Fallacies in Memory for Conversations: Reflections on Clarence Thomas, Anita Hill, and the Like

KATHY PEZDEK and MATTHEW PRULL

The Claremont Graduate School, USA

SUMMARY

This study examines conditions that relate to fallacies in memory for conversations. This research tests a cognitive interpretation for why a conversation might be vividly memorable to one eyewitness but not to another. Specifically, a test of gist and verbatim memory for sexual versus non sexual material is presented. In addition, the relative memorability of sexual versus non sexual material is tested as a function of the consistency of the context in which it is presented. In two experiments participants heard a recorded conversation between a man and a woman that included four sexual and four non sexual target sentences. The conversation was framed as having been recorded in either a singles bar (the consistent context) or an office setting (the inconsistent context). Sexual items were recalled and recognized better than non sexual items, on both gist and verbatim memory tasks, and the difference in gist (but not verbatim) memory between sexual and non sexual items was greater in the inconsistent than in the consistent context. The discussion considers how this pattern of results might illuminate slippages in memory that may have occurred during the Clarence Thomas–Anita Hill hearing (U.S. Supreme Court appointment review; October 1991) as well as memory slippages more generally.

Slippages in memory for conversations are not unusual. In recent years there have been several compelling incidents that reveal apparent memory inconsistencies between people who have participated in the same events—John Dean’s memory during the Watergate Hearings; Ollie North’s memory during the Iran-Contra Hearings; and, more recently, the memory of Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill during Senate Confirmation Hearings of now US Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas. These, as well as numerous anecdotal examples from our everyday lives, raise questions regarding how observers to the same event can remember it so differently. Although there is a substantial literature on eyewitness memory that identifies factors affecting memory for real-world visual information—settings, faces, and sequences of events—there is little research on fallacies in memory for conversations. This is the focus of this study.

In general exact memory for wording is surprisingly poor. In a now classic study,
Sachs (1974) had people read or listen to passages of connected discourse. At several points throughout each passage recognition test sentences were presented to be verified as identical or changed. After only 40 syllables of intervening material (equal to 12.5 seconds in the auditory condition and 8.5 seconds in the visual condition), although semantic memory was better than chance, little of the lexical or surface structural information from the original sentences was retained. This finding is consistent with the notion that although formal and acoustic–phonetic properties of discourse are retained in short-term memory, only the semantic properties of discourse are encoded into long-term memory (Crowder, 1976).

On the other hand, Kintsch and Bates (1977) reported that both gist and verbatim recognition memory for material presented in a classroom lecture were better than chance after 2 days. However, after a 5-day delay, although gist memory was still significant, verbatim memory was significantly reduced. Their study included memory for lecture-relevant material as well as extraneous remarks such as jokes and announcements, with the latter being especially well retained. Similarly, Intons-Peterson and Smyth (1987) have documented the impressive ‘repertory’ memory of expert memorizers (theatre students). However, such verbatim memory is unusual and requires processing strategies not used by the novice memorizers (psychology students). These results raise doubts about whether any witness could remember conversations verbatim years after they occurred—such as the likes of Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, Ollie North, and John Dean have claimed.

In particular, few studies have specifically assessed recognition memory for sexual phrases despite the fact that memory for sexually oriented conversations is often crucial in determining guilt or innocence in criminal trials (e.g., the Mike Tyson trial and the Clarence Thomas–Anita Hill Hearing). MacWhinney, Keenan, and Reinke (1982, Experiment 2) reported impressive memory for the surface structure as well as the meaning of sentences that included sexually suggestive and profane language. In their study the sentences were presented within the context of an audio-taped conversation with a recognition memory test immediately after the conversation. On the other hand, Geer and McClone (1990) reported modest differences in accuracy between recognition memory for sexual versus neutral sentences, with both male and female participants more accurate and faster recognizing neutral than sexual sentences. Although the Geer and McClone study provided no evidence that sexually explicit material was more likely to be remembered than non sexual material, since this study included completely new sentences as distractor items, it did not specifically assess verbatim memory for sexual material. Also, the text used by Geer and McClone presented the temporal sequence of coitus, and thus all material was consistent with various romantic and physical aspects of sexual intercourse. In the present study, as in the episodes reported between Hill and Thomas, sexual phrases were presented within the context of an otherwise non sexual conversation.

Thus, it might be predicted that a sexually explicit statement, presented in the context of an otherwise neutral conversation, would produce a von Restorff effect (Koffka, 1935). The von Restorff effect describes the phenomenon in which an item that stands out against its background is better remembered than items that are similar to each other (e.g., the word peach in a list of vegetables).

A second assessment in this study was whether memory for sexually explicit material is affected by the context in which the information is presented. Anderson and
Pichert (1978), for example, had people read a narrative about what two boys did at one of the boy's homes while they were playing hookey from school. Half of the people were told that they were to read the passage from the perspective of a potential homebuyer, and half were told to read it from the perspective of a burglar. More clusters of burglary-relevant than homebuyer-relevant information were recalled by those receiving the burglary perspective instructions, and vice-versa for those receiving the homebuyer perspective instructions. Thus, when people read a passage, they are more likely to encode and subsequently recall information relevant to the schema invoked by the perspective activated.

More specifically, within the context of schematic processing it has been reported that items inconsistent with expectations are better recalled and recognized than items consistent with expectations. This effect, termed the consistency effect, has been reported for text (Bower, Black, and Turner, 1979; Graesser, Gordon, and Sawyer, 1979) as well as for real-world scenes (Pezdek, Whetstone, Reynolds, Askari, and Dougherty, 1989). According to Pezdek et al. (1989), the consistency effect in processing items in the real world results from the fact that schema-inconsistent items are encoded qualitatively differently than schema-consistent items. That is, whereas schema-consistent items are encoded quite globally in a manner that simply activates the correct scene frame, schema-inconsistent items are encoded in a manner that is more likely to preserve the physical appearance of the items.

The present study tests the generalizability of this interpretation of the consistency effect to memory for a conversation that includes sexually explicit material. Although the previous findings on the consistency effect would appear to apply to semantic memory for sexually explicit information, it has not been demonstrated that consistency affects verbatim memory. Based on the interpretation of the consistency effect by Pezdek et al. (1989), that schema-inconsistent items are more likely to be encoded in a manner that preserves their physical appearance, it would be predicted that verbatim memory for sexually explicit material would be preserved better when the sexual material is more inconsistent with the context in which it is presented. On the other hand, since the basis of the consistency effect is the semantic fit between the target material and its context, it might be predicted that the consistency of the context would affect semantic memory but not verbatim memory for the target material.

In summary, this study assesses gist and verbatim memory for sexually explicit material as a function of the context in which the material is presented. A tape-recorded dialogue between a man and a woman was presented to participants. The dialogue included four sexually explicit target sentences and four non sexual target sentences. Prior to hearing the dialogue, participants read an introductory paragraph that presented the contextual setting in which the subsequent dialogue was recorded. The context was either a singles bar or a professional office. Five weeks after the presentation phase, participants were presented a recall test and then a recognition memory test including lexically changed distractor items (to assess verbatim memory) and semantically changed distractor items (to assess semantic memory). It was predicted that sexually explicit target sentences would be recalled and recognized better than non sexual material, based on the von Restorff effect. Further, it was predicted that the memory advantage for sexually explicit material would be greater in the inconsistent context, the professional office, than in the consistent context, the singles bar.
EXPERIMENT 1

Method

Participants and design

Fifty-four students (33 females and 21 males) from Pomona College and San Bernardino Valley Community College served as participants. Students in each of two classes participated together with their class. The design was a 2 (context) x 2 (sexual/non sexual target item) mixed factorial ANOVA. All participants listened to the same dialogue, including both sexual and non sexual target sentences, but either from the perspective of the professional office context or the singles bar context. Both factors were varied within each class tested.

Materials

Participants listened to a 5-minute dialogue between a man and a woman that was recorded by two theatre students. The dialogue was written to appear to be a typical real-world conversation between a male and a female acquaintance. Embedded within the dialogue were four sexually explicit target sentences, each of which was recorded by the man. These sexually explicit target sentences were the following:

1. Yeah, I’m hungry too, but I can’t keep my eyes off your sensuous moist lips.
2. The girls in that movie had such tan bodies, creamy thighs, and breasts like watermelons.
3. I like indoor sports; you know ... pool, darts, and ... sex.
4. Well part of the money I used for gambling some more, some of it paid for the hotel I was staying in there, and I spent the night with two incredible prostitutes.

Prior to listening to the recorded dialogue, participants read a typed paragraph describing the contextual setting in which they were to assume that the dialogue took place—a professional office setting or a singles bar. Equal numbers of participants were assigned to each of these two conditions. The two context setting paragraphs are presented in the Appendix.

Procedure

The experiment included a presentation phase and 5 weeks later a test phase. In the presentation phase participants first were given 2 minutes to read the context paragraph for the condition to which they had been assigned. They were then instructed to pay careful attention to the dialogue that would follow, as they would be asked questions about it afterwards. The 5-minute recorded dialogue was then presented. Students were asked not to discuss the material in the dialogue among themselves. Further, to reduce suspicion that a subsequent memory test would be given, immediately after hearing the dialogue, a bogus test was given assessing participants’ perceptions regarding the age, education, and personality characteristics of the two speakers.

Five weeks later the experimenter returned to administer a recall test and then a recognition memory test. On the recall test, participants were given 10 minutes
to recall as much as they could from the dialogue. The recognition memory test included 24 test sentences, each to be verified as old (i.e., exactly the same as a sentence they had heard before) or new. The old sentences included the four sexual target sentences and four non-sexual sentences selected from the dialogue. The non-sexual target sentences were the following:

1. Domenico's has a recipe for lasagna straight from heaven.
2. There's just a certain excitement that you can’t get from watching baseball on television.
3. It’s said that it takes two lifetimes to master the sport of fencing.
4. I mean, what would you do if you won fifty million dollars?

For each of the eight old sentences, two 'new' distractor sentences were derived—one lexically changed and the other semantically changed. In each lexically changed sentence, one word (or a two-word phrase) in the original sentence was changed with a synonym substitution. In each semantically changed sentence, one word (or a two-word phrase) in the original sentence was changed to a different word that changed the meaning of the sentence.

Results

Recognition data

The recognition data were coded in terms of the signal detection measure of *d'*; *d'* is an index of the ability to discriminate old from new items. Two sets of *d'* values were calculated for each subject. The semantic *d'* values compared the hit rate for target items with the correct rejection rate for semantically changed items, and thus assessed gist memory, that is, participants' ability to discriminate old items from new meaning changed items. The lexical *d'* values compared the hit rate for target items with the correct rejection rate for lexically changed items, and thus assessed verbatim memory, that is, participants' ability to discriminate old items from new wording changed items. The mean *d'* values are presented in Table 1.

The semantic *d'* values and the lexical *d'* values were analysed separately, each with a 2 (context) × 2 (sexual/non sexual target item) mixed factorial ANOVA. Of major interest in each analysis was whether sexual items were recognized better than non sexual items and whether this difference significantly interacted with type of context. The rejection region for all analyses was *p* < .05.

Regarding the semantic *d'* values, sexual items (*d'* = 5.78) were recognized significantly better than non sexual items (*d'* = 1.30), *F*(1,52) = 60.22, MSE = 9.01. Also, as predicted, this factor interacted significantly with context, *F*(1,52) = 6.21,
Table 2. Mean proportion correct recognition data as a function of type of test item, context and sexual/non sexual item type in Experiment 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Target items</th>
<th>Semantically changed items</th>
<th>Lexically changed items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexual items</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office context</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bar context</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non sexual items</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office context</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bar context</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MSe = 9.01. As can be seen in Table 1, although memory for the non sexual items did not differ between the office context and the singles bar context, the sexual items were recognized significantly better in the office context, where they were more inconsistent with social expectations, than in the singles bar context.

Regarding the lexical $d'$ values, although the results were in the predicted direction, none were significant. The main effect of item type approached significance, $F(1,52) = 2.98$, MSe = 7.60, $p < .10$. These data are presented in Table 1. The absence of significant effects with these data is likely because of a floor effect. In this experiment, 5 weeks after hearing the dialogue, participants were at chance levels distinguishing old from lexically changed distracter items; the overall mean in this analysis was $d' = 0.68$.

These results generally suggest that, after 5 weeks, participants have relatively good memory for the semantic content of sexually explicit sentences, but poor verbatim memory for these sentences. To assess whether the pattern of $d'$ data resulted from the hit rate or the correction rate, the proportion correct data were analysed next. These data are presented in Table 2.

Separate 2 (context) $\times$ 2 (sexual/non sexual target item) mixed factorial ANOVAs were performed on the proportion correct for target items, semantically changed items, and lexically changed items. Regarding the hit rate data for correctly recognized old target items, sexual items (mean proportion correct = .66) were recognized significantly better than non sexual items (.455), $F(1,52) = 21.23$, MSe = .81, but this effect did not interact with context, $F < 1.00$.

Regarding the correct rejection rate for semantically changed items, sexual items (.92) were recognized significantly better than non sexual items (.67), $F(1,52) = 50.21$, MSe = .54, but this effect did not significantly interact with context, $F < 1.00$. These results suggest that the pattern of $d'$ data for distinguishing old from semantically changed distracter items is not restricted to either the hit rate or the correct rejection rate alone.

There were no significant effects in the analysis of the correct rejection rates for lexically changed items, but again, this is likely due to the low overall performance recognizing lexically changed items (mean proportion correct = .50).

**Recall data**

The recall data were coded in terms of the percentage of idea units recalled from the four sexual target sentences and the four non sexual target sentences. Idea units were identified in the protocols using criteria specified by Maki and Swet (1987). As a general finding, most participants recalled little of the dialogue after the 5-week
delay, and the recall protocols contained little more than gist memory. Nonetheless, the recall data were analysed with a 2 (context) × 2 (sexual/non sexual target item) mixed factorial ANOVA. The main effect of item type was significant, F(1,52) = 11.08, MSe = .00, with more idea units recalled from sexual items (4.03%) than non sexual items (.93%). The interaction of item type × setting did not approach significance.

To test if the attention drawn to each sexual sentence at the time of hearing the dialogue generalized to the sentence subsequent to each sexual sentence, the number of idea units recalled from the non sexual sentence following each of the four sexual sentences was also assessed and compared to the number of idea units recalled from the four sexual items. The results of the analysis of these data replicated the above recall results and therefore will not be reported. Thus, the idea units in the sexual sentences were more likely to be recalled than the idea units in the non sexual sentences, and the attention to and memory for sexual sentences did not generalize to the sentence heard immediately after each.

In this experiment, although sexual items were more likely to be recalled than non sexual items, the absolute level of recall of sexual items was surprisingly poor. Two reasons for the low recall rates are first, that the task involved free recall rather than cued recall, and second, that memory for only one isolated episode was tested. In the Anita Hill case, her memory, as she reported it, involved cued recall for sexually explicit material that had been presented to her on several occasions. These two differences between the task of our participants versus that of Anita Hill might account for the differences obtained in the absolute levels of recall for sexual material.

Although it appears that the absence of significance of all effects involving lexical d' values resulted from a floor effect for this measure, it was deemed necessary to test this hypothesis in a second experiment. Experiment 2 was conducted for this purpose. Experiment 2 was a replication of Experiment 1 except that participants were tested after 3 hours rather than after 5 weeks, and the recall test was not included.

**EXPERIMENT 2**

**Procedure**

*Participants, design, and materials*

Fifty-five students (44 females and 11 males) from San Bernardino Valley Community College and Chaffey Community College served as participants. Students in each of two classes participated together with their class. The design was a 2 (context)
Table 4. Mean semantic and lexical $d'$ values as a function of context and sexual/non sexual item type in Experiment 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Semantical $d'$</th>
<th>Lexical $d'$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexual items</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office context</td>
<td>9.81</td>
<td>5.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bar context</td>
<td>8.26</td>
<td>4.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non sexual items</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office context</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>1.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bar context</td>
<td>5.34</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Mean proportion correct recognition data as a function of type of test item, context and sexual/non sexual item type in Experiment 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Target/Item</th>
<th>Semantically changed items</th>
<th>Lexically changed items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexual items</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office context</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bar context</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non sexual items</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office context</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bar context</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

× 2 (sexual/non sexual target item) mixed factorial ANOVA. All participants listened to the same dialogue that was used in Experiment 1, with the contextual setting—a professional office or a singles bar—varied between subjects but within each class.

Procedure
In each of the two classes, participants were presented the taped dialogue at the beginning of their class and were tested 3 hours later at the end of their class. The regular course lecture by their instructor intervened. The recognition memory test included the eight old sentences (four sexual and four non sexual) and eight lexically changed ‘new’ distractor sentences from Experiment 1.

Results
The recognition data were scored in terms of the same five measures reported in Experiment 1. These data are presented in Tables 4 and 5. Each of these five measures was analysed separately with a 2 (context) × 2 (sexual/non sexual target item) mixed factorial ANOVA.

Regarding the semantic $d'$ values, sexual items ($d' = 9.04$) were recognized significantly better than non sexual items ($d' = 5.10$), $F(1,54) = 62.23$, MSe = 6.96. The item type × context interaction was also significant, $F(1,54) = 4.09$, MSe = 6.96. As can be seen in Table 4, although memory for the non sexual items did not differ between the office context and the singles bar context, the sexual items were recognized significantly better in the office context than in the singles bar context.

Regarding the analysis of the lexical $d'$ values, sexual items ($d' = 4.91$) were recognized significantly better than non sexual items ($d' = 1.14$), $F(1,54) = 30.45$,.
MSE = 13.10. Thus, the absence of a significant effect of item type in Experiment 1 does appear to have resulted from the floor effect that resulted with this measure. The interaction of item type × context did not approach significance, F < 1.00.

The analysis of the hit rate data for correctly recognized target items yielded a significant main effect of item type, F(1,54) = 11.23, MSE = .50, with sexual items (mean proportion correct = .86) recognized more accurately than non-sexual items (.74). The main effect of context was also significant, F(1,54) = 3.98, MSE = .50.

The analysis of the correct rejection rates for semantically changed distractor items yielded a significant main effect of item type, F(1,52) = 33.53, MSE = .19, with sexual items (.98) recognized better than non sexual items (.85). The interaction of item type × context was also significant, F(1,54) = 7.77, MSE = .19. As can be seen in Table 5, whereas the correct rejection rate for sexual and non sexual items did not differ in the bar context, the correct rejection rate for sexual items was higher than for non sexual items in the office context.

Finally, the analysis of the correct rejection rates for lexically changed distractor items yielded only a significant main effect of item type, F(1,54) = 49.54, MSE = .72, with sexual items (.71) recognized more accurately than non sexual items (.43). Together, these results suggest that the pattern of d' data for both semantic d' and lexical d' measures is not restricted to either the hit rates or correct rejection rates alone.

In Experiment 2, by decreasing the test delay from 5 weeks to 3 hours, the recognition rates for lexically changed items were successfully elevated above the chance rates reported in Experiment 1. In Experiment 2, measures of both gist and verbatim memory were significantly higher for sexual sentences than for non sexual sentences; the main effect of item type was significant for each of the five dependent measures. However, the fact that the interaction of item type × context was significant for the semantic d' values but not for the lexical d' values suggests that the consistency effect affects semantic memory but not verbatim memory for sexual material.

**GENERAL DISCUSSION**

How good is memory for sexually explicit information relative to non sexual material? In these two experiments, sexually explicit sentences were more likely to be recalled and were better recognized than non sexual sentences. Regarding recognition memory, after 5 weeks (Experiment 1) and 3 hours (Experiment 2) participants could discriminate old from new meaning-changed sentences more accurately for sexual than for non sexual sentences. Verbatim recognition memory was significantly better for sexual than non sexual sentences after a delay of 3 hours (Experiment 2) but was only marginally significant after a delay of 5 weeks (Experiment 1). Thus, in an experimental setting, sexually explicit ideas were generally more likely to be recalled and recognized than non sexually explicit ideas. However, in terms of absolute levels of performance, after a delay of 5 weeks, whereas the gist of sexually explicit sentences was recognized relatively well, both verbatim recognition memory and free recall of sexually explicit sentences were surprisingly poor.

Regarding the second factor assessed in this study, the consistency of the context in which the dialogue was presented affected gist memory but not verbatim memory
for sexual and non sexual material. The difference in gist memory, but not verbatim memory, between sexual and non sexual items was greater in the less consistent context, the office, than in the more consistent context, the singles bar. These results suggest that the semantic fit of the context to the target sentence affects memory for the meaning of the target sentence but not memory for the exact wording of the target sentence. Although with real-world visual scenes, the physical appearance of items is more likely to be preserved in memory for schema-inconsistent items than for schema-consistent items (Pezdek et al., 1989), this effect apparently does not generalize to verbatim memory for verbal material.

Based on these findings is it likely that Anita Hill could remember, after 10 years, sexual statements that Clarence Thomas had made in conversations with her? Perhaps so. Although this study assessed memory after only 5 weeks, not 10 years, it does appear that sexually explicit material presented within an otherwise neutral conversation is significantly more memorable than non sexual material. Further, if, as Hill claimed, the sexual comments were uttered in the professional context of her boss’s office, the gist of the sexual comments would be especially well retained because of the inconsistency of context. However, although these results suggest that memory for the gist of sexual phrases may be retained over time, the results suggest that verbatim memory for all phrases, including sexual phrases, is unusual.

This result is similar to Neisser’s (1981) finding regarding John Dean’s testimony at the Watergate Hearings. Much of Dean’s testimony was in the form of the exact wording of his conversations with President Nixon several months prior. Despite Dean’s appearance as a ‘human tape recorder,’ his memory for the conversations, when compared to the actual White House tapes subsequently discovered, revealed that few of these conversations were as he remembered them. However, he was fundamentally right about what happened. Thus, although Anita Hill may be accurate in her verbatim memory for some of the sexually explicit comments uttered, much of what she recalled, although perhaps accurate in gist, is not likely to have been remembered verbatim.

Based on these findings, is it likely that Clarence Thomas would have forgotten, after 10 years, sexual statements that he had made to Anita Hill? Thomas’s inability to remember sexual comments he made to Hill could be explained if he considered the remarks less inconsistent with the professional context of his office. Perhaps Thomas considered sexual comments appropriate within the context of what a man does in pursuing a woman he is attracted to. As such, they would have been less memorable to him than to the woman who considered the relationship and the office to be strictly professional.

In advancing this latter possibility regarding the Thomas–Hill case, we are keenly aware that this study relates more to the memory of the victim of sexual harassment than to the memory of the perpetrator, for this study assessed memory for comments presented to an individual rather than memory for comments generated by an individual (cf. Bobrow and Bower, 1969; Slamecka and Graf, 1978). The generalizability of the results of this study to the Clarence Thomas–Anita Hill incident must be qualified in several other ways as well, qualifications that make obvious the need for more general research on the topic of memory for conversations.

First, certainly listening to a tape recording of an event is very different from participating in the actual event (see Toglia, Shlechter, and Chevalier, 1992, and Larsen and Plunkett, 1987). Second, Anita Hill was remembering directly observed
events over a 10-year interval, whereas the present study involved memory for events over only a 5-week or 3-hour retention interval. However, we suggest that although there may be differences in the absolute levels of memory with increasing retention interval, the pattern of results obtained here might be replicable over extended intervals.

This study thus extends our understanding of eyewitness memory to memory for information in conversations. Given the importance of being able to assess memory for sexual language, we look forward to additional research elucidating memory differences between sexual and non sexual material. The present data highlight the role of contextual factors in affecting memory for sexually oriented conversations and suggest the importance of additional research along these lines.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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APPENDIX: THE CONTEXT-SETTING PARAGRAPHS FOR THE OFFICE AND SINGLES BAR CONTEXT

Office context

The setting is at Syntek, Inc., a company in Santa Clara, California that designs and manufactures integrated circuits for computers. Inside it looks very clean, well-lit, and modern. People within can be seen milling about, busily going about their jobs. All employees look very professional, wearing nice suits and stylish attire. Most people here work 8 to 5 during the business week. The building contains numerous individual offices, computer centres, manufacturing laboratories, meeting rooms, along with a cafeteria, exercise room, lounge, and storage warehouse.

Near a water cooler upstairs a man and a woman are taking a short break. The man is a Vice President. He supervises several people, one of whom is the woman he is talking to.

Singles’ bar context

The setting is in the bar and lounge at the Holiday Inn at Marina del Rey. It’s Friday night, just after 11:00. The only lighting is over the bar; the tables are in shadows. The lounge is full with a lively crowd of men and women. Many have paired off as the evening progressed. Most are clearly single, available, and eager for company.

In one corner a man and a woman are talking over drinks. She came in after work, alone. He came in about 8:00. After one drink alone at the bar, he noticed the woman, found her sexually attractive and migrated in her direction. They have had several drinks together. As the hours pass, they slide closer and closer together at the table. They are now thigh to thigh and talking.
REFERENCES


