MEMORY, 2003, *11* (2), 125–136

Self and social functions: Individual autobiographical memory and collective narrative

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The personal functions of autobiographical memory build on the basic biological functions of memory common to most mammals that, however, do not have the kind of episodic memories that compose human autobiographical memory according to present theory. The thesis here is that personal autobiographical memory is functionally and structurally related to the use of cultural myths and social narratives, and that the relative emphasis put on the self in different cultural and social contexts influences the form and function of autobiographical memory and the need for developing a uniquely personal life narrative in those contexts. Historical and cross-cultural trends revealed in psychological and literary research are invoked to support this thesis.

Why do we tell stories of ourselves to ourselves? Why do we tell them to others? These are the questions raised by the theme of this special issue of *Memory*: the function of autobiographical memory. In this article I argue that the function of self stories is related to the social and cultural milieu within which they are situated, and the alternative resources available within the milieu for understanding self and society. Based on the assumption that a unique and important characteristic of all human life is the capacity for and habit of telling stories, I am suggesting that self stories derived from autobiographical memory are one version of the stories that humans share with one another.

At the broadest level are cultural stories, shared in and retold by all members of a cultural group, such as religious and historical accounts. Within a culture, subgroups such as professions, genders, classes, or ages, construct and circulate stories of passing or enduring interest. Often this is classified as gossip. On a personal and social level people exchange stories of personal significance to the individual, family, or close associates. The general claim here is that autobiographical memory serves the latter social function, at the same time that it serves as a vehicle for self-expression and definition. In addition, all forms—cultural, social, and personal—can be seen to serve very general functions of extending knowledge about the social and physical world as a basis for prediction and explanation. From this perspective autobiographical memory is individuated knowledge based on self experience that may be shared with others, whereas social and cultural stories draw on broader sources of group experience and imaginative constructions.

An important claim here is that the personal and the social and cultural are both functionally and structurally related. To make this claim it is necessary to see the relation between memory as an individual function, its role in the phylogenetic scheme of adaptation, and narrative as the medium of shared memories, collective memories, and fictional creations. Focus on this relation brings out the problematic question of the role of narrative in the composition of autobiographical memory, and whether autobiographical memory exists in a raw, non-narrative form. When we examine the functions of autobiographical mem-

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http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/pp/09658211.html DOI:10.1080/09658210244000315

ory we do so from a particular point in human evolutionary and socio-historical time. Thus my argument takes a semi-historical form, beginning with the functions of individual memory in a cognitive evolutionary framework, through cultural uses of group memory in prehistory and historical times, to modern individualist narratives, factual and fictional, to questions about the place of autobiographical memory in the contemporary narrative space. Finally I will ask how these excursions shed light on understanding the function of autobiographical memory as it develops in early childhood.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL MEMORY IN EVOLUTIONARY CONTEXT

Tulving (1983) made the claim that the type of memory termed episodic is uniquely human, which raised the issue of how and why it could arise in the course of human evolution. Although this claim has been contested, it seems probable that memory for temporally sequenced events or activities—a characteristic of episodic memory—may have evolved as functional for certain kinds of knowledge: how to build a nest, for example, or how to locate and dig out termites. In the terms of evolutionary epistemology (Plotkin, 1988) basic memory functions retain information about the particular conditions of social and physical life of individuals, beyond that which can be anticipated in the genetic heritage of the species in its environmental niche. Basic memory is therefore a knowledge source that anticipates future needs; it is not about the past but about the future (Nelson, 1993a,b, 1996; Tulving & Lepage, 2000). By retaining information about both common and novel events, it provides the basis for taking action in the present and anticipating future needs. Taking account of the epistemic value of memory in its natural setting we can better appreciate the distinction that Tulving made between episodic memory and other types of declarative memory. There are two main bases for this distinction: it is temporally situated as an event in a specific point in the past, and it is about the individual self's experience (Tulving, 1983). Episodic memory in particular is characterised by *autonoesis*, re-experience of the past, as distinguished from semantic memory, or *noesis*, that is, factual memory with no accompanying sense of self-experience in a specific past. Autobiographical memory is clearly a form of episodic memory in this sense, although not all everyday episodic memories are retained in the set of ''self stories'' that constitute an adult's autobiographical memory. Indeed, as my colleagues and I have shown (Hudson & Nelson, 1986; see also Linton, 1982), episodic memories that are followed by repetitions of similar events become absorbed in general scripts for ''what happens'', that is, they become general knowledge structures, although of a temporally organised kind.

There are two aspects of temporal structuring that characterise episodic memory; first, there is the situatedness of the event in specific past time in relation to the present. Second there is the temporal sequencing within the episode remembered. Both of these aspects rely on a conscious sense of the ''extended self'' (Damasio, 1999; Moore & Lemmon, 2001; Neisser, 1997). The significance of this ''self in time'' (Nelson, 1989, 1997) has become recognised increasingly, especially with regard to memory development. An important function of autobiographical memory is now seen as providing the sense of the continuity of the self across time from the past to the future.

With the advent of human language in the course of human evolution, temporally organised memory could be put to new uses, specifically the use of sharing knowledge across the social group. With language, individuals could pass on to other members of the group specific information about what they had experienced or observed. Individual episodic memories could be turned into episodic narratives, thereby expanding the practical knowledge base within the group, and establishing a shared memory store that could be passed on through symbolic means to later generations.

CULTURAL NARRATIVES

Memory for personally experienced episodes is not all that individuals might share with the group. What might initially have been individual thoughts about the natural world, proposing explanations for unexpected occurrences and making predictions about future events, could be shared as well, and these might borrow the narrative form used to exchange stories. Narratives situate action in time and place, introduce agents, connect events through mental and physical causal and temporal sequences moving towards a goal or outcome. Complex narratives serve as origins stories, symbolic accounts of the beginning of the earth and its inhabitants, morality tales, religious

myths, epics of heroic deeds, and so on. All human cultures have narratives of these kinds that encode shared beliefs, from which they derive coherence and the group cohesiveness that has been both the glory and the bane of human existence throughout its history.

Donald (1991) argued that the primary function served by language for early *Homo sapiens* was narrative. The invention of language, in this view, was the catalyst that made all of human culture the rich tapestry that we have observed over the millennia of history and prehistory. Narratives served for the production of cultural myths that solidified social structures, and provided common ways of understanding and explaining the world. Individuals participate in these myths, and may contribute to them, but their function is primarily communal, not personal. Carrithers (1991) asserted that human societies would not be possible without the aid of narrative, which ties together not only family structures over generations, but importantly marks the generations of political hierarchies, establishing legitimacy of power. In Carrithers' view, human societies themselves would not exist without the glue that narratives make possible.

Thus I am suggesting that a particular form of temporally organised individual memory came to serve a cultural function through shared narratives, producing the mythic structures that have served as the cohesive glue of cultural groups. Personal memories, which had been encapsulated within the individual, became transformed through verbal narratives into cultural memory, incorporating a cultural belief system. An important point to note is that, like language, narrative is assumed to be a group construction, one that turns individual memories into shared conceptual systems. Societal narratives establish an inclusiveness that in turn relies on the common memories of individuals within the society. Whether religious, secular poetic, or historic in form, communal narratives tend to reflect unchanging hierarchical forms of societies, providing information for individuals of their place within the society, whether low or high, and the behaviours (and even thoughts) that are acceptable for those places. Moreover, and this point is critical, to the extent that cultural narratives provide the explanatory structure that defines individual human lives, as is characteristic of most pre-Modern societies, there is little call for individuals to seek self-definitions for their own lives. As a result there is little use for the personal function of autobiographical memory as an explanatory self story.

The thrust of this proposal is that the evolution of temporally organised memory gave rise in human culture to communal narratives that serve an adaptive function, for both the society and for the individual. The temporally organised memory that was originally encapsulated in individuals became functional within the society and thus served individuals in a different more expanded way. The memory burden for the individual is then different; it has more sources outside the person's own experience. At the same time, minor experiential variations may be ignored when life is expected to be the same in an unchanging future world, determined in advance by the communal memory. Whereas temporality and self are important components of autobiographical memory, in the communal narrative time is a salient feature while self remains hidden from view.

An implication of this view of the relation between cultural narratives and individual memory is that the stronger and more coherent a mythic societal foundation, the more integrated the social structure, and the less likely that individual variations of experience will be valued or encouraged. The psychological question then is whether such individual variations will be or can be privately harboured. Can we assume that autobiographical memory is a psychological universal with a universal function?

THE RISE OF INDIVIDUALISM IN NARRATIVE AND MEMORY

Mythically based cultures rest on a world view of the recurrence of the cycles of lives, where the future is expected to repeat the past. In Europe as recently as the 17th century, the world view in the West was of an eternal enduring reality where each individual lifespan was determined in terms of its place within the whole society (Watt, 2001/1957). In such frameworks, specific past happenings are of only passing interest if they do not fit the cultural moulds. Art and literature are expressions of the common narratives of the culture, not of specific individual lives. Then, given a strong mythic foundation, individuals within a society have little incentive to compose individualised pasts and project unique individual aspirations for the future.

The last three centuries of European history comprise a period during which changes in

economic arrangements, with repercussions on family life, were accompanied by wide-ranging changes in world views, reflected in new forms of philosophy, literature, and art. Specifically, an emerging individualistic perspective permeated the institutions and practices of society. The philosophical individualism of both Descartes and Locke (different as their views might be) can be seen as both reflective of and contributing to this shift in world view. The emergence of individualism was a product of converging societal forces, encouraged by the emphasis on individual responsibility in Puritan and Protestant forms of Christianity. Changing economic arrangements, as the production of goods such as textiles moved out of extended households into commercial businesses located in urban areas, required that individuals establish their own social and economic place, no longer determined solely by the locale and status of one's family. As a result, the traditional extended family structure tended to disintegrate, as children left home to seek their fortunes in the burgeoning cities, where new identities, and new nuclear families were formed. (See Watt 2001/1957 for an excellent summary of these social and cultural shifts.)

The rise of both the novel and biography in the 18th century reflected this emergence of individualistic world views. Both are based on individual life stories and thus depend on real or fictional versions of autobiographical memory. The relation between the individualism of the Modern era and its expression in written forms, particularly the novel and autobiography, has been intensively discussed by scholars of 18th century history and literature. Watt (2001/1957) focused on ''the rise of the novel'' (in the book of that title) as a product of the social and economic changes taking place in Britain during the 18th century. In characterising the novels of Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding, Watt emphasised a new ''realism'' that focused on the particularities of the everyday world in the lives of individual characters with distinctive personalities, and on time sequences that mirrored those of the everyday events they reported. This realism contrasted with classic literary forms—classic drama, epic poetry—based on conventional plots and structures. New productions of the classical type, including Shakespeare's, varied the expression but not the plot of their narratives. These literary forms thus reflected a mythic view of cyclical time, presented through summaries of events, omitting detailed descriptions of scenes, which, because of their familiarity, could be easily re-imagined by the hearers of the standard tales.

Watt (2001/1957) pointed out that the novel was the first wholly written (printed) literary genre. Prior to the 18th century literary forms were basically oral, meant to be read or recited aloud, often in groups. Novels, however, are usually read alone, thereby encouraging the individual reader's identification with its characters, ''reliving'' the events with them. Other printed forms, emerging at about the same time, included diaries and individualistic autobiographies. These written forms of a person's own life (ongoing or retrospective and reflective) transformed everyday personal episodic memory into a retelling of a life story that was at least sometimes meant to be shared, if not with the world at large, then with a later version of the self.

During the course of the 19th century the novel was also used to illuminate lives from perspectives and contexts beyond the middle (reading) class and the dominant male perspective. In the 19th century women became recorders of their own perspectives on lives as lived, through diaries as well as novels. For example, Jane Austen explored the marriage conventions of the English gentry, and its often deleterious effects on women's lives. Throughout the 19th century women ''scribblers'' comprised a large proportion of the authors of novels.

The social characteristics that Watt (2001/1957) cited as contributing to the rise of the novel in England in the first place—individualism, economic opportunity—were especially characteristic of American life, where autonomy, personal freedom, and self-reliance were part of the national psyche from the beginning (documented by de Toqueville 1945/1835). Following the example set by Dickens, who shed light on the ravages of rural and urban poverty on children as well as adults in 19th century Britain, American novelists by the end of the 19th century began to focus on the more pernicious aspects of urban life in industrial societies, especially pronounced among the large and growing immigrant populations. Novelists such as Dreiser gave voice to the intractable problems individuals with few resources faced within the capitalist American economy.

Whereas the classic literature of pre-Modern Europe envoiced the common cultural assumptions on which lives were structured, novels emerging in the 18th and 19th centuries as individualistic narratives served a similar communal function through providing descriptions of

different possible life patterns. Rather than describing an eternally unchangeable life space, the new individualistic literature described the problems that life circumstances posed for the individual within a community where change and challenge were to be expected. Literature no longer reflected mythic time and a settled world; freedom and change (progress) were shown in their dark as well as light sides. Individuals were thus faced with charting their own futures in the light of their own remembered pasts.

TIME, NARRATIVE, AND MEMORY

Freeman's (1998) discussion of modes of human time attempted to put some of these societal changes in individual psychological perspective. He proposed three distinctive modes of time: mythic, historical, and narrative, where each provides a different perspective on the world. Mythic time is basically cyclical, in that the past is expected to be repeated in the present and future, and individual lives repeat those who came before. Mythic time thus incorporates meaning for both the society and the individual, and tends to preempt meaning of the individual life's sojourn. Historical time, in contrast, is scientific and linear, its causal sequences impersonal and determinative; thus historical time lies outside personal time and meaning. In Freeman's account, a shift from mythic to historical time was the notable development of the 18th century. Narrative time, according to this scheme, is eventful and discontinuous, structured and configured with meaning. Freeman sees narrative time as characteristic of the contemporary world, and dates its emergence as a dominant form to the social upheavals of the 19th century.

In Freeman's view narrative time—eventful, discontinuous—is an inherent characteristic of autobiographical memory. This view contrasts with my earlier proposal relating cultural narratives to individual memory, where narrative was seen as a group construction that was adaptable to individual memory functions (e.g., anticipating the future). Brockmeier (2002, p. 9) takes a more integrated view of memory and culture, stating that ''there is no principal separation of what traditionally is viewed as individual or personal memory from what traditionally is viewed as social, collective or historical memory. Considering the manifold layers of the cultural fabric that weaves together individual, group and society, the idea ... of an isolated and autonomous individual becomes meaningless.''

Another temporal perspective has been put forth by social psychologists (McGrath & Kelly, 1986), who have pointed out the distinctiveness of experiential or transactional time that orders individual human lives. Transactional time refers to the cultural organisation of daily, seasonal, and societally significant events. It is based on the temporal order of ''doing'' activities, rather than the temporal order of ''telling'' about these activities. It brings together the broader cultural configuration of time in action with its individual configuration; transactional time thus organises experiential time in memory as well as in daily living. Transactional time forms the framework of autobiographical memories, which societal-level temporal orders (mythic, historical, or narrative) may each then contribute to or transform (Nelson, 1998).

It is an essential part of Watt's (2001/1957) argument on the rise of the novel that literature and the surrounding social structures and values are connected. The additional point I want to suggest is that they are organically connected, in that during periods of mythic time, the literature that constitutes the communal form of shared memory tends to exclude expressions of the individuality of time and experience; whereas with the breaking through to historic and narrative time, where change is both expected and welcomed, a vacuum of self-determination is created which may be filled with individual life narratives that use the past to project into the future.

Certainly, the temporal experience of events is not the same as narrative time. Time in the novel is very different from transactional or experiential time. Watt (2001/1957) noted that some early novelists, in particular Sterne, attempted to recreate the experience of time in the novel, but the effort inevitably failed. Similarly, personal narratives, derived from autobiographical memories, are imposed on selected experiences for purposes that are individually significant, whether they incorporate cultural meanings or not. This claim differs from Freeman's, as well as that of psychologists like Bruner (1986) who see narrative as an inherent mode of thought, contrasted to the paradigmatic mode. In the present view, in contrast, narrative form is a cultural invention, one that may be adopted by individuals in organising their own autobiographical memories. The further implications of this view are that the extent and effect of individual adoption of a particular

cultural narrative form and/or content varies among cultures and historical periods, and that individuals learn the cultural forms in early childhood to greater or lesser degrees of usefulness.

A point that follows from this is that if narratives are imposed on event memories for the telling, providing the coherence and point that are the same for the listener as the teller, the teller may no longer truly ''remember'' the memory (Mink, 1980). In the distancing necessary to compose the narrative, the teller may find it difficult to participate fully in re-experiencing the past that Tulving claims is a prime criterion for episodic/autobiographic memory. Whereas the meaning for the individual resides in the re-experience, the imposed narrative is a way of establishing shared (not idiosyncratic) meaning. It is not necessary to agree with Mink (1980) that telling destroys the ''true'' experience of the memory to accept the point that narrativising it is a way of sharing meaning.

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SELF IN MEMORY AND FICTION

A different perspective is provided by Eakin's (1985) commentary on the fiction of memory, implying a close parallel between the novel and the ''reinvention of the self'' in autobiography, a reinvention based on the original ''invention'' of self in that period of early childhood now recognised as the beginning of autobiographical memory, self, and time (Nelson, 1996, 1997, 2001). The ''fiction'' of memory that Eakin refers to is a product of its reliance on re-construction in context, dependent on differing elicitations and circumstances. In another, cognitive, sense it can be asserted that autobiographical memory is as imaginative as is future projection of the self. Both are based on past experience re-imagined (or re-constructed) to fit the present or future circumstances, although typically we believe memory to be more mimetic with respect to ''reality'' and future plans to be freer of the constraints of what has already taken place. Nonetheless, these considerations begin to reveal the closeness of the connection between autobiographical memory and fiction, a connection made manifest by overtly autobiographical novelists such as Erica Jong or Philip Roth.

Eakin (1985) cites a number of autobiographers (James, 1956/1983; Kingston, 1977; Nabokov, 1966) who remark on the emergent realisation of the self through the medium of language at about the age of 4 years. Prior to this age only an implicit self was seen to exist by these writers, whereas the reflective self in relation to others and to temporality—the continuity of self over time—is an explicit linguistic construction, or invention. Eakin (p. 192) states ''that the self and language are mutually implicated in a single interdependent system of symbolic behavior.'' He quotes Benveniste (p. 195): ''With the advent of language … the gradual emergence of the self accelerates. It is not a question of language endowing a hitherto mute self with the capacity for self-expression, but, quite possibly of language constituting the self in its very make-up.'' It is striking that these quotations mirror the evolving recognition among developmental psychologists of the close connection between language practices and the emergence of autobiographical memory in early childhood, indeed at the specific age span identified by these literary sources (Fivush, 1991; Nelson, 1996).

The most dramatic evidence of the close relation of self and language comes from Helen Keller's famous autobiography (Keller, 1905/1954) in which she relates how at the age of 6 years she awakened to the power of words as her teacher (Annie) finger-spelled the word ''water'' into her hand while pumping water into it. She relates that following this incident she asked for and learned the ''words'' for everything in her immediate world, and at once came into a new sense of herself in the world around her, a sense of being a self in relation to others. That she had some inchoate memories from the years prior to this event suggests that personal memory *per se* does not depend on language, but that language has the power to make these memories explicit and to provide a wholly new sense of the self in its context.

The other autobiographers noted by Eakin emphasise that it is the relational aspects of language—the I in relation to the Other and to the continuity of the I in the past, present, and ongoing into the future—that brings out the self in its reflective and reflexive form. These ideas relate well to current psychological theories of the origin of autobiographical memory in early childhood; very similar claims made in commentary on the autobiography genre from a literary perspective are independently made in the contemporary literature on the emergence of autobiographical memory (see Nelson, 2001; Nelson & Fivush,

2000, 2002). In his most recent book Eakin (1999) lays even more stress on the inherent relational aspect of autobiography and its origins in discursive cultural practices, which aligns well with the developmental and cultural research.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL MEMORY AND NARRATIVE IN CONTEMPORARY CULTURES

In contemporary Euro-American societies, autobiographical memory emerges somewhere around $3\frac{1}{2}$ years of age, as shown in numerous studies of adult recall of memories from early childhood (Pillemer & White, 1989). Moreover, it is during this period of early childhood that adults typically begin to talk with children about their memories (Nelson & Fivush, 2000). Such adult talk differs in its forms and emphases, some being more elaborative and narrative-like than others (Reese & Fivush, 1993). It has been shown in a number of studies that the ways in which adults talk with their children about the past is correlated with children's later (as much as two years) memory reports in both quantity and completeness (Nelson & Fivush, 2000). Autobiographical memory also differs among people, both in its age of onset, and in the density and quality of the memories from early childhood.

Important to the present account is the fact that differences in onset, quantity, and quality also characterise individuals from different cultures. Contemporary cultural differences in autobiographical memory have been documented in a series of studies (Han, Leichtman, & Wang, 1998; Mullen, 1994; Wang, Leichtman, & Davies, 2000) showing that members of Asian societies (China, Korea, Japan) report fewer autobiographical memories, and have fewer and later memories from early childhood than do Euro-Americans. Leichtman (2001) has reported the most extreme differences among cultures. She and her colleagues studied autobiographical memories of people residing in a rural Indian farming community. Native speakers interviewed adults of both sexes and varying ages about their memories of the past, and especially of their memories of childhood. Almost all the interviewees claimed that they did not remember specific episodes from the past, and further that there was ''no point'' to doing so. They did report generalities of life in the past, but somewhat reluctantly and in skeletal form. They differed in these respects from urban dwellers from the same area and linguistic group, who were able to provide some specific accounts of past lives, although fewer than would be expected from a Western population.

Leichtman and her colleagues also obtained video tapes of families with young children in their homes, with the aim of analysing references to the past in conversations between adults and children, and found that, as expected, there was little talk about the past, and what there was tended to be about general or ''semantic'' issues, such as what homework was assigned. These findings strongly suggest, as inferred from the previous research on mother–child memory talk, that in the absence of models who provide guidance in formulating narratives about the personal past, and of societal values that give such narratives meaning, individuals do not compose life stories in the same way that we expect people in Western societies to do. A further interpretation is that the traditional society in which the rural Indian people live provides a strong sense of prescribed life roles in an unchanging world, precluding the value of reproducing individual life experiences in memory accounts.

Given the widely accepted assumptions that autobiographical memory serves both social and self functions, and given the cultural differences in memory found in cross-cultural studies, the question arises: Are these functions served in different ways in different cultures, for example in contemporary Asian societies and in Western ones? It is now accepted that the sense of self and identity differs between these two meta-cultures, with Asian individuals reporting more interpersonal identification and a closer self-identity with family and friends than do Americans, who tend to value autonomy more (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). As implied in the previous sections, the relations between individual memory and communal forms of memory, between narratives of the self, social narratives of others, and communal narratives of all kinds are keys, I believe, to understanding the source and meaning of the social and self functions of autobiographical memory.

To understand contemporary autobiographical memory, then, it is important to situate it in its cultural context, and not solely in the social and individual context of its development. It is necessary therefore to examine the constituents of contemporary American culture that heighten attention on autobiographical memory, and on the possible reasons for this attention. In doing this, however, it is important to keep in mind the multi-

cultural composition of contemporary American society. As Mullen (1994) and Wang and Ross (2001) have documented in a number of studies, cultural differences in autobiographical memory between Chinese-Americans and Euro-Americans are found in the same directions as in comparisons of Euro-Americans with Chinese people in China, although somewhat muted in size. Characteristics of American culture, where the majority of the work on the early development and later characteristics of autobiographical memory have been carried out, are those of the ''mainstream'' middle-class native-born population. Similar descriptions may apply to other Western or Westernised societies and to other groups within the United States, but differences must also be recognised. There is considerable room for additional exploration of both differences and similarities in the characteristics of autobiographical memory among people of different cultures.

FROM INDIVIDUALISM TO PERSONALISM

It is often claimed that American culture and cultural values have changed little since de Toqueville's observations in the early 19th century. However, technical, economic, and social changes in American life and society over the past century imply otherwise. Given the thesis of this article that individual memory relates to cultural narratives in various ways, the characteristics of contemporary culture that may bear on our understanding of the functions of autobiographical memory bear examination. In particular, changes in these characteristics over the past 50 years have frequently been noted in the general media as well as in professional literature. Classic sociological studies of the 1950s (e.g., Riesman, 1961; Whyte, 1956) pointed out changes from the previous generations of Americans towards a more ''other-directed'' individual—other-directed not towards traditional family and community members, but toward peers and the institutions (corporations, governments) that related to and controlled their adult lives. Thirty years later Lasch (1979) described the ''culture of narcissism'' in terms that related the dense interpersonal conditions of modern life to a newly intense focus on self. These writers and others since have shared the conviction that cultural changes, reflected in cultural productions such as literature and visual media, have had profound influences on the inhabitants of modern urban societies, perhaps especially American. Here I want to speculatively explore some of these influences and their pathways in relation to cultural differences in the functions of autobiographical memory.

In the last half of the 20th century, the child-rearing practices of the adults who grew up during and after World War II changed radically from the previous norms. Partly influenced by ''Dr Spock'' (Spock, 1946) former emphases on order, routine, and respect for the authority of adults in family, school, church, and community, were replaced by a child-centred emphasis on freedom of expression, flexibility of daily routines, and healthy personality development. Changes in family structure over this period have been dramatic, partly due to the sexual revolution of the 1960s and later. As the majority of women took on lifetime employment in the 1970s, the ways that families organised their households and lives changed. In addition, an unprecedented increase in unmarried parenting in all social classes, as well as of single-parent families has taken place. In comparison with generations who were children prior to the 1950s, the greatest differentiating factor may be the pervasiveness of television, music, video—and for the last 15 years computers—which now dominate so much of the time in children's lives. These changes in the way that people live of course affected the children who have grown up during this period (''baby boomers'' and ''Generation X'', now adults in their 20s to 50s), especially in terms of their expectations of adult life and of their relation to peers and their communities.

Educational institutions, in response to pressures from trends in child-rearing, as well as political and technical change, gradually began to adjust to these changes in far-reaching ways. By the 1960s many schools had abandoned dress codes and adopted more flexible scheduling, ''open'' classrooms, with revised textbooks and novel curriculums designed to adapt to a multicultural and technically sophisticated population. The ''radical'' movements of the 1960s for racial equality, women's rights, and associated demands for political and institutional change, resulted in such educational innovations as university curricula individually constructed by each student, coeducational dorm life, and the like.

National mythology and cultural narratives that were formerly purveyed through school,

community, and church gradually disappeared from view during the last half of the 20th century. Bible stories had been commonly taught in elementary schools as well as Sunday Schools, along with tales of adventure and war, such as the Knights of the Round Table, fairy tales, and the morality tales that were common in the Readers used for generations in American schools. Today, individual families are responsible for conveying society's histories, myths, and values as they view them, through their own choices of what stories their children hear, what places they visit, what TV, video, and movies they watch, what books they are encouraged to read, and what conversations they engage in. Conservative commentators in response decry the loss of traditional values common to all replaced by a multicultural plurality of values.

A summary view of these recent societal trends might be termed the ''personalisation of culture'', which may be particularly pervasive in the United States but is not confined to that country. Whereas individualism conveys autonomy within a common society where values are generally shared, personalism conveys ''person-defined'' needs and values independent of the surrounding society (sometimes changing in response to different social contexts as Gergen, 1994, argues). These generational changes have all been subject to a great deal of commentary and speculation among academics and other professionals as well as journalists. Here the question is how they might bear on the relation of cultural narratives and the self and societal functions of autobiographical memory that has been proposed in the previous sections. If self stories reflect general cultural narratives, whether purveyed in myths, novels, or in contemporary forms such as movies and television, there should be observable changes in the content, form, or function of autobiographical memory over this period. How to track such changes is the problem, and here I can only suggest some possible directions.

In contrast to the previous period of conformity to accepted models (whether derived from novels, movies, or religious tracts), everyone now must have a personal story to tell, beginning in preschool, and everyone's story must emphasise his or her unique individuality. Common culture consists, not of common knowledge of political and social affairs and expectations of personal responsibility, but of common recognition of personalities from different quarters of society, whether sports, politics, movies, music, or fashion. Filling these needs is an increasing number of personal memoirs, biographies, and autobiographies, as well as magazine ''profiles'' of famous and not-so-famous people, an art form perfected in recent years. Newspapers place a ''feature story hook'' on the majority of news reports, beginning with a personal account of some person or family before launching into the facts of what the news is about. Even more, television news focuses much of its attention on individual stories designed to illustrate general points.

Schools have substituted a new kind of inclusiveness for the old common culture through a practice of self-expression, beginning in preschools and the early elementary years with ''sharing time'' or ''show and tell''. Prior to the institution of these traditions sometime in the post-World War II period, group activities were organised around learning projects, not individual expression. Family activities, trips, pets, and other personal experiences were not part of the school curriculum, and were not expected to be brought into the classroom. Mary's ''little lamb'' was a cautionary tale, not a model to be followed.

Recent developmental research on memory has focused on the ways in which parents encourage their children to engage in talk about remembered episodes (Fivush, 1991; Nelson & Fivush, 2000), concluding that children learn the narrative ways of formulating their stories about themselves, to contribute to the discourse, and to build up autobiographical memory. In the present social context where personal histories have become very important, both school and parent practices of this kind can be viewed as apprenticeship to personhood. Further, the self function and the social function of the self story converge. It is important to imagine one's past and future for one's own self-image and concept; at the same time, it is important to learn to tell the narrative in ways that interest the listener as well as the teller.

Autobiographical memory in contemporary America is thus revealed as particularly important because, in the light of the vanishing of mythic or fictional models that instruct individuals how they are to live their lives, lives must be individually composed. The individual construction of a life plan depends on the conscious continuity and integration of the self through time and with society. When there is no historical line to continue, to fill in, or to take one's place in, but rather a unique personal line to be filled, autobiographical memory must serve as a source of

direction and personal strength. However, one must not only have a life, but also present it effectively to other people. Thus, the personalisation of American culture in addition means that acquiring narrative skill is important for the telling of one's unique story. These observations suggest the reasons that parents, preschools, and kindergartens might put special emphasis on encouraging children to become good at telling about their past. The hypothesis here is that this practice may be a particular manifestation of the focus on the personal that is so much a part of contemporary culture. This possibility is supported by the cross-cultural research that has revealed significant differences in the timing and quality of autobiographical memories among different national groups, consistent with attributions of different self and identity concepts in the different groups, as well as differences in parental practices of encouraging talk about the self in the past.

What is implied here is that what we are studying today in developmental research on autobiographical memory is at least partly the result of recent societal changes, and that autobiographical memory may serve more important functions to members of this culture than in any previous society. Because establishing a unique and autonomous self is more important than ever before to taking one's place in this society, autobiographical memory is more important to the individual in both its social and personal functions. It expresses the self to others and establishes peer relations, at the same time that it provides ballast for maintaining identity within a somewhat fractured community, where in the eyes of some observers (e.g., Gergen, 1994) there is no single self but rather many selves to be displayed on different occasions.

This is not to deny that children in general must be initiated into the practices of narrativising memory through experience with this as a discourse practice. Eakin's (1985) review of the autobiographies of Nabokov, Kingston, and others, has emphasised their accounts of the invention of the self through language in early childhood. But these authors did not depend on the intensive tutoring that some of our children are given. Indeed, in Kingston's case, as Eakin relates, as a female child in China she was strongly discouraged from telling stories of herself. However, she was exposed to narratives and family histories in tales told by her mother—and presumably exposure to such narratives may be sufficient for many or most children to construct their own self-narratives. Leichtman's (2001) report of a culture in which memory narratives are downplayed and people deny interest in their past suggests the importance of the link between accessible narratives in the culture and composing narratives of the self. What is different today it seems, is not that children are learning the narrative form of autobiographical memory, but that they are being overtly encouraged both at home and in school to do so. The autobiographical tales have taken on a social significance that gives them a special resonance and importance to the child as well as the adult.

There are two important parts to this conclusion about the function of autobiographical memory and its relation to cultural narratives in the contemporary world. One is that the vanishing of common communal narratives, replaced with a cacophony of personal stories, makes it necessary for individuals to each add their own unique self story. The other is the necessity in today's world of perfecting the skill of the telling of one's personal story. I have argued that we can understand the relation of the personal and the cultural in the context of the different ways that stories of self and society have served similar self and social functions throughout human history, with a balance between the roles of individual and society shifting over time.

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