

Age differences in the appraisal of past and future transitional events: evidence from the transitional impact scale and linguistic analyses

Saturday, September 13, 2025 3:45 PM (15 minutes)

Transitional events are significant life experiences that organize autobiographical memory by introducing substantial psychological and material changes to individuals' everyday lives. The amount of change associated with transitional events is measured by the Transitional Impact Scale (TIS). In this study, we employed an adapted version of the TIS for both past and anticipated future events to investigate the role of age in shaping the cognitive appraisal and the linguistic characteristics of memories for transitional experiences.

305 participants (Age, $M = 27.77$, $SD = 11.32$; range = 18–64; 76 males) completed both the past and future versions of the TIS, provided verbal narratives of their transitional experiences, and completed additional psychological measures.

Results revealed that older participants rated past transitional events as more emotionally positive compared to younger individuals, suggesting a possible age-related positivity bias in the evaluation of autobiographical memories. Conversely, older participants rated future transitional events as less positive than younger participants. Moreover, age was negatively associated with the perceived material change of future events, indicating that older individuals anticipate less material disruption in their future life transitions. In contrast, no significant age-related differences were found on perceived psychological change for either past and future events.

These findings, along with linguistic analyses of transcribed narratives, will be discussed within the framework of the Transitional Theory of Autobiographical Memory, which posits that major life transitions play a central role for the organization of life narratives and self-concept, across the lifespan.

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Old and new perspectives on the study of human memory

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Session Classification: Old and new perspectives on the study of human memory

Track Classification: Memory