

Schemas

Psychology

Mental frameworks that organise knowledge and distort memory.

A schema is an organised packet of knowledge about a concept or situation, built from experience, that guides attention, interpretation and recall.

RECALL IS
reconstructive

DISTORTS TOWARD
the schema

- Bartlett's War of the Ghosts: recall shifted toward the participants' own culture.
- Recall is reconstructive, not a replay.
- Schema-consistent detail is remembered; inconsistent detail is often lost or altered.
- Scripts are schemas for event sequences — a restaurant visit.
- They speed comprehension and introduce systematic error.
- They underlie stereotyping.

LOOK FOR IT

Participants who read a description of an office later 'remembered' books that were never there.

This is why eyewitness memory is unreliable: recall reconstructs from a schema, and the reconstruction feels identical to a memory.