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COLLECTIVE MEMORY, COLLECTIVE NARCISSISM, AND MORAL FOUNDATIONS THEORY: MORALLY MOTIVATED REASONING AND BIASED ASSESSMENTS OF GROUP INFLUENCE

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In the current study we demonstrate how moral values may bias collective memory. We follow Wertsch and Roediger in defining collective memory as memories shared by members of a group that are relevant to that group's identity. The specific collective memories we examine are American participants' perception of their state's contribution to overall U.S. history. Prior work in our lab has demonstrated a state narcissism effect, in which participants over-attribute responsibility for U.S. history to people from their state. Putnam and his colleagues hypothesized that the group narcissism bias in collective remembering arises due to ego-protection biases, the availability heuristic, and base-rate neglect. We examine the phenomenon from a different perspective: morally motivated reasoning. We drew on Haidt's (CIT) moral foundations theory, and predicted that the binding values—loyalty, authority, and purity—would positively predict state narcissism. We collected data from 2,000 American Mechanical Turk workers. Participants rated their home state's contribution to U.S. history, as well as the contributions of 10 other states. They also filled out the Moral Foundations Questionnaire. We collected demographic data, such as level of education, home type, and degree of identification with home state. Endorsement of binding values positively and strongly predicted state narcissism. We attributed this to morally motivated reasoning, in which binding values may motivate people to include the group in their ego-protective biases, and to neglect historical contributions made by groups outside their own. Individuating values (fairness, harm) did not significantly predict state narcissism. Moral reasoning style, therefore, may moderate the extent to which the biases suggested by Putnam, et al. influence collective remembering. Moral reasoning can bias the way people judge and remember their group's role in history.