

# **Retelling Is Not the Same as Recalling: Implications for Memory**

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# **Retelling Is Not the Same as Recalling**

**Imagine what you would do if asked to recall  
a list of words**

**Recall emphasizes both accuracy and quantity**

**Imagine the equivalent for autobiographical memories...**

*We (Jimmy, Elisabeth, Todd, and I) walked into Baker's Square in a suburb of Chicago from a glass-windowed area into the restaurant. Elisabeth, Todd, and Jimmy were in suits (Elisabeth's was a black skirt-suit with a blue button-down, Todd and Jimmy's were both black and I can't remember details), and I was in a pink button-down no-iron shirt and brown slacks with pointy shoes. I was on the phone with my brother, talking about banking and how to get an edge on other people who want to get into the industry. I lingered in the windowed area for a little while, but realized that my brother wasn't about to stop talking any time soon, so I walked behind Elisabeth, Todd, and Jimmy to the table we were sitting in (the first one in its row nearest to the front-door side). I do not remember who sat next to whom at the table, but everyone was complaining about Elisabeth's driving, and I was still on the phone with my brother, this time moving to the topic of his potential new job. We ordered while I was still on the phone, I got the French Dip sandwich, and my brother could apparently hear everything because he repeated everyone else's order to me as well. Soon thereafter, my brother and I ended our conversation, and I apologized to the group for my rudeness of speaking on the phone at the table. We started talking about my brother and how his girlfriend was moving to England in a week. We*

# Retellings vary with social context

- **Effects of Goals: Entertainment vs. Accuracy**

Wade & Clark (1993)

- **Audience effects: peers vs. experimenters**

Hyman (1994)

# A snapshot of everyday retellings

- $n = 33$  undergraduates
- Reported for 28 days
- Nightly electronic filing of reports
- 1059 retellings filed (range: 17 to 82 per subject)

## Selected items from retelling form:

- Purpose: \_\_\_ inform \_\_\_ entertain \_\_\_ pride \_\_\_  
sympathy \_\_\_ avoid conflict \_\_\_ other
- Did you give a complete & accurate retelling?
- Did you exaggerate? If yes, describe
- Did you minimize? If yes, describe
- Were you selective? If yes, describe
- Did you add anything to the retelling? If yes, describe

# Many retellings were distorted, and yet judged 'accurate'

	Judged Accurate	Judged Inaccurate	
Undistorted	.38	.01	<b>.39</b>
Distorted	<b>.20</b>	.41	<b>.61</b>
	<b>.58</b>	<b>.42</b>	

# Predicting Distortion in Retellings

	Exaggerated	Minimized	Selective	Added
Inform	-.66*	.54 *	.38 *	-.05
Entertain	.34	-.31	-.27	.52 *

Bartlett's notions of *simplication* and *elaboration*

## Summary: Retellings of Personal Memories

- Retellings are common and are told for different purposes
- Retellings are not always accurate
- Some distorted memories are considered “accurate”

What are the memorial consequences of retelling?

## What is the impact of telling a biased & selective story on memory for the original event?

- Read story containing multiple perspectives for each of two characters
- Selective use of story information
- Delay
- Memory for original story tested

## Two characters did activities

David joins a fast-paced volleyball game

Mike competes in a limbo contest

David finishes off all of the food (including your lunch)

Mike uses up all your suntan lotion

Mike asks the cute lifeguard for a date

David knows how to mix drinks

Mike left his dirty dishes out

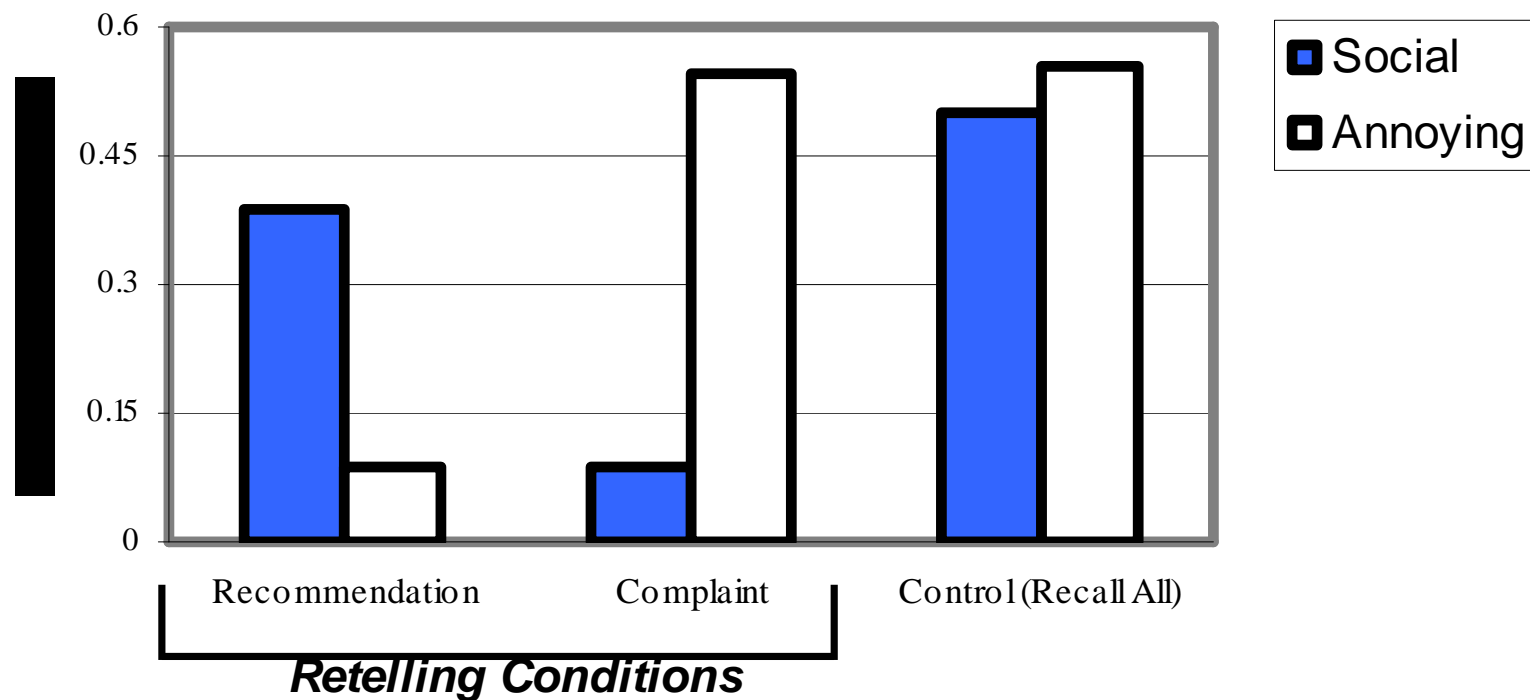
## 3 conditions:

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1. Recall about a character (control)
2. Complain to Housing authority
3. Nominate for sorority / fraternity

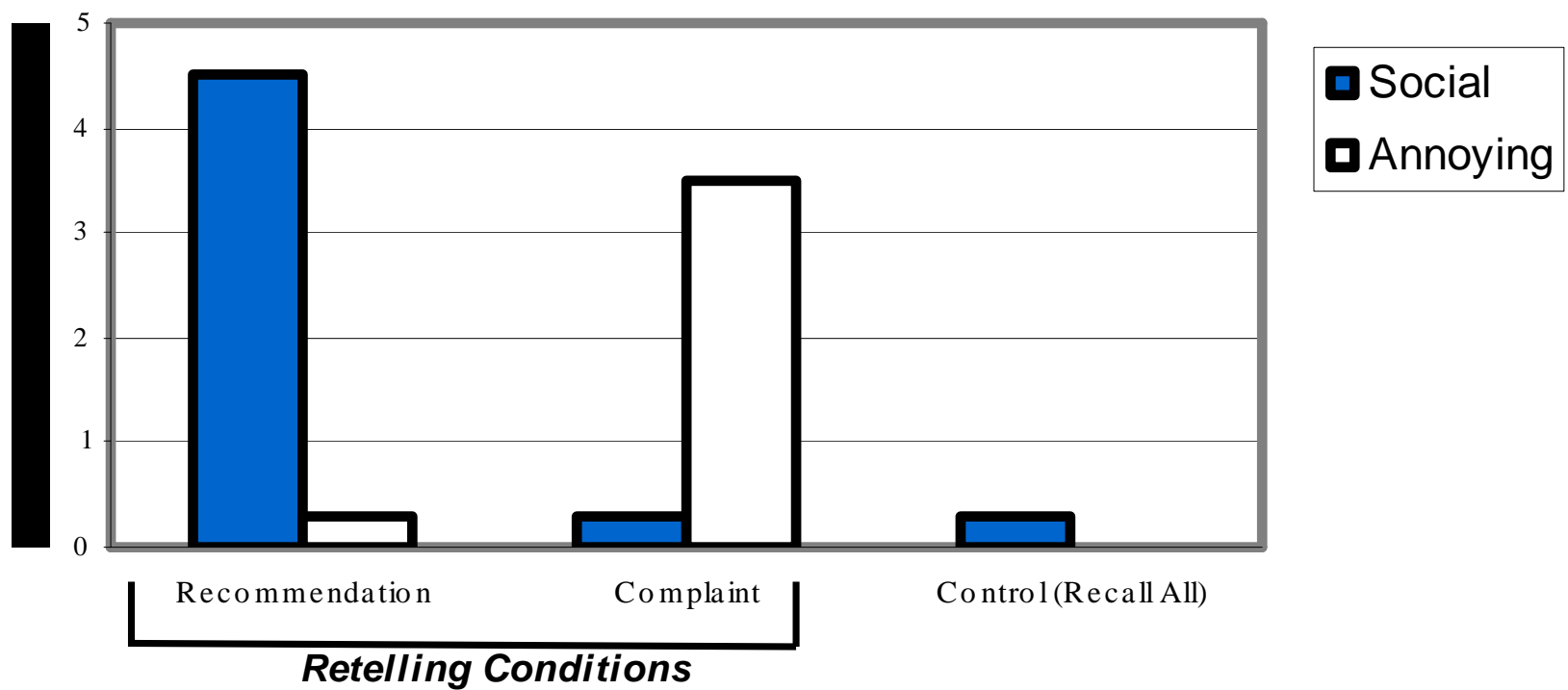
**Subjects in the Retellings conditions selectively used story information to support their goals.**

**Use of Story Facts in Retelling**

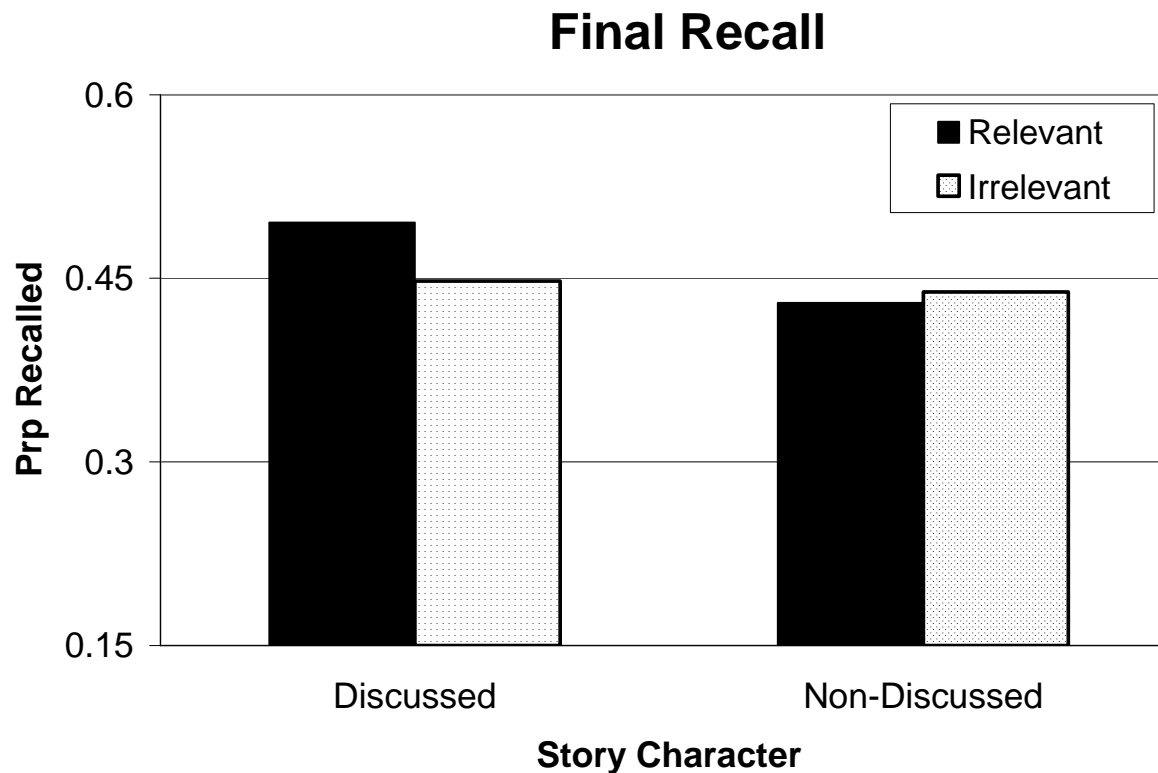


**Subjects in the Retellings conditions went beyond the story, making judgments about the characters.**

### Elaborations in Retelling



**Retelling led to better memory for perspective-relevant information, but only for the discussed character.**



## Rehearsing information aids memory.

Rundus & Atkinson, 1970;

Woodward, Bjork, & Jongeward, 1973

Glenberg, Smith, & Green, 1977

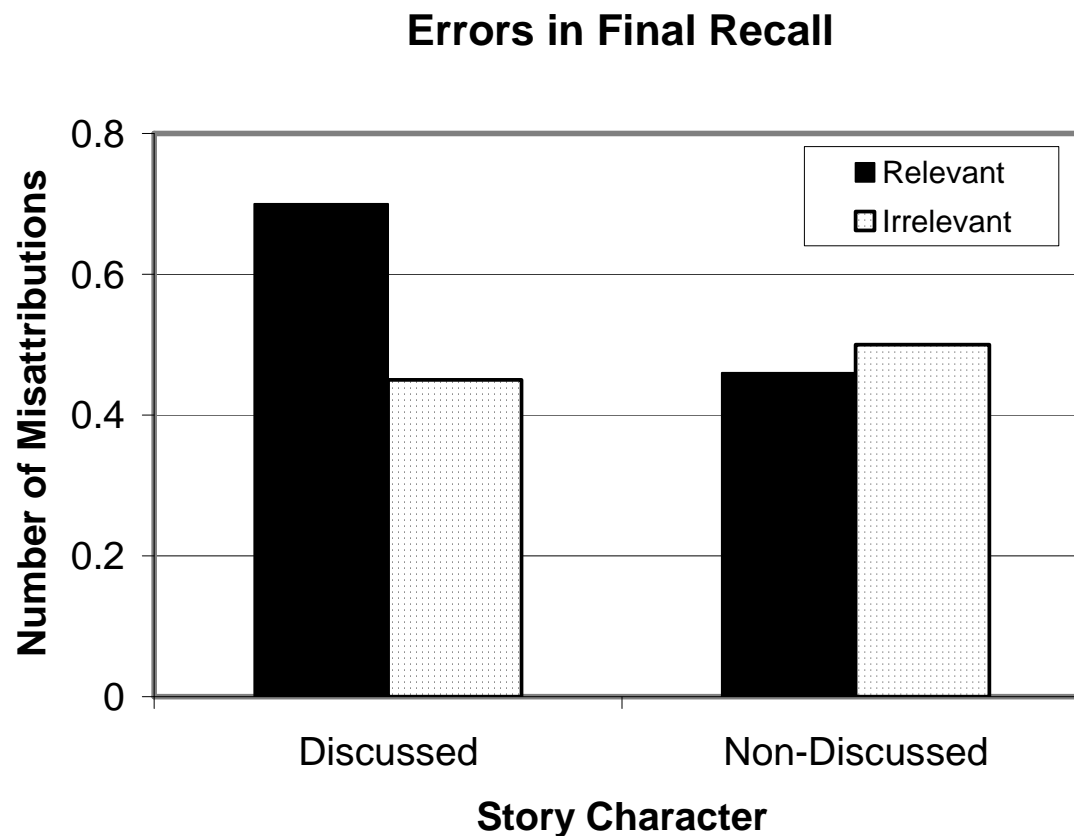
Maki & Schuler, 1980

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# Rehearsal is not the whole story...

- Misattributions are not rehearsed
  - \* An equivalent level of rehearsal is not sufficient
  - \* Overt item rehearsal not required

**Retelling also led to misattribution of perspective-relevant story activities to the discussed character.**



This pattern replicates on a recognition test with a higher error rate.

# Rehearsal is not the whole story...

- \* Misattributions are not rehearsed

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# Rehearsal is not the whole story...

- \* Misattributions are not rehearsed

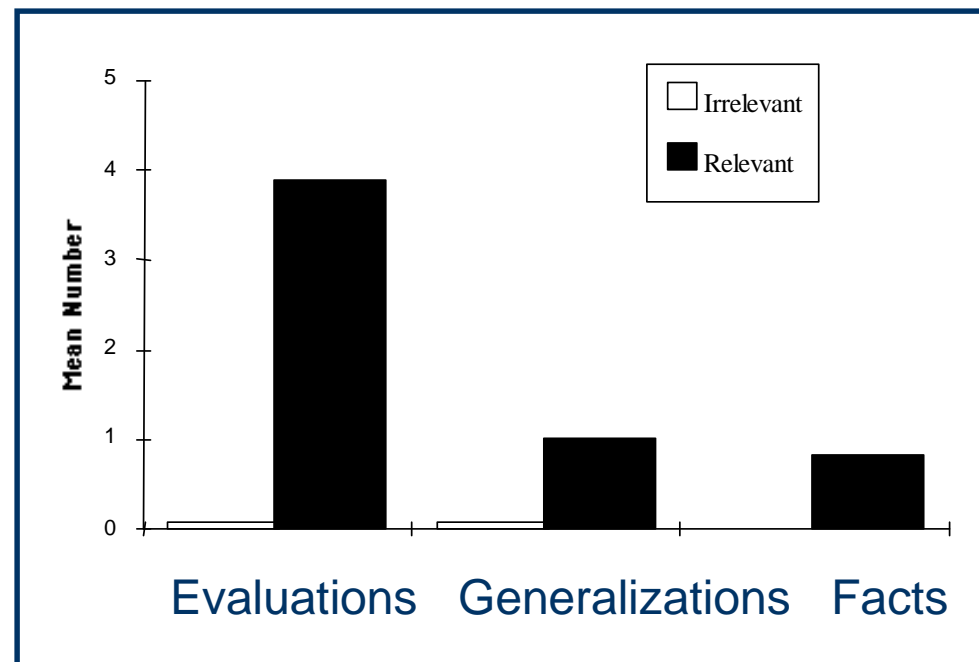
- \* An equivalent level of rehearsal is not sufficient

→ Overt item rehearsal not required

# Retellings do not have to include specifics

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Please just write a brief statement, similar to what you would say if you were really talking to the person in charge of housing. Just write generally about what you think about Lisa, explaining how difficult living with her has been for you. Don't include specific story items since you are just writing about your impressions.



## **The Stories We Tell**

**Stories are more than just selective rehearsals.**

**Rather, telling a story involves selecting, judging and elaborating upon to-be-remembered information.**

**The perspective (or schema) created during retelling guides later reconstruction of events. It provides retrieval cues and serves as a heuristic for source attributions.**

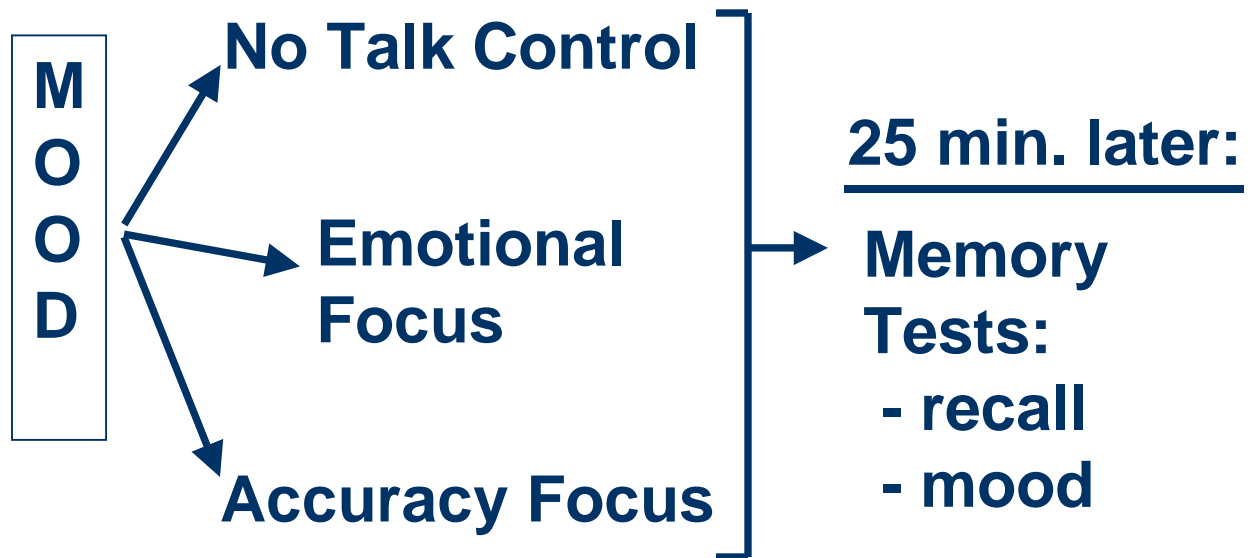
# Memorial consequences of Emotional Retellings (in the eyewitness domain)

- Motivated by Marcia Johnson's work
- **2 possibilities:**
  - *Emotional Retelling as Deep Re-Encoding*
  - *Emotional Retelling as Selective Re-Encoding*

# Stimuli: from *The Professional*



## Watch violent Film scene



## Sample Retelling:

*OK, lets see, the film, the clip began with some man in a hallway of an apartment-type building and there was a clear, clearly one man was the leader, or organizer of the, of the group. He opened up a, they all had guns, or well-armed, and that was clear that they were getting ready to break into an apartment. So, the leader then was shown, panned in, opening a pillbox. He then took one pill, swallowed it, and you could see that he was kind of disturbed...*

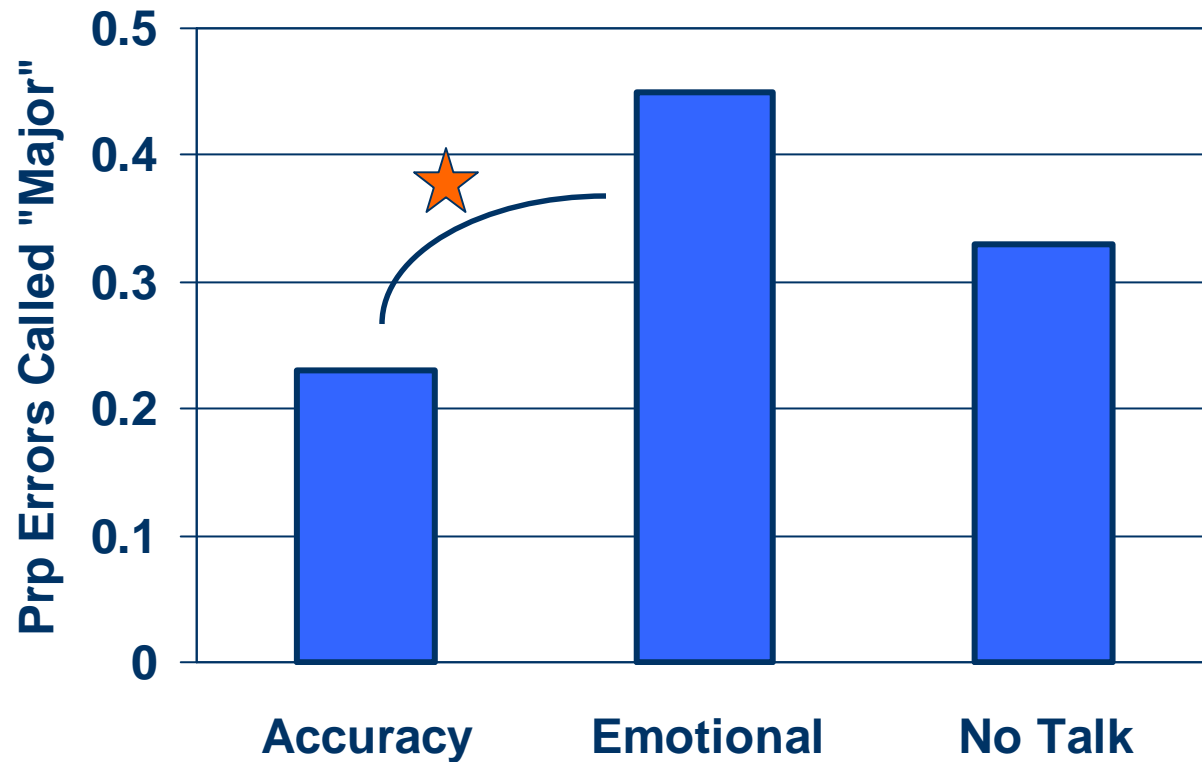
## Another Sample Retelling:

*I was sort of nervous and anxious not necessarily about the film but just because the experiment was starting and I didn't know exactly what was going on. Then I saw a number of people with guns and, I became a little bit more anxious probably, not much as if I didn't live in a modern society and fairly used to violent scenes and all movies and such. But it went on. When the guy took the pill or drug or whatever the heck it was, I was sort of shocked because I had no clue what that was supposed to be...*

# Differences in Final Free Recall

- More words following Emotional Retellings, including more references to self
- Higher subjectivity score after Emotional Retellings

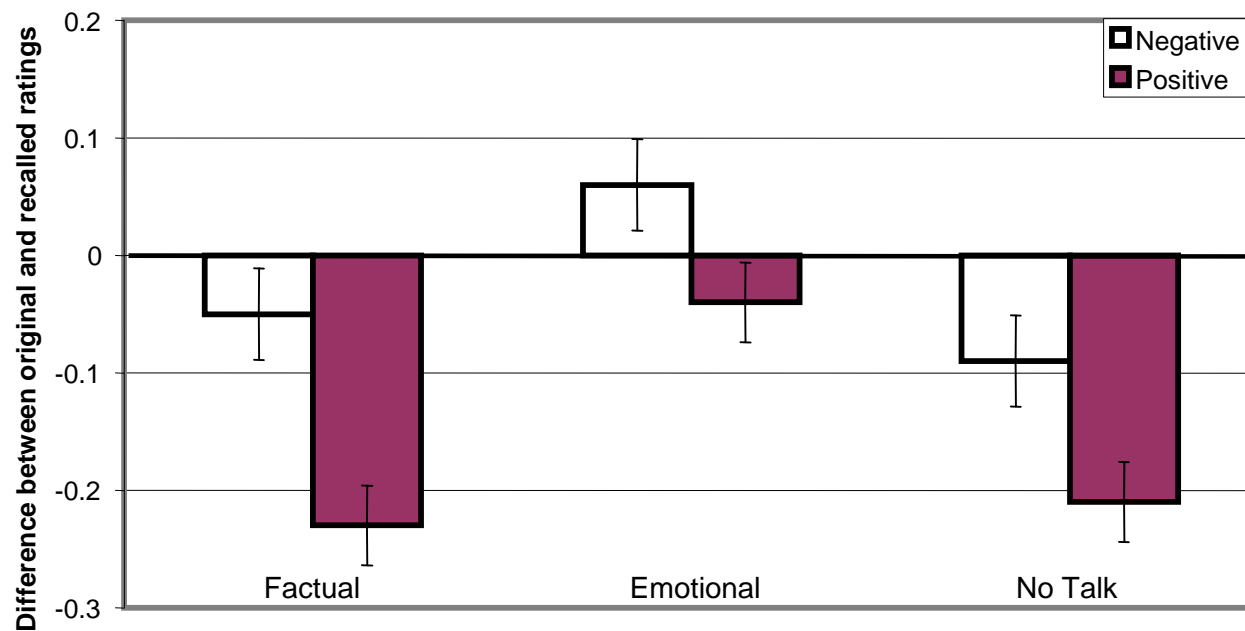
# More Major Errors after Emotional Retellings



Marsh, Tversky, & Hutson, 2005, *ACP*

# Only Subjects in the emotional condition recalled positive emotions

Remembering Emotional Reactions



# Conclusions

Unlike typical laboratory free recall, retellings can be selective and distorted, depending on the social context.

Biased retellings in turn have consequences for memory.

Retelling is more than selective rehearsal.

Rather, it encourages use of schemas in reconstructing events.