

Courts wary of evidence aided by hypnosis

IMAGINE you are on a jury in a murder trial. The prosecutor's star witness testifies the defendant committed the crime. She reports that with the aid of hypnosis, she was able to recall the color of the crime — even down to the color of the assailant's socks.

Are you impressed? Enough to vote for a conviction?

MANY PEOPLE would be. Self-assured eyewitness testimony from a credible witness can be very persuasive.

When this testimony is the result of information "unlocked" by hypnosis, it is

even more persuasive because people tend to assume that accuracy and truth are guaranteed.

Unfortunately, this assumption is dangerously inaccurate.

A professor staged a surprise, mock "assassination" of a guest speaker during an undergraduate psychology class. Afterwards, one student under hypnosis described the black gloves the assassin had worn, including the type of stitching and the location of worn spots. The problem was, the assassin had not worn gloves.

HYPNOSIS obviously does not guaran-



psychology

Dennis Sugrue

tee accuracy. It appears to assist us in recalling details as we perceived them, not necessarily as they were in reality.

In the case of the psychology student, the scene of the assassination likely blended with his own subconscious ideas

about assassinations.

When he witnessed the assassination, the blur that occurred before his eyes was embellished with additional details from the psyche's storehouse of information. It was then recorded into memory, embellishments and all.

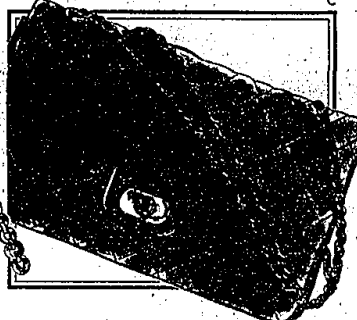
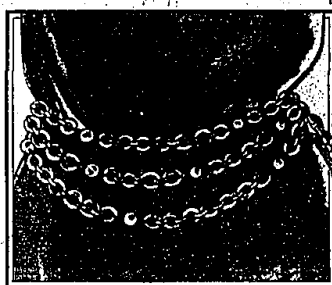
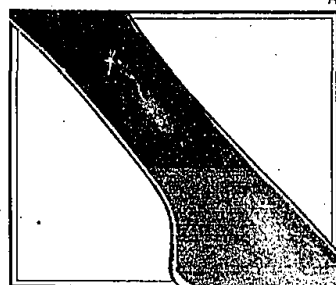
Perhaps the idea of the assassin's black gloves came from an old, late-night movie, influencing the mind to automatically assume assassins wear black gloves.

BECAUSE OF the danger of hypnotically induced testimony not only being inaccurate but, more significantly, being inappropriately convincing to a jury,

many court rulings in recent years have thrown out this type of evidence.

Although there is no guarantee that hypnotic recall is totally accurate — a critical issue in a courtroom — hypnotic recall can nevertheless produce valuable information that had been accurately recorded by the mind, but blocked from conscious recall.

Dr. Sugrue is a clinical psychologist at Henry Ford Hospital. He welcomes questions and topics for future articles, but is unable to answer questions on an individual basis. Questions and topics may be sent to this newspaper.



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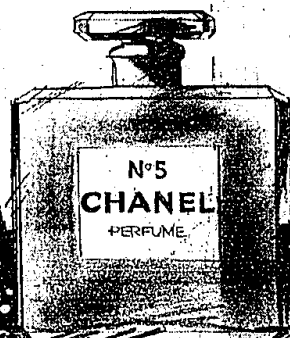
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