

Abstracts fra SARMAC 2008

Berntsen, D. (2007). Involuntary conscious memories after traumatic experiences and in everyday life: No trauma-specific mechanisms are needed. Talk presented at SARMAC VII (Society for Applied Research in Memory and Cognition). Bates College, Lewiston, Maine. July 28

According to a widespread clinical view, involuntary autobiographical memories are a phenomenon that largely occur as an aftermath to traumatic/stressful experiences. Unlike voluntary memories, they are symptoms of distress. Further, they are considered as an effect of unique and trauma-specific encoding mechanisms that render the traumatic memory hard to access through voluntary, goal –directed recall and at the same time persistent as an involuntary memory. This view is especially dominant in modern clinical theories of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. This presentation challenges this view by showing that involuntary memories are as frequent in everyday life and show the same pattern as voluntary (strategically recalled) memories with regard to emotional content, distribution across the life span and memory enhancement through overt rehearsal. Involuntary memories in general differ from voluntary memories by involving more emotional reaction and mood impact at the time of recall. A theoretical alternative to clinical theories of involuntary memories after traumas is presented based on these findings and general mechanism of autobiographical memory.