

and varied, so abundant, so shifting that it is like trying to shoot a moving target," says Elizabeth Loftus, professor of psychology and law at the University of Washington and an authority on cognitive processes, long-term memory and eyewitness testimony. "If repression is the avoidance in your conscious awareness of unpleasant experiences that come back to you, yes, I believe in repression. But if it is a blocking out of an endless stream of traumas that occur over and over that leave a person with absolutely no awareness that these things happen, that make them behave in destructive ways and re-emerge decades later in some reliable form, I don't see any evidence for it. It flies in the face of everything we know about memory."

If such recovered memories are indeed false, where do they originate? From two sources, critics say: the popular culture and misguided or inept therapy. Sensational tales about recovered memories of incest have been grist for celebrity-magazine cover stories. And repressed-memory incest and satanic-ritual-abuse victims have been featured prominently on Geraldo, Oprah,

Sally Jessy Raphaël and other daytime TV talk shows.

In bookstores, pop-psychology sections are filled with dozens of self-help survivor titles. By far the most controversial and best selling (more than 700,000 copies) of these books is *The Courage to Heal* by Ellen Bass and Laura Davis. In their 1988 publication, considered the bible of the recovered-memory movement, they include such dogma as "If you think you were abused and your life shows the symptoms, then you were," and "If you don't remember your abuse, you are not alone. Many women don't have memories . . . this doesn't mean they weren't abused." Like many of the authors of these self-help books, neither Davis nor Bass has any academic training in psychology, although Davis claims to be an incest survivor. Yet many therapists urge their patients to read *Courage* and other similar volumes.

Many of these books contain laundry lists of symptoms of repressed-memory victims. They inform their readers that even though they have no memory of the acts, they may have been victims of child-

hood sexual or ritual abuse if they experience some of the following conditions: depression, anxiety, loss of appetite or eating disorders, sexual problems and difficulty with intimacy. The all-inclusive nature of that list, critics say, suggests that among the entire U.S. population, only the rare individual has managed to escape childhood sexual abuse. That doesn't seem to surprise therapist E. Sue Blume. In her book *Secret Survivors*, she writes, "It is not unlikely that *more than half of all women* are survivors of childhood sexual trauma."

**A**LMOST ANY NIGHT, IN ANY major American city, adult incest and ritual-abuse survivor meetings are held in church basements and community rooms. Churches and other institutions also offer counseling for dissociative disorders and satanic-ritual-abuse victims.

Private psychiatric hospitals, which advertise in medical journals and airline magazines, are profiting as well. "We can help you remember and heal," promises one ad

## It Came From Outer Space

**N**ANCY, A WEST COAST ATTORNEY, REMEMBERED DETAILS of the incident only four months ago, after she began hypnotherapy sessions. Now, she recalls how one spring night in 1989 she awoke in a stupor to see a strange craft outside her window. She was taken into the vehicle and examined by a team of strange beings. A silver tube was inserted into her to extract an ovum. She breaks down as she describes the abduction. "People say 'How do you know?' You don't know. You're never sure what happened."

As thousands of therapy patients are "discovering" repressed memories of childhood sexual abuse, a smaller number are adding a new twist: they are recalling abductions by aliens. Under hypnosis, Los Angeles film producer Michael Bershad recalled his car being pulled to the side of the road by a bright object. "I got out of the car and saw five guys under 4 ft. tall. They led me inside the craft." A leader examined him, opening up his back to poke around his vertebra. The extraterrestrials also extracted sperm. "I had a lot of shame," says Bershad. "It was humiliating and degrading."

A painful sincerity unites those who have dredged up memories of UFO abductions. Many suffer from insomnia and shy away from telling anyone what they believe may have happened for fear of being perceived as crazy. "Virtually all abductees are opposed to the idea that these things really happen," explains Budd

Hopkins, author of two books about contact with aliens. "They don't want these things to be real. There is no pleasure in this experience."

Harvard psychiatrist John Mack, who won a Pulitzer in 1977 for his psychological study of Lawrence of Arabia, takes the stories literally. "I encountered something here very early on, which I saw did not fit anything I had ever come across in 40 years of psychiatry." He has treated more than 70 abductees, whom he calls "experiencers."

A few researchers argue that alien abductions may be disguised memories of sexual abuse. Others assert that abduction memories may also be unwittingly planted by over-zealous therapists. "I believe these victims believe it," says Ray Hyman, professor of psychology at the University of Oregon. "People are trying to please the hypnotist. The therapist and patient collaborate with each other to produce the story." Hypnosis can be extremely effective in eliciting fantasies that therapists can use in treating patients. The technique, however, can also create false memories. Says Ray William London, president of the American Boards of Clinical Hypnosis: "It isn't a way of validating an abduction or anything else."

William Cone, a psychologist in Newport Beach, California, who specializes in treating alleged abductees, finds similarities between some of his patients and people who recover memories of satanic-ritual abuse. Both have "organizing personalities"—a loose sense of self given to paranormal experiences like seeing ghosts. Many are also highly suggestible. "They are highly functioning, intelligent people and truly believe that this happened," says Cone. "I try not to believe or disbelieve. I just sit and listen and try to help." —By Jeanne McDowell/Los Angeles

