From actors to characters to persons: the development of character representation in young children's narratives

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From actors to characters to persons; the development of character representation...

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FROM ACTORS TO CHARACTERS TO PERSONS:
THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHARACTER REPRESENTATION
IN YOUNG CHILDREN’S NARRATIVES

by

Elizabeth S. Richner

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Date

______________________________
Ageliki Nicolopoulou
Thesis Advisor

______________________________
Susan Barrett
Co-Adviser

______________________________
Diane T. Hyland
Co-Advisor

______________________________
Diane T. Hyland
Chairperson of Department
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ABSTRACT

This study examined the changing representation of characters in young children's spontaneous stories, and its significance for both narrative and cognitive development. Narrative research on this topic has been limited in two respects: (a) the focus has been almost exclusively on delineating the structural criteria of narrative complexity based on sequences of actions and events, with little attention to the selection and representation of characters; and, (b) the bulk of this research is based on experimentally-elicited stories that restrict children's use and depiction of characters. Due to these limitations, narrative research has posited that children do not represent characters' psychological states or motivations until 7 or 8 years at the earliest, or more reliably around 9 or 10. In contrast, research on children's early social understanding and "theories of mind" shows that children are capable of talking about their own and others mental states beginning around 2 to 3 years, and develop an understanding of how thoughts affect actions by around 4 to 5 years.

The present study addressed this discrepancy by analyzing the complete body of 570 spontaneous stories composed by 30 children, ages 3-5, in a storytelling activity that formed a regular component of the curriculum in the preschool studied. The guiding hypothesis was that one important element in the increasing complexity of children's spontaneous stories is the development of their conceptions and portrayals of characters, which is facilitated by this activity. Because current developmental research does not provide an adequate model of young children's conceptions of personhood, this study proposed two theoretically-motivated models of character representation which were
supported by the results. First, a basic typology modeled children’s broad movement from representing simple “actors” at 3 years, to including more basically psychological and intentional “characters” at 4 and 5 years, to psychologically motivated “persons” by 5 years. A more elaborated, seven-level typology differentiated children’s development within the basic levels. In addition, the basic level of “character” was further differentiated to map out boys’ and girls’ different developmental trajectories along the landscapes of Intention-in-Action and Consciousness.
FROM ACTORS TO CHARACTERS TO PERSONS:
THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHARACTER REPRESENTATION
IN YOUNG CHILDREN'S NARRATIVES

I. Introduction and Overview

This study examines the changing representation of characters in young children's spontaneous stories and its significance for both narrative and cognitive development, which are linked by children's developing understanding of personhood. Specifically, it aims to investigate the relationship between children's developing understanding of the social world and their representation of this understanding in narratives, particularly in their portrayals of characters.

In storytelling, events may be expressed by simply relating the characters' actions in a temporal sequence. But stories take on more meaning and become more powerful when told through colorful depictions of characters' internal worlds. As adults we know that we become involved in stories when we identify with well-represented, lifelike characters. In becoming good storytellers, children must learn to develop their story characters through their portrayals of characters' experience, appearances, and characteristics, and to coordinate characters' actions with their internal mental states--emotions, desires, and thoughts--and their perceptions of the internal mental states of other characters.

In short, good storytelling integrates a sequence of actions with representations of characters' internal worlds in order to recreate a social world (Carrithers, 1991). The two crucial elements of actions and consciousness are what Bruner refers to as the "two
landscapes" of narrative (1986, p. 14). According to Bruner, stories are only meaningful when these two landscapes are sufficiently integrated. Nelson also argues that an important developmental question is "whether and when children incorporate the landscape of consciousness into the landscape of action" (1996, p. 186).

Unfortunately, research in narrative development has not focused in a systematic and effective way on the development of children's attempts to integrate landscapes of action with landscapes of consciousness through their portrayal of characters; at most, it has addressed this subject in a limited and incidental way. For several decades, the primary focus of research in narrative development has been on delineating the structural criteria of a "well-formed" narrative based on temporally connected and causally motivated sequences of events. The widely influential model of a "well-formed" story developed by Stein and associates (e.g., Stein & Glenn, 1979) includes such elements as an initiating event, a goal-directed effort by the major protagonist, an outcome, and possibly an evaluative response and/or reaction. Since this approach emphasizes children's ability to represent goal-directed activity, it does include a concern with character portrayal and its development. In fact, an elementary or prototypical "well-formed" story is conceived, in effect, as an episode that centers on the portrayal of a goal-directed activity by a single major protagonist (for a critical overview, see Nicolopoulou, 1998). However, this interest in character portrayal is largely limited to asking whether children represent goal-directed activity within this specific structural framework. Current research rarely explores the wider range of ways in which children's stories might portray the internal mental lives of characters, and the very few studies
which take into account some of the ways in which children might portray story characters do so only in an unsystematic way.

Strikingly, this research has consistently found that children begin to include portrayals of characters' internal states no earlier than 7 or 8 years of age and consolidate their ability to do this at 9 to 10 years of age. Character representations by younger children are reported to be very simple and limited to external descriptions of characters' actions. These reports for younger children are essentially negative because they only describe what children cannot yet achieve as compared to an adult-based model of story well-formedness. This study argues that adult-models are inadequate and inappropriate standards for analyzing young children's stories, because they cannot capture the development of character representations in young children's narratives with the result that they conclude that children only begin to represent the internal worlds of their characters around 7 or 8 at the earliest.

These results seem puzzling, however, in light of apparently conflicting evidence generated by an increasing accumulation of research on preschool children's social understanding and their "theories of mind." Evidence from children's performance on various experimental tasks as well as from their everyday language during interactions with parents, siblings, and peers suggests that children recognize and talk about their own and others' emotions and desires by 2-3 years, have a representational understanding of desire at 3 years, and understand that people have different desires and beliefs around 4 years of age. Why is it that this psychological understanding of other people is found to be so completely absent from their portrayal of characters in young children's narratives?
This striking discrepancy between these two sets of findings poses a problem that this study will seek to resolve.

Why has most research in narrative development not been able to find any evidence of preschool children's ability to incorporate their social understanding into their character portrayals? The argument advanced here is that this outcome stems from a combination of conceptual and methodological limitations in the main bodies of existing research. Conceptually, investigations of character representation have been guided by a single criterion of goal-directed activity that might possibly make sense only for the evaluation of stories by older children and adults. However, this model is too simple, too adult-oriented, and limited in focus to take into account the actual strategies of character representation that younger children might use. To make sense of young children's pattern of development we need a more refined, differentiated, and elaborated typology of different models of character representation than existing research in narrative development provides.

Methodologically, the great bulk of narrative research has been based on narratives elicited by experimental procedures (e.g., story stems, story-themes, picture books) that constrain children's narrative options, and that have the effect of channeling the results toward narratives that fit the postulated model of narrative representations, while shutting out alternatives. As Nicolopoulou has shown (e.g., Nicolopoulou, 1996a, 1996b, 1997c), exclusive reliance on data generated by these techniques yields a systematically misleading picture of young children’s narrative abilities, and one would expect this to be especially true with regard to character representation. Thus, these
procedures, though intended to facilitate and simplify the child's task, greatly delimit children's options to select their own characters and to develop character representations that reveal their developing understanding of persons. To be able to see the kinds of conceptions of personhood children have, we must allow them to tell their own stories in contexts that are meaningful for them and that bring out the children's actual uses of narratives, whether social or individual. Only spontaneous stories generated by children in socially situated contexts can be a rich enough source to examine the actual strategies children use to represent characters in their stories. The present study is based on such spontaneous narratives generated by preschool children who told and acted these stories as part of their everyday classroom activities. Since the focus of the research was to delineate the types of character representations used by 3-, 4-, and 5-year-old children, stories told by children from several classrooms were combined in order to obtain stories from 10 children at each age group, 5 girls and 5 boys.

Since existing narrative research does not provide an adequate model of how children represent their conceptions of personhood through character portrayal, several areas of research were reviewed in search of new and more comprehensive ways to capture children's changing representations of characters. Though at first blush Theory-of-Mind and social understanding research seem likely candidates for a model of character representation in young children's narratives, they too prove to be inadequate. Theory-of-Mind research has focused primarily on preschool children's acquisition of a "representational theory of mind" around 4 years of age, and has not focused on other social aspects of preschoolers' person concepts. Furthermore, it does not illuminate
children's development of person concepts prior to age 4. Although social understanding research based on children's talk in everyday interactions has a broader focus, including the understanding of very young children, it fails to give a clear developmental sequence for young children's changing conceptions of persons.

A third candidate is research on children's self- and other-descriptions that focuses broadly on children's explicit conceptions of personhood. However, the emphasis of this research is on developmental changes between major stages of childhood, and it is primarily based on cognitive models which are also inadequate to model character representation in young children's narratives. Overall, missing from research on self- and other-conceptions is a consideration of the socially-embedded nature of children's understanding of themselves and others, which is necessary to capture their developing representation of characters as portrayed in their narratives.

The following sections will review these areas of research before turning to consider some theoretical models of person concept development. A theoretically-motivated model of character representation will be proposed to analyze character representations in stories by 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds. The analysis will attempt to integrate this model with data from Theory-of-Mind and social understanding research, as well as preliminary observations of preschool children's strategies for complexifying story characters, to trace the development of character representation in young children's narratives.
II. Narrative Research

A. Problem: A Structural Conceptualization of Character Representation is the Only Game in Town

The following review of research on children’s narratives reveals that it has not systematically or effectively studied either children’s representation of characters, or the relation between children’s developing conceptions of persons and their representation of story characters. This is true not only for children’s narratives, but for adults’ narratives as well. Toolan (1988) argues that this neglect is due to (a) narratologists’ reluctance to accept the notions of “character, individuals, and the self” (p. 90) as relevant constructs for examination, as well as (b) the difficulty of analyzing character portrayal systematically. Though Toolan was writing primarily about narratological accounts of adult fiction, the same is true of narrative developmental research focused on children’s abilities to tell stories.

In general, narrative research has focused primarily on the delineation of the structural criteria of narrative complexity based on temporally connected and causally motivated sequences of actions and events. Specifically, children’s narratives are evaluated on the basis of whether or not they meet the criteria of “well-formedness” defined by adult models of story structure (Stein & Glenn, 1979). These models specify the necessary action sequences that define a well-formed episode, such as an initiating event, formulation of a goal, attempts to achieve the goal, outcomes, and an overall reaction or evaluation. Even other attempts to break away from strict structural models of narrative (such as functional analyses, which will be reviewed later) share the same basic
conclusions regarding children’s abilities to develop their character representations, because they analyze stories elicited by structurally-based techniques (which also will be discussed later). One result of these analyses is that young children’s stories are evaluated in one-sidedly negative terms of the criteria that they do not yet achieve (Nicolopoulou, 1997a, 1998). This research has concluded that preschoolers tend not to produce well-formed stories at all, and therefore, their stories are not worth considering any further. Thus, because narrative research has disregarded young children’s efforts to tell stories, it has not sought to uncover the strategies that children may use to create and complexify their stories. Instead, a large amount of research effort has been spent on delineating when and how children’s stories come to match adult models, resulting in several unfortunate consequences (Nicolopoulou, 1996b, 1997a).

The present study attempts to address one particularly unfortunate result of the use of adult models to evaluate young children’s stories: a lack of systematic attention to children’s strategies for character representation. A core argument of this study is that preschool children can and do develop complex and psychological representations of characters in their stories, and that the development of character representation is a central aspect in their narrative development. Furthermore, this study proposes that children’s character representations are an important expression of their developing social understanding, constituting a valuable window into their conceptions of self and other. In this respect, understanding the development of children’s character representations is a task of essential importance for narrative research.
To date, however, narrative research has given little systematic attention to children’s strategies for character representation; instead, it has considered character representation only in light of the structural criteria derived from well-formed, adult-based narrative models: that is, in terms of the portrayal of characters’ implicit or explicit intentions, goal plans, and reactions to outcomes. Hence, studies have focused on children’s abilities to construct well-formed story episodes using structural criteria, and have provided only anecdotal evidence for some limited, structurally-defined, aspects of character portrayal. When children’s stories are evaluated in this way, studies conclude that children are unable to represent motivated or psychological characters until they have mastered the elements of structural complexity needed to tell a well-formed story—that is, some time during middle childhood. Children’s stories that lack basic structural criteria are usually disregarded from analyses altogether, and therefore children’s own strategies for character representation are practically ignored. Moreover, preschool children’s character portrayals have been described as impoverished, action-based, and lacking psychological reality (Leondar, 1977; Shapiro & Hudson, 1991; Stein, 1988; Stein & Glenn, 1979). Although functional research has attempted to broaden its analysis of children’s narratives in general, it borrows research methods based on structural models, resulting in similar evaluations of young children’s character representations.

The limited evidence gleaned from research on young children’s narratives, together with evidence from research focusing more specifically on character representation by older children and adults (Feldman, Bruner, & Kalmar, 1993; Fox, 1987, 1990, 1991) suggests that a shift in character portrayal from external characteristics
and events to psychological descriptions and motivations occurs late in childhood—around 7 or 8 at the earliest, but more reliably around 9 to 10 years of age. Around this time, children begin to introduce descriptions of characters' internal and psychological states, which are said to be absent in younger children’s stories. This evidence will be presented and assessed below.

B. Research Evidence

B.1. Story Production Tasks: Character Representation in Structural Analysis. Although most narrative researchers are interested in children’s ability to comprehend or produce structurally complex stories, over the years some have come to acknowledge the necessity of considering the relationship between children’s developing social understanding and their development of storytelling skill. For instance, Stein states, “[s]ince stories reflect the structure and content of personal and interpersonal knowledge, it becomes increasingly important to understand the relationship between the development of social knowledge and the development of good storytelling skills” (1988, p. 282). However, her research practice betrays her long-held structuralist emphasis (see in particular Stein & Glenn, 1979; Stein & Policastro, 1984; Stein & Trabasso, 1982) and does not really illuminate a “relationship” between children’s social understanding and story structure. Instead, her focus on how children’s developing ability to produce an adult-like story structure dictates what social knowledge they can incorporate into story content.

Stein’s (1988) priority to story structure is reflected by the coding categories she used in a series of studies conducted with her collaborators that analyzed kindergarten,
third-, and fifth-grade children’s completions of three story stems. In these studies, children were asked to tell a story about (a) “a fox who lived in the forest,” (b) “a girl named Alice, who lived by the seashore,” and (c) “a boy named Alan who had lots of toys.” Children’s stories generated by these story topics were evaluated for the types of structural elements they included. Stein did not attempt to draw any relationship between her structural criteria and children’s representation of social understanding in their stories, except to note that very few of the children (through fifth grade) included motivational or psychological portrayals of their characters. Even the older children who included internal portrayals of their characters did not use these traits to explain the characters’ actions. She concluded that at fifth grade, children still needed to develop the ability to represent the relationships between beliefs and actions in their stories.

In a recent chapter, these same stem-elicited stories were reanalyzed to address the development of coherence and complexity in children’s narratives (Stein & Albro, 1997). This reanalysis defined one strategy for building narrative complexity and coherence, namely character intentionality, as either implicit or explicit reference to characters’ motivations for action. However, like other structuralist research, this study argued that children cannot express their understanding of character intentionality until they have mastered the most essential elements of a well-formed story, or a simple episode that includes an initiating event or goal, an attempt, and an outcome. This analysis focused on how children use each of these structural elements to build narratives. Though most kindergartners produced about one story (out of three) that included all these criteria, children did not consistently tell stories with the necessary structural elements until fifth
grade. The comparison of children’s abilities to explicitly represent characters’ goals (the only category related to character representation) showed that even by fifth grade, children included characters’ goals in only half of their episodic stories. This study did not consider character representation in stories that did not meet the structural criteria of an episode.

Similarly, Trabasso and his associates (Trabasso & Nickels, 1992; Trabasso & Rodkin, 1994) have focused on goal plans as a unit of story structure. Although they were not interested in children’s character representations per se, they did comment in passing that goal plans were constructed by the application of “naive theories of psychological and physical causation” (Trabasso & Nickels, p. 249). However, Trabasso and Nickels’ study did not focus on the various ways in which children might apply these theories to their story character representations, but focused more narrowly on children’s incorporation of their knowledge about plans and intentionality into stories.

In this study, Trabasso and Nickels (1992) reanalyzed a corpus of children’s stories told by English-speaking children, originally collected as part of a larger cross-linguistic study coordinated by Berman and Slobin (1994). In this study, children were asked to tell a story based on an episodically-structured, commercially available picture book, *Frog, where are you?* (Mayer, 1969). The picture book portrays the story of a little boy who loses his frog and then tries to find it, through several embedded goal-attempt-failure subepisodes, before he succeeds. Though the study focused solely on children’s ability to represent the main character’s goal plans, Trabasso and Nickels’ analysis showed that young children could not produce this type of character representation.
Rather, from 3 to 5 years of age, children’s narrations changed from primarily naming and describing objects depicted in the story book to providing disconnected actions that were interpreted as being related to the goal presented in the picture sequence. Children did not reliably produce goal descriptions in this study until 9 years of age. Like most studies focusing only on types of character representations required for structural complexity defined for a well-formed episodic story, Trabasso and Nickels (1992) concluded that preschool children were not capable of representing complex characters and did not analyze the stories further to determine if children used any other strategies for character representation and complexification.

B. 2. Story Production Tasks: Character Representation in Functional Analysis. In contrast to the strictly structural definitions of character motivation and representation used in the studies summarized above, some researchers have taken a more functional perspective when analyzing children’s story structure and character representation. Functional analyses mainly focus on the linguistic forms that children use to achieve story functions and complexity. Unfortunately, even these studies do not pay systematic attention to children’s specific strategies for character portrayal. In effect, they simply use less strenuous criteria for what counts as character portrayal, and end up with broad categories that lump together various types of character representation. Therefore, like more structural accounts of children’s narrative development, research focusing on functional aspects of narrative development cannot provide an accurate picture of the development of character representation in children’s narratives. Furthermore, functional research on narrative development often analyzes stories elicited
by structurally-focused techniques (such as the *Frog, where are you?* [Mayer, 1969] story book) to elicit children’s stories. Because these elicitation techniques limit children’s abilities to create their own stories, functional analyses have not found development in young children’s character portrayals, even by less stringent criteria. Instead, both approaches simply conclude that young children do not represent psychologically complex story characters.

For instance, Berman and Slobin (1994) provide “developmental profiles” (pp. 57-84) that describe the patterns of narrative development as revealed through analyzing narrations elicited by using the previously-mentioned children’s picture-story book, *Frog, where are you?*. Narrations were collected from children, ages 3, 5, and 9, and from adults, from five different language groups (English, German, Hebrew, Spanish, and Turkish). The narratives produced by each age group were evaluated to determine how well speakers could connect the major theme of the story (the boy looking for his lost frog) to each embedded subepisode presented in the pictures. Berman and Slobin characterized 3-year-olds as having difficulty constructing coherent narratives; instead, they produced narratives that were based on the saliency of each picture in the book, without the ability to organize them through the use of a hierarchical concept of multi-episode story structure. Although the 5-year-olds were somewhat better at temporally ordering and connecting events in their stories within the subepisodes, only the 9-year-olds began to causally connect the episodes and subepisodes of the boy’s adventures to his central goal of finding his frog. Overall, hierarchical story structure (i.e., episodes with embedded subepisodes) was consistently used only by the adults.
Berman and Slobin noted that 9-year-olds included descriptions of characters' mental states and emotions at the same time they began to tell structurally coherent narratives. Although some 5-year-olds were capable of mentioning a few emotions in their stories, these were usually directly connected to the character's emotional expressions depicted in the picture book. Berman and Slobin concluded that young children are capable of telling very simple stories, and only older children and adults go beyond listing characters' actions in order to provide the motivation of characters' actions, and thus to provide more hierarchically-organized narratives with episodes and subepisodes. Only at this point did children include other psychological states in their character representations.

Bamberg and Damrad-Frye (1991) used a Labovian analysis of story-narrations by 5-year-olds, 9-year-olds, and adults, also in response to the *Frog, where are you?* book-elicitation technique. In contrast to more structural analyses (e.g., Stein, 1988) which only analyze story events corresponding to a preformed model of a well-formed story, Bamberg and Damrad-Frye's Labovian analysis divided all the clauses in the narrations into either narrative clauses (action-based, past tense clauses that move the narrative) and evaluative clauses (which include truly evaluative clauses that tell the reader why the story or an event in a story is interesting or significant, but may also include character representations). Labovian analyses evaluate narrators' abilities to use both types of clauses to relate and evaluate basic story structure: An Orientation, followed by Complicating Action, Resolution, and (optional) Coda (Labov, 1972; Labov & Waletzky, 1967). Bamberg and Damrad-Frye (1991) focused on children's use of
evaluative clause types to build complexity in their narratives. In their analysis, evaluative clauses were subdivided into several categories. One such category grouped together clauses describing characters’ thoughts, desires, and emotions, which they called “frames of mind.” Another category of evaluative clauses, portrayals of characters’ speech, was the only other category related to character representation.

Like Berman and Slobin (1994), Bamberg and Damrad-Frye (1991) found that although the 5-year-olds included evaluative clauses in their narratives, they included them much less than both 9-year-olds and adults. In addition, the 5-year-olds showed no particular preference for any evaluative types, and did not include many character descriptions. Nine-year-olds and adults, however, showed a clear preference for including more representations of characters’ thoughts, desires, and emotions than any other evaluative type. Bamberg and Damrad-Frye also noted that when the 5-year-olds did include “frames of mind” for the story characters, they simply used an emotional state verb to describe a character’s physical expression of emotion as pictured in the story book (e.g., The little boy frowns at his dog, after it falls out of a window and breaks a jar). They suggested that even the 9-year-old children did not spontaneously use character’s mental states in their narratives, but were bound by the events as depicted in the pictures of the story-book. In particular, most of the younger children’s references to a character’s “frame of mind” were produced during their narrations of the frowning boy in the picture described above, and the children simply said the boy was “mad” or “angry,” without connecting the emotion to any actions.
Taken together, the results from studies utilizing the *Frog, where are you?* book-elicitation technique seem to suggest that the structure of children's narrations as well as the frequency and type of character representations is strongly dependent on the information provided in the pictures of the book. In short, young children rarely elaborate their narratives beyond what is presented to them in the pictures.

This suggestion is further supported by a series of studies aimed at testing children's understanding of story concept (Yussen, 1982). In one study, second graders, seventh graders and adults were asked to produce stories based on 12 picture sequences from the Picture Arrangement subtest of the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC). Yussen described a "remarkable absence" of any representation of character motivations, goals, and feelings in the children's stories (p. 261). He also reported that, although adults represented descriptions of characters' internal states, even seventh graders failed to give any type of complex character representations. It should be noted that the picture sequences used in this experiment did not show any physical expressions of characters' emotions, suggesting that even children much older than those in Berman and Damrad-Frye's (1994) study were restricted by the materials used for elicitation. (The implications of using experimental elicitation techniques for studying children's character portrayal will be discussed in more detail later.)

However, even studies using less structured elicitation procedures have found a similar lack of complex character portrayals in young children's narratives. For instance, Hudson and Shapiro (1991) have found that even third graders (the oldest children in their study) did not include complex character portrayals in their stories. In this study,
preschool, first-, and third-grade children were given four story topics (birthday, doctor’s visit, Halloween, and trip) and were asked to either give a scripted summary ("Can you tell me what happens when..."), a personal narrative ("Can you tell me what happened one time when you..."), or a make-believe story ("Can you tell me a make-believe story about...") for each story topic (p. 107). Although the authors focused primarily on children’s developing ability to produce structural elements required for each of these different story types, they also analyzed children’s representation of “any information about emotional or physical states and reference to internal thought processes” of the characters (p. 109). Hudson and Shapiro found that even by third grade, children did not include complex character portrayals in their stories and they attributed this finding to the fact that children do not produce goal-based stories until later. Thus, although Hudson and Shapiro used less stringent criteria for what constituted character portrayal than previously reviewed structural research, they nonetheless concluded that character portrayal is a product of a goal-directed episodic structure, and therefore not present in young children’s stories.

McCabe’s (McCabe & Peterson, 1983; McCabe, 1997) three-way analysis of children’s narratives of personal experiences, told during an interview with an experimenter, did not explicitly focus on any specific elements of character portrayal. Rather, personal narratives by children of every age between 3½ to 9 years were evaluated for their syntactic complexity, for construction of goal-directed episodes, and for the Labovian elements deemed necessary for a well-formed narrative. The Labovian analysis determined whether children were able to create, evaluate, and close a climactic
event or "high-point" in their personal narratives. In their summary of children’s
developing abilities to produce stories with increasing structural complexity, Peterson and
McCabe (1983) suggested that children may not represent the psychological
characteristics or motivations of characters until they can construct a "goal-directed,
problem solving episode" (p. 99). Instead, they argued that young children can only
report their own reactions to "externally imposed events" (1983, p. 99).

**B. 3. An Alternative Approach: Analysis of Spontaneous Narratives.** Other
researchers have analyzed spontaneous (usually fictional) narratives told by children, and
the results regarding children’s character representations are very similar to studies of
elicited narratives. The majority of these studies have analyzed stories from two major
collections: (1) Pitcher and Prelinger's (1963) collection of spontaneous stories told by
children from each age group between 2 and 5 years of age, and (2) Sutton-Smith’s
(1981) collection of stories told by children from each age group between 2 and 11 years
of age. Pitcher and Prelinger’s (1963) corpus was collected primarily by researchers
(though the youngest children’s stories were sometimes collected by the children’s
mothers or teachers), who asked the children to tell them a story. Two stories per 3- and
4-year-old, and one story per 5-year-old were elicited. In addition, only children’s
original stories were used, not stories children had already heard or seen on television.
Sutton-Smith’s corpus was collected by psychology graduate students in a preschool and
elementary school setting in New York City. The corpus includes stories from children
who volunteered to tell stories over a two-year period of time. Their sample included 51
children who told about 10 stories each.
Pitcher and Prelinger analyzed their stories for the representation of character. Although they had hoped to find development in children’s representation of characters’ thoughts and emotions, they reported only “hints” of a trend toward more sophisticated character portrayals with age. They suggested that even the 5-year-olds “were little concerned” (p. 156) with representing the inner complexity of their characters, and the overall number of complex character representations was “quite small” (p. 159).

Although Sutton-Smith did not focus on character representation, his data were reanalyzed by Kemper (1984), who analyzed stories from both the Sutton-Smith and Pitcher and Prelinger corpora by attempting to account for narrative complexity by identifying the implicit and explicit causal chains in the stories. In this analysis, each story clause was classified into three categories: (1) actions or events; (2) physical states, which included physical descriptions of characters, objects, and events; and (3) mental states, like thoughts, emotions, or desires. Kemper argued that changes between clause categories (e.g., change from Action [Character received present] to Mental State [Character felt happy]) require causal connections (i.e., Receiving the present caused the character to be happy). In this model, a series of transitions between clause categories makes up a causal chain, or the structure of a narrative. Simple causal chains are implicit, and are made up by shifts between simple actions and states; whereas more complex causal chains are made up by explicit causal connections between characters’ internal states, actions, and outcomes. Therefore, the more complex and explicit the causal chain, the more complex the narrative, and the more psychological the character representations.
Kemper's analysis of children's stories showed a developmental change in chain structure, which also revealed a development in children's character representations. She found that 2- to 5-year-olds primarily listed character's actions without any motivations or consequences. Around 4 years of age, children began to link actions with physical states, and 5-year-olds began to describe characters' motivations for acting. Although this trend continued gradually, even the 10-year-olds failed to consistently link characters' actions to descriptions of mental states. Kemper concluded that although there is gradual development in children's ability to describe causes and consequences of the actions in a story, most children cannot adequately link actions, physical states, and mental states until after 10 years of age.

Leondar (1977) also looked more specifically at children's character portrayals in her analysis of children's spontaneous stories. She is one of the very few who have argued that both narrative structure and character representation are important aspects for children's narrative development. With respect to children's representation of characters she stated that "characters there must be even if, as Aristotle insisted, they exist only for the sake of action" (pp. 176-177). However, Leondar's conclusion was that preschool children only represent characters in terms of their actions (or what she very loosely calls "plot"), and do not represent more complex descriptions or psychological states. Her analysis of children's stories concluded that they were "all plot, and not much besides" (p.180). She suggested that most children tell skeletal, "primary narratives" (p. 180) from the ages of 4 or 5 until the age of 8 or 9. Primary narratives are those which have the most basic structural criteria of a beginning, middle, and end, but whose "plots are bare
and unelaborated and...[a]tributes of thought, feeling, or motive are entirely absent” (p. 181). Leondar does note that young children do include specific external descriptions of characters, but only rarely.

Finally, Haslett (1986) analyzed stories that children of each age group from 5 to 7 years wrote and also dictated to an experimenter during a one-week period. The stories were analyzed using Labov’s “high point” analysis of story structure (that is, the stories were evaluated for their use of an Orientation, Complicating Action, Resolution, and Coda). In addition, the number and types of evaluative clauses (clauses that deviate from the actions or events of the story but give the reader “the point” of the story) were analyzed. Haslett found that the structural complexity and connectedness of actions in the stories increased with each age group, but that only the 7-year-old children began to represent dialogues, thoughts, and feelings of characters. Seven-year-olds also began to link character’s plans and motives to actions. Although character portrayal was not explicitly linked to structural complexity in this study, as in those previously reviewed, there was still no explicit analysis of character portrayal per se. Haslett only commented on patterns of character portrayal in her discussion of the evaluative clause types used by children in each age group without providing a fuller picture of the abilities of the children in this respect.

B. 4. **Character Representation by Older Children and Adults.** Studies focusing on character representation by older children and adults support the previously presented findings with younger children, which suggest that children do not begin to construct complex and psychological character representations until late in middle
childhood, around 9 or 10 years of age. However, these studies of older children and adults are notable because they focus explicitly on character representation, and therefore consider a greater number of aspects of character portrayal beyond those aspects subordinated to strictly structural categories of a goal-directed activity used in many studies of younger children’s stories. Unfortunately, these studies do not go beyond describing the types of character representation used by each age group in rather general terms, and tend to conflate various dimensions of character representation (e.g., character descriptions with character coordination). (These limitations will become more apparent later on when I present my own model of character representation in young children’s narratives.) In addition, these studies also lack any explanations or possible mechanisms for the development of different types of character representation.

Fox (1987, 1990, 1991) described a developmental progression of “how characters become persons” (from the 1990 title) based on stories of elementary school children ages 7, 9, 11, and 13. In these studies, teachers asked children to write two stories, entitled “The visitor” and “The day I ran away from home.” Each story was rated by assigning one of five character representation levels to ten different character “aspects” (or ways of representing characters, such as by describing characters’ situations, physical characteristics and traits, mental states, relations with other characters, and so on). The character representation levels describe increasingly complex ways of representing elements of characters’ motivations, thoughts, interactions and roles. Complexity was also evaluated in terms of how many characters were elaborated in the story. Each character aspect was evaluated and assigned a level from this
complexity measure (1987, 1991). In addition, the overall complexity of character representation in a story was evaluated by averaging the assigned character representation levels from each aspect (1987) as well as by applying the five character representation levels to the story as a whole (1990).

In one study, Fox (1991) analyzed two character aspects, (1) descriptions of characters’ internal or psychological states, including physiological states, emotions, desires, and thoughts and (2) characters’ expression of their internal states through actions or communication. He found that most 7- and 9-year-olds only represented their characters in terms of solitary actions and goals, and did not clearly or consistently represent the characters’ internal worlds (Level 1). If these children did attempt to represent characters in psychological terms, they primarily portrayed characters’ physical expression or communication to implicitly represent the internal states of just one character (Levels 1 and 2). Although some 9-year-olds were able to give more complex character representations, only the 11-year-olds consistently portrayed characters as dialoging about their thoughts, or represented main characters who evaluated their own internal states (Level 3). Between the ages of 11 and 13, children could fully describe and coordinate the thoughts, feelings, and plans of their various story characters (Level 4). Fox’s fifth level, in which characters’ thoughts about social issues are represented was rare even among 13-year-olds.

Fox’s levels were more specifically aimed at capturing children’s changing abilities to represent characters’ psychological complexity than studies more interested in the structural complexity of children’s narratives. However, his descriptions support
findings from other studies, which suggest that children only begin to develop sophisticated character representations late in middle childhood. The character representation levels in his model begin to fill out the details on how children at this age go about complexifying their character representations. However, Fox’s attempt to capture increasing complexity in children’s character representations conflates various aspects of character representation, which I consider to be separate, and thus developmentally independent. Some such dimensions include the type and depth of representation (settings and situations, descriptions, interactions, actions, perceptions, intentions, emotions, desires, or thought), how this is portrayed (through characters’ actions, speech, or descriptions), and how many characters are represented at each level. From Fox’s levels, it is hard to draw a clear picture of what exactly develops in children’s character representations or how each level is connected to the next one. Though these levels seem to be nothing more than a very broad description of the data, it is at least clear that children begin to develop their character representations beyond actions and descriptions, to include psychological states beginning around the age of 9. These finding also support the results of the narrative research outlined earlier.

A second study suggests that the psychological turn in character representation continues through adolescence into adulthood. Feldman, Bruner, Kalmar, and Renderer (1993) asked pre-adolescents (ages 10-12), adolescents (ages 15-19), and adults (ages 26-49) questions during and after the reading of two short fictional stories about the adventures, crises points, and decisions of the young men who were the main protagonists in the stories. The questions were asked during the reading of the story to assess each age
group's strategies for story interpretation. Feldman et al. analyzed the answers from each age group given to questions like "What's the most important thing I've told you so far?" and "What are the directions this could be going?" (p. 329) to understand how each age group interprets story events and characters differently. The analysis showed that the 10-to-12-year-olds' answers focused more on the actions in a "plot," and explained characters' actions in terms of their intentions and motivations. Adolescents focused on characters' "plight," or situation in terms of what characters "have to" do, or how they react to the events around them (p. 333). Adults focused on "dramatism" (p. 334), which combined action with fuller descriptions of characters' knowledge (or lack thereof) and considerations of possible situations and actions for the characters (e.g., "He's trying to do the right thing without really knowing why he's trying to do it." [p. 334]).

Although Feldman et al. (1993) focused specifically on the development of strategies for interpreting stories, and used participants a good deal older than the previously described story production studies, the pattern of result nonetheless supports a similar action-to-thought shift in character representation between childhood and adulthood. Though not entirely specific to character representation, this study does suggest that people of different ages use different models of action and of character to understand stories. Feldman et al. argue that these results may be extended to story production as well as to other age groups. They argue that even preschoolers have their own models for telling stories, although they do not elaborate what types of models preschoolers may use. So, although the data presented in the Feldman et al. study do not bear directly on children's character representations in their own story productions, the
results do suggest multiple models for understanding and representing characters which develop with age (albeit Feldman et al.‘s data were from older children and adults). As such, Feldman et al. adds a significant argument against structural models, which suggest that children’s narrative development is merely a gradual movement toward an adult story structure, which is attained by 9-10 years. Instead, they suggest that different age groups may have qualitatively different, yet complete working models of story and of character. However, they do very little in the way of explaining what younger children’s models for story or for character representation might be like, and do not specify how a developmental trajectory might progress.

C. Summary

The preceding discussion has sought to provide a comprehensive review of existing narrative research that directly or indirectly addresses children’s representation of characters. Two conclusions can be gleaned from this review: (1) there is a lack of any systematic or well-integrated research effort toward understanding how children represent characters in their stories; and (2) there has been a general consensus that children do not represent story characters in psychological terms until sometime during middle childhood, around 7 or 8 at the earliest. I will now turn to discuss each of these points further.

The general lack of systematic or well-integrated research effort toward understanding how children represent story characters is primarily the result of the strongly structuralist tendencies of research in narrative development. For the most part, research in this area has been primarily interested in delineating children’s development
of structural complexity in their narratives. In this view, narrative development is seen as children’s gradual acquisition and use of a story concept that matches the adult model of a well-formed story. This story model is generally taken to be a goal-directed single episode story that has a beginning, with an initiating event or problem; a middle, with a protagonist’s reaction to the initiating event, including the formation of a goal and an action sequence attempting to carry out the goal; and an end, in which the protagonist either succeeds or fails to accomplish the goal, and reacts to this consequence. In structurally-focused research, children’s stories are evaluated in terms of their inclusion of these elements of plot structure. Because young children’s story-telling attempts lack many, if not most, of these structural criteria, they are considered not to be stories at all, and the goal of narrative research has been to trace children’s gradual inclusion of these structures in their stories rather than uncovering children’s own interests or strategies for developing narrative complexity. Hence, there has been no motivation for research to launch a specific and inclusive investigation of the various ways in which children represent characters.

Furthermore, any interest in character representation has been defined in terms of these structural criteria of story well-formedness (e.g., emotional reactions to problems and outcomes, goal setting and intention) with the result that even structurally-focused narrative research has given a limited picture of some aspects of children’s character representations. In fact, research interested in the development of structural complexity in children’s narratives has looked either specifically at the representation of character’s goal plans, or more broadly at whether or not characters are represented in terms of any
internal states. As outlined above, these studies have concluded that preschoolers’ stories are primarily sequences of actions and that children only begin to complexify their story plots by adding characters’ intentions, motivations, and emotions by 7 or 8 years of age, at the earliest. Some have suggested that even at this late age, children may only represent characters’ goals and motivations when they are given the support of an episodically structured picture sequence to narrate. Likewise, it has been argued that children’s descriptions of characters’ emotional reactions are strongly dependent on support from pictures of characters smiling or frowning (Bamberg & Damrad-Frye, 1994; Shapiro & Hudson, 1991; Yussen, 1982).

As a result of this apparently overwhelming lack of evidence for any sort of development of character representation until late in childhood, even the few researchers interested in character representation as an important aspect of narrative development (e.g., Leondar, 1977; Pitcher & Prelinger, 1963; Nelson, 1996) accept that young children cannot represent story characters in complex ways. Hence, no serious effort has been made to study young children’s character representations. For instance, Nelson (1996) seems to acknowledge the importance of character representations for narrative development, “...it is the intentionality of the actors that provides the consciousness, and ultimately the meaning, to the story...” (p. 188), but notes, “[a]nalyses of younger children’s story productions have uncovered little evidence of the semantics or meaning of Bruner’s ‘landscape of consciousness.’... This suggests that by kindergarten age, children... fail to incorporate it into their own productions” (pp. 214-215).
In summary, both the hegemonic influence of structural analysis in most narrative research, and the apparent lack of any evidence supporting the development of character representation in early childhood have led to the remarkable disregard of young children’s character representations in narrative research. The limited research specifically aimed at understanding character representation has looked at stories by older children and adults, when the development of character representation is said to begin. The present study aims to remedy this lack by focusing on young children’s character representation in a systematic and theoretically-motivated way.
III. Social Understanding and Theory of Mind Research

In light of the evidence reviewed so far, a study focused on the development of young children’s character representations may seem unnecessary, even ludicrous. However, in contrast to narrative developmental research suggesting that children do not represent characters’ motivations or internal states until well into middle childhood, evidence from research on children’s developing social understanding suggests that young children construct a rich understanding of their own and others’ psychological states and use this understanding to interpret and predict others’ actions. Research on the development of children’s social understanding has begun to map out a trajectory that follows children’s understanding of people’s external behavior to their internal states and motivations. The discrepancy between narrative developmental research and research delineating the early development of children’s concepts of themselves and others raises an interesting question regarding the reported absence of complex character representations in young children’s narratives. To answer this question, I will first highlight the content, pattern, and timing of development in children’s social understanding, then provide several possible explanations for the apparent lag between children’s character representations in narrative research and that of their social understanding.

A. General Pattern of Development

In the past decades, research in social understanding has shown that from infancy, children begin to construct an understanding of themselves and others, as well as how people interact with one another. Early on, babies recognize the differences between
objects and people, and soon learn to construct the connections between people, actions, and objects. Eventually, their social understanding includes connections between people's actions, reactions, motives, knowledge, and other internal states. Thus, soon after their acquisition of language, children begin to talk about people's simple psychological states in everyday conversation around 2-3 years of age. One particular development in social understanding, children's acquisition of a "theory of mind," allows children to explain and predict their own and others' actions based on their developing knowledge of the causal nature of mental states like desire and belief.

Theory-of-Mind research focuses specifically on children's development of the understanding that other people have minds and that the mind constructs representations of the world (that is, beliefs about the state of affairs in the world) that affect people's actions. Researchers argue that children develop a representational model of the mind during early childhood, sometime between the ages of 2 and 5. Infants do not have an understanding of others' minds, but gradually develop the understanding that actions are caused by agents, and gain practical knowledge about others' gaze direction and expression of emotions. During toddlerhood, children are said to develop understanding of others' perceptions, emotions, and desire. Then, during the preschool years, children acquire a mature "theory of mind" and begin to understand its representational nature. (For useful reviews, see Astington, 1993; Flavell & Miller, 1998; Flavell, Miller, & Miller, 1993; Moses & Chandler, 1992; Taylor, 1996.)

Interestingly, this general trajectory of development resembles the physical to psychological shifts described in the narrative literature outlined above. However,
Theory-of-Mind researchers argue that children move from physicalistic to mentalistic conceptions of persons roughly between the ages of 2 and 5. Thus, children’s development of a theory of mind occurs at a considerably earlier age than the shift documented in the narrative literature, which is said to begin around 7-8 years at the earliest, but most reliably occurring around 9-10 years of age. In order to understand why these apparently similar shifts in understanding might occur at considerably different ages, it is necessary to delineate what type of knowledge is involved in the young child’s “theory of mind” and then examine how this knowledge is similar to, or different from, the knowledge expressed in children’s narrative depictions of character.

A.1. False Belief Understanding and Belief-Desire Psychology. Although social cognition research deals broadly with children’s progression from physical to psychological conceptions of themselves and others, much interest has focused specifically on the child’s ability to understand that people may have beliefs or ideas that are discrepant from reality. For these researchers, the child’s ability to understand that people have false beliefs is proof that the child has a representational understanding of the mind, or to put it differently, the child understands that minds think and that their thoughts are representations of reality. In other words, false belief understanding signifies that the child can understand that minds represent the external world in an internal, subjective fashion. When children have a mature theory of mind, they can understand that the mind’s representations are actively constructed (rather than copied from the world), and therefore may not match the world perfectly, but may be mismatched, or false.
To test for false belief understanding, Theory-of-Mind researchers use variations of a basic experimental paradigm commonly called the “false-belief task.” In this paradigm, experimenters usually tell children a story about two characters, using pictures or puppets as visual aids. In the most common versions of the story, one character places a prized object in a particular location and then leaves the room. While the first character is gone, a second character moves the object to a second location and then also leaves. Finally, the first character reenters the room, and the child is asked where the first character will look for the prized object. If the child responds that the character will look in the place where the second character moved it, or where the object actually is, one concludes that the child has not yet achieved false belief understanding, or a does not have a “theory of mind.” Children who do not have a mature “theory of mind” are not able to understand that the representations of the two characters are different. However, if the child responds correctly that the first character will look in the place where she originally placed it (and thus where she should think it is) then one concludes that the child has achieved a “theory of mind.” Although there is some discrepancy as to the exact age at which children acquire this “theory of mind” understanding, most researchers agree that it occurs some time between 2 and 5 years of age, and most argue that the shift to a representational theory of mind occurs shortly after the child reaches 4 years of age.

In addition to false belief tasks, a large amount of data supporting preschool children’s increasingly psychological and abstract understanding of others has come from studies of children’s everyday speech in social interactions (Bartsch & Wellman, 1995; Bretherton & Beeghly, 1982; Brown, Donelan-Mcall, & Dunn, 1996; Brown & Dunn,
It appears that around the same time that children pass the traditional false belief tasks (i.e., around 4 years of age), they also start to use language to express the concepts of thoughts, beliefs, mistaken beliefs, and imaginings to describe the internal worlds of people, worlds that may be different from reality. In addition, children begin to use their own and others’ belief states as frameworks to explain and understand behavior. Bartsch and Wellman (1995) use this evidence of children’s knowledge of the mind from everyday conversations as well as experimental data to describe what they call a “Belief-Desire Psychology,” which they argue becomes more elaborated throughout middle childhood. By about 6 years of age, children can understand that people may have
separate or different interpretations of the same situation or that different perspectives or
different types of information about the same event may cause people to have different
understandings or beliefs about it.

Bartsch and Wellman's description of the development of belief-desire
psychology is corroborated and further expanded by Chandler's description of an
"interpretive theory of mind" (Chandler & Lalonde, 1996). Chandler and Lalonde argue
that children begin to understand that people may have different interpretations of similar
information--stemming from their ability to take different simultaneous perspectives on
the world, and to understand that characters' understanding and interpretations of
situations is dependent on their particular perspectives. For example, when children have
an interpretive theory of mind, they can understand that two people looking at the same
partially-obstructed drawing can both make different, but wrong guesses about what the
drawing might be, although they both have exactly the same information in front of them.
At the same time, children can also pass "second-order false belief tasks" in which the
child must understand how one character represents the thoughts or beliefs of a second
character. This level of understanding also relates to Flavell's (1992) Level 2
perspective-taking skill, in which children can represent both their own and another's
different visual perspective at the same time. Thus, children's belief-desire psychology
begins with the ability to understand that other people have mental representations that
can be discrepant from reality, and gradually evolves into the ability to compare multiple
distinct representations of reality, and understand how different minds may construct
different representations of reality.
A. 2. **Desire-Belief Psychology.** Although children are considered to have a mature theory of mind when they can understand the representational nature of belief at the level of belief-desire psychology as described above, many researchers argue that false belief understanding is not acquired in “all-or-none” fashion at children’s fourth birthdays (Flavell & Miller, 1998). Instead, they argue that false belief understanding is the culmination of earlier stages at which children understand some things about the mind, but not the representational nature of beliefs in particular (e.g., Astington & Gopnik, 1991; Bartsch & Wellman, 1995; Wellman 1990; 1991; Wellman & Bartsch, 1994).

According to Bartsch and Wellman’s model, children around the age of 3 acquire what they call a “**Desire-Belief Psychology.**” Although these children do not pass false belief tasks, children at this level use belief terms occasionally in their everyday speech in reference to both themselves and others; and if asked to explain a character’s actions, they may even (but rarely) mention the character’s thoughts and beliefs. If children at this level are explicitly given a character’s belief in a simplified false belief task, they can use this knowledge to explain or predict the character’s behavior (Bartsch & Wellman, 1995). For example, when children are told a story about a boy who lost his puppy, then told that the puppy could be in the garage or under the porch, plus told that the boy thinks that his puppy is in the garage, 3-year-olds will correctly predict that the boy will look in the garage (and not under the porch) for his puppy. Children in this stage can also link sources of information to knowledge states (e.g., looking leads to seeing; seeing leads to knowing; Astington, 1993; Flavell & Miller, 1998). But when closely examined,
children's uses of belief terms are not equivalent to the adult conception of these terms. For example, Astington (1993) and Bartsch and Wellman (1995) argue that although 3-year-olds can represent the concept of belief (they can understand that people think things and believe things), they do not understand the representational nature of belief (and thus they cannot comprehend that beliefs can be false, or correctly distinguish between correct and false beliefs). Instead, when children possess a desire-belief psychology, they cannot really separate belief from desire in order to correctly predict or explain actions, but rely primarily on desire to understand the causes of actions, hence the label "Desire-Belief Psychology" as opposed to the higher level, "Belief-Desire Psychology." Astington (1993) further argues that children first use terms like "think" and "believe" to refer to successful representations that match the world in a positive way (or what adults would call "knowledge") and cannot correctly distinguish reality from belief states or understand that several people may have more than one discrepant belief. In short, children with a desire-belief psychology have an early understanding about others' beliefs, but do not use belief understanding as a framework to explain and predict others' actions (and do not pass false belief tasks). Instead, children with a desire-belief psychology rely primarily on their understanding of desire to understand and predict others' behavior.

A. 3. Simple Desire Psychology. Still some researchers argue that young children have an understanding that others have desires (just like themselves), and can use this understanding to explain and predict actions and outcomes of actions even before they turn 3. Specifically, Wellman (1990; 1991; Bartsch & Wellman, 1995) argues that
prior to children’s acquisition of desire-belief psychology, children use what he calls a
“Simple Desire Psychology.” However, he argues that, unlike the higher levels of
children’s “theories of mind,” simple desire psychology is non-representational, and thus
is not really a “theory” about the mind (Wellman, 1990). He suggests that 2-year-olds
can understand that people desire things in the world, just as they do, but do not represent
desire itself as a representational mental state. In contrast, older children represent desire,
and eventually, belief, as mental states in the minds of themselves and others. Though it
is difficult to tease apart how younger children’s non-representational understanding of
desire is different from older children’s representational understanding, a large amount of
experimental and naturalistic data confirm that 2-year-old children can understand and
talk about their own and others’ desires and emotions (both of which are considered to be
non-representational mental states at this level), but do not mention other mental states
like thinking, dreaming, imagining, and the like. Other studies (e.g., Astington &
Gopnik, 1991) have confirmed that 2-year-old children explain characters’ actions by
referring to their desire, and understand that outcomes of desires are linked with
emotions. (For example, 2-year-olds can understand that a character will be happy if she
gets what she wanted; but sad if she gets an equally pleasant, but not desired object.)
However, children do not go beyond “Simple Desire” to further explain or predict
behavior.

Naturalistic data also support these claims for 2-year-olds’ developing knowledge
about others’ simple internal states. Several studies have reported that around 2 years of
age, children begin to refer to the simple internal states of other people. Shortly after
children begin using simple object and action terms, they begin to include verbs of perception (e.g., look, see, hear), emotion (e.g., happy, sad), and desire (e.g., want, like) (Bartsch & Wellman, 1995, Bretherton & Beeghly, 1982; Huttenlocher & Smiley, 1990; Shatz, Wellman, & Silber, 1983; Smiley & Huttenlocher, 1989). In addition to simple use of these words to label their own internal states, toddlers begin to label others' internal states (especially in emotionally-laden situations), to contrast their own internal states with those of others, and to link actions with desire and intention words (Brown & Dunn, 1991).

These results are further corroborated by experimental studies of early person perception suggesting that young children are capable of understanding psychological and comparative person descriptions. For example, Bullock and Lütkenhaus (1990) demonstrated that toddlers (by 24 months) perform significantly better than chance in correctly matching descriptions of characters' emotions in short stories with pictorial representations (e.g., matching verbal descriptions of "happy" or "sad" characters to pictorial depictions of a happy face or sad face) suggesting that toddlers can understand others' emotions. In short, converging evidence from experimental and naturalistic tasks suggests that beginning at about 2 years of age, children begin to understand that people have desires, emotions, and perceptions, and that people act because of desires, and react emotionally because of consequences.

B. Summary. Evidence from both naturalistic speech data and experimental tasks (false belief tasks and variations thereof) demonstrates that young preschool children do not conceive of persons merely in terms of actions and external features, as
their character representations reported by narrative research would suggest. Instead, beginning around 2 years, children gradually develop more sophisticated conceptions of the mental lives of other people. The general consensus is that this progression occurs in three major stages (Bartsch & Wellman, 1995; Flavell & Miller, 1998; Nelson, 1996).

During the first stage, "Simple Desire Psychology," 2-year-olds seem capable of understanding themselves and others as psychological beings, with perceptions, emotions, and desires. In addition, 2-year-olds use their understanding of desire to explain and predict actions and can link emotions to outcomes of desires, although their understanding of desire is nonrepresentational. In the second stage, "Desire-Belief Psychology," 3-year-olds begin to talk about beliefs in their everyday speech, but still rely primarily on desires (which children begin to understand as representational mental states) to explain and predict others' behavior, because they do not yet have a representational understanding of belief. Finally, in the third stage, "Belief-Desire Psychology," 4-year-olds are said to have a full-blown "theory of mind" by which they can understand the representational activities of the mind (like thinking, believing, imagining and dreaming), and link perceptions, desires, beliefs, actions, and emotions to understand why people behave as they do.
IV. Age Discrepancy Between Character Representation in Narrative Research and Social Understanding/Theory-of-Mind Research: Why the Difference?

This physical-to-psychological or action-to-thought shift in children’s understanding of themselves and others during early childhood stands in stark contrast to evidence from studies of children’s narrative development, which suggest that children do not begin to explicitly represent characters as psychological beings until they are between 7 and 9 years of age. As discussed earlier, narrative researchers have argued that children’s character representations focus primarily on actions and external features until well into middle childhood, when there seems to be a shift to descriptions that go “beneath the skin,” as Flavell, Miller, and Miller call it (1993, p. 202). At this point, narrative research has reported that children’s character representations begin to include descriptions of traits, motivations, feelings, thoughts, beliefs, plans, and coordinations of internal states with actions.

It should be noted that the pattern of shift, from physical-to-psychological or from action-to-thought, is similar in both bodies of research. However, the rather large age discrepancy between them begs for attention and explanation. Specifically, why is it that young children demonstrate sophisticated knowledge about their own and others’ psychological worlds both in their everyday speech and in experimental tasks during the preschool years, and yet narrative research suggests that they fail to explicitly represent this knowledge in their portrayals of story characters until between the ages of 7 and 10? I will now turn to consider several possible explanations for this age discrepancy.
A. Possible Explanations

A. 1. Implicit vs. Explicit Knowledge and the Demands of Storytelling. One possible answer to this question is that the type of understanding expressed by preschoolers in everyday interactions, or necessary for young children to pass Theory-of-Mind tasks (and thus necessary for researchers to credit the child with a representational and mentalistic conception of persons), may be considerably less sophisticated than the understanding made explicit in their character representations in narratives. It may be that the type of understanding expressed in early conversations, for example, is largely possible because of strong interpsychological support from adults, older siblings, or peers. Likewise, traditional Theory-of-Mind tasks may tap an implicit type of understanding that is not equivalent to that expressed in children’s explicit representations of character.

This line of argument has been considered recently by researchers interested in delineating the various forms of knowledge each task requires. Raver and Leadbeater (1993) argue that children’s precocious uses of mental terms in their everyday interactions with adults, older siblings, and peers is possible because of the strong support of the social situation. They argue that Theory-of-Mind tasks tap a somewhat more explicit form of knowledge that is unsupported by familiar others in social contexts. However, Nelson, Plesa, and Henseler (1998) go further to suggest that even Theory-of-Mind tasks do not require children to construct representations of others’ mental states on their own. Instead, they argue that for children to pass false belief tasks, they must simply use a particular form of interpretive skills that allows them to follow the story they
are being told. According to Nelson et al., true “theory of mind” construction occurs when children begin to construct their own narratives. Independent narrative construction may be a significantly more challenging task than either interpersonal conversation or false belief tasks.

A similar argument is taken up by Nicolopoulou’s (1999) demonstration of the importance of storytelling for language development. Nicolopoulou argues that narrative is particularly suited to promoting children’s “decontextualized” language skills because it requires children to portray social worlds and characters within them using only words, without the support or the assumption of shared knowledge of more expert adults or peers (or without experimental supports). This is what Wells (1985, 1986) means when he says that stories are distinctively “self-contextualizing” (1985, p. 253).

In this vein, narrative researchers have postulated that the demands of storytelling inhibit children’s ability to express their social understanding through their narratives. In her attempt to address this problem, Stein (1988) suggests:

Although young children have acquired substantial amounts of knowledge about social contexts and the structure of personal and physical causality, they may not have acquired enough knowledge to understand many of the features associated with the adult conception of a good story. . . . The fact that young children are proficient at understanding many core concepts associated with personal and physical causality does not guarantee an elaborated understanding of the story concept (pp. 282-283).

Basically, Stein proposes that children are incapable of incorporating their sophisticated knowledge about the social world into their stories because they do not have the skills (or structural knowledge) to tell a good story. Stein supports her position by demonstrating that when children were asked specifically about story characters’ thoughts, feelings, and
motivations, preschoolers were capable of giving correct answers. However, they did not include this information when asked to tell their own stories (Stein & Levine, 1989).

Shapiro and Hudson (1991) showed that some kindergarten children were capable of representing simple character descriptions, goal states, and internal responses, when they were given explicit problem-resolution picture sequences and asked to tell a story about them. However, even these character portrayals were rare for the kindergartners, but became more frequent for first graders, and were common for children of 8 or 9 years of age. Shapiro and Hudson concluded that children are capable of including these structural elements in their stories if given enough support, such as through picture sequences. They argued that the demands of production for unaided storytelling (what they call “storymaking,” p. 961) are too high for young children to express what they may (implicitly) know about story structure (and therefore, character representations) in their own stories.

Other researchers go even further to suggest that the demands of creating fictional narratives, in particular, inhibit children from portraying characters in sophisticated, psychological ways (Kemper, 1986; Nelson, 1996). They point to evidence of children’s ability to represent their own and others’ emotions and desires in reconstructing emotional real life events (e.g., Stein & Levine, 1989) as well as in scripts (Nelson, 1996). Kemper (1986) concludes that although preschool children are capable of talking about others’ plans, mental states, and motivations in everyday talk and script construction, these are “largely absent in the stories told by young children” (p. 18).
If one accepts that the demands of storytelling are far greater than those of conversation or experimental tasks, which is certainly plausible, then one would expect that children's abilities to portray complex characters in stories should lag behind the knowledge of others' mental states that children demonstrate in social understanding and Theory-of-Mind research. However, the size of the gap between their performance on these two types of tasks (ages 2 to 5 for social understanding vs. ages 7 to 10 for narrative) is considerably larger than one would expect on these grounds alone. Hence, other possible explanations must be explored.

A. 2. Story Elicitation Techniques May Restrict Character Representation.

In order to lessen the demands of storytelling on young children (as well as to make elicited stories more uniform, and thus more easily comparable by structural criteria) narrative researchers have designed various story elicitation techniques, such as the use of various wordless picture books, picture sequences, story-topics or story-stems to help children tell a story. However, the usefulness of these elicitation techniques is debatable, even in terms of how well they assist children in telling stories. As the previous review of several narrative studies has indicated, children did describe the physical expressions of characters in picture sequences by the use of emotional words, but rarely went beyond what was represented in the pictures to describe characters' emotions, motivations, or thoughts (e.g., Bamberg & Damrad-Frye, 1994; Berman & Slobin, 1994; Trabasso & Nickels, 1992; Yussen, 1982). It may be argued that instead of helping children with the task of storytelling, these elicitation techniques may actually hinder children's character representations by limiting the number of characters children may choose to represent,
and constraining them to portray characters only in terms of the events, emotions, or other characteristics depicted in pictures. In fact, Nelson (1996) argues that researchers increase the demands of storytelling, and decrease children's creativity and involvement in the activity when they elicit stories from children using prefabricated story-stems, topics, or picture books. Therefore, by my point of view, these methods decrease the chances that children will incorporate complex character portrayals in their stories. Instead, if children are allowed to represent characters and events freely, they may actually be able to produce richer character representations than what is currently attributed to them.

This line of argument has been vigorously pursued by Nicolopoulou (1996a, 1997a), who has demonstrated that placing children’s narrative activity into the everyday context of preschool classroom cultures allows children to produce much more sophisticated stories than those generated by experimental elicitation techniques. Nicolopoulou argues that situating storytelling within children’s social world of peer culture provides them with more resources to produce sophisticated narratives, and gives them a purpose (the audience of their peers) for which to tell stories. The influence of peer culture on children’s storytelling has proven to generate stories that are not only more sophisticated, but also more revealing of children’s own concerns, imaginations, and peer group dynamics. When the social impetus and resources for storytelling are absent, children will produce much less sophisticated narratives. The present study builds on these arguments and utilizes this same methodology.
A. 3. Structural Categories May Disregard Children’s Own Strategies for Character Representation. Regardless of whether or not story elicitation techniques using pictures books, story-stems, or story-topics actually restrict children’s abilities to represent characters in complex and psychological ways, it is true that storytelling requires children to represent their social understanding in an explicit, formal fashion, largely without social or experimental supports (Nicolopoulou, 1999). In short, when children tell stories, they are on their own, and must recreate a social world and characters within it using only language, and without the support of other people or experimental cues. Hence, one might expect that a physical-to-psychological shift in children’s social understanding as expressed in everyday conversations and experimental tasks might precede a similar shift in their story character representations. However, the argument of the present study concurs with Astington (1990), who has argued that this lag should not be as large as the studies of narrative development seem to suggest.

In fact, Astington (1990) proposes that children should be able to represent psychologically complex characters in their stories about the same time that they acquire a theory of mind, that is, beginning around the age of 4. Although Astington seems to recognize the necessity for children to be competent with language and storytelling skills, she nonetheless argues that the knowledge necessary to represent psychologically complex characters is the same knowledge that is tapped by Theory-of-Mind tasks. In accord with the argument advanced in this paper, Astington speculates that one reason there is no evidence for preschool children’s development of complex character representations is the structuralist interests, and therefore, the structural categories used in
most studies of children's narrative development. She calls the structuralist claim regarding the absence of complex character portrayals "quite remarkable", and says that even a "cursory" reading of Pitcher and Prelinger's (1963) corpus reveals preschool children's increasing ability to represent characters' psychological worlds (p. 167). It should be noted here, however, that Pitcher and Prelinger (1963) did analyze their corpus explicitly for children's representations of story characters' mental states, and found none. This discrepancy was not addressed by Astington (1990), nor did she go further to analyze the Pitcher and Prelinger corpus in any systematic way.

B. Argument for Young Children's Ability to Represent Complex Characters: Landscape of Consciousness in Preschool Children's Stories

In her argument for children's abilities to comprehend and produce stories which include descriptions of characters' internal worlds, Astington (1990) applies Bruner's (1986) model of the landscapes of narrative to suggest what children must learn to do in order to become good storytellers. According to Bruner (1986), narrative thought is divided into two landscapes: action and consciousness. For the landscape of action, the plot of the story is central. Actions, goals, situations and instruments (i.e., the structural criteria for narrative) make up the landscape of action. The landscape of consciousness involves the internal world of the story's characters. For Bruner, both landscapes are necessary, but it is the incorporation of consciousness into action that marks a good story. Bruner argues that the integration of action and consciousness through character representation becomes the storyteller's expression of a conception or model of persons in society. Such a concept of personhood expressed by children's character
representations may not include everything they are capable of understanding about themselves or others; but it should represent what is most salient or important in their conceptions, or working models, of self and other.

Astington (1990) argues primarily from evidence of children’s developing capacity to appreciate the landscape of consciousness in the stories they hear (and uses the example of reading her daughter the story of The emperor’s new clothes between ages 2 and 4). She adds that preschool children’s abilities to produce stories that incorporate the landscape of consciousness into character portrayal should not lag far behind their comprehension of characters’ internal worlds in the stories they hear. Astington postulates that children should acquire the ability to attribute certain mental states, like belief or desire, to their characters, and should flesh out their characters’ internal worlds by the characters’ own expressions (through dialogue with other characters) beginning around age 4. She concludes that an investigation of children’s incorporation of the landscape of consciousness into their own stories is needed.

Interestingly, Feldman et al.’s (1993) previously reviewed study was aimed directly at determining whether people of different ages incorporated the landscape of consciousness into the landscape of action, and found that, contrary to Astington’s suggestions, even 10- to 12-year-olds included only limited elements of characters’ intentions in their story interpretations. One possible explanation for this result is that the methodology in the Feldman et al. study restricted the participants’ representations of characters. In line with the argument of this study, more sophisticated character
representations may be generated through children’s spontaneous storytelling in meaningful and socially situated contexts.

Though up to now no study has systematically analyzed children’s spontaneous, socially-situated narratives to determine whether, and if so, when and how children incorporate the landscape of consciousness into the landscape of action through their representation of characters, some support for the suggestion that character representation might be more sophisticated in spontaneous narratives comes from Wolf, Rygh, and Altshuler’s (1984) study on the development of young children’s pretend play. However, this study cannot be directly compared to narrative research, because pretend play is a significantly simpler (or context-dependent, in contrast to self-contextualizing) task than narrative. As in everyday social interactions, or in experimental tasks, children do not have to use only language to recreate social worlds or characters in pretend play. Instead, children can rely on the support of toy props to fill in the details that must be explicitly described in narrative. (For a similar argument, see Nicolopoulou, 1999.) However, in the absence of any other supporting data, Wolf et al.’s detailed analysis of pretend play serves to suggest that young children may have the capacity to represent psychologically complex characters in their narratives.

Wolf et al. (1984) assessed the pretend play of young children longitudinally between the ages of 1 and 5 years in the context of both spontaneous and elicited play with toy props. In spontaneous play periods, the children were provided with a set of toys (figurine dolls and setting pieces) and were simply encouraged to play as they wished. In the elicited play periods, children were provided with the same toys, but the
experimenter either enacted a short episode with the toys, and then asked the children to reenact the same episode, or she started an episode by providing an interesting setting, and then asked the child to continue the episode. The children’s utterances during the play with the toy props were analyzed for what Wolf et al. called “levels of representation of human action” (p. 202), or what can be considered the increasing complexity of character representation in the children’s pretend play.

Wolf et al. (1984) described five levels of increasing complexity of character representation in their data (p. 202): At the first level, the children did not consider the dolls to be actors, but rather treated them as recipients of the child’s own actions. At the second level, the children ascribed actions and speech to the doll, but no internal states. At the third level, children ascribed sensations, perceptions, and physiological states to the doll. At the fourth level, children represented the dolls’ emotions, judgments between right and wrong, obligations, and relations like friendship or rivalry. Finally, at the fifth level, children characterized the doll with thought, planning, and wondering. The results of this investigation showed that most children represented the figures at all levels by the age of 5. More specifically, most children in the study had reached Level 3 by 2 ½ years of age, most had reached Level 4 by 3 ½, and all of the children had reached level 5 by age 4 ½. It should be noted, however, that the results reflect the highest level achieved by one play-episode per child, and do not necessarily reflect the children’s primary or most stable strategy for character representation.

In broad terms, these results seem to parallel the gradual physical-to-psychological shift outlined above for children’s development of a theory of mind. In
addition, Wolf et al. (1984) also found interesting gender differences in their data. Although all the children in the sample developed more psychological figurine representations with age, the boys in this sample represented their figurines primarily in terms of their actions and goal sequences, while girls referred more often and more explicitly to their figurine's internal states. These gender differences suggest that boys and girls may hold different conceptions of person in their pretend play, a possibility that will also be pursued in the current study.

Unfortunately, like Fox’s studies of character representation in older children described earlier (Fox, 1987, 1990, 1991), the levels presented in Wolf et al.’s (1984) study also appear to simply describe the patterns in the data and do not to represent theoretically motivated models of children’s conceptions of personhood. The result is that Wolf et al.’s levels also tend to conflate children’s representations of internal states with types of character relations and situations, which need to be considered as conceptually and developmentally separate dimensions. The present study will separate these dimensions, and will also attempt to offer a theoretically-motivated model of character representation.

Although Wolf et al.’s (1984) study can provide some basic intuitions about how young children’s representations of story characters might develop, it does not provide a very detailed model to follow for an analysis of children’s stories. First, it is not clear that the development of children’s character representation in fictional narratives will be identical to that of the development in pretend play. Although a correspondence in direction (physical-to-psychological, or action-to-thought) can be expected, children’s
character portrayals may begin to develop slightly later, or may develop more slowly than the children's figurine representations. In addition, the content of children's character representations in narratives, and the details of sequencing would be expected to be somewhat different. In fact, the current study argues that children's story character portrayals represent their developing conceptions of personhood in a way that has not been captured by current research. For example, the experimental and naturalistic data in Theory-of-Mind and social understanding research show other qualitative shifts in children's understanding of themselves and others which are not represented in Wolf et al.'s (1984) model. Wolf's highest level attempts to capture some of the elements involved in children's "theories of mind," but conflates that knowledge with several other dimensions. Therefore, a more careful conceptualization of children's understanding of personhood is needed to guide the analysis of character representation in young children's narratives. The search for such a model will be taken up in the next section.

C. Summary

To some extent, a kernel of truth can be found in each of the previously outlined possible explanations for the apparent late development of children's character portrayals in their narratives. The task demands for children to express their social understanding in terms of character representation in fictional narratives are far greater than those in pretend play, everyday discourse, and experimental Theory-of-Mind tasks. Unlike the context-dependency of these tasks, narratives are self-contextualizing. In storytelling, children must create the social context and manipulate characters within it. Furthermore, in storytelling, children must explicitly represent their knowledge about people's internal
states in a far more abstract, formal (self-contextualizing) way. This requires that children have considerable expertise not only with understanding themselves and others, but also with the decontextualized language skills needed for storytelling. Thus, in order for children to represent psychologically complex characters in their stories, their own social understanding must be somewhat sophisticated and explicit in form. Thus, the types of characters children portray in their stories may be one of the best indicators of what aspects of the social world are most salient, important, or best understood by the child. Given these considerations, it is expected that children’s character representations will lag behind the level of knowledge they can express in less demanding, or more supportive situations. However this lag should not be as great as previous narrative research has claimed.

In fact, the view of narrative espoused in this study is in accord with that of several researchers who have argued that narrative is a primary tool for humans’ construction of identity and for understanding and representing the social world (Bruner, 1986; Engel, 1995; Miller, 1994; Miller, Mintz, Hoogstra, Fung, & Potts, 1992; Miller, Potts, Fung, Hoogstra, & Mintz, 1990; Nelson, 1995, Nicolopoulou, 1996a; 1997a; 1997b Nicolopoulou, Scales, & Weintraub, 1994; Nicolopoulou & Weintraub, 1998). As such, in accordance with Astington’s (1990) view, children should begin to represent human intentionality and thought in their narratives soon after they acquire the necessary language skills and storytelling ability to do so. An important research question for both narrative and cognitive developmental research, then, is the exact timing of children’s incorporation of the landscape of consciousness into the stories they tell, and what forms
this landscape takes with development. These are the questions the study attempts to address.

In order to understand the development of young children's capacities to represent complex, psychological story characters that reflect their conceptions of persons, children must be allowed to use narratives as the powerful tool that they are, situated in social context. That is, the elicitation of stories by topics, stems, or picture books, will likely constrain children to represent characters in a very simple form, primarily through actions and simple descriptions. However, if children are allowed and encouraged to tell their own stories in everyday and important social contexts, children may be more likely to use the storytelling situation to construct and refine, as well as to express, their own developing models of personhood.

The methodology used in this study takes these considerations seriously, and views the process and setting of children's storytelling activities as an important part of proper narrative analysis. The stories analyzed in this study were all told spontaneously by preschoolers in their classroom settings as part of a storytelling and story-acting practice first pioneered by Vivian Paley (1984, 1986, 1990). In this method of story generation, children had an opportunity to dictate stories to their teachers every day, as part of their morning free play activities, for the purpose of acting them out later with their friends. When the children chose to tell stories, the teachers transcribed the stories as the children told them. At the end of the day, all the stories told during that day were read aloud to the entire class during "circle time." During the reading of each story, the authors, along with friends chosen by them to act out the story's characters, performed a
"drama" of each story. The result of this practice is that storytelling and story-acting become a central part of the preschool classrooms' culture, and children spontaneously use narrative as a tool to communicate and achieve social-relational goals, as well as to share their social knowledge in the "real world' of their classroom miniculture." (Nicolopoulou, 1997a, p. 203). Stories generated by this procedure have been analyzed extensively by Nicolopoulou (1996a; 1996b; 1997a; 1997b; 1999; Nicolopoulou, Scales, & Weintraub, 1994; Nicolopoulou & Weintraub, 1998). She has demonstrated that children's spontaneous, socially-situated stories are far more sophisticated than those analyzed by most narrative research studies. This result may be due to children's enthusiastic involvement in, and collaborative support of, each others' narratives. Experimental elicitation techniques, which do not motivate children's involvement or creative energy, may be particularly susceptible to the self-contextualizing task demands of narrative. On the other hand, when storytelling is socially-situated in the classroom, children can use peer support and encouragement to lessen the burden of recreating a social world with language. The stories analyzed in this study were generated through this activity and were obtained from Nicolopoulou's corpus. Thus, I expect that these stories will yield character portrayals that most accurately represent the children's developing conceptions of personhood, as opposed to those found in narrative research that is based on more impoverished and limited social contexts for the generation of stories.

In accord with this point is the argument that narrative analyses should not evaluate young children's stories simply for their resemblance (or, more precisely, for
their lack of resemblance) to adult-based models of story well-formedness, but should aim to uncover the strategies that the children themselves use to represent characters. Structural analysis is unlikely to uncover these strategies because, as argued earlier, it evaluates children’s stories primarily in terms of sequences of events, or specific kinds of character representation that may be absent from young children’s stories, or unimportant from children’s perspectives (Nicolopoulou, 1996b, 1997a, 1997b, 1998.) Therefore, the goal of any study of the development on character representation in young children’s narratives must be based on children’s socially situated narratives and must be geared toward uncovering the developing models of personhood represented by children’s story characters. Thus, a prediction of this study is that, if children are encouraged to tell their own fictional stories in regular and familiar social contexts, and if these stories are analyzed sensitively to uncover children’s own strategies for character representation, then a developmental progression starting from more physical and action-based character representations, to more psychological character representations, is expected to occur much earlier than has been previously demonstrated by narrative research.
V. Toward a Model of Person Conception in Children’s Character Representations

While the general pattern of development in young children’s story character representations might be expected to roughly approximate the milestones of development already mapped out by research on children’s social understanding, there also may be some important differences in children’s representations of story characters that current models of children’s “theories of mind” or social understanding cannot account for. Specifically, children’s portrayals of story characters may include aspects not considered by social understanding or Theory-of-Mind research, because in portraying characters children must represent their holistic conceptions of persons situated and acting in social contexts, and not simply particular isolated elements or dimensions. Because in telling a story, children have to recreate both a social world and characters within it, their character representations may not match the dimensions delineated in research of early social understanding or that of the “representational theory of mind.” Instead, children’s character representations may express a more holistic account of the most salient or important characteristics of children’s conceptions of themselves and others. In short, children’s character representations may be a kind of explicit working model of personhood. The development of character representation, then, may be seen as a development of children’s explicit models of persons, seen as situated and acting in social contexts. Furthermore, the timing as well as the specific details in the development of character representation may be somewhat different than the sequence described so far by research on children’s social understanding and “theories of mind.”
Specifically, Theory-of-Mind models tend to lump together the development of concepts of action, perception, emotion, desire, and intention in the first stage of children's developing theory of mind, the so called "Simple Desire Psychology." Most summaries of children's early understanding of mental concepts use naturalistic speech data and experimental tasks to demonstrate that children begin to express an understanding of these concepts by the age of 2, or shortly after children begin to use language. In contrast, because storytelling is a much more difficult, decontextualized, task in which children must use language alone to represent a social world and to manipulate characters, it is not expected that children's representations of story characters will develop in the same fashion as their everyday speech. Instead, a more gradual development from more simple, action-based characteristics to increasingly social and psychological ones is expected. However, Theory-of-Mind research cannot alone provide an adequate model for this type of development.

The more sophisticated levels of children's "theories of mind," "Desire-Belief" and "Belief-Desire," are plagued less by this tendency to conflate several aspects of social understanding. Models of more mature "theories of mind" give more detailed accounts of the order of development for the concepts of desire and belief, and their relations to each other, to action, and to other mental concepts, like perception and emotion. Therefore, the "Desire-Belief" and "Belief-Desire" psychology models may be more useful to describe children's more sophisticated models of character representation, but, again, do not include an adequate model for other social and mental dimensions included in story character representations.
Likewise, social understanding research based on children's early social interactions also lacks a detailed developmental picture of early forms of social understanding for application to young children's simplest models of character representation. Research in this area often simply describes when and in what situations children talk about various dimensions of their social understanding. In general, social understanding research lacks an overall guiding framework for organizing the development of various dimensions of social understanding. Compounding this problem is the fact that the origins of a good deal of early social understanding are hypothesized to be in infancy, before babies can talk. So, questions of content, order, and causal relations remain for the development of children's understanding of concepts like action, perception, communication, desire, intention, and emotion. Even less clear is how these early implicit forms of social understanding are transformed into explicit concepts in children's developing models of character representation. (For a similar argument, see Dunn, 1988.)

As pointed to earlier, character representation may be a more explicit or abstract form of knowledge than the knowledge tapped by experimental Theory-of-Mind tasks or supported by social interaction of children in their families. The type of explicit knowledge of personhood represented in children's portrayals of story characters cannot be adequately modeled by accounts of children's developing social understanding. However, one might argue that research on children's descriptions of themselves and others has attempted to describe children's explicit conceptions of what are the most central or important aspects of themselves and others throughout childhood. For this
reason, I will turn to review this research and evaluate its usefulness for modeling the
development of character representation in young children’s narratives.

A. Children’s Conceptions of Person through Self- and Other-Descriptions

A.1. Self- and Other-Descriptions in Childhood. Though generally considered
to be separate yet parallel areas of research, traditional work in children’s self-concepts
and what is known as “person perception” have both utilized a basic description paradigm
in which children are asked to describe themselves (e.g., “I am a person who...”) or
friends (“What is the most important thing to know about...”) through free response, or
semi-structured interviews (e.g., Baramboim, 1981; Livesley & Bromley, 1973; Mohr,
1978; Montemayor & Eisen, 1977; Peevers and Secord, 1973). These techniques have
been aimed at uncovering the most important elements of children’s person concepts
during different age periods (Damon & Hart, 1988; Schaffer, 1996). Although some
researchers argue that the development of self- vs. other-understanding are separate
processes (Damon & Hart, 1984), a great deal of evidence suggests that these two types
of social understanding follow similar developmental patterns (Flavell, Miller, & Miller,
1993; Gopnik, 1993; Tomasello, Kruger & Ratner, 1993). Therefore, I will describe the
development of children’s self- and other-descriptions, and evaluate its usefulness as an
application for children’s developing models of character representation.

Like narrative and social understanding research reviewed above, traditional
research on children’s self- and other-descriptions has uncovered an external-to-internal,
action-to-psychological, or concrete-to-abstract trend in development. (For reviews, see
Damon & Hart, 1982; 1988; Flavell, Miller, & Miller, 1993; Harter, 1983; 1998; Ruble &
Dweck, 1995; Schaffer, 1996; Shantz, 1983.) In general, these studies have found that when preschoolers are asked to describe themselves or their friends, they give descriptions that center on physical characteristics and possessions (Damon & Hart, 1988; Selman, 1980). In free description tasks, preschool children are likely to describe external features and possessions like, “I have brown eyes” or common activities like, “I play soccer” (Keller, Ford, & Meachum, 1978). Peevers and Secord (1973) suggest that children produce “peripheral” descriptions of external appearance or common activities, and do not describe “central” (or psychological) features until after age 7. Preschoolers have also been reported to confuse psychological processes and characteristics to physical body parts, or to attribute psychological processes (e.g., thinking) to physical body parts (e.g., “my mouth thinks,” Broughton, 1978).

During middle and late childhood, children’s person descriptions are focused on their own and others’ habitual actions, capabilities, and relationships with others. Like the pattern of development in character representation reported in narrative research, evidence from children’s self- and other-descriptions also points to an important shift in children’s person descriptions around age 8 (Broughton, 1978; Flavell, Miller, & Miller, 1993; Peevers & Secord, 1973, Selman, 1980, Shantz, 1983). Beginning around this time, children begin to separate descriptions of mental states and intentions from physical characteristics (for instance, children’s describe others’ personality traits [“She is friendly”] rather than habitual actions [“She gives me things”]). Beginning late in middle childhood and continuing through adolescence, children’s self- and other-descriptions become more abstract, or psychological in nature (e.g., “He may appear a joker in class
because of his unique style of eloquence, but in reality he feels a deep responsibility toward the advancement of his own personal knowledge” [Flavell, Miller, & Miller, 1993, p. 203]). Early adolescents characterize themselves and others in terms of social relationships and stable personality traits. During late adolescence and throughout adulthood, individuals focus primarily on psychological aspects: solidifying belief systems, moral values and philosophy, and inner thought processes. It appears, then, that this research supports the late shift in narrative research, and does not add any new insight on how to conceptualize the development of young children’s conceptions of personhood as portrayed through their character representations.

**A. 2. Recent Research in Self Concept.** In recent years, there have been some important changes in the study of children’s conceptions of themselves and others. “Person perception” research has given way to social understanding and Theory-of-Mind research, which has primarily focused on preschool children. Research on children’s developing self concepts has abandoned the paradigms which sought to simply uncover the qualitative shifts in the content of self-concepts to exploring more cognitive models of the changing structure of self concepts (Harter, 1998). Many newer models of self-concept development have taken into account the evidence from social understanding and Theory-of-Mind research which suggests that very young children begin to understand the activities of the mind. Further, researchers have gone beyond simple self- and other-description techniques to probe children’s understanding of themselves and others using specific questions and various experimental techniques that do not simply rely on the child’s ability to produce descriptions through language (e.g., Damon & Hart, 1982,
The trend in current work in self- and other-understanding assumes that children of all ages include elements of physical features, activities, dispositional traits, and psychological states in their self- and other-concepts and focuses on determining the relative weight or complexity of each type of self knowledge for different age groups and how children of different ages relate conflicting or separate types of self knowledge into a self-concept (Damon & Hart, 1982; 1988; Harter, 1998).

Thus, unlike traditional self-concept research, more recent approaches have assumed that preschool children incorporate their knowledge about the mind into their conceptions of self. Eder (1990) argued that 3-to-7-year-olds include knowledge about their mental states and traits, and can use this knowledge to make comparisons between themselves and others. She asked children to compare themselves to puppets’ self (e.g., “I am a person who . . . ” descriptions. When asked to make a forced choice (either like or not like the puppet), even 3 ½ year-old children could correctly identify their own and others’ psychological dispositions. Damon and Hart (1988) argue that children from preschool through adolescence incorporate aspects of physical appearance, regular activities, social competencies, and psychological characteristics into their self-concepts, and view children’s development as the shifts in the relative saliency and their gradual elaboration of particular dimensions with age. Results from these types of analyses portray the development in self-concept as progressing from simple to differentiated, from inconsistent to consistent, from absolute to comparative, and from public to private throughout childhood (Schäffer, 1996).
Furthermore, current work in self-concept development has become increasingly cognitive in emphasis, and has applied principles of cognitive development and theory construction to the concept of self. For example, in describing the development of person understanding in middle childhood, Rotenberg (1982) has developed the idea of "character constancy" to describe children's increasing ability to describe themselves and others in terms of stable personality characteristics and traits. Rotenberg places the onset of character constancy during the middle childhood period and credits its emergence to the child's cognitive shift to concrete operations and the ability to conserve. Baremboim (1981) illustrated how qualitative shifts in children's person perception are complexified by children's increasing abilities to make comparisons. He depicted children's descriptions of others as progressing from simple action descriptions, to action comparisons, to psychological descriptions, and finally, to psychological comparisons. Recently, Harter (1996, 1998) has applied Fischer's (1980) model of skill development to model the developing structure of self-concept. Though these models provide some important information about how the development of self-concept is related to cognitive development in general, current research in self-concept development (like Theory-of-Mind Research in social understanding) fails to map the development of children's concepts of persons as situated within social and moral contexts. (For a similar argument, see Shweder, Goodnow, Hatano, LeVine, Markus, & Miller, 1998.)
A. 3. Can Models of Personhood from Self- and Other Descriptions be Useful Models for the Development of Character Representation in Young Children’s Narratives? In the brief review of person concept development in self- and other-concept development research above, two primary research emphases were outlined. Traditional self-and other-description research originally sought to delineate the major changes in the content of children’s person concept. The general progression outlined by this research resembles the direction of development already outlined for earlier development in children’s social understanding and with regard to both the pattern and timing of development in older children’s character representations reported by narrative research. However, the development of children’s self- and other-descriptions cannot serve as a satisfactory model for understanding the development of young children’s character representations in narratives. These traditional analyses of children’s self- and other-descriptions have yielded a picture of a sweeping shift between physical or action-based models of person to psychological or social-comparative models, just like the pattern already described in older children’s character representations in narrative research. Thus, traditional accounts of person concept development do not add new insight to how children’s narrative representations of character should develop, and are especially inadequate for modeling how young children incorporate their conceptions of personhood into character representations.

Unfortunately, the more recent emphasis in applying cognitive models to the development of self-concept has not yielded a more coherent account of how children’s models of personhood gradually change, or how the concepts in earlier models lead to the
development of newer or more integrative ones. These cognitively oriented models of self-concept development do not attempt to address how children see themselves or others participating as subject or agent in a social world. In summary, neither traditional nor current work in children’s developing self- or other-concepts can adequately model the development of character representation in preschool children’s models. Both lack a general conception of persons as a meaningful entity, or as part of a social world, and thus, both are inadequate to model character representation in narratives.

B. Other Models of the Development of Person Conception

Although research in social understanding and self- and other-descriptions falls short of giving an adequate model for understanding how preschool children might develop the character representations in the stories they tell, some broader, more theoretical models of the development of person concepts offer some insight into how the representation of character might further develop. For example, William James’ model of self concept (as presented in Harter, 1998) describes three hierarchical levels of self concept (material, social, and spiritual) which can be adapted to fit the development of character representation. At the lowest level of James’ self concept is the “material self” which is comprised of the physical body and material possessions. The “social self” is that which interacts with and is perceived by others. Finally, the “spiritual self” is made up of enduring dispositional traits, psychological states, thoughts, and moral reasoning. These basic levels provide a broad and intuitive outline that encompasses the physical-to-psychological shift traced in each of the research areas reviewed so far, yet motivates and
allows further specification appropriate for children's character representations at each level.

Another general model of person concept development was recently proposed by Tomasello, Kruger, and Ratner (1993) as an orienting framework for integrating the various findings of social cognition research. Tomasello et al. argued that children go through three major shifts in their models of person concept development. Beginning at about 9 months, children construct a model of people as "intentional agents," and understand people's intentions for acting by increasingly sophisticated ways of communicating with them, by learning to take others' visual perspectives, and by gauging others' emotional reactions to events. Around 4 years of age, children's concept of persons as "mental agents" emerges, and includes children's development of a "theory of mind" to understand and predict others' actions. Finally, between the ages of 6 and 7, children begin to conceive of others as "reflective agents" (p. 503). That is, children begin to understand that other people have specific concepts for understanding third parties' actions in terms of desires and beliefs. Although Tomasello et al.'s model is also relatively unelaborated in terms of the specific developments within each level, it provides a broad and motivated framework for predicting how young children might gradually develop their character representations.

A third model of development of person concept was formulated outside the field of psychology by the philosopher Amélie Rorty (1988), but is applicable to the current study because it describes changing conceptions of personhood as revealed through character development, albeit in the case of the history of western fiction. Rorty
delineates several levels of development in her model, but I will focus on the ones most applicable to this study. In particular, Rorty traces a progression in literature, from the representation of “characters” to “persons.” According to Rorty, “characters” begin to have some personality and capacities for social interaction: they have basic psychological processes (the capacity to see, feel, or communicate) and can make choices, but have no thought life apart from actions or physiological capabilities. In contrast, “persons” have psychological worlds and identities that can be separated from their actions and external features. While Rorty’s levels of “character” and “person” are useful categories for modeling children’s character representations, as Rorty herself points out, “characters” are already somewhat sophisticated representations; therefore, a simpler level of representation is needed to capture children’s earliest development. To address this need, I have adapted Bal’s (1985) narratological delineation of “actors” as opposed to what she calls “characters.” In Bal’s model, “actors” are the simplest level in fiction who only act or are acted upon, and are not further delineated. In short, I have loosely adapted and integrated Rorty’s and Bal’s models to arrive at three categories of “actors,” “characters,” and “persons,” which I further define to create a model of character representation that will capture children’s changing conceptions of personhood.

As with the two other models of person conceptions just presented, this basic typology of character representation spells out the nature of important shifts in conceptions of persons from simple actors to social and psychological beings who interact with others in a social world. The models reviewed are further integrated and adapted to include findings from studies on children’s developing social understanding.
and “theories of mind” in order to more accurately model the developmental shifts in children’s conceptions of persons.
VI. The Current Study: A Model of the Development of Character Representation in Young Children's Narratives

This section more precisely defines the basic model of character representation, which attempts to capture the major shifts in children's character representations from "actors" to "characters" to "persons," as loosely adapted from Rorty (1988) and Bal (1983). This model defines "actors" as non-psychological beings who only act or are acted upon, and who may be described in terms of their external or public characteristics. "Characters" become more delineated and simply psychological by their basic internal capacities for interaction or their simple motivations for action, interaction, and reaction. "Persons" are defined as thinkers, who have mental representations which become coordinated with actions. A second model further elaborates this basic one, by using intuitions from the other theoretical models reviewed, and by integrating them with specific findings from research on children's early social understanding and "theories of mind," when applicable.

Still, the levels of the more elaborated model cannot be justified strictly on the basis of the developmental research previously reviewed. As argued earlier, research on early social understanding does not adequately delineate a trajectory of development that is readily available for application to children's character representations, nor does it adequately address children's gradually developing conceptions of persons as actors in social worlds. Rather, social understanding research appears to oversimplify what may be a sequence of more differentiated developments by simply lumping together the development of children's understanding of perception, intentionality, and emotion at the
beginning of early childhood (around 2 years). In this respect, there is a conceptual
deficit in the psychological literature for explaining children’s development at the
intermediate levels of character representations (i.e., at the level of “character”). To
address this need, I have adapted Searle’s (1983) philosophical account of increasingly
sophisticated levels of Intentionality or “aboutness” (p. 1). The reader should note here
that “Intentionality” with an uppercase “I” refers to a larger set of internal states that can
have propositional content or be “about” something in the world. This “Intentionality”
includes the lower case “intentionality” which refers to the desire to perform an action. I
will continue to distinguish these two concepts by capitalizing the first one, in accordance
with the philosophical tradition.

According to Searle, simple actions are not necessarily “about” anything (that is,
the objects of action are not propositional in the way that Intentional states are; e.g., “I
know that tomorrow is Friday”). Therefore, “actors” in the current model are not viewed
as intentional beings in any way. However, “characters” are defined by increasing
Intentionality, both in action (i.e., the lay person’s definition of “intentionality,” which is
modeled as one developmental trajectory) and in consciousness (i.e., other basic
psychological states that may have propositional objects, which are modeled as a second
developmental trajectory). At the lowest level, characters’ Intentionality is only implicit:
the intentionality of action is implicit in the kinds of actions characters perform, the way
they perform them, or the simple reasons for which they perform them. The lowest level
of Intentionality in basic psychological states is implicit in characters ability to see, feel,
or communicate. (These may all have propositional objects; e.g., I can see that, feel that,
and say that... At the second level of Intentionality or “aboutness,” characters either respond through action or emotion to situations and events. These reactions are Intentional because they are either actions or emotions “about” something. At the highest level of Intentionality, characters’ prior explicit intentions for action are marked as end goals, explicit attempts, blocking of intentions, or by use of explicitly intentional desire state words.

Of course, representations of “persons” must also be Intentional in nature, but persons’ Intentionality is complexified by the portrayal of “representational” mental states, that are by definition Intentional, but also have a “direction of fit” to the world in that they may either be matched or mismatched to the state of affairs in the real world (Searle, 1983, p. 8). Research on children’s developing “theories of mind” have taken these complexities into account; therefore, the previously delineated models of “representational theories of mind” will be adapted to model the development of children’s character representations at the basic level of “persons.”

A. Presentation of the Model: Progression from Actors to Characters to Persons

The levels of the more basic model of character representation attempt to capture the important shifts delineated in the theoretical model of person conceptions outlined above; the more elaborated model attempts to define these shifts in terms of preschoolers’ own strategies for representing increasingly psychologically sophisticated story characters. As mentioned above, the more elaborated model also expands the category of “characters” into two developmental trajectories of Intentionality outlined briefly above;
that is, into the landscapes of Intention-in-Action (A) and Consciousness (B). In general, both the basic and more elaborated models of the development of character representation in young children's stories are very loosely adapted from Rorty's (1988) and Bal's (1983) typology of character development to show how young children progress from representing "actors," who are defined by their actions, to portraying "characters," who are simply individuated with basic psychological capacities for interactions, to "persons," who are truly cognitive beings, with psychological motivations and representations of the world.

In the more elaborated model, the basic category of "Actors" develops in two levels. In Level 1, actors simply act or are acted upon; they are not further elaborated. In Level 2, actors begin to be fleshed out through descriptions of their physical features or other observable and public characteristics. The basic category of "Characters" develops in three levels, each of which is delineated into the subtypes of Intention-in-Action (A) or Consciousness (B). First, characters are attributed capacities of basic psychological processes in Level 3 through their ability to perceive others and events in the world as well as to communicate (3B) or through their implicit intentions for actions (3A). In Level 4, characters react to events in the social world, either emotionally (4B) or through action (4A). In Level 5, characters act based on their explicit intentions (4A) or explicit desires states (4B). Finally, the basic category of "Persons" develops in two levels, in which children begin to integrate the landscapes of Intention-in-Action (A) and Consciousness (B) to attribute persons with mental states that correspond to their developing "theories of mind." In Level 6, persons have representational desire and
belief states, but act based only on their desires, which are portrayed through children’s use of a “desire-belief psychology.” That is, Level 6 persons may be portrayed as having some knowledge about the world, or gaining information from various sources, though this information does not seem to affect their actions. In contrast, Level 7 persons are portrayed through children’s use of a “belief-desire psychology” and act based on information they obtain, false-beliefs, or plans they make about the future. (See Appendix for a schematic overview of these levels.)

B. Gender Differences in Character Representations: The Landscapes of Intention-in-Action and Consciousness

B. 1. Further Predictions of the Model. In addition to the proposed progression from less to more psychological character representations as outlined above, the basic category of “characters” was delineated to capture girls’ and boys’ different models of character representation: the boys toward motivated action, and the girls toward explicit consciousness. The intuition that boys and girls may represent qualitatively different types of characters, and thus may be working from different models of personhood are modeled by Bruner’s two landscapes of narrative: (A) Action (which I have called “Intention-in-Action” for purposes of clarity) and (B) Consciousness. The landscape of Consciousness attempts to model girls’ tendency to represent characters as whole, socially-connected persons by fleshing out their characters’ psychological realities in terms of perceptions, communications, emotions, and explicit mental states, like desire and belief. On the other hand, Intention-in-Action attempts to model boys’ focus on
characters' actions and intentions for acting, and construing their internal worlds in terms of these actions.

B. 2. Evidence for Gender Differences from the Research Literature. The suggestion that girls and boys may have gender-differentiated models of personhood is strongly supported by empirical evidence from the research literature in other areas. The prediction of gender differences in children's character representations stems from evidence of gender differences of figurine representations in children's pretend play (Tarullo, 1994; Wolf, 1987) as well as evidence for strong gender-based genres and strategies in preschool children's spontaneous fictional narratives (Libby & Aries, 1989; Nicolopoulou, 1996a; 1996b; 1997a; 1997b; 1997c; Nicolopoulou, Scales, & Weintraub, 1994; Nicolopoulou & Weintraub, 1998). In addition, there have been various findings for gender differences in children's social understanding and Theory-of-Mind tasks. For instance, several studies of children's use of emotion terms in everyday conversations have provided evidence that girls may develop an earlier and more sophisticated understanding of emotion than do boys (Adams, Kuebli, Boyle, & Fivush, 1995; Brown, Donelan-McCall & Dunn, 1992; Brown & Dunn, 1996; Dunn, Slomkowski, Tesla, et al., 1991; Kuebli, Butler, & Fivush, 1995).

One rarely cited and up to now unreplicated finding of gender differences in standard Theory-of-Mind tasks was reported in Frith and Happé's (1996) summary of some preliminary data by Happé and Frith (1995). The results of this study suggested that 4-year-old girls outperformed boys in Theory-of-Mind tasks, and thus, may acquire a "representational theory of mind" first. Although this finding has lacked support from
other Theory-of-Mind tasks (e.g., Astington, 1995; Taylor & Carlson, 1997), research on children’s understanding of real vs. apparent emotions and emotion display rules suggests that girls understand the difference between the appearance and reality of emotions before boys (Banerjee, 1991; Joshi & Maclean, 1994). These findings relate both to girls’ more developed understanding of emotions as well as to more sophisticated theory of mind, because it is assumed that false belief understanding and the ability to distinguish between appearance and reality (as in the real vs. apparent emotions tasks) are both derived from the same underlying “representational theory of mind” (Sabbaugh & Callanan, 1998). In addition, the ability to distinguish between appearance and reality has been found to be correlated to the ability to pass false belief tasks when experimentally tested (Taylor & Carlson, 1997).

These gender difference findings for differentiating real from apparent emotions suggest that girls may have a more detailed understanding of emotions, as well as an earlier grasp of the representational nature of others’ minds during early childhood. Gender differences in children’s conceptions of themselves and others may extend beyond early childhood, as demonstrated by boys’ and girls’ increasingly dissimilar self- and other-descriptions (Montemayor & Eisen, 1977; Rosenberg & Simmons, 1975). Hence, a prediction for the development of gender-differentiated models of character representation by preschool boys and girls is supported both by research focusing on children’s narratives, as well as research on children’s development of social understanding, including children’s understanding of emotions, their development of a “theory of mind,” and later self- and other-descriptions.
C. Summary: Outline of the Present Study

The model presented above outlines a proposed developmental progression for character representation in the narratives of 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds. It attempts to integrate theoretical models of personhood as situated in social contexts with evidence from research studies that have traced children's development of increasingly sophisticated knowledge about others' mental lives. Specifically, the model attempts to loosely adapt and integrate Rorty's (1988), Bal's (1983), Searle's (1983), and Bruner's (1986) typologies in order to model young children's character representations in narrative. Based on this proposed model, children's character representations should progress from "Actors," portrayed in terms of simple strings of actions and descriptions of observable traits, to "Characters," portrayed as interacting, reacting, and choosing to act in a social world, to "Persons," portrayed as acting based on mental representations of their social worlds.

In addition, this study follows strong suggestions of gender differences from research on children's developing social understanding as well as narrative research to propose that, although girls and boys will both follow this external-to-internal, or action-to-psychological progression in their character representations, they will follow different paths along the way. Specifically, Bruner's (1986) division of two landscapes of narrative was used to model (1) girls' emphasis on their characters' "Consciousness," or models of persons as social and psychological beings who are connected to others, and (2) boys' emphasis on their characters' "Intention-in-Action," or models of persons that emphasize actions.
Based on these models, girls’ character representations should reflect and elaborate more elements of the landscape of consciousness, including characters’ perceptions, sensations, and communications with others (Level 3A), emotional reactions (Level 4A), and more explicit references to characters’ mental states overall (Level 5A, 6, and 7). On the other hand, boys’ character representations should focus more on characters’ actions (Level 1), physical characteristics and possessions (Level 2), as well as increasingly explicit intentions-in-action (Levels 3B, 4B, and 5B).

However, by the end of the preschool years, both boys and girls are expected to incorporate references to characters’ mental states into their portrayals of actions. Hence, the differentiation between Intention-in-Action (A) and Consciousness (B) is dissolved as children begin to use a “theory of mind” to represent “persons” at the higher levels of the model; that is, as children learn the art of storytelling. Though girls’ and boys’ trajectories of the development of character representations in their narratives may be different, their overall development toward the highest levels of the model represents their increasing abilities to integrate the landscape of action and the landscape of consciousness.

Importantly, however, this developmental progression can be expected for preschoolers only when they are allowed to tell stories for their own purposes on an everyday basis. The review of narrative research presented above has attempted to demonstrate that unless this is the case, children do not include characters’ motivations or internal states in their narratives until much later, sometime between the ages of 7 and 10. Experimental narrative elicitation techniques used to generate young children’s stories
often restrict children’s character representations. This is also the case beyond childhood, into adulthood. In response to these problems, I have followed a research program initiated by Nicolopoulou (1996a; 1996b; 1997a; 1997b; 1997c; 1998; 1999; Nicolopoulou, Scales, & Weintraub, 1994; Nicolopoulou & Weintraub, 1998) which analyzes stories collected in preschool classrooms utilizing a storytelling and story-acting practice that encourages children to tell stories to each other, and thus enhances narrative development. Children’s narratives generated by this activity are ripe for analyses that focus on children’s own strategies and interests in socially-situated storytelling, including the analysis of character representations. Though narrative research has shown little interest in children’s own strategies for character representation, and has found no evidence for its development in early childhood, this study argues that, given the chance, preschool children can and will develop complex and psychological character representations in their narratives which reflect their developing conceptions of personhood.
METHOD

A. Participants

Thirty preschool children who attended a half-day nursery school in western Massachusetts participated in this study. The children were selected from four preschool classes (two from 1992-93 and two from 1994-95 school years) so that they would comprise three age groups of equal size at the beginning of the school year: early 3’s, early 4’s, late 4’s, 5 girls and 5 boys per age group.

At the beginning of the school year, the age ranges of the children were as follows: The 3-year-old girls ranged from 3.2 to 3.3 (mean \( M = 3.3 \)) and the 3-year-old boys ranged from 3.1 to 3.5 (\( M = 3.3 \) ); the 4-year-old girls ranged from 4.1 to 4.4 (\( M = 4.3 \) ) and the 4-year-old boys ranged from 4.0 to 4.2 (\( M = 4.1 \) ); the 5-year-old girls ranged from 4.7 to 4.11 (\( M = 4.9 \) ); and the 5-year-old boys ranged from 4.7 to 4.11 (\( M = 4.9 \) ). As can be seen from the mean ages of the oldest group, these children started out as late 4’s and most turned 5 during the fall semester. (These were children whose birthdays occurred after their school districts’ cut-off dates and therefore were ineligible to enter kindergarten.) However, these children will be referred to as “5-year-olds” and will be used to compare the development of character representation in the stories at three age groups. The children in this study were primarily from middle- to upper-middle-class families, whose parents were mostly professionals or academics.

B. Data Collection

The stories analyzed here were drawn from a larger, multi-year project (using data gathered from the 1992 to 1995 school years) that has studied the development of
children's narrative activity in its social context (Nicolopoulou, 1996a; 1996b; 1997a; 1997b; 1997c; 1998; 1999; Nicolopoulou, Scales, & Weintraub, 1994; Nicolopoulou & Weintraub, 1998). These stories were generated using the storytelling and story-acting technique originally pioneered by Vivian Paley (1986, 1988, 1990) which was carried out in the preschool classrooms for the entire length of their school year (from September to June). Each day, as part of each classroom’s regular morning free play activities, any child could choose to dictate a story to a teacher, who wrote it down as the child told it. The children were allowed to tell any kind of story and portray any number of characters they wished. During “circle time,” all the child authors for that day acted out their stories with friends whom they chose as story characters while the teacher read the transcribed stories aloud. Nicolopoulou and her research assistants visited the classrooms about once a week to collect ethnographic observations, and then at the end of the year she also collected the entire body of stories for analysis. The 30 children selected for analysis in the present study told a total of 570 stories (range = 9 to 42 stories per child, mean number of stories per child = 19).

C. Coding

Each of the children's stories was coded using the more elaborated, seven-level coding scheme constructed to evaluate the type, depth, and complexity of character representations. (Again, see Appendix for a schematic overview of the three-level basic typology and the seven-level elaborated typology.) Each story was coded for the highest Representation Level portrayed for any character. As outlined earlier, these levels describe a hypothesized developmental progression in children’s character representation
from the most simple portrayals of isolated actions to increasingly more psychological portrayals and greater intercoordination of characters.

In addition, the Levels 3 through 5 were further subdivided into two types: Intention-in-Action (A) and Consciousness (B), which delineate the development of two gender-related models of character representation. Character portrayals falling into Levels 3 through 5 were assigned one of these types based on their content. There were a few stories that contained elements of both Intention-in-Action (A) and Consciousness (B). These stories were coded as "Mixed."

Intercoder reliability was established by having two coders (the author and a trained undergraduate) independently code approximately 20% of the total corpus; this subsample comprised all the stories told by one girl and one boy, respectively, chosen randomly from each age group. The second coder was blind to the gender and age of the children, as well as to the hypotheses and predictions of the study. This coder was instructed to code each story to its highest elaborated level of character representation, using the coding scheme below as a guide. The rate of agreement between the two coders was 89%, a satisfactory figure. All but one of the disagreements were resolved easily through discussion; in most cases they proved to be due to the second coder's lack of familiarity with some details of the coding system. There was only one story (1% of the double-coded subsample) for which there was a genuine difference of opinion, involving a difference of one level (in the elaborated categories) between the judgments of the coders; this case was resolved by coding the story at the lower level of representation level.

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After each child’s stories was coded to a Character Representation Level and Type (if applicable), the mean proportion of stories falling into each Level and Type was calculated separately for fall (September through December) and spring (January through June) semesters. In addition, the broader categories of “Actors,” “Characters,” and “Persons” were derived from the more elaborated coding scheme by simply collapsing the subordinate elaborated levels under each basic category.

D. Character Representation Levels

I. Actors

Actors are simply defined by their actions; they act or are acted upon.

Level 1. Action Only: Actors are represented simply by actions and are not further described:

- The turtles came and Slash.
- Slash fights.
- The turtles fight.
- The turtles win.

Level 2. Simple Descriptions: Actors are beginning to be fleshed out through externally identifiable or public characteristics. These include physical traits (e.g., T-Rex has sharp teeth); or names or ages (e.g., The girl’s name was Clara and she was 14 years old); or possessions (e.g., A cat had a hat); or locations (e.g., The king and the queen lived in that castle); or simple evaluative descriptions (e.g., The bear was nice). At times, actors’ stereotypic or habitual actions may be adjectivized as descriptions (e.g., Flying skeletons came).

Once upon a time there was a clown who had a pet mouse and he lived in a castle with the mouse.
And he lived with a king, and a queen, and a prince, and a princess, too.
And they had a dog
and the dog snored.
And they went for a walk.

II. Characters

Characters begin to be gradually individuated as entities with basic psychological capacities. At this level, characters are differentiated into two types: (A) **Intention-in-Action**, in which characters have an intentional stance through their actions; and (B) **Consciousness**, in which characters manifest basic psychological capacities for interaction in the (social) world.

**Level 3A. Implicit Intention:** Characters are represented in terms of their implicit intentions for actions. For example, characters’ regular actions may be marked as agentive (e.g., The ghost went to bed by himself); or characters may use tools to accomplish actions (e.g., He fights using his powers); or may perform intentional actions that strongly imply that they mean to accomplish them (e.g., They were waiting in the batmobile); or have implicit goals or purposes for carrying out actions (e.g., She met her friend for a sleepover). Finally, in accordance with research on children’s understanding of intentionality, if characters’ actions are marked by necessity (“had to”) rather than choice (“tried to”), the characters’ actions are considered to be implicitly intentional (Shultz, 1991). In addition, if characters’ actions are precipitated by one of their own traits (e.g., He googoo at school because he is so silly), these actions are also considered to be implicitly intentional.

First there was a tarantula.
Then Spiderman tamed the tarantula.
Then the bad guys. (There’s 11 bad guys.)
Then Spiderman makes himself turn into 11 Spidermen and they fight 11 fights.

**Type 3B. Simple Psychological Capacity for Interaction:** Characters begin to have the capacity for basic-level psychological interactions or a point of view on the world in that they can see (e.g., Leah watched them go); or feel things (e.g., He was so hungry); or communicate (basically meaningless communication, e.g., Then Spiderman said, “Yahoo!”); or exhibit simple undirected emotions (e.g., They were all happy).

Once upon a time there were two Dorothys and one Toto. And they lived together in a nice house. And then they walked in the woods together. In the woods they meet a little bear. And in the woods, after they found a little bear, They found a little guinea pig.

**Level 4.** Characters are further individuated in that they are represented as reacting to situations and events either through their Action Responses (4A) or Emotional Reactions (4B). (At this level, the coding begins to incorporate not just simple clauses but relations between them.)

**Type 4A. Reactive Intentionality:** Characters respond through actions to situations and events. These actions tend to be linked to their precipitating causes by “so” or “because” (e.g., The ghosts are still alive, so they just left the ghosts alone).

Once upon a time there was a bat and it lived in a cave. And every time animals came the bat ate it. Then the bat saw that their friend bats were in trouble so they had a battle. The End.
**Type 4B. Emotional Reaction:** Characters have emotional reactions to situations and events or may also make evaluative statements (e.g., The cat liked to read books. It said, “This is fun!”).

> Once upon a time there was a little girl. There was a kingdom. It had a princess, a queen, a king. They had one baby, and then a wolf came and ate the baby. And the queen was very sad. The End.

**Level 5.** Characters are further individuated by children’s use of a “Simple Desire Psychology.” This can be accomplished in two ways: through representations of characters’ explicit intentions-in-action (5A) and explicit desire states (5B).

**Level 5A. Explicit Intention-in-Action:** Characters have explicit intentions for action that are portrayed by markers such as “tried to” or “getting ready to” (e.g., They tried to find their Hippo); or by goal-oriented action sequences (e.g., Then a bunny came to rescue the kittens); or by their spoken commands that express characters’ desires or intentions (e.g., He said, “Shoot the Ninja Turtles, Rocksteady!”). In accordance with research on children’s understanding of intentionality, characters’ explicit intentionality can also be expressed through the explicit negation of their intentions (Shultz, 1991). For example, this can be portrayed by the blocking of characters’ intentions (e.g., He couldn’t kill the lion) or by characters’ actions that happen by accident (e.g., By accident, he touched the circle).

> Once upon a time there once was a little kitty who had a mommy. He was lucky to have a mommy because he loved his mama very much.
And he never went to sleep without his mama kissing him.
And whenever bad guys came
they hid under the quilt or something to keep them safe,
so they wouldn’t get stolen.
“Baby kitty and I” said the mom.
And he loved his mom very much.

Level 5B. Explicit Desire States: Characters have explicit psychological desire states such as “wants” and “wishes” (e.g., She found another princess who wanted to live with her).

Once upon a time a prince lived in a castle.
And one night a woman came
and offered him a rose.
But the prince didn’t want the rose
and she turned him into a beast.
And she put a spell on the castle and all who live there.
And in a town nearby there lived a man named Gaston and a beautiful girl named Belle.
Gaston wanted to kill the beast.
And they went to the castle and killed the beast.
To be continued.

III. Persons

Persons are represented by higher psychological processes that are integrated with actions. These higher psychological processes include persons’ beliefs, knowledge, dreams, and imaginings that are cognitive and representational in nature. Children represent person by integrating the landscapes of Intention-in-Action and Consciousness by using their representational “theories of mind” to coordinate persons’ actions, explicit intentions, and mental representations. (At this level, the coding tends to incorporate the entire story.)
Level 6. Desire-Belief Psychology: Persons are portrayed as having not only explicit intentions and desires, but also thoughts and beliefs; however, their actions are motivated by their desires alone, and not mediated by their thoughts or beliefs.

Once upon a time there was a bat family. And they spotted a monster. And then a dragon came. The bats killed the dragon and then the dragon came alive. And the bats and the dragon played together and then they became friends and then they played all day. The monster said, “Let’s go have something to eat.” And they had a big feast. And they didn’t know what to do, so they jumped in the pond and had a swim together. And they didn’t know what to do after their swim, so they began to play again, and then finally they knew what to do. [And want to know what they did?] They played hopscotch and then they went inside and had dinner and they went to sleep. The End.

It should be noted that persons’ mental representations may be portrayed without the use of mental state words (like “think” or “know”), but instead through persons’ planning, or communication of intentions, or asking permission, to accomplish a goal. These activities are considered representational knowledge states because they imply future sequences of actions that may be carried out if the appropriate conditions of satisfaction are met. In fact, this is the representational definition of intentionality, according to Searle (1983).

And he was stealing people’s money by scaring them with his poison arrow Saying he was going to shoot them if they didn’t give him their money.

Level 7. Belief-Desire Psychology: Persons’ beliefs and desires are coordinated to motivate their actions. Persons’ false beliefs may also be represented at this level.

So the Frisbee ran away because he thought the ring would spy on him. But the ring would not do that.

Or:
Once upon a time there was a kingdom. There was a king and a queen and a princess. One time they all went walking in the woods and they got lost. There was a witch in their house. When they came home they said, “My, everything looks different!” and the witch jumped out and said, “Surprise!” One time when the little girl (princess) was sleeping, the witch combed into her room and scared her and she waked up and the witch ran away and the girl said, “Oh, there’s nothing here.” And the witch came back and knocked on her door. And there was no one there, and she said, “Oh, there’s no one knocking on my door either.” Later, when she woke up, she was terribly cranky in her room. She couldn’t go to school and this was her favorite day. She said, “Mom, it’s really not my fault. A witch comed in my room.” But her mom didn’t believe in witches. The end.
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After all the children’s stories were coded for the highest level (1 through 7) of character representation depicted in the story, the proportion of stories falling into each of the Levels, and Type (A or B) within level (when applicable), was calculated for each child, for fall and spring semesters. In addition, proportions of basic level representations (Actors, Characters, and Persons) were calculated by summing the proportions from each of the elaborated levels within each basic level. (For example, proportions of “actors” were equal to the summed proportions of Level 1 and Level 2 representations.) Finally, the appropriate elaborated representation levels were also summed to analyze children’s use of their different levels of “theories of mind.” (For example, proportions of “Simple Desire Psychology” were equal to the summed proportions of Level 3, 4, and 5 representations.)

Separate analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were performed on these sets of proportions. The three ANOVAs were identical in design: four-way mixed factorial ANOVAs, with semester (fall, spring) and levels (either basic, or elaborated, or Theory-of-Mind levels) as the within factors, and gender (girls, boys) and age (3-, 4-, 5-year-olds) as the between factors. Because mean proportions were used, the grand means for each group summed to 100%, therefore the important results of the analyses are in the form of interactions. An alpha level of .05 was adapted to test for statistical significance in all analyses.

A. Basic Level Representations

The first analysis was performed on the proportions of children’s representations
of “actors,” “characters,” and “persons,” the categories of the basic model of character representation. Each child’s proportions of stories falling into these basic categories for the school year and the overall group means are depicted in Figures 1 through 6. A four-way mixed factorial ANOVA was performed on the mean proportions with semester (fall, spring) and the basic representation levels (“actor,” “character,” “person”) as the within factors, and gender (girls, boys) and age (3-, 4-, 5-year-olds) as the between factors. In this analysis, the Age x Basic Level interaction was significant ($F_{[4,48]} = 9.84, p = .00001$), indicating that children developed more sophisticated character representations with age. The Semester x Basic Level interaction was also significant ($F_{[2,48]} = 4.6, p = .01$), indicating that the children also developed more sophisticated character representations in the spring semester than in the fall. Finally, there was a significant Gender x Basic Level interaction ($F_{[2,48]} = 8.11, p = .0009$), indicating that boys and girls followed different trajectories of development for these basic categories. A more detailed and integrated summary of these results is presented next.

In the 3-year-old group, both boys and girls represented mostly simple “actors” and some “characters,” and both boys and girls developed more “characters” and fewer “actors” throughout the school year (see Table 1 for age group mean proportions). However, gender differences were apparent from the beginning (see Table 2 or Figures 7 and 8 for age/gender/semester mean proportions). Girls began representing more “characters” than boys in the fall semester (18% vs. 4%), whereas the boys represented mostly actors (96%). And while boys developed some “characters” in the spring (16%), girls still represented more “characters” (30%) than the boys. This shows that the boys’
representations of "actors" decreased between semesters (from 96% to 83%), while the girls’ proportions of "actors" did not decrease (72% to 70%); instead, the increase in girls’ representations of "characters" (from 18% to 30%) in the spring semester reflects a decrease in their representation of "persons" between semesters (from 10% to 0%). This decrease in 3-year-old girls’ representations of "persons" can be explained by the fact that three of the girls told about one story in the early fall semester that was clearly a retelling of a familiar story, and thus contained representations of "persons" that were not found in their later story creations. Even with this anomaly taken into account, the girls still represented more "characters" with simple psychological capacities for interaction than did the boys in both semesters, though the boys began to depict a few representations of "characters" in the spring semester. Overall, 3-year-olds represented very few persons (3%, see Table 1).

In the **4-year-old group**, both boys and girls represented fewer simple "actors" (56% vs. 80%) and more "characters" (35% vs. 17%) than did the 3-year-olds (see Table 1 for age group mean proportions.) But despite this basic similarity, there were two interesting differences between the 4-year-old boys and girls (see Table 2 or Figures 7 and 8 for gender/age/semester mean proportions). First, while both the 4-year-old boys began to portray more "characters" in the fall (31%) than the 3-year-old boys had in the spring (16%), the 4-year-old boys did not continue to develop any further. In contrast, the 4-year-old girls portrayed about the same proportions of "characters" in the fall (33%) as the 3-year-old girls had in the spring (30%), but shifted to portraying even more characters during the spring semester (50%). Second, the 4-year-old girls began to
consistently represent a few psychologically complex “persons” in the fall (11%) and in the spring (15%), but the boys represented “persons” rarely (2% for fall, and 8% for spring). Overall, the 4-year-olds primarily developed more “character” representations than the 3-year-olds, thus moving away from simple actions and descriptions, toward individuating characters through depicting basic psychological capacities for interaction as well as implicit intentions. However, 4-year-old girls showed more development than the boys during the school year, coming to portray many more “characters” in the spring semester. In addition, the girls began to represent a few psychological “persons” both semesters (11% in the fall, 15% in the spring), while the boys represented even fewer (2% in the fall, 8% in the spring).

In contrast, boys and girls in the 5-year-old group showed significant development toward more “persons” (25% vs. 9%) and fewer representations of simple “actors” (32% vs. 56%) as compared to the 4-year-olds (see Table 1 for age group mean proportions). Once again, however, the specific pattern of development during the school year differed between the boys and girls (see Table 2 or Figures 7 and 8). While the 5-year-old girls began to represent significantly more “persons” in the fall semester than the 4-year-olds did in the spring (33% vs. 15%), they did not continue to develop any further (33% to 35%). Instead, their primary movement between semesters was an increase in representing “characters” (from 46% to 60%) and a decrease in representing simple “actors” (from 21% to 5%). The 5-year-old boys, on the other hand, did not significantly increase their representations of “characters” above the level of the 4-year-old boys throughout the year; instead, they represented more “persons” (from 8% to 24%) and
fewer “actors” (from 60% to 42%) between semesters. Thus, while 5-year-old girls and boys represented more “persons” overall, the girls primarily developed more representations of “characters” between semesters, while the boys primarily developed more representations of “persons.” However, it is important to note that despite this difference in development between semesters, girls still represented more “characters” and “persons” in both semesters than did the boys.

In sum, the development of the children’s basic categories can be roughly described as a shift in focus from “actors” at 3 years, to an increasing use of “characters” at 4 and 5 years, to “persons” at 5 years. By 5 years of age, the children represented “characters” more frequently than “actors” (see Table 1) and also began to represent “persons” to a considerable degree. Importantly, however the rhythm of this development was different for boys and girls. (1) In general, girls in every age group had higher proportions of both “characters” and “persons” than the boys, while the boys in every age group had higher proportions of “actors” than the girls. This difference became particularly pronounced among the 4-year-olds during the spring semester: the girls shifted to representing many more “characters” while the boys did not show much development. And while the 5-year-old boys and girls developed considerably in developing “characters” and “persons,” the gap between the boys and girls held. (2) A second overall difference was the girls’ more pronounced focus in representing “characters” than the boys. Even while the girls began to represent “persons” consistently at 5 years, they also continued to increase their representations of “characters.” In contrast, the boys only increased their representations of “characters”
between the 3-year-olds' spring semester and the 4-year-olds' fall semester; and they did not continue to develop them further. Instead, the 5-year-old boys began to represent "persons" more consistently, but only in the spring semester. This overall pattern of differences between the boys and girls suggests that while both developed toward more psychological character representations with increasing age, the girls focused on portraying their characters' mental worlds earlier and in larger proportions than did the boys. Boys, on the other hand, retained higher proportions of "actors" as they moved to increasingly more sophisticated representations. These differences may reflect the development of two different models of personhood in the narratives of preschool boys and girls.

B. Elaborated Character Representation Levels

An even more differentiated view of the development of children's character representations was shown by the analysis of the more elaborated seven-level model, which differentiates the basic levels discussed above. Each child's proportions of stories falling into the elaborated levels for the school year and the overall group mean are depicted in Figures 9 through 14. A four-way mixed factorial ANOVA was performed on the mean proportions with semester (fall, spring) and the more elaborated representation levels (Levels 1 through 7) as the within factors, and gender (girls, boys) and age (3-, 4-, 5-year-olds) as the between factors. In general, the results of this ANOVA support those from the basic level analysis. Like the first analysis, the Age x Basic Level interaction was significant (F [12, 144] = 4.58, p < .001) which indicates that children developed more sophisticated character representations with age. Also like the
first analysis, there was a significant Gender x Basic Level interaction (\(F[6, 144] = 3.74, p = .003\)), indicating that boys and girls showed different trajectories of development for these elaborated levels. However, the Semester x Level interaction was not significant for this finer analysis, most likely due to the large range of elaborated character representation levels portrayed by the children during each semester. While it is clear from the first analysis that children did develop more complex representations as the school year went on, here I will simplify the presentation by collapsing the results across semesters.

The results of this more elaborated analysis showed that 3-year-olds' primary mode of character representations, "actors," was mostly made up of Level 1 representation (actions only, 48%), with fewer Level 2 representations (actions and external descriptions, 32%; see Table 3 for age group mean proportions). As can be seen in Table 4 or Figure 15, the girls' earlier shift to representing "characters," demonstrated by the previous analysis, was accomplished by their fewer Level 2 "actors" (22% vs. 42% by the boys) and more Level 3 "characters" (20% vs. 5% by the boys). Neither 3-year-old girls nor boys included character representations at any higher levels.

The proportion of 4-year-olds' representations of Level 1 "actors" decreased significantly (from 48% to 25% overall, see Table 3) and Level 2 remained the same (32% to 31% overall) as they began to represent more "characters." As can be seen in Table 4 or Figure 15, the girls (who had begun to represent some Level 3 "characters" as 3-year-olds) began to also represent a few Level 4 "characters" (emotional and action responses; 11% vs. 3% for the 3's) and Level 5 "characters" (explicit intention and desire,
8% vs. 1% for the 3's). In contrast, the boys, besides representing “actors” (Levels 1 and 2), began to represent a few Level 5 “characters” (from 3% at 3 years to 16% at 4), but rarely represented Level 3 or 4 “characters.” As the basic level analysis showed, only the 4-year-old girls began to represent “persons” in any substantial way. This analysis shows that they began by using a “Desire-Belief Psychology” (Level 6, from 3% at 3 years to 12% at 4 years), which portrays representational mental states and motivates actions through explicit desires and goals. However, they did not integrate thoughts and beliefs with actions, as Level 7 remained low.

The more elaborated analysis illuminates the 5-year-olds' shift to representing some “persons” by showing that girls decreased their representations of Level and Level 2 “actors” quite substantially as compared to the 4-year-old girls (Level 1, from 22% to 4%; Level 2, from 24% to 9%). At the same time, the girls increased their representations of “characters,” particularly by portraying their explicit desires (Level 5, from 8% to 21%). And while 4-year-olds girls had begun to represent “persons” using only a “Desire-Belief Psychology” (Level 6), the 5-year-old girls extended their representations of “persons” by using a “Belief Desire Psychology” (Level 7, 19%). In comparison to the girls, the 5-year-old boys increased their representations of “characters” only slightly, by portraying a few more Level 3 and 4 representations than the 4-year-old boys. Instead, the boys shifted to representing “persons” by using a “Belief-Desire Psychology” (Level 7, 12%), though they still represented fewer “persons” than the girls, due to their continuing portrayal of “actors,” which accounted for over half of their stories.
For the 5-year-old group overall, the most marked (albeit limited) transition was toward both boys’ and girls’ increased representations of psychologically complex “persons,” particularly by their use of a “Belief-Desire Psychology” (Level 7). The most prominent gender difference was the significant decrease in the girls’ representation of Level 1 and 2 “actors” as compared to the boys’ higher proportions at these levels. In addition, girls continued to increase their representations of “characters” by producing more Level 5 representations, while boys increased their representations of Levels 3 and 4 very slightly, moving instead to represent “persons” at level 7.

These results flesh out the developmental picture provided by the more basic analysis. To summarize these trends, 3-year-olds represented “actors” primarily through their actions (Level 1) and external descriptions (Level 2), but only the girls began to represent “characters” by giving implicit intentions and basic psychological capacities for interacting in the social world through perceptions, sensations, and communications (Level 3). While 4-year-olds continued to represent many “actors,” they also began to represent “characters” more often. In particular, the girls continued to represent Level 3 “characters,” but also began to portray reactions to events around them (Level 4) and motivate characters’ actions by portraying their explicit desires and intentions (Level 5). In contrast, 4-year-old boys retained higher proportions of “actors” and only represented “characters” at Level 5. In the 4-year-old group, only the girls began to represent “persons” by using a “Desire-Belief Psychology” (Level 6) to represent characters’ desires and beliefs, but coordinated only desires with actions. In the 5-year-old group, the most significant overall development was the boys’ and girls’ representation of
"persons," using a "Belief-Desire Psychology" (Level 7) to coordinate desires and beliefs with actions, and the girls' dramatic decrease in representations of simple "actors" to represent "characters" and "persons" equally as often.

As the basic level analysis indicated, the overall trends in this more elaborated analysis showed that while both boys and girls developed steadily from "actors" to "characters" to "persons," the girls closely followed the hypothesized sequence of the more elaborated levels while the boys tended to move less gradually from "actors" (Levels 1 and 2) to representations of "characters" explicit intentions and desires (Level 5) to coordination of "persons" representational mental states and actions (Level 7). Only as 5-year-olds did the boys represent characters at Levels 3 and 4; and even at this age, they did not represent "persons" by using a "Desire-Belief Psychology." Once again, these gender differences point to boys' and girls' development of two different models of character representation. The elaborated model of character representation illuminates what was suggested by the more basic model: girls develop gradually more complex and well-differentiated representations of characters in their stories and abandon representing only simple actions and descriptions, while boys at each age continue to focus on actions, but move toward individuating characters' intentions-in-action, and toward representing a few "persons" by motivating actions through mental states.

C. Theory-of-Mind in Character Representations

A third analysis focused on the development of children's abilities to use their "theories of mind" to portray characters' internal states and coordinate them with actions. As outlined in the introduction, preschool children are said to develop a "representational
theory of mind” in three successive stages. Children’s “Simple Desire Psychology” includes their nonrepresentational understanding of perception, emotion, desire and intentionality in action (Levels 3, 4, and 5 in the elaborated model); their “Desire-Belief Psychology” includes a representational understanding of desire, and a rudimentary understanding of knowledge states that are not coordinated with actions (Level 6); and their “Belief-Desire Psychology” includes their ability to understand that beliefs can be false, and that both true and false beliefs mediate actions (Level 7). This model corresponds nicely to the basic typology of character representation in the current study: “Actors” in the basic typology are not represented by the use of any “theory of mind,” “characters” are represented by a “Simple Desire Psychology,” and “persons” are divided into “Desire-Belief” (Level 6) and “Belief-Desire” (Level 7) representations.

The development of children’s ability to use their “theories of mind” to represent psychologically complex characters was analyzed by a four-way mixed factorial ANOVA with semester (fall, spring) and Theory-of-Mind psychologies (“no theory of mind,” “Simple Desire Psychology,” “Desire-Belief Psychology,” “Belief-Desire Psychology”) as the within factors, and gender (girls, boys) and age (3-, 4-, 5-year-olds) as the between factors. In general, the results of this analysis support the general pattern of the previous analyses. This analysis showed a significant Age x Theory of Mind interaction ($F_{[6,72]} = 9.38, p < .00001$), indicating that children use increasingly more sophisticated “theories of mind” to represent characters with age. The significant Semester x Theory of Mind interaction ($F_{[3, 72]} = 3.92, p = .01$) indicates that the children also used more sophisticated “theories of mind” for character representation between semesters. Finally,
the significant Gender x Theory of Mind interaction ($F[3,72] = 7.86, p = .0001$) showed that boys and girls used different “theories of mind” to represent their characters.

As previously indicated, the 3-year-olds mainly represented “actors” and a few “characters” in their stories, thus there are only a few Theory-of-Mind representations in their stories (84% of the 3-year-olds’ stories had “no theory of mind,” see Table 5 for age group mean proportions). However, the 3-year-olds did begin to use a “Simple Desire Psychology” to represent some “characters,” particularly in the spring semester. As in the previous analyses, girls began representing more “characters” using a “Simple Desire Psychology” before the boys in the fall (18% vs. 4%), and though the boys represented more “characters” with a “Simple Desire Psychology” between semesters (increased from 4% to 16%), the girls continued to represent more of these “characters” than the boys in the spring (30% vs. 16%, see Table 6 or Figures 16 and 17 for age/gender/semester mean proportions).

In the 4-year-old group, the boys began to represent characters’ explicit intentions and desires by a “Simple Desire Psychology” more frequently in the fall semester (31%) than the 3-year-old boys did in the spring (16%), but the 4-year-old boys did not continue to develop any further. On the other hand, the girls began the year with about the same proportions of “Simple Desire Psychology” representations as the 3-year-old girls had in the spring (33% vs. 30%), but increased their use of this type of representation significantly between semesters (from 33% to 50%). In addition, only the 4-year-old girls began to represent some “persons” using a “Desire-Belief Psychology” to portray their representational mental states and to coordinate desires with actions. Girls
developed these representations primarily in the fall semester (11%) and did not increase them significantly in the spring (13%).

As also indicated by the previous analyses, the primary development in the 5-year-old group was the boys' and girls' representations of "persons" using their "Belief-Desire Psychology" to coordinate actions with desires and beliefs (from 1% at 4 years to 15% at 5 years overall, see Table 5). As Table 6 and Figures 16 and 17 indicate, girls began portraying these representations in the fall (20% vs. 2% for 4-year-olds in the spring), but did not continue to develop further. Instead, the girls continued to increase their representations of "characters" using a "Simple Desire Psychology" in the spring semester (from 46% to 60%). In contrast, boys never consistently represented "persons" using a "Desire-Belief Psychology" (2% in the fall, 8% in the spring) and only began using a "Belief-Desire Psychology" in the spring semester (17%).

These patterns of results indicate that girls consistently used their "theories of mind" to represent characters' psychological worlds earlier and more frequently than the boys. Once again, this difference can be explained by boys' overall focus on their characters' actions, while the girls focused on elaborating characters' internal worlds more fully. In addition, boys did not use a "Desire-Belief Psychology" for character representations at any age, while the girls began using this type of representation as 4-year-olds, and continued to use it while they developed "Belief-Desire" character representations as 5-year-olds. The low proportions of boys' "Desire-Belief" character representations compared to the other "theory of mind" categories suggests that "Desire-Belief" may not be an important or stable representation level for the boys. Again, this
result reflects a more general trend toward more action-oriented character representations in the boys' stories; that is, boys use representations of internal states to motivate actions, whereas girls focus on representations of internal states per se, and do not always coordinate them with actions. A more explicit analysis of this trend follows.

D. Comparison of Subtypes: Landscapes of Intention-in-Action and Consciousness

The finding that boys focus more on elaborating characters' motivations for action, while girls focus more specifically on the social and psychological worlds of their characters was further considered by the subdivision of Levels 3, 4, and 5 into Intention-in-Action (A) vs. Consciousness (B). Because children may also use both types to represent characters at each level, a "Mixed" (AB) category was designed to capture children's abilities to integrate Intention-in-Action and Consciousness. Though no specific predictions were made for the Mixed (AB) category, I expected that boys would produce more Intention-in-Action (A) character representations by portraying characters' increasingly explicit intentions and motivations for acting, and girls would produce more Consciousness (A) representations by portraying characters' perceptions, sensations and communications (Level 3B), emotions (4B), and explicit desire states (5C).

The girls' and boys' ratios of Intention-in-Action (A) representations to Consciousness (B) representations supported the predicted pattern. As shown in both Table 7 and Figure 18 (and as the previous analyses have shown), 3-year-olds represented very few "characters" overall. And while 4- and 5-year-olds increased their representations of "characters" with age, the boys' representations did not increase as substantially as those of the girls. Because of the small and unequal proportions between
younger and older children (and between boys and girls) an ANOVA was not performed on these data.

Nonetheless, the patterns of results illustrated by Figure 18 support my initial prediction that boys would represent more characters’ Intention-in-Action (A) and that girls would represent more characters’ Consciousness (B). However, this general pattern holds only for the 4- and 5-year-olds; because the 3-year-olds represented very few “characters,” the proportions of these subtypes were very similar between the boys and girls. In contrast, the difference between the proportions of boys’ higher representations of Intention-in-Action (A) and girls’ higher representations of Consciousness (B) character representations is considerable at 4 and 5 years. Specifically, 4-year-old girls represented characters’ Consciousness about five times more frequently than they represented their Intentions-in-Action (46% vs. 9%), but the 4-year-old-boys represented characters’ Intention-in-Action five times more frequently than Consciousness (22% vs. 4%). The 5-year-old girls represented characters’ Consciousness twice as frequently than they represented Intention-in-Action (28% vs. 14%), and the 5-year-old boys represented characters’ Intention-in-Action twice as frequently than they represented Consciousness (18% vs. 9%). This pattern suggests that gender differences in boys’ and girls’ uses of the landscapes of Intention-in-Action (A) and Consciousness (B) for their portrayals of characters have developed initially at age 4 and continued to age 5.

It is also interesting to note that the girls’ Level 5 character representations did not follow the same pattern as their Level 3 and 4 character representations (see Table 7). That is, girls did not represent more characters as 5B (explicit desire states) than 5A.
(explicit goals for action). Instead, both girls and boys had higher proportions of 5A character representations than 5B. This may reflect either children’s general tendency to portray characters’ desires through actions, or it could be an artifact of my coding scheme, in which 5A is a broader category, which may be represented in a variety of ways, whereas 5B can only be portrayed by children’s attribution of words like “wanted” or “wished” to their characters. A more plausible interpretation of this result comes from differences within girls’ and boys’ Level 5A character representations: it seems that while boys use markers like “tried to” to denote the intentionality of their characters’ actions, girls tend to use more spoken dialogue and commands between characters like “Let’s go...” to express their characters’ desires or intentions. Though I did not specifically analyze these tendencies, they may explain why girls represent more characters at 5A than 5B, especially in the 5-year-old group. Instead of describing their characters’ desire states directly, girls may use their characters’ social interactions to embed discussion of their intentions, which were coded as Intention-in-Action.

E. Summary

All of the above analyses support the character representation models hypothesized by this study. Roughly, they show that 3-year-old children portray mainly “actors” who may simply act (Level 1) or are described (Level 2); 4-year-olds begin to represent “characters” who have basic psychological capacities and implicit intentions for interacting in a (social) world (Level 3) or who may respond through emotion or action to events around them (Level 4) or have explicit desires and intentions (Level 5). Finally, 5-year-olds begin to portray “persons” by using their “representational theories of mind” to
portray thoughts and feelings which may or may not be coordinated with actions (Levels 7 and 6, respectively).

While children generally developed each of the basic levels in the hypothesized order, girls tended to develop them earlier, and follow the elaborated model's order more closely than the boys. As illuminated by the more elaborated model analysis, boys focused more on characters' actions, external descriptions, and explicit intentions for action before they began to fill out "characters" and "persons" more fully. When boys did begin to individuate "characters," they focused more on the landscape of action, by elaborating implicit intentions (3A) and action responses (4A), while girls focused more on the landscape of consciousness, by elaborating characters sensations, perceptions, communications (3B) and emotional responses (4B) to a social world. In summary, these results support the predictions of this study.
GENERAL DISCUSSION

The results of this study show that, contrary to claims from previous narrative research, preschool children can develop increasingly sophisticated and psychological character representations in the stories they tell. The analyses were based on two typologies of character representation: first, a basic typology that modeled general shifts in character representation, from “actors” to “characters” to “persons,” and second, a more elaborated seven-level typology that modeled more specific transitions in children’s character representations within the more basic typology. In addition, the more elaborated typology of character representation divided the development of the level of “character” into two distinct paths of development (the landscapes of Intention-in-Action [A] and Consciousness [B]) which became integrated at the next level of “person.”

A. The Developmental Model of Character Representation

The results show that changes in 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds’ character representations follow the hypothesized sequence of both the basic and more elaborated typologies. Specifically, 3-year-olds focused mainly on representing “actors” defined by their actions (Level 1) and simple external or public characteristics (Level 2). Four-year-olds began to more frequently represent “characters,” who are defined by basic psychological capacities (Levels 3, 4, and 5). Finally, 5-year-olds began to also represent “persons,” who are defined by their mental representations that became coordinated with actions (Levels 6 and 7). Thus, there was a gradual development of “actors” to “characters” to “persons,” with “persons” comprising 25% of the 5-year-olds’ representations (see Table 1).
While this general progression supports the models outlined for the development of character representation in young children's narratives, boys and girls followed different trajectories of development, which strongly suggests that they develop two different models of personhood in their stories. Interestingly, girls at every age group represented more of their characters at higher levels than boys, indicating that girls' character representations developed earlier than the boys. And while the girls' development followed both the basic and more elaborated typologies closely, the boys followed more the progression outlined by the basic model and less that outlined by the elaborated model. More specifically, 3-year-old girls represented "actors" (Levels 1 and 2) and some simple "characters" (Level 3 only). Four-year-old girls developed toward representing more "characters" (Levels 4 and 5) and a few "persons" (Level 6 only), and 5-year-olds girls developed toward more explicitly intentional "characters" (Level 5) and psychological (Levels 6 and 7) "persons." As the girls gradually increased their complex character representations, they gradually decreased their representations of simpler levels (see Table 4).

In contrast, as boys developed more complex character representations, their simpler representations remained high. Instead of developing along the levels of the elaborated model, boys focused on a subset of the levels. Boys shifted from the 3-year-olds' almost exclusive focus on "actors" (Levels 1 and 2) to 4-year-olds' increasing portrayals of characters' explicit intentions (Level 5) while continuing to represent mainly actors. The 5-year-olds boys began to differentiate their representation of "characters" by portraying them across Levels 3, 4, and 5, and also began to represent
“persons” by using a “Belief-Desire Psychology” (Level 7). Unlike the girls, who first portrayed “persons” knowledge states simply (Level 6) before coordinating them with actions (Level 7), the boys rarely ever mentioned “persons” knowledge states without coordinating them with actions.

This pattern of results reflects the different models of personhood that girls and boys construct through their character representations. As Nicolopoulou (1996b; 1997c) has argued, girls and boys have different intentions for storytelling that are expressed in their collaborative construction of different identities through their storytelling and story-acting activities. Nicolopoulou has demonstrated that these children’s spontaneous, socially situated narratives are vehicles for children’s co-construction of gender identity, and that the processes (and products) of this identity construction are clearly visible in the form and content of girls’ and boys’ narratives. In accord with this argument, I would suggest that the differences in girls’ and boys’ character representations demonstrated in this study may not be due as much to differences in girls’ and boys’ ability to understand the mental worlds of others, rather, these differences are products of girls’ and boys’ construction of different explicit working models of personhood expressed through their different narrative intentions of character representation. This interpretation fits nicely with the picture of development that has been presented. That is, both boys and girls are capable of representing psychologically complex characters but nonetheless follow very different paths of development. Girls gradually shifted away from representing simple “actors” to representing both simply psychological “characters” and thinking “persons” through their interactions with other characters, while boys at every age group
represented a significant portion of “actors” while developing explicitly intentional
“characters” and “persons” whose representational mental states were coordinated with
actions. This pattern suggests that while boys are capable of representing characters at
higher levels, they focus many of their character representations on actions, and that their
higher-level representations of characters’ psychological states are based primarily on
elaborating and motivating sequences of actions. Of course, this interpretation does not
rule out the possibility that girls may develop some types of social understanding earlier
than boys, but situates this possibility within the larger development of children’s explicit
models of personhood.

This conclusion that girls and boys have different narrative intentions that reflect
different underlying conceptions of personhood further explains the pattern of results
found in the comparison of character subtypes in Levels 3 and 4. Girls portrayed more
“characters” in terms of their simple psychological capacities for interaction (Level 3B)
and emotional reactions (Level 4B) and boys represented more characters in terms of
their implicit intentions for acting (Level 3A) and action responses (Level 4A). Like the
pattern of development across the levels of the models, these different developmental
trajectories show that preschool boys and girls construct different models of personhood
in their character representations that correspond to the landscapes of Intention-in-Action
(A) and Consciousness (B). These gender differences show that, although both boys and
girls developed psychological representation of characters in their stories, their specific
trajectories of development differ based on different conceptions of personhood as
revealed through different sets of narrative intentions: a landscape of Intention-in-Action, and a landscape of Consciousness.

B. Addressing the Apparent Time Lag between Narrative and Social Understanding/Theory of Mind Research

While the above patterns of results support the model of character development proposed in this study, this evidence is at odds with the findings of several narrative research studies that claim that young children are not capable of representing psychologically complex characters in their stories. The results of the current study suggest that children's character representations do not lag far behind their achievement of early social understanding and "theories of mind" as has been documented in both naturalistic and experimental studies. In fact, my results suggest that children's explicit expression of their models of personhood through character representations follow their naturalistic and experimental precursors by one year or less, a lag which is far less than the 3 to 5 year gap previously found by narrative research.

As suggested earlier, the key explanation for children's ability to represent psychologically complex character representations during the preschool years (rather than later in middle childhood) lies in the methodology espoused in this study. Unlike previous narrative research studies, which have primarily analyzed stories elicited by experimental techniques such as story-topics, story-stems, and wordless picture books and picture sequences, this study analyzed stories generated as part of children's everyday social life in the classroom. This study argues that when children are allowed and encouraged to tell stories to and for their peers (and in an everyday, ongoing basis), they
are able to construct more sophisticated character representations that more accurately reflect their developing models of persons acting in social worlds. Evidence for this point comes not only from the earlier development of the children's character representations in this study, but also from the above analyses which indicate significant development toward more sophisticated and psychological between school semesters. These results highlight the importance of children's ongoing participation in storytelling and story-acting for their development of sophisticated character representations. In contrast to previous narrative research, this methodological difference encourages children's own intentions for storytelling, and thus, their strategies for representing more complex characters. Furthermore, the typologies developed by this study were aimed at uncovering these strategies. Hence, the results of this study confirm that when properly situated and appropriately analyzed, preschool children's character representations do not lag far behind their earliest displays of social understanding or "theories of mind."

However, there remains an age discrepancy of about one year between children's naturalistic and experimental displays of their developing social understanding and their explicit expression of this knowledge in their spontaneous, fictional narratives. This smaller lag was predicted based on the difference between the decontextualized language skills required for storytelling and the more contextualized, socially-supported nature of everyday discourse and even those of experimental tasks. To recapitulate this argument (made at length in the Introduction), children may display early social understanding in conversations with adults, older siblings, or peers due to the support of the social context. Likewise, experimental tasks may also bootstrap children's abilities to express their
developing understanding of others' minds. However, unlike both of these situations, storytelling is unique in that children must use only words to construct a social world and to situate and manipulate characters within it. This is a significantly more demanding process than either socially-supported conversations or experimentally-supported task requirements.

Similarly to the findings of research on children's early social understanding, some studies on pretend play have shown that children as young as 2 to 3 years of age can begin to attribute some internal states to the toy props they play with (e.g., Mascolo & Chasse, 1998; Tarullo, 1994; Wolf et al., 1984). Analyses of pretend play have often focused on children's individual productions, for which they do not receive support from older siblings, peers, or adults as they do in everyday conversations. However, I argue that children are nonetheless supported by toy props, and furthermore, do not have to construct the same type of self-contextualizing world as they do in narratives. More specifically, when children are given dolls or setting toys to use in enactments, they do not need to verbally construct these items (or persons) with language. Furthermore, children often explicitly identify with the toy dolls in their play, and produce loosely-connected dialogues between characters in which all the details of situation, action, and temporal or causal connections between events is completely missing and "contextualized" with the use of the toy props. While children do not need to focus on narrating a situated, coherent, or understandable story for any listeners in these play monologues, they can become very emotionally involved, with the result that the psychological content of the play enactment may be quite sophisticated, though language
of the monologue does not rise to the level of truly decontextualized narratives. Paley (1990) has made a similar observation in the comparison of her students' sociodramatic play and narratives, and suggested that preschool children’s fantasy is first expressed in their pretend play, and later explicitly expressed and formalized in children’s storytelling and story-acting. In addition to these differences in levels of independent, explicit, and decontextualized language necessary for play vs. narratives, it should also be noted that most young children engage in pretend play both by themselves and with others on an everyday basis, while storytelling is often a less frequent activity, for which children need to develop expertise in order to represent psychologically complex characters.

Together, the more contextualized, simpler task demands of pretend play, along with the greater possibility for children’s development of expertise in this domain, and the resultant private, highly emotional engagement of children in it, explains the evidence that children can attribute psychological states to the dolls in their pretend play at about the same time as they talk about them in everyday conversations, but prior to the developments in children’s story character representations as outline above. In short, only storytelling requires young children to verbally construct social worlds and to explicitly represent their conception of persons acting in those social worlds. (This argument coincides with Nelson et al.’s [1998] point that narrative constructions are better representations of children’s “theories of mind” than their interpretations of the events in Theory-of-Mind tasks.) Thus, when young children are encouraged to participate in everyday, socially-situated storytelling and story-acting, their narrative
productions serve as a unique source of information about how children understand persons and their actions and relations in the world.

C. Implications for Social Cognition Research

So far, I have argued that children's representations of characters in their spontaneous, socially-situated narratives develop later than in their early, contextualized expressions of social understanding. Because young children's character representations are independent and explicit expressions of their developing models of personhood, it follows that research on children's early (contextualized or implicit) social understanding is inadequate to capture its development. In contrast, the typologies presented in this study capture the development of children's explicit integrations of persons' actions, intentions, and psychological states within a social world.

In the typologies proposed by this study, the development of "actors" to "characters" represents a shift from models of personhood that include only basic representations of actions (Level 1) and simple characteristics (Level 2) to models in which personhood is first viewed as intentional and psychological in a very basic way. At the "actor" level, social interaction can only be accomplished by acting on or with another actor. However, at the "character" level, actions, reactions, and interactions are increasingly imbued with intentionality, or purpose (Level 3A, 4A, and 5A), and characters first begin to interact in their worlds using basic-level psychological processes: that is, first characters see, feel, and communicate (Level 3B), later characters can have emotional reactions to what they experience (Level 4B), and finally, their intentions are experienced as explicit internal states, like desires (Level 5B).
In particular, the basic category of “character” was differentiated into the landscape of Intention-in-Action, which develops in three levels: from implicit intentionality (3A) to reactive intentionality (4A) to explicit intentionality (5A). This conceptualization of children’s developing representations of characters’ intentionality has not been considered by any existing developmental or narrative research. Thus, I based this progression on Searle’s (1983) philosophical account of levels of “Intentionality.” The results of this study show that this progression was followed, but only by the girls. Boys, on the other hand, focused more on representing characters’ explicit intentions (5A) before gradually increasing their representations of their implicit intentions (3A) or reactive intentionality (4A). Once again, these differences can be explained by boys’ and girls’ different intentions in storytelling. Nonetheless, the typology of development from implicit intention (3A) to reactive intention (4A) to explicit intention (5A) is an important, though at this point tentative, contribution of the current study toward the conceptualization of children’s developing understanding of intentionality.

In contrast to the inadequacies of developmental research to model the lower levels of children’s character representations, the later transition from “characters” to “persons” fits well with the documented transitions in children’s development of “representational theories of mind.” These models assume that children understand that persons are Intentional beings, and focus on children’s understanding that others have representational mental states that mediate their actions. While the children’s representations of characters’ mental states and activities sometimes take the stereotypic
form of false-belief paradigms, they also can portray persons’ mental representations within dialogues, or mental activities like planning, or imagining. That is, children may use their theories of mind to represent everyday uses of mental representations in various social contexts. In general, however, the basic typology provided by Theory-of-Mind models was useful in that it mapped out the development of children’s conceptions of persons as psychological beings.

The analysis of children’s use of their increasingly sophisticated “theories of mind” to represent characters’ mental states supported a broad shift from children’s use of a “Simple Desire Psychology” (Levels 3, 4, and 5) to “Belief-Desire Psychology” or “representational theory of mind” (Level 7) in their narratives. This result suggests that children’s development of character representations corresponds roughly to, and confirms the most basic transitions mapped out by Theory-of-Mind research. However, the intermediate level of development, the “Desire-Belief Psychology” (Level 6) did not receive strong support as an independent stage. In particular, while both boys and girls represented some persons’ thoughts and beliefs in isolation before they were able to coordinate them with actions, only the girls had a sizable proportion of Level 6 character representations. This gender difference may once again reflect girls’ overall tendency to portray characters’ psychological worlds in a wide variety of ways, and boys’ tendency to use characters’ psychological states to motivate actions. If this is the case, boys in general should not produce representations of characters’ mental states without relating them to actions (Level 6) and should move directly from using a “Simple Desire
Psychology" to a "Belief-Desire Psychology" in their character representations. This is exactly the pattern of observed results.

V. Summary

The purpose of this study was to map out the development of young children's representations of characters in their stories. Contrary to the findings of past narrative research, this study demonstrates that preschool children's character representations develop from simplistic accounts of actions to more fully psychological portrayals. This finding is dependent on two major contributions to narrative development research: first, this study analyzed stories generated by children's participation in an everyday, socially-situated storytelling and story-acting activity that promotes children's development of spontaneous narratives that are far more sophisticated than the experimentally-elicited stories analyzed by most narrative research. Second, prompted by initial evidence that preschoolers' character representations produced through this activity were far more sophisticated than those in experimentally-elicited stories, this study proposed and supported a theoretically-motivated, differentiated, and refined typology that captures young children's developing strategies for character representations in their narratives.

This study has argued that children's character representations are an important vehicle for their construction and expression of explicit working models of persons as agents in social worlds. The typology of character representation presented was based on this argument. Analyses of 3-, 4-, and 5-year-old boys' and girls' character representations showed that a basic typology describes the general pattern of development: children first represent simple "actors," then they begin to flesh out
"characters" with basic psychological capacities, before they can begin to represent
"persons" who have mental representations which become coordinated with actions. In
addition to this general progression, the more elaborated typology of character
representation captured differences in boys’ and girls’ timing and focus of development
that reveal two different underlying conceptions of personhood. That is, boys’ character
representations elaborated a landscape of Intention-in-Action, whereas girls developed a
landscape of Consciousness.

Importantly, neither the general progression of development, nor the more
detailed conceptions of personhood that this study has uncovered in preschool children’s
narratives have been previously found. Therefore, this study has important implications
for narrative research, suggesting that more research should focus on children’s everyday,
socially-situated narratives as a source for better understanding children’s narrative
development. Secondly, this study also points to the importance of using models of
narrative development that seek to uncover children’s own strategies and intentions for
storytelling rather than analyzing children’s narratives only according to adult models. In
addition, the findings of this study are also important for research on children’s social
understanding. Children’s character representations are explicit expressions of their
developing models of personhood, and thus are important sources of information about
how children think about themselves and others as agents in social worlds. Furthermore,
this study argues that children use socially-situated storytelling to collaboratively
construct these explicit working models of personhood; therefore, children’s character
representations can be viewed both as tools for the construction of social understanding and as the works-in-progress of this constructive process.
REFERENCES


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## APPENDIX: Schematic Overview of Character Representation Levels

### ACTORS

**Level 1. Action Only:** Actors perform actions and are acted upon. Actors are not further described.

**Level 2. External Characteristics:** Actors are fleshed out by externally identifiable characteristics such as physical traits, names, and possessions.

### CHARACTERS

Characters begin to be individuated as entities with basic psychological capacities through two types:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A. Intention-in-Action</th>
<th>B. Consciousness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 3A. Implicit Intention:</strong> Characters’ actions are marked as agentive.</td>
<td><strong>Level 3B. Simple Interactional Capacity:</strong> Characters see, feel and communicate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 4A. Reactive Intentionality:</strong> Characters’ reactions are linked to causes by “so” and “because.”</td>
<td><strong>Level 4B. Emotional Reaction:</strong> Characters have emotional reactions and are evaluative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 5A. Explicit Intention-in-Action:</strong> Characters’ explicit intentions are marked by “tried to,” goal-oriented action</td>
<td><strong>Level 5B. Desire States:</strong> Characters have explicit psychological desire states such as wants and wishes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### PERSONS

Represented as entities motivated by higher psychological capacities; integration of Intention-in-Action and Consciousness resulting in a representational theory of mind.

**Level 6. Desire-Belief:** Persons have desires and beliefs, but their actions are still motivated by their desires alone, not by thoughts or beliefs.

**Level 7. Belief-Desire:** Persons’ beliefs and desires are coordinated to motivate their actions. False beliefs are also represented at this level.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Actors</th>
<th>Characters</th>
<th>Persons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3-year-olds</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-year-olds</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-year-olds</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1

Mean Proportions (%) of Basic Character Categories by 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds, Averaged over Gender and Semesters
Table 2

Mean Proportions (%) of Basic Character Categories by 3-, 4-, and 5-year-old Girls and Boys, by Semester

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Actors</th>
<th>Characters</th>
<th>Persons</th>
<th>Fall</th>
<th>Spring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>Spring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-year-olds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-year-olds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-year-olds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Table 3

Mean Proportions (%) of Elaborated Character Representation Levels by 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds, Averaged over Gender and Semesters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character Representation Level</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age Group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-year-olds</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-year-olds</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-year-olds</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4

Mean Proportions (%) of Elaborated Character Representation Levels by 3-, 4-, and 5-year-old Girls and Boys, Averaged over Semesters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character Representation Level</th>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3-year-olds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-year-olds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-year-olds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5

Mean Proportions (%) of Theory-of-Mind Psychologies by 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds, Averaged over Gender and Semesters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>TOM0</th>
<th>TOM1</th>
<th>TOM2</th>
<th>TOM3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3-year-olds</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-year-olds</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-year-olds</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. TOM0 = No "theory of mind," TOM1 = "Simple Desire Psychology,",
TOM2 = "Desire-Belief Psychology," and TOM3 = "Belief-Desire Psychology."
Table 6

Mean Proportions (%) of “Theory of Mind” Psychologies by 3-, 4-, and 5-year-old Girls and Boys, by Semester

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Fall</th>
<th>Spring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TOM0</td>
<td>TOM1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-year-olds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
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<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>4-year-olds</td>
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<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
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<td>33</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-year-olds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. TOM0 = No “theory of mind,” TOM1 = “Simple Desire Psychology,” TOM2 = “Desire-Belief Psychology,” and TOM3 = “Belief-Desire Psychology.”
Table 7

Mean Proportions (%) of "Character" Levels and Types by 3-, 4-, and 5-year-old Girls and Boys, Averaged over Semesters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Level 3</th>
<th>Level 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A  B  AB</td>
<td>A  B  AB</td>
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<td>Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>8 8 4</td>
<td>0 2 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>3 2 1</td>
<td>1 0 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-year-olds</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>4 14 5</td>
<td>2 30 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>7 1 1</td>
<td>1 1 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-year-olds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>1 13 2</td>
<td>3 11 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>4 5 3</td>
<td>7 3 0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. A = Action, B = Consciousness, and AB = Mixed
Figure 1. 3-Year-Old Girls: Proportions of stories per child at each level of Character Representation (Basic Categories), with group mean.
Figure 2. 4-Year-Old Girls: Proportions of stories per child at each level of Character Representation (Basic Categories), with group mean.
Figure 3. 5-Year-Old Girls: Proportions of stories per child at each level of Character Representation (Basic Categories), with group mean.
Figure 4. 3-Year-Old Boys: Proportions of stories per child at each level of Character Representation (Basic Categories), with group mean.
Figure 5. 4-Year-Old Boys: Proportions of stories per child at each level of Character Representation (Basic Categories), with group mean.
Figure 6. 5-Year-Old Boys: Proportions of stories per child at each level of Character Representation (Basic Categories), with group mean.
Figure 7. Mean Proportions (%) of Basic Level Character Representations by 3-, 4-, and 5-Year-Old Girls and Boys, Fall Semester.
Figure 8. Mean Proportions (%) of Basic Level Character Representations by 3-, 4-, and 5-Year-Old Girls and Boys, Spring Semester.
Figure 9. 3-Year-Old Girls: Proportions of stories per child at each level of Character Representation (Elaborated Categories), with group mean.
Figure 10. 4-Year-Old Girls: Proportions of stories per child at each level of Character Representation (Elaborated Categories), with group mean.
Figure 11. 5-Year-Old Girls: Proportions of stories per child at each level of Character Representation (Elaborated Categories), with group mean.
Figure 12. 3-Year-Old Boys: Proportions of stories per child at each level of Character Representation (Elaborated Categories), with group mean.
Figure 13. 4-Year-Old Boys: Proportions of stories per child at each level of Character Representation (Elaborated Categories), with group mean.
Figure 14. 5-Year-Old Boys: Proportions of stories per child at each level of Character Representation (Elaborated Categories), with group mean.
Figure 15. Mean Proportions (%) of Elaborated Level Character Representations by 3-, 4-, and 5-Year-Old Girls and Boys, Averaged Over Semesters.
Figure 16. Mean Proportions (%) of Theory-of-Mind Psychologies by 3-, 4-, and 5-Year-Old Girls and Boys, Fall Semester.
Figure 17. Mean Proportions (%) of Theory-of-Mind Psychologies by 3-, 4-, and 5-Year-Old Girls and Boys, Spring Semester.
Figure 18. Mean Proportions (%) of “Character” Subtypes by 3-, 4-, and 5-Year-Old Girls and Boys, averaged over semesters.
PERSONAL BACKGROUND
Born on June 14, 1976 to John and Jennifer Skrabak in Lancaster, PA

EDUCATION
1996 - 1999 Lehigh University Bethlehem, PA
M.S. Psychology, Concentration: Cognitive Development

1994-1996 Lancaster Bible College Lancaster, PA
B.S. Bible, Counseling
Graduated with honors
Member of Counseling Club, College Choir, Junior Class Treasurer.

1992 - 1995 West Chester University West Chester, PA
Major: Chemistry-Biology
Received Freshman Chemistry Scholarship

EMPLOYMENT AND TEACHING EXPERIENCE
Teaching Assistantships, Lehigh University:
Child Development (PSYC 107)
Directed Study In Child Development (PSYC 106)
Experimental Psychology (PSYC 210)

Research Assistantship, Lehigh University
Worked under A. Nicolopoulou, Spencer Foundation Grant

DEPARTMENTAL INVOLVEMENT
1997-1998, Graduate Student Council Representative
Spring, 1999, Coordinator, research brownbag meetings

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS
development in young children's narratives. Poster Presented at
the Annual Meeting of the Jean Piaget Society, Chicago.

Nicolopoulou, A., & Richner, E. S. (April, 1999). From Actors to
Character to Persons: The development of Character
Representation in Young Children's Narratives. Poster
Presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research
in Child Development, Albuquerque.