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Editorial

From individual to collective memory: Theoretical and empirical perspectives

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THE PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY OF SOCIAL MEMORY PHENOMENA

Very often our memories of the past are of experiences or events we shared with others. And ''in many circumstances in society, remembering is a social event'' (Roediger, Bergman, & Meade, 2000, p. 129): parents and children reminisce about significant family events, friends discuss a movie they just saw together, students study for exams with their roommates, colleagues remind one another of information relevant to an important group decision, and complete strangers discuss a crime they happened to witness together. Psychology is at the heart of recent interdisciplinary efforts to understand the relationships between an individual remembering alone, an individual remembering in a group, and the group itself remembering.

The 10 papers in this special issue of *Memory* exemplify, evaluate, and extend a range of increasingly mainstream conceptual frameworks and empirical paradigms for the psychological study of diverse social memory phenomena. Established and emerging memory researchers adapt and apply theoretical approaches from the cognitive, developmental, clinical, and cultural psychology of memory, as well as ideas from the broader cognitive sciences about the epidemiology of representations, distributed cognition, and social ontology. At the same time, they analyse and illustrate tightly focused methods for investigating transactive memory, collaborative recall, memory contagion, and the dynamics of decision-making in small groups.

Across six theoretical reviews and four original empirical reports, this special issue addresses two major themes. First, how do groups operate to process information, especially memories—what are the costs and benefits of collaboration? Second, what are the pathways to and between individual and collective memory—how does individual memory constrain and contribute to collaborative remembering, and how do groups shape individual memory?

We approach these questions with some confidence that previous disciplinary and theoretical gulfs can be bridged, especially if we look for coordination and interaction between different forms of memory, and between different levels or grains of analysis. Such an approach should overcome any residual suspicion or mutual disinterest between psychological and social-scientific studies of memory. There is no need, we suggest, for over-ambitious universalism on either side: there is no good scientific reason either to discount social contexts as mere external triggers to the real memory processes in the head, or to treat remembering as an entirely social and worldly business to which psychology is irrelevant.

The contributions to this special issue of *Memory* highlight the need for and value of

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concerted psychological attention to questions about social and collective memory, which will combine with and enrich burgeoning traditions in other disciplines (cf. Middleton & Brown, 2005; Wertsch, 2002). This brief introduction is not the place to survey the potential relevance to the psychological study of social memory phenomena of ideas about distributed cognition (Barnier, Sutton, Harris, & Wilson, in press; Beach, 1988; Clark, 1997; Hutchins, 1995; Kirsh, 2006; List, in press; Sutton, 2006; Wilson, 2005), or of contributions from the social sciences (Cole, 2005; Connerton, 1989; Olick, 1999) and philosophy (Campbell, 2003, 2006; Hoerl & McCormack, 2005; Sutton, 2007, in press). It is also not the place to consider the complex and uncertain legacy of Bartlett's attempt to build social psychology into the heart of a theory of remembering, nor to diagnose what has recently been called a ''crisis of memory'' in Western culture or academia. Readers concerned with these questions, which are of considerable interest in the philosophy and sociology of science, will find ample raw material in the papers that follow, as well as in the citations above.

Our intention in this introduction instead is to give a sense of the diversity of the phenomena under investigation. The terminological confusions about ''collective memory'' that our contributors identify and resolve in their own ways are due, we suggest, to the multiplicity of relevant and under-theorised phenomena, not to their non-existence. It's not that science has settled what counts as a case of remembering, and that different theorists then disagree over whether anything within that fixed domain is in fact *collective* remembering. Rather, as Hirst and Manier argue in our opening paper, what might look like competing theoretical approaches in fact apply to distinct, but complementary, aspects of the world of memory phenomena. So the aim should be to integrate observations of and claims about social memory phenomena into a broader picture of the mechanisms underlying the transformation and transmission of all kinds of memories. This picture will rely centrally, although perhaps not exclusively, on our best cognitive theories of and methods for studying individual memory.

Taken together, the 10 papers in this special issue of *Memory* suggest that an empirically tractable psychological approach to the relationships between individual and collective memory will naturally be anchored in the study of small groups rather than, for instance, nations, and will be aided by a set of dimensions on which cases of remembering may vary. We can pay attention to the size and nature of different groups with different histories, aims, and structures, and to the different cultural or institutional roles that group members play. We can ask, for example, which of the many possible patterns of information-sharing and transmission the group employs, how decision-making and other executive roles are distributed, and by which particular methods the group tracks its own past actions and decisions over time. More specifically, drawing on cognitive, organisational, and developmental psychology, we can seek ways to analyse the dynamics and micro-processes of collaboration and discussion in different groups, and we can study the different media they employ for informational and social exchange, their explicit or implicit social decision schemes, and the functions of disagreement within different groups. We can examine the forms in which individual and group views about the shared or unshared past are expressed, and analyse the product of, for instance, group recall or discussion in relation to the aims of the task and the long-term goals of the group and of its members.

To highlight one example, our papers demonstrate the strength of current empirical paradigms for studying the dynamics and the products of collaborative recall. They focus on robust results such as collaborative inhibition; the finding that the information produced by a group in remembering together—though more than any *one* of the members could have produced alone—is typically less than the pooled *sum* of information produced by the same number of individuals remembering alone (Basden, Basden, Bryber, & Thomas, 1997; Weldon & Bellinger, 1997). What matters is not whether such products do or don't under some circumstances deserve the label ''collective memory'', but our capacity to detect and explain the different ways in which they emerge and the different properties they exhibit in all these varying circumstances.

Next, in identifying dimensions for studying the relationship between individual and collective memory, we can address the short- and long-term influences of such group membership and such collaborative processes on individuals' subsequent memory capacities and performance. What we take away from our various social interactions can have complex effects on our own later behaviour, remembering included, and can shape what we then bring to the other group

contexts we inhabit. Under some conditions, for example, recollection of shared past events may converge with those of others with whom they have been discussed, or may incorporate information encountered only from other people and not originally encoded. In other contexts, it can be left up to trusted others to carry the details of some body of knowledge, where the trust underwrites confidence that this information can be accessed when needed (Wegner, 1987; Wegner, Erber, & Raymond, 1991; Wegner, Giuliano, & Hertel, 1985).

The common mechanisms underlying these phenomena, as argued in the paper by French, Garry, and Mori, can produce both beneficial and troubling outcomes. On the one hand, for example, we may talk with trusted others and successfully renegotiate the emotional significance of a shared past experience, to arrive at both a more accurate picture of the past and a more fruitful conception of current self and other. On the other hand, as established traditions of work on misinformation and memory contagion demonstrate, memories of our own experiences can be substantially distorted or confused by external influence (Loftus, 2005). As Bartlett (1932) argued, the constructive filling in of gaps in our memories is driven either by the actual presence of others as we seek interpersonal coordination, or by the active, schema-mediated interests, sentiments, and ideals that reflect the tendencies of our social organisation. And so, of course, not all social effects on individual memory are malign. We often talk about the shared past with partners, friends, family, or colleagues in order to facilitate or tap what may be only fragmentary, partial, or shrouded in our own memories. A key challenge for the experimental study of social memory is to understand both the unusual contexts in which transactive, distributed, or collaborative memory systems may in fact promote accuracy, and the range of functions that shared remembering may have besides or beyond accuracy.

Functional approaches to memory, utilised in a number of our papers, exemplify the possibility of finding relationships between individual and collective remembering that are stronger than mere analogy. The point is not just that the regulatory and directive roles of remembering, for example, can apply in groups as in individuals, but that it's often precisely the difficult coordination of the individual- and group-level functions that drives and thus explains particular features of the ways in which we remember together. Psychology continues to seek principled connections between, for example, remembering word lists or short digit strings and, for example, emotional autobiographical remembering. The reconciliation of laboratory and ecological approaches to memory over the last 15 years has been based in part on a broadly shared confidence in the mutual relevance of more basic and more complex memory phenomena. Research in tightly controlled contexts aims at identifying processes that contribute directly to remembering in the wild, even if they are in turn modified and transformed as they are co-opted by broader systems. Similar forms of interaction, we suggest, are in play as we extend from more complex forms of individual remembering to complex remembering alongside others (such as in co-witness discussion) and to collaborative work on the past among longstanding, organised groups. Just as different forms of memory within the individual can operate on the same information as it is transformed or abstracted or conventionalised (Toth & Hunt, 1999), so the same content can be transmitted across individuals, with its fate shaped by the available social resources and dynamics (Sperber, 1996).

So in addition to clearer methods and larger datasets for studying memory processes across a range of groups, we will aim for nested and multidimensional theoretical frameworks (cf. Barnier et al., in press). If we make the necessary distinctions between, for instance, shared and unshared events, more and less established and coherent groups, and more and less interactive forms of collaboration, we can more clearly isolate the effects of each of these dimensions in turn, as well as more clearly identify the interactions between these dimensions in the complex situations in which we remember the past together. Such an approach, in turn, will encourage mutual feedback between the cognitive psychology of collaborative remembering and various applied fields, as illustrated in a number of the papers in this special issue; they promise better integration, for example, with studies of group processes and shared remembering in education and in organisations, as well as the ongoing study of transactive remembering among older people.

THE CONTENTS OF THIS SPECIAL ISSUE

We turn now to summarise briefly the contributions of the papers in this special issue. In the first

paper, ''Towards a psychology of collective memory'', Hirst and Manier situate psychology in the broader field of social scientific studies of collective memory. They distinguish between, on the one hand, the design of social resources and memory practices and, on the other hand, the mechanisms underlying the transmission and transformation of memories between individual and collective. Whereas the former is often seen as the province of social scientists and the latter as the province of psychologists, Hirst and Manier argue that they are complementary, rather than incompatible, approaches to the study of social memory phenomena.

In the second paper, ''The development of collective remembering'', developmental psychologists Reese and Fivush outline a sociocultural, developmental approach to collective memory. Reviewing a now extensive empirical literature, they identify the crucible of all memories in conversations about the past between parents and children, and stress that individual and collective memories are ''radically interactive''.

In the third paper, ''Collaborative recall and collective memory: What happens when we remember together?'', Harris, Paterson, and Kemp review the literature on group remembering and draw together findings from different traditions. They lead us clearly through the complexities of paradigms for investigating individual and group recall and raise questions about the outcomes and consequences of group discussion about the past. This paper lays the methodological foundation for the four empirical papers that follow.

The next four papers report new empirical data from well-established experimental procedures, which add to our understanding of the microprocesses of social memory. In the fourth paper, ''Re-exposure and retrieval disruption during group collaboration as well as repeated retrieval influence later individual recall'', Blumen and Rajaram meticulously combine different sequences of individual and group recall sessions to evaluate three potential hypotheses about collaborative recall. They consider both the negative effects of retrieval disruption and the potentially positive effects of re-exposure to additional items during group recall.

In the fifth paper, ''Collaborative recall in face-to-face and electronic groups'', Ekeocha and Brennan ask a related question about recalling in groups. Using a short movie clip, rather than the more typical list of words, they compare the recall of groups of participants who collaborated either face-to-face or electronically. They find different costs and benefits depending on the media of exchange, which implies that social memory performance is ''due not only to intrapersonal factors stemming from cognitive interference, but also to interpersonal costs of coordinating the group product''.

In the sixth paper, ''You say tomato? Collaborative remembering between intimate couples leads to more false memories than collaborative remembering between strangers'', French, Garry, and Mori extend the well-investigated memory conformity paradigm to examine whether the relationship between discussion partners is important. They report, not unexpectedly, that romantic partners rely on one another's memories more than do strangers. More problematically, however, romantic partners also yield to one another's memory errors.

In the final empirical paper, ''Performance and process in collective and individual memory: The role of social decision schemes and memory bias in collective memory'', Van Swol adopts methods of small group and organisational research and reports the indirect memory outcomes of a group decision-making task. Focusing on recognition memory rather than the more typical free recall, she shows how individuals' and groups' subsequent memories are influenced by the earlier decision-making processes of the group.

In three final theoretical papers, our authors extend the boundaries of the psychological study of social memory phenomena in important ways. In our eighth paper, ''Collective memory: A perspective from (experimental) clinical psychology'', clinical psychologists Wessel and Moulds first consider explicitly, yet critically, those concepts from the study of individual memory in cognitive and clinical psychology that can be fruitfully applied to the study of collective memory. Second, they argue that the social memory literature may inform the study of trauma-related disorders and associated clinical practice.

In the ninth paper, ''On the cultural constitution of collective memory'', cross-cultural psychologist Wang analyses how functional variations of collective memory across cultures may influence the processes, practices, and outcomes of collective remembering. She proposes a new approach, in which the individual, the collective, and the culture are treated as a single unit of analysis.

In the final paper, ''Collective memory: Conceptual foundations and theoretical approaches'', Wertsch and Roediger, two leading figures in memory studies, offer a map of the conceptual space involved in discussions of collective memory across diverse disciplines. In this, as well as in their other influential work, they treat the socially-situated individual as the bridge between the individual and the collective.

As a set, these papers contribute to four important goals in this developing domain. First, these authors are working to develop clear, testable frameworks for social memory phenomena, whether from cognitive, developmental, cultural, or clinical perspectives. Second, they are contributing to a strong, empirical foundation on the micro-processes of social memory. Over time, the goal will be to extend basic research across a full range of memory cases and remembering groups. Third, they are exploring the balance between positive and negative effects of remembering with others, especially depending on context, and thus balancing the pessimism in some quarters about social influences on memory. As we noted above, in some contexts, such as the forensic setting, it is entirely appropriate to focus on the potential contaminating influences of remembering with others. In other contexts, such as in intimate and longstanding relationships, it makes more sense to focus on the positive functions of remembering together. Fourth, and finally, these authors are considering the full effects of collaboration, as well as the purpose of collaborating. Work in this field will be increasingly relevant as we measure beyond just the amount recalled and its accuracy, and consider especially the fate of memories over time, and across individuals and their groups.

In an outstanding recent edited volume, *Science of Memory: Concepts* (Roediger, Dudai, & Fitzpatrick, 2007), across 65 chapters that address ''16 core concepts of the science of memory'', nowhere is there any real sign that human beings are often together when they engage in the activities of remembering. In an epilogue, one of the editors acknowledges that the book ''focuses almost exclusively on memory research using individual subjects'', and that these results about individual memory need to be linked in some future project to an understanding of what she calls the ''uses of collective memory'' (Fitzpatrick, 2007, pp. 394–395). We believe that progress in understanding complex social memory phenomena will naturally build on the more mature sciences of individual memory. But, as the papers in this special issue of *Memory* demonstrate, active integration of conceptual frameworks and empirical methods, which allows us to move between individual and collective memory, is already well under way.

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