The Influence of Causal Information on Memory for Misinformation

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Abstract: Causal information has been characterized as a "mental glue" that binds ideas together in the mind. This experiment tests the influence of such causal binding in a traditional memory misinformation paradigm. Participants studied information that either appeared as individual traits or as traits connected by causal links. Participants then rated a series of traits that contained both true and "misinformation items." Misinformation items were created to be causally plausible or implausible alternatives to previously learned information. Our question was whether the presentation of causal links in the study phase would affect the reporting of misinformation in later phases. Participants in the causal version of the study phase were more influenced by misinformation items that were causally plausible than items that were causally implausible. Participants in the noncausal version of the study phase were not differentially influenced by the plausibility of misinformation lures. Explanations for these results are discussed.