ATTEMPTED MEMORABILITY AND INTERPERSONAL IMPRESSIONS

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Abstract

Can people control the memorability of their remarks? Female students were videotaped while answering questions aloud. Some of these students had been instructed to give memorable or non-memorable answers; others had received no instructions. An independent group of subjects viewed the resulting tape and tried to recall their answers.

Results showed that subjects were not successful in controlling the memorability of their answers. However, those who attempted to control the memorability of their answers created a negative impression.

Introduction

Social memory researchers have focused and concentrated on the cognitive processes of memory by studying how people acquire, represent, and retrieve information about others (Srull and Wyer, 1989). People play two roles in social memory, the rememberers and the remembered (Higgins, Rholes, and Jones, 1977).

As agents of memory, people process incoming social information and relate it to pre-existing cognitive structures. Their processing objectives may vary. Sometimes people process social information to form an impression of a target person. At other times, they process information to remember it. These processing
objectives have curious effects on the memorability of information such as the processing goals and the nature of the stimulus materials. Devine, Sedikides, & Fuhrman (1989) examined the role of anticipated-interaction instruction on memory of social information. The results suggested that the goals that individuals bring to bear on the processing of information about others have implications for how information is remembered about others and how that information is organized in memory.

Pratkanis (1987) studied the effect of attitude on social memory. College students were asked to complete a survey and knowledge test consisting of pairs of statements about famous personalities. Students indicated which statement they believed to be true, and gave their attitudes toward each of the personalities. Results showed that students demonstrated a tendency to identify as true those events that were most consistent with their attitudes toward the personalities, indicating a selective effect of attitudes on memory of students toward each of the personality.

Researchers have also focused on the generality of reorganize processes of memory for social information. Schmurr & Morris (1982) asked students to read stories with good or bad endings and then were asked to write their impressions of the stories. The dependent measure was the number of reorganizing errors in the recall. Subjects made more errors when they formed negative impressions about the stories.

DeTurck (1989) examined mock jurors processing testimony under impression-set and memory-set conditions to determine under which condition they rate a witness to be more deceptive. Results showed that subjects under impression-set objectives formed stronger judgments of the witness's decepiveness, while they could not do the same under memory-set conditions.

In many circumstances, people who set out to remember social information remember it no better than those who have other objectives. Indeed, they may recall less about a target person than cognizers who set out to form an impression (Hastie, Park, & Weber, 1984).

Researchers of social memory have focused on the cognitive processes of the rememberer. But social memory involves a second person, as well: the individual to-be-remembered. If social memory reflects the rememberer's processing objectives, it
may also reflect the objectives of the individual to-be-remembered. Targets bring
diverse objectives to social interaction. They may wish to manage the cognizer's
impression, by cultivating a positive self-image (Baumeister, 1982; Schlenker,
1984). But they may have other interaction objectives or goals, as well. Targets may
wish to convey information that they hope will be remembered, as when teachers
deliver their lectures. Targets may, on the other hand, be forced to convey
information that they hope will be forgotten, as when job candidates must make
unfavorable self-disclosures. Social memories may be affected by targets' attempts to
be memorable or nonmemorable, but these attempts have never been studied.

In the current experiment, we examine targets' objectives in social interaction,
and the impact of those objectives on others' memories and impression. In particular,
can people control the memorability of their remarks? Will those who set out to be
remembered be better recalled than targets who have other interaction objectives?

Method
Subjects
Twenty-seven undergraduate American females served as target-subjects for
memory, and judgment tasks performed by a second independent sample of 90
undergraduate American females. Subjects received course credit for their
participation.

Stimulus Tapes
Target-subjects arrived at a laboratory individually and were told that they would
be videotaped while responding to a series of questions aloud. The subjects were
informed that their videotapes would be played back to a small audience. At random,
one-third of the subjects were told to give memorable answers to the questions (that
is, answers that the audience would remember); one-third were told to give non-
memorable answers to the questions (answers that the audience would not remember); and one-third received no special instructions (these latter subjects comprised a control group). Target-subjects were then handed the following
questions: 1) Suppose you were a great inventor. What's the first thing you would
invent? 2) Suppose you were stranded alone on an island for a year. What would you
do? 3) Suppose you were on the perfect date. What would your date be like? 4)
Suppose you wanted to draw attention to yourself in public. How would you do it?
After studying these questions for four minutes, the target-subject sat in front of a color video camera and answered the questions aloud. Meanwhile, the subject was videotaped. Afterwards, the subject predicted how memorable her answers would be and predicted the impression she would make.

A transcript was prepared that listed verbatim the target-subject's answers to the four experimental questions. A videotape was made of the transcript. The transcript videotape displayed questions and answers in precisely the same order as the videotape of the target herself, exposing each segment of the question-and-answer session long enough so that the segment could be read.

Thus, stimulus tapes were prepared for a 3 (Target Instructions: Control, Memorable, Non-memorable) x 2 (Presenation Modality: Audio-Visual vs. Written Transcript) experimental design (See table 1). The tapes of the 27 target-subjects were randomly divided into three stimulus sets. Each set displayed, in a random order, the answers given by nine target-subjects: 3 who had been told to give Memorable answers, 3 who had been told to give Non-memorable answers, and 3 who had received Control instructions.

Memory and Judgment Tasks

The 90 judgment-subjects participated in a second phase of the study in groups of 5. The five subjects were seated around a table, and informed that they would be watching a videotape of females' answers to a series of questions. The subjects were instructed to remember the answers for a later memory test.

The subjects then watched a videotape. At a randomly selected half of the five-person sessions, the tape was an Audio-Visual display of 9 target-subjects answering questions aloud. At the other five-person sessions, subjects saw (on videotape) a Written Transcript of 9 target-subjects' answers to the questions. The experimental design ensured that each target-subject's answers were seen by 30 judgment-subjects: 15 who saw an Audio-Visual display of the target herself and 15 saw a Written Transcript of the target's answers. Target subjects were presented on the videotape in one of three different orders.

After viewing the videotape, judgment-subjects worked on a distracter task that required them to write things they ate for 2 minutes, then were asked to recall the
targets' answers to the questions. Subjects worked on this written free recall task for 10 minutes.

Subjects handed in their recall sheets, then saw the video tape a second time. After viewing a given target's answers to the four questions (in either Audio-Visual or Transcript mode, as before), the subjects indicated their impression of the target. After rating all targets, subjects were debriefed and dismissed.

Results

Memorability

The free recall sheets were scored by an undergraduate assistant who was blind to experimental condition. The assistant scored the data leniently, trying to match each response recorded on a free recall sheet with one of the answers the rememberer had seen. Of interest is the percentage of times a given target's answers to the questions were recalled.

These memory data were submitted to a 3 (Target Instructions) X 2 (Presentation Modality) mixed-model Analysis of Variance, with the 90 judgment-subjects rememberer as units of analysis (See table 1). The ANOVA revealed no significant effects. There was some tendency for targets told to give Non-memorable answers to be recalled more often that other targets, mean percent recall were 64.9%, 60.9%, and 66.0% for Control group, targets told To Be Remembered, and targets told NOT TO BE Remembered, respectively. However, this tendency was not significant.

| Table 1
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Percentable Correct recall</th>
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<tr>
<td>Control</td>
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<tr>
<td>Audio-Visual Presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written Transcript</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65.74%</td>
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</table>
Instruction main effect $F(2, 176), 2.87, (\text{ns}).$ There was also some tendency for answers to be better recalled if presented in Audio-Visual, rather than Transcript mode (Means: 65.74% and 62.16%, respectively); however, this difference was not reliable, $F(1,88), 1.69, (\text{ns}).$ Target Instructions did not interact with Presentation Modality, $F(2, 176), .11, (\text{ns}).$

**Impressions**

The judgment subjects rated their impression of each target on a scale that ranged from +3 (Very Positive) to -3 (Very Negative). These ratings showed a Target Instruction main effect, $F(2, 178) -12.64, P< .001;$ and a Target Instruction X Presentation Modality interaction, $F(2,178) -11.38, P< .001.$ When targets were presented on an Audio-Visual display (see table 2), those in the Control condition made the best impression (Mean: +1, 21, +.55, and +.01 for Control subjects, those told To Be Remembered and targets told Not To Be Remembered, respectively). When targets' answers were presented in a Transcript mode, those who had been told to give memorable answers made the best impression (Mean: +.44, +.83, and +.42 for Control subjects, those told To Be Remembered, and targets told Not To Be Remembered, respectively).

**Table 2**

Means for impression Ratings

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Target Instruction</th>
<th>Control Item</th>
<th>Be Remembered</th>
<th>Do Not Be Remembered</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Audio-Visual</td>
<td>Audio-Visual</td>
<td>Be Remembered</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modality</td>
<td>Written Transcript</td>
<td>Control Item</td>
<td>.44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Targets had earlier predicted the impression they would make. Their instructions affected these predictions, $F(2, 24) - 5.99, P < .01.$ Targets told Not To Be Remembered thought that they would make the worst impression (Mean =m -.88 on the -3 to +3 scale). These told To Be Remembered thought that they would make a
better impression (Mean = +.78), and Control subjects thought that they would make the best impression (Mean = 1.00).

One wonders if the targets were aware of the impression they would create. Correlational analyses indicate that they were not. The within-cell correlations between impression rating predicted by Targets and mean impression rating received from judgment-subjects were -.12 (for ratings made from the Audio Visual tape) and -.30 (for ratings made from the Transcript).

Targets had also predicted how memorable their answers would be. These predictions were similarly inaccurate. Targets who had been told to give Memorable answers predicted that their answers would be best-remembered; those who had been told to give Non-memorable answers predicted that their answers would be worst-remembered; and Control subjects predicted an intermediate level of memory for their answers. The mean predictions of others' memories for own answers, on a scale that ranged from -3 (very bad) to +3 (very good), were 1.00, -3.3, and .22 for subjects told To Be Remembered, Subjects told Not To Be Remembered, and Control subjects, respectively. These differences are not significant, F (2,24) = 1.68 (ns).

Discussion

Cognizers' processing objectives influence social memory, as previous research has shown (Baumeister, 1992). We conducted the present study to see if social memory would also be affected by targets' interaction objectives. It was not. In this setting, targets were unsuccessful in making their remarks memorable and unsuccessful in making their remarks non-memorable.

Targets' interaction objectives affect the impressions they make. Targets may focus on the memorability of their remarks to the exclusion of their non-verbal self-presentation. Hence, those who set out to give memorable answers make a poor impression. This implies that targets have impression management as their default objective, and that impression management suffers when cognitive resources are diverted to an alternative end. People have been noted to use different self-presentation strategies as ways of controlling rewards from others (Jones & Pittman, 1982). However, people can't be successful in controlling both the memorability of their remarks and the impressions they leave among themselves. If people care about the impressions they want to leave among others in social gathering or educational settings, the study suggests that we should pay some
attention to ourselves a long with attention on the task we are trying to control it's degree of memorability.

The present findings can be described as specific to targets who are alone while answering questions. Perhaps access to others' answers would help targets regulate the memorability of their own remarks. However, the results make a clear argument that an intent to make our own remarks memorable if they were to be presented to others is not successful and rather it influences the impressions we leave among ourselves as ways of impression self-management. Future research should focus on controlling the memorability of our own remarks in social settings such as in classrooms, courtrooms, or social gatherings.
References


العلاقة بين ضبط قابلية التذكر والانطباعات الشخصية

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ملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى معرفة قدرة الأفراد في التحكم بمناذر المعلومات التي يقدمونها إلى الآخرين. لقد تصور عينة من الطلاب خلال اجاباتهم على عدد من الاستمارات بصوت عال. طُلب من بعض الأفراد هذه المهمة أن تعطي اجابات سهلة أو صعبة التذكر بينما لم يرد البعض الآخر بأي تعليلات حول سهولة أو صعوبة الإجابات. لقد تم عرض الرحلة الفيدر المصور على عينة أخرى مستقلة وحاولوا تذكر إجاباتهم.

استنتج النتائج إلى أن المجموعة التالية من الطلاب الذي شاهدين إجابات المرة الأولى لم يتمكن من التحكم بمناذر سهلة أو صعبة الإجابات المطولة حيث لم يكن هناك أداة فرع في تذكر المرة الثانية لإجابات المرة الأولى. إلا أن النتائج أشارت إلى أن الأفراد الذين حاولوا التحكم بمناذر سهلة أو صعبة إجاباتهم تركوا انطباعاً طفيفاً أكثر من المجموعة التي لم تمحولوا التحكم بمناذر سهلة أو صعبة إجاباتهم.