

Emotional Factors in Memory: Flashbulb Memories



This activity will help you to:

- Explain what is meant by a flashbulb memory (FBM)
- Describe evidence for and against FBMs
- Evaluate FBMs as a distinct memory process

Use your textbook and your psychological skills to answer the following questions.

Outline what is meant by a flashbulb memory. Give at least one example of an event that might produce a flashbulb memory.

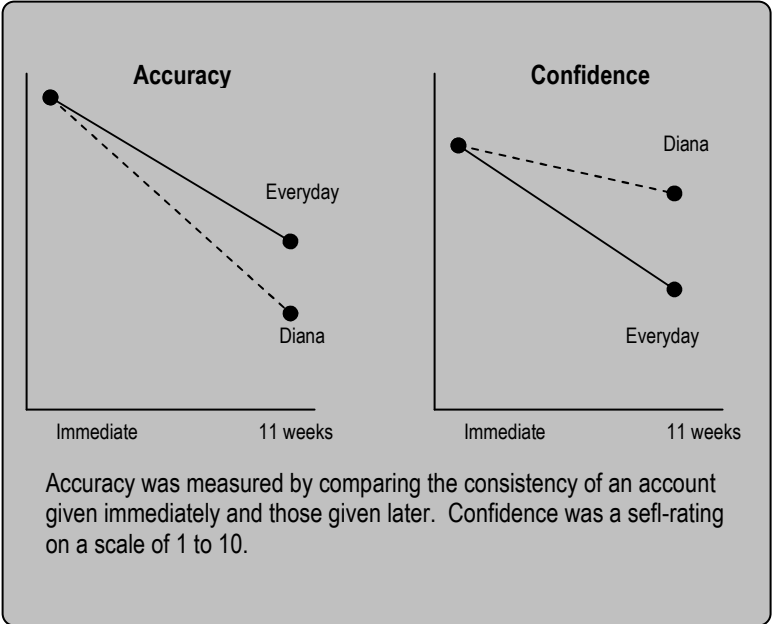
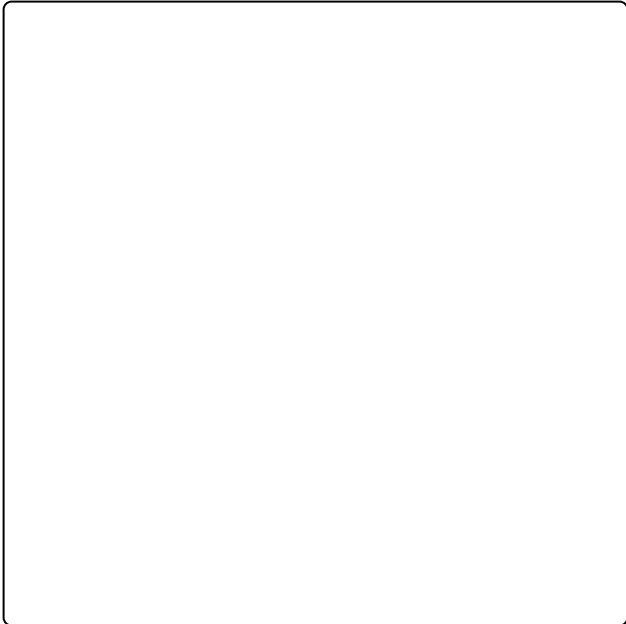
Brown & Kulik (1977) found that all of their US PPs had high levels of recall for the assassination of Kennedy. However, Black PPs were far more likely than White PPs to recall the assassination of Medgar Evers, a civil rights worker. Why do you think this was?

Neisser (1988) is sceptical about the existence of FBMs. He investigated memories of the Challenger shuttle disaster. Below are the accounts given by the same man two years apart. How are they different? What did Neisser find when he looked at lots of accounts of hearing about the disaster?

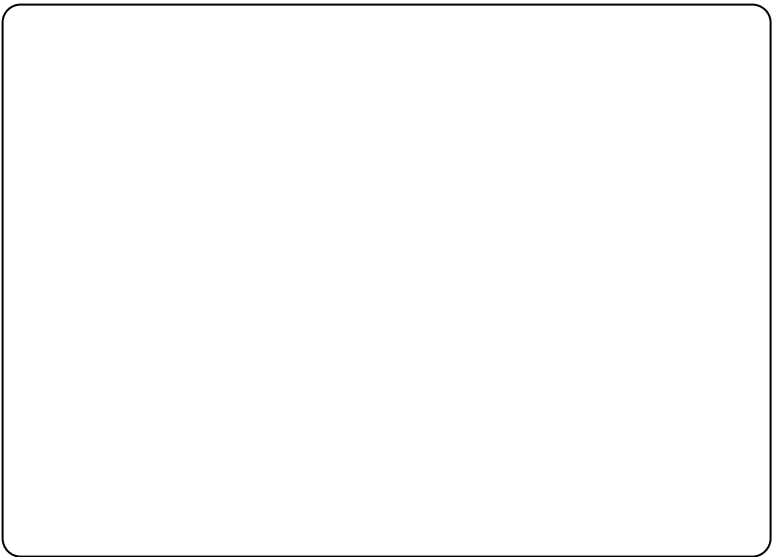
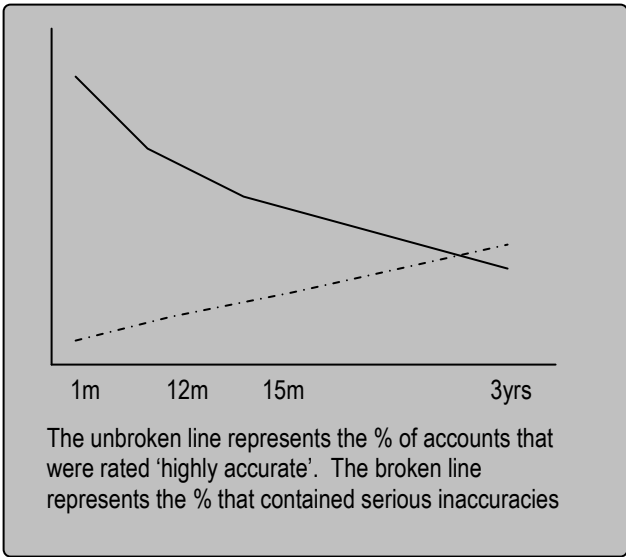
"I was in my religion class and some people walked in and started talking about it...the schoolteacher's students had been watching and I thought it was so sad...I went to my room and watched the TV...I got all the details from that."

"When I first heard...I was sitting in [my] dorm with a roommate watching TV. It came on a newsflash and we were both totally shocked. I was really upset and went upstairs to talk to a friend of mine and then I called my parents."

Platania & Hertkorn (1998) investigated memories for the death of Princess Diana. They measured accuracy of recall and confidence in recall over 10 weeks. They compared the PPs' memory of the death with their memory for an everyday event that happened at the same time. Their results are on the graph below. Outline their findings.



Squire (2000) tracked PPs' recall of the verdict in the OJ Simpson trial (which was closely followed) over three years. All PPs claimed to have excellent recall of hearing the verdict for the first time. The graph shows the accuracy of the PPs accounts, and the number of serious distortions occurring over time. What did Squire find?



What conclusions could be drawn from the evidence reviewed above?

