The Implications of Autobiographical Memory Style for the Deficits associated with Borderline Personality Disorder

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I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis is the result of original research and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or Institution.

(Signed): ……………………………………………………………………………………..
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Abstract

Overgeneral autobiographical memory is thought to be a clinically meaningful phenomenon which is related to affect regulation, problem solving ability, and treatment outcome in clinical populations (see J. M. G. Williams et al., 2007, for review). Individuals with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) are thought to be particularly prone to developing an overgeneral style of memory due to their temperamental difficulties in controlling affect (J. M. G. Williams, 1996). However, research in this population has so far yielded inconsistent findings. In a series of three studies, this thesis addresses the question whether overgeneral memory is associated with BPD, as well as exploring the relationship between memory specificity, affect regulation, problem solving ability, and response to treatment in this population. Findings indicate that individuals with BPD display reduced autobiographical specificity relative to controls, however, this appears to be a reflection of differences in cognitive ability as IQ and education mediated the association between specificity and diagnosis. Reduced specificity was not associated with Borderline traits in a non-clinical sample. Results failed to confirm the hypothesis that autobiographical memory specificity would be related to affect regulation in individuals with BPD, although there was some indication that memory specificity is associated with reduced rates of deliberate self-harm. Specificity was related to problem solving performance in individuals with BPD, although this relationship did not extend to self-reported problem solving ability. Memory specificity also appeared to change significantly over the course of treatment in a year-long Dialectical Behavior Therapy program, however, there was little indication that change in memory specificity was associated with the observed improvement in symptomatology, affect regulation or problem solving ability.
Lastly, an experimental study with university students found no relationship between memory specificity and affect dysregulation, although low specific students reported greater reductions in positive affect following a negative event than individuals with a specific style of autobiographical recall. The assimilation model is considered as a framework for conceptualising these results.