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Raised Afraid: The Media's Influence in Heightened Fear of Terrorism

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Raised Afraid:

The Media's Influence in Heightened Fear of Terrorism

Honors Thesis

Submitted

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By

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Abstract

Raised Afraid: The Media's Influence in Heightened Fear of Terrorism

By Paige Fetters

Mentored by Dr. Ken Tunnell, Department of Justice Studies

Since the tragic events of September 11, 2001, terrorism has become a household topic and a leading headline for the news media. Following the 9/11 attacks, coverage of the event was played around the clock for the first five days. 99 – 100% of Americans followed terrorism-related events by watching television listening to the radio, or reading print news. Exposure to terrorism-related media have increased substantially since the widespread use of smartphones and social media, where news and topics can be shared and discussed around the world in a matter of seconds. The psychological effects of this exposure could affect how fearful Americans are of terrorism, despite their relative level of victimization. This thesis will explore the various theories and hypotheses that have psychoanalyzed the effects terrorism-related media have had on Americans post-9/11. A convenience sample of 240 college students at a central Kentucky university yielded results of contradictory opinions regarding the government, media, and terrorism protection since 9/11. A comparison of this sample's results to the Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics revealed similar results regarding various opinions of terrorism. A Pearson correlation was also conducted to examine if any correlation exists between the number of hours spend consuming news and levels of fear regarding terrorism.

Keywords and phrases: terrorism, terrorism fear, terrorism media, mass-mediated terrorism, September 11

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Introduction

"And then, on September 11, the world fractured" (Obama, 2004, Preface to

2004 edition). For many citizens of the United States, it seems as though that fateful day

in 2001 stood still in time. The harrowing sight of two commercial airplanes slamming

into the World Trade Center and then watching America's greatest symbol of wealth,

power, and international unity plummet to the ground in piles of rubble scarred each

and every American that witnessed it. Ask any person on the street and they will be able

to tell you where they were on that horrifying day. But in all honesty, how could anyone

forget where they watched the planes hit the towers and their subsequent collapse? For

weeks, day in and day out, coverage about September 11 engulfed every news channel,

newspaper, and radio station. While this constant coverage may have seemed beneficial

at the time, how has this affected the United States and our fear of terrorism? Have we

become over-sensitized to terrorism-related topics? The new age of 24-hour news

cycles and social media have caused a heightened fear of terrorism in those who watch,

read, and/or listen to the news.

Defining Terrorism

It is important to preface an underlying issue when conducting a study involving

terrorism: its definition. Although terrorism has existed long before September 11,

2001, the attacks that day jumpstarted the need for major anti-terrorism reform in the

United States and around the world. World leaders in the United Nations Security

Council (UNSC) worked feverishly after 9/11 to create new regulations to condemn

terrorism and even worked to propose a new internationally-accepted definition, however the UNSC failed to accomplish these tasks because of "profound differences . . . over the central issues that affect it [terrorism], such as the use of violence, the responsibility of armed forced in internal conflicts, the right to resist foreign occupation, or the limits of the exercise of the right to self-determination" (Ruperez, 2006).

With no universally-accepted definition, choosing a definition to use became challenging. Online searches of articles and government websites led me to the Bureau of Federal Investigation's (FBI) Terrorism page, which defines international and domestic terrorism as listed in the 18 U.S.C. §2331. According to the FBI (2015) website:

"International terrorism", the focus of my research, means activities that:

- Involve violent acts or acts dangerous to human life that violate federal or state law;

- Appear to be intended (i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; (ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or (iii) to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping; and

- Occur primarily outside the territorial jurisdiction of the U.S., or transcend national boundaries in terms of the means by which they are accomplished, the persons they appear intended to intimidate or coerce, or the locale in which their perpetrators operate or seek asylum.

"Domestic terrorism" means activities that:

- Involve acts dangerous to human life that violate federal or state law;

- Appear intended (i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; (ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or (iii) to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping; and

- Occur primarily within the territorial jurisdiction of the U.S.

Established Theories

Research on mass-mediated terrorism, regardless of the population studied, has yielded similar results. *Mass-mediated terrorism* refers to "acquiring the heightened attention of the general public, and political elite, and the decision-making circles in the countries and regions of their choice by politically-motivated deeds perpetrated by groups of individuals for the sake of communicating messages to a larger audience" (Nacos, p. 19, 2002). Cultivation Theory, Information Seeking Theory, and Media Dependency Theory have been especially important in explaining from where heightened fear of terrorism comes. The studies that highlight the following concepts have helped researchers, psychologists, and various professionals in understanding the complex nature of mass-mediated terrorism.

Cultivation Theory

Lett, DiPietro, and Johnson (2004) conducted their study of Cultivation Theory by giving college students questionnaires regarding their television usage and their feelings towards people of Arab cultures. Developed by George Gerbner, the theory "examines the extent to which cumulative exposure to television contributes to viewers' conceptions of social reality, in ways that reflect the most stable, repetitive, and pervasive patterns of images and ideologies that television presents" (Lett, DiPietro, and Johnson, 2004, p. 40).

Cultivation Theory speculates that prolonged television viewing is more likely to skew one's perception of reality toward what they see on television. The aftermath of the September 11, 2001, attacks set the stage for how Cultivation Theory begins. The effect of watching airliners crash into buildings and people running for their lives as the World Trade Center collapsed became especially striking and made people fearful of attacks to come. The results of Lett, DiPietro, and Johnson's study (2004) indicated that students had negative personal emotions and personal relationships with Islamic peers, but had positive views of Islamic individuals in general. A possible explanation for the positivity toward Islamic individuals may be the overzealous attempt by television programs to portray terrorists in a negative light as extremists and separate them from mainstream Islam.

Nellis and Savage (2012, p. 749) also conducted a research study into Cultivation Theory, which expanded the research of Lett, DiPietro, and Johnson (2004) by focusing on one's perceived risk of terrorism to self and others. Nellis and Savage (2012, p. 749)

posit "research suggests that although victimization is often associated with fear, people become afraid disproportionately to their objective risk of victimization because they are influenced by the information they receive about crime through informal sources, including the media". Nellis and Savage used Cultivation Theory to compare fear of terrorism to fear of crime, which has been studied for decades. However, Nellis and Savage suggest that the media play a bigger role in fear of terrorism than fear of crime, stating that "although crime is present within many communities, and individuals have other sources of local crime information besides the media, terrorism is a very rare phenomenon that does not occur in most neighborhoods [like crime]. Most Americans must rely exclusively on the media for terrorism-related information" (2012, pp. 750-751).

Nellis and Savage's research also focused on emphasizing the difference in fear between those who actually watch and pay attention to the news and those who simply turn on the news as background noise while doing other things. Their findings suggest that those who intentionally watch the news for terrorism-related stories are more fearful and feel more at risk of encountering terrorist activity, suggesting their motivation for viewing was significantly related to their fear of terrorism (Nellis and Savage, 2012).

The study conducted by Nellis and Savage (2012) included telephone surveys with residents of Washington, D.C. and New York City, which were the sites of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Their results show that people were more afraid of a peer becoming a victim of terrorism than themselves, however both fearing for others and oneself are

positively and significantly associated with exposure to television. Their results also showed that minorities and women were more fearful of terrorism than any other group. The authors suggest that women may fear more for their children than men; women may be including their fear for their children in their estimates (Nellis and Savage, 2012). Overall, this study reinforces what these researchers were suspicious of in regards to fear of terrorism.

Information Seeking Theory and Media Dependency Theory

Information Seeking Theory and Media Dependency Theory have a very similar structure; however, Media Dependency is a subsect of Information Seeking Theory. This theory postulates that "the drive for certainty motivates people to seek out information. People have an almost innate desire to know things, and when they do not have the answers they want or need, they are fundamentally compelled to collect information" (Lachlan, Spence, and Seeger, 2009, p. 102). When uncertainty arises, whether it be a threat or even a situation where the outcome is completely uncontrollable, this puts one in an uncomfortable state of 'what-ifs' or unwanted anxiety. To reduce this stress or to calm their nerves, people try to obtain information that would give them a better grasp on the situation at hand.

Media Dependency Theory is one's inherent desire to obtain information via media outlets during times of crisis to help understand the world around them and take appropriate actions. In this case, the events of September 11, 2001, clearly constitute a

severe crisis, described as "the worst crisis in modern U.S. history" (Lacklan, Spence, and

Seeger, 2009, p. 102). Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur's theory states the following:

> Audiences depend on mediated information to meet certain needs and achieve
>
> certain goals, but do not depend on all media equally . . . When the most salient
>
> aspects of one's environment become ambiguous and difficult to understand,
>
> people become especially dependent on mediated information and expert
>
> recommendations in order to restore order to their world . . . During and
>
> following times of crisis, dependencies will not only intensify from an
>
> information-seeking standpoint, but also as they relate to the use of media for
>
> tension release or emotional coping purposes" (Lachlan, Spence, and Seeger,
>
> 2009, p. 102) (Lowery, 2004, p. 344).

Since it is apparent that humans are psychologically attuned to depending on the

media for information during times of crisis, what effect does it have after-the-fact?

According to Lachlan, Spence, and Seeger (2009) it may have a negative effect. Results

of their study yielded that respondents indicated higher levels of anger, confusion,

depression, and fear as the amount of media consumption on September 11 increased.

It also states that women reported greater confusion, depression, fear, sorrow, and less

calm (Lachlan, Spence, and Seeger, 2009). According to the authors, "the findings

suggest a potentially dysfunctional pattern of media use in the aftermath of September

11. Similar to other claims that excessive media consumption may lead to overreaction,

the current data suggest that individuals were likely to use media to seek out

information concerning a major crisis or disaster" (2009, pp. 105-106). Even though the

media are supposed to help keep people informed about crisis situations to reduce

uncertainty, the results of this study indicate that the media create a heightened fear of

terrorism.

The Media's Role

In her speech to the American Bar Association in July 1985, former British Prime

Minister Margaret Thatcher declared "publicity is the oxygen of terrorism" (Nacos,

2002, p. 27; Kampf, 2014, p. 2). The media plays a role of utmost importance for both

terrorists and the public: terrorists need the media to broadcast their propaganda to

instill fear in others and the public needs a constant flow of information about the

terrorist event. Television's instant, live, emotional coverage make it the top news

medium compared to print media. The competitive nature of modern news media

forces corporations to be the first with breaking news and to provide more information,

excitement, and entertainment than their rivals. Hence, news media are "bound to

respond to terrorist propaganda of the deed because it is dramatic bad news" (Nacos,

2002, p. 29).

According to Brigitte Nacos, international terrorists have three universal goals:

"1) To seek attention by spreading fear and anxiety among their target

audiences, which then demonstrates the impotence of a targeted government,

2) To seek recognition of their demands, their grievances, and their causes, and

3) To gain a degree of respectability and legitimacy in their target societies"

(Biernatzki, 2002, p. 9). With these goals in mind, Nacos posits that "the media's

reporting of terrorist spectaculars helps to facilitate two of the universal goals of terrorism. Terrorists gain attention when the volume and placement of news coverage affects the public agenda" (Biernatzki, 2002 p. 9).

The combination of nearly instant coverage of a terrorist event and the public's demand for government officials to resolve the issue has created what Brigitte Nacos coins as the "CNN Effect", which is the global news network's ability to inform the public instantly and thereby pressure decision makers into quick reactions without granting them sufficient time for deliberation. The CNN Effect coincides with the "Vietnam Effect", which implies that the media caused the loss of the Vietnam War, which was one of the most televised wars in history. The Vietnam War turned American public opinion against involvement in military conflicts by dwelling on visual images of the ugly side of war and there is a growing concern about what kind of war would be started if American military forces retaliated against a terrorist force (Nacos, 2002, p. 153).

The media and terrorism have a special relationship that Kevin G. Barnhurst has outlined in two models. The first is the Culpable-Media model, which says that the media is part of a vicious cycle: "As media discover terrorism, they incite more terrorism, which produces more media coverage . . . [This also] involves a cycle of control: If government or the media censor coverage, the controls tend to harm the credibility of the government and/or the media. The terrorists . . . may resort to even greater violence" (Barnhurst, 1991, p. 125; Biernatzki, 2002 p. 6-7). Milosevska and Taneski (2014) offer that the media's quick coverage of a terrorist organization's act is a

key aim for the group which then encourages them to carry out more violent acts (p.
59).

On the other hand, the Vulnerable-Media model sees the media as victims of
terrorism, not as an aide (Milosevska & Taneski, 2014, p. 59). "Any control on coverage,
even a natural one, will be ineffective because terrorists can shift to other forms of
communication by striking vulnerable point in the infrastructure of liberal societies . . .
although the mass media are involved, they present no escape from terrorism"
(Barnhurst, 1991, p. 126; Biernatzki, 2002, p. 7). These two models demonstrate the
double-edged sword that is mass-mediated terrorism's consequences to the public.

Following the 9/11 attacks, coverage of the attack was played around the clock
for the first five days. Sports and entertainment channels suspended their scheduled
programs and aired only 9/11-related coverage. For the eight weeks following 9/11,
Newsweek and TIME Magazine devoted all cover stories to terrorism. 99 – 100% of all
Americans followed initial news of the terrorist attacks by listening to radio broadcasts
and watching television, viewing the broadcasted images of planes hitting the towers
hundreds of times (Snow, 2007, p. 19): " . . . television networks and stations replayed
the scenes of horror again and again, revisiting the suffering or people over and over,
searching for emotions beyond the boundaries of good taste" (Nacos, 2002, p. 54).

Others read first-hand accounts that detailed the horror and chaos from people
who were near the Twin Towers that day. John Bussey, a journalist at The Wall Street
Journal, was one of those people. The opening paragraphs to his article, published
September 12, 2001, wrote:

If there's only one sight I'll remember from the destruction of the World Trade

Center, it is the flight of desperation – the headlong leap from the top-most

floors by those who chose a different death than the choking smoke and flame.

Some fell swinging their arms and legs, looking down as the street came up at

them. Others fell on their backs, peering upward toward the flames and sky.

They dropped like deadweight, several seconds, hopeless and unhelpable.

Always the same end. Some crashed into the Plexiglas awning over the entrance

to the North Tower. Others hit a retaining wall. Still others landed on lampposts

and shrubbery. After the 80-floor drop, the impact left small puffs of pink and

red drifting at ground level. Firefighters arriving on the scene ran for cover.

(Bussey, 2001)

Such a captivating, yet bone-chilling description to read about the way hundreds

of people died on September 11, 2001. Nacos refers to these detailed accounts provided

by the media as being of our modern "show and tell" culture, which she says

"desensitizes the public and causes confusion between the public and private sphere"

(Nacos, 2002, p. 53). Is it morally disturbing that a journalist meticulously described the

suicide of those facing an imminent death? Or what about the media producers that

allowed for recorded exchanges between first responders and victims stuck in the World

Trade Center on 9/11 to be aired on national television for all to hear their final words?

Nacos (2002) describes the media as creating a collective sadness in which for everyone

to participate, but it has caused an outrage in the public eye that the area between

public and private has become grayed because, in the eye of journalists, "nothing is ever too private to be talked about" (Nacos, 2002, p. 53).

With this prolonged exposure to such harrowing images from 9/11 due to the media, how has it affected the way people react emotionally to other terrorism-related themes? Aaron Hoffman, Christopher Kowal, and Jose Kaire de Francisco of Purdue University detailed two hypotheses that may explain how people react when they see new terrorism-related events. The first is the fear inflation hypothesis:

> The fear inflation hypothesis suggests that frequent exposure to depictions of terrorism in the mass media causes more intense emotional reactions in consumers than infrequent exposure to the material. People who are exposed to several mass media depictions of terrorism should report higher levels of anxiety than people who only see a single media depiction of terrorism. People who are exposed to several mass media depictions of terrorism are also likely to display related emotions, like anger, more intensely than those who are exposed to a single depiction of terrorism in the mass media. (Hoffman, Kowal, & de Francisco, 2010, p. 4)

The second is the fear deflation hypothesis:

> In contrast, this hypothesis suggests that frequent exposure to depictions of terrorism in the mass media moderates the intensity of the emotional reactions consumers experience relative to those whose exposure to these depictions infrequent. It implies that people who are exposed to several mass media depictions of terrorism will report lower levels of anxiety than people who only

see a single media depiction of terrorism. People who are exposed to several

mass media depictions of terrorism are also likely to display related emotions,

like anger, less intensely than those are exposed to a single depiction of

terrorism in the mass media. (Hoffman, Kowal, & de Francisco, 2010, p. 4)

These hypotheses parallel research by child psychologists that suggest playing violent

video games can desensitize or hyper-sensitize children due to their aggressive and

gruesome nature (Ferguson, Garza, Jerabeck, Ramos, & Galindo, 2013, p. 110). Exposing

children to terrorism media can have a similar effect. According to Becker-Blease,

Finkelhor, and Turner (2008), younger children react to more frightening visual images,

including fantasy images, which can create "trauma networks" in their long-term

memory more easily than adults (Houston, 2009, p. 853). By displaying these harrowing

images to children, they become more pre-disposed to feeling fearful of fantasy and

reality concepts throughout their childhood and into their adult life (pp. 229-230).

These images can also result in effects such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

(PTSD) in children and adults, especially for individuals that rely heavily on the media for

information. While many people assume that PTSD can only occur in those who have

first-hand experience of a traumatic event, people who are more geographically distant

from the area of an attack must watch media coverage for more information about

what happened. This heavy exposure to terrorism media may then cause post-traumatic

stress or even PTSD in some cases (Houston, 2009, p. 846).

Tweeting Terrorism

Social media has become a staple of the 21st Century and media usage itself is a

relatively new phenomenon that jihadist groups have started to use in the last 20 years.

According to the U.S. State Department, less than half of the designated "foreign

terrorist" organizations maintained a website in 1998; by the end of 1999, nearly every

terrorist organization had at least one website or some established presence online and

there were over 5,300 active terrorist websites in 2006. These websites were used for

two reasons: First, they would use them to express their hate and violence with other

terror groups and their supporters to launch a "psychological warfare" against their

enemies. Secondly, they would use them for attacking and hacking computer networks,

software, and the Internet—a new phenomenon now referred to as cyberterrorism. As

the need for mobility amongst these jihadist groups grew, members expanded their

verbal rhetoric to other platforms (Weimann, 2008, pp. 74-75).

Social media sites such as Twitter, Instagram, and various text-messaging apps

are utilized by thousands of Islamic jihadists daily to detail their lives on the front lines

of an international war. According to Kurt Eichenwald (2015, p. 2), social media is a vital

tool for any terrorist cell; it is how they recruit new members, keep track of other

members, get money from sympathizers, and document any terrorist activity from the

Middle East for the world to see. Advanced technology also makes terror cells virtually

mobile so that they are not confined to any one geographical location where they can

be found (Weimann, 2008, p. 78). According to Jytte Klausen (2014, p. 4), "social media

has changed the dynamic fundamentally. It has eliminated the terrorists' dependency

on mainstream media, reversing the relationship by making mainstream media dependent on the jihadist-run social media".

Terrorist activity on social media is a very meticulous and thoughtfully planned occurrence. Each tweet, message, and shared post is meant to attract people to the lifestyle of a "radicalized fighter" (O'Briain, 2015, p. 2). For those that follow Islamic terrorist organizations on social media, whether out of fearful curiosity or an interested fan, watching videos or opening links shared by the organization and/or its members increases the exposure of said group to the masses and helps recruit new members.

The Islamic terrorist cell ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), also known as ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant), is especially careful about what kind of propaganda its members share on their social media pages when it comes to recruiting new members. Unlike other terrorist groups, ISIS does not settle for any person that wants to join their ranks, especially those that are disillusioned or easily swayed because these type of people tend to back out at the last minute of traveling abroad to fight with them. Instead, ISIS tends to recruit members that are more ambitious, educated, and settled. ISIS is viewed by some on social media "as a group with a role and purpose for everyone, from builder to doctor, locksmith to engineer" (O'Briain, 2015, p. 2).

ISIS also uses social media to show the world that they go through their daily lives just like everyone else. Not only does ISIS share pictures and videos of its members beheading innocent victims and merciless executions, but ISIS members have shared pictures of themselves eating Snickers bars (Farwell, 2015, p. 50), holding a jar of Nutella found in a convenience store (Klausen, 2014, p. 12), and a packed power strip charging

half a dozen smartphones used by ISIS members (Klausen, 2014, p. 5). Members share these pictures to attract new recruits, showing them that life as a jihadist is not much different than the life they are used to living. One member, a British foreign fighter with ISIS named Abu Sumayyah Al-Britani, made it seem like living in a war-torn city was more desirable than living comfortably in a family home: "It's actually quite fun. It's really really fun. It's better than that game Call of Duty. It's like that but it's in 3D where everything is happening in front of you" (Klausen, 2014, p. 4).

While there are numerous benefits for terrorist groups that use social media as a platform, it also has its drawbacks. ISIS gained the world's attention by sharing videos of its members beheading men and other atrocities, but while members may take pride in sharing and bragging these experiences to followers, it can be used as opposition by their enemies. These types of horrors can be used to discredit the militants' supposed purpose, which was illustrated by the U.S. State Department in a video mocking ISIS recruitment efforts and displaying the graphic, ugly brutality of the group (Farwell, 2015). Internet communications can also cause feuding between Islamic groups. For example, ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra, a branch of al-Qaeda operating in Syria, have been fighting with each other over the same media platforms used to get new recruits. According to Kurt Eichenwald (2015, p. 3), "Islamic terror groups are not some giant, unified entity – they are split by egos, arrogance, self-righteousness and a lust for power, just like any other collection of ideological organizations".

Research Methods

      A survey with a series of terrorism-related questions using Likert scales was given to students in selected classes within the five academic colleges at Eastern Kentucky University: College of Justice and Safety; College of Health Sciences; College of Education; College of Arts and Sciences; and College of Business and Technology, on September 3rd, September 9th, and September 15th, 2015. 240 students in these classes gave consent to participate in the survey. The survey had the United States' Code of Federal Regulations definition of terrorism at the top of the page where the survey questions began. For the purpose of this survey, the "definition" of terrorism was broad as to not limit any participants' thinking about what could constitute terrorism.

      A sample from the undergraduate population of Eastern Kentucky University (EKU) was chosen because of the unique experiences of the student body. EKU's service region encapsulates Kentucky's Appalachian area, which contains one of the poorest regions in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Many students from this region attend EKU due to the university's satellite campuses throughout this district and EKU's low tuition rates when compared to rates at other public universities in the state. However, there are also urban areas located in Kentucky, such as Lexington and Louisville, from where many students hail. The combination of many low-income, rural-area students with many higher-income, urban-area students creates a unique population to study.

      Students who were asked to participate in the survey were enrolled in courses that were selected using EKU's online course scheduling system within EKUDirect, a

portal used by students to access their personal information. This course scheduling

system can be used to look up when courses meet (time and days of the week), the

building they are held in, and the number of students enrolled in that course. By using

previously-held knowledge about which classes are designated to a specific academic

college, I looked up classes that I thought would have a wide-range of student

backgrounds and ages. Since my survey had a specific age-range, I avoided 400-level

(upperclassmen) courses as best as I could to limit the number of non-traditional

students, typically students over the age of 23, whom would not be able to participate

in the survey.

Three-hundred student surveys were printed out that were to be divided up

equally amongst the five academic colleges, which allotted 60 surveys per college. As I

began my search for classes, I looked for courses that had 25 to 30 students or courses

that neared 60 students that were held on Thursday afternoons or at any time on

Wednesdays. These specific time slots fit my class and work schedule and also gave me

the chance to survey students regardless of Tuesday-Thursday or Monday-Wednesday-

Friday class schedules.

As I found classes that fit my time slot and believed I would have a majority of

students within the 18-23-year-old age range, I emailed the professor of record and

asked if I could have their permission to survey their students. I explained the purpose

of my survey and attached a copy of my survey so the professor could examine it and

make a decision. In total, I emailed nine professors and got a response and approval

from eight, with one professor never responding. As I was given their approval, the

professors and I scheduled a day to come to their class during their assigned course meeting to distribute my surveys.

When I arrived at these classes, I talked to the students about my survey and went through the survey process to make sure they understood what was expected of them if they were to participate in the survey. I explained that the survey was voluntary and that they were not receiving any sort of incentive for completing the survey. After speaking with the students, I passed out surveys to each student for them to complete and I left the room while students participated in the survey. After the surveys were completed, I would collect them then thank the students and their professor for their time.

IBM SPSS was used to input and analyze the data from the student surveys. Due to this type of data being ordinal and/or categorical data, each answer was coded so that I could use descriptive statistics to find the mode and mean for the survey questions. Pearson correlation tests were used and descriptions of that process appear later in this paper.

Sample Demographics

Demographic self-reported data appear in Table 1. The mean age of participants in the survey was 18.31 years old. Nearly one-half (N=117; 48.8 percent) of participants were this age. 45 participants (18.8 percent) indicated they were 19 years old, 31 (12.9 percent) indicated they were 20 years old, 25 (10.4 percent) indicated they were 21

years old, 10 (4.2 percent) indicated they were 22 years old, and the remaining three

participants (1.3 percent) indicated they were 23 years old.

For gender, 150 students (62.5 percent) indicated they were female, 80 said they

were male (33.3 percent), and 10 (4.2 percent) were unknown or preferred not to

specify their gender. An overwhelming majority of participants (76.3 percent; N=183)

indicated they were natives of Kentucky while 48 participants (20 percent) were out-of-

state students, and the remaining 9 students (3.8 percent) were unknown.

For religious beliefs, more than ¾ of participants (N=181; 75.4 percent) indicated

they were Christian, 18 participants (7.5 percent) said they were Agnostic, 8 participants

(3.3 percent) identified as Atheist, 1 student (0.4 percent) identified as Muslim, 9

students (3.8 percent) said they had an "other" religion (most of these students

specified they were Catholic), and the remaining 23 students (9.6 percent) were

unknown or preferred not to specify.

Political affiliation had more varied results. 109 students (45.4 percent)

identified as Republican/Conservative, 53 students (22.1 percent) identified with being a

Democrat/Liberal, 41 students (17.1 percent) identified as being an Independent, 3

students (1.3 percent) identified as being an "other" party, and the remaining 34

students (14.2 percent) were either unknown or preferred not to specify.

Table 1: Sample Demographics

	Self-Reported Data	Frequency	Percent
Age	18	117	48.8
	19	45	18.8
	20	31	12.9
	21	25	10.4
	22	10	4.2
	23	2	1.3
	Unknown	9	3.8
	Total	240	100.0
Gender	Male	80	33.3
	Female	150	62.5
	Unknown	10	4.2
	Total	240	100.0
Political affiliation	Republican/Conservative	109	45.4
	Democrat/Liberal	53	22.1
	Independent	41	17.1
	Other	3	1.3
	Prefer not to specify	25	10.4
	Unknown	9	3.8
	Total	240	100.0
Religious belief	Christian	181	75.4
	Muslim	1	0.4
	Agnostic	18	7.5
	Atheist	8	3.3
	Other	9	3.8
	Prefer not to specify	14	5.8
	Unknown	9	3.8
	Total	240	100.0
Kentucky native	Yes	183	76.3
	No	48	20.0
	Unknown	9	3.8
	Total	240	100.0

Results

Results showed that over half of the sample population (50.4 percent) rely on

the Internet/social media as their preferred source of news. The specific sites and phone

applications used varied greatly among participants, but many people used Facebook,

Twitter, and apps for CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC as their main news sources. The

amount of time spent consuming news also varied greatly, with the same amount of

students indicating they consumed between 0-2 hours (37.1 percent) of news and 3-5

hours (37.1 percent) of news each week. Only 22.4 percent of students said they

consumed more than six hours of news each week. It is known how much of this time

spent consuming news is terrorism-related. Table 2 below displays more detailed

information on news consumption by survey participants.

Table 2: Hours of news consumption by survey participants

	Frequency	Percent
0 – 2 hours	89	37.1
3 – 5 hours	89	37.1
More than 6 hours	54	22.4
Does not consume news	5	2.1
Unknown	3	1.3
Total	240	100.0

When asked how much they fear about becoming a victim of terrorism, 70.8

percent (N=170) said that they were not worried. The remaining 29.2 percent (N=70)

said they were worried about becoming a victim of terrorism. 58.3 percent (N=140) of

participants said that they were not worried about a friend or family member becoming

a victim of terrorism. The remaining 41.7 percent (N=100) of students indicated they

were worried. This indicates that this sample is more fearful of their friends and family

becoming a terrorism victim than they are becoming a victim themselves. Table 3 below

displays this information.

These results could be an indication of Cultivation Theory, which was mentioned previously as being studied by Nellis and Savage for disproportionate levels of victimization fears for oneself and for peers by receiving information from informal sources, such as the media (2012). In their study, Nellis and Savage ranked fear of terrorism victimization on a scale from 1 (not worried at all) to 10 (extremely worried). The mean score for fear of a family member was 4.48 and the mean for fear for oneself was 3.82 (Nellis and Savage, 2012). The respondents in Nellis and Savage's study, similar to this sample in my study, reported greater fear of family members becoming terrorism victims than for themselves becoming terrorism victims.

Table 3: Comparison of participants' fear of becoming terrorism victim and friend/family becoming terrorism victim

	Participant becoming terrorism victim		Participant's friend/family member becoming terrorism victim	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Worried	70	29.2	100	41.7
Not worried	170	70.8	140	58.3
Total	240	100.0	240	100.0

An explanation for this reasoning being, as previously mentioned, most (48.8 percent) of the participants of this survey were 18 years old. For many students at age 18, presumably a freshman in college, it is their first time living away from home and, for some students, they are away at school in a university outside of their home state, away from the psychological and emotional support of their families. These students may fear that something tragic will happen to their friends and family at home while they are away at school, including terrorism. Another factor that could affect this

statistic is that 62.5 percent of the participants are female. *A posteriori* knowledge

denotes that women are more empathetic and emotionally driven than their male

counterparts, so answers by female participants may have more emotional reasoning

than male answers when asked about friends and family becoming victims of terrorism.

Feelings about another terrorist attack in the United States and fear that ISIS/ISIL

will be behind the attack yielded similar results. 65.8 percent (N=158) of this sample

indicated they were worried a terrorist attack will happen to the United States within

the next year. The remaining 34.2 percent (N=82) indicated they were not worried. 62.5

percent (N=150) indicated they were worried that ISIS/ISIL will attack the United States

within the next year, while the remaining 37.5 percent (N=90) indicated they were not

worried. Table 4 below shows the comparison of the two questions and the answer

frequency and percentages.

Table 4: Comparison of terrorist attack fear and ISIS/ISIL fear

	Fear of terrorist attack to the U.S. in the next year		Fear of ISIS/ISIL attacking the U.S. in the next year	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Worried	158	65.8	150	62.5
Not worried	82	34.2	90	37.5
Total	240	100.0	240	100.0

These questions may have yielded similar results because media coverage about

ISIS/ISIL is very prominent right now. ISIS/ISIL is the most broadcasted extremist group

at the moment and this sample may have assumed that ISIS/ISIL will be behind the next

terrorist attack in the United States if there is one. Radicalized groups such as Al-Qaeda

and Hezbollah are not given nearly as much attention as ISIS/ISIL in the media currently so the media may have shaped some preconceived notions about who will claim responsibility for the next terrorist attack on the United States.

An interesting aspect to the results of this sample's survey is the question about preventative measures. Following the two previous questions about terrorism attacks in the United States, participants were asked if they had taken any preventative measures due to their fear of becoming a victim of terrorism, such as not traveling by airplane, avoiding large metropolitan areas, and avoiding visiting a high-populated tourist area. An overwhelming 69.2 percent (N=166) indicated they had not taken any preventative measures. The next most-frequently chosen answer was "avoided traveling by airplane," which was only selected by 22 participants (9.2 percent). The six preventative measures listed in the survey had a combined total of N=74, which is only 30.8 percent of the participants.

Even though this sample indicated that they are fearful of another terrorist attack in the United States within the next year, they are not acting on their level of fear. These answers, however, are nearly parallel with the answers of the previous survey question about this sample's fear of becoming a victim of terrorism. Table 5 below displays the frequencies of each answer listed in the survey.

Table 5: Preventative measures taken due to fear of being a terrorism victim

	Frequency	Percent
Avoided traveling by plane	22	9.2
Avoided visiting/living in a large metropolitan area	18	7.5
Avoided attending large sporting events	4	1.7
Denied a job offer based on type of work or location of job	1	0.4
Avoided visiting a high-populated tourist attraction/area	19	7.9
Changed travel plans	10	4.2
None	166	69.2
Total	240	100.0

When asked what characteristics of terrorism were most fearful to the participants, the majority of this sample (64.2 percent; N=154) indicated that the unknown of when or where an attack will happen was the most worrisome. The next most-frequently selected answer was that participants were fearful of a friend or family member becoming a victim (16.3 percent; N=39). The fear of oneself becoming a victim of terrorism from this sample was only indicated in 5 percent (N=12) of the answers, which would rank this characteristic fourth on the list of fears provided to participants. This sample demonstrates, as previously mentioned, their fear of losing loved ones tragically to terrorism if, for the sake of this sample, they are away from home attending college. Table 6 is displayed below with an itemized list of frequencies and percentages for each answer.

Table 6: Characteristics of terrorism that are most fearful

	Frequency	Percent
Number of casualties	22	9.2
Unknown on when/where an attack will happen	154	64.2
Fear of becoming a victim	12	5.0
Fear of friend/family member becoming a victim	39	16.3
Other	10	4.2
Unknown	3	1.3
Total	240	100.0

The most surprising results are from the next four questions on the survey that asked about confidence and trust in the government and the news media. Participants were asked if they were confident that the United States government is providing effective terrorism information. Over two-thirds of this sample (69.6 percent; N=167) were had confidence in the government's terrorism information, while 30 percent (N=72) did not have confidence. However, when asked if they trusted that the government is being open about potential terror threats, nearly two-thirds of this sample did not have trust that the government was being open, while the remaining one-third (35.5 percent; N=85) did have trust. A comparison table for these results is displayed below in Table 7.

Table 7: Comparison of participants' trust and confidence regarding terrorism threats and protection

	Confidence the government is providing effective terrorism protection		Trust the government is being open about potential terror threats	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Agree	167	69.6	85	35.5
Disagree	72	30.0	153	63.7
Unknown	1	0.4	2	0.8
Total	240	100.0	240	100.0

As the results show, the statistics for these two questions are contradictory of each other. One would expect that if someone were confident that the government were providing effective terrorism protection that they would also agree that the government was being open about their potential terror threats from which they are protecting the public. This could question if this sample is assuming there is effective terrorism protection because they had not seen or heard anything that would make them think otherwise. This sample may also have assumptions that broadcasting potential terror threats could cause widespread panic and it may also put people in danger by revealing information too early without more investigation by the proper authorities.

Another interesting twist to this sample's results was when survey participants were asked if they thought the government was doing well to reduce the threat of terrorism, which is displayed in Table 8 below. A little more than half of the participants (55.4 percent; N=133) agreed that the government was reducing the threat of terrorism and the remaining 44.2 percent (N=106) disagreed. This is slightly contradictory to the previous question about this sample's confidence that the government is providing effective terrorism protection, in which nearly 70 percent said they were confident. So while over two-thirds of the participants agree that the government is providing effective terrorism protection, this sample is split nearly down the middle regarding the government's overall performance in reducing the threat of terrorism to the United States.

Table 8: Comparison of government's confidence and performance of terrorism protection

	Confidence the government is providing effective terrorism protection		Government is doing well to reduce terrorism threat	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Agree	167	69.6	133	55.4
Disagree	72	30.0	106	44.2
Unknown	1	0.4	1	0.4
Total	240	100.0	240	100.0

In my knowledgeable opinion, the most interesting finding from this sample's survey was their opinion on the media's responsibility of relaying terrorism information to the public. When asked if they trusted that the news media is providing credible terrorism information, the majority of this sample (60.4 percent; N=145) indicated they disagreed, while the remaining participants (39.2 percent; N=94) indicated they agreed with the statement. This indicates another discrepancy in how this sample answered the survey questions. Even though the majority of this sample believes that the U.S. government is providing effective terrorism protection and that the U.S. government is doing well to reduce the terrorism threat, they also believe that the government is NOT being open about potential terrorist threats and that the news media is providing credible terrorism information. However, there is consistency when comparing the government's openness about terrorist threats and the news media providing credible information as is displayed in the Table 9 below.

Table 9: Comparison of feelings towards the government's openness about terror threats and the news media providing credible terrorism information

	Trust that the government is being open about potential terror threats		Trust that the news media is providing credible terrorism information	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Agree	85	35.5	94	39.2
Disagree	153	63.7	145	60.4
Unknown	2	0.8	1	0.4
Total	240	100.0	240	100.0

As mentioned previously, the majority of this sample agree that the government is not being open about terror threats and the news media is not providing credible terrorism-related information. This begs the question of who or what do we blame for this pattern of mistrust? The process of public information is calculated with precision and is controlled for the purpose of ensuring that the right information is given at the right time. Since we rely so heavily on the media to deliver credible news effectively and efficiently, this also means that we are exposed to regulated bias from media conglomerates.

This regulation, or lack thereof, is evident in television media. Each television channel is owned by one of a handful of massive media conglomerations that are controlled by just a few individuals after the media was deregulated following the Telecommunications Act of 1996 (Daws, 2009). These individuals have the power to control what is broadcast on stations and channels under their ownership. This power also extends to local and national news channels and can lead to bias in the information reporters and broadcasters are telling the public. In an investigation to find out if professional journalists were neutral or not, authors K. McCarthy and W. Dolsfma

suggest that "(1) the media help set the public agenda, by promoting certain events and causes, for better or for worse; (2) the media influence the public's perception of risk, by disproportionately sensationalizing risk and by emphasizing probable negative consequences over probable positive ones" and their results demonstrate "conclusively that the media are not neutral: the media alter the public's perception of reality" (2014, Abstract).

As we can see from the results of the survey, participants are aware of the media bias in news reporting and it can be conclusively said that this sample does not have trust that the government is being open about potential terror threats, which is further aggravated by not trusting that the news media is providing credible terrorism information.

Pearson Correlation

A Pearson Correlation test was performed on two variables and compared to a third to find any statistical significance between the two sets of variables. Pearson correlations measure two variables on a scale from -1 to +1, -1 being a total negative correlation, 0 being no correlation, and +1 being a total positive correlation. "Fear of becoming a victim of terrorism" and "Fear of Friend/Family becoming a terrorism victim" were both compared to "Hours of news consumption" to determine if there were any correlations between the variables.

A Pearson correlation test determined that there is a -.137 (p=.034) correlation between "Hours of news consumption" and "Fear of becoming a victim of terrorism" that

is significant at the 0.05 level. A Pearson test also determined that there is a -.166 (p=.010) correlation between "Hours of news consumption" and "Fear of Friend/Family becoming terrorism victim" that is significant at the 0.05 level. Even though these are both relatively weak negative correlations, these results demonstrate the application of a couple of theories and hypotheses that were previously mentioned.

These results could be an indicator of the fear deflation hypothesis, which posits that those who are exposed to more frequent depictions of mass-mediated terrorism will report lower levels of anxiety than those who only see a single depiction of mass-mediated terrorism ((Hoffman, Kowal, & de Francisco, 2010). The negative correlation in these results indicate that as one variable increases (hours of news consumption), the other decreases (levels of fear), meaning that the increased exposure to terrorism-related media could have helped lower the levels of fear for this sample. Tables 10 and 11 displaying these correlations are below.

Table 10: Pearson Correlation of hours of news consumption and fear of becoming a victim of terrorism

		Hours of news consumption	Fear of becoming a victim of terrorism
Hours of news consumption	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	1 240	-.137 .034 240
Fear of becoming a victim of terrorism	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	-.137 .034 240	1 240

Table 11: Pearson Correlation of hours of news consumption and fear of friend/family becoming terrorism victim

		Hours of news consumption	Fear of friend/family becoming terrorism victim
Hours of news consumption	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	1 240	-.166 .010 240
Fear of friend/family becoming terrorism victim	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	-.166 .010 240	1 240

Comparison to Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics

A few of the questions used in the survey were pulled from telephone surveys that the Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics (SCJS) conducted between 2009 and 2013 of adults 18 years of age or older. The difference between the sample in my survey and the sample in the SCJS survey is that my sample is a non-probability convenience sample that was found based on their accessibility and proximity to me as a researcher. On the other hand, SCJS's sample was found using simple random sampling which is a probability sampling method. Since they are two different sampling methods, I cannot compare them for the purpose of coming to conclusions about the population the samples from which they were derived. However, they can be compared for similarities and any parallel characteristics. The SCJS questions were asked multiple times over a decade or more so I will only be comparing the results of the latest date the survey conducted with my survey questions. Wording of the questions or answers may be altered slightly to similar words for the purpose of clarity in the comparison of the two surveys.

The first question asked if respondents thought it would be necessary to give up some civil liberties to curb terrorism in the United States. In March and April 2009, 27 percent (N=403) of SCJS respondents agreed that they would have to give up some civil liberties while 65 percent (N=970) disagreed. 8 percent (N=119) refused or did not know. My sample was slightly different than SCJS. 42.5 percent (N=102) of my sample agreed that giving up civil liberties was necessary, while 56.7 percent (N=136) did not agree. However, majority of both samples agree that giving up civil liberties was not necessary to reduce terrorism. Table 12 displays these results.

Table 12: Comparison of SCJS survey and this sample regarding civil liberties: "It will be necessary to give up civil liberties to reduce terrorism."

	SCJS		This sample	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Agree	403	27.0	102	42.5
Disagree	970	65.0	136	56.7
Unknown/refused	119	8.0	2	5.8
Total	1492	100.0	240	100.0

The next question asked how respondents felt the U.S. government was doing in reducing the threat of terrorism. For this comparison, I have kept the original format of each question for the sake of clarity because altering them may have been confused their integrity. In August 2011, 76 percent (N=1147) of SCJS respondents answered that the government was doing well while 22 percent (N=332) answered that they thought that government was not doing well. My sample, however, were not as optimistic. When asked if they thought that the government was doing well to reduce the threat of

terrorism, 55.4 percent (N=133) answered that they agreed, while 44.2 percent (106)

disagreed. The results for these questions is displayed on the next page in Table 13.

Table 13: Comparison of SCJS and this sample based on government's ability to reduce terrorism threat

	SCJS: "How well do you think the U.S. government is doing in reducing the threat of terrorism?"		This sample: "The U.S. government is doing well to reduce the threat of terrorism, agree or disagree?"	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Well/Agree	1147	76.0	133	55.4
No/Disagree	332	22.0	106	44.2
Unknown	30	2.0	1	0.4
Total	1509	100.0	240	100.0

The third question for comparison asked respondents their confidence that the

U.S. government is providing effective terrorism protection for its citizens. In April 2013,

70 percent (N=716) of SCJS respondents answered that they had confidence, while the

remaining 30 percent (N=307) answered that they had no confidence. My sample was

nearly parallel with the answers of SCJS respondents. 69.6 percent (N=167) of my

sample had confidence of effective terrorism protection, while 30 percent (N=72) did

not have confidence. The comparison of this question is displayed below in Table 14.

Table 14: Comparison of SCJS and this sample in regards to the government providing effective terrorism protection

	SCJS		This sample	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Confidence	716	70.0	167	69.6
No confidence	307	30.0	72	30.0
Unknown	0	0.0	1	0.4
Total	1023	100.0	240	100.0

The last question for comparison is a little different than the first three. SCJS asked their respondents: "How worried are you that you or someone in your family will become a victim of terrorism?" For my survey, I divided this question into two separate questions, asking my sample how worried they are about themselves becoming a victim of terrorism and then how worried they are that a friend or family member will become a victim of terrorism. For the purpose of comparison, I have computed the mathematical average for the answers of these two questions in my survey so that they can be parallel to the question in the SCJS survey.

In April 2013, 40 percent (N=409) answered that they were worried that they or a friend/family member would become a victim of terrorism, while the remaining 60 percent (N=614) indicated that they were not worried. My sample, however, were more worrisome than SCJS respondents. 64.6 percent (N=155) answered they were worried that they or a friend/family member would become a terrorism victim, while the remaining 35.4 percent (N=85) were not worried. Table 15 below displays this information.

Table 15: Comparison of SCJS and this sample regarding fear of oneself or friend/family member becoming terrorism victim

	SCJS		This sample	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Worried	409	40.0	155	64.6
Not worried	614	60.0	85	35.4
Total	1023	100.0	240	100.0

Conclusion

In conclusion, I have explored some of the various theories and hypotheses that are established for mass-mediated terrorism and the findings researchers have discovered through their studies. There were discrepancies in this sample's attitudes towards how the media and government inform the public of terrorism threats and events which demonstrated contradictory feelings from what would be expected. This sample demonstrated higher levels of fear for their friends/family becoming victims of terrorism compared to themselves becoming terrorism victims, which could be an indication of Cultivation theory. A Pearson correlation test also demonstrated a weak negative correlation between the number of hours this sample consumed news media and their levels of fear for themselves and friends/family becoming victims of terrorism. This negative correlation could be an indication of the fear deflation hypothesis, which posits that increased exposure to terrorism media contributes to lower levels of anxiety regarding terrorism.

Despite the addition that my research contributes to in the exploration of mass-mediated terrorism, more research still needs to be completed due to my shortcomings. First, since my sample was chosen because of convenience sampling, I am unable to compare it to other samples that were chosen through simple random sampling as an indicator of how this sample feels as compared to others surveyed in their age group. This means that I cannot take this sample and compare their answers to other surveyed persons between the ages of 18 and 23 to see how this sample is similar or different to the other samples.

However, convenience sampling was the only feasible way I was going to get responses to this survey with college students as my sample population. With the help of my mentor to bounce ideas off each other, I considered many options before choosing to do the convenience sampling, such as standing at the heavily-student-populated Powell Student Center or having a mass e-mail containing the survey sent to 400 members of the EKU Honors Program, where I am a student as well and is the purpose behind my research. I ultimately decided that the convenience sampling was the best decision, despite it hindering some analyses I could perform.

Another limitation of this study was my survey. When I was creating my survey, I looked at the types of questions other published research with surveys used and I based most of my questions off the types of questions those surveys asked. Through no one's fault but my own, I did not realize that my survey lacked the type of questions it should regarding media and terrorism until after all 300 three-page surveys were printed, courtesy of the Honors Program. I did not want to waste 900 pieces of paper by throwing out the surveys and creating new ones to be used, so I had to make do with what I had and hoped the results would be useable with all of the research I had completed already. My mentor helped me analyze the results by comparing the answers of some questions and discovering there were discrepancies in this sample's feelings.

My last shortcoming was an overarching theme that can be found in my previous two limitations: lack of time and money. With only 10 months to complete this paper and lack of money to be able to spend on this project, I was very limited in the resources I could use. As a college student, I had to complete this project on top of balancing

upper-level courses, a part-time job, and a social life. The Honors Program took a huge burden off of me by printing the surveys free of charge and I did not have any other available funds to use on other, more expensive ways to conduct my research. Despite these issues, I feel that my research contributes a great deal to informing others of the unknown knowledge regarding mass-mediated terrorism and how it affects our society today.

The overall theme to take away from my research is that despite what the media tells us, terrorism does not happen that often. In fact, in his study researching terrorism fear and mental health, Ian Palmer (2007, p. 290) posits that "the risk of dying from one [acts of terror] has been put at somewhere between dying after a bee sting and lightning strike". The media has frightened us into thinking that we have a big red target on our heads, when in fact we are actively protected from these dangers, influenced by the events of September 11, 2001.

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