

Voice and Silence:

A feminist model of autobiographical memory

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Talk about the past is ubiquitous. Whether we are talking with old friends or new acquaintances, colleagues or family members, everyday conversations are replete with the stories of our lives. But what is it we talk about when we talk about the past? And what is that we don't say? Although the psychological study of autobiographical memory has experienced a resurgence in the past decade, the focus has been on formulating how autobiographical memories are represented and retrieved. The majority of research focuses on accuracy and retention over time (e.g., Conway & Rubin, 1993; Rubin, 1996). Moreover, virtually all the research conceptualizes autobiographical memory as internal to the individual; that is, although autobiographical memory may be used to achieve social and emotional goals (e.g., Conway & Pleydall-Place, 2000), it is a system that is organized within individual minds.

In this chapter, I present a different approach to autobiographical memory based on Katherine Nelson's (1989, 1993, 1996, 2001) social-constructionist model. How are memories of our personal experiences modulated through joint reminiscing with others? More specifically, how does what we choose to tell and not tell emerge from the kinds of interactions in which we engage and the people with whom we reminisce? I approach this question from both developmental and feminist perspectives. To foreshadow, I argue that autobiographical memory must be conceptualized within a framework that examines the ways in which personal experience is given voice, told from the individual's "owned" perspective, versus the ways in which personal experience may be silenced, either through disallowing certain stories to be told or imposing certain perspective on the

remembered event. Essentially, how are autobiographical narratives validated or invalidated by the individual, by the conversational partner and by the larger community?

To flesh out this argument, I first describe the basic principles of feminist theory in more detail and define voice and silence within the feminist concepts of place and power. Language is clearly central to this argument, and, therefore, in the second section, I show how language is critical to the development of autobiographical memory more generally and, specifically, to the development of validated and invalidated autobiographical narratives. Following from this, I develop a model of autobiographical memory based on two dimensions, voice and silence by self or other, and I illustrate this model using examples from early mother-child reminiscing. Finally, I return to the issues of language, memory, voice and silence and revisit relations between what may be remembered and what may be said.

The feminist perspective.

Although there are multiple feminist theories (see Rosser & Miller, 2000), all share the common core assumption that place and power are critical in understanding human culture (Yoder & Kahn, 1992). In order to explicate these concepts, I focus on feminist standpoint theory (Alcoff & Potter, 1993; Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1993) because this theory emerged from, and critiques specific aspects of the scientific method as used within the social sciences (Fivush, 2000). Importantly, feminist standpoint theory endorses the scientific method and the role of experimentally derived empirical data, but argues for placing empirical data in a more contextualized framework of knowledge and objectivity. More specifically, feminist standpoint theory reformulates some of the basic

assumptions of logical positivism, which has guided theory and methodology in psychology for over a hundred years (e.g., Heidbreder, 1933; Pepper, 1946).

Logical positivism. Logical positivism makes three fundamental assumptions (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1993). First, the scientist is assumed to be objective; by virtue of this objectivity, the social scientist can observe human behavior without bias. Thus the scientist is in a privileged position to define reality, i.e., the “real” objectively defined reasons why people behave the way they do. Second, behavior can be reduced into component elements in order to assess cause-and-effect relations. Once these elements are identified, they can be put back together to explain the whole; the whole is no more than the sum of its parts. Third, knowledge is represented independently in the individual mind and the social-cultural worlds in which individuals live are not relevant. Reality (i.e., the real causes of behavior) can be objectively defined without recourse to history, culture or context; the goal of psychology is to discover basic principles of human behavior that can predict across gender, race, class and context.

Obviously, this is a simplified exposition, and many theories, especially within developmental psychology have questioned these assumptions. In particular, approaches stemming from Vygotsky’s (1979) social-cultural theory of development have highlighted the contextualized nature of human cognition (see Gauvain, 2001, and Rogoff, 1990, for overviews). Still, these basic assumptions have guided much of the work in developmental psychology within Piagetian and information-processing models, the two dominant developmental models (Miller & Scholnick, 2000).

The concept of place. In contrast to assumptions underlying logical positivism, feminist theories focus on the interrelated and contextual basis of knowledge (Longino,

1993; L.H. Nelson, 1993). Knowledge is embedded in the way in which social activity is structured and knowledge emerges from social interactions. Knowledge must be considered in terms of who knows, in what situations, for what purposes. Because knowledge cannot be extricated from social-cultural structures, the observer can never be completely unbiased. An observer is always, by definition, observing from a specific place or perspective. This is the “standpoint” in feminist standpoint theory, and it is defined historically, culturally, individually and situationally.

Historically and culturally, we are all positioned in a particular time and place, socialized within the specific belief systems of our historical and cultural milieu. This is not to say that we can never see beyond these socialized lenses, but that it is difficult and never completely successful. Individually, we are each a member of a specific gender, race and class, and are thus defined historically and culturally as a particular kind of person. This definition allows us access to certain ways of knowing and denies us access to other ways of knowing. For example, being male or female will provide the individual access to particular kinds of activities (e.g., Batman versus Barbie birthday parties, fraternity initiations versus sorority teas), and these activities lead to the development of specific kinds of skills over others. Thus as individuals engage in culturally prescribed activities, they learn to perform in ways appropriate to their “place” in the social structure (Fivush, 1998). Obviously, these kinds of activities change historically (and perhaps even radically as the last three decades of racial and gender discrimination in access to various activities and institutions have loosened), but they are always present.¹ Finally, all behaviors are influenced by the specific situation in which the individual is embedded. Behavior is constructed with other people in particular situations in which multiple goals

are negotiated and achieved. Thus place is a dynamic concept; one's historical, cultural, individual and situational position in an ongoing stream of human activity is always evolving, although each of these levels of place evolve at different rates.²

The concept of place changes our understanding of the scientific method. Although scientists are trained in specific tools that allow for more systematic and objective observation, even scientists remain embedded in a particular historical and cultural context that can never be completely overridden. Thus, scientists must seriously consider the standpoint from which they are observing, and how this might affect their observations. Further, behavior must be conceptualized as dynamic and fluid, and therefore it cannot be reduced to independent cause-and-effect relations, but must be understood transactionally and reciprocally. Finally, knowledge is not in an individual's head, but in the relationship between the individual and the environment.³ Thus, rather than objectivity being defined as an unbiased perspective (the view from nowhere), feminist standpoint theory defines objectivity as the coordination of multiple perspectives; objectivity emerges from diversity of perspectives (the view from everywhere) (Bordo, 1990; Code, 1993; Harding, 1993). The ultimate goal of psychology is not to deduce context-free universal principles of behavior but rather to specify the conditions under which different individuals will display specific kinds of behaviors.

The concept of power. Due to the way in which society has come to define specific roles in the social structure, some standpoints are imbued with more authority or power than others. Views from more culturally accepted standpoints are considered the center, whereas views from less accepted standpoints are at the margins. The view from the center is given "voice." It is the accepted version of our shared socially constructed

reality, whereas views from the margins are “silenced.” These stories are either not heard or these perspectives are not validated. In this sense, power gives voice.

Within the psychological literature, power is often equated with dominance or status (e.g., Raven, 1992). However, critiques of power stemming from feminist theory have provided a more nuanced understanding of this concept (Griscom, 1992; Yoder & Kahn, 1992). In summarizing and integrating across psychological and feminist conceptualizations of power, Hall and Halberstadt (1996) define three interrelated dimensions that have contributed to theorizing about power: process, location and quality. Process refers to whether power is conceptualized as static or dynamic. Location refers to where the power resides, in the individual or in the relationship. Finally, power can be cooperative, in that individuals use their power democratically (power-with), or power is coercive, in that individuals use their power autocratically (power-over).

Arguing from a feminist perspective, Griscom (1992) agrees that power is more than coercion or dominance; power can be power over other people, but power can also be power-with others, or power over oneself, in the sense of empowerment. Importantly, power-over is not always “bad” and power-with “good.” There are times within particular relationships or contexts when dominance is appropriate and other times when power should be shared relationally. Dominance and empowerment overlap in complex ways and the appropriate balance between them will evolve over time within relationships and contexts. Power can be something that individuals dictate, abdicate, share or own. Thus, power is always relational. Power exists between people and emerges from relationships; power is a process that occurs over time. Finally, power must be conceptualized as an intersection of the individual and society; individuals exist

within societal power structures and societal power structures are simultaneously created by individuals.

Voice and silence. The way in which voice and silence are conceptualized emerge from place and power (Belenky, Clinchey, Goldberg & Tarule, 1986; Gilligan, 1982). From the feminist concept of place, voice and silence must be seen as dynamic and relational. Voice and silence will emerge within the individual as a function of their historical and cultural place and their individual history of specific interactions with specific others. The ways in which individuals develop voice or silence will have important implications for the development of an autobiographical life story. Experiences that are voiced provide a sense of validation; experiences are accepted as real and the individual's perspective on the experience is viewed as appropriate. Experiences that are silenced lead to a sense of existential despair; experiences are not heard or the individual's perspective on the experience is not accepted as appropriate.

From the feminist concept of power, how voice emerges over time within specific relationships and whether voice is cooperative or coerced raises additional questions about authority. Who has the authority to author the autobiography? Are individuals allowed their own voice or are particular ways of telling the story imposed on them? And on the other side of the dimension, do individuals choose not to report certain information or are they simply not heard by those they tell? Thus power may be expressed as voice or as silence depending on who has the authority to give voice or to silence.

This review of the feminist concepts of place and power culminates in a two-dimensional model of autobiographical memory, with voice and silence as one dimension and self and other as the second dimension. The two dimensions can be crossed yielding

4 quadrants as displayed on Figure 1. Clearly, voice and silence imply language, at least metaphorically, in that what is voiced is said and heard, whereas what is silenced is either not told or not heard. Therefore, it is important to examine the role of language in the development of autobiographical memory,

Language and autobiographical memory.

The concepts of voice and silence point to the critical role that language plays in modulating consciousness (see Damasio, 1999, Donald, 1991 and Nelson, 1996, for further theoretical arguments). More specifically, in terms of autobiographical memory, language allows for new ways of organizing and evaluating personal experience (Fivush, 1998; 2001; Nelson & Fivush, 2002). Language allows us to share our past experiences with others, and through this joint reminiscing, children learn the canonicalized narrative forms for representing and reporting their personal past. Although experienced events may be temporally sequenced before the advent of language (e.g., Bauer, 1997), linguistically based narrative forms allow for a deeper and more complex organization of our personal memories (Bruner, 1990; Fivush & Haden, 1997).

First, narratives provide an experiential context for discrete events. It is through narratives that single events can coalesce into larger themes that encompass life periods (e.g., school years, adolescence, mid-life), life tracks (e.g., relationships, career) and more abstract motifs (e.g., regrets, accomplishments, legacies). By placing single events in the larger context of one's unfolding life story, young children begin to develop a sense of a true autobiography, a self with a past, present and future (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 1992). Second, and related to the first, narratives, by definition, are evaluative (Bruner, 1990; Labov, 1982). Autobiographical narratives move beyond telling

what happened to include information about what the event meant to the individual; autobiographical narratives are about a self that has an emotional stake in the event and its consequences.

Finally, language allows us to co-construct our personal experiences with others; it is through socially sharing the past that experiences take on personal coherence and meaning. Our autobiographical lives are created through and with others (Gergen, 1994; Middleton & Edwards, 1990). For young children who are just beginning to use language to reminisce about their past with others, the ways in which adults help them to organize and evaluate their experiences may be a critical filter through which children come to understand what these experiences mean for their understanding of the past and of themselves (Fivush, 2001; Fivush, Haden & Reese, 1996).

There is now a substantial body of research demonstrating that children are learning both the canonical narrative forms and an evaluative stance on their personal past through participating in adult-guided reminiscing (see Nelson & Fivush, 2002, for a review). Parents who engage in more elaborated and narratively coherent reminiscing with their preschool children have children who come to tell more narratively coherent, detailed stories of their own experience later in development (Haden, Haine & Fivush, 1997; Peterson & McCabe, 1992; Reese, Haden & Fivush, 1993). And parents who engage in and encourage their children in interpreting and evaluating their experience facilitate their children's developing use of narrative evaluation as they grow older (Fivush, 1991; Haden et al., 1997). Narrative evaluation provides a subjective perspective on the past; this is what happened, and this is how I think and feel about it. Through reminiscing with others, children come to understand that their perspective on the event

may or may not be the same as someone else's perspective. In this way, children come to understand that they have a unique perspective on what occurred. In a very real sense, it is only when we share our experiences with others that they become our own (Fivush, 2001).

But language is a two-edged sword. By definition, we do not report everything we remember about any given event on any given recall occasion. By foregrounding particular aspects of an event, we necessarily background others. This is not to argue that autobiographical memory is linguistically represented. Obviously, representations of personally experienced events are quite complex and represented in multiple modalities, including visual, auditory and kinesthetic sensations, as well as language, and much of what we remember may never be put into words and never spoken. Language does not determine memory, but in sharing our past with others, language has a privileged place; it is primarily through language that we can communicate our past experiences and what they mean to us (Pillemer & White, 1989). But the very act of putting our experiences into words validates some aspects of the experience over others, validates a particular interpretation or evaluation of the event over others (Nelson, 1996). As the novelist Janet Fitch says, "That was the thing about words, they were clear and specific – but when you talked about feelings, words were too stiff, they were this and not that, they couldn't include all the meanings. In defining, they always left something out" (1990, p. 265).

The role of the other. If our personal past takes on meaning as we share it socially with others, then the ways in which others listen to, hear and interpret our past has implications for what aspects of the past will be validated. Listeners can accept or dismiss, negotiate, cajole or coerce particular evaluations over others (see Pasupathi,

2001, for a theoretical review). Through this jointly constructed version of what occurred and what it means, some aspects of memories are given voice whereas others are silenced. Moreover, as discussed earlier, from feminist standpoint theory, what is voiced and what is silenced occurs at multiple levels simultaneously, cultural, individual and situational.

At the cultural level, cultures define a canonical life story and how to tell it (e.g. Connerton, 1989). In western culture, a focus on the self and individual achievement is considered appropriate, whereas in eastern culture, the focus is on one's place in the larger community and one's contribution to a moral society (Oyserman & Markus, 1993), and these differences are reflected in autobiographical memory. For example, Asian Indians from rural villages have few and sparsely detailed memories of their childhood or even their recent past (Leichtman, 2001). When asked to recount their personal experience, they respond that they do not remember, that their memories are unimportant in the context of the larger community. Intriguingly, when reminiscing with their preschool children, Asian parents do not talk as much about the past as do Caucasian parents, they do not talk in as much elaborated detail, and they do not focus on the child to the same extent as Caucasian parents (see Leichtman, Wang & Pillemer, in press, for a review). Rather, Asian parents focus on the community and moral behavior to a greater extent than do Caucasian parents (Mullin & Yi, 1995). These different patterns emerge in children's later independent autobiographical narratives, with Asian children narrating shorter, less detailed and less self-focused experiences than Caucasian children (Han, Leichtman & Wang, 1998). Thus, the child's developing skills in recounting the past are

modulated such that cultural expectations about self and autobiography shape what information is reported and not reported.

At the individual level, the specific kinds of experiences that are considered reportable and not reportable depend on where one is situated in the larger society. As argued earlier, it matters whether one is male or female, white or black, rich or poor. Being a member of a particular race, class and gender defines one's place in the larger culture as well as one's everyday interactions. The kinds of activities that are deemed appropriate and the kinds of interactions in which we are expected to engage change as a function of our place in the larger culture. For example, in our culture, it is more acceptable for females to experience and express emotions than males (Basow, 1992; Fischer, 2001). As adults, women report experiencing and expressing emotions more intensely than do males (Fischer, 2001), and include more emotional information when reporting the personal past (Bauer, Stennes & Haight, in press; Davis, 1990). Similarly, parent-daughter reminiscing is substantially more emotion laden than parent-son reminiscing. With preschool daughters, parents talk more about emotion overall, talk about a wider variety of emotional experiences, and evaluate and validate their daughters' emotional experience to a greater extent than with sons (see Fivush & Buckner, 2001; in press, for a review). By the end of the preschool years, girls are reporting their personal past in more emotional terms than are males (Buckner & Fivush, 1998; Reese, Haden & Fivush, 1996). In this sense, emotions are voiced for females but silenced for males (see Fivush, in press, for a full theoretical discussion).

Finally, the specific situation in which we are recalling a past event influences what is reported. Who we are telling what story to for what purpose matters, both from

the teller's perspective and the listener's perspective. From the teller's perspective, we may choose to disclose some information to some people but not others. For example, Tenney (1989) examined the information that new parents told friends versus family about the birth. When talking with family, new parents focused on the infant's characteristics and vital statistics. With friends, in contrast, new parents talked about the difficulties of the labor. Thus the teller focuses on different aspects of the event depending on the intended audience. From the listener's perspective, more attentive and concerned listeners elicit longer and more coherent narratives than do inattentive and distracted listeners (Pasupathi, Stallworth & Murdoch, 1998). Of course, the teller and the listener are in a relationship and each mutually influences each other. For example, a large literature on self-disclosure indicates that the gender of both the teller and the listener matters; females disclose to both men and women but males tend to disclose only to female listeners (Snell, Miller, Garcia-Falconi & Hernandez-Sanchez, 1989).

Overall, then, in any given recall context, we need to consider the ways in which specific information about the past is allowed to be voiced or is silenced by the culture, by the individual's place in society and by the specific situation in which one is recalling a specific event with a specific listener. Thus voice and silence emerge within ongoing interactions in which the teller and listener negotiate or coerce a particular version of the past, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Voice and silence, Self and other

As already alluded to, children are learning the forms and functions of talking about the past in early parent-guided reminiscing. How might voice and silence add to our understanding of the development of autobiographical memory? In order to explore

the usefulness of the proposed model, I will discuss each quadrant in turn, using examples from my previous research on parent-child reminiscing (Fivush & Fromhoff, 1989; Reese et al., 1993). However, it is important to first emphasize several points. First, it is obvious that parents hold power over children, although the way in which this power is expressed may vary widely both across individuals and situations. Thus relations between power and voice and silence emerge from specific evolving relationships, as I discuss in more detail below. Second, although I discuss each quadrant as a category for the sake of explication, the model conceptualizes voice and silence and self and other as dimensions rather than categories. Specific autobiographical memories can be more or less voiced and this dimension can be modulated more or less by self or other. Third, any specific autobiographical memory will have elements of both voice and silence by both self and other. For purposes of exposition, I discuss specific conversations as illustrative of one side of these dimensions or another, but it should be kept in mind that, in reality, memories are a complex interweaving of voice and silence by self and other. Finally, issues of voice and silence by self and other are not simply a matter of what is said and not said but the conversational process by which specific aspects and evaluations of the past are validated, imposed, negated or avoided. It is in the process of sharing our experiences with others that each of us comes to have an individual voice or are silenced.

Self-voice.

“After the good times were over, as we grew older, we were to tell each other stories about the past, each adding his or her own fragments of pleasurable detail, until the joint memory became something larger than

each single memory, and yet became something that each of us possessed fully, as if it were solely our own.” (Wilson, 1998, p.142)

In the self-voiced quadrant, individuals have power and voice over their own autobiographical experience. Although autobiographical memory is still shared in the social interaction, individuals have the authority to describe and evaluate their own experience and these experiences are validated by the listener, as can be seen in this conversational excerpt between a mother and her 5-year-old child talking about visiting a museum of natural history (M stand for Mother, C for Child and “...” indicates some intervening comments)

M: What other kinds of dinosaurs were in there?

C: Uh, Tyrannosaurus Rex. The first thing we came in, rrrraarr!

M: (laughing) that’s right. And he was huge, wasn’t he?

C: Huge, very huge. They take it, they dug up the bones. You know why?

M: ...They figured out how big the real ones were and then they made these.

C: Nuh uh, they didn’t make those.

M: They didn’t?

C: Those were real bones.

M: It was?

C: They figured out how to put ‘em out, up together

M: They did?...and they made ‘em move, didn’t they? Didn’t they move?

C: No.

M: They did too move (laughing)

C: No, he did not. It did not have his skin on.

M: Oh, that's right, one of 'em was just bones.

C: That was Tyrannosaurus Rex.

M: Tyrannosaurus Rex was just his bones. Ok.

Several things are notable in this conversation. First, both the mother and child are fully engaged, each responding to the other's comments. Neither the mother nor child leads the conversation, but each responds to the other and then introduces a new aspect of the event to which the other again responds. The event is fully co-constructed. Moreover, even though it is clearly not the case that each always agrees with the other, there is a real sense of listening and responding to the other. When there is disagreement, the other is not ignored. Rather disagreements are negotiated until agreement is reached. Most important, the child feels comfortable challenging the mother's version ("No, he did not") and the mother accepts and validates her child's version of the event ("oh, that's right"). Importantly, it is not just the child's version of the facts of the event that are validated in these conversations; it is also the child's emotional reaction and evaluation, as shown in this excerpt between a mother and her 5-year old child talking about a visit to the lake during which the child and her sister fell into the water:

C: I remember Lauren, me falling, going into the water.

M: ...I do too. That was upsetting, wasn't it?

C: (makes crying noise)

M: That's what you did. It kind of scared you, didn't it?

C: I don't like that!

M: I don't blame you!

When the child recalls the upsetting incident, the mother immediately confirms the memory as shared (“I do too”), and then provides an evaluation of the event to which the child assents. As the child emphatically elaborates on her perspective of what occurred (“I don't like that!”) the mother completely validates this perspective (“I don't blame you!”). Conversations in which children are given voice include maternal affirmation and validation of what occurred and how the child felt about it. When there is disagreement, the mother and child negotiate a resolution rather than the mother imposing her version of what happened on the child. Thus autobiographical memories falling along the self-voice dimension are validated; children learn to own their experience and to have authority in the construction of their own life story.

Other voice.

“It is our parents...who not only teach us our family history but who set us straight on our own childhood recollections, telling us that *this* cannot have happened the way we think it did, and that *that*, on the other hand, did occur just as we remember it.” (McCarthy, 1957, p. xx, italics in the original).

In conversations falling into the other-voice quadrant, the mother tends to impose her version of what happened on the child. It is not so much that the mother disagrees with the child's memory or evaluation of what happened, as much as that the mother simply tells the event to the child and the child contributes little to the emerging narrative, as can be seen in this excerpt between a mother and her 4-year-old child about a visit to the zoo:

M: Do you remember, we were strolling Baby around and do you remember when we went over near those ducks, what happened to Baby's binkie (pacifier)?

C: It fell in the water with the ducks....(Daddy) washed it under the bridge thing.

M: Yeah, he found it under that bridge thing. And remember the ducks tried to get Baby's binkie? And Daddy got it, but we had to wash it off first, didn't we? We couldn't give it to the baby when it had been in that yucky water, could we? And do you remember when we went in that building and Uncle Bob put you on his shoulder and we watched those penguins? And that lady was feeding the penguins? Do you remember that? I remember that. Do you remember when we went to eat, do you remember the special kind of french fries we had? What kind were they?

C: (unintelligible)

M: But do you remember the shape, what kind of shape those french fries were in? Those french fries were in little animal shapes, remember? We had those animal shape french fries? They were neat.

In this conversation, the mother essentially tells the child what happened, including what specific aspects were interesting and why ("But do you remember the shape?...They were neat."). The child is an engaged listener but not contributor. In this way, autobiographical memories falling along the other-voice dimensions are imposed;

children are not the authors of their own story but have their stories told for them and about them.

Other silence.

“It didn’t seem like the kind of story that would gather with time, but instead would retract, condense, and turn into one of those things that nobody talked about, and in a year or so it would all be forgotten.”

(Proulx, 1992, p. 21)

In conversations that fall into the other-silence quadrant, children’s versions of what happened are silenced by the mother. In contrast to self-voiced memories, when children disagree with their parents, the child’s version of what occurred is dismissed. In contrast to other-voiced memories, it is not that the mother tells the story for the child, but that the child’s perspective is negated, as seen in this example of a mother discussing a trip to American Adventures, an amusement park, with her 6-year-old child:

M: ... That was our first time there, and I thought you had –

C: (interrupting) No, I don’t, no, it wasn’t my first time there.

M: Yes it was.

C: You don’t remember. Mom, remember when we went to it, umm, not at Chad’s birthday and not when we met Lauren, some other time.

M: Oh, that was when we went to that place in Florida.

C: No

M: With the rugs?

C: No.

M: Okay, well, that's enough about American Adventures. I want to talk about something else.

The mother is sure that this was the child's first visit to this amusement park, but the child is convinced that he had been there before. In fact, the child is quite insistent, providing several challenges and specific information to cue the mother's memory of the other visit. First the mother simply denies the child's memory, then she assumes it was a different memory ("that place in Florida") and when the child again insists, the mother simply refuses to continue the discussion. Clearly, this child's autobiographical memory is negated; it simply did not happen. Further, just as self-voiced memories can validate the child's evaluation, other-silenced memories can silence evaluations as well as actual facts, as seen in this conversation between a mother and her 4-year-old child about a visit to an amusement park:

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 know you like to swing. But you just sat there.

In this brief excerpt, The mother twice denies her daughter's evaluation of the event. First the mother states that the child had fun even when the child denies it, and then when the child says that she does not like to swing, the mother directly contradicts her. Autobiographical memories that fall on the other-silenced dimensions are negated; either the event or the child's perspective on the event is simply ignored. When this happens, children are not given the authority to tell their own story. Things did not

happen the way they thought they did; they did not feel what they thought they felt. In essence, they do not know who they are.

Self silence.

“One benefit, which I have lost, of a life where many things go unsaid, is that you didn't have to remember things about yourself that are too bizarre to imagine. What was never given utterance eventually becomes too nebulous to recall.” (Smiley, 19xx, p. 305)

Finally, there are some memories that are too painful and the individual simply chooses not to remember. Surprisingly, even very young children can consciously make this decision, as seen in this conversation between a mother and her 5-year-old child talking about going to the wake when the child's preschool teacher died:

M: And what was the wake like?

C: Well, it had sadly music and it was really sad to talk about. So I don't want to talk about it.

M: Well, let's talk about it right now and, if you don't want to ever talk about it again, that's fine.

C: I didn't want to talk about it at the wake (very softly)

(Several intervening questions and answers)

C: But I don't want to talk about this cause you're almost gonna make me cry.

M: Okay, I won't. We won't talk about it anymore.

Obviously, this child found this event emotionally difficult and does not want to bring these emotions back to mind by remembering. Rather than trying to resolve these

difficult feelings, the child chooses to silence herself; to simply avoid thinking about or talking about this event. Whereas emotionally difficult experiences are the most likely candidates for self-silencing, especially early in development, there are other reasons to self-silence as well, such as impression management for both self and other. In silencing oneself, one loses some of the richness of autobiographical memory. Whether it is whole events, or particular perspectives (e.g., specific kinds of emotional reactions) through self-silencing, the child loses part of her past.

Language, memory, voice and silence.

In this chapter I provided a theoretical framework for understanding the development of autobiographical memory from the feminist perspectives of place and power. These concepts led to a two dimensional model of autobiography based on voice and silence and self and other. While still preliminary, this model provides a useful heuristic for understanding how children begin to construct an autobiographical life story in collaboration with their parents. Again, I emphasize that all parents and children engage in both voicing and silencing by both self and other, and that memories of any given event will most likely have elements of both of these dimensions to a greater or lesser extent. Moreover, as has been emphasized throughout this chapter, issues of place and power are dynamic; the ways in which parents and children reminisce about their shared past will change as a function of the child's age and cognitive abilities, as well as the specific events that are under discussion.

To summarize, to the extent that parents share power with their children, children are given voice; they are empowered and have authority over their life experiences. Children's perspectives on what happened and how they felt about it are validated. To

the extent that parents exert power over their children by imposing certain stories, children may come to tell these stories but not necessarily from their own subjective perspective. They will not have a sense of ownership of these memories; they are not the authors of their own autobiography. To the extent that parents exert power by refusing to hear particular versions of reality, children will be silenced; their perspective on their past will be invalidated. And to the extent that children silence themselves, and refuse to voice certain experiences or emotions, their perspective will not be socially shared and therefore not open to validation or invalidation.

It is essential to point out that in the process of parenting, some imposition of appropriate life stories is necessary. In order to be a socially appropriate member of one's culture, one must learn to tell certain stories in certain ways. There are cultural prescriptions on what a life should look like and how one should react to certain kinds of events. Thus, other-voice is a necessary aspect of developing a culturally appropriate life-story. Similarly, some perspectives may simply be unacceptable for certain people in certain situations. Thus other-silence may also be a necessary part of developing an appropriate autobiographical narrative. Finally, it may be more important to tell some experiences in particular ways than others. For experiences that may be self-defining, having one's own voice may matter a great deal more than for experiences that do not serve a self-defining function. Similarly, experiences that are important for defining the family as a cohesive social group may need to be told from a shared family perspective, and thus parents may be more likely to impose a particular shared perspective on narratives of these events than on other events. The issue may be more about the balance of self versus other and voice versus silence in one's own autobiographical story. It may

also be that how parents accept or impose particular versions of reality on their children is critical. The way in which power is exerted or shared within the developing parent-child relationship may be more important than the number of times the child's voice is heard versus silenced.

This brings us back to the issue of maternal reminiscing style discussed earlier. Mothers who are more elaborative may be helping their children develop voice to a greater extent than mothers who are less elaborative. Elaborative mothers both encourage and evaluate their children's participation in the co-construction of past experiences, as well as providing more richly embellished accounts of what occurred. In contrast, less elaborative mothers tend to simply repeat the same questions over and over, and repetition of questions is especially likely when the child does not respond with the information the mother was looking for (e.g., Fivush & Fromhoff, 1989; Reese et al., 1993). In this way, elaborative mothers may fall more on the voiced side of the dimension, both self and other, whereas less elaborative mothers may fall more toward the silenced end of the dimension. If so, then we might also speculate that children of more elaborative mothers will have more power over the construction of their own life story. Their memories and their perspective on their past are validated and their voice is heard. Elaborative mothers and children co-construct richly detailed and shared memories of their past together. In contrast, children of less elaborative mothers are not allowed their memories or their perspective on what occurred. Given the role of language in the organization and maintenance of a consciously accessible, socially sharable autobiographical memory (Nelson & Fivush, 2002), these children may come to have more fragmented, disorganized memories of their past. They may have more difficulty

understanding who they are in relation to their own past experiences or in relation to others with whom they have shared these experiences.

Finally, I return to the issue of place. As already discussed, one's gender, race and class help define the kinds of experiences that are validated and invalidated. In illustrating the model in this chapter, I have relied on white middle-class mothers reminiscing with their preschool children. Clearly how power is displayed in the parent-child relationship, and the role of particular kinds of events or perspectives in constructing an autobiographical life narrative will be modulated by both the parent's and the child's place in the larger social order. There is a growing body of research attesting to differences in parent-child reminiscing as a function of culture and gender (see Fivush & Haden, in press, for a review) but much less is known about the role of race and class (but see Wiley, Rose, Burger & Miller, 1998). These remain important questions for future research.

Ultimately, this model provides a way of thinking about the development of autobiographical memory that focuses on authority and ownership rather than on accuracy per se. Cultural, individual and situational factors privilege some experiences over others. Voice and silence extend previous theorizing about the social construction of autobiographical memory first developed by Katherine Nelson (1989, 1993, 1996, 2001). Especially with the feminist concept of power, this model adds an important dimension to the social construction of autobiographical memory. Memories are not simply jointly constructed; some individuals have more power to guide the narrative in a particular direction than others. How this power is displayed in parent-child reminiscing is a critical question that has implications for the way in which individual children come to

understand and “own” their experience. If children are developing voice and silence in parent-guided reminiscing, then we need to examine the specific ways in which particular memories are validated or invalidated. The construction of an autobiographical life story is a complex developmental process. Each of us develops a voice, but perhaps more provocative, our voice, by definition, implies silence as well. What we can say about our past must always be placed against the backdrop of what may be remembered but cannot be said.

Footnotes

¹ Although feminist theories tend to view race, class and gender as socially constructed, it is important to point out that there may be biological predispositions to engage in certain kinds of activities over others, especially for gender (see e.g., Maccoby, 1998, for a full exposition of the biological basis of gendered play behavior).

² Feminist analyses of place share much in common with Soviet activity theory in general (Gauvain, 2001), and Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural developmental theory in particular. Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory of development also posits that individual mind emerges from cultural and contextual interactions. This similarity is not surprising as both Vygotsky's theory and feminist standpoint theory emerge from the philosophical premises of Hegel's dialectics.

³ Within psychology, this perspective has been argued most strongly by Gibson (1982), who introduced the concept of "affordances" as behaviors which are elicited by the individual-environment interaction. However, this theory focuses on the interactions between the person and the physical environment, whereas feminist theory focuses on the interaction between the person and the socially constructed human environment.

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