

New Research From *Clinical Psychological Science*

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[Media Exposure to Collective Trauma, Mental Health, and Functioning: Does It Matter What You See?](#)

E. Alison Holman, Dana Rose Garfin, Pauline Lubens, and Roxane Cohen Silver

To test how exposure to media coverage of collective trauma, such as the Boston Marathon bombings (BMB), contributes to distress, Holman and colleagues surveyed a U.S. sample 2 to 4 weeks after the BMB and again 6 months later. In the first assessment, respondents completed a measure of acute stress (AS) symptoms, and reported the amount of time they spent engaged with BMB coverage from different media outlets and whether the content of the media images was graphic (bloody) or nongraphic (chaotic, nonbloody). Six months later, respondents reported posttraumatic stress symptoms (PTSS), rated their fear of terrorism, and reported how often their physical and emotional health interfered with social- and work-related functioning in the prior week (i.e., functional impairment). Respondents who reported greater exposure to graphic images reported more AS symptoms weeks after the BMB and reported increased PTSS, fear of future terrorism, and functional impairment 6 months later. Both the amount of exposure to media and the graphic content of the exposure were indirectly associated with functional impairment via increased AS, PTSS, and fear of terrorism. These findings suggest that media-related distress may linger for months, with potentially negative consequences. Given the prevalence and widespread media coverage of mass violence events, Holman and colleagues suggest that these findings may help media outlets make informed decisions about what content to share following collective traumas.

[Perfectionism in the Transition to University: Comparing Diathesis-Stress and Downward Spiral Models of Depressive Symptoms](#)

Shelby L. Levine, Marina Milyavskaya, and David C. Zuroff



Transition to university can be a stressful time for many students. Levine and colleagues explored whether perfectionism could be detrimental to mental health during this transition. Students responded

to surveys in August (before the beginning of university), October, early January, and April that measure self-critical perfectionism (unrealistic goal striving accompanied by cognitive distortions, such as worry about criticism from others or harsh self-evaluation), personal-standards perfectionism (related to increased achievement striving and not accompanied by excessive self-doubt), depressive symptoms, and general stress. Results indicated that self-critical perfectionism was related to increased depression and stress over the school year. Further, the pattern of results was consistent with a downward-spiral model of depressive symptoms in which the relation between self-critical perfectionism and depression is explained by perceived stress—students with high self-critical perfectionism were more likely to show more stress, which led to greater depression, which in turn led students to perceive more stressors as especially difficult to handle, leading to even greater depression. In contrast, students higher in personal-standards perfectionism experienced less stress and fewer subsequent depressive symptoms. These findings provide a model for why self-critical perfectionism is related to poor mental-health outcomes that become sustained over time. They also indicate that stress-management interventions may be effective for reducing both stress and depression in students with higher self-critical perfectionism.

The Power of the Present: Effects of Three Mindfulness Tasks on Women's Sexual Response

Julia Velten, Lori A. Brotto, Meredith L. Chivers, Gerrit Hirschfeld, and Jürgen Margraf

Velten and colleagues investigated the impact of three types of mindfulness exercises on women's sexual response. They instructed female participants to (a) focus their attention on feelings and sensations in their genitals; (b) scan through their bodies as a whole, from head to toe; (c) observe their stream of thoughts; or (d) in a control task, visualize a walk through a forest and imagine perceptions related to it. After the exercise, participants watched a 5-min nature documentary (neutral stimuli) or a 5-min erotic video. During the attention task and the film visualization, participants' vaginal pulse amplitude (VPA), a measure of genital sexual response, was tracked. During the presentation of the neutral and erotic videos, women rated their subjective sexual arousal (SSA) by moving a computer mouse up and down. Greater VPA occurred during the exercise in which participants focused on their genitals, but not during the erotic film. While watching the erotic film, greater SSA and VPA occurred after participants had focused on their bodies as a whole. Moreover, the concordance between VPA and SSA was higher after participants had focused on their bodies as a whole or had observed their stream of thoughts. These results suggest that using mindfulness exercises that include an explicit focus on bodily sensations might help enhance women's feelings of arousal, and using exercises that focus on sexual sensations before planned sexual activity might increase genital response and boost subsequent sexual feelings.