

## TMP Episode 4.5

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Hello, and welcome to Bonus episode 4.5 of the Movie Plaza on number 54, Memento. As promised. Here's an interview with Mr. Carl Mumm, a social studies teacher at McCasky High School. Mr. Mummer was actually the one who introduced me to Memento when I had him for psychology class, so I thought he would be the perfect person to help you better understand the psychology behind Leonard's condition that made it so unique. As we know in Memento, Leonard Shelby has anterograde amnesia, a condition leading to the partial or complete inability to form new short term memories. Mr. Mummer explains what that means.

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Sure. Anterograde amnesia, as you said, dealing with not being able to form any type of new memories after some type of incident. A good example, quite honestly, could be if somebody's on a sports field, they get hit, they get knocked out for a second, they wake up and say, hey, what happened? Is Where am I? Those types of things, they have to readjust their brain to figure out what's going on. But anterograde amnesia in general, it's an encoding issue. We receive information from our sensory registers, basically our five senses. We take that information into our short term memory, and if we give it meaning, it'll go to our long term memory. So anterograde amnesia is typically some type of connection issue or encoding a problem. Moving information from short term memory, which only lasts about 30 seconds, into our long term memories.

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Okay, so we know that in the film, Leonard has a very severe form of this. How is Leonard able to still remember things from before the incident, including basic tasks like how to drive or give an insulin

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shot? Well, and you kind of said about the basic tasks. With anterograde amnesia, you struggle to make any type of new memories, but our memories are broken into what I call folders. And some of those folders are things like procedural memories, how to perform tasks. Those are things you learn, like, for instance, riding a bike. If you don't ride a bike for 20 years, you could probably still get on a bike and ride it because it's something that you have stored. So that was before and before his accident. So once again, he knows how to do it. Other things that are involved are a couple of other folders would be episodic memories. And in episodic memories, they're the events in your life, the episodes of your life. And so the things that he had had throughout his life, they're still there. A birthday party, for instance. You remember your birthday parties. You remember things like that. And then you also have semantic memories, and they're just our general knowledge. I like to call it basically kind of like your jeopardy info. They're just bits of information you have. What's the capital of this state or such? All these things are stored in the long term memory already, so they're still there. So that's why he's able to do things like in the movie. He knows how to drive. He can look at directions and read directions and be able to get someplace. But if you gave him verbal directions, that's something new. He wouldn't be able to remember those directions in his head, but you write them down. He knows how to read. He knows how to go east, west, north, south.

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Okay, so as you said, he can remember certain life events from before the incident, which would be part of his episodic memory. However, we see that the version he remembers is inaccurate. And though he doesn't realize this, there are times when he comments on the unreliability of memory to explain why he writes things down. Can you explain more about why memory is so unreliable?

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Memory is malleable, and that's the first thing to remember. We do not remember most things step by step or every little bit of it. We kind of remember the general concept, and then we fill in what makes sense. A lot of times that is the right information, but we have times where we don't fill it in with the correct information, and that's where the mind is malleable. I give the example a lot of times for people that probably somewhere along the line, you had to remember the Gettysburg Address in elementary school, and you had to memorize it word for word, and you might not remember it anymore, but you remember what the Gettysburg Address is about. And that's kind of the idea with memory. A good example there would be with eyewitness testimony, and we talk about that in our psychology classes. Eyewitness testimony is considered credible in a court case, but at the same time, your memory of what a situation could be, could be influenced by a lot of outside sources, what other people say, that can influence your memory. If you hear what somebody else is saying, it's different from your original memory. It can become part of your memory now. And so now your memory has changed. Other things that could happen is your own personality on what you believe, on what you thought you saw, how you interpreted something can really affect your memory as well. And other things, like traumatic events in the movie, obviously a traumatic event can change your perception of a memory. And then lastly, over time, the order you get memories fade. And when you want to try and remember something, a lot of times you're going to fill in the blanks to what makes sense, to.

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More on filling in the blanks. But it is revealed that Leonard lies about the reality of his life by perpetuating a false narrative and over time, subconsciously combining aspects of the Sammy Jenkins story with his own life. Would you say this is possible?

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Yeah, and absolutely. Because, again, like we said, he's filling in the blanks to make his memory make sense to him. And we think a lot about out the mind as kind of twofold. You have your conscious mind, which is what's happening on a daily basis. You listen to this podcast right now as you're using your conscious mind. We also have an unconscious mind, and I kind of explain it as, like, the mind, it's locked behind a closed door. And for somebody like Leonard or Lenny here, he can't believe that he would kill his own wife. He can't believe that his version of the truth isn't right. So he incorporates something, again, one of those memories, those episodic memories he had in the past about Sammy Jenkins jenkins, sorry. When he was an insurance investigator. And most likely, I would imagine, would probably be one of his more recent cases before his accident. So he incorporates that person's life into his own and just takes his experiences and put them into Sammy's. So, yes, I do believe it could

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happen. Okay. You mentioned that Leonard can't believe or accept the reality of his life, and that is what I believe is one of the most tragic aspects of memento. It's the lack of purpose in his life and his inability to move on or get closure. Without his memory, he's merely a husk of a person. And because he lacks a true sense of reality and self, it's just kind of sad. This actually reminded me of John Locke, who we talked about in your class. He's a 17th century English philosopher who believed that one's sense of self

depended on consciousness, or more specifically, quote, a reflecting and self reflecting consciousness. Can you first explain what a self reflective consciousness means?

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Yeah, well, I'm going to take a step back before we get to that. And talking about Locke. Locke had two major concepts that he believed in. He believed in natural law and the social contract theory. And the natural law basically was simply that he believed that every person **1s** was entitled to life, liberty and property. Going along with that, he had a social contract theory that basically says for a society to be successful, everybody in that society must be willing to give up a little bit of their freedom so that the society as a whole can work together and so that each person can then have that life, liberty or property, which is a natural law. So if you put those two things together, when you move down to his self reflective consciousness, that's a very philosophical concept. So little outside the realm of psychology, even though psychology started from philosophy. But the idea is quite simply in the easiest terms of you being able to be self aware and look at your own actions, at your own life and make sense of it and learn from it. So that self reflective consciousness is basically kind of looking in the mirror at yourself, at your actions, at actions purposes that you've done, and see how you can make yourself better. And in the movie towards the end, Lenny will have a comment about that, that everybody needs a mirror to look at themselves

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more. On the social contract, you said everybody has to give up something to basically reap the benefits from the greater good. And this made me think of characters like Teddy or Natalie who find ways to help Leonard, even when it seems that they have stopped benefiting from doing so. Why do you think they might do that?

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Yeah, it's interesting. And I think if you look at the character of Teddy, I think he's probably trying to do some of that self, self reflective consciousness and maybe atone for some of the things he did in his past. He doesn't seem like he might be the most honest cop, but by helping, he has a soft spot for Lenny because of what happened to him and his wife. And so he's trying to not only help Lenny, but he's also trying to help himself, too, maybe atone for some of his actions throughout his life. And as you see throughout the movie, everybody is trying to use Lenny a little bit for their own purposes. And in this case, **2s** Teddy had his own purposes there as well. So you get some cash.

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Okay. And based on the film, as well as what you know about personal identity and consciousness, would you agree with John Locke's sentiment that self reflection is a core element of your personal identity and sense of self?

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Yeah, absolutely. **1s** As a teacher, one of the things that we do a lot is self reflection of our lessons. And you put together a lesson, you teach the lesson, and then you look back at the end of the day and say, hey, did it go the way I wanted to go? Where can I make those changes to make it better **1s** for the students? And I think in life we do the same thing. Going back to John Locke again here, and one of his thoughts was a tabula rasa, which is kind of loosely termed a blank slate when you're born. And we learn from our

experiences to fill that slate up throughout our life. Well, by using this self reflective consciousness, you can kind of almost give yourself a new slate by looking at what you've done in the past and how I can make that better. So, yeah, I actually do believe that it is a valid point and something that I think we all do. I talked about teachers, but if you think about your own life, have you ever sat back and said, maybe I should have done that different, or Maybe I can do that better next time? Kind of the same idea.

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Awesome. And is there anything else you want to add or could say about the film for the audience?

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This is one of my favorite films to show because it connects all the parts of memory, but it also dives pretty deep into personalities and motivations, which are all concepts in psychology, <sup>2s</sup> if you think about it. If you're going to watch a movie for a class, it's a whole lot more fun to watch a movie that was in the movie theaters than maybe some of the movies or video clips other teachers will put out there. So I definitely recommend it. It looks like it's in the top 100. And then go for it and just understand that if you haven't watched it, yet. You really got to pay attention to the clues because it will mess with your mind a little bit.

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Okay? And that was Mr. Mummert on memento. Thank you again so much for listening to bonus episode 4.5 of The Movie Plaza. If you would be interested in finding more, you can find me at my website [themovazapodcast.com](http://themovazapodcast.com) or on Instagram, the Movie Plaza. Again, that's [themoviaplazapodcast.com](http://themoviaplazapodcast.com) or the movie Ozone instagram. If you like this podcast, be sure to share it with your friends. Bye.