The Effects of Looming Vulnerability on Test Anxiety and Performance

Kyle L. Gravel, Christine D. Scher, Steven Miller, & Mindy B. Mechanic
Department of Psychology, California State University, Fullerton

Introduction
- Test anxiety is the experiencing of anxious symptoms in the context of threat and danger perception, defines looming vulnerability as a cognitive component to the perception of fear and threat (Riskind, 1997; Riskind & Williams, 1999a, 1999b, 2006; Williams, Shaha, Riskind, & Joiner Jr., 2005).
- Looming vulnerability is experienced in specific situations but can also form into a global cognitive style referred to as a looming maladaptive style (LMS; Riskind, Williams, Gessner, Chrosniak, & Cortina, 2000).

Method
- Sixty three introductory psychology students at California State University, Fullerton completed batteries of measures on two occasions, approximately four weeks apart.
- Time 1 occurred during the second week of the semester when it was unlikely for students to have any exams taking place.
- Time 2 took place during the 15 minutes immediately preceding an exam.

Results
- Consistent with our hypotheses, looming vulnerability levels at Time 1 correlated with test anxiety levels at test time ($r = 0.26, p = 0.05$).
- Unexpectedly, no significant correlations were found between Time 1 looming vulnerability levels and test grades ($r = -0.11, p = 0.37$) between Time 2 looming vulnerability levels and test anxiety ($r = 0.16, p = 0.20$), or between Time 2 looming vulnerability levels and test grades ($r = -0.08, p = 0.54$).

Discussion
- Test anxiety may have interfered with responses on the Time 2 looming vulnerability measure and might explain why test anxiety was correlated with Time 1 scores and not with Time 2 scores.
- It may also be that the construct of looming vulnerability may no longer be relevant when a threat is happening in the moment since the test is no longer looming during the period of and immediately preceding an exam.
- Future research should investigate how test anxiety impacts looming vulnerability to see if the discrepancy between looming vulnerability in the test and no-test conditions can be replicated.
- A larger sample size may have allowed for more accurate results and could have indicated a relationship between looming vulnerability and performance. We are currently working to increase our sample size.

Measures
- **Demographics Questionnaire.**
- The **Looming Maladaptive Style Questionnaire-II** (LMSQ-II; Riskind et al., 2000). The LMSQ-II was used to measure the extent to which a participant has a LMS. It consists of seven brief vignettes that describe either a social or physically threatening situation and are each followed by six questions requiring answers on a 5-point Likert scale.
- The **Test Anxiety Scale** (TAS; Sarason, 1978). The TAS was used to measure test anxiety in participants and consists of 37 statements assessing tension, worry, test-irrelevant thinking, and bodily reactions in relation to tests. Respondents indicated if they believed each statement to be true or false.

For more information, or for a PDF-version of this poster, contact kyle.gravel@csu.fullerton.edu.