Parent–child reminiscing locates the self in the past

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In this paper, we extend our social-cultural developmental model of autobiographical memory development (Nelson & Fivush, 2004) to discuss children’s developing understanding of self and other as temporally extended in time. Parent-guided reminiscing about past events that includes discussion, comparison, and negotiation of internal states of self and other, and places these internal states in explanatory narratives of behaviour, allows children to construct a psychologically imbued representation of relations between past and present, and self and other. We provide a theoretical and empirical review in support of these arguments and end with directions for future research.

One of the most fundamental developmental phenomena that occurs during the preschool years is the emergence of the child from living in the ‘here-and-now’ to a deeper understanding of self as extended in time, both backwards into the past and forward into the future. In this paper, we argue that until children begin talking with others about what they have experienced in the past, or about the experiences of others at some other time, young children do not represent themselves in past lives or project themselves into possible futures. More specifically, we argue that parent-guided reminiscing, specifically about internal states, structures children’s developing understanding of their own and other’s past and allows for children’s construction of a temporally extended understanding of self and other.

This argument derives from our research on parent–child reminiscing that extends over more than a 20-year period. In particular, longitudinal research on relations between the structure and content of parent-guided reminiscing and children’s developing autobiographical and narrative skills supports this argument. We have presented some of this evidence and related arguments in two earlier papers that focused on the emergence of autobiographical memory during the preschool period (Fivush & Nelson, 2004; Nelson & Fivush, 2004). Here, we specifically focus on the...
aspects of social and self-understanding revealed in these conversations, especially those that have been observed in recent work from our research groups and from others. In this context, we argue that conversations about the past are of special importance for two reasons. On the one hand, talking about what has happened in the past requires both participants to defocus from the present and to refer to a mental representation of a past event, one that was either shared between the two or that was experienced by only one of the conversationalists. In this paper, we concentrate on the case of shared events as that is where much of the data have been concentrated, although we recognize the significance of reminiscing about unshared past events as well. The second reason that talking about the past is uniquely important is that it allows the child to reflect on past actions and particularly past feelings, emotions, and beliefs related to these actions. In so reflecting, the child brings into consciousness the former self, different in some ways and yet the same as the present self. Such talk may be a foundation for the self-understanding of a ‘continuing me’ from the past into the present and on into the future, although at present this is a hypothesis subject to further research and evidence.

Our perspective that language, and more specifically, adult-guided discourse about the past, is critical in children’s developing understanding of self, time, and mind reflects the Vygotskian theory of the relation between social interaction, language, and mind (Vygotsky, 1978). Our interpretation of this perspective views the emergence of self and social understanding in terms of multi-causal components, as proposed in Nelson and Fivush (2004). In this view, early development of self and social relations are basic to the development of language (Tomasello, 1999), which, in turn, enables social interaction on the higher plane of conversational engagement and the articulation of relations of temporal periods (past, present, and future) of self and other differentiations, and emotional and mental states. From this theoretical perspective, the developmental ‘mechanism’ requires linguistically mediated social interaction in conjunction with the child’s capacity for representing internally what is experienced externally in talk and for reconstructing from memory what was experienced in the past (in action or in talk). This complex of processes (rather than mechanics) evolves over time to produce social- and self-understandings, based on orientations to past, present and future, such as have been observed in longitudinal studies.

Thus our paper presents two parts of the process: first, observations of parent–child reminiscing from early in development, and second, evidence of growing understanding of self and other in temporal perspective later in development. We are not focusing on evidence of theory of mind specifically, as that is not our central concern, although we do present evidence of growing awareness of emotional and mental states from the past as well as the present. Rather, our focus is on the emergence of children’s understanding of self and other as extended beings in time, with thoughts, emotions, beliefs, and desires that connect past to present and self to other. More specifically, in relation to understanding of mind, internal states may differ among individuals at any given point in time, may change within the self over time, and may change in others over time. Thus, the child is faced with the difficult task of constructing an understanding of how internal states of both self and other that may or may not be stable over time are related to and causative of behaviour in the past, in the present, and from the past to the present.

Several recent reviews have established the role of conversational interaction and internal state language on children’s developing understanding of mind (Carpendale & Lewis, 2004; Symons, 2004), and we do not review this research in detail here. Rather, we extend these arguments by focusing on talk about the past, that is, reminiscing, as being critical in this process. We argue that it is through the formation of
autobiographical narratives that link past to present, self to other, and mind to
behaviour, that children construct a more complex understanding of mind. As displayed
in Table 1, we argue that specific aspects of parent–child reminiscing lead the child to
specific forms of cognitive processing about self and other, which, in turn, constitutes
children’s developing understanding of mind as psychologically real and extended in
time.

Why talk about the past is critical
Our first claim is that talk about the past is critical in constructing an understanding of
mind. Conversations about past events pose a special challenge for very young children
in that the topic of conversation is not physically present. Whereas even quite young
children are able to attain a state of inter-subjectivity, in which the adult and child are
both attentionally focused on the same physically present object (Tomasello, 1999),
when talking about a past event, the conversational participants must establish a non-
shared referent that has no physical embodiment but only exists in the mind of each.
How does a child come to understand that when the mother asks about going to the zoo,
the mother and child are both thinking about and referring to the same past event? How
does a representation of a past event become an object of shared attention?

Any conversation focused on a shared past event must rely on at least one
conversational partner holding a conscious representation of that event in mind and
describing it in ways that allow the other conversational partner to access their own
representation of that same event so that the two may share a topic of conversation.
Thus, unlike talk about ongoing events, talk about the past requires the object of shared
attention to be a shared representation, and the conversational participants must
negotiate the shared representation through language. When the shared past is
discussed, both conversational participants have consciously called to mind and are
referring to their own representations of a past event, and, at least for mature
interactants, each is aware that the other also has a memorial representation to which
their language refers, although also recognizing that the representations may differ in
some ways.

Although young children begin to engage in adult-guided conversations about the
past very early in development, as early as the end of the second year (e.g. Eisenberg,
1985; Nelson & Ross, 1980; Sachs, 1983), it is not at all clear that children this age yet
understand that memories are representations of past events, let alone that these
representations may differ even among individuals who shared that event together in
the past. Essentially, we are arguing that before the age of 3, children are most probably
not aware that when discussing the past with others, that the mental object that is the
topic of conversation is not a reproduction of what occurred in the past, and thus, each
individual may not have the same ‘object’ in mind.

This claim requires some backing. There is now ample evidence that children as
young as 9 months retain some memory of a novel event for as long as 1 month, and by
24 months, the length of delayed memory may stretch into years (Bauer, Wenner,
Dropik, & Wewerka, 2000). However, there is little evidence that the child’s
demonstration of knowing how to make a toy, based on observation some months in the
past, reflects awareness of this knowledge as a representation of the past event.

In order to develop an awareness that memories are not accurate reproductions of
what happened, one must understand either that one recalls the event differently over
time (this would require rather sophisticated metamemory skills in comparing
Table 1. Relations between parent–child reminiscing, child’s cognitive processing and child’s developing understanding of self and other

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<th>Parent–child reminiscing</th>
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similarities and differences in one’s own memory over time, something that even most adults find difficult; e.g. Wilson & Ross, 2003) or one must realize that different individuals who experienced the same event can recall different things about it. That is, to move from a reproduction theory of memory to a representational theory of memory, the child must come to understand that the representation is selective and others may or may not recall the same experienced event in the same way. It seems evident that the only way in which this knowledge can be acquired is through language. It is only through discussing past events with others that one can come to realize that others may not recall the event in the same ways as the self.

We argue that there are critical conversational junctures at which parents and children disagree about what occurred during a past event that may cause children to re-evaluate their understanding of what a memory is and that lead to a representational theory of memory (Fivush, 2001). The following excerpt from a conversation between a mother and her 40-month-old child about a shared trip to the circus illustrates this process (all examples are from Reese, Haden, & Fivush, 1993, unless otherwise specified; in this and all other examples, M stands for mother, and C for child):

Example 1:
M: What other animals did we see at the circus?
C: A giraffe
M: No, we didn’t see a giraffe at the circus. Who did we see at the circus that looked funny? Remember the rhinoceros?
< 4 turns focusing on seeing a rhinoceros >
M: What else did we see at the circus?
C: Um, giraffe.
M: No, we didn’t.

In this example, the child seems fairly sure that he saw a giraffe at the circus, in fact bringing it up twice in a relatively brief conversation, but the mother asserts not. By negating what the child reports, the mother is implicitly informing the child that they recall different things about the event and that the mother’s version is right. Perhaps even more compelling is when parents explicitly acknowledge that they have forgotten certain aspects of the event as in this excerpt of a conversation about a family trip to visit grandparents:

Example 2:
M: What did Mommy find for you that you brought home?
C: Rocks
M: Yeah, we got some rocks, didn’t we?
C: And fire hats
M: And fire hats? Yeah, that’s right! Those tiny little fire hats. I forgot about those. Where did you get those?
C: Grandma and Grandpa
M: Grandma and Grandpa gave those to you.

In this excerpt, when the child recalls something the mother does not, she reflects on her own memory and acknowledges that the child recalls correctly but that she had forgotten. In this way, there is direct acknowledgement that memories can differ, and that different individuals can remember and forget different aspects of an experienced
event. In these kinds of conversations, children are being confronted with the fact that their memory is not the same as others. Without the ability to discuss the past with others, this understanding could not be constructed. Thus we argue that language in general, and talk about the past in particular, is essential for children’s developing understanding that memory is a representation of a past event, not a reproduction.

Further, the developing understanding that memory is a representation is a prerequisite for children’s understanding of self in relation to memory. An awareness of memory as a representation that may or may not be the same as another’s allows for the further understanding that one has a unique memory of the past event (i.e. what I remember compared with what you remember). Further, it is this unique memory that allows for the connection between self and memory: ‘this is what I recall about the past, which may or may not be the same as what you recall’. These kinds of negotiations create the cognitive context for children to begin to think about what the self remembers compared with what others may remember, facilitating a new awareness of the distinctiveness of each person’s mind, and a movement into a temporally extended understanding of self and other.

Why narrative is critical
Talk about the past moves beyond references to past actions and objects. When we tell what happened, we include information about where and when the event occurred (orienting information), as well as information about what we thought and felt about the event (evaluative information; Labov & Waletzky, 1967; Peterson & McCabe, 1982). Essentially, we tell a narrative, a coherent story about the event that makes human sense (Bruner, 1990). In constructing a narrative, we construct meaning by weaving the who, when, where, and what of an event into the why. Importantly, the why is often conveyed through internal state language that includes thoughts, emotions, desires, and beliefs – what Bruner has called ‘the landscape of consciousness’. We argue that there are two ways in which narratives about the past are related to children’s understanding of mind. First, the inclusion of internal state language in past narratives helps children understand the mind of self and other as extended in time. Second, narratives weave these internal state words into more fully explicated explanations of why people behave the way they do, and specifically relate past to present, thus facilitating children’s understanding of temporally extended mind as psychologically and motivationally effective.

The inclusion of internal state language
Several recent reviews have shown the relations between internal state language and children’s developing understanding of mind (Carpendale & Lewis, 2004; Nelson, 2001; Symons, 2004). We do not review that evidence here, but, to summarize briefly, a great deal of research has established that families that engage in conversations focusing more on internal states, especially emotion terms, have children who develop earlier understanding of emotion (Denham, Zoller, & Couchard, 1994; Dunn, Bretherton, & Munn, 1987; Dunn, Brown, & Beardsall, 1991), and perform at higher levels on traditional theory of mind tasks (Dunn, Brown, Slomkowski, Tesla, & Youngblade, 1991; Ruffman, Slade, & Crowe, 2002). We extend this argument by showing how specific talk about past internal states, as embedded in narratives, allows the child to construct a temporally extended understanding of self and other. There are at least three ways in which talk about past internal states builds understanding.
Coordinating current and past self

First, when discussing past internal states, the child must coordinate current self with past self; for example, one was angry at one’s brother yesterday but is not angry now, one was sad that a favourite toy was lost and may still be sad about this. Thus, in reminiscing about the past, the child is confronted with multiple ways in which past internal states may be related to current internal states. Some of these internal states may differ between then and now and some may be the same. Thus, in these conversations, children may learn how to relate past self-understanding to current self-understanding. Such discussions allow children to come to an understanding that the life of the mind, as expressed in mental state and emotion terms, continues to exist even when the event is over, that thoughts and feelings about events exist over time, and continue to influence the interpretation and evaluation of the past event in the present.

In support of this interpretation, several studies have confirmed that parents who talk more about emotion during reminiscing with their preschool children have children who include more emotion in these co-constructed narratives (Adams, Kuebli, Boyle, & Fivush, 1995; Fivush, Berlin, Sales, Mennuti-Washburn, & Cassidy, 2003; Kuebli & Fivush, 1992). Critically, longitudinal research has also demonstrated that mothers who talk more about emotion during shared reminiscing early in the preschool years have children who include more emotion in their personal narratives later in the preschool years (Kuebli, Butler, & Fivush, 1995), and that mothers’ use of narrative evaluation that includes emotional reactions and feelings during early mother–child reminiscing (e.g. ‘wasn’t that fun?’ and ‘that was neat!’) predicts children’s later use of evaluation in their own independent personal narratives (Fivush, 1991; Haden, Haine, & Fivush, 1997; Peterson & McCabe, 1992).

Lagattuta and Wellman (2002) have also examined spontaneous conversations about emotional experiences in mother–child dyads across the preschool years and found that the majority of discussions about negative emotions were about past emotional experiences. Furthermore, these conversations were also more likely to include discussion of causes and consequences, as well as relations to other mental states, than conversations about positive emotions. This finding suggests that talk about the past may be particularly effective for constructing understanding of negative emotional states and their relations to both past and current behaviour (Fivush et al., 2003). Importantly, there were increases in this kind of emotion talk across the preschool years.

Less research has examined mental state terms during reminiscing. Rudek and Haden (2005) examined mother-child mental state language during reminiscing in a longitudinal study from 30 to 42 months of age. Mothers were stable over time in their use of mental state language, but, not surprisingly, children increased in the inclusion of this kind of language over time. Longitudinal relations suggest that mothers facilitate children’s developing use of mental state language during reminiscing, although children also influence mothers to a limited extent. Through participating in conversations about past events in which the child’s internal states are highlighted, the child is able to make the link between past self and current self, and come to understand the self as having a temporally extended mind.

Self and other in the past

A second way in which internal state language in past talk is critical is that in such conversations, differences in how one’s own past internal state may differ from another’s past internal state may be highlighted. Whereas talk about current internal states may call attention to the fact that different people may have different thoughts,
emotions, beliefs, and desires at the moment, talk about the past focuses on the fact that these differences may be extended in time. Not only does the self have continuous internal states that may change or remain the same over time; so, too, do other people. Early in development, both mothers and children focus on the child’s emotions during reminiscing, but over the preschool years, both mothers and children begin to refer to the other’s emotions to a greater extent (Kuebli et al., 1995). Similarly, at 30 months, virtually all mental state language during reminiscing refers to the child’s mental world, but by 42 months of age, both mothers and children refer to other people’s mental lives as well (Rudek & Haden, 2005). This developmental progression suggests that parent–child reminiscing begins by focusing on the child’s mind as extended over time, but with development, begins to include others’ minds as temporally extended as well. By the end of the preschool years, children are exposed to an ever-widening circle of understanding people as temporally extended persons with temporally extended minds.

The patterns of findings across studies of internal state language in mother–child reminiscing suggest that children exposed to conversations about the past, replete with language reflective of the mind, come to understand and recall their own past experiences in more mentalistic ways, reflecting more on their own and others’ thoughts and feelings, and how these may be the same and different over time. Still, children only gradually learn a more mentalistic stance on self and other in the past. In parent-guided conversations about past events, children of 3 and 4 years of age will refer to their own mental states and emotions, and will begin to refer to the mental states and emotions of others as well. However, in their own independent narratives of the past, the inclusion of mental state and emotion language is rare. Although 4-year-old children use evaluative devices in their narratives that indicate subjective perspective (e.g. ‘that was fun’ and ‘I liked it’), these kinds of evaluations increase dramatically by age 6 (Fivush, Haden, & Adam, 1995; Peterson & McCabe, 1982). Moreover, explicit reference to mental states and emotions are still infrequent even in 5-year-olds’ independent narratives of past events (Henseler, 2000; Walkenfeld, 2000), although they are easily able to use these kinds of words when talking about ongoing events (Bartsch & Wellman, 1995; Kessler-Shaw, 1999) or in retelling stories from text (Henseler, 2000). These patterns suggest first, that preschoolers are relying on parents to scaffold their reference to, and understanding of, the mental life of self and others in the past, and second, that this is a very difficult concept that develops gradually across the preschool years.

An additional question is whether the inclusion of internal state talk in personal narratives is related to children’s understanding of mind in other contexts. There is some evidence that children who recall their past in more elaborated and more emotional ways show higher levels of understanding of mind on traditional theory of mind tasks (Perner, 2000; Welch-Ross, 2000). In addition, research by Lagattuta and Wellman (2001) indicates that as early as 4 years of age, children are able to link a past emotion to a current situation, such that a child whose pet rabbit was chased away by a dog in the past will now feel worried or afraid of that dog in the present. Although Lagattuta and Wellman did not assess individual differences in children’s abilities to link past events to current situations, it would be interesting to see whether children who have participated in adult-guided reminiscing that was more laden with internal state language would show earlier and better performance on these kinds of tasks. Nevertheless, the findings that children show individual differences in how much they include internal state language in their own personal narratives as a function of earlier
maternal input suggests that some children may be learning a more complex understanding of mind as extended in time.

**Different perspectives**

A third way in which internal state language facilitates understanding of self and other is related to our previous discussion of parent–child negotiations about the past. Importantly, negotiations about shared memories are often about internal reactions to events, focusing on thoughts and feelings. Mothers and children will disagree and negotiate about whether the child was sad or angry, or whether the mother wanted the child to do something the child did not want to do, as this example of a mother and her child aged 4;6 discuss the child’s emotional reaction to an amusement park ride illustrates:

**Example 3:**
- M: . . . Was that fun to go on the Ferris wheel?
- C: No.
- M: It wasn’t fun? You said it was fun. Was it scary?
- C: Yeah. I didn’t like the swings.
- M: . . . I thought it was fun.

Or in this excerpt, in which the mother and child explicitly discuss their different emotional evaluations of a shared past event:

**Example 4:**
- M: And we were all goin’ on a bike and you didn’t wanna go on a bike and so you were just going to jog but you got so tired –
- C: NOT TIRED!
- M: (Laughing) You didn’t get tired. OK. You didn’t get tired –
- C: (giggles)
- M: – but you wanted to sit on the bike seat I was peddling. What do you remember about that?
- C: Wanting you to go really really slow. My legs were hurting.
- M: (laughs) Why were your legs hurting?
- C: Cuz I was like this (spreads legs wide) all the time
- M: Cuz your legs were spread apart like that.
- C: Yeah, but if you went slowly I could relax.
- M: Uh huh
- C: And you went too fast
- M: But you had fun, though, didn’t you?
- C: It was great!
- M: What was that, a half mile or something?
- C: I was afraid I might, uh, you might go flying off the edge (both laughing), edge of the bridge and, umm. I just wanted to jog.
- M: And you were afraid of riding on the bike with me across the bridge, huh?
- C: Uh huh uh huh uh huh.

In this highly affective shared reminiscing about a family bike trip, the mother and child negotiate what happened, how they felt about it, and their evaluative perspective of the event as a whole. These kinds of negotiations are particularly important in children’s
developing understanding of mind, as they point to discrepancies between what two people experiencing the same event think and feel about it. This difference in perspective or evaluation of the past event may lead children to understand the subjective nature of memory representations: what one remembers about an event provides a subjective perspective about what was important and meaningful about this event, which is related to a subjective understanding of what one thought and felt about the event (Fivush, 2001). Thus, these kinds of negotiations move the child from a simple representational theory of memory to a *perspectival* theory of memory: ‘not only do I remember the past differently than other people, but I evaluate my past experiences from the unique perspective of my self’. It is notable that in a longitudinal corpus collected by Reese *et al.* (1993) that spanned the preschool years, no instance of this kind of negotiation was apparent until children were at least 4 years old. Thus, although mothers and children discuss the internal landscape of consciousness even very early in development, it is not until late in the preschool years that children may be able to engage in these more complex negotiations about past internal states that allow children to coordinate past self to past other, and understand both self and other as having a unique perspective on a shared past.

**Narrative structure**

When internal state language occurs in parent–child reminiscing, it is almost always embedded in longer narrative sequences that place internal states in context, explain the causes and consequences of internal states and describe how internal states are related to behaviours and outcomes. Essentially, internal states are woven into meaningful stories of human activity. In contrast to talk about ongoing events and activities, reminiscing about past events inexorably leads to the construction of a narrative that provides an explanatory framework.

Although children typically begin to participate in parent-guided talk about the past towards the end of the second year, very young children’s references to the past are fleeting and most probably refer to recent activities, such as a just-completed block tower or to breakfast that morning (Nelson & Ross, 1980; Sachs, 1983). These references tend to be just a word or two, and are difficult to understand by someone who had not shared the event. Children of this age also indicate knowledge of the past in terms of familiar scripts for repeated events, and may refer to some novel bit that occurred in such an event, without placing it at a specific place in the past. Thus, at this early point in development, children may refer to the past but, as already discussed, show little awareness of the past as a mental representation of a past event.

Over the next year or so, as children become more active participants in conversations about past events, adults continue to provide most of the content and structure of these conversations (Eisenberg, 1985; Hudson, 1990), asking the child for specific pieces of information and expanding these responses into more complete accounts of the past event. By about 2 years of age, children begin to bring up past events as topics of conversations and provide more extended comments and reports of what occurred. However, adults continue to provide most of the coherence to these accounts, integrating what each conversational participant recalls into a full narrative (Farrant & Reese, 2000; Fivush & Fromhoff, 1988; Peterson & McCabe, 1992; Reese *et al.*, 1993). This is illustrated in the following example of a mother reminiscing with her 24-month-old child. The mother takes the simple reference by the child to something that they had experienced together and makes it into a narrative.
Example 5 (Source: Engel, 1986. Used with the author’s permission).

C: Mommy, the Chrysler building.
M: The Chrysler building?
C: The Chrysler building?
M: Yeah, who works in the Chrysler building?
C: Daddy.
M: Do you ever go there?
C: Yes, I see the Chrysler building\picture of the Chrysler building\
M: I don’t know if we have a picture of the Chrysler building. Do we?
C: We went to . . . my Daddy went to work.
M: Remember when we went to visit Daddy? Went in the elevator, way way up in the building so we could look down from the big window?
C: big window.
M: mmhm.
C: When . . . we did go on the big building.
M: mmhm, the big building. Was that fun? Would you like to do it again sometime.
C: I want to go on the big building.

Notice that the mother sets the reference (‘Chrysler building’) into the sequence of visiting Daddy at work. She provides the temporal and causal structure (using ‘when’ and ‘so’), and emphasizes the high point of looking out the big window; she also supplies the evaluation (‘that was fun’) and connects it over time to the future (‘would you like to do that again sometime?’). In this way, the mother has - probably unconsciously - modelled all of the narrative components that the child may need to structure his own memory for episodes in later reminiscences, together with some of the linguistic units that aid such constructions. In acquiring narrative structure of this kind, the memory itself takes on a more coherent, holistic form that enhances its retention and recallability (Nelson, 1996).

There is now substantial evidence that children are learning the narrative forms of autobiographical memory in these early parent-guided conversations. Parents who reminisce about the past in more elaborate detail, and place past events in a clearer spatial and temporal context have children who, by the end of the preschool years, are able to recount more detailed and spatially temporally coherent narratives of their own experiences (Fivush & Fromhoff, 1988; Peterson & McCabe, 1992; Reese et al., 1993; see Nelson & Fivush, 2004, and Reese, 2002, for reviews).

Importantly, the explanatory structure provided by a coherent narrative also integrates internal states with behaviours, as the following example illustrates:

Example 6 (from Fivush et al., 2000)
M: I remember when you were sad. You were sad when (friend’s name) had to leave on Saturday, weren’t you?
C: Uh huh.
M: You were very sad. And what happened? Why did you feel sad?
C: Because (friend’s name), say, was having (Unintelligible word)
M: Yes.
C: And then she stood up on my bed and it was my bedroom. She’s not allowed to sleep there.
M: Is that why you were sad?
C: Yeah. Now it makes me happy. I also, it makes me sad. But (friend’s name) just left.
M: Uh huh.
C: And then I cried.
M: And you cried because . . .
C: (friend’s name) left.
M: Because (friend’s name) left? And did that make you sad?
C: And then I cried (makes ‘aaahhh’ sounds) like that. I cried and cried and cried and cried.
M: I know. I know. I thought you were sad because (friend's name) left. I didn’t know you were also sad because (friend’s name) slept in your bed.

In this excerpt, we see that the mother and child engage in an extended discussion and negotiation of what the child was feeling and why. The mother begins by placing the event in spatial temporal context, and then focuses on discussing the child’s emotional reaction. This young girl demonstrates a precocious understanding of linking past emotion to current emotion, as well as understanding that emotions are complex and one can feel both happy and sad at the same time. The mother helps the child structure her emotional reactions through her questioning, and at the end the mother provides a synopsis that brings together the emotion and the behaviours. In this way, co-constructing narratives helps children build explanatory structures linking past to present and internal states to actions and behaviours.

Conclusion
Into the future
We have presented arguments that talk about the past is critical in children’s developing understanding of self, other and mind. In particular, a full understanding of mind involves an understanding that self, other and mind are temporally extended, and understanding past self as continuous with the present and possibly the future as well. We have not discussed studies of future talk and their effects because such studies are still so rare (but see Benson, 1994; Hudson, 2004; Lucariello & Nelson, 1987; Nelson, 1989; Presler, 2000, for examples). However, we know from these and other studies that talk about the future is at least as frequent in everyday parent–child conversations as is talk about past events, although reference to the future is even more obscure for the child than is the past. Nonetheless, a sense of the continuing self depends on the understanding of its existence in future time, and gradually over the preschool years children come to anticipate their future as older children and adults, as well as the near future of next week or this summer.

We have also not discussed parent–child conversations about unshared past events. A further understanding of mind involves children’s developing awareness that others can have memories of events that the child did not experience. That is, each individual has a unique set of experiences that that individual alone has privileged access to. When do children become aware that their parents, for example, have memories of events that occurred outside the child’s awareness both in time and space? This is an intriguing question that has received virtually no research attention, yet seems critical to a full understanding of self and other as temporally extended beings (Fivush, in press). Moreover, this kind of understanding can only be constructed through language. It is only through language that an individual can come to understand that others have had experiences independent of the self, and to which the self only has access through language.
We have also focused on reminiscing between parents, mostly mothers, and their young children. This is because virtually all of the research on reminiscing has examined mother–child dyads. Limited research with fathers indicates that mothers and fathers do not differ substantially in how often or in how elaborately they talk about the past with their children, but fathers may talk less about emotional aspects of the past than mothers do (Buckner & Fivush, 2000; Fivush & Buckner, 2003; Reese, Haden, & Fivush, 1996). We are aware of no research examining sibling reminiscing. This is an extremely interesting avenue to pursue for multiple reasons, including findings that children with older siblings perform better on traditional theory of mind tasks (see Carpendale & Lewis, 2004, and Symons, 2004, for reviews).

Moreover, a full understanding of the development of a temporally extended self must consider gender and cultural differences as well. In terms of gender, both mothers and fathers talk more about emotions, especially sadness, and elaborate and evaluate more when reminiscing with daughters than with sons (Adams et al., 1995; Fivush et al., 2003; Reese et al., 1996). Parents also use a wider variety of emotional terms when reminiscing with daughters (Kuebli & Fivush, 1992) and place the past in a more peopled environment, talking more about relationships and affiliations with daughters than with sons (Buckner & Fivush, 2000). These patterns suggest that girls may be learning more nuanced and elaborated links between past self and present self, and may come to define themselves in more emotional and relationally oriented ways. In fact, by the end of the preschool years, girls' personal narratives are longer, more detailed, more emotional, and more peopled than are boys' (Buckner & Fivush, 1998), suggesting that girls may have a more elaborated sense of self and other as temporally extended and a more psychologically imbued understanding of mind.

There are also differences in parental reminiscing style as a function of differences in cultures. Several theorists have postulated that western concepts of self focus on autonomy and independence whereas eastern concepts of self focus more on relationships and community (Oyserman & Markus, 1993). In line with these conceptualization of self, mothers from eastern cultures, including India, China, and Korea, talk less about the individualized past, and talk in less elaborated ways about the past with their preschool children than do mothers from western cultures (see Leichtman, Wang, & Pillemer, 2003, and Pillemer, 1998, for reviews). Further, whereas western mothers encourage their children's expressions and elaborations of past emotional states, Chinese mothers often take a more directive role, asking specific questions and offering specific corrections to children's responses (Wang, 2001). Western mothers also negotiate their children's emotional reactions during reminiscing to a greater extent than Chinese mothers (Fivush & Wang, 2005). These patterns suggest that western mothers assume their children have independent emotional experiences to which the child is privileged, leading to more extended, elaborated, and negotiated discussions of these emotional experiences. In contrast, eastern mothers may assume that they understand their children's emotions as well as the children themselves do, and see their role more didactically. The ways in which autobiographical reminiscing and self-understanding are intertwined in development is clearly influenced by cultural models of self and gender, and the way in which this process unfolds developmentally must be considered in more detail in future research.

Finally, this essay is an extension of the social-cultural developmental model of autobiographical memory that we developed (Nelson & Fivush, 2004), in which we demonstrated the role of parent-guided reminiscing as a source for the construction of autobiographical memories. As we have argued here, conversations about the past are...
also critical for a full understanding of self, other and mind. Returning to the theoretical perspective articulated earlier, we argue that it is through language and parent-scaffolded interaction that children come to understand their memories as representations, and themselves as having unique perspectives on their past. We conclude by emphasizing two points about our theoretical model. First, psychological development emerges gradually over time, and through social interaction. By closely examining social interaction more broadly, and language interaction more specifically, we can examine the processes of development, and by studying these interactions longitudinally, we can map the specific ways in which language interactions shape children’s developing social cognitive concepts over real developmental time.

Second, children are not passive in this developmental process. Parents and children together co-construct their past through language and the ways in which children participate in these conversations influences the ways in which parents respond (Reese, 2002). Both the structure and content of parent–child reminiscing evolve over time, creating ever more sophisticated and nuanced understandings of past, self and other. Thus, we view this as a dialectical process whereby earlier parental scaffolding changes the way in which children understand and respond to subsequent interactions, which, in turn, influences subsequent parental scaffolding, and so on. Language is both the medium and the ‘mechanism’ of development. The very notion of a temporally extended self in which past and present are linked through internal states is not possible outside language. Without the ability to discuss, compare, and negotiate one’s own and other’s perspectives on past events, the child would not be able to construct an understanding of self and other as psychological entities that exist through time.

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