

# The sins of memory



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What are “the sins of memory”? Have you ever accidentally left your house keys in the front door or walked to the next room only to wonder why you are there? What about believing that someone told you something only to remember later that you read it or heard it on the radio? These are just a few examples of sins that one’s memory executes every day. The means by which memory fails is comprised of the “sins of omission” as well as the “sins of commission” (Schacter, 2001). According to Schacter (2001) memory blunders can be divided into seven elemental lapses: transience, blocking, and absentmindedness (sins of omission), then misattribution, bias, persistence and suggestibility (sins of commission) (Psychology Today, 34(3), 62; Robinson-Riegler & Robinson-Riegler, 2008).

According to Schacter (2001, as cited in Renk, Donnelly, McKinney & Baksh, 2007), transience refers to the deterioration or loss of memory over a period of time. As the offender of various memory troubles, transience is a basic aspect of one’s memory (Schacter, 2001). Although studies have shown that immediately following an experience memory preserves a comprehensive file allowing one to call to mind the earlier period, with time lapsing one’s memory of experiences disappear gradually without rehearsal (Schacter, 2001) (Psychology Today, 34(3), 62).

Most people have had the frustrating experience of failing to produce a face or name. According to Schacter, the memory has not faded and is later unexpectedly retrieved (Schacter, 2001). This blunder is termed tip-of-the-tongue phenomenon (Robinson-Riegler, 2008). Simply because one’s mind is

unsuccessful in pulling up a piece of information does not imply that the knowledge is not there (Robinson-Riegler, 2008). It possibly will be briefly unobtainable given inadequate retrieval cues (Robinson-Riegler & Robinson-Riegler, 2008; *Psychology Today*, 34(3), 62).

According to Schacter (2001, as cited in Renk, Donnelly, McKinney & Baksh, 2007), bias refers to the misrepresented persuasions of ones existing knowledge, and values on their current and later memories of ones experiences. The rebuilding of memories can influence appearance of family affairs and connections; and as a result, the information presented can consist of reconstructed memories adjusted to interconnect with the obligation of the current circumstances and, therefore, are not an accurate portrayal of children's emotional or behavioral functioning (Schacter, 2001, as cited in Renk, Donnelly, McKinney & Baksh, 2007) (*Journal of Child & Family Studies*, 16(3), 297-306; *Psychology Today*, 34(3), 62).

Additionally, Schacter (2001, as cited in Renk, Donnelly, McKinney & Baksh, 2007) suggests that there are different types of bias. Consistency and variation biases would cause people to call to mind their past feelings and beliefs so they would remind one of ones existing views and values (Schacter, 2001 as cited in Renk, Donnelly, McKinney & Baksh, 2007).

Whereas hindsight bias implies that memories of past dealings are categorized by current knowledge; egocentric bias would encourage people to recall ones past in a self-enhancing way; along with stereotypical bias that would persuade peoples memories and opinions of diverse social parties (Schacter, 2001, as cited in Renk, Donnelly, McKinney & Baksh, 2007) (*Psychology Today*, 34(3), 62).

According to Schacter (2001, as cited in Renk, Donnelly, McKinney & Baksh, 2007), memories can be influenced as a result of external manipulations and as a result may absorb the misleading information from other people into their memory (Schacter, 2001, as cited in Renk, Donnelly, McKinney & Baksh, 2007). Well and Bradfield (1998, as cited in Renk, Donnelly, McKinney & Baksh, 2007) documented that people who are given validation feel more certain in their own recollections. Additionally, people interrogated with intimidation may have doubts about their memories (Schacter, 2001, as cited in Renk, Donnelly, McKinney & Baksh, 2007). One will get a more accurate answer if the questions are worded in a neutral way (Schacter, 2001, as cited in Renk, Donnelly, McKinney & Baksh, 2007) (*Psychology Today*, 34(3), 62).

Absent-mindedness entails disengagement amid memory and attention, where recall blunders take place because one is distracted with an issue or concern and is not paying attention (Schacter, 2001, as cited in Renk, Donnelly, McKinney & Baksh, 2007). As a consequence of this preoccupation, the wanted information is not transmitted in memory (Schacter, 2001, as cited in Renk, Donnelly, McKinney & Baksh, 2007). Conceivably, as a result of preventing oneself from expanding on specific information required for later recollection, dividing one's attention throughout encoding information inhibits later recall (Schacter, 2001, as cited in Renk, Donnelly, McKinney & Baksh, 2007). People are prone to fail to remember central responsibilities. A good system to reduce this obstacle is to develop a prioritized duty record use daily (Haraburda, 2007) (*The Free Library*, 2007; *Journal of Child & Family Studies*, 16(3), 297-306).

Misattribution entails transferring a memory to the incorrect source. This breakdown of memory can consist of recollection of events that never transpired or recalling events accurately and nevertheless misattributing it to the incorrect situation or occasion (Schacter, 2001, as cited in Renk, Donnelly, McKinney & Baksh, 2007). People recollect facts precisely and still may misattribute the source of the fact when one has uncertain memories of an incident (Schacter, 2001, as cited in Renk, Donnelly, McKinney & Baksh, 2007). “ People have a tendency to remember things that did not happen” (Haraburda, 2007) (The Free Library, 2007; Journal of Child & Family Studies, 16(3), 297-306).

The sin of persistence is the repeated recollection of unsolicited memories (Schacter, 2001, as cited in Renk, Donnelly, McKinney & Baksh, 2007). Schacter believes that one may be able to avoid certain situations that are harmful because of the way that negative memories are stored (Schacter, 2001, as cited in Renk, Donnelly, McKinney & Baksh, 2007). He suggests that until memories are reframed adequately they are forced into conscious attention (Schacter, 2001, as cited in Renk, Donnelly, McKinney & Baksh, 2007) (Journal of Child & Family Studies, 16(3), 297-306).

In conclusions performing the following actions can improve ones precision of the information acquired from others, but failure to do so can result in one making inadequate judgments based on flawed information (Haraburda, 2007). Acquire information promptly after an experience, while it is fresh in one’s mind (Haraburda, 2007). Make use of a prioritized duty list. 3. Record observations from important dealings (Haraburda, 2007). Document important dates, events and goals on a daily (Haraburda, 2007). Utilize

impartially worded questions when seeking information (Haraburda, 2007).

Recognize the perspective of the person supplying the information

(Haraburda, 2007). Be aware of and identify the symptoms of PTS

(Haraburda, 2007) (The Free Library, 2007).

### **Reference**

Chart is from "The Seven Sins of Memory," by Brian Work, Vol. 12 No. 3 May-June 2002

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