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ANGER AND REPRESSION:

A TEST OF A MODEL

CAROL HALL

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.

Concettell

This thesis describes original research
carried out by the author in the
Department of Psychology at the
Australian National University during
1986.

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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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