Reviewer's report

Title: Autobiographical memory and hierarchical search strategies in depressed and non-depressed participants

Version: 2  Date: 10 July 2014

Reviewer: Xianhua Liu

Reviewer's report:

The authors have made an ambitious to examine the hierarchical search sequence used to recall autobiographical memories (AM) in depressed and non-depressed participants, with a view to determining whether depressed participants exhibited truncated search strategies. The authors find that depressed participants retrieve more general and this AM characteristic is contributed to terminating the retrieval search early in the search hierarchy. These findings are of interest for the research of memory function in depressed patients, although AM overgenerality in depressed patients has been well examined and is not novel.

In general, I like the goals of this manuscript, it makes some useful contributions. However, there are several problems with the manuscript that raise significant questions about its readiness for publication.

Major Compulsory Revisions#

Background:

(1) Since the major goal of this manuscript is to determine whether depressed participants exhibited truncated search strategies. The authors should give a more detailed introduction on the hierarchical representation of autobiographical knowledge and the retrieval processes, rather than the interpretative model called CaR-FA-X.

Methods:

(2) The sample size may be too small—just 13 depressed patients and 13 no-depressed individuals.

(3) The inclusion criteria and the exclusion criteria which participants meet should be detailed.

Results:

(4) Page 13 line 2-11. I am unsure why the degrees of freedom quoted are 313 and 388 given a total of 26 participants.

Minor Essential Revisions#

(1) I think the paragraphs 1-2 of the part of Results would better be removed to the part of autobiographical memory test by cue words

(2) The ways of presentation of the cue words of AMT should be introduced.
Discretionary Revisions:
(1) The response latency of the cue words is an important variable of AMT. I wondered why it was not analyzed in the current study.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests.