

# Retrospective Accounts of Past Memories

## Savannah Smith

### Faculty Advisor: Dr. Kalavar

#### BACKGROUND & SIGNIFICANCE

Grysmen & Hudson (2013) discovered that there are multiple differences in men and women’s recollections of past memories from childhood. Some of these differences include women reporting more descriptive memory experiences than men and women including more details involving emotions, other people, and recalling more meaningful memories. Females seem to utilize emotion, elaboration, and a sense of connectedness more so in their recollections than men. Researchers believe that women excel in autobiographical memory because they are more episodic, emotionally detailed, coherent, and more meaningful to them compared to those of men. This is not to say that men do not have the ability to store these types of memories. They just tend to not remember these types of memories because they do not place as large of an importance on interpersonal relationships in autobiographical memory (Grysmen & Hudson, 2013). Therefore this proposed study is a significant and compelling project.

There has also been a link established between education level and ability to recall memories. Kingo, Berntsen, & Kroigaard (2013) found participants that received a higher amount of education reported having earlier memories than those who received lower amounts of education. It was also reported that women recalled having memories that occurred earlier than men.

While some of these findings were largely focused on middle-aged adults, there is very limited research on college-aged students and recollections of past memories. Therefore, this proposed study is significant.

#### INTRODUCTION

- H<sub>1</sub>: It is hypothesized that female college students will provide a higher number of childhood memories than male college students.  
H<sub>2</sub>: It is hypothesized that female college students will recall a higher amount of emotion-based memories than male college students.  
H<sub>3</sub>: It is hypothesized that word association in both students over the three periods (childhood, adolescence, and adulthood) will vary by gender.

#### METHOD

##### Participants.

There were 54 participants who attended the Penn State New Kensington Campus (PSNK,) and their ages ranged from 18-49 years. The mean age of the participants was 22.4 years (sd=7.) In this survey, nearly equal males (48%) and females (52%) participated.

##### Procedure.

The participants completed an online survey, this was sent via email and was forwarded by various student led clubs at PSNK. Qualtrics was the program used to collect and record the data.

##### Assessment.

Besides social demographics, participants responded to questions regarding past memories of childhood, adolescence, and current developmental period. Participants were asked questions pertaining to past memories such as, “ In your own words, could you please describe your favorite childhood memory?” and “What three words come to mind when you think of your childhood, adolescent, and adulthood years?” At the end of the survey, they were asked if they had anything to add about their recollections of their childhood memories.

Table 1. NUMBER OF WORDS (DETAIL) IN DESCRIBING CHILDHOOD MEMORIES BY GENDER

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Male	15.7	9.72
Female	37.71*	25.95
* p < .01		

Table 2. NUMBER OF EMOTION AND NON-EMOTION BASED MEMORIES RECALLED BY GENDER

	Emotion Based Memories	Non-emotion Based Memories
Male	23.1%	76.9%
Female	32.1%	67.9%
*Chi square test results were not significant		

Table 3. MOST FREQUENT DESCRIPTOR USED TO DESCRIBE THREE DEVELOPMENTAL PERIODS

	Childhood Memories	Adolescent Memories	Adulthood Memories
Male	Fun (26.9%)	School (11.5%) Fun (11.5%)	College (23.1%)
Female	Fun (17.9%)	School (14.3%)	Stress (21.4%)

#### RESULTS

- After an ANOVA test was conducted, it was found that the frequency of emotion and non emotion based memories by gender was significant. Female college students stated a higher number of words describing childhood memories than male college students (see table 1).
- A chi square test showed that the results were not significant. Female college students did not recall a higher frequency of emotion based memories than non-emotion based memories than male college students (see table 2).
- Word association by male college students over three developmental periods and female college students did not vary by gender (see table 3). There was no support for this third hypothesis.

#### DISCUSSION

- In accordance with Grysmen & Hudson (2013), it was found that women were more expressive and descriptive of their emotions than men. Women are also more likely to process information differently than men because of gender differences. Women also tend to attach more importance to detail and emotion than males.
- Female college students were found to be more descriptive of childhood memories than male college students. This may be because they are more adept and willing to share due to gender based socialization.
- The number of emotion based memories and non-emotion based memories were nearly the same among male and female college students. This may be caused by social desirability causing the males to respond in a non emotional way.
- A possible reason that my results were not supported could be that the authenticity of the responses is questionable because of social desirability coming into play.
- In future research, psychologists could study childhood and other developmental period memories through the use of case studies.

#### REFERENCES

Grysmen, A., & Hudson, J. (2013). Gender differences in autobiographical memory: Developmental and methodological considerations. *Developmental Review, 33*(3), 239-272. doi:10.1016/j.dr.2013.07.004

Kingo, O., Berntsen, D., & Kroigaard, P. (2013). Adults' earliest memories as a function of age, gender, and education in a large stratified sample. *Psychology and Aging, 28*(3), 646-653. doi:10.1037/a0031356