

Chapter 2

The Processes of Adaptive Reminiscence

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The past affects us more than we generally realize. Our perceptions are colored by past experiences. Even our values, life-styles, and the choices we make spring from our unique past history. Whether we are resilient or vulnerable to stress, whether we are resourceful or inadequate in coping, often has its roots in early childhood experiences.

Whereas the causal role of early experience in personality development is widely recognized, there is little agreement as to how the present is shaped by the past. Diverse theoretical formulations tend to emphasize different underlying mechanisms. Learning theorists focus almost exclusively on environmental impact and conditioning. Psychoanalysts pay special attention to early childhood experience and unconscious motives. Recent research on reminiscence, life review, and autobiographical memory has revealed the importance of conscious, cognitive mechanisms.

Our past can be both a burden and a resource. The emotional baggage and the scars we carry can sap our energy and reduce our sense of well-being. Defective self-concepts and irrational beliefs based on faulty negative memories can further hinder us from effective functioning. But the vast reservoir of memories can also

serve as a storehouse of wisdom, meaning, and solace. This chapter is concerned mainly with the adaptive aspects of reminiscence.

Different from other types of memory, reminiscence serves our psychosocial rather than informational needs. Butler (1963) revolutionized our view of reminiscence by proposing that memory can be a source of mastery, wisdom, and gratification in old age. Therefore, remembering the past not only empowers individuals for the present, but also prepares them for the future. Butler's life review interpretation of reminiscence opened up a whole new field of research (see Foreword).

However, research on the adaptive benefits of reminiscence has not always yielded consistent results. One way to reconcile the seemingly contradictory findings is to recognize that reminiscence is multidimensional and that only certain types of reminiscence are adaptive. With Watt, I recently identified six types of reminiscence—integrative, instrumental, transmissive, narrative, escapist, and obsessive—and reported that only the first two types are associated with successful aging (Wong & Watt, 1991).

The response to our paper has been most gratifying. Numerous graduate students from North America and Europe have inquired about the procedure of coding and classifying reminiscence. Therapists have inquired how they may apply such a classification to help their clients to live fully in spite of the burden and traumas of the past. In this chapter, I address these queries, but the main thrust is on the adaptive processes of integrative and instrumental reminiscence.

TAXONOMY OF REMINISCENCE

Integrative Reminiscence

The main ingredients of integrative reminiscences are acceptance of self and others, conflict resolution and reconciliation, a sense of meaning and self-worth, and the integration of the present and past. The following are examples of integrative reminiscence:

Accepting one's past as significant and worthwhile: "I have had a wonderful life"; "I'm satisfied with the way my life has turned out."

Accepting negative past experiences and integrating them with the present: "When I was young, my father deserted the family. We were very poor, but we stuck together and loved each other as a family. I believe that this hardship in my childhood has made me a better person."

Reconciling reality with ideal: "I always wanted to be a writer, but I discovered that I just don't have the talent, so I became an editor."

Reconciling past conflicts and accepting those who have hurt one in the past: "When I was a teenager my parents broke up, and both remarried. I was very resentful because they did not seem to care about my feelings or needs. But as I grow older and look back I understand that they were really not compatible with

each other. They had suffered for many years before their divorce. Now I'm on good terms with both sets of parents."

Recalling experiences and lessons that have contributed to the development of personal values and meaning: "My father was a medical missionary. He was a godly man and provided a good role model for all his children. I'm grateful for the important values that I learned from him and have kept through all my life."

Achieving a sense of coherence in the past and the present: "I have experienced many difficulties and much suffering. It is my faith in God that has carried me through and given me a sense of meaning. I was brought up in a large family. My parents were devout Christians. They really lived out their faith. I think that they are really part of my life and my children's lives."

Instrumental Reminiscence

Instrumental reminiscence can be defined by three kinds of statements:

Remembering past plans and goal-directed activities: "Ever since I was a child, I always dreamed about becoming a nurse. I had to work several years to save up money and I had to talk to my parents on many occasions until they finally agreed to let me leave home and move to the city to study nursing. But I'll tell you, it was worth it."

Drawing from past experience to solve present problems: "During the Great Depression, life was very hard. There were very few jobs and money was difficult to come by. But we learned to survive by budgeting and making do without many things. The lessons I learned in those years have really helped me in trying to live on my old age pension."

Recalling how one coped with past difficulties: "I think the worst experience was the day I found out I had tuberculosis. The doctors wanted to take out the lung. They said it was the only hope I had but I refused. I was damned if those germs were going to get me, so I practiced a positive mental attitude. Two years later I had recuperated. I think what helped my progress most was my state of mind."

Transmissive Reminiscence

Transmissive reminiscence is similar to storytelling and oral history. It is the recounting of past events with the purpose of instructing or entertaining the listener. It can be inferred from references to the practices of a bygone era and statements about the lessons one has learned from one's past experiences:

Sharing traditional values and cultural heritage: "We were always taught to respect our elders. So when my parents were alive, I always gave them lots of money to spend, I took good care of them and they stayed with us until they died. I have taught my own children the same way and I hope they will look after us during our last years."

Sharing personal wisdom or lessons learned in one's past: "For most of my adult life, I was a drunk. I lost my job, I lost all my friends, and worst of all I abandoned my wife and children. Finally, I woke up in the hospital without remembering how I got there. That day I knew I had to change or I would be dead. Through the help of AA I was able to break free from alcohol and I haven't touched a drink in 20 years. That's why whenever I have the opportunity I tell young people about the dangers of drinking."

Both kinds of transmissive reminiscence presuppose an audience. In most cases, the listener is a younger person who may benefit from such knowledge. A common example would be grandparents' teaching their grandchildren moral lessons through stories from their family's history or personal experience.

Escapist Reminiscence

Escapist reminiscence is also referred to as defensive reminiscence. Whenever one seeks comfort from people and events that inhabit one's memory landscapes, one is engaged in escapist reminiscence. It is evident in statements that glorify the past and deprecate the present.

Boasting exaggeratedly about past achievements: "You wouldn't believe how tough we were in the war when you look at me now. Let me tell you about the day when we were flying over enemy territory when all of a sudden we were overwhelmed by a squadron of German planes. We killed a bunch of them, but eventually the Germans got all my buddies and I was the only one left. My plane was riddled with bullets, I was shot twice in the leg, and I was completely outnumbered. I thought about bailing out, but then I remembered why I was there—to defend democracy and the freedom of those counting on us at home. So I stayed, and I fought, and I killed all those Germans. Never was there such a fight. It's guys like me that have given you the type of life you lead today."

This is not an example of transmissive reminiscence because of the illusion of self-importance exemplified by the last two sentences. The fact that this heroic act was frequently referred to with relish throughout the interview confirmed that this veteran indulged in escapist reminiscence.

Exaggerating the pleasant aspects of the past and desiring to return to "the good old days": "My husband and I had some really great times together. We had so much fun going on camping trips, fishing. . . . My memories of the many cities we have visited are as vivid as if I was there right now. The sights, sounds and smells are so beautiful and fill me with longing to have those times back. Life is so very bland and lackluster now—my memories are what keeps me going."

There is a strong tendency to recall selectively pleasant aspects of the past and overlook negative events. Dwelling on the good old days allows a person to escape from present realities. Such flight to the past is similar to daydreaming or

fantasizing about the future. It can be psychologically beneficial because it provides a source of happiness and a buffer against present stress. When the present is painful and the future looks bleak, the past becomes the only source of solace. Furthermore, memories of self as someone who was loved and valued enable one to maintain a positive self-concept when everything conspires to destroy one's self-esteem. But escapist reminiscence has its drawbacks when it is carried to the extent of interfering with present functioning.

Obsessive Reminiscence

Obsessive reminiscence is characterized by persistent rumination on unpleasant past events. It is often accompanied by feelings of guilt, shame, resentment, or despair. Another characteristic of an obsessive reminiscence is that it tends to be repeated like a broken record. It reflects a failure to integrate problematic past experiences with the more positive aspects of life.

Confessing guilt, bitterness, or disappointment: "My husband died when I was away for two days visiting my friends in the West. He fell in the bathtub and eventually died because there was no one there to help him. It has been years now but I still cannot forgive myself for leaving him home alone for two days. This terrible thing would never have happened had I stayed with him."

Obsessive reminiscence causes inner pain, which serves as a warning that all is not well within one's psychic system. The cause is typically some past trauma or unresolved conflict. Obsessive reminiscence is an inner cry for healing.

While this type of reminiscence is generally associated with poor mental health, it can also be adaptive for two reasons. First, it calls attention to the unfinished business and provides the motivation for healing. Second, it may reflect an intense inner struggle that is necessary for recovery. Integration is generally preceded by the working through of obsessive memories.

Narrative Reminiscence

Narrative reminiscence is more descriptive than interpretative or evaluative. It consists of either bare-thread statements of autobiographical facts or the recounting of past episodes with embellishment.

Providing a simple autobiographical sketch: "I was born in Aberdeen, Scotland in 1920. I got married right after the Second World War to my sweetheart from school. We moved to Canada in the early 1950s, and my first job in Canada was working as a technician at CGE in Peterborough."

Providing anecdotes from the past in the absence of psychological evaluations present in the other categories of reminiscence: "Every winter my dad used to flood the side lawn and we would have a skating carnival. We were all

dressed up in different costumes, and dad was always a clown. And dad would take all the little girls for a skate. Then we'd come in and have cocoa and sandwiches."

This is not a case of transmissive reminiscence because it is neither a general description of a bygone era nor a moral lesson.

Guidelines for Coding Reminiscence

A three-stage procedure may be used to code reminiscences.

Stage 1 First, the reminiscence data are divided into paragraphs, which serve as the units of analysis.

If data are based on diaries or autobiographies, paragraphs already exist. In the case of tape-recorded and transcribed oral reminiscence, paragraphs can be identified using simple rules of English style. Each paragraph must have at least one complete sentence and a self-contained idea. Typically, a paragraph begins with a topic sentence, which is elaborated in one or more sentences, and ends with a summary of the main point.

Whenever the interviewer asks a question that introduces a new topic, it usually marks the beginning of a new paragraph. It is also helpful to pay attention to the flow and pauses of the interviewee's speech while coding paragraphs.

The main purpose of using the paragraph as the unit of content analysis is that each paragraph conveys a complete thought. It does not make a great deal of difference in the coding process whether the reminiscence is divided into two or three large paragraphs or five or six smaller paragraphs, as long as each paragraph is classified correctly.

Stage 2 In the second stage, each unit is assessed for the presence of one of the six types of reminiscence. In classifying reminiscence, the therapist should focus not on isolated sentences, but on the main idea in each paragraph. For example, in the case of a woman wrestling with the meaning of the untimely death of her husband, the entire process of grieving and eventual acceptance would constitute an integrative reminiscence, not just the single statement indicating acceptance.

Another important consideration is the overall pattern of reminiscence. In the case of obsessive reminiscence, it is the repetitive nature of certain negative sentiments that reveals an obsession with past troubles. Similarly, it is the disproportional and recurrent remembrance of the good old days that identifies a reminiscence as escapist. Thus, the classifying of each unit should be done in the context of the entire reminiscence transcript, which helps clarify the meaning of each paragraph.

Stage 3 In the third stage, each subject is given a score for each of the six types of reminiscence. These scores represent the total number of words devoted

to each type of reminiscence. This quantitative measure enables the researcher to investigate the relationships between different types of reminiscence and other psychological variables. In addition, therapists may use this measure to assess the progress of reminiscence therapy by monitoring the increased use of adaptive types of reminiscence and decreased use of maladaptive types.

ADAPTIVE PROCESSES OF REMINISCENCE

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss all the adaptive functions of reminiscence and their underlying mechanisms. Lieberman and Tobin (1983) identified three functions of reminiscence: (a) To maintain the self-concept in the midst of change and decline, through mythmaking; (b) to serve as a resource of consolation and gratification; and (c) to resolve past conflict and achieve meaning for the remaining years. My own analysis focuses on the particular adaptive functions of integrative and instrumental reminiscence.

Functions of Integrative Reminiscence

One of the most important functions of reminiscence is to help the individual achieve ego integrity. According to Erikson (1959, 1963, 1982), ego integrity is the cumulative product of having successfully resolved the earlier stages of development. It is "reaping of the benefits of a life richly spent, not only in the storehouse of memories, but in the fruition of problems worked through, plans executed, mediation undertaken, suffering survived" (Ulanov, 1981, p. 113).

The attainment of ego integrity is a lifelong process, according to Erikson. It depends on successful management of developmental conflicts, acceptance of one's life cycle without regrets, and harmonization of different stages of life without fear of death. The hallmark of ego integrity is wisdom.

Butler's (1975) view of ego integrity is less ambitious:

It is a quality of "serenity" and "wisdom" derived from resolving personal conflicts, reviewing one's life and finding it acceptable and gratifying, and viewing death with equanimity. One's life does not have to have been a "success" in the popular sense of that word in order to be gratifying. People take pride in a feeling of having done their best, of having met challenge and difficulty and sometimes from simply having survived against terrible odds. (p. 417)

The life review, according to Butler, is the primary mechanism whereby ego integrity is achieved.

Ego integrity may be conceptualized as the development of positive but realistic self-schemas. In the struggle for survival, we need a self-concept that has stood the test of time and enables us to cope with the demands of the present and the uncertainties of the future.

Ego integrity involves the integration of various self-schemas in such a way that we have a clear sense of coherence and identity. This cannot be achieved by mythmaking and denying the negative aspects of our past. Nor can it be attained by reclaiming the innocence of childhood. Ego integrity requires a longitudinal perspective and honest examinations of one's entire life history.

I agree with Butler that the mechanism responsible for ego integrity is the life review. It is a long and arduous process, which involves confronting, making sense of, and working through painful past experiences. It is also a dynamic process, because it requires revisions of self-schemas so that we can incorporate both the negative and positive aspects of the past into a self-concept that approximates the kind of person we want to be.

Wisdom is the crowning achievement of the search for ego integrity. Wisdom is demonstrated in learning to accept the self with all its defects and failures. Wisdom is also manifested in having a sense of meaning, purpose, and coherence in the midst of adversities and relentless change.

One of the major sources of confusion in the reminiscence literature is the failure to clarify the concept of life review. Although there is some consensus that life review is evaluative, the distinction between active life review and the actualization of life review has not been recognized.

Strictly speaking, life review is an active, ongoing process. Life review is said to be actualized when one has resolved most of the past conflicts and has more or less achieved integrity and all that remains to be done is an occasional fine-tuning. Once the major work of life review has been successfully completed, it will be manifested in integrative reminiscence.

Whenever the literature mentions life review, it typically means active life review. For example, Molinari and Reichlin (1984-85) observed, that

In contrast to simple storytelling, life review reminiscence is personal and intense, representing an active grappling with the past in order to come to terms with it. Conflict is a natural part of life review, reflecting as it does a set of contents and an internal process that is evoked through the recollection of experiences that remain unresolved. (p. 82)

In a similar vein, Horacek (1977) emphasized the problem-solving aspect of life review: "Life review offers an opportunity to understand and accept personal weaknesses and past misdeeds and to take responsibility for our actions. There is the chance to resolve longstanding conflicts, to restore relationships with a spouse, children, relatives, and friends" (p. 104).

What these writers have in mind is clearly the problem-solving process of active life review. When individuals are still in the throes of working through unresolved conflicts, a high level of reminiscence is to be expected.

Active life review tends to be triggered by major transitions or personal crises. Although active life review is adaptive, in the short run it can be painful and may have an adverse impact on one's well-being and life satisfaction.

Although conflict resolution has been the main focus of the life review literature, the search for self-worth and self-identity may be equally important. A conflict-free life can be boring and meaningless. Similarly, a past devoid of problems may also be shallow and empty. Resolution of all past conflicts does not necessarily confirm the value of one's existence. That is why in active life review, people are seeking something that imbues their past with a sense of meaning and significance. They need the validation that they have not lived in vain.

Related to the search for meaning and self-worth is the quest for self-identity. People want to know who they are. There must be, at the very core of their being, some basic, irreducible, and immutable elements that define who they are.

The foundation of self-identity often lies buried, however. It is only by excavating layers and layers of memories that we can get to the beginnings from which our self has evolved. Having stripped away the persona and discovered what we are really like, we can work toward self-acceptance. Without the self-knowledge gained through active life review, self-affirmation means self-deception.

Thus, active life review attempts to answer a number of fundamental questions we ask about ourselves: Why do I feel so insecure? What have I done that I am ashamed of? Why do I have such a poor self-concept? What do I really want in life? What is my ultimate purpose in life? Is my life meaningful? These are difficult questions that demand a great deal of soul searching.

Active life review is also the self's adaptive response to past traumas, because if there is no confronting and working through of painful memories, there can be no healing and restoration. The presence of an obsessive memory indicates the need for or the failure of active life review.

The preceding analysis indicates why it is important to distinguish between the active life review and actualized life review. It is a distinction between process and product, which may have very different psychological correlates. Without this distinction, it would be difficult to predict and interpret the relationship between life review and various outcome measures.

Integrative reminiscence indicates the actualization of life review: The individual not only has resolved past conflicts, but also has achieved personal significance and self-acceptance. This type of reminiscence should be associated with healthy and happy aging (Wong & Watt, 1991).

The cognitive processes of active life review involve the following:

Search of early memories: This is especially important in working through memories related to feelings of shame, guilt, and anger. Basically, it is the process of confronting past traumas and unresolved conflicts in order to recognize the events and forces that have shaped one's present condition.

Reconstruction of memories: The past seldom intrudes into the present without distorting it. In restructuring one's life history, the mind actively seeks to fill in missing gaps and rearrange events so that life begins to make sense and take on personal significance.

Revision of self-schemas: The revision of self-schemas is the major part of working through the past. In this process, one has to revise existing schemas and beliefs in such a way that the negative sides of the past are integrated with the positive aspects.

Search for personal meaning: This process includes searching for past experiences and acquired values that make life meaningful (Wong, 1989).

In essence, the main function of active life review is to achieve and protect ego integrity. Active life review includes processes that serve one's need for coherence, meaning, identity, and self-esteem and facilitate the struggle to be free from psychic pain and conflict.

Functions of Instrumental Reminiscence: Preserving the Sense of Mastery

To be effective in dealing with the exigencies of life, one needs a sense of mastery and competence. Otherwise, even small problems seem unsurmountable, and one is constantly threatened by feelings of inferiority and insecurity.

A backlog of successes is important in building confidence, but success alone is not sufficient. People can be very successful by objective criteria but still feel haunted by a sense of inferiority, which is rooted in early experience.

From the perspective of reminiscence therapy, early memories are useful in identifying possible causes of negative schemas about the self and others. Numerous therapeutic benefits will flow from the revision of mistaken schemas. At the very least, acceptance of one's limitations and weaknesses removes the need for relying on unadaptive defense mechanisms to overcome feelings of inferiority. As we survey the wreckage from the past—all the futile struggles and all the broken dreams—we begin to see ourselves in stark nakedness. All of a sudden, we realize that we are not as smart as we thought, and that we may not have what it takes to be what we have always wanted to be.

By giving up fictitious goals of superiority, one is freed from both the illusion of success and the burden of failure. One recognizes the absurdity and futility of such misguided aspirations as saving the whole world. At this point, dreams of glory give way to more realistic life goals (Adler, 1958).

By revising self-schemas, we also learn to adopt realistic strategies to cope with the demands of life. Once we have identified the internal and external obstacles and differentiated the controllable and uncontrollable forces, we are able to use appropriate strategies to cope with various demands.

A sense of mastery is needed in every stage of development. Erikson (1963) believed that mastery is a major source of satisfaction and proposed that the desire to achieve autonomy begins in early childhood. The subsequent developmental tasks to achieve initiative, competence, and generativity are all related to the need for mastery. Both Adler (1927/1957, 1958) and Fromm (1947) postulated that

people possess an innate drive to overcome helplessness experienced in childhood through mastery over their environment.

The mastery motivation is beneficial because it mediates adaptive behaviors, such as problem solving and persistence. According to Bandura's (1977, 1981) self-efficacy theory, people's perception that they can effect changes in their environment increases their ability to cope and leads to greater persistence in the face of adversity. People who perceive that outcomes are independent of their behaviors are likely to become helpless and vulnerable to depression (Seligman, 1975).

However, an excessive need for control because of an unresolved inferiority complex can be destructive. Attempts to dominate and intrude into other people's territories can ruin relationships. The tendency to control the uncontrollable can create unnecessary frustration, anxiety, and hostility (Wong, 1992; Wong & Sproule, 1984).

The task of maintaining a sense of agency and mastery becomes increasingly difficult in later years. Regardless of how we glorify the golden age, sooner or later the harsh realities of aging descend on all of us. Unless we die prematurely, the relentless aging process does not leave anyone unscathed.

Old age can be a breeding ground for feelings of inferiority because of diminished coping resources and the chronicity of age-related problems. We feel helpless when there is no cure to health problems and when our memories are failing us. We are made to feel inferior when we have to ask others to do things we used to do well. These feelings may be compounded by memories of childhood situations associated with feelings of inferiority.

The illusion of control also plays an important role in bolstering one's sense of competence (Lefcourt, 1976; Taylor & Brown, 1988). It has been suggested that the active mastery of middle age changes into a more passive mode, or even a magic mode of mastery in old age (Neugarten & Gutmann, 1958). In their desire for greater mastery, the elderly's perception of personal control may become highly inflated; sometimes their perceived control may be based on wishful thinking and fantasy.

There are many ways to preserve a sense of mastery through reminiscence. One way is to recall career achievements. Several investigators (e.g., Butler, 1963) have recognized the value of summarizing one's life work. Others may not be interested in our resume when we are out of the job market, but it is for our own mental health that we know what we have done with our lives in spite of the limitations. At the very least, it gives an account of how we have spent our productive years. If we have not fared too badly in spite of the many constraints, we can derive certain measures of satisfaction.

Magee (1988a) observed that

When older adults confront current problems, many regularly review their lives for instances of successful problem-solving conduct. These precedents support their self-

concept as competent people and serve as a model of effective behavior that they can adapt to their current situations. (p. 9).

Such recollections serve not only as a motivation for mastery, but also as a source of wisdom.

Even when dealing with the problem of bereavement, it is helpful to learn from past experience. "Methods used to adjust to past losses, however, are probably the most important factor defining acceptance of one's own death. By recounting past crises and their resolutions, the aged gain access to their most effective coping skills" (K. King, 1984, p. 282).

By reminiscing about a time of strength and accomplishment, we reassure ourselves and others that we are the same competent person. This sense of sameness and consistency reinforces the construction of the self as a functioning, effective problem solver. Such a self-identity fosters self-esteem.

There is now considerable evidence that instrumental coping is beneficial (Billings & Moos, 1981; Folkman, Lazarus, Pimley, & Novacek, 1987; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Instrumental reminiscence can be regarded as remembering the past use of instrumental coping.

A sense of mastery cannot be maintained solely by memories of past achievements. There is the need to find new activities and involvements in later years. Commitment to meaningful work can lessen our pains and provide a surge of energy.

It is through looking back that we learn what we have always wanted to do. We are more likely to feel that we are engaged in something meaningful when there has been a lifelong commitment. Finding meaningful work in old age is a main ingredient of mastery.

Unfortunately, declining health will eventually force us to give up many activities. However, we need not become less active, because we can switch to activities that are more in line with our inner needs and physical constraints. As we grow older, we tend to become more inner oriented and spiritually minded. We should always explore and discover activities that make us feel competent and fulfilled.

Reminiscing, whether in the form of writing an autobiography or sharing recollections with friends, is an activity that capitalizes on the strength of the elderly. It requires a minimum of physical energy and provides inner resources for living.

To promote a sense of mastery, a two-prong approach is needed in reminiscence therapy. On the one hand, we need to help clients become aware of their inferiority complex, fictitious life goals, and the self-destructive strategies they used in their attempts to overcome inferiority. On the other hand, we need to encourage them to recall past accomplishments and successes in achieving life goals. Such instrumental reminiscence helps maintain a sense of continuity and mastery.

There are at least three processes whereby instrumental reminiscence contributes to healthy aging:

Access to problem-solving skills: Instrumental reminiscence ensures that one's actions and decisions benefit from accumulated wisdom and experience in coping with the demands of everyday life.

Search for realistic tasks: We learn what we can do and cannot do only by examining our track record. Learning to pursue realistic goals and activities not only frees us from unnecessary frustration, but also gives us a sense of competence.

Summarizing past achievements: Reviewing instances of successful problem solving and accomplishments provides a firm foundation of mastery and resourcefulness.

Both instrumental reminiscence and commitment to meaningful activities are needed to keep us afloat in the face of continued decline and loss in old age. If we have done it before, we can do it again in overcoming the challenges of life.

CONCLUSIONS

Memories can cut both ways—they can depress us or elevate our spirit; they can bind us or set us free. When the power to recall is properly channeled, reminiscence can help maintain a sense of integrity and mastery.

I have focused on the adaptive processes of integrative and instrumental reminiscence in this chapter. Most of these processes are cognitive in nature. The most difficult and painful processes involve confronting and reconstructing the past and revising one's schemas. Only through these processes can one develop a realistic, yet positive, self-concept in spite of past negative events, present difficulties, and future uncertainties.

The other adaptive processes of reminiscence concern the use of memory as an inner resource. Our memory storage provides us with a constant supply of wisdom, inspiration, and personal meaning. Thus, as a resource, memory not only expands our coping capabilities, but also helps us maintain a positive self-concept.

When reminiscence takes place in a group setting, it also serves the social support function; I have discussed the adaptive benefits of social reminiscence elsewhere (Wong, 1991).

Reminiscence yields many practical implications for therapy (Watt & Wong, 1990). In this chapter, I have identified only several adaptive processes which may be employed in a therapeutic context.