

Constructive Memory and Imagining the Future

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Studies of memory have mainly focused on remembering the past, but an important function of memory is to allow individuals to simulate or imagine future scenarios. A rapidly growing number of studies have shown that simulating future events depends on much of the same neural and cognitive machinery as does remembering past events. To account for these findings, we have suggested the *constructive episodic simulation* hypothesis, which holds that simulation of future events requires a system that can draw on the past in a manner that flexibly extracts and re-combines elements of previous experiences, sometimes producing memory distortions that reflect the operation of adaptive processes. This talk considers recent evidence that bears on the constructive episodic simulation hypothesis, including studies that distinguish between episodic and non-episodic contributions to event construction and evidence that reveals both pitfalls and adaptive aspects of constructive memory and future simulation, in the context of research on planning, prediction, problem solving, mind wandering, and the interconnected set of brain regions known as the default network.

Objectives

1. How would you characterize the relationship between remembering past experiences and imagining future experiences?
2. What are the pitfalls and adaptive features of episodic future simulation, and what implications do they have in everyday life?
3. How can the benefits of an episodic specificity induction be realized in everyday life?