

**Vicarious and collective memory ground autobiographical narrative identity and
sociality**

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Abstract

Humans are social beings and memory in its various forms supports sociality. In this perspective, we introduce the term allobiographical memory, which subsumes vicarious and collective memory, to promote exploration of their intersections and shared functions. We develop a model to bridge research on allobiographical and autobiographical memory, suggesting that allobiographical memories and the future projections they may ground are organized into extended allobiographical narratives to construct identities of social entities, e.g. “my mother” and “my nation”. Allobiographical narratives allow comprehension of other individuals and communities as extended from past to present to future, serving to enhance perspective-taking and interpersonal connection with the potential to guide action. Furthermore, allobiographical narratives intersect with personal narratives to socially embed personal identity. We review research in vicarious and collective memories from the perspective of the model, organized to illuminate 1) key findings on vicarious and collective memory and future projections, as well as their organization into extended allobiographical narratives that intersect with personal narratives, and 2) functions with respect to sociality and social embedding of personal identity. The model points to new research agendas including the dynamic interplay between autobiographical and allobiographical memory, as well as their relations to memory for fiction, social media, and master narratives.

Memory is fundamental to human culture and interaction. The shared past and the anticipated shared future, constructed through narratives told across time and in daily interactions, provide a collective understanding of human existence that guides social expectations and behavior¹⁻³. In order to gain a more complete understanding of how humans remember the past and project into the future, we build a model for *allobiographical memory* that integrates research on autobiographical memory, vicarious memory, and collective memory, as displayed in Figure 1 and Table 1. Our model highlights the critical functions of memory: To provide a sense of coherence and continuity to individuals⁴, of the self, of others, and of groups, and to facilitate socially embedded prediction of the future to guide action. The model for allobiographical memory synthesizes separate streams of literature on vicarious and collective memory and both focuses and expands current research. It focuses on how memory functions to define identity and sociality, and it expands current views by creating a shared conceptual space to guide research into intersections among vicarious, collective, and autobiographical memory. In doing so, our model generatively points to emergent issues and questions for future research.

Key characteristics, definitions, and examples of allobiographical memory along with autobiographical memory are shown in Table 1⁵⁻⁹. Theory and research on autobiographical memory most often focus on memory of personally experienced events (e.g. “my wedding day”)¹⁰⁻¹⁶. But not all memories relevant to the self are of personally experienced events (what we term personal memory). Many of our most treasured memories are of the experiences of others, experiences we have only been told about. Vicarious memory, which refers to individuals’ memories of events that happened to other people with potential relevance to their identity (e.g., “my mother’s first day at school”)⁷, has only recently been studied within psychology. Collective memory includes communicative and cultural memory¹⁷, but here we focus on communicative memory, which we define as interpersonally

shared memories of events that happened to a group with potential relevance to shared identity (e.g., the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor during WWII)¹⁸. In contrast, cultural memory refers to “cultural” instantiations of the past, such as memorials, commemorative practices, and textbooks. Each serve to reinforce a shared memory of the event¹⁷.

We introduce *allobiographical memory* as an umbrella concept for vicarious and collective memory, which includes the memories individuals have for events that have happened to other people and/or to communities with the potential to bear on individual and group identity¹⁸⁻²¹. We provide an overview in Table 1 and Figure 1. As we combine vicarious and collective memory into one overarching category of *allobiographical memory* we demonstrate that these memories serve shared functions and are based on similar principles; principles that also undergird autobiographical memory. All three forms of memory - autobiographical, vicarious and collective - ground future projections and dynamically interact in creating individual and group identity. For example, I (the first author) have a vicarious memory of my grandmother’s WWII experiences of being ostracized for dating a German soldier during the occupation of Denmark. The memory is vicarious as I did not directly experience it, it was shared with me by an aunt, and I use it to understand the identity of my grandmother, which in turn informs aspects of my own identity. I have talked about the memory with my family, and it has become a shared family memory we refer to in family conversations because it bears on the collective identity of our family. Finally, the memory is an instantiation of my country’s collective memory of what we did to women who were romantically engaged with the occupying Germans after the end of the war, and as such it aids me in understanding the identity of my country and therefore connects me to my country.

This example further illustrates three key points. First, as supported by current neuroscience research, all memories are fluid and dynamic²². Personal, vicarious and collective memories are not separable components of a stable memory system, but are

interwoven re-constructions of both directly and indirectly experienced events, and are complex tapestries of single, extended and recurring experiences²³.

Second, the example shows that allobiographical memory serves to construct identities of social entities, what we term allobiographical identities, that play a critical role in understanding and feeling connected to other people and groups as well as navigating the complexities of relationships and communities^{8,18,24}. We emphasize that social identities, just like individual identities, are intersectional and dynamic over time²⁵. Allobiographical memories help to construct and support both stable and evolving aspects of social identities. In addition to understanding the past, allobiographical memory also grounds future projections about the trajectories of individuals and communities used to construct shared knowledge with the potential to undergird collective action²⁶⁻²⁸. Further, although allobiographical memory, future projection and identity concern social entities, they also concern the individual rememberer because the objects of allobiographical representations are personally owned, they are experienced as “mine”. They are of *my* others (my child, my friend, my colleague) and of *my* communities (my workplace, my family, my generation). As such they constitute examples of William James’²⁹ idea that the self extends beyond the internal and personal to what individuals call “mine.”

Third, the example highlights that memories are social; events are shared when they are experienced and in retrospect, and this sharing takes the form of narrative. Narratives capture events as they unfold over time, depict intentions of the involved protagonists, and allow individuals to construct a coherent representation that mesh actions with the inner landscape of thoughts and emotions^{30,31}. Although memory and narrative are not isomorphic, narratives are the fundamental way in which humans share their memories to and with others. Allobiographical memories and future projections often stem from narratives communicated by other persons or through media, where the narrative transports the listening individual into

the reality of another person or a community^{1,30}. The transportational power of narrative allows individuals to form mental representations of events as they are viewed by another person and use it to understand that person's identity (vicarious memory) or viewed by a community and use it to understand the identity of the community (collective memory). The narrative underpinnings of personal, vicarious and collective memory connect individuals to both specific others and groups as well as to larger social and cultural systems that define world views³⁰. From this perspective, traditional accounts of memory that focus on encoding, storage and retrieval of personally experienced bounded episodes is expanded to place these processes as part of a larger human effort after meaning³².

In this perspective article, we develop a model that brings together new ideas on allobiographical memory and future projections and relate them to their more well-established personal memory counterparts. Three basic principles underlie our approach. First, these forms of memory are social, and they are shared between and among people through narratives. Culturally canonical narratives shape the very way in which individuals experience events even as they are occurring as well as subsequently through conversations, and thus shape the way individuals remember^{2,33-35}. Second, while personal, vicarious and collective memories can be conceptualized as different types of memories, they intersect and blur into each other in myriad ways, reinforcing a need for a common model. Third, memories, personal and allobiographical, function to define self, others, and groups in the past^{7,18} and shape construction of possible future trajectories^{26,27,36}.

The paper is organized into five sections. In the first two, we provide a more detailed analysis of allobiographical memory and describe our model. We then selectively review research from the standpoint of the model's key assumptions and note where research is robust and where it is scarcer. We focus first on vicarious memory, including intergenerational memory, and then on collective memory in smaller groups, such as couples,

friends and families, and in larger communities such as nations. Although discussed separately for the sake of clarity, we emphasize throughout that personal, vicarious and collective memories are dynamically intertwined. In the final section, we provide directions for future research.

What Is Allobiographical Memory?

Allobiographical memories are memories that an individual holds of another individual's direct experiences (vicarious memory) or a group's experiences, sometimes direct, sometimes not (collective memory, see Table 1 for definitions). Allobiographical memory differs from autobiographical memory as it is typically understood, i.e. as mental representations of past events directly experienced by the individual¹². Both allobiographical and autobiographical memory are remembered by individuals, but the sources of the memory vary (see Table 1). Vicarious memories may stem from conversations with the other person sharing a memory from their life (2nd hand, e.g., my grandmother telling me about how she met my grandfather) and from conversations with other individuals who share memories held by another person (3rd hand, e.g., my mother telling me how my grandmother met my grandfather)⁷. Vicarious memories can also be formed from written narratives and combinations of images and writing as shared on social media^{37,38}. Collective memories may be memories shared across a community of an event directly experienced by this community (e.g., a group of friends' memory of attending a football match together). These might also be viewed as shared autobiographical memories. In other instances, the memory is of an event not directly experienced, but learned about through conversational interaction. This includes both person-to-person conversation, where collective memory may overlap with vicarious memory, as when another person tells about an event they have experienced that simultaneously constitutes a collective memory (e.g., 9/11), and broader conversations including news reports, social media, movies, and books^{6,39}. The critical defining aspect is

that the collective memories are about the event itself, not how it was heard or learned about. Collective memories can be maintained through cultural artifacts or practices such as textbooks, memorials or commemoration. These tend to be relatively permanent, thereby ensuring that a shared memory can be transmitted through multiple generations. The latter point also highlights an important distinction between vicarious and collective memory: Not all collective memories are vicarious, as they do not refer to another individual's memory of an event with implications for that person's identity. And not all vicarious memories are collective; only those vicarious memories that simultaneously comprise shared memories of the referent group with potential relevance to shared identity can also be considered collective. The distinctions among personal, vicarious and collective memories can be blurred depending on the factors laid out in Table 1 and as illustrated in Figure 1. Some memories may clearly fall into one form or the other, but some memories have elements of all.

We argue that allobiographical memory has an identity-defining function, either in terms of individual identity of another person or in terms of collective or social identity, that will intertwine with the remembering person's individual identity. A classic broad definition of autobiographical memory is "memory for information related to the self"⁴⁰ p. 26). If we adopt a wider conceptualization of the self, inspired by James' socially extended self²⁹; then allobiographical memory is a part of autobiographical memory, as it also is related to the self. By remembering the other person's memory or the community's memory, individuals make them their own and use them to construct identities of social entities, that they consider "mine", e.g. "my generation", "my family" and "my friend". Grounded in this understanding, we consider allobiographical memory as a part of autobiographical memory and following Pillemer et al.⁷ we will use the term personal memory to refer to autobiographical memory of events directly experienced by the rememberer (see Table 1 and Figure 1).

Both vicarious and collective memories are sometimes remembered along with a “reception event.” Flashbulb memories are a good example of such recollections. They refer to detailed memories of the reception context where one learns about a surprising and consequential event^{41,42}, e.g. remembering where you were, who you were with, and what you were doing when hearing about an important (public) event as well as details about the (public) event itself. For example, many Americans will have flashbulb memories of 9/11, recalling their personal circumstances when receiving this catastrophic news⁴³. As originally noted by Brown and Kulik⁴¹ who coined the term, flashbulb memories may also be formed when hearing about an important personal event, e.g. the birth of your grandchild (e.g., a vicarious memory). Memories of reception events can serve as a phenomenologically rich connection between personal memory of one’s own life and the individuals and communities whose identities are represented in allobiographical memory⁴⁴ and as such are one of the ways that personal memory intersects with vicarious and collective memory.

Allobiographical memory also supports the construction of the allobiographical future (see Table 1). Personal future projections are mental representations of future events that may happen in one’s personal life with potential relevance to identity (e.g., “my next summer vacation”)^{45,46}. One key insight from this literature is that the construction of personal future projections is based in personal memory, while also being shaped by schemata and goals⁴⁶⁻⁴⁸. Szpunar & Szpunar²⁶ further proposed that individuals engage in collective future thought, and we define the future counterpart of collective memories as interpersonally shared mental representations of future events that may happen for groups with potential relevance to shared identity. A generative extension of our model predicts that allobiographical future projections, both vicarious and collective, are grounded in allobiographical memory and intersect with each other and with personal future projections. Individuals can construct mental representations of future events for other individuals such as a child, a friend, and a

colleague, and for communities, such as one's family, school class, and nation. The construction process likely draws on relevant vicarious and collective memories, while also being shaped by knowledge of the goals of the other person and the community as well as various types of schemata. Vicarious future projections may also stem from conversations in which the other person shared hoped-for events, and collective future projections may be informed by conversations in the community and media coverage^{26,49}.

Allobiographical memory and future projections concern events located at a specific moment (e.g., "my partner's argument with his employer") and temporally extended events (e.g., "my country's next presidential election")^{7,26,27,50}. This mirrors personal autobiographical memory and future projections. Conway and colleagues⁵¹ have proposed a hierarchical organization, where memory for temporally extended events (lifetime periods, e.g. "doing my PhD") nests memories of specific episodes located to one day (e.g., "my defense") as well as categoric memories of repeated events (e.g., "working late nights at the university"). Another prediction of our model is that this hierarchical organization may extend to both vicarious and collective memory and future projections. Across personal and allobiographical memory, specific and temporally extended event memory and future projections are organized and communicated through narrative^{52,53}.

It is important to emphasize that allobiographical memory does not map easily on to Tulving's⁵⁴ influential distinction between episodic and semantic memory, just as personal autobiographical memory blurs clear borders between these two memory systems as demonstrated in research on personal semantics⁵⁵ and semanticized memory for episodes^{22,56}. Some allobiographical memories and future projections include vivid sensory details, reflecting memory of experience-near information that Tulving's theory would attribute to the involvement of episodic memory⁵⁷. We propose that memory for experience-near information may derive from both direct experience or indirect experience, as in specific vicarious

memories where a vivid and elaborate narrative communicated by the other person functions in the same way as direct experience (e.g., a colleague's detailed account of an emotionally intense argument with the manager). Other allobiographical memories and future projections may be more abstract which according to Tulving's theory would reflect a heavier involvement of semantic memory, as in remembering a parent's childhood with general information about sibling relationships, living space, and favorite activities. In other words, we view experience-near and abstract memory information as dimensions that allobiographical memory can vary on. This is consistent with other approaches that conceptualize each instantiation of memory as reflecting the contributions of intersecting episodic and semantic memory processes rather than clearly divided memory systems^{22,56,58}.

Personal, vicarious, and collective memories involve dimensions that are both shared (personal, vicarious and collective memories may all differ on the dimensions of experience-near versus abstract information) and differ (direct experience, which is involved for personal memories versus indirect experience, which is involved for vicarious memories). As shown in Table 1, we propose that features important for distinguishing between the three types of memory and future projections involve the target of the event (self, other individual, group/community) and source (direct experience versus indirect experience).

The Allobiographical Memory Model (ALMO)

Allobiographical memory and future projections can be employed by individuals for a range of purposes⁷. However, in the present paper, we focus on illuminating how allobiographical memories and future projections are used to create allobiographical identities that interweave with personal identity. Echoing insights from research on personal autobiographical memory, we suggest that not all allobiographical memories are equally relevant to allobiographical identity^{59,60}. Some memories are endowed with identity salience through the meaning individuals make of them^{33,61}, whereas other memories are less

elaborated on with respect to implications for identity⁶², and the same holds for future projections⁴⁵. As such, importance to allobiographical identities is a dimension on which allobiographical memories and future projections may vary.

Many authors have emphasized the role of collective memory for social identity^{18,63,64}. Social identity consists of an individual's identifications with the social groups they feel they belong to⁶⁵. Collective memories shared by a family, a workplace, and a nation serve to create a shared understanding of the values of the group and a sense of who the group is. As such they help individuals feel connected and satisfy their need to belong⁶⁶. Introducing the concept of collective future thought, Szpunar & Szpunar²⁶ likewise emphasized the importance of imagining a shared future for the group to maintain cohesion and support collective action. They stressed how collective future thought is important to the sense of continuity which heavily impacts the persistence versus fragmentation of the group.

We suggest that the construction of extended narratives plays a key role in binding together allobiographical memories and future projections into allobiographical identities. This idea is based on the concept of narrative identity, which refers to the personal life stories that individuals construct to understand who they are^{67,68}. Connecting personal autobiographical memories with personal future projections supports self-continuity, a sense of who one is through time⁶¹. Narrative identity is created as individuals reason about selected personal memories, considering how such memories capture stable aspects of oneself (e.g., "I am a good mother"), as well as noting how one has changed over time (e.g., "I have become less strict with my kids")^{33,69}. As such, narrative identity addresses temporality, intentionality, continuity and change in ways that have until now not been captured in concepts of social identity. Furthermore, narrative identity moves beyond abstract categories by grounding identity in interpretations of remembered and imagined events, providing insights into how identity may change or not change in response to circumstances.

Extending narrative identity, we posit that individuals construct extended allobiographical narratives that represent the identities of other persons and communities as they unfold over time. Borrowing ideas from a theory of situated personal stories³³, we suggest that allobiographical narratives can be employed to abstract information about groups (e.g., “we have always been persecuted”), while at the same time recognizing and explaining meaningful changes (e.g., “we have more resources to fight back now because we have powerful allies”), and imagining the future of the group (e.g., “we will persevere, and we will win this war”). Similarly, individuals can use extended narratives of other persons to make abstractions about their character (e.g., “she has always been shy”), while noting and explaining change (e.g., “she has become more talkative when she is with her friends”), and projecting the other person’s development in the future (e.g., “she imagines going to high school parties which will likely help her overcome her shyness”). Extended vicarious narratives can be viewed as one aspect of person perception, where individuals construct mental models of other individual’s traits, goals, and narrative identities^{21,70}.

Mentally representing both oneself, other persons, and communities through extended narratives provides individuals with rich and contextualized information that allows a more sophisticated understanding of how they can support the development of others and consider actions that align with the projected future of the communities they belong to. As personal, vicarious, and collective narratives intersect over time in various ways, individuals come to feel connected to other people and to groups, and they may employ projected future narratives to guide actions that will aid them in remaining connected. Individuals may also anticipate a narrative trajectory of another person or community that does not align with how they narrate their own future in relation to that person or group. We hypothesize that this could propel individuals to take actions aiming to change the trajectory of the other person or group. Alternatively, individuals may begin storying a new personal future carrying fewer

intersections with the projected allobiographical identities (e.g., “If this candidate wins the presidential election, I’ll feel disconnected to my country and I may move to another country”).

We note that individuals likely limit the construction of extended narratives to social entities to which they feel connected⁷¹. Other allobiographical memories that represent social entities that individuals identify less with may be organized in theme-based clusters across different social entities⁷² such as “wars”, “coming-out stories”, and “workplace Christmas parties” that may inform allobiographical and personal future projections. If social circumstances change, individuals may begin to organize such theme-based allobiographical memories into extended narratives for those other people they move closer to (e.g., deepening a friendship with a colleague) and groups they begin to identify with (e.g., a soccer team), reflecting the dynamic nature of memory organization.

In the following sections, we selectively review current evidence structured by the key ideas in our model: 1) the organization of vicarious and collective memory into extended allobiographical narratives that intersect with personal narratives, and 2) allobiographical memory functions with respect to sociality and social embedding of personal identity.

Vicarious Memory Research

Research into vicarious memories has emerged over the last decade and has mostly focused on children’s vicarious memory of parents, as studied under the term intergenerational narratives¹⁹. Studies have shown that individuals retain vicarious memories from a variety of people, including friends, parents, romantic partners, and others who share an identity such as LGBTQ+ (see Table 1)⁷³⁻⁷⁸. Vicarious memories can be used to construct an extended narrative of a significant other that deepens one’s understanding of their identity, and may at the same time become incorporated into extended narratives of communities, as is illustrated by my vicarious memory of my grandmother being ostracized for her relationship

to a German soldier, which I use to construct both the identity of my grandmother and the identity of my country (see Figure 1).

Vicarious memory, future events and narratives

Empirical studies have examined characteristics of one-moment in time episodes (e.g., my daughter's story of a marriage proposal). Generally, specific vicarious memories are remembered with vividness and detail, although to a lower extent than personal memories^{21,79-81}. For example, Pillemer and colleagues⁵⁷ elicited college students' specific personal memories that they had told a friend about, and specific vicarious memories of events that the friend had told them about. Ratings of memory vividness, emotionality, visual qualities, and physical reactions were higher for personal than for vicarious memories, but overall patterns of mean ratings were similar. Ozdemir and colleagues asked older adults to recount personal memories and vicarious memories of events from their child's life⁸². Both personal and vicarious memories showed a pronounced reminiscence bump, an enhancement for events experienced during adolescence and young adulthood. That the same bump is obtained for vicarious memories suggests that memories of self and others are similarly organized around identity functions of this developmental age period⁸³. In further support that personal and vicarious memories share similar functions, characteristics of personal and vicarious memories showed parallel associations with measures of relationship closeness and well-being.

Few studies have examined vicarious future projections, that is, mental representations of future events that may happen for other individuals with potential relevance to their identity (e.g., my daughter's imagined birth of the baby she is currently expecting). In the one study we could locate, Grysman and co-authors⁷⁹ asked participants to write about events that had happened to or would likely happen in the future to a close friend, a non-close friend (i.e., two different vicarious memory conditions), and themselves (personal memory

condition). They found that vicarious future events for the close friend (but not the non-close friend) were almost as vivid, detailed, and positive as personal future events, consistent with the idea that individuals construct vicarious future events for other people. That vicarious future projections differ in quality depending on closeness of the relationships suggests that they are not merely generalized schemas. It is possible that at least part of the vivid quality of vicarious future projections of close others stem from conversations with the other person, as when a teenage son shares with his father images of how the much-anticipated high school graduation may unfold. A great deal more research needs to be done, highlighting the generative potential of our model.

To date, only a handful of studies have examined vicarious life story chapters (e.g. my daughter's marriage) grounded in the assumption that individuals construct extended narratives for close others. Life story chapters refer to memory for extended periods that are important to narrative identity⁶¹, and by extension vicarious chapters refer to memory for extended periods in another person's life important to that person's narrative identity²¹. This research demonstrates that individuals can describe detailed chapters for close others, including friends and parents, and that the characteristics of these chapters tend to be positively related to characteristics of personal chapters^{84,85}. For example, Thomsen et al.⁷⁶ found that themes of agency and communion as well as emotional tone in vicarious chapters for mothers were often positively related to the same qualities of personal chapters. Moreover, studies have shown correspondences between vicarious life stories and the personal life stories of the target person, indicating that vicarious life stories to some extent depict the other person as they see themselves^{24,74,76}. Because individuals construct future chapters in their personal life stories⁸⁶, by extension we would expect individuals to construct future chapters in vicarious life stories, but this has not been examined yet⁴⁹.

Sociality and embedding of personal identity

A key claim in our model is that vicarious memory allows individuals to understand the identity of the other person as it extends from past into the present and future, supporting perspective-taking and social connection. Perspective-taking involves attempts at taking another person's mental perspective, often conceptualized as the cognitive aspect of empathy, which is closely related to Theory of Mind^{87,88}. In the literature on empathy, perspective-taking and Theory of Mind, the focus is on stepping into the other person's *present* mind, e.g., understanding the anger expressed by a colleague who tells you about how he has been wronged. Vicarious memory and future projections may undergird more sophisticated perspective-taking that enriches the individual's understanding of the other person's mind with the temporality, intentionality and meaning folded into extended vicarious narratives⁴⁹. For example, the colleague's anger may be understood in a more nuanced manner by embedding it in the extended vicarious narratives of his previous work-related conflicts.

Several studies show that specific vicarious memories are perceived as contributing to understanding the other and nurturing closeness^{20,57,81,89}. Examining perspective-taking in vicarious memories, studies have shown that young adults who narrate vicarious memories for their parents with more elaboration of the parent's emotions and thoughts, experience higher levels of secure attachment^{20,78}. In contrast, individuals with borderline personality disorder, who struggle with perspective-taking, have difficulties when narrating vicarious chapters for a parent⁹⁰.

The interconnection between vicarious memory and personal identity is supported by research showing that individuals create links between vicarious memories and their personal narrative identity^{8,20,57,91}. Because parents are actively engaged identity figures for adolescents and young adults⁹², intergenerational vicarious memories may be especially powerful in shaping personal identity⁸. Well over 90% of adolescents across multiple studies and multiple cultures know stories about both their mothers' and their fathers' childhoods and

claim to use these stories to understand themselves and to learn life lessons that will help them meet future challenges^{89,93}. Some intergenerational vicarious memories may simultaneously enter the store of collective family memories used to build an extended family narrative to understand family values and identity, as displayed in Figure 1¹⁹.

If primary functions of vicarious memories include enhancing understanding of and connection to others that would enrich personal relationships and socially embed personal identity⁷, then one would expect to discover positive associations between vicarious memory attributes and personal well-being. Studies examining this issue have demonstrated that individuals who narrate vicarious memories and chapters with more positive emotional tone and meaning score higher on a range of positive outcomes, such as well-being^{21,73,84,85}. Furthermore, adolescents who tell more elaborated stories about their parents' childhoods show higher self-esteem and greater meaning and purpose in life^{19,94}. Finally, an experimental study showed that writing about vicarious chapters for a parent increased self-esteem, indicating the benefits of connecting to the other through reflecting on their life story⁹⁵.

Section summary

Reviewing studies on vicarious memory from the perspective of our model highlights that findings are generally consistent with the model's assumptions, while also generatively pointing to new areas in need of research. In summary, studies indicate that vicarious and personal memories display parallel patterns regarding phenomenological qualities and temporal distribution. Furthermore, individuals organize vicarious memories of close others into extended life stories, although research on vicarious future projections is so far sparse. There is some support for the idea that vicarious memories and life stories facilitate perspective-taking and understanding of the other person, thus nurturing healthy relationships. Last, studies have demonstrated that vicarious memory is used to construct a personal identity connected to the other person. We now turn to memories and future

projections that scaffold individuals' understanding of and belonging to groups and communities, such as couples, families, and nations.

Collective Memory Research

At any one time, individuals belong to a complex array of groups: Friendship groups, families, religious groups, work groups, generations, and nations. Collective memories flow through these groups that may be nested and overlapping, e.g. families are often nested within nations. Attempting to capture this complexity, collective memory research spans a range of approaches (see Table 1) including studies examining individuals' memory of the distant history of large communities such as nations, e.g., WWII^{96,97}, and intergenerational vicarious memories, e.g. a parent's memory of living through WWII^{18,98}. Another line of research focuses on events occurring within the lifetime of the individual where the collective memory may stem from directly participating in a community relevant event or witnessing it through media or narratives shared by others, often referred to as lived collective memories¹⁸. Focusing on smaller groups, researchers have examined collective family memory formation, which overlaps with intergenerational narrative research discussed in the previous section. Families may represent a particularly important group context^{19,99}, although other social groups whom individuals identify strongly with may take on similar importance¹⁰⁰. In more applied areas, collective memory has been researched as relationship-defining memories^{101,102} and important workplace memories¹⁰³⁻¹⁰⁵. An underlying assumption across these approaches is that memories become collective and able to define the identities of groups through communicative exchanges either as this unfolds in everyday conversations or through narrative cultural products such as books and movies¹⁰⁶.

Collective memory, future events and narratives

Research into collective memories has addressed the important question of how the group converges on a collective memory through conversation, as mnemonic convergence

would be critical for the memory's ability to define the group's identity and connect the individual to the group. Exchanges are usually selective, with some aspects of a memory recounted, while other aspects are left unmentioned¹⁰⁷. The impact of such selective shared reminiscing has been examined as the effects of a speaker on one or more listeners^{6,106,108}. Within this paradigm, researchers have identified several processes that might promote collective memory formation, including reinforcement effects and retrieval-induced forgetting^{106,109}. Regarding reinforcement, for example, when two people talk to each other about the assault on the Capitol in connection with Trump losing the 2020 presidential election, one of them may recall that Trump stated that he asked the rioters to go home. This recollection should reinforce both of their memories and, in turn, make it more likely that both will subsequently remember Trump's request. With respect to retrieval-induced forgetting^{110,111}, unmentioned details such as Trump taking hours before requesting that rioters go home, will induce forgetting for the unmentioned, but related fact.

The extent to which basic psychological processes such as reinforcement and retrieval-induced forgetting play a role in mnemonic convergence will depend on a host of social factors that relate to group identity. For example, when a speaker leaves out recalling that Trump delayed telling his supporters to go home, speakers are more likely to induce forgetting if they share group membership with the listener^{111,112}. Moreover, the presence of retrieval-induced forgetting will be less likely if the listener feels socially threatened, as might be the case if the speaker is a Democrat talking about the moral failings of Republicans to a staunch Republican^{113,114}. Mnemonic convergence is also driven by group structures. Social networks that are divided into cliques are less likely to converge on a representation than are social networks without cliques¹¹⁵. See Box 1 for an explanation and illustration of these processes.

Less attention has been paid to collective future projections, although studies are beginning to emerge. When individuals imagine the collective future of their country, the events are less positive than when they imagine personal future events and events in the collective future of their family^{28,36,116,117}. Similar to personal memory and future projections, individuals' collective memory and future projections are related as shown by positive correlations between emotional qualities and vividness^{28,36}.

Consistent with our idea that individuals form extended narratives grounded in collective memory and future projections, other authors have suggested that individuals view their groups and relationships as temporally extended through the construction of coherent narratives¹¹⁸⁻¹²⁰. Similar narratives are built around histories that reach across thousands of years¹²¹, and studies have shown that people organize their memory of history into longer periods to form chapters in history, e.g. WWII and the Covid pandemic⁵⁰. Individuals appear to narrate the history of their country with certain overarching themes, what Wertsch¹²² refers to as *narrative schematic templates*, and these speak to their national identity. For instance, Russians often adopt a template that has their peaceful country being invaded treacherously, almost losing the war, but with heroic effort, winning the war triumphantly as the “people” push out the invader, as evident in how Russians see both WWII and the Napoleonic Wars. The United States’ appear to adopt another narrative template, “reluctant hegemon”, when narrating important events¹²³. Here the notion is that the United States must serve as the police of the world, preserving the world order, but accepting this role reluctantly.

We have suggested that extended narratives grounded in personal, vicarious and collective memory intersect in various ways (Figure 1). Earlier on we mentioned remembering the reception event of when one received an important piece of news, e.g., flashbulb memories^{41,42}, as one example of how individuals may connect memories from their own life to vicarious and collective memories. Another demonstration that extended

personal and collective narratives intertwine is the living-in-history effect. Studies have shown that people tend to place their personal autobiographical memories in time based on periods defined by reference to historical events (e.g., “it was just before the invasion”), but only when the historical event causes substantial changes in the fabric of people’s daily lives^{124,125}.

Illustrating intersections between vicarious and collective memories, intergenerational vicarious memories may connect individuals to a broader history⁷⁵. For example, studies have explored the intergenerational transmission of narratives about major historical events, such as WWII, that the older generation has experienced and is passing on to the second and third generations. Not surprisingly, there is a loss of detailed information about these experiences across the three generations when asked to recall these stories individually⁹⁸. But when these generations are brought together to reminisce, members of the older generation tell more historical and fewer personal memories than when recalling individually, perhaps to place their family histories with the larger historical context¹²⁶. Other studies suggest that the meaning of such intergenerationally shared memories may shift across generations depending on how each generation view the past as filtered through the own generational identity^{127,128}. For example, the German grandchildren of former Nazis tended to “heroize” their grandparent’s role in the war, underplaying in many cases gross antisemitic acts done by them during the war. This heroization occurred even when the grandparent had talked to their grandchildren about their war experiences¹²⁹. Research has also begun exploring intergenerational transmission of memories outside the family unit, e.g. in LGBTQ+ communities^{77,130}.

Sociality and embedding of personal identity

We have proposed that individuals use collective memories and future projections to construct temporally extended narratives of significant groups, and that the trajectories

captured in these extended narratives may sustain social connection with the potential to guide future action. Indications that this may be the case can be found in research on relationship defining memories, that relate to marital outcomes¹⁰². Furthermore, a recent study examining the collaborative construction of shared future events showed that pairs of participants who together imagined a shared future event experienced more social connection than participants who imagined shared future events independently or who engaged in another type of collaborative activity¹³¹. Examining broader communities, Feola et al.¹³² explored how collective memories and future projections shaped visions of sustainable transformations of spaces in a Columbian community.

Several findings within the collective memory literature are consistent with our suggestion that collective memories and future projections ground the construction of group identities and socially embed personal identity. This is illustrated in studies of generational differences in collective memory that reflect generational identity. For example, when asking individuals which public events they consider most important, researchers have shown that individuals from the same generation identify some similar events, which differs systematically from agreed on events selected by other generations, e.g. whether WWI, WWII, or the Vietnam war is selected as an important public event. Moreover, the selected events often occurred during the generation's late adolescence and early adulthood, an age range in which political identity becomes established¹³³. Furthermore, the generation who lived through a public event represents it differently from the next generation, who did not live through it. The older generation sees it in more personal terms, appreciates the causes and consequences better, views it as more emotionally intense, and supplies more detailed information¹³⁴⁻¹³⁶.

Studies further indicate that collective memories show some stability within a generation, although change in a generation's collective memories is also sometimes

observed^{133,137}, which is consistent with our view that collective memories can ground both stability and change in generational identity. The question of when and how stability and/or change emerges for collective memories within and across generations and other social groups is a critical one for future research. For example, although major emotionally charged public events can shift what kind of events the public view as important¹³⁸, the effect is sometimes transient¹³⁹. Both Black and White Americans were more likely to identify race-relevant historical events, such as the Civil Rights Movement, as among the “most important” in US history after the murder of George Floyd than they had before this tragic event. However, the shift in what was considered most important was temporary. Within six months, the mention of race-relevant events as “most important” slid back to the level observed before the Floyd murder, for both groups¹³⁹. Change is more clearly observable across generations^{133,140}, which may be due to different ways educators and media portray history. In part because of differences in the way he is discussed in textbooks, the image of Christopher Columbus has shifted from the heroic posture he had 50 years ago to the current terrifying figure who abused the indigenous population, although this shift only applies to about 50% of the generation exposed to the “new” Columbus¹⁴⁰.

Research into flashbulb memories also demonstrate how collective memories can define a group’s identity as connected to personal identity^{64,141}. The group individuals belong to appears to shape whether they have flashbulbs memories for events of importance to that group^{41,142,143}, and this extends to subjective sense of belonging¹⁴⁴. For example, Brown and Kulik⁴¹ found that Black Americans were more likely to have flashbulb memories of the assassination of Martin Luther King than White Americans, presumably because the memory helped them understand the identity of their group, e.g. Black Americans, and helped them connect their personal identity to that of the group they belong to. Further testifying how flashbulb memories connect individuals’ personal identities to groups, Americans without a

flashbulb memory of the terrorist attack of September 11 are not viewed as “good” Americans or do not identify as strongly as an American^{145,146}.

Section summary

Research shows that individuals form collective memories for groups that are shaped by conversational forces whose effects on mnemonic convergence depend on group membership and structures. As we reviewed studies on collective memories from the standpoint of our model, we found some support for the main assumptions and identified new directions for research. There is emerging evidence that individuals engage in collective future projections. Our proposal that individuals organize collective memories and future projections into extended narratives aligns with ideas discussed by other authors. Various strands of research support the idea that collective memory and future projections play a role for interpersonal connection, while also serving to socially embed personal identity. However, as yet there is little direct evidence that collective memory and future projections guide collective action.

Conclusion

Our model integrates allobiographical memory and autobiographical memory to create a new starting point for researching shared principles and functions as well as intersections between these forms of memory. Our review provides evidence, albeit still scarce, that vicarious and collective memory function in dynamic interaction to create allobiographical narrative identities with the potential to guide future action. Individuals remember events that have happened to other people and to groups, and they construct future events for other people and groups. Allobiographical memories and future projections are organized and communicated as extended narratives, that intersect with each other, and with extended personal narratives. Extended allobiographical narratives underpin the construction of the identity of social entities, be they specific other persons (e.g., “my father”) or groups (e.g.,

“my workplace”), with benefits for interpersonal understanding and social belonging, and potential to guide collective action. Furthermore, the links between personal narratives and allobiographical narratives scaffold social embedding of personal identities. Our focus on the functions of personal, vicarious and collective memories to create cohesive individual and groups identities over time extends the study of memory beyond cognitive systems to link memory to social, personality and developmental functions^{147,148}. Further by synthesizing the literatures on personal, vicarious and collective memory and future projection, we have identified areas in need of research, including vicarious and collective future projections and their intersections with personal future projections, the potential of allobiographical narrative identities to guide action^{149,150}, and the role of vicarious memories and future projections in sophisticated perspective-taking. As such, our model provides novel avenues for theorizing and research.

We call for studies simultaneously examining allobiographical and personal memories and future projections and their interrelations. Although studies have compared vicarious to personal memory^{57,81}, and collective to personal memory¹⁵¹, the synthesis provided by our model points to the need for studies examining similarities, differences, and intersections across personal, vicarious, and collective memories and future projections. Such studies could address the question of how some allobiographical identities may become more salient than others and sometimes even more salient than personal identity, as may be the case when individuals commit to actions that serve their group at great personal expense¹⁵². Grounded in narrative identity assumptions, we suggest that present events that connect to dormant allobiographical identities may bring these narratives to the forefront. Such events can include a child transitioning to living independently, bringing the vicarious narrative of the child into focus, and intergroup conflict as the current war in Gaza which re-activates intertwining narratives of one’s own and the enemy’s allobiographical identities. Present

events will be interpreted in relation to past narratives as well as the allobiographical projected futures to which they lead with possible implications for how individuals may act. This will depend on whether individuals construct their future personal narratives to remain interlinked with, while possibly attempting to change the projected allobiographical narrative, or whether they detach their personal narrative from the projected allobiographical narrative. Crucially, this narrative process is anchored in events as they unfold, the possibilities of interpretation as afforded by past events, schemata, and communicative influences channeled through everyday conversations, public and social media, and cultural memory products.

Furthermore, research could address how the interconnected web of personal and allobiographical narratives develop from early childhood to old age as well as individual and cultural differences in how they are represented and intersect. Connections to memory for fiction, social media and cultural master narratives are other paths that could be fruitfully explored (see Box 2). Finally, the neural underpinning of allobiographical memories and future projections could be examined. This would help illuminate similarities and differences in involved processes as well as relationship to related concepts such as perspective-taking and memory for fiction^{153,154}.

In conclusion, our model synthesizes insights from multiple domains of research to provide a cohesive understanding of human memory and how it supports sociality and identity for individuals embedded within layers of socioculturally constructed groups. The model points to future research directions that can enrich connections between the study of memory and a wide array of other areas.

Table 1. Overview of personal and allobiographical memory including target, source, identity function, definitions, and examples

Memory type	Target	Source	Identity function	Short definition	Examples (specific and extended)
Personal memory	Oneself	Direct experience	Personal identity	Memories of personally experienced events with potential relevance to identity	“my final exam in high school” “my years in Minneapolis”
Personal future projection	Oneself	Personal memory, schemata, personal goals	Personal identity	Mental representations of future events that may happen in one’s personal life with potential relevance to identity	“when I get my new puppy” “my retirement”
Vicarious memory	A specific other person: Parent, child, friend, partner, colleague	Conversation with the target person (2 nd hand) or with others who relate events about the target person (3 rd to X th hand), social media	Identity of the target person and identity of self-in-relation-to-target	Memories of events that happened to other people with potential relevance to their identity	“my mother’s traffic accident” “my partner’s years abroad” “my colleague’s argument with the Head of Department” “my child’s time in kindergarten”
Vicarious future projection	A specific other person: Parent, child, friend, partner, colleague	Vicarious memory, schemata, goals of the target person, conversations with or about the target person	Identity of the target person and identity of self-in-relation-to-target	Mental representations of future events that may happen for other individuals with potential relevance to their identity	“my mother’s move to her new nursing home” “my child’s upcoming wedding” “my friend’s next job” “my colleague’s planned cancer treatment”

Collective memory	Groups and communities: couple, family, workplace, nation, generation	Shared direct experience, conversation with group/community members about non-experienced past events of relevance to the group/community, media (e.g. news and social media), narrative cultural products (e.g. books and movies)	Identity of the group/community and identity of self-in-relation-to-group/community	Interpersonally shared memories of events that happened to a group/community with potential relevance to shared identity	“our honeymoon in Italy” “my great-grandparents’ immigration to the states” “when my Department laid off the lowest performing professors” ”I watched with many others as the planes crashed into the twin towers” “my uncle has told me about how difficult it was to be gay back then” “I remember watching the Berlin wall come down on the news” “I know about D-day from movies I have watched”
Collective future projection	Groups and communities: couple, family, workplace, nation, generation	Collective memory, schemata, goals of the group/community, conversations with group/community members, media	Identity of the group/community and identity of self-in-relation-to-group/community	Interpersonally shared mental representations of future events that may happen for groups/communities with potential relevance to shared identity	“our upcoming meeting with the divorce attorney” “our next family Christmas get together” “the selection of our new Head of Department” “our country may be attacked by the Russians and we will need to prepare” “women’s rights are threatened if Trump becomes president, and it could affect me and my close others”

“climate problems are increasing
and I fear for my grandchildren’s
futures”

Figure 1: An overview of allobiographical memory and future projections in relation to autobiographical memory and future projections

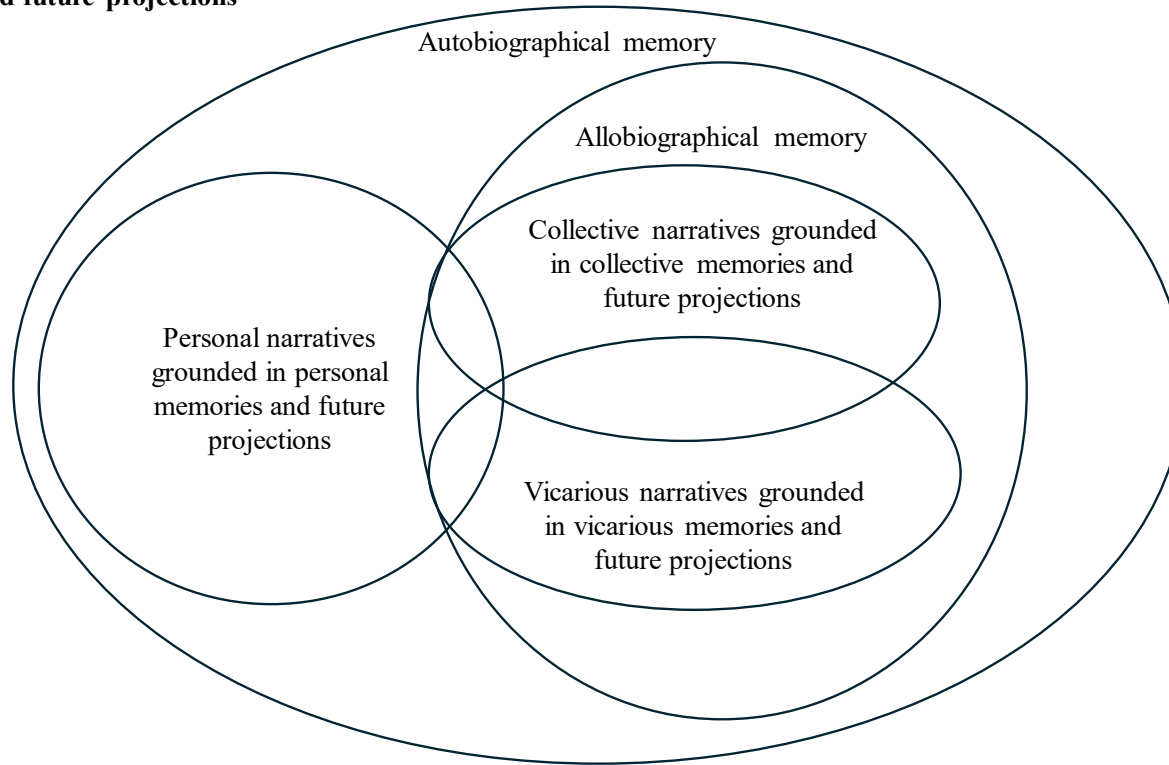


Figure 1a: An example of allobiographical memory and future projections in relation to autobiographical memory and future projections

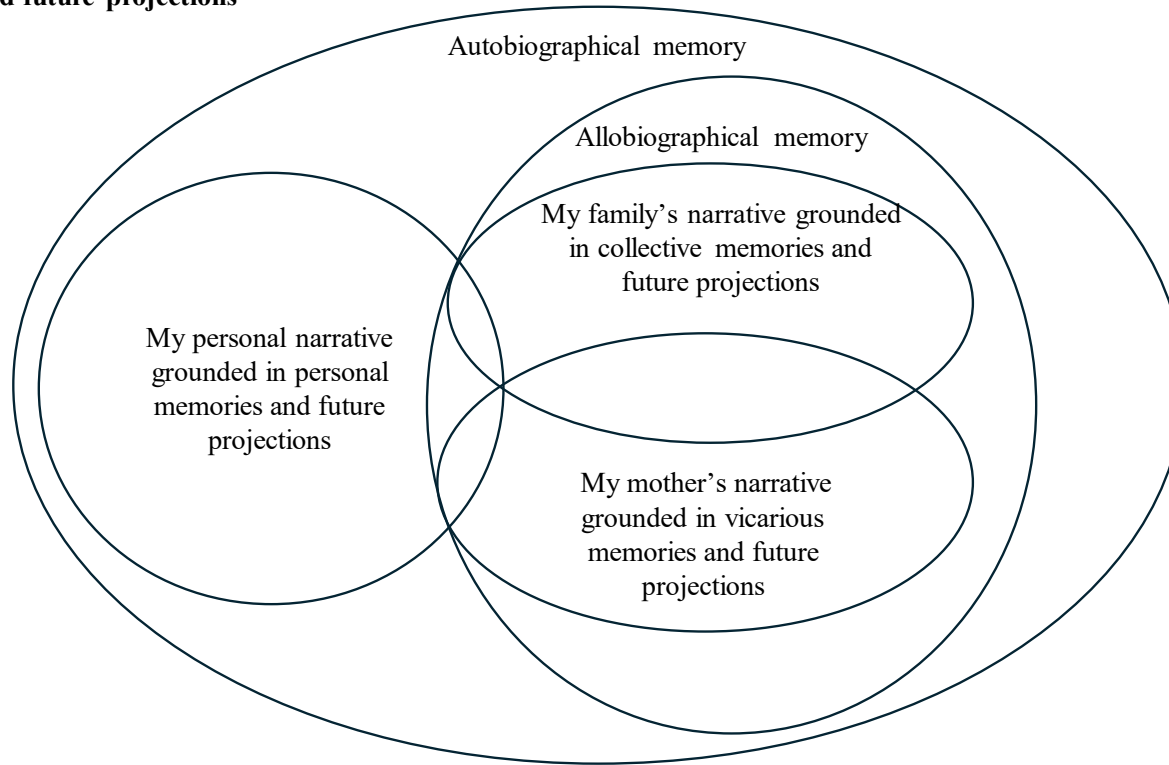
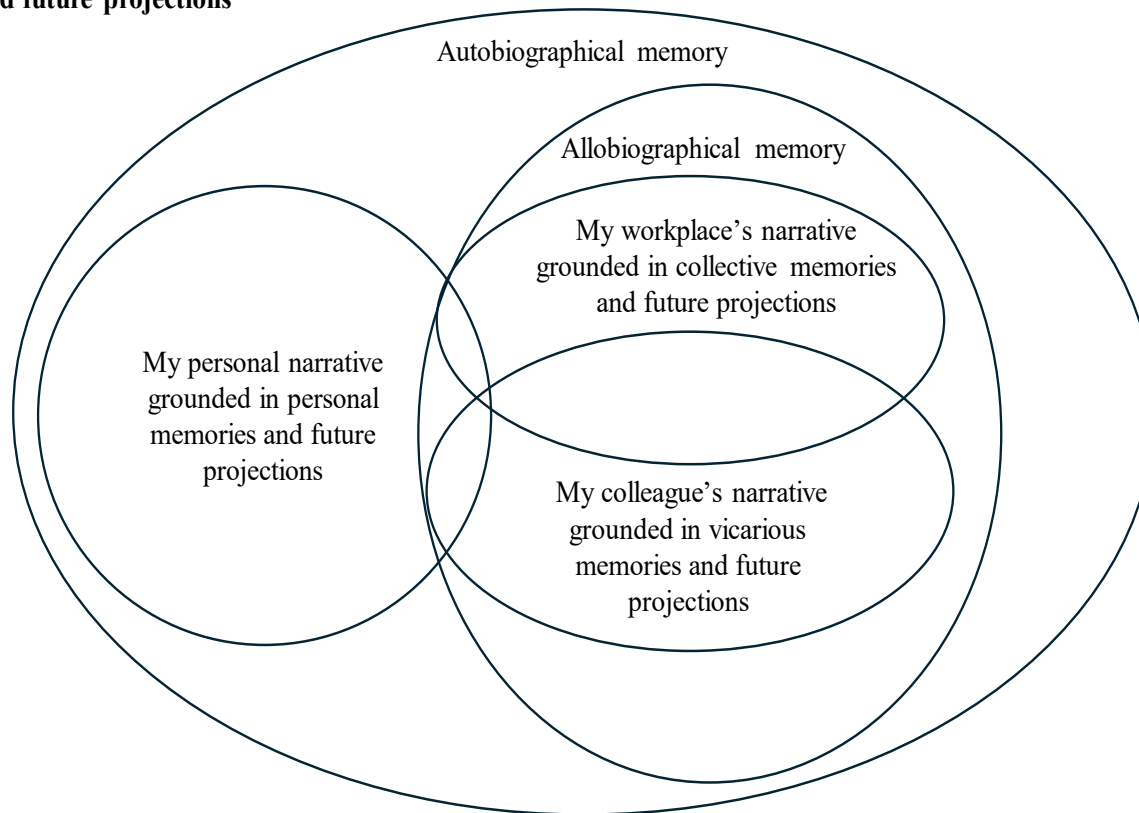


Figure 1b: An example of allobiographical memory and future projections in relation to autobiographical memory and future projections



Text and images for Box 1: Collective memory study paradigms

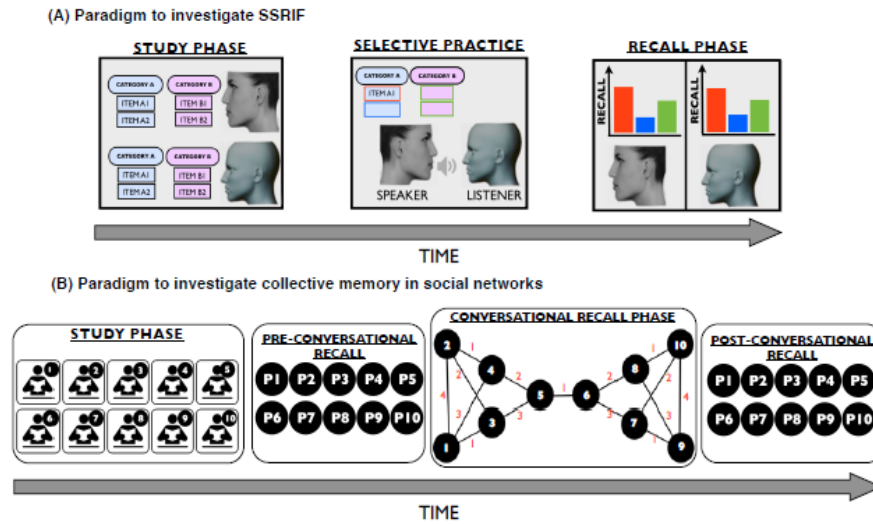


Fig. X. Panel A: the socially-shared retrieval-induced forgetting paradigm. Pairs of participants study category-exemplar pairs, they then selectively practice information during conversational remembering, and then individually recall the initially presented information. *Reinforcement effect*: practiced information (red bar) is remembered better than baseline information (green bar). *Retrieval induced forgetting*: information related to the practiced information (blue bar) is remembered worse than baseline information (green bar). SSRIF is the retrieval induced forgetting experienced by the listener. Panel B: the paradigm used to investigate collective memory. Groups of participants study category-exemplar pairs and then individually recall the studied information. In the conversational recall phase, participants jointly remember the information in dyadic sequential conversations (Circles represent participants, links represent conversations, and numbers in red indicate the sequence of conversational interactions). Finally, participants recall the information individually. The results show that the conversational network structure impacts the mnemonic convergence the community reaches.

Text for Box 2: Allobiographical memory, memory for fiction, social media, and cultural master narratives

Memory for fiction

We have proposed that allobiographical memories and future projections are organized into extended narratives and help define the identities of social entities. As such allobiographical representations overlap with how individuals may mentally represent fiction, e.g. the extended narrative of Harry Potter¹⁵⁵. Like vicarious memory, fiction allows individuals to enter the inner world of other people transcending the limits of direct experience^{7,156}. At the same time, allobiographical narratives differ from fictional narratives because they refer to the lived experience (or imagined lived experience) of another person or group that the person is connected to. Strong identification with fictional characters, the degree to which individuals define them as “mine”, e.g. “my favorite book”, and can remember intersections between their personal narrative and the fictional product, e.g. “I read that book when I was in high school”¹⁵⁷, may blur the boundaries between fictional, personal and allobiographical narratives.

Social media

Allobiographical memory and future projections may relate to social media in a variety of ways. Social media may provide individuals with vicarious memories and future projections for other people and as such become the raw material of extended vicarious narratives. Because social media content is highly selected, vicarious narratives may lose their anchoring in lived experienced with implications for how personal narratives intersect with vicarious narratives (e.g., “all my friends are happily married [as evidenced by their social media contributions], why can’t I make my marriage work?”). Social media may also function to select and shape collective memories and future projections of community relevant events through some of the same processes as outlined in Box 1¹⁵⁸.

Cultural master narratives

Allobiographical narratives, just like personal narratives, are shaped by master narratives, defined as “culturally shared stories that tell us about a given culture”, that are pervasive and rigid^{159,160}. Narrative schematic templates as identified by Wertsch¹²² are “deep” structures that implicitly shape how a nation selects, interprets and narrates important historical events, and constitute master narratives that inform collective memories, as well as guiding future projections and actions¹⁵⁹. Similarly, vicarious memories can provide culturally canonical interpretations of milestone life events, such as education, marriage and childbearing. Critically, alternative or resistance narratives can arise, especially within certain marginalized groups, that challenge the universal “truths” represented in master narratives. As such, vicarious and collective narratives may serve as models of identification for individuals living marginalized lives outside the boundaries of master narratives^{7,77,161}.

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