

Examining Historically Defined Periods in Autobiographical Memories for Transitional Events

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Abstract : We examined the plausibility of transition theory suggesting that memories of transitional events, which give rise to a significant and persistent change in the fabric of daily life, are organized around the historically defined autobiographical periods (H-DAPs). 141 Pakistani older adults retrieved 10 autobiographical memories (AMs) each to 10 cue words. As the history of Pakistan is dominated by various political and nationwide transitional events, it was expected that the participants would recall memories with H-DAPs references. The content analysis revealed that 0.7% of memories had H-DAP references and 0.4% memories mentioned major transitional events such as War/Natural Disaster. There was a vivid reminiscence bump between 10 - 20 years of age in lifespan distribution of AMs. There were 67.9% social-focused AMs. Significantly more self-focused memories were reported by individuals who endorsed themselves as conservatives. Only a few H-DAPs were reported, although the history of Pakistan was dominated by numerous political, historical and nationwide transitional events. Memories within and outside of the bump period were mostly positive. The participants rarely used historical/political or nationwide significant events or periods to date the memories elicited. The intense and nationwide (as well as region-wise) significant historical/political events spawned across decades in the lives of participants of the present study but these events did not produce H-DAPs. The findings contradicted the previous studies on H-DAPs and transition theory. The dominance of social-focused AMs in the present study is in line with the past studies comparing the memories of collectivist and individualist cultures (i.e., European Americans vs. Asian, African and Latin-American cultures). The past empirical evidence shows that conservative values and beliefs are adopted as a coping strategy to feel secure in the face of danger when future is dominated with uncertainty and to connect to likeminded others. In the present study, conservative political ideology is somehow assisting the participants in living a stable life midst of their complex social worlds. The reminiscence bump, as well as dominance of positive memories within and outside the bump period, are in line with the narrative/identity account which states that the events and experiences during adolescence and early adulthood assimilate into a person's lifelong narratives. Hence these events are used as identity markers and are more easily recalled later in life. Also, according to socioemotional theory and the positivity effect, the participants evaluated past events more positively as they grow up and the intensity of negative emotions decreased with time.

Keywords : autobiographical memory, historically defined autobiographical periods, narrative/identity account, Pakistan, reminiscence bump, SMS framework, transition theory

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