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The Varieties of Remembered Experience:

Moving Memory Beyond the Bounded Self

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When William James wrote *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (James, 1902/2012), he sought to convince a skeptical audience that religion was an appropriate subject for scientific study. Since the advent of the autobiographical memory movement dating back to the early 1980s (MARTIN – SUPPLY KEY CITATIONS HERE; E.G. YOUR WORK; RUBIN; NEISSER; GRUNEBERG), memory researchers with an interest in "real world" remembering have sought to expand the boundaries of what might constitute legitimate scientific inquiry in memory studies. By the time of the publication of the widely cited Conway and Pleydell-Pearce (2000) *Psychological Review* article on the self-memory system, autobiographical memory research had clearly arrived in the mainstream.

What the articles in this splendid special issue demonstrate is that the boundaries of the scientific study of memory have expanded even further to include investigations of collective memory; socially-distributed memory; bodily memory; and even intercorporeal memory (aligning of bodily memory between a pair of individuals). Drawing on multiple disciplines, including human-computer interface design, sociology, anthropology, social psychology, and not to be overlooked (!), cognitive psychology, the researchers assembled in this special issue review innovative and rigorous methodologies for capturing how memory can be understood to be a contextual and sociocultural phenomenon that cannot be confined to the private mind of a bounded individual.

Perhaps a valuable way to grasp the diverse contributions of these authors is to track their explorations of memory all the way from the single individual to the couple to the group and ultimately to a larger community. As we touch on their valuable insights regarding each of these loci of memory, we can form a more coherent picture of how remembered experience belongs both within and outside the individual.

When Ebbinghaus and the other pioneers of memory research began their initial laboratory studies of recall, they focused on list learning and other forms of verbal processing. Even in contemporary autobiographical memory research, we tend to favor memory that is reported through language and visual imagery. However, the explosion of research on implicit and procedural memory and a renewed interest in non-conscious processing has revived work in "bodily memory," or what Summa and Koch define as "how memory itself is expressed through the movement or sensation of the body reflecting previous experience." Drawing on Ryle's distinction, they characterize bodily memory as "knowing how" rather than "knowing that." Connected to these bodily memories, which may have the characteristics of motor sequences, postures, gestures, and pain sensations, are cognitive and emotional associations, such that a particular bodily memory may invoke a full range of lived experience. This was the conviction of the psychoanalyst, Wilhelm Reich, who took these ideas to an extreme with his emphasis on orgone energy and physical massage of patients to release repressed memory. Thankfully, the current authors provide a more rigorous and scientific demonstration of the validity and value of the bodily memory concept. Their empirical study illustrates that different personal memories and associated

affective states are invoked by light vs. strong movement. These encouraging findings build on our previous knowledge about the "facial feedback" hypothesis and illustrate that emotional memory is stored throughout the body and not just in facial expression or conscious emotional experience.

Brown and Reavey take on what some might conceive as the most private and personal of autobiographical memories – memories of trauma – and show how these memories are actually complex socially contested phenomena. They coined the phrase, "Vital Memories," to emphasize how crucial these memories are to individuals' sense of self. We might consider vital memories to be a form of self-defining memory within an individual's larger narrative identity (Singer, Blagov, Berry, & Oost, 2013). What distinguishes these memories, which are often of physical or sexual abuse, is their unresolved nature. As the authors elaborate, vital memories exist in a tension between highly personal and social interpretations – the social dimensions of these memories can be facilitative or coercive. Helping professionals can provide solace and context to the sufferer of an abusive experience; perpetrators or enablers of abuse can press the victim toward denial, repression, or self-questioning. In all of these cases, the memory cannot be considered to reside solely in the victim's private experience. For this reason, there may be several conflicting narratives that vie to be the "true" rendering of what happened and what can be recalled. Similarly, there are multiple meanings and values ascribed to the individual's capacity to retain or let go of the traumatic memory. The survivor's agency can be expressed through a decision to work through and release oneself from a memory's hold, just as it also can be found in a commitment to frank disclosure and continued focus on the ramifications of the experience. Once again, the role of others in

an individual's efforts at agency is critical – how do they assist with valuable forgetting or prevent necessary remembering?

Once we begin to consider vital memories as entities that bear the weight of social construction, we see that their narratives stretch across physical space. As Brown and Reavy demonstrate, memories of victimization that have led to hospitalization or foster care or other forms of institutional intervention become mediated by telephone, text, photograph, and music. They write,

> The topological boundaries of the lifespace of the forensic mental health patient do not map on to the metric space of the ward – they are considerably broader and more spatially complex. In this way, we can begin to think that remembering must also follow these topological planes of connection, which diverge considerably from our usual understanding of (Euclidean) space and (chronological) time.

As the aftermath of exposure to trauma leads individuals to become part of institutional cultures (including the psychotherapeutic one), these institutions' language, symbol systems, and meanings further influence individuals' private registry of the original experience. Law enforcement, judicial, and medical accounts may compete with therapeutic, family, and personal formulations of the events within the memory. Finally, Brown and Reavey assert that if "vital memories" comprise these diverse forms of narrative discourse, they cannot be studied within a single discipline or through a solitary lens. Interdisciplinary and collaborative research is the only means to capture the many truths and (to the degree there is one) the larger Truth of these powerful self-defining memories.

Thus far, we have continued to place the locus of memories within the bounded individual, despite emphasizing the role that forces beyond private thought might play in in his or her memories. In contrast, Harris, Barnier, and Sutton's work highlights the role of socially distributed memory in couples. They review the literature on shared remembering, transactive memory, and collaborative recall. Interestingly, an unexpected finding in the collaborative recall literature, which they also found to be true in their studies of couple's shared memories, is that remembering together is not always facilitative.

As Harris et al. determined, what encourages more effective shared memory is the nature of communication that occurs within the dyad. Couples that recruit higher order thinking, which allows them to find commonalities and themes among events, show more efficient recall. Most importantly, couples that display extensive coordination of recall by dividing responsibilities show facilitative rather then inhibitive patterns of collaborative recall. These couples reflect the working of what Harris call a "dynamic coordinating system." Here is where our conventional views of memory begin to stretch – the locus of memory is no longer the individual but a socially distributed system across two individuals, which includes the psychological and material manifestations of this relationship (e.g., their home, their belongings, their familiar routines).

Interestingly, Harris et al.'s work on older couples' collaborative remembering found that facilitation was particular to episodic memories rather than semantic remembering. Since semantic memory is preserved better than episodic memory in older adults, this result suggests that working together augments what would normally be a weaker episodic recall for each separate individual. In related research, Piolino et al.

(2012) reported that when recalling self-defining episodic memories older adults did not show the typical decrement in episodic recall. Considering this finding in light of Harris et al.'s result, it is possible that memories of personal events retrieved collaboratively have an emotional depth and self-relevance that allows for greater recall of individual detail and more vivid recollection. In this sense, members of a couple that are more emotionally in tune with each other may both enjoy their shared recollections more and be able to access a given memory with greater specificity. Their intimacy yields a supportive scaffolding that makes up for what would be an episodic deficit if either were recalling the memory alone.

In a forthcoming book (Singer and Skerrett, 2014), we draw on both laboratory and clinical work with couples to illustrate the power that shared memories of their relationship have for reinforcing the experience of mutuality and resilience in couples. "We-Stories" are particularly vivid, well-rehearsed, and emotionally evocative shared memories that serve as a touchstone or metaphor for the couple's sense of connection. Couple therapists can help couples to define these stories and leverage them to remind them of their compassion and support for each other. As Harris et al. write in summarizing some of their findings regarding couples' shared remembering,

> Those individuals who scored highly on measures of intimacy and social satisfaction had richer, more detailed episodic memories of events that they had shared with their partner compared to those who scored lower on measures of intimacy and social satisfaction (Priddis et al., 2013).

What we also appreciate about Harris et al.'s work is that they look at more than

just the accuracy or content of the memories recalled, but also at the process of remembering that occurs within the couple. They have uncovered some provocative patterns that reflect the rigidity of gender roles – how women function as the organizers and planners with regard to the couple's recall functions, relying more on the use of external memory aids (e.g., calendars, photographs, physical momentos), while men are more socially reliant on women for memory aid. They illustrate this process with a moving example of an older couple in which the husband is suffering from escalating memory loss, and the wife has learned mnemonic tricks and modulations in her behavior that provide him with both cognitive cues and emotional support.

We can now move from couples to small groups and touch on some of the highlights of Cienki, Bietti, and Kok's innovative study of bodily alignment during shared recollection. These researchers videotaped a family and a group of friends during each group's efforts at remembering recent collective experiences. The authors employed both qualitative and quantitative analyses to measure the degree to which the participants in each group aligned vocal expression, gesture, eye gaze, and bodily posture as they engaged in positive group-affirming recollections. They write,

> …[W]e believe that conversations among members of small groups may be considered as good examples of collaborative activities in which distributed and hybrid memory systems, constituted by the interplay of biological and social resources, may emerge.

The sample photographic illustrations from their study speak volumes more than we can explain in print. Viewing the photographs from their study reminds one of many late-night across-the- kitchen table conversations among family members or old friends. As

recollections flow, a synchrony of body, voice, and laughter emerge that is not unlike the rhythms and counterpoint of an intricate string quartet. Their analyses take us in compelling fashion beyond individual memory and into the realm of collective remembering – a remembering that not only brings to the surface a certain shared social reality, but also is in and of itself a way of cementing and sustaining group identity. As members align, they are creating an intersubjective entity through their intercorporeal communication – what Thomas Ogden (xxxx) has called the "analytic third" and what the late psychoanalyst, Stephen Mitchell (xxxx), referred to as moments in which "love is in the air"(see also Singer, 2005, Chapter 5, for more discussion of intersubjective space in relationships).

As psychologists, we are more comfortable in the realm of the psychological study of memory when we consider the individual, couple, family or even small group, but how might we understand memory when it is a shared cultural experience among a larger group of people, many of whom do not know each other and might never interact again? Collective remembering, as Murakami illustrates in her article on war veterans' pilgrimages to former battlefields or P.O.W. encampments, is a way in which individuals within the same culture retain a relationship to a significant past event that has become part of that culture's history. Monuments, museums, public ceremonies, commemorative associations, and reunions are all part of this collective remembering. Given this, Murakami asks how individuals in the context of a collective remembering event – a pilgrimage to a former Japanese P.O.W. camp - undergo a personal transformation that draws both on collective memory and their own personal idiosyncratic experience.

In her analysis, a pilgrimage contains a master narrative that delineates cultural traditions regarding the stages and outcomes of travel to a sacred place. Going on a pilgrimage implies a goal of transformation or renewal. It is emphatically a psychological journey at the same time that it is a literal travel to a hallowed place. One expects that the trip will involve some self-sacrifice and endurance – that it will allow one to engage with a place of reverence and spiritual importance and that this engagement will lead to a change in one's current interior world. This change will be a deepening of one's current convictions or an insight that takes one in a new direction.

Yet whether the pilgrimage is done alone or in the company of others, by going to an acknowledged sacred place, it is aligning one's psychological destiny with others who have come before. In this sense, it adheres to the master narrative and takes on the form of collective remembering. The pilgrim leaves a community to go to the sacred site, but re-enters a different community – those who have found a shared meaning in this ritual of passage and veneration. In this way an intensely personal experience of remembering is simultaneously part of and influenced by a ritual activity that belongs to the larger culture. Rituals, ceremonies, structured prayer, and song provide an emotional rhythm to the transformation process. The material context (what Murakami calls the material mediation of memory) – memorial plaques, uniforms, poppies pinned to chests, and physical structures – all of these elements – concretize and give emotional resonance to the transformation, yet at the same time they remind the pilgrim that the past endures. It has a solidity that does not vanish, even if the individual has moved to a different place psychologically with regard to past wounds or grief. The old self is not eliminated – it lives in a persisting but altered relationship to the past. In the great psychoanalyst, Hans

Loewald's (xxxx) words, the individual has turned "ghosts into ancestors" (see Singer & Conway, 2011). Two of the pilgrims that Murakami describes, Ray and Ruth, put it exactly this way. After the collective pilgrimage with the other veterans, they have finally managed to "let go of ghosts."

We are also very grateful to Murakami for the subtlety of her analysis in conveying the complexity of pilgrims' collective remembering experience. Although the individuals involved do go through a communal transformational process, she notes at numerous points that many of their highly private and idiosyncratic experiences were not voiced and did not become part of the shared and publically validated narrative of transformation and release of the past. As researchers who retain a fundamental interest in the most personal and intimate memories of the single individual, we wonder with her about the fate of these distinctive memories. Are they smoothed over by the power of the collective transformation; do they become more peripheral as the master narrative of healing is embraced, or is it their nature to persist and leave some rough edges on any reconciled surface? Does some doubt or tension linger that cannot be fully removed by the collective transformation that links them with the other pilgrims?

In considering Kopietz and Echterhoff's article, also on another form of collective remembering, we could not help recalling the famous beginning of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, "All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." These authors explored German citizens' memories for events from a culturally significant event, the hosting of the World Cup in Germany in 2006. Drawing on social reality theory, they sought to demonstrate that shared episodic memories of the World Cup events would serve the function of strengthening confidence in individuals' memories and also reinforce their sense of belonging to a larger group. Using different

instructions across two studies, they found that participants' perception of the shared relevance of their remembered experiences was a powerful influence on their self-perceived memory accuracy and their general overall identification with Germany. In other words, going through the World Cup together as Germans amplified their retention of memory details and deepened their social ties with each other.

However, the authors point out that the World Cup was an extremely positive experience for most Germans. In contrast, the shared relevance of different episodic memories, perhaps memories of war or ethnic conflicts, which invoke more ambivalent feelings and potential alienation, might affect convictions about the memories' veridicality and also would not lead to a deepening of social ties. It is likely that these negative memories would be remembered more idiosyncratically and not cement the common bond that positive memories can create. The power of collective memory clearly depends on the strength of affiliation with the larger culture that weaves individual rememberers together through a sense of shared purpose and common heritage. The authors write,

> Thus, it is reasonable to assume that remembering World War II and the Holocaust will lead more to a disengagement of their national identity. The same might be true for American's memory for the Vietnam War or the Australian's memory of the stolen generation.

No wonder most societies rely on ritual, tradition, and ceremony to heighten perceived positive commonality and in turn help individual citizens to feel more connected and interdependent. These efforts inspire a stronger collective memory and in turn these episodic memories reinforce the group identification. And as social reality theory would predict, and the authors demonstrated, the sense of shared relevance leads

individuals to perceive their individual episodic autobiographical memories to be more accurate. In this way cultural identification is internalized and made part of personal experience.

Unfortunately, as Stone and Hirst illustrate in their article, publically engineered silences or omissions can lead to states of forgetting in individual citizens that are also internalized within their personal memories of historical and political events. Building off of a body of experimental research on "retrieval-induced forgetting," they illustrated with a study of Belgian citizens that listening to a speech by the Belgian King which highlighted only selected topics had an interfering influence on the citizens' ability to retain political information that they had received prior to hearing the speech. The implication from this finding and the authors' other research is that collective memory can be shaped by inducing forgetting as much as it influenced by signaling what should be retained. The authors assert,

> If collective memories are to serve as a foundation on which to build a collective identity, then what is *not* remembered is as critical to forming this identity as what is remembered.

Collective remembering and collective forgetting each forge individuals' larger relationship to their culture and community. Stone and Hirst's application of experimental techniques to actual life settings challenges us to consider how the purveyors of propaganda can employ selective interference through press release, speech, and broadcast media to divert us away from truths that we might seek to retain or information that runs counter to the state's or private corporations' agendas.

The last article to be considered by VandenHoven takes us to the further boundaries of memory – memory that extends beyond the human and embraces the

human-computer interface. While films like *Her* are raising questions about the possibility of having a plausible intimate relationship with an operating system based in one's cell phone, researchers are increasingly exploring the role of new technologies in memory. As VandenHoven illustrates, we are rapidly transitioning to a world where we rely less on internally cued remembering and more on externally cued memory. Instead of drawing on mental imagery and internal dialogue, our memories are constantly piqued by digital images captured in cell phone Instagrams and Vines videos.

What does the sheer saturation of these digital images through Facebook and other social media mean for our capacity to filter and select what memories we should retain? As VandenHoven suggests, we face a problem of "curation," not collection. We now have the facility to retain any amount of information or image that we desire, but perhaps our former limitations forced us toward selectivity – to make choices that helped to define our priorities and determine what mattered enough to be remembered. Technology, as it takes over the practical function of recording and retaining our lived experience, may allow us to keep life logs, so that every lived moment is encoded, but how are we to discriminate among this surfeit of experience?

We wonder if eventually our interface with technology will lead us to develop an internal tagging system so that our computer-aided memories will tag experiences at inception. If deemed sufficiently important to be retained, the computer would register this and impede the typical decay that effaces most memory traces. Such a device would be like a Flashbulb Memory "now print" mechanism that would alert us at memory encoding that this new memory should be considered a self-defining turning point in our ongoing sense of identity.

Materially-aided memory devices, such as the Conversation Cube, with its four-side flow of digital images, are creative forays into how we might build more humane connections with the electronic repositories of our past experiences. They encourage person-machine interaction, narrative emplotment that gives life to two-dimensional images, and social interaction among individuals who share the device. Despite the dystopic fantasies they invoke of machines taking over or humans ceding their conscious will to the operating systems that are meant to serve them, these devices helps us to see the potential benefits of materially-aided memory. For the elderly suffering memory loss, or patients in need of cognitive remediation due to stroke or accident, memory prosthetics could be potential vehicles for the preservation or renewal of the self. Computer-aided memory may allow individuals to retain a fundamental sense of identity, providing unity and purpose within the self-concept through the capacity to link past, present and future.

Taken as a whole, these far-reaching articles leave us with some challenging insights about a new conception of memory and memory research. Memory extends to the body, the couple, the group, the community, and the larger culture. More unsettling is our awareness that memory is beginning to merge with technology in ways that leave the boundaries of human and non-human increasingly unclear. As we expand our conceptions of the loci of memory, as well as of the processes that encode, store and retrieve our memories, these articles also beautifully demonstrate the diversity of methods that we can employ to track remembered experiences. Laboratory studies, field experiments, videotaping and coding, interviews, focus groups, and participant observation – all are represented here and yield valuable data, analysis, and interpretation.

Finally, underlying the wide range of findings reported in these articles is a fundamental theme of memory's role in human society. Autonoetic memory, as Tulving defined it, is our knowledge that we personally and uniquely engaged in a particular past event. Yet at the same time that we claim conscious ownership of our lived experience, we must also acknowledge that to be human is to be part of a biological reality that extends beyond our conscious awareness – to be human is to be embedded in networks of intimate and more extended relationships – to be human is to belong to a larger collective that helps to shape our memory and that remembers with us. This variety of individuality, corporality, and community takes us toward a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of how memory in the human species works. We are grateful to the editors and assembled authors for moving us closer to this vision.