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The question

Should we keep a stiff upper lip?

Stuart Jeffries
Tuesday June 3, 2008
[The Guardian](#)

Talking about your feelings is widely held to be healthy. But is it? According to psychologist Mark Seery, the reverse is true. "We should be telling people there is likely nothing wrong if they do not want to express their thoughts and feelings after experiencing a collective trauma."

Seery's researchers at the University at Buffalo in the US devised an online survey to test responses to the 9/11 attacks over a two-year period. Respondents were put into two groups: those initially unwilling to talk about their feelings, and the rest. The first group later reported fewer related mental and physical problems. "People who chose not to express were better off than people who did," says Seery.

Article continues ▼

In Britain, the government is committed to funding talking cures - such as cognitive behavioural therapy - to help the estimated one in six Britons who suffer chronic depression or anxiety. The government's happiness tsar Professor Richard Layard argues that softening the British stiff upper lip is a desirable political objective. If Seery is right, though, perhaps the money would be better spent on sending us DVDs of Brief Encounter so we can relearn how to bottle it up in the traditional British manner.

But the implications of Seery's survey are limited: it didn't include those who lost loved ones in the bombings, for instance. Indeed, Professor Stephen Joseph at Nottingham University's Centre for Trauma questions the survey's findings, arguing that possibly those most affected by 9/11 wanted to say the most about it initially and still suffered most two years' on. And Seery's findings about those who experience trauma can't automatically be applied to those

who go into therapy because they're depressed. So those recent "Why a British stiff upper lip is best" headlines may well be misplaced.

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