

**DEBRIEFING FORM**

**PROJECT TITLE: Shapes and Shocks: Learning & Attention Games (2022/3539, Rowlands)**

**Thank you very much for participating in this experiment!**

Our research explores the relationship between memory suppression and emotional regulation. In particular, this project focuses on whether suppressing unpleasant memories is involved in regulating emotions during fearful tasks.

**Fear conditioning & fear extinction.** In this experiment, we initially asked you to learn which shape was associated with an electric shock. This procedure is known as “fear conditioning” or “fear learning”, whereby repeatedly reinforcing the link between a neutral object (e.g., a shape) and something unpleasant (e.g., an electric shock) leads to a fear of that neutral object alone. After this “fear learning”, we repeatedly showed you the same shape but *without* the electric shock. This is known as “fear extinction”, whereby you unlearn to associate an object with fear. Understanding this process is very important as the mechanism is thought to underlie exposure therapy – the gold-standard treatment for stress- and anxiety-related disorders.

**Memory suppression.** The work of our research group finds that you can actively stop the recall of unpleasant memories in response to reminders. This phenomenon is known as “memory suppression”. Research finds that repeatedly engaging in memory suppression renders memories more likely to be forgotten, and less emotional in nature. Recently, our lab has been exploring whether this memory suppression mechanism is involved in the fear extinction process described above. It may be that, when some people are unlearning fear associations, they may (consciously or unconsciously) suppress memories related to that fear (in this case, the memory of the electric shock). Such memory suppression may facilitate successful emotional regulation during these tasks and may hold important implications for exposure therapies.

**Disclosure.** To ensure that your behaviour in the task was uninfluenced by our theory, the task was framed as an attention and learning task, excluding specific theories of the role of memory suppression in fear extinction.

**If you have any questions about the research, please feel free to ask!**

Please feel free to contact me at Molly.Rowlands@mrc-cbu.cam.ac.uk at any time after the experiment, in case you have any questions about our research.