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The Mediation of Personal Distress on Negative Television News and Donations

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THE MEDIATION OF PERSONAL DISTRESS ON NEGATIVE TELEVISION NEWS
AND DONATIONS

by

WALT COLLINS

(Under the Direction of Amy Hackney)

ABSTRACT

Previous research has shown that negative television news can lead to a reduction in positive affect (Harrell, 2000; Szabo & Hopkinson, 2007). What has yet to be investigated though is how negative television news influences an individual's interactions with others; precisely, how negative television news affects a person's empathy for persons in need and donation behaviors to help others. Participants were randomly assigned to four different conditions: local victim news condition, nonlocal victim news condition, far victim news condition, and a neutral media condition. Participants viewed media clips that corresponded with their condition and then filled out a questionnaire that examined implicit affect, empathy, and donation behavior. A series of models were conducted to analyze the data. A one-way between groups ANOVA showed that participants in the local victim news condition donated more money to a crime victim charity than participants in the nonlocal victim news condition, the far victim news condition, and the neutral media condition. The results of a MANOVA showed implicit positive affect, personal distress, and empathic concern to be significant process variables. These process variables were entered into the model as covariates with victim distance being the independent variable and donations being the dependent variable. The results suggested that personal distress may be mediating the relationship

between local victim news and donations. One implication of this research that warrants

further examination is the possibility that television news creates personal distress,

ultimately precipitating an increase in donations to victims of crime.

INDEX WORDS: Media, Television news, Negative television news, Mediation, Personal distress

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by

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this book to my friends, and most importantly, my family.

Thank you for all of your wonderful support. You've made me the person I am today. I

would be nothing without all of you.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The media is a pervasive presence throughout the lifespan of the majority of

Americans.   It serves as entertainment, knowledge, and even a mere distraction from the

self (Konijn,Walma van der Molen, & Nes, 2009). Statistics show that a typical

American adult spends four hours and thirty-five minutes a day watching television

(Nielsen, 2006). Many of these individuals also view the television as their major source

of information regarding the world (Konijn et al., 2009). Around 500,000 American

children between the ages of two and seventeen watch the late afternoon news on any

particular day (Nielsen, 2001, as cited in Wilson, Martins, & Marske, 2005) and most

people on average watch three hours of television news programs each week (Anderson,

Collins, Schmitt, & Jacobvitz, 1996).

Negative television news is defined as television news that contains negatively-

valenced content (Johnston & Davey, 1997). Most news programs accentuate negative

content and very seldom focus on positive aspects of life (Whitman, 1998). A

correlational study showed that 75% of the people who participated in a phone interview

believed that television news broadcasts were overrun by negative news stories (Galician,

1986).   Although research on the psychological effects of television news has been

limited, past research suggests that negative television news may have harmful effects.

For example, research has shown that watching negative television news can result in an

increase in negative affect and a decrease in positive affect (Harrell, 2002) and can

increase the development of psychological disorders, such as depression and anxiety

(Ahern, Galea, Resnick, & Vlahov, 2004). Thus viewing negative television news can be harmful to the self.

<div align="center">Purpose of the Study</div>

Given the previous research's findings on negative television news, it is necessary to determine how negatively-valenced television news content affects an individual's attitudes towards others. The current research will assess the effects of negative television news on empathy for crime victims and donations to a crime victim charity. The paper begins with an overview of cultivation theory and negative television news, followed by a discussion on affect, empathy, donation behaviors, and victim distance.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF PAST LITERATURE ON NEGATIVE TELEVISION NEWS

Cultivation Theory

Cultivation theory (Gerbner, 1969) hypothesizes that if an individual spends a large quantity of time observing the world that the media creates, that person will have difficulty distinguishing between media's reality and actual reality. This theory relies heavily on the availability heuristic, in which a person makes judgments on how often something occurs based on how easily it is able to be retrieved in memory (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973). In support of cultivation theory, Busselle and Shrum (2003) found that participants who watched numerous hours of television had an easier time accessing content themes from their memories that were constantly being displayed on television (violence, homicides, and drug stings) compared to participants who did not engage in much television viewing.

Cultivation theory also explains that viewers who watch a large amount of television will have more of a misconstrued viewpoint of their surroundings and will also tend to be more concerned with crime rates, problems, and falling prey to dreadful situations (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). Saleem and Anderson (2011) state that the beliefs and notions we receive from media sources are being integrated into our reality. As a result, viewers may come to believe that the world is more problematic if news programming is constantly presenting individuals with adverse stories (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). For example, participants who documented watching a large capacity of broadcast news reported an increase in worrying about crime, especially those relating to violence (Romer, Jamieson, & Aday, 2003).

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In a correlational survey conducted over the telephone, researchers found that watching particular television incidents can not only produce negative mental reactions, but also affect the estimated frequency of events (Wilson et al., 2005). In the survey, about 78% of parents overestimated how often child abduction actually occurs due to the influence of news broadcasts and the media. It is possible that the news programs on the television created an irrational belief within these individuals since the actual number is much smaller (Wilson et al., 2005). Past research also suggests that adopting irrational beliefs such as these are related to symptoms of depression and anxiety (McNaughton, Patterson, Smith & Grant, 1995). Wilson et al. (2005) found that habitual watching of narratives involving child kidnapping on television was positively related to feelings of worry and fear in both children and adults. The researchers state that people who watch more news stories regarding kidnapping have more instances of this particular crime available in their memory, which in turn leads to them becoming more afraid. The previously discussed research shows that news programs can influence a viewer to believe that an event is a common occurrence, which may produce the negative affective states that television news viewers experience.

The State of Television News Programming

The nature of television news has changed since the terrorist attack on September 11th (Young, 2003). One of these changes is the integrity of journalism. Many news programs are now being influenced by financial motives and compete to obtain ratings rather than competing to report a story the most accurately (Serani, 2008). This mentality increased after news broadcasts discovered that inducing feelings of trauma and

capitalizing on an individual's vulnerabilities can boost ratings (Altheide, 2002), even if the story is not always accurate (Kovach & Rosenthal, 2001).

Such distress-based news broadcasts has two primary purposes. The first purpose is to capture the attention of the viewer by introducing a problem or issue that the individual "needs" to know about. The second purpose is to make the viewer believe that the answer to the problem will be disclosed in the upcoming segment (Glassner, 1999). News programs capture the attention of viewers by exposing them to accounts containing melodrama instead of facts (e.g., displaying particular social groups as treacherous, replacing hopefulness with pessimism and suggesting to the audience that an isolated incident is a common occurrence) (Glassner, 1999; Leinwald, 2002, as cited in Wilson et al., 2005). Distress-based news broadcasts can pique the interest of viewers and may make them feel as if they need to stay up-to-date on the news to survive (Serani, 2008).

Today's technology also allows the media to report on events as they unravel. News tickers, for instance, have become extremely prevalent on many news channels since the World Trade Center attack on September 11th (Poniewozik, 2010). While news tickers were initially used to provide a quick update on this particular catastrophe, the urgency that these news tickers create still remains. Many news channels continue to use news tickers as a way to increase viewership. In fact, research has shown that news stations have been trying to strike fear within viewers following the attack of September 11th (Young, 2003). As a result, many news programs are filled with news stories involving crime, economic failure, and terrorism as an attempt to frighten the viewer. As discussed previously, the public is primarily concerned about events or incidents that are given extensive coverage in the media (Coleman, 1993).

A prior study found that the public's distress and fearfulness instigated by the media often exceeds the actual threat (Fischoff, Slovic, & Lichtenstein, 1981). For example, an experiment conducted in Jerusalem by Shoshani and Slone (2008) showed that watching only seven minutes of a movie clip on terrorism can significantly increase a person's state anxiety. Although this study was carried out in a different country, terrorism continues to be a concern for many Americans and threats are recurrently shown in many news stories. Other research has shown that individuals who had witnessed the bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993 on television exhibited an increase in depression and symptoms relating to post-traumatic stress (Ofman, Mastria, & Steinberg, 1995). This can arise from the viewer feeling similar to the portrayed victims or if the news happens to relate to a viewer's past life experience (McNaughton-Cassill, 2001).

Research shows that adolescents who see violence in the media may even encounter anxiety and problems in sleeping (Joshi & Kaschak, 1998). This finding suggests that watching negative stories in the news may produce harmful effects for not only adults, but also children. In another study, fourteen and fifteen year old participants self-reported having more fear and sadness, along with other negative emotions, when they watched clips that contained intentional violence compared to unintentional violence (Unz, Schwab, & Winterhoff-Spurk, 2008). These adolescents also reported an increase in negative feelings and a diminished amount of enjoyment after watching clips containing violence compared to nonviolent news clips.

Negative television news may be even more problematic for people who are already anxious and/or depressed. Moods that contain anxiety and depression have

shown to promote biases towards the information-processing of negative material (Johnston & Davey, 1997). For example, a person who is anxious has a propensity to attend to material that is threatening (Matthews, 1990); while individuals who suffer from depression may access memories that are similar to the current mood state, such as adverse or threatening memories (Matthews & Macleod, 1994). Watching television news may actually exaggerate feelings of sadness in depressed individuals (Potts & Sanchez, 1994). Seeing other individuals' anguish in the news may generate stress for the viewer.

Altheide (2002) also found that constant exposures to disaster, in which despair, suffering, and hopelessness are prevalent, considerably alters social expectations, "and with enough repetition and expanded use, it becomes a way of looking at life" (p.3). For example, previous research has found that the relationship between depression and the belief that America has a bleak future becomes stronger as television viewing and attention increase (McNaughton-Cassill & Smith, 2002). Prior research shows that the emotional distress caused from witnessing a traumatic event in person are similar to those created by looking at a photograph of the traumatic event (Lang, Greenwald, Bradley, & Hamm, 1993). A previous experiment also showed that individuals who watched fourteen minutes of downbeat news clips displayed an increased amount of anxiety and depression, as well as a heightened concern over personal problems (Johnston & Davey, 1997).

Past studies have examined negative television news' relationship with a number of different variables (McNaughton-Cassill & Smith, 2002; Ofman, Mastria, & Steinberg, 1995). It is necessary, however, to use constructs that are more state-dependent than

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dispositional measures of depression and anxiety in experimental research to determine the immediate effects negative television news has on a viewer. Positive and negative affect are two appropriate constructs to examine in this regard.

Affect

The majority of research on negative television news has focused solely on depression and anxiety, but a few studies have examined its relationship with negative and positive affect (Harrell, 2000; Szabo & Hopkinson, 2007). As mentioned before, the affective symptoms of depression and anxiety are generally stable over time (Prenoveau et al., 2010) whereas affect deals with current mood (Quirin, Kazen, & Kuhl, 2009) and considers situational mood fluctuations. Depression and anxiety share a communal characteristic; they both are included in emotional distress, also known as negative affect (Clark & Watson, 1991). A person suffering from anxiety displays increased levels of negative affect and elevated levels of physiological arousal; a person suffering from depression displays a decreased level of positive affect and an amplified level of negative affect. Positive affect is defined as the magnitude of enthusiasm, activeness, and attentiveness a person feels at any given moment (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). A high amount of positive affect means being full of energy, experiencing enjoyment, and being effective in concentrating. Negative affect is the subjective distress and unpleasantness that consumes an array of adverse moods, comprising anger, disgust, remorse, nervousness, disdain, and fear. A high amount of negative affect would be characterized by elevated levels in these particular mood states.

Harrell (2000) found that participants who watched just ten minutes of negative news clips showed significantly more negative affect and anxiety, and a substantial lower

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degree of positive affect compared to participants who watched ten minutes of news

containing both negative and positive news, or ten minutes of a news broadcast

containing only positive news. Szabo and Hopkinson (2007) also examined the effects of

news on positive and negative affect in their research, and found that after watching

fifteen minutes of a random television news broadcast, participants showed an increase in

state anxiety and total mood disturbance, as well as a reduction in positive affect.

Negative affect also increased, though not significantly. The results also demonstrated

that these effects persist for at least fifteen minutes, unless some sort of relaxation

technique is implemented.

Sometimes individuals may be unaware of their emotions or be unable to describe

their affective states accurately or with the correct label (Quirin et al., 2009). Quirin and

colleagues described implicit affect as "the automatic activation of cognitive

representations of affective experiences" (p.501). These authors speculate that implicit

measures tap into impulsivity, while explicit (self-report) measures involve reflecting on

concepts and classifications. Keeping this in consideration, implicit affect was chosen to

be examined in the current experiment.

Saleem and Anderson (2011) stated that constantly watching stories involving

violence, deception, and crime will result in an unfavorable view of the world. To date,

empirical research has shown that watching negative television news can result in

negative affect (Harrell, 2000) and a reduction in positive affect (Szabo & Hopkinson,

2007). What has yet to be shown, however, is how negative television news affects

individuals' attitudes towards others, especially the victims of these dreadful

circumstances. Thus, the current study aims to examine how watching negative

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television news affects one's empathy for victims and how it influences donations to victims of crime.

CHAPTER 3

EMPATHY AND HELPING BEHAVIOR

Empathy

While much research has been conducted to determine violent media's effect on empathy for others, no research has looked at the relationship between negative television news and empathy specifically. Empathy has been defined as having the capability to understand and show sensitivity to another person's feelings (Funk, 2003). Empathy involves reactions of compassion, kindness, sympathy, and sorrow for another person (Batson, 1987; Batson, Early, & Salvarani, 1997). Empathy can be conceived as multi-dimensional. Davis (1983) defined three dimensions of empathy: perspective taking, empathic concern, and personal distress. Perspective taking is the inclination to spontaneously adopt the viewpoint of others. Empathic concern is other-oriented emotions of concern and sensitivity, while personal distress involves emotions of anxiety and agitation and is regarded as self-oriented.

Stotland (1969) postulated that perspective taking or imagining what a person is going through is the catalyst that determines whether or not a person will express empathy for another. This researcher's experiment showed that individuals who took another person's situation and feelings under consideration reported more empathy and a larger physiological response compared to individuals who were led to take an objective approach. Prior research shows that the majority of individuals tend to place some value on another person's welfare, even when it's someone they don't know, unless some type of justification for not valuing the person exists (Batson, Eklund, Chermok, Hoyt, & Ortiz, 2007). Taking the perspective of another can produce empathy as long as there

isn't any previous antipathy towards an individual, and it often occurs spontaneously. Batson (1991a) proposed that a person will experience either the empathic concern emotion or the personal distress emotion when they come in contact with a helping opportunity. Research has shown that helping behavior occurs in a variety of different situations if the dominant emotion experienced by the possible helper is empathic concern (Davis, 1983; Davis et al., 2004). Batson and colleagues (2007) concluded that having empathy is associated with helping behavior.

If the dominant reaction a person experiences is personal distress however, the possibility of helping will be less likely to occur, unless the person deems the situation as difficult to escape without offering assistance (Batson, 1991a). A previous experiment by Batson et al. (1988) provides an example of a situation that may be deemed difficult to escape without helping. In the experiment, participants watched a confederate suffer through a series of "painful" shocks each time the confederate made an error on a performance task. After witnessing this, participants were then asked if they would be willing to take the confederate's place. They were told however, that if they chose not to take the confederate's place they would have to continue to watch the confederate receive shocks over the last eight trials.

Desensitization

People may also demonstrate less empathy towards victims as a result of desensitization to media violence. When the amount of media violence consumption increases, empathy for others tends to decrease (Funk, 2005). Cognitive desensitization occurs when individuals start to believe that violence is not only unavoidable, but normal as well (Funk, Baldacci, Pasold, & Baumgardner, 2004). Individuals habituate to

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watching others suffer through various media outlets, and as a result, may exhibit a lower amount of empathy towards real-life people (Anderson & Bushman, 2001). For example, a previous experiment found that individuals who watched R-rated movies containing violence were less empathic towards rape victims as a whole compared to participants who watched movies that did not contain violence and individuals that did not watch movies (Linz, Donnerstein, & Penrod, 1988). Desensitization from media violence may cause impairment in emotional regulation towards stimuli and situations that would normally elicit an empathetic response (Eisenberg, 2000). Some researchers claim that this occurs as a result to becoming desensitized to the actual outcomes and repercussions of violent activity (Strasburger & Wilson, 2002). This relationship has been found for both children (Krahe & Moller, 2010; Funk et al., 2004) and adults (Carnagey, Bushman, Anderson, as cited in Funk, 2006) after playing violent video games.

<center>Other Factors that Influence Helping Behavior</center>

Individuals will also be less likely to help another person if they feel that the person's actions were responsible for their fate (Brickman et al., 1982). The just world hypothesis states that people have a tendency to place the blame on a victim and view that person's misery as a result of their own actions to continue to perpetuate the belief that the world is just (Lerner, 1970). Research shows that people who believe in a justifiable world are less likely to help others when compared to participants who do not have this belief (Kogut, 2011). Blaming the victim helps individuals create more psychological distance between them and the victim, which in turn, makes them feel safer (Lerner, 1980). Lerner (1980) postulates that having the belief in a just world will result in unfavorable judgments of people in need when helping would not alleviate the need

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entirely. Previous research found that a single verifiable victim of a tsunami was given larger donations compared to a group of victims, regardless of whether they were identifiable or not (Kogut & Ritov, 2007). Other research has shown that people tend to demonstrate less generosity towards nameless or statistical victims when compared to an identifiable victim (Small & Lowenstein, 2003).

Participants view showing concern for numerous victims to be more costly than a single suffering person (Cameron & Payne, 2011). Dovidio, Piliavin, Gaertner, Schroedner, and Clark (1991) speculate that when helping is costly, individuals will reduce the amount of arousal caused by seeing others suffer by engaging in coping mechanisms such as actively changing their perception of the situation, diffusing the responsibility of helping to someone else, or escaping the situation. Shaw, Batson, and Todd (1994) state that people strongly avoid experiencing feelings that would influence them to help when the situation is deemed materially costly. Individuals may also engage in evading their feelings for others due to fear of becoming emotionally overwhelmed by multiple victims (Cameron & Payne, 2011). This seems to be especially true for individuals who are skilled at regulating feelings and emotions. Individuals in these situations tend to proactively inhibit feelings of emotions before the onset of an intense mental state.

Slovic (2007) came to the conclusion that people just seem to be unable to fathom the suffering of more than one person on an emotional level. He states that people do not exhibit a higher degree of charitable behavior or a larger amount of emotion when numerous individuals need help compared to a single individual. A prior experiment found that participants demonstrated less compassion to a group of eight individuals

compared to only one victim (Cameron & Payne, 2011). Surprisingly, previous research has even shown that people tend to have more sympathy for one person compared to even just two individuals (Västfjäll, Peters, & Slovic, as cited in Slovic, 2007).

Affect has also been shown to influence empathy and helping behaviors. A previous experiment examined the relationship between empathy, which was measured by helping behavior, and affect (Chapman, Zahn-Waxler, Cooperman, & Iannotti, 1987). The results showed that as the implementation of negative affect increased, helping behavior decreased. Other research has shown that children in a negative affect condition exhibited less donation behaviors than participants in a positive affect condition, as well as a control condition (Moore, Underwood, & Rosenhan, 1973). The findings that donation behaviors decrease in a linear fashion from the positive affect group to the control group to the negative affect group have been replicated in an adult sample as well (Underwood, Froming, & Moore, 1977). The previously mentioned findings suggest that negative affect does indeed inhibit donation behavior.

CHAPTER 4

SUMMARY AND OVERVIEW OF CURRENT STUDY

Previous research has shown that watching negative television news can produce depression and anxiety (Ahern et al., 2004) and can result in a reduction in positive affect (Harrell, 2000; Szabo & Hopkinson, 2007) and an increase in negative affect (Harrell, 2000). What is still unknown however, is how watching negative television news influences a person's attitudes towards others. Research shows that taking the perspective of another can produce empathy as long as there isn't any animosity towards the individual, and it often occurs spontaneously (Batson et al., 2007). Research has also shown that helping behavior occurs in many situations if the possible helper experiences empathic concern (Davis, 1983; Davis et al., 2004). If a person experiences personal distress however, the possibility of helping will be less likely to occur, unless the person deems the situation as difficult to escape without offering assistance. Prior studies have also found that experiencing negative affect results in less donation behaviors (Underwood, Froming, & Moore, 1977; Chapman, Zahn-Waxler, Cooperman & Iannotti, 1987).

As stated previously, depression and anxiety may be more suitable constructs to use in correlational studies than actual experiments considering how stable these traits typically are. Positive and negative affect may be more appropriate constructs for examining the immediate effects of watching television news media. Unfortunately, some discrepancies seem to lie in this part of the literature. As stated previously, Harrell (2000) found that participants who watched ten minutes of negative news clips showed significantly more negative affect and a considerable less amount of positive affect.

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Szabo and Hopkinson (2007) found that participants showed a reduction in positive affect after watching fifteen minutes of a random television news broadcast, but did not show a significant increase in negative affect. While Szabo and Hopkinson's experiment differs from Harrell's (2000) study in the aspect of negative affect, it may be due entirely to the particular television broadcast that was shown. Regardless, the present researcher does believe that watching negative television news will result in an individual experiencing a heightened sense of negative affect. While the majority of the previous research implies that watching negative television news produces harmful effects on the self, it is important to investigate how news programming influences an individual's attitudes towards others, especially how it impacts one's empathy and willingness to help those in need.

Figure one displays a model of hypothesized relationships among negative television news, negative affect, empathy, and donations. The model predicts that watching negative television news leads to less donations to those in need (Path 1), negative television news leads to more negative affect (Path 2) which in turn leads to a reduction in empathy (Path 3). Having less empathy will result in less donations (Path 4). Negative affect will lead to less donations (Path 5). Path 1 is not predicted to be a direct path, but is expected to be mediated by affect and empathy.

It is further predicted that watching negative television news will have a greater impact on affect, empathy, and donations when the news stories come from a person's immediate environment. That is, the physically closer the negative news, the more psychologically closer one should feel towards the victim. This self-other overlap may lead to either emotional empathy or distress. Past research by Heath (1984) supports this

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hypothesis. Heath (1984) conducted a study that examined newspaper reported crimes and how the location of these crimes affected perceptions of crime. Participants who read newspapers that covered local crimes reported a higher amount of fear when the majority of the local crime stories were random. Participants who read newspapers that covered mostly nonlocal crimes showed less fear when crimes were random. Sensational crimes (crimes that violate social norms) were reported to be scarier when they occurred in the local area of readers. In contrast, when crimes of this nature occurred in cities other than the readers', participants felt less frightened and more reassured about crime. Heath states that when things are atrocious somewhere else, individuals feel better about their immediate surroundings. It may also be that one can more easily imagine being in the victim's shoes if the location is closer and experience more self-other overlap. This self-other overlap may then lead to either empathic concern or personal distress. Logically, this would make sense when it comes to televised news crimes as well. Researchers stipulate that crimes from distant places will lower an individual's crime risk perception in comparison to crimes shown from the local area (Romer, Jamieson, & Aday, 2003). Based on this literature, it is predicted that the aforementioned model will have an even greater magnitude when crimes occur in an individual's local proximity.

<center>Hypotheses</center>

It was hypothesized that participants in the local victim news condition would show more negative affect compared to participants in the nonlocal victim news condition, the far victim news condition, and the neutral media condition. It was believed that this would occur for the participants in the local victim news condition due to the negative news coming from the immediate area. As discussed previously, individuals

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exhibit more fear when crimes are local (Heath, 1984). It was also believed that

participants in both the nonlocal victim news condition and the far victim news condition

would experience more negative affect than the neutral media condition. Even though

participants in the nonlocal victim news condition and the far victim news condition

should feel more at ease about their immediate environment, it was believed that these

participants would experience more negative affect than participants in the neutral media

condition because they did witness individuals suffering. It was also hypothesized that

participants in the victim news conditions (local victim news condition, nonlocal victim

news condition, far victim news condition) would donate less money to victims of crime

than participants in the neutral media condition, as a result of placing blame on the

victims. As stated previously, blaming the victim helps individuals create more

psychological distance between them and the victim, which in turn, makes them feel safer

(Lerner, 1980). Finally, it was hypothesized that participants in the victim news

conditions would exhibit less perspective taking, less empathic concern, and more

personal distress than participants in the neutral media condition.

Theoretical Model

| Negative Television News | Path 2 → | Negative Affect | Path 3 → | Reduced Empathy |

Path 4

Path 5

Less Donations

Path 1
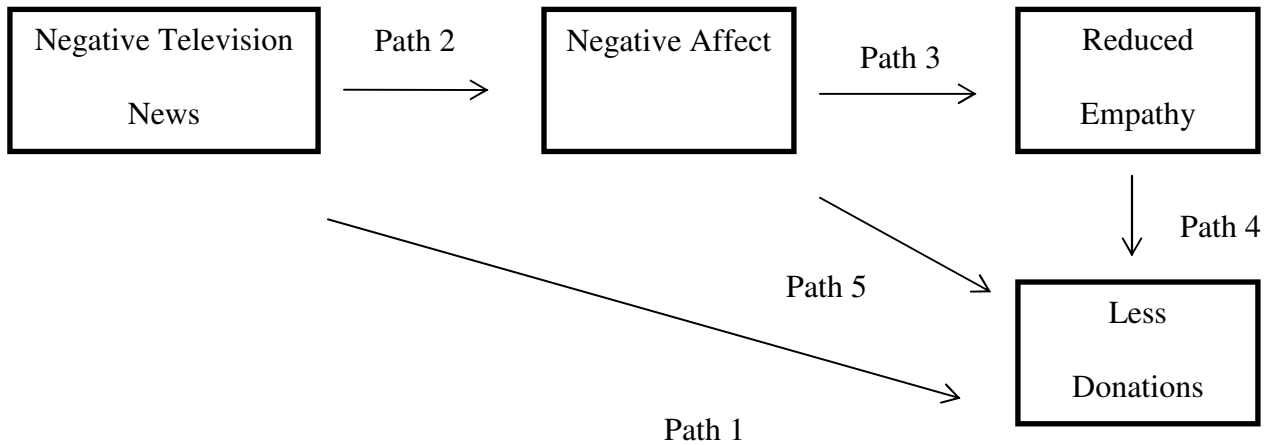
Figure 1.   Hypothesized theoretical model of negative television news. Path 1 = Negative television news leads to less donations. Path 2 = Watching negative television news increases negative affect. Path 3 = Negative affect results in a reduction in empathy. Path 4 = A reduction in empathy leads to less donation behaviors. Path 5 = Negative affect leads to less donation behaviors.

CHAPTER 5

METHOD

Participants

One hundred and seventy students (117 women; 53 men) in Introductory to

Psychology courses at Georgia Southern University participated in the experiment.

Participants ranged from eighteen to forty-two in age (*M* = 19.63; *SD* = 2.65). Fifty-

seven percent of participants were Caucasian and 34% of participants identified

themselves as African Americans. Other participants identified themselves as Asian or

Pacific Islander (.6%), Asian Indian (.6%), Native American (.6%), Hispanic (.6%), more

than one ethnicity (5.3%), or some other ethnicity than listed above (.6%). Forty-one

participants were randomly assigned to the local victim news condition, 39 participants

were randomly assigned to the nonlocal victim news condition, 43 participants were

randomly assigned to the far victim news condition, and 47 participants were randomly

assigned to the neutral media condition.

Design

The independent variable was victim distance, while the dependent variables

included implicit positive and negative affect, perspective taking, empathic concern and

personal distress, and donations to victims of crime. Participants were randomly assigned

to one of four conditions: local victim news condition (participants watched news stories

that involved the local immediate area), nonlocal victim news condition (participants

watched news stories from areas no more than two hundred and ten miles away), far

victim news condition (participants watched news stories from areas at least one thousand

miles away) and neutral media condition (participants watched a media clip taken from a national geographic documentary).

Materials

Local victim news condition

Participants in this condition watched two videos involving college students at Georgia Southern University. One video covered the murder of a nineteen year old college student at an apartment complex. The other video revolved around a domestic abuse issue involving the use of a drug known as "spice." In the video, the victim's mother describes how the victim's boyfriend almost beat her to death after consuming the drug. The length of the videos was three minutes and thirty-nine seconds when combined.

Nonlocal victim news condition

Participants in this condition watched two videos involving college students at Savannah State University and Georgia State University. The Savannah State University video involved a reporter discussing a shooting that occurred on campus, and the Georgia State University video discussed robberies and muggings that occurred on campus. Savannah State University is 57 miles away from Georgia Southern University, and Georgia State University is located 210 miles away from Georgia Southern University. The length of the videos was three minutes and one second when combined.

Far victim news condition

Participants in this condition watched two videos involving college students at Becker College in Worcester, Massachusetts and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee campus. The Becker college video discusses the murder of a student, and the University

of Wisconsin-Milwaukee video revolves around armed robberies and muggings that occurred near campus. Becker College is 1,035 miles away from Georgia Southern University, and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee campus is 1,020 miles away from Georgia Southern University. The length of the videos was three minutes and fifty seconds when combined.

Neutral media condition

Participants in this condition watched one video from a national geographic documentary involving Antarctic penguins. This video covers feeding, building nests, and other behaviors of the Antarctic penguins. The length of this video was five minutes and forty-three seconds.

Measures

Bogus Pipeline (Cohen, Jussim, Harber, & Bhasin, 2009). A reformed bogus pipeline adapted from Cohen et al. was used to help ensure truthful answers for the rest of the measures of the experiment (see Appendix A). Cohen et al. stated that the bogus pipeline has been able to help decrease a person's propensity to overrate their positive features and underrate their negative features in past research (Jones & Sigall, 1971, as cited in Cohen et al., 2009). This technique induces the belief that experimenters are able to determine a person's real values and attitudes. The bogus pipeline was taken verbatim from Cohen et al. and was given to participants before they received anything else. The sheet read "Please remember to answer truthfully on the questions. Any lying and untruthfulness will be detected by sophisticated methods developed by psychologists. In another experiment, for example, participants were asked to consider the following question: "How often do you stop for stranded motorists? (never, rarely, sometimes,

usually, always)." Participants were then told "This question might appear innocent enough, but, in fact, it is one of many tools psychologists use to detect people who lie to create a positive impression of themselves. With the possible exception of policemen on patrol, NO ONE "usually" or "always" stops for stranded motorists. People who say they do are most likely lying." As in this example, untruthful answers to the questions asked in the current experiment will be detected."

Implicit Positive and Negative Affect Test (IPANAT; Quirin, Kazen, & Kuhl, 2009). The Implicit Positive and Negative Affect Test is a thirty-six item measure used to examine levels of implicit positive and negative affect (see Appendix B). This measure was used to assess participants' implicit positive and negative affect after viewing the media clips. The measure consists of six nonsense syllables with the same six characteristics next to each nonsense syllable. Participants were asked to circle numbers to indicate how well each characteristic "fits" with each nonsense syllable by using a four point Likert scale that ranged from 1=doesn't fit at all to 4=fits very well. Characteristics included happy, helpless, energetic, tense, cheerful, and inhibited. The total scores for positive affect (happy, energetic, and cheerful) and negative affect (helpless, tense, and inhibited) from all nonsense syllables were calculated by summing up the responses for all of the items that make up the subscale and then dividing by the number of items that make up each subscale. Higher scores on implicit negative affect items indicated higher levels of implicit negative affect within an individual; higher scores on implicit positive affect items indicated higher levels of implicit positive affect within an individual. Cronbach's alpha was .81 for positive affect and .72 for negative affect in the current study.

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Prosocial Personality Battery (PSB; Penner, 2002). This Prosocial Personality Battery version is a thirty-item measure used to examine levels of social responsibility, empathic concern, perspective taking, personal distress, mutual moral reasoning, other oriented reasoning, and self-reported altruism (see Appendix C). These traits are divided across four different subscales: Social Responsibility, Empathy Scale, Moral Reasoning, and Self-Reported Altruism. The scales range from five to twelve items. In this particular study, only the empathy scale was used from the PSB. Only items regarding perspective taking were given to participants, because the empathic concern and personal distress scales in this measure focused more on traits rather than states. The perspective taking subscale consisted of five items. Participants were asked to circle the response for each item that corresponded with their feelings and behavior using a five-point Likert scale that ranged from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. The total scores for perspective-taking were calculated by adding up the responses for all of the items and dividing by the number of items. Higher scores on the perspective taking subscale indicated higher levels of perspective taking. Cronbach's alpha for the perspective taking subscale was .62 in the current study.

Indexes of Empathic Concern and Personal Distress (Coke, Batson, McDavis, 1978). These scales were used to examine state levels of empathic concern and personal distress (see Appendix D). Five items were included in the empathic concern scale, and three items were included in the personal distress scale. The items that made up the empathic concern scale included: softhearted, empathic, warm, concerned, and compassionate. The items that made up the personal distress scale included: upset,

alarmed, and troubled. Other adjectives were previously included with these scales, but due to factor loadings, Coke, Batson, and McDavis (1978) decided that only the adjectives listed above should make up these indexes. Participants were asked to circle the response for each item that corresponded with how they felt using a five-point Likert scale that ranged from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. Higher scores on the empathic concern scale indicated higher levels of empathic concern while higher scores of personal distress indicated higher levels of personal distress respectfully. Cronbach's alpha was .60 for the empathic concern subscale and .71 for the personal distress subscale in the current study.

Donation behavior. The strategy used to measure donation behavior came from a previous study by Freeman, Aquino, and McFerran (2009). The researchers in this experiment gave participants a fact sheet about an African-American charitable organization and told participants that they were entered into a drawing for a chance to win $25 for participating in the experiment. Participants were told that they had a 4% chance of winning the drawing, but were asked how much of the money they would donate to the charity if they indeed, did win the money.   Participants were given four options: (1) $25 to me and $0 to the charity (2) $15 to me and $10 to the charity (3) $10 to me and $15 to the charity, or (4) $0 to me and $25 to the charity. This exact same process was used in the present experiment to examine donation behavior. In the present experiment, participants were given a fact sheet about the National Center for Victims of Crime (see Appendix E). The data from this measure was analyzed by examining the actual amounts participants were willing to donate to the charity.

Procedure

Participants in the local victim news condition watched three minutes and thirty-nine seconds of local negative television news. Participants in the nonlocal victim news condition watched three minutes and one second of nonlocal negative television news. Participants in the far victim news condition watched three minutes and fifty seconds of far negative television news. Participants in the neutral media condition watched a five minute and forty-three second clip from a National Geographic segment about Antarctic penguins. This study was conducted with small groups of participants when participants signed up for the same time period. These groups ranged from two to nine participants. Each group was randomly assigned to a condition. Participants were given either course credit or extra credit in their Introduction to Psychology course for participation in the experiment.

When participants arrived, they were given an informed consent form to read over and sign. Participants then watched the clip(s) that corresponded with their condition. After watching the clips, participants received the bogus pipeline from Cohen et al.'s (2009) study, the Implicit Positive Affect and Negative Affect Test (IPANAT; Quirin, et al., 2009), questions from the Empathy Scale regarding perspective taking from the Prosocial Personality Battery (PSB; Penner, 2002), the Indexes of Empathic Concern and Personal Distress used in Coke, Batson, and McDavis' (1978) study, the National Center for Victims of Crime Fact Sheet, and a demographics page. The National Center for Victims of Crime Fact Sheet contained a brief overview of the National Center for Victims of Crime. The bottom of this sheet stated that each participant had been entered into a random drawing to win $25 for participation in the study and asked each participant to indicate how much money they would be willing to donate to the

organization if they won the money. Questionnaires were collected by the researcher

after all of the participants finished. Participants were then debriefed and told the nature

of the experiment.

CHAPTER 6

RESULTS

It was hypothesized that participants in the local victim news condition would show more negative affect compared to participants in the nonlocal victim news condition, the far victim news condition, and the neutral media condition. It was also hypothesized that participants in the nonlocal victim news condition and the far victim news condition would exhibit significantly more negative affect than participants in the neutral media condition. It was also hypothesized that participants in the victim news conditions (local victim news condition, nonlocal victim news condition, far victim news condition) would exhibit significantly less donations compared to participants in the neutral media condition. Lastly, it was hypothesized that participants in the victim news conditions would exhibit less perspective taking, less empathic concern, and more personal distress than participants in the neutral media condition.

Correlations

Table one displays descriptive statistics, reliabilities, and intercorrelations between the research variables. Donations were significantly positively correlated with perspective taking, empathic concern, and personal distress. Perspective taking was significantly positively correlated with empathic concern and negative affect. Personal distress was significantly positively correlated with negative affect, while positive affect was also significantly positively correlated with negative affect.

Hypotheses Testing

To test the hypothesized relationships between victim distance, affect, empathy, and donations, a series of models was conducted. First, a one-way between groups

(victim distance) ANOVA on donations was conducted. Results showed that there was a

main effect of victim distance for donations, $F(3, 166) = 3.59$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .06$ with

participants in the local victim news condition ($M = 15.37$, $SD = 8.54$) donating more

money than the participants in the nonlocal victim news condition ($M = 11.28$, $SD =$

8.25), the participants in the far victim news condition ($M = 12.21$, $SD = 8.61$), and the

participants in the neutral media condition ($M = 9.68$, $SD = 7.76$) (see Figure 2).

Participants in the nonlocal victim news condition and far victim news condition did not

significantly differ from the neutral media condition. A chi-square test of independence

was also conducted to examine the relation between victim distance and donations.

The relation between these variables was significant, $X^2 (9, 170) = 19.1$, $p = .025$.

Participants in the local victim news condition gave more money to others and kept less

money for themselves than any other group (see Table 2).

      Second, the effects of victim distance on the predictor variables were analyzed. A

one-way between groups MANOVA was conducted to analyze the effects of victim

distance on implicit positive affect, implicit negative affect, perspective taking, empathic

concern, and personal distress. The results showed a significant multivariate main effect

for victim distance, Wilk's $\lambda = .78$, $F(15, 447.61) = 2.80$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .08$. Univariate

results showed a main effect of victim distance for implicit positive affect, $F(3, 166) =$

3.73, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .06$, with participants in the local victim news condition ($M = 1.97$, SD

$= .52$) reporting less implicit positive affect than participants in the neutral media

condition ($M = 2.21$, $SD = .52$). Participants in the far victim news condition ($M = 1.89$,

$SD = .45$) also reported less implicit positive affect than participants in the neutral media

condition. Participants in the nonlocal victim news condition ($M = 2.03$, $SD = .40$) did

not significantly differ from participants in the other conditions (see Figure 3). The results also revealed a main effect of victim distance on empathic concern, $F(3, 166) = 2.77$, p <.05, $\eta^2 = .05$, with participants in the local victim news condition ($M = 3.29$, $SD = .82$) reporting more empathic concern than participants in the nonlocal victim news condition ($M = 2.92$, $SD = .58$) and participants in the far victim news condition ($M = 2.90$, $SD = .65$). Participants in the neutral media condition ($M = 3.05$, $SD = .67$) did not significantly differ from participants in the other conditions (see Figure 4).

There was also a main effect of victim distance on personal distress $F(3, 166) = 6.85$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .11$, with participants in the local victim news condition ($M = 2.58$, $SD = 1.12$) reporting more personal distress than participants in the neutral media condition ($M = 1.76$, $SD = .68$). Participants in the nonlocal victim news condition ($M = 2.28$, $SD = .83$) and the far victim news condition ($M = 2.26$, $SD = .80$) also reported significantly more personal distress in comparison to participants in the neutral media condition (see Figure 5). However, personal distress did not differ significantly across the three experimental conditions. No relationship was found between victim distance and negative affect, $F(3, 166) = .387$, $p > .05$, $\eta^2 = .01$. Univariate results indicated that there was also no relationship between perspective-taking and victim distance, $F(3, 166) = 1.05$, p > .05, $\eta^2 = .02$

Third, to test whether the effect of victim distance on donation behavior was mediated by the significant process variables of positive affect, personal distress, or empathic concern, these variables were included into the model as covariates with "victim distance" being the independent variable and "donations" being the dependent variable. A one-way between groups ANCOVA was then conducted to analyze the data.

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The results showed that there was not a significant main effect of victim distance on donation behaviors when controlling for these variables, $F(3, 163) = 2.40$, $p > .05$. Further examination revealed that removing personal distress from the list of previously mentioned covariates resulted in a significant main effect of victim distance, $F(3, 164) = 3.04$, $p < .05$. Finally, removing positive affect and empathic concern as covariates in the model with only personal distress left as a covariate did not result in a significant main effect, $F(3, 165) = 2.51$, $p > .05$. These results suggest that personal distress may be mediating the relationship between local victim news and helping behavior (see Figure 6).

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics, Reliabilities, and Intercorrelations among Research Variables*

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Donations	12.06	8.47						
2. Perspective Taking	3.23	.45	.24**	.(62)				
3. Empathic Concern	3.04	.70	.16*	.22**	(.60)			
4. Personal Distress	2.20	.91	-.17*	.11	.33*	(.71)		
5. Positive Affect	2.03	.49	-.02	.10	.08	-.09	(.81)	
6. Negative Affect	1.92	.40	.00	.19*	.14	.19*	.18*	(.72)

Note. Reliabilities are in parenthesis. *p < .05, *p < .001
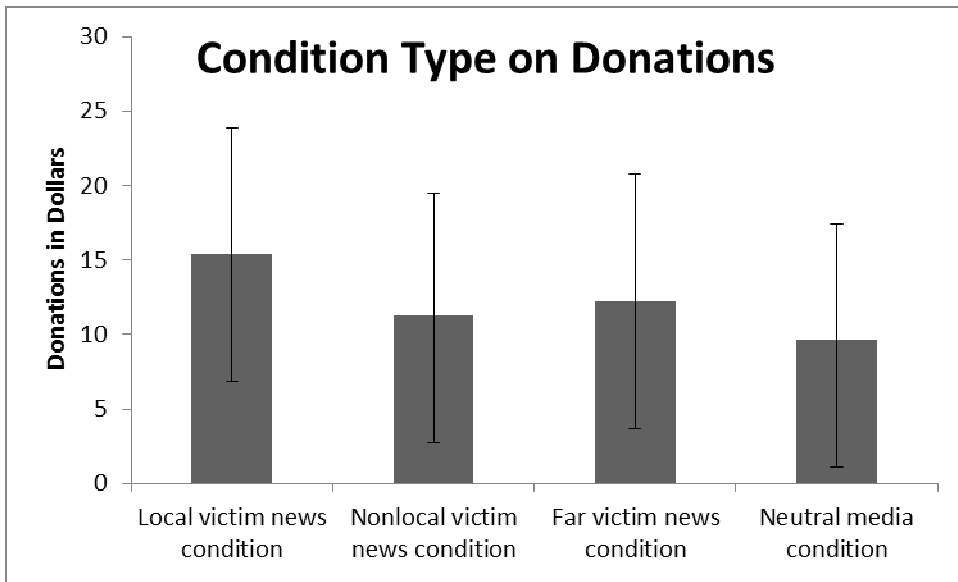
Figure 2. Victim distance on amount of donations.

Table 2. *Percent of Participants Donating to Self vs. Other as a Function of Victim Distance*

Condition	$25 to Self $0 to Other	$15 to Self $10 to Other	$10 to Self $15 to Other	$0 to Other $25 to Self
Local victim news	12.2%	29.3%	22.0%	36.6%
Nonlocal victim news	20.5%	53.8%	5.1%	20.5%
Far victim news	18.6%	51.2%	4.7%	25.6%
Neutral media	27.7%	48.9%	10.6%	12.8%
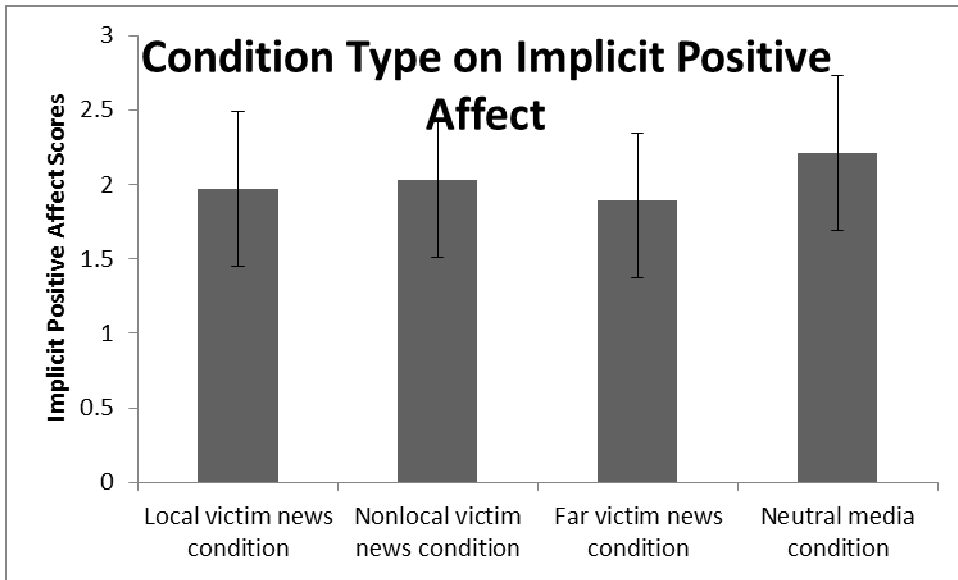
Figure 3. Victim distance on implicit positive affect scores.
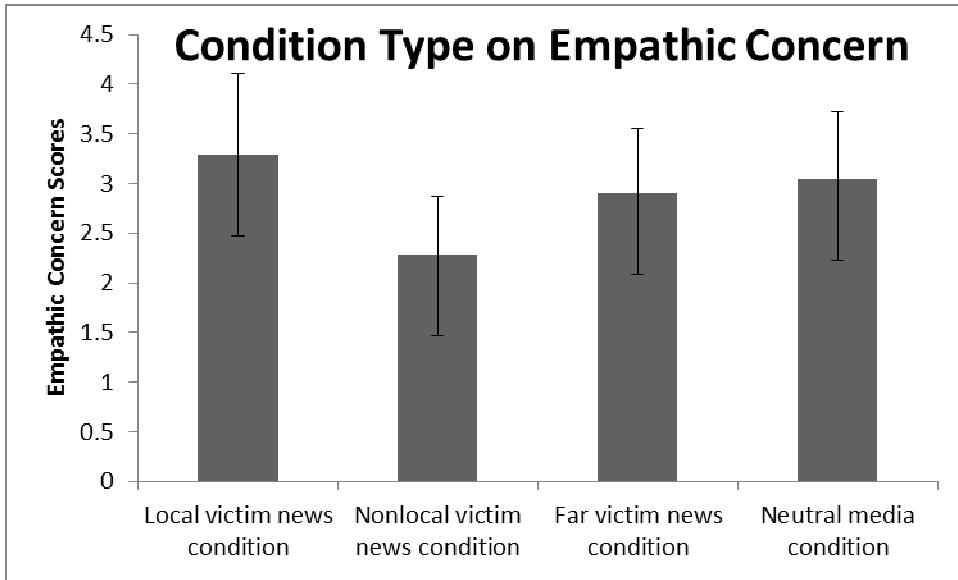
Figure 4. Victim distance on empathic concern scores.
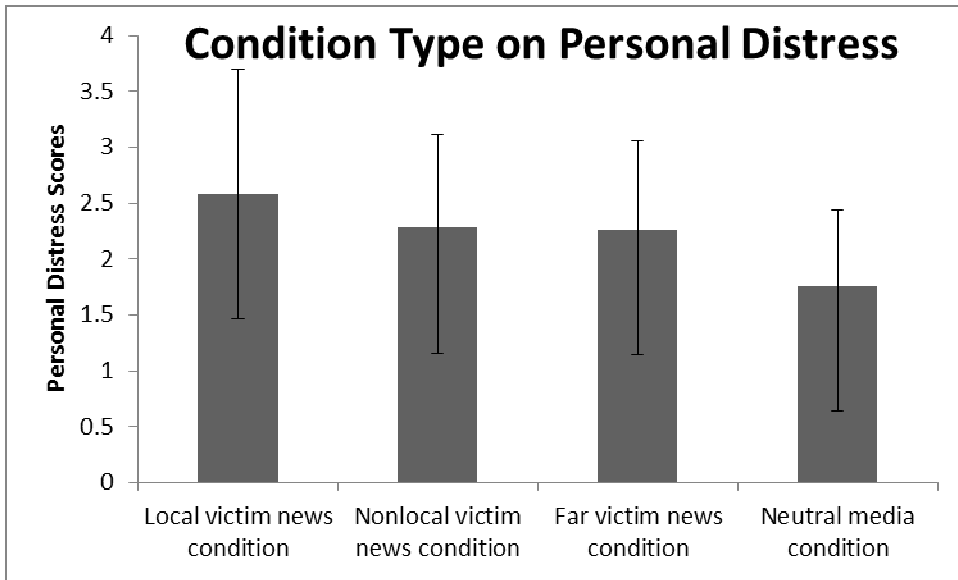
Figure 5. Victim distance on personal distress scores.
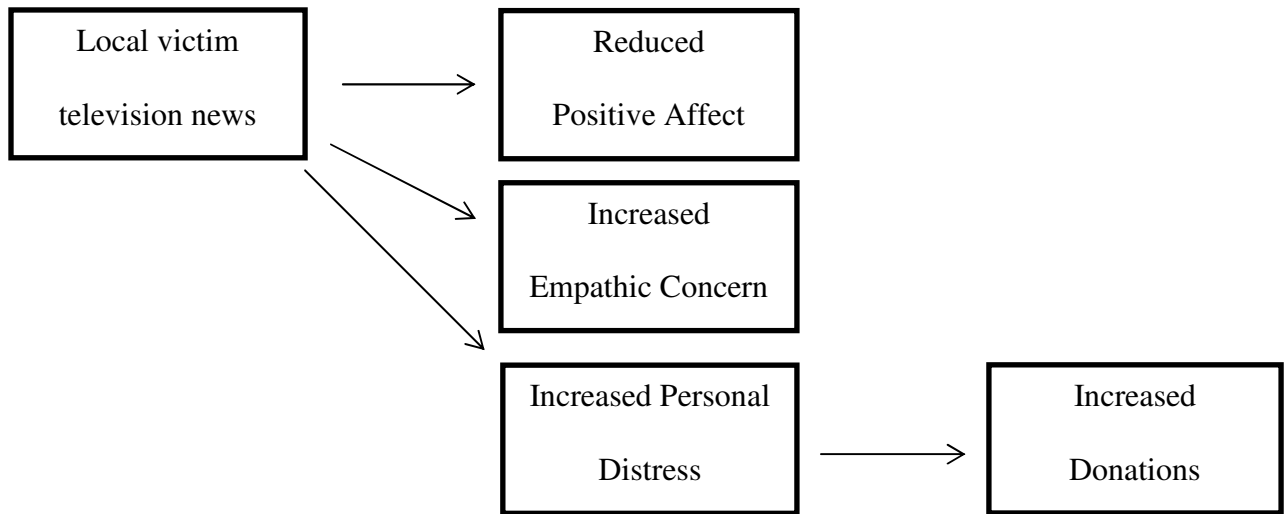
Figure 6. Updated theoretical model of local negative television news. Local victim

television news leads to a reduction in positive affect, an increase in empathic concern,

and an increase in personal distress. The increase in personal distress is what leads to

increased donations.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION

It was hypothesized that participants in the local victim news condition would show more implicit negative affect compared to participants in the nonlocal victim news condition, the far victim news condition, and the neutral media condition. It was also hypothesized that participants in both the nonlocal victim news condition and the far victim news condition would exhibit significantly more implicit negative affect than participants in the neutral media condition. It was also hypothesized that participants in the victim news conditions (local victim news condition, nonlocal victim news condition, far victim news condition) would donate less money to victims of crime compared to participants in the neutral media condition. Finally, it was hypothesized that participants in the victim news conditions would exhibit less perspective taking, less empathic concern, and more personal distress than participants in the neutral media condition.

Contrary to the hypotheses, the results of the study showed that watching negative television news led to increased donations. This was shown to be especially true when the negative television news came from the local surrounding area. While participants in all of the victim news conditions donated more than the neutral media condition, participants in the local victim news condition was the only group to donate significantly more than participants in the neutral media condition. Participants in the local victim news condition also donated significantly more than participants in the nonlocal victim news condition. It's important to remember that participants were not only potentially donating money to others in the current experiment, but were also taking money away

from themselves by choosing to donate. Participants in the local victim news conditions donated more to others and kept less for themselves than any of the other conditions.

The results showed that victim distance did not affect implicit negative affect, but it did however, have an impact on implicit positive affect. Participants in the local victim news condition and the far victim news condition showed a significant decrease in positive affect when compared to participants in the neutral media condition. Victim distance did not influence perspective taking, but it did make a difference in empathic concern and personal distress. The results showed that individuals in the local victim news condition showed significantly more empathic concern than individuals in both the nonlocal victim news condition and the far victim news condition. The results also showed that individuals in the victim news conditions (local victim news condition, nonlocal victim news condition, and far victim news condition) displayed more personal distress than participants in the neutral media condition. It is important to note though, that the local victim news condition had the largest amount of personal distress compared to the other conditions. The findings of the experiment suggest that personal distress may be acting as a mediator in the relationship between local victim news and donations. While the hypothesized model was incorrect, the results from the ANCOVAs advocate a different model.

Since the finding that personal distress may potentially mediate the relationship between local victim news and increased donations is the most meaningful finding, it will be discussed first. As stated previously, research has shown that experiencing personal distress should lead to less donation behaviors unless the person perceives their situation as too costly to escape without offering assistance (Davis, 1983; Davis et al., 2004;

Graziano, Habashi, Sheese, & Tobin, 2007). When compared to Batson et al. (1988)'s experiment, where participants had to continue to watch the confederate get shocked if they didn't agree to take the confederate's place, the present experiment was certainly not costly to escape without helping. Participants in the current experiment were specifically told that they would be watching a media clip(s) and would fill out a questionnaire after viewing the clip(s). When participants were filling out the measure regarding donations, they were aware that they would not be seeing any more crime victims during the experimental session. So even though the situation was easily escapable, personal distress still led to increased donations. It may be fruitful to take other findings of the present experiment into consideration to help explain this contradiction with previous literature.

In the current experiment, participants in the local victim news condition exhibited significantly more personal distress than participants in the neutral media condition, and had the most personal distress overall. Participants in the local victim news condition also donated significantly more money to crime victims than both the neutral media condition and the nonlocal victim news condition. Participants may not have seen the experimental session as inescapable, but may have seen local crime as difficult to escape without helping. Participants in the local victim news condition may have given larger donations as a self-defense mechanism; this behavior may have been an attempt to reduce personal distress caused by the local crime. For some reason, participants in the local victim news condition did not give significantly more donations than participants in the far victim news condition. Recall that the far victim news

condition also showed less positive affect than the neutral media condition. These two findings suggest that the far videos may have differed in something besides distance.

Victim distance had a significant effect on implicit positive affect, but not implicit negative affect. More specifically, participants in the local victim news condition and the far victim news condition showed a significant decrease in positive affect when compared to participants in the neutral media condition. This finding is consistent with the results from the study conducted by Szabo and Hopkinson (2007), in which participants experienced a decrease in positive affect, but not a significant increase in negative affect after watching fifteen minutes of a television news broadcast on a random day. While the current study's finding is consistent with Szabo and Hopkinson's study (2007), it is in conflict with the results of Harrell (2000)'s study. Individuals that watched only negative news in Harrell's experiment showed a significant increase in negative affect and a sizable decrease in positive affect. It is important to remember however, that participants in the current study watched less than four minutes of negative news clips compared to fifteen minutes in Szabo and Hopkinson (2007)'s study and ten minutes in Harrell (2000)'s study. This finding indicates that watching only a few minutes of negative television news can still have an adverse effect on an individual. It is necessary to note that the current study assessed affect implicitly, while previous researchers (Szabo & Hopkinson, 2007; Harrell, 2000) used an explicit measure. As stated previously, implicit measures assess a person's impulsivity, while explicit measures involve a person reflecting on concepts and classifications.

Negative affect not being displayed by participants in the current study may explain why donations occurred. This finding coincides with previous research findings

on affect and donation behaviors. Previous research with children showed that those who experienced negative affect gave significantly less donations than a neutral group and a positive affect group (Moore, Underwood, & Rosenhan, 1973; Underwood, Froming, & Moore, 1977). The positive affect groups in these studies gave the largest donations. Another study found that adults who watched a sad movie not only donated less, but were also less likely to donate than individuals who watched a neutral movie (Underwood et al., 1977). These research findings suggest that negative affect is related to less donation behaviors.

The results of the experiment showed that participants did not differ in perspective taking across conditions. Stotland (1969) stated that perspective taking is crucial in determining whether a person would express empathy for another individual. Other research has shown that taking the perspective of someone else can generate empathy towards that person, and it often occurs spontaneously (Batson et al., 2007). Participants in the local victim news condition showed significantly more empathic concern than participants in both the nonlocal victim news condition and the far victim news condition. Empathic concern was displayed by the individuals in this condition even though they did not actually know the victims. This is consistent with Batson and colleagues (2007)'s belief that most people place at least some value on another person's welfare, unless there is a justification for not doing so. Previous research has found that people may show emotional reactions to another individual when that person's distress is clearly visible (Graziano et al., 2007). This seems to have occurred in the current experiment. Batson et al. (2007) also state that exhibiting empathy towards another person is related to prosocial behavior, which is also consistent with the present

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experiment's findings, particularly the findings regarding the local victim news condition. While participants in the local victim news condition displayed more empathic concern than participants in both the nonlocal victim news condition and the far victim news condition, they did not differ from participants in the neutral media condition. This provides evidence that suggests personal distress was a driving emotion that led to donations. If empathic concern was the cause, participants in the local victim news condition should not have displayed more donations than participants in the neutral media condition. The finding that participants in the local victim news condition experienced more personal distress and gave the most donations suggests that these participants may have been willing to offer assistance to victims as an attempt to relieve their own distress.

Walster (1966) stated that individuals can gain perceived control in a situation if they place what happens to a victim as being due to a particular behavior or characteristic of the victim. This would allow the individual to convince themselves that they would not be a victim, which in turn, eliminates the presence of danger. Heath (1984) stated that without knowing what caused a person to become a victim, an individual would not be able to view being in the victim's situation as implausible. Since the news stories that were shown primarily discussed the actual crimes without giving credence to victim characteristics or things that led up to the crime, this may have prevented participants from engaging in self-protective practices such as these. As a result, participants in the victim news conditions experienced personal distress in the current experiment. Another interesting finding of the current experiment lies in the amount of personal distress participants experienced in each condition. Although participants in all the victim news conditions experienced significantly more personal distress than participants in the

neutral media condition, the significance of the relationship began decreasing in a linear fashion as the amount of distance between the viewer and the crimes increased. These results are consistent with Heath (1984)'s findings regarding crime stories in newspapers. Participants in this study exhibited more fear when newspapers depicted random local crime. When things are bad somewhere else, people feel better about their imminent surroundings. It seems that as physical distance increased, psychological distance increased to the self.

As mentioned previously, a significant positive correlation was found between implicit positive and negative affect. It is speculated that watching negative television news clips may have aroused participants, which resulted in experiencing both of these affective states (M. Quirin, personal communication, April 11, 2012) Previous research has shown that other types of media can elicit both happiness and sadness at the same time (Larsen & Stastny, 2011).

Watching negative television news can be detrimental. This seems to be especially true when the news stories come from the local area. The results of the experiment showed that negative television news can lead to a decrease in positive affect and an increase in personal distress. However, watching negative television news may strengthen our attitudes towards others. Participants in the local victim news condition experienced not only less implicit positive affect, but also the most empathic concern, personal distress, and donation behavior. While the results of the experiment suggest that watching negative television news can lead to empathic concern for victims, the findings of the experiment infer that personal distress plays the pivotal role in actually helping victims of crime.

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Limitations

A large limitation of the study was not ensuring that the videos were comparable between the conditions on different aspects (excitement, aesthetically pleasing, attractiveness of victims, tone in newscasters' voice, etc.). The limited availability of video clips constituted a problem in this aspect. It would be nearly impossible to make sure every video was comparable in every dimension between the conditions of the experiment. If this somehow was accomplished, the current experiment would have a large amount of internal validity, but at a great cost to external validity. Examining negative television news in this way would be less practical since no news story is exactly the same. In this researcher's opinion, having external validity is more important when it comes to examining the effects of negative television news.

Another limitation of the study was the amount of time allotted to watch negative television news content. As previously stated, participants in the victim news conditions watched less than four minutes of negative television news. Watching a longer amount of negative television news might have an even greater impact on the current experiment's findings.

Future Directions

The results suggested that personal distress may mediate the relationship between local victim news and donations. In the current study, mediation was inferred by statistical analysis. Future research should manipulate personal distress to causally assess this mediating relationship (Bullock, Green, & Ha, 2010). Having local negative television news clips rated prior to an experiment could help ensure that some clips lead

to personal distress, while others not. Conducting a between-subjects experiment in this way would be helpful in determining whether personal distress is actually mediating the relationship between negative television news involving local victims and donations. Future research should also examine whether psychological distance is actually increasing to the self as physical distance of crime increases.

Graziano and colleagues (2007) stated that people with a high degree of prosocial motivation may provide assistance almost automatically to a person who is not related to them. These researchers speculate that people who exhibit high tendencies of prosocial motivation connected with agreeableness may view people in need the same way that they view their own family. People who were high in agreeableness tended to help individuals who were not in their ingroup more than those who had low degrees of agreeableness. While agreeableness and prosocial motivation was not actually examined in the present experiment, it may explain why individuals in the local victim news condition and the far victim news condition were more willing to donate to victims of crime than participants in the other conditions. Future research should examine what role agreeableness plays in helping crime victims after watching negative television news. Future research should also investigate other facets of negative television news besides crime such as economic perils, natural disasters, and wars between countries. Future research should also examine the effect of national news on these test variables and try to determine whether there are any differences between different politically ideated broadcast news programs. It would also be important to examine the effects of other news media types, especially the internet, since it is increasingly playing a much larger role in the lives of people around the world than ever before.

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Summary

The findings suggest that watching negative television news may influence viewers to provide assistance to others. Individuals in the local victim condition experienced not only less implicit positive affect, but also the most empathic concern, personal distress, and donation behavior. It seems that there is an overlap between the self and others when the crimes displayed in negative television news occur locally. However, as the physical distance of the crime increases, psychological distance increases as well. It seems that negative television news has an adverse effect on the viewer, but a positive effect on the viewer's attitudes towards those in need.

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APPENDIX A

BOGUS PIPELINE

Please remember to answer truthfully on the questions. Any lying and untruthfulness will be detected by sophisticated methods developed by psychologists. In another experiment, for example, participants were asked to consider the following question: "How often do you stop for stranded motorists? (never, rarely, sometimes, usually, always)." Participants were then told "This question might appear innocent enough, but, in fact, it is one of many tools psychologists use to detect people who lie to create a positive impression of themselves. With the possible exception of policemen on patrol, *NO ONE* "usually" or "always" stops for stranded motorists. People who say they do are most likely lying." As in this example, untruthful answers to questions will be detected.

APPPENDIX B

IMPLICIT POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE AFFECT TEST

Instructions: Each nonsense syllable has a list of characteristics next to it. Please indicate the extent to which each characteristic "fits" with each nonsense syllable by circling the corresponding number.

		Doesn't Fit at all	Fits somewhat	Fits quite well	Fits very well
	Happy	1	2	3	4
	Helpless	1	2	3	4
SAFME	Energetic	1	2	3	4
	Tense	1	2	3	4
	Cheerful	1	2	3	4
	Inhibited	1	2	3	4
	Happy	1	2	3	4
	Helpless	1	2	3	4
VIKES	Energetic	1	2	3	4
	Tense	1	2	3	4
	Cheerful	1	2	3	4
	Inhibited	1	2	3	4
	Happy	1	2	3	4
	Helpless	1	2	3	4
TUNBA	Energetic	1	2	3	4
	Tense	1	2	3	4
	Cheerful	1	2	3	4
	Inhibited	1	2	3	4
	Happy	1	2	3	4
	Helpless	1	2	3	4
TALEP	Energetic	1	2	3	4
	Tense	1	2	3	4
	Cheerful	1	2	3	4
	Inhibited	1	2	3	4
	Happy	1	2	3	4
	Helpless	1	2	3	4
BELNI	Energetic	1	2	3	4
	Tense	1	2	3	4

	Cheerful	1	2	3	4
	Inhibited	1	2	3	4
	Happy	1	2	3	4
	Helpless	1	2	3	4
SUKOV	Energetic	1	2	3	4
	Tense	1	2	3	4
	Cheerful	1	2	3	4
	Inhibited	1	2	3	4

APPPENDIX C

TRAIT PERSPECTIVE TAKING ITEMS TAKEN FROM THE EMPATHY
SUBSCALE OF THE PROSOCIAL PERSONALITY BATTERY

Below are a number of statements that may or may not describe you, your feelings, or your behavior. Please read each statement carefully and circle the answer to each question that corresponds to you. There are no right or wrong responses.

1. I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the "other person's" point of view.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

2. I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

3. If I'm sure I'm right about something, I don't waste much time listening to other people's arguments.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

4. I believe that there are two sides to every question and try to look at them both.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

5. When I'm upset at someone, I usually try to "put myself in their shoes" for a while.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

INDEXES OF EMPATHIC CONCERN AND PERSONAL DISTRESS

Below are a number of statements that may or may not describe you, your feelings, or your behavior. Please read each statement carefully and circle the answer to each question that corresponds to you. There are no right or wrong responses.

1. I feel softhearted right now.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

2. I feel upset right now.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

3. I feel empathic right now.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

4. I feel warm right now.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

5. I feel alarmed right now.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

6. I feel concerned right now.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

7. I feel troubled right now.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

8. I feel compassionate right now.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

APPPENDIX E

THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME FACT SHEET AND
DONATION MEASURE

The National Center for Victims of Crime is the nation's leading resource and advocacy organization for crime victims and those who serve them. Since its inception in 1985, the National Center has worked with grassroots organizations and criminal justice agencies throughout the United States serving millions of crime victims. The National Center for Victims of Crime is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization supported by members, individual donors, corporations, foundations, and government grants.

Our mission is to forge a national commitment to help victims of crime rebuild their lives. Through collaboration with local, state, and federal partners, the National Center:

- Provides direct services and resources to victims of crime across the country;
- Advocates for laws and public policies that secure rights, resources, and protections for crime victims;
- Delivers training and technical assistance to victim service organizations, counselors, attorneys, criminal justice agencies, and allied professionals serving victims of crime; and
- Fosters cutting-edge thinking about the impact of crime and the ways in which each of us can help victims of crime rebuild their lives.

***You have been entered in a random drawing to win $25 for participating in this experiment. You have a 4% chance of winning the money. Please indicate how much of the $25 you would be willing to donate to The National Center for Victims of Crime if you won the drawing.

1)$25 to me, and $0 to NCVC   2)$15 to me, and $10 to NCVC

3)$10 to me, and $15 to NCVC   4)$0 to me, and $25 to NCVC