

## CODING MEMORY USAGE IN PERSONAL NARRATIVES

### Reference:

Kulkofsky, S., Wang, Q., & Hou, Y. (2010). Why I remember that: The influence of contextual factors on beliefs about everyday memory. *Memory & Cognition*, 38, 461-473.

### Instructions:

Assign each distinct reason the participant provided to the question why they thought about or talked about the given memory into one of the following codes. These codes are **exhaustive** and **exclusive**, so that EVERY reason should be coded and each reason should be given only one code. If you find a reason that does not fit any of the outlines categories you may add it to “other.” Please specify what this “other” reason is.

Thus, each distinct “reason” is the coding unit. Each reason should be coded separately. Sometimes multiple reasons can be embedded in one sentence. In this case, independent clause (a subject-verb construct) can be used to detect how many reasons described in one sentence. For example: “The event was interesting and fun and I wanted to share it with my friends” would be coded as 2 distinct reasons: “event was interesting and fun,” and “I wanted to share the event with my friends.” Note that not every independent clause entails a distinct reason. Sometimes a subject may describe one single reason in several clauses or sentences. E.g., “My brother is really important to me, so I thought about when he visited me” coded as one reason.

The exact repetitions should not be coded. E.g., “I talked about it because it was funny. It was funny.” This should be coded only once.

However, a subject may state the same reason more than once via different expressions (as opposed to repetition). For example “I thought about the class because my friends asked me about it. Also, I later saw books that reminded me about the class” are distinct reasons, both being “cues trigger memory.”

In designing this coding scheme, we combined both “talked about” and “thought about” memories. Some categories are mostly suitable for only one of these types of memories while some are suitable for both. Do not try to restrict yourself on whether you think the reason is suitable for only a “talked about” memory or “thought about” memory. Try to Keep an open mind, and code the reason in the category that best fits.

Occasionally participants did not properly respond to the question, and described “thoughts” but not “memories.” (e.g. “I’d think about how I don’t know what to do in the future. The year is almost over and I am nervous for what will happen this

summer...etc...”) If this occurs do not code these responses or their reasons. It is memory and the use of memory that we are interested in.

**Categories:**

1. Nature of memory event – The participant reports that the memory was thought about or talked about because of certain **characteristics** of that memory.

A. Recency – The memory event happened recently.

Examples: “It just happened.” “This happened just last week”

B. Emotionality – The participant explicitly states that the event was related to an emotional experience (e.g. “it was happy” “it was fun” “it was sad” etc.). This includes positive, negative, and “nonspecific” emotional experiences.

Examples: “I am excited about meeting this girl” “It was a fun and interesting experience” “I’m feeling really bad about what happened” “It was really an upsetting thing to see” “Its an emotional topic”

C. Important -- The memory event was important to the subject.

Examples: “It was a big event in my life.” “Basketball is important to me, so I thought about the game I played last night.”

D. Typicalness – The event is something that people often talk about or think about, or is a common occurrence for the participant.

Examples: “That’s the sort of thing I think about when I’m alone,” “Basketball is common topic for guys to talk about,” “It’s a really typical experience for me,” “That sort of thing happens all the time.” “Anyone would think about it in this situation.”

E. Memorable- The participant describes the event as memorable or readily accessible.

Examples: “That’s not the sort of thing you can forget.” “It’s been on my mind a lot lately.” “It just sort of popped into my head.” “It’s the first thing I thought of.” “It’s the sort of thing you really remember.”

F. Novelty: Participant describes the memory event as novel, unexpected, unique, surprising.

Examples: “It was really surprising,” “Its not the sort of thing that happens every day,” “It was a novel event.”

G. Cues trigger memory – Internal (e.g. thoughts or emotional states), social (e.g., being reminded by others), environmental, or situational cues remind the participant of the memory.

Examples: “Thinking about the time I spent with my friends made me remember this time I spent with them,” “I was feeling lonely so I thought about..” “The books on my desk reminded me of class” “Succeeding in this class made me think of other successful events” “My friends asked me what I did last night” “I saw the girl again at the party.”

2. Social – Participant reports that talking about or thinking about the memory will serve the function of interacting with and relating to other people.

A. Conversational exchanges - Talking about or thinking about the memory may further conversation with others including sharing memories for the sake of sharing and providing amusement or entertainment.

Examples: “Run out of interesting things to talk about.” “Talking about it can lead to other conversations.” “It’s a good thing to talk about at the party.” “My friends would think this is a funny story.”

B. Relationship maintenance - Thinking or sharing memory to relate to others or promote intimacy.

Examples: “Other will probably sympathize to this story,” “My friends weren’t there and may be interested so I want to tell them,” “My brother is really important to me, so I thought about when he visited me.”

C. Influence others' behavior – Participant talks about or thinks about an event for the purpose of influencing or manipulating another’s behavior or attitude, in a self-serving way.

“I would tell them about how busy my day was yesterday so that they would not ask me to do something with them today.” “They might want me to play basketball with them tonight, so if I tell them how I played last night they might not ask me again.” “I would tell them about how my girlfriend broke up with me so that they would find me a date.”

3. Decision Making/Future Actions – Participant reports that a memory is thought about or talked about because it is related to future actions or helps them make sense of a current situation.

A. Directive - Use the past to direct current and future behavior, including evaluating one's past in order to do better in the future, using the past to inform current or future decision-making anticipating a future event, etc.

Examples: “I did poorly on my last exam, and I don’t want to fail this next one,” “Thinking about how I get along with my friend will help me decide if I should live with her again this summer,” “I need to decide if I want to continue the relationship with my boyfriend, so I thought about the fight we had last week,” “I can’t wait for our next big party, so I thought about the party we had last weekend.”

B. Understand/Make sense of situation – Thinking about or talking about a memory helps to make sense of an uncertain situation in the present.

Examples: “I need to figure out my feelings about my ex-boyfriend.” “I would like to analyze the event. Why did I have a good time?”

C. Gain Advice from others – Talking about or thinking about the event helps get advice from others about what one should do regarding an uncertain situation.

**Examples:** “I want my friends opinion on what I should do,” “I’d like to know how other people deal with this situation so I know what I should do.”

4. Self - The participant states that the event is thought about or talked about because it serves a function for one’s self-view.

A. Self-assurance and regulation – Talking about or thinking about the memory reassures one that he or she is correct or okay or promotes positive emotional states in the present.

**Examples:** “Others would tell me that I am right,” “I would be reassured about the situation,” “I felt really bad for failing the exam, so I thought about the other times I had done really well.”

B. Bragging/Self Promotion – Talking about or thinking about the event promotes the self in a positive light and may make others think highly of the self.

**Examples:** “Show my friends how nice my family is.” “Would like to impress others.”

NOTE: In some of the examples above I have provided complex sentences (such as “I am looking forward to our next big party so I thought about the party we had last weekend.”) Often participants do not explicitly state this “so...” clause, but they may be inferred.