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Living in History and Living by the Cultural Life Script: How People Date their Memories

This study investigated how people date their memories. According to Brown & Lee's "Living in History (LiH) theory, people date their memories with reference to public events, if these had a strong impact on the daily lives of people. Here, we extend this theory by drawing on cultural life script theory (Berntsen & Rubin, 2002, 2004) by hypothesizing that people will use cultural life script events to date their memories.

Old and young people from Berlin and North Germany (mean ages 77 years and 53 years) participated. They generated 20 memories to cue words, and then "thought aloud" while dating their memories. Participants' dating strategies were scored by Brown & Lee's (2010) scorings as *unjustified, personal, conflict related or pop/culture/weather related*. Further, categories for *Fall of the Berlin Wall* and *cultural life scripts* were added.

Hypotheses: 1) the percentage of memories dated referring to WWII is higher in older Germans than in the samples in an earlier study (Brown & Lee, 2010), and the percentage of datings referring to WWII is higher in old people from Berlin than in North Germans, because WWII had a larger impact on the daily lives in Berlin than in North Germany. 2) The fall of the Berlin Wall is used more as a reference point to date memories in Berlin, where this event supposedly had a higher impact on lives than in North Germany 3) The number of memories dated in relation to personal events will be reduced in favor of cultural life script events.

Results: Older Germans dated more memories than other national samples with reference to WWII, and people from Berlin dated more memories than North Germans with reference to WWII. Surprisingly, all four groups dated almost no memories with reference to the Fall of the Wall. In all four groups, cultural life scripts were a prominent way to date autobiographical memories. Results are discussed in relation to LiH- and cultural life script theory.

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