

# REMINISCENCE THERAPY

## THEORY, RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

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# A DECADE OF RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

- There are more older adults than ever before. By 2050, 25% of Australians will be classified as older
- What does it mean to have quality of life as we age?
- What makes people happier in late life?
- What can we do as mental health practitioners and researchers to help improve emotional wellbeing in older adults?



# **THE BIG GAPS IN MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR OLDER ADULTS**

**Poor access to mental health services in Australia**

**Poor training in late life mental health care for psychologists and other mental health care practitioners**

**Poor understanding on how to adapt psychological treatments for older adults**

# SWINBURNE WELLBEING CLINIC FOR OLDER ADULTS

The Swinburne Wellbeing Clinic for Older Adults was established in 2011 to address mental health needs of aged care residents.

The clinic has provided more than 10,000 hours of counselling and therapeutic services, digital story befriending programs, and carer support groups over the last decade, to over 150 residential aged care facilities in Victoria and nationally. Training, supervision and research underpins these services.

# OUR NEWEST SERVICE TELEHEALTH SERVICE FOR RESIDENTIAL AGED CARE

Open to any aged care resident living in Australia, as well as to families and aged care staff

Free

Services delivered by postgraduate students studying psychology, social work and counselling

[swin.edu.au/telehealthcounselling](https://swin.edu.au/telehealthcounselling)



# PSYCHOLOGICAL TREATMENT APPROACHES FOR LATE LIFE DEPRESSION

Supportive counselling

Behavioral activation

Problem solving therapy

Cognitive behavioural therapy

Complimentary treatments (e.g.,  
aromatherapy)

Reminiscence therapy



T: Do you think your training in the military and your way of working...have prepared you for the future?

P: My training started back home with my mum... She was strict...she had me get up and go to school everyday. We were poor, not that we didn't have food to eat or clothes to wear, but we had to wash our underwear, socks, put them on the heater so that they could dry for school the next day...I had to put paper in the bottom of my shoes because we had holes in them. We learnt to appreciate a lot of things. If I made \$10, I gave up \$9 for the house...

T: So, you developed a work ethic...had structure in your day, you didn't take things for granted because things were a struggle for you. You learnt to be responsible at that very early age.

P: Yeah...

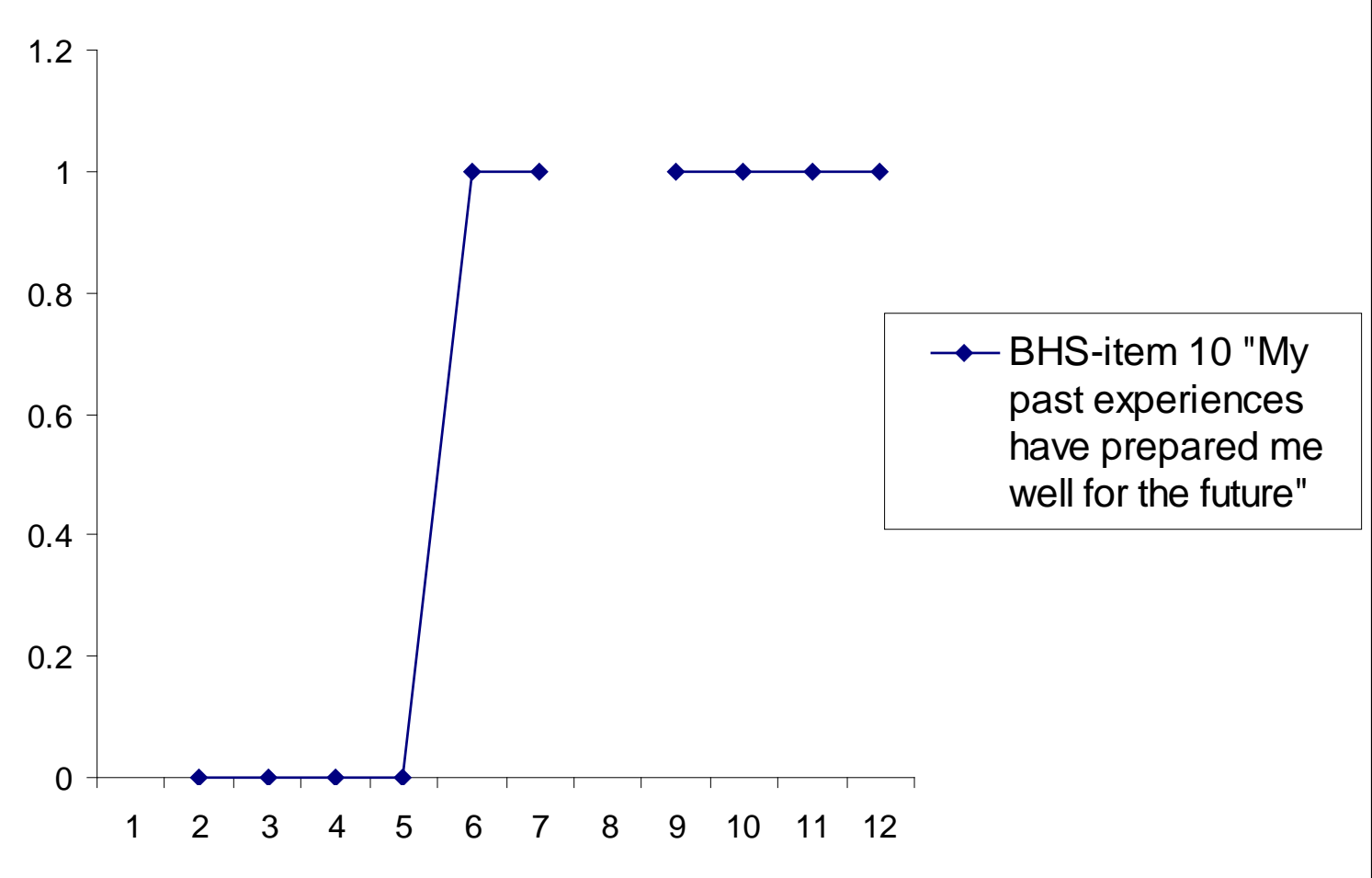
T: So how have all these helped you in your adult life?

P: I do my best at my jobs...I've never been fired off a job.

T: Over the course of your life...you have developed certain skills, certain ways of thinking...do you think they have helped you through the course of your life?

P: Oh yeah

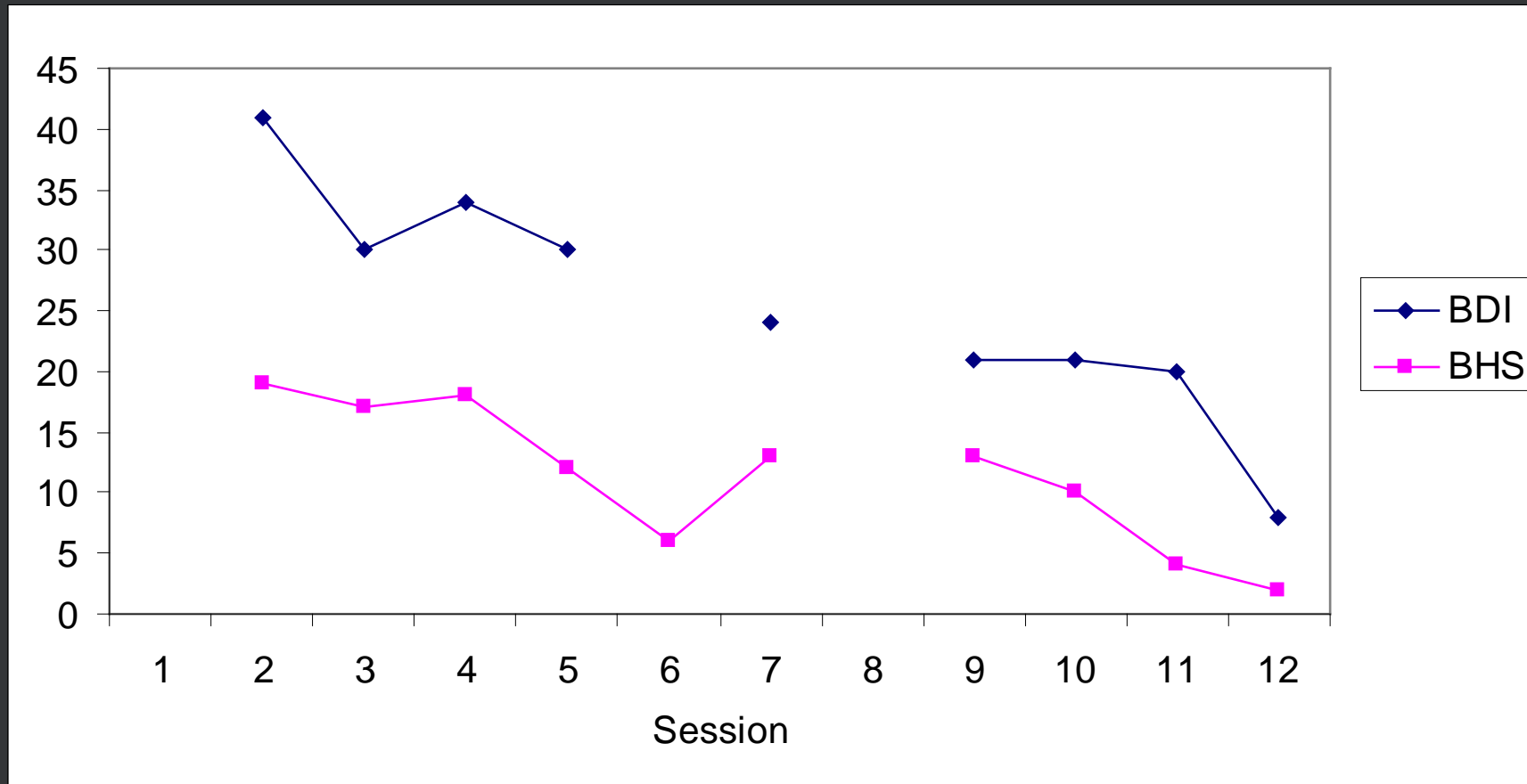
# IMPROVEMENT IN ITEM BECK HOPELESSNESS SCALE - ITEM 10



Pt 2006693: From Cognitive Therapy for Suicidal Older Men In Primary Care Settings



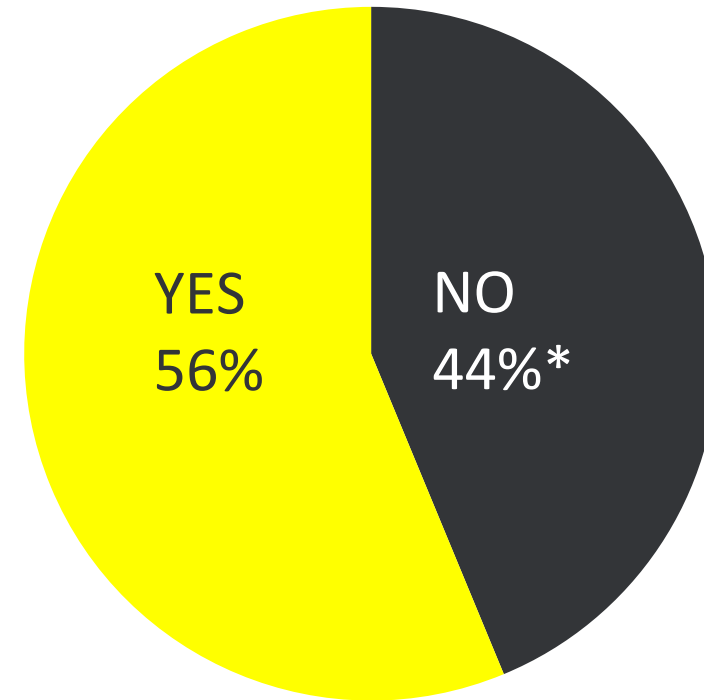
# IMPROVEMENTS IN DEPRESSION AND HOPELESSNESS



Pt 2006693: From Cognitive Therapy  
for Suicidal Older Men In Primary  
Care Settings

# IS REMINISCENCE EFFECTIVE?

Improves mood  
Improves hopelessness  
Improves problem solving self-image  
Improve appreciation of past  
Improves cognitive skills  
Improves behavioural disturbance



\*7% negative effects; Bhar, in prep

Erikson, 1959; Arian et al., 1993; Haight, 1989a, b; Serrano et al., 2004; Kunz, 2002

# TAXONOMY OF REMINISCENCE

My husband died when I was away for two days visiting my friends in the West. He fell in the bathtub and eventually died. I still cannot forgive myself for leaving him home alone for two days

Lamenting

During the Great Depression, life was very hard. There were very few jobs, and money was difficult to come by. But we learned to survive by budgeting and making do without many things. The lessons I learned in those years have really helped me in trying to live on my old-age pension

Problem solving

Negative

Positive

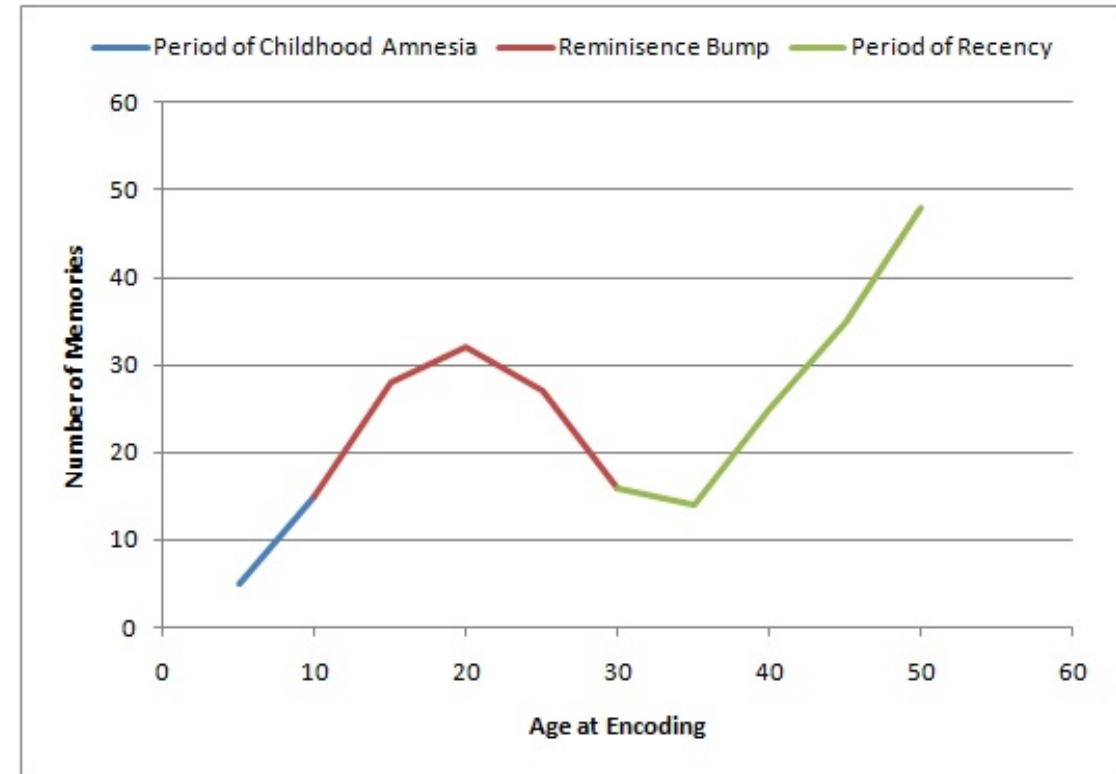
(Wong & Watt (1991))

# WHAT IS REMINISCENCE?

...recalling past events

...thinking and talking about past experiences

...recalling events that happened in early adulthood or childhood



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reminiscence\\_bump](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reminiscence_bump)

Merriam-Webster dictionary, Haight, 1989; Perrotta & Meacham, 1981

# MECHANISMS OF CHANGE

Psychological bridge to past resources

Improves feelings of mastery

Pleasurable experience

Affirms identity

Expand understanding of past

Process (doing reminiscence) or product (having a tangible product)?

# REMINISCENCE THERAPY

- Simple reminiscence – to encourage social connections and shared memories
- Life review – to encourage an understanding of one's life and identity
- Life review therapy – to encourage a recollection of problem solving successes



# SIMPLE REMINISCENCE

The aim of this type of reminiscence is to engage the client in pleasurable discussion and to create or strengthen engagement between the resident and you. Usually, this type of reminiscence is bi-directional – that is, you share your experiences or common memories (e.g., “my grandmother used to say that too...”).

Talk about growing up, schooling, their marriage, neighbourhood, favourite movies and so on. **Groups are a great way to do this.**

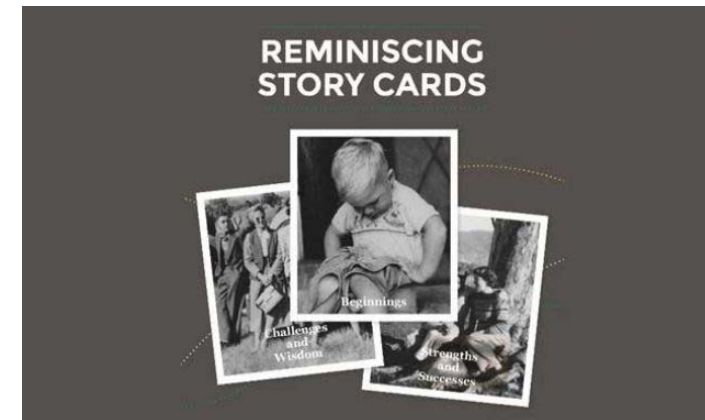


# SIMPLE REMINISCENCE

What is the story of your name  
Where does your family come from?  
When did you move to this city?  
What was schooling like in your  
childhood?  
How did you meet your wife?  
What work did you do?



<https://storycorps.org/participate/great-questions/>



<https://www.cota.org.au/information/resources/products/reminiscing-story-cards/>



# SIMPLE REMINISCENCE (EXAMPLES)



<https://storycorps.org/stories/ken-morganstern-priya-morganstern-and-bhavani-jaroff/>



<https://vimeopro.com/user19105161/swc/video/209147370>

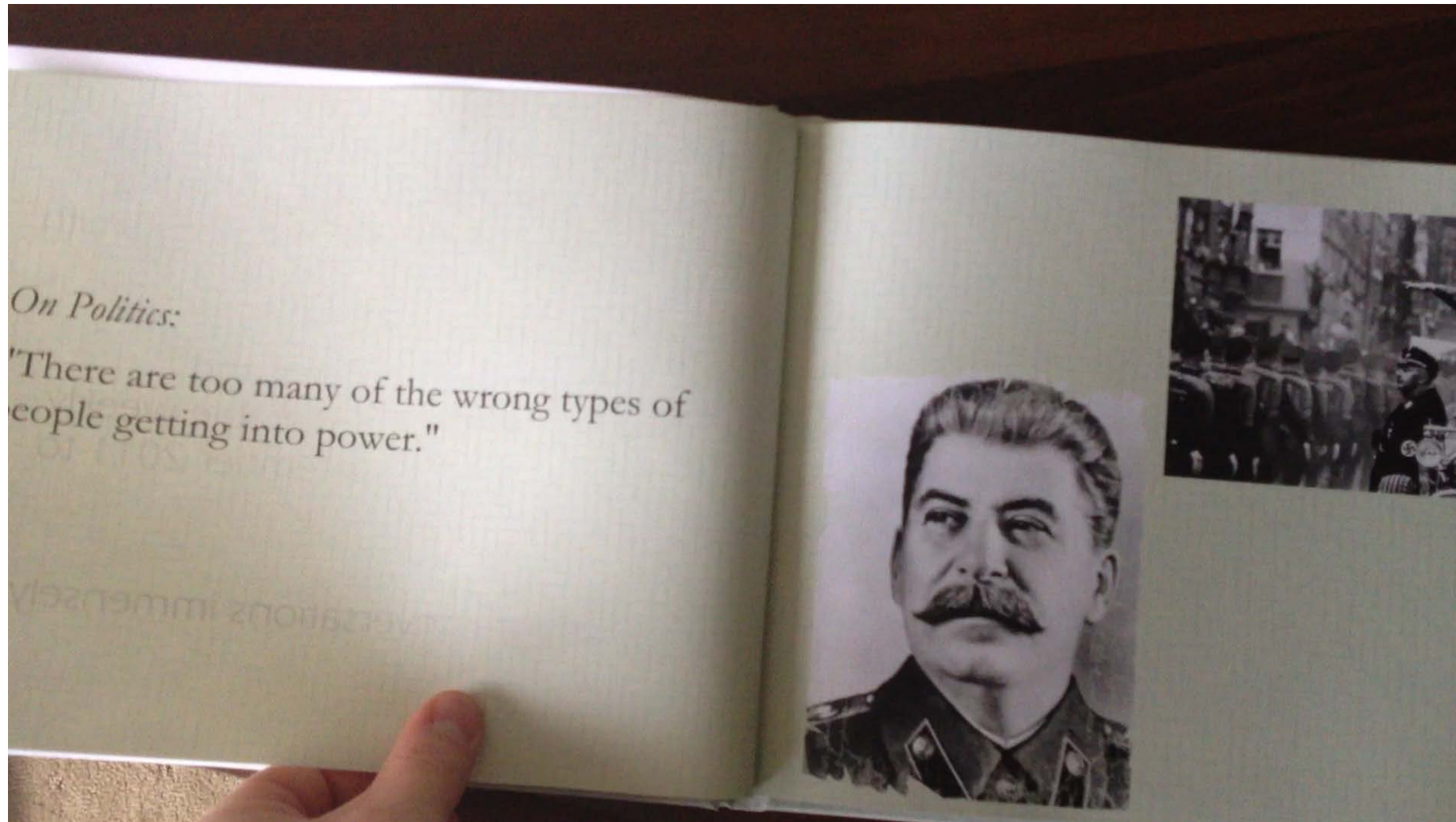
# LIFE REVIEW



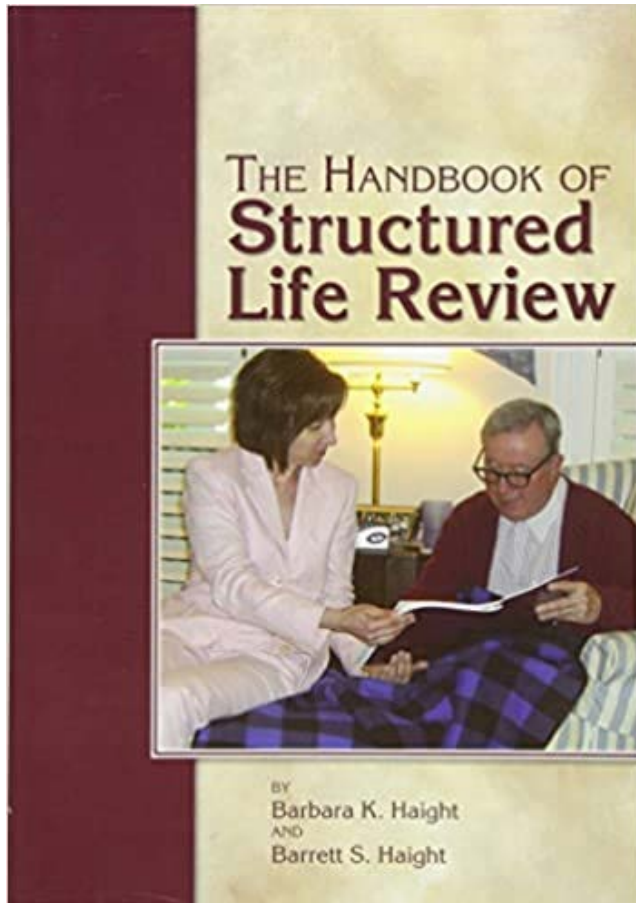
Not simply a list of events

Life review is a more systematic form of reminiscence intervention. You ask questions that have a chronological order. For example, in one session, you ask about childhood; in the next about adolescence, then about early adulthood and so on. The purpose of this intervention is to assist the resident to appreciate the common themes throughout their life (i.e., the “thematic unity of one’s life”), and to reach a sense of who they are (a sense of self, called “narrative identity”). Usually, the outcome of such reminiscence is a life-book or digital story. **Selves create stories, stories create selves.**

# LIFE REVIEW (EXAMPLE)



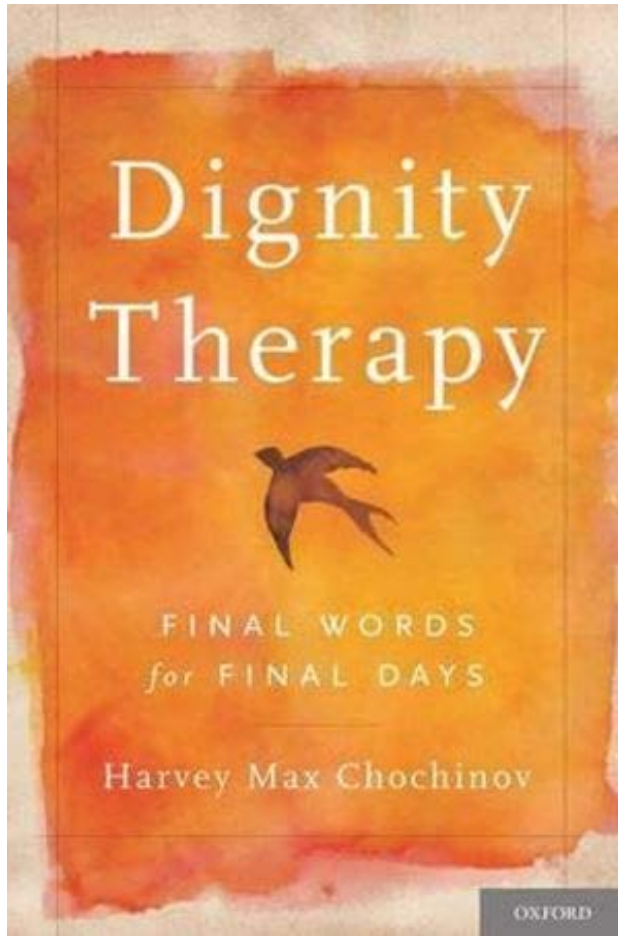
# LIFE REVIEW



#	Life stage	Questions
1	Early childhood	What was life like as a child? What were your parents like? Did you feel care for as a child?
2	Family and home	What was the atmosphere like in your home? Tell me about your extended family
3	Young adulthood	What was like for you in your 20s and 30s; what kind of person were you?
4	Older adulthood	What wisdom would you like to hand down to the next generation? On the whole, what kind of life had you had?

Haight, B. K., & Haight, B. S. (2007). *The handbook of structured life review*. Baltimore: Health Professions Press

# LIFE REVIEW FOR END OF LIFE CARE



Chochinov, H. M. (2012). Dignity therapy: Final words for final days. New York: Oxford University Press.

## Questions asked during Dignity Therapy

Tell me a little about your life history, particularly the parts that you either remember most, or think are the most important. When did you feel most alive?" "Are there specific things that you would want your family to know about you, and are there particular things you would want them to remember?" "What are the most important roles you have played in life (family roles, vocational roles, community service roles, etc.)? Why were they so important to you, and what do you think you accomplished in those roles?" "What are your most important accomplishments, and what do you feel most proud of?" "Are there particular things that you feel still need to be said to your loved ones, or things that you would want to take the time to say once again?" "What are your hopes and dreams for your loved ones?" "What have you learned about life that you would want to pass along to others? What advice or words of guidance would you wish to pass along to your (son, daughter, husband, wife, parents, others)?" "Are there words or perhaps even instructions you would like to offer your family to help prepare them for the future?" "In creating this permanent record, are there other things that you would like included?"

<https://www.dignityincare.ca/en/toolkit.html>

# LIFE WRITING

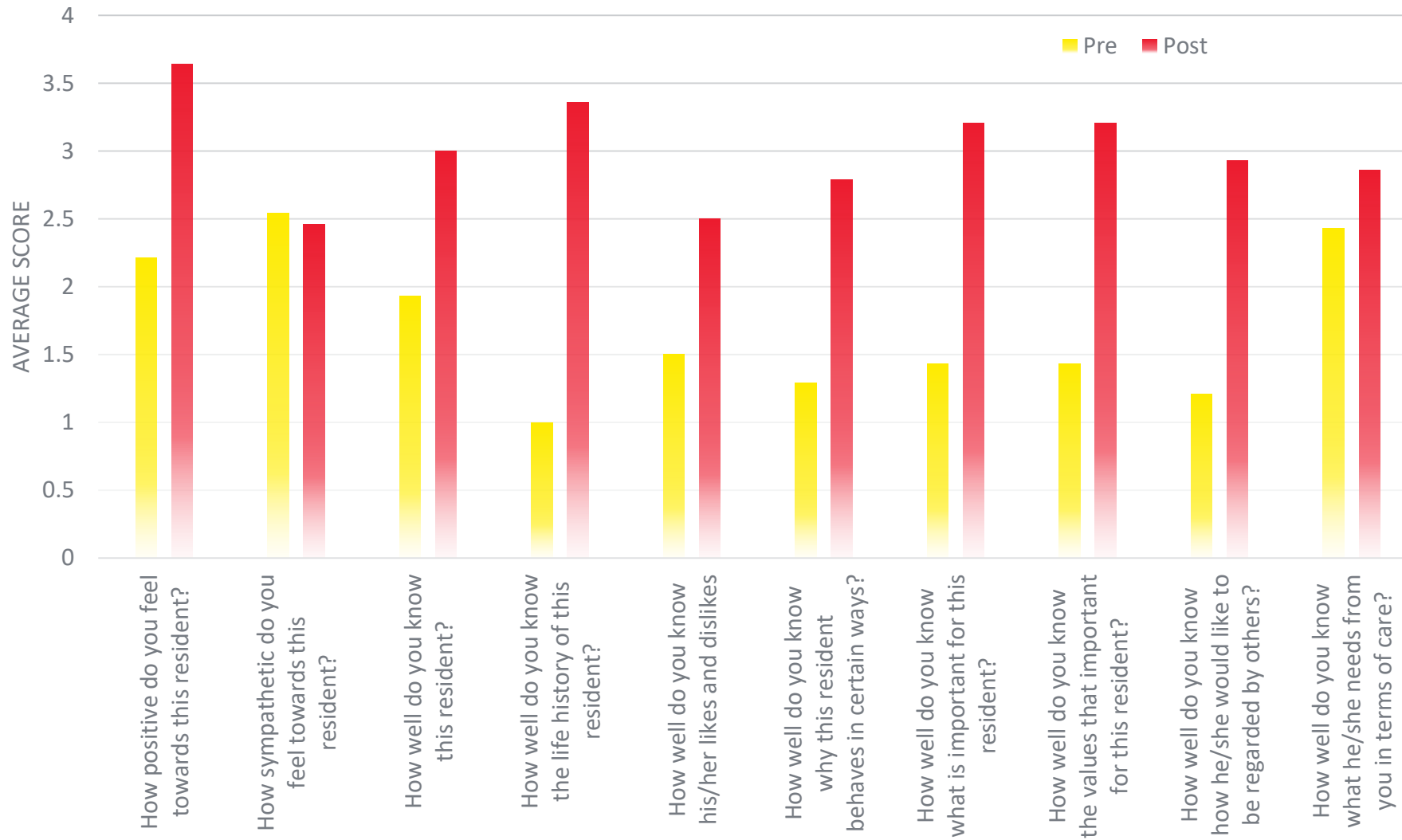
“For the next three days, I would like for you to write about your very deepest thoughts and feelings about the most traumatic experience of your entire life. In your writing, I’d like you to really let go and explore your very deepest emotions and thoughts. You might tie this trauma to your childhood, or your relationships with others, including parents, lovers, friends, or relatives. You may also link this event to your past, your present, or your future, or to who you have been, who you would like to be, or who you are now. You may write about the same general issues or experiences on all days of writing or on different topics each day. Not everyone has had a single trauma but all of us have had major conflicts or stressors—and you can write about these as well. All of your writing will be completely confidential. Don’t worry about spelling, sentence structure, or grammar. The only rule is that once you begin writing, continue to do so until your time is up.”

- Redemption – values emphasised; “From that death, I learnt that I should not take life for granted”  
Communion – relationships strengthened; “My illness made me a better listener”;  
Agency – autonomy prized – “I am a fighter”

After writing, people exhibited Less physiological arousal, improvements in the mood, lower systolic and diastolic blood pressure (DBP), improvements in grades, Less visits to GP, Less hopelessness

Pennebaker and colleagues

# DIGITAL STORIES VALIDATE IDENTITY



Over a period of 7 months, undergraduate psychology students met with the aged care residents weekly or fortnightly to understand how the resident viewed themselves – created digital story. Staff members (n = 14) were asked to rate their level of knowledge of the resident prior to watching the digital stories, and again after watching the stories.

# LIFE REVIEW THERAPY



The Harvard Study of Adult Development:  
<https://www.adultdevelopmentstudy.org/>

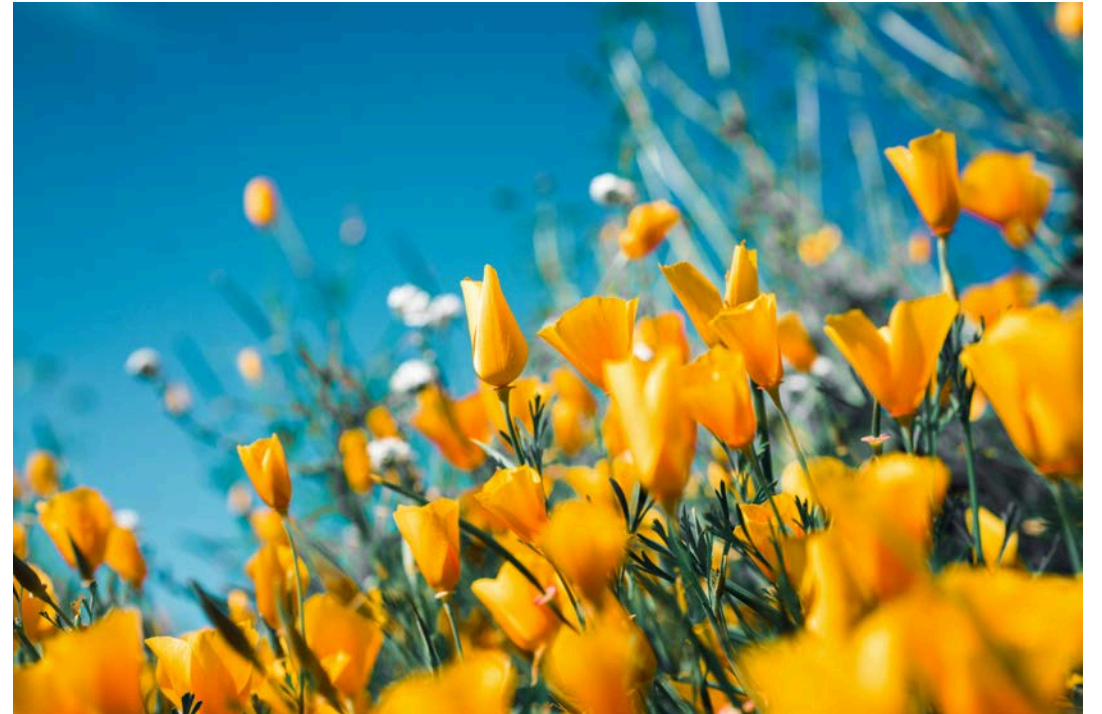
In this form of reminiscence, you ask specific questions designed to prime a positive representation of self, where the resident can feel efficacious by recalling problem solving successes. These questions prompt for stories of success, and experiences of mastery.



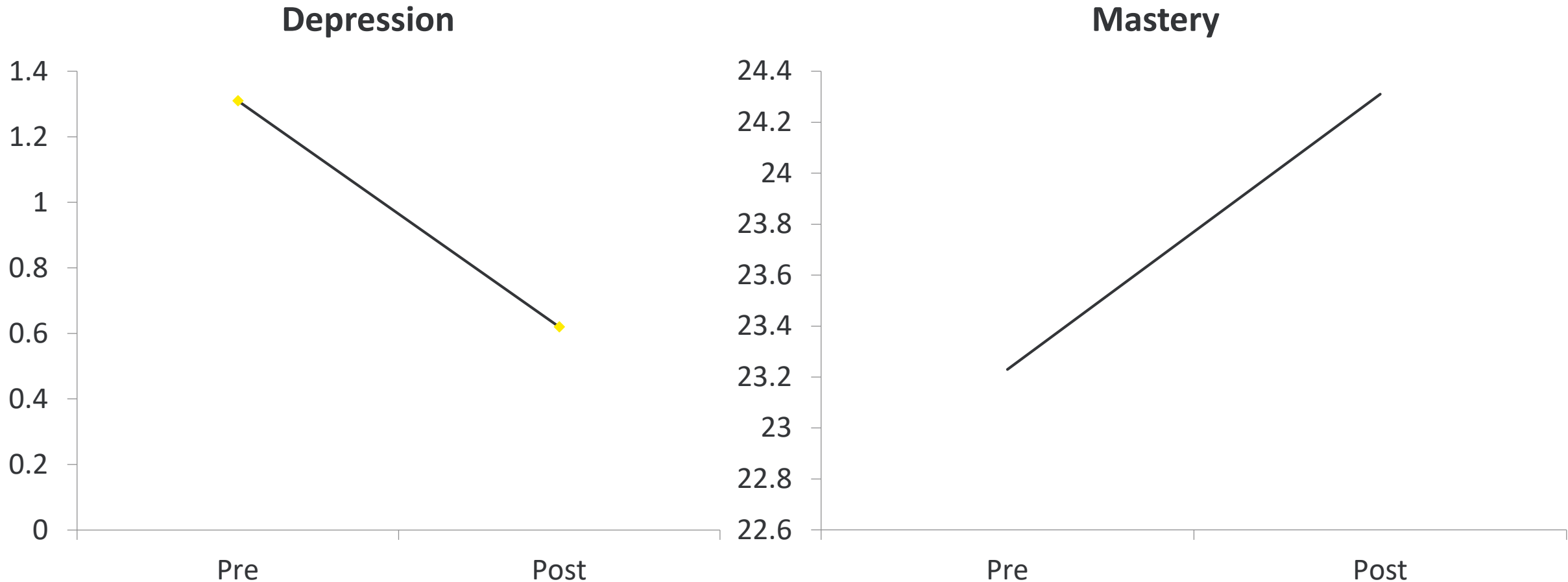
# LIFE REVIEW THERAPY

Think back over your life and try to remember times when you managed to solve a problem, which required some effort or creativity on your part. Can you describe the problem you faced?

How did you solve the problem - What did you do? How did you think of the solution? What qualities did you show, which helped solve that problem?



# LIFE REVIEW THERAPY IMPROVES MOOD AND FEELINGS OF MASTERY



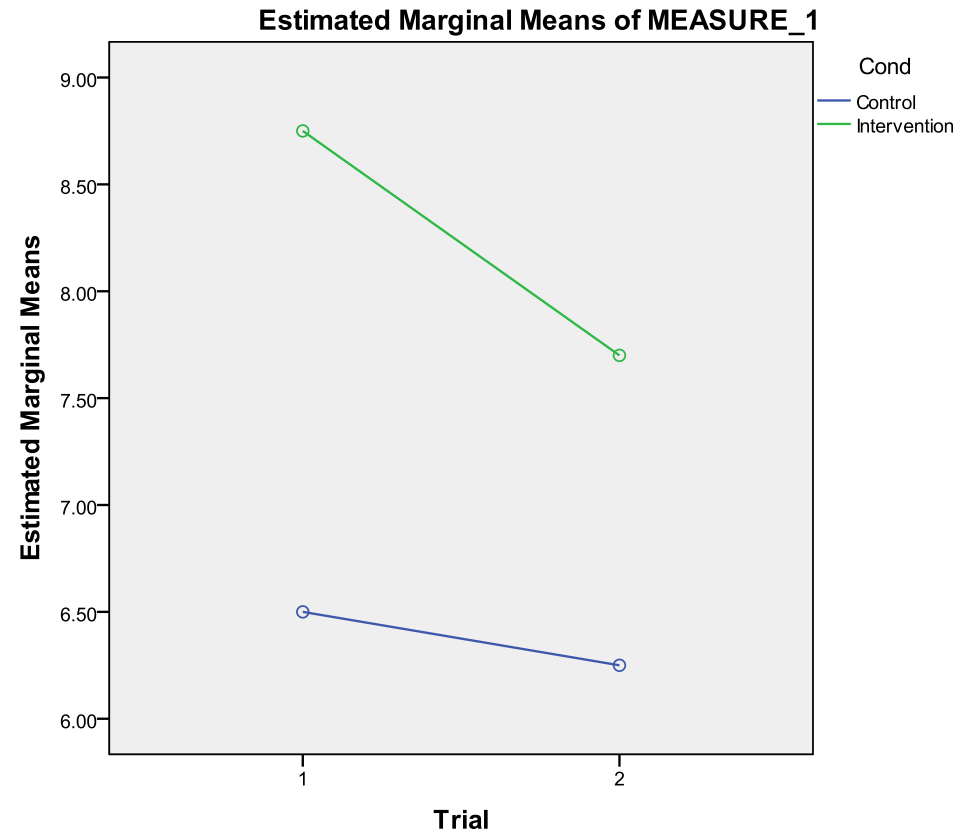
An open trial of the intervention with 26 non-clinical participants. Participants' mean age was 34 ( $SD=11.30$ ; range = 18 – 58). Participants were engaged through a one-to-one interview to talk about their past problem solving successes. James, K. L., & Bhar, S. (2016). Brief reminiscence intervention improves affect and pessimism in non-clinical individuals: A pilot study. *Clinical Psychologist*, 20, 119-124

# LIFE REVIEW THERAPY IMPROVES HOPELESSNESS

40 adults: mean age 69.6, SD 8.81, 60-92,  
73% female, 62% born in Australia, 65%  
university educated

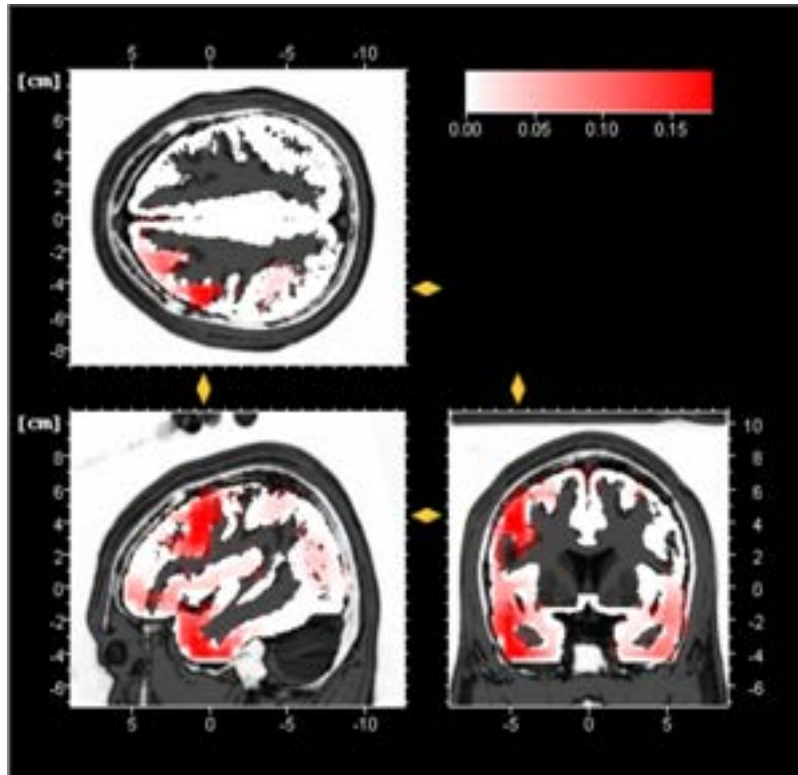
24 met *DSM-IV* Axis 1 disorder, including 17  
who met criteria for a depressive disorder  
(*SCID*)

Randomly allocated to Life review therapy  
or control



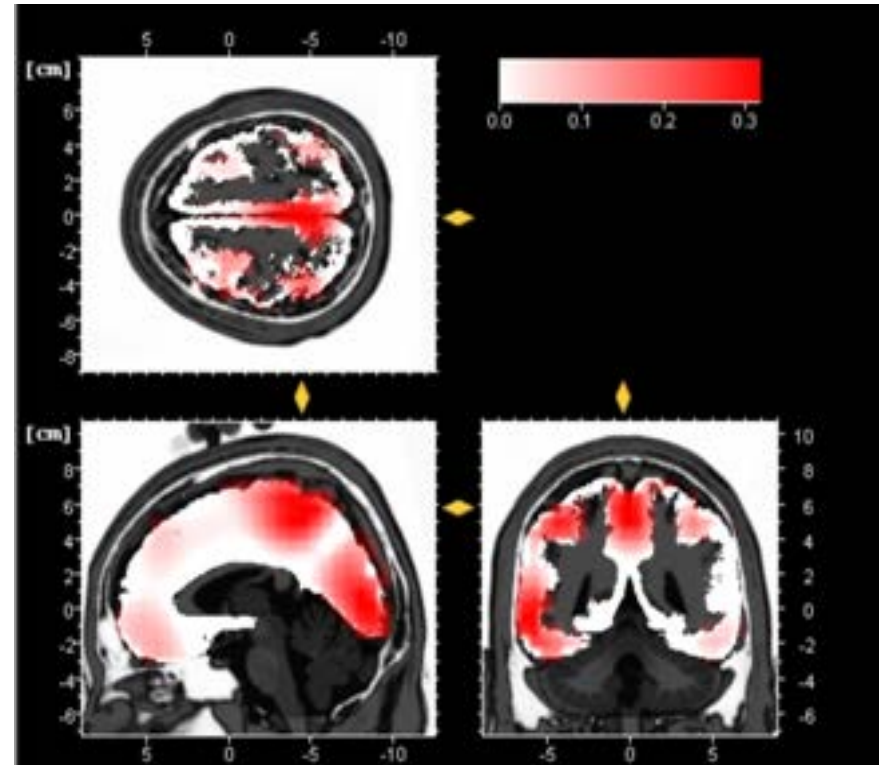
# LIFE REVIEW THERAPY ACTIVATES SOMATOSENSORY AND VISUAL REGIONS

Control



Memory systems  
activated

Reminiscence



Somatosensory and Visual  
processing systems activated

Bhar et al, under  
review

# OTHER RESOURCES

International Institute for Reminiscence and Life review

Association of Personal Historians

The National Creative Aging Center

Gerontology Society of America

American Society on Aging

The Birren Center for Autobiography and Life Review

Alzheimers UK "This is me"

[www.dementiauk.org/life-story-work/](http://www.dementiauk.org/life-story-work/)

Australian Government Using Reminiscence with People with Dementia

<http://www.storycentre.ca/>

**THANK YOU**



**The National Telehealth  
Counselling Service for  
Residential Aged Care is  
is now accepting  
referrals**

**[swin.edu.au/telehealthcounselling](http://swin.edu.au/telehealthcounselling)**