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Title

What's the Matter with Memory?

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9r79v8tc>

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Publication Date

2004-09-21

What's the Matter with Memory?

New studies show the power of imagination and suggestion to make people believe that they have had experiences that they didn't have. People have been led to remember nonexistent events from the recent past as well as non-existent events from their childhood. They can be led to falsely believe that they have had familiar experiences, but also rather bizarre or implausible ones (e.g., that they witnessed demonic possession as a child). They can be led to believe that they did things that would have been impossible (e.g., that they shook hands with Bugs Bunny during a trip to Disneyland). They can also be led to falsely believe that they had experiences that would have been highly traumatic had they actually happened. False beliefs have consequences for people, affecting later thoughts and behaviors. People who are led to believe that as children they got sick eating particular foods show avoidance of those foods later on. People who are led to believe they had a bad experience with Pluto at Disney want to pay less for a Pluto souvenir. I discuss the process by which people go from no memory to embracing false beliefs, and finally to developing rich false memories.