

Understanding Memory-Focused Cognitive-Behavioural Interventions Through a Narrative Identity Perspective

Soljana Çili¹ and Lusia Stopa²

¹ University of the Arts London, ² University of Southampton

Autobiographical Memory and The Self

- Autobiographical memory (AM) has three main functions (Bluck, Alea, Habermas, & Rubin, 2005; Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000):
 - **Self** (develop and maintain a continuous and coherent sense of self)
 - **Directive** (guide behaviour, cognition, and emotion)
 - **Social** (develop and nurture interpersonal relationships)
- AM functions are facilitated by **autobiographical reasoning**, which involves linking AMs and forming self-event connections and goals (Bluck & Habermas, 2000; Pasupathi, Mansour, & Brubaker, 2007).
- The **life story model of personality** (e.g., McAdams, 2013) argues that personality encompasses dispositional traits, characteristic adaptations (e.g., goals, values), and a life story or narrative identity.

Memory and Psychological Well-Being

- AMs are associated with low psychological well-being and with symptoms of psychopathology when they (see Adler, Lodi-Smith, Philippe, & Houle, 2016; Çili & Stopa, 2019):
 - Are described with a low sense of agency and communion;
 - Contain contamination rather than redemption sequences and have a negative affective tone;
 - Include negative meanings or self-event connections; and/or
 - Are overgeneral rather than specific.
- Adverse AMs** and **related intrusive images** contribute to the onset and maintenance of psychological disorders by playing **maladaptive self and directive functions** (Çili & Stopa, 2019).

Mechanisms of Change in Memory-Focused Interventions: A Narrative Identity Perspective

- Cognitive-behavioural techniques such as **prolonged exposure** and **imagery rescripting** help modify the meanings attached to adverse AMs and intrusive images and reduce the distress associated with them (see Çili & Stopa, 2019).
- Çili and Stopa (2019) propose that such interventions may facilitate autobiographical reasoning and effect change at all personality levels:
 - **Change in the life story** as patients reappraise the targeted self-defining memories (Singer & Salovey, 1993), as well as related AMs, and establish a sense of self-continuity and unity
 - **Changes in characteristic adaptations**
 - **Changes in traits** that are strongly associated with affect and approach or avoidance motivation
- Cognitive-behavioural interventions may thus modify the self and directive functions of the targeted memories (Çili & Stopa, 2019).

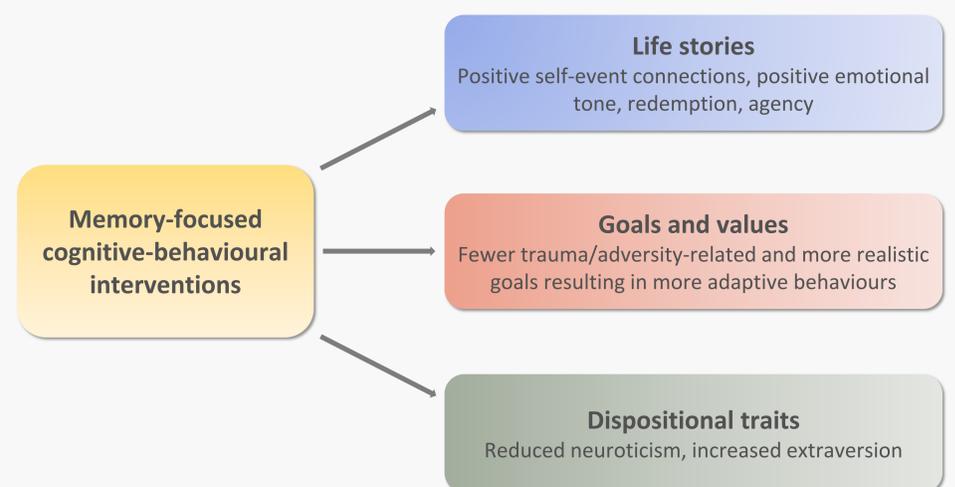


Figure 1. Proposed impact of memory-focused cognitive-behavioural interventions on each layer of personality. From “Autobiographical Memory and The Self: Relationship and Implications for Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy,” by S. Çili and L. Stopa, 2019, p. 105. Copyright 2019 by S. Çili and L. Stopa.

What Next?

- Çili and Stopa’s (2019) model can be used to better understand and enhance interventions targeting adverse AMs and intrusive images
- Future research on these interventions needs to involve:
 - Self and personality assessments
 - Long follow-up periods
 - Mediation analyses

Acknowledgement and References

- The authors are grateful to Elihu Salazar Espinosa for his help in preparing the model diagram.
- Adler, J. M., Lodi-Smith, J., Philippe, F. L., & Houle, I. (2016). The incremental validity of narrative identity in predicting well-being: A review of the field and recommendations for the future. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 20*(2), 142-175.
- Bluck, S., Alea, N., Habermas, T., & Rubin, D. C. (2005). A tale of three functions: The self-reported uses of autobiographical memory. *Social Cognition, 23*(1), 91-117.
- Bluck, S. & Habermas, T. (2000). The life story schema. *Motivation and Emotion, 24*(2), 121-147.
- Çili, S., & Stopa, L. (2019). *Autobiographical memory and the self: Relationship and implications for cognitive-behavioural therapy*. London, England: Routledge.
- Conway, M. A., & Pleydell-Pearce, C. W. (2000). The construction of autobiographical memories in the self-memory system. *Psychological Review, 107*(2), 261-288.
- McAdams, D. P. (2013). The psychological self as actor, agent, and author. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 8*(3), 272-295.
- Pasupathi, M., Mansour, E., & Brubaker, J. R. (2007). Developing a life story: Constructing relations between self and experience in autobiographical narratives. *Human Development, 50*(2-3), 85-110.
- Singer, J. A., & Salovey, P. (1993). *The remembered self: Emotion and memory in personality*. New York, NY: Free Press.