

# Foreword

The study of autobiographical memory is becoming of broader interest as people are living longer and having more active lives. This book offers valuable information about the course of autobiographical memory in adults based upon longitudinal research.

The findings are based on a five-year study in which young, middle aged, and older adults were interviewed using the LIM | Life-line Interview Method three times. The research provides an important perspective on the changes in memory over adult life. Not only what is recalled but how it is evaluated by individuals is reported. The relationships between gender, age, and memory are described and discussed. Both past events and expected future events were measured, i.e., both retrospective and prospective autobiographical memory.

The method used to collect individual autobiographical memory data was the Life-line Interview Method. It results not only in chronologically ordered memories but also in data on how these are evaluated by the individuals recalling them. The method also provides individual life stories' events of the past, present, and expected future.

Those who are interested in lifespan development will find the findings significant. Young and older adults show different trends in their memories. Results of the study showed that older persons recall more past events and anticipate fewer future events. The data reveal what is described as the “bump effect,” in which older adults recall a disproportionate number of events from adolescence and early adulthood. This contradicts what might be expected from classical views of lifelong memory.

The study also gives new and important findings about how age is related to positive and negative evaluations of life events. While the participants in the study reported equal numbers of negative and positive events, there were gender differences – young women were more positive about their lives than were young men. Of significance was the finding that older persons were more positive about the past than were the young. The period of life reported to be the most positive is “the period between about 20 to 40 years of age.” By contrast the worst period is that of 70–80 years.

There are many other findings that are reported that will stimulate further research and lead to knowledge about lifespan developmental processes. For example, there are issues about the expression of aggression by young persons and depression by older persons. How do such behavioral predispositions relate to autobiographical memory and the ways life events are interpreted? The significance of this work will increase as the social and behavioral sciences expand their explorations of lifespan development and the ways autobiographical memory is related to individuals' behavior over the life span.

*James E. Birren*  
Andrus Gerontology Center  
University of Southern California  
Los Angeles, CA