The converging evidence that the memory wars are not over

Talk at SARMAC 2019
Lawrence Patihis, PhD
University of Southern Mississippi
Tribute
James Ost
Hi Lawrence,

Thanks for your email. Interesting idea. I have some unpublished data using that crashing memories method with a year delay (using the 7th July attacks in London as the 'target' event). The delay didn't seem to make any difference on the rate with which participants claimed to have seen the film (but we used psychology students, unlike our other studies, and got quite low endorsement rates as a result, which might partly explain that - plus the design was a bit messy in the end).

Anyway, to answer your specific question. The data for the study published in 2002 were gathered sometime between April and June of 1998 (i.e., less than a year after the target event).

On a related note, I guess you already have our paper on the 7th July attacks (published in Memory, 2008 - attached just in case). The delay between the event and the data collection was 3 months.

We also have another paper (published in 2006) using a different target event (attached). The delay between the event and the data collection was 4-5 months in that case. Again, the student who collected the data (Ian Hogbin) submitted his project in September 2003 so would have been collecting the data Feb-March 2003.

Also - just in case you haven't got the paper - Marko Jelicic and colleagues at Maastricht published a chapter where they report very low rates of endorsement after a 6-8 month delay (also attached). However, in their study the target event in question (the assassination of a Dutch politician, Theo van Gogh) was back in the news at the time they collected their data (the assassin was standing trial). They speculate that this may have led to reduced "false memories". However, in our 7/7 study the data collection was only 3 months after the event so it may not just be a question of delay.

Anyway - hope some of the above is useful - let me know how the metaanalysis works out!

And please say hi to Beth for me.

all the best,
James

p.s. have also attached papers by Smeets et al., and Sjoden et al. which also use this methodology - sure you already have them though ... both had quite long delays (39 months and 4 years, respectively).
Alan Scoboria
• Drs Ost and Scoboria discovered new facts and details about memory: for the first time in human history.

• Understanding memory distortions helps the whole of society
This talk

• Chapter 1: Beliefs about repressed memory and dissociative amnesia
• Chapter 2: Similarities in definitions of repressed memories and dissociative amnesia
• Chapter 3: Prevalence of recovered memories in therapy
• Chapter 4: Additional explanatory power for the memory wars: Malleability of memories of emotions in childhood
• Chapter 1: Beliefs about repressed memory
People and therapists believe in repressed memories (Patihis et al., 2014; Ost et al., 2013; 2015; Otgaar et al., submitted)

But did the 80% of the public who indicated a belief in Patihis et al. mean unconscious repressed memories? (Brewin & Andrews, 2014)
Are the memory wars really over?

People and therapists believe in repressed memories? (Patihis et al., 2014)

So does that belief create a demand for repressed memory recovery today?

Figure 1. 89% of participants agree to some degree that traumatic memories are often repressed (was 84% in 2012)

Those that agreed to some degree got this follow up question

Figure 2. Of those agreeing to some degree to the top statement, most (81%) indicated they meant unconscious repression

Figure 3. 88% of participants reported some level of agreement with the statement repressed memories can be retrieved during therapy (was 78% in 2012)

Those that agreed to some degree got this follow up question

Figure 4. Of those agreeing to some degree with the top question, most (82%) indicated they meant that people can retrieved repressed memories that they didn’t even know happened before therapy.
• In that unpublished data we also found beliefs about dissociative amnesia corresponded highly with repressed memories.

• So does that belief create a demand for repressed memory recovery today?
Chapter 2:

Similarities in definitions of repressed memories and dissociative amnesia
A lot of skepticism has been expressed about “repressed memories”
Not used as a term much
Did skeptics win the debate?
Proponents now use the term dissociative amnesia: this is an esteemed term
Did proponents win the memory war?
• As predicted by Holmes in 1994, there has been a change in terminology
• Dissociative amnesia is embedded deeper into the DSM-V
• And WebMD, etc.
• Dissociative amnesia is where critical thinking and articles are needed
• In the DSM-5 (p. 298) dissociative amnesia is defined as
• (1) autobiographical information that is “successfully stored,”
• (2) “usually of a traumatic or stressful nature,”
• (3) there is a subsequent “inability to recall” the “important autobiographical information,”
• (4) is not attributable to “a substance” or “neurological… condition,”
• (5) is “always potentially reversible because the memory has been successfully stored,” and
• (6) “is inconsistent with ordinary forgetting”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“inability to recall autobiographical information”</td>
<td>[implied indirectly in quotes]</td>
<td>“repression is a loss [of memory] which…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“usually of a traumatic or stressful nature, that is inconsistent with ordinary forgetting,”</td>
<td>“something happens that is so shocking…””</td>
<td>“…is specifically designed to selectively eliminate from consciousness those memories which cause the individual [affective] pain”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“and that it should be successfully stored,”</td>
<td>“…that the mind grabs hold of the memory and pushes it underground,”</td>
<td>“material which is repressed is not lost but rather stored in the unconscious”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“involves a period of time when there is an “inability to recall,””</td>
<td>“into some inaccessible corner of the unconscious. There it sleeps for years, or even decades, or even forever isolated from the rest of mental life”</td>
<td>[implied indirectly] Implied cause: “repression is a process motivated by a need to avoid the disturbing affect associated with certain memories”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not caused by “a substance” or “neurological… condition,”</td>
<td>[implied indirectly] Implied cause: an event “that is so shocking”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“always potentially reversible because the memory has been successfully stored.”</td>
<td>“Then, one day, it may rise up and emerge into consciousness”</td>
<td>“the material can return to consciousness without having to go through the process of being relearned.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Important questions about dissociative amnesia:
• Did Charcot, Janet, Freud, Prince, etc. obtain *good* evidence of all six tenets?
• Not at all: arm chair theory and anecdotes were dominant and evidence was not scientifically obtained.
• We have inherited dissociative amnesia theory from an argument from authority.
• When modern journals publish articles on dissociative amnesia are all six tenets scientifically established?
• No, many of the 6 tenets are assumed from theory.
• Dissociative amnesia does not really effect members of SARMAC: we for the most part are critical thinkers so we take a careful approach
• Little reward to critique it
• Backlash from trauma-dissociation therapists
• But it will effect some the public who seek therapy,
• or those that just read about dissociative amnesia theory
• Middle ground view prevents strong rebuttals that might benefit the public
• Opinion: The public/trainee clinicians would benefit to hear provocative ideas:
  • Dissociative amnesia is pseudoscience
  • Involving extraordinary remembering
  • Falsifiability issues: e.g. establishing one tenet invalidates other tenet (e.g., storage vs inaccessibility)
  • Difficulty establishing tenets
  • Psychiatric folklore passed down from authority
Chapter 3: Prevalence of recovered memories in therapy
• Patihis & Mark Pendergrast (2019)
  Clinical Psychological Science
• US public
During the course of therapy, did you come to remember being abused as a child, when you had no previous memory of such abuse?

![Graph showing the percentage of people who recalled being abused as a child during therapy by the year therapy started. The years are 1970-74, 1975-79, 1980-84, 1985-89, 1990-94, 1995-99, 2000-04, 2005-09, 2010-14, 2015-17. The percentages range from 6.6% to 17.9%.]
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Yes (Count)</th>
<th>No (Count)</th>
<th>Don’t know (Count)</th>
<th>Row Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attachment Therapy</td>
<td>8 (57% [29%, 82%])</td>
<td>5 (36%)</td>
<td>1 (7%)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment-based therapy</td>
<td>4 (36% [11%, 69%])</td>
<td>7 (64%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Freedom Techniques</td>
<td>8 (30% [14%, 50%])</td>
<td>17 (63%)</td>
<td>2 (7%)</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accept. &amp; Commitment (ACT)</td>
<td>5 (24% [8%, 47%])</td>
<td>16 (76%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Family Systems</td>
<td>10 (23% [12%, 39%])</td>
<td>31 (72%)</td>
<td>2 (5%)</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure Therapy</td>
<td>4 (22% [6%, 48%])</td>
<td>14 (78%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypnosis</td>
<td>5 (21% [7%, 42%])</td>
<td>18 (75%)</td>
<td>1 (4%)</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survivors Group</td>
<td>5 (21% [7%, 42%])</td>
<td>18 (75%)</td>
<td>1 (4%)</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral Therapy</td>
<td>41 (17% [13%, 22%])</td>
<td>193 (80%)</td>
<td>6 (3%)</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian-based therapy</td>
<td>9 (16% [8%, 28%])</td>
<td>45 (80%)</td>
<td>2 (4%)</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twelve-step program</td>
<td>6 (15% [6%, 29%])</td>
<td>35 (85%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion Focused Therapy</td>
<td>23 (13% [8%, 18%])</td>
<td>156 (85%)</td>
<td>4 (2%)</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage Counselling</td>
<td>19 (12% [7%, 18%])</td>
<td>134 (85%)</td>
<td>4 (3%)</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Behavioral Therapy¹</td>
<td>25 (9% [6%, 13%])</td>
<td>242 (88%)</td>
<td>9 (3%)</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychodynamic</td>
<td>1 (5% [0%, 26%])</td>
<td>17 (89%)</td>
<td>1 (5%)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
US Public Results (cont.)

• About 10% of public recovered memories in therapy of those who enter therapy (4% of population)

• Of those therapists discussed the possibility they may have repressed memories, 46% recovered abuse.

• When therapists didn’t discuss that, only 2.3% recovered abuse (20 fold difference)
• Asking the public could be a way to get the truth after the litigation of the memory wars
Other relevant work

• We found a lot of our sample indicated their recovered memories came in (involuntary) flashbacks.

• Nevertheless, Sanson et al. (2019) found that people often mistake fluid and fluent remembering as involuntary.

Follow up 1: Students in the South

Wood, Pendergrast, Herrera, Patihis (submitted to Memory)
Follow up: Students in the South Wood, et al. (submitted to Memory)

- During the course of counseling or therapy, did your therapist ever discuss the possibility that you might have been abused as a child but had repressed the memories?
  - U.S. Public Sample: 20.1%
  - Undergraduates: 16.5%

- During the course of therapy, did you come to remember being abused as a child, when you had no previous memory of such abuse?
  - U.S. Public Sample: 11.3%
  - Undergraduates: 8%

- Do you still believe that your recovered memories of abuse are accurate?
  - U.S. Public Sample: 92.6%
  - Undergraduates: 93.3%

- Did you cut off contact with any family members as a result of your new memories?
  - U.S. Public Sample: 42.6%
  - Undergraduates: 60%
Follow up 2: French public via social media

Dodier, Payoux, & Patihis (submitted to Memory)
• Patihis and Pendergrast (2019) raised the worry that some people may have meant suppression rather than repression
• In Dodier et al (2019) we asked follow up questions to examine this
• Surprisingly, these follow-up questions did not alter the percentages much:
• 5.4% of clients reported they recovered memories of childhood abuse during the course of therapy that they were unaware of before therapy.
• After the follow up questions, 6.0% reported recovered memories during therapy!!

IMPORTANT: Most respondents who reported having recovered memories really did mean recovered memories of abuse for which they were not previously aware of.
During the Course of Therapy, Did You Come to Remember Being Abused as a Child, When You Had No Previous Memory of Such Abuse?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Percentage Answering &quot;Yes&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1995-99</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-04</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-09</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-14</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015-18</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### During the course of therapy, did you come to remember being abused as a child, when you had no previous memory of such abuse?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Therapy</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behavioural Therapy</td>
<td>6 (15.0%)</td>
<td>34 (85.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy</td>
<td>6 (7.1%)</td>
<td>79 (92.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMDR</td>
<td>2 (6.9%)</td>
<td>27 (93.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychoanalytical or psychodynamic</td>
<td>4 (3.3%)</td>
<td>199 (96.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion Focused Therapy</td>
<td>1 (1.9%)</td>
<td>51 (98.1%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Chapter 4: Additional explanatory power for the memory wars: Malleability of memories of emotions in childhood
Observation: not all clients who did repressed memory therapy had episodic false memories, but yet still became estranged from parents.

They seemed to reappraise events or parents, rather than create false memories.

This reappraisal is underexplored in experiments.

As is memories of emotions about childhood.
Theory behind Our Experiments

Current Appraisals of mothers

Memory of love towards mothers in childhood
Manipulation of the IV
Exp. 1
Age 6

Memory of Love toward Mother Grade 1

- Mother Appraisal Down
- Null
- Teacher Appraisal Down
- Mother Appraisal Up

* p < 0.05
** p < 0.01
Exp. 1
Age 11

B

Memory of Love toward Mother Grade 6

- Mother Appraisal Down
- Null
- Teacher Appraisal Down
- Mother Appraisal Up

* Indicates significant difference
Exp. 1

Age 14
Exp. 1

Now

Love toward Mother Now

- Mother Appraisal Down
- Null
- Teacher Appraisal Down
- Mother Appraisal Up

Significance Levels:
- *: p < 0.05
- **: p < 0.01
- ***: p < 0.001
Experiment 1 Potential Confound

• Pre-existing differences between groups.
• Unlikely, but we check this confound with a pretest posttest design
Exp 2.
Age 6
Exp 2.
Age 11
Exp 2.
Age 14
Exp 2. Pretest (contemplate meaning here)
• So little doubt that changing the IV changes the DV
• Current appraisals of mother likely a causal factor in memory of love towards mothers.
• Establishes cause with a bit more certainty
• Expands research into the most profound of areas.
Exp 2.

How much social support are you willing to give your mother after she reaches the age of 70? (assuming she is still alive then)

Mother Appraisal Up

Mother Appraisal Down

Pretest

Experiment 8 Weeks Later

Time
Exp 2. financial support age 70
The memory wars discussion

• Beliefs about repressed memory and dissociative amnesia
• Definition of dissociative amnesia
• Prevalence of recovered memories in therapy (US and France)
• Additional explanation for some memory wars casualties: Malleability of memories of emotions in childhood
Acknowledgments

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  • Mark Pendergrast
  • Mario Herrera

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Questions

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Questions