



Norman Brown

University of Alberta,
Edmonton, Canada



11/10/2020

The Possible Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Contents and Organization of Autobiographical Memory: A Transition Theory Perspective

Abstract:

In this presentation, *Transition Theory* is used to explicate the mnemonically relevant ways in which the onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic differs from other personal and collective transitions and how the Pandemic Period might differ from other personally-defined and historically-defined autobiographical periods. In the process, I provide a brief outline of Transition Theory and introduce two new measures, the *Stability Ratio* and the *Continuity Ratio*, which describe important aspects of autobiographical memory in a quantitative manner. I then use Transition Theory to motivate several predictions. Specifically, the theory predicts (a) a modest *COVID* bump (i.e., an increase in availability of event memories at the outset of the Pandemic) and (b) a *COVID* dip (i.e., a decrease in availability of event memories from the Pandemic Period compared to other stable periods). It also predicts that (c) people will consider the Pandemic an important chapter in their life stories only if there is little continuity between their pre-Pandemic lives and their post-Pandemic lives, otherwise they will remember it is an isolated *extended interlude*. The possible effects of the Pandemic's near-universal scope and open-ended duration are also discussed.