

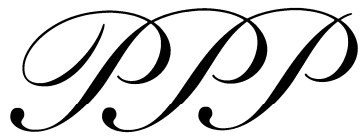


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TRAUMATIC BLOCKING AND BRANDOM'S OVERSIGHT

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ABSTRACT: Robert Brandom grants that an individual can know even if she cannot provide a reasoned defense of her non-accidentally true beliefs about the world. Brandom is wrong, I argue, to suggest that this phenomenon of super blindsightedness is rare or fringe. This oversight becomes clear when we turn from the eccentric example of the industrial chicken-sexer to the case of the survivor of sexual violence. What we have in this instance is a subject who, qua survivor, has certain reliably formed, that is, non-accidentally true, beliefs about which she has deep conviction, but which she cannot defend because she has blocked from memory the details of her traumatic experience. She is super blindsighted. In light of the universality and everydayness of sexual violence this phenomenon is, I conclude, run of the mill. Thus, even if Brandom is right that reliabilism cannot replace reason-giving from its central role in a cognitive practice, it takes up a vital role alongside it.

KEYWORDS: internalism, externalism, reliabilism, sexual violence, super blindsightedness

TYPICALLY, IF A SUBJECT *S* has a non-accidentally true belief that *p*, then *S* will be able to provide a justification for *p*, to stand behind *p* in the game of giving and taking of reasons. In these cases, according to the traditional understanding of knowledge as justified true belief, we conclude that *S* knows that *p*. But there are other cases where we want to say that *S* knows that *p*, even though *S* cannot defend her

belief that *p*, cases where justification, understood in this traditional evidentiary sense, drops out. These are cases where *S* has acquired *p* in a reliable way such that *S*'s belief that *p* is, again, non-accidentally true. That *S* can know that *p*, even though *S* cannot offer a reasoned defense of *p* is a consequence of the key insight of epistemic externalism. On this view, what counts is that a subject acquires her beliefs using reliable methods, say ones that tend to produce true beliefs, and not that she has a cognitive grasp of these methods. If this is right, it implies a radical restructuring of one or another of our fundamental epistemic notions, such as the standard evidentiary notion of justification, which is internalist. On this view, a subject must have a cognitive awareness of what makes her beliefs justified, such that she is able to give reasons for why she holds the beliefs that she does. But if what matters most is only that beliefs are acquired reliably, then we might want to broaden this internalist understanding of justification as evidentiary to incorporate reliabilism as a kind of justification such that, in some cases, *p* will be justified for *S* if *S* has acquired *p* using a reliable method. Alternatively, we can leave the notion of justification alone but grant, against orthodoxy, that it is not a necessary condition for knowledge.

Robert Brandom's insight into this epoch-making move by the externalist is to note that this choice is only forced on us in cases of the super blindsighted individual (Brandom 1998, 376). This individual is reliable and has a deep conviction about her reliably formed true belief, yet does not believe herself to be reliable. Pressure is applied on the traditional understanding of knowledge as justified true belief, in other words, only when a subject *S* cannot use her reliability as a reason for why she holds the belief that she does. For if *S* acquires *p* in a reliable way and *S* is able to see herself as using reliable methods, then, as Brandom notes, *S* can offer up these methods as a reason for why she holds the belief that *p* and justification, in the traditional evidentiary sense, is preserved.

It appears that Brandom, like myself, would prefer to beg the question on justification rather than on knowledge, and thus concedes that the super blindsighted cases are genuine instances of knowledge. But he cautions against overstating this result. Reliabilism, he argues, can never entirely displace reason-giving from its central role in a cognitive practice. Brandom is right about this and for the reason that he gives, which is that knowledge based on reliabilism without reasons—such as the case of the super blindsighted—is not possible as a global phenomenon, only as a local one (Brandom 1998, 378–381). In other words, it is not possible with respect to all the beliefs that we hold. Individuals who are never in a position to see themselves or others as forming beliefs reliably are more like thermometers than they are concept users in a cognitive practice.

But Brandom overestimates this result. He draws from it the conclusion that cases of the super blindsighted are rare; hence, his emphasis on the eccentric example of the industrial chicken-sexer who reliably sorts hatchlings into males and females without, apparently, any real understanding as to how she does it. Brandom claims that the super blindsighted cases are, like the chicken-sexer case, “delicate and special,” essentially “fringe phenomena” (Brandom 1998, 375; 381). This is wrong, and the bulk of this article is devoted to showing precisely why. Brandom's oversight is to miss just how unexceptional instances of the super blindsighted really are. This becomes clear

when we turn from the example of the industrial chicken-sexer to the case of the sexual abuse survivor. In the experience and aftermath of a traumatic event, the sexual abuse survivor formulates what become for her deeply held beliefs—some general, for instance about the kind of world that she lives in, and some specific, for instance about the character of her assailant. However, according to our best theoretical understandings of the post-traumatic experience, survivors of sexual abuse often have trouble accessing their own traumatic experiences, either initially or indefinitely, hence *a fortiori* cannot access them as a reason for why they hold the beliefs that they do. And even if we suppose that the survivor is able to recollect her traumatic experience, there are, as I discuss below, a variety of social and political factors that make it difficult for her to see it as the reliable method of belief acquisition that it is.

Thus, what we have in the case of the survivor of sexual abuse is a subject who, qua survivor, has certain reliably formed, that is, non-accidentally true beliefs about which she has deep conviction, but that, for one reason or another, she cannot defend. In what follows, I argue that this is a common state of affairs with sexual abuse survivors, whether we are talking about adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse, adult survivors of adult rape, or children survivors of sexual abuse. In light of what statistics tell us about the universality and everydayness of sexual violence, in particular against women and children, the phenomenon of super blindsightedness is, I conclude, run of the mill.

How much pressure does this put on Brandom's conclusion? Just enough. For even if we grant that reliabilism cannot replace reason-giving from its central role in a cognitive practice, the case of the sexual abuse survivor shows that knowledge without justification is no fringe phenomena. Quite the contrary; this case shows that it is common for an individual to know that *p* even if she cannot give reasons, or provide evidence, for why she believes that *p*. Thus, unless we are prepared to retract our concession that a reliably formed belief can count as knowledge even in the absence of reasoned defense, then we are going to be obliged to admit a key role for externalism alongside internalism as

a significant alternative to the justification component in a theory of knowledge. The recentering of epistemology from reasons to reliability is more tempting than Brandom supposes.

EPISTEMOLOGICAL INTERNALISM AND EXTERNALISM

In classical epistemology, “knowledge” is defined as justified true belief. By all accounts, if a subject *S* knows that *p*, then *S* must believe that *p* and *p* must be true. But a true belief is not enough to guarantee knowledge, as Plato long ago suggested, because that would allow for lucky guesses. To say that a subject *S* knows that *p* is to say that *S*'s belief that *p* is non-accidentally true. One way of understanding internalism and externalism is to see them as offering different ways of securing this third condition for knowledge.¹ Although there are important variations of both views among their proponents, on the standard internalist picture, this third component is characterized as a justification condition, where justification is seen as something to which the subject has a kind of special access. This special access is generally understood as both internal and infallible. The idea here is that whatever it is that justifies an individual's beliefs is accessible to that individual through reflection on her own mental state, and that state is one about which the subject cannot be wrong, it is “given.” Thus, the traditional foundationalist approach to justification is, for instance, internalist. For the foundationalist, the evidentiary connections that hold between basic beliefs and non-basic beliefs must be within the subject's viewpoint such that the subject has a cognitive grasp of them, and the strength of this connection, at least on the traditional view, must be airtight. But even if this connection is secure, unless there is a further infallible Cartesian-like connection from our mental state representations to the external world, there is no guarantee that our beliefs about the world are, if justified, also true. This setup thus allows for justified false beliefs about the world, an aspect of internalism that many advocates (e.g., Chisholm 1988) regard as a virtue of the theory.

This internalist conception of justification is regularly, although not necessarily, tied together with a deontic notion of justification, according to which we fulfill our duties as knowers by having justified beliefs. The idea here is that even if having a justified belief does not ensure that the belief is true, this is the most that we can ask of an agent, epistemically speaking. As responsible knowers, we have a duty to accept only those beliefs that we think are likely to be true, in virtue of our access to the evidentiary connections presented upon reflection. A more Brandomite way of putting the point is to say that we have a duty, qua knower, to accept only those beliefs that we are able to stand behind, those beliefs that we are prepared to defend in the game of giving and taking of reasons. On this account, then, to be justified is to be epistemically blameless. Thus, for any subject, mirroring the gap between having justified beliefs and having true beliefs is the gap between fulfilling our epistemic duties and having true beliefs. That is to say that a subject can be epistemically praiseworthy even if her beliefs about the world are false, which is again seen as a virtue of internalism by many of its advocates (e.g., Foley [1985]) thinks this gets the deontic notion of justification exactly right).

Because, on internalist accounts, justified beliefs are at best a kind of promissory note that our representations of the external world are veridical, internalism opens the door to general skeptical concerns. And with its failure to establish a necessary connection between truth and justification, internalism is also particularly susceptible to the well-known Gettier-type problems, which show that justified true belief is insufficient for knowledge (Gettier 1963). Not coincidentally, then, it was in the post-Gettier climate of the late 1960s that we saw the rise of externalist epistemologies. Externalism is alternatively put forward as a kind of justification or as a replacement for justification. The basic externalist idea picks up on the internalist notion that what we are looking for in a third condition for knowledge is a reason for thinking that our beliefs about the external world are true. Externalist accounts suggest that one good reason for thinking this is that our belief forming mecha-

nisms are *reliable*. On reliabilist accounts, there is an essential connection between a state of affair p and a subject's belief that p obtains, such that if p did not obtain the subject would not believe that p . This connection might be characterized as a counterfactual condition, for instance, whereby a process is reliable if it not only produces true beliefs in actual situations, but would also produce true beliefs in relevant counterfactual situations (Goldman 1976). What further distinguishes externalist accounts is the stipulation that the individual in question need not be aware of this connection. If it obtains—that is, if a belief was acquired using a reliable method—then this fact alone is a way of showing that the belief is non-accidentally true. In other words, reliable methods of belief acquisition are a reason to think that our beliefs are true, even if in particular cases a subject does not have a cognitive grasp of her own reliability and hence cannot cite it as a reason for why she holds the beliefs that she does.

Thus, reliable methods, like traditional justification, are a way of showing that a belief is not true by accident. This is why reliabilism is sometimes taken to be a form of justification; it expresses one kind of support relation that exists between a subject and her non-accidentally true beliefs. But because of the traditional tendency to tie together the notion of justification with the practice of reason-giving, I think it is better to consider reliabilism as an alternative to justification as what a true belief must have to count as knowledge. Indeed, it is precisely because reliabilism awards epistemic success to a subject even in cases where she cannot provide a reasoned defense of her beliefs that allows the phenomenon of super blindsightedness. As Brandom notes, in many cases reliabilism can be easily accommodated within the reason-giving tradition of justificatory internalism, specifically in situations when a subject can see herself as using reliable methods (Brandom 1998, 373). In these cases, the subject can cite these methods as a reason for her non-accidentally true beliefs about the world and justification, in the traditional evidentiary sense, is maintained. The revolutionary feature of reliabilist accounts of knowledge, the “founding insight” as Brandom calls it, is that reliabilism allows for epistemic success even

in cases where a subject cannot see that she has formed her beliefs reliably (Brandom 1998, 371). The subject in question is, thus, super blindsighted. This is the predicament of the industrial chicken-sexers who, as Brandom tells it, reliably sort hatchlings into males and females by inspecting them without having a hot clue as to how they do it. There is no explicit recipe that they learn, but with enough practice they apparently just catch on. It is thus a well-developed skill, but not one that is available through introspection. In fact, although the chicken-sexer suspects that she makes her discriminations according to visual signs, tests have shown that in fact they depend on olfactory ones. And not only does the chicken-sexer reliably discriminate between male and female chicks, but she has a strong conviction about which chicks are male and female, even though she cannot say exactly why.

Although the chicken-sexers respond blindly, and so have no access as to why they respond the way they do, they have learned to trust those responses. And because their beliefs about the sex of the chick are non-accidentally true, Brandom admits that these cases should count as genuine instances of knowledge—the reliable belief-forming process satisfies the third condition for knowledge. But Brandom argues that super blindsightedness (knowledge based on reliabilism without reasons) is not possible as a global phenomenon, that is, with respect to all the beliefs that we hold, but only as a local one. His reasons for this are compelling enough. He asks us to imagine a community of individuals who are deeply committed to their true beliefs about the world but who are never in a position to see themselves or others as forming beliefs reliably. Individuals like these, who are not able to access their reasons for why they hold the beliefs that they do, are not, according to Brandom, concept users or participants in cognitive game of giving and taking reasons. This is because they are not able to use their reliably formed beliefs inferentially, that is, as premises or conclusions in arguments, or to further draw out a set of corresponding entitlements and commitments. These individuals exhibit an appropriate response to stimuli, like thermometers or bulls charging at flapping red material, but they are unable to rely on their own responses.

It is for this reason that Brandom rightly concludes that the phenomenon of reliabilism without reasons is not possible globally, that is, with respect to all the beliefs that we hold. Where he goes wrong is with his further inference that cases of super blindsightedness are rare. As he puts it, "The examples of knowledge based on reliability without the possibility of offering reasons, which motivate the Founding Insight, are essentially fringe phenomena" (Brandom 1998, 381). Brandom goes from the perfectly good notion that reliabilism without reasons cannot entirely displace reason-giving from its central role in an epistemic practice to the mistaken conclusion that it is not a common phenomenon. This slip becomes clear when we turn from the case of the industrial chicken-sexer to the case of the sexual abuse survivor.

SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE

Brandom's oversight is to miss just how unexceptional instances of the super blindsighted are. As we shall see, this phenomenon is widespread in survivors of sexual abuse. In the experience and aftermath of a traumatic event, the survivor of sexual abuse formulates what become for her deeply held beliefs. Some of these beliefs are general—for instance, about the kind of world that she lives in—and some are specific—for instance, about the character of her assailant. These beliefs are reliably formed for a survivor through her own traumatic experience, as evidenced by the facts on sexual violence, in particular against women and children. However, as I discuss below, our best theoretical explanations of the posttraumatic experience suggest that survivors of sexual assault have a difficult time recollecting the details of the traumatic events that they experience. Depending on which interpretation of trauma we are looking at, the memory of the traumatic event might be forever repressed or only temporarily dissociated from. In either case, the event is not initially accessible to the trauma survivor, hence *a fortiori* not accessible to her as a reason for why she holds the beliefs that she does. And even if the survivor is eventually able to recollect the details of her traumatic experience, the picture of the world that it

presents is contrary to the one survivors encounter in a society that routinely denies the harsh realities of sexual violence against women and children. Thus, although the facts about sexual violence against women provide the evidence for the kinds of beliefs that arise in the aftermath of sexual violence, there are factors both internal and external to the survivor that undermine her ability to see herself as a reliable indicator of these facts. As we shall see, this is true with adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse, adult survivors of adult rape, and children survivors of sexual abuse. Thus, what we have in the case of the survivor of sexual abuse is a subject who, qua survivor, has certain reliably formed; that is, non-accidentally true beliefs about which she has deep conviction but that, for one reason or another, she cannot defend. Given the universality and everydayness of sexual violence, in particular against women and children, the phenomenon of super blindsightedness is entirely run of the mill.

In the aftermath of a traumatic event, the survivor of sexual assault's beliefs about the world can be dramatically altered. To start with, take the case of the adult survivor of adult rape. It is well known that after a traumatic event like rape, a victim's emotions and physiological state are volatile as she undergoes intense personal suffering. The standard view in psychiatric medicine today is that this condition may, depending on a number of factors (including but not limited to the severity of the attack), develop into posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).² I discuss various theoretical interpretations of PTSD shortly, but this prolonged symptomatology is only one side of the aftermath of psychological trauma—what Brison (2001) calls the "shattered self." Less well known but just as significantly, the experience of sexual violence also shatters a victim's worldview, that is, her beliefs about the world. As I have argued elsewhere, after a traumatic event a survivor experiences a kind of cognitive dissonance as she is faced with a whole new set of beliefs that have cropped up, often very suddenly, and that are inconsistent with previously held beliefs (Freedman 2006). Over a period of time—a marriage, a date, 15 minutes—the adult victim of a sexual assault learns certain loathsome facts about the world and the possibilities

of human behavior, and a worldview is destroyed. Typically, the kinds of beliefs that get shattered in an act of sexual violence are centered on themes of safety and trust, in relationships and in the world.³ So, for instance, before an attack the survivor of sexual violence may believe that the world is basically fair; that she is capable of protecting herself against serious harm; that her husband is not a violent man; that strangers can be trusted; and that the world is a safe place.⁴ Beliefs like these are often difficult to sustain in the aftermath of a traumatic event. The evidence that seemed to support them, gathered over years of safe living, is quickly overturned. Like a Popperian conjecture, the idea that the world is basically safe is, for the survivor, falsified in one bold test. Thus, after the experience of extreme violence, survivors struggle with the question, “What am I to believe?,” and in some cases the answer to this question leads to a full-fledged rejection of the old belief set in favor of a new one, namely, that the world is not basically fair; that she is not capable of protecting herself against serious harm; that her husband is a violent man; that strangers cannot be trusted; and that the world is not a safe place.

The evidence for this new set of beliefs is found in the universality of the everydayness of sexual violence, in particular against women and girls. As Amnesty International states in its 2004 report *It's in Our Hands: Stop Violence Against Women*, violence against women is “the most outrageous human rights scandal of our times,” and sexual violence against women is universal (Amnesty International 2004, iii; 6). This is certainly true in war-torn societies, where rape is a common practice of warfare, used by both governments and armed groups (this is what Allen [1996] has called “genocidal rape”). And rape is no less systemic a crime in countries during times of peace. For example, as Amnesty International reports, in Turkey 35.6% of women have experience marital rape “sometimes” and 16.3% have experienced it “often” (2004, 34). In Canada, 12% of young women aged eighteen to twenty-four reported at least one incident of violence by an intimate partner in a year period, and one out of two women, or 51%, have experienced physical or sexual violence since the age of sixteen (Johnson 1996;

Statistics Canada 1993). And the picture is even bleaker in less developed countries. So, according to a recent World Health Organization report, women living in the Third World and women living in poverty suffer disproportionately (2002, 99). Indeed, studies have shown that Aboriginal women in Canada—a demographic group whose living conditions are often likened to those in the Third World—experience violence of a “non-incident” sort; that is, not just one rape or assault or battering, but a lifetime of it. Thus, as the Mohawk writer Patricia Monture-Angus has noted, pointing to statistics is really doing a disservice in these cases, since they almost disguise what she calls “the utter totality of the experiences of violence that Aboriginal women face” (Monture-Angus 1995, 170–171).

The facts on sexual violence against women, as evidenced by these statistics, go to show that the beliefs formed in the aftermath of sexual violence are indeed reliably formed, that is, likely to be true.⁵ In other words, the world is not a basically fair or safe place for women, and the notion that women (or children) can protect themselves against serious harm and are immune to acts of unspeakable violence—what Brison calls the “myth of our own immunity”—is indeed a myth (Brison 2001, 9). Moreover, these new beliefs are ones that survivors generally have a deep conviction about. However, survivors of sexual violence often fail to see themselves as reliable reporters of their own traumatic experiences. They doubt their own reliability, and are often not prepared to stand behind their deeply held, non-accidentally true beliefs about the world. These survivors of sexual violence are, thus, super blindsighted.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF TRAUMA

Why is this group of survivors not always able to see themselves as being reliable reporters of their own traumatic experience? There are a number of good explanations for this, and the first is connected to the issue of access. In the language of folk psychology, it is often said that survivors of traumatic events “block out” the details of their traumatic experience. The idea here is that psychological blocking is caused by the fact that

the memory of the attack is too distressing for the survivor to consciously process and recall. The history of trauma turns up some sophisticated theories about why exactly this is the case. In her genealogical study of the concept of trauma, for instance, Ruth Leys dates this interpretation of the posttraumatic experience back to the famed Parisian neuropsychiatrist Jean-Martin Charcot. Starting with Charcot, trauma has been understood as an experience of a kind of hypnotic imitation. On this model of trauma—the “mimetic account,” as Leys calls it—a traumatic experience shatters the individual’s cognitive and perceptual capacities in the moment of trauma, making the traumatic scene literally inaccessible to the survivor for recollection (Leys 2000, 9). On this view, the traumatic scenario overwhelms the brain’s neural receptors with the result that the trauma victim is unable to witness what is happening to her. As Leys puts it:

From the beginning trauma was understood as an experience that immersed the victim in the traumatic scene so profoundly that it precluded the kind of specular distance necessary for cognitive knowledge of what had happened. (2000, 9)

The implication of this interpretation of the posttraumatic experience is that the details of the traumatic event are literally inaccessible to the subject, who is thus not able to represent it, either to herself or to others. A less extreme view—what Leys calls the “antimimetic theory”—has it that, in the moment of trauma, the victim distances herself from her own traumatic experience; she splits, or dissociates. Consequently, she ends up witnessing her attack, but as a kind of spectator. The traumatic memory of the scene is not integrated into conscious memory, but is instead split off from conscious recall. Thus, on this view, the traumatic scene is in principle accessible to the subject, although the process of remembering it and representing it to others can be long and difficult, because it involves reintegrating the unconscious traumatic memory with the conscious memory.

Although Charcot was interested in the neurological theory of hysteria, Pierre Janet, a one-time student of Charcot’s, picked up on this notion of psychic splitting from oneself and thus paved the way for the psychologization of trauma. As

Hacking notes, Janet’s doctoral dissertation on *Psychological Automatism* (1889) was the first systemic treatise on psychological trauma as the cause of hysteria (Hacking 1995, 191). In that dissertation and in his other writings on hysteria, Janet characterizes the traumatic experience as a kind of dissociation, one that can be studied experimentally and treated through hypnotism. In their study of Janet’s legacy van der Hart and Friedman claim,

Janet concluded his psychological analysis of hysteria with the tentative definition that it is a form of mental dissolution characterized by the tendency to a permanent and complete splitting (*dédoublement*) of the personality. (1989)

Janet’s view on the importance of dissociation in trauma fell out of favor at the end of the nineteenth century when hypnosis fell into disrepute, but Freud too picked up this idea, at least for a brief time in his early work with Josef Breuer, in their *Studies on Hysteria* (1895). There, he talks about dissociation and the splitting of consciousness, crediting Janet (Breuer and Freud 1895/1937, 8), and of the repression of the origin of trauma. In that text Freud also notes the ensuing lack of confidence displayed by the victim in her own ability to remember the scene of the trauma. As he put it,

Those ideas which originate in the deepest layer, and from the nucleus of the pathogenic organization, are recognized by the patient as reminiscences only with the greatest difficulty. Even after everything is accomplished, when the patients are overcome by the logical force and are convinced of the curative effect accompanying the emergence of this idea—I say even if the patients themselves assume that they have thought “so and so,” they often add, “but to *recall*, that I have thought so, I cannot. (Breuer and Freud, 1895/1937, 228)

When Freud famously abandoned his seduction theory, with it went his interest in the traumatic origins of neuroses. But the debates were revived in the 1920s with the almost epidemic-like appearance of shell shock, and for a time the idea that traumatic events shock the survivor into a dissociative state became a popular diagnosis of war neurosis. And although interest in trauma waned after World War I, it was ignited again after the Vietnam War and has been a hot topic ever since (see Leys 2000; Young 1995).

There is much debate today over the proper conceptualization of trauma and of the traumatic memory, and competing theoretical interpretations are rich with implications about recovery from the traumatic experience. Recently, for instance, the trauma theorist and physician Bessel van der Kolk has argued, in the spirit of Janet, that the traumatic memory is literally cut off from normal memory, rendering it unavailable for normal recollection (1996, 279–302). The literary postmodernist critic Cathy Caruth agrees with van der Kolk and argues further that a literal representation of the trauma can never be known or represented, only returned to in “flashbacks” (1995, 151–153). An obvious problem with this interpretation is that it throws into doubt the veracity of the trauma survivor’s recollection,⁶ whereas if the memory of the assault is only temporarily repressed or dissociated from, then in principle it can be recovered, even if the process of remembering it and representing it to oneself and others can be long and difficult.⁷

Do survivors dissociate in the moment of trauma, do they split, as Janet long ago suggested? Is the traumatic scene repressed and held in the unconscious memory? Is it in principle unavailable to the trauma survivor, or principally accessible, but only after a therapeutic recollecting and integration of the traumatic memory? The emergence of brain imaging technologies and other developments in cognitive neuroscience in the last few decades may one day help us to find an answer to these difficult questions. Indeed, these developments might also help us to better understand precisely how a memory that is inaccessible might nevertheless deeply impact our beliefs about the world.⁸ In the meantime, I favor the “antimimetic view”; for my purpose here, however, that is beside the point. For whatever interpretation of the posttraumatic experience we prefer, only a naïve understanding of trauma would posit the traumatic memory as something that is readily accessible to the trauma survivor. Rather, even if they do not have it exactly right, our best theoretical explanations of the posttraumatic experience draw a complex picture that suggests that the memory of the trauma is unavailable to the survivor, either initially or indefinitely.

BARRIERS TO ACCESS: INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL

Thus, what in the language of folk psychology we call “blocking” provides one good reason why adult survivors of adult sexual abuse are unable to see themselves as reliably forming beliefs, qua survivor, in the aftermath of a traumatic event. And in addition to this, which we might characterize as internal to the survivor, there are other external factors, primarily social and political, that give survivors further reason to doubt their own reliability. For even if it is the case that individuals can access the details of their own traumatic experience, either initially or some time after the traumatic event, the picture of the world that it paints is one that is routinely dismissed by our contemporary culture that keeps well hidden the universality of sexual violence against women. Indeed, despite increased awareness and public concern over the last few decades about violence against women, the everydayness of sexual violence remains a social secret. It is therefore no surprise that women tend to doubt their own credibility as reliable reporters of sexual violence. Indeed, as one reviewer of this paper suggested, the inconsistency between what survivors experience and the public narrative provides an even further incentive for survivors to dissociate, as a strategy to combat the dissonance and distress brought on by the conflicting stories.

Both these internal and external factors are multiplied when we turn from the case of the adult survivor of adult sexual violence to the cases of the adult survivor of childhood sexual abuse and the child survivor of sexual abuse. For instance, in the case of adults who were sexually abused as children, compounding the problem of blocked memory is the general problem of memory failure. That is, even if the memory of a childhood traumatic event was at one time part of the child’s conscious memory, there is a good chance that as the years and decades pass she will forget the details of the event, even though she continues to have strongly held beliefs about various aspects of it. In this case, the survivor might have some inclination that something happened to her, but she is unlikely to be able to say precisely what.

So, for example, take the case of the woman who refuses to remain alone in a room with her father because she is convinced that it would be unsafe, even though she cannot say exactly why.

And the likelihood of children survivors of sexual abuse to see themselves as reliably forming beliefs about the world, qua survivor, is even more remote. In the first place, children have fewer cognitive skills than adults and are thus less capable of constructing for themselves a coherent account of the traumatic event. Moreover, according to the standard psychological story, abused children face the formidable task of needing to find a way to develop a basic trust and safety with caretakers who are fundamentally untrustworthy and unsafe. As Herman tells this story, the child's need to believe in the goodness of her parents is a psychological adaptive strategy that trumps the reality of the abuse she undergoes (1992, 96–114). Children go to great lengths, both consciously and unconsciously, to preserve their faith in their parents and thus absolve their abusers of responsibility, because the alternative is psychologically intolerable for them. Thus, as Herman states:

All of the abused child's psychological adaptations serve the fundamental purpose of preserving her primary attachment to her parents in the face of daily evidence of their malice, helplessness, or indifference. To accomplish this purpose, the child resorts to a wide array of psychological defenses. By virtue of these defenses, the abuse is either walled off from conscious awareness and memory, so that it did not really happen, or minimized, rationalized, and excused, so that whatever did happen was not really abuse. Unable to escape or alter the unbearable reality in fact, the child alters it in her mind. (1992, 102)

As for external factors, as soon as children reach their teenage years, an age that enables us to comfortably make knowledge attributions about them, they have already been taught the dominant public narrative that fathers do not hurt their children and that home is a safe haven. Moreover, as young adults they have yet to acquire much confidence and trust in themselves. It is thus easy to imagine that if an adult's credibility is undermined by the prevalent picture of a world free from sexual abuse, then the situation is even more challenging for this group of young adults.

KNOWLEDGE WITHOUT JUSTIFICATION

In all of these cases, we have a subject who, qua survivor, has certain reliably formed (non-accidentally) true beliefs about which she has deep conviction, but that she cannot defend. Like the chicken-sexer whose olfactory sense tells her which chick is male, in the case of the survivor of sexual abuse who, for example, refuses to remain alone in a room with her father, there are good reasons for her deeply held beliefs about the world, qua survivor, it is just that she cannot see them. She is super blind. And, as we have seen, if the phenomenon of super blindsightedness is common in adult survivors of adult sexual abuse, it is even more pervasive in the case of children and adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Thus, however we interpret Brandom's use of the word "fringe," whether he means uncommon, or peripheral, or on the edges of the mainstream, this way of characterizing super blindsightedness is misleading. The phenomenon is not fringe but rather, given the prevalence of sexual violence against women and children, widespread.

Thus, although Brandom allows for knowledge based on reliability without reasons, he fails to see just how much he is conceding to the externalist. In fact, as it turns out, there are whole populations of individuals who, with respect to some of their core beliefs about the world, know even though they cannot defend those beliefs. If this conclusion is an uncomfortable one, then it is open to us to retract the concession that a subject can know that *p*, even though she cannot defend *p*. But I think this would be exactly the wrong response. Indeed, the case of the survivor of sexual abuse shows us precisely why we ought to reconfigure the notion of knowledge so that justification is no longer a necessary component of it. For what we have here is an individual who has not just a non-accidentally true belief about the world, but one that she has come to trust. This individual, in other words, has non-accidentally true beliefs that she is rightly convinced are true, even though she cannot say exactly why. We might think that this is cognitively irresponsible of her, but we do not want to beg the question on knowledge by

presupposing epistemic responsibility. The point is that the individual in question has achieved a measure of epistemic success, and our theory of knowledge should recognize this. For it to do so, we need to concede that justification is not a necessary condition for knowledge, that reliabilism is an alternative to justification, and, when combined with true belief, a sufficient condition for knowledge. In making this move, we open the door to epistemic externalism as an important counterpart to internalist justification as a way of securing knowledge.

SUPER BLINDSIGHTEDNESS: LOCAL VERSUS GLOBAL

This analysis illustrates why we should agree with Brandom that we can have knowledge based on reliabilism without reasons, while at the same time showing what is wrong with his characterization of super blindsightedness. There are a lot of people who are super blindsighted with respect to many of their core beliefs about the world. Still, Brandom is right that no one individual can be super blindsighted with respect to all her beliefs about the world, but only a subset of them. As he argues, people who are never in a position to recognize themselves as reliable indicators of belief are less like concept users in a cognitive practice than they are like thermometers, appropriately responding to stimuli. In some sense, then, despite the universality of the phenomenon, for any given individual the incidence of super blindsightedness must be a local, not global, occurrence. That said, there is an important difference between the reliable responses of the survivor of sexual abuse and the reliable responses of the thermometer; the thermometer will never be in the position of defending its responses. In the case of the survivor of sexual abuse, however, there is at least the possibility that she can enter into the cognitive game of giving and taking of reasons. Even if, in other words, she cannot use her beliefs inferentially at time t , there is the possibility that at time t_1 she will be able to use them to draw out a further set of entitlements and commitments. This, of course, depends on the availability of the traumatic memory to the survivor. If that memory is accessible after

a period of therapeutic recollecting, then there is the possibility that she will one day be able to see herself as a reliable indicator of belief. Until that time, the rest of us participants in the cognitive game of giving and taking of reasons can use the individual's reliable responses inferentially, just as we would the thermometer's response to temperature.

CONCLUSION

The main insight in Brandom's paper that is worth preserving, and that goes some distance to resolving the stalemate between internalism and externalism, is that an individual can know even when she cannot provide a reasoned defense of her non-accidentally true beliefs about the world. Brandom's oversight is to think this will result in a small number of cases of knowledge. But just because an individual cannot be super blindsighted with respect to all the beliefs that she holds does not entail that the phenomenon is fringe. The discussion of psychological trauma and its impact on survivors of sexual abuse speaks to the universality of the case of the individual who has non-accidentally true beliefs about which she has deep conviction but that, for one reason or another, she is not in a position to defend. "Knowledge" is a success term, a compliment we pay to the survivor of sexual abuse who knows that she ought to stay away from her uncle, even though she cannot say exactly why. The case of the survivor thus teaches us something important, namely, that justification is not a necessary condition for knowledge.

Furthermore, the discussion of the survivor of sexual abuse shows that a theory of knowledge, if it is to recognize the epistemic success of those individuals who have reliably acquired beliefs about the world, must open the door to reliabilism as a sufficient condition for knowledge, when combined with true belief. If we accept justificatory internalism as an alternative sufficient condition for knowledge, when combined with true belief, we are left with two ways of securing knowledge, and thus two ways of being a good knower. Individuals can achieve a measure of epistemic success by virtue of their non-accidentally true beliefs about the world. Or, they can

achieve a measure of epistemic success by virtue of the fact that they are prepared to stand behind their beliefs and defend them to others. Is one of these routes more significant, epistemically? I am not sure what the answer to this question is. From an epistemic perspective, it is not obvious why it is important to be able to give reasons for one's true beliefs, which is not to say that it is not important at all. Perhaps, from an ethical perspective, this is what really matters—that is, to be able to participate in a cognitive community in a responsible way and to be prepared to defend our beliefs to other people. Perhaps it is for this reason, and not general skeptical concerns, that achieving warranted assertability is more important than achieving knowledge. But these issues are for another time. My aim here has been to show that the phenomenon of super blindsightedness is run of the mill, and thus even if reliabilism cannot replace reason-giving from its central role in a cognitive practice, we must nevertheless admit a key role for externalism alongside internalism as a significant alternative to the justification component in a theory of knowledge. The recentering of epistemology from reasons to reliability is more tempting than Brandom supposes.

Notes

1. A number of articles on this topic have been collected in the recently edited volume by Kornblith (2001), although missing from this set is Goldman's important (1976) and (1979), as well as *Brandom's (1998). Pryor's recent survey article (2001) also has a helpful review of the debate.

2. The symptomatology of PTSD is well documented throughout the trauma literature, but a particularly good account can be found in Herman's (1992) influential book. The standard nosology can be found in the American Psychiatric Association's handbook of mental disorders, *DSM III* (1980) and *DSM IV* (1994).

3. My evidence for this claim is in part anecdotal, gathered from personal conversations with women in sexual assault survivor groups, and partly drawn from first-person reports and autobiographies of trauma survivors, such as Sebold's (1999) and Venable Raine's (1998), as well as psychological studies like Janoff-Bulman's (1992).

4. These assumptions are captured by what Aphrodite Matsakis (1998, 26) calls the "just-world philosophy," according to which the world is basically fair,

and so long as "you are sufficiently careful, intelligent, moral, and competent, you can avoid misfortune," a twist on Melvin Lerner's (1980) hypothesis that individuals have a psychological need to believe in a so-called just-world.

5. Although statistics are not always accurate, the case for the universality of sexual violence is likely even stronger than these statistics make it out to be; rape is notoriously underreported. For example, in South Africa, a country that has a particularly high number of reported rapes—54,000 in 2001–2002—it is estimated that only 1 in 35 rapes are actually reported (Amnesty International 2004, 23).

6. As Leys puts it, "to the extent that the traumatic occurrence is considered never to have become part of the victim's ordinary memory, it is unclear how she can truthfully testify to what befell her" (Leys 2000, 298).

7. Recently, clinical psychologist Chris Brewer (2003) has conceptualized trauma along these lines with his dual representation model of PTSD, where the traumatic memory is split off from the conscious memory but with time and psychotherapy (the "talking cure") integration of the two memories is possible.

8. One possibility was helpfully pointed out to me by one of the reviewers of this paper, who suggested that if, for instance, our procedural memory (for habits and dispositions) and semantic memory (for concepts and propositions) dissociate from our episodic memory (for memories of events), then arguably extreme stress can impair the latter while leaving the others intact.

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