The Torch

Edition 37

Long Cane Rally Throwback

We asked a few attendees of the previous year's Long Cane Rally to share their thoughts.

A group of Long Cane Rally participants walking with their white canes

I am happy to have been given the task of being the liaison from CTSB side. Handing out the T-shirts to participants and insuring that everybody boarded the bus before and after the rally was done. Being in contact with Noretta was great, I can tell she is a busy lady because we've never met before and only but briefly saw each other when the rally was done. - Sergil, CTSB

An older design of a Long Cane Rally TShirt

Trophies from a previous year's event

Participants with their guide dog and white cane

"We as Beacon very much loved the walking route as well as the location..very blind friendly.. the gifts out of this world.. eatables and bags highly appreciated.. The burgers fantastic worth waiting for..
Thanks for organising to the T... colours of sweaters very noticeable.. so much to mention Thx .. looking forward to the next event." - Beacon Club for the Blind

" Dit is beslis 'n hoogtepunt elke jaar vir ons leerders. Dit was heerlik.
Baie dankie aan "The John and Esther Ellerman Trust" vir die borg van die t-hemde en kos.
Dit word opreg waardeer." - Melani, Pionier Skool

What to Know About Repressed Emotions

Repressed emotions are feelings you unconsciously avoid. These are different from feelings you actively push aside because they overwhelm you. Repressed emotions can lead to health problems over time.

What Are Repressed Emotions?

Smiley faces

Some people express their emotions openly. Others tend to hide them. But hiding your emotions doesn't necessarily mean you're repressing them. There's a lot of debate about repressed emotions. There are also many definitions.

Repression usually refers to the tendency to avoid uncomfortable feelings. You unconsciously push painful feelings, thoughts, or memories out of your consciousness. This lets you forget them.

You may do this for fear of damaging your positive self-image. These are unprocessed emotions. But they can still affect your actions.

Repressed emotions can be a way to protect your mind from painful situations. This can happen to a child who is abused by a parent or caregiver. They might repress the memories of abuse and their emotions. They then become unaware or partly unaware of them. The abuse still affects them, though. It might cause relationship problems in adulthood.

What's more, some people have a tendency to unconsciously avoid negative feelings that threaten your self-image in all your experiences.

Or, you might see yourself as always in control of how you feel and try to avoid conversations where people talk about their troubles. These are repressive tendencies. You might unconsciously do this so you don't have to feel sadness or anxiety. Those feelings can make you feel like you're losing control.

You might've learned to repress your emotions if you were raised in a dysfunctional family. You learn how to communicate and control your emotions as a child. Dysfunctional families have members who haven't gotten help for things like:

- Fear
- Anger
- Pain
- Shame

They might also have problems like abuse, addiction, or mental illness. But no one talks about those problems. This leads to children and adults who repress their emotions and deny their own needs.

Repressed emotions can also lead to things like:

- Denying feelings
- Ignoring feelings
- Avoiding communication
- Avoiding touch
- Distrust

Suppression vs. Repression

Repressed emotions are not the same as suppressed emotions. Suppression happens when you actively push uncomfortable thoughts, feelings, or memories out of your consciousness. This is because you don't know what to do with them.

Some people call suppression shutting down. Sometimes this leads to numbing yourself with scrolling on your phone, watching TV, or doing any other activity so you don't have to feel your emotions.

This type of behavior can be temporary. You might do this in your workplace when you're frustrated with a coworker but you still have to work together and finish a project. You set aside your feelings because you don't really know what to do with them and then deal with them later at home.

Signs of Repressed Emotions

There isn't a lot of research that indicates that repressed emotions cause health problems.

But your overall emotional and mental health is directly linked to your physical health. Repressed anger or other negative emotions may be tied to a higher risk for things like:

- Depression
- High blood pressure
- Heart disease
- Digestive problems
- Infections
- Low energy
- Pain

You might also have problems in your relationships. You could have trouble:

- Saying what you need
- Facing conflict
- Feeling connected and intimate with others

How to Release Repressed Emotions

You might not realize that you repress your emotions. If you have trouble in your relationships or you're uncomfortable with negative feelings, these might be signs that you tend to unconsciously avoid them.

The best way to learn to take charge of your emotions is to see a licensed therapist. They can help you understand your feelings. They can also teach you ways to manage conflict and communicate better.

You can practice expressing yourself on your own, too. Try these tips alone at first and then with someone you trust. When you feel positive or negative emotions:

Say what you feel out loud in the moment.

Use "I" statements that help you own your feelings ("I feel sad" or "I feel angry").

Eventually practice with friends and acquaintances in moments of conflict.

Speak from your experience when you express your emotions. Don't blame the other person. Be ready and willing to hear their point of view.

Source: WEBMD

Do's and Don'ts When Interacting with a Person who is Blind

When speaking with a person who is blind

A blind person wearing sunglasses

DO identify yourself, especially when entering a room. Don't say, "Do you know who this is?"

DO speak directly to the individual. Do not speak through a companion. Unless they are hard of hearing, they can speak for themselves.

DO give specific directions like, "The desk is five feet to your right," as opposed to saying, "The desk is over there."

DO give a clear word picture when describing things to an individual with vision loss. Include details such as color, texture, shape and landmarks.

DO use their name when addressing them. This lets them know you are speaking to them, and not someone else in the room.

DON'T shout when you speak. They can't see but often have fine hearing.

DON'T be afraid to use words like "blind" or "see." Their eyes may not work, but it is still, "Nice to see you."

If you see a blind person who seems to be in need of assistance

DO introduce yourself and ask the person if he needs assistance.

DO provide assistance if it is requested.

DO respect the wishes of the person who is blind.

DON'T insist upon trying to help if your offer of assistance is declined.

If a blind person asks you for directions

DO use words such as "straight ahead," "turn left," "on your right."

DON'T point and say, "Go that way," or, "It's over there."

If you are asked to guide a blind person

DO allow the person you are guiding to hold your arm and follow as you walk.

DO move your guiding arm behind your back when approaching a narrow space so the person you are guiding can step behind you and follow single-file.

DO hesitate briefly at a curb or at the beginning of a flight of stairs.

DO tell the person you are guiding whether the steps go up or down.

DO allow the person you are guiding to find the handrail and locate the edge of the first step before proceeding.

DON'T grab the person you are guiding by the hand, arm, or shoulder and try to steer him.

DON'T grab the person's cane or the handle of a dog guide's harness.

DO refer to Sighted Guide Techniques for more information.

General guidelines

DON'T pet, feed, or distract a guide dog. They are not pets; they are working companions on whom a Blind person depends.

DO treat Blind people as individuals. People with visual disabilities come in all shapes, sizes, and colors. They each have their own strengths and weaknesses, just like everyone else.

Source: DHS

Are You Blind and Deaf to Your Feelings?

KEY POINTS

- The brain's emotional responses persist without sight or sound, illuminating innate processing.
- Plasticity in the brain allows it to adapt to sensory deprivation.
- The study results can inform interventions for sensory impairments.

Humans rely on the five senses to make sense of the world around us, including understanding our feelings and the feelings of others. But what if you do not have access to your senses? How do those who are blind or deaf organize sensory cues and create emotional responses? A recent study conducted by a team of researchers at the Social and Affective Neuroscience Group at IMT School for Advanced Studies in Lucca, Italy, found that our brain is wired to generate emotional meaning, even when we cannot see or hear. Our feelings are so powerful that even if you are blind and deaf, your brain can generate intense emotional responses.

Role of Sensory Inputs in Emotional Processing

The five senses play an important role in emotional processing, learning, and interpretation. Vision is dominant, with the visual cortex playing a vital role in identifying emotions and helping us navigate our own emotions and those of others. Audio stimuli also impact emotional processing, with examples such as beautiful music sparking joy or noisy environments causing frustration.

Mom and daughter

Emotions can also be influenced by our sense of taste and smell, with flavors and odors being linked to emotional memory recall. There are even imperceptible influences of human senses on emotion, like human chemosignals influencing behavior. Understanding how the senses impact emotion provides interesting insights into the wonders of the human brain and the significant impacts on behavior.

Investigating the Neural Representation of Emotional Experiences

The study conducted by the researchers at the Social and Affective Neuroscience Group and led by Giada Lettieri investigated how the brain's processing and interpretation of sensory input influences the neural representation of emotional experiences. Using functional magnetic resonance imaging, the research team examined brain activity in 50 deaf and blind as well as typically developed participants while exposing them to an emotional movie either in sound and visual, just sound, or just visual conditions.

The researchers also included a cohort of 124 independent participants who were asked to watch the same movie and track their emotional experiences outside of the brain scanner. This was done with the aim of predicting how the brain reacts to emotions such as amusement, fear, and sadness in individuals with and without sensory deprivation.

Findings: Insights Into the Brain's Response to Emotional Stimuli

Various important findings show that emotions are represented in the brain regardless of sensory experience and modalities. Firstly, the ventromedial prefrontal cortex was found to represent emotion categories regardless of the brain's interpretation of the input or the sensory channel or receptor type that was stimulated. This region stored an abstract

representation of emotion categories and showed consistent activity patterns for specific emotions like love or contempt across individuals with and without sensory deprivation.

Secondly, the activity of the posterior portion of the superior temporal cortex was decoded to track changes in emotional valence, meaning whether the emotion was determined to be good or bad, even in individuals lacking visual or auditory inputs since birth. However, the sensory experience affected how emotions were stored in the posterior portion of the superior temporal cortex, the back part of the brain, indicating that our senses help shape how emotions are represented.

Furthermore, regions like the mid-cingulate cortex, insula, somatomotor cortex, thalamus, hypothalamus, and caudate nucleus were better explained by affective dimensions like valence and arousal than by sensory input. The primary sensory areas preferentially represented emotions based on modality, with blind individuals showing higher fitting values in the early auditory cortex when exposed to auditory stimuli and deaf individuals showing higher fitting values in early visual areas when exposed to visual stimuli. This suggests that in the absence of input from one of the senses, the brain's primary sensory areas become more specialized and responsive to emotional information conveyed through the remaining intact senses. This reflects the brain's plasticity and ability to adapt to sensory deprivation.

The study showed that language plays a part in processing emotions, indicating that how we understand emotions in the ventromedial prefrontal cortex, the front part of the brain, might depend on word meanings. Also, they discovered that emotions are grouped in clear categories in one part of the brain, the ventromedial prefrontal cortex, and are more varied in another part, the left posterior portion of the superior temporal gyrus.

Beyond these findings, the study indicates that sensory experience, in general, rather than the specific sense itself, plays a significant role in how the brain organizes emotional information. Higher-order occipital regions encoded emotion categories similarly in sensory-deprived and typically developed individuals, suggesting that the brain constructs a framework for emotional representation independently of sensory experience. However, sensory inputs during development shape its functioning. Finally, the study acknowledged some limitations, including the small sample size, lack of affective ratings from congenitally blind and deaf participants, and the challenge of capturing real-time emotion reports in blind individuals. Despite these limitations, the study provided valuable insights into the neural representation of emotional experiences across sensory and modal domains.

Future Directions

Exploring the clinical implications of these findings could inform interventions and therapies for individuals with sensory impairments as well as those seeking to manage behaviors. Comparing the neural representations of emotions across different cultural backgrounds could provide insights into the universality versus cultural specificity of emotional processing. Exploring how cultural factors interact with sensory inputs to shape emotional experiences could enrich our understanding of emotional diversity.

Additionally, advanced neuroimaging techniques like electroencephalography or functional near-infrared spectroscopy could offer complimentary insights into the neural mechanisms underlying emotional processing, providing more data in a wider range of populations. This study sheds a hopeful light on our innate ability to navigate the world, even in the absence of certain sensory inputs, and provides an exciting foundation for future studies.

Source: Pcychology Today

Congratulations Graduates

Estelle Roos obtained her BA Honours - German at the University of Pretoria.

Shani Little obtained her Honours in Psychological Counselling at Unisa.

Nkoshinathi Mphumulo obtained his BA Social work at University of KZN.

Beneficiary News

Congratulations to **Pieter Engelbrecht** (eldest son of Pieter Engelbrecht) who recently qualified as a Masters Technician at BMW.

Congratulations to **Maria Barnado** who obtained her Education and development NCV LEVEL 4

THE END