Self-defining memories and self-concept clarity: A comparative study of depressed patients, bipolar patients and healthy subjects

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BACKGROUND

Self-defining memories (SDMs) are…(Blagov & Singer, 2004)
- Vivid, emotionally intense and well-rehearsed autobiographical memories;
- Reflections of the central goals, values and conflicts of an individual's life;
- Integrated memories related to a meaning-making (i.e., a learned lesson about oneself, others or the world).

Depressed and bipolar patients present disturbances of autobiographical memory (AM) (Blagov & Singer, 2004):
- **Overgeneralisation bias:** recall of less specific memories than general ones
- **Mood congruence bias:** recall of less positive memories than negative ones

Because SDMs have not been studied a lot since yet in these two disorders…
└ Aims of this study: (1) Assess the presence of AM disturbances in the recall of SDMs
(2) Compare SDMs' characteristics among depressed and bipolar patients

Depressed and bipolar patients also suffer from disruptions of the self-concept clarity (SCC) which is the degree of certainty and confidence concerning self-descriptions (Campbell, 1996; Singer, Blagov, Berry & Oost, 2012).

Because SDMs are crystallisations of the links between memory and identity (Lardi & Van der Linden, 2012), SDMs might help to have a high SCC.

└ Aim of this study: (3) To assess the relationship between SDMs and SCC.

HYPOTHESES

Compared to healthy subjects, depressed and bipolar patients will:
Recall — less specific and meaning-making SDMs — more negative SDMs
Report — more contamination than redemption — lower SCC

METHOD

EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN
1(TIME)*3(GROUP: depressed patients, bipolar patients and healthy subjects) design is used
Recall of 6 SDMs according to these instructions:
- SDMs should date from last than a year and be clear and familiar
- SDMs help to understand who you are
- SDMs can be positive, neutral or negative
- SDMs are well-rehearsed and as familiar as a picture

SAMPLE

SAMPLE	Depressed patients (DP) N = 17	Bipolar patients (BP) N = 16	Healthy subjects (HS) N = 19	
Sex (♀/♂)	8/9	7/9	10/9	
Age	51,24 (10,60)	55,56 (9,99)	48,21 (13,24)	p > 0,05
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	
Number of depressive episodes	2 (1,31)	5,22 (5,67)	/	
Number of manic episodes	/	5,18 (5,88)	/	

SDMs ASSESSMENT
- Specificity
- Meaning-making
- Contain
- Recalled and current emotional valence
  └ Redemption: negative *past* valence - - > positive or neutral *actual* valence
  └ Contamination: positive *past* valence - - > negative *actual* valence
  └ Neutral sequence: identical *past* and *actual* valences

MOOD & SELF ASSESSMENT
- Depression severity (Beck Depression Inventory, BDI-II)
- Mania (Young Mania Rating Scale, YMRS)
- Self-concept clarity (Self-concept clarity scale, SCCS)

STATISTICAL ANALYSES
Descriptive, correlational analyses & ANOVA measures

RESULTS

MOOD & SELF

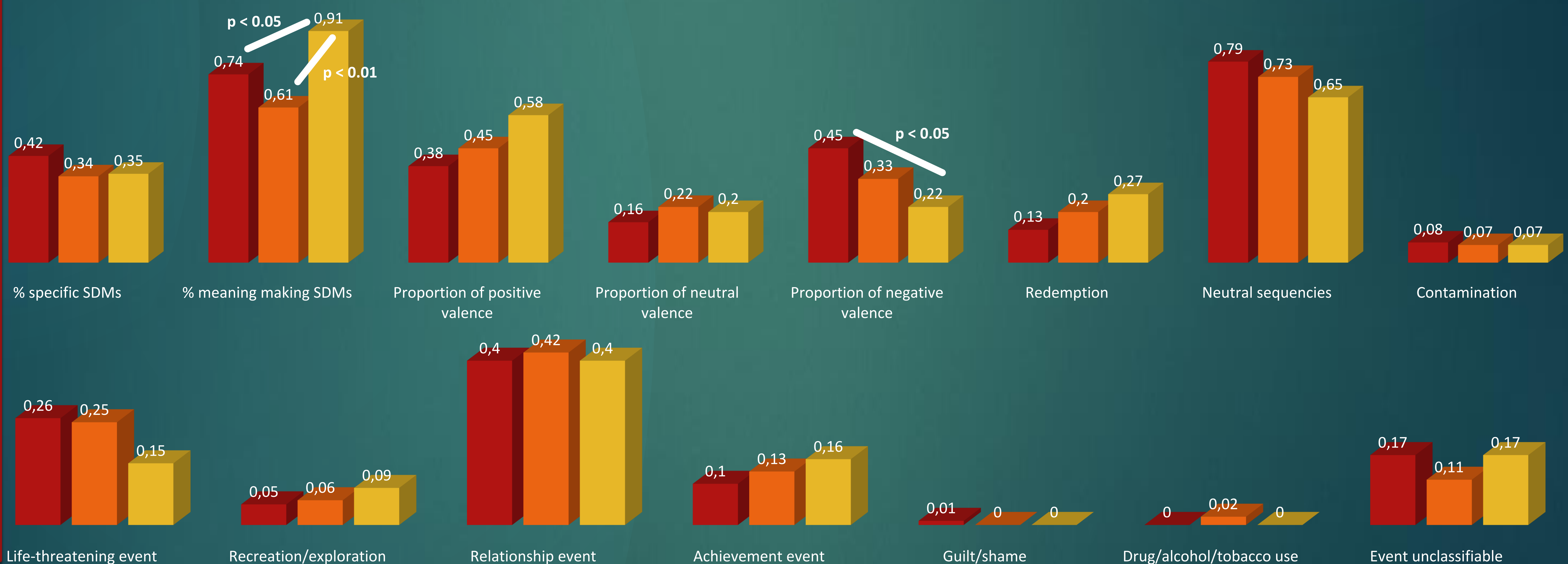|	DP M (SD)	BP M (SD)	HS M (SD)	GROUP F(dl=2)	P
BDI-II	25,47 (15,06)	15,13 (19,93)	3,79 (6,18)	13,53(2)	< 0,01
YMRS	/	6,25 (11,40)	/	/	/
ECCS	37,35 (10,67)	38,13 (10,22)	50,63 (5,12)	12,41	< 0,01

SDMS & SELF

Correlational analyses were conducted on the whole sample (N = 52).

	Meaning making	Specificity	Redemption	Neutral sequences	Contamination	Negative	Valence Neutral	Positive
SCC	r = 0,41 p < 0,01	r = -0,04 p = 0,76	r = 0,26 p = 0,06	r = -0,29 p < 0,05	r = 0,10 p = 0,46	r = -0,59 p < 0,01	r = 0,05 p = 0,72	r = 0,55 p < 0,01

SDMS CHARACTERISTICS

■ Depressed patients ■ Bipolar patients ■ Healthy subjects

% specific SDMs: 0,42 / 0,34 / 0,35
% meaning making SDMs: 0,74 / 0,61 / 0,91 (p < 0.05, p < 0.01)
Proportion of positive valence: 0,38 / 0,45 / 0,58
Proportion of neutral valence: 0,16 / 0,22 / 0,2
Proportion of negative valence: 0,45 / 0,33 / 0,22 (p < 0.05)
Redemption: 0,13 / 0,2 / 0,27
Neutral sequencies: 0,79 / 0,73 / 0,65
Contamination: 0,08 / 0,07 / 0,07

Life-threatening event: 0,26 / 0,25 / 0,15
Recreation/exploration: 0,05 / 0,06 / 0,09
Relationship event: 0,4 / 0,42 / 0,4
Achievement event: 0,1 / 0,13 / 0,16
Guilt/shame: 0,01 / 0 / 0
Drug/alcohol/tobacco use: 0 / 0,02 / 0
Event unclassifiable: 0,17 / 0,11 / 0,17

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Our results support partially our hypotheses. In accordance with our hypotheses,
✓ DP and BP report a lower self-concept clarity than HS.
✓ DP and BP recall less meaning-making SDMs than HS.
✓ DP recall more negative SDMs than HS.
 └This confirms results of previous study (Werneir-Seidler & Moulds, 2012) and is in line with the mood congruence bias.

Contrary to our hypotheses,
➢ DP and BP do not recall less specific SDMs than HS.
 └This does not confirm the presence of the overgeneralization bias in SDMs.
➢ DP and BP do not present more contamination than HS.
 └ This does not confirm results of previous study (Harkness, 2011).
➢ BP do not recall more negative SDMs than HS.

Memories mainly concern relationships among the three groups. Despite no difference between groups, DP and BP also recall life-threatening events which seems to correspond to the negative emotional valence of their SDMs.

As predicted, DP and BP present a lower sense of self throughout a lower SCC than HS' one. It seems that certain SDMs characteristics might help to maintain SCC (meaning making, redemption and positive emotional valence).
➔ These results already highlight clinical implications of working on recalling positive SDMs and on recalling SDMs which contain meaning making and present redemption sequences for the SCC.

/!\ The limited samples' size does not enable us to have an adequate statistical power: similar studies include at least 30 subjects within each group ➔ Analyses should be replicated in larger samples.