

# Are repressed memories valid essay



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After reading both arguments, I came to two major conclusions: first, there seems to be inherent differences in what the experts were in fact debating; and secondly, in arguing whether or not repressed memories exist remains not only a possibility but an enigma of how little we still understand about the complexities of the mind.

My first point teeters upon the precarious semantic posturing of the two opposing views. Kluft refers to the phenomenon of “repressed memories” as “...Delayed Recall of Trauma”, whereas Loftus refers to it as “Creating False Memories”, which in my opinion, are not the same thing. While both cite circumstances of recovering lost or repressed memories, they fail to address the innate differences and comparisons between the types of memories in question: i. e. a memory that lay dormant after what may have been a horrific life experience (such as sexual abuse as a child) and the banality of failing a French Test or getting lost in the mall. The latter having been the crux of hypothetical and experimental research from which Loftus feels validates her position on the fallacy of repressed memories.

The ease in which “memories” are implanted via her experiments is testament to not only the power of suggestion but also the malleability of the human psyche when the motive to please supplants the desire to cling to the truth. She does go on to say, however, that she is aware of these differences. She comments:

Of course, being lost, however frightening, is not the same as being abused. But the lost-in-the-mall study is not about real experiences of being lost; it is about planting false memories of being lost.”

For Kluft, the subject at hand is the real experience of (figuratively) being “lost” whether by an abuse or a mental disorder such as DID or PTSD. In essence, they are comparing “apples with oranges.” The patients Kluft has treated in his practice as a Psychiatrist exhibit a higher level of dysfunction and psychic trauma than the subjects Loftus employs in her research by virtue of the fact they are seeking treatment to begin with. They are not, as indicated by Loftus’ own admission, entirely random and objective participants. Coincidentally, five of the young subjects in her study were “all friends and relatives of our research group.” One’s subconscious need to disassociate out of a traumatic event, burying and locking away that which is unspeakable has little to do with coaxing people to agree with them (the mental health professional) on a supposed (and trivial) event or activity (such as knocking over a punch bowl at a wedding!)

Kluft defends his position by referring to a C. L. Whitfield notation from his book *Memory and Abuse: Remembering and Healing the Effects of Trauma*. In it, Whitfield states:

“... trauma dissociates and confuses memory, and trying to block traumata out with guilt, shame and/or threats of harm can drive its mental representation out of awareness.”

Personally, I cannot imagine going through an experiment (such as Loftus’) and falling victim to one of the implanted memories, however plausible. Those that know me would agree I am “strong-headed” or “strong-willed”. This personality trait would appear to be resistant to the type of clinical voodoo practiced by Loftus, and which as Kluft points out “...is not anchored

in common sense.” Also addressed in his points, which I agree with, is the issue of retracted stories “...in response to strong interpersonal pressures.”

Perhaps many of the people exploited in some of Loftus’ experiments have a weaker constitution and are subject to fall prey to false encouragement and influence? Interestingly enough, the first part to the issue summary points out that Loftus cites, “ under the right circumstances, false memories can be instilled rather easily in some people.” Note: some people are wont to remembering erroneous events. Chances are, and I am speculating, these people would fit a pattern of having similar traits of a more subordinate disposition.

Even Kluff brings to light the wobbly premise underlying Loftus’ research:

“...that has received little attention is that only a small minority of the subjects who received misdirection cues took the indicated misdirection. Most did not. This research might be cited as evidence that most persons, even those subjected to an intense campaign to distort their memories and induce confabulations, will reject such suggestions.”

To that end, the issue that seemed to be circumvented in both positions was the aspect of differing personalities and mental capacities. Just because Loftus can “ create” false memories does not discount the possibility that repressed memories do exist. I believe that Kluff’s argument in the support of repressed memories is more valid. His logic is based not on superficial inferences as those postulated by Loftus, but on “ hundreds of examples of confirmed recovered memories...” These memories were not only corroborated anecdotally, through third parties, but with more objectivity.

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Loftus presents a somewhat “ Straw Man” argument in that she distorts Kluff’s position and subtly changes the subject. He theorizes people can recover memories that have long been made unavailable due to their unacceptable nature, while she argues some mental health professionals encourage patients to imagine childhood events as a way of recovering these supposedly hidden memories. In effect, she attempts to blur the line between “ traumatic experience” and “ research phenomena” which seeks to mimic repressed memories. However, I do agree with her on many areas of memory distortion. That of the “ misinformation effect”, “ source confusion” and the ease in which memories can be modified and therefore distorted over time. We are all subject to varying degrees of this type of episodic memory decay.