Margaret Gordon - Training and Facilitation Officer

Highlights from the International Reminiscence and Life Review Conference Nov. 2009, Atlanta, USA
Susan Bluck: “Living Parallel Lives.”
Parallel Developments in Reminiscence and Autobiographical Memory research

**Reminiscence research**

- Erikson (1959) - “Developing Integrity” in late life
- Butler (1963) - “Life Review” a basic need?
- Birren (1991) - Guided Autobiography: a therapeutic intervention, adaptive positive outcomes
- Webster and Haight (2002) - Structured Life Review; theory, research and practice
Auto Biographical Memory Research – in the laboratory

Cognitive Memory researchers

- Found memory “Biases”
- False Memories
- Error
- Flashbulb memories

Memory is a partially reconstructive system, it is not just a recording system.
What is the FUNCTION of memory?
“What the Hell is it For?” (Baddeley 1998)

Autobiographical Research

**Fading Effect Bias**: people recall more positive than negative events: negative emotion associated with remembered events fades more quickly than emotion in positive events.

*The Adaptive Outcome?* Memory for emotion may be part of a set of mental processes that work “over time” to maintain a positive view of self that is capable of overcoming adversity, and facing the future with hope and optimism.

Autobiographical Research

**Intrusive Trauma Memory**; where rich, highly detailed sensory memories of deeply disturbing negative effects come to mind unbidden, unwanted and repeatedly.

*The Adaptive Outcome?* The underlying mechanisms, i.e. imagery, uncontrolled repetition, “warning signals” may aid emotional processing and prevent further harm.

Autobiographical Research

Time Estimation Biases; where memories are “telescoped” forward and backward in time, and positive memories about self are judged closer, and negative events as more distant than they actually were.

The Adaptive Outcome? Flexible time estimation allows people to take credit for former glories, while reducing the threat of past failings. It appears to be a crucial aspect of self regulation.

Susan Bluck proposes that the processes of reinterpretation and reintegration suggest that memory works as a basis of a survival system.
The Function of Memory? Jeffrey Webster endorsed Susan Bluck’s view

“Remembering the past may serve a specific function— to produce an outcome such as bolstering a person’s sense of mastery or self esteem.”

“Social reminiscing may serve as a powerful emotion regulation strategy in later life.”
J. Webster’s plea

The “decoupling of Reminiscence” from earlier Eriksonian perspectives concerning death preparation, towards a comprehensive model integrating research from childhood and adult reminiscence.
Reminiscence

is a lifespan process!
Robyn Fivush (Atlanta)

*Childhood reminiscence is closely linked to*

- Language skills
- Academic competence
- Sense of identity
- Autobiographical memory skills
- Socio-emotional development
- Higher self esteem
Robyn Fivush: Childhood reminiscence

Maternal reminiscing styles ----
• More elaborate, emotional and relational with daughters, -- enduring implications

Intergenerational families reminiscing linked to--
• Lower internalising behaviour(linked to depression)
• Higher self esteem
• Lower externalised aggression
Japanese Intergenerational project tackling ageism in children; Ryuji Yamazaki & Tsutomu Fujinami

• 9-10 year olds reveal old age and dementia as a burden
• Were told a fairy story about a character enjoying life with a princess, opening a forbidden box, and in doing so becoming an old man.
• Children asked to act out drama of old person returning to his village.
• Attitudes to ageing underwent transformation.
• Termed “Story Interface for Intergenerational Communication.”
Jim Johnston’s (RNNI) “Creative Impulse” Initiative

Creative writing
Senior citizens group
Reminiscence materials, poems and stories published
Augmenting and sorting Trigger Memory boxes for Museums
Clear application of reminiscence work
Life Review at Loyola University, Dan and Kathy Vaillancourt

• Students audio-taped and transcribed the life stories of retired sisters in a religious community, and created an art product representing the life of the nun.

• “A life altering experience for storytellers and students of unexpected proportion.”

• My learning - to consider and arrange for the archiving of course participant life reviews.
Guided Autobiography Workshop with Jim Birren
Structured Life Review Workshop with Barbara Haight
The Reminiscence “Family” and John Kunz
Atlanta’s Senate building’s gold dome