

Inventing stories: forcing witnesses to fabricate entire fictitious events.

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Studies of the forced fabrication effect have shown that participant witnesses are prone to developing false memories for specific items or details that they have been forced to fabricate earlier (e.g., what type of hat someone wore). Building on these earlier findings, the present study assessed whether participants would develop false memories if forced to fabricate entire fictitious events that were more complex and extended in time and involved people, locations, and actions that they had never seen. Participants vehemently resisted fabricating these events, and false memory development over the short term (1-week recognition test) was limited. However, after 8 weeks, participants freely reported their forced fabrications nearly 50% of the time and did so even when they had correctly and publicly rejected them earlier on the 1-week recognition test. This is the first evidence that participant witnesses will freely incorporate into their eyewitness accounts entire fictitious events that they have earlier been forced to fabricate.

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