



Master Narratives, Self-Simulation, and the Healing of the Self

ABSTRACT: *Infiltrated consciousness occurs when a subject's sense of self comes to be strongly and negatively shaped by victimizing master narratives. Consider the stay-at-home dad who has internalized a harmful narrative of traditional masculinity and so feels ashamed because he is not the family's bread winner. One way master narratives infiltrate consciousness is through conditioning self-simulation by assigning a hierarchy of values to different social roles. Further, master narratives confine self-simulation by prescribing certain social roles to an individual and prohibiting others. One common suggestion for counteracting infiltrated consciousness is to transform it through membership in new communities with new master narratives. But how does such healing happen? This essay offers a response. Recent psychological research on constructivist theories of memory outlines a naturalistically plausible mechanism for self-simulation. I argue that this mechanism is implicated in transforming infiltrated consciousness. This clarifies features of our psychological architecture that make the alteration of self-concepts possible.*

KEYWORDS: moral psychology, personal identity, self-concepts, social philosophy, self-simulation

Psychological and philosophical literature on self-concepts contends that they are coauthored in part by the master narratives of the communities in which such self-concepts are embedded (e.g., McLean 2015; Fivush and Graci 2017; Nelson 2001; Brison 2003). In *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair* (2001), Hilde Lindeman Nelson identifies what she calls 'infiltrated consciousness' as one problem generated by master narratives. Cases of infiltrated consciousness are instances in which a subject's sense of self comes to be strongly and negatively shaped by victimizing master narratives.

In response to this problem and in light of the suggestion that self-concepts are coauthored by master narratives, psychologists and philosophers offer similar accounts for how such problematic cases could be transformed (see Nelson 2001: xii; Rea 2018; McLean 2015; Brison 2003; Ethell 2010). If self-concepts are in part constituted and can be damaged by the master narratives of one's communities, then perhaps (i) new communities and (ii) new master narratives can heal them. Interesting as this suggestion is, how new communities and new master narratives aid in healing remains unclear and underspecified. A fuller description is needed.



This article offers a fuller description by drawing attention to the psychological capacity for self-simulation. Human beings are fantasists: we often simulate and imagine various pasts that could have been and futures that may yet be. These retrospective and prospective hypothetical simulations are not the profitless acts of daydreamers, but play important motivational roles in decision-making, in self-evaluation, and, importantly, in the development and modification of self-concepts. Despite these important roles, self-simulation is deeply conditioned by context and culture. One way contexts and cultures condition self-simulation is through master narratives. This influence both clarifies one way in which master narratives harmfully infiltrate consciousness and points to a parallel story for how new master narratives could aid in the healing of infiltrated consciousness through alternatively conditioning self-simulation.

Part 1 and part 2 below offer a philosophical gloss on the suggestion that master narratives coconstruct self-concepts. This analysis reveals the relational nature of self-concepts and their vulnerability to pernicious influence. Part 3 introduces the problem of infiltrated consciousness and challenges the suggestion that (i) new communities and (ii) new master narratives can transform infiltrated consciousness. Part 4 address this challenge through offering a fuller account.

1. Self-Concepts, Self-Simulation, and Relational Coconstruction

Philosophers and psychologists have pointed out that, paradigmatically, around late preschool years something dramatically changes in human cognition (see Fivush, Haden, and Adam 1995; Wang 2013). Theorists often describe this cognitive change as the development of a new subjective level of consciousness or a sense of self (see Nelson 2003: 33), and they identify the self-concept in question with the emergence of a subjective, *de se* awareness of one's temporal persistence through time (see Hutto 2017: 195; Fivush 2010: 563; Ishmael 2016: 200; Schechtman 2014: 100; Bermudez 2017: 188). This sense of self, however, is more than just a generic sense of diachronic extension; instead, it describes the development of a sense of one's own unique and distinct personal past and anticipation of a personal future (see Nelson 2003: 22; Tulving 2002; Ishmael 2016; Fivush 2010, 2012; Bermudez 2017; Hutto 2017; Brockmeier 2015; Schechtman 2014; Wang 2013). When scholars speak of the development of this new 'diachronically extended sense of self', what they often mean is that one comes to develop:

A sense of a specific personal past, the anticipation of a specific personal future, and the sense that one is present at all those times.

Call this a *diachronic sense of self*. (This, in various forms, is affirmed by the following scholars: Schechtman 2014; Hutto 2017; Bermudez 2017; Fivush 2010, 2012; Nelson 2003; Ishmael 2016; and Wang 2013). This diachronic sense of self, however, is not just a sense of temporal extension derived passively from keeping track of a sequence of past events, but a construction that results from the development and use of the cognitive capacity for mental time travel or hypothetical self-simulation across time. Mental time travel is described as a form

of episodic hypothetical thinking or self-simulation (De Brigard [2013] and Michaelian [2016]).¹ Thus, self-simulation is both an imaginative act of *retrospective* hypothesizing about what was and what could have been as well a *prospective* imaginative act in which a subject simulates various scenarios about what could be—what theorists call future-oriented mental time travel (see De Brigard 2013: 6; Michaelian 2016: 99; also, for the growing data in memory science that supports the hypothesis that retrospection and prospection belong to some same broader underlying system, see Schacter, Addis, and Buckner 2007). Through the deployment of this cognitive capacity for hypothetical self-simulation, a subject is said to construct a diachronic sense of self and to continue to modify it throughout the course of their life (Ishmael 2016; Fivush and Graci 2017; Wang 2013; and Brockmeier 2015).

This is not to suggest, however, that a diachronic sense of self is merely the construction of a subject formed in isolation from the contexts and communities in which they are embedded. Indeed, as many theorists have noted, the contexts in which subjects are embedded have far-reaching influence on both the form and content of their diachronic sense of self (see Brockmeier 2015; Wang 2013; Nelson 2003; McLean 2015; Fivush and Graci 2017; MacIntyre 2007; Frank 1997; Glover 2014; Taylor 1992; Nelson 2001; and Brison 2003).² Developmental psychologists point to the influence of master narratives of these communities as demonstrating one way contexts and communities coauthor a person's diachronic sense of self.

2. Master Narratives and the Coconstruction of Self-Concepts

Human beings are embedded in particular historical and cultural contexts, and these cultural contexts possess cultural stories. Psychologists identify one type of these cultural stories as 'master narratives'. According to Kate McLean:

Master narratives are culturally shared stories that communicate what the standards and expectations are for being a part of a community. . . . All members of a culture use, or at least acknowledge, master narratives in telling their own stories. Master narratives give form to experiences within a culture, they shape the stories told in that culture, and they are reinforced as they are used again and again by members of the community. Stories told by group members at high frequencies legitimize those stories, constructing a shared narrative reality and a sense of group belonging. . . .

¹ This account opts for the language of self-simulation over imagination since it is deeply indebted to constructivist theories of memory, and this literature describes the capacity for self-simulation as *one* form of imagining—namely, the development of the psychological capacity to imagine oneself in hypothetical scenarios across time (see Michaelian 2016).

² Situational interactionist theorists (SIT) draw further attention to ways in which self-concepts are relational see Hutto (2017).

In terms of their function, scholars in psychology, linguistics, sociology, anthropology, and other disciplines agree that master narratives tell us how to belong and how to define ourselves. Master narratives give meaning to social categories, such as gender . . . sexuality . . . ethnicity . . . and nationality. . . . *They tell us how to be, or what it means to be, male or female, Black or White, gay or straight, Israeli, Palestinian, or American.* (McLean 2015: 32, my emphasis)

In sharpening the resolution of this sketch, consider the male subject who lives and belongs to a socially and religiously conservative context; a context that upholds binary and traditional understandings of gender and gender roles. The subject's context will be saturated with master narratives that convey normative expectations of gender. For instance, the subject may have grown up listening to frequent sermons on an interpretation of biblical manhood that communicate the divine expectation that men be providers, breadwinners, and protectors (see Kobes Du Mez 2020). The frequent telling of this story of biblical manhood in this context conveys and reinforces normative expectations of gender and so functions as a master narrative of masculinity.

Expanding on the general construal above, McLean elsewhere identifies several 'principles' of master narratives. She identifies these principles as:

the *ubiquity* of master narratives—they must be known by the majority; *utility*—they must serve the purpose of defining the acceptable, valued frameworks for defining the self; *invisibility*—they are often internalized through unconscious processes so that many are unaware that they are conforming to cultural expectations in defining themselves; *rigidity*—they hold structural power in society and are difficult to change; and *compulsory* nature—those whose personal narratives do not align with these master narratives are telling stories that are less valued, less 'good,' and are in a more marginalized position in society. (McLean et al. 2017: 7; this summarizes McLean and Syed 2015)

When taken together, McLean's construal of master narratives and articulation of its principles suggest a fuller picture of the nature and function of master narratives. Master narratives are narratives in that they are stories that are frequently told in a particular context and that convey assumptions of social identity. They are master narratives in that they function as a sort of interpretive lens that communicate and reinforce normative expectations of social identity in a particular context.

Recent work in social metaphysics can be enlisted to further clarify these psychological insights. In a recent article, 'Yep, I'm Gay: Understanding Agential Identity', Robin Dembroff and Catharine Saint-Croix introduce three concepts: social blueprints, social positions, and social properties. *Social blueprints* are the clusters of beliefs, concepts, attitudes, and so forth of a social context that give rise to concrete practices (Dembroff and Saint-Croix 2019: 574). *Social positions* are concepts of social offices affirmed by social blueprints. Examples of social positions are being a parent, a spouse, or a football player (575). Some person comes to be

assigned ‘a social position by a social context when that person is regularly perceived as possessing (enough of) the properties that are, within shared blueprints, associated with a group corresponding to that position’ (2019: 574). *Social properties* are those properties significant in social blueprints used in identifying types of social positions and their tokens.

In filtering McLean’s insights through this philosophical taxonomy, master narratives communicate aspects of a context’s social blueprint. That is, they identify types of social positions—‘male or female, Black or White, gay or straight, Israeli, Palestinian, or American’ (McLean 2015: 32)—and communicate the social properties of each. Master narratives do more than just offer descriptive accounts of social positions, however. They communicate normative interpretive frameworks of social position that are expected to be accepted and internalized by members belonging to social positions. Stated variously, master narratives define for subjects of social positions the ‘acceptable, valued frameworks’ and normative standards for self-understanding (McLean et al. 2017: 7).

In illustration of this point, consider again the male subject who grew up in a religiously and socially conservative context and frequently heard stories of biblical manhood that maintained that to be a man is to be provider, breadwinner, and protector. These stories are master narratives of masculinity not just because they identify the social position of male and communicate social properties of that position, but also because they communicate to the male subject an interpretive framework of the acceptable, valued, and normative standards for understanding one’s self as male (McLean et al. 2017: 7). That is to say, the stories of biblical manhood communicate to the stay-at-home father that he is to be a provider, breadwinner, and protector and that he is to understand himself according to this logic.

So efficient are these master narratives in effecting internalization, that McLean and others have been led to contend that they ‘coauthor’ a subject’s sense of self (see McLean 2015: 5; Brockmeier 2015: esp. 181; and Wang 2013).

3. The Problem of Infiltrated Consciousness

The susceptibility of self-concepts to the conditioning influence of master narratives makes them intensely vulnerable to infiltration by harmful master narratives. Philosopher Hilde Lindemann Nelson calls cases in which such harmful infiltration occurs instances of infiltrated consciousness (see Nelson 2001). I will characterize cases of infiltrated consciousness as follows:

A subject, *S*, suffers from an instance of infiltrated consciousness, if *S*’s sense of self comes to be strongly and negatively shaped by a victimizing master narrative.

I take a self-concept to be strongly shaped by some master narrative if some subject of a social position internalizes the social properties ascribed to them. The language of ‘strongly shaped by’ is meant to permit the inclusion of cases in which a subject’s sense of self is not ‘defined by’ victimization but is nevertheless deeply affected by

it. Stated succinctly, I think infiltrated consciousness is more than just having a sense of self that is strongly shaped by a victimizing master narrative. The victimizing master narrative must also have a destructive or nontrivially harmful effect on a subject's life. Consider a clarifying example. Imagine a subject who is Black and living in the context of Jim Crow America. Consider the sorts of extant social properties master narratives attributed to subjects occupying this social position. As described by James Cone, what it meant to be Black, according to the master narratives of the Jim Crow South was to be: a beast (no different from fleas, snakes, chickens, or cows), a wanton, a corruptor of White purity, ignorant, uncivilized, a heathen, and a subject with no rights any White man or woman was bound to respect (Cone 2013: 6–7). The salience of racist master narratives, coupled with other tactics of violence and oppression, exerted immense pressure toward conditioning the self-understanding of Black men and women in accordance with these ascribed social properties. Martin Luther King Jr. in his 'Letter from Birmingham Jail', speaks of this harm. He says:

When you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate-filled policemen curse, kick and even kill your black brothers and sisters; when you see the vast majority of your twenty million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society; when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she can't go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see tears welling up in her eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children, and *see ominous clouds of inferiority beginning to form in her little mental sky* . . . when you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading 'white' and 'colored'; . . . when you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a Negro, living constantly at tiptoe stance, never quite knowing what to expect next, and are plagued with inner fears and outer resentments; *when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of 'nobodiness'*—then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait. (King Jr. 1963, my emphasis)

These social contexts and social blueprints threaten to instill harmful social properties in his and his daughter's consciousness. Insofar as self-concepts are coconstructed by the contexts and communities in which a subject is embedded, the relational nature of self-concepts renders them susceptible to harmful infiltration.³ What philosophical account can be offered for how these troubling cases of infiltration can be transformed?

³ Persons frequently occupy multiple social positions. As a result, a person will have master narratives told about the various social positions they occupy. But not all social positions contribute equally to one's self-concept. Some positions are valued differently and are more or less central to one's self-concept.

3.1 Introducing a Suggested Solution to Infiltrated Consciousness

Recent psychological and philosophical literature offers a suggestion. If self-concepts are in part constituted and can be damaged by the master narratives of one's communities, then perhaps (i) new communities that offer (ii) new master narratives can transform these infiltrated self-concepts (see Nelson 2001: xii; Rea 2018; McLean 2015; Brison 2003; Ethell 2010). Insofar as new master narratives offer alternatives to the victimizing master narratives generating infiltrated consciousness and are able to salutarily change a subject's self-concept, we have a promising story for how infiltrated self-concepts may be transformed. (This suggestion is offered by Rea 2018; McLean 2015; and Nelson 2001: xii). Call this the parallel mechanisms argument for transformation.

This common suggestion, however, spells out the fact that narratives both harm and heal, not how master narratives infiltrate consciousness. If we want to tell a story along the lines of the one given by this common suggestion—about how new master narratives can heal through infiltrating our consciousness—a further account needs to be offered for *how* master narratives harm through infiltrating consciousness.

3.2 The Conditioning Influence of Master Narrative as a Mechanism for Harmful Infiltration

Recall that developmental psychologists argue that self-concepts are constructed and modified through the development and implementation of the cognitive capacity for self-simulation. I briefly summarized this capacity for hypothetical self-simulation as the ability to imagine or simulate possible past events—what was or potentially could have been (De Brigard 2013: 6)—as well as imagining sundry possible future events—what could be (2013: 6; this is often called hypothetical counterfactual thinking; however, is also captured in the language of mental simulation). Our capacities for self-simulation, however, are conditioned by our contexts and communities, and one way the latter condition self-simulation is through master narratives. This influence, I argue, suggests one mechanism by which master narratives can infiltrate consciousness in harmful ways.

By definition, master narratives are the most salient and frequently told stories a context tells about social positions and the social properties that go with them. This saliency means that alternative narratives of social position and their social properties are limited and infrequent in comparison. The positions and properties imposed by master narratives are not only salient; they also convey a context's normative standards for self-representation that are expected to be accepted and internalized by members of certain social positions (see McLean et al. 2017: 7). From the ontogenesis of self-simulation, master narratives are used as didactic tools to prompt and guide subjects to self-represent in accordance with these normative standards (see Wang 2013; Nelson 2003; and McLean 2015).

For instance, being American may be less central to the stay-at-home father's sense of his own identity than is being masculine.

These considerations suggest that master narratives condition self-simulation through confining it. They confine self-simulation not because they make some self-simulations impossible or inconceivable, but because the salience of master narratives and their function as prompts and guides for self-simulation make self-simulations that accord with its standards less difficult than alternative self-simulations. (For a comprehensive explication of the role that prompts and guides play in the generation of imaginative simulation, see Walton 1990.)

These considerations point to an additional way that master narratives condition self-simulation. To reiterate, contexts infuse self-simulation with value. From the eyes of a given context not all the self-representations of a subject from a particular social position are made equal; some are deemed deficient and others optimal. Master narratives represent normative standards for self-simulations. The infusing of representations with value, the saliency of master narratives, and the frequent instructing of subjects on these standards makes the internalization of these normative standards more likely than that of the alternatives. The internalization of these standards dissuades subjects from self-simulating in ways that contrast with master narratives of their social position or, if simulated, to evaluate contrasting representations as deficient. In both cases, subjects are predisposed to self-simulate in ways that conform to the normative standards evidenced by master narratives.

Permit me an example to refine these points. Imagine a son who belongs to a socially and religiously conservative family known for professional and academic success. Imagine that this son turns out not to have much academic ability and ends up working a low-profile, mediocre-paying desk job, and then because his spouse lands a high-paying and time-intensive position as a CEO becomes a stay-at-home dad in the small town where he was born and raised. It is not difficult to imagine him having grown up with a variety of narratives (some familial, some religious, some cultural) that condition him to view his overall situation as one of failure and to view himself as diminished in his masculinity. Perhaps, he grew up frequently hearing sermons on biblical manhood that told the story that a man's place was outside of the home and that to be a man was to be a breadwinner, provider, and protector. It is conceivable that both he and his community see his role as stay-at-home dad as inimical to his masculinity. Moreover, it is possible that this affects not just his sense of who he is presently but also his vision and anticipation of his future: insofar as he continues on in this role into the future, he will continue to think of himself as a failed man. To be sure, it is not that these narratives make it impossible or inconceivable to think of things differently, but they may well be ingrained enough that it would take a lot of dedicated effort to resist the tendency to think of things in that way. And, of course, to the extent that the man persists in thinking of himself as a failure and 'not really a man', he is harmed. These conditioning influences are one way master narratives infiltrate in harmful ways.

The upshot of these considerations is that master narratives and the contexts in which they are told condition subjects to conceive of their self and their circumstances in particular ways—assigning certain kinds of meaning and value to various potential self-representations—and predispose subjects to envision a select range of possibilities that branch off from them. In cases in which master

narratives are demeaning, these master narratives condition subjects to conceive of their self and their circumstances in accordance with these demeaning normative representations. These conditioning influences, then, make it difficult for subjects to envision their self and their circumstances in deviating ways or if they do imagine them, to value those alternatives. This is not to say that it is impossible or inconceivable for a subject to envision their self and circumstances in contrasting ways, but that it would take a lot of effort to resist the tendency to think of things in the ways prescribed by their context. For a subject to persist in thinking of their self in accordance with pernicious master narratives is for them to incur personal harm.

4. Offering a Parallel Story: New Master Narratives, New Communities, and Healing Infiltration

If these are mechanisms by which communities and master narratives infiltrate consciousness in harmful ways, we should be able to tell a parallel story about how new communities and new master narratives can transform through infiltrating consciousness in healing ways. What then is that story? Significantly, the provision of this story offers an answer to the chief question of this project: how can new master narratives and new communities aid in the healing of infiltrated consciousness? This story has three parts. New master narratives and new communities aid in the healing of infiltrated consciousness through (a) conditioning self-simulation in new ways (making it easier to break out of negative patterns of thought) and through these new simulations providing (b) motivational reasons and (c) generating feedback loops.

4.1 New Conditioning Influences

To recapitulate, master narratives infiltrate consciousness in harmful ways by conditioning subjects to understand their self and their circumstances in particular ways—assigning certain kinds of meaning and value to various potential self-representations and through predisposing subjects to envision a select range of possibilities that branch off from them. This conditioning makes the patterns of self-simulation that conform to these standards easier and alternative patterns of self-simulation more difficult. In the case of infiltrated consciousness, the conditioning influence of harmful master narratives and contexts that uphold them make it difficult for a subject to break out of negative patterns of self-simulation. New contexts could condition subjects to understand their self and their circumstances in new, liberating ways through making salient new narratives and normative representations of social positions and their properties. These new narratives and norms could disrupt and replace the old narratives, opening up new ways for the subject to relate to their self and their circumstances. For a subject suffering from infiltrated consciousness, new patterns of self-simulations are made easier through gaining membership into new communities that offer alternative master narratives of social position and social properties.

In clarifying these points, we revisit again the example of the stay-at-home father. Imagine that his spouse's success continues; so productive were they in their position as CEO, they were offered and have accepted an equivalent position for a major company in a large city. The entire family relocates, and the father continues on as a stay-at-home dad. It is not difficult to imagine that this new context possesses new salient narratives and normative expectations about masculinity that challenge the harmful narratives and the normative expectations currently conditioning his self-understanding. Perhaps this new context characterizes traditional articulations of gender roles as misogynistic and tells stories that advocate for nontraditional, nonessentialist articulations of gender roles. For instance, this new context may frequently maintain that there is no social property or role that belongs essentially to either gender, and therefore to be a 'successful male' does not necessitate that one be a provider, a protector, or that one work outside of the home. Continuous exposure to these alternative, new, and more positive narratives and normative expectations for his social position, and increased acquaintance with role models and communities that underwrite them, can make it easier for him to break out of the negative pattern of thinking of himself as a failed man. It can do so by making it more natural or in other ways easier for him to envision himself, say, as the protagonist of a masculine success story.

Though this suggests that new communities and new contexts can prompt and guide new self-simulations, it remains unclear, as of yet, how these new self-simulations aid in the healing of infiltrated consciousness. How is it that these new healthier ways of envisioning one's self come to take root in one's self-concept? The motivational role self-simulation plays in decision making, in self-evaluation, and in the generation of feedback loops suggests one answer: access to new master narratives makes new self-simulations easier, and this may serve as new motivation for new action and, in turn, may mediate the alteration of self-concepts.

4.2 Self-Simulation and Motivational Reason

In making all sorts of self-involving decisions, we frequently enlist prospective imagination to simulate ourselves in various hypothetical scenarios and to reverse-engineer our preferences. Suppose, for instance, that you are trying to decide whether to spend your Christmas vacation in the Midwest with family or on the beach with friends. In making your decision and assessing the desirability of each option, you might call upon your imagination. In deciding whether or not to go home for the holidays or to a beach, you may begin by imagining fresh fallen snow dusting the limbs of evergreens, the refreshing warmth of a cup of hot chocolate after an evening of ice-skating, and the comfort of woolen socks, a crackling fireplace, and your mother's embrace. You might next imagine the beauty of a beach sunset, the taste of fresh seafood, the rejuvenating warmth of the sun on your skin, but also the disappointment of spending Christmas at a great distance from family. These prospective simulations and the assessment of the desirability of each alternative can provide a motivating reason for acting in

favor of one or the other alternative. (These examples are adaptations of those offered by Paul 2017 and Kind 2019).

L. A. Paul has recently noted that subjects also engage in prospective hypothetical counterfactual thinking about future selves (Paul 2017: 22). As in the cases of common prospective self-simulation, Paul argues that in deciding what future self to be, subjects often prospectively simulate the subjectivity of future hypothetical selves to assess the desirability of each alternative and to decide which future self to work toward actualizing (2017: 23). Paul's account, I think, serves as an interesting analogy for thinking about the present project: if simulations of the subjectivity of hypothetical future selves can function as a means to assess the desirability of these hypotheticals and provide the motivating reasons to actualize them, perhaps the simulation of hypothetical future selves with alternative diachronic senses of self could serve a similar end. (Of course, this is not to endorse the view that prospection ought to function as a normative reason for acting.)

In fleshing out the significance of this work to this project, we turn again to the example of the stay-at-home father. This father, to reiterate, has internalized narratives of masculinity that condition him to see his role as a stay-at-home father as diminishing his masculinity. His wife's continued career success has brought their family to a large city. The communities they form in this new context offer new narratives of and normative expectations for masculinity that challenge those that are currently harming and conditioning his self-understanding.

Let us assume that the stay-at-home father has the capacity for mental time travel and episodic hypothetical thinking. Theoretically, then, he could apply these capacities to his sense of self; he could hypothetically simulate himself as a future self with alternative diachronic senses of self. Similar to more mundane contexts, these self-simulations could provide useful means for evaluating alternatives and the motivational reasons to work toward actualizing them. In deciding between hypothetical future selves to actualize, he may begin by simulating them in order to decide which alternative is most desirable. Importantly, through engaging in this hypothetical imagining and through the influence of the new master narratives of his new context, he may come to find that the self-concept of some simulated hypothetical future self that no longer conceives of his masculinity as diminished is more desirable than his current sense of self that does. In deciding between future hypothetical selves to actualize—his current sense of his personal trajectory or some hypothetical trajectory—he may come to assess his current trajectory as suboptimal, and the imagined alternative guided by the new master narratives of his new context as more preferable.

Insofar as imagined alternative scenarios can provide motivating reasons for action, perhaps this more appealing imagined alternative might provide him with a motivating reason to act contrary to his current diachronic sense of self and in ways consistent with actualizing this healthier alternative. (For ways in which imagined futures can affect future decisions see Debus 2016; Nanay 2016; and Christoph Hoerl and Teresa McCormack's [2016] recent work on anticipated regret.) These new motivations and actions may mediate the alteration of his self-concept. Important for the purposes of this essay, this suggests an account of how new and healthier ways of envisioning one's self could come to take root in

one's self concept. To clarify, the stay-at-home father is not imagining alternative master narratives in the absence of being exposed to new master narratives. Rather, life circumstance takes him to a new context—a context he likely would not have chosen for himself—that exposes him to new master narratives. This new context exerts social pressure, and these new, alternative master narratives act as new interpretive frameworks that prompt and guide alternative ways for envisioning himself. The type of case explored in this article—where unexpected life circumstance thrusts a subject suffering from infiltrated consciousness into a new context with new master narratives—are certainly not the only cases of interest. One may legitimately wonder what account could be offered for cases of infiltrated consciousness where the subject does not have an unexpected shift in context or community. Is it possible for the subject then to imagine or seek out alternative master narratives in absence of exposure to new master narratives and new communities? Legitimate as these questions are, the hope of this essay is to offer a fuller account of the common suggestion that accessing and exposure to new master narratives and communities may aid in the healing of infiltrated consciousness and do so through drawing attention to the role self-simulation has in the creation and modification of self-concepts and to the effect that exposure and access to new master narratives has on self-simulation.

4.3 The Generation of a Feedback Loop

Stated more specifically, the alteration of the stay-at-home father's self-concept occurs through the generation of what psychologists call feedback loops. In deciding between what future self to be, the stay-at-home dad may begin by hypothetically simulating them in order to decide which alternative is most desirable. We are assuming he does not do this in the absence of exposure to new communities and alternative master narratives. Rather, life circumstance leads him to a new context, and it is this context's new master narratives of masculinity that offer new interpretive frameworks that make it easier to envision himself in alternative ways. That is, it is easier to think of himself not as a failed man but as a prime example of ideal masculinity. If accessing these new master narratives of masculinity causes him to evaluate his understanding of himself as a failed man as suboptimal or to find more desirable the alternative construal of himself as the protagonist of a male success story, these evaluations and imagined alternatives can provide motivating reasons for acting in opposition to this suboptimal sense of self and toward actualizing this healthier option. The more he acts in repudiation of his sense of self as a failed man or in a way consistent with the healthier alternative, the more this alternative will be reinforced in his self-concept; thus, in time, precipitating personal change. (This is noted by Velleman 2005; McLean, Pasupathi, and Pals 2007; and Fivush and Graci 2017).

4.4 Offering a Description: One Way New Communities and New Master Narratives Aid in the Healing of Infiltrated Consciousness

These considerations offer an analogy for thinking about how new communities and new master narratives could precipitate the healing of infiltrated consciousness.

Insofar as the new representational frameworks offered to a subject by new communities encourage a subject to envision new, healthy future selves, these new self-simulations can precipitate healing through the generation of a feedback loop. That is, these new self-simulations can cause a subject to evaluate their current infiltrated sense of self as deficient and/or to find the newly imagined sense of self as a more desirable alternative. These evaluations and newly imagined alternatives can provide motivating reasons for acting in opposition to this suboptimal infiltrated sense of self and toward actualizing a more preferable option. The more one acts in repudiation of a current infiltrated sense of self and/or in a way consistent with the more desirous alternative offered by new master narratives of this new community, the more these alternatives will be reinforced in one's self-concept, and thus, over time, they will lead to the healing of one's infiltrated consciousness. (David Velleman has argued for something similar. According to Velleman [2000], self-fictionalizations can function as motivation for action.)

5. Conclusion

The chief goal of this project was to offer a fuller description of how new communities and new master narratives can aid in the healing of infiltrated consciousness. The foregoing analysis suggests such an account. New contexts, through making salient new narratives, normative representations of social position and their social properties, and through diminishing old ones, make it easier for subjects suffering from infiltrated consciousness to break free of negative patterns of thought characteristic of infiltrated consciousness and prompt and guide new, healthier patterns of self-simulations. These new self-simulations can precipitate the healing of infiltrated consciousness through providing motivational reasons for acting in opposition to this suboptimal sense of self and through generating feedback loops.

To be sure, this account is by no means exhaustive. Several questions remain for future work to answer: can new master narratives and new communities aid in the healing of all instances of infiltrated consciousness? For instance, given that recent literature in trauma studies indicates that trauma does not just alter memories and self-concepts but also alters the brain itself—for example, the automatic physical and hormonal responses of the body (see van der Kolk 2015: esp., 58)—does the account sketched by this project seem adequate for cases of infiltrated consciousness that result from, say, trauma? Or, does this account suggest a story of healing for only certain types of infiltrated consciousness?

Despite the many details that require filling in, the account offered in this essay aims to advance the discussion of the ways that new master narratives and communities may aid in the healing of infiltrated consciousness. It does so through drawing attention to the role that the psychological capacity for self-simulation can play in offering an account of the healing of infiltrated consciousness.

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