Dealing with Uncertainty in the Era of COVID-19

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Will I get the virus? Will I die?
When can I go back to work?
Will someone I know get sick?
Will I be able to travel this summer?
What I’ve Learned
(i.e., Why This Whole Thing is So Hard)
Waiting is uniquely stressful. 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PREPARING</th>
<th>ACTING</th>
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<td>REACTING</td>
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Sweeny (2018)
WORRY IS BAD FOR YOUR HEALTH

Howell & Sweeny (2016)

Howell & Sweeny (in press)
MANY COPING STRATEGIES ARE INEFFECTIVE

- Planning
- Hoping for the best
- Bracing for the worst
- Finding silver linings
- Distraction
- Suppression

Sweeny et al. (2016)
WORRY MAKES TIME SLOW DOWN

More worry \leftrightarrow Time slows down

Rankin, Sweeny, & Xu (2019)
COVID-19 Study
Affected cities in China, Feb. 12-26
6304 residents of Wuhan and other affected areas of China

Online survey Feb. 12-26, 2020

- Distributed on social media
- Mean age = 23 years old
- 66% women
- 30% in quarantine, most at least 2 weeks
STUDY DETAILS

- Measures
  - Emotional well-being
  - Health behavior
  - Expectations
  - Perceived control
  - Mindfulness
  - Flow
**UNCERTAIN + NO CONTROL = UNIQUELY STRESSFUL**

<table>
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UNCERTAIN + NO CONTROL = UNIQUELY STRESSFUL

Howell, Sweeny, et al. (UR)
FINDINGS: MINDFULNESS AND FLOW

MINDFULNESS
- Less negative emotion
- More positive emotion
- Fewer depressive symptoms
- Fewer anxious symptoms
- Less lonely
- More healthy behaviors

FLOW
- More positive emotion
- Fewer depressive symptoms
- Less loneliness
- More healthy behaviors
- Less unhealthy behaviors

Sweeny et al. (UR)
EFFECTIVE COPING STRATEGIES

#1: Find your flow
Seek effective distractions to pass the time

#2: Practice mindfulness
Meditate to reduce mental time travel

#3: Meet your needs
Seek autonomy, competence, and relatedness

#4: Imagine a good future
Embrace a positive version of your future self

#5: Be inspired
Seek experiences of awe

Howell & Sweeny (2019)
Rankin, Walsh, & Sweeny (2018)
Sweeny & Howell (2017)
Rankin et al. (2019)
Sweeny & Dunlop (in press)
THANKS!

Any questions or comments? You can find me at

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