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9/11 Stress About Coping with 9/11 Stress

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Title: 9/11 Stress About Coping with 9/11 Stress

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Abstract. This article identifies paradoxes and conceptual difficulties with behavioral scientists and expert advice on coping with 9/11-related stress.

The construct of stress has been a problematic one in the history of scientific and professional psychology. The construct most often suggests a challenge to some conflation of body and the problematic construct of mind, a challenge that most often is viewed as a harbinger of noxious consequences.

A minority but growing opinion is that stress as challenge can be a harbinger of positive, noxious, or no consequences at all. As well, whatever is conceived as stress may be positive, noxious, or nonconsequential for different people or for the same person at different times.

In addition, the construct of stress is exclusively or concurrently conceived as relating to just a stimulus, how the stimulus is perceived and more elaboratively processed, or the consequences of perception and elaborative processing.

With all the above, there is also a conflict over certitudes about coping with stress, wherein coping most often applies to preventing or attenuating noxious or putatively consequences that vary in their degree of inevitability.

For example, following Goode (2002) in the context of 9/11-related stress, one expert asserts that, "the goal is to institute control at a time that marks an event that was out of control." Yet the 9/11 terrorist attacks, at least large portions or its aftermath, were not phenomenologically and/or behaviorally out of control for all. Moreover, even if the attacks were out of control for all, remaining out of control for events that are out of control would seem prudent.

Another expert states that, "if you have a road map of where you want to be, you won't end up somewhere you don't want to be." Would that life was so predictable with such a positive and powerful contribution from planning!

We are also told that anniversaries, feelings that have begun to fade, nightmares, and frightening images may resurface, as if they are anthropomorphic spirits from the World Beyond, and fight through efforts at repression or suppression. Spirits from the World Beyond may well be a reality but certainly one that is not usually supported by scientific and professional psychology!

And as well, a former president of the American Psychoanalytic Association wrote that, "the TV industry will do the nation and its citizens a major disservice if the horrifying images of Sept. 11 are once again beamed into our homes." Such a statement seems to discount the role of intrapsychic imagery and all mass media-produced 9/11 stimuli since 9/11, as well as exaggerating the ineluctable power of the mass media.

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The bottom line of behavioral scientists' advice is that the world is controllable if not predictable through coping techniques and that the noxiousness of the world is by prima facie evidence not part of the world that should be experienced. It would seem that a populace with such beliefs and such experts would be an easy target for perpetrators of terrorism. (See Anegg, U., Dietmaier, G., Maier, A., Tomaselli, F., Gabor, S., Kallus, K. W., & Smolle-Juettner, F. M. (2002). Stress-induced hormonal and mood responses in scuba divers: A field study. *Life Sciences*, 70, 2721-2734; Fox, R.P. (September 4, 2002). Letter to the editor. *The New York Times*, p. A30; Goode, E. September 9, 2002). The best way to cope? Even experts aren't sure. *The New York Times*, p. A11; Miceli, M., & Castelfranchi, C. (2002). The mind and the future: The (negative) power of expectations. *Theory & Psychology*, 12, 335-366.) (Keywords: Stress, Terrorism.)