

Please make sure to watch our presentation on Child Molestation before continuing to view False Memory Syndrome. The two presentations are meant to go together in that order.

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In the last three decades, thousands of women have gone to psychotherapists for mental and physical issues and end up making allegations of sexual abuse against their parents, close relatives or friends. These are women who never suspected abuse prior to their therapy. They had no any previous memory of abuse. There was no evidence of abuse, but nonetheless they come to believe that they were molested. These women and their families are victims of False Memory Syndrome or FMS.

While FMS became a phenomenon before 2000 and ruined countless lives, there are still women who are traumatized by therapists who believe in recovered memories. The results of FMS are devastating: accused parents lose contact with their child and grandchildren, close relatives become suspect of horrible crimes, and those accused may face civil and criminal prosecution for acts that they did not commit.

And what happens to the patient who sought help? She sees herself as a victim of loved ones who submitted her to hellish scenarios that never happened. Almost 20% of these women have recovered memories of satanic ritual abuse and all of its horrors: baby sacrifices, murder, multi-generational abuse and mutilation. Some have even reported memories of abuse in past lives and during alien space abductions. As ludicrous as it seems, these women believe they have been horribly abused and their allegations have devastated many thousands of families.

How could this happen?

All of these women participated in a highly controversial therapy to uncover their “repressed memories”. Unfortunately, they were unwitting victims of a dangerous mental health fad and their false memories were created through suggestive questioning and invasive therapy techniques. Again, it is important to note that no corroborating evidence of abuse existed in these cases.

The repressed memory movement began in 1980's and swept through the mental health profession as the miracle cure for nearly any adult psychological malady. The movement is based on flawed ideas and unfounded theories that tried to prove that the majority of American women were molested as children and that they had repressed those memories. Yet, according to the self-proclaimed experts, the memory is like video camera that captures indelible images—even in the womb. With the proper techniques, they also claimed that the memories could be recovered.

The recovered memory movement gained such rapid and widespread support because it coincided with the national attention on child abuse and influx of federal monies to prosecute alleged molesters. If, according to the statistics, so many children were being molested, then a legion of women had to exist who were molested in previous decades. But where were they?

They had to be created.

Self-appointed “experts”, most with minimal training and little if any experience with molested children, took it upon themselves to write books, give lectures, and propose unorthodox techniques that actually created false — not recovered memories. They co-opted legitimate psychological concerns in order to give their beliefs credibility. Repression, disassociation, post-traumatic stress disorder, multiple personality disorder and a pseudo-scientific phenomenon called body memories, all became part of the grab bag of terms to convince patients—and psychotherapists across the county—that most women had been sexually molested.

“Recovering memories” typically followed several stages of treatment and therapy. The first technique was using a bogus list of symptoms that “indicated” abuse and comparing them to their clients’ symptoms. The list included headaches, vaginal and urinary tract infections, sleep disturbances, stomach or gastro-intestinal complaints, dizziness, eating disorders or the dislike of certain foods, such as bananas or tapioca pudding. Problems in maintaining stable relationships, wearing baggy clothes, being obese, anorexic, depressed or having little self-esteem were also considered “proof” that abuse occurred.

It is a rare individual who hasn’t displayed or experienced many of these symptoms at one time during her life for any number of reasons. That is why no medically-sanctioned list of “typical symptoms” of molestation exists. There are many life-altering events that can bring about the same physical or emotional symptoms of trauma, like marriage, divorce, pregnancy, birth, death of loved ones, illness, accidents, military service or change in or loss of employment. Yet adherents of repressed memories acknowledge only one cause for all of these problems, and they are willing to seduce their clients into believing they have been molested.

In the next stage of therapy, therapists typically use pop-psychology books like The Courage to Heal or Secret Survivors to reinforce the notion that their clients were molested. Authors’ poet Ellen Bass and personal-healing writer Laura Davis explain, “If you think you were abused, and your life shows the symptoms, then you were and if you don’t remember your abuse, you’re not alone, many don’t have memories, this doesn’t mean they weren’t abused.”

In essence they are telling their clients whether they believe they were abused or not, they were abused. Social worker E. Sue Bloom writes in Secret Survivors, "Incest is easily the greatest single underlying reason why women seek therapy or other treatment." She continues with, "many if not most incest survivors do not know that the abuse has even occurred." Patients are told that corroborating evidence is unnecessary, their video-like memories are true, and once they are ready to believe, the third stage begins.

Its purpose is to "prove" the abuse. Hypnosis or sodium pentothal (known as "truth serum") may be used to help patients "remember" and verify remembered abuse. Other unprofessional techniques associated with the 80's "new-age" thinking — like guided imagery, age regression, inner-child work, relaxation therapy, channeling, trance writing, re-birthing and crystal reading — are used to help clients create memories. Then, to validate the patients' imagined experiences, they attend incest survivor support groups, and as "new victims", they are surrounded by others who recount their "recovered" memories.

At this point patients are encouraged to being the "healing process" by severing their relationship with the alleged abuser(s) and any family member or friend who does not believe the accusations. Therapists motivate patients to join other survivor groups and to "act out" their anger and regain control of their lives by suing or filing charges against the abuser.

The professional community and even government agencies are extremely critical of "recovered memories". First of all, there are no national statistics that support the claim that most American women have been molested as children or that satanic cults commit such abuse. Second, there is research from over 100 years of study by scientists, psychologists and medical specialists which shows that the memory is highly malleable and susceptible to suggestion, which means that false memories can be easily created. And third, extensive studies on the brain and memory prove that there is no secret video camera of the mind that captures a picture-perfect record of the past.

#### Professional Community

The Board of Trustees of the American Psychiatric Association has warned that, "it is not known how to distinguish with complete accuracy memories based upon true events from those derived from other sources. Memories also can be significantly influenced by a trusted person, i.e. therapist or parent involved in a child custody dispute, who suggest abuse as an explanation for symptoms, problems, despite initial lack of memory of such abuse. It has been shown that repeated questioning may lead individuals to report memories of events that never occurred."

The California Therapist, a magazine for the association of marriage, family and child counselors has stated “some therapists contribute to the problem of recovered memories by among other things inappropriately helping patients remember sexual and other abuse, sometimes satanic ritual abuse when it may never have happened. One must exercise caution when utilizing hypnosis and repressed memory and related cases because of the power of suggestion under hypnosis”.

#### Government Agencies

Kenneth Laning at the behavioral science unit at the FBI academy in Quantico writes, “Therapists are probably in the best position to influence the allegations of adult survivors. The accuracy and reliability of the account of adult survivors who have been hypnotized during therapy is certainly open to question. Satanic and occult crime and ritual abuse of children has become a growth industry—speaking fees, books, video and audio tapes, prevention materials, television and radio appearances, all bring egotistic and financial reward.”

#### Scientists, Medical Professionals

The best proof of how memory can be manipulated is revealed in a study done by Elizabeth Loftus, the pre-eminent scholar on the subject. Dr. Loftus points to over 20 years of research that clearly shows that one’s recall of events can be easily influenced by fictitious descriptive details inserted characters and fictitious plot elaborations.

Her famous study was the “Mall Story” in which “Chris” was supposedly lost in a mall when he was 5 and eventually found by an older man. It was an event that never happened. However, after being told a controlled narrative about what “happened,” several times, Chris said that he remembered being afraid and that he would never see his family again. Two days after that he remembered the man’s flannel shirt, a conversation with him and eventually “remembered” that the man was bald and wore glasses. Even after being told that the event never happened, Chris clung to his beliefs. He was so positive that he had been lost in the mall that he even remembered his mother coming up and telling him never to do that again.

Dr. Loftus has replicated this kind of study again and again on adolescents, adults and senior citizens, and every person was easily induced to believe in false memories. Dr. Loftus’ work has been repeated in other studies and countless hours of scientific research and the malleability of memory is accepted by the leading mental health practitioners and professional organizations throughout the United States

The implications of the “False Memory Syndrome” is devastating for the patient, her family, and for mental health field. Dr. Paul McHugh, Chair of the Psychiatry

Department Johns Hopkins University, explains, “to treat for repressed memories without any effort at external validation is malpractice, pure and simple, malpractice on the basis of the standard of care that has developed out of our history of psychiatric service and malpractice because of misdirection of therapy will injure the patient and the family.”

While it is important that such therapy is discredited by mental health and scientific community, there still is no assurance that therapists will restrain from using questionable techniques on their patients. Margaret Singer, nationally known for her work as research psychologist, urged patients to exercise their own rights when therapists practice suggestive and invasive techniques of recovered memory therapy. She explains that “perhaps the most serious danger is that true accusations of child sexual abuse will be trivialized or discredited”.

The Innocence Legal Team defends its clients from false allegations of abuse through research, experience and hard work. Our goal is not to diminish the seriousness or effects of sexual abuse, only to protect those who are innocent from wrongful allegations.