

MEMORY VIVIDNESS MAY BE KEY TO HOW WELL PEOPLE SAY THEY REMEMBER THEIR LIVES



Vividness may drive self-assessment of autobiographical memory functioning

Samuli Kangaslampi, PhD
Tampere University, Finland
Maastricht University, Netherlands

BACKGROUND

- There are substantial, stable individual differences in autobiographical memory (AM).
- Assessing subjective AM functioning, that is, how well people think they remember their lives, is useful and important for both research and clinical practice.
- Often, such assessment is limited to single questions or assessing single memories, but some self-report questionnaires on overall subjective AM have also been developed.
- It remains unclear what features of AM affect self-evaluation of how well people remember their lives.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do simple one-question assessments of subjective autobiographical memory functioning relate to results gained from self-report questionnaires?
2. What aspects of autobiographical memory are most linked to its self-evaluated level of overall functioning?

METHOD

- In an online study, 457 Finnish-speaking adults ($M_{\text{age}} = 40.6$) were asked “How well and precisely do you usually remember the events of your own life?” and administered novel Finnish translations of the Autobiographical Recollection Test (ART) and the Survey of Autobiographical Memory (SAM).

RESULTS

- On a scale from 0–100, participants rated their ability to remember the events of their life at $M = 65.0$ ($SD = 19.0$).
- Answers to this simple question correlated highly with total scores on the ART ($r = .64$) and moderately with the SAM ($r = .47$).
- Correlations were highest for the Episodic subscale of the SAM ($r = .60$) and the Vividness ($r = .63$) and Coherence ($r = .62$) components of the ART.
- Scores on the SAM correlated highest with the Vividness ($r = .58$), Visual ($r = .54$), and Scene ($r = .54$) components of the ART.

DISCUSSION

- Answers to simple, single questions on subjective AM tend to correlate highly with results of longer self-report measures, especially with episodic aspects and vividness and coherence.
- Results on questionnaires like the SAM, though intended to measure more objective aspects of AM, may also largely reflect differences in recollective experience.
- Put together, results of this and previous studies suggest that subjective vividness and to some extent coherence of autobiographical memories may be key to how people evaluate the functioning of their autobiographical memory.



More details and to access the data

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

More information:
samuli@kangaslampi.net