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ANGER AND REPRESSSION:

A TEST OF A MODEL

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
of the degree of Master of Clinical Psychology,
Department of Psychology,
Australian National University.

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis reports my original work, that no part of it has been previously accepted or presented for the award of any degree or diploma by any University, and to the best of my knowledge no material previously published or written by another person is included, except where due acknowledgement is given.

[Signature]
This thesis describes original research carried out by the author in the Department of Psychology at the Australian National University during 1986.
I would like to express my appreciation to the following people for their valuable contributions at various stages of this research. Dr Don Byrne provided formal supervision and encouragement during this study. Dr Penny Davis of Sydney University offered access to her own, as yet, unpublished findings. Others in the ANU Psychology Department who gave willingly were: Dr Mark Dickerson who was enthusiastic about my early interest in the topic; Dr Coby Brinkman who assisted with advice concerning physiological measurement; Drs Jacqui Holman and Val Braithwaite who gave moral support, friendship and humour; Mr Martin Schaefer and Mr Neville Whitworth who offered technical expertise and advice and established the test laboratory; Mrs Jess Giddings, Mrs Eunita Smith and Mrs Carol Beames provided constant assistance and encouragement throughout the research. Also, to my friends: John Raivars who brought the gifts of laughter and relaxation when these were most needed; Lex Beardsell who acted as an associate during subject selection; Jenny Ninham who verified hand-scored physiological data and was draft editor; and, Sue Butcher, Leonie Kinsella and Tony Corless who assisted in the final stages of manuscript preparation.
ABSTRACT

Anger or more specifically, repression, suppression or difficulties in coping with anger has achieved prominence in the literature of psychological medicine, as contributing or etiological factors in hypertension, coronary heart disease and cancer. In past studies, 'repression', operationally defined by a pattern of high defensiveness and low trait anxiety, has been linked consistently with elevated physiological arousal during stressful laboratory tasks, despite low self-reported disturbance. This model for operationalizing repression has also been used in studies which demonstrate that repression is associated with restricted access to memories from childhood and that this is particularly so for negative emotional experiences. The current research was designed to extend the previously mentioned model of repression to anger, to test whether similar effects to those noted in research into repression of anxiety also exist in anger repression. Defensiveness and trait anger were used to operationalize repression of anger and five groups of subjects participated in free-recall of angry, anxious and happy experiences from childhood. Heart rate, skin conductance level and facial skin temperature were monitored throughout baseline and recall, and subjective involvement during recall was assessed. Mixed-sex samples comprised eight 'repressors of anger', 10 'true-low angry' and 10 'true-high angry' subjects, eight traditionally-defined 'repressors of anxiety', and six individuals who repressed both emotions; the latter two groups being included to permit comparison of repressors of anger with repressors of anxiety and to allow for evaluation of possible additivity of effects in repression. Results revealed no group differences in physiological, subjective arousal, or access to affective memories. Explanations for the absence of effects similar to those in repression of anxiety were sought, both in terms of methodology and conceptual issues examining differences between the emotions of anger and anxiety. The latter suggested that repression of these emotions may not operate in a similar manner.
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