

LONG LASTING PERSONALITY CHANGES AFTER THE ONSET OF DISSOCIATIVE AMNESIA

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Introduction: Across various cultures, dissociative amnesia is triggered by psychological stress or trauma. Its hallmark is a severe (usually retrograde) memory impairment, occurring without evidence of significant brain damage (as detected by conventional structural brain imaging). In a substantial number of cases, the memory impairment follows a chronic course. Sometimes dissociative amnesia occurs on a background of a personality disorder (narcissistic or borderline). Other times, amnesia itself triggers long lasting personality changes.

Objectives: This work's objectives are establishing greater recognition among health care providers of the spectrum of the personality changes that may accompany chronic forms of dissociative amnesia.

Aims: We review data from own patients with chronic forms of dissociative amnesia.

Methods: Patients were investigated medically, psychiatrically, neuropsychologically and and neuroradiologically.

Results: Changes in personality dimensions occur after the onset of amnesia. These may involve affectivity, perception (e.g. impaired self face or face-emotion processing), cognition (e.g. social cognition) and behaviour (e.g. changing in eating, smoking, drinking or working habits).

Conclusions: The observed personality changes may represent a consequence of amnesia. Functional imaging studies show metabolic changes in dissociative amnesia in brain areas involved in conscious mnemonic processing. Several structures engaged in processing within episodic-autobiographical memory system were also implicated in self and reward-related processing. Alternatively, the personality changes may be viewed as being pivotal in the development and maintenance of dissociative amnesia; this personality shift may subsequently lead to enduring changes in ways of cognitive processing, self-processing, perception and affect.