

Letters to the Editor

veterans sometimes experience flashbacks to wartime events, it provoked thoughtful debate about the nature of memory and the terms that should be used to describe the distress veterans face. We urge the scientific community to approach adults' recollection of childhood abuse in a similarly considered manner.

It would be fascinating to understand the mechanisms involved in memories for traumatic events that never occurred. But a necessary precondition is unequivocal knowledge that the event did not occur. For the sake of intellectual honesty, let's leave the term "false memory syndrome" to the popular press.

Repressed Objectivity

Dear Editor:

We, a group of researchers from diverse areas, share a common concern for the responsibility of psychology as a science. In that regard, we are writing in response to the *APS Observer's* recent coverage of repressed memories of sexual abuse. The primary focus has been on the dubious nature of memories recovered later in adulthood and possible mechanisms for the incorporation of nonexistent events into autobiographical memory.

While we strongly support research aimed at understanding the veracity of memory, we urge a more even-handed approach to this topic. In particular, we object to the term "false memory syndrome" a non-psychological term originated by a private foundation whose stated purpose is to support accused parents.

As behavioral scientists, we have great appreciation for the fact that memories can be distorted. We readily acknowledge the work of scientists who find that manufactured memories can be insinuated into the stream of consciousness.

However, many children are sexually abused. And, unlike laboratory scientists who carefully construct events and measure the degree of distortion in memories of the events, few cases of child sexual abuse remembered in adulthood are verifiable one way or the other. In the vast majority of cases, we will never know whether the abuse occurred or not. Individuals who claim that memories of abuse are always true or always false are taking a political or legal stand. At the very least, their claims are scientifically unwarranted.

When it became evident that Vietnam

Laura L. Carstensen
John Gabrieli
Roger Shepard
Stanford University

Robert W. Levenson
Mary Ann Mason
University of California-Berkeley

Gail Goodman
University of California-Davis

Richard Bootzin
University of Arizona

Stephen J. Ceci
Uri Bronfenbrenner
Cornell University

Barry A. Edelstein
West Virginia University

Michael Schober
New School for Social Research

Maggie Bruck
McGill University

Terence Keane
Rose Zimering
National Center for the Study of PTSD
Boston VA Medical Center

Thomas F. Oltmanns
University of Virginia

Ian Gotlib
Northwestern University

Paul Ekman
University of California-San Francisco