

Autobiographical Memory, Eyewitness Reports, and Public Policy

D. Stephen Lindsay

University of Victoria

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Please address correspondence to:

D. Stephen Lindsay  
Department of Psychology  
University of Victoria  
P.O. 3050 Box STN  
Victoria, BC. V8W 3P5  
[slindsay@uvic.ca](mailto:slindsay@uvic.ca)  
250-721-8593

Abstract

In the first part of this article I summarize the source-monitoring perspective on the cognitive processes involved in differentiating between mental events from different sources (e.g., memories of what one witnessed during a crime versus memories of what one later heard a cowitness describe). In the middle section of the article I consider, from the perspective of the source-monitoring framework, four issues pertaining to remembering in forensic situations: (a) adults' memory reports, (b) children's memory reports, (c) "recovered memories" of childhood sexual abuse, and (d) eyewitnesses' suspect-identification decisions. I then comment briefly on research psychologists as expert witnesses before offering some concluding comments.

### Autobiographical Memory, Eyewitness Reports, and Public Policy

None of our worldly possessions rivals the value and utility of our memories of our own personal past. We'd quite literally be lost without them. And autobiographical memory pops up frequently in applied domains. Consider, for example, the autobiographical memory questions that health care providers routinely pose to their patients (e.g., "How many servings of fruits and vegetables do you eat in a typical day?" "When was the last time you had a cold or the flu?" "How long have you had that cough?"). Similarly, journalists often ask politicians to remember their past behaviours and knowledge states (e.g., "What did the Prime Minister know and when did s/he know it?"), and consumer scientists often ask people questions about their prior experiences of shopping for or using various products. Likewise, studies of such public policy issues as voting behaviour or financial expenditures are, in essence, tests of autobiographical memory. (See chapters in Durso et alia's *Handbook of Applied Cognition*, 1999, for discussions of research and theory pertaining to memory in a wide variety of applied domains, many of which have public policy implications.)

Below I first provide a sketch of a theoretical perspective on autobiographical memory (namely the source monitoring framework of Johnson, Hashtroudi, & Lindsay, 1993). I then consider, from the perspective of that framework, four issues pertaining to remembering in forensic situations: (a) adults' memory reports, (b) children's memory reports, (c) "recovered memories" of childhood sexual abuse, and (d) eyewitnesses' suspect-identification decisions. After these capsule reviews, I comment on research psychologists as expert witnesses, then close with some concluding comments.

#### A Source-Monitoring Perspective on Autobiographical Memory

When you were a child, were you ever bitten by a dog? If so, take a moment to recall as much as you can about that event. Can you see the surroundings? What did the dog look like, and how did it come to bite you? Do you remember sounds, such as the dog snarling or yourself

screaming? Smells? Can you remember the pain of the bite itself, or your emotional reaction at the time? What were you wearing? Can you recollect anything about what was going on 24 hours before the dog bit you? Whose dog was it? (If you were never bitten by a dog, you can do the same exercise with any other memorable one-off event, such as breaking a bone or winning a prize.)

As Tulving (2002) has pointed out, autobiographical reminiscence can be described as mental time travel, with the rememberer transported into the past to re-experience, albeit only partially, a moment of his or her personal history. How do we accomplish this feat? Human memory has been studied at various levels of analysis and with diverse methodological tools for a century or so, but we are still far short of a complete understanding of how it works. Yet we have learned a good deal along the way, much of it at odds with lay intuitions. For example, lay people sometimes describe memories as though they were sensurround videotapes, with each experience stored on its own cassette and housed in a vast autobiographical library. From this perspective, although it's sometimes difficult to locate a tape and details may become blurred with the passage of time, a unitized record of each experience is in principle available for playback (for a discussion of metaphors of memory, see Roediger, 1980.)

This naive view of autobiographical memory as a storehouse, and of remembering as playback, has been strongly challenged by many memory theorists. Such researchers have shown that recollections are reconstructions that are influenced by the rememberer's beliefs and desires (e.g., Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000; Jacoby, Kelley, & Dywan, 1989; Ross, 1989; Schacter, 1999; Whittlesea, 2003).

Much of my research on memory has been informed and guided by a theoretical perspective called the source monitoring framework (SMF: Johnson et al., 1993; Lindsay & Johnson, 2000). The SMF grew out of Johnson and Raye's (1981) reality monitoring model. The reality monitoring model was primarily an account of how individuals differentiate between

memories of actual experiences versus memories of thoughts, fantasies, or dreams (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 dream of being bitten?"). 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 core idea of the SMF is that thoughts, images, and feelings that come to mind in response to external or internal cues will be experienced as memories if the person generating them attributes them to past experience. That is, memory-based thoughts and images do not include abstract tags that specify their sources (e.g., "These are memories of what John said at work Friday afternoon"); rather, aspects of source are inferred from the perceptual, semantic, and affective content of the thoughts, images, and feelings that come to mind. For example, memory information that comes to mind from a past conversation with your friend John might include information about the meaning of John's utterance, the sound of his voice, his appearance and that of the surrounding context, your thoughts and feelings at the time, etc., all of which provide clues to various dimensions of the source of this recollection.

People are sometimes aware of SM processes, but most source attributions are made very rapidly and without conscious reflection. In this way SM attributions are analogous to the inferential processes performed in ongoing perceptual processing. When your friend Kim calls you on the phone, for example, you recognize Kim's voice immediately, because knowledge about your friend is quickly and automatically evoked in the process of perceiving the auditory input. Likewise, you may remember an utterance as having been spoken by Kim because the information that comes to mind includes sensory details and/or semantic content that leads you to recognize Kim as the speaker. If you do not access sufficiently detailed, source-specifying memory information, you may fail to identify the speaker of the remembered utterance (just as

you may not recognize Kim on the phone if the connection is poor).

Source discriminations are also influenced by the rememberer's current orientation. For example, some tasks orient rememberers to making fine source discriminations with high confidence (e.g., testifying in court) whereas others orient individuals toward some other goal (e.g., telling an amusing story) with little regard to the sources of thoughts and images that come to mind while working toward that goal.

According to the SMF, false-memory phenomena arise when thoughts, images, and feelings from one source are misattributed to another source. This may occur because the mental event has characteristics of a source other than, or in addition to, its actual source. For example, a memory of an unusually vivid fantasy image may be mistaken as a memory of a perceptual event, or a memory of Jane doing something may be misidentified as a memory of her sister Jill doing something. Another cause of false-memory phenomena is test situations that discourage careful source monitoring. The mistaken attribution may be made non-deliberatively and while attention is focused on other aspects of task performance (as when one blends information from different sources while telling a story to entertain friends), or the situation may create a bias to attribute whatever thoughts and images come to mind to a particular source or to base source attributions on characteristics that are not reliably diagnostic of source. Yet another source of errors is biases that arise from expectations. For example, thoughts and images that are based on memories of seeing Jim do something but that come to mind when you are trying to recollect something John did may be misidentified as memories of John. Here again, this is analogous to errors in ongoing perception (e.g., if you expect John to telephone, you may mistake Jim's voice for John's).

The SMF has emphasized discriminations between memories from different sources (e.g., "Is this a memory of something that really happened or something I imagined; is it a memory of something that happened yesterday or the day before?"). But remembering involves

an even more fundamental discrimination between thoughts, images, and feelings that arise from memory versus those that arise from other sources. What leads people to feel that they are remembering as opposed to thinking, fantasizing, etc.? As Jacoby and colleagues have pointed out, people can “retrieve” and use memory information from specific prior episodes without having the subjective experience of remembering (as in involuntary plagiarism; Stark & Perfect, 2006), and people can have the subjective experience of remembering specific prior episodes that they never, in fact, experienced (as in various forms of false memories; Jacoby et al., 1989). This “memory attribution” problem is equivalent to the source-monitoring problems described above; thoughts, images, and feelings that come to mind with characteristics typical of memories are likely to be experienced as memories, especially if the person is oriented to the past as a source of current mental events. Note that these views fit well with earlier research on “schema-based” memory errors, in which individuals’ knowledge and beliefs were shown to distort their memory reports (e.g., Bartlett, 1932; Brewer & Treyens, 1981). That is, schemas support the fluent generation of inferences that may have many of the characteristics of memories.

Think back to the exercise with which this article began, in which I invited you to reminisce about a one-off, long-ago childhood experience such as being bitten by a dog. Parenthetically, note that if you thought, “Nope, I was never bitten by a dog,” you may have simply forgotten the seemingly memorable event (e.g., Brown, Schefflin, & Hammond, 1998; Lindsay, Wade, Hunter, & Read, 2004; Read & Lindsay, 2000). Even if you were bitten by a dog, it’s likely that you couldn’t answer all of the questions about the details of the event – your recollection is likely very incomplete. Also, you may have successfully cued yourself to recollect details that initially escaped you; given additional cues (e.g., if you revisited the scene of the bite or talked with someone else who was there), you might remember even more about it. You may also have found yourself consciously making inferences in an effort to answer some of the

questions (“Hmm...Whose dog would it have been, given that I was about 9 years old and it was on the beach?”). Autobiographical memory is characteristically incomplete (Lindsay & Read, 2006) and typically convolves relatively vivid, imagistic/experiential recollections with more knowledge-like feelings of knowing or inferring (Lindsay et al., 2004). Moreover, it’s quite possible that some of what you remember, with or without images, didn’t happen (for reviews, see Lindsay & Read, 1994, 2006).

### Remembering in Forensic Situations

The police and court systems place heavy reliance on human memory in their attempts to apprehend and prosecute those responsible for misdeeds. My impression is that this is *the* real-world public policy domain that has most attracted memory researchers. Indeed, eyewitness memory was among the first applied topics to be studied by psychological scientists. Shortly after the advent of psychology as a discipline, around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, psychologists in England, France, Germany, and the US championed the role of scientific psychology in forensic decision making (for historical reviews, see Goodman, 1984; Penrod, Fulero, & Cutler, 1995). This early work was directly inspired by real-world legal cases in which the reliability of eyewitness memory (by adults or children) was brought into question.

Psychological research on eyewitness memory was quiescent in the middle years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but at least four factors reinvigorated interest in this area in recent decades: (a) Loftus’s seminal research on the eyewitness misinformation effect (e.g., Loftus, Miller, & Burns, 1978), which was part of a Zeitgeist that included a wide range of cognitive psychological investigations of memory errors, such as the aforementioned development of Johnson and Raye’s (1981) reality monitoring model; (b) highly publicized cases in which children made unsubstantiated allegations of bizarre forms of sexual abuse (e.g., the Martensville, SK, case of 1992 in which nine adults were charged with 190 counts of abuse); (c) the debate regarding “recovered memories” of childhood sexual abuse; and (d) widespread concern about erroneous

criminal convictions of innocent suspects revealed by DNA evidence.

The psychology of eyewitness memory is a vast and multifaceted topic. For a comprehensive review I highly recommend the two volumes of the *Handbook of Eyewitness Memory*. Volume 1 addresses eyewitnesses' reports of events (Toglia, Read, Ross, & R. C. L. Lindsay, 2006), and Volume 2 deals with eyewitnesses' memory for people (R. C. L. Lindsay, Ross, Read, & Toglia, 2006). In the following I briefly sketch, from a source-monitoring perspective, a few subdomains of eyewitness memory in which I have conducted research. Despite its brevity and focused emphasis, I hope this review will serve to illustrate lines of research on eyewitness memory that have obvious implications for public policy.

Eyewitness suggestibility. Loftus, Miller, and Burns (1978) introduced a procedure in which subjects are exposed to misleading suggestions regarding details in a recently witnessed event. The key finding was that subjects often reported having witnessed details that had merely been suggested to them. Subsequent research indicated that, under many conditions, a fair proportion of these errors reflect knowing uses of the post-event information. For example, when asked what sort of traffic sign had marked an intersection in the event, subjects might think, "I don't remember what I saw in the slides, but I remember that the experimenter later mentioned that it was a stop sign, so I'll say 'stop sign'." Importantly, however, when conditions are such that it is difficult for subjects to differentiate between memories of the witnessed event versus memories of the post-event information, then subjects sometimes genuinely confuse memories from the latter source as memories of the witnessed event itself (for a review, see Lindsay, 1994). It's worth noting that intrusions of memories from one source into reports of another can occur even when subjects are explicitly warned against making such errors (e.g., Lindsay, 1990), even when the source in which the suggestions were embedded pertained to a different event from the witnessed event (e.g., Allen & Lindsay, 1998), and even when the suggestions preceded rather than followed the witnessed event (Lindsay, Allen, Chan, & Dahl,



2004).

Findings such as these have implications for the solicitation and evaluation of eyewitness reports by police conducting investigations and by triers of fact hearing cases. We have no choice but to rely on eyewitness memory – without it, many crimes could neither be investigated nor prosecuted. Also, it is important not to exaggerate the fallibility of witnesses. It's likely that high-confidence memory reports of central aspects of memorable autobiographical experiences obtained from "normal" adult witnesses in a straightforward way soon after the event in question are typically essentially accurate (e.g., Yuille & Cutshall, 1986; for discussion of non-leading but productive approaches to interviewing witnesses see Fisher, Brennan, & McCauley, 2002). But investigators and triers of fact must, in my opinion, be aware that even under optimal conditions eyewitnesses sometimes make errors (sometimes with high confidence) and that the likelihood of errors increases when suggestive influences are combined with other factors that undermine accuracy (e.g., long delays, poor attention during the event, and extreme scores on individual difference measures associated with susceptibility to suggestions [Gudjonsson, 2003]). It's worth noting that the factors that modulate the reliability of eyewitness reports in criminal investigations are also at play in other sorts of investigations, such as those conducted to determine the causes of industrial accidents (e.g., Kelloway, Stinson, & MacLean, 2004).

Children's eyewitness memory. Child sexual abuse is typically perpetrated in secret and usually leaves no physical evidence. Thus the child's report is often the sole evidence of the abuse. Unfortunately, as noted by Goodman, Emery, and Haugaard (1998), "There is as yet no generally accepted, scientifically valid way to determine whether an abuse report is true or false" (p. 821). Children as young as 3 years can provide accurate accounts of their experiences under optimal conditions. However, as discussed in the preceding section, even adults make false memory reports under non-optimal conditions. Children older than 6 years of age are at

least as susceptible to memory-distorting influences as are adults, and younger children are substantially more so (Dickinson, Poole, & Laiman, 2005; Zaragoza, Payment, & Ackil, 2001).

Conducting effective forensic interviews with young children is very difficult. Young children who have not been coached are unlikely to make false allegations in response to non-leading, open-ended questions. The problem is that very young children are unlikely to say much of anything in response to such questions. This is primarily a matter of young children's cognitive, linguistic, and social skills being insufficiently developed to support extended narrative memory reports, but the problem is likely exacerbated by situational factors (e.g., that the child is questioned by an unfamiliar adult in an unfamiliar place, that adults may drop cues as to the momentousness of the interview, and that the interview concerns sensitive topics). Young children's very limited responses to open-ended free-recall probes often compels interviewers to asking more specific (and, hence, leading) questions, which increase the likelihood of false reports.

Above and beyond the inescapable difficulties of eliciting detailed reports of past experiences from young children, some forensic interviewers believe that children have a particular reluctance to disclose sexual abuse. Some such interviewers appear to believe that their job is to enable the child to overcome this reluctance and make an abuse report. This belief has led some interviewers to use grossly suggestive approaches that have led children to make outlandish false reports (for a comprehensive review, see Ceci & Bruck, 1995).

When children have been coached (e.g., by a parent in a custody dispute, or by a clinician or prior forensic interviewer with an agenda), even if they are interviewed in optimally non-suggestive ways, they may make false reports. This is a specific case of a more general principle that, when memory-source discriminations are difficult, young children make more errors than older children or adults (e.g., Lindsay, Johnson, & Kwon, 1991). Deb Poole and I explored this issue in a series of studies in which children interacted with an unfamiliar man

named Mr. Science, later listened to a parent read a story about the child's interaction with Mr. Science, and finally were interviewed in their own homes by a trained interviewer using procedures designed to encourage accurate reports. Across 114 3- to 8-year-old children in our 2001 study, there were 58 free-recall reports of non-experienced events suggested in the story, including 17 children who reported having been touched in an unusual way. These false reports were in response to completely open-ended questions; cued-recall questions substantially increased false reports. In a subsequent study we found that a brief source-monitoring training procedure designed for children reduced false reports in 7- to 8-year-old children, but was ineffective with younger children (Poole & Lindsay, 2002). Repetition of a particular type of event, with varying details from occasion to occasion, may further increase susceptibility to suggestion (Connolly & Price, 2006).

As with adults, we cannot forego the use of children's eyewitness reports. Also, it's important to exercise due caution in generalizing from research studies to real-world cases. For example, Poole and Lindsay (2002) would likely have obtained lower rates of false reports if their suggestions had been of violent or taboo touch. Policy makers must balance the benefits of helping real victims disclose abuse against the risks of fomenting false reports, and those decisions must be guided by the best available scientific evidence (for an excellent treatment of this topic, see Poole & Lamb, 1998).

Recovered memories. One afternoon in the early 1990s I met in my office at the University of Victoria with an older man from the community. Mr. X told me a strange tale, according to which his 40-something-year-old daughter had come, under the guidance of a counsellor, to "recover" previously repressed memories of him sexually assaulting her as a girl. The allegations were of brutal and bizarre acts of sexual violence, for which Mr. X faced criminal charges.

This was my introduction to the phenomenon of "recovered memories." Mr. X's story was

typical of the sorts of cases that alarmed memory researchers such as Beth Loftus (e.g., Loftus, 1993). The counsellor who had worked with Mr. X's daughter (Ms. X) had little formal training. She had hypothesized after the very first session that Ms. X was suffering from repressed memories of childhood sexual abuse and, thereafter, she used a variety of suggestive techniques in an effort to encourage the recovery of such memories. Despite the counsellor's zeal, it took a full year of quite intense therapy before Ms. X began experiencing memories of being abused. Over the course of a second year of therapy, the memories became progressively more bizarre and disturbing, leading Ms. X to stop communicating with her father and, eventually, to file charges against him.

The controversy regarding recovered memories of childhood sexual abuse raged for half a dozen years, and repercussions continue to be felt by family members and therapists (see Read, Connolly, & Welsh, 2006, for an archival analysis of Canadian court cases involving long-delayed accusations of childhood sexual abuse). The issue is an extraordinarily complex, emotionally charged, and politically sensitive one, with valid concerns expressed by those who emphasize the importance of protecting victims of child sexual abuse and by those who emphasize the importance of protecting clients from suggestive therapies.

My colleague Don Read and I have published extensively on the topic of recovered memories (e.g., Lindsay & Read, 1994, 2006; Read & Lindsay, 2000). We also co-organized a NATO-sponsored Advanced Studies Institute on this topic, in which we brought together major figures with a wide variety of backgrounds and perspectives on the issues (Read & Lindsay, 1997). From our perspective, highly suggestive forms of trauma-memory-oriented psychotherapies tend to create severe source-monitoring difficulties for clients, with some who receive such therapies coming to accept thoughts, feelings, and images that are really the result of suggestive influences as evidence of repressed memories of childhood sexual abuse.

In an article published in *Psychology, Public Policy, and the Law*, Lindsay and Read

(1995) touched on the numerous public policy implications of the recovered-memories phenomenon. These include the training and certification of psychological therapists/counsellors, legislative actions related to psychological therapy (e.g., repealing statutes of limitations), state-funded research initiatives, and a host of legal and ethical issues. One of our most general recommendations was that it would be helpful if more of those responsible for formulating public policy understood the basic principles of science.

Eyewitnesses' suspect-identification decisions. As of this writing, The Innocence Project (<http://www.innocenceproject.org>) reports 184 cases of individuals in the United States convicted of serious crimes whose convictions were subsequently overturned on the basis of DNA evidence (and there are many other such cases in the United States and elsewhere). Robert Clark, for example, was convicted of rape, assault, and armed robbery, and served 24 years while steadfastly maintaining his innocence before DNA evidence sought by the Innocence Project revealed that another man was responsible for the crimes. At least 11 men in the United States whose convictions have been overturned had been sentenced to death. The majority of these cases involved mistaken eyewitness identifications, often obtained in sub-optimal testing situations. In the Clark case, for example, in an initial photospread lineup the victim identified another man as the perpetrator; in a second photospread lineup she said that Clark looked very much like the perpetrator; it was only in a third identification test, using a live lineup in which Clark was the only man whose photo the victim had previously been shown, that she erroneously identified Clark as her rapist.

Inspired in part by these DNA cases, American Attorney General Janet Reno convened a panel of experts, including psychologist Gary Wells of Iowa State University (who was at the University of Alberta from 1977 to 1989 and is the world's foremost authority on the psychology of eyewitness identification) along with other leading psychologists in this area (e.g., Rod Lindsay of Queen's University and John Turtle of Ryerson University), police officers, and

prosecution and defense lawyers. This group produced, for the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), a 55-page document titled *Eyewitness Evidence: A Guide for Law Enforcement* (Technical Working Group for Eyewitness Evidence, 1999). This is one of scientific psychology's most dramatic and consequential contributions to North American public policy. It is quite exciting that several police departments in the US and Canada are already implementing many of the recommendations in these guidelines. Space constraints prohibit even a brief review of these issues, but a fascinating *American Psychologist* article by Wells, Malpass, R. C. L. Lindsay, Fisher, Turtle, and Fulero (2000) does a terrific job of laying out the background for the NIJ guidelines and explaining their import. Also, a book by Doyle (2005), written for the popular press but meeting high scientific standards, provides an engaging treatment of these issues.

Canada, too, has wrongfully convicted innocent suspects (e.g., David Milgaard, Donald Marshall, Romea Fillion, Thomas Sophonow; see the Association in Defense of the Wrongfully Convicted website at [www.aidwyc.org](http://www.aidwyc.org)). Responding to publicity surrounding such cases, the Department of Justice Canada struck a working group on the prevention of miscarriages of justice which, in 2004, produced a report with various recommendations (FPT Heads of Prosecutions Committee, 2004). This report is less specific and, in my view, less ambitious than the NIJ guidelines, but it does represent an important acknowledgment of the problem of wrongful convictions. Read (in press) and Yarmey (2003) offer cogent analyses of issues pertaining to eyewitness identifications from a Canadian perspective.

My contributions to the research literature on eyewitness identification have emphasized two points. First, Don Read and I argued that many psychologists have under-estimated the relationship between witnesses' confidence and their accuracy on non-biased identification tests performed shortly after the witnessed event (Lindsay, Nilsen, & Read, 2000; Lindsay, Read, & Sharma, 1998; for references to others with the same bottom line, see Brewer & Wells, 2006). Under optimal conditions, there is a substantial, albeit far from perfect, relationship between

witnesses' confidence and their accuracy, which suggests that it would be worthwhile for investigators to collect measures of confidence. Even under ideal conditions, some witnesses who report very low confidence are accurate, and some who report 100% confidence are inaccurate. Also, it is likely that there is essentially no relationship between witnesses' apparent confidence and their accuracy at trial, which is long after the event in the question, long after the initial identification test, and after selection processes and numerous forms of social influence have operated to undermine the confidence/accuracy relationship.

More recently, Liz Brimacombe, our students, and I have been exploring how role-playing investigators weigh the identification evidence provided by role-playing witnesses. Our basic finding is that investigators put far too much stock in witnesses' identification decisions and are almost completely insensitive to the witnesses' accuracy (Boyce, Lindsay, & Brimacombe, 2006; Dahl, Lindsay, & Brimacombe, in press). In this regard, those in the role of investigators behave similarly to those in the role of jurors (e.g., R. C. L. Lindsay, Wells, & O'Connor, 1989). In future work with John Turtle we hope to test experienced police officers in this procedure.

What does the SMF have to say about eyewitnesses' identification decisions? First, when performing an identification test the witness must differentiate between feelings of recognizing a particular photo or lineup member as the culprit that arise from memories of that person perpetrating the crime versus from other sources (e.g., the similarity of a few superficial features of the suspect to the perpetrator, or memories of having seen the suspect in a prior lineup or in some other setting). Such source confusions are well-documented (e.g., Deffenbacher, Bernstein, & Penrod, 2006). Second, one person's perception of another person's performance on a memory test can be described as a sort of interpersonal metamemory or interpersonal source monitoring (e.g., Johnson, Bush, & Mitchell, 1998). That is, an investigator must assess, if only implicitly, the likelihood that a witness's identification

response reflects memory for the culprit versus other sources of influence. Extant evidence suggests that lay people are poor at doing this. Related research on deception detection indicates similarly poor performance in both lay people and police (Granhag & Vrij, 2005; for a perspective on lie detection informed by the SMF, see Sporer, 2004).

#### Psychological Experts on Eyewitness Memory

My impression, based primarily on limited personal experience and some informal conversations with colleagues, is that Canadian courts are, in general, disinclined to admit the testimony of psychologists on eyewitness memory and identification (see Read, in press; Yarmey, 2001). Many judges appear to be of the opinion that psychologists' knowledge in these domains is unlikely to go beyond their own commonsense or that of jurors. It may, indeed, be the case that psychologists sometimes exaggerate the novelty and counter-intuitiveness of their insights into the frailties of eyewitness memory (Read & Desmarais, 2006). Moreover, I suspect that psychological experts sometimes succumb to the inducements of the adversarial situation by going beyond the data. I have heard, for example, of cases in which psychologists have testified to the effect that a particular child's testimony is or is not credible. In another case, an expert psychologist reportedly testified that there was a 75-90% probability that a complainant's accusations were based on false memories. Such "expert" opinions do not have any sound scientific footing.

Despite these concerns, I believe that scientifically scrupulous psychological experts can usefully inform triers of fact in certain kinds of cases (e.g., when eyewitness reports or identifications or suspect confessions are obtained via highly suggestive methods, or when an opposing expert makes claims that go beyond the data). I also believe that such experts can play a very important role by educating police, attorneys, and judges on what we have learned about the factors that promote and undermine witnesses' accuracy (as renowned Canadian experts such as Rod Lindsay, Don Read, John Turtle, and John Yuille have often done).



### Conclusions

The foregoing described the broad outlines of a source-monitoring perspective on autobiographical memory and briefly touched on a handful of domains pertaining to eyewitness memory viewed through the lens of that perspective. The SMF is not the only way of thinking about autobiographical memory, and psychological scientists are still far short of establishing consensus on a detailed model of how memory works. Also, the eyewitness memory issues mentioned above are but a small and idiosyncratic sample of a much larger body of work that includes research addressing such fascinating and important topics as false confessions and deception detection. Despite its limitations, I hope that this paper has served to illustrate some of the many ways in which cognitive psychological scientific research on memory has important implications for public policy.

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Author Note

D. Stephen Lindsay, Department of Psychology, University of Victoria.

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to D. Stephen Lindsay, Department of Psychology, University of Victoria, P.O. Box 3050 STN CSC, Victoria, BC, V8W 3P5, Canada. Email [slindsay@uvic.ca](mailto:slindsay@uvic.ca).