
Exploring the Lines of Jane Doe's Picture of Pain

Judith Armstrong

University of Southern California

I saw Corwin and Olafson's remarkable set of videotapes when I attended the 1996 meeting of the International Society of Traumatic Stress Studies. During the spirited discussion that followed, I shared some ideas on the developmental questions this case raised for me, and I welcome the opportunity to put some of these in writing at this time.

Although it is true that an article cannot fully capture the emotional impact of the videotape, Corwin and Olafson's annotated transcription of the videotapes of Jane Doe presents an array of material and ideas that manage to carry considerable emotional power (Corwin and Olafson, 1997 [this issue]). This comes from the clear importance of the data, as well as from the fact that interpretations of the data are not presented as undebatable fact, as has been so often the case in the discovered memory controversy, but rather as ideas in progress to be shared with scientific modesty. What a relief.

The focus of this commentary will be on the most intellectually and emotionally compelling portion of the videotape—the moment when, at age 17, Jane appears to remember abuse by her mother. I will not focus on the content of her discovered memory, although this aspect of the data poses many interesting and thorny issues, such as the grafting of a new memory of being photographed onto Jane's earlier report of being digitally penetrated. As important as this is, I believe the most unexpected aspect is gathered by examining the form of Jane's discovered memory.

As Jane, at age 17, searches to remember her abuse at age 6, she begins with visual images of the interview room and of the clothes that were worn. Corwin and Olafson alert us to the fact that at this point her memory appears to be organized in sensory form. As her discovered memory emerges, Jane, who is clearly an intelligent and observant rememberer, appears to be translating her sensory images into words. In her efforts to understand and share her memory, Jane herself gives us an important commentary on the form her memory takes. As Putnam (1997 [this is-

sue]) notes, Jane makes a distinction between remembering the abuse and remembering that the abuse "happened." She makes it clear that her memory now is of the abuse happening. The sensations that comprise Jane's "happening" memory appear to be curiously fused. She describes her feeling of physical pain as a visual picture. Developmentally speaking, Jane's feeling-picture is probably a *synesthesia*, wherein one bodily sensation produces and is merged with another. Although as listeners we may struggle to logically comprehend this undifferentiated sensory experience, Jane's "picture of pain" has a capacity to arouse our emotional attunement with her because, as Putnam notes, we experience her sensory bridging as an intense poetic metaphor.

While Jane is having this emotional, visual, visceral, synesthetic experience, she is apparently standing back from it a bit. She uses her adult intellect to comment on the frustrating limits of her pain picture—on what it does not allow her to see. Eckman's (1997 [this issue]) visual analysis of her behavior enables us to understand that there may also be a defensive process at work that is limiting what she is seeing. We understand from Jane's description of her picture that it centers on only one aspect of the situation. This narrow focus is static, so that she cannot move her internal camera to see her mother's face. The picture gives her no information about how to view her mother's motivation. Jane struggles with the fact that she cannot determine whether the hurt was intended or a chance mishap.

As a developmental psychologist, I am struck by the way in which the form of Jane's memory (but not her commentary on her memory) parallels the largely perceptual thinking of the preoperational child as described in Piagetian theory (Flavell, 1977). Like Jane's image, preoperational thinking is often visual, static, and focused on a single element that is not coordinated with other aspects of the situation. Dif-

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ferent perspectives and the role of chance are not taken into account. On the other hand, as a trauma researcher and clinician, I am also aware that the sensory-emotional form of Jane's memory typifies the amygdala-like storage qualities characteristic of poorly remembered trauma (van der Kolk, McFarlane, & Weisaeth, 1996). Regardless, Jane's memory appears to be organized in a developmentally early fashion.

Imagine for a moment that we had only this single memory from 17-year-old Jane, plus her records indicating likely childhood abuse. We might conclude that Jane's rediscovered memory of the trauma had been developmentally arrested at the time it was formed because it was so upsetting that she could not fully assimilate and coordinate the memory with the rest of her ideas. In fact, the videotape of Jane at age 6 clearly shows that this was not so! Corwin and Olafson's data indicate that at the time of her initial interview, and apparently for some time before and after, Jane had developed an integrated narrative of her abuse by her mother, with appropriate emotional and sensory components.

She could describe the experience verbally, in an organized fashion. She could communicate its emotional impact through her expressions of embarrassment and anger. She could illustrate the depth and force of her mother's digital penetration in visual-kinesthetic form by inserting her own finger far inside her closed fist. I know of no theory, whether it be suppression, repression, dissociation, isolation, cognitive avoidance, or simple forgetting, that would predict or easily explain how a memory that has been organized into a complex, rich, and multileveled narrative at an earlier point in time, and was then forgotten, avoided, or unacknowledged, becomes accessible again, but in a completely different and developmentally earlier form. It is as if the act of not recalling causes a regression in the structure of memory, turning memory development into a two-way street so that the child's memory is more advanced than the adult's.

When I considered discounting this data as, after all, a single and perhaps atypical case, I was reminded of Jonathan Shay's (1994) discussion of the need for veterans to express their traumatic experiences in poetry. Poetry is a synesthetic medium, bridging the verbal with the sensory and emotional. Indeed, we have many volumes attesting to the affinity traumatic expression has for poetry. To apply Schooler's (1997 [this issue]) evocative image, poetry presents an affective picture that both speaks and happens to the writer and reader. It seems possible that Jane Doe's picture of pain may point to some distinctive formal quality that characterizes discovered memories of trauma,

and to the process by which these elements are connected with more complex memory organization.

Jane's picture of pain also points us to new areas of scientific investigation. For example, is this affective-visual form of memory characteristic of all discovered memories, or is it indicative of traumas that, like Jane's, occur during preschool years? Is the distinction between the "happening" and the "knowing" aspects of a memory an earmark of trauma? Are there conditions that create or exacerbate this division, such as, in Jane's case, a parental demand to lie? What changes occur in the representation of trauma over time? Should we take preventive measures (e.g., follow-up narration checks) to track and impede the regression of memory? As Corwin and Olafson note in their introduction, we have much to learn about human memory.

The rediscovered memory controversy has tended to be expressed as a simple problem. It is often assumed that the answers, whether we like them or not, will be familiar to us. For example, memories can either be discovered or not. Either they correspond with the original incident or they do not. One of the more original and useful lessons from this critically important case study is that the issue of losing and regaining traumatic memory may constitute a deep problem, one with answers we cannot yet anticipate. From whichever camp of this controversy we originate, we ought to arrive at the territory of discovered memories with an attitude of humility in recognition of the limitations of our present theory and the extent of our ignorance of the field we are about to explore.

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Judith Armstrong, Ph.D., Clinical Associate Professor, University of Southern California; private practice, consulting and forensic psychology, Santa Monica, California. Correspondence concerning this commentary should be addressed to Judith Armstrong, Ph.D., 501 Santa Monica Blvd., Suite 402, Santa Monica, CA 90401; e-mail: jarmstro@almaak.usc.edu.