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## Blurring of emotional and non-emotional memories by taxing working memory during recall.

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### Abstract

Memories that are recalled while working memory (WM) is taxed, e.g., by making eye movements (EM), become blurred during the recall + EM and later recall, without EM. This may help to explain the effects of Eye Movement and Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR) in the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in which patients make EM during trauma recall. Earlier experimental studies on recall + EM have focused on emotional memories. WM theory suggests that recall + EM is superior to recall only but is silent about effects of memory emotionality. Based on the emotion and memory literature, we examined whether recall + EM has superior effects in blurring emotional memories relative to neutral memories. Healthy volunteers recalled negative or neutral memories, matched for vividness, while visually tracking a dot that moved horizontally ("recall + EM") or remained stationary ("recall only"). Compared to a pre-test, a post-test (without concentrating on the dot) replicated earlier findings: negative memories are rated as less vivid after "recall + EM" but not after "recall only". This was not found for neutral memories. Emotional memories are more taxing than neutral memories, which may explain the findings. Alternatively, transient arousal induced by recall of aversive memories may promote reconsolidation of the blurred memory image that is provoked by EM.

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