

# Recollections of Trauma

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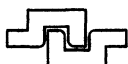
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# Recollections of Trauma

## Scientific Evidence and Clinical Practice

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## PREFACE

The controversy regarding cases in which people report “recovered memories” of childhood sexual abuse may well prove to be the most important issue in professional psychology in the 1990s. Some have argued that such reports often reflect illusory beliefs inadvertently created by suggestive forms of “memory work” in psychotherapy. This claim amounts to a charge of widespread malpractice, and publicity about it threatens the reputation of clinical psychology. From a cultural/historical point of view, this controversy constitutes a crisis point in Western society’s belated and still incomplete efforts to acknowledge and respond effectively to the shocking prevalence of child sexual abuse. “Responding effectively” entails both protecting children from abuse and avoiding false accusations. Some professionals who emphasise prevention of false accusations have described the popularisation of therapeutic searches for suspected hidden memories of childhood sexual abuse as a modern “witch hunt” in which suggestive therapies lead to false accusations (e.g., Ofshe & Watters, 1994). In turn, some who emphasise support of abuse victims have dismissed such arguments as anti-feminist “backlash” (e.g., Bloom, 1994). This political polarisation, which has been avidly fanned by the media, overlays the long-standing tension between experimental and clinical psychology. The mixture of a taboo subject, deep politicisation, and a historic rift within psychology creates an explosive cocktail, and it is not surprising that professional discussions of this topic have often generated more heat than light.

The aim of the NATO Advanced Studies Institute (ASI) on which this book is based was to create a situation that would facilitate productive and probing dialogue among an international group of experts with a variety of perspectives on memory for trauma. Most of the 95 participants were psychologists (including practitioners and clinical, cognitive, and neuroscience researchers), but the group also included anthropologists, legal scholars, and experts from other relevant fields. The remote and pleasant setting of the conference (which was held at Les Jardins de l’Atlantique, a lovely resort hotel on the French Atlantic) ensured that participants worked, ate, and socialised together throughout the 11-day meeting. Although gruelling, this situation fostered a convivial atmosphere, which in turn created opportunities for in-depth and probing discussions of difficult and controversial issues as professionals with diverse perspectives struggled to understand one another’s views. To paraphrase remarks made by several participants, it is difficult to dehumanise someone you’ve just had breakfast with. The ASI did not, of course, eliminate differences in perspective, but it did succeed in enhancing mutual understanding and respect, promoting serious dialogue, and fostering future collaborative research efforts between researchers and clinicians who often held very different perspectives on the issue.

This book attempts to capture the content, as well as some of the process, of the ASI of the same name as this volume. During the meeting, each of the major lectures (Section I) was followed by a 30-minute commentary, which in turn was followed by a tape-recorded 30-minute discussion period. The book includes the text of thirteen lectures along with a written version of the accompanying peer commentary and selected excerpts from the discussion period. The lectures are presented in the same order in which they occurred during the ASI. There were also fifteen 30-minute papers (Section II), each of which is included (again, in the order in which the papers were given). The same brief format was also used in a single integrated symposium of six paper presentations on the legal issues surrounding recovered memories (Section III) organized and moderated by Daniel Shuman. Subgroups of 10–15 attendees also met over the course of the ASI to discuss particular focal issues (Section IV). These working groups provided opportunities for participants to engage in extended discussions of a particular issue, and the book includes reports on the fruits of these discussions authored by the facilitators: Agenda for Clinical Research (facilitated by Lucy Berliner and Judith McDougall), Agenda for Cognitive/Neuroscience Research (facilitated by Ira E. Hyman, Jr., and Jonathan W. Schooler), Issues Related to Guidelines for Clinical Practice (facilitated by Tara Ney and Fran Grunberg), and Concepts of Sexual Trauma in France (facilitated by Marie-Christine Simon de Bergen). The last chapter in this section represents an ongoing data-collection project completed by a much smaller workgroup of Steve Lindsay and Jonathan Schooler and presents a brief overview of the results of a questionnaire distributed to participants at the beginning of the ASI. The questionnaire asked participants about a range of issues relevant to the controversy regarding recovered memories of childhood trauma. Lindsay and Schooler note that the questionnaire suffered from numerous shortcomings, but contend that its most striking finding may well reflect the current state of knowledge in this area: opinions on many issues varied extremely widely, both between and within subgroups of participants, and rarely if ever did opinions divide neatly between practitioners and researchers. Finally, the ASI also included three evening poster sessions, and abstracts of the 58 posters are presented in the penultimate section (V) of the book. Preceding a subject index (Section VI) are presented the names, affiliations, mail and e-mail (where available) addresses of all of the participants. Readers are encouraged to contact these individuals for discussion and provision of additional relevant reading materials.

Thus this book is a somewhat polished representation of an 11-day effort by a substantial number of highly regarded experts with a wide range of perspectives to communicate with one another on the topic of the relationship between trauma, memory, and remembering. We owe a tremendous debt to each of the participants in the scientific programme for their thoughtful and stimulating contributions and to all of the attendees for their vigorous participation in the discussions throughout the ASI conference and we record here our gratitude to all of them. We also express our profound appreciation to Sherrill Mulhern for her wonderfully successful efforts in selecting the site for the meeting and working tirelessly with the excellent hotel staff to coordinate the many details of our accommodations. It is no exaggeration to say that the meeting would not have been as successful without Sherrill's efforts. The NATO Scientific Affairs Board is thanked for providing the funding that made both the ASI and this book possible. As well, we would like to thank Elaine Hunter, who worked with the technical staff at the hotel to record all of the discussion sessions following the presentations, for her great success in deciphering and transcribing those comments into written form. Two skillful people at the University of Lethbridge provided tremendous support and assistance during the conference organisational and book preparation stages, Lisa Bjorn and Karen Larsen, respectively, and we

also owe them a debt of gratitude. Finally, we thank Robert Wheeler, Eileen Bermingham and, in particular, Meri Zeltser at Plenum for assistance in the speedy production of this book.

J. Don Read  
D. Stephen Lindsay

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