



Letter to the Editor

Memory sin: Misattribution, false recognition, and feeling of *déjà-vu* when reading peers' contributions


In an article published in 2001, Schacter and Dodson described one of seven memory sins, misattribution, which is “implicated in false or illusory recognition of episodes that never occurred” (p. 1385). Unfortunately, scientists are not immune to such tendencies. In this new paper, we reply to Jeronimus and Riese's letter (this issue), in which the authors criticized a recent contribution of ours (Bianchi and Laurent, in press) and expressed a feeling of “*déjà-vu*” about it.

In our paper (Bianchi and Laurent, in press), we suggested that depression could explain the intriguing gender-dependent relationship between neuroticism and cortisol reported in past research, given that the melancholic and atypical subtypes of depression have been associated with opposite neuroendocrine profiles (e.g., hypercortisolism versus hypocortisolism, respectively), and shown to have gender-specific prevalence. Our work illustrated the importance of assessing and controlling for depression in neuroticism research, within a precisely-delimited research topic. Remarkably, Jeronimus and Riese did not discuss at all our neuroendocrinological and epidemiological rationale in their letter. The authors talked of a *déjà-vu* regarding our paper but they obviously did not pay attention to what made our paper an original contribution.

In their critique, Jeronimus and Riese argue that adjusting for depression in neuroticism research is ill-advised because *depressive traits are part and parcels of neuroticism*. The authors' emphasis on the link between depressive traits and neuroticism is elusive to us given that we never referred to depressive traits in our work. Thus, it seems that the authors created themselves the argument that they then sought to invalidate, ascribing thoughts to us that we did not have. As put by Durkheim (1982), “experience has demonstrated all the dangers of this method which, by allowing one to construct in arbitrary fashion the systems under discussion, also allows one to triumph without difficulty over them” (p. 34).

We maintain that examining the impact of neuroticism on given outcomes without considering the current depressive state of the individual is a problem. Indeed, such an approach implies a risk of superfluously invoking personality (i.e., lifelong dispositions) to account for variations that may be imputable to transient symptoms. The examination of depression in neuroticism research is justified by the definitional, theoretical, and empirically-established links between the two constructs. Estimating the extent to which the neuroticism construct adds explanatory power to the depression construct is critical to further identifying the clinical usefulness of neuroticism.

Conceptual confusion is a constant risk in science. By recommending that depression and neuroticism be concomitantly examined, our aim was to help reduce that risk. While we welcome

contributions to our methodological reflections with great interest, we think that Jeronimus and Riese missed their target when dismissing our recommendations.

Conflict of interest

None declared.

Contributors

The two authors took part in the preparation of the article to a similar extent. The two authors have approved the final version of the article.

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