

Beliefs About Memory in the Police, Public and Memory Experts

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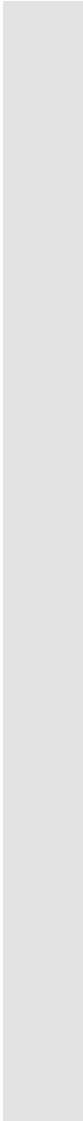
*It was 9.30 and I remember
it was a really cold evening. I remember a man,
his green coat and his bright blonde hair. He ran
up beside me, I can still hear his footsteps, and
grabbed my bag.
I am certain, I have a very good memory and
rarely forget anything*

*It all happened so quickly, I can't remember very
much. I think it was around 9pm, maybe later. A
man ran up beside me, grabbed my bag and ran
off*

- Is there one you believe more?
- How have you come to that conclusion?
- How are memories judged?
 - Many legal proceedings rely primarily on memory evidence
- *Common sense beliefs*

- Common sense beliefs
 - Experience of one's own memory
 - Memory of others
 - Cultural norms
 - Media influences?
- In the UK and US courts, judges regard the public as knowing how memory works
 - The public are sufficiently informed as to require no further advice.

“It [memory evidence] has
no scientific or technical underpinnings
...therefore
expert testimony is not necessary...”

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- But are common-sense beliefs about memory accurate?



Method

- Metropolitan Police (all ranks)
 - Memory Experts (attending ICOM-6)
 - Members of the general public
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- N= 853
 - 240 (28%) Memory Experts
 - 531 (62%) Police
 - 81 (10%) Public



Results

	Experts	Police	Public
Memory is generally accurate	D	A	A
The more details, the more accurate	D	A	A
Memories can be false	A	D	D
Memory is like a video	D	A	A
Durability of trauma	D	A	A

Experts agree

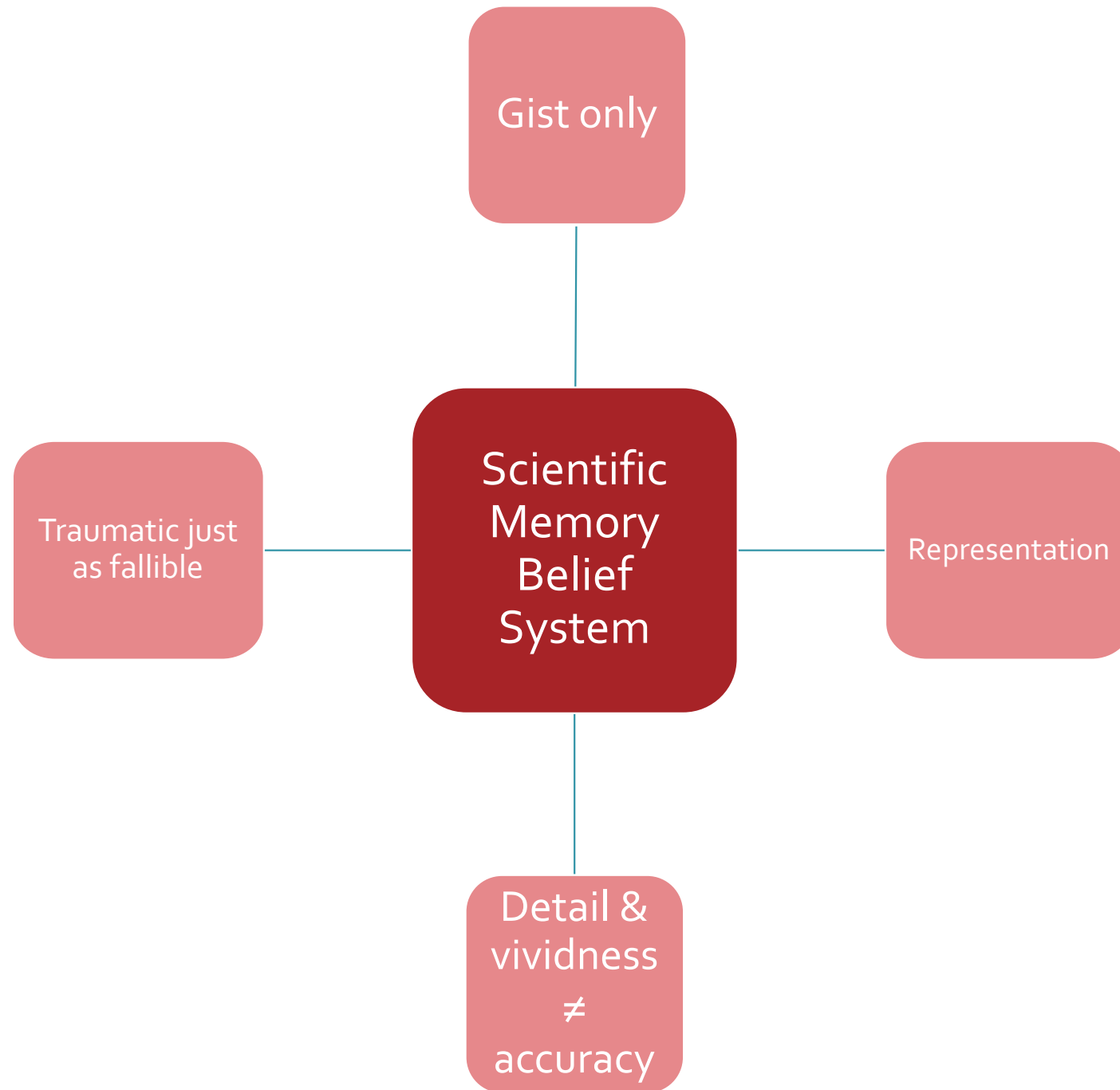
Public & Police
disagree

- Children's memories are less accurate than adult's memories
- People can come to remember events that never occurred
- Over time memories deteriorate and can become less accurate.
- Memories of traumatic events may contain details that are false

Experts
disagree

Public & Police
agree

- Memories are like photographs or videos
- Memory is like a movie of one's experiences
- People often accurately remember emotions and feelings
- Memories from childhood are as accurate as memories from other ages.



- By “common sense” a memory is *believed* to be accurate if:
 - ...it contains highly specific details
 - ...it is vividly recalled
 - ...it is of an emotionally intense experience
 - ...it is of an emotionally negative / traumatic experience
- Contrary to scientific understanding

- The “common sense” belief system is almost certainly held by many non-experts
 - Implicitly and non-conscious
 - Not surprising

If all there is to go on is “common sense” then judgments of memory evidence will often be flawed



What next?

- Offer training to legal professionals?
- Establish guidance for jurors?
- How can we work with the legal community?