

New Research From Clinical Psychological Science

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Read about the latest research published in *Clinical Psychological Science*:

[Affective Flexibility: Relations to Expressive Flexibility, Feedback, and Depression](#)

Zhuoying Zhu and George A. Bonanno

Research has increasingly shown the importance of flexibility in the use of emotion-regulation strategies. With this in mind, the expressive flexibility task was developed to measure individual differences in people's ability to up- or down-regulate emotional expression. Although this task is a useful measure of regulation of emotional expression, it does not provide information on the regulation of subjective feelings. The researchers examined the regulation of emotional experience by developing a task measuring affective flexibility (AF) — the ability to modulate subjective feelings. Participants viewed blocks of negative pictures while behaving naturally or while enhancing or suppressing their subjective feelings (AF task) or their facial expressions (expressive flexibility task). Participants repeated these two tasks after receiving negative or neutral feedback on their previous performance. Facial electromyography was performed to assess affective experience in the AF task. Although task feedback was not found to influence task performance, the researchers did find improvements in AF performance over time that were associated with incrementally lower depression levels. In addition, after the researchers controlled for expressive abilities, up- and down-regulation of subjective feelings were inversely associated with lower depression levels.

[Decentering Attenuates the Associations of Negative Affect and Positive Affect With Psychopathology](#)

Kristin Naragon-Gainey and Kenneth G. DeMarree

Decentering — taking a third-person perspective of one's affective and emotional experiences — has been theorized to help protect people against the mental-health influences of extreme affect. In two studies, the researchers examined whether decentering moderates the relationship between negative and

positive affect and psychopathology. In the first study, three student samples and one clinical sample completed assessments of positive and negative affect, decentering, and the extent to which they struggled with or responded emotionally to their thoughts. Participants also completed measures of depression, anxiety, mania, and personality traits relevant to psychopathology. In the second study, a clinical sample completed an assessment of decentering before completing a 10-day ecological momentary assessment task in which they reported affect and psychopathology symptoms at various times throughout the day. Greater decentering weakened the association between negative affect and dysphoria and panic symptoms. Positive affect interacted with decentering to predict anhedonia and narcissism symptoms. These findings help clarify the role of decentering in psychopathology and the people for whom decentering-based interventions might be effective.

[Decreased Neural Response to Threat Differentiates Patients Who Have Attempted Suicide From Nonattempters With Current Ideation](#)

Anna Weinberg, Alexis M. May, E. David Klonsky, Roman Kotov, and Greg Hajcak

Although research has identified predictors for suicidal ideation, the ability to predict which of those people will go on to attempt suicide is limited. The authors examined whether reduced fear of pain might help distinguish those who attempt suicide from those who do not. Participants, the majority of whom had a current or past diagnosis of a mental disorder, passively viewed positive, negative, or neutral images while electroencephalographic data were recorded. The researchers examined differences in late positive potential (LPP) — a waveform that is thought to reflect, in part, threat sensitivity — between participants who had and participants who had not attempted suicide. Participants who had attempted suicide were found to have a blunted LPP in response to threatening images compared with participants who had not attempted suicide, regardless of their current level of suicidal ideation, which suggests that diminished neural responses to threat may distinguish those who attempt suicide from those who do not.

[Willingness to Expend Effort Toward Reward and Extreme Ambitions in Bipolar I Disorder](#)

Sheri L. Johnson, Benjamin A. Swerdlow, Michael Treadway, Jordan A. Tharp, and Charles S. Carver

Research has shown that people with bipolar disorder are more likely than others to set extremely ambitious goals. The researchers examined whether this could be related to willingness to expend effort toward reward by having participants diagnosed with remitted bipolar I disorder complete an effortful expenditure for rewards task in which they chose to complete easy or difficult button-press trials. Participants could earn more money for successful completion of difficult trials than for easy trials. Participants were also assessed for adoption of extremely high life ambitions. The researchers found that willingness to pursue ambitious financial goals was associated with choosing the difficult trials on the effortful expenditure for rewards task. The tendency to set ambitious goals has been found to predict the onset of bipolar disorder, manic severity over time, and positive outcomes associated with the disorder, such as creative accomplishment. This study therefore provides insight into the ways that reward sensitivity might be tied into underlying features of this disorder.