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ANTI-MUSLIM PREJUDICE WHEN EXPOSED TO NEWS ABOUT TERRORISM: THE

ROLES OF NEGATIVE AFFECT AND PSYCHOLOGICAL INFLEXIBILITY

by

ARTHUR T. HATTON

(Under the Direction of Michael E. Nielsen)

ABSTRACT

In the United States, some proposed law enforcement policies intended to prevent terrorism may violate the civil rights of American minorities. These policies include random searches by law enforcement, banning Muslims from entering the country, and refusing to grant asylum to Syrian refugees. Additionally, the rise of ISIS has heightened the salience of terrorism across the world and in the United States. The goal of the high-production videos produced by ISIS may be partially intended to create inter-religious conflict in the West. My study examines the effect of news about ISIS propaganda videos on Americans' opinions about policies that limit the civil rights of Muslims. I also examine one possible moderator of reactions to ISIS propaganda: psychological inflexibility. This psychological factor, developed from Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, is a kind of behavioral reactivity to distressing events. I obtained two samples for this experiment: one student sample from a southeastern university, and a national sample of adults. Results showed that viewing ISIS propaganda raised negative affect in participants in both samples, did not increase support for anti-Muslim security policies, and psychological inflexibility did not play a role in this relationship. However, negative affect did play a role in predicting support for anti-Muslim policies. These results suggest support for anti-Muslim security policies may be more influenced by negative affect than viewing any particular news story in the media. Future research may determine whether other measures of emotional reactivity may be predictive of reactions to terrorism portrayed in the media.

INDEX WORDS: Psychological inflexibility, ISIS, Terrorism, Media, Negative affect, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, Security policies, Political psychology, Prejudice

ANTI-MUSLIM PREJUDICE WHEN EXPOSED TO NEWS ABOUT TERRORISM: THE

ROLE OF NEGATIVE AFFECT AND PSYCHOLOGICAL INFLEXIBILITY

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In a press release on December 7, 2015, echoing statements he made elsewhere, then GOP presidential front-runner Donald Trump called for a "total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until our country's representatives can figure out what is going on" (Diamond, 2015). This statement, combined with previous statements by Trump supporting surveillance against mosques and establishing a database of Muslims in the country, seem to indicate a growing popular support for law enforcement profiling of certain groups in the United States based on religion, a proposal condemned by the Obama administration, Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson, and even many members of Trump's own party as unconstitutional and dangerous. Several of Trump's fellow Republican candidates suggested similar bans not based on religion but on country of origin (Diamond, 2015).

Despite the debate over the constitutionality of blanket restrictions imposed by the Federal government on the basis of religion, Trump's position did not seem to harm his political ambitions. In fact, by May of 2016 Trump's remaining rivals in the GOP race had formally withdrawn their candidacy, and Trump's continued statements casting Muslims as security threats to the United States seem only to empower his supporters. According to a Pew Research Center poll from March of 2016, 64% of Trump supporters agreed that U.S. Muslims should be subject to more scrutiny because of their religion, compared to 33% of all voters (Pew Research Center, 2016).

The political fight over admitting Syrian refugees into the U.S. did not begin with Donald Trump. In June of 2015, a hearing before the Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence, part of the Committee on Homeland Security of the United States House of Representatives, addressed the growing concern of admitting refugees into the U.S. from the surging crisis resulting from the Syrian Civil War. At the forefront of concerns was the

possibility that, among those fleeing legitimately for their own safety, there were terrorists from extremist Islamic groups, including ISIS, using the situation to plant themselves surreptitiously into Western countries. Representatives cited the lack of clear intelligence in a quickly-changing environment and some precedent in terrorists using such crises to their advantage as evidence that the refugee program, with relation to the Syrian refugees, needed to be re-evaluated or even "paused," while others noted that a restructuring of the refugee program undermines its humanitarian *raison d'être* without clear guarantees that it would make the country safer (*Admitting Syrian Refugees*, 2015). Notably, a statement from the Syrian Community Network from Chicago, Illinois at that hearing contained the following:

> The families and individuals being considered for resettlement face dire protection challenges and often need specialized care. Among those being considered are victims of torture, women at risk, persons with disabilities, LGBTQ persons facing risk, women-headed households, and those facing acute security threats. To prohibit Syrian refugees from the option of U.S. resettlement because of the presence of ISIL and other extremist groups in Syria, and not based on thorough U.S.-led security checks and humanitarian needs assessments, discounts the commendable work of the Department of Homeland Security and Department of State and amounts to blatant discrimination based on nationality. (p. 34)

As the conflict in Syria heated up and ISIS grew in influence, power, and control of land and resources, governmental bodies in the United States continued to debate the refugee admission system as it relates to security. In January of 2016, some members of Congress and the House of Representatives suggested that the safest solution was to categorically refuse refugees from Iraq and Syria from resettlement in the United States (Collins et al., 2016).

Additionally, governors from a number of states publically opposed the resettlement of Syrian refugees within their own states, and some began fighting in the legal system for the right to refuse refugees (Sakuma, 2016).

Despite vows by the Obama administration for the United States to pick up its share of refugees to ease the Syrian crisis, as of April of 2016, the United States government had only settled 13% of the refugees it had pledged to take in, a total of just over 1,200 (Sakuma, 2016). By way of comparison, by February 3, 2016, the vast majority of Syrian refugees had been resettled in neighboring countries: Turkey (2.5 million), Lebanon (1.1 million), Jordan (over 600,000), Iraq (4 million displaced internally and over 200,000 from neighboring Syria), and Egypt (over 100,000), while the EU has resettled just under 100,000, representing one-fifth of those currently crossing into Europe from the Syrian conflict (Amnesty International, 2016). In an editorial for *Scientific American*, anthropologist Krystal D'Costa argued that the United States' hesitance to resettle even the small number of refugees the Obama administration has pledged to help may be a reflection of not just a bureaucratic failure but something more nuanced and sinister: an intentional act of prejudice and discrimination against Muslims, buried in a code of language citing safety, feigning empathy, and treating Syrians, particularly Muslim Syrians, as a suspicious Other (D'Costa, 2015).

To more fully understand support for law enforcement and security policies that profile Muslims, psychology may play a unique role. Those who support these policies cite safety and security as their primary motivations, not racial, ethnic, or religious prejudice. Yet, the proposed solutions to the threat of terrorism seem to target particular religious and ethnic groups. Therefore, the intersection between psychological factors such as out-group prejudice, perceptions of safety and threat, and support for various security policies ought to be more fully

examined, especially in light of the various groups and candidates who may benefit from leveraging these psychological forces.

Terrorist groups such as ISIS may be a greater beneficiary of this kind of rhetoric than Donald Trump. ISIS in particular has made a name for itself, not only due to its rapid expansion and conquest of large swaths of territory in Syria and Iraq, but also for its violent cruelty, especially featured in its high-production-quality propaganda videos. The goals of ISIS's propaganda machine are seemingly complex and nuanced, but one of the strongest goals appears to be recruitment (von Behr, Reding, Edwards, & Gribbon, 2013). A number of commentators, including Trump's Democratic rival, Hillary Clinton, suggest that Trump's rhetoric and anti-Muslim policies actually help ISIS recruitment by confirming international Muslim's fears that the United States is systematically biased against Muslims as a whole (Merica, 2015). Though Donald Trump demanded an apology from Clinton for those remarks, in 2016, both Al-Shabaab (an Al-Qaeda affiliate in Somalia) and ISIS released recruitment videos depicting Donald Trump, with Al-Shabaab's video specifically citing Trump as evidence that America is a "racist nation that will turn against its Muslim citizens" (Schatz, 2016). If it is true that one of the purposes of ISIS terrorism is to provoke an anti-Muslim reaction in the United States in order to enhance recruitment into its own organization, then it is vital to examine whether their propaganda succeeds in these goals. Because ISIS propaganda videos have been reported on in a wide variety of traditional and online news outlets, a full understanding of the purpose and the effects of these videos is highly needed.

While there has been only a short time to examine the psychological effects of ISIS propaganda on opinions of security policies that profile Muslims, and the traits that might influence this connection, some theoretical directions have been suggested. In an editorial in the

Huffington Post, Steven C. Hayes, the founder of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, suggested that the rise of Donald Trump may be partially the result of a construct called psychological inflexibility (Hayes, 2016). In that article, Hayes suggested that psychological inflexibility makes a unique contribution to generalized prejudice, which Hayes defines as a "kind of authoritarian distancing" toward people who are deemed to be a threat. There has been some evidence that psychological inflexibility is implicated in prejudice (Levin, Luoma, Vilardaga, Lillis, Nobles, & Hayes, 2015), however, its role in reactions to terrorism and terrorist propaganda, as well as support for profiling against Muslims, has not yet been studied empirically. A full understanding of what psychological inflexibility is, how it may be theoretically implicated in general prejudice and prejudice toward Muslims, whether it is related to people's reactions to ISIS terrorist propaganda, and whether it matters in a context of national security and law enforcement policy would make a strong contribution to the current social and political discourse on these issues. Uncovering possible connections with these topics may help the media, politicians, policymakers, and public figures to be mindful of their rhetoric and understand possible side effects of their framing of terrorism. Additionally, it may aid in crafting interventions that could buffer the effects of terrorist events on the public. Reducing the power of terrorism to generate a counter-reaction in the public may decrease one incentive for committing terrorist acts.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Feelings toward Muslims

From 1990 to 2008, Muslims were disproportionately discriminated against, compared to other religious minorities, in Western countries (Fox & Akbaba, 2015). This discrimination can be seen in both emotional antipathy toward Muslims and groups that are seen as related, such as Arabs, Middle Easterners, and even Sikhs. Even before the attacks on the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001, Arabs were often portrayed as supportive of terrorism, violent, and deceptive in film and media (Johnson, 1992). In a study conducted by the Arab American Institute in 2014, 27% of a large sample of Americans endorsed "favorable" opinions toward Muslims, but 45% endorsed having "unfavorable" ratings, giving Muslims the lowest "favorable" ratings of any major religious group in the United States (Arab American Institute, 2014). In that same study, 42% of the sample endorsed law enforcement profiling of Arab Americans or Muslim Americans. Similar attitudes have been found in Europe, where polled respondents endorsed unfavorable attitudes toward Muslims at rates that exceed those in the United States, such as 63% in Italy, 53% in Greece, 50% in Poland, and 46% in Spain (Stokes & Oates, 2014).

After September 11, 2001, some have suggested that this counter-reaction to Islamic extremism has had both political and social consequences for all Muslims, regardless of their views toward terrorism or affiliation with terrorist groups (Pratt, 2015). Research suggests that the backlash of hate speech and violence against Muslims after 9/11 has slowed the rate of Muslim assimilation in the United States, resulting in American Muslims having higher rates of marriage within their own community, higher birth rates, lower female labor force participation, and lower English proficiency (Gould & Klor, 2014). Discrimination often takes the form of

support for security policies that unfairly target Muslims, such as through racial, ethnic, and religious profiling (Ward, 2001), as well as general social policies that seem to target anything Islamic. For instance, in Europe, laws have been passed that limit the building of minarets and the wearing of headscarves (Pratt, 2015). In 2006 conservative television host Mike Gallagher on "Dayside," a Fox News show, suggested airport security should have a "Muslims-only" line (Judy, 2006). Empirical research suggests that hate crimes against Muslims as well as Asians increased dramatically after 9/11 as well as the 7/7 attack in London in July of 2005, both events of which were highly reported on in traditional news media (Hanes & Machin, 2014). Furthermore, hate speech against Muslims not only occurs on the "street level" but on websites and social media such as Facebook and Twitter as well (Awan, 2014). Thus, the actions of extremists who profess Islam as their inspiration, and popular-level support for discrimination against Muslims may be a bidirectional process occurring with both social and traditional media as intermediaries.

The Goals of Terrorism

Violent terrorism is intended to accomplish specific goals and can be compared to a type of theater or "spectacle" intended to provoke a response (Cowen, 2006). In a modern world with a 24-hour news cycle saturating television, newspapers, magazines, social media, and the Internet, the spectacle of terrorism plays out on the stage in people's homes via televisions and computers. In other words, the function of terrorism is not dissimilar from other "cultural spectacles," such as a 4th of July parade or the Roman Empire's numerous, often violent, circus games.

Several previous studies sought to understand how extremist content is disseminated and what effects it has on recruitment into extremist and terrorist organizations as well as on violent

actions. For instance, a report by the RAND Corporation (2013) sought to examine the role of extremist Internet outlets on the radicalization of terrorists and extremists in the United Kingdom. That report suggests that extremist content released onto the Internet may not have the average person in mind as an audience, but instead may be seeking recruits among those who are already sympathetic to their causes (von Behr, Reding, Edwards, & Gribbon, 2013). In other words, these outlets are not intended to radicalize someone who is not sympathetic to extremism at all to begin with, but rather to find and recruit sympathetic audiences who use that content to radicalize further and possibly justify taking violent or destructive action in line with their radical beliefs.

ISIS is not the only organization known to spread extremist content online. On June 17 of 2015, a gunman, 21-year-old Dylann Roof, burst into a historically black church in Charleston, South Carolina and shot and killed nine church members and non-fatally injured a tenth. Roof had previously released a manifesto online detailing his racist views and his hope that his actions, presumably the shootings on June 17th, would incite a race war in the United States (Robles, 2015).

After Roof was captured, many political and popular discussions were ignited. One of the controversies in the case of Dylann Roof was the role of the right-wing propaganda he sought out online as a means of radicalizing Roof and his actions. In particular, Roof's manifesto mentioned the website of a right-wing white supremacist group called the "Council of Conservative Citizens" (Robles, 2015). The CCC's website features racist views such as "God is the author of racism…. Mixing the races is rebelliousness against God," opposition toward immigration of non-white people into the United States, black people are a "retrograde species of humanity," and white culture in the United States is on the decline (Southern Poverty Law Center, n.d.).

Roof specifically credited the extremist content in that website as partial inspiration for his violent actions.

It is not clear whether terrorists are "rational in the economic sense" (Cowen, 2006), suggesting terrorists, especially terrorists motivated by religious incentives, do not necessarily respond to "secular" incentives or adjust to real-world changes in cost or benefit. Therefore, we may not expect that terrorists would respond based on success, or lack of success, in achieving some short-term political goal. Nevertheless, if we assume that at least some of the motivation of terrorism is rational, we may also consider the question of whether terrorism is successful in achieving its aims. The answer to this question depends on what the stated goals are. On the one hand, political scientist Max Abrahms argued if the goal of terrorism is to gain political concessions from nation-states, then terrorism in the modern era is not very successful (2006). However, Abrahms made this argument before the rise of, arguably, the most successful terrorist organization in modern history, ISIS. Although this organization has not successfully used its violent terrorist propaganda to gain political concessions, some estimates of ISIS manpower are as high as 200,000 as of November 2015, suggesting recruitment methods are effective (Cockburn, 2015).

ISIS videos tend to follow a certain pattern of dissemination: they are first released from "official" social media accounts to a complex web of thousands of pro-ISIS social media outlets who then spread these videos generally to the public (Berger & Morgan, 2015). Social media websites such as Twitter have suspended a large number of pro-ISIS accounts for the purpose of limiting ISIS's influence and research suggests that this strategy helps curtail ISIS online network's ability to spread (Berger & Morgan, 2015). However, news outlets have reported on ISIS videos and published detailed descriptions of their contents, particularly still frame pictures.

For example, news outlets reported heavily on the November 2015 attacks in Beirut and Paris, broadcasting images of the chaos ensued after the attacks took place. The reporting of these attacks, as well as official ISIS propaganda films, may have an unspecified number of both intentional and unintentional effects among those exposed to them.

News Broadcasting and Well-Being

Research suggests that news broadcasting of tragic or violent news stories, particularly those involving war and terrorism, can influence mental health. For instance, following the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, a large sample of middle-school students in Oklahoma City were surveyed regarding their mental health symptoms. It was hypothesized that the tremendous amount of news coverage following the incident may have increased symptoms of post-traumatic stress in local children. That study found that greater television exposure was associated with higher post-traumatic stress seven weeks after the bombing, even among those with no emotional or physical exposure to the bombing (Pfefferbaum, Nixon, Doughty, Pynoos, Gurwitch, & Foy, 2001).

Another body of similar psychological research emerged in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. One study found that post-traumatic stress among New Yorkers was similar across those who had been directly exposed to the event and those who had not (Galea & Resnick, 2005), though follow-up research indicates that those exposed to the event had significantly higher symptoms over time (Neria, DiGrande, & Adams, 2011). This would suggest that secondary symptoms among the general population after a terrorist event may be minimal. However, research has also shown that televised trauma may increase anxiety, especially among children and adolescents (Pfefferbaum et al., 2001), and this suggests that media exposure may mediate the relationship between terrorist events and possible symptoms in the general population. For

instance, one study found that post-traumatic symptoms in adolescents from Boston were partly predicted by media exposure following the 2013 Boston Marathon bombings (Busso, McLaughlin, & Sheridan, 2014).

A more recent article found evidence that news consumption increases as the result of major wartime events and that an increased frequency of exposure to these newscasts results in a number of negative mental health outcomes (Bodas, Siman-Tov, Peleg, & Solomon, 2015). This study was done on a sample in Israel following Operation Protective Edge, a military operation launched by Israel against targets in the Gaza strip in July of 2014. During that operation, Israeli media broadcasted news regarding the conflict around the clock, and 76% of the sample of the study reported an increase in news media consumption. A majority of the viewers in the sample, 70%, reported that the newscasts were stressful but that they would not avoid watching them. A majority of the sample reported that the urge to watch the newscasts was "burdensome," but that they are also "addictive." A majority also reported that they watched the newscasts out of fear of missing important information (Bodas, Siman-Tov, Peleg, & Solomon, 2015). The researchers also surveyed their sample regarding mental health symptoms and examined how these increased during Operation Protective Edge. Members of the sample who watched the newscasts reported the following symptoms while viewing the newscasts: physiological hyperstimulation (12.8%), a sense of uncontrolled fear or anxiety (18.4%), sleeping difficulties (22.3%), and fearful thoughts (36.6%). The researchers reported that it was impossible to conclude that watching the newscasts, as opposed to the general wartime climate, was associated with significant increases in these symptoms due to the fact that their sample did not have enough participants who did not watch the newscasts – watching the newscasts was almost completely pervasive among their sample (Bodas, Siman-Tov, Peleg, & Solomon, 2015).

Therefore, violent and distressing news does not have uniform effects across all individuals. Instead, there are individual factors that determine reactions to news stories. More research has sought to identify mediating and moderating variables between news exposure and mental health variables. One study showed that two predictors of post-traumatic symptoms in children after the Boston Marathon bombings were media exposure and nervous system reactivity, suggesting a role of unwanted physiological reactions as a result of terrorism exposure (Busso, McLaughlin, & Sheridan, 2014). Reactivity to unwanted physiological reactions may also play a role in how people react to terrorism. One study found that media exposure and trait anxiety, as measured by the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory, was predictive of the hyperarousal and re-experiencing symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among undergraduate students in Ontario following 9/11. On the other hand, it was anxiety sensitivity that predicted avoidance behaviors and overall PTSD symptoms (Collimore, McCabe, Carleton, & Asmundson, 2008). Anxiety sensitivity is a construct defined as a fear of anxiety or anxious symptoms due to the belief that it will have harmful consequences (Reiss & McNally, 1985).

Possibly, any connection between exposure to depictions of terrorism perpetrated by Muslims and prejudice against Muslims may be explained through similar mechanisms. Studies that identify relationships between exposure to terrorism- or war-related news stories, psychological variables, and prejudice against Muslims have been sparse. One study examined whether or not the phrase "War on Terror" increased prejudice in the aftermath of the 2013 Boston Marathon bombings. Usage of the phrase "War on Terror" increased in the heavy news coverage following the bombings, but priming participants with a "War on Terror" frame did not increase mortality salience or prejudice (Hatton, 2013). To the contrary, it was found that the phrase significantly decreased support for security policies that unfairly target Muslims.

However, the author noted that it is possible that priming participants with Federal involvement may trigger a decrease in support for any government intervention in a sample of conservative Southern students due to a general distrust of government (Hatton, 2013).

To follow up on that study, Hatton and Nielsen (2016) collected data on reactions to ISIS videos in the fall of 2014 in order to determine whether exposure to ISIS propaganda videos interacted with a differential effect of framing the "War on Terror" at the Federal or community level. On February 15, 2015, ISIS released a video depicting the beheading of 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians. This video had a number of unique aspects that may have influenced the American public differently than the previous videos. First, it depicted a larger scale of executions than many other videos (21 victims). Second, the victims were targeted solely due to their Christian religion and the video was addressed to "people of the cross" in the Coptic Church and in Rome. Third, the video had wide coverage by Christian and secular online media, including Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant media, many of which heavily emphasized the religiously-motivated nature of the executions (Casper, 2015; Catholic News Service, 2015; Orthodox Christian News, 2015), resulting in a heavy spread of dissemination through social media. Such a bold statement toward Christianity may have brought the conflict into people's back yards, so to speak. Because of the possible effect this video may have had on people's opinions about Muslims, a second wave of data collection was added to the study soon after the release of this video (Hatton & Nielsen, 2016). In that study, it was found that after the video depicting the execution of 21 Egyptian Christians, participants were significantly more supportive of security policies that unfairly target Muslims when the "War on Terror" was framed at the community level as opposed to the Federal level.

That study suggested two interacting influences on reactions to ISIS terrorist propaganda, both dealing with the perceived "closeness" that viewers felt toward the victims in the videos. First, the video released in February depicted a large group of Christians being targeted solely for their religious affiliation. The release of this video may have increased the reaction in the largely Christian sample. Second, there was a larger effect when participants were primed to think of the "War on Terror" happening on the proximal community level as opposed to the distal Federal level. These two interacting effects resulted in significantly higher support for prejudicial security policies aimed at curbing terrorism in the United States.

A group of researchers examined the link between exposure to terrorism news and prejudice through the lens of Terror Management Theory (TMT), which theorizes that exposure to stimuli that remind people of mortality and death results in attempts to avoid those thoughts through worldviews that give people a sense of permanence, or attempts to bolster self-esteem. Because previous research links mortality salience and prejudice, this seems to be a natural connection (Das, Bushman, Bezemer, Kerkhof, & Vermeulen, 2009). The researchers conducted the study by exposing participants to either news about Islamic terrorism or a control news story. Those in the terrorism condition had an increase in death-related thoughts, which then predicted prejudiced attitudes against Muslims. If these findings are replicable it may suggest that news depicting Islamic terrorism increases prejudice against Muslims and that the relationship may be explained by mortality anxiety. However, Hatton (2013) failed to find a connection between usage of the phrase "War on Terror" immediately after the 2013 Boston Marathon Bombings and mortality salience.

If exposure to news or stimuli related to terrorism does not increase anti-Muslim prejudice through mortality salience, then we are left searching for other mechanisms. The

research implicating anxiety sensitivity in mental health outcomes when people are exposed to distressing, terrorism-related stimuli suggests that anxiety-related systems are activated during that exposure. If connections between affect-related variables and prejudice can be made, this may go toward explaining the relationship between depictions of terrorism in the media and prejudiced reactions.

We are then left to evaluate Hayes' claim that psychological inflexibility may be implicated in recent events as well as reactions to news about terrorism (Hayes, 2016). The researchers who first proposed the existence of psychological inflexibility call it the epicenter of human suffering, and defined it as the combination of behavioral patterns of effortful avoidance intended to reduce or eliminate unwanted internal and external experiences, combined with the rigid adherence to literal content of thoughts (Hayes et al., 2006). It is similar to anxiety sensitivity in that it describes a certain reactivity toward internal distress, though it differs in significant ways. First, it describes reactivity toward a wide range of distressing internal experiences, not just anxiety. Second, it focuses on behavioral avoidance, including cognitive and behavioral strategies intended to down-regulate internal distress. Third, it has been linked in the literature to prejudice (Levin et al., 2015).

The Psychological Flexibility Model

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), the clinical theoretical system from which psychological inflexibility emerged, identifies six core cognitive and behavioral processes that are linked to mental health. *Acceptance* is the embrace of unwanted experiences, including thoughts and emotions, without attempts to force them away or change them. *Cognitive defusion* is the process of changing the relationship to one's thoughts, rather than their content or form, such that their functions are diminished. *Being present* is the process of mindfully allowing one's

self to experience events non-judgmentally as they occur. *Self-as-context* is the process of viewing one's self as the transcendent context upon which thoughts, events, and behaviors tend to occur. *Values* are the over-arching patterns of behavior that are good for a person in the long-term. *Committed action* is the process of developing meaningful behaviors that help a person more fully move toward values (Hayes et al., 2006). According to this model, all six processes working together are termed *psychological flexibility*: a description of the willingness to experience unwanted internal events without allowing them to influence behavior.

The opposite of psychological flexibility is called *psychological inflexibility*. Psychological flexibility has been found to be negatively correlated with psychological inflexibility, but individuals can score high or low on both traits (Bond et al., 2011). Behaviors intended to reduce unwanted internal experience can be external, in the case of outward behavioral avoidance of triggers, environments, stimuli, places, etc. that are associated with negative experiences, or they can be internal, in the case of often repetitive cognitive patterns or processes intended to "push away" or "fight against" those experiences. The downside to avoidance behaviors, called *experiential avoidance*, is that, although they serve to help a person achieve the goal of emotional down-regulation in the short-term, long-term valued behaviors are avoided and distress and other mental health symptoms are increased. Relatedly, attempts at suppressing unwanted or distressing cognitions can paradoxically result in increases in the very cognitions a person is trying to avoid (Wenzlaff & Wegner, 2000). One common ACT metaphor to illustrate this principle is that of a bus driver with a bus full of loud, aggressive passengers (Hayes et al., 2006). One strategy to calm passengers would be for the driver to pull over the bus and yell at them. This strategy may be effective in the short term, but ultimately the driver's

whole purpose is to drive the bus to a certain destination, and stopping to yell at the passengers is only a short-term solution that does not ultimately aid in the goal.

According to ACT theory, a psychologically *flexible* person is more willing to tolerate emotional and cognitive discomfort in the short term by fully contacting the present moment without psychological defensiveness to pursue valued long-term behavioral directions (Bond et al., 2011). Paradoxically, letting go of attempts to control or avoid unwanted internal experience should result in reductions in those experiences.

In support of this theory, psychological inflexibility and experiential avoidance have been linked to a number of negative mental health symptoms. High psychological inflexibility has been linked to distress in a wide range of areas, such as depression, anxiety, stress, general health symptoms, and even higher absences from work (Bond et al., 2011). High psychological inflexibility has also been implicated in high anxiety sensitivity and pathological worry (Ruiz, 2014). The link between psychological inflexibility and maladaptive coping as well as mental health symptoms has even been seen in a number of samples across the world, including Spain (Ruiz, Herrera, Luciano, Cangas, & Beltran, 2013), the Netherlands (Boelen & Reijntjes, 2008), Asian Americans (Dosheen & Hayes, 2010), Korean-born American adoptees (Sarubbi, Block-Lerner, Moon, & Williams, 2012), and among Chinese students and athletes in Hong Kong (Zhang, Chung, Si, & Liu, 2014). This lends credence to the theory that psychological inflexibility, which is based on universal principles of conditioning and learning, exists across cultures.

Psychological Inflexibility and Prejudice

Psychological inflexibility has been implicated in prejudice, stigma, and discrimination, because these constructs share cognitive roots in classical and operant conditioning,

overgeneralizing, and categorizing. Because these are basic cognitive processes, prejudice toward outgroups, including people of different religions, races, ethnicities, cultural backgrounds, social classes, etc. is common across societies. Even those who deny prejudiced attitudes often maintain unconscious or automatic biases (Greenwald, Poehlman, Uhlmann, & Banaji, 2009). Theories of psychological inflexibility predict that people who experience negative emotions or cognitions as the result of thinking about or encountering members of stigmatized out-groups, and who are also psychologically inflexible, will engage in additional behaviors, control strategies, or experiential avoidance to down-regulate those experiences (Levin et al., 2015). These behaviors may include avoidance of out-group members, refusal to hire someone of a different ethnic or cultural background, behaviors aimed at driving out a member of a community, support for laws and policies that marginalize out-group members, and even violence toward out-group members. Additionally, inflexibility may mediate the relationship between self-concealment and psychological distress in the victims of prejudice (Leleux-Labarge, Hatton, Goodnight, & Masuda, 2015).

A recently proposed model based on both ACT and RFT called the Flexible Connectedness Model seeks to predict and, possibly, influence a number of maladaptive or harmful social processes by proposing that prejudice can be viewed as a deficit in three independent factors: low empathic concern for others, low ability to take the perspective of others, and high psychological inflexibility (Vilardaga, Estevez, Levin, & Hayes, 2012). Vilardaga et al. (2012) suggested that deficits in these factors may also predict social anhedonia, or a lack of interest in social activities or close contact with others. In a study of students at a Spanish university, 26% of the variance in social anhedonia was predicted by these three factors, working independently, and of these, experiential avoidance was the strongest factor (Vilardaga,

Estevez, Levin, & Hayes, 2012). A follow-up study examined the relationship between

psychological inflexibility, perspective taking, and empathic concern with generalized prejudice

(Levin et al., 2015). The concept of generalized prejudice emerged from the finding that

prejudice against one target group is often highly correlated with prejudice against many target

groups (McFarland, 2010). In the Levin et al. study (2015), generalized prejudice was examined

by combining measures of racism toward African Americans, obese individuals, gay men,

women, and substance abusers, and generating a scale based on the contribution of all those

factors. Psychological inflexibility was significantly positively correlated with generalized

prejudice ($r = .28$) (Levin et al., 2015).

This research on prejudice and psychological inflexibility is notable because it not only

identifies significant factors that predict prejudice but suggests possible interventions to reduce

that prejudice in the form of clinical techniques developed to reduce psychological flexibility and

experiential avoidance (Masuda, Hill, Morgan, & Cohen, 2012). Although research on this topic

is still in its infancy, a number of studies suggest connections between interventions to decrease

psychological inflexibility and the reductions of both prejudice and the effects of prejudice. One

pilot study compared the effectiveness of two classroom interventions on positive behaviors to

overcome racial boundaries. One intervention was a more "traditional" prejudice-awareness

training intended to educate students on prejudice and how to overcome prejudice. The other

intervention educated students on ACT theory regarding how psychological inflexibility may

contribute to prejudice. The study found that the ACT intervention was more effective in

increasing prosocial and prejudice-reducing behaviors at follow-up one week later (Lillis &

Hayes, 2007). Another study found that ACT interventions were successful in reducing

stigmatizing attitudes against people with a mental disorder (Masuda et al., 2007). Increasing

psychological flexibility has also been linked to decreasing stigma directed at one's self. One study found that an ACT workshop successfully reduced self-stigma of weight-related thoughts in those in a weight-loss program (Lillis, Hayes, Bunting, and Masuda, 2009). Another study found that an ACT workshop reduced self-stigma among patients with substance use difficulties (Luoma, Kohlenberg, Hayes, & Fletcher, 2012).

Empirical Directions

Combining the research on psychological inflexibility and prejudice with a political and social backlash against Muslims suggests a line of empirical predictions. Possibly, the prejudicial backlash against Muslims, in the form of violence, hate speech, and support for policies that limit the civil rights and influence of Muslims in the public sphere may be partly the result of psychological inflexibility: the trauma and discomfort generated by the original event may result in behaviors intended to reduce that discomfort. In this case, stigmatizing acts intended to limit Muslim influence may be attempts to increase one's own feelings of safety and security. Typically, information about terrorism comes through news media outlets. These may include Internet, social media, broadcast and cable television news, newspapers, and magazines. As such, it may be possible to view news articles or segments about terrorist events as primes that can measurably cause discomfort and prejudice regarding Muslims. This would suggest that it may be possible to predict a person's cognitive, affective, or behavioral responses to news about terrorism based on that person's levels of psychological inflexibility.

Current Study

The connections between prejudice as the result of terrorist media exposure and the role of psychological inflexibility have not been fully examined in the empirical literature. The attacks that occurred in November 2015 may provide stimuli to be used to test the effects of

terrorist attacks presented in video media, in this case, news reports. Because there were two similar attacks at roughly the same time, this allows predictions to be made regarding reactions to the news based on perceived closeness to the victims of the attacks. After both attacks took place, commenters made note that the attacks in Paris garnered a level of sympathy in Western media that was not given to the attacks in Beirut (Barnard, 2015). Based on the proposed connections between psychological inflexibility, terrorist media exposure, and prejudice, I have constructed a model depicting the relationships between these variables. This model is depicted in Figure 1.

Preliminary Hypothesis: Viewing a news story depicting an incident of ISIS terrorist propaganda will increase negative affect.

Hypothesis 1: Viewing a video depicting a disturbing incident of terrorism will increase anti-Muslim prejudice in the form of support for law enforcement and security policies that profile Muslims, compared to viewing videos depicting either distressing, non-terrorist-related news or neutral news.

Hypothesis 2: Psychological inflexibility will moderate the relationship between an increase in negative affect resulting from exposure to news about terrorism and support for Muslim profiling by law enforcement.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Pilot Study

My study first hinges on the hypothesis that news stories depicting ISIS propaganda are emotionally distressing. To confirm this effect, I measured changes in negative affect in participants who viewed a CNN news broadcast of an ISIS propaganda film.

Participants. We recruited 69 undergraduate students (29 male, 40 female) at a rural southeastern university in the United States to participate in a study for course credit. The mean age of the students was 20.3 (*SEM* = .45).

Materials and Measures.

The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS). The PANAS is a 20-item measure of both positive and negative state affect (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). It has been shown to be internally consistent, with Cronbach's alphas ranging from .86 to .90 for the Positive Affect subscale and .84 to .87 for the Negative Affect subscale. It consists of 20 emotion words, such as "afraid" and "interested," that represent positive or negative affect, and respondents are asked to indicate on a 1-5 Likert-type scale to what degree the respondent has felt that way in the indicated time frame, which can range from the present moment to the past year (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). We presented the PANAS twice, with the first PANAS asking participants to "Indicate to what extent you feel this way right now, that is, at the present moment," and the second PANAS asking, "After having watched the video, please indicate how you are feeling now, that is, at the present moment."

I selected two CNN news broadcasts to include in this study. Possibly, any change in support for anti-Muslim prejudicial policies from viewing an ISIS news story may be the result of an increase in negative affect, regardless of whether the video depicts terrorists who claim

Islam as their motivation. To examine this possibility, I also included a video that depicts a distressing news story that is unrelated to terrorism perpetrated by Muslims. The videos were chosen from the same news service, CNN, to eliminate possible news service-specific reactions, and were roughly the same duration. The two videos were:

1. Mass beheading video: "ISIS posts video of purported mass beheading," a video clip featured on CNN on February 15, 2015 reporting on an ISIS propaganda film depicting the execution of 21 Egyptian Christians. The video is located on CNN's official YouTube channel at https://youtu.be/uzNfN21ye6I.

2. James Holmes video: "Witnesses give emotional testimony in James Holmes trial" – a video clip featured on CNN on May 4, 2015 reporting on witnesses giving testimony at the trial of the Aurora theater shooter, James Holmes. The video is located on CNN's official YouTube channel at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1p7z57gqWrE.

Demographics. Demographic questions asked included age, sex, frequency of church attendance (1-5 Likert-type scale, with 1 = "every week or nearly every week," 2 = "most weeks," 3 = "occasionally," 4 = "rarely," and 5 = "never"), liberal vs. conservative (1-7 Likert-type scale, with 1 = "very liberal," 2 = "liberal," 3 = "slightly liberal," 4 = "moderate," 5 = "slightly conservative," 6 = "conservative," and 7 = "very conservative), and whether they or a person close to them had served in law enforcement or the military (1 = "yes," 2 = "no").

Procedure. After receiving an informed consent document, students received a PANAS and were instructed to fill it out according to how they were presently feeling. After clicking next, students were randomly shown a video via an embedded YouTube window and were instructed to view the video. Then, students were instructed to complete the PANAS again to

indicate how they were feeling after viewing the video. After the second PANAS, students filled out the demographic questions and were debriefed.

Main Study

  Participants. Two samples were obtained for this study, an online sample, and a student sample. The student sample consisted of 465 undergraduate students (216 male, 245 female, 4 no sex reported, mean age 20.37) from a rural southeastern university in the United States. The online sample consisted of 435 workers (206 male, 226 female, 3 no sex reported, mean age 37.88) recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk, a website that provides survey respondents for research. Mechanical Turk respondents were reimbursed $0.40 each for their participation in the survey.

  Materials and Measures.

  The Acceptance and Action Questionnaire-II (AAQ-II). The AAQ-II was developed as a brief measure of psychological inflexibility (Bond et al., 2011). It has been shown to be internally consistent in previous research (Cronbach's alphas ranging from .78 to .88). The measure includes 7 items consisting of statements that represent an unwillingness to experience unwanted thoughts and feelings, such as "I'm afraid of my feelings," and "My painful memories prevent me from having a fulfilling life" (Bond et al., 2011). Respondents answer on a 1-7 Likert scale with 1 representing "never true," and 7 representing "always true."

  Videos. The same two videos were shown as in the pilot study, with the addition of one neutral video that served as a control. The control video is entitled "First Nobel Prize of teaching winner speaks," and it depicts a teacher who won an award for excellence in teaching. The video is located on the CNN official YouTube Channel at https://youtu.be/tR_qW6IuXv0.

Support for security policies. Six policy questions were included from previous research on support for security policies that unfairly target Muslims and Middle Easterners (Hatton & Nielsen, 2016). We asked participants to "Please indicate how much you agree with the following national policies according to the following scale" followed by a list of the six policies. The policies were: "Increasing security in public places, such as shopping malls and government buildings;" "Increasing security at critical infrastructure facilities, such as commercial nuclear power plants;" "Banning airline passengers from carrying on board any luggage, including purses, computers, and briefcases;" "Requiring everyone to carry a national ID card and show it to authorities on request;" "Allowing authorities to stop people on the street at random to search their possessions, based on suspected affiliation with terrorist organizations;" "Allowing authorities to stop people on the street at random to search their possessions, based on Middle Eastern ethnicity;" and "Allowing authorities to stop people on the street at random to search their possessions, based on having a Muslim name, Muslim religious items, or Muslim religious clothing." A seventh item was added to the six used in previous research to reflect opinions regarding the resettlement of Syrian refugees: "Banning refugees from Syria or surrounding areas from settling in the United States."

Demographics. The demographic data collected included the same questions asked to pilot study participants with two additions: household income and highest educational level. For household income, the response options were: a) 0-$19,999, b) $20,000-$34,999, c) $35,000-$49,999, d) $50,000-$64,999, e) $65,000-$79,999, and f) $80,000+. For highest educational level, the response options were a) Some high school, b) High school diploma or equivalent (GED), c) Some college, d) Associate's or technical degree, e) Bachelor's degree, and f) Graduate degree.

Procedure. I built the survey using Qualtrics software and sent participants the URL after they agreed to participate. After they agreed to the informed consent document, the survey presented the participants with the AAQ-II, followed by the first PANAS. Following this, participants were taken to a page that informs them of the following: "The following is a news clip taken from a CNN broadcast. The video may contain violent material that some may find disturbing. You have the option of skipping the video if you do not wish to view the violent content and moving to a later part of the survey. Do you wish to view the video or skip it?" Participants who chose to view the video were randomly selected to watch one of the three videos (the James Holmes trial, mass beheading, or teacher videos). After watching the video, participants were given the second PANAS. Then, participants were given the list of security policies. Participants who chose to skip the video were sent directly to the list of security policies. Then, the demographics questions followed. After finishing the demographics questions, the survey debriefed participants and, for the Mechanical Turk workers, gave instructions on how to receive compensation.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Pilot Study

To test my hypothesis that the James Holmes and mass beheading videos would increase negative affect, I calculated negative affect scores by finding the sum of all negative affect words in each PANAS (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). Then, I ran a paired-samples t-test comparing negative affect before watching the video and after watching the video. There was a significant result in the James Holmes video condition, such that negative affect before viewing ($M = 15.10$, $SD = 5.18$) was significantly less than negative affect after viewing ($M = 21.10$, $SD = 7.16$), $t(29) = -4.63$, $p < .001$. There was also a significant difference in the mass beheading video condition, such that negative affect after watching the video ($M = 21.97$, $SD = 7.70$) was significantly higher than negative affect before watching the video ($M = 16.26$, $SD = 6.20$), $t(33) = -5.26$, $p < .001$. The results of this analysis are depicted in Table 1.

Main Study

To confirm that the James Holmes and mass beheading videos increased negative affect, and the control video did not increase negative affect, I once again calculated negative affect change by conducting paired-samples t-tests to compare negative affect after viewing each video to negative affect before viewing each video. The results of the analysis are in Table 2. The results of this analysis supported my predictions, such that in both the student and online samples, the James Holmes and mass beheading videos significantly raised negative affect. The neutral teacher video significantly decreased negative affect in the student sample, and did not change affect in the online sample.

Before examining the study's questions, I examined the factor structure of those security policy scores in both the student and online samples to determine if support for three security

policies that relate to Middle Easterners, Muslims, and Syrian refugees represent a single factor

or multiple factors. The three security policies were: "Allowing authorities to stop people on the

street at random to search their possessions, based on Middle Eastern ethnicity," "Allowing

authorities to stop people on the street at random to search their possessions, based on having a

Muslim name, Muslim religious items, or Muslim clothing," and "Banning refugees from Syria

or the surrounding areas from settling in the United States." Based on Kaiser's (1960)

recommendation for factor selection of only component scores above a minimum eigenvalue of

1.0, the analysis resulted in a single factor that accounted for 80.88% of the total variance in the

three items. The factor loadings for this analysis are reported in Table 3, and the scree plot for

the Eigenvalues in this analysis is depicted in Figure 2. Consequently, I used SPSS to calculate a

single factor component score to represent support for prejudicial policies that target Middle

Easterners, Muslims, and Syrian refugees.

In examining Hypothesis 1, I conducted a one-way ANOVA in both the online and

student samples to compare the effect of video condition on the prejudicial factor component

score. In the student sample, the results were not significant, $F(2, 314) = .16$, $p > .05$. The η^2 for

this effect was less than 0.001. In the online sample, the results were also not significant, $F(2, 261) = 1.74$, $p > .05$. The η^2 for this effect was 0.01. These results do not support the hypothesis

that viewing the CNN video depicting the ISIS propaganda film significantly increased support

for prejudicial policies, compared to viewing the other videos. The mean prejudice component

scores broken down by sample and video condition are displayed in Table 4.

To test Hypothesis 2, that inflexibility moderates the relationship between increase in

negative affect and support for prejudicial policies, a moderation model was analyzing using

Hayes' (2013) PROCESS macro. The analysis was conducted for each video condition and beta

weights for direct and conditional effects are depicted in Tables 5, 6, and 7. In Step 1 of each model, I entered post-negative affect and inflexibility as predictors along with pre-negative affect as a covariate. In Step 2, I added an interaction term (post-negative affect*inflexibility) of post-negative affect X inflexibility to the previous model. The component score for support for prejudicial policies was entered as the dependent variable.

For the James Holmes video condition, the predictor variables were not significantly related to the dependent variable in either the online or student samples. In addition, the interaction term did not significantly increase the variance in the dependent variable. These results suggest that the change in affect resulting from watching the video did not change support for the anti-Muslim security policies, and inflexibility was not related to this relationship. The results for this analysis are depicted in Table 5.

For the mass beheading video condition, in both the online and student samples, there was a significant main effect at Step 1 for post-negative affect ($p < .05$) but not for pre-negative affect or psychological inflexibility. Adding the interaction term did not significantly increase the variance in the dependent variable for either the online or the student samples. In the student sample, adding the interaction term resulted in post-negative affect dropping from significance. The results for this analysis are depicted in Table 6.

For the teacher video condition, in the online sample, there was a significant effect for post-negative affect ($p < .05$) but not for pre-negative affect or psychological inflexibility. In the student sample, there were no significant main effects. Adding the interaction term did not increase the variance in the dependent variable, and in the online sample, adding the interaction term resulted in post-negative affect dropping from significance. The results for this analysis are depicted in Table 7.

Therefore, the results of these analyses reveal some evidence that an increase in negative affect as a unique result of watching the news broadcast from ISIS resulted in stronger support for security policies that target Muslims, Middle Easterners, and Syrian refugees. This relationship was not seen in the James Holmes video condition and was only seen in the online sample in the teacher video condition. However, the analysis did not support the hypothesis that psychological inflexibility moderates this relationship.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

My main hypotheses, that the terrorism video would increase support for prejudicial policies and that psychological inflexibility would play a role in this relationship, were not supported in either sample. One finding did emerge from the results, however, that viewing violent ISIS-related news stories may influence opinions about anti-Muslim security policies solely through negative affect. Though I predicted that affect would play a part in this relationship, I was incorrect that psychological inflexibility would moderate this relationship.

These results seem to suggest that caution is needed when interpreting the role of psychological inflexibility in affect-related responses to stimuli in the news and in general prejudice. Though psychological inflexibility was implicated in previous research on prejudice, it had an effect mainly in conjunction with other variables, specifically low empathic concern for others and low perspective-taking ability (Vilardaga et al., 2012). Without examining these other two variables, we may have missed their combined effect with inflexibility. Additionally, all three variables combined only had a moderate effect on prejudice in previous research, with $r =$ .28 (Levin et al., 2015). Therefore, while this study is evidence that inflexibility itself is not implicated in reactions to terrorist propaganda, the entire Flexible Connectedness Model of prejudice still cannot be dismissed.

Limitations

Several aspects of this study limit the conclusions that may be reached from these data. First, the lack of significant findings in this study may be the result of Type II error. The most obvious candidate for this error may be sample size: both samples were split between four possible conditions (three video conditions plus those who opted out of the video), resulting in between 71 and 100 valid participants per video condition. A post-hoc power analysis revealed

that power ranged from .54 for the video condition with the smallest sample size, to .98 at the largest. The video conditions with the smallest samples may be too low to detect a small or medium moderation effect (McClelland & Judd, 1993).

The nature of the Amazon MTurk survey as a long-distance questionnaire completed on a computer may have introduced some possible confounds into the survey process. There was no way to ensure that participants' attention was focused on the survey at all times, particularly during the video exposure. The question of the nature and external validity of MTurk samples has been examined in political science, and this may speak to the demand characteristics and demographic makeup of my MTurk sample (Huff & Tingley, 2015). Previous research has determined that in occupation and rural-urban distribution, MTurk respondents mirror other types of general population surveying, while MTurk is disproportionately strong in attracting young Asians and Hispanics and tends to have some age-related differences in responding compared to other methods of population surveying (Huff & Tingley, 2015). Finally, because MTurk rewards participants based on completion and not necessarily engagement, it is unclear whether the incentive to finish quickly diminished the quality of the responses in the MTurk sample.

Huff and Tingley (2015) also note that, while the rural-urban ratio of respondents is roughly equivalent for MTurk and other national sampling methods, it sits at roughly 90% urban and 10% rural. By contrast, our undergraduate sample was taken from a predominantly rural population at a school in a rural area. However, this should not be taken as a pure urban vs. rural comparison, as many students at the university came from urban areas, and rural southeastern Georgia may not be representative of every rural area. In particular, access to resources, education, and wealth may be significant moderators across rural areas in the United States.

Participant characteristics and motivations for both samples may have influenced the process of data collection. Allowing participants to opt out of watching the video may have given participants an opportunity to shorten the duration of the study. Participants in both groups were compensated not based on the duration of their participation but simply on their participation, therefore, they may have simply wished to "skip ahead" and receive their compensation more quickly. This could be remedied in future research by giving participants who didn't want to watch a graphic video an alternate video of the same duration rather than an opportunity to simply skip a section of the study.

Additionally, giving participants the opportunity to opt-out of the video was intended to ensure that participants were not unwillingly exposed to troubling material. However, this may have removed participants with certain characteristics from the video conditions, resulting in a weakening of any existing effect. A post-study analysis revealed no significant difference in either sample between those who opted out and those who did not in psychological inflexibility ($p > .05$). However, there was a significant difference in negative affect between those who opted out and those who did not in the online sample [$t(426) = -2.17, p < .05$] and the student sample [$t(443) = -3.18, p < .01$], such that in both samples, negative affect was higher in those who opted out of watching the video. Additionally, support for prejudicial policies was higher in those who opted out of watching the video in the student sample [$t(461) = -3.68, p < .001$] but not in the online sample [$t(433) = -1.50, p > .05$]. These findings may be interpreted as implying that negative affect plays a role in support for prejudicial security policies, consistent with Hatton and Nielsen (2016), and suggest future directions for research.

Finally, by the time of data collection, the videos were over one year old. Qualitative data taken in later studies (Hatton & Nielsen, 2016b) revealed that many people reported that the emotional valence of these particular news stories had diminished due to over-exposure.

Future Directions

Future research can examine more closely the role of negative affect in support for national security policies, including those that profile Muslims. The form of the PANAS chosen for this study includes 20 emotion words and these break down into global positive and global negative affect scores. An examination of the specific emotions that drive support for various security policies can be performed. Additionally, other studies can use the PANAS-X, an expanded 60-item version of the PANAS that includes factors that make up positive and negative affect, including the basic emotions of fear, hostility, guilt, sadness, joviality, self-assurance, and attentiveness (Watson & Clark, 1994).

While inflexibility did not seem to have any effect on reactions to the ISIS news story, this is not the only possible psychological variable that measures behavioral reactivity to discomfort. There are two forms of reactivity to distressing stimuli that may bear some role in how people respond to news stories depicting violent terrorism: anxiety sensitivity and disgust sensitivity.

Anxiety sensitivity does have some previous research support in terms of predicting reactions to distressing media (Collimore, McCabe, Carleton, & Asmundson, 2008). Though anxiety sensitivity was not implicated in prejudice in previous studies, it may result in support for policies that are prejudicial in certain contexts, particularly those intended to make Americans safer. If this is the case, anxiety sensitivity may play the role that psychological inflexibility was hypothesized to play in the current study.

Disgust sensitivity is hypothesized to play a role in prejudice. Though it is a construct developed to measure one's sensitivity to substances that may be dangerous, noxious, or contaminated (Rozin, Haidt, & HcCauley, 2008), some evidence has tied it to negative views toward out-groups (Hodson & Costello, 2007) and groups judged to threaten traditional standards of religious morality (Terrizzi, Shook, & Ventis, 2010). On that line of research, disgust sensitivity is an evolutionary adaptation that emerged to protect humans from objects, substances, and even other humans who may represent carriers of disease or threats to health. Thus, disgust sensitivity may predict support for security policies that protect against external threats coming from out-groups such as Muslims or terrorists; however, it is unclear whether terrorism actually provokes the emotion of disgust. In particular, the gruesome nature of ISIS videos may evoke disgust in ways that even other kinds of terrorism do not.

Additionally, we asked participants to explicitly indicate their emotional feelings toward Muslims, using a cold/warm paradigm that had previously been developed in social psychology and public research. There may be a way to less explicitly test for prejudice toward Muslims, such as using a covert variable, photograph, personal description, or laboratory confederate. Experiments testing anti-Muslim prejudice may find more robust prejudice when the variables are less subject to desirability bias.

In conclusion, data from this study suggest that psychological inflexibility as it is measured in the AAQ-II does not play a role in moderating reactions to news of terrorist events. Although the results did not confirm this hypothesis, this study does raise the possibility that future researchers may improve our understanding of people's reactions to distressing media stories by examining the role of anxiety sensitivity, disgust sensitivity, or negative affect. Such research may inform our understanding of psychological factors that carry consequences for

social policy. This research may also be used to create interventions that decrease the effects of terrorism on the public.

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TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1

Negative Affect Before and After Viewing Pilot Study Videos

	Pre		Post		Paired Differences *t*-test				
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SEM*	*df*	*t*	*p*
James Holmes Video	15.10	5.18	21.10	7.16	-6.00	1.29	29	-4.63	<.001
Mass Beheading Video	16.26	6.20	21.97	7.70	-5.71	1.08	33	-5.26	<.001

Table 2

Negative Affect Before and After Viewing Main Study Videos

	Pre- Negative Affect		Post- Negative Affect		*t*-test		
	M	SD	M	SD	*df*	*t*	*p*
Student Sample							
James Holmes	16.04	6.31	19.58	7.45	101	-5.36	<.001
Mass Beheading	16.98	7.90	21.18	9.15	95	-5.20	<.001
Teacher	16.48	7.13	14.30	6.57	101	4.67	<.001
Online Sample							
James Holmes	13.97	5.72	18.24	6.58	91	-7.16	<.001
Mass Beheading	13.08	5.19	18.60	7.61	89	-6.92	<.001
Teacher	13.20	5.86	12.76	5.44	75	.86	.40

Table 3

Factor Loadings for Support for Prejudicial Policy Opinions

Items	Factor 1 Loadings
Allowing authorities to stop people on the street at random to search their possessions, based on Middle Eastern ethnicity.	.946
Allowing authorities to stop people on the street at random to search their possessions, based on having a Muslim name, Muslim religious items, or Muslim clothing.	.932
Banning refugees from Syria or the surrounding areas from settling in the United States	.814
Eigenvalue	2.426
% of Total Variance	80.881

Table 4

Effect of Video Condition on Mean Prejudicial Factor Score

	M	*SD*	*SEM*
Student Sample			
James Holmes	-.12	.95	.09
Mass Beheading	-.18	.88	.09
Teacher	-.12	.98	.09
Online Sample			
James Holmes	-.02	1.06	.11
Mass Beheading	-.17	.93	.10
Teacher	.13	1.14	.13

Table 5

Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Support for Prejudicial Policies in James Homes Video Group

| | Online Sample | | | | Student Sample | | | |
| | Step 1 | | Step 2 | | Step 1 | | Step 2 | |
Variables	*B*	*95% CI*	*B*	*95% CI*	*B*	*95% CI*	*B*	*95% CI*
Predictors								
Baseline NA	.01	[-.04, .06]	.00	[-.05, .05]	.03	[-.01, .06]	.03	[-.01, .03]
Post NA	.03	[-.01, .07]	.03	[-.02, .08]	-.01	[-.04, .03]	-.01	[-.04, .02]
Inflex.	-.01	[-.04, .01]	-.01	[-.04, .02]	.01	[-.01, .03]	.01	[-.01, .03]
Interactions								
NA x Inflex.			.00	[-.00, .01]			.00	[-.00, .01]
R^2		.05		.06		.04		.10
Change in R^2				.01				.03

Note: Betas are unstandardized. None of the predictors in this model are significant. Effects were rounded to the nearest hundredth and (-) indicates direction.

Table 6

Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Support for Prejudicial Policies in Mass Beheading Video Group

	Online Sample				Student Sample			
	Step 1		Step 2		Step 1		Step 2	
Variables	*B*	*95% CI*	*B*	*95% CI*	*B*	*95% CI*	*B*	*95% CI*
Predictors								
Baseline NA	-.02	[-.06, .03]	-.02	[-.07, .03]	-.02	[-.05, .02]	-.01	[-.04, .03]
Post NA	**.05**	**[.03, .08]**	**.05**	**[.02, .09]**	**.03**	**[.00, .05]**	.03	[-.00, .06]
Inflex.	-.00	[-.03, .02]	-.00	[-.02, .02]	.01	[-.02, .03]	.01	[-.02, .03]
Interactions								
NA x Inflex.			-.00	[-.00, .00]			-.00	[-.003, .001]
R^2		.16		.16		.07		.09
Change in R^2				.00				.01

Note: Betas are unstandardized. Predictors in bold are significant (p<.05). Effects were rounded to the nearest hundredth and (-) indicates direction.

Table 7

Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Support for Prejudicial Policies in Teacher Video Group

	Online Sample				Student Sample			
	Step 1		Step 2		Step 1		Step 2	
Variables	*B*	*95% CI*	*B*	*95% CI*	*B*	*95% CI*	*B*	*95% CI*
Predictors								
Baseline NA	-.03	[-.09, .04]	-.04	[-.17, .09]	.04	[-.01, .09]	.04	[-.02, .09]
Post NA	**.07**	**[.00, .13]**	.07	[-.12, .26]	.03	[-.01, .08]	.01	[-.04, .01]
Inflex.	.00	[-.03, .03]	.00	[-.04, .04]	-.02	[-.04, .00]	-.02	[-.04, .01]
Interactions								
NA x Inflex.			.00	[-.01, .01]			.002	[-.00, .00]
R^2		.07		.12		.17		.22
Change in R^2				.03				.02

Note: Betas are unstandardized. Predictors in bold are significant (p<.05). Effects were rounded to the nearest hundredth and (-) indicates direction.

Figure 1

Proposed Model of Psychological Inflexibility as a Moderator of Reactions to Terrorist Events
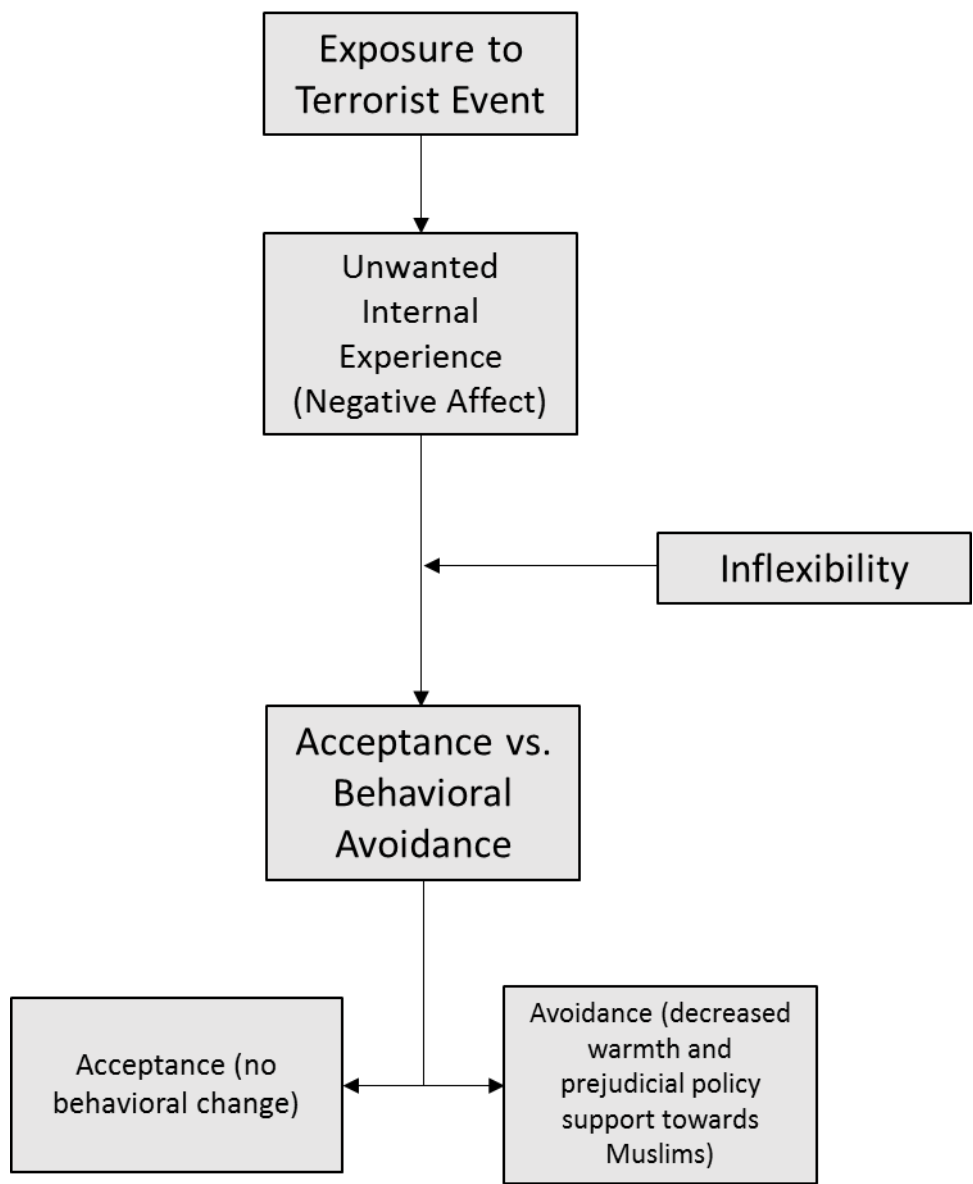
Figure 2

Scree Plot of Eigenvalues for Prejudicial Security Policies