Integrity or fraud …
or just
questionable research practices ?

Richard Gill

Original talk December 2012; slides updated March 2013; postscript July 2013

http://www.math.leidenuniv.nl/~gill

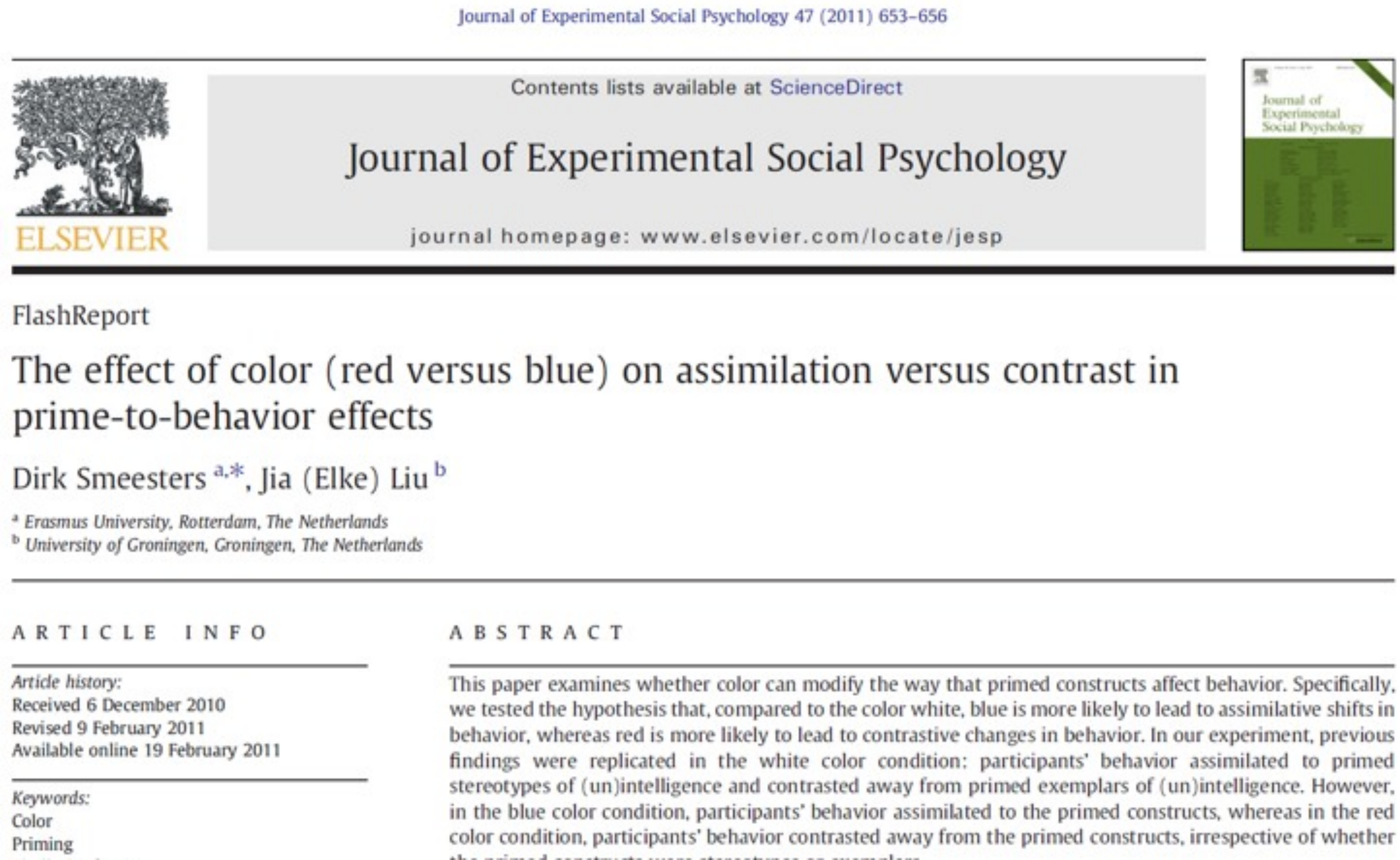
Two cases

- Smeesters affair
- Geraerts affair

Smeesters: closed
Geraerts: open, controversial

Smeesters

- August 2011: a friend draws attention of Uri Simonsohn (Wharton School, Univ. Penn.) to "The effect of color ... " by D. Smeesters and J. Liu.



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ELSEVIER

FlashReport

The effect of color (red versus blue) on assimilation versus contrast in prime-to-behavior effects

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ARTICLE INFO

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines whether color can modify the way that primed constructs affect behavior. Specifically, we tested the hypothesis that, compared to the color white, blue is more likely to lead to assimilative shifts in behavior, whereas red is more likely to lead to contrastive changes in behavior. In our experiment, previous findings were replicated in the white color condition: participants' behavior assimilated to primed stereotypes of (un)intelligence and contrasted away from primed exemplars of (un)intelligence. However, in the blue color condition, participants' behavior assimilated to the primed constructs, whereas in the red color condition, participants' behavior contrasted away from the primed constructs, irrespective of whether

- Simonsohn does preliminary statistical analysis indicating results are "too good to be true"

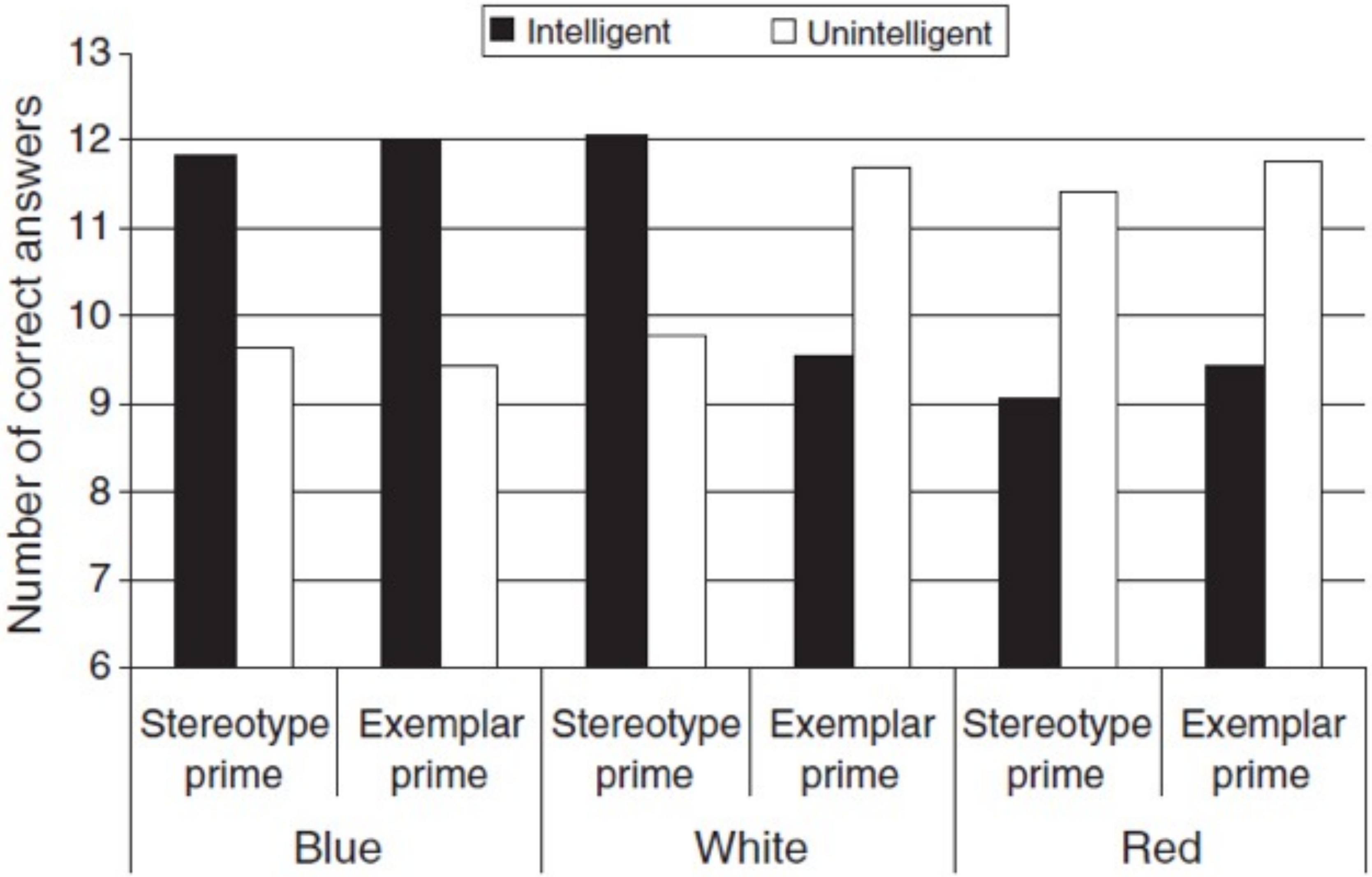


Fig. 1. Number of correct answers as a function of color, prime, and dimension.

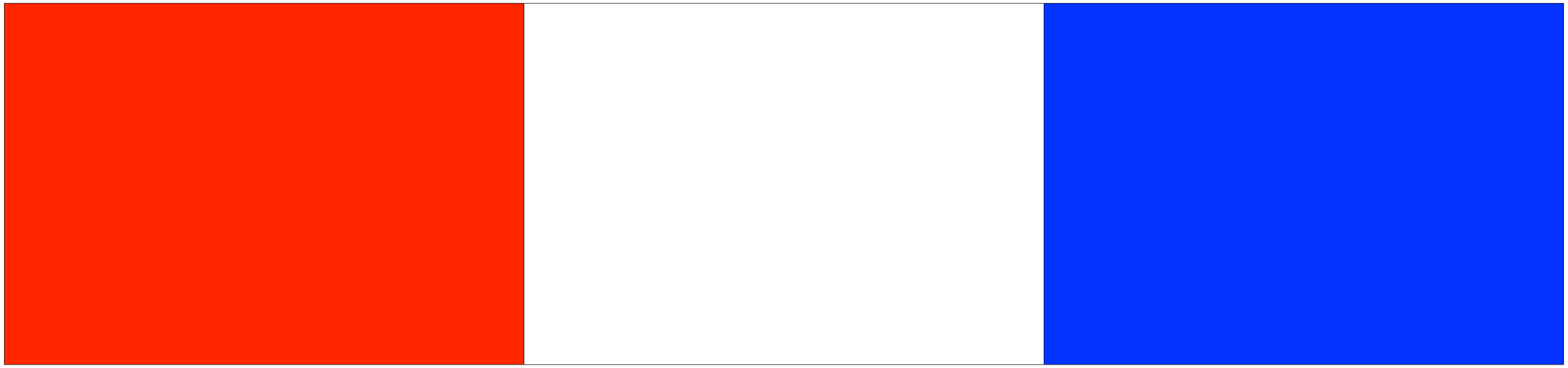
Hint: text mentions a number of within group SD's

3x2x2 design, $n \approx 12 \times 14$

- Outcome: # correct answers in 20 item multiple choice general knowledge quiz

- Three treatments:
  - Colour: red, white, blue
  - Stereotype or exemplar
  - Intelligent or unintelligent

	Unintelligent	Intelligent
Exemplar	Kate Moss	Albert Einstein
Stereotype	A supermodel	A professor



Priming

- Red makes one see differences
- Blue makes one see similarities
- White is neutral

- Seeing an intelligent person makes you feel intelligent if you are in a “blue” mood
- Seeing an intelligent person doesn’t make you feel intelligent if you are in a “red” mood

- The effects depend on whether you see an exemplar or a stereotype

- The theory predicts something very like the picture (an important three way interaction!)

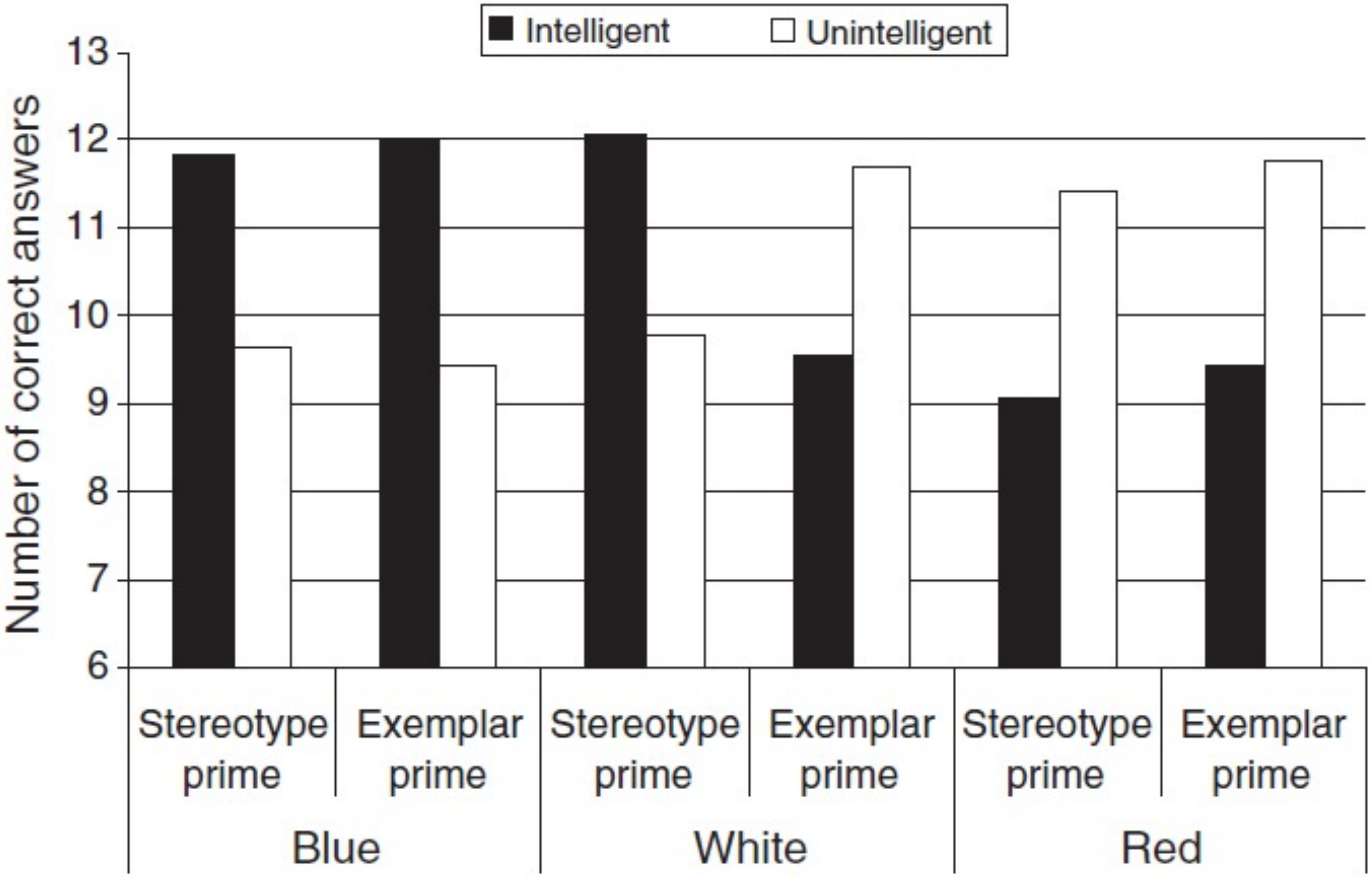


Fig. 1. Number of correct answers as a function of color, prime, and dimension.

- August 2011: a friend draws attention of Uri Simonsohn (Wharton School, Univ. Penn.) to “The effect of color” by D. Smeesters and J. Liu.

- Simonsohn does preliminary statistical analysis indicating results are “too good to be true”

- September 2011: Simonsohn corresponds with Smeesters, obtains data, distribution-free analysis confirms earlier findings

- Simonsohn discovers same anomalies in more papers by Smeesters, more anomalies

- Smeesters’ hard disk crashes, all original data sets lost.
  None of his coauthors have copies.
  All original sources (paper documents) lost when moving office

- Smeesters and Simonsohn report to authorities

- June 2012: Erasmus CWI report published, Smeesters resigns, denies fraud, admits data-massage “which everyone does” http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2114571

What did Simonsohn actually do?

- Erasmus report is censored, authors refuse to answer questions, Smeesters and Liu data is unobtainable, identity Simonsohn unknown
- Some months later: identity Simonsohn revealed, uncensored version of report published
- November 2012: Uri Simonsohn posts "Just Post it: The Lesson from Two Cases of Fabricated Data Detected by Statistics Alone"

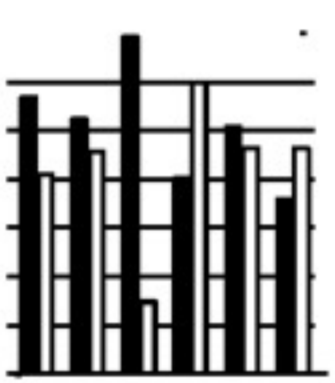
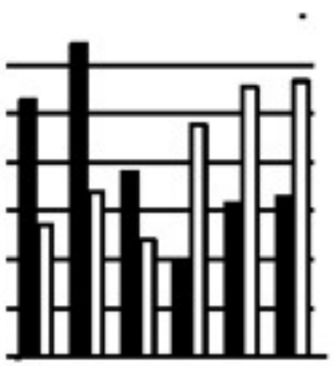
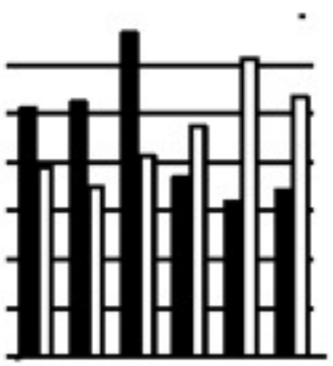
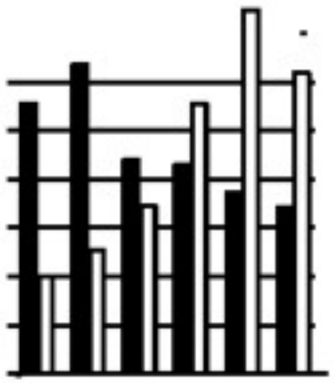
  Two cases? Smeesters, Sanna; third case, unconclusive (original data not available)
- December 2012: original data *still* unavailable, questions to Erasmus CWI *still* unanswered
- March 2013: Simonsohn paper published, data posted

- Theory predicts that the 12 experimental groups can be split into two sets of 6
- Within each set, groups should be quite similar
- Smeesters & Liu report some of the group averages and some of the group SD's
- Theory:
  variance of group average = within group variance divided by group size!
- The differences between group averages are too small compared to the within group variances!

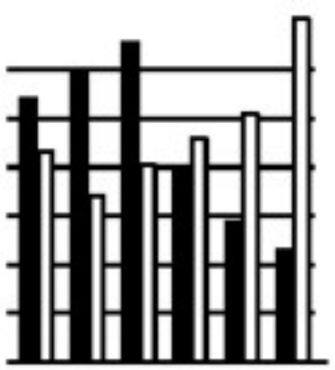
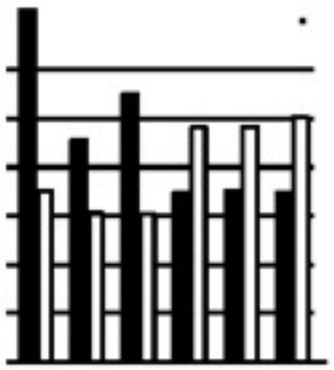
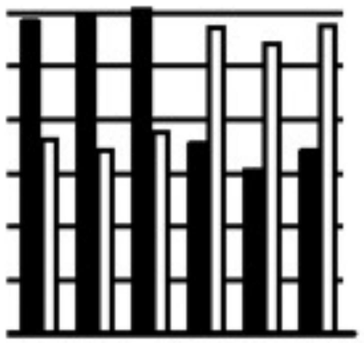
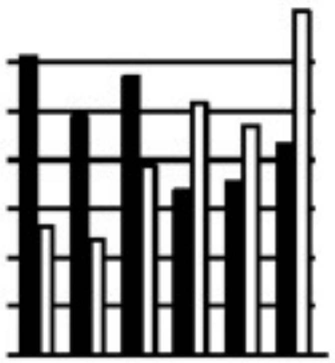
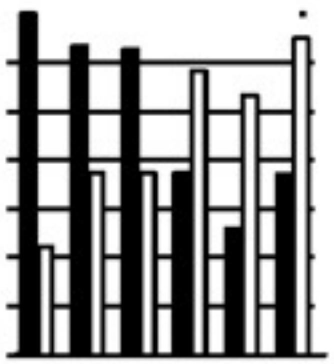
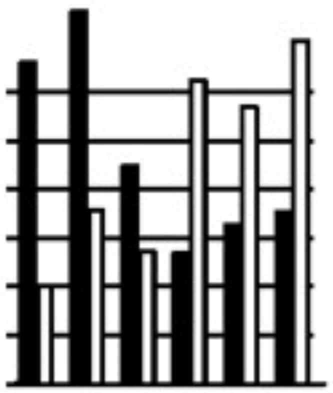
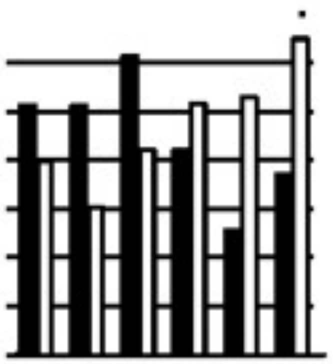
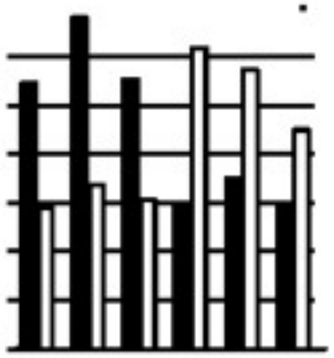
- Simonsohn proposes ad-hoc test-statistic (comparing between group to within group variance), null distribution evaluated using parametric bootstrap
- When original data is made available, can repeat with non-parametric bootstrap
- Alternative: permutation tests
- Note: to do this, he pools each set of six groups. “Assumption” that there is no difference between the groups within each of the two sets of six groups is conservative

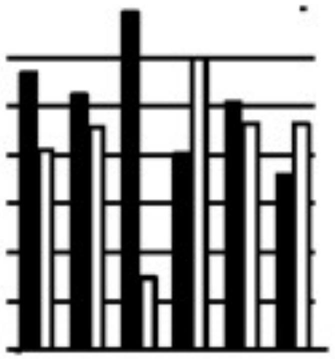
A picture tells 1000 words

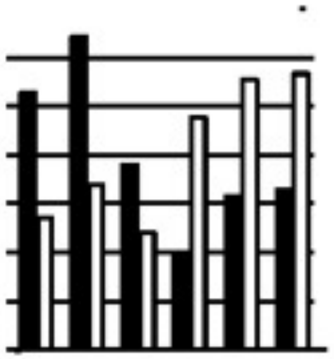
```
sigma <- 2.9
pattern <- c(rep(c(1,0),3),rep(c(0,1),3))
means <- pattern
means[pattern==1] <- 11.75
means[pattern==0] <- 9.5
set.seed(2013)
par(mfrow=c(3,4),bty="n",xaxt="n",yaxt="n")
for (i in 1:12) { averages <- rnorm(12,mean=means,sd=sigma/sqrt(14))
   dim(averages)<- c(2,6)
   averages <- rbind(averages-6,0)
   plot(c(0,20),c(0,7),pch=".",,xlab="",ylab="")
   abline(h=0:6)
   barplot(as.vector(averages),col=rep(c("black","white","white"),n=6),
   add=TRUE)
}
```

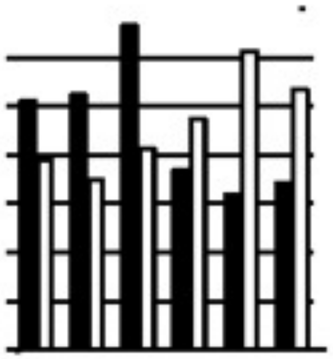





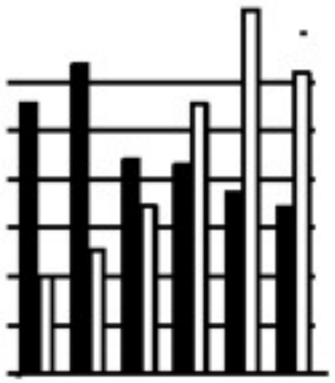
Spot the odd one out!

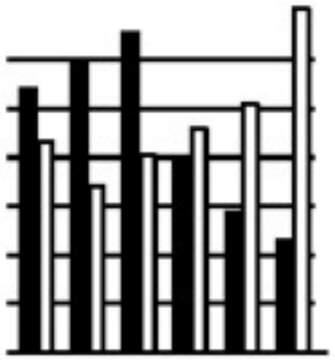


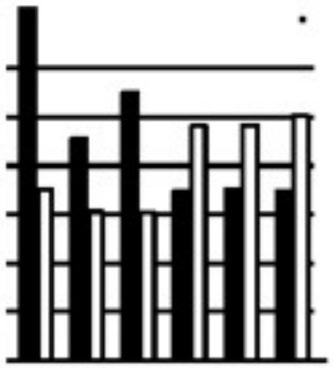


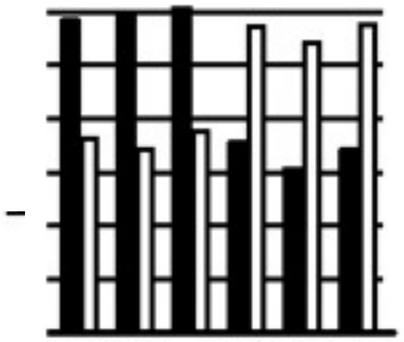


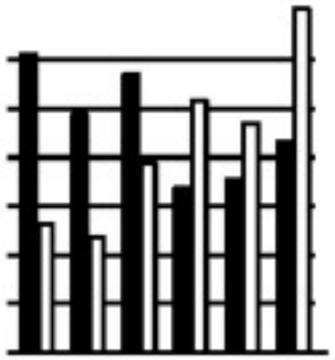


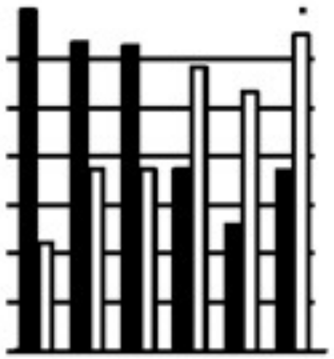
Spot the odd one out!

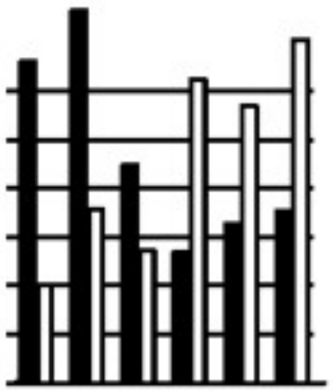


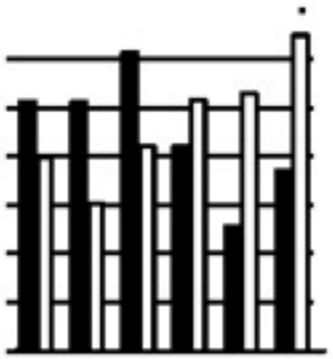


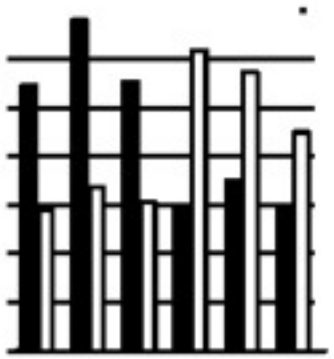




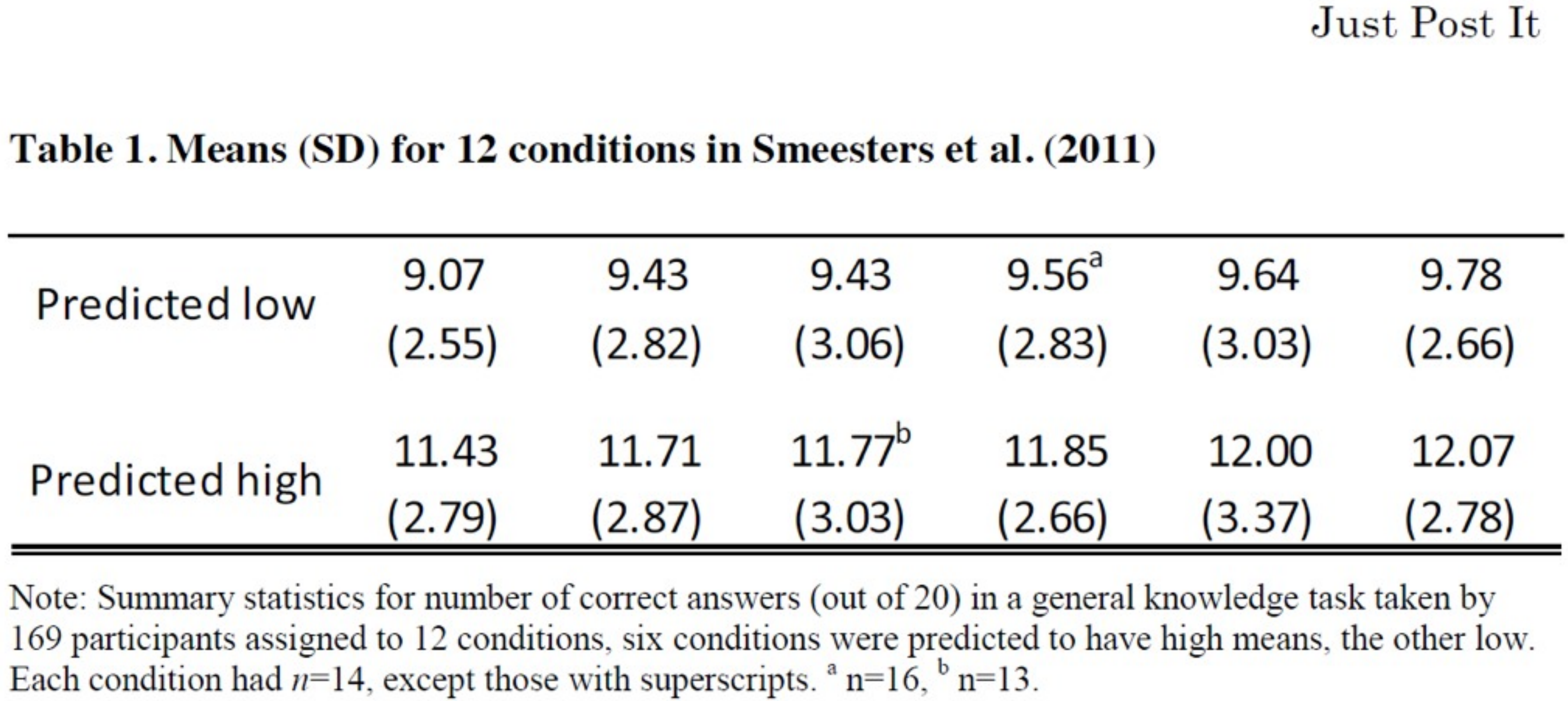








Further analyses



Just Post It

Table 1. Means (SD) for 12 conditions in Smeesters et al. (2011)

Predicted low	9.07 (2.55)	9.43 (2.82)	9.43 (3.06)	9.56[a] (2.83)	9.64 (3.03)	9.78 (2.66)
Predicted high	11.43 (2.79)	11.71 (2.87)	11.77[b] (3.03)	11.85 (2.66)	12.00 (3.37)	12.07 (2.78)

Note: Summary statistics for number of correct answers (out of 20) in a general knowledge task taken by 169 participants assigned to 12 conditions, six conditions were predicted to have high means, the other low. Each condition had *n*=14, except those with superscripts. [a] n=16, [b] n=13.

Further analyses

- Simonsohn’s test-statistic is actually equivalent to standard ANOVA F-test of hypothesis “each of two groups of six conditions have the same mean” – except that we want to reject if the statistic is too small

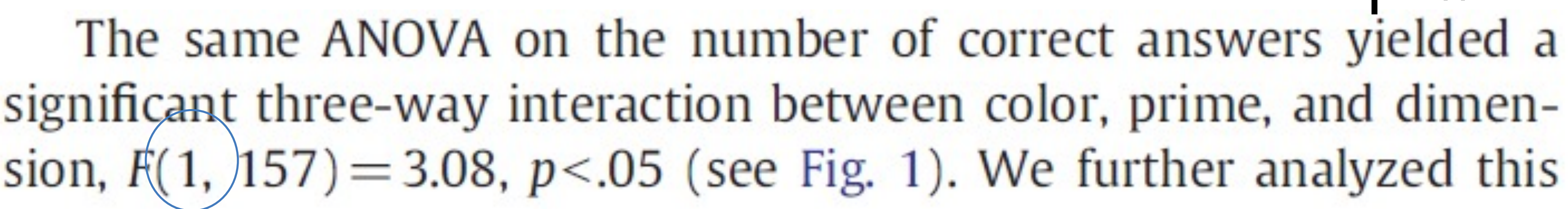
```
data <- data.frame(score=scores,colour=colour,
prime=prime,dimension=dimension,pattern=pattern.long)

result.aov.full <- aov(score~colour*prime*dimension,data=data)
result.aov.null <- aov(score~(colour+prime+dimension)^2,data=data)
result.anova <- anova(result.aov.null,result.aov.full)
result.anova

result.aov.zero <- aov(score~pattern,data=data)
result.anova.zero <- anova(result.aov.zero,result.aov.full)

result.anova.zero$F[2]
pf(result.anova.zero$F[2],df1=10,df2=156)
```

Test of the three way interaction

```
> result.anova
Analysis of Variance Table

Model 1: score ~ (colour + prime +
dimension)^2
Model 2: score ~ colour * prime * dimension
  Res.Df    RSS Df Sum of Sq      F  Pr(>F)
1    159 1350.8
2    157 1299.6  2    51.155 3.0898 0.04829 *
```

RDG

Smeesters and Liu (OK, except # d.f.)



The same ANOVA on the number of correct answers yielded a significant three-way interaction between color, prime, and dimension, $F(1, 157) = 3.08$, $p < .05$ (see Fig. 1). We further analyzed this

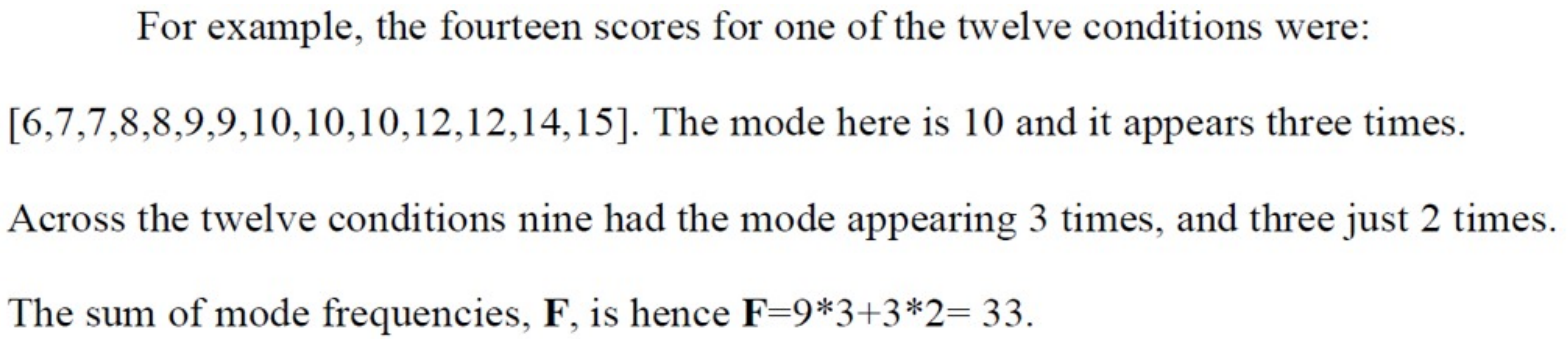
```
data <- data.frame(score=scores,colour=colour,
prime=prime,dimension=dimension,pattern=pattern.long)

result.aov.full <- aov(score~colour*prime*dimension,data=data)
result.aov.null <- aov(score~(colour+prime+dimension)^2,data=data)
result.anova <- anova(result.aov.null,result.aov.full)
result.anova

result.aov.zero <- aov(score~pattern,data=data)
result.anova.zero <- anova(result.aov.zero,result.aov.full)

result.anova.zero$F[2]
pf(result.anova.zero$F[2],df1=10,df2=156)
```

Test of "too good to be true"

```
> result.anova.zero$F[2]
[1] 0.0941672
> pf(result.anova.zero$F[2],df1=10,df2=156)
[1] 0.0001445605
```

Further analyses

- Scores (integers) appear *too uniform*

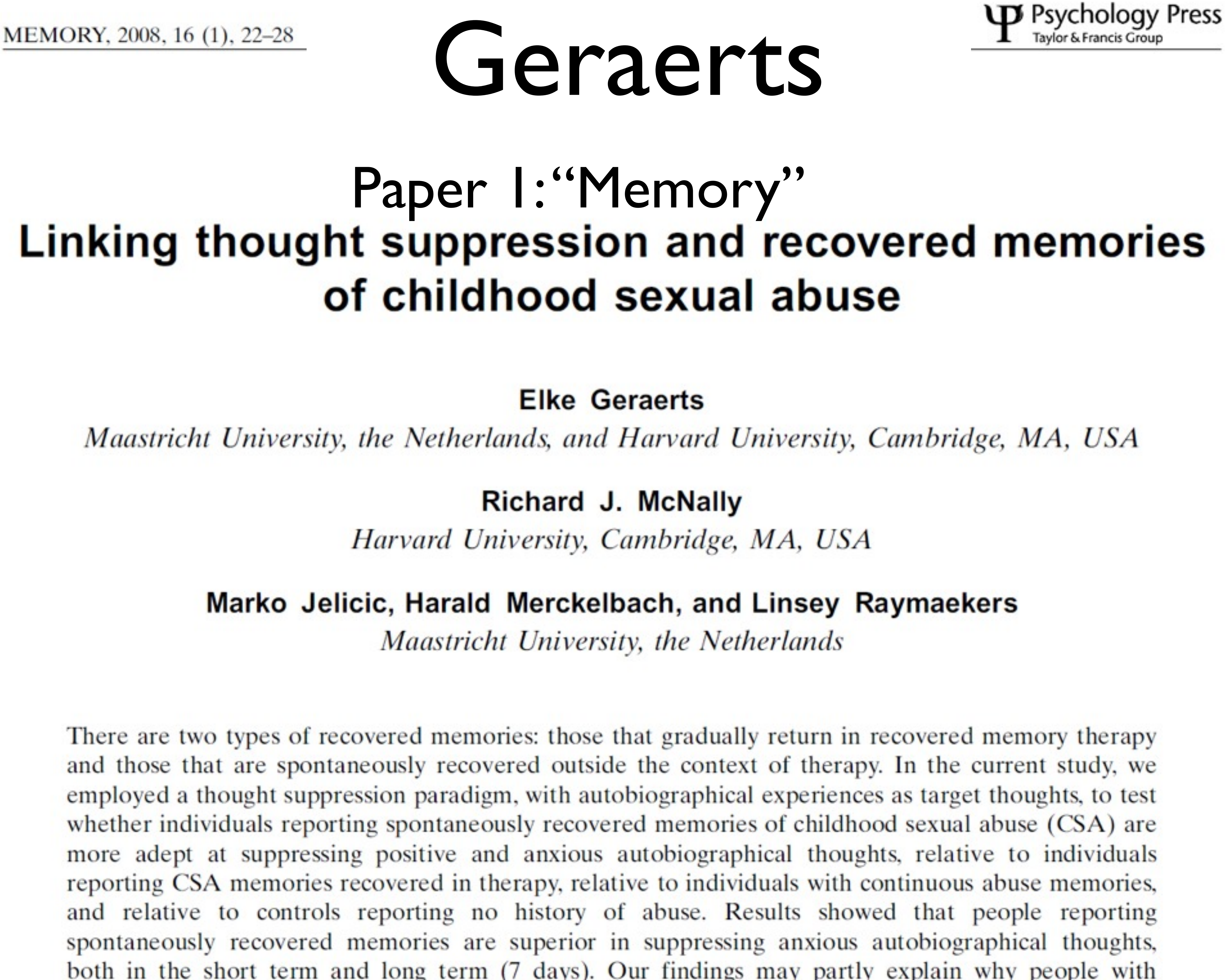


For example, the fourteen scores for one of the twelve conditions were: [6,7,7,8,8,9,9,10,10,10,12,12,14,15]. The mode here is 10 and it appears three times. Across the twelve conditions nine had the mode appearing 3 times, and three just 2 times. The sum of mode frequencies, **F**, is hence **F**=9*3+3*2= 33.

- Permutation test: p-value = 0.00002

Geraerts

Paper 1: "Memory"



MEMORY, 2008, 16 (1), 22–28

Psychology Press
Taylor & Francis Group

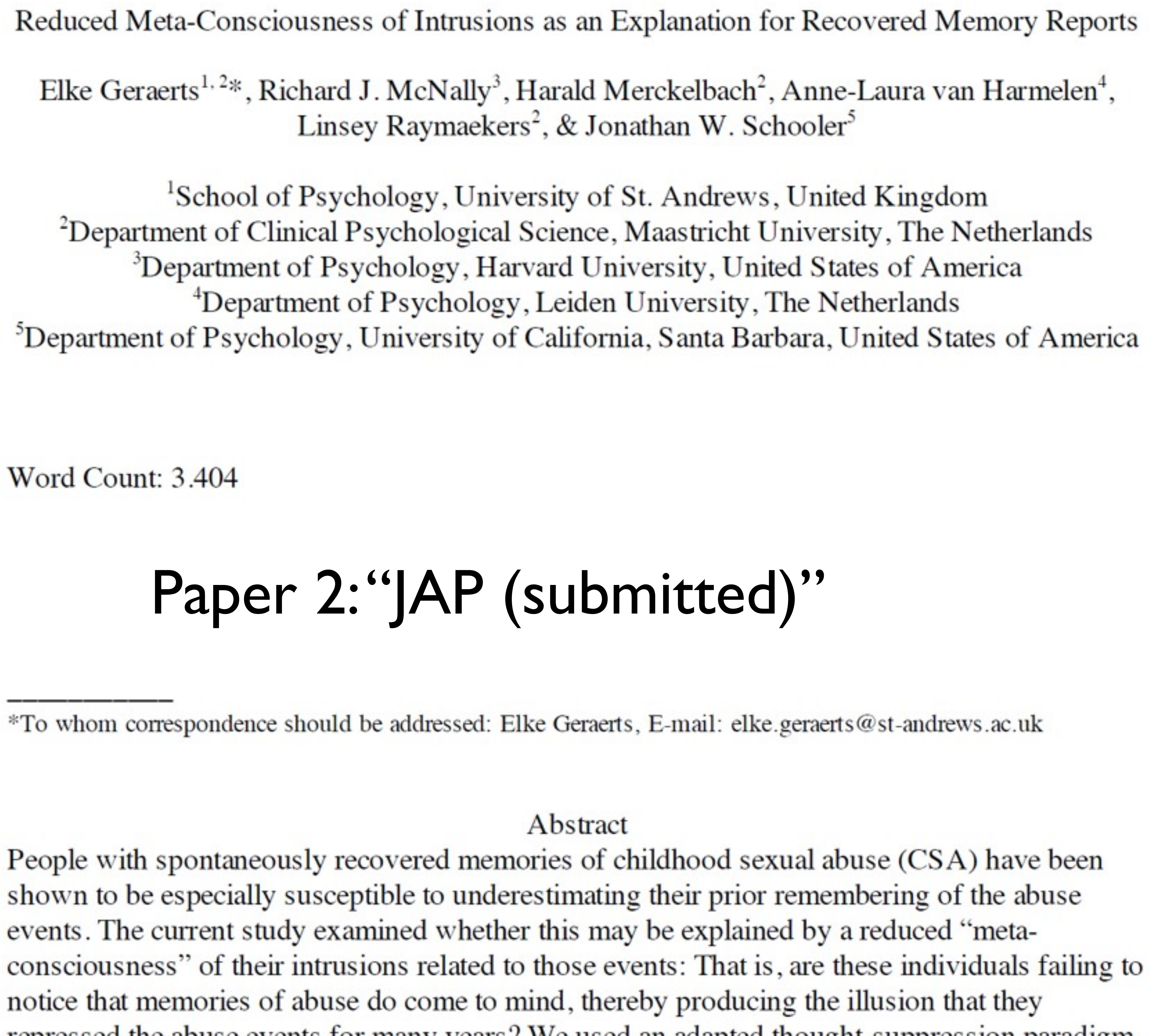
Linking thought suppression and recovered memories of childhood sexual abuse

Elke Geraerts
Maastricht University, the Netherlands, and Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA

Richard J. McNally
Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA

Marko Jelicic, Harald Merckelbach, and Linsey Raymaekers
Maastricht University, the Netherlands

There are two types of recovered memories: those that gradually return in recovered memory therapy and those that are spontaneously recovered outside the context of therapy. In the current study, we employed a thought suppression paradigm, with autobiographical experiences as target thoughts, to test whether individuals reporting spontaneously recovered memories of childhood sexual abuse (CSA) are more adept at suppressing positive and anxious autobiographical thoughts, relative to individuals reporting CSA memories recovered in therapy, relative to individuals with continuous abuse memories, and relative to controls reporting no history of abuse. Results showed that people reporting spontaneously recovered memories are superior in suppressing anxious autobiographical thoughts, both in the short term and long term (7 days). Our findings may partly explain why people with



Reduced Meta-Consciousness of Intrusions as an Explanation for Recovered Memory Reports

Elke Geraerts[1, 2]*, Richard J. McNally[3], Harald Merckelbach[2], Anne-Laura van Harmelen[4], Linsey Raymaekers[2], & Jonathan W. Schooler[5]

[1]School of Psychology, University of St. Andrews, United Kingdom
[2]Department of Clinical Psychological Science, Maastricht University, The Netherlands
[3]Department of Psychology, Harvard University, United States of America
[4]Department of Psychology, Leiden University, The Netherlands
[5]Department of Psychology, University of California, Santa Barbara, United States of America

Word Count: 3.404

Paper 2: "JAP (submitted)"

*To whom correspondence should be addressed: Elke Geraerts, E-mail: elke.geraerts@st-andrews.ac.uk

Abstract

People with spontaneously recovered memories of childhood sexual abuse (CSA) have been shown to be especially susceptible to underestimating their prior remembering of the abuse events. The current study examined whether this may be explained by a reduced "meta-consciousness" of their intrusions related to those events: That is, are these individuals failing to notice that memories of abuse do come to mind, thereby producing the illusion that they repressed the abuse events for many years? We used an adapted thought suppression paradigm

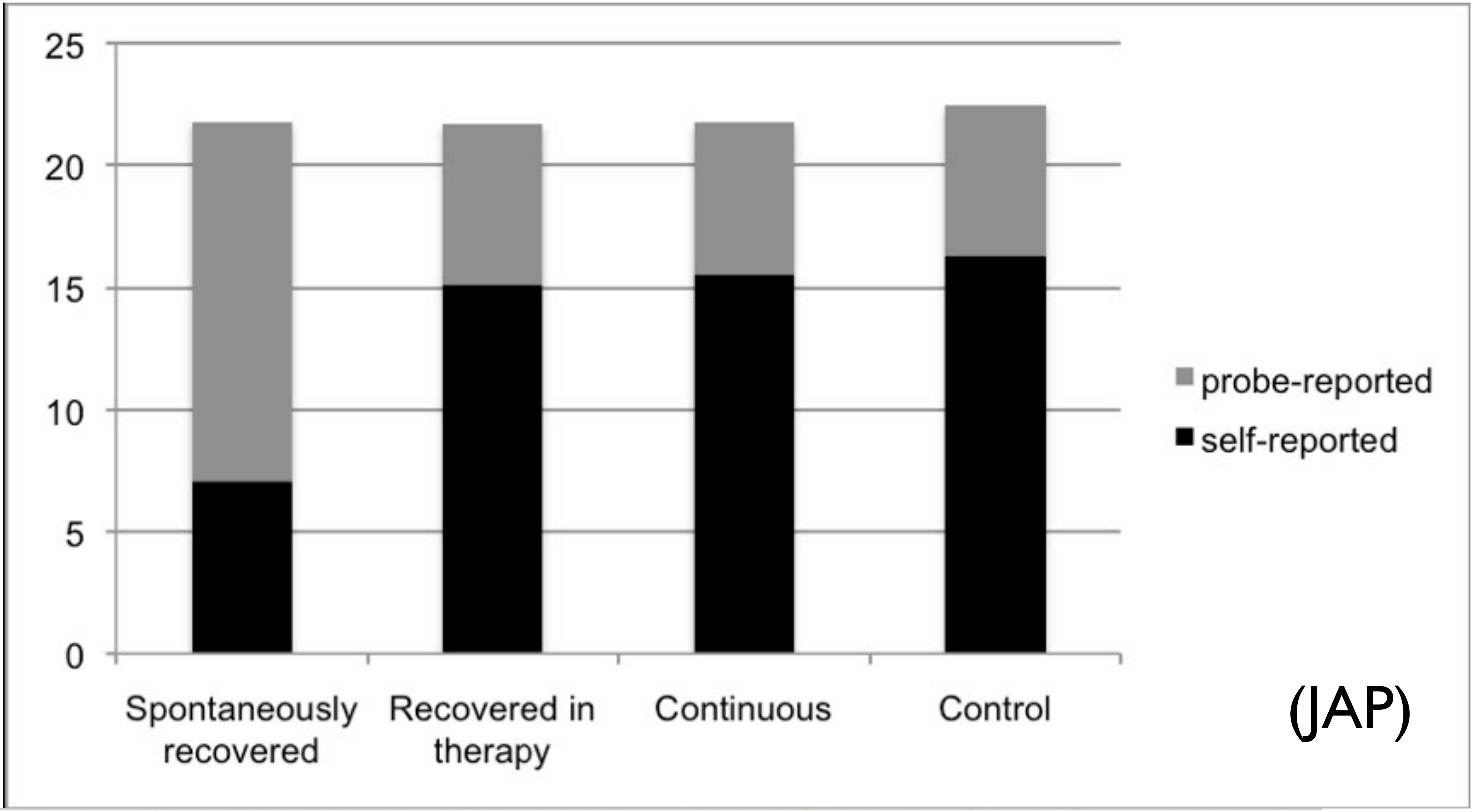
Geraerts

- Senior author Merckelbach becomes suspicious of data reported in papers 1 and 2
- He can’t find “Maastricht data” among Geraerts combined “Maastricht + Harvard” data set for paper 2 (JAP)

Too good to be true?

```
> tapply(TotalNeg,group,mean)
21.76667 21.70000 21.73333 22.43333

> tapply(TotalNeg,group,sd)
2.896887 4.094993 5.930246 6.770541
```

```
> tapply(ProbeTotalNeg,group,mean)
14.666667  6.600000  6.233333  6.133333

> tapply(ProbeTotalNeg,group,sd)
2.564120 3.864962 3.287210 3.598212


> tapply(SelfTotalNeg,group,mean)
 7.1 15.1 15.5 16.3

> tapply(SelfTotalNeg,group,sd)
2.324532 3.457625 4.462487 4.587464
```



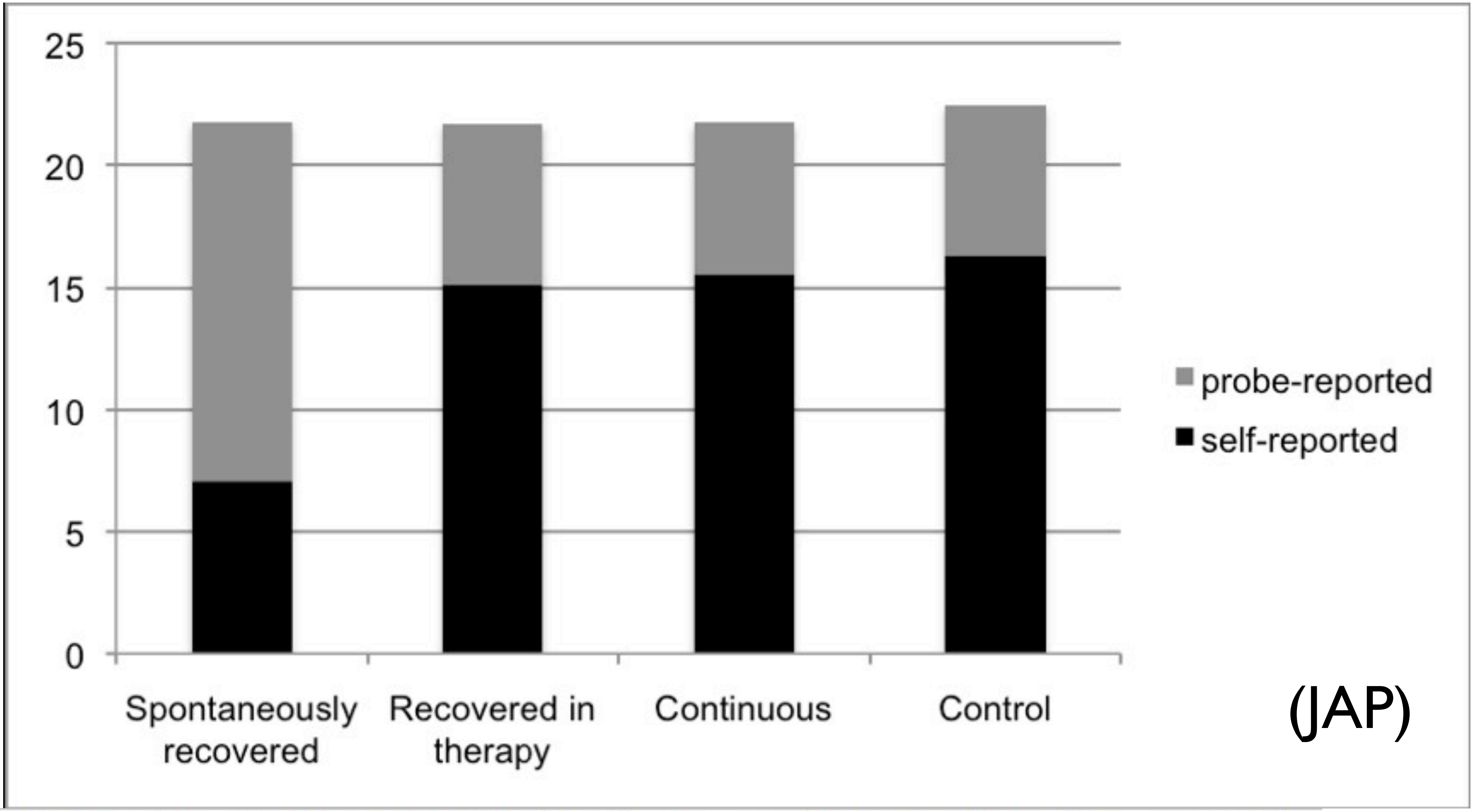
(JAP)

Figure 1. Summation of self-reported and probe-reported negative intrusions across the suppression and expression periods.

Curiouser and curiouser:

Self-rep + Probe-rep (Spontaneous) = idem (Others)
Self-rep (Spontaneous) = Probe-rep (Others)

Samples matched (on sex, age education), analysis does not reflect design



(JAP)

Figure 1. Summation of self-reported and probe-reported negative intrusions across the suppression and expression periods.

Geraerts

- Merckelbach reports Geraerts to Maastricht and to Rotterdam authorities
- Conclusion: (Maastricht) some carelessness but no fraud; (Rotterdam) no responsibility
- Merckelbach and McNally request editors of “Memory” to retract their names from joint paper
- The journalists love it (NRC; van Kolfschooten ...)

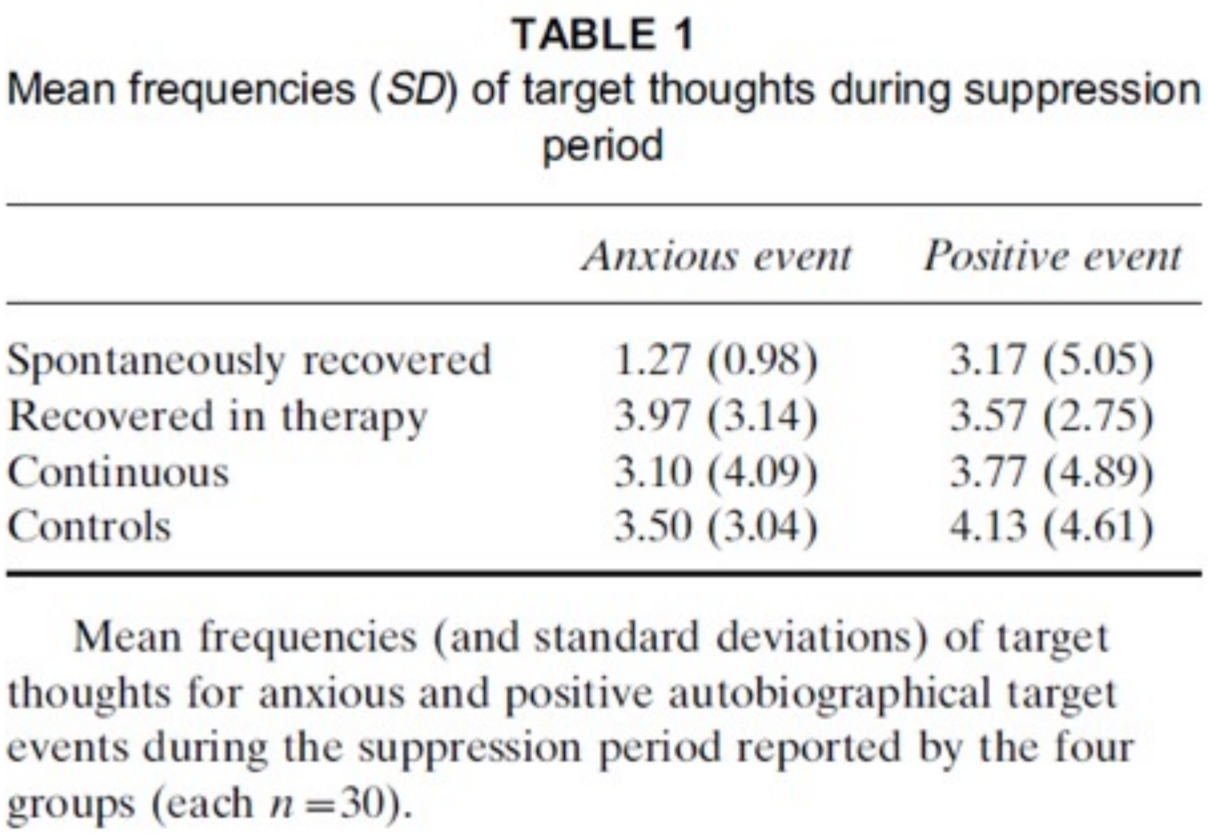


TABLE 1
Mean frequencies (*SD*) of target thoughts during suppression period

	Anxious event	*Positive event*
Spontaneously recovered	1.27 (0.98)	3.17 (5.05)
Recovered in therapy	3.97 (3.14)	3.57 (2.75)
Continuous	3.10 (4.09)	3.77 (4.89)
Controls	3.50 (3.04)	4.13 (4.61)

Mean frequencies (and standard deviations) of target thoughts for anxious and positive autobiographical target events during the suppression period reported by the four groups (each $n = 30$).

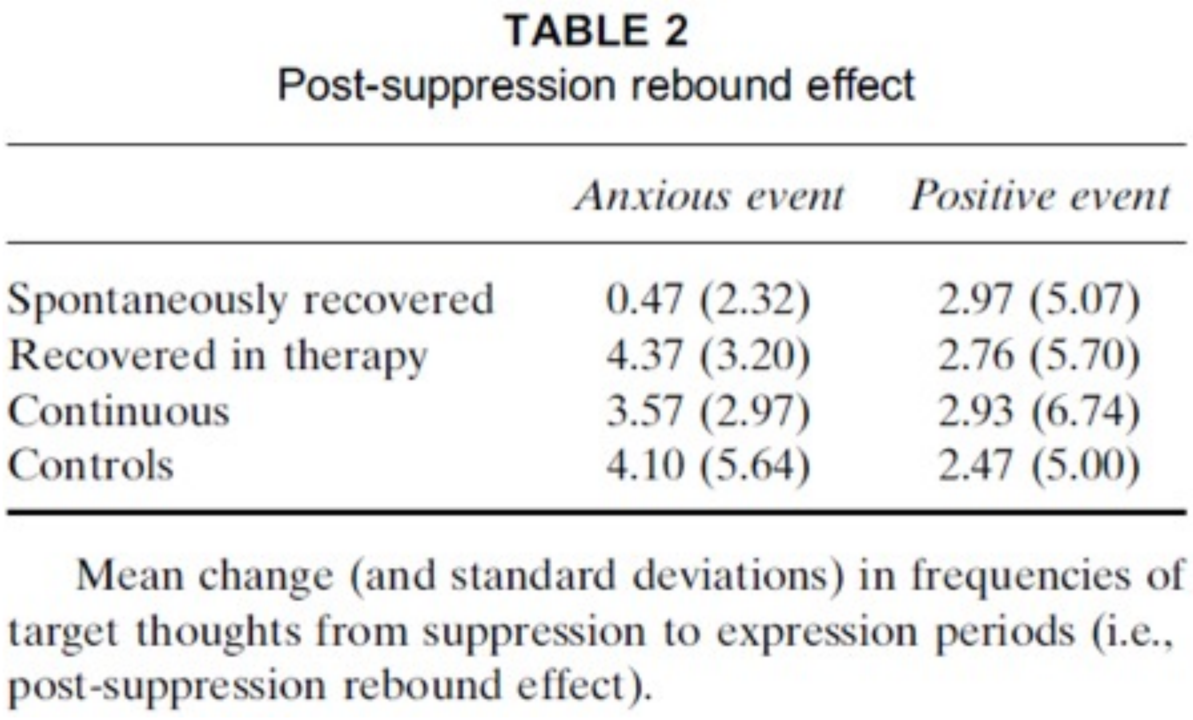


TABLE 2
Post-suppression rebound effect

	Anxious event	*Positive event*
Spontaneously recovered	0.47 (2.32)	2.97 (5.07)
Recovered in therapy	4.37 (3.20)	2.76 (5.70)
Continuous	3.57 (2.97)	2.93 (6.74)
Controls	4.10 (5.64)	2.47 (5.00)

Mean change (and standard deviations) in frequencies of target thoughts from suppression to expression periods (i.e., post-suppression rebound effect).

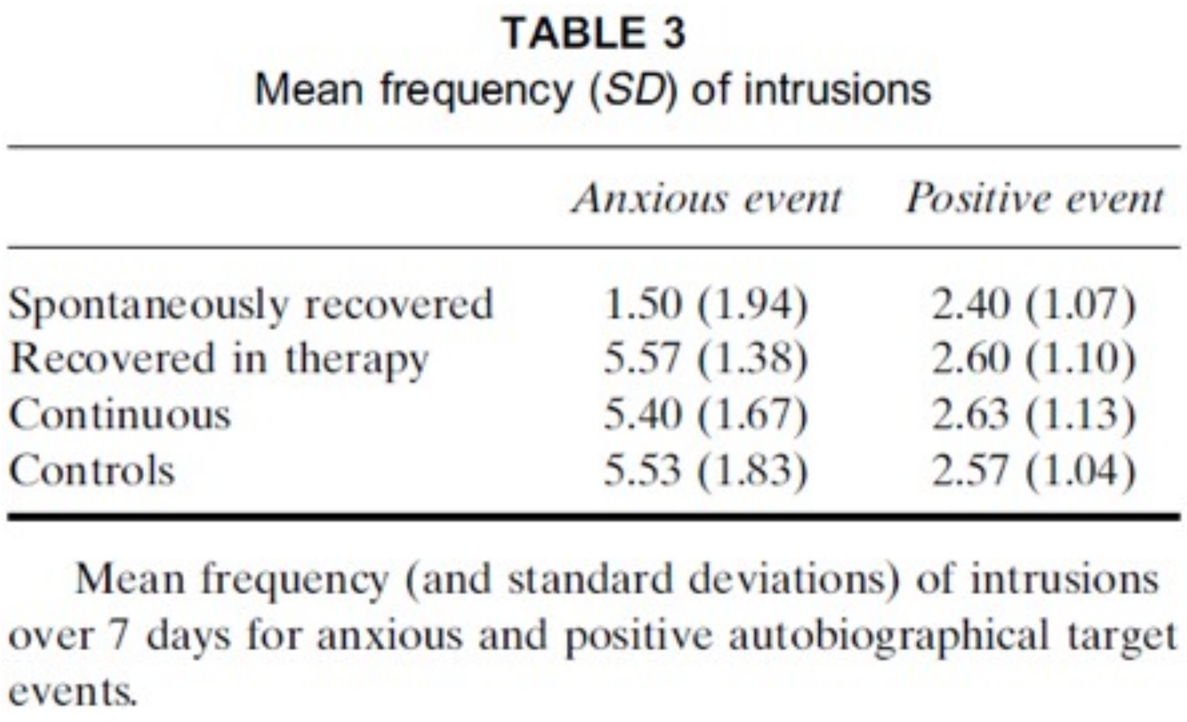


TABLE 3
Mean frequency (*SD*) of intrusions

	Anxious event	*Positive event*
Spontaneously recovered	1.50 (1.94)	2.40 (1.07)
Recovered in therapy	5.57 (1.38)	2.60 (1.10)
Continuous	5.40 (1.67)	2.63 (1.13)
Controls	5.53 (1.83)	2.57 (1.04)

Mean frequency (and standard deviations) of intrusions over 7 days for anxious and positive autobiographical target events.

Summary statistics
(Memory paper)

Picture is "too good to be true"

```
> results
          [,1]       [,2]
[1,] 0.13599556 0.37733885
[2,] 0.01409201 0.25327297
[3,] 0.15298798 0.08453114
```

```
> sum(-log(results))
[1] 12.95321
> pgamma(sum(-log(results)),6 ,
lower.tail=FALSE)
[1] 0.01106587
```

- Parametric analysis of *Memory* tables confirms, esp. on combining results from 3x2 analyses (Fisher combination method)
- For the *JAP* paper I received the data from Frank van Kolfschooten
- Parametric analysis gives same result again (4x2)
- Distribution-free (permutation) analysis confirms! (though: permutation p-value only 0.01 vs normal +independence 0.0002)

```
> results
           [,1]       [,2]
[1,] 0.013627082 0.30996011
[2,] 0.083930301 0.24361439
[3,] 0.004041421 0.05290153
[4,] 0.057129222 0.31695753
> pgamma(sum(-log(results)),8,lower.tail=FALSE)
[1] 0.0002238678
```

The morals of the story (I)

- Scientific = Reproducible: Data preparation and data analysis are integral parts of experiment
- Keeping proper log-books of all steps of data preparation, manipulation, selection/exclusion of cases, makes the experiment reproducible
- Sharing statistical analyses over several authors is almost necessary in order to prevent errors
- *These cases couldn’t have occurred if all this had been standard practice*

The morals of the story (II)

- Data collection protocol should be written down in advance in detail and followed carefully
- Exploratory analyses, pilot studies … also science
- Replicating others' experiments: also science
- It's easy to make mistakes doing statistical analyses: the statistician needs a co-pilot
- Senior co-authors co-responsible for good scientific practices of young scientists in their group
- *These cases couldn't have occurred if all this had been standard practice*

Memory affair postscript

- Erasmus University Psychology Institute asks committee of external researchers to investigate "too good to be true" pattern in "Memory" paper
- Nonparametric analysis of final data-set confirms my findings
- Recommendations: 1) the paper is retracted; 2) the report is made public; 3) the data-set is made public

http://www.erasmusmagazine.nl/nieuws/detail/article/6265-geraerts-trekt-memory-artikel-terug/
Obtaining the data "for peer review": send request to secretariaatpsychologie@fsw.eur.nl

Main findings

- No proof of fraud (= intentional deception)
- Definite evidence of errors in data management
- Un-documented and unreproducible reduction from 42 + 39 + 47 + 33 subjects to 30 + 30 + 30 + 30

Together, mega-opportunities for *Questionable Research Practice number 7*: deciding whether or not to exclude data after looking at the impact of doing so on the results

(Estimated prevalence near 100%, estimated acceptability rating near 100%)

Remarks

- A balanced design looks more scientific but is an open invitation to QRP 7
- Identical "too good to be true" pattern is apparent in an earlier published paper; the data has been lost

E. Geraerts, H. Merckelbach, M. Jelicic, E. Smeets (2006),
Long term consequences of suppression of intrusive anxious thoughts and repressive coping,
Behaviour Research and Therapy **44**, 1451–1460