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Reliable Testimony

Increasingly more research has been done in the area of false memory--notably the works of Dr. Elizabeth F. Loftus and Dr. V.F. Reyna, who have called specific attention to reliability of eyewitness testimonies. In one of Loftus' studies, false memories of fabricated political events, it was proven that personal perspectives – how people viewed things emotionally, (for example political views), influenced false memories. In this study the question explored was about physical perspectives: how does the perspective from which one physically experiences an event influence the accuracy of one's memory? This study measured the overall memory accuracy in youth with three categories: basic memory, confabulation, and resistance to false suggestion. These categories were tested for and compared in two different perspectives: "acknowledged witnesses" and "outside observers." Seventy-two eighth grade students were exposed to an event, a role-play, thirty-six as the acknowledged witnesses – role-players – and the other thirty-six as the observers – watchers. All subjects were given scripts: the role-players to read from (first try) to simulate a spur-of-the-moment event, and the observers to follow along with. The results, obtained from a questionnaire given eleven days afterwards, were graphed, scored, and compared. While there was no large statistical difference between the scores in basic memory or confabulation, the observers had an eleven-person lead in the false-suggestion-resistance area, which leads me to conclude that viewing perspective does affect the testimony reliability and memory accuracy of eyewitnesses.