. Ben, was a Royal Marine seconded to work as an Equerry for the Duke of Edinburgh at the time of the allegations. He was charged with three counts of indecent assault on a girl aged under 14; he was charged further with indecency towards a child under the age of 16. The allegations date back to 1972. Ben's accuser, aged 54, made the allegations to the police after watching, in 2012, a documentary on the Jimmy Savile scandal. In May 2015, a jury sitting in Blackfriars Crown Court, took less than 40 minutes to acquit Ben on all charges. Ben would like to see three changes made to the legal system, to prevent other innocent persons from being dragged through the criminal justice system wrongly accused of historical CSA. First, the complainant has the right to anonymity for life ; the accused is named publicly from the outset and many cases, like Ben's, are reported in the press. Any right-thinking person can see the inherent flaws in this process. It would be naïve not to recognise that some accusing parties are moti-

vated by the prospect of financial remuneration. Would the number of false allegations reduce if the right to anonymity was waived? Second, Ben would like to see changes to the police bail system. After voluntarily visiting the police station, he was arrested, put into a police cell and later spent 27 months on police bail. It took 18 months before the police finally charged him. Third, Ben would like to see reforms to the legal aid system. He has spent his life savings mounting a legal defence. This is inherently unfair and the financial burden placed on the falsely accused in historic CSA allegations is nothing short of a national disgrace. After listening to Barrister, Matthew Scott, speaking at a recent conference which took place in Cardiff Law School, I would also highlight another area where legal reform ought to be implemented. If the doctrine 'innocent until proven guilty' (which is supposedly enshrined in the criminal justice system) has any sway in the current moral panic taking place around historic CSA, then why are defendants forced to sit in a 'glass cage', while their accuser gives evidence from behind a screen or by video link. This is blatantly unfair. Most civilised countries have long abandoned this practice and it is time that we did so.

Kevin Felstead

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SPECIAL FEATURE

BFMS AGM 2015

Director's Report

The seeds of the BFMS were sown back in 1992 when our founding director, Roger Scotford, decided with a few others to set up a group to help parents whose lives were being turned upside down by false allegations of childhood abuse. Now we are in our 23rd year. Over the years we have experienced many ups and downs in the way that society reacts to our work. As you are all too well aware this is a difficult topic but we have managed to work with the press and media to expose the way that false memories are ruining lives. We have been through phases when the press were keen to tell stories and to report on research and others, when they said the subject was exhausted. Journalists and producers have come and gone over the years and fortunately there are new ones who are keen to know more about the subject and who want to inform the public. With the difficult cultural climate that we have faced since the shocking revelations about Savile and the exponential rise in the number of historical allegations of abuse it has proved a sensitive subject for journalists to handle and we are all mindful of ensuring that the time is right to raise the profile again. It must be kept in the news so that anyone newly affected by it knows that they are not alone and that there is somewhere to turn for help and information.

With events taking place, particularly in relation to the new inquest into Carol Felstead's death, we are optimistic that there will be considerable press and media reporting of this case coupled with highlighting the dangers of recovered memory therapy. We await these developments with interest but will keep you informed by posting notices of any programmes or articles on our web site.

The upside of the many claims we hear about today is that sometimes the press do report on the unsubstantiated claims that have been the subject of much exposure. Only very recently there has been press coverage of a bizarre High Court family case in which a father, falsely accused of abusing his two children as part of a 'satanic cult', has spoken of the horrific allegations he faced and the

fallout he continues to bear. It is some small redemption to read that in delivering her judgement at the High Court, Mrs Justice Pauffley said the children had been forced to concoct accounts of horrific events and that their stories were a result of relentless emotional and psychological pressure and significant physical abuse by their mother's new partner in collaboration with their mother. The public need to be aware that such cases do exist.

We've seen the MP Nigel Evans, the actor Bill Roache and the radio and television presenter Paul Gambaccini all pleading their innocence but struggling to survive the incessant public exposure as a result of their celebrity status. From the press we have learned how they have challenged the process of their arrest, the naming and shaming prior to charge and inordinate length of the bail process before their cases concluded either with an acquittal or a decision that there would be no further action. This has been encouraging.

The current Director of Public Prosecutions, Alison Saunders, has been determined to raise the conviction rate for child abuse trials and this is commendable under the circumstances with what we now know about child grooming cases but we fear that her belief that very few cases are actually false could lead to a blanket policy that every case must be tried in court without thorough and careful investigation beforehand. We have written to her to highlight our concerns. As yet, we have received only an acknowledgement but we will follow it up. In the meantime we hope she has seen the letter and is aware that false allegations can and do occur, more frequently than she might like to admit.

Although it has not been an easy year we have broken the back of the changes and now have much work to get on with in the coming months.

Diary Note

BFMS AGM 2016

Will be held in central London

April 9th, 2016

The BFMS Archive: True Stories of False Memory Dr Kevin Felstead, Director of Communications

Background

The BFMS was founded in 1993 following unprecedented numbers of allegations about historic Child Sexual Abuse. The accusers were adults – mostly female – who believed they had ‘recovered’ repressed memories of abuse. Typically they were in their twenties or thirties and a majority were middle class and well educated. In most cases, the allegations were levelled at male family members – especially their fathers.

The files in the archive reveal that the accused were in an absolute state of shock and ignorance about the nature and provenance of the allegations. This was compounded by the dawning realisation that the accuser actually appeared to believe that they had been abused. It is easy to overlook, of course, that during this period, we lived in a very different era. This was pre-internet and the science on false memory was in a state of comparative infancy. Our Scientific and Professional Advisory Board had not yet been established. A false memory society had been founded in the United States in 1992 following an epidemic of similar allegations, but it was not well-known in the United Kingdom.

Satanic Ritual Abuse

Significantly at this time, there had been a number of Satanic Ritual Abuse Panics in the United Kingdom which helped foster a heightened perception of historic child sexual abuse. The publication in 1980 of *Michelle Remembers* was of much relevance in engendering the SRA panics here and elsewhere. ‘What Michelle Remembers, you will never forget’ was the sensational claim of the publisher. A Canadian Psychiatrist and his patient Michelle Smith collaborated to write the book and they subsequently married. Following protracted psychotherapy, Smith alleged that as a child she had been imprisoned by a

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Satanic Cult, tortured, raped and sodomised with candles. Her psychiatrist insisted that his patient was so traumatised by these horrific events that her unconscious mind blocked them out. Amazingly, Smith’s ‘memories’ of this supposed physical and mental torture were meant to have been repressed entirely for over two decades prior to commencing psychotherapy. As you will be painfully aware, the process described throughout *Michelle Remembers* is fundamentally and diametrically opposed to the genuine experience of victims of childhood sexual abuse who cannot ‘forget’ or repress the traumatic recall of this reprehensible crime.

Michelle Remembers was subsequently exposed as an elaborate fantasy generated in therapy. Its central claims were comprehensively and definitively debunked. Yet it helped engender a moral panic which took hold first in the US and then manifested in the UK, with devastating consequences. In 1989 a conference was held at Reading University. In attendance were healthcare professionals, including dozens of social workers who learnt first-hand about the horrific allegations contained in *Michelle Remembers*. *Child Watch* contacted child protection workers across the country proclaiming that thousands of babies were being slaughtered in Satanic Abuse Rituals each year. There were a number of moral panics about Satanic Abuse. Nottingham being the first (1987), followed by Rochdale (1990) and the Orkney Islands (1991), culminating in over 50 children being forcibly taken from their families by social workers.

There were further significant developments during this period which helped sow the seeds of a SRA panic. *The Ritual Abuse Information Network* (RAINS) was set up in Manchester in 1989. Initially RAINS had five members, yet by 1993 this had risen to

120 members comprising of clinical psychologists, therapists, counsellors, social workers and psychiatrists. A number of high profile books were published at this time, including Andrew Boyd’s rallying text, *Blasphemous Rumours*, which made extraordinary claims about the prevalence of SRA. In February 1992, Channel 4 broadcast *Wicked Beyond Belief*. The television programme focused on adults who claimed to have experienced SRA. The ‘documentary’ was

applauded by the *British Association of Social Workers* and a helpline was set up after the programme had been broadcast. Callers to the helpline claimed to have been variously drugged, raped, locked in coffins, forced to drink urine, eat faeces and forced to participate in pornography. Some callers claimed to have witnessed ritual murder. All of these allegations feature in our case files for this period.

Typical Features

The archive features predominately middle class adult women accusing adult men. In the majority of cases, the accuser had previously received some form of counselling, psychotherapy, hypnotherapy or regressive therapy. A number of accusers received therapy from Christian Counsellors. Why did these adult accusers seek therapy? The case files in the archive pinpoint a number of common features which appear time and time again. Depression – including post-natal depression – was a common issue for which female accusers sought professional help. I ought to add here that in approximately 10% of cases the accusing party was male, though this trend would appear to be less common in recent years. Perhaps not surprisingly, a number of females went to a therapist because they were suffering from stress. Others had experienced problems at school or suffered from a difficult adolescence.

Relationship problems – particularly marital breakdown drove other females into therapy. In a significant minority of cases, controlling husbands and boyfriends loomed menacingly in the background encouraging their partners to seek out a therapist for, say, sexual problems or emotional difficulties. Looking through these cases, their input can accurately be described as domestic abuse. Undoubtedly, one of the most common problem for which accusing females sought therapy was eating disorders. It is difficult to overstate how clearly this resonates throughout the files. The implication, of course, is that eating disorders are interpreted by treating therapists as symptomatic of childhood sexual abuse. Yet the reality is that there are no sure fire symptoms of sexual abuse, and those people experiencing eating disorders are no more or no less likely to have suf-

fered from childhood abuse.

The Courage to Heal

Reading through the files it is apparent that some accusers were highly suggestible; others presented with a history of attention-seeking. Many – particularly in the early cases – had read self-help literature. By far the greatest influence here was the bible of the recovered memory movement, *The Courage to Heal: A Guide for Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse* (by Ellen Bass and Laura Davies), which became an international best-seller. A central thesis of the book is that even if you don't remember being abused that does not mean that you were not abused. "If you don't remember your abuse, you are not alone. Many women don't have memories and some don't get memories. This doesn't mean they weren't abused (81)." Which, of course, puts the cart before the horse.

The Courage to Heal and other self-help literature provide a checklist of symptoms which operate at a huge level of generality. Potential victims are encouraged to identify symptoms which can be interpreted as evidence of childhood abuse.

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"If you think you were abused and your life shows the symptoms", assert Bass and Davies, "then you were (22)." Symptoms of abuse include anxiety, sadness, low self-esteem, lack of confidence and so on. The book also advises 'victims' about how to confront their alleged abusers. In one of our earliest cases, a daughter accused her father of committing Satanic Ritual Abuse. Subsequently she disclosed a written statement from her homeopath. That statement encapsulates what has happened to hundreds, thousands of families who are victims of false memory. It is worth noting that the accusing daughter had read the *Courage to Heal* together with similar self-help books: "To Whom It May Concern", wrote her homeopath, "As a professional practitioner, I wish to state that all of her symptoms, whether physical, mental or psychological, are consistent with her being a survivor of father/daughter rape, over a continued period of time. I have a great deal of experience working with people who have been abused as children, and sadly she is one of them". A cursory examination of the facts would have revealed that the daugh-

ter's fantastical allegations were false, delusional and impossible. If true, the accuser would have suffered extensive medical injuries. She had none. But the daughter did suffer from thrush!

It is surprisingly easy to become a therapist. The promotional literature for one hypnotherapy diploma course advertised in a national newspaper in 1994, states: 'Effective Techniques in Hypnosis, Suggestion, Regression, Hypno-Analysis ... Study at home at your own pace; Easy to learn; NO (sic) qualifications needed ... Qualified in months; Provide for the future ... Another income for life; Flexible Hours ...'

Yet the damage done by poorly-qualified therapists, as evidenced in the case files, is difficult to overstate. They believe that all problems which present in adulthood are a result of repressed trauma – particularly child sexual abuse – which took place in childhood. Hidden in the psyche, it is asserted, of every adult are detailed memories of all of our experiences going right back to the time of birth and, furthermore, according to the claims of regression therapists, these memories can be traced back to the womb and beyond. When these convoluted theories are put into practise, the results can be devastating as the following cursory summary of false memory allegations documented in the Archive pinpoint:

- 1) The daughter who accused her father of carrying her down the stairs and raping her. They lived in a bungalow and she subsequently came to realize that her memories were distorted; the allegation was impossible.
- 2) The daughter who accused her mother of murdering a sibling. The sibling was ill from birth. She died in hospital before the accusing daughter was born.
- 3) The daughter who accused her parents of committing murder, killing animals and hanging them in trees; it transpired that she had been put in hypnotic trances during protracted psychotherapy. Her parents were charged with rape and sexual assault. A jury returned not guilty verdicts on all counts. The judge said that the defendants

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- 4) The daughter who claimed that her family had abused her and buried a body under the patio. The police dug it up. There was no body.
- 5) The daughter who was admitted to hospital with stomach pain and given unnecessary operations and later placed in a psychiatric ward where she was drugged and given appalling psychiatric input that would bring shame on a medieval quack. She was bullied into making allegations against her father who she came to believe was part of a large paedophile network. Later she came to understand that her new 'memories' didn't make sense. People were the wrong ages, the chronology was muddled. Eventually she realized that the allegations had been induced through abysmal psychiatric treatment.

- 6) The hundreds of cases involving adult daughters who made allegations against their fathers after receiving psychotherapy for depression, stress or other problems. Each case is unique, but all share similar traits. A number of the accusers experienced a mental breakdown. But it's important to note that the therapy came first, and not the other way round.

The impact of the false allegations are devastating and life-changing:

- Family breakdown and estrangement
- A destructive, compulsive over-dependency on the therapist
- Negative media publicity
- Police or social services involvement
- Criminal charges
- Wrongful imprisonment and miscarriages of justice

The archive reveals that many cases are characterised by systemic incompetence by the authorities and shoddy police investigations. There is no fact-finding, no proof, no evidence. Allegations are normally made by one of three means: in person; through a third party; by telephone or letter. One

of our members described the harrowing impact of the false allegations:

“Following complaints to the Police in 2004 by my youngest daughter, I was arrested and questioned concerning her claims of sexual and physical abuse going back in time between 20 – 35 years. I was eventually charged with many counts of abuse. After twenty long months of torment the charges were dropped and no evidence was offered. Fortunately because of a life-threatening bone disease, her life is well documented.

All this began following a period in the late 1980s and early 1990s when she had suffered an ectopic pregnancy, a miscarriage and the very difficult birth of her son – obviously at a time when she was vulnerable.

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The pressure that I, my wife, daughter, family and friends endured because of the actions of these so-called therapeutic practitioners is simply beyond comprehension.

Consequently she sought assistance, firstly through her local GP; he referred her to the Psychiatric Nurse who provided her with a copy of *The Courage to Heal*, then proceeded to compound matters with regression therapy.

Following extensive investigations, we discovered she had sought further therapy from a private psychotherapist who specialises in treating women who claim to have been abused by ‘regression therapy.’ She was encouraged to join the support group which plainly exacerbated her delusions. Consequently the story of abuse she claimed was both detailed and compelling.

As a result of this therapy our younger daughter came to believe she had been abused by me, and turned every innocent action into suspicious innuendo. All this eventually broke-up her marriage; she left the town and has cut herself off from the family completely.

The ‘therapist’ she turned to is virtually self-taught, having undertaken what can only be described as a correspondence course with some weekend tuition from an ‘institute’ situated on a back street of a mill town. Through this ‘institute’ he has been able to acquire a string of impressive-looking qualifications after his name; he has further enhanced his status with more pseudo qualifications – claiming that what, at best, one can describe as well-meaning individuals, are allowed to practice with no genuine learning or clinical evaluation with the vulnerable and damaged

minds is to reasonable people simply unacceptable.

Our daughter went on to report me as a serious suspect in two local murder cases: I was interviewed in both cases. She then went on to inform the Child Protection Unit I am a danger to children in our neighbourhood such was, and still is, her level of paranoia.

It is worth quoting from the remarks of the prosecuting barrister that the life of abuse she claimed bore little or no resemblance to the truth.

I collapsed twice, spent periods in hospital and still suffer from the huge stress of the proceedings.

Because I am not the patient, also the passage of time, I was refused having my complaints recognised and dealt with by any regulatory body despite the continuing pain inflicted on my family.”

I am sure that many readers will recognise this scenario. There is some good news, however, in that the number of reported cases to the BFMS has gradually declined over time from a peak of 260 cases in 1993, to 134 in 2003, reducing further to 34 in 2013. However, we continue to receive new contact from families accused of historic child sexual abuse generated through false memory. Sadly false allegations emanating from false memory show no sign of abating.

Creating false crimes that never happened

Dr. Julia Shaw

It is a rainy day. You are sitting in front of a professionally dressed woman on a slightly uncomfortable chair, in what appears to be an office. She has just accused you of committing a crime, saying you assaulted someone with a weapon and that the police caught you in the act.

She claims that it happened when you were with

your best friend, in your hometown, about four years ago. She then asks you to tell her everything you can remember about the event from start to finish, and not to leave anything out – no matter how trivial. The only problem is you can't remember the event at all – which is understandable, because it never actually happened. But, what do you think it would take for her to convince you that it did? It's probably a lot less than you think.

Given that the interviewer is clearly trying to elicit a false confession out of you, this is concerning. And it isn't hard to think about the numerous ways that we might be in a situation where we would give a false confession. We may think about extreme situations and vulnerable suspects. Situations including torture or threats to our loved ones may come to mind, with suspects willing to say or confess to anything in order to get out of a terrible situation.

But, what if I told you that some people do not just falsely confess to crimes, but that they come to feel like they actually committed the act, with the ability to recount it in vivid detail? This is precisely the question I explore in my research. Rather than focusing on times when we forget things that happened, my work focuses on the opposite; times when we remember things that did not happen. These are known as false memories and can help us understand a particularly vicious kind of false confession - internalized false confessions. Internalized false confessions occur when an individual not only confesses to a crime they did not commit, like Michelle, but actually comes to believe that they committed the crime.

Internalised false confessions are a product of our normal memory processes; processes that inherently make our memory incredibly malleable. Like a ball of clay, our memories can be shaped and reshaped. Indeed, our memories change all the time for all kinds of reasons. Perhaps we have told a story about an event a number of times and over this re-telling the story has become a 'better' story including an embellished version of our original memory - something we may only notice when someone else who went to the event points it out.

Alternatively, we may integrate the memories of others into our own, acquiring memories of

events we never actually experienced our self. This is related to a phenomenon called source confusion, which occurs when we forget the original information. This forgetting of the sources of our memories makes them vulnerable to accidentally misattributing other sources to them. It is a bit like forgetting the original author of a quote you enjoy. You can mistakenly think the quote is originally by another author, a friend, or even by yourself.

It is these kinds of normal memory errors that can lead to internalized false confessions, and in lab environments researchers have been able to demonstrate that we can come to believe we did all kinds of things that never actually happened.

Taking all this into account, let us go back to the beginning - what would it take for the profession-

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ally dressed woman to cause you to give an internalised false confession? Given that the scenario described is exactly the situation you would find yourself in if you were to participate in my research, I have a pretty good idea, because that woman would be me. And so

far, my hit-rate for implanting rich false memories of committing crimes exactly like this is 70%. The majority of the remaining 30% also offer a false confession or general memory details, they just do not meet my stringent criteria for forming *full* internalized false confessions.

The majority of participants in my research are convinced they either committed a theft, assaulted someone, or assaulted someone with a weapon. And all it takes me to convince them of this is three short interviews over 3 weeks. I simply talk to the participants using techniques that are known to encourage false memories. It is surprisingly easy.

One of the main techniques to implant false memories is through guided imagery - having the participant close their eyes and visualize what the event would have been like. This imagination exercise can then lead to misattribution, whereby the individual may believe that what they are picturing is a real memory rather than a false memory. The participant goes from thinking what the crime *would* have been like, to what it *could* have been like, to what it *was*.

My findings build on other research that suggests the same thing - most people can come to believe they have memories of doing things that never happened. And these memories are usually multi-sensory. People feel, see and smell things in the memories. They seem to become part of the participant's personal reality, at least until I debrief them and tell them that the memories are false.

They also seem to look like real memories. In two of my studies, observers who watched videos of participants talking about their false memories were unable to reliably tell the difference between the same individual recalling a true or a false memory. This highlights a critical need for prevention efforts, as once they are there they may be indistinguishable from real accounts.

Finally, while certain personality characteristics such as compliance, suggestibility, and fantasy proneness have been linked to an increased risk for forming false confessions, in my normal samples it seems there is no particular personality trait that shields individuals from forming internalised false confessions.

It has led me to believe that most people have the potential to falsely confess to crimes they never committed. Including me, your loved ones, or possibly even you.

TERROR IN THE COURTROOM

Reading through old newsletters one article caught my eye. Extracts from *How the Police Trawl the Innocent*, written by the late Richard Webster (originally published in the *New Statesman*) was reproduced in the BFMS Newsletter-Aug '99. I thought that it was worth revisiting .

“The problem that our criminal justice system now faces”, wrote Webster, “is that the attitude we have adopted as a society towards allegations of sexual abuse is neither sane nor reasonable. So terrifying has the spectre of child sexual abuse become, so convinced are we that we are beset by some unspeakable evil, that the ordinary checks and balances have become powerless ... In such a climate, the dispensing of justice is replaced by a witch-hunt.” Does this sound familiar? It is difficult to believe that this article was written 15 years ago. Webster's perceptive essay has a haunting resonance that remains of much relevance in the contemporary climate.

MEMBERS' FORUM

BFMS Student Membership

The society has recently set up a new student membership. We now have our first inaugural members. We must continue to raise awareness about the BFMS and its work. To do this more effectively, we need to engage with the media, members of the public and with young people. In particular, the society must connect with young professionals working in the criminal justice system. We are looking to recruit Psychology, Law, Criminology and Sociology students. Our work would also be of interest to students studying the history of crime and policing and moral panics, and journalism. The more people who are aware of false memory and its devastating consequences, the better.

It would be fantastic if we can engage with students at the 2016 AGM. Please get in touch if you would like to sponsor a student to attend the AGM. To date, we have confirmed sponsorship for nine students. The cost of admission to the event, with lunch, is £30. Ideally we would have two to three tables of students in attendance. I know from speaking at events and talking to students (often in the pub) that there is considerable interest in, and awareness of, false memory.

Several members of our Scientific and Professional Advisory Board have done a great job in raising awareness about false memory in University psychology courses. I'm keen to build on this excellent work and to explore whether we can hold student events, or perhaps a conference, on false memory. We need champions who will take our work forward. There has been some very good media coverage of late, and I suspect that there is a good deal more to come in the future. On the one hand, the current moral panic about historical CSA is frightening and relentless. However there is also a healthy scepticism within the media to a number of high profile, knee-jerk investigations.

If you would like to sponsor student attendance at the AGM, then please email Kevin (kevinfelstead@bfms.org.uk). Alternatively, contact us by telephone, on: 01225 333 654 or 07544 841 971.

The emotional dimension of false or distorted memory

A BFMS Member

It is not always understood that very strong emotions can sometimes cause normal consciousness to break down. Such emotions can emerge in psychotherapy. They can cause a person to lose their usual orientation in life, when others might say of them, "What on earth has got into you?" And such a state of mind could result in memory distortion. We know that strong emotions usually accompany false memories of sexual abuse.

Uncontrolled emotions can also lead to a kind of possession. But possession, although sometimes exhilarating, is a state of unawareness. The BFMS document *What is False Memory* states, "However grotesque and unreal the believed-in events the emotional dynamics of recovered memory are powerful forces which can give people a sense of meaning in life".

There are powerful forces in the unconscious, a subject we will discuss briefly later on. Practitioners often have a too limited an understanding of the unconscious and are not always aware of the dangers. When vulnerable people get in touch with the unconscious in therapy the results, on occasions, can be *negative* rather than positive.

I can elucidate such a thing happening because my story, which did not involve accusations of sexual abuse, is different from the more usual false memory story and particularly noticeable were powerful emotions. What was taking place was exceptionally confusing at first, but in time as I learnt much more, what had happened became very revealing. The accuser was my wife who went to a psychotherapist.

The effect the therapy had on her, very early on, was simply to wipe out the whole emotional dimension of our marriage. Quite simply the loving relationship we had *disappeared*. I was not to fully grasp this immediately. Such a thing was so shocking it took me many months to discover this had actually happened. I simply could not get my head around it.

Yet it was true. In the area of our family life, both past and present, she became disastrously out of touch with reality. Her memory of our life togeth-

er became entirely distorted. It was not until about three years later, after a great deal of confusion, that I found out what, *from a clinical point of view*, had actually happened. I discussed the situation at length with no less than three professionals that I trusted.

Early on, after returning from a visit to her therapist, she said to me "You have never loved me and never cared for me". These words were so patently untrue, and so contrary to her normal personality, I simply thought she was having an odd turn and would get over it in a short while.

How wrong I was. A huge and strange anger emerged which was, on occasions and in due course, directed at others besides myself.

How could a loved one go to a psychotherapeutic session one day and come back a fundamentally changed and now disturbed person? We might be able to understand it if some powerful drug has been taken, but not if all that has happened is that an hour has been spent with someone skilled in the art of counselling and healing.

All this took place many years ago now and I have since done a considerable amount of research. *It has been something of a revelation*. In this article I will relate my findings very briefly. The marriage situation, incidentally, for all my strenuous endeavours, went from bad to worse and ended in a divorce. After the divorce, with my wife's delusional ideas now strongly confirmed by the continuing therapy, the situation for the children, dividing their time between both parents, became - to say the least - exceptionally worrying.

The Unconscious

It was Freud who was the key figure who brought to the Western world the scientific concept of the existence of an unconscious mind. He claimed that we are under the influence of unconscious forces of which we are unaware, that unconscious processes influence our thoughts and emotions. Early psychoanalysts believed, rightly it seems, that the discovery and investigation of what they called the unconscious could reveal many of the secrets and causes of madness and neurotic conditions. Madness (psychosis) was a state when the unconscious had so overwhelmed consciousness that consciousness had become fragmented.

But early psychoanalysts knew that investigating the unconscious - mostly through dreams - could also be risky. For the very advantage of such an investigation was that it could unlock in a person doors that normally would be tightly closed, and by so doing could reveal latent illness. In the development of 20th century psychology this was taken to be a most important and significant discovery. And it is one of the reasons why, in the early years, there was much discussion about whether all psychoanalysts should be medically qualified. For was it not possible, with proper training, that some analysts could be lay therapists? What generally emerged from this discussion was that if there were to be lay psychotherapists, they must work with, and have access to, an analyst who was medically trained.

Besides the known and potential benefits of investigating the unconscious for the purposes of healing, the very effectiveness of psychoanalysis posed at the same time a particular risk. If a patient was the type who could be described as psychologically vulnerable, the unconscious dimension of their mind/psyche could be in a semi-turbulent state. And if examined by an inadequately trained therapist, contents of the unconscious from a deep psychic level could erupt, sometimes quite suddenly, into consciousness. Repressed material could, at least to a certain degree, overwhelm the ego (i.e. the centre of consciousness), resulting in the surfacing of powerful feelings. These feelings could sometimes cause a patient to lose their orientation and their footing in outer reality.

The General Public

This particular clinical risk has never, as far as I know, been explained by professionals to the public at large. Nor are the very important and far-reaching issues it raises. The phenomenon has similarities to what can happen to certain individuals who become unbalanced after taking hallucinogenic drugs (cannabis, LSD). For these individuals the danger of these substances is that too much (including the possibility of a morbid aspect) of the unconscious is experienced all at once. (In the sixties a few psychiatrists did use LSD in their treatment. Its use was always controversial). On a few occasions these drugs can even trigger a latent psychosis – a subject quite often in the news. Such a disturbed state, of course, is extremely serious. But it can also be serious when

a lesser disturbance, a latent neurosis, erupts when a patient is in treatment.

Another Risk

The potency of certain contents in the unconscious always indicates a corresponding weakness and vulnerability in the conscious mind. But when a latent disturbance/neurosis erupts into consciousness, as described above, and depending on its seriousness, *the therapist may not always be aware that such a thing has happened*. Such an event may take place very early on in a treatment and, if this is the case, the therapist will not know the personality and circumstances of their client before therapy started. All the therapist will have to go on is the personality of the person now sitting before him or her. This is a disastrous situation. In such circumstances a whole course of treatment may be conducted on the basis of a wrong diagnosis and understanding.

We are now at a similar place as that of the coming into being - however it has happened - of false memories. The treatment may run on and on and no third party can do anything about it. For the remarkable and most unfortunate fact is that practitioner and client are in an extraordinarily strong position. A whole alternative history (wrong), all backed up by strong feelings, may be being created which is wretchedly influential, misleading and confusing to others. The far-too-long twenty-year history of the British False Memory Society tragically shows how true this is.

A Young Profession

One of the causes of the false memory disaster is due to professionals not progressing with *sufficient caution*. There is too much reliance on imperfect knowledge with, sadly, a corresponding huge impact on many people's lives. Evidence from third parties is avoided at all costs. There are not enough questions being asked by psychotherapists, not enough curiosity and too much presumption. The subject is excellently outlined in Tana Dineen's book *Manufacturing Victims, What the Psychology Industry is doing to People* (Constable 1999).

Psychoanalysis is one major area of the development of modern psychology. It concentrates on the *psychic* causes of mental illness. But there is a general failure to appreciate that the science of the human mind/psyche is still in its early stages.

This may seem strange to many, but it is true. All the important international research into the functioning of human memory in the last number of years, and its findings, which will be known to many BFMS members, bears witness to this.

Kevin - an innocent man

Exactly five weeks after Ben Herman was acquitted, Kevin appeared in Crown Court charged with seven counts of indecent assault and one count of attempted rape. All of the allegations were historical. I was introduced to Kevin and his wife, at a falsely accused carers and teachers (FACT) conference, a few weeks before Kevin was due to stand trial. We swapped telephone numbers and spoke the following day. Kevin, a self-effacing and unassuming man, was not in a good place. As is often the case, his wife was holding everything together. Kevin's accuser cannot be named for legal reasons. She had made a series of improbable allegations, flimsy in the extreme, in my opinion, but the police and Crown Prosecution Service deemed that there was enough 'evidence' to proceed. The adult complainant stated in her police statement that she had never had a sexual relationship with a man and her testimony appeared to mirror passages in a Mills and Boon novel which she had been reading.

Kevin and his wife run a small residential home and the complainant had lived with them for over 20 years. Their relationship with her had been cordial. However she may have been prone to fantasy. Her elderly mother provided a written statement for the defence. After the jury had acquitted Kevin - in a unanimous verdict - the prosecuting barrister shook their hands. The judge, with a smile on her face, said: "either sit down or get out of my court." It speaks volumes about the state of our criminal justice system that such a flimsy case can be prosecuted. In the previous newsletter, former *Rough Justice* and *Trial and Error* presenter, David Jessel, wrote about 'the making of a perfect storm.' Since then the number of individuals prosecuted for historic CSA has risen dramatically. Truly, there is no doubt that we have entered a new era where any allegation - no matter how weak - can result in the prosecution of innocent people. Whatever happened to the legal maxim 'innocent until proven guilty?'

IN THE NEWS

Ritual Sexual Abuse: The Anatomy of a Panic

Radio 4 recently broadcast a documentary about the myth of Satanic Ritual Abuse. David Aaronovitch, a journalist for *The Times*, traced the powerful intellectual influences behind what he sees as one of the most important cultural shifts of the past 40 years: from a society in which accusations of sexual abuse were wrongly ignored to one in which the falsely accused were crushed by a system where the mantra was "victims must be believed."

In the first of two programmes, Aaronovitch examined the role played by unproven psychoanalytic theories which, from the 1980s, spread from the world of therapists in Canada and the USA to social work, medicine and then to law enforcement in Britain. From the NSPCC to academia it was believed that children were being sexually abused in group Satanic rituals, which involved murder and animal sacrifice. The programme explored how these bizarre ideas took hold, how they were related to mistaken psychotherapeutic practises, and how they resonate still. It looked at the influence of four books which played a key role in influencing the intellectual and cultural climate. These are *Sybil*, *Michelle Remembers*, *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) and *The Courage to Heal*. **To listen to the broadcast, click on the link posted on the home page of the BFMS web site.**

Expert Evidence not allowed in the Courtroom

Journalist Christopher Booker (Sunday Telegraph, 8 August 2015) commented on the prosecution of 10 defendants (7 were acquitted) for alleged historic CSA: "There is not much about the conduct of the trial I can report for legal reasons. But I can say that defence counsel were not happy at the judge's ruling that they could not call as an expert witness the country's leading academic authority on "false recovered memories and how interviews can be led by persistent questions into recalling events which never happened." The trial took place in Norfolk.

LEGAL FORUM

SRA raises its head in the Family Court

Radio 4 also recently broadcast an excellent documentary about a landmark ruling from Mrs Justice Pauffley sitting in the Family Court at the Royal Courts of Justice (Strand, London). In P and Q (Children: Care Proceedings: Fact finding), Justice Pauffley delivered a very detailed judgement, extracts of which are quoted below. If you thought that the myth of Satanic Ritual Abuse (SRA) is a phenomenon of the past, then think again. From the Judgement:

‘In September 2014, lurid allegations of the most serious kind were drawn to the attention of the Metropolitan Police. In a variety of ways, it was suggested that P and Q were part of a large group of children from North London who had been sexually abused, made to abuse one another and that they had belonged to a satanic cult in which there was significant paedophile activity.

Specifically, it was said that babies were supplied from all over the world. They were bought, injected with drugs and then sent by TNT or DHL to London. The assertions were that babies had been abused, tortured and then sacrificed. Their throats were slit, blood was drunk and cult members would then dance wearing babies’ skulls (sometimes with blood and hair still attached) on their bodies. All the cult members wore shoes made of baby skin produced by the owner of a specified shoe shop.

Children, it was alleged, would be anally abused by adult members of the cult using plastic penises or “willies.”

Christchurch primary school in Hampstead was said to be where the “main action” occurred but at least seven other schools were named. East Finchley swimming pool was identified as one of the other meeting venues for the paedophile ring. Rituals were performed, so it was claimed, in an upstairs room at the McDonald’s restaurant where the “boss” allowed child sacrifice because he was a member of the cult. Human babies were pre-

pared, cooked in the ovens within a secret kitchen and then eaten by cult members.

Justice Pauffley was unequivocal in her assessment. ‘I am able to state with complete conviction’ she proclaimed, ‘that none of the allegations are true ... The claims are base-less. Those who have sought to perpetuate them are either evil and/or foolish. All the indications are that over a period of some weeks last summer, P and Q were forced ...to provide accounts of horrific events. The stories came about as the result of relentless emotional and psychological pressure as well as significant physical abuse. Torture is a strong word but it is the most accurate to describe what has been done to the children by Mr Christie and Ms Draper’ (mother and partner). The children were assaulted by Mr Christie by being hit with a metal spoon on multiple occasions over their head and legs, by being pushed into walls, punched and kicked. Water was poured over them as they knelt semi-clothed.’

Allegations of child abuse ought to be taken seriously and be subjected to robust investigation. Justice Pauffrey conducted a detailed and meticulous investigation which was evidenced-based. Her ruling was unequivocal. The allegations were baseless. The children made the allegations after suffering physical, emotional and psychological abuse.

This case should warn against leaping to precipitous conclusions. The fantastical allegations about SRA in this particular could have come straight out of the archive of the BFMS. This is a very important ruling which, I would argue, has potentially wide-reaching implications. Let us hope that future claims of SRA are subjected to the same level of rigorous investigation and fact-finding.

Carol Felstead - New Inquest

The inquest into the death of Carol Myers (nee Felstead) was quashed in the High Court, in the Royal Courts of Justice in December 2014. The case was heard before Mr Justice Ouseley and His Honour Judge Peter Thornton QC. The following extracts are quoted directly from a written transcript of the Judgement. I should add that we were Litigants in Person.

‘Mr Justice Ouseley: This is an application brought by David Felstead, the brother of Carole Patricia Myers, with the *fiat* of the Solicitor General, dated 4 March 2014. The applicant seeks an order under section 13 (1) (b) of the Coroners’ Act 1988 (as amended) to quash the inquisition into the death of Ms Myers and to direct that a fresh inquest be heard.

Ms Myers was found dead on 29 June 2005 at the age of 41. As a result of information received in an emergency telephone call, the police forced entry into her flat in Wandsworth, London, and found her dead in bed (NB Carol was actually found naked from the waist down, on top of the bed).

The investigation commenced by the Assistant Deputy Coroner for Inner West London was inconclusive. The coroner concluded the inquest on 12 August 2005 with an open verdict. The cause of death was given by the coroner as “unascertained.”

... Medical and scientific evidence about her death was inconclusive. The coroner heard evidence from a pathologist who found mild dilation of the left ventricle and congestion of the lungs, but was unable to establish the cause of death. There was a suggestion that Ms Myers may have suffered an electrolyte imbalance which had triggered a cardiac arrhythmia, but it was little more than a possibility.

Toxicology analysis was similarly inconclusive. It revealed the presence of a number of therapeutic drugs, but there was no evidence of any significant or dangerous overdose. She was cyanosed. There was no suicide note or any other evidence of contemporary suicidal ideation. With a nursing background, she would have been apparently well aware of when she needed medical help.

There was no finding that Ms Myers actually died on the day she was found, in view of the cyanosis.

The applicant now seeks a fresh inquest into his sister’s death. He puts forward a number of grounds, the first of which is presented on the basis of “the discovery of new facts or evidence,” one of the bases upon which it may be just to hold a new inquest pursuant to section 13 (1) (b).

The principal point concerns a Dr Fleur Fisher, a former clinician who had years before treated Ms

Myers... She has described herself as the “next of kin of Ms Myers and “executor” of her estate. Dr Fisher was not called to give evidence at the inquest.

The point arises in this way. At around the time of death of Ms Myers, it was Dr Fisher who made the 999 emergency call, at 3.14 pm. In this significant call, she told the police that she was a friend of Ms Myers, and had serious concerns for her welfare, and that she might have taken a drug overdose. Dr Fisher added that they had been unable to reach Ms Myers by telephone and that Ms Myers would be in the bedroom at the rear of Ms Myers’ property. It was as a result of this call that the police went to the flat and forced entry.

At the time of the inquest, this 999 call was said by a police witness to have been made by a “friend” of Ms Myers, as she was concerned for her friend ... No reference was made at the inquest to Dr Fisher.

Subsequent to the inquest, enquiries by the family revealed that this call had, indeed, been made by Dr Fisher. Enquiries to the coroner also revealed a letter from the coroner dated 18 October 2006, that this “initial informant” had described herself to the coroner’s officer as the “next of kin,” stating there was no family to contact... Dr Fisher also provided a photograph for the coroner for identification purposes.

In addition, the “friend”, Dr Fisher, had provided to the coroner’s officer a document (allegedly written by Ms Myers) in which she claimed she had been sexually abused as a child, referring to ritual satanic abuse both by her family and others. This document was subsequently given by the coroner to the family. Dr Fisher also made arrangements for cremation ...

In my judgement, some of this is potentially material evidence which, if available at the time of the inquest, could have made a difference to the coroner’s decision ... At the very least there should have been, and now can be, enquiry into the reasons for the 999 call by Dr Fisher, and whether she knew or suspected that Ms Myers may have taken an overdose and, if so, why.

There should be exploration of what Dr Fisher ... knew about the deceased’s health and state of mind shortly before her death, and of her behaviour. She may have been the last person to have had contact with Ms Myers before her death. I am

therefore satisfied, as a result of new facts and evidence, that it is necessary and desirable in the interests of justice under section 13 (1) of the Coroners' Act 1988 (as amended) that another inquest should be held.

This application is not resisted by the Senior Coroner for the Inner West London Coroner area or by the Coroner who conducted the inquest. They agree that an order should be made for a fresh inquest ...

In those circumstances, this application is granted and the inquisition is quashed. There will be a new inquest in this investigation as soon as possible.'

Since the application to quash the Inquest was granted, there have been two pre-inquest review hearings (PIRHs), in the Royal Courts of Justice. A provisional date for a full Inquest hearing has been set for 30 September 2015. However, Dr Fiona Wilcox, Senior Coroner for Inner West London has stated, in Court, that identification photographs are now missing; all Scene of Crime (SOCO) photographs are missing. To date, witness statements have not been provided. In the last PIRH, the coroner stated that if witness statements are not forthcoming, she will use her coronial powers to issue warrants, backed up with powers of arrest.

Writing or up-dating your will?

An estranged daughter has overturned her deceased's mother's wish to cut her out of her will. Melita Jackson left £486,000 to three animal charities. The Court of Appeal, overturned her will, awarding the claimant, Heather Illott £164,000 ruling that her mother's will was "unreasonable, capricious and harsh." Their relationship broke down when Illott left home, aged 17.

The judges ruled in favour of the daughter on the grounds that she had no pension provision and 5 children to care for, it was therefore necessary to make provision from her mother's estate for her future maintenance.

Illott contested the will utilising the Inheritance (Provision for Family Dependents) Act 1975.

The ruling is a source of considerable debate within the legal profession. It is a landmark ruling that may now open the floodgates for challenging a will. It may now be easier for estranged children to lodge a claim against their parents' estate even

when they were held jointly responsible for the failure of reconciliation. It will still be possible to disinherit children but parents may have to demonstrate a valid connection with their beneficiaries. James Anderson, a solicitor representing the animal charities, commented: "This is a worrying decision for anyone who values having the freedom to choose who will receive property when they die." In this case, the mother did not appear to have any connection with the animal charities. In the light of this ruling, it may be necessary to state clearly (eg in a written document which should be kept alongside your will) the reasons for disinheriting your children and leaving your estate to another beneficiary. **It is important that you seek the advice of your solicitor.**

Sonae legal case - High Court rejects £100 million compensation claim

A Judge has rejected a £100 million compensation claim in a significant ruling in the High Court. The claim arose following a fire at the Sonae wood chip factory in Kirby in 2011. After the fire, over 16,000 people claimed to have suffered breathing problems, headaches or eye and skin irritation. Mr Justice Jay delivered a robust assessment of the mass action: "In my judgement, there are serious weaknesses in the claimant's overall case which I need to make explicit. The case is severely damaged by the delay in bringing these claims and the absence of any contemporaneous evidence."

The judge was highly critical of GT Law and Walter Barr Solicitors who represented the claimants.

He said that the firms "preyed on human susceptibility," ruling that the evidence presented was "vague, impressionistic" and "imprecise. Recall bias is always an issue in scientific research based on retrospective evidence, and this phenomenon is hugely magnified when one brings into the equation the obvious corollaries of the medical-legal component.

Human beings are naturally susceptible and suggestible, particularly if they are made to believe that they form part of a coherent group with shared experiences, and if they risk none of their own resources in bringing a claim.

The standard-form questionnaires asked a series of leading questions. Many of the questionnaires examined in the context of the test claimants were shown to be exaggerated, calling into question the objectivity and integrity of the whole process.

It proved not very difficult to recruit willing claimants to the group, not least because there was a lot of ill-feeling in the neighbourhood directed towards Sonae, and many people genuinely believed that they must have been harmed in some way.

Had 16,000 people really suffered symptoms of the severity claimed, one would surely have seen evidence of complaints to newspapers and to the local council, increases in GP attendances, and some contemporary record of the problem. The legal process preyed on human susceptibility and vulnerability, and the rest is history.”

The ruling is of much significance. In a climate where ‘complainants’ are now referred to as ‘victims’ and the criminal justice system is increasingly dealing with historic allegations of child sexual abuse, Mr Justice May’s ruling is a sober - and timely - reminder that allegations are not evidence. This case demonstrates, moreover, that a high volume of allegations does not necessarily guarantee that allegations are more likely to be true. In the case of historic allegations, where there is likely to be no forensic evidence, it is paramount that rigorous, objective, evidence-based investigations are implemented.

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Date for your Diary

**BFMS AGM—9 April 2016,
London**

Professor Christopher French

It gives me great pleasure to announce that the keynote speaker at the 2016 AGM is Professor Christopher French. Chris is professor of anomalistic psychology at Goldsmiths University and a member of our Scientific and Professional Advisory Board. Chris has published widely on the subject of false memory. He writes a regular science column for the Guardian Online and Chris has appeared in a number of television and radio programmes including Heart of the Matter, Everyman, All in the Mind and Timewatch.

Dr Peter Naish

I’m also delighted to announce that Dr Peter Naish, the chair of our Scientific and Professional Advisory Board, is confirmed as a speaker. Peter is a senior lecturer in cognitive psychology at the Open University. He is the chair of the British Society of Clinical and Academic Hypnosis. In a varied career, Peter has undertaken academic research and worked for the Home Office and for the Ministry of Defence. He has appeared on numerous television and radio programmes, discussing hypnosis, in the UK and abroad.

BFMS Website

Work has now begun on creating a new website, utilising improved technological advances. Traffic to the site has increased significantly over the last 12 months, with around 500 unique visitors logging onto the site each week. The new site will have a dedicated section on the science of false memory with an overview of relevant research. We will be able to add links direct to Amazon books. There is a plethora of book reviews in previous newsletters and we can utilise these on the website. Do let us know if you would like to write a review for the site.

Overseas False Memory Societies

Please feel free to write or phone if you have relatives in these countries who would like to receive local information. The American and Australian groups produce newsletters.

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The Scientific and Professional Advisory Board provides BFMS with guidance and advice concerning future scientific, legal and professional enquiry into all aspects of false accusations of abuse. Whilst the members of the board support the purposes of BFMS as set out in its brochure, the views expressed in this newsletter might not necessarily be held by some or all of the board members. Equally, BFMS may not always agree with the views expressed by members of the board.

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