

Clinically depressed patients phrase personal goals in less specific terms

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People suffering from clinical depression express personal goals and reasons for their attainment or failure in less specific terms than people without the disorder. This lack of specificity in representing personal goals may be partially responsible for the motivational deficits seen in these patients, according to research published May 15 in the open access journal *PLOS ONE* by Joanne Dickson from the University of Liverpool, UK and Nicholas Moberly from the University of Exeter, UK.

Participants in the study were asked to list specific personally meaningful goals that they thought would characterize them in the future, and were given prompts such as, 'In the future it will be important for me to...'. In a second task, they were asked to list reasons why they would, and would not, achieve their goals.

Compared to non-depressed [control participants](#), [depressed individuals](#)' goals tended to be less specific and more abstract, for example 'to be happy', rather than 'to improve my time running the local 10 km race'.. A similar reduced level of specificity was found when reasons for achieving or not reaching personal goals were analyzed. There were no significant differences in the number of goals and reasons, or the kinds of goals provided by depressed and non-depressed participants. The authors suggest that these results may help to improve psychotherapeutic approaches used to treat depression.

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