Generosity or genocide? Identity implications of silence in American Thanksgiving commemorations

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This paper investigates the identity implications of silence about genocide in commemorations of American Thanksgiving. In Study 1 we assessed the co-occurrence of national glorification themes with different forms of silence in commemoration products by conducting a content analysis of presidential Thanksgiving proclamations. In Study 2 we examined the extent to which different commemoration products are infused with particular beliefs and desires by measuring participants’ reactions to different Thanksgiving commemorations—a literal-silence condition that did not mention Indigenous Peoples, an interpretive-silence condition that mentioned Indigenous Peoples but did not explicitly mention genocidal conquest, and an anti-silence condition that did mention genocidal conquest—as a function of national glorification. In Study 3 we manipulated exposure to different Thanksgiving commemorations (with associated forms of silence) and assessed the impact on national glorification and identity-relevant action. Results provide evidence for the hypothesised, bi-directional relationship between national glorification and silence about genocide in commemorations of American Thanksgiving.

Keywords: Collective memory; National identity; Indigenous; Genocide; History.

Each year the President of the United States proclaims the fourth Thursday of November to be a National Day of Thanksgiving. The resulting commemoration—that is, act of “remembering together”—is one of the most important American holidays. Prominent in celebrations of this holiday are representations of the “first Thanksgiving”. The conventional Thanksgiving story describes how a group of religious dissenters fled persecution in England aboard the ship Mayflower and landed on a place they called Plymouth Rock in 1620. Woefully unprepared for the coming winter, these “Pilgrims” suffered greatly from cold, disease, and hunger until local “Indians” came to their rescue. The Indians shared food with the Pilgrims and helped them plant their first crops. After the first harvest, the Pilgrims celebrated with a Thanksgiving feast to which they invited their Indian neighbours as a gesture of thanks for their generosity.

As scholars of collective memory note “any historical narrative is a particular bundle of silences” (Trouillot, 1995, p. 27). To illuminate silences associated with the conventional story about the first Thanksgiving, consider remarks that a Wampanoag leader, Frank Wamsutta James (1970), prepared when the Massachusetts Department of Commerce invited him to speak at an event commemorating the 350th anniversary of the Pilgrims’ landing in Plymouth:

Today is a time of celebrating for you, but it is not a time of celebrating for me. It is with heavy heart that I look back upon what happened to my People. The Pilgrims had hardly explored the shores of Cape Cod four
days before they had robbed the graves of my ancestors, and stolen their corn, wheat, and beans. Massasoit, the great leader of the Wampanoag, knew these facts; yet he and his People welcomed and befriended the settlers little knowing that before 50 years were to pass, the Wampanoags and other Indians living near the settlers would be killed by their guns or dead from diseases that we caught from them. Although our way of life is almost gone and our language is almost extinct, we the Wampanoags still walk the lands of Massachusetts. What has happened cannot be changed, but today we work toward a better America, a more Indian America where people and nature once again are important.

Besides noting instances of past wrongdoing against Indigenous Peoples, James’s remarks suggest a link between silence about such wrongdoing and celebratory constructions of American identity.\(^1\) In one direction, glorifying constructions of American identity promote silence about historical wrongdoing in representations of collective memory. In the other direction, silence about historical wrongdoing in collective memory products promotes national glorification.

**MEMORY AND IDENTITY**

Psychologists have long noted a bi-directional relationship between memory and identity (Bartlett, 1932; Conway, 2005; Greenwald, 1980; Wilson & Ross, 2003). One direction of this relationship emphasizes the influence of memory on identity. Rather than a naturally emerging entity, people actively construct and continuously reproduce an experience of self-identity based partly on material from autobiographical memory. Moreover, this active reconstruction of the personal past proceeds in collaboration with others through linguistic and cultural tools (McAdams, 2001; Nelson, 2003; Pasupathi, 2001). Autobiographical memory and personal identity emerge gradually alongside developments in language, narrative, and conceptions of self and other (Fivush & Nelson, 2004). Adults guide children’s earliest conversations by rehearsing events in community-specific ways to create a common-ground past from which a personal past emerges (Fivush, 2001; Wang, 2008). Across the life course, culturally saturated conversation practices influence how people remember autobiographical experiences and reconstruct personal identity (McLean, Pasupathi, & Pals, 2007; Pasupathi, 2001).

The other direction of this relationship emphasizes the influence of identity on memory. Rather than a passive reflection of what happened, people actively construct an experience of the past to meet needs of the present. One important pressure that bears on memory is the need for a coherent identity (Barclay, 1996; Wilson & Ross, 2003). People integrate across diverse experiences to construct a sufficiently integrated sense of self that accentuates defining experiences, conveniently omits incompatible experiences, and thereby affords a sense of unity and purpose through time. Another important pressure that bears on memory is the desire for positive identity (Greenwald, 1980; Ross, 1989, 1991; Wilson & Ross, 2003). In ordinary circumstances people tend to reconstruct the past in ways that preserve a sense of self as competent and moral.

\(^1\) While guidelines of the American Psychological Association dictate use of American Indian or Native American, some writers criticize such labels as “counterfeit” identities imposed by European American colonisers as tools of racist subjugation (e.g., Yellow Bird, 2004). For purposes of the present paper we use Indigenous Peoples as the pan-ethnic representation of past and present Indigenous populations within the United States. In a vivid demonstration of the link between national glorification and silence about past wrongdoing, Massachusetts officials decided that James’s remarks were inappropriate for the planned celebration, so they rescinded his invitation to speak. Silenced at the anniversary event, James delivered his speech to a nearby gathering, where he proclaimed a National Day of Mourning with traditions of grieving and fasting that continue to operate in parallel to mainstream Thanksgiving celebrations.

**FROM PERSONAL TO COLLECTIVE MEMORY**

Besides social influences on memory and identity, recent work has extended discussions from the level of individual self (autobiographical memory and personal identity) to collective self (e.g., representations of history and national identity; Liu & Hilton, 2005; Liu, Wilson, McClure, & Higgins, 1999; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). In one direction, tools for collective remembering provide a basis for national identity and identity-relevant action. Rather than a natural connection to a self-evident category, people construct an experience of national identity based on imagined community with others who are distant in time and
space (Anderson, 1983; Billig, 1995). This sense of shared past serves as a temporal reference point, which guides the actions of those individuals whose lives are tied to it. By providing a collective “life story” (McAdams, 2001) about who we have been, practices of commemoration provide a unified sense of who we are now and project a sense of collective purpose into the future. With respect to national identity, celebratory commemoration practices promote nation-glorying identification and action, but critical commemoration practices undermine nation-glorying identification and action (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001).

In the other direction, the influence of identity on memory suggests that commemoration of the collective past is subject to identity dynamics. When recalling national history, highly identified citizens are likely to emphasise celebratory events and “silence”, deny, or otherwise fail to recall identity-threatening incidents (Sahdra & Ross, 2007). This influence of identity on memory is not necessarily the product of identity-enhancing motivations (i.e., desire to portray collective self in positive light). Instead it may reflect a process whereby identity categories have links to relatively positive associations for highly identified participants, which can result in identity-enhancing patterns of recall regardless of individual motivations.

**A CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH**

While collective memory has been a part of academic discourse across a wide variety of disciplines (e.g., Bodnar, 1992; Cole, 2001; Halbwachs, 1980; Pennebaker, Paez, & Rime, 1997; Young, 1993; Zerubavel, 2003), a consensual definition remains elusive (Wertsch & Roediger, 2008). In this study we draw on a cultural psychology (CP) approach to collective memory as mind-in-context (Adams, Salter, Pickett, Kurtiš, & Phillips, in press; see also Wang, 2008): a recognition that the structure of memory is not limited to brain architecture, but also extends to cultural tools and environmental affordances. This approach affords a conception of collective memory, not as a metaphysically dubious property of superordinate entities with their own consciousness, but instead as traces of psychological activity inscribed in everyday cultural worlds.

In other words, a CP approach considers remembering as a dynamic process of “mediated action” (Wertsch, 2002; see also Vygotsky, 1978). Remembering is not situated solely within individuals, but instead is a joint product of culturally grounded agents and the ecologically embedded structures that provide a common basis for stories about the past. As we noted earlier, the sociocultural scaffolding of experience is evident even in the apparently intrapersonal phenomenon of autobiographical memory: a joint product that people actively construct with listeners through culturally infused conversational practices and other sociocultural affordances (Fivush & Reese, 1992; Nelson, 1993; Pasupathi, 2001; Wang & Brockmeier, 2002). However, the sociocultural scaffolding of remembering becomes particularly clear with respect to collective memory (Wertsch, 2002). Because people do not have direct memory of centuries-old events, they rely heavily on social representations of history—repositories of memory embedded in history textbooks, official memorials, museums, and other bits of mind-in-context—to reconstruct stories of the collective past and forge a sense of collective identity and purpose.

Besides the idea of mind-in-context, another contribution of a CP approach is the concept of mutual constitution: the idea that “psyche and culture . . . make each other up” (Shweder, 1990, p. 1). This concept provides a framework for thinking about practices of commemoration as “intentional worlds” (Shweder, 1990, p. 1; see Adams et al., in press) that mediate the relationship between collective memory and identity. In one direction, practices of commemoration are not natural or objective renderings of the past; instead they are social products that bear the particular beliefs and desires (e.g., about national virtue) of the people who produced them. In the other direction, practices of commemoration are not neutral; instead, they carry a psychological charge that directs experience towards particular ends (e.g., patriotic citizens prepared to kill or die for nation). Note that the “intention” in intentional worlds refers to this directive force of cultural realities, not the deliberate wishes of people who inhabit and animate those realities. A person who engages in nation-glorying commemoration practices can inadvertently reproduce nation-glorying effects, regardless of the person’s conscious, individual intentions (see Ahmed, 2004).
SILENCE AND FORGETTING

Implicit in the concept of intentional worlds is the suggestion that dominant representations of history are not unbiased reflections of objectively recorded events. Instead, they are cultural tools that have evolved through differential exercise of power not only to enable or reproduce memory of collective triumphs, but also to silence or repress memory of collective misdeeds (Trouillot, 1995). Instances of such collective forgetting are especially prevalent among groups who have harmed other groups (Baumeister & Hastings, 1997; Branscombe & Miron, 2004; Wohl & Branscombe, 2008), reflecting in a conspiracy of silence about wrong-doing in the name of nation.

A framework for exploring collective forgetting comes from Cohen’s (2001) work on denial of historical violence. Cohen identifies three categories of collective denial mechanisms. Literal denial occurs when people deny that acts of violence happened. This category is evident in the work of Sahdra and Ross (2007), who observed that Canadians who identified as Hindu or Sikh recalled fewer incidents of own group atrocities than other-group atrocities (especially when they were highly identified or when collective identity was salient). Implicatory denial occurs when people acknowledge acts of violence, but attempt to justify or legitimise them on ideological bases. This category is evident in the work of Branscombe and her colleagues (Branscombe & Miron, 2004; Wohl & Branscombe, 2008), who report a relationship between group identification and justification or legitimisation of historical violence.

Of particular relevance for the present research is a third of category of collective denial mechanisms. Interpretive denial occurs when people acknowledge raw facts of historical violence but construct events in ways that make them appear less atrocious. In classic social psychological terms (Asch, 1948), interpretive denial does not merely result in differential judgement of an equally atrocious object (e.g., as in implicatory denial), but instead results in different objects of judgement: representations of violence as something other than atrocity. An important implication of interpretive denial is that silence and forgetting are not simply about absence or failure to mention relevant events. Instead, silence and forgetting also result from particular forms of presence or mention that transform potentially threatening events (e.g., “torture”) into transgression-denying objects (e.g., “enhanced interrogation”). Indeed, the identity-bolstering effects of silence may be stronger when commemoration practices incorporate identity-threatening cases of collective misdeeds in a sanitised form than when they omit mention of these events altogether (for a similar idea, see Cue, Koppel, & Hirst, 2007).

STUDY 1

Previous authors have documented the extent to which formal education materials—history textbooks (Loewen, 2007) and classroom activities (Brayboy & Searle, 2007)—present sanitised and nation-glorifying depictions of American Thanksgiving and related historical events. In our first study we extended the focus beyond formal education materials to consider examples of silencing in an important practice of commemoration: annual proclamations by the President of the United States to announce the National Day of Thanksgiving.

One question of interest was the extent to which these presidential proclamations reproduced silence about genocide. Another question concerned themes systematically associated with different forms of silence. We anticipated that all proclamations would perform some sort of silence by failing to mention genocide in connection with the Thanksgiving holiday. However, the conception of proclamations as “intentional worlds” suggests that different forms of silence reflect (and promote) different beliefs and desires materialised in different textual themes. To the extent that silence about wrongdoing promotes national interests, one can hypothesise that proclamations that perform literal forms of silence, which we operationalise here as failure to mention Indigenous Peoples, will co-occur more frequently with nation-glorifying themes (e.g., national identity, freedom, positive emotion, and religion), but less frequently with nationalism-attenuating themes (e.g., world citizenship and tolerant diversity), than proclamations that perform more interpretative forms of silence—that is, mentioning Indigenous Peoples in ways that portray Thanksgiving-relevant history as something other than genocide.
Method

Materials. We conducted content analyses of presidential Thanksgiving proclamations from the years 1993–2008, including eight proclamations by William Jefferson Clinton (1993–2000) and eight proclamations by George W. Bush (2001–2008; Pilgrim Hall Museum, 2009). We removed any content that could identify the author of the speech. The proclamations generally follow a standard format: an unstructured section (roughly three paragraphs) providing background for the proclamation, followed by a relatively formulaic section with fairly standard prose enacting the proclamation. The analyses that we report below refer only to the initial, less formulaic section.

Procedure. We used the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC; Pennebaker, Francis, & Booth, 2001) to determine the length of text and the frequency with which categories of interest appeared in each of the 16 proclamations. We used four items from the standard dictionary that accompanies the LIWC: word count, and the categories we, positive emotion, and negative emotion. We supplemented these items with the 11 custom categories that appear in Table 1.

To assess reproduction of silence, two independent coders—undergraduate students at the University of Kansas who were unaware of hypotheses and proclamation source—noted whether each proclamation mentioned genocide of Indigenous Peoples (as in the James speech that we discussed in the Introduction), mentioned Indigenous Peoples without mentioning genocide, or made no mention of Indigenous Peoples. Agreement between coders was 100%.

Results and discussion

As anticipated, all 16 Presidential proclamations reproduced silence about genocide. They failed to mention the acts of violence that James (1970) noted in his proclamation of a National Day of Mourning. Of the 16 texts, 6 (all of them Clinton proclamations) were cases of interpretive silence (Cohen, 2001). Although these texts mentioned Indigenous Peoples, they typically did so alongside themes of generosity, unity in diversity, and coming together in friendship. This excerpt from Clinton’s 1998 proclamation provides an example of this category:

Thanksgiving Day is one of America’s most beloved and widely celebrated holidays. Whether descendants of the original colonists or new citizens, Americans join with family and friends to give thanks to a provident God for the blessings of freedom, peace, and plenty. We are a Nation of people who have come from many countries, cultures, and creeds. The colonial Thanksgiving at Plymouth in 1621, when the Pilgrims of the Old World mingled in fellowship and celebration with the American Indians of the New World, foreshadowed the challenge and opportunity that such diversity has always offered us: to live together in peace with respect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding category</th>
<th>Examples of constituent words</th>
<th>Bush Literal (n = 8)</th>
<th>Clinton Literal (n = 2)</th>
<th>Clinton Interpretive (n = 6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Word count</td>
<td></td>
<td>335.63 (75.32)</td>
<td>350.50 (10.61)</td>
<td>358.50 (36.18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We</td>
<td>we, our, us</td>
<td>7.44 (1.33)</td>
<td>7.12 (1.00)</td>
<td>6.63 (1.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive emotion</td>
<td>happy, pretty, good</td>
<td>9.51 (0.75)</td>
<td>8.30 (1.06)</td>
<td>7.43 (1.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative emotion</td>
<td>hate, worthless, enemy</td>
<td>0.60 (0.83)</td>
<td>0.58 (0.42)</td>
<td>0.56 (0.27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National identity</td>
<td>America, citizens, presidents</td>
<td>4.06 (1.07)</td>
<td>2.00 (0.06)</td>
<td>2.38 (0.78)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom</td>
<td>liberty, opportunity, rights</td>
<td>1.29 (0.59)</td>
<td>1.42 (0.77)</td>
<td>0.72 (0.58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>adversity, challenge, trouble</td>
<td>0.13 (0.18)</td>
<td>0.44 (0.62)</td>
<td>0.28 (0.25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military</td>
<td>Armed Forces, military, war</td>
<td>1.49 (0.40)</td>
<td>0.00 (0.00)</td>
<td>0.59 (0.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tradition</td>
<td>festival, heritage, tradition</td>
<td>0.37 (0.34)</td>
<td>0.29 (0.00)</td>
<td>0.20 (0.30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>faith, God, prayer</td>
<td>4.22 (0.94)</td>
<td>2.84 (1.12)</td>
<td>2.64 (0.93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prosperity</td>
<td>abundance, prosperous, wealth</td>
<td>0.33 (0.30)</td>
<td>1.02 (1.04)</td>
<td>1.15 (0.69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World citizenship</td>
<td>humanity, international, mankind</td>
<td>0.16 (0.17)</td>
<td>0.00 (0.00)</td>
<td>0.37 (0.28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolerant diversity</td>
<td>culture, different, diversity</td>
<td>0.04 (0.11)</td>
<td>0.00 (0.00)</td>
<td>0.33 (0.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communalism</td>
<td>community, neighbour, together</td>
<td>1.13 (0.61)</td>
<td>1.44 (0.45)</td>
<td>1.59 (0.77)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social justice</td>
<td>equitable, fair, just</td>
<td>0.83 (0.45)</td>
<td>1.02 (1.04)</td>
<td>1.39 (0.77)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cell entries refer to mean frequencies (and standard deviations) for each theme.
and appreciation for our differences and to draw on one another’s strengths in the work of building a great and unified Nation.

The remaining 10 texts—2 Clinton proclamations and all 8 Bush proclamations—were cases of literal (Cohen, 2001) or absolute (Fryberg & Townsend, 2008) silence. These texts made no mention of Indigenous Peoples, despite the fact that all eight Bush proclamations, but neither Clinton proclamation, mentioned relevant historical events (i.e., Pilgrims’ “first Thanksgiving”).

This excerpt from Bush’s 2003 proclamation provides an example of this category:

Each year on Thanksgiving, we gather with family and friends to thank God for the many blessings He has given us, and we ask God to continue to guide and watch over our country. Almost 400 years ago, after surviving their first winter at Plymouth the Pilgrims celebrated a harvest feast to give thanks. George Washington proclaimed the first National Day of Thanksgiving in 1789, and Abraham Lincoln revived the tradition during the Civil War. Since that time, our citizens have paused to express thanks for the bounty of blessings we enjoy and to spend time with family and friends. In want or in plenty, in times of challenge or times of calm, we always have reasons to be thankful. America is a land of abundance, prosperity, and hope. We must never take for granted the things that make our country great: a firm foundation of freedom, justice, and equality; a belief in democracy and the rule of law; and our fundamental rights to gather, speak, and worship freely.

Thematic correlates of different forms of silence. Besides frequency of different forms of silence, we investigated the hypothesis that different forms of silence co-occur with different themes. To examine this hypothesis we compared the mean frequency of key themes in each text across literal- and interpretive-silence categories. Consistent with hypotheses, nation-glorifying themes—national identity, freedom, military, positive emotion, and religion—were more frequent in the literal-silence texts, which failed to mention Indigenous Peoples, than in the interpretive-silence texts, which mentioned Indigenous Peoples without mentioning genocidal conquest, one-tailed $t(14) > 1.89$, $p < .04$, $ds > 1.01$ (see Table 1 for means). In contrast, but also consistent with hypotheses, nationalism-attenuating themes—global citizenship and tolerant diversity—were more frequent in the interpretive-silence texts than in the literal-silence texts, one-tailed $t(14) < -2.20$, $p < .025$, $ds > 1.17$ (see Table 1).

One complication to this analysis is that proclamation source is almost perfectly confounded with silence category; that is, Clinton was the source of all interpretive-silence texts, and Bush was the source for 80% of the literal-silence texts. Of course, this source effect speaks to the hypothesised way in which different types of silence are associated with different “beliefs and desires”. Literal silence was associated with the president (Bush) and party (Republican) noted for nation-glorifying politics, and interpretive silence was associated with the president (Clinton) and party (Democratic) noted for more inclusive politics. However, this confounding makes it difficult to know if observed thematic differences are directly linked to type of silence or whether both are indirectly related consequences of different source politics.3

Summary

The results of Study 1 suggest different uses of silence by different political actors. Clinton

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2 In other words, Bush mentioned the Massachusetts colony or Pilgrims in all eight proclamations, even though he never mentioned Indigenous Peoples. By contrast, each of the six times Clinton mentioned the Massachusetts colony, he also mentioned Indigenous Peoples.

3 The two Clinton texts that are instances of literal silence provide important information in this regard. Due to the small sample size, it is not feasible to conduct formal tests of mean differences between these two texts and other categories. However, examination of means in Table 1 suggests that silence type, regardless of proclamation source, provides the best account of observed differences for the categories of freedom, tolerant diversity, and global citizenship. Moreover, it is possible to examine the direction of deviation of these two Clinton texts from the other Clinton texts. If differences between silence categories are partly a function of silence type rather than source identity, then one can hypothesise that means for the two literal-silence Clinton texts will deviate from six interpretive-silence Clinton texts in the direction of other literal-silence (Bush) texts. This was true for 12 of the 15 categories in Table 1—all but national identity, challenge, and military—a proportion that constitutes a marginally significant deviation from chance, $\chi^2(1) = 2.97$, $p = .085$. Again, this pattern provides tentative evidence that some observed differences in thematic content across Thanksgiving proclamations may be a function of silence type, beyond the identity of the president who made the proclamation.
proclamations were more likely to use interpretive forms of silence and to emphasise tolerant diversity and other nationalism-attenuating themes. In contrast, Bush proclamations were more likely to use literal forms of silence and to emphasise national identity, military action, positive emotion, and other nation-glorifying themes. None of the proclamations mentioned genocidal conquest in connection with Thanksgiving commemorations. This is not surprising, as no US government has officially acknowledged or apologised for genocidal conquest.

We propose that different forms of silence about genocide both reflect and promote celebratory constructions of American identity (e.g., in terms of freedom, in the case of literal-silence proclamations, or tolerant diversity, in the case of interpretive-silence proclamations). From this perspective, recalling genocidal conquest is inconsistent with the nation-glorifying function of presidential proclamations, which are official, enactive commemorations of the collective past. Indeed one might argue that, although perhaps appropriate for discussions of American history, mention of genocidal conquest is in fact irrelevant to the National Day of Thanksgiving.

In contrast, we propose that such claims of irrelevance constitute a form of silencing: a denial of the importance of an historical event for present experience. From this perspective, claims about the irrelevance of genocidal conquest for Thanksgiving commemorations are not reflections of an objective historical fact; instead they are a construction of events that qualifies as a case of interpretive silence. In turn, to the extent that claims of irrelevance constitute a form of silence about genocide, then one can hypothesise that claims of irrelevance will be greatest when identity concerns are strongest. We examined this idea empirically in Study 2.

STUDY 2

Method

Participants

Participants were 38 students (66% women) enrolled in an undergraduate psychology course at the University of Kansas. They included 30 participants who indicated White or European-American, 5 who indicated Latino/a, 1 who indicated Asian, 1 who indicated Jewish, and 1 who indicated no response to an item about ethnic identification.

Speech-rating task. Participants read the three excerpts of Thanksgiving proclamations that we quoted earlier, in this order: the 2003 Bush proclamation, which did not mention Indigenous
Peoples (literal silence); the 1998 Clinton proclamation, which did mention Indigenous Peoples but did not acknowledge genocidal conquest (interpretive silence); and the 1970 James proclamation of a National Day of Mourning, which mentioned both Indigenous Peoples and genocidal events (anti-silence). Immediately after each text participants used a 7-point scale (0 = not at all to 6 = very much) to rate the text along six dimensions; (1) familiarity with text information, (2) accuracy of this version of events, (3) agreement with this version of events, (4) relevance of points to the participant’s own domestic observation of Thanksgiving, (5) liking of this version of the Thanksgiving story, and (6) the likelihood that the participant would recommend this speech to international students so that they could understand the true meaning of Thanksgiving.

Results and discussion

We report results of analyses including only the 30 participants who indicated White or European American ethnicity. Preliminary analyses indicated no effect of the order manipulation on national identification scores. To assess the influence of national identification on participants’ ratings of each speech we conducted two sets of parallel analyses.

Effects of identity salience manipulation. First we assessed effects of national identity salience by conducting 2 (Identity Order, between-participants) × 3 (Text, within-participants) mixed-model analyses of variance (ANOVAs) on participants’ ratings of each speech. These analyses revealed a main effect of the identity manipulation for ratings of familiarity, $F(1, 27) = 4.45, p < .04, \eta_p^2 = .14$. Participants rated all texts as less familiar in the identity-first condition (i.e., in which national identity was salient) than in the identity-last condition (see Table 2). Consistent with the idea that different commemoration texts are infused with different beliefs and desires, these analyses also revealed main effects of text such that ratings of familiarity, relevance, and liking were lower for the James declaration of a National Day of Mourning than for the two presidential proclamations of a National Day of Thanksgiving, $Fs(2, 54) > 4.24, ps < .02, \eta_p^2s > .14$; (see Table 2 for means).

In the case of relevance ratings, the effect of Text was moderated by a Text × Identity Order interaction, $F(2, 54) = 3.70, p < .035, \eta_p^2 = .12$. To interpret this interaction we calculated a difference score for each participant by subtracting relevance ratings of the James text from the mean relevance rating for the two presidential proclamations. Consistent with the hypothesis about the effects of identity salience on silence about past wrongdoing, the tendency to rate the James text as less relevant than the presidential proclamations was greater among participants in the identity-first condition ($M_{diff} = 2.64, SD = 1.26$) than in the identity-last condition ($M_{diff} = 1.53, SD = 1.54$), one-tailed $t(27) = 2.11, p < .025, d = 0.81$.

Effects of identification. Besides salience of national categories, another way to conceptualise the influence of national identity is to compare participants who are high and low in strength of identification. Particularly relevant in this regard is the relatively ego-involved, glorification dimension of national identification: the extent to which people endorse American exceptionalism and regard the USA as superior to other nations. To assess the implications of national glorification we conducted a parallel set of 2 (National Identification) × 3 (Text) ANOVAs replacing the identity salience manipulation with a dichotomised national glorification score (based on a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Familiarity</th>
<th>Bush</th>
<th>Clinton</th>
<th>James</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identity First</td>
<td>3.53 (1.41)</td>
<td>3.14 (1.41)</td>
<td>2.20 (1.66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity Last</td>
<td>4.07 (1.34)</td>
<td>4.07 (1.49)</td>
<td>3.67 (1.50)</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Accuracy</th>
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<th></th>
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<tr>
<td>Identity First</td>
<td>3.13 (1.25)</td>
<td>3.14 (1.29)</td>
<td>3.60 (1.24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity Last</td>
<td>3.27 (1.03)</td>
<td>3.07 (1.16)</td>
<td>4.07 (0.96)</td>
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<th>Agreement</th>
<th></th>
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<tr>
<td>Identity First</td>
<td>3.20 (1.42)</td>
<td>3.50 (1.23)</td>
<td>3.40 (1.18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity Last</td>
<td>3.33 (1.29)</td>
<td>3.13 (1.13)</td>
<td>4.07 (0.88)</td>
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<table>
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<th>Relevance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identity First</td>
<td>3.73 (1.49)</td>
<td>3.50 (1.45)</td>
<td>1.33 (1.29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity Last</td>
<td>4.00 (1.00)</td>
<td>2.93 (1.03)</td>
<td>1.93 (1.03)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Liking</th>
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<tr>
<td>Identity First</td>
<td>3.53 (1.69)</td>
<td>3.64 (0.75)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identity Last</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identity First</td>
<td>2.93 (2.28)</td>
<td>2.93 (1.69)</td>
<td>2.87 (1.85)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity Last</td>
<td>2.80 (1.47)</td>
<td>3.00 (1.77)</td>
<td>2.40 (1.68)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cell entries refer to mean ratings (and standard deviations) for each text.
median split. In addition to main effects of Text (on ratings of familiarity, relevance, and liking) that emerged in the previous analyses, results also revealed significant, Text × National Glorification interactions for ratings of liking, $F(2, 52) = 6.57$, $p < .005$, $\eta^2_p = .20$, and strength of recommendation, $F(2, 52) = 4.83$, $p < .015$, $\eta^2_p = .16$. Consistent with the hypothesis about implications of identification for reproduction of silence, high-glorification participants expressed less liking and weaker recommendation of the James text than did low-glorification participants, one-tailed $t(27) = -1.88$ and $-1.38$, $ps < .04$ and .09, $ds = 0.72$ and 0.53, for liking and recommendation ratings, respectively. Likewise, resonating with the co-occurrence of glorification themes and literal silence in Thanksgiving proclamations by Bush (Study 1), high-glorification participants expressed greater liking and stronger recommendation of the Bush text than did low-glorification participants, one-tailed $t(27) = 4.12$ and 2.79, $ps < .001$ and .005, $ds = 1.59$ and 1.07, for liking and recommendation ratings, respectively (see Table 3 for means).

**Summary**

The results of Study 2 extend those of Study 1 by suggesting the extent to which thematic differences in Thanksgiving proclamations reflect beliefs and desires of the people who produce and consume them. Proclamations for the Day of Thanksgiving resonated more strongly with participants’ beliefs (e.g., about familiarity and relevance) and preferences (e.g., liking and recommendation) than did James’s declaration of a Day of Mourning. This pattern is not surprising, given that participants were White American undergraduates for whom the James declaration likely constituted a form of identity threat. Perhaps more surprising is that these students did not also rate accuracy and personal agreement lower for the James text than for the presidential proclamations. In this regard it is noteworthy that participants were a relatively educated sample of university students. Participants with less education in more conservative settings might indicate less accuracy and personal agreement for the James text.

In any case, and despite their somewhat positive assessment of the James text along relatively “cold” or cognitive dimensions (accuracy and agreement), even these relatively liberal participants showed less acceptance of the James text along the relatively motivation-relevant, or affect-laden dimensions of relevance, liking, and recommendation. We propose that what distinguishes these from the other rating dimensions—what contributes to their motivational and affective charge—is their greater identity relevance. Consistent with this proposal, ratings of the James text along these dimensions were especially low when identity concerns were greatest—whether as an individual difference in national glorification (as for liking and recommendation) or as an effect of the experimental manipulation (as for relevance). In contrast, ratings of the literal-silence Bush text along dimensions of liking and recommendation were especially high among participants who scored high on American glorification.

**STUDY 3**

To the extent that denial of relevance and failure to recommend constitute forms of silence about past wrongdoing, the results of Study 2 provide experimental evidence for an effect of identity salience on cultural representations of collective memory. Study 3 highlights the other side of this hypothesised, bi-directional relationship: the effect of different representations of collective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bush</th>
<th>Clinton</th>
<th>James</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Familiarity</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>High Glorification</td>
<td>3.88 (1.20)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low Glorification</td>
<td>3.69 (1.65)</td>
<td>3.83 (1.64)</td>
<td>2.92 (1.85)</td>
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<td><strong>Accuracy</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Glorification</td>
<td>3.44 (1.32)</td>
<td>3.25 (1.24)</td>
<td>3.56 (1.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Glorification</td>
<td>3.00 (0.82)</td>
<td>2.83 (1.19)</td>
<td>4.08 (1.04)</td>
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<td><strong>Agreement</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>High Glorification</td>
<td>3.81 (1.33)</td>
<td>3.31 (1.20)</td>
<td>3.50 (1.10)</td>
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<td>Low Glorification</td>
<td>2.77 (1.01)</td>
<td>3.25 (1.22)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Relevance</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Glorification</td>
<td>4.13 (1.09)</td>
<td>3.31 (1.30)</td>
<td>1.50 (0.97)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low Glorification</td>
<td>3.62 (1.45)</td>
<td>3.08 (1.31)</td>
<td>1.85 (1.46)</td>
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<td><strong>Liking</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Glorification</td>
<td>4.44 (1.96)</td>
<td>3.50 (1.56)</td>
<td>1.88 (1.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Glorification</td>
<td>2.69 (1.32)</td>
<td>3.33 (39)</td>
<td>2.77 (1.54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recommendation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Glorification</td>
<td>3.69 (1.58)</td>
<td>3.00 (1.59)</td>
<td>2.19 (1.64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Glorification</td>
<td>2.08 (1.50)</td>
<td>2.75 (1.87)</td>
<td>3.08 (1.85)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cell entries refer to mean ratings (and standard deviations) for each text.
memory on identification and identity-relevant action.

**Method**

**Participants**

Participants were 173 students (57% men) at universities in the Midwest USA. They included 153 participants who indicated White or European-American, 7 who indicated Black or African American, 7 who indicated Latino/a, 4 who indicated Asian or Asian American, and 2 who indicated American Indian or Native American in response to an ethnic-identification item.

**Procedure**

Participants completed materials in groups of 4-25 people. We assigned each participant at random to one of three treatment conditions or to a fourth, no-treatment control condition. Participants in the treatment conditions read one of the three proclamations from Study 2. Participants in the treatment conditions read the 2003 Bush proclamation (which did not mention Indigenous Peoples); participants in the interpretive-silence condition read the 1998 Clinton proclamation (which mentioned Indigenous Peoples, but not genocidal events); and participants in the anti-silence condition read the 1970 James proclamation (which mentioned both Indigenous Peoples and genocidal events). Participants in the control condition did not read a speech. All participants then completed the same dependent measures.

**Dependent measures**

**Thanksgiving commemoration.** On the first page participants completed a common classroom activity—a “Thanksgiving alphabet” task—that we informed them was for use as educational material in schools and bookstores. The instructions directed participants to provide a Thanksgiving-relevant word or phrase corresponding to each letter of the English alphabet (e.g., “apple pie” for the letter “A”). To provide measures of the
tendency to reproduce silence about the experience of Indigenous Peoples in US society, we calculated the number of times that participants mentioned the categories Indigenous Peoples or genocidal history in their Thanksgiving alphabet lists. The former category included mentions of American Indian, Indigenous, Indian, Native, or Native American. The latter category included mentions of such words as colonial, damage, disease, death, empire, killing, land, massacre, military, or violence.

**National identification.** Participants completed the same 16-item measure of American identification as in Study 2 (Roccas et al., 2006). We again calculated separate scores for the eight-item subscales of national attachment ($\alpha = .89$) and national glorification ($\alpha = .85$).

**Policy endorsement.** Drawing on a report of the Americas Policy Program for the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (Norrell, 2008), we created seven items that assessed support for Indigenous rights policies. Participants used a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree) to indicate their agreement with each item. A principle components analysis with varimax rotation suggested a two-factor solution. A first, reparative action factor consisted of four items ($\alpha = .80$) that focused on rectifying past wrongs inflicted on Indigenous Peoples (e.g., “The US should establish a National Day of Apology to memorialize and atone for suffering inflicted upon Native Americans”). A second, Indigenous sovereignty factor consisted of two items ($\alpha = .59$) opposing greater US government control over Indigenous communities (e.g., “The US should nullify agreements that provide for legal sovereignty of Indian Nations—that is, precedence of Native laws over US laws—on reservation lands”; reverse coded). One of the items (“The US should allow Native Americans to practice Indigenous religions without harassment by law enforcement”) referred to a current Civil Rights issue and did not load on either scale; we treated it as a separate, single-item measure.

**Results and discussion**

The primary purpose of Study 3 was to test the hypothesis that silence in commemorations of American Thanksgiving systematically promotes national glorification and glorification-relevant
action (e.g., reproduction of silence). A secondary purpose was to assess the relationship between different manifestations of national identification and identity-relevant action. We report results of analyses including only the 153 participants who indicated White or European American ethnicity.

Effects of the commemoration manipulation. To test for hypothesised effects of different commemoration texts we conducted a series of one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) on measures of national identification and policy endorsement with commemoration condition as the between-participants factor. Of particular interest were a series of orthogonal contrasts with codes of (1, 1, 1, −3), (−2, 1, 1, 0), and (0, 1, −1, 0) for the control, literal-silence (Bush speech), interpretive-silence (Clinton speech), and anti-silence (James speech) conditions, respectively. The first contrast compared mean outcomes of participants in the anti-silence condition with participants in the remaining three conditions to evaluate the hypothesis that explicit mentions of genocidal conquest in Thanksgiving commemorations can elicit weaker identification and stronger support for Indigenous rights policies. The second contrast compared mean outcomes of participants in the two silence conditions with participants in the control condition to assess whether various forms of silence about Indigenous Peoples in Thanksgiving commemorations produced stronger national identification and weaker support for Indigenous rights policies, relative to no commemoration. The third contrast compared mean outcomes of participants in different silence conditions to determine if the mere mention of Indigenous Peoples, without explicit mention of genocidal conquest, produced weaker identification and stronger support for Indigenous rights policies than more complete silence about Indigenous Peoples.

Because these were directional hypotheses we evaluated them with one-tailed tests of significance. Means and standard deviations for each outcome appear in Table 4.

National identification. The omnibus ANOVA for national glorification was not significant, \( F(3, 148) = 1.06, p = .37 \), and the first contrast provided only modest evidence for hypothesised patterns. Participants in the anti-silence condition scored lower in national glorification than did participants in the other three conditions, \( t(148) = -1.61, p = .055, d = 0.26 \). The other two contrasts were not significant, \( ts(148) > -1 \). Likewise, although participants in the interpretive-silence and anti-silence conditions appeared to score lower in national attachment than did participants in the literal-silence or control conditions, neither the omnibus ANOVA \( F(3, 149) = 1.54, p = .21 \), nor planned contrasts, \( ts(148) > -1.20, ps > .11 \), reached conventional levels of statistical significance.

Support for Indigenous rights policy. The effect of commemoration conditions varied across policy-support outcomes. Results for the multi-item measure of support for reparative action (i.e., apology and compensation) did not approach conventional levels of statistical significance for either the omnibus ANOVA \( F(3, 146) < 1 \), or planned contrasts, \( t(146) < 1 \). In contrast, results for the single-item measure of support for Indigenous religious freedom did provide evidence for the primary hypothesis. Although the omnibus ANOVA did not reach conventional levels of statistical significance, \( F(3, 146) = 1.64, p = .18, a \) planned contrast indicated that participants in the anti-silence condition expressed greater support for Indigenous religious freedom than did participants in the other three conditions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Control: No speech (n = 38)</th>
<th>Literal-silence: Bush speech (n = 36)</th>
<th>Interpret-silence: Clinton speech (n = 41)</th>
<th>Anti-silence: James speech (n = 38)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attachment</td>
<td>5.41 (0.85)</td>
<td>5.24 (1.17)</td>
<td>4.93 (1.07)</td>
</tr>
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<td>Glorification</td>
<td>4.26 (0.95)</td>
<td>4.32 (1.08)</td>
<td>4.12 (1.06)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reparative Action</td>
<td>3.55 (1.56)</td>
<td>3.78 (1.22)</td>
<td>3.37 (1.36)</td>
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<td>Indigenous Sovereignty</td>
<td>4.38 (1.58)</td>
<td>4.16 (1.59)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Freedom</td>
<td>4.46 (1.59)</td>
<td>4.49 (1.46)</td>
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<td>Indigenous Peoples</td>
<td>0.34 (0.48)</td>
<td>0.28 (0.51)</td>
<td>0.44 (0.59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genocidal History</td>
<td>0.16 (0.44)</td>
<td>0.06 (0.23)</td>
<td>0.46 (1.02)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cell entries refer to mean scores or frequencies (and standard deviations) for each condition.
Reproduction of silence. To examine the effect of the commemoration manipulation on reproduction of silence we considered mentions of Indigenous Peoples and genocidal conquest categories in the Thanksgiving commemoration task. Poisson regression analysis for mentions of Indigenous Peoples revealed no significant effects, either of overall condition, $\chi^2(3) = 1.45, p = .70$, or for pairwise contrasts of each treatment condition with the control condition, $\chi^2$s(1) < .048, ps < .49. However, Poisson regression analysis for mentions of the genocidal conquest category revealed a strong effect of condition, $\chi^2(3) = 16.36, p = .001$. Pairwise contrasts indicated that mentions of genocidal conquest were significantly greater in both the anti-silence and interpretive-silence conditions than the control, $\chi^2$s(1) = 9.14 and 6.03, ps = .002 and .014, respectively. This pattern suggests that exposure to historical accounts that refer to Indigenous Peoples, even without explicit references to genocidal history, can be sufficient to elicit references to genocidal history in reproductions of Thanksgiving commemoration materials.

National identification and silence about genocide. Besides testing the hypothesized effects of silence about past wrongdoing on identity and identity-relevant action, a secondary purpose of Study 3 was to assess the relationship between different manifestations of American identification and reproduction of silence. The two indicators of national identification—glorification and attachment—were positively correlated, $r(152) = .74, p < .0001$. Although these two dimensions overlap, simultaneous multiple regression often reveals different associations (negative for glorification, but positive for attachment) with tendencies to acknowledge ingroup wrongdoing, experience collective guilt, and endorse reparative policies (Roccas et al., 2006). To assess the relationship between these separate manifestations of American identification and silence about genocide in Thanksgiving commemorations, we first centred the identification variables by subtracting the mean for each variable from each participant’s score. We then conducted a Poisson regression analysis with glorification and attachment as mean-centred predictors of the number of times participants mentioned Indigenous Peoples or genocidal history categories.$^5$ Results revealed the hypothesized pattern of relationships, such that silence-breaking responses were negatively associated with national identification, $\beta = -.30$, $\chi^2(1) = 5.80, p = .016$, but positively associated with national attachment, $\beta = .31$, $\chi^2(1) = 5.98, p = .014$. Although correlational, these results are consistent with the results of Study 2, which suggest an effect of identity on reproduction of silence about genocide in Thanksgiving commemorations.

$^5$Here, and elsewhere, we first conducted preliminary analyses with national glorification, national attachment, and their interaction term as simultaneous predictors of each outcome. The Glorification $\times$ Attachment term was not a significant predictor in any analysis, so we report results from the main effects models. In addition to Poisson regression analyses of frequency data, we also conducted loglinear (for effects of the manipulation) and logistic regression (for implications of identification) analyses of mentions for Indigenous Peoples and genocidal history categories as dichotomous categories. The results are virtually identical to those we present.
GENERAL DISCUSSION

The present studies provide evidence for the hypothesised relationship between identity (national glorification) and memory (silence about past wrongdoing) at the level of collective self. Study 1 provided evidence for this relationship in cultural representations of the collective past. Studies 2 and 3 provided evidence for this relationship in responses of individual participants. Besides revealing hypothesised relationships, our results also provide experimental evidence for both directions of these relationships. Regarding effects of identity on silence, participants exposed to a manipulation of identity salience (Study 2) rated the genocide-mentioning James text as less relevant for Thanksgiving commemoration (a form of interpretive silence) than did participants who were not exposed to this manipulation. Regarding effects of silence on identity, participants exposed to the genocide-mentioning James proclamation (Study 3) scored somewhat lower in national glorification than did participants exposed to genocide-silencing presidential proclamations or no proclamation at all (who did not differ in national glorification).

Limitations and future directions

As initial steps in an ongoing programme of research, the present studies have limitations that constitute directions for future research. The Thanksgiving proclamations that were the subject of the present research are relatively impoverished forms of commemoration. One can anticipate that more involving forms of commemoration may produce stronger effects on national glorification than we observed in Study 3. Another issue with using these proclamations as an experimental manipulation is that they vary in ways other than forms of silence. Although use of actual proclamations contributes to ecological validity, a direction for future research is to create texts that more precisely instantiate the conceptual distinction between literal and interpretive silence, both to better concentrate effects of silence and help ensure that the source of observed effects lies in different forms of silence rather than some other feature of the texts.

Another important limitation of the present research is its exclusive focus on White American experience. Although this emphasis reflects an interest in American identity and national memory, it reproduces silence about Indigenous experience in mainstream psychology. A question for future research is whether silence about genocide benefits or harms Indigenous Peoples. One version of this question is whether literal silence is less harmful than interpretive forms of silence that misrepresent Indigenous Peoples. Indeed, research suggests that some forms of mention—sports mascots and Hollywood portrayals, whether of bloodthirsty or noble savages—might be more hazardous than literal silence or absolute invisibility (Fryberg, Markus, Oyserman, & Stone, 2008; Fryberg & Townsend, 2008).

Another version of this question considers whether recovering silenced memories of genocide is a prerequisite for resolving trauma or grief. On one hand, silence about genocide might reflect a desire to forget about unspeakable trauma and may protect self and subsequent generations from the continual re-traumatisation that remembering can evoke (Connerton, 2008). On the other hand, researchers have identified several harms—including health problems (Lepore & Smyth, 2002), disruption of social networks (Pennebaker & Chung, 2006), and compromised cognitive capacity (Klein & Boals, 2001)—associated with failure to disclose traumatic experiences. At the individual level, silence about traumatic personal memories can lead to a fragmented sense of self and post-traumatic stress symptoms (Fivush, 2004; Wessel & Moulds, 2008). At the collective level, researchers have linked the high rates of depression and suicide among First Nations youth in Canada to these youths’ limited abilities to construct a sense of continuity and a coherent narrative given their silenced history (Chandler & Lalone, 1998; Chandler & Proulx, 2008). Such research suggests a need to counteract silence and other processes of forgetting in order to achieve healing, reconciliation, and restorative justice (Cole, 2004; Liem, 2007). Indeed, some scholars have linked ongoing problems of Indigenous Peoples to a “wound to the soul” or “legacy of chronic trauma and unresolved grief” (Duran & Duran, 1995, p. 27) as an enduring result of European conquest.

THANKSGIVING COMMEMORATIONS AS INTENTIONAL WORLDS

A key contribution of the present research is the application of a cultural psychology perspective
to the study of collective memory. In our view, a cultural psychology perspective emphasises two related points. The first is the concept of intentional worlds: collective constructions of reality that both reflect and promote particular beliefs and desires.

*Thanksgiving commemorations as psychological product.* In the “reflect” direction, practices of commemoration are not objective renderings of the past; instead they are particular constructions of reality that bear psychological traces of the people who produced them. In the present research we examined this idea by assessing the extent to which different commemoration products resonate with beliefs and desires of White American students. Consistent with the notion of intentional worlds, ratings of these products were much more favourable for genocide-silencing presidential proclamations than for the genocide-mentioning alternative, especially among students who were high in national glorification. These patterns suggest how commemoration products are not objective or uninflected accounts of the past, but instead carry identity-glorifying beliefs and desires of previous actors.

Results for ratings of relevance deserve special comment. Although one might agree that silence about genocide is a problem in general discussions of US history, one might argue that such silence is appropriate in the context of a holiday devoted to gratitude. One interpretation of this argument is as a claim that discussions of historical events are irrelevant to the purpose of Thanksgiving. Without debating this claim as a prescriptive statement, we note that it is clearly wrong as a descriptive statement. The vast majority of Thanksgiving celebrations (in Study 1, 14 of 16 presidential proclamations) do include commemoration of colonial settlement, which suggests that Americans do perceive these historical events as relevant for the holiday.

Another interpretation of this argument is that events of the “first Thanksgiving” were causally irrelevant or even antithetical to the larger process of genocidal conquest. Questions about the objective relevance of genocidal conquest for events of the first Thanksgiving (and vice versa) are a matter of historical analysis that lies beyond the scope of the present investigation. Even so, judgements of causal relevance are not objectively given; rather they are subjective assessments that invariably implicate the unexamined assumptions and unconscious desires of the observer.

Indeed, the present research provides evidence of the identity-invested nature of relevance judgements. Participants in a situation where identity concerns were salient judged genocide-emphasising material as less relevant for Thanksgiving commemoration than did participants in a situation where identity concerns were not salient. Rather than a disinterested assessment based on objective judgement, claims about the irrelevance of genocidal conquest for Thanksgiving commemorations are an act of interpretive silencing that bears the influence of identity concerns.

*Thanksgiving commemorations as psychological affordance.* In the “promote” direction, practices of commemoration are not neutral or inert features of the cultural environment; instead they carry a psychological charge that, regardless of individual intention or awareness, systematically directs experience towards particular ends. In the context of the present research, results tentatively suggest that genocide-silencing commemorations promote national glorification, undermine support for reparative action, and foster the reproduction of silence. However, results also hint at the liberatory potential of alternative forms of commemoration to promote more inclusive models of identification, support for reparative action, and concern for social justice (Martín-Baró, 1994). James alluded to this potential in his proclamation, when he noted that the inclusion of Indigenous voices in Thanksgiving commemorations would promote not only “more Indian” constructions of American identity, but also “a more humane America”.

*Thanksgiving commemorations as mind-in-context.* The second contribution of a cultural-psychological perspective is an emphasis on mind-in-context: the idea that the structure of memory is not limited to brain architecture, but is also inscribed in the stuff of everyday cultural worlds. In the context of the present research this idea emerges most clearly in Study 1, which documented the material co-occurrence of different constructions of identity (national glorification themes) and memory (forms of silence about genocide) in cultural products related to commemoration of American Thanksgiving. However, the concept of intentional worlds suggests that the structures for mind inscribed in cultural products are not limited to representations of identity and memory, but also include desire and
motivational force. Genocide-silencing products associated with Thanksgiving commemorations are infused with a psychological charge that directs activity towards nation-glorying ends, often regardless of the individual motivations of the people exposed to these products.

To illustrate, consider the example of hosts preparing for a Thanksgiving dinner. Especially if they are disposed to national glorification, the dinner is likely to reproduce celebratory, genocide-silencing representations of Thanksgiving-relevant history that match the hosts’ beliefs and desires. To the extent that they mention Indigenous Peoples, it is likely to be in a manner consistent with interpretive silence: celebrating the generosity of Indigenous Peoples or the inclusive spirit of togetherness around a food-filled table. The beliefs and desires that animate their choices need not include conscious intentions to create nation-glorying patriots; instead the more likely form may be barely conscious preferences for one representation over another. However, imagine that the hosts manage to set aside any motivated biases and approach dinner preparations in an open, non-defensive fashion. Even then, they are likely to appropriate conveniently available, mainstream resources that—as the analysis of Presidential proclamations in Study 1 suggests—tend to reproduce silence about genocide. Moreover, regardless of the forces that animate their choices, these genocide-silencing representations are likely to promote nation-glorying ends: ignorance or denial of past wrongdoing, opposition to social justice policies designed to address past and present wrongs, and beliefs in national superiority and American exceptionalism that facilitate and reproduce militarism and aggressive foreign policy (Yellow Bird, 2004).

The issue for present purposes concerns the location of motivations that produce such nation-glorying ends. A conception of motivation as individual product might lead one to conclude that the hosts’ choices and resulting effects are “unmotivated” to the extent that the hosts set aside ego-defensive biases when selecting representations for display. In contrast to this standard, individual-centred analysis, a cultural psychology analysis provides a means for theorising the motivation that animates such choices and effects. Rather than the property of individuals and their defensive biases, one can see these motivations as environmentally embedded manifestations of mind-in-context: tools for collective memory that bear the sedimented, identity-enhancing desires of the people who reproduced them; that silence other, more damning representations (Cohen, 2001); and that systematically direct subsequent activity towards culturally “desired” ends (Salter & Adams, 2009). In short, the motivations and desires that animate action need not reside in individual actors, but instead infuse the cultural models and representations that people apply to situations, often without full awareness of their effects (D’Andrade & Strauss, 1992). A task for future research is to consider implications of this perspective for such topics as motivated silence and collective forgetting of historical trauma (e.g., Cole, 2001).

REFERENCES


