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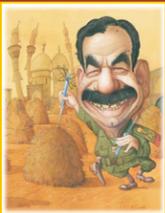
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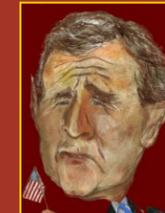
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Attitudes Toward the War in Iraq: Memory Bias Due to Affect



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ABSTRACT

We studied the influence of emotion on people's recollection of their attitudes toward the war in Iraq. Participants were 395 North American individuals who completed a longitudinal web-based study. We examined how emotional reactions and attitudes at the beginning of the Iraqi war (T1) influenced people's recollections of those attitudes at the war's conclusion, defined by the official withdrawal of U.S. troops from combat (T2). We predicted and found that emotional reactions to the war at T1 highly correlate with attitudes at T1, and in some cases influenced the recall of those initial attitudes at T2 (e.g. the more angry participants were about the war at its start, the more they remembered holding President Bush responsible for it when it ended, over and above what their attitude actually was at T1). Implications for understanding the effect of emotion on autobiographical memory are considered, and future directions are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The U.S.-led war in Iraq provided an opportunity to examine the influence of emotion on people's recollection of their attitudes associated with this salient event. Although researchers have studied factors that influence accuracy of recall of autobiographical memories (e.g., Ross, 1989), the effect of emotion on memory retrieval (e.g., Levine, 1997), and the role of affect in attitude formation (see Eagly & Chaiken, 1998), no one to date has studied how emotional feelings at the encoding of an autobiographical memory influence its later recall. Previous research demonstrated that emotional experience at the time of encoding of pictures influences their representation in perceptual memory (Halberstadt & Niedenthal, 2001). Similarly, we investigated how emotional experiences at the time of reporting attitudes towards the Iraqi war influenced later recall of that reporting.

On March 20, 2003, the day President Bush declared war on Iraq, we launched an internet-based study inviting individuals to voice their opinion about the war. The timeliness of the study ensured maximum accessibility and personal relevance of the attitudes we sampled. At Time 1 (T1), we ask participants to indicate their *current* feelings and attitudes about the war.

On April 16, 2003, as reported in the *New York Times*, US troops began to withdraw from Iraq and transition from war fighting to peacekeeping. We sent an 'end of the war' questionnaire (T2) to those participants who completed the T1 questionnaire. At T2, we asked participants to indicate their *current* emotions and attitudes about the war, as well as to *recall* those that they reported at T1.

In the present study, we examined how feelings of fear, anger, and pride influenced who people held responsible for the war (George W. Bush or Saddam Hussein) and whether they thought the U.S.-led war in Iraq was justified. We predicted that emotional experience would highly correlate to attitudes. Most importantly we predicted that emotional reactions at T1 would have a small, but significant impact on memory of attitudes at T2. We expected the influence of emotion to be small because we predicted that people would have highly stable attitudes about the war. Attitudes that are extreme and highly personal tend to show more stability (Grant, Button, & Noseworthy, 1994).

METHOD

Participants: We began with 1510 individuals who completed the T1 questionnaire during the period of March 20 – April 4. 86% of the participants completed the questionnaire in the first 7 days. Of these individuals, 425 also completed the T2 questionnaire during a 21 day collection period (April 16 – May 6). 74% of the sample completed the questionnaire in the first 7 days and 94% completed it in the first 14 days. For the purposes of this poster we have limited our analyses to the North American sample. Our final N=395 (266 female), age range 18 to 84 (*mean* 34.7, *mode* 21).

Sample Demographics			
Ethnicity:	Political Affiliation:		
Caucasian = 90.9%	Democrat = 46.3%		
Asian = 3.0%	Republican = 13.9%		
Latino & P. Islander = 2.5%	Independent = 14.4%		
African American = 1.5%	Green Party = 4.1%		
Religion:	Completed Education:		
Christian Catholic = 18.7%	4 yr. college = 27.8%		
Christian Protestant = 18.5%	Ph.D. = 25.1%		
Other = 9.1%	Masters = 19.5%		
Christian other = 8.1%	Some college = 13.2%		

T1 Procedure: Participants were recruited by postings on internet listservs (both national and international), although other word-of-mouth strategies were used (e.g., posting flyers in the Boston area). The website was hosted and maintained by Collegiate Internet Services.

We sampled many emotional reactions and attitudes, but only those relevant to our hypotheses are discussed here. We asked participants to indicate how afraid, angry and proud they felt about the war in Iraq. Participants indicated their responses on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1=Neutral, 4=Moderate, 7=Intense). We also asked participants to indicate how justified they thought the war was, and how responsible Bush and Hussein were for this war. Participants indicated their responses on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1=Neutral, 4=Moderate, 7=Very much).

T2 Procedure: The T2 questions assessing participants' **current feelings and attitudes** about the war were identical to T1. To assess the participants' **memory of their original attitudes**, we asked participants to recall filling out the questionnaire, and then remember their original attitudes as they reported them at T1.

RESULTS

Attitude Stability

As predicted, Ps evidenced highly stable attitudes across time.

	War Just @ T2	Hussein Resp. @ T2	Bush Resp. @ T2
War Just. @ T1	.894	.591	-.679
Hussein Resp. @ T1	.559	.718	-.336
Bush Resp. @ T1	-.643	-.357	.817

All correlations were significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Emotion Stability

Ps also evidenced relatively stable emotions across time.

	Afraid @ T2	Angry @ T2	Proud @ T2
Afraid @ T1	.495	.273	-.120(*)
Angry @ T1	.403	.736	-.501
Proud @ T1	-.216	-.497	.847

All correlations were significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), except for * which was significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Recall Accuracy

Ps demonstrated highly accurate recall of previously held attitudes.

	Recall War Just.	Recall Hussein Resp.	Recall Bush Resp.
War Just @ T1	.912	.572	-.704
Hussein Resp. @ T1	.555	.687	-.391
Bush Resp. @ T1	-.683	-.358	.823

All correlations were significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Emotion-Attitude Relationship

Ps emotional reactions to the war highly correlate with attitudes.

	War Just. @ T1	Hussein Resp. @ T1	Bush Resp. @ T1
Afraid @ T1	-.162	-.098 ^{NS}	.179
Angry @ T1	-.656	-.452	.446
Proud @ T1	.767	.395	-.657

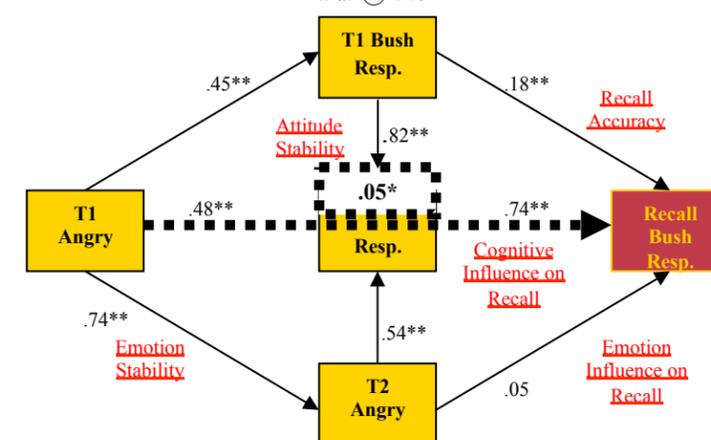
All correlations were significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), except for ^{NS}.

Emotion Influence on Attitude Recall

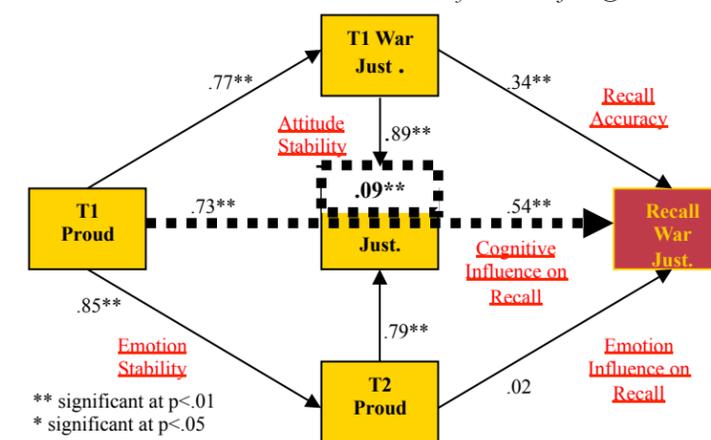
By examining the correlations between emotions at T1 and attitudes at T1, we identified strongest emotion predictors for each of the attitudes: *War Just* = Angry & Proud; *Hussein Resp.* = Angry; *Bush Resp.* = Angry & Proud. Since *Afraid* was weakly related to all three attitudes, it was dropped from the analysis.

To determine whether emotional experiences influenced encoding of reported attitudes, we conducted path analyses with multiple regression procedures. Emotional experience at time of initial reporting had a direct influence on recall in two (of five) analyses.

Anger at T1 had a direct effect on Recall of Bush as Responsible for the War @ T1.



Pride at T1 had a direct effect on Recall of War was Just @ T1.



** significant at p<.01
* significant at p<.05

DISCUSSION

As predicted, attitudes regarding the U.S.-led war in Iraq remained relatively stable across time, and people remembered their previously reported attitudes relatively accurately. Over and above these effects, emotional reactions at Time 1 had a direct effect on recall of the attitudes in several cases. These findings support the hypothesis that emotional experiences at time of encoding of autobiographical attitudes (reporting attitudes about U.S.-led war in Iraq) can influence later recall of those attitudes.

These findings contribute to research on the role of emotion in memory by showing that emotional experience not only contributes to memory at time of recall, but affect can contribute to memory at time of encoding. Future research will work to replicating this effect, as well as examine mechanisms of this effect.