

a spiritual dimension, although I would think the opportunity for cult manipulation of these would be greatly diminished.

Artificially constructed “memories” would also enable cult perpetrators to implicate innocent people as being involved in the cult. By choosing the people to whom the survivor might be tempted to disclose forbidden information or go to for help, they can lessen the chances of this happening. They could also craft such “memories” to convince children that God cannot hear them, is mean, or is incapable or uninterested in helping them, effectively eliminating this source of help for them as well.

Artificial fantasy scenes could also be designed that defy the physical laws of nature, or in other ways present impossible situations, for the purpose of causing confusion and disbelief regarding the reality of the person’s memories as a whole, should they be recalled or revealed to others. If *some* are absolutely impossible, then why should a reasonable person believe *any* of them?

On the other hand, once these deceptive tactics become known to survivors and those working with them, they open a whole new array of possibilities for evaluating reported memories. Suddenly they realize that every memory does not have to have occurred in the physical realm in order to be real. Some may have occurred through one of these “artificial” means. Also, just because some may fall into this category doesn’t mean that all do. This can be very helpful information for a survivor’s struggle with denial.

VALIDATING FEATURES OF TRUE MEMORIES

In light of all this ambiguity surrounding memory, questioning the veracity of specific retrieved memories is certainly legitimate. When one has a broad understanding, however, of the dynamics of the various types of memory possible as well as the potential deceptions of cult-related memories, one can

evaluate a questionable experience from a much more knowledgeable perspective.

Since true Traumatic Memories, as described by van der Kolk, are stored in affective and sensory form and can only be recalled when one encounters a reminder of the trauma, any memory that is accompanied by sensory replay, or the “re-experience” of a vivid sense of touch, smell, sound, and/or taste, can be trusted as a true memory. The same is true if the memory occurs spontaneously in response to a trigger.

Another validating indicator of a true Traumatic Memory is the simultaneous experience of some form of Body Memory as the event is recalled. This may be the reappearance of specific injuries on the skin, the feeling of pain or pressure on the body corresponding to the actions being remembered, or any other activation of the body, either internally or externally, as the memory is being recalled or aroused. Since the body is not suggestible, these concurrent body reactions are very reliable indicators of true memories.

When Implicit Memory symptoms seen in the person’s life are consistent with the content of the memory, this gives a certain amount of validation as well. While it may not be able to provide detailed confirmation of specific memories, it can often affirm some aspects of them, such as the type of trauma experienced and/or the use of certain techniques, objects, or creatures.

As will be explained in the next chapter, memories are healed by identifying and bringing truth to the false beliefs the person conceived in the midst of the trauma event. If significant change occurs in the person’s life when truth is brought to the beliefs embedded in the memory, this also lends support to the reality of the memory. In essence, the changed symptoms represent Implicit Memory manifestations that may or may not

have been previously recognized as such. Change would not have occurred unless significant healing of a *real* psychological issue coming from a real event had taken place.

In addition to these confirming dynamics that are derived from a knowledge of how the various types of memory work, I believe common sense adds a few other fairly reliable indicators of reality for memories. If God is called upon to speak healing truth into the beliefs the person took away from the memory and He does so in an *undisputable* way,¹² I believe that also validates the reality of the memory. I do not believe that God responds to inaccurate or imaginative “memories.”

If the content of the memory reveals something the person is unable to identify or cannot recall having seen before and it turns out to be a real item to which he would not ordinarily have been exposed, that is also significant. You cannot accurately imagine something that you have never seen before.

For instance, I once had a memory of being in a building that had a number of elongated furnaces in it where an act took place that was designed to frighten me into obedience. I initially described the place as some sort of foundry because that was the only kind of building I could think of that would have furnaces in it. Two years later I saw a movie which showed the inside of a crematorium—with the same kind of elongated furnaces I had seen in the memory! I saw them again when I visited the site of the Dachau Concentration Camp in Germany years later. But how could my mind have so accurately depicted them *before* these experiences if I had not truly been in such a place as a child? This provided tremendous validation to the reality of the memory, even though it had none of the other previously

¹² Not all presumed “messages from God” are necessarily from God. Sometimes they come from one’s own mind and still effect healing because they reflect truth. However, at times a message of truth is so profound or unexpected or reveals a perspective that could only be divine that it leaves no doubt that it is from God. These are the instances to which I am referring here.

listed indicators of reality. My mind also quickly realized that having access to a crematorium would be quite advantageous to cult perpetrators.

I have had similar experiences with seeing specific surgical instruments being used on me in my memories and later having them confirmed to be real instruments. An internet search revealed one of them to be an instrument that was used for doing abortions for a short while in the 1950s and early 1960s, the exact time frame of my memory, which again lent considerable credibility to it.

Thirdly, if the content of the memory includes an element of surprise, something that would never have been imagined by the individual or is the opposite of what would have been expected, this too lends support to the genuineness of the memory. Obviously, supporting physical evidence and confirming reports from actual witnesses provide very concrete validation of a memory's reality.

"Memories" derived purely from imagination will bear none of these validating features and should be considered "iffy." In time, stronger evidence may arise to confirm some of them, but in the meantime drawing conclusions or making major decisions on the basis of such "memories" would not be wise.

Contrary to the beliefs of some, an emotional reaction that is consistent with the content of the "memory" is *not*, in itself, a valid indicator of its reality, as imagined scenes can activate one's emotions just as much as real ones. Movies and guided imagery experiences, for instance, can be real "tearjerkers." Reading or listening to scary stories can stimulate children's imagination and arouse great fear, as most any mother can testify.

Memories of experiences occurring through guided imagery, virtual reality, or dimensional "excursions" are generally just as significant as memories from the physical realm. For one thing, their presence indicates that someone was deliberately trying to

trick the person’s mind for an ulterior motive. Furthermore, if perceived as reality, they can be just as traumatic to the psyche as physical realm memories and thus produce Implicit Memory effects as well as some of the other confirming characteristics listed above. Discerning between them and physical realm memories can often be difficult and of minimal importance, except when the identification of perpetrators or participants is involved.

When physical marks of injury consistent with the memory reappear during memory recall, however, you can know for sure that the event occurred in the physical realm. While sensory replay could be possible for some virtual reality experiences, it would be impossible for guided imagery and most other “artificial memories.” The cells of the body and the five senses can only play back what physically happened to them. The source of memories manifesting these distinct features is therefore much more apt to be the physical realm.

	Physical Realm	Guided Imagery	Virtual Reality	Dimensional Experience	Demons (?)	Imagination
Wound Appearance	X					
Physical Evidence	X					
Confirming Reports	X					
Sensory Replay	X		X			
Physical Reactions	X	X	X	X		
Implicit Memory	X	X	X	X		
Jesus Heals	X	X	X	X		
Triggered	X	X	X	X	X?	
Unknown Object	X		X	unlikely	X	
Surprise	X	X	X	X	X	

Figure 7: Distinguishing Sources of Memories

CONCLUSION

What scientists know about the neurobiology of memory is fascinating but incomplete. Even what is known is not an exact science. Narrative Memory is easily distorted. Traumatic Memory, while accurate and at times verifiable, is at best sketchy. Implicit Memory is subjective, and while Body Memory is infallible, it is still non-verbal. This means that deciphering an absolutely clear picture of the trauma history of every survivor is probably an unattainable goal.

This need not impede healing, however. What is essential for healing to take place is not a precise knowledge of all the details of a trauma history, but identifying the *beliefs* that one carried out of the trauma. Bringing truth to those painful and often debilitating false beliefs is the truth that sets a person free (John 8:32)!