

## Dispositional and Situational Determinants of Repression

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This research project posits a model of repression that incorporates both repressive personality and repressive social behavior. The 1st parameter of the model specifies the motivation for repressors' distancing of themselves from emotional events. Experiment 1 demonstrates that repressors are hypersensitive—in their cognitive attention—to both negative and positive emotional events. The 2nd parameter of the model specifies the conditions under which repressors distance themselves from emotional events. Experiments 2 and 3 demonstrate that repressors psychologically distance themselves when the situation threatens their self-evaluation and provides opportunity for them to attend to and process self-relevant and non-self-relevant information. This 2-factor model extends the current conceptualization of repression in that it identifies motivation (dispositional emotional sensitivity) and context (situational threats to self-evaluation and distraction availability) for repressors' distancing of themselves from negative and positive emotional events.

The dispositional strategy (Byrne, 1964) that has been used to study repression assumes that the phenomenon of repression can be understood by first identifying individuals who display behaviors that reflect the influences of repression—people who tend to distance themselves from psychologically threatening ideas, emotions, memories, or experiences—and then exploring the social-psychological processes associated with a repressive personality—avoidant information processing (e.g., Bonanno & Singer, 1993), memory failures (e.g., Davis, 1987), discrete encoding processes (R. D. Hansen & Hansen, 1988), or failure to recognize affective responses (e.g., Weinberger, 1990). One criticism of the dispositional strategy is that it can be atheoretical. For example, one failure or gap in our current conceptualization of repression is that there is no explanation of the difference in underlying motivation of repressors and nonrepressors (i.e., Why does not everyone choose to avoid or protect himself or herself from unpleasant or threatening emotional events?). A second criticism of the dispositional strategy is that by focusing primarily on the characteristics of the person, the current conceptualization of repression fails to describe the circumstances under which repressors and nonrepressors behave

the same or differently with respect to distancing themselves from threatening emotional events. The model we propose uses an interactional strategy—which considers the combined influence of dispositional and situational features (Endler & Magnusson, 1976)—and, thus, extends the current conceptualization of repression in that it specifies the situations within which certain individuals are likely to exhibit repressive behaviors.

Researchers have identified which people more readily choose to avoid threatening or unpleasant emotional experiences. For example, Weinberger (1990; Weinberger, Schwartz, & Davidson, 1979) identified repressors from their self-reported anxiety (e.g., the Manifest Anxiety Scale [MAS]; Taylor, 1953) and from their defensiveness, a person's belief that he or she conforms to rigid standards of self-control (e.g., the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale [MCSDS]; Crowne & Marlowe, 1964). Based on these two components, dispositional repressors are people who report feeling little or no anxiety (low scorers on the MAS) but who are also very defensive and protective of their self-esteem (high scorers on the MCSDS). Thus, dispositional repressors can be distinguished from low-anxious individuals, who report not to be defensive; from defensive high-anxious individuals, who report to feel anxious; and from high-anxious individuals, who report not to be defensive but to feel anxious (see Table 1). Thus, repressors characteristically report to feel little anxiety but also tend to be very defensive (i.e., they are extremely self-protective).

When faced with negative or threatening stimuli, dispositional repressors have been observed to use two mechanisms. First, dispositional repressors dissociate their somatic reactions from their perceptions of distress (e.g., Asendorpf & Scherer, 1983; Jammer & Schwartz, 1986; Kiecolt-Glaser & Greenberg, 1983; Newton & Contrada, 1992; Weinberger et al., 1979). Generally, whereas repressors are more responsive, indicated by their physiological responses to threatening stimuli, than are low-anxious individuals, repressors report that their bodily responses are at levels similar to those of low-anxious individuals. Second, although any emotional stimulus can evoke nondomi-

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Table 1  
*Weinberger's Two-Factor Operationalization of Repression*

Anxiety	Defensiveness	
	Low	High
Low	Low anxious	Repressor
High	High anxious	Defensive high anxious

nant as well as dominant emotions and both can be encoded in memory (e.g., Bower & Cohen, 1982; Clark, 1982), when faced with stimuli connoting threat, repressors encode dominant rather than nondominant emotions associated with the event (e.g., R. D. Hansen & Hansen, 1988; C. H. Hansen, Hansen, & Shantz, 1992). One implication of repressors' discrete appraisal of emotional stimuli concerns their later memory failures of negative emotional memories (Davis, 1987; Davis & Schwartz, 1987). Overall, these studies are consistent with a theoretical conceptualization of repression serving as a defense against threatening stimuli and emotions; however, a similar pattern of results has been obtained for positive emotional stimuli.

Asendorpf and Scherer (1983) observed that repressors displayed significantly higher pulse volume amplitudes, consistent with increased autonomic activity, and a tendency toward higher levels of self-reported anxiety and more facial activity, which judges perceived to display anxiety, in response to a humorous video episode than did low-anxious participants. According to current theory, there is no reason for repressors to be more reactive in response to positive stimuli. Similarly, C. H. Hansen, Hansen, and Shantz (1992) observed that repressors discretely appraised positive emotional stimuli; that is, repressors encoded dominant rather than nondominant emotions. For happy faces, repressors did not differ from nonrepressors in their perceptions of happiness (the dominant emotion), but repressors perceived them to be less fearful and less angry (nondominant emotions) than did nonrepressors (low-anxious, high-anxious, and defensive high-anxious participants). Furthermore, Davis (1987; Davis & Schwartz, 1987) observed that repressors recalled significantly fewer positive childhood experiences than did nonrepressors (low-anxious and high-anxious participants). Davis (1990) argued that repressors' less elaborate processing of both negative and positive emotional stimuli results in later memory failures. This explanation implies that repressors encode negative emotional events in the same manner as they do positive emotional events but does not explain why nonthreatening or positive emotional events would trigger this encoding mechanism.

Thus, although the current notion of repression clearly identifies various consequences of repressive personality, there are gaps in this conceptualization. First, this view fails to explain the underlying motivation for repressive behavior. Researchers have identified who repressors are based on what they do—repressors are defensive individuals who report to feel low levels of anxiety—but not why they do it (i.e., why only repressors avoid negative or threatening emotional events; cf. Baumeister & Cairns, 1992). Second, the current conceptualization of re-

pression focuses primarily on the characteristics of the person and fails to describe the circumstances in which people would choose to avoid threatening or negative emotional events (cf. Lewin, 1936). In other words, when—under what conditions—do repressors avoid emotional stimuli? Third, the current conceptualization fails to explain evidence suggesting that repressors strongly react to, discretely appraise, and have difficulty recalling positive emotional events, as well as negative emotional events. The current conceptualization of repression gives no reason to avoid positive emotional events. Fourth, although there is no reason to believe that repression is a gender-specific personality characteristic, several researchers have conducted single-gender studies (e.g., Asendorpf & Scherer, 1983; Davis, 1987; Davis & Schwartz, 1987; Newton & Contrada, 1992; Weinberger et al., 1979). These gender-specific samples limit the external validity of their results.

The model we propose extends the current conceptualization of repression in that it specifies both motivation for and situational determinants of repressive personality. In an attempt to address these concerns, we propose that repressors are dispositionally hypersensitive to negative and positive emotional events; that is, they, regardless of valence, are more responsive to emotional events than are nonrepressors. Only under specific conditions, however, does repressors' heightened responsiveness to both negative and positive emotional events motivate them to use a perceptual defense. Repressors will psychologically distance themselves from an emotional event only when they appraise it as a negative or a positive emotional event that threatens their self-evaluation (cf. Carver & Scheier, 1981; Tesser, 1988).

Failure performance feedback that threatens participants' self-evaluation motivates repressors to distract themselves from their emotional reactions. However, success performance feedback can provide motivation for repressive behavior. For example, repressors' heightened responsiveness can be experienced as aversive if they perceive that the feedback is inconsistent with their self-concept. Repressors, as defined by the Byrne (1964) scale, engaged in "selective exposure" (e.g., Festinger, 1957) in that they spent more time looking at paintings consistent with their choices than did sensitizers (Olson & Zanna, 1979). Furthermore, repressors' heightened responsiveness to positive emotional events can be experienced as aversive if they perceive that their arousal state may impair performance. For example, the mere presence of an audience has been demonstrated to impair or facilitate task performance as a function of whether the dominant response is well-learned, consistent with the necessary task behavior, or both (e.g., Geen, 1989; Zajonc, 1965). Newton and Contrada (1992) demonstrated that the presence of an audience elicited verbal-autonomic response dissociation from repressors when they were instructed to give a speech about their undesirable personality characteristics.

Both negative and positive emotional events, then, can threaten self-evaluation and, thus, elicit psychological distancing of self from the event. This motivation to repress exhibits itself in repressive behavior when repressors have the opportunity to avoid, simply not to think about, or dampen their responses to self-threatening emotional stimuli. For example, an emotional stimulus can occur within a context that provides the perceiver with a number of inputs—congruent, incongruent, or irrelevant to the stimu-

lus—to which he or she may attend. The person may process some inputs more fully than others. Although input context (e.g., the presence of irrelevant inputs) can alter repressors' as well as non-repressors' attention to or evaluation of the emotional event by increasing the difficulty of information processing—performance drops, for instance, when the number of irrelevant inputs increases (Shiffrin, 1976; cf. Srull, 1981; Srull, Lichtenstein, & Rothbart, 1985)—the stimulus complexity alone does not explain the repressors' motivation to attend to non-self-relevant information rather than self-relevant information. Repressors' hypersensitivity to the emotional event alters their attention because it provides the motivation to distance themselves from self-relevant information.

In summary, we propose that dispositional repressors are hypersensitive to both negative and positive emotional events, but they distance themselves from these events under specific conditions—namely, when the situation threatens their self-evaluation and provides the opportunity for them to distance themselves from the event. The following three experiments demonstrate repressors' hypersensitivity to negative and positive emotional events and the condition in which they distance themselves from a negative emotional event. Participants' cognitive attention to the event is assessed using an encoding task. *Encoding* refers to the cognitive process whereby an external stimulus is transformed into an internal representation. A person's attention, an integral part of encoding, determines the make-up of the representation (Kahneman, 1973; Posner, 1982). Consequently, factors that affect a person's attention when exposed to a stimulus—for example, the person's internal state or the situational context—affect his or her encoding of it (Anderson, 1985). A commonly used paradigm to measure encoding effects is to manipulate the context, introduce a learning task, and measure participants' recall of the task (e.g., Bower, Monteiro, & Gilligan, 1978). This methodology should show whether repressors are more responsive to both positive and negative emotional events by measuring whether they encode more of the stimulus items, as reflected by their recall of the information presented during the learning task. This proposed interactional model incorporates repressive personality and repressive social behavior and, thus, extends our current conceptualization of repression in that it addresses motivation and conditions in which repressors use a perceptual defense in response to negative and positive emotional events.

### Experiment 1: Dispositional Determinants: Repressors' Sensitivity to Self-Relevant Negative and Positive Emotional Events

Experiment 1 addresses the hypothesis that repressors will display heightened responsiveness to both negative and positive emotional events. Repressor and low-anxious participants were exposed to negative-performance feedback or positive-performance feedback that was self-relevant in that it directly involved the participants by evoking self-evaluation. Participants' cognitive attention to the event was assessed using an encoding task, which contained only emotion-stimulus items. According to the proposed model, repressors should be more attentive to emotion stimuli after receiving negative- or positive-performance feedback than should low-anxious participants. Al-

though the negative-performance feedback may threaten participants' self-evaluation, repressors should not distance themselves from the event because they do not have the opportunity to attend to non-self-relevant stimulus items; they are given the opportunity to process only information relevant to self-evaluation. Thus, repressors should recall more emotion-stimulus items than should low-anxious individuals, regardless of the valence of the performance feedback.

## Method

### Participants

Introductory psychology students volunteered to participate in a study designed to explore performance on several tasks that assess verbal ability. During group testing sessions, a total of 337 participants (202 women and 135 men) completed a shortened, 20-item version of the MAS (Bendig, 1956) and the MCSDS (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964). The experimenter established the selection criteria from individuals who participated in the first group session ( $N = 139$ ). According to their responses on the MAS and the MCSDS, the experimenter classified participants as repressors if they scored at or below the median on the MAS ( $Mdn = 6$ ) and above the median on the MCSDS ( $Mdn = 15$ ) or as low-anxious individuals if they scored at or below the median on the MAS and at or below the median on the MCSDS. Of the individuals who participated in the group testing sessions, 41% ( $N = 127$ ) of them met these criteria.<sup>1</sup> The experimenter contacted some of these individuals by telephone and scheduled an appointment with each participant who volunteered to participate in the laboratory session of the experiment. Of the laboratory participants ( $N = 58$ ), 3 were not included in the final sample because of equipment failure ( $n = 2$ ) or because the participant questioned the validity of the negative-performance feedback ( $n = 1$ ). The final sample included 29 repressors (22 women and 7 men) and 26 low-anxious participants (15 women and 11 men). Volunteers received partial course credit for their participation and were treated in accordance with the "Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct" (American Psychological Association [APA], 1992).

### Procedure

At a later session, the experimenter, blind to whether the participant was classified as either a repressor or a low-anxious individual, told the participant that the study was designed to explore and improve performance on analogy word tasks and that researchers have learned that performance on such tasks is related to intelligence. While alone in the laboratory, the participant responded to 25 ostensibly solvable analogy items. The experimenter randomly assigned the participant to a feedback condition, returned to the room, scored the participant's responses, and stated that the participant correctly solved either 5 of the 25 items (failure condition) or 20 of the 25 items (success condition). The feedback established the emotional context at encoding by eliciting either a negative or positive emotional reaction from the participant. An assessment of participants' emotional response to the feedback was taken at the end of the study.

The experimenter then told the participant that familiarity with words may account for performance at the analogy task and that the next task was designed to test that possibility. The experimenter left the

<sup>1</sup> A post hoc breakdown of the 337 participants revealed 91 repressors (33 men and 58 women), 71 low-anxious individuals (38 men and 33 women), 88 high-anxious individuals (35 men and 53 women), and 87 defensive high-anxious individuals (29 men and 58 women).

room and the participant indicated on a 7-point scale ranging from *not at all* (0) to *extremely* (6) how familiar he or she thought the average University of Georgia student was with each of 24 positive-emotion words (e.g., proud, active, happy) and 24 negative-emotion words (e.g., nervous, distressed, sorry; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988; Watson & Tellegen, 1985). So as not to make the rating task self-relevant, participants rated how familiar they thought the average student was with the words rather than how familiar the participant was with the words. The familiarity task was intended to allow the emotion that was elicited in participants to guide their attention to the words.

Afterward, the participant listed all the emotion words from the list that he or she could bring to mind. This free-recall task assessed the participant's encoding of the event, the rationale being that the emotional context affects participants' attention to and recall of the stimulus words. Only emotion words were included in the encoding task to focus participants' attention on the emotional aspects of the event. In other words, participants were not given the opportunity to process nonemotional information, nor were participants aware that their free-recall was to be tested. The encoding task assessed participants' cognitive attention after receiving the performance feedback.<sup>2</sup>

Participants then responded to a number of evaluation items intended to assess specific cognitive and emotional reactions to the analogy task and to the free-recall task. First, participants indicated on a 10-point scale ranging from *not at all* (0) to *extremely* (9) how difficult they found the analogy task to be; how important luck and ability were in accounting for their performance on the analogy task; and how pleased they were with their score. Second, participants indicated on a 10-point scale ranging from *not at all* (0) to *extremely* (9) how difficult they found the free-recall task to be, the extent to which their thoughts were distracted from the task, the extent to which they were distracted by thoughts of their performance on the analogy task, and how pleased they were with their performance on the free-recall task. Third, after recalling the kinds of feelings that were elicited in them when the experimenter told them how they performed on the analogy task, participants indicated the extent to which they felt each of 24 positive-emotion words (e.g., proud, active, happy) and 24 negative-emotion words (e.g., nervous, distressed, sorry; Watson et al., 1988; Watson & Tellegen, 1985) on a 6-point scale ranging from *very slightly* or *not at all* (1) to *extremely* (6). The experimenter then queried the participant about any suspicions he or she had concerning the procedure and provided a full explanation of the experiment.

### Results and Discussion

An initial disposition (repressor vs. low-anxious) by gender (male vs. female) multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) on participants' recall of the emotion and nonemotion words did not reveal a significant main effect for gender,  $F(2, 50) = .46$ , nor did gender significantly interact with disposition,  $F(2, 50) = .20$ . These analyses suggest that gender was not confounded with disposition and did not influence participants' recall of the emotion and nonemotion words. Thus, gender was not included in the remaining analyses.

As predicted, repressors correctly recalled more emotion words than did low-anxious participants during the free-recall task. A Disposition (repressor vs. low-anxious)  $\times$  Feedback Condition (failure vs. success) analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed a main effect for disposition,  $F(1, 51) = 5.46$ ,  $p = .023$ . Repressors correctly recalled significantly more emotion words ( $M = 13.21$ ,  $SD = 5.21$ ) than did low-anxious participants ( $M = 10.19$ ,  $SD = 3.99$ ) during the free-recall task, suggesting that repressors encoded more of the negative and the positive emo-

tional event than did low-anxious participants. No other effects were significant in this analysis.<sup>3</sup>

During the encoding task, participants indicated how familiar they thought the average university student was with each of the emotion words. The false consensus effect suggests that such ratings can reflect their personal choices (e.g., Ross, Greene, & House, 1977). Thus, differences on this measure address the alternative hypothesis that repressors were initially different from low-anxious participants. A Disposition (repressor vs. low-anxious)  $\times$  Feedback Condition (failure vs. success) ANOVA on participants' familiarity ratings of the emotion words did not reveal a main effect for disposition,  $F(1, 51) = .03$ , or a significant Disposition  $\times$  Feedback Condition interaction,  $F(1, 51) = .94$ . Because repressors' responses were not different from those of low-anxious participants, repressors' familiarity ratings do not explain their performance on the free-recall task.

To assess participants' reactions to various aspects of the experiment, a number of evaluation items were administered after the free-recall task. Even though these items rely on participants' ability to recall how they felt or what they were thinking at various points during the experiment, the items provide useful information concerning the impact of the feedback manipulation and whether repressors differed from low-anxious individuals in their assessment of the experiment. A Disposition (repressor vs. low-anxious)  $\times$  Feedback Condition (failure vs. success)  $\times$  Mood Rating (positive vs. negative) ANOVA revealed a Feedback Condition  $\times$  Mood Rating interaction,  $F(1, 51) = 113.8$ ,  $p < .0005$ . Success condition participants reported more positive emotion ( $M = 3.15$ ,  $SD = .71$ ) and less negative emotion ( $M = 1.68$ ,  $SD = .51$ ) than did failure condition participants ( $M = 2.09$ ,  $SD = .68$  and  $M = 2.72$ ,  $SD = .71$ , respectively). Furthermore, a Disposition (repressor vs. low-anxious)  $\times$  Feedback Condition (failure vs. success) MANOVA on participants' reactions to the analogy task revealed a significant effect only for feedback condition,  $F(4, 47) = 103.7$ ,  $p < .0005$ . Univariate tests revealed that failure condition participants found the analogy task to be more difficult ( $M = 7.32$ ,  $SD = 1.18$ ) than did success condition participants ( $M = 5.97$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ),  $F(1, 50) = 11.1$ ,  $p = .002$ ; failure condition participants believed that ability was more important ( $M = 5.97$ ,  $SD = 1.36$ ) in accounting for their performance than did success condition participants ( $M = 4.80$ ,  $SD = 2.02$ ),  $F(1, 50) = 6.4$ ,  $p = .014$ ; and failure condition participants reported that they were less pleased ( $M = .96$ ,  $SD = 1.43$ ) with their scores than did success condition participants ( $M = 7.55$ ,  $SD = .91$ ),  $F(1, 50) = 410.2$ ,  $p < .0005$ . Thus, the performance feedback appeared to successfully

<sup>2</sup> In Experiment 2, we included a recognition task to control for the possibility that repressed response rather than encoding variability contributed to task performance.

<sup>3</sup> Although participants' scores represented the number of words they correctly recalled, a main effect for disposition, revealing the same pattern of results, was obtained when all words recalled were included,  $F(1, 51) = 6.93$ ,  $p = .011$ . Furthermore, an analysis including type of word recalled (positive vs. negative) as a within-subjects factor revealed that repressors recalled more emotion words than did low-anxious participants during the free-recall task,  $F(1, 51) = 5.46$ ,  $p = .023$ , and word type did not significantly interact with the other factors.

alter participants' mood and performance attributions. Repressors' reported response to the feedback did not significantly differ from that of low-anxious individuals.

Because repressor and low-anxious individuals respond similarly to items on the MAS—that is, these individuals report to experience low levels of anxiety—repressors are not expected to differ from low-anxious individuals on items assessing self-reported mood. The model, however, does propose that repressors' attention to emotional events differs from that of low-anxious individuals, reflecting their heightened sensitivity to emotional events. A Disposition (repressor vs. low-anxious)  $\times$  Feedback Condition (failure vs. success) MANOVA on participants' responses to items assessing their reactions to the free-recall task revealed a significant main effect for disposition,  $F(4, 48) = 3.8$ ,  $p = .01$ , but no significant two-way interaction,  $F(4, 48) = .54$ . Univariate tests revealed that repressors found the free-recall task to be less difficult ( $M = 6.38$ ,  $SD = 1.70$ ) than did low-anxious individuals ( $M = 7.38$ ,  $SD = 1.2$ ),  $F(1, 51) = 7.0$ ,  $p = .011$ , and repressors were less distracted during the task ( $M = 4.52$ ,  $SD = 2.30$ ) than were low-anxious individuals ( $M = 5.92$ ,  $SD = 1.96$ ),  $F(1, 51) = 6.1$ ,  $p = .017$ . Thus, these data suggest that, as predicted, repressors' performance during the free-recall task may be associated with their attentiveness to the task and that repressors' performance was not associated with global repression of response.

The data from Experiment 1, then, extend earlier work addressing repressors' responses to positive and negative emotional stimuli. Asendorpf and Scherer (1983) suggested that repressors' increased autonomic response to a positive-emotional video episode was a methodological artifact (i.e., an order effect). This experiment, with regard to participants' cognitive attention to a positive emotional event, does not support their discussion. Because feedback condition was a between-subjects variable, the possibility that treatment order contributed to the effect is ruled out. Rather, Experiment 1 suggests that repressors were more responsive to the negative and the positive emotional events than were low-anxious individuals. This experiment, however, does not address whether repressors' autonomic responsiveness to positive events differs from that of low-anxious participants because psychophysiological measures were not included. Also, high-anxious and defensive high-anxious participants were not included in this study. Thus, we are unable to rule out the possibility that participants' defensiveness is responsible for the results.

### Experiments 2 and 3: Situational Determinants of Repressive Behavior

Experiments 2 and 3 address the second parameter of the model, the conditions under which repressors distance themselves from emotional events. According to the proposed model, repressors should distance themselves when the situation is threatening to their self-evaluation and when it provides the opportunity for them to attend to and process self-relevant and non-self-relevant information. Specifically, when the situation presents cues relevant to self-evaluation as well as those irrelevant to self-evaluation, repressors distance themselves from the event by dividing their attention among the types of cues. In addition to the negative per-

formance and positive performance feedback conditions, Experiment 2 included both a no-feedback control condition and an encoding task to which nonemotion words were added to give repressors the opportunity to attend to and process emotion and nonemotion words. The negative performance feedback provides the component of self-evaluation, whereas the nonemotion words provide the opportunity for distancing. After receiving negative performance feedback, a self-threatening event, repressors should be less attentive to emotion words when nonemotion words are included in the encoding task than are low-anxious participants. After receiving positive performance feedback, a self-enhancing event, repressors should be more attentive to emotion words when nonemotion words are included in the encoding task than should low-anxious participants. After receiving no performance feedback, repressors should be as attentive to emotion words in the encoding task as low-anxious participants.

Experiment 3 included an instructional set following the negative performance feedback, which established whether the encoding task was relevant to the performance feedback. Participants were instructed to go on to a different task, which dissociated the encoding task from the negative performance feedback (different context), or to a similar task designed to explore why participants performed poorly on the analogy task, which associated the encoding task with the negative performance feedback (same context). For the different-context condition, repressors should recall more emotion words in the encoding task than do low-anxious individuals, whereas for the same-context condition, repressors should recall fewer emotion words in the encoding task than do low-anxious individuals. Furthermore, Experiment 3 controlled for dispositional defensiveness by including repressor, low-anxious, high-anxious, and defensive high-anxious participants.

### Experiment 2: Complex Negative and Positive Emotional Events

#### Method

**Participants.** Introductory psychology students volunteered to participate in this study. At a group testing session, 396 participants completed a shortened, 20-item version of the MAS (Bendig, 1956) and the MCSDS (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964), along with a number of scales that are not pertinent to this study. According to participants' responses on the MAS, the experimenter identified participants who scored at or below the median ( $Mdn = 6$ ).<sup>4</sup> The experimenter then contacted some of these participants by telephone and scheduled an appointment with each person who volunteered for the laboratory session of the experiment. Of the 74 laboratory participants, 8 were not included in the final sample because of equipment failure ( $n = 2$ ) or because they questioned the validity of the negative performance feedback ( $n = 6$ ). The final sample consisted of 66 participants who were randomly assigned to one of the three experimental conditions. According to participants' responses on the MCSDS, the experimenter classified participants as repressors (28 women and 8 men), those who scored above the median on

<sup>4</sup> A post hoc breakdown of the 396 participants revealed 118 repressors (41 men and 77 women), 81 low-anxious individuals (44 men and 37 women), 104 high-anxious individuals (47 men and 57 women), and 93 defensive high-anxious individuals (35 men and 58 women).

the MCSDS ( $Mdn = 14$ ), or as low-anxious individuals (10 women and 20 men), those who scored at or below the median on the MCSDS. Volunteers received partial course credit for their participation and were treated in accordance with the "Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct" (APA, 1992).

**Procedure.** At the laboratory session, the experimenter, who was blind to the participant's classification, told the participant that the study was designed to explore and improve performance on analogy word tasks and that researchers have learned that performance on such tasks is related to intelligence. As in Experiment 1, while alone in the laboratory, the participant responded to 25 ostensibly solvable analogy items. The experimenter randomly assigned the participant to one of the feedback conditions, returned to the room, scored the participant's responses, and stated that the participant correctly solved either 5 of the 25 items (failure condition) or 20 of the 25 items (success condition), or the participant received no feedback about his or her performance (control condition). The feedback established the emotional context at encoding by eliciting either a negative or positive emotional reaction from the participant, whereas the no-feedback condition served as the control.

The experimenter then told the participant that familiarity with words may account for performance on the analogy task. The experimenter left the room, and the participant indicated on a 7-point scale ranging from *not at all* (0) to *extremely* (6) how familiar he or she thought the average University of Georgia student was with each of 16 positive- and 16 negative-emotion words (Watson & Tellegen, 1985) and 32 nonemotion words (e.g., swift, interstate). Although the instructions for the familiarity task were the same as in Experiment 1, the 64 stimulus items were presented individually on the monitor of a Zenith computer. The computer's clock measured the amount of time the participant devoted to this task. Afterward, the participant listed all the words from the list that he or she could bring to mind. This free-recall task assessed the participant's encoding of the event, the rationale being that the emotional context affects participants' attention to and recall of the stimulus words. Nonemotion words were included to assess the participant's attention to different types of stimuli. Again, the computer's clock measured the amount of time the participant devoted to the free-recall task.

The participant then saw a number of words displayed individually on the computer screen. For each word, the participant indicated whether he or she recognized the word as one of the words from the familiarity task. Of the 64 words included in this recognition task, 8 positive- and 8 negative-emotion words and 16 nonemotion words were randomly selected from the familiarity task, whereas the remaining words (8 positive- and 8 negative-emotion words and 16 nonemotion words) were new items. The experimenter then returned to the room, queried the participant about any suspicions he or she had concerning the procedure, and provided a full explanation of the experiment.

## Results and Discussion

An initial Disposition (repressor vs. low-anxious)  $\times$  Gender (male vs. female) MANOVA on participants' recall of the emotion and nonemotion words did not reveal a significant main effect for gender,  $F(2, 61) = .68$ , nor did gender significantly interact with disposition,  $F(2, 61) = 1.37$ . These analyses suggest that gender was not confounded with disposition and did not influence participants' recall of the emotion and nonemotion words. Thus, gender was not included in the remaining analyses.

As predicted, repressors' recall of the emotion words was affected by the type of performance feedback they received. A Disposition (repressor vs. low-anxious)  $\times$  Feedback Condition

(failure vs. success vs. none)  $\times$  Stimulus Word (emotion vs. nonemotion) mixed-model ANOVA revealed a three-way interaction,  $F(2, 60) = 3.41$ ,  $p = .040$  (see Figure 1). Simple effects analyses revealed that after receiving failure feedback, repressors recalled fewer emotion words than did low-anxious participants,  $F(1, 60) = 4.14$ ,  $p = .046$ ; however, after receiving positive feedback, repressors recalled more emotion and fewer nonemotion words than did low-anxious participants,  $F(2, 60) = 5.35$ ,  $p = .007$ . For the control condition, during which participants received no performance feedback, participants did not differ in their recall of emotion words, but repressors recalled more nonemotion words than did low-anxious participants,  $F(2, 60) = 6.46$ ,  $p = .003$ .<sup>5</sup> Thus, when the encoding task contained relevant (emotion words) and irrelevant (nonemotion words) information, repressors were less attentive to emotion words after receiving negative performance evaluations but more attentive to emotion words after receiving positive performance evaluations than were low-anxious participants.

Repressors' performance on the free-recall task was not associated with their spending more time learning or attempting to recall those words, their assessment of how familiar university students are with the emotion and nonemotion words, or their being more distracted during the recall task. Repressors did not differ from low-anxious individuals in the overall amount of time they devoted to the familiarity and free-recall tasks,  $F(1, 60) = .22$ , nor did they differ in the amount of time they devoted to the tasks across conditions,  $F(2, 60) = .52$ . Although all participants reported that university students are more familiar with the emotion words than the nonemotion words,  $F(1, 60) = 95.74$ ,  $p < .0005$ , repressors did not differ from low-anxious individuals in their assessment of students' familiarity with the emotion or nonemotion words,  $F(1, 60) = .21$ , nor did repressors' ratings of the words differ from those of low-anxious participants' across conditions,  $F(1, 60) = .53$ . Furthermore, repressors reported a tendency to be less distracted ( $M = 2.17$ ,  $SD = 1.42$ ) during the free-recall task than did low-anxious individuals ( $M = 3.07$ ,  $SD = 1.74$ ),  $F(1, 60) = 3.61$ ,  $p = .062$ , suggesting that repressors' performance on the free-recall task was not associated with their globally distracting themselves from the task.

Although we cannot identify participants' decision-making criteria during the free-recall task, we included a recognition task to control for the possibility that repressed response rather than encoding variability contributed to their task performance. Participants' responses during the recognition task were analyzed, using signal detection theory techniques (Green & Swets, 1974), to explore whether they were more willing to report the presence or absence of the stimulus words (response

<sup>5</sup> An analysis including type of word recalled (positive vs. negative vs. nonemotion) as a within-subjects factor revealed the same pattern of results. Univariate tests of the significant Disposition  $\times$  Feedback  $\times$  Word Type interaction,  $F(4, 116) = 2.49$ ,  $p = .047$ , revealed that repressor and low-anxious participants differed across feedback condition in their recall of emotion and nonemotion words,  $F(2, 60) = 3.11$ ,  $p = .052$ , but not in their recall of positive- and negative-emotion words,  $F(2, 60) = 2.13$ ,  $p = .128$ . Thus, whether the emotion word was positive or negative did not contribute significantly to the results.

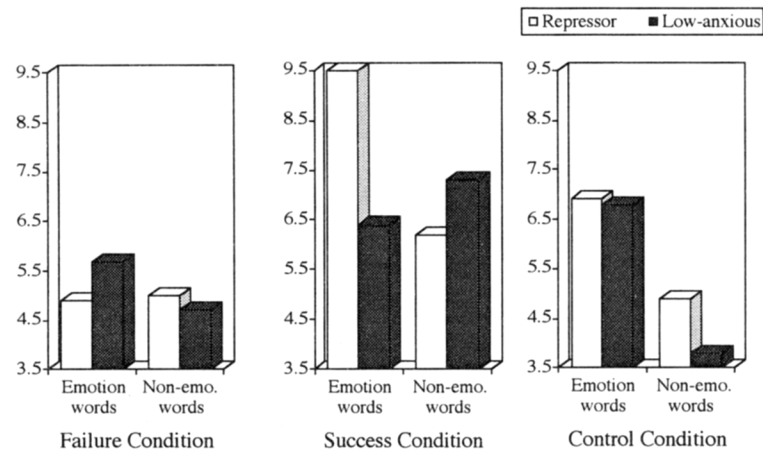


Figure 1. Mean number of emotion and nonemotion (Non-emo.) words recalled by repressor and low-anxious participants as a function of feedback condition.

criterion or  $c$ ) and to assess their subjective level of stimulation in response to the stimulus words (sensitivity or  $d'$ ). These two indices ( $c$  and  $d'$ ), which are believed to be independent of each other, were computed using participants' hit rate ( $H$ ), the proportion of correctly recognized stimulus words previously seen, and false alarm rate ( $F$ ), the proportion of incorrectly recognized stimulus words not previously seen.

Response criterion (Ingham, 1970; Macmillan & Creelman, 1990) is the average of the transformed  $z$  scores associated with the hit rate and the false alarm rate, as follows:  $c = -0.5[z(H) + z(F)]$ . A  $c$  value less than zero suggests a liberal response bias toward responding yes, such that a person tends to make more hits as well as more misses, whereas a  $c$  value greater than zero suggests a conservative response bias toward responding yes, such that a person tends to make fewer hits as well as fewer misses. Planned comparison contrasts, using participants' response criterion scores for the emotion and nonemotion words, revealed that although repressor and low-anxious participants' response criterion for the emotion and nonemotion words did not differ between the success and failure feedback conditions,  $F(1, 60) = 1.43, p = .236$ , the response criterion did differ between the emotion feedback conditions (success and failure conditions) and the control condition,  $F(1, 60) = 5.32, p = .025$  (see Figure 2). After receiving failure or success feedback, repressors displayed a more liberal response criterion for emotion words and a more conservative response criterion for nonemotion words than did low-anxious participants; however, after receiving no performance feedback (the control condition), participants did not differ in their response criterion for emotion words, but repressors displayed a more liberal response criterion for nonemotion words than did low-anxious participants. These data suggest that after receiving failure or success performance feedback, repressors' criterion for detecting emotion words was more liberal than that for low-anxious individuals, which does not support a response inhibition explanation.

To assess participants' subjective level of stimulation in response to the stimulus words, we computed sensitivity scores. Sensitivity (Green & Swets, 1974) is the difference between the  $z$  scores asso-

ciated with the hit rate and the false alarm rate [ $d' = z(H) - z(F)$ ]. A  $d'$  value of zero suggests that the person is not sensitive to the stimulus, whereas a  $d'$  value greater than zero suggests that the person is sensitive to the stimulus. Planned contrasts, using participants' sensitivity scores for the emotion and nonemotion words, revealed no significant contrast involving type of word, suggesting that participants did not differ in their subjective level of stimulation in response to emotion and nonemotion words. However, there was a trend in the data, suggesting that repressor and low-anxious participants' sensitivity to the words differed between the emotion feedback conditions (success and failure conditions) and the control condition,  $F(1, 60) = 3.49, p = .067$  (see Figure 3). After receiving failure or success feedback, repressors showed less sensitivity to the stimulus words than did low-anxious participants; however, after receiving no performance feedback (the control condition), repressors showed more sensitivity to the stimulus

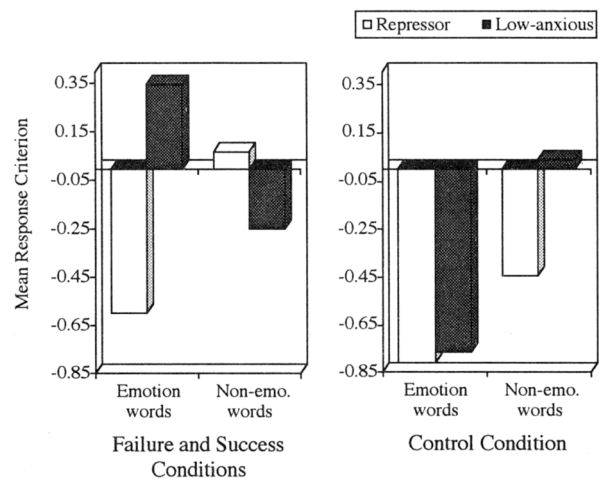


Figure 2. Repressor and low-anxious participants' response criterion for emotion and nonemotion (Non-emo.) words as a function of feedback condition.

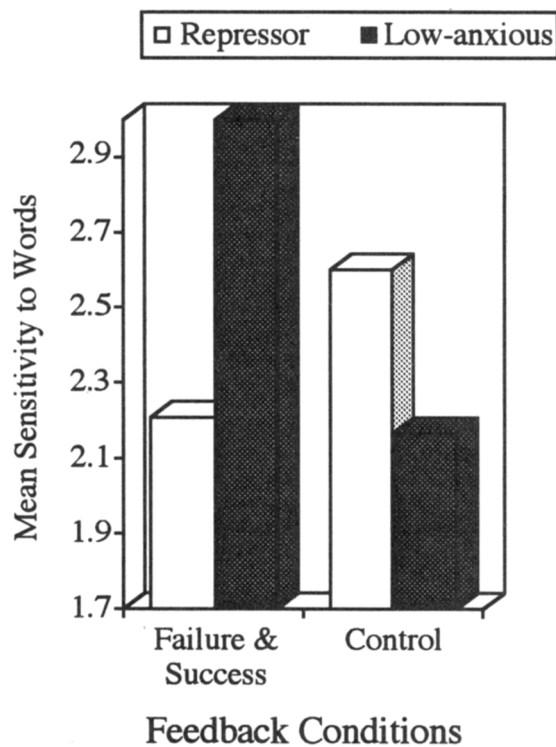


Figure 3. Repressor and low-anxious participants' sensitivity to the stimulus words as a function of feedback condition.

words than did low-anxious participants. These data are consistent with the proposed model in that after receiving no performance feedback, repressors were hypersensitive to the signals, whereas after receiving performance feedback intended to elicit an emotion, repressors were hyposensitive to the signals. However, these data failed to differentiate the signal participants saw (emotion vs. non-emotion word) or the feedback they received (success vs. failure). Thus, repressors' response criterion scores suggest that response bias does not explain repressors' performance on the free-recall task, and their sensitivity scores present evidence consistent with the model.

In summary, as predicted by the model, because of their dispositional hypersensitivity to emotional events, repressors distance themselves when the situation is threatening to their self-evaluation and also provides the opportunity for them to attend to and process self-relevant and non-self-relevant aspects of the event. Bonanno and Singer (1993) argued that repressor personality style involves "perception-focused processing,"—that is, that repressors focus their attention away from the self and toward the field and fail to notice their own personal response (e.g., Bonanno, Davis, Singer, & Schwartz, 1991). Furthermore, this perceptual cognitive disposition interacts with motivational factors. These data are consistent with the notion that repression involves selective attention processes or perceptual defenses. In addition, from these data we may identify the conditions under which repressors are motivated to turn their attention away from their personal response, namely when that response is threatening to the self.

In Experiment 2, we assessed participants' attention to an emo-

tional event (the positive or negative performance feedback) by exposing them to a list of nonemotion and emotion stimulus items and later testing their recall of those words. The performance feedback established the context at encoding in that participants were led to believe that the task involving these stimulus items was relevant to and could possibly explain their performance on the analogy task. After receiving self-threatening negative performance feedback, repressors and low-anxious individuals should approach the words differently. Repressors should be motivated to distance themselves from the emotion words and should recall fewer emotion words than do low-anxious individuals. The data of Experiment 2 support this argument.

### *Experiment 3: Same and Different Contexts for a Negative Emotional Event*

In the failure feedback conditions of Experiments 1 and 2, repressors had the motivation to distance themselves from a negative emotional event; that is, they perceived the event to threaten self-evaluation. These repressors distanced themselves, however, only in Experiment 2, in which they were given the opportunity to attend to non-self-relevant information. If our thinking about repressors' motivation is correct, then even if repressors are provided with the opportunity to distance themselves from a negative emotional event, they will distance themselves only when the negative emotional event threatens their self-evaluation.

In Experiment 3, we manipulate the context established at the time of encoding by including a different-context condition. After receiving failure performance feedback, participants are given the opportunity to attend to and process self-relevant and non-self-relevant stimulus items—that is, emotion and nonemotion stimulus items are included in the encoding task—but participants are led to believe that the encoding task is not relevant to their performance on the analogy task. Because participants are led to believe that the encoding task is not relevant to their self-evaluation, their motivation to distance themselves from the emotional event should be lessened. Thus, repressors should recall more emotion words than should low-anxious individuals, as we saw in Experiment 1, because it is the interaction of motivational and situational factors that contributes to repressors' distancing themselves from a negative emotional event. In Experiment 1, after receiving failure performance feedback, participants were led to believe that the encoding task was relevant to their performance on the analogy task, but they were given the opportunity to process only information relevant to self-evaluation; that is, only emotion stimulus items were included in the encoding task. Although the negative performance feedback might have threatened participants' self-evaluation, repressors did not have the opportunity to distance themselves from the event, and, thus, repressors recalled more emotion stimulus items than did low-anxious individuals. Repressors displayed heightened responsiveness to a negative emotional event.

On the other hand, the same-context condition of Experiment 3 provides repressors with both the opportunity and motivation to distance themselves from a negative emotional event. As in the different-context condition, after receiving failure performance feedback, participants are given the opportunity to attend to and



process self-relevant and non-self-relevant stimulus items; that is, emotion and nonemotion stimulus items are included in the encoding task. In contrast to the different-context condition, however, participants are led to believe that the second task is relevant to their failed performance on the analogy task. Thus, repressors should be motivated to distract themselves from their emotional reactions to the analogy task and, therefore, should recall fewer emotion words from the encoding task than should low-anxious individuals. Repressors should display lessened responsiveness to a negative emotional event, as we saw in the failure condition of Experiment 2. In Experiment 2, after receiving failure performance feedback, participants were led to believe that the encoding task was relevant to their performance on the analogy task, and they were given the opportunity to attend to and process self-relevant and non-self-relevant stimulus items. Consequently, repressors recalled fewer emotion words from the encoding task than did low-anxious individuals.

### Method

**Participants.** At a group testing session, introductory psychology students ( $N = 53$ ) volunteered to complete a shortened, 20-item version of the MAS (Bendig, 1956) and the MCSDS (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964). The experimenter then scheduled an appointment with each of them for the laboratory session of the experiment. The final sample consisted of 53 participants who were randomly assigned to one of the two experimental conditions. According to participants' responses on the MAS and the MCSDS, the experimenter classified participants as repressors (5 women and 9 men) if their scores were at or below the median on the MAS ( $Mdn = 7$ ) and above the median on the MCSDS ( $Mdn = 15$ ), low-anxious (5 women and 12 men) if their scores were at or below the median on the MAS and the MCSDS, high-anxious (9 women and 6 men) if their scores were above the median on the MAS and at or below the median on the MCSDS, or defensive high-anxious (4 women and 3 men) if their scores were above the median on the MAS and the MCSDS. Volunteers received partial course credit for their participation and were treated in accordance with the "Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct" (APA, 1992).

**Procedure.** At the laboratory session, the experimenter told the participant that the study was designed to explore and improve performance on analogy word tasks and that researchers have learned that performance on such tasks is related to intelligence. While alone in the laboratory, the participant responded to 25 ostensibly solvable analogy items. The experimenter randomly assigned the participant to one of the context conditions, returned to the room, scored the participant's responses, and stated that the participant correctly solved 5 of the 25 items. The feedback established an emotional event.

The experimenter then told the participant that familiarity with words may account for his or her performance on the analogy task and that the next task was designed to test that possibility (same context), or the experimenter told the participant that he or she would now begin a new task (different context). These instructions established the context at the time of encoding. The experimenter left the room, and the participant indicated on a 7-point scale ranging from *not at all* (0) to *extremely* (6) how familiar he or she thought the average University of Georgia student was with each of 16 positive- and 16 negative-emotion words (Watson & Tellegen, 1985) and 32 nonemotion words (e.g., *swift*, *interstate*).

Afterward, the participant listed all the words from the list that he or she could bring to mind. This free-recall task assessed the participants' encoding of the emotional event, the rationale being that the instructional set—same or different context—affects participants' attention to and recall of the stimulus words. The experimenter then queried the participant

about any suspicions he or she had concerning the procedure and provided a full explanation of the experiment.

### Results and Discussion

An initial Disposition (repressor vs. low-anxious vs. high-anxious vs. defensive high-anxious)  $\times$  Gender (male vs. female) MANOVA on participants' recall of the emotion and nonemotion words did not reveal a significant main effect for gender,  $F(2, 41) = .91$ , nor did gender significantly interact with disposition,  $F(6, 84) = .64$ . These analyses suggest that gender was not confounded with disposition and did not influence participants' recall of the emotion and nonemotion words. Thus, gender was not included in the remaining analyses.

As predicted, repressors' recall of the emotion words was affected by the instructional set they received prior to the encoding task. A Disposition (repressor vs. low-anxious vs. high-anxious vs. defensive high-anxious)  $\times$  Context Condition (same vs. different)  $\times$  Stimulus Word (emotion vs. nonemotion) mixed-model ANOVA revealed a three-way interaction,  $F(3, 42) = 12.28, p = .038$ .<sup>6,7</sup> For the purposes of the current study, we did not predict that low-anxious, high-anxious, and defensive high-anxious participants would differ in the number of items they recalled across context and word conditions,  $F(2, 30) = .78$ . Thus, for the simple effects analyses, low-anxious, high-anxious, and defensive high-anxious participants were combined to form a nonrepressor group. Although a two-group division such as this creates unequal cell sizes, the multivariate Box's M test was not significant, suggesting that variance matrices were similar (the analysis can tolerate violation of one of the assumptions and still be considered to be robust). A significant three-way interaction,  $F(1, 46) = 34.25, p = .038$ , revealed that repressors recalled more emotion words than did nonrepressors in the different-context condition but that repressors recalled fewer emotion words than did nonrepressors in the same-context condition (see Figure 4).<sup>8</sup> Repressors and nonrepressors did not differ in their recall of nonemotion words.

<sup>6</sup> Three participants were dropped from the analysis because of their extreme scores on the free-recall measure of nonemotion words; their  $z$  scores were above 2.3. Although dropping these participants did not alter the pattern of results, it did allow the data to meet the multivariate homogeneity of dispersion matrices assumption for the ANOVA concerning the repeated measures.

<sup>7</sup> An analysis including type of word recalled (positive vs. negative vs. nonemotion) as a within-subjects factor revealed the same pattern of results. Univariate tests of the significant Disposition  $\times$  Feedback  $\times$  Word Type interaction,  $F(6, 84) = 2.10, p = .032$ , revealed that participants did not differ across feedback conditions in their recall of positive- and negative-emotion words,  $F(3, 42) = 2.17, p = .106$ . Thus, whether the emotion word was positive or negative did not contribute significantly to the results.

<sup>8</sup> An analysis isolating repressor and low-anxious individuals revealed a significant Disposition (repressor vs. low-anxious)  $\times$  Context (same vs. different)  $\times$  Word (emotion vs. nonemotion) interaction,  $F(1, 26) = 4.82, p = .037$ , suggesting that repressors recalled fewer emotion words than did low-anxious individuals in the different-context condition but that repressors recalled more emotion words than did low-anxious individuals in the same-context condition.

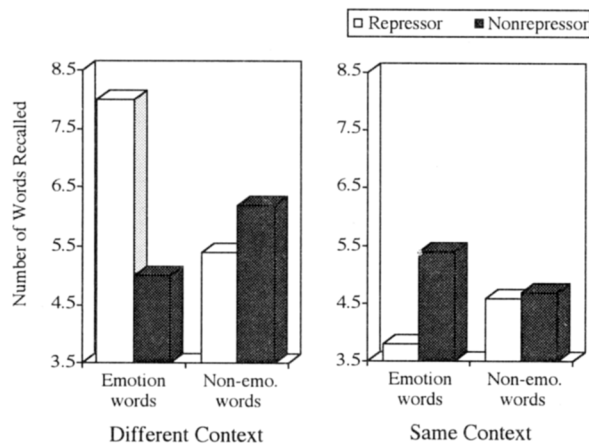


Figure 4. Mean number of emotion and nonemotion (Non-emo.) words recalled by repressors and nonrepressors as a function of context condition.

Thus, after receiving negative performance evaluations, repressors were more attentive to emotion words when they believed that the encoding task was not relevant to their performance but less attentive to emotion words when they believed that the encoding task was relevant to their performance than were nonrepressors. Furthermore, consistent with Experiments 1 and 2, repressors' performance on the free-recall task, which assessed their encoding of the emotion and nonemotion words, was not associated with their assessment of university students' familiarity with the emotion and nonemotion words. Repressors did not differ from nonrepressors in their ratings of how familiar university students were with the emotion or nonemotion words,  $F(1, 47) = .09$ , nor did repressors' ratings of the words differ from nonrepressors' across conditions,  $F(1, 46) = .31$ .

### General Discussion

The data from these experiments suggest that repressors under certain circumstances are dispositionally disposed to encode more emotional details of negative and positive events than are low-anxious participants but that repressors' encoding of the emotional aspects of negative events becomes impaired when the situation threatens their self-evaluation and provides the opportunity to distance themselves from self-relevant information. Furthermore, both men and women participated in each of these experiments, and the analyses revealed that neither gender nor the combined influence of gender and disposition significantly contributed to participants' performance, which strengthens the external validity of these results. This research, directed at exploring repressors' reactions to emotional events, has implications for personality and emotion theory. The failure to encode all of the emotional information—perhaps a coping strategy to reduce anxiety—may be an important component of repression. Repressors' responsiveness to emotional events motivates them, under certain circumstances, to alter their attention so that they may distance themselves from self-relevant information.

The findings of this research provide insights into the processes of repression with regard to repressive personality and repressive behavior. Repressors' dispositional hypersensitivity to negative and positive emotional events provides the underlying motivation for why they engage in repressive behavior, and the situational context determines when repressors would choose to use such a strategy. In these experiments we assessed participants' attention to an emotional or nonemotional event by measuring their recall of a list of stimulus items, which included both emotion and nonemotion words. In Experiment 1, repressive personality facilitated recall—repressors recalled 30% more emotion words than did low-anxious individuals—suggesting that in response to an emotion-eliciting event repressors were hypersensitive and more attentive to self-relevant information. Although Experiment 1 did not control for the possibility that repressors were better, overall, at the recall task than were low-anxious individuals, repressors' rate of recall for emotion words in Experiment 1 ( $P = 27\%$ ) was similar to their rate of recall for emotion words in the success feedback condition of Experiment 2 ( $P = 30\%$ ) and in the different-context condition of Experiment 3 ( $P = 25\%$ ). Thus, the data indicate that repressive personality facilitated recall for emotion words rather than for overall recall.

The commonality across these conditions of the experiments is that none provides the motivational and situational conditions for repressors to distance themselves from the emotional event. The success feedback conditions of Experiments 1 and 2 used a self-enhancing event rather than self-threatening event. The failure feedback condition of Experiment 1 presented only self-relevant information (emotion words) during the encoding task so that participants did not have the opportunity to attend to non-self-relevant information. The instructional set used in the different-context condition of Experiment 3 made the encoding task not related to the self-threatening event, which lessened repressors' motivation to distance themselves. In these experiments, repressors' dispositional hypersensitivity was demonstrated by their attention to self-relevant information.

In Experiments 2 and 3, repressive personality contributed to which types of information were encoded and later recalled (see Figures 1 and 4). Repressors recalled more emotion than nonemotion words, and they recalled more emotion words than did low-anxious individuals in response to a self-enhancing, positive emotional event (success condition in Experiment 2) and to a self-threatening, negative emotional event from which they were not given the opportunity to distance themselves (different-context condition of Experiment 3). Thus, repressors' dispositional hypersensitivity was demonstrated both within-subjects—they recalled more emotion than nonemotion words—and between-subjects—they recalled more emotion words than did low-anxious individuals. On the other hand, repressive behavior was elicited in response to a negative emotional event that threatened their self-evaluation (failure and same-context conditions of Experiments 2 and 3); repressors recalled fewer emotion words than did low-anxious individuals but did not differ from low-anxious individuals in their recall of nonemotion words. Thus, when nonemotion stimuli were available, repressors differed both within- and between-subjects in the type of stimuli encoded, not in the overall amount of infor-

mation encoded. Furthermore, the data from Experiment 2 suggest that such encoding differences were not due to repressors' spending more time with the stimulus items or to their devoting more time to the recall task.

The data from these experiments provide supportive evidence for the first parameter of the proposed model concerning repressors' hypersensitivity to negative and positive emotional events and address the second parameter, in part, concerning the specific conditions under which repressors distance themselves from these events. Experiments 2 and 3 demonstrate the conditions under which repressors distance themselves from negative emotional events. Further research is needed to demonstrate when male and female repressors will choose to avoid or distance themselves from positive emotional stimuli when their heightened responsiveness to the event psychologically threatens the self.

In summary, we propose that dispositional repressors are hypersensitive to both negative and positive emotional events, but they distance themselves from these events under specific conditions—namely, when the situation threatens their self-evaluation and provides the opportunity for them to distance themselves from the event. Thus, repressors do not avoid all negative or all positive emotions in all situations. This proposed interactional model incorporates repressive personality and repressive social behavior and, thus, extends our current conceptualization of repression in that it addresses motivation and conditions in which repressors use a perceptual defense in response to negative and positive emotional events.

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