

[Memory](#). 2007 May;15(4):412-22.

Reducing the vividness and emotional impact of distressing autobiographical memories: the importance of modality-specific interference.

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Source

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Abstract

Experimental analogues of post-traumatic stress disorder suggest that loading the visuospatial sketchpad of working memory with a concurrent task reduces the vividness and associated distress of predominantly visual images. The present experiments explicitly tested the hypothesis that interfering with the phonological loop could analogously reduce the vividness and emotional impact of auditory images. In Experiment 1, 30 undergraduates formed non-specific images of emotive autobiographical memories while performing a concurrent task designed to load either the visuospatial sketchpad (eye movements) or phonological loop (articulatory suppression). Participants reported their images to be primarily visual, corresponding to the greater dual-task disruption observed for eye movements. Experiment 2 instructed participants to form specifically visual or auditory images. As predicted, concurrent articulation reduced vividness and emotional intensity ratings of auditory images to a greater extent than did eye movements, whereas concurrent eye movements reduced ratings of visual images much more than did articulatory suppression. Such modality-specific dual-task interference could usefully contribute to the treatment and management of intrusive distressing images in both clinical and non-clinical settings.

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