



Depression: Depression is characterized by a sad mood, loss of interest or pleasure, sleep problems and appetite problems for at least 2 weeks. Major depressive disorder is a common mental disorder with an estimated lifetime prevalence of 17%. Moreover, the World Health Organization expects the prevalence of depression to show a rising trend during the coming years.

Experimental psychopathology research: The **Centre for the Psychology of Learning and Experimental**

Psychopathology investigates vulnerability factors in psychopathology, such as depression. Besides a focus on symptoms of depression, a thorough understanding of the underlying mechanisms (i.e., vulnerability factors) is necessary for understanding the course (i.e., onset, maintenance and relapse) of depression. These vulnerability factors can give important leads for the development of screening tools and preventive and curative interventions. In the boxes below, four important vulnerability factors are discussed.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL MEMORY

= The aspect of memory concerned with the recollection of personally experienced events (Williams et al., 2007).

Problems with autobiographical memory are related to depression

Autobiographical memory is believed to be consulted when we experience difficulties, serving as a kind of database of previously used solutions, and it is thought to play an important role in the construction of our self-concept. It should not surprise, therefore, that problems with autobiographical memory have been associated with emotional disorders such as depression and post-traumatic stress disorder.

How to investigate autobiographical memory?

Autobiographical Memory Test

One task that is regularly used to map autobiographical memory is the Autobiographical Memory Task. In this task, respondents are presented with a range of cue-words such as 'happy' or 'lazy'. They are asked to retrieve a memory in response to each cue. The memory they retrieve should refer to a personally experienced event that happened only once, and did not last longer than one day (= a specific memory).

Overgeneral autobiographical memory

Depressed, previously depressed and traumatized patients perform differently on this task compared to normal controls.

Instead of retrieving a specific memory, as instructed, they more often refer to categories of events: a phenomenon called overgeneral memory.

Overgeneral: "Every time I play tennis"

Specific: "That one set when I broke my racquet in that thrilling tiebreak against my brother."

Gelieve in deze kolom je herinnering te schrijven	
aangenaam	
boos	
belangstblijvend (bezorgdheid samen in of over iets)	

VISUAL PERSPECTIVE DURING RECALL OF MEMORIES

Autobiographical memories can be retrieved from a field or an observer visual perspective.



Field perspective: using this original perspective, you are experiencing the remembered event through your own eyes.



Observer perspective: you can see yourself in the situation from the outside.

Depression has often been related to memory recall from an observer perspective. For example, a study has shown that students with depressive symptoms recalled positive memories more from an observer perspective compared to negative memories. This was not the case for the non-depressed students which emphasizes a positive memory perspective deficit in depression.

OVERGENERALIZATION

Generalization refers to the assumption that the outcome of one experience applies to the same experience in the future or to even slightly similar experiences (Lefebvre, 1981).

Overgeneralization is the pathological variant of generalization and refers to generalization that is inappropriate because it is excessive. When overgeneralizing, a person fails to make important discriminations and therefore arrives at incorrect conclusions and draws inappropriate lessons from experiences (Epstein, 1992).

An example:

"Geoffrey, a 48-year old man is diagnosed with depression. Over the last four months his complaints have worsened. He recently had a conflict with one of his best friends over a promise that was not kept. This event has touched him deeply. Since then he does not trust any of his friends anymore, leading to avoidance of close contacts and gradual isolation and chronic rumination about his incapacity to maintain friendships"

RUMINATION AND INTRUSIONS

Rumination refers to repetitively thinking about unwanted/disturbing feelings (e.g., depressed affect) and/or disturbing thoughts (e.g., past events).

Intrusions are very specific memories that pop into your mind involuntarily.

Some studies suggest a positive association between overgeneral memory and intrusions. Our centre is currently investigating whether rumination as a common underlying process could be an explanation for the paradoxical co-occurrence of overgeneral memory and specific intrusive memories in depressed people. An independent series of studies has demonstrated a causal relationship between (depressive) rumination and overgeneral memory (e.g., Raes, Watkins, Williams, & Hermans, 2008), and between rumination and intrusions (e.g., Guastella & Moulds, 2007).