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The survivor experience: Memory, identity, and self-worth

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Introduction: With the growth of recent movements like #metoo and Time's Up, sexual assault has become a popular topic. While awareness has increased, there is still much more work to be done within the field of psychological research.

Objective: This study aims to investigate the effects sexual assault has on autobiographical memory in relation to survivorhood, PTSD, and satisfaction with life.

Method: 45 female students at

Sarah Lawrence College ages 18-24, recruited via online student group postings, filled out an online survey that assessed for levels of PTSD, satisfaction with life, significant autobiographical events and memory characteristics of traumatic and non-traumatic experiences.

Results: PTSD is significantly higher in survivors than in non-survivors and survivors' autobiographical memories are significantly more vivid and have more sensory details than those of non-survivors.

Conclusion: These results further support findings that sexual assault is correlated with PTSD diagnosis and memory is significantly impacted by such traumatic events. However, not

just traumatic memories, but other forms of autobiographical memory are impacted.

Biography

Emma J. Heisler-Murray is a recent graduate of Sarah Lawrence College where she studied cognitive psychology. She is now pursuing her master's degree in clinical psychology at Teachers College, Columbia University where she is concentrating in Sexuality, Women, and Gender. She also works full time at Weill Cornell Medical College where she is a Research Assistant studying the impacts of therapy on depression, suicidality, mild cognitive impairment, and chronic pain. She aspires to attain her Ph.D. in psychology in an effort to launch a career in academia studying feminist issues like sexual violence against women. She hopes that one day her research can impact policy in a way that betters the treatment of survivors of intimate assault and relationship abuse. In addition to her work in academia, she has also been very involved in advocacy work, volunteering for organizations such as It's On Us, One Love, and the National Organization of Women.

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