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Retrieval inhibition of trauma-related words in women reporting repressed or recovered memories of childhood sexual abuse

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Abstract

Several authors have argued that survivors of childhood sexual abuse (CSA) who report to have repressed their traumatic memories are more skilled in forgetting emotional stimuli than survivors who have always remembered the abuse. The current experiment employed a list-wise directed forgetting task to investigate whether women reporting repressed (n=16) or recovered (n=23) memories of CSA are better at forgetting disturbing material, relative to women reporting having always remembered their abuse (n=55) or reporting no history of abuse (n=20). We found no support for the hypothesis that women reporting repressed or recovered memories of CSA are especially versed in inhibiting retrieval of trauma-related words. Additional analyses revealed that participants characterized by a repressive coping style did not display a superior retrieval inhibition

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Keywords

Childhood sexual abuse; Repression; Directed forgetting

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