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**Abstract** Autobiographical remembering is examined as a cultural practice unfolding in the developmental dynamics of the interplay between memory, self and culture. In discussing the results of recent comparative studies in the United States and East Asia, we argue that autobiographical memory and self are interconnected meaning systems constructed in macro- and micro-cultural contexts—contexts of collectively performed and shared symbols, tools and artifacts. This process involves many-layered interactions between an individual and the belief structures of the society; it also involves various forms of active negotiation among the agents of socialization. As a result, a culture's genres of autobiographical remembering and its prevailing conceptions of selfhood have a decisive impact on the very nature of mnemonic transmission from one generation to the next. Against this backdrop, autobiographical remembering is described as an important dimension of cultural memory.

**Key Words** autobiographical memory, cultural practice, self

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## Autobiographical Remembering as Cultural Practice: Understanding the Interplay between Memory, Self and Culture

When we speak of autobiographical remembering, we speak, in one way or another, of a narrative account of one's past. This means, as Bruner (1990, 1993, 1994) has argued, that we are dealing with narrative forms and models that are culturally shaped and, in turn, shape the remembering culturally. In this process of meaning-making, the self of the narrator is not only being articulated but also being examined, transformed and reaffirmed. In this article, we explore the dynamics of this interplay between memory, self and culture. We view culture as the system and the process of symbolic mediation – a mode of configuration, that is, in which language is pivotal. Manifesting itself in social institutions as well as in the actions, thoughts, emotions, beliefs and

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moral values of individuals, culture regulates both intra-personal and inter-personal psychological functions, to put it in Vygotskian terms.

In discussing the results of recent investigations into the interrelations among the self, narrative practices and personal memories in different cultures—studies that have aimed to avoid the problems of traditional cross-cultural research—we want to highlight that concepts of the self and practices of remembering not only construct and constitute each other; they are also bound into the material and symbolic orders of the overarching cultural system. Viewed within this larger context, it appears obvious that a culture's practices of autobiographical remembering as well as its prevailing ideas about selfhood play a central role not only in defining the mnemonic registers of the entire sociocultural system, but also in transmitting them from one generation to the next. In conceiving of autobiographical remembering as a cultural practice, we thus highlight it as an important dimension of cultural memory.

### The Concept of Autobiographical Memory

It appears to be common sense in Western cultures that when individuals tell their personal life stories, they talk about their *selves* or, as some prefer, about their self-concepts and identities, about what has made them who they are and what they have become and are becoming. The same applies in the reverse: when individuals talk about their selves, they seem to refer to their life histories, their successes and failures, achievements and losses, hopes and fears. In this view, one's idea of the present self is all but peripheral to one's idea of the past. In examining the compelling influence of the self on the 'writing' of one's personal history, Greenwald (1980) stated that individuals remember their past as if it were a drama in which the self is the leading player; moreover, in the drama of one's personal history the self acts in an all-determining, 'totalitarian' fashion.

In fact, it has often been pointed out that the intimate interplay between one's self and one's personal history is crucial for our understanding of what we usually call autobiographical memory. However, there are various other factors that impinge on the concept of autobiographical memory, one being our very notion of autobiographical memory itself. A standard definition of autobiographical memory in psychology is that of 'memory for information related to the self' (Brewer, 1986, p. 26). Emergence and form of this 'self-memory' in today's Western understanding is functionally related to the process of identity formation, a development biased toward an increasingly

autonomous self that actively distinguishes itself from other selves and from its social and natural contexts. As Bruner (1993) has reminded us, there is a deeply rooted Cartesian mode for thinking about autobiographical memory, a mode that is characteristic not only of academic psychology but also of all Western folk theories that emphasize individuality, autonomy and power in explicating and evaluating human lives. Autobiographical memory, like many other psychological phenomena, thus appears as a private, personal matter determined by intrinsic mechanisms such as personality and neurocognitive operations.

Over the last decade, this traditional view of autobiographical memory has been increasingly challenged by the social-interactionist approach to memory development, which emphasizes the social contexts of acting, experiencing and remembering. For Nelson (1993, 1996) and other authors of more recent studies (e.g. Fivush & Haden, in press), autobiographical memory is the outcome of narrative constructions that emerge and develop in early childhood in collaboration with significant adults and in order to structure memory for personally meaningful experiences. In this view, socially constructed narrative forms and models are cultural organizers of children's nascent autobiographical memory. From the very beginning, autobiographical remembering is fused with narrative practices, particularly with those that take form in 'self-narratives' (Neisser, 1994).

Building upon this approach, we conceive of autobiographical memory as an active construction embedded in a social weave of dialogues that are negotiated not only between an individual and his or her immediate social environment (parents, peers and significant others), but also, equally important, between the individual and the larger cultural milieu. Thus, we suggest that autobiographical remembering is a cultural practice. One consequence of this is to realize that the Western notion of autobiographical remembering as intimately connected to the development of an autonomous self is only one possible form in which individuals remember their pasts. There also exist other cultural genres of remembering, such as genres that are connected to a process of increasing social interrelatedness.

## Cultural Genres of Remembering One's Past


In what has been called our 'culture of autobiography' (Folkenflik, 1993), with its pressure on the individual to 'stand out', one might easily find the view plausible that we remember our past as if it were a drama in which the protagonist is the focus of the plot and

determines the storylines. Whether it is the active agent of this construction, a passive experiencer or the vehicle of some uncontrollable destiny, the self is the constructive pivot of narrative organization. But can the same be said for a *we*, or an *other*, that does not consist exclusively of Western individuals, whose reports and recollections usually provide the material for the extensive multidisciplinary literature on autobiographical remembering? More precisely, do people in different cultures all cast themselves as the central character in remembering, telling and writing their life stories?

Observations of autobiographical writings and everyday practices in Asian cultures suggest the existence of another genre of personal narratives where the ego often withdraws to the background to spotlight on significant others, the narrators' personal relationships to them, and the social context (Pillemer, 1998; Röttger-Rössler, 1993). This supports the view that the I/we distinction is not an absolute dichotomy but that 'I' and 'we' mark an open and extendable field (Bühler, 1934/1990). This field takes on different forms and extensions in different cultures (Geertz, 1984), and is not least determined by the specifics of the pronoun system(s) of the languages used in these cultures (Mühlhäusler & Harré, 1990).

Recent comparative studies have provided empirical evidence for different cultural genres of remembering one's past. For example, in comparing earliest childhood memories among Caucasian-American and native Chinese college students, Wang (2001a) found different narrative patterns that emerged in the two cultural groups. In general, early memories reported by Americans tended to be voluminous, specific, self-focused and concerned with autonomy and personal predilections. In contrast, memories provided by Chinese were often skeletal, routine-related, centered on relationships and sensitive to other people involved. Narrative content analysis showed that cultural differences in these dimensions all reached high levels of statistical significance. Consider the following two examples.

This episode was provided by an undergraduate from Harvard University when she was asked to think of her earliest childhood memory:

I have a memory of being at my great aunt and uncle's house. It was some kind of party; I remember I was wearing my purple-flowered party dress. There was a sort of crib on the floor, shaped kind of like this:  I don't know if it was meant for me or for one of my younger cousins, but I crawled into it and lay there on my back. My feet stuck out, but I fit pretty well. I was trying to get the attention of people

passing by. I was having fun and feeling slightly mischievous. When I picture the memory, I am lying down in the crib, looking at my party-shoed feet sticking out of the end of the crib. (Memory dated at 3 years 6 months)

In response to the same question, a female Chinese college student from Beijing University wrote:

I was 5 years old. Dad taught me ancient poems. It was always when he was washing vegetables that he explained a poem to me. It was very moving. I will never forget the poems such as 'Pi-Ba-Xing,' one of the poems I learned then.

While the first memory—a typical memory of Americans—is early-dated, elaborate, self-focused, concerning a personal experience that took place at a particular time and place, the second memory—a typical Chinese one—is later-dated, brief, centering on a social interaction or collective activity that took place regularly or on multiple occasions. The American memory has the individual highlighted as the leading character of the story. In contrast, the Chinese memory shows a heightened sensitivity to information about significant others or about the self in relation to others. These two examples—typical, as we found—illustrate that autobiographical memories of people in different cultures can take on different forms and consist of different themes that appear to be a function of the ways in which the self is culturally conceived of.

## The Self in a Cultural Context of Remembering

Since conceptions of selfhood fulfill different, culture-specific purposes, they vary across cultures. Specifically, ideas of selfhood vary as a function of the structural organization of a society, of moral, religious and philosophical traditions, as well as of other aspects of the symbolic fabric of a culture (Geertz, 1973). According to several authors (Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998; Kagitcibasi, 1996; Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 1998; Triandis, 1989), a number of differences, especially between Western (particularly North American and West European) and East Asian cultures, can be characterized along a dimension of 'independence–interdependence' that reflects the type and degree of social engagement suggested by the respective notion of the self. These cultural modes of social participation—Markus, Mullally and Kitayama (1997) have dubbed them 'selfways'—show a relative stability even across substantial group and individual variations within any single culture.

In this view, the promotion of individuality, self-expression and personal sufficiency in Western societies facilitates the development of an *independently oriented* self that is essentially well-bounded, distinct and separate from others and from natural and social contexts. In contrast, the emphasis on social hierarchy, interpersonal harmony and personal humility in many East Asian cultures gives rise to an *inter-dependently oriented* self that is fluidly defined and inextricably connected within a relational network that localizes the individual in a well-defined social niche. Although differences between the two views of selfhood may only be a matter of degree (e.g. Spiro, 1993), the underpinning relations between the self, others and the larger society have far-reaching psycho-social consequences. In fact, what characterizes both cultural conceptions is that the functional positioning of 'the self' imposes demands on individuals in terms of how they perceive and conceive of themselves in space and time. These demands impact not only on how they think, feel and behave (and educate their children to do so), but also on how they understand their own autobiographical experiences and construct their life stories (and teach their children likewise).

Although many contemporary theorists have emphasized the interface between memory and self in constituting, maintaining and embellishing each other (e.g. Bruner, 1994; Conway, 1996; Pillemer, 1998; Singer & Salovey, 1993), less attention has been allotted to the implications of the fact—albeit often mentioned—that neither memory nor self is an isolated psychological phenomenon blocked in one's head (be it the mind or the brain), and that, rather, both are interpersonally shared, socially constructed and integrated into the same cultural context. We suggest that autobiographical memory and self are interconnected constructions of meaning, two dynamic aspects of the same overarching cultural system. Cultural genres of remembering one's past and cultural conceptions of selfhood are both raw materials and end products of such interconnected constructions. In this way, they contribute—in turn—to a culture's continuity and transformation. (See Figure 1 for a schematic illustration of this view.)

To look closer at this interplay between memory, self and culture, we draw upon Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model of human development, which views the dynamics of cultural practices as unfolding under the impact of various levels of contextual forces. According to this model, we conceptualize the memory–self–culture interaction at both the macro-level of the larger cultural milieu and the micro-level of the immediate narrative environment. These two levels of contexts, indeed, define essentially a social niche of discursive

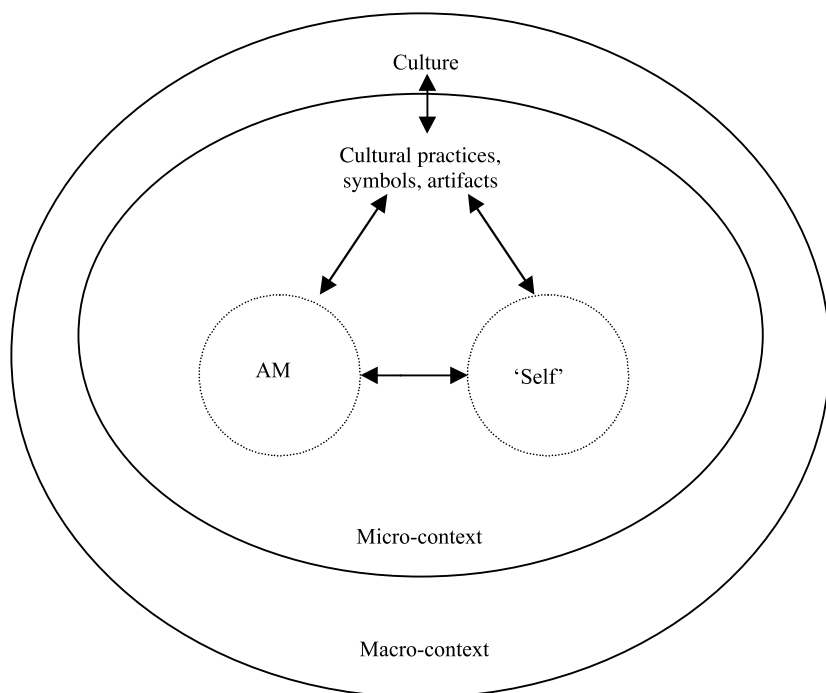


Figure 1. Interplay between memory, self and culture

actions and other cultural practices through which both memory and self are produced and performed, and in which culture is both transforming and being transformed by its own products. Against the backdrop of this theoretical framework, we look at a series of recent comparative studies in East Asian cultures and in the United States on adults' childhood recollections, children's autobiographical reports and parent-child conversations about a shared past.<sup>1</sup>

### **A Test Case: Autobiographical Memory in the United States and East Asia**

Western cultures, particularly that of the United States, advocate a strong, independent and unified self. A coherent, elaborate, well-integrated life history with the individual cast as the central character is typically considered crucial for an enduring self-concept and self-understanding, as well as for the social affirmation of the self as an

autonomous entity. In contrast, many East Asian cultures, like that of China, promote an unbounded, interdependent, relational self and, therefore, often value a life of collective activities over a unique *auto*-biographical history. Personal remembering in these cultures evokes and preserves an important social orientation that serves to engage individuals in ongoing relationships and further reinforces the idea of one's self as an interdependent entity. The dynamic relationship between memory and self is thus built into the larger fabric of a culture, a fabric in which conceptions of the self are institutionalized in various material and symbolic ways (including law, education, religion, philosophy, literature and the arts) that create and reconsolidate different genres of its autobiographically remembered past. In turn, autobiographical memories reflect, and further substantiate, culture-specific conceptions of selfhood.

This vision is evidenced in recent cross-cultural findings. Compared with Caucasian-Americans, who on average recall their earliest autobiographical memories back to as early as 3.5 years of age, Asians and Asian-Americans report memories that are more than 6 months later-dated (Mullen, 1994; Wang, 2001a; standard deviations in these studies were around 15 months within each cultural group and across the entire sample). In a study that directly investigated the relation between cultural self-conception and autobiographical memory, Wang (2001a) asked American and Chinese college students to report their earliest childhood memory and then to provide self-descriptions on a shortened Twenty Statements Test (Kuhn & McPartland, 1954). In comparison, the self-descriptions provided by Americans were mostly individual-focused and self-assured, while the self-descriptions given by Chinese tended to be group-oriented and modest in content. We believe that such differences clearly reflect an emphasis on individuality and self-enhancement in American culture and an emphasis on interconnectedness and humility in Chinese culture (Bochner, 1994; Ip & Bond, 1995; Triandis, 1989). Intriguingly, at both the cultural (i.e. Americans vs Chinese) and the individual level (i.e. across the entire sample), an independently oriented self is associated with the early establishment of an autobiographical history that is elaborate, specific, emotionally charged and self-focused, whereas an interdependently oriented self is associated with the later establishment of an autobiographical history that is brief, general, emotionally unexpressive, and relation-centered.

Are such memory differences apparent early among children in different cultures that correspond to their respective cultural self-conceptions? In a study with Korean, Chinese and American



preschoolers, researchers interviewed 4- and 6-year-olds in each country in their native language, asking a series of open-ended questions about recent life events such as how children spent their last birthday (Han, Leichtman, & Wang, 1998). It was found that, compared with Asian children's memory narratives, American children's narratives were more complex and elaborate, as indicated in their more frequent use of temporal markers (words that indicate chronological time and complex temporal and causal relations), descriptives (words that provide descriptive texture to the narrative, including adjective, adverbs and modifiers) and internal state language (words indicating inner cognitive and emotional processes). In addition, while American children tended to focus on themselves when describing specific past events, Asian children often provided 'bare-bones' accounts of routine activities that, however, involved significant others.

In another recent study, Wang and Leichtman (2000) further compared the social content of children's narratives of personally significant events. During individual interviews, American and Chinese kindergartners were asked to recount episodes in which they felt a certain emotion such as happiness, sadness, fear or anger. Content analyses revealed that, compared with American children, Chinese children showed in their memory narratives a greater tendency to introduce social interactions and positive interpersonal relations, a greater concern with moral correctness and appropriate behavioral conduct, a greater concern with authority, and less of a tendency to express individual judgments, opinions or self-determination. These findings indicate that before the onset of formal schooling, American and Asian children already show content and stylistic differences in their autobiographical memories that echo those among adults, in line with the system of beliefs, practices and material and symbolic 'selfways' of their cultures.

Taken together, cultural variations in both adults' childhood recollections and children's autobiographical reports accord with different conceptions of selfhood, as well as with different values that cultures place on autobiographical remembering. Depending on whether a culture views the self as essentially individuated from or bonded to other selves, and depending on whether a culture emphasizes the importance of personally focused memory in constituting one's self and identity, autobiographical remembering varies in content, form, style and timing of emergence. Such variations in memory, in turn, reestablish the very notion of self within a larger cultural milieu, in which individuals are expected, for example, to anchor their existence in an autobiographical past, or to understand their being as created

through social interconnection and constant participation in collective activities. In this sense, memory and self, as well as the social norms they are to realize, are integrated into the same mnemonic system of a culture as a whole.

## **Memory and Self: A Fusion in the Narrative Environment**

Integrated into the macro-cultural context that configures particular conceptions of the self and genres of autobiographical memory, the early narrative environment of the family plays a central role in mediating children's acquisition of culturally appropriate modes of thinking, remembering, feeling and behaving. Many theorists have emphasized the importance of parent-child joint narrative construction of past experiences for the development of self and autobiographical memory (e.g. Fivush, 1994; Fivush & Buckner, 1997; Middleton & Edwards, 1990; Miller, Fung, & Mintz, 1996; Miller, Mintz, Hoogstra, Fung, & Potts, 1992; Nelson, 1996). Middleton and Edwards (1990) describe family conversations about the shared past as a rich learning environment

... in which the parent takes pains to elicit perceptions, memories and judgements from the children, to examine and elaborate upon them, to contextualize and assign significance to them, in terms of a shared past in which personal identity, family relationships and the landmarks of development can be reconstructed. (p. 41)

Nelson (1996) further suggests that parent-child memory-sharing is crucial for the establishment of a self-history upon which an enduring self-concept is built. Similar claims regarding family narrative practices have been made by Fivush (1994, 1998) and Miller (1994), who focus on gender-specific differences and particular socioeconomic subcultures in the United States.

However, it is difficult to apply generically the same point of view to non-Western cultures (Brockmeier & Wang, 2001). Instead of serving the purpose of helping children build individuality and construct a unique autobiographical self, as is often occasioned in American middle-class families, family discussions about the shared past in many Asian cultures primarily serve to establish a sense of connectedness and proper behavioral conduct in children. To help demonstrate such differences, we shall first provide below two excerpts from memory conversations between an American mother and her 3-year-old daughter and a Chinese mother and her 3-year-old daughter

(Wang, Leichtman, & Davies, 2000), and then report related contrasts identified in empirical findings.

*American mother–daughter pair:*

- M: What did we do when you went camping?  
C: At the beach.  
M: Uh-huh.  
C: And a big rock of . . . I couldn't get up and so Dad had to carry me.  
M: Daddy carried you up that big rock.  
C: Yeah, um . . . and Daddy was fine.  
M: Oh yeah, he was just fine. And what about um . . . was it a beautiful sunny day we had our picnic?  
C: Yeah, um . . . and it started to rain.  
M: And then what happened?  
C: The sun came up again.  
M: But we had to go back through the woods, right?  
C: Yeah.  
M: Where did we sleep when we went camping?  
C: In the tent!  
M: In a tent. And what did we climb inside?  
C: Sleeping bags.  
M: And you have your very own, don't you? Yeah. Is there anything else about camping that you really liked?  
C: Swimming.  
M: Swimming. And how about the camp fire? Did you like the fire? What did we cook over the fire? . . . Marshmallows, right?  
C: Marshmallows! Yummy!

*Chinese mother–daughter pair:*

- M: Do you remember that Mom took you to the Fandole park last time?  
C: I remember.  
M: Tell Mom what were there in the Fandole?  
C: There were toys.  
M: What else?  
C: There was food.  
M: Right. When we went to the Fandole park, did you ask Mom to carry you on the way?  
C: I didn't. If I got tired, I would still keep on going ahead bravely.  
M: Oh, right. When we rode on the bus, what did you see? We saw big wide roads. What else?  
C: We also saw a big round circle.  
M: Right. What else did we see on the way there?  
C: Um . . .  
M: Tell Mom, when a Mom takes her child to cross the street, where should they look?  
C: Look to their left and right. Look at the zebra lines.

*M:* Right. We must walk on the zebra lines. Did you behave well that day?  
*C:* Yes.

Studies have found that spontaneous parent-child memory conversations not only occur less frequently in Asian than in American families (Mullen & Yi, 1995), but they also show substantial stylistic variations across cultures (Wang, 2001b; Wang et al., 2000). When discussing with their 3-year-old children shared past experiences, American mothers often provide rich and embellished information about the events under discussion, elaborate on and supplement children's responses, and invite children to co-construct stories of the shared past. In contrast, Chinese mothers tend to pose and repeat questions in order to elicit memory information from their children without providing embellishment or following up on children's responses, with the conversation often resembling a memory test. Correspondingly, American children frequently provide more event information than do their Chinese peers during family memory-sharing.

Such differences in volume and style of memory conversations between American and Asian mothers mirror those described in previous studies with American samples between 'high-elaborative' and 'low-elaborative' mothers (Haden, Haine, & Fivush, 1997; Leichtman, Pillemer, Wang, Koreishi, & Han, 2000; Reese, Haden, & Fivush, 1993). 'High-elaborative' mothers make lengthy conversations and tend to re-create stories collaboratively with their children about the shared past, whereas 'low-elaborative' mothers often treat the conversations as a forum to test their children's memory performance. Consequently, children of high-elaborative mothers typically remember more details and are more likely to exhibit an elaborative style of discussing the past than children of low-elaborative mothers (Haden et al., 1997; Reese et al., 1993). Thus, the different conversational styles employed by American and Asian parents instill different ways of personal remembering in their children, resulting in significant cultural differences in the volume and elaborativeness of children's independent narration of autobiographical events (Han et al., 1998; Wang & Leichtman, 2000).

In addition, noticeable differences also emerge in the social content of parent-child memory conversations in American and Asian cultures. In keeping with the cultural emphasis on individuality and autonomy, American parents often focus on the child's personal attributes, preferences and judgments, making the child the central character of the co-constructed story. In contrast, consonant with Confucian ethics that place a high value on social hierarchy and moral

rectitude, Asian parents often take a leading role during the conversation with their children and frequently refer to moral rules and behavioral expectations. Amazingly enough, children as young as age 3 have already obtained from their parents different views of such conversations: while American youngsters often comment on their personal roles, choices and opinions, their Asian peers make references to rules, standards and requirements (Miller et al., 1992, 1996; Mullen & Yi, 1995; Wang et al., 2000).

Not only do American and Asian parents employ distinct styles of reminiscing and focus on different social contents when sharing past experiences with their children, but they also show strikingly different ways of integrating emotions into ongoing conversations. Wang (2001b) found that during conversations about shared emotional experiences, American mothers (44%) more often than Chinese mothers (27%) chose to discuss events in which non-social objects or events in the environment triggered children's emotional reactions (e.g. getting a present or losing a toy), while more Chinese mothers (73%) than Americans (56%) talked about events in which other people either caused children's emotions or shared the emotions with the children (e.g. being scolded by an adult or being visited by a friend). In addition, American mothers provided rich causal explanations for their children's emotions, whereas Chinese mothers made very few comments on children's feeling states, and when they did, their commentary was often used as a way of 'teaching the child a lesson' rather than explaining to the child why he or she may have felt the emotion. Accordingly, compared with their Chinese peers, American youngsters talked more frequently about the causes and consequences of their emotions when sharing memories with their mothers.

Patently, within a larger cultural milieu (which promotes either an independent or an interdependent self-construction), families preserve social-linguistic micro-environments in which children learn to co-narrate and, in this way, formulate stories of themselves. In doing so, they gradually acquire not only their parents' narrative repertoire but also their moral values. With their focusing on the personal roles, predilections and feelings of the individual child, the highly elaborative memory conversations in the American family are obviously well suited to the goal of fostering the interrelated development of children's autonomy and autobiographical remembering. In contrast, focusing on social relations and behavioral appropriateness, the low-elaborative conversations between Asian parents and their children tend to engage the child in collective activities, while downplaying practices of remembering one's unique autobiographical history. In

both cases, as Pillemer (1998) has pointed out, '[p]arents' implicit or explicit communicative goals influence which functions will assume center stage in the child's own memory operations' (p. 129). To put this argument in a developmental perspective, we suggest that these early narrative environments constitute resources from which children actively construct their life stories and draw their 'selfways' in individual yet culturally canonical forms.

Again, at the micro-level, we notice the same interplay between memory, self and culture: culturally promoted practices of narrative interaction between parents and children transform into the intergenerational transmission of, among others, genres of autobiographical remembering, which, in turn, actively reinforce, and are also reinforced by, culturally prevailing notions of selfhood. In other words, memory, self and culture fuse in a process of narrative co-construction.

### **Conclusions: Autobiographical Remembering and Cultural Memory**

In this paper, we have conceived of autobiographical remembering not as a natural and universal process but as a cultural practice or, more precisely, as an array of practices. We have highlighted practices of narrating and remembering personal experiences, arguing that these practices are inextricably intermingled with the cultural 'selfways' of individuals. With Markus et al. (1997), we understand such 'selfways' as culture-specific forms of social participation that are realized in and through a myriad of daily social exchanges. Among these social interactions, we have focused on practices of narrative discourse because it is here, as we have proposed, that autobiographical memory and self are given meaning and significance. Throughout the course of ontogenetic development these practices embed the individual mind in a multitude of social relations and societal institutions (as given, for example, in educational systems), and other material and symbolic systems of beliefs and values. All of them surround and penetrate the individual, configuring his or her actions, thoughts and experiences in accordance with historically prevailing conceptions of both autobiographical remembering and selfhood. Together, the practices of autobiographical memory, self-construction and narrative exhibit a developmental dynamic in which they mutually construct and confirm each other.

Such a dynamic is expressed and further maintained in 'markedly different modes across cultures. The findings we have reported demonstrate that the meaning and function—indeed, the very notion—of

autobiographical memory differ significantly in populations in North America and in East Asia. Patently, the Western teleological model of an 'autobiographical self' is all but universal. Autobiographical memories do not fulfill in all cultures the same psychological function, namely to anchor the identity of an individual in his or her past. No doubt, this form of the autobiographical process has become, for a variety of reasons, a central concern in the 'Freudian cultures' of the West (Brockmeier, 1997). However, even here, in the Western 'culture(s) of autobiography' (Folkenflik, 1993), this process does not manifest itself in the same way for all individuals; nor is it the only purpose of remembering one's past. There are many local constraints, social interests and rhetorical orders that may have an impact on why individuals engage in memory talk, what they present as their past, and how they 'position' themselves in this past (Harré & van Langenhove, 1993).

Moreover, anchoring in autobiographical memory discourse is all but the only form of identity construction. There are many forms of social participation, many options to localize oneself in the social contexts of family, work, religion, politics, ideology, art and other intellectual interests, as well as other institutions and memory practices of a culture. Such psychosocial localization of the self is not confined by time or space, but can take place simultaneously in multiple (including diverse and contradictory) cultural worlds (see, e.g., Zentella, 1998). As we see particularly in Asian societies, there also can be a strong sense of social connectedness and moral restraint that seems to be at least as powerful in developing and maintaining a sense of self and personal integrity as the Western idea of individual autonomy and autobiographical rootedness in one's personal past.

We have argued that the different trajectories of an independently or interdependently oriented self provide distinct social ways in which experiences are not only perceived, cognitively categorized and emotionally and morally valued, but also autobiographically organized and remembered. As a consequence of these reflections (and of the findings they draw upon), we propose that this dynamic is pivotal to any concept of cultural memory that aims to capture the dialectic between individual and social remembering. We believe that the concept of cultural memory is too narrowly defined if it just refers to collective, institutional and historical forms and representations of memory and remembering, viewed as a domain that is independent of individual forms of memory and remembering. A consequence of such a perspective on social remembering would be to view individual remembering as being distinctively localized in the mind or brain of an isolated person.

In fact, ever since Durkheim (1898), in distinguishing 'collective representations' from 'individual representations', made the case to separate the sociological from the psychological side of the issue, phenomena like memory have been seen as *either* individual (i.e. mental, neuro-cognitive) *or* collective (social, historical, cultural). Robert Farr (1998) has pointed out that, in the wake of Durkheim, an entire tradition of social scientific memory research (including Halbwachs and Moscovici) distinguished individual from collective and social representations. They did so with the same intent as Durkheim, namely 'to ensure that the one (i.e. social representations) cannot be explained in terms of the other' (Farr, 1998, p. 277). While, on the one hand, traditional individual psychology (i.e. experimental memory research) neglected or even rejected the social dimension of its subject matter, on the other hand, sociology and social psychology opposed what they considered to be the reductionism of individual psychology (be it experimental psychology or, more influential, psychoanalysis). By drawing 'an oversharpest distinction' between the individual and the social, that is, between psychology and sociology (as well as anthropology, as we might add), 'Durkheim created an identity crisis for social psychologists which they have been unable to resolve in the course of the 20th century' (Farr, 1998, p. 277).

In contrast to the idea of separating the individual from the social dimension of memory (or 'representation'), the concept of cultural memory that underlies our account aims to capture the very interaction between these two dimensions. For us, the dialectical interplay between the individual and the social comes especially into view in the process of mnemonic transmission from one generation to the next. We have argued that in this process the cultural practices of autobiographical remembering—and, that is, the developmental dynamic involving memory, self and culture—play a central role. Conceptualized in this way, then, the notion of cultural memory is not restricted to the 'collective' and 'social' forms of knowledge, experience and the moral and aesthetic values that constitute cultural traditions. It also, and essentially, comprises the particular forms and ways through which the process of mnemonic transmission is actively carried out by the individual. Within this process of transmission emerge the cultural registers of autobiographical remembering, which define what matters in a culture for an individual self and what does not.

This view is also consequential for the very idea of 'the individual'. Foulkes (1999) states that 'with the emergence of active self-representation, autobiographical memory, and a sense of self that lends continuity to experience, the human person emerges' (p. 157). Perhaps



this claim is true for all people all over the world. Yet in light of the arguments and findings that we have presented, we would like to put it this way: with the emergence of culturally different self-conceptions, different forms of autobiographical remembering and different modes of social interaction and communication, *different* human persons emerge.

## Note

1. Owing to limited space, we cannot go through each study in great detail. For a more detailed account of the findings, we would like to refer to the quoted empirical studies.

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