
Abstract:

The recent interest in neuroscientific psychodynamic research (‘Neuropsychoanalysis’) has meant that empirical findings are emerging which allow greater public scrutiny of psychodynamic concepts. However, Macmillan (1991) claims that the psychoanalytic cornerstone, ‘repression’, is a circular explanatory term and incapable of referring to a ‘real process’. This paper discusses Macmillan’s criticism and finds that repression is a coherent explanatory term and is not precluded from referring to real processes. Specifically, ‘neural inhibition’, triggered by social factors, can account for Freudian repression, without succumbing to circular explanation. Recent developments in neuroscience suggest that a plausible mechanism of inhibition exists, providing testable avenues for the ‘cornerstone’ of psychoanalysis. Evidence of the role of the frontal lobes, a brain area that appears to mediate the influence of social factors upon impulse control, demonstrates that repression is plausible within a dynamic neural framework.