

# InSights

**1 SELFISHNESS**  
Individuals who behave selfishly may misremember their own behavior to see themselves in a better light, research published in the journal *Nature Communications* suggests.

In five experiments, more than 3,100 participants split money between themselves and anonymous partners. Then, in a surprise test, they were asked to remember how much they gave away. Overall, participants tended to recall being more generous than they actually were, even when offered a monetary bonus for recalling accurately. They were especially likely to misremember if they had given less than what they had previously deemed “fair.”

**2 SCHEMAS**  
Mental constructs that help us make sense of the world—called *schemas*—may lead us to misremember information that is inconsistent with previously held views.

In one experiment published in *Human Communication Research*, participants saw sets of statistics related to societal issues. When asked to recollect the numbers and the relationship between them later, they more accurately recalled those that coincided with widely-held views, like that gay marriage has gained support in recent years. But when the statistics conflicted with common beliefs—like that Mexican immigration had increased over



## Memory Mishaps

**Memories regularly become distorted with the passage of time. But it's also possible for the brain to incorrectly recall events hours or even minutes after they occur. Recent studies highlight three psychological factors that may make someone more likely to misremember a recent event.** —Devon Frye

says psychologist William Hirst, who studies social memory at The New School. “But what you remember about the past is shaped by your interactions with others.” On the bright side, testing individuals’ recall before the collaboration task made them less likely to fall victim to social contagion. “If you somehow retrieve the information [beforehand],” Hirst explains, “you may become less susceptible.”

the past decade, which it did not—they were less likely to recall the stats accurately.

“Pre-existing biases can distort our memories,” explains study author Jason Coronel, who researches communication at Ohio State University. Viewing memory as a reconstructive process that relies on schemas “might make people more willing to scrutinize the accuracy of their memories.”

**3 SOCIAL CONTAGION**  
Interactions with others can distort memory through the process of social contagion, research published in the journal *Cognition* finds. In two experiments, participants memorized lists of words, then collaborated with others to recall them. But participants had not seen identical sets of words. When multiple other group members recalled words, participants were significantly more likely to falsely report that they had, too.

“We tend to think of memory like a computer,”