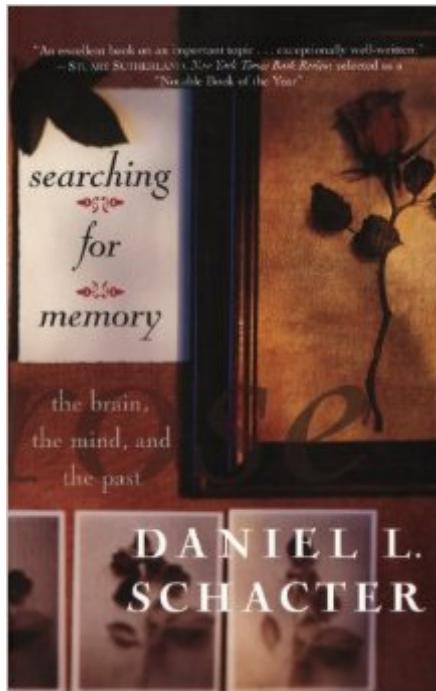


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Searching For Memory: The Brain, The Mind, And The Past



Synopsis

Memory. There may be nothing more important to human beings than our ability to enshrine experience and recall it. While philosophers and poets have elevated memory to an almost mystical level, psychologists have struggled to demystify it. Now, according to Daniel Schacter, one of the most distinguished memory researchers, the mysteries of memory are finally yielding to dramatic, even revolutionary, scientific breakthroughs. Schacter explains how and why it may change our understanding of everything from false memory to Alzheimer's disease, from recovered memory to amnesia with fascinating firsthand accounts of patients with striking and sometimes bizarre amnesias resulting from brain injury or psychological trauma.

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Customer Reviews

Your memory is certainly the most crucial aspect of who you are. Without it, arguably at least, consciousness itself borders on irrelevance, and identity no longer exists. Most of us think of memory, metaphorically, as shining a spotlight on images, sounds, and emotions from our past. Reading Daniel Schacter's fascinating text, *Searching for Memory*, The Brain, the Mind, and the Past, I realized just how deceptive and simplistic that notion is. In fact, every time you speak, or write something, or read, or drive a car, you're calling on "procedural" memory which allows you to learn skills and acquire habits, and/or "semantic" memory, which includes conceptual and factual knowledge. Even the spotlight-type memories you do have can be divided into "field" memories, which mimic your perceptions at the time of the original experience, and "observer" memories, which where you actually see yourself from the outside. (The latter is common when recalling

early-childhood experiences.) Searching for Memory is beautifully written, and teeming with stories and anecdotes that illustrate the nature of memory in a way that makes the absorption of its insights effortless. My only complaint about this book is that my wife kept trying to read it over my shoulder. If you're married, I suggest you order two copies

The title of this book is not very helpful in understanding what this book is about. There is a translation of Schacter's book (ISBN 3498063243) in German titled "Wir sind Erinnerung", meaning "we are recollections". These three words sum up the essence of the whole book much better than the original title. Really. Schacter seems to be one of the leading scientists in the field of research on memory. He coined several technical terms of the field and built theories about how humans remember, what they remember and how they fail to remember. This book is a summary of Schacter's work over the period 1980 to 1995 in plain words. While the main text uses very few technical terms, there are many many references to scientific papers. The Notes section stretches over 40 pages, the bibliography covers 35 pages, and the index is excellent. All in all a well written book about a scientific subject. If you are a scientist in the field, this book is not for you. You should read scientific papers instead of reading 400 pages of a paperback book. There are some other things I do not like about this book (which others seem to like). Schacter often refers to paintings of artists which are reproduced (in black and white, no colour) in the book. These pictures illustrate the way some artists feel about several aspects of memorizing. Well, I am not interested in such poor black and white reproductions, but perhaps you like it. Another annoying feature of this book is that there is often too much story telling in it. I would have liked more conciseness and precision instead of the many many cases a clinician sees through his career. Anyway, it was good enough to keep me reading it from the first to the last page.

I read this book in 1997 and it inspired me. I now have a PhD in neuroscience, and I can say that this is a fantastic book for a serious reader. One thing that sets this book apart from other similar books (including Schacter's latter books) is that it is fully referenced. Every claim that he makes is cited, so the interested reader can easily follow up on a specific topic. Because of this extensive citing, I consider this to be more scholarly than popular science. But the style of writing is very fluid and keeps the reader interested. Schacter breaks down the different kinds of memories: episodic, procedural, source, etc. Explains what each is and where in the brain we think these memories are stored. You might think that you should get a newer book, since neuroscience is a fast moving field. When this was written it was the very beginning of functional MRI. Since then there have been many

studies. However, I still recommend this book as a primer. You can start here and then use PubMed to search for the authors whose work interest you to see what's new.

this is the best review of the cognitive psychology of memory, by one of the leading experts in the field. I personally did not enjoy the artistic aspect of the book, but many say it was complementing. Now there are much better cognitive neuroscience books on memory -Kandel and Squires books, Steven Roses, among others- but as for the psychological aspects, this book stands above all others. At times it reads too much like a collection of case studies, but few would deny that lesion studies have contributed a lot to an understanding of the brain/mind. Most of the memory field is covered: recognition vs. recall, implicit vs. explicit, episodic vs. procedural, short -long term, working memory, general, emotional, semantic, etc..... but there is also a welcome and thorough discussion of false and recovered memories. In no other field can one see better the immediate impact that cognitive psychology of memory has on legal and social issues. Schacter effectively explains everything we know about the phenomenon. As for the other themes, adequate and sufficient reviews are given. I personally would have liked a bit more of neuroscience, but it is a great read nonetheless. There is also not much mention of the relationship between memory and other higher cognitive processes, like consciousness (a good place for speculation) or attention. But Schacter sticks to what is known, and does it well. AS an introduction to any aspect of memory studies, few texts are better than this one. But I would tell anyone interested to also read other Schacter books, as well as more pure psychology and neurological texts on the subject. (see Seven Sins of Memory by the same author, Kandel and Squires Memory: from Minds to Molecules and Roses The Making of Memory among others).

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