In a study in the 1990s,

participants recalled getting lost in a shopping mall as children.

Some shared these memories in **vivid** detail—

one even remembered that the old man who rescued him

was wearing a flannel shirt.

But none of these people had actually gotten lost in a mall.

They produced these false memories

when the psychologists **conduct**ing the study told them they’d gotten lost,

and although they might not remember the **incident**,

their parents had confirmed it.

And it wasn’t just one or two people who thought they remembered getting lost—

a quarter of the participants did.

These findings may sound unbelievable,

but they actually reflect a very common experience.

Our memories are sometimes unreliable.

And though we still don’t know **precise**ly what causes this fallibility

on a neurological level,

research has **highlight**ed some of the most common ways our memories

diverge from what actually happened.

The mall study highlights how we can **incorporate** information

**from outside sources,**

**like other people or the news,**

**into our personal recollections without realizing it**.

This kind of **suggestibility** is just one influence on our memories.

Take another study,

in which researchers briefly showed a random collection of photographs

to a group of participants,

including images of a university campus none of them had ever visited.

When shown the images three weeks later,

a majority of participants said that they had probably or definitely

visited the campus in the past.

The participants **misattributed** information from one context— an image they’d seen—

onto another— a memory of something they believed they actually experienced.

In another experiment, people were shown an image of a **magnifyi**ng glass,

and then told to imagine a lollipop.

They frequently recalled that they saw the magnifying glass and the lollipop.

**They struggled to link the objects to the correct context—**

**whether they actually saw them, or simply imagined them**.

Another study, where a psychologist questioned over 2,000 people

on their views about the legalization of marijuana,

highlights yet another kind of influence on memory.

Participants answered questions in 1973 and 1982.

Those who said they had supported marijuana legalization in 1973,

but reported they were against it in 1982,

were more likely to recall that they were actually against **legalization** in 1973—

bringing their old views in line with their current ones.

Our current opinions, feelings, and experiences

can bias our memories of how we felt in the past.

In another study,

researchers gave two groups of participants background information

on a historical war and asked them to rate the **likelihood** that each side would win.

They gave each group the same information,

except that they only told one group who had actually won the war—

the other group didn’t know the real world outcome.

In theory, both groups’ answers should be similar,

because the likelihood of each side winning

isn’t effected by who actually won—

if there’s a 20% chance of **thunderstorms**, and a thunderstorm happens,

the chance of thunderstorms doesn’t **retroactive**ly go up to 100%.

Still, **the group that knew how the war ended**

**rated the winning side as more likely to win than the group who did not.**

All of these fallibilities of memory can have real-world impacts.

If police i**nterrogatio**ns use leading questions with eye witnesses or suspects,

suggestibility could result in incorrect identifications or unreliable **confessions**.

Even in the absence of leading questions,

misattribution can lead to inaccurate eyewitness testimony.

In a courtroom,

if a judge rules a piece of evidence inadmissible

and tells jurors to **disregard** it, they may not be able to do so.

In a medical setting, if a patient seeks a second opinion

and **the second physician is aware of the first one’s diagnosis,**

**that knowledge may bias their conclusion.**

Our memories are not **ironclad** representations of reality,

but subjective **perceptions**.

And there’s not necessarily anything wrong with that—

the problems arise when we treat memory as fact,

rather than accepting this fundamental truth

about the nature of our recollections.

Английский