

# Exploring the Persistence of Negative Emotional Memories Over Positive Ones: A Qualitative Study

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## Abstract

This study explored the persistence of negative emotional memories over positive ones using a qualitative methodology. By examining participants' lived experiences and perspectives, the study aimed to uncover the underlying factors contributing to the persistence of negative emotional memories. In the research, the purposive sampling approach was employed to select participants with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and ages ranging from 18 to 60. The participants were interviewed with semi-structured, open-ended questions to explore their emotional memories. The selection criteria included the participants' ability to reflect on their emotional memories and effectively communicate their thoughts during interviews. The concepts of emotional memories emerged from the data. The results revealed that negative emotions are remembered more vividly and persistently than positive ones. These negative emotions left a lasting impression, with details and sensations remaining vividly etched in participants' minds over extended periods. Negative emotions that align with prevailing cultural values are more likely to be encoded and recalled. In most cultures that value emotional expressiveness and authenticity, negative emotions may be recalled more prominently, reflecting their perceived significance in representing genuine human experiences.

**Keywords:** cultural values, cognitive bias, emotional memories, memory biases, memory persistence

## 1. Introduction

Rolls (1999) proposes that emotions emerge in response to incentives, encompassing changes in these motivational factors. Zhang et al. (2022) argue that emotions influence individuals' lives, impacting them continuously. Consequently, various emotion regulation strategies offer diverse ways to manage and cope with these emotional effects. Emotions entail adaptive behavioral, physiological, and neural responses, accompanied by a conscious subjective experience that constitutes the feeling of the emotion. They play a crucial role in social interactions, directly influencing behavior (DeWall et al., 2016). Emotions are integral to human cognition and behavior, shaping how individuals perceive, interpret, and respond to the world around them. The intricate interplay between emotions and memory has been a subject of fascination for researchers across various disciplines. One striking phenomenon in this realm is the tendency for negative emotional memories to persist more robustly in human consciousness than their positive counterparts. This intriguing bias in memory retention has garnered significant attention within psychology. Numerous studies have documented the phenomenon of the negativity bias in memory, wherein negative emotional events are more likely to be remembered and recalled with greater detail than positive ones (Rozin & Royzman, 2001a).

### 1.1 The Idea of Negative Event

Baumeister et al. (2001) coined the term "bad is stronger than good" to encapsulate the notion that negative experiences have a more profound impact on individuals' thoughts, emotions, and behavior. This bias is rooted in evolutionary perspectives, where remembering and learning from negative experiences could have had survival advantages for our ancestors (Rozin & Royzman, 2001b).

Nolen-Hoeksema (2000a) argued that the persistence of negative emotional memories has substantial implications for emotional regulation, mental health, and decision-making. Individuals frequently find themselves involuntarily ruminating on past negative experiences, which can contribute to heightened stress,

anxiety, and even mood disorders. Moreover, this memory bias can influence individuals' perceptions of their environments and relationships, potentially fostering a skewed view of reality.

### *1.2 Statement of Problem*

The phenomenon of remembering negative emotions more vividly and persistently than positive ones has long intrigued researchers across disciplines. This cognitive bias, commonly called the negativity bias, highlights the intriguing tendency of human memory to prioritize and retain negative emotional experiences over positive ones (Rozin & Royzman, 2001). While empirical evidence substantiates this bias, the underlying cognitive, neural, and psychological mechanisms contributing to the persistence of negative emotional memories warrant further exploration. Research indicates that negative emotions often leave a more enduring impact on memory than positive emotions (Baumeister et al., 2001). This bias, with its far-reaching implications for emotional regulation, decision-making, and mental well-being, underscores the gravity of the situation. Individuals' tendency to ruminate over negative experiences, even after they have passed, can contribute to increased stress, anxiety, and even mood disorders (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2000b).

### *1.3 Purpose of the Study*

This qualitative study aimed to explore and comprehend the mechanisms and factors influencing the persistence of negative emotional memories in contrast to positive ones. By examining the lived experiences and narratives of individuals affected by this memory bias, the study aims to uncover the cognitive, emotional, and contextual dimensions that contribute to the lasting nature of these memories. Additionally, the research seeks to establish a platform for individuals to share their encounters with the persistence of negative emotional memories. Therefore, utilizing qualitative methods to capture the depth of these experiences, the study strives to present a holistic perspective on how individuals perceive and interpret this phenomenon.

### *1.4 The Research Questions*

- (1) How do individuals describe their personal experiences of remembering negative emotions compared to recalling positive ones?
- (2) What key differences do they perceive in these emotional memories' vividness, intensity, and duration?
- (3) What cognitive processes and emotional factors do individuals perceive as contributing to the pronounced and lasting recall of negative emotional memories instead of their recollections of positive emotions?
- (4) How do they believe these processes interact to create the observed memory bias?
- (5) How do individuals view the role of societal norms, familial values, and peer interactions in shaping their memory experiences?

### *1.5 Significance of the Study*

Understanding memory mechanisms and delving into individuals' subjective experiences, the research provides a unique perspective on how memory mechanisms operate in the context of emotions. The awareness gained can contribute to meaningful insights into the cognitive and emotional processes that shape memory retention and retrieval. Furthermore, advancing emotional psychology, the study's exploration of cognitive processes and emotional factors contributing to memory biases enhances our understanding of emotional psychology. Insights into how individuals perceive, and process negative emotional memories can contribute to developing more comprehensive theories of emotion-cognition interactions.

### *1.6 The Scope of the Study*

The scope of this qualitative study was to investigate the factors and mechanisms underlying the persistence of negative emotional memories over positive ones within the unique context of individual experiences and perceptions. The study involved participants with diverse and unique experiences, each offering a distinct perspective. However, the findings were not generalizable to all individuals, as memory processes and emotional responses can vary widely based on personal history, culture, and other factors. While the study considers the influence of cultural and social factors on memory biases, it did not aim to analyze every cultural nuance comprehensively. The focus is on exploring participants' perceptions within the context of their cultural backgrounds.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1 Remembering Emotions*

The phenomenon of the negativity bias, where negative emotions are remembered more vividly and persistently than positive ones, is a significant area of interest in psychology and cognitive science (Rozin & Royzman,

2001). This bias plays a crucial role in memory processes, prompting questions about the underlying cognitive mechanisms, emotional reflections, and potential cultural influences. The literature on this topic offers diverse perspectives and insights. This componential view of emotion also recognizes a cognitive dimension, understanding that changes in information processing occur alongside affective changes as integral aspects of the emotional process (Clore & Ortony, 1999). This perspective aligns with cognitive theories of emotion centered primarily on humans, supported by a growing body of evidence linking biases in cognitive processing to emotional states (Mathews & MacLeod, 1994; Mineka et al., 1998; Schwarz, 2000). Emotions play a major role in driving behavior. For instance, fear prompts a response of fleeing, anger triggers aggression, love evokes affection and sexual behavior, guilt motivates reparative actions, and shame leads to withdrawal. Therefore, behavior is implicit within the emotion itself, highlighting the practical implications of this research. The adaptive function of the emotion, which is to ensure survival and reproduction, may be specifically geared toward eliciting these behaviors. For example, the emotional state of anger inherently includes the implicit motor patterns associated with aggressive behavior (Berkowitz, 1989).

## 2.2 Cognitive Mechanisms

Research by Baumeister et al. (2001a) introduced the concept that "bad is stronger than good," emphasizing the evolutionary basis for the negativity bias. According to their work, negative emotions, owing to their survival value, undergo more profound cognitive processing and greater cognitive elaboration, resulting in enhanced memory consolidation. This view aligns with the perspective proposed by Rozin and Royzman (2001a), who suggested that negative events exhibit greater "contagiousness" and significantly impact cognitive processing.

Baumeister et al. (2001b) argued that the ability to detect and respond to negative stimuli held crucial adaptive significance for survival throughout human evolution. This evolutionary perspective is crucial in understanding the negativity bias. Consequently, individuals develop cognitive mechanisms that prioritize processing negative information over positive information. This negativity bias is reflected in various cognitive processes, including attention, perception, and memory. Moreover, Rozin and Royzman (2001b) highlighted the pervasive influence of negative events on cognitive processing, suggesting that they capture attention more readily and elicit stronger emotional reactions than positive events. As a result, negative events are more likely to be remembered and integrated into cognitive schemas, contributing to the persistence of negative emotional memories. Negativity bias has significant implications for understanding human cognition and behavior. It suggests that individuals are predisposed to attend to and remember negative information more readily than positive information, which can influence decision-making, social interactions, and emotional well-being. They provide valuable insights into the cognitive mechanisms underlying the negativity bias.

## 2.3 Memory and Emotions

Memory is a complex cognitive process crucial in shaping human behavior and emotions. One intriguing aspect of memory is its differential persistence for negative and positive emotional experiences. This phenomenon has garnered significant attention in psychological research due to its implications for understanding emotional processing and adaptive behavior. Numerous studies have demonstrated that negative emotional memories persist longer than positive ones (Walker et al., 2003a; Kensinger, 2009a; Buchanan & Adolphs, 2004a). Individuals exhibited better recall of negative emotional events than positive ones, suggesting a negativity bias in memory retention (Walker et al., 2003b). Similarly, Kensinger (2009b) reported that negative emotional content enhanced memory consolidation and retrieval, resulting in more durable memory traces. The persistence of negative emotional memories over positive ones has been attributed to various psychological mechanisms. One proposed explanation is the evolutionary significance of prioritizing negative information for survival (Buchanan & Adolphs, 2004b).

### 2.3.1 Persistence of Negative Emotional Memories

Neurobiological research has shed light on the neural mechanisms underlying the persistence of negative emotional memories. Studies indicated that neuroimaging techniques have identified the involvement of brain regions such as the amygdala and hippocampus, mediating the enhanced encoding and consolidation of negative emotional information (Buchanan & Adolphs, 2004c). Their findings suggest a neurocognitive basis for the observed asymmetry in memory persistence between negative and positive emotions. Despite the robust evidence supporting the persistence of negative emotional memories, this phenomenon has notable exceptions and complexities. Some studies have reported contextual factors and individual differences that influence the relative retention of positive and negative emotions. For instance, an emotional event's relevance and intensity may modulate its impact on memory persistence. Negativity bias in memory retention is prevalent (Sharot et al., 2007; Talarico et al., 2009). As evidenced by Ito et al. (1998), neuroscientific investigations have delineated

specific neural pathways implicated in negative emotion processing. The amygdala, a pivotal hub in emotion regulation, displays heightened activity when confronted with negative stimuli, thereby facilitating the consolidation of negative emotion memories.

### 2.3.2 Emotional Amplification and Rumination

Nolen-Hoeksema (2000) proposed the "response amplification" hypothesis, which suggests that individuals tend to ruminate, particularly on negative emotions, thereby intensifying their emotional impact. This prolonged rumination on negative emotions contributes to a heightened recall of these experiences in memory. Consequently, negative emotional memories persist more prominently over time than positive ones. Nolen-Hoeksema's work deepens our understanding of the cognitive processes influencing emotional processing and memory consolidation. It provides a framework for comprehending how specific emotional experiences become deeply ingrained in memory, thus impacting individuals' emotional well-being and mental health outcomes, such as depression and anxiety. By emphasizing the role of rumination in emotional experiences and memory consolidation, Nolen-Hoeksema's research informs interventions aimed at mitigating rumination tendencies and promoting healthier emotional regulation strategies. Ochsner et al. (2002) posit that emotions characterized by higher arousal levels, such as fear or anger, are more prone to be remembered owing to their physiological and cognitive impacts. Negative emotions elicit more robust physiological responses, facilitating heightened encoding and retention processes.

### 2.3.3 Cultural Norms and Emotional Influence

Markus and Kitayama (1991) highlight the profound influence of cultural norms and values on individuals' emotional experiences and memory biases, and they propose that cultural scripts act as cognitive templates, guiding which emotional events are perceived as significant and worthy of remembrance. Societal expectations, traditions, and collective beliefs shape these scripts within a specific cultural context. Their research suggests that negative emotions that align with prevailing cultural values are more likely to be encoded and recalled. For example, cultures that emphasize stoicism or resilience may prioritize remembering adversities and challenges, leading to a heightened recall of negative emotional experiences associated with overcoming obstacles. Conversely, in cultures valuing emotional expressiveness or authenticity, negative emotions may be encoded and recalled more prominently, reflecting their perceived significance in reflecting genuine human experiences. The practical implications of this cultural shaping are far-reaching, impacting individuals' psychological well-being and interpersonal relationships. A deep understanding of how cultural norms influence the encoding and recall of emotional events equips researchers and practitioners with the tools to develop more culturally sensitive interventions and strategies for emotional regulation and memory enhancement. This empowering knowledge enables us to navigate the complex interplay between culture and emotion, fostering more effective and inclusive approaches to understanding and addressing emotional experiences.

### 2.3.4 Theoretical Framework

This study integrates various theoretical perspectives to construct a comprehensive framework for elucidating why negative emotional memories persist over positive ones. These selected theories provide valuable insights into the cognitive, emotional, and sociocultural factors contributing to this memory bias. The framework revolves around Kahneman's Dual-Process Theory and Lazarus's Cognitive Appraisal Theory.

#### (1) Dual-Process Theory

Kahneman's (2011) Dual-Process Theory proposes that human cognition operates via two distinct modes: System 1 (fast, automatic, intuitive) and System 2 (slow, deliberative, analytical). In the context of memory biases, negative emotional memories may undergo more elaborate processing due to their emotional salience, engaging both System 1 and System 2. This theory elucidates why adverse events, with their evolutionary significance, garner heightened attention and are consequently more persistently encoded in memory.

#### (2) Cognitive Appraisal Theory

Lazarus' Cognitive Appraisal Theory (1991) offers insights into how individuals evaluate and interpret emotional experiences. Negative emotions, such as fear or anger, prompt immediate appraisals of threat or harm, leading to profound cognitive processing. For instance, fear may trigger an immediate appraisal of a potential threat, while anger could lead to an immediate appraisal of a perceived injustice. The intensity of these negative appraisals can enhance memory consolidation, thereby contributing to the persistence of negative emotional memories. This theoretical synthesis provides a robust foundation for understanding the mechanisms underlying the persistence of negative emotional memories. It informs potential avenues for further research and intervention strategies to mitigate the impact of negative memory biases.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Protocol Description and Research Design

This study employed a qualitative methodology, utilizing an interpretive approach to delve into the underlying factors contributing to the persistence of negative emotional memories over positive ones. This approach aims to uncover participants' subjective experiences, perceptions, and reflections within their unique contexts (Creswell, 2013). The research design adopted for this study is phenomenological, which centers on understanding participants' lived experiences and perspectives concerning memory biases. Phenomenology offers a framework for an in-depth exploration of the cognitive, emotional, and sociocultural dimensions that shape the phenomenon (Giorgi, 2009; Smith et al., 2009; Van Manen, 2016).

#### 3.2 Institutional Review Board (IRB)

The researcher ensured the study complied with ethical guidelines and regulations by adhering to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements when conducting the research. This process guaranteed the transparency of the study's objectives and prevented any misrepresentation of participants. As a result, the researcher reported the findings accurately, maintaining the integrity of the data without distortion.

#### 3.3 Participants

The researcher used the purpose sampling approach to select participants with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and ages ranging from 18 to 60. This approach ensured a comprehensive exploration of emotional memory perspectives. Selection criteria included participants' ability to reflect on their emotional memories and effectively communicate their thoughts during interviews. Cultural, socioeconomic, and educational diversity were encompassed to capture various viewpoints.

#### 3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

In the study, each participant was interviewed in a semi-structured manner. These interviews with participants were guided by open-ended questions to explore participants' recollections of negative and positive emotions, cognitive processes, reflections on emotions, and perceived cultural or social influences. Throughout the interviews, detailed field notes were taken to capture nonverbal cues, the interviewer's reflections, and contextual observations. Following the interviews, transcriptions were meticulously reviewed multiple times to immerse the researcher in the data and gain a thorough understanding. Key concepts, patterns, and emotions related to memory biases emerged from the data. These were then organized into distinct themes and further refined through iterative analysis and discussion. The alignment of these themes with participants' experiences ensures that the study is grounded in real-life situations. To ensure rigor and relevance to the research questions, themes were systematically reviewed, refined, and defined based on their alignment with participants' experiences.

#### 3.5 Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability are fundamental in qualitative research, ensuring the trustworthiness and credibility of study findings. Various strategies have been employed in this qualitative investigation on the persistence of negative emotional memories to bolster validity and reliability. As advocated by Birt et al. (2016), member checking was utilized to validate the accuracy of interpretations. By allowing participants to review and verify preliminary findings, their perspectives were accurately represented, enhancing the study's credibility. Following the framework outlined by Morse et al. (2002), peer debriefing sought feedback from colleagues or field experts. This external validation process identified potential biases, clarified interpretations, and bolstered the overall validity of the research through critical peer evaluation. Prolonged engagement with data, as emphasized by Charmaz (2006), facilitated comprehensive data analysis and interpretation. This immersion in the data over an extended period enabled a deeper understanding of the studied phenomenon and the identification of emerging themes, thereby enhancing the reliability of the study's findings. By integrating these validity-enhancing strategies into the research design and analysis, this qualitative inquiry maintains the trustworthiness and rigor of its findings. Ultimately, it contributes valuable insights into the persistence of negative emotional memories over positive ones.

#### 3.6 Ethical Considerations

The participant was informed about ethical principles such as informed consent, confidentiality, and participant safety, which were rigorously upheld throughout the study. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw, and their anonymity was maintained. The study's adherence to ethical standards aligns with the American Psychological Association (2020), emphasizing the importance of respecting participants' autonomy, ensuring justice, and promoting beneficence. Through in-depth interview analysis, the study delved into the persistence of

negative emotional memories over positive ones, uncovering cognitive, emotional, and sociocultural factors contributing to this intriguing memory bias. This approach provided valuable insights and upheld ethical integrity by prioritizing participant welfare and consent.

#### 4. Results

The study employed a qualitative approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews with diverse participants aged 18 to 60 from various nationalities. All participant interviews were transcribed verbatim, and the transcripts were carefully analyzed to assign themes. Themes emerged from the data, illustrated by participant quotes, and included vivid memory, recall of emotions, cognitive processes, feelings, and cultural and social factors. These themes were reviewed to ensure they were coherent and distinct (Saldaña, 2013). This approach enabled the researcher to systematically analyze qualitative data, deriving meaningful and reliable themes that addressed the research questions. Additionally, the study provided profound insights into the mechanisms and factors underlying the persistence of negative emotional memories over positive ones.

##### 4.1 Vivid Memory

Participant 1: Negative Emotions: “One vivid memory of a negative emotion occurred during my final exams in high school. I remember feeling intense anxiety and stress because I was unprepared for one of the subjects. The pressure to perform well and the fear of disappointing my parents exacerbated my negative emotions. This anxiety was compounded by the realization that I had neglected to study an important section of the syllabus, which left me feeling overwhelmed and helpless.”

Positive Emotion: “Conversely, a memory of a positive emotion comes from the time I received an acceptance letter from my dream university. The anticipation and excitement built up over the weeks, and when the letter finally arrived, I felt an overwhelming sense of joy and accomplishment. The support and pride my family and friends expressed during that moment enhanced the positive emotions I experienced.”

Participant 2: Negative Emotion: “I vividly remember feeling intense sadness and disappointment. It occurred when I did not get the job I had hoped for after several interviews’ rounds. I had invested much time and energy into the application process and was confident about my chances. I felt a deep sense of failure and self-doubt when I received the rejection email. The circumstances surrounding this memory include sitting alone in my apartment, reading the email, and feeling sinking in my chest.”

Positive Emotion: “A vivid memory of positive emotion is from the day I graduated college. The overwhelming sense of achievement, pride, and happiness was palpable as I walked across the stage to receive my diploma. The circumstances include being surrounded by family and friends, hearing their cheers, and feeling the warm sunshine on my face during the ceremony.”

Participant 3: Negative emotion: “I vividly remember a time when I felt intense anxiety and fear during a car accident. I was driving on a highway when another car abruptly swerved into my lane, causing me to lose control and crash into the median. The circumstances were chaotic, with the screeching of tires, the impact, and the immediate aftermath where I was left shaken and disoriented.”

Positive Emotion: “I recall a moment of sheer joy and excitement when I graduated from university. The day was filled with celebration, surrounded by family and friends, and a sense of accomplishment and pride in reaching an important milestone in my life.”

Participant 4: Negative Emotion: “One vivid memory of a negative emotion occurred during a challenging period at work. I was assigned a high-stakes project with an extremely tight deadline. Despite putting in long hours and immense effort, I received harsh criticism from my supervisor, who felt my work was inadequate. The combination of stress, disappointment, and frustration created a powerful negative emotional memory. The fear of failure and further criticism lingered long after the incident.”

Positive Emotion: “In contrast, a memory filled with positive Emotion happened during a family reunion. After months of planning, my extended family gathered for a weekend retreat. The joy of reconnecting with loved ones, sharing stories, and creating new memories was overwhelming. The environment was filled with laughter, warmth, and a deep sense of belonging. This experience left me with a strong, cherished, positive emotional memory.”

Participant 5: Negative Emotion: “One vivid memory of a negative emotion occurred during my divorce. The day we signed the final papers was tough. The sense of finality and loss hit me deeply, causing a profound feeling of sadness and failure. The overwhelming Emotion of that moment was intensified by realizing how life

was about to change drastically. The experience left a lasting impression due to the event's emotional weight and personal significance.”

Positive Emotion: “A vivid memory of positive Emotion is from when I received an unexpected job promotion a few years after the divorce. The promotion came after hard work and personal growth, and it validated my efforts and resilience. The joy and pride I felt were immense, and I vividly remember celebrating with friends who had supported me through tough times. This memory stands out due to the sense of accomplishment and the positive reinforcement it provided.”

Participant 6: Negative Emotion: “I remember a negative emotion that had a significant impact on me when I was at work and manipulated by co-workers into a situation where I reacted impulsively. It led to a moment of anger, grief, and sorrow. I am easily manipulated into situations when I believe people take advantage of a situation to suit their agenda.”

Positive Emotion: “I experience positive emotions every time I see my grandson or even see him on FaceTime video calls. Because I love him so much, he fills my heart with love and positive emotions. It does not matter what kind of day I have had if I see him, all is well.”

#### 4.2 Recall of Emotions

Participant 1: “When I think back on the memory of anxiety during my exams, it still evokes a sense of unease and discomfort, albeit less intense than at the moment it happened. The memory is often accompanied by physical sensations such as a tight chest or a slight headache, almost as if my body remembers the stress. In contrast, recalling the positive emotion of my university acceptance brings a warm and uplifting feeling. This memory often makes me smile and feel a sense of pride and relief. The difference in how these memories come to mind is quite stark: the negative memory feels heavier and more physically present, while the positive memory feels lighter and more mentally uplifting. The negative emotion tends to resurface with dread and worry, almost as a warning or lesson learned. Meanwhile, the positive memory is accompanied by feelings of happiness and motivation, often as a source of encouragement and inspiration.”

Participant 2: “When I reflect on this negative emotion, the memory feels heavy and somewhat constricting, as if the disappointment is lingering. This memory often comes to mind with vivid details, such as the wording of the rejection email and my immediate reactions. It evokes a physical response, like a knot in my stomach.”

Participant 3: “When I reflect on the negative emotion from the car accident, the memory feels heavy and somewhat distressing. It often comes with a physical sensation of tightness in my chest and a knot in my stomach, reflecting the anxiety and fear I felt at the time.”

Participant 4: “When I recall the negative emotion from the work-related incident, the memory feels heavy and tense. It often comes with a sense of dread and a physical reaction, like a tightening in my chest. The details of the criticism and the stress I felt are vivid and tend to resurface in stressful situations, sometimes even triggering anxiety.”

Participant 5: “When I recall the negative emotion from the day of my divorce, the memory feels heavy and somber. It brings a mix of sadness and a sense of loss, often accompanied by a physical feeling of tightness in my chest. The memory is vivid and detailed, with specific moments of that day standing out clearly, often triggered by discussions about relationships or similar life changes.”

Participant 6: “Whenever a negative memory resurfaces unexpectedly, it still deeply impacts my life. Sometimes, these memories emerge when I am asked to describe why I left a job or when someone brings up something said about me to assess my background. If I still harbor grudges or have not fully addressed those negative emotions, they can stir up overwhelming feelings, making it difficult to provide honest and coherent answers. This emotional intensity can leave me trembling when I am expected to remain composed. The thoughts that flood my mind revolve around recalling my past behavior and self-accusations, blaming myself for not remaining calm, or speaking unwarranted truths. This mental turmoil hampers my ability to think clearly about the situation.”

##### 4.2.1 Cognitive Processes

Participant 1: “When I remember a negative emotion, my mind often revisits the circumstances surrounding the event that triggered the emotion. Specific thoughts related to what went wrong or how I felt in that moment tend to dominate. I may replay conversations or actions that contributed to the negative experience, analyzing them for meaning or searching for potential lessons learned.”

Participant 2: “Images associated with the event may flash in my mind, such as the expressions on people's faces or the environment where the emotion occurred. Details like sounds, smells, or physical sensations can also stand out, intensifying the emotional impact of the memory.”

Participant 3: “Various thoughts and images flood my mind, often revolving around the circumstances that led to the emotion and the consequences that followed. Specific details, such as hurtful words exchanged or moments of disappointment, stand out prominently. I replay the events leading up to the negative emotion, analyzing what went wrong and how it affected me, and others involved. Sometimes, there is a sense of rumination, where I dwell on the negative aspects of the experience, which can exacerbate the emotional response.”

Participant 4: “Sometimes, there are vivid images associated with the memory, like a scene from the past or the facial expressions of those involved.”

Participant 5: “Details such as words spoken, actions taken, or physical sensations experienced during the event stand out prominently, and there is a tendency to ruminate on the negative aspects of the memory, which can intensify the emotional response and lead to feelings of distress or unease.”

Participant 6: “Specific details are easier to remember since I have not dealt with the matter. I believe the only way to deal with negative emotions is to forgive the situation and the person, including myself. It is, however, not easy. When the hurt is deep, I must go over it multiple times until I feel at peace with the emotions in that situation. Sometimes, they can resurface, and I need to do it again. Positive emotions can drive the negative away for a while, but they will return.”

#### 4.2.2 The Feelings

Participant 1: “I often experience a range of emotions, including sadness, frustration, or anxiety, depending on the intensity of the memory. The emotional reaction can be strong, especially if the memory is distressing or triggers unresolved feelings. It can significantly impact my mood and overall well-being, sometimes leading to a temporary dip in mood or feelings of unease. In some cases, dwelling on negative emotional memories for too long can exacerbate stress or anxiety levels, affecting my ability to focus or engage in activities I enjoy.”

Participant 2: “The recollection of emotional experiences often triggers feelings within me. Negative emotions, such as sadness or disappointment, may linger and color my mood, while positive emotions bring warmth and upliftment. Therefore, the intensity of these emotions can vary depending on the significance of the memory, sometimes influencing my interactions and outlook on life. Reflecting on these emotions allows me to navigate past experiences and gain insight into my emotional landscape.”

Participant 3: “The recollection of negative emotions often brings forth a rollercoaster of feelings, from sadness to frustration or even anger, depending on the memory's intensity. If the memory is deeply distressing or stirs up unresolved emotions, it can greatly affect my mood and overall mental state. I find myself grappling with these emotions, sometimes leading to periods of unease or difficulty in maintaining a positive outlook. It is a constant battle to navigate through these emotions and find moments of peace amidst the turmoil.”

Participant 4: “I have noticed that revisiting negative emotions is like opening a Pandora's box of feelings. Depending on the memory, there is a mix of sadness, regret, and sometimes resentment. These emotions can weigh heavily on me, impacting my mood and overall well-being. It is a struggle to shake off the negativity and refocus on the present, especially when the memories resurface unexpectedly. However, I am learning to cope better with time, finding solace in positive distractions and activities that bring me joy.”

Participant 5: “Negative emotions have a way of lingering, casting a shadow over my thoughts and emotions. Whether it is feelings of sadness, frustration, or anxiety, they can have a profound impact on my mood and mental state. Sometimes, the weight of these emotions feels almost suffocating, making it challenging to find relief. However, I am gradually learning to manage these emotions better, seeking support from loved ones and engaging in self-care practices to alleviate the emotional burden.”

Participant 6: “A negative emotion or even the memory of it can make me look ahead with despair and hopelessness, but a positive one can give me the strength to carry on. I know that these positive moments are my source of strength to stay in the light, fighting the darkness at all times. It is like a necessary war for me to win at all costs.”

#### 4.2.3 Cultural and Social Factors

Participant 1: “Cultural factors significantly influence how individuals remember and reflect on negative emotions compared to positive ones. In my cultural background, certain norms and beliefs shape the perception and expression of negative emotions. For instance, there is often a stigma surrounding the expression of sadness



or anger, leading individuals to suppress or downplay these emotions in favor of maintaining a facade of strength or resilience. As a result, negative emotion memories may be recalled with a sense of shame or guilt, causing reluctance to discuss or reflect on them openly.”

Participant 2: “Societal expectations regarding gender roles can influence how individuals are socialized to express and cope with negative emotions. In my culture, men are often socialized to suppress or avoid expressing vulnerability or sadness, while women are encouraged to be more emotionally expressive and nurturing. This difference shapes how negative emotions are remembered and processed.”

Participant 3: “Family upbringing and dynamics also play a crucial role in how individuals learn to cope with negative emotions. For example, a family environment that encourages open communication and emotional expression fosters healthier ways of dealing with negative emotions than a family where emotions are suppressed or ignored. This background influences how negative emotions are remembered and managed.”

Participant 4: “Cultural beliefs and attitudes about mental health and emotional well-being shape how individuals perceive and cope with negative emotions. In my culture, there may be a stigma surrounding mental health issues, leading to reluctance to seek help or support for negative emotions. This cultural context influences how negative emotions are remembered and addressed.”

Participant 5: “Cultural factors significantly influence how individuals remember and reflect on negative emotions compared to positive ones. In my culture, there may be a tendency to suppress or downplay negative emotions to maintain social harmony or save face. In contrast, positive emotions are more openly expressed and celebrated within the cultural context.”

Participant 6: “In my cultural background, which values collectivism and harmony, there is often an emphasis on avoiding confrontation and preserving group cohesion. As a result, there may be a tendency to minimize or suppress negative emotions, such as anger or sadness, especially in public or social settings. Instead, individuals focus on maintaining a positive facade and are more inclined to emphasize positive emotions, such as happiness or gratitude, in their interactions with others.”

## 5. Discussion

The findings of this research align with existing literature on the phenomenon known as negativity bias, which suggests that negative emotions are remembered more vividly and persistently than positive ones (Rozin & Royzman, 2001a). Participants in this study discerned significant differences in the vividness, intensity, and duration of their recollections of negative and positive emotional memories. They frequently described negative memories as more vivid, intense, and enduring. These negative emotions tend to leave a lasting imprint, with details and sensations remaining vividly etched in their minds for extended periods. Conversely, positive emotions were often perceived as fleeting, with less intensity and shorter durations of recall. This discrepancy in vividness, intensity, and duration of emotional memories shapes participants' overall perceptions and experiences of emotional memory recall. The persistent nature of negative memories can profoundly impact individuals' emotional well-being, as these memories are more likely to resurface and influence current emotional states and behaviors. Understanding this bias is crucial for developing strategies to mitigate the impact of negative memories and enhance the recall and influence of positive emotional experiences.

The research by Baumeister et al. (2001a) underscores the profound evolutionary basis for the negativity bias. Due to their survival value, negative emotions undergo more profound cognitive processing and greater elaboration, leading to enhanced memory consolidation. This finding, in line with Rozin and Royzman (2001b) perspective, suggests that adverse events exhibit greater contagiousness and significantly impact cognitive processing. Participants recognize several cognitive and emotional factors contributing to the pronounced and lasting recall of negative emotional memories compared to positive ones, providing significant insights into our understanding of memory consolidation. They highlight the role of attention and salience, noting that negative events tend to capture more attention and remain more salient in memory. Participants attribute the heightened recall of negative emotions to activating survival instincts or threat detection mechanisms, prioritizing processing negative information. The negative emotions of fear and sadness embed these memories more deeply in their minds.

Additionally, negative events that are significant to one's sense of self or well-being enhance recall. Cognitive processes like repetitive thinking about negative events exacerbate the persistence of negative emotional memories. Participants describe how dwelling on negative experiences prolongs their emotional effects and reinforces the associated memory traces. This complex interplay of cognitive processes and emotional factors contributes to the pronounced and lasting recall of negative emotional memories, contrasting with the more

transient nature of positive emotions. Participants identified several cognitive and emotional factors contributing to the pronounced and lasting recall of negative emotional memories compared to positive ones. They emphasized the role of attention and salience, noting that negative events tend to capture more attention and remain more salient in memory. Participants linked the heightened recall of negative emotions to activating survival instincts or threat detection mechanisms, prioritizing processing negative information. This intensity of negative emotions, such as fear or sadness, also contributes to the lasting impact of these memories. Participants described how the visceral nature of negative emotions embeds these memories more deeply in their minds.

Additionally, cognitive processes like rumination and repetitive thinking about negative events exacerbate the persistence of negative emotional memories. Dwelling on negative experiences prolongs their emotional effects and reinforces the associated memory traces (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2000). Research indicates that memory is a complex cognitive process that shapes human behavior and emotions. One aspect of memory is its differential persistence for negative and positive emotional experiences. Studies have demonstrated that negative emotional memories persist longer than positive ones (Walker et al., 2003a; Kensinger, 2009a; Buchanan & Adolphs, 2020a).

For example, Walker and colleagues (2003b) found that individuals exhibited better recall of negative emotional events than positive ones, suggesting a negativity bias in memory retention. Negative emotional content enhances memory consolidation and retrieval, producing more durable memory traces (Kensinger, 2009b). The persistence of negative emotional memories over positive ones has been attributed to various psychological mechanisms. Negative experiences, such as threats or dangers, may have had more excellent adaptive value for our ancestors, leading to the preferential encoding and retention of negative emotional events in memory (Buchanan & Adolphs, 2020b). Participants in this study also highlighted these mechanisms, noting how survival instincts and threat detection processes contribute to the enhanced recall of negative emotions.

Participants reported that societal norms, familial values, and peer interactions significantly shape their memory experiences, with peer interactions being a particularly interesting aspect. These interactions influence memories' emotional content and interpretation, contributing to the collective understanding of socially acceptable or desirable emotional experiences. For example, familial values and dynamics also play a crucial role in shaping memory experiences. Family upbringing, cultural practices, and intergenerational transmission of values influence how individuals process and remember emotional events. Participants indicated that family narratives and traditions shape their understanding of emotions and memories, influencing which experiences are prioritized or emphasized in memory recall.

Participants recognized the multifaceted influence of societal norms, familial values, and peer interactions on interpreting and sharing emotional memories. These social influences contribute to the complexity and richness of individuals' memory landscapes. It aligns with Markus and Kitayama (1991), who explored the influence of cultural norms and values on individuals' emotional experiences and memory biases. They proposed that cultural scripts act as cognitive templates, guiding which emotional events are perceived as significant and worthy of remembrance. Their research suggests that negative emotions aligning with prevailing cultural values are more likely to be encoded and recalled. For example, in cultures that value emotional expressiveness and authenticity, negative emotions may be recalled more prominently, reflecting their perceived significance in representing genuine human experiences.

### *5.1 Limitations of the Study*

Although efforts to include various participants have been made, the sample may only partially be the larger population, potentially constraining the generalizability of the findings. This results in a skewed understanding of how different populations experience and recall emotional memories. Moreover, relying on self-reported data from participants introduces another layer of potential bias. The study's cross-sectional design captures participants' experiences simultaneously rather than capturing the dynamic and evolving nature of memory processes over time. Longitudinal studies would be more effective in understanding how negative emotional memories persist and change over extended periods.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study explored the persistence of negative emotional memories compared to positive ones. The findings corroborate existing literature, which indicates that negative emotions are remembered more vividly and persistently than positive ones (Rozin & Royzman, 2001a). Participants in the study reported significant differences in the vividness, intensity, and duration of their emotional recollections. Specifically, they described negative memories as more vivid, intense, and enduring. These negative emotions left a lasting impression, with details and sensations remaining vividly etched in their minds over extended periods. Positive emotions,

conversely, were often perceived as fleeting, characterized by less intensity and shorter durations of recall. Understanding this bias toward negative emotional memories is vital for developing strategies to mitigate their impact. Addressing this imbalance not only enhances the recall and influence of positive emotional experiences, but it also holds the potential to significantly improve emotional well-being.

Baumeister et al. (2001a) highlight the profound evolutionary basis for the negativity bias. Due to their survival value, negative emotions undergo more extensive cognitive processing and elaboration, leading to enhanced memory consolidation. This finding aligns with Rozin and Royzman's (2001a) perspective, which suggests that negative events are more contagious and significantly impact cognitive processing. Emotions such as fear and sadness were particularly noted for embedding these memories more deeply. Additionally, negative events, especially those that significantly impact one's sense of self or well-being, were found to enhance recall, underscoring their profound impact. Cognitive processes, such as repetitive thinking about negative events, exacerbate the persistence of negative emotional memories (Rozin & Royzman, 200b).

This finding underscores the evolutionary basis for the negativity bias, where negative emotions undergo more extensive cognitive processing and elaboration, leading to enhanced memory consolidation (Baumeister et al., 2001b; Rozin & Royzman, 2001). The study underscores the multifaceted influence of societal norms, familial values, and peer interactions on interpreting and sharing emotional memories. These social influences contribute to the complexity and richness of individuals' memory landscapes, highlighting the integral aspect of social and cultural context in shaping how memories are formed, retained, and recalled. This understanding is crucial for further research in memory studies and has significant implications for our understanding of human memory processes.

### 6.1 Future Research

A mixed methods approach to integrating in-depth interviews with large-scale surveys or experimental studies can validate qualitative findings and uncover broader patterns and correlations. Studies will assess the effectiveness of various therapeutic methods of cognitive-behavioral therapy, mindfulness practices, and emotional regulation strategies over extended periods. It will help understand the sustainability of intervention effects and the mechanisms that influence memory processes. It will also incorporate neuroimaging and psychophysiological measures to offer objective insights into the brain and body responses associated with negative emotional memory persistence. Techniques such as fMRI, EEG, and biometric assessments will complement self-reported data, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

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