have found this to be the case. For example, the suppression of stereotype-congruent memories leads to enhanced recall and recognition of the material when suppression is discontinued (Macrae et al. 1997; Sherman et al. 1997).

A unified theory of repression may eventually be developed, but that theory cannot simply hold that all forms of not thinking are the same. Conscious suppression of thoughts often has the ironic effect of accentuating those thoughts, and a full theory of repression must both acknowledge and explain the occurrence of such effects.

Social incoherence and the narrative construction of memory

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Abstract: By shifting the focus of analysis from forgetting and remembering to interpreting and making-meaning, Erdelyi allows theoretical consideration of repression to move beyond the heuristic assumption that personal memory is necessarily private memory. In this commentary, repression is considered to be a collective process in which memories are shaped by the need for coherence between individual and social narratives.

Erdelyi's integrative theory pivots on the idea that repression represents a broad class of consciousness-lowering processes. If repression is merely an umbrella term for the tandem operation of cognitive avoidance and transformations of target material, we find little to quibble with in this regard. Nor do we contend with Erdelyi's view – now widely accepted in the scientific community – that memory construction is a complicated, active, and meaning-making process. Although we appreciate the breadth of the integrative theory, which encompasses developments in evolutionary theory, neuroscience, and experimental research in memory, Erdelyi's focus is still too narrow. Remembering and forgetting are also collective processes, and as such are subject to specific narrative pressures. On one hand, there are the multiple ways in which attention is directed to salient social events, including reinforcement ("Yes, that's what happened"), suggestion ("Do you remember when that happened?"), and rehearsal ("Tell everyone what happened"). On the other hand, there are narrative processes of directed inattention ("Don't tell, don't think about it, it didn't happen"), which occur within relational contexts marked by varying degrees of coercion and constraint.

Throughout Erdelyi's exposition, the question hovers regarding what the construct of "repression" adds to our understanding of human memory beyond ordinary forgetting. Yet, by shifting the focus of analysis from forgetting and remembering to interpreting and making-meaning, Erdelyi allows theoretical consideration of repression to move beyond the heuristic assumption that personal memory is necessarily private memory. If memory is understood to reside in the relational space between people who share direct and indirect experiences, then its dynamics take on considerable depth. We remember and forget not only within the parameters given to us by our social worlds, but as part of the mutual creation of the narratives that give form to our social worlds.

In broad sweep, this conceptualization of memory is not new. Sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (c.1877–1944) and psychologist Charles Blondel (c.1876–1939) argued that personal memories cannot be understood in isolation from the social frameworks that give them meaning. According to Halbwachs (1951/1992), the conceptual narratives that arise within a particular cultural or social group are internalized by individuals within that group, who must construct and reconstruct their autobiographical memories within the frames they know. He notes, however, that the frameworks individuals depend upon to remember their pasts are also constructions, themselves subject to a variety of pressures. Social memory is not necessarily more accurate than personal memory, because social groups frequently distort the past in the act of reconstructing it. Rather than ensuring accuracy, social frameworks as a mechanism promote *consistency* in memory between individuals and social groups. Blondel, whose research and writing were informed by clinical practice, was intrigued by the *in* consistencies. The most pathological conditions described by Blondel (1914) were suffered by individuals whose autobiographical selves were dramatically disconnected from collectively understood frames of meaning. He theorized that his patients who were unable to retrieve certain memories had never identified an appropriate social framework within which to comprehend them (see Wallon 1951/1984).

In recent decades, research interest in the social and cultural aspects of autobiographical memory, particularly as it relates to traumatic experience, has increased (Fivush & Haden 2003; Lynn & Pintar 1997; Lynn et al. 1997; McNally 2003). In our analysis of the dynamics of revictimization (Lynn et al. 2003), we introduced the term "social incoherence" to refer to intolerable incongruities between personal and social narratives. A child who is abused by her father, for example, finds her experience to be incoherent within the social contexts that she knows. Her father's actions contradict cultural narratives of what fathers are supposed to do and to be, and his interpretations likely will be irreconcilable with her experience as well; he may tell her that she asked for the abuse or that it didn't even happen at all. When a child inhibits her memories of specific events and enhances other aspects of her experience, she may be attempting to bring her personal narrative in line with the social narratives. Repression, in this view, is a method of reducing the distress of social incoherence.

The concept of social coherence recalls some features of Festinger's (1957) cognitive dissonance, and Bateson's double-bind (1972), though our focus is on incompatibilities between personal experiences and collective frameworks available for comprehending those experiences. Correspondingly, a social narrative approach predicts that traumatic experiences will be followed by less memory distortion and better outcomes, generally, for those who have access to social frameworks which help them narrate their experiences coherently. Research on maltreated children demonstrating that the presence of supportive social relationships moderates risk of depression provides suggestive evidence for this hypothesis (Kaufman et al. 2004).

A growing base of research supports the view that traumatic events can compromise the coherence of memory and narrative production. To be more specific: (1) rape narratives are more ambiguous than narratives related to non-rape events (Tromp et al. 1995); (2) the level of articulation of trauma narratives is inversely related to chronic post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Amir et al. 1998); and (3) reductions in trauma-related anxiety during therapy for PTSD are associated with a decrease in the fragmentation of rape narratives (Foa et al. 1995a). Moreover, emotional processing leads to the creation of organized, unfragmented, and more articulated narratives related to traumatic events (Amir et al. 1998; Foa & Riggs 1993). Social coherence, however, cannot be achieved solely through the cognitive task of modifying personal narratives, in cases when it is the social world and its narratives that are inaccurate and require alteration (Pintar 2000).

Erdelyi recognizes that there are multiple interpretive contexts surrounding any event, and that individuals will weight these differently. We see weighting as an intrinsically social and relational process in which individuals are subject to direct and indirect pressures of reinforcement and constraint. Erdelyi is correct that we inhibit and enhance experiences to make sense of our reality. We would add that we are often compelled to make that reality coherent in relationship to larger social realities.

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