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Parent Child Conversations Regarding the Movie Finding Dory

Children are able to recall a past event by the age of three (Bauer, 2007). The ability to recall past events is influenced by many factors, such as parent-child memory conversations (Fivush & Fromhoff, 1988; Fivush, Haden & Reese, 2006) and children's development of language (Simcock & Hayne, 2002, 2003).

Another factor that contributes to children's memory skills is their conversations with their parents about past events. Conversational skills are developed over a period of time and through a variety of sources. Children learn how to communicate from their parents, a skill which develops sometime between the ages of three to five (Fivush, 2007). The style of conversation the parent uses plays a large role in not only how their children communicate, but also in how their personality develops (Buckner & Fivush, 1998). Parent-child memory conversations shape the way children recall and actually help to "teach" children how to remember (Fivush & Fromhoff, 1988).

The Influence of Parent-Child Memory Conversations on Memory Development

Reese, Haden and Fivush (1993) found that mothers, but not fathers, increased in the amount of elaborative responses to daughters' and sons' memory responses. They also found that there were more conversational differences between mothers of daughters versus mothers of sons and fathers of daughters versus sons. There appears to be evidence of maternal differentiating by the child's gender, which is at odds with past research on parent gender-typing where fathers were found to be the parent gender-typing more than mothers. They hypothesize the reason for this discrepancy as a past focus on gender differences in play behavior as opposed to conversational style. These findings support the conclusion that girls are receiving positive

feedback that reminiscing is a valued activity through conversations with both of their parents, starting as early as the preschool years (Reese, Haden & Fivush, 1993).

Gender Differences in Episodic Memory and Parent-Child Conversations

As a result of parents speaking more elaboratively with their daughters during the preschool years, they have more one-on-one interactions with their friends. Girls are more likely to share experiences than their male counterparts, as found by Tannen (1990). Fivush explained that girls have more practice in emotional disclosure and so they are more skilled at it (Buckner & Fivush, 1998). In their study, Buckner and Fivush (1998), recruited 22 middle-class children (50% female), around the age of 7 years old. The children performed two tasks in the same day; a self-concept scale entitled the *Children's Self-View Questionnaire* and an autobiographical memory task. The questionnaire was completed with the researchers via the use of puppets, measuring how children rated on *achievement, aggression, alienation, harm avoidance, social closeness, social potency, stress reaction, traditionalism, well-being*. The child was instructed to tell the puppet which statement they most closely identified with. For example, under the Well-Being dimension, the children had to choose between "I laugh a lot" or "I don't laugh a lot" (Buckner & Fivush, 1998). The second task had the children describe an event that went along with the dimensions. The Well-Being dimension asked for an event where the child was happy or silly (Buckner & Fivush, 1998). Children scored similarly for the Questionnaire, the only significant gender difference being Harm Avoidance. For the narrative event, there were more gender differences between the two. Girls used more descriptives in four of the nine dimensions. The largest gender difference came out of the Traditionalism dimension, which resulted in longer and more detailed descriptions of being well-mannered and following the rules. Overall, they

found that "girls' narratives were longer, more temporally-causally connected, and more highly embellished with descriptive detail" (Buckner & Fivush, 1998, p.421). The researchers hypothesize that these results could stem from parent's more elaborative reminiscing with daughters than sons (Buckner & Fivush, 1998).

In a study completed by Reese & Fivush (1993), they found that parents of daughters were "overwhelmingly more elaborative" (p.604) than parents of sons. Interestingly, they note that differences in adult language are part of a gender bias the parents hold rather than children's language participation. During their study, there were more girls participating than boys, however there were no differences between child-driven variables. Children's memory responses were provided at the request of their parents. The study focused on twenty-four two-parent families with three year old children. Participants were recruited through country birth records in the Atlanta area (Reese & Fivush, 1993). The families were divided evenly between male and female children. Of the twenty four children, nine boys and eight girls were firstborns, three boys and four girls were laterborns.

Before the recorded study took place with the children, researchers assisted parents in selecting appropriate memories to discuss. These included one-time events rather than annual events like Christmas or birthday parties. Memories involving a storyline, such as movies or plays, were also rejected as options. Once the memory event was chosen, the parent and child sat together with an audio-recorder and talked for as long as they wanted (Reese and Fivush, 1993). The codes in this study were adapted for the present study. They were broken into *parent's event codes* and *children's event codes.* Parent codes included Initiation Statements, Initiation Questions, Elaboration Statements, Elaboration Questions, Repetitions, Clarifications, and Fill in

the Blank Questions. Children's codes included Initiation Statements, Initiation Questions, Elaboration Statements, Elaboration Questions, Repetitions, Placeholders, and Facts. This study found that parents of daughters were more elaborative than parents of sons. Daughters also had greater levels of participation than sons (Reese & Fivush, 1993).

Studies show that parents, regardless of their own gender, are more elaborative with their daughters versus their sons (Fivush, 2007). This is especially true when talking about emotions. Mothers and fathers will talk more about specific emotions with their daughters, bringing up a variety of emotion words. Fivush et al., (2006) explains parents may use words such as "sad, upset, distressed" with daughters, but only "sad" with their sons. Parents are also more likely to brainstorm solutions to negative emotions with their daughters, as well as sorting emotional experiences into social contexts. Parents also talk about other people and their relationships when having a conversation with their daughters versus their sons (Fivush, 2007).

Findings of elaborative parents are consistent across studies. Reese, Haden, and Fivush (1993) found that overall, parents provide more elaborative statements and evaluations with daughters than sons. As a result, girls report more elaborate episodic memories on a variety of topics (Buckner & Fivush, 1998). As such, it may be the case that the present study will find girls provide more elaborative memories than boys do.

Developmental Differences in Episodic Memory and Parent-Child Conversations

As children age, they are able to participate more in conversations, providing their own thoughts and opinions. This begins between the ages of 3-5, although they still rely on their parents to provide structure to the conversation (Fivush, 2007). By the time the child is out of preschool, they're able to give details about their memories without assistance (Fivush, 2007).

As a result, parents become more elaborative with younger children, which prompts deeper conversations. This plays a significant role in how children develop their conversational skills. Studies show that children who have highly elaborative mothers tell more coherent and emotionally expressive autobiographical narratives (Fivush, 2007). As defined by Reese, Haden & Fivush (1993), high elaborative is "the use of many questions and statements that add new information to the ongoing narrative". These can include open or closed ended questions.

According to Fivush (2007), mothers are consistent over time and with each of the siblings with their level of elaboration. If a mother is highly elaborative during their child's development, they will remain highly elaborative. Research also shows that mothers will be highly elaborative with all of their children. That being said, maternal elaborations are not indicative of how talkative someone is. Past research has shown that reminiscing is "a unique conversational context in which mothers may be trying to achieve specific goals" (Fivush, 2007).

Fivush and Fromhoff (1988) explained that talking about the past is not just a memory skill, but a conversational skill. As a result, the way parents speak to their children about past events will affect how children talk about the past on their own (Fivush & Fromhoff, 1988). Children's conversational skills should improve as they age, allowing them have to more in-depth conversations with their parents.

Differences Due to Birth Order

Firstborn children are often considered to be the "guinea pigs" while parents learn how to balance. As a result, later born children have the benefit of more relaxed parenting and realistic expectations (Kail, 2016). Firstborn children tend to have higher scores on intelligences tests and are more likely to conform to adults' requests. They are victims of higher expectations and

additional pressure (Kail, 2016). It's hypothesized that firstborn children will have more elaborative conversations with their parents than their siblings.

Memories and Talk About Non-Personally Experienced Events

A Greek study aiming to find out parents' opinions on and children's preferences of fairy tales highlighted the importance of the stories for children's development (Tsitsani, Psyllidou, Batzios, Livas, Ouranos & Cassimos, 2012). They found that parents consistently agreed on the importance of fairy tales, which is why the majority of parents read to their children nightly. Nearly 40% of parents use audio-visual materials. As technology has advanced, the fairy tale film became one of the most popular genres (Tsitsani et al, 2012). Fairy tales have long since been used as instructional tools for children. For example, they provide a set of morals, as well as behavior expectations. The present study used a non-traditional fairy tale, *Finding Dory*, although it's hypothesized that the results will be consistent with Tsitsani et al., (2012).

Lozada, Halberstadt, Craig, Dennis and Dunsmore (2015) created a study that asked parents and children to play a board game called LifeStories. They used 125 parents and their fourth or fifth grade aged children, who were recruited through community organizations, such as churches, Boys and Girls club, and recreational sporting events (Lozada et al., 2015). After consenting to the experiment, the parents and children completed the *Parents' Beliefs about Children's Emotions Questionnaire*. Then they began to play the LifeStories game. The purpose of the game was to "encourage emotion-related expression and discussion through the sharing of memories, likes/dislikes, and goals" (Lozada et al, 2015). The game functioned as a real board game, including rolling of dice and moving spaces on the board. The cards each player picked alternated between neutral questions and emotion-related topics. The results of this study showed

that parents employed more instructional strategies when discussing negatively-valenced conversations. This means that parents attempt to help their children understand and work through negative emotions more than positive emotions.

While the aforementioned research has focused primarily on children's memories about personal events, there haven't been any studies looking into how they remember fairy tales. Due to the significant importance of the role of fairy tales in children's lives, the present study was developed to see what memories stood out for children and if there were any themes that resonated with either them or their parents. One of the primary aims of the present study was seeing if a replication of the trends in memory literature regarding elaborations and initiations, as shown in Reese and Fivush (1993), was possible. The film *Finding Dory* was chosen because it was gender neutral and it came out recently enough that it was believed that the majority of children will have seen it.

Method

Participants

Fifteen parent-child pairs participated in a one-session study. The sample included 3 fathers and 12 mothers. Regarding the children the sample included 7 (46.7%) male children and 8 (53.3%) female children. Children's ages ranged from 3;6 to 11;6, with an average age of 7 years. Ten children (66.7%) were the eldest child in the family, three (20%) were the second child, one (6.7%) was the youngest, and one (6.7%) was an only child. The child without siblings was removed from data analysis of birth order in order to focus solely on children with siblings. Of the fifteen parent-child pairs, fourteen were Caucasian.

Most children came from highly educated families, with 100% of participating fathers and 58% of mothers having a college degree or higher. Ninety-three percent of the adult participants were Caucasian and 7% were Hispanic. Children were recruited through a Living Laboratory partnership with the Delmarva Discovery Center and Museum in Pocomoke City, MD. Children were also recruited at the Salisbury Zoo in Salisbury, MD. Parental consent was obtained via a signed permission slip onsite before the interview began and verbal assent was obtained from all children. The only three required criteria in order to participate included the child being within the ages of three to eleven having seen the film, and both parent and child being fluent in English.

Procedure

Families were approached by researchers, given a pamphlet providing more information about the main purpose of the study, and asked if they would like to participate. The parent-child pairs participated in a recorded conversation about the film, *Finding Dory*. Upon agreeing to participate in the study, the parent filled out the permission slip/consent and brief questionnaire. The questionnaire contained participating child's name, birthday, and gender, as well as any additional siblings at home to be identified simply by first initial and age. They were also asked how many times the child had seen the film, how often the child watches Disney movies, ethnicity, and level of education for the parents.

When the pair indicated that they were ready to begin, the recorder was turned on and the researcher stated the participant number and their initials. The pair was then instructed to talk about whatever felt natural, for as long as they wanted. The researcher left the immediate area to give as much privacy as could be afforded in a public place.

When the pair finished their conversation, the recorder was turned off and they were thanked for their participation. Both the parent and child were debriefed. All children received a sticker, whether they participated or not, which included any siblings present.

The average length of conversation was 3 minutes and 28 seconds. Conversations ranged from 1 minute, 30 seconds to 9 minutes, 6 seconds.

Coding

All responses were audio-recorded and transcribed. A single coder coded all responses according to the manual developed by Reese and Fivush (1993).

Parent's contributions to the conversation were coded using the following codes. *Initiations* are referred to as either "statements or questions that served to introduce a new topic" (Reese & Fivush, 1993, p. 598) (i.e 'Let's talk about the time we went to the movies'). *Elaborations* are a statement or a question where instances were either the parent or child who added more information about a part of the event (i.e. 'Did we see the movie in the theater?'). *Repetitions* are when the parent or child repeats back the previous statement (i.e 'Remember when we saw Finding Dory...Angela, do you remember when we saw Finding Dory?'). A *Fill in the Blank* is when the parent asks a leading question where they give all but one piece of information for the child to add (i.e. 'Dory found her friend…'). *Clarifications* are when the parent would ask a question to better understand what the child said (i.e. 'The seals did what?').

Initiations, Elaborations and Repetitions were coded for both the parent and child conversations. Unique codes to parents were *Fill in the Blanks* and *Clarifications*. Unique codes to children were Placeholders and Facts. *Placeholders* are statements such as 'I don't know'. *Facts* are any factual piece of information given about the film ('Dory is a Blue Tang fish!').

Results

Parents and Children's Codes

The average number of elaborations, repetitions, initiations, fill-in-the-blanks, and clarifications that parents and children provided are summarized in Table 1. We correlated parent's contributions to the conversations (i.e. elaborations, repetitions, initiations, fill-in-the-blanks, clarifications) with children's contributions (i.e, elaborations, repetitions, initiations, placeholders, facts). There were no significant correlations between the number of elaborations, initiations, and repetitions that parents and children provided. However, there were some significant correlations between the other parent and child codes. One of the significant correlations that was identified in the data was between parent's fill in the blank questions and the amount of facts children provided, $r(13)=.539$, $p= .038$. The more open ended questions parents provide, the more opportunities the children have to provide facts about the film. There was a positive correlation between the number of repetitions given by parents and the amount of placeholders children used, $r(13)=.598$, $p=.018$. As the number of repetitions increased, so did the number of placeholder utterances. There was a positive correlation between the amount of initiation questions made by parents and the amount of facts children provided, $r(13)=.610$, $p=.016$. The more initiation questions the children asked, the more facts they responded with. There was a positive correlation between the number of clarifications asked by parents and the number of repetitions given by children, $r(13)=.828$, $p<001$. As the number of clarification questions increases, so does the number of repetitions given. This makes sense, as the children need to explain with more detail what they were attempting to convey. Finally, there was a marginally significant positive correlation between the amount of clarification questions asked

and the number of children's placeholders, $r(13)=.477$, $p=.072$. As the number of clarification questions went up, as did the amount of placeholder utterances.

Frequency of Finding Dory and Parent Codes

Since all of the frequency variables were non continuous nonparametric tests (Spearman's rho correlations) were run between all of the frequency variables and the parents and children's codes. A marginally significant positive correlation was found between initiation statements and the frequency of seeing Finding Dory, ρ $(13)=.432$, $p=.107$. The higher frequency of seeing the film showed an increase in the amount of initiation statements given. There were no other significant relationship between the parent codes and the frequency of viewing *Finding Dory*.

Frequency of Finding Dory and Child Codes

A Spearman's rho was conducted and found a marginally significant negative correlation between children's initiation statements and the frequency of seeing *Finding Dory*, $\rho(13)=-.452$, $p=.091$. Surprisingly, the amount of initiation statements went down with higher viewings of the film. All other children codes held no significance.

Frequency of Disney and Parent Codes

There were no significant correlations between how often children watched Disney films and any of the parent's codes.

Frequency of Disney and Child Codes

A Spearman's rho was conducted and found a significant positive correlation between the amount of times children reported watching Disney movies and the amount of placeholders they used, $r(13)=.560$, $\rho=.030$. This was an interesting finding, as the more they watched Disney films

in general, the more filler phrases they used, such as "um" and "I'm not sure". There was also a significant positive correlation between the frequency of Disney films and the amount of facts that were given, $r(13)=.560$, $\rho=.030$. This makes sense, as the children who spend more time watching Disney films will be able to provide more facts about its' films.

Age Differences

There was a marginal negative correlation between children's age and the amount of repetition questions that the parents asked, $r(13)=-.451$, $p=.092$. As the children age, the amount of repetition questions that are asked go down, which is unsurprising. Older children are able to hold more fluid conversations. A marginally significant positive correlation between the number of initiation statements children make and their age, $r(13)=.442$, $\rho=.099$. As children age, the amount of initiation statements also increased. A marginal negative correlation was also found between the child's age and the number of placeholders they provided, $r(13)=-.451$, $p=.060$. As children aged, the amount of placeholders they used decreased. This means they stopped using utterances such as "I don't know" and were able to hold more expressive conversations.

Gender Differences

An independent samples t-test indicated significant gender differences in the number of clarifications provided, $t(13)=-1.80$, $p=.096$. Parents provide more clarifications for girls ($M=1.250$, $SD=1.832$) than boys, where parents provided no clarifications. There were no significant results for the additional parent's, children's, or unique codes.

Birth Order

As with frequency of viewing *Finding Dory* and other Disney movies, birth order was also a non-continuous variable so Spearman rho correlations were run for all analyses of birth order. There was a significant positive correlation between the number of initiation statements

parents made and their child's birth order, $\rho(12)=.536$, $p=.048$. This means that parents provided more initiation statements with their youngest children than they did with their eldest children. There was also a significant positive correlation between the number of parent's elaboration statements and their child's birth order, $\rho(12)=.608$, $p=.021$. This means that parents also provided more elaboration statements with their youngest children than they did with their elder children. The last significant positive correlation was between the number of clarifications and birth order, $\rho(12)=.576$, $\rho=.031$. The data shows that parents provided more clarification statements with their youngest than they did with their eldest children.

Discussion

The data showed several significant results. Most of the results confirmed study expectation. The more clarification statements parents asked, the more repetitions and placeholders children provided. This makes sense because the repetitions are needed in order to clarify what the child was trying to convey. There was also a positive correlation between parent's initiation questions and facts the children provided. The more questions parents asked, the more their children told them about the movie.

There was a significant correlation between the amount of facts children provided in response to their parent's fill in the blank questions. This was an unsurprising correlation, as the nature of fill in the blank questions allows for a higher number of facts. Another significant correlation was between the number of initiation questions parents asked and the amount of facts children responded with.

The frequency of placeholders decreased as children's age increased. As children age, they're able to hold more mature and fluent conversations. In the same vein, there was a

marginal negative correlation between the amount of repetitions parents used and their children's age. As children age, parents had to repeat themselves less.

One of the surprising correlations we found was the negative correlation between children's initiation statements and the amount of times they had seen *Finding Dory*. It was very unexpected for the frequency of a child initiation the conversation to decrease the more they had seen the movie.

Another interesting correlation was the relationship between the amount of times the children watched Disney films and the amount of placeholders they used. The higher the frequency of Disney films, the more placeholders they used. This was an interesting finding, as the more Disney films the children watched, the more likely they were to use phrases like "I don't know" and "um". It was expected that the higher number of Disney films watched, the stronger their conversations would be.

It was found that parents initiate and hold more elaborative conversations with their younger children. Because older children are able to maintain a conversation without as much assistance (Fivush, 2007), parents are more elaborative with their elder children. As previously established, children within the ages of 3-5 are able to have detailed conversations about their memories, but still need assistance from their parents to guide the conversation. This would result in more fill-in-the blank questions and repetitions being used.

The data is somewhat representative of prior research. Past research has found clear gender differences in the way parents talk to their children based on their gender. Parents, both father and mothers, elaborate more and focus on emotion-based conversations with daughters more so than sons. Clear gender and birth order differences were difficult to obtain with such a

small sample size. However, there were significant differences in the number of clarifications parents provided, favoring girls. Based on prior research, it was expected that there would be more gender differences in elaborative conversations, but as stated previously the small sample size made gender differences difficult to detect.

Differences in the amount of elaborations girls made was also expected, as a result of prior research citing a difference in the amount of elaborate episodic memories (Buckner & Fivush, 1998). Some of the reasons why there could have been such few gender differences in this study was the small sample size and a younger sample of children than Buckner and Fivush's study (1998).

The designed topics in Lozada et al. (2016) were similar to topics brought up throughout parent-child conversations about *Finding Dory* in the present study, including discussions about their favorite parts or characters, as well as meaningful memories associated to the film. Lozada et al. (2016) instructed the child to choose a card with a pre-typed question on it. The card asked for the child to reminisce on emotional situations in their family. For example, the child may be asked to name something that makes their mother happy or to name something that upsets them (Lozada et al., 2016, p. 1529). In the present study, both parents and children discussed their preferences in the film. This included what made them happy, such as "the magical Disney ending" of the film or something they didn't enjoy, such as being sad when baby Dory got lost. Because there were no restrictions on conversation topics, children also commented on whatever struck them. This could include quoting Dory ("just keep swimming!"), in-depth explaining a plot point to their parents (explaining how Hank the Septopus was injured), or commenting on the voice of Dory (Ellen DeGeneres).

There were three main limitations of the present study. The first was the small sample size. As a result, clear gender and birth order differences were difficult to obtain. Further, the frequency of some codes (i.e., morality themes) was so low they had to be left out, such as if the parents introduced any morality themes.

A second limitation was the highly educated sample. All of the parents had a college degree. These findings were not generalizable, as different topics may have been introduced due to educations and the use of more complex language. Finally, a third limitation may have been the singular film used. We did this to constrain the possible topics children could talk about and for comparison because all children were talking about the same movie. It's possible that may have had an impact and a movie with more clear moral themes may have yielded different results. Further, there was no direct comparison to how children recalled personally experienced past events.

Future research into this topic could look at which fairy tales children find most interesting and which themes they find most important versus what their parents think is the most important.

Being sure to include a larger variety in parent's education levels, so that findings could be more generalizable. Further, it would be helpful to compare recall styles of fictional stories directly to personally experienced events by having parents and children discuss both in the same study. The present study provides an initial exploration into how Disney films, as a modern form of fairy tale, can be studied as a means of exploring memory and parent-child interactions. Given the correlations between the amount of parental initiation questions and the number of facts children provided, it is apparent that the more parents ask and guide their children in a

conversation, the more willing and able the child is to provide them with information. Based on the negative correlation between placeholders and children's age, it is also clear that as children grow older, they're able to hold more fluent and detailed conversations.

Table 1: Mean, minimum and maximum occurrences of parent and children codes during the conversations

Parent Contributions

Initiation Codes	Mean	Minimum	Maximum
Initiation Statements	.3333	.00	1.00
Initiation Questions	5.733	2.00	12.00
Elaboration Statements	1.00	.00	4.00
Elaboration Questions	1.00	.00	4.00
Repetitions	.8000	.00	4.00
Fill in the Blanks	.9333	.00	4.00
Clarifications	.6667	.00	5.00

Child Contributions

Initiation Codes	Mean	Minimum	Maximum
Initiation Statements	.3333	.00	2.00
Initiation Questions	.0000	.00	.00
Elaboration Statements	.0000	.00	.00
Elaboration Questions	.0000	.00	.00
Repetitions	.1333	.00	2.00
Placeholders	1.200	.00	4.00
Facts	4.9333	.00	14.00

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