

Free term paper on why do we forget our childhood

[Experience](#), [Memories](#)



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Abstract

The paper discusses infantile amnesia – the phenomenon of the inability of adults to recollect any memory before the rough age of three years. The science behind the phenomenon is brain development. However brain development theory is being questioned today for its inability to explain a few aspects of childhood memory. Sigmund Freud’s explanation is his theory of repression of traumatic sexual experiences. Other psychologists meanwhile believe that language development holds the key to the explanation behind infantile amnesia. The paper also discusses the concept of identity and focuses on some empirical results that have been developed to prove the theories surrounding the question: Why do we forget our childhood?

Infantile Amnesia is the universally felt human experience of not being able to recollect incidents below the (average) age of three. This paper looks at the science, psychology and new findings about infantile amnesia. In as far as the science behind the phenomenon is concerned the paper discusses neurological subjects such as coding by the brain.

Other similar theories emerging from neuroscience are discussed in this

section. The section on the psychological explanation behind this form of Amnesia discusses, among other things psychologist Sigmund Freud's theory of repression. Here the paper also discusses the important correlation between language development and childhood memory. How the end of babbling and the natural use of full words are around the same time as memory solidification is a pattern the paper attempts to dissect. Thirdly, the paper looks some new empirical research that has been conducted on the subject.

- The Science of Missing Memories from Childhood

Lack of Neurological development is among the explanations for humans forgetting our memories as a child. Neuro-studies believe that human brains do not develop enough till the age of three for the memories to be formed. In particular, the structures in the anatomy of the brain and therefore the memory namely the prefrontal cortexes and the hippocampus have been found to not develop till the age of three. These are the key structures which contribute to the memory which in particular deals with looking back at one's life .

In as far as the hippocampus is concerned a key role is played by the medial temporal lobe in structural development. This has an impact on encoding of memories as well as maintaining of the memories from the time of childhood. However, this explanation is not considered as complete. Most importantly children at the age of two or three can remember incidents that take place some months earlier. If the neurological explanation is to hold well, then the child should not be able to remember these incidents as well. That, however is not the case, implying that memory coding structures are

established by the age of three or four.

However another possible neurological explanation lies in the associations that various components inside the cerebral hemisphere. These associations have been observed to have increased with age thereby helping adults retain memories of their childhood after the age of three but not before. This has been established as a statistical correlation between the cerebral associations and significance of memories.

- Psychological Explanations

Sigmund Freud, often considered the father of psychology, has been criticized by modern psychologists for his stress on the sexual aspects of human psychology. In the case of infantile amnesia too, Freud's theory rakes up the sexual nature and inclination of a child which he propagated in many of his other theories including the famous reinterpretation of the Oedipus complex. Sigmund Freud believed that repression due to disturbing and traumatic sexual experiences force the child to push the memories from birth to year 3 to the unconscious thereby being in a position from where the adult memory is unable to recall the same.

Other psychologists believe that the formation of memory in age three and above is vastly due to the growth of identity in human beings. Many psychological theories about identity reveal that it is only at the age of three that children start putting oneself in the perspective of the rest of the world. This includes Eric Ericson's model of the social stages of development wherein he says, in the age one to three, the development is more of some feelings of trust and independence.

- Language as a factor

Psychologists also believe that among the most crucial reasons for humans not remembering their childhood is the development of language in children. It is observed that till the age of three, the child mostly babbles. Babbling is the art of uttering non comprehensible language and words in attempt to express one's emotions. As the child grows from the age two to three, there are one word utterances. By the age of three, the child starts speaking some half sentences with many words. This, psychologists say, is directly responsible for memory. The inability of human beings in recollecting childhood memories lies vastly in language development.

- New Findings

Some of the new research in the area of infantile amnesia throws up interesting results. A study of a hundred and forty children in a paper published in the Child Development journal had, over a course of two years, studied the same set of children to gauge the impact of the growth on childhood memory. The study established that the age of the earliest memory grows with age of the child and stops with the age three. In essence a child at the age four can recollect incidents at one and a half years and not at the age of one. However as the child crosses the age five and six, he or she can't recollect anything beyond the age three. After this the pattern stops. Most adults can also recollect memories from three years and above. A similar study has established percentage numbers to this trend. The research found that 39 percent of the memories were done away with in the children between four and five years of age. The percentage was twenty four for the children between six and seven years of age.

Conclusion

The paper projected different routes taken to dissect the phenomenon of infantile amnesia. While the neuroscientists can prove the memory loss by the theory of brain development, they contradict their own theory due their discovery that a child of two years of age can recollect incidents from months ago. The better explanations lie in language development and memory staging as projected by the psychologists. Freud's theory of repression is also significant.

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