

Memory and Law

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Elizabeth Loftus is an internationally recognized expert in the study of human memory, particularly the malleability of memories. Her extensive research shows that memory is highly susceptible to distortion and manipulation, and that people can vividly recall events that never happened. Loftus developed the “Lost in the Mall” technique, or Familial Informant Narrative Procedure, in which a study participant is told about a time the participant got lost in a shopping mall. Even though the event didn’t happen, a significant percentage of participants developed a false memory for the experience. Her research on false memory, the reliability of eyewitness reports, and memories “recovered” through therapy has affected how law enforcement, courts, and psychologists consider eyewitness testimony. She has served as an expert witness or consultant about false memories in hundreds of legal cases, including the McMartin preschool molestation case; the trial of Oliver North; the Rodney King beating; litigation involving Michael Jackson, Martha Stewart, and Scooter Libby; and Bosnian war crimes trials in The Hague. Loftus is a member of the National Academy of Sciences the Royal Society of Edinburgh.

[Watch Inside the Psychologist’s Studio with Elizabeth Loftus.](#)