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Why Are You Telling Me That?:

A Conceptual Model of the Social Function of Autobiographical Memory

Nicole Alea

Susan Bluck

University of Florida

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Abstract

In an effort to stimulate and guide empirical work within a functional framework. this paper provides a conceptual model of the social functions of autobiographical memory (AM) across the lifespan. The model delineates the processes and variables involved when AMs are shared to serve social functions. Components of the model include: lifespan contextual influences, the qualitative characteristics of memory (emotionality and level of detail recalled), the speaker's characteristics (age, gender, and personality), the familiarity and similarity of the listener to the speaker, the level of responsiveness during the memory sharing process, and the nature of the social relationship in which the memory sharing occurs (valence and length of the relationship). These components are shown to influence the type of social function served and, or, the extent to which social functions are served. Directions for future empirical work to substantiate the model and hypotheses derived from the model are provided.

Why Are You Telling Me That?:
A Conceptual Model of the Social Function of Autobiographical Memory

Over two decades ago Neisser (1978) addressed the need for understanding memory from an ecological perspective. Since then, research on everyday memory has grown considerably and the study of autobiographical memory (AM) is no exception. The function of memory, or how we use memory, is a central tenet of the ecological memory approach that has been adopted at a theoretical level by AM researchers. Three functions of AM have been theorized: a self, social, and directive function (e.g., Cohen, 1998; Pillemer, 1992). Despite its intuitive appeal, however, the ecological approach has led to a limited amount of empirical work on the functions of AM. Three empirical studies offer preliminary evidence for the theoretical functions of AM (Bluck, Habermas, & Rubin, 2001; Hyman & Faries, 1992; Pasupathi, Lucas, & Coombs, 2001). Clearly, more research is needed on the function that personal memories play in individuals' daily lives.

We suggest that the lack of empirical research may be due, at least in part, to the need for a conceptual model that provides the level of specificity necessary for hypothesis-driven research. Currently, no models exist that conceptualizes what AMs are used for in everyday life. Such a model could also identify crucial gaps in the existing literature where further research is needed to make more sophisticated model-building possible. Thus, the objective of the current paper is to present a conceptual model of one category of functions of AM, the social functions, that illustrates the processes and variables involved when individuals share AMs for social purposes.

The model presented here focuses exclusively on the social functions of AM. Social functions of AM include using AM: to develop or maintain intimacy in relationship, to illustrate a point or give advice in order to teach and inform others, and to elicit empathy from others or provide empathy to others (see Table 1).[1] Although we recognize that

empirical evidence exists for all three theoretical functions, and that models may eventually be needed for all functions, we begin model development with the social functions of remembering because it has been suggested that using AMs for social purposes, such as relationship maintenance and development, is their most fundamental use (e.g., Bruce, 1989; Nelson, 1993). In addition, individuals often talk about the past and share their experiences with others in order to fulfill social goals (e.g., Baumeister & Newman, 1994; Hirst & Manier, 1996; Norrick, 1997; Pasupathi, et al., 2001). Thus, social functions warrant independent attention due to their potential fundamentality and to their ubiquity in everyday life.

In addition to focusing only on the social functions of AM, the model also is limited exclusively to memories that are shared with others and not memories that are only thought about. There is no doubt that AMs can be used for social functions in the absence of memory sharing. For example, individuals report thinking about past experiences they had with someone who has passed away in order to maintain intimacy with that person (Webster, 1995). Autobiographical remembering however frequently occurs in social contexts; it is often an interpersonal phenomenon (Graumann, 1986; Nelson & Fivush, 2000). Individuals share personal memories with others not present at the original event (Hyman & Faries, 1992; as well as collaborate and co-construct memories with others present at the original event (e.g., Dixon & Gould, 1993; Edwards & Middleton, 1986; Fivush & Reese, 1992; Hirst & Manier, 1996; Norrick, 1997). In sum, the fundamental nature of social functions of AM, the frequent use of AMs for social purposes, and the often interpersonal nature of autobiographical remembering makes a conceptual model focused solely on the social functions of AM during AM sharing an appropriate starting point for model building, particularly at this early stage in the development of the literature.

In the next section, we provide a preliminary conceptual model of the social functions of AM during AM sharing. The pathways and components of the model are described, using relevant empirical work from the AM literature and related areas. This work is used to generate ideas, sometimes speculations, about the interrelations between each component and the social functions of remembering. In the final section, the model's utility is demonstrated by: (a) identifying areas for future research to substantiate the model, and (b) employing the model to generate specific research questions.

A Conceptual Model of the Social Functions of AM

The conceptual model presented here is a first step at providing researchers with a schematic representation of the processes and variables involved when individuals use *personally meaningful* AMs, such as memories for specific events, life periods and domains (Bluck & Habermas, 2001; Conway, 1996), to serve social functions across the lifespan. AMs can range in quality from trivial memories to memories that are important enough to be included in one's life story (Bluck & Habermas, 2000). Personally meaningful memories are the focus of the current model because this distinction may be especially salient when taking a functional approach. For example, personally meaningful memories are probably the type of memories used to serve central functions, such as maintaining relationships (e.g., Thorne, Cutting, & Skaw, 1998).[2] The next section addresses how the social functions of autobiographical memory are influenced by the components of the model.

Pathways in the Model

Although for clarity we present each component in isolation, they are in fact interrelated. Two paths lead to the social functions of AM: one from the dyadic interaction unit directly to the social functions of AM and one that is mediated by memory characteristics. As shown in the model (see Figure 1), the dyadic interaction unit as an entity can impact the social function of remembering the past. Components and variables within

this unit however can also individually have a direct impact, but it is not feasible to pictorially represent each relation with individual pathways. Another pathway represented in the model suggests that social functions are not only an outcome of remembering but that remembering can be decided upon a priori to serve a certain function. That is, an individual can decide that they want to share an AM for a particular purpose, such as developing intimacy, and share their memory accordingly. This is illustrated in the model by the broken arrow leading from the social functions of AM to the dyadic interaction unit. Empirical work manipulating the reasons why people share stories and other information supports this notion that stories change based on the intent of the teller (e.g., McGregor & Holmes, 1998; Sanitioso, Kunda, & Fong, 1990; Tversky & Marsh, 2000). Now that the pathways in the model have been clarified, components of the model are described.

Components of the Model

The major components related to the processes involved when one individual shares an AM with another to serve social functions are also shown in Figure 1. These include the lifespan context in which all other components are embedded, characteristics of the person sharing the AM (e.g., age, gender, personality), how familiar and similar the listener is to the speaker, and the level of dyadic responsiveness during the memory sharing process. Speaker-listener characteristics and responsivity are nested within the speaker-listener relationship (e.g., valence and length of the relationship). Characteristics of the person's memory, such as level of detail and amount of emotion are included because they are influenced by the above person and relationship components and may also influence the extent to which social functions are served. Finally, both the type of social function served and the extent to which the function is served are shown as outcomes in the model. Note that this outcome is considered here only for the person doing the memory sharing. Future work might consider

outcomes for both partners in the exchange or for the dyad (i.e., the relationship) as a unit of analysis.

Social functions of AM: use and adaptivity

The model accounts for both the social *uses* of AM (i.e., which function is served) and the *adaptivity* of social functions (i.e., extent to which the function is served).[3] Identifying the uses of AM has been the primary focus of empirical work (Bluck, et al., 2002; Hyman & Faries, 1992; Pasupathi, et al., 2002). The social uses of AM include using AMs for intimacy, teaching and informing others, and for eliciting and showing empathy (see Table 1). The other connotation of function however is that of an action being adaptive in serving some goal or leading to some preferred end state (Bruce, 1989; see also Bluck & Alea, 2001). When function is conceived as adaptation it refers to the extent to which the use of memory results in adaptive or maladaptive outcomes. For example, adaptively using AMs to develop intimacy in relationships means that when AMs are shared intimacy is enhanced. A similar distinction to that made between uses and adaptivity of memory functions has been made between goals and goal achievement (e.g., Baumeister & Newman, 1994; Brandtstadter & Renner, 1990; Emmons, 1986). We prefer, for a variety of reasons, to maintain the focus on function instead of recasting it in terms of goals, though they may be closely allied concepts under some conditions.

Unlike the reminiscence tradition, which more seriously considers the adaptive value of memory (e.g., Watt & Wong, 1991), work in the AM literature only alludes to adaptation and does not often directly include it in research conceptualization and design. Including the adaptive value of social functions of AM in the present model aims to stimulate work in this area. As such, the conceptual model presented here considers both how memories are used, that is the different types of social functions served, as well as what factors might affect variation in how adaptively memory is employed (i.e., the extent to which the function is

served). Each of the components in the model has been included because of its potential impact of which functions are served and how well. To begin, one factor that might influence the type and adaptive use of AMs that are employed for social purposes is the individual's developmental life context.

Lifespan context

The components in the model are nested in a lifespan context because such a context can directly impact how and how well AMs are used for social purposes (Wong & Watt, 1991). Researchers have only very recently incorporated a life span developmental approach (Baltes, Staudinger, & Lindenberger, 1999) into the study of AM (Bluck & Habermas, 2001). Taking a life span perspective involves understanding how changes in chronological age and an individual's life context influence the uses of AM. Conceptualizing both gains and losses (Baltes, 1987) in AM across the lifespan is an integral part of understanding the function of AM. In addition, changes in developmental goals and tasks across life phases (e.g., Erikson, 1980; Havigurst, 1972) may affect how AM is used: the importance of particular social functions and the extent to which they can be adaptively served may vary across the adult lifespan. Predictable changes in, for example, social networks across the lifespan (e.g., Carstensen, 1993; Antonucci & Akiyama, 1995) can influence which social functions are most often used, and the extent to which they are adaptively employed.

For example, developmental tasks and life contexts affect the types of social functions likely to be used across the lifespan. Tasks in young adulthood revolve around developing intimacy (e.g., finding a spouse; Erikson, 1980; Havigurst, 1972), thus AMs in early adulthood are likely to be used for the social function of developing intimacy. In midlife, individuals begin to use the past for directing future goals and aspirations (Buhler, 1968) and guiding future generations (Erikson, 1980). Thus, one frequent social use of AM at this point in the lifespan may be to teach and inform others. Tasks faced in old age may concern

adaptation to loss (Neugarten, 1979), including adjusting to widowhood and retirement (Havigurst, 1972). In late life using AMs for eliciting empathy from others (as well as self functions such as maintaining self continuity) may be important for managing losses. This very brief review suggests that not taking a life span perspective limits our understanding of the social uses of AM by assuming developmental uniformity in lifespan contexts, as well as in AM capabilities and qualities. The next section addresses the qualitative characteristics of AMs that can impact the social functions of AM.

Memory characteristics: detail and emotion

Qualitative memory characteristics include the phenomenal qualities of remembering (Larsen, 1998). Two memory characteristics, level of detail and amount of emotion in the memory, are included here because meaningful memories are encoded with high levels of emotion and detail, or vividness (e.g., Bluck & Li, 2001; Cohen et al., 1994). Individuals have vivid memories, composed of great detail and affect, for personally meaningful events and surprising national events (e.g., flashbulb memories; Conway, 1995). Most individuals have memories of the John F. Kennedy assassination that are detailed and emotional enough to be categorized as flashbulb memories, but not for less significant events (Brown & Kulik, 1977). Similarly, specific details about conditions in a concentration camp (Wagenaar and Groeneweg, 1990) and events surrounding the Challenger explosion (Bohannon, 1988) are remembered well months and years later. Emotional information is often included when recalling surprising events, such as the OJ Simpson verdict announcement (e.g., Bluck, et al., 1999), and when individuals recall their most vivid personal memories (e.g., Cohen & Faulkner, 1988). How might detail and emotion relate to the social functions of AM?

Memories of specific episodes that are rich in emotion and detail communicate "meaning over and above the particular informational content of the memories, and thereby helps the speaker achieve important interpersonal goals" (Pillemer, 1992, p. 242). Detail and

emotion influence the type of social functions served and the extent to which social functions are served. Memories that include detail are judged as more credible and persuasive by others (e.g., Bruce, 1989), thus possibly better serving the social function of teaching and informing others. Memories rich with detail and emotion also signal caring and intimacy as opposed to neutral memories, which signal emotional detachment (Tannen, 1990). The intimacy function of AM may be better served by such memories. Similarly, including details and emotional information during recall allows the listener to relate to the story being told (Schank & Abelson, 1995), thus enhancing the likelihood of an empathic function being served. In sum, memories rich with detail and emotion are common when recalling personally meaningful, emotional events thus demonstrating their social importance. The extent to which AMs are detailed and emotional is partially driven by the person who is sharing the memory however, that is by the speaker's characteristics.

Speaker characteristics: age, gender, and personality

During conversational remembering, enduring qualities of the speaker clearly affect the way that events are recalled (see Pasupathi, 2001 for a review). Age, gender, and personality can affect the type of social function served and influence the qualitative characteristics of memory thereby affecting the extent to which social functions are served.

Age. The influence of age on the frequency of remembering in order to serve social functions has been documented. Older adults are more likely than younger adults to reflect on the past in order to teach and inform others (Webster & McCall, 1999). Using the past to maintain intimacy increases steadily from age 20 to age 80 in cross-sectional work (Webster, 1995). Thus, age affects the type of social function served.

In addition to the type of social function served, age affects the extent to which social functions are served via memory characteristics. Research on age differences and similarities in qualitative characteristics of AM is equivocal. Some research finds no differences in the

levels of detail of young and older adults' most vivid AMs (Cohen & Faulkner, 1988) or in the emotional quality of their memories when recalling an emotionally charged event (e.g., Bluck, et al., 1999). On the other hand, when recalling specific episodes, such as an important historical event (e.g., Cohen, et al., 1994), older adults recall less detail than younger adults and are sometimes more likely than younger adults to focus on affect (e.g., Carstensen & Turk-Charles, 1994; Hashtroudi, et al., 1990). In general, when the event is important for the individual, age differences are attenuated (Cohen, 1998). What do these age differences imply for how social functions are served?

Since variations in amounts of detail and emotion differentially serve the social functions of memory (Pillemer, 1998), differences in the quality of older and younger adult's memories could translate into differences in the extent to which AMs can be adaptively employed for social purposes. Specifically, older adults should be just as likely to retell their AMs in ways that successfully serve social functions if there are no age differences in the characteristics of AM when remembering personally meaningful AMs (e.g., Bluck, et al., 1999; Cohen & Faulkner, 1988). Older adults may better serve social functions when they recall the past with more of an affective focus than younger adults (Hashtroudi, et al., 1990). Summarizing, the literature shows that age affects the types of social functions that are most often employed (intimacy, teach and inform) and the extent to which shared memories may serve their intended function because of age differences and similarities in the detail and emotional characteristics of memory.

Gender. An individual's gender is related to overall frequency of reminiscence, the types of social functions served, and how well they are served. Women reminisce more often than men (e.g., Webster, 1995) and recall a greater number of personal memories, particularly of emotionally important life events (Davis, 1999). In addition to this overall tendency, women reminiscence more often than men for the social function of maintaining intimacy in

relationships, but not for the social function of teaching and informing others (Webster, 1995). Women also have systematic advantages with respect to the qualitative characteristics of their AMs and thus how well their AMs may serve intended functions. When wives and husbands are asked to recall memories of specific relationship events, wives report memories that are more clear and vivid (i.e., that include more detail and emotional content; Ross & Holmberg, 1992).

If women are at an advantage with respect to the amount of detail and emotion that they remember, then they may be more able to use their AMs to serve social functions. It might also be the case that women regard the social uses of AM as particularly important and thus choose to use their memories for these reasons more often than men. This social rehearsal may be responsible for the greater levels of emotion and detail in women's AMs. Further research on gender and memory for other life events is needed.

Personality. Individuals with certain personality traits are more likely to reflect on the past to serve functions that are consistent with their personal identities. With regard to the social functions of AM, there is a positive correlation between the Big Five personality trait Extraversion and using AMs to teach and inform others. Using AMs for intimacy is unrelated to personality traits (Cully, LaVoie, Gfeller, 2001). When constructing stories, however, individuals remember events from their past that are consistent with their personalities and motives (e.g., McAdams, Diamond, de St. Aubin, & Mansfield, 1997;Woike, Gershkovich, Piorkowski, & Polo, 1999). Specifically, generative individuals are more likely than less generative individuals to construct a life story about the sensitivity to the suffering of others and a commitment to pro-social goals (McAdams, et al., 1997); they may be more likely to use AMs for teaching and informing future generations. The limited amount of work allows for tentative conclusions regarding personality and the social functions of AM. Although affect intensity is strongly related to self-defining memories (Singer & Salovey, 1996), little

is known about the relation between personality characteristics and the qualitative characteristics of AM (emotion, detail), and the types of social uses of AM.

This review of the potential impact of speaker characteristics on the social functions of AM illustrates that age, gender, and personality may affect the types of functions AM is used for, and the extent to which it is served. We recognize that these conclusions are based on very few studies, thus providing an exciting area in need of further research.

Listener characteristics: familiarity and similarity

Despite the importance of the individual speaker characteristics, speakers construct memories in conversations that take the listener into account (Pasupathi, 2001; Grice, 1989). For simplicity, the current framework outlines the dyadic interaction unit; the memory sharing process between one speaker and one listener during a single interchange. Having a listener present influences remembering in any dyadic interaction (e.g., Anderson & Roennberg, 1995; Bavelas, et al., 2000). Two characteristics of the listener, their familiarity to and similarity to the speaker, have been considered in previous research.

Familiarity. Familiarity refers to how well the speaker knows the listener. Individuals share experiences from their past with family, friends, colleagues, acquaintances, strangers, and sometimes experimenters. While there are memory benefits of collaboration (e.g., Dixon & Gould, 1998), these benefits are amplified when working with familiar others versus strangers. Participants who recall episodic material with a friend remember more information than when recalling with a stranger (Andersson & Roennberg, 1995). Similar results exist for individuals remembering with their spouses (Dixon & Gould, 1998). Thus, when the goal of remembering is to produce complete memories, we recall more information (including more detail) when remembering with people we know well. This may not always be the case. People will vary the amount of information retold depending on how much they think the listener needs to know (Grice, 1989). For instance, during family remembering, when a

family recounts an event they experienced together, researchers find that the person telling the story (narrator) will sometimes omit details of the event. Thus, the stories people tell are sometimes constrained by the presence of familiar listeners (e.g., family members) when they were present at the original event (Hirst & Manier, 1996). Level of familiarity seems to affect amount recalled: sometimes enhancing it and sometimes limiting it (because one may have told the story before to someone who they are familiar with). This amount of information or detail can, in turn, impact the extent to which social functions are served. There is no known work regarding the amount of emotion expressed in recall when remembering with known versus unknown others.

Similarity. Similarity refers to the fact that speakers and listeners can be different or similar in terms of personal characteristics such as age, gender, and personality. A small amount of research addresses the similarity between the speaker and listener when collaboratively remembering stories and disclosing personal information. Participants provide more emotional evaluations and personal reactions when retelling a story to a peer who is similar to them than when recalling for an experimenter who is dissimilar (Hyman, 1994). Likewise, individuals are more inclined to disclose personal information (including information about their past) to someone who is similar to them. Young women share more information about themselves when interacting with another young woman than when interacting with a woman who is older (Collins & Gould, 1994). The limited amount of empirical work suggests that detail and emotion, qualitative memory characteristics that heighten the extent to which social functions are served, are more likely to be included when remembering for similar others. More work is needed to substantiate this claim.

In sum, listener characteristics influence how much and what is remembered during conversations (Pasupathi, 2001). People sometimes remember more and disclose more personal information when the listener is familiar and similar. Individuals change what they

tell depending on whom they are telling: sharing more emotional and personal information with a peer leads to the development of social bonds, thereby fulfilling social functions of establishing or maintaining intimate relationships (Hyman, 1994). There is no work at this point to guide speculations regarding the relation of similarity and familiarity to other social functions (e.g., teach and inform, empathy). Work does show however that sharing memories with similar and known others influences the detail and emotional quality of the memory shared and should thereby affect the extent to which functions are served.

Memory sharing process: responsiveness

In addition to individual characteristics of speakers and listeners, qualities of the interactive memory sharing process, such as level of responsiveness, can influence social functions of AM. Responsiveness is a two-way interaction between speakers and listeners; listeners make responses to what speakers are saying, and speakers respond in how they continue the interaction. Responsiveness can indicate attentiveness and comprehension (e.g., eye-contact), or go further by contributing to the conversation (see Pasupathi, 2001 for a review). How might levels of responsiveness influence the use of AM for social purposes?

First, responsiveness can impact the social functions of AM by affecting the type and level of personal self-disclosures (AM sharing is one kind of self-disclosure) between speakers and listeners. For example, revealing self-related information to another leads to social functions such as intimacy development and maintenance when the speaker perceives the listener as responsive (Reis & Shaver, 1988). Individuals who reveal more personal information during social interactions rate that interaction as higher in intimacy when they perceive the listener as responsive, particularly when the disclosures are emotional rather than factual (Laurenceau, et al., 1998).

Second, responsive listening affects how memories are told. Speakers include less detailed information when recalling stories to uninterested or distracted listeners. Particularly,

when listeners are distracted through experimental manipulations, speakers tell less dramatic and less well-organized autobiographical stories (Bavelas, et al., 2000). Stories with this quality may be less likely to serve social functions of AM. Similarly, speakers with interested listeners recall more of a movie excerpt, including more elaborations, such as opinions and emotions, than those with distracted listeners or no listener (Pasupathi, et al., 1998). Thus, responsiveness has the potential to affect the extent to which social functions are served via the inclusion or exclusion of details and emotions during recall.

Taken together, this research suggests that responsiveness can affect one type of social function that is served (e.g., intimacy; Laurenceau, et al., 1998). More work is needed to delineate the relation between responsiveness and other social functions (e.g., teach and inform, and empathy). Evidence regarding the extent to which a function is served comes from work on the quality of the memory (e.g., Bavelas, et al., 2000): including more information and affect heightens the extent to which a function will be served.

Relationship qualities: valence and length

The components reviewed so far are placed in the context of an existing relationship. Pre-existing qualities of the relationship (e.g., valence and length) between the speaker and listener are included in the model to provide the relationship context within which the memory sharing process occurs. Two qualities of the speaker-listener relationship, valence and length, can influence the social functions of AM.

Valence. Studies of relationship satisfaction provide indirect evidence regarding the relation between the global valence of a social relationship and specific memories about that relationship. Memories are biased in the direction of current relationship satisfaction: wives who perceive their marriage as improving over time remember the past as more negative than it was (Karney & Coombs, 2000). Memories are also predictive of future satisfaction: husbands who report less expansive memories about their marriage (characterized by fewer

details and feelings) are more likely to be divorced or separated years later (Buehlman, et al., 1992). In the first case, memory is distorted in order to serve the function of bolstering current satisfaction (maintaining intimacy). In the second case, the qualitative characteristics of the memories (e.g., level of detail and amount of emotion) may be related to the extent to which the social function of intimacy maintenance is served. Thus far, work on the relation between valence and social functions of AM have focused on the intimacy function and the extent to which this function is served. Work on attachment style provides additional support.

An indicator of relationship valence, attachment style (see Koski & Shaver, 1997, for a review) influences the quality of personal (sometimes past) information that is shared during daily interactions. Individuals with avoidant (poor valence) attachment styles express lower levels of positive emotional information during social interactions than those with secure attachments (positive valence). Expressing fewer positive emotions leads to less intimacy in that interaction (Tidwell, et al., 1996). Again, the extent to which this social function is served depends on memory characteristics: heightened emotional valence of disclosures leads to higher levels of intimacy. With the exception of intimacy, however, little is known about the extent to which social functions are served in relationships with varying valence due to the qualitative characteristics of memories.

Length. Suggestions concerning how length of relationship influences social functions of AM is drawn from research on the use of the personal past during initial introductions and research on collaborative remembering in short and long-term marriages. Upon meeting someone, older adults are more likely than younger adults to spontaneously talk about the past (Boden & Bielby, 1983). Older stranger pairs are also more likely to incorporate personal information when recalling stories (e.g., Dixon & Gould, 1998). Thus, when there is no pre-existing relationship, older adults share more personal past information with others possibly putting them at an advantage when using AMs initiate relationships (e.g., an

intimacy function). No conclusions can be drawn at this point regarding other social functions.

When a relationship already exists, however, how is memory sharing influenced by the duration of the existing relationship? Research on collaborative remembering finds that long-term (older) couples remember equal amounts of information (including details) from a story as do couples together for a shorter period of time. Among stranger dyads, this finding does not hold (Dixon & Gould, 1998). Couples in relationships for longer periods of time develop a "couple expertise" (Dixon & Gould, 1996) that improves memory performance (e.g., remembering more details). Thus, the length of a relationship affects the amount of information remembered, including level of detail. As conceptualized in the model, these qualitative memory characteristics (i.e., detail) and others that are similar (i.e., emotion) can impact the extent to which the social functions of remembering are served.

In sum, the valence of a relationship can influence the use of AM for intimacy maintenance, one social function of AM, by affecting what is remembered about that relationship (e.g., Buehlman, et al., 1992). In addition, individuals with secure attachment styles or positive relationships interact in ways (i.e., include more emotional information) that foster social uses of memory, such as intimacy (Tidwell, et al, 1996). Thus, valence influences the types of social functions that are used (e.g., intimacy) and the extent to which these functions are served via emotional characteristics of memory. Length of relationship affects the type of social function served: in initial introductions AMs are likely to be used to initiate intimacy, while for existing relationships AMs are used for maintaining intimacy. Couples who have been together longer may be expert at using AMs to serve social purposes (Dixon & Gould, 1996). Individuals in close relationships are more likely than strangers to share detailed and emotional personal memories (Pillemer, 1998), thus influencing the extent to which social functions, such as intimacy, are served. These ideas are speculations but are

based on existing areas of work that provide insight into variations in the types of and extent to which social functions are served in relationships.

Future Directions and Conclusion

Our major objective was to develop a conceptual model of the social functions of AM sharing across the lifespan. Modeling the critical components diagrammatically, and providing literature to link them, illustrates how AMs may be used to serve social functions in daily interactions. Future work can take two directions: (1) substantiating the model, and (2) employing the model. Both directions require empirical investigations that will advance our understanding of the social functions of AM.

Substantiating the model. Explicating the components of this model has made it evident that there are large gaps in the existing literature that need to be addressed to further substantiate the model. Among many possibilities, two major areas of work are suggested here. First, the relation between qualitative memory characteristics and the social functions of AM needs substantiating. The qualitative memory characteristics included in the model (detail and emotion) are important during autobiographical remembering and are often included when recalling meaningful events (e.g., Bohannon, 1988; Conway, et al., 1994). Related work suggests that these characteristics are relevant when using AMs for various social functions (e.g., Tannen, 1990) but there are no direct empirical investigations of these claims. It is unknown whether detail, emotion, or both are more necessary for AM to serve each particular social function. For instance, is emotion more necessary when using AMs for empathy, while detail is more important when using AMs to teach and inform others? Another unknown is the extent to which these characteristics, detail and emotion, influence the adaptive function that memory serves. Pillemer's (1998) suggestion that heightened levels of detail and emotion better serve interpersonal functions was adopted. It is unclear though whether or not there is an optimal amount of detail or emotion needed to best serve a

particular function. Could remembering too much detail or emotional information sometimes hinder the social functions of AM? Future work in which levels of detail and emotion in memory telling are manipulated and a variety of functional outcomes are measured will be needed to further substantiate the relations between components and functional outcomes. Some such work in currently underway in our lab.

A second area in need of further development includes work on specific types of social functions. The majority of work currently available to substantiate the model focuses on one social function: intimacy. For example, literature is available to link all of the components of the model in some way to the use of AM for intimacy development and maintenance. To a lesser extent, components of the model can be linked to using the past to teach and inform others. There is almost no work addressing how model components affect the use of AM for eliciting or showing empathy. Given that social functions of AM are not limited only to intimacy, future work should use multiple outcome measures to assess the relation of various components in the model to each of the various types of social functions of AM. In sum, developing a model of the social functions of AM elucidated these (and other) crucial gaps in the literature. Future directions for substantiating the model outlined here are clearly not exhaustive.

Employing the model. Despite limitations posed by current gaps in the literature, research questions can be still generated based on the existing literature as organized in the model. Two examples are provided here.

Suggestions for future work regarding the relation of speaker characteristics (e.g., age, gender, and personality) to social functions were given in a previous section. We expand upon these suggestions here by making age and gender hypotheses about using AMs to maintain intimacy in relationships. With increasing age, individuals are more likely to use AMs for intimacy maintenance. Women are also more likely to use AMs for intimacy

(Webster, 1995; Webster & McCall, 1999). In addition, older adult's and women's AMs are sometimes characterized by more emotion (Carstensen & Turk-Charles, 1994; Hashtroudi, et al., 1990; Ross & Holmberg, 1992). A useful question is: how do these age and gender differences and similarities in the qualitative characteristics of AM influence the extent to which the social function of intimacy is served? For instance, emotion is more relevant to using AMs for intimacy (Tannen, 1990) and thus older adults and women may be advantaged when using their AMs to serve the intimacy function. Does a single session of AM sharing (e.g., about one's spouse) increase intimacy differentially in younger and older adults, for men versus women? If so, are those age group and gender variations in intimacy as an outcome, mediated by differences in level of emotion in individual's recalled accounts? Based on the model, a speaker characteristic hypothesis about using AMs for intimacy might be that women's AMs and older adult's AMs, which are more emotionally focused than men and younger adults' memories, may better serve the social function of developing intimacy.

A second hypothesis can be generated based on existing work on listener characteristics (e.g., familiarity), the level of responsiveness during the memory sharing process, and the extent to which the qualitative characteristics of AM serve a particular function, such as intimacy. Existing evidence shows that individuals are likely to share more personal details and emotions when remembering for someone that they know (Dixon & Gould, 1998) and with someone who is responsive (e.g., Bavelas, et al., 2000; Pasupathi, et al., 1998). Based on the relation between listener characteristics and responsiveness depicted in the model, suggestions for future hypothesis driven work are possible. Specifically, it would be expected that sharing an AM with someone who is known (e.g., a spouse), and responsive, heightens the extent to which AMs serve an intimacy function. Sharing an AM with someone who is known but unresponsive, however, may be particularly detrimental to serving the intimacy function. While this hypothesis may be generally true, it would likely

differ depending on the age of the speaker and listener. For instance, older, long-term happily married couples, are more tolerant of unresponsive listening by their partner (Pasupathi, et al., 1999), than are younger couples. Experimentally manipulating listener familiarity (e.g., stranger or spouse) and training confederates to be more or less responsive (similar to methods used by Pasupathi, et al., 1998) across different age groups would allow for a direct test of this hypothesis. In sum, these research questions have been set forth to give a snapshot of the model's utility as a catalyst for guiding future empirical work.

Conclusion

A conceptual model of the social functions of AM was developed that serves to identify existing gaps in the theoretical and empirical literature on the social functions of AM. By elucidating the variables and processes involved when AM is used to serve social functions the model also provides a basis for hypothesis-driven research. Developing similar models of the self and directive functions of AM will be needed in order to fully explore the functional approach to the study of AM. It is hoped that this modest attempt at conceptualization will help to translate an ecological construct with great intuitive appeal, function, in a manner that provides a catalyst for the advancement of our understanding of how, and particularly why, individual's use AMs in their everyday lives.

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Footnotes

[1] Eliciting empathy from others through AM sharing and showing empathy to others through AM sharing does not involve recounting only negative emotional events. Empathic functions, as they are defined here, involve sharing mutual feelings (positive or negative) with another in order for the person to feel the same way (positive or negative). Also, while conversational uses of AM (e.g., using AMs to make the conversation more enjoyable or to persuade the listener) are sometimes considered to be a social function of AM sharing (e.g., Pillemer, 1998; Webster, 1998), they are excluded from the current model. For the current paper conversational uses are seen not as a social function per say (that is as an outcome of AM sharing), but rather as part of the memory sharing process.

[2] There is a body of literature exploring how everyday talk, even about mundane events (e.g., "I went to the grocery store yesterday"), is important for sustaining relationships (e.g., Duck, Rutt, Hurst, Strejc, 1991). While recognizing this type of conversation as important for relationships, it is not clear whether talk about mundane events is different from talk about "truly autobiographical" or more meaningful events. Thus, personally meaningful past events are the focus of the current model.

Author Note

Nicole Alea, Institute on Aging and Department of Psychology, University of Florida. Susan Bluck, Institute on Aging and Department of Psychology, University of Florida. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to either Nicole Alea or Susan Bluck, Institute on Aging, 1329 SW 16th Street, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, USA, 32610-3505. Electronic mail can be sent to either nalea@ufl.edu or bluck@ufl.edu.

Table 1

Social Functions of Autobiographical Memory

Type of Function	Description
Intimacy	Initiating, maintaining, and developing relationship intimacy.
Teach/Inform	Teaching and informing others; illustrating a point and giving advice.
Empathy	Eliciting empathy and reassurance from others; showing empathy.

Note. This is not an exhaustive list of the types of social functions of AM but is based on suggestions in the literature (e.g., Cohen, 1998; Hyman & Faries, 1992; Pillemer, 1998; Webster, 1995).

Figure 1

A Conceptual Model of the Social functions of Autobiographical Memory