Second, the intentional nature of defense mechanisms highlights their interpersonal nature. The decision to attend, or not to attend, to various mental contents is very much influenced by what significant others deem appropriate or not. This is obvious in Ms. J.'s case, given that her family members explicitly conveyed to her the reprehensibility of dependency. Two theoretical and empirical contributions, both of which aim to account for the fact that women are twice as prone as men are at being diagnosed as suffering from unipolar depression, indirectly allude to the interpersonal nature of repression/suppression. Nolen-Hoeksema (1990) theorized that men are likely to respond to emotional distress by distracting behavior that short-circuits depression, whereas women are likely to engage in self-focus ruminating attention, which ultimately exacerbates their depression. As acknowledged by Nolen-Hoeksema (1990, p. 276), the origins of these different response styles are likely to be social, constituted through stereotypes (i.e., women are passive and emotional) and amalgamated in the context of family relations (women are discouraged from being active and assertive). Similarly, Jack's (1999) self-silencing theory holds that depressed women tend to "silence" (in cognitive terms – not attend to) self-aspects that are perceived to compromise close relations. This, in turn, leads to an increase in women's hopelessness about "the possibility of genuine relationships or self-expression" (Jack 1999, p. 226), ultimately leading to depression. Both theoretical positions point to the possibility that social norms, expectations, and rules, impact individuals' attention and memory, leading to lowering of consciousness toward important mental contents, and in turn leading to self-alienation and depression. Hopefully, this succinct presentation will convince the reader that, at least in the case of unipolar depression, interpersonal and political oppression, operating at the cognitive level, is implicated in repression and suppression.

Further intriguing is Erdelyi's postulate, whereby repression/suppression is context sensitive. Espousing $\varepsilon \neq \varepsilon \mid [\varepsilon]$, where $\varepsilon||I||$ is the manifest content of the stimulus, $[\varepsilon||I||]$ is the context, and $\varepsilon \mid [\varepsilon]||I||$ is its latent content, Erdelyi proposes that defense mechanisms – particularly denial – are predicted by the person's failure to construe a stimulus (e.g., an event) in its proper context of meaning. In acknowledgment that repressed/suppressed mental contents are frequently enacted in relations (i.e., Freud's return of the repressed occurs in the interpersonal arena), I would like to argue that (1) people fail to grasp the meaning of these mental contents because they are eluded by some features of the social context, features which (2) they themselves created. Consider Ms. J. once again: her strong, albeit repressed/suppressed, dependency needs were constantly enacted in relationships where she repeatedly sought support and reassurance. Yet, she remained unaware of this because of her attentiveness to the boredom (in her marital relationships) and acrimony (in her relationships with therapists) summoned by these interpersonal exchanges. Ironically, it was she who actively contributed to this boredom (for instance, by putting an emotional rift between her husband and herself) and acrimony (e.g., by constantly provoking and challenging friends and therapists; see Shahar 2004). Ms. J.'s behavior, highly consistent with action perspectives of psychopathology (Shahar 2001; 2006), suggests that she actively contributed, if unwittingly, to the very social context that consolidated her repression/suppression of dependency needs.

To conclude, in drawing from research and clinical accounts of unipolar depression, I observe that (1) repression/suppression are influenced by social pressures exerted by significant others (i.e., "oppression"), and (2) this and other defense mechanisms are maintained by people being eluded by interpersonal circumstances they themselves created. These observations are made in an attempt to add an interpersonal touch to Erdelyi's intriguing, but largely cognitive, "unified theory of repression," so as to further appreciate the complex associations between cognition, power, and psychopathology.

## Resolving repression

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**Abstract:** The feuding factions of the memory wars, that is, those concerned with the validity of recovered memories versus those concerned with false memories, are unified by Erdelyi's theory of repression. Evidence shows suppression, inhibition, and retrieval blocking can have profound yet reversible effects on a memory's accessibility, and deserve as prominent a role in the recovered memory debate as evidence of false memories. Erdelyi's theory shows that both inhibitory and elaborative processes cooperate to keep unwanted memories out of consciousness.

Repression has long been the battleground in psychology's family feud. No other issue has seen such contentious and emotional brawling among psychologists as the question of repression. Once seen as merely an academic debate, the memory wars now rage with such intensity not only because of theoretical disagreements and empirical squabbles, but because there have been very real victims of the war – victims of true physical and sexual abuse, and victims unjustly accused of abuse that did not actually occur. In his treatment of this divisive question, Erdelyi negotiates a peace plan for the feuding factions by reviewing the disparate views and contentions, integrating the relevant ideas and findings, correcting persistent misunderstandings, and synthesizing his unified theory of repression.

The essence of Erdelyi's theory unifies the warring factions of the memory wars by accepting and synthesizing the two positions. Erdelyi states that "repression is divided into two subclasses: (1) *inhibitory* or *subtractive processes* (e.g., degrading the 'signal'), and (2) *elaborative* or *additive processes* (e.g., adding 'noise' to the signal)" (sect. 3.1, para. 3). Erdelyi envisions these two subclasses, avoidance and distortion, not as adversarial processes, as has been assumed by the false memory debate, but rather as processes that cooperate in the service of defensive emotion regulation. This synthesis makes a lot of sense.

Some of the misunderstandings have occurred because of verbal labels. Examples of problematic labels include distinctions among the terms "repression," "suppression," and "inhibition." Erdelyi indicates that if we drop the bogus requirement that repression must be caused by unconscious mechanisms, these terms are essentially synonymous. There may be reason, however, to distinguish suppression from inhibition, even if both are important mechanisms that serve to keep unwanted thoughts and memories out of consciousness. Whereas Wegner has used the term "suppression" to refer to a temporary means of keeping thoughts out of mind (e.g., Wegner 1989), Anderson and his colleagues have used the term "inhibition" to mean the resultant effect on a memory following repeated suppression of a memory retrieval (e.g., Anderson et al. 1994; Anderson & Green 2001).

Some misunderstandings in the memory wars have been caused by conceptual disagreements. Erdelyi decouples the concepts of "defense" and "repression," indicating that repression, as a mechanism, might or might not be engaged for the purpose of defensive emotion regulation. Psychologists who focus on the mechanisms of repression can study those mechanisms independently of defensive coping purposes. This understanding is important not only for investigating the mechanisms that underlie forgetting, such as suppression, inhibition, and blocking, but also for investigations that give rise to elaborative repression, such as false memories and memory attribution errors.

Some misunderstandings have persisted because of limited empirical evidence, or more often, because some types of laboratory research have not been commonly associated with the repression debate. The relevance of false memory research done in the laboratory to the repression debate has been made abundantly and compellingly clear by such investigators as Loftus, Roediger, and many others. Empirical studies of forgetting and recovered

memories, however, have been cited only rarely in this debate. Erdelyi appropriately points to a long history of laboratory research on mechanisms of forgetting, dating back to Ebbinghaus, and including more recent research on suppression, inhibition, and blocking. These relatively simple laboratory procedures can induce strikingly potent forgetting effects (e.g., Smith et al. 2003). Equally important is research on memory recovery, which includes both reminiscence (e.g., Erdelyi & Kleinbard 1978) and cue-dependent recovery (e.g., Smith et al. 2003).

One piece of the big picture that Erdelyi has neglected concerns the mechanisms and consequences of memory recovery. Although he points out that forgetting need not be due to decay (or "oblivescence"), he implies that reminiscence is caused simply by persistent efforts to retrieve. Reminiscence can be caused by the same type of restructuring that can give rise to insight in problem solving, that is, by breaking mental sets that initially block successful retrieval. For example, Smith and Vela (1991) found incubated reminiscence effects, similar to incubation in problem solving, and their evidence indicates that the increased reminiscence found after a delay is not a result of simply attempting to retrieve more. Furthermore, Smith et al. (2003) showed that appropriate cues can trigger powerful memory recovery effects. The affective consequences of memory recovery may also be important, particularly if recovery is accompanied either by disturbing realizations, or by relief when restructuring makes it clear that stressful memories can be more rationally or innocently reinterpreted. More research is needed to investigate the emotional outcomes of memory recovery.

Erdelyi's unified theory of repression provides a cogent and compelling framework for understanding several bodies of research, as well as the history of psychotherapy. His theory is also important because of the questions that must now be investigated to expand the utility of his theory. One important gap is research on implicit memory of reversibly forgotten material; that is, the "return of the repressed" in the form of non-declarative memories. Other insufficiently researched questions include what are the limits of forgetting (e.g., how and under what circumstances emotional and distinctive experiences are forgotten), the limits of false memories (e.g., what degree of schema consistency must be maintained for false memories to occur), and the limits of recovered memories (e.g., how do repressed memories degrade in detail and accuracy over time). More research that informs us on the question of distinguishing between false and valid recovered memories is also needed. Finally, we must learn more about methods for recovering memories, including how those methods can enhance the amount and the accuracy of recovered memories, and what the affective consequences of recovery are likely to be.

Erdelyi correctly points out how researchers have continued to misunderstand and misinterpret each other, how we dissociate ideas and research that should be related, and how partisans in the memory war have imposed unjustified distinctions that have blurred our understanding of repression. His theory takes important steps in terms of resolving the subject of repression, and, hopefully, demilitarizing the memory wars.

# Author's Response

## The return of the repressed

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**Abstract:** Repression continues to be controversial. One insight crystallized by the commentaries is that there is a serious semantic problem, partly resulting from a long silence in psychology on repression. In this response, narrow views (e.g., that repression needs always be unconscious, must yield total amnesia) are challenged. Broader conceptions of repression, both biological and social, are considered, with a special stress on repression of meanings (*denial*). Several issues – generilizability, falsifiability, personality factors, the interaction of repression with cognitive channel (e.g., recall vs. dreams), and false-memory as repression – are discussed.

### R1. Introduction

It is perhaps not surprising that, given the controversial nature of repression in modern psychology, reactions to "The Unified Theory of Repression" (TUTOR) vary widely in the commentaries, ranging from outright rejection of the reality of repression (e.g., **Bonanno; Hayne, Garry, & Loftus**[**Hayne et al.**]; **Kihlstrom; McNally**) to urgings that the ambit of repression be extended further than I ventured in my target article (e.g., **Freyd; Hermans, Raes, Iberico, & Williams** [**Hermans et al.**]; **Pintar & Lynn; Shahar; Smith**). The commentaries, as a group, are extremely helpful in revealing the issues animating the repression controversy, and I am grateful for the commentators' efforts, regardless of their stances.

Several important, partly overlapping themes emerged in the commentaries, to which I respond here. First (see sect. R2), it is increasingly clear that the controversy surrounding repression is to an important degree semantic. Extremely narrow or stringent definitions of repression (e.g., **Bonanno, Crews, McNally, Hayne et al.**) tend indeed to render repression nonexistent, whereas more expansive conceptualizations (which I claim are consistent with the classical literatures) render it ubiquitous and obvious.

A related issue (sect. R3) is the striking hiatus in the scientific literature on repression for a generation, which I claim (contrary to **McNally**) is partly responsible for the depredations of the memory-recovery therapy movement. Also, this long silence on repression contributed to the semantic derailment of the concept. Thus, I oppose some of the commentators' apparent eagerness (e.g., **Bonanno**, **McNally**) to reestablish psychology's silence on repression.

Critics of repressed memory (e.g., **Bonanno**, **Hayne et al.; Kihlstrom**, **McNally**) ignore or underplay the fact that false memories need not imply the absence of true memories, and, crucially, that recovered true memories are an established empirical phenomenon, as emphasized in the target article and by **Gleaves** and **Smith**. I note in section R4 that protracted therapies may be assumed to produce *both* recovery of true memories *and* "rich false memories" (**Hayne et al.**), which, however, may be negative false memories, that is, false memories that some event *did not* occur. Positing negative false-memory is, of course, another way of positing repression.

Another noteworthy trend (sect. R5), related probably to the current anti-Freudian climate in mainline psychology, is either to give Freud too much credit (e.g., make him responsible for the recovered therapy movement even though Freud withdrew his infantile seduction theory within ten years of its promulgation: **Crews, McNally**), or not to credit Freud enough (e.g., **Crews, Kihlstrom**) – as, for example, for his empirically based