

‘Retracted memories’: The mind treats false recollections as real

False memories can seem just as real as genuine memories. It should be no surprise, then, that they influence how we think and behave. But what happens when we realize that a memory is false, and no longer believe in it — does its influence vanish? The answer, according to a [new study](#) in *Memory & Cognition* is: no. In fact, the work suggests a person’s level of belief in a memory has surprisingly little bearing on how much it affects them.

Ryan Burnell at Waikato University, New Zealand, and colleagues ran a series of online studies to explore these “retracted” memories. A striking finding was the sheer number of people who reported them. In the first two studies, on a total of about 750 people, just over a quarter of the participants said they had a “memory” like this.

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There were some inconsistencies in findings across the studies. However, overall, participants reported that retracted memories had just as much of an impact on them as real memories. In fact, there was only a weak relationship between how much participants believed in a memory (or retracted memory), and how much it influenced them.

[**This is an excerpt. Read the original post here**](#)