



Effect of recall on current feelings toward a current or former romantic partner  
by Laurie Lane Goldberg

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF SCIENCE  
IN PSYCHOLOGY

Montana State University

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Abstract:

The effects of recalling a positive, negative, or no experience about a current or former romantic partner were explored, with the intention of applying either the principles of cognitive dissonance or reinforcement-affect theory. There was support for reinforcement-affect particularly for positive versus no experiences, while cognitive dissonance would explain some of the negative experience findings. This study also showed that persons rate present relationships more highly in matters such as likelihood of marriage, importance of the relationship, and loving and liking as indicated by the Rubin Loving and Liking Scales.

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OR FORMER ROMANTIC PARTNER

by

LAURIE LANE GOLDBERG

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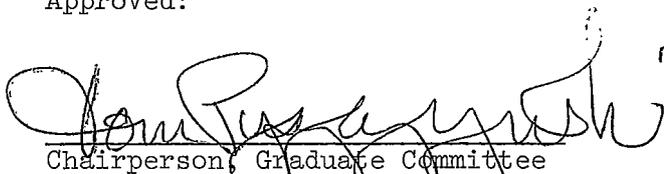
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## Abstract

The effects of recalling a positive, negative, or no experience about a current or former romantic partner were explored, with the intention of applying either the principles of cognitive dissonance or reinforcement-affect theory. There was support for reinforcement-affect particularly for positive versus no experiences, while cognitive dissonance would explain some of the negative experience findings. This study also showed that persons rate present relationships more highly in matters such as likelihood of marriage, importance of the relationship, and loving and liking as indicated by the Rubin Loving and Liking Scales.

## INTRODUCTION

This study explored the link between memory and emotion, particularly the question of whether recollection of pleasant or unpleasant experiences influences present feelings toward one's current or former romantic partner. The practical significance of this question lies in determining whether a relationship can be altered by focusing on certain types of memories. Does living in or frequently visiting the past affect one's perception of the present? Emphasizing negative memories extending back in time could perpetuate bad feelings and contribute to the deterioration of a relationship, since anger and hurt feelings are kept viable through rehearsal. Conversely, floating in fond memories could refute the lackluster present or anesthetize against recent painful memories. Reliving positive memories could improve one's perception of the present by recreating a positive mood. This process could help maintain attraction in a long term relationship by highlighting positive aspects and minimizing negative qualities of the partner or relationship. Of course, dwelling on past happiness could lull the individual into ignoring the collapse of the relationship. This study was an attempt to provide empirical evidence regarding the effects of recalling such events.

Although much research has been done relating emotions to memory, most studies have been concerned with the effect of affective significance on recall. These studies have generally found that regardless of whether the experience recalled was positive or negative, the more in-

tense the experience, the better the recall (Dutta & Kanunga, 1967; Menzies, 1935; Robinson, 1976, 1978, 1980; Thomson, 1930; Turner & Barlow, 1951).

This study focused on the effect of recalling and vividly imagining pleasant or unpleasant memories involving a person with whom one is currently or was at one time involved in a long term romantic relationship. Finke and Schmidt (1978) found that empathic role-taking allowed subjects to recreate the motives and emotional responses of the original experience. Placing subjects in a role allowed them to expand and relive that role. Fiske, Taylor, Etcoff, and Laufer (1979) stated that recalled images can exhibit structural and functional characteristics similar to actual physical objects, i.e., they can be scanned and rotated mentally. Brewer, Doughtie, and Lubin (1980) found support for the idea that subjects' moods of elation and depression can be manipulated by autobiographical recollection. Previous research involved recall of personal experiences, but did not stress imaginal replay or test whether recollection modified the subject's feelings toward any person involved.

The present research was concerned with the effects of retrieval of positive and negative memories on present feelings toward a current or former romantic partner. Two theoretical perspectives, Byrne and Clore's (1970) reinforcement-affect theory and Festinger's (1957) cognitive dissonance theory, seem to relate well to this question and predict

different results when applied to this study.

Byrne and Clore's reinforcement-affect theory makes the most straightforward predictions. The theory derives from classical conditioning principles and states that people associated with positive affect will be liked, while people associated with negative affect will be disliked. Thus a previously neutral person may come to be liked or disliked due to an association with strong affect. Changes in affect would be expected to lead to changes in the subject's evaluation of the previously associated person, in this case the romantic partner. Pleasant thoughts and experiences should enhance positive affect and increase attraction toward the romantic partner, while unpleasant thoughts and experiences would lessen attraction toward the romantic partner.

Research has been generally supportive of this model. Gouaux (1971) used movies to influence the moods of subjects in a positive or negative direction and found links between positive mood state and liking for a stranger and negative mood state and disliking for a stranger. McDonald (1962) found that attraction to another person was directly related to the amount of reward or punishment that person appeared to give to the subject. Veitch and Griffit (1976) showed that positively slanted newscasts increased attraction and negatively slanted newscasts decreased attraction to strangers. So, if a person is exposed to affectively positive or negative stimuli, the affect can be generalized to

another person. Unfortunately, this model has not been tested in the context of ongoing relationships. Nevertheless, attraction to those persons already acquainted with the subject would be expected to follow the same principles. Within the context of the present study, recalling pleasant experiences or thoughts should enhance attraction, while recalling negative experiences or thoughts should reduce attraction.

It is also possible, however, that recalling negative experiences involving a current romantic partner, or positive experiences involving a former romantic partner could lead the individual to experience cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). According to Festinger, cognitive dissonance is a highly unpleasant tension state that occurs when an individual confronts inconsistent cognitions. This tension state may be reduced by eliminating a dissonant cognition, reducing its importance by adding consonant cognitions, or increasing the importance of existing consonant cognitions. The theory further states that the cognition that is least resistant to change is most likely to be altered. In this case, the cognition of staying in the relationship or having terminated it is highly resistant to change, since it is difficult to deny a behavioral commitment. After reviewing the vast body of accumulated literature on research completed since the original statement of the theory, Wicklund and Brehm (1976) concluded that dissonance reduction occurs only when an individual perceives herself/himself as personally responsible for the inconsistent cognitions and this inconsis-

tency leads to affectively significant consequences.

One implication of dissonance theory is that a person will attempt to justify a commitment to the extent that information discrepant to that commitment is available. This would be expected to occur in the case of the individual recalling a negative experience while still involved in a relationship. The fact of still being involved in the relationship is less deniable than the importance attached to the negative experience. After reviewing such research, Keisler (1971) concluded that commitment led to inflexibility in behaviors and attitudes. Cohen (1962) conducted a study which focused on males involved in long term romantic relationships with the intention of becoming engaged. High conflict males, i.e., those who felt dissimilar to their steady girlfriends yet believed that similarity was an important factor in compatibility for marriage, experienced a rise in their ratings of need and devotion after committing themselves to their girlfriends by becoming engaged. Low conflict males, i.e., those who felt similar to their steady girlfriends on basic issues, exhibited no change on ratings of need and devotion after becoming engaged.

Of perhaps greater relevance to this study is research from the effort justification paradigm. These studies generally show that once an individual is committed to joining a group, the attractiveness of that group increases as its aversive qualities increase. The more one has to endure to become a member, the more attractive the group appears

(Keisler, Zanna, & DeSalvo, 1966).. Aronson and Mills (1959) showed that a severe initiation led to greater attraction to a group. Female subjects who had to undergo an embarrassing procedure involving reading sexually explicit word lists to a male experimenter regarded a boring discussion group more highly than female subjects who underwent a less embarrassing procedure. The more effort expended, the more highly the subject rated the attractiveness of the group. Using procedures conceptually similar to those of Aronson and Mills, Gerard and Mathewson (1966) demonstrated that suffering leads to liking if an individual intends to join a particular group. Schopler and Bateson (1962) also obtained evidence consistent with this proposition.

The same processes which operate for larger groups should operate in the smaller group consisting of two people. If a person is still involved in a relationship after experiencing negative affect, dissonance should occur. This may be resolved by expressing greater attraction toward the romantic partner in an attempt to justify enduring negative aspects of the relationship. In the present study, dissonance may be made salient by asking subjects to focus on a particular experience of either positive or negative quality involving a current or past relationship. Brehm and Wicklund (1970) demonstrated that greater post-decisional attitude change occurred after subjects were made to focus on the dissonant elements of a choice, i.e., the dissonance was made salient. Thus dissonance theory leads to the prediction of an inter-

action effect between timeframe and recall experience.

In summary, according to the reinforcement-affect theory, recalling a positive experience should enhance feelings of attraction for both the current and former romantic partners, while recalling a negative experience should induce a lessening of attraction toward both current and former partners. Thus a main effect of recall experience would be predicted on the basis of the reinforcement-affect theory. On the other hand, cognitive dissonance theory would predict that recalling either a negative event involving a current romantic partner, or a positive event involving a former romantic partner would induce dissonance. Thus a dissonance theory leads to the prediction of an interaction effect between timeframe and recall experience.

## METHOD

### Subjects

A total of 47 female and 52 male undergraduates at Montana State University participated in return for extra credit in an introductory psychology course. Subjects were run in same-sex groups ranging in size from one to five persons, with most groups containing four persons. The subjects were run in a 2 (time frame of the relationship: current or past) x 3 (recall experience: positive, negative, or non-recall control) x 2 (sex of subject) x 2 (sex of experimenter) factorial design. Recall experience and experimenter were randomly assigned. Two female subjects were dropped from consideration, one for excessive questions indicating lack of understanding for the instructions and an ambivalence about timeframe ("on the verge of breaking up"), and one for not having written an account of the experience she recalled. The minimum number of subjects per cell was eight.

Subjects were selected on the basis of a premeasure (See Appendix A) that was filled out in class. This questionnaire asked potential subjects whether they were currently involved in a romantic relationship, to describe its status (married, engaged, living together, dating exclusively, dating), the duration of the relationship in months, and the degree to which they felt themselves in love with that person (1 = not at all, to 9 = extremely). Potential subjects were also asked whether they had been involved in a romantic relationship within the past 18 months other than the one listed previously, to check the same.

list of classifications, give the duration in months, and rate the extent to which they believed they had been in love with that person. The final question inquired whether the person had been a participant in previous psychology experiments.

Subjects were required to have been involved in a relationship for a minimum of two months, not fit into the classification of simply dating, and have reported a loving rating of neither one nor nine, since these extremes would limit the ease with which changes could be noted in rated feelings. Subjects deemed suitable were contacted by phone to arrange experimental sessions.

#### Procedure

When the subjects arrived, they were told that they were participating in a study of long term romantic relationships and would be contributing background information about the feelings and attitudes common to people involved in such relationships. Experimental (positive and negative recall experiences) subjects were also told that the study was concerned with the types of experiences people recall about such relationships. Subjects were assured of confidentiality and asked to be as open and honest as possible. The cover sheet of the questionnaire booklet gave instructions for filling out the major dependent measure, the Rubin Loving and Liking Scales (Rubin, 1970), which consist of statements containing blanks that the subject should mentally fill with the name of the romantic partner (See Appendix B). The

second page asked for identifying and classifying information such as sex, age, length of the relationship in months, main force for ending the relationship if it was past (subject, partner, or mutual), and descriptive classification of the relationship.

If the subject was in the no recall control condition, she/he was not asked to recall an event. If the subject was in an experimental condition, the next page asked that the subject recall an experience as vividly as possible, concentrating fully. If the recall condition was positive, the instructions read:

We are also interested in the type of experiences persons recall about relationships. Take five minutes and try to recall an intense memory of your partner that gives you warm and positive feelings, an event that convinced you or reconfirmed the special nature of your relationship. Please try to think of a vivid good memory involving your partner, then concentrate on exactly what happened. Try to fix it firmly in your mind, then jot down the main points in the space below. Please do not put your name on this sheet, as we prefer that your response be anonymous.

If the recall condition was negative, the instructions read:

We are also interested in the type of experiences persons recall about relationships. Take five minutes and try to recall an intense memory of your partner which gives you negative and disturbing feelings, an event that caused you to seriously question the special nature of your relationship. Please try to think of a vivid unpleasant memory involving your partner, then concentrate on exactly what happened. Try to fix it firmly in your mind, then jot down the main points in the space below. Please do not put your name on this sheet, as we prefer that your response be anonymous.

Additional instructions from the experimenter stressed relaxing and recalling as vividly as possible an event. Five minutes were given for

recall, then the subjects were asked to jot down the main points of the experience in the space provided. The experimenter was blind to each subject's recall condition, but ideally half the subjects in each session were positive and half were negative.

The next page asked subjects to rate their present mood state. This was included mainly as a manipulation check, and asked subjects to rate the extent to which they were experiencing the following emotions: happy, hostile, secure, depressed, relaxed, dissatisfied, confident, upset, angry, affectionate, elated, and nervous. They used the same nine point scale described previously. The next page asked subjects to rate their partner or former partner on the following traits: intelligent, friendly, fair, honest, thoughtful, open-minded, knowledgeable, likeable, trustworthy, considerate, aggressive, cold, compassionate, caring, sexually warm, sexually desirable, and sensitive, on the same nine point scale.

The next three pages asked for subjects' current feelings regarding the partner or former partner, rated on a nine point scale (1 = not at all true/disagree completely, 5 = moderately true/agree somewhat, 9 = definitely true/agree completely) using the Rubin (1970) Loving and Liking Scales, a direct self-report love measure, and ratings of the physical attractiveness of the partner, likelihood of marriage to that person, and importance of the relationship. The final ten items contained in the booklet were a control for a general agreement or dis-

agreement bias, designed to be neutral statements of trivia on such subjects as bread, doberman pinschers, and wallpaper (These questions occasioned the greatest curiosity and comment, see Appendix E.):

After collecting the completed booklets, the experimenter called for questions and comments, probed for suspicion, explained the theories behind the study and solicited opinions, thanked subjects for their participation and released the fully debriefed subjects after securing their promise not to discuss the study.

## RESULTS

### Recall Ratings

To check the effectiveness of the recall manipulation, the essays were randomly divided into two groups, then rated on seven point scales, with 1 indicating "very negative", 4 indicating "neutral", and 7 indicating "very positive", by four judges blind to experimental conditions. Two judges rated each essay, and reliability between judges was high (group A:  $r = .890$ , group B:  $r = .881$ ,  $p < .001$  for both groups). A  $2 \times 2$  analysis of variance, using the mean recall affect ratings, for timeframe (present or past) by recall condition (positive or negative) showed a main effect for recall,  $F(2,62) = 204.268$ ,  $p < .001$ . Essays in the positive recall condition (mean = 5.68) were rated as more affectively positive than essays in the negative recall condition (mean = 2.16).

Relationships Items

Not surprisingly, subjects in the present conditions scored higher on the Rubin Loving Scale,  $F(1, 75) = 7.78$ ,  $p < .001$ , Rubin Liking Scale  $F(1, 75) = 10.37$ ,  $p < .01$ , self-report loving,  $F(1, 75) = 16.85$ ,  $p < .001$ , likelihood of marriage,  $F(1, 75) = 40.88$ ,  $p < .01$ , and importance of the relationship,  $F(1, 75) = 8.47$ ,  $p < .01$ , than did subjects in the past conditions. See Table 1 and Table 2 for means. There were no significant main effects or interactions for ratings of physical attractiveness of partners or former partners.

A near-significant Timeframe X Recall experience interaction was found for subjects' ratings of their likelihood of marriage,  $F(2, 84) = 2.60$ ,  $p < .1$ . Pairwise comparisons<sup>1</sup> revealed that subjects reported that they were more likely to marry their current partner after recalling a positive experience than after recalling a negative experience,  $t(32) = 2.71$ ,  $p < .05$ , or after not recalling an experience,  $t(33) = 2.94$ ,  $p < .01$ . Recall had no effect on likelihood of marriage ratings for past relationships.

A Timeframe X Sex of subject interaction was found for self-report loving,  $F(1, 75) = 16.85$ ,  $p < .01$ . Means may be found in Table 3. Pairwise comparisons revealed that females in the present condition rated their loving higher than did females in the past condition,  $t(95) = 4.2$ ,  $p < .001$ , or males in the past condition,  $t(95) = 2.93$ ,  $p < .01$ . Males in the present condition rated their loving higher

Table 1

Timeframe X Recall Experience Interaction,  
Means for Rubin Scales and Self-Report Loving

Dependent Measure		Recall Experience		
		Positive	Control	Negative
Rubin Loving				
	Present	2.31	1.38	1.85
	Past	.004	.36	.19
Rubin Liking				
	Present	1.91	1.26	1.65
	Past	.99	.79	.96
Self-Report Loving				
	Present	2.50	1.06	1.69
	Past	.24	-.19	.06

Table 2

Timeframe X Recall Experience Interaction,  
Means for Supplemental Questions

Dependent Measure	Recall Experience			
	Positive	Control	Negative	Total
Likelihood of Marriage				
Present	2.28	.12	- .12	.80
Past	-2.35	-2.33	-2.12	-2.27
Total	.03	-1.06	-1.09	
Importance of Relationship				
Present	3.72	2.56	2.59	2.98
Past	2.24	2.00	1.56	1.94
Total	3.00	-2.29	2.09	

Table 3

Timeframe X Sex of Subject Means  
for Self-Report Loving

---

	Male	Female
Present	1.39	2.04
Past	.42	- .29

---

than females in the past condition,  $t(95) = 3.18, p < .01$ .

A marginally significant main effect for recall experience manifested for likelihood of marriage and importance of relationship,  $F(2, 84) = 2.54, p < .1$ , and  $F(2, 84) = 2.60, p < .1$ , respectively, (means available in Table 1). Pairwise comparisons revealed that subjects recalling a positive experience were scored higher than subjects recalling no experience,  $t(66) = 2.23, p < .05$ , for likelihood of marriage. Pairwise comparisons for relationship importance showed a trend toward subjects who recalled a positive experience to rate the relationship as more important than those who recalled a negative experience,  $t(64) = 1.70, p < .1$ .

Recall experience and sex of subject interacted for Rubin Liking,  $F(2, 75) = 3.89, p < .05$ . Means are available in Table 4. Pairwise comparisons revealed that males recalling a positive experience scored significantly higher than males recalling no experience,  $t(93) = 2.74, p < .01$ ; or females recalling a positive experience,  $t(93) = 2.56, p < .05$ . Thus recalling a positive experience increased liking for partners for males but not for females.

#### Partner Trait Ratings

Univariate analysis of variance was performed on each item separately. There were no significant main effects or interactions for ratings of intelligence, openmindedness, sexual warmth, sexual desirability, or sensitivity.

Table 4

Recall Experience X Sex of Subject  
Interaction Means for Rubin Liking

	Recall Experience		
	Positive	Control	Negative
Male	1.89	.86	1.42
Female	.89	1.22	1.48

Main effects for timeframe were found for ratings of thoughtfulness,  $F(1, 75) = 5.6$ ,  $p < .05$ , honesty,  $F(1, 75) = 7.38$ ,  $p < .01$ , trustworthiness,  $F(1, 75) = 4.64$ ,  $p < .05$ , and coldness,  $F(1, 75) = 5.46$ ,  $p < .05$ . As may be seen in Table 5, current partners were rated as more honest, thoughtful and trustworthy, and less cold than were former partners.

A Timeframe X Sex of experimenter interaction was found for car- ing,  $F(1, 75) = 4.02$ ,  $p < .05$ , and likeable,  $F(1, 75) = 5.53$ ,  $p < .05$ . Pairwise comparisons for likeable showed that subjects in the present condition with the female experimenter (mean = 2.52) rated their partner significantly less likeable than did subjects in the present condition with the male experimenter (mean = 3.33),  $t(95) = 2.22$ ,  $p < .05$ . Subjects in the present condition with the male experimenter rated their partner as more likeable than subjects in the past condition with the male experimenter (mean = 2.48),  $t(95) = 2.19$ ,  $p < .05$ , (mean for past condition with female experimenter = 2.74). Pairwise comparisons were not significant for caring.

A main effect for recall was found on ratings of knowledgeability,  $F(2, 75) = 5.57$ ,  $p < .01$ , and caring,  $F(2, 75) = 2.98$ ,  $p < .1$ . Subjects rated their partner or former partner as more knowledgeable in the positive recall condition (mean = 2.37) than in the no-recall control condition, (mean = 1.48) or negative recall condition, (mean = 1.58),  $t(66) = 3.27$ ,  $p < .05$  and  $t(64) = 2.52$ ,  $p < .05$ , respectively.

Table 5

Timeframe Main Effect Means  
for Partner Trait Ratings

Timeframe	Trait			
	Thoughtful	Honest	Trustworthy	Cold
Present	2.28	2.53	2.65	-2.10
Past	1.40	1.58	1.88	-1.19

Subjects in the positive condition (mean = 2.94) rated their partners or former partners as more caring than did subjects in the control (mean = 2.48) or negative condition (mean = 2.13). Pairwise comparisons revealed, however, that only the positive versus negative condition were significantly different from each other,  $t(64) = 2.42$ ,  $p < .05$ .

Main effects for sex of subject were found on ratings of trustworthiness,  $F(1, 75) = 5.79$ ,  $p < .05$ , compassion,  $F(1, 75) = 4.26$ ,  $p < .05$ , and caring,  $F(1, 75) = 4.77$ ,  $p < .05$ . As may be seen in Table 6, males rated their partners or former partners as more likeable, trustworthy, compassionate, and caring, than did females.

An experimenter main effect was found for fairness,  $F(1, 75) = 4.62$ ,  $p < .05$ , and honesty,  $F(1, 75) = 4.38$ ,  $p < .01$ . Subjects in the male experimenter condition rated their partner or former partner as fairer (mean = 2.0) and more honest (mean = 2.42) than did subjects in the female experimenter condition (mean = 1.28) and 1.78, respectively.

Ratings of honesty showed a three-way interaction among timeframe, recall experience, and experimenter,  $F(2, 75) = 4.20$ ,  $p < .05$ . Knowledgeable also showed a three-way interaction among recall experience, sex of subject, and experimenter,  $F(2, 75) = 3.39$ ,  $p < .05$ , and the only four-way interaction,  $F(2, 75) = 5.15$ ,  $p < .01$ .

#### Mood State Items

The mood state items were analyzed separately using univariate

Table 6

Sex of Subject Main Effect Means  
For Partner Trait Ratings

Sex of Subject	Trait			
	Likeable	Trustworthy	Compassionate	Caring
Male	2.98	2.67	2.27	2.83
Female	2.53	1.83	1.60	2.21

analyses of variance. No significant main effects or interactions were obtained for the item happy.

Main effects for timeframe were found for feelings of relaxation,  $F(1, 75) = 10.05$ ,  $p < .01$ , affectionateness,  $F(1, 75) = 4.47$ ,  $p < .05$ , hostility,  $F(1, 75) = 6.38$ ,  $p < .05$ , upset,  $F(1, 75) = 6.26$ ,  $p < .05$ , and nervousness,  $F(1, 75) = 6.21$ ,  $p < .05$ . As may be seen in Table 7, subjects in the present condition felt more relaxed, and affectionate, and less hostile, upset, and nervous than did those subjects in the past condition.

A near significant main effect for recall experience was found for elated,  $F(2, 75) = 2.76$ ,  $p < .10$ . Pairwise comparisons revealed that negative recall subjects were more elated than control subjects,  $t(31) = 2.55$ ,  $p < .05$ . Subjects who recalled a negative event (mean = .26) rated themselves as more elated than did those who recalled a positive event (mean = -.40) or no event (mean = -.79), though this may have been due to a misunderstanding of the definition, since several subjects asked what the term meant.

A Timeframe X Recall experience interaction was found for subjects' ratings of confidence,  $F(2, 75) = 3.68$ ,  $p < .05$ . Means may be found in Table 8. Subjects in the past control condition rated themselves as more confident than those in the past negative recall condition,  $t(33) = 2.29$ ,  $p < .05$ , or subjects in the past control condition,  $t(31) = 2.82$ ,  $p < .01$ . Present control subjects rated themselves as less confident

Table 7

Timeframe Main Effect Means  
For Mood State Items

Timeframe	Mood Item				
	Relaxed	Affectionate	Hostile	Upset	Nervous
Present	1.71	1.20	-3.02	-2.43	-2.14
Past	.58	.27	-2.19	-1.50	-1.15

Table 8

Timeframe x Recall Experience

Means for Confident

Timeframe	Recall Experience		
	Positive	Control	Negative
Present	1.28	1.82	1.25
Past	.94	2.27	.69

than did past control subjects,  $t(31) = 2.11$ ,  $p < .05$ .

A Recall Experience X Experimenter interreaction was found for re-  
laxed,  $F(2, 75) = 5.61$ ,  $p < .01$ . See Table 9 for means. Pairwise com-  
parisons revealed that subjects in the positive condition rated them-  
selves as less relaxed in the female experimenter's conditions than  
subjects in the male experimenter's condition,  $t(93) = 3.13$ ,  $p < .01$ .  
Males in the positive condition rated themselves as more relaxed than  
males in the control condition,  $t(93) = 2.32$ ,  $p < .05$ , females in the  
control condition,  $t(93) = 2.23$ ,  $p < .05$ , or males in the negative  
condition,  $t(93) = 2.58$ ,  $p < .05$ .

A main effect was found for experimenter on the item confident,  
 $F(1, 75) = 5.65$ ,  $p < .05$ . Ratings of confidence were higher for sub-  
jects in the male experimenter condition, (mean = 1.8) than in the  
female experimenter condition (mean = 1.00).

#### Irrelevant Items

There were no significant main effects or interactions for the  
irrelevant items. Thus there were no indications of a general positive  
or negative response bias.

Table 9

Recall Experience x Experimenter

Means for Relaxed

Experimenter	Recall Experience		
	Positive	Control	Negative
Male	.55	1.27	1.11
Female	2.53	.81	.93

## DISCUSSION

Recall experience was the most important independent variable in this study. Significant findings for this variable indicated differences between subjects in the positive recall experience and those in the no-recall control condition. Subjects in the positive condition were more likely to feel they would marry their partner and they rated the importance of the relationship more highly than those who were not asked to recall an event. For males there was a higher Rubin Liking score when they recalled a positive event, which supports the theory of greater liking generalizing from something that engenders good feelings. After recalling a positive event, subjects rated their partner or former partner as more knowledgeable and caring than those who did not recall an event. Males were more relaxed after recalling a positive event than males in the control condition.

All these findings support the reinforcement-affect model of Byrne and Clore. Thinking of something pleasant is a rewarding activity, and the glow spreads to the person involved, in this case the romantic partner.

The failure to discover similar effects for negative recall experience as opposed to control could indicate that dissonance is operating, but the effects are subtle and difficult to pinpoint. The means in Table 1 are consistent with the dissonance prediction, since higher scores are found for the present negative condition. Perhaps the negative

recall manipulation was not strong enough, or subjects were unwilling to concentrate on that type of experience as deeply as they did for the positive recall experience. The unpleasantness of the memory could have ensured that it was not explored in depth, to guard against further pain. Perhaps subjects hid their feelings of negative affect from the prying of the experimenter, or felt motivated to expiate the guilty feelings of "bad" thoughts about the romantic partner by characterizing that person as worthy and positive, which would indicate dissonance is present.

Perhaps the dissonance effect is fleeting. This explanation would account for the comment of some subjects that they did feel negatively toward the romantic partner, but as they completed the rest of the dependent measure they were reminded of what a wonderful person the partner was, and the feelings dissipated and were replaced by more positive ones, would reduce the dissonance.

Inspection of means for mood state ratings indicated that in the present negative condition, subjects rated themselves as less hostile, upset, and nervous, and more depressed, and in love with their partner than did control subjects. The Rubin Loving and Liking scores were also higher for negative than for control subjects. For the past condition, subjects rated themselves as more angry, dissatisfied, hostile, and nervous than control subjects. Rubin Loving and Liking scores were higher for the negative condition.

Timeframe was the most ubiquitous effect. Subjects in the present condition were more likely to believe they would marry their partner, rated that person's warmth and good manners higher, scored higher on the Rubin Loving Scale, Rubin Liking Scale, and reported their mood as less hostile, upset, and nervous, and more relaxed, and affectionate than subjects in the past condition. This is intuitively plausible, since people tend to stay in relationships when they are in love, and get out when love is no longer present. This also makes sense from the viewpoint of the behavioral commitment. If the relationship is past, for whatever reason, the person should regard it as less important or desirable than a present relationship. The past relationship may be tainted with bitterness and regret, while the present relationship offers hope of working out.

Females rated their loving as higher in the present condition than they did in the past condition. Males rated their former partners more highly than did females on trustworthiness, compassion, and warmth, which may be explained several ways. The males may be idealizing their former partners, exhibiting gallantry, or females may be less enthusiastic about someone with whom they are no longer associated. Possibly females idealize their current partners.

The evidence obtained in this study suggested that positive recall does influence persons in an affectively positive direction as compared to recalling no event. This is consistent with the reinforcement-affect

model. The evidence for negative recall experiences is less clear, but the possibility of dissonance cannot be dismissed. This response to positive stimuli may be adaptive, in that such recall is capable of altering feelings in a positive direction. This practice is rewarding and pleasant. In contrast, perhaps negative recall is intuitively recognized by most people as nonproductive, and is avoided unless sufficient reason is given for indulging in a possibly destructive practice. Clinicians recognize that depression spirals and moods tend to continue, demonstrating emotional inertia (Brewer et. al., 1980).

#### Criticism and Improvements

Perhaps the experimental manipulation, though effective, was not strong enough. Research on memory using hypnotized subjects (Bower, Monteiro & Gilligan, 1978; Bower, 1981) enabled the experimenter to control the intensity of the recalled event and may have elicited stronger emotional reactions. In this study, subjects may not have concentrated on a single vivid incident for the entire time allotted, but may also have been reminded of other experiences of contrasting affective tone. Some subjects found it difficult to recall an incident of the affective tone requested but had little difficulty recalling other types of experiences not specifically sought. Hypnosis would alleviate this problem, but the difficulty in recruiting suggestible subjects would be a problem, as well as generalizing from their

data to the population as a whole.

A premeasure of loving was solicited from potential subjects, but could not be compared across timeframe due to incompatible wording that asked for either a measure of present loving or past loving at that time. This score might give more power to comparisons when used as a covariate.

Unfortunately, there were several experimenter main effects and interactions visible. This suggests nonuniformity, but may have been a function of the different personalities of the experimenters as well as their gender. The male experimenter elicited higher ratings of caring, fairness, and honesty. Subjects also rated themselves as more relaxed, and confident, in the male experimenter-positive recall experience than for the comparable condition for the female experimenter.

The importance of this study was that it dealt with ongoing and actual relationships rather than strangers, as did Gouaux (1971), or laboratory rather than real-life interpersonal situations (McDonald, 1962).

Perhaps the dependent measures used were not adequate for detecting the cognitive dissonance effect. More work is necessary to devise a satisfactory tool for doing so in the context of romantic relationships. It is difficult to probe the subjective feelings of persons and expect scientific answers to subjective feelings, but it is worth pursuing.

However, the findings of this preliminary study are encouraging and certainly the answers lurk somewhere.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>All pairwise comparisons reported in the present paper were two-tailed t-tests, with the error term based on the pooled variance estimate.

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## Appendix A

The following information is preliminary data for subject selection.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_ Male \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number \_\_\_\_\_

When can you be reached? \_\_\_\_\_

Are you currently involved in a romantic relationship?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, how would you describe it?

- married  
 living together  
 engaged  
 dating exclusively (not dating anyone else)  
 dating (but also dating others)

How long has the relationship lasted, in months?

\_\_\_\_\_ months

To what extent do you believe yourself in love with your partner?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not at all				somewhat				extremely intensely
in love				in love				in love

Were you involved in a romantic relationship within the past 18 months (other than a current one)?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

If yes, how would you describe it?

- married  
 living together  
 engaged  
 dating exclusively (not dating anyone else)  
 dating, but also dating others

How long did the relationship last, in months?

\_\_\_\_\_ months

To what extent did you believe yourself in love with your former partner?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not at all				somewhat				extremely intensely
in love				in love				in love

Have you participated in any other psychology experiments?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

## Appendix B

General Instructions

The following items pertain to various aspects of your feelings towards your partner and your relationship. At various points in this questionnaire, you may come across a blank ( \_\_\_\_\_ ). This refers to your partner in the relationship. When you encounter these blanks, mentally fill them in with the name of your partner. Be assured that your response to these items will be strictly confidential. Feel free to be as candid and accurate as possible. Your name will not be associated with your responses in any way. Please respond to the items by circling the number that best corresponds to your feelings or attitudes. Do **NOT** write your name on this questionnaire.

Please answer the following questions:

What is your Age? \_\_\_\_\_

Is the relationship you are commenting on current or past? \_\_\_\_\_

How long (in months) has/had the relationship lasted? \_\_\_\_\_

If the relationship is past, which of the following was the main force for dissolving the relationship?

You            Him            Mutual

Please check the item which best describes/described your relationship?

\_\_\_\_\_ dating  
 \_\_\_\_\_ dating exclusively (not dating anyone else)  
 \_\_\_\_\_ engaged  
 \_\_\_\_\_ living together  
 \_\_\_\_\_ married

## Appendix C

## Present Mood State

Please indicate the extent to which you are experiencing each of the following emotions at the present moment by circling the appropriate number along the scales.

not at all happy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	extremely happy
not at all hostile	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	extremely hostile
not at all secure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	extremely secure
not at all depressed	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	extremely depressed
not at all relaxed	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	extremely relaxed
not at all dissatisfied	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	extremely dissatisfied
not at all confident	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	extremely confident
not at all upset	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	extremely upset
not at all angry	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	extremely angry
not at all affectionate	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	extremely affectionate
not at all elated	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	extremely elated
not at all nervous	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	extremely nervous

## Appendix D

Please rate your partner, to the best of your knowledge, on the following traits by circling the appropriate number.

not at all intelligent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	extremely intelligent
not at all friendly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	extremely friendly
not at all fair	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	extremely fair
not at all honest	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	extremely honest
not at all thoughtful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	extremely thoughtful
not at all open-minded	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	extremely open-minded
not at all knowledgeable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	extremely knowledgeable
not at all likeable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	extremely likeable
not at all trustworthy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	extremely trustworthy
not at all considerate	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	extremely considerate
not at all aggressive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	extremely aggressive
not at all cold	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	extremely cold
not at all compassionate	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	extremely compassionate
not at all caring	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	extremely caring
not at all sexually warm	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	extremely sexually warm
not at all sex-desirable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	extremely sexually desirable
not at all sensitive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	extremely sensitive

## Appendix E

The following questions pertain to your current feelings about your partner or ex-partner

1. To what extent do you believe yourself in love with \_\_\_\_\_?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not at all				somewhat				extremely intensely
in love				in love				in love

2. If \_\_\_\_\_ were feelings badly, my first duty would be to cheer him up.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not at all true/				moderately true/agree				definitely true/
disagree completely				somewhat				agree completely

3. When I am with \_\_\_\_\_, we are almost always in the same mood.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not at all true/				moderately true/agree				definitely true/
disagree completely				somewhat				agree completely

4. I feel that I can confide in \_\_\_\_\_ about virtually anything.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not at all true/				moderately true/agree				definitely true/
disagree completely				somewhat				agree completely

5. I think that \_\_\_\_\_ is unusually well-adjusted.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not at all true/				moderately true/agree				definitely true/
disagree completely				somewhat				agree completely

6. I find it easy to ignore \_\_\_\_\_'s faults.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not at all true/				moderately true/agree				definitely true/
disagree completely				somewhat				agree completely

7. I would highly recommend \_\_\_\_\_ for a responsible job.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not at all true				moderately true/agree				definitely true/
disagree completely				somewhat				agree completely

8. I would do almost anything for \_\_\_\_\_.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not at all true				moderately true/agree				definitely true/
disagree completely				somewhat				agree completely









