

Responses to Media Coverage of Terrorism

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Differential anxiety responses to television coverage of national threat situations and terrorism in Israel were examined. A total of 237 participants were evenly divided into two groups, each exposed to an experimental or control condition. The experimental condition involved exposure to television news clips of terrorism and threats to national security. The control condition involved equivalent-length exposure to news clips unrelated to national danger situations. Results supported the anxiety-inducing effect of the experimental condition and indicated differential demographic and dispositional responses to the footage according to gender, religiousness, and level of dogmatism. These results support the powerful effect of the mass media and advocate further exploration of links between media broadcasting of political violence and psychological processes.

Research on the influence of the mass media on people's attitudes and emotional states has a long and contentious history. Arguments range from those that cite the mass media as a powerful propaganda tool capable of molding the attitudes of a susceptible public (Herman and Chomsky 1988; Lee 1990) to those that claim the media has a very limited influence (Curran, Gurevitch, and Woollacott 1982). However, in general, unreliable methodologies and complex results have plagued this body of research (Blumler and Gurevitch 1982).

In the subdomain of mass media reporting of violence, a clearer picture has begun to emerge. In general, findings have demonstrated that media documentation of violence and brutality engenders feelings of fear even among individuals who have not been directly exposed to such violence and for whom it poses no immediate personal threat (Bandura 1986). Furthermore, results suggest that the extent and direction of media influence may vary across groups or individuals (Blumler and Gurevitch 1982). However, the majority of research has focused only on media reports of criminal violence, whereas the emotional impact of media coverage of political violence remains virtually unexplored. In light of this hiatus, this study focuses on the emotional response evoked by media coverage of political violence. More specifically, it investigates the differential anxiety response of different groups of individuals to television coverage of political terrorism.

It has long been recognized that political circumstances exert an impact on the emotional status of individuals. The deleterious psychological effects of political instability and accompanying violence have been clearly demonstrated in such diverse the-

aters of conflict as Northern Ireland (Cairns and Wilson 1989), South Africa (Dawes 1994), Lebanon (Macksoud and Aber 1996), and Guatemala (Miller 1996). Congruently, Israeli and Palestinian studies have echoed international findings (Baker 1990; Klingman, Sagi, and Raviv 1993; Punamaki 1988; Slone, Adiri, and Arian 1998). However, although most past research in this area has targeted the effect of victimization or witnessing of political violence, the adverse psychological consequences of political upheaval are by no means caused exclusively by direct contact with incidents of confrontation or violence. Most individuals do not assess threat to personal and national security on the basis of direct experience but rather on the basis of more indirect forms of exposure. One of the most salient channels through which information and perceptions are gleaned is through mass media coverage of political events, which may mediate assessments of threat. However, the absence of neutrality in the majority of media reports has been cited by critics across the political spectrum (Giner-Sorolla and Chaiken 1994), suggesting that the public is exposed to biased coverage of political events that may influence attitudes and feelings in particular directions.

The political milieu of Israel constellates many of these issues and provides a rich context within which to redress the lack of rigorous methodological research on the psychological impact of media reports of political violence. The long-standing peace initiative in the Middle East has failed to curb the high levels of political violence or to ease concerns for national and personal security to which both Israelis and Palestinians are exposed on a daily basis. For Israelis, the establishment of a Jewish state has for decades been fraught with opposition to its autonomous existence, war, threats of war, and terrorist attacks (Harkabi 1988). Recurring spates of suicide bombings, the assassination of the prime minister in 1995, and the faltering Israeli-Palestinian peace process have intensified the ideological and political divisions not only between Israelis and Palestinians but also between Israelis at opposing ends of the political spectrum (Arian 1996). The Israeli population's preoccupation with national security is reflected in its constant evaluation of the country's security status and the plentiful critical debates about it in the mass media (Jacobson and Bar-Tal 1995). Although the psychological effects on Israelis of direct exposure to war and political violence as witnesses or victims have been well documented in recent literature (Klingman, Sagi, and Raviv 1993; Slone, Adiri, and Arian, 1998), the emotional impact of the widespread exposure to media coverage of such events remains unknown.

The spectrum of political attitudes among Israelis toward security issues and definitions of borders highlights the complex interweaving of political and religious ideology. On this grid, the boundaries of religion and nationalism are blurred (Tabory 1993). Religion dictates that all the land of Israel is sacred, promised to the Jewish people by God, thus making political claims for the land and resistance to its surrender inseparable from religious belief. Israel is perceived as both a national and a religious homeland, and any threat to the security of the country can be construed as a peril both to the Jewish religion and to the Israeli nation. The ideology of the land operates together with security concerns and perceptions of threat in ordering political orientation. In this way, political and nationalistic attitudes are thus often intricately linked to religious attitudes (Arian 1996).

There are a number of religious groupings in Israel, which can be broadly categorized into three divisions. First, the ultraorthodox Jews, who comprise approximately 5% of the population, are distinguished by their modest traditional dress, insulated residential communities, and devout practice of traditional Jewish religious laws and rituals. Second, the religious Jews, who comprise approximately 40% to 45% of the population, are more modern and less insulated than the ultraorthodox although still stringent and devout in their religious practices. Third, approximately 40% to 45% identify themselves as secular Jews (Tabory 1993).

On this spectrum, the ultraorthodox community tends to oppose most strongly, and frequently more militantly than other religious grouping any attempt by the state to cede land to the Palestinians in the framework of the peace negotiations. They are the most extreme representatives of the interlocked religion-politics fusion. The assassination of the "doveish" Prime Minister Rabin by an orthodox Jew opposed to his peace initiatives highlights some of the ways in which political opposition divides the population along religious dimensions.

In the Israeli context, the enmeshment of land and religion suggests that Israelis may have differing psychological responses to threats to national security, depending on their degree of religiousness. General findings on the relation between religion and emotional response have been inconclusive, with some studies reporting a positive relation between the two variables (Koenig 1993; Myers and Diener 1995; Neeleman and Persand 1995) such that individuals with high levels of intrinsic religiousness experience less anxiety than others (Mickley, Carson, and Soeken 1995). However, the majority of studies have found no significant relation between religion and mental health (Hathaway and Pargament 1990). Surprisingly, very little research has been devoted to this question in Israel, although the few studies that have been conducted echo this finding of no significant relation (Francis and Katz 1992).

This study departs from previous correlative research in that rather than examining the broad relation between religion and mental health it focuses more narrowly on psychological responses to a particular type of stressor in an experimental design. Specifically, the study examines the effects of media coverage of threats to national security with particular reference to differential response according to degree of religiousness. This refinement of methodology enables a rigorous examination of the role of religion in mediating psychological well-being in this specific political context. In addition, in the search for a finer discrimination of the way in which stress responses to political broadcasts are mediated by religion, this study includes examination of the dispositional variable of dogmatism, which is closely related to religious ideology.

The concept of dogmatism was developed by Rokeach (1960) as a measure of authoritarianism without ideological content (Sexton 1983). Rokeach (1960) defined dogmatism as a closed cognitive organization of beliefs about reality, manifested in an inclination to be close-minded, intolerant of others, and deferential to authority. People who score high on dogmatism have a pervasive outlook of fear, pessimism, and concern for power. Although the concept of dogmatism was developed to encompass all points on the political spectrum, those who score high on dogmatism also tend to score high on measures of authoritarianism (Hanson 1968; Plant 1960). Authoritarianism, in turn, is correlated with conservative or extremist right-wing political attitudes,

nationalism, and religiosity (Adorno et al. 1950; Eckhardt 1991) and shows different patterns by gender (McFarland, Agayev, and Abalinka 1990). Although the relation between dogmatism and gender has not been rigorously examined, some studies have found higher scores on Rokeach's *F* scale for men than for women (Duckitt 1983).

Dogmatism also appears to mediate emotional stress responses. Rokeach (1960) himself suggested that dogmatism is a rigid but brittle defense against anxiety, which would be correlated with anxiety responses to stress. Indeed, when subjected to examination, studies have shown a direct relation between a high level of dogmatism and increased levels of anxiety (Anderson 1962; Nidorf and Argabrite 1968).

In accord with these considerations, the aims of the present study were twofold. First, it attempted to extend existing but generally methodologically fragile research on the impact of media reports of violence to the arena of political violence and terrorism. In the attempt to employ a rigorous methodological design, the study investigated whether an intervention of a political film containing television news clips of threats to Israel's national security and terrorist activity in the country induces anxiety responses in an Israeli sample. Second, the study aimed to investigate whether the exposure would induce anxiety changes differentially in various groupings within the population.

In line with these aims, the study posited four hypotheses. The first hypothesis stated that there would be an increase in state anxiety in the experimental group that was exposed to the intervention showing terrorist activities but not in the control group that was exposed to an intervention unrelated to terrorism and national threat. Positive results for this research question would reinforce the validity of the intervention and allow examination of the other research questions.

The other three hypotheses related to the differential impact of media exposure to political violence for different sectors of the population. To explore this question, three participant characteristics were examined. These characteristics were gender, religiousness, and dogmatism.

Regarding gender differences in response to the intervention, the second hypothesis stated that the difference in state anxiety in the experimental group would be greater for women than for men. This is in line with prolific research on gender differences in stress responses, which reports that significantly higher rates of anxiety are diagnosed among women than among men (Myers and Diener 1995; Pilgrim and Rogers 1993).

Regarding religiousness, the third hypothesis stated that the difference in state anxiety as a result of the intervention for the experimental group would be greater for religious persons than for secular persons. The complex, unique interweaving of nationalism and religion in Israel at this historical juncture suggests that orthodox more than secular Israelis may be more invested in maintaining Israel's security without surrendering land in the West Bank in return for peace treaties. This is due to their strong religious beliefs in the legitimacy of a Jewish homeland as defined in the Bible, which compounds political and nationalistic ideologies. Thus, visual material of threats to the existent structure along with their fear that these threats would not deter the left-wing government from land-for-peace deals would be more anxiety provoking for orthodox Israelis than for secular Israelis whose recognition of national security threats has generally spurred support for land-for-peace deals.

Finally, given the apparent links between anxiety, dogmatism, religiousness, and gender, the fourth hypothesis stated that dogmatism would interact with gender and religiousness in determining the impact of the experimental manipulation on state anxiety.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

Participants in the study were 237 Israeli adults, relatively evenly divided by gender. They ranged in age from 20 to 56, the average age being 34.7. Participants were divided into two groups: 120 comprised the experimental group that was exposed to a media intervention of television clips of terrorism and political violence, and 117 comprised the control group that received an intervention of news clips unrelated to national threat. All participants were of middle-class socioeconomic status and held various public service jobs, such as teaching and other technical, administrative, and municipal positions. Post hoc comparisons between the experimental and control groups showed no significant differences on the demographic characteristics of gender, age, socioeconomic status, and parental educational level. Exposure to one of the two conditions was the only difference in procedure between the two groups.

INSTRUMENTS

All participants completed the following questionnaires:

State anxiety questionnaire (Spielberger, Gorsuch, and Lushene 1970). This widely used questionnaire examines state anxiety level and consists of 20 items that describe various feelings. The respondent is required to indicate for each item, on a scale of 1 to 4 (*not at all, a little, moderately, a lot*), the description that best reflects his or her current feelings. The summed score of all items is a measure of the respondent's state anxiety. The questionnaire has been translated into Hebrew (Teichman and Melink 1979) according to the instructions of the author and is widely used in Israel. The questionnaire is reported to have excellent psychometric properties with cross-cultural applicability and good test-retest and split-half properties. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the scale reported in the literature is .91. In the present study, the test was used as a split-half measure with 10 items administered before the intervention and 10 items after the intervention in both the experimental and control conditions. The internal consistency for the preintervention administration was $\alpha = .92$ and for the postintervention administration $\alpha = .95$, yielding an overall internal consistency score of $\alpha = .94$.

Rokeach's E Version Dogmatism Questionnaire. This questionnaire consists of 40 items, each of which is a declarative sentence, to which respondents are required to rate their agreement or disagreement on a scale from -3 (*very much disagree*) to +3 (*very much agree*). A general dogmatism score is yielded by converting ratings to a 1 (*very much disagree*) to 6 (*very much agree*) scale and summing these ratings. The

questionnaire is reported to have excellent cross-cultural applicability and test-retest and split-half reliability. The questionnaire was translated into Hebrew by Green (1975), who also reported good psychometric properties in Israel, including reliability scores ranging from .69 to .93 on different samples and Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .71 for internal consistency. The present study yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .81 for the scale.

Demographic background questionnaire. This questionnaire contained questions regarding the demographic background of participants, including age, gender, profession, socioeconomic status, and educational level, and was used to assess similarity between the experimental and control groups. The questionnaire also included a series of questions assessing self-definition of religiousness and adherence to religious practices. Responses to these questions were used to categorize participants into two groups, religious and secular, which served as one of the independent variables in the study.

PROCEDURE

The study was conducted in an auditorium in which groups of 10 participants were seated. Each administration of the study was randomly assigned as an experimental or a control condition. In both conditions, the experimenter explained to participants that they were taking part in a study on feelings and personal beliefs about various issues. Each participant was allocated a booklet and requested to respond to the questionnaires in the order in which they appeared in the pamphlet until reaching a page that read "Please stop." The questionnaires included the demographic questionnaire, Rokeach's dogmatism questionnaire, and half of the state anxiety questionnaire. Except for the state anxiety questionnaire, which was adjacent to the experimental or control procedure, the other questionnaires were randomly counterbalanced across all participants. After completing the first section of the booklet, participants were administered either the experimental or the control condition.

Experimental Condition

The experimental group was exposed to an intervention consisting of a 12-minute film that was prepared using video editing. The film consisted of segments of archive material of news clippings depicting terrorist threats to the country that had been broadcast on Israeli national television. The segments used in the film were presentations of Hizballah activity in Lebanon, footage of Hamas training in the West Bank, and coverage of terrorist attacks within Israel. A continuous Hebrew soundtrack was added to the edited film.

Control Condition

The control group was exposed to a movie that was equivalent in length and format to that of the experimental condition. The presentation in the control condition con-

tained locally relevant news clips that had been broadcast on Israeli national television, but it did not contain coverage of terrorist activity or direct danger to national security.

After each condition, participants responded to the second half of the state anxiety questionnaire. The experimental and control conditions were randomly presented to the groups of participants.

At the end of the entire experiment, all participants responded to a question concerning their own or their close family's direct exposure to terrorism. The rationale underlying this question was to remove from the study participants whose responses may have derived not from media portrayals of terrorism but from direct exposure as victims. Only one participant responded affirmatively, and she was removed from the sample, leaving the 237 participants of the study.

RESULTS

First, the delta for the differences in state anxiety before and after the interventions was calculated. There was no significant difference in state anxiety between the two groups prior to the interventions.

To test the hypotheses, a $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$ ANOVA was conducted with the intervention conditions (experimental and control), gender (male and female), religiousness (religious and secular), and dogmatism (high and low, divided at the median) as the independent variables and the delta (state anxiety difference) as the dependent variable.

The first hypothesis was supported by a main effect of the intervention condition, $F(1, 222) = 127.34, p < .0001$, with the delta significantly higher for the experimental condition ($M = 16.20, SD = 11.69$) than for the control condition ($M = 2.33, SD = .09$). However, because higher order interactions were found, this hypothesis is further reported for specific groups.

A significant two-way interaction emerged for the intervention condition and gender, $F(1, 222) = 33.91, p < .001$. Scheffé post hoc comparisons revealed that in the experimental condition the anxiety difference was significantly greater ($p < .001$) for women ($M = 21.91, SD = 13.07$) than for men ($M = 14.69, SD = 10.34$), but in the control condition no difference emerged.

A significant two-way interaction emerged for the intervention condition and religion, $F(1, 222) = 13.91, p < .001$. Scheffé post hoc comparisons revealed that in the experimental condition the anxiety difference was significantly greater ($p < .001$) for religious ($M = 18.73, SD = 13.23$) than for secular participants ($M = 12.83, SD = 11.75$), but in the control condition no difference emerged.

Two significant three-way interactions were found. The first was an interaction between intervention condition, religiousness, and dogmatism, $F(1, 222) = 7.20, p < .01$. Scheffé post hoc comparisons revealed that in the experimental condition, the anxiety difference for religious participants was greater for those who scored low on dogmatism than for those who scored high on dogmatism ($p < .05$). For secular participants, the reverse was found in that the anxiety difference was lower for those who scored low on dogmatism than for those who scored high on dogmatism ($p < .01$). Means for the

anxiety difference in the experimental condition for religious and secular participants with low and high levels of dogmatism are presented in Figure 1.

In the control condition, no difference emerged in the anxiety difference for religiousness or dogmatism. These results mean that there are opposite patterns in the way religious and secular people react with anxiety to the experimental manipulation, depending on their basic level of dogmatism.

A second three-way interaction was found for intervention condition, gender, and dogmatism, $F(1, 222) = 11.72, p < .001$. Scheffé post hoc comparisons showed that in the experimental condition the anxiety difference for men was significantly greater ($p < .05$) for participants who scored high on dogmatism. For women, although the reverse phenomenon occurred, this did not reach statistical significance. Means for the anxiety difference for men and women with low and high levels of dogmatism are presented in Figure 2.

This means that there are different patterns in the way in which women and men react with anxiety to the footage on terrorism, depending on their basic level of dogmatism. In the control condition, no difference emerged in the anxiety difference for gender and dogmatism. No four-way interactions emerged.

Because similar interactions were found for religiousness and gender, a chi-square test for independence was calculated to assess whether these variables were correlated. No relation was found between gender and religiousness, indicating that the above results are not confounded.

DISCUSSION

This study found a significant difference in anxiety-level changes between participants in the experimental group who were exposed to a media broadcast portraying terrorist threats to Israel's national security and participants in the control group. Thus, the first hypothesis was strongly confirmed. In addition to the undeniable value of the result itself, this validated the stressogenic nature of the experimental intervention and adds credence to the findings for the other hypotheses.

The finding that media portrayals of terrorism, political violence, and threats to national security provoke anxiety in individual viewers questions the veracity of those studies that claim that the influence of the mass media is negligible and benign (Curran, Gurevitch, and Woolacott 1982). Consonantly, this finding provides support for existing research that documents the powerful and potentially damaging impact of mass media on the psychological well-being of the viewing public (Bandura 1986). However, it should be noted that most existing research has been restricted to examinations of the effects of media exposure on attitudes and opinions rather than on emotional states. The present finding of significant state anxiety increase as a result of media exposure suggests extension of the perimeters of this research domain to encompass media elicitation of emotional responses in the political sphere.

This is particularly pertinent in the case of television, which so vividly and immediately portrays occurrences that may not be part of the direct experiential repertoire of

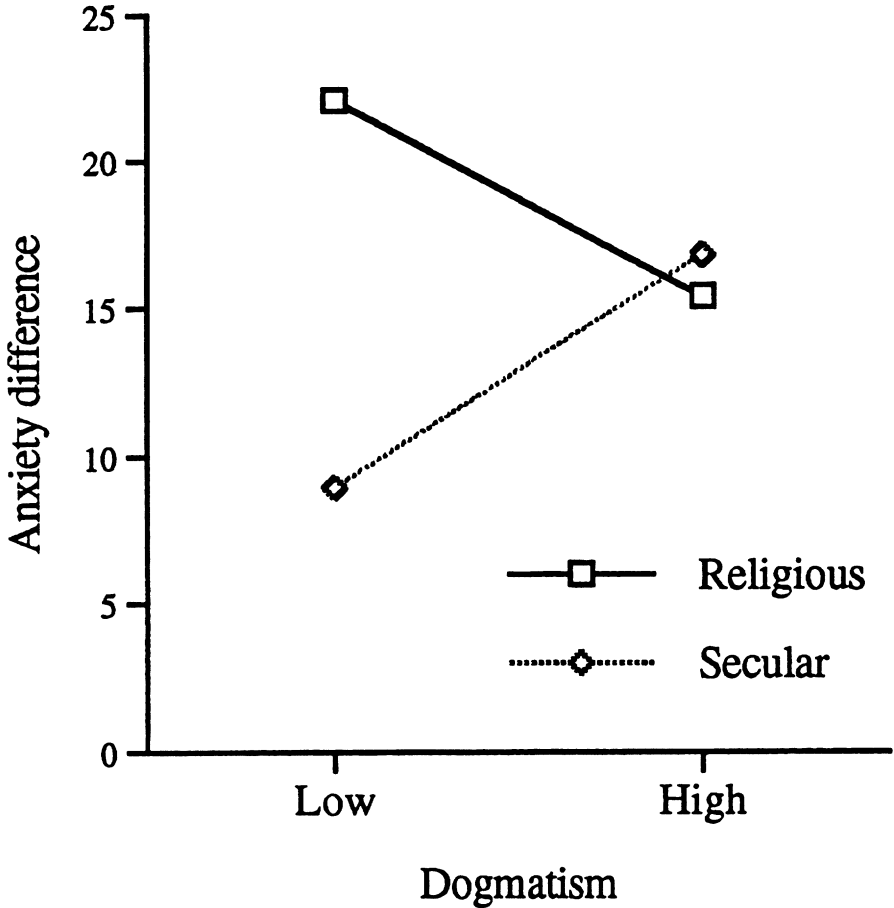


Figure 1: Means of Religious Participants with High and Low Dogmatism Levels on Anxiety Differences

the individual. The visual medium provides a dramatic concretization of images and scenes that draw the viewer into the events. This could invoke a powerful emotional response even in individuals removed in time and space from direct personal threat. These results buttress the notion of the power of television over the viewing public (Lee 1990). However, it should be noted that this study investigated only immediate response. Future research should attempt to disentangle transitory from perpetuating emotional responses to disturbing media broadcasts.

This study enhances the existing literature in two important ways. First, it offers a rigorous methodological design, which has been largely absent in studies of the psychological impact of mass media (Blumler and Gurevitch 1982). This study examined only one possible psychological response to media reports of threats to national secu-

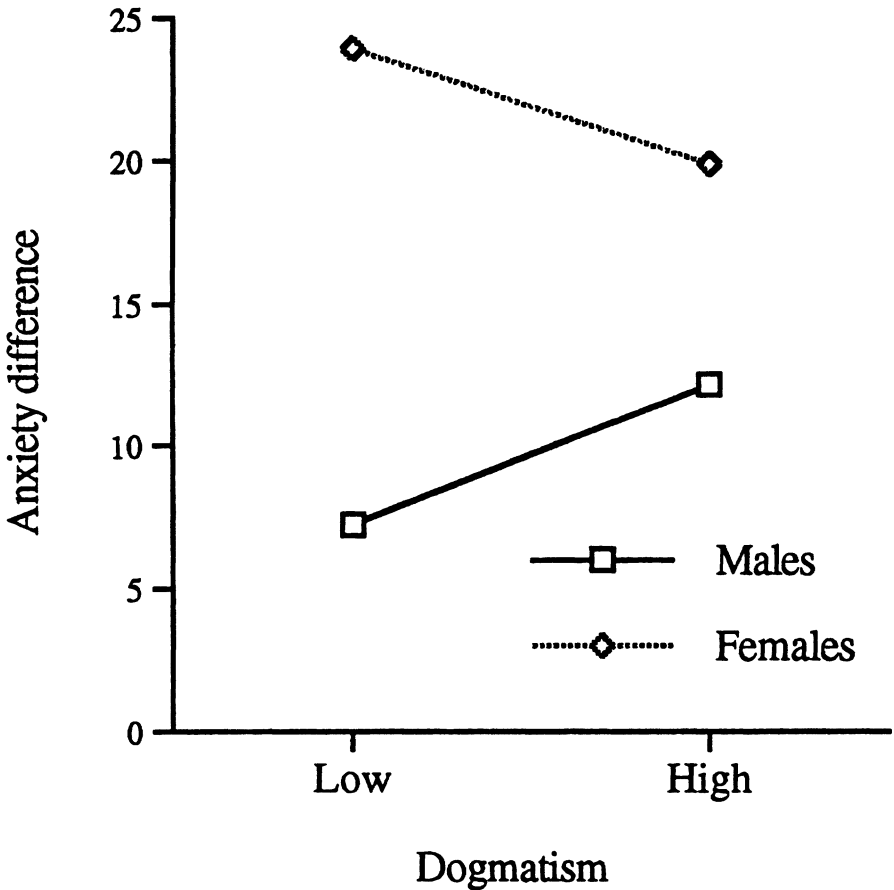


Figure 2: Means of Men and Women with High and Low Dogmatism Levels on Anxiety Differences

urity, that of state anxiety. However, it is probable that an array of emotional responses, such as fear, depression, hostility, and many others, may be elicited by exposure to such stimuli. The methodology of this study could be mobilized in future research to explore a range of psychological responses.

Second, the study extends the exploration of media impact on psychological health to media portrayals of political violence, which have thus far received little attention from researchers. Although this study examined the specific political context of Israel, politically motivated violence and its media coverage extend almost throughout the world. Terrorist attacks, bombings, assassinations, war, civil war, and violent confrontations are increasingly a feature of many nations, from Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Asia to the United States, South America, and Africa. Although the film used

in this study was compiled by the researchers for the purpose of the study, it consisted of a montage of existing media clips. Such footage forms part of the daily media diet of Israelis (Jacobson and Bar-Tal 1995) and, indeed, constitutes the international media that people who have access to print and electronic media view. Given the pervasiveness of politically motivated violence and its ongoing coverage in the mass media, the results of this study indicate the importance of monitoring the effects of such exposure on the psychological well-being of media viewers across the globe.

The hypothesis that women will report greater anxiety changes than will men in response to the experimental intervention was also confirmed. Because previous findings have suggested that men tend to respond to stress instrumentally, whereas women tend to respond in a more emotionally expressive manner (Eagly and Wood 1991), the greater anxiety change of female participants may simply reflect their greater willingness to report anxiety. However, it may also indicate that women are, in fact, more vulnerable than men to anxiety when exposed to threatening political broadcasts.

As hypothesized, religious participants reported greater anxiety changes in response to the experimental intervention than did secular participants. No interaction between gender and religion was found, indicating that there is no differential effect on the anxiety difference for religious women as opposed to secular women and for religious men as opposed to secular men. Thus, the religious participants of both genders were more vulnerable to anxiety in response to the political broadcasts than were the secular participants.

This finding raises the issue of the role that religious ideology plays in regulating emotion. The results of this study appear to contradict a vast body of research that has documented the role of religion in enhancing psychological well-being (Myers and Diener 1995; Neeleman and Persand 1995) and in facilitating psychological adjustment in the face of direct exposure to political violence and oppression (Punamaki 1996). However, the finding may be explicable in terms of the specific positioning of religion to political ideology and emotional outcome within the particular Israeli context examined in this study.

One explanation suggests that the finding may be specific to responses to media coverage of political violence. Studies of the role of religion in mediating stress responses have neglected responses to media portrayals of violence in general and political violence in particular. It is possible that religious commitment may serve a protective function under circumstances of direct victimization and witnessing of violence, but not when violence is filtered through the media. A speculative explanation for this is that events that entail personal involvement may be more easily assigned meaning than indirectly viewed media events that involve anonymous individuals. Whether the protective function of religion operates differently in cases of direct and indirect exposure to political violence should be explored in future research.

Second, it is plausible that the greater anxiety level changes of religious participants as compared to secular participants on exposure to media portrayals of national security threats reflect the complex interrelation between religion and nationalism in Israel. Religious Israelis tend to place a heightened focus on retention of land in the West Bank for ideological reasons than do secular Israelis. This stance of resistance to surrender of land has become enmeshed with settlement of areas of the West Bank and

concomitant demands for security of the settlements. This ideology posits that concern for general national security cannot come at the expense of relinquishment of parts of historical larger Israel.

Religious right-wing adherents tend to view terrorist threats to the security of the settlements and suicide bombings in the heart of Israel as questioning the Palestinians' credentials as worthy negotiating partners. This coupled with the then-Labor government's insistence on pressing ahead with the peace process and territorial compromise would certainly make religious right-wing adherents feel threatened both from within and without.

Indeed, after each suicide bombing, a heated debate ensued in which predominantly secular left-wing adherents advocated pressing on with the peace process nonetheless, in the face of a lack of viable alternate routes, whereas the predominantly religious right-wing adherents advocated halting the peace process immediately. Despite these calls for cessation of the peace process, Acting Prime Minister Shimon Peres's left-wing Labor government was determined to continue negotiations. This prompted criticism by right-wingers of weak capitulation to all Palestinian demands and eventually contributed to the fall of the Labor government in the following elections and the ascent of the right-wing Likud government that essentially brought a halt to the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations. Thus, high levels of religiousness may be associated with an enhanced sense of threat and vulnerability in the face of challenges to both community and national security.

The hypothesis that levels of dogmatism will interact with religion in determining the change in anxiety response was confirmed. For secular participants, it was found that individuals who scored high on dogmatism became more anxious in response to the threatening political broadcast than those who scored low on dogmatism. This finding is in line with existing theory (Rokeach 1960) and empirical studies (e.g., Anderson 1962; Nidorf and Argabrite 1968) that posit that dogmatism is correlated with anxiety.

However, among religious participants, a contradictory relation emerged whereby dogmatic participants showed less change in anxiety than did nondogmatic participants. This finding suggests that for dogmatic individuals, religion seems to mediate responses to threatening political broadcasts. One possible interpretation for this may be that high levels of both dogmatism and religiousness are quite compatible, as borne out by studies that indicate that the two are correlated (Eckhardt and Newcombe 1969; Eckhardt 1991). Both dogmatism and fundamentalist religion comprise a rigid set of beliefs and a clear encompassing ideology that prescribe a philosophy and way of life that may be characterized as close-mindedness. This is particularly true in Israel, where religiousness is associated with orthodoxy, insularity, and a set of conservative political beliefs (Arian 1996). On the other hand, nondogmatic religious Israelis may find their relative open-mindedness at odds with the community and the fixed religious codes by which they live. Pervasive media bombardment about enemy threats and terrorism may evoke a conflict between close-minded religious ideology and a more open-minded nationalist or political ideology, a conflict that increases anxiety. Dogmatic ultrareligious Israelis are unlikely to be troubled with such internal ideological conflicts.

In this sample, there was also an interaction between dogmatism and gender in the experimental group. Among men, those who scored high on dogmatism reported a greater increase in anxiety in response to the threatening intervention than those who scored low on dogmatism. Among women, there tended to be the reverse phenomenon, with those who scored low on dogmatism reporting a greater increase in anxiety than those who scored high on dogmatism. This highlights the complex relation between dogmatism and demographic variables in responsiveness to stressogenic political stimuli. Clearly, the interaction between dogmatism and demographic variables such as religiousness and gender suggests that dogmatism holds a pivotal position in response to anxiety-provoking situations in a political-ideological context. These interrelations warrant closer investigation with larger samples and in a variety of contexts of televised portrayals of political violence.

In sum, the findings of this study provide support for the argument that the mass media has an impact on the psychological well-being of viewers. Specifically, television broadcasts of political violence and national threat have the power to increase personal levels of state anxiety among viewers. However, more important, the findings also confirm the contention that different individuals and groups are differentially affected (Blumler and Gurevitch 1982) and suggest that the demographic variables of religiousness and gender and the personality variable of dogmatism are important determinants of such effects.

Within the specific sociopolitical context of Israel, these variables were found to mediate the impact of television coverage of political violence and terrorism on levels of anxiety. Women, dogmatic men, religious Israelis in general, and nondogmatic religious Israelis in particular seem to be especially vulnerable to anxiety responses within this particular political framework. It would be valuable for the planning of intervention measures to explore whether these variables are equally predictive in other sociopolitical contexts. Additionally, in this study, only the variables of religiousness, gender, and dogmatism were examined. However, the findings suggest extension of this form of intervention to a broader array of variables that could be implicated in modulating emotional response to political violence exposure both directly and indirectly via the media.

It is widely acknowledged that political media broadcasts are seldom ideologically neutral (Herman and Chomsky 1988; Lee 1990) and are often perceived by viewers to be biased (Giner-Sorola and Chaiken 1994). It is possible that in addition to the actual reports of political instability, it is their partisan and often sensationalist nature that fuel anxiety. The mass media, in Israel and elsewhere, should take cognizance of its potentially powerful effect on the public's psychological well-being and consider its policy in presenting emotionally evocative content in its political coverage, where ethically necessary. Debate in Israel has, indeed, pondered the effects of uncensored broadcasts of the horrendous aftermath of suicide bombings and other terrorist attacks. Some journalists stand firm on the media's right to freedom of expression and obligation to report uncensored events, and others advocate restraint to avoid fertilizing public panic and serving the aims of the terrorists.

Unlike news coverage in other domains, the dependence of terrorist organizations on propaganda and media dissemination of the effectiveness of their activities raises

searching ethical concerns for media presentation decisions. This discussion has been voiced in other arenas of terrorist activity, although no clear consensus about media coverage guidelines has emerged (Kingston 1995).

In the exploration of the links between media broadcasting and psychological processes, the methodological design of this study offers a useful research paradigm, molded from the domain of psychological research, which can be extended to the forum of media and propaganda research. Knowledge of variables affecting the differential impact of media reporting could be exploited by the media for propaganda purposes under strict ethical considerations. This research paradigm could prove to be a valuable tool to address the imperative of fostering an accountable and responsible ethos toward the reporting of political violence and terrorism by the mass media.

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