

DePrince, A.P. & Freyd, J.J. (1999) Review of *Truth in Memory* (Lynn & McConkey, Eds.) *American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis*, 41, 281-283.

Lynn, Steven J. & McConkey, Kevin M. (Eds.) (1998). *Truth in memory*. New York: Guilford, xix + 508 pages, \$50.00 (cloth).

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The title of Lynn and McConkey's edited volume, *Truth in Memory*, engages the reader in a watershed of questions: Are we able to find truth in memory? Whose truth? How do we - as scientists, therapists, citizens - determine historical truth? The editors nicely set the stage to grapple with some of these questions by acknowledging the inherently reconstructive nature of memory. In the preface, the editors lay out a number of issues arising from such nature, many of which are important to current considerations of recovered memories. This edited volume is organized into six sections, with nineteen chapters, spanning topics from historical considerations, to suggestibility in children, traumatic memory, hypnosis and pseudomemory, and legal/media considerations. While *Truth in Memory* offers some chapters that are novel contributions to the field, many contributions replay aspects of the false memory debate already covered by other texts and journals.

At times, *Truth in Memory* falls into traps that we have seen in other discussions around the false memory debate. One of them is the characterization of experimental results as "false memories," rather than memory errors. The term "false memories" is one that became popular in connection with allegedly false memories of childhood sexual abuse; in recent years, the term "false memories" has increasingly been applied to memory errors induced in psychology experiments. The problem with this use of terminology is that it exaggerates the generalizability of the laboratory results and fails to discriminate between different sorts of memory inaccuracy. We see this inattention to ecological validity at times in *Truth in Memory*, for example in a chapter by Payne and Blackwell. The chapter authors review Roediger and McDermott's (1995) study in which participants were asked to study lists of words. When recognition memory was tested, participants tended to endorse a not presented, but semantically associated, word as having been part of the original list. Roediger and McDermott characterized their results as evidence for the existence of false memories, as do Payne and Blackwell. Roediger and McDermott indeed demonstrated a memory error, but not a "false

memory" in the sense that is usually understood in the context of the recovered memory debate (see Freyd & Gleaves, 1996).

Though portions of the book try to grapple with experimental evidence for memory errors, the contributions at times fail to fully consider the external validity of the various paradigms presented. It would have been valuable to include more discussion of the range of traumas for which delayed recall has been reported. A particularly important consideration to ecological validity is the relative frequency of delayed recall for different types of trauma; some traumas such as childhood sexual abuse, witnessing combat violence, or adult rape lead to higher levels of reported memory impairment than do other sorts of trauma, such as automobile accidents and natural disasters (e.g., Elliott, 1997). Motivations that influence information processing differ based on aspects of the traumatic event (Freyd, 1996). Yet, noticeably absent from *Truth in Memory* are distinctions between memory for different sorts of traumatic events, for instance, events of an interpersonal nature versus non-interpersonal events.

In addition to being an inherently reconstructive process, memory serves social functions for individuals and groups, with different motivations affecting memory processing according to the specific conditions. For example, consider experimental paradigms on thought suppression: do not think about a white bear (you are thinking about a white bear, aren't you?). What intrinsic motivation do participants have for not thinking about a white bear? Thinking about the bear in spite of the instructions probably does not threaten a participant in a profound way, and thus it does not generalize well to interpersonal traumas. In cases of interpersonal traumas, the motivations to remain unaware of events may be much greater. For example, in the case of child sexual abuse, betrayal trauma theory posits a social utility in remaining unaware of the abuse if perpetrated by a caregiver (Freyd, 1996).

The child requires the attachment to the perpetrator for survival; therefore, awareness of the abuse may be detrimental to those very survival goals. Much of the experimental work in memory has, to date, been unable to take into account the social motivations that influence attention and information processing. It is quite likely that when information is threatening in significant ways, the mechanisms engaged differ fundamentally from those that are recruited by participants in conscious attempts to suppress information due to task instructions in psychology laboratories.

A chapter by Nash nicely advances the reader beyond the trappings of the false memory debate. Nash argues that two types of memory error are possible: false negatives (claiming an event did not happen, when in fact it did) and false positives (claiming an event happened, when in fact it did not). Nash argues that the existence of one of these errors does not negate the existence of the other. Nash challenges the reader to entertain the plausibility and consequences of both errors. Indeed, Nash raises a critical point. The false memory debate has too long been framed, either explicitly or implicitly, as two mutually exclusive truths. Even the term "debate" suggests that the two sides are opposed to one another: this is simply not the case. Freyd (1998) has proposed a view of memory using a coordinate system in which memory persistence is on one axis and accuracy on another. In this view, one memory may be continuously available while another is unavailable for a period of time, although both may be historically accurate. Alternatively, both memories may be inaccurate. Freyd's (1998) coordinate view and Nash's chapter move us away from one-dimensional views of memory as true or false.

When considering memory, especially for traumatic events, psychologists face many social considerations, including how the research is interpreted in critical realms such as the courts, media and public education. Among the most important contributions *Truth and Memory*

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makes to the field is the chapter by Arrigo and Pezdek. The authors examine the portrayal of multiple personality disorder (described in the DSM-IV as dissociative identity disorder) in introductory psychology textbooks. They argue that introductory textbooks reach a very large audience and are therefore especially important in understanding how views of multiple personalities (MP or DID) are conveyed to the public. A number of quantitative analyses are reviewed in this chapter, including evidence that most introductory textbooks published before 1992 discuss MP as involving internal defects of the individual, while fewer books discuss trauma models for MP development. Arrigo and Pezdek raise awareness of biases that can be interjected in the writing and publishing process. The chapter also alerts us to the ways in which scientific research reaches public consumers.

Arrigo and Pezdek inspire the reader to consider the influence of research on the public by examining which views are presented and which are not. Once again, we find ourselves wondering who decides truth in memory? Whose truth is taught in textbooks? Which truth makes the newspapers and reaches the public? Although we do not have answers for these questions, we applaud *Truth in Memory* for providing another avenue by which these critically important questions are brought to our attention.

References

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