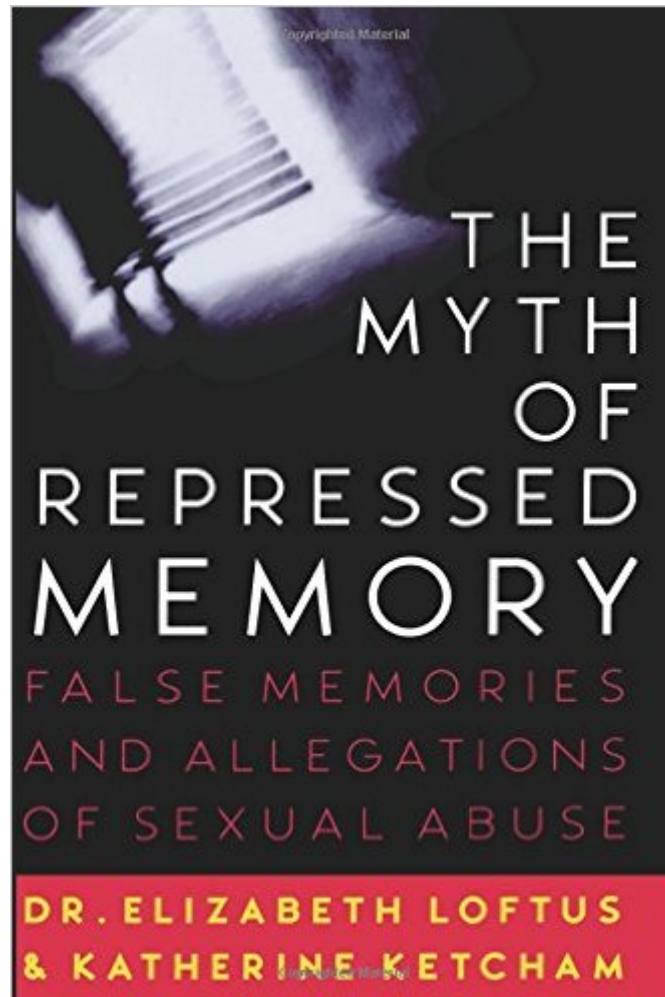


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The Myth Of Repressed Memory: False Memories And Allegations Of Sexual Abuse



Synopsis

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.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In "The Myth of Repressed Memory," Elizabeth Loftus makes a compelling case for the argument that there is, indeed, no such thing as repressed memory. Using science to challenge the common (mis)understanding of repressed memory, she brings us through a few horrifying cases of people who have been, it seems, wrongly accused of sexual abuse as the result of vulnerable "victims" being coaxed and prodded by zealous law enforcement officials and counselors to see abuse where there has been none. While in no way demeaning the very real experiences of real sexual abuse survivors, Loftus takes us through the ins and outs of memory and the workings of the brain, and demonstrates pretty convincingly that there is no "there" there. I was interested in this subject

because it always seemed to me strange that (particularly in the day care abuse cases of the past few decades) children would come up with the most fantastic stories about hidden tunnels and clowns and ritual murder but there was never, ever any evidence uncovered to that effect. I often thought well, if these satanists are murdering scores of babies in their rituals, why aren't we hearing about the strange disappearance of infants from their cribs? It never made sense to me. It still makes no sense that people hold on to these explanations when, as Loftus points out, all the evidence (and plain common sense) points to the fact that they never happened, that memory is not an object existing in time, but a construct, the product of imagery and suggestion and fear and vulnerability.

Loftus was the first to make such a public declaration of skepticism about the theory of repressed and recovered memory, and considering the climate in which this book was written her bravery is commendable. At the time--and still perhaps today--some therapists diagnosed a history of incest within minutes of the intake session, spurious evidence was routinely admissible in the courts, and Multiple Personality Disorder was apparently as common as the flu. Things have changed, and there are more than a few red-faced recovered memory enthusiasts around these days. One of the things that becomes obvious in this book is the fact that, while the debate was a raging one, few people who took part in it understood what it was really about. The recovered/false memory debate is not about whether the sexual abuse of children is a lie, or that the family is the seat of all evil. It is an essentially scientific debate about the operations of memory and the clinical applications of such knowledge. Loftus navigates through the cultural and rhetorical detritus of the debate to this core issue, and we benefit from her position as an expert researcher. The book is clearly written for lay people, or for clinicians wanting a very quick summary of the issues. More clinically pertinent summaries of the research findings and theories are available elsewhere. If you're a therapist or researcher looking for professional information, you'll find the journalistic style slow going. However, if you're a lay person, the book is an excellent introduction to the debate. The core debate that Loftus addresses is not whether or not sexual abuse exists.

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