# **Written Assignment - Unit 4**

Computer Science, University of the People

PSYC 1504-01 Introduction to Psychology - AY2024-T4

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Repressed Memories: Controversy and Consequences

The whole idea of repressed memories as seen by Sigmund Freud revolves around the idea that people block traumatic memories and events to protect themselves from emotional trauma and distress. The theory has been at the center of many debates over the years and has interesting and significant implications, especially in legal circles. The reappearing of a repressed memory can have multiple complex psychological and legal issues, as seen during the 1990’s where multiple cases of child abuse were rooted in the subject. This assignment summarizes the article I found in the New Scientist ‘Repressed memories: The dangerous idea we can’t seem to forget’ and focuses on the reliability of the repressed memories and what happens when they return.

**Summary of the article**

The article I found called ‘Repressed memories: The dangerous idea we can’t seem to forget’ looks into the repressed memory theory and the controversial nature of them, not to mention the significant impact they can have on individuals and society as a whole. The article focuses on a few of the cases that were made during the 1990’s which had several people both rightfully and wrongfully accused and even convicted with the only basis being victims suddenly remembering as their memories resurface. The memories usually surfaced during the subject’s therapy sessions, some using techniques that have since been criticized for being to suggestible and are likely causing false memories. The article also ends with the state that repressed memories are an open issue that is still under psychological study, from a legal point of view it is a risky tool since it is prone to distortion.

**When do memories resurface?**

The memories in question usually resurface during therapy sessions, most of the time while using tools like hypnosis or guided memory imagery. However, as mentioned these techniques sometimes have a false result by creating false memories. This is usually caused by misleading questions or even sometimes the therapist’s own prejudice or influence, on purpose or by mistake. Sometimes the memories might even resurface from a new external traumatic event that triggers a flash back to the old traumatic event and resurfaces all memories connected to it.

**What happens when memories resurface?**

When repressed memories return the results can be extreme both from a psychological point of view and life changing. Some people might find closure or answers that make them feel better after finally seeing missing parts from their past that might have eluded them till then. However, there is also the other end of the spectrum, being people that react badly to the discovery of lost memories. These people can suffer multiple symptoms, anything from distress, confusion, and even self-identity confusion. These effects are sometimes even more profound when the memories turn out to be false. Maybe more importantly in the context of legal cases, both the victims and the accused might suffer a miscarriage of justice, again more so when the memories are found to be false.

**My two cents on repressed memories**

I personally believe that the concept and idea of repressed memories should be used carefully, more so in legal court settings when a subject’s life be changed significantly. Human memories are complex and malleable, we see times where a person’s memories can be altered by mere suggestion from an external source. This means that any use of repressed memories or any treatment that tries to revive repressed memories should be done with the utmost care and should always include a healthy amount of skepticism.

**Conclusion**

Repressed memories can and do raise many questions and issues around the issue of memories and their validity. While there is some small amount of basis to the theory that we can bury memories in our mind to protect ourselves from trauma both past and future caused by the memories. The problems arise when the memories reemerge, even more so if a significant amount of time has passed since the original trauma are extremely questionable and unreliable. It’s important to try and balance the need to understand the repressed memory concept while remembering the implications of resurfacing them and their subsequent reliability.

## References

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