Psychotherapeutic Use of Childhood Memories

Steven Taylor;

Abstract

Reviews the book, Using Early Memories in Psychotherapy: Roadmaps to Presenting Problems and Treatment Impasses by Michael Karson (see record 2006-07331-000). For psychotherapists who believe that the roots of adult psychopathology lie in memories or cognitive representations of childhood experiences, memories of childhood are an important focus of clinical attention. The best known examples of such treatments are, of course, psychodynamic psychotherapies, in which free association and interpretations are used to uncover putatively repressed memories, thereby enabling the patient to gain insight into the nature of his or her problems (e.g., Freud, 1914; Mayman, 1968). Drawing largely on psychodynamic formulations, combined with elements of systems theory and operant conditioning, Michael Karson describes in his book how early memories can serve as a primary focus of treatment. This book is as much about his development as a therapist as it is about his treatment methods. The book is richly illustrated with clinical vignettes, and the author emerges as a compassionate and dedicated therapist who is open to admitting mistakes and learning from them. Paradoxically, however, the book also contains many dogmatic assertions. Elaborating on the work of others, particularly Mayman (e.g., Mayman, 1968) and Bruhn (e.g., Bruhn, 1990), Karson offers guidelines on how to use early memories as ways of gaining insight into the patient's presenting problems, and for developing interventions and dealing with treatment impasses. (PsycINFO Database Record (c) 2006 APA, all rights reserved)

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Most importantly, childhood memories keep the inner child alive. No matter how old we get, there is always a child within each one of us. He/She comes out at different times. For instance, some may act like a child on seeing swings; the other may get excited like a child when they see ice cream. All this happens so because we have our childhood memories reminding us of the times associated with the things we get excited about. My Childhood Memories. Growing up, I had a very loving family. I had three siblings with whom I used to play a lot. I remember very fondly the games we used to play. Especially, in the evenings, we used to go out in the park with our sports equipment. Each day we played different games, for example, football on one day and cricket on the other. Children and teenagers have earlier memories than adults do. This suggests that the problem may be less with forming memories than with maintaining them. This includes using the past tense, memory-related words such as “remember” and “forget”, and personal pronouns, a favourite being “mine”. It is true to some extent that a child’s ability to verbalise about an event at the time that it happened predicts how well they remember it months or years later. Maori adults have the earliest childhood memories (age 2.5) of any society studied so far, thanks to Maori parents' highly elaborate style of telling family stories. Reminiscing has different social functions in different cultures, which contribute to cultural variations in the quantity, quality and timing of early autobiographical memories. Back in the 1900s, Freud coined the term “childhood amnesia,” to describe the strange phenomenon of losing childhood memories as adults. His theory was that we repress our earliest memories because of their disturbing sexual content, because that's his whole MO. While some agree with this hypothesis, the last few decades have yielded a different conclusion, thanks in large part to several studies led by Patricia J. Bauer, an Emory University psychology professor and expert in the field of children's cognitive development. Happiest childhood memories would be when we would visit our grandparents during our summer vacations. It used to be fun. Our grandparents would be eagerly waiting for us with all smiles and my grandmother would prepare all our favorite foods... Some of my happiest, most vivid childhood memories circulate around my yearly stays at my German grandmother's home for summer vacations. I was allowed to go there for the first time as a young boy, some 10 years old, maybe, all by myself. It was a grand event full of new and for me forbidden activities! For me, childhood memories are all made up of recollections of tasty food. I had this sandwich made up of two cookies and just some butter between them. Now that's the taste of childhood! Tomorrow I'm going to grab a can of condensed milk; I just realised how much I miss it. You all know what I'm talking about! My grandma used to work in a garage in a warehouse, and often took me with her to work. One time she didn't keep her on eye on me, and I sneaked out. She found me inside the garage.