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## EPISODIC MEMORY, TRAUMA, AND THE NARRATIVE OF SELF<sup>1</sup>

**I**S SELF A KIND OF STORY? Although attracting increasing interest in recent years (e.g., Spence, 1984; Schafer, 1992), this notion is a difficult one. It has a major therapeutic implication, which is that the person telling his or her story to a psychotherapist for the first time is, in some way, telling the wrong story. If this were so, which is the right one? The implied therapeutic task is to help in the creation of a narrative that is more truly a manifestation of self. How can we detect, among the many stories that are presented to us, those that reflect this essence, which authorities such as Kohut (1977, p. 311) and Jung (1917, p. 236) have called "unknowable."

This article suggests that the narrative of self is defined by its form. It is interrupted from time to time, in the clinical situation, by another kind of narrative, which has a different form and represents, in the present, a repetition of past impingements. Relative to the narrative of self, it tends to be automatic, less under voluntary control, and is registered in a memory system that differs from that of the narrative of self. The impinging narrative operates as a relatively sequestered system. The therapeutic aim is to discover and lay bare the outlines of this system, described by Bernard Brandchaft (1993), and then to foster its integration into the more mature system of the narrative of self.

Brandchaft's observation forms the core of this article. His germinal idea is amplified in two main ways. First, it is argued that self and not-self depend upon different forms of mental activity. The second elaboration involves recent work in memory research.

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## The Narrative of Self

In order to identify a self-narrative, it is necessary, first of all, to define self. Kohut, who reintroduced the term *self* into psychoanalytic discourse in 1971, found, toward the end of his life, that he was unable to define it (Kohut, 1977, p. 311). His clinical descriptions, however, suggest certain of its characteristics. The Kohutian self is not necessarily a permanent aspect of psychic life. It can come and go. It may be attenuated, stunted, or broken up. More extremely, the sense of self can be entirely lost.

The momentary quality of self leads to the conclusion that it is not a "structure," an organized system of memories dependent upon protein changes in cells (Hyden, 1973; Davis & Squire, 1984). One cannot imagine that this organization could come and go in the transient manner of the Kohutian self. The organized structure of experiential memories relating to "who-one-is" is better called self-representation (Hartmann, 1950). The concept explained in this article is different. It was well described by William James. It involves the sense of existence.

William James's work focused, at its core, on the nature of existence, mind, and self. He described a self that was, in his language, "duplex." One pole is of awareness, the other is the experience itself. Self, in essence, is an awareness of the movements of an inner life, which he called "the stream of consciousness." This is not an experience with which we are born. Flavell, Green, and Flavell (1993) recently studied the emergence of the stream of consciousness in children. They inferred from observations that this experience was not discovered till about the age of four.

Why should the stream of consciousness not appear until about the age of four? An answer begins with the German physiologist Ewald Hering (1834-1918), who made the following observations to the Vienna Academy of Sciences in 1870.<sup>2</sup>

It seems, then, that we owe to memory almost all that we either have or are; that our ideas and conceptions are its work, and that our everyday perception, thought, and movement are derived from this source. Memory collects the countless phenomena of our existence into a single whole; and, as our bodies would be scattered into the dust of their component

<sup>2</sup> This quotation comes from Hering's most famous essay, "Memory as a general function of organized matter."

atoms if they were not held together by the attractors of matter, so our consciousness would be broken up into as many fragments as we have lived seconds but for the binding and unifying force of memory.

These important remarks suggest that memory, or at least a certain kind of memory, unifies the multitudinous atoms of experienced data, past and present, that make up the flow of inner life. A cardinal quality of the stream of consciousness is that the images, feelings, ideas, memories, fantasies, etc. that make up this experience are connected. The atoms of the metaphorical stream do not present themselves independently. As James put it, the sense of inner life "does not appear to itself chopped up in bits" (1892, p. 154). The links between the bits are associational and analogical, so that the movements of the stream are unpredictable, capricious, and nonlinear.

The form of memory that, in my view, binds the atoms of the experience, thus giving it cohesion and a sense of underlying order, was described by James himself. He wrote:

Memory requires more than a mere dating of a fact in the past. It must be dated in *my* past. In other words, I must think that I directly experienced its occurrence. It must have that "warmth and intimacy" which were so often spoken of in the chapter of the self, as characterising all experiences "appropriated" by the thinker as his own. (1890, I, p. 650)

In this passage, James distinguishes between a memory that concerns knowledge and another kind of memory consisting of personal experience. In autobiographical terms, the first kind of memory provides a series of facts. These facts might include, for example, the schools one has attended; the years of that attendance; and the names of the teachers. This knowledge of facts is different from a personal experience of one's school years. The second kind of memory is made up of episodes of personal experience that have a sensory aliveness. The stereotypic episode has oneself at its center and is made up of sights, sounds, smells, and the feeling of one's body. One conjures up a scene, perhaps of the schoolyard.

The Jamesian description of memory was, for a long time, disregarded in memory research. However, Endel Tulving reintroduced the notion of a personal memory system in a seminal paper published in 1972. He

distinguished between a memory concerning knowledge of the world, which he called semantic, and another system of personal memories, which he called episodic (Tulving, 1983). Although exciting some controversy (Baddeley et al., 1984), Tulving's conceptions have been widely influential. So far as I am aware, however, they have not been incorporated into psychotherapeutic theory.

Tulving (1993a) distinguishes five kinds of memory systems that, at the moment, can be distinguished. They are (1) episodic, (2) semantic, (3) procedural, (4) perceptual representation, and (5) short-term memory. Each is seen as a "module" (Gazzaniga, 1989) of the larger memory system. Lesions of the central nervous system can cause the function of one module of neural organization to be lost, whereas the function of others is largely retained. For example, patients with Korsakoff's syndrome, who are amnesic, retain motor skills. Moreover, they can learn to use novel tools (Talland, 1965). "A striking feature about these tasks is that it is frequently the case that the patient will deny having encountered the task before, at the same time showing a clear, and on occasion totally unpaired learning" (Baddeley, 1990, p. 208). Memory for motor skills is termed "procedural" and is nonverbal, in comparison with the semantic and episodic memories, which can be expressed in language. Consequently, they are termed "declarative."

The main theme of this article concerns the declarative modules of memory. It is suggested that during high anxiety, episodic memory is lost, so that the event is recorded in semantic memory. Tulving describes a case in which a patient, K.C., as a consequence of injury, has lost episodic memory, but retains semantic memory. The effect of the loss of episodic memory is illustrated in the following anecdote.<sup>3</sup>

K.C. is in Dr. Tulving's room. Tulving takes an object from a drawer and asks K.C. to identify it. "It's a stapler," he replies. He is told that the stapler will now be hidden and that he should remember the place in which it is hidden, because he will be asked about it in the future. Dr. Tulving then hides the stapler behind the bookcase. About a week later, K.C. is again in Dr. Tulving's room. He is asked if he remembers their previous conversation in this room. He denies any memory of the episode. He is told that the conversation certainly took place. While K.C. was in the room, he is told, a stapler was hidden. He is now asked to find it. Without hesitation, he retrieves it from behind the bookcase.

<sup>3</sup> Personal communication.

Although this man had lost his capacity for personal memories, he had retained the ability to record from these episodes certain "facts."

The modules of memory do not develop simultaneously, but sequentially. Developmentalists distinguish between recognition memory and recall memory (e.g., Nelson, 1984; Kail, 1984). Recognition memory is evident soon after birth. The baby of less than two weeks is able to recognize as familiar certain stimuli emanating from the mother—her eyes (Carpenter, 1974), the smell of her milk (MacFarlane, 1975), the sound of her voice (De Casper & Fifer, 1980). Recognition memory is presumably the first manifestation of the perceptual representation system, which is nonverbal and not connected to ordinary consciousness. It is an aspect of implicit memory (Tulving & Schacter, 1990; Schacter, 1992).

Recall memory, in contrast to recognition memory, depends upon the capacity to bring to mind stimuli that are not present at that moment. It involves knowledge of the world and is, in this sense, semantic. It begins to appear during the last half of the first year (Mandler, 1984; Ashmead & Perlmuter, 1980), when the baby might crawl to a cupboard to find something he or she knows is kept there. This early semantic memory becomes declarative during the last part of the second year of life, when words start to be used.

Episodic memory emerges very late in development, at about four years of age (Nelson, 1992).<sup>4</sup> It may be dependent upon a phase in the maturation of prefrontal structures, since the encoding and retrieval of episodic memory is dependent upon prefrontal activity (Shallice et al., 1994; Tulving et al., 1994). Episodic memory appears at about the same time as the stream of consciousness; this is consistent with the proposal that the latter is dependent on the evolution of the former.

The concept of episodic memory sheds new light on the phenomenon of infantile amnesia. It implies that memories of early life are not repressed, rather, the memory system that records actual episodes of one's personal history has not yet developed. This idea is consistent with the suggestion of Schachtel (1947).

<sup>4</sup> Nelson uses the term *episodic memory* in a way that differs from Tulving. In essence, she has divided episodic memory into two categories: episodic memory and autobiographical memory. The latter is more permanent. The memories of the episodes that make up the former subcategory do not usually persist over the years. Tulving's conception concerns memories of the Proustian kind, described by William James. His episodic memory, therefore, conforms with Nelson's autobiographical memory, which arises at about four years of age. Her episodic memory, concerning episodes that occurred in the recent past, develops earlier, so that, for example, a child of three can talk of having gone to the beach last week. In this article, episodic memory is used in the manner of Tulving.

### Symbolic Play and the Concept of Impingement

We now come to consider the development of the narrative of self, since the concept of the impinging narrative depends upon the idea that it is a manifestation of disrupted development.

Self as the stream of consciousness is not, in ordinary experience, a narrative. Words that might accompany it can never quite capture the experience. These words are not the stream itself, but manifestations of it. What has been called the "narrative of self" reflects something of it, but is not self itself. A principal characteristic of this narrative is its form, which shows, to a degree, the dynamic movements of a particular kind of mental activity that underpins it.

Something of the form of this narrative can be comprehended from a study of a child's symbolic play, which begins in the second year of life and is a feature of the child's life between, say, eighteen months and four or five years of age, i.e., during the period just before the stream of consciousness is discovered. I have suggested that this form of play, one amongst a multiplicity of forms, is the precursor, and a necessary precursor, to the experience of a stream of consciousness (Meares, 1990, 1992, 1993a). The child of, say, three years is immersed in the activity of playing with things, such as toys, apparently oblivious to what is going on around him or her, much as the adult is when lost in thought. The experience of the child may be very like that of the adult in a state of reverie, during which he or she is aware of the stream of consciousness. Since the play is going on in the outer world, the observer has an opportunity to discern, at least in rudimentary form, something of the main elements of the stream of consciousness. A cardinal characteristic is nonlinearity, depending upon associational linkings, as previously remarked. This is evident in the child's language that accompanies play. It has a form notably different from that used by the child in coping with environment. This language is goal-directed and can be called linear.

During the play, a kind of story is being told that is of a personal kind. It is a rudimentary narrative of self. It has the sequencing and coherence of genuine narrative, and is not merely a series of comments. How is this achieved in the absence of episodic memory? A plausible explanation is that the actual presence of the toys or other physical objects is the binding component. They become vehicles of a particular kind of mental activity that underpins the sense of self. In this way, parts of the physical

world allow the child to develop a sequential and coherent narrative, which is characteristic of self as Kohut described it.

A third cardinal characteristic of symbolic play, beyond nonlinearity and coherence, is an accompanying state of positive affect. This is an essential aspect of not only symbolic play, but also of self.

James Mark Baldwin (1906) remarked that symbolic play has to be accompanied by some positive affect for it to go on. That affect is interest. If the play is not interesting, the child simply stops. However, there is a second, more important kind of affect associated with the experience. It is a state of well-being. I have suggested (Meares, 1977, pp. 52-59; 1993b) that this might arise through a sense of congruence between the child's core experience and the responses of the caregivers. This notion depends on evidence that a central matching or mismatching between an inner model or representation of an individual's immediate experience and the representation of that experience in the environment, provokes affective change.

In order for symbolic play to go on, the child needs, as Piaget (1959, p. 243) pointed out, the sense that someone else has such an understanding of his or her world, that this someone else is experienced as an extension of the child's own self, i.e., as a selfobject, in Kohut's (1971) terminology. The representation of the child's experience that this person creates resonates with the child's own. This concordant matching, I suggest, leads to a subtle sense of well-being.

Mismatching leads to different kinds of affective states. A paradoxical, or polar, mismatch may create laughter (Stroufe & Wunsch, 1972). For example, a baby, who can now crawl, sees mother crawling and laughs. The internal model or rule is that babies crawl and mothers walk. The external representation shows the child's model of reality turned on its head. On the other hand, a mismatch in which the outer representation is merely experienced as novel, creates alertness. The child turns toward this response in the manner of the orienting response, which involves a variety of immediate physiological changes (Sokolov, 1963). A different kind of language and mental activity is now triggered. Its form is linear. The thinking process is directed toward that which caused the alertness.

Of course, actual alerting stimuli, such as a noise in the kitchen, a siren in the street, also cause this same change. This is part of normal development. Both kinds of experience are necessary. When the child is oriented outwards, the quasi-inner experience is put on hold, operating, as it

were, as a background. Sometimes, however, the mismatch is gross and has an effect, not of an alerting stimulus, but of an alarming one. In this case, to use the Winnicottian word, an impingement has occurred. An impingement, as he said, is equivalent to a loud noise. An alerting mismatch is like a knock on the door. An impingement is a thunderclap.

With an impingement there is an obliteration of what was developing of an inner life, an "annihilation of personal being," as Winnicott (1960, p. 47) put it. Furthermore, the positive affect of well-being is replaced by a negative emotional state, which includes, most importantly, anxiety. A miniature trauma has occurred. It should be clear that impingements do not occur only in the infantile period. They can occur throughout the developmental period. Sullivan has remarked on the effect in adolescence of damage to what he called the "tender emotions." Responses from others that ridicule or devalue such expressions lead to what he called the "malevolent transformation" (Sullivan, 1953, pp. 203-216).

In those whose development has been disrupted, impingements are repeated and cumulative. They are of many kinds: shaming, invalidating, derisive, etc. Their anxiety-provoking effects attenuate or knock out the system of self. During these periods, the mental activity underpinning symbolic play and the stream of consciousness is lost. This might be understood in terms of ordinary experience. When one is very anxious or angry, there is no other experience than that of immediate sensory experience, the stimuli from the body, and the affect itself.

Such experiences, according to the hypothesis, will be recorded, at least in the developing individual, not in the episodic memory system but in a memory system that, although usually verbal, is earlier or more primitive than the episodic system. The traumata are not recorded as incidents, but as a form of "knowledge" of negative self-characteristics. The individual is as though unconscious of the origins of these attributions, which convey the feeling that he or she is, for example, bad, stupid, ugly, incompetent, or a failure. This possibility receives some support from the case of K.C.

K.C. received a severe head injury at the age of thirty. Following the injury, K.C. was unable to remember a single thing that had ever happened to him. However, apart from this massive deficit, of which he generally seemed unaware, his cognitive functioning was relatively intact. His IQ and language comprehension were normal, and his short-term memory was also intact. After the accident, his personality changed. "Whereas he used to be outgoing, adventurous, and gregarious, he is now passive,

cautious, and reticent" (Tulving, 1993b). His demeanor is "attentive and polite."

K.C. and his mother were asked to rate themselves and each other in terms of seventy-two personality traits. The ratings concerned not only his current personality, but also his premonitory personality. The results showed that he had a fairly realistic trait self-knowledge, but only as it concerned the present. These findings showed that since his injury, K.C. had relearned his trait self-knowledge. Tulving (1993b) writes: "He had done so despite the fact that his episodic memory system is severely impaired and that as a consequence, and as far as we know, he has no access to any behavioural instances from which the traits can be inferred. The facts of the case suggest that K.C.'s self-knowledge is represented in a memory system other than episodic memory. This other system is presumably semantic memory [in which] abstract representations of traits are held."

In summary, I am suggesting that the high anxiety accompanying impingement has a noxious effect on central nervous system function. During such states, those functions that have evolved most recently and developed latest will be diminished or lost, in accord with the Hughlings Jackson hypothesis. Episodic memory will be impaired or cease to function. Abstract information about the anxiety-provoking incident will be stored in memory, without knowledge of its origins. Repetition of such incidents seems to be important in this process of learning. Learning of self-traits without awareness of their sources may also occur through an accumulation of incidents occurring before the age of four, when, it is supposed, episodic memory emerges.

#### Repetition

Memories of the original impingement are reactivated by the circumstances of later life. Typically, these circumstances are either contextual or affective. Contextual triggers are external. In the therapeutic situation they characteristically arise when the therapist's behavior inadvertently mirrors, in minor form, an aspect of the original traumatizing environment. A well-known example of this reactivation was produced by Kohut's Miss F (Kohut, 1971, pp. 286-287). His silence provoked violent anger and presumably replicated the nonresponsiveness of the original caregivers. This article focuses on affective triggering, which is internal. An example of affective triggering is provided by Jane, a married

woman in her forties. Whenever she described an event or activity in which she felt pride or well-being, sooner or later the description would change to one of self-depreciation and devaluation. For example, she spoke of setting up a room in which she was going to make tapestries. There was pleasure in her voice. Then her face fell, her eyes looked down, and she said it was a stupid thing to do, she would be no good at it. When what had occurred was pointed out to her, she commented that she had never been any good at things like that.

In this case, both contextual and affective cues triggered her self-deparagement. Her facial expression and posture, when this system took over, suggested that the original impingements were shaming. Contextual circumstances that were in some way reminiscent of the shame situation triggered the negating system, in the same way that pride or well-being did. A more purely affective triggering, at least as it appeared clinically, is described by a man, David, also in his forties. He said:

The feelings of feeling good—I get to a point where I feel good, then suddenly I hit a brick wall. The other night I was doing something really interesting [a technical task] and I got a kick out of it and I was thinking this is great then suddenly I went “whammo” . . . something stops me, like deflation, boom, deflated. I think, why is it? My father fears . . . stronger than me. Am I frightened? Why am I frightened? Am I frightened to show myself? Am I fearful of his anger? Was he such an ego that I would be a threat to him if I excelled and did better than he was.

Brandchaft outlined the main features of this phenomenon as it affected his patient Patrick: “Whatever transient feeling of well-being, confidence, enthusiasm, or hope, arising from some still-active spring inside himself, Patrick experienced in the sessions would regularly disappear, relentlessly initiated by some self-disparaging thought” (1993, p. 215). Brandchaft remarked that “that point at which the shift in feeling state from enthusiasm to malaise occurs continues to mark exactly the great divide of development derailment” (p. 216). An important aspect of the activity of this malignant system is that it is automatic. It is “an internal and automatic replication of crucial developmental events of the child caretaker experience” (p. 216). Moreover, the system is sequestered from ordinary consciousness: “Developmental traumata derive their lasting significance from the establishment of invariant and relentless principles of organization that remain beyond the accommodative influence of reflex-

tive self-awareness or of subsequent experience” (Brandchaft & Storow, 1990, p. 108).

“Invariant organizing principles” is an expression that describes, better than the “impinging narrative,” an important aspect of the activity of an internally triggered system, which penetrates and diminishes the narrative of self. What these principles produce cannot strictly be termed “narrative,” since the product does not have the sequencing, progressing, and evolving characteristics of a true personal narrative that depends on episodic memory. Bartlett (1932) was perhaps the first to show that memory for narrative is not reduplicative. Rather, each telling of the tale involves a reshaping and transformation of the story. However, the kind of memory that breaks down someone’s sense of feeling good about himself or herself is of a different kind. It is repetitive and invariant. The narrative is a thwarted one. It does not consist of episodes of personal history but, rather, of “facts” the individual has come to learn about himself or herself. The language is linear, offering few associational linkages. The individual is as if entrapped within the confines of the system.

Since this system has the malignant effect of structuring the totality of the individual’s experience, he or she tends, “unconsciously,” to build a life around this repetitive narrative. David describes an incident in which this seems to be occurring.

The other night my daughter had a baby. . . . Coming back, I had this warm feeling, nice warmth, and I thought, gee this is nice, and then between [two towns] in the middle of the night I ran out of petrol. . . .

This feeling came over me, this car breaking down like this, breaking down was a failure. This feeling of failure then led me to scan [my life]

“Who loves me?”

Running out of petrol is obviously an event over which David had some control. “Unconsciously,” he constructs an event that breaks up his state of well-being. Whereas other people might be annoyed or frustrated by the breakdown, it confirms for him that he is “a failure.”

The construction of one’s personal world about the impinging narrative has a reverberating effect, tending to perpetuate the system. The individual may choose a partner whose responses resemble its “facts.” For example, Carol, whose main presentation was that she was a hopeless person, unable to cope with ordinary living, had a husband who repeatedly reinforced this view. He was, to use her words, ceaselessly “hound-

ing" her, or like an "acid eating into" her. Yet, to use her own expression again, she could not but think that his view of her was "reasonable." She lived much of the time in a state of chronic dysphoria.

After a time, as the patient became increasingly aware of the operation of this system, the therapist posed a question. "What if," he asked, "you told him to stop?" As it happens, she had, in fact, made such a request, for the first time, a few days previously. The effect was dramatic. She felt good. "Living and breathing was easier." Very soon, however, she felt she was living a "delusion." This state did not conform to what she knew as "reality." She relapsed into her usual state of dysphoria and hopelessness.

#### Autonoesis and a Therapeutic Approach

Brandchaft suggests that the phenomenon he describes has "pre-reflective" origins. This idea is fundamental and needs further consideration.

The reflective capacity is generally supposed to arise at about eighteen months. This supposition is based on evidence that it is not until this age that children recognize their own images (Amsterdam, 1972; Lewis & Brooks-Gunn, 1979). In being able to say "this is me," they show the first evidence of the capacity for reflection, which Michael Lewis (1992) argues, as James had done, is essential to the sense of self. However, the more complex human functions do not arrive all at once, but develop in stages, in the way that, for example, locomotion does. Flavell's finding, that stream of consciousness is not discovered by the child until the age of four, suggests that a later phase of the reflective capacity emerges at this time. Whereas the reflection that is demonstrated at eighteen months concerns external being, the later stage must depend on a new kind of awareness that concerns inner states. This kind of awareness must also be an aspect of episodic memory. Tulving (1985) has called it "autonoetic," which, since "noesis" refers to mental activity, means an awareness of this activity. Semantic memory is "noetic." It concerns information but no consciousness of how it was gained. Memories of the procedural kind are "anoetic," in that consciousness is not necessary to them. It would seem that the prereflective awareness about which Brandchaft writes concerns those experiences that are not "autonoetic."

This idea leads to a therapeutic approach to the malignant system, contained in semantic memory, that breaks up the sense of self, and tells the individual, in various ways, that he or she is of no value.

The impinging system is sequestered from the stream of conscious-

ness, which depends upon episodic memory. A principal therapeutic task will be to integrate the system into that of normal consciousness. In a sense, then, the aim is to make the unconscious conscious, as in traditional theory. However, the way in which this is understood is different, since what is stored in pre-episodic memory, and thus is inaccessible to the stream of consciousness, is "unconscious" in a different way to the repressed. Using Tulving's terminology, the therapeutic aim is to bring that which is "noetic" into the sphere of "autonoesis." In order for the sequestered system of traumatic memory to be incorporated by the mature form of consciousness dependent upon episodic memory, it must be penetrated by, and mingled with, the nonlinear and associational mental activity that underpins the stream of consciousness.

The therapeutic task begins with an identification of the impinging narrative as it arises in the therapeutic conversation. The therapist points out what has happened. At first, the patient may seem puzzled. After all, he or she was just stating the facts. She "is hopeless," Carol might point out. One only had to see the state of her house to know this was true. Despite this apparent lack of success, the therapist continues to identify the appearance of the impinging narrative. Something different will now be occurring. The traumatic activation, instead of occurring without the patient's awareness, now becomes part of ordinary consciousness. The state of this reexperience will now be different from the past, somewhat transformed. It will soon be possible to have the patient describe, as completely as possible, what went on inside him or her as the sense of well-being collapsed. It is important to focus upon such immediate experience, rather than to embark too early on speculations regarding the patient's possible participation in an event that may be simply chance, and that seemed to confirm his or her own negative self-evaluation. The danger in this procedure is that the interpretation may feed into a system of self-blame and provide more evidence in favor of the negative self-image. Unwittingly, it becomes a covert form of derogation, an aspect of "the persecutory therapist" (Meares & Hobson, 1977).

The exploration of the impinging narrative becomes, ideally, the starting point of mental play. This will depend upon the patient's sense of being understood, so creating a selfobject experience. This enabling atmosphere fosters a kind of mental activity that has an associational quality and allows linking up this experience with others, which might include the discovery of experiences resembling the traumatic incident.

As remarked in a previous publication, this form of mental activity,



which has the dynamic qualities of play, seems to have a unifying function, without which psychic life is broken up and discontinuous (Meares & Lichtenberg, 1995).

### Summary

The narrative of self is conceived in terms of the stream of consciousness. Consequently, it cannot be defined by its contents, since the metaphorical stream is in constant flux, endlessly changing and never repeated. Rather, self depends upon a particular form of mental activity, which resembles play (Meares & Lichtenberg, 1995), and which is associational and nonlinear. Where this activity is manifest in words, it can be called a "narrative of self." This "narrative" is frequently interrupted, in the clinical situation, by another system of mental activity that has a different form. It is fixed, rather than dynamic and progressive, and is associated with negative affect. It represents a repetition in the present of a past anxiety, in which the effect of the caregiving environment had been damaging to a developing sense of self. This malignant system, described by Brandchaft, functions as if automatically. The individual may be relatively unaware of its operation. It is triggered internally by states of well-being that are characteristic of a sense of self.

In this article, Brandchaft's description is amplified in terms of Tulving's distinction between episodic and semantic memory. It is postulated that episodic memory, which develops at about the age of four, is the basis of the stream of consciousness, and so, of self. It involves reflective awareness. The fixed system of negating evaluations is seen to reside in a module of memory that develops earlier than episodic memory. This form of memory, semantic, concerns knowledge of facts. The system is relatively sequestered from the stream of consciousness, and the origins of its "facts" are no longer accessible. The therapeutic aim is to integrate this system into the more mature form of consciousness underpinned by episodic memory.

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