

# Manipulating recall vantage perspective of intrusive memories in dysphoria

**Author/Contributor:**

Williams, Alishia; Moulds, Michelle

**Publication details:**

Memory

v. 16

Chapter No. 7

pp. 742-750

0965-8211 (ISSN)

**Publication Date:**

2008

**Publisher DOI:**

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09658210802290453>

**License:**

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/au/>

Link to license to see what you are allowed to do with this resource.

Downloaded from <http://hdl.handle.net/1959.4/52711> in <https://unsworks.unsw.edu.au> on 2022-12-08

Manipulating Recall Vantage Perspective of Intrusive Memories in Dysphoria

Alishia D. Williams & Michelle L. Moulds

The University of New South Wales, Sydney

Correspondence: Michelle L. Moulds  
School of Psychology  
The University of New South Wales  
NSW 2052 AUSTRALIA  
Tel: 61-2-9385 3425  
Fax: 61-2-9385 3641  
e-mail: m.moulds@unsw.edu.au

Running Head: vantage perspective

Keywords: Depression, vantage-perspective, memory, cognitive avoidance

## Abstract

The current study attempted to experimentally manipulate mode of recall (field, observer perspective) in a sample of mildly dysphoric participants ( $N = 134$ ) who reported a distressing intrusive memory of negative autobiographical event. Specifically, the current study sought to ascertain whether shifting participants into a converse perspective would have differential effects on the reported experience of their memory. Results indicated that shifting participants from a field to an observer perspective resulted in decreased experiential ratings; specifically, reduced distress and vividness. Also, as anticipated, the converse shift in perspective (from observer to field) did not lead to a corresponding increase in experiential ratings, but did result in reduced ratings of observation and a trend was observed for decreased levels of detachment. The findings support the notion that recall perspective has a functional role in the regulation of intrusion-related distress and represents a cognitive avoidance mechanism.

## **Manipulating Recall Vantage Perspective of Intrusive Memories in Dysphoria**

### Introduction

Memories recalled in the first-person are experienced from the individual's original or 'field' perspective and contain more information on affective, physical, and physiological states, whereas memories recalled in the third person are experienced from an 'observer' perspective and contain more descriptive and less affect-laden information (Nigro & Neisser, 1983). The work of Nigro and Neisser (1983) introduced the notion that recall vantage perspective was an important component of memory experience. They documented variables associated with naturally occurring field and observer perspective memories and found that field memories generally arise in relation to recent events, whereas observer memories are more commonly reported in relation to older events. More importantly, they found that participants requested to recall emotional elements of their memory tended to adopt a field perspective while participants requested to focus on objective or peripheral details tended to adopt an observer perspective. The proposal that vantage perspective could be related to different subjective experiences of remembering was supported by the findings of Robinson and Swanson (1993). They instructed participants to recall autobiographical memories on two separate occasions and found that participants who switched from their original field perspective to an observer perspective reported decreased emotional intensity of the memory. The converse was not observed for those who switched from an observer perspective to a field perspective, nor were there any differences in ratings for those who maintained the same recall perspective across both times.

McIsaac and Eich (2002) demonstrated the influence of perspective on the content of the information retrieved from memory. They employed an experimental procedure that required participants to verbally dictate their memory of a simple physical task they had previously performed from either a field or observer perspective. Participants who adopted a field perspective during recall included more emotional and psychological descriptors; by comparison, those who adopted an observer perspective included more information about objective details such as the physical appearance and location of objects that were part of the tasks. Not only did the content of participants' narratives vary between the two perspectives, but ratings of emotionality were also discrepant across vantage perspective. That is, participants who adopted a field perspective rated their memory as more detailed and emotional compared to those who adopted an observer perspective. In another study, Berntsen and Rubin (2006) investigated recall vantage perspective adopted when recalling a range of emotional autobiographical memories. Results were in accord with previous findings such that a shift from a field to an observer perspective resulted in a reduction in ratings of emotional intensity and the sense of 'reliving' the event. Consistent with Robinson and Swanson (1993), a shift from an observer to a field perspective did not correspond to an increase in emotional intensity ratings or the reported sense of reliving.

McIsaac and Eich (2004) extended this line of research to clinical samples and examined the ways in which recall vantage perspective influenced the subjective experience of remembering a traumatic event. In a sample of 49 patients who met DSM-IV criteria for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD; American Psychiatric Association, 1994), those who verbally recounted their trauma from a natural field perspective focused

on the emotional, physical, and mental activity that occurred during the event. Patients who naturally retrieved their trauma memory from an observer perspective mentioned more information about their own appearance and/or descriptive information about the event. Additionally, naturally recalled observer memories were experienced as less anxiety eliciting than field memories and 89% of those who recalled their trauma from an observer perspective reported that they did so in an effort to avoid reliving the experience. More recently, Kenny and Bryant (2007) reported that in a sample of trauma-exposed participants, those who endorsed avoidance of their trauma were more likely to recall the event from an observer perspective compared to trauma-exposed participants who were low in avoidance. Interestingly, levels of avoidance were not associated with vantage perspective for the recall of positive or neutral events occurring within the same time period, supporting the notion that recall perspective may in fact be strategic and not simply reflect a stable predilection to either perspective (Kenny & Bryant, 2007).

Collectively, these findings suggest a functional role for recall vantage perspective in memory retrieval. It has already been suggested that adopting a third-person perspective in the context of intrusive trauma memories may serve as a cognitive avoidance mechanism (McIsaac & Eich, 2004). In effect, observer perspective memory recall may function as a means of removing oneself from reliving the specific event by becoming a 'detached spectator', and both research and clinical observations indicate that this is common in victims of disasters and assaults (Cardena & Spiegel, 1993; Foa & Rothbaum, 1998, as cited in McIsaac & Eich, 2004). In addition, it has been speculated that adopting an observer vantage perspective may hinder the emotional processing of memories of traumatic events. Emotional processing requires integration of both the

cognitive and affective components of a memory (Foa & Kozak, 1986). Observer perspective recall could prevent integration of the affective components of the memory by inhibiting attention to these elements in favour of emphasizing the objective details of the original experience (McIsaac & Eich, 2004). It follows, then, that adopting an observer perspective may therefore interfere with exposure-based therapies (McIsaac & Eich, 2004), and thus contribute to intrusion maintenance.

The results of McIsaac and Eich (2004) provide initial clinical evidence of the potential role of recall vantage perspective in the regulation of affect linked to intrusive trauma memories. There is increasing evidence that intrusive memories in PTSD and depression share common characteristics (Patel, Brewin, Wheatley, Wells, Fisher, & Myers, 2007; Reynolds & Brewin, 1999; Williams & Moulds, 2007a), are associated with shared management strategies (Starr & Moulds, 2006; Williams & Moulds, 2007b), and that maladaptive interpretations of intrusive memories are linked to their maintenance in both disorders (Ehlers & Steil, 1995; Starr & Moulds, 2006; Williams & Moulds, in press). Accordingly, it may be that an observer perspective of intrusive memories in depression is also linked to reduced emotional impact, as is the case in PTSD. To date, the recall vantage perspective of intrusive memories has been minimally investigated in the context of depression. Recent research has, however, documented the occurrence of an observer perspective in deliberately retrieved memories. Kuyken and Howell (2006) found that observer perspective memories were more common in depressed adolescents than in never-depressed controls, and suggested that the incongruence between an adolescent's current and ideal self-perception may prompt retrieval from this perspective as it would facilitate objective evaluation. Similarly, Lemogne, Piolino, Friszer, Claret,

Girault, Jouvent, et al. (2006) reported that depressed individuals experienced fewer field perspective memories for positive events and suggested the role of current negative affect in mediating this retrieval pattern. An investigation of the vantage perspective of spontaneously recalled, or intrusive memories was conducted by Williams and Moulds (2007b) in a non-clinical sample to examine whether recall vantage mediated the effects of distress associated with intrusive autobiographical memories. Contrary to prediction, field memories were not experienced with greater levels of distress than observer memories. However, as hypothesized, there was an association between an observer vantage perspective and indices of cognitive avoidance, suggesting that emotional disengagement may be a motivating factor in the adoption of this perspective. Although providing initial evidence of the importance of vantage perspective as a feature of intrusive memories, this study was limited by its correlational design. McIsaac and Eich (2002) propose that intrusive memories, particularly trauma memories, are unlikely to lend themselves to experimental manipulations that permit assessment at the level of encoding and retrieval. If the observer perspective indeed functions as an avoidant mechanism, it is unlikely that participants would be willing to engage in the necessary perspective shift in a research environment. Despite the documented parallels between how memory intrusions are experienced in both PTSD and depression, it is possible that the non-traumatic nature of intrusions reported by depressed and dysphoric individuals may render these memories more amenable to experimental manipulations of characteristics such as vantage perspective.

The current study was therefore an attempt to experimentally manipulate mode of memory recall in a sample of non-clinical dysphoric participants who reported distressing

intrusive memories of negative autobiographical events. Specifically, the current study sought to ascertain whether shifting participants into a converse perspective would have differential effects on the reported experience of their intrusion. It was expected that participants who naturally recalled their intrusive memory from a field perspective would report decreased distress, vividness, and reliving and increased detachment and observation when instructed to shift recall to an observer perspective. Based on previous findings (Berntsen & Rubin, 2006; Robinson & Swanson, 1993), it was not expected that the converse shift in perspective would necessarily lead to a corresponding increase/decrease on these indices. However, it was hypothesized that participants who naturally recalled their intrusive memory from an observer perspective would report decreased ratings of observation and detachment when instructed to shift to recall to a field perspective.

## Method

### *Procedure*

One hundred and ninety four first-year undergraduate students were recruited through the Psychology Participant Pool at The University of New South Wales. Participants initially completed an intrusive memory interview to assess the occurrence of an appropriate intrusive memory in the preceding week. Participants then completed a battery of self-report measures. Data from participants who reported an intrusive memory of a traumatic event that satisfied PTSD criteria for a Criterion A stressor (DSM-IV; APA, 1994) were eliminated in order to exclude PTSD as a potential confound (in line with previous studies in this field; e.g., Brewin, Reynolds, & Tata, 1999; Starr & Moulds, 2006). Thirty-five participants were eliminated on this basis, with the majority indicating

involvement in a motor vehicle accident. Additionally, data from participants who rated their memory as 'not at all' distressing ( $n = 25$ ) was also omitted from analysis given the focus on negative intrusive memories and to avoid potential floor effects. Therefore, data from 99 females and 35 males with a mean age of 20.01 ( $SD = 5.34$ ) were included in the analyses. All participants received course credit for their participation.

### *Measures*

*Intrusive Memory Interview* (following Hackmann, Ehlers, Speckens, & Clark, 2004). The items on the Intrusive Memory Interview were drawn from a number of validated inventories and have been used in previous research (Williams & Moulds, 2007a, b, c). The questions relate to participants' subjective experience of a spontaneous memory that occurred within one week prior to the interview. Information regarding intrusion frequency, content, sensory modalities, and appraisals was collected. Frequency information was based on the participant's report of how many times the memory spontaneously intruded within the one-week time period. Participants described both the content of the memory and the way in which they experienced the intrusions (visual, auditory, kinetic features). Ratings of distress, vividness, reliving, detachment, and observation were anchored on a 0 (not at all) to 100 (very much) scale following Hackmann et al. (2004). It is important to note that ratings for 'observation' were not used to categorize memory perspective (see below). This item referred to participants' general sense of observation (e.g., '*When you experienced this memory, how much did it feel like you were observing it, as if you were watching a movie of the event?*').

Instructions for the interview were delivered in a combination of written and computer format in order to ensure consistent exposure to vantage instructions as detailed below.

Recall vantage perspective was assessed through the following item modified from Coles, Turk, and Heimberg (2002): *Sometimes we “see” a memory from a first-person perspective. In a first-person memory you see the event from the same visual perspective that you originally did; in other words, in your memory you are looking out at your surroundings through your own eyes. For example, if you recall standing on a beach with your family looking at a cloudy sky from your eyes, it may look like the following:* Participants were then exposed to a computer-based photograph depicting a view of a cloudy sky and provided with the following information: *However, at other times we “see” a memory from a third-person perspective. In a third-person memory you see the event from an observer's visual perspective; in other words, in your memory you may actually see yourself as well as your surroundings. Now the same scene may appear like the following:* Participants were then exposed to the same computer-based photograph now depicting the image from an external vantage point and asked to indicate the perspective they predominantly had (either (i) field, (ii) observer, or (iii) a combination of field and observer – i.e., blended modality) when they experienced the memory intrusion in the previous week.

Finally, participants were given instructions to switch recall vantage perspective and provided with the following instructions:

*Now I would like you to take a few minutes to orient yourself in the opposite perspective (i.e. if you originally experienced the memory predominantly in the first person, you now must focus on recalling the memory predominantly in the*

*third person). Some participants find that closing their eyes is helpful. Now please write out your spontaneous memory in as much detail as you can from this new perspective. It is important that you only describe the information that was in your spontaneous memory. Do not try to elaborate or embellish your memory. If you find yourself switching to your original perspective while detailing the memory please write 'SWITCH' and continue writing.*

Following instructions to adopt the converse vantage perspective, participants completed a 7-item questionnaire from McIsaac and Eich (2004) that assessed: (a) the percentage of total recall time they were able to maintain the perspective, (b) how strongly they maintained the perspective, (c) how easy/difficult it was to maintain perspective, (d) to what degree the vantage point influenced their recollections, (e) how rich in detail their recollections were, (f) how rich in emotion their recollections were, and (g) how much anxiety they experienced while recollecting. Responses to the last six questions were made on 7-point scales (i.e., where 1 = *not strongly maintained, difficult to maintain, small influence, little detail, little emotion, and little anxiety* and 7 = *strongly maintained, easy to maintain, large influence, much detail, much emotion, and much anxiety*, respectively).

*Impact of Event Scale* (IES; Horowitz, Wilner, & Alvarez, 1979). The IES a self-report questionnaire that has two subscales anchored to the subjective experience of a specific life event. The Intrusion subscale assesses both the frequency and range of intrusions associated with the event and the Avoidance subscale assesses the efforts of the respondent to suppress the thoughts/memories associated with the event. In the current

study the wording was altered so that participants anchored their responses to the intrusive memory reported in the interview. Internal consistency for the Intrusion and Avoidance subscale has been reported as .78 and .82, respectively (Corcoran & Fischer, 1987, as cited in Brewin, 1998). Internal consistency for the total score in the current study was .84.

*Beck Depression Inventory – Second Edition* (BDI-II; Beck, Steer, & Brown, 1996). The BDI-II is a 21-item self-report rating inventory measuring characteristic attitudes and symptoms of depression. The BDI-II demonstrates high internal consistency, with alpha coefficients reported at .92 (Beck et al., 1996).

## Results

### *Sample and Intrusion Characteristics*

Of those who classified their intrusive memory as recalled from either extreme end of the perspective scale (i.e., as either a field or an observer memory, and not a blended modality), the majority (58%) reported a natural first-person perspective. Nineteen participants reported a blended modality, and were not included in the analyses. BDI-II scores were in the mild dysphoric range for both groups, with a mean of 12.96 ( $SD = 9.26$ ) for participants who reported a field memory and 14.43 ( $SD = 7.83$ ) for those who reported an observer memory. Importantly, the groups did not differ in their level of depressed mood,  $t(131) = -.98, p > .05$ . IES scores were moderately high for both groups. Specifically, mean total IES scores were 31.47 ( $SD = 13.62$ ) and 33.98 ( $SD = 15.12$ ), mean IES Intrusion scores were 15.92 ( $SD = 7.20$ ) and 17.14 ( $SD = 8.59$ ), and mean IES Avoidance scores were 15.55 ( $SD = 8.11$ ) and 16.83 ( $SD = 8.46$ ) for participants who reported an original field and observer memory, respectively. These means were not

significantly different, all  $t$ 's  $< 1$ , all  $p$ 's  $> .05$ . However, the frequency of the memory intrusion, indexed by the participant's estimation of the number of times the memory had intruded in the past week, varied across the groups. Observer memories intruded an average of 4.71 ( $SD = 3.59$ ) times within the previous week, compared to field memories, that intruded an average of 3.28 ( $SD = 2.92$ ) times,  $t(117) = 2.45$ ,  $p < .05$ .

Time elapsed since the remembered event ranged from 1 week to 14 years, with a mean of 73.58 ( $SD = 146.88$ ) weeks. In line with Williams and Moulds (2007b) and contrary to the research on normal autobiographical memory retrieval (Nigro & Neisser, 1983; Robinson & Swanson, 1993) there was no effect of age of event on vantage perspective,  $t(127) = -1.01$ ,  $p > .05$ .

#### *Intrusion Ratings at Baseline*

Table 1 reports the descriptive statistics for the primary measures of interest at baseline. Ratings of intrusion distress, vividness, detachment, reliving, and observation did not differ between participants who reported a naturally-occurring field versus observer memory, all  $t$ 's  $< 1.89$ ,  $p$ 's  $> .05$

-----  
 Insert Table 1 about here  
 -----

#### *Recall Manipulation Variables*

Responses to the 7-item recall questionnaire (McIsaac & Eich, 2004) revealed that, irrespective of the direction of recall shift (i.e., whether from observer to field, or field to observer), participants maintained the instructed (manipulated) perspective for the majority of the allocated time. The mean percentage of time maintained across both

conditions was 68% ( $SD = 24.36$ ). Additionally, there were no differences in ratings of how easy it was to maintain the experimentally-instructed perspective, how much detail was contained in their memory from either perspective, or how much emotion was elicited by perspective, all  $t$ 's  $< 1.70$ ,  $p$ 's  $> .05$ . As expected, however, participants who shifted from an observer to a field perspective reported greater mean levels of anxiety ( $M = 4.58$ ,  $SD = 1.81$ ) compared to participants who shifted from a field to an observer perspective ( $M = 3.65$ ,  $SD = 1.77$ ),  $t(131) = 2.94$ ,  $p < .01$ . There was a slight trend for participants who naturally recalled their intrusive memory from an observer perspective ( $M = 4.54$ ,  $SD = 1.91$ ) to report that the shift in vantage perspective influenced their recollections more than those who naturally recalled from a field perspective ( $M = 3.97$ ,  $SD = 1.88$ ),  $t(131) = 1.70$ ,  $p = .09$ .

#### *Intrusion Ratings Post-Manipulation*

Tables 2 and 3 report the means, standard deviations, and statistics for the primary outcome measures when participants shifted from a field to an observer perspective, and from an observer to a field recall vantage perspective, respectively.

*Shifting from a Field Perspective to an Observer Perspective.* Bonferonni adjusted paired samples  $t$ -tests were conducted (see Table 2) to test the main hypothesis that participants who were instructed to shift from a field to an observer perspective would report a decrease in ratings of distress, vividness, and reliving and an increase in ratings of detachment and observation. As expected, ratings of distress were significantly lower when participants shifted to an observer perspective compared to their naturally-occurring field perspective,  $t(77) = 5.58$ ,  $p < .001$ . Similarly, ratings of vividness were significantly lower when participants shifted to an observer perspective compared to their

naturally-occurring field perspective,  $t(77) = 3.04, p < .01$ . Contrary to predictions, ratings of reliving did not significantly decrease when shifting from a field to an observer perspective, although the means were in the expected direction. Finally, as expected, ratings of observation significantly increased following the manipulated shift from field to observer perspective recall,  $t(77) = -3.76, p < .001$ . Results did not indicate a corresponding significant increase in ratings of emotional detachment, although again the means were in the expected direction.

-----  
 Insert Table 2 about here  
 -----

*Shifting from an Observer Perspective to a Field Perspective.* Bonferonni adjusted paired samples  $t$ -tests were conducted to test the hypothesis that participants who shifted from an observer to a field perspective would not report any significant change in ratings of distress or vividness, but would report a decrease in ratings of observation and detachment. As expected, ratings of distress and vividness did not increase from pre-post vantage manipulation (see Table 3). As expected, ratings of observation significantly decreased following the manipulated shift from observer to field perspective recall,  $t(54) = 2.66, p < .01$ . Contrary to hypothesis, ratings of detachment did not decrease significantly following this shift, although there was a trend in the expected direction with a decrease from 45.81 ( $SD = 24.47$ ) to 38.18 ( $SD = 23.65$ ),  $t(54) = 1.78, p = .08$ .

-----  
Insert Table 3 about here  
-----

### Discussion

The current study experimentally manipulated mode of recall vantage perspective in order to assess the different functional roles of these retrieval perspectives. The results indicated that shifting participants from a field to an observer perspective resulted in decreased experiential ratings; specifically, reduced distress and vividness. Also, as anticipated, the converse shift in perspective (from observer to field) did not lead to a corresponding increase in experiential ratings, but did result in reduced ratings of observation and a trend was observed for reduced ratings of detachment. These results replicate previous findings in the cognitive literature, and extend them to the clinical domain. Although there is a need for replication of the current research within clinical samples to ensure the generalisability of the findings to clinically depressed populations.

The results also align with recent conceptualizations of the underlying processes responsible for mode of recall. Robinson and Swanson (1993) put forth a model suggesting that the reconstruction of the original memory depends upon the accessibility of cognitive and experiential information or codes. The authors suggest that the cognitive code specifies beliefs and goals linked to the original event, and thus recall of the event produces an affective response consistent with these beliefs and goals. The experiential code also provides affective information, but in the form of emotional arousal experienced at the time of the event. Recall vantage perspective may therefore be dictated

by the type of affective information available or accessible; the presence of the cognitive code resulting in an observer perspective and the presence of both the cognitive and experiential code resulting in a field perspective (Robinson & Swanson, 1993). This model may partially explain the asymmetrical effect observed when participants were instructed to shift recall perspective. That is, when instructed to shift from a field to an observer perspective, the cognitive code would drive memory reconstruction and the experiential code would be inhibited - thus accounting for the observed reduction in affect ratings obtained in other studies (Berntsen & Rubin, 2006; Robinson & Swanson, 1993). When an individual is instructed to shift from an observer to a field perspective, however, the experiential code should drive memory reconstruction. If this code is inaccessible (through degradation or active inhibition) then the cognitive code will still drive memory reconstruction and a corresponding increase in affect ratings will not be observed. This explanation also aligns with Berntsen and Rubin's (2006) parsimonious account of the asymmetry effect. They propose that it is simply more difficult to increase one's subjective experience of a memory than it is to decrease one's affective reaction to it; thus it is easier to experimentally induce the corresponding effects.

This model is also compatible with the notion of active cognitive avoidance. Intrusive memories may be preferentially reconstructed from an observer perspective due to attempts to inhibit the experiential code, and therefore the emotional components experienced at the time of the event. Additionally, avoidance at the time of encoding may similarly impact upon the mode of recall. Avoidance may take the form of active suppression of the affective features of an event or take a more subtle form via ruminative processes. For example, in relation to intrusive memories in PTSD,

rumination involves thinking *about* the causes and consequences of the trauma, thus avoiding direct reliving of the traumatic event which is proposed to interfere with the consolidation of the trauma memory (Ehlers & Clark, 2000). Rumination in depression may also be construed as a cognitive avoidance mechanism (Moulds, Kandris, Starr, & Wong, 2007) that may prevent the processing of emotionally-relevant information and therefore integration into conceptual memory. More specifically, it has been demonstrated that the mode of processing (abstract/analytical or concrete/experiential) adopted during self-focus is an important factor linked to the avoidant function of rumination (Watkins, 2004; Watkins & Teasdale, 2004). Abstract/analytical processing is characterized by ‘why’ questions (e.g., ‘*Why do I feel this way?*’) and is thought to prevent successful emotional processing, while concrete/experiential processing involves a focus on moment-to-moment experience (e.g., ‘*How do I feel?*’) and is argued to facilitate emotional processing. It may be that engaging in analytical rumination subsequent to a negative event prevents encoding of the holistic emotional features associated with that event, resulting in retrieval in the form of an observer perspective memory. In contrast, if one focuses on an event, but does so in an experiential manner, relevant emotional information may be better encoded and consolidated. Consequently, subsequent recall of the event may be more likely to occur from the field perspective. Given that Kuyken and Howell (2006) found that depressed adolescents rehearsed their negative memories more often than never-depressed controls, another possibility is that rehearsal serves as a mechanism that increases the likelihood of retrieving memories from an observer vantage perspective. Future studies that explore the relationship between vantage perspective and rumination are needed to confirm these proposals.

Although age of the recalled event is another factor that has been documented to influence vantage perspective recall, such that older memories are typically recalled from an observer perspective (Berntsen & Rubin, 2006; Kuyken & Moulds, 2008; McIsaac & Eich, 2003; Robinson & Swanson, 1993), this pattern was not observed in the current study. One potential account of this discrepancy is the study's focus on *spontaneously* recalled memories, which departs from earlier studies that examined *deliberately* recalled memories of personal autobiographical events. Spontaneous intrusions and deliberately recalled memories may simply differ with respect to this age effect. Future research is needed to determine what specific variables may account for this discrepancy.

Finally, given that the present findings support the notion that variations in vantage perspective may serve distinct functional properties, it is therefore surprising that participant's naturally-occurring memories did not vary according to vantage perspective across key measures such as distress, detachment, and observation. Interestingly, Kenny and Bryant (2007) similarly did not find differences in the ratings of emotional intensity of field and observer trauma memories. They proposed that the adoption of an observer perspective may have reduced levels of distress such that they were then comparable to the distress ratings reported for field memories. Due to the wide array of memories included in the current study, it is likely that participants' intrusions differed on other dimensions that were not indexed. Although an informed account of this anomalous finding cannot be currently presented, future research should focus on isolating and disentangling key variables that may uniquely link spontaneous intrusions to vantage perspective. At present, it appears that intrusive memories differ from intentionally retrieved autobiographical memories with respect to vantage perspective. Experimental

studies that involve exposure to a laboratory-created event (e.g., a distressing film-clip) will usefully clarify the impact of recall vantage perspective, and have the advantage of eliminating factors that potentially vary significantly across the real-life memories reported by participants (e.g., age of memory, frequency of previous retrieval/rehearsal).

Developing a better conceptual understanding of the functional role of vantage perspective in intrusive memories could have important treatment implications for depression. Similar to exposure therapy for PTSD, having depressed clients re-engage in the content of their intrusive memory from a field perspective may aid in processing the emotional components of the memory (if not degraded) and result in reduced negative affect and, secondarily, intrusion frequency. Techniques developed to aid in emotional processing may also be advantageous in reducing post-event rumination. Preventing analytical rumination as a response to negative events may reduce the likelihood of developing intrusions, or reduce the likelihood of initially encoding the event in an observer perspective. Each of these possibilities opens exciting avenues for the treatment of depression, and await empirical test.

Finally, although there is a growing body of literature that documents the nature and importance of recall vantage perspective across clinical disorders, including PTSD (Kenny & Bryant, 2007; McIssac & Eich, 2004), social phobia (Wells & Papageorgiou, 1999), agoraphobia (Day, Holmes, & Hackman, 2004), and body dysmorphic disorder (Osman, Cooper, Hackmann, & Veale, 2004), future research assessing the feasibility and potential therapeutic benefit of applying similar cognitive manipulations to images in these disorders is needed.

### Acknowledgment

This study was supported by an International Postgraduate Research Scholarship (issued by The University of New South Wales) awarded to Alishia D. Williams.

## References

- American Psychiatric Association (1994). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (4<sup>th</sup> Ed.)*. Washington, DC: APA.
- Beck, A.T., Steer, R. A., & Brown, G. K. (1996). *Beck Depression Inventory – Second Edition manual*. San Antonio: The Psychological Corporation.
- Berntsen, D., & Rubin, D. C. (2006). Emotion and vantage point in autobiographical memory. *Cognition & Emotion, 20*, 1193-1215.
- Brewin, C.R. (1998). Intrusive autobiographical memories in depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. *Applied Cognitive Psychology, 12*, 359-370.
- Brewin, C. R., Reynolds, M., & Tata, P. (1999). Autobiographical memory processes and the course of depression. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 108*, 511-517.
- Coles, M. E., Turk, C. L., & Heimberg, R. G. (2002). The role of memory perspective in social phobia: Immediate and delayed memories for role-played situation. *Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapy, 30*, 415-425.
- Day, S. J., Holmes, E. A., & Hackmann, A. (2004). Occurrence of imagery and its link with early memories in agoraphobia. *Memory, 12*, 416-427.
- Ehlers, A., & Clark, D.M. (2000). A cognitive model of posttraumatic stress disorder. *Behaviour Research and Therapy, 38*, 319-345.
- Ehlers, A., & Steil, R. (1995). Maintenance of intrusive memories in posttraumatic stress disorder: A cognitive approach. *Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapy, 23*, 217-249.
- Foa, E. B., & Kozak, M. J. (1986). Emotional processing of fear: Exposure to corrective information. *Psychological Bulletin, 99*, 20-35.

- Hackmann, A., Ehlers, A., Speckens, A., & Clark, D.M. (2004). Characteristics and content of intrusive memories and their changes with treatment. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 17*, 231-240.
- Horowitz, M., Wilner, N., & Alvarez, W. (1979). Impact of Events Scale: A measure of subjective distress. *Psychosomatic Medicine, 41*, 209-218.
- Kenny, L.M, & Bryant, R. A. (2007). Keeping memories at an arm's length: Vantage point of trauma memories. *Behaviour Research and Therapy, 45*, 1915-1920.
- Kuyken, W., & Howell, R. (2006). Facets of autobiographical memory in adolescents with major depressive disorder and never-depressed controls. *Cognition & Emotion, 20*, 466-487.
- Kuyken, W., & Moulds, M.L. (2008). *Remembering as an observer: How is recall vantage perspective linked to depression?* 6<sup>th</sup> Special Interest Meeting on Autobiographical Memory and Psychopathology: The exploration of new research directions. Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
- Lemogne, C., Piolino, P., Friszer, S., Claret, A., Girault, N., Jouvent, R., Allilaire, J., & Fossati, P. (2006). Episodic autobiographical memory in depression: Specificity, auto-noetic consciousness, and self-perspective. *Consciousness and Cognition: An International Journal, 15*, 258-268.
- McIsaac, H. K., & Eich, E. (2002). Vantage point in episodic memory. *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review, 9* 146-150.
- McIsaac, H.K., & Eich, E. (2004). Vantage point in traumatic memory. *Psychological Science, 15*, 248-253.
- Moulds, M.L., Kandris, E., Starr, S., & Wong, A.C.M. (2007). The relationship

- between rumination, avoidance and depression in a non-clinical sample. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, *45*, 251-261.
- Nigro, G., & Neisser, U. (1983). Point of view in personal memories. *Cognitive Psychology*, *15*, 467-482.
- Osman, S., Cooper, M., Hackmann, A., & Veale, D. (2004). Spontaneously occurring images and early memories in people with body dysmorphic disorder. *Memory*, *12*, 428-436
- Patel, T., Brewin, C.R., Wheatley, J., Wells, A., Fisher, P., & Myers, S. (2007). Intrusive images and memories in major depression. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, *45*, 2573-2580.
- Reynolds, M., & Brewin, C.R. (1999). Intrusive memories in depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, *37*, 201-215.
- Robinson, J. A., & Swanson, K. L. (1993). Field and observer modes of remembering. *Memory*, *1*, 169-184.
- Starr, S., & Moulds, M.L. (2006). The role of negative interpretations of intrusive memories in depression. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, *93*, 125-132.
- Watkins, E. D. (2004). Adaptive and maladaptive ruminative self-focus during emotional processing. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, *42*, 1037-1052.
- Watkins, E. D., & Teasdale, J. D. (2004). Adaptive and maladaptive self-focus in depression. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, *82*, 1-8.
- Wells, A., & Papageorgiou, C. (1999). The observer perspective: biased imagery in social phobia, agoraphobia, and blood/injury phobia. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, *37*, 653-658.

- Williams, A.D., & Moulds, M.L. (2007a). An investigation of the cognitive and experiential features of intrusive memories in depression. *Memory, 15*, 1-9.
- Williams, A.D., & Moulds, M.L. (2007b). Cognitive avoidance of intrusive memories: Recall vantage perspective and associations with depression. *Behaviour Research and Therapy, 43*, 1145-1153.
- Williams, A.D., & Moulds, M.L. (in press). Negative appraisals and cognitive avoidance of intrusive memories in depression. *Depression and Anxiety*.
-

Table 1

Means and (Standard Deviations) Across Memories Naturally Recalled from Field and Observer Perspectives

Memory Rating	Field ( $n = 78$ )	Observer ( $n = 55$ )
Distress	65.83(18.95)	68.27 (19.12)
Vividness	68.39 (22.68)	72.00 (21.20)
Reliving	46.98(25.74)	52.72 (25.85)
Observation	52.94 (29.19)	62.72 (29.53)
Detachment	49.74 (25.01)	45.81 (24.47)

*Note.* Range = 0-100.

Table 2

Results of Paired Samples *t*-tests for Field to Observer Manipulation ( $n = 78$ )

	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i> (77)
Distress F	65.83	18.95	5.58**
Distress O	48.71	24.98	
Vividness F	68.39	22.68	3.04*
Vividness O	60.38	23.65	
Reliving F	46.98	25.74	1.57
Reliving O	41.02	28.90	
Observing F	52.94	29.19	-3.76**
Observing O	67.05	24.55	
Detachment F	49.74	25.01	-.81
Detachment O	52.69	25.61	

*Note.* \*  $p < .01$ , \*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 3

Results of Paired Samples *t*-tests for Observer to Field Manipulation (*n* = 55)

	Mean	( <i>SD</i> )	<i>t</i> (54)
Distress O	68.27	(19.12)	2.38
Distress F	60.36	(23.72)	
Vividness O	72.00	(21.20)	.85
Vividness F	69.27	(23.71)	
Reliving O	52.72	(25.85)	-.40
Reliving F	54.54	(27.54)	
Observing O	62.72	(29.53)	2.66*
Observing F	48.54	(31.29)	
Detachment O	45.81	(24.47)	1.78
Detachment F	38.18	(23.65)	

*Note.* \*  $p < .01$ .