Mother–Child Reminiscing About Peer Experiences and Children’s Peer-related Self-views and Social Competence

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Abstract

This study examined mother–child reminiscing about children’s experiences with peers and its relation to children’s peer-related self-views and social competence. Sixty-three mothers and their preschool-aged children discussed at home two specific past events involving the child and his or her peers, one event being positive and one negative. The children’s self-views in peer relationships were assessed at school during individual interviews, and their social competence was rated by mothers. Both maternal and child participation in the reminiscing, in terms of reminiscing style and content, were uniquely associated with children’s peer-related self-views and social competence. The results suggest the important role of family narrative practices in children’s social development.

Keywords: mother–child reminiscing; peer relations; self-views; social competence

Introduction

Discussing past experiences is a frequent family activity starting at the early preschool years (e.g., Nelson, 1996). A wealth of literature has suggested that mother–child reminiscing serves an important mechanism for the development of autobiographical memory, knowledge of emotion and mind, and psychological well-being (Fivush, Haden, & Reese, 2006; Laible, 2004; Reese & Cleveland, 2006; Sales & Fivush, 2005). There is also a small but growing body of research examining the role of mother–child reminiscing in the development of self-concept (Fivush et al., 2006; Reese, Bird, & Tripp, 2007; Welch-Ross, Fasig, & Farrar, 1999). One uncharted area concerns family reminiscing about children’s experiences with peers. Such experiences constitute an increasingly important part of children’s lives, and are critical for children to establish positive self-views and psychological functioning in the social realm (Boivin & Hymel, 1997; Rudolph, Hammem, & Burge, 1995). The present study aims to examine the relation of mother–child reminiscing about peer experiences to children’s peer-related self-views and social competence.

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Mother–Child Reminiscing and Children’s Self-development

Reminiscing with parents about past events serves a powerful means for children to develop representations of the self. During parent-guided memory discourse, children may come to understand important aspects of past events that are not necessarily obvious or explicit to them, and further internalize a framework for evaluating the personal meaning of past experiences in connection with their present self (Fivush et al., 2006; Reese & Cleveland, 2006). With age, children become increasingly able to contribute to the conversations, and by the end of preschool years, children often take on their parents’ ways of discussing, interpreting, and remembering the past (Fivush et al., 2006; Nelson, 1996).

Of particular importance, elaborative reminiscing, where mothers frequently provide embellished details about the events under discussion and offer evaluative feedback to encourage children’s participation, is associated with children’s ability to construct a coherent story of the past based on which children can form stable self-representations (Fivush et al., 2006; Wang, 2006; Wang, Doan, & Song, 2010). Furthermore, emotion talk, including discussions of emotions experienced by children and of the emotional meanings of past situations, is also related to children’s self-concept (Bird & Reese, 2006; Reese et al., 2007; Welch-Ross et al., 1999). Studies conducted with mostly Western middle-class families have shown that maternal frequent emotional references about the child (e.g., ‘You were happy’) or the event (e.g., ‘It was fun’) are associated with more consistent self-views (Welch-Ross et al., 1999) and greater self-esteem in children (Reese et al., 2007). By focusing on children’s emotions and by discerning emotional meanings from past situations, the conversation may allow children to better understand the personal meaning of the event and to incorporate the past experience into their self-understanding. This is particularly important in reminiscing about negative events, where parents often elaborate to a great extent on the causes and consequences of children’s feeling states and make frequent comments on what the event meant to the child (Bird & Reese, 2006; Reese et al., 2007; Wang et al., 2010).

Extant research in this literature has focused on the link between mother–child reminiscing and the general consistency of self-concepts or global self-esteem in children, when children’s integration of discrete events into a coherent autobiography and accordingly a coherent self-concept is the outcome of interest. Self-knowledge in specific domains has rarely been investigated. Importantly, the self is a multifaceted construct that is likely to exhibit differing characteristics in response to different domains of life experiences, with peer competence being one unique domain (Harter, 1999; Wang & Li, 2003). Early family narrative practices may, thus, shape the development of self-views not only generally but also in specific domains important in the child’s life, such as the self in relation to peers.

Constructing the Self in Peer Relationships

guide their cognition and behavior during peer interactions. Research has shown that the more competent and positive children perceive themselves in peer relationships, the more likely they rate peers as friendly and supportive (Rudolph et al., 1995). Furthermore, preschool children’s positive views of self and peer are negatively associated with anxious-withdrawn behaviors and aggression whereas positively associated with the ability to generate high-quality strategies in hypothetical social dilemmas (Meece & Mize, 2009; Meece et al., 2007).

Importantly, the self-in-relation is the representational product of past experiences. According to the social information processing theory (Crick & Dodge, 1994), prior interpersonal experiences form the memory database from which individuals develop knowledge structures concerning relationships, which in turn affect the processing of future social encounters. Social cognitive theories (e.g., Baldwin, 1992) have also suggested that children develop relationship schemas from repeated social interactions. These schemas are abstract and generalized interpersonal scripts that store information about the self, others, and the interactive contingencies between them. Furthermore, the social process model (Boivin & Hymel, 1997) and the transactional approach (Parker, Rubin, Price, & DeRossier, 1995) have proposed that peer reactions and peer attitudes conveyed during social encounters can influence how children evaluate their competence and acceptance in peer relationships.

In line with these theoretical proposals, there has been some empirical evidence that children’s peer experiences influence their social self-evaluation (e.g., Boivin & Hymel, 1997). However, children’s self-perception does not always correspond to their peer experiences. Aversive peer experiences only partially account for negative self-perceptions (e.g., Hymel, Franke, & Freigang, 1985) and feeling of loneliness (Boivin & Hymel, 1997). Some studies have failed to find the association between aggression and relevant cognitive representations of the self and relationship (Hymel, Bowker, & Woody, 1993; Patterson, Kupersmidt, & Griesler, 1990). This gap between experiences and self-views points to the important role of other intrapersonal and interpersonal variables in modulating children’s interpretation of their experiences with peers and their internalization processes of self from the experiences. One interpersonal variable of possible importance concerns parent–child reminiscing about peer experiences.

**Parent–child Reminiscing About Peer Experiences**

Extant literature has foreshadowed the importance of parent–child narrative interactions in facilitating children’s reflection on peer-related issues. During the conversation, parents may explicitly teach children relevant social knowledge and skills through frequent peer-related discussions (Laird, Pettit, Mize, Brown, & Lindsey, 1994). It has been suggested that mothers who are elaborative when discussing hypothetical peer situations help children integrate important social cues into social event representations, thus facilitating children’s social competence (Mize & Pettit, 1997). Furthermore, mothers may send explicit evaluative messages about the social partner and peer situation. Mothers who frequently frame problematic peer situations as positive rather than hostile have children with better social skills (Mize & Pettit, 1997). In addition, family emotional discourse may help children understand their own emotions and those of others (e.g., Denham, Zoller, & Couchoud, 1994; Doan & Wang, 2010; Dunn, Brown, & Beardsall, 1991; Laird et al., 1994). Consistent with the emotion coaching hypothesis, children whose parents coach them about emotions exhibit fewer conduct problems and negative behaviors (Hooven, Gottman, & Katz, 1995; Katz & Windecker-Nelson, 2004).
Parent–child discourse in extant studies mostly concerns hypothetical peer situations or occur during children’s ongoing experiences. Children’s memories of peer-related events are autobiographical recollections of past experiences, which may be more powerful and self-relevant than hypothetical peer situations to extrapolate personal meanings. Thus, whereas maternal elaborations and emotional discussions during a conversation of children’s past experiences are strongly associated with children’s socioemotional understanding, the relationship is absent in a storybook reading context (Laible, 2004). Furthermore, postevent discussion of emotional experiences may alleviate children from experiencing strong emotions in the heat of the moment, which may allow effective internalization of emotional meanings of past experiences into self-understanding (Dunn et al., 1991; Reese et al., 2007).

Therefore, parent–child reminiscing about children’s past experiences with peers may be a resourceful forum for children to understand themselves in peer relationships and to develop social competence. The co-constructed narrative representations may provide children with the organizational structure or scripts in relation to peers, and further guide their behavior and cognition during peer interactions (Nelson, 1996). In particular, elaborative reminiscing about peer experiences and evaluative feedback provided by parents may scaffold children to interpret and understand past events, and to construct coherent narrative representations of the self in peer relationships. Emotion talk during reminiscing may highlight the causes or consequences of children’s thoughts, feelings, and actions in peer situations. As peer issues constitute an increasingly important topic in parent–child daily conversations across preschool years (Flannagan & Hardee, 1994; Miller, Mintz, Hoogstra, Fung, & Potts, 1992), children may learn to attend to relevant social cues, take the perspectives of others, consider their own and others’ feelings, and enlarge their repertoire of problem-solving strategies from parental advice (Denham et al., 1994; Dunn et al., 1991; Laird et al., 1994; McDowell & Parke, 2009).

The Present Study

This study aims to establish the relation of mother–child reminiscing in children’s social cognitive functioning to the peer relationship domain. We focused on preschool children because, during this period, children’s peer-related self-representations start to emerge (Meece et al., 2007; Welch-Ross et al., 1999), and family reminiscing plays a particularly important role in shaping young children’s social cognitive development (e.g., Fivush et al., 2006). To control for differences in preschoolers’ reminiscing with different parents (e.g., Fivush, 1998), we focused on mother–child reminiscing about both positive and negative peer experiences, examining reminiscing style and content in relation to children’s peer-related self-views and social competence.

In line with prior research (Fivush et al., 2006; Wang, 2006), we expected that an elaborative reminiscing style, where mothers and children elaborated on each other’s responses and where mothers provided evaluative feedback on their children’s responses to encourage children to participate, would be associated with more positive peer-related self-views and greater social competence in children.

Pertaining to reminiscing content, we expected maternal references to emotions, including discussions of feeling states of the child and the emotional meaning of the event, to be related to more positive peer-related self-views and greater social competence in children. Such associations were hypothesized to be particularly salient in the discussion of negative peer experiences, where emotion talk is likely to be especially
effective to engage children in reflecting on past peer interactions and drawing meaningful lessons from them (Bird & Reese, 2006; Reese et al., 2007; Wang et al., 2010). Furthermore, we predicted that mothers who provided positive framing of negative events would have children with more positive self-views and greater social competence. Such positive framing may facilitate conflict resolution and model to children emotion regulation strategies (Bird & Reese, 2006; Murphy & Eisenberg, 2002).

In addition, we were interested in personal perspectives in co-narrating peer experiences. As suggested by the adult expressive writing literature, the use of pronouns in adults’ writing samples is a sensitive psychological marker of the extent ‘to which people focus on or relate to others’ (Pennebaker, Mehl, & Niederhoffer, 2003, p. 570). No previous study has directly assessed the relations of personal perspective focus in mother–child co-narration to child outcome. Conceivably, focusing on the child when discussing positive events may highlight to children positive past emotions and experiences, and link the positivity to their self-understanding. By contrast, focusing on the role of others during the discussion of negative experiences may be particularly helpful for children to re-appraise the past event, take the perspectives of others, and come to understand themselves in relation to others (Bird & Reese, 2006; Fivush & Wang, 2005). We, therefore, expected that mother–child reminiscing that focused on the child in the positive event discussion and on peers in the negative event discussion would be associated with more positive peer-related self-views and greater social competence in children.

Methods

Participants

Children were recruited at local day care centers in a university town in upstate New York, which has a population of around 30,000. Approximately half of the parents we approached agreed to participate and signed the parental permission form (N = 90). Among them, 17 mothers did not complete the audio recording of mother–child reminiscing at home. The final sample consisted of 63 mothers (mean age = 37.53, SD = 5.52) and their children (32 boys and 31 girls), including 18 three-year-olds, 26 four-year-olds, and 19 five-year-olds (mean age = 52.84 months, range = 40–68 months). Children were of varying birth orders, with most being firstborn (48 percent) or second born (39 percent). All children came from middle-class families, and 95 percent mothers had a college or graduate degree. Children were from ethnically diverse backgrounds, which reflect the population characteristics of the area: 84 percent (N = 53) had White American mothers, 11 percent (N = 7) had Asian or Asian-American mothers, 2 percent (N = 1) had African-American mothers, and 3 percent (N = 2) had Latino-American mothers. Although a growing body of research has demonstrated cultural and ethnical variations in mother–child reminiscing (e.g., Fivush & Wang, 2005; Wang, 2006), the main purpose of this study is to examine the variables of interest in a representative sample of the population, and the small number of participants from non-White backgrounds does not allow reliable statistical tests of ethnic differences.

Procedure

A researcher described the tasks to mothers and invited them to play a role. Each mother received a tape recorder, a tape, and a packet that included questionnaires and a written instruction detailing the procedure (Wang, 2001). In order to capture the way
that personal storytelling is practiced as part of everyday family life, mothers were instructed to audio record their conversations with children at home so that the conversations would occur at a familial setting. The absence of a researcher during the conversation best allows mothers and children to share memories in the way they usually do. Audio recording of semi-structured memory conversations has been commonly used in narrative research (e.g., Reese et al., 2007; Wang, 2001).

In the instruction, mothers were asked to discuss with their children two specific, one-time events that happened to the child and his or her peers within the past month. One event was emotionally positive to the child, and one was negative. Mothers were encouraged to select the events by first asking their children for nomination. If children could not specify any event, mothers would give suggestions until an agreement with their children was reached. It was emphasized that mothers should talk with children as they normally would and take as much time as they wanted. The order of talking about positive and negative peer events was counterbalanced among families. In addition, mothers were asked to complete three questionnaires concerning children’s social competence, language skills, and demographic information of the family. The questionnaires were included in the same package, following the audio recording instruction. Mothers returned the tape recorder, the recorded tape, and completed questionnaires to the child’s teacher within 2 weeks.

In the following 2 weeks after research materials were distributed to mothers, the same researcher interviewed children individually at school to assess their views of themselves in relation to peers. Interviews took place in a quiet room near the children’s classroom, and each took approximately 15 minutes.

**Coding of Mother–Child Reminiscing**

Mother–child conversations of peer events were transcribed verbatim onto paper. Maternal and child utterances in the positive and negative events were tabulated separately for the following variables.

*Reminiscing Style.* Following prior research (e.g., Reese, Haden, & Fivush, 1993), the coding of reminiscing style focused on the way that information was elicited and provided during the conversation. Only utterances relevant to event details were coded. Proposition, defined as a subject–verb construction, was used as the coding unit (e.g., ‘He hit me’; Fivush, Haden, & Adam, 1995). Two types of utterances were tabulated:

**Elaborations.** Maternal elaborations included times when mothers introduced a topic for discussion, moved the conversation to a new aspect of the event, or added information regarding a particular aspect (e.g., M: ‘Do you remember whose birthday party did we go to?’). Child elaborations included times when children requested new information, moved the conversation to a new aspect, or provided new information regarding the past event being discussed (e.g., C: ‘I said “I don’t wanna be around you”’).

**Evaluations.** Maternal evaluations were coded when mothers provided evaluative feedback on children’s previous statement (e.g., M: ‘Oh yes, you played in the sandbox’). Child evaluations were coded when children gave feedback on mothers’ previous statement (e.g., M: ‘We went to Miss Kelly’s house’. C: ‘Mm-hmm’). Evaluations represent an interactive style where one person attends and gives feedback to
the other person’s utterances. Usually, by repeating a previous statement or using confirmation (e.g., ‘Oh, OK’, ‘Right’) or negation (e.g., ‘No, that did not happen’), interlocutors indicate their acknowledgment, agreement, or disagreement with each other on aspects of the event under discussion.

*Emotion Talk.* Following Fivush (1991), we identified emotional terms in mothers’ and children’s speech. This included terms that directly referred to emotional states (e.g., happy) and behaviors (e.g., cry), and those that were expressed as subjective judgments about the child (e.g., ‘You were special’), peers (e.g., ‘He was mean’), and situations (e.g., ‘Everything was OK then?’). The terms were further coded as either positive or negative. *Positive talk* included all maternal or child references to positive emotions and judgments, and *negative talk* included all maternal or child references to negative emotions and judgments.

*Resolution.* Whether mothers provided resolutions for negative peer events was coded. Mother–child pair would receive a ‘1’ if mothers ended the conversation with a positive note or outcome (e.g., ‘You were not sad any more?’, ‘I remember you guys figured it out later’). Mother–child pairs would receive a ‘0’ if mothers did not provide any positive resolution in the event discussion.

*Child vs. Peer Focus.* This coding was intended to index the extent that the conversation focused on the role of the child vs. peers. Following prior research (e.g., Wang & Fivush, 2005), the number of times that mothers and children mentioned the child and peers in their conversations in the form of names and pronouns was counted (e.g., in ‘I was there. Alex was there too. Then he said the mean words to me’, there are two references to the child and two to peers). A ‘child-to-peer ratio’ was then calculated for each mother and child, respectively. Some mothers and children did not make any direct reference to peers, so the ratio was constructed by dividing the number of child references by the number of peer references plus 1—that is, child/(peer+1). The ratio represents a focus on the child relative to peers during reminiscing.

Two coders independently coded 20 percent of the data. Cohen’s kappa was .70–.84 for maternal codes and .74–.92 for child codes. One of the coders then coded the remaining transcripts.

*Child Measures*

*Self in Peer Relations.* Children’s peer-related self-views were assessed using a task adapted from the perceptions of peer and self questionnaire (Rudolph et al., 1995). This questionnaire measures children’s appraisal of peers and themselves in the context of peer relationships. It includes 15 statements pertaining to peers’ social attributes, such as empathy, loyalty, and dependability (e.g., ‘some kids can be trusted’), and 15 statements pertaining to the self (e.g., ‘I am the kind of kids who makes friends easily’). Given the focus of the present study, only responses to self-statements were included in the analyses.

To simplify the task and make it appropriate and fun for preschool children, the statements were presented to children as stories during the interview. The researcher first showed children three buckets with cartoon-like faces depicting happy, neutral, and sad expressions. After children correctly identified all three faces, the researcher explained to children that each time after she read a story from a card, children should
put the card into one of the buckets depending on how true the story was for them. The three buckets with happy, neutral, and sad faces represented that the story was always true, sometimes true, and never true for them, respectively. The researcher then told three practice statements (‘I like broccoli’, ‘I like rainy days’, and ‘my name is ____’) and ensured that children understood the procedure. Afterward, she read children statements from the perceptions of peer and self questionnaire. This rating procedure with the aid of emotional faces has been commonly used with preschool children (Asher, Singleton, Tinsley, & Hymel, 1979; Wang & Li, 2003).

Children’s responses to each story were recorded as 1 (never true), 2 (sometimes true), or 3 (always true). Responses to statements expressing negative views of the self (e.g., ‘It is a waste of other kids’ time to stay with me’, N = 7) were reverse-coded so that higher scores index more positive self-views in peer relations. Reliability analysis showed that all negative-worded items were negatively correlated with the total scale (rs = −.07 to −.51), suggesting that children of this age range might have difficulty understanding these items. These items were, therefore, excluded. The remaining items formed a reliable scale for peer-related self-views (N = 8; see Appendix A). The Cronbach’s alpha for the scale is .74, which exceeds the recommended level of .70 in assessing young children’s self-concept (Nunnally, 1978).

Language. Mothers reported children’s language skills by completing a shortened version of the child development inventory (Ireton, 1992), which assesses children’s language production and comprehension. The Cronbach’s alpha for the language scale was .91 in the current sample. Children’s language production and comprehension assessed in the scale were highly correlated and were combined into a total language score in analysis.

Social Competence. Mothers rated children’s social competence using the social competence and behavior evaluation short form (LaFreniere & Dumas, 1996). The measure includes 30 items that describe different social behaviors associated with the child’s capacity to modulate affect and behaviors in interpersonal contexts. Mothers reported on 6-point scales how frequently they observed those behaviors in their children at home. Scores on two subscales relevant to the current study were computed for later analysis: social competence (e.g., ‘comforts or assists another child in difficulty’) and anxiety withdrawal (e.g., ‘sad, unhappy, or depressed’; see Appendix B). Cronbach’s alphas for social competence and anxiety withdrawal subscales were .65 and .77, respectively.

Results

Preliminary Analysis

The mother–child conversations involved a variety of peer relationships and issues (Murphy & Eisenberg, 2002; Zahn-Waxler et al., 2008). About 58 percent mother–child dyads discussed positive peer events that involved acquaintances children interacted with outside preschool or day care settings, 18 percent discussed positive events involving schoolmates, and 23 percent specifically identified the involved peers as friends. By contrast, more than half of mother–child dyads (54 percent) reminisced negative peer events concerning problems with schoolmates, and the rest discussed negative events involving friends (17 percent), siblings (3 percent), and acquaintances outside school settings (25 percent).
In addition, positive peer events predominantly concerned shared positive activities (90 percent), including school activities, playdates, and special events such as birthday parties. A few events concerned issues of offering help (5 percent) and displaying affective behaviors or expressions (5 percent). Conversely, there was a wide range of issues featured in reminiscing about negative peer experiences, including physical harm (25 percent), psychological harm (10 percent), claim over objects (29 percent), violation of general classroom or social rules (14 percent), violation of friendship rules such as ignoring (5 percent), conflict over opinions (5 percent), and others.

 Mothers and children also discussed a variety of emotional states in their conversations. The expression of ‘having fun’ or ‘fun’ was most prevalent in positive event discussions (70 percent). In addition, 25 percent mother–child dyads explicitly discussed happiness, pride, or excitement, 5 percent discussed ‘feeling good’, and 13 percent discussed other emotions (e.g., ‘scared’). For negative peer events, about half of mother–child dyads (51 percent) talked about being sad, unhappy, or upset, 20 percent of them about anger, 7 percent about anxiety or fear, 20 percent about ‘feeling bad’, and 22 percent about other emotions.

One mother did not fill out the social competence and behavior evaluation short form. Three mother–child dyads did not talk about specific positive peer experiences, and four mother–child dyads did not talk about specific negative peer experiences. These mother–child dyads were not included in relevant analyses. Because mothers recorded the memory conversations at home at a time of their choice, the length of talk might not only reflect their reminiscing style but also the individual context of having the conversation. Some previous studies shared similar concerns and controlled for the volume of conversations when examining the associations between reminiscing codes and children’s psychological outcomes (e.g., Fivush & Vasudeva, 2002; Laible, 2004; Welch-Ross et al., 1999). To eliminate the possible effect of context variation and keep consistent with previous studies, analyses were conducted on proportions of reminiscing style and emotional-judgmental codes relative to the total propositions.

Descriptive data for mother–child reminiscing codes and child outcome measures are presented in Tables 1 and 2. The relations of those variables to child age, language, and gender were examined. Older children tended to include more elaborations ($r = .28, p < .05$) and fewer evaluations ($r = -.29, p < .05$) when discussing negative events, and were slightly more likely to provide positive talk when discussing positive events ($r = .23, p < .10$). Mothers whose children had better language ability made less negative talk in negative event reminiscing ($r = -.34, p < .01$). There was a trend that boys used fewer evaluations than girls in the negative event discussion ($t = -1.84, p < .10$). Child age, gender, and language only showed marginally significant relations to outcome variables. Specifically, children with better language ability had more positive self-views ($r = .23, p < .10$). Boys were rated as slightly lower in social competence than girls ($t = 1.72, p < .10$), and older children were rated as more anxious-withdrawn than younger children ($r = .24, p < .10$). In subsequent analyses, child age, gender, and language were included as covariates only if they were at least marginally correlated with variables of interest.

Predicting Child Outcomes

The major purpose of the study is to examine how mother–child reminiscing about peer experiences relates to children’s self-views and social competence in the peer domain. Zero-order correlations were first calculated between reminiscing codes and
child outcome variables, with significant correlations highlighted (see Table 3). Mothers who used more evaluations, who made more negative talk when discussing the positive event, and who made more positive talk and provided resolution when discussing the negative event had children with more positive peer-related self-views. Children who focused more on themselves as opposed to peers in the positive event had

### Table 1. Descriptive Data for Maternal and Child Reminiscing Codes

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<td>Elaborations&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>Mother</td>
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<td>2.21</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>.00–13.00 (59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>.15–6.00 (59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolution&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>.00–1.00 (59)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> Variables calculated in proportion to the total number of propositions. <sup>b</sup> Variables calculated as the ratio score of total references to child vs. total references to peers. <sup>c</sup> Nominal variable that indicates the presence or absence of positive resolution. Mean stands for the percentage of conversations that included resolution.
marginally more positive self-views whereas those who focused more on themselves in the negative event had less positive self-views.

In addition, children who used more elaborations in either positive or negative event discussion tended to score higher on social competence. Mothers who provided...
resolution in negative event discussion had children with higher social competence at a marginal trend. Children’s anxiety withdrawal scores were negatively associated with maternal and child uses of evaluations in the negative event discussion, and negatively associated with maternal focus on the child vs. peers during the positive event discussion.

Next, we conducted a series of hierarchical regression analyses to investigate unique contributions of maternal and child reminiscing codes to child outcome measures, controlling for child age, gender, and language wherever appropriate. We analyzed conversations of positive and negative events separately in order to identify possibly different patterns of relations to child outcomes. In each hierarchical regression analysis, child age, gender, or language were entered in the first step if they were at least marginally correlated with the outcome variable. In the second step, we entered maternal and child reminiscing codes that were significantly or marginally correlated with the outcome variable.

As shown in Table 4, both models predicting the children’s self-scores were significant overall. After controlling for child language in the regression model for the positive event discussion, maternal negative talk remained a significant predictor, and maternal evaluations made marginally significant contribution, whereas child self/peer focus was no longer significant. Thus, mothers who included more evaluations and fewer negative talk in the positive event reminiscing had children with more positive self-views. In the second model pertaining to the negative event discussion, all predictor variables remained significant or marginally significant after controlling for child language, except child negative talk. Thus, children had more positive self-views when mothers included more evaluations and positive talk, and provided resolutions in the negative event reminiscing. Also, children who focused less on themselves relative to peers in the negative event reminiscing showed more positive self-views.

Table 4. Hierarchical Regression Analyses Predicting Self-views

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor variable</th>
<th>β in the final model for positive event reminiscing</th>
<th>β in the final model for negative event reminiscing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>.28*</td>
<td>.31**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.10*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother evaluation</td>
<td>.21†</td>
<td>.41**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother positive talk</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.19†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother negative talk</td>
<td>-.29*</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternal resolution</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.33**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child negative talk</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child self/peer focus</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>-.24*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>.27**</td>
<td>.46***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΔR²</td>
<td>.22**</td>
<td>.36***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: † p < .10, * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001, two-tailed.
It is possible that maternal views of children’s social competence might influence the way that mothers narrated peer experiences, and thus child self-views. We, therefore, ran another set of regression analyses to test the relations of reminiscing codes to children’s self-views, controlling for children’s social competence and anxiety withdrawal. All significant results remained, except that the contribution of maternal positive talk in negative event conversation was no longer significant in relation to children’s self-views.

In the next set of regression analyses, two models examined the relations of reminiscing codes to children’s social competence in positive and negative event conversations, respectively, and two models examined the relations of reminiscing codes to children’s anxiety withdrawal in positive and negative conversations, respectively. As shown in Table 5, maternal use of negative talk in the positive event reminiscing was associated with lower social competence in children, after controlling for child gender. For the negative event reminiscing, the overall regression model approached significance, with child elaborations contributing to social competence at a marginally significant level. Pertaining to anxiety withdrawal, maternal focus on the child relative

| Table 5. Hierarchical Regression Analyses Predicting Social Competence and Anxiety Withdrawal |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Predictor variable                           | β in the final model for positive event reminiscing | β in the final model for negative event reminiscing |
| Predicting social competence                 |                                              |                                                |
| Step 1                                        |                                              |                                                |
| Sex                                           | .12                                          | .07                                           |
| $R^2$                                         | .04                                          | .02                                           |
| Step 2                                        |                                              |                                                |
| Child elaboration                             | .18                                          | .24*                                          |
| Mother negative talk                          | −.34**                                       | —                                              |
| Maternal resolution                           |                              —               | .19                                           |
| $R^2$                                         | .19**                                        | .13*                                          |
| $\Delta R^2$                                  | .15**                                        | .11*                                          |
| N                                             | 60                                           | 58                                             |
| Predicting anxious-withdrawal                 |                                              |                                                |
| Step 1                                        |                                              |                                                |
| Age                                           | .22*                                         | .10                                           |
| $R^2$                                         | .06*                                         | .03                                           |
| Step 2                                        |                                              |                                                |
| Mother evaluation                             | —                                             | −.37*                                         |
| Child evaluation                              | —                                             | −.02                                          |
| Mother self/peer focus                        | −.27*                                         | —                                             |
| $R^2$                                         | .13*                                         | .16*                                          |
| $\Delta R^2$                                  | .07*                                         | .13*                                          |
| N                                             | 60                                           | 58                                             |

Note: *$p < .10$, *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, two-tailed.
to peers in the positive event reminiscing and maternal evaluations in the negative event reminiscing were associated with less anxious-withdrawn behavior in children, independent of child age.²

To ensure that the regression analyses have sufficient statistical power, we limited the number of variables in the models by removing insignificant variables. Significant results remained the same.

Discussion

This is the first study to investigate how mothers and children co-construct peer experiences through reminiscing and its relations to children’s peer-related self-views and social competence. The findings showed that certain reminiscing style and content were associated with children’s self-understanding and social competence. They further suggest that talking about positive and negative peer experiences may serve as a unique context for social development.

Consistent with our predictions, mothers who used more evaluations to facilitate children’s participation had children with more positive self-views and less anxiety withdrawal. Maternal evaluative feedback is an effective strategy to validate children’s previous statements and actively engage children in subsequent discussions (e.g., Reese et al., 1993), which may further facilitate children to reflect on peer experiences and build positive self-views in relation to peers. Furthermore, children who used more elaborations in the reminiscing about negative peer experiences scored higher on social competence. One speculation is that when children are given the opportunities to discuss details of past peer events, particularly negative events that may require additional reappraisal and processing, they may come to a better understanding of what had happened. This may then help children successfully participate in peer interactions. This finding is further consistent with the social information processing theory that proposes mutual influences between forming social schemas and the ability to remember and make use of social cues from past social situations (Crick & Dodge, 1994). Children who remember more details about past peer experiences may form richer schemas pertaining to peers and be better able to utilize the information in similar future encounters (Gouze, 1987).

Interestingly, maternal elaborations were not directly associated with child outcome measures. This may reflect characteristics of the events under discussion. Unlike previous studies of mother–child reminiscing about shared experiences (e.g., Fivush et al., 2006; Reese et al., 1993; Wang, 2006), here mothers and children discussed events that happened to the child and his or her peers. Mothers were not the primary participants in the peer events, and therefore had limited access to the event information to add to the discussion. Nevertheless, they contributed by providing evaluative feedback and comments to facilitate children’s participation.

Consistent with previous studies (Bird & Reese, 2006; Marin, Bohanek, & Fivush, 2008), negative event discussion appeared to be a particularly effective context in which an elaborative reminiscing style is linked to positive outcomes. Encouraging children to revisit details of negative events may allow them to reappraise the events and reflect on the causes and consequences of peer conflicts. Such conversations may, therefore, help children develop coherent representations of peer-related past experiences and further gain social strategies and knowledge about themselves.

Although the current findings suggest associations between maternal reminiscing style and children’s self-views and social competence in the peer relationship domain,
there may be moderation and mediation factors in effect. For instance, mother–child dyads with secure attachments are more likely to have an open communication style, where mothers are elaborative and feel comfortable talking about emotions, particularly when discussing stressful events (Fivush & Vasudeva, 2002). Maternal reminiscing style may, therefore, reflect the quality of mother–child relationship, which in turn translates into peer–child relationship (Cassidy, Kirsh, Scolton, & Parke, 1996). On the other hand, Mize and Pettit (1997) found that maternal elaborations in discussing hypothetical peer situations made a significant contribution to children’s social competence, independent of maternal warmth and maternal coaching style. It is possible that both maternal reminiscing style and mother–child relationship play a role. Future studies should disentangle the influences of mother–child reminiscing and other important variables on child outcomes.

Maternal uses of positive and negative talks were also related to children’s self-views. Maternal positive talk and positive resolution in the reminiscing about negative peer experiences were associated with more positive self-views in children. It is possible that when discussing negative peer experiences, mothers who provide an interpretive framework that tunes children to attend to the positive aspects of the event or even casts the event in a positive light may facilitate children’s positive reappraisal of the event and further positive self-understanding (Mize & Pettit, 1997). The following two excerpts help illustrate the characteristics of mother–child conversations.

Excerpt 1
...C: Knocked over.
M: He stepped on it?
C: Yeah.
M: And how did that make you feel?
C: Sad.
M: Did you cry?
C: Yeah.

M: What happen, did you make up and be friends later?
C: Yeah.
M: So everything was OK. You weren’t mad at Tom and he wasn’t upset anymore?
C: No.
M: So everything was fine?
C: Yeah.

Excerpt 2
M: Tell mommy about a time when you got into a fight with a friend.
C: OK. Chris and I had a fight.
M: Yeah. You and Chris got into a fight one day. Why? What happened?
C: Because I want the giraffe boots.

M: Adam played outside. So you guys didn’t play together because of the fight?
C: No.
M: No? And then what happened? Did you end up playing with Adam?
C: No.
M: No?
C: Yeah.
M: You guys, you guys stop playing together?
C: Yeah.

As illustrated in Excerpt 1, the mother took several turns ensuring the child that he and his friend had re-established their relationship. The positive ending was noted, and negative emotions were resolved. By contrast, the mother in Excerpt 2 did not try to
change the child’s appraisal after a negative ending was specified. A positive framing, particularly a positive ending, may help children form coherent and positive representations of the peer experience, from which a positive self-view can be further formulated.

On the other hand, maternal negative talk in the reminiscing of positive peer experiences was associated with less positive self-views and lower social competence in children. Referring to negative aspects of an overall positive experience may cast a negative spin on the event. This negativity may offset children’s attention to positive affect and behavior in past peer interactions, and further hinder the integration of positive event details into the formation of self-representations. In addition, maternal references to negative aspects of positive peer events may result in a negative bias in children in assessing the self in relation to peers, and further in turn lower social competence (Meece et al., 2007). These findings suggest that the effects of maternal positive and negative talks should be considered within the specific reminiscing context. Maternal emotion talk that holds opposite valence to the event theme may send particularly strong messages that influence how children relate the past experience to their self-knowledge and further guide their social interactions in similar situations.

Children who focused on their own roles when discussing the positive event and those who focused on peers when discussing the negative event exhibited more positive self-views, although the effect for the positive event discussion was no longer significant after controlling for child language. In addition, mothers who focused more on their children in reminiscing positive events had children who showed less anxiety withdrawal. Focusing on the child during positive event discussion may draw children’s attention to past positive emotions and involvement, and perhaps reinforce children’s positive representations of themselves in relation to peers. During the reminiscing about negative peer experiences, on the other hand, focusing on the roles of peers may allow children to understand the negative incidents not just as experienced by themselves but also as experienced by their peers. By taking peers’ perspectives, children may construct a fuller picture of the past event to integrate into their self-representations. Furthermore, focusing on others’ roles may serve to distance oneself from negative experiences (Kross & Ayduk, 2011), which may facilitate a broader perspective to reflect on, reconstrue, and make positive meaning out of the experience. By contrast, focusing on one’s own roles and perspectives in a negative event may result in heightened negative affect (Boals & Klein, 2005), which in turn contributes to negative self-views.

There are some limitations to the study. The results were derived from correlational data assessed at a single time point, based on which we could not determine the causal direction between mother–child reminiscing and children’s self-views and social competence. Longitudinal data are needed to show how mother–child reminiscing contributes to children’s positive self-views and social competence in the long term. In addition, future studies may implement training on maternal involvement in reminiscing and investigate whether the training can improve children’s psychosocial functioning in the peer domain. It should also be noted that the current sample consisted of only middle-class families. The findings may, therefore, not be generalized to other populations. In addition, the way of discussing children’s previous peer experiences may be influenced by relevant cultural values (e.g., Wang, 2006; Wang & Li, 2003). Future research that compares peer-related conversations in different cultural groups will be informative.

Children’s positive self-views and social competence in the peer domain may directly influence their interaction with peers and their ability to effectively explore and
establish social network. Family narrative practices, particularly parent–child remi-
niscing about past peer experiences, may play an important role in facilitating positive
self-views and the development of social competence in children. Although children
form friendships and other positive relationships with peers outside home, their remi-
niscing with parents at home may be an important context to shape such development.

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Appendix A: Items Comprising Perception of Peer and Self

There are a lot of things about me that other kids really like.

I am a lot of fun to be with.
Once I am friends with someone, I know how to keep them as a friend.
Kids like to be around me, because I can be a really good friend.
I am good at helping other kids to feel better when they are upset.
I am good at making other kids laugh.
I can usually get other kids to play the games that I suggest.

**Appendix B: Items Comprising Social Competence Behavior Evaluation**

- Maintains neutral facial expression (doesn’t smile or laugh)
- Comforts or assists another child in difficulty
- Helps with everyday tasks (e.g., cleans up)
- Timid, afraid (e.g., avoids new situations)
- Sad, unhappy, or depressed
- Inhibited or uneasy in peer group
- Works easily in a peer group
- Inactive, watches the other children play
- Negotiates solutions to conflicts with other children
- Remains apart, isolated from the peer group
- Takes other children and their point of view into account
- Cooperates with other children in group activities
- Tired
- Takes care of toys
- Doesn’t talk or interact during group activities with other children
- Attentive toward younger children
- Goes unnoticed in a group of children
- Worries
- Accepts compromises when reasons are given
- Takes pleasure in own accomplishments