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BRAIN

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The fMRI images of the subjects' brain activity revealed strong neurobiological evidence for the key concept of the experiment: People can mentally suppress unwanted memories with brain mechanisms similar to those used when stopping overt physical actions.

In other words, the brain systems — including the prefrontal cortex — that allow one to stop an arm motion midstream can be used to halt the retrieval of an unwanted memory.

And instead of stopping activity in brain regions linked with physical action, however, these control processes reduce brain activation in the hippocampus, a structure known to be involved in storing conscious memories of the past. It was this reduction in hippocampal activity that led the subjects to forget the rejected experiences.

"The people who suppressed their memories the best had the most activation in the prefrontal cortex," Gabrieli said. "Hence, the hippocampus and the act of suppression had an opposite connection."

Freud and beyond

Anderson and Gabrieli's latest findings provide strong evidence that Freud was on to something 100 years ago when he proposed the existence of a "voluntary repression mechanism" that erases unwanted memories.

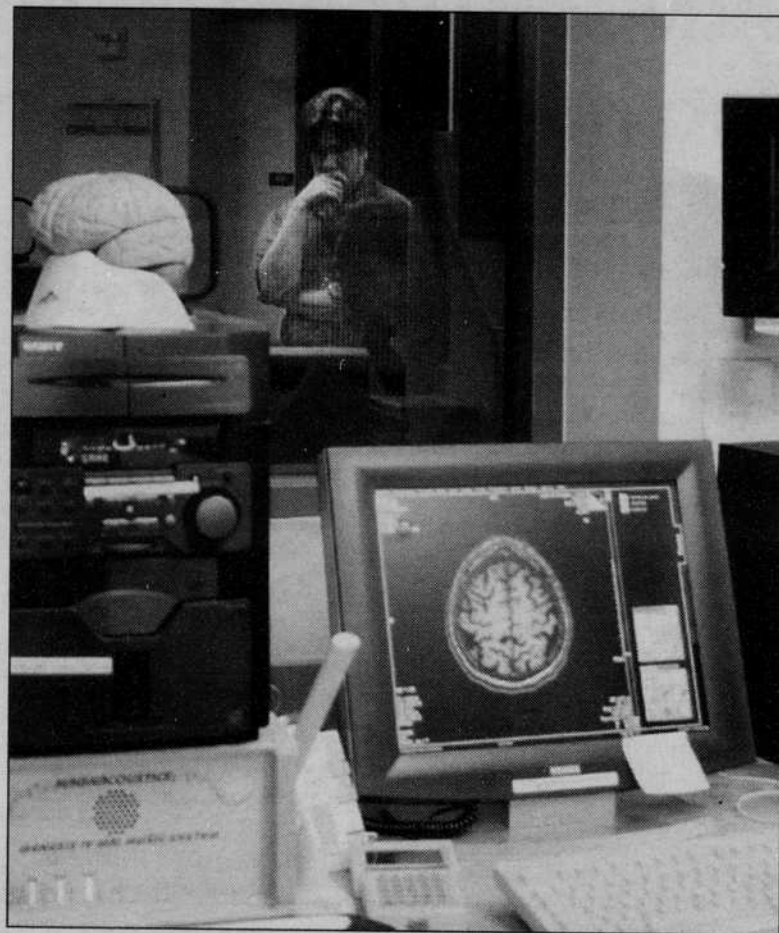
Although he has studied Freud's research and theories about the brain, Anderson said his main interest is in how people actively control their memories and what parts of the brain are involved.

Matthew Erdelyi, a researcher at Brooklyn College in New York, has an extensive background in experimental psychology and Freudian theory. Erdelyi said Freud was first a neuroscientist, one who understood that the brain's subsystems could work against each other. Anderson's findings, Erdelyi added, show how modern technology can take century-old science a step further.

"This is very much the kind of picture Freud would feel at home with," Erdelyi said.

Since Freud, the idea of memory repression has been a vague and highly controversial idea, in part because it has been difficult to imagine how such a process could occur in the brain.

Elizabeth Loftus, a distinguished professor of social ecology at the University of California-Irvine, has been a leading voice in the debate of false-memory theory, which states that people are



Tim Bobosky Photographer

Associate Professor Michael Anderson watches Scott Watrous, an MRI Technologist, operate an electromagnetic brain scanner on a subject Monday morning. Anderson's experiments reveal that people can voluntarily suppress memories.

susceptible to suggestion, or false memories. This theory conflicts with the relevance of Anderson's experiment to traumatic cases because people might be able to fabricate their memories.

"This seems like very carefully done work, but it has little to do with traumatic experiences," she said. "People are simply misinterpreting the results of this study."

Erdelyi, who has been interviewed about Anderson's findings by European media, agreed.

"I think this is groundbreaking as a first step," he said. "But I don't think it's going to be the last."

Traumatic potential

By providing a way to map and investigate cognitive and brain processes in the laboratory, Anderson has encouraged a better understanding of neural mechanisms by which people deal with traumatic memories.

For more than a decade, University psychology Professor Jennifer Freyd has studied the process of forgetting traumatic episodes. Through her

studies of people's childhood experiences, Freyd said she has found her own evidence of memory suppression in those who were abused at home.

"If the abuser was a caregiver, the abused was much more likely to forget the experience," she said. "It's actually helpful at times to forget so they can stay close to the abuser."

Although Anderson's experiment did not address traumatic memories, Freyd said the connection with brain mechanisms is extremely important.

"My best guess is there are different ways people can forget, and Michael Anderson's is one way," she said.

Considering his study focused on the suppression of relatively neutral events, Anderson stressed that future research is needed to examine the suppression of emotional experiences.

"I hope this sets off a new wave of research on how people actively forget and cope with obtrusive memories," he said. "This is really just the beginning."

Contact the business/science/technology reporter at caronalarab@dailyemerald.com.

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CELLULAR

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through quite a few business "peaks and valleys" as it grew to form a wholesale division and offer more than 300 cell phone accessories for most makes and models.

Miller said the EMU Board will remain active in its search for a "valuable" replacement to fill the void as Totally Cellular continues to pay a minimum rent of \$1,100 per month for the remainder of its three-year lease.

"We're doing our research with an open mind," he said. "If we can find a good service that can help students on campus, that's what we'll present to the board."

Contact the business/science/technology reporter at caronalarab@dailyemerald.com.

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