

Examining the Relations among Autobiographical Memory Recall Types, Quality of Descriptions, and Emotional Arousal in Psychotherapy for Depression

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Abstract : Three types of autobiographical memory recall -specific, episodic, and generic- were examined in relation to the quality of descriptions and in-session levels of emotional arousal. Correlational analyses and general estimating equation were conducted to test the relationships between 1) quality of descriptions and type of memory, 2) type of memory and emotional arousal, and 3) quality of descriptions and emotional arousal. The data was transcripts drawn from an archival randomized-control study comparing cognitive-behavioral therapy and emotion-focused therapy in a 16-week treatment for depression. Autobiographical memory recall segments were identified and sorted into three categories: specific, episodic, and generic. Quality of descriptions of these segments was then operationalized and measured using the Referential Activity Scale, and each memory segment was rated on four dimensions: concreteness, specificity, clarity, and overall imagery. Clients' level of emotional arousal for each recall was measured using the Client's Expression Emotion Scale. Contrary to the predictions, generic memories are associated with higher emotional arousal ratings and descriptive language ratings compared to specific memories. However, a positive relationship emerged between the quality of descriptions and expressed emotional arousal, indicating that the quality of descriptions in which memories are described in sessions is more important than the type of memory recalled in predicting clients' level of emotional arousal. The results from this study provide a clearer understanding of the role of memory recall types and use of language in activating emotional arousal in psychotherapy sessions in a depressed sample.

Keywords : autobiographical memory recall, emotional arousal, psychotherapy for depression, quality of descriptions, referential activity

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