Remembering Being Me:
The Self-continuity Function of Autobiographical Memory in Younger and Older Adults

Susan Bluck
University of Florida

Nicole Alea
University of North Carolina Wilmington

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Abstract

What is the function of remembering one's personal past? Literatures converge to identify three fundamental functions of autobiographical memory: self, social, and directive. This chapter focuses on the role of autobiographical memory in maintaining self-continuity. Self-continuity refers to the knowledge and experiential sense of being the same person over time regardless of changes in one's environment, in social relationships, and across ontological development. People need to maintain self-continuity: memory for one's self in the past is an important form of self-knowledge (Neisser, 1988) that is necessary for achieving current goals (Conway, Singer, & Tagini, 2004) and is related to well-being. Do individuals consciously use autobiographical memory to promote self-continuity? In the current study, using the Thinking About Life Experiences Questionnaire, younger and older adults self-reported the frequency with which they use autobiographical memory to develop and maintain self-continuity. Individuals who reported low levels of self-concept clarity reported more frequently recalling their personal past to try to create self-continuity. Mediation analyses show that it is younger adults, who have lower levels of self-concept clarity, who most frequently draw on their personal past to create continuity. The extent to which individuals use autobiographical memory in the service of self-continuity may depend on the psychosocial tasks faced in their specific life phase.

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Self-continuity requires knowing and experiencing that we are, in a fundamental way, the same person over time. Experientially it seems obvious. I am, of course, me. Who else would I suddenly be? But how do we actually know and feel that we are the same person that we were yesterday, or a decade ago? What psychological processes are at work to maintain this continuity? One crucial process is autobiographical memory: I *remember* being me. A central function of autobiographical memory is to help individuals maintain self-continuity (Bluck, 2003; Pillemer, 1992).

"His own face, too, when he lingered for a quarter of an hour in front of his mirror, shaving, often seemed to him like that of a child grown old… You talk of the years as though they existed. Then you notice that between the moment when you still went to school, even between the moment when your mother tucked you up in bed, and the moment you're living through now…" (Simenon, 1952, pp. 54).

This character in Simenon's novel reflects on his self-continuity. It is memory that bridges the moment when his mother tucked him up in bed and the moment he is living through now. It is autobiographical memory (i.e., memory for the experiences of one's own life) that brings the past forward in time, allows us to be the self that we have always been. Well, not quite. A person could, without remembering anything from their past, be the same person over time. Memory does not actually create the *objective* continuity in one's life. For example, a newt is born and remains the same newt over a lifetime with very little memory capacity and no nostalgic reflection on earlier days. This chapter, however, is not about self-continuity in the sense of *being* the same person over time (nor is it about newts). It is about the subjective human capacity of knowing and feeling that one is the same person over time. One function of autobiographical memory is that it allows people to experience their own self-continuity (e.g., Cohen, 1998; Neisser, 1978).

The relation of autobiographical memory to the self has been theorized about for at least the last 40 years (e.g., Brewer, 1986; Bluck & Levine, 1998; Fitzgerald, 1996; Markus, 1980). Neisser (1988), for example, postulated five kinds of self-knowledge, with one kind being the *extended self*:

the self extended both backwards and forwards in time. Knowledge of one's self in the present is combined with memory, that is, past self-knowledge (and future possible selves) to form part of the larger self-knowledge system. The concept of the extended self opened the door for consideration of how episodic and generic memories about the self might be organized, and related to the larger self-system.

Further conceptualization of the extended self has resulted in the *life story* construct, a narrative record of one's personal past that forms a central aspect of identity (McAdams, 1999). The ability for one to maintain a coherent *long-term self* is tied to the creation of a life story (Conway, Singer, & Tagini, 2004) that is represented in autobiographical memory (i.e., the life story schema, Bluck & Habermas, 2001). Thus, memory and identity have a reciprocal relationship: memory organization is aided by a continuous sense of self (Greenwald, 1980), and self-continuity relies on autobiographical memory (Bluck & Levine, 1999). The life story combines memory and identity in a dynamic, integrative, relationship: it is argued to be the highest level of organization of both autobiographical memory (Bluck & Habermas, 2001;Conway, Singer, & Tagini, 2004), and identity (Hooker, 2002; McAdams, 1999).

At one level, this relation between autobiographical memory and self-continuity is likely highly automatic. The basic knowledge that one is the same person on awakening each morning, along with autobiographical facts (Brewer, 1986) about one's self (e.g., name, birth place) seem to occur with very little cognitive effort. In this chapter, however, a different level of self-continuity is examined. Though one knows that they are the same person, to what extent do they *experience* being the same person over time? Does experiencing a sense of self-continuity require cognitive-affective effort, such as searching memory and evaluating past experiences? From a memory perspective, the extent to which one experiences a sense of continuity may depend on (a) the constancy of one's environment, (b) the availability of long-term relationship partners, and (c) one's lifespan developmental phase. The first two of these are discussed briefly below, followed by some empirical work concerning adult developmental differences in using autobiographical memory to create self-continuity.

Environmental Constancy: Home is Where the Memories Are

The physical environment is full of potential external memory cues. Though memory can be cued internally (i.e., our own thoughts and feelings cue memories for us) both voluntary and involuntary recall of autobiographical experiences are often cued by objects (Habermas, 1999) and places in our external environment (e.g., Berntsen, 1996). Individuals who remain in the same house or city should not feel as much need to consciously forge continuity in their sense of self over time (Nelson, 2003) since their recall of times past is more frequently activated by cues in their environment. Individuals who repeatedly walk the same neighbourhood streets, and frequent the same café's in the evening are likely to be bombarded with cues that remind them of previous experiences in those long-familiar environments. Individuals who move and change environments often, however, are more likely to engage in effortful recall of the self in times past to create the sense that, regardless of changing environments, their life story is still a connected set of events (e.g., see Conway & Haque, 1999).

Long-term Relationships: I Knew You When…

The extent to which one is able to maintain a sense of self-continuity with the aid of memory may also depend on cues provided by other people (Thorne, 2004; Thorne & Klohnen, 1993). Sharing self-defining memories (Singer & Salovey, 1996) aids in making meaning of one's ongoing experiences (e.g., Pasupathi, Lucas, & Coombs, 2002; Thorne, McLean, & Lawrence, 2004). Note, however, that the length of the relationship between individuals may influence the functions that memory serves (Alea & Bluck, 2004), particularly the self-continuity function. When telling memory stories with someone who has been known for a long time, conversational references are more frequently made to how one acted or felt not only during the event being recalled, but as related to other past events, or in different life phases (Pasupathi & Richardson, 2005). These findings suggest that speaking to a long-term partner allows one to talk about an event as a continuous part of one's larger life story. This is different from confining memory-sharing to a time-limited frame of reference as is necessary with a partner that one has known for a shorter time (e.g., Gould & Dixon, 1993). Recently acquainted conversational partners cannot guide the reconstruction of one's past; long-term partners often do (Pasupathi, 2001). Taken together, this research suggests that conversations about

past experiences in long-term relationships may aid in spontaneous integration and updating of individuals' sense of self-continuity. Individuals who do not maintain many long-term relationships, with family or friends, may have the more arduous task of forging self-continuity without the benefit of social construction.

Life Phase: Remembering Being Me at 20 and 70

Is self-continuity more easily achieved early or late in life? From a pure memory perspective, logical hypotheses for either end of adult life having greater self-continuity can be made. For example, self-continuity should be easier to maintain the fewer experiences one has, or the shorter period of time one has, to bridge into a continuous life story. If so, younger people, with less life lived, should find the forging of self-continuity less taxing: they need draw together only 20 not 70 years of memories. Contrarily, older adults may have developed more efficient organization of self-related memories over a lifetime. Older adults appear to maintain a limited but well-defined and well-rehearsed set of meaningful memories (Anderson, Cohen, & Taylor, 2000) that create a clear biographical sense of identity (Cohen, 1998). This streamlined organizational structure could outweigh the problem created by the greater number of experiences to be collected into a continuous sense of self. That is, the established clarity of older adults' self-concept could render the conscious forging of self-continuity a less pressing issue. Thus, from a memory perspective, whether forging self-continuity is likely to be more effortful for younger or older adults is a bit of a toss-up.

From a lifespan developmental perspective (e.g., Baltes, 1987), however, theory and empirical research converge to suggest that younger adults should find the creation of self-continuity more challenging. Individuals entering young adulthood still face the developmental task of creating a clear and coherent identity (McAdams, 1999; Habermas & Bluck, 2000). They are, as necessitated by their life phase, in the process of self-definition, forging an identity that will carry them into the adult sphere (Erikson, 1959). In contrast, older adults, even into very late life (Troll & Skaff, 1997), have a well-defined sense of self that shows remarkable stability and resiliency (Brandstädter & Greve, 1994).

The study presented below investigates the self-continuity function of autobiographical memory within a lifespan development framework, focusing on three relations. (i) This research

examines the extent to which having a clear and consistent self-concept is related to self-reporting that one uses autobiographical memory to serve the function of maintaining a sense of self-continuity. We expect individuals with low levels of self-concept clarity to more frequently use autobiographical memory in the service of creating self-continuity. (ii) The study involves both younger and older adults with the expectation, based on theory and some very recent research (Diehl, personal communication, September 12, 2005), that younger adults will have lower levels of self-concept clarity than do their older counterparts. (iii) As such, we expect that younger adults, who are likely to currently have lower self-concept clarity as they are still in the midst of forging an adult identity, are more likely to use autobiographical memory to help them achieve this self-related developmental goal.

Methods

Participants

There were 156 younger (*M* age = 22.54; range = 17-39; 74 male) and 151 older adult (*M* age = 73.71; range = 60-91; 75 male) participants. Roughly representing the demographics of the area, 82% of the sample was Caucasian, 6% African American, 5% Hispanic, 4% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 4% reported their race as "Other." Younger adults had an average of 18.04 years of education (*SD* = 5.28) and older adults 21.55 years (*SD* = 4.92), t (305) = 6.01, $p < .001$. On a Likert-scale (Maddox, 1962) ranging from 1 (*very good*) to 6 (*very poor*), young and older adults both reported being in *good* to *very good* health (young: *M* = 1.84, *SD* = .71; old: *M* =1.79, *SD* = .95), t (305) = .47, $p > .05$. The sample was typical in terms of age differences in basic cognitive functioning (Schaie, 1994): older adults had better vocabulary ability (WAIS-R Vocab; Wechsler, 1981), and younger adults showed higher reasoning ability (Letter Series Task; Thurstone, 1962) and episodic memory performance (Auditory Verbal Learning Test; Rey, 1941).

Procedures and Measures

All participants completed the Thinking About Life Experiences questionnaire (TALE; revised form of Bluck, Alea, Habermas, & Rubin, 2005). The entire sample completed this questionnaire in order to provide sufficient power for factor analyses to obtain relevant subscales. In order to examine the relation between TALE subscales and other relevant psychological constructs, a subset of

participants (*n* = 177; 93 young and 84 old, balanced by gender) also completed the Self-Concept Clarity Scale (SCCS; Campbell, et al., 1996) and the Big Five Inventory (BFI; John & Srivastava, 1999). For participants who completed all measures, the TALE was given first followed by the SCCS, the BFI and several other measures not relevant to the current report. Only measures used in the current analyses are described here.

Thinking About Life Experiences Questionnaire. The TALE questionnaire is a self-report assessment of how frequently people use autobiographical memory to serve one of three theoretical functions: self, social, and directive. Previous analyses of the TALE have revealed that it contains several factors, including one that is interpreted as representing a self-continuity function (Bluck, et al., 2005). The revised scale used in the current study also resulted in the emergence of a self-continuity function subscale (exploratory factor analyses: common factors model with Promax rotation; Gorsuch, 1983). The factor loadings for the eight items that form the self-continuity function subscale (Chronbach's $\alpha = .88$) are presented in Table 1. Instructions for the TALE questionnaire focus not just on remembering, but also thinking about one's past (i.e., autobiographical reasoning; Habermas & Bluck, 2000). The instructions are: "Sometimes people think back over their life or talk to other people about their life…We are not interested in your memory for particular events, but more generally in how you bring together and connect the different events and periods of your life."

The questionnaire begins with two general items concerning how often people reflect on the past ("In general, how often do you *think back over* your life?") and share personal memories ("In general, how often do you *talk to others* about what's happened in your life?"). These questions are used to control for individual's baseline frequency of thinking and talking about the past. The second and major part of the questionnaire has 40 items that assess the frequency with which individuals use autobiographical memory to serve each of the theoretical functions (self, social, directive). The stem statement for all items is "I think back over or talk about my life or certain periods of my life…" Responses are made on a 5-point Likert-scale, ranging from *almost never* (1) to *very frequently* (5). The focus of the current report is on the self-continuity function subscale: stem completions (with *M* and *SD* by item) for that subscale appear in Table 1.

Self-Concept Clarity Scale. Individuals who are low on self-concept clarity may rely on autobiographical memory to help create greater self-continuity. The SCCS is a 12-item self-report measure that assesses the extent to which the participant's self-concept is clearly defined and internally consistent. SCCS items direct people to think about the level of clarity and consistency in their view of themselves (e.g., "My beliefs about myself often conflict with one another", "In general, I have a clear sense of who I am and what I am"). Responses are made on a 5-point Likert-scale, ranging from *strongly disagre*e (1) to *strongly agree* (5). Reliability of the SCCS has been reported in terms of internal consistency ($\forall$ = .85), and evidence is also available for its convergent and construct validity (Campbell et al., 1996). Chronbach's alpha in the current study was .87; descriptives appear in Table 2.

Big Five Inventory. Personality traits were included as control variables. The goal was to examine whether, independent of basic tendencies due to trait-level personality, the variables of major interest (self-concept clarity and age) predict frequency of using autobiographical memory to serve a self-continuity function. The BFI is a 44-item self-report measure of the big five personality traits. Questions assess the extent to which people agree or disagree with statements that describe them (e.g., "I see myself as someone who…" "is talkative", "tends to be lazy"). Responses are made on a 5-point Likert-scale, ranging from *disagree strongly* (1) to *agree strongly* (5). Items were averaged to produce subscales indicative of the big five personality traits (openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism; Chronbach's alpha > .80 for all subscales). Means and standard deviations for each subscale appear in Table 2.

Results

Regression analyses were conducted to examine the relation between self-concept clarity, age, and the frequency of using autobiographical memory to create self-continuity. Specifically, analyses examined whether level of self-concept clarity predicts how often people (regardless of age) remember and think about their past in an attempt to create greater self-continuity, and then whether age mediates this relation. Following standard mediation analysis procedures (Baron & Kenny, 1986), three separate hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to: (i) demonstrate that self-concept clarity predicts the frequency of using the self-continuity function of autobiographical memory, (ii)

demonstrate a significant relation between self-concept clarity and age, and (iii) examine whether age partially or fully mediates the relation between self-concept clarity and the self-continuity function of autobiographical memory.[1] Several control variables were included in the initial step of each regression analysis: gender, the BFI subscales (personality), and the two baseline TALE questions (frequency of thinking about, and talking about, one's past). Correlations and descriptive statistics for all variables are reported in Table 2.

The first regression analysis examined whether self-concept clarity predicts the frequency of using the self-continuity function of autobiographical memory. The criterion variable was an individual's score (average across items) on the self-continuity function subscale of the TALE. The predictor variable was the total score on the SCCS. The control variables (gender, BFI, two baseline TALE questions), entered in the first step of the model, together accounted for 6% of the variance in the self-continuity function of autobiographical memory, F (8, 169) =1.44, $p > .05$. Self-concept clarity was entered in the second step of the model and explained an additional 3% of the variance, $R^2 = .09$, F (1, 168) = 4.77, $p < .05$. As predicted, individuals with lower self-concept clarity reported using autobiographical memory to create self-continuity more frequently than individuals with higher self-concept clarity (i.e., in whom self-concept clarity is already established), $B = -.21$, $SEB = .01$. Thus, the first step in mediation was confirmed.

The second analysis examined the relation between self-concept clarity and age. That is, in order for age to mediate the existing relation between self-concept clarity and the frequency of using autobiographical memory for the self-continuity function, it was necessary that self-concept clarity be related to age (Baron & Kenny, 1986). The same group of control variables was entered in the model first. The criterion variable was age, and the predictor was the individual's total score on the SCCS. The control variables explained 18% of the variance in age, F (8, 169) = 4.54, $p < .05$. Relation of the control variables to variables of interest, (particularly the relation of personality variables to age; see correlations in Table 2), demonstrate the need to control for such variables when examining the

[1] Before beginning analyses, we examined whether age was a moderator (i.e., a self-concept clarity x age interaction), rather than a mediator. It was not. We also analyzed the data for non-linear trends. There were none.

relations between self-concept clarity, age, and the self-continuity function of autobiographical memory. Self-concept clarity accounted for an additional 3% of the variance in age, $R^2 = .21$, F (1, 167) = 6.33, $p < .05$. As expected, there was a positive relation between self-concept clarity and age, $B = .23$, $SEB = .31$. Younger adults, who are at a stage in their life when they are still developing a coherent sense of self (Erikson, 1959; Habermas & Bluck, 2000), were less clear about and less confident of their self-concept. Thus, the second step necessary to show mediation was also confirmed.

The final regression analysis involved the full mediation model: examining whether age mediates the relation between self-concept clarity and the frequency of using autobiographical memory to create self-continuity. If age is a partial mediator of the relation between self-concept clarity and the self-continuity function of autobiographical memory, self-concept clarity will be a weaker predictor (i.e., reduced *Beta* weight) of the self-continuity function of autobiographical memory when age is also entered in the model. If age fully mediates this relation, self-concept clarity will no longer be a significant predictor of the self-continuity function of autobiographical memory.

Results from the regression analyses for the mediation model are presented in Table 3. The criterion variable was the frequency of using the self-continuity function of autobiographical memory. The group of control variables was entered in the first step of the regression equation (omitted from Table 3). Self-concept clarity was entered as a predictor in the second step, and age was entered as a predictor in the final step. As before, control variables together accounted for 6% of the variance explained in how often people report using the self-continuity function of autobiographical memory, F (8, 169) =1.44, $p > .05$. Self-concept clarity independently explained an additional 3%, $R^2 = .09$, F (1, 168) = 4.77, $p < .05$. Most relevant to the mediation hypothesis, however, is the final step of the regression model: whether age predicts the frequency of using autobiographical memory for the self-continuity function, and partially or fully eliminates self-concept clarity as a significant predictor. Adding age to the regression model explains an additional 6% of variance in the frequency of using autobiographical memory in the service of promoting self-continuity, $R^2 = .15$, F (1, 166) = 12.31, $p <$ .05. Thus, age explains more variance in the reported use of autobiographical memory for the self-continuity function than does self-concept clarity. Further, as can be seen by the *Beta* weights reported

in Table 3, age is a full mediator: adding age to the model eliminates the previously significant relation between self-concept clarity and the self-continuity function. That is, more frequent use of the self-continuity function of autobiographical memory to enhance self concept clarity is largely related to one's age. Younger individuals at a developmental stage when self-concept is still being formed and consolidated use reflection on their past to help in that developmental task.

To further examine these age differences, we conducted an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) to assess mean-level frequency of using autobiographical memory to serve a self-continuity function. Age group (young, old) was the independent variable; average on the self-continuity function subscale of the TALE was the dependent variable. Covariates were gender, BFI subscales, the two baseline TALE questions, and total score on the SCCS. As expected from the regression results, there was an age main effect, F (1, 177) = 11.63, MSE = 6.70, p = .001, η_p^2 = .07. Young adults reported using autobiographical memory to serve a self-continuity function from *occasionally* to *often*. Older adults reported using autobiographical memory to gain self-continuity from *seldom* to *often* (see Figure 1).

Discussion

While most memory research has focused on memory performance and accuracy (how much and how well individuals remember), the ecological approach to memory demands that researchers also ask, what do humans use memory for (Baddeley, 1987, Neisser, 1978)? What functions are served by remembering our personal past? Autobiographical memory, the memory for one's past experiences, has been theorized to serve self, social, and directive functions (Bluck & Alea, 2002; Pillemer, 1992). Concerning self functions, one important end served by autobiographical remembering may be to forge and maintain a sense of self-continuity. Acts of autobiographical recall and reasoning (Bluck & Habermas, 2001; Staudinger, 2003), such as individuals report on the TALE questionnaire, provide connections between the current and past self. These multiple iterations of accessing one's autobiographical memory allow for an extended self, and a life story, to be constructed, maintained, and reconstructed.

Having a clear and coherent sense of self has been related to lower levels of neuroticism, and higher levels of self-esteem (Campbell et al, 1996). Temporal stability (i.e., continuity) in one's self-evaluations has been linked to higher levels of positive affect, and a sense of authenticity (Diehl, Jacobs, & Hastings, in press). Individuals who have coherent and clearly defined self-representations have significantly higher mean scores on measures of positive psychological well-being and significantly lower mean scores on measures of depression and negative affect, than individuals with unclear or fragmented self-representations (Diehl & Aertker, 2005). In short, the organization of individuals' view of self, such as maintenance of a clear and continuous sense of self, affects psychological well-being (Diehl, in press). Development of a coherent and organized self-knowledge system that incorporates one's personal past is not only crucial for well-being but for making future plans and achieving current goals (Conway, Singer, & Tagini, 2005).

While maintaining a basic level of self-continuity likely occurs automatically, certain challenges to continuity may require conscious forging. In such cases, people draw on autobiographical memory to link their past and present. As discussed earlier, changes in one's physical environment, and the lack of long-term social relationships, may be two conditions that challenge self-continuity. Aside from these individual differences in life context, lifespan development itself requires that each individual develop a self-concept (in childhood; Harter, 1999), develop autobiographical memory (in childhood; Nelson, 1993), and develop an extended self or life story across adolescence and young adulthood (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 1999). Thus, developmental life phase also affects the extent to which conscious efforts must be made at forging self-continuity through the use of autobiographical memory.

Despite cultural stereotypes to the contrary, reminiscing, reasoning about, and evaluating ones' past is not simply an idle pastime for the elderly; it is a psychological process that serves adaptive ends across the lifespan (Bluck & Alea, 2002). Thus, while autobiographical memory may serve some universal functions, (i.e., across age groups, across cultures), it may also be recruited as a resource to face specific demands at different points in the adult lifespan (e.g., Webster, 1997). Late adolescence into early adulthood is a life phase in which forming a clear and coherent sense of identity is the primary developmental task (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 1999). For example,

Erikson (1958) states that, "to be an adult means, among other things, to see one's own life in continuous perspective... (p. 111)."

The current study examined whether the frequency with which individuals report using autobiographical memory to serve a self-continuity function varied across two distinct life phases: early adulthood and late life. Due to their developmental phase, we hypothesized that younger adults would have lower self-concept clarity than older adults, and be more likely to use autobiographical memory to serve a self-continuity function as part of their attempt to create greater self-concept clarity. The mediation analyses confirmed our hypotheses: it appears that autobiographical memory serves a developmentally relevant function for these younger adults. Results show that younger adults report more frequently thinking or talking about their life, for example, when they are concerned about being "the same type of person that I was earlier", about whether their "beliefs have changed over time", and when they "want to re-interpret old events in the light of things that have happened since." Younger individuals at a developmental stage when self-concept is still being formed and consolidated (self-concept clarity was lower in young adults) use reflection on their past to move toward resolution of that psychosocial developmental task. Thinking about their own past allows them to collect together the data for their life story; talking about it provides an opportunity to rehearse and receive feedback from others (Pasupathi, 2001).

Note that all analyses included baseline levels of thinking and talking about one's personal past. Thus, it is not that younger adults, products of a different cohort than their elders, simply think and talk more about their past in general. Nor was it the case that personality differences between these two cohorts accounted for the obtained age effect; personality was also controlled for in all analyses. Instead the findings suggest that, regardless of baseline levels of autobiographical remembering and sharing, and controlling for personality differences, younger adults more often engage in remembering to serve a self-continuity function. Age accounted for a small but significant amount of variance in use of the self-continuity function of autobiographical memory (suggesting that it may be important to examine other individual differences in future research). The results are consistent with lifespan theories of development (Baltes, 1987; Pasupathi, 2001) and the notion that the life story is emergent during this life phase (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 1999).

This does not imply that older adults do not also recall their personal past in the service of maintaining continuity. Our results show that they report doing so ranging from *seldom* to *often*. It appears however, that older adults, having established higher self-concept clarity, do not consistently draw on autobiographical memory to forge self-continuity in the manner that younger adults do. Markus & Herzog (1992) suggest that older adults' sense of self-concept is much stronger because it is based on more accumulated evidence, and Cohen (1998) argues that older adults cull this 'accumulated evidence' to create a central set of well-rehearsed self-defining memories. Even in very old age, individuals report high levels of self-continuity (i.e., that they are essentially the same person as they have always been; Troll & Skaff, 1997). Thus, the conscious use of autobiographical memory particularly to maintain self-continuity may not be as frequent in late adulthood. Some research suggests that other functions, specifically socio-emotional functions such as maintaining intimacy in relationships, may be more important in later life (e.g., Carstensen, Pasupathi, Mayr, & Nesselrode, 1999; Webster, 1997). In addition, though older individuals may no longer be as concerned with forging self-continuity, later life has often been considered a time in which memory is accessed for more evaluative purposes: to evaluate one's self in relation to the life lived (e.g., *life review,* Birren & Deutchman, 1991; Butler, 1967; Bluck & Levine, 1998).

Conclusion: Remembering Being Me

Self-continuity involves knowing and experiencing that we are, in a fundamental way, the same person over time. At a physical level, there is a metaphorical *bridge of breaths* (Raisbeck, 2005) across our lifespan, confirming our continuity as an organism: a bridge of continuous breaths, one following another, connects our first day at kindergarten to our last day in hospice. But how is self-continuity maintained psychologically? How does one unite "*the moment when you still went to school, even… the moment when your mother tucked you up in bed, and the moment you're living through now"* (Simenon, 1952, p. 54)? One critical resource in developing and maintaining self-continuity is autobiographical memory.

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Author Note

Susan Bluck, Center for Gerontological Studies and Department of Psychology, University of Florida; Nicole Alea, Department of Psychology, University of North Carolina Wilmington.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Susan Bluck, University of Florida, P.O. Box 115911, Gainesville, FL, 32611-5911. Email: bluck@ufl.edu

Table 1
Factor Loadings and Descriptives for Self-continuity Subscale Items from the TALE

Item		Factor Loadings	*M*	*SD*
Q7	When I want to think about how I am different now than I was in the past.	.72	3.51	1.14
Q10	When I am concerned about whether I am still the same type of person that I was earlier.	.78	2.75	1.20
Q13	When I am concerned about whether my values have changed over time.	.83	3.01	1.15
Q14	When I want to try to learn from my past mistakes.	.48	3.62	.97
Q20	When I want to remember a lesson I learned in the past.	.50	3.63	.91
Q23	When I want to re-interpret old events in the light of things that have happened since.	.41	3.18	1.14
Q36	When I am concerned about whether my beliefs have changed over time.	.76	2.83	1.13
Q38	When I want to understand how I have changed from who I was before.	.84	2.86	1.15

Note. Question stem for all items was "I think back over or talk about my life or certain periods of my life." Scale = *almost never* (1) to *very frequently (5).*

Table 2
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for Study Variables

Variables	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Age	47.62	26.37	1.00										
2. Sex	2.51	.50	-.07	1.00									
3. Extraversion	28.03	5.91	.13	-.02	1.00								
4. Agreeableness	35.53	5.82	.24**	.15*	.33**	1.00							
5. Conscientiousness	34.15	6.21	.15*	.18*	.14*	.26**	1.00						
6. Neuroticism	20.66	6.82	-.37**	.25**	-.30**	-.50**	-.12	1.00					
7. Openness	38.33	6.63	.24**	-.08	.20**	.03	.18*	-.22**	1.00				
8. TALE: Think	3.98	.81	-.01	.11	.01	.00	-.13	.09	.14	1.00			
9. TALE: Talk	3.48	.89	-.03	.08	.26**	.10	-.04	-.08	.01	.43**	1.00		
10. SCCS	42.62	8.10	.37**	-.09	.33**	.38**	.41**	-.51**	.26**	-.15	.03	1.00	
11. TALE: Self	3.17	.81	-.30**	.08	.01	-.08	-.02	.11	-.02	.22**	.11*	-.18*	1.00

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

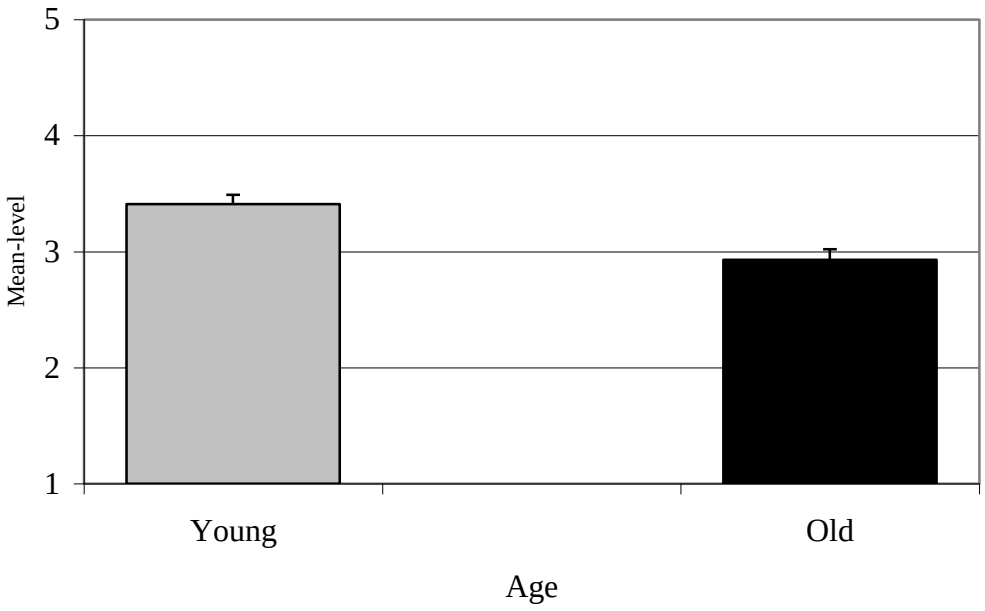
Table 3
Hierarchical Regression Analyses: Age Fully Mediates the Relation Between Self-concept Clarity and the Self-continuity Function of Autobiographical Memory

	SEB	*Beta*	*t*	*p*
Step 2				
Sex	.13	-.01	-.09	.93
TALE: Think	.08	.18	2.21	.03*
TALE: Talk	.08	.05	.65	.52
Extraversion	.01	.07	.88	.38
Agreeableness	.01	-.06	-.63	.53
Conscientiousness	.01	.11	1.29	.20
Neuroticism	.01	-.02	-.16	.88
Openness	.01	-.04	-.49	.63
SCCS	.01	-2.14	-2.18	.03*
Step 3				
Sex	.13	-.01	-.16	.88
TALE: Think	.08	.20	2.44	.02*
TALE: Talk	.08	.06	.69	.50
Extraversion	.01	.06	.69	.49
Agreeableness	.01	-.04	-.48	.63
Conscientiousness	.01	.12	1.42	.16
Neuroticism	.01	-.07	-.73	.47
Openness	.01	.00	.01	.99
SCCS	.01	-.15	-1.54	.13
Age	.01	.28	-3.51	.00**

Note: Step 1 (omitted above): control variables R^2 = .06; Step 2: R^2 = .09;
Step 3: R^2 = .15 * p < .05, ** p < .001

Figure Caption

Figure 1. Mean-level of Self-reported Use of Autobiographical Memory to serve a Self-continuity Function in Young and Older adults.


5
4
3
2
1
Mean-level
Young
Old
Age