

The Recovered Memory Debate: Wins, Losses, and Creating Future Open-Minded Skeptics



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Scott O. Lilienfeld was among the most influential clinical psychological scientists and critics of pseudoscience in our time. An expert in the psychometric assessment of psychopathy, Scott's intellectual range extended far beyond this specialty. He was a prolific generalist who promoted a healthy skepticism about dubious clinical claims as embodied in his canonical edited volume *Science and Pseudoscience in Clinical Psychology* (Lilienfeld et al., 2003). His audience was as broad as his interests. He wrote for clinicians, researchers, and the public.

Scott was an influential critic of the claim that victims of trauma encode, consolidate, and then repress their memories of trauma precisely because they are so emotionally distressing (e.g., Lilienfeld & Loftus, 1998; Lilienfeld et al., 2003; Lilienfeld, 2007; Lilienfeld et al. 2008; Lynn et al., 2014; Lynn et al., in press; Otgaar et al., 2019). He was especially critical of the notion that hypnosis and other putative memory recovery methods could unlock supposedly repressed (or dissociated) memories without running the risk of fostering false memories of trauma. Finally, he and his colleagues developed the sociocognitive theory of dissociative identity disorder (DID) as an alternative to the trauma-based theory of this

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syndrome (Lilienfeld et al., 1999). Although some scholars, such as McHugh (2006, p. 129), proclaimed victory for critics of repressed memories of trauma in the so-called “Memory Wars” (Crews, 1995; Loftus, 2004), the debate over reports of repressed and recovered memories of trauma appears to continue, especially in Europe (e.g., Otgaar et al., 2019).

Scott was as critical of a cynical perspective that cavalierly dismissed ideas without giving them their due as he was of a mindset that credulously embraced claims absent any cogent evidence. Scott was humble; yet if he ever displayed a scintilla of pride, it was in his view of himself as an open-minded skeptic who carefully weighed strong claims against the evidence. He succeeded famously in this regard, as many authors of chapters in this volume attest.

In this chapter, we identify some of the wins and losses in the repressed memory debate from our perspective, contribute insight into misleading rhetoric employed in past losses, and look, with some conditional optimism, to the future. We describe the use of the motte-and-bailey technique of defending repressed memory theory in such a way that we hope will help improve our understanding of current debates and contentious issues. We outline the conditions under which future generations could continue to produce scientific skeptics with a rare mix of attributes that Scott so well exemplified: kindness, fearlessness, sophisticated quantitative skills, indefatigable energy, productivity, commitment to scientific methods, and a critical and thorough philosophy of science. We suggest that current trends in academia may have to be challenged for the concept of academic freedom to prevail and for the next generation of scientists to be able to speak freely and flourish in academic settings. We conclude with a call for those on both sides of the memory wars to be skeptical of their own beliefs and perspectives and to search for disconfirming evidence and objective truth.

The Memory Wars and Why They Matter

Pivotal to the memory wars are conflicts regarding the authenticity of so-called repressed memories—memories presumedly repressed to defend against the negative repercussions of trauma. These memories are purportedly inaccessible for years yet can be recovered with pristine accuracy in psychotherapy. On one side of the fray are those who generally accepted the existence of repressed memories and touted the importance of uncovering and processing them to cope successfully with the aftereffects of trauma (e.g., Blume, 1990; Freyd, 1994).

In contrast, scholars who question the existence of repressed memories, including the present authors, have expressed an alternative view (Loftus, 1993; Loftus & Davis, 2006; Lynn & Baltman, 2016; McNally, 2003a, b; Otgaar et al., 2019; Patihis et al., 2014). The notion of repression of memories is challenged by findings that traumatic memories are generally highly memorable and are at times intrusive and troubling, as in cases of posttraumatic stress disorder, rather than repressed or dissociated (McNally, 2003b). Repressed memory critics further questioned the

accuracy of memories that were supposedly uncovered or de-repressed in psychotherapy and further expressed concerns about iatrogenic treatment effects produced by attempts at excavating such memories.

In research studies involving strong forms of suggestion, and depending on the conditions, about 30% to almost 50% of individuals report memories of a variety of autobiographical events that did not happen or had been previously denied by the participants (e.g., being bullied as a child, riding in a hot air balloon; see Scoboria et al., 2017, for a mega-analysis), rendering concerns about false recovered memories plausible and concerning (Otgaar et al., 2022). Researchers have also expressed concerns about resurgent belief in repressed memories among the public, mental health professionals, and potential jurors (see Otgaar et al., 2019; Patihis et al., 2014). As Patihis et al. (2014) observed and co-authored with Scott: “These differing beliefs can have profound consequences for clinical practice and the judicial system. For example, therapists who believe that traumatic memories can be repressed may develop treatment plans that differ dramatically from those developed by practitioners who do not hold this belief. In the courtroom beliefs about memory often determine whether repressed-memory testimony is admitted into evidence” (p. 520).

Perhaps even more importantly, individuals who come to mistakenly believe that they suffered terrible abuse during childhood, for example—based on memories they recover during therapy—can give credence to a narrative of a past that “never was,” with potentially disturbing and destabilizing consequences. The memory wars spawned substantial concern regarding harms linked to therapy techniques geared to recover repressed memories (see Lilienfeld, 2007; Otgaar et al., 2019). In their review of evidence from research and legal cases, Otgaar et al. (2019) contend that the memory wars are alive and well “and may even be on the rise” (p. 1073). They further suggest that in recent years, the scientifically controversial concept of dissociative amnesia (integral to the diagnosis of dissociative identity disorder [DID]) has gained popularity as a way to denote a condition akin to memory repression (p. 1073). Accordingly, the concept of repression is intimately entwined with controversies regarding dissociative amnesia and DID. Although we will allude to the latter conditions, a full discussion of their link with repressed memory is beyond the scope of this chapter.

Wins for Skepticism

Since the 1990s, there have been some successes from our perspective in the memory wars. The first win was that the subject of repressed memory became widely discussed outside of psychoanalysis and the self-help community. Until the 1990s, it appeared that psychodynamic practitioners were informed by repression theory and existed in their own bubble, whereas psychological scientists generally did not comment much on the authenticity of repressed memories. However, many of those successes were likely invisible in that psychotherapy clients may not have known

that they were spared such a fate or that they benefited from the movement to implement evidence-based therapies that do not rely on memory recovery.

Critiques of the putative evidence for repressed and recovered memories of trauma proved persuasive to many, and perhaps was the cause of a decline in legal cases involving claims of repressed memory, which peaked in 1994 (Lipton, 1999). The attorney and psychologist Christopher Barden (2016) commented that he observed a large decrease in DID legal cases that involved false memories. Kevin Felstead, of the British False Memory Society, estimates that the Society's caseload was about 260 per year in 1993, and today they deal with approximately 40 legal cases per year (Felstead, 2022). The US-based False Memory Syndrome Foundation was dissolved at the end of 2019, with a message that included "The need for the FMS Foundation diminished dramatically over the years" (FMSF, 2019). These examples may indicate a decrease in the number of memory recovery legal cases active in the USA and UK. Nevertheless, some of the current authors can attest that memory recovery legal cases still occur. Indeed, recent data from the Netherlands Expert Committee for Equivocal Sexual Abuse Allegations show between 2008 and 2020, 17% ($n = 88$) of the cases involved recovered memories (Nierop, 2022).¹

We have witnessed notable successes in communicating the hazards of recovered memory therapy for the lay public. Major documentaries highlight these hazards and the possibility of false memories, such as the 2021 Showtime series *Buried*. In the USA, the television program *60 Minutes*, *Public Broadcasting Service's Frontline*, *National Public Radio*, and many more media venues have aired stories questioning the validity of repressed memories. In the UK, the BBC and many broadsheet newspapers have highlighted stories on the hazards of repressed memory recovery. Some researchers have given TED talks and TEDx talks on repressed memory and false memory themes (e.g., Loftus, 2013). In some circles, false memories have become a well-known hazard to avoid when processing trauma in psychotherapy.

Guidelines for psychologists have been changed for the better in some areas, too. The British Psychology Society Research Board Working Group (2008) came to nuanced conclusions, which included the possibility that childhood events recalled in adulthood can be accurate, but sometimes can be "highly inaccurate, and sometimes wholly false" (p. 11). For example, the British Psychological Society's Working Party on Recovered Memories in 1995 offered recommendations on recovered memories with some preliminary caution about the production of false memories (Andrews et al., 1995). The American Psychological Association's report on false and recovered memories came to an uneasy consensus that both accurate remembering and false memories were possible (Alpert, 1997). The Health Council of the Netherlands (2004) report on false and recovered memories also concluded

¹This committee consists of investigative psychologists, sex crime investigators, and experts in memory, cognition, and psychopathology. The second author of this chapter is a member of this committee. The committee investigates cases involving, for example, recovered memories and claims of ritual abuse and provides advice to the Public Prosecution on what the next steps should be (e.g., stop the investigation).

that recovered memories could be false. At least the possibility of false memories was becoming more widely communicated in the field.

Guidelines in some court systems have also seen improvements. For example, New Jersey adopted a detailed and evidence-based set of juror instructions for eye-witness testimony cases (*New Jersey v. Henderson*, 2011), and hypnosis-augmented testimony was banned from the courtroom in that state in 2006 (*State v. Moore*, 2006). Memories retrieved via hypnosis have been deemed inadmissible in 27 states in the USA, and in only 3 states, it is admissible without preconditions such as when procedural guidelines (e.g., only one person present in the room) are followed. Repressed memory evidence has also been deemed inadmissible in some courts. The earlier mentioned Dutch expert committee has also been established to evaluate potential recovered memories cases and advise prosecutors whether a criminal investigation of abuse, for example, should be pursued (Nierop et al., 2021).

Losses for Skepticism

To balance these wins or partial wins, some losses are notable. Some have documented continued beliefs in the concept of repressed memory among the public and clinicians (Patihis et al., 2014; Otgaar et al., 2019), with data suggesting that these beliefs appear to translate to clinical practice, too (e.g., Patihis & Pendergrast, 2019).

In addition, dissociative amnesia is now deeply embedded in psychiatry's "bible" for mental disorders, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)*; American Psychiatric Association, 2013), as well in the *International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11)*. The definition of dissociative amnesia in the *DSM-5* has the unfortunate side effect of legitimizing the dubious claim that traumatic memories can be stored yet blocked, only to be retrieved in pristine form years or decades later. This claim is based on repression theory and is presented in the guise of the different terminology of trauma and dissociation in arguably the most important book in psychology and psychiatry. Specifically, in the *DSM-5*, the diagnostic criteria on page 298, state that dissociative amnesia is:

An inability to recall important autobiographical information, usually of a traumatic or stressful nature, that is inconsistent with ordinary forgetting. Note: Dissociative amnesia most often consists of localized or selective amnesia for a specific event or events; or generalized amnesia for identity and life history.

Accordingly, the *DSM* proposes that "dissociative amnesia most often consists of localized or selective amnesia for a specific event or events" (p. 298). Localized is described as a "failure to recall events during a circumscribed period of time" and selective is described as, "the individual can recall some, but not all, of the events during a circumscribed period of time" (p. 298). Both subtypes of dissociative amnesia are functionally indistinguishable from repressed memory (see Otgaar et al., 2019). The rarer subtype of generalized dissociative amnesia is "a complete loss of memory for one's life history" (p. 298), which is different from the alleged

selective inability to recall a trauma. Even in the case of generalized dissociative amnesia, “dissociative” is suggestive of a psychological traumatic cause, when in fact it is extraordinarily difficult to rule out physical neurological problems and non-trauma environmental causes of forgetting (see Mangiulli et al., 2022). Dropping the word “dissociative” from the term dissociative amnesia in the *DSM-5* would thus improve the document and eliminate a term with connotations associated with a controversial and unproven theory. However, any such changes would have to be cautiously examined to identify potential unforeseen consequences. “Dissociative,” when referenced in the *DSM-5*, legitimizes psychiatric folklore regarding dissociation that dates as far back as the nineteenth-century physicians/hypnotists such as Jean-Martin Charcot and Pierre Janet and persists to the present time (see Otgaar et al., 2019). The phrase “selective amnesia” would be much less suggestive of cause than the term “selective dissociative amnesia.” “Generalized amnesia” is also arguably less laden with problematic theoretical baggage than “generalized dissociative amnesia,” and so on. We hope these changes will be considered in future iterations of the *DSM*, along with corresponding added cautions noted in the text.

Controversy surrounding the retention of DID in the *DSM-5* represents another contested battle for skeptics who have been outnumbered in this arena. The use of the word “dissociative” has deep historical links to the dubious proposition that traumas are sequestered from working memory yet cause the diverse symptoms of DID (e.g., Prince, 1906). As researchers have contended that DID is a disorder of a person’s *belief* in a fractured self (see Lynn et al., 2019, *in press*), the term “identity disorder” would be less theory-contaminated, more parsimonious (i.e., not requiring the construct of dissociation), and therefore preferable. Although some patients do report serious identity and memory problems, we recommend that clinicians in such cases keep an open mind about other possible causes, such as physical brain or neuronal problems, substance use, and environmental damage to the brain. This open-minded stance is preferable to assuming that uncorroborated reports of early childhood (ritualistic) abuse, for example, are the hidden cause of serious dissociative symptoms (Mangiulli et al., 2022). Such cautions regarding causal assumptions should be integrated into routine clinical practice to avoid unnecessary traumatization to those patients who suspect they harbor repressed memories of childhood trauma. In short, the iatrogenic recovery of purported repressed memories should be a concern in treating individuals who report dissociative symptoms, including reports of multiple identities.

Social media bubbles on the topics of dissociative amnesia, blocked trauma, and DID are also problematic. The reader is invited to type in “dissociative identity disorder” into YouTube to assess the magnitude of the problem. YouTube channels and Facebook groups on these topics have gathered millions of views that often feature accounts of bizarre and improbable recovered memories and/or strongly encourage self-diagnosis of DID. In these social media echo-chambers, nonsense and implausible claims flourish, and a disturbing disparity exists between the few people familiar with science-based portrayals of dissociative conditions and the millions of people who watch social media videos promoting repressed memories and multiple personalities. In this context, extreme expressions of credulity in social

media comments sections for people claiming to harbor multiple personalities are potentially harmful. There is a need for responsible education and encouragement for consumers to participate in critical thinking about iatrogenic social media rabbit-holes on topics like DID.

The social influence of a burgeoning online culture is difficult to navigate and challenge insofar as some of the same individuals who mis-educate the public on social media platforms often simultaneously claim to be victims of terrible trauma. Direct confrontation of such miseducation on social media can thus be defended against with claims of personal offense, devaluation, and accusations of denying trauma victims' identity or even their existence. Dialogue can be quashed by confusing legitimate scientific inquiry regarding dissociative amnesia and DID with invalidating the reality, repercussions, or scope of child sexual abuse. To the extent that harmful suggestive "therapies" instantiate false narratives of familial abuse that fracture families and eventuate in legal actions against therapists for harmful practices, it depreciates the claims and suffering of survivors of actual childhood abuse and hampers much-needed efforts to raise awareness of childhood abuse and prevent its occurrence.

Another loss in the memory wars is that some journals continue to publish uncritical and unchallenged articles that advocate for the concept of trauma-induced dissociative amnesia. One prominent example is a recent issue of the *Journal of Trauma and Dissociation* in which multiple articles (2022, volume 23, issue 2) suggest, with scant credible evidence, that a political agenda motivates research on false memories (e.g., Cheit, 2022; Crook, 2022).

Threats to free speech in academia are also a disappointing loss that scientific skeptics have suffered in the last decade (O'Donohue & Fisher, 2022). Scott himself felt some foreshadowing of this loss decades earlier when he commented on the suppression of the Rind et al. (1998) meta-analysis on abuse and psychopathology. Scott also showed intellectual courage in his critique of the evidential merit of work on microaggressions (Lilienfeld, 2017, 2020). As Scott voiced heterodox ideas, he faced a vocal minority of critical social justice activists within the Society for Science in Clinical Psychology (see Pignotti, 2020). Unfortunately, such events could have a chilling effect on other individuals who are considering voicing courageous yet unpopular opinions. In some circumstances, academics who are outspoken in expressing skeptical views regarding controversial topics can benefit the public by calling attention to potentially iatrogenic psychological treatments and implausible, untested, and even nonsensical theories. Some of the current authors have also faced challenges due to changes that have limited academic freedoms of speech and inquiry.

The debate over repression, dissociative amnesia, and DID requires that academics know that they can speak freely on the issues without undue constraint, being targeted by *ad hominem* attacks or physical threats to their safety, or fear they will lose their academic positions. In the UK, for example, although there is a tradition of free speech and critical rationalism, tenure for academics was removed in 1988 (Education Reform Act, 1988). Nevertheless, the freedom of inquiry traditions of

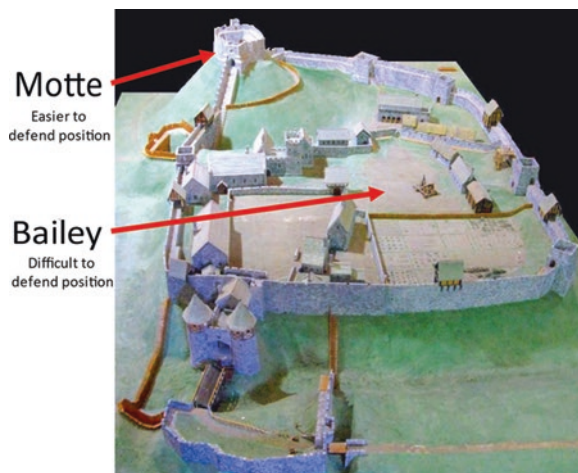
British academia, as well as free speech clauses in various education acts, likely encouraged scholars to engage with contentious issues in the repressed memory debate. America has retained a tenure system and that might explain why some of the most direct criticisms of repressed memories were from American professors in the 1990s and 2000s (even then, some of those critics faced foreshadowing of so-called cancel culture). In the USA recently there is at least a perception that there has been a weakening of the free speech protections of those on the tenure track, and the perception now is that tenured positions no longer guarantee free speech on controversial issues. The Netherlands also has a tradition of free speech and an ethic that everything can and should be discussed, which may explain why resident scholars have also contributed to this topic. Similar observations are arguably relevant with respect to countries, such as New Zealand and Canada, where scholars have likewise contributed to the debate. As a link appears to exist between the conditions of free inquiry and valuable skepticism on the topic of repressed memories, we suggest that it is imperative to protect and reward such inquiry in the universities.

A potential example of how free speech restrictions might cause harm is when academics are hesitant to debunk social media DID bubbles that harm young people. Concerns about social media mobbing might also dissuade concerned experts from speaking freely in response to viral videos that promote self-misdiagnosis in thousands of young adults. Without guarantees of free speech protections, the debate will be dominated by those who misleadingly claim that repressed memory and DID skeptics, delegitimize or harm victims of childhood trauma. The misdirected insinuation that scientific skeptics do not empathize with or care about suffering clients has made it especially difficult to freely critique DID without risking online attacks and negative responses from others.

In fact, participants on the skeptical side in the memory wars do appreciate the potential aftereffects of genuine trauma or sexual abuse. The authors of this chapter have written with concern about the harmful effects of sexual abuse captured by diagnoses such as posttraumatic stress disorder and/or developed treatments or preventive programs related to sexual abuse and dissociation, thereby acknowledging the real and long-lasting effects of trauma and the experience of associated symptoms (e.g., Blackwell et al., 2004; Layman et al., 1996; Mohajerin et al., 2020). To be clear, what is at issue in terms of dissociation is not that people believe they have DID—they do, in that their experiences meet diagnostic formal criteria—but rather whether the genesis of their symptoms invariably resides in traumatic experiences. As Spanos (1994) and others (Lynn et al., 2019, 2022, *in press*) have pointed out, DID might have other causes such as role enactment, social influence (e.g., suggestive psychotherapeutic interventions, media influence), and cognitive (e.g., fantasy proneness, suggestibility, hyperassociation, failure of thought suppression) and affective (e.g., emotion dysregulation, avoidance of negative affect) factors. Informing people of such causes who have developed or are at risk of iatrogenic DID has great potential to help them escape pseudoscientific echo-chambers.

Another loss is the development of a motte-and-bailey argument technique among proponents of trauma–dissociation theory. The motte-and-bailey fallacy (named after the motte-and-bailey castle, see Fig. 1 is an argument where an

Fig. 1 An example of a fourteenth-century motte-and-bailey arrangement of Carisbrooke Castle on the Isle of Wight, Hampshire, UK. Creative Commons Licence: [CC-BY-2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/)



easy-to-defend position (the “motte”) is used to obscure or direct attention away from a more controversial position (the “bailey”). It is a fallacious argument technique. While in the bailey the arguer advances the controversial position, but when challenged, they run up the motte into the castle and take an easy-to-defend position. Upon retreating to the motte, the arguer can claim that the bailey has not been refuted because the critic did not defeat the motte. The arguer may equate an attack on the bailey with an attack on the motte.

The analogy to the recovered memory debate is that advocates advance (as a battle force might advance) controversial ideas while out on the *bailey* (e.g., claims about dissociative amnesia, DID, extraordinary remembering via repressed memories, widespread ritualistic abuse). However, when challenged they run up into *motte* to the castle and adopt a much easier to defend position (e.g., that trauma correlates with dissociation, that memories of words can be suppressed, that DID is merely identity confusion). While out on the bailey, trauma and dissociative amnesia advocates have succeeded in embedding many of their ideas into culture, journals, books, the *DSM-5*, and the *ICD-11*. Entries in the *DSM-5* on dissociative amnesia and dissociative identity disorder hint at extraordinary claims such as the ability to accurately retrieve blocked memories, and the idea that people can *literally* (not figuratively) have multiple personalities that dwell inside a single brain. Yet when these claims are challenged, many trauma/dissociation advocates retreat to their motte. From this motte, they state that numerous studies have shown trauma is correlated with dissociation. Of course, the latter is the more defensible claim, although correlation does not necessarily signify causation.

From this motte, proponents may argue that there is evidence of suppression in Anderson and Green’s (2001) “think/no-think” memory research. From the motte, some may claim that the idea that many people believe in unconscious repression is a red herring (e.g., Brewin et al., 2020). However, out on the bailey, larger claims are made. In court, trauma/dissociation theory proponents may state as expert

witnesses that dissociative amnesia and DID involve recovered memories that should be treated credibly by the courts. Yet their peer-reviewed writings on the topic tend to revolve around the more defensible argument (from the motte) that past research has shown a correlation between traumatic experiences and the dissociative experiences scale (Dalenberg et al., 2012; Brand et al., 2017a, b; for critiques see Lynn et al., 2014; Merckelbach & Patihis, 2018).

Until scientific skeptics are more successful in identifying and naming the motte-and-bailey technique of trauma–dissociation theory proponents, skeptics will continue to fall into the trap of debating them in their motte: For example, debating the size of the correlation between trauma and dissociation, or debating whether telling a participant to forget a list of words leads to worse recall from that list. Skeptics might profitably invite trauma-centric theorists back out onto the bailey to debate the claim of complete memory blockages followed by extraordinary remembering that is proposed to be so accurate that people could be convicted based on repressed memories. Skeptics should invite trauma-centric theorists to debate whether dissociative identity disorder involves *literal* multiple personalities inside people’s minds, or whether it is a delusional belief. Noticing the retreat to the motte in the coming years might improve the relevance and quality of the discussion of these important and controversial issues.

The Future: How to Create Open-Minded Skeptics

Scott Lilienfeld had a positive effect on the recovered memory debate in part due to a rare and extraordinary combination of traits and behaviors embedded in an academic climate that tolerated and often embraced his skeptical positions on controversial issues. His fair-minded, balanced, thoughtful arguments and impeccable scholarship were well equipped to tilt even some true believers or people “on the fence,” regarding well-entrenched views, toward being more critical thinkers and considering alternative perspectives. Scott’s ability to welcome and consider diverse opinions and change his own ideas also earned personal and professional respect in his mission to distinguish scientific from pseudoscientific claims.

Scott boldly applied a broad scientific toolkit to examine sensitive and controversial topics such as sexual abuse, the Rind et al. (1998) controversy, dissociative identity disorder, autism and facilitated communication, left-wing authoritarianism, and of course the repressed memory controversy. If he were alive today, he would, we predict, endeavor to help resolve the most painful and controversial topics that confront society.

There is a need for more skeptical scientists to follow in Scott’s path, not only because of the losses in the memory wars that we recounted but also because the debate can impose a burden on scholars over years. Many critics may only engage *directly* in a limited number of battles or for a limited period on the topic before returning to their own research programs. For example, challenging the wording in the *DSM-5* will inevitably prove to be daunting, and individual researchers may

only be able to devote direct engagement in such an immense, protracted, and consuming undertaking only a few times in their career. Accordingly, early-career scientists must ideally not only be dedicated to taking on challenges but also perceive that they have guaranteed free speech rights in academia, even before tenure, and during the time they still possess the desire and energy to address the most difficult and controversial topics. These circumstances present an immense challenge for academia because it can take years to acquire a sufficient understanding of all the deep roots of a controversial topic. Moreover, whether hard-nosed scientific critical thinkers would be attracted to and seek a career in a modern psychology department is another matter. Nevertheless, future skeptics, if retained in academia, have the potential to debunk pseudoscience inside psychology and thereby mitigate harmful practices in therapies worldwide.

The aforementioned ideas lead us to raise this question: What is required in academia to attract productive and brilliant scientific critical thinkers like Scott—and to sustain their motivation to address controversial topics? As discussed earlier, speech protection for academics is essential for one to tackle many controversial issues. Some free speech provisions are guaranteed in the education acts in the UK and the Netherlands, in the US constitution, and in some academic contracts. Nevertheless, in recent years some academics have reported dire consequences after speaking freely on controversial topics (see Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, 2021; Boghossian, 2021). This situation is potentially a problem for future scientists in the area of traumatic memory recovery, which is a controversial topic linked with highly personal and important societal issues: identity, child abuse, and sexual assault. Without the kind of free speech parameters that were in effect when Scott was an early-career scientist, it is uncertain whether emerging skeptical scientists will choose to join academia and whether they will be hired over more credulous candidates. It is also far from certain that they will choose to speak out on controversial pseudoscience in the future.

Funding is needed to retain future skeptical scientists in academia. Funding that prioritizes highly constrained and programmatic research conducted by prestigious or established researchers, rather than research that challenges basic assumptions or received scientific wisdom, can impede motivation to pursue important research contra to the status quo. We hope that promising scientific work will be supported generously that questions the validity of underlying premises, currently popular theories, and the genesis of symptoms related to controversial *DSM* diagnoses, including DID. Research on trending psychology topics and methods (e.g., neuroscience) likely influence both funding and hiring in tenure track jobs at prestigious universities, which poses a potential problem for investigators who wish to pursue topics that are not necessarily viewed as “cutting edge” or that could stir controversy. Theoretical and empirical initiatives regarding issues that are over 100 years old, such as pseudoscientific clinical practices, dissociative amnesia, and dissociative identity disorder, may well be harder to sell to funders and hiring committees.

We also suggest that toning down, if not eliminating, relational aggression and *ad hominem* arguments in psychology would potentially help retain science-oriented skeptics motivated to root out pseudoscience in the field. Relational aggression

consists of *indirect* undermining of reputation, usually without the target present. It arises in socially competitive environments that breed a web of social influence in which the truth is secondary. Hard-nosed scientists will be more interested in what is true from first principles, rather than living in a conflict-laden web of social influence.

In addition, many scholars will likely be put off by *ad hominem* arguments in the publishing world and in academia, as the authors of this chapter have encountered. Scott eschewed such arguments, and his unique brand of skepticism facilitated his attempts to teach critical thinking and embrace an open-minded scientific mindset. Direct *ad hominem* attacks pose a major obstacle in (a) achieving the goal of disclosing evidence-based “truths” in the debate over recovered memories, (b) encouraging movements toward rapprochement across competing perspectives, and (c) engaging in potentially invaluable adversarial collaborations.

For people like Scott, the foundation of the American Psychological Society (APS; since renamed as the Association of Psychological Science) in 1988 provided essential oxygen for the scientific branch of psychology at the time, and for a few decades following was at the vanguard in advocating for clinical psychological science. We are concerned that if psychological organizations gravitate toward or endorse ideologically motivated ideas, political slogans, and arguments inspired by postmodernism and critical theory (see Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020), it will put off potential scholars who value critical thinking. It would benefit the field if psychological organizations promoted the highest values of scientific inquiry and continued to apply and exemplify critical thinking to resist political and social pressures put upon them. Any attempts to stifle open inquiry can dampen the very dialogues essential to foment progress on scientific and societal fronts. On a brighter note, Scott was a member of the Heterodox Academy, and an attendee of its conferences, and it remains to be seen whether this organization becomes a new haven for critical thinkers in psychology.

Summary

In summary, we argue that the arena in which future combat in the memory wars takes place should be signposted and demarcated by markers of free speech, free thought, and open and civil discourse. As shown in the rise and fall of skepticism in Ancient Greece, and the Dark Ages, the struggle to defend the gains of the scientific method and the Enlightenment, and the postmodern and critical theory movement more recently (see Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020), scientific skepticism and freethought can fade and lose ground if not valued and encouraged.

Prominent challenges that face skeptics of recovered memories span the inclusion of poorly validated categories in the *DSM-5* (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), which implicitly endorses attempts to recover purportedly dissociated memories, the rampant unconstrained viral nature of trauma and DID misinformation in social media bubbles, and the motte-and-bailey argument of traumagenic theorists.

Still, debates on false memories, recovered memory, dissociation, and dissociative amnesia should proceed with the assumption that scientific methods can and should be applied by skeptics and non-skeptics alike. Science is an evolving process that ideally, with accumulating evidence, weeds out claims that do not survive demanding tests. Moreover, as the physicist Richard Feynman noted, scientists should bend over backwards to prove themselves wrong.

Another challenge that skeptics face is to develop a research agenda with priorities that encompass the study of recovered memories and whether and how trauma impacts memory in and apart from psychotherapy. The following examples merely serve as suggestions but might surely be promising next steps. Specifically, future researchers could determine under what conditions memories that arise during or after psychotherapy are likely to be correct, incorrect, or of indeterminate accuracy. Relatedly, it will be important to acknowledge that memories are forgotten and remembered, and often morph and are recalled in different ways during quotidian living as well as in the consulting room. Researchers from competing camps could profit from the following: (a) clarifying the mediators and moderators of significant changes in memories and attributions associated with “recovered memories” and how they fit with pre-existing narratives and/or contribute to novel beliefs integral to personal identity; (b) examining how recovered memories may be perceived in divergent ways as a function of psychiatric diagnosis and personality characteristics; (c) evaluating the role of suggestion and demand characteristics in the emergence and appraisal of recovered memories; and (d) determining how memories take on particular salience and meaning, whether recovered or not. Developing different typologies of memories that are recovered (e.g., trauma vs. non-trauma-related; high vs. low arousal level; positive vs. negative valence) would also be important and fascinating to validate in the context of the initiatives mentioned. Given the fact that memories of unknown or unsubstantiated accuracy constantly surface and resurface, we suggest that informed consent procedures be routinely applied that acknowledge the possibility that false memories will arise during therapy, particularly when high-risk procedures (e.g., hypnosis) are considered or employed.

There are promising indications that at least some differences across competing views can be breached in certain arenas of conflict. For example, there is some degree of rapprochement across theoretical divides in the conceptualization of DID, which has been close to the epicenter of battles in the memory wars. For example, advocates of competing perspectives acknowledge that DID is related to self-understanding and that fantasy proneness may lead to inaccurate trauma reports, implying that recovered memories of trauma may not be accurate (see Lynn et al., 2019). Importantly, researchers have “failed to detect consistent objective evidence (e.g., behavioral tasks, event-related potentials) of distinct personalities segregated by impermeable amnesic barriers...” (Lynn et al., 2019, p. 3), buttressing the notion that DID involves a subjective sense of self.

Meanwhile, critics of repressed and recovered memories acknowledge the possibility that an unknown percentage of recovered memories will turn out to be accurate and corroborated, forgotten for a period and cued by current events, and only

years later, for example, be interpreted as abuse (McNally, 2012). However, the index of suspicion regarding the accuracy of recovered memories should be particularly high when the memory (a) surfaces for the first time in psychotherapy or after learning about a trauma repression theory; (b) relates to a traumatic or highly emotional, ordinarily memorable event, which would likely be remembered (e.g., violent sexual assault); (c) is highly implausible (e.g., satanic ritual abuse); (d) is not corroborated or at variance with the reports of individuals who would be in a position to verify the occurrence of the event; and/or (e) is reported by a highly credulous consumer of social media relevant to memory recovery, dissociation, and/or dissociative amnesia.

The debate over trauma, repression, and memory has elicited considerable research, theoretical developments, and even, at times, productive dialogue. Whether adversarial collaborations would be profitable might depend on the situation. One of us (RJM) successfully moderated a civil debate between psychologists who disagree on whether memories of trauma tend to be especially fragmented or disorganized (McNally et al., 2022), prompted by an article by McNally (2022). Although this was not an empirical research adversarial collaboration, it nevertheless shows that people with sharply divergent views can clarify their points of agreement and disagreement when they share principles of reason and evidence. Such collaborations may be profitable under the constraints of the scientific method, using a disconfirming approach, investigating basic assumptions, and focusing on valuing singular precise constructs more than vague loose constructs. These adversarial collaborations could pertain to multiple fronts of the memory wars; they could center on topics such as (a) the nature and mechanisms of remembering and forgetting, (b) re-examining the assumptions, reliability, and validity of the dissociation concept, and (c) potentially harmful psychotherapies that elevate the risk of false recovered memories. Nonetheless, in the area of repressed and false memory, some adversarial efforts were unsuccessful in accusations going back and forth between different camps (Ceci & Williams, 2022; Clark et al., 2022).

We believe in the long and extraordinarily successful tradition of scientific skepticism. This approach posits that there is an objective truth, and that we should adapt to evidence with a very cautious understanding that cause can be difficult to establish in complex dynamic systems. This approach posits that humans are flawed, and that people need the scientific method to acknowledge, compensate for, and potentially mitigate confirmation and other ubiquitous biases, mental heuristics, and logical fallacies (see Lynn et al., Chap. 7, this volume). The approach is based on empiricism guided by careful examination of the wide breadth of cognitive and neurobiological research in memory. Such an approach has reduced harm in the world. Scott was an example of the type of beautiful mind this open-minded skepticism can shape. These habits of mind that are allied with this school of thought allow people like Scott, for a few fleeting but enlightened years, to discern some of the deeper meanings and workings of the world.

In conclusion, we hope that readers will look to Scott as an inspiring role model, as we do. He displayed remarkable intellectual clarity and courage in calling attention to the dark side of psychotherapy and the harms of pseudoscientific clinical

practices. Scott engaged directly and indirectly, via his prolific writings, with individuals who expressed views that diverged sharply from his opinions. Yet we suspect that his kindness, empathy, and even-handed arguments encouraged some of his many readers to recognize, if not outright reject, pseudoscientific practices and adopt a more scientific mindset. Scott was keenly aware of the limitations of his knowledge, and he embodied the important trait of epistemic humility. While he expressed an unwavering commitment to the scientific method, he steadfastly questioned his own beliefs in his openness to novel ideas, discoveries, and emerging evidence as it accumulated. We believe that Scott would be pleased to learn something new about trauma and memory, regardless of whether it challenged or refuted his beliefs, and whether he ultimately was proven to be right or wrong. That is the kind of person and scientist that Scott O. Lilienfeld was and the person we miss dearly.

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