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# *The acquisition of memory by interview questioning: Holocaust re-membering as category-bound activity*

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ABSTRACT    In this discourse analysis of how memory acquires and is acquired in interview exchanges, we investigate remembering as a category-bound activity, both a tensional and collaborative process of moral ratification of 'survivor' as membership category. We propose the term *re-membering* to mean piecing together possible versions of survivor experiences in talk; these versions, offered by respondents and elicited by interviewers through questioning strategies, are epistemic claims to acquire the Holocaust as *memory*, or institutional History. We explore the accounting dynamic of interviewer and respondent, the relationship of ownership between survivors and memory, and the duties and moral obligations of the category 'Holocaust survivor' that can be shown through the interviews of survivors and their adult daughters.

KEY WORDS: *epistemic rights, Holocaust, interview, membership categorization, memory, questioning*

Patient: I can't remember anything that happened when I was five weeks old.

Doctor: Of course not.
(Lynch and Bogen, 1997: 103)[1]

I don't consider myself a survivor. I'm saying I am an orphan because I was in an orphanage from the age of 10 to 16 (years old), not in a camp, but my entire family was exterminated. (Ruth Westheimer, 4 October 2008, www.nbc10.com)

In *The Acquisition of a Speaker by a Story*, Linde (2000), much like Douglas (1986) in her analysis of remembering and forgetting as institutional thinking, argues that memory is part and parcel of the process of institutionalization. By re-formulating institutional narratives as their own, inductees come to understand their own stories as representative of the institution, thus re-membering the institutional story. And in *The Acquisition of a Child by a Learning Disability*,

McDermott (1993) constructs a learning disability as an agentive, predatory social category. Framing categorization within a dynamic of accounts as social action (Baker, 2004; Shotter, 1990), McDermott's argument is that learning disabilities' acquisition of children (and not the other way round) is a consequence of the discursive effort of education and psychology professionals. Thus, both 'learning disabled children' or 'institutional (re)member(er)s' are discursive accomplishments of institutional categorizers that reflexively constitute the very subjects they describe.

To illustrate our argument about how memory acquires and is acquired in interview exchanges, we move to unpacking the excerpts above. In the first, from a psychiatric consultation, the psychiatrist responds to the patient's admission of the impossibility of remembering things that happened during his infancy. Considering the social propriety of the patient's statement, the psychiatrist's forceful agreement with it makes sense. Less clear is the need for the patronizing quality also present in 'Of course not'.

In the second excerpt, taken from her keynote speech at an event on trauma and the Holocaust,[2] sex therapist turned autobiographer Dr Ruth Westheimer executes a remarkable move. Though at first unaffiliating with the identity of 'survivor' and instead choosing 'orphan', Westheimer's 'but' is both grammatical modifier and membership claim. What comes after 'but' is a re-affiliation with survivors, by way of belonging to a family that was not only killed but, by semantic upgrade, 'exterminated' in the camps.

Westheimer's identity management rests on a bid for category acquisition, which is a bid for the epistemic rights to memory claims. Her statement indicates that 'orphan' and 'survivor' are differently ranked categories in terms of access Holocaust re-membering; the former, while compelling, may be less desirable than the latter. In the collective memory narrative of the Holocaust as moral universal (Alexander, 2004), individual survivor accounts do not stand alone, but ensure that the tragedy will not be forgotten (Schiffrin, 2002). Survivor memory points to memory as cognitive faculty that is 'perfectly observable' (Sacks, 1992: 559) in discursive negotiations of moral responsibility (Coulter, 1983, 1992): what should and should not be remembered. In turn, just like Westheimer suggests that orphans and survivors may not enjoy the same access to memories (and moral universes), questions of accountability are attached to categories of persons (Sacks, 1992). As Ekman (1983) puts it:

> memory failure is credible only in limited circumstances. The doctor asked if the tests were negative can't claim not to remember, nor can the policeman asked by the suspect whether the room is bugged . . . Even the passage of time may not justify a failure to remember extraordinary events . . . no matter when they happened. (pp. 30–1)

And just like lapses in memory could not be claimed by defendants at the Nuremberg trials, the passing of time did not exculpate the 86-year-old 'last Nazi war criminal' (Crossland, 2008) from remembering his sins.

Returning to the mental patient in the first excerpt, we see that although he is joined by the doctor in confirming the non-symptomatic version of

remembering, he cannot acquire membership or memory granted to those psychiatry acknowledges as competent. The questioning dynamic of the psychiatric interview works to acquire those it engages into nosological categories (see Bartesaghi, this issue: 153–77); the patient's memory statement may be acceptable (this time), but, as the categorically unreliable statement of a mental patient, it still deserves the doctor's metacommentary. As for Westheimer's more successful situation, we can appreciate how her apparent disclaiming of 'survivor' memory is only just that. Indeed, as the only remaining member of an 'exterminated' family, Westheimer's warrant to memory acquisition does not involve an either/or choice between categories, but an ability to extend membership to both: she is *both* orphan *and* Holocaust survivor, the victim of twofold cruelty inflicted by Nazi Germany.

Premising our argument on the construction of the categories 'Holocaust survivor' and 'children of survivor', in oral history interviews we carry on the empirical investigation of institutional acquisition of Linde (2000) and McDermott (1993) by investigating remembering as category-bound accounting process (Shotter, 1990) in discursive exchanges (Edwards and Middleton, 1990). Our choice to approach memory as a discursive resource of the interview entails that we set aside studies where Holocaust remembering is considered a cognitive process, which interviews may 'trigger' or 'access' with mixed results (e.g. Adelman, 1995; Epstein, 1979; Goldenberg, 2002; Mor, 1990; Wajnryb, 2001). Rather, we propose the term *re-membering* to mean piecing together possible versions of survivor experiences in talk; these versions, offered by respondents and elicited by interviewers, are epistemic claims to acquire the Holocaust as *memory*, or institutional History. In turn, we locate the dynamic of categorization and memory-making in questioning exchanges during interviews conducted with survivors and their children by the Transcending Trauma Project at the Council for Relationships, in a large northeastern US city. One purpose of these interviews was to reframe the notion of Holocaust trauma and replace it with an account of resilience. In the course of this category work centered on survivors' accounts, interviewer and respondent are engaged in an accounting dynamic which is at times questioned by the interviewer as institutional member, while all the time working together to categorize the respondent's account as institutional Holocaust memory.

After explicating our definition of the Holocaust as institutional memory and outlining the goals of the Transforming Trauma Project, we review the literature on interviews as loci for membership categorization and the construction of memory. We then describe our data and approach. An analysis of issues tied to re-membering as interview dynamic is followed by a reflection on the implications of our work.

## The Transcending Trauma Project and institutional memory

Like that of the Yale University Video Archive, the Shoah Visual History Foundation, and the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, the purpose of the

Transcending Trauma Project is to create institutional memory, by turning oral histories of the Holocaust into History. This process is described in terms of narrative acquisition (Linde, 2000) by Schiffrin (2002: 309):

> The Holocaust . . . has become a centralizing symbol in American Jewish life . . . [and] a potent and pervasive reference point for the description of other human cata-strophes that both precede (e.g. the enslavement of African Americans) and postdate (e.g. AIDS) [it].

Elie Wiesel's famous characterization of the Holocaust as 'ontological evil' not-withstanding, Schiffrin's commentary (2002; see also 2003a, 2003b) suggests that the status of the Holocaust as collective memory, as well the ability of its narrative to memorialize other events under its rubric, is neither natural nor transparent; rather, it is due to the constitutive work of discourse. Arguing for an epistemological view of the Holocaust, Alexander (2004) details how the narrative of its events shifted from a post-war progressive account of redemption through suffering to what is now a postmodern 'trauma drama'. Central to the trauma narrative – chaotic and foreboding, urging its audience to never forget – had to be a way to re-member trauma for posterity, in the form of a new kind of 'narrative that emerge[d] through the alliance of witness and interviewer' (Hartman, 1996: 153; see Alexander, 2004).

Enter oral history projects. In acquiring Holocaust History, these sites for discursive re-membering thus constitute the key characters and plot devices – 'trauma', 'suffering', 'survivor', and 'witness' – as epistemic categories which emerge in the course of the question and answer dynamic between interviewers and informants. Interview questioning constructed this way grants first-person accounts the epistemic status of institutional memory. As Alexander (2004) explains, the oral history interview is a site for both personalization and de-personalization of accounts. If, on the one hand, the audience should emotion-ally identify with survivors, the success of the trauma narrative depends on its objectification. Only then can it reach the largest possible audience, as archetypal trauma drama (able to acquire other stories, like Dr Westheimer's, as survivor stories). The collaboration between interviewer and interviewee in this process of dual acquisition is captured in Geoffrey Hartman's account of interviews at the Yale Video Archive:

> However many times the interviewer may have heard similar accounts, they are received as though for the first time. This is possible because while the facts are known [by] historians . . . [there is] . . . the midwife role of the interviewer listener; the hope that the elicited words will inscribe themselves on the minds of the auditor; and the renewal of compassionate feelings. The interview, conceived in this way, is a social act. (Hartman, 1996: 153)

Hartman's midwife-interviewer aside, birthing institutional memory is no effortless social act. In her push for a linguistic turn in history, Schiffrin (e.g. 2003b) writes of the skepticism with which oral histories are met by historians (who, as Hartman notes with unwitting irony, *know* 'the *facts*' (our emphasis)). For this reason, the US Holocaust Memorial Museum has developed a set of Oral

History Interview Guidelines designed for the strict authentication of information (Schiffrin, 2003b); in order for compassion to be renewed, interviewers' questioning techniques must address the authenticity of re-membering and trauma, as well as the epistemic category of 'survivor'. It is to this issue we now turn.

The Transcending Trauma Project (TTP), which is affiliated with the Council for Relationships, a psychotherapeutic practice in an urban northeastern US city, collected nearly a hundred interviews with Holocaust survivor families.[3] Unlike that of other oral history projects, the purpose of the TTP is to 'identify the key elements in successful psychological coping following extreme trauma and the key processes that comprise intergenerational transmission of trauma and recovery' (Council for Relationships, 2008). To this end, the TTP broadly defines a Holocaust survivor as anyone whose life was disrupted by the events in Europe between 1933 and 1945; this includes those who were forced to emigrate, as well as those who were relocated or moved into ghettos, hid under false identities, were forced into labor or death camps, or fought in the resistance. Designed to 'probe the inner experiences of the survivor' (Hollander-Goldfein and Kliger, 1999: 2) and allowing interviewer-researchers to later categorize experience and 'extract the psychological themes within each category' (p. 3), TTP questions are intended to produced an 'integrated model of survivorship' (p. 6) by reworking the membership rules of the survivor category. Specifically, the goal of the TTP is to memorialize the survivor in terms of a:

> direct contrast to those existing models that focus on the negative effects of the Holocaust and trauma. A secondary goal [is] an investigation of the intergenerational transmission of Jewish identity. [Survivors'] willingness to pass on a positive Jewish identity could no longer be taken for granted, given the powerful impact of the events in their recent history. (Hollander-Goldfein and Kliger, 1999: 3)

What is compelling about the Transcending Trauma Project from an analytical standpoint is its category logic (Baker, 2004), that is, the way the TTP constructs survivor, trauma, and identity as epistemic categories dependent on the establishment of the cognitive category of memory, which it assumes as a psychological faculty established by questioning. Given its therapeutic bent, this logic is not, per se, surprising. What is more interesting is its discourse of resilience from trauma, which in fact rests on the institutional establishment of psychological trauma. Though TTP seeks to measure survivors' *resilience* from trauma and *positive* identity, the fact that these are to be 'extracted' by psychological analyses of talk after the two multivariate psychological constructs (trauma and identity) suggests that the project's memory-making questions are structured on interesting 'asymmetries of knowledge' (Drew, 1991). As well, there is TTP's desire, as oral history project with a twist, to (re)construct history, and certainly, as Hollander-Goldfein and Kliger note above, to be able to have a say on its events. In order to do so, the Transcending Trauma Project trains its interviewers to ask what we categorize as history-memory questions alongside psychological-memory questions, in order to endow its speakers with the epistemic rights to re-member as survivors of the Holocaust, or *own* Historical memory (Sharrock, 1990). Both of these types of questions are sometimes at odds with interviewees'

answers, perhaps revealing that the epistemic rights to speak as survivor and acquire memory are not so easily granted by the institutional dynamic of the oral history project. We will return to explore how TTP questions work to categorize speaker experience as survivor memory, as well as to the issues that arise as the interviewer and interviewee perform the category work in the process of memory acquisition in our analysis section. In the sections that follow we review relevant literature as well as account for our data and method.

## Membership categorization and re-membering in interviews

Schiffrin's (2003b: 90) commentary with respect to Holocaust interviews (which she offers as part of a larger discussion on the importance of linguistics to the study of history) caught our attention:

> Interviews are speech events designed to elicit information: one person typically takes a questioning role; the other . . . answers. Despite this seeming asymmetry, the questions asked by Holocaust oral history interviewers end up co-constructing a life story . . . by building two overarching, but interlocking, frameworks: the linear passage of time (both personal life stages and historical phases) [and] the non-linear distribution and recurrence of themes (e.g. discrimination, contact with family, emotional reaction).

The awareness of interviews as speech events – rather than information-gathering tools in the positivist tradition – counts classic studies such as Mishler's (1986; see also Wooffitt and Widdicombe, 2006) and edited manuals (e.g. Gubrium and Holstein's, 2002). Analyses in this tradition make of the interview a topic of study rather than a resource for extracting knowledge (Sarangi, 2003), considering the interviewer and the interviewee equally vested parties in the sensemaking of the question–answer process. The respondent, therefore, is someone who 'has her uses for the interview just as the interviewer and [the analyst] have [theirs]' (Smith, 1972: 27). In addition, interactional analyses of interviews as indexical exchanges (e.g. Enosh and Buchbinder, 2005) or opportunities for interviewers and interviewees to construct identities and social norms (e.g. Baker, 2004; Rapley, 2001), and perform institutionalization in action (e.g. Bartesaghi, this issue: 153–77; Kress and Fowler, 1979; Mehan, 1990; Smith, 1972), render Schiffrin's (2003b) observation above curious in two ways.

Schiffrin contrasts 'co-construction' with speech events that feature 'asymmetry'. By implication, 'co-constructive' speech events are, in her view, participatory and non-asymmetric. This leaves ambiguous the nature and proportion of what is symmetric in the interaction. We believe this dichotomy is false, and that indeed speakers' moment by moment collaboration in interaction does not depend on presumed symmetry (Bartesaghi, 2008; Drew, 1991; Sarangi and Slembrouck, 1997). By extension, we also find curious Schiffrin's observation that 'co-constructive' interviews – such as those devised by Holocaust projects – enable a connection, by means of a putative symmetric exchange, between the categories of time and (what we interpret to be) survivor experiences. What follows is our review of how first, questioning is an exchange where asymmetry

is not antithetical to co-construction; a case in point is the exchange between psychiatrist and patient at the beginning of our article, where both collaborate to advance the socially 'sane' version of memory (while the doctor establishes the epistemic primacy of psychiatry). Second, we address making history as re-membering in interviews by means of the collaborative category-work of interviewer and respondent. For this purpose, we will explain how Sacks's (1990) notions of membership categorization and category boundedness are relevant to our work.

Edwards and Middleton (1990: 28) note that:

> The awareness of having . . . a 'memory' . . . may very well arise as a matter of difficulty – as a matter of *not* being able to remember something, of being suddenly reminded . . ., of trying to remember and of trying to square an offered version of events with what another speaker says.

Positing remembering as a socially accountable process (also see Shotter, 1990), Edwards and Middleton understand 'memory' as a discursive resource in an asymmetric exchange. Their essay on conversational remembering (1990) illustrates how parents teach children how to construct socially appropriate memory statements by both posing and encouraging questions about family photographs. The parent's interrogatives formulated in terms of 'do you', or, in close-ended form, 'don't you remember?' work to construct memory as a cognitive faculty. At the same time, the questions metadiscursively instruct the children that remembering is pragmatic: part and parcel of doing family relationship categories.

Approaching claims to have remembered a particular event as speakers' bids for epistemic authority, Ochs and Capps (1997) also analyze remembering in an exchange between parents and children. Showing how memory cannot be so without others' authorization (whether it be a child's account, or that which is 'of consequence for groups and nations' [p. 84]), Ochs and Capps illustrate that claims to memory are advanced by displaying ownership (Sharrock, 1990) of memory discourse. Speakers' use of adverbs such as 'actually' and 'absolutely', exact numbers, direct reported speech, as well as their conformity to an accepted version of events are all ways to successfully stake claims to memory.

Dorothy Smith's (1972) analysis of the interview as a first step in the process of institutionalization offers a good entry point to connect our observations about remembering to interview questioning. Smith's argument (and ours) is that the interview is an exchange where both questioner-interviewer and respondent are engaged in membership categorization (Sacks, 1990, 1992; see also Hester and Eglin, 1997). As she explains:

> The form of the [interviewer's] questions tells the respondent what sort of work she is being asked to do . . . to find from her own experience an instance . . . *which can* be properly matched against criteria of class membership assumed to be known at large. (Smith, 1972: 27; italics added)

The idea of membership categorization, or the *process* of fitting persons into social classifications or types, was first introduced by Sacks (1990 [1974]), though his definition has been modified since (e.g. Baker, 1997, 2004). One

important change is the inclusion of collectivities to the original definition (Hester and Eglin, 1997). Smith's comment suggests that interview questions are questions of categorization, making interviews sites for the co-constitution of social categories.

To Carolyn Baker (2004), interviews are strategic encounters, where speakers identify and test categorizations of others and construct themselves as moral agents. Like Smith, Baker conceives of interview questions as category-making discourse strategies, which invite interviewees' to produce situated 'accountings for' in their descriptions. Baker's pragmatic analysis reveals that questioning is done by both participants, as their category knowledge re-constructs social, institutional, and moral order. Our own analysis of how interview questioning acquires moral order ties together Sacks's (1990) notion of category-boundedness, Sharrock's 'On Owning Knowledge' (1990), and Jayyusi's (1984) work on membership categorization and moral discourse.

Taking as one of his examples 'Baka medicine', Sharrock (1990) notes that it does not simply imply that the collectivity 'Baka' practices the medicine, or that the medicine is a specialty known to the Baka, but that the relationship described is one of ownership. Let us substitute the collectivity 'Holocaust survivor' to Baka and 'memory' to medicine, and appreciate how the category locution 'Holocaust survivor memory' also describes a relationship of ownership between survivors and the memory. Concurrently, Sacks's notion of category-bound activity speaks to activities performed 'expectably and properly by persons who are the incumbents of particular categories' (Hester and Eglin, 1997: 5). Accordingly, Holocaust survivors are expected to be tied to Holocaust memory. Interview re-membering, as we shall see, is the questioning process which binds them together. What this also means is that, just as survivors are bound to memory, not just anyone can fulfill the requirements of the category 'Holocaust survivor', its duties and moral obligations (Jayyusi, 1984). In order for the survivor account to acquire 'Holocaust memory' it has to be morally ratified by an institutional questioner, trained in leading respondents through the dynamic of re-membering.

## Data and method

Excerpts in this article are drawn from a corpus of 25 interviews with survivor mothers and daughters in the Transcending Trauma Project's database selected by the second author (Bowen, 2007; see also Bowen and Kliger, 2007; Bowen and Spitzer, 2005). Out of this pool, we chose two pairs of interviews by the same interviewer for analysis. According to the interviewer, these were among the longest and most insightful interviews. The first pair of interviews is with Eva and her daughter, Rose. Their interviews were 295 pages and 146 pages in length, respectively. The second pair is with Frances and her daughter, Helen. Fran's interview totaled 68 pages of transcription, while her daughter's interview was 158 pages. The interviews were transcribed for content alone. In our recontextualization, we sometimes omit segments of transcribed talk due to space constraints; in this case, we take care to account for what we chose to omit.

Conceiving of interview talk as category elaboration (Baker, 2004), our discourse analysis of interview questioning seeks to illuminate the category bound work between interviewer – as institutional questioner seeking to ratify memory, and interviewee, as 'survivor' in the making – as they work to acquire Holocaust memory. Though membership categorization analysis (MCA) and conversation analysis (CA) both originate in the work of Sacks, MCA has largely taken off beyond CA's program of tracking sequential features of utterances. Ethnomethodological investigations of how members' use of categories enact cultural knowledge (Coulter, 1983; Hester and Eglin, 1997), as well as Baker's (2004) study of interviewing as categorization in action, are compelling examples in favor of how to combine attention to the category work of speakers to a discourse analysis of interviews.

By making interview questioning a topic for empirical investigation and a site for re-membering, our approach is in contrast to that of the Transcending Trauma Project. TTP interviewers are trained to formulate circular or triangulated questions according to Milan style family therapy (Tomm, 1987a, 1987b) to discern respondents' memory of pre-war and war experiences. Direct questions are asked about how the respondent perceived the communication about the Holocaust in their home, asking different family members about similar people or events is one way of discovering how the stories have been told (or not told). Individual family members are asked about one another and questions are posed in various ways to elicit recall and probe deeper understanding (Bowen, 2007; Hollander-Goldfein and Kliger, 1999). The category expectations embedded in TTP questions and the kind of answers they elicit, as they bind the categories of survivor and memory together, is the topic of our next section.

## Holocaust re-membering as category-bound activity

The six extracts that follow exemplify moments of memory acquisition in Transcending Trauma Project interviews. In Extract 1, below, the interviewer (Int.) begins the interview by asking the respondent, who is Helen in this case (H), the routine set of questions (of which we show only the beginning), having to do with birth date, socioeconomic and marital status, children, religion, education level, and organizations she belongs to. (The same questions are then asked about Helen's spouse.)

**Extract 1**

| 1 | Int: | I wonder if you could just start by telling me where you were born, |
|---|------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2 |      | and your age? |
| 3 | H:   | I'm 45 years old. I was born October 2, 1953, in Israel. Actually born |
| 4 |      | in Tel Aviv, Israel, and lived my first four years in Holon, Israel. |
| 5 | Int: | And can you tell me your marital status? |
| 6 | H:   | I'm married. I've been married for twenty two and a half years to |
| 7 |      | Ilon K. |
| 8 | Int: | What year were you married? |
| 9 | H:   | We were married July second, 1977. We have two |

| 10 |      | children. The oldest, very old, is eight and a half. His name is Haim |
|----|------|----|
| 11 |      | Eliezer P. K. And his sister, my second child, is six and a half, and |
| 12 |      | her name is Nomi Rose P. K. Or, as she says, "Nomi Rose Eliezer P.K." |
| 13 |      | ((Laughter)) |
| 14 | Int: | And what are their birth dates, just the years? |

Though Holocaust oral history interviews, and TTP interviews specifically 'root their approach in the field of ethnography [seeking] insights into the experiential quality of how ordeals . . . are remembered' (Hollander-Goldfein and Kliger, 1999: 6), the kind of survivor re-membering the interviewer is asking Helen to perform here has less to do with her own experiential desire and more to do with an institutional agenda of historical recording. Like Sarangi (2003; see also Mazeland and ten Have, 1996), we conceive of the interview as an essentially institutional activity, named and occasioned by the interviewer-researcher. The interviewer's questions themselves are formulated according to a script, and an institutionally generated idea of first, how the interview should proceed in an orderly fashion and second, how remembering (of ordeals), as the respondent's lifeworld experience, should proceed. Both the interview and the lifeworld are thus connected to an institutional goal, and these are all subsumed as part of the interviewer's construction of 'survivor'. The interviewer's formulation of questions-qua-directives, as well as the prefacing of the questions (Sarangi, 2003): 'I wonder if you could just start' (line 1), 'can you tell me' (line 5) is metadiscursive instruction. Helen is, in effect, being told about the sort of role the interviewer expects her to adopt in the interview, including what sort of expectations she should have about the interviewer (Rapley, 2001) – as someone who is able to gently guide as well as ably control Helen's telling in starting and stopping it.

Helen's answers in lines 6–7, where she offers her husband's name in addition to her marital status, as well as in lines 9–12, where Helen supplements the required response as to her marital status with accounts of her children, present an interactional complexity. Her version of '(child of) survivor' is at odds with that invoked by the questioning, just as her version of respondent has violated the instructions imparted by the interviewer. Although Helen boosts the authenticity of her answer by the adverb 'actually' on line 3, and draws laughter from the interviewer (line 13) after animating her daughter (line 12), the interviewer is not pleased. The next contribution (line 14) is tagged with clear guidelines: 'just the years'. These instructions demarcate the boundaries of Helen's ownership of the survivor category, indicating that the epistemic rights to account as such are a matter of institutional process.

In the following extract, the interviewer (Int.) asks daughter of survivor Rose (R) about her parents' background.

**Extract 2**

| 1 | Int: | What was the name of that town, do you know? Or the town |
|---|------|----|
| 2 |      | where your mother was born? |
| 3 | R:   | I don't know. I can't remember. I'm not sure. |
| 4 |      | I can certainly ask, if it's significant for you. |
| 5 | Int: | Do your parents, your mother's mother came from a comfortable |

| 6 | | family with a lot of siblings, and her father, do you have any sense of |
|---|---|---|
| 7 | | what kind of family he came from? |
| 8 | R: | No. |
| 9 | Int: | Were they religious growing up? |
| 10 | R: | I don't think so. |

Notice the tension between Rose's answers and the institutional categorization of 'survivor' they are intended to answer for. If the Transforming Trauma Project's constitutes (a child of) survivor as someone who has been affected by the parents' experiences, then the interviewer's three questions (lines 1–2; 5–7; 9) follow an institutional script designed to verify – as well as ratify – Rose's memory of these experiences. The first question categorizes survivor memory as cognitive access, asking Rose to *know* something from her mother's past (line 1: 'do you know?'). The association between Rose's identity as child of survivor and her ability to *know* is a matter of category entitlement (Whalen and Zimmerman, 1990), that is, the granting of epistemic rights to certain people, by virtue of who they are.

However, as Rose's answer reveals (lines 3–4), the establishment of epistemic rights is no simple matter (e.g. Shuman, 1986).

| 3 | R: | I don't know. I can't remember. I'm not sure. |
|---|---|---|
| 4 | | I can certainly ask, if it's significant for you. |

That Rose accounts for her lack of 'knowledge' with two follow-up statements on line 3 is evidence of her awareness of having upset the interviewer's expectations. But does Rose's 'I don't know' display the same categorization of knowledge as the interviewer's 'do you know' (line 1) (Hutchby, 2002)? Though Rose does associate 'knowledge' to what appears to be a cognitive construction of 'memory', her third statement, 'I'm not sure', appears to be referring to her stake (Potter, 1996) in accounting for her mother's story, and, by extension, for herself in the terms designated by the interviewer. Rose's contribution in line 4 points in the direction of this interpretation. Rose's offer to ask her mother for information on the interviewer's behalf (line 4) is compounded by the implicit disavowal of the personal significance of such information for anything other than answering institutional questions. Her knowledge, Rose argues, is not what the interviewer assumed she'd be entitled to own. But the interviewer *wants* Rose to know. Continuing down the script of institutional re-membering with an altogether different query, the interviewer's formulation in lines 6–7 presents knowledge as altogether different than on line 1. This time, it is 'do you have any sense', instructing Rose that an approximate account of the economic status of father's family will be acceptable category entitlement. In lines 8 and 10, however, Rose's answers continue to frustrate the script, and instead keep to her own experiential version of what is 'significant' to be re-membered.

The different cultural logic displayed by the interviewer (Int.) and Eva in their categorization of survivor memory during the re-membering of Eva's liberation from the Nazis is at the heart of the exchange below.

**Extract 3**

```
1   Eva:  And that was the day I was liberated.
2   Int:  What day was that, do you remember the date?
3   Eva:  That was a Sunday. All I remember. It wasn't the middle of the summer
4         yet, because that feast is when things begin to grow.
5   Int:  So it was in May, nineteen forty-five.
6   Eva:  It could have been June, because the harvest usually was in August,
7         so that could have been in June, the end of June or something like that.
8         And I don't remember. That feast is not celebrated here in America.
```

With 'that was the day' (line 1) Eva marks ownership of the liberation as her first-person experience in time, claiming the rights to account for it as *the* day. The interviewer's inversion of the very phrase 'that was the day' into the interrogative formulation 'what day was that' (line 2) queries Eva's first-person logic of survivor re-membering on historical grounds; to the interviewer, Eva's 'day' can only be memory if objectified as a 'date'. The remainder of the exchange provides additional evidence of the different cultural and moral logic embedded in the Eva's answers vis-a-vis the interviewer's questions. While Eva's rights to re-member are staked on narrative authenticity (Ochs and Capps, 1997), with sensory details such as the harvest, the summer feast celebrated in her country of origin, and her awareness of the land cycles, and even the day of the week of her liberation, the interviewer's interrogative-qua-directive on line 5 instructs Eva on what to say in order to ratify her account in historical terms. Though Eva does not follow instructions, she is nonetheless at a disadvantage with respect to the interviewer's historical construction of memory. In lines 3 and 8, she accounts for her answers as being *less than* the institutional expectation put forth by the interviewer: justifying her own first-person account as partial (line 3) or as not remembering (line 8).

In the next excerpt from the same interview, Eva is telling how she survived repeated acts of rape.

**Extract 4**

```
1    Eva:  All I could do is pray. That prayer book that Irene gave me saved my
2          life, my sanity, that I didn't just became a raving maniac and didn't run
3          around the fields. And I told him that if you don't do it for me within, I
4          don't know, it was a day or two that weekend. I said, "If you don't take me
5          this weekend over," I said, "I'm going to disappear. That's it, whatever
6          happens, happens." I said, "Nothing worse can happen to me already that
7          happened."
8    Int:  How long was this going on? A few days?
9    Eva:  A few days. Every night.
10   Int:  Every night. And how old were you?
11   Eva:  Seventeen. Seventeen or eighteen. It was in forty-three. I was eighteen.
12         Eighteen.
```

Holocaust oral histories, notes Schiffrin, are a 'multivocalic genre' where:

> participants balance the need to provide historical facts with the desire to create video clips that show and sound well on a screen, but still manage to respect the privacy of what can be a highly personal and painful story. (2003a: 540)

The exchange above suggests that the balance Schiffrin refers to is accomplished in interview questioning, rather than by the account offered by Eva; indeed, Eva's survivor story appears incomplete by the interviewer's institutional requisite of getting things on the record as historical facts. Much like her contributions in Extract 3, Eva's category work is grounded in the logic of the lifeworld. The prayer book, her friend Irene, and the fields, are all details that set the stage for her moral reasoning surrounding the most reportable event (Labov, 1997): her life and death negotiation with God. Eva uses direct speech to animate her character as young girl and to explicate her moral reasoning as survivor, constructing herself as a credible actor by being both agentive (as marked by her first-person statements in lines 4–5, where she negotiates with God) and helpless (lines 5–7, in non-agentive, passive constructions). To help the listener understand and believe the despair involved in her negotiation, as well as her faith, Eva's 'I don't know' (lines 3–4) is a report on her mental state for pragmatic purposes (Schiffrin, 2003a), at once illustrating her confusion and her clarity.

In light of the moral complexities of Eva's category work, the interviewer's follow-up question of survivor experience (line 8) itself presents an interesting complexity in the deictic 'this'. Both sensitive in its avoidance of the naming of Eva's rape (Bergmann, 1992) it also implicitly calls for a re-categorization of Eva's account in terms of time-span. Though Eva's answer has the appearance (but, arguably, only that) of adding 'information', it indicates a schism between the experiential and the memorable. Additionally, we find interesting that both Eva's ('a few days') and the interviewer's ('every night') first utterances in lines 9 and 10, respectively, are full modified repeats (Stivers, 2005). By repeating a prior claim made by another speaker, full modified repeats advance a speaker's claims for epistemic rights to an account. At issue here are Eva's epistemic rights to acquire memory, in the absence of appropriate historical grounding, which is in the interviewer's domain. Though the interviewer is not competing for the rights to tell Eva's story, what is nonetheless at stake is Eva's ability to tell it in institutional terms, which is what the interviewer's contributions are formulated to instruct her to do.

In line 10, we can appreciate what this dynamic looks like, when the interviewer uses a full modified repeat to ratify (or acquire) the version produced by Eva as memory, and then redirects with a new institutional query, continuing the task. But while the interviewer's 'every night' on line 10 acts as an acquisition of Eva's version, Eva's full repeat on line 9 works as acquiescence to the interviewer's account, which she proceeds to follow up with another version. Thus, though both parties use full modified repeats as claims to epistemic rights to re-member survivor categorization, and ultimately collaborate to produce survivor memory, their use of the utterance reveals their different positioning as speakers/categorizers in the exchange. Lines 11–12 show that Eva understands the rules of the game, as she answers the question correctly, corroborating her age with a historical date.

So far, we have discussed tensions between the respondents' first-person accounts and the institutional requirements of memory in re-membering of survivor categorizations. In Extract 5 below, the interviewer's questioning

expands upon the expectations of memory acquisition we have seen up to this point, and instead introduces another set of moral stipulations for the respondent's account. In line 1, the interviewer's question pertains to Frances' (F) experience of witnessing her family being taken away.

**Extract 5**

```
 1   Int:   How were you feeling at this point? Were you still strong enough to feel
 2          that you wouldn't give up?
 3   F:     Yes. I was so optimistic. I had to be.
 4   Int:   But you're the youngest in your family.
 5          (omitted 3 lines of Fran's turn. Agrees with Int.)
 8          How do you think you took that role?
 9          Where did it come from, this strength?
10   F:     Yes, I really wonder how it was.
11          I feel. I feel up till today that I have a lot of responsibility.
12   Int:   But you didn't feel that as a child, did you? Did you feel that way as a
13          child, even before the war, that you had a lot of responsibility, and you
14          needed to hold other people up?
15   F:     As a child maybe I didn't feel, but as I started to grow up, I feel
16          responsible for myself, first of all. I had to be a mensch, I had to be
17          responsible.
```

The interviewer's formulation in lines 1–2 is more unusual than familiar. Though asking Frances for a 'point' in time, the concern here appears to be less with a particular historical point and more with the lifeworld features of Frances's account. But a closer reading suggests that the interviewer's interest may lie with accounting for Frances's lived experience in institutional terms. Note, for instance, the therapeutic formulation of the two questions (Sarangi, 2003) on lines 1 and 2, designed to elicit an account of feelings which, as therapy presumes, is accessible to clients by means of time travel, where communication is no more than a conduit (Reddy, 1979) for contents of the psyche. Considering the TTP's psychological orientation (its cognitive discourse of trauma, memory, and focus on 'depth' metaphors of psyche), this is to be expected. Perhaps more surprising is the interviewer's adoption of professional discourse and expert knowledge in the characterization of strength that ensues. Because, as Baker (2004) posits, each attribution advanced by speakers in the course of membership categorization accounts is, reflexively, an attribution about oneself as speaker-categorizer, what Frances and the interviewer construct is the moral identity of survivor as well as of themselves as speakers, as character in the account and interviewer, respectively. A survivor, both parties re-member, is someone strong enough not to give up (lines 1–2) and who, like Frances, remains optimistic (line 3).

The interviewer's questions in lines 4–5 and 12–14, however, presume knowledge of 'survivor' experience as yet unaccounted for by the survivor-respondent. Expanding on the attribution of strength raised in the prior question, the interviewer introduces Frances's age and position within the family as a new aspect of strength (line 4), siting the logic of the question in family roles and structure (line 8). When Frances 'wonders' about the validity of the

interviewer's query (line 10) in terms of her own responsibility, the interviewer gains access to Frances's feelings as a child, calling for an account of how she felt then. In lines 12–14, the interviewer's second question directs Frances toward an account of her childhood feelings of responsibility (as constructed for her by the interviewer): 'you needed to hold people up'. With 'maybe I didn't feel' (line 15), a partial modified repeat (Stivers, 2005) of the interviewer's construction 'you didn't feel' (line 12), Frances reclaims the epistemic rights to her childhood feelings and her own survivor account, and offers a revised and personalized version of responsibility from the less specific 'a lot of responsibility' in lines 10–11. We are left to wonder, as the interviewer and Frances continue to work together to categorize survivor in terms of strength and responsibility, if the interviewer's (Kohlberg's? Gilligan's?[4]) theory of moral development is what Frances's account needs in order to become institutionally relevant.

In our final excerpt, the interviewer (Int.) elicits Rose to re-member her own and her mother's past. We join the exchange as Rose is telling the interviewer how, around age 15, her mother Eva lashed out at her, seemingly taken back to her own rape as a teenager. Eva saw Rose kissing a boyfriend and as soon as the boy left, locked Rose in the bathroom and told her that sex was not something to engage in.

**Excerpt 6**

```
 1   Int:   How old was she when she was raped?
 2   R:     I don't know, she was fifteen when the war started. So I have no
 3          idea. It was when the Russians came through.
 4   Int:   That was the beginning. The beginning of the war, or the end
 5          of the war?
 6   R:     I don't know. I don't know when the Russians came through.
 7   Int:   She was either fifteen, or she was twenty then, at the end of the war.
 8   R:     I don't know. Again, I have such a sense of being overburdened by my
 9          parents. And they don't tell you my parents never tell me anything
10          without the expectation that I'm going to fix it.
            (data omitted; expands upon idea of burden)
13   Int:   So why was she telling you at fifteen?
14   R:     To make me stop being sexually active.
15   Int:   It scared her in some way.
16   R:     Mm-hm.
17   Int:   How did you process that? Do you remember how you dealt with it at the
18          time, when you were fifteen?
19   R:     I remember crying, being very upset. And not understanding why
20          the hell she was telling me, and why then. You know?
```

Much like Kress and Fowler (1979), we see the interviewer's questioning as doing something other than presumed by the interview as social exchange: one person needing more information than the other can provide. For one, the interviewer's contributions on lines 7 and 15 suggest that more is already known than what Rose 'knows'. As well, Rose's use of the utterance 'I don't know' is once again (see Extract 2 above) contrasted to the knowledge that is asked of her from the interviewer, who may already have the knowledge. But which 'knowledge' is in question?

The interviewer poses six interrogatives to Rose. Five of these (lines 1, 4–5, 7, 13, 15) are about the categorization of her mother as survivor. Two of these (lines 7 and 15) also function as declaratives, which Rose orients to as questions, opening an answer slot for her utterances to occupy. Notice that, up to her answer in line 14, Rose's contributions each begin with 'I don't know', bolstered in 6 by repeating the utterance and in 2–3 with 'I have no idea'. In the second part of her answer in line 8, however, as well as in line 14, Rose redirects her answer to something she does know; by connecting her mother's actions to her own account of experience, she can make sense of the interviewer's question in her own terms. At issue, then, are two kinds of 'knowledge': that which the interviewer seeks about Rose's mother Eva as 'survivor', a historical figure, connected to wartime and tragedy, at a particular age; and that which Rose has about her mother as parent and character in her own self-account, whose 'survivor' past overburdens Rose's present. The latter is a categorization that both interviewer and Rose (lines 15 and 16) can 'know' about. On line 17, the interviewer's therapeutic formulations acquiesce to Rose's version of Eva by inviting her to 'remember' her feelings about her mother's actions institutionally, as cognitive 'process'. With 'you know?' (line 20), Rose marks a shared interpersonal, knowledge (Schiffrin, 1987). Following institutional instruction, she is however speaking to the interviewer's personal experience as knower of mother and daughter relationships, and is now able to re-member.

## Acquiring memory

> For discourse analysis, remembering is studied as action, with the report itself taken as an act of remembering, and studied as a constructed, occasioned version of events. It is studied directly as discourse, rather than taken as a window upon something else. (Edwards and Potter, 1992: 35)

In our own analysis of how interviewers and respondents re-member in interviews, we have shown that the discourse of remembering is talk in action in several ways. As predicate in the interviewers' formulations, 'remembering' is not always the grammatical equivalent to the respondents' ability to produce an adequate answer in the 'situated pragmatics of recall' (Lynch and Bogen, 1996: 182). As professional knowers, conversant in the vocabulary of memory as cognitive resource, as well as in that of feelings, trauma, and history, interviewers' bids for epistemic rights to first-person accounts of survivor both challenge and downgrade respondents' knowledge on historical and moral grounds. Though Eva, Helen, Frances, and Rose 'know' or 'don't know' about the Holocaust according to a logic of personal experience, that is, what may be significant and authentic to their story in the present moment, interviewers' logic is located in the authorization of local knowledge, and the acquisition of something much more significant: the visibility granted to History itself. That this visibility should be afforded by means of psychological formulations' warrant to 'access', go 'deeper', 'elicit', and facilitate the hidden processes of 'recall', is no doubt an interesting contradiction.

As questioning exchanges, interviews are displays of category talk. They are interviews (Baker, 2004), where participants' question and answer formulations reveal to each other the socially embedded assumptions of what counts as culturally shared category knowledge. But they are also sites for the negotiation of category ownership by means of the question and answer adjacency dynamic. The interviewer's interrogatives rarely asked for information from respondents. Instead, they embedded instructions on how to properly account for first-person 'survivor' experiences in institutionally appropriate terms. Likewise, respondents' answers, though occupying the adjacency slot opened by the interviewer's questions in the performance of the oral history interview, often did not follow instructions and instead re-membered 'survivor' in non-historical ways.

As Schudson has observed, we are experiencing a 'current fascination with cultural memory' (1997: 1; see also Nerone and Wartella, 1989). Recently, special issues of *Communication* (1989) and *The Communication Review* (1997) addressed the role of artifacts and the mass media in the collective construction of memory. Work in discursive psychology (e.g. Edwards and Potter, 1992) and ethnomethodology (e.g. Coulter, 1983; Lynch and Bogen, 1996, 1997) have illuminated the conversational, pragmatic basis of cognitive processes. And Schiffrin's analyses of Holocaust narratives have shown that a discursive approach to oral history can have a say in *His*tory. The window we have opened and looked through (to appropriate Edwards and Potter's image) allowed us to ask something new. Positing that memory is emergent, claimed, and ultimately ratified in an exchange, then is it still proper to speak of survivor memory as category ownership? Is Holocaust memory a category that properly belongs to the commemorative institution, more so than the re-membering dynamic which actually produces it, or the first-person accounts where it is occasioned? In the moment by moment asymmetry of the shifting interview dynamic, our analysis explicates the different moral implications of the process of acquiring memory for interviewer and respondent.

NOTES

1. From a longer exchange that Lynch and Bogen draw from English et al. (1961).
2. Dr Ruth Westheimer was the keynote speaker at a special reception on the Holocaust at the Liberty museum hosted by the Relational Communication Council (RCC). The reception included the dedication of 275 Holocaust survivor family interviews.
3. The Transcending Trauma Project includes interviews with 95 Holocaust survivors, their spouses, children, children's spouses, and grandchildren; in total, 275 interviews.
4. Both theories discussed in Gilligan (1982).

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