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Reliability of memory

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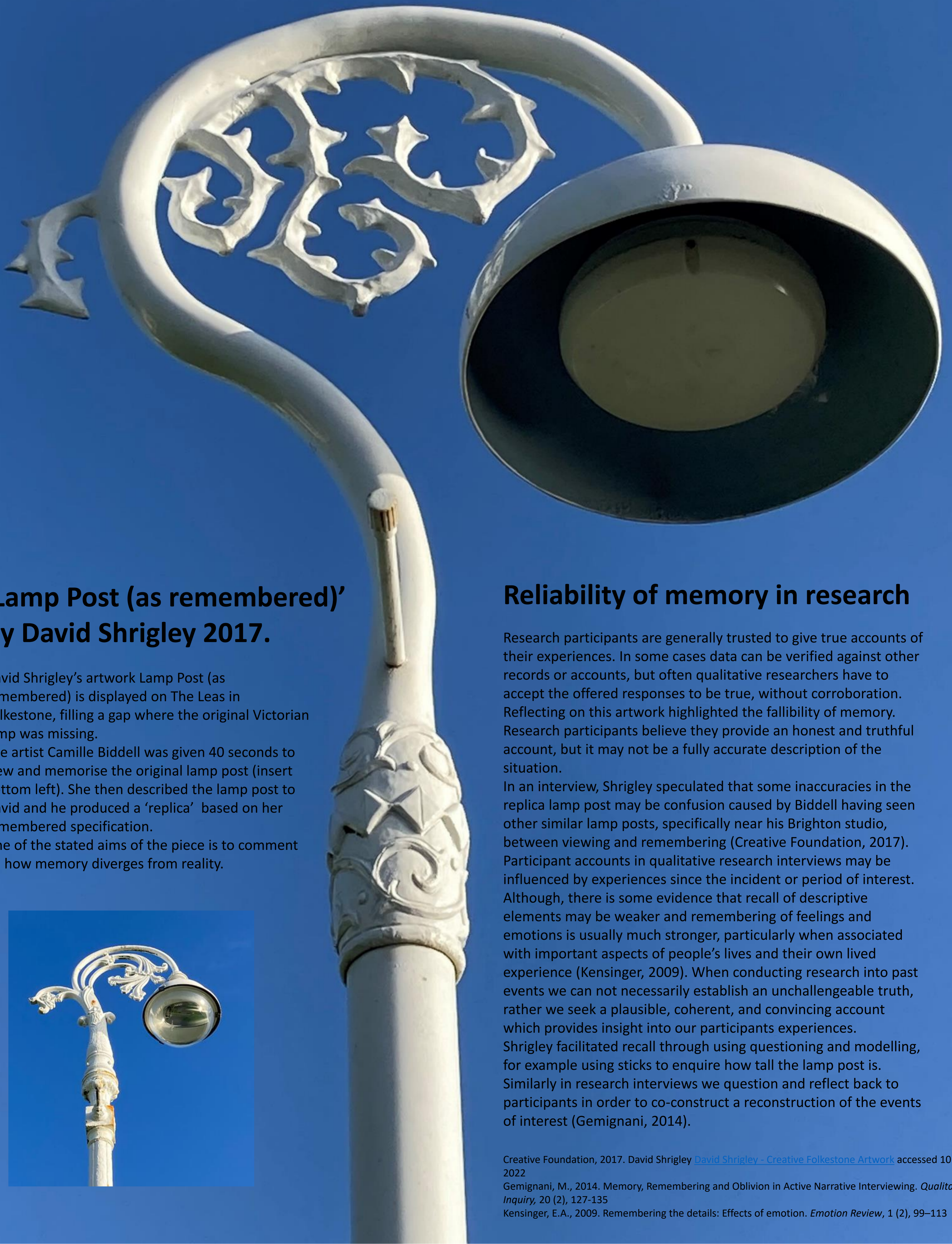
Reliability of memory

Linda Robson, Doctoral Researcher

Linda.Robson1@open.ac.uk



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‘Lamp Post (as remembered)’ by David Shrigley 2017.

David Shrigley’s artwork *Lamp Post (as remembered)* is displayed on The Leas in Folkestone, filling a gap where the original Victorian lamp was missing.

The artist Camille Biddell was given 40 seconds to view and memorise the original lamp post (insert bottom left). She then described the lamp post to David and he produced a ‘replica’ based on her remembered specification.

One of the stated aims of the piece is to comment on how memory diverges from reality.



Reliability of memory in research

Research participants are generally trusted to give true accounts of their experiences. In some cases data can be verified against other records or accounts, but often qualitative researchers have to accept the offered responses to be true, without corroboration. Reflecting on this artwork highlighted the fallibility of memory. Research participants believe they provide an honest and truthful account, but it may not be a fully accurate description of the situation.

In an interview, Shrigley speculated that some inaccuracies in the replica lamp post may be confusion caused by Biddell having seen other similar lamp posts, specifically near his Brighton studio, between viewing and remembering (Creative Foundation, 2017). Participant accounts in qualitative research interviews may be influenced by experiences since the incident or period of interest. Although, there is some evidence that recall of descriptive elements may be weaker and remembering of feelings and emotions is usually much stronger, particularly when associated with important aspects of people’s lives and their own lived experience (Kensinger, 2009). When conducting research into past events we can not necessarily establish an unchallengeable truth, rather we seek a plausible, coherent, and convincing account which provides insight into our participants experiences. Shrigley facilitated recall through using questioning and modelling, for example using sticks to enquire how tall the lamp post is. Similarly in research interviews we question and reflect back to participants in order to co-construct a reconstruction of the events of interest (Gemignani, 2014).

Creative Foundation, 2017. David Shrigley [David Shrigley - Creative Folkestone Artwork](#) accessed 10 Feb 2022

Gemignani, M., 2014. Memory, Remembering and Oblivion in Active Narrative Interviewing. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 20 (2), 127-135

Kensinger, E.A., 2009. Remembering the details: Effects of emotion. *Emotion Review*, 1 (2), 99–113