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The Misinformation Effect and Fate of Witnessed Minutiae

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The study endeavored to examine the effects of suggestibility, emotional arousal and types of detail on the accuracy of recall of witnessed events in 40 adolescents (20 males and 20 females) aged 15 to 17 years. Through two video-clipped events and two corresponding written passages, low and high levels of emotional arousal were induced in the subjects and their accuracy of recall for central and peripheral details were assessed. The results indicate that types of post-event information significantly affected the subjects' accuracy of recall. Subjects showed higher recall accuracy under consistent post-event information condition as compared to those who were misled. In addition, emotional arousal and types of detail also moderated the recall accuracy of the subjects. It was observed that recall accuracy was higher in high emotional arousal and for central details as compared to low emotional arousal and peripheral details.

Keywords: Eyewitness memory, Suggestibility, Accuracy of recall, Emotional arousal, Types of detail.

INTRODUCTION

The moment an event is seen, heard or read; it is registered by the observer and subsequent information, as and when received, may modify the original trace. If such post-event information is inconsistent with the event witnessed earlier, it may obfuscate the recollection of the original event. This phenomenon is popularly known as the 'misinformation effect' (Loftus & Hoffman, 1989). Since the persons receiving such post-event information become suggestive and assume it to be true, it is also known as suggestibility effect. Studies on this phenomenon have reported that such a misinformation materially alter the recollections of originally witnessed event (Lindsay, 1990; Loftus, Donders, Hoffman, & Schooler, 1989; Loftus, Miller & Burns; 1978; McCloskey & Zaragoza, 1985; Schacter, 2001). Any suggestive or new

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