

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

**Autobiographical Remembering, From Noun to Verb: A Discursive Approach to
Autobiographical Memory**

by

Julie E.A. Quinn

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Abstract

A two-part discursive study was conducted in order to investigate autobiographical remembering as it is constructed in talk and text. A detailed analysis of 'text' was conducted on four published research articles that adopted a cognitive approach to the study of autobiographical remembering. The second part of the study focused on 'talk', featuring an in-depth analysis of autobiographical remembering in the context of everyday conversation. Ten pairs of participants were recruited from the university population and asked to recollect personal memories from their lives. Sessions lasted from 50 minutes to one hour and were taped, transcribed, and analyzed using discourse analysis. This analysis identified the complexities and nuances of autobiographical remembering as it occurs in a conversational context. The implications of constructing autobiographical remembering as a social, dynamic, and rhetorical process are discussed.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: What is autobiographical remembering?

“When I was your age we had to walk 12 miles to school, uphill, all the way -- both ways...” While this story may be *true* in the sense that Grandfather actually remembers it that way (although with *Grandfather* you can never tell), it is probably not *accurate* in the sense that the details may not be correct (Grandfather was *never* your age). This anecdote illustrates a recurring concern in the memory literature in cognitive psychology, the problematic distinction between the *truth* and *accuracy* of a recollection (Barclay, 1988, as cited in Baddeley, 1990, p. 309). A discursive perspective (e.g., Edwards, 1997; Middleton & Edwards, 1990) refocuses this concern to ‘truth’ and ‘accuracy’ as part of a larger repertoire of discursive resources which an individual (cognitive psychologist or lay person) can use, for example, to give credibility to her/his account.

Ordinarily, Grandfather’s remembering of his past will be constituted in such a fashion that we will accept it as both truthful and accurate. However, in the opening example Grandfather is explicitly inviting criticism and doubt. To understand why Grandfather does this, we would have to look at his remembering as an *occasioned, contextually situated discourse*. In other words, every time Grandfather ‘remembers’ a story from his past, he is constructing a discursive ‘account’; an account which is produced in a specific setting for a specific purpose, and thus, is potentially different every time. In any case, Grandfather is remembering (and constructing) an event or series of events from his personal past: that is, he is engaged in *autobiographical remembering*.

What kinds of memory/remembered events count as autobiographical? While specific definitions of autobiographical memory in the psychological literature vary, autobiographical memory is typically characterized as the memory or recall of the events in one's life (Baddeley, 1990); a recounting of past experiences (Fivush, Haden & Reese, 1996); or a process in which individuals recall "private, personally significant, and personally selected events" (Bruce & Read, 1998). For the purposes of this study, it is most helpful to take Brewer's definition of recollective memoryⁱ as representing the traditional psychological understanding of autobiographical memory: that is, "the type of memory that occurs when an individual recalls a specific episode from their past experience" (Brewer, 1996). From a discursive perspective, on the other hand, autobiographical memory is considered to be a *discursive act*, specifically, the act of recounting personal events, including any event from one's past in which one was personally present or involved (c.f. Edwards, 1997).

This study: An overview. The purpose of this research will be to examine autobiographical memory from a discursive perspective where it is treated as an act; and therefore, a *social* process and a function of rhetoric. First I will examine the cognitive psychological understanding of autobiographical memory, beginning with the most important general models of memory that have been used to explain autobiographical memory. Then I will introduce some alternative cognitive approaches developed specifically to explain autobiographical memory. Finally, I consider a discursive theoretical position, beginning first with the existing discursive critiques of the cognitive approach and extending the critique to offer a discursive account of autobiographical

memory specifically. Part of this project will involve the collection and discourse analysis of autobiographical rememberings, and therefore, what it means to adopt a discursive approach to psychology will be discussed in the last section of the chapter.

Autobiographical Memory: A Cognitive Psychological Perspective

Beginning with a definition of autobiographical memory as memory of the personal events in one's life, Anderson and Conway (1997) suggest that autobiographical memories have four general properties:

- 1) they can be both *general* (e.g., 'when I went to school') and *specific* (e.g., 'my first day of school');
- 2) they are *retrieved* and *constructed*, in the sense that memory is first retrieved and, then, translated into a presentable form;
- 3) they can vary in their *durability* and *vividness*; and, finally,
- 4) they are characterized by the following trends: *childhood amnesia* (most people can recall comparatively few memories from the period of their lives between birth and age five), the *reminiscence bump* (a period from 15 to 25 years of age characterized by a marked increase in the number of memories recalled), and, following the reminiscence bump, a steadily increasing rate of *forgetting* (in which individuals have good recall for recent memories, but poor recall for distant ones).

For the purposes of the present study, I am particularly interested in the second set of properties identified by Anderson and Conway (1997): the *retrieval and construction* of autobiographical memories. This process of retrieval and construction is understood to be a complex operation, one "often characterized by false starts, redundant information,

and retrieval blockages,” in which memories are “effortfully constructed rather than retrieved as whole, fully formed units” (Anderson & Conway, 1997, p. 219). That is to say, the business of memory retrieval is not straightforward. People make mistakes, remember the same event differently on different occasions, and sometimes, they forget. Some examples of the more disruptive and less consistent aspects of memory retrieval include the following: memories can be

- wrong (e.g., Neisser, 1982; Loftus 1993)
- impaired by trauma and intrusive memories (e.g., Brewin, 1998)
- subject to false memory syndrome (e.g., Hyman, 1999; Hamilton, 1998)
- affected by the context in which the memories are recalled (e.g., Miller, Lewy & Peckham, 1997)

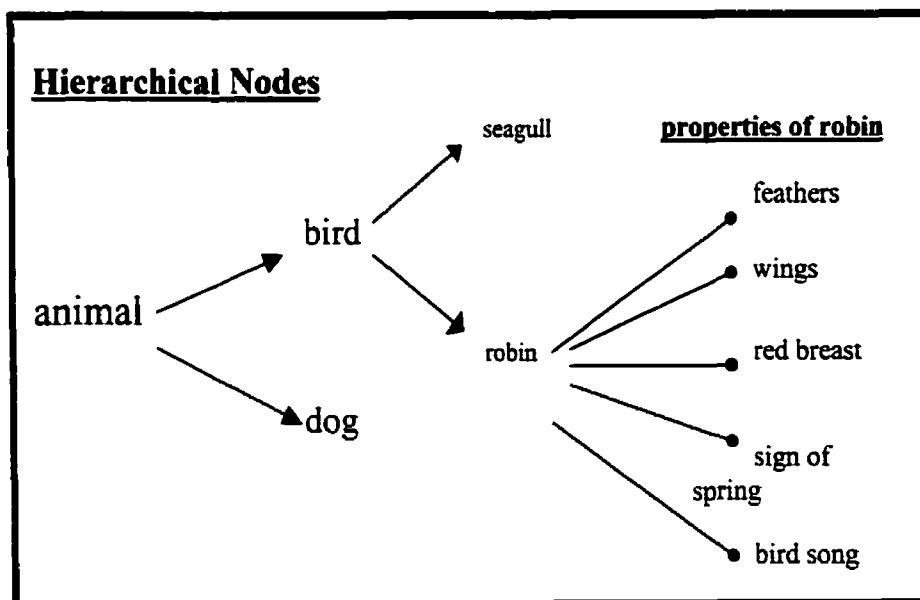
These anomalies pose certain challenges to the cognitive conception of memory and retrieval: why do people remember things differently? How do we account for these differences? Cognitive approaches to autobiographical memory have offered varying explanations: anomalies are explained by memory deterioration over time, interference during storage (i.e., the encoding of the memory), or cognitive interference (e.g., emotional distress, fatigue, etc.) during memory retrieval (e.g., Baddeley, 1990; Howe & Courage, 1997). Later, I will turn to a consideration of discursive models of remembering as applied to autobiographical memory. But first, I review cognitive models of memory formation in general, and autobiographical memory in particular.

Models of Memory Applied to Autobiographical Memory

In their comprehensive review of the autobiographical memory literature, Anderson and Conway (1997) identify a variety of theories of how memories are created, stored and retrieved. The most influential of these are derived from three traditions: semantic network models; scripts and schemas; and connectionist models of memory (Anderson & Conway, 1997).

Semantic network model. In semantic network models of cognition (c.f. Quillian, 1988), concepts are represented as hierarchically organized nodes that form part of a greater network of nodes or concepts. Each node contains a set of semantically related features or properties (see Figure 1).

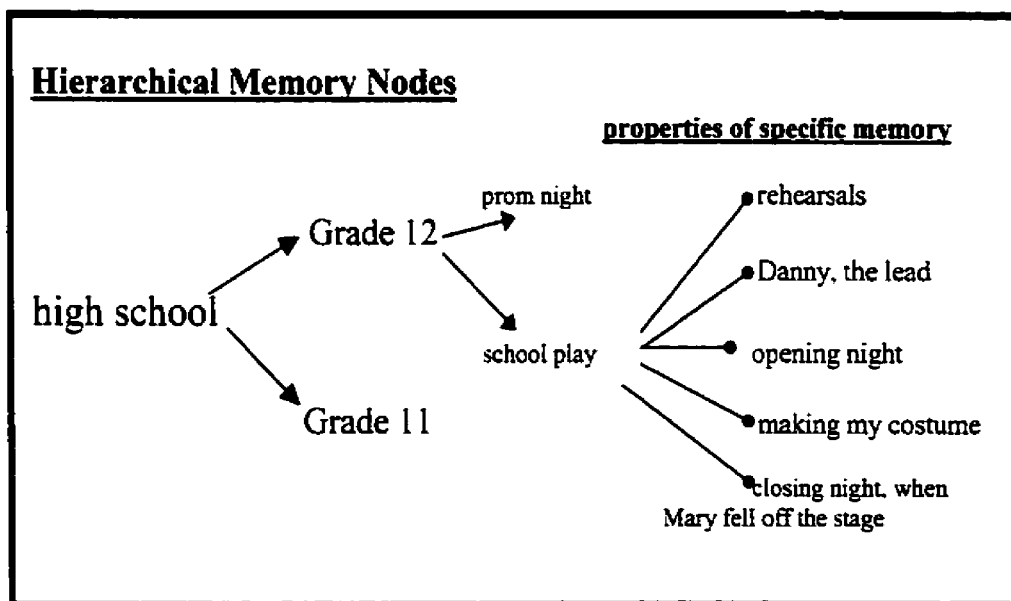
Figure 1: Semantic Network Model of Cognition



When this type of organizational structure is applied to autobiographical memory, “memories are treated as holistic units of knowledge... and are accessed by traversing

links of the semantic network,” (Anderson & Conway, 1997, p.233). In other words, when applied to autobiographical memory, Figure 1 might (conceivably) look like the example in Figure 2 (on the following page). However, Conway and Berkerian (1987, as cited in Anderson & Conway, 1997) performed a series of “primed autobiographical memory retrieval” experiments in which they investigated the suitability of the semantic model for explaining autobiographical memory. Their research led them to conclude that there was no empirical evidence upon which to link this model and autobiographical memory (Anderson & Conway, 1997).

Figure 2: Semantic Network Model of Autobiographical Memory



Scripts and schemas. Another model, which has been applied more directly to memory, is *script theory* (Abelson, 1981; Schank & Abelson, 1995). A script is a well structured, culturally sanctioned/stereotyped sequence of actions that characterizes a well-known situation or specific type of activity (Schank & Abelson, 1977, cited in

Matlin, 1998). Perhaps the most oft-cited example is the scripted or ritualized behavior for *eating at a restaurant* (e.g., Abelson, 1977; Anderson & Conway, 1997; Matlin, 1998), a hypothetical description of which is given below:

- waiting to be seated by the greeter
- telling the waiter what you'd like to drink
- selecting food from the menu
- waiting for the waiter to return so you can place your order
- eating soup with a spoon, instead of drinking directly from the bowl
- tipping (15% now, isn't it?)
- paying *before* you leave

The situation described above is actually a highly specialized instance, perhaps for eating at an expensive restaurant. While this might be an adequate script for eating at La Ritz, it is not a particularly useful script for how you should conduct yourself at McDonalds. Arguably, these particular scripts (e.g., eating at La Ritz, and eating at McDonalds) could actually be part of larger *schema* for "eating at restaurants" or "things to do when you're hungry." Technically speaking,

Schemas are abstracted from a large number of specific events in our lives, and these schemas summarize the important characteristics contained in events. (Matlin, 1998, p. 158).

Again, there is a hierarchy: each schema has its attendant possible scripts; in the same way, scenes themselves can be grouped under larger Memory Organization Packets

(MOPS). A MOP is “a set of scenes directed towards the achievement of a goal” (Anderson & Conway, 1997, p.229, citing Schank, 1982, p.97). In fact the possibilities are almost exponential: in addition to MOPS, there are also TOPS (*Thematic Organization Packets*) and EMOPs (event-memory organization; Anderson & Conway, 1997).

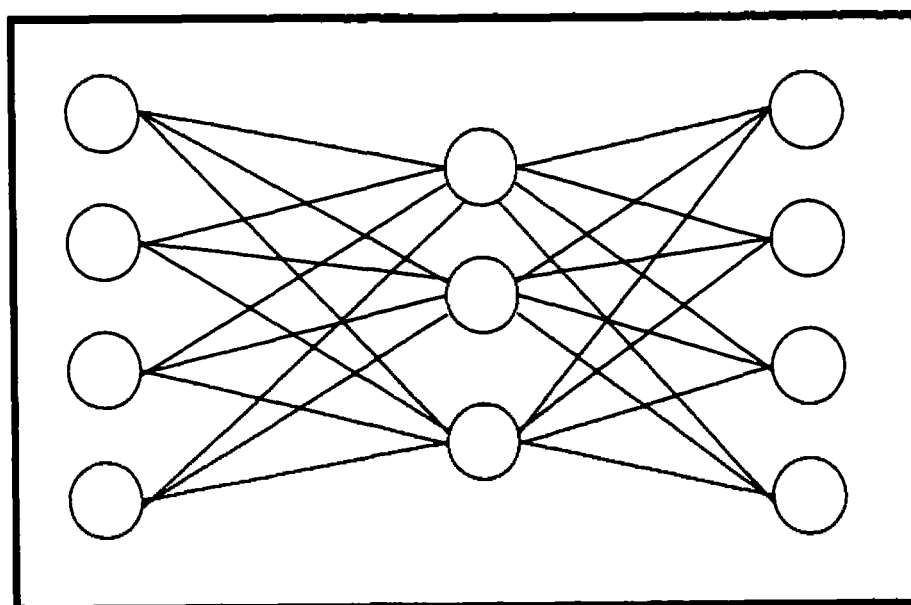
Script theory may be used as a way to explain the organization of autobiographical memories. It is possible, for instance, that episodic memories are organized around scripts or schemas (Anderson & Conway, 1997; Matlin, 1998) in the sense that when we are relating, say, what happened at the restaurant on Tuesday, there is a culturally understood sequence of expected events which will help to structure the telling of that story. Anderson and Conway (1997) conclude that while this model is useful for explaining the first three properties of autobiographical memory (e.g., general-specific qualities, durability-vividness, and cue and retrieval), the model does not really illuminate the characteristics of the life-span retrieval curve (e.g., the reminiscence bump). Finally, they turn to a more “connected” model of memory.

Connectionist models. Connectionist models of cognitive processes (e.g., McClelland & Rumelhart, 1985) depart from the mind-as-computer metaphor of the previous two models. Connectionists favour instead the analogy of the *neuron*, in which knowledge is represented as a pattern of activation across layers of neurons or units (Anderson & Conway, 1997; McLeod, Plunkett, & Rolls, 1998). Information in the brain is processed or computed at the level of the neuron: a neuron will pass on information in response to the sum of the signals received from other neurons. This model is very much

like the spreading activation model (i.e., semantic network model), except that it postulates the possibility of *parallel* processes (rather than exclusively linear ones).

Information is stored and retrieved through a process of *parallel distribution*: that is, this process occurs simultaneously across many levels and connections (McLeod et al., 1998). The neurons (or units) in each layer of the cognitive system in question (in this case, autobiographical memory) collect and sum information received from neurons in the previous layer (for a graphic representation see Figure 3). If the input or signal received from the contributing neurons is strong enough to pass “threshold” level, then the neuron is activated (i.e., it “fires”) and the signal is sent on to neurons at the next level. The weight or strength of any particular neuronal signal is determined by the strengths of the connections between neurons; furthermore, particular “learning” experiences may strengthen particular connections (McLeod et al., 1998).

Figure 3: The layered structure of information processing in the brain and connectionist models. (from McLeod et al., 1998, p.13)



In connectionist models of memory, episodic memory (and, for our purposes, autobiographical rememberingⁱⁱ) consists of the processing or recording of the composite elements of everyday events (for instance, the place in which an event occurred, the people involved, *what* happened; McLeod et al., 1998). This recording process requires the rapid formation of connections or associations between these composite elements, which can later be used as cues to trigger retrieval of the memory. In other words, “episodic memory involves the combination of information about different aspects of an event into a single pattern, which can be recalled when cued by some component of the original output” (McLeod et al., 1998, pp.283-4). In applying the connectionist model directly to autobiographical memory, Anderson and Conway (1997) observe,

A memory is ‘retrieved’ when the representation of a cue reinstates patterns of activation representing stored experiences. A ‘cue’ in this case will always be an *internally derived representation*, possibly arising directly from *externally presented* information, but more usually arising from a sequence of *internally constructed patterns of activation* (p.239, *italics mine*).

The possibility of *parallel* processes (as opposed to strictly linear ones) provides connectionist models with a significant advantage over the “computer models” used to explain autobiographical memory. Simultaneous memory activation across many connections allows for a flexibility which the linear systems do not afford: that is, they allow for variations in output, or multiple versions (which are explained by the changing

weights and patterns of neural activation) that make it possible, with this model, to explain why people sometimes remember the same event differently.

In general, Anderson and Conway favour this idea, and feel it has the kind of theoretical potential that is generally accredited to PDP (parallel distributed process), but that, as yet, the model is not developed sufficiently to provide answers to the organizational mysteries of autobiographical memory. They conclude: "Overall, it may be the case that autobiographical remembering is simply too complex a form of cognition for current models of knowledge representation" (p.243). Later, in considering Rubin's idea of the 'memory as *brain*', I will consider some of the more specific implications of applying connectionist thinking to autobiographical memory.

Semantic networks, scripts and connections: The discursive view. When Anderson and Conway discuss *memory construction* either in terms of mind-as-computer or mind as neural network, they are referring to an *internally generated process*, guided by prompts (or cues) and driven by an internal network of memory recognition (see also Edwards, 1997). The shortcoming of these models, from a discursive perspective, is the assumption that individuals retrieve and construct memories in isolation (that is, they assume that remembering is a purely mental process), and, consequently, look for the structural elements of autobiographical memory exclusively within the mind of the individual. The discursive approach treats the process of memory construction as external, interactional, and socially constructed (e.g., Billig, 1990; Edwards, 1997; Edwards & Mercer, 1989; Edwards & Middleton, 1986). In this vein, I will argue that the process by which autobiographical memories are constructed is ultimately *a social*

one, which can be studied by examining the ways people use language to remember. But first, let us look at the techniques that have been used within the traditional psychology literature to study autobiographical memory.

Techniques for Studying Autobiographical Memory

A variety of methodologies have been adopted for studying autobiographical memory within cognitive psychology. For example, there is the autobiographical memory schedule employed by Kopelman, Wilson, and Baddeley (1989) in which participants are systematically questioned about personal information and events from different periods of their lives; responses are then analysed using cluster analysis. Another method involves the use of meticulously kept diary entries to be used for testing autobiographical memory (Brewer, 1988; Linton, 1975). In this case the participant (sometimes the experimenter herself) keeps a daily record of her activities, and then uses these as the basis for examining inaccuracies and distortions in her later recall. However, one of the more common approaches is the study of cuing and retrieval.

Cue/retrieval studies. Imagine that a student sits at her keyboard. She types “masterpiece” after the prompt and hits *enter*. The computer searches, retrieves the file, and suddenly the paper she saved yesterday (her *masterpiece*) fills the screen. Is that how memory works? Are our experiences written/encoded in the computer (i.e., our minds) to be retrieved later by the appropriate triggers or cues? As we have already seen, this human memory bank is assumed to be susceptible to memory deterioration problems -- for instance, faulty encoding, fading with time -- i.e., the processes of forgetting. Nevertheless, drawing on the computer metaphor that underlies memory models within

cognitive psychologyⁱⁱⁱ, the cue-retrieval approach to studying memory is persuasive. For instance, if I present you with the cue phrase, “riding a bike,” and ask you to tell me the first thing that you remember, you may recall scenes like the following ones: peddling without your training wheels for the first time, your older brother holding the bike upright behind you, only, wait a minute, he’s not behind you any more... several tries and a bloody nose later you were a newly formed two-wheeled wonder (and, eventually, you even forgave your older brother). These kinds of experiences in which a conversation topic, a sight, a sound, or a place ‘calls to mind’ or ‘cues’ a particular memory from your past are commonplace in everyday life, and considered to be instances of *cued retrieval* (although there are other explanations to which we will turn later).

One method commonly used to investigate the relationship between cue presentation and memory retrieval is the *Galton cuing technique*, first developed by Sir Francis Galton in 1883 (Baddeley, 1990; Brewer, 1996). Typically, the participant is presented with a cue word and then asked to describe the first personal memory that pops into their head. Research using this technique has generated the autobiographical phenomena mentioned earlier: the reminiscence bump, the retention effect and infantile amnesia (e.g. Fitzgerald, 1996; Jansari & Parkin, 1996; Rubin & Schulkind, 1997; Rubin, Wetzler, & Nebes, 1986). A specific example of the word cuing technique is Rybasch and Monaghan’s (1999) study. They examined episodic and semantic contributions to autobiographical recall by giving their participants a series of cue words for the purpose of generating/ retrieving personal memories. Following each cue word presentation, participants were asked to write a brief description of the first thing that ‘popped’ into

mind. The memories were first coded by the researchers as containing either episodic or semantic content, and then plotted according to the mean proportion of responses that were associated with different age intervals in the participants' lives.

When the human mind is taken to be analogous to a computer, with comparable memory functions such as coding, filing, and retrieving information, the dominant concern becomes how memories are organized to enable their recall. With this metaphor as a theoretical basis, it makes sense to study memory in terms of how memories are cued and correspondingly retrieved. Such accounts, however, fail to take into consideration the *social nature* of remembering -- a point which I expand on later (c.f., for example, Billig, 1990; Edwards, 1997; Middleton & Edwards, 1990; Shotter, 1990). Nevertheless, as we have seen, not all autobiographical memory researchers are satisfied with the mind-as-computer approach to memory. In the connectionist tradition, David Rubin (1998), for instance, would have us take a more *biologically* oriented approach, replacing the computer metaphor with the metaphoric concept of '*mind as brain*'.

The Multi-Modal Nature of Autobiographical Memory: A Middle Ground?

David Rubin (1998) has challenged the predominant model of 'mind as computer', postulating that while the computer model of retrieval is well understood, it should not be forgotten that the mind is also a *biological organism*:

In contrast to the general data processing of the computer, the brain processes different kinds of information in different systems, integrating these processes into a unitary consciousness. (p.48).

According to Rubin, autobiographical memory is a process requiring the integration of many different parts of the brain working together (which is reminiscent, in its emphasis on connectedness and parallel processes, of the connectionist models discussed earlier). In his view, the computer metaphor of memory, in which specific efficiently engineered neural systems are the focus, ignores the integrative aspects of autobiographical memory that are better served by the “brain” metaphor. That is, the best metaphor to represent autobiographical memory is *the brain*, because this allows for the incorporation of the “different natures of the informational, sensory, emotional and phenomenological qualities of memory” (p.47). Drawing on earlier work by Brewer (1996) and Proust (1956), Rubin emphasizes these multiple processes by observing that *any* description of autobiographical memory must include the following components: it must begin with some form of *cuing* that leads to a *search process* that retrieves and integrates *narrative*, *visual imagery* and *affect* components. In including the integration of these last three processes in his theoretical framework, Rubin acknowledges the multi-modal aspect of autobiographical memory.

In addition, Rubin (1998) goes beyond the cognitive view of memory as a straightforward cued retrieval of coded events by emphasizing the centrality of narrative (e.g. storytelling) in the production of autobiographical memory. Language, he acknowledges, is an integral part of autobiographical remembering, since most autobiographical memories are related in narrative form. In fact, he goes so far as to claim, based upon the work of, for example, Neisser (1982), Rubin and Kozin (1984) and

Barsalou (1988), that autobiographical memory is shaped by the properties of the narrative genre employed, verbal rehearsal, and the narrative conventions of the culture.

Language and especially narrative structure are necessary components of autobiographical memory. Autobiographical memories are usually related as narrative. They are told to another person and to oneself. What is included and excluded depends in part on the language available and the narrative structures used. If no words exist to describe something or if the narrative structure omits something, it is less likely to be remembered. (p.53)

Discourse analysts, like Middleton and Edwards (1990), might take this opportunity to point out that language is not simply descriptive but *performative*, that is, remembering is a discursive act and performs some action which is situated within culture and context. Rubin, however, incorporates language as another component of the biological processes which make up autobiographical memory/remembering. The importance of language and narrative to autobiographical memory illustrates for Rubin the appropriateness of the 'memory as brain' metaphor:

Language is the prototypical rapidly developed, species-specific, highly specialized human ability, and language is spread over a large part of the cortex, with damage in various locations causing different changes in behavior. (p.48)

At first glance, Rubin (1998) -- with his rejection of the computer metaphor, his insistence on the multi-faceted nature of autobiographical memory, and his emphasis on the importance of language -- appears to be moving theoretically toward an approach that shares some common ground with a discursive perspective. However, the mind-as-brain metaphor for understanding memory still locates memory within the mind of the individual. Rubin takes up the 'brain' metaphor as an explanation for the multi-modal aspects of memory; rather than considering external (i.e., social) aspects of memory (such as culture, context, negotiated interaction with other people), "multi-modal" to Rubin means "multi-process"-- with all of these processes located within the brain. Finally, language use for Rubin is simply the product of these multi-modal internal processes, rather than (as a discourse analyst would argue) a dynamic, occasioned, socially mediated activity.

Leaving Rubin's 'middle ground', I move to the discursive critique of memory and autobiographical remembering. First, I will examine what distinguishes a discursive approach from a cognitive approach to memory in general and some examples of 'remembering' research which employ this approach. Next, I will consider the implications of the discursive approach for autobiographical memory.

The Act of Remembering: Discourse and Memory

It would be convenient if we could assume that memories corresponded directly to mental structures and categories of language, which in turn are programmed in our brains (Edwards, 1997). But, in everyday settings people's remembered versions of events do not resemble the orderly accounts such structures should produce. Instead, our

recollections are often incomplete, contradictory, and open to contention and debate. To compensate for this, experimental researchers design tightly controlled laboratory experiments, in effect,

tidying up (using laboratory conditions, materials and procedures) *the messy, indeterminate nature of reality and language*, in the pursuit of the rules of thought. And the same kinds of problems have arisen; what do those tidied up versions of cognition and reality tell us about everyday thought and language? (Edwards, 1997, pp.3-4; *italics mine*)

On this account, even within controlled experiments, any set of event descriptions is *rhetorically organized* in the sense that the nature of the events remembered is constructed by the participant to perform some action (Edwards, 1997). For example, in a laboratory situation (be it a cognitive or a discursive study), in 'remembering' a particular event in a particular way the participant also offers a particular account of who they are. In other words, the story-teller and the story cannot be separated; the story of a remembered event includes an account of the story-teller as part of its description. Moreover, how they recount their memories will be constrained by whatever restrictions the researcher places on how they are to remember (e.g., they may have to recall an event in 50 words or less). Furthermore, the event will usually be recalled in terms that make sense to the researcher. The researcher may offer a list of topics to define the areas in which recollection is desired (as I did) or a set of cue words to prompt remembering.

Thus, what counts as an act of remembering depends on the research context as constructed by the researcher as well as the research participant's response to the research task.

Cognitive psychology is concerned with *knowledge representation* manifested in the assumption that psychological life begins with 'a given external world' which is perceived, processed and, finally, put into words through the workings of mental processes and perceptual experience (Edwards, 1997). In cognitive psychology,

...the study of language as a mental representation, rather than the study of *discourse as social action*, is a built-in and natural-seeming disciplinary commitment. Studies of narrative [in traditional psychology] have tended to pursue generalized types and categories of narrative structure, rather than dealing with *how specific story content, produced on and for occasions of talk, may perform social actions in the telling*. (Edwards, 1997, p. 266, *italics mine*).

From a discursive perspective, to study the importance of language for remembering means examining the way in which people talk when they remember, as well as the particular events they choose to remember and what is accomplished by remembering a particular event in a particular way in a particular time and place. In contrast to cognitive accounts (in which language is defined as a form of mental representation), discourse analysts view language use in terms of a social act, contextualized both by the moment and by the socio-cultural setting, and performed for some purpose. That is, when

someone tells a story about themselves, or ‘remembers’ an event, the way in which such an event is constructed in the telling will depend upon a host of factors: the setting, company and general demands of the situation in which the narrator finds herself, and also, given these constraints, by the purpose of the remembering (c.f. Edwards, 1997; Edwards & Middleton, 1986; Gergen & Gergen, 1988). For example, she may be remembering the trials of university in order to comfort a younger student; or perhaps he is recalling in the presence of his children summers spent on the farm during his childhood in order to position himself as having a rural background in contrast to the ‘big city’ life he and his children are currently living. When autobiographical memories/remembered events are viewed in this context, the relationship between thought (in this case, memory) and language is not one that exists primarily within a person’s head (for example, as cognitive processes, linguistic systems, vocabularies, whatever), but is treated, rather, as the participant’s personal concern, a matter of how they give account of themselves and their pasts (Edwards, 1997).

In discussing the difference between a discursive approach to language and a “scientific” approach to language, Potter (1996) characterizes the difference in terms of metaphor. Potter talks about “descriptions” in his discussions of language, referring very specifically to the kinds of things that people say and the actions people accomplish in their descriptions. In scientific discourse, language is treated like a *mirror*, in the sense that it is assumed to reflect (represent) our perceptions of things out there in the world, translating them into accounts, descriptions and representations. With respect to autobiographical memory, language is treated as the interpretive structure into which we

translate memories that have been stored in, and retrieved from, the memory system in our brains. While language, like a mirror, can blur or distort the images it represents, the basis of autobiographical narrative is still in the real world, i.e., it is assumed that accurate memories describe our actual experience of events in the world. The difficulty with the mirror metaphor from a discursive perspective is that it renders descriptions (language) passive in the sense that they are taken to be merely mirrored reflections of the real world. The real world is responsible for the perceived reflections that are mirrored in our language (in our descriptions). On the other hand, Potter uses the metaphor of the *construction yard* to convey the idea that our versions of the world are built/constructed in our accounts and the language we use. Thus, language is active (rather than passive). Extending this metaphor to autobiographical remembering, we actively construct our memories in our descriptions, i.e., in our narrated versions of personal events. I will return again to the importance of language in the discussion of my analytic approach at the end of the chapter. Here, I turn to a discussion of the accuracy of remembering.

The ‘problem’ of accuracy and the performative nature of remembering. In experimental studies of memory rooted in the cognitive tradition, the ‘problem’ to be explained (or the topic of interest) is often the discrepancy between what is remembered and what ‘actually’ happened (Middleton & Edwards, 1990). Thus, distortions in memory become the primary concern, the assumption being that these distortions must occur during encoding, retrieval, or perhaps deterioration of the stored message (c.f., Baddeley, 1990).

In contrast, discourse analysts are not concerned with memory distortions or discrepancies in the sense of being able to judge recall accuracy, because within this framework all remembering is done within a social context, and therefore subject to negotiation across individuals, place, and time. From a discursive perspective, 'memory' or the act of remembering is simply another type of talk: in other words, it is a discursive act. When we remember, we are, amongst other things, constructing stories about ourselves, our lives, and our experiences using the kinds of culturally available socio-historical discourses that allow us to make the most coherent sense (to ourselves and to others) of our experiences. Importantly, this 'sense-making' is negotiated within a social context. As Gergen and Gergen (1988) observe in their discussion of self-narrative:

It becomes increasingly necessary for the individual to explicate the self-narrative in such a way that one's actions seem coherent and connected with each other and with the narrative itself... Whether a given narrative can be maintained depends importantly on the individual's ability to negotiate successfully with others concerning the meaning of events in relationship with each other. (p. 38)

Furthermore, it is in the nature of storied rememberings that stories are not told (or, in this case, remembered) in the same way twice. Therefore, in discursive studies of memory, it is precisely this variation that becomes the focus of attention (Middleton & Edwards, 1990). Furthermore, "no description of anything is the only one that is

reasonable or possible” (Edwards, 1997, p.10). In comparison to cognitive studies of event memory where it is assumed that there is one correct version (i.e., that which most closely resembles what actually happened), in discourse analysis, the remembered event is merely one version, and “a potentially variable and contentious one” at that (Edwards, 1997, p.10). Thus, ‘accuracy’ becomes of interest when it is raised as a concern by the person providing the account or when another person challenges that account. Here, a discourse analyst would focus on the function served by contesting the accuracy of the account.

As I have been discussing, cognitive memory studies begin with the assumption that there is an undisputed version of what actually happened that provides the basis for what is subsequently remembered (Edwards & Potter, 1992). To illustrate, let us consider Edwards and Potter’s (1992) critique of Neisser’s (1981) analysis of the testimony of John Dean. Dean testified to the Watergate committee investigating Nixon’s involvement in alleged illegal activities intended to undermine his (Nixon’s) political opponents. Neisser was interested in what Dean’s testimony could show about memory and provided an optimal opportunity for research. In addition to Dean’s testimony at the hearings, taped recordings of the original conversations were also available -- against which to test the accuracy of Dean’s remembering. Neisser compared Dean’s remembered version of events with *what Neisser assumed actually happened* -- that is, the output (the remembered event) was compared against the input (the taped event), in order to illuminate the process of remembering in terms of accuracy, distortion, etc. From a discursive point of view, however, both Dean’s original conversation, and his

remembered retellings of that conversation are discursive versions of what is, as far as Dean is concerned, the truth -- that is, neither one is more accurate or valid than the other (c.f. Edwards & Potter, 1992).

Neisser's work is interesting because it took the study of memory outside the laboratory and situated it in the context of everyday activities (i.e., a legal hearing). In addition to investigating the cognitive aspects of Dean's recall, Neisser was also concerned with the *functional* properties of memory: that is, he "makes further sense of those [cognitive] patterns by reference to personal goals such as Dean's concern to tell the truth, and his desire to display himself in a favorable light" (Edwards & Potter, 1992, p.33).

In order to reconcile the discrepancies between Dean's version and the tape recorded version with notions of Dean's integrity and honesty, Neisser postulated a "deeper level" of accuracy (at which, presumably, Dean's version of events is *correct* or *true*): the level of *repisodic memory*,

in which Dean 'extracted the common themes that remained invariant across many conversations and many experiences, and then incorporated those themes in his testimony' (Neisser, 1981:20, as cited by Edwards & Potter, 1992, p.35).

Neisser interpreted Dean's testimony in terms of Dean's "best efforts" to accurately recall remembered events (Edwards & Potter, 1992, p.41). In contrast,

Edwards and Potter approached the accounts offered by Dean and Neisser from a discursive perspective:

Our aim is to question the status of 'repisodic memory' as a cognitive process, as an aspect of Dean's thought, and to relocate it as an artefactual category fashioned through Neisser's 'cognitivizing' of Dean's discourse.... Neisser's very recognition of the phenomenon relies crucially upon his possessing a knowledge of the truth of what 'really happened' in the White House, which is independent of, but comparable with, Dean's testimony. (1992, pp.40-41).

The discursive alternative to Neisser's interpretation emphasizes the contextually occasioned nature of Dean's testimony, both in terms of conversational turn-taking (e.g., he was responding to accusations, and questions, etc.) and in terms of performing some action (i.e., he was diverting attention from his possible guilt to his integrity and truthfulness). Furthermore, from a discourse-analytic perspective, Edwards and Potter demonstrate that notions of truthfulness, accuracy, guilt and blame are all available to be analyzed as discursive accomplishments, governed by conversational and situational contingencies (like, for instance, being on trial). Therefore, they argue, remembering, or 'remembered accounts', should be studied "as pieces of discourse... contextualized and variable productions that perform pragmatic and rhetorical work" (1992, p.54).

The social nature of remembering. Why do people forget or remember the same event differently? How do we account for this? One answer to these questions anticipates these types of ‘glitches’ as natural and unavoidable aspects of autobiographical memory; that is, it anticipates the social nature of remembering. Remembering our past involves telling a story, and how we tell that story is influenced by a host of social and cultural factors.

Some researchers within the cognitive psychological tradition have approached autobiographical memory from this perspective. For instance, Hirst and Manier (1996) examined the social function of autobiographical memory within the context of family communication. While allowing for social, interactive qualities in the process of remembering, their approach obfuscates the dynamic, often contested negotiation of discourse in favor of proscribed roles and quantified narrative units. Similarly, Haden, Haine and Fivush (1997) studied the joint remembering that occurs between parents and their children when remembering things they have done together in the past. They observed that the discursive style a parent uses while ‘reminiscing’ with their child can influence the subsequent development of the child’s memory and narrative skills. Like Hirst and Manier (1996), they stopped short of a discursive analysis of the parent-child negotiation that took place and focussed instead on the individual contributions of parent and child with the aim of understanding the child’s cognitive development. In Chapter 2 I provide a closer analysis of these two texts and how they fail to consider the implications of a social interactive approach to remembering because they continue to theorize remembering as fundamentally a cognitive process.

Before moving to the discursive perspective on the social aspects of remembering, I want to mention one other relevant cognitive study, i.e., Pillemar, Desrochers and Ebanks (1998). Their analysis focused on the function of verb-tense shifts in autobiographical remembering. In this context Pillemar et al. (1998) noted that “effective communication about the past requires the use of culturally shared, canonical forms of narrative expression” (p. 145). However, the weight of their analysis concentrated on the structural elements of that expression, specifically what is signified in memory by the use of present over past tense.

Overall then, while some cognitive researchers have attempted to integrate the social into their theories of autobiographical remembering, social considerations are reduced to the level of cognitive artefact, i.e., acting out intrinsically prescribed roles, internalizing remembering styles demonstrated by parents, or employing structural elements of remembered narrative such as verb tense shifts. An alternative is to foreground the social and conversational nature of remembering -- to consider the ways in which autobiographical remembering is accomplished by and through social interaction.

As one example, Edwards and Middleton (1986) studied memory and memory recall as *a collective process of joint remembering*. They used discourse analysis to examine the way in which students jointly remembered a movie (“E.T.”) they had watched together (an interpersonal context which is relatively common for students). The ‘data’ they collected reflected the importance of the social interaction among the students and the negotiated manner in which they ‘remembered’ the plot: “The data to be

examined are not agreed upon final versions of the original story, but [instead] the dialogue through which people actually pool their recollections,” (p. 426). During this process of joint recall, Edwards and Middleton observed how the participants’ ‘rememberings’ were dependent on one another through social interaction in which the students actively negotiated the story line. To demonstrate their point, they provided the following sequence in which “J” has just made a point. Upon being contradicted by three other people, J eventually concedes to the group’s version:

J: before that happens you’ve got the bit where he hides in

the wardrobe and the mother comes in

L: no that that’s later

D [at the same time as L]: no that’s later

T: that’s a lot later

D: mm

J: oh

(from Sequence 22, p.445)

In addition to this type of group ‘validation’ process, group members also “shared, communicated, and negotiated” (p.448) affective responses to particular parts of the story, as well as evaluative reactions to the story line and to each other (Edwards & Middleton, 1986).

Other researchers have studied this type of social negotiation and remembering in other discursive contexts. For instance, Edwards and Mercer (1989) considered the influence of *context* upon the way students in a classroom recalled and reconstructed knowledge, and

how knowledge is shaped within the confines of discourse. Gergen and Gergen (1988) considered self-narratives as products of social accounts or discourse: the nature of what is remembered and how events are structured is dependent on the social processes in which people are immersed. Finally, Mary Gergen (1994) studied published autobiographies of famous people to investigate how such cultural heroes construct themselves (and are constructed by their publishers) in the ways that they remember their personal life histories.

Discourse and autobiographical memory. The previous examples treat 'remembering' as a part of our everyday discourse. Extending a discursive perspective to autobiographical remembering, autobiographical memories are treated not as mental or cognitive artefacts but discursive phenomena: that is, they are understood "not merely as mental reflections of a life lived, but as instances of a culturally and historically located textual genre" (Edwards, 1997, p.267). Taking this approach, the organization of autobiographical memory becomes the study of the organization of autobiographical discourse. Furthermore, *narrative* (i.e., story-telling) is the discursive genre of autobiographical memory -- that is, people recalling autobiographical memories are engaged in the process of telling/reconstructing a story (Edwards, 1997). How and why they do this becomes the subject of analysis.

Edwards (1997) postulates that there are two ways in which to approach this relationship between memory and narrative. On the one hand, we can assume that narrative accounts are actually acts of remembering: "the discursive equivalent to what people do in memory experiments when they recall events" (p.282; also Edwards &

Middleton 1986). On the other hand, we can also approach memory as the production of narrative accounts in which the participant has a vested interest; accounts in which words like “forget” and “remember” are considered not in terms of psychological processes, but, rather, as words to be analyzed in terms of their public usefulness (i.e., as criteria for establishing public accountability; Edwards, 1997; cf. Shotter 1990). In my analysis of autobiographical accounts in Chapter 3, I adopt both approaches.

Edwards (1997) maintains that studying remembering as it occurs in conversation is the ideal method to study how remembering performs its interactional work. When considering memory as a discursive process, it is better to study memories in conversational form, rather than in the form of static (e.g., written) narratives or even interview format. When autobiographical memory is treated from this perspective, a number of considerations arise that are unique to a discursive framework. For example, in treating memories as discursive events or “interaction-oriented productions” (Edwards, 1997, p.288), a particular consideration for the speaker is deciding where a story starts and where it ends (or where another begins):

Where to start a story is a major, and rhetorically potent, way of managing causality and accountability... alternative narratives compete in terms of precisely where they begin and where they start... then there is [the matter of] what to include.... It is not just a matter of possessing a narrative mind, whose mental operations turn events into best-sense

personal stories. Telling stories is discursive action doing
discursive business. (p. 277)

Another consideration is the manner in which conversations are normally structured as a series of turns taken by the different speakers. Through such turn-taking, one person (usually) gives way to another thereby allowing stories to be told without constant disruption and competition. That is not to say that disruptions, interruptions, and negotiations do not occur within this turn-taking interaction (for instance, going back to the opening example, Grandfather's "memories" change a lot when *Grandmother* is around... "it wasn't like that, you old fool..."). Nevertheless, when we treat autobiographical memories as a kind of story-telling, the implications of turn-taking as an alternative perspective to the cued retrieval of cognitive studies are interesting. Turn-taking bears some resemblance to the cued retrieval approach taken within the cognitive tradition where on the researcher's turn a cue is provided and the research participant responds on their turn with a memory. From within a discursive approach, however, such turn-taking is socially situated and contextually dependent. Participants in a conversation where remembering is being performed negotiate the story to be told, responding to what others have said and constructing a discursive space for the contributions that follow. How a single autobiographical account is given and what is accomplished in so doing requires careful analysis and will be particular to that account.

The Present Study

The aim of this study is to analyze autobiographical rememberings produced in the context of ordinary conversations as discursive moments, drawing on notions of turn-taking, performativity and the social nature of remembering. My purpose then is two-fold:

- 1) to reconceptualize autobiographical memory from a discursive point of view and to provide a discourse analysis of some research examples that take a cognitive approach to autobiographical remembering. The question that informed this part of the study was: how do examples of cognitive research on autobiographical memory work discursively to construct autobiographical memory as a cognitive event? Taking Edwards and Potter's (1992) analysis of Neisser's (1981) study as my example, I used discourse analysis to examine the discursive elements embodied in cognitive research on autobiographical memory.
- 2) to demonstrate the strategic action-accomplishing aspect of autobiographical memory (something that traditional cognitive approaches have not investigated). Here, the research questions were: How is autobiographical memory worked up in the context of everyday conversation? What is the function of autobiographical remembering in these conversations? To this end, university students participated in recorded conversations in groups of two and were asked to remember certain experiences which most students would be expected to share.

Discourse analysis. As both parts of the thesis used discourse analysis, a brief explanation is warranted. The term "discourse" is used by many researchers in many

different contexts, and therefore it is important to clearly define what I mean by “discourse analysis”. My understanding of discourse analysis is drawn from the works of discourse analysts like Edwards (1997), Edwards and Potter (1992) and Potter (1996). Specifically, I draw from Edwards and Potter’s (1992, pp.28-29) summation of the characteristics of discourse analysis in psychology:

- discourse analysis is concerned with *naturally occurring talk and text*;
- discourse analysis deals with *the content of talk* in terms of its subject matter and social organization;
- the three main concerns of discourse analysis are: *action* (i.e., the social actions that people perform in their talk and in their writing), *construction* (i.e., how talk is constructed out of a range of linguistic resources, styles and rhetorical devices), and *variability* (i.e., the variation in accounts that are generated according to the action and interactional contexts which talk and text are constructed to serve);
- discourse analysis emphasizes the rhetorical (i.e., argumentative) nature of everyday talk and text, and how people offer particular versions of events that argue against other possible versions; and, finally,
- discourse analysis is concerned with traditionally ‘cognitive’ issues of mind and reality such as truth and explanation, belief and knowledge, and fact and error.

In conclusion, it is my position that discourse analysis is an excellent theoretical position from which to explore autobiographical remembering. With this in mind, I turn in the next chapter to a discursive analysis of research texts: examining four published papers on autobiographical memory with a view to analyzing how they work up a cognitive

account of autobiographical memory and illustrating the discursive elements embodied in this research. In the following chapter, I turn to an analysis of autobiographical remembering in talk; that is, in taped and transcribed conversations in which people are engaged in remembering personal experiences. Finally, in chapter four, I summarize what I have learned from adopting a discursive approach to autobiographical remembering.

Chapter 2: Analyzing the Text

Introduction: Why study scientific discourse?

The goal of this chapter and the next is to investigate autobiographical remembering as it is constructed in talk and text. ‘Talk’ will be the focus of chapter three where I study autobiographical remembering in the context of everyday conversation through a discourse analysis of transcribed conversations. In this chapter, I focus on ‘text’ through a discourse analysis of a selection of “texts” from the autobiographical memory literature. One of the ways to study fact construction is to research its operation in the settings in which it is most frequently employed. Since research reports are an important setting/source where the facts of autobiographical memory are constructed, I undertook an analysis of some selected research reports on autobiographical memory for the purpose of understanding how the “facts” of autobiographical memory are constructed within the cognitive psychological approach.

I am interested then, in the ways in which “autobiographical memory” has been defined and talked about within the genre of psychological studies. The emphases/reasons for this “textual” critique are two-fold: first, there is the matter of identifying how others (in particular, cognitive psychologists) account for autobiographical memory; and secondly, (and this follows from the first point of investigation), I want to see how these accounts compare to a discursive account of autobiographical remembering. Taking Potter and Edwards’ (1992) analysis of Neisser’s (1981) study as one example (see Chapter 1), I will use discourse analysis to examine

versions of autobiographical memory offered by a cognitive approach, with an aim to reconceptualizing autobiographical memory from a discursive point of view.

In conducting this analysis, I borrow my guidelines from those used by Edwards (1997) in describing his own analysis of Butterworth and Grover's (1988) 'baby gaze' study:

My point here is not to criticize this study, nor to cast doubt on its findings, nor even on its basic conclusions. Rather, my aim is to see how it works as a piece of developmental psychology, to analyse it *as text*, examine its descriptions and interpretations, to show what is involved in taking a piece of infant behaviour as the prelinguistic origin of something that comes later, and comes with a label attached to it. (p.40, *emphasis his*)

To contextualize Edward's account, Butterworth and Grover (1988) conducted a series of studies investigating infants' development of cognition in which they addressed the concept of pre-linguistic thought (1988; Edwards, 1997). They argued that an infant's gaze, which is assumed to signify the focus of the infant's attention, changes contingently in relation to the focus (i.e., direction of gaze) of an adult.

The results make clear that the very young infant may enter into a communicative network with others through comprehension of an adult's direction of gaze; communication is not solely dependent on the greater

cognitive sophistication of the adult. (Butterworth & Grover, 1988)

Butterworth and Grover then attribute intentional states to the baby's actions. On what basis do they make this interpretation? As Edwards (1997) emphasizes, there are other alternative explanations:

The notable thing here, from a discourse-oriented perspective, is not what babies do, but what they are *described as doing, or counted as doing*, and, indeed, how that counted-as process is precisely what constructs the nature of their actions... . The same behaviour, of turning in response to the mother's face turning, could presumably be described as a kind of automatic servo-mechanism, as one might for a robot, or even an automatic door closer ([cites] Latour, 1988). (Edwards, p.39, italics his).

Taking Edwards as a starting point, I examined how each of the selected papers 'works' as a piece of cognitive psychology: that is, how does this research contribute to, detract from, or otherwise modify the existing understanding of autobiographical memory within the cognitive psychology literature? In the context of these articles, what is the cognitive version of autobiographical memory? Additionally, I explored how these articles negotiate the discursive aspects of autobiographical memory. And finally, in terms of the interpretations or accounts given in these articles, are there alternative interpretations that might be highlighted by a discursive approach to autobiographical

remembering? This focus on how a discursive take on autobiographical memory can be useful in describing autobiographical memory as a social action will take us into chapter three where I will study autobiographical remembering as it occurs in ‘every day’ conversation.

Method

Study Selection

In total, four published research papers were selected for study. Two (Brown & Schopflocher, 1998; Rubin & Schulkind, 1997) were chosen because (a) they are recent examples of two important areas of investigation in the autobiographical memory literature: cue retrieval and the life-span distribution of autobiographical memories, and (b) they employed standard cognitive methods for the study of memory.

Brown and Schopflocher (1998) patterned their cuing study after the Galton cuing technique, which is used widely in the research literature in various adaptations (e.g., Wilhelm, McNally, Baer, & Florin, 1997; Williams, Healy, & Ellis, 1999). Brown and Schopflocher used a variation of the technique, which they labelled *event-cuing*. In this study the authors’ aim was to investigate the associations that they assume bind autobiographical memories.

Rubin and Schulkind (1997) was chosen because Rubin is a widely cited and particularly active researcher in the field of autobiographical memory. In addition, Rubin and Schulkind attempted to quantify previously reported characteristics of *the lifespan curve*: childhood amnesia, the reminiscence bump, and the retention function. These are commonly accepted characteristics of autobiographical memory in the research literature

(e.g., Jansari & Parkin, 1996; Neisser & Libby, 2000; Robinson & Taylor, 1998; Rybash & Monaghan, 1999), and thus this paper was of interest for its aim of describing the “facts” of memory retrieval over the lifespan.

The last two papers were chosen because they are examples of recent research that incorporates the *social* into their explanations of autobiographical memory, while maintaining a cognitive approach. Specifically, **Haden, Haines and Fivush (1998)** is part of a more comprehensive research program (c.f., Fivush, Haden, & Reese, 1996) in which Fivush and her associates have investigated the role of parental example (or scaffolding) in children’s development of autobiographical memory skills. Of the four papers, **Hirst and Manier (1996)** take the most explicitly social approach to autobiographical memory, while still being grounded in the cognitive paradigm. In light of my interest in a discursive account as a socially oriented account of autobiographical memory, these two papers were useful as examples of how the social is taken up within a cognitive account.

Analytic Approach

Language, alternate versions and fact construction. In order to contextualize the following analysis, it may be useful at this point to review some of the differences between the cognitive and discursive views of autobiographical remembering which have been developed through my consideration of the literature thus far. From a cognitive perspective (this being the understanding most commonly reflected in the literature), autobiographical memory *is a system of mental representation*, that is, an internal process by which personal experiences are coded and retrieved by individuals. Conversely, from

a discursive perspective autobiographical remembering is *a discursive accomplishment*, that is, something people do in a socially managed, interactive context (please refer to Table 1 below).

Perhaps the most significant difference between a cognitive approach to autobiographical memory and a discursive approach to autobiographical remembering, however, is in their respective treatment of *language*. The role of language has considerable implications when we contemplate a discursive analysis of cognitive psychological approaches to autobiographical memory. In order to consider these implications, it is necessary to introduce some of the theoretical concepts that are used to analyze discourse.

First, the term *discourse* will be used in this context to describe talk (verbal language) or text (written language) (c.f. Potter, 1996). In producing discourse, for example, in remembering an autobiographical event, people use a host of *rhetorical* devices aimed at making their accounts more believable, imparting blame, or constructing a certain version of themselves. In using the term “rhetorical”, I take Potter’s (1996) definition of *rhetoric* to mean any discourse used in order to promote a particular version (or versions) of the world and to protect those versions from being undermined.

Table 1. A comparison of cognitive and discursive perspectives.

Cognitive/Social Cognitive perspective	Discursive perspective
autobiographical memory (AM) ~ <i>noun</i>	autobiographical remembering (AR) ~ <i>verb</i>
a type of memory (e.g. episodic)	a rhetorical act/ discursive accomplishment
internal process ~ <i>within the mind</i>	social process ~ <i>socially, culturally situated</i>
Guiding metaphor(s) ~ <i>mind as computer</i> ~ <i>as neural network</i>	Guiding metaphor ~ <i>memory as conversation</i>
language is a form of mental representation ~ <i>coded & retrieved</i>	language is a performative act ~ <i>interactive, managed in conversation</i>

This concept of rhetoric is useful when it comes to understanding the shift in research focus necessary to make the transition between autobiographical memory to autobiographical remembering discussed above. Rhetoric is a pervasive aspect of the way in which people negotiate meaning or arrive at understanding:

The point, then, is that this rhetorical emphasis can serve as a counter to the more familiar approach to descriptions as primarily about the relationship between a particular set of words and a particular part of reality. Instead, it emphasizes the relation between *a description and alternate*

descriptions, and the way such relationships may be worked up in argument. (Potter, 1996, p.107, italics mine).

An emphasis on rhetoric is necessary for a discursive analysis of what people (e.g., cognitive psychologists) are attempting to accomplish in their talk. When descriptions are analyzed in this manner, the focus is not only on what particular versions the speaker (or writer) is trying to promote, but also on what *alternative versions*, arguments or claims are being undermined (Potter, 1996). From this perspective, there are two types of rhetoric: *offensive rhetoric* or discourse that undermines alternative descriptions or versions and *defensive rhetoric* or discourse which protects a version or description from being undermined. These rhetorical positionings are often described in terms of two functions of discourse: *reifying discourse* is discourse which constructs versions of events or the world which are seen as factual, that is, it turns an abstract notion into a material fact or certainty. Conversely, *ironizing discourse* refers to discourse which is undermining material versions, that is, turning the fact or material thing back into talk which is motivated, interactive and dynamic (Potter, 1996). These distinctions are useful for appreciating the difference between autobiographical memory and autobiographical remembering: 'autobiographical memory' reifies memory constructing it as a concrete 'thing' available to be encoded, stored, and retrieved; whereas 'autobiographical remembering' ironizes memory, (de)constructing it as an activity, a product of intent and context.

There are a variety of 'rhetorical devices' that may be used by the participants in a conversation, some of which will be introduced in the course of the paper as they become

relevant to the discourse being analyzed. But for now I would like to highlight two in particular: the dilemma of stake and category entitlement (Potter, 1996). The *dilemma of stake* refers to a rhetorical move in which the speaker undermines or discounts another person's (or group's) version as being biased by that person or group's personal interest or stake in the matter at hand: 'Well, *you would say that.*' The source of the dilemma arises, then, in the ever-present possibility that a speaker's discourse may be discredited as a product of personal stake. Care must be taken to construct accounts that cannot be undermined in this way. In most scientific discourse accusations of stake are rhetorically defended against by positioning the scientist as an objective observer, reporting the facts as indicated by the data. The 'dilemma of stake' is an action-oriented concern, that is, it involves performing an action -- in this instance, discrediting a version of events by implying that the author has a vested interest. Scientific discourse, then, works to ward off this threat even when no accusation of bias has been made.

Category entitlement is an epistemological concern, that is, it is concerned with a description's status or construction as a 'fact'. for instance, whether or not a particular claim about memory is taken to have the status of scientific truth or unsupported theory. Potter (1996) proposes that in the quest to produce facts, accounts or descriptions fall along a continuum or "hierarchy of modality", depending on their seeming factuality -- i.e., the more believable a description is, the higher its position in the hierarchy (see Table below):

Table 2. A hierarchy of modalization (from Potter, 1996, p.112, citing Latour & Woolgar, 1986).

[...]
X
X is a fact
I know that X
I claim that X
I believe that X
I hypothesize that X
I think that X
I guess that X
X is possible

The ability to claim category entitlement, that is, the idea that certain people have access or entitlement to certain types of knowledge can be used to increase the ‘factuality’ of a description. For example, scientists making claims in a scientific journal speak with the formidable weight of the scientific community behind their claims. Thus the reader is likely to understand this as more “truthful” than an editorial piece on memory in the daily paper.

I now present the analysis of each of the four studies in turn. At the end of the chapter I discuss the implications of a discursive approach to autobiographical memory, emphasizing again the differences between this and a cognitive approach and providing a segue for the discursive examination of conversational rememberings in chapter three. I approached each paper as a text for discursive analysis. This involved several readings of the paper, during which I kept notes about aspects of the text that were discursively interesting. The analysis, based on my notes and the readings, was informed by the following questions: how do these texts work to construct autobiographical memory as a

cognitive event? To this end I attended to how the descriptions of autobiographical memory were constructed and what was accomplished by these constructions.

Citations. Since discourse analysis is concerned with ‘analysing discourse’, each of the texts is heavily cited. For this reason, when quoting the texts, I give not only the page reference, but also the paragraph number. So, for example, 271.2 would indicate that the citation comes from the second paragraph of the page in question. If I am citing the top of a page in which the paragraph is continued from the page before, I have labelled it paragraph “0” as in 471.0.

Analysis and Discussion

Brown, N.R., & Schopflocher, D. (1998). Event clusters: An organization of personal events in autobiographical memory. Psychological Science, 9(6), 470–475.

Synopsis. Brown and Schopflocher (1998) introduced a technique called ‘event cuing’ in order to study the nature of the relationships among event memories in autobiographical memory. In particular, Brown and Schopflocher wanted to know if events were grouped together in memory by means of *event clusters*, that is, in “a memory structure that organizes information about a set of causally and thematically related events” (470.5). Instead of using a word or a word phrase to cue the participant, Brown and Schopflocher used “event descriptions as retrieval cues” (470.1). They argued that if one wants to understand how event memories are related to each other, “standard word and phrase cues” (p.470.7) are not useful. Such cues do not refer to personal events; and in order to study how autobiographical memories are related to each other it is necessary to use “event descriptions as retrieval cues,” which will then generate event memories as responses (470.1). As with the standard cuing paradigm (i.e., using a word

or a word phrase), participants were asked to respond to each presented cue with a related personal event. However in this case the cue was actually a previously generated event from the participant's life. To illustrate *the event cue - cued event sequence* (which, when both cuing event and cued event are taken together, constitute an *event pair*) I present an example provided by Brown and Schopflocher:

For example, in the current experiment, one participant first recalled, "I cut my finger on a tube with radioactive toxin in it." Later, this description was presented as a cuing event, and she responded with the following cued event: "I spent nearly two hours waiting to see the nurse at this hospital." (470.7-471.0)

Participants in this study were 150 University of Alberta students. The students were each given a series of five tasks. For the first task, they were separated into two groups: the "important-event" and "word-cued" groups (471.6). The first group was "given 5 minutes to review their lives" (471.6) and then asked to briefly describe 14 important events from their lives. The latter group was given 14 concrete nouns which they responded to with "the first related personal event" (471.6) that came into their minds. The rationale for these two groups was to compare whether "important" memories were more likely than "unimportant" memories to occur in event clusters (471.2). These 14 event descriptions obtained during the first task were used as "retrieval cues" during the second task in which participants were asked to respond "as quickly as possible" to

each prompt by retrieving the memory of a related event. Participants were carefully instructed as to the 'nature' of their responses:

At the beginning of each task [i.e., the first and second tasks], participants were told that each retrieved memory should refer to a specific personal event that lasted no more than a few hours. Also, the Task 2 instructions noted that the cued and cuing events might be related in a number of ways and warned participants that they should not respond with trivial details of the cuing event, with statements concerning their emotional states during the event, or with evaluative event statements. (471.6)

In addition to these instructions, participants' responses were monitored during the performance of these tasks:

Each response yielded a retrieval time, which was measured from the onset of the retrieval prompt, cue word, or event cue until the participant hit the space bar [signalling completion]. If a participant failed to respond to a prompt or cue within 90 s, the trial was terminated. (472.0)

There was no time limit for the last three tasks. In the third task, the participants were presented with an event pair (the cuing event and its corresponding cued event), and

asked to answer “yes” or “no” to a series of questions designed to indicate the nature of the relationship or association between the two remembered events.

Specifically, they [the participants] indicated whether the cuing and cued events involved the same people or activities, whether the two events took place at the same location, whether one event caused the other, or whether both events were part of some larger story. A positive response to one to one or more of the latter three options indicated that the participant considered the events in the pair to be members of the same cluster. (471.3)

In the fourth task, participants were asked to estimate the time (the date, month and year) in their lives during which each event occurred. In the final task, participants were asked to rate the personal importance of each event on a scale from one to five (from ‘not important at all’ to ‘very important’).

Based on their analyses of the responses to the five tasks, Brown and Schopflocher reported that personal memories are grouped in event clusters that reflect narrative-like structures of association in memory. Again, in their own words:

The present study indicates that memorable personal events, regardless of age or importance, are often embedded in event clusters and that events organized by these clusters, like episodes in a story, are often causally related, temporally proximate, and similar in content.

(474.2)

The empiricist repertoire. The discussion that follows concerns the type of language in which most scientific research (including, at times, my own) is written (Potter, 1996). I focus on how Brown and Schopflocher manage the dilemma of stake as a means of creating a credible account of the facts of autobiographical memory. As discussed earlier, one method of managing the dilemma of stake is to insist on the objectivity of one's analysis. Like many scientific papers, this study is written in the passive voice: that is, apart from their names under the title, Brown and Schopflocher are not actually (that is, actively) present in the body of the text. Their role in the study (in interpreting the results, forming the conclusions) is, at most, *implied*. For example,

The present study *employed*... (p. 470, para. 1; para. 6)

The present study *was conducted*... (470.3)

Participants *were divided* into two groups... (471.2)

Participants *were presented* with the event descriptions...

(472.3)

(*emphases, mine*)

In each case, the employing, conducting, dividing, and presenting were 'done', but the experimenters who performed these actions are effectively removed from the acts of doing. This invisibility constructs the experiment as objective -- the scientists themselves are not mentioned, suggesting that anyone could have performed the actions with the same outcome. This rhetorical manoeuvre is an effective defence against accusations of stake: the experiment is conducted in an objective, unbiased manner -- the 'fact' that it is

conducted by people with a stated agenda, that is, to assess the usefulness of the event-cuing technique which the authors themselves developed, is rendered invisible by the language used in the text. This rhetorical device is widely used in scientific discourse. As Potter (1996) observes,

Discourse of this kind [i.e., scientific or empirical discourse] treats data as primary and provides only generalized, inexplicit formulations of the actions and beliefs of the scientist. When the scientist does appear, he or she is depicted as forced to undertake actions by the demands of natural phenomena or the constraints of rules. (p.116)

In effect, the dilemma of stake is managed through diverting attention away from the experimenter and onto what is being reported (Potter, 1996).

This type of description not only removes the scientists and their interests from having a visible presence in the text, it also has the effect of “constructing the data as having its own agency” (Potter, 1996, p.116). This is clearly noticeable in Brown and Schopflocher’s discussion of the three possible outcomes of the study, and their attendant assumptions:

There seemed to be three possible outcomes. **First, the probability that** a cuing and cued event might belong to the same cluster might be very high and unrelated to the importance, age, or origin of the cuing event. *This would be consistent with the view* that the formation of event clusters is an inevitable, if

incidental, consequence of coordinating and evaluating memorable, goal directed behaviors. **A second possibility was that** an important event would almost always elicit the memory of another event from the same event sequence and that an unimportant event would almost never elicit such memories. *This reasoning assumes that* some form of narrative processing is necessary to create and maintain event clusters [supporting citations] and that important events are likely to receive this type of processing, and unimportant events are not [supporting citations]. **The third possibility was that** cuing events, regardless of their importance, would often elicit same-cluster event memories, but that clustered pairs would be more common when the cuing event was important than when it was unimportant. *The assumptions underlying this possibility are that* normal event processing *often results* in the creation of event clusters; that interevent associations created by these processes may be forgotten if not rehearsed; that narration serves to strengthen existing associations and, perhaps, create new ones; and that important events are more likely than unimportant ones to be narrated. (471.4, *emphasis mine*)

The authors then go on to list other less likely outcomes, which, in any event, are all accounted for within their theoretical framework. The above text is taken from the

introductory section of the paper. Even before they have the data, only these hypotheses are made explicit. Thus, no matter what the outcome of the experiment, the resulting explanation will support the cognitive theory that informs Brown and Schopflocher's hypotheses. The rhetorical organization of the long list of possible outcomes that repetitively link a possible pattern in the data with its possible meaning (drawn from their own account of autobiographical memory) serves to emphasize the constructed connection between data and interpretation. No other possible interpretations are even mentioned, i.e., what the list contains are a series of possible research outcomes but one theoretical perspective framing their interpretation. However, Brown and Schopflocher do not explicitly state that the only possible interpretations of the outcomes are the interpretations they provide here. The language they use is ostensibly non-committal: e.g., "This would be consistent with"; "This reasoning assumes that"; and "The assumptions underlying this possibility are". Thus, their tentative language works to counter any accusation of bias. In the absence of any explicit counter-arguments, however, the text reads smoothly as a claim regarding how their data will reveal the organization of autobiographical memory.

The above points regarding the management of stake, i.e., the way in which Brown and Schopflocher's experiment is designed and managed so that all possible outcomes are in keeping with the experimenters' expectations, are by no means unique to Brown and Schopflocher. They are, as Potter indicates elsewhere (1996), integral parts of the empiricist repertoire. In writing my thesis, by necessity I have also engaged in managing the dilemma of stake. That is, formal writing (and the APA Manual) demands some level

of the impersonal. More importantly, however, my task has been to write a thesis that supports a line of thinking in a way that will convince the reader that my research has some value. To do so, I must counter arguments of bias and justify my claims as effectively as possible. The difference between Brown and Schopflocher and myself, however, is that I undertake this task self-consciously. Similarly, as was apparent in the first chapter, my study is 'designed' around the view that remembering is a socially negotiated (as opposed to cognitively structured) enterprise, and my 'results' (i.e., chapters 2-4) therefore will be in keeping with this assumption, stemming as they do from an analysis of conversation. I mention these points now to illustrate the ways in which, even within scientific/academic texts, the notion of memory is constructed by our use of language and guided by the discursive resources available to us. This reasoning becomes, then, my rationale for offering a discursive understanding of autobiographical remembering as an alternative perspective to the traditional cognitive view of autobiographical memory that characterizes the psychological literature.

Brown and Schopflocher: Narrowing the critique. While the discussion thus far has centered on aspects of Brown and Schopflocher's text that are common to many examples of scientific discourse, I would like to move to a consideration of Brown and Schopflocher's use of the notion of cue-retrieval specifically. Throughout the text, the central role of cues or triggers in the retrieval of memories is emphasized:

If event memories are associated to one another in a systematic manner, and if people typically recall an associated event memory when responding to an event cue,

then relations holding between cued and cuing events
 should correspond to the type of associations that bind
 event memories... (471.1)

In keeping with this constructed relationship between cue and retrieval, the
 memory task was set up to produce memories in response to cues:

Participants were seated at a computer terminal and
 initiated a trial by pressing the “enter” key in response to a
 message presented on the video display. When this key was
 pressed, the initiation prompt was replaced by a generic
 retrieval prompt, a cue word... or an event cue... (471.7-
 472.0)

The only memories available for analysis then are those produced by participants in
 response to cues (and within the constraints and time limitations discussed previously).
 Consequently, the authors are constrained to construe the organization of
 autobiographical memory in terms of the cue-retrieval data elicited from the participants
 by virtue of the context in which memories are provided. As mentioned above, however,
 the interpretation of the recall data is constructed in light of the researchers’ model of
 autobiographical memory. The text is silent regarding the constraints placed on
 participants’ remembering and how they might remember in other circumstances. The
 link between cuing event and recall, which was required by the experimental procedures,
 is described not as the outcome of the procedures but as an outcome of the organization
 of memory. In other words, the experimental design was based on a specific view of

memory involving a cue-retrieval process, and this view guided what Brown and Schopflocher took to be autobiographical memories. Thus, their conclusions necessarily adhere to the predictions of the model. In the writing of the research report, however, Brown and Schopflocher work to convince us that their data were a test of the model.

In making this point, I am not suggesting that the experiment was methodologically flawed, nor do I suggest that Brown and Schopflocher designed their experiment with the intention of biasing the data -- in fact my own project (discussed in Chapter 3) is designed to examine autobiographical remembering as occasioned discourse, which required me to gather instances of occasioned remembering. The point I make here is that Brown and Schopflocher do not overtly, within the text, recognize their contributions to the data and the rhetorical nature of the case they make for a particular account of autobiographical memory.

Contradiction within: “Narrative-like” structures. From a discursive perspective, an interesting aspect of Brown and Schopflocher’s account of memory is their reference to narrative in the context of the overall organization of autobiographical memory. They emphasize its importance by including it in the summary of their results and in the abstract at the beginning of the paper:

Results indicate that memorable personal events, regardless of age or importance, are often embedded in event clusters, *like episodes in a story*, are often causally related, temporally proximate, and similar in content; *and that narrative processes may not be necessary for the formation*

*of event clusters, though subsequent narration may affect
their contents and structure. (470.1, italics mine).*

According to Brown and Schopflocher, the organization of personal memories reflects a certain narrative coherence (“like episodes in a story”), often characterized by “associations between items that are similar in content or temporally contiguous” (470.3) -- that is, they occur in the same time period or share common themes. Narrative appears to play a role in this organization, but only in as much as it shapes pre-existing structures in the brain:

It is possible that processes involved in constructing and communicating personal narratives affect the organization and content of autobiographical memory. Specifically, *compositional processes* should reinforce existing *interevent associations* and may create new ones, and subsequent narrations should impede forgetting of constituent events and their relations. Finally, a wide variety of evidence indicates that some, if not all, event memories are part of larger *narrative-like memory structures*. (470.4, italics mine)

Autobiographical memories (or event memories) are conceptualized in this manner as a series of discrete memory units, linked together in sequential or thematic form by narrative structures. Narrative is relegated to *compositional processes* that *reinforce* the associative structures binding constituent event memories. Narrative

processes do not create associations between event memories, they merely reinforce them: “narrative processes may not be necessary for the formation of event clusters, though subsequent narration may affect their contents and structure” (470.1). Although Brown and Schopflocher are not explicit on this point, their ability to generate interevent associations in the laboratory (which is, arguably, removed from a narrative context) supports the assertion that narration is not required for these associations to be forged. This conclusion begs the question: how exactly are they formed then?

The answer to this question is elusive. In theorizing a possible response to this question, Brown and Schopflocher introduce the concept of event clusters:

The preceding discussion suggests that memorable personal events may often be embedded in *event clusters*. An event cluster is defined as a memory structure that organizes information about a set of causally and thematically related events. There is a growing consensus that these narrative-like structures “are a primary form of organization in autobiographical memory”. (470.5; italics, Brown and Schopflocher)

Interestingly, in the footnote explaining their choice of the term “event clusters,” Brown and Schopflocher minimize the role of narrative:

We use this term in preference to others in the literature (e.g., general event, personal narrative, mini-histories) because it conveys the idea that each cluster coordinates

multiple event memories (c.f. general event) and because it does not imply that the creation of these units depends upon the operation of specific narrative processes (c.f. personal narrative). (470.footnote 1)

Again, narrative is constructed as contributing in a limited way to the formation of links or associations between memories – it too is a cognitive process to be explained by cognitive structures formed in the brain and triggered by event cues. From a discursive perspective, narrating is a social act. This latter approach to narrative (more specifically, the role of language) will be explored further in the next chapter.

Brown and Schopflocher: A summary. In summary, let us return to the original question: how does Brown and Schopflocher ‘work’ as a piece of cognitive psychology? How does this article draw on the discursive resources available within cognitive psychology and to what end? A particularly interesting aspect of this study was the authors’ account of the role of narrative (or, rather, *narrative-like memory structures*; 470.4) in autobiographical memory. By framing a cognitive account of narrative (i.e., as a set of “compositional processes” which may reinforce or create new “interevent associations”, 470.4), Brown and Schopflocher have created a mechanistic account of the way in which autobiographical memory works, not in conversation, but inside people’s minds.

In addition to this, the cue-retrieval paradigm as well as the method by which the retrieval of autobiographical memories are cued severely constrain the memories available for analysis. I discussed in chapter one the rhetorical importance of where a

story (or event) starts, and when a story ends, and how these endings and beginnings are managed in conversation. In Brown and Schopflocher's case where the participants are restricted to brief responses provided quickly (within 90 seconds within an "80-character-wide response field", 472.0), the occasion of the participant's memory production effectively precludes any beginning, middle, or end. Brown and Schopflocher's story of their experiment is strategically written to offer a cognitive account of autobiographical memory. Furthermore, their use of the empiricist repertoire contributes to the overall credibility of their findings (as it does mine) in terms of the management of stake. This is accomplished in the text by various techniques, including the removing of personal pronouns and an appeal to 'logic' or common sense:

If event memories are associated to one another in a
systematic manner, and if people typically recall an
associated event memory when responding to an event cue,
then relations holding between cued and cuing events
should correspond to the type of associations that bind
event memories... (471.1)

Thus, Brown and Schopflocher's cognitive account of autobiographical memory is carefully constructed using rhetorical devices that draw the reader's attention to the "facts" of autobiographical memory and away from the construction of those "facts".

Rubin, D.C., & Schulkind, M. D. (1997). Properties of word cues for autobiographical memory. Psychological Reports, 81(1), 47-50.

Synopsis. This paper builds upon the cue word technique (Crovitz & Schiffman, 1974; Galton, 1879) discussed earlier. Rubin and Schulkind used 124 words to generate

over 900 memories from 20 - and 70- year old participants. They asked participants to estimate their age at the time the remembered events took place and used this method to study the distribution of remembered events across participants' lifetimes. The stated goals of this study were to:

study the distribution of autobiographical memories across the adult lifespan in order to (1) test the reliability of earlier findings while excluding artefactual explanations, (2) quantify such findings as precisely as possible while assessing the scope of individual differences that would limit general statements, and (3) try to understand the recall of autobiographical memories in terms of current methods and theories in cognitive psychology. (859.1)

The theoretical basis for Rubin and Schulkind's research comes from a rich tradition of studies which chart the pattern of autobiographical memories across the lifespan (they cite, for example, Holding, Noonan, Pfau & Holding, 1986; Hyland & Ackerman, 1988; Rubin, Wetzler & Nebes, 1986). As indicated earlier, the lifespan distribution curve generally includes three parts: an earlier period of relatively few memories from birth to age 10, called *infantile amnesia*; a period of high concentration of memories retrieved from the 2nd and 3rd decade (roughly 10 to 30 years of age), referred to by Rubin and Schulkind as the *bump* (also commonly referred to as the *reminiscence bump*); and finally, the *retention component*, a steadily climbing rate of remembering the closer one gets to one's present age.

Rubin and Schulkind's procedure for eliciting autobiographical memories and plotting them in a memory distribution curve spanning the lifespan was similar to the method employed in other studies. Cue words were presented individually on a computer monitor while participants were screened from potential outside input or distractions. Again, as in the Brown and Schopflocher experiment, participants were given detailed instructions as to the nature of what constituted an autobiographical memory:

The subjects who were tested individually, were asked to provide one event for each cue word; that is, a memory for each event in their lives that could be specified as having occurred at one particular place and time. The subjects worked at a desk facing a wall so that the experimenter was out of sight. Their reaction times were recorded with a stop watch from the end of each word being read until the writing of a memory began. The subjects recorded a brief description of the memory. They were asked to try to make the descriptions generally clear and specific, but were told to use initials intelligible only to themselves whenever they wished. The subjects were informed that they would return to the memories later in order to answer questions about them. After all 124 cue words had been presented, the subjects were asked to return to and date each of their descriptions. (861.2)

In the first experiment, twenty university students (between 20 years 1 month and 20 years 11 months of age) and twenty older adults (between 70 years 1 month and 70 years 11 months) participated. Each participant was presented with 124 cue words during the session. In the second experiment, five of the 20-year olds and five of the 70-year olds from the first experiment were asked to participate in eight additional weekly sessions where the procedure was repeated using 100 new words each session. The purpose of the second experiment was to test for differences at the level of individual participants. The goal of the study overall was to explain the three parts of the aforementioned distribution curve (which was replicated in both experiments, but only with the 70-yr olds) in quantifiable, statistically reliable terms and in theoretical terms from within a cognitive psychological perspective:

With these studies as an empirical base [i.e., the “rich tradition” alluded to earlier], we performed two experiments designed to quantify these basic findings outlined as precisely as possible, to assess the scope of individual differences, and to understand the distribution and recall of autobiographical memories in terms of the standard methods and theories of cognitive psychology. (860.5)

Rubin and Schulkind: A critical analysis. As mentioned earlier, the authors identified one objective of the study as follows: to “test the reliability of earlier findings” (859.1) in research on the distribution of autobiographical memories across the adult lifespan. *Reliability* is an important concept within the scientific literature: in order for

laboratory findings concerning the nature of autobiographical memory to be considered credible, they must first be found to be reliable -- that is, the findings must be replicated in other studies following the same procedure. Adopting reliability as a necessary characteristic of scientific phenomena assumes that human beings will react in a like manner given like circumstances. In addition, appealing to the reliability of one's findings also contributes to the 'factuality' of one's conclusions. Rubin and Schulkind explored behavioral norms of autobiographical remembering within a laboratory context under specific constrained conditions -- conditions specifically designed to reproduce the findings of other studies. In terms of category entitlement, 'reliability' here is a persuasive rhetorical resource that appeals to the taken-for-granted value of a 'reliable' set of results produced under a fixed set of conditions.

As we shall see, the reliability of Rubin and Schulkind's results draws the focus away from the need for theoretical explanations of these same results. For example, in emphasizing the reliability of the distribution curve, Rubin and Schulkind gloss over other potential weaknesses of the study:

The regularity of the results obtained here within one study and their agreement with existing autobiographical memory and laboratory memory studies should not be overlooked, *especially given the lack of control exerted in this study*. The power function fits individual subject's data with correlations above .9 and group data with correlations above .99 with no systematic variation in the loss parameter with the age of the subject. Such correlations are

not all that common in cognitive psychology. (865.0, emphasis mine)

In light of the “regularity of the results”, the absence of stringent controls is offered as a strength of the findings: the results were reliable *despite* “the lack of control exerted in this study.” This rhetorical manoeuvre allows Rubin and Schulkind to bolster the significance of their findings while at the same time managing potential criticism about the design of their study.

It is also worth noting here that Rubin and Schulkind employed a conventional rhetorical device in order to emphasize the credibility of their findings, i.e., the three-part list. Listing (most notably lists using three examples) is often used within discourse to accentuate the factuality or generality of a claim (c.f. Gail Jefferson, 1990; Potter, 1996). In the excerpt above, Rubin and Schulkind list three reasons why their results should not be overlooked:

- (1) “the regularity of the results obtained here within one study”
- (2) “their agreement with existing autobiographical memory and laboratory memory studies” and
- (3) “the lack of control exerted in this study” (which is included in this context as giving credibility to the results of the study)

At this point in the text the ‘list’ works to bolster the authors’ claim. Moreover, they manage the dilemma of stake by using verbs in such a way that the data (including reliability coefficients, significance values, etc.) speak for themselves (Potter, 1996; see also Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984). For example:

Two analyses *argue for* the reliability of the bump (861.4; emphasis mine)

The power function *provides* an excellent fit [for the retention component] (862.2; emphasis mine)

The resulting retention function *suggests* that the recall of autobiographical memories is much like the recall of laboratory memories learned under controlled conditions.

(865.0; emphasis mine)

Here the data “argue,” “provide,” and “suggest” actions that would be expected of the human researchers who are the interpreters of the data and the writers of the research report. This personification of the data, along with the effective removal of the authors as agents, is again an example of the empiricist repertoire that characterizes scientific writing. As in the Brown and Schopflocher study, it serves to add credibility to the claims made within the text.

In addition to this, Rubin and Schulkind explain each component of the distribution curve in terms of its mathematical predictability. Childhood amnesia, the first component, they conclude, “is a mathematical result of having subjects of different ages all of whom have few memories from their early childhood and none from before birth” (863.7-864.0) The implication is that “as a mathematical result” it is a ‘fact’ that requires no further explanation. The retention of recent memories (steadily increasing from the last twenty years to the present) can also be captured mathematically as a power function chosen because it “provides one of the best fits to laboratory retention studies” (859.2).

The power-function retention component is extremely reliable in spite of the lack of controls placed on the subject. Not only do different laboratories produce the same power-function retention function for the most recent decades of life (Rubin et al., 1986), but the function also exists when individual subjects or responses to individual words are analyzed (Rubin, 1982), when visual or olfactory, instead of verbal cues are given (Rubin, Groth, & Goldsmith, 1984), and even when the subject produces responses in the absence of any given cue words (Rubin, 1982). (859.3)

This component fits the retention part of the distribution curve across studies, across populations and across age groups. Described in this way, the power function is a universal ‘fact’. Again, as before, *listing* is used to bolster the factualness of the account:

- (1) “not only do different laboratories produce the same power-function relation”
- but
- (2) “the function also exists” when analyzing responses to different types of cues,
- and
- (3) “even when the subject produces responses in the absence of any given cue words.”

However, the authors argue that, despite the quantification of these findings, the explanation for these patterns (especially for the bump) will require more investigation:

What remains is to understand why such distributions of autobiographical memories occur. The observation that the number of memories recalled diminishes to near zero at birth (i.e., the childhood amnesia aspect of the distribution) and the observation that memories from the most recent 10 years closely follow a retention function that has been proposed for other kinds of memory require little explanation. In contrast, explaining the bump is more difficult. (864.4).

The implication is that infantile amnesia and the retention function are ‘known’ through their mathematical form and accepted by all, thus requiring *little explanation*; the bump, however, is not an intuitively ‘known’ aspect of autobiographical memory. The claim that finding a theoretical explanation for ‘the bump’ “is more difficult” is presented here against the “observation[s]” about childhood amnesia and the retention function, which in contrast, “require little explanation.” Yet the theoretical difficulty presented by the bump is glossed over; in fact, the only related other mention of this issue is in the footnote, discussed below.

Rubin and Schulkind suggest a problem with the theoretical account available for the findings related to the bump. Consider, for example, the authors’ choice of the term “bump” as opposed to “reminiscence bump” found elsewhere in the literature (e.g., Conway, & Haque, 1999; Elnick, Margrett, Fitzgerald, & Labouvie-Vief, 1999; Jansari & Parkin, 1996; Rybash & Monaghan, 1999):

We use the theoretically neutral term “bump” to highlight the empirical nature of this finding and its lack of a suitable theoretical framework. We leave the theoretically richer term “reminiscence” to refer to conscious recollections seemingly done for their own purposes rather than those requested by another or used for the retrieval of information (for recent reviews, see Fitzgerald, 1996, and Webster & Cappeliez, 1993). The findings using a quantitative definition of a bump are consistent with those in the literature on reminiscence and could add to them. (860.1)

Here, Rubin and Schulkind introduce a distinction between recollections “requested by another or used for the retrieval of information” (presumably, in this instance, those recollections generated by cue-word retrieval in the lab) as opposed to those “conscious recollections seemingly done for their own purposes” (presumably, outside of a laboratory context and for the purposes of the recollections themselves). Note how “for their own purposes” eliminates the person doing the recollections (“their” refers to the purpose of the recollections). In the same manner, “seemingly” used here suggests that these purposes are not easily determined. These distinctions imply that “conscious recollections” done ‘out there’ (i.e., outside of laboratory controls where memories are required by the experimenter and used for the purposes of collecting data) are vague, unmeasurable, and produced for indeterminable reasons.

Rubin and Schulkind's distinction between *quantitatively* defined recollections and *theoretically richer* reminiscences implies a distinction between autobiographical memories generated in the lab and the contextualized, narrative rememberings that people do in every day conversation. That said, however, the focus of their text remains on the quantitative character of the 'bump', thereby keeping the reader focused on the research contribution of quantitative phenomena. The gloss over conscious recollections is accompanied by the claim that the quantitative findings will aid understanding of "reminiscence". Rubin and Schulkind do not suggest that the "theoretically richer" notion of reminiscence can or should be brought to bear on the present quantitative study. Thus the "quantitative" knowledge generated through the experimental study of memory is privileged over knowledge generated through the study of remembering in other contexts.

The experimental context in which memories are produced (i.e., in this case, the random presentation of 124 or more cue words in a laboratory setting) makes it difficult to explore the connection between the context of remembering and the remembered event. Participants were given a cue word and asked to write a brief description of the first memory that came into their heads. In some cases, "these components occurred in subjects who provided over 900 memories" (864.1). Although a connection between cue and recalled memories is assumed by virtue of the procedure, the nature of that connection is not discussed. Rubin and Schulkind count the memories and take for granted how they are produced. Their glossing over their lack of explanation for the "bump" in the excerpt on pp.61-2, then, moves attention away from the relationship between cue and retrieved memory in search of some other explanation.

Conclusion. As a piece of cognitive psychology, Rubin and Schulkind's article focuses on the explicit aim "to test the reliability of the findings" (860.5). By going to such extensive lengths to quantify the components of the distribution curve of autobiographical memories across the lifespan (i.e., infantile amnesia, the bump and the retention component), Rubin and Schulkind reinscribe the 'factuality' of these components, reifying them in the process. As was the case for Brown and Schopflocher, Rubin and Schulkind draw on the empiricist repertoire, relying particularly on the rhetorical devices of giving the data 'agency' and promoting the scientific "reliability" of the data over less impressive aspects of the study. Furthermore, they concentrate on the organizational patterns of retrieved autobiographical memories, but ignore the social or contextual aspects of autobiographical memories. In their discussion of their choice term "bump" over the "theoretically richer" "reminiscence bump," they limit themselves to those autobiographical memories generated in the laboratory using their experimental paradigm and choose not to expand upon or explore "theoretical richness." What happens when cognitive psychology does consider the social features of autobiographical remembering? To begin to answer that question, I turn now to the next published paper.

Haden, C.A., Haine, R.A., & Fivush, R. (1997). Developing narrative structure in parent-child reminiscing across the preschool years. Developmental Psychology, 33(2), 295-307.

Synopsis. This study examined the developmental aspects of autobiographical memory, or as Haden, Haine and Fivush themselves describe it, the development of children's narrative skills "in the context of joint reminiscing" between children and their parents (304.4). It is part of a larger longitudinal study of children's memory and

narrative development, during which 15 families were visited in their homes when the children were 40-months old, and, then, again when they were 70 months old. They participated in a series of 4 sessions at each age. The procedure, in the authors' own words, was as follows:

At the start of the study, experimenters explained that they were interested in how much and what kinds of information children remember about past experiences. Mother-child, father-child, and experimenter-child interviews were conducted during three separate sessions at both of the time points. (298.2)

The topics of discussion during the interviews were predetermined by the experimenter and the parents:

At all memory interviews, events were selected during discussions with the parent out of earshot of the child, upon the experimenter first entering the home. At each point, experimenters helped each parent to select three special, one time events to discuss with their child. Mothers selected events they had participated in with their child, and fathers selected events that they and their child had shared. (298.3)

The need to select events "out of earshot of the child" is not explained. It is taken for granted that the readers will understand this as a control procedure. What is described here is a particular social context where parents decide and children go along with those

decisions. In other words, a particular version of parent-child relationships is offered, but its form is presumed to be so taken for granted by the anticipated reader as well as by the researchers that it does not require the authors to defend their procedural choice.

During the parent-child interviews, parents were asked to bring up the pre-selected topics “in a natural and spontaneous way” (298.4). The experimenter left the room during the parent-child interviews to avoid learning information that would enable the experimenter to influence the child’s recall during the experimenter-child interview. This effort was reinforced during the experimenter-child interviews:

In the experimenter-child interviews, experimenters asked general open-ended questions to introduce each event (e.g., “your mom tells me you went to the aquarium. Can you tell me about that?”) and encouraged the child to continue using only general prompts (e.g., “Tell me more about it” or “Anything else?”) and repetitions of the child’s responses (e.g., “So, you saw the ducks.”). (298.4)

All memory interviews were transcribed and coded, first for “codeable narrative events”, which were “the first three events for which the child remembered at least two unique pieces of information” (298.5). Additionally, the interviews were coded using a coding system adapted from Peterson and McCabe (1983) and “developed to capture the narrative structure of the memory conversations” (298.6):

Mothers’ and fathers’ comments, as well as the children’s talk in all three memory interviews were coded first for the

type of memory structure in one of four mutually exclusive categories: (a) referential actions, (b) referential descriptions, (c) orientations, or (d) evaluations, and then, for orientations and evaluations were coded into the subcategories of these codes. (298.6)

The coding system works to identify the contributions of each individual participant. Again, however, the authors do not refer to the choice they have made here about how to conceptualise the conversation between parent and child.

Theoretical grounding. Drawing on Vygotsky's (1978) notion of the zone of proximal development and Rogoff's (1990) guided participation model as their theoretical grounding, Haden et al. begin their paper with "the idea that cognitive skills have their origins in social interactions with more skilled partners" (295.2). Specifically, Haden et al.'s main hypothesis (and their informing metaphor) is centered around the notion of *parental scaffolding*:

Essentially, as children begin to participate in social activities that are slightly beyond their competencies, *adults scaffold children's performance by providing the necessary structure* for accomplishing the task. (295.2, italics mine).

As the child gets older and the child's skills improve, they put the skills learned from interactions with adults (who provide the scaffolding) into practice:

The theories predict that, through their interactions with adults, children will directly *learn and internalize* all the

component skills and will become able to perform the task
unscaffolded.

(295.2, *italics mine*)

According to Webster's Universal College Dictionary (1997), a scaffold can be defined as "a platform or framework for raising workers and materials during the erection, repair, or maintenance of a building or the like," or, more concisely, "any supporting framework." As used by Haden et al. the parental scaffolding metaphor refers to the platform or structure of support upon which children build their narrative skills (in this case, within the context of autobiographical remembering). Here, parents initially provide the structure in some visible, external fashion that children must then internalise as the mental structures necessary for mature autobiographical remembering. How this might happen is not explained in the article.

Haden et al. focus on the use of different narrative structures by different parents when "scaffolding" their children: "But, not all parents scaffold talk about the past with their young children in structurally similar ways" (295.3). The authors then describe the various parental narrative styles documented in the literature (e.g., "topic extending" or "high-elaborative" as opposed to "topic switching" or "repetitive") before adding their own selection of narrative components which characterize parental styles. These components are characterized by three types of information:

- referential information... "that explicitly states the actions that occurred and describes objective details concerning conditions, , persons or objects involved in the event"
- (296.2)

- orienting information... “to convey to the listener the spatial temporal and social context of the past event” (296.2)

And

- evaluative information... “to make explicit why the event was interesting, self-defining, emotional, meaningful, and so on” (296.2).

The authors add that,

There appears to be a good deal of individual variability in the ways parents talk about the past with their young children, and *these styles relate differently to children's ability to recount the past.* (296.0, italics mine).

The theoretical importance of these narrative components is that they are learned and internalized by the children so that they can be incorporated into the child's subsequent autobiographical narrations (i.e., with the “relatively unfamiliar experimenter” 297.4).

Parental scaffolding provided within the context of parent-child reminiscences introduces the children to the narrative components (the “building blocks” --- in keeping with the scaffolding metaphor) that children require in order to be able to produce “meaningful” and “coherent” narratives on their own. The authors outline their reasoning in the following paragraph:

Recounting past experiences involves more than simply recounting information. In order to communicate effectively with others, one must organize what is remembered into a coherent and meaningful story. In this way the development of personal narrative skills may

be an important prerequisite for other kinds of cognitive and social advances in the preschool and early school age years... ..In particular, the development of decontextualized language skills for socially sharing personal narratives may provide critical linguistic resources for literary acquisition. (296.1)

The use of the word “decontextualized” is interesting here. Internalized language skills can be abstracted from the conversational context (de-contextualized) and used not only for sharing personal narratives in a social context but also in a different context, literary acquisition (i.e., these internalized skills will guide children’s future reminiscing attempts). Children presumably hear and learn the skills in conversation with their parents and “internalize” these descriptive techniques which then become part of the children’s mental repertoire for remembering. That is, parentally scaffolded skills become abstract principles that children incorporate into their narrative recounting repertoire of abilities and use in later “unscaffolded” conversations. Therefore, while Haden et al. make explicit reference to the importance of the social and interpersonal aspects of autobiographical remembering, they focus attention not on the social or interactional aspects per se, but in how these skills, acquired in an interpersonal context, contribute to the child’s individual and internalized memory abilities.

The text works to construct several interesting properties of autobiographical reminiscing. The most striking perhaps is that these *narrative* skills, learned within a social context, become internal, cognitive properties of individuals. To this end, the child-parent conversations were ‘translated’ by means of a coding system into codeable

utterances. Actions, descriptions, orientations and so forth were abstracted from the conversational texts, counted, and used as the bases for analyses. For example, each parent's use of the aforementioned elements of narrative structure (i.e., utterances designated as actions, descriptions, orientations and evaluations) was compared for each child over time (at ages 40 months and 70 months):

An initial analysis considered the total number of parental narrative codes as a measure of total amount of narrative structure provided. A 2 (time point) X 2 (gender of child) X 2 (parent) mixed model analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted with time and parent as within-subjects factors and gender of child as a between subjects factor. Results revealed a main effect of time, [statistical means, standard deviations and general p-values are reported here], but no differences between mothers and fathers or with daughters or sons emerged. Also of note in this analysis was the substantial variability in amount of narrative elements used, indicating marked individual differences. (299.3)

Here the *narrative* skills displayed by the parent within a conversational context are reduced to a pre-determined set of narrative elements based on Haden et al.'s prior assumptions about what is important, isolated from the conversational context, and compared through statistical analysis. They "note"... "marked individual differences" but remain silent on their possible meaning. Only the parents' contributions coded in

predetermined categories and removed from the conversational parent-child context are of interest.

By removing the parents' discourse from their context and treating them as mental cognitive abilities, Haden et al. universalize what from a discursive perspective is a culturally occasioned activity. While arguably, the adults and children in Haden et al.'s study perform evaluative and orienting talk in making their reminiscences into "coherent and meaningful stories" (295.1), such ways of organizing talk may not be valued in other contexts, or even in other conversations. As the authors themselves note,

Although we must be cautious about generalizing our findings beyond a White, middle-class population, the results indicate that early parent-child reminiscing is an important component of children's developing skills.

(306.1)

This excerpt includes another facet of the empiricist repertoire: the tendency to ascribe 'universal' procedural rules. In this case, the rules of good scientific writing demand that researchers do not generalize beyond their sample representation. Glossed over is the contradiction between an account focused on mental structures which on their account have to be similar if parent-and-child or interviewer-and-child are going to be understood by one another, and the recognition that remembering is social and conversational in everyday contexts. Looking carefully at the construction of the sentence excerpted above, i.e., "although X, Y holds," the generalizability question is glossed. Following the empiricist repertoire, the researchers assert caution. This is the "although" part of the

sentence. Yet, “the results indicate...” In the main clause of the sentence the language used is “parent-child” and “children’s” with no qualification. Thus, a generalized claim is offered, but the researchers have effectively warded off the potential criticism of overgeneralizing through the subordinate clause (i.e., “although..”).

Also interesting is the degree to which parents are credited with influencing their children’s narrative styles. Haden et al. acknowledge the influence of others on children, while maintaining the primacy of parent-child scaffolding:

Moreover, parent-child conarratives about the past are certainly not the only context in which children may be learning personal narrative skills. Several studies indicate that children may learn the kinds of information to include in their personal narratives in myriad types of interactions involving stories told around them and about them to others (e.g., Miller, Potts, Fung, Hoogstra, & Mintz, 1990; Miller, 1994). Yet theories of adult-child scaffolding would lead to the hypothesis that the ways parents and children co-construct personal narratives would be a particularly important context for children to learn the forms for personal narration and the value of this activity. (296.4)

Haden et al. argue for the influence of parents as “particularly important” even though other studies point to “myriad types of interaction.” Again, they avoid the opportunity to explore this variety and orient to “theories of adult-child scaffolding.” Furthermore, they treat their version of parent-child relationships as unproblematic.

As in the previous two articles, Haden et al. draw on the empiricist repertoire, which not only satisfies requirements for journal publications but also works, as I have noted, to add credibility to their claims. For example, as in the last paper, data are frequently imbued with agency, as if the data themselves were making the facts appear:

These results [which again showed a main effect of time, but no significant interactions of parent/experimenter or child’s gender] *indicate clear developmental changes* in the amount of narrative structure children were providing in personal narratives across the preschool years. Over time, both girls and boys included more actions, descriptions, orientations and evaluations in narrating personal experiences with their mothers, fathers, and in their unscaffolded narratives elicited by an experimenter.

(302.3; emphasis mine)

In this excerpt, “clear developmental changes” in the children’s use of narrative structure are “indicated” by the data. Yet these elements were previously defined, coded and counted by Haden et al. (not, as we are told, by *the data*). The issue of interest here is what, according to Haden et al.’s interpretation, is *indicated* by these results:

The results indicate that even in early development, parents are engaging in highly contexted and richly evaluative narratives about the past with their children. Although parents generally increase in their use of actions, descriptions, orientations, and evaluations over time, they are providing the basic structure to these narratives with their 40-month-old children. Preschoolers show increasing abilities to include structural elements in their personal narratives over time as well, such that these conversations are becoming more and more co-constructed over time.

(303.1)

According to the authors, the results indicate that ‘although parents generally increase’ their use of the elements of narrative structure over time, ‘they are providing the basic structure to these narratives with their 40-month-old children’. At the outset of the paper, in the literature review, Haden et al. explain that “cognitive skills have their origins in social interactions with more skilled partners” (295.2) and “through their interactions with adults, children directly learn and internalise all the component skills and will be able to perform the task [of autobiographical remembering] unscaffolded” (295.2). In their discussion section, the internalised nature of these cognitive elements is not explicitly articulated. Parents “are providing the basic structure” to their children, who are in turn “show[ing] increasing abilities to include structural elements in their personal narratives over time” (303.1). Where the structure resides is not described. My argument

is that the structure is in the conversation, but Haden et al. locate it in internalized personal skills modelled from parent to child.

Conclusion. As a piece of cognitive psychology, Haden et al. have expanded the cognitive treatment of memory by incorporating the social into their theory. Yet, even while acknowledging the influence that conversing with parents can have on autobiographical remembering, this influence is theorized in terms of cognitive abilities which are ‘scaffolded’ by the parents who enact precisely defined parental styles. Haden et al., like the authors of the other two papers, employ the empiricist repertoire, especially the rhetorical device of imbuing the data with agency. Parents are thought to scaffold children’s autobiographical memory structures, providing a template with which children learn these abilities. There is nothing particularly ‘social’ about this account. Parents display their mental structures; children observe and develop their own mental structures. In the next study, Hirst and Manier (1996) also attend to the social qualities of autobiographical remembering with slightly different results.

Hirst, W., & Manier, D. (1996). Remembering as communication: A family recounts its past. In D.C. Rubin (Ed.), Remembering our past: Studies in autobiographical memory (pp.271-290). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

This last paper also attempts to incorporate ‘the social’ into a comprehensive explanation of autobiographical memory. It is a particularly interesting example because, compared to the other papers in this section, it draws less on the empiricist repertoire. Yet, like Haden et al., Hirst and Manier focus attention on the social aspects of autobiographical remembering from within a cognitive psychological understanding of autobiographical memory. Their particular interest was “to understand how

conversational roles in our [their] sample family shaped their autobiographical memory” (274.0).

Synopsis. Hirst and Manier studied conversational remembering in a family context in order to investigate how the family as a collective influences the process of autobiographical remembering. They had two stated goals in conducting this research:

to investigate... whether we can identify the roles adopted
by participants in group efforts at reconstruction of the past
and [secondly] specify how roles can shape a recounting. (272.3)

The authors chose to study a single family “because we [they] felt that every family differs in the way that they remember conversationally” (273.4). They “solicited recollections” (274.2) from a family of four (mother, father, daughter, and son) who had emigrated from India to New York two years before the beginning of the study. In the first set of interviews (one week before the group interview), individual members of the family were asked to “recollect” (274.2) eight different shared family experiences (previously established as shared experiences through a questionnaire given to all members of the family). The individual interviews served as a comparison for the way in which the family remembered as a unit. The individual interviews were structured as follows:

For these individual recollections, that were video-taped in
the family’s home, an experimenter unknown to the family
asked each family member (separately from each other) to
recall an event all had taken part in: for example, “Tell me

everything you can remember about the family outing to Coney Island.” The experimenter was instructed not to interrupt the family member’s narrative. After the story had ended, the experimenter requested more information – “Can you tell me anything else about what happened?” – until the family member reported that there was nothing more to say. The experimenter then probed for the next event. (274.3)

An interesting aspect of Hirst and Manier’s approach is their lengthy description here of the procedures adopted to minimize experimenter-family member interaction. For instance, the experimenter was “unknown to the family” and “instructed not to interrupt the family member’s narrative” except to ask very specific questions and to “probe(d) for the next event.” The group interview followed the same format, with the experimenter restricting herself to the questions asked in the individual interviews, but this time addressing the family as a whole.

In the group interview, only two of the topics discussed in the individual interviews were selected for discussion. Interestingly, there is no description of who did the selecting. All of the interviews were videotaped and later transcribed.

The specific question that informed Hirst and Manier’s analysis was: “Are there discernible roles in this family’s recountings?” (275.2). The transcripts were analyzed using a coding scheme developed by Hirst and Manier that broke the text into component narrative and nonnarrative units. Narrative units “describe states or events that are linked

together (causally, temporally, or spatially) and that relate to a central topic or theme” (277.Table). Nonnarrative units included metamemory statements, metanarrative statements, overt requests for assistance, facilitating remarks and assessing statements.

The narrative units were further classified into structural categories that signified one of the following conversational roles:

- narrators (or narrative tellings): “assume the function of telling the story. Their utterances are meant in some fashion to ‘further the narrative’” (276.0).
- mentors (facilitating remarks): “assume the function of prompting narrators to further their narratives and provide more details” (276.1).
- monitors (assessing statements): “assume the function of explicitly agreeing or disagreeing with the utterances of the narrator, without taking personal responsibility for the narrative” (276.2).
- others: “conversational participants who do not meet the criteria for any of the three conversational roles defined above” (276.3).

A family member was assigned to one of these conversational roles in each conversation (that is, as narrator, mentor, monitor or other) if

- 1) statements characterising a specific role were “among the two most preponderant structural categories in his or her contribution to the conversation” **and**
- 2) “his or her share of all narrative tellings [or insert appropriate category here] uttered in the conversation is greater than would be expected from chance [e.g. for a family of four, greater than 25%]” (276.1).

Using this system, Hirst and Manier identified the daughter as the narrator, the father as the mentor, and the mother and brother as monitors.

The authors then compared the content of the individual narratives with the group narrative in order to investigate whether or not the conversational roles of the family members influenced the content of the group narrative.

Can we predict what will appear in the group narrative by considering what was said in the pregroup recollections and the conversational roles of the participants? At least in the present instances of conversational remembering, almost half the narrative units in the group recall did not appear in any of the pregroup recollections. This interesting fact means that the story told in the group differed substantially from that told by the separate individuals, presumably because the group recollection was influenced in some manner by interpersonal dynamics. (280.2)

Their interest in comparing the two groups here is to offer quantitative predictions: “Can we predict what [how many narrative units] will appear in the group narrative by considering what was said in the pregroup recollections”? The fact that “almost half the narrative units in the group recall did not appear in any of the pregroup recollections” is presented here as evidence for the influence of ‘interpersonal dynamics’ on ‘group recollection.’ The added “presumably” identifies this claim as an inference. Indeed, Hirst

and Manier did not analyze “interpersonal dynamics.” They counted narrative units and compared the number across conditions.

Hirst and Manier concluded that conversational roles play an important part in family remembering:

Our study, then, demonstrated the importance of conversational roles as a theoretical construct in the investigation of family remembering and explored analytically the parameters constraining the adoption of a role. Our results showed that conversational roles shape family recountings. We suspect that they may even have an indirect effect on what family members remember in subsequent acts of recounting. (286.5)

This study was part of a larger research project: “we intend this study of family recounting to provide the starting point for a broader-ranging investigation of how the family as a social unit shapes the life stories of its members” (272.3-273.0). They argued that this particular project makes a unique contribution to the literature: although “many researchers have investigated the social character of memory” (273.2) and “explored the structure of conversations” (273.2) none so far have considered the importance of conversational roles.

Theoretical orientation. Of the papers I selected for close analysis, Hirst and Manier take the most explicitly social approach to explaining autobiographical memory. Their particular focus is *conversational remembering* in what they term “purposeful” conversations “with a well-defined goal” (271.2), such as “providing a lost person with directions” (271.2) or “jointly reconstructing a shared past experience” (272.0). Citing Grace (1978), Hirst and Manier describe how conversational remembering takes place in every day conversations:

In instances of conversational remembering, those conversing cooperate in their joint effort to reconstruct the past. We claim that they adopt various conversational roles as a means of achieving their goal. Conversational roles should be thought of in terms of identifiable patterns of speech taken on by participants in a conversation in order to facilitate (or hinder) the task at hand. (272.0).

They assume that conversational remembering is negotiated through the playing of particular roles which provides a means to tell a story. In what they refer to as the “dialectical drama of group recounting, where the goal is to remember the shared past” (272.2), Hirst and Manier predict that there are particular parts which are typically played out in the natural acting-out of goal directed communication. In the dramatic story-telling of conversational remembering,

...at least one person should accept the primary responsibility of *narrating* the story. Another participant

might aid in the reconstruction by *monitoring* the story assessing its validity or falsity. Other participants might cooperate in the reconstruction by *mentoring*, guiding others to tell the story rather than telling it themselves. (272.2).

Participants in this story-telling may switch roles in the conversation (or from conversation to conversation) depending on, for instance, the shifting of goals, what needs to be accomplished, who the principal actor was in the situation being recalled, etc.

Remembering: a social act. As we have seen already with Haden et al., and elsewhere in the literature, many researchers have attempted to include the social aspects of autobiographical remembering into their theories of autobiographical memory. Hirst and Manier, in particular, are quite explicit about the social nature of autobiographical memory:

Remembering can be viewed as an act of communication. People remember their life stories by writing autobiographies, conversing with relatives, friends and strangers or even by talking to themselves. Their autobiographical memories emerge out of these varying forms of discourse. We cannot divorce the act of remembering from the act of communicating, nor can we treat autobiographical memory as something distinct from the discourse itself. Recollections arise not from the depths

of a storehouse in the head, but from a desire to
communicate with others about the past. (271.1).

According to Hirst and Manier, remembering is “an act of communication”. They refer to autobiographical memories not as encoded memories retrieved from the brain (“recollections arise not from the depths of a storehouse in the head”), but as [arising] “from a desire to communicate with others about the past”. They cite the many forms in which autobiographical remembering occurs (i.e., written autobiographies, conversation with “relatives, friends and strangers”, and even when talking to oneself).

There are a number of things to note here. First of all, they define autobiographical memory as a social act, replacing the noun ‘memory’ with the verb ‘remembering’:

Our present investigation is motivated by a strong claim:
that autobiographical remembering is a communicative act,
or to put it more forcefully, that one cannot divorce the act
of remembering from the act of communicating (cf.
Barclay, this volume). (287.1)

Moreover, remembering as a form of communicating also applies when the individual is remembering in isolation:

We doubt, however, that we could be inclined to treat
remembering as less bound together with communicating if
we studied people recollecting the past in the solitary
confinement of a cognitive science library laboratory, or in
their own room at home. Autobiographical memory – or

what we might, following James (1983), call autobiographical memory proper – is always conscious. This conscious expression of the past can take many forms: verbal, visual, olfactory, and so on. We are mostly concerned with those instances in which memories are presented verbally, although we believe that our comments would apply equally to other modes of representation. When people remember in the privacy of their room a verbally represented past event, they are not only constructing a memory, but also a discourse. They are, in essence, telling a story to themselves. (287.2)

Quantifiably qualitative. Of the four texts studied in this chapter, Hirst and Manier come closest to a discursive position: “Remembering, then, has a dialogical quality that makes it subject to the principles of discourse, especially the importance of context and meaning (cf. Bakhtin, 1981; Wertsch, 1991)” (288.1). Because they adopt a communication model, however, their analysis is not discursive. The family’s conversation is broken down into narrative units that are coded and quantified in order to calculate the strength of individual member’s roles. For instance, the following calculations were used to calculate the strength of the narrator role:

Narrator: $N_s = (n + n^2)/2$, where

N_s = strength of narrator’s role,

n = percentage of narrator's narrative tellings
out of the total number of structural units he or she
contributed, and

n' = percentage of narrator's narrative tellings
out of the total from all participants in the conversation (278.3)

Since with a family of four 25% is chance level for most of
the criteria involved in the definition of the strength of
conversational roles, scores higher than 25 can be taken as
indications of a strong role. (279.1)

Strengths of all conversational roles were calculated for each member of the family and
used as the basis for the discussion/analysis that followed. Predominant role strengths
were expected to predict a family member's influence on the group narrative. For
example,

As the narrator, the daughter presumably accepted the main
responsibility of telling the story. In doing so, she may have
acquired an advantage over the others in injecting her
version of the past into the family's collective recounting.
She may, for instance, have had an advantage in
introducing her unshared pregroup narrative units into the
group recollection. This proved to be the case. The
daughter introduced into the group recollection 33% of her

unshared pregroup recollections, whereas the father inserted 25% of his unshared pregroup narrative units into the group recollection. The son and the mother both contributed to the group recounting less than 10% of their unshared pregroup narrative units. (281.1)

Here, each group member is treated as an individual and his or her individual contributions to the conversation are assumed to be uniquely identifiable. For example, the daughter is described as “injecting her version... into the family’s collective recounting.” The collective recounting is simply the sum of each person’s contributions. Their “unshared pregroup” rememberings are taken for granted as fixed “narrative units” that can be produced and added to the conversation by all the family members and the experimenter.

From a discursive perspective, this concept of role as used by Hirst and Manier is problematic because it implies fixed narrative characteristics that, when taken up by the group (i.e., family members) shapes the structure of the group narrative. Discourse analysts prefer to speak of ‘positioning.’ ‘Positioning’, as I use it here:

can be understood as the discursive construction of personal stories that make a person’s actions intelligible and relatively determinate as social acts and within which members of the conversation have specific locations. (Harré & Langenhove, 1991, p.395).

While people often position themselves (or other people) during the course of a conversation, this positioning is a dynamic, situationally mediated process rather than the carefully prescribed 'roles' which Hirst and Manier have defined above. Discursively, the question would be, how does the daughter position herself (and how is she positioned by others in the conversation)? In the Hirst and Manier study, "narrator" is a role imposed by the authors, for as they themselves have said, "at least one person should accept the primary responsibility of *narrating* the story" (272.2). From a discursive perspective, the daughter may (or may not) have *positioned herself* as narrator in the conversation. Moreover, how her positioning as narrator works is dependent on the conversation. So for instance, if the father "injects" his version (which, apparently he did in 25% of the talk as opposed to the daughter's 33%), he might do it in such a way as to challenge the daughter's 'position.' In describing the advantages of adopting the notion of "positioning" over the notion of "roles", Davies and Harré offer the following:

We explore the idea that the concept of 'positioning' can be used to facilitate the thinking of linguistically oriented social analysts in ways that the use of the concept of 'role' prevented. In particular the new concept helps focus attention on dynamic aspects of encounters in contrast to the way in which the use of 'role' serves to highlight static, formal and ritualistic aspects. (1990, p.43)

While Hirst and Manier allow for changes in 'roles' for individual family members between conversations, these changes are still within the framework of role definitions

imposed by the researchers. They allow for the possibility that which family member acts as “narrator” might be subject to change, but do not recognize that the availability of the role itself might change, depending upon how positions are taken up and acted out in the conversation by all the family members and the experimenter.

Hirst and Manier offer autobiographical remembering as not only a social act but a *communicative* one – one in which people communicate *their life stories*, telling other people about themselves. The understanding here is that people share knowledge, ideas, remembered experiences with one another when they talk, and it is taken for granted that when we talk to each other our intention is to communicate with one another some part of ourselves. Edwards (1997) calls this the ‘communication model’ of discourse (p.90), pointing out that when communication is taken as being “an obvious reality or necessity” (p.90) it loses its distinction as ‘model’ and enters the realm of ‘common sense’. The idea becomes, then, that talk *is always* about communication:

The ‘communication model’ of discourse sits most happily with a minds-goals-intentions version of what people are doing when they are talking, writing, reading, conversing and so on. The starting point is two individuals, two minds that begin in Cartesian isolation from each other, but which/who set out to know and influence each other’s contents. Each mind contains (or is partly made up of) knowledge, in the form of images, semantic organizations, propositions, hypotheses, inferences, and so on, and these

include notions about the contents of other minds. On the basis of these notions, messages are formulated to achieve a variety of communicative goals, such as informing, persuading, and finding things out. (1997, p. 90)

As we have already seen, the *starting point* for Hirst and Manier is four individuals, interviewed in isolation. When these individuals come together for group recollections, Hirst and Manier are concerned with how these individuals “know and influence each other’s contents” (Potter, 1997, p.90). For example, their research concerns include such questions as, “Can we predict what will appear in the group narrative by considering what was said in the pregroup recollections and the conversational roles of the participants?” (280.2), and talk about how “the daughter introduced into the group recollection 33% of her unshared pregroup recollections” (281.1). Hirst and Manier are concerned with how communication (in the form of family recollections) is accomplished by individual family members in the group context and so they formulate their theoretical explanation in terms of conversational roles that provide a kind of communicative template for family recollections. An alternative perspective (i.e., the discursive perspective suggested by Edwards) would be to treat communication as one of a range of possible participant’s concerns.

Empiricist repertoire. Unlike the other three papers, Hirst and Manier draw inconsistently on the empiricist repertoire. Their data have agency at times:

Our results showed that conversational roles shape family recountings. (286.4; emphasis mine)

Our findings concerning the importance of conversational roles in understanding family recounting *underline for us...*

(287.1; emphasis mine)

Unlike the other studies, however, the authors are not nameless actors in their research. They consistently use personal pronouns when describing their actions, and position themselves as responsible for many of the decisions shaping the study. For example:

We decided to concentrate our efforts on the conversational remembering of a single family because we felt that every family differs in the way that they remember conversationally. (273.4)

Of course, we hoped that we could offer several tentative generalizations, even within the context of a case study, but our initial aim was to understand how conversational roles in our sample family shaped their autobiographical memory. (274.0)

Conclusion. How does Hirst and Manier ‘work’ as a piece of cognitive psychology? With their emphasis on the social, dialogic and communicative aspect of communicating, Hirst and Manier’s work appears to reject a traditional cognitive rendering of autobiographical memory. Nonetheless, in their account of “the noncommunicative” aspects of autobiographical remembering they reintroduce the notion of private, internal thoughts:

In conversations, people also bring to mind information that they do not communicate. For instance, those conversing may bring to mind details about the target recollection, but hesitate to mention them because they think that someone else will... ..There may also be social strictures that prevent family members from saying what they clearly have in mind. (287.1)

From a discursive perspective, various “social strictures” may or may not be available to the researcher when analysing a text. However, those details which Hirst and Manier suggest that people “bring to mind” or “clearly have in mind” are cognitive constructions and not available for analysis. This ‘flexibility’ of perspective (i.e., in adhering mostly to a social understanding of autobiographical remembering, while suggesting the possibility of cognitive elements) applies to other aspects of their study as well: their ‘data’ is qualitative (i.e., ‘talk’) while their analysis is quantitative (i.e., number of narrative units); they depart significantly (but not entirely) from the empiricist repertoire. Additionally, their use of prescribed “roles” (which are calculated by reducing the text to coded narrative ‘units’) also reinscribes a cognitive, structural account of remembering.

Theoretically speaking, Hirst and Manier occupy a sort of mid-ground between cognitive and discursive approaches to autobiographical memory. In the next chapter, I will complete this distance by studying autobiographical remembering as discourse and as it occurs in conversation.

Chapter 3

Introduction: A discourse analysis of autobiographical remembering.

In the preceding chapters I have argued the advantages of a discursive take on autobiographical remembering, that is, treating autobiographical remembering as a discursive accomplishment and something people do in a socially managed/negotiated, interactive context. In this chapter I will explore remembering as it occurs in the context of conversation, which is the type of social context in which we most frequently engage in remembering in every day life. By describing how we remember in every day contexts, my aim in this chapter is to develop a theory of autobiographical remembering that takes into account the social-interactional properties of remembering. In this part of the analysis the following questions inform my work:

- how is memory worked up in the context of everyday conversation?
- what is the function of autobiographical remembering in these conversations?
- how do the participants talk about remembering/memory?

Method

Participants. Twenty participants were recruited from the university population – either as a pair who signed up together, or individually (those who volunteered as individuals were randomly paired with one another). Participants ranged in age from 17 to 40 years. Seven out of 10 pairs were friends who signed up together; the remaining six participants were signed up in three pairs of two, depending on their schedules. All of the participants except four were women; all four men participated in sessions with female

partners. Three of the participants spoke English as a second language; all participants were fluent.

Procedure. At the beginning of each session, I explained to each pair of participants that I was interested in studying autobiographical memory, that is, how people remember personal events. The participants were asked to talk about personal memories from their lives. While students were given a list of suggested topics (see Appendix A), they often talked about other things. Topics varied widely from group to group, including such subjects as:

- toys they played with as children (e.g., Transformers and Star Wars action figures)
- close encounters with ghosts, Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny
- what it was like to move a lot as a child
- bouncing eyeballs in biology class

To make conversation as ‘natural’ as possible, the recording sessions took place in a comfortable environment, replete with couches, coffee/tea and refreshments. The sessions generally lasted from 50 minutes to one hour (although some participants chose to continue their conversation even after the tape recorder was turned off). When asked after the session was finished what it was like to participate in this kind of experiment, participants generally agreed that it had been a good experience.

Participants were informed verbally and in the text of their consent form (see Appendix B) that they were permitted to withdraw from the session at any time and not required (unless they wished to do so) to offer an explanation for their decision to

withdraw. In addition, participants were encouraged to ask questions and learn more about the research after the session (see Appendix C for the debriefing procedure).

The sessions were taped and transcribed for analysis.

Analysis and Discussion

The conversations were analyzed using discourse analysis (as defined in Edward's and Potter, 1992, pp.28-29) in order to investigate how autobiographical rememberings are constituted in every day conversation and the actions they perform. I began the initial reading by carefully checking the transcripts against the audio recording, making corrections and filling in blanks in the original transcription. This initial reading was followed by several close readings of the text, during which I noted interesting aspects of the participants' talk, with special attention to the discursive business of autobiographical remembering. Each one of the transcripts provided a rich and varied amount of material for discursive analysis. Choosing a handful of examples for detailed analysis and reporting was a difficult challenge. The following excerpts were carefully selected from a wealth of discursive material: I chose these particular examples because they were interesting, helped me to address the questions that informed my analysis (see above) and they represented the heterogeneity of my participants (strangers, friends and 'mixed' pairs).

Participant confidentiality was ensured by using pseudonyms in transcribing the taped conversations, and also on the demographic information record sheet (i.e., record of sex, age, relationship to interview partner). Pseudonyms were also used in all excerpts from the transcribed conversations included in this written thesis, and care was taken to

exclude information within the excerpts that might identify the participants. Transcripts were numbered by line of text. Thus an excerpt marked “Gr.3: 234-250” means the excerpt was taken from Group 3, lines 234 to 250. The following transcribing conventions were followed:

- FV : Speaking with ‘funny’ or altered voice.
- [comments between square brackets]: Editorial comments, laughter.
- []: Represents something that was said, but was not comprehensible on the tape.
If words are present within the brackets, it means that the transcriber could not completely make out what was said, and therefore only part of what was said was written down.
- **Bold**: emphasized when spoken.
- CAPITAL LETTERS: Indicate loudness.
- X---- or G-----, etc.: Person or place name.
- Note: Comments occurring directly underneath one another (i.e., with no space between) indicate that speakers’ utterances overlapped.
- ... : indicates pauses in speaking

In the following analysis the results are discussed as they are presented, from the point of view of their discursive work. A discussion of the implications of this investigation for theory and research on autobiographical remembering will be offered in the fourth chapter. The analysis is presented in two sections. In the first section, I analyze how personal experiences are ‘remembered’ in the participants’ conversations and the construction of those remembered events as participants’ concerns situated in the

participants' talk. In the second section, I analyze how the participants' talk about "memory" occurs within the conversations, considering how the idea of memory and remembering is worked up in the participants' talk.

Conversational remembering: How autobiographical memories are constructed in conversation

It is interesting to note how different stories are occasioned in conversation, and particularly how transitions between stories are managed by the participants. Sometimes in the texts, stories are offered in response to thematically isolated questions, or occasionally, in response to the list I offered at the beginning of each session. But most often, story topics are clearly suggested within the context of the talk. In the following section I will analyze three excerpts, beginning with Kerry and Pete.

Santa Claus and 'show & tell'. How is autobiographical remembering occasioned and accomplished in conversation? I begin this analysis with excerpts from the conversation between Kerry and Pete. Kerry (21 years) and Pete (also 21 years) are friends who came to the interview together. The excerpt that follows is mainly about Pete remembering the time he took his brother to school. However, as we will see, Pete's story arises in the context of a discussion between the three of us about Santa Claus. Interestingly, Santa came up in a few other interviews as well. I had just finished recalling the Christmas Eve that Santa Claus came to visit me in my bed, explaining that this was the reason I believed in Santa Claus for so long. I finished the story by recounting what actually happened Christmas morning the following year:

Gr.9: 988-997

- J and mom said she went to the bedroom to see why I hadn't gotten up yet, and she said I was sitting there crying because Santa Claus hadn't come [laugh]
- K ooh
- J I hadn't gone out to see if there was anything under the tree, it was just
- K you just assumed
he wasn't coming.
- K [laugh]
- J And then she explained to me that Santa was very busy and he couldn't visit you every year, that that was just, you know, every once in a while.
- K yeah
- J [laugh] Sitting in bed, crying [laugh]

Here, Kerry encouraged my story with supportive comments like "ooh" and, an overlapping remark, "you just assumed he wasn't coming," which was accompanied with laughter. Thus engaged in the conversation, she recalled one of her own recollections concerning her past behaviour and Santa Claus:

Gr. 9: 998-1008

- K Now, like, I mean, I don't do any more, but when I got to the point where I knew there was no Santa, I used to bug kids, like little kids. "There's no Santa!" Make them feel really, like [FV] "Yes, there is!" And like "No" and just torment these little kids. I don't do it any more, but
- P I don't really torment little kids. I like kids. I've always liked kids, like kids younger than me.
- K mm-hm
- P so it was like, oh my cousin, my uncle used to live with us, and my cousin used to live with us too. So when he was born, um, I was 8, I used to like carrying him around all the time. like, it was funny. I felt like a parent and just. I-I like wanted to take care of this, my little cousin, all the time.
- K mm-hm
- P So. It was fun

In this segment of conversation Kerry began with a *disclaimer*: “Now, like, I mean, I don’t do any more, but.” A disclaimer is a rhetorical device commonly used in conversation to ward off criticism (cf. Edwards, 1997; Potter, 1996). Kerry used it here in anticipation of possible criticism of her actions, thereby responding to the criticism even before it occurred. Frequently, such a move effectively blocks criticism. There is no point in the next turn-taker making the obvious criticism when the previous speaker has already explained why such criticism is not warranted. So, even though she “used to bug kids... and just torment these little kids”, she constructed herself here as no longer engaging in that kind of behavior: “I don’t do it any more.” The relative success of Kerry’s disclaimer is determined within the context of the talk that follows. Kerry may have been about to reinforce her point (“but”), but Pete interrupted. “I don’t really torment little kids. I like kids. I’ve always liked kids, like kids younger than me.” Pete’s statement oriented to the social norm against bullying younger children which Kerry’s earlier disclaimer also pointed to. He described himself as someone who has never tormented children (“I don’t really torment little kids”), and in fact has “always” liked children. In so doing, Pete positioned himself as morally superior to Kerry – Kerry has a tainted past and he does not. Kerry responded twice, “um-hm,” which supported Pete in continuing his story. Thus, instead of continuing on her ‘turn’ which was interrupted at the ‘but’, Kerry allowed Pete to take over as storyteller. In this instance, Kerry’s disclaimer was less than successful: not only did she lose her turn in the conversation to Pete, but Pete took the occasion to position himself as superior to Kerry.

Pete used the following story about his baby cousin to bolster his claim to a superior moral positioning:

Gr9: 1004-1006

P So when he was born, um, I was 8, I used to like carrying him around all the time. like, it was funny. I felt like a parent and just. I-I like wanted to take care of this, my little cousin, all the time.

The details here constructed Pete as the sort of person who not only liked children from an early age (“when he was born, um, I was 8”), but “wanted to take care of” them. The comparison of his 8-year-old self to being a parent implies a maturity beyond his chronological age. In the next part of the segment, both Kerry and I encouraged Pete to continue with his story, by asking questions, offering information, and even praising him:

Gr9: 1009-1028

K So you took him to school

P Yeah, I took him to school for show-and-tell, and no one knew.

J [laugh]

P I just took him and my grandma found out

J oh no! [laugh]

P Yeah, actually I think my teacher phoned

K I can see this little kid, walking in

P I had a little kid

K ‘oh I just brought my cousin’

P Well, you know, I put a little toque on him, you know, wrapped him up

J How old was he?

P I think 8 , nine months

J Oh my god [laugh]

P yeah

J And you took him from the house and nobody knew

P no, no one knew

J oh my goodness

P And I put him in his little things. Oh yeah, like I had the bags [laugh], so I looked like a little parent, with the bottles

K [laughs]

J Were you hiding in the cabinet that night? *

K&J [laugh]

*[earlier Pete told how he used to do this when he thought he was in trouble]

Kerry invited Pete to embellish his story by introducing a specific incident that she must have heard about before: "So you took him to school." It is Kerry then and not Pete who specifically directed Pete's narrative to this episode. She also 'forced' Pete to do a little 'image management': it is one thing to 'feel like a parent' and 'take care of your little cousin'; it is quite another thing to take your baby cousin to school without adult consent or supervision. As the outsider, I interjected at several points: "oh my god," "oh my goodness," and "were you hiding in the cabinet that night?" My interjections clearly positioned Pete as having done something wrong, possibly dangerous, and deserving of punishment. Yet Pete worked at maintaining his position as the responsible 8 year old: "I put a little toque on him, you know, wrapped him up." "And I put him in his little things. Oh yeah, like I had the bags [laugh], so I looked like a little parent, with the bottles."

Pete successfully rescued the image he was constructing of himself as kid-liker and care-taker as neither Kerry nor I criticized him and joined in the joke:

Gr9: 1029-1035

P I thought it was cool, you know, I'm like a parent, you know, I can take him around anywhere I want.

K show and tell. You walk into school with this baby!

- P yeah
- J [laugh] that's pretty good show and tell
- K [laugh]
- J That's pretty good show and tell

In the end, after Pete recalled how carefully he protected his cousin from being held incorrectly ("I'm like no, you have to put your hand on the head and you have to hold it right properly, otherwise, you know, it'll wobble"), Pete not only managed to retain his claim to being life-long kid-liker, but he also moved me from expressing the view that he had done something wrong to complimenting him on his actions. Twice I told him: "that's pretty good show and tell."

There are two aspects of the preceding analysis that I would like to emphasize here: (1) the way in which the successive stories were occasioned in the talk and (2) the way in which positioning (and remembering) was used to construct, manage and defend accounts. Each turn in the conversation was mediated/occasioned by what had gone on previously in the talk. Kerry's 'confession' was likely suggested by *my* story, which by my own designation was all about my earlier admission that "I believed in Santa Claus a long time. And if you ever met my dad you'd know why. Because one year, Santa Claus **came to me** on Christmas Eve..." (972-73). My talk about why I believed in Santa for so long led to Kerry's talk about what used to happen after she stopped believing in Santa. This, in turn, led to Pete's choice of conversation. In our stories, Kerry and I worked up versions of ourselves as 'funny little kids', i.e., children who did things and believed things appropriate for our age but that are no longer a part of who we are. Pete did not choose to continue the Santa theme and instead worked up a version of himself as

morally superior to Kerry and mature for his age. Interestingly, neither Kerry nor I challenged his self-construction. Indeed, it might be argued that Kelly facilitated this sequence of talk by introducing Pete's story (after he rejected her disclaimer that her teasing behavior as a child was not a persistent behavior). Notably, this conversational jockeying for position took place without any overt criticism.

This example illustrates the kind of turn-taking in conversation that has traditionally interested discourse analysts. In Edwards' (1997) treatment of turn-taking as a way of developing and maintaining conversational *intersubjectivity*, he explains:

Each utterance creates a context for the next, and each next utterance, in attending to the context created by its prior, thereby stands as a kind of participant's public reading of, or treating-as, whatever action that prior performed, or whatever implication it made relevant. (p.100)

Yet while turn-taking does occur in the above excerpt (i.e., I talked; Kerry talked; then Pete talked), it is *not* as if the telling of *one story automatically triggers another*. Indeed, it would be difficult to predict where the conversation went next based on the opening statements alone. The conversation could have gone in many directions and the stories described in other terms. As Edwards (1997) terms it: "it could have been otherwise." The point is that this particular conversation occurred at this particular point in time with these particular participants and accomplished particular ends.

My second concern was the way in which positioning (and remembering) was used to construct, manage and defend accounts. As I argued above, during the course of

the conversation Pete actively positioned himself in contrast to Kerry. Even when Kerry reminded him of the time he took his cousin “for “show and tell,” and I provided the normative framework by evaluating this as dangerous, Pete protected his image, supporting his ‘identity’ as a responsible ‘little parent’ in his talk. In this case, Pete’s construction of himself as a “little” parent made his action of taking his cousin to school “intelligible” from within his account of himself as someone who has “always liked kids.” This then illustrates a second principle of conversation. In giving an account (and in this context, when engaging in autobiographical remembering), people simultaneously construct identities and position themselves in relation to others.

Given the complexity of the talk in the preceding excerpt, theorizing this case of autobiographical remembering as a matter of cued retrieval is problematized. For example, what ‘cued’ Peter’s memory about looking after his little cousin? To answer simply that Pete remembered this event in response to Kerry’s memory about teasing little children ignores the complexity of what Pete was doing in his remembering talk and also that it was Kerry who brought up the story and encouraged Pete to tell it. Pete not only recalled a memory, he undermined Kerry’s disclaimer and positioned himself as her moral superior. Thus, a discursive reading of this autobiographical remembering moment points us to the complexity of what Pete, Kerry and I were doing as Pete was presumably engaging in an act of remembering.

Dana and Lavern: The baby chronicles. This analysis illustrates again how autobiographical remembering is worked up in the context of conversation. Dana was 19 years old and Lavern was 37 years old. We were all strangers, having met for the first

time during the session. The first few minutes of every session were interesting as the participants worked out what they wanted to talk about first. In this case, Lavern took the lead:

GR3: 1-7

L: [Tape starts] You want to start? Or...

D: [Laughs] I barely don't know what to start off.

L: I don't know either, but how about I start with, I don't know, um, my, the birth of my first-born, or whatever?

J: Hey, that's a big one. [Laughs] OK.

L: Um, I was a new Mom, right, or whatever. Somebody who didn't have any kids. I didn't know what to expect, even though I read books and stuff like that...

Lavern took responsibility for 'getting started'. She invited Dana to start, but in such a manner as to indicate that she, Lavern, was ready to start if Dana did not want to. The unfinished sentence "You want to start? Or..." trails off, implying the unspoken alternative: do you want to start? Or [do you want me to start]? Given this 'out', Dana replied that she "barely know[s] what to start off." Having gained Dana's consent, Lavern took the initiative, picking a topic but simultaneously posing it as a question: "I don't know either, but how about I start with, I don't know, um, my, the birth of my first-born, or whatever?" Thus, in taking the lead in the conversation, she nevertheless positioned herself as open to alternatives should anyone object to her choice of topic. I gave my approval ("hey, that's a big one") and, permission gained all round, Lavern began a colourful version of the birth of her first child. It is notable that, in this example, Lavern's choice of topic was clearly *not* occasioned by our conversation to that point, or by the list of topics I had offered. The choice of beginning however is not entirely arbitrary. Lavern

went on to a detailed description of her childbirth experiences, establishing herself as an expert in this area. Neither Dana nor I have given birth, but after our initial approval of the topic we continued to enable Lavern's story-telling by supporting the unfolding narrative.

While some participants relied often on responses or questions from either their partner or myself to get them talking and keep the conversation going, Lavern required minimal support in the relating of this particular event. From line 6 of the text until line 68 (where I begin the next excerpt below), Lavern told the story of her first child's birth. Occasionally I offered interruptions such as "Oh no" (line 19); "how long were you in labour?" (25); "really" (34); "oh no!" (43); and "so you're coming out of the epidural and you still haven't had the baby?" (50-51). During this time, Dana did not speak, although later she said that she was looking forward to having children. She thus describes herself as oriented to the topic of childbirth. Nonetheless, as a much younger woman than Lavern who also lacks experience in this area, Dana is positioned as the novice. Her silence then is the appropriate response of the student when the teacher is explaining. In the excerpt that follows, Dana kept to the 'birthing' topic, which supports this interpretation further. She could have interrupted and/or refocused the conversation despite the difference in age between herself and Lavern, an easy conversational move accomplished by many other participants as in the case of Pete and Kerry. I pick up this narrative near the end of Lavern's story of her first delivery, as this is the occasion for Dana to recall her mother's experience:

Gr3: 68-85

L: So in the end, I had to, basically, they had to take her out with forceps. But, you know, I mean, I did, they did tell me when to push, but I just didn't have any control about how it was going and stuff. So, because she was born early, um, and I don't know whether that had anything to do with it, she had to go to an ICU for a day, or for a night, because she couldn't breathe on her own. So, basically, other than that, I think that she was basically healthy and she's got asthma now, so I don't know whether that's related to her being born early or whatever happened, you know, whether that's, you know, I don't know.

J: I-I was premature, too.

L: But my ex, or my ex-mother-in-law, she has asthma too, so maybe it's

J: Maybe it runs in the family

L: Yeah. So, that was my first-born.

D: [] my mother had a very easy labour. Four hours and she only knew she was in labour for the two, the last two hours.

J: Really?

D: She said she had back pains, that was it. She said she had back pains.

J: Wow. Amazing.

D: Yeah, I was a very easy and low-pain birth. [Laughs]

Not all topics that are introduced in the conversation become occasions for remembering.

For instance, when Lavern talked about how her youngest has asthma, and “whether that’s related to her being born early”, I responded with “I-I was premature, too”. Now my statement was clearly occasioned in the text; yet it was not taken up as a topic for further discussion. In fact, Lavern continued as if I had not spoken at all: “But my ex, or my ex-mother-in-law, she has asthma too, so maybe it’s...” I did not press the point about my being premature, but instead contributed a plausible conclusion to Lavern’s unfinished sentence: “Maybe it runs in the family”, to which Lavern responded, “Yeah.

So, that was my first-born". My contribution constituted *repair work* – after all Lavern had just ignored my concern, but as researcher my task was to keep the conversation going. As an unequal participant, my concerns were secondary to those of the volunteers. Hence, I assured Lavern that she could continue with her concern.

"So that was my first born" acted here as a denouement, signalling the end of the story. As we have discussed before, "Where to start a story is a major, and rhetorically potent, way of managing causality and accountability..." (Edwards, 1997, p. 277).

Conversations are normally structured as a series of turns taken by the different speakers, and through such turn-taking, one person (usually) gives way to another thereby allowing stories to be told without constant disruption and competition. My interjection about being premature could have been taken up as an interruption or as a contribution to her own story. Lavern treated it as an interruption and proceeded to complete her account.

At this point, Lavern created a discursive space for a new story – and Dana took it. "My mother had a very easy labour. Four hours and she only knew she was in labour for the two, the last two hours." Dana's comment here, like mine was occasioned within the context of the conversation. Nevertheless, I encouraged her with comments like "really?" and "wow. Amazing." Discursively speaking, Dana's timing was better than mine had been. Lavern had finished her story. In the continuing narrative (below) Lavern not only gave Dana 'discursive space' for her story, but approved it (e.g., "Amazing."):

Gr.3: 86-105

L: Amazing.

J: You were the good baby. [Laughs]

D: Yeah, and I'm hoping that, you know, that childbirth being easy runs in the family.

[Laughter]

D: I want to have a, I want to have a big family, so

J: Oh, man.

D: I'm hoping that mine are all easy too.[Laughs]

J: I remember that I worked in a library, see I'm doing it already. I worked in a library and I had to catalogue this book called "Where there's no doctors" and they were saying, going through it, picture diagrams, what you would do if someone was having a baby, and all possible complications that can happen. Well, by the time my relief work came in, I was green. [Laughs] I was saying, Oh my God, I couldn't do this, I can't believe I did this to my Mother. [Laughs] And the poor guy came in, I said, you did this to your Mother.

L: Well, my kid is already asking me, you know, "Is that painful? Mom, is it painful to have children?" And she's only ten, right? So, might as well continue with the second one. Um, the second one, I thought I knew it all by then, right? [Laughs] Well, wrong. Anyway, and I thought for sure, this time, I am not going to get any anaesthetic or anything, and I will do it the natural way. Well, she came early too.

Dana's comment "Yeah, and I'm hoping that, you know, that childbirth being easy runs in the family" followed from Lavern's earlier description of her lengthy labour with her first child. But it is also occasioned by her expressed "want" to have children, as expressed in the next lines: "I want to have a, I want to have a big family, so... I'm hoping that mine are all easy too." By this admission, Dana forged a sort of common ground between herself and Lavern: Lavern is a mother who recounts the story of her birthing experience in great detail; Dana isn't a mother yet, but *she positions herself as wanting to be*. I constructed my interest in the topic by relating an experience in the library. However, in my story I positioned myself not only as not a mother, but as not ever wanting to be a mother and as a child who "did this to my Mother": "I was saying, Oh my God, I couldn't

do this, I can't believe I did this to my Mother." This talk created a distance between myself and the other speakers. When Lavern responded, she affirmed this distance: "Well, *my kid* is already asking me, you know, 'Is that painful? Mom, is it painful to have children?'" She did not respond to me directly, but referred instead to her 10-year old daughter whose questions are similar to mine, implicitly positioning me as naive and childlike on this matter. In another conversational context, this might have been a different moment, but the structure of the research context maintained our orientation to the purpose of the conversation – participants' remembering. Having responded to me, Lavern continued with the topic she had started: "So, might as well continue with the second one..."

Celia and Raquel: Palliative problems. Strangers, both Raquel (24 years) and Celia (also 24 years) had never met before the session. In many ways, their backgrounds were quite different. Raquel had recently immigrated to Canada, English was not her first language, and most of her job training happened in her country of origin. Celia, on the other hand, was a native English speaker and was born and raised in Canada. Yet what was striking in this session was not how Raquel and Celia managed the differences between them, but how quickly they created common ground. The locus of this common ground was the time that both women have spent working in palliative care, and most of the session was spent sharing and comparing their experiences. One common theme was the hardship occasioned by a lack of adequate staffing in the nursing homes in which they worked. Many of the experiences they recounted were provided as examples of what can go wrong when there are not enough staff to take care of people. At the time of the

following excerpt, Raquel has just given an account of the time when the person she was looking after went missing during her shift. At the end of Raquel's account, Celia responded with one of her own:

Gr. 10: 470-485

- C I think my worst experience was we had to bath bath this one woman, and she, no, she she was like the queen and she expected you to wait on her hand and foot. And uh, but she was so used to getting her own way, and I'd never had any problems with her before. And I came in and I said "Ok, we're going have a bath." And she was screaming. Like we had to literally, I mean you have to get these people clean.
- R Yeah, but they--
- C You **have** to give them a bath. Unfortunately, you know, a choice does not exist in a nursing home.
- R They'd give them choice here, but which, which, sort of traps you. I do not agree with, because come on, it's it's, if resident refuses his bath twice a week, for three weeks...
- C yeah
- R Man, it's like, 'oh, please'
- C Exactly, I mean
- R You can't handle it
- C Yeah, it's not taking care of them, you know.
- R yeah

In her description of this incident, Celia offered a defensive account of her actions, that is, one which resists being discounted or undermined (Potter, 1996). She defended her actions with regard to the lady in the bath from any accusation of meanness or undue force on her part. First of all, Celia positioned the woman as being demanding and unreasonable: "this one woman, and she, no, she she was like the queen and she expected you to wait on her hand and foot. And uh, but she was so used to getting her own way." She also foregrounded her own part in the story as being unavoidable: "You **have** to give

them a bath. Unfortunately, you know, a choice does not exist in a nursing home.” The interesting part of Celia’s rhetorical style on this occasion was that she defended herself even though both other people in the room were supportive of her position. Raquel for instance supported Celia’s claim that she had no choice, even though in Raquel’s nursing home, residents do have a choice: “They’d give them choice here, but which, which, sort of traps you. I do not agree with, because come on, it’s it’s, if resident refuses his bath twice a week, for three weeks...;” “Man, it’s like, ‘oh please’ and ‘you can’t handle it.’” Celia’s justifications in the absence of blame serve to construct her as a concerned caretaker of the elderly. Celia in turn supported *Raquel’s version* of the dilemma with comments like “yeah” and “exactly, I mean”. While these women had never worked together, they reinforced each other’s accounts of their experiences. According to Edwards (1997), this kind talk demonstrates a *pragmatic intersubjectivity*, that is, “shared knowledge as a participant’s practical concern: what their talk *treats as* shared, and when and how.” (p.114, emphasis his). In this conversation, Raquel and Celia share a common practical concern: Their experiences of palliative care the difficulties and stresses that are involved in such work.

Another interesting aspect of this excerpt is how turn taking was negotiated. Sometimes in conversation this negotiation occurs smoothly, but often it is characterized by interruptions and missed turns. Raquel and Celia were openly supportive of one another, but sometimes Raquel would try to interrupt the story before Celia had come to an end. In the above part of the narrative, Raquel tried to interrupt with her contribution once without success (“yeah, but they—”); and in the second attempt she successfully

sidetracked the story for a moment with a corroborating story about her own experience (“they’d give them choice here, but...”). While Celia (as we have discussed) affirmed Raquel’s interjection with her own responses, when the opportunity arose, she returned to the story she had begun:

Gr.10: 486-502

- C But um, so I get her in the tub, it's a whirlpool tub. I was really scared because I wasn't expecting any... Like she calmed down. Like she was freaking out. We had two people hold her on the bath chair and then we got her in the tub and she was like just like the water calmed her down. But I [] I was trying to get her to tilt her head back so I could um like wash her hair. And anyway, I made the mistake, she um wouldn't do it. So I thought "I have to wash her hair." And um, so, I got water in her in her eyes, around her face, and like she flipped on me. And she accused me of trying to drown her. And then she's screaming and she's like [FV] "God damn you." Like she's just cursing at me. And I was like, ah, I I thought I could mentally handle that, but I was not expecting this horrified look on her face, and this this absolute --
- R And it gets to you
- C Well it does. And she was screaming, like ok, I'm trying to talk to her to calm her down. But then I start yelling, cause I, she she won't listen to me. And then--
- R I get it very bad. I start yelling, I I'm shooting right at them, because if you are, because you know, I see it this way. If you're ok, right, if you have at least something left in your brain so you can function at least normally, like, you can be polite.
- C Yeah, I agree

Again, Celia used defensive rhetoric when describing this scene. She described the woman’s behavior as being unpredictable and unexpected, since the woman had calmed down after getting into the tub: “I was really scared because I wasn’t expecting any... Like she calmed down.” Celia described her “mistake” in a way that indicates the reasonableness of such a mistake: “But I [] I was trying to get her to tilt her head back so I could um like wash her hair. And anyway, I made the mistake, she um wouldn’t do it.

So I thought 'I have to wash her hair.' And um, so, I got water in her in her eyes, around her face, and like she flipped on me." Celia presented her reasonable actions as a contrast to the woman's unreasonable responses: "and like she flipped on me. And she accused me of trying to drown her. And then she's screaming and she's like [FV] 'God damn you.' Like she's just cursing at me." Here Celia defended herself in response to her *actual accuser*: the woman in the story. Through the telling of this story in this particular way, Celia constructed a version of herself as a caring and well-meaning person who did not intend to upset the woman. In this case, Celia was the victim of circumstances and is not responsible for the upset.

Celia described this event as difficult. At the beginning of the story she said "I think my *worst experience* was we had to bath bath this one woman..." This not only prepared us for the following description to be negative, but also identified it as unusually negative. Furthermore, in the above citation she used emotion talk:

And I was like, ah, I I thought I could mentally handle that, but I was not expecting this horrified look on her face, and this this absolute – [Raquel, interrupting: 'And it gets to you'] Well it does. And she was screaming, like ok, I'm trying to talk to her to calm her down. But then I start yelling, cause I, she she won't listen to me. And then—

This description underscored her positioning as also a victim. First of all, she did not expect the woman's reaction – a "horrified look on her face" and "screaming." Second, the woman would not listen to her when she tried "to calm her down." At this point in the narrative, Raquel interrupted her and effectively ended Celia's story. Unlike earlier in

the conversation, Celia did not resist and in fact actively encouraged Raquel's remembering turn:

Gr.10: 503-509

R I'm doing my job. Then that's what you're supposed to be. It's not my fault you are in the nursing home. It's not my fault you have to have a total care.

C yeah

R I cannot **do** anything for you to bring you back, and there, men usually will be ok.

C It's the women--

R But women, there is this old lady that drives me nuts, [a: hm] because she sits on the toilet for 15 minutes, because if you put her on the toilet you have no time to run...

And so the conversation continued.

Conclusion. Each of these excerpts offers a glimpse of the discursive resources mobilized by the participants remembering within a social context. Participants constructed and defended accounts of themselves; and they jockeyed for position as they worked out the terms of turn-taking. Clearly autobiographical remembering is a complex discursive phenomenon, situated and shaped in talk. How people remember in conversation is managed within a particular context at a particular time. Similarly the issue of what participants are accomplishing in their remembered stories is not only a matter of what the participant is trying to accomplish, but also how her conversational contributions are taken up (or not) by others in the conversation.

In the next section, I study *how people talk about autobiographical remembering/memory*. How is autobiographical remembering defined when it is taken up as a participant's concern?

Conversation about remembering: Talk about memory

From a discursive perspective, autobiographical memories/rememberings are treated as discursive phenomena, i.e., as the participant's personal concern and a matter of how they give account of themselves and their pasts (Edwards, 1997). We have seen in the first part of the chapter that how people remember in conversation and what counts as remembering varies from conversation to conversation and according to the concerns of the participants. A further interest in this analysis is not only how people talk when they are remembering, but how, when and why they talk about memory. Not surprisingly, given the context of participating in research about remembering, the participants frequently talked about memory and how it works. They also talked about what they were "supposed" to be doing in the session.

From the various examples available in all of the sessions, I chose three examples from the session with Matthew and Betty and one from the session with Mary and Tina. Two considerations guided the first choice. First, this group (i.e., Matthew and Betty) talked more about "memory" and "remembering" than any other group. Second, because they talked about memory on more than one occasion during the session, these examples allow an analysis of the different ways people can talk about memory, even within one conversation. At the time of the session, Betty (26 years) and Matthew (32 years) had been classmates who had known each other for three weeks. In the following three episodes from Betty and Matthew's session, the topic of memory came up in three distinctly different ways.

In the first excerpt, which occurred near the beginning of the session, Matthew had been talking about weight-lifting competitions he had participated in. Betty added to the story, indicating that she had heard about it before. In this way, she also prompted Mathew to fill in particular details:

Gr2: 96-121

M and I did a competition... three weeks ago? Four weeks?

B Three weeks

M Three weeks ago

B and he placed first

M yeah. That's no []

J did you??

M []

B tell her, tell her why you went into competition

M why I went to the competition?

J [laughs]

M you know, you're supposed to actually--

J This is anonymous [referring to taping]

M [to b] you're supposed to have **input** into this conversation. you're just--

B I'm so helping - I'm helping you remember

[laughter]

M no you're not, you're supposed to, remember when you said []...

B I REMEMBER when

he told me about why he went in to the competition

M she REMEMBERS...

M about WHY I went into competition

B hey I remember

J why don't I just turn off the tape recorder

[laughter]

M what tape recorder?
[laughter]

M there's a tape recorder?

Even though it's still early in the session, here Matthew pointed to Betty's lack of participation in the remembering task, positioning her as not contributing to the session: "You know, you're supposed to actually... you're supposed to have **input** into this conversation, you're just—". Betty resisted this positioning and interrupted Matthew, insisting that she was doing what they were supposed to do: "I'm **so** helping - I'm helping you remember." Matthew repeated his objection ("no you're not, you're supposed to, remember when you said...") and once again Betty resisted it, appealing this time to me: "I REMEMBER when he told me about why he went in to the competition." Here Betty's answer challenged Matthew's common sense notion about what autobiographical remembering is 'supposed' to be – after all, he was the one who was at the competition. Betty's defence that she *was indeed remembering* ("I REMEMBER when he told me...") defended her contribution to the study up to this point as being sound – because, arguably, she 'remembered' her own past experience of being told about this competition. Even though her remembering acted to facilitate Matthew's remembered narrative, Betty pointed out (perhaps jokingly) that she was also contributing her own autobiographical remembering to the situation.

All of this positioning and resistance provides an example not only of how people position themselves, but also how others can position them. In the above example, Matthew was trying to position Betty as not contributing to the session (which, at the

same time, he positioned himself as doing); Betty resisted this and told him that she was remembering too. An observer might ask, based on this text, (as Matthew does): ‘who is really doing the autobiographical remembering here?’ – but the observer would be missing the point. In this text, autobiographical remembering was the participants’ shared concern. While their definition of what autobiographical remembering is may not be shared, as far as each participant was concerned, it is what they were doing. Betty rejected Matthew’s claim that he was the only one engaged in remembering because he was recalling an event from his life. She did this by offering a different version of remembering. It may be Matthew’s experience in the competition that they were recalling, but their ability to do this together rested on Betty remembering what Matthew had told her about this experience on another occasion. Thus, she legitimated her claim to participation by defining remembering in this case as involving a second-hand story.

When examined in the context of every day conversation, the construct of autobiographical remembering (what that means, how it is done), becomes considerably more open to interpretation than in an experimental investigation. This illustrates the indexicality of language in use, i.e., participants used the term ‘remembering’ in different ways in different contexts.

In the second excerpt, this time Matthew asked a question and told a story that again highlights the variability in how ‘memory’ is constructed to serve particular participant concerns at a particular point in time.

Gr 2: 897-923

M do you and your brother have any conflicts in memories?

B [pause] like what?

M well, ok, my brother K---- and I, have the **identical** memory of our first day at school.

J yeah?

B you're not sure who's it is?

[laughter]

M I know it's mine. he thinks it's his, but he's sadly mistaken.

[laughter]

B oh lord

M it was first day of school, and I smashed a 7-up bottle next to the uh, electrical pole, the utility pole in the... playground. and F---- M----- cut his finger picking it up. And K---- remembers that exact same thing, but **he** broke the bottle

J [laughs]

M and I'm thinking, 'that's great Keith, but F---- M-----'s a year **younger** than you, and a year **older** than me

J [laughs]

B wooo..

M so---- ha! but he doesn't see the logic in that

B [laughs] uh-huh

M but

B I have absolutely --

J you should, now, you trunk, you you track F---- down and find out he has actually **two** scars

M I was a—

[laughter]

B ha – like it happened twice! [laughs]

M no wonder he used to beat me up,

In this segment, Matthew talked about what he considered a ‘conflict in memory.’ In this instance, he and his brother “have” an “identical” memory, that is, according to Matthew, both brothers remembered the same event, but Matthew remembered it as having happened to him, while his brother Keith remembered it happening to *him*. Matthew attributed the error to Keith, and then provided evidence for this attribution: “I’m thinking, ‘that’s great Keith, but F---- M----’s a year **younger** than you, and a year **older** than me’” (which means that *it couldn’t have happened* the way Keith remembered it). Several things are accomplished here besides Matthew proving that he is right. Memories are constructed as something you “have” – i.e., they belong to a person like a personal possession. Also, memories reflect what actually happened and therefore corroboration of the sort Matthew provided settles the matter of who is correct. However, Matthew also manages to position himself as superior to his brother – Keith “doesn’t see the logic in that.”

Much later in the conversation, Betty took up Mathew’s earlier theme of conflicting memories. She identified the excerpt that follows on the next page (the one about the “wench” who slapped her) as being precipitated (occasioned) by Mathew’s earlier story of the identical memory he shares with his brother. Yet, several other remembered events were discussed *in between* these two stories. The delay, then, between Matthew’s story and her story of conflicting memories requires some analysis. The possible reasons for this delay, however, were suggested in the talk. The discussion above was followed by a reminiscence about F---- M----’s father-in-law’s pub, which was followed by a discussion about whether or not this was “the sort of thing you [I, the

researcher] were after” (34.3), which in turn was followed by Betty and Matthew commenting on how unorthodox they probably were as compared to other ‘saner’ participants. It was at this point that Betty indicated that she had a story to tell but could not remember it:

Gr2: 969-971

B I had another damn story to tell you, but I don’t remember

M ‘and the girl, she started taking her clothes off
and stuff’

Matthew interrupted Betty here with an irrelevant comment that poked fun at her. After she threatened to punch him in the nose, Matthew remembered a girl who had stripped to her undershirt in Grade one. Then I recalled a similar incident that took place at my apartment building, and then Matthew and I talked about how strange it was. Finally, Betty “remembered” what she was going to say: “I know what you were talking about, you were talking about conflicting memories,” (1012). This is a good example of how distractions (for example, changes in topic, insults, etc.) can disrupt the sometimes smooth process of turn-taking in ordinary conversations. It also indicates the ‘messiness’ associated with autobiographical remembering in every day conversation. In other words, how memories get recalled in conversation is contextually determined and subject to the particularities of the situation such as distractions, interruptions, etc. In returning to the topic of “conflicting memories”, Betty adopted a different version of “conflicting memories,” thereby illustrating the indexicality of language use:

Gr.2: 1012-1029

B I know what you were talking about, you were talking about conflicting memories

M yeah

B um, when I was little I couldn't remember stuff. like, if something happened, and then somebody told me it didn't happen, I had no idea whether or not it had actually happened.

M hmm, yeah , hmm

B like, weird shit, yeah, [clears her throat], like.. I was like
weeeeeeeeeeeer...

J like dream/reality, dichotomies
like that?

B like, like, I was in dance class one day, and there was like, this, just 'wench' in my dance class, and. And, ah, she went and she slapped me across the face, right? I can't remember how hard, whatever. anyways afterwards

J oh my

B I told my brother about it, he got pissed, right, and he went after her, [fv] 'don't you ever slap my little sister across the face' and she's like 'I didn't'. and I have no idea whether, I mean it was **the same damn day** and I had no idea whether it happened or not, I was like,

M wow, she must have hit you **hard**

[laughter]

Betty emphasized the unusual nature of this situation involving "conflicting memories" and "not remembering stuff" by saying things like " like, if something happened, and then somebody told me it didn't happen, I had no idea whether or not it had actually happened" and "like, weird shit, yeah, [clears her throat], like.. I was like weeeeeeeeeeeer...".

I introduced my own version of weirdness and remembering by asking, "like dream/reality, dichotomies like that?" Betty responded with a specific example that rejected my version of the problem. She told the story of the time a "wench" in her dance class slapped her across the face. Afterwards, according to Betty, she "had no idea

whether it happened or not.” Nevertheless, Betty had just finished describing this girl in strongly pejorative terms as being a “wench”, and told her brother about the incident – both are descriptive details consistent with the claim that the incident occurred. Yet, although she remembered *some* event, when told it did not happen, she could not say whether or not it had occurred (“I mean it was **the same damn day** and I had no idea whether it happened or not.”). Betty did not offer any explanation for this contradictory state of affairs after she told the story. However, before she began the story, she described the experience of conflicting memories as occurring when she was “little”. The problem as she described it was limited to her childhood and involved not being certain about her memory if someone told her that some remembered incident did not happen. At the end of the story, however, Matthew offered another explanation: “wow, she must have hit you **hard**,” implying a possible physical cause for the memory problem. Betty worked up normal memory as remembering something that actually “happened.” Her unusual experience occurred when this assumption of the link between reality and remembering was thrown into question. She attributed it to being young, but Matthew attributed it to physical trauma.

Both Matthew and Betty talked about the mystery of “conflicting” memories – and in both cases this conflict was seemingly based in the assumption that memories are something you ‘have’, and about something that ‘happened’ to you. Their ‘experiences’ demonstrate the differing interpretations of the meaning of “memory” that can arise even when participants orient to similar concerns about memory.

I explained at the beginning of every session that I was interested in studying how people remembered their personal experiences in the context of normal conversation. A point of recurring interest was the way in which participants talked about what they thought I expected during the sessions. This example comes from a conversation between Mary and Tina. Mary (23 years) and Tina (26 years) were friends. Prior to the beginning of this excerpt, Mary was talking about showing some new students around campus.

Gr8: 137-156

M You know what, I didn't tell you this, but, um I don't know if you were there, but we were like, I was taking them, like I want to call them the kids, for some reason

T [laugh] the new kids

M the new kids, around____, and we went to like, Mac Hall, and stuff and we were like--

T Did you do that yesterday?

M No, this was... I don't even remember

T That's okay. That's not crucial

M [laughs]

T what?

M This is a study about memory

T [laugh]

M So I'm like really

J More about actual conversations

T Whew, no pressure!

M oh, oh. You just failed [laugh]

J you just became a sermon illustration [laugh]

M I'm really conscious of like, I'm like, hm, anyway, that's interesting

J What were you saying before you ..sneezed [laugh]

M I'm pretty sure it was on Wednesday

T Did we come in? no Wednesday, no classes

M Wednesday, no. No, Tuesday. okay, I'm pretty sure it was on Tuesday.
Yes, it was on Tuesday. Thank you very much.

When Tina asked Mary for specific details, for example, "did you do that yesterday?"

Mary replied "No, this was... I don't even remember". Two interesting things took place following this. First Mary suggested, though jokingly as her laughter implied, that Tina had just violated the terms of the study. Tina's reply that the forgotten information is not "crucial" was aimed at smoothing over Mary's inability to remember – she began with "that's okay." Mary, however, laughed out loud, because, after all, "This is a study about memory." In this instance, Mary orients to her obligation as a participant in a study of memory where her failure to remember may be problematic. On my turn, I clarified that the study was "more about actual conversations." Tina responded with, "Whew, no pressure!" which called attention to the fact that she had just been criticised by Mary for not appreciating what was important and now I had just added another requirement to the task. Mary then offered a response accompanied by laughter – not feeling pressure is associated with failure (or rather, escape from failure). Thus, neither Tina nor Mary took up my attempt to focus attention away from their concerns about accurate remembering. In this example, Mary's understanding of autobiographical remembering is reflected in her talk (as opposed to determined by my instructions): that is, there *is* a correct way to do it.

A second point of interest was how Mary and Tina together resolve the 'problem' of Mary's lack of memory. Mary decides, "I'm pretty sure it was on Wednesday." Tina, however, responded that there weren't any classes that day; so Mary conceded: "I'm pretty sure it was on Tuesday. Yes, it was on Tuesday. Thank you very much." Although Mary did not initially recall which day it was, here she incorporated Tina's version into her own account and then confirmed that it was now her own recollection too: "Yes, it was on Tuesday."

Conclusion. In the above example Mary's 'remembering' involves agreeing with Tina's version. Also, like Matthew and Betty, Mary and Tina were concerned with how well they were remembering. Matthew's concern with "having" memory, Betty's concern with remembering things that actually happened and Mary and Tina's concern with "accuracy" in remembering reflect common sense understandings of memory that are consistent with cognitive approaches to memory (which treat memories as 'actual' units of recorded data -- to be retrieved when necessary). Yet, sometimes, the participants' understandings of what memory is supposed to be are not consistent with the kinds of challenges that arise in actual conversation. These kinds of contradictions are consistent with a discursive approach that considers definitions of memory in terms of participants' concerns and studies remembering as a discursive production.

Chapter 4: General Discussion

“Your Grandfather couldn’t remember where he put his head if it wasn’t fastened on.”

~ Grandmother

The following chapter contains a general discussion of the analyses reported in Chapters 2 and 3 as well as the contributions of this research to an understanding of autobiographical remembering. I begin with a short synopsis reviewing the purposes of my study and the procedures followed. In order to move on to a discussion of the analyses I will begin each section with the questions that informed that part of the study. Finally, I will briefly discuss the study’s limitations followed by a discussion of the implications of my analysis for future research in this area.

The Study in Review

At the beginning of this work, building on both Brewer’s (1996) definition of ‘recollective memory,’ and a discursive understanding of ‘remembering’ (e.g., Edwards, 1997) I introduced **autobiographical remembering** as *a discursive act*, specifically, the act of recounting personal events, including any event from one’s past in which one was personally present or involved. Thus autobiographical remembering was understood as an *occasioned, contextually situated discourse* involving the discursive production of autobiographical accounts of one’s life – accounts produced in specific settings for specific purposes. The purpose of this research was to take up the traditional cognitive notion of autobiographical memory from a discursive perspective with a view to learning how autobiographical memory is treated in both research text and everyday conversation. I described how, from a discursive perspective, autobiographical memories may be

understood as discursive phenomena: that is, “not merely as mental reflections of a life lived, but as instances of a culturally and historically located textual genre” (Edwards, 1997, p.267). When applying this discursive approach, the organization of autobiographical memory becomes the study of autobiographical discourse in talk and text.

One of the most important features distinguishing between the cognitive psychological understanding of autobiographical memory and the discursive account of autobiographical remembering is their treatment of *language*. In the cognitive accounts that I reviewed in the first chapter, language was defined as a kind of structural framework for representing and communicating meanings from one individual to another. Some of the different ways in which this treatment of language can be taken up in research were demonstrated in the textual analysis of the four cognitive studies in Chapter 2 (a discussion of which will follow in this chapter). In contrast to such cognitive accounts, discourse analysts view language use in terms of social action performed in talk, contextualized both by the moment and the socio-cultural setting, and carried out for some purpose. Thus, the focus of analysis becomes descriptions as they are used in talk, referring very specifically to the kinds of things that people say, and the actions people are trying to accomplish in their descriptions. In Chapter 3, which foregrounded the importance of language from a discursive perspective, the importance of language for remembering was studied by examining the way in which people talk when they remember, as well as the particular events they choose to remember and what is accomplished by remembering a particular event in a particular way in a particular time

and place. To this end, autobiographical remembering was studied in the context of conversation.

The overall goal of this study was to investigate autobiographical remembering as it is constructed in talk and text. In terms of text, a critical analysis of the autobiographical memory literature was conducted, with an in-depth analysis of four cognitive studies aimed at examining the ways in which “autobiographical memory” has been defined and talked about within the genre of psychological studies. The emphases/reasons for this “textual” critique are two-fold: first, there is the matter of identifying how others (in particular, cognitive psychologists) account for autobiographical memory; and secondly, (and this follows from the first point of investigation), I want to see how these accounts compare to a discursive account of autobiographical remembering. ‘Talk’ was the focus of the second part of the study, featuring an examination of autobiographical remembering in the context of everyday conversation through a discourse analysis of transcribed conversations.

Chapter 2: Analysis of published research texts

In Chapter 2, I was interested in the ways in which “autobiographical memory” has been defined and talked about within the genre of psychological studies. Specifically, I wanted to examine how each of the selected papers ‘worked’ as a piece of cognitive psychology: that is, how did this research contribute to, detract from, or otherwise modify the existing understanding of autobiographical memory within the cognitive psychology literature? Additionally, I explored how these articles managed the discursive aspects of autobiographical memory. And finally, in terms of the interpretations or accounts given

in these articles, are there alternative interpretations that might be highlighted by a discursive approach to autobiographical remembering?

‘Working’ as pieces of cognitive psychology. Every piece of research (including my own) gives a particular account or version of what is being studied that, when considered against a larger body of accounts, works to contribute to, detract from or otherwise influence the research in the field. In general, each of the studies analyzed contributed to the reification of the individualist mechanistic understanding of autobiographical memory that exists within the cognitive psychological literature. It may be useful at this point to recall Potter’s (1996) definition of reifying discourse: “I will refer to discourse which is constructing versions of the world as solid and factual as *reifying* discourse. *Reifying* means to turn something abstract into a material thing... “ (p.107; emphasis, his). The concept of memory (and autobiographical memory, in particular) is an abstract concept – as I have argued, it is a discursive category which has been culturally constructed to describe what people are doing when they remember/reminisce about events from their pasts. Remembering is a category we have chosen to describe what we do when we talk or write (or think) about our past experiences: it is not, however, a material record of those experiences. Yet, often within the studies reviewed in Chapter 2, autobiographical memory *is* treated as “solid and factual” – a material thing. For example, Brown and Schopflocher (1998) required participants to generate autobiographical memories in the lab so that they could study “the associations that bind event memories”. In this study, it is the *nature* of the bonds that bind event memories that are considered in the abstract; event memories themselves

are treated as discrete quantifiable units of analysis: facts to be retrieved from a person's memory.

Similarly, Rubin and Schulkind (1997) required their participants to produce autobiographical memories in response to computer generated cue words so that these "memories" could be charted in a lifespan distribution curve. It was taken for granted that the participants would automatically do this and that they would produce the sort of memories that the researchers had in mind. In both studies (i.e., Brown & Schopflocher, 1998 and Rubin & Schulkind, 1997) the autobiographical memories produced by the participants became the quantifiable units of analysis; in both studies it was presumed that an autobiographical memory can be triggered or induced with a word or phrase prompt. Neither study explained what *counts as* an autobiographical memory. Only Brown and Schopflocher give an example of one event memory given in response to another event memory:

For example in the current experiment, one participant first recalled, "I cut my finger on a tube with radioactive toxin in it." Later, this description was presented as a *cuing event*, and she responded with the following *cued event*: I spent nearly two hours waiting to see the nurse at this hospital." (470.7-471.0, emphasis, the authors')

There is no discussion about what it is about "I cut my finger on a tube with radioactive toxin in it" that qualifies it as a remembered event. For instance, if the participant said

this in conversation with her lab partner, she might be using it as an excuse for not cleaning up the lab.

In the process of quantifying autobiographical memories for analysis, research was designed to reduce autobiographical memories to their component parts. For Brown and Schopflocher this meant that remembered events must be typed within 90 seconds of the prompt and on an 80-character computer field. In Rubin and Schulkind, participants were timed with a stopwatch as they wrote down their memory in response to a cue word that was read to them – they were given 124 cue words in a session. In both these studies, autobiographical memories were stripped of any contextualizing factors.

Haden et al. (1997) and Hirst and Manier (1996) also reified the cognitive aspects of autobiographical memory, despite their recognition that autobiographical remembering is related to the social world. While starting with qualitative data (in terms of tape-recorded adult-child conversations), Haden et al. reduced this potentially rich discursive text into component utterances using a coding system “designed to capture the narrative structure of these conversations” (297.footnote), to see if parental styles of reminiscing can predict children’s reminiscing abilities. Three aspects of memory were given the status of material entities: the narrative structure of memory, parental reminiscing styles, and children’s reminiscing abilities. Similarly, Hirst and Manier broke down family conversation down into “narrative units” in order to see how “family roles” predicted group reminiscing.

Incorporating the social: Managing the discursive aspects of autobiographical memory. While the last two papers (i.e., Haden et al., 1997; Hirst &

Manier, 1996) make the most obvious attempt to account for the social aspects of autobiographical memory (referring to it as “reminiscing” and “autobiographical remembering,” respectively), all four papers in some way acknowledge the social dimension of autobiographical remembering. According to Brown and Schopflocher, the organization of personal memories reflects a certain *narrative* coherence (“like episodes in a story”, 470.4). Yet, this narrative coherence is the result of “narrative-like memory structures which organize autobiographical memories in the brain through a set of “computational processes” and are implicated in the formation of the “interevent associations” that connect memories (470.4). This use of the term narrative is consistent with the cognitive understanding of language discussed earlier (i.e., as a type of structural framework for representing meaning). In like manner, in their discussion of their preference for the term “bump” as opposed to “reminiscence bump”, Rubin and Schulkind made an interesting choice to limit themselves to the more scientific autobiographical memories generated in the laboratory as opposed to the theoretical richness of reminiscences done for their own purposes – perhaps they mean (and their meaning is vague at best) that social remembering does not lend itself to quantitative analysis. In any event, social aspects of remembering are not mentioned elsewhere in their paper.

The last two papers explicitly included the social aspect of remembering in their studies – yet even with their emphasis on the social, both papers were drawn back to cognitive explanations in their analysis. Haden et al. studied how reminiscing skills are taught to children through parent-child reminiscing. While acknowledging the influence

that conversing with parents can have on autobiographical remembering, this influence is theorized in terms of cognitive abilities that are 'scaffolded' by the parents who enact precisely defined parental styles. Parents are thought to scaffold children's autobiographical memory structures, providing an internal template with which children learn these abilities. Hirst and Manier's work was the most socially-oriented text reviewed in Chapter 2. They emphasized the socially negotiated aspects of group recollection, paying particular attention to how roles are played out by individual family members. However, as was discussed in Chapter 2, the *starting point* of analysis for Hirst and Manier was four individuals, interviewed in isolation. When these individuals came together for group recollections, their conversation was broken down into narrative units that were coded and quantified in order to calculate the strength of individual member's roles. Hirst and Manier were concerned with how these individuals "know and influence each other's contents" (Potter, 1997, p.90). A discursive perspective would ask how family members work together to construct group remembering.

Implications of analysis. In reifying autobiographical memory as an individual cognitive process, researchers assume a very narrow and descriptively impoverished definition of what it means to remember personal experiences. Even in the studies where the social aspect of remembering was included, the richness of the text, and the actions that participants were accomplishing in the text were minimized or ignored altogether. In all four of the studies discussed above, reducing autobiographical memories to their component parts in order to generate quantifiable data means removing the contextual, interactive, and (to borrow Rubin and Schulkind's term) *theoretically richer* aspects of

autobiographical memories. When one considers the narrative detail and discursive complexities of the autobiographical rememberings that were the focus of chapter three, the component parts of autobiographical memory available for quantitative analysis appear rather limited.

What is needed is an approach to autobiographical remembering which considers the complexities of autobiographical remembering as they occur in a social context; an approach that includes in its analysis the discursive richness and the theoretical complexity which these earlier studies dismiss. These are the advantages of a discursive take on autobiographical remembering, i.e., treating autobiographical remembering as a discursive accomplishment, something people do in a socially managed/negotiated, interactive context. From this perspective, it is useful to study autobiographical remembering as it occurs naturally in talk.

Chapter 3: Autobiographical remembering in talk/conversation

In Chapter 3, I was interested in studying autobiographical remembering from a discursive perspective, as it occurred in the context of ordinary conversation. The following questions informed my analysis: how is memory worked up in the context of everyday conversation? What is the function of autobiographical remembering in these conversations (that is, what are the participants doing in their remembering)? A further question was generated while doing the analysis: how do the participants talk about remembering/memory?

Transitions and turn-taking. I first mentioned the idea of turn-taking in chapter 1, as a kind of discursive alternative to the idea of cued retrieval. So one aspect of the

participants' rememberings that caught my attention was the variety of ways in which *transitions between stories* are managed by the participants and the way in which people's successive stories/rememberings were occasioned in the talk. Most often, people talked about remembered events that were related in some way to topics previously suggested/occasioned in the talk. Sometimes discussion about one topic led smoothly to another person's remembered story. But most often, transitions were not managed so smoothly: people cut each other off; one person remembered the interesting story she wanted to tell after twenty minutes of other conversation; sometimes, a participant would be in the middle of a story and be interrupted; and sometimes someone would begin a story, but have to stop and explain it to the rest of us. For example, during the Group 2 session we were talking and all of a sudden Betty started singing. It turned out that something we were talking about had reminded her of "the Bee Song", and once she explained it, it all made sense. *This* kind of discursive messiness is what I mean when I talk about transitions being managed in conversation. It is a kind of messiness that does not lend itself easily to theories about fixed reminiscence styles or role-types in group recollections. The discursive business of remembering makes sense when it is located in a specific conversational context and new topics, interruptions, and definitions are 'analysed' as they arise in conversation as participant concerns. Furthermore, people position themselves within their storied remembering, position others, or resist being positioned by others. In so doing they construct versions of themselves. Remembering (in this case autobiographical remembering) is a complex discursive accomplishment requiring complex discursive analysis.

Autobiographical remembering/memory as a participant's concern. This analysis suggested, among other things, that the current definitions or theories of autobiographical memory in the psychological literature do not embrace the many ways in which people talk about autobiographical memory in conversation. For instance, one participant could not remember where she was at the time of the event she was describing and became distracted. The reason for her distraction was clear when she said to me "Oh, this is no good for your study, is it?" She was worried that she was remembering incorrectly, or insufficiently, to satisfy the requirements of a study on autobiographical remembering. Another participant asked me, "Is this the kind of stuff you want?" Their questions suggested that, at least in a research setting, some kinds of remembering might be better or more appropriate than others. From a discursive perspective, however, this is not the case: autobiographical memories/rememberings are treated as discursive phenomena -- as the participant's personal concern, a matter of how they give account of themselves and their pasts (Edwards, 1997). Autobiographical remembering, then, is not only defined in conversation (e.g., by how participants remember), but what *counts as* autobiographical remembering is also worked up in conversation as a participant's concern.

Contributions, Limitations, and Suggestions for Future Research

As a discourse analyst, I am persuaded of the importance of multiple perspectives as they come up in text and talk. In that vein, the cognitive psychological approach to autobiographical memory offers what is clearly an important perspective within both psychology and the culture at large. Notions such as remembering, forgetting, memory accuracy, cuing, storage and retrieval of memories provide academic and cultural norms

for the description and understanding of autobiographical memory. As demonstrated in Chapter Two, the writings and research of cognitive psychologists provide a discursive resource from which to study how people (in this case, autobiographical memory researchers) talk about memory. Furthermore, as was the case in the conversations discussed in Chapter Three, sometimes the ways in which participants talk about memory are informed by the norms referred to above. My aim has been to treat cognitive norms as being discursive productions, while still acknowledging the explanatory power that these cognitive descriptions hold for autobiographical memory (c.f. Edwards' discussion of discourse and script formulations, 1997, p. 164).

As I have already endeavoured to demonstrate, I believe that a discursive approach to studying autobiographical remembering allows for the richness, diversity and complexity of people's storied remembering of their lives. In addition to this, taking up definitions of autobiographical memory as they are brought up in conversation as participants' concerns meaningfully broadens our understanding of what *counts as* autobiographical remembering. The ability to remember one's life, to create and manage accounts of who one is in conversation is rarely recognised in the traditional autobiographical memory literature. As is evident from the excerpts I have analyzed, people use discourse in a variety of creative and sophisticated ways. In short: our discursive way of getting things done makes for a fascinating realm of study.

I chose to study autobiographical memory (or autobiographical remembering) because it is an area of the memory literature in which researchers must concern themselves with *memory as narrative*: that is, with the narratives that people generate to

talk about some remembered aspect or personal event in their lives. In addition, research in autobiographical memory is a growing, dynamic field of interest with, for instance, two edited books on the topic published in the last 3 years. While there are some researchers who approach autobiographical memory strictly from within a cognitive framework, many researchers are trying to integrate the social, interactive aspect of autobiographical memories into the traditional cognitive understanding of memory. It is this element within autobiographical memory research which makes a discursive analysis of autobiographical memory not only timely but necessary. It was evident from the analysis in Chapter 3 that the practice of autobiographical remembering is an integral discursive practice through which people define themselves, work out their histories and manage their personal stories. Thus, research on autobiographical remembering also bears on other elements of social life.

Moving from cognition to discourse, and from talk to text was challenging. One particular challenge was deciding how much material to draw on in reporting the analysis. Every conversational session provided discursively rich material, and necessarily I could not include it all. In hindsight, a thorough analysis of two or three transcripts might have been sufficient. With 10 conversations in hand however I was compelled to analyse parts of all of them. As a result, my analyses do not completely follow any one conversation and consequently I necessarily miss some of the transitions and discursive moves in each session. Another consideration was the 'artificial' nature of the study. While the coffee and the cookies did help to facilitate more 'natural' conversation, the participants were fully aware that they were participating in a 'study'

and it came up frequently in the conversation. I confess I am ambivalent about this particular limitation. These sessions were *not* conversations that occurred naturally as part of every-day talk (I made them happen). Yet, when the reason for the sessions came up as participants' concerns during the sessions, it made for some very interesting talk about 'memory' and 'remembering.' At the very least my analysis allows for a useful comparison with autobiographical studies conducted within the cognitive perspective (such as those highlighted in Chapter 2), identifying aspects of autobiographical remembering that are rendered invisible by the social constraints of the methods employed in cognitive studies.

In conclusion, having demonstrated the need for a discursive approach to autobiographical remembering, I now urge the necessity of further research in this area. The potential applications of this kind of research are numerous. The study of autobiographical remembering as it occurs in the context of conversation is the type of social context *in which we most frequently engage in remembering in every day life*. By describing how we remember in every day contexts, this research contributes to a general understanding of the process of remembering. Such understandings are useful for many areas of social life, including the formation and maintenance of social groups where autobiographical memories also tell the story of, for example, a family; the courtroom where eye witness memory constitutes a special kind of autobiographical memory; and the clinic where clients' autobiographical memories constitute the materials with which clinical psychologists and other professionals work.

I would like to emphasize, in particular, the important work that could be done by examining in more detail what it is that people *accomplish or work toward* when they ‘remember.’ *Why* do people tell stories about their lives? People do many things through autobiographical remembering – which accounts for the ‘richness, diversity and complexity of people’s storied rememberings’ referred to earlier. For instance, when Grandfather tells his stories, how do we make sense of his spinning wild, entertaining tales? A discourse analysis of conversations between, for example, grandparents and their grandchildren where grandparents remember events from their past would offer the possibility of addressing a variety of research questions. How do grandparents and grandchildren position one another and themselves in the context of grandparents’ stories? Do they accept or reject this mutual positioning? What is accomplished through such intergenerational story-telling? Do, for example, grandparents use their life stories to construct versions of the world rooted in particular cultural or ethnic traditions? Do the grandchildren take up, transform, or reject such constructions? While this is but one example, it illustrates the generative possibilities associated with a discursive perspective on autobiographical remembering, where reminiscing about one’s past is not treated as an end in itself, but as a conversational moment where reminiscing is strategic and performative.

Endnotes

¹ Brewer's (1996) definition of 'recollective memory' is a reworking of his earlier definition of 'personal ' memory (1986); he offers recollective memory here as a plausible substitute for the idea of 'autobiographical memory'.

² Some researchers believe that autobiographical memories are by their very nature episodic, and in terms of the definition/understanding of autobiographical memory used in the present discussion, it is an acceptable association. However, others (for instance, Rybash & Monaghan, 1999) have argued that autobiographical memory is composed of both episodic and procedural memories.

³ As we have already seen, not all cognitive memory models employ the 'computer' metaphor. For instance, connectionist models work with the more comprehensive analogy of the 'neural network'. The limits of this perspective when it comes to explaining 'remembering' as a socially negotiated/driven phenomena will be discussed later in the chapter and in the next chapter. In the present discussion, while the retrieval process from a connectionist perspective calls for a potentially more complex pattern of memory retrieval, the basic premise of internal memories retrieved in response to an external prompt is similar.

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Appendix A**Topics Suggestions:**

- your experiences of dorm life
- leaving home to come to university
- what happened to you the first day of classes
- things you remember doing during Block week
- getting lost/finding your way around campus/Calgary
- writing your first exam or giving your first presentation
- talk about specific experiences you've had since coming to school
 - e.g., student rallies
 - sports teams
 - going to the gym (or other facilities)
 - clubs
 - activities

Appendix B
UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
CONSENT FORM

Research Project Title:

Autobiographical Remembering, Cues and Performance: A Discursive Study.

Investigators: Julie Quinn (M.Sc. Student, Department of Psychology)

Dr. H. Lorraine Radtke (Project Supervisor, Department of Psychology)

Funding Agency: National Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC)

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, please ask.

Please take time to read this form carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Description of Research Project

Autobiographical remembering is the remembering of events or experiences from a person's life -- that is, of any event or experience in which one was personally present or involved. The purpose of this study is to examine autobiographical memory in the context of every day conversation thus taking into account the social-interactive properties of remembering. By describing how we remember in every day contexts, this research will contribute to a general understanding of the process of remembering.

Since all of the participants are university students, you (and another participant) will be asked to recall some of your memories of your experiences at university.

Sessions will last at most 60 minutes. You will be given a list of possible topics relating to life at university, and asked to talk about which ever ones interest you. You are free to choose suggestions from the list, or come up with a topic not on the list, provided both participants agree and you are talking about things that *you remember*. Suggested topics are:

- your experiences of dorm life
- leaving home to come to university
- what happened to you the first day of classes
- things you remember doing during Block week
- getting lost/finding your way around campus/Calgary
- writing your first exam or giving your first presentation

- talk about specific experiences you've had since coming to school:
 - e.g., student rallies
 - sports teams
 - going to the gym (or other facilities)
 - clubs
 - activities

You are free to terminate the session at any time.

All interview sessions will be conducted, taped and later transcribed by Julie Quinn. The interview and all resulting data will be **anonymous** and **confidential**. In transcribing the interview, we will eliminate any information which could be used to identify you. Pseudonyms will be used to refer to you and any other individuals identified in the interview. Any information which we publish will not reveal individual identities. In the reporting of data, transcript excerpts may be included but care will be taken not to include any identifying information.

This is to certify that I, _____, hereby agree to participate as a volunteer in this research project within the Department of Psychology, University of Calgary, under the supervision of Dr. H. Lorraine Radtke. The research project and my part in the project (i.e., the interview) have been fully explained to me by Julie Quinn and/or Dr. Radtke, and I understand the explanation. The procedures of the project have been fully described and discussed in detail with me. I have been given an opportunity to ask whatever questions I may have had and all such questions and inquiries have been answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that I am free not to talk about specific topics or answer questions in the session.

I understand that any data or answers to questions will remain confidential with regard to my identity. All confidential data (interview tapes, transcripts, computer disks) will be stored in Dr. Radtke's research lab, at the University of Calgary, in a locked filing cabinet to which only Julie Quinn and Dr. Radtke will have access. Raw data will be disposed of by the investigators at the end of the project as per the Canadian Psychological Association Code of Ethics.

I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and terminate my participation in the study at any time without penalty.

I understand that I may request a summary of the results of this study. In signing this form I fully understand that I am participating in this study as part of my educational experience in the Department of Psychology. In exchange for my time I expect to gain some understanding of research and some of the ideas currently being

explored in psychology. If, after the study, I feel I have not gained sufficient educational benefit, or have other concerns regarding this experience, I may register my concerns with Dr. T. B. Rogers, Chair: Department of Psychology Research Ethics Board. He will insure that my comments are acted upon with no fear that I will be identified personally. Dr. Rogers can be reached at: A255B, 220-6378, tbrogers@ucalgary.ca.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a participant. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the Investigators, Sponsors, or involved Institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time. Your continued participation should be as informed as your consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

If you have further questions concerning matters related to this research, please contact:

Julie Quinn

220-7130

e-mail: jeaquinn@ucalgary.ca

If you have any questions concerning the ethics review of this project, or the way you have been treated, you may also contact **Mrs. Patricia Evans, Research Services Office, Room 602 Earth Sciences, telephone: 220-3782**. If you have concerns about the project itself, please contact the researcher.

Participant

Date

Investigator/Witness (optional)

Date

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. This is the ethical approval of the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board.

OPTIONAL:

I, _____ would like to receive a synopsis of the study's findings.

Please mail these results to:

Appendix C

Debriefing Procedures.

Participants were made aware of the nature of the investigation at the outset of each session, both verbally, and as part of the consent form they are asked to sign. However, at the end of the session, participants were given time to talk, ask questions, or voice any concerns they may have had about the study.

Specifically, at the end of the session, I:

- explained to the participants that my area of research is Theoretical Psychology, a branch of psychology concerned with the critical examination of foundational ideas and assumptions in the discipline. Then I explained how being a qualitative researcher enables me to take a different approach to studying traditional psychological concepts. I explained that from a discursive perspective, *remembering* is a social act, something that people do in order to communicate something about themselves and their lives. In particular, my reason for having them talk together about their remembered experiences was to be able to study how remembering is negotiated in conversation.
- asked them what it was like to participate in this study. Was this a comfortable place to talk about their personal memories?
- did they have any questions about the study? Would they like to know more about autobiographical memory, or qualitative research?
- emphasized that if they should have any questions later about the study, about my research, theoretical psychology or research in general, they can contact me anytime at my e-mail address.