

A. Leichtman and Ceci's Sam Stone Study

In Leichtman and Ceci's Sam Stone Study, research assistants visited preschool children once a week for four weeks and told them about twelve incidents involving a clumsy fellow named Sam Stone.⁸⁸ Subsequently, Sam Stone visited the classroom while the children were hearing a story. He was introduced to the children, commented on the story, and walked around the perimeter of the classroom. He then departed, having stayed a total of approximately two minutes.⁸⁹ Following Sam Stone's visit, researchers interviewed the children four times over a four-week period. In the last three interviews, children were provided with "erroneous suggestions . . . that Sam Stone had ripped a book [and] . . . soiled a teddy bear."⁹⁰ For example, in the second interview, interviewers asked the children "Did Sam Stone rip the book with his hands, or did he use scissors?"⁹¹

Approximately ten weeks after Sam Stone's visit, a new interviewer questioned the children. The interviewer first asked a "free-narrative" question: "Remember the day that Sam Stone came to your classroom? Well, I wasn't there that day, and I'd like you to tell me everything that happened when he visited."⁹² If the child did not specifically refer to a book being ripped or a teddy bear being soiled, she was asked "probe" questions: "I heard something about a book. Do you know anything about that?" and "I heard something about a teddy bear. Do you know anything about that?"⁹³ Forty-six percent of the three- and four-year-old children spontaneously reported that Sam Stone had performed one or both misdeeds in response to the free narrative question; seventy-two percent did so in response to probe questions.⁹⁴

What was most surprising about these children's reports was the number of false perceptual details, as well as nonverbal gestures, that they provided to embellish their stories of these nonevents. For example, children used their hands to show how Sam had purportedly thrown the teddy bear up in the air; some children reported seeing Sam in the playground, on his way to the store to buy chocolate ice cream, or in the bathroom soaking the teddy bear in water before smearing it with a crayon.⁹⁵

B. Bruck, Ceci, Francoeur, and Barr's Inoculation Study

In Bruck, Ceci, Francoeur, and Barr's Inoculation Study, a pediatrician gave four- and five-year-old children a routine medical examination.⁹⁶ After the examination, a research assistant greeted the children and spoke to them about a poster on the wall for several minutes. The research assistant stayed during the pediatrician's administration of the oral vaccine and the inoculation and then took the child to another room

where she gave them treats and read them a story.⁹⁷

Approximately eleven months after their visit to the pediatrician, researchers interviewed the children four times over a two-week period.⁹⁸ In the first three interviews, researchers gave the children false information about their visit. The interviewer minimized how much the inoculation had hurt and how much the children had cried.⁹⁹ In addition, the interviewer told the children that the research assistant had given them their oral vaccine and inoculation, and that the pediatrician had shown them the poster, given them the treats, and read them the story.¹⁰⁰ In the fourth interview, researchers asked the children to recall everything that happened on their visit to the pediatrician's and directly asked who had performed the various actions during their visit (if the children had not already volunteered such information).¹⁰¹

In the fourth interview, the children reported significantly less pain and crying than a control group of children. About thirty percent to forty percent of the children falsely reported that the research assistant had given them their shot, the oral vaccine, and the checkup, and that the pediatrician had shown them the poster, given them treats, and read them a story.¹⁰² The authors concluded, “[t]hese results challenge the view that suggestibility effects are confined to peripheral, neutral, and nonmeaningful events.”¹⁰³

C. Ceci, Crotteau Huffman, and Smith's Mousetrap Study

In Ceci, Crotteau Huffman, and Smith's Mousetrap Study, researchers interviewed preschool children about various events, only some of which had occurred, seven to ten times over a period of ten weeks.¹⁰⁴ One of the fictitious events concerned getting one's hand caught in a mousetrap and having to go to the hospital. The experimenter held cards on which the events were written and told the child that only some of the events had occurred and that the child should “think real hard” and decide whether each event had really happened or not.¹⁰⁵ At the end of ten weeks, a new interviewer asked the children whether the events had ever occurred.¹⁰⁶ Fifty-eight percent of the children produced false narratives to at least one of the fictitious events, and twenty-five percent falsely affirmed that most of them had occurred.¹⁰⁷ Many children were able to provide compelling narrative accounts of the nonexistent events. For example: “My daddy, mommy, and my brother [took me to the hospital] in our van. . . . The hospital gave me a little bandage, and it was right here [pointing to index finger] I was looking and then I didn't see what I was doing and it [finger] got in there somehow. . . . The mousetrap was in our house because there's a mouse in our house The mousetrap is down in the basement, next to the firewood I was playing a game called `operation' and then I went downstairs and said

to Dad, 'I want to eat lunch,' and then it got stuck in the mousetrap My daddy was down in the basement collecting firewood [My brother] pushed me [into the mousetrap]; he grabbed *Blow Torch* [an action figure]. It happened yesterday. The mouse was in my house yesterday. I caught my finger in it yesterday. I went to the hospital yesterday.”¹⁰⁸

D. Bruck, Hembrooke, and Ceci's Monkey-Thief Study

In Bruck, Hembrooke, and Ceci's Monkey-Thief Study, researchers interviewed sixteen preschool children on five occasions about four events: two true events and two false events.¹⁰⁹ One of each type of event was a positive event, and one was a negative event. The false-positive event involved helping a woman find her lost monkey, whereas the false negative involved witnessing a man come to the daycare and steal food. In the first interview, the researcher simply asked the children whether the events had occurred. In the second and third interviews, the interviewers used a combination of suggestive techniques that included “peer pressure, visualization techniques, repeating misinformation, and selective reinforcement.”¹¹⁰ If the children stated that an event had occurred, the interviewer asked open-ended and closed-ended questions about the event. If the children denied that the event had occurred, the interviewer asked them to pretend that it had and asked the same questions. On the fourth interview, the researcher asked the children to tell their stories to a puppet. Again, if the children denied that an event had occurred, the researcher asked them to pretend. On the fifth interview, a new interviewer asked an open-ended question about the events (e.g., “I heard something about a lost monkey. Do you know anything about that?”).¹¹¹ The study found that “[b]y the third interview, most children had assented to all true and false events. This pattern continued to the end of the experiment.”¹¹² These studies undercut sanguine assumptions that children are not unduly suggestible. In each of these studies, a substantial number of children falsely affirmed that nonexistent events had occurred. These false reports often occurred spontaneously, in response to a request for free narrative. Moreover, children frequently elaborated on their false reports, even going beyond the information previous interviewers had suggested. Finally, the false reports often concerned events in which the children both participated and were harmed. The results thus challenge the shibboleths of previous research on children's suggestibility: false reports occur rarely and only in response to highly misleading questions;¹¹³ false reports tend to be unelaborated, single-word responses;¹¹⁴ false reports are unlikely when the child is reporting a negative event that involves the child's body.¹¹⁵

On the other hand, the new wave studies establish only that researchers can produce false allegations and do not enable others to

estimate how often such allegations are occurring under current interviewing practices. To make such a judgment, one must understand how investigators actually conduct these interviews in the real world. Such an understanding leads to the conclusion that the new wave research may overstate children's suggestibility in actual practice. Moreover, the new wave ignores a number of important variables in their criticism of interviewing practices. These variables decrease the likelihood of false allegations of sexual abuse and in some cases justify the use of interviewing practices the new wave criticizes.