

The Remembering of Forgetting

By Marita Sturken

Recovered Memories and the Question of Experience

- Recovered memory syndrome is portrayed extensively throughout popular culture and the media.
- Women have primarily been viewed as experiencing recovered memories of childhood sexual abuse (at least this is what the article focuses on).
- Opponents call this rush of recovered memories *false memory syndrome*:
 1. These recovered memories expose “contemporary confusion and ambivalence about family relationships, sexuality, and gender power relations.”
 2. They depict our culture as one obsessed with the concept of “victimhood.”
 3. “It exposes many of the disabling aspects of contemporary mainstream feminist discourse.”
 4. It shows how individual memory recovery can influence cultural memory, in the “context of trauma.”
 5. The whole idea of recovered memories is purely “American.”
- The truth or falsehood of recovered memories is basically insolvable.
- *Recovered memories* are different than *repressed memories*.
- “The core concepts of feminism, the equation of memory and experience and the cultural coding of forgetting as a loss or negation of experience” prevent us from grasping anything beyond the truth or falsehood of [recovered] memory.

Questions of Criteria

- Concern over the volatility of memory and its ability to be easily persuaded by outside opinions after the event has occurred, BUT, can this be true with *traumatic* memories, such as long term sexual abuse?
- Witnesses, evidence and credibility are especially hard to secure in sexual abuse cases, because sexual acts are usually private, and by the time these grown up women recover these memories, physical evidence is no longer available.
- The relationship between ritual abuse and the notion that “all recovered memories are part of cultural memory...To remember something *is* an experience.”

Displacement and Expansion

- Memories are considered essential to one’s identity, but they can be blotched or altered by suggestiveness or other outside forces.
 1. Case: Paul Ingram/satanic cult; power of suggestion.
 2. Case: George Franklin/daughter’s recovered memory of him murdering Susan Nason; memories of abuse can bloom into different memories.

Traumatic Memory and Narrative Form

- Traumatic memories are often depicted as still snapshots that have no narration, so it is a therapist’s job to add narration to the memories, which is what prompts the memories to “tell stories of blame and guilt.”
- There are concerns that the therapist prods the memories of the patient.

Memory and Testimony

- The ability for trauma victims to testify and record their encounters is crucial in the writing of history.
- Therapists act as witnesses to these trauma victims, and they have the gift of “belief,” which gives them the ability to act as a narrator to the victim’s memories.

Freud’s Legacy

- Recovered memory therapy—“a stepchild to psychoanalysis?”—Repressed memories.
- Truth of childhood sexual abuse versus hysteria and fantasies. Cultural fantasies (Freud) remains.