9-11 anniversary news: Too much or 'national group therapy'?

By Sharon Jayson, USA TODAY
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Are you preparing to be depressed?

You've already seen plenty and know that plenty more media attention will be focused on the 10th anniversary of the terrorist attacks in this week leading up to 9/11. People will be watching online and on TV, as well as reading about how that day 10 years ago changed American life forever.

"We are a media-saturated society and media becomes a central focus for this collective remembrance," says Leonard Steinhorn, a communication professor at American University in Washington, D.C.

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But how much is too much? And is it harmful to our psyches to wallow in sadness?

"There's no doubt the anniversary is going to stimulate memories and anxieties," says Sharon Brennan, a psychologist in New York City. "Some people will probably embed themselves in the media and it will be almost like an addiction reliving this. Others will take a more a dosed approach."

Steinhorn says most who weren't affected through personal loss have moved on.

"Life did stop 10 years ago when those terrorists assaulted our country, but life won't stop for a memory of it," he says.

Psychological research has indeed shown that humans are a resilient bunch. Despite the overarching effect of the events of that Tuesday morning, experts say for most Americans not directly impacted through personal loss or proximity, the attacks did not leave permanent scars.

Brennan says reactions to this year's commemorations will be highly individualized.

"Too much inundation for anyone at any age level can perhaps create too intense a feeling," she says.

But on the whole, Brennan suggests that the 10th anniversary is a national experience that may be beneficial.

"Certainly, it can be a national vicarious group therapy, in terms of sharing the memories, the sadness, the strength and the empowerment," she says.

Jane Hall, an associate professor of communication, also at American University, and a
former commentator on Fox News, says the sheer volume of anniversary coverage planned might make people feel like "it's too much."

But she believes people will watch "out of a psychological need to talk about this again because it was traumatic."

"I think a lot of people are going to watch a lot of coverage and not feel that it was too much, because of the importance of the event emotionally and as a shared experience," Hall says.

For those close to the World Trade Center during the attacks, brain imaging has found that even three years after the attacks, the brains of those directly exposed are more reactive to emotional stimuli.

"Our findings suggest that trauma may have long-term effects on the brain and behavior in healthy people that don't have a clinical disorder. It may be the usual response living through a very terrible and scary experience," says Barbara Ganzel, a research scientist at Cornell University in Ithaca, N.Y., whose 2008 study was published in the journal NeuroImage.

Although her work didn't address any type of media consumption effect, Ganzel notes that "personally, I'm not going to be watching."

Melissa Utsler, 39, most certainly will be.

"I'm really interested in it," she says.

Utsler, who teaches English at a community college in Rancho Cucamonga, Calif., says she favors a "respectful remembrance" and hopes the coverage won't have a circus atmosphere like she felt with the death of Osama bin Laden. "Some of the patriotism got a little scary to me. It seemed not as respectful of the sad stuff that happened."

Sociologist Brian Monahan, of Iowa State University in Ames, studied media coverage for his 2010 book The Shock of the News: Media Coverage and the Making of 9/11. He says the barrage on this anniversary is "going to be virtually inescapable."

But he doesn't see it as too depressing for most.

"There's an inherent sadness, but alongside that is a celebratory undercurrent for how far we've come," he says.

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Are you preparing to be depressed?

What a stupid question. I'm preparing to remember and pray once again for the 3,000 Americans that lost their lives that day. And of course for their families. I and the majority of Americans will never forget this day in our history, 9/11/2001. It will be there for all generations to learn in their history lessons right along side of July 4, 1776.

My patriotism will go up a few notches that day as I watch all the coverage. Just like it does on Memorial Day, or watch a jet fly-over, or the signing of the Star Spangled banner as we remember why we live in the greatest country in the world ever devised by mankind.

And at the same time my hatred for militant Muslims will kick into high gear. Knowing that there are many more terrorists and other bin Ladens out there ready to kill Americans.

WE WILL NEVER, NEVER FORGET. God bless America and all its citizens!!!
3 replies

Brill Galt

Score: -3

3:38 PM on September 4, 2011

They attacked because of stupid U.S. government actions. That is the true lesson to be reminded of. Guess what?
The U.S. government is STILL sticking its nose where it doesn’t belong.

1 reply

siete

Score: -7

3:39 PM on September 4, 2011

I don’t know if it’s ‘helpful’, but it sure is stupid. Get over it...

3 replies

RidingHigh

charlescharles

Score: -7

3:41 PM on September 4, 2011

No, Obama says lets just ignore illegals and the problems they cause. Lets just welcome more Muslim immigrants every week because they are so peaceful. Its madness.

It is simply amazing how disconnected you folks are from reality.

RKH

Score: 17

3:44 PM on September 4, 2011

I guess we should just stop recognizing Pearl Harbor Day.
Since when did reporters become shrinks?

GWnumber1

Score: 23

3:44 PM on September 4, 2011

Ten years after Pearl Harbor, no one was asking if it could be remembered too much....

1 reply