SOCIOGENETIC PERSPECTIVES ON INTERNALIZATION

Edited by

Brian D. Cox
Hofstra University

Cynthia Lightfoot
State University of New York at Plattsburgh

WORLDMAKING AND IDENTITY FORMATION IN CHILDREN'S NARRATIVE PLAY-ACTING

Ageliki Nicolopoulou
Lehigh University

This chapter investigates the role of narrative in the processes by which socialization serves as a matrix for development. Specifically, it examines the ways in which children's narrative activity, understood as a form of symbolic action, links the construction of reality with the formation of identity. In doing so, it advances several interconnected claims that bear on the larger theoretical question of how we should understand internalization and its role in development from a sociocultural perspective.

In the first place, the analysis presented here contends that narrative is a cognitively crucial activity, because it is a mode not only of representing but of constituting reality and of conferring meaning on experience. This rich and complex field of children's symbolic activity—spanning the range from the enactment of narratives in fantasy or pretend play to their discursive exposition in storytelling—not only provides us with an invaluable window into young children's mental life and their images of the world; it also serves as a crucial context for learning and development, within which fantasy can become a tool for grappling with reality. To borrow a nice formulation of Paley's (1986), the microcosm of the play-world and of narrative practice serves as an "experimental theater" (p. xv) within which children explore, and attempt to master, the mysteries of the larger social world. Children use these narrative activities, not just to represent the world, but to make sense of it—both factually and emotionally—and to find their place in it. In constructing their narratives, they necessarily draw on images, models, and conceptual resources available to them from their

culture, which shape their development in profound and subtle ways; but it is clear that, even at an early age, they are able to appropriate these *selectively* and, to some degree, to use them for their own purposes—cognitive, symbolic, and social-relational. And one of the most striking aspects of this process is the extent to which the construction of reality and of identity are closely intertwined.

Identity is, of course, a complex and many-sided phenomenon. This chapter focuses specifically on the construction and consolidation of one key dimension of personal and collective identity, namely, gender. Through an examination of the spontaneous storytelling and story-acting of children in a preschool classroom, it explores the interplay between the developmental emergence of gendered images of order in children's symbolic constructions, of gender differentiation in children's group life, and of gender identity in the children involved. My analysis demonstrates that the children I have been studying develop and elaborate two distinctive gender-related narrative styles that embody quite different modes of ordering and interpreting the world, expressing different images of social reality and of the self. This narrative polarization is one aspect of a larger process by which two distinct gendered subcultures are actively built up and maintained by the children themselves. At the same time, the crystallization of these subcultures within the microcosm of the classroom provides a framework for the further appropriation, enactment, and reproduction of crucial dimensions of personal identity as defined by the larger society, including gender. Thus, the narrative construction of reality is not a purely individual process but a sociocultural one, whose cognitive significance is inextricably linked to the building up of group life and the formation of both individual and collective identities.

One important implication of this analysis is that, although the internalization of elements from the larger culture plays a crucial role in individual development, internalization should not be seen as simply a mechanism of passive absorption. Rather, it must be understood as a more complex, dialectical process that includes the active and selective appropriation of cultural elements—both individually and in collaboration—through various modes of symbolic action. In short, this chapter offers a concrete example of an approach to development that is simultaneously constructivist and sociocultural, one that views the development of both mind and personality as emerging from an active interplay between the internal dynamics of the individual's cognitive structures and the formative impact of sociocultural context.

NARRATIVES AND SOCIALIZATION

In recent years, there has been a burgeoning interest among psychologists, linguists, and educators in narrative as an important medium of socialization. Anthropologists, ethnographers, folklorists, and cultural historians have long emphasized the power of myths, traditional tales, historical accounts of group experience, and other cultural narratives as vehicles for transmitting adult roles and responsibilities (e.g., Herdt, 1981); affirming, maintaining, and preserving cultural norms (e.g., Basso, 1984; Sapir, 1949); and reproducing and shaping sociopolitical formations (e.g., Bruner & Gorfain, 1984; MacAloon, 1984). However, scholars are just beginning the systematic exploration of the role of narratives as a context for the socialization and education of young children.

Most recent research in this field has followed two main lines that overlap only partially. First, a number of studies have focused on delineating the types, range, and structures of narrative forms acquired by children from different sociocultural communities, often before they enter school (e.g., Gee, 1991; Heath, 1982, 1983, 1986; Hicks, 1991; Michaels, 1981, 1991). Each of these distinctive narrative styles is seen as part of a larger package—both an element in and a product of the community's distinctive world view and mode of life. This work has attempted to uncover and illuminate the forms and uses of narratives among children from different cultural communities, partly as a way to help avoid the misunderstandings and educational failures that can occur when these children enter school and encounter a new cultural style, a style that (as these researchers have demonstrated convincingly) is based on and harmonizes most easily with mainstream middle-class culture.

A second line of research attempts to delineate the types and patterns of narrative *interactions* between caregiver and child that can facilitate, shape, and promote the development of narrative competence and help to socialize children into the norms and practices of their communities. (For useful reviews see Fivush, 1991; McCabe & Peterson, 1991; Miller & Moore, 1989; see also Miller, Mintz, Hoogstra, Fung, & Potts, 1992; Miller, Potts, Fung, Hoogstra, & Mintz, 1990; Miller & Sperry, 1987.) This body of work has focused predominantly on one particular narrative form, "factual" accounts of personal experiences, and it has neglected fictional narratives. As Miller and Moore (1989) explain, this interest in narratives of personal experience stems from the fact that researchers who examine language acquisition consider such narratives almost a cultural universal; however, they argue, insufficient attention has been paid to "the socializing potential of the informal, mundane, and often pervasive narrative accounts that people give of their personal experiences" (p. 429). Such narratives are undoubtedly important for socialization and acculturation, but they do not exhaust the range and variety of stories that young children encounter: Children are also exposed to a wealth of fantasy and imaginary stories, not only in direct interactions with adults, but also, in our society, in books, videos, and TV programs. They also enjoy telling such stories and acting them out. The enormous field of children's pretend play, which is both ubiquitous and

highly engaging for the children involved, consists in large part of the enactment of fictional stories, and it vividly demonstrates their fascination with such stories. These forms of narrative activity effectively nourish and educate children's symbolic imagination; they should not be neglected or undervalued either theoretically or practically.

In addition to these two main tendencies, there have also been some noteworthy efforts to address the role of fantasy narratives in socialization, including the celebrated work of Bettelheim (1977) and a more recent study by Wolf and Heath (1992). Both dealt with stories—mostly, but not exclusively, fairy tales—that adults read or tell to children. Wolf and Heath added a longitudinal dimension to this investigation by following the socialization of two preschool children and their changing responses to stories repeatedly read to them. By focusing on the children's reactions, the analysis explored the meanings the children construct for themselves in listening to (and at times enacting) these stories.

All the bodies of research just described focus on adult–child interactions. However, other research has shown clearly that children's socialization during the early years also has a great deal to do with their participation in group life and peer culture (e.g., Corsaro, 1985, 1988, 1992; Davies, 1989). This perspective carries several important implications for a sociocultural approach to internalization. First, it emphasizes (in a way broadly consistent with Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Lawrence & Valsiner, 1993) that socialization is not a purely linear process whereby the child, as a passive object of this process, simply absorbs the external culture transmitted by adults. Rather, internalization is in large part a process of active *appropriation* in which children themselves play an active role in creatively *reproducing* the skills, knowledge, and social roles available in the adult culture. Second, much of this process of appropriation and reproduction is carried out by children, not in isolation, but in the context of their group life and their interactions with each other. In other words, this perspective does not deny the importance of adult–child relations in socialization, but adds a new (and mediating) dimension to the process: To a great degree, the cultural messages, images, and cognitive and symbolic frameworks transmitted to and acquired by children pass through the prism of peer culture.

The research reported in this chapter contributes to the line of work informed by this last perspective. Through an examination of the spontaneous fictional stories that a group of 4-year-olds in a preschool classroom tell and act out together, it shows how these stories provide a crucial vehicle for the construction of important dimensions of social reality and identity. The girls and boys involved, though participating in a shared storytelling and story-acting practice, come to tell quite different types of stories, which express sharply different images of the social world and of social relationships. At the same time, the girls and boys use these narrative activities to mark themselves off symbolically into different subgroups, to build up a sense of collective identity and cohesion within each subgroup, and to further elaborate different styles of symbolic action in both play and storytelling. Thus, these narrative activities contribute in important ways to the *construction* of the classroom culture—and, in particular, to the crystallization and polarization of two subcultures within the microcosm of the classroom. As I indicated earlier, a dialectical process is at work here: On the one hand, the formation of these subcultures is associated with the articulation and enactment of a crucial dimension of identity in the larger society, namely, gender. On the other hand, these gendered subcultures, built up and maintained by the children themselves, come to serve as distinct microcultural contexts for the differential and selective appropriation of elements from the larger culture. In the process, the children thus play an active role in constructing and maintaining some of the key social contexts for their own socialization.

In addition to my own previous work (e.g., Nicolopoulou, Scales, & Weintraub, 1994), some other studies have also noted systematic gender differences in children's spontaneous stories (e.g., Ames, 1966; Libby & Aries, 1989; Paley, 1984; Pitcher & Prelinger, 1963; Sutton-Smith, 1981; Tarullo, 1994; and, in a somewhat more limited and ambivalent way, Dyson, 1994). Although the number of such studies remains surprisingly small, I think it is fair to suggest that analyses that pay some attention to the symbolic content of stories (as opposed to focusing exclusively on formal structure), and that analyze a sufficient *quantity* of stories for the relevant patterns to emerge, almost cannot help noticing such differences, even when the researcher is not concerned with pursuing these issues in depth. It seems clear that, when girls and boys are given the opportunity to compose their own stories, these will differ on a number of dimensions.

The present study extends this line of research in three ways. First, most current studies of children's narrative activity tend to focus exclusively either on the analysis of symbolic content or, more commonly, on the formal analysis of narrative structure; varieties of formalist analysis predominate overwhelmingly in the main bodies of narrative research (see Nicolopoulou, in press, for a critical overview), whereas a good deal of the gender-sensitive research just cited has been restricted to the analysis of content. This study, by contrast, seeks to bring out the systematic interconnections between form and content in the children's narrative strategies. That is, I argue that the gender differences observed in the children's stories go beyond isolated thematic elements and amount to two distinct narrative styles, each informed by a different set of intentions—both symbolic and social-relational—and manifested in a distinctive range of narrative genres. In the philosopher Goodman's (1978) phrase, these narrative styles represent two different "ways of worldmaking." I have, therefore, attempted to delineate the logic

of each of these narrative styles and to take stock of the range of genres employed, drawing in part on Bakhtin's (1981, 1986) notion of genre, which is conceived as a specific interrelation of form and content. One implication of this approach is that a key starting point for the analysis of children's narrative styles is necessarily the interpretive reconstruction and elucidation of the underlying *structures of meaning* they embody and express.

Second, I attempt to show that these different narrative styles are not simply the result of a passive absorption of available cultural forms, or a straightforward top-down enforcement of gender roles, but that children actively construct the styles in their own way when given the opportunity, drawing selectively from and weaving together the variety of cultural elements available to them. Third, this study links the emergence, polarization, and elaboration of children's distinctive narrative styles to the dynamics of their group life.

In sum, this chapter demonstrates and analyzes the link between narrative worldmaking and identity formation in the emergence of two gender-based subcultures in a preschool classroom over the course of a school year. The formation of these subcultures is manifested by the simultaneous polarization, along gender lines, of three key factors: (a) the nature of the stories composed and enacted (in both form and symbolic content); (b) the patterns of attachment and affiliation expressed in the makeup of the groups enacting these narratives; and (c) the enactment and elaboration of self-conscious gender identifications, as revealed both by the distributions of roles in play-acting and by indications that the children themselves are conscious of these distinctive gender-related styles and their symbolic elements.

THE CHILDREN AND THEIR STORIES

The stories analyzed here are drawn from a multiyear project that examines the development of children's narrative activity and attempts to situate it in the context of their group life. The children in this sample were a class of 8 girls and 10 boys who attended a half-day nursery school in western Massachusetts during the academic year 1992–1993. This was one of six classrooms that were the object of ongoing observations by myself and several assistants from 1992 to 1994. At the beginning of the school year, the girls' ages ranged from 3-3 to 4-11 (mean age 4-4) and the boys' from 3-3 to 4-9 (mean age 3-11). The children in this group were primarily from middle-to upper-middle-class families, mostly professional or academic. In all, these 18 children generated 495 stories during the school year.

The stories were generated and collected as part of a storytelling and story-acting practice, pioneered by Paley (1986, 1988, 1990), that is a regular component of the preschool curriculum. Every day, any child in the class

can choose to dictate a story to a designated teacher, who records the story as the child tells it. At the end of each day, at "circle time," the same teacher reads aloud to the entire class all the stories dictated during that day; while each story is being read, the child/author, and other children whom he or she chooses, act out the story. Note that under this arrangement children tell their stories, not only to adults, but primarily to each other. Furthermore, their storytelling activity is embedded in the ongoing framework of their everyday group life—in the "real world" of their classroom miniculture. It seems clear that these conditions lead children to produce narratives that are richer, more ambitious, and more illuminating than when they compose them in isolation, and in response to agendas shaped directly by adults (see Nicolopoulou, 1996; Sutton-Smith, 1986). One result is that I have been able to study spontaneous stories by preschool children at younger ages than almost all similar research (the chief exception being the work of Paley). A second result is that certain patterns emerge quite sharply in these stories that appear to be muffled or obscured in the narrative material used by other studies.

This analysis builds on and extends a previous analysis based on a body of 582 stories generated by a preschool class of 28 4-year-olds attending a half-day nursery school affiliated with the Child Study Center of the University of California at Berkeley during the academic year 1988–1989 (see Nicolopoulou et al., 1994). The Berkeley study did not involve ongoing classroom observations of the children, so it lacked most of the ethnographic and sociometric data drawn on for the present study. However, I occasionally refer here to my analysis of the Berkeley data for illustrative purposes, without attempting a systematic comparison.

THE FORMATION OF GENDERED SUBCULTURES

This preschool makes strong and deliberate efforts to create an egalitarian, nonsexist atmosphere, and there is every reason to believe that most of the children come from families that share this orientation. Furthermore, one of the teachers' intentions in using this storytelling and story-acting practice is to help generate greater cohesion and a common culture within the classroom group. The children do indeed draw themes and other elements from each others' stories; to a great extent, however, they use them to build up two subcultures within the classroom, not one.

As I noted earlier, the formation of these gender-based subcultures is demonstrated by the combined evidence supplied by three sets of indicators: (a) polarization of gendered narrative styles, expressed in the kinds of stories composed and enacted; (b) gender differentiation in the children's group life; and (c) indications of self-conscious gender identification. The

factors underlying these indicators are interwoven and mutually reinforcing. I discuss each in turn.

Gendered Polarization of Narrative Styles

Despite the fact that the children's stories were shared with the entire group every day, my analysis shows that they divide overwhelmingly along gender lines. (This is consistent with my findings from other classrooms; see Nicolopoulou et al., 1994.) The kinds of stories told by the boys and girls differ systematically, and increasingly over time, in both form *and* content. In short, their stories are dominated by two highly distinctive gender-related *narrative styles* that contrast both sharply and subtly in their characteristic modes of representing experience and in their underlying images of social relationships. In fact, these narrative styles embody two distinctive types of genuine aesthetic imagination (surprising as it may seem to assert this about preschoolers), each with its own inner logic and coherence—two different "ways of worldmaking."

These differing orientations are manifested in a number of ways. At the most general level, they involve different approaches to the symbolic management of order and disorder: The girls' stories show a strain toward order, whereas the boys' stories show a strain toward disorder (for explanation and elaboration, see Nicolopoulou et al., 1994). I focus here on one key contrast: Each of these narrative styles presents a distinctive picture of social relationships and the social world, and, correspondingly, of the self. These distinctive preoccupations and symbolic starting points mean, in turn, that different narrative problems are salient for the kinds of stories that the boys and girls tend to construct.

Out of the 495 stories generated by this class during the academic year, this portion of the analysis is based on the 328 stories told by the older cohort of four boys (ages 4-2 to 4-9; mean age 4-6) and five girls (ages 4-6 to 4-11; mean age 4-8). This restriction yields a more manageable body of data, and it reflects the fact that these older children made up the dominant voice of the classroom peer culture, with the younger children generally following their lead.

The Girls' Stories: The Family Genre. The older girls in this group told stories that largely fit within what I call a "family genre," as they focus overwhelmingly on families and family activities. The families may be ordinary and quasirealistic or more clearly fictional (kings, queens, princes, and princesses are much favored by the girls, though *not* by the boys). The crucial point is that the girls' stories start—not just typically, but overwhelmingly—with characters already embedded in groups, and specifically in stable and "given" networks of *social relations*, the most favored of these being the

family unit. One corollary is that a concern with formal symmetry and relational completeness is built into the stories: That is, if the girl's story includes a mother, then it is very likely it will also include a father, and even some children; if there is a brother, then a sister is likely; if there is a king, there is a queen, and often a prince and/or princess; if a little girl appears, she will be situated in the context of her family. Furthermore, the girls use this theme to achieve narrative stability and coherence in their stories: An interrelated *set* of key characters is typically introduced at the beginning and then kept through the story. Thus, the family, after all its members have been carefully enumerated, may go places and do things—and then come back *home*:

> Once upon a time there was a castle and a *king*, and a *queen*, and a *princess*, and a *prince* lived in it. And they went out for a walk and they were at a playground and they played on the swings and slide down the slide. And then they went back home. They found a diamond and a crystal. The End. (Nelly, 10/8/92)[1]

This use of characters influences the way they are presented in the narrative. The girls' stories tend to introduce most of the characters at the beginning by listing family members, along with their pets (animals can thus be safely included in the story by being brought within the family unit). The girls also tend to specify the physical *setting* of the story, usually beginning with a home or castle, which are roughly equivalent. (A physical setting is introduced in the opening lines of the story—immediately before or after the characters have been enumerated—in 85% of the girls' stories and only 19% of the boys' stories.) Furthermore, this home setting becomes the locus from which action emanates (home-out movement occurs in 81% of the girls' stories) and, often, where the story ends (home-out-home movement occurs in 58% of the girls' stories). Thus, "home" is not only a specific physical place but also the center of safety, security, and order, rooted in the family unit; coming back home is often the natural ending and closure of the story.

As the next story indicates, the world outside the home may be a source of danger and disruption, whether the family goes out or the danger comes in.

> Once upon a time there was some people. The *brother*'s name was Nick. The *sister*'s name was Kate and the *mother*'s name was Jane. They went out into the woods and they saw a cave and they ran away because they saw glowing eyes. Then they saw a couple of *bears* and a lot of *bats*. The bears came into the house with the people and then they locked the door and the bats couldn't get in. They forgot to lock the windows and the bats came in the windows.

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[1]Pseudonyms have been assigned to the children whose stories are quoted. Characters in the stories are marked by italics.

The bats flew out. The *bearman* person told them to lock the windows then the people never forgot. And that must be the end. (Margo and Nelly, 9/14/92)

This is one way that the girls begin to elaborate their plotlines by introducing some danger, threat, or surprise. But, even when girls' stories introduce these elements, their stories tend to come to a satisfactory resolution most of the time (52% of stories introduce some dangerous element, but 72% of those are resolved in a positive way).

Once upon a time there was a castle and a *king* and a *queen* and a *prince* and a *princess* and a *unicorn* and a *pony* lived in it. And they went for a walk. And they found a playground and they swang on the swings, and they slide down the slide and then they went back home. But they had some trouble finding the way. But then a *dog* came to them and said "I'll help you find the way home" and he did. The End. (Nelly, 11/3/92)

Thus, when the girls do introduce a danger, threat, or surprise, they are almost always careful to resolve it in a positive way before ending the story. But it is worth noting that they also tell many stories that do not include these elements; that is, they do not consider these to be necessary elements in telling a story. (In this respect, they disagree with both preschool boys and most researchers in narrative development.) A story can just as well be about the ordinary everyday rhythms of life, which the girls (unlike the boys) often recount in a framework of cyclical action.

In short, the girls' stories are informed by a style organized around the representation, maintenance, and restoration of order. This image of order is rooted in a framework of *stable social relationships* (particularly family relationships), and the stability being depicted is physically *centered*, anchored topographically in the home. The major characters are overwhelmingly presented as embedded in these stable networks of family relationships. Thus, in the world of the girls' stories, the self starts out in a framework of solid (and largely harmonious) relationships that it encounters as already "given."

The Boys' Stories: The Heroic-Agonistic Genre. In contrast, the overwhelming majority of 4-year-old boys' stories start with isolated individual characters who are defined, not in terms of their relation to a stable social group and its setting, but through their actions (e.g., a bee buzzes and stings; Batman, Superman, and other superheroes fight and kill; Dragon blows fire). Thus, the formal problem facing the boys is how to relate these isolated figures to each other. The boys' solution is to connect the characters through their actions, and the types of actions favored for this purpose center on conflict and opposition, often with explicit stress on the characters' physical size and power. The characters most often used by boys tend to be either

big and powerful animals, real or mythical (e.g., wild horses, growling bears, T-Rex, Brontosaurus, Pterodactyl, Godzilla, fiery dragons, huge monsters), or much-admired superheroes, villains, and other cartoon action characters (e.g., Batman, Superman, Spiderman, Ninja Turtles, Shredder, Krang, Venom, Captain Hook, Captain America); a number of small but lethal or scary characters (e.g., scorpions, snakes, cobras, bats, skeletons) also appear. In short, the boys' stories focus on struggle and destruction, and they revolve around physical force and the demonstration of who is the most powerful character (i.e., the winner). In the Berkeley stories, straightforward depictions of destruction and/or chaos are not uncommon, without opposition between characters necessarily being involved; in the present sample, however, there is almost always conflict (at least two-sided). For this reason, the predominant genre can usefully be termed "heroic-agonistic."

Once there was *Robin Hood*. Then *Batman* came. Then prince *John* came—he's the king. Then *Superman* came. Superman battled with Batman and Batman died. Then he came alive again. Superman died. And then *Splinter*, *Raphael*, *Donatello*, and *Michelangelo* came.[2] Then an *Indian* came with a bow and arrow. Then a *cowboy* came on a horse with a bow and arrow just like the Indian and shot Superman so he wouldn't ever come alive again. And they lived happily ever after. The End. (Ethan, 11/19/92)

As this story demonstrates, characters are often introduced sequentially to keep the action going. In fact, boys' stories tend to consist of a series of episodes, with each episode featuring two (or more) characters confronting each other through conflict and struggle; a central point and outcome of each episode is usually to declare a winner.

Once upon a time there was a *wolf*. And then a *T-Rex* came. And then *Godzilla* came. And then *Pterodactyl* came. Then they had a fight, and then T-Rex killed Godzilla. And then Godzilla came back alive again. Then there came a bunch of *bad guys*, and then the Godzilla knocked the bad guys down and they were trying to get him. Then a little *super hero* came. Then he was flying and he landed. Then he flipped, and then Godzilla realized it was Batman, so then he blowed fire at him, and then he falled down and he was dead. Then a *Brontosaurus* came, and Godzilla jumped on him, and then he got squished. Then they had a major fight. Then they stopped the fight, and everyone looked at each other, and then they didn't do the fight anymore. The End. (Zachary, 9/17/92)

At first, these sequential episodes tend to be loosely connected, with different sets of characters for each; but as the year goes on, one or more

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[2]For the sake of those readers (presumably ones who rarely encounter young children) who are not already aware of this: Raphael, Donatello, and Michelangelo are three of the Ninja Turtles (Leonardo is the fourth), and Splinter (a wise rat skilled in martial arts) is their mentor.

characters appear in several episodes, so that in some of the stories a single character emerges after many trials as the overall winner. Unlike the girls, the boys do not feel compelled to specify the setting of the action, particularly at the beginning of the story; when they do come to use some spatial markers later in the year, these mainly indicate not a stable site but a direction of motion.

In the world of the boys' stories, connections between the characters, even the major characters, are not "given" but (if they are depicted at all) have to be achieved. Over time, the boys do begin to link their characters in somewhat more stable ways, most often by having them come together as "friends" or teams who gang up against a third character (or another team). Thus themes of cooperation begin to emerge, but in the service of the overriding theme of conflict.

> Once upon a time there was *Batman* and *Robin the Boy Wonder* and they were riding in a Batmobile. And suddenly they crashed and the Batmobile exploded. And they suddenly jumped out so they wouldn't get exploded. *Joker* came and he set Bat traps and they were for Robin the Boy Wonder and Batman. Batman and Robin the Boy Wonder got stuck in Bat traps. It almost turned them into bad guys but they broke through it. And they had a battle and Batman and Robin the Boy Wonder fighted Joker. Joker had his flower on his clothes and it squirted ink at Robin the Boy Wonder and Robin the Boy Wonder got wounded. The wound got better. They had another battle and Batman and Robin the Boy Wonder won. Then *Penguin* came with Penguin's umbrella. And the gas shot at Robin the Boy Wonder and he fell down and got wounded. The wound got better. They had a battle and Robin the Boy Wonder and Batman won. The End. (Zachary, 2/23/93)

Given these preoccupations, the boys have a harder time establishing and maintaining coherence in their stories than the girls. The story I have just quoted holds together fairly well, but one can still see in it the kinds of centrifugal elements that operate in the boys' stories. The overwhelming emphasis on fighting, disruption, and the demonstration of power, combined with the sequential presentation of characters in unspecified and thus unstable settings, tend to pull the coherence of the narrative apart. The typical boy's story rarely has a "natural" closure, as do many of the girls' stories, because it is always tempting to introduce another character who could fight with the winner-so-far, to prolong the fighting and/or to demonstrate further the winner's power and superiority.

In short, the boys' stories are not just relatively disorderly; they are motivated by a positive *fascination* with disorder.

Summary Remarks. The foregoing discussion is not a comprehensive interpretive analysis of these gender-related narrative styles or even of the two specific genres on which I have focused. In fact, delineating these styles,

and the cognitive and symbolic modes they embody, remains one of the richest and most interesting areas of inquiry in this long-term study. I am continuing to refine and elaborate my analysis of the developing narrative strategies by which the children are able to achieve an ambitious range of symbolic effects.

However, some of the basic contrasts should already be clearly established. The boys and girls have developed, and make enthusiastic use of, two distinctive narrative styles that point to distinctive modes of ordering and interpreting the world, particularly the social world. Correspondingly, they present two contrasting images of the self: in the girls' stories, a socially embedded self, and in the boys' stories, an essentially isolated and conflictual self. In the process, they *selectively* appropriate and manipulate elements available to them from the larger culture. For example, in constructing their stories, both boys and girls draw material from television and other media of popular culture, and they are read to from the same books in the classroom, but the girls use fairy-tale themes in their stories far more often than boys, whereas the boys more frequently use cartoon action characters and TV superheroes. Although both boys and girls in the classrooms I have studied are exposed to units about dinosaurs, it is the boys who use dinosaurs continually in their stories, whereas the girls tend to ignore them. These and other choices are guided by two distinctive sets of preoccupations and narrative intentions.

Further implications follow from these differences. These different symbolic orientations and preoccupations pose different—in some ways complementary—*formal problems* for the boys and girls, and thus help lead their stories in different directions in terms of form as well as content. (Therefore, it is worth adding, the criteria used to assess the development of children's narrative competence need to take into account the different purposes and effects that the children themselves are trying to achieve—and gender is only one of the sociocultural axes along which these motivating concerns can differ. For some discussion, see Nicolopoulou, 1996, pp. 380–381.) As indicated earlier, boys' stories portray a number of essentially unattached individual characters who are basically presented through their actions; thus the key narrative problem for the boys' genres is to find ways to connect these characters so as to yield a moderately coherent story. The boys use the characters' actions—particularly actions involving conflict and opposition—to relate them to each other. As time goes on, characters may be linked in coalitions, but these are also for the sake of conflict, so that adversarial and violent themes continue to be central. For girls, on the other hand, connection is not something that needs to be achieved, but is rather a "given" starting point. Because girls begin with characters embedded in networks of stable social relationships, their key narrative problems are to generate movement and action (without disrupting the basic framework of

order) and to find ways to individualize the characters (without breaking the basic connections). The girls' strategies for solving these formal problems are complex, inventive, and often ingenious.

These general orientations are broadly consistent in all the preschool populations I have studied, in Berkeley and in several preschools in western Massachusetts. However, one difference is also worth noting. In the Berkeley stories, these orienting narrative purposes are pursued by means of a wider range of specific genres. Although the boys frequently portray disorder by depicting violence, conflict, and destruction, they also use other narrative strategies to achieve the desired symbolic effects—for example, by focusing on rule breaking rather than violence per se, or by building a story around escalating chains of extravagant, grotesque, and disruptive images. Correspondingly, although the prototypical kind of girl's story in the Berkeley sample centers on the depiction of a family group, the girls also use other genres to convey themes of centered stability rooted in stable relationships. The stories generated in the Massachusetts classrooms display a much narrower range of specific genres—overwhelmingly, the two I reconstructed earlier. In other words, both boys and girls focus more single-mindedly on what had been a more loosely defined prototypical genre for the Berkeley sample. At the same time, each of these genres is developed and elaborated more fully than was the case in the Berkeley corpus of stories. (Some of these differences can, I think, be attributed to the dynamics of the different classroom cultures involved; but space limitations do not permit this question to be pursued further here.) With regard to the interpretive analysis of the two gendered narrative styles, these variations bring out, even more sharply, the striking consistency of the basic underlying patterns.

Narrative Polarization: A Quantitative Demonstration. In reconstructing the distinctive narrative styles elaborated by the girls and boys, I have thus far used specific examples as illustrations. Now let me offer one simple but forceful quantitative comparison to indicate how strongly the boys' and girls' stories in this sample gravitate toward the two gender-related genres I have identified: the "family genre" and the "heroic-agonistic genre." Table 8.1 summarizes the relative frequencies (technically, the mean proportions) of the content themes central to each of these dominant genres: explicit depictions of the family group and of aggressive violence. All stories that explicitly mentioned a family and/or a set of family members (with at least one kinship relation being indicated) were coded as including a "family" theme. Correspondingly, stories were coded for "aggressive violence" when characters explicitly attacked, fought, hurt, killed, ate, and/or actively threatened each other.

The results show an unambiguous contrast along gender lines, with the boys depicting aggressive violence much more frequently throughout the

TABLE 8.1
Mean Proportions of Themes in Stories Told by the Older Children

| | Fall | | Spring | |
	Family	Aggressive Violence	Family	Aggressive Violence
Girls	76%	17% (N = 46)	76%	27% (N = 71)
Boys	18%	87% (N = 85)	3%	97% (N = 116)

year, whereas the girls disproportionately favor the family theme. Furthermore, examining the stories told in the fall and spring separately reveals an interesting pattern in gender polarization that will recur with the other dimensions discussed later in this chapter. The boys' stories tend to polarize more sharply than the girls': The imbalance in their use of the two themes is more pronounced, and it increases as the year goes on, whereas for the girls' stories the pattern of polarization is less intense in both respects.

This simple quantitative comparison strongly demonstrates the tendency toward gender polarization I have suggested; but I should add that, if these categories are refined for further analysis, it becomes clear that this table actually *under*states the contrasts involved. For example, although girls also describe conflict, they tend to do so in ways that are very different from those used by the boys: There is none of the enthusiastic fascination with violence and disorder apparent in the boys' stories. Rather, girls tend to deal with aggressive violence quickly, rarely describing it in detail (such as dwelling on the weapons used to kill others, a favorite topic for the boys), and these incidents are often described using the passive voice. In fact, a number of these cases can best be described as involving unilateral harm, where a character is one-sidedly the *victim* of violence or harm without being an agent of either (e.g., the princess was captured; the baby was stolen). Furthermore, in the great majority of these types of stories the harm inflicted is reversed in the end (e.g, the princess or the baby returns safely back home). (For a more general discussion of the ways that apparently similar elements are transformed in significance through "symbolic reworking" when they are introduced into the contrasting frameworks of these two gender-related narrative styles, see Nicolopoulou et al., 1994, pp. 113–116.)

Gender Differentiation in Group Life

These gendered narrative patterns seem to emerge from a complex and mutually reinforcing interaction of two ongoing processes: (a) the children's distinctive narrative styles express underlying differences in their emerging cognitive modes and patterns of symbolic imagination; and, simultaneously,

(b) the boys and girls use these different styles as part of an effort to mark themselves off from each other symbolically into different groups, and to build a sense of cohesion and shared identity within each subgroup. This link between the emergence of distinctive narrative styles and the crystallization of gendered subgroups in the classroom miniculture is supported by extensive evidence concerning the children's patterns of attachment and group affiliation. As one illustration, we can examine the makeup of the groups acting out these narratives; in other words, who acted in whose stories? Because these stories are acted out every day in a group context, and the author of the story chooses the other children who will help act it out, the storytelling and story-acting practice is used as a vehicle for addressing social-relational concerns such as seeking or expressing friendship, group affiliation, and prestige. Everything else being equal, children will usually try to include as many of their friends as possible, as well as potential friends and playmates who will then owe them a favor in return. The initiative, it should be noted, is not simply one way; the composition of the story-acting groups is also affected by which children signal a desire to act in the story (usually by raising their hands). Either way, however, the makeup of these story-acting groups provides a useful indicator of patterns of attachment and group affiliation.

Table 8.2 addresses this question. Taking advantage of the fact that this is a mixed-age classroom, it lists figures separately for the younger (3-year-old) and older (4-year-old) children; our classroom observations indicate that older and younger children play separately most of the time, except when they are brought together for teacher-directed activities. Results for fall and spring are also separated.

As even a quick glance at Table 8.2 makes clear, in general children tend to act much more often (over 75% of the time) in stories by children of the same gender as themselves. One notable exception is that, in the fall, the older girls are almost as likely to act in boys' stories as in those of other girls; but this is no longer true by the spring. This pattern, incidentally,

TABLE 8.2
Frequency With Which Children Acted in Stories by Members
of the *Same* Gender and of the *Other* Gender (Mean Proportions)

	Girls Acted					Boys Acted			
	Fall		Spring			Fall		Spring	
	In Girls' Stories	In Boys' Stories	In Girls' Stories	In Boys' Stories		In Girls' Stories	In Boys' Stories	In Girls' Stories	In Boys' Stories
Older	58%	42%	75%	25%	Older	17%	83%	25%	75%
Younger	72%	28%	90%	10%	Younger	25%	75%	21%	79%

reflects the more general phenomenon already mentioned: Of the two genders, it tends to be the boys who are most consistently preoccupied with marking themselves off sharply from the girls and from everything female. However, as time goes on, the boundaries of the gendered subgroups are sharpened on both sides. This pattern of gender differentiation in group life appears to be linked to a growing sense of conscious gender identification. The following section examines evidence attesting to this phenomenon.

Some Indications of Conscious Gender Identification

Types of Roles Acted Out

I have argued that this polarization of narrative styles and of group affiliation is linked to the symbolic construction and assertion of a key component of individual and collective identity, namely, gender. There is abundant evidence to support this link, and I have already presented some of it. Further evidence is provided by an examination of the kinds of *roles* children take in enacting these stories.

For present purposes, the roles are coded into three categories: (a) the gender of the character is clearly identified, and the child takes a role of the *same gender* as herself or himself; (b) *gender-crossing* roles, where a girl takes on a masculine role or a boy a feminine role; and (c) *gender-neutral* roles, where the gender of the character is not intrinsically obvious and cannot be established by the child's consistent use of gendered pronouns in the story.

Most of these "gender-neutral" roles are animals of one sort or another, and it should be noted that, although these roles carry no explicit gender identification, many are in fact highly gender-*stereotyped*. (For example, dinosaurs are generally a boy's enthusiasm, not a girl's.) If the "gender-neutral" category were disaggregated along these lines, the results would be more striking. However, because that analysis is still under way, I will use the three broad categories outlined here.

As already noted, each storyteller acts in his or her own story, and he or she chooses the other children who will play the other parts. We look first at the kinds of roles children take for *themselves* when their own story is being enacted (Table 8.3).

Clearly, when a direct presentation of self is involved, same-gender or gender-neutral roles are overwhelmingly preferred over gender-crossing roles. Note also that, in every category, the preference for same-gender roles relative to gender-neutral roles increases during the year and that younger children (both girls and boys) are more willing than older ones to take gender-neutral roles as compared with same-gender roles. (We can also see that, although gender-crossing roles are very rare for all categories, they are *slightly* more common for the girls than for the boys.) In short, there is a clear trend toward gender identification and its assertion in narrative enactment.

TABLE 8.3
Distributions of Types of Roles Taken by
Author of Story (Mean Proportions)

			Fall			Spring	
		SG	GN	GC	SG	GN	GC
Girls	Older	73%	25%	2%	76%	15%	9%
	Younger	27%	67%	6%	45%	53%	2%
Boys	Older	62%	36%	2%	86%	14%	—
	Younger	22%	79%	—	45%	54%	1%

Note. SG = same-gender, GN = gender-neutral, GC = gender-crossing.

Now we can examine the distribution of roles acted out by children *other* than the storyteller. Again, bear in mind that two factors are involved here: (a) whom the author chooses; and (b) whether the other child *wants* to act in the story. (See Table 8.4.)

Although the pattern here is more complex, we find the same general tendency toward gender polarization demonstrated by the previous results. On the whole, children are *slightly* more willing to take gender-crossing roles in other children's stories than in their own, but the overall preference for same-gender or gender-neutral roles is still strong. Again, girls are clearly more willing to take on gender-crossing roles (mostly in boys' stories) than boys are; but this is only a matter of degree. The highest figures for the older girls' gender-crossing roles are in boys' stories during the spring; and by the spring, of course, the overwhelming majority of the stories in which they are acting are stories by other girls. Most intriguing is the finding that, in the fall, the younger girls are willing to take a large proportion of gender-crossing roles when they act in boys' stories (although these account for only about one fourth of all the stories they act in). Usually, this means that the boys have picked them to be "bad guys," and they are willing to go along (although the boys often complain that they stand around and don't "do" anything). By the spring, however, their proportion of gender-crossing roles in boys' stories has dropped from 52% to 18%. Both younger and older boys, of course, are very unwilling to take gender-crossing roles from the start. Overall, the pattern of children's roles once again demonstrates a general tendency toward the assertion and mutual demarcation of gender identities.

Conscious Awareness of Gender-Related Styles

It would follow from the argument advanced so far that one factor contributing to the polarization of the children's narrative styles is precisely the process by which the boys and girls acquire greater familiarity with each others' styles and self-consciously sharpen the symbolic boundaries between

TABLE 8.4
Distributions of Types of Roles Acted by
Children Other Than Storyteller (Mean Proportions)

A. Acted by Girls							
			Fall			Spring	
		SG	GN	GC	SG	GN	GC
Girls' Stories	Older	42%	48%	10%	52%	37%	11%
	Younger	19%	67%	15%	56%	37%	7%
			Fall			Spring	
		SG	GN	GC	SG	GN	GC
Boys' Stories	Older	18%	54%	27%	27%	37%	37%
	Younger	4%	44%	52%	22%	60%	18%

B. Acted by Boys							
			Fall			Spring	
		SG	GN	GC	SG	GN	GC
Girls' Stories	Older	56%	40%	4%	57%	39%	4%
	Younger	43%	53%	4%	58%	32%	10%
			Fall			Spring	
		SG	GN	GC	SG	GN	GC
Boys' Stories	Older	55%	45%	—	61%	38%	1%
	Younger	56%	44%	—	61%	38%	1%

Note. SG = same-gender, GN = gender-neutral, GC = gender-crossing.

them. Therefore, the use of this storytelling and story-acting practice to build up a common culture within the classroom may also, ironically, have provided the children with a framework for the articulation of differences within this common culture. There is considerable evidence to suggest that this sort of dialectic is in fact at work. I offer just a few examples here.

The Newcomer. Some of this evidence can be obtained by focusing on the longitudinal analysis of individual children and tracing the developmental progression of their stories over the course of the year. These analyses suggest that a number of the boys and girls are initially more willing to use elements from each others' stories, but over time they generally drop these "anomalous" elements as their stories come to conform to the style characteristic of their own gender, even as that style is more sharply crystallized

and more fully elaborated. At the same time, during this process they show signs of becoming increasingly aware of the differences between the two styles, and sometimes even comment on them explicitly.

One boy in this class, whom I will call Ethan, is of particular interest in this regard because he was the only newcomer in the group of older boys; the rest had attended the same classroom (as its younger members) the previous year. Ethan was a good and comfortable storyteller, but he had not yet learned the specific themes, conventions, and customs of this group of boys. Thus, it is significant that, in several ways, his first stories of the year diverged markedly from the characteristic boys' style. As the year went on, however, his stories increasingly conformed to the forms and conventions of this gender-specific style, though he was also able to give them a unique personal touch. Ethan began his first four stories by explicitly stating the setting, and in two of those also included members of a royal family:

> Once upon a time there was a kingdom where a King and a Queen and a bad guy lived. . . . (9/17/92)

> Once upon a time there was a spooky old cave where there lived two bats and one monster and one daddy long legs. . . . (9/23/92)

> There was a kingdom where a King and Queen and 94 courts lived and one soldier in a castle. . . . (10/7/92)

> Once there was a dragon. It lived in a castle. . . . (10/8/92)

Although the depiction of a royal family became a characteristic element of the girls' stories in this class—and was generally avoided by the boys—it was in fact first used by Ethan. Nevertheless, despite the inclusion of setting and royal-family characters, even Ethan's first stories do not fall neatly into the girls' style: In addition to the King and Queen, there is also an explicit "bad guy" in one story, and the "94 courts and one soldier" in the other actually fight against a number of powerful animals. In fact, all of Ethan's stories in the fall include the theme of aggressive violence, as do all but one of his stories in the spring. But his initial stories are his most stylistically "mixed" or ambiguous of the year.

By the fifth story, Ethan no longer begins with the setting; rather, his openings begin to conform to the characteristic boys' mode, which involves starting *in medias res*: "The bad guys killed the dragon. . . ." (10/9/92); and "Captain Hook killed the dragon. . . ." (10/19/92). After a number of stories in this mode, Ethan again introduces a setting and a royal family in two consecutive stories. Significantly, however, the first of these is told together with Valerie, a popular girl who is chosen to act in several stories every day and is at times Ethan's play companion. For the rest of the year, he essentially abandons the use of an opening setting statement, except on a few isolated

occasions. It should be noted, too, that although he introduces the (royal) family theme in 49% of his stories during the fall, the family as a group rarely plays any significant role in the action, as the next story illustrates.

> Once upon a time there was a kingdom and a *prince* and a *king* and a *queen* and *Mutant Ninja Turtles* in it. Then a *wolf* came. The prince and the wolf had a big battle. Then *Knight in Shining Armor* came. Then *Batman* came, and with his big weapon he killed the wolf. The End. (Ethan, 10/28/92)

By the spring only 2 of his 22 stories (9%) include the family theme. Furthermore, before he told one of these two stories, he announced to the teacher writing down the story that he had "decided in [his] mind to have a girl's story." As an indication of how well he understood the central motifs defining "a girl's story," notice that there is again an explicit statement of the setting.

> Once there was a castle and a *prince* and a *princess* and some *knights* lived there. They went for a walk and one *knight* had some binoculars. He spied a *wolf* with them. And then he said to the other knights, "Let's kill that wolf." So they charged forward and the end of their lances went into the wolf. Then they went back to their kingdom and the princess and the prince went bicycle riding. (Ethan, 3/1/93)

Although this story could not be used as an exemplar of the girls' style without some reservations, Ethan has clearly captured several key elements. In fact, the story seems to represent a deliberate blending of boys' and girls' styles. Despite the fact that it includes violent aggression, the enemy is introduced at a distance (rare in boys' stories), and the actual battle is somewhat stylized. The setting is specified and the plot unfolds as movement in designated space, which is typical of the girls' stories. Furthermore, the story ends with the prince and the princess going back home where they engage in the everyday activity of "bicycle riding"—the first time Ethan ever mentioned such an everyday activity in his stories, although it is common in the girls' stories.

The pattern of Ethan's storytelling offers many indications that the gendered narrative styles I have identified are not simply artifacts of adult analysis, but are recognized and understood—more or less self-consciously— by the children themselves. Indeed, once the boundaries between the two styles are clearly established, it is occasionally possible for a boy like Ethan to play at crossing these boundaries—if he first signals to the group that he realizes he is going to tell "a girl's story."

Some Group Stories. Another example that brings out this conscious awareness of gendered styles is a group story told in the spring by two boys and a girl. Before we turn to that story, let us first examine, for purposes of comparison, a group story told earlier in the spring by all four of the older

boys. This is a prototypical boys' story. The amount of violent aggression, and the detail and elaboration with which it is recounted, are quite striking, though not unusual.

> Once upon a time there was a *monster* and *Mummyman* came. And Mummyman squished poison out of his nose. And then *G.I. Joe* came and the G.I. Joe had a gun. At the part where it shooted a yellow light, shot out poison at the monster, and the monster died. And *Cutman* cut a house and it fell on Mum-myman and he got squished. And Mummyman's tushy fell off. And *Superman* was seeing this and it didn't look funny. And Superman put Mummyman back together. And Mummyman squirted poison out of his nose at Superman and then Mummyman squirted lava and fire out of his nose and killed Superman. Then Mummyman shot poison out of his nose at Cutman and Cutman died. And then Cutman came alive again. And Cutman and G.I. Joe became friends. Then Mummyman squirted lava out of his nose holes onto the wall and it bounced onto a *tree* and the tree fell down. And it broke the *mountains* and the mountains said, "Why did you fall on me?" but the tree ignored him. And Superman was standing on the ground and Cutman looked at Superman and said, "Hey! What's going on with my eyes?" And Superman said, "I put poison in your eyes to make me look like a ton of Supermans." And the poison came out of Cutman's eyes and Superman looked like one plain Superman. Then Cutman cut off Superman's head. The G.I. Joe said, "What a show!" (Ethan, Seth, Zachary, Jacob, 4/6/93)

By contrast with this typical boys' story, we can now examine the kind of exception that proves the rule. About a month later, two of these boys and Valerie, the popular girl mentioned earlier, decided to tell a story together. (This is the only mixed-gender group story in the spring; there were a few more in the fall.) With the addition of a girl to the storytelling group, the change in tone is dramatic. In a number of ways, the new story appears to involve a blend of elements from the boys' and girls' styles; but what is most remarkable is the amount of evidence that this mixing is deliberate and self-conscious. For example, not only is the violence in this story softened and modulated by comparison with the previous one, but the story comments explicitly on this modulation. (The characters are watching a TV show, "but it had so much violence in it they changed the channel"—hardly what one would expect in a usual boys' story.) The story veers back and forth between violent and centrifugal elements (exploding spaceships, outer space, bad guys) and fairy-tale and domestic themes (including a return to a "cozy home," the classic girls' touch).

> Once upon a time there were three aliens and one was named *Valerie*, then *Seth*, then *Zachary*. They went to Pan Palm Island. Then they said they didn't like that place so they went to Treasure Island where they found lots of treas-ure—like a golden sword with crystals on it. When they tried to get home the spaceship was exploded so they had to live there. Then they found some

> bottles and pieces of paper and they putted the pieces of paper in the bottles and throwed them into the water and some people found them. They were *mechanics* and they sailed back to Treasure Island and they fixed the space ship. Then they flew back to outer space. They went back to their cozy home and they watched TV. They were watching Sliver but it had so much violence in it they changed the channel. And they watched all the cartoons, they got so sleepy that they drifted off. They woke up and Bugs Bunny was on and they watched it and then they went back to sleep. Then they had a bad dream. While they were sleeping a scary cartoon was on and the *bad guys* came out of the cartoon. Then their *friend bear* came along and broke up the bad guys and then he stomped on them and they turned into bubble gum. The End. To be continued. (Zachary, Valerie, and Seth, 5/25/93)

The final product of this compromise is not so much a synthesis of the two styles as a heterogeneous amalgamation. As this example vividly illus-trates, even when the children seek to cross the boundaries of their gen-dered subcultures in their narrative activity, the results testify precisely to the sharpness and significance of those boundaries, as well as the children's preoccupation with them.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The results demonstrate a close interconnection between (a) the develop-ment of gendered narrative styles in children's symbolic action, carrying with them distinctive images of self and society, and (b) the emergence of gender differentiation in children's group life; in combination, these contrib-ute to a process by which two distinct subcultures are actively constructed and maintained by the children themselves. At the same time, (c) the crys-tallization of these subcultures within the microcosm of the classroom both draws on and provides a framework for the further appropriation, enact-ment, and reproduction of a crucial dimension of identity in the larger society, namely, gender. The individual child, through participation in the symbolic action of the storytelling and story-acting practice, is contributing to the maintenance and elaboration of these gendered subcultures and, simultaneously, is drawing from them symbolic resources for the difficult and complex project of defining personal identity. Thus, the formation of individual identity and of these two levels of collective identity (subgroup membership in the classroom, gender affiliation in the larger society) are mutually implicated in fundamental ways, and the symbolic action of the children's narrative worldmaking serves as a key link between them.

Before I go on to discuss some of the substantive implications of these results, a few methodological remarks may be in order. The type of study reported here requires going beyond a purely formalist analysis of narrative to undertake an interpretive analysis that treats children's narrative activi-

ties as forms of meaningful symbolic action. But it is also worth noting that to carry out this kind of analysis effectively depended on the availability of a body of stories composed and enacted by the children themselves under conditions that were, to an unusual degree, spontaneous and self-directed. It was also important that the stories were available in sufficient quantity to allow significant patterns to emerge that are harder to establish when the research is limited to a small number of cases. Furthermore, these stories were not generated, as is usually the case, by children interacting individually (or in pairs) with adults—caretakers and/or researchers. Instead, they were generated as part of a storytelling and story-acting practice embedded in the children's everyday classroom life and their peer-group activities. As I noted earlier, these conditions lead children to produce narratives that are in many ways richer, more ambitious, and more illuminating than the material used by most current narrative research.

In addition, the sociocultural embeddedness of these narrative practices allows the present study to address a critical problem raised perceptively by Maccoby (1988, 1990). She pointed out that much of the work that attempts to examine the significance of gender and of gender differences in development yields systematically misleading results because it treats gender (explicitly or in effect) as a purely individual characteristic, whereas gender is a deeply social phenomenon—not *only* in the sense that gender roles are defined in various ways by the larger culture, but also in the sense that gender identity is established, constructed, and developed in concrete sociocultural contexts. For children (but not only for them), peer culture is a crucial context within which gender identity is defined, explored, enacted, and elaborated. Thus, researchers studying children in artificial isolation from the context of their everyday peer culture (with both its pressures *and* its resources) experience mysterious difficulties in finding the kinds of gender-related narrative differences (in storytelling, play, and writing) that hit parents and teachers in the face every day.

Therefore, this study underlines the need to situate development in sociocultural context; but it also suggests the complex and multifaceted character of this context and of its role in development. In the case examined here, it appears that a key matrix for the children's socialization and development is a practice of *shared symbolic activity* that serves as a collectively constituted field for narrative performance, experimentation, and cross-fertilization. This socially structured practice is more than just a sum of interactions, particularly adult-child interactions. Rather, it has to be understood as a genuinely *collective* reality, an ongoing activity system that provides the children with opportunities and resources for development (including the mastery of narrative skills themselves) and, at the same time, helps to motivate and direct this development. And it is, ironically, as a *shared* activity that this storytelling and story-acting practice contributes to the formation

and elaboration, within the miniculture of the classroom, of two gendered subcultures that define themselves, in part, against each other.

However, the sociocultural context shaping these processes is not limited to the face-to-face interaction of the classroom and the peer-group subculture. The dynamics of the classroom miniculture can be understood only in their interrelations with the larger society. In their narrative activities the children, while trying to make sense of this larger social world, are simultaneously trying to find their places in it, and to define and develop their own identities. One of the key resources for the construction of individual identity is, of course, the appropriation of the grand categories of collective identity established by the larger culture, gender being one of the grandest and most pervasive. But this process involves more than just *placing* oneself in one of these categories. It is also necessary to flesh out the *meaning* of these categories, which are complex, puzzling, and—even within a single society—highly multivalent. In this respect, the microcosm of the play-world and of narrative practice serves—to return to Paley's expression—as an "experimental theater" within which children can explore, and attempt to master, these mysteries of self, agency, and social relations. At the same time, this "experimental theater" is ultimately constructed and maintained by the children's symbolic activity itself. For example, the gendered narrative styles I have delineated were not simply available to the children ready made, but were *developed* and *elaborated* over the course of the year. The same is true, more generally, of the gendered subcultures within which these narrative styles are enmeshed.

What this analysis makes clear is that a socioculturally situated approach to development need not be one that simply dissolves the individual in his or her sociocultural context or that sees the child as merely a passive object of the socialization process. Instead, what the present study advocates and—I hope—concretely exemplifies is a dialectical approach that can grasp the social formation of mind and personality while effectively treating children (even young children) as active participants in their own development and self-formation as well. In this case, one key aspect of this dialectic is that the children use their narrative and other symbolic activities to mark off, maintain, and elaborate the two gendered subcultures I have identified within the microcosm of the classroom. In doing so, they draw on (and participate in reproducing) a key dimension of identity as defined by the larger culture, namely, gender. However, these gendered subcultures (and other peer-group subcultures), once formed, serve in turn as minicultural contexts within which children can collaborate in *selectively* appropriating elements from the larger culture for both worldmaking and identity formation. The formative impact of these peer-group subcultures is, of course, heightened by their emotional significance for children, manifested both in positive motivations toward friendship, acceptance, inclusion, and identifi-

cation and, more negatively, in powerful pressures to limit nonconformity. Thus, when children participate by way of narrative practices in the process of their own socialization, they do not do it *only* through the individual appropriation of elements from the larger culture. They also help to construct some of the key sociocultural contexts within which the process of their own socialization occurs.

Recognizing the full complexity of this dialectic is particularly important when attempting to address, as the present study does, a dimension of development as difficult and controversial as the emergence of gender differences and gender identity. Gender is a phenomenon that is especially salient, perplexing, and emotionally charged, not only for young children, but for adult researchers as well. Many socioculturally oriented scholars who would otherwise be eager to emphasize the significance of children's own agency and initiative in development become a good deal more uneasy about doing so when the question of gender differences is involved. In so far as they are willing to recognize these differences, they would prefer to attribute them one-sidedly to the imposition of gender roles on children by adults—either in direct adult-child interaction, or through messages disseminated by the mass media, and so on. (For other scholars, of course, the emergence of gender differences is not a matter for sociocultural inquiry in the first place, because they take them to be straightforwardly genetic.)

The roots of this uneasiness deserve to be addressed directly and without circumlocutions. The fact that, to a significant degree, young children actively separate themselves into subgroups that are not only gender-segregated but also suffused by distinctive gender-related cultural styles—and that they do this most thoroughly and effectively precisely to the extent that they are allowed to organize and direct their own peer-group activities independent of adult direction—can be depressing to many of us. Many people would, therefore, like to pretend that it does not happen, or that it can be directly attributed to the influence of parents or teachers, or that it could be easily changed with some superficial modifications in classroom practices. However, the relevant evidence from research on children's play, friendship, storytelling, and other symbolic activities is quite consistent on this point: Everything else being equal, the greater the extent to which young children organize their activities independently and on their own initiative, the more likely these are to be gender-segregated and (to put it bluntly) gender-stereotyped (see, e.g., Davies, 1989; Paley, 1984; Thorne, 1993). In the past, teachers in our society certainly played an active role in promoting gender-segregated activities. At present, however, it seems clear that, in most schools and preschools, young boys and girls are most likely to be brought together when adults organize mixed-gender activities. Whether or not we like it, we have to face the reality that children invest considerable energy in actively constructing, maintaining, and elaborating these symbolic

boundaries, and in policing these boundaries (through teasing, exclusion, and other means) when they are breached. Of course, these boundaries are never absolute or impermeable, but that is another matter; as we have seen, even the crossing of these boundaries often involves a recognition and reassertion of their significance.

Furthermore, a range of work in a number of fields supports the conclusion that the gender differences in symbolic imagination and in images of self and society outlined in this study are broadly representative, and that they go deeper than superficial narrative conventions among preschoolers. Although systematic studies of gender differences in children's spontaneous stories remain fairly rare, their findings are generally compatible with those presented here. And the distinctive gender-related patterns in young children's narrative styles delineated here resonate to a striking degree with other findings from research on gender differences in children's play (e.g., Black, 1989; Paley, 1984, 1986; Sachs, 1987) and in the narrative, conversational, and dispute-resolving styles of children and adults (e.g., Goodwin, 1990; Goodwin & Goodwin, 1987; Sheldon, 1990; Tannen, 1990a, 1990b). By 3 to 4 years of age, and possibly even earlier, children prefer to play with same-gender partners, and a major reason seems to be that boys and girls have already developed different play styles (see, e.g., Golombok & Fivush, 1994; Maccoby, 1988, 1990; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1987). In addition—speaking more tentatively—it seems plausible that the contrast between the socially embedded image of the self presented in the girls' stories and the isolated and conflictual image presented in the boys' stories points to some of the crucial developmental "prehistory" for the kinds of differences in men's and women's moral sensibilities and sociocultural orientations explored, for example, by Gilligan and her associates (e.g., Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan & Attanucci, 1988). And in many ways the results of the present study correspond closely to what one would expect from the work of Chodorow on the social formation of gender differences in emotional and personality development (e.g., 1978, 1989). In particular, her analysis suggests that, although establishing symbolic boundaries on the basis of gender is something that concerns both boys and girls, boys' sense of gender identity is more fragile and problematic than girls'. Therefore, as we have seen, boys feel a much more urgent need to mark themselves off decisively from girls, and from everything female, than vice-versa.

All this having been said, it is also important to stress that facing reality is not the same as surrendering to fatalism. None of the evidence just cited implies that the kinds of gender differences explored in this study are necessarily inflexible, biologically determined, and unshaped by culture. It simply means that the formative influence of culture is more complex, mediated, and indirect than is often assumed. If we wish to understand—and, perhaps, modify—this influence, we need to be guided by an informed ap-

preciation of its complexity. Furthermore, in thinking about the dynamics of young children's development, we need to remember that, socioculturally speaking, preschoolers do not start from scratch. The projects of adults—including parents and teachers—who try to shape and advance children's development encounter the multiple projects, themselves already culturally shaped, that the children themselves are trying to pursue. Without having some sense of the inner logic of the children's own projects, we are unlikely to be able to understand the complex consequences of these encounters for children's development.

In short, a key challenge faced by a seriously sociocultural developmental psychology is to find the most effective ways of grasping the social formation of mind and personality in a manner that takes adequate account of the meaningful agency of the children involved. A necessary element of this project, I have argued, must be a more complex and genuinely dialectical understanding of the process of internalization. In this connection, as the present study has sought to demonstrate, it is necessary for developmental research to treat children—even preschool children—as active agents, whose narrative practices are informed by cognitive, symbolic, social-relational, and even aesthetic purposes that we ought to take seriously. And they pursue these purposes, not only as isolated individuals, but in the sociocultural contexts of their relationships to others and of their everyday group life.

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