The Ownership of Memories

Is there such a thing as experiencing a memory as one’s own? In this chapter, I argue that the phenomenon of disowned memory gives us a reason to believe that memories do carry a sense of mineness, or an experience of ownership. I challenge a proposal about the nature of this experience, according to which the experience of a memory as one’s own is the feeling of being identical with the witness of the remembered scene, and I put forward an alternative proposal. According to the alternative proposal, the experience of a memory as one’s own is the experience of the memory as matching the past. I argue that the alternative proposal makes better sense of the available reports of disowned memory. I conclude by offering some considerations on how the proposed account of the nature of the experience of memory ownership could accommodate other cases of disowned conscious states.

1. **Introduction**

A subject’s inner awareness of their phenomenal states has a number of interesting features.[[1]](#endnote-1) Among them, there is a feature that is especially familiar to us. Normally, when a subject is aware of their phenomenal states, the subject takes those states to be their own; the subject attributes those states to themselves. If your inner awareness reveals the occurrence of the thought that it is about to rain, for example, then you will attribute to yourself the thought that it is about to rain; you will take yourself to be the thinker of that thought. It seems uncontroversial that our awareness of our phenomenal states leads to the self-attribution of those states, as opposed to the attribution of those states to others. What is less clear is why this is the case.

A simple explanation which comes to mind rather easily is the following. The reason why a subject attributes the phenomenal states that they experience through inner awareness to themselves is that, when a subject is aware of one of their phenomenal states, the subject is not only aware of the fact that the relevant state is instantiated, but they are also aware of the fact that the state is theirs. We can abbreviate this view by saying that inner awareness of phenomenal states carries with it a ‘sense of mineness’ or an ‘experience of ownership’ (Gallagher 2005; Zahavi 2008). This view explains why our awareness of our phenomenal states leads to the self-attribution of those states. For suppose that the view is right and, when a subject is aware of one of their phenomenal states, they are aware of the relevant state as being theirs. It does not seem surprising, then, that the subject attributes the phenomenal state to themselves. After all, on this view, what the subject would be doing by self-attributing the phenomenal state is simply trusting their episode of inner awareness.

But is there really, in episodes of inner awareness, an experience of a phenomenal state as the subject’s own, over and above the experience of the instantiation of that state? The concern is that perhaps being aware of a phenomenal state, and being aware of it as the subject’s own, is one and the same thing.[[2]](#endnote-2) And if there really aren’t two different experiences in our awareness of our phenomenal states, but only one, then the sense of mineness turns out to be just a fiction. It seems reasonable, therefore, to demand some reasons for believing in the existence of the sense of mineness as a genuine experience. Relatedly, one would also want to know more about the nature of this experience, since it is not straightforward what qualifies as experiencing a phenomenal state as being one’s own. Unless some progress can be made on both of these fronts, it seems that the simple explanation of why inner awareness of phenomenal states leads to the self-attribution of those states sketched above will not get off the ground.

The objective of this chapter is to address both of these issues with regards to the specific case of episodic memories.[[3]](#endnote-3) I will begin by highlighting, in section 2, a phenomenon that gives us a reason for believing in the existence of the sense of mineness in our awareness of our episodic memories. This is the condition of ‘disowned memory’, wherein a subject claims to have memories that are not theirs. In section 3, I will consider a proposal about the nature of the sense of mineness for episodic memories that is based on a particular diagnosis of disowned memory. According to the ‘identification model’ of the sense of mineness, the experience of a memory as the subject’s own is the feeling of being identical with the witness of the remembered scene. I will argue that, while this model does account for some details in the available reports of disowned memory, it is also in tension with other details in those reports. Accordingly, I will put forward, in section 4, an alternative proposal. According to the ‘endorsement model’ of the sense of mineness, the experience of a memory as the subject’s own is the experience of the memory as matching the past. I will argue that this model squares with the details in the available reports of disowned memory which are in tension with the identification model, as well as with those which are explained by it. In section 5, I will suggest a template for generalising the proposed model of the sense of mineness for episodic memories to accommodate other cases of disowned phenomenal states, such as disowned thoughts, disowned impulses, disowned feelings and disowned actions.

1. **Disowned memory**

What considerations can be offered in support of the idea that our awareness of our episodic memories carries with it a sense of mineness? In this section, I will suggest that one such consideration involves a condition wherein a subject reports to have a memory while, at the same time, claiming that the memory in question is not theirs. I will refer to this condition as ‘disowned memory’.

Disowned memory is extremely rare. As a matter of fact, the only relatively clear case of disowned memory that is reported in the philosophical and psychological literatures seems to be that of patient R.B., a case investigated in detail by Stanley Klein (2015, 2013, 2012).[[4]](#endnote-4) Shaun Nichols and Stanley Klein have argued that the case of patient R.B. has interesting philosophical implications for the connection between memory and personal identity (Klein and Nichols 2012). Patient R.B. suffers, due to head trauma sustained during a bicycle accident, various cognitive deficits including, it seems, a remarkable memory impairment. Patient R.B. can have, we are told, accurate memories of scenes from his past. And yet, for some of those memories, he also claims that the memories at issue are not his, and that he does not own them.[[5]](#endnote-5) Here are some of the claims which patient R.B. makes, and which Klein and Nichols take to be reports of episodic memories:[[6]](#endnote-6)

Report 1

I was remembering scenes, not facts … I was recalling scenes … that is … I could clearly recall a scene of me at the beach in New London with my family as a child. But the feeling was that the scene was not my memory. As if I was looking at a photo of someone else’s vacation. (Klein and Nichols 2012, 686).

Report 2

Things that were in the present, like my name, I continue to own. Having been to MIT had two different issues. My memories of having been at MIT I did not own. Those scenes of being at MIT were vivid, but they were not mine. But I owned ‘the fact that I had a degree from MIT’. That might have simply been a matter of rational acceptance of fact. (Klein and Nichols 2012, 686).

Report 3

I can picture the scene perfectly clearly … studying with my friends in our study lounge. I can ‘relive’ it in the sense of re-running the experience of being there. But it has the feeling of imagining, [as if] re-running an experience that my parents described from their college days. It did not feel like it was something that really had been a part of my life. Intellectually I suppose I never doubted that it was a part of my life. Perhaps because there was such continuity of memories that fit a pattern that lead up to the present time. But that in itself did not help change the feeling of ownership. (Klein and Nichols 2012, 686).

Report 4

RB: I can see the scene in my head. I’m studying with friends in the lounge at my residence hall. I am able to re-live it. I have a feeling … a sense of being there, at MIT, in the lounge. But it doesn’t feel like I own it. It’s like I’m imagining, re-living the experience but it was described by someone else. (Klein and Nichols 2012, 687).

Report 5

RB: I can recall memories [from the non-ownership period of his life] at will. I have normal control over remembering facts and scenes from my past. But when I remember scenes from before the injury, they do not feel as if they happened to me—though intellectually I know that they did— they felt as if they happened to someone else. (Klein and Nichols 2012, 687).

Report 6

What happened over the coming months was interesting: every once in a while, I would suddenly think about something in my past and I would ‘own’ it. That was indeed something ‘I’ had done and experienced. Over time, one by one I would come to ‘own’ different memories. Eventually, after perhaps eight months or so, it seemed as if it was all owned. As if once enough individual memories were owned, it was all owned. For example, the MIT memory, the one in the lounge ... I now own it. It’s clearly part of my life, my past. (Klein 2013, 6).

Report 7

When I remember the scene with my friends, studying, I remember myself walking into the room … and … other things I did and felt … But it feels like something I didn’t experience … (something I) was told about by someone else. (Klein 2015, 18).

It seems that R.B. is having a highly unusual experience. R.B. claims, on the one hand, to have certain memories and, on the other hand, not to own those memories. It is hard to know how to make sense of these reports. There seem to be three interpretative approaches to R.B.’s reports that one may take. One may, first of all, attribute to R.B. an awareness of the instantiation of certain memories without the awareness that the memories at issue are R.B.’s own.[[7]](#endnote-7) Call this the ‘something-missing’ approach. Alternatively, one may see R.B.’s case as a case where there is a phenomenology of alienation that is absent from normal memories. Call this the ‘something-extra’ approach. And, finally, one may see R.B.’s reports as expressions of episodes of awareness which do not share any phenomenological common core with our awareness of normal memories. Call this the ‘something-entirely-different’ approach.[[8]](#endnote-8) Which is the most preferable approach?

The something-extra approach explains why R.B. disowns some of his memories. In addition to the phenomenology that we undergo when we are aware of our memories, he has an extra experience of alienation. The difficulty for this approach concerns the question of whether there is something, phenomenologically speaking, that my different episodes of awareness of normal memories have in common. Intuitively, when I am aware of my memory of my first kiss, and when I am aware of my memory of my first bicycle fall, for example, it seems that my two experiences are different in one respect. There is a quasi-sensory painful-ish way it is like for me to be aware of the latter memory, but not of the former one. At the same time, the two experiences seem to have something in common as well. In both cases, I seem to be aware of my memory as my own. Now, this intuition is difficult to capture if we take the something-extra approach towards a case in which a subject disowns some of their memories. For the approach suggests that the awareness of the occurrence of a memory cannot be instantiated without the awareness of the memory as the subject’s own. (After all, any case in which the two types of awareness appear to come apart, such as a case of disowned memory, will be treated instead as a case in which the subject has an experience of alienation in addition to the two types of awareness of their memory.) But if the awareness of the occurrence of a memory and the awareness of it as one’s own cannot be instantiated without each other, then what reason do we have to consider them different experiences?[[9]](#endnote-9) In the absence of a reason, the something-extra approach pushes towards the view that, when I am aware of my memory of my first kiss, for example, I am aware of the occurrence of this memory, and my awareness of the memory as my own is nothing over and above that experience. Similarly, when I am aware of my memory of my first bicycle fall, I am aware of the occurrence of this memory, and my awareness of the memory as my own is nothing over and above that experience. Thus, the two episodes of awareness turn out to have no phenomenological element in common, which seems counter-intuitive.

The something-entirely-different approach seems to raise a different type of difficulty. If the phenomenology that R.B. undergoes when he is aware of his memories is nothing like ours, then it is hard to see why R.B.’s reports are so similar to the claims that we ourselves would make if we had normal memories of being at a beach in New London, or of being at the MIT study lounge. It is also hard to see how adopting this approach would help us explain why R.B. disowns some of his memories. Why should we expect that R.B., in virtue of having a phenomenology which radically differs from ours when he is aware of his memories, will disown those memories and not, let us say, claim that he is aware of having certain premonitions? If the phenomenology that R.B. undergoes is radically different from ours, then it does not seem possible to explain, on the one hand, the similarities between his reports and the reports that we would make of normal memories and, on the other hand, the differences between those two sets of reports, by attributing to R.B. such a phenomenology.

It seems, therefore, that the most plausible way of reading R.B.’s reports is by attributing to him an awareness of the instantiation of certain memories without the awareness that those memories are his own, that is, by adopting the something-missing approach. If the something-missing approach is the right approach to take towards R.B.’s reports, then what R.B.’s case seems to show is that the awareness of an episodic memory as being the subject’s own is dissociable from the subject’s awareness of the occurrence of that memory. And if the two experiences are dissociable, then we should conclude that they are different experiences. Thus, it seems that what the case of patient R.B. ultimately shows is that the sense of mineness is a genuine experience; an experience which, ordinarily, is part of the characteristic phenomenology of our awareness of episodic memories, even though it turns out to be separable from it.

This means that, at least in the case of our awareness of episodic memories, the simple explanation of why inner awareness leads to the self-attribution of phenomenal states seems to be available to us. We can account for the fact that we self-attribute those episodic memories that are revealed to us in inner awareness by appealing to the fact that, in normal circumstances, our awareness of those memories is accompanied by an experience of those memories as being our own. We can appeal to this experience of ownership, or this sense of mineness, because that seems to be precisely the experience which is missing from patient R.B.’s awareness of those memories that he disowns. This, however, does not provide us with a full grasp of what R.B. means when he claims not to own some of his memories. After all, we have left the question of what it takes for a subject to experience a memory as being their own open. Let us therefore turn to this question now.

1. **The identification model of memory ownership**

Stanley Klein and Shaun Nichols have put forward a proposal regarding the nature of the sense of mineness for episodic memory. What patient R.B. lacks, they tell us, is ‘a sense of numerical personal identity with the past person’ (Klein and Nichols 2012, 689). Since the main idea in this proposal concerns R.B.’s identity with a past person, let us abbreviate this view as the ‘identification model’ of the sense of mineness for episodic memory. Notice that Klein and Nichols’s proposal that R.B. lacks the sense of being identical with a person in the past can be understood in at least two ways. On one version of this proposal, what R.B. is trying to express when he claims not to own some of his memories is that he lacks the sense of being identical with the person who had the remembered perceptual experience in the past. Let us call this view the ‘experiencer version’ of the identification model. On a different version of this proposal, what R.B. is trying to express when he claims not to own some of his memories is that he lacks the sense of being identical with the person who was experienced as being part of the remembered scene.[[10]](#endnote-10) Let us call this view the ‘object version’ of the identification model. What are the virtues and shortcomings of each version of this model?

Both versions of the identification model square with a number of details in R.B.’s reports. In report 1, for example, R.B. claims to have felt that the remembered scene was ‘not his memory’. And, in report 2, R.B. claims to have experienced that the remembered scenes were ‘not his’. We can make sense of these claims if the experiencer version of the identification model is right and, when R.B. has the relevant memories, he does not feel that the person who, in the past, experienced the remembered scenes was him. The claims make sense, too, if the object version of the model is correct, and R.B. does not feel that he is the person represented as being part of the remembered scene. Furthermore, in report 3, R.B. claims that the relevant scene did not feel like it was something that really had been ‘a part of his life’. Along similar lines, R.B. claims, in report 5, that the scenes remembered did not feel as if they had ‘happened to him’. And, in report 7, R.B. claims that he feels as if the scene is ‘something he didn’t experience’. One would certainly expect claims of this type if the experiencer version of the identification model were right, and R.B. did lack the sense of being the person who, in the past, experienced the remembered scenes. And, conversely, in those instances in which R.B. did enjoy the feeling of being the person who, in the past, experienced the remembered scenes, one would expect R.B. to claim, as he does in report 6, that he felt that the relevant scene ‘was something ‘I’ had done and experienced’, and that the scene felt like it was part of his life. These remarks in reports 3, 5, 6 and 7 fit within the object version of the identification model as well. If R.B. did lack the feeling of being the person who was experienced as being part of the remembered scenes, one would expect him to claim that he does not have the sense that the remembered scenes happened to him. And, in those instances in which R.B. did enjoy the feeling of being the person who was experienced as being part of the remembered scenes, one would expect R.B. to claim, as he does, that the scene felt like it was part of his life. On either version of the identification model, therefore, one can see the motivation for reading R.B. as saying that he lacks the sense of being identical with a remembered person in the past. However, the identification model of the sense of mineness faces a difficulty. For it seems to be in tension with a number of details in R.B.’s reports.[[11]](#endnote-11)

Let us consider, first, the object version of the identification model. The view that R.B. does not have the sense of being identical with the person who was experienced as being part of the remembered scenes does not sit easily with some references that R.B. makes to himself while describing the content of his memories. In report 1, for example, R.B. refers to the remembered scene as a scene ‘of me’ at a certain beach, which does not seem to be neutral on who R.B. remembers to have experienced being at that beach in the past. In that report, R.B. seems to be describing a memory that presents a past perceptual experience of a scene (a scene that involves a beach in New London, and R.B.’s family in it) as having been his own experience. This is perhaps clearer in report 2, where he refers to a memory of ‘having been’ at MIT, and in report 3, where he refers to a memory of ‘studying with my friends’. This kind of talk does not seem to be neutral on who R.B. remembers to have experienced being at MIT at the remembered time. It does not seem to be neutral on who R.B. remembers to have experienced studying with his friends at that time either. Notice that R.B. does not claim that he remembers ‘someone being at MIT’, and he does not claim that he remembers ‘someone studying with his friends’. And yet, one would expect him to use locutions of that kind if he did not feel that he was the person who experienced the scenes to which he refers in reports 2 and 3. Similarly, in report 7, R.B. claims to remember ‘myself walking into the room and other things that I did and felt’. In this case too, R.B.’s references to himself give the impression that R.B.’s memory is presenting him with some past experiences and actions which appear to R.B. to have been his own.

Let us consider, now, the experiencer version of the identification model. The view that R.B. lacks the sense of being identical with the person who experienced the remembered scenes does not square with some references that R.B. makes to a phenomenology of mental time travel associated with his memories. In reports 3 and 4, for example, R.B. talks about ‘reliving’ and ‘re-running’ a past experience in memory. This experience is described by R.B., in report 4, as involving ‘a sense of being there, at MIT, in the lounge’. It is hard to make sense of this talk if the person who R.B. remembers to have experienced being at the study lounge at MIT, studying with R.B.’s friends, is not R.B. himself. If R.B. does lack the sense of being the person who originally experienced the scene at the MIT study lounge, then in what sense is R.B. reliving, or re-running, that scene when he has the relevant memory? After all, that scene is, by assumption, not remembered by R.B. as having been experienced by him in the first place. An analogous worry applies to R.B.’s talk of having ‘a sense of being there’. If the identification model is correct, then one would expect R.B. to claim, in order to describe his memory of the scene at the study lounge, that his memory conveys a sense of someone being there; not a sense of being there. R.B.’s talk of having a sense of being there when he remembers the scene mentioned in reports 3 and 4, and his talk of reliving and re-running the experiences of that scene in memory, strongly suggests that R.B.’s memories do carry the feeling that he is the person who experienced the remembered scenes in the past.

What we need, then, is a reading of R.B.’s reports that, on the other hand, makes sense of R.B.’s remarks about the reported memories not being his own while, on the other hand, accommodating R.B.’s remarks about them being memories of himself as well as R.B.’s comments that the relevant memories involve an experience of reliving the remembered scenes. Let us turn, therefore, to a proposal that is aimed at satisfying these constraints.

1. **The endorsement model of memory ownership**

It seems clear that at least some of R.B.’s memories do lack some salient phenomenal feature that episodic memories normally enjoy. It also seems clear that, due to that fact, R.B. feels, in some sense, estranged or alienated from those memories. Thus, if we manage to specify the form of estrangement that R.B. is experiencing, this case should provide us with some clues as to the nature of the sense of mineness for episodic memories that is present in the non-clinical population. The question, then, is what phenomenal feature is missing from some of R.B.’s memories; those memories which R.B. disowns.

Usually, when we think that one of our mental states is a memory of some state of affairs, then that state of affairs will appear to us as having been the case in the past and, accordingly, we will take ourselves to be remembering the relevant state of affairs. Thus, if I take myself to be having a memory of me giving a lecture while facing a theatre with some students in it, it will thereby seem to me as if, in the past, I was giving a lecture in a theatre with some students in it. And, likewise, it will seem to me as if I am remembering that I was giving such a lecture. This is, in fact, one of the characteristic ways in which the phenomenology of remembering tends to be similar to that of perceiving, and dissimilar to that of imagining. (Whereas those states of affairs that we take to be perceiving appear to us to be the case, those states of affairs that we take to be imagining do not appear to us to be the case.) Let us abbreviate the idea that a subject has the sense that the content of a memory that they are having matches the past by saying that the subject ‘endorses’ the memory. The suggestion that I wish to put forward is that R.B. does not endorse those memories to which he refers in reports 1-5 and 7, but he endorses those to which he refers in report 6; hence his disowning the former and claiming to own the latter. By contrast, in normal circumstances, we are aware of our episodic memories as being our own in that we have the sense that the content of those memories did take place in the past.[[12]](#endnote-12) Let us abbreviate this view as the ‘endorsement model’ of the sense of mineness for episodic memories.

What reasons are there to think that the endorsement model of the sense of mineness is correct? In order to describe the experience of those memories that R.B. disowns, he uses two telling analogies; an analogy with the experience of imagination and an analogy with the experience of looking at a photograph. In reports 3 and 4, in which R.B. tries to describe what it is like for him to have a memory of the scene at the MIT study lounge, he compares his experience to the feeling of imagining a scene that is being described by someone else.[[13]](#endnote-13) Suppose that, when R.B. has a memory of the scene at the MIT study lounge, it does not feel to him as if the scene of him studying with his friends at that lounge really took place. Suppose that, by having an episodic memory of that scene, R.B. can picture being at the study lounge with his friends. And yet, when R.B. pictures that scene, the fact that he was there, studying with his friends, does not seem to R.B. to have actually happened. Then, it makes sense that he tries to express this experience by saying that having a memory of the scene at the study lounge feels like an episode of imagination. For if R.B. was imagining the scene as described by someone else, then R.B.’s relevant episode of imagination would certainly not present the scene to R.B. as having been the case.

R.B.’s other analogy is revealing as well. In report 1, in which R.B. tries to describe what it is like for him to have a memory of the scene at the beach in New London, he compares his experience to that of looking at a photograph; a photograph of someone else’s vacation.[[14]](#endnote-14) Suppose that, when R.B. has a memory of the scene at the beach in New London, it does not feel to him as if the scene actually happened. Then, it makes sense that he tries to express this experience by saying that having a memory of the scene at the beach in New London feels like looking at a photograph. For if R.B. was looking at a photograph of the scene, the scene would not appear to R.B. as having really happened. To be sure, R.B. would be able to visualise the scene by looking at the photograph. But visualising the scene in this way would not convey to R.B. the sense that the scene being visualised had in fact taken place in the past.

The endorsement model of the sense of mineness, like the identification model, can account for why R.B. disowns some of his memories. Notice that if the endorsement model is right, then R.B. is aware of having certain memories, but he does not have the feeling that the scenes represented in those memories happened in the past. And if he does not have the feeling that the scenes represented happened in the past, then he should not have the feeling that he is remembering those scenes.[[15]](#endnote-15) The suggestion, then, is that what R.B. is trying to express, by disowning some memories, is that he does not feel like he is recollecting some scenes despite having memories of those scenes. Thus, if R.B. does not feel like the scene of him and his family at the beach in New London really took place when he remembers it, it seems natural for him to claim that the remembered scene ‘is not his memory’. For R.B. will not feel like he is remembering the scene at the beach in virtue of having a memory of it. Similarly, if R.B. does not feel like the scene of him and his friends at the MIT study lounge did actually happen when he remembers the scene, then it seems natural for him to claim that the remembered scene is ‘not his’. After all, R.B. will not feel like he is remembering the scene at the study lounge, even though he feels like he has a memory of it.

It is also no wonder that R.B. claims, with regards to some of the scenes which he has memories of, that they do not feel like they were something that really had been ‘a part of his life’, or that they do not feel as if they had ‘happened to him’. That seems to be a natural way of expressing the odd feeling that the scenes are not real. The contrast that R.B. is drawing with those memories to which he refers in report 6 can also be accounted for if R.B. has managed to endorse the relevant memories. Suppose that what R.B. feels, for each of the memories that he claims to have come to ‘own’, is that the remembered action or experience did take place in the past. Then, it is not surprising that R.B. describes what it is like for him to have those memories by saying that, at that point, what he remembers seems to be something that he had indeed done and experienced; or by saying that what he remembers seems to have been part of his life, his past.

Unlike the identification model of the sense of mineness, however, the endorsement model can accommodate R.B.’s references to himself while he describes his memories in reports 1-3 and 7, as well as R.B.’s talk of ‘reliving’ and ‘re-running’ a past experience in memory in reports 3 and 4. Suppose that R.B.’s memories represent him as having experienced certain scenes in the past even though, oddly enough, R.B. does not have the sense that the remembered scenes actually ever happened. Then, it makes sense that he refers to those memories as memories ‘of him’ at a certain beach, memories of ‘having been at MIT’ (as opposed to memories of ‘someone being at MIT’), memories of ‘studying with his friends’ (as opposed to memories of ‘someone studying with his friends’) and memories ‘of himself’ walking into the room in reports 1, 2, 3 and 7 respectively. After all, R.B.’s memories do represent him as having experienced those scenes. It is just that, in virtue of having those memories, R.B. represent himself as having experienced those scenes in much the same way in which he would be representing himself as having experienced those scenes if R.B. was imagining that he experienced them in the past. Thus, the endorsement model allows us to take those references that R.B. makes to himself while describing the content of his memories in reports 1-3 and 7 at face value.

What about R.B.’s talk of ‘re-running’ and ‘reliving’ the experience of being at the MIT study lounge with his friends, and his talk of having ‘a sense of being there’ in reports 3 and 4? Suppose that, when R.B. has a memory of the scene at the study lounge, R.B. does not have the sense that the scene actually ever happened. If R.B. has a memory of the scene at the study lounge, then the way in which he will picture the lounge in virtue of having his memory will seem to R.B. to be that in which he experienced the scene when he was present in the lounge at the time. In other words, when R.B. has a memory of the scene in the study lounge, it will seem to R.B. that his memory presents to him the objects in the lounge as having had those properties which R.B. originally perceived them to have. Thus, such-and-such friend will not only appear to R.B. to have been, let us say, sitting to his right when R.B. has his memory of the scene, but it will also seem to R.B. that this is where he originally perceived his friend to be when they were all sitting in the lounge. The table in the study lounge will not only appear to R.B. to have been, let us say, blue, but it will also seem to R.B. that this is the colour he originally perceived the table to be when he was present at the lounge; and so on. This much seems to be part of what it is for a subject to have a memory of some scene. But if R.B. has a memory of the scene at the study lounge in this way, then it seems natural for R.B. to talk of having a sense of being there, and reliving the experience of being there, when he has a memory of the scene. After all, when R.B. has a memory of the scene, it will seem to R.B. that every object in the study lounge is represented in his memory as it first appeared to R.B. when he was there, at the lounge. It seems, therefore, that the reading of R.B.’s reports according to which he does not experience some of his memories as matching the past preserves the virtues of Klein and Nichols’s interpretation of those reports while, at the same time, sidestepping its difficulties.

1. **The ownership of phenomenal states**

Let us take stock. We have examined patient R.B.’s disownment of some of his memories as a piece of evidence that suggests that the experience of a memory as being the subject’s own is indeed a genuine experience. We have also been trying to determine how exactly R.B.’s reports, in which he disowns some of his memories, should be interpreted. And the proposed interpretation has been that, for each of those memories that R.B. disowns, R.B. lacks the sense that the content of that memory took place in the past; that it was real. With this proposed interpretation of patient R.B.’s reports, came a proposal about the nature of the sense of mineness for episodic memories more generally. The proposal has been that what it is for a subject to experience an episodic memory as being their own is for them to have a sense that the content of that memory did take place in the past. Where does this leave us with regards to our original question?

Our original question was why our awareness of our phenomenal states leads to the self-attribution of those states. This was not a question about our awareness of our episodic memories specifically. Thus, one might be worried that the case of patient R.B. does not give us enough reasons for believing in the experience of our phenomenal states as being our own; just a reason for believing in the experience of our memories as being our own. Similarly, one might be worried that the proposal that being aware of our episodic memories as our own consists in having the sense that those memories match the past does not have a wide enough scope. For it is unclear what this proposal tells us about what it is for us to be aware of our phenomenal states, more generally, as being our own. It seems that, unless we can offer some reasons for thinking that the justification of the sense of mineness for episodic memories offered in section 2, and the analysis of its nature offered in section 4, can be generalised to other types of phenomenal states, we will need to conclude that our progress with regards to our original question has been very limited indeed.

How could we justify, first of all, the existence of a sense of mineness in our awareness of our phenomenal states of types other than memory? One thought is that, given that the condition of disowned memory suggested that there is a sense of mineness associated with our awareness of our episodic memories, perhaps there are other pathological conditions in which the subject disowns some of their phenomenal states; conditions to which we could appeal in order to vindicate the sense of mineness. And, in fact, it does seem that we can find some disturbances of the relevant sort among the first rank symptoms of schizophrenia (Schneider 1959). In certain delusions, subjects with schizophrenia seem to be able to report some of their phenomenal states while, at the same time, disowning those states.[[16]](#endnote-16) These are so-called ‘passivity’ symptoms such as the thought insertion delusion, and delusions of ‘made’ feelings, impulses and actions. The following reports illustrate, respectively, delusions of thought insertion, delusions of made feelings, delusions of made impulses and delusions of made actions:

Report 8

As I walked along, I began to notice that the colors and shapes of everything around me were becoming very intense. And at some point, I began to realize that the houses I was passing were sending messages to me: *Look closely. You are special. You are especially bad. Look closely and you shall find. There are many things you must see. See. See.*

I didn’t hear these words as literal sounds, as though the houses were talking and I were hearing them; instead, the words just came into my head – they were ideas I was having. Yet I instinctively knew they were not *my* ideas. They belonged to the houses, and the houses had put them in my head. (Saks 2007, 27).

Report 9

I cry, tears roll down my cheeks and I look unhappy, but inside I have a cold anger because they are using me in this way, and it is not me who is unhappy, but they are projecting unhappiness onto my brain. They project upon me laughter, for no reason, and you have no idea how terrible it is to laugh and look happy and know it is not you, but their emotions. (Mellor 1970, 17).

Report 10

The sudden impulse came over me that I must do it. It was not my feeling, it came into me from the X-ray department, That was why I was sent there for implants yesterday. It was nothing to do with me, they wanted it done. So I picked up the bottle and poured it in. It seemed all I could do. (Mellor 1970, 17).

Report 11

When I reach my hand for the comb it is my hand and arm which move, and my fingers pick up the pen, but I don't control them. . . I sit there watching them move, and they are quite independent, what they do is nothing to do with me. .. I am just a puppet who is manipulated by cosmic strings. When the strings are pulled my body moves and I cannot prevent it. (Mellor 1970, 18).

There is a certain analogy between, on the one hand, reports illustrating the four delusions above and, on the other hand, patient R.B.’s reports of disowned memory. Just like, in the disowned memory case, R.B. reports to remember things even though R.B. claims that the relevant memories are not his, in these delusions, patients claim to have thoughts, feelings and impulses which are not theirs, or they claim to be the proprietors of the bodies in which certain actions are taking place while, at the same time, rejecting the claim that they are the agents of those actions.[[17]](#endnote-17)

The reason why this analogy is interesting concerns the issue of what methodology to adopt while reading reports 8-11. We approached the case of disowned memory by assuming that a charitable way of interpreting R.B.’s disownment of some of his memories is by attributing to R.B. the lack of a sense of mineness in his awareness of those memories. Similarly, then, it seems that a charitable way of reading reports of patients with the thought insertion delusion, and delusions of made feelings, impulses and actions is by assuming that they, too, lack a sense of mineness in their awareness of the relevant states: It seems to be a natural way of reading report 8, in which the patient claims that a certain thought is not ‘their idea’. It seems to be a reasonable way of reading report 9 as well, in which the patient claims that ‘it is not them’ who experiences a certain feeling. It appears to be a sensible way of reading report 10, in which the patient claims that the impulse was not ‘their feeling’. And it also seems to be a plausible way of reading report 11, in which the patient claims that what happened in their disowned action is that ‘their bodies’ (as opposed to the patient themselves) moved. But if the reason why patients with the thought insertion delusion, and delusions of made feelings, impulses and actions disown those states is that they are not aware of the relevant states as being theirs, then this diagnosis suggests that most of us, in the non-pathological condition, are indeed aware of our thoughts, feelings, impulses and actions as being our own. It suggests, in other words, that the sense of mineness is a genuine feature of our awareness of our phenomenal states.

What about the concern that we are yet to find out what it is for us to be aware of our phenomenal states, and not only our episodic memories, as being our own? Things are more complicated regarding this concern. It seems, on the one hand, that there are some reasons for thinking that the endorsement model of memory ownership can be generalised to the ownership of phenomenal states of other types. But it also seems, on the other hand, that such a generalisation will require additional conceptual resources and may, in any case, suffer from some limitations of scope.

The reason why it seems that the endorsement model can be generalised is that the notion of endorsement does not only apply to memories. It applies more generally, since endorsement is simply an experience wherein some phenomenal state is presented to the subject as fitting, merited or appropriate. And such an experience can be associated with our awareness of phenomenal states other than memories. Which phenomenal states? Those phenomenal states that we regard as being subject to the reasons, or grounds, that we have in our possession. Thus, we can think of a subject as endorsing a thought of which they are aware when the subject finds reasons for regarding the content of that thought as being correct. Similarly, we can think of a subject as endorsing a feeling of which they are aware when the subject regards the circumstances in which they are as justifying, or warranting, the feeling. And, finally, we can think of a subject as endorsing either an impulse or an action of which they are aware when the subject finds reasons for regarding the goal of that impulse, or that action, as worth pursuing. For, in all of those cases, the subject will experience the relevant mental state as being appropriate in virtue of the fact that they experience finding reasons for occupying the state. This notion of endorsement allows us to put forward a generalised version of the endorsement model of ownership. According to the generalised version of the model, a subject is aware of their phenomenal states as being their own just in case the subject has the experience of endorsing those states; the experience of finding reasons for regarding them as being appropriate.[[18]](#endnote-18) But what evidence is there to suggest that the experience of endorsing a phenomenal state is indeed the experience of the phenomenal state as being one’s own?

The main reason is that the experience of endorsement seems to be the experience that has gone missing in those conditions that we have used to motivate the existence of a sense of mineness, namely, delusions of thought insertion, and delusions of made feelings, impulses and actions.[[19]](#endnote-19) The hypothesis that patients with the thought insertion delusion do not endorse their ‘inserted’ thoughts accounts for some references that patients make to those thoughts as being representationally neutral. The patient in report 8, for example, refers to their inserted thought as an ‘idea’.[[20]](#endnote-20) The expression suggests that the thought is not being experienced as the type of mental state that needs to match the world. After all, entertaining an idea will not bring with it the feeling that there are reasons for regarding the content of that idea as being correct. It seems, then, that if thought insertion patients experience their inserted thoughts as being representationally neutral, they will not find reasons for regarding the content of those thoughts as being correct; they will not endorse them. Furthermore, the hypothesis that patients with delusions of made feelings do not endorse their disowned feelings squares with the fact that, in report 9, the patient claims to behave as if they felt happy ‘for no reason’. If the patient is not endorsing their feeling of happiness, then they are not regarding the feeling as warranted by the circumstances. And if they are not regarding the feeling as warranted by the circumstances, then you would expect them to claim that they find no reason for having the disowned feeling. Likewise, the hypothesis that patients with delusions of made impulses do not endorse their disowned impulses squares with the fact that, in report 10, the patient claims to have felt an impulse to pour the bottle because ‘they wanted it done’. If the patient is not endorsing the impulse to pour the bottle, then you would expect the patient to say that someone else, and not themselves, wanted the bottle to be poured. For, in that scenario, the patient would not find reasons of their own that could motivate their impulse. And, finally, the hypothesis that patients with delusions of made actions do not endorse their disowned actions accounts for the fact that, in report 11, the patient claims to experience a bodily movement that ‘has nothing to do with them’. If the patient is not endorsing the action to comb their hair, for example, then they are not regarding the state of affairs in which their hair has been combed as a goal to be pursued. But if they are not regarding that state of affairs as a goal to be pursued, then it is no wonder that the patient says that the combing action has nothing to do with them. After all, in that scenario, the patient would not be able to produce any reasons which recommend the action of combing their hair.

The extension of the endorsement model for the ownership of memories to the ownership of thoughts, impulses, feelings and actions, however, will require further work. Notice that, while making the case that the experience of endorsement has gone missing in delusions of thought insertion, and delusions of made feelings, impulses and actions, I have been assuming that the relevant patients are aware of their non-endorsed thoughts as thoughts, of their non-endorsed feelings as feelings, of their non-endorsed impulses as impulses, and of their non-endorsed actions as actions. After all, what they claim to have is mental states of those types, and not something else. This means that, despite lacking the experience that the mental states of which they are aware are appropriate given the reasons they have for being in those states, these patients must have some kind of awareness of those states which has not been disturbed. What a complete generalisation of the endorsement model requires, therefore, is an account of what this type of awareness amounts to. As it stands, the generalised account remains incomplete, even though there are reasons for thinking that the account can be developed in the direction of explaining our felt ownership of phenomenal states other than memories.

1. **Conclusion**

What all this means for our project in this chapter is that the advocate of the sense of mineness can make a case for the existence of such an experience, and they can offer an informative proposal about the nature of it, at least in the case of memories. This allows them to draw a distinction between two experiences that, arguably, are involved in our awareness of our memories. These are the experience of a memory as being instantiated, and the experience of the memory as being one’s own. The advocate of the sense of mineness can use this distinction in order to, among other things, account for why our awareness of our memories leads to the self-attribution of those memories. We have also seen some reasons for thinking that, more generally, the distinction can be drawn for phenomenal states of other types, such as thoughts, feelings, impulses and actions. If this is correct, then the advocate of the sense of mineness can also use the distinction to explain why our awareness of those states leads to their self-attribution.

However, even if the model of the sense of mineness for memories offered here can eventually be generalised with success, this will only be done at a cost; a cost that should be disclosed. The distinction drawn by the advocate of the sense of mineness seems to be, on reflection, a sort of double-edged sword. On the one hand, the distinction allows the advocate of the sense of mineness to account for a fact about the relation between inner awareness and the attribution of phenomenal states; a fact that others will have trouble explaining without the conceptual resource of the sense of mineness. But, on the other hand, the distinction also brings up a difficult question for the advocate of the sense of mineness; a question with which others will not need to concern themselves if they do not accept the existence of a sense of mineness. This is the question of why, in our awareness of our phenomenal states, the two experiences distinguished by the advocate of the sense of mineness should go together in the first instance. If our awareness of our phenomenal states does involve two different experiences, and not one, then why do those experiences go hand in hand in episodes of inner awareness?

The endorsement model of the sense of mineness does not yield an answer to this question, but it does indicate where such an answer may be found. Suppose that the sense of mineness associated with our awareness of our phenomenal states is the experience of endorsing those states. Then, the issue of why experiencing the occurrence of a phenomenal state tends to go together with experiencing the state as one’s own is really the issue of why we endorse those phenomenal states that we are aware of having. If the endorsement model is correct, then the challenge for the advocate of the sense of mineness is to specify the function that the experience of endorsement is supposed to have in inner awareness. How manageable this challenge is for the advocate of the sense of mineness may ultimately depend on the commitments that the opponent of the sense of mineness will need to acquire in order to explain why we self-attribute those phenomenal states which are revealed to us in inner awareness.

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1. I will use the term ‘phenomenal state’ to refer to mental states with phenomenal properties; states for which there is such a thing as what it is like to be in them. I will also assume that there is a phenomenology of agency, and that there is a phenomenology of thought. See (Bayne 2008) for a discussion of the former, and (Bayne and Montague 2011) for a discussion of the latter. Accordingly, I will include actions and thoughts in the category of phenomenal states. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Interestingly, Georg Lichtenberg takes his disagreement with Descartes on the nature of introspection to be precisely about the issue of whether being aware of a mental state and being aware of a mental state as one’s own are one and the same experience or not. Lichtenberg seems to think that Descartes is wrong in assuming that they are identical experiences (1990, 168). The issue of whether being aware of a phenomenal state and being aware of a phenomenal state as one’s own are one and the same experience or not hinges on one’s criterion for the individuation of properties. For, presumably, experiences are properties of the subject. In what follows, I will assume that property P and property Q are identical if and only if, necessarily, for any object x, x has P if and only if x has Q. On this criterion for the individuation of properties, the question becomes that of whether a subject could be aware of a phenomenal state without being aware of it as their own. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. The distinction between episodic and semantic memory is introduced by Endel Tulving in (Tulving 1972), and it has undergone several revisions since then. For our purposes here, it will suffice to characterize episodic memory as the type of memory that we have of events, or states of affairs, which we experienced in the past. By contrast, we can think of semantic memory as the type of memory that we have of events which we have learnt to have taken place in the past, and of states of affairs which we have learnt to have been the case in the past. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Does the extreme rarity of the disorder diminish its significance? The appeal to disowned memory will be made to argue that the experience of a memory, and that of a memory as one’s own, can come apart in a subject. Since this is arguably sufficient to show that the two experiences are distinct, it does not seem to matter whether, as a matter of fact, only one subject has suffered this disorder or whether, by contrast, this is a relatively common disorder. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. In what follows, I will speak of scenes and states of affairs as the intentional objects of episodic memories interchangeably. I will be assuming that scenes are best construed as states of affairs, though nothing in the discussion that follows should hinge on that assumption. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. For the sake of brevity, not all of R.B.’s reports cited in the literature are reproduced in this list. Reports 4 and 5, for example, are part of a longer exchange between Klein and patient R.B. in (Klein and Nichols 2012). As far as I can see, however, those reports which are not reproduced here are neutral on whether the correct interpretation of R.B. is that discussed in section 3, or it is the interpretation to be proposed in section 4. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Some of the claims that Klein and Nichols make about R.B. suggest that they are adopting this approach. Thus, they claim that R.B. lacks the feeling that the memories that he experiences ‘belong to him’ (Klein and Nichols 2012, 684). Likewise, they claim that those memories lack a ‘sense of mineness’ (Klein and Nichols 2012, 677). [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. See (Billon and Kriegel 2015) for a defence of the coherence of the something-extra approach, and the coherence of the something-entirely-different approach, in other cases of disowned mental states. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. André Billon and Uriah Kriegel motivate the intuition that there is something common in a subject’s experience of their various phenomenal states along the lines sketched above in (Billon and Kriegel 2015, 29-30). As far as I understand their view, however, they also think that the awareness of the occurrence of a phenomenal state, and the awareness of it as the subject’s own, are necessarily co-instantiated. On the criterion for the individuation of properties that is being assumed here, this turns out not to be a consistent position. (See note 2.) [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. I am grateful to an anonymous referee for pointing out this ambiguity. The referee also suggests a further reading of the identification model according to which R.B. lacks the sense of being the person who undergoes a current experience, namely, the memory being expressed. As far as I can see, however, there is no evidence to suggest that R.B. lacks the sense of being the person who is the bearer of the memory. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Two anonymous referees are concerned that the objections raised against the identification model below are too reliant on the precise wording of R.B.’s reports. The thought is that perhaps we should not assume that R.B.’s reports are raw transcriptions of what it feels like to him to have those memories. I acknowledge that relying on first-person reports of mental states for investigating the phenomenology associated with those states is a methodology with some obvious limitations in pathological cases. But this worry cuts both ways. To the extent that it is problematic to rely on the details of R.B.’s reports for challenging the identification model of memory ownership, it is also problematic to make use of this type of data in support of the model. I take it that the project in which Klein, Nichols and myself are all involved is that of finding a reading of R.B.’s reports which, overall, makes the most sense of the highest proportion of remarks in those reports. In order to pursue this project, it seems reasonable to trust R.B.’s comments as expressions of his memories, and not as expressions of beliefs to which he has arrived through inferences grounded on those memories (except, of course, where R.B.’s reports give us a clear reason to believe that he has performed such inferences). [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. An anonymous referee raises the question of what it is for a subject to be aware of a mental state as a memory over and above being aware of the mental state as representing the past. The worry is that, unless there is such a distinction, it is hard to see why R.B. refers to his disowned memories as memories when he lacks the sense that the content of those memories matches the past. (As we will see in section 5, an analogous question should be raised for our awareness of phenomenal states of other types.) My own view is that memories represent themselves as having a certain causal history, that is, as originating in the subject’s past experiences. For that reason, I am inclined to think that the awareness of a mental state as a memory is the awareness of it as originating in a past experience of the subject. The idea would be, then, that R.B. enjoys this awareness even though he lacks the awareness of the past experience as having been veridical. I, however, I cannot elaborate this idea here for reasons of space. For details, see (Fernández 2006). [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. I take it that this is also the experience to which R.B. is referring when, in report 7, he claims that the scene concerned feels like something he was told about by someone else. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. In (Klein 2012, 493), R.B. is cited, instead, as saying ‘As if I am looking at a movie of someone else’s vacation’ in that report. Similar considerations to those that follow will apply whether R.B. actually used an analogy with the experience of looking at a photograph or he used an analogy with the experience of looking at a movie. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Interestingly, Klein agrees that, when R.B. has an episodic memory that he disowns, having that memory is not experienced by him as an act of recollection (Klein 2015, 19). [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. The diagnostic manual of the American Psychiatric Association DSM-5 characterises a delusion as ‘a ‘fixed belief that is not amenable to change in light of conflicting evidence’ (2013, 87). I will assume this conception of delusions for the purposes of the present discussion. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. I do not mean to suggest that the sources of these conditions are also analogous. In R.B.’s case, for example, there seems to be no suggestion of any form of mental illness being present. The analogy that I am drawing only concerns the structure of the patients’ reports. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Since the relevant notion of endorsement does not apply to those mental states that we do not regard as being subject to reasons, the model cannot explain our experience of ownership for mental states such as episodes of imagination or dreams. I am grateful to an anonymous referee for pointing this out. The model cannot explain our experience of ownership regarding sensations, and regarding generalised emotions (that is, feeling happy as opposed to feeling happy about such-and-such thing), for the same reason. Whether this feature of the model is a limitation in scope or not will depend on whether there are in fact cases of disowned mental states of these types. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. The idea that the experience of endorsement is missing in cases of disowned thoughts is not new; neither is the idea that it is missing in cases of disowned actions. For details on the former idea, see (Fernández 2010). The latter idea is explored, for example, in (Graham and Stephens 2000). [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Other patients with thought insertion refer to their inserted thoughts as ‘pictures’ (Mellor 1970, 17) and ‘pieces of information’ (Hoerl 2001, 190). [↑](#endnote-ref-20)