

*Self-Construction through  
Narrative Practices: A  
Chinese and American  
Comparison of Early  
Socialization*

PEGGY J. MILLER, HEIDI FUNG, and JUDITH MINTZ

In recent years discourse-level language has emerged as an important locus of inquiry into a number of problems central to psychological anthropology (e.g., Lutz 1985; Shweder and Much 1987; White 1992). Prominent among them is the cultural constitution of self and personhood. In developmental psychology a similar trend is apparent, particularly with respect to processes of self-construction in early childhood (e.g., Bruner 1986, 1990; Miller, Mintz et al. 1992; Nelson 1989; Snow 1990). Thus the shift from a representational view of language to a broader discourse view is evident in the two subdisciplines that intersect in the problem of how children construct culture-specific selves. Instead of treating lexical items or utterance-level propositions as semantic encodings of self-referential categories, researchers have begun to examine how self-expressive talk is constructed with and responsive to others. In this view, language is not merely a methodological tool

for revealing the categorical self: it is the means by which selves are created and transformed through the dual capacity of language to be both reflective of and embedded in interpersonal experience.

In this article we explore the process by which young children, in coordination with other social actors, reconstruct their personal experiences. Focusing on Chinese and American two-year-olds, we locate self construction within a discourse practices theory of childhood socialization. This framework derives from several powerful theoretical currents—Vygotsky's (1987[1934]) sociohistorical theory (Wertsch 1985, 1991), practice and performance approaches to language in linguistic anthropology and language socialization (e.g., Bauman and Briggs 1990; Duranti and Goodwin 1992; Ochs 1988; Schieffelin 1990), and Bourdieu's (1977, 1990) practice theory of social life—that have revitalized thinking about socialization. Taken together, these theories converge on a view of language as socially situated practices that are organized beyond the sentence level into genres, dialogues, and multichanneled performances. They share the premise that meaning is constituted through discursive practices, with the implication that an adequate model of socialization must incorporate talk in a principled way.

As applied to the problem of socialization in early childhood, a discourse practices model takes as its central task the identification of the communicative activities that occur routinely in the course of everyday life, mediating relations between children and their caregivers and companions.<sup>1</sup> It posits that the social and psychological consequences of children's routine participation in these practices will depend on how messages are packaged in discourse. When messages are packaged in self-relevant ways, the consequences for the child include not only the acquisition of discursive skills but the creation of self or identity.

Although there are many types of everyday family discourse that have socializing implications for the self, we chose to study stories of personal experience—stories that people tell in ordinary conversation in which they relate past experiences from their own lives. Personal storytelling provides a fruitful focus for comparative analysis because it is widely practiced yet variably constituted in cultures around the world (Miller and Moore 1989). Moreover, several sources of narrative-self affinity—temporal, causal, evaluative, and conversational—converge in this narrative genre, providing a rationale for treating personal storytelling as an important

locus for self-construction (Miller 1994; Miller, Potts et al. 1990). In addition, because it is now well established that children from a variety of cultural backgrounds are able to recount past experiences in conversation by two to two-and-a-half years of age (e.g., Eisenberg 1985; Heath 1983; Miller, Potts et al. 1990; Miller and Sperry 1988; Sperry 1991), personal storytelling affords the opportunity to study the beginnings of self-construction.

In this article we compare personal storytelling as practiced by Chinese families in Taipei and American families in Chicago. Our goal is to gain insight into the actual process of self-construction by examining how young children's past experiences are narrated in the two cultures. We ask how personal storytelling is practiced in the everyday settings that young children inhabit, what kinds of participant roles children and caregivers assume, which of the child's personal experiences are treated as reportable, and what kinds of interpretive frameworks are instantiated in narrations of young children's experiences.

A second goal is to demonstrate the usefulness of a discourse practices model for comparative inquiry into socialization and self-construction. There is strong consensus on the need to move beyond dichotomizing comparisons of psychological functioning in Western and non-Western cultures (e.g., Howard 1985; Kleinman and Kleinman 1989; Spiro 1993), and concrete proposals have been offered for achieving more adequate comparisons (e.g., Corsaro and Miller 1992; Gaskins 1994; Lucy 1992; Markus and Kitayama 1991; Shweder and Sullivan 1993; White 1992; Wierzbicka 1993). Thus, finding effective ways to represent the intricate patterning of similarities and differences among cultures—without subduing the complexity of particular meaning in each—poses a challenge of major importance.

A discourse practices perspective, as we envision it, has several key implications for how this challenge can be met. The first is that comparative study must be grounded in rigorous description of discourse practices, with their inherent systematicity and variability. A second implication is that there is a great deal more to stories (and other cultural "texts") than disembodied texts, and that cultural principles are expressed not just in the content of stories but in the way that narrative discourse is organized internally and in relation to larger events and sequences of talk. The unit of analysis is thus the entire event of narration rather than the isolated

story. Still another implication is that any given practice carries with it multiple interpretive frameworks that coexist in complex relationship with one another. And, finally, a discourse practices approach acknowledges the individual variation within cultural groups and thus requires that the idiosyncratic and personal be taken into account (Miller and Mintz 1993).

The article is organized as follows. We begin with an introduction to the study and to the worlds in which the children live, and then describe how personal storytelling is made available to young children in the two cultural cases. In the second part we focus more directly on self-construction, situating our analysis within Lutz and White's (1986) comparative framework for studying emotional lives in cultural context. We show how two of the problems of social relationship they propose get played out similarly in some ways, differently in other ways, in Chinese and American narrations of personal experience. The most striking contrast between the two cases concerns how a child's violations of cultural codes are treated narratively.

#### STUDYING PERSONAL STORYTELLING IN TAIPEI AND CHICAGO

The comparison reported here is part of a larger comparative project designed to investigate how personal storytelling is used to socialize young children within the family context (Miller, in press; Miller, Mintz et al. 1992). The Chinese study was done in Taipei, Taiwan; the American study in "Longwood," a middle-class European American community in Chicago. In keeping with standard research practice in the field of language socialization, we combined ethnographic fieldwork with extensive audio and video recording of naturally occurring talk. Each researcher spent at least two years in the field and collected both cross-sectional and longitudinal data, encompassing the period from two-and-a-half to five years of age.

The second author, a native speaker of Mandarin Chinese who was born and raised in Taipei, worked with the Chinese families. The third author, who grew up in middle-class European American communities in the United States, worked with the American families. We chose to assign researchers to cultures about which they had native intuitions, thereby enabling them to draw on their

cultural expertise in custom-designing their interactions with children and their families. We also adopted the following general guideline: try to participate as a friend who has stopped by for a casual visit; at the same time, don't "push" narrative talk. Within these parameters, the ethnographers were left to their own ingenuity in negotiating a role with the families.

As it turned out, the two ethnographers negotiated roles that contrasted in an important way. The American researcher came to be treated as a family friend who was addressed by her first name. The Chinese researcher was granted fictive kin status; children were encouraged to call her "Auntie." She was introduced to the families' relatives and was frequently invited to family events, such as dinners or picnics. In parallel with these contrasting roles, the ethnographers participated differently in the families' narrative practices, as we shall see below (see also Miller, in press).

In this article we single out for scrutiny that moment in development when children have just begun to enter into the narrative life of their culture. Our corpus for the two-and-a-half-year-olds consists of four hours of recorded observations for each of nine children in each cultural group, for a total sample per group of 36 hours of home observation. The descriptions of the families and of personal storytelling as a routine practice, presented in the next two sections, are based on the full sample plus extensive field notes. Later in the article we examine more intensively the naturally occurring narrations produced by three families from each cultural group, with the aim of extracting the interpretive frameworks instantiated in personal storytelling. This analysis is based on verbatim transcriptions of more than 40 narrations per group (see Miller, Mintz et al. 1992 for description of procedures for transcribing speech and identifying co-narrations).

Both the Chinese and the American youngsters whom we studied came from two-parent families who lived in large cities, owned their own homes, and were economically secure. All but a few of the parents were college educated. Despite these similarities, the children were growing up in very different worlds.

#### TAIPEI

Taipei, the largest city in Taiwan, Republic of China, has undergone enormous change in the second half of this century, beginning with the imposition of Kuomintang (KMT) rule at the end of

World War II and the transfer of the KMT government from mainland China to Taipei in 1949. When the Chinese nationalists arrived on the island, Taiwan was a rural society with a capital city of 200,000 inhabitants (Chang 1987). The second author's parents remember watching water buffalo graze in the fields outside their house in Taipei. Today more than 2.5 million people live in a city that has quadrupled in area (Taipei Municipal Government 1988). In what has come to be known as the "economic miracle," an agrarian economy was transformed into an industrialized economy in a matter of decades. By 1990 Taiwan had become a consumer society, with an average per capita income exceeding U.S.\$8,000, a low rate of unemployment, a relatively equitable distribution of income, and a trade surplus envied by other nations (Simon and Kau 1992).

In parallel with economic development, social change has been rapid as well. Forty percent of the nation's workforce are high school graduates, the literacy rate exceeds that of the United States, and women are entering the workforce in record numbers (Cohen 1988). Inevitably, development has exacted its costs: severe noise and air pollution, nonstop traffic jams, and rising rates of violent crime (Simon and Kau 1992).

In comparison with the economic and social spheres, political life in Taiwan has been slow to change. Significant reforms have occurred in the last several years, however, marking a transition from the one-party dictatorship established by the KMT to a more democratic form of government (Simon and Kau 1992; Tien 1989). Martial law, in effect for 40 years, was lifted in 1987, and opposition parties have been legalized. The first presidential election was held in March 1996.

The families in our study are members of the first "middle-class" generation in Taiwan. Most of the parents were college educated, and the majority of fathers worked in white-collar jobs (e.g., physician, businessman, architect, engineer). Two of the parents received graduate degrees or job training in the West, and several had a close relative who was currently residing in the United States or Canada. All of the parents were born in Taiwan and had two children.

In counterpoint to these similarities, our sample also reflects the ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity characteristic of contemporary Taipei. The sample included children whose grandparents

were native-born Taiwanese as well as those whose grandparents came to Taiwan from mainland China after the Communist revolution. Indeed, several of the families were "mixed" in that one parent was a second-generation mainlander and one was Taiwanese. Although half of the parents spoke fluent Taiwanese, all used Mandarin Chinese, the country's official language, with their children. Many parents in Taipei want their children to learn Mandarin early so that they will not be at a disadvantage in school (Farris 1988). The situation with respect to religious affiliation was especially complex. Folk religion provided a common thread that wove through the families in complex and subtle ways.<sup>2</sup> At the same time a variety of other religious traditions were represented both within and across families. For example, in one case the parents worshipped at folk temples, but the primary caregiver was a devout Protestant. In another family the grandmother worshipped daily at a Protestant church yet remained strongly committed to folk religious beliefs.

In contrast to Chicago, Taipei is not organized into distinct neighborhoods. There is little residential segregation by class and ethnicity; an engineer and a fruit vendor or a physician and a gas station attendant might live in the same apartment building. Geographical proximity seemed to play little part in the formation of social networks. Instead, the family and other social institutions, such as church or school, took precedence. In keeping with this pattern, families were recruited for the study through contacts provided by the second author's own family and friends and through the cooperation of a kindergarten. In the latter case, endorsement of the study by the school authorities was not sufficient to persuade families to participate; first-hand contact with the researcher was also necessary.

Owing to continuing migration from outlying areas, space is at a premium in Taipei. Nearly everyone lives in apartments, and housing accounts for the largest chunk of the family budget. The families in our study occupied living spaces that were remarkably similar in size and floor plan: about 1,200 square feet, divided into a living room, a dining area, a small kitchen, three bedrooms, and one or two bathrooms. Most households consisted of the immediate family: mother, father, and two children. This pattern departed from the traditional three-generation household, in which the married couple moved in with the husband's family and the grand-

mother, mother, and other female relatives shared domestic and child-care responsibilities.

Today, as an increasing number of women remain in the work force after their children are born, child-care support is needed more than ever, yet many young couples prefer to establish their own two-generation households. Our sample was divided between mothers who were full-time housewives and those who worked outside the home as teachers or clerks. For the latter, child-care arrangements varied widely. In one family the maternal grandmother lived in the household and took care of the children during the week. In another family the children lived with the maternal aunt and her teenage children while the parents worked, visiting their parents only on the weekend. Two families sent their children to a group day-care center from one year of age. The majority of families, however, entrusted their children to the care of the mother or an older female relative.

The early years of life were spent in close physical and emotional proximity to this caregiver, who supervised and nurtured the child. Even though there was extra space in the apartment and an individual bed for the child in a room shared with an older sibling, the caregiver slept with the young child. Except for excursions to the grocery store, visits with relatives in another part of the city, or trips to school to pick up an older sibling, two-year-olds stayed at home. Their days were punctuated by meals and by a long nap in the early afternoon. Within the constraints of their housekeeping responsibilities, caregivers found time to talk to their youngsters, pretend with them, help with puzzles, play board or card games, and otherwise focus attention on them, one or two at a time. When mothers were busy, youngsters played alone or with a sibling or watched television. The children had a modest number of play-things—stuffed animals, blocks, matchbox cars, cookware sets—that filled a shelf or two in a closet or fit neatly into a toy box.

Children saw their fathers in the evenings and on the weekends. After the family dinner, fathers might play or watch TV with the two-year-old, teach her some simple Chinese characters, or read classical poems to her. Bedtime for adults and children alike was 10:00–11:00 p.m. Weekends were a time for family activities such as picnics, going to the flower market or book exhibition, and visiting or dining out with grandparents and other relatives.

The children's social life thus revolved around the immediate and extended family. Apart from siblings or cousins, preschoolers had little experience with peers. Since families lived in apartment buildings in which neighbors were unacquainted, the children were restricted to their own apartment. Only those who attended day care had regular contact with non-kin of their own age.

Caregivers held high standards for their children's conduct. Two-year-olds were expected to successfully negotiate a home environment that was not child-proofed, offering the temptations of open cabinets and fragile objects. They were expected to listen attentively to their elders, comprehend what was said, and behave accordingly. Misdeeds were dealt with promptly, and rules of conduct were rehearsed. Caregivers also corrected grammar and mispronunciations and rehearsed rhymes and poems. They made sure that two-year-olds knew their full name, parents' names, address, and phone number. Literacy skills were actively cultivated. Parents read to the children and taught them to draw, and some used flash cards to teach Chinese characters or numbers. All of the children were toilet trained by 18 months, and several of the mothers reported that they had begun toilet training at 6 months. When the first author visited the families and gave each child a wrapped present decorated with small candies, she was astonished at their self-control. In keeping with proper etiquette, even the two-year-olds waited until the guests departed to open their gifts.

#### LONGWOOD

The other children in our study lived halfway around the globe from their Chinese counterparts, in a predominantly Irish-Catholic neighborhood in Chicago. Longwood has been a home to Irish Americans for nearly a century, and many of its residents have deep roots in the community. Holidays such as St. Patrick's Day are observed with great enthusiasm and include an annual neighborhood parade. The neighborhood is known locally for the beauty of its streets and homes, several of which are on the national historic registry. Civic organizations have worked actively to preserve the special character and small-town ambience of the neighborhood. Many express disdain for a newly established shopping mall and feel that it is important to resist the homogenization they see in nearby suburbs. At the same time, Longwood has responded to demographic changes in the city, especially the expansion of an

adjacent African American neighborhood. The community made a determined effort in the 1970s not to join the flow of "white flight" from the city and to work toward increasing ethnic integration. Although most families continue to praise the neighborhood and take tremendous pride in the continuity of their community, several have recently expressed doubts about its ability to sustain itself in the face of continuing diversification.

Most of the parents in the study had college or professional degrees from local universities or community colleges. Fathers' occupations varied: some were lawyers, several owned their own businesses, others worked for the city as policemen or firemen or held jobs in advertising or sales. In contrast to the Chinese families, none of the mothers worked full-time outside the home, but many had worked as social workers, clerks, or teachers prior to having children. A number of mothers participated in "babysitting co-ops," which allowed them to share child care, and some offered day care in their homes for other families in the community. Most of the families had three or four children; none had fewer than two. Many of the parents were natives of Longwood and had parents or siblings living nearby. Parents typically had at least five siblings, and it was not uncommon to meet those who had eight or nine.

Families were recruited for the project by word of mouth. The initial contact was made through the intervention of a friend who had grown up in Longwood. He introduced the researcher to a relative who referred her to friends and neighbors who had children in the desired age range. Recruitment was facilitated by the fact that Longwood's status as a community is based on much more than regional proximity or neighborhood boundaries. Many residents participate in a cohesive social network based on a common cultural heritage and active involvement in one of the three local Catholic churches. Most send their children to the local Catholic school that they themselves attended. Thus the Longwood families were tied by cultural tradition, religion, family history, and active commitment to a community that had a distinct identity within the larger urban environment. Unlike Taipei, where the extended family seemed to be the most vital unit of social organization beyond the immediate family, in Longwood the community and the extended family interlocked to form a level of organization that brought young children into extensive contact with both kin and non-kin.

The families in our sample lived in large, single-family homes located on quiet, exclusively residential, tree-lined streets. Built before World War II, the typical house had two stories, four bedrooms, a recreation room in the basement, and an expansive backyard. Houses in Longwood are almost never placed on the real estate market, being sold instead by word of mouth. Yards are manicured and well kept. A concerted effort is made to keep streets safe and clean to a degree that is unusual in urban environments in the United States. One community member explained that "keeping up the neighborhood" was an implicit expectation among Longwood inhabitants; if a new resident did not maintain his lawn to expected standards, neighbors would "drop by to see if everything was alright" and to offer their "help." Children are often seen riding bikes or tricycles on the sidewalks or playing out on the front lawn.

The interiors of the homes reflected an emphasis on family life. Virtually all the homes in our sample contained playrooms filled with toys. Basement family rooms also contained numerous items to encourage children's play and activities. In addition to rooms and objects that were specifically intended for children, the children generally had access to other parts of the house. The designation of specific portions of a home as children's or family space was not meant to restrict children. Instead, it served to index the high priority that families placed on attending to their young. In short, family and community life was very child centered and quite consciously designed to provide an "optimal" environment for children's perceived needs. At the same time, each member of the family, including the youngest, was provided with his or her own space and property. Children either had their own bedrooms, or two same-sex siblings shared a bedroom in which each had his or her own bed.

Most of the families in our sample expressed the belief that very young children should be cared for routinely by their own mothers. Several mothers also stated that they chose to stay home with their preschool children because they did not want to miss the opportunity to observe and influence their child's development. Thus very young children spent the majority of their time in the home environment under the supervision of their mothers. While children played with siblings or peers, mothers often attended to household chores, periodically checking on the child and engag-

ing in play or bookreading with her. Children also watched videos or TV. Longwood mothers varied in the degree to which they provided structured activities (e.g., baking, doing a crafts project, having the child help with the laundry), but all allowed their children plenty of time for creative, self-initiated play. Aside from play, Longwood children's days were organized around informal meals, an afternoon nap, and often an outing of some sort (e.g., shopping; watching an older sibling's softball game; a trip to the park, the zoo, or a museum; a visit to a nearby relative's home). By the age of three, several of the children began to spend a few half-days per week at one of the local nursery school programs, two of which were church-affiliated.

Fathers spent time with their children in the evenings and on weekends. Many Longwood fathers also moonlighted as baseball and soccer coaches for local children's teams. Fathers interacted with preschoolers at dinner and afterwards by reading, playing, or watching videos with them. Fathers also helped with bath and bedtime. Most preschoolers were put to bed between 8:00 and 9:00 p.m. In households where there were older children, bedtimes were stratified by age, with older children having the privilege of a later bedtime.

In contrast to the Chinese, young children experienced a world that was heavily populated with other children both inside and outside the home. In addition to siblings and cousins, children made friends with their neighbors on the block. In several homes in Longwood, children ran in and out of each other's houses and yards on a casual and frequent basis. Preplanned play dates also took place. Birthday and other holiday parties were arranged for children, and visits to local parks provided another forum for children to meet and interact. Thus, early in their lives, Longwood children were initiated into a peer-based social life through several types of interactional activities and settings in their community.

Within this highly social environment Longwood youngsters were exposed to a great deal of talk in both multiparty and dyadic configurations. As in the "mainstream" case described by Ochs and Schieffelin (1984), mothers talked directly to their youngsters, accommodating to their perspective and language level by building upon and extending the child's semantic intent. This tendency to accommodate to the child was evident in a variety of other practices as well, including childproofing the environment, use of child-

scaled objects and furniture, and abundant provision of toys, as indicated earlier. Talking and listening to children, reading to them, pretending with them, teaching them to play baseball were not just enjoyable experiences but ways in which parents could provide the kind of focused attention that they believed fostered healthy development. Several mothers expressed the view that children need a great deal of adult attention to feel happy and good about themselves. In discussing a popular preschool teacher, they spoke admiringly of her ability to foster the children's self-esteem.

Longwood preschoolers were taught and expected to follow rules of appropriate conduct. When children misbehaved in minor ways—refusing to share with a playmate, quarreling with a sibling, hanging on the dining room curtains—parents intervened promptly and repeatedly if necessary. At the same time, most parents expressed respect for young children's willfulness and appreciated the "clever" ways their youngsters attempted to get what they wanted. When a serious behavior problem occurred, such as hitting or biting another person or an uncontrollable temper tantrum, parents resorted to "time out" procedures or revoked a privilege or treat. For the most part, however, these incidents were not dwelled on by parents, and once settled, were no longer the focus of attention. When misdeeds were discussed, emphasis was placed on the rationale for the rule and on helping the child to understand the reasons why it is important to obey (e.g., if a child hit someone, "That hurts! Say you're sorry!").

In sum, the two groups of children whom we studied from 1988 to 1991 were not "typical" Taiwanese or "typical" Americans and should not be taken as such. They were members of families who occupied a relatively privileged position within their respective societies and created a particular cultural idiom at a particular moment in history. Although Longwood has changed over the past decades, what stands out is the extent to which its identity and continuity with the past have been preserved. Families take pride in their traditional values and family-centered way of life, rooted in long-term prosperity. In Taipei the balance between change and continuity is tipped in the other direction. The Chinese children inhabited a world that differed substantially from those in which their parents and grandparents grew up. We entered their lives at a time when the symptoms of modernization were blindingly obvi-

ous. Yet, as we shall see, traditional Chinese values were also visible, sturdy, and intricate in everyday narrative practices.

### PERSONAL STORYTELLING AS ROUTINE PRACTICE

The first question we asked about personal storytelling was whether it was routinely available to young children in Taipei and Longwood, and, if so, how their narrative participation was structured. We found that personal storytelling occurred regularly as part of everyday family life in both cases. In addition, Chinese and American two-year-olds were exposed to personal storytelling in three related ways. Stories about other people's past experiences were told *around* young children as co-present others. Stories of the young child's past experiences were told collaboratively *with* the child as co-narrator. And stories *about* the young child's past experiences were told in the child's presence, with the child assuming the participant role of co-present other or ratified participant.

In the practice of telling stories *around* the child, a family member narrated to another person a past experience from his or her life. The child was neither a protagonist in the story nor an addressee, but he or she was present during the narration and was free to listen or not, to contribute verbally or not. For example, a Chinese mother might tell her friend, a devotee of the stock market, a story about her successful transaction the week before, or an American mother might tell an older child a story about some mishap that occurred when she went on a camping trip. Young children thus had the opportunity to hear the people who were most important to them select reportable experiences from their lives and narrate them in their own words. We have discussed elsewhere the socializing power of this practice and its relevance to the child's understanding of self and other (see Miller and Moore 1989; Miller, Potts et al. 1990). This article is restricted to analysis of the two practices in which the *child's* past experiences were narrated.

In telling stories *with* young children, the child collaborated with one or more family members in jointly constructing stories about his or her own past experiences. The child spoke in the first person, coparticipants in the second person. Some of these co-narrations were initiated by the two-year-olds, others by caregivers or siblings. Co-narrators prompted, directed, edited, and elaborated on the

child's contributions. For example, a Chinese child, Didi, co-narrated a story with his mother and older sister about an event in which he cried and made a scene at older sister's music lesson, causing his mother to lose face (*hao mei-you mianzi*). The following is an excerpt from the beginning of a much longer co-narration.<sup>3</sup>

#### Example 1

- Mother:* [Looks at child.] Eh, eh, you that day with Mama, with younger sister [pats sister's back], with older sister went to the music class. Was that fun?
- Child:* It was fun.
- Mother:* What didn't the teacher give you?
- Child:* Didn't, didn't give me a sticker.
- Mother:* Didn't give you a sticker. Then you, then what did you do?
- Child:* I then cried.
- Sister:* Cried loudly, "Waah! Waah! Waah!"
- Mother:* Oh, you then cried? Yeah, you constantly went: "Waah, didn't [gestures wiping eyes, makes staccato gesture of fists away from body], why didn't you give me a sticker? [whines] Why didn't you give me a sticker? [whines]," didn't you?
- [Child looks up from book, gazes at mother, smiles, and looks down at book again.]
- Sister:* [To mother:] Yes, "Why didn't you give me a sticker?" [claps hand]
- Mother:* [To child:] Sticker. [sighs] Ai, you made Mama lose face [*hao mei-you mianzi*]. That, that, I wanted to dig my head into the ground. Right? [smiles, shakes head, smiles again]
- [Child points to picture book and says something unintelligible.]
- Sister:* Almost wanted to faint [*hun-dao*]. Mommy almost began to faint [*hun-dao*].

In this example the mother initiated the narration by introducing the topic of the older sister's music lesson. She prompts Didi to recount what happened—that he cried when the teacher did not give him a sticker. (Stickers were rewards for good performance and were distributed only to the students in the music class.) Both mother and older sister elaborate on Didi's contributions to the narration by quoting what he said when denied a sticker and by reenacting his gestures and demeanor.<sup>4</sup> Later in this co-narration Didi and his mother assert conflicting versions of what happened in the past event.

Telling stories *about* young children resembled co-narrated storytelling in that the child was again cast as a protagonist in the story. However, this practice differed in that the narrator addressed the story to a third party, referring to the child in the third person. For

example, Didi's mother later renarrated the story of her son's misconduct, directing it to the researcher as Didi and his sister looked on: "Because at 3, at 4:00 [pause] there was no time, person to take care of him. So that I thought I for the first time might just take him. It turned out to be very very terrible!" In this narrative practice caregivers exercised more extensive control over the story than they did in co-narrations. At the same time, the young child's participant role also differed. Whereas young children were, by definition, verbal participants in co-narrated storytelling, they did not necessarily participate verbally in this narrative practice. They might watch and listen silently; become absorbed in some other activity, apparently tuning out what others said about them; or lend their own voices to the story as ratified participants.

In sum, these findings establish an important similarity between Longwood and Taipei, namely that two-year-olds had ready and varied access to personal storytelling on an everyday basis. In both Chinese and American families children were growing up amid a complex and shifting web of personal storytelling practices. These practices mediated relations between the child and significant others and defined and redefined the child's past experiences in terms of specific interpretive frameworks.

#### INTERPRETIVE FRAMEWORKS FOR NARRATING PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

In their influential review of anthropological research on emotion, Lutz and White (1986) argue that a comparative framework for studying emotional lives in cultural contexts should begin not with biopsychological criteria but with problems of social relationship or existential meaning that cultures often present in emotional terms. They offer a partial list of such problems as "initial comparative reference points" (1986:428) that would shift comparative inquiry away from questions of decontextualized experience to questions about how people make sense of life events. We have found two of the problems that they propose especially useful as points of departure in identifying the interpretive frameworks instantiated in Chinese and American narrations of children's experiences. The first is what they call the "positive" problem of rewarding bonds with others. The second is ego's violation of cultural codes. In the next two sections we address each of these in

turn, examining events of personal storytelling that arose within the flow of family interaction.

#### NARRATED SELVES AS RELATIONAL SELVES

As applied to personal storytelling, the problem of rewarding bonds with others invites us to ask whether the past experiences of two-year-olds were rendered as interpersonal events. Note that it is possible to construct a perfectly intelligible and well-formed narration in which the child protagonist acts alone. This seldom happened, however, in either cultural case. The past experiences of both the Chinese and the American children were routinely narrated as interpersonal experiences. This was evident at two levels of analysis: the level of the narrated event and the level of the event of narration (see Miller 1994; Miller, Mintz et al. 1992 for further discussion of these analytic levels).

*The Narrated Event.* The narrated event refers to the child's past experience as it is re-created in the here and now. In the majority of narrations, child and family members constructed a rendition of the past experience in which the child protagonist was situated in a social nexus. The stories described above concerning Didi's experience at his older sister's music lesson provide good illustrations: Didi's transgression occurred in response to the teacher's action, and it caused his mother to lose face. In the following example from the American corpus, the participants co-construct an account in which some friends gave presents to Athena and her sister. Immediately prior to this co-narration, Athena's mother had been describing a present that she planned to give to a friend:

#### Example 2

- Child:* Did they give us a present?  
*Mother:* Yes, they did give us a present for Christmas, that's right. What did they give you, Athena? Do you remember what Martha and Ken gave you guys for Christmas? Think about it, can you recall?  
*Sister:* We forgot.  
*Mother:* You can't remember the art set with all the paints and crayons and markers? And she gave a little puzzle to Athena with all the stars and the little crescent moons? Remember that puzzle?  
*Child:* It goes up the sky [points and looks upward]. Up, up, up.  
*Mother:* What goes up in the sky?  
*Child:* Moon.  
*Mother:* Right, yes, you are right.  
*Child:* Up in the, in the home, up in the home.

Further analysis of the narrations revealed that the participants, including the two-year-olds, linked self and other in specific ways in their narrative re-creations. They portrayed the child protagonist as simply sharing an activity or experience with another person (e.g., the child went to the zoo with a friend), as the recipient of help or benefit from another person (as in the example above), and they compared the child protagonist with others (e.g., the child was not afraid to go on the ride but his older brother was). These were the most frequent ways of linking self and other for both the Chinese and the American children.

A fourth way of linking self and other yielded an intriguing developmental pattern in relation to comparable data from five-year-olds in the two communities. This linkage, which we call "self apart from other," is similar to the dimension that Markus and Kitayama (1991) have called the "independent" self. The child explicitly said that he was not with another person, did not share an activity or experience with another person, or did some activity all by himself. In setting himself or herself apart, the child typically mentioned another person (e.g., Aunt wasn't holding my hand, Father let me drive the car by myself) and, in so doing, invoked a relational frame of reference while at the same time portraying the self as independent. Neither the Chinese nor the American two-year-olds linked self and other in this way; for five-year-olds, however, this linkage was made more frequently by the American children than by the Chinese children. If verified in subsequent analyses, these findings would suggest that a relational framework for interpreting personal experience emerges very early in narrative development for both the Chinese and the American children and that setting the self apart from others is a later elaboration of that framework for the American children. These findings leave open the questions of how relational interpretive frameworks get elaborated for the Chinese children and of how Chinese children come to differentiate themselves from others when narrating their past experiences.

*The Event of Narration.* So far we have described relatedness at the level of the narrated event. The child portrayed himself or herself as "being with" another person in some past event. But at the same time the child was "being with" another person in the present, that is, in the very act of narrating the past event. In other words, the event of narration was itself an interpersonal event, involving at

least two persons. Moreover, we found that these levels of relatedness were connected. Children were more likely to compare the self-protagonist to another child in the past event when a peer was present in the event of co-narration (Miller, Mintz et al. 1992; Mintz 1993). In addition, children sometimes altered their version of a past experience in response to what co-narrators said. These findings suggest that two-year-old narrators were responsive to the particulars of the interpersonal event in which the story was told and expose the emergent nature of their constructions of their own past experiences. They show that interpretations of the child's past experiences arose as by-products of the social process of coordinating and negotiating narrative accounts. A child's interpretation of a past event and of herself as protagonist in that event was subject to repeated alteration and revision in the here-and-now social activity of narrating and renarrating experience.

Another way in which self and other were related at the level of the event of narration was in terms of the distribution of storytelling rights. When caregivers collaborated *with* the child in relating the child's experience or told a story *about* the child in the child's presence, they were constructing stories that, strictly speaking, were stories of vicarious experience. These practices raise the Bakhtinian (1981) question: Whose story is it, the child's or the caregiver's? They suggest that while young children were granted rights as speaker, they were not granted full rights to author their own experience (Goffman 1981). The disparity in storytelling rights was especially wide in the practice of telling stories about the child in the child's presence. When caregivers and older siblings engaged in this practice they did more than direct or edit the child's contributions. They exercised their right as parent or older sibling to appropriate the young child's experience and to fashion a more unilateral, less negotiated narrative. In the process, they not only furnished the child with personalized models of how to organize and interpret particular past experiences, but indexed the asymmetrical power relations between caregiver and child.

In sum, these analyses suggest that the past experiences of two-year-olds, whether Chinese or American, were anchored to an interpersonal matrix through the construction of a continuing series of miniature interpersonal dramas. Although autobiographical, these dramatizations of the child's personal experiences were not created by the child alone; instead they were joint productions

in which older family members often exercised more authority than the child in constructing relational interpretations of the child's past experiences.

#### EGO'S VIOLATION OF CULTURAL CODES

We turn now to the second problem from Lutz and White's comparative scheme, namely, ego's violation of cultural codes. Whereas an interpretive framework of relatedness of self and other was evident in the narrative constructions of two-year-olds from the two cultures, this second problem more strongly differentiated the narrative practices in which Chinese and American youngsters participated. The child as transgressor figured more prominently in Chinese than in American constructions of children's experience, and this finding applied to both co-narrated storytelling and to telling stories about the child in the child's presence.

*Telling Stories with the Child.* We were initially alerted to this contrast by Fung's (1987) analysis of the co-narrations of two Chinese children and their mothers. In these co-narrations moral and social rules were repeatedly invoked and the child was explicitly cast as a transgressor. Not only did the mothers guide their three-year-olds toward rule-centered accounts of experience, but the children themselves elaborated on their transgressions and even volunteered confessions.

Our analysis is consistent with these findings, showing that Chinese co-narrators were much more likely than their American counterparts to make explicit reference to code violations by the child. In addition, all of the most lengthy and elaborate Chinese stories but none of the most lengthy and elaborate American stories were structured so as to establish the child's rule violation as the point of the story. The co-narration above concerning Didi's misbehavior at the older sister's music lesson provides a good example. In another example, consisting of more than 50 turns, the caregiver directed the child to tell Auntie (the researcher) why she had gotten spanked the day before. Through a series of queries from caregiver and Auntie and responses from the child, it was established that the child interrupted a church meeting, the caregiver spanked her, she cried, and the other adults who were present "saved" her by allowing her to distribute snacks to them. The co-narration ended with an exchange in which the caregiver asked the child whether she still wanted to go to church meetings and

the child responded by saying that she would not run around next time. Without specific prompting from the caregiver, the child thus volunteered that she would not repeat her misdeed in the future. The co-narration was bounded at the beginning by the caregiver's demand that the child confess her misdeed to Auntie and at the end by the child's explicit commitment not to transgress in the future. Such symmetry makes one wonder whether the misdeed was a well-worked narrative topic that had undergone a degree of ritualization.

There is nothing comparable to this co-narration in the American corpus. Although caregivers intervened promptly when children misbehaved, they tended not to treat the child's past transgressions as storyworthy. When a rule violation was invoked it was peripheral to the main point of the story. For example, an American child initiated a story about going to the dentist to have her tooth pulled, resulting in a windfall from the tooth fairy. A code violation was implied only once, as the final contribution to the co-narration. An older sibling explained that the two-year-old had been "eating bad food" so she had to have her tooth pulled. Both the placement of this contribution and the fact that no one elaborated on it render the rule violation peripheral to the main action of the co-narration.

Lest we convey too stark a contrast between the Chinese and American co-narrations or leave the impression that Chinese caregivers invariably assumed the voice of authority toward their children's past experiences, we want to emphasize that in the majority of co-narrations for both the Chinese and American children rules were not invoked. Children and their families created joint accounts of holidays or family excursions—birthday parties, the fair, the zoo, McDonald's for the American children, the night market, the zoo, riding on trains and horses for the Chinese children. Both groups of children also talked about experiences of physical harm, such as illnesses and nosebleeds, and about times when they were afraid. Thus the striking cultural difference in the priority given to a transgressive interpretation of the child's experience must be seen against this backdrop of overlapping content between Chinese and American co-narrations.

*Telling Stories about the Child.* These patterns apply not only to telling stories with the child but to telling stories about the child.

American stories about the child were less likely to invoke rule violations or to be structured so as to establish the child's transgression as the point of the story. Instead, narrators selected benign or entertaining events that illustrated how cute or smart or odd the child was. The following example is one of a chain of stories that an American mother told about her two-year-old daughter's language errors:

Example 3

[The child and her older sister are playing a board game.]

*Mother:* You'll get a big kick out of this one. Friday night, we were just sitting around. Jim took Friday off, I don't know what we did but, we were just sitting here at night. Jim and I were sitting on the ground and Jack was [inaudible]. She puts her hand on me and says, "Me happy." And I'm like, "That's good, Mollie. You happy."

*Researcher:* I love it, it sounds so cute.

*Mother:* I said, "I don't think I ever heard anyone say that," and Jim says, "I know I never heard anyone come up with [inaudible]."

*Researcher:* "Me happy."

There are two notable features of this narration. First, the story is structured around the child's funny pronoun usage, rendered in direct quotation, and the parents' response, which is quoted, recycled, and elaborated. The narrator thereby conveys the surprising and endearing quality of her child's expression. What is reportable is not only the unusual usage, but the sentiment that is expressed and the novel, unprecedented nature of the error. The child's act is represented in a manner that is consistent with the parents' view, articulated in other interactions, that this is their goofy child, the one who is "touched." Second, the researcher has a definite role to play as audience for and participant in this narration. The mother introduces the story with a comment about the story's anticipated impact on the researcher, "You'll get a big kick out of this one," and the researcher obligingly responds, "I love it, it sounds so cute."

This type of story about a child was common in the American middle-class corpus, as was the researcher's role of joining with the caregiver in appreciating the child's antics, accomplishments, and enjoyable experiences. The Chinese corpus included some stories that were similar in that the caregiver and the researcher were aligned in taking an affirming stance toward the child's benign or decidedly positive experience—for example, a feat of memory or

quick-wittedness. However, the Chinese stories about young children, in parallel with co-narrated stories, were much more likely than the American stories to be organized around the child's transgression. Thus the Chinese researcher often found herself in a somewhat delicate position: as party to accounts in which the caregiver assumed the voice of authority toward the child's misdeeds, she could side either with the caregiver or with the child.

We found that most of the time the researcher affirmed the caregiver's perspective, even going so far as to assume the caregiver's voice in relation to the child. For example, after a mother told a story about how her child had made a false accusation, the researcher said to the child, "You're young but tricky, aren't you?" At other times, however, the researcher took the child's perspective on the event, thereby mitigating the caregiver's interpretation of the child's wrongdoing. In the following example, which is the final segment of a longer narration, the researcher alternately sides with the child and with the aunt, who is the child's primary caregiver. At issue, from the aunt's standpoint, is the child's greediness, as exemplified in her demands to ride in a small mechanical car owned by a vendor in the neighborhood.

Example 4

*Aunt:* Children are greedy by nature, you know? Really. So, one time she [the child] wants to ride in [the car], and then, she wants to buy stuff, and wants to ride again. How can this go on! This can't go on.

*Researcher:* But she also knows it; she also knows—

*Aunt:* It's because we never let . . . I, I was very angry. Like this. Yeah.

*Researcher:* [laughs]

*Aunt:* On the one hand, on the one hand, she can go to the market and after buying everything, she turns around and wants to ride again. She just wants everything, period.

*Researcher:* [To child:] Are you very greedy?

[Child nods and makes a face.]

*Researcher:* [To child:] Yeah? Oh, you want everything? [laughs] And, and you're still acting like a poor mistreated thing?

*Aunt:* [laughs]

The researcher's first response is a defense of the child: she refers back to earlier comments made by the child in which the child indicated that she understood and accepted her aunt's limits on bumper car riding. When the aunt recycles her claims about the child, however, the researcher turns to the child and directs several

rhetorical questions to her that affirm the aunt's perspective on the child's greediness.

*Two Transgression Stories Compared.* Although this kind of story about the child was much more frequent in the Chinese families, we did find the rare American story in which the child was cast as transgressor. Such exceptions are important analytically, for they allow us to examine how caregivers in Longwood handle an interpretive task that caregivers from Taipei engaged in routinely. The question, then, is this: Given that the caregiver has selected the child's transgression as storyworthy, how does the transgression get narrated in the Chinese and American cases? The following story is the only one in our American corpus that "looks Chinese" in the sense that it is structured so as to establish the child's wrongdoing as the point of the story. As narrated by the mother, the story actually involved two transgressions. First, Mollie wrote on the wall, and then she tried to evade responsibility for her misdeed by falsely accusing her sister.

Example 5

- Mother:* [To child:] Did you tell Judy what you wrote on the dining room wall with?
- Child:* Ah . . . key.
- Researcher:* [To child:] You wrote on the dining room wall?
- Mother:* With a key, not even a pencil.
- Researcher:* [To mother:] You must have loved that!
- Mother:* A key, the front end of that key.
- Sister:* And behind a living room chair.
- Mother:* I was sort of napping in there and I saw this and I thought it was a pencil. And I woke up and said [whispering], "Mol, you didn't write on Mommy's wall with a pencil, did you?" Oh, she was so relieved, she said, "No! Me no use pencil, me use key!" and I was like, "OH, GOD! Not a key!" And she said, "No, no, ME no use key, Mom. Kara use key," and then I was even more upset.
- Sister:* I didn't even see her do it!
- Mother:* But it's so funny. You look at her and she's like, "I didn't use pencil."
- Researcher:* So, I'm in the clear.
- Mother:* Oh, yeah.
- Sister:* I didn't even see her do it. I was at school.

This story about the child is preceded by a co-narrated account initiated by the mother in which Mollie is prompted to confess her wrongdoing to the researcher. The child complies and the researcher invites further response. Several turns ensue in which the mother emphasizes that Mollie used a key to write on the wall, the

researcher aligns herself with the mother through an ironic expression ("You must have loved that!"), and Mollie's older sister, Kara—who was falsely blamed by Mollie—contributes further information about the incident.

Having established Mollie's wrongdoing by eliciting supporting accounts from the parties involved, the mother then explains more fully to the researcher what happened. That is, she situates the wall-writing incident within the events that preceded and followed it, providing a story about the child. In this story the mother explains that she was napping when the transgression occurred. Her dawning realization that Mollie wrote on the wall while she napped is re-created in the narration through the mounting suspense of parallel, but increasingly damaging, admissions by the child. Mollie is represented as trying to mitigate her responsibility for wrongdoing, first, by explaining that she used a key instead of a pencil, and, second, by falsely blaming her sister. The humor lies in the fact that the child's inept and increasingly transparent attempts to explain away her misdeeds have exactly the opposite effect. Her mother's subsequent comment "But it's so funny" explicitly acknowledges that the narration is framed nonseriously. Note also that although the mother says that she was "even more upset" by the child's lie than by the misdeed that occasioned it, there is no further mention of the more serious transgression. Also, the interaction that preceded the story about the child, including the elicited confession from the child, includes no mention of Mollie's false accusation.

There are, of course, many Chinese stories about children's past transgressions that could be compared with this story from Longwood. We have chosen the Chinese story that most closely resembles it. In this story, Angu, like Mollie, wrote on the wall and then tried to shift the blame to someone else. Angu lived with her aunt, who was her primary caregiver. She referred to her aunt as "Mama" and to her biological mother, who was a school teacher, as "Teaching Mother." According to the aunt's narration, after Angu wrote on the wall and was rebuked by her aunt, she called Teaching Mother on the phone and complained that her aunt had mistreated her. Although this sequence includes ten times as many turns as the American example and lasts for nearly six minutes, it too was prefaced by a prompted confession from the child.

## Example 6

*Aunt:* After you scribbled on my wall, how did you tell your mother? [pause]  
Tell me! [pause] Tell me!

[Child is silent, tries to get on sofa, gazes at aunt.]

*Aunt:* Tell me! [louder]

*Child:* Hmm.

*Aunt:* You tell Auntie [referring to the researcher], how did you accuse me?  
[pause] Hmm? [louder]

[Child is silent.]

*Aunt:* [to researcher:] Has she said, have I said it before?

*Researcher:* No.

*Aunt:* Oh.

[Aunt picks up the child and puts her next to herself on the sofa.]

*Aunt:* [To child:] You, you made my wall, you used, you. . . . At midnight before going to bed, and then you used a pen to scribble on my wall. And then how did you call Teaching Mother? Tell me. Tell Auntie. Tell, tell her how smart you are able to accuse. [turns her body to face child and makes child sit still] Hurry up.

[Child is silent, makes face and turns away.]

Eight additional turns follow in which Angu remains silent as her aunt continues to prod her into confessing to her false accusation. The aunt then escalates her efforts by threatening to leave.

*Aunt:* You won't say, right? Good, we're leaving. Good-bye. [pretends to move away from sofa] We're leaving.

*Researcher:* Goodbye.

*Aunt:* Goodbye.

[Child turns toward her aunt and seems ready to say something.]

*Aunt:* Then what are you going to say? What are you going to say?

*Child:* Go away!

*Aunt:* Okay, I'm going away. You say it.

[Child turns away from her aunt and breathes heavily.]

*Aunt:* How did you tell Teaching Mother?

*Child:* [Lowers her head, displays a sad facial expression.] "Mama [referring to the aunt], I'm not going to come back to your home [whining]. I'm, I'm going to go to Teaching Mother's home [whining]." [looks at her aunt and enacts sobbing]

*Aunt:* And then?

*Child:* Then [lengthening the word], Mama [referring to her aunt] didn't talk. [Sad face]

*Aunt:* Mama didn't talk? I didn't scold you! You even called your mother to report it. How did you report? How did you report?

Although Angu finally provides a partial confession, quoting the complaint against her aunt that she had made in the phone call to Teaching Mother, her aunt continues to try to elicit from her a

more detailed account of her transgression. The aunt shames the child through 72 additional turns, occasionally invoking the researcher's support against the child and repeatedly expressing her displeasure. The child continued to resist, saying at times, "I faint [*hun-dao*]."

In parallel with the American example, the sequence eventually evolves into a story about the child as the aunt shifts from the second to the third person and renarrates the story to the researcher, explaining more fully what happened:

*Aunt:* [To researcher:] She is really bad. At that time, she told her mother [enacts crying, sobbing, and whining], "Ummmm, I don't want to live in Brother Mother's home.<sup>5</sup> I want to go back to your home. I don't like Brother Mother's home." And then she cried. Wah, look, such a big deal. I didn't scold her at all [for writing on the wall]. I only looked at her. I was in a good mood. I didn't scold her. Yet she acted like this. Look, what a rascal.

*Researcher:* [laughs]

*Aunt:* If she were my sister [referring to the child's mother], were not my sister, ages ago we would already. . . . At midnight, after eleven o'clock [the child called her mother on the phone to complain], midnight after eleven o'clock, just before going to bed, at the head of the bed, she scribbled on the wall with chalk. We had already had our home painted again ages ago.

*Researcher:* [laughs]

This narration resembles its American counterpart in several ways. In both accounts it is the child's deception after being discovered in an act of wrongdoing that the caregiver takes to be the more serious transgression. The nature of the deception is similar in that Mollie falsely blames her sister for the wall writing and Angu falsely accuses her aunt of mistreatment. Both accounts imply that the child realized she had done something wrong. In addition, the Chinese story, like the American, is structured around a quoted response from the child.

The difference is that in the Chinese story the quote serves to foreground the more serious transgression: not writing on the wall, but calling the mother on the phone to complain about the aunt. From the aunt's perspective, this behavior is even more unacceptable given the immediately preceding circumstances—that the child had written on the wall and that she had responded leniently to the misdeed. The foregrounding of the child's false accusation is also accomplished in the lengthy preceding interaction in which

the aunt's efforts to draw a confession from the child remain steadfastly focused on the child's complaint to mother, not on the wall-writing incident. In this respect the Chinese story contrasts sharply with the American story, in which the lesser transgression of writing on the wall is foregrounded both in the story about the child and in the preceding interaction in which the child is prompted to confess to writing on the wall. This contrast is heightened by the parallel contrast in the keying of the narration (Goffman 1974; Hymes 1972), with the American story being told in a consistently humorous, nonserious manner. Thus, despite notable similarities of content, structure, and interpretation, the two wall writing stories differ qualitatively in the meanings that the caregivers assigned to the children's misdeeds.

However, there is another reading of this contrast that must be acknowledged. It is possible, even likely, that Angu's and Mollie's false accusations are ranked differently within the scale of values of their respective caregivers. To falsely accuse the aunt herself, as Angu did, is very serious from the aunt's perspective, for it is not only disrespectful and face-threatening but could sow dissension among the adults in the family ("See what a troublemaker she is. . . . If she were my sister, if she were not my sister, ages ago we would already . . ."). On the other hand, Mollie's attempt to fix blame on her sister is perhaps less serious from her mother's perspective because conflict among young siblings is expected. This may help to account for the contrast in length and keying of the two stories. The major point for our purposes, however, is that the story from the American corpus that most closely resembles the Chinese stories of children's transgressions—indeed, the only story in which an American caregiver constructs a story around a child's past transgressions—conveys a qualitatively different interpretation. Instead of creating an opportunity for remediation, the caregiver develops the amusing dimensions of the incident. She creates a mischief maker, not a transgressor.

### CONCLUSION

In this article we set out to compare personal storytelling as it is practiced with very young children in Taipei and Longwood. We found that two-year-olds' past experiences were repeatedly narrated and renarrated in the course of everyday family life in both

cultural cases, and that the youngsters themselves assumed a variety of participant roles. Each time a child heard her past actions narrated by a caregiver or contributed to a collaborative narration, she engaged in self-relevant interpretive activity.

In attempting to identify the interpretive frameworks instantiated in these narrative activities, we focused on two frameworks corresponding to Lutz and White's (1986) problems of bonds between self and other and ego's violation of cultural codes. We do not mean to imply that these frameworks are the only ones that are instantiated in the narrative practices described above. Given the contradictions inherent in any ideological system and the multiplicity of perspectives that can be taken toward any event, human experience is rarely describable in terms of one or two problems (Lutz and White 1986). Thus our analysis is quite clearly incomplete. Nonetheless, it does reveal something of the complexity of meaning conveyed through narrative practices and lays a foundation for future analyses.

With respect to bonds between self and other, we found that the children's past experiences were interpreted in terms of a relational framework in both cultural systems. Acting in concert with other social actors in re-creating a past experience in the here and now, the *narrating self* constructed a version of the past experience in which the *narrated self* as protagonist was situated interpersonally. The children's experiences were thus doubly anchored, in the past and in the present, to relationships with other people. It is perhaps not surprising that the Chinese and American families shared a relational perspective. The children inhabited a rich social world, daily life was spent in close emotional proximity to significant others, and both cultural systems placed a high value on family relationships, however differently these were defined. This is not to say that the relational frameworks instantiated in Chinese and American narrative practices were identical. Our finding of increasing differentiation during the preschool years on a dimension of setting the self apart from others underscores this point. We expect that further analysis will reveal other differences, especially as we extend our analyses into later ages.

With respect to the second problem, we found that the personal experiences of two-year-old Chinese children were more likely than their American counterparts' to be interpreted within an explicitly evaluative, overtly self-critical framework. The primacy of this in-

terpretive framework for the Chinese cut across co-narrated storytelling and caregivers' narrations about the child, and it was jointly maintained by the coordinated efforts of the several participants. It was maintained by caregivers as they invoked rules explicitly, structured stories so as to establish the rule violation as the point of the story, and recruited the researcher's support against the errant child. It was maintained by older siblings as they aligned themselves with the caregiver, speaking in the voice of authority. It was maintained by the children themselves as they confessed to misdeeds, kept silent, laughed, and expressed feelings of shame. And it was maintained by the ethnographer as she alternately aligned herself with the caregiver and with the child.

These findings support Wu's (1981) contention that discipline begins early in life for Chinese children and suggest that evaluation and criticism, identified as key cultural constructs in early (Hu 1944) and contemporary accounts of Chinese cultures (Kleinman 1986; Schoenhals 1991), have their roots in early socialization practices in the family. Wang's (1992) study of young deaf children and their mothers in Taipei is consistent with this conclusion. Moreover, by following two of the children from our sample longitudinally from two to four years of age, Fung (1994) has shown that Chinese notions of face and shame come into play when children's experiences are narrated from an evaluative perspective and that the repeated, negotiated application of this framework through the medium of personal storytelling is a major means by which the socialization of shame is accomplished. Committed to a moral ideology in which shame is positively valued, the parents felt that they would be remiss as parents if they did not raise their children to know shame and to abide by the rules of appropriate conduct. These findings resonate strongly with Schoenhals's (1991) study of a middle school in the People's Republic of China, in which he found that evaluation, criticism, face, and shame formed a major cluster of values and that children prior to puberty were openly criticized by parents and teachers.

In the American case, a different interpretive framework was at work in personal storytelling practices, one that we might call implicitly evaluative and overtly self-affirming. Observations of nonnarrative activity in the American homes suggest that the narrative practice of portraying the child protagonist in a favorable light is part of a wider network of practices that caregivers use to

protect their children's self-esteem—handling discipline in the here and now without dwelling on the child's past misdeeds, conducting serious disciplining in private, putting the best face on the child's shortcomings or even recasting shortcomings as strengths. As with the Chinese, this framework was maintained through the active collusion of the several participants, including the researcher. Thus the contrast between the Chinese and American practices reflects, in part, systematic differences in how the researcher's role got defined in the two cases. Whereas the Chinese researcher was enlisted as judging witness to the child's past misdeeds, the American researcher was cast as appreciative audience to the child's benign experiences. From the American standpoint, the Chinese practices appear harsh; from the Chinese standpoint, the American practices appear irresponsible.

In identifying contrasting interpretive frameworks in Taipei and Longwood, it is important not to overstate these differences. The Chinese families found ways to portray their children favorably and to show their appreciation, and the American families found ways to enforce moral and social rules. Also, within each cultural group families differed among themselves in the extent and manner in which they instantiate particular frameworks. It is equally important not to treat these differences as though they existed in isolation, unconnected to other interpretive frameworks. Indeed, one of the chief advantages of a practice perspective is that it acknowledges that any given practice carries a multiplicity of meanings simultaneously. Thus, when Chinese families narrated a young child's transgression, they simultaneously situated the child in relation to others. Were we to examine personal storytelling in terms of the other social problems proposed by Lutz and White (1986), still more interpretive threads would come to light. The task for children, as for the rest of us, is to create meaning by tracing through the variety and interconnectedness of interpretive threads in "the tangle of experience" (Briggs 1992:26).

These several findings, in conjunction with the finding that personal storytelling practices occurred routinely in the everyday home environments of both the Chinese and American children, shed new light on the process of self-construction. Personal storytelling emerged in both cultural cases as an important means by which young children, together with family members, construct and reconstruct their experiences in culture-specific terms. Each

co-narrated story, each story that the caregiver tells about the child, provides him with yet another opportunity to hear how he is related to other people, how he transgressed, or why a particular action was funny. Each story instantiates these problems somewhat differently but always in personally relevant terms, thereby inviting, perhaps impelling, the child's emotional involvement (Briggs 1992). Our findings thus suggest that self-construction is a highly dynamic process in the early years of life, a process that encompasses not only the child's moment-by-moment interpersonal encounters but his or her participation in iterative narrations of those encounters, which are themselves embedded in moment-by-moment interpersonal encounters.

The dynamic nature of self-construction follows not only from the recurrent nature of narrative practices but from the variability inherent in the situatedness of narrative practices (Miller and Mintz 1993). This is most apparent when a narrator spontaneously retells a story (Miller, Hoogstra et al. 1993). Several of the examples we cited were told repeatedly. For example, the incident in which the Chinese child was described as interrupting a church meeting occurred first as a co-narration; later in the same video recording, the caregiver renarrated the incident, this time as a story about the child in the child's presence. Note also that the two stories about writing on the wall were prefaced by co-narrated stories on the same topic, without any obvious boundary between the two. This suggests an important property of narrative practices that should not be overlooked, namely, that the analytic distinction between types of practices (e.g., telling stories with the child, telling stories about the child), however useful, masks the interpenetration of types that occurs in everyday life, the seamless manner in which a co-narration merges, at times, with a story about the child. This complicates the researcher's task of identifying units of analysis that preserve the integrity of naturally occurring events (Watson-Gegeo 1988). But for the child, this higher-order packaging and repackaging, conveying both multiple perspectives on events and cross-cutting redundancies, provides yet another cultural resource for creating personal meaning.

PEGGY J. MILLER is professor of speech communication and professor of psychology, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

HEIDI FUNG is assistant professor in psychology, the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

JUDITH MINTZ is a graduate student in the Committee on Human Development at the University of Chicago.

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## NOTES

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1. This model confers several important advantages for a theory of childhood socialization: (1) the actual processes of socialization are rendered accessible through analysis of the forms and functions of everyday discourse; (2) an active role is accorded to the child through a focus on child and caregivers' mutual, negotiated participation in discourse practices; and (3) because language practices systematically index social statuses and ideologies, a discourse model helps to explain the variety of affective stances—eager acceptance, resistance, playfulness—that children assume as they attempt to invest cultural resources with meaning.

2. In a recent survey of religious affiliations in Taiwan (Chu 1991) conducted by the Academia Sinica in Taipei, only 35.8 percent of the respondents claimed folk religion as their religious affiliation. However, two-thirds expressed the hope that their descendants would worship them after death.

3. In all examples given, the child is identified as "Child," and siblings are referred to as "Sister" or "Brother." Chinese transcripts are provided in the Appendix.

4. Note that although the mother and older sister consistently focus on the inappropriateness of Didi's behaviors and the resultant loss of face to his mother, their narration is keyed nonseriously, as indicated by their smiles and laughter (see Fung 1994 for further discussion of this point).

5. In addition to referring to her aunt as "Mama," Angu also called her "Brother Mother," that is, mother of Angu's brother (or male cousin, in American terms).

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## APPENDIX

Each Chinese example that appears in the text is given here, with the Chinese on the left and the English translation on the right. The Chinese is rendered in *pinyin*, a standardized system for transcribing Chinese into the Roman alphabet. Each line in Chinese is followed immediately by its literal translation.

## Example 1

Mother to Child:

*Ei, ei, ni na-tian*

Eh, eh, you that-day

*gen Ma, gen Mei,*

with mama, with younger-sister,

*gen Jiejie qu shang yinyue ke.*

with elder-sister go up music class.

*Hao-bu-hao wan?*

good-not-good play?

[Looks at child.] Eh, eh, you that day with Mama, with younger sister, with older sister went to the music class.

Was that fun?

- Child to Mother:  
*Hao wan a.*  
Good play a.  
It was fun.
- Mother to Child:  
*Laoshi dou mei-you gei ni*  
Teacher all not-exist give you  
*shenme dongxi?*  
what thing?  
What didn't the teacher give you?
- Child to Mother:  
*Mei, mei-you gei wo tiezhi.*  
not, not-exist give me sticker.  
Didn't, didn't give me a sticker.
- Mother to Child:  
*Mei-you gei ni tiezhi. Ranhou*  
not-exist give you sticker. later  
*ni jiu, ni jiu zenme la?*  
you then, you then how la?  
Didn't give you a sticker. Then you,  
then what did you do?
- Child to Mother:  
*Jiu ku le.*  
then cry le.  
I then cried.
- Sister to Mother:  
*Da-sheng ku,*  
big-voice cry,  
"A! A! A!"  
"waah! waah! waah!"  
Cried loudly, "Waah! Waah! Waah!"
- Mother to Child:  
*O, ni jiu ku la? Dui, jiu*  
oh, you then cry la? correct, then  
*yizhi: "A, mei-you,*  
straight: "waah, not-exist,  
*wei-shenme mei-you gei wo tiezhi?*  
for-what not-exist give me sticker?  
*Wei-shenme mei-you gei wo*  
for-what not-exist give me  
*tiezhi?" Dui-bu-dui?*  
sticker?" correct-not-correct?  
Oh, you then cried? Yeah, you constantly  
went: "Waah, didn't [gestures wiping  
eyes, makes staccato gestures of fists  
away from body], why didn't you give  
me a sticker? [whines] Why didn't you  
give me a sticker?" [whines] Didn't you?
- [Child looks up from the book, gazes at mother, smiles, and looks down at the book again.]
- Sister to Mother:  
*Dui ya, "wei-shenme mei-you gei*  
correct ya, "for-what not-exist give  
*wo tiezhi?"*  
me sticker?"  
Yes, "Why didn't you give me a sticker?"  
[clap hand]

- Mother to Child:  
*Tiezhi. Aya, hai de Mama*  
sticker. aya, harm de mama  
*hao mei-you mianzi. Na-ge, na-ge*  
very not-exist face, that-ge that-ge  
*tou dou yao wang di-shang zuan*  
head all want into ground-up dig  
*le. Dui-bu-dui?*  
le. correct-not-correct?  
Sticker. [sighs] Ai, you made Mama lose  
face. That, that, I wanted to dig my  
head into the ground. Right?  
[smiles, shakes head, smiles again]
- [Child points to picture book and says something unintelligible.]
- Sister to Mother:  
*Dou yao hun-dao le. Mama yao*  
all want faint-down le. mama want  
*kai-shi hun-dao le.*  
open-begin faint-down le.  
Almost wanted to faint. Mommy almost  
began to faint.

## Example 4

- Aunt to Researcher:  
*Xiaohaizi de benxing haishi hen*  
child de nature still very  
*tanxin de, ni zhidao ba? Zhende.*  
greedy de, you know ba? true de.  
*Suoyi yixiazi you yao wan,*  
so suddenly again want play,  
*ranhou ne, you yao mai dongxi,*  
later ne, again want buy thing,  
*you xiang yao wan. Nali keyi*  
again think want play. how can  
*zhe-yang! Bu keyi zhe-yang.*  
this-mode! not can this-mode.  
Children are greedy by nature, you know?  
Really. So, one time she wants to ride in  
[the car], and then, she wants to buy  
stuff, and wants to ride again. How can  
this go on! This can't go on.
- Researcher to Aunt:  
*Danshi ta ye zhidao a.*  
but she also know a.  
*Ta ye zhidao—*  
she also know—  
But she also knows it. She also  
knows—
- Aunt to Researcher:  
*Ye shi women yizhi bu gei,*  
also be we always not give,  
*wo, wo hen shengqi ya. Zhe-yang*  
I, I very angry ya. this-mode  
*de. Shi.*  
de. be.  
It's also because we never let . . . I,  
I was very angry. Like this. Yeah.
- Researcher: [laughs]

Aunt to Researcher:

*Yi-mian, ta keyi yimian qu*  
one-side, she can one-side go  
*cai-shichang, zhe-ge shenme*  
vegetable-market, this-ge what  
*dou mai wan le, ta jiu*  
all buy finish le, she then  
*hui-tou you yao zuo.*  
back-head again want sit.  
*Ta sheme dou yao jiu dui*  
she what all want then correct  
*liao le.*  
*liao le.*

On the one hand, on the one hand,  
she can go to the market and after  
buying everything, she turns around  
and wants to ride again. She just  
wants everything, period.

Researcher to Child:

*Ni shi-bu-shi hen tanxin?*  
you be-not-be very greedy?

Are you very greedy?

[Child nods and makes a face.]

Researcher to Child:

*Shi o? O, ni sheme dou xiang yao*  
be oh? oh, you what all think want  
*a? Hai yao, hai yao ban*  
a? still want, still want act  
*hen kelian, hen wei-qu de*  
very sympathy, very grievance de  
*yangzi.*  
appearance.

Yeah? Oh, you want everything? [laughs]  
And, and you're still acting  
like a poor mistreated thing?

Aunt: [laughs]

Example 6

[Note that the child lives with her aunt, who is her primary caregiver, and the aunt's teenage son. Her parents live in another household. The child calls her aunt "Mama." She calls her biological mother, who works as a teacher, "Teaching Mother." Sometimes her aunt is also referred to as "Brother Mother," meaning mother of the brother, although the "brother" is actually the child's cousin.]

Aunt to Child:

*Ni gei wo-de qiangbi hua hei le*  
you to I-de wall draw black le  
*yihou, ni zenme gen ni mama shuo*  
later, you how with you mama say  
*de? Ni shuo! Ni shuo!*  
*de? you say! you say!*

After you scribbled on my wall, how  
did you tell your mother? [pause]  
Tell me! [pause] Tell me!

[Child is silent, tries to get on sofa, gazes at aunt.]

Aunt to Child:

*Ni shuo a!*  
you say a!

Tell me! [louder]

Child to Aunt:

*N.*  
hmm.

Hmm.

Aunt to Child:

*Ni gaosu Ayi, shuo ni*  
you tell auntie, say you  
*zen-yang gaozhuang? N?*  
how-mode accuse? hm?

You tell Auntie [refers to researcher],  
how did you accuse me? [pause] Hmm?  
[louder]

[Child is silent.]

Aunt to Researcher:

*Ta shuo guo-le, wo shuo guo-le*  
she say guo-le, I say guo-le  
*mei-you?*  
not-exist?

Has she said, have I said it before?

Researcher to Aunt:

*Mei-you.*  
not-exist.

No.

Aunt to Researcher:

*O.*  
oh.

Oh.

[Aunt picks up the child and puts her next to herself on the sofa.]

Aunt to Child:

*Ni, ni ba wo-de qiang, ni na,*  
you you ba I-de wall, you take,  
*ni. . . Ni sangbenyao yao*  
you. . . you midnight want  
*shuijiao de shihou, ranhou ni*  
sleep de time, later you  
*zenme da dianhua gei jiao-shu*  
how call phone to teach-book  
*Mama de? Ni shuo, shuo gei Ayi*  
mama de? you say, say to auntie  
*ting. Shuo, shuo ni zen-yang*  
hear. say, say you how-mode  
*congming hui gaozhuang.*  
smart know accuse.  
*Gankuei shuo.*  
hurry say.

You, you made my wall, you used,  
you. . . At midnight before going to bed,  
and then you used a pen to scribble on  
my wall. And then how did you call  
Teaching Mother? Tell me. Tell Auntie.  
Tell, tell her how smart you are able to  
accuse. [turns her body to face child  
and makes child sit still] Hurry up.

[Child is silent, makes face and turns away.]

[8 more turns]

Aunt to Child:

*Ni bu shuo, dui-bu-dui?*  
you not say, correct-not-correct?  
*Hao, na women zou le. Zai-jian.*  
good, then we go le. again-see.  
*Women zou le.*  
we go le.

You won't say, right? Good, we're  
leaving. Good-bye. [pretends to move  
away from sofa] We're leaving.

Researcher to Child:

*Zai-jian.*  
again-see.

Good-bye.

Aunt to Child:

*Zai-jian.*  
again-see.

Good-bye.

[Child turns toward her aunt and seems ready to say something.]

Aunt to Child:

*Na ni shuo shenme? Na ni shuo*  
then you say what? then you say  
*shenme?*  
what?

Then what are you going to say?  
What are you going to say?

Child to Aunt:

*Zou-kai!*  
go-apart!

Go away!

Aunt to Child:

*Hao, wo zou-kai. Ni shuo.*  
good, I go-apart. you say.

Okay, I'm going away. You  
say it.

[Child turns away from her aunt and breathes heavily.]

Aunt to Child:

*Ni zenme gen jiao-shu Mama shuo de?*  
you how with teach-book mama say de?

How did you tell Teaching Mother?

Child to Aunt:

*"Mama, wo bu-yao hui nimen jia*  
"mama, I not-want return your home  
*le. Wo yao gen, wo yao dao*  
le. I want with, I want go  
*Jiao-shu Mama jia la."*  
teach-book mama home la."

[lowers her head, displays a sad facial  
expression] "Mama, I'm not going to  
come back to your home. [whining] I'm,  
I'm going to go to Teaching Mother's  
home." [whining] [looks at her aunt  
and enacts sobbing]

Aunt to Child:

*Ranhou na?*  
later na?

And then?

Child to Aunt:

*Jiu, Mama bu jianghua.*  
then, then mama not talk.

Then [lengthening the word], Mama  
didn't talk [sad face].

Aunt to Child:

*Mama bu jianghua? Wo mei-you*  
mama not talk? I not-exist  
*ma ni a! Ni hai da dianhua*  
scold you a! you even call phone  
*gao ni mama. Yenme gao?*  
report you mama. how report?  
*Zenme gao?*  
how report?

Mama didn't talk? I didn't scold you!  
You even called your mother to report  
it. How did you report? How did you  
report?

[72 more turns]

Aunt to Researcher:

*Ta hao huai o! Ta na shihou*  
she very bad o! she that time  
*gen ta mama shuo,*  
with she mama say,  
*"N n n, wo bu-yao hui nimen*  
"ummm, I not-exist return your  
*jia. Wo bu xihuan Gege Mama jia."*  
home. I not like brother mama home."  
*Ranhou jiu ku le. Wa, ni kan*  
later than cry le. wah, you look  
*bu-de-liao. Wo genben mei ma ta.*  
not-get-liao. I root not scold her.  
*Wo xinqing hen hao. Wo mei-you*  
I mood very good. I not-exist  
*ma ta. Ta jiu zhe-yang.*  
scold her. she this-mode.  
*Ni kan, hao huai-dan.*  
you look, very rotten-egg.

She is really bad! At that time, she told  
her mother [enacts crying, sobbing, and  
whining], "Ummm, I don't want to live  
in Brother Mother's home. I want to go  
back to your home. I don't like Brother  
Mother's home." And then she cried,  
Wah, look, such a big deal. I didn't scold  
her at all [for writing on the wall]. I only  
looked at her. I was in a good mood. I  
didn't scold her. Yet she acted like this.  
Look, what a rascal.

Researcher: [laughs]

Aunt to Researcher:

*Ruguo shi ziji meimei a, bu-shi*  
if be own sister a, not-be  
*meimei a, zao ba-beizi*  
sister a, early eight-generation  
*bei ta, bei ta shuo. . . .*  
by she, by she say. . . .  
*Sangbenbanye, shiyi-dian duo,*  
midnight, eleven-o'clock over,  
*yao shuijiao le. Jiu zai*  
want sleep le. then at

If she were my sister [referring to child's  
mother], were not my sister, ages ago we  
would already. . . . At midnight, after  
eleven o'clock, midnight after eleven  
o'clock, just before going to bed, at the  
head of the bed, she scribbled on the  
wall with chalk. We had already had our  
home painted again ages ago.

*chuang-tou, na fenbi jiu*  
bed-head, take chalk then  
*hua qiangbi a. Women jia zao*  
draw wall a. we home early  
*ba-beizi you yijing*  
eight-generation again already  
*fenshua guo yi-ci le.*  
paint guo one-time le.

Researcher: {laughs}