

Example of literature review on child abuse and repressed memory

[Sociology](#), [Violence](#)



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Introduction

This paper provides an overview of descriptive theories that have advanced in over the last decade concerning the working of the human memory and how it affects the adult behavior and experiences. Purposefully, this paper attempts by using different scholars to examine the influence of abuse on children. We explore the relationship between child abuse and repressed memory. The purpose of this literature review is anchoring an understanding of different attempts to come up with one comprehensive understanding of psychology and the developing of the human brain. While exploring the different facets of the concept of human behavior, the paper embarks on different scholastic analysis using divergent resources.

Literature Review

Williams Meyer (2012) examined the consequences of abuse on children and the effect on their memories. They had one hundred and twenty nine women who had documented stories of sexual abuse as children. Meyer asked the women details of the sexual abuse as children to confirm if they were able to recapture the traumatic events. The research wanted to explore if people

actually forget traumatic events such as childhood sexual abuse. If that is that is case, how common is it to forget or not to forget? In this study, thirty-eight percent of the women did not recall the abuse that had occurred seventeen years earlier. Women that were subject to sexual abuse from people that they knew recalled the experience vividly. Meyer argued that the forgetfulness of the women on the abuse does not mean that the abuse did not occur; it simply means that the memory had shut down that experience for the purposes of forging ahead. The pros for Meyer's argument are the presence of empirical data that she uses. However, the con is that overreliance on the data can be misleading.

Psychologists relate the idea of forgetting past events related to traumatic events as "recovered or repressed memories." The repressed memories according to Dallam, in her article *Crisis Or Creation? The Systematic Examination of False Memory Foundation*, she argues that repressed memories are synonymous with victims of large-scale trauma such as war or destruction. She refers to the process as called "traumatic amnesia". She further argues that the problem of traumatic amnesia has been common with populations that have undergone violent conflicts such as natural disasters, war, the holocaust or some form extraordinary shocking phenomenon. Some scholars, particularly in children psychology argued that traumatic amnesia also affected adults that have suffered sexual abuse as children (Dallam, 2001). Like, William Meyers, Dallam agrees that adults who suffered sexual abuse as children often do not remember those experiences. Unlike Meyers, Dallam argues that some adults who were victims of sexual abuse remember details of those experiences. While conducting a research

on childhood memories of sexual abuse, I would consider using the research by Dallam because of its depth, analysis and extensive research.

For the better part of the 1990s, there was a debate on the concept of “ recovered memories and false memories. The media was focused on the idea of child abuse for the better part of the 1990s. In the media, proponents of the concept of false memory refuted the claims of traumatic amnesia and posited that the idea “ of recovered memories or sexual abuse was quirky. In the last century, increased science has improved information and science has affirmed the place of traumatic amnesia. In countries like Australia, the court still has to dig deep to support claims of traumatic amnesia.

Loftus (2003) another psychologists argued that the repression is perhaps one of the most controversial concepts in the study of psychology. She says that repression occurs when something that is shocking occurs and the mind attempts to push it way back so that the conscious meter do not read it.

Instead of staying in its place, the memory becomes stubborn and emerges in consciousness. As a s psychoanalyst, repression is the backbone of the career of psychoanalysis. The unearthing of repression and the triumph of repression proponents over false memory syndrome has led to the resurgence of cases of abuse that occurred many years ago. In her article, Loftus examines the credibility of repressed memory while detailing how jurors and judges can react to cases of repressed memory claims. Loftus records the occurrence of child sexual abuse is irrefutable. Loftus provides an historical perspective as well as a legal viewpoint that is missing from the rest of the sources.

While some people have said that there is a little exaggeration on the part of

adults claiming for damages accruing from repressed memories, they still agree that child sexual abuse is a concern for many families in the United States. Granted, the problem of child abuse as grave in the American psychology, it is understood that there are people who make use of the situation. This begs the question, how often does child sexual abuse occur? Many scholars in this field have reported that sexual abuse is often forgotten amongst adults. Pike (2000) reported that most incest survivors and victims' do not recall about the abuses. Frederickson (2012) wrote, " Millions of people have blocked out frightening episodes of abuse years of their life, or their entire childhood". She went ahead to argue that sexual abuse was perhaps the greatest beneficiary in that fold. In making an argument, one needs that side that supports, and one that goes against the thesis, on this front; I will use Frederickson's research to provide the antithesis.

The commonness of repressed memories has also become a concept of debate amongst scholars varying from the degree of most common to least common. Some legal scholars have championed for legislations that allows the victims of repression to sue for damages. Lamm (1991), who argued that the government should ease access to courts for victims of childhood sexual abuse, proposed one such argument. In 1991, the state of California passed a legislation that allowed victims of child abuse no matter how old they are to sue within three years if they discovered injuries that occurred because of a sexual abuse that happened as a child. The premise of Lamm's argument is that " total repression of memories is a common.

Not every scholar agrees with Lamms's assertion, some doctors in the medical field report that clinical anecdotes remain very unconvincing on the

reliability of repressed memories. Ganaway (2003) reported that repressed memory evidence is “ empirical observations lacking in scientific underpinnings.” Holmes (2000) wrote that repressed memories are “ impressionistic case studies” and should be compared to clinical “ speculations” (p. 203). Holmes was particularly harsh with the concept when he went ahead to argue that the concept of repression do not have any scientific backing and does not conform with the standards of the medical profession.

Griffin & Gregory (2006) explored the sociological analysis of repressed memory. According to them, human memory works as a combination of new and old knowledge, personal beliefs and other experiences. The book records that children’ s memory can be unreliable to be used as witnesses because they are vulnerable to change (p. 501). Usually, the desire to break patterns and sense out problems is basic to human nature. Reconstruction is pivotal in ensuring that humans reconnect the past and bring out clear messages. However, age and physical health can be detrimental to the full execution of this responsibility. The text defines social support as the “ the helpful coping resources provided by friends and other people” (p. 599). In the book, the authors evaluate definitions of social support utility for research. In their arguments, the availability of social support makes it possible for children to forget the experiences of abuse as adulthood. However, the absence of social support increases of mental shock (p. 599).

Daniel Siegal (2012) writes that the Mind is rarely defined in fields that focus on mental experience. In his book, Siegal explores how recent findings in science have exposed a different understanding of the developing mind. His

study is paramount for research focusing on childhood experience. He asserts that childhood experiences affect the perception of reality and the maturity of their cognitive ability. Siegal argues that while science explains the science functions, by providing an in-depth but distinct perspective on human experience, anthropology gives insights on how relational experiences and communication patterns within different groups affect the development of human brain (p. 2). Siegal defines the human mind as “ a core aspect of the mind that is an embodied and relational process that regulates the flow of energy and information (p. 6). In his understanding, the mind is an emergent property of the body and its relationships is created within internal neurophysiologic process and relational experiences. The structure and function of the developing brain are determined by how experiences, especially within interpersonal relationships, shape the genetically programmed maturation of the nervous system.

Siegal continues to argue that the mind, brain and relationships are not three separate elements. Instead, he argues, “ they are three aspects of one reality (p. 7). This consensus accrues from the fact that they all lead to the conclusion of the power of energy, information flow and experiences. The power of energy flow together forms the brain, which controls the working of the complete neuron-system. The recursive, reentry property of the mind, typical of self organizing emergent process, means that the relationships and brains shape the mind, and the mind shape relationships and the brain (p. 7)

Hockenbury (2010) explored the flashbulb memories. This theory suggests that dramatic events can imprint powerful images in people’s memories.

Brown and Bulk argued that flashbulb theories was instrumental in investigating the murder of J. F Kennedy by suggesting that human memory do not forget dramatic events. Flashbulb theory presents the argument that human memory is a highly detailed snapshot of moments and circumstances. Flashbulb memories allow individuals to remember finer details events and are resistant to forgetting. However, because flashbulb do not document like real cameras, there is a possibility that information could be impaired. According to Brown and Kulik, flashbulb memories are distinct from ordinary memories for details held and method of storage since they use emotional aspects to store information. Another emotional memory component was suggested by Whitefield (2005). This is called repression theory that argues that emotionally threatening materials can be kept from consciousness by motivated forgetfulness. Scholars agree that trauma can cause problems of memory. Still, scholars fail to agree if repression can be a cure for trauma. In his research, Freud believed that repression was caused by hypnotic states in life. Repressed memory has been used widely for people undergoing therapeutic treatments from traumatic experiences. In the best selling *Mind at a Time*, Mel Levine reports that children's learning is complex and varying depending on the nature of their brain. He also asserts that children learning can also be affected by events such as tremor or sexual abuse. By using his abundance experience at the Children's Hospital, and as an educator, Levine writes a book that targets a larger audience on children is learning strategies. The book uses the concept of objective observation that allows the children and parents to tell their stories. In addition to using observation, the book also employs a wide range

of research available from writings of many people such as Howard's concept of emotional intelligence, and many other conventional scholars. Levine describes the workings of the human brain, which he exploits to find a way of helping students learn better. In my view, the book accomplishes the original goal of providing a reroute for analyzing the mind development (p. 15).

Contrary's to Goleman's Emotional Intelligence, Levine premises his work on the argument that human minds are not the same. He asserts that the preposition that human minds are equal should not be tolerated. The assumption of equality makes adults put undeserving pressure on the children to perform even when it is beyond their intellectual capability. In the p. 23 of the Mind at a Time, Levine writes, " it is taken for a granted in adult society that we cannot all be generalists skilled in every area of learning and mastery." While the general society accepts this fact, we have refused to accept that our kids learning also follow the same route (p. 23). He argues that while some students face difficulties in school, the challenges are not tantamount to disabilities or learning deficiencies. Instead, he acknowledges that learners possess differences that are numerous than their similarities. Helping students require that we exploit mechanisms that are preemptive and combative. Labeling students with terms like " learning disables" or ADHD victim is undermining and restrictive to the child's development. A comprehensive analysis of the child's problems and a detailed description of the child challenge offer a better way of helping the child go through the obstacle, as opposed to the easy labels.

In conclusion, the scholars from the different fields agree that repression is an occurrence that happens for children as the younger ages. However, the

scholars disagree on the frequency of the phenomenon. Some scholars in the field of psychology have termed the experience as an “emotion overload that the subconscious mind fails to handle at the time that it occurs” (Loftus, 2003, p. 12). In order to handle the situation, the subconscious represses the experience so that it is not replayed in the brain. The purpose is to stop the child from witnessing an emotional overwhelming situation in life. Some incidences that can lead to this include physical insult, sexual abuse, or mental abuse. The disruption occurs to help the child grows. However, in adulthood, the repression can surface leading to myriad of symptoms and damages. In this paper, we have analyzed the frequency, the nature and correctness of the concept of repression by using various sources from different scholars. For the purposes of future research, a multidisciplinary concept and a deeper involvement on personal testimonies would provide a coherent and well developed analysis on this topic.

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