



Recollections of Sexual Abuse: Treatment Principles and Guidelines

Christine A. Courtois, Ph.D.
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Reviewed by Sandra L. Bloom, M.D.

In 1988, Dr. Christine Courtois published a landmark text on the treatment of incest survivors, a topic that many psychiatrists at the time rarely had to address. A decade later, Courtois, an experienced clinical psychologist, has taken on another controversial issue in her newest book, *Recollections of Sexual Abuse: Treatment Principles and Guidelines*. She sets out to accomplish two major goals: to illuminate the reader about the many-faceted aspects of the raging controversy over "true" and "false" memories, and to provide the clinician with the most current principles and guidelines for working with these issues.

Unlike others who have written much on this topic, Courtois made a painstaking effort to present this material in the most balanced way possible. She has thoroughly reviewed the literature on everything from the vagaries of normal memory to the engraving of traumatic memory, and has successfully attempted to condense a vast amount of material into a few chapters. She also provides us with a professional and political context for understanding how skewed, if not bizarre, the "true/false" dichotomy argument has become when it is applied to the extremely complicated questions of memory, identity, meaning and perspective.

If clinicians find the first four chapters daunting in their detail, the last five chapters will be well worth the price of the book. Here she sets out for the clinician the evolving consensus model for the treatment of traumatized patients. She reviews clinical guidelines and gives excellent risk management advice. Readers will be relieved to recognize that the author does not employ a patronizing tone or pretend that the issues of dealing with traumatized people are anything but complex.

Although we know that her sympathies lie with the victims of sexual and other forms of abuse, she does not shy away from sharp criticism of practices that lead clinicians astray. Rather than exclusively focusing on what should *not* be done, for which so many of the false memory advocates have been faulted, Courtois' book focuses on what *should* be done for suffering pa-

tients who confront practitioners on a daily basis.

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