

Memory in Life Transitions

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Why do we attach so much importance to the memories of our own life—enough to keep them in diaries and books, share them with others through anecdotes and pictures, or worry that, in time, we might forget them? In this chapter, we explore how such memories help us overcome changes, transitions, and challenges in life by allowing us to make sense of what has happened and to imagine what could come next. To do so, we adopt a pragmatic stance that highlights three main functions of autobiographical memory: its role in the construction of the self, in relating with others, and in directing our actions toward the future. By connecting the last, directive function to scholarship on imagination, we propose a dynamic and pragmatic model of autobiographical remembering as a sociocultural act unfolding in time. This model allows us to retrace the development of autobiographical memory over the life-course and follow the transformation of its uses. Finally, we apply this model to the longitudinal case study of a teenager and discuss its implications for further research.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL MEMORY

There are probably as many ways to define autobiographical memory as there are researchers working on the topic. We adopt the view that it is made up of the “personal memories of the events of our lives” (Nelson, 2007, p. 184) and that it is distributed along four main dimensions, which we describe next.

First, and quite unsurprisingly, autobiographical memory concerns what one remembers about one’s own past. The main point here is not so much that it is about what happened to oneself in the past but that it is remembered as such—that is, a memory of an event affecting the self. This specific quality of autobiographical memory is called *autoneotic consciousness* (Tulving, 2002). This means that, for instance, remembering that the word for “butterfly” in Spanish is “mariposa” is not quite the same as remembering that one learned it from a story told

by one's mother about a failed Spanish exam—although both actually refer to the same event in one's life. The first formulation is just a memory of a fact; the second one refers to a personal life event—that is, one's personal experience of being told a story by one's mother.

Second, autobiographical memory is more than the mere accumulation of past life events; it involves at least a partial semiotic, semantic, or narrative integration. The degree of this integration varies, leading to more or less general memories—from the *episodic memories* of single events to a *personal memory* encompassing general principles about self, values, and beliefs. Multiple episodes of one's life can be brought together by giving them similar meanings (Habermas & Bluck, 2000), organizing them along a coherent timeline (Bluck & Alea, 2008), relating them to the stories of others (Fivush, Bohanek, & Duke, 2008), or making them fit into cultural autobiographical narratives (Berntsen & Rubin, 2002).

Third, these integrations are supported by a rather wide array of cultural tools—narrative structures, conventional ways of telling one's life, lay normative models of development, and so on, up to language—shaping the way we talk about our past, link it to the present, and make sense of it (Fivush, 2011), to the point that, as McAdams (2001), states,

stories live in culture. . . . [Indeed, they] are born, they grow, they proliferate, and they eventually die according to the norms, rules, and traditions that prevail in a given society, according to a society's implicit understandings of what counts as a tellable story, a tellable life. (p. 114)

Fourth, remembering one's past is a social activity, often done together with others and thus involving multiple perspectives (Nelson, 2008). Indeed, social interactions are necessary for the development of memory: It is through their conversations with adults that children learn to remember the past and organize it in narratives that can be communicated to others (Nelson, 2007; see also Nelson, Chapter 8, this volume). Moreover, reminiscence is a cultural activity (Fivush, 2011); not only do our social environments shape the way we talk about our past but also they are often an important source of autobiographical demands. This may be especially true in Western societies, in which performing an autobiographical narrative is required from children quite early on (through activities such as retelling one's weekend, etc.). These specific demands may be linked to certain representations of the "healthy" self as an independent and coherent whole (Nelson, 2008).

Taking these four aspects into consideration, a more thorough definition of autobiographical memory thus considers it as "that uniquely human form of memory that moves beyond recall of experienced events to integrate perspectives, interpretation, and evaluation across self, other, and time to create a personal history" (Fivush, 2011, p. 560). This implies that autobiographical memory changes throughout the life: It depends on the experiences a person had, the ability she has to reflect upon them, the cultural tools she masters, and her interactions with others. This development has rarely been studied beyond childhood. In this

chapter, we examine the development of memory in the life course, focusing on the moments of catalyzed change that we call transitions (Kadianaki & Zittoun, 2014). To do so, we propose taking a pragmatic stance on memory.

A PRAGMATIC STANCE ON MEMORY

Pragmatism invites us to move away from abstract considerations about the true value of a notion or the a priori examination of its value to concentrate on what can be done with it. From a pragmatist stance, a notion is useful or good enough if it allows one to see the world in a more intelligible way, to explain a phenomenon otherwise not understood, or to act upon it. Pragmatism also invites us to examine what people do with the entity designated by the notion discussed (James, 1904). In our case, it implies to focus not only on what autobiographical memory is but also mainly what it is used for (Pillemer & Kuwabara, 2012).

Life stories are not told in a vacuum: They are part of conversations with others and often with the self; have a developmental history; and take place in specific social, historical, and cultural contexts. Then, what do we do when we talk about our past in these contexts? Why do we tell stories about ourselves? What does a personal history bring that other forms of memory would not provide already? To answer these questions, Susan Bluck has proposed dividing the functions of autobiographical memory into three main categories: self, social, and directive (Bluck, 2003; Bluck, Alea, Habermas, & Rubin, 2005). Following these three functions, we explore what is known about the development of memory.

Autobiographical Memory and the Self

First, and quite unsurprisingly, we use autobiographical memory to define who we are (Fivush, 2011). Life is full of ruptures and changes, and we also tend to assume different roles and positions depending on the sphere of experience we are in. By sphere of experience, we mean the following (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2015a):

A configuration of experiences, activities, representations and feelings, recurrently occurring in a given type of social (material and symbolic) setting—it is one of the various regular, stabilized patterns of experience in which a person is likely to engage on a regular basis. (p. 8)

Even if the me-at-home and the me-at-work are not similar, both are part of who I experience I am. Thus, each “self” is a set of multiple identities or “identity positions,” interacting with each other and evolving in time—a sort of “society of minds” (Hermans, 2002). But if it is so, how do we achieve a coherent sense of who we are? Through organizing past events into a narrative, we establish a sense of continuity (Erikson, 1959). By causally and temporally linking different parts of our lives (Fitzgerald & Broadbridge, 2012), we develop “narrative identities,”

which are “stories people construct and tell about themselves to define who they are” (McAdams, Josselson, & Liebich, 2006, p. 4).

This ability to connect past and present selves has a long developmental history, from infancy to early adulthood. Indeed, although children are able to produce personal stories that are chronologically organized from approximately the age of 8, it is not until they are 10 years old that they can integrate several proximal events into a single narrative (Habermas, 2012). More global coherence, causally and thematically linking multiple personal events, does not appear until the age of 12 (Habermas & de Silveira, 2008). It seems, however, that people start to tell full life stories only during adolescence, when the necessary and previously mentioned cognitive skills are fully developed and when it becomes an “age-specific requirement” to define one’s identity (Habermas & Bluck, 2000, p. 753). Indeed, it is expected from teenagers to develop a stable identity (Erikson, 1968), and in Western societies, in which being a “unique being” is particularly valued (Nelson, 2008), personal narratives are an especially efficient way to achieve such an aim (Habermas & Bluck, 2000).

Life stories also require the mastery of various norms and expectations that surround the narration of one’s life (Bruner, 2003)—what Habermas (2007) termed mastery of “the cultural concept of biography” (p. 1). These cultural norms can also be represented in the form of life-scripts or “culturally shared representations of the timing of major transitional life events” (Berntsen & Rubin, 2004, p. 427). In any case, the idea is that to tell one’s life “is a form of cultural activity and as such is individually and culturally specific to the local and cultural forms of social interaction from which it is shaped” (Fivush, 2011, p. 561). Although children start to use culture-specific story forms to tell personal events starting at approximately 5–7 years of age, using frames borrowed from myths and tales to structure their stories (Nelson, 2003), it is not until adolescence that individuals fully master normative life-scripts. Research has shown that a peak is attained at approximately 16 years old, followed by a decrease until the age of 20 and remaining quite stable for the rest of the life course, probably because “adults [convey] a more realistic variation in the life course than adolescents [do], whose depiction [is] highly stereotyped” (Habermas, 2007, p. 4). However, the mastery of these normative cornerstones is necessary to be able to tell a life story: Even if one’s path always deviates from what is expected to happen in life, they help us choose which elements to include—especially those that are culturally considered as relevant—and which ones deserve explanation—typically those that differ from the norm (Schütze, 1984, as cited in Habermas & Bluck, 2000, p. 750).

In addition, memories change together with the ideas one has about the self (Habermas, 2012) and are constantly reinterpreted from the perspective of the present. Thus, the relation between autobiographical memory and self is bidirectional (Conway, 2005), and as Cameron, Wilson, and Ross (2004) expressed it, “People fashion identities that fit their memories and memories that fit their identities” (p. 208). Periods of transitions and changes lead to more conscious efforts to reconstruct a meaningful and coherent narrative (Bluck & Alea,

2008). Moreover, periods during which important aspects of one's identity are defined tend to be remembered more, or at least made more salient (Fitzgerald & Broadbridge, 2012): If we remember more events that occur during the 10- to 30-year-old age period than during any other—the “reminiscence bump” (Rubin, Wetzler, & Nebes, 1986)—it is because these events play the major role in our identity (Rathbone, Moulin, & Conway, 2008).

Finally, having a personal story implies being able to make a distinction between one's own past and the memories of others (Fivush, 2011), and thus between self and other (Nelson, 2008). It also involves being able to recognize memory as perspectival—what I remember about an event may not be what you remember about it—which children are not able to do until the end of the preschool years (Fivush et al., 2008). By taking part in reminiscing conversations with adults whose perspectives on the past may diverge, children move away from a memory perceived as a copy of what happened to understanding their memories as their own subjective version of the past (Nelson, 2008).

What happens to the development of autobiographical memory beyond childhood? If one function of autobiographical memory is to establish a sense of who we are, then any events that are likely to question who we are, or change our definition of ourselves, can also demand some new elaboration of autobiographical memories. From a lifecourse perspective, it is typically moments of crises, bifurcations, or transitions that question our sense of integrity and self-continuity and usually call upon our memories (Erikson, 1959; Sato, Yasuda, Kanzaki, & Valsiner, 2013; Zittoun et al., 2013). Adolescence, becoming a parent, moving to a different country, and changing job or partner usually question who we are, for oneself and for others. The notion of transition designates the processes of readjustment in which a person engages when or after she perceives a rupture; these usually involve identity transformations, learning (acquiring new skills, knowledge, or ways of doing), and sense-making (Zittoun, 2006). As discussed later, transitions are quite likely to engage memory work, precisely because of the various functions of memory.

Autobiographical Memory and Interactions

The second function autobiographical memory serves is *relational*. By conversing about the past, people create converging accounts of what happened, thus developing a shared representation of the past that facilitates collective action (Hirst, Cuc, & Wohl, 2012). However, life stories also have the potential to locate us in time and in the social world by connecting our lives with those of others (Fivush et al., 2008): Developing a narrative about one's childhood, for instance, also locates one relative to siblings, parents, and so on. Moreover, because much of autobiographical memory is actually memory of past relations (Habermas, 2012), it “provide[s] a framework for interpreting current relationships” (Fivush, 2011, p. 575) and “serve[s] to create and maintain social and emotional bonds

with others through reminiscing and through representations of relationships” (p. 574). Other people’s narratives also participate in this function, especially those of family members, which have the potential to create a sense of connection and cohesion with the rest of the family (Fivush et al., 2008).

The links between social relations and autobiographical memory are not limited to the latter sustaining the former: Accounts of the past are also forged through social interactions. Indeed, remembering is a social activity, and what we recall and forget depends on with whom we are remembering (Halbwachs, 1950). Elements that are made salient by others will be more easily recalled, whereas what others silence will eventually be forgotten (Hirst & Echterhoff, 2012). Moreover, the stories we tell are forged through past reminiscing episodes. Very rehearsed narratives, for instance, can become surprisingly stable through the years, as in the case of flashbulb memories (Baddeley, 2012), whereas stories of difficult events may be transformed each time they are told until a form of closure is found (Habermas, 2012). In any case, “acts of recall must be viewed as having a social history” and are created in conversation with others (Hirst & Echterhoff, 2012, p. 63).

Social interactions also play a central role in the development of autobiographical memory. As discussed in the previous section, it is through social interactions that children realize the perspectival nature of memories (Nelson, 2008). In addition, during conversations about the past, parents scaffold children’s accounts “by specifically supporting those aspects of life narratives which children and adolescents are about to acquire next” (Habermas, Negele, & Mayer, 2010, p. 348). They also “convey that there are certain ways to tell these kinds of stories, focusing not just on what happened but why it was interesting, important, and emotional” (Fivush, Habermas, Waters, & Zaman, 2011, p. 324). Through this, children acquire biographical concepts to the point that they master the life stories of others before they can build their own (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). Thus, “the ways in which parents, and especially mothers, structure conversations about past events with their preschool children have strong and enduring influences on how children come to construct their own narrative life history” (Nelson & Fivush, 2004, p. 497). Moreover, different cultural and historical contexts will also give more or less importance to reminiscing and will shape what is expected in an autobiographical account (Habermas, 2011). School activities such as telling what one did for the holidays, a tradition favored in Western societies, teach children not only how to tell a story but also that they are expected to do so (Nelson, 2008).

Again, it is quite likely that as people move through life, the meeting of new others will also convoke autobiographical memories: To fulfill their relational function, memories are quite likely to be revisited every time people establish new significant relationships—friends, partners, and children. These might typically occur during transitions but not only during these times. Many social situations, which can be connected to transitions, require the elaboration of an autobiographical account: a job postulation, creating a blog, a family celebration, and so on.

Autobiographical Memory and Imagination

The third function of autobiographical memory is *directive*. By this, we mean that it has the potential to direct actions. The notion of “directive function” has been used to designate its role in guiding, planning, or motivating future actions on the basis of the past (Pillemer, 2003). This directive function has variations.

First, it allows us to act in the present based on what we learned from past experiences. Singer and Blagov (2004), for instance, showed that “self-defining memories”—vivid and emotional memories that are repeatedly recalled—are able to guide action in the present based on past experiences, which is why people remember them so often. When faced with decisions about their lives or difficulties to overcome, people can use memories of past similar events to choose a path of action.

Second, by organizing the past into a narrative and linking it to the present (Fivush, 2011), autobiographical memory also gives a direction to one’s life (Habermas, 2012). Indeed, if narratives follow culturally shared story lines, it also means that we come to expect, or anticipate, what comes next and how things should end (e.g., think of the much anticipated endings of many Hollywood movies). Some authors have thus called this “prospective memory,” the process of “remembering to perform an action at a future point in time in the absence of an external prompt” (Matli, Schnitzspahn, Studerus-Germann, Brehmer, & Zöllig, 2014), and have studied it in the workplace (McDaniel & Einstein, 2007).

Third, autobiographical memory allows us to imagine possible futures. Similarly, imagination allows us to explore what could or might be and, on this basis, enables us to choose a path toward what we view as desirable (Zittoun & de Saint-Laurent, 2015). Memory not only provides the “material” from which the future can be imagined (Vygotsky, 2004) but also, by giving us a sense of who we are, gives us a sense of what we could be and what we may want to be. Such observations have led many researchers to argue that autobiographical memory is primarily oriented toward the future (Fivush, 2011) and that its directive function is the most important one (Dudai & Carruthers, 2005; Schacter & Addis, 2007). We could indeed argue that memory feeds forward into the future; it is what has been called a “proleptic” function (Cole, 2007; Valsiner, 2014).

However, research rarely explores the directive function of memory, and when asked why they remember, people refer to the self and social functions much more often than they refer to the future (Bluck et al., 2005); however, the self-report method might be responsible for these results (Pillemer, 2003). Although the importance of the directive function is still to be explored, there is compelling evidence that autobiographical memory and imagining the future are deeply linked. Indeed, the underlying neurological processes seem to be the same (Berntsen & Bohn, 2010) or at least to rest on similar abilities (Mullally & Maguire, 2014); memory deficits and losses are usually accompanied by difficulties in imagining future situations and in telling fictitious stories (D’Argembeau, 2012). Moreover, these two functions develop during the same period (D’Argembeau, 2012), and

children acquire a sense of past and future at the same time, during the preschool years (Nelson, 2008). Finally, both remembering the past and imagining the future rely on cultural scripts that help one move away from the present (Berntsen & Bohn, 2010). For instance, the amount of details given is identical for periods that are similarly distant from the present, whether they are located in the future or in the past (D'Argembeau, 2012).

The directive function of memory is likely to be triggered in transitions. In many cases, it is when the taken for granted is questioned that new options have to be imagined; these explorations of possibility rely on re-examining one's past in light of the future, and defining possible futures in light of one's past, through the present (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2015b). Similar to the previous two functions, the directive function can be normatively triggered; again, career choices or job interviews typically demand people to be able to show how their past experiences led them to a clear future path.

What may be lacking, then, is a model that fully integrates remembering and imagining. Although some proposals have been presented, such as Tulving's (2002) idea of mental time travel, few attempts have been made to link scholarship on memory and on imagination (for some notable exceptions, see Bartlett (1995) or Mullally & Maguire (2014)). This lack of articulation may be due to the fact that most memory research is considered to be about the reality of the past, whereas most studies of imagination consider it as focused on the non-real. However, the directive function of memory encourages us to further examine the link between these two processes.

Imagination is the process of distancing from the here and now of experience, a move that draws on past experiences and a diversity of resources while allowing us to explore alternative and future possibilities, which in turn transform the present and may guide immediate action (Vygotsky, 1931/1994, 2004; Zittoun & Gillespie, 2015a). Previously, we proposed to represent this process as a loop of consciousness. These loops can vary in a three-dimensional space according to their temporal orientation (i.e., they are about past or future events), their generality (i.e., they concern a specific event, such as fixing a bookshelf, or general matters, such as making the world a better place), and their (im)plausibility (e.g., in a northern European town in 2014, imagining that one could receive a fine for parking one's automobile poorly, which is a plausible event; or imagining one could sunbathe on Mars, which is less likely to happen) (Figure 9.1).

Elsewhere, we have shown how imagination can play an important role in the creation of new life paths during periods of transition (Zittoun & de Saint-Laurent, 2015). Here, we highlight the mutual dependency of thinking about the past and thinking about the future, of memory and imagination. These two orientations are part of the same movement of thinking, typically in transitions, when the future has to be defined on the basis of the past. Conversely, examining how people imagine the future reveals much about how they imagine the past. In fact, these processes are so closely related that, at times, remembering can appear as a way of imagining the past. On the other hand, imaginations of the future become forms of remembering when engaged in regularly, particularly during

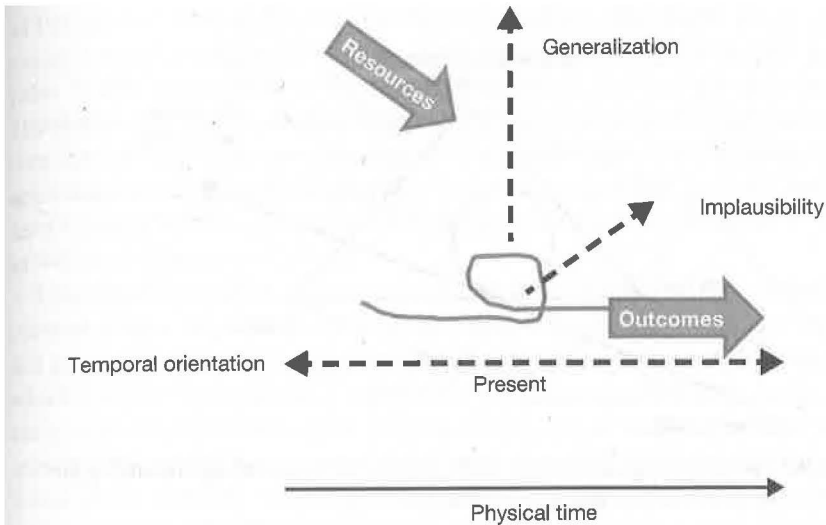


Figure 9.1 Loop of imagination in a three-dimensional space.
SOURCE: Zittoun and Gillespie (2015a).

adolescence. Considering these two processes within a unified framework, we can draw on literature related to both imagination and remembering in order to overcome the limits of each. More precisely, adopting a developmental perspective, we use this framework to understand the development of autobiographical memory in the life course.

A PRAGMATIC MODEL OF AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL MEMORY

We propose an integrative model that, in a dynamic way, accounts for the three functions of memory identified so far—that is, its role in the definition of self, in relations with others, and in defining possibilities and the future. Figure 9.2 integrates the existing literature and defines autobiographical remembering as an oriented sociocultural act (de Saint-Laurent, 2017).

In this model, the “self” pole of the triangle refers to both the fact that remembering is done by a socially and culturally located self and the fact that such a self is constructed through autobiographical remembering (the self function). The “other” pole designates the audience in relation to which the self remembers, which can be physically or imaginatively present, as well as the relation that is maintained through recall (the relational function). The “social and cultural resources” are the social, cultural, and material elements that are used for recall and those developed through remembering, which range from cultural narrative frames and concepts to social scaffoldings by others. This notion is left deliberately large: What people can use to remember is, in the end, infinite. It can be material

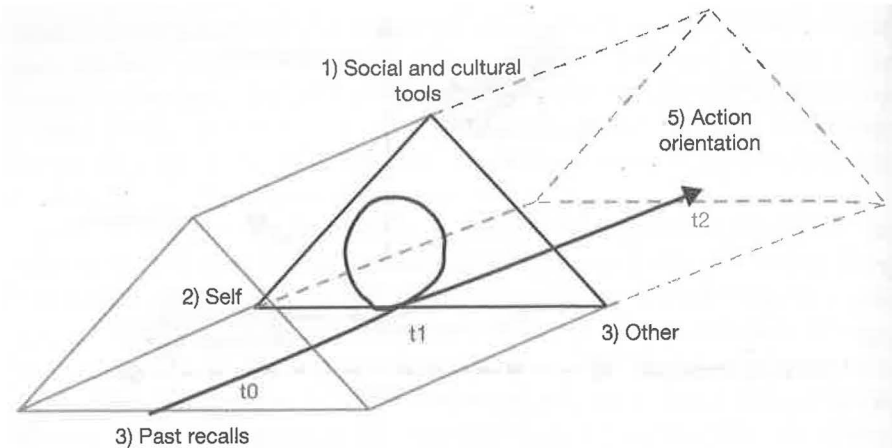


Figure 9.2 Autobiographical memory as the product of imaginatively distancing the self (t_1) from past recalls of past experiences (t_0).

(e.g., a diary or a notebook), social (e.g., using a past conversation with a friend to enrich one's story), or semiotic (e.g., using a metaphor to convey meaning about one's past). What matters here is that remembering is not something done "in the mind" (Wagoner, 2015) but, rather, is distributed across material, social, and symbolic dimensions. In Figure 9.2, the arrow going from "past recalls" to "action orientation" refers to both the history of recalling—how the self remembered this event in the past—and the fact that remembering is part of an activity oriented toward an aim (the directive function), in a pragmatist sense.

In addition, the model represents the movement of remembering as an imaginative "loop" borrowed from models of imagination (see Figure 9.1). It suggests that remembering demands imaginatively distancing oneself from past experiences through interaction with others and the use of cultural resources that give these experiences meaning, narrative shape, and relate them with other periods of one's life, eventually leading to the production of a life narrative. Finally, we also integrate a temporal dimension into the model, showing that remembering always occurs along a line of other instances of remembering or imagining (t_0 , t_1 , and t_2 in Figure 9.2)—hence the triangular-shaped "Toblerone"-like model (see also Bauer & Gaskell, 1999).

This integrative model thus proposes to contribute to the literature on autobiographical memory. First, it postulates that it is the triangular relation between self, other, and tools that opens the symbolic space necessary for autobiographical memory (see also Nelson, Chapter 8, this volume). On the one hand, social and cultural tools are what make the (re)organization of past events, beyond the chronological retelling of single episodes, possible in the first place. On the other hand, it is through the interaction with the perspective of others that we can both understand our memories as being subjective and specific to ourselves—Tulving's *autoneotic consciousness*—and distance ourselves from them to construct alternative interpretations. Second, autobiographical memories must be understood

as the product of a double history: the history of the past recalls of the specific event(s) remembered and one's history of remembering in general, as it participates in the construction of the "pool" of resources one can use to remember. Third, the central role of imagining is highlighted as an active process of construction partaking in remembering and its inherent future orientation. Fourth, autobiographical memory is part of a larger ongoing action, and the functions memory may serve are constrained by the resources and interlocutors available, as well as one's history of recall.

This conceptualization allows understanding why memories are so sensitive to cultural norms, media, and other people's discourses. In effect, telling one's story is a process of narrative imagination, which demands selection and creation and which is fed by "second-hand" resources as books, movies, and other media—that are at once highly influential in shaping the process of autobiographical understanding but of which one may remain largely unaware" (Freeman, 2007, p. 139). Issues about children testimony (Jensen, 2005; Takagi & Mori, Chapter 6, this volume) or the reliability of past events in oral history (e.g., former Wehrmacht soldiers tend to use images and events from recent films when they tell their past war experiences; Welzer, Moller, & Tschuggnall, 2002/2013) can thus be explained by the fact that remembering is closely linked to imagining, being always a creation that combines both personal experiences and the resources at hand. In this way, the imaginative processes of memory can lead to practices that can actually change social relations and situations.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL MEMORY IN THE LIFE COURSE

As the functional approach has shown, there is much at stake in the development of autobiographical memory. First, it is by developing a narrative explaining who they have been through time that people acquire a coherent sense of self. Second, through reminiscing together, people redefine and reinforce social relationships. Third, by integrating multiple life events into a single narrative, people can give direction to their lives and imagine what may come next. But how do these functions develop during the life course?

Adolescence and Memory

As discussed previously, little is known about the emergence of these functions (Fivush, 2011). Memory researchers do consider the self "as a continuous individual person with a past and a future [which] emerges during the early childhood period" (Nelson, 2008, p. 13). Then, most existing models draw on Erikson's intuition that the ability to tell one's life story appears during adolescence (Erikson, 1968) and consider that these functions develop during this period (McAdams, 2001; Reese, Yan, Jack, & Hayne, 2010). Adolescence—classically, the period that

follows biological puberty—is thus considered one of the most important periods to understand the development of memory, and the development of autobiography can be linked to a more general developmental process.

There seems to be a consensus that it is during adolescence that people are faced with the tremendous task of developing a stable identity, a purpose that is best served by reaching a global and coherent life narrative (Bluck & Habermas, 2000). Indeed, memories of adolescence tend to become central to one's story once an adult and also to be linked to important aspects of the self (Rathbone et al., 2008). That "task" of defining a stable identity is set both by psychological needs and by relational and social expectations.

Adolescence appears to be the period during which many of the cognitive abilities necessary for autobiographical memory are developed (Fivush et al., 2011). In a review of the existing literature on the development of autobiographical memory in adolescence, Habermas and Bluck (2000) regrouped the abilities necessary to attain global narrative coherence in a life story into four main categories. The first one is temporal sequencing, or the organization of stories around timelines, which does not fully develop until late childhood (Friedman, 1992). The second one is mastery of the cultural concept of biography—that is, the local understanding of how a life story should be organized. As noted previously, it is not until mid-adolescence that people fully master these life-scripts (Habermas, 2007), and it is not until late adolescence to early adulthood that they can use these in a flexible and realistic manner (Habermas & de Silveira, 2008). The third one is causal coherence, which links multiple events and emotional states with one another. Although children can achieve local coherence from late childhood, only by mid-adolescence do teenagers begin to make connections between long periods of time and to explain their life in terms of personality and developmental trajectory. Also, it is not until late adolescence that they begin to explain change and people's behaviors in terms of past experiences (Feldman, Bruner, Kalmar, & Renderer, 1993). The fourth one is thematic coherence, which establishes a global coherence between several episodes of one's life through tools such as metaphors or cultural maxims. This ability develops slowly during adolescence through the capacity to summarize stories, interpret them, and question existing interpretations and knowledge (Bluck & Habermas, 2000).

Adolescence is the period during which young people progressively become independent from their parents and families (Grotevant & Cooper, 1986; Hofer, 2004; Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986) and the importance of horizontal relationships—those with friends, intimates, and partners—increases (Collins, Gleason, & Sesma, 1997; Laursen & Collins, 2011; Meeus, Branje, van der Valk, & de Wied, 2007). As a consequence, the role of parents in supporting consistency and information in the construction of memories (Habermas, 2012; Fivush et al., 2008) may progressively diminish, especially with regard to recent memories. Socializing outside the home, young people create new memories and new groups with which they can remember. Adolescents may thus develop new understandings of their past, which may foster what has been called "autobiographical reasoning." This is the "process of self-reflective thinking or talking about the

personal past that involves forming links between elements of one's life and the self in an attempt to relate one's personal past and present;" the basis of life narratives (Bluck & Habermas, 2000, p. 749).

Finally, the need for identity definition is set socially as people enter the life period during which they define studies, career paths, or life trajectories—a period whose ending has been largely debated (Arnett, 2006; Hendry & Kloep, 2007; Zittoun, 2007). This raises the important need to understand autobiographical memory in adolescence within a broader lifecourse perspective.

A Case Study

Despite its richness for the topic of autobiographical memory, adolescence has rarely been explored by researchers interested in this topic. We previously investigated the development and transformation of imaginative processes during adolescence (Zittoun & de Saint-Laurent, 2015) using the longitudinal documentary *Romans d'ados (Teens Novels)* (Bakhti, 2010).¹ This documentary follows the parallel evolution of seven young people (four young women and three young men, all middle class), who live in a midsize French-speaking town in Switzerland, from their 11th to their 18th birthday. They are visited regularly by the documentary crew at their homes, at school, at the workplace, or when they are with their friends. Although the documentary is scripted and edited according to the interests of the director, it gives good access to the evolution of these young people's close relationships, vocational choices, and general orientations.

The focus of this initial exploration was on the imaginative loops in which adolescents engage (see Figure 9.1) and their contribution to developing a life trajectory (Zittoun & de Saint-Laurent, 2015). In doing so, however, the teenagers also drew on the past, showing how memory feeds into imaginative processes. This can be seen, for instance, in the case of Rachel, aged 15, who reflects on her active role in supporting her mother at a time of major crises between her mother and her stepfather (Figure 9.3). Discovering one day her desperate mother left alone by her companion after a violent quarrel, Rachel engaged in the following reflection (Bakhti, 2010; as quoted in Zittoun & de Saint-Laurent, 2015, p. 68):

I thought about it. [I went into my room, I thought about it]. [I told myself that I would] take the matter into my hands. I didn't want my family to break up like this. I wanted to help my mother and my sister the best I could. (Rachel, 15, DVD 2)

Rachel also tells that this episode put at stake her own future: Because her father left the house when she was 2 years old, "I felt as if I was losing my second father. In case of another divorce, I thought I could never trust a man again. And that my relationships with men were going to be very complicated" (Rachel, 15, DVD 2) (Bakhti, 2010; as quoted in Zittoun & de Saint-Laurent, 2015, p. 68). Finally, she

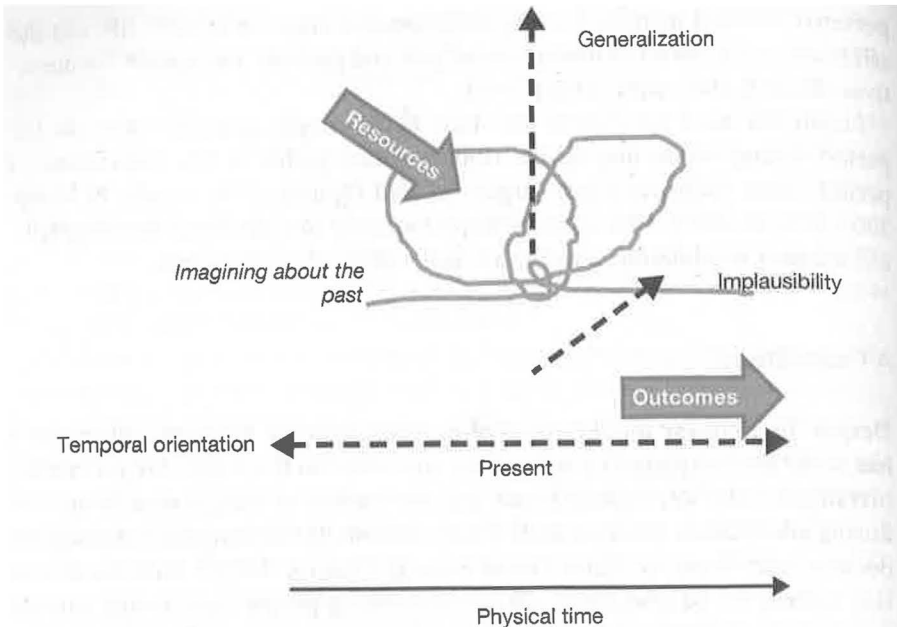


Figure 9.3 Rachel's memory and imagination.

explains how, during that time, she was drawing on the memory of her grandfather Bakhti, 2010; as quoted in Zittoun & de Saint-Laurent, 2015, p. 67):

I've always been very proud of my grandfather. I had a very special relationship with him even when I was little. I really have the impression that he taught us many things, and that it is thanks to him that I am as I am. And I was always impassioned by his culture, and his charisma, and his good mood. I constructed myself with his image, and I always have been really really proud of the relationship I had with him. I feared that when he would die the family would turn to dust. It is thanks to him that the family is so united, that's his work. I think that that's why he came on earth, I think it was in that role, because really . . . for me thanks to him family is sacred. (Rachel, 14, DVD 2)

Rachel seems to engage in a complex imagination loop. Given the current situation, her parents' crisis, she imagines the close and distant futures, based on her childhood: Like her father, the stepfather may leave, but if so, she will grow up as a woman who cannot trust men. She then loops back into the past to draw on the memories of her grandfather and, finally, focuses on doing her best to help her parents through the current crisis. Hence, through this imagination loop, drawing on her past, she helps to shape her own future or—the other way around—in shaping her future, she can draw on her memories. This also helps her to build

new relations with her family by creating a sense of continuity between her grandfather, her mother, and herself.

In the following discussion, we draw on the same data source (*Romans d'ados*) to explore the developmental dynamics of autobiographic memory along the life course, using our unified model of autobiographical memory (see Figure 9.2). Specifically, following our pragmatic stance, we focus on the transformation of remembering along the three functions discussed in this chapter—self, social relations, and directive. If we can show that the same person's remembering acts vary along these three aspects, we will have shown the development of remembering. We thus turn to a new case study, that of Thys, another young person followed for 7 years by Bakhti (2010).

Thys' story starts when he is 12 years old, living with his mother and older brother. He is not very talkative, and most of his life seems to revolve around “being an old couple” with his mother, something she jokes about, and visiting his father on weekends, who teases him frequently. In the following conversation, his mother asks him what he did with his father over the weekend (Bakhti, 2010, DVD 1):

MOTHER: How are you doing, Thyssou? The weekend went well?

THYS: Yes.

MOTHER: What did you do?

THYS: Well, we came Friday . . .

MOTHER: Yes.

THYS: We watched TV for a bit . . .

MOTHER: Yes.

THYS: And after, well Saturday we went . . . well, in the morning we went to Jean-Claude's . . .

MOTHER: Saturday morning you went out? Ah, good, well, ok.

THYS: Yes. Well . . . after we did lunch there . . . well, after we went to see the show . . .

MOTHER: So you had lunch and dinner at Jean-Claude's? The Auntie was there?

THYS: No, she was not there.

MOTHER: Ah, it was only the two of you?

THYS: Yes! Us, us three.

MOTHER: Ok.

THYS: There was also Christiane.

MOTHER: Ah, she came?

THYS: Yeah.

This conversation seems quite typical of late childhood reminiscing: The mother scaffolds her child's recall, which becomes organized into a small local narrative, as illustrated in Figure 9.4. Thys, in a conversation with his mother, reconstructs what happened, with the mother supporting this process (Fivush, 2011). His

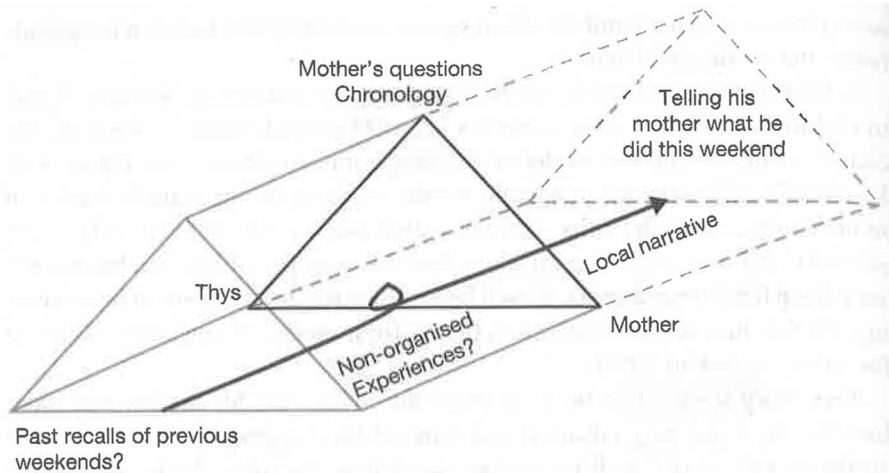


Figure 9.4 Thys, age 12 years, remembering his weekend with his mother.

mother's questions as well as basic chronological rules—starting the story with Friday evening, for instance—help him organize his story into a narrative, albeit a limited one. This is a transformation of the past because it is very likely that it had not been told to anyone yet: The conversation takes place just after Thys returned home. However, it is extremely likely, although we do not see it in the documentary, that it is not the first time that Thys, upon returning home, is asked by his mother what he did during the weekend; this segment is thus a probably quite well-rehearsed conversation, in which he can build on previous recalls to satisfy his mother's demands. The remembering episode is strongly guided by the local routines and is based on the use of quite simple resources that allow for the production of a local and limited narrative but that is sufficient to satisfy the demands of the situation.

Let us examine this episode in terms of the three functions. First, in terms of self-identity, Thys' voice is quite absent. He presents what he has been asked to do, using a “we” including him and his father, as well as other persons. None of the activities—watching TV, eating, and visiting the father's friend—seems to have a personal implication. Second, regarding social relations, we observe here the importance of the role of the mother, who is both a support for the recall and at the origin of the request. Also, the narration itself could be seen as reinforcing the relation between mother and child because the episode with the father appears to be relatively dull. Third, in terms of the directive function, the remembering, modestly turned to the immediate past, comes to the present but does not explore any possible futures, as the modest loop in Figure 9.4 suggests—unless, of course, it announces a very similar disappointing next encounter with the father.

A few years later, however, we find Thys, aged 15 years, having a quite different type of conversation with his mother (Bakhti, 2010, DVD 2):

FILMMAKER: So, you're still like an old couple?

MOTHER: But exactly. We are an old couple. It's totally that. So, we'll have to take the tricks. That's why sometimes it's a bit hard, isn't it, Thys? Actually, is it hard for you or not? I say that it's hard for me, but what about you?

THYS: When you yell for nothing, yes.

MOTHER: I yell for nothing, you think I yell for nothing? I yell straight away . . . but well . . . not that much.

THYS: As soon as she realizes that she is wrong, as soon as she believes that she is right, although it's not true, she starts raising her voice and oh, careful.

MOTHER: You too you throw words at me.

THYS: Ah yes, but . . .

MOTHER: You don't realize you're getting angry. You tap . . .

THYS: Neither do you . . .

MOTHER: You tap your feet, and all. You get up, you get upset. Yes, no, still a bit. But it's true that it is not violent. We are not violent, anyway, are we? We are not breaking things yet. Or well . . . yes, did we break anything yet? No, it's your brother who used to do that, not us.

Although it is still his mother who includes him in the conversation and pushes him to talk about the recurring past, his answer here is of a quite different tone compared to the previous episode. He challenges his mother on her depiction on their life together, and he uses memories as arguments to defend his position on how she is, as shown in Figure 9.5. He does so by generalizing multiple experiences, showing a beginning of autobiographical reasoning. It seems that Thys generalizes from past experiences using the recurring chronology of past events to extract general statements about his mother.

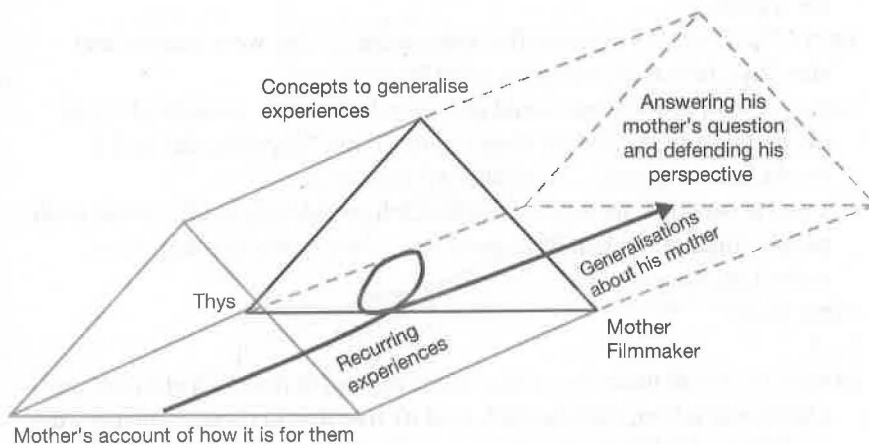


Figure 9.5 Thys, age 15 years, challenges his mother's representation of their relationship.

Interestingly, all the teenagers in the *Teens Novel* documentary similarly start creating new accounts of the past by challenging their parents' summaries of recurring past experiences. Here, however, both Thys and his mother settle on a version of the past in which neither is better. But, temporarily at least, Thys contradicts his mother on her understanding of the past, and a symbolic space to reinterpret memories is open: New interlocutors are available—the change from “you” to “she” when he talks about his mother to the new other that is the filmmaker is noticeable—and new resources appear. Old resources are used in new ways: Thys already used knowledge of chronological order to narrate his weekend in the previous intercept. Here, however, he uses recurring chronologies not only to generalize from experience but also to attribute motivations to the actions of his mother: If she yells, it is because she is afraid to be wrong.

Regarding the three functions, we could thus say that due to his wider uses of resources, Thys achieves different results. First, in terms of identity definition, Thys starts to differentiate himself from his mother—most of his utterances are formulated in “you”; his position is that of someone having his own perspective. Second, in terms of relations, Thys uses the established relation to triangulate and question the relation to the mother, who becomes “she.” Third, and this is where we need to be careful, it seems that by identifying a current pattern in their relationship, Thys timidly suggests that another mode of relation could be wished for or possible.

A year later, Thys transforms from a shy boy mocked at school to a more social teen with new friends who, in fact, happened to be his past bullies. He explains (Bakhti, 2010, DVD 3):

THYS: Diego, Kevin, and other people in the class, we didn't really get along, actually. In 7th grade, I even went to see the school mediator because they would provoke me and . . . I, I hated them. And now, that's just it, we are friends.

KEVIN: Well, we also were smaller, first excuse. . . . We were dumber and also Thys, he was an easy prey, actually.

THYS: As soon as someone would give me a little insult, I would take it at the first degree so, that's it. They would tell me “Thys the piss” and it would last me a week . . . it would last me a week.

KEVIN: He wouldn't say much, actually. Or he would say, but he would make people laugh more than feel scared, so. . . . We were a bit mean then, weren't we, Diego?

THYS: Yeah.

[. . .]

DIEGO: We would make fun of him but it was not to hurt him either. It was a bit to mock him, truth be told. And it's true that in these moments we would have the impression that he was hurting. And now that we are

here and we laugh with him, well it's less hurtful for him, well, it's not to hurt him actually.

THYS: I changed a bit and then I came with them and I managed to talk and talk. Well yeah, it was super cool, actually.

Here, Thys, with the help of his new friends, creates a new account of the past, as shown in Figure 9.6. What he used to interpret as being bullied in the first year of the documentary (Bakhti, 2010, DVD 1) becomes the product of his overreaction and their global immaturity (Kevin's "first excuse"). He discovers new perspectives on the past, which leads to its reinterpretation, although previous resources are still present (generalization). His interlocutors, however, also refer to what we may call "lay theories of development" or common-sense concepts about the maturation of the person. This allows Kevin to explain his previous behaviors as a product of a lack of maturity and as something quite acceptable for a young teenager. What is notable here is that the story Thys, Kevin, and Diego are telling is a co-construction in which the past is reinterpreted—one was overreacting and the others were "dumb," in their words—to link it to current social interactions: They can now be friends because they have changed and matured. By remembering with his new friends, Thys gains new insights on the situation, has access to new tools, and is thus given a new space to understand his past.

In this case, the functions of memory are very clear. First, Thys starts to have an autobiographic narrative that his is own—a story of development and more maturity. Second, in terms of relationships, we observe the radical change of the others with whom memory is build and with whom memory allows to establish a relationship. Third, this autobiographic reasoning that goes further in the past allows to enrich the present—which is now "super cool"—and perhaps allows to open new options.

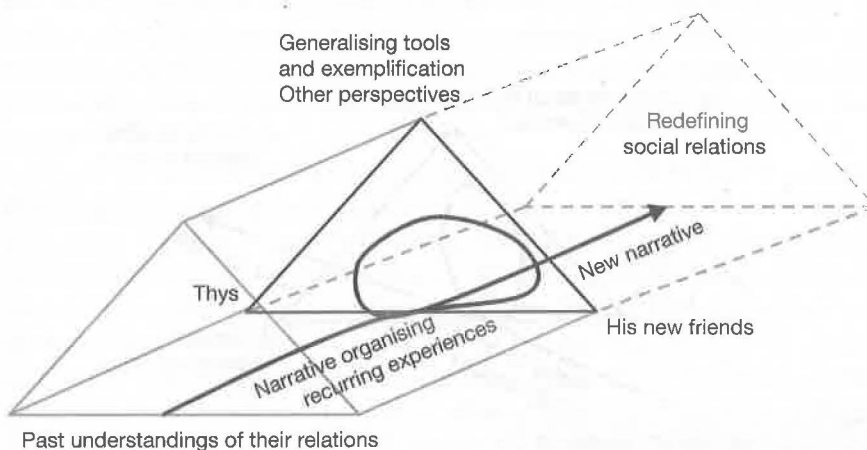


Figure 9.6 Thys, age 16 years, reinterpreting his past with his new friends.

Finally, 2 years later, the filmmakers confront Thys with his early statements about his father (Bakhti, 2010, DVD 4):

THYS (AGE 12 YEARS): Well, it was difficult. Even, once my daddy, he was . . . when they were not together anymore, I overturned a full wardrobe for him to come. I was very sad, yes, I . . . angry. . . I wondered what was going on.

THYS (AGE 18 YEARS): I used to want to, before . . . to have more relations with my father, share like other would and all. I also idealized a lot to have my father . . . yeah, I idealized a father, all that. But now, I'm passed this stage.

In this intercept, analyzed in Figure 9.7, Thys completely reinterprets his relation with his father. Where he used to view his father's absence as the result of his parents' divorce, he now follows a version favored by his brother much earlier in the documentary: His father just did not really behave like one. But to make sense of this change of perspective on the past and link it to the present, Thys makes use of a resource his friends introduced in the previous intercept: the idea that to different ages in life correspond different ways, more or less mature, to interact with others.

Here we see the most drastic changes in uses of memory. First, in terms of identity and position, Thys is reflecting on his former attachment and ideas, and he is positioning himself as having "passed a stage"—that is, having gone through a transition. Second, as mentioned previously, using his internalized friends, he is now using memories to distance himself from his father. Third, for the first time, he opens new options for the future, where he will no longer expect the impossible from his father.

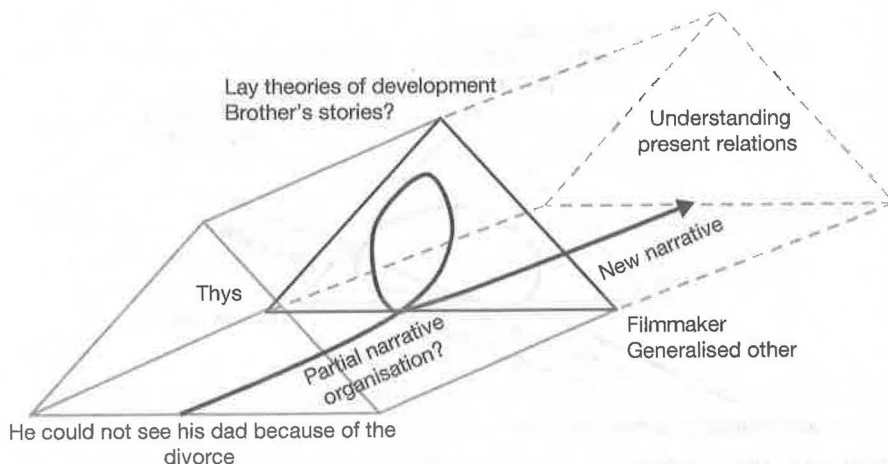


Figure 9.7 Thys, age 18 years, reinterpreting his relation with his father.

We have thus seen that Thys, during his adolescence, does indeed become more independent from his mother's accounts of the past, which gives him the space necessary for a more personal interpretation of his past. However, the role of others in scaffolding remembering does not end here: New relations introduce him to new ways of thinking about his past. Also, as the years go by, he indeed becomes familiar with new tools that allow him to think of his past further and differently. As a result, this allows him to move away from an orientation to the past—what was and what could have been—to a possible future—now that this stage is over. Interestingly, however, new resources do not always seem to be required for new forms of memory to emerge: New challenges and new desires, such as challenging one's mother, may bring one to use old resources in new ways.

CONCLUSION

As we move through life, we live new experiences and engage in new relationships, all of which can question who we are or, at least, invite us to reflect on our past or to share some memories. But how does autobiographical memory evolve through the life course?

In this chapter, we proposed to understand the development of autobiographical memory as the process through which one learns to “rework” and reinterpret the past in a way that is relevant to the current situation of the self. We considered this movement as being one of distancing the self from the exactitude and details of past experiences, to organize them into stories that can be told to others, and to generalize them into concepts about oneself or turn them into lessons to be learned.

Our attempt here consisted in drawing on the developmental literature and expanding it beyond childhood. We have for this privileged a pragmatic stance and have proposed an integrative model of remembering, which highlights the social, cultural, and imaginary nature of remembering. Our proposition is that remembering, like any other complex social and cultural psychological dynamic, is a socially situated activity that demands the mastery of specific cultural tools and uses diverse resources.

Because remembering draws on previous recalls through time, it is subjected to more general developmental processes. In effect, as with any other modality of experience, memory is mediated by language and social norms, and in spheres of experience that are frequently shared, nourished, and elaborated, memories can become increasingly more differentiated. In addition, some experiences can be moved from one sphere of experience to another (e.g., when one's musical success can support one's academic expenses; Zittoun, 2012). Finally, some other memories can diffuse across spheres of experience and be generalized into general principles or personal life philosophies or allow more abstract contemplation (Baldwin, 1915/2009; Vygotsky, 1931/1994; Werner & Kaplan, 1963; Zittoun et al., 2013).

Hence, teenagers who start to narrate their childhood to their close friends actually start to create the vocabulary and the grammar of the autobiographical memories in a given sphere of experience, which can then become the values that may govern their future choices in other spheres. Conversely, the fact that older people's stories lose details but convey more meaning can be understood as a result of such forms of generalization rather than a form of memory loss (Fitzgerald & Broadbridge, 2012).

However, the developmental literature tends to focus on the early development of the capacity to remember; then, as life passes and one has defined who he or she is, autobiographical memory appears generally as nonproblematic. Of course, the question of autobiographical memory and its fate appears in different studies—for example, clinical research examining the way in which people narrate themselves and, at times, develop more functional autobiographical accounts (Gonçalves & Ribeiro, 2012a, 2012b); studies on aging, which emphasize progressive transformation or losses of memory due to organic transformation (Balota, Dolan, & Duchek, 2000); or more general considerations of our sense of time and memory (Draaisma, 2004).

If every occurrence of autobiographical reasoning is one element in a long chain of remembering, then it can evolve with experience, become more abstract and generalized, and be part of the many processes that constitute who we are. Thus, it both allows and constrains our capacity to reinvent ourselves. In this sense, autobiographical memory is suspended between past and future because it is a variation of a loop of imagination. Just as does imagination, it distances itself from experience to produce new and unique compositions. Remembering one's life is, in that sense, an imagination of the past that uses a diversity of resources and that will have a variety of outcomes (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2015a). Indeed, if memory is a way to mentally travel through time (Tulving, 2002) and to defy the laws of irreversibility of time, then memory is an imagination oriented toward the past.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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NOTE

1. Longitudinal documentaries, as specific genre following people over a longer period of time (Kilborn, 2010), offer an interesting source of data for developmental research—a strategy that we have used and justified elsewhere (Gillespie & Zittoun, 2010; Zittoun & de Saint-Laurent, 2015; Zittoun & Gillespie, 2012).

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