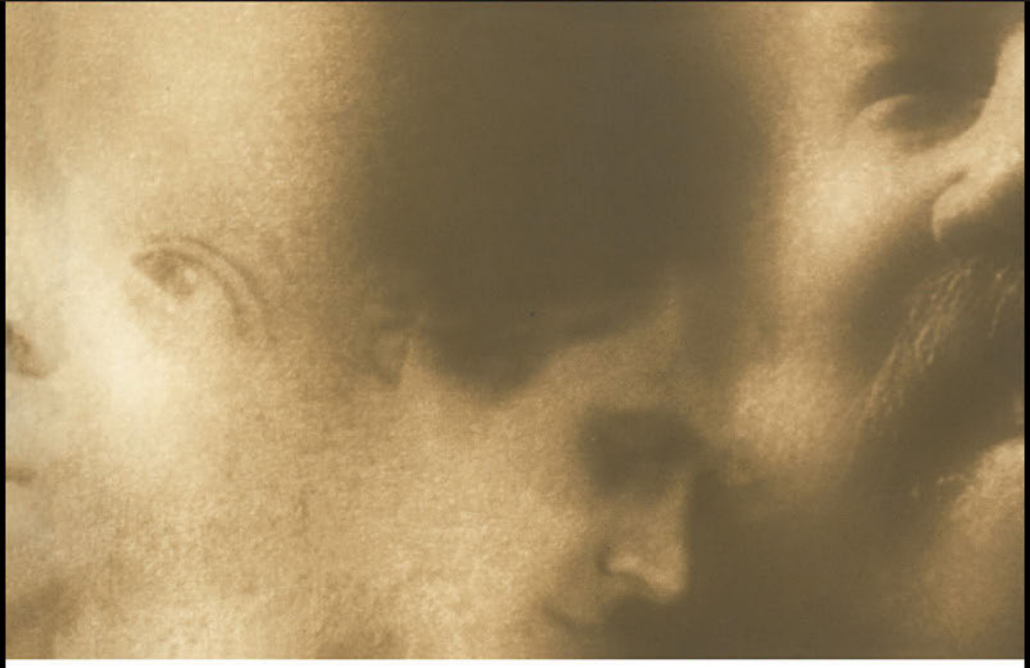

JEFF AND CHRISTINA GARLAND

Life Review in Health and Social Care

A Practitioner's Guide

Life Review in Health and Social Care

The key to gaining awareness of the present and preparing for the future lies in our understanding of the past, yet there is little coverage of this topic in the existing psychology and counselling literature. How can people improve themselves by greater self-knowledge?

Jeff and Christina Garland break new ground in making a straight-forward presentation of the theory and practice of the everyday process of life review, which is a therapeutic approach for helping clients make sense of their past, and can be used to help change undesirable behaviour and plan for the future. The theory and structure of the life review process is examined, and clinical examples of how it works in practice are given; this includes interviews both with 'narrators' (people engaged in life review) and 'listeners' (health and social care professionals). These examples demonstrate how professionals can use life review to help their clients overcome difficulties in their lives and face the future with confidence.

Life Review will appeal to trainees and practitioners in occupational, developmental, clinical, and health psychology, social work, counselling, psychotherapy, and nursing.

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A Practitioner's Guide

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Actually we have it all wrong, when we say look forward to the future. The future is a void and we walk, so as to say, blindly with our backs towards it. At best we see what we have left behind.

(Fritz Perls, 1969)

Contents

Preface

Sitting as a student at the feet of Professor Leslie Hearnshaw at the University of Liverpool in the 1960s, the senior author heard him open the module 'Introduction to Psychology' with a guiding principle. In the East, the professor intoned, there was a tradition of inspired passivity. In the West, by contrast, a culture of uninspired activity prevailed. 'Here', he announced, 'let us aim to have the best of both worlds.'

With this text, we are still hopeful after all these years, in striving for the best of both worlds in the integration of theory and practice relating to adult life review. We examine the status of life review within the developmental process; and show how human services may draw on life review in working with clients.

Our experience in working with students, teachers, researchers, and practitioners has uncovered a strongly felt need for such integration; and frequently we have been asked for a book that gathers the many strands of thinking and practice, and 'brings it all together'.

Life review is used in at least eight areas of activity: counselling; psychotherapy, individual and group; family therapy; career planning; reminiscence in everyday life; autobiography and biography; oral history; and the study of life span development. We shall be giving particular attention to the first two of these.

There are many gaps and overlaps in a scattered literature. We have pieced together a map, finding that in spite of disparities among previous explorers the sum of their charts adds up.

We ask you not to mistake the map for the territory: learning by doing is vital; and we encourage you to appreciate that knowing yourself is a prerequisite for knowing others.

Introduction

For brevity's sake, life review will usually be called 'review'. The individual whose life experience is the subject of review will be called 'the narrator'. The target of the narration, usually one or more others, is called 'the listener' (such listening is likely to be active, with engagement in dialogue, including seeking clearer expression, prompting, probing, and challenging). As review can be carried out independently, without an external listener, 'listener' is occasionally used to denote a narrator self-monitoring.

Three modes of review are introduced in Chapter 1, and discussed in Chapters 4 and 6. The first, and most widely used, is everyday relatively unstructured and non-specific reflection. This activity may be channelled into two other forms: organised activity in an individual or group approach in which semi-structured questioning is undertaken on selected topics; and review in a setting of counselling or therapy, individual or group, in a more intensive process, with a therapeutic alliance imposing structure, and an agenda of identifying specific issues for change.

Review is presented in Chapter 1 as to be understood most usefully in the context of life span development, and the concepts of mapping, metaphor, tasks, themes, and transitions are commended as particularly appropriate. While recognising its significance for older adults, review is seen as relevant across the life span. The modes are located in the context of life span development theory, particularly in relation to thinking on mapping, metaphors, tasks, themes, and transitions; and autobiographical memory. Drawing in methods and techniques that use review, although they are not labelled as such, widens the perspective.

In Chapter 2, narrators' reasons for choosing to review are appraised in terms of: curiosity; self-presentation; taking stock; assessment; and support.

The structure of review is described in Chapter 3 as including: recognition of readiness; exploring and interpreting life events; shaping time; and planning for the future. The involvement of review is outlined in: everyday reminiscence; autobiography and biography; oral history; life span development; career planning; counselling; family therapy; and individual psychotherapy. Its status in practice and ethical framework is considered.

Seven interrelated elements that appear to be of particular importance in determining whether or not review is effective in enhancing the psychological

well-being of the narrator are identified in Chapter 4 as ‘active ingredients’. These are: positive reinforcement built into the process; accepting experiences and conclusions that the narrator wishes to continue to own and be responsible for; letting go of experiences and conclusions that the narrator sees as harmful or no longer relevant; taking control; insight; reframing; and commitment to change. Development of a model of how these interact within the modes of life review is discussed.

Procedures and skills for engaging in each of the modes are presented in an interactive style that encourages the reader to learn through taking part. Over the first seven chapters a total of twenty scenarios set out choice points and pose questions to elicit preferred options for engaging in life review. Chapter 9 takes up the scenarios in turn and examines options and outcomes.

Ten of the scenarios are to be found in Chapter 5, ‘Narrators and their stories’, and this chapter opens up the subject of practitioner skills. Readers who want to ‘get down to business’ may choose to start with Chapter 5 and continue with 6 and 7 on skills and their use. Thinking points are used throughout the text to draw out opinions. In Chapters 6 and 7 exercises in conducting a personal life review invite involvement.

Issues relating to the evaluation of life review and its development are confronted, and scope for extending qualitative investigation is examined, in Chapter 8. We acknowledge that thorough appraisal of the outcomes of life review needs more intensive study and look at prospects for establishing evidence-based practice.

A postscript gives key references, audio-visual aids and other learning resources that we would commend to readers; and an appendix includes questions that may be used by a listener.

Chapter 1
Review in context

SUMMARY From childhood on, life review is an everyday activity. As a resource in personal development, counselling, and therapy, it can take many forms, be engaged in by individuals or groups, and have a variety of functions and outcomes. It draws on autobiographical memory and focused reminiscence to maintain or modify coping strategies. A framework for understanding review is life span developmental theory, particularly the concepts of mapping, metaphor, tasks, themes, and transition.

Review helps people to learn to know themselves and others, and to be more fully human: it is a vital resource. But it is not a panacea. While it can enable a person or group to make a balanced appraisal of progress and to evolve psychologically in order to get to grips with a challenging world, misused (for example, by a narrator who selectively recalls unhappy events), it can entrench resistance to change, and deepen misery. Also, as Phillips (1999) warns, it is part of our own life story to try to keep control of the stories people tell about us. For every narrator there is always the story of stories I don't want people, including myself, to tell about myself. The listener should respect due reticence.

Defining review

Throughout this text review is understood as being a continuing reflexive process starting in childhood with the development of autobiographical memory. It can have three stages: focusing on what has been learned about self in relation to others; considering whether this learning is still relevant; and recognising what should be retained, revising what is unclear, and discarding what is no longer required.

It is a distinctive way of using evaluative reminiscence (Molinari and Reichlin, 1984–5). As Ruth and Kenyon (1995) indicate, individuals are co-authors of their own stories, in that we shape the world and ourselves, and our world and other persons shape us. Edinberg (1985) sees review as having a

multifaceted role: to aid the narrator in achieving new insight and peace of mind; to bring closure to troubling events through viewing them from a different perspective; and to restore as far as possible neglected skills or abilities.

The stages are not necessarily present in sequence in every episode of review. If it is being carried out without a listener, the narrator can be reluctant to look too closely at learning and need for change. If there is no listener then the narrator determines the meanings of 'relevant', 'unclear', and 'no longer necessary'. If there is a listener, this is usually negotiated between narrator and listener.

Review occurs in three modes. In the course of life, most of us engage in Mode 1 from time to time, in a relatively unstructured and non-specific way. On occasion—for example, when facing a transition or a crisis—this may become much more focused and intensive; and the narrator may seek out one or more listeners for support. In Mode 2, the reviewer takes up his or her story as a planned activity, sometimes in a group, with a semi-structured approach, going through selected topics with one or more committed listeners. Mode 3 offers a relatively structured and specific opportunity to the narrator or narrators experiencing problems in everyday living, to work with one or more counsellors or therapists, and consider changes in the way a story is viewed and lived. These modes may overlap to some extent, and it is not suggested that any one of these is necessarily superior to the others. They are discussed in more detail in Chapters 4 and 6.

Narrative psychology (McLeod, 1997, Crossley, 2000, and Payne, 2000) sets accounts of human behaviour in a storytelling framework. Review often proceeds by fits and starts, using contemplation, soliloquy, and monologue, as well as dialogue, with an episodic and intermittent course rather than a continuous progression. Narrative psychology puts forward a post-modern perspective, contending that what is knowable essentially is immediate awareness of living expressed in the stories we tell others and ourselves.

Varieties of review

As Hillman (1999) points out, a life has a huge inventory. The individual may be likened to a warehouse keeper running a LIFO system —last in, first out— clearing new input in order to preserve space for stock that has been there for a long time. With progress towards maturity and character formation, the warehouse keeper may be expected to spend more time in the back of the premises recovering and refurbishing the past, as character seeks to understand itself.

Review can occur in a momentary fashion, with one or more brief episodes, at exceptional times of unexpected upheaval or with the occurrence of epiphanies (moments of enlightenment). An individual who makes a practice of mulling over daily experience can conduct review in a sustained way as a form of meditation. For some people the process may be protracted, running in the background over

an extended period. As DeSalvo (1999) illustrates, there is an extensive literature of autobiographical 'healing' of psychological trauma. For others, review may be largely absent, or engaged in only sporadically, with self-questioning (for example, 'where did I go wrong?') only under immediate pressure of outside events.

It may be private or public; be conducted by an individual, or carried out by a couple, family, or other system (see Byng-Hall, 1995, for analysis of family scripts); and it may be structured within the remit of counselling, individual or family therapy, or some other form of professional intervention. However, as McLeod (1997) suggests, it may be open to doubt that psychotherapy, with an individualistic, specialist and morally neutral stance, is positioned to enable people to tell stories that need to be presented in social, cultural, and moral context.

White and Epson (1990) note that human nature and 'self' is socially constructed from moment to moment, with knowledge and practices of culture informing our life and thought. A central consideration in their work is that persons generally ascribe meaning to their lives by plotting their experience into stories that shape lives and relationships.

As a therapeutic approach, review has distinctive features that call to mind cognitive behavioural therapy. It keeps returning to the present to find how 'then' has shaped 'now'; it questions whether decisions taken in the past should continue to influence present or future; and if the answer is 'no' it identifies how such decisions can be challenged or replaced (Garland and Kemp, 1996). From an objective standpoint the main aim could be described as being to increase insight and psychological well-being based on a secure sense of self-identity in relation to others.

Review does not necessarily have a beginning, middle, or an end. Frequently it may be postponed or sidetracked. When existence is marginal, so that survival from day to day is doubtful, it may be abandoned completely. Even when it is used consistently, it may be biased by the distortions of an individual's negative expectations and by the pressures of social prejudice, so that it becomes counter-productive.

Review in action

We are in accord with psychologists who give particular emphasis to the consideration that the brain creates meaning and that a human being can be most usefully understood in terms of the way meaning is processed and understood. We propose that the most productive way of viewing individual differences in human personality is through examining the variety of ways in which persons shape and interpret the meaning of their experience (Rowe, 1995).

People normally use autobiographical memory, reminiscence, and review throughout conscious and reflective life. It is not always easy to distinguish between these, because in practice they are interrelated. However, not all

autobiographical memory or reminiscence can be construed automatically as review, and our first scenario may help the distinction become clear.

In the following scenario, the statement by Alice in the last paragraph and the thoughts that led up to it we would see as potential steps in review, or at least an opening gambit. A generalisation drawn from experience is made about how a life has been lived; and there is implicit understanding of potential for learning that may be applied to present and future behaviour. It is of course possible that 'Alice' will not be interested in applying the learning she hints at. She may consider that 'feeling bad' is an interesting, potentially dramatic, state that she would not want to quit; or even have come to the decision that it is no more than she deserves. Or, more prosaically, dealing with the topic may be derailed by one of the many distractions that can affect a private discussion in a public place.

Scenario 1

From the next table in a café you can hear Alice talking to her friend Tilda, about their relationships with men (she refers to them as 'chaps'). You do not wish to eavesdrop but Alice and Tilda talk loudly, as is the way with Oxford undergraduates, and you cannot avoid hearing them.

Alice begins by drawing on autobiographical memory to describe incidents from the social life of the past week of their term. Her confidante, who has shared some of these experiences, contributes some corrections and other amendments from her own memory. Alice appears to accept some of these and lets others pass without comment.

Tilda begins to reminisce about her earlier experiences with males in her school life, but Alice is not interested, dismissing that as 'kids' stuff'. However, she begins to look thoughtful, and is silent for a few moments. Alice then announces, as though she has realised something for the first time: 'You know, my problem is I always end up going out with chaps who are less (how can I put it?) mature than me. And I end up feeling bad.' She is speaking in earnest, and when she has finished each is silent.

- **If you were Alice and wanted to engage in review, how would you continue the dialogue?**
- **If you were Tilda and wanted to listen to Alice constructively, how would you respond?**
- **Taking the roles of Alice and Tilda alternately, how would you continue to explore the implications of what Alice has said?**
- **Consider from your own life, or that of someone you know, an example of a 'my problem is...' situation. How could this be resolved in life review?**

(See Chapter 9, p. 143, for authors' comments.)

Not just for older people

This text gives full attention to the use of review by older adults, which is indeed a widely used application worthy of interest in its own right. It is not to be confined to the well-known definition of Butler (1963), who revived the concept of life review for older adults. He introduces this as: 'A naturally occurring, universal mental process characterised by the progressive return to consciousness of past experiences, and, particularly, the resurgence of unresolved conflicts: simultaneously and normally, these revived experiences can be surveyed and reintegrated' (p. 66).

He sees this as prompted by the realisation of approaching dissolution and death, and the inability to maintain one's sense of personal invulnerability. This can result in reorganisation, including achievement of wisdom, serenity, and increased self-assurance. Butler's seminal paper was the precursor to rapid growth in review therapy, concerned with helping clients restructure their past into a positive and integrated story (Lewis and Butler, 1974). In directing the attention of researchers and clinicians, the concept of review as a therapy came to be focused mainly on middle life and old age.

Many other writers developed this theme, including Verwoerdt (1981), for whom the task of review is to integrate life lived with the one that might have been. He sees this as a constructive and active process, which could achieve a sense of 'closure' and harmony. Recognising that it could be far-ranging in mood, from nostalgic recall to marked unhappiness, leisurely or urgent, he views it as a vehicle for communicating a set of social and cultural values to a younger generation.

Discussing reminiscence in relation to the therapy needs of older adults, Garland (1994) suggests that life review therapy for them could be summed up as

> a process of systematic reflection in later life, involving a therapist and a client or clients, and focusing on understanding life history and its implications for current coping strategies. A positive outcome would be assessed in terms of resolution of conflicts, and improved well-being based on a sense of self-acceptance and having come to terms with life.
>
> (p. 21)

Review is not confined to tying up loose ends, and putting one's psychological house in order. In a continuing process, with many ups and downs, it is not uncommon for narrators to remain at odds with life and to choose to leave conflicts unresolved, yet feel positive about the process because, after due reflection, they have reaffirmed their decision not to be reconciled.

A family saga

In this chapter, review will in effect tell its own story and introduce itself. This narrative of its growth can be viewed as a condensed family saga, in the sense that it is most usefully considered in a context of relationships with life span development, autobiographical memory, and reminiscence.

As Bromley (1990) explains, these are all closely connected with adults' ability to maintain and develop a sense of self, based on historical continuity. Both individuality and social identity are based on being able to recall psychologically significant events and being able to recognise who other people are.

Life span development

The life span perspective views human development as occurring across the life span (Sugarman, 1986), with most theorists proposing a series of critical stages. Transitional phases and significant life events, it is suggested, punctuate these. An individual can only be understood in the context of a personal history ('read like a book'). Baltes *et al.* (1980) view life span perspective as a family of theoretical propositions:

1 Development is a long-term process—throughout life there is potential for both continuous growth (gradual, incremental, cumulative, and quantitative), and discontinuous development (rapid, innovative, substantial, and qualitative).
2 It is multidimensional and multidirectional. Different elements— career, family, intellectual, social—may take relatively distinct developmental directions. Conflicts can be expected between role of child and role of parent, role of employee and role of home-maker. Even within one of these roles, there are several different criteria for measuring progress.
3 It involves loss as well as gain. Growth and decline sometimes come together. To make a decision to move on in life is to sacrifice possibilities, and lose something of the past, while opening up new opportunities and relationships. Personal growth brings risk, as Gould (1980) understands, pointing out that, as we push at psychological boundaries to gain a sense of inner freedom, we simultaneously undermine the illusion that we can do this and remain safe from major risks.
4 Plasticity is normal. There is potential for substantial variability in the way each individual copes with development at any point in time. While steps in developmental progress during the first few months or years of life are likely to follow a relatively fixed timetable, in later life a much wider range of possibilities tends to open up.
5 The historically and culturally embedded nature of development should be appreciated. Cultural differences are important, and it is inappropriate to

transfer from one social group to another ideas about development. Historical differences mean that the past is an uncertain and unreliable guide to the future.

6 Development is the outcome of transactions between each person and that person's environment. The human being is an active organism as part of an active environment, in a two-way interchange.

7 Life span development is a multidisciplinary concept. Input from anthropology, sociology, psychology, biology, chemistry, and other sciences is needed for its full understanding. Psychology is applied to describing processes within the individual, interactions between individuals and their personal settings, and interactions between different settings. In effect, aspects of the developmental process are usually most usefully considered from a both/and, rather than an either/or viewpoint.

You work for an agency that advises couples on relationship issues, and you have been asked to counsel Laura and Adam who are in their mid-thirties. Each has been married before. After six months their marriage is in trouble. They quarrel frequently and Laura wants a separation.

Adam has initiated their referral He is critical of Laura's continuing to 'encourage' men she knew before their marriage by behaving with them on social occasions 'as if nothing had happened'. He claims that this must mean she has a problem of 'being promiscuous in her head', which as a counsellor you must know how to deal with. Laura feels that Adam has a problem—'long-standing insecurity' stemming from his disturbed childhood during which several relationships within his family of origin ended abruptly. He attacks her verbally and physically and he appears abnormally jealous of what she sees as being simply everyday friendships.

- **Thinking point**
  Examine the propositions of Baltes *et al.* With these in mind formulate questions that you would wish to ask to help you understand this couple.

Rapid growth

Life span development has grown rapidly as an area of study, particularly over the last twenty years, for a number of reasons. The topic is intrinsically interesting, as it deals with the complexities of developing as a changing individual in a changing society; it helps in the understanding of what is meant by psychological well-being or normality; and it gives scope for judging the significance of instances of deviation from age-appropriate behaviour.

This area of study has been a relatively late developer, and we suggest that this is not surprising. There has been a body of psychodynamic opinion that adults don't develop significantly; adult life has not been seen as susceptible to developmental analysis; adults tend to be less accessible to researchers between

the hours of nine and five; it is difficult to get funding, because expensive social problems are seen as clustering in early or late life; and adult researchers may be uncomfortable studying peers, as this is too close to home.

Objections

A number of objections to life span theorising have been raised. Until the 1970s, most psychologists believed that qualitative advances in development did not occur after adolescence (Alexander and Langer, 1990). Cognitive, affective, moral, self, and consciousness development in adults was given little attention by researchers. Although this position has changed, some scientists and clinicians still feel uncomfortable with life span development as a subject of serious study. They point out that it tends to be all-embracing, taking in 'life, the universe, and everything'; and that its concepts are not always well-defined.

Considering theories of successful ageing, Ryff (1989) points to: lack of theory guiding research; narrow conceptions of well-being (seen as the absence of significant abnormality, rather than in positive terms); neglect of possibility for continued growth and development; and failure to take sufficient account of concepts of positive ageing as being human constructions liable to cultural variations and historical change. Bromley (1988) sees adult ageing as a disorderly process of biological and behavioural disorganisation, and as fundamentally unsuitable for developmental understanding since it lacks the coherence of development in early life.

Other critics have argued that many of the early influential studies were difficult to generalise from because they had a preponderance of white middle-class American males; and that for the disadvantaged, struggling to survive, preoccupation with personal development would not be an issue. Also, on many life span issues it is difficult to gather reliable data. For example, growing loneliness in later life may be covered up because: it is socially undesirable to admit loneliness; it is too painful to discuss; many respondents practise stoicism; there is a tendency to accept 'the devil you know'; scepticism or fear relating to possible outcome of admitting loneliness. Technical problems for quantitative analysis abound; and life span evidence is a messy mixture (autobiographical accounts, semi-structured interviews, relatively small samples, and few long-term studies).

As in almost any area of scientific study, investigators are divided among themselves. For example, Riegel (1976) swims against the mainstream as a critic of stage theories, which he dismisses as an enormous waste of time and effort, an exercise in futility. He views development as 'ceaseless flux', within which at least four dimensions (inner-biological, individual-psychological, cultural-sociological, and outer-physical) are constantly interacting to create problems, raise questions, and bring changes for individuals and systems. Schroots (1995) invokes chaos theory, noting that in the open system of a life a single fluctuation may become so powerful that it shatters the form of a narrative, so that it is