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False memories and the source monitoring framework Reply to Reyna and Lloyd (1997)

D. Stephen Lindsay^{a,*}, Marcia K. Johnson^b

^a*Department of Psychology, University of Victoria, P.O. Box 3050, Victoria, BC, Canada V8W 3P5*

^b*Department of Psychology, Yale University, New Haven, CT, USA*

Abstract

Reyna and Lloyd [Learn Individ Differ 9 (1997) 95.] reviewed a wide range of studies on false-memory effects, and argued that all of the findings support fuzzy trace theory (FTT) and that many of them challenge the source monitoring framework (SMF). The present paper provides a brief overview of the SMF and corrects a number of misconceptions in Reyna and Lloyd's review, with the aim of providing a more complete understanding of how the SMF can be used to understand false-memory phenomena. © 2001 Elsevier Science Inc. All rights reserved.

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1. Introduction

Memory researchers have long been interested in false memories (i.e., cases in which individuals report or otherwise evidence memories of past events that did not occur or that occurred differently from the way in which they are remembered; e.g., Bartlett, 1932; Bransford & Johnson, 1973; Deese, 1959) because studying false memories provides insights into basic mechanisms of memory. In recent years, interest in false memories has been heightened by two real-world phenomena: concern about cases in which eyewitnesses give honest, but inaccurate, testimony (e.g., Ceci & Bruck, 1995; Gudjonsson, 1992; Loftus, 1986; Wells, 1993) and controversy regarding “recovered memories” of childhood sexual abuse (e.g., Loftus, 1993; Lynn & McConkey, 1998; Read & Lindsay, 1997). Researchers have responded with a torrent of publications on false memories (e.g., a search for the terms

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1-250-721-8593; fax: +1-250-474-5014.

E-mail address: slindsay@uvic.ca (D.S. Lindsay).

“false memory” or “false memories” in PsychInfo yielded nearly 500 articles between 1996 and 1999).

Reyna and Lloyd (1997) compared three accounts of false-memory phenomena: fuzzy trace theory (FTT), the source monitoring framework (SMF), and a version of constructivism (the last of which will not be discussed here). Reyna and Lloyd argued that all of the reviewed studies of false memories support FTT, and that many of those findings challenge the SMF.¹ The present paper provides a brief overview of the SMF and a thumbnail sketch of FTT, and then corrects a number of misconceptions in Reyna and Lloyd’s article. We hope to thereby provide readers with a more complete and useful understanding of how the SMF can be used to understand false-memory phenomena, and of its current limitations and directions for future development.

2. Brief introduction to the SMF

The SMF (Johnson, 1988; Johnson, Hashtroudi, & Lindsay, 1993; Mitchell & Johnson, 2000) is an elaboration of Johnson and Raye’s (1981) and Johnson, Taylor, and Raye’s (1977) reality monitoring model. The reality monitoring model focused on the processes by which people differentiate between memories of actual vs. imagined experiences (e.g., “Did I lock the door, or did I only *think* about locking the door?” or “Did a dog bite me as a child, or did I only imagine or dream about being bitten by a dog?”). The SMF addresses the more general issue of how people differentiate between memories from different sources (including reality monitoring and other memory-source dimensions, such as remembering when and where a past experience occurred, its medium of presentation and modality of perception, the actors involved in it, etc.).

The SMF is grounded in Johnson’s (1983) multiple-entry, modular (MEM) model of memory. According to the MEM model, behavior and experience arise from the operation of numerous quasi-independent component processes (e.g., the perceptual processes involved in figure/ground separation and pattern recognition). MEM classifies component processes into two relatively broad categories or processing subsystems — perceptual processes and reflective processes. MEM describes memory “traces” or “records” as byproducts of the operation of the component processes. At test, memories of a subset of the perceptual and reflective processes that were involved in a to-be-remembered experience may be evoked by cues (as per the encoding specificity principle), along with products of expectations, general knowledge, imagination, etc.

A core idea of the SMF is that thoughts, images, and feelings that are experienced as memories are attributed, by the rememberer, to particular sources of past experience. That is, thoughts and images do not include abstract tags that specify their sources (e.g., “These are memories of what John said today at work”); rather, aspects of source are *inferred* from the perceptual, semantic, and affective content of the thoughts, images,

¹ Several of Reyna and Lloyd’s (1997) criticisms were repeated, in abbreviated form, in Brainerd and Reyna (1998a), but we focus here primarily on the more extended critique offered by Reyna and Lloyd.

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