Chapter 8

DUALLING MEMORIES: TWINSHIP AND THE DISEMBODIMENT OF IDENTITY

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Memory is an intriguing, complex and multifaceted phenomenon. Memory is poetically depicted as subjective time travel (Tulving 2002), the present of things past (Rapport and Overing 2000: 7), a mental mirror (Kotre 1995), a labyrinth that takes a different turning each time we come back to it (Teski and Climo 1995: 1), and a conundrum of record and resource (Boyarin 1994, Kotre 1995). More prosaically, memory is depicted as everyday forms of social process and action (Garro 2001). Memories also link us to our earlier selves (Lowenthal 1985). Themes of identity, person and selfhood permeate the memory literature (Fivush et al. 1995). Memories impart interesting or important information about events that bridge people’s inside and outside worlds (Mageo 2001).

This chapter draws on both the more exotic and the more prosaic aspects of memory. As anthropologists and as identical twins, we present an analysis of memories among two pairs of adult, identical twins that focuses on some of the early developmental identity challenges faced by twins. In the popular science and academic literature identical twins are depicted as truncated or compromised selves, whose embodied likeness and mutuality impede the development of their individuality. As such, they are placed on fault lines (Conklin and Morgan 1995) of Usan constructions of embodied identity and self and personhood.1,2 We argue, however, that, although identical twins may face some unique challenges as they construct and legitimise their identities, presentation and analysis of their memory narratives show that twins’(s) self-styling develops in accordance with cultural expectations. Nevertheless, the dual, positioned and dialogically co-constructed personal memory narratives of identical twin pairs do provide an interesting lens through which to view memory
as a form of social action (and interaction) embedded in wider cultural meaning systems.

Although it is probably not what they had in mind, ours is truly an exercise in what Collins and Gallinat (this volume) term ‘double vision’. In its minimalist guise, a twin dyad, we explore thresholds marking individual, personal memory from collective memory. As identical twins ourselves, we have first-hand, everyday and lifetime knowledge of the juxtaposed, embodied, existential worlds of identical twins. In what follows, our own memories and experience, combined with those of other sets of twins, become a resource for putting the I and the we back into the doing and writing of ethnography.

**Doubling Visions: Twinship and Twinscapes**

As anthropologists and identical twins, we for the first time in our anthropological careers play the native card and become subjects and objects of the anthropological gaze as well as subjects and objects of our mutual and individual memories. We eclectically draw from and combine perspectives of person-centred (LeVine 1982; Hollan 2001) minimalist (Rosaldo 1986; Jackson 1998) and identification (Visweswaran 1994; Behar 1996) ethnography with perspectives of autobiographical (Bartlett 1932; Rubin 1986, 1996) and co-biographical memory (Abelson and Schank 1995; Fivush et al. 1995) theorists. We focus on memory both as a form of social action (Garro 2001) and as a form of narrative or memory story (Baumeister and Newman 1995; Bruner and Fletscher Feldman 1996).

Memory lies at the very heart of reflexivity (Behar 1996). The practice of reflexive self-ethnography or identification theory desegregates boundaries between self and other (Visweswaran 1994; Behar 1996). As twins talking to twins about their lives as twins, we not only bring our subjects to authorship but also draw on our shared worlds and an intimate knowledge of each other to reflect on our own self-makings. We are, at the same time, researchers and informants. The very process of researching and writing this piece is a dialogue of self and other that enacts the very dynamic we seek to analyse. Our goal is not to expose our own vulnerabilities (Behar 1996), but to make a contribution to the memory literature at three of its weaker links. These are: (1) memory as material and embodied; (2) memory as social action and interaction; and (3) memory as shaped by social and cultural processes (Garro 2001; Hollan 2001).

Any discussion of identical twins’ (s) memories must take into account the embodied and material aspects of memory. With our informants we have a shared, embodied, dyadic, experience of growing up with a most significant other who shares your face and looks just like you. Others,
including your own family members, either confuse your two embodied, personal identities or conflate them into a unit identity such as 'the Davis twins'. We use the term twinship to characterise the twin bond or intimate, social and psychological relationship between twins. Twinship, as we use it entails an insider’s (within the twin dyad) perspective. Yet the experience of being twins is not only shaped by twinship. The wider social and cultural contexts also shape the lived worlds of twins. Your twinship may exist in a wider world that views twins as genetic freaks of nature, as good and evil, as good for advertising, etc. These meanings and beliefs or cultural models of identical twins have practical implications concerning what is expected of you and how you live your life. We use the term twinscapes to refer to the singleton (non-twin) view of twins, as well as to twins as situated in the wider, cultural domains of social practice and meaning.

Background: Intertwining Memories

Data for this study come from three narrative-based case studies in which twins reminisce about their childhood as twins. The first case features Tina and Gina, identical twins we interviewed at the 2003 Twinsburg Twin Festival. The second and third cases turn the ethnographic lens on ourselves. Case two comes from our Twinsburg research assistant’s (Cody 2004) interview of us. While the first two cases capture the more exotic aspects of memory, twinship and Usan twinscapes, case three draws from our own more mundane, everyday memories and comes from narratives explicitly prepared for the purposes of this chapter. Before our personal travels down memory lane begin, however, we take a short detour through the relevant memory literature in order to give our twin memory project an academic as well as a reflexive tone.

The terms autobiographical or personal memory refer to the capacity of individuals to recollect their everyday ordinary lives (Bartlett 1932; Baddeley 1992; Rubin 1996; Garro 2001). Autobiographical memory can be episodic, as in the recall of a single event, or episodic (Kotre 1995), as in memory of extended situations or typical patterns (Neisser 1988; Garro 2001). Self-stories as a form of autobiographical memories are viewed as the essence of self, self-theories, self-reference, self-definition and identity. Self-stories answer the question of who we are (Rubin 1986, 1996; Kotre 1995: 103) and provide information about our lives from which we are likely to make judgements about our own personalities (Singer and Salovey 1993).

The minimal components of autobiographical and personal memory include verbal narrative, visual imagery and emotion (Bruner and
Autobiographical memories are constructed through narrative (Abelson and Schank 1995; Kotre 1995; Kirmayer 1996; Rubin 1996). Memory creates narratives and narrative creates memory. Narrative encodes possible ways of knowing and acting, as well as a philosophy of life integral to what a person brings to self-definition or being and acting in the world (Bruner 1994; Abelson and Schank 1995; Baumeister and Newman 1995; Garro 2001). As forms of social action and interaction (Fivush et al. 1995; Garro 2001), personal memories are situated and positioned. They have a location and a point of view (Abelson and Schank 1995; Garro 2001). Autobiographical memories have an audience and enact personal motivations and agendas (Baumeister and Newman 1995). Personal memory is acquired through embodied experiences actually felt by the person and associated with movement and sensory perception (Barclay 1993; Hollan 2001).

As twins and anthropologists, we have four major issues with the literature on autobiographical memory. First, the authoring self and the self described in personal or autobiographical memories are an individual self. Few memory studies feature a dyadic component. Even when terms such as co-constructed and co-biographical (Barclay 1993; Abelson and Schank 1995; Fivush et al. 1995) are used to refer to the recounting of events with others who shared the experience, a standard Western sense of self is assumed. In Western folk theory this is an a priori, essential, embodied, bounded, unique self that is set in contrast to other embodied, bounded, unique selves (Bruner 1994). Secondly, even though memory is recognised as having multiple actors (Conway 1996), the socially textured, interactive dimension of personal memory – as felt relations to others (Haraway 1991), social interactions and social acts used to accomplish everyday, mundane, tasks in the real world (Rubin 1996; Garro 2001) – is rarely addressed. Thirdly, with the exception of memory and embodiment of trauma (Antze and Lambek, 1996, Young 1996), the body as a focus of analytic attention in the memory literature lies largely within the neuro- and cognitive science literature (Tulving 2002). One finds little discussion of how experience is embodied or how the senses and perceptions of the body are culturally elaborated into the experience of self and other (Hollan 2001). This point about culture brings us to a final, fourth, critique of the memory literature. Although personal memories are recognised to be embedded in wider cultural institutions, social relations and meaning systems, little attention is given to explaining how cultural factors come into play or to explicating what happens when there are contradictions between personal experience and expectations based on shared cultural models (Bruner 1990; Antze and Lambek 1996; Rapport and Overing 2000).

The following analysis of identical twins’ (s) identity narratives supplies a corrective to these gaps in the memory literature. The three cases that
follow are examples of joint reminiscing. They are dyadic, dialogic, co-constructed and co-biographical. Western constructions of selfhood are challenged. Twin selves are less bounded and ego-centred. Their lived worlds are intimately and intensely shared. Among identical twins in Usan culture, a range of potentials for self constructions, past and present, are brought into play (Goffman 1959; Markus and Nurius 1986; Gergen 1994). Instead of self-defining memories (Singer and Salovey 1993), we prefer the terms self-styling or mutually self-styling memories, since they raise situational issues of what self is being defined, by whom, for whom and to what effect or purpose. Our notion of social action both is interactive and spans different time frames. By focusing on the microcosm of twinship and relating it to the notion of twinscapes we hope to put some ethnographic meat on the bones of culture and memory theory. First, however, we need a further word about cultural contradictions and the embodiment of identity in identical twins.

When Connerton (1989) commented on the importance of bodily practice and habits of the body in the formation of collective identity, he was not thinking of identical twins. Neither was Csordas (1990, 1999) when he used the term embodiment to refer to the body as the existential condition of life, the site of apprehension of the world and the subjective and intersubjective ground of experience. Certainly Proust (cited in Connerton 1989: 2) was not thinking of identical twins when he notes that on seeing someone we know we pack the physical outline of the person we see with all the notions we have already formed about them. Identical twins bring a new twist to the notion of embodied identities. Identical twins challenge us to figure bodies from the inside out as well as the outside in. Growing up within the twinscapes of Usan culture, identical twins face cultural contradictions about embodied identity and challenges for self-styling that are not experienced by singletons. They face a development task of interactively disembodying (or detwining or splitting) their identity(ies). Identical twins, particularly in early childhood, must find their own individuality. They must disembodify their collective and shared identity to meet the self-development demands or expectations of the wider culture. Within the transcendent and interconnected ‘we-ness’ of twinship, each twin has to disembodify her identity by communicating to others that ‘I’ am more than just someone who looks like her. We call this dualling.

**Dualling Memories**

When we originally conceptualised this chapter, we felt quite clever in arriving at the title dualling memories as a fairly straightforward play on
words. We are not so sure of that any more. Dualling implies a collaborative, co-biographical effort, shared experiences and a common stock of knowledge (Schuchat 1995). Dualling implies past and present. The homonyms of dualling/duelling also refer to memory as positioned social interaction and knowledge. This encapsulates the notion that memories may be contested. Through the dyadic lens of twinship, we want to capture, within narratives, the process in which the single becomes dualed and the process in which the dualled becomes single. Although twins simultaneously share an immense amount of space and experiences, as the three cases show, it is more than propinquity that binds us together. Twins’ collective identity, mutuality and permeability of self-boundaries challenge Western dualistic epistemologies of self and other as well as mind and body. Yet self-styling among twins also includes disembodiment or dualling of identity, a closing off of the body boundaries from those of the other twin. Twins’ identities are thus based on a duality of being the same and being different. Dualling in this chapter also implies an academic co-authorship, where we are both researcher and informant. As fifty-nine-year-old twins, with the help of Tina and Gina, we find ourselves, as co-authors, in it together again, mining our collective and individual memories, ‘we-ing’ and ‘I-ing’ ethnography as we re-imagine self and other from yet another standpoint of life.

Childhood Memories of Being, Being There and Becoming Different

We use three cases studies to explore how childhood memory narratives, as self-styling, embodied forms of social interaction, are embedded within both the twin dyad and the wider Usan cultural context. Each case illustrates a different approach to what we have called the dualling and disembodiment of identity. The cases are examples of a living narrative (Ochs and Capps 2001: 2). They are ordinary social exchanges (rather than polished narratives) in which interlocutors build accounts of life events without knowing where they will lead. A critical feature of narrative is that it forges links between the exceptional and the ordinary (Bruner 1990) or rationalizes puzzling elements to render material acceptable and understandable (Garro 2001). Twins, because they lie on the fault lines of Usan person and selfhood are a particularly suitable subject for a narrative analysis of how culture shapes memory as it contributes to what a person cares about, pays attention to and remembers (Garro 2001).

When interviewing twins at Twinsburg, we were frequently told stories of early childhood identity confusion. We were also told ‘favourite twin
stories’ about how identical twins colluded with each other to play tricks on those (parents, teachers, friends) who could not tell them apart. In mutually reminiscing about their lives together, twins’ autobiographical memories also included a ‘split episode’ or an individuating event such as getting married or leaving home for work or school. The three cases that follow illustrate these themes. In the first, Gina and Tina describe a traumatic emergency room incident where their remembered identities become conflated in an imagined reality of ‘being there’. In the second, our Twinsburg research assistant, Kristi Cody (2004), asks us each individually for our first memories. She gets two ‘blanket stories’, about shared worlds and trickster twins. The first two cases embody what are everyday commonplace memories among twins, but their mystical (or pathological) content also reifies the more exotic twinscapes of Usan culture. The third example also comes from ourselves. Case three is a kind of split story where we reminisce about two very different ponies that entered our life worlds around age seven. We describe how our ponies enabled the disembodiment of a collective identity and set us on the path to more individual or individuated identities. Together the three cases show how life is situated and contextualised and identities are improvised from the resources at hand (Holland et al. 1998).

In writing this chapter, we subject our own memories (and those of Tina and Gina), as twins, to several lines of analysis that reach beyond our previous fieldwork experiences or training in anthropology. We feel secure in our expertise as twins and our ability to share and relive our own experiential worlds of being twins with other sets of twins. The phenomenon of memory and literature on memory, however, constitutes uncharted territory for us. Participating in this project we have seen numerous ways that anthropology can contribute to the memory literature. Each case study, although thematically interrelated, as cultural analysis, will engage the memory literature in a slightly different way.

**Case 1: On Body, Being and Being There**

The past is what you remember, imagine you remember, convince yourself you remember or pretend to remember. (Harold Pinter, quoted in Adler 1974: 462)

Case 1 comes from our interview with Tina and Gina. At the time of our interview (2003), Tina and Gina were thirty-six years old. Gina recently received her Ph.D. and Tina has an MA. They are both college instructors and work at different schools of business. Each twin is married with children and they currently live within six miles of each other. They are
very close and both feel that they are at a stage of their life where they have a special appreciation of being twins. Their memory narrative illustrates what Kotre (1995) describes as the curious mix of past and present and memory and imagination. The following narrative comes as an answer to our final interview question: 'Tell us some of your favourite twin stories.' Gina and Tina regard this as a fairly typical twin story. The story enacts a form of intragroup (both within the dyad and among twins) memory that validates the status quo (Mageo 2001) of twinship and marks them off from the singleton-dominated world. It is an experience that places twins on the fault lines of Usan culture in that it raises some interesting issues about selfhood and the embodiment of memory.

Tina: When I was three or four ...
Gina: ... two or three ...
Tina: three, let's agree on three. OK? We were playing hide-and-seek, and our brother jumped out and I put my hand through a china cabinet. Just, you know, a piece of plate glass there. I push my hand through and had to go to the emergency room. [I] Had blood all over. She [Gina] had a tear on her shirt and it had blood on it. She kept crying that her shirt was bleeding. I had cut three major arteries, but she says her shirt was bleeding and she was crying. Here, I was in the hospital and they were stitching me up. I'm lying there and I'm looking over there and I see Gina. And I say, Mom, I just want Gina. Can't I go over to Gina? Can't they sew it up over there with her?
Gina: And I was watching her and she was very upset.
Tina: And, when we were nine or ten, we were talking about it. Oh! Do you remember?
Gina: I remember them standing you up and I said she has glass in her feet. She's got glass in her feet.
Tina: They kept standing me up and I'd cry.
Gina: She'd cry.
Tina: They would stand me up again and I'd say it hurts; it hurts; it hurts.
Gina: And I said she has glass in her feet.
Tina: They took the glass out and put two big Band-Aids there.
Gina: She's got big scars there.
Tina: When we were nine or ten we were talking about it. I wanted her there and had my eye on her when they put in the stitches.
Gina: I watched them do it. But then we were thinking this is kind of weird. Why would they let me watch them sewing her up? We were older than that though, I think we were older than that (nine or ten). I think we were eleven or twelve when we were telling that, 'cause I was saying 'I think that's pretty sick. They were letting me watch them sewing her up.' And our Mom goes, 'You weren't even in the same room, Gina. You were out in the waiting room crying hysterically. There was no way they would let you in there. You were not there.'
Tina: So that was our only twin psychic type of thing, which we don’t buy into. Ha Ha.

Gina: I still have the visual memory of the seat, everything, watching her. It was real. That’s our only weird thing.

Tina and Gina’s memories of the trauma and of each other in the emergency room, although not veridical, are vivid and real. Their memory narrative positions them both as apart and together. The narrative is dualling in the sense that it is co-told and boundaries of self and other in terms of embodied experiences are permeable. The narrative is duelling as fact and fiction are played against each other, as are memories from different life stages and the mother’s versus the twins’ memory of the event. This memory contains elements of self and not self, because the narrative story is both self and twin/twinship defining. Embedded within the narrative are embodied dualities of connectedness and separation. On the one hand, this living narrative supports Usan twinscapes of identical twins having overlapping, confused or conflated identities and a more exotic but also stereotypical notion about a mystical, embodied, psychic, unity of the twins (Johnson 2004). The more psychologically inclined (Schave and Ciriello 1983) might argue that Tina and Gina’s confused self-styling narrative represents some unresolved identity conflict or failures in individuation. On the other hand, Tina and Gina accept the rationale that Gina would not have been admitted to the emergency room and state that in later childhood they came to accept their mother’s version of events. Nevertheless, the memory remains real to both of them.

Gina and Tina’s case offers some interesting challenges to the memory literature. According to Lowenthal (1985: 195) memories can never fully be shared: ‘For someone else to know about my memory is not the same as having it. We can no more share a memory then we could share a pain.’ Yet, in their narrative and in their memories, Tina and Gina do share (as real) Tina’s pain and frightening experience. Even accepting the mother’s version, if not in the emergency room, Gina was crying hysterically in the waiting room. Their emotional distress was mutual and interactive. Tina and Gina both felt it was natural for Tina’s distress to also be felt and embodied in Gina. The twin twist (as a twin memory story) here comes not from confusion of identity, as Gina knows she is Gina and Tina knows she is Tina, but from the shared distress as well as the vivid sharing of the false emergency room memory, which features the disembodiment of Gina (in the sense that she is in two places at the same time). The point they make is that twinship is a special relationship, a sense of attachment, empathetic connectedness and sharing that conflates or joins both mind and body and self and other. Yet also embedded within this story of shared worlds and empathetic connectedness is a story of discovering
difference, individuality and bodily boundaries. Tina and Gina do not buy into an extrasensory perception (ESP) explanation. At an older age they come to re-examine this memory and concur with their mother’s version of what actually happened. Twins with their shared worlds and identical faces and embodied likeness have identity challenges that are not ‘faced’ by those in the singleton world. Nevertheless, within their short narrative, their dyadic bond becomes re-contextualised in the wider cultural milieu that stresses the importance of an embodied, bounded, individual self.

Case 2: Trickster Twins and Blanket Identities

Intragroup memories provide a kind of protective shell that solidifies group identity (in contradiction to others) and represents a unified front to the world. (Mageo 2001: 13)

According to Bruner and Fleischer Feldman (1996: 292), autobiographical memory creates a life story around a self under particular constraints that are shared with no one else. Memory is subjective in that it is uniquely ours. Even memory among those in a close dyadic relationship (husband and wife) shows a kind of Rashomon effect and becomes told as two different stories. Yet because of their situated closeness in early childhood, as in the case of Tina and Gina, twin memories evoke an enormous archive of shared experiences. While interviewing twins at Twinsburg we found that among the personal fables (Kotre 1995) of twinship were first memories as twins. There seems to be a folk theory among twins that because they spent so much time in each other’s company, they can remember things from an earlier age than singletons. Early childhood memory is a topic of considerable debate. Our ‘blanket case’ addresses issues of primary and secondary memory.

Since we were identical twins interviewing identical twins at Twinsburg, we thought it appropriate to be subjects of our study. Our student research assistant, Kristi Cody (2004), interviewed us, using her own interview schedule. She asked us, without consulting each other, to email her a short narrative of our respective first memories of being a twin. These memories came as a big surprise to the three of us and make up case 2. The similarities of our memories will be familiar to twins or to those close to them. It is a kind of twin trickster tale where twins collude in using their physical similarity to switch identities or confuse others. But sometimes it is just the two twins collectively occupying the same space at the same time, sharing agency or acting together, positioned as a unit that anchors the tale.
Dorothy: This question is not easy to answer. I have many early memories of stuff that Dona and I did together. I remember playing hide and seek under a blanket with Dona. Dona and I are hiding from our older sister, Pam. We were young enough to think that she really didn’t know where we were when the blanket was over us … whatever Piaget development stage that is???

Dona: When we were babies, Dorothy and I shared a room. We each had cribs on opposite sides of the room. There was a big space in the middle. Our Mother must have put us down to play because I remember being on the floor with lots of blankets. I think we were crawling but not walking. My older sister, Pam, brought her red haired friend to see us. They opened the door to see us. Dorothy and I were hiding under the blanket. We were laughing because they couldn’t see us. They made a big deal about ‘where could the twins be, where are they?’ We thought we had fooled them. It was a conscious act of collaboration and planning even if we were stupid enough (speaking in a Piaget sense) to think that no one knew that the two giggling lumps under the blanket were us.

Our written memory (or should we say memories?) of being together under the blanket contains a vivid imagery of a single incident. This is called a flashbulb (Fitzgerald 1988) or flashback (Rubin 1996) memory. According to Kotre (1995), first memories exist on the border between memory and dream and there is no research that can tell one from the other. Most memory experts assert that language must precede memory (Hudson 1986) and memory for those less than three years old is nonexistent. As ‘crawlers’, for us it is therefore unlikely that this could be a direct memory. Kotre (1995) like the two of us, refers to Piaget, stating that it is difficult, if not impossible, to recover memory through the eyes of a child who has not yet acquired the cognitive skills we reflexively take for granted as adults. Among these skills is the ability to employ conventional narrative structures for memory. Although we cannot remember being told this as a story, it is most probably a secondary memory or a version of a story told to or about us by family members, or what Lowenthal (1985: 96) refers to as ‘the remembering things from the remembering of them’. Even if this was a family story, we both sincerely doubt that it had a Piaget caveat in the family’s telling. Perhaps the blanket case shows us that you can take the memory out of the anthropologist but cannot take the anthropologist out of the memory.

Earliest memories as personal fables or myth makers, however, do establish the place where you began (Kotre 1995). They reveal a person’s attitude towards self and others and life in general (Huyghe 1985). Our twin trickster story is not a story of confused identity; it is a story of being in it together. The blanket is our protective shell. It unites us in our own environment. Dualling here means that both first memories are the same.
But it also means that the memory narrative co-embodies and unties us and at the same time it closes us off from the outside world. We are the giggling lump under the blanket. Our memory entails a sense of self and other as collaborators in action but also a sense of self and other as insiders, under the blanket, and outsiders, our mother, our older sister and her friend. Twinship for us was in many ways a joint enterprise. Like many twins, we shared a room, we shared a life and we were always together.

Yet memory experts like Kotre hold that, although the memories date back to childhood, they are really about a person’s entire life, especially the present conditions of life (Kotre 1995). These are culturally shaped. Although describing a joint endeavour, the process of remembering in our narratives is contextualised and marked by each narrator’s use of ‘I’ and personal identifying names. It is also dualled as a tale told by two individuals about us and them. Moreover, the blanket memory joins the children under the blanket with the present-day academics. This memory is also positioned in contemporary social relationships. Audience is important here too (Hirst and Manier 1996; Rubin 1996; Mageo 2001). It is a case of two rather pedantic professors that have a tale to tell a student. Narrative is created by the process of retrieval and influenced by our goals at the time of recording as well as retrieval (Rubin 1996). Like Tina and Gina and ESP we are quite sanguine about the similarity of our narratives. It’s just part of being twins. What does on reflection bother us is that neither one of us is very keen on Piaget’s theories.

Case 3: Material Memories and the Empontment of Identity

Dorothy: You are your pony.
Dona: I loved Bobby Boy with all my heart. He was mine, mine, mine.

Dening (2001: 209), when he states, ‘I recognize myself in the mirrors of otherness around me,’ was probably not thinking of twins riding their ponies, nor was Haraway (1991) when she comments that intragroup memory involves states of embodiment and felt relations to others. Yet self and family narratives of us as twins and as individuals feature episodic memories of our respective ponies as instrumental in effecting the type of persons we would each become. We call this the emponyment of identity. For each of us our pony became a significant ‘other’. For the first time in our young lives, sitting on our respective ponies, our father could actually tell us apart. Yet the ponies mean much more in that they have emerged as
condensing narratives of how we are and have become, same and different.

Dona: The horse thing was very much a part of our identities. They [our ponies] were in the family until we were twenty-seven and embody memories of our early childhood and adolescence.

Dorothy: Dona and I both see that our involvement with our ponies and challenges they presented as being integral to our personality development. These ponies were our pets from second grade all the way through college.

Data for case 3 come from two largely chain-of-consciousness autobiographical essays we each independently wrote about our ponies. We approached the project as homework (Visweswaran 1994), or an opportunity to develop our own self-styling narratives. After writing the initial essays, we commented on each other's essays in order to give a collaborative, processual and negotiated dimension to the project. Our analysis of the emponyment of identity starts with a discussion of material and embodied memory and ends with a discussion of family, individuality and shared and non-shared environments.

Material memory receives little attention in the personal memory literature. The term material memory (Lowenthal 1985; Middleton and Edwards 1990) refers to artefacts, pictures and literature as well as to the physical environment. Photographs are a kind of material memory (Kotre 1995). Probably over 90 per cent of our pictorial history, up until late adolescence, captures us on a pony or later a horse. A picture of us at our first Christmas shows us, at nine months old, sitting together under the Christmas tree, dressed exactly alike, in footed pyjamas with cowboy hats and gun belts and each holding an identical stuffed black horse set on wheels. Like many middle-class twins raised in the 1950s, our parents felt that the only way to treat us fairly was to treat us equally. Our physical similarity was reflected in the duality of a material world that included our toys, clothes and other objects, such as identical twin beds.

When we were seven years old, we were each given a pony of our own, resulting in the formation of new dyads and the emergence of new quadratic relationships. Although our father initially set out to find us two similar, if not identical, ponies, he ended up buying two very distinctive ponies. Our ponies were the only material things we had ever been given that did not arrive at the same time and were not exactly alike. In case 3, dualling involves same (getting a pony and riding them together every day) and duelling involves difference (the ponies themselves).

Dorothy: Bobby Boy and Pepper were as different as night and day.
Dona: Bobby Boy and Pepper were the first parts of our lives that were different. We were both to be equally adept riders but with very different mounts.

Dorothy: We spent our formative years on those ponies.

Attachment, literally and figuratively, to our ponies anchored for each of us as a sense of mutual embodied identity of twins with ponies that included the embodiment of a differentiating new dyad, that of each twin and her own pony. The ponies are not just abstract or condensed symbols of identity; they were also their own beings with their own realities. They offered very different challenges and opportunities to each twin.

Dona: Bobby Boy was just over eleven hands high and could jump four and one half feet. He flew around the arena and never refused or ran out. He was a remarkable pony. He could do anything but he was not an easy ride.

Dorothy: Pepper was generally considered to be the prettier pony. He was a blue roan. He had good conformation. Dorothy got the good-looking one and Dona got the better-performing one.

Although they brought new opportunities for enhanced mutuality and shared experience, the ponies stand out in our memories as our first experiences if not exactly as a non-shared world at least as mutually exclusive identity links. The ponies opened up new opportunities for positioning self and other in the twin dyad. If not exactly 'a split episode' of going our separate ways in life, each of us receiving a pony of our own marks the beginning of a transformational, pre-adolescent, individualising period of our young lives. The following statements illustrate how the physical attributes of our ponies (colouring) may continue to influence our material worlds in terms of consumption patterns, accessorising and self-styling (literally the clothes we put on our bodies today).

Dorothy: Pepper was a blue roan. Blue is my favourite colour.

Dona: Bobby Boy was a pinto [black, white and brown]. Showing Dorothy got all the flashy outfits. She wore turquoise and black. I wore brown and gold.

Dorothy: I got to wear blue and she got stuck with dull old brown or mustard yellow. Mother insisted our outfits be coordinated with our ponies. I was the big winner here since I liked blue so much.

Dona: Look in our closets today. Dona's clothes are all black and brown and Dorothy has more bright colours and pastels. Dona's hair remains dull birth brown while Dorothy is a flashy blonde.

Autobiographical memory is not simply a declaration of what we have experienced or things we have possessed; it also includes dispositions to
act (Kirmayer 1996). Given the fact that we are middle-aged women, why do we feature two ponies that we were given over fifty years ago in our identity or self-styling memory narratives? Are we not, as Dorothy says, 'putting the cart before the horse'? Certainly, as we have gone our separate ways in life, our identities have taken many different and differentiating twists and turns. But ponies are an important part of our family memory stories. Although we did not realise it at the time, we were writing what Kotre (1995) calls family memory stories. In middle-class American culture, the family plays an important role in personal explanatory systems and the organisation of experience. Family memories nourish the idea that we are special and define the traits of its individual members (Kotre 1995; Bruner and Fleischer Feldman 1996).

One kind of family memory story is the origin story. In accounts of what you were like as a child, the family identifies and reinforces personality traits it sees in you today (Kotre 1995). Plomin and Daniels (1985) state that non-shared environments in a family make children from the same family different from one another. For us, beginning at age seven, our ponies became an element in a non-shared environment, but they also became a family resource for developing and dualling our distinctive identities. When Dona’s husband, Richard, first met her family, he asked our older brother Barry what he (Barry) could tell him about the kid he married: his (Richard’s) thirty-four-year-old wife. This is Barry’s response: ‘Well, you’ve got to understand, Richard, they had these two ponies. Dona had this hot little pony called Bobby Boy and Dorothy had this pretty pony called Pepper.’ The subtext of Barry’s statement is that Dorothy still needs to be pretty and Dona still needs to be reined in. Our own narratives echo these family origin themes as a strategy for presenting the past to explain more contemporary dispositions and behaviours. Dorothy (who self-styles as having put family before career) describes how Pepper made her a better mother. Dealing with a stubborn and bad-tempered pony made her patient, understanding and nurturing. Dona (who has no children, but did not mention this in the essay) is more performance oriented and refers (in response to Dorothy’s mother comments) to Bobby Boy’s influence on her career (Dona fell off her pony and hurt more than Dorothy did). Comparison of the two quotes indicates sameness and difference in terms of acquisition of the same skills but of putting them to different uses.

Dorothy: I believe that my equine experiences have made me a better mother. Learning to deal with a green animal that outweighs you by six hundred pounds, has some powerful jaws and four metal-clad hooves is excellent preparation for dealing with a human two-year-old.
Dona: Career-wise I think the pony years gave me a sense of stick-to-it-ness and seeing it through by getting back on that pony and showing him who was the boss.

Our essays also mention how our respective ponies influenced our taste in men and our eventual spouse choices. Dorothy is divorced and Dona happily married.

Dorothy: Dona and I have often referred to our relationships to men in pony terms. She married Bobby-Boy and I married Pepper.

Dona: I did get the Bobby Boy. I call my [bearded] husband Fuzz Face One and my current horse Fuzz Face Two.

There are several limitations to these exercises in family memory. First of all they have little meaning as family memory stories apart from their comparison value, e.g. both are tomboys but Dona more so than Dorothy. They exaggerate our differences and distinctiveness, while overlooking our similarities. Even on our ponies we were still constantly in each other’s company. Secondly, away from the barn and outside the immediate family, these stories were not shared. For example, our school friends knew we had ponies but that was pretty much it. Thirdly, many character traits we both associate with the ponies were actually recognised before we got the ponies.

Dorothy: Actually I think our family would say Dorothy was more mothering from the get-go. Barry used to say Dorothy was the little mother and Dona the little football player.

Fourthly, we certainly recognise that our contemporary selves reflect the many different life choices we have made. There was and is a life beyond the ponies. Dorothy writes about it; Dona does not. At the end of her intensely personal pony essay that she wrote for her own children, Dorothy asks if we are putting too much emphasis on an event that happened over fifty years ago. Dona, whose essay was far less personal and is written more like a topical fieldwork report, responds, ‘Maybe it’s just making sense of a way of making sense.’

Before we conclude this section we would like to raise one final issue that points to both the strengths and limitations of minimalist or reflexive strategies for ‘l-ing’ or ‘we-ing’ ethnography. Person-centred ethnography is just that – person-centred. Self-involved, reflexive data can be very skewed data. They do not encompass a very wide range of perspectives. Nor do they open the door to multiple players. In this case the family stories and opinions shared among the children of a family are not
necessarily those of the parents. During the summer when we were writing our pony memories, Dona went to visit our mother and asked her how she thought our ponies had made us different. Expecting a parentally perceptive analysis of the issue, which clearly meant so much to us, Dona did not anticipate the dismissive answer Mother gave to the question.

Mother: I used to worry about you both when you [Dona] had the good pony and Dorothy had the bad one, but then Dorothy got the better horse so you both came out equal in the end.

Mother took a long-range view and clearly was not into the details. Perhaps our father, who rode his own horse with us and who spent hours on end with us at the barn, would have a different answer, but he died even before the ponies left us. It is our siblings who currently supply the details. Our younger brother, Robert, was so touched by our essays that he put them in the family Bible. Our older brother, Barry, surrounded by children and grandchildren of his own, still tells horse show stories at family gatherings that tease us by condensing our identities to our emponyed childhood experiences.

Our ponies were real-world entities. They were also and continue to be core family symbols for defining special traits of its individuals. Although recognising our twinship, these family stories both document and nurture our differences, thus bringing us in line with Usan culture and its Western style of a distinctive, individuated and bounded self. Aside from Plomin and Daniels (1985), however, and their interest in how non-shared environments within a family can make children from the same family so different from one another, little attention has been paid to how nurture in the form of singleton siblings and even family pets may shape the experiential realities of twins and socialise them into wider social expectations concerning person and selfhood.

Conclusion

We began this chapter with depictions of memory as a mixture of poetic and prosaic phenomena. Identical twins, too, have their poetic and prosaic components. We have played the native card and used ourselves as data. By focusing on the dualling of twins' co-biographical memories as embodied imaginaries, as collective and mutual, as material and as family self-styling stories, we have entered a territory of ethnographic investigation that lies beyond both space and time (Teski and Climo 1995: 1). Like Bloch (1995), we take issue with the assumptions of many psychologists, interested in memory in everyday life, that the relationship between actors and their
external worlds are unproblematic. Through the lens of twinship and twinscapes, we have tried to explicate ways in which personal memories are culturally embedded, culturally embodied, forms of social action.

Notes

1. The term Usan culture (Boulanger 2008) refers to society and culture in the United States.
2. For example, identical twins are referred to as clones and freaks (Wright 1997); as a single unit (Segal 1999); and as having mutual or symbiotic identities and diffuse ego boundaries and as inhabiting another person's being (Angle and Neimark 1997).
3. Tina and Gina's narrative comes from open-ended interviews we conducted among twenty-three sets of identical twins at the annual Twinsburg Twins Festival during the summer of 2003.
4. Autobiographical memory also includes knowledge, embodied habits and acquired skills (Kirmayer 1996). Our equine twinship memories are embodied in a co-mutuality of horses and riders as well as in the sense that our riding skills are encoded in muscle memory and remain with us today. This is a non narrative form of memory.

References


