
Flashbulb Memory: An Analysis

On December 23, 1972, one of the most memorable games in the history of the National Football League took place at Three Rivers Stadium in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The Pittsburgh Steelers were playing the Oakland Raiders in the AFC Championship Game. The score was 7-6 in favor of the Raiders; then something extraordinary happened. Steeler quarterback Terry Bradshaw dropped back to pass with thirteen seconds remaining in the fourth quarter. The intended receiver was Frenchy Fequa. Fequa collided with one of the safeties from the Raiders and the ball was deflected. Steeler's running back Franco Harris rescued the ball before it hit the ground and scampered 60 yards for a Steeler touchdown and earned the Steeler's a spot in the Super Bowl. If you were to ask any Steeler fan where they were when the "immaculate reception" took place they would probably be able to tell you exactly where they were and who they were with. This is an example of the psychological phenomenon of flashbulb memory.

Flashbulb memory is a clear memory of a significant moment or an event. I think that flashbulb memories occur because the events that happen are often so unpredictable. Since they were so unexpected and bring up so many different emotions, it seems that the environment around us is permanently burned into our memories. We remember exactly whom we were with, what we were wearing, our initial reaction, words spoken by friends, and even the smells associated with the environment. Flashbulb memory is still debated among some of the most intelligent neuropsychologists today. The debate centers on whether these memories are encoded into the brain. From a superficial overview of some Internet sites and book reviews, it seems that evidence is split down the middle for and against the encoding view. Although these neuropsychologist still debate the relevance of their finds, one fact remains true: we all have flashbulb memories. To further illustrate this psychological concept, I will share some of my unique experiences that have permanently burned into my mind.

It was the middle of June and I was still in school. The teachers at our school went on strike for thirty days and were forced back to work by binding arbitration. What this meant to the students was that we were in school until June 30th. Then, on a hot summer afternoon, the word spread. Nicole Brown Simpson and Ronald Goldman were murdered. I was in my 7th grade English class; my teacher was Mrs. Biega. I was sitting in the row closest to the chalkboard in the second seat when she came back in the room and turned on the television. We sat and watched the breaking news as reporters gave their rendition of the events. Preliminary reports indicated that football star O.J. Simpson was the number one suspect. I could not believe it. One of my favorite football players was accused of murder. My hero, how could it be? As I talked to my classmates, I remember my emotions. I was shocked, scared, and nervous. When class let out that day, I went home, only to be glued to the television. Watching NBC, I

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remember watching Los Angeles police in pursuit of a white Ford Bronco driven by O.J. Simpson. I remember the police arresting O.J. and all of the events that follow. The trial was lengthy. It lasted until the fall semester of my freshman year in high school. The events that happened between the time of the murders and the verdict are distorted. If asked to recall the specifics of the trial my responses would probably inconsistent until the verdict was read. When the verdict was read, I was once again in English class. My teacher was Mr. Mariano. At the time we did not have access to a television so we listen to the verdict on the radio. The class was very noisy and it was hard to hear the broadcaster. Then, it happened. O.J. Simpson was acquitted of double murder. I was in shock; I had mixed emotions. I did not know whether to feel happy because my hero was innocent or whether to doubt the judicial process since a large amount of the evidence pointed to a guilty Simpson. This is exactly how I remember the events. Someday when my children ask me about the trial I know I will be able to tell them the same story just as my parents told me about the immaculate reception.

Flashbulb memories are a unique psychological phenomenon. They have a tremendous impact on our life. These phenomena burn permanent images into to our minds of our thoughts, feelings, and actions. Some of them we share, some of them we do not. The flash bulb memories we do share have our own little twist to them. This is what makes them special; this is why they are imprinted into are mind. So, I leave you with some questions. Where were you when the Challenger exploded? Where were you when John F. Kennedy was assonated? Where were you when Mark McGwire hit his 70th home run? Where were you when an earth rumbled through Oakland, California during the 1989 World Series?

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