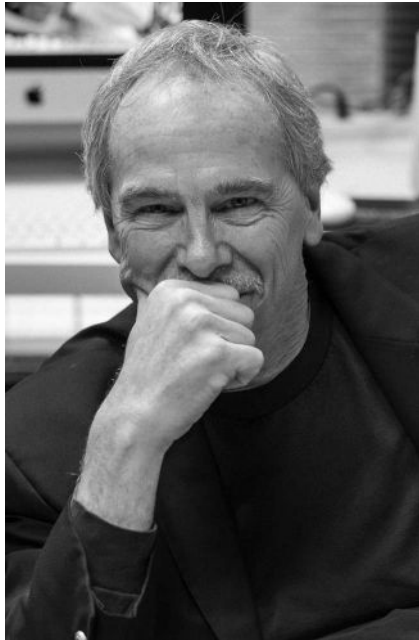


APA AWARD

Award for Distinguished Scientific Applications of Psychology: Steven D. Hollon



Citation

“For outstanding research on the treatment of depression, including the analysis of mechanisms and moderators of therapeutic change, and for promoting the dissemination and implementation of evidence-based treatments across different cultures and countries. Steven D. Hollon is renowned for sharing his wisdom in research collaborations with psychologists and other mental health professionals in the United States and throughout the world. His work is characterized by a balanced approach to the interplay between psychological science and the clinical practice of evidence-based treatment.”

Bibliography

Steven D. Hollon was born in 1949 in Washington, DC. His parents were both high school dropouts with a lifelong commitment to literature and politics. His father had some brushes with the law but developed an interest in psychology and was reading Freud in his teens. He was a professional boxer before the war and fought for the Navy in the

interservice rivalries. He used his GI bill to go to college (his probation officer wrote on his behalf) and took his doctorate at Catholic University. He did his postdoctoral training at Menninger in Topeka before spending the next 40 years in independent practice in Rockford, Illinois. He devoted a portion of his time to community service, developing an organization for parents of children with cerebral palsy, a hospital-based program for kidney dialysis patients, and volunteering at the Kovler Center for victims of political torture. Hollon’s mother went to her death one credit short of graduating from high school because she refused to apologize for upbraiding a nun who was taunting a classmate who stuttered. She was heavily involved in state and local politics (helping to rewrite the state constitution and chairing the local board of health) and was active in the League of Women Voters. There were always books and periodicals in the house (e.g., *Current History* and *Foreign Affairs*). Both parents were remarkable role models who valued service to the community, albeit with an antiauthoritarian streak.

Hollon grew up reading incessantly but was an indifferent student who pursued his interests wherever they led. Like his father, he went to George Washington University but almost as an afterthought. He was traveling across town to visit a girl he had met the previous summer when it occurred to him that he was at risk of getting drafted, so he got off the bus on impulse and applied. He was fascinated by the Barbary apes at the National Zoo and spent far too much time observing their behavior (and reading Lorenz and Goodall) that might have been better spent going to introductory physics. He scraped by on probation his first 2 years but found the upper level courses more to his liking. Hollon entered college knowing that he did not want to go into psychology (he admired his father and was attracted to the discipline but did not think it wise to go into the “family business”). He planned instead on a career in law but became fascinated by upper division courses on comparative psychology and cultural anthropology. He was in the midst of applying to law schools his senior year when he had an epiphany and decided that family business or not, he would pursue a career in psychology.

The 10 graduate programs he applied to were not impressed, so he returned home and got a job as a therapist at

the local community mental health center, where he saw clients during the day and manned the suicide hot line every third night. He applied to 50 graduate programs the next time around and got put on the wait list at two. He was digging out from a late spring blizzard when he got calls from snowy Michigan State and balmy Florida State, so he accepted the latter. He had the good fortune of working with Jack Hokanson, a terrific scientist and a very decent man. When Hollon told Hokanson that he planned to drop out of the program because he was bored by the required courses, Hokanson gave him a preprint of a chapter by Martin E.P. Seligman on learned helplessness. Hollon was fascinated and did a dissertation to disentangle prediction and control, which, of course, he could not. He broadened his readings to include Aaron T. Beck (most intriguing) and Gerald L. Klerman (an advocate of clinical trials). **Hollon had his own history of depression (as did his father before him) with episodes in three successive years in his early 20's but none in the decades since he started treating patients with cognitive therapy.**

Hollon spent the summer doing a practicum placement at a Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Augusta, Georgia, where he and fellow graduate student (and eventual life partner) Judy Garber discussed their shared interests in depression, sports, and politics. Garber moved to Philadelphia to work with Seligman that winter, and Hollon followed a few months later, turning down a prospective American Psychological Association internship in the process, with the intent of working with Beck. As per usual for Hollon, there was not a lot of forethought; he did not know Beck and Beck knew nothing about him. Hollon had to drive to a conference in Boston where Beck was presenting to meet his future mentor and worked his way into Beck's research group by volunteering to stand in for Marika Kovacs interviewing people who had survived suicide attempts so that she could extend a visit to family back in Hungary. Hollon did his best to make himself indispensable (he masqueraded as an expert in research methodology on the strength of having read [Campbell & Stanley, 1963](#)) and negotiated with his dissertation committee to count his first year with Beck as his clinical internship. During the following year while continuing to work with the Beck group, he went through the psychiatric residency program at the University of Pennsylvania (UPenn) to broaden his exposure to other interventions. Around that time, Beck and colleagues completed the first randomized controlled trial to find that a psychosocial intervention could hold its own with medications ([Rush, Beck, Kovacs, & Hollon, 1977](#)) and had an enduring effect that medications lacked ([Kovacs, Rush, Beck, & Hollon, 1981](#)). The University of Minnesota called to ask Beck whether he had anyone to recommend, and he suggested Hollon, who was invited to interview for a position as an assistant professor, for which he was thoroughly

unprepared. The visit went well nonetheless, and an offer was made.

Minnesota had an eminent faculty filled with luminaries such as Paul Meehl, David Lykken, Irv Gottesman, Norm Garmezy, and Ellen Berscheid. Hollon started alongside Phil Kendall and became especially close with Auke Tellegen and Gene Borgida. Garber became a graduate student at Minnesota, where she first worked with Gottesman and then finished her dissertation with Meehl. She continued her research on cognitive models of depression and expanded her work to include developmental psychopathology through interactions with faculty at the Institute of Child Development including Allen Sroufe and John Masters.

Hollon connected early with Robert DeRubeis, his first doctoral advisee, who became (along with Garber) his closest friend and colleague and with whom he still collaborates. Senior faculty advised him to focus on simpler nonexperimental studies until he got tenured, so instead of following that well-intentioned advice, the first thing that he did was to submit a grant with DeRubeis to do a complex series of clinical trials. They got site-visited and funded. Their study showed that cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) was as efficacious as antidepressant medications ([Hollon et al., 1992](#)) and more enduring ([Evans et al., 1992](#)). Hollon was tenured in his third year, and DeRubeis accepted a tenure-track position at UPenn, where he remains to this day.

During the year that Garber did her clinical internship at the University of Washington, Hollon spent summers and winter quarter with her in Seattle, where he became close to Marsha Linehan and Neil Jacobson. Hollon and Garber returned to Minnesota, where their son—Nick Garber Hollon (now a doctorate in neuroscience)—was born. Hollon and Garber went on the job market the following year and were fortunate to get faculty positions in the two different Departments of Psychology at Vanderbilt University. They remain there to this day.

Continuing to work as close colleagues, Hollon and DeRubeis have done two more major randomized control trials. The first showed that CBT is as efficacious as antidepressant medications even for more severe depressions ([DeRubeis et al., 2005](#)) and again more enduring ([Hollon et al., 2005](#)). The second found that adding CBT to medications enhanced recovery, albeit in a moderated fashion ([Hollon et al., 2014](#)) and at the expense of CBT's enduring effect ([DeRubeis et al., 2020](#)).

Hollon has had several outstanding students in addition to DeRubeis who have gone into academia. These include Kelly Bemis Vitousek at the University of Hawaii (a leading expert on eating disorders), Michelle Carter at American University, and Lisa Najavits at Boston University School of Medicine. Other superb advisees, including Monica Mandell, Margaret Kriss, Kirsten Haman, Richard Carson, and Sabine Schmidt, have gone on to sterling clinical careers. Hollon worked with Sona Dimidjian in the aftermath of Neil

Jacobson's untimely death to bring to closure a placebo-controlled trial that showed that behavioral activation was as efficacious as medications (Dimidjian et al., 2006) and as enduring as CBT (Dobson et al., 2008). Hollon also has worked with several postdocs and DeRubeis protégés, including Daniel Strunk at the Ohio State University; Tony Tang (formerly at Northwestern); Jay Fournier at the University of Pittsburgh; Lorenzo Lorenzo-Luaces at Indiana University; and Zachary Cohen, currently on a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of California Los Angeles. Hollon met Ellen Driessen, now at Radboud University, through her mentor Pim Cuijpers at Vrije Universiteit and Daisy Singla at the University of Toronto through her mentor Vikram Patel at Harvard. Other valued colleagues include Marcus Huibers at Vrije Universiteit and Claudi Bockting at the University of Amsterdam and the quintet of superstars at Oxford including David Clark, Anke Ehlers, Paul Salkovskis, Chris Fairburn, and Daniel Freeman.

When Hollon started at Minnesota, he used to joke with his graduate students that he wanted to be Terry Wilson when he grew up. He almost got his wish. Wilson played "fifth business" by introducing him to his future colleague Fairburn, who in turn introduced him to his future colleague Patel, who in turn introduced him to his future colleague Ron Kessler. He also has had the good fortune to work with several other superb research psychiatrists, starting with John Rush at UPenn, Vicente Tuason in Minnesota; Richard Shelton at Vanderbilt (a quarter-century collaboration); Jay Amsterdam at UPenn; John Zajecka in Chicago; and the "dean of them all," Jan Fawcett, former chair of psychiatry at Rush, now retired in Santa Fe, New Mexico. In recent years, Hollon has revived his earlier interest in ethology through conversations with Paul Andrews, an evolutionary biologist at McMaster who has strongly influenced Hollon's recent perspective on depression.

The entire process has been exciting and a great good fun. Hollon looks at his mentor Beck (to whom he owes his career and whom he adores) and thinks "thirty years and counting."

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