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EMPIRICAL ARTICLE

Distinguishing Collective Memory and History: A Community's Identity and History Are Derived From Distinct Sources

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The collective past can be represented in a variety of ways. For instance, through facts, iconic media representations, and flashbulb memories (FBMs). These various representations, however, might be viewed differently in the context of a community's collective memory and its history. Two studies compared the ratings of the relative contribution of these three types of representations to history and the social identity of members of a community. Although factual details were considered most important for inclusion in historical accounts of a community's past (i.e., history textbooks), knowledge of these facts was not viewed as particularly relevant to one's social identity. Instead, memories for iconic media representations of public events and FBMs were considered particularly important for social identity maintenance. A community's history and the social identity of its members are derived from distinct sources.

General Audience Summary

Psychologists have defined collective memories as widely shared memories that bear on a group's identity (Hirst et al., 2018) and consider these memories to be distinct from history. We evaluated this distinction by examining the identity relevance and historical importance placed on representations of public events. We considered the importance placed on three types of event representations: factual details, iconic media representations of the event, and flashbulb memories (FBMs). We considered historical events in relation to three communities: Americans, Black Americans, and sports fans. In Study 1, participants rated the extent to which various details about public events should be included in a textbook outlining an affected community's history. In Study 2, participants read about a fictional individual with dementia who was starting to lose memories for the same public events. Participants rated the extent to which this individual would lose their identity as a member of a particular group (i.e., their *social identity*) when memories for event details were forgotten. Differences emerged between the details considered important for social identity and those considered important for inclusion in a history book. Factual details were considered more important for inclusion in a history book than iconic representations and FBMs. When considering relevance to the maintenance of social identity, on the other hand, facts were considered less important than iconic representations and FBMs. In both studies, iconic representations were considered more important than FBMs. The results demonstrate a distinction between collective memory and history. The kinds of event representations that are deemed particularly relevant to social identity are distinct from the details considered important in historical accounts, such as history textbooks. A community's history and the identity of its members are derived from distinct sources.

Keywords: collective memory, social identity, flashbulb memory, history, memory

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review and editing. William Hirst played a lead role in funding acquisition, supporting role in conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, investigation, methodology, project administration and software, and an equal role in writing of original draft and writing of review and editing.

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Memory and identity are closely linked (Conway, 2005). Our concern here is how this connection holds at the collective level. We are interested in the relation between the identity one holds as a member of a community, *social identity* (Tajfel, 1982), and the widely shared memories within a community that bear on the community's identity, *collective memories* (Hirst et al., 2018). Such a link clearly exists. In a study connecting collective memories and social categorization, for instance, people were more likely to categorize someone as part of their community if they shared the same understanding of what constituted an important event for the community (e.g., WWII vs. the 2006 Israel–Lebanon War; Tavani et al., 2017). Moreover, Americans reported that frequent thoughts about the attacks of September 11, 2001 (9/11), made them feel "patriotic" 1 year after the event (Huddy & Khatib, 2007).

Our interest is in the contribution of distinct details about a public event to the social identity of members of an affected community. People can remember public events in various ways. Among the possibilities, they can recite facts (e.g., nearly 3,000 lives were lost in the attacks of 9/11), recollect iconic media representations (e.g., pictures and video of the collapse of the World Trade Center Towers), and recount personal experiences, such as flashbulb memories (FBMs; e.g., being at a coffee shop when first learning of the attack). They can also weave these details together into a narrative (e.g., a story of what unfolded on 9/11). We treat personal memories, specifically FBMs, as germane to a discussion of collective memory because, although their content differs from person to person, many members of an affected community report possessing FBMs for consequential public events (Hirst & Phelps, 2016).

When considering the relation between memory for these details and social identity, one must recognize that people's recollections of public events, even emotionally charged ones, can be spotty. They may forget some facts, while retaining memory for iconic imagery. Or they may know a few facts without necessarily being able to recount more than a rudimentary narrative about the event. Younger Americans may know that the United States lost the Vietnam War but be unable to offer much of a narrative of the war (e.g., a story with a clear beginning, middle, and end; Schuman et al., 1997). This narrative impasse may arise because people usually need a reasonable factual foundation on which to build a compelling narrative, but facts can fade quickly from memory. Even for an event as recent and traumatic as the attacks of 9/11, Hirst et al. (2009) found that more than 10% of their participants could not accurately remember how many planes or what cities were involved just 1 year after its occurrence.

When community members fail to remember the details of a public event affecting their community, will the extent to which the community member identifies with the community suffer? There is little empirical evidence addressing this issue. There are, of course, clear differences in the extent to which facts, iconic media representations, and FBMs are retained. Images, for instance, are better remembered than words or propositions (Jenkins et al., 1967; Paivio, 1977; Paivio & Csapo, 1969), and people remember material better if they can relate it to themselves (Symons & Johnson, 1997). However, there is no *a priori* reason that the influence a memory for a fact, an iconic media representation, or an FBM has on social identity should mirror these mnemonic differences. People might remember that Betsy Ross designed the original American flag, but that does not mean this memory has much bearing on the degree to which they identify as an American.

There are also clear differences in the extent to which different event representations are featured in a history book. Facts such as the number of planes involved in the attacks of 9/11 are just what one might expect to be included in history textbooks. After all, history books largely consist of facts woven into narratives. Iconic media can also be found in history books but assume, at best, a secondary role. FBMs are rarely featured, as one might expect given their personal nature. However, once again, there is no *a priori* reason to assume that these differences have a bearing on a reader's social identity. The information included in history books can certainly reinforce or even shape an understanding of a group, but this does not necessarily mean that group members will identify more or less with the group as a result of reading this information.

The question we explore here, then, is: Do memories for facts, iconic media representations, and FBMs have distinct impacts on social identity? What happens if a person forgets one of these details? We focused on these three types of event representations because we wanted to examine what might be viewed as the building blocks of narratives. For us, an understanding of the relative importance of these building blocks in isolation will contribute to the more complex task of understanding the contributions of narratives. Wertsch (2021) claimed that narratives are a "basic means for making sense of human action, memory, and identity" (p. 5), but also noted that they are not the only means. In isolation, the statement "3,000 lives were lost on 9/11" or a picture of smoke billowing from the World Trade Center Towers may not constitute a narrative, according to some theorists (for a discussion on this point, see Bruner, 1998), but they do have a strong emotional impact and underscore the devastation of the day. Moreover, isolated facts can become context for interpreting other events, as was the case when reporters highlighted that the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) daily death toll in the United States had surpassed the number of deaths on 9/11 (Crist, 2020).

Given that our concern is in the identification an *individual* has with a group, we are particularly interested in the contributions of FBMs. As Brown and Kulik (1977) first discussed them, psychologists have focused on the claim that FBMs differ from "ordinary" autobiographical memory, showing that the rate of forgetting may be the same but their phenomenological characteristics diverge (see Hirst & Phelps, 2016; Talarico & Rubin, 2003). Only recently have psychologists turned their attention to the role social identity might play in FBM formation and maintenance (although Brown and Kulik hinted at such a possibility in their original paper; see Berntsen, 2018; Hirst & Meksin, 2018; Merck et al., 2020). It is now well established that FBMs are often community-specific. For instance, Black Americans are more likely to have an FBM of the assassination of Malcolm X than are White Americans (Brown & Kulik, 1977) and French citizens are more likely to have a flashbulb memory of the death of François Mitterrand than French-speaking Belgians (Curci et al., 2001). FBMs are also widely held within an affected community. Almost every American has an FBM of the attacks of 9/11, even 10 years after the attack (Hirst et al., 2015). Given their widespread, community-specific nature, FBMs might be viewed as markers of community membership (Hirst et al., 2020). We want to explore what might be a corollary of this assertion: That community members' identification with an affected community is diminished if they fail to remember an FBM. Will an American, for instance, be viewed as less of an American if they do not have an FBM of 9/11?

We began our study by assessing what people believe should be in history textbooks. We then explored the results of losing access to memories for facts, iconic media representations, and FBM_s on social identity using a novel experimental paradigm. We asked members and nonmembers of an affected community to judge the extent to which a fictional individual will lose their identity as a member of a community if they forget facts about a public event, iconic media representations associated with the event, and FBM_s related to the event. In order to explore the generalizability of our results, we examined three different communities and three different social identities: American, Black American, and sports fandom. We chose American identity because much of the collective memory and collective identity literature focuses on the nation. We chose Black American identity because collective memory scholars are also concerned with the relation between collective memories and collective identity of minority and colonized groups within larger, national communities (Dimitrova et al., 2014; Eyerman, 2001; Figueiredo et al., 2019; Ruble et al., 2004). We included sports fans because we wanted a nonpolitical or nonpoliticized group that could still engender a strong sense of community and collective identity (Merck et al., 2020; Talarico & Moore, 2012).

We varied the public events that we examined in two ways. First, we included both positive and negative events, allowing us to explore the effects of valence. Second, we varied the amount of time that had passed since the events occurred. As a result of this manipulation, some events were “lived” public events for some, but not all participants, in that only some were old enough to have witnessed the events as they unfolded. We included both lived and distant public events because some researchers have documented differences between the two (Hirst & Manier, 2008; Muller et al., 2016, 2018).

Study 1: Importance for Inclusion in a History Textbook

This study was done to provide an empirical basis for our assertion that people would judge facts as the most important for inclusion in history textbooks, then iconic media representation, and finally FBM_s. Inasmuch as it grounds Study 2, we will be interested in exploring the same social groups, public events, and event details. Specifically, we will look at Americans, Black Americans, and sports fans and examine details about positive and negative events important to these communities.

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited via Amazon’s Mechanical Turk. All participants were residents of the United States. An a priori power analysis suggested that a sample of 240 participants would be sufficient to detect a moderate effect size with 80% power. Participants were assigned one of three social group conditions: American ($n = 60$), Black American ($n = 120$), or sports fandom ($n = 60$). In order to examine the similarities and differences in the identity relevance attributed to memories across members and nonmembers of at least one of the social groups, Mechanical Turk’s screening tools were used to recruit 60 Black American participants and 60 non-Black American participants for the Black American condition.

In the American and sports fandom conditions, the only selection requirement was that participants were American residents. Participants in the sports fandom condition were asked if they identified as sports fans, but this was not a selection requirement.

According to self-identification, 54.6% were male, 45.0% were female, and 0.4% were nonbinary. One participant did not report gender. Most participants reported having some level of college education. Age and education did not vary across social group conditions.

Of the non-Black participants in the Black American condition, 86.7% identified as White American, 8.3 as Asian American, and 5.0% as Latinx. In the American and sports fandom conditions, 80.0% identified as White American, 9.2% as Asian American, 5.8% as Black American, 2.5% as Latinx, and 2.5% as multiracial.

A series of attention checks were completed at the end of the survey, in which participants were asked to recall key aspects of the survey. Participants who did not complete these attention checks accurately were excluded from the analyses. Overall, 75 participants were excluded for failing to pass attention checks or reporting demographic information that did not match that which they were screened for using Mechanical Turk’s recruitment tools. Additional participants were recruited until the target sample numbers above were met.

Materials, Design, and Procedure

Participants read a description of three public events that were relevant to a particular social group: Americans, Black Americans, or Boston sports fans. The public events included in each social group condition are listed in Table 1. We selected these events so that, for each memory type, there was at least one positive event, for example, the Apollo moon landing, the “I Have a Dream” speech, and the 2004 Major League Baseball (MLB) World Series and 1984 National Basketball Association (NBA) Finals. Many of these events or similar events have figured in studies of FBM_s. The descriptions for each event can be found in the Supplemental Materials. The order of event presentation was randomized. Following the description of each event, participants rated the extent to which various details about the events were important to include in a textbook about the affected social group’s history. The general wording of the statements was:

To what extent should [FBM, ICONIC MEDIA REPRESENTATION OR FACT] be included in a textbook of [RELEVANT SOCIAL GROUP’S] history?

As can be observed, the statement refers not only to the relevant social group but also the different types of event representations. Specifically, for each public event, participants were asked about (a) two details concerning an FBM, (b) two memories for iconic media representations, and (c) two facts about the event. The FBM details always pertained to location and activity of community members. Table 1 contains the specific details of the iconic representations and facts. Below each statement was a 7-point scale with 1 = *definitely should NOT be included* and 7 = *definitely should be included*. For the American condition the relevant social group was “American,” for the Black American condition it was “Black American,” regardless of whether the participant identified as a Black or non-Black American, and for the sports fandom condition it was “Boston sports fan.” FBM_s, iconic representations, and facts were inserted into each statement. The order of events and event representations was

Table 1
Public Events, Social Groups, and Iconic Media Representations/Facts

Social group condition	Public event	Iconic media representations	Facts
American	Attacks of 9/11	... the live television coverage of the second plane hitting the World Trade Center ... the first Tower collapsing on live television	... how many people were killed in the attacks of 9/11 ... the total number of planes that were involved in the attacks of 9/11
	Apollo 11 moon landing	... Neil Armstrong taking his first steps on the moon's surface on live television ... the live television audio of Neil Armstrong's famous quote	... the year in which the first spacecraft landed on the moon ... that the first spacecraft to land on the moon was the 11th Apollo mission
	Kennedy assassination	... the live television footage of Kennedy's 3-year old son saluting his father at his funeral ... the live television coverage of Lee Harvey Oswald being shot and killed the following day	... the name of Kennedy's assassin ... the city in which the assassination took place
	Obama's 2008 election	... Obama delivering his victory speech on live television after he was announced as the next President ... the live television coverage of Black Americans in Chicago with tears in their eyes as Obama's victory was announced	... the year that Obama was first elected President ... that Obama's opponent in the 2008 election was John McCain
	Malcolm X assassination	... the images of Malcolm X being carted away from the scene ... the photographs of Malcolm X's supporters trying to comfort him after he was shot	... the names of Malcolm X's assassins ... the city in which the assassination took place
	“I Have a Dream” speech	... live audio of MLK powerfully delivering his line, “I have a dream”	... the number of supporters that attended the speech in Washington, DC ... whether the “I have a dream line” was stated at the beginning or the end of the speech
	2004 MLB World Series	... the images of the massive crowd stretching from the Lincoln Memorial to the Washington Monument to hear MLK's speech ... Boston pitcher Curt Schilling's bloody sock being shown on television as he led the Red Sox to a victory	... the name of the player who was awarded the MVP of the 2004 World Series
	1986 MLB World Series	... the live television coverage of the Red Sox players celebrating on the field after winning the final game of the series ... the live television coverage of the Mets scoring the winning run in the bottom of the tenth inning of Game 6, extending the Series to seven games	... the stadium at which the final game in the series was played
Sports fandom	1984 NBA Finals	... the live television coverage of a Red Sox player striking out in the final inning of Game 7 to lose the 1986 World Series ... the live television coverage of a Celtics player getting hit in the head with a beer can that was thrown by a Lakers fan	... the score of the final game in the series
		... the live television coverage of the players on both teams sweating profusely as the indoor temperature rose to 97 degrees during Game 5	... the stadium at which the final game in the series was played

Note. Events in each social group condition are listed chronologically from most recent to most distant. MLK = Martin Luther King, Jr.; MLB = Major League Baseball; MVP = Most Valuable Player; NBA = National Basketball Association.

randomized. The mean ratings for each memory type (FBMs, iconic representations, facts) were calculated in each social group condition.

Participants then completed a group identification scale in which they rated the extent to which they identified with a particular social group (e.g., "I see myself as a Black American"). Scale items and format were adapted from research assessing group identification across a range of groups (Hall & Crisp, 2008; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Lyons et al., 2013; McCoy & Major, 2003). All items were rated on a 7-point scale with 1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*. The group to which the scale referred varied across social group conditions and across participants within those conditions. In the American condition, all participants rated their group identification as an American. In the Black American condition, Black participants rated their identification as a Black American, whereas non-Black participants rated their identification as an American. In the sports fandom condition, participants who were fans of any Boston sports team(s) rated their identification as Boston sports fans, whereas non-Boston sports fans rated their identification as sports fans in general. Finally, participants completed a series of demographic questions including age, gender, and education.

Results

We first examined ratings of different memory types and public events across social group conditions. In our analyses, we identified four social groups: Americans in the American condition, Black Americans in the Black American condition, non-Black Americans in the Black American condition, and participants in the sports fandom condition. There were very few participants who reported any level of Boston sports fandom ($n = 11$), so we did not separately analyze Boston sports fans and nonfans. When reporting results of statistical comparisons, we present 95% confidence intervals for the difference of the means. Cohen's d effect sizes were calculated using Lakens (2013) calculator.

Table 2
Ratings of Importance for Inclusion in a History Textbook in Study 1

Social group condition/event	<i>M (SD)</i>			
	Iconic representations	FBM	Factual event memories	All memory types
All participants	5.78 (1.01)	3.77 (1.79)	6.20 (0.79)	5.25 (0.92)
American condition	5.94 (0.82)	3.62 (1.79)	6.57 (0.56)	5.38 (0.74)
Attacks of 9/11	6.14 (1.09)	3.88 (1.94)	6.63 (0.66)	5.56 (0.82)
JFK assassination	5.13 (1.49)	3.52 (1.92)	6.47 (0.76)	5.04 (0.99)
Apollo 11	6.56 (0.75)	3.46 (1.93)	6.60 (0.69)	5.54 (0.76)
Black participants in the Black American condition	6.09 (0.83)	4.69 (1.54)	6.21 (0.68)	5.66 (0.81)
Election of Obama	6.29 (0.93)	4.48 (1.81)	6.35 (0.80)	5.71 (0.87)
Malcolm X assassination	5.31 (1.72)	4.60 (1.59)	5.31 (1.72)	5.39 (1.10)
MLK "I Have a Dream"	6.68 (0.71)	4.98 (1.71)	6.02 (1.08)	5.89 (0.87)
Non-Black participants in the Black American condition	5.91 (0.93)	3.81 (1.89)	6.09 (0.84)	5.27 (1.02)
Election of Obama	6.11 (1.23)	3.93 (2.10)	6.28 (0.96)	5.44 (1.13)
Malcolm X assassination	4.84 (1.60)	3.54 (1.89)	6.18 (1.20)	4.86 (1.22)
MLK "I Have a Dream"	6.78 (0.65)	3.96 (2.09)	5.79 (1.24)	5.51 (1.08)
Sports fandom condition	5.19 (1.19)	2.97 (1.51)	5.93 (0.91)	4.69 (0.80)
2004 World Series (win)	5.72 (1.39)	3.09 (1.88)	6.17 (1.13)	4.99 (0.98)
1986 World Series (loss)	4.72 (1.71)	2.88 (1.56)	6.25 (1.10)	4.61 (0.91)
1984 NBA Finals (win)	5.13 (1.67)	2.94 (1.62)	5.36 (1.44)	4.48 (1.23)

Note. All ratings were made on a 7-point scale from 1 = *definitely should NOT be included* to 7 = *definitely should be included*. FBM = flashbulb memory; JFK = John F. Kennedy; MLK = Martin Luther King, Jr.; NBA = National Basketball Association.

Social Group Condition and Memory Type

Mean ratings of identity loss across social group conditions and memory type are provided in Table 2. A 4 (social group) \times 3 (memory type: fact, iconic representation, FBM) mixed analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. The dependent variable was ratings of importance for inclusion in a history textbook. Social group condition was a between-participants variable and memory type was a within-participants variable. There was a significant effect of memory type, $F(2, 472) = 370.70, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .61$. Post hoc tests demonstrated that facts about public events were rated as more important to include in a history textbook than iconic representations and FBMs, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.31, 0.52], $d = 0.46$, and $p < .001$, 95% CI [2.21, 2.65], $d = 1.75$, respectively. Iconic representations were rated as more important than FBMs, $p < .001$, 95% CI [1.80, 2.23], $d = 1.38$.

The effect of social group condition was also significant, $F(3, 236) = 13.72, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .15$. Post hoc tests demonstrated that overall ratings in the Boston sports fandom condition were significantly lower than ratings in the American condition, Black participants' ratings in the Black American condition, and non-Black participants' ratings in the Black American condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [−0.99, −0.38], $d = 0.89$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [−1.28, −0.66], $d = 1.21$, and $p < .001$, 95% CI [−0.88, −0.27], $d = 0.63$, respectively. Black participants' ratings in the Black American condition were significantly higher than the ratings of non-Black participants in the Black American condition, $p = .01$, 95% CI [0.09, 0.70], $d = 0.43$. The difference between ratings of Black participants in the Black American condition and ratings in the American condition was approaching significance, $p = .07$, 95% CI [−0.02, 0.59], $d = 0.37$. The remaining comparison was not significant ($p = .48$).

The interaction between memory type and social group condition was significant, $F(6, 472) = 6.68, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .002$. Comparisons across memory type within each social group condition demonstrated

that factual details and iconic representations were rated as more important for inclusion in a history textbook than FBM_s in all conditions (all $p < .001$). Factual details were rated as more important than iconic representations in the American and Boston sports fandom conditions (both $p < .001$), but this comparison was not significant in the Black American condition for Black and non-Black American participants (both $p > .10$). The mean ratings of public events within the Black American condition suggest that Martin Luther King, Jr.'s (MLK's) "I Have a Dream" speech produced a distinct pattern with iconic representations rated as more important than factual details.

Public Events

The previous analyses averaged across the public events within each social group condition. It is possible, however, that ratings varied across events. With this in mind, we examined whether differences arose across events within each condition separately, inasmuch as the events in each condition differed.

A repeated-measures ANOVA was conducted to examine differences in ratings of identity loss across public events in the American condition. The effect of public event was significant, $F(2, 118) = 17.43, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .23$. Post hoc tests demonstrated that the assassination of John F. Kennedy (JFK) was rated as less important to include in a history textbook than the attacks of 9/11 and the Apollo 11 moon landing, $p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} [-0.72, -0.31], d = 0.57$, and $p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} [-0.70, -0.30], d = 0.57$, respectively. There was no difference in ratings of the attacks of 9/11 and the Apollo 11 moon landing, $p = .89$. The reason for this pattern of ratings is unclear, but it does not appear to be driven by event valence or recency effects.

In the Black American condition, we could contrast the ratings of Black and non-Black American participants. We conducted a 3 (public event) \times 2 (participants' race) mixed ANOVA. The effect of public event was significant, $F(2, 236) = 28.63, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .20$. Post hoc tests showed that MLK's "I Have a Dream" speech was rated as more important for inclusion in a history textbook than the assassination of Malcolm X, $p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} [0.39, 0.76], d = 0.52$, but only marginally more important than the election of Obama, $p = .08, 95\% \text{ CI} [-0.02, 0.27], d = 0.12$. Ratings for Obama's election were greater than ratings for the assassination of Malcolm X, $p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} [0.30, 0.60], d = 0.41$. Valence could have been a factor in these ratings, with both positive events rated as more important than the negative event, but alternative explanations are possible.

The effect of participants' race was also significant, $F(1, 118) = 5.53, p = .02, \eta^2_p = .05$. Overall, Black American participants judged the public events they rated as more important for inclusion in a textbook about Black American history than non-Black American participants, $p = .02, 95\% \text{ CI} [0.06, 0.73], d = .43$. The interaction between public event and participants' race was not significant, $F(2, 236) = 1.44, p = .24, \eta^2_p = .01$.

A repeated-measures ANOVA was conducted to examine differences in ratings across public events in the Boston sports fandom condition. A significant effect was found, $F(2, 118) = 6.31, p = .002, \eta^2_p = .10$. Post hoc comparisons demonstrated that the 2004 World Series was rated as more important for inclusion in a textbook about the history of Boston sports than the 1986 World Series and the 1984 NBA Finals, $p = .003, 95\% \text{ CI} [0.13, 0.63], d = 0.40$, and $p = .001, 95\% \text{ CI} [0.21, 0.81], d = 0.46$, respectively. There was no significant difference in ratings of the 1986 World Series and 1984

NBA Finals, $p = .43, 95\% \text{ CI} [-0.21, 0.48], d = 0.13$. This pattern may reflect a recency bias in that the event associated with the greatest levels of identity loss occurred approximately 20 years after the other events. No recency bias was found in the other conditions. It was unclear if the valence of the sporting events played any role. The event associated with the highest ratings of identity loss was a victory for a Boston sports team, but so was the event associated with the lowest ratings.

Group Identification

The group identification scale showed high reliability across all social group conditions (all Cronbach's $\alpha > .91$). In a one-way ANOVA comparing group identification across social group conditions, a significant effect was observed, $F(3, 236) = 19.39, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .20$. Ratings of Black American identification provided by Black participants in the Black American condition ($M = 5.75, SD = 1.10$) were significantly higher than ratings of American identification in the American condition ($M = 4.90, SD = 1.38$), $p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} [0.35, 1.34], d = 0.68$, American identification of the non-Black participants in the Black American condition ($M = 5.06, SD = 1.29$), $p = .006, 95\% \text{ CI} [0.19, 1.18], d = 0.58$, and identification as a sports fan ($M = 3.87, SD = 1.64$), $p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} [1.39, 2.37], d = 1.36$. Group identification as a sports fan was lower than American identification in the American condition and among non-Black participants in the Black American condition, $p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} [-1.52, -0.54], d = 0.69$, and $p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} [-1.69, -0.70], d = 0.82$, respectively. This finding concerning sports fandom is not surprising in that we did not specifically recruit sports fans. There was no difference in American identification of participants in the American condition and American identification of non-Black participants in the Black American condition, $p = .52, 95\% \text{ CI} [-0.65, 0.33], d = 0.12$.

We next examined correlations between group identification and ratings of the importance of inclusion of public events in a history textbook. The only significant correlation that emerged was between identification as a sports fan and the extent to which FBM_s should be included in a textbook about sports history, $r(59) = .44, p < .001$. When considering the historical importance of public events, participants may have tried to take an objective perspective or, at least, a perspective unrelated to their personal experience and social identity.

Study 2: Relevance to Social Identity

Study 1 established that, as expected, people believed that it was more important to include facts in history textbooks than iconic representations. FBM_s were the least important. To the extent these judgments reflect what people deemed important to each of the three groups' histories, they could be viewed as representing what people view as critical to the group's identity as a whole. The present study explores whether the same pattern of results holds when considering social identity, that is, the extent to which an individual identifies with a group.

Method

Participants

A similar sample ($N = 240$) was collected via Amazon's Mechanical Turk for Study 2. Participants were assigned one of three social

group conditions: American ($n = 60$), Black American ($n = 120$), or sports fandom ($n = 60$). For the Black American social group condition, we used Mechanical Turk's screening tools to recruit 60 Black American participants and 60 non-Black American participants. All participants were residents of the United States.

Overall, 51.2% self-identified as male, 44.6% as female, and 0.4% as nonbinary. One participant did not report gender. The mean age of the sample was 38.39 ($SD = 11.63$). Reported education levels suggested that most participants had some level of college education. Education levels did not differ across social group conditions. Age did significantly vary across social group conditions, $F(3, 236) = 4.54, p = .004, \eta^2_p = .06$, in two ways. First, Black participants ($M = 34.82, SD = 10.32$) were younger than non-Black participants in the Black American condition ($M = 41.97, SD = 11.86$) and participants in the American condition ($M = 39.77, SD = 12.26, p = .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [3.06, 11.25], d = 0.65$, and $p = .02, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.86, 9.05], d = 0.44$, respectively. Second, participants in the sports fandom condition ($M = 37.00, SD = 10.99$) were younger than non-Black participants in the Black American condition, $p = .02, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.87, 9.06], d = 0.44$. Although these age differences existed, no effects of age on the variables of interest were observed.

Of the non-Black participants in the Black American condition, 88.3% identified as White American, 5.0% as Latinx, 5.0% as Asian American, and 1.7% as Native American. In the American and sports fandom conditions, 77.5% identified as White American, 10.0% as Black American, 7.5% as Latinx, 4.2% as Asian American, and 1.6% as multiracial. Of the Black participants in the Black American condition, 5.0% identified as multiracial.

As in Study 1, attention checks were completed at the end of the survey and those who provided inaccurate responses were excluded from the analyses. Overall, 93 participants were excluded either for failing to pass attention checks or reporting demographic information that did not match that which they were screened for using Mechanical Turk's recruitment tools. Additional participants were recruited until the target sample numbers above were met.

Materials, Design, and Procedure

Participants read about a fictional individual who was described as either an American, Black American, or Boston sports fan. The age of this individual was always 75, which was old enough to have lived through all public events included in the study materials. The fictional individual's gender was randomly assigned as female or male, with the name Anna or Daniel, respectively. Participants were told that this individual had developed a form of progressive amnesia that will cause them to lose certain memories over time and that they are worried that losing certain memories will lead to a loss of their identity as a member of a particular group. Participants were told that they would be asked about the effects of losing certain memories on this individual's identity. Below is an example vignette from the Black American condition:

Anna is 75 years old. She is a Black American and has lived through many historic events that have highlighted racial divides and marked progress towards equality in the United States. Unfortunately, Anna was recently diagnosed with a form of progressive amnesia and is expected to lose some of her memories over the next few years. Some memories will be lost permanently, while others will remain intact. Anna was shocked to learn about this diagnosis and is worried that she will lose her identity if certain memories are lost. She does not yet know which

memories will be lost, but has been thinking about the consequences of losing certain memories.

An individual's sense of who they are is, at least in part, dependent on their ability to remember past experiences. Anna wants to know if losing certain memories will cause her to lose her identity as a member of certain groups. Specifically, she wants your help in determining the extent to which losing specific memories will lead to a loss of her identity as a Black American.

On the next few pages, you will be asked about the effects of losing certain memories on Anna's identity as a Black American. Please read the instructions carefully and respond honestly and to the best of your ability.

After reading the vignette, participants read a description of three public events that were relevant to the particular social group associated with the social group condition they were in. The public events, social group conditions, and details about each event were identical to Study 1 (see Table 1). Participants were told that the fictional individual had attended to the media coverage of each public event. Following the description of each event, participants rated their agreement with a series of statements indicating the extent to which Anna or Daniel's identity as a group member would be impacted by the forgetting of certain memories that they had held previously. The general wording of the statements was:

To what extent will Anna/Daniel have lost her/his identity as a(n) [RELEVANT SOCIAL GROUP] when she/he can no longer remember [FBM, ICONIC MEDIA REPRESENTATION OR FACT].

As in Study 1, the rating task for each public event included (a) two details concerning an FBM, (b) two memories for iconic media representations, and (c) two facts about the event. The statements concerning FBMs always probed for the same details, specifically, (a) where Anna/Daniel was when the event was learned about and (b) what Anna/Daniel was doing when the event was learned about. Below each statement was a 7-point scale with 1 = *not at all* and 7 = *completely*. The order of events and memory representations was randomized.

After responding to all three events, participants were asked to provide their race/ethnicity. Participants in the sports fandom condition also indicated if they supported any Boston sports teams. Participants completed the group identification scale included in Study 1 and provided the same demographic information.

Results

Analyses were similar to Study 1. We compared results across four social groups: Americans in the American condition, Black Americans in the Black American condition, non-Black Americans in the Black American condition, and participants in the sports fandom condition. As in Study 1, few participants reported any level of Boston sports fandom ($n = 9$), so we did not separately analyze these fans. When reporting the results of statistical comparisons, we present 95% confidence intervals for the difference of the means. Cohen's d effect sizes were calculated using Lakens (2013) calculator.

Social Group Condition and Memory Type

Mean ratings of identity loss across social group conditions and memory type are provided in Table 3. The ratings are in the mid-range

Table 3*Ratings of Social Identity Loss in Study 2*

Social group condition/event	<i>M (SD)</i>			
	Iconic representations	FBM	Factual event memories	All memory types
All participants	3.27 (1.78)	2.98 (1.73)	2.84 (1.65)	3.03 (1.65)
American condition	2.80 (1.65)	2.56 (1.64)	2.36 (1.40)	2.57 (1.51)
Attacks of 9/11	2.78 (1.85)	2.63 (1.82)	2.31 (1.57)	2.57 (1.65)
JFK assassination	2.55 (1.66)	2.58 (1.81)	2.28 (1.41)	2.47 (1.51)
Apollo 11	3.08 (1.82)	2.48 (1.74)	2.48 (1.58)	2.68 (1.62)
Black participants in the Black American condition	3.47 (1.92)	3.10 (1.81)	2.99 (1.82)	3.18 (1.79)
Election of Obama	3.30 (2.04)	2.85 (1.89)	2.75 (1.71)	2.97 (1.78)
Malcolm X assassination	3.31 (2.06)	3.04 (1.95)	2.99 (2.00)	3.11 (1.91)
MLK "I Have a Dream"	3.79 (2.02)	3.41 (2.08)	3.22 (2.07)	3.47 (1.94)
Non-Black participants in the Black American condition	3.19 (1.79)	2.81 (1.71)	2.57 (1.56)	2.85 (1.63)
Election of Obama	3.18 (1.91)	2.74 (1.84)	2.43 (1.62)	2.78 (1.68)
Malcolm X assassination	3.03 (1.82)	2.58 (1.65)	2.43 (1.65)	2.68 (1.64)
MLK "I Have a Dream"	3.35 (1.92)	3.12 (1.89)	2.84 (1.74)	3.10 (1.77)
Sports fandom condition	3.61 (1.66)	3.43 (1.67)	3.44 (1.64)	3.50 (1.57)
2004 World Series (win)	3.82 (1.75)	3.50 (1.67)	3.52 (1.56)	3.62 (1.54)
1986 World Series (loss)	3.66 (1.74)	3.43 (1.83)	3.36 (1.84)	3.48 (1.67)
1984 NBA Finals (win)	3.36 (1.76)	3.38 (1.76)	3.43 (1.76)	3.39 (1.60)

Note. All ratings were made on a 7-point scale from 1 = *not at all* (no loss of identity) to 7 = *completely* (complete loss of identity). FBM = flashbulb memory; JFK = John F. Kennedy; MLK = Martin Luther King, Jr.; NBA = National Basketball Association.

across all memory types and public events. This was expected in that the loss of a single memory is unlikely to be perceived as a complete loss of one's social identity, regardless of the type of memory.

A 4 (social group) \times 3 (memory type) mixed ANOVA was conducted. The dependent variable was identity loss. There was a significant effect of memory type, $F(2, 472) = 35.55, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .13$. Post hoc tests demonstrated that forgetting iconic representations was associated with significantly higher ratings of identity loss than the forgetting of FBMs and facts, $p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} [0.18, 0.40], d = 0.17$, and $p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} [0.33, 0.53], d = 0.25$, respectively. Forgetting FBMs was associated with higher ratings of identity loss than facts, $p = .007, 95\% \text{ CI} [0.04, 0.24], d = 0.08$.

There was also a significant effect of social group condition, $F(3, 236) = 3.63, p = .01, \eta_p^2 = .04$. Post hoc tests demonstrated that overall ratings of identity loss in the Boston sports fandom condition were significantly higher than ratings in the American condition and non-Black participants' ratings in the Black American condition, $p = .001, 95\% \text{ CI} [0.34, 1.51], d = 0.61$, and $p = .03, 95\% \text{ CI} [0.06, 1.23], d = 0.41$, respectively. Black participants' ratings in the Black American condition were significantly higher than the ratings of participants in the American condition, $p = .04, 95\% \text{ CI} [0.03, 1.20], d = 0.37$. The remaining post hoc comparisons were not significant (all $p > .27$). In particular, the difference in ratings of the Black and non-Black participants in the Black American condition was not significant, suggesting that community members and nonmembers may have similar perceptions regarding the importance of memory representations for the social identity of community members.

The interaction between memory type and social group condition was not significant, $F(6, 472) = 1.73, p = .112, \eta_p^2 = .002$. That is, the advantage of iconic representations over FBMs and, in turn, of FBMs over facts held regardless of the social group Anna or Daniel belonged to and the specific social identity of participants. Despite the lack of a significant interaction, it is notable that this pattern was

not as apparent in the sports fandom condition, in which ratings of identity loss associated with FBMs and facts were nearly identical.

Public Events

We next examined the comparisons of ratings across public events within each condition. A repeated-measures ANOVA was conducted to examine differences in ratings of identity loss across public events in the American condition. The effect of public event was not significant, $F(2, 118) = 1.68, p = .19, \eta_p^2 = .03$.

In the Black American condition, we conducted a 3 (public event) \times 2 (participants' race) mixed ANOVA. The effect of public event was significant, $F(2, 236) = 15.59, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .12$. There was no effect of participants' race, $F(1, 118) = 1.11, p = .29, \eta_p^2 = .01$, nor was the interaction between public event and participants' race significant, $F(2, 236) = 1.19, p = .31, \eta_p^2 = .01$. These results suggest that both Black and non-Black Americans viewed the contribution of the various public events to Black American identity similarly. As to the main effect for event, post hoc tests showed that it was due to higher ratings for MLK's "I Have a Dream" speech when compared to the assassination of Malcolm X and the election of Obama, $p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} [0.24, 0.54], d = 0.21$ and $p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} [0.23, 0.60], d = 0.23$, respectively. Ratings for the assassination of Malcolm X and Obama's election did not differ from one another, $p = .77, 95\% \text{ CI} [-0.13, 0.18], d = 0.01$. This finding underscores the degree to which memories of the "I Have a Dream" speech are viewed as critical to Black American identity. One cannot conclude that valence mattered, in that there was no difference in the rating assigned to the assassination of Malcolm X and the election of Obama.

A repeated-measures ANOVA was conducted to examine differences in ratings across public events in the sports fandom condition. A significant effect was found, $F(2, 118) = 4.70, p = .01, \eta_p^2 = .07$.

Post hoc comparisons demonstrated that the 2004 World Series was associated with significantly higher ratings of identity loss than the 1984 NBA Finals, $p = .005$, 95% CI [0.07, 0.38], $d = 0.14$, and moderately higher ratings than the 1986 World Series, $p = .09$, 95% CI [-0.02, 0.29], $d = 0.08$. There was no significant difference in ratings of the 1986 World Series and 1984 NBA Finals, $p = .18$, 95% CI [-0.04, 0.23], $d = 0.06$. This pattern, which is similar to that observed in Study 1, could reflect a recency bias, though, as in Study 1, no recency bias was observed in other social group conditions.

Group Identification

The group identification scale showed high reliability across all social group conditions (all Cronbach's $\alpha > .93$). A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare ratings of group identification across social groups. A significant effect of social group condition was found, $F(3, 236) = 12.47$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .14$. Group identification was highest among Black participants in the Black American condition ($M = 5.69$, $SD = 1.25$), whose ratings were significantly higher than American identification of participants in the American condition ($M = 4.83$, $SD = 1.61$), $p = .002$, 95% CI [0.31, 1.41], $d = 0.60$, American identification of the non-Black participants in the Black American condition ($M = 4.92$, $SD = 1.49$), $p = .006$, 95% CI [0.22, 1.32], $d = 0.57$, and identification as a sports fan ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 1.63$), $p < .001$, 95% CI [1.15, 2.25], $d = 1.15$. Group identification as a sports fan was lower than American identification both in the American condition and among non-Black participants in the Black American condition, $p = .003$, 95% CI [-1.39, -0.29], $d = 0.51$, and $p = .001$, 95% CI [-1.47, -0.38], $d = 0.58$, respectively. There was no difference in American identification of participants in the American condition and American identification of non-Black participants in the Black American condition, $p = .76$, 95% CI [-0.46, 0.64], $d = 0.06$.

Did group identification of the participants correlate with ratings of identity loss of Anna or Daniel? Correlations were positive across all social group conditions, but not all correlations were significant. See Table 4. Group identification as an American was significantly correlated with all ratings of identity loss in both the American and Black American conditions. Group identification as a Black American correlated only with loss of identity associated with forgetting FBMs. For sports fans, the only significant correlation

was with memories for iconic media representations. These results may suggest that national group identification of the participants is strongly related to their treatment of identity loss for all types of memories for public events, but the relation for nonnational group identification of participants is less compelling.

General Discussion

The results bear on four related issues. First, they address what kinds of memories about a public event affect the degree to which one identifies with a community, focusing on memories for facts, iconic media representations, and FBMs. One might expect that the facts concerning a public event, which, after all, inform one of what the event is about, would be important. If one does not know that nearly 3,000 people were killed on 9/11, then one might not appreciate how disturbing the event was for the American public. But participants rated memories for facts as less important to an individual's social identity than either memories of iconic media representations or FBMs. This ordering held regardless of the community being examined in our study. One possible explanation for this result is that FBMs and iconic media representations are likely to be more memorable than facts (Paivio, 1977; Symons & Johnson, 1997), and people may feel that members of a community will lose their social identity when more memorable material is forgotten. But the failure to remember facts, iconic representations, and FBMs may have differential effects on social identity that this general explanation misses. For instance, iconic representations may evoke strong emotions (Döveling & Konijn, 2010), increasing the extent to which people consider them relevant to social identity. For example, recalling the video recordings of the World Trade Center Towers collapsing may elicit stronger emotions than merely reciting the fact that the Towers collapsed. As for FBMs, when people forget the circumstances in which they learned of a public event, they lose a personal connection to the event. Clearly, a public event that one *directly* experiences will play a role in the extent to which one identifies with the affected community. The present results suggest that even when one only *indirectly* experiences a public event, for instance, via television coverage, memory and social identity are nonetheless viewed as closely connected to one another.

The second issue addressed by the present results is the difference between which memories are considered important to include in a

Table 4
Correlation Coefficients of Group Identification and Ratings of Identity Loss in Study 2

Group identification and social group condition		Memory type		
	FBMs	Iconic representations	Facts about event	All memory types
American identification				
American condition	.39**	.42***	.42***	.42***
Non-Black participants in the Black American condition	.45***	.37**	.38**	.41***
Black American identification				
Black participants in the Black American condition	.26*	.19	.20	.22
Sports fandom identification				
Boston sports fandom condition	.05	.27*	.17	.17

Note. FBMs = flashbulb memories.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

history textbook, which we might call *historical memory*, and which memories are considered important to an individual's social identity, what we would call *collective memories*. Whereas facts were viewed as the most important to include in a history book, they were viewed as the least important in terms of maintenance of social identity. One interpretation of this difference is that the information included in a book about a community's history speaks to the identity of the group as a whole, which is not the same as the extent to which individual community members identify with that community. An American may believe that America is defined in part by the Enlightenment value that "all are created equal," a declaration that would most likely find its way into a history text, but still feel little identification as a member of the American community. What the results here suggest is that the event representations important for defining a group as a whole are not necessarily the same as those that shape an individual's identification with that group.

The third issue the results address concerns the cross-community appreciation of the influence of memory on social identity. The results indicate that participants from one community can have insight into what people from other communities deem important for social identity maintenance. Not only did both Black and non-Black Americans recognize the importance of FBM and iconic representations associated with public events relevant to the Black American community, they also provided a similar pattern of ratings for specific events. Both Black and non-Black American participants rated memories of MLK's "I Have a Dream" speech as bearing more on Black American social identity than memories of the assassination of Malcolm X (Study 2). The same rank ordering held when considering what should be included in a textbook of Black American history (Study 1), though Black American participants deemed all the rated public events more important for inclusion in a Black American history textbook than did non-Black American participants. Although speculative, this difference could reflect differences in appreciation for the underrepresentation of minorities in historical accounts (King, 2017). It is also possible that this pattern reflects disparities in the historical importance that individuals attribute to their own communities (Putnam et al., 2018). This difference did not emerge for ratings in relation to social identity in Study 2.

Finally, the results bear on studies of FBM. As we noted, most studies of FBM have focused on their accuracy and phenomenological characteristics, but these concerns do not directly address why individuals find FBM of such interest. People are constantly exchanging their FBM with others, for instance. The present results suggest that one reason for this chatter is that FBM can ground an individual's identification with the affected community. People share their FBM with others because the memories underscore, to paraphrase Neisser (1982), their place in history writ large (also see James, 1890, for a discussion of the distinction between *the* past and *my* past). The present results suggest that students of memory might turn their attention more to FBM's role in shaping social identity, in addition to questions surrounding their retention and phenomenological characteristics (see Hirst et al., 2020).

The present studies represent only an initial foray into the relation between collective memories for public events and social identity, a relation that motivates contemporary discussions as to how society should seek to remember its past. Future research could expand upon our results. The present data were collected from an online sample, which is not without limitations. The online tools allowed us

to set specific requirements for participation and we utilized attention checks that ensured that participants understood the survey instructions, but it would be worthwhile to examine related research questions with in-person participants or a more representative sample. The present studies did not explore how participants arrived at their judgments or other potential impacts of forgetting details about public events. For instance, future research could examine the role of forgetting specific event details on overall narrative representations (e.g., what narrative would a person tell about the "I Have a Dream" speech if they could no longer remember the images of the massive crowd in attendance?). What constitutes a narrative is highly contested. Some may claim that a simple fact, such as "3,000 people died on 9/11," is itself a narrative, whereas others look for certain tell-tale characteristics such as a beginning, middle, and end (Carr, 1991). In any case, it is quite possible that our participants judged the importance of a fact, iconic representation, or FBM to social identity merely on the basis of what the representation depicts and the emotions it elicits, rather than the possible narrative one might tell in their absence. Whatever participants may be doing in the present instance, the critical role for memories of personal experiences, such as FBM, needs to be underscored. The role the Vietnam War plays in shaping one's identity as an American may be affected more by the memory of a friend burning their draft card than by any memory one has of the Tet Offensive.

The focus of the present studies was on lived collective memories, that is, memories of public events that occurred during the lifetime of the rememberer (Hirst & Manier, 2008; Muller et al., 2016, 2018). It is not always possible to talk about personal experiences when considering distant collective memories. In some cases, one may have vicarious memories of personal experiences of a member of an older generation that could serve similar purposes (Stone et al., 2014). However, for more distant events, only facts and media representations, as well as narratives, are available. As public events and memories become more temporally distant, will the same pattern of importance stand? Will, for instance, iconic representations remain more important than facts? Or will memory and history become more unified as more time passes?

The present studies provide an empirical grounding for understanding the way different mnemonic representations of the collective past bear on the extent to which one identifies with a collectivity, as noted, a topic of great interest today. Events that would rarely appear in a historical account, such as FBM, are viewed as critical to maintaining social identity. When considering history, on the other hand, concrete facts are viewed as critically important. Further exploration may expand our understanding of how public event memories contribute to the maintenance of social identity and how these contributions differ in historical accounts and the social representations people have of history.

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