

narrative practices and the social construction of self in childhood

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Of all the intersections of narrative and self, perhaps none is more common than that which occurs in ordinary talk when people relate to one another their personal experiences. Indeed, telling other people about events that have happened to oneself may well be a cultural universal. We know, at least, that versions of this type of storytelling occur in diverse cultural traditions in the United States and around the world.¹ One encounters in the anthropological and folklore literatures narrators who heard witches in the dead of night; witnessed sudden, fatal fights in bars; outwitted foreign intruders or school principals; coped with errant children; or survived hunting accidents, complications of childbirth, or stone-hard biscuits. Despite the diversity of events recounted, despite substantial differences in verbal form and style of performance, all these narrators lay claim to some personal experience and, in so doing, reveal something about themselves. Stories of this sort, then, provide one widely available means by which people create, interpret, and publicly project culturally constituted images of self in face-to-face interaction.

The importance of personal storytelling hinges not just on its ready availability, however. There may be a special affinity between narrative and self such that narrative can be said to play a privileged role in the process of self-construction. This notion is implicit in work spanning a wide range of disciplines, with a variety of specific proposals being offered as to the sources of this affinity.

One source of the narrative-self affinity is a shared temporal dimension: both the experiences of self and the events in a narrative are organized with respect to time (Ricoeur 1984). The narrative form is thus especially well suited to representing that basic psychological dimension of the self that Hallowell (1955) called "self-continuity." Hallowell used this term to refer to an individual's capacity to relate temporally distinct experiences through personal memories within an organized structure, a process that is a functional requirement for the experience of self-awareness.²

Another source of affinity between narrative and self centers on the capacity for representing human action. Gergen (1986) has suggested that narrative is particularly well suited to gener-

Narrative, self, and face-to-face interaction all intersect in everyday storytelling practices in which children and caregivers make claims to personal experiences. This article examines such practices as a site for the social construction of self in early childhood. Drawing upon excerpts of narrative talk from a variety of cultural traditions in the United States, we describe the self-relevant meanings and processes entailed in three particular narrative practices. {narrative, self, childhood socialization, language socialization, ethnopsychology}

ating understanding of human action because it replicates linguistically the process by which understanding is achieved. Gergen views understanding as an interactional achievement arising out of sequences of coordinated and evaluated action. Such narrative properties as causal linkages between events and evaluative closure parallel key features entailed in the process of understanding: the sequence of interdependent actions and the adjudicated conclusion. Applying these ideas to self-understanding, Gergen argues that the rules of narrative creation within a culture form "a set of ready-made intelligibilities; in effect, they offer a range of potentials for the social construction of self" (1986:31).

The foregoing arguments focus on narrative as a distinctive form for organizing propositions and on self as an entity enduring over time. They make general claims that are apparently intended to apply to a wide range of narrative genres, regardless of medium. Intellectual traditions that study talk and face-to-face interaction offer additional perspectives on the narrative-self affinity, perspectives of special relevance to stories told in a conversational medium. Conversation analysts have made the point that "[conversational] stories are about—have to do with—the people who are telling them and hearing them" (Sacks's April 24, 1968, lecture notes, cited in Shuman 1986:195). When a person tells a conversational story about a witnessed event, for example, the point of telling the story is not to recount the event but to show how the narrator has made that event into something in his or her life.

This perspective implies a dynamic situatedness of self in face-to-face interaction, a view similar to that embodied in Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical model of the self. According to this sociologically based model, when a person encounters another person, he or she projects a definition of the situation and thereby makes implicit or explicit claims to be a certain kind of person. The self as performed character emerges as a by-product of the interactive process of sustaining a definition of the situation. While self-expressive messages are entailed in every social encounter, when the encounter involves informal talk, self-expression is accomplished largely through "replayings," that is, recountings of personal experience (Goffman 1974). Moreover, the "biographical facts" or personal experiences embodied in these recountings are a variety of information preserve to which the narrator expects to control access while in the presence of others (Goffman 1971). Like other territories of the self, information preserves are used in a dual way—to maintain respect and to establish relationships—and they vary both across cultures and across situations and among participants within cultures.

In sum, it is clear from this brief and partial sketch of proposed sources of affinity between narrative and self that different intellectual traditions bring to this problem differing conceptions of self and narrative. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss these differences in detail or to identify points of articulation. This sketch is offered instead by way of rationale for our focus on conversational stories of personal experience. In that these diverse proposals converge in a narrative genre in which self, narrative, and face-to-face interaction all intersect, they provide a rationale for treating conversational stories of personal experience as an important site for the social construction of self. In addition, the fact that personal storytelling is widely practiced but variably constituted recommends it as a focus for comparative investigation.

Although we believe that personal storytelling plays an important role in the social construction of self throughout the life span, we are especially interested in the beginnings of this process. There is evidence that conversational stories of personal experience are available early in life to children from a variety of cultural backgrounds (see, for example, Eisenberg 1985; Engel 1986; Heath 1983; Miller and Moore 1989; Miller and Sperry 1988a; Potts 1989; Preece 1987; Scollon and Scollon 1981). The process of self-construction may be especially visible in early childhood, when it first gets under way. Bruner (1986) has suggested that stories are one of the first cultural constraints on the nature of selfhood. Moreover, caregivers may be more likely to reveal their implicit assumptions about the nature of personal experience when interacting with the young, who are likely to violate those assumptions.

The purpose of this article, then, is to explore in a preliminary fashion some of the ways in which personal storytelling serves as a resource for young children as they come to express and understand who they are. This article is part of a larger project whose goal is to develop a comparative programmatic for studying the ways in which narratives of personal experience function in the socialization and acquisition processes (Miller and Moore 1989). We first locate the problem of narrative and self-construction at the intersection of two domains of comparative inquiry, namely, language socialization and ethnopsychology. Then we describe several narrative practices that seem plausibly relevant to the task of self-construction, drawing upon excerpts of talk from a variety of cultural traditions within the United States. Because so little is known about children's naturally occurring stories (Miller and Sperry 1988a; Preece 1987) or about the cultural organization of narrative practices involving children (Miller and Moore 1989), we will, of necessity, raise more questions than we can answer.

perspectives from language socialization The study of language socialization rests on two related assumptions about ordinary talk: first, that it is a pervasive, orderly, and culturally organized feature of social life in every culture (M. Goodwin 1982a; Gumperz and Hymes 1972; Hymes 1967; Sacks 1984 [1965-71]); and second, that it is a major, if not the major, mechanism of socialization (Ochs and Schieffelin 1984; Miller and Sperry 1988b; Sapir 1949[1933]; Schieffelin and Ochs 1986; Vygotsky 1978, 1987[1934]). Although there are general properties of language—propositionality, representational capability, and indexicality—that make it an especially effective purveyor of cultural meanings (Miller 1987), little is known as yet about the socializing implications of particular, culturally organized forms of discourse. Elsewhere we have emphasized the socializing potential of the informal, mundane, and often pervasive narrative accounts that people give of their personal experiences, and we have argued that even when such stories are told informally and without didactic intent, even when they are not addressed specifically to the young, they may play a powerful role in childhood socialization (Miller and Moore 1989). The issue of how personal stories figure into the social construction of self is thus linked to the more general question of the role that stories of personal experience play in childhood socialization, which is, in turn, linked to the fundamental problem of articulating the socializing implications of particular, culturally constituted species of talk.

From this perspective, the personal storytelling practices in which children participate constitute situated socializing contexts through which patterned messages are communicated. The particular version of personal storytelling that is available in the child's culture and the ways in which the child is exposed to that version together form a culturally organized path of access into storytelling (Miller and Moore 1989). If we take the child's point of view as he or she moves along that path, then local narrative practices become a resource to the extent that the growing child resists, accedes to, seizes upon, or in some way makes use of the self-relevant messages embodied therein.

This perspective is compatible with the Vygotskian view that sociocultural meanings are acquired by using language for particular purposes in socially defined activities (Vygotsky 1978, 1987[1934]; Wertsch 1985). In particular, it shares with Rogoff (In press) an emphasis on the interrelated contributions that caregiver(s) and child make to the child's socialization through their mutual participation in semiotically mediated routine practices. A narrative practice, then, is both social and symbolic. It involves recurring conjunctions of child and caregiver mediated by the activity of telling a story of personal experience.

From a comparative standpoint, however, we want to stress several points that are not necessarily associated with a Vygotskian perspective. First, caregivers may or may not take a guiding or scaffolding role in relation to the novice narrator. One of the tasks of cross-cultural work is to identify the varieties of ways in which caregivers interact with young children in narrative contexts. Second, as Goodnow (1990) has pointed out, children are not necessarily eager or

compliant learners. They may actively seek out opportunities to participate in personal storytelling, vigorously resist such direction as the caregiver provides, or respond in any number of other ways. Finally, although Vygotsky emphasized cognitive outcomes, the consequences of routine participation in semiotic practices may well extend into such affective domains as emotion management (Miller and Sperry 1988b), the creation of social identity (Holland and Valisiner 1988), and the emergence of the self-analytic function in psychoanalytic treatment (Nye 1988). This article raises the possibility that children develop a means for understanding and expressing who they are through their routine participation in personal storytelling.

perspectives from ethnopsychology From an ethnopsychological perspective, the problem of stories as a resource for self-construction is linked to two issues. First is a concern with cross-cultural variation in native notions of self and personhood and in conceptions of development and change through the life cycle. Among the dimensions that have emerged as relevant to comparative analysis is the self as isolated individual in contrast to the self as embedded in social relationships. Later we will argue that children's appropriations of others' stories as their own reveal a sense of personal experience that extends beyond the skin and overlaps with another's experience. Second is the methodological concern about how best to study personhood cross-culturally. Here, language has emerged as a crucial tool in the ethnopsychological enterprise, as is amply illustrated by the papers in White and Kirkpatrick (1985). This reliance on language as a window into native systems for interpreting self extends beyond terminologies, metaphors, and idioms to ethnopsychological propositions (Lutz 1985).³ The latter may at times be made explicit but are more often implicit in ordinary talk, leading to the problem of how to construct and validate descriptions of implicit knowledge. Lutz (1985:40) has argued that "the use of implicit knowledge can be convincingly demonstrated by reference to commonly occurring sequences of verbal and nonverbal behavior in everyday contexts."

Stories of personal experience provide one such sequence, a sequence particularly rich in self-relevant meanings both implicit and explicit. Although these stories, unlike other narrative genres (such as folk tales and histories), are explicitly self-referential, the significance of the narrator's experience is not necessarily drawn explicitly. Linguistic analyses of stories of personal experience reveal that a host of devices, drawn from all levels of the linguistic system, are used to "evaluate" or convey the point of a story (Labov 1972; Labov and Waletzky 1967; Polanyi 1985) while at the same time conveying implicit evaluative messages about who the narrator is. Just as choices of linguistic options can index culturally constituted categories and affective stances (Irvine 1982; Ochs 1988, 1990; Silverstein 1976, 1985), so can such choices index culturally constituted evaluations of self.

From a comparative perspective, it is important to note that the evaluative dimension of personal storytelling is highly variable cross-culturally. Several researchers have emphasized that both the selection of reportable events and the deployment of evaluative techniques to appraise those events are subject to culture-specific norms (Brady 1980; Robinson 1981; Rosaldo 1986; Watson 1973).⁴ Our own research (Miller and Sperry 1988a; Potts 1989) as well as that of Peterson and McCabe (1983) shows that young children are highly skilled at using evaluative devices (for example, reported speech, explicit reference to emotion, intensifiers) to convey their attitude toward a recounted event.

In sum, although personal storytelling can be examined for its socializing implications with respect to various domains—morality or affect, for example—we focus on how personal storytelling functions in the social construction of self. We propose that children develop a means for expressing and understanding who they are through their routine participation in culturally organized narrative practices in which personal experiences are recounted. Furthermore, we propose that narratives of personal experience can provide access to culturally specific images of self as well as to the ways in which those images are conveyed and evaluated. Because narrative accounts typically employ a range of evaluative devices to convey their point or sig-

nificance, narratives of personal experience may be particularly useful as a means of gaining access to implicit propositions about the self.

In the remainder of the article we describe three narrative practices that seem plausibly relevant to the task of self-construction: (1) caregivers tell stories about a child in the child's presence; (2) caregivers intervene in a child's storytelling; and (3) children appropriate others' stories as their own. In support of these descriptions we draw upon detailed excerpts of everyday narrative talk involving children and caregivers from a variety of cultural traditions in the United States. The focus on these particular narrative practices is meant to be illustrative only. It is intended neither as a comprehensive description of narrative practices in these particular communities nor as a claim that narrative practices are similarly constituted elsewhere.

telling stories about the child

Our first example of a narrative practice germane to the issue at hand comes from the urban, working-class community of South Baltimore, where one of us has done ethnographic research on early language socialization (Miller 1982, 1986; Miller and Garvey 1984; Miller, Nemoianu, and DeJong 1986). This research focused on girls who were observed longitudinally from roughly two to three years of age. The residents of this community are descended from people of German, Polish, Irish, Italian, and Appalachian origin, work in blue-collar or low-skilled jobs, and live and raise their children in extended families. Personal storytelling is not only a major form of adult talk in this community but also constitutes a significant part of the young child's verbal environment (Miller and Moore 1989; Miller and Sperry 1987). Moreover, by the time children are two-and-a-half years old, they are able to tell incipient stories of personal experience (Miller and Sperry 1988a).

One subset of adult storytelling in South Baltimore that would seem to be especially salient and useful to the child in the task of self-construction is the telling of stories about the child's experience. These are addressed to another person in the child's presence and make up about one-quarter of our corpus of mother stories.⁵ In the following story, told in the presence of 23-month-old Amy and her five-year-old cousin, Kris, Amy's mother relates to the researcher an event involving her boyfriend, Johnny, whom Amy habitually calls "Daddy." This story focuses on Amy's clever, assertive retort to Johnny's efforts to prod her into teasing her mother.⁶

Example 1

(Participants: A = Amy; K = Kris; M = Amy's mother, Marlene; R = researcher. Setting: A's home. Video-recorded. A is sitting on her mother's lap, and K has just playfully bitten her toe.)

1. M to R: Johnny told her the other night, he says to her, "Isn't your mother a creep?"
2. (A reaches for and grabs stuffed pig, gazes at M)
3. A to M: Mar! Mar!
4. M to R: And he kept tellin' her all these things and she says, "Ná huh." She says, "Yóu are, Daddy. Yóu're the creep."
5. R: (laughs)
6. M: That's what she told him. He like to come off that chair.
7. (A slides onto sofa next to M)
8. A to M: Mar (unintelligible)/
9. M to A: Yeah.
10. A to M: Yeah/ (shifts gaze downward)
11. M: Yeah, he says, "Tell your mother she's a creep." And finally she's just sittin' there takin' it and takin' it and he said, "Tell her, tell your mother she's a creep." That's when she said, "Núh uh, Daddy." She said, "Yóu're the creep."
12. (A turns her attention to M's pocketbook)

This practice of telling stories about the child in the child's presence occurred in routine contexts (for example, the mother arrived home from work and the grandmother recounted to her stories about the child whom she had taken care of that day). But because most of the recorded stories were addressed to the researcher, it is important to say a few words about her relationship with the families. They knew her initially as an outsider who was interested in child

development and wanted to understand how children learn to talk.⁷ Eventually, over the course of more than a year of frequent visiting to make observations or talk with the mothers, the relationship acquired some of the elements of friendship. For example, the researcher was invited to birthday parties and baby showers; the families got acquainted with her sister. There were thus several reasons why a mother might regard the researcher as a good audience for stories about the child: she was a familiar person with an avowed interest in the child, and she was uninformed about the child's latest exploits, thereby providing an opportunity to recount them afresh. Given these considerations, stories about the child addressed to the researcher are perhaps best regarded as stories for a familiar guest, containing messages for public consumption.

Several kinds of self-relevant messages are entailed in telling stories about the child. Most obvious are messages at the level of content. In this sense, the stories are like a series of snapshots of the child protagonist in action: they contain specific images of the child and, by implication, of the parent, images that recur across stories and across children. Mothers recounted their children's achievements—getting weaned, attempting to sew, burping the baby, drawing a circle, remembering to stay on the sidewalk. They recounted mishaps in which an active or spirited child fell off her bike, bumped her head, or burned her arm and they themselves responded coolly and competently. They described acts of mischief in which a disobedient child broke an ashtray or bed, pinched her mother, wrote on the wall, or dumped salt, pepper, and peanut butter into the pancake batter. In these stories the child was portrayed as "bad" but also as quick, enterprising, and funny, the mother as exasperated but amused.

Still other stories about these two-year-old girls focused on their verbal abilities. These were quite likely told for the researcher's benefit, given her expressed interest in language learning. However, this does not account for the content or unique rendering of the incidents reported. In a few stories the mother drew attention to the child's cleverness or imagination, as when a pretending child asked her grandfather if he wanted to smoke or referred to herself by an invented name. But the majority of cases resembled Example 1: the child was portrayed as speaking up or talking back, as "mouthy," feisty, or sharp. This is consistent with earlier findings concerning the high value placed on self-assertion and self-defense in this community (Miller 1986; Miller and Sperry 1987, 1988b).

Aside from providing a source of information about the child's attributes and activities, telling stories about the child conveys messages about the significance and organization of her experiences. By consistently telling stories about some experiences rather than others, caregivers convey which ones are reportable. By creating a particular rendition of the experience, they show what the component events are, how the events are related, and what is important about them.

In Example 1 the narrator starts with Johnny's repeated efforts to goad Amy into calling her mother a "creep." Amy responds to this provocation by calling Johnny a "creep." The narrator organizes both the initial account of the event (1.1, 1.4) and its recycling (1.11) around a reported conversational exchange of a particular sort: an insult-return insult sequence. Moreover, in line 1.6 she singles out Amy's retort for comment, thereby highlighting it further. She thus structures her narration to establish Amy's quick-thinking assertiveness as the "point" of the story. The event is represented more fully than this, however. In her account, the mother links Johnny's insult and the child's retort through Amy's subjective experience of "takin' it" (1.11)—that is, of enduring repeated offenses that finally impel her to act. As she describes it, the event ends with Johnny's astonished reaction to Amy's retort, "He like to come off that chair" (1.6).⁸ The mother's narrative about the child thus provides a model for interpreting the child's response, connecting it to someone else's prior actions, to the child's own (inferred) subjective experience, and to its interpersonal consequences.

Still other messages are deeply implicit in this particular narrative practice. By singling out a two-year-old child and making her the focus of a story, the mother treats her as an actor in her own right, as someone whose experiences are tellable. She publicly spotlights the child in a

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way that other cultures might regard as unseemly or even dangerous. According to LeVine (1990), for example, Gusii mothers of southwestern Kenya give little visual and verbal attention to their infants as a way of protecting them from the witchcraft of envious neighbors. Although LeVine did not investigate narrative practices—in fact, the ethnographic literature rarely touches on narrative practices vis-à-vis children—his account suggests that any focus on children, narrative or otherwise, would be avoided. By contrast, the kind of narrative attention to young children observed in South Baltimore seems to reflect families' public pride and pleasure in their offspring and is consistent with the practice of talking directly to young children and with the elaborate celebration of children's birthdays and child-centered holidays such as Christmas. The youngest member of an extended family is especially valued and likely to be the focus of family attention.

Another facet of this narrative practice that requires comment is that stories about the child are told in the child's presence, thereby raising issues of entitlement to tell stories. The situation illustrates how tellings get organized when "parties who have experienced an event together are jointly in a position to describe it to someone else" (C. Goodwin 1981:159). In the intimate world of the mother-child relationship, as in other intimate relationships—such as those between spouses or friends (C. Goodwin 1981; Sacks's October 19, 1971, lecture notes, cited in C. Goodwin 1981; Shuman 1986)—many experiences are shared, thereby establishing extensive rights of co-ownership. While joint rights to tell a story apply whenever two persons have shared an experience, the conditions giving rise to joint ownership are more likely to occur in intimate relationships than in nonintimate ones. Thus, the daily practice of telling stories about the child's experience in the child's presence indexes the intimacy of the mother-child relationship.

However, the relationship between the mother and the very young child, unlike other intimate relationships, is markedly asymmetrical, thereby bestowing on the mother greater claim to the story. This was most apparent at the youngest ages, when the children made few verbal contributions to the stories, and the mothers tended to treat the children as nonparticipants, only rarely directing talk to them in the course of relating a story to an adult interlocutor.⁹ In contrast, in the conversations described by Charles Goodwin (1981), adult narrators constructed turns that provided for the inclusion of the knowing recipient as well as the unknowing recipient. In effect, the mothers treated the co-present very young child as an unknowing recipient of her own experience. By responding routinely in this way, the mothers indexed the child's status as a child, as someone not fully in possession of her experience.¹⁰

To summarize, so far we have tried to show that telling stories about the child in the child's presence is rich in self-relevant meanings at a number of different levels. Caregivers not only communicated specific images of the children, images reflecting wider systems of (sub)cultural meaning in the community, but furnished models for the interpretation and construction of experience. By engaging in this particular narrative practice they also indexed implicit cultural notions about intimacy and the nature of children.

However, the question remains as to whether the children made use of these messages in the process of self-construction. Although we cannot prove that they did so, we did find that by the age of two-and-a-half the children were four times more likely to make related verbal contributions to stories about themselves than to stories not about themselves.¹¹ In the following example the mother recounts to the researcher a fight involving Beth (30 months old) and her younger cousin, Edith.

Example 2

(Participants: B = Beth; M = Beth's mother; R = researcher. Setting: B's home. Video-recorded. M has been complaining about B's younger cousin, Edith, who is prone to temper tantrums; B is gazing at M.)

1. *M to R:* She got Beth on the gr—(laughs). Beth was bent over pickin' the cards up in the kitchen. And she was pullin' Beth's hair an—(laughs)
2. *R to M:* Oh!
3. *M to R:* And goin' like this, "Aaah, aaah!" (shrieks, then laughs)

4. (B gazes at R, laughs, turns gaze back to M)
5. *M to R*: Beth won't hit a little baby back. I told her that. But she did—Edith must've hurt her on her hair or somethin'. And she bit her.
6. *R*: (laughs)
7. *M to R*: (quickly) Not that hard. I don't know.
8. *B to M, R*: See/ Pull my hair like that/ Pull my hair like that too/ (turning back of head to audience and demonstrating, pulling her own hair)
9. *M to R*: I, I said, "No, she's only a little baby, hon. Don't bite her."
10. *M to B*: Beth, who pulled your hair?
11. *B to M*: Yeah/ Like that too/ There/ (turning back of head to audience and demonstrating, pulling her own hair)
12. (B gazes at R)
13. *M to B*: Umhm.
14. *R to B*: And what did you do to Edith then?
15. *B to R*: I do nothin' a her/ (standing up to look out window)
16. *M to B*: You did too. You bit her.
17. *B to M*: No, I didn't/ (gazes at M)

In this example Beth participates in the telling in a number of ways: gazing at the narrator (2.4, 2.17) and the addressee (2.4, 2.12), laughing (2.4), volunteering more information about the event (2.8, 2.11), and asserting a version of the event that conflicts with her mother's (2.15, 2.17).

The children's greater engagement in stories about themselves than in stories not about themselves seems to reflect, in part, a different participant structure that has emerged by this age in stories about the child. The mothers are more likely to tell such stories in a way that includes the child as a "ratified" participant (Goffman 1981).¹² In example 2, the mother asks Beth a question about the event (2.10) and responds to Beth's contributions (2.13, 2.16). In another example, Tara's mother recounted a story in which Tara (30 months old) got upset because her baby doll had fallen on the floor, then turned to the child and asked, "Were you cryin'?" thereby inviting Tara's participation. Thus, added to whatever interest value a story about the child may have for the child are the caregiver's invitations to participate. Both factors contribute to a special responsiveness on the part of children in South Baltimore to stories other people tell about them.

Intervening in children's storytelling

Telling stories about the child in the child's presence is not the only source of information about how to shape an account of one's experience. In a second and related narrative practice, a caregiver or older child intervenes in a child's efforts to tell a story of personal experience. Our preliminary observations of children from low-income African-American, working-class white, and immigrant Chinese backgrounds in Chicago suggest that caregivers in each of these communities routinely engage in this kind of narrative practice with three- to four-year-old children. By this age the children are quite capable of initiating and elaborating stories of personal experience. Here again the caregiver affirms the child as an actor whose experiences are tellable while at the same time indexing the special relationship between caregiver and child by virtue of which the caregiver gains the right to (co-)tell the story (see C. Goodwin 1981; Shuman 1986; Sacks's fall 1971 lecture notes, cited in C. Goodwin 1981 and Shuman 1986). The practice of editing the child's narration also indexes the child's status as a child. While granted rights as speaker, he or she is not granted full rights as author (Goffman 1981). The child is treated as someone who is not yet a competent narrator of his or her experiences, not yet, in short, a full-fledged person.

The caregiver's interventions may support the rendition offered by the child, with caregiver and child collaboratively developing and elaborating a story. Or the caregiver may challenge the child's rendition, asserting a different perspective on the remembered event. Either way, the caregiver communicates, perhaps directly and insistently, perhaps subtly and unobtru-

sively, his or her version of the child's experience. The caregiver may do this by asking questions or making comments that direct the child toward those aspects of the experience that he or she regards as important. A striking example comes from an African-American mother who was trying to prod her son (35 months old) into telling the researcher about his visit to a fire station (Potts 1989). In this lengthy episode (70+ turns) she asked him a series of questions about interesting or novel aspects of the experience: "What did you hear?" "What about the noise the truck made? What kind of noise was that?" "Did they blow the horn?" "Did you see the fire hose?" "Was it a dog in the fire station?" The child insisted on talking instead about such mundane matters as the firemen's beds, blankets, and pillows and, especially, about their toilets. The mother tried in vain to deflect him from the last topic: "And besides the toilets, Calvin! What else did you see?"; and a bit later, "That's enough of that"; and then again, "I'm so sick of the bathrooms and the toilets"; and, finally, "That's not important!" By intervening in these ways, the mother carved out for the child the reportable or publicly claimable parts of his experience.

In another example from the same community, seven-year-old Latoya intervenes in an account offered by her niece, Justina (33 months). At issue is the reason Justina and her mother have left their apartment and moved back in with Latoya and her mother (Justina's grandmother).

Example 3

(Participants: J = Justina; L = Latoya; R = researcher. Setting: J's home. Audio-recorded. J and L have been talking to each other, and J mentions her "brand-new house," to which L replies, "You don't have no more brand-new house.")

1. J to R: My toilet stool broke.
2. L to J: No! Up there in the bathroom, the ceiling fell down in the bathtub. So, you moved back with me.
3. J to R: Yeah. My mama moved over from back here.
4. L to J: Where you gone move at?
5. L to R: She talking about, that, she had a brand-new house. But she used to, that's what she call it.
6. J to L, R: But! The toilet stool seat, the toilet stool seat =
7. L to J: = Ain't nothin' happened to the toilet stool seat!
8. J to L, R: The toilet // stool seat.
9. L to J: Naw! naw, naw. (grabbing and holding J's arms)
10. J to L: (pulling arms loose and then wrestling with L) Let, talk, about, Latoya! My toilet seat broke!
11. L to J: No, it didn't! I was there. I saw it. It's in the bathroom by the shower. OK. There was the toilet stool and the sink. And it was over there. OK.
12. J to L, R: And, and the bathtub =
13. L to J: = And up in the ceiling it broke down.
14. J to L, R: It broke down // and, so =
15. L to J: So, so, so! (drowning out J's attempt to talk) So mama she, so your mama she brought all the // stuff.
16. J to L, R: Stop! The thing broke in the bathtub.
17. L to J: The ceiling broke in the bathtub.
18. J to L, R: The ceiling broke in the bathtub.

In this episode Latoya repeatedly (3.2, 3.7, 3.9, 3.11, 3.17) corrects Justina's version of what happened, insisting that Justina moved back because the ceiling fell into the bathtub. Justina adamantly disagrees and even attacks Latoya physically (3.10), but in the face of Latoya's vigorous defense (3.11, 3.13, 3.15, 3.17) Justina eventually accedes to Latoya's version of what happened. Note Latoya's claim "I was there. I saw it." (3.11), which explicitly establishes her entitlement to narrate the story. (A few minutes later Justina initiates another story and Latoya intervenes again until finally the disgruntled Justina closes her eyes. Latoya asks, "Are you listening to me?" and Justina replies, "I'm gone to sleep!")

Although interventions of this sort, in which a caregiver or older child directs the child toward a particular version of experience, occur in all the communities we have been studying, cultural differences seem to affect which aspects of experience will be foregrounded. In the Chinese families studied by Fung (1987), for example, mothers tended to define a child's experience in terms of rule violations.¹³ When Chung-Chung (35 months old) related an incident in which a

cat had scratched him, his mother said, "You annoyed him, didn't you?" and the child replied, "Yes." The mother then continued, "You went to bother him, so of course he scratched your hand."¹⁴ In another story, Chung-Chung himself immediately admitted to misconduct.

Example 4

(Participants: C = Chung-Chung; M = Chung-Chung's mother. Setting: C's home. Audio-recorded. C has been looking at a picture book and comments on a picture of a sliding board. He then says, "Tomorrow, / Tomorrow, / Just now/ Will not play on the slide/ I'll let other kids play on the slide/" to which his mother replies, "Right, the slide is for everyone.")

1. C: Yes/ In the zoo/ I, that slide/ I didn't let other kids play/
2. M: Yes. It was your fault, wasn't it?
3. C: Yes/
4. M: Papa was mad at you.
5. C: Yes/
6. M: Papa said, "How come you didn't listen to me?"
7. C: (looking at another picture) What's that?
8. C: (returning to the story after intervening talk) So many kids were playing on the slide/ Chung-Chung wanted to play on it/ Chung-Chung didn't want other kids to play on it/ I want I myself, I myself to play on it/ Chung-Chung/ So many kids, I didn't get to play on it/
9. M: See how selfish you are? Did Papa say you could do this? Papa said you couldn't, right? Didn't Papa tell you you should share whatever you have with other kids?

In this example every contribution by the mother contains an explicit reference to a rule violation, to the resulting parental displeasure, or to the inferred selfishness of the child. She seems to have adopted society's voice and to have done so in a highly consistent manner. The assumption of an authoritative, normative voice may help to establish her entitlement to co-tell the story. Interestingly, the child, to some extent, takes the same normative perspective on his behavior. He spontaneously confesses to not letting other children play on the slide. And he readily accedes to his mother's interpretation and elaboration of his misconduct. At the same time, however, he articulates in remarkable detail his own point of view: "Chung-Chung wanted to play on it/ Chung-Chung didn't want other kids to play on it/ I want I myself, I myself to play on it/ Chung-Chung/ So many kids, I didn't get to play on it" (4.8).

This Chinese mother's explicitly didactic interventions contrast with the interventions of the low-income African-American and working-class white groups. In these groups moral messages are embodied in caregivers' interventions but they tend to be implicit; explicit references to moral rules and transgressions are relatively few. This contrast among the groups is most apparent when content is relatively similar, as, for example, in the case of misbehavior resulting in damage to another's property. For example, intervening in a story about how Chung-Chung broke a neighbor's window, Chung-Chung's mother made repeated reference to his "making big trouble," referred explicitly to the rule that he had violated—"Don't play it [ball] inside the house, OK?"—reminded him to apologize, and elicited from him a reference to the expected punishment, "Spank me if I break things." The white working-class caregiver's emphasis was somewhat different in a story about how her children had dug up the neighbor's yard. The caregiver referred several times to "cut[ting] up the yard" but did not refer to other, more general rules; voiced her disapproval in a global way, "That's bad," but did not elaborate; mentioned the interpersonal consequences of the act, "she'll [the neighbor] get mad at you"; and listened while the siblings discussed how much of the digging each had done. Compared to Chung-Chung's mother, she made fewer explicit references to morals and elaborated less on the children's wrongdoing but conveyed nonetheless that their behavior had been wrong.¹⁵

Another dimension that seems to differentiate caregivers' narrative interventions is the literal/fictional. Caregivers from Chinese and low-income African-American families were relatively tolerant of fictional embellishments of experience, whereas those from the white working-class community demanded a fairly strict adherence to the literal truth. When young storytellers in the latter community veered off into fantasy or outlined unlikely scenarios, caregivers noticed and intervened. For example, five-year-old Kathy related to her grandmother an incident in which she had ridden down the street with her three-year-old cousin, Francie, on the back of

her bicycle as she "went to go have a race." After querying Kathy on several details, the grandmother concluded, "I think you're makin' believe there was some girl holdin' on." Later in the same session the grandmother asked Kathy what she had done last summer during vacation time. Kathy launched into an explicitly marked pretend story about going downtown and seeing a wolf who talked, to which the grandmother responded, "Do wolves go downtown?" The child persisted in this vein and the grandmother continued to object, "No silly stuff. Nice stuff." and "What kind of story is this?" With these interventions caregivers are drawing clear boundaries between what belongs in a story of personal experience and what does not. They are saying, in effect, that the only defensible claims to personal experience are those that meet a criterion of literal truth. This emphasis on the literal truth is consistent with narrative traditions in other white working-class communities, namely, Roadville in the Piedmont Carolinas (Heath 1983) and South Baltimore (Miller and Moore 1989).

In sum, caregivers' interventions in children's storytelling embody a host of messages about how to interpret and create accounts of one's experiences. What are the reportable or publicly claimable aspects of one's experience? Is there more than one version of an experience? If so, whose version takes precedence and on what grounds? How important is it to portray oneself explicitly as a rule abider or violator? How important is it to adhere to a criterion of literal truth? These are but a few of the questions warranting further comparative study. Moreover, in order to determine how children make use of these interventions, we need to follow them and their caregivers over time as the children become more proficient storytellers.

appropriating others' stories

Both kinds of narrative practices that we have considered so far are, of course, interactive, but we have highlighted caregivers' initiatives. We turn now to children's initiatives, focusing on interactions in which a child appropriates another's story as his or her own. These will help to reveal the process of self-construction viewed from the child's angle.

Our first example of this kind of narrative practice comes from a group of Zuñi first graders whom one of us had the opportunity to observe in a classroom in Zuñi, New Mexico. The children and their Anglo teacher were sitting on the floor in a circle while the teacher conducted a health lesson.¹⁶ She asked the group, "What work can we do when we're feeling healthy and strong?" First one child and then another and another responded to this question with a personal narrative, each narrative thematically linked to the stories preceding it. The first child told a story about planting corn, and the next child told a story about planting chilies with his brother. Even more interesting, the children began to produce long, chained narratives into which they incorporated the experiences related previously by their peers, but doing so always in the first person. So the third child might say, "I planted corn and I planted chilies with my brother and I planted beans with my grandfather." In other words, this jointly constructed narrative ended up being a repository of the group's experience although it was told not as a we-experience but as an I-experience. Or at least that is how it appeared at the time. Perhaps each child's experience was so similar to his peers' that when he heard the story about planting chilies, it reminded him of a time when he too had planted chilies with his brother.¹⁷ In any case, this observation alerted us to the possibility of a socially expansive notion of personal experience.

Other seemingly related phenomena involve children from quite different cultural backgrounds. In recording conversational stories produced by three- to four-year-old children from a low-income African-American community in Chicago, Potts (1989) found instances in which one child recounted a personal experience, each particular of which was followed by a matching claim from his or her friend. In such cases entitlement to tell the story was established by the positing of parallel experiences.

Example 5

(Participants: G = Gwen, 42 months; K = Karla, Gwen's friend, 47 months; R = researcher. Setting: preschool center attended regularly by both children. Audio-recorded. G, K, and R have been talking about a class trip to the police station.)

1. R: You cried at the police station, Gwen? Why?
2. K: Me too. 'Cause my sore was hurting.
3. R: Aw, yeah?
4. K: It's gone away.
5. R: Why were you crying, Gwen? At the police station.
6. G: 'Cause I, don't want to go there.
7. R: Were you scared?
8. G: (nods)
9. R: What were you scared of?
10. G: My mama didn't go.
11. R: Aw, is that why you were scared?
12. K: My mama didn't go either.
13. G: I asked my mama, I didn't want to go to the police.
14. K: My mama didn't go too.
15. R: Yeah?
16. G: My mama didn't go.
17. R: Is that why you were scared?
18. K: I was scared too.
19. R: Yeah?
20. G: And Tasha was scared. My cousin Tasha.

In this example the researcher inquires into Gwen's experiences at the police station (5.1), and Karla matches (5.2, 5.12, 5.14, 5.18) Gwen's claims of vulnerability—crying, being scared, not having her mother with her. Elsewhere in this same session Gwen matches Karla's claims to competence, such as talking on the telephone and cooking "reeaal good." The themes that each child draws from her experience when she is the focus of the researcher's attention while in the company of the other child are consistent with the themes employed in other sessions when she is alone with the researcher: Gwen tends to portray herself as vulnerable, soliciting and receiving sympathy from the researcher; Karla tends to portray herself as capable, impressing the interlocutor with her competence. But when the *other* child is the focus of the researcher's attention, each child maintains her relationship with the researcher by duplicating the other's self-portrayal: Gwen appropriates claims of competence from Karla and Karla appropriates claims of vulnerability from Gwen. This pattern points not only to the mutual identification of Gwen and Karla whereby they appropriate one another's stories¹⁸ but to the situatedness of their self-portrayals. That is, each child portrays herself differently depending on whether she is or is not the focus of the researcher's attention.

Still another example of narrative appropriation involves a white middle-class child (31 months old) and his mother (Janellen Huttenlocher and Judy Mintz, personal communication, 1988).¹⁹ In this episode Billy's mother tries to encourage him to get off a kitchen chair because she is afraid that he may fall. She does so by telling Billy a cautionary tale from her own childhood, to which he responds by retelling the story in the first person.

Example 6

(Participants: B = Billy; M = Billy's mother. Setting: child's home. Video-recorded. The mother has been trying to convince her son to stop climbing on a chair.)

1. M: You know what, Billy? When I was a little girl, one time I was playing in the kitchen and you know what happened? I toppled over and I cut my mouth, and I had to go to the doctor and he had to fix it, yeah. So you have to be very, very careful.
2. B: Uh huh/ One day I'm topple over/
3. M: But you don't wanna topple over because you could fall and =
4. B: = One day/ (very emphatically)
5. M: One day?
6. B: Uh huh/ The doctor fixed me!/
7. M: The doctor fixed you?
8. B: Uh huh/ One day [fixed] me/
9. M: Yeah, but you know, see 'cause you have to be so careful. You're a thirsty boy today.
10. B: Milk/
11. M: Milk? What do you say?

12. B: One day, I flipped, I cut my, cut my mouth, OK, my doctor and my doctor fixed me!
13. M: Your doctor fixed you?
14. B: Uh huh/ I topple over and I go [unintelligible] it and my doctor man fixed me/ Uh huh/
15. M: Your doctor man fixed you?
16. B: Uh huh/
17. M: But you know what? Your doctor is a lady. The doctor lady fixed you.
18. B: Uh huh/ One day [unintelligible] fixed me/ Doctor lady [unintelligible]/ Doctor lady/ Two doctor ladies/ Two doctor ladies/
19. M: Two doctor ladies.
20. B: Uh huh/ (starts to giggle and reaches for the telephone)

Immediately upon completion of the mother's story, Billy launches into a story that is topically relevant (6.2). In this sense, his story is "triggered" by his mother's story in a manner consistent with the sequencing of stories in adult talk (Jefferson 1978). However, the means by which Billy relates his story to the preceding story is highly distinctive and uncharacteristic of adult talk: he recasts his mother's story with himself as protagonist. His mother attempts to elaborate on the dangers of climbing (6.3), only to be emphatically interrupted by Billy as he excitedly recounts the story in the first person (6.4, 6.6, 6.8). By line 10, Billy has asked for some milk and the conversational subject appears to have changed. When the mother tries to elicit the polite form of a request from Billy—"Milk? What do you say?"—he once more takes the opportunity to recount the event, again in the first person (6.12). Billy's fascination with this narrative is evident from the fact that he repeats the story so many times. Billy does not begin to lose interest in the story until his mother tries to change the tale to fit Billy's actual experience. In line 17, she directs his attention to the fact that *his* doctor is a woman. But instead of incorporating this detail into another retelling, Billy merely repeats the phrase "doctor ladies" (6.18).

In all these cases—that of the Zuni children who incorporated the experiences of the whole group into their stories of personal experience, that of the African-American child who recounted an experience identical to her friend's, and that of the white middle-class child who converted his mother's story into his own—narrative seems to be functioning as a means by which the child vicariously relives another's experience. Children's narrative appropriations, thus, exemplify what Howard (1985) has called personal extension, or more precisely, behavioral indicators of personal extension. In "Ethnopsychology and the Prospects for a Cultural Psychology," he argues that

it may be more fruitful for comparative analysis to accept the proposition that all people extend personhood beyond the skin than to begin with a "they do it and we do not" framework. What would then be problematic—the focus for comparative analysis—would be the ways in which extensions occur and from what conceptual base. [Howard 1985:415]

When a child appropriates another's experience as his own or allows another's story to call forth a related experience from his own past, he has extended personhood beyond the skin. The line between the child's experience and the other's is blurred in the sense that Goffman has described: because replayed events are seen from a personal perspective, listeners are able to "empathetically insert themselves into [the story], vicariously reexperiencing what took place" (1974:504). When a child appropriates another person's narrative, he or she makes *explicit* such vicarious reexperiencings.

Delineating the full implications of such appropriations for native experiences of self would require addressing in more depth a number of comparative issues. These include identifying the targets of children's narrative appropriations across cultural groups and the circumstances under which such appropriations occur, as well as determining how narrative appropriations relate to other culturally organized ways of handling self-other relations and inside-the-skin/outside-the-skin distinctions. Taking a developmental angle on the phenomenon of narrative appropriations raises still other issues. In the examples that we have presented, narrative appropriations seem to reflect and sustain ongoing identifications with significant others—individuals or groups, parents or friends. Such identifications probably originate in infancy (Stern 1985). But once children achieve some ability to understand and participate in personal sto-

ytelling, their access to the experiences of significant others, and hence the perceived bases for identification, substantially expands. Experiences that are not otherwise available to the child become available for the first time. These include experiences that are temporally inaccessible (such as those that happened before the child was born), spatially inaccessible (such as those that occurred in places from which the child is excluded) and affectively/cognitively inaccessible (such as bewildering experiences the child has witnessed).

In addition, a comprehensive account of how children arrive at narrative-mediated understandings of self in relation to other would have to include not only identifications but oppositions and other more subtle perceived relations between one person's experience and another's. For example, Marjorie Goodwin's (1982b) description of aggravated conflict talk contains an example (#19) in which the preadolescent disputants exchange conflicting versions of a past experience in support of their respective positions. Goodwin argues that such speech events shape the alignment and social identities of the participants. In contrast to narrative appropriations, such narrative-mediated oppositions and competitions index how the narrator is different from or superior to his or her peer.²⁰

conclusion

This article has focused on a type of storytelling found in the ordinary talk of many cultural groups. Because personal storytelling is characterized by a unique three-way intersection of self, narrative, and face-to-face interaction, it provides an optimal site for exploring processes of self-construction. We have argued that childhood furnishes a fruitful vantage point on this problem in that narrative conjunctions of novice and caregiver are likely to reveal local assumptions about the nature of personal experience. In this preliminary investigation we have identified three narrative practices engaged in by young children and their caregivers in one or more cultural groups. Telling stories about the child in the child's presence, intervening in the child's storytelling, and appropriating another's story as one's own—all seem plausibly relevant to the task of coming to express and understand who one is.

But what exactly do we mean by "coming to express and understand who one is"? Which of the notions of self mentioned in the introduction does this phrase implicate? In light of our current lack of knowledge about narrative practices vis-à-vis children and in light of ethnopsychological evidence for the cultural variability of notions of self, we have deliberately avoided a too-hasty delimiting of what we mean by self. In addition, we have been wary of drawing stark boundaries between social and psychological constructs of self, a distinction that fades when self is viewed through the prism of routine practices. Following Vygotsky (1978, 1987[1934]), we suggest that habitual participation in narrative practices has both social and psychological consequences. By taking part in narrative-mediated social practices, children develop tools for self-construction that transform how they function inter- and intrapersonally. These tools include the means for communicating and evaluating who one is, for assessing other people's impressions of oneself, and for establishing one's continuity across time and space.

To the extent that there is cross-cultural variation in the organization of personal storytelling practices, we would expect children to develop varying tools for self-construction. We claim no privileged status for the particular narrative practices identified in this article. We assume that further study of these and other cultural groups will yield a much longer list of relevant narrative practices and configurations of practices, leading eventually to a culture-sensitive comparison of narrative-mediated processes of self-construction. In the meantime, several final questions remain concerning the three narrative practices described above.

First, is there any special relationship among these particular practices? Perhaps most obvious is the similarity between telling stories about the child and intervening in the child's sto-

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rytelling. Both of these practices affirm the young child as an actor whose experiences are tellable, while at the same time indexing both the intimate relationship between mother and child and the child's status as a child. We would expect these practices to occur together in communities in which it is considered appropriate to direct parental attention to young children in public. Because caregiver interventions presuppose that the child has some capacity for narrative participation, this practice may be introduced somewhat later than the practice of telling stories about the child.

The relationship between these practices and children's narrative appropriations is less straightforward but may help to explain how children learn to make such appropriations. When caregivers tell stories about the child or intervene in the child's storytelling, they are implicitly appropriating the *child's* experience, treating it as overlapping with their own. A related practice in adult-to-adult talk takes the form of the passionately told story of vicarious experience in which the narrator imagines what he or she would have done in like circumstances. After relating how the man down the block beat his wife with a lead pipe, a mother from South Baltimore said, "I'm afraid I'd a had picked up somethin', the nearest thing that was to me and slammed him in the head with it before he'd a gotten me real good." In all such cases the narrator relives the past experience of a person with whom he or she identifies—for the moment or for the long term—and in so doing provides for the child models of narrative-mediated identification.

Young children's appropriations of others' stories thus direct our attention to the narrative-mediated identifications that often remain implicit in adult storytelling and, moreover, they lead us to affirm again Goffman's (1974) claim that listeners vicariously reexperience stories framed from a personal perspective. The power of stories to amuse or frighten, anger or excite, rests on a felt overlap with the narrator's recounted experience. When children inhabit environments rich in personal storytelling, they encounter again and again such moments of personal extension. It is not surprising that they come to make narrative-mediated identifications. That they do so explicitly—claiming someone else's experience as their own—is a puzzle whose unraveling promises to illuminate further the process of self-construction and the relational basis of personal experience.

notes

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¹Cultures where personal storytelling has been documented include the Ilongot of the Philippines (Rosaldo 1986), the Gusii of Kenya (LeVine 1984), and the Yucatec Maya of Mexico (Gaskins and Lucy 1987). Within the United States, stories of personal experience are told by Navajo (Brady 1980), Western Apache (Basso 1984), Native Hawaiians (Watson 1973; Watson-Gegeo and Boggs 1977), Northern Athabaskans (Scollon and Scollon 1980, 1981), low-income African-Americans (M. Goodwin 1982a; Heath 1983; Kernan 1977; Labov 1972), working-class whites (Heath 1983; Leary 1976; Miller and Sperry 1987), and middle-class whites (Polanyi 1985).

²Self-continuity in this fundamental sense should be distinguished from our own culturally elaborated notions of the self as "a coherent and meaningful unity" (Polkinghorne 1988:152) whose experiences can be represented in the form of a life story. Other cultures may place less emphasis on this concept of coherence or individual unity.

³As Shweder (1990) notes, ethnopsychology originated as a subdiscipline of ethnosemantics or ethnosciences. These disciplines were concerned with native systems of classification and focused on native terminologies. Early work in ethnopsychology, including Lutz's work on the lexicon of emotion (1982), followed in this tradition. The investigation of metaphor extended the tradition and was based in part on the recognition that "ethnopsychological concepts are abstract to a degree that plants and colors are not" and that "metaphors will frequently be used in attempts to understand and communicate the experiences of

self and other" (Lutz 1985:39). The investigation of ethnopsychological propositions represents an important departure from this earlier tradition since the focus is less on formal theories or systems of classification than on the ways in which statements about self and other are routinely formulated and used. As Lutz argues, "Since the inferences people make upon hearing a statement are based on culturally provided knowledge"—knowledge that is rarely made explicit in routine interactions—"the attempt to understand why one statement (or action) follows the next is a crucial method for the study of ethnopsychology" (1985:40).

⁴Robinson (1981) argues that under certain circumstances competent storytellers may recount commonplace, rather than unusual, events; fail to make explicit evaluative transformations; delegate the task of making the point to the interlocutor; and portray themselves in a negative rather than a positive light.

⁵Of a total corpus of 249 mother stories, 66, or 27 percent, were stories about the child.

⁶The following conventions were used in transcribing the examples of talk:

/ —A single oblique indicates the end of a child's utterance. This is used only in transcribing the talk of very young speakers (that is, those less than three years old).

// —Double obliques indicate the point at which a current speaker's talk is overlapped by the talk of another.

= —An equals sign indicates "latching," meaning there is no interval between the end of one and the start of another piece of talk.

' —An accent mark over a word indicates emphatic stress.

() —Parentheses contain information on the setting or situation, descriptions of the manner of delivery, and descriptions of key nonverbal behaviors.

Note also that the numbers on the left side of the transcript refer to consecutive turns at talk.

⁷At the time that the study was conducted, narrative was not an object of inquiry.

⁸Not understanding this metaphoric description of Johnny's astonishment, five-year-old Kris later asked, "What did he do when he got out of the chair?" This reminds us that stories of this sort provide models of interpretation not only for the child who is the focus of the story but also for other children present at the telling. It also raises the intractable methodological problem of assessing whether or not co-present children attend to the story, and if they do, how much they understand.

⁹The exceptions are revealing in that they contain other devices, such as elicited imitation, that index the child's status as a child. For example, when Amy was 19 months old, Amy's mother recounted the following mishap: "She [Amy] pulled a little sneaky the other day, went out the back door and fell down the back steps and busted her back all up." She then addressed a confirmation question to the child ("Didn't you?") in combination with an elicited imitation device ("Say yes.") reserved exclusively for young children.

¹⁰Sickness stories told by aborigines of northern Australia provide an illuminating case for comparison. According to Sansom (1982), the recovered patient is not permitted to tell the story of his illness. Rather, the story becomes the exclusive and enduring property of the person who cared for the patient when he was ill. The rights to tell the story are even more asymmetrically distributed in the context of the recovered patient-carer relationship than in the context of the mother-young child relationship in South Baltimore. In both cases, however, the denial of storytelling rights to a category of persons is associated with a time of dubious personhood—severe illness, in which personhood is usurped, on the one hand, and early childhood, in which personhood is not yet achieved, on the other.

¹¹For this analysis we compared 24 randomly selected mother stories about the child with 24 randomly selected mother stories not about the child. (Stories not about the child were those in which the child was not mentioned. The mother was usually the protagonist and the events recounted involved family members, co-workers, friends, and neighbors.) These stories were drawn from 12 samples of family-child interaction during which the children were about two-and-a-half years old, with a mean length of utterance of 2.8 morphemes. (Mean length of utterance is widely used in studies of child language to provide a rough index of language level.) Related verbal responses occurred in 33 percent of stories about the child versus eight percent of stories not about the child, despite the fact that stories about the child were considerably shorter than stories on other topics.

¹²Unfortunately, we cannot assess whether patterns of gaze paralleled patterns of talk in differentiating stories about the child from stories not about the child, as the camera angle was often not wide enough to include the mother.

¹³In that study, conducted in Chicago (Fung 1987), two three-and-a-half-year-old Mandarin-speaking children were intensively observed in their homes for a period of three months. Both of the fathers had come to the United States for graduate education. One mother worked as a babysitter in an ethnically diverse neighborhood and the other worked as a clerk in Chinatown. Fung is currently conducting a similar project with middle-class Mandarin-speaking families in Taipei, Taiwan, on a much larger scale.

¹⁴Throughout this article we provide line-by-line translations of the Mandarin Chinese materials. Original transcripts in Mandarin Chinese for this example and all other quoted examples are available upon request from the first author.

¹⁵A similar contrast can be drawn between Chinese and South Baltimore caregivers. When Chung-Chung related an experience in which he had cried at the doctor's office, his mother said, "You cried. And then,

oh my! It was so shameful, wasn't it?" When a mother and child from South Baltimore recounted a situation in which the child had cried at the sight of Santa Claus, the mother said, "Went to see him Thursday night and cried the whole time. She wouldn't go up there; she screamed bloody murder." This mother does not refer to a rule that was violated nor does she articulate what one should feel. However, her choice of the intensifiers "whole" and "bloody murder" and her use of emphatic stress on key words index local notions of inappropriate, that is, self-indulgent, expression of feelings (Miller and Sperry 1987).

¹⁶The class was conducted in English. Although the children were native speakers of Zúñi, they were also fluent in English.

¹⁷This possibility is reminiscent of what Rosaldo (1986) has called "minimalist narratives," stories that are told and listened to by people whose biographies significantly overlap.

¹⁸Note that there are other strategies that a child might use to maintain her relationship with the adult—for instance, making competing claims that establish her superiority over the other child.

¹⁹This episode was captured fortuitously on video tape as part of a study of children's vocabulary development in the home.

²⁰Such self-other categorizations may lead to acceptance of or resistance to learning in those areas of knowledge or skill associated with the other person (Goodnow 1990).

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