

Coherence Psychology Institute

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Contact: Robin Tivic, CPI Director of Development
robin.tivic@coherenceinstitute.org

Process for Erasing Emotional Conditioning Independently Identified by Psychotherapists and Neuroscientists

OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA – A process identified by psychotherapists in their therapy sessions, and subsequently discovered independently by neuroscientists in lab studies with animals, has now been used by neuroscientists to erase a fear reaction in human subjects. In the new study, reported in the January 7, 2010 issue of *Nature*, researchers at New York University successfully used the brain's built-in process for modifying established neural circuits, known as reconsolidation.

In their 1996 book *Depth Oriented Brief Therapy*, psychotherapists Bruce Ecker and Laurel Hulley described a process discovered through observations of therapy sessions in which lasting cessation of unwanted emotional reactions occurred. The subsequent emergence of what appears to be the same fundamental process in research by neuroscientists was a completely independent development. "The brain's proven ability to eliminate the memory circuits maintaining a learned emotional reaction could herald a major advance in the field of psychotherapy," foresees Ecker, co-director of the Coherence Psychology Institute along with Sara K. Bridges of the University of Memphis.

Memory research by psychologists and neuroscientists throughout the 20th century seemed to imply that all emotional conditioning and subsequent reactions were indelibly imprinted for a lifetime. The brain seemed to possess no way of unwiring the extraordinarily durable memory circuits that maintain emotional learnings, such as expectations of rejection or disaster, fear of insects, or traumatic memory of being attacked. The only possible therapeutic strategy appeared to be various counteractive techniques that only suppress such learnings temporarily.

A complete reversal of that view began with a few reconsolidation experiments published by neuroscientists between 1997 and 2000. "It's clear now that emotional conditioning can be erased after all," explains Ecker. However, it wasn't until 2004 that details of the process were

clarified enough by neuroscientists to make it apparent that this was the same process previously detected clinically. The latest results in *Nature* establish the corroboration even more strongly. The striking correspondence between the reconsolidation research and the clinical findings has been a main focus of Ecker's writing and conference talks since 2006.

When an ingrained emotional learning has been successfully dissolved, symptoms of behavior, mood and thought based in it simply cease, and relapse is impossible. According to Ecker, "When we began using our methodology to focus therapy on this process, we became much more consistent in facilitating breakthroughs with clients in a small number of sessions. We hear the same from other therapists now using this approach."

In Ecker's view, "The new neuroscience of memory reconsolidation, combined with the versatile methodology we developed for facilitating exactly that process, has potential to remove much of the ambiguity in psychotherapy regarding how existing, unwanted responses undergo lasting change. I hope to see a much higher level of effectiveness become the norm in the psychotherapy field as we keep learning how to apply and teach this combined clinical and neurological knowledge."

The methodology developed by Ecker and Hulley is known in the psychotherapy field as Coherence Therapy. Like many other systems of therapy, it is emotionally deep and involves a client-therapist relationship rich in empathy and trust. In addition, it uses a methodology focused on the process that induces reconsolidation. It has been effective in dispelling depression, low self-esteem, general anxiety, panic attacks, disturbed attachment patterns, anger, sexual problems, procrastination, compulsive behaviors and many others.

The Coherence Psychology Institute welcomes enquiries regarding collaboration, articles, interviews, lectures, and other educational information.

For enquiries or to receive future informational emails, please email Robin Ticic at CPI:

robin.ticic@coherenceinstitute.org

Links:

Coherence Therapy website:

<http://www.coherencetherapy.org/>

Directors of the Coherence Psychology Institute:

<http://www.coherencetherapy.org/contact.htm>

Bibliography with free downloads:

<http://www.coherencetherapy.org/discover/bibliography.htm>

The neuroscience of Coherence Therapy:

<http://www.coherencetherapy.org/discover/ct-neuro.htm>

Mileposts in establishing Coherence Therapy:

<http://www.coherencetherapy.org/mileposts.htm>

Online interview of Bruce Ecker:

http://www.mentalhelp.net/poc/view_doc.php?type=doc&id=29647&cn=91

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