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According to many clinical psychologists, when the mind is forced to endure a horrifying experience, it has the ability to bury the entire memory of it so deeply within the unconscious that it can only be recalled in the form of a flashback triggered by a sight, a smell, or a sound. Indeed, therapists and lawyers have created an industry based on treating and litigating the cases of people who suddenly claim to have "recovered" memories of everything from child abuse to murder.

This book reveals that despite decades of research, there is absolutely no controlled scientific support for the idea that memories of trauma are routinely banished into the unconscious and then reliably recovered years later. Since it is not actually a legitimate psychological phenomenon, the idea of "recovered memory"--and the movement that has developed alongside it--is thus closer to a dangerous fad or trendy witch hunt.

The Myth of Repressed Memory: False Memories and Allegations of Sexual Abuse Details

Date : Published January 15th 1996 by St. Martin's Griffin (first published January 1st 1994)

ISBN : 9780312141233

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Format : Paperback 312 pages

Genre : Psychology, Nonfiction

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Shani says

Dr. Loftus writes about sexual allegations arising from recovery of repressed memories, and claims that these memories are false and there is no such thing as repressed memories. Memories tend to fade and change with time, and not to disappear, locked away until they are one day unlocked and found in crystal clear condition. This book is way too long because there is so much repetition and no new information from about half way through. It seems she is trying to convince you by repeating the same point over and over again. And while Dr. Loftus tries to appear fair and not make over generalized claims, the name of the book ("The Myth of...") gives her away and gives a cynical tone to her otherwise neutral words. The order of the chapters was strange and there were problems with the editing (quoting other books, sometimes as separate paragraphs, sometimes inside her own words). The true stories (very interesting, and horrific, some made me lose sleep) were told in a story-like fashion which makes you wonder how she has all the details of how people felt and what was said. Also, I was lacking an interview perhaps with someone who had memories and then later retracted them, about how it feels. What bothered me the most was the story of her scientific experiment of creating false memories was never completed! We are never told about the results of the experiment or even given a reference (I didn't read the reference chapter). I thought her whole point was that if you cannot prove it then you cannot assume it is true, so I was really looking forward to reading more about her relevant experiments!! I don't understand how that could be missing. Overall it was interesting to read and made me think a lot.

Ryan says

A very disappointing book. I read it for Psych 100 because I was interested in Dr. Loftus' memory research. However I was disappointed to find that the book contains only the briefest mention of that research, and no details or even summaries of the experiments conducted. Instead, the book concerns itself entirely with the sexual abuse/incest accusations that arise from the allegedly recovered "repressed" memories.

Even if I had been looking for information about that wave of accusations and trials, I would not recommend this book. It is clearly biased against the existence of repressed memories, which would not be a problem if she would present the experimental data which supports that conclusion in enough detail to be meaningful. Instead, she merely mentions it in passing before going back to sensational descriptions of outlandish and crucible-esque trials. Very little hard science, and her discussion of the differences between implanted memories and so-called "repressed" memories was superficial and incomplete, so minus 1 star there.

The second star is taken off for the unnecessarily graphic and frankly sensationalist details of alleged sexual abuse and satanic torture that makes up the bulk of this book, or at least the most memorable portion. Such lurid details are irrelevant to the question of whether or not there is such a thing as repressed memory.

The third star is taken away because I get the feeling that Dr. Loftus has focused heavily on the extreme fringe cases of a wave of sexual abuse cases, and, perhaps because she is not a sociologist, she does not provide any data or even estimate of what percentage of the overall sexual abuse cases in that time period rested solely upon the testimony of recovered memory.

I do not recommend this book. The history of cases is hand-picked and biased, and the lack of hard science, which is purportedly her area of expertise, makes it little more than an opinion piece.

Suzanne says

As another reviewer of this book as pointed out, it is advisable to investigate the background of individuals who write books about controversial topics. So, here is some background on Dr. Loftus.

This is her website at the University of California, Irvine, where she is currently employed as a Distinguished Professor in the Psychology and Social Behavior and Criminology, Law and Society Departments:

<http://socialecology.uci.edu/faculty/...>

If you download her CV (academic resume) available on the page, you will see a 40 page document outlining her educational experience, publication history, teaching experience, and awards. The awards section alone is two pages and includes honorary degrees from six universities, awards granted from six honorary societies and organizations, four fellowships (three from Stanford and one from Harvard), etc.

Dr. Loftus is the acknowledged world-leading expert in false memories. She was listed by the American Psychological Association as the #58 most eminent psychologist in the 20th Century. She has also served as the President for professional organizations such as the Association for Psychological Science and the Western Psychological Association. The list of professional achievements goes on and on.

Mainstream professional psychologists recognize Dr. Loftus as an accomplished expert. This book is a bit old, but still contains good research and examples. For current reading on the topic, refer to any of the dozens of peer-reviewed publications listed on her website.

Gilahk says

This book was written in the 1990's, which is about 20 years ago and so is not recent, but the research and the conclusions are all still very valid.

And scary.

It is much more accepted today that memories are not like tape recorders. Our recollections of the past are a mixture of imagination, emotion, desire and some actual event. Certainly not enough to convict someone of a crime without physical proof and yet people went to jail just on the basis of a recovered memory, without any physical evidence of a crime. Pretty scary stuff.

This book could have been edited better, there was a lot of repetition and anecdotes mixed in with the research, maybe she was in a rush to publish because she thought she might reach enough people to prevent another innocent person from going to jail. Good read.

Marcia Barksdale says

There are some books that stand out and this was one. As a therapist, this was eye opening. I knew that this existed but not to the extent that was reported in the book.

Eyvonne says

A good review

This is an engaging review of memory research, which many counselors do not get in their training. Includes a lot of references for further details.

Stephen Cranney says

The author's tendency to recite conversations as if they were recorded verbatim bothered me, but I'm giving it five stars just because the central themes in the book (the inaccuracy, suggestibility, and malleability of memory, etc.) are paradigm-changing enough that everybody should read it, and as a pioneer in the field this author is as qualified as anyone to talk about these issues (although the book is a little dated).

Angie crosby says

This book angered me. Although I am sure some people do falsely accuse, It is not most people. Repressed memories are real. They do exist.

Mizuki says

It's an informative and educational book about the fact and the myth of repressed memory and psychology. I'm aware that the topic of repressed memory is still a sensitive issue and I don't (and the author also doesn't) deny victims of rape and child abuse may be in denial and/or suffering with difficulties recalling and dealing with their traumatic experiences.

However! When an abused victim told her psychiatrist about getting raped by her uncle when she was a girl, then said psychiatrist insisted her to *start digging her subconscious mind for (nonexistent) memory about being abused and raped by her own parents, which she had no memory about*, or when the authority started prosecuting a father for rape and satanic ritual abuse against his daughter when they couldn't find a single physical evidence to back the girl's accuse. I think these people had gone too far.

Errobins says

I am a fan of Dr. Loftus' research and find it fascinating. That said, this book was a mess. It was not well organized or written. There were some good insights and some good background, ie: how the idea to do the shopping mall experiments was born. However, after spending almost an entire chapter detailing how the idea was born, no time at all was spent on how the experiments were conducted, the findings, etc. If I'd not already been familiar with the research I would have been confused.

After some reflection it seems really obvious that two people wrote this book. Some parts read like a poorly written crime drama, while others read like the memoir of a scientist reflecting on her life's work and the backlash that has resulted from it.

Cara says

As is clear from the other reviews of this book, its subject matter is still quite controversial. However, make no mistake about it, science comes down quite clearly on one side of the controversy - that is, Dr Loftus' side. False memories are easy to create in a laboratory, under carefully controlled scientific conditions. This has been done many times, in many laboratories around the world. False memories are likewise easy to create out in the "real world" (intentionally or otherwise). This book describes the tremendous consequences that these false memories can have. Sexual abuse happens - too often, to too many people, and it can have horrible consequences. But so can false accusations.

Paul Jr. says

A dangerous book. It is very, very important that you know the full background of Dr. Loftus before reading this book and choosing to believe it. Dr. Loftus has a long and interesting involvement in issues of recovered memories, including a period of time where she not only supported the evidence that repressed memories existed, but actually wrote a "study" supporting repressed memories. Mainstream psychologists and trauma specialists have decried this book. Dr. Loftus "research" methods have been shown to be faulty and unreliable, and the organization with which she has allied herself has a fascinating and slightly frightening history in and of itself. All of this information is accessible on the web, with varying perspectives. Please educate yourself on Dr. Loftus' background before believing all that is put forward in this book.

If you really desire to know the facts of repressed memories there are far better books out there which do not mislead and misrepresent the facts and scientific evidence the way Dr. Loftus has done. These books look at all angles and issues from a scientific perspective and do not -- unlike Dr. Loftus -- take on the political agenda of the FMSF.

Tiamoyo says

Not just hero worship, I swear! This book explains how mistaken memory destroys lives.

Mark Isaak says

No doubt this book would have been more effective during the 1990s when accusations based on repressed memory rose to witch-hunt status, but it has not aged well. Most of the book consists of fairly details looks at individual cases, showing how the "repressed memories" arose and all the damage they did. Those stories leave the reader outraged, but with the repressed memory craze now burnt out, the outrage has no target. I sought this book to learn more of the science behind repressed memory formation, but that part of the book was barely adequate. Loftus clearly showed that false memories can easily be manufactured, and she

distinguished among different types of amnesia, but she never really delved into the basics of memory formation.

Lindsay says

Very, very interesting --- if confusingly structured and sometimes awkwardly written --- discussion of something really bizarre that happened in American psychology during the 1980s and 1990s.

People would go into therapists' offices, looking for help with various psychological problems --- eating disorders, depression, relationship problems, etc. --- and, sometimes, the overzealous therapist would leap to the conclusion that the person must have been abused as a child, and would insist that memories of the abuse must lie buried within the patient's unconscious mind, waiting to be dug up.

One of the writers of this book, Elizabeth Loftus, is a memory researcher who found herself in the middle of a bunch of court cases relating to repressed memories, which she believes were mostly fictitious. (She doesn't think anyone knowingly *lied* about being abused; she just thinks some very desperate and suggestible people and some therapists who were very, very strongly committed to the idea that all psychopathology stems from childhood trauma got together and created these lurid, nightmarish stories of abuse, which both patient and therapist believed in). Loftus describes her research, especially the turns it took as she tried to prove her suspicions about the origins of these bizarre memories: at one point, she is able to demonstrate that you **can** create a memory of a traumatic event where none existed before, just by suggesting to someone that they actually experienced whatever it is you want them to remember. (Loftus's example was getting lost in a mall --- something scary enough, to a child, that "remembering" it caused distress, but not so horrific as to do lasting psychological damage to the people she suggested it to).

Besides the bizarre, unreal nature of so many of the uncovered memories, I was also struck by just how **unhelpful** so much of the recovered-memory "therapy" was to the people undergoing it. In the cases Loftus describes, the patients would go into the therapist's office with persistent, but manageable, psychological problems, and would become so consumed by the memories of abuse they discovered in therapy that they would become totally unable to cope with daily life. It really brings home the magnitude of the ethical violations these therapists committed, giving traumatic memories to people who had none.
