Repression

I. Multiple views of Repression

II. Criticisms of the Common View
   A. Emotion enhances memory
   B. Attempts to suppress memory do not work
   C. Poor memory for periods of forgetting
   D. Suggestive therapy
   E. Fraudulent case studies

III. Repression and Modern Theories of Memory

Throughout this discussion, I want you to try not to think of a “white bear.”

I. Multiple views of repression
   – Freud’s original formulation: seduction hypothesis (1895-1897)
   – Repression as a way of dealing with motivational conflicts (Freud, 1910-1939, rejection of seduction)
   – The “common view” (Baddeley, 1999)
   – Repression in mass media (The Courage to Heal, 1988; talk shows, fiction)
I. Multiple views of repression

A. The seduction hypothesis
Freud was looking for a (non-hereditary) cause of hysteria
Seduction hypothesis grew out of his analysis of Dora (Ida Bauer)
1. Early sexual seduction leads to unassimilated (unconscious) memories
2. At sexual maturation, "self reproaches become attached to the memory of the seduction"
3. Both the memory and the self-reproach are repressed
4. A period of health
5. Illness - return of the repressed memories.

B. Repression - the "common view"
"retrieval of painful memories is actively avoided," (Baddeley, 1999, p. 143)
"emotionally unpleasant or otherwise highly charged memories... are repressed by the conscious mind into the unconscious (Henderson, 1999, p. 76)
The common view has its roots in the seduction hypotheses. It is the common view that has received the most attention by memory researchers and the mass media.
Repression in mass media

“You may think you don’t have memories ... you don’t need the kind of proof that would stand up in a court of law... Assume your feelings are valid. It is rare that someone thinks she was abused and then discovers she wasn’t ... The progression always goes the other way, from suspicion to confirmation. If you genuinely think you were abused and your life shows symptoms, there’s a strong likelihood that you were.”


II. Criticisms of repression (common view definition):

A. Research suggests strong emotions lead to vivid memories for an event (e.g., Christianson et al., 1991)

B. Attempts to suppress traumatic memories actually lead to enhanced memory for the trauma

Dalgleish & Yiend (2006)

Asked participants to name a traumatic experience from their childhood. Half were then told not to think about it, while the other half served as a control. Each group asked to make a mark on their paper if they happened to think of the event during a 9 min writing task.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intrusions</th>
<th>Suppression</th>
<th>Control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(depressed participants)</td>
<td>5.75</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
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</table>

II. Criticisms of repression (cont.)

C) Supporting evidence may reflect forgetting of prior remembering.

People reporting a recovered memory may be incorrectly claiming that there was a period of time when the event was “forgotten.”

Geraert et al. (2006) (part of the larger study on recovered memory) investigated cued recall in a study - test - test design. If they could not remember the word on the first test, they were reminded of it. On the second test they were asked whether or not they correctly recalled the word on the first test.
forgetting of prior remembering

Geraert et al. (2006) (continued)

Three groups of participants:

- **recovered memory**: reporting recovered memory of abuse
- **continuous memory**: where abused, and reported continuous memory for the abuse.
- **control**: no history of abuse.

Proportion of items recalled on test 1 correctly judged as recalled on test 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>recovered</th>
<th>continuous</th>
<th>control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
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Conclusions:

1. Generally, people not very good at correctly judging prior recall.
2. People reporting recovered memories are worse than others are correctly reporting prior recall.

II. Criticisms of repression (cont.)

D) Evidence for repression may result from suggestive therapy.

Suggestive recovery techniques may lead clients to create false memories. These “memories” may help them understand their anxiety, and for this reason the memories can be quite compelling.

Corroborative Evidence for *recovered memories.* (Geraerts et al., 2007):

Identified women (sampled from respondents to newspaper adds) who reported childhood sexual abuse, and investigated whether their memories of the abuse were continuous or discontinuous (recovered?).

Those with discontinuous memories were further subdivided into those who recalled the memory as a result of therapy, or recalled the memories out of therapy.
Corroborative Evidence?

Geraerts et al., (2007) results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Memory Type</th>
<th>Uncorroborated</th>
<th>Others abused by same perpetrator</th>
<th>Others who learned of abuse soon after</th>
<th>Perpetrator of abuse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continuous (n = 71)</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recovered out of therapy (n = 41)</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recovered in therapy (n = 16)</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
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</tbody>
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II. Criticisms of repression (cont)

E. Famous case studies of repression are fraudulent.

Example: "Who Abused Jane Doe" (Loftus & Guyer 2002)
Case study of a young girl who apparently repressed and then recovered memory for child sexual abuse.
Psychologist (D. Corwin) was evaluating a child as part of a tumultuous, protracted, and vicious custody dispute.
- During a first interview (at 6 years old) she reported sexual abuse by her mother.
- During a second interview (age 17) she had "forgotten" the abuse, and then appeared to remember it.
- This case study was published and used to support the notion of memory repression (Corwin and Olafson, 1997).

Corroborative Evidence?

Jane Doe (cont)
Further evidence suggests that:
Jane discussed the alleged abuse with others during the period in which it was supposedly repressed.

The abuse probably didn’t take place. Rather it was a hoax perpetrated by the stepmother to gain custody of Jane.
III. Repression and theories of forgetting

"Warning: The concept of repression has not been validated with experimental research and its use may be hazardous to the accurate interpretation of clinical behavior." (Holmes, 1990, p. 97)

Three ways in which memory failures are "mistaken" for repression. (Loftus, Joslyn, & Polage, 1998)

1) Retrieval failures:
   a) Lack of cue support
   b) Misunderstood experiences (e.g. child sexual abuse) may be poorly remembered.
2) Distorted views of one's own memory:
   e.g., forgetting of prior remembering
3) False memories:
   Created as a result of extended psychotherapy.

The white bear? Does repression work?
Wegner et al. (1987)
Participants told not to think of the white bear thought of it more times than a control group.