Memory Reconsolidation

The Innate, Core Process of Transformational Change in Diverse Psychotherapies

Bruce Ecker, LMFT

Transformational Change: Defining Markers

- Symptom cessation
  Behaviors, emotions, thoughts and somatics disappear.

- Non-reactivation
  A specific emotional activation is no longer triggered.

- Effortless permanence
  Non-recurrence continues without counteractive or preventative measures.

Two Kinds of Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Counteractive, incremental change</th>
<th>Transformational, liberating, profound change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Partial symptom reduction</td>
<td>Total elimination of symptom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effort to maintain</td>
<td>Effortless to maintain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relapses occur</td>
<td>Permanent, no relapses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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New Learning That Competes With Old Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NEW LEARNING</th>
<th>OLD LEARNING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>↓ NEW NEURAL CIRCUITS</td>
<td>↓ OLD NEURAL CIRCUITS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>↓ NEW BEHAVIOR, MOOD, THOUGHTS, SOMATICS</td>
<td>↓ OLD BEHAVIOR, MOOD, THOUGHTS, SOMATICS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Incremental, counteractive, unstable change

New Learning That Dissolves Old Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NEW LEARNING</th>
<th>OLD NEURAL CIRCUITS</th>
<th>NEW NEURAL CIRCUITS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>↓</td>
<td>↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NEW BEHAVIOR, MOOD, THOUGHTS, SOMATICS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Transformational change via memory reconsolidation process

Emotional Learnings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHEMA</th>
<th>SYMPTOMS GENERATED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• If I feel sad or hurt or scared I'll be attacked and humiliated.</td>
<td>• Suppressed emotions, avoids intimacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Dad never talking to me or playing with me means I'm too unworthy to matter.</td>
<td>• Depression, self-devaluing, low self-esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• If I try for what I really want, the world will crush it, so I better not try for or even feel what I really want.</td>
<td>• Passivity, underachieving, emotional disconnection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Emotional learnings are known as...
- implicit schemas
- core beliefs
- mental models
- parts

EMOTIONAL CONDITIONING
EGO-STATE

Symptoms Dispelled in Therapy by the Memory Reconsolidation Process
- Aggressive behavior
- Agoraphobia
- Alcohol abuse
- Anger and rage
- Anxiety
- Attachment-pattern-based behaviors & distress
- Attention deficit problems
- Codependency
- Complex trauma symptomology
- Compulsive behaviors
- Couples’ problems of conflict / communication / closeness
- Depression
- Family and child problems
- Fidgeting
- Food / eating / weight problems
- Grief and bereavement problems
- Guilt
- Hallucinations
- Inaction/indecision
- Insomnia
- Low self-worth, self-devaluing
- Obsessive thoughts
- Panic attacks
- Perfectionism
- Post-traumatic symptoms / PTSD
- Procrastination / Inaction
- Psychogenic / psychosomatic pain
- Sexual problems
- Shame
- Undersachieving
- Voice / speaking problems

The Root Cause of Most Symptoms Is...
- memory.

Emotional learnings in implicit memory

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Case Example: Adrienne’s Panic Attacks

♦ Since early teens – baffling to her
♦ Now 34 – more intense and almost daily
  since starting work at a new job

Memory Reconsolidation Core Process for Transformational Change

1. Reactivate target schema
   as a conscious emotional experience

Adrienne’s Panic-Generating Emotional Learning

After becoming conscious and verbalized:

I am a harmful, dangerous person, and if I do anything that directly disturbs someone, it could gravely harm them or even kill them. So I've got to stay off to the side and never have any direct effect on anyone.

(Schema of insecure attachment)
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Memory Reconsolidation Core Process for Transformational Change

1. Reactivate target schema as a conscious emotional experience

2. Guide a contradictory experience. This juxtaposition unlocks (de-consolidates) the target schema’s memory circuits. (“Mismatch” / “prediction error” experience.)

Index Card for Adrienne

I am a harmful, dangerous person, and if I do anything that directly disturbs someone, it could gravely harm them or even kill them.

So I’ve got to stay off to the side and never have any direct effect on anyone.

(MINDFULNESS PRACTICE FOCUSED ON SCHEMA)

Memory Reconsolidation Core Process for Transformational Change

1. Reactivate target schema as a conscious emotional experience

2. Guide a contradictory experience. This juxtaposition unlocks (de-consolidates) the target schema’s memory circuits. (“Mismatch” / “prediction error” experience.)

3. Repeat contradictory experience in juxtaposition with target schema. This re-writes and erases target schema.

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Therapies of Transformational Change

Such as... AEDP
Coherence Therapy
EFT (both of them)
EMDR
Focusing
Gestalt Therapy
Hakomi
IFS
Imago
IPNB
NLP
SE
TIR

Emotional Brain

- Evolutionary neurobiology: Emotional learnings don’t fade out over time.
- Persistence of learnings is not “maladaptive.”
- Responses driven by emotional brain’s learnings are not “dysregulation.”
- Emotional learnings and the responses they drive are coherent.

Preparation for Core Process

A. Symptom identification.
   What / when: specific behaviors, emotions, thoughts, somatizations.

B. Retrieve underlying emotional schema.
   Implicit ➔ Explicit

C. Find contradictory experience.
Therapeutic Reconsolidation Process

A. Symptom identification
B. Schema retrieval
C. Find contradictory experience

1. Reactivate target schema
2. Evoke contradictory experience in juxtaposition
3. Repetitions of step 2

V. Verification of erasure

Case Example: Norina’s Anger & Resentment

✓ A. Symptom identification
✓ B. Schema retrieval
✓ C. Find contradictory experience

✓ 1. Reactivate target schema
✓ 2. Evoke contradictory experience in juxtaposition
✓ 3. Repetitions of step 2
✓ V. Verification of erasure

Psychotherapy Integration: Memory Reconsolidation as the Core Process in Diverse Systems of Therapy

◆ It’s the brain’s only known process and only known type of neuroplasticity that eliminates an emotional learning and produces transformational change.

◆ Its required steps of process can be observed and verified in each clinical case of transformational change.

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Memory Reconsolidation as a Framework for Psychotherapy Integration

Same core process is evident in AEDP, Coherence Therapy, EFT, EMDR, IPNB

...and maybe all other therapies of transformational change?

Case Example: NLP for Thomas’s PTSD Flashbacks

✓ A. Symptom identification
✓ B. Schema retrieval
✓ C. Find contradictory experience
✓ 1. Reactivate target schema
✓ 2. Evoke contradictory experience in juxtaposition
✓ 3. Repetitions of step 2
✓ V. Verification of erasure

Convergence of clinical observations and memory research

1995 2004 2012
Memory reconsolidation

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- Memory reconsolidation FAQ, info videos
- Free articles, case examples, bibliography
- Online short courses on Coherence Therapy
- Coherence Therapy Practice Manual
- DVDs of sessions by Bruce Ecker, LMFT
- Long-distance training

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How to use memory reconsolidation—the brain’s innate process of profound change—in diverse psychotherapies

by
Bruce Ecker
Robin Ticic
Laurel Hulley

"One of the most important psychotherapy books of our generation."
Ricky Greenwald, PsyD
Author of Child Trauma Handbook

"A significant 'breakthrough' book....I recommend it most highly!"
Michael F. Hoyt, PhD
Author of Brief Psychotherapies: Principles and Practices

"A major contribution....Even the most seasoned clinician will be inspired to learn from these masters."
Patricia Coughlin Della Selva, PhD
Clinical Professor of Psychiatry, UNM School of Medicine

Research breakthrough guides clinical breakthroughs

Unlocking the Emotional Brain
Eliminating Symptoms at Their Roots Using Memory Reconsolidation

Unlocking the Emotional Brain, like some earlier classics, draws from, adapts, and integrates the very best of the best currently available concepts and techniques into a powerful and accessible psychotherapeutic method....[P]sychotherapists of all sorts will find many resources which will enhance as well as ease their work.
Babette Rothschild, MSW, LCSW
Author of The Body Remembers: The Psychophysiology of Trauma and Trauma Treatment

In this book filled with both groundbreaking neuroscience and provocative case examples, Bruce Ecker, Robin Ticic and Laurel Hulley describe how to tap into the reconsolidation process in therapy. If you want to know what's happening that is new in psychotherapy, this is the place to start.
Jay Lebow, PhD
Clinical Professor of Psychology at Northwestern University and editor of Family Process

A refreshing and audacious book that throws open the doors and blows the dust from the corners of clinical practice....[O]ffering a 'virtually theory-free' methodology..., the authors add a startlingly effective process to the repertoire of every clinician [and] build powerful alliances across clinical approaches...
Ann Weiser Cornell, PhD
Author of Focusing in Clinical Practice: The Essence of Change

Imagine the founders of diverse therapy methodologies discussing how they achieve deep, lasting, transformational change and agreeing it's due to one basic process....[T]he authors develop an approach that is theory-free, nonpathologizing, empathic, experiential...and that honors therapy while not cramping the therapist's unique contribution—an integrationist's dream!
Hanna Levenson, PhD
Author of Brief Dynamic Therapy

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