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Motivated to "Forget": The Effects of In-Group Wrongdoing on Memory and Collective Guilt

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Abstract

Reminders of in-group wrongdoing can prompt defensive responses that affect intergroup relations. Across two studies, American participants were randomly assigned to have their American identity increased (or not), then read a passage describing the negative treatment of Native American Indians by perpetrators described as either early Americans (i.e., in-group members) or European settlers (i.e., out-group members). Memory for the content of the passage and feelings of collective guilt were assessed. Participants demonstrated poorer memory when the perpetrators were framed as in-group (Americans), rather than out-group (Europeans), members. Further, participants in the in-group perpetrator condition whose American identification was primed experienced less collective guilt compared with participants in the in-group perpetrator condition whose American identification was not primed. Implications for intergroup relations and the understanding of collective memory are discussed.

Keywords

social identity threat, memory, collective guilt

How intergroup events are remembered can cause controversy decades and even centuries after the events. The perceived erasing or ''rewriting'' of negative in-group history insults victimized groups and can lead to increased intergroup tension and conflict. For instance, there have been ongoing flares of tension between China and Japan due to the perception (if not reality) that Japanese textbooks minimize wartime atrocities against China (see Hein & Selden, 2000; Lind, 2008) and, similarly, tensions persist between Turkey and Armenia because of the refusal by Turkey and its allies to use the term genocide to describe the killing of more than a million ethnic Armenians by the Ottoman Empire (Balakian, 2003).

Understandably, appropriate memory of these events is extremely important to victims of intergroup aggression. Victims commemorate these events through stories and artwork (Noor, Brown, & Prentice, 2008), often passing down such knowledge to future generations of in-group members (Brown, Wohl, & Exline, 2008; Evans-Campbell, 2008). Not only do victims keep the memories of intergroup aggression alive for themselves, but they also expect such memories to be recognized and maintained by the perpetrator groups (see Pennebaker, Paez, & Rimé, 1997). Indeed, acknowledgment of past wrongdoing by (and the responsibility of) perpetrators is perhaps critical to the success of apologies and attempts at reconciliation (Lazare, 2004). Given the importance of such collective memory to intergroup relations, therefore, gaining greater insight into the responses of perpetrator group members to reminders of past transgressions is vital. The present work seeks to offer such insight.

Reactions to Collective In-group Wrongdoing

People are motivated to perceive themselves and their in-groups as good, moral, and deserving (Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990; Tajfel & Turner, 1986); hence, information suggesting their in-group has misbehaved is potentially threatening. As such, reminders of in-group wrongdoing frequently prompt defensive reactions like denial, victim-blaming, derogation and infrahumanization of victims, or justification of the wrongdoing (Bilali, Tropp, & Dasgupta, 2012; Castano & Giner-Sorolla, 2006; Noor, Shnabel, Halabi, & Nadler, in press; Roccas, Klar, & Liviatan, 2004; Sullivan, Landau, Branscombe, & Rothschild, 2012). These defensive reactions are often accompanied by reductions in the experience and/or expression of collective guilt—guilt felt in response to

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misdeeds committed by one's in-group (Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, & Manstead, 1998). This phenomenon is associated more strongly with highly identified group members, with some studies finding that high identifiers shift their standards for confirming injustice upward so that in-group wrongdoing no longer elicits collective guilt (Doosje et al., 1998; Miron, Branscombe, & Biernat, 2010). The mitigation of collective guilt, furthermore, can reduce individuals' desire to make reparations or reconcile with victims (Doosje et al., 1998; Peetz, Gunn, & Wilson, 2010). Importantly, these defensive responses are not incidental—they are *motivated* in service of reducing the social identity threat associated with exposure to the misdeeds of important group memberships (Branscombe & Wann, 1994; Peetz et al., 2010; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Motivated "Forgetting"

Motivated ''forgetting'' is the process by which people attempt to avoid or forget information that is potentially embarrassing, painful, or threatening (Ceci & Bruck, 1995; Thompson, Morton, & Fraser, 1997). This can be accomplished preemptively through selective inattention, interrupting memory processes such as rehearsal, or after the fact through suppression (Thompson et al., 1997; Wegner, 1989). Alternatively, ''forgetting'' may sometimes represent a refusal to acknowledge or repeat threatening information (Cooper & Stone, 2004), rather than an actual failure to remember. These processes help individuals restore the ''mental peace'' disrupted by the unpleasant information (Wegner & Schneider, 1989). While frequently studied at the personal level, threatened group identities elicit similar effects. Cooper and Stone (2004) observed motivated forgetting among participants asked to recite, from memory, a passage that questioned the validity of their religious beliefs. Specifically, when asked to recall information presented in an article asserting Buddhism as the true religion and path to spirituality, Evangelical Christians displayed greater levels of ''forgetting'' compared to when asked to recall a control (i.e., nonthreatening) article.

When the in-group is portrayed as a perpetrator of gross misdeeds, the stakes are even higher. In a study of Hindus and Sikhs, Sahdra and Ross (2007) found that people easily generated past instances when their in-group was victimized, but when asked to list instances of in-group aggression toward the other groups, high identifiers recalled a fewer number of events than did low identifiers. This work provides compelling evidence for motivated forgetting of in-group aggression toward out-groups, but is limited in that the evidence for such ''forgetting'' relies primarily on individuals' ability to self-generate instances of in-group aggression and, thus, the threshold for inclusion may differ as a function of many factors. That is, participants were prompted to list incidents of in-group aggression rather than first being exposed to and then subsequently tested on their memory of such information. While provocative, the Sahdra and Ross findings also do not touch on whether such differences in memory co-occur with more established responses to in-group wrongdoing, such as collective guilt.

Interestingly, a study by Imhoff and Banse (2009) offers additional suggestive evidence of motivated forgetting of group wrongdoing, albeit only by happenstance during the investigation of another phenomenon. Specifically, German students read a description of the Holocaust that either included details regarding the suffering of contemporary Jews (threat condition) or did not include this information (control condition). Quite shockingly, the researchers observed an unpredicted difference between the threat and control condition participants' performance on a manipulation check item wherein they simply reported ''yes'' or ''no'' that the passage they read included information regarding the contemporary suffering of Jewish people. Whereas only 2% of control condition participants failed the manipulation check, a stunning 40% of participants in the threat condition did so (Imhoff & Banse, 2009, footnote #2, p. 1445). That is, a plurality of participants in the threat condition either refused to acknowledge or simply forgot that the passage they read contained the very information that is likely to be most threatening to contemporary Germans.

Although this finding is provocative, additional experimental evidence for the motivated forgetting of in-group aggression is still necessary. First, because the Imhoff and Banse finding was incidental and unpredicted, it must be interpreted cautiously. Second, the evidence from this study stems from a single, dichotomous assessment of memory that was only pertinent to the threat condition. That is, only participants in the threat condition were actually exposed to the relevant information, making the manipulation check an imperfect test of forgetting on the part of control condition participants. Similarly, participants in each condition were exposed to different amounts of information and, of course, different content, undermining a strict test of memory differences. Consequently, drawing on this unexpected finding by Imhoff and Banse (2010), coupled with the Sahdra and Ross (2007) work, the present research seeks to provide an experimental test of the emergence of the motivated forgetting of in-group wrongdoing. Further, because it is the hallmark of defensive responses to negative in-group information, the experience of collective guilt is also assessed in the current work.

Present Research

The present work examines how information that one's in-group has harmed another group affects memory and collective guilt. To investigate these questions, American participants read about the controversial and brutal treatment of American Indians under one of two conditions. Specifically, the perpetrators of the violence were described either as early Americans (in-group condition) or as Europeans who settled in what became America (out-group condition). Although these are truly the exact same people, framing the early Americans as settlers from Europe positions them as outsiders and, thus, was

expected to attenuate the social identity threat, resulting in less motivated forgetting and greater collective guilt.

Study 1

Participants

Participants included 279 (188 female) users of Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) program,[1] who participated in exchange for $0.20 credited to their Amazon account. All participants were born, raised, and currently living in the United States. The sample was 80.1% White with a mean age of 32 years.[2]

Materials

American Identification Manipulation

To investigate the potential moderating role of American identification, we employed Sahdra and Ross' (2007) adaption of Pickett, Silver, and Brewer's (2002) method of inducing needs for assimilation and differentiation. Based on optimal distinctiveness theory, this method can temporarily alter levels of identification with national groups (Brown, Wohl, & Exline, 2008; Sahdra & Ross, 2007). In the low-identification prime, participants recalled 2 times when they felt very similar to other people, so similar that it made them uncomfortable. This prime promotes differentiation needs and causes people to distance themselves from larger, less unique collective identities such as their national identity. In the high-identification condition, participants recalled 2 times when they felt too different from other people, so different that it made them uncomfortable. Conversely, this prime promotes assimilation needs and draws participants closer to large, collective identities such as their national identity.

Historical Primes and Perpetrator Group Membership Manipulation

Participants read a half-page passage describing the history of the Illiniwek American Indian tribe from before European contact to the post-Revolutionary years, and, finally, a statement regarding ongoing consequences for remaining tribe members. The passage highlighted various ways outsiders victimized the tribe and the suffering this caused. For half of the participants, the perpetrators were described as ''American colonists'' (in-group perpetrator; high threat condition), while for the remaining half the perpetrators were described as ''European settlers'' (out-group perpetrator; low threat condition).[3]

Memory Task

To assess motivated forgetting, a recall task was adapted from Cooper and Stone (2004). Participants were unexpectedly asked to recreate the historical passage, as accurately as possible. They were given 5 min to complete this recall task. Two independent raters blind to condition and study hypotheses coded the recreations for accuracy on a 0–100% scale, as well as whether participants specifically reported the perpetrators as being either American or European.

Dismissive Attitudes

The two independent raters also coded participant responses for dismissive attitudes toward the victims or the events in question, or downplayed the responsibility of the colonists/settlers. Items such as ''The author seemed to downplay the suffering of the tribe members'' were rated on 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) Likert-type scales.

Collective Guilt

Collective guilt was measured using an adaptation of the collective guilt scale (CGS) developed by Branscombe, Slugoski, and Kappen (2004). Participants rated their agreement with 5 items, including ''I feel regret for the American colonists' (European settlers') harmful past actions toward the Illiniwek'' on 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) Likert-type scales.

American Identification Manipulation Check. To assess the effectiveness of the group identification primes, we employed the identity subscale of the collective self-esteem scale (CSES; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). Four items such as ''Being American is an important reflection of who I am,'' were rated on 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) Likert-type scales.

Procedure

After logging into MTurk providing informed consent, participants completed one of the group identity primes and, then, read one of the historical primes. Next, they completed a 3-min distraction task involving describing any room in their home. After, participants completed the unexpected recall task, followed by the CGS and American identification manipulation check. Participants were then debriefed, thanked, and their accounts credited.

Results

American Identification Manipulation Check

Scores on the identity subscale of the CSES ($\alpha = .90$) were averaged and subjected to a 2 (ID-Level Condition: low, high) $\times$ 2 (Perpetrator Condition: in-group, out-group) analysis of variance (ANOVA). Only a marginal main effect of ID-level condition emerged such that those in the high-ID condition ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 1.26$) reported somewhat higher American identification than those in the low-ID condition ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 1.63$), $F(1, 277) = 3.21$, $p = .07$.

Table 1. Percentage of Cases Correctly, Incorrectly, or Unclearly Identifying the Perpetrators by Perpetrator Condition.

	Correctly Identified Perpetrator	Incorrectly Identified Perpetrator	No Clear Identification
Perpetrator condition			
American (in-group)	36.99%[a,1]	43.15%[a,1]	19.86%[b]
European (out-group)	86.67%[a,2]	3.7%[b,2]	9.63%[b]

Note. Different letter superscripts within rows and different number superscripts within columns indicate statistically significant ($p < .05$) differences.

Memory

Coders' ratings of participants' overall accuracy in the recall task ($r = .87$) were averaged and subjected to a 2 (ID-Level Condition: low, high) × 2 (Perpetrator Condition: in-group, out-group) ANOVA. Results revealed only a main effect of perpetrator condition such that those who read about the American colonists as the aggressor (i.e., in-group condition) recalled significantly less of the passage (M =54.25%, $SD = 30.34$) relative to those who read about the perpetrators as European settlers (i.e., out-group condition; $M = 60.81\%$, $SD = 28.84$), $F(1, 277) = 3.91$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .014$. Further, we examined participants' accuracy (based on condition) in describing the perpetrators as Americans or Europeans in their free recalls (or, rather, if they did not specifically mention either group; i.e., used no label or a nonspecific term such as "Whites"). As shown in Table 1, participants who read about Europeans as perpetrators were nearly always correct in their recall, while participants who read about Americans were equally likely to be either correct or refer to the perpetrators as Europeans (a term that was not mentioned in the passage they read), $\chi^2(2, N = 281) = 78.47$, $p < .001$.

Dismissive Attitudes

Coders' ratings of dismissive attitudes ($r = .83$) were averaged and again subjected to a 2 (ID-Level Condition: low, high) × 2 (Perpetrator Condition: in-group, out-group) ANOVA, revealing only a significant main effect of perpetrator condition, $F(1, 277) = 6.50$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2 = .023$. Participants for whom the perpetrators were framed as in-group members expressed significantly more dismissive attitudes toward the victims in their recall passages ($M = 2.11$, $SD = 1.74$), compared with participants for whom the perpetrators were framed as out-group members ($M = 1.69$, $SD = 1.46$).

Collective Guilt

Responses to the CGS ($\alpha = .85$) were averaged and subjected to the same 2 × 2 ANOVA. A significant main effect of perpetrator condition emerged, $F(1, 277) = 6.50$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2 = .003$, which was qualified by a significant interaction with group identification, $F(1, 277) = 4.15$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .015$. Participants in the low-ID prime condition did not differ in reported CGS across perpetrator conditions, $t(132) = 0.67$, $p = ns$ (In-group: $M = 5.03$, $SD = 1.45$; Out-group: $M = 4.84$, $SD = 1.25$). However, participants in the high-ID prime condition who read about in-group perpetrators ($M = 4.71$, $SD = 1.37$) expressed significantly less collective guilt than did participants who read about out-group perpetrators ($M = 5.22$, $SD = 1.39$), $t(145) = 2.49$, $p < .05$.

To test the possible role of memory in the relationship between perpetrator condition and collective guilt, we used Preacher and Hayes' (2004, 2008) bootstrapping method with the recommended 5,000 resamples including identity condition and the interaction as covariates. The indirect effect was significant, $t(280) = 3.14$, $p < .01$, $\beta = 0.06$, while the direct effect became nonsignificant, $t(280) = -0.59$, $p = ns$, $\beta = -.1$, and the direct effect of the interaction remained significant, $t(280) = 2.16$, $p < .05$, $\beta = -.18$. The bias-corrected bootstrap estimate had a 95% confidence interval (CI) reliably different from zero, 95% CI [−0.175, −0.0044], suggesting that reduced memory may partially mediate the relationship between the in-group perpetrator condition and decreased collective guilt, even controlling for the effect of identity level.

Discussion

Study 1 found that memory for negative historical events was significantly reduced when the perpetrators were framed as Americans (in-group members) versus Europeans (out-group members), and what participants did recall was phrased more dismissively when the perpetrators were in-group members. In addition, participants who read about American perpetrators and were primed to be higher in American identity expressed significantly less collective guilt than participants primed to be lower in American identity, an effect possibly mediated by memory. This finding replicates and extends previous research (Doosje et al., 1998).

While compelling, Study 1 has several limitations. First, the memory measure was a potentially taxing recall task. Given that social or moral identity threat can deplete executive resources (Richeson & Trawalter, 2005), it is possible that the memory difference that emerged reflects this process more than "motivated forgetting" per se. Second, the perpetrator-type manipulation in the passages included both a reference to their in-group/out-group status (i.e., American or European) and a subtle reference to their status in the new land—Americans were always described as colonists and Europeans were always described as settlers. Given that these terms could have different connotations and, thus, evoke different interpretations and reactions, this quite subtle difference could be the source of the effects rather than the perpetrators' group membership. We address these concerns in Study 2.

Study 2

Participants

Participants included 145 (95 female) users of Amazon.com's MTurk program who were credited $0.20 to their Amazon

account.[4] All participants were born, raised, and currently living in the United States. The sample was 96% White with a mean age of 33.5 years.[5]

Materials

American Identification Manipulation

The manipulation was identical to that described in Study 1.

Historical Primes and Perpetrator Group Membership Manipulation

The primes described in Study 1 were used, except that all references to "settlers" or "colonists" were eliminated.

Memory Task

Participants were presented 24 statements related to the lives and treatment of the Illiniwek and asked to determine whether the information had appeared in the original passage. Half of the statements had appeared originally, while the other 12 were foils (contextually reasonable statements that had not appeared in the passage). Both real and foil statements included items pertaining to both neutral (e.g. "The Illiniwek first encountered Americans/Europeans in the early 1700s"; "The Illiniwek peoples spoke Algonquin") and negative-outcomes information (e.g., "Typhus and cholera were first introduced to the Illiniwek by the Americans/Europeans"; "Diabetes and alcoholism are now common among the remaining Illiniwek").

Collective Guilt

Collective guilt was again measured using the CGS (Branscombe, Slugoski, & Kappen, 2004).

American Identification Manipulation Check. American identification level was again measured using the identity subscale of the CSES.

Procedure

The procedure for Study 2 mirrored that of Study 1, except that participants completed the recognition task rather than a recall task for memory.

Results

American Identification Manipulation Check

Scores on the identity subscale of the CSES ($\alpha = .89$) were averaged and subjected to a 2 (ID-Level Condition: low, high) $\times$ 2 (Perpetrator Condition: in-group, out-group) ANOVA. Somewhat surprisingly, the main effect of ID-level condition was not significant, $F(1, 141) = 1.85$, $p = .18$, although the means were in the predicted direction. Specifically, participants in the high-ID condition ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 1.51$) reported slightly higher levels of American identification than those in the low-ID condition ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 1.63$). The perpetrator condition and interaction were also not significant (all Fs $< .62$, all p's $= ns$).

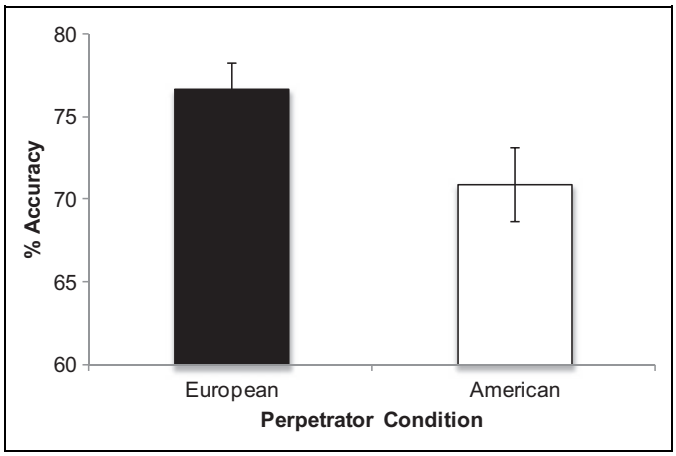

Figure 1. Accuracy on recognition task across perpetrator type conditions. Error bars represent +1/−1 standard error.

Memory

The percentage of items participants' remembered correctly on the recognition test was subjected to the same 2 $\times$ 2 ANOVA. Results revealed only a significant main effect of perpetrator condition, $F(1, 141) = 4.41$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .03$. As seen in Figure 1, participants in the out-group perpetrator condition correctly recognized more items from the passage than did participants in the in-group perpetrator condition. Consistent with Study 1, participants who read about the misdeeds of fellow in-group members demonstrated poorer memory for the passage than did participants who read about the misdeeds of out-group members.[6]

Collective Guilt

Responses to the CGS (Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$) were averaged and subjected to the same 2 $\times$ 2 ANOVA. A significant main effect of perpetrator condition emerged, $F(1, 141) = 5.38$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .04$, which was qualified by a significant interaction with group identification condition, $F(1, 141) = 5.08$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .03$. Simple effects analyses revealed that participants in the low-ID condition did not differ in the level of collective guilt they expressed in the in-group ($M = 4.84$, $SD = 1.27$) and out-group ($M = 4.85$, $SD = 1.44$) perpetrator conditions, $t(73) = 0.05$, $p = ns$. Replicating the results of Study 1, however, participants in the high-ID condition who read about in-group perpetrators expressed significantly less collective guilt ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 1.08$) than participants in the high-ID condition who read about out-group perpetrators ($M = 5.22$, $SD = 1.57$), $t(68) = 2.87$, $p < .01$. Examining this interaction differently, when the perpetrators were described as in-group members, participants in the high-ID condition reported significantly lower collective guilt than those in the low-ID

condition, $t(70) = 2.13$, $p < .05$. When the perpetrators were described as out-group members, however, group identification did not shape participants' expressed level of collective, $t(71) = 1.05$, $p = ns$. We again tested the mediation analyses described in Study 1, however, the bias-corrected bootstrap estimate had a 95% CI that was not reliably different from zero, 95% CI [−0.06, 0.13], providing no evidence for mediation.

Discussion

The results of Study 2 largely replicate those of Study 1. Using a recognition rather than recall memory task, participants who read about in-group perpetrators revealed poorer memory than participants who read about out-group perpetrators. Furthermore, participants who read about in-group perpetrators and were primed to be higher in American identification expressed significantly less collective guilt than participants in the other conditions. This latter finding is particularly intriguing, given that the American identification manipulation check was not reliable. Nevertheless, the primes clearly moderated the effects of perpetrator group membership on collective guilt. This suggests that the failure of the manipulation check may be due to its administration at the end of the study, a considerable time after the identity manipulation and following the dependent measures.

Taken together, the results of the present study suggest that reminders of in-group misdeeds can result in ''motivated forgetting'' and reduce feelings of collective guilt among those most identified with the in-group. The lack of mediation in Study 2 may reflect the smaller sample size as compared with Study 1 or, perhaps, indicate that reduced memory is not a necessary pre-condition for lowered collective guilt. Indeed, given that collective guilt, but not memory, was moderated by group identification, this possibility seems quite reasonable. Further, mediation analyses cannot provide conclusive evidence for the causal relationship between variables, as mediation analyses are by their nature correlational. Indeed, the experience of collective guilt may partially mediate the effect on memory as well. Nevertheless, future research should investigate the nature of, for whom, and the extent to which memory may mediate the expression of collective guilt.

General Discussion

Two studies demonstrated that one response to learning about one's in-group as a perpetrator of intergroup aggression is simply to forget the threatening events. Remarkably, we found that very subtle differences in how the perpetrators of past acts of intergroup violence were described, suggesting either their in-group or out-group status, was sufficient to bias participants' memory. Indeed, the misdeeds of in-group members were remembered less well than the same misdeeds of out-group members, be they assessed via recall or recognition tests. This result is particularly striking in that it was not moderated by group identification; both participants primed to be relatively high or low in American identification revealed the *in-group-serving* memory difference. That is, participants exhibited ''motivated forgetting'' of their in-group's past acts of intergroup violence irrespective of whether they were primed to be high or low in American identification.

In addition to this compelling, novel evidence for the motivated forgetting of in-group wrongdoing, the present work replicated previous research finding differences in expressed collective guilt among low and high identifiers (Doosje et al., 1998). As in previous studies, participants primed to be relatively higher in American identification were less likely to express collective guilt for in-group wrongdoing compared with those primed to be relatively lower in American identification. These defensive reactions are likely to relieve individuals of the identity threat posed by the very knowledge that an important and valued group membership was involved in harmful, if not atrocious, activities.

Motivated Memory for In-Group Wrongdoing

The findings of the present work are particularly interesting for several reasons. First, because the aggressive acts described should be generally familiar to most Americans, it is surprising that they nevertheless engendered defensive reactions such as motivated forgetting. Second, as alluded to previously, the passages were identical, describing the exact same behaviors across conditions. In most research on in-group versus out-group wrongdoing, it is difficult to attribute the same actual, historical events to either group (for a notable exception, see Tarrant, Branscombe, Warner, & Weston, 2012). But, of course, in the present case, the perpetrators were the very same people, regardless of being framed as ''Europeans'' or ''early Americans.'' Because our passage included events that occurred *after* the American Revolution, furthermore, perpetrators initially described as Europeans, or at least their ancestors, likely became Americans. Nevertheless, a framing distinction that does virtually nothing to change the literal meaning of the passage still altered participants' memory for the passage. Perhaps, the ''out-group'' framing allowed participants to categorize the perpetrators as more distant to the self, reducing the threat posed by the information. Thus, our studies could manipulate group threat directly and in a manner that maintains ecological validity while presenting participants with identical information about true past events in both the threat and control conditions. The tight experimental control afforded by our design makes the emergence of memory differences all the more compelling.

Limitations and Future Directions

One intriguing question that remains is what exactly our memory tasks capture. Much like the findings of other research on motivated forgetting, the memory ''lapses'' presently demonstrated may not be indicative of actual problems in encoding or retrieval but simply unwillingness to repeat information that challenges the in-group's moral character. Future research should investigate whether easing social identity

threats through other means, such as group or individual affirmations (see Čehajić, Effron, Halperin, Liberman, & Ross, 2011; Peetz et al., 2010), mitigates these effects. For example, Peetz et al. (2010) found that Germans who read about the Holocaust experienced greater collective guilt, were more willing to make reparations, and saw the Holocaust as less distant in time if they were also shown the mitigating information that postwar Germany had made symbolic and financial reparations to victims. As distancing is related to motivated forgetting, similar interventions may help ease the threat of being a member of a perpetrator group and allow people to report - memories more accurately. Similarly, other incentives may help demonstrate whether such memory ''lapses'' merely represent unwillingness to dwell on threatening information. Financial incentives for accuracy introduced after reading a threatening passage could be used to determine whether the problem is due to failure to encode versus retrieve or repeat threatening information.

Conclusion and Implications

The present work demonstrates the power of threatening individuals' collective moral identity on memory for the moral failings and relevant intergroup relations. Specifically, confronting members of perpetrator groups with evidence of their group's culpability can cause backlash in the form of the motivated forgetting of the violent acts and, for high identifiers, reduce collective guilt. This may explain why textbooks, education, and popular culture frequently omit mention of the in-group perpetrating intergroup atrocities (Hein & Selden, 2000). Not only does motivated and collective ''forgetting'' do a disservice to education, but it can harm efforts at reconciliation by not fulfilling victims' needs for acknowledgment, apologies, or reparations (Chapman, 2007; Lazare, 2004). Given the importance of preserving memory for victims (Evans-Campbell, 2008; Pennebaker et al., 1997) and the prosocial benefits of perpetrators' expressions of guilt (Doosje et al., 1998; Peetz et al., 2010), understanding how social identity threat affects these processes is vital to promoting more positive intergroup relations.

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Notes

1. Of an initial sample of 299 (197 female) participants, 19 were dropped after failing an attention check and 1 for self-identifying as American Indian (the historical prime's victimized group). The attention check's instructions directed participants to select a particular answer indicating they read all instructions, those selecting other options failed the check.
2. Results did not differ dramatically if only White participants were included in analyses (all relevant Fs > 3.05, all ps $\leq$ .08), as such, we report results for the full sample.
3. To ensure results were not due to Americans' tendency to construe these acts as attributable to ''Europeans'' (making the threat condition upsetting because it is discrepant with this construal), we conducted a small pilot study. Specifically, White American participants were presented with the passage, but without indications of perpetrator nationality. Participants selected whether the perpetrators were ''best described'' as Americans, Europeans, or other. Responses were nearly evenly divided between identifying the perpetrators as in-group (Americans) or out-group (Europeans), $\chi^2(1, N = 45) = 0.2$, $p = .66$. Hence, there is no evidence that the in-group condition was somehow less consistent with participants' likely default construals.
4. Of an initial 149 (97 female) participants, 4 were dropped after failing the attention check described in Study 1.
5. Results did not differ if only White participants were included in analyses (all relevant Fs > 3.35, all ps < .07), as such, we report results for the full sample.
6. Supplementary analysis revealed that the percentage of correct rejections of foils did not differ across conditions, all Fs < 0.35, all ps = *ns* (In-group: $M = 63.89\%$, $SD = 17.59$; Out-group: $M = 64.01\%$, $SD = 19.84$).

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