

IGSN - SYMPOSIUM

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Trauma and memory distortions

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Trauma and Memory Distortions: A view from Autobiographical Memory Research

According to a prevalent view going back to the infancy of PTSD research, autobiographical memory of trauma victims is disturbed in at least two ways. Victims of trauma have intrusive, involuntary recollections of the traumatic event. At the same time they have difficulties voluntarily (strategically) remembering important parts of the event —a feature known as dissociative amnesia. I will challenge both of these interrelated ideas, and suggest an alternative account. First, an accumulating amount of evidence contradicts the idea of involuntary remembering being a special medium for stressful and negative material by demonstrating that emotional stress at encoding enhances both involuntary and voluntary recall. Second, studies based on the Centrality of Event Scale (CES) consistently show robust positive correlations between PTSD symptoms and the accessibility and centrality of the traumatic memory for life story and identity. Third, more recent findings suggest that key differences between involuntary and voluntary recall of stressful events concern the emotional reactions at the time of retrieval – not encoding. In order to understand intrusive trauma memories we should move the focus from mechanisms operating at encoding to mechanisms at the time of retrieval.

Hosts:

NIKOLAI AXMACHER, OLIVER T. WOLF

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Guests are welcome!