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Cognition, Behavior, and Memory

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Emotional memory is defined as the mental representation of events with an affective load, which are stronger and less susceptible to forgetting than neutral ones. After a cue-reminder presentation, consolidated memories can be reactivated and strengthened or updated by reconsolidation. Some studies compare the effectiveness of presenting all the original material (complete reminder) or a part of it (incomplete reminder) to reactivate memories. The present study aims to hone a paradigm to reactivate emotional memories and to assess such effect on memory persistence. We evaluated complete and incomplete reminders to reactivate visual and verbal emotional memories, using a three-day protocol. On Day 1, participants learned a list of emotional and neutral pictures (Experiment 1, N = 43) or words (Experiment 2, N = 59), and were assessed through a free recall task. On Day 2 (24 hours later), reactivated groups were exposed to a complete or incomplete reminder, and non-reactivated groups were not. On Day 3 (15 days later), memory persistence was evaluated through free recall and recognition tasks. Both reactivated groups recalled more items than non-reactivated ones on Day 3. Moreover, emotional content was better remembered than neutral only in free recall. In recognition task, neutral words were better recognized than emotional ones. This effect was absent for pictures. These findings suggest that complete and incomplete reminders can reactivate and strength emotional memories.