Personality Traits and Existential Concerns as Predictors of the Functions of Reminiscence in Older Adults

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This study examines to what extent personality and existential constructs predict the frequency of reminiscence, in general, and its various functions, in particular. Eighty-nine older adults completed the NEO-Five Factor Inventory, the Life Attitude Profile–Revised, and the Reminiscence Functions Scale. Neuroticism predicted total reminiscence frequency, as well as reminiscence for self-understanding and ruminating about a negative past. Extraversion predicted total reminiscence frequency, as well as reminiscence for generating stimulation, conversation, and maintaining memories of departed loved ones. Openness to experience predicted total reminiscence frequency and reminiscence for addressing life meaning and death. Existential concerns, and in particular low desire to seek new challenges, added significant additional predictive power for total reminiscence frequency and for such uses as generating stimulation, preparing for death, and ruminating about the past. The discussion draws the implications of the finding that the combination of personality traits and existential concerns predicted the overall reminiscence frequency together with the intrapersonal functions of reminiscence.

RECOGNITION of reminiscing as a potentially adaptive process can be traced back to the seminal work of Robert Butler (1963), himself inspired by the writings of Erikson (1959, 1982), who regarded evaluative reminiscence as a core process of the final stage of life. These pioneering works have stimulated considerable research in order to better understand the contribution of this mental activity to adaptive functioning and well-being, in particular in the later phase of life (e.g., Buchanan & Middleton, 1993, 1994; Haight & Webster, 1995; Hyland & Ackerman, 1988; Lieberman & Tobin, 1983; McMahon & Rhudick, 1964, 1967; Merriam, 1993a, 1993b, 1993c; Merriam & Cross, 1982; Parker, 1995, 1999; Romaniuk & Romaniuk, 1983; Webster, 1994, 1995; Webster & Cappeliez, 1993; Webster & McCall, 1999; Wong, 1995). This research has made clear that reminiscence serves a wide range of different functions that vary across individuals and the lifespan. Realization that different types of reminiscence appear associated with different adaptive and health outcomes (Wong & Watt, 1991) underscores the utility of adopting a differentiated and functional approach to the study of reminiscence.

Webster and Haight (1995) reviewed the classifications proposed by the various authors (Beaton, 1980; Coleman, 1974; Kovach, 1995; LoGerfo, 1981; McMahon & Rhudick, 1967; Merriam, 1993a; Romaniuk & Romaniuk, 1981; Rybarczyk, 1995; Sherman, 1995; Watt & Wong, 1991; Webster, 1993) and concluded that, with few variations, a remarkable consensus emerged on a taxonomy of recall with eight distinct purposes of reminiscence. Reminiscence can be used to discover meaning and continuity, to draw on past experiences to solve present problems and to cope, to provide an instructive story, to provide a descriptive story, to dwell on the “good old days” and escape from the present, to ruminate about unresolved disturbing events in the past, to prepare for death, and to maintain memories of significant others. Research on the functionality of reminiscence has been greatly advanced with the development of the Reminiscence Functions Scale (Webster, 1993, 1997), which allows for the measurement of these eight functions, respectively called identity, problem-solving, teach/inform, conversation, boredom reduction, bitterness revival, death preparation, and intimacy maintenance.

Consideration of context and contents of reminiscence may advance the functional approach to the adaptive value of reminiscence. Some authors (e.g., Cohen, 1998), primarily interested in the processes of autobiographical memory, have proposed three distinct categories of functions: intrapersonal functions, interpersonal functions, and knowledge-based functions. Intrapersonal functions are reminiscences done privately with the person as the focus. The primary purposes served by these reminiscences might be emotional regulation and self-concept maintenance. It makes sense to group within this category the functions of identity, boredom reduction, death preparation, and bitterness revival. Interpersonal functions are reminiscences occurring in a social context. Characteristically, these reminiscences serve to communicate with others. They can constitute the material for social and friendly interactions (e.g., conversation). We may also consider intimacy maintenance as an interpersonal function to the extent that it represents a way of reliving relationships and maintaining contact with lost others. In addition to these two groups, there are the knowledge-based functions. Reminiscence for problem-solving clearly falls into this group; the main feature is drawing on past experiences in order to provide possible strategies for current problems and guides for future actions. We propose to add teach/inform to this group of knowledge-based function. Although this type of reminiscence occurs within social con-
As suggested by Fry (1991, 1995), the notion that different types of reminiscence are associated with different personality factors and psychosocial variables has only recently begun to gain currency. Yet knowledge on the antecedent conditions of reminiscence is essential for a better understanding of the adaptive value of the various kinds of reminiscence. A few studies have examined the relationships between personality traits and functions of reminiscence, all of which have been based on the five-factor model of personality (Digman, 1990; Wiggins, 1996) as operationalized by the NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI; Costa & McCrae, 1992), perhaps the most widely used personality inventory based on this model. Neuroticism (i.e., the propensity for emotional instability, negative emotions) appears associated with reminiscence for boredom reduction (Webster, 1994), suggesting that this function of reminiscence connotes a negative process. Additional, albeit indirect, evidence to this effect comes from the finding that this function is negatively correlated with happiness (Webster & McCall, 1999). It may well be that reminiscence for boredom reduction represents an escapist tendency (to dwell on the good old days in order to escape from the present), as various authors have indeed proposed (see Webster & Haight, 1995, for a review). As anticipated, extraversion (i.e., the propensity for sociability, stimulation-seeking, positive emotions) has been linked with the use of reminiscence in interpersonal contexts such as conversation (Quackenbush & Barnett, 1995; Webster, 1993). This fits with the notion that sharing reminiscences is a means to establish and maintain social interaction and friendship. It further suggests that reminiscence for conversation may play a role in the development and maintenance of positive affect. Openness to experience (i.e., the propensity for introspection, exploration of novelty, intellectual curiosity) predicts the overall frequency of reminiscence (Fry, 1991, 1995; Webster, 1994). This would suggest that reminiscence is an important mental activity for open individuals, curious about inner and outer worlds, in the context of an experientially rich life. At a specific functional level, openness to experience is associated with reminiscence for identity/problem-solving (Webster, 1993, 1994). These functions of reminiscence pertain to vital issues of strategic coping, life coherence, and meaning. Individuals with this personality tendency have a particular interest in using reminiscence to address existential concerns.

A number of authors have argued that reminiscence plays a crucial role in the search for the meaning of one’s life or to build (or rebuild) a sense of identity and life coherence (e.g., Bluck & Levine, 1998; Kenyon, Ruth, & Mader, 1999; Meacham, 1977; Parker, 1995). Of note, this corresponds to the set of intrapersonal functions of reminiscence as defined above. Reker and collaborators (Reker, 1997; Reker, Peacock, & Wong, 1987) have contended that existential constructs of personal meaning, personal choice/responsibleness, and future outlook have value in understanding adaptation to physical and mental health problems in later life. It thus makes sense to consider such existential constructs among personal variables potentially related to differential uses of reminiscence. Despite clear relevance for understanding the contribution of reminiscence to the life of the older person, however, relationships between existential needs or life concerns and functions of reminiscence have received minimal empirical scrutiny. Fry (1991, 1995) reported negative correlations between the overall frequency of reminiscence and variables such as purpose in life, life control, and will to meaning. She argued that reminiscence activity serves a particular need for older individuals experiencing a sense of existential vacuum or struggling to find meaning in personal existence. In a similar vein, Quackenbush and Barnett (1995) demonstrated that perceived existential vacuum was associated with a tendency to reminisce for the purpose of improving self-understanding.

The objective of the present research was to examine the contribution made by specific personality traits and by attitudes concerning life issues in the prediction of the various functions of reminiscence, as well as the overall level of reminiscence activity. In addition to the specific uses of reminiscence, the extent to which these variables generally predicted involvement in reminiscence, as an index of the relative importance of that mental activity in the person’s life, warrants consideration. Among personality traits of the five-factor model (Digman, 1990; Wiggins, 1996), neuroticism, extraversion, and openness to experience were examined. Theoretical considerations and previous research, as reviewed above, led us to believe that these traits were to some degree related to the different uses of reminiscence. No theoretical rationale existed to justify inclusion of the other two traits of agreeableness and conscientiousness. As available research on personality and reminiscence functions is limited to a few studies not connected to a theoretical framework, replication of that component of previous studies was in order. With respect to existential concerns, we considered how psychologists have applied techniques of evaluation that fit more mainstream research methodologies to these constructs originating from existentialism (Furchtgott, 1999, chap. 12). An empirically based operationalization of these constructs is provided by Reker and colleagues (Reker, 1992; Reker et al., 1987), which considers six dimensions: purpose and direction in life, sense of coherence and personal identity, feeling of life control, level of death acceptance, degree of meaning in life, and eagerness for new challenges. Following Costa and McCrae (1994), we adopted the view that personality, essentially established by age 30, functions as basic tendencies that interact with external influences to produce characteristic adaptations. Skills, habits, beliefs, interests, and attitudes represent concrete realizations of basic tendencies. Because personality traits are logical antecedents to the development of these attitudes, we considered such traits as primary predictor variables.

In summary, the present study attempts to answer these two questions:

1. To what extent do the personality traits of neuroticism, extraversion, and openness to experience predict the frequency of reminiscence and various functions of reminiscence?
2. After taking these traits into account, do existential concerns, such as sense of meaning, coherence, or control,
Nearly all (93%) were retired from the paid workforce. The widowed, 12% divorced or separated, and 12% single. The majority of the participants were married (58%), with 18% separated, and 12% single. Nearly all (93%) were retired from the paid workforce. The vast majority lived in urban centers (84%) and in their own dwellings in the community (73%).

METHODS

Participants

Eighty-nine older adults (M = 66.7 years, SD = 6.4, range = 57 to 92 years) took part in this study (66% women). These participants were recruited among persons enrolled within a university-based continuing education program. In terms of highest level of education received, the distribution was 6% primary school, 50% high school, and 43% superior (university or technical institution). The majority of the participants were married (58%), with 18% widowed, 12% divorced or separated, and 12% single. Nearly all (93%) were retired from the paid workforce. The vast majority lived in urban centers (84%) and in their own dwellings in the community (73%).

Instruments and Measures

Personality traits.—Participants completed the NEO Five Factor Inventory (NEO–FFI; Costa & McCrae, 1992), an abbreviated version of the NEO–PI–R, which is a well-known and validated measure of the Big Five personality traits (i.e., neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness). This self-report measure consists of 60 items, 12 items for each of the five scales. Respondents indicate their agreement with each statement on a 5-point Likert-type scale. This study used only the Neuroticism, Extraversion, and Openness to Experience subscales. Neuroticism refers to emotional instability and susceptibility to negative affects such as fear, sadness, anger, and guilt. Extraversion is the tendency to be sociable, active, energetic, and cheerful by disposition and to have a need for stimulation. Openness to experience entails active imagination, aesthetic sensitivity, preference for variety, intellectual curiosity, and independence of judgment. Research with the NEO–FFI has demonstrated that it is a reliable, structurally sound inventory. Costa and McCrae (1992) reported internal consistency as measured by Cronbach’s alpha varying between .68 (agreeableness) and .86 (neuroticism). Holden and Fekken (1994) indicated that all NEO–FFI scales had alpha coefficients exceeding .70.

Life attitudes.—Participants answered an abbreviated version of the Life Attitude Profile–Revised (LAP–R; Reker, 1992). The LAP–R was devised to operationalize the logotherapeutic constructs of will to meaning, existential vacuum, personal choice and responsibleness, realities and potentialities, and death transcendence that comprise the building blocks of Frankl’s (1963) theoretical structure. In its entirety, the LAP–R is a 48-item, 7-point Likert-type scale consisting of six factorially derived dimensions: purpose, coherence, life control, death acceptance, existential vacuum, and goal seeking. Purpose refers to having life goals, a sense of direction from the past, in the present, and toward the future. Coherence refers to having a sense of order and reason for existence and a clear sense of personal identity. Life control is an operational index of the degree to which one perceives personal agency in directing his or her life. Death acceptance refers to the absence of anxiety about death and the acceptance of death as a natural aspect of life. Existential vacuum refers to an absence of meaning in life, boredom, apathy, or feelings of indifference. Goal seeking concerns the desire to get away from the routine of life and to search for new experiences and challenges and an eagerness to get more out of life. Research regarding the psychometric properties of the instrument is reported in detail in the manual (Reker, 1992) and is summarized here. Indices of internal consistency are generally satisfactory, ranging from an alpha of .77 to an alpha of .91. Test–retest reliability at a 4–6-week interval ranges from .77 to .90, supporting short-term stability of the LAP–R. The results of a principal-components analysis showed an effective fit between LAP–R dimensions and the empirically derived factor structure. The concurrent validity of the LAP–R was assessed in a set of eight studies involving 18 other instruments measuring related constructs. The pattern of results reveals convergence for all LAP–R scales with respective criterion measures. Discriminant validity is shown by the lower correlations of LAP–R scales with past meaning, dispositional optimism, physical health, and social desirability.

For the purpose of this research, we used an abbreviated 18-item version consisting of the 3 items that best represented each of the six dimensions, as indicated by their highest loadings on that factor in the original factor analytic study (Reker, 1992). For this study’s sample, Cronbach’s alphas demonstrated reasonably good internal consistency for most of the subscales: Purpose (α = .68), Coherence (α = .69), Life Control (α = .74), Death Acceptance (α = .88), Existential Vacuum (α = .66), and Goal Seeking (α = .65).

Functions of reminiscence.—Participants completed the Reminiscence Functions Scale (RFS; Webster, 1993, 1997). This scale consists of 43 items; each item refers to a particular use of reminiscence. Respondents indicate the degree to which they reminisce for that particular purpose (from never to very frequently) on 6-point Likert-type scales. Items are grouped within eight subscales: (a) Boredom Reduction (6 items; i.e., reminiscence to maintain a form of activation when not occupied or stimulated, e.g., “for lack of any better mental stimulation”); (b) Death Preparation (6 items; i.e., reminiscence to reduce fear concerning death and to confront one’s own mortality, e.g., “because I feel less fearful of death after I finish reminiscing”); (c) Identity (6 items; i.e., reminiscence to find meaning and continuity in one’s life, e.g., “to try to understand myself better”); (d) Problem-Solving (6 items; i.e., reminiscence to review previous coping strategies, e.g., “to see how my strengths can help me solve a current problem”); (e) Conversation (5 items; i.e., reminiscence as contents for social interaction, e.g., “because it brings me closer to newer friends and acquaintances”); (f) Intimacy Maintenance (4 items; i.e., reminiscence to maintain alive the memory of someone who departed, e.g., “to keep alive the memory of a dead loved one”); (g) Bitterness Revival (5 items; i.e., reminiscence to reactivate memories of old injustices and bad times, e.g., “to rehash lost opportunities”); and (h) Teach/Inform (5 items; i.e., reminiscence to inform others on life in a past period,
PREDICTORS OF REMINISCENCE FUNCTIONS

E.g., "in order to teach younger persons about cultural values"). The sum of the eight scores constitutes a measure of the overall frequency of reminiscence.

The RFS was developed on the basis of responses from a large (N = 710) sample of demographically diverse adults ranging in age from 17 to 91 years (M = 45.5 years; Webster, 1993). The 54-question RFS prototype was subsequently factor analyzed. This indicated the viability of a 43-item, seven-factor solution (Identity/Problem-Solving formed a single factor). Internal consistency for the factors ranged from .79 to .89. In a replication study (Webster, 1997) with another sample (N = 399) of adults ranging in age from 17 to 45 years (M = 22.7 years), eight factors emerged that were exactly the same as in the original study, with the important qualification that the original factor of Identity/Problem-Solving was separated into its constituent elements. Without exception, all items loaded on the appropriate factors consistent with findings from the original study. Internal consistency of all factors was again within acceptable limits, ranging from .74 to .86. This was also the case in the present study: Boredom Reduction, .79; Death Preparation, .84; Identity, .87; Problem Solving, .79; Conversation, .75; Intimacy Maintenance, .86; Bitterness Revival, .82; and Teach/Inform, .77. In both studies (Webster, 1993, 1997), the majority of factors were significantly related to each of the others, with correlations ranging from small to moderate (mean r = .30). However, the average variance observed between factors (Webster, 1993, 1997) was below 10%, indicating an association between factors small enough to validate the divergent nature of the subscales.

These studies also examined predictive validity in relation to personality and developmental variables. As reported above, and consistent with predictions, personality traits of neuroticism, extraversion, and openness to experience correlated positively with the RFS factors of Bitterness Revival, Conversation, and Identity/Problem-Solving, respectively (Webster, 1993). Anticipated age differences on the Death Preparation and Teach/Inform factors were found and replicated (Webster, 1993, 1997).

Procedure and Data Analysis

Recruitment took place at administrative and educational meetings. This study was described as addressing the role of reminiscence in adaptation. Those interested were given a package containing the questionnaires above (plus a sociodemographic questionnaire), which they completed individually and returned to the organization.

Nine separate hierarchical regression analyses for each of the eight functions of reminiscence plus the overall frequency of reminiscence were computed. Preliminary analyses indicated that age, gender, and education were not statistically significant predictors of any of the nine dependent variables; these sociodemographic variables were therefore excluded from the subsequent analyses. In each regression, we first entered the three personality variables, followed by the six life attitudes variables. This method was chosen to provide a rigorous test of the independent contribution of life attitudes to the predictions, over and above the predictive power provided by personality traits (i.e., unique variance).

Results

The set of predictors including personality variables and life attitudes significantly predicted the total frequency of reminiscence and four specific functions of reminiscence (i.e., boredom reduction, death preparation, identity, and bitterness revival). These variables together did not have a significant predictive power for the four other uses of reminiscence (i.e., problem solving, conversation, intimacy maintenance, and teach/inform).

Considering first the total frequency of reminiscence (Table 1), altogether 16% of the variance in the total amount of reminiscence was predicted by scores on personality traits, $F(3,85) = 5.47, p < .01$. Specifically, a higher level of neuroticism, extraversion, and openness to experience predicted a higher frequency of reminiscence. A further 12% of the variance was predicted by life attitudes, $F(9,79) = 3.41, p < .01$, independent of personality traits. A lower score on goal seeking (lower desire to seek new and different experi-

Table 1. Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses for Variables Predicting Total Frequency of Reminiscence, Reminiscence for Boredom Reduction, and Reminiscence for Death Preparation (N = 89)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Total Reminiscence</th>
<th>Boredom Reduction</th>
<th>Death Preparation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>β</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 1: Personality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.37**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.31*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.24*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2: Life attitudes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coherence</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life control</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death acceptance</td>
<td>-0.87</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>-0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existential vacuum</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal seeking</td>
<td>-2.30</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>-0.34**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $R^2 = .16$ for Step 1; $\Delta R^2 = .12$ for Step 2 (p < .01).
** $R^2 = .07$ for Step 1; $\Delta R^2 = .14$ for Step 2 (p < .05).
*** $R^2 = .11$ for Step 1 (p < .05); $\Delta R^2 = .16$ for Step 2 (p < .01).
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.  

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ences, to be on the move, and to welcome new challenges) predicted a higher level of reminiscence.

For boredom reduction (Table 1), whereas personality traits taken together were not significant predictors, $F(3,85) = 2.11$, $ns$, 14% of the variability in the use of that function was predicted by life attitudes, $F(9,79) = 2.29$, $p < .05$. Again, lower goal seeking predicted a greater use of that function of reminiscence.

Concerning death preparation (Table 1), personality traits accounted for 11% of the variance in the use of that function, $F(3,85) = 3.44$, $p < .05$. Among the personality traits, a higher level of openness to experience predicted a greater use of reminiscence for death preparation. Life attitudes on their own contributed to the prediction for an additional 16%, $F(9,79) = 3.18$, $p < .01$. Among life attitudes, a higher score on existential vacuum and a lower score on goal seeking predicted a higher frequency of reminiscence for death preparation.

With respect to identity (Table 2), 27% of the variance in the use of that function was predicted by personality traits, $F(3,85) = 10.51$, $p < .001$. Higher neuroticism and openness to experience emerged as significant predictors. On their own, life attitudes altogether accounted for an additional 9% of the variability, $F(9,79) = 4.97$, $p < .001$, although significance was reached by none of the individual life attitudes.

Regarding bitterness revival (Table 2), 18% of the variance in the frequency of use was predicted by personality traits, $F(3,85) = 6.18$, $p < .01$, specifically a higher level of neuroticism. In addition, life attitudes contributed a further 7% of prediction, $F(9,79) = 2.84$, $p < .01$, with a lower level of goal seeking associated with increased use of that function.

**Discussion**

If one considers the entire set of results, it becomes apparent that, among the eight functions of reminiscence, only those that can be regarded as intrapersonal in nature (i.e., boredom reduction, death preparation, identity, bitterness revival) were predicted by the combination of personality traits and life attitudes. By contrast, these same variables did not contribute to a significant degree to the prediction of interpersonal functions of reminiscence (other person as their focus), such as conversation and intimacy maintenance, or for essentially knowledge-based functions such as problem-solving and teach/inform. This pattern of results supports the contention that personality and existential concerns are specific determinants of the intrapersonal uses of reminiscence.

A higher level of emotional lability was found to predict greater frequency of reminiscence in general. This finding concurs with previous research suggesting an association between psychological difficulties/negative affectivity and reminiscence activity. Indeed Blankenship, Molinari, and Kunik (1996) have reported high levels of reminiscence among older patients with psychiatric problems. Furthermore, Fry (1991, 1995) indicated that a greater frequency of reminiscence activity was associated with negative affect. In a similar vein, Webster (1994) found that persons with higher levels of neuroticism experienced more negative emotions while reminiscing. And finally, Parker (1999) has reported a greater likelihood of reminiscence in times of uncertainty, transition, and change among younger adults. Taken together, these findings would suggest that reminiscence occurs with particular frequency when individuals face emotional turbulence. Our findings shed light on the purposes of this reminiscence activity. A higher level of emotional vulnerability as a trait was found to predict reminiscence for the purpose of self-understanding and self-concept (identity) and reminiscence for ruminating about unresolved disturbing past events (bitterness revival). The tendency toward emotional instability and negative affect thus appears to be accompanied by an attempt to find a sense of meaning and continuity in life. On the negative side, it is also linked with use of reminiscence in a ruminative way to reactivate the memories of unresolved difficulties.

Extraversion also predicted a higher frequency of total reminiscence, as well as its use for generating stimulation when the environment provides little. This result stands in contrast to the view of reminiscence as a passive and purely introspective activity. To the contrary, it seems that a tendency to seek active involvement and external stimulation reflected in extraversion predicts more reminiscence activity, and in particular reminiscence to fill for a relative lack of external stimulation. This suggests that reminiscing is a mental activity that is actively pursued for generating an optimal level of stimulation and engagement by more extraverted older persons.

Openness to experience additionally predicted total reminiscence frequency, most specifically reminiscence for addressing issues of meaning concerning life (identity) and death (death preparation). More openness and curiosity about ideas, feelings, and values goes hand in hand with the use of reminiscence to address existential concerns. This appears particularly salient for identity, where the combination of personality traits with openness and neuroticism dominating accounted for 27% of observed variance, the most of all functions examined. This largely supports Web-
cism (Quackenbush & Barnett, 1995) constitutes a main motive for reminiscence, in its various forms, among older adults. Of note, individuals with this type of disposition are also prone to reminiscence for the purpose of maintaining the memory of someone no longer a part of the reminiscer’s life. This supports our contention that this reminiscence function contains an important relational component. Except for extraversion, the relatively poor showing of the other personality and attitudinal variables for the prediction of the more interpersonal and knowledge-based functions of reminiscence suggests that variables related to the present state of the person, such as mood, may be more important determinants of these functions of reminiscence than more stable and trait characteristics. It would be interesting to address this question in future research.

These findings have useful implications for clinicians interested in using memories for therapeutic purposes, such as in reminiscence-based therapies. An instrument such as the RFS could be used to identify the frequency of reminiscence and map out its habitual uses for a given client. It could provide valuable information regarding decisions concerning the adequacy and the direction to give to reminiscence-based interventions so that the past is reviewed in more adaptive ways (Watt & Cappeliez, 1995, 2000). The results of the present study suggest that, in and of itself, a relatively high level of reminiscence activity could signal a person experiencing negative affect, possibly caught in ruminations and/or struggling with life meaning and coherence.

Limitations of the present study include concern for the validity of the life attitudes data, given that several of the subscales of the abbreviated LAP–R used here demonstrated relatively low internal consistency. This issue requires further examination in replication of this study using the full version of the scale. We also need to acknowledge that the sample was one of convenience. Participants were rather “young” older adults. The majority were women, most married, with a relatively high level of education, involved in educational activities, and relatively free of serious medical problems. Given the homogeneity of this sample, there is a need to examine, with a randomly derived sample, to what extent the findings reported here extend to older adults with other characteristics such as advanced age, social isolation, and impairments in physical condition, as well as different ethnic origin.

In summary, this research demonstrates that personality traits and existential concerns are significantly and differentially associated with various uses of reminiscence. In so doing, it helps us understand the adaptive value of reminiscence, in its various forms, among older adults.

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