

The Social Power of Remembering: How Memory Qualities Shape Interpersonal Judgments

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Introduction

In everyday conversations, other people tell us memories about events they experienced, and this can support vicarious learning and decision making. However, memories are not always true or faithful to what really happened. Humans thus frequently need to monitor the veracity and fidelity of other people’s memories ¹.

The first goal of this study was to assess whether interpersonal memory monitoring judgments are influenced by the level of recollective details in autobiographical narratives.

The second goal was to test whether interpersonal memory monitoring judgments are associated with social attitude towards the narrator.

Methods

158 raters (18-40 years old) – Online study via Prolific

- **8 autobiographical narratives:** 4 with high recollective richness and 4 with low recollective richness. Examples:

	Date	Location	General context	Character	Event	Details of character	Details of environment	Details of actions or objects
High	At nightfall last Friday	in the little wood behind my garden	I was walking	when I saw a deer	that stopped when it saw me.	Its brown fur shone in the moonlight.	An owl's cry rang out	and the deer made a graceful leap to disappear into the thickets.
Low	One day, I think it was quite late	in a wood that is not very big	I was walking	when I saw a deer	that stopped when it saw me.	I think it was brown or red.	There was a sudden noise	and the animal left. I did not see it again.

- After each narrative, **3 questionnaires** (0-100 VAS):

- Interpersonal Memory Monitoring scale (9 items, e.g., “How much do you think that the person has a faithful memory of what happened?”)
- Willingness to Interact scale (7 items, e.g., “How much would you like to meet this person?”)
- Socio-Emotional Reactions scale (9 items, e.g., “Can you understand the situation of this person?”)

Random order for narratives; counterbalanced order for questionnaires (IMM – Social attitude vs. Social attitude – IMM).

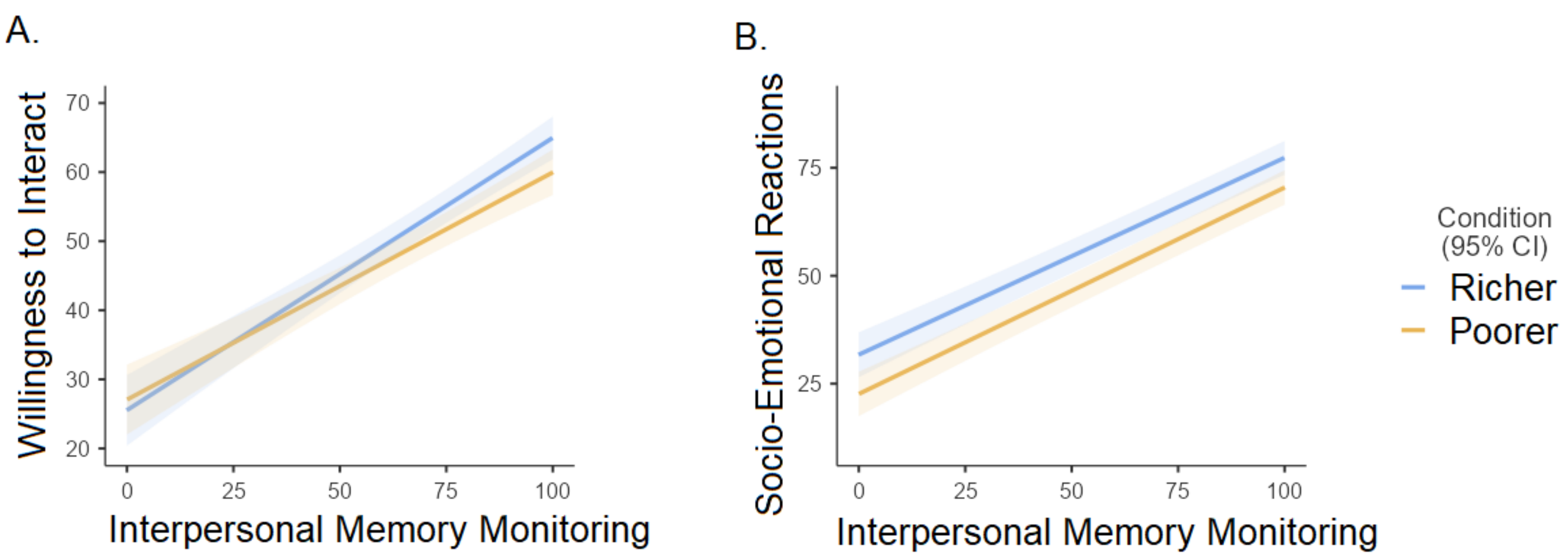
Results

Interpersonal Memory Monitoring judgments as a function of the richness of recollection

	Richer recollection	Poorer recollection
Interpersonal Memory Monitoring	72.6 (19.9)	67.3 (18.8)

LMM: Significant effect of richness: $\beta = -5.32$, 95% CI = [-9.49, -1.15], $SE = 2.13$, $t = -2.50$, $p < .05$

Is social attitude associated with Interpersonal Memory Monitoring?



LMM: Significant association between Interpersonal Memory Monitoring ratings and social attitude, but no interaction with richness of recollective details.

Discussion

Past research has suggested that people use the same memory cues to judge the source of their own memory and the source of other people’s memory ². These cues include the number of details contained in the memories. It is interesting to note that interpersonal memory monitoring ratings were high even in the case of poorer recollections. So, the mere fact that narrators were able to recollect the event may be sufficient to make the memory credible. This is consistent with the idea that **recollection is a sign that the narrator experienced the event first-hand** ³.

Additionally, **raters were sensitive to the richness of information** provided about the characters, objects and environment of the story. Indeed, they judged richer memories as more true, accurate and faithful than less rich memories. This may be because specific details facilitate the mental simulation of the event experienced by the narrator¹. A specific narrative is likely to trigger a vivid mental simulation. This will give the raters the feeling that they can imagine the event as if they were experiencing it themselves. With such experiential quality, the narrative will qualify as true, accurate and faithful more readily than a less specific narrative.

Moreover, higher interpersonal memory monitoring judgments were significantly related to a more positive social attitude (i.e., more trust and empathy, and more willingness to interact) towards the narrator. This supports the idea that **interpersonal memory monitoring judgments play a role in the creation and maintenance of social relationships.**

The article:



¹ Sadeh, T., Lieberman, L., & Dobbins, I. G. (2025). How do we evaluate and learn from others' memories? Trends in Cognitive Sciences.

² Johnson, M. K., Bush, J. G., & Mitchell, K. J. (1998). Interpersonal reality monitoring: Judging the sources of other people's memories. Social Cognition, 16(2), 199-224.

³ Mahr, J., & Csibra, G. (2017). Why do we remember? The communicative function of episodic memory. Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 41, 1-93.