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**Describe and evaluate at least two theories of forgetting .
[18 marks]**

In this essay I have chosen to look at Freud's motivated theory of forgetting and cue - dependent forgetting. I have chosen these because they both report convincing arguments to try to explain why we forget.

Freud's motivated theory of forgetting states that the ego represses unpleasant memories into our subconscious in order to avoid anxiety in the event of recall. Freud says that techniques such as dream analysis are the only way to access the repressed memories.

Herman and Schaton[1987] carried out a study which supports Freud's theory. They found that when questioned, 28% of females affected by incest showed a memory deficit as a child. This is a sign of repression during childhood, to block out any unpleasant memories. This study is complimented by a later study conducted by Myers and Brewin in 1991. They concluded that those who were repressors took significantly longer to recall negative childhood memories. This shows that negative memories were less accessible than positive ones, suggesting a state of repression had occurred.

Cue - dependant theory of forgetting concerns itself with the accessability of memories using cues. The theory states that recall is enhanced when cues are used. However, the cues need to be relevant to the information. The term given to this is the encoding specificity principle. A study conducted by Tulving and Psotka [1971] compared cue - dependant forgetting with interference theory.

Participants were given a retroactive interference task [learning information AFTER the material intended for recall]. Once cues for the initial material were presented, retroactive interference no longer played a role in inaccurate recall. A further study by Godden and Baddley [1975] tested deep sea divers on their recall both on land and underwater. They observed that the divers recall was best in the environment the information was learnt. For example words learnt

underwater were recalled best underwater. This study supports both cue - dependant and context dependent theory.

Freud's theory of motivated forgetting intuitively seems to be reasonable. Repressed memories [if in existance] could have an effect on our behaviour. However, one main weakness of his theory is the inexplination of why we forget pleasant memories. The study by Herman and Schaton [1987] showed a 28% result. This is by no means definitve. It could have been the case that some subjects in their experiment did not talk about their negative memories because of embarrassment or to protect their privacy.

Freud's theory contrasts the theory of flashbulb memories. According to Freud, if a memory was significant [in a negative way] it would be repressed. Flashbulb theory would argue that the person would remember a life changing event [such as warning of a death] exactly, detailing exactly what you were wearing or how many sugars you had in your tea. Freud's concept of the ego and repression cannot be observed. This therefore means his whole theory is unscientific and subjective. It is based on Freud's opinion.

Cue dependent theory of forgetting has two main weaknesses. Firstly the concept itself and its supporting studies lack ecological validity. The tests conducted were artificial and carried out in artificial environments. This means that the subjects could have felt compelled to memorise information. The second main weakness of the theory concerns "available" memories. If the memory is not accessible, how can it be proven that the memory has been encoded. However, the supporting studies do have definitive results. They clearly show subjects' recall is far more enhanced by the use of close cues [the encoding specify principle]. This theory can be used effectively by anyone wishing to remember information. Effective use of cue cards enhances memorability and encourages semantic encoding.

Freud's theory of motivated forgetting and cue - dependent theory of forgetting are both intuitively believable concepts. However cue - dependent theory does seem to have more evidence to support it. It is also a lot more scientific than Freud's theory and has more definitive results.

In conclusion both cue - dependent theory of forgetting and Freud's theory have many strong points about why we forget. However cue - dependent theory of forgetting seems to have the stronger evidence and scientific evidence to back up it's theory.

588 words - 1hr 15 mins.