Dissociating Automatic and Intentional Processes in Children’s
Eyewitness Suggestibility

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Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, November 1999
I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis is the result of original research and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or Institution.

(Signed) ____________________________________________________________
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Publications arising from this research

One refereed journal article arising from this research has been accepted for publication.

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Abstract

The chief aim of this dissertation was to establish the respective contributions of automatic and intentional memory processes to misinformation effects in 5-, 8-, and 9-year-old children. In the first two experiments children were presented with a picture story followed by misleading post-event details that were either read to participants, or were self-generated in response to semantic and perceptual hints. Children were then presented with original and suggested items and given a yes / no recognition test under inclusion or exclusion instructions. The application of Jacoby’s (1991) process dissociation procedure to children’s recognition performance revealed that the contribution of intentional processing to misinformation acceptance increased following the self-generation of suggestions. Automatic processing made a strong contribution to misinformation effects regardless of the way that misinformation was encoded. Experiment 3 extended this general pattern of results to a forced choice recognition paradigm. Experiment 4 examined the role of social demand factors in children’s suggestibility using Belli’s (1989) yes / no retrieval paradigm. Little evidence of an influence of social demand on children’s suggestible responses was found with automatic processes again the predominant factor determining suggestibility. In the final experiment, the temporal order of the original and post-event phases was reversed such that 5-year-olds were initially presented with a post-event summary containing misinformation, followed by a witnessed event. The results of this study confirmed that children’s suggestions were unlikely to be the result of trace alteration or social demand. The implications of the findings for theoretical accounts of the misinformation effect in children’s recognition and for children’s eyewitness testimony are discussed.