Memories and Behavior

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Sutin and Gillath (2009) discussed how the emotional intensity of memories can remain, while the coherence of the event does not. Middleton, Cromer, and Freyd (2005) referenced a case in which a woman began bizarre behavior without a history of treatment or psychological problems. This bizarre behavior began after a former foster parent moved to her neighborhood and she came in contact with her; this piece of the puzzle was not revealed until later. This woman's bizarre behavior consisted of inflicting personal injury on herself, and finally jumping from a two story window. Prior to these events, she was aware of abuse in her past, but was not able to retrieve explicit details in recalling the memories. She also did not recall the events in which she inflicted personal injury, or the jump. As she began to recover the recent events of personal injury and jumping, those memories of the past also came flooding back with intensity and detail.

This woman's case is an example of how incoherent memories can influence behavior. Thomas, Hannula, and Loftus (2007) did a study to show how imagery can not only influence behavior, but also the memory of the behavior. Further studies were done to determine if memory error is reduced if a person other than themselves is utilized in the imagery and self-relevant scripts. The results indicated that the memory error was reduced for imagery of a different person, but the effect of the imagery was also reduced. The self-relevant scripts did show a change in behavior without memory error of pre-experimental behavior.

Some people may argue that the distortion of memory is a minimal price to pay for the altering of behavior if the distortion of memory does not create further emotional trauma. In doing research for this paper, I have come to the conclusion that in some cases, the altering of behavior is more important than the distortion of the memory.

When dealing with habitual behavior, Tobias (2009) found that reminders have a strong effect on behavior frequency. Habits are the driving force of behavior selection; habits impact memory processing by making it easier to remember repeated behavior. Habitual behavior makes the memory of other behavior inaccessible for the model that Tobias used. There are some models in which the habitual behavior is performed unconsciously. Providing imagery and self-relevant scripts to change accessibility of memory to change habits and behavior would be beneficial.

Amnesia is still evident in war trauma victims (Middleton, Cromer, & Freyd, 2005). This literature review discussed the idea previously mentioned by Sutin and Gillath (2009) that the explicit memory may not remain in the conscious, yet the emotional content of the implicit memory remains in the subconscious. It could have been rapidly forgotten from the short-term memory before committed to long-term memory (Middleton, Cromer, & Freyd, 2005). The declarative part of memory is lost while the sensory of the procedure remains, creating puzzling behavior. Another case that was reference was a case in which a Vietnam Veteran would

annually on the same day pretend to have a gun in his pocket and hold up a bank to draw fire from the police. This veteran did not explicitly remember an incident in which his actions resulted in the death of a fellow soldier. Once this incident is remembered the veteran understood his behavior and it stopped.

Steffens and Mecklenbrauker (2007) posed the question of can we actually forget memories that are loaded with emotion; research shows that emotionally connected information helps us to recall and remember things. This review, as well as Middleton, Cromer, and Freyd (2005), referenced a study by Meyer Williams in 1994 who interviewed adult women who had a hospital record of child abuse; thirty-eight percent of the adults were unable to remember the incident 17 years later. Were their memories blocked, were they forgotten, or were they even encoded and incorporated into their memory?

Middleton, Cromer, and Freyd (2005) stated that if we remember absolutely everything we saw, or that happened to us, we would be so overwhelmed that it would be almost better to remember nothing. Some researchers have suggested these forgotten and recovered memories may be due to regular monitoring and encoding of information. Steffens and Mecklenbrauker (2007) suggested the source of memory and the trace are separate in source-monitoring. For example, a person may remember something that was said, but not the person who said it. They further discussed that verbatim traces are surface details of physical stimuli, whereas gist traces are the theme or meaning of the stimuli; accurate memory relies on verbatim. If there is only a gist trace it is easy to plant false details of memory. The ability to recover a memory depends on whether the memory was actually encoded, if it was never even encoded then it cannot be recalled and recovered; yet a formed memory can be inhibited to later be recalled (Middleton, Cromer, & Freyd, 2005).

Circumstances may influence the ability to recall; similar circumstances may provide cues for recall (Steffens and Mecklenbrauker, 2007). I know that if someone asks if I remember a conversation we had, I may not remember until they start talking about it again. Once a few words from the previous conversation are said, the whole previous conversation comes flooding back in detail. This could be similar to the research Middleton, Cromer, and Freyd (2005) referenced by Elliott and Briere in 1995 where more traumatic memories are recovered through TV shows and other venues rather than during therapy sessions. Middleton, Cromer, and Freyd (2005) referenced on organization that helps to keep track of documented cases of recovered memory. The Recovered Memory Project in 1997 (www.RecoveredMemory.org) created by Professor Ross Cheit now has 101 documented cases.

I wonder if it really matters whether the memories are true or not. If a person is going to therapy to deal with an issue in their life of either commitment, or other behavioral problems, what difference does it make whether that memory was true or false? Even with those that seek therapy for very implausible memories such as alien abduction, those memories are very much a part of them, they have to work through them with the therapist. Whatever we have to do to work through true or false memories to function in society, is what we need to do. On the other hand, if a person is fully functional by suppression of horrifying memories, then what is the purpose of

recovering those memories? Middleton, Cromer, and Freyd (2005) discussed that therapist should not have any other agenda than to provide a safe place for a person to share whatever they want to, and that proper training of therapist is vital in regards to memory recovery. The therapist should not actively pursue memory which takes the power away from the patient in focusing on their internal state (Middleton, Cromer, and Freyd (2005).

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