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Attitude Relevant Distortion Regarding the Recognition of Controversial Material

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ATTITUDE RELEVANT DISTORTION REGARDING THE RECOGNITION OF CONTROVERSIAL MATERIAL

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In many situations, people who cannot remember information perfectly nevertheless feel compelled to give a response. If full memory information is not available, where is the source of the confabulated "memory" reports? It has been theorized that recognition error is due to actual memory loss combined with confabulation based on a person's prior beliefs. Therefore, it was expected in this study that (1) recognition accuracy would decrease over time and that (2) the nature of the false recognitions would be consistent with the subject's prior attitudes on a controversial issue.

Subjects were given a questionnaire to assess their beliefs and attitudes on the choice regarding abortion. They read a brief story about a real abortion case and afterwards were asked to recognize to what extent (1) true, (2) modified, and (3) novel false material in a recognition test was present or not in the story. The forgetting curves for pro- and anti-choice subjects appeared different; whereas the pro-choice subjects showed a decrease in recognition accuracy over time, this trend was not clearly evident for the anti-choice subjects. Although data support the theory of decreased recognition accuracy over time due to memory loss data were not robust enough to conclude support or rejection for the theory that confabulation is biased by prior beliefs.