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**Review of *Remembering our Childhood: How Memory Betrays Us*.
Karl Sabbagh. Reviewed by Susan P. Robbins.**

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Karl Sabbagh, *Remembering Our Childhood: How Memory Betrays Us*. Oxford University Press, 2009. \$29.95 hardcover.

People typically have memories of childhood, some vivid and others vague, but we rarely examine our memories and question their source or accuracy. It was not until the advent of recovered memory therapy in the late 1980s and early 1990s that the topic of childhood memory became a major source of controversy among mental health professionals. Jeffrey Masson's rediscovery of Freud's seduction theory and the concomitant overdue societal acknowledgement of the reality of childhood sexual abuse led to the rise of theories and therapies to help adults "recover" their memories of childhood abuse. At the heart of this controversy was whether or not childhood memories of repeated abuse could be totally repressed or forgotten, and, decades later, be vividly and accurately recalled in adulthood. Over the last two decades, scholarly research on childhood memory proliferated in an attempt to address this issue.

In *Remembering our Childhood*, Sabbagh takes the reader on a voyage through the world of memory research and, specifically, how memories of childhood are recalled. The book contains ten chapters that cover diverse but interrelated aspects of memory, forgetting, remembering, and theories and therapies that were designed to help adults "recover" repressed memories of abuse. In chapter 1, Sabbagh sets the stage with lively vignettes of childhood memories and introduces the reader to issues related to the timing, accuracy and quality of childhood memories. Chapter 2 examines the phenomenon of childhood amnesia and how children encode memories at different ages. Chapters 3 and 4 provide insight into the reconstructive nature of autobiographical memory in both children and adults and, in particular, how memory is influenced by social interaction. This includes, for example, the ways in which parents and children speak to each other, reminiscing, the influence of first impressions, perception, pre-existing psychological states, and the importance of meaning in shaping and reshaping our memories. This corpus of research clearly demonstrates the complex reconstructive processes involved in remembering and shows the various ways in which memory can be fallible. These initial

chapters set the stage for an in-depth look at the controversy, advent and demise of the now discredited recovered memory therapy. The remaining chapters provide a thoughtful examination and analysis of the "memory wars" (the beliefs and theories of recovered memory proponents contrasted with the empirical research on memory), the array of methods used by therapists to help clients "recover" memories of abuse, and several high profile cases involving repressed memory. He also considers important and controversial studies by memory researchers and discusses the often tragic consequences to falsely accused families.

For those interested in memory, empirical research published in scholarly journals is typically dry and extremely laborious to read. Part of the appeal of this book is Sabbagh's fluid and engaging writing style; it is truly joy to read. He deftly weaves a tale of memory, drawing from research, vignettes, transcribed interviews, and accounts of therapy gone awry. His use of rich imagery and analogies to explain complex mental processes and research findings are complemented by a thoughtful selection of illuminating and provocative direct quotes. Equally as important as his writing style is his well reasoned and astute analysis of the existing empirical evidence. He rigorously examines the full body of existing research, pointing out the caveats and limitations of the data. Sabbagh's strong belief in the scientific method provides the underlying theme for the book and this point of view is clearly expressed throughout.

Despite that recovered memory therapy has been discredited as a reliable therapeutic method, there are still many victims left in its wake. This book should be required reading for all clinical social workers, psychologists, and others who work in the field of mental health. In addition, it is also an excellent book for a non-academic audience with an interest in memory and recovered memories.

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