

Emotionally Priming Memory as It Affects Recall and Disclosure

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Abstract

Twenty seven participants were conveniently selected to participate in a study on how word priming affects the participant's comfortability in disclosing turning points. There has already been research done on priming and memory recall, but not enough done on what participants would do with the memory: In this case, it would be the participant's comfortableness in disclosing the memory. Results suggest that being priming does affect how a participant would go about telling a turning point and participants who are negatively primed are more likely to share their turning points compared to those who are positively and negatively primed.

Keywords: word priming, turning point, contamination, redemption, lifestory

Introduction

The life story of a person consists of a series of connected isolated events that gives the person a sense of self. Some of these events, while memorable, are considered to be salient to the individual because they changed the person's life. They are known as turning points.

With turning points, there are two types: positive and negative. The former people perceived to be a monumental event that "steer them in the right direction or made them think differently", while the latter changed their life for the worse. All of these concepts correspond to the ideas of redemption and contamination. People gain wisdom when they see there is something to be gained from going through a negative experience such as personal growth. (redemption) ; they are viewing a negative experience positively. On the other hand, sometimes people don't feel like they there was anything to be gained (From chump to champ: People's appraisals of their earlier and present selves.). What should be noted is that in between events -mundane and significant, an allotted amount of time passes, which distances our current self from our past selves (Wilson, A. E., & Ross, M., 2001). Because the current self has more experience and wisdom than its former selves, the current self will criticize the former selves, despite the the self needing to endure what happened in the past to get where he or she is now.

With this contentment of self and actually enduring the endure, the person is willing to offer share their wisdom gained from a memory like a turning point after some time has pass. Furthermore, sharing a memory in detail causes the person to gain greater insight and see more meaning behind the they event (Grysmen, A., & Hudson, J. A. 2010). Autobiographical memory such as a turning point has a social function where it allows participants to establish

communication, trust and bonds with other people (Rasmussen, A. S., & Berntsen, D. 2009).

These are the benefits of sharing an event. However it is up to the person to decide whether or not to share the memory.

According to one study, people were asked to write about their most memorable event that day and the results were that people are more willing to disclose information when they are feeling intensely negative (Pasupathi, M., Mclean, K. C., & Weeks, T. 2009). This study applies to sharing memorable events but not specifically, turning points where the events would be considered monumental. Limited research has been done on priming and sharing turning points. Our study strives to answer the questions: How does priming affect someone's comfortableness in disclosing this information? Is this dependent upon the primed mood?

These questions are important because when a person misses out on disclosing or sharing a memory, he or she loses the opportunity to gain different insight into the event, especially as an event as life changing as a turning point. Essentially, they are missing out on the chance in understanding an issue much further. Hence, it is important to look into other factors like priming, besides time and people being satisfied with who they are, that enables them to share memories.

Previous research has touched upon memory recall and priming recall but not specifically turning points and disclosure. In Snyder and White's study, they demonstrated that when a participant is exposed to a certain mood induction, he or she would recall a corresponding memory to the mood induction (Drace, S. 2012). Similarly, the type of retrieval that the participant practices reinforces a congruent mood and memory (Vrijssen, J. N., Hertel, P. T., & Becker, E. S. 2016). Another study examines how if one pretends to feel and display a

certain emotion, he or she would recall a corresponding memory(Eich, E., & Macaulay, D. 2000). What these research studies show is that depending on the type of mood induction, it will warrant a congruent response. For example, if a person pretends to be happy, he or she will recall positive thoughts. Hence, the research we have provided will carry over to our hypothesis that priming will affect comfort in disclosing turning point memories.

Method

Participants

Twenty seven college students (18 female, 5 men,4 other) participants were conveniently selected to complete a 10-15 minute survey on turning point narratives, mood priming, and sharing/visiting. Each participant were randomly assigned to one of the three (positive, negative, neutral) online surveys. All participants were expected to read the consent form before moving onto the survey. Participants were not compensated for their time.

Materials & Procedure

To collect the data, the researcher developed an online survey, which contained both quantitative Likert scale questions and open-ended qualitative questions that relate to word priming and turning points. There were three questionnaires that a participant could be sent: positive, negative, or neutral (See Appendix A.). Participants were expected to provide demographic information and judged each of five words on 5 point scales (1= *very negative* and 5= *very positive*). When creating the online survey, the researcher carefully selected the words

(corresponding to each condition) from Affective Norms for English (ANEW): Instruction Manual and Affective Ratings). Participants were then asked to think of a turning-point narrative and briefly write about the experience in the text box. Then participants rated (1= very negative and 5=very positive) how they felt about the memory they described and then they answered questions regarding to sharing and changing that turning point. Lastly, they rated (1=not at all and 5=very) on how positive and negative they were feeling at the moment. Prior to entering the online survey, the researcher provided each participant with a copy of the informed consent form and information about the study. The data collected from this survey was stored in Excel.

Coding

The 27 codes were coded using LIWC (Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count) software, particularly the researcher was interested in analyzing the thirteen following variables: word choice, positive emotion, negative emotion, cognitive processing, focus on past, focus on present, focus on future, valence, word rating average, sharing, positive mood, and negative mood.

Results

Analyses focused on all 27 participants' responses to the survey. Because our main interest was in examining the effects of word priming on sharing turning points, the researcher decided to look at analyzing the thirteen following variables: word choice, positive emotion,

negative emotion, cognitive processing, focus on past, focus on present, focus on future, valence, word rating average, sharing, positive mood, and negative mood. One way ANOVAS (Analysis of variance) using LIWC were conducted across these variables. The ANOVA revealed that word rating average is significant across conditions, $F(2,24) = 28.26, p < .001$. Self reported valence is not significant, however, LIWC-reported tones is significant between the positive and negative conditions, $F(2,24) = 4.00, p < .05$. Table 1. shows the average of the LIWC tone across conditions. Notice that for the positive condition, the LIWC reported tone is neutral ($M = 52.57$), while for the negative condition, the tone is negative. According to the LIWC coding manual, a score of 50 means the tone is about neutral or lack of emotion, above 50 is positive or happy, and below 50 is negative. In addition, cognitive processing is statistically significant between the positive and neutral condition, $F(2,24) = 3.38, p < .05$.

There was a significant correlation between negative mood and sharing [$r(27) = 0.41, p < .05$] demonstrating that participants with negative narratives are more likely to share their turning point. In addition, there was a significant correlation between sharing and valence [$r(27) = 0.42, p < .05$] demonstrating that participants who are more likely to share their narratives gave positive ratings for each word.

Table 1. Mean Differences In Tone Across Conditions

Condition	N	M(SD)
Positive	9	52.57(1.75)*
Negative	9	16.62(5.31)*
Neutral	9	23.10(8.86)

*= $p < 0.05$

The Chi Square (see Table 2) shows that for a majority of participants it is their first time disclosing information. The greatest number of people is sharing the turning point for the first time goes to the negative condition, followed by the neutral condition and finally positive condition.

Table 2. Frequency Count of Participant's Answer to First Time Sharing Turning Point Across the Three Conditions.

Condition	Yes	No
Positive	6	3
Negative	9	0
Neutral	7	2

Discussion

This study shows that valence is not significant but tone is. For participants who were exposed to the positive condition, their narratives were relatively neutral, while those who are negatively or neutrally primed ended up writing narratives with a negative tone as detected by LIWC. There is an effect due to priming which is supported by Snyder and White's study on mood induction, for example.

There are differences in priming effects when participants answered the question of whether or not it's the participant's first time sharing the turning point, which supports our hypothesis that priming affects the participant's comfort in disclosing a turning point. More students who were negatively primed shared a turning point (for the first time) than those exposed to the positive and neutral conditions. Our latter finding is similar to the study done with students who were more likely to disclose an event if they are feeling intensely negative (Pasupathi, M., Mclean, K. C., & Weeks, T. 2009). This finding is further supported by there being a significant correlation between negative mood and sharing if the participants' narratives were more negative, they are more likely to share it. Our research extends current understanding by providing multiple quantitative evidences that word priming does affect a person's comfort in sharing a memory, specifically turning points.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study only relies on a chi square and correlation to look at disclosure, which are not powerful statistical measures to say that word priming does have an effect. In the future, we encourage researchers to look at more of a diverse population than college students and look into other manuals with positive, negative, or neutral words. We selected words for each condition merely based on how positive, negative, or neutral we feel the word is to other people. It would also be interesting to do the test vocally to simulate disclosure in real life.

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Appendix A.

Loved

12345

Very NegativeVery Positive

Delight

12345

Very NegativeVery Positive

Sad

12345

Very NegativeVery Positive

Alone

12345

Very NegativeVery Positive

Nonchalant

12345

Very NegativeVery Positive

Habit

12345

Very NegativeVery Positive

1

2

3

Think back to the turning point memory you identified earlier. For this event please describe what happened, where and when, who was involved, and what you were thinking and feeling. Also, please say a word or two about what you think this event says about you as a person or about your life.

Description (optional)

WRITE YOUR RESPONSE ON THE LINE BELOW.

Long answer text

On a scale from 1-5, with 1 being very negative, 3 being neutral, and 5 being very positive, how would you rate this memory?

1 2 3 4 5

Are there specific details of this memory that make you feel comfortable disclosing, but not others? Why or why not?

Long answer text

Are there aspects of this memory you would share with some, but not others? (Consider, but do not feel you must write about all, a friend, acquaintance, parent, sibling, romantic partner, professor)

Long answer text

Based on what you recall of the experience, would you change the event?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe

Please elaborate on how you wish this experience had been different, if you answered yes or maybe.

Long answer text

How comfortable would you feel disclosing this information to others?

Not comfortable at all 1 2 3 4 5 Extremely comfortable

Are there specific details of this memory that make you feel comfortable disclosing, but not others? Why or why not?

☐ Yes☐ No

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very