

Wish You Were Here: A Psychological Analysis Using Atkinson-Shiffrin Memory Mode

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Graham Swift's last novel *Wish You Were Here* carries many sad memories that threaten Jack's present life and changes its direction. Vera's, the dog's and Tom's death, all have their far-reaching effects in Jack's life. Jack is a man who feels unable to assert himself. The novel is the slow, repetitive unfolding of Jack's life leading up to this point. It shows the instability of truth and the complexity of memory are tiresome, and may stand in the way of what is crucial. Here Swift applies a mode that comfortably portrays memory on the move—a voice that accomplishes in catching the second thoughts and equivocations. The first-person narration tries to either suppress for the reason of clarity or indulges at the cost of clarity. The paper will shed light on the effect of the memories of one's life depending on the Atkinson-Shiffrin model. The Atkinson-Shiffrin model is a multi-store model that asserts that human memory has three separate components.

Keywords: psychoanalysis, Atkinson-Shiffrin model, human memories, multi-store model, sad memories

Introduction

Graham Swift's *Wish You Were Here* opens on an autumn day in 2006, at Isle of Wight. Jack Luxton, the male protagonist of the novel is a former Devon farmer who is currently, the proprietor of a seaside caravan park. His wife is Ellie, who has been with him throughout his entire life. In this scene, Jack receives the news of his brother Tom's death, in Iraq, who left home some years back to work as a soldier. This contemplative novel probes and dwells into the innermost and dark secrets of the past and how the characters affect the present and future of an individual. Jack has faced a lot of emotional downs consistently and lost significant and emotionally close people. This is because he is not an expressive or an articulate man. Tragic events get sunken in his memory and get accumulated, unfortunately, one day he is sitting in his bedroom with a fully loaded shotgun by his side. He starts to think that, "Death, in many ways, is an extreme place of asylum. It was life and all its intelligence that was unbearable" (Swift, *Wish Y*, 2011, p. 12). This kind of a depressed suicidal behavior can be analyzed using the principles and methodology of psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis is a collection of psychotherapeutic and psychological theories and related facilities initially suggested and dwelled upon by Sigmund Freud. The most common problems and delusion applied in psychoanalysis are fears and phobias, obsessive compulsive disorders, compulsions, conversions, panic attacks, and anxiety. Other issues include sexual dysfunctions, mild to severe form of depressions, differences in interpersonal relationships such as marriage life problems and a wide variety of character problems. One such basic theory and memory model is the Atkinson-Shiffrin model.

The current paper discusses about the multi-store model and connects as well as relates it to different scenarios and situations in Graham's novel which was published in 2011. It also details the three components of the multistore model namely sensory memory, short and long term memory. These three components establish an interconnection between the main characters behavior and how sad, painful memories were stored and processed based on the three compartments of the Atkinson model. The current review uses exploratory study design using secondary data sources employed in the form of peer-reviewed journal articles along with review papers being referred and summarized. The search strategy used included literature searches of science direct, Springer, PubMed, and psychINFO electronic databases. The primary search terms included keywords like "psychoanalysis", "multistore model", "Atkinson-Shiffrin model", and "sad memories". As a part of the search strategy, the reference list of each article was reviewed in order to retrieve additional and relevant literature.

Description of the Model

Richard Atkinson and Richard Shiffrin proposed the memory model, Atkinson-Shiffrin model/multi-store model/modal model/dual process model in the year, 1968. The theory is termed as "stage theory" and supposes that the information proceeds in a series of discontinuous manner from one stage to the next. This model explains how memory processes work. An individual can see, hear and feel many things, but out of the entire stimulus received, only a little can be remembered and recalled well (Atkinson & Shiffrin, 1968; Miller, 1956). The model consists of a three store concept and states that human memory composes of three distinct compartments. They are namely a sensory register, a short-term store/working memory (STM) and a Long-Term Store (LTM). Sensory information enters the memory through the sensory register and remains in the working memory for a while. Finally, the data proceed to the long-term store and are stored indefinitely.

The Working of the Atkinson-Shiffrin Model

The three compartments that form the human memory as mentioned by the Atkinson-Shiffrin model are detailed as follows (see Figure 1.): (Atkinson & Shiffrin 1968; Miller, 1956).

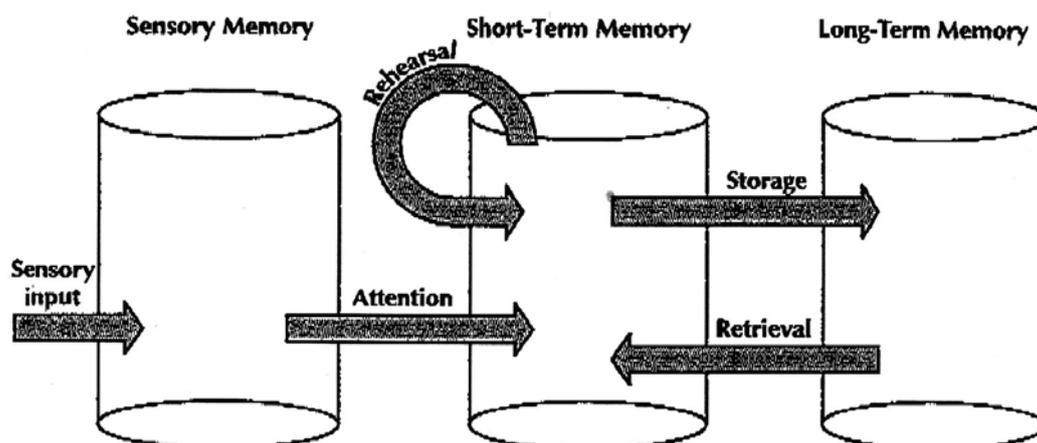


Figure 1. Atkinson & Shiffrin Model of Memory. (Source: Adopted from Atkinson & Shiffrin Model of Memory, 1968)

Sensory memory (STSS) associates with energy transduction. The human brain can only comprehend electrical energy, but the stimulus contains different sources of information via light, sound, cold, etc. Sensory

receptor cells transduce the received stimulus, from any form of energy into electrical energy. This process creates a memory that lasts for about 0.5 seconds for vision and 3 seconds for hearing. For transferring this information to the next compartment of Short-Term Memory (STM), it is essential that this initial information be well-received. It is possible if the external stimulus attracts some attention or possesses an impressive feature. It can also happen if this stimulus represents a previously known and perceived pattern (Atkinson & Shiffrin, 1968; Miller, 1956).

Short-Term Memory (STM) referred to a working or conscious memory which is stimulated either by external stimulus or by an internal thought process. Sometimes both the stimulus leads to STM of which the duration would be 15-20 seconds. The cerebral cortex frontal lobes handle the working memory, and information processing in STM based on the number of units being processed at a specific timeframe provided. Previous studies concluded that the number of units that can be processed range from 7 ± 2 to 5 ± 2 (Miller, 1956; Kahana, et al., 2008). The Organization and the repetition are the two major concepts involved in the process of retaining information in STM. When the information is arranged by the concept in a categorical, sequential and chronological manner, and parallel when grouped as per relevance and appropriate connection, it is easy to retain the information in short-term memory. Repetition/Rehearsal or memorizing is a very useful technique to “learn” any concept. When something that was forgotten is being repeated, it proves to be highly effective (McLeod, 2007; Kahana et al., 2008; Usher et al., 2008).

Long-Term Memory (LTM) is also referred to preconscious and unconscious memory. When the information is relatively easy to recall, it is called preconsciousness e.g. few minutes to a couple of hours, and this is related to long-term memory. Unconscious memory refers to any data that is unavailable during normal consciousness. Distributed practice and elaboration are the two processes, which help to place information in the long-term memory (Kahana et al., 2008; Miller, 1956; McLeod, 2007; Atkinson & Shiffrin, 1968; Malmberg, 2008; Usher et al., 2008).

Relation Between Jack's Condition and the Memory Components

Graham Swift's *Wish You Were Here* stands to be an extraordinary novel which opens up profound insight into the memory of humans by an excellent artist. It portrays the mature talent to produce just the way how he wants. The story moves forward by dangling the disclosures that are haunting Jack's thoughts. The reader works backward, exploring the wound before discovering the cause. The novel's action takes place in the scenario where the key character, Jack sits with his shotgun looking out at the sea from the upstairs window. He is waiting for his wife to drive him home in this rain. Jack's tortuous thoughts went on to think how he lost control over everything, through the Swift splashes through time with abandon. As in many of Swift's novels, the book suffers from tedious repetition; *Wish You Were Here* is a vastly complicated story. It doesn't rest on one great detail. But on the accession of a lifetime's worth of little torture and subsequent severe events that translate the complication of mourning, and the capability of sorrow to make us injure those we love. Information is provisional, and events are in fragments, and then, eventually those fragments are pieced together into a complete picture.

Swift presents a handful of characters, a few scenes, dual or triple objects and then brainstorms on them for about 300 pages. He sets a chronology to cycle through the same happenings, phrases and thoughts repeatedly, from one angle to another, structuring and elaborating toward an upsurge that is magnificent. The main events are Tom's departure, Vera's death, Michael's death, the burning of cattle, and the death of the dog. These events and objects are repeated many times in the novel. Overall, the novel has a very remorseful and depressing backdrop.

Foot-and-mouth and mad cow disease and the effects on the countryside of second homes has been highlighted and referred throughout the book, along with the Iraq war, which resulted in Tom's death. Prior to Jack's loss of his beloved younger brother, he had suffered various emotional and mentally frightful experiences. His mother's demise, his father's years of hard work on the family dairy farm in Devon, the death of his family dog, Tom running away from home at age of 18, to join the army to escape from the farm were part of it. Besides all of this, he had also experienced his father's suicide by the side of the old oak tree and the death of Ellie's dad. Unfortunately, he was an extremely introvert character and had never verbally expressed his feelings and grief. All these external stimulus after being received by his sensory memory got linearly transferred to his short-term memory, and as the experiences were continuous and repetitive they got engraved very strongly in his STM. As discussed earlier, organization and repetition are the key factors in retaining information in STM and similar was the case observed with Jack. Jack's short-term memory has practically "learned" the concept and feeling of losing people close to him. His STM was never given a break or a chance to forget or let go of all the unpleasant, sad memories. Therefore, their retention became adamant and permanent (Markovits, 2011; Malmberg et al., 2012; Murdock, 1962).

The eight years during which Ellie and Jack ran a successful caravan park were a happy phase in the couple's life. They would even go for a vacation and enjoy each other's company. Unfortunately, in 2006, Jack receives the news of Tom's death in Iraq war. He concludes to bury him in the old churchyard, along with his family members, and it is the funeral process that compels him to confront his past and present. Jack's LTM quickly recalls his firmly engraved painful past because it is deeply etched in his STM due to several episodes of the same kind and intensity. He didn't do or say, but he felt guilty for the same. Adding to that, then he thought he would have found a way to prevent his father's death or his brother leaving from home to apart from the depressing farm. He also doubted and questioned the decisions he had taken, with respect to selling his family estate and farm. He got covered with grief, self-doubt, despair, and resentment. His LTM had cumulatively presented all his negative experiences and emotions from his preconscious memory (Markovits, 2011; Malmberg et al., 2012; Murdock, 1962; Sirotn, Kimball, & Kahana, 2005).

Michael. Some of them in the sensory memory get repeated. Swift gives the reader a significant image of the father "but Michael Luxton hadn't put his arms round his two sons...He had looked hard at his feet, at the ground he was standing on and spat" (Swift, *Wish Y*, 2011, p. 2). A harsh sensory memory connects to the father: "Michael was an unsentimental dairy farmer, uncomfortable at" (p. 15). Jack remembers his father's features as "he had a face like a wall and was stumbling his fall-back posture. It shows to take what he got and stagger on and to look healthy or just dumb on the outside and stumble inside" (p. 20). In section 17, again he restores: "Michael pulled Tom out of school when he turned sixteen to be a prisoner with his brother on Jebb Farm. No more making hay with schoolgirls" (p. 137). The description repeats in the sensory memory of Jack, but some events are hanging in the short term memory and his memory. When he remembers the story of the killing of the dog in section 19. "Dad had walked back to the pickup to stow the gun" (p. 143). Also, the scene of burying the dog is organized in Jack's memory: "But it seemed that from the point on there hadn't been much conversation except for Dad saying, 'Deeper.' Then again, 'Deeper'" (p. 143). Sections 26 and 28 show a deliberate description of the sad memory of the father's death. The working of the Long Term Memory is clear through this event.

He begins section 26 with Remembrance Day. "November 1994, just him and Dad. Almost a year since Tom had gone, his name no longer being mentioned" (Swift, *Wish Y*, 2011, p. 229). The narrator goes to describe how that day passes; he describes all the smallest details in three sections 26-28. "Michael had put on the

same clothes that he might have put on, a little” (p. 236). Even Jack remembers the things he said to Detective Sergeant Hunt (p. 239).

The cattle and the mad cows. Of course, the opening scene of the novel mentions madness as an introductory core to the book: “There is no end to the madness. Thoughts of Jack Luxton’s are of craziness. He recalls the 65 head of healthy cattle that had to be shot and burned on his family’s old farm back in Devon. Jack thinks that once the thought enters, it stays. Hadn’t that specialist said it could take years before it blows up in human beings? So, it had blown up now in him and Ellie. Jack first re-imagines the sensory images as “the healthy cattle. The sound of limb and udder and hoof—and mind” (Swift, *Wish Y*, 2011, p. 1). Mad cow disease crippled their precarious livelihood. The image of the cattle is repeated and organized again: “sixty-five head of cattle. Or, to look at it another way (and never mind the promised compensation): ruin. Ruin, at some point in the not-so-distant future, the destruction that had been creeping up on them since Vera Luxton haddied” (p. 2). He thinks of the cattle slaughter required by BSE as “the devastation that had been dragging up on them after Vera Luxton had passed away.” The image of burning the mad cow is roaming in the short term memory but not elaborated as the event of the father’s suicide. Jack thinks about the cows disease in section 19 when he explains the story of the killing of the dog Luke. It goes like this: “he got sick, just slow and sluggish sick, nor mad sick” (p. 138). Section 23 replays the memory as “He had the picture of those burning cattle in his head. As if it was a real to remember, whenever he saw a flinch of black smoke” (p. 197). May the memory of the cows work in the Long Term Memory since it causes the death of Michael.

Vera’s death. Once Jack remembers love and sympathy, he is obligated to remember his mom Vera whom he loved and who took care of him even after she got her second son. Section 3 tells us about Vera Luxton, who “died when Jack was twenty-one and Tom was thirteen, of ovarian” (Swift, *Wish Y*, 2011, p. 20). Jack’s short term memory remembers that he was close to his mom: “would you like a little brother, Jack?” (p. 21). He remembers that the little brother becomes a risk for him because he creates a problem for his mother. Jack has a working memory with his mom that is characterized by love and sympathy: “His mom is dead, yet she has never not been, in theory, on his shoulders. He wants her not to have known or suffered or even witnessed all the things that followed her death (p. 25). Jack still remembers some sensory scenes: “Her grave was in the Churchyard” (p. 14). Repeatedly, Vera visits Jack’s memory as an angel. Section 4 opens with the statement: “WHAT WOULD his mother think (he tries not to think about it) if she could see him now?” (p. 26). Nothing should happen to hurt her feelings.

Tom’s departure and death. Throughout the novel, the event of Tom’s death in Iraq is repeated, but not organized. They reflect Jack’s Long Term Memory. At the beginning of the story, Jack remembers that Tom was not his rival even being born after a long time. Frozen by grief, Jack recollects how deeply he loved that boy, how he adored him throughout their boyhood, and how rattled he was when Tom ran off to enroll on his 18th birthday. Tom confided to Jack the secret that he will join the army, and Jack supported him by saying “Good Luck!”. This episode is repeated many times in the novel, which indicates that it flows from the unconscious memory LTM. Section 7 narrates deliberated details about Tom’s departure. The STM memory works in the following lines:

And why hadn’t he, Jack thought of it first? Just to clear off out of it. But he never faced such a situation. And what may be the reason behind when Tom said that he had been facing all right around a year? It’s just for your ears, Jack (Swift, *Wish Y*, 2011, p. 42). This story is repeated many times from one section to another; the reader is being reminded that Jack was the only one who knew about Tom’s departure. “Good Luck” is repeated many times. He can’t determine anything more intimate or better to say than: ““Good luck, Tom. I’ll be

remembering of you.’ That was a stupid thing perhaps to have told, as it is what he had explicitly written on the card” (p. 126). When the officer comes to inform Jack officially about Tom’s death and asks him to take the funeral “he felt as if he’d told again that Tom was dead” (p. 119). The sensory memory worked in the description of Tom when he was thirteen years old (p. 100). When the army calls to collect his brother’s body, Jack remembers the range of their shared history, a series of remembrances that threatens to disturb the new life he and his wife had built. It’s a refreshing exploration of the varied feelings of brotherly love and envy. LTM works in section 22 when he goes to take the funeral. When he asks Ellie to prepare breakfast, he remembers that Tom was a professional chef (p. 259). The memory of Tom was influential in Jack’s mind and life.

The dog Luke. In the Long Term Memory, Jack stores the episode of the dog Luke. Section 19 carries a detailed description of his death. It describes his disease: “But then Luke had got sick. He wasn’t young anymore etc.” (Swift, *Wish Y*, 2011, p. 138). Then, the description of the killing of the dog by the father: “One dull August morning Michael drove the pick-up into the yard... After that Michael went into the kitchen where Luke has confined to his blanket in a corner—” (p. 139). Jack remembers all the details regarding the dog even the smell of his blanket (p. 141). He remembered, even, how they pick up Luke in his grave (p. 143). One may suggest that Luke works in the Long Term Memory since he is Tom’s dog.

Limitations of the Atkinson-Shiffrin Model

This model helped us to decipher and understand Jack’s mental and emotional trauma but like any tool used for psychoanalysis, the multi-store model has been both influential and controversial. The multi-store model is very simple, fundamental and extremely limited in explaining a complex, diverse and enigmatic concept such as “memory”. This psychological model does not provide any explanation for the non-linear nature of the neural activity that occurs between anatomical structures, and this contradicts the linear approach of the model. This model also does not take into account any previous experience with learning techniques or an individual’s cognitive ability and it also does not support or dwell into a tri-partite memory structure (Baddeley, 1986). This model is extremely simple, but the functioning and role of memory is not being explained well. LTM cannot be a unitary store as it holds a multitude of memories and information. This model is considered to be only the hypothetical layout of the memory system function but at the same time, it does not meet the representative aspect of a memory’s physical or biological basis. New models are being created that can better account for these other characteristics, and a lot of developmental and research studies have been conducted on the physical structure of the memory systems (Baddeley, 2000). It is also possible that the one reason of Jack’s hidden depression could have been Ellie’s influence. Because she was equally depressed due to her father’s death and had not expressed or vented out her frustration. They both were emotional time bombs. Ellie had also shown a further reticent and introvert behavior when she did not accompany Jack to receive Tom’s body and had left him all alone in such a sensitive situation. The multi-store model cannot explain such behavior, and different analysis and perspective is required to understand these emotions and thought process.

Conclusion

This review based paper highlights and discusses the Atkinson-Shiffrin model, its relationship with the main protagonist “Jack” of Graham Swift’s novel. Jack’s emotional and mental depression is related to the different compartments of the model. This paper also focuses on the strengths and weaknesses of the multi-store model and sheds light on a couple of models that evolved using the multi-store model as a fundamental principle.

Undoubtedly the novel highlights the image of death and funerals, and the picture of England at that time. The book heavily features dead cows and dead soldiers, and there is even a recommendation of little country devotion, the flowers and the “drawing-down of blinds”, by which they are both recalled. Also, the death of Vera, Michael, and Tom convert the novel into a novel of diminution. And the mad cow and foot-and-mouth disease and its effects on the countryside of second homes also played their part. The outbreak of foot and mouth disease in the United Kingdom in 2001 caused a crisis in British agriculture and tourism.

This epizootic saw 2,000 cases of the disease in farms across most of the British countryside. More than 10 million cattle and sheep were killed in a successful attempt to halt the disease. Also with the attack on the World Trade Centre, the vague war on terror and the two rather-less-obscure wars in Iraq and Afghanistan that it precipitated. *Wish You Were Here* is not only a generational epic. It is also the latest masterpiece in Swift’s perpetual mosaic regarding the fate of England.

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