

# Accuracy of flashbulb memories essay sample



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This presentation deals with the topic of flashbulb memories and how accurate they can be. The awareness of flashbulb memory was first conveyed by psychologist Roger Brown and James Kulik in 1977. It was proposed that flashbulb memories are so emotionally important to us that they are embedded with vividness, accuracy and with complete fullness in our minds. They argued for an existence of a memory mechanism that, when triggered by an event that was of unusual and exceeding levels of surprise and consequence, created a permanent record of the details surrounding the experience. This though has been put to question.

Resulting with a permanent record of details surrounding a experience with extreme vividness, fullness and accuracy.

Common examples of flashbulb memories would be the assassination of president J F Kennedy, John Lennon, the Space shuttle disaster in 1986, and the attack on the twin towers.

One study to challenge this was a study led by Ulric Neisser in 1992. It compared people's immediate recollections and then their later recollections two and a half years after the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster. It was suggested that people's memories of the event and how they had heard about it deteriorated considerably. It could be suggested that in the space of the two and a half years more data could have been collected at intervals and then used to show exactly how the deterioration may have occurred. Also, only flashbulb like memories were collected and not everyday memories.

Results showed that memories deteriorated for both events recorded.

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To tackle furthermore the issue of how accurate flashbulb memories were another research carried out by Talarico (2003) used 54 University students and got them to recount their recollections of 9/11 attacks. The students were requested to describe the experience of attacks and also of a regular, everyday memory. Three different groups were made answer sets of question laid out at different periods. This was done so to prevent participants from strengthening their memories through rehearsal. It was found that ratings of vividness, recollection and belief in the accuracy of memory declined for both but considerably for everyday memories, the 9/11 memories were much stronger.

From the above two studies it can be suggested that flashbulb memories are not necessarily all that accurate and unforgettable and tend to deteriorate but do appear to be more vividly remembered than other normal memories.

In another study carried out by Phelps (2004) an experiment with 24 participants was carried out and they were asked to recall their experiences of 9/11 and also an unrelated significant memory from their past. While doing so she scanned their brains with a Magnetic imaging system as they were relating to her their stories. A difference was noted with participants who were further away from the towers as compared to the ones closer. When participants that were closer recalled the attack it lit up their amygdala - an area know for making emotional memories. The results of this study would suggest that the amygdala allows for emotions to exclude everything around you to recreate vivid details and revisit a flashbulb memory. Though with respect to accurateness sufficient studies have not

been conducted regarding how emotion arousal can help recreate vivid clear memories.

It can be concluded that the first proposal of flashbulb memories – of creating a permanent record of the details surrounding the experience in complete vividness and details was not so accurate. Studies had challenged this and have proved flashbulb memories to be not so very vivid but memories that are remembered more clearly than normal memories.

#### References :

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