

Describe the THEORY OF RECONSTRUCTIVE MEMORY

Key word

explanation

example

The theory of reconstructive memory suggests that memory is not an accurate reconstruction of past experiences and instead, is based on schemas (1) and is shaped by prior experiences (e.g. a happy camping memory shapes a later camping memory) and expectations (e.g. we expect a person to behave a certain way). (1) Schemas are the mental representations of an object or situation based on prior experience (such as our identification of a cat based on its paws, fur, whiskers and ability to meow). (1) Schemas are not necessarily in chronological order and can be reconstructed based on new information (e.g. if we see a bald cat we might add 'no fur' to our 'cat schema'). (1)

The theory suggests that we experience confabulation where we make up details or use aspects of other memories to fill in the blanks in our schemas. (1) It also warns that memory can be deliberately altered through leading questions, such as using the verbs 'smashed' or 'bumped' when asking eyewitnesses about a car crash. (1)

Evaluate the Theory: CRITICISMS/ LIMITATIONS

The theory is reductionist and focuses on how we create schemas, however, it fails to explain how these processes happen in the brain. (1) For example, Bartlett describes memory as being an active process in the brain but doesn't explain how memories are processed. (1)

As scans can only show brain activity not what is being processed (i.e. being able to observe schema), (1) the theory's concept of schema is too vague and hypothetical to be useful. (1)

Bartlett based his theory on his 'War of the Ghosts' research, which was not standardized and lacked validity due to demand characteristics. (1) Therefore, the research does not offer valid support for the theory. (1)

The Reconstructive model of memory is complicated and very hard to test, (1) therefore it is difficult to predict how people will recall information. (1)