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Fraudulent therapies in psychology: The enduring value of science.

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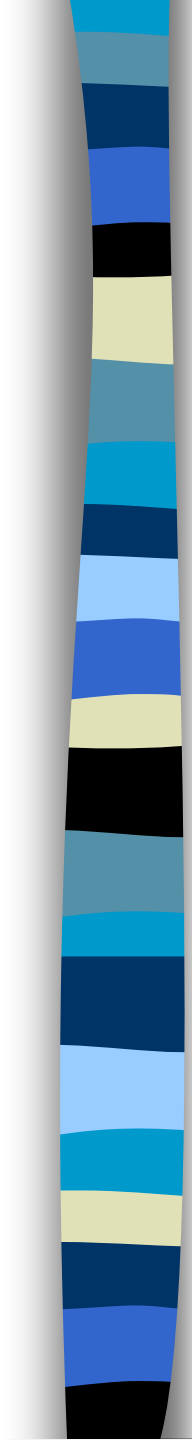


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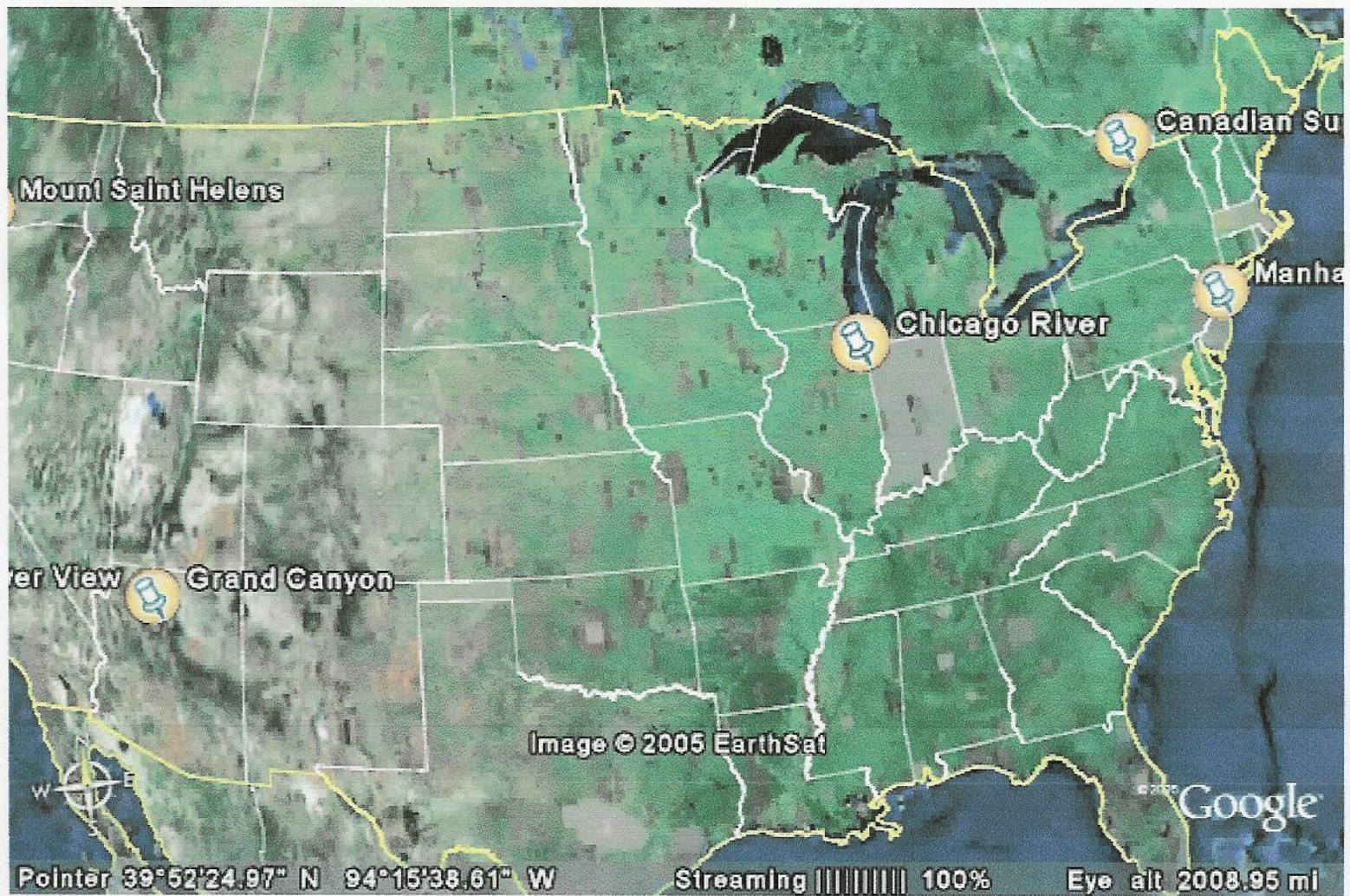


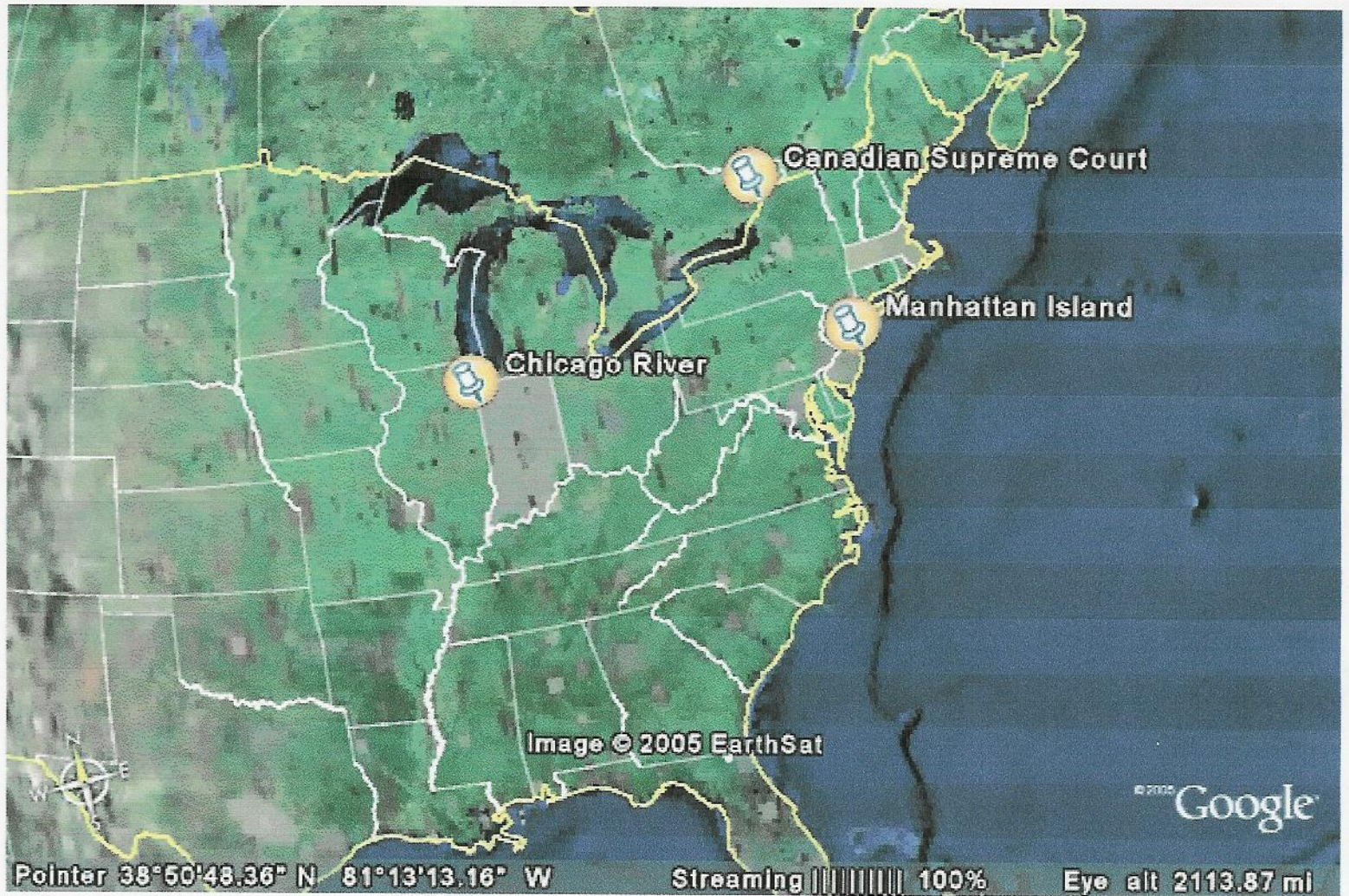
Fraudulent Therapies in Psychology: The Enduring Value of Science

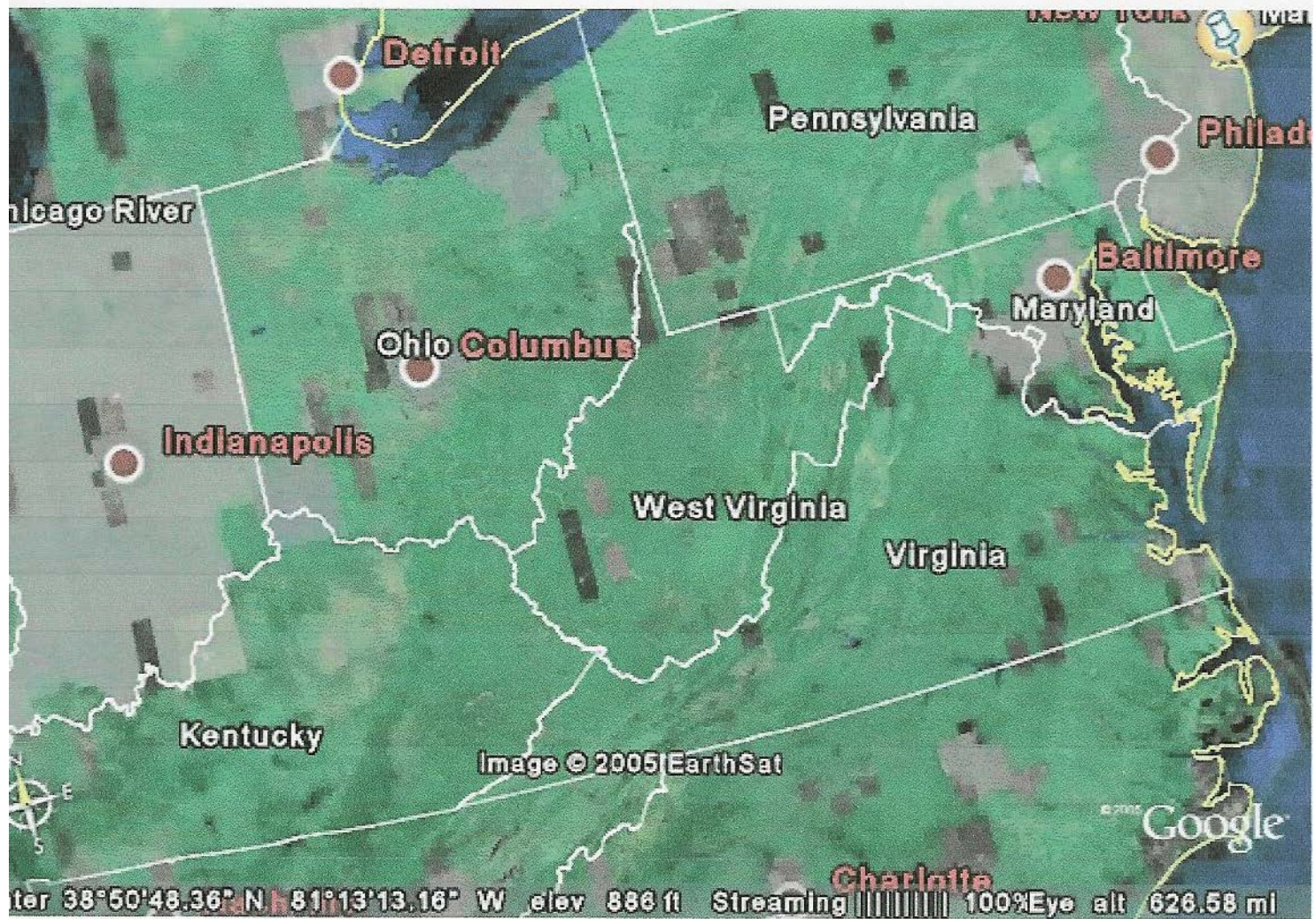
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Q: What is Therapy?

A: Therapy is an effort, based upon scientifically derived principles, to optimize the ratio of positive-to-negative reinforcers, for the individual and for society.



Examples of Therapy:

- Desensitization of phobia.
- Discrete trial training for autism.
- Increased enjoyable activity for depression.
- Relaxation training for generalized anxiety.
- Assertion training.
- Social skills training.
- Communication skills training...



Q: Fraudulent therapies--where do they originate?

A: In an atmosphere that is not oriented to the principles of science

Example:

The belief that masturbation causes insanity.

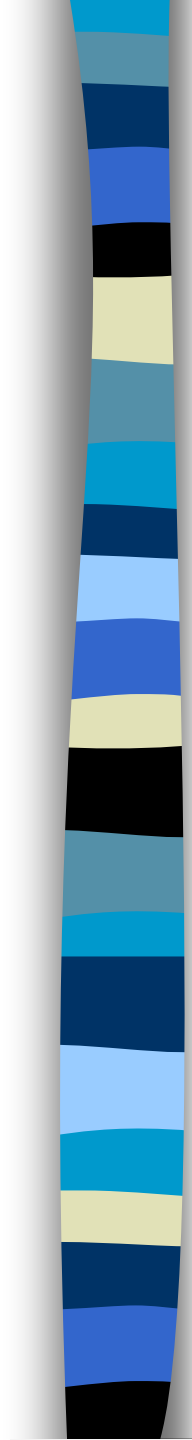
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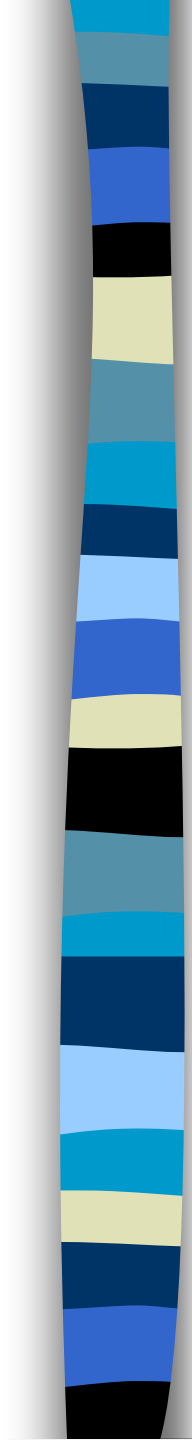
Observation of psychotic patients who were openly masturbating.



Another example: Orgone therapy. Devised by Wilhelm Reich, early 1900s.

- Reich believed that all natural phenomena were caused by “orgone energy,” a new form of energy which he had discovered.
- Reich believed that orgone energy caused the wind, the rain, hurricanes, everything...
- ...including sexual orgasms!

- 
- Reich also believed that low levels of orgone energy in the body caused abnormal behavior, including depression, anxiety, psychosis, etc.
 - Reich came to the U.S. and began to sell machines:
 - **“Orgone Energy Field Meter”**
 - **“Orgone Energy Accumulator”**

- 
- The machines were useless. Reich had never subjected the machines to scientific test.
 - Reich was prosecuted by the U.S. government for selling his fraudulent machines.
 - Reich died in prison in 1957.



Q: Why did Reich go wrong?

A: Reich ignored the scientific method. He never tested his theory or his machines.
Instead, Reich relied upon blind faith.



Q: How is science different from blind faith?

A: Science:

- Is self-correcting.
- Tests hypotheses about what treatment might work.
- Uses double-blind studies.
- Uses comparison groups & procedures.
- Publishes results & invites replication.



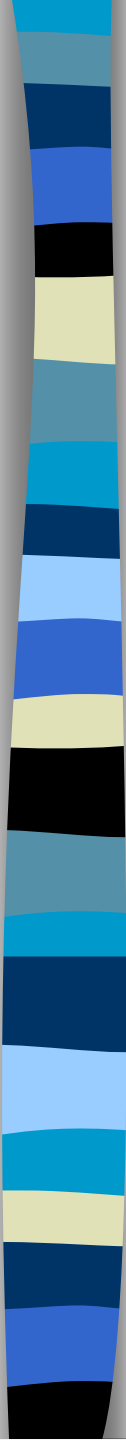
Some examples of non-science explanations and therapies:

- Re-birthing.
- Facilitated communication. (Prof. Howard)
- Recovered memory therapy.
- Alien abduction.
- Past-life therapy.



Re-birthing

- The theory: Maladjustment (depression, anxiety, child conduct problems, etc) is best treated by having the patient undergo a second “birth.”
- The treatment: The patient is wrapped very tightly in blankets and other material. The patient must struggle to get free (be re-born).





North Carolina “re-birther” (Left):







Re-birthing (Continued)

- Evidence for effectiveness? None.
- Evidence of harmfulness? Yes. In the U.S. two women practicing re-birthing with a young girl, age about 11 years, wrapped the child so tightly that she suffocated to death.
- Result: A child is dead. The two “therapists” are in prison, 16 years.



Another example of non-scientific therapy: Recovered Memory Therapy

- Intended purpose:

_____To bring repressed memories of early trauma into conscious thinking, as a treatment for many disorders, including depression and anxiety.



Recovered memory therapy (continued)

■ Underlying theory:

—(1) When a child undergoes a frightening experience (assault, natural disaster such as a flood or hurricane), that memory is “repressed” to the unconscious part of the mind (as Freud believed).

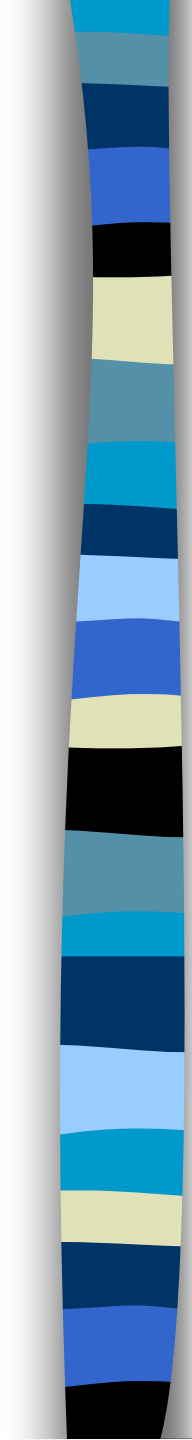
(2) Later, that “unconscious memory” causes adult abnormal behavior (depression, anxiety, addiction, etc).



Recovered Memory Therapy (continued)

How does it work?

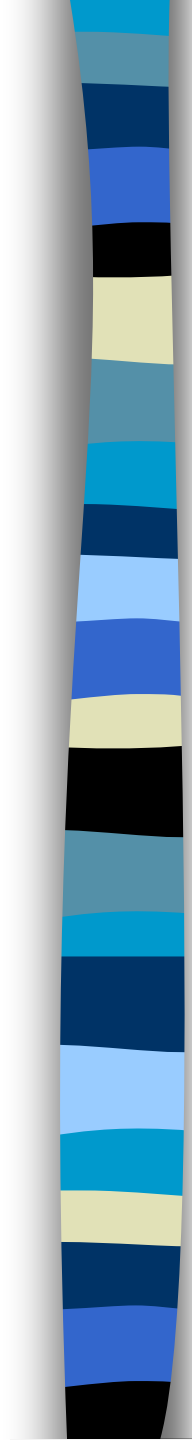
- (1) The therapist fully believes in the theory...believes most people have repressed memories of trauma.
- (2) A patient comes to the therapist for help with depression, anxiety, etc.
- (3) The therapist uses hypnosis, deep relaxation, “truth” drugs, etc., to “access” the hypothetical memories.



(4) If the patient does not report any memories, the therapist offers *suggestions*. “Think harder...are there gaps in your memory?...If you don’t remember, pretend that you were assaulted to see if that brings back memories of assault...”

(5) The therapist praises the patient when he or she “remembers” trauma.

(6) The therapist unintentionally implants false memories into the patient’s thinking.



(7) The patient, and the therapist, come to believe that the memories are real, and that remembering them is helping the patient overcome his depression, anxiety, etc.

(8) Note: Usually the “memory” is of sexual abuse by the patient’s parent, and often the “memories” involve satanic ritual abuse.







Recovered memory therapy (continued)

Results:

- (1) The patient confronts her “abuser” (usually a parent), accusing him of the abuse. The parent denies the abuse.
- (2) The family is torn apart.
- (3) The patient continues to believe, wrongly, that she has found the cause of her problems. She does not improve.
- (4) This sequence happened thousands of times in the U.S. in the 1970s to 1990s.



Recovered memory therapy (continued)

Conclusion:

_____Recovered memory therapy was a disaster. It harmed thousands of patients.



Recovered memory therapy (continued)

Q: Why did recovered memory therapy flourish for several years?

A: The theory had not been tested scientifically.

Q: Was it later tested?

A: Yes (continued).



When recovered memory theory was tested.

- In Britain, 30 children had witnessed three playmates struck and killed by lightning. Twenty years later, *none* had repressed the memory of the tragedy. They all remembered it.
- In the U.S., children who had seen a parent murdered were followed up 20 years later. *None* had repressed or forgotten the event.



When recovered memory was tested (continued)

- In California, in the 1970s, a school bus full of children was hijacked, for ransom (the children later escaped unharmed). *None* of them ever forgot it.
- Conclusion: If repression of memories of traumatic events happens, it is so rare that the concept is essentially useless for therapeutic purposes. (*Note:* Trauma victims often wish they could forget the trauma, but they can not.)

Chowchilla, California, bus driver Ed Ray.



Chowchilla kids:



VICTIMS

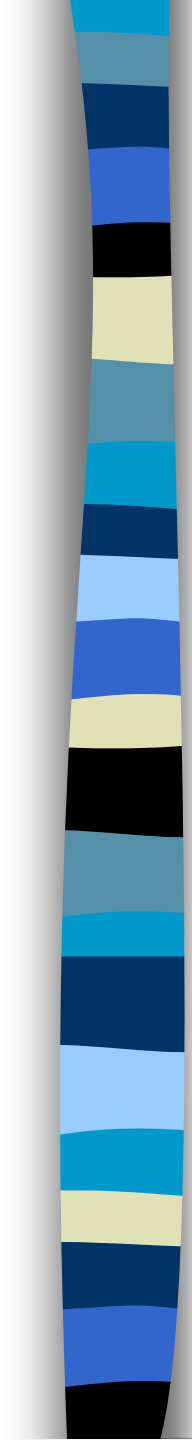


Q: Can false memories of trauma be implanted?

A: Yes.

A study by U.S. psychologist Elizabeth Loftis shows that false memories can be implanted.

Loftis recruited college students who had a younger teenage brother or sister. The younger brother or sister visited the college campus for a weekend. (continued)



Loftis instructed the college students to suggest to their younger brother or sister that years earlier, at age five or six, the younger sibling had been lost in a shopping mall and had been very frightened.

If the younger sibling did not “remember” this false event, the college student was told by Loftis to persist, to say, “Oh, you must remember, a policeman found you. He treated you nicely, you were very glad to see us when we found you...”



Result:

Well over half of the younger brothers and sisters eventually said that they remembered being lost in the shopping mall. They began to add details. “The policeman gave me ice cream. He was very kind and let me wear his hat...”



Conclusion:

_____ It is relatively *easy* to implant false memories of non-existent, frightening experiences.



Recovered memory therapy: Conclusions

- Science showed that people *do not* routinely repress the memory of traumatic events to the unconscious mind.
- Science also showed that it is relatively easy to implant false memories.
- Many patients, and their families, were damaged by recovered memory “therapy.”



Recovered memory therapy (continued)

Legal implications:

By the 1980s several patients, and the people they had accused, successfully sued the therapists.

* * * *

Today very few therapists continue to practice recovered memory therapy.



Another example of non-scientific therapy:

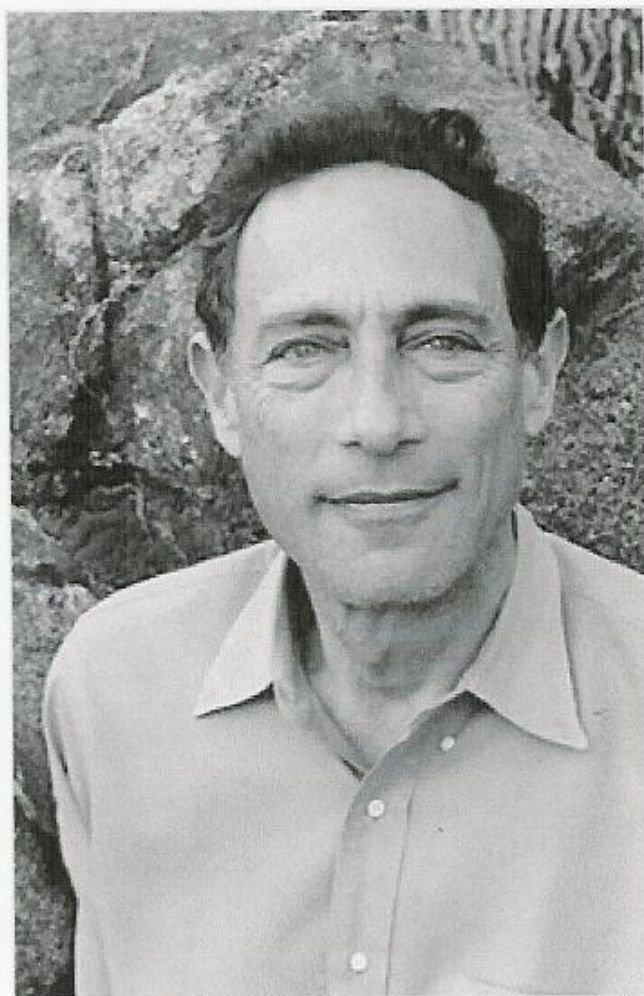
Alien abduction

- Alien abduction:

The theory that abnormal behaviors (depression, anxiety, eating disorders, psychosis, etc) are caused by abduction by aliens from outer space.

- Chief advocate:

Professor of Psychiatry John Mack,
Harvard University, USA, 1990s.









Another example of non-scientific therapy:

Past-Lives Therapy

- The theory:

_____Reincarnation--we have all lived many “past lives.” Traumatic events in our past lives stay with us, in the unconscious mind. These past-life events cause our present problems in adjustment.

- Chief advocate: Actress Shirley McClain; The Church of Scientology (actor Tom Cruise).





Conclusions

- There are many therapies that did not work. In fact, these therapies were often toxic--resulting in harm to patients:
 - Orgone Therapy
 - Re-birthing.
 - Recovered memory therapy.
 - Therapy for alien abduction.
 - Past-lives therapy.



Conclusions (continued)

- Q: Why did these therapies become widespread?
- A: “True believers” in these therapies did not engage in scientific testing of the therapies. Instead they advocated the therapies, with damaging results.



Recommendations

- Improved behavioral sciences training for students who will become therapists.
- Always ask, “What is the evidence?”
- Better training in critical thinking skills, starting with children in 1st grade.
- Education of the public by guild groups such as psychological associations, etc.



Recommendations (continued)

- Stronger government requirements, such as with drug testing.

The end
Thank you.