

Besides being a
nolan masterpiece,
memento portraits a
rare medical
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But You Don't Know Who You've Become

The thriller Memento walks its viewer through the life of a man with a rare memory disorder, temporal lobe amnesia. In the movie the main character Leonard Shelby is initially portrayed as a man incapable of forming new memories who seeks vengeance for his late wife; a lovely gentle woman who was raped and murdered by one or more men on the night that Lenny lost his memory. The movie begins with Leonard answering the phone, we later find out that the man on the other line is Teddy, an alleged cop who is trying to help Lenny find the assailant Jimmy G. Jimmy G. or perhaps John G. is the name of Mrs. Shelby's mysterious and alleged second attacker. The police that worked the case dismissed Leonard's ideas of a second assailant although Leonard claims to clearly remember being knocked in the head by a second man while his wife was being attacked.

Moreover, the police found no real evidence to support Leonard's second-man-theory as they believe his concussion was really caused by him tripping and hitting his head on the mirror. The viewer cannot accept either of these claims as we did not hear the cops themselves ever dismiss the idea of a second murderer and initially we are presented with what we know Lenny remembers. Since Lenny is the main character it must be assumed that what he remembers is what we must accept as truth. Following this logic we return to the opening scene with Lenny on the phone with Teddy. Teddy is asking him questions. However later on Teddy pretends to know this information as if he learned it from hanging out with Leonard. He portrays himself as Leonard's cop buddy but later on in the movie there is substantial

evidence to suggest that Teddy or should I say John Gammell is a dangerous drug dealer that is trying to use Lenny to take out his competition.

But this information is also questionable as we learn it from Natalie. Natalie is Jimmy the drug-dealer's girlfriend. Leonard killed Jimmy the drug dealer because Teddy convinced him that this Jimmy must have been the man that took part in his wife's murder. However there is no hard evidence to support this idea either. As Leonard "learns" new solid facts about his wife's murderer he tattoos them on his body and keeps a bunch of disorganized papers in his folder on the case. In order to function we find that Lenny leaves himself lots of notes and trusts his own handwriting. He remembers people by taking a Polaroid picture of them and writing their name on the picture. He explains his disorder to everyone he meets and he trusts everyone until they prove themselves untrustworthy. Using a series of routines Leonard takes solace in his condition.

He takes pictures of places he's been and he believes in his system. Leonard however isn't the only man in this film with temporal lobe amnesia. Before his incident Leonard was an insurance fraud inspector. With a keen knowledge for detail Leonard would meet with people claiming they needed large insurance pay outs due to sudden illness. Commonly Leonard would use his skill and "sniff out" those trying to swindle the company; finally Leonard's shrewd façade and investigative instincts met their match, Sammy Jankis. Sammy has temporal lobe amnesia with a short term memory capacity that is about the length of the average commercial. Sammy appears to have no anterograde amnesia and even remembers how to deliver his wife's insulin shots. Sammy cannot make any new memories but Leonard

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determines that this is because of a mental illness not a physical condition so the insurance company refuses to provide money to the Jankis family.

Ultimately Leonard seals his fate with this determination as a series of unfortunate events lead to the deaths of Mrs. Jankis, Mrs. Shelby, Jimmy, and Teddy.

Leonard is portrayed in the end as a psychotic killer who chooses not to remember that he has already killed the person that he believes participated in murdering his wife. This strikes me as one of the most unlikely activities for a person with this condition to perform. An individual with temporal lobe amnesia like Lenny has a short term memory of about sixty seconds and in reality this person is very empty. An individual like this is totally removed from who they are and like Teddy says in the movie, " You know who you were but do you have any idea who you've become?" Lenny is not emotionless or acting as though he is perpetually confused; he has characteristic thought and is driven by revenge. This is utterly impossible. A person with amnesia like this could never be able to place that emotion to the context of life. While this also confirms the premise of the movie, a man stuck in an infinite loop of hatred and murder it shows how unrealistically the movie portrays individuals with this disease. An individual with temporal lobe amnesia could feel the urge to seek revenge and could hypothetically seek that revenge then forget that it has been sought however it would take more than tattoos and scraps of paper. In the movie they do a very good job of conveying the emotional strain of having to meet people over and over again and trying so hard to remember them then failing to store the memory of

having sex with that person, or them hitting you in the face, or being set up for two murders.

There are no claims here that a person like this would not be functional, but remember Sammy Jankis? He had totally lost the ability of analysis. He did not realize he was hurting his wife. He did not realize he was watching a new commercial he simple could not remember what he was doing before. Sammy could not lead a conversation like Leonard. Sammy could not interrogate someone or investigate anything. This is how a person with this condition truly appears yet as these words go onto this page it strikes that perhaps Leonard's amnesia is psychological and not physical.

The viewer finally finds out that Sammy is not faking his condition in any way he truly has a physical problem with storing new memories as the audience watches him murder his own wife. However Leonard's memory capacity varies throughout the movie as if the traumatic shock of losing all the power he held in his life was removed when his wife was raped and killed in his house without his realizing it. Perhaps the reason there are various inconsistencies within the film about Leonard's memory capabilities are because his temporal lobe amnesia is not physical.

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