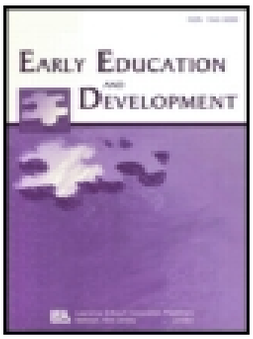

Early Education and Development

ISSN: 1040-9289 (Print) 1556-6935 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/heed20

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To cite this article: Elizabeth S. Richner & Ageliki Nicolopoulou (2001) The Narrative Construction of Differing Conceptions of the Person in the Development of Young Children's Social Understanding, Early Education and Development, 12:3, 393-432, DOI: 10.1207/s15566935eed1203_6

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1207/s15566935eed1203_6

Early Education & Development

Volume 12, Number 3, July 2001

The Narrative Construction of Differing Conceptions of the Person in the Development of Young Children's Social Understanding

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The study reported here used a systematic interpretive analysis of young children's spontaneous narratives to investigate the development of their conceptions of the person. We argue that currently predominant approaches to this subject in social cognition research are insufficiently sociocultural and need to be broadened and reoriented (a) to capture the social (rather than purely mentalistic) dimension inherent in any conception of the person, (b) to examine how the development of children's conception of the person involves the selective appropriation of culturally elaborated models of personhood, and therefore (c) to recognize that children develop and employ *different* conceptions of the person, in ways that are socioculturally patterned. The study examined a body of 598 stories generated by 30 preschool children (5 girls and 5 boys in 3 age cohorts: 3s, 4s, and 5s) through a storytelling and story-acting practice that was a regular (but voluntary) part of their classroom activities for the entire school year. Analyses indicated that in their narratives the girls and boys constructed and elaborated two distinctive gender-related conceptions of the person: girls a socially embedded and interdependent person, who becomes increasingly individuated and self-consciously responsible; boys a separate and agonistic person, who increasingly becomes a stable, autonomous, and self-conscious mental agent. Typologies are presented to delineate and compare the developmental pathways of these two gender-related models of personhood. Some implications for early childhood education are also discussed.

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An earlier version of this paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Jean Piaget Society (Montreal, Canada: June 1-3, 2000). The authors would like to thank the teachers who allowed us in their classrooms as well as the children who provided us with an exceptionally rich body of data. We are also grateful to Jeff Weintraub for extensive consultation, advice, and constructive criticism.

The Narrative Construction of Differing Conceptions of the Person in the Development of Young Children's Social Understanding

This study examined the development of young children's conceptions of the person as these were expressed, constructed, and elaborated in the children's narrative activities. The plural "conceptions" should be emphasized here, since a key concern was to explore whether and how different sets of children develop *distinctive* conceptions of the person in ways that are socioculturally patterned. The perspective informing this research was sociocultural in two respects worth distinguishing analytically, even though they are ultimately interconnected. First, it approached the development of children's conceptions of the person, not as a purely individual process, but as one which is socioculturally shaped and situated in fundamental ways. The formation of children's models of personhood necessarily involves the active (and selective) appropriation of constitutive models drawn from the larger culture, in ways that are in turn situated within the more immediate and small-scale social worlds of children's everyday relationships and other socially structured practices. In short, a guiding premise was that socialization serves as a crucial matrix for development. Second, and somewhat more exceptionally, this study sought to delineate and explore the sociocultural dimension in children's own developing conceptions of the person; our orienting hypothesis was that children's images of the person are inextricably and reciprocally linked to their images of social relations and the social world.

The subject of this study lies at the intersection of three bodies of research that are not yet sufficiently integrated: (a) mainstream research in social cognition, which is currently dominated by the study of children's "theory of mind"; (b) the comparative examination of differing, culturally mediated conceptions of the person and their developmental significance by sociocultural psychology; and (c) the study of narrative and its role in children's socialization and development. Whereas most research on language and socialization focuses on modes of adult-child (or, more generally, expert-novice) interaction, usually dyadic, this study focused on the peer group and peer-oriented narrative activities as a socializing context that both promotes and shapes children's construction of reality and identity—in this case, gender identity.

The Conception of the Person in Social Cognition Research: From "Person Perception" to "Theory of Mind"

Over the past several decades there have been two broad phases of research on children's conception of the self or person and its development in the field of social cognition. (This paper will use the terms self and person interchangeably.) During the 1970s and 1980s, research on this subject centered on the voluminous body of work usually referred to as "person perception," exemplified by the seminal book of Livesley and Bromley (1973). The prototypical person perception studies asked children and adolescents to provide open-ended free descriptions of themselves or of another individual they knew, such as a close acquaintance or friend. This research consistently found that young children, up to 6 or 7 years, tend to describe a person in terms of external, physical, and readily observable features, sometimes supplemented by stereotypical actions. It is not until middle childhood, around

7 to 9 years of age, that children begin to "penetrate cognitively beneath the skin" (Flavell, Miller, & Miller, 1993, p. 202) and their descriptions become more focused on stable personality traits and enduring dispositions, including attitudes, interests, abilities, temperamental qualities, and other internal and psychological characteristics (e.g., Barenboim, 1981; Keller, Ford, & Meecham, 1978; Livesley & Bromley, 1973; Mohr, 1978; Peevers & Secord, 1973). By adolescence, these attributions of stable internal traits begin to get synthesized into an "organized, integrated portrait" of the individual's distinctive personality (Flavell et al., 1993, p. 203).

The main outlines of this developmental picture, often described as "one of the most widely replicated findings in the social developmental literature" (Rholes, Newman, & Ruble, 1990, p. 372), converged with findings from two other lines of work that were largely assimilated to the person perception literature: studies based on children's descriptions of unknown individuals and their actions presented, for example, in films (beginning with Flapan, 1968); and research that examined children's modes of explaining and predicting behavior, generally using more structured constrained-choice formats and follow-up questions (for a favorable overview, see Rholes et al., 1990; for a critical overview, P. H. Miller & Aloise, 1989). Leaving aside various differences of detail, emphasis, and terminology, the overall developmental model offered by person perception research and its affiliated currents (for which we will use "person perception" as a convenient shorthand) was that children's conception of the person shifts over time from an "external" and physical perspective to an increasingly "internal" and psychological one—from "peripheral" to "central" aspects of the person, from observable features and events to inferred mental states and dispositions, from mere descriptions of behavior to attempts at explaining its causes, from a causal/predictive focus on situational factors to one on personal traits, and so on—with a fundamental transition occurring in middle childhood. (For useful overviews see Flavell et al., 1993, pp. 201-227; Rholes et al., 1990; Ruble & Dweck, 1995; Shantz, 1983, pp. 504-522).

There have been some debates about the timing of these developmental changes, and about how well particular results actually captured young children's underlying conceptions of the person. For example, some studies using more structured and less verbally demanding techniques elicited descriptions of dispositional traits from young children, at ages ranging from 5 to as early as 3 to 4 years (e.g., Eder, 1989, 1990). But even researchers who interpreted these results as showing a rudimentary awareness of personality traits were skeptical about how effectively young children were able and inclined to use these trait-perceptions to understand and explain behavior, and were reluctant to conclude that these were salient enough to indicate a genuinely psychological conception of the person (Rholes et al., 1990; Ruble & Dweck, 1995). Fundamentally, the basic model of an overall movement from external to internal has remained unchallenged within the person perception framework.

The Young Child Discovers the Mind

Since about 1990, however, person perception research has been largely displaced by the flood of research on children's "theory of mind" that had been building up momentum in the 1980s and has now come to dominate the field of social cognition. (For useful reviews see Astington, 1993; Flavell, 1999; Flavell & Miller, 1998; Gopnik & Meltzoff, 1997; Moses & Chandler, 1992; M. Taylor, 1996.) One striking sign of this shift is the contrast between the reviews of social cognition research in the two most recent editions of the *Handbook of*

Child Psychology. The discussion of "the conception of the person" in the 1983 chapter (Shantz, 1983, pp. 504ff) focused heavily on person perception and related research, whereas the entire 1998 chapter (Flavell & Miller, 1998) dealt almost exclusively with theory of mind research, and barely mentioned person perception research. According to the authors of the 1998 chapter, "It is simply the case that theory-of-mind research is where most of the scientific action is at present in this field" (p. 836)—a boldly triumphalist judgement, but not an idiosyncratic one.

This paradigm shift has, in the usual manner, involved radical changes in both methodology and theoretical problematic. Using mostly indirect methods of testing and inference, theory of mind research has sought to explore how children construe the internal mental processes of others and use these to understand their actions and interactions—in the most ambitious formulation, not fully subscribed to by all the scholars involved, the question is how the child forms or acquires a "theory" of the other person's mind. This research has found that even very young children show an intense interest in "everyday mindreading" (as Whiten, 1991, has termed it) and display impressive skills in performing it. According to evidence from the now-famous false belief task, generally regarded as the gold standard in theory of mind research, starting around age 4 children are able to predict another person's behavior by imputing to them a combination of desires and beliefs, even when the child knows that the imputed belief is false—which demonstrates that the prediction is based on inferring the consequences of internal mental states understood to be different from the child's own rather than on observed external conditions (Perner, 1991). Other research suggests that children as young as 3, and perhaps even younger, already show at least a "rudimentary awareness of mental states" (P. H. Miller & Aloise, 1989, p. 269; some would claim considerably more), particularly desires and emotions, and some ability to employ their interpretations of these internal mental states, implicitly and explicitly, in their own everyday interactions (Bartsch & Wellman, 1995; Bretherton & Beeghly, 1982; Dunn, 1988, 1991).

The larger implications of these findings for our picture of young children's conception of the person are dramatic. Despite important controversies within theory of mind research, there is broad consensus (even among many who find the label "theory of mind" troublesome or misleading) that young children have already begun to conceive of the person as an agent whose internal mental states need to be inferred and whose actions, to a significant extent, can and should be understood in terms of these underlying mental states. Furthermore, at some point during the preschool years, probably around age 4, the child begins to be able to integrate these elements of mental life—especially desires, beliefs, intentions, and emotions—into a roughly coherent model with which to explain and predict behavior.

Theory of mind research has not often addressed the person perception literature directly. Clearly, however, it not only challenges the main conclusions of person perception research regarding the timing of key developmental changes, but also calls into question its overarching developmental model of a general shift from "external" to "internal." If even young children already have a conception of the person that is, to some degree, "internal" and "mentalistic," then it would seem that the alleged starting point for such a transition has been invalidated. Those scholars from the theory of mind camp who have explicitly engaged the claims of person perception research—most notably Flavell, P. H. Miller, and their associates (e.g., Lillard & Flavell, 1990; P. H. Miller & Aloise, 1989)--have indeed contested them on

empirical, methodological, and theoretical grounds. When appropriate tasks are used, young children frequently offer psychological descriptions and causal attributions, and in a number of contexts even prefer them to external ones; furthermore, these critiques have suggested, the results of the person perception studies themselves were actually ambiguous in this regard if interpreted properly. P. H. Miller and Aloise (1989, pp. 278-279) argued in addition that the category of "external" or "situational" causes used in previous research was oversimplified and misleading, since it often conflated a range of phenomena that should be conceptually distinguished. One example we would like to highlight is that many causal explanations by young children classified as external "refer to the social rather than the physical world" (p. 265). P. H. Miller and Aloise (1989) suggested that in such cases what is being invoked "is actually a psychological cause," since it involves "using the opinions, likes, and needs of other people as causal explanations" (p. 272); we might also describe this type of explanation as *social-relational*. Lumping together social-relational and physical-environment explanations as "external" is questionable for a number of reasons, and it obscures the interesting fact that preschool children are much more likely to invoke the former than the latter.

As a result of this and other work, the portrait of an overwhelmingly externalist and physicalist young child who makes the decisive breakthrough to a more "psychological" and explanatory conception of the person only in middle childhood has been convincingly discredited. It seems clear that the overall model of a movement from external to internal in the conception of the person has also been severely shaken, at least in the sweeping and undifferentiated form in which it was advanced within person perception research. Should we then take the next step and simply abandon it as well? Many theory of mind proponents would probably agree that this conclusion necessarily follows from the arguments and findings just outlined, but on closer inspection the matter proves to be more complicated. The implications of theory of mind research can also be read as suggesting, explicitly or in effect, that at least some aspects of this framework should be "modified" (P. H. Miller & Aloise, 1989, p. 279), refined, and complexified rather than fully discarded. Indeed, Flavell et al. (1993, p. 224), in an overview of cognitive development that strongly endorsed the theory of mind perspective and its damaging implications for the findings of person perception research, nevertheless went on to reaffirm the principle that "Like its nonsocial counterparts, social-cognitive growth tends to proceed from *surface* (people's appearance and behavior) to *depth* (their inner thoughts, feelings, etc.)...." (italics in the original). The metaphor of surface-to-depth strikes us as both more apt and more analytically illuminating than external-to-internal, but it clearly signals an unwillingness to break entirely with the orienting framework expressed by the latter.

A number of considerations suggest why this reluctance is justified. The most obvious is that even when children can use certain kinds of mentalistic talk or display particular interpretive skills, that does not yet mean that the kinds of understanding involved have been solidly grasped and fully consolidated, or that they predominate in children's thinking about persons and human action. At the first appearance of new skills, these are generally limited, precarious, and incompletely mastered, requiring further struggle before children can use them in a confident, consistent, generalized, and sophisticated way (for a general discussion of such issues see Flavell & Miller, 1998). The achievement of "depth" in the various forms of social understanding is not a one-time accomplishment but a continual process—which, of course, does not end after middle childhood, either (Chandler & Lalonde, 1996). It is

also a complex and uneven process. At every age, children display different kinds and levels of social understanding in different contexts, for different purposes, and in different domains of activity. As Dunn (1994, p. 308) put it, "It is not that the understanding is *there* or *not yet there*," (her italics) since it will be mastered in some areas before others, and will not always be easily maintained.

One illustration of the protracted and uneven character of these developmental rhythms may be a finding from person perception research that has remained stubbornly persistent. Although preschool children display significant understanding of temporary mental states, research continues to show that they have more difficulty grasping enduring traits, and they are rarely able or inclined to use such traits to explain behavior (Flavell & Miller, 1998, p. 868; P. H. Miller & Aloise, 1989, pp. 268-269). The significance of this discrepancy remains unclear (Flavell & Miller, 1998, p. 884), but it may indicate that young children still have trouble achieving *stability* in their conceptions of the person. More generally, theory of mind research continues to generate a range of findings about children's social understanding that show movements from surface to depth in ways that closely parallel previous findings from person perception research—though usually at considerably younger ages. We will cite just one illustration from a study by Dunn (1994) that followed a sample of children longitudinally during roughly the first half of their third year (33 months to 40 months) in the context of their interactions with mothers, siblings, and close friends. The study found that "children's causal talk [as distinct from merely descriptive talk] to both their mothers and siblings increased markedly over this seven-month period" (p. 299). Furthermore, at 33 months their causal references involved "overt behaviour or action" twice as frequently as internal states. "By 40 months, however, their causal talk centred on internal states" (p. 300) (and, it is worth noting, "[t]here was also a significant increase in their causal talk concerning social practices and rules" [p. 300]). In sum, theory of mind research has reframed and reopened a number of these issues rather than having settled or disposed of them.

It still seems plausible, therefore, that the notion of a movement from surface to depth captures at least some dimensions in the development of children's social understanding, but only if this orienting hypothesis is used in a modest, flexible, and carefully focused way. Certainly the processes involved are more *differentiated*, *complex*, and *uneven* than person perception research had suggested. It is also clear that these processes begin to be important well before the period between 7 and 9 years that had been identified as the crucial watershed. In fact, the period from 3 to 5 years appears to be one especially crucial phase of transition in the development of children's conceptions of the person.

From the Mind to the Person: Fleshing Out and Socializing Children's Conceptions of the Person

Theory of mind research has made important contributions to the study of cognitive development, raised significant new questions, and opened up exciting new areas of research. In the process, it has valuably transformed key elements in our picture of young children's conceptions of the person, not least by offering a welcome corrective to weaknesses and blind spots in person perception research. At the same time, these genuine advances have been accompanied by their own limitations. The probing and illuminating questions asked by this research, pursued with impressive energy and ingenuity, have been directed to a

fairly narrow and specific focus, excluding many of the concerns addressed by previous work in social cognition. This narrowed focus is readily conceded by a number of theory of mind scholars (e.g., Flavell & Miller, 1998)—though they usually add the confident expectation that, in time, theory of mind research will provide a foundation for investigating the full range of issues traditionally included in the field.

In a recent article, Wellman, Phillips, and Rodriguez (2000, p. 895) remarked that "Contemporary research on children's 'theory of mind' ... is both voluminous and limited"; and this is true in ways that probably go beyond what they intended. In particular, the child's conception of the *mind*, as this has been defined within the theory of mind perspective, clearly captures only one element in the child's conception of the *person*. In this respect, there have been losses as well as gains even in the paradigm shift from person perception to theory of mind. For example, although person perception research often tended to get caught up in overly fragmented examinations of how the child grasps particular traits, these pointed to a larger and more interesting question: when, how, and to what extent children come to conceive of persons as having a stable and coherent *personality* with an enduring configuration of internal traits, motivations, dispositions, and temperamental style which can be used to understand their actions across different situations. This question has so far been outside the purview of theory of mind research, and it is not clear how effectively its approach would allow it to address these kinds of issues.

At a deeper level, person perception and theory of mind research actually share certain crucial underlying premises, which lead to some shared limitations. Here we need to consider the connections between psychologists' own conceptions of the person and their ways of construing the child's conception of the person. With rare exceptions, researchers in both camps have operated with an essentially and one-sidedly *individualistic* conception of the person; and they have largely imputed this way of understanding the person, along with its corresponding problematic, to the child whose development is being studied. Theoretically and methodologically, both approaches (again excluding rare exceptions) assume, implicitly or in effect, that our conceptions of the person—as children and adults—can be understood in isolation from our conceptions of the social world. And substantively, both tend to take it for granted that "development" consists in moving toward one specific conception of the person: that is, the person as an independent, bounded, and autonomous individual, whose core can be defined as separate from his or her relations with other people and/or social groups, and whose actions proceed fundamentally from "internal" mental states and cognitive processes.

These shared premises become apparent if we return to the authoritative overviews of social cognition research in the two most recent editions of the *Handbook of Child Psychology*. Shantz (1983, p. 497) organized her review around a three-part classification of the subject-matter of the field: the child's developing conceptions (a) of "the other person as an individual," (b) of "the relations between people (dyadic level)," and (c) of "the social relations among people (group level)." Flavell and Miller (1998, p. 882) restated Shantz's organizing framework but, except in their last few pages, deliberately focused almost entirely on the first topic, justifying their decision partly on the grounds that getting this basic level right will provide the necessary foundation for attacking the issues addressed by the other areas of social cognition research. In both cases, what is striking is the underlying assumption that

the first subject can effectively be understood prior to, and in isolation from, the second and third; these other elements can then be added on to the first. In other words, neither discussion seriously considers the extent to which our conceptions of the social world and of how the person is situated in that world form an inherent part of our conceptions of the person themselves.

These orienting assumptions, pervasive in most person perception research, have on the whole been continued and even intensified in theory of mind research. Wellman et al. (2000, p. 895) offered an especially direct and admirably candid assertion of this approach. They did concede in passing that "People are complex; they admit of multiple construals." For example, people can be seen as physical beings subject to natural forces and biological processes. "People are social creatures too and thus subject to construal as members of dyads, families, kin groups, and political bodies." But having made these remarks, they briskly moved on to conclude that "one basic level of person conception [which the rest of their discussion clearly indicated they regarded as *the* basic level] is the psychological—construing people in terms of their internal psychological states such as their desires, beliefs, and intentions." However, even if we construe the "psychological" dimension of personhood in a broader sense than this formulation suggests, it is dubious whether, taken in isolation, it can adequately capture either the ways that we really make sense of other people's thoughts and actions or the skills of construal that the child has to master in achieving a "basic" level of everyday person-reading and social understanding.

Theory of mind research has certainly made a valuable contribution by situating the developing child, as an actively thinking being, in a landscape of other people whose thinking and emotions need to be paid attention to and understood. But by itself this is only part of the story. In order to accomplish this enterprise, the developing child (like the adult) is not confronted simply with the task of understanding the minds of other individuals. She also has to make sense of a world of culturally mediated meanings, socially structured practices, and institutionalized roles and relationships within which she encounters those other people—and, furthermore, she necessarily *uses* these sociocultural frameworks as resources, templates, and orienting frames for understanding human action. As Nelson, Plesa, and Henseler (1998) pointed out, an exclusive focus on how we reconstruct the mental states and cognitive processes of other individuals yields a truncated and misleading picture of what is involved when we try to make sense of people and their actions; this is true for adults as well as children:

> Desire-perception-belief-action psychology may be a minimal unit in the adult interpretation of human action which involves also other motivations, other goals, conflicts among actors and groups, constraints of laws, customs, institutions, and much else. (Nelson, Plesa, & Henseler, 1998, pp. 16-17)

With suitable modifications, much the same can be said of preschoolers.

For almost half a century, a central theme in cognitive and developmental psychology has been the effort to understand the developing child as a "folk psychologist," and a key question has been what *kind* of psychology the child practices. From the point of view of person perception research, the young child is essentially a behaviorist who then, starting in middle childhood, develops into a trait-personality theorist (Shantz, 1983, p. 506). The claim made by theory of mind research is that even the very young child is already, in part,

a budding cognitivist. This shift in perspective (one might say: from Skinner in the box to Piaget in the crib) has been valuable and important; but, by itself, the picture it presents is misleadingly incomplete. We need to grasp the extent to which the young child is also a sociocultural psychologist (Bruner in the playground?).

In order to do this effectively, we need to be socioculturally informed psychologists ourselves. This requires not only that we try to situate the development of children's conceptions of the person in the context of their everyday relationships and socially structured practices (Dunn, 1996), but also that we consider the ways in which this process includes the appropriation of culturally elaborated cognitive and symbolic resources (Astington, 1996). In particular, the child's model of personhood takes shape in an active interplay with culturally available models of personhood, which are not uniform either between or within societies. If we take this interplay seriously, one implication is that it necessarily complicates the project of tracing the development of *the* conception of the person. There is in fact no single, uniform, historically and cross-culturally universal conception of the person, overlaid perhaps with merely superficial peculiarities, for the developing child to acquire—not unless the conception of the person is itself conceptualized in such a thin and partial way as to wash out much of its actual richness and significance (see, e.g., Carrithers, Collins, & Lukes, 1985; Geertz, 1973, 1984). Instead, we find a range of cultural models, overlapping but also varying in complex and important ways; and the developmental impacts of these diverse cultural models, appropriated through participation in different societies, institutional frameworks, subcultures, relationships, and everyday practices, help to shape genuinely diverse conceptions of the person—which we need to reconstruct, elucidate, compare, and analyze.

Almost a decade ago, Feldman (1992, p. 108) suggested optimistically that "the new literature on theory of mind" opened up exciting possibilities for an approach that "embeds the thinking child in a semiotically rich and interpreted world" and, "[a]t the same time, ... embeds the old theory of cognitive development, in a principled way, in a new cultural psychology." On the whole, one would have to conclude that this promise has not yet been fulfilled (Astington, 1996). But this kind of socioculturally grounded developmental inquiry remains the most effective approach with which to grasp the richness, complexity, and diversity of young children's conceptions of the person.

Conceptions of the Person in Sociocultural Psychology

Some tendencies in psychology have begun to devote increased attention to the multiple and culturally mediated character of conceptions of the person and their development. These efforts are linked to an ongoing resurgence of psychological approaches that focus on the processes by which people construct the meaning of the world and of their own experience and on the ways that these processes emerge from the interplay of mind and culture (e.g., Bruner, 1990; Cole, 1996; Holland, Skinner, Lachicotte, & Cain, 1999; Nelson, 1996; Nicolopoulou & Weintraub, 1998; Rogoff, 1998; Shweder, 1991; Shweder, Goodnow, Hatano, LeVine, Markus, & Miller, 1998; Shweder & Levine, 1984; Stigler, Shweder, & Herdt, 1990; Tomasello, 1999; Valsiner, 1998; Wertsch, 1998). One result of this sociocultural groundswell has been a body of research investigating cultural models of personhood and their significance for the formation of mind and self (for one overview, see Shweder et al., 1998, pp. 894-910).

Cross-cultural comparisons, most often between the United States (or Western societies in general) and societies in Asia and Africa, have identified a variety of culturally distinctive conceptions of the person, with concrete implications ranging from cognition and emotional life to moral reasoning (e.g., Hart & Fegley, 1997; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Shweder & Bourne, 1984). Although each of these cultural models has its own complex specificity, this work has generally argued that they can be located on a continuum from more separate and individualistic conceptions of the person (exemplified by mainstream American culture) to more interdependent and social-relational conceptions (found in East Asia, India, and sub-Saharan Africa). It has further explored how these cultural models of personhood inform patterns of child-rearing and socialization, in the process helping to reproduce themselves (e.g., LeVine et al., 1996; Markus, Mullally, & Kitayama, 1997). In addition to cross-national comparisons, other studies have investigated sociocultural variations within particular societies along lines structured by class, ethnicity, gender, and so on (e.g., Greenfield & Cocking, 1994; Oyserman & Markus, 1993; Wiley, Rose, Burger, & P. J. Miller, 1998).

Several key themes run through this research and the extensive bodies of work from other disciplines, including philosophy and the social sciences, on which it has drawn (some recent examples, among very many, are Geertz, 1973, 1984; C. Taylor, 1985a, 1985b, 1989; and, on the borderlines of sociocultural psychology itself, the anthropologically oriented sociolinguistics of Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984). They have directly challenged the assumption of a single, universally applicable conception of the person and, perhaps even more fundamentally, the view that treats the development of this conception as a straightforwardly individual and socioculturally decontextualized process. Instead, conceptions of personhood are historically and cross-culturally diverse, in deep and subtle ways, and both their content and their construction have an inherently sociocultural dimension. Conceptions of the person necessarily presuppose and imply conceptions of social relations and the social world; and they are developed, enacted, and institutionalized in the context of particular cultures and ways of life. (It is easy to forget that even the most militant or naive forms of individualism are still, explicitly or in effect, ways of conceiving and justifying certain modes of participation in social life, which in the real world require certain cultural and institutional frameworks in order to be at all plausible or viable.) Furthermore, conceptions of the person are never purely descriptive or explanatory, but have an inescapable *evaluative* component as well. That is, any meaningful conception of personhood necessarily includes images of "normal," "good," "acceptable," and/or "desirable" modes of being a person (and their obverse), whether implicitly or explicitly; and these ideal or normative elements are entwined in complex ways with the descriptive and explanatory elements. (For powerful treatments of this whole cluster of themes, see MacIntyre, 1984; C. Taylor, 1985b, 1989.) Finally, conceptions of the person vary within as well as between societies. They are shaped by subcultures based on such factors as class, region, or ethnicity. And even within particular communities, there will not generally be one culturally available model of personhood, but an interrelated set of alternative models, or at least variants of a common pattern; for example, status hierarchies carry with them more or less differentiated notions of personhood, and in most (if not all) human societies conceptions of the person tend to be deeply gendered—albeit in different ways and to different extents.

The study of diverse and culturally mediated conceptions of the person by sociocultural psychology has thus taken important steps toward moving beyond the limitations of mainstream social cognition research on this subject. It has genuinely situated the developing

child "in a semiotically rich and interpreted world" (Feldman, 1992, p. 108) of culturally elaborated meanings. So far, however, this body of work has largely addressed conceptions of the person as they are held by adults or embedded in the larger culture, and has analyzed the ways that these inform the socializing practices by which culturally available models of personhood are passed on to children. It has rarely paid direct and sustained attention to children's own conceptions of the person, particularly those of *young* children, and the processes by which these develop. (J. G. Miller, 1987, a cross-culturally based critique of the developmental model of person perception research, did include interviews with children, but the youngest cohort were 8-year-olds.) Even when this work has studied socializing interactions between adults and children in which children take an active part, the focus has primarily been on the beliefs, values, and agendas that the adults bring to the encounter, and on the ways that children are initiated into the adult culture (e.g., Fivush, 1994; P. J. Miller, 1994; P. J. Miller & Sperry, 1987). The research reported in this article sought to take the next step by systematically delineating young children's own conceptions of the person and tracing their patterns of development.

Narrative as a Tool of Research, Medium of Socialization, and Resource for Development

We propose that the interpretive analysis of young children's narratives offers a powerful tool for investigating their developing conceptions of the person in a way that can do justice to their richness, complexity, and diversity. In taking this route, we draw on a vigorous emerging approach that has emphasized the significance and potential value of narrative inquiry as a focus for developmental research (e.g., Bamberg, 1997; Bruner, 1986, 1990, 1992; Nelson, 1989). But one reason why children's narratives can offer such a revealing window into the mind of the preschooler, it is important to add, is that narrative plays a vital role in children's own efforts to make sense of the world and find their place in it. Narrative is simultaneously a vehicle for self-expression, a medium of socialization, and a key symbolic resource that children (and adults) employ "in constructing and in making sense not only of the world, but of themselves" (Bruner, 1990, p. 2). Children's own interpretive efforts thus provide an invaluable opportunity for those of the researcher, since we can use the analysis of their narratives as a way to catch them in the act.

This perspective offers a way to help overcome the kind of methodological impasse that Budwig (2000), speaking more broadly of research on language and self-development, characterized as a contrast between two orienting approaches to language: one that focuses on language as a "method" of research and one that treats it as a "mechanism" of development. In the first case, language is seen as "a tool for the researcher," in the second as "a tool for the child." One reason for this divide is the self-limiting assumption—substantive or operational—of researchers in the first camp that language use merely reflects, but does not shape, the child's underlying conceptions. An interpretive perspective that sees thinking as a process of "meaning-making" (Bruner, 1990, p. 2) and language as one of its instruments points toward an integrated approach that allows—in fact, requires—us to treat language as a tool for both the inquiring psychologist and the developing child.

Such an approach is especially applicable to the study of narrative. Bruner (1992, p. 233) and others have argued convincingly for the crucial role "of narrative as a form not only of representing but of constituting reality." This is above all true in terms of our efforts

to make sense of the *human* world; to a great extent, we render it intelligible by narrativizing it, by ordering and representing it in narrative form (Bruner, 1986, pp. 11-43). This process involves an ongoing interplay between mind and culture, since we necessarily rely on the narrative genres available to us in order to narratively structure reality, and narrative genres are culturally elaborated forms. Thus, narrative representation and cognitive development are not separate phenomena, but are closely linked and inseparable from the process of socialization. As Feldman, Bruner, Kalmar, and Renderer (1993, p. 340) have argued, narrative genres provide constitutive mental models for ordering and interpreting human experience, both one's own and that of others. These are "an important and ubiquitous part of the cognitive tool kit" on which humans depend, and therefore "the mastery of narrative models must be one of the central tasks of cognitive development in any culture." In one of the familiar paradoxes of socialization, the narrative models that we appropriate shape our conceptions of the world, push our thinking in certain directions, and limit it in others; but at the same time they provide us with necessary tools for thought and action and, once mastered, can also be used flexibly and creatively. In Anthony Giddens' (1979) well-known formulation of "the duality of structure," they are simultaneously constraining *and* enabling.

The discussion so far suggests both the promise and some of the requirements of the kind of interpretive and sociocultural approach to narrative that we have tried to employ. The study of how children come to acquire and develop *narrative skills* needs to be integrated with an interpretive analysis of the *symbolic content* of narrative as a vehicle of meaning and with an examination of the various ways that children *use* narrative as a tool to grasp reality and to confer meaning on experience (Nicolopoulou, 1997a). This project requires, in turn, that in the study of narrative we follow a central precept offered by Ochs and Schieffelin (1984) for the field of language socialization as a whole: to avoid an artificial separation between the role of socialization in language acquisition and the use of language in the broader process of socialization, but instead to explore how the two are intertwined in the context of participation in social practices. In short, children's narrative activity ought to be approached as a form of meaningful and socioculturally situated symbolic action.

In this vein, there is now a growing body of socioculturally situated research, conducted in naturalistic settings, investigating the role of narratives in the socialization of young children (e.g., Aukrust & Snow, 1998; Blum-Kulka, 1997; Fivush, 1994; P. J. Miller, 1994; Ochs, Smith, & Taylor, 1989; Sperry & Sperry, 1995). Although we see the present study as a contribution to this enterprise, our approach here differed in two ways from those which characterize most of this literature. First, the bulk of this work has focused on one particular form of narrative: "factual" narratives of past experience, usually embedded in conversations with adults. Our research complemented this prevailing focus by examining young children's fictional or fantasy narratives.

A second notable feature of this literature is shared with most other research on early childhood socialization. With some significant exceptions, the "social context" of socialization has been conceived fairly exclusively in terms of modes of adult-child interaction. (For example, Ely & Gleason, 1995, documented this overall pattern for research on language and socialization, while also indicating some of the exceptions.) Even in work that has emphasized the distinctive role of siblings in socialization, including language socialization, peer relations have usually, in effect, been conceptually assimilated to the dyadic adult-child model, being treated as another case of expert-novice interaction (e.g., Zukow, 1989). The

recent narrative socialization research has largely focused either on adult narratives told to or overheard by children or else narratives co-constructed by adults and children. This has typically involved dyadic interaction (e.g., Fivush, 1991, 1994), though other research has studied the joint construction and uses of narratives in multi-party, multi-generational family talk (e.g., Aukrust & Snow, 1998; Blum-Kulka, 1997; Ochs et al., 1989).

Adult-child interactions obviously play a very important role in children's socialization, education, and development. However, other researchers, including one of the present authors, have argued that this one-sided picture of the "social context" of development must be expanded to take systematic account of the complementary role of children's peer relations and group life. Nor is this simply a matter of adding dyadic child-child interactions to the analysis of adult-child (or expert-novice) interactions; the peer *group*, understood as a genuinely *collective* reality, constitutes a powerful socializing context in early childhood and beyond. To a considerable degree, the cultural messages, images, and cognitive and symbolic frameworks transmitted to and acquired by children pass through the mediating prism of peer culture. (See, e.g., Corsaro, 1985, 1992; Davies, 1989; Maccoby, 1998; Nicolopoulou, 1996, 1997b, in press; Harris, 1995, 1998, offers a valuable overview of the role of the peer group in socialization, albeit one that excessively deemphasizes the impact of adult-child interaction). The present study explored this complementary dimension of socialization through the examination of a peer-oriented narrative practice by young children that served as a matrix for their socialization, collaboration, and development.

The Study: Background and Overview

Young Children's Spontaneous Storytelling in a Peer-Group Context

The present study is one offshoot of a long-term project by Nicolopoulou (1996, 1997b, in press; Nicolopoulou, Scales, & Weintraub, 1994) that examines the development of children's narrative activity and its role in development more generally. The project's central focus is the analysis of spontaneous stories by preschool children generated and recorded as part of a storytelling and story-acting practice pioneered by Paley (e.g., 1986, 1990) that is integrated as a regular—but entirely voluntary—component of the curriculum in the preschool classes involved. At a certain period during the day, any child who wishes can dictate a story to a teacher, who records the story as the child tells it. (These are overwhelmingly fictional or imaginary stories, rather than "factual" accounts of personal experience of the sort one hears in "show and tell" or "sharing time.") At the end of the day, each of these stories is read aloud to the entire class at "group time" (or "circle time") by the same teacher, while the child/author and other children, whom he or she chooses, act out the story.

Several features of this practice are especially worth noting in light of our present concerns. One result of "group time" is that children tell their stories, not only to adults, but primarily to each other; they do so, not in one-to-one interaction, but in a shared public space. In contrast to the artificial situations that predominate in much research on young children's narratives, here the children's storytelling and story-acting are embedded in the ongoing context of the classroom miniculture and the children's everyday group life. Their storytelling is also voluntary, self-initiated, and relatively spontaneous: The stories are neither solicited directly by adults nor channeled by props, story-stems, or suggested topics. Because this practice runs through the entire school year and the children control their own participation in storytelling, it provides them with the opportunity to work over, refine, and elaborate their

narratives and to use them for their own diverse purposes—cognitive, symbolic, expressive, and social-relational. In the process, they can use their stories as a way of expressing certain emotionally important themes that preoccupy them and of symbolically managing or resolving these underlying themes (this is brought out in an especially vivid and perceptive manner by Paley, 1990). Furthermore, to a certain degree this practice combines two aspects of children's narrative activity which are too often treated in mutual isolation: the discursive exposition of narratives in storytelling and their enactment in pretend play.

There is strong evidence that these conditions lead children to produce narratives that are richer, more ambitious, and more illuminating than when they compose them in isolation from their everyday social contexts and in response to agendas shaped directly by adults (Nicolopoulou, 1996; Sutton-Smith, 1986). The quality of this material is enhanced by the fact that children's participation in this type of storytelling and story-acting practice significantly promotes the development of their narrative skills (Nicolopoulou, in press).

Adults certainly play an important role in this practice, but in terms of the narrative activity itself their essential role is indirect. In the classrooms we have studied, teachers who transcribe and read out the children's stories offer very little feedback, commentary, guidance, or other direct input as they do so. Instead, their key contribution is to establish and facilitate a child-driven and peer-oriented activity that develops its own autonomous dynamics. This storytelling and story-acting practice creates a framework of shared symbolic activity that draws on preschoolers' emerging abilities to tell and enact fictional stories—and their enthusiasm for doing so—and helps these develop by serving as a collectively constituted field for narrative performance, experimentation, and cross-fertilization. To borrow a useful formulation of Ochs et al. (1989, pp. 238-239), this practice provides an institutionalized *opportunity space*. Its activation, and the realization of its developmental potential, depend on the engagement and enthusiasm of the children themselves. The role of adults is to help create and maintain the social framework within which these activities can flourish, rather than to intervene in them directly.

Gendered Narrative Styles, the Creation of Gendered Subcultures, and the Development of Gendered Models of Personhood

The present authors have studied the operation and effects of this storytelling and story-acting practice in 12 preschool classes. Between 1988 and the present, Nicolopoulou studied 11 such classes (2 in collaboration with Richner) in 3 preschools in California and Massachusetts serving children from largely middle- or upper-middle class backgrounds; in most cases, collecting the stories was combined with ethnographic observations of the classroom activities, friendship patterns, and group life of the children involved. During the 1997-1998 school year we collaborated to study a preschool class in a Head Start program in Massachusetts; these children, of course, came from poor and otherwise disadvantaged backgrounds.

In all these cases, the children became enthusiastically involved in this storytelling and story-acting practice. As the school year progressed, the children's stories became more complex and sophisticated, manifesting significant advances in both narrative competence and related language skills. In addition, the children used their narrative activities, in ways we will explain, in their construction of reality and identity. Identity is, of course, a complex

and many-sided phenomenon. The present study focused on the construction and consolidation of one key dimension of personal and collective identity, gender. Since our analysis emerged from and built on previous work on this subject by Nicolopoulou, we will first outline that briefly to lay the necessary foundation.

This preparatory overview encompasses the broad findings from classes in the middle-class preschools, which included the sample of participants used in the present study. These 11 classes yielded a total of over 3500 spontaneous stories composed by 3- to 5-year old boys and girls. (The discussion that follows will necessarily be very compressed and schematic; for further explanation, see Nicolopoulou, 1997b; Nicolopoulou et al., 1994.)

The Narrative Construction of Reality and Identity in Preschool

Before proceeding, we should emphasize that all the preschools studied make strong and deliberate efforts to create an egalitarian, non-sexist atmosphere, and most of the children came from families that seemed to share this orientation. Furthermore, one of the teachers' intentions in using this storytelling and story-acting practice was to help generate greater cohesion and a common culture within the classroom group. The children did indeed use their narrative activities to help build up a common culture; but they also consistently used them to build up gendered subcultures within this common culture.

Although the stories were shared with the entire group every day, Nicolopoulou's (1997b; Nicolopoulou et al., 1994) previous analyses demonstrated that they divided sharply, consistently, and increasingly along gender lines. They were dominated by two highly distinctive gender-related *narrative styles*, differing in both form and content, that embodied different approaches to the symbolic management of order and disorder; different underlying images of social relationships and the social world; and different images of the person. In turn, these distinctive symbolic orientations and preoccupations posed different—in some ways complementary—narrative *problems* for the boys and girls, and thus helped to push the development of their stories in different directions.

The girls' stories, for example, characteristically portrayed characters embedded in networks of stable and harmonious relationships, whose activities were located in stable and specified physical settings. One common genre within the girls' preferred narrative style revolved around the family group and the cyclical patterns of its everyday activities, centered topographically on the home. In contrast, the boys' stories were characteristically marked by conflict, movement, and disruption, by the relative absence of stable and harmonious relationships, and often by associative chains of extravagant imagery. Whereas the girls' stories tended to begin by establishing characters in "given" networks of relationships and then found ways to set them in motion, boys' stories were more likely to portray relatively disconnected characters and then to bring them into contact, usually through fighting or other opposition.

In constructing their narratives, the children drew themes, characters, images, plots, and other elements from each others' stories; they also incorporated elements into their narratives from a wide range of other sources including fairy tales, children's books, TV (and popular culture more generally), and their own experience. However, they did not simply imitate other children's stories, nor did they just passively absorb messages from adults and the larger culture. It was clear that, even at this early age, they were able to

appropriate these elements *selectively*, and to *use* and rework them for their own purposes. For example, whereas the girls tended to supplement their depictions of family life by drawing on fairy-tale characters such as kings and queens or princes and princesses, boys were especially fond of powerful and frightening characters along the lines of large animals, cartoon action heroes, and so on. Even when apparently similar elements were used in the stories, they were transformed in significance through *symbolic reworking* as they were introduced into the contrasting frameworks of these gender-related narrative styles (Nicolopoulou et al., 1994, pp. 113-116).

Furthermore, this narrative polarization was one aspect of a larger process by which the children themselves actively built up and maintained two distinct *gendered subcultures* in the classroom that defined themselves, in part, against each other. These subcultures were manifested by the convergence of gendered styles in the children's narratives, gender differentiation in their friendships and group life, and increasingly self-conscious gender identity in the children involved. At the same time, the crystallization of these gendered peer-group subcultures within the microcosm of the classroom provided a framework for the further appropriation, enactment, and reproduction of crucial dimensions of personal identity as defined by the larger society, including gender. For children, of course, this process is more than just a matter of *placing* oneself in one of these categories of gender identity. It is also necessary to flesh out the *meaning* of these categories, which are complicated, puzzling, and—even within a single society—highly multivalent. In this case, the shared symbolic activity of the children's narrative practices constituted a key matrix for this enterprise. (For elaboration of the arguments in this section, see particularly Nicolopoulou, 1997b; for further consideration of their significance, see Nicolopoulou & Weintraub, 1998, pp. 228-233, from which we have partly drawn in this discussion.)

Although systematic studies of gender differences in children's storytelling remain surprisingly rare, other research on this subject (e.g., Libby & Aries, 1989; Paley, 1984; Pitcher & Prelinger, 1963; Sutton-Smith, 1981), as well as work in a number of related fields ranging from children's pretend play and group life to gender-related differences in conversational and dispute-resolution styles (e.g., Davies, 1989; Maccoby, 1998, pp. 15-74; Paley, 1984, 1986; Thorne, 1993), support the conclusion that the patterns identified here are broadly representative—at least for the U.S. and other English-speaking industrial societies—and that they go deeper than superficial narrative conventions among preschoolers. (These patterns also resonate with what one would expect from the arguments of Chodorow, 1989; Gilligan & Wiggins, 1987. For further references, as well as some discussion of the relevant empirical and interpretive controversies, see Nicolopoulou, 1997b, pp. 179-184; for a valuable synthesizing overview of the field of gender development, with whose outlook we are largely in accord, see Maccoby, 1998.) To avoid any possible misunderstanding: The claim is *not* being made that these particular gender-related narrative styles are "universal"; on the contrary, the logic of the argument advanced in this article, as well as the available empirical evidence, would lead one to expect considerable cross-cultural variation. We do not pretend to be able to offer a conclusive explanation of the ultimate causes of gender differences, which are surely complex. We do want to emphasize that our analysis here approached gender differences, not as a straightforward product of biologically determined "essentialism," but rather as emerging, socially constructed patterns bound up with the formation of gendered subcultures and the sociocultural dynamics of peer-group socialization.

The findings outlined above suggest some broad conclusions that go beyond the specific subject of gender. The narrative construction of reality is not a purely individual process but

a sociocultural one, whose cognitive significance is inextricably linked to the building up of group life and the formation of both individual and collective identities. In this process, in other words, the construction of reality and of identity are closely entwined. Children participate—by way of narrative practices—in their own socialization and development, and they do not do this *only* through the individual appropriation of elements from the larger culture. They also help to construct some of the key sociocultural contexts that shape (and promote) their own socialization and development.

The Present Study: Gendered Conceptions of the Person and Their Developmental Pathways

In short, the boys and girls in these preschool classes developed and elaborated two distinctive narrative styles, each manifested in a range of specific narrative genres, that expressed distinctive modes of ordering and interpreting the world, particularly the social world. Correspondingly, they presented two contrasting images of the person: in the girls' stories, a socially embedded and interdependent person, and in the boys' stories, an essentially isolated and conflictual person.

The present study focused more directly on these two distinctive conceptions of the person in order to delineate and analyze them more fully and in greater depth; to compare them more systematically; and, in particular, to reconstruct and compare their distinctive pathways of *development*.

For this purpose, we analyzed a body of stories composed by a sample of 30 children from 3 age cohorts selected from one of the Massachusetts preschools. On the basis of previous studies, we expected the stories generated by this sample to be dominated by two specific gender-related narrative genres that we have termed, for reasons explained below, the *family/group genre* (characteristically favored by the girls) and the *heroic-agonistic genre* (characteristically favored by the boys); and we expected each of these genres to display the corresponding gender-related conception of the person. We further expected, both on theoretical grounds and on the basis of previous work, that each of these genres would serve as a *generative framework*, offering distinctive possibilities for increasing narrative complexity and symbolic elaboration, which the children would use in order to construct, explore, develop, and elaborate their conceptions of the person, and that a systematic interpretive analysis would therefore allow us to trace this process of development.

Method

Participants

Thirty preschool children were selected from those attending four half-day mixed-age nursery classes in a preschool/elementary school in western Massachusetts observed over a period of several years (two classes from 1992-1993 and two from 1994-1995). The sample consisted of an equal number of boys and girls (15 each), with five girls and five boys apiece at each of three age levels: 3s, 4s, and 5s. To select participants, children were identified who at the beginning of the school year fell into the categories of early 3s, early 4s, and late 4s (who turned 5 early in the school year); participants were then randomly selected within each category (mean ages of each cohort: 3-3, 4-2, 4-9). (Late 4s were selected because children who are already 5 at the beginning of the school year are placed in kindergarten.)

The school involved is a well-regarded private school that describes itself as "progressive" and is heavily committed to maintaining an atmosphere that is egalitarian, non-sexist, inclusive, and respectful of diversity. All children in the sample came from

middle-class or upper-middle-class families, largely professional or academic. All but one of these children lived with two parents (including a co-parenting lesbian couple); in the great majority of cases, both parents worked outside the home. All the children were English-speaking, born and raised in the United States (though two had at least one foreign-born parent). In these respects, the sample generally reflected the overall characteristics of the school's student body. All participants in this particular sample were white; this standardizing of the racial background of the sample was not intentional, but it did have the methodological advantage of increasing the degree of comparability between participants.

Data Collection

The stories analyzed in this study were composed, recorded, and enacted as part of a storytelling and story-acting practice, described above, that was a regular component of the everyday preschool curriculum. As indicated earlier, each storytelling event was voluntarily initiated by the child her/himself; children were free to tell any type of story and to include whatever numbers and types of characters they wished. The great majority of the stories were fictional, although some included elements referring to the storyteller's own experience. The 30 children in this sample told a total of 598 stories (mean number of stories per child = 20, ranging from 9 to 42 stories per child); all these stories were included in the analysis. (There were also some collaboratively composed group stories, most frequently by the 4- and 5-year-old girls; but this study focused exclusively on stories by individual children, primarily because this was necessary to allow systematic comparison between age-cohorts.)

Procedure

The analysis proceeded in two stages. All the children's stories were first analyzed to determine (a) what proportions belonged to the two narrative genres expected to predominate, each with its distinctive model of personhood (and of the social world), and (b) to what degree the distribution of stories between these two genres was gender-related. After it was established that these two genres were in fact overwhelmingly predominant and strongly gender-related, and were thus an appropriate focus for further examination, the next stage of analysis attempted to delineate the developmental pathways of each of the models of personhood they expressed. For this purpose, a developmental typology was constructed for each of these two models of personhood, based on previous work and an exploratory analysis of the stories in this sample, and each typology was used as a basis for coding the body of stories to which it pertained. Results were calculated separately for each of the three age cohorts within each gender and compared to assess developmental patterns.

Results

Narrative Genres and Models of Personhood

Coding

Each story was coded to determine whether it fit into one of the two hypothesized narrative genres and displayed the corresponding model of personhood. Five categories were used:

1. *Family/Group genre*, for which the corresponding model of personhood is the *socially embedded and interdependent person*. Either all characters or (in some cases) the

central characters are embedded in the context of groups that are marked by networks of stable, harmonious, and predominantly "given" relations. (In subsequent discussion, the term *group* will refer specifically to groups of this sort.) The prototype is the family group (depicted either in "realistic" forms or as fairy-tale royal families), which centers on kinship relations and also incorporates animals as "pets"; it may also include groups that are family-like or represent metaphorical equivalents of a family group (i.e., are marked by equivalent networks of stable and harmonious relations). Relationships are considered "given" when either (a) characters are already placed in these relationships at the beginning of the story, or (b) a framework of canonical interdependent or complementary roles within the group is explicitly or latently present, and characters are simply plugged into these roles to constitute the group (e.g., "The prince and the princess got married. They had babies. [etc.]"). Central characters are identified, usually explicitly, by their position within the network of group relations (e.g., mother, father, brother, sister, king, queen, pet, etc.). Once the group is constituted, its continuity and cohesion are maintained through the rest of the story (though new characters may also be incorporated), and it serves as the core framework for action. If threats to and/or disruptions of group order are portrayed, they emerge from outside the group; and, in such cases, order is maintained and/or restored before the story is ended.

2. *Heroic-Agonistic genre*, for which the corresponding model of personhood is the *separate and agonistic person*. These stories portray essentially separate and independent characters (i.e., *not* located in frameworks of stable and harmonious relationships) who are usually powerful and/or threatening (e.g., cartoon action heroes, bears, dinosaurs, monsters, etc.). These characters are described primarily by their actions, and their interactions with other characters predominantly take the form of violent conflict and aggression. Conflicts may be chaotic or, increasingly, are more explicitly motivated by the concern of characters to establish dominance, display greater power, and/or determine winners and losers (hence, characters are not only conflictual but competitive, i.e., agonistic). Alliances or coalitions (usually temporary) may be established, but only for the purpose of conflict (with other coalitions or individuals).

3. *Mixed*. Stories that contain substantial elements of both of these genres, so that they cannot unambiguously be placed in either.

4. *Other*. Stories that do not belong to either of these genres (and do not display a mixture thereof).

5. *Protostories*. Narrative efforts that do not yet qualify as stories. In most cases, protostories in this sample introduced characters, and usually included stative verbs ("is," "was," "were"), but did not include any action verbs.

Reliability. All stories were coded independently by two coders. Their rate of agreement was 97%, and almost all discrepancies concerned whether stories should be placed in the "mixed" or "other" categories (a relatively peripheral issue). In no case was a story placed in the family/group genre by one coder and in the heroic-agonistic genre by the other: assignment to these two categories was 100% mutually exclusive. All disagreements were resolved easily through brief discussion.

Analysis

The results strikingly confirmed our expectations (see Table 1: all percentages are mean proportions). Overall, 85% of the stories in this sample fit unambiguously into one of the two narrative genres that we had hypothesized would predominate as generative frameworks. Furthermore, these two predominant genres divided overwhelmingly along gender lines. Of the girls' stories, 76% belonged to the family/group genre, while 4% were mixed-genre and .7% (only one story) fit in the heroic-agonistic genre. Of the boys' stories, 90% belonged to the heroic-agonistic genre, with 3% mixed-genre and .3% (two stories by the same boy) in the family/group genre. These polarized patterns remained essentially consistent across age cohorts, though with some asymmetry. Among the 3-year-olds, the girls were somewhat less monolithically committed to the family/group genre than were the boys to their corresponding heroic-agonistic genre (64% vs. 88%), but among the 4- and 5-year-olds the contrast was further solidified (83% and 82% vs. 91%). In short, the results demonstrated a clear, sharp gendered polarization of narrative genres.

Before leaving these results, it is worth commenting on the finding that the proportion of protostories was higher for the girls than for the boys (5% vs. .3%), especially at younger ages (by age 5, protostories dropped to zero). It would be misleading, we think, to interpret this contrast as showing that the younger girls have weaker narrative skills than the younger boys. Rather, this outcome appears to stem from the fact that the boys and girls were pursuing different narrative objectives in their stories; and one consequence was that, at the most primitive levels, the girls' preferred genre entailed somewhat greater narrative demands than the boys' (since the girls had to establish the characters in a network of relations *and* set them in motion, whereas the boys focused on action immediately). Thus, the threshold criteria we used for a narrative effort to qualify as a story were, in effect, more stringent for the girls' preferred genre than for the boys'. (If the girls' protostories were counted as stories, then the overall proportion of their stories fitting into the family/group genre would be even greater than it is.)

Models of Personhood and Their Developmental Pathways

Next, the girls' stories belonging to the family/group genre and the boys' stories belonging to the heroic-agonistic genre were analyzed separately. Based on previous work and an exploratory analysis of the stories, we constructed parallel typologies to capture the development of each of the two models of personhood expressed in these narrative genres. These two typologies, each comprising five developmental levels, were used as a basis for coding criteria. (For an overview, see Table 2.)

Socially Embedded and Interdependent Person: Developmental Typology

Level 1: Introduction and/or formation of the group. The group is portrayed and characters are located within its framework of stable, harmonious, and "given" relationships. Either the characters are simply presented as members of a pre-existing group (family or family-like), which may also be located in the physical setting of its "home" or "castle"; or characters are introduced and inserted into canonical roles and relationships so as to constitute the group (e.g., "Once there was a princess and then a prince married her. And then we had

Table 1.

Mean Proportions (and Frequencies) of Narrative Genres (and Models of Personhood) in Stories by 3-, 4-, and 5-Year-Old Girls and Boys

	GIRLS					BOYS				
	Proto-Story	Family/ Group (Socially Embedded)	Heroic-Agonistic (Separate & Agonistic)	Mixed	Other	Proto-Story	Family/ Group (Socially Embedded)	Heroic-Agonistic (Separate & Agonistic)	Mixed	Other
AGE 3	11% (11)	64% (54)	-- --	9% (9)	15% (14)	1% (1)	--	88% (114)	3% (5)	9% (12)
AGE 4	3% (4)	83% (92)	-- --	1% (1)	13% (16)	-- --	--	91% (80)	2% (1)	6% (6)
AGE 5	-- --	82% (50)	2% (1)	3% (2)	13% (7)	-- --	1% (2)	91% (104)	5% (6)	3% (4)
M:	5%	76%	0.7%	4%	14%	0.3%	0.3%	90%	3%	6%

Table 2.

Models of Personhood and Their Developmental Pathways

Socially Embedded and Interdependent Person: Developmental Typology	
Level 1:	Introduction and/or formation of the group
Level 2:	Consolidation of the group and its extension and movement in time and space
Level 3:	Beginnings of individuation: Differentiation of members within the group
Level 4:	Explicit articulation of group order
Level 5:	Individuals explicitly take responsibility for group order: Self-consciously responsible person
Separate and Agonistic Person: Developmental Typology	
Level 1:	Disconnected, transitory, and aggressive characters
Level 2:	Shifting conflictual interactions between unstable characters
Level 3:	Stabilization of conflicts and conflictual characters
Level 4:	Articulation of characters' capabilities, intentions, and motivations: Increasing character depth
Level 5:	Characters plan and anticipate: The person as an autonomous, agonistic, and self-aggrandizing mental agent

babies and then we had the mother and the castle."). Individual characters perform no actions other than those that directly contribute to establishing the group (e.g., getting married, having babies, acquiring/becoming a pet). The group, once established, may perform one or at most two routine (non-violent) actions as a collective "they" (e.g., "They go in a park and they got dunkin donuts. All finished.").

Level 2: Consolidation of the group and its extension and movement in time and space. The group having been established, its activities are fleshed out and multiplied and its scope of action is extended. The two main techniques, often combined, are: (a) extended sequences of the group's shared activities (which include such everyday activities of family life as getting up, breakfast, lunch, naps, playing together, dinner, going to sleep, getting up again, etc.) are elaborated; and (b) the group performs actions which involve movement to different physical locations, often taking it outside its home base (at least temporarily). The minimum criteria for this category are that the group, as a collective "they," performs at least three actions (in most cases there are considerably more) and that group actions decisively predominate over actions attributed to individual characters. Thus, although there may be a few individual actions by group-embedded characters (in addition to those that are part of the constitution of the group), the group itself, as a collective actor, remains the major protagonist.

Level 3: Beginnings of individuation: Differentiation of members within the group. While the central characters are still firmly embedded in the framework of group relations, they become increasingly highlighted and differentiated as individual actors. Actions by individual characters (mostly within the group context) begin to be a substantial proportion of the total, and gradually come to predominate over actions attributed to the group as an undifferentiated collectivity. Some characters also begin to be described in more detail and specificity (with more use of distinctive adjectives, more assignment of names, etc.). In its most basic form, this process of character differentiation involves just one or two characters performing relatively simple actions, but over time it is extended to more characters and is further elaborated.

Level 4: Explicit articulation of group order. The framework of order represented by the group, rather than being implicit or taken for granted, is now treated as one explicit focus of the story, and as something that group members must maintain or restore. This is done in two major ways (sometimes combined): (a) The group's constitutive relationships and canonical activities, which in previous levels are simply recounted, are now explicitly portrayed as elements of a *normative order* by being marked as *expected*, *required*, and/or *mandatory* for group members (using such expressions as "had to," "needed to," "it was time to," etc.), and (b) the group and its order are threatened or disrupted, invariably by threats coming from outside the group, but then are maintained or restored before the end of the story. Through this dramatic device of *breach and restoration* of order, group order is framed as problematic—but precisely in order to highlight and ultimately affirm it.

Level 5: Individuals explicitly take responsibility for group order: Self-consciously responsible person. As in the previous level, group order is explicitly articulated through the normative marking of group activities and relationships and/or the breach and restoration of order. Here, in addition, differentiated individual characters are assigned responsibility for maintaining and/or restoring the group and its normative order. Individuals take this responsibility by performing required actions (or by failing to do so) and/or by expressing what is normatively required and, sometimes, holding other characters accountable. In short, the socially embedded and interdependent person has developed into one who is, at the same time, increasingly individuated and self-consciously responsible within this group context.

Here are two examples from this sample, both focusing on the breach and restoration of order. The first is relatively simple (for a Level 5 story) and displays the minimum degree of responsible individual action required for inclusion in this level ("and the queen let them in"). The second is more complex and elaborated, and includes an exceptionally vivid and explicit depiction of danger and even some violence—but in the context of an ultimate restoration and affirmation of the normative order.[1]

> Once upon a time there was a kingdom. And a queen and a king and a princess lived there and a prince, and they had a unicorn and a pony. And they were walking in the forest and they found a house and they said, "I wonder what is inside." And a witch popped out and the witch said, "Boo!" And they were so scared they ran back to their castle. They closed the

[1] Pseudonyms are used for all children quoted in this article.

> doors too quickly and the unicorn and the pony couldn't get in, and so the unicorn and the pony knocked at the door and the queen let them in. And they closed the door quickly and locked all the windows and all the doors so the witch couldn't get in. The End. (Nelly, 5-4, 2/23/93)

> Once upon a time there was a little girl and she had a brother, a mom, and a dad. One day they went walking and they met a bear. The bear was a baby bear. The sister said, "Isn't he cute" and they brought him home. A crib was in the sister's room and the baby bear sleeped in it. And when they woke up the very next day, the brother came into the sister's room and she was gone. The bear was gone too, and they got kidnapped. And the brother found a kingdom and he saw the bear and the sister been locked up in a cave. The brother said, "You can't do this" and the bad guy got a timer and put the sister in it. And in 5 minutes time, sand was going to bury the sister. But in 5 minutes she got buried, but the brother had a knife in his pocket and he banged the knife on the timer and it broke. And the sister came out and she said, "Where is mom and dad?" And the brother took the sister's hand and brought her home. When the sister was grown up, she met a boy in the street named Pete. And she got married. Her cousins were the flower girls and they lived happily ever after. (Anna, 5-1, 3/3/93)

Separate and Agonistic Person: Developmental Typology

Level 1: Disconnected, transitory, and aggressive characters. A string of characters, typically powerful and aggressive (e.g., cartoon superheroes, other action characters from popular culture, large and threatening animals, monsters), are introduced in sequence. Each character performs one action at most before the next character is introduced, and then does not appear again in the story; some characters are introduced without being assigned an action. (The great majority of characters are single individuals, but sometimes generic categories are introduced as characters: e.g., "some bad guys," "black knights," "pirates," etc. These are not further described, and do not persist.) With rare exceptions, all the actions depicted involve conflict, aggression, and/or destruction; but neither the targets of aggression nor specific opponents are clearly indicated. Either the depiction of the character's aggression is unfocused (e.g., "Peter Pan comes and fights. And then a knight comes and fights. Then Captain Hook came. Then the Sheriff came. Then that's the end.") or the conflict is presented as a general free-for-all (e.g., "And the pterodactyl and some bad guys came, and there was a dragon. And they had a battle. And that's the end."; "It's about pirates. They fight. And that's the end."). In short, characters are not just separate but isolated, and are depicted as no more than vehicles for disconnected and/or chaotic actions.

Level 2: Shifting conflictual interactions between unstable characters. Characters enter into single conflicts with specified opponents; these are presented exclusively in unidirectional terms (i.e., A fights B, A kills B). Either the story describes one such conflict, or a sequence of disconnected conflicts is generated (e.g., A fights B, C fights D, E fights F, etc.). No character participates in more than one interaction or persists (even inactive) beyond one conflict.

Level 3: Stabilization of conflicts and conflictual characters. Characters begin to be stabilized by persisting through several actions, typically by participating in more than one conflict. (Characters may also perform non-violent and non-conflictual actions in addition to their conflictual interactions.) In its most minimal form, this stabilization involves just one character performing more than one action, but gradually it comes to include more characters in a story and more extended continuity for each character. One or more characters may participate in conflicts with several different other characters (e.g., A fights B, A fights C, etc.; or A fights B, B fights C, C fights D then E, etc.). Or more rarely—but increasingly over time—paired opponents may engage in repeated conflicts (e.g., A fights B, B fights A, A fights C, A fights B, etc.). Either way, one or more characters may achieve continuity through much of the story or even the entire story. In some cases, alliances of two or more named characters may also participate in conflicts; usually these are temporary (characters allied for one conflict may even fight each other next), but they may also persist for more than one conflict. In addition, some characters begin to receive more extensive descriptions, primarily with regard to the physical features (e.g., size, fangs, armored skin) and/or possessions (especially weapons) being used in the actions described.

> Once upon a time there was Mummyman. And he squirted lava out of his nose at a criminal who died. Mummyman walked away and then a monster came and that one shot poison out of his fingers. Mummyman came back and shot poison out of his stomach and the monster died. The second monster came and Spiderman kicked the monster. Then another Spiderman came and squished the monster and then the monster got unsquished and squished, etc. Then they had a battle. And Mummyman squirted a web out of his ear and then caught a skeleton and the skeleton got pulled back into his ear. The skeleton came out of his other ear. It was nothing but chocolate and Mummyman ate the skeleton. The End. (Seth, 4-9, 4/8/93)

Level 4: Articulation of characters' capabilities, intentions, and motivations: Increasing character depth. In addition to descriptions of characters' actions, there are now also explicit descriptions of their *capabilities*, positive or negative (e.g., "a big heavy frog that was strong and could jump"; "he didn't know how to swim"; "A very strange turtle that could turn a dragon into an alligator. Then a scary bat that couldn't fly, but it had wings and it drank blood."), their *intentions* ("Some knights in shining armor ... plunged their swords into the dragon again so he would never come alive again."), and/or their *motivations* ("They put up their shields for safety."). Capabilities, which may take the form of personal characteristics and/or weapons and other equipment ("Spiderman has this machine on his back that could shoot webs out of it, and it could hold spider guns."), can be treated distinctly from the actions that they allow (or do not allow) characters to perform. Intentions are described even in cases where characters fail to achieve them ("Captain Hook ... tried and tried but he missed."). And the stories now begin to provide explicit reasons for action ("And Batman had a big battle with Spiderman to see who's the strongest."). The person is now explicitly portrayed, not only as a source or vehicle of action, but as an intentional agent with potentialities and motivations that underlie his (or, more rarely, her) visible actions.

Level 5: Characters plan and anticipate: The person as an autonomous, agonistic, and self-aggrandizing mental agent. At least some characters are also able to develop and articulate concrete plans, to consider hypothetical and/or future sequences of actions and outcomes, and/or (more rarely) to anticipate the actions or responses of other characters.

Characters use these mental abilities in their conflicts with opponents, and sometimes also to exercise leadership or dominance within alliances. Here is a fairly sophisticated example:

> Once upon a time an alien was trying to sneak a little piece of treasure from a bad guy named Penguin. Penguin was watching his alien robot and Batman and Robin the Boy Wonder said, "What could that be?" And Batman said, "Hmm, I don't think it's a robot." And then the alien pushed out his arms and shot bullets out of his fingers and Batman said, "Oh, I was wrong. It was a robot." And then Batman had a plan. He said, "Let's go back to the bat cave and next time we'll bring our big hammer and smash the robot to pieces. And then Penguin will be screaming when we broke his robot." And then they went back to the robot and went boom, boom, boom, boom, boom with the hammer and smashed it to pieces. And then Penguin called his whole army—Joker and Riddler and Catwoman—and they got set. And Batman got his army—Batgirl and Robin and Superman—to kill them. And all the superheroes and all the bad guys had a battle at last and the good guys winned—and they cheered, "Hooray! Hooray!" The End. (Jacob, 5-2, 2/23/93)

Coding and Reliability

All stories within each of the two predominant genres (girls' stories in the family/group genre and boys' stories in the heroic-agonistic genre) were coded independently by two coders who assigned each story to a level within the appropriate typology. Their rate of agreement was 93%; all discrepancies were resolved through brief discussion.

Analysis

For each of these models of personhood, the results showed a clear developmental pattern along the lines suggested by the typologies just outlined (see Figures 1 and 2). Within each age cohort, the children's stories were distributed along a range of developmental levels (comprising all or, at age 5, almost all the proposed categories). However, with increasing age there was a clear, decisive, and broadly continuous shift from lower levels to more advanced levels.

Socially embedded and interdependent person (girls' stories). The proportion of stories at the most primitive level (Level 1), which was substantial at age 3 (37%), dropped sharply by 4 years (13%) and then disappeared at 5 years (see Figure 1). At the other end of the scale, stories at Level 5 began at 3% for 3-year-olds, but then increased to 9% for 4-year-olds and 33% for 5-year-olds. Overall, there was a clear upward shift in the center of gravity of the distribution. At age 3, Levels 1 and 2 combined accounted for 51% of the stories. By age 4, with the decline in Level 1 stories to 13%, 67% of the stories fell in either Level 2 or Level 3; the two highest levels, Levels 4 and 5, added up to 19%. By age 5, the center of gravity had again shifted upward, with the stories in Levels 4 and 5 adding up to 52% of the total.

Separate and agonistic person (boys' stories). Results showed a similar developmental pattern (see Figure 2). The proportion of Level 1 stories was substantial at age 3 (34%), decreased sharply to 9% at 4 years, then dropped to 3% at 5 years. On the other hand, stories at Level 5 accounted for a mere 1% at age 3, then increased to 7% at age 4 and 19% at age 5. If we combine the figures for the two lowest levels, this shift is even more striking. At age 3, Levels 1 and 2 added up to a full 62% of the stories (vs. 6% for Levels 4 and 5); this

dropped to 22% at age 4 and 3% at age 5. By age 4, most of the stories were in Level 3 (52%), and Levels 4 and 5 added up to 26% vs. 22% for Levels 1 and 2; at age 5 the total for Levels 4 and 5 was 40% vs. 3% for Levels 1 and 2.

Figure 1.

Development of the socially embedded and interdependent person in the 3-, 4-, and 5-year-old girls' stories.

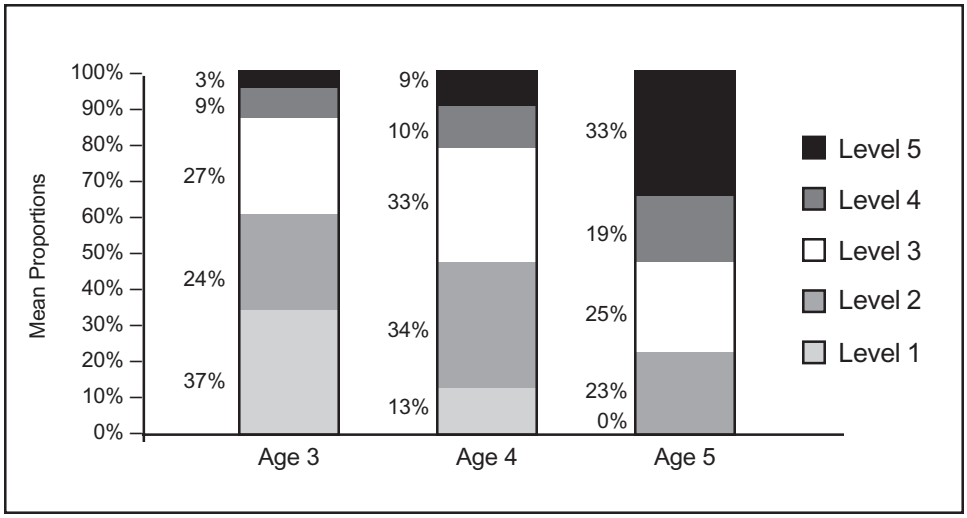
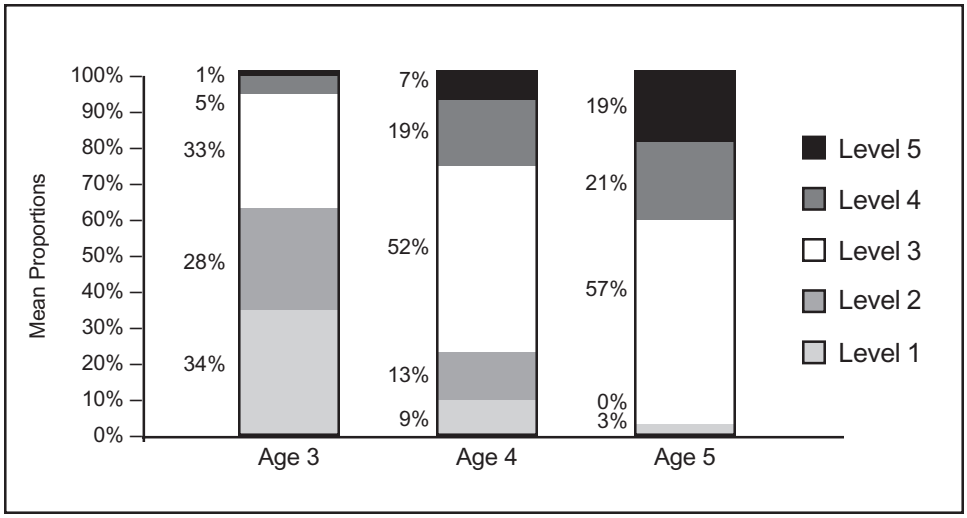


Figure 2.

Development of the separate and agonistic person in the 3-, 4-, and 5-year-old boys' stories.



Discussion

The results of this study strongly confirmed the multiple, culturally mediated, and socially situated character of young children's conceptions of the person and their development. The preschool children studied here constructed and elaborated two quite distinctive conceptions of the person through their ongoing narrative activity within the context of a shared classroom miniculture. And both the nature of these conceptions and the distinctive pathways of their development supported our contention that conceptions of the person have an inescapable social dimension—that is, conceptions of the social world and of how the person is situated in that world form an inherent part of conceptions of the person themselves. Furthermore, these differing conceptions did not emerge randomly, or on a purely individual basis, but in a socioculturally patterned way; in this case, the contrast was structured by gender, and was bound up with the formation of gender identities in the context of peer-group socialization and narrative collaboration.

In a number of respects, these results provided further corroboration for previous findings—described earlier—in the line of research from which this study originated; but they also carried these findings further (and deeper) in significant ways. In the course of their participation in an everyday peer-oriented, voluntary storytelling and story-acting practice, as we have seen, the preschoolers in this study constructed, developed, and creatively elaborated two narrative genres that dominated the body of stories they produced and that polarized sharply and consistently along gender lines. This gendered narrative polarization occurred in situations where all the children in each class listened to all the other children's stories as they were read out and enacted (ruling out the possibility that they were simply unfamiliar with the narrative genre preferred by children of the other gender), and in which teachers and other adults encouraged contact and cooperation across gender lines rather than gender separation. These factors, taken together with other relevant research, strongly suggest that the construction, use, and gender-related differentiation of these narrative styles provide us with revealing evidence about the children's underlying preferences, outlooks, and concerns.

These two predominant gender-related narrative genres embodied and expressed sharply contrasting images of social relations and the social world. Correspondingly, they expressed quite distinctive conceptions of the person, which differed in both sharp and subtle ways: Within the framework of the *family/group genre*, the girls portrayed and developed a conception of the person as essentially *socially embedded and interdependent*. Within the framework of the *heroic-agonistic genre*, the boys portrayed and developed a conception of the person as essentially *separate and agonistic*. All these results accorded with the main thrust of findings from Nicolopoulou's previous studies.

However, the present study allowed these conceptions of the person to be delineated and analyzed in a more detailed, probing, and systematic way than had previously been undertaken. We were also able to map the *developmental pathways* for each of these conceptions across the 3-5 year age period, by comparing the stories produced by the 3-, 4, and 5-year old cohorts. In this respect, the results of the analysis, reported above, were quite strong and illuminating. Each of these gendered models of personhood showed a clear developmental pattern along the lines suggested by the parallel developmental typologies we constructed. In particular, each model of personhood remained fundamentally consistent

for each gender with increasing age, but within each of these frameworks the model of personhood was also developed considerably in depth and complexity. In the girls' stories, the socially embedded and interdependent person, while still acting in the context of a cohesive group marked by networks of stable, harmonious, and predominantly "given" relationships, was no longer simply subsumed in group relations, but became an increasingly *individuated and self-consciously responsible* group member. In the boys' stories, the separate and agonistic person, originally portrayed as an extremely isolated and transitory locus of disconnected actions, became an increasingly *stable, autonomous, and self-conscious mental agent*. In both models, this developmental transformation in the portrayal of the person was bound up with a transformation in the symbolic landscape of social relationships portrayed in the stories.

The typologies we proposed were thus strongly validated by the evidence. At the same time, the results of this study supported our larger argument that the interpretive and socioculturally sensitive analysis of young children's narratives, of the type proposed and employed in this study, offers a powerful tool for investigating their developing conceptions of the person in a way that can do justice to their richness, complexity, and diversity. Of course, this requires being able to work with narrative material that genuinely expresses children's own interests, concerns, and preoccupations. In this case, the children's stories were indeed generated in the context of their everyday peer-group life and in response to their own agendas rather than those of adults. The resulting analysis of the stories provided us with a richer, more multifaceted, and more differentiated picture of young children's conceptions of the person than one would expect from most of the current research on this subject in the field of social cognition.

Models of Personhood, Narrative Problems, and Developmental Projects

Without restating the analysis of these two gender-related models of personhood and their respective developmental pathways, we will briefly review and compare some of the main outlines. At 3 years, both the boys and the girls had already established the core features of their respective models of personhood in the genres organizing their narratives. Each of these models can be seen as constituting a *generative framework* for further development, characterized by distinctive purposes and concerns and by what might be termed a distinctive *developmental project*, which in turn generates a distinctive set of *formal problems* for the corresponding narrative genre. The two typologies summarized in Table 2 capture the steps through which each of these developmental projects was then pursued in the children's narratives. In the movement from Level 1 to Level 5 within each typology (which broadly corresponds to increasing age from 3 to 5 years), the complexity and sophistication of the children's stories increased quite markedly. But this narrative development proceeded along two different pathways.

The boys' stories within the heroic-agonistic genre (which, for convenience, we will henceforth simply call the boys' stories) began by introducing a set of highly kinetic and aggressive but also transitory and disconnected characters. A key narrative problem the boys faced was to stabilize the characters and to link them in ways that could generate coherent plots, while maintaining the essential separateness of the characters and an overall strain toward disorder. In the girls' stories, on the contrary, the characters typically started off by being embedded in the ordered framework of a cohesive and harmonious group,

within which they were linked by networks of "given" and interdependent roles. Stabilizing and connecting the characters was thus not a salient problem within this genre; instead, they faced the problem of generating movement, action, and dramatism while maintaining the basic framework of order and cohesion. In each case, the children found distinctive and sometimes ingenious narrative devices to address these genre-specific formal problems.

In the most primitive level of the boys' stories, as just noted, the process started out with the portrayal of disconnected, transitory, and aggressive characters defined fundamentally by their *actions*. At this level, in fact, the characters were not only essentially separate but actually isolated. And the characters also lacked any real stability, solidity, or continuity; when they were not simply introduced and then forgotten, they functioned as no more than vehicles for action. Through the subsequent levels of development, two processes proceeded in complex interconnection. On the one hand, the characters became more stable and substantial, and were given greater depth; and on the other hand, the boys tried to find ways to connect the characters in more stable and coherent ways. Their main strategy for bringing characters into contact was through conflict, so the first stages of this process involved the stabilization of conflicts. At first the stories portrayed relatively unfocused aggression and destruction; then this shifted to conflicts between specific opponents; then in some cases paired opponents engaged in repeated conflicts. Boys also began to link characters in alliances or coalitions (even, at more advanced stages, what might be called "teams"), either temporary or more stable, but always structured by the overriding motif of conflict. In these ways, what began as chaotic conflict was transformed into more clearly *agonistic* competition (though even in Level 5, of course, the world of the boys' stories remained a world of disorder).

These attempts to find ways to connect the characters (albeit in a conflictual and ultimately unstable pattern) went roughly in tandem with the gradual effort to give characters themselves more stability, continuity, and depth. From Levels 1-3, the characters were stabilized and made a little more substantial, but they remained essentially vehicles for action. In Levels 4-5, there was a movement toward greater character *depth*. In Level 4, the *character* began to be distinguished from the visible *actions* that he (rarely she) performed, through portrayal of the capabilities, intentions, and/or motivations of the actor; that is, the character began to be depicted as an intentional agent (though not yet one who explicitly expressed intentions). In Level 5, this process was pushed further as the character began to be explicitly depicted formulating plans and, in the most advanced cases, even considering possible future actions and events. In this overall developmental process, the fundamental portrayal of the person as essentially separate and agonistic was not altered, but only refined, deepened, and brought to fruition. In the highest level, the character was now portrayed, not as a transitory and insubstantial locus of observable action, but as an increasingly stable and self-conscious agent—not just as isolated or independent, but as increasingly autonomous (i.e., consciously self-determining).

In the girls' stories, one sees a very different developmental trajectory, driven by very different purposes, preoccupations, and narrative problems. The contrast was established in their respective starting points. In the most primitive level of the girls' stories, their first concern was to construct the family (or quasi-family) group, and to embed the characters in its structure of orderly relations. Thus, the girls' characters were defined fundamentally by their *relationships*, not their actions. In fact, in the Level 1 stories, the characters typically performed no actions as individuals; and even in Level 2, actions by the group as a collectivity

still predominated over the actions of individual members. In stories at Levels 1-2, individual characters were largely swallowed up by their roles within the group. The movement from Level 1 to Level 2 focused primarily on consolidating the group and elaborating the rhythms of its activities.

Only when this was accomplished did the girls turn to the process of differentiating the characters (within the group) and fleshing out their portrayals of individual characters, beginning with stories in Level 3. Next, in Levels 4 and 5, there was a significant shift, which featured the use of some complex and even rather sophisticated narrative devices. In the girls' stories, the group, typically anchored physically and symbolically in the home (or "castle"), represented the central framework of order in the story. In Level 4 this framework of order, rather than being a taken-for-granted background of the story, was now treated as an explicit focus and concern. This was done either through the explicit articulation of the group's normative order or through the device of breach and restoration of the canonical order—in which group order was framed as problematic, but precisely in order to highlight and reaffirm it. In Level 5, the explicit articulation of group order was carried further, and in addition differentiated individual characters were assigned responsibility for maintaining and/or restoring this order (including verbal expressions of what was normatively required, expected, and/or prohibited). The person was now represented as an individuated and self-consciously responsible agent—but still within the group framework.

Thus, while the developmental project of the boys' genre began with disconnected and unstable characters and sought both to flesh them out and to bring them into contact (for the purpose of agonistic conflict), the corresponding project in the girls' genre began and ended with central characters firmly embedded in the group's framework of stable and harmonious relationships, but found ways to differentiate and individuate the characters within this framework. It is worth noting that, in the development of the girls' model of personhood, there was not a simple trade-off between group cohesion and individuation. In important ways, one could even argue that *both* were strengthened in the movement from Level 1 through Level 5; what changed was the way that group cohesion was organized and portrayed in the stories, so that it came to rely more explicitly on the self-conscious motivation and responsibility of group members.

We will add two reflections that apply to the developmental logics operating in both of these models of personhood. First, to reemphasize an earlier point, in both cases transformations in the portrayal of the person were intimately linked to transformations in the portrayal of social relations. Second, however, these links were complex rather than simple or straightforward. Each step along the developmental pathway required that the child find new ways to master and integrate several dimensions in the portrayal of the person and the social world, and this could lead the child to focus on certain concerns at the (temporary) expense of others. Therefore, it is not surprising that all the dimensions in each narrative genre did not progress in a smoothly linear manner. For example, as we have seen, the overall development of the girls' model of personhood from Level 1 through Level 5 involved a major increase in character individuation, and there was a major step forward in this respect in Level 3. However, in Level 4 the main concern seems to have been the articulation of group order, and the focus on individuation receded, so that a number of the stories in Level 4 showed a smaller degree of individuation than some of the most advanced Level 3 stories. Then, in Level 5, the girls integrated the developmental advances of Levels

3 and 4 to achieve portrayals which combined increased articulation of group order *and* significantly increased individuation.

Certain of the orienting hypotheses offered by person perception and theory of mind research appear to point to *some* aspects of the processes involved in the development of these conceptions of the person—though in a partial and uneven way. In both of these models we saw interesting examples of movements from surface to depth in character portrayal, with increasingly mentalistic descriptions of characters. This phenomenon, which is worth exploring further, was especially striking in connection with some aspects of the boys' genre, since they began with almost purely "surface" descriptions of characters' visible actions, giving no attention to motives or intentions, and then gradually began to give their characters more of the features of an intentional agent. The surface-to-depth model also captures some aspects of the girls' developmental pattern, especially in Levels 4 and 5. However, as noted in the previous paragraph, for the girls the concern with portraying the inner mental life of characters (which, incidentally, they began to do earlier than the boys, at least in terms of emotions) had to be balanced by, and integrated with, equally compelling concerns regarding the establishment, consolidation, and transformation of interdependent social relationships and normative order; and, furthermore, their increased individuation of characters was accomplished as much through shifting the structures of group relations as by their descriptions of individual characters per se. These organizing and motivating dimensions of the girls' developmental project are not really well captured by existing theory of mind approaches. On the other hand, one feature of the boys' narrative genre brings to mind, though perhaps not in a precise way, a central theme in person perception research: The boys, as we have seen, experienced considerable difficulty in establishing the *stability* and *continuity* of their characters. Once again, however, this was not a salient problem for the girls, since they established the stability of their characters quite early; but the means they used to do this, which was to embed the characters in networks of stable relationships, is not one addressed by person perception research. The points we have just mentioned raise a more extensive set of issues than we can address here. But, overall, it is hard to avoid the impression that, in so far as the theoretical perspectives of person perception and theory of mind research can help us address some aspects of these conceptions of the person and their development, both of those perspectives are better suited to capture the developmental logic of the boys' model of personhood than that of the girls—which is perhaps not surprising, since the world of the boys' stories more closely fits the individualistic presuppositions of those perspectives.

Some Lingering Puzzles and Dilemmas

This step toward developing a "morphology of persons" (Bruner, 1986, p. 39) in young children's construction of reality and identity points, we believe, to a wide range of questions that remain to be addressed by developmental research. But we would like to close by touching, in a deliberately tentative and inconclusive way, on some practical issues raised by the phenomena we have discussed in this article. Actually, an intertwining of practical and scholarly considerations is already inherent in its subject matter. We have sought to demonstrate that the storytelling and story-acting practice pioneered by the teacher/researcher Vivian Paley is an invaluable resource for developmental research because the narrative activity it helps to promote offers a powerful window into the minds of preschoolers. But Paley introduced it into her own classroom as an educational practice, and it was available to us for research purposes only because it was a regular part of the curriculum in the preschool

classrooms we studied. It is certainly a valuable educational tool in many respects. For example, as we noted earlier, it has been demonstrated that participation in this storytelling and story-acting practice significantly promotes the development of children's narrative skills and other related language skills that serve as foundations for emergent literacy (Nicolopoulou, in press). A major reason for its effectiveness is the enthusiastic engagement of the children who participate in it.

As we have argued, the children's enthusiasm is understandable, if only because they use this activity to pursue a number of their own agendas, not just ones that adults have in mind. But at least some aspects of the children's agendas make some adults a little uneasy. The fact that children use their narrative activities to develop narrative styles and conceptions of the person that are so sharply polarized along gender lines is not what many teachers and other adults would hope for. This is especially true since the boys and girls are developing, not just notions of gender roles, but more comprehensive gendered visions of the social world and the person.

Part of the answer is that, in this kind of activity, the children are not just passive objects of adult socialization. It seems clear that different children gravitated to different genres in part because of the ways that these genres helped them to *selectively* appropriate and manipulate elements available to them from the larger culture. But the matter is more complicated than that, because of the crucial role of peer-group socialization in this process. Once gendered peer-group subcultures are formed, they can offer powerful resources for mutual support and collaborative learning, but they also exercise powerful pressures for conformity, and their emotional significance for young children heightens their impact in both directions. To return to the phrase of Giddens, they are simultaneously enabling and constraining (and it seems to be hard to separate one aspect from the other). It seems clear that peer culture plays a key role in gender socialization and the formation of gender identities (e.g., Maccoby, 1998; Thorne, 1993), and one of their effects is to increase polarization by enforcing sharp boundaries where there might otherwise be a more gradual continuum. To the extent that this kind of child-initiated narrative activity heightens the impact of children's peer culture, is it really to be welcomed?

We do know of classrooms where teachers have become sufficiently uneasy about the gendered patterns in the children's storytelling, or simply about the amount of enthusiastic violence and destruction in the boys' stories, that they have intervened (more or less gently) and tried to tone down the more polarized aspects. Unfortunately, it turns out to be very tricky to do this, even for very experienced and sensitive teachers, without short-circuiting and undermining the vitality of the storytelling and story-acting practice in the process. Children are not so easily diverted from their agendas, and what often happens is that the children's narrative energy (especially the boys') is simply diverted from storytelling to the playground and the underworld of children's pretend play. When this happens, the potential value of the storytelling activity is lost. We are not suggesting, of course, that there is no way to intervene so as to shape the directions of children's narrative activity without undermining it—only that doing so successfully requires great tact and skill.

But the larger question is whether we should regard this gendered diversity in young children's models of personhood as necessarily or exclusively a "problem." Our reaction is that, at the very least, one should be cautious about doing so. In the end, what really most

impresses us is that the visions expressed in these boys' and girls' models of personhood have important complementary strengths, so we should try to encourage both of them and to find ways that both can be cultivated and built on in the process of development.

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