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Individual Differences in Interpretations of Justified and Unjustified Violence

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INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN
INTERPRETATIONS OF JUSTIFIED AND
UNJUSTIFIED VIOLENCE
BY
MELISSA MARCOTTE

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS
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OF

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact and interaction of individual differences in personality, empathic style, ethical position, and trait violence sensitivity on perceptions of violence in a “justified” or “unjustified” video clip. Undergraduate students (n=229) enrolled in an introductory psychology course participated in an online survey where they were randomly assigned to 1 of 6 groups (Video Order x Justification). As found in previous studies, in general, participants rated the justified clip as less violent, even though both videos depicted the same scene. When rating the unjustified violence, individual differences did not seem to impact severity ratings but when participants were told the violence was justified, those who scored higher in Idealistic ethical position and higher in Violence Sensitivity actually rated it as more violent, which may be a reactive decision. Differences in violence severity ratings for the unjustified video condition were found between Violence Sensitive and Violence Tolerant trait groups only when the Violence Tolerant participants saw the video before taking the individual differences survey. This implies that violence sensitivity may have a set point for an individual, but that the sensitivity is malleable if primed to think about ethics and empathy first. Further implications on the impact of internal individual differences and external cues on a person’s perception of violence are discussed, particularly in regards to criminal justice and violence sensitivity training.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

It is in the nature of humans to label and categorize things in order to assist with making sense of our world. Because most things cannot be easily classified, it is particularly useful in communication of phenomena that fall on a continuum. For example, we teach our children that behaviors fall into the dichotomy of “right” and “wrong” or “good” and “bad,” but most adults would agree that the morality of behavior is actually based a spectrum and while some things are bad (e.g. lying to your parents about taking cookies from a jar), other things are far worse (e.g. lying to your parents about stealing money from their room). So while classifying is a useful tool, both evolutionarily and developmentally, our need to compartmentalize can also hinder communication between individuals and groups who may not agree on a particular label, especially when varying degrees or context is taken into account. In the previous example of lying, we are taught that lying is bad, but children can lie about taking cookies from the cookie jar, stealing money from their parent’s room, or skipping school and doing drugs with their friends. Here, there is clearly an escalation in severity of the behavior labeled “lying.” What about white lies? The classic “Does this make me look fat?” question is often answered with a lie to avoid hurting a person’s feelings. Is this type of lie justified?

Additionally, our evolutionary drive to label also makes us susceptible to priming, which is, having implicit memories associated with a label that triggers

our response to future stimuli with that same label. So if someone categorizes a stimulus for us, we automatically link our understanding of the new stimulus to an old one, defaulting to the same response without any consideration of variability between the new and old stimuli. The importance of understanding individual perceptions of behaviors and the effects of priming becomes clear when we consider the criminal justice system in the United States. The outcomes of cases that go to trial are often decided by a jury of our peers. Behavior that is justifiable to one person may be inexcusable to another. Still, simply labeling the behavior justifiable is enough to prime an individual and influence their response. The same could go for labeling crimes as either “nonviolent” or “violent,” resulting in harsher judgment and punishment for the latter. This study explores the effects of labeling a violent behavior as justified or unjustified on the subsequent judgments made by the onlooker, while also taking into consideration individual characteristics that may simultaneously influence that person’s perception.

Violence Severity and Individual Sensitivity

As in many other types of perception, violence as a stimulus can be arrayed on a continuum of intensity of the behavior (i.e. gossip, sabotage, rudeness, vandalism, screaming, manipulation, swearing, pushing, stealing, fighting, hitting, slapping, kidnapping, stabbing, shooting, and murder) and be measured on a relative scale successfully (Collyer et al., 2007). A person's response to violence depends in part on the severity of the violence that he or she is confronting, and in part on the person's sensitivity to violence, a trait-like characteristic. Sensitivity is also a continuum, but for clarity we can group

individuals into one of two categories: Violence-Sensitive (VS) or Violence-Tolerant (VT). VS individuals are those who tend to rate behaviors higher (i.e. more violent) on a Likert or magnitude estimation scale, and VT individuals are those who rate the behaviors less violent (Collyer et al., 2007; Collyer & Melisi, 2008; Collyer, Brell, Moster, & Furey, 2011). There are differences in the perception of violence between cultures at large, and also between individuals, due to varying ideologies and attitudes. For example, some people hold the ideology that corporal punishment is an appropriate form of retribution for females who commit adultery or children who talk back to their parents, some believe this type of physical punishment should be reserved for greater offenses, such as rape and murder, and there are still some others that do not think corporal punishment is appropriate under any circumstances, regardless of the offense. Here the perception of the severity of violence is based not only on the magnitude of the punishment, but on the person's perception of the mitigating factors that led to that punishment. The collective stimuli, in this case the offense leading up to the punishment and the punishment itself, are both considered by the person perceiving it as they mentally calculate their judgment on its severity through their personal lens influenced by their own sensitivity.

In a study by Lauterbach and Hosser (2007), prison inmates were assigned into "violent" and "nonviolent" offender groups based on the offense committed, but, in fact, some of these offenses are perceived as violent by others, particularly those who are VS (Collyer et al., 2007; Collyer & Melisi, 2008). This is one example of how perceptions can differ and raise questions about something of

importance, in this case the evaluation and generalizability of research. Egan (2010) found that Violence Sensitivity is not significantly related to self-reported participation in violent behavior in a college sample. Still, through nonviolence training, which is described as training with “an emphasis on harm and avoidability of violence” (Collyer, Johnson, Bueno de Mesquita, Pallazo, & Jordan, 2010, p. 48), sensitivity can be increased in both VS and VT groups. However, just as it is important to understand individual learning styles and use different teaching techniques in a school setting to ensure success, it would be advantageous to design nonviolence trainings to better suit the more VT individuals. Not much work has been done to differentiate the characteristics of those who are more VS versus a more VT person. There have been gender differences found wherein females tend to be more sensitive to violence than males, but it is only a moderate difference ($\eta^2 = 0.10$) and does not fully describe the differences between those higher and lower on the Violence Sensitivity spectrum (Collyer, Brell, Moster, & Furey, 2011).

Justified and Unjustified Violence

Idealists draw a hard line between behaviors that are “right” and “wrong,” whereas moral relativists take into consideration the surrounding events before determining what is justified and unjustified behavior (Forsyth, 1980). A study done by Moore and Cockerton (1996) found that participants would rate violent behaviors as less extreme if they were described as justified rather than unjustified. Conversely, participants in another study became more aggressive when retaliating when they witnessed a film clip showing justified aggression (as

opposed to a neutral or unjustified clip) prior to the exchange, indicating an increase in their own feelings of justification which led to more pronounced retaliatory aggression (Meyer, 1972). Collyer et al. (2007) found that when justification for a violent act was claimed, the VS and VT individuals would rate the severity of the violence as less severe than when it was described as unjustified. The current study seeks to explore the differences between VS and VT individuals in how they rate violence in these justified and unjustified scenarios and if there are other mediating factors in overall scores, that is, ethical ideologies/positions, Empathic Style, and personality.

Individual Differences in Perceptions of Violence Severity

Idealism versus Relativism. Idealism, holding everyone to a universal moral standard, and Relativism, considering situational information before making a judgment, are not mutually exclusive; when they are crossed, they yield four conceptually different ethical ideologies (See Table 1, Forsyth, 1980). Forsyth (1980) describes those high in both Relativism and Idealism as Situationists who tend to judge the morality of the behavior based on the specific situation and not specific rules. Those low in both are labeled Exceptionists and they are characterized by preferring absolute moral values (i.e. universal moral rules) but there are often exceptions to those rules. Those high in Relativism and low in Idealism are called Subjectivists and base their moral judgment on their preconceived personal values. Conversely, those low in Relativism and high in Idealism are called Absolutists and believe that the best possible outcome is attainable only through following universal moral imperatives. In creating this

framework, Forsyth (1980) compared four ideologies against one another with respect to their rating of several moral issues relevant at the time (i.e. “artificial creation of human life, mercy killings, marijuana use, capital punishment, Nixon’s pardon, homosexuality, obeying the 55 mph speed limit, and abortion”). Surprisingly, the only sex difference that was found was with the speed limit scenario, wherein men were less likely to comply with the law than women. Situationists tended to be more liberal regarding these behaviors, and Absolutists appeared to be more “extreme” in their judgments, particularly so for males. Absolutists also tended to blame the actor and rate that person's behavior more harshly, while Exceptionists were more lenient and forgiving. In later studies, those lower in Relativism tended to score high on a right-wing authoritarianism scale, characterized by conventionalism and aggression (McHoskey, 1996). Predictably, Situationists were lenient when the actor’s behavior (breaking a moral rule) resulted in a positive outcome. Although their self-concept differed, surprisingly, all four of the groups were equally likely to actually break a moral rule (Forsyth, 1980). The current study will explore how someone’s ethical ideology impacts ratings of violence severity and whether justification plays a role.

Empathic Style. Empathic Style has been measured by the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI; Davis, 1980) in many studies, but these studies examined the relationship between Empathic Style and *displays* of good and bad behaviors (including acts of violence), not *perceptions* of violent behavior. Lauterbach and Hosser (2007) did a study with inmates in a German prison, where about half had

committed “violent crimes” (i.e. simple assault/robbery, assault with bodily harm or aggravated robbery, sexual offenses, and homicide) and the other half committed “nonviolent crimes” (i.e. theft, drugs, traffic laws, vandalism, and miscellaneous others). They found that aggression had a significant and inverse relationship to Fantasy Empathy, Perspective Taking, and Empathic Concern ($r = -0.10, -0.25, \text{ and } -0.33$, respectively). Through logistic regression, they also found that those who scored higher in Perspective Taking were less likely to commit violent offenses within two years of their release. It has also been found that narcissism has a weak, but negative correlation with Perspective Taking and empathy (Delic, Petra, Kovacic, & Avsec, 2011). Further, those who were high in Fantasy Empathy and Openness were more likely to intervene by changing the conversation in a study that looked at helping behavior in online bullying situations (Freis & Gurung, 2013). Additionally, social mindfulness (i.e. being concerned for others and their autonomy in decision making) was positively correlated with Empathic Concern, Perspective Taking, and Fantasy Empathy, but not with Personal Distress, a more self-oriented perspective (Van Doesum, Van Lange, & Van Lange, 2013). So while the various Empathic Styles have been shown repeatedly to contribute to acts of violence, aggression, or helping behaviors, we have yet to find out if Empathic Style affects the perceptions of those behaviors. This could be important when designing programs to mitigate perception, especially since it has been shown that empathy scores measured by the IRI, particularly Perspective Taking and Personal Distress, increase after

anger and aggression management programs, in this case with adolescents (Bundy, McWhirter, & McWhirter, 2011).

Personality. Personality has been studied in those who participate in violent behavior, but little research has been done on personality and perception of violent behavior. It has been found that those who score high in Neuroticism also score high in their preference for *watching* violent media, watching real crime, and watching cop dramas, but not in their rating for *liking* violent content (Krcmar & Kean, 2005). When it comes to intervening and preventing further violence, Freis and Gurung (2013) also found that those high in extroversion were more likely to intervene in a bullying situation, but Neuroticism and Agreeableness did not have a relationship with the decision to intervene. It seems that personality traits do play a role somehow, but this study will be the first to explore their relationship to one's overall perception of violence using the Violence Sensitivity Scale (Collyer et al., 2007).

CHAPTER 2

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The current study proposes to replicate the findings of Collyer, Gallo, Corey, Waters, and Boney-McCoy (2007) wherein regardless of one's sensitivity to violence, Justified violence was rated as less severe than Unjustified violence. Because the characteristics of a violence-sensitive compared to a violence-tolerant person have not been fully investigated, the relationships between personality, Empathic Style, ethical position, and Violence Sensitivity, as well as their interaction with ratings of justified and Unjustified violence as depicted in a video clip, will be examined in an exploratory manner. The hypotheses are as follows:

Hypothesis 1. The severity of Justified violence will be rated lower than both Unjustified violence and violence with no preface.

Hypothesis 2. The mean perceived severity of video violence in all three conditions will be higher for those who are violence sensitive (as compared to violence tolerant) as determined independently using the approach of Collyer et al. (2007).

Hypothesis 3. Different interpersonal reactivity, ethical position, and personality traits will be predictors of violence severity scores overall.

3a. For ethical position, those higher in Relativism, considering situational information before making a judgment, will rate the severity of violence as greater in the Unjustified and neutral conditions, while Idealists will remain consistent across Justified, Unjustified, and neutral conditions.

3b. Those scoring higher in Empathic Concern, Fantasy Empathy, and Perspective taking will rate the severity of violence greater overall across Justified, Unjustified, and neutral conditions.

3c. Those who score higher in Agreeableness and Conscientiousness will rate the severity of violence higher across Justified, Unjustified, and neutral conditions.

Hypothesis 4. Different interpersonal reactivity, ethical position, and personality traits will be predictors of an individual's Violence Sensitivity.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Recruitment. Undergraduate students in an introductory psychology course at a public Northeastern university were offered optional assignment credit for participation, but otherwise, there was no compensation for participating.

Procedure

An online survey was used to collect the data through Survey Monkey (www.SurveyMonkey.com). Participants completed this study online after giving informed consent. They were randomly assigned to either the Before Group, which would complete the questionnaire instruments before watching a video clip, or the After Group, which would complete the questionnaire instruments after watching the clip to counterbalance and avoid order effects. All subjects were randomly assigned to one of three groups differing in Justification of the violence seen in the video – (a) reading an explanation that justifies the action in the video, (b) reading an explanation that does not justify the action in the video, or (c) a neutral condition with no background before watching the video. The video was a 7-minute clip from the movie “Murder in the Heartland” that depicts a heterosexual couple in their late teens/early twenties acting very much in love. The parents reject the boyfriend and warn the daughter not to see him anymore

and the presumed father displays a short temper with her. The boyfriend shows up to the house one day when she is not around and shoots both of the parents and spares the infant sibling. At no point is there any backstory revealed to undermine the descriptions given; the circumstances remain ambiguous. The survey scales included the Big Five Inventory (personality), Ethical Position Questionnaire, the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Empathic Style), and the Violence Sensitivity Scale. When the participant was finished, they had the option to print out the last SurveyMonkey screen to bring to class and receive credit for participation.

Measures

Violence Sensitivity. The Violence Sensitivity Scale (adapted from Collyer et al., 2007) was used to measure sensitivity to violence. Sixteen behaviors were listed randomly (i.e. pushing, murder, shooting, stealing, slapping, cursing, kidnapping, vandalism, sabotage, stabbing, gossip, rudeness, manipulation, fighting, hitting, and screaming) and rated on a Likert-type scale from 1 (not at all violent) to 7 (extremely violent). Higher scores for a behavior averaged over individuals indicate greater severity on the otherwise unmeasurable continuum of violence severity. Higher scores averaged over behaviors for each individual indicate a greater sensitivity to violence. Collyer, et al. (2007) used cluster analysis (and subsequently, Collyer and Melisi (2008) used a percentile split) to divide participants into violence sensitive and violence tolerant groups.

Personality. The Big Five Inventory (BFI; John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991) has 44 items in five subscales that measure Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extroversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism. The scale

begins with the statement “I am someone who...” and each item is a descriptor, such as “is reserved”, “can be tense”, and “is inventive.” Each descriptor is rated by the participant as to the extent that it applies to them on a Likert-type scale from 1 (disagrees strongly) to 5 (agrees strongly). Studies have shown the BFI to have strong reliability and validity scores (Rammstedt & John, 2007).

Ethical position. The Ethical Positions Questionnaire (EPQ; Forsyth, 1980) has two subscales used to measure the constructs of Idealism and Relativism with 10 items each. Items from the Idealism subscale include “If an action could harm an innocent other, then it should not be done.” Items from the Relativism subscale include “What is ethical varies from one situation and society to another.” Participants rate their agreement with each item using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (disagree strongly) to 5 (agree strongly). Idealism and Relativism when crossed give four separate ethical ideologies: Situationist, Exceptionist, Subjectivist, and Absolutist (See Table 1). Studies have shown for the Idealism and Relativism subscales strong internal consistency (ranging from 0.73 to 0.84) and test-retest reliability (0.67_{Idealism} and 0.66_{Relativism}; Forsyth, 1980; Forsyth, Nye, & Kelley, 1988).

Empathic style. The Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI; Davis, 1980) is used to measure Empathic Style. There are 28 items divided into four subscales. To rate their agreement with each item, participants chose from a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (does not describe me at all) to 5 (describes me very well). Perspective Taking (PT) is the ability to see life from another’s view and is measured through items like, “I try to look at everybody’s side of a disagreement

before I make a decision.” Empathic Concern (EC) is having the ability to experience sympathy for others and uses ratings from items like, “I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me.” Personal distress (PD) focuses on one’s experience of discomfort when seeing others in extremely stressful situations. Items for this measure include, “In emergency situations, I feel apprehensive and ill-at-ease.” Finally, the fantasy scale (FS) is a measure of imagination where one would have the ability to put themselves in fictional situations, and is measured through items like, “When I am reading an interesting story or novel, I imagine how I would feel if the events in the story were happening to me.” Test-retest reliability of the IRI was high for both males ($r = 0.62$ to 0.81) and females ($r = 0.61$ to 0.79). Additionally, the subscale items were practically unrelated, with small intercorrelations between most measures, with only EC displaying a moderate relationship with FS and PT, both around 0.33 (Davis, 1980; Davis, 1983).

Manipulation of Justification relative to the action in the video. A 7-minute clip from the movie “Murder in the Heartland” was chosen as the stimulus behavior to be rated, wherein a boy is trying to court a girl and her parents refuse to allow it. He then breaks into their home and kills the parents by shooting them. When the girl arrives back home she is shocked and upset and the man tries to comfort her. In the Unjustified scenario, the movie is prefaced with the statement “The following clip is about two young adults in a relationship. The girl’s parents are trying to protect her from her boyfriend as he is a criminal with a history of violence.” In the Justified scenario, the movie is prefaced with “The following

clip is about a two young adults in a relationship. The boyfriend knows that his girlfriend is being sexually abused by her stepfather and that both parents are trying to frame him for the murder of her three friends.” In the neutral scenario, the movie is prefaced with “Next, we will have you watch a short video clip.” This clip and the Justification descriptions were successfully used by Moore and Cockerton (1996) in their attempt to measure the perceived severity of violence of a Justified as compared to an Unjustified scenario. They found that the video during the Justified condition was rated as significantly less violent than the video during the Unjustified condition. In the current study, participants were asked a series of questions following the video. First they were asked to describe what happened in the video in an open ended text box to ensure they watched the video. Then they were asked to rate how violent they thought the film clip was using a Likert-type scale from 1 (not violent at all) to 7 (extremely violent) to replicate the results of Moore and Cockerton (1996). Next they were asked a forced choice question regarding whether or not the murder of the girl’s parents was Justified or Unjustified. They were then asked “Do you understand why the killer did what he did?” on a Likert-type scale from 1 (I do not understand at all) to 7 (I completely understand). Finally they were asked how Justified the murder of the girl’s parents was on a Likert-type scale from 1 (Unjustified) to 7 (completely Justified) and subsequently asked to explain their answer underneath in an open ended text box.

Analysis

The data was downloaded from Survey Monkey into Microsoft Office Excel 2010 for initial calculation and organization and then entered in SPSS 16.0 for subsequent analysis.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Demographics

Out of the 336 participants who entered the study, 229 (68%) completed the entire survey (See Table 2). Ages ranged from 17 to 63 ($M = 19.7$, $SD = 5.7$). The majority of the sample was female (73%). Participants identified as Caucasian (81%), Hispanic (10%), Black (5%), or Asian (4%). The participants were also asked whether they saw themselves as Independent (16%), Democratic (20%), Republican (11%), or other (53%).

Analysis of Assumptions

There were order effects found for the overall Violence Severity Ratings (VSRs) wherein those who saw the video first ($M = 5.79$, $SD = 1.22$) rated the severity lower than those who saw it after ($M = 6.2$, $SD = 1.05$) the questionnaire ($t(227) = -2.74$, $p = .007$, 95% CI [-.709, -.115]), but there was no difference in the Level of Understanding (LU; $p = .994$) or Justification Ratings (JR; $p = .908$). Further analysis revealed that while the Justified and Control groups had no differences in VSRs between those seeing the video before or after the survey, the Unjustified group who saw it before ($M = 5.76$, $SD = 1.256$) rated the severity of violence in the Justification video lower than the group that saw the video after ($M = 6.47$, $SD = .971$) they completed the survey (See Figure 13; $t(71) = -2.718$, p

=.008, 95% CI [-1.240, -.191]). This may indicate that actually taking the survey itself regarding one's ethical positions and violence sensitivity prior to seeing the video actually sensitized them to violence in the same way that nonviolence training sensitized participants in the study by Collyer et al. (2010). No other order effects were found for the dependent variables ($p > .05$; See Table 2). Subsequent analysis and the implications of these order effects are addressed later. Skewness (+/- 1) and kurtosis (+/- 3) were significant only for education (1.43 and 3.99, respectively) and age (5.67 and 35.89, respectively), but the remainder of the study variables satisfied the assumption of normality. Full descriptive values, including means and standard deviations (Table 3), and correlations for all continuous variables (Table 4) and frequencies for discrete variables (Table 5) are shown in the Appendix.

Manipulation check. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to determine if participants understood the scenarios to be Justified or Unjustified. Those in the Justified condition ($n = 79$, $M = 1.962$, $SE = .125$) scored the severity of violence in the video as greater than both Unjustified ($n = 73$, $M = 1.479$, $SE = .13$) and Control ($n = 77$, $M = 1.494$, $SE = .126$) conditions, $F(2, 229) = 4.75$, $p = .10$, $\eta^2 = .04$. Tukey's HSD test showed that both the Control and Unjustified groups rated the video as significantly less Justifiable than the Justified group.

Correlations. (See Table 3) Violence Sensitivity correlated significantly with Agreeableness ($r = .144$, $p = .029$), Idealism ($r = .213$, $p = .001$), Perspective Taking ($r = .196$, $p = .003$), Fantasy Sympathy ($r = .138$, $p = .037$), Empathic Concern ($r = .185$, $p = .005$), Personal Distress ($r = .147$, $p = .026$), and VSRs (r

= .171, $p = .01$). So as Violence Sensitivity increased, so did each of the listed variables. VSRs correlated significantly with Idealism ($r = .22$, $p = .001$), Relativism ($r = .165$, $p = .012$), Empathic Concern ($r = .137$, $p = .039$), and Justification Ratings ($r = -.281$, $p < .001$). Increases in the VSRs would indicate an increase in Idealism, Relativism, and Empathic Concern, while Justification Ratings would decrease.

Similarly, Idealism significantly correlated with Conscientiousness ($r = .228$, $p = .001$), Agreeableness ($r = .394$, $p < .001$), Relativism ($r = .165$, $p = .012$), Perspective Taking ($r = .234$, $p < .001$), Fantasy Sympathy ($r = .183$, $p = .005$), Empathic Concern ($r = .30$, $p < .001$), and Justification Ratings ($r = -.131$, $p = .05$). Higher scores in Idealism predicted higher scores in Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, Relativism, Perspective Taking, Fantasy Empathy, and Empathic Concern. Conversely, higher scores in Idealism predicted a decrease in Justification Ratings. Relativism was correlated negatively with age ($r = -.146$, $p = .027$), and with Extraversion ($r = .134$, $p = .043$), and negatively with Empathic Concern ($r = -.18$, $p = .006$). Empathic Concern was significantly correlated with Openness ($r = .201$, $p = .002$), Conscientiousness ($r = .176$, $p = .008$), Extraversion ($r = .153$, $p = .021$), and Agreeableness ($r = .516$, $p < .001$). Agreeableness also was significantly and positively correlated with Fantasy Sympathy ($r = .319$, $p < .001$).

Justification Scenarios (Hypothesis 1). An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to determine if participants rated the scenario to be more or less violent based on its Justification. Those in the Justified condition (M

=1.962, $SE = .125$) rated the severity of violence as significantly greater than both Unjustified ($M = 1.479$, $SE = .13$) and control ($M = 1.494$, $SE = .126$) conditions, $F(2, 229) = 4.75$, $p = .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .04$. There were order effects found for the overall severity rating of violence between those who saw the video first ($M = 5.79$, $SD = 1.22$) and those who saw it after ($M = 6.2$, $SD = 1.05$) the questionnaire ($t(227) = -2.74$, $p = .007$, 95% CI [-.709, -.115]), but there was no difference in the level of understanding ($p = .994$) or Justification ratings ($p = .908$). Further analysis revealed that while the Justified ($p = .313$, $d = .25$, $R^2 = .12$) and Control ($p = .246$, $d = .269$, $R^2 = .134$) groups had no differences in violence severity ratings between those seeing the video before or after the survey, the Unjustified group who saw it before ($M = 5.76$, $SD = 1.256$) rated the severity lower than the group that saw the video after ($M = 6.47$, $SD = .971$) they completed the survey ($t(71) = -2.718$, $p = .008$, $d = .632$, $R^2 = .301$, 95% CI [-1.24, -.191]).

Violence Sensitivity and Justification (Hypothesis 2). When taking into account Justification and video order (See Figure 14), differences in severity of violence ratings were significantly different between the VS ($M = 6.33$, $SD = 1.113$) and VT ($M = 5.36$, $SD = 1.217$) groups if they saw the Unjustified video before taking the survey ($t(35) = 2.462$, $p = .019$, $d = .676$, $R^2 = .32$, 95% CI [.170, 1.769]), but not after ($M_{VS} = 6.40$, $SD_{VS} = 1.046$ and $M_{VT} = 6.56$ and $SD_{VT} = .892$, $p = .625$). Similarly, the difference in severity ratings approached significance between the VS ($M = 6.25$, $SD = .754$) and VT ($M = 5.57$, $SD = 1.207$) in the Justified condition if they saw the video first ($t(31) = 1.755$, $p = .089$, $d = .832$, R^2

=.384, 95% CI [-.11, 1.1467]). There were no differences between the VS and VT groups in the control condition for those who saw the video before ($p = .747$) or after ($p = .461$, $d = .115$). An ANOVA revealed that there were no significant differences in violence severity ratings by the VS group across Justification conditions when taking order into account ($p = .605$) but there were differences for the VT group, $F(5, 129) = 2.456$, $p = .037$, $\eta^2 = .091$. A follow up Tukey test uncovered that the only significant difference was between groups in the Unjustified condition that saw the video first ($M = 5.36$, $SD = 1.217$) versus those who saw it second ($M = 6.56$, $SD = .892$, $p = .019$, $d = 1.125$, $R^2 = .49$).

Individual characteristics, video order, and Justification (Hypothesis 3).

Variables were compared to six groups, defined by Justification condition and by video order.

For the ethical perspective measure, Idealism had a significant, positive relationship, as well as a large effect size, with VSR ($r = .557$, $p = .001$, $R^2 = .31$) in the group that saw the Justified video before taking the surveys. Relativism and VSR had a significant relationship of medium size ($r = .387$, $p = .026$, $R^2 = .149$) in the control group that saw the video first. Neither Idealism nor Relativism had any relationship with VSRs for any of the other conditions.

Next, personality measures were correlated with VSRs for each group. In the control condition when participants saw the video after the survey, Conscientiousness had a significant but small relationship with VSR ($r = .298$, $p = .05$, $R^2 = .089$). None of the other personality measures were significant. Of the Empathic Style variables, Empathic Concern was the only one significantly

related to VSR and only in the Justified condition that saw the video after taking the survey ($r = .315, p = .033, R^2 = .099$). Violence Sensitivity only correlated with VSR in the Justified condition that saw the video before taking the survey ($r = .411, p = .017, R^2 = .169$).

Perceptions of Violence

Violence Sensitivity. A 2-means cluster analysis classified the participants into one of two groups, either Violence Sensitive (VS) or Violence Tolerant (VT), based on their total Violence Sensitivity rating to more easily identify and explain general differences between them. After five iterations, all participants were accounted for, with 44% ($n = 100$) of participants being considered Violence Sensitive, $r^2 = .799$. A t-test revealed a significant difference in the average Violence Sensitivity rating between VS ($M = 79.7, SD = 8.825$) and VT ($M = 57.36, SD = 7.986$) groups, $t(227) = 20.053, p < .0001, 95\% \text{ CI } [20.148, 24.539], d = 2.65$. There were no gender differences in the distribution between the two groups, $t(226) = -1.633, p = .104, M_{\text{Women}} = 68.01, SD_{\text{Women}} = 13.882, M_{\text{Men}} = 64.60, SD_{\text{Men}} = 13.841$. After the split, 22% of participants in the VS group and 29% of the VT group were male.

Individual characteristics in Violence Sensitivity (Hypothesis 4). A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) revealed differences between the two groups in several characteristics contained in the Empathic Style scores, ethical position scores, and scores on the five traits in personality, $F(11, 217) = 2.122, p = .02, \text{Wilks' } \lambda = .903, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .09$. A follow up ANOVA showed that Violence Sensitive individuals scored higher in both Idealism [$F(1, 227)$

=14.546, $M = 39.49$, $SD = 6.088$, $p < .001$] and Perspective Taking [$F(1, 227) = 6.927$, $M = 17.93$, $SD = 4.452$, $p = .009$] compared to the Violence Tolerant group ($M = 36.36$, $SD = 6.22$ and $M = 16.4$, $SD = 4.47$, respectively). Differences in Agreeableness approached significance between the VS ($M = 3.97$, $SD = .493$) and VT groups ($M = 3.83$, $SD = .584$, $p = .053$).

A stepwise multiple regression analysis was conducted, revealing that Idealism ($\beta = .351$), Perspective Taking ($\beta = .517$), and Personal Distress ($\beta = .419$) were all significant predictors of the Violence Sensitivity scores, $F(3, 225) = 7.096$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .074$.

Ethical Perspective. A 2-cluster solution classified the participants into one of two groups, either high or low in Idealism. After five iterations, 60% ($n = 137$) of participants were considered high in Idealism, $r^2 = .785$. Similarly, the cluster analysis was performed on the Relativism ratings. After 4 iterations, 42% ($n = 97$) of participants scored high in Relativism, $r^2 = .776$. The crossing of high and low scores for Relativism and Idealism categorized participants as either a Situationist (high in both, $n = 79$, 34%), Exceptionist (low in both, $n = 39$, 17%), Subjectivist (low in Idealism, high in Relativism, $n = 53$, 23%), or Absolutist (high in Idealism, low in Relativism, $n = 58$, 25%). A t-test revealed significant gender differences in Idealism, wherein males ($M = 36.23$, $SD = 6.36$) scored lower than females ($M = 38.25$, $SD = 6.28$, $t(226) = -2.126$, $p = .035$) although the effect was rather small ($d = .32$, $r^2 = .158$). There were no significant gender differences between Situationist, Exceptionist, Subjectivist, and Absolutist..

Individual differences in ethical perspective. A MANOVA revealed significant differences in characteristics between the Situationist, Exceptionist, Subjectivist, and Absolutist groups in Agreeableness [$F(3, 229) = 6.537, p < .0001$], Perspective Taking [$F(3, 229) = 6.537, p < .02$], Fantasy Scale [$F(3, 229) = 6.537, p < .019$], Empathy [$F(3, 229) = 6.537, p < .0001$], and Personal Distress [$F(3, 229) = 6.537, p < .032$], while approaching significance with Violence Sensitivity [$F(3, 229) = 6.537, p < .075$]. A post hoc Tukey test revealed the individual differences. Exceptionists scored significantly lower than Absolutists in Agreeableness ($M_{\text{Exceptionist}} = 3.718, SD_{\text{Exceptionist}} = .607, M_{\text{Absolutist}} = 4.069, SD_{\text{Absolutist}} = .528, p = .009$), Perspective Taking ($M_{\text{Exceptionist}} = 15.49, SD_{\text{Exceptionist}} = 3.727, M_{\text{Absolutist}} = 18.00, SD_{\text{Absolutist}} = 4.558, p = .029$), Fantasy Scale ($M_{\text{Exceptionist}} = 1.28, SD_{\text{Exceptionist}} = 5.186, M_{\text{Absolutist}} = 18.34, SD_{\text{Absolutist}} = 4.506, p = .018$), Empathic Concern ($M_{\text{Exceptionist}} = 17.92, SD_{\text{Exceptionist}} = 4.319, M_{\text{Absolutist}} = 21.67, SD_{\text{Absolutist}} = 3.43, p < .001$), and approached significance with Violence Sensitivity ($M_{\text{Exceptionist}} = 62.9, SD_{\text{Exceptionist}} = 13.709, M_{\text{Absolutist}} = 69.53, SD_{\text{Absolutist}} = 13.027, p = .095$). Approaching significance, Exceptionists' scores were lower than Situationists in Agreeableness ($M_{\text{Exceptionist}} = 3.718, SD_{\text{Exceptionist}} = .607, M_{\text{Situationist}} = 3.98, SD_{\text{Situationist}} = .532, p = .059$), Perspective Taking ($M_{\text{Exceptionist}} = 15.49, SD_{\text{Exceptionist}} = 3.727, M_{\text{Situationist}} = 17.58, SD_{\text{Situationist}} = 4.63, p = .068$) and Empathic Concern ($M_{\text{Exceptionist}} = 17.92, SD_{\text{Exceptionist}} = 4.319, M_{\text{Situationist}} = 19.85, SD_{\text{Situationist}} = 4.353, p = .075$). Subjectivists scored significantly lower than Absolutists in Agreeableness ($M_{\text{Subjectivist}} = 3.7, SD_{\text{Subjectivist}} = .467, M_{\text{Absolutist}} = 4.069, SD_{\text{Absolutist}} = .528, p = .002$), Empathic Concern ($M_{\text{Subjectivist}} = 18.68,$

$SD_{\text{Subjectivist}} = 4.032$, $M_{\text{Absolutist}} = 21.67$, $SD_{\text{Absolutist}} = 3.43$, $p = .001$), and Personal Distress ($M_{\text{Subjectivist}} = 11.75$, $SD_{\text{Subjectivist}} = 5.099$, $M_{\text{Absolutist}} = 14.17$, $SD_{\text{Absolutist}} = 4.798$, $p = .025$). Subjectivists also scored significantly lower than Situationists in Agreeableness ($M_{\text{Subjectivist}} = 3.7$, $SD_{\text{Subjectivist}} = .467$, $M_{\text{Situationist}} = 3.98$, $SD_{\text{Situationist}} = .532$, $p = .018$). Finally, Situationists scored significantly lower than Absolutists in Empathic Concern ($M_{\text{Situationist}} = 19.85$, $SD_{\text{Situationist}} = 4.353$, $M_{\text{Absolutist}} = 21.67$, $SD_{\text{Absolutist}} = 3.43$, $p = .048$). In sum (See Table 6 and Figures 1-12), Absolutists, those higher in Idealism and lower in Relativism, scored high in Agreeableness, Perspective Taking, Fantasy Sympathy, Empathic Concern, Personal Distress, and Violence Sensitivity. Situationists, those high in both Idealism and Relativism, scored high in Agreeableness, Perspective Taking, and Empathic Concern. Subjectivists, those low in Idealism and high in Relativism, scored low on Agreeableness, Empathic Concern, and Personal Distress. Exceptionists, low in both Idealism and Relativism, scored low in Agreeableness, Perspective Taking, Fantasy Sympathy, Empathic Concern, and Violence Sensitivity.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Justification's Influence on Sensitivity to the Violence in the Video

Hypothesis 1 was supported when participants who saw the Justified video rated it as significantly less violent than those who saw the Unjustified or control video. This supports previous studies that concluded that when a person understands a violent act to be Justified, they tend to perceive it as being less violent than when they understand it to be Unjustified, even when it is the exact same act (Collyer et al., 2011, 2007; Moore and Cockerton, 1996). The resulting difference in severity of video violence ratings between conditions can be viewed as an example of the framing effect (Tversky & Kahneman, 1986), in which different conclusions, positive or negative, are drawn on the same scenario depending on context and might result in more or less punishment, say, by a jury.

Further, individual differences (Hypothesis 2-3) in what led to higher video violence severity ratings based on the given justification description of the situation in the video were found. For example, if a participant was told that the situation was Justified, those scoring higher in Violence Sensitivity (supporting Hypothesis 2) and Idealism (not Relativism, as expected in Hypothesis 3a) tended to give higher ratings of severity of violence. One interpretation of this finding is that when a person who is more idealistic or violence sensitive is told that a violent act is Justified, their moral instinct is to dispute that a violent act is

justifiable at all, that is, committing acts of violence can never be seen as justified. This would be a consciously reactive rating, meaning they are purposefully reacting contrary to what they were told. For those participants in the Unjustified group, the perception of how violent the video was, was related to Openness, but when you take into consideration the video order, none of the characteristics were related to the rating of violence severity, which did not support the hypothesis (3b & c) that Agreeableness and Conscientiousness, as well as traits of empathy (IRI) would be the key characteristics to contribute. This could indicate that these personal characteristics matter less when violence is understood to be Unjustified, because they are no longer considering situational factors (as in Justified scenarios) and they do not have to determine the circumstances for themselves (as in the control group). In other words, when they didn't have to evaluate the morality of the act, their own personal beliefs were irrelevant. Those who were given no background on the video and rated the severity as more violent were influenced more by their degree of Relativism and Neuroticism than any of the other characteristic variables. One proposed explanation is that when someone high in Relativism and Neuroticism is uncertain, they default to interpreting the violence as severe because they have no other information to go on in helping them determine situational factors. The implications of this are important, particularly in areas where we are required to judge the actions of another person. This subconscious agreement of unjustifiability with an unknown person(s) (in this case, the researcher, but in a courtroom, for example, a prosecution lawyer) may be cause for concern in the real world. For example, in the United States,

defendants on trial are supposed to be innocent until proven guilty. Outcomes between the Justified and Unjustified groups should be the same when only evidence is presented, but when the violence is declared Justified, reactions seem more explicit and variable. But when labeled Unjustified, everyone just agrees to prosecute without question. The Fundamental Attribution Error (Jones & Harris, 1967; Ross, 1977) is our tendency to attribute another person's behaviors to some intrinsic attribute and discount the situational explanations for it. This makes it easier to pass negative judgment on someone's actions and deem them as Unjustified, which would result in the observer judging the behavior more harshly. Those high in Relativism and Neuroticism would therefore use this mental shortcut to assume the act was Unjustified, or at least as violent as any other Unjustified act. For example, if a jury needs to convict a person of murder and suggest a sentence, the outcome will likely be based, at least partially, on their perception of Justification. Many studies in the area of social psychology have shown time and again that we are biased in our interpretations and attribution of others' behavior, particularly when the circumstances are unknown, and that could sway how we judge another person's actions. In this study, changing the short description of the same video prior to watching it changed the observer's perception of the severity of violence. This could have caused a confirmation bias to occur wherein the observer was looking for reasons to excuse the offender in the Justified condition and condemn the offender in the Unjustified condition (Nickerson, 1998). By extension, a juror could be swayed to look for justifying or condemning information as a result of the most effectively moving

description of the event during the opening statements and not necessarily base decisions on unbiased analysis of succeeding evidence. Either way, the study outcome suggests that we are much more influenced subconsciously by these small details than we think.

Violence Sensitivity

Results also showed that there was an overall difference between the severity of video violence ratings given by the violence sensitive and violence tolerant groups. This result was not surprising. However, the interaction between sensitivity and the order in which they saw the video was unexpected.

Collectively, those who completed the survey first rated the video violence more severe than those who watched the video first. This could indicate that when primed to think about ethics and/or violence, a person becomes more sensitive. Upon further analysis of the separate groups, this effect was greatest for the violence tolerant participants in the Unjustified condition. The group that was more violence tolerant rated the severity of the video violence significantly less than those who were violence sensitive if they watched the video first. However, when they filled out the survey before watching the video, the violence tolerant group rated the severity similar to the violence sensitive group. This could indicate that for those with higher Violence Sensitivity, the salience of any violence is always at its peak, but for those with lower sensitivity, severity of violence is not as salient until they are primed to consider the topic. This finding is similar to those found in studies looking at violent video games priming cognitions. Participants who played violent video games were prone to both

aggressive and positive cognitions (Bosche, 2010), possibly because the priming can occur to both remind the observer of the horror of violence as well as possibly make them more violent, depending on their Violence Sensitivity set point, or the general level of sensitivity without external cues. Here, answering questions regarding ethics and violence first could have primed the participants to later judge the Unjustified violent video more severely. This effect was not significant in the Justified and control group, which could indicate that it was not completing the Violence Sensitivity scale that primed them, but rather the questions about ethical perspective that primed them to judge the Unjustified violence more harshly. Additional studies are necessary to explore this phenomenon further.

Violence Sensitivity and Ethical Perspective. The hypothesis (3a) that higher scores in Relativism would lead to decreased ratings of video violence severity in the Justified scenario was not supported. In fact, only in the control condition where the participant was not primed with a storyline did Relativism play a role at all, and in the opposite direction. When the participants had no situational knowledge of the events that precipitated the violent act, those higher in Relativism rated the act as more violent, implying that without context in which to make sense of the act, their default is to perceive the violence as more severe. Subjects higher in Violence Sensitivity showed increases in empathy as measured by the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (i.e. Perspective Taking, Fantasy Sympathy, Empathic Concern, and Personal Distress), supporting Hypothesis 4. These relationships were small but significant. The result was not surprising given that Lauterbach and Hossler (2007) found an inverse relationship between Fantasy

Empathy, Perspective Taking, and Empathic Concern with aggression. Similarly, empathy scores increased after anger and aggression management training (Bundy, 2011).

The relationship between Violence Sensitivity and Idealism found in the current study is not a surprising one. Instead of considering the act's level of violence based on its context, an idealist would have the strictest moral standard where, regardless of the situation, violence is violence. With that, the rating of the severity of violence in the video was also positively correlated with Violence Sensitivity, which highlights the notion that those higher in Violence Sensitivity tend to perceive acts of violence, circumstances aside, as more violent. While many of the variables predictably (Hypothesis 4) had a significant but weak relationship with Violence Sensitivity, a stronger relationship was found with Idealism, Agreeableness, and Empathic Concern. When these factors were considered simultaneously, Idealism, Perspective Taking, and Personal Distress predicted overall Violence Sensitivity ratings. One interpretation of this could be that a person with a highly Idealistic ethical position is not only more likely to see things from another person's perspective (Perspective Taking), but also be emotionally/physically affected by it (Personal Distress), and so will consider the violence as more severe. With all of this taken into consideration, we can assume that a person who is higher in Violence Sensitivity could be described as a person who can relate well with others and one who seems to hold everyone to the same morally idealistic standard, victim and perpetrator alike, because they do not only try to *see* it from the other person's perspective, but seem to also *feel* it from the

other's perspective. In order for Violence Sensitivity to be increased in another person, that ability to not just sympathize but to empathize is an important practice. This could partially explain the findings of Collyer et al. (2010), wherein the experience of nonviolence training, which includes teaching both the harm (Personal Distress) and avoidability (Perspective Taking) of violence, increases Violence Sensitivity. The trait of Agreeableness (being more considerate, understanding, and sympathetic) might be what allows these individuals to fully invest in such trainings without defensiveness and with an open mind, and to be willing to learn about the hardships of others.

Conclusion

The important takeaway from this study is that perceptions of violence can differ from person to person and there are some clear characteristics, such as the ability to empathize, ethical perspective, or violence sensitivity, which may predispose them to come to an initial judgment of a violent action. Still, these judgments may be more malleable than we think. By intervening early in the perception process through explanation of an action or simply labeling it as justifiable or not, we can alter the final moral judgment a person might make of another, or possibly change how the person might interpret their own potential actions in the future. This could have a considerable impact on how we present court cases, whether we decide to punish criminals or rehabilitate, and, if so, how to create and deliver interventions to those labeled both “violent” and “nonviolent” criminals.

Of course with every study, there are limitations to consider. Future studies should reexamine these findings with larger groups across different demographics, since this study was limited to college students at a University in the Northeast, a region known for being more liberal than other parts of the country. Additionally, the data here consist of self-reported characteristics that could be influenced by social desirability. Further, this was done entirely online at the convenience of the participant in unknown locations, which could be cause for concern regarding distractions. Again, the data appeared to be normal in trend and distribution, but future studies might consider surveying in a laboratory setting.

TABLES

Table 1
Ethical Perspectives

	<i>High Idealism</i>	<i>Low Idealism</i>
<i>High Relativism</i>	<p style="text-align: center;">Situationist</p> <p>Rejects moral rules; advocates individualistic analysis of each act in each situation; relativistic</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Subjectivist</p> <p>Appraisals based on personal values and perspectives rather than universal moral principles; relativistic</p>
<i>Low Relativism</i>	<p style="text-align: center;">Absolutist</p> <p>Assumes that the best possible outcome can always be achieved by following universal moral rules.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Exceptionist</p> <p>Moral absolutes guide judgments but pragmatically open to exceptions to these standards; utilitarian.</p>

Note. Idealism: desirable consequences can always be obtained with the “right” action. Relativism: rejects universal moral rules and absolutes, takes context into account (Forsyth, 1980).

Table 2

Means Table for Variable Ratings Before and After Video

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Video Order</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>p-value</u>
Openness	1	3.417	0.539	0.053	.504
	2	3.466	0.577	0.052	
Conscientiousness	1	3.538	0.610	0.060	.890
	2	3.549	0.593	0.053	
Extraversion	1	3.428	0.595	0.059	.661
	2	3.391	0.668	0.060	
Agreeableness	1	3.861	0.560	0.055	.462
	2	3.915	0.540	0.048	
Neuroticism	1	2.966	0.717	0.071	.941
	2	2.959	0.708	0.063	
Idealism	1	38.068	6.833	0.673	.453
	2	37.432	5.948	0.532	
Relativism	1	33.243	7.289	0.718	.642
	2	33.632	5.317	0.476	
Violence Sensitivity	1	65.709	14.704	1.449	.168
	2	68.264	13.190	1.180	
Video Violence *	1	5.786	1.226	0.121	.008
	2	6.192	1.053	0.094	
Understanding	1	3.990	1.871	0.184	.929
	2	3.968	1.896	0.170	
How Just	1	1.660	1.053	0.104	.936
	2	1.648	1.193	0.107	
Perspective Taking	1	16.718	4.328	0.426	.300
	2	17.328	4.479	0.401	
Fantasy Sympathy	1	16.990	5.516	0.543	.752
	2	16.776	4.718	0.422	
Empathic Concern	1	19.748	4.153	0.409	.861
	2	19.648	4.335	0.388	
Personal Distress	1	12.816	4.432	0.437	.525
	2	13.200	4.628	0.414	

* $p < .05$

Table 3
Means and Standard Deviations of Continuous Variables

Variable Name	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age	19.67	5.461
Openness	3.445852	.5588544
Conscientiousness	3.544396	.5980208
Extraversion	3.404173	.6364547
Agreeableness	3.893741	.5495565
Neuroticism	2.96015	.709899
Idealism	37.72	6.343
Relativism	33.43	6.270
Violence Sensitivity	67.11	13.891
Perspective Taking	17.07	4.410
Fantasy Sympathy	16.89	5.079
Empathic Concern	19.71	4.245
Personal Distress	13.02	4.527

Table 4
Frequency Table

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
<u>Gender</u>		
Male	60	26.2
Female	169	73.8
Other	1	0.4
<u>Race</u>		
Caucasian	186	81.2
Hispanic	23	10.0
Black/African		
American	12	5.2
Asian	8	3.5
<u>Exp. Group</u>		
Justified	79	34.5
<i>1st</i>	33	14.4
<i>2nd</i>	46	20.1
Unjustified	73	31.9
<i>1st</i>	37	16.2
<i>2nd</i>	36	15.7
Control	77	33.6
<i>1st</i>	33	14.4
<i>2nd</i>	44	19.2
<u>Violence Sensitivity</u>		
VS	100	43.7
VT	129	56.3
<u>Ethical Perspective</u>		
Situationist	79	34.5
Absolutist	58	25.3
Subjectivist	53	23.1
Exceptionist	39	17.0
<u>Political Affiliation</u>		
Republican	25	10.9
Independent	37	16.2
Democrat	46	20.1
Other	121	52.8

Note. For the experimental group (Exp. Group), the 1st refers to those who saw the video before the survey and the 2nd refers to those who saw it after taking the survey.

Table 5

*Correlation Matrix of
Measured Variables*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1 O	1.000													
2 C	.130*	1.000												
3 E	.307**	.165*	1.000											
4 A	.129	.379**	.186**	1.000										
5 N	-.255**	-.231**	-.189**	-.183**	1.000									
6 I	.039	.228**	.057	.394**	-.109	1.000								
7 R	.025	-.028	.134*	-.069	-.099	.166*	1.000							
8 VS	.066	.019	.070	.144*	.071	.213**	-.011	1.000						
9 VSR	-.118	-.017	.029	.053	.088	.220**	.165*	.171**	1.000					
10 JR	.035	-.038	.068	-.052	.102	-.131*	-.013	.032	-.281**	1.000				
11 PT	.368**	.144*	.067	.430**	-.128	.234**	-.022	.196**	.071	-.098	1.000			
12 FS	.274**	.031	.010	.319**	.076	.183**	-.058	.138*	.072	.001	.338**	1.000		
13 EC	.201**	.176**	.153*	.516**	.091	.300**	-.180**	.185**	.137*	-.097	.517**	.617**	1.000	
14 PD	-.181**	-.223**	-.105	.052	.481**	.106	-.046	.147*	.063	.084	-.039	.215**	.168*	1.000

Note. O = Openness, C = Conscientiousness, E = Extraversion, A = Agreeableness, N = Neuroticism, I = Idealism, R = Relativism, VS = Violence Sensitivity, VSR = Violence Severity Rating, JR = Justification Rating, PT = Perspective Taking, FS = Fantasy Sympathy, EC = Empathic Concern, PD = Personal Distress. * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$

Table 6

Means and Standard Errors for Measured Variables with High or Low Relativism and Idealism

Variable Name	Relativism	Idealism	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
<u>Agreeableness</u>	Low	Low	3.718	.085	3.551	3.885
		High	3.702	.073	3.559	3.846
	High	Low	4.069	.070	3.932	4.206
		High	3.980	.060	3.863	4.098
<u>Violence Sensitivity</u>	Low	Low	62.897	2.205	58.552	67.243
		High	65.491	1.892	61.763	69.218
	High	Low	69.534	1.808	65.971	73.098
		High	68.506	1.549	65.453	71.560
<u>Perspective Taking</u>	Low	Low	15.487	.696	14.116	16.858
		High	16.453	.597	15.277	17.629
	High	Low	18.000	.570	16.876	19.124
		High	17.582	.489	16.619	18.545
<u>Fantasy Sympathy</u>	Low	Low	15.282	.801	13.704	16.860
		High	16.189	.687	14.835	17.543
	High	Low	18.345	.657	17.051	19.639
		High	17.089	.563	15.980	18.198
<u>Empathic Concern</u>	Low	Low	17.923	.650	16.643	19.203
		High	18.679	.557	17.581	19.777
	High	Low	21.672	.533	20.623	22.722
		High	19.848	.456	18.949	20.748
<u>Personal Distress</u>	Low	Low	12.487	.716	11.077	13.897
		High	11.755	.614	10.545	12.964
	High	Low	14.172	.587	13.016	15.329
		High	13.278	.503	12.288	14.269

FIGURES

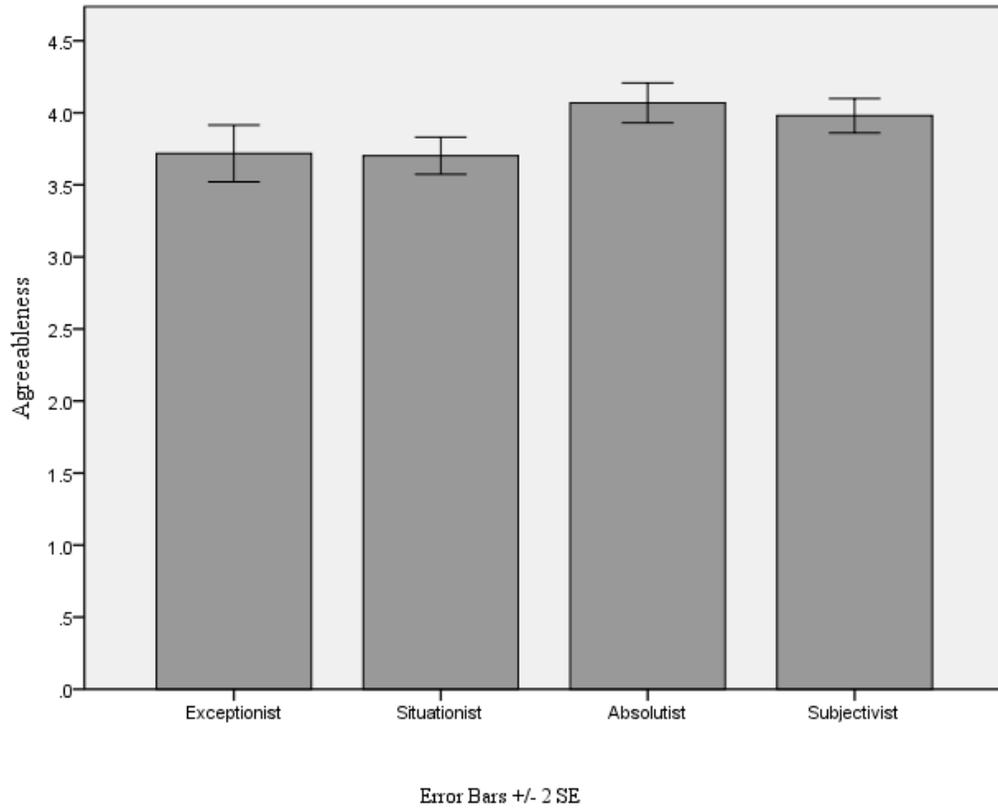


Figure 1. Mean Agreeableness score for Ethical Perspective groups.

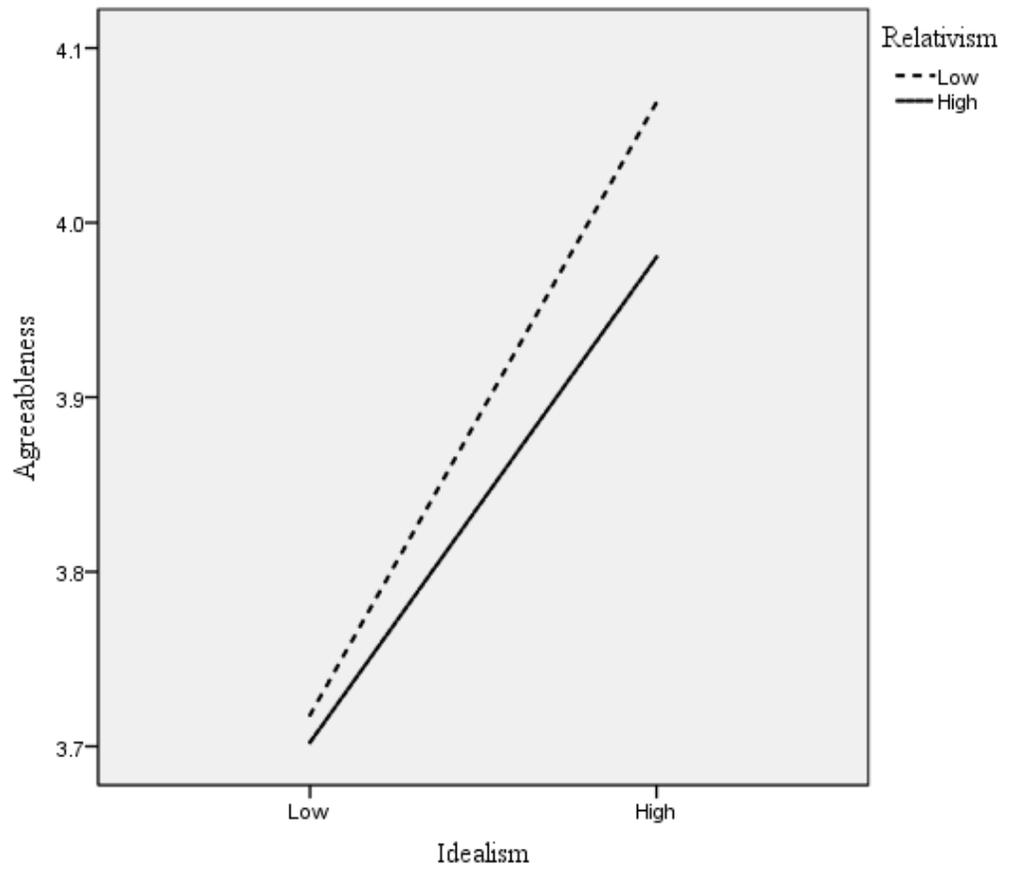


Figure 2. Mean Agreeableness score for Relativism X Idealism level.

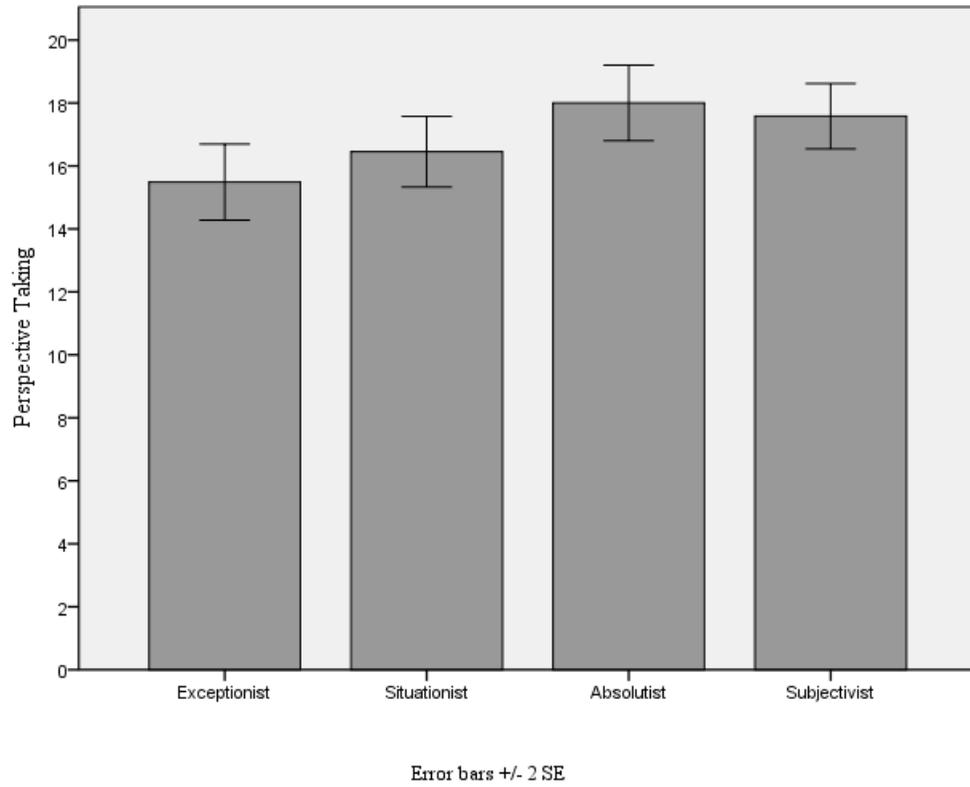


Figure 3. Mean Perspective Taking score for Ethical Perspective groups.

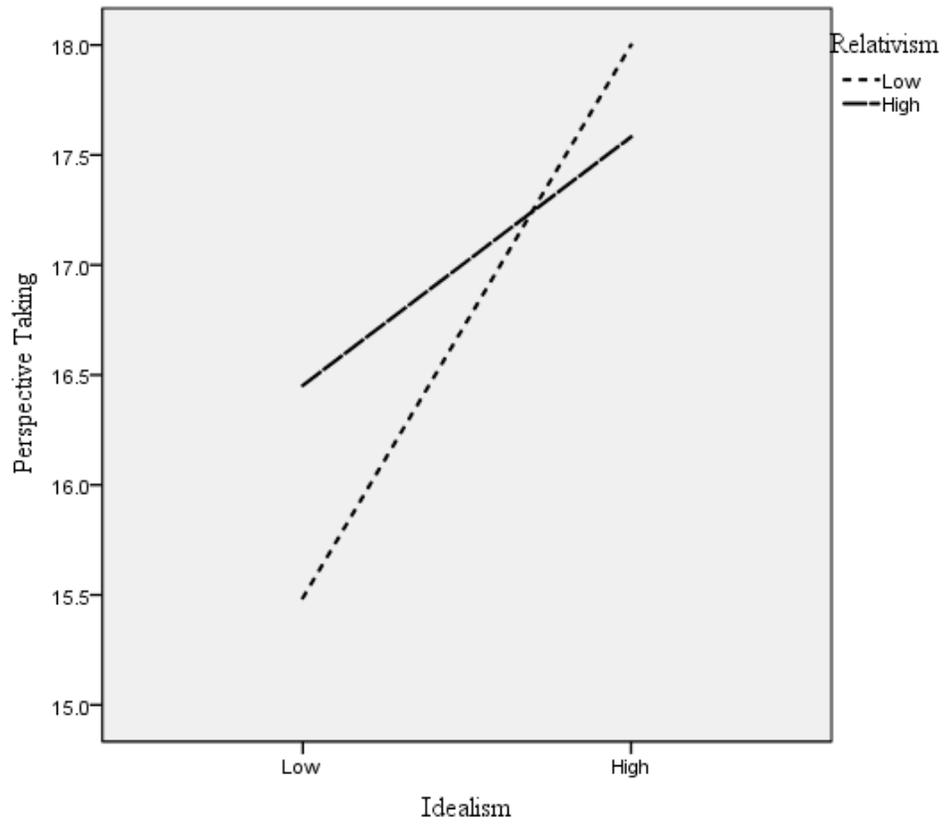
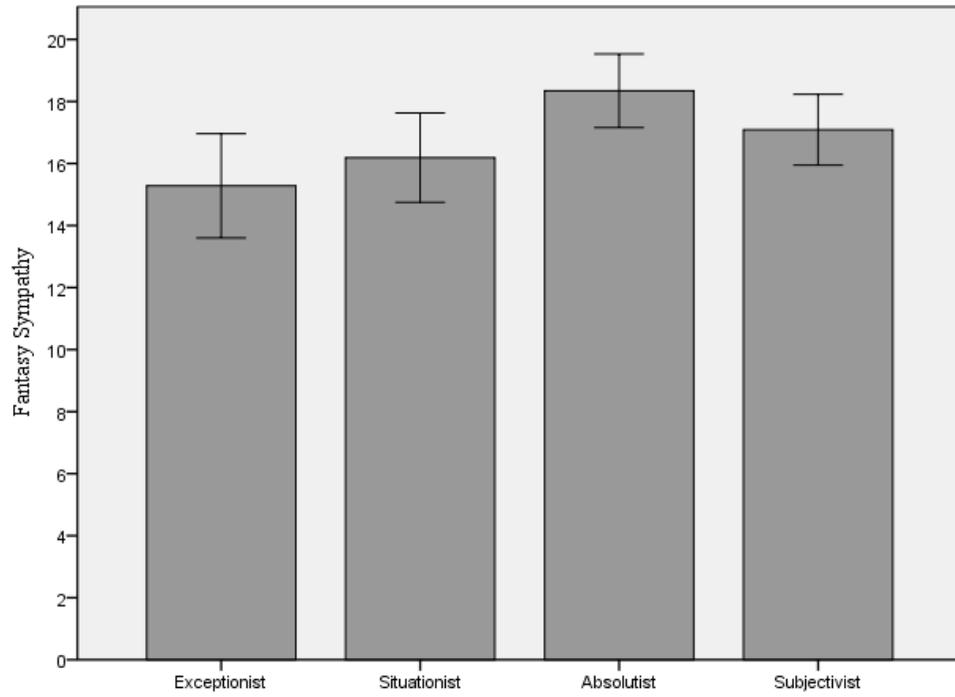


Figure 4. Mean Perspective Taking score for Relativism X Idealism level.



Error bars +/- 2 SE

Figure 5. Mean Fantasy Sympathy score for Ethical Perspective groups.

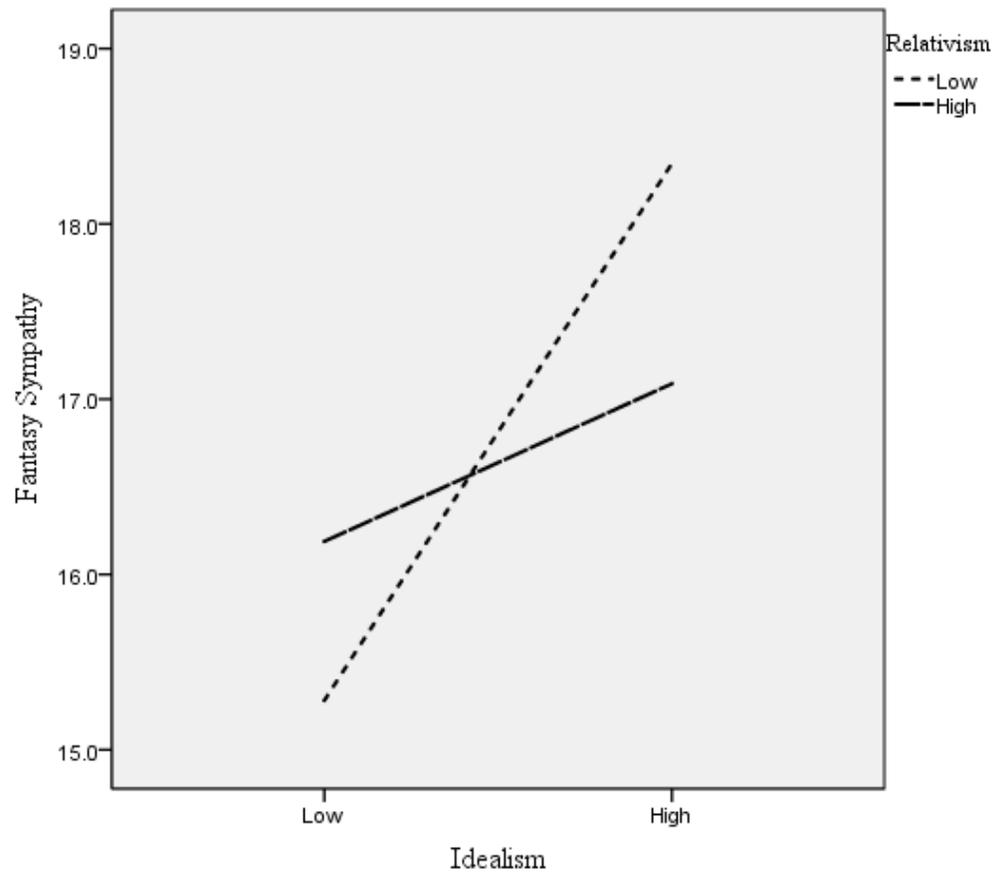


Figure 6. Mean Fantasy Sympathy score for Relativism X Idealism level.

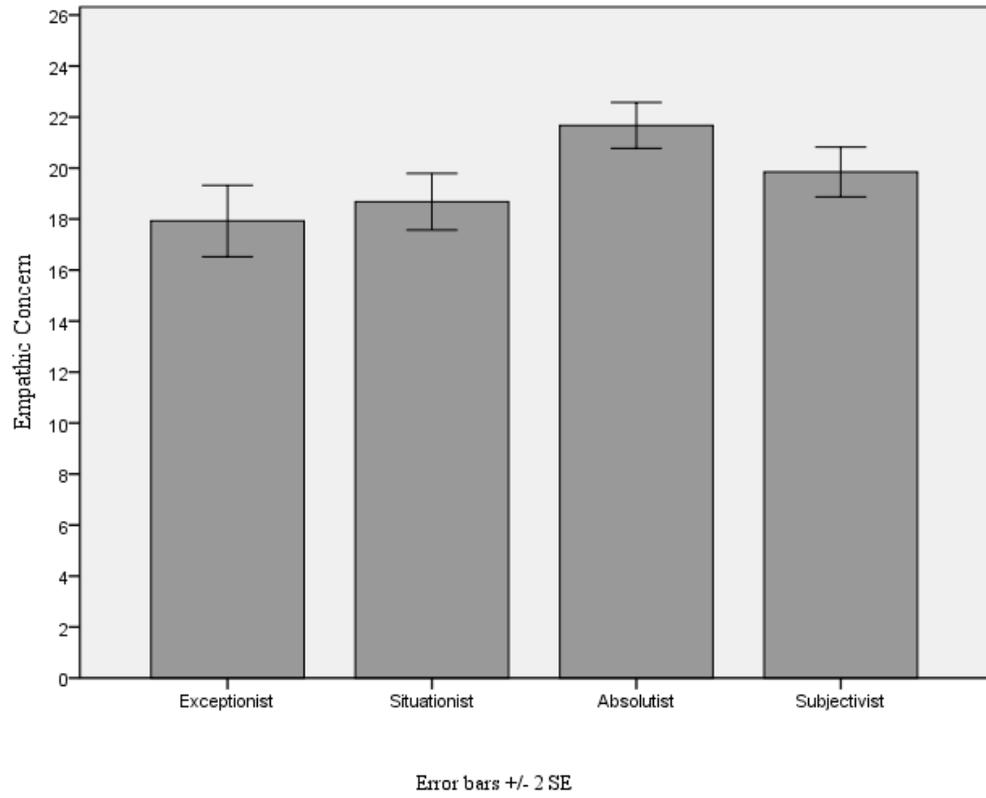


Figure 7. Mean Empathic Concern score for Ethical Perspective groups.

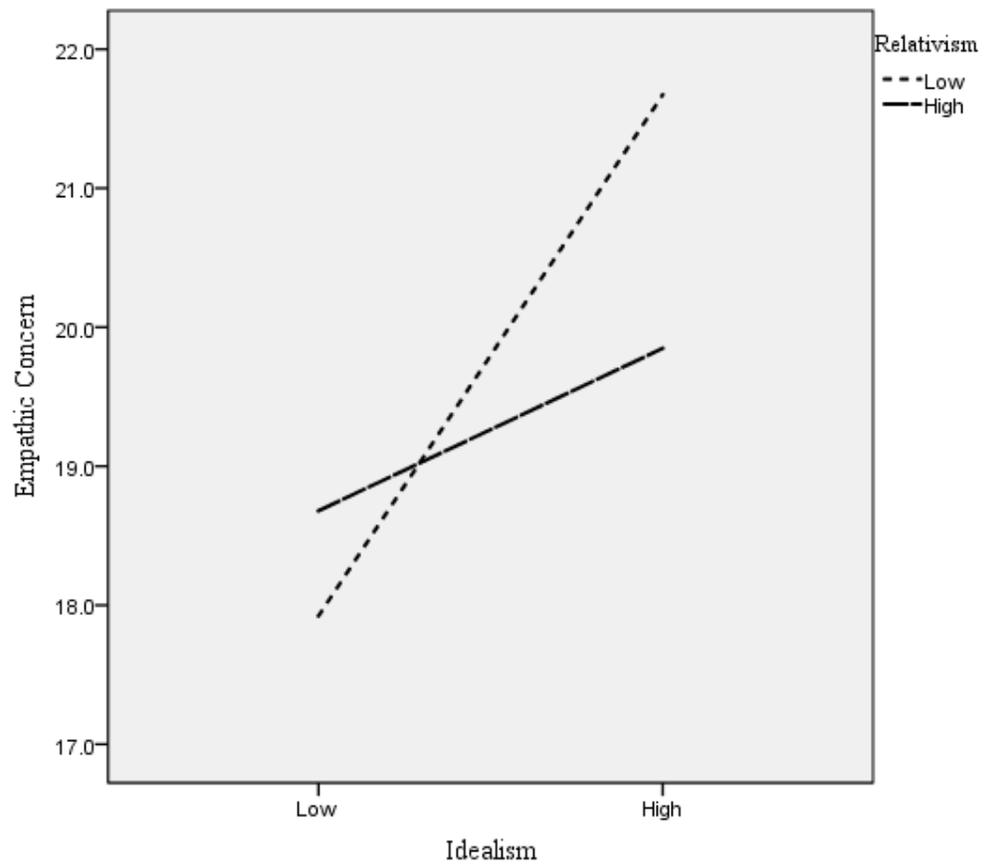


Figure 8. Mean Empathic Concern score for Relativism X Idealism level.

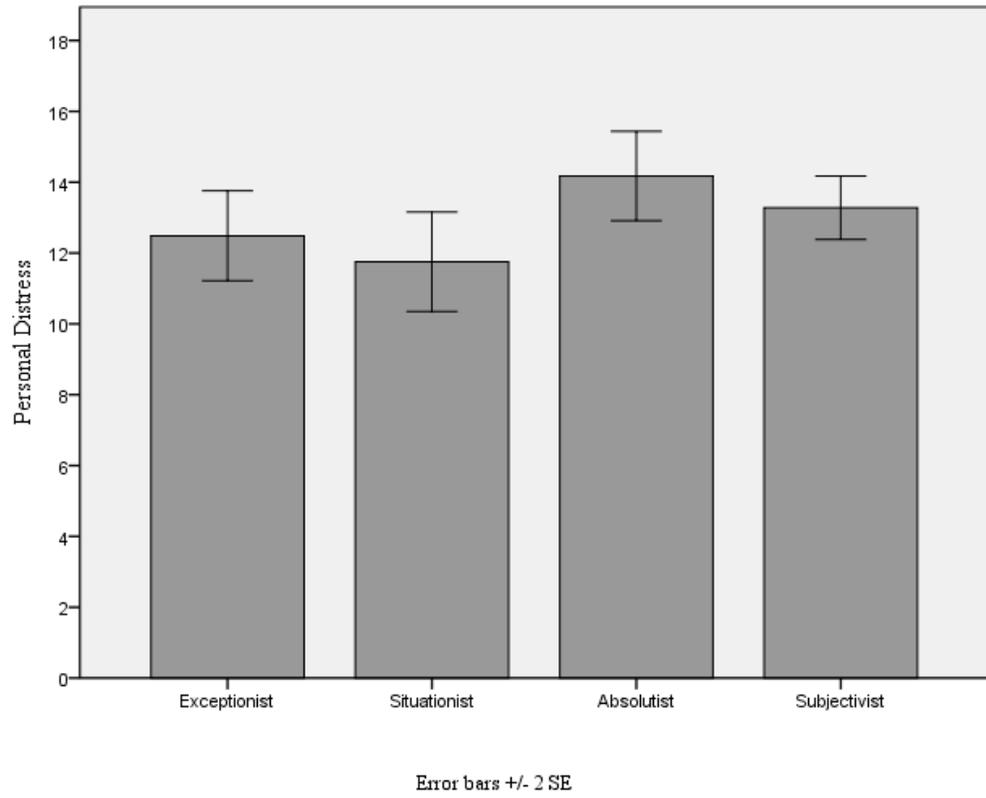


Figure 9. Mean Personal Distress score for Ethical Perspective groups.

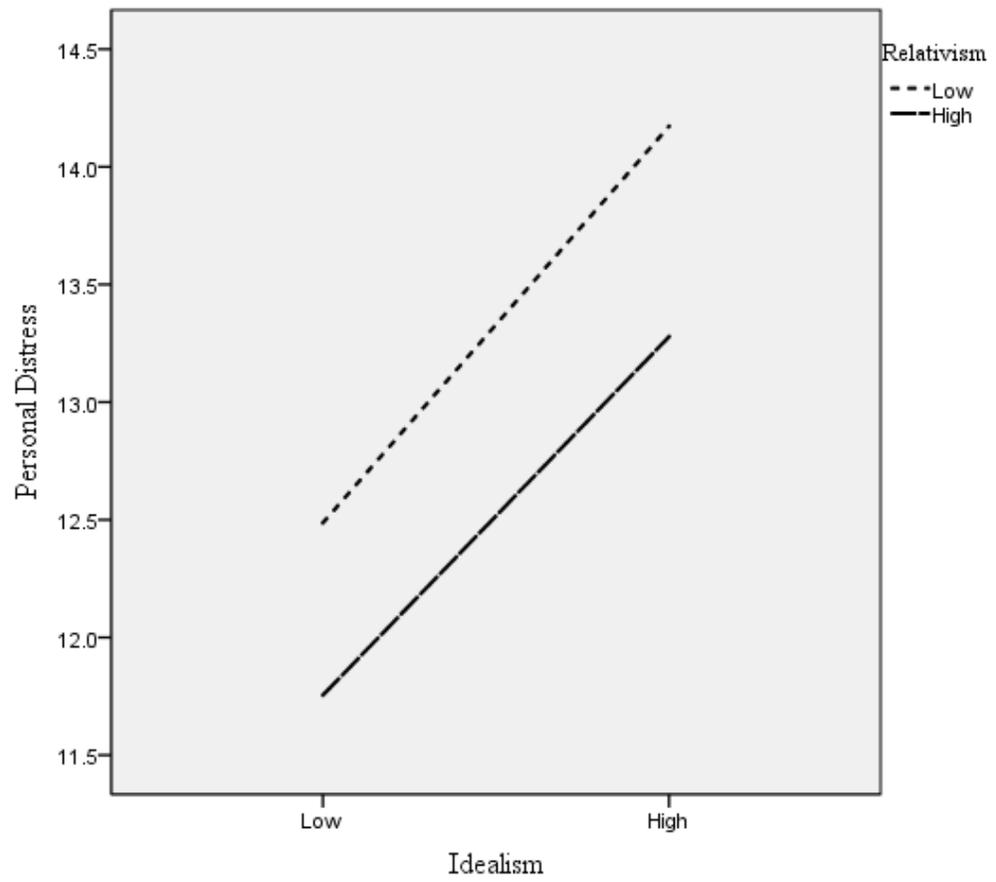


Figure 10. Mean Personal Distress score for Relativism X Idealism level.

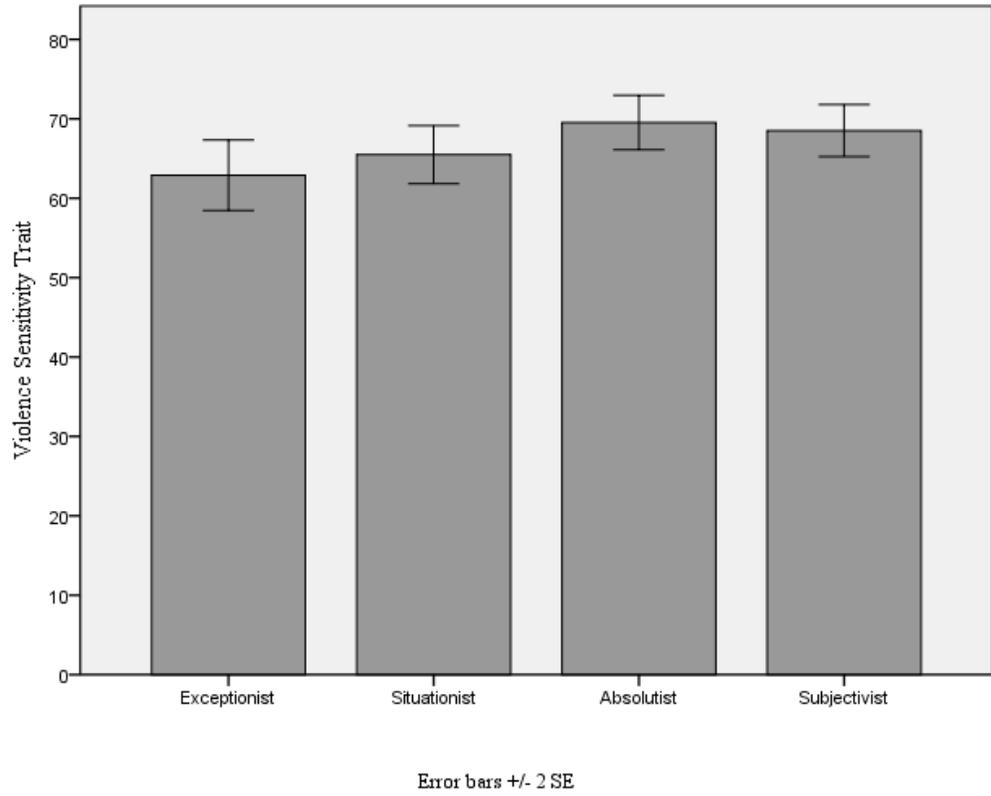


Figure 11. Mean Violence Sensitivity score for Ethical Perspective groups.

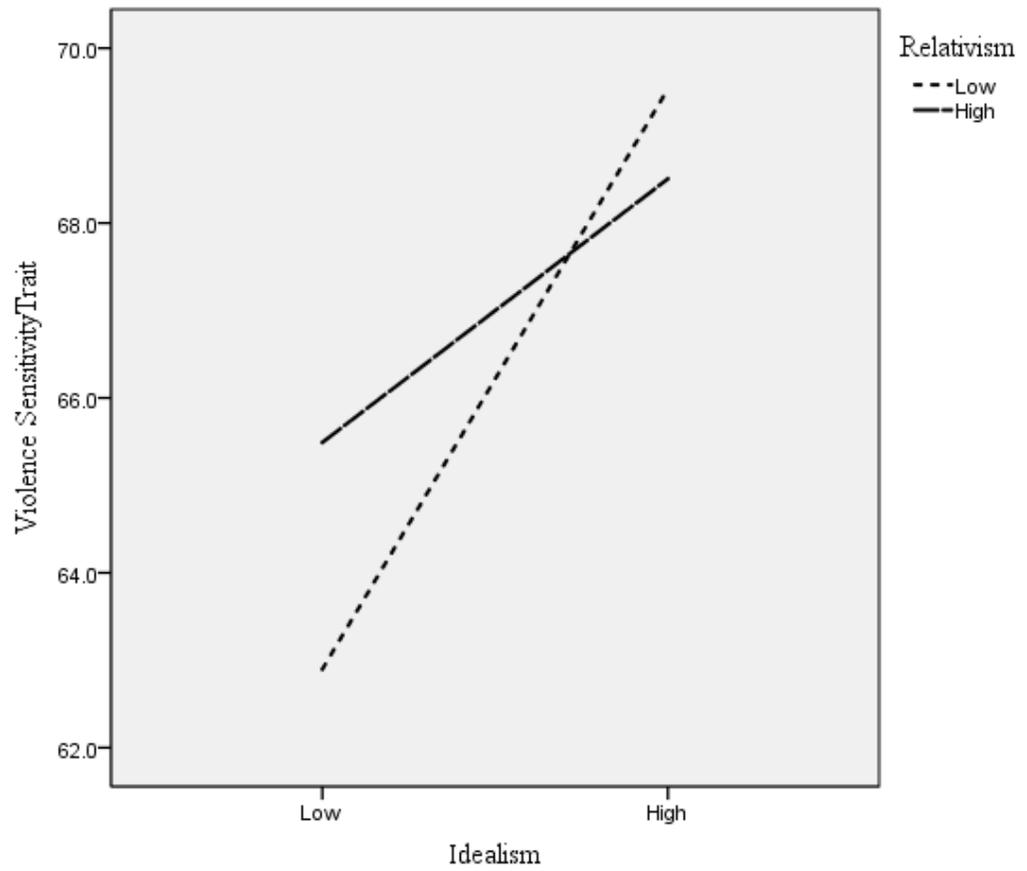


Figure 12. Mean Violence Sensitivity score Relativism X Idealism level.

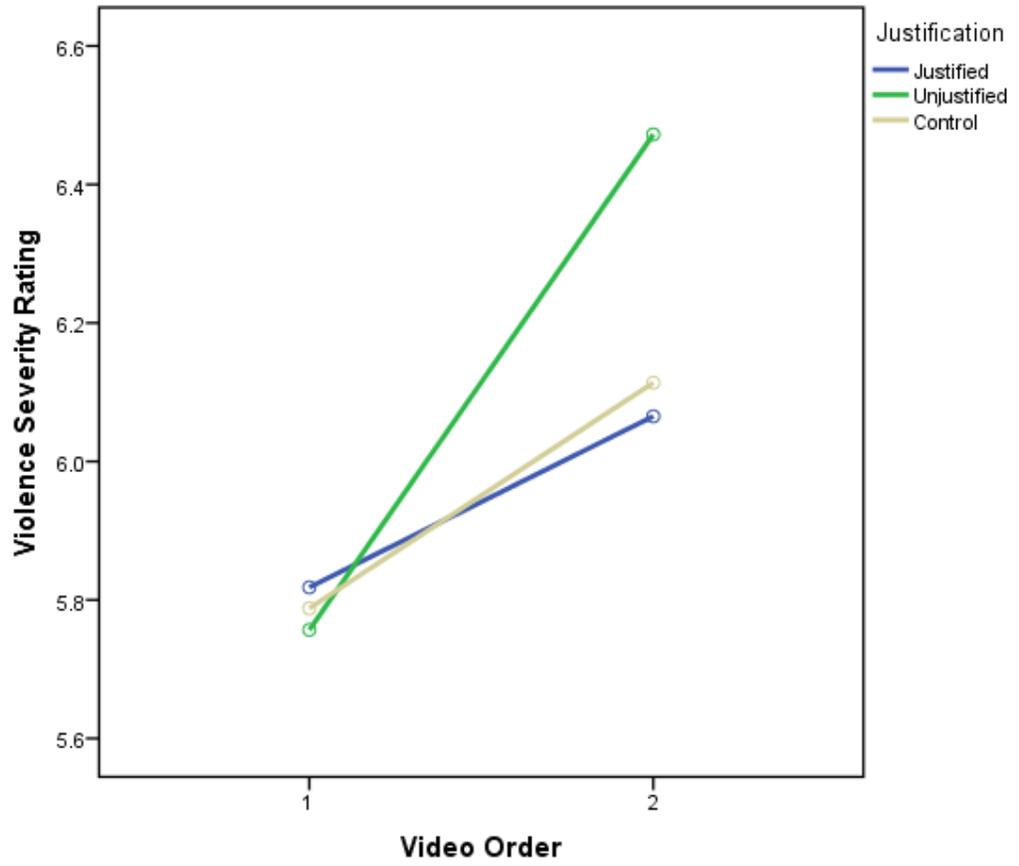


Figure 13. Mean Violence Severity Ratings: Justification X Video Order

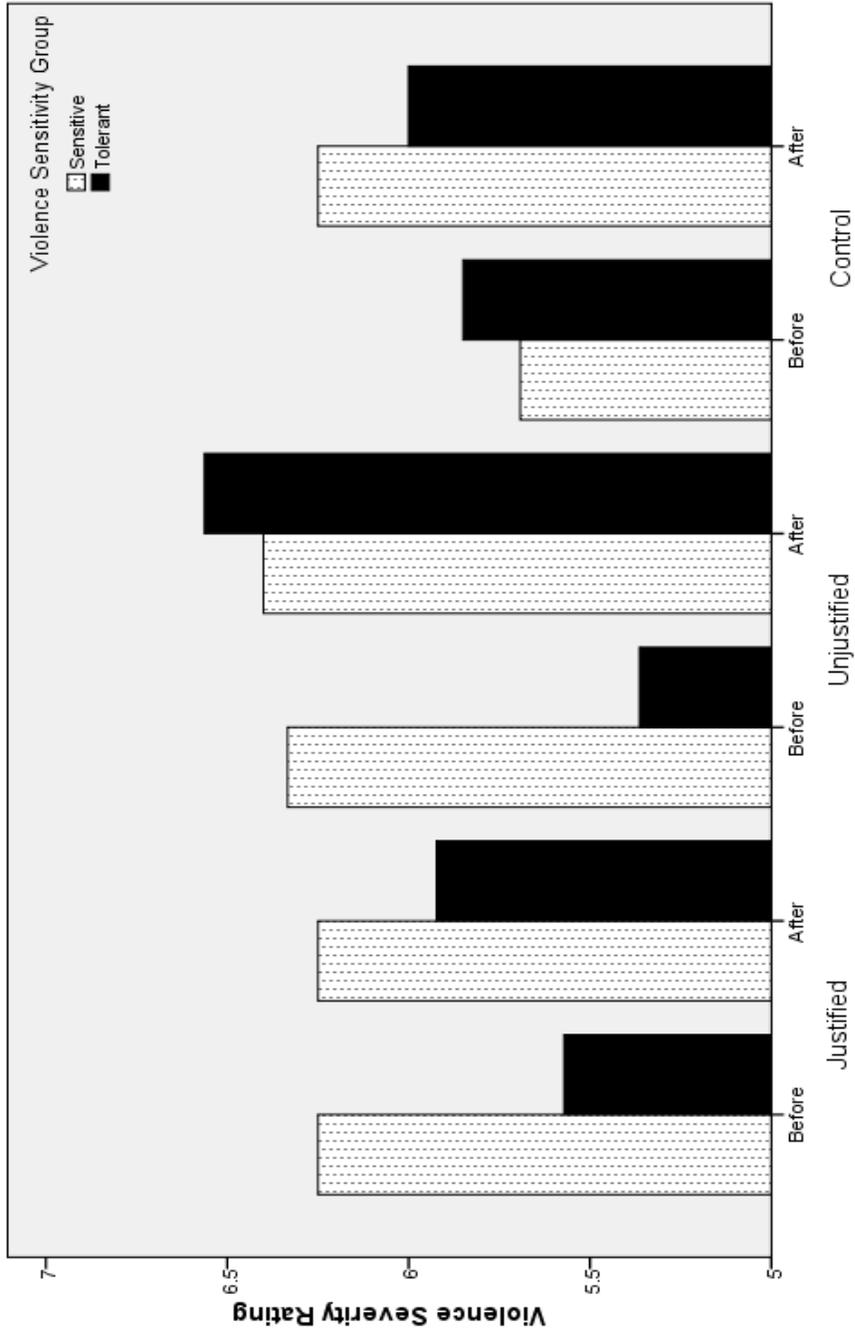


Figure 14. Violence Severity Ratings (VSR) by experimental group. This figure illustrates the VSRs for each group when they saw the video before taking the survey or afterwards

APPENDIX A

SURVEY GIVEN TO PARTICIPANTS THROUGH SURVEY MONKEY

Informed Consent for
Individual Differences in Interpretations of Justified and Unjustified Violence

INTRODUCTION

You have been invited to participate in the research project described below. This research project is being conducted by a researcher at the University of Rhode Island to fulfill the requirements for a master's degree in Psychology. The purpose of this form is to give you information that may affect your decision whether to say yes or no to participation in this research. If you have any questions about this study, you may contact the investigator, Melissa Marcotte (mmarcotte_2422@my.uri.edu) or major professor, Dr. Charles Collyer (collyer@uri.edu). This project has been reviewed and approved by Institutional Review Board of the University of Rhode Island.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to better understand individual differences in attitudes toward violence in different scenarios. Responses to the questions will be anonymous and are used to describe group differences; therefore there are no correct answers.

PROCEDURES

Participants will complete this study online following this informed consent. If you decide to take part in this study, your participation will involve completing a series of demographic questions followed by filling out an online survey pertaining to personality, personal preferences, and violence-related beliefs. Afterward, the participant will watch a short video clip about a violent situation and complete a rating scale. The completion of the study is anticipated to take about 15-20 minutes.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

The possible risks or discomforts of the study are minimal. Please note that there may be use of strong language throughout the survey. The decision to participate in this research project is up to you. You do not have to participate and you can exit the survey at any time if you are uncomfortable with answering any question. Participation in this study is not expected to be harmful or injurious to you. However, if this study causes you any injury, you should write or call Charles Collyer, Ph.D. at the University of Rhode Island at 401-874-4227 or 401-258-9834.

BENEFITS

Although there are no direct benefits of the study, your answers will help increase knowledge regarding how people vary in their attitudes toward violence.

RIGHT TO REFUSE OR WITHDRAW

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may refuse to participate or discontinue answering questions at any time without penalization.

ANONYMOUS AND CONFIDENTIAL DATA COLLECTION

Data collection will be entirely anonymous and will remain secure through the online survey database and any paper document will be safeguarded in a locked file in Dr. Charles Collyer’s office at the University of Rhode Island.

If you have other concerns about this study or if you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Rhode Island’s Vice President for Research at 70 Lower College Road, Suite 2, URI, Kingston, RI, (401) 874-4328. CONTACT INFORMATION. If you have any questions about this study, you may contact the investigator, Melissa Marcotte (mmarcotte_2422@my.uri.edu) or major professor, Dr. Charles Collyer (collyer@uri.edu). This project has been reviewed and approved by Institutional Review Board of the University of Rhode Island.

ACCEPTANCE

I have read the information provided above and all of my questions have been answered. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. My completion and electronic submission of this questionnaire will serve as my consent. I may print a copy of this consent statement for future reference.

Thank you for participating!

Please read the informed consent and if you agree please print this page for your records. You must be 18 years old to participate in this research project.

By choosing YES, you are saying that you have read this form, understand its risks and benefits and agree to participate in the study.

___ Yes, I agree to participate in this study.

___ No, I do not agree to participate in this study.



Demographics

What is your age?

What gender do you identify as?

- Male
- Female
- Neither/Prefer not to answer

What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? If currently enrolled, please mark the highest level completed or degree received.

- No schooling completed
- Nursery school to 8th grade
- 9th, 10th or 11th grade
- 12th grade, no diploma
- High school graduate - high school diploma or the equivalent (for example: GED)
- Some college credit, but less than 1 year
- 1 or more years of college, no degree
- Associate degree (for example: AA, AS)
- Bachelor's degree (for example: BA, AB, BS)
- Master's degree (for example: MA, MS, MEng, MEd, MSW, MBA)
- Professional degree (for example: MD, DDS, DVM, LLB, JD)
- Doctorate degree (for example: PhD, EdD)

If you are in college, enter your major in the box below.

(Note: Open text box)

What is your ethnicity?

- White
- Hispanic
- Black
- Asian
- American Indian/Alaskan Native
- Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander
- Other (please specify)

What is your political affiliation?

- Republican

- Independent
- Democrat
- No political affiliation
- Other (please specify)



At this point, the participant either gets assigned to complete the individual differences scales first or gets assigned to watch the video clip and answer the related questions first.

(Justified Scenario)

The following clip is about a two young adults in a relationship. The boyfriend knows that his girlfriend is being sexually abused by her stepfather and that both parents are trying to frame him for the murder of her three friends.

(Unjustified Scenario)

The following clip is about a two young adults in a relationship. The girl's parents are trying to protect her from her boyfriend as he is a criminal with a history of violence.

(Neutral)

Next, we will have you watch a short video clip.



(Video imbedded in the survey screen)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k4hwV1wPays&feature=youtu.be>



Please answer the following questions based on the film clip you just watched.

Describe what happened in the video.

(Note: Open text box)

On a scale of 1 (not violent at all) to 7 (extremely violent), how violent was the film clip you

just watched?

(Note: 1-7 scale given)

Would you say the murder of the girl's parents was:

___ Justified

___ Unjustified / Not Justified

Do you understand why the killer did what he did?

(1) I DO NOT understand at all to (7) I COMPLETELY understand

(Note: 1-7 scale given)

On a scale of 1 (unjustified) to 7 (justified), how justified was the murder of the girl's parents?

(Note: 1-7 scale given)

Please explain why you chose this level of justification in the previous question. In other words, why do you think the actions were justified or unjustified?

(Note: Open text box)

.....
The Big Five Inventory (BFI; John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991)

Here are a number of characteristics that may or may not apply to you. For example, do you agree that you are someone who likes to spend time with others? Please select a number next to each statement to indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with that statement.

(1) Disagree Strongly (2) Disagree (3) Neutral (4) Agree (5) Agree Strongly

I am someone who...

1. Is talkative
2. Tends to find fault with others
3. Does a thorough job
4. Is depressed, blue
5. Is original, comes up with new ideas
6. Is reserved
7. Is helpful and unselfish with others
8. Can be somewhat careless

9. Is relaxed, handles stress well.
10. Is curious about many different things
11. Is full of energy
12. Starts quarrels with others
13. Is a reliable worker
14. Can be tense
15. Is ingenious, a deep thinker
16. Generates a lot of enthusiasm
17. Has a forgiving nature
18. Tends to be disorganized
19. Worries a lot
20. Has an active imagination
21. Tends to be quiet
22. Is generally trusting
23. Tends to be lazy
24. Is emotionally stable, not easily upset
25. Is inventive
26. Has an assertive personality
27. Can be cold and aloof
28. Perseveres until the task is finished
29. Can be moody
30. Values artistic, aesthetic experiences
31. Is sometimes shy, inhibited
32. Is considerate and kind to almost everyone
33. Does things efficiently
34. Remains calm in tense situations
35. Prefers work that is routine
36. Is outgoing, sociable
37. Is sometimes rude to others
38. Makes plans and follows through with them
39. Gets nervous easily
40. Likes to reflect, play with ideas
41. Has few artistic interests
42. Likes to cooperate with others
43. Is easily distracted
44. Is sophisticated in art, music, or literature

.....

The Violence Sensitivity Scale (adapted from Collyer et al., 2007)

On a scale from 1 (not violent at all) to 7 (extremely violent), please rate the following behaviors.

(Note: Full 1-7 Scale given across the top)

Pushing
Murder
Shooting
Stealing
Slapping
Cursing
Kidnapping
Vandalism
Sabotage
Stabbing
Gossip
Rudeness
Manipulation
Fighting
Hitting
Screaming



Ethical Positions Questionnaire (EPQ; Forsyth, 1980)

Please indicate if you agree or disagree with the following items. Each represents a commonly held opinion and there are no right or wrong answers. We are interested in your reaction to such matters of opinion.

(Note: The Idealism score is obtained by taking the mean of items 1-10. The Relativism score is obtained by taking the mean of items 11-20.)

(1) Disagree Strongly (2) Disagree (3) Neutral (4) Agree (5) Agree Strongly

1. People should make certain that their actions never intentionally harm another even to a small degree.
2. Risks to another should never be tolerated, irrespective of how small the risks might be.
3. The existence of potential harm to others is always wrong, irrespective of the benefits to be gained.
4. One should never psychologically or physically harm another person.
5. One should not perform an action which might in any way threaten the dignity and welfare of another individual.
6. If an action could harm an innocent other, then it should not be done.
7. Deciding whether or not to perform an act by balancing the positive consequences of the act against the negative consequences of the act is immoral.

8. The dignity and welfare of the people should be the most important concern in any society.
9. It is never necessary to sacrifice the welfare of others.
10. Moral behaviors are actions that closely match ideals of the most "perfect" action.
11. There are no ethical principles that are so important that they should be a part of any code of ethics.
12. What is ethical varies from one situation and society to another.
13. Moral standards should be seen as being individualistic; what one person considers to be moral may be judged to be immoral by another person.
14. Different types of morality cannot be compared as to "rightness."
15. Questions of what is ethical for everyone can never be resolved since what is moral or immoral is up to the individual.
16. Moral standards are simply personal rules that indicate how a person should behave, and are not to be applied in making judgments of others.
17. Ethical considerations in interpersonal relations are so complex that individuals should be allowed to formulate their own individual codes.
18. Rigidly codifying an ethical position that prevents certain types of actions could stand in the way of better human relations and adjustment.
19. No rule concerning lying can be formulated; whether a lie is permissible or not permissible totally depends upon the situation.
20. Whether a lie is judged to be moral or immoral depends upon the circumstances surrounding the action.



The Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI; Davis, 1980)

The following statements inquire about your thoughts and feelings in a variety of situations. For each item, indicate how well it describes you by choosing the appropriate description on the scale at the top of the page: Does NOT describe me well, Describes me very little, Describes me somewhat, Describes me well, Describes me very well. When you have decided on your answer, select the bubble under the options that describes you the best. **READ EACH ITEM**

CAREFULLY BEFORE RESPONDING. Answer as honestly as you can. Thank you.

(1) Does not describe me well (2) Describes me very little (3) Describes me somewhat (4) Describes me well (5) Describes me very well

1. I daydream and fantasize, with some regularity, about things that might happen to me. (FS)

2. I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me. (EC)

3. I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the "other guy's" point of view. (PT) (-)

4. Sometimes I don't feel very sorry for other people when they are having problems. (EC) (-)

5. I really get involved with the feelings of the characters in a novel. (FS)

6. In emergency situations, I feel apprehensive and ill-at-ease. (PD)

7. I am usually objective when I watch a movie or play, and I don't often get completely caught up in it. (FS) (-)

8. I try to look at everybody's side of a disagreement before I make a decision. (PT)

9. When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards them. (EC)

10. I sometimes feel helpless when I am in the middle of a very emotional situation. (PD)

11. I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective. (PT)

12. Becoming extremely involved in a good book or movie is somewhat rare for me. (FS) (-)

13. When I see someone get hurt, I tend to remain calm. (PD) (-)

14. Other people's misfortunes do not usually disturb me a great deal. (EC) (-)

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

arguments. (PT) (-)

16. After seeing a play or movie, I have felt as though I were one of the characters. (FS)

17. Being in a tense emotional situation scares me. (PD)

18. When I see someone being treated unfairly, I sometimes don't feel very much pity for them.
(EC) (-)

19. I am usually pretty effective in dealing with emergencies. (PD) (-)

20. I am often quite touched by things that I see happen. (EC)

21. I believe that there are two sides to every question and try to look at them both. (PT)

22. I would describe myself as a pretty soft-hearted person. (EC)

23. When I watch a good movie, I can very easily put myself in the place of a leading character. (FS)

24. I tend to lose control during emergencies. (PD)

25. When I'm upset at someone, I usually try to "put myself in his shoes" for a while. (PT)

26. When I am reading an interesting story or novel, I imagine how I would feel if the events in the story were happening to me. (FS)

27. When I see someone who badly needs help in an emergency, I go to pieces. (PD)

28. Before criticizing somebody, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place. (PT)

NOTE:(-) denotes item to be scored in reverse fashion

PT = perspective-taking scale

FS = fantasy scale

EC = empathic concern scale

PD = personal distress scale

.....

Debriefing

This research focuses on individual characteristics related to violence sensitivity in justified and unjustified scenarios. You answered some questions designed to measure personality traits, empathic style, ethical perspective, and violence sensitivity, attributes which vary from person to person. Some participants watched a film clip that was described as a justified act of violence and then were asked to rate how violent they thought the character's actions were. Other participants watched a film clip that was described as an unjustified act of violence, and then were asked to rate how violent they perceived the character's actions were. Other participants watched a neutral film clip and were asked to rate how violent they perceived the character's actions to be. Finally, some participants didn't watch a film clip and just took the surveys.

If you have any questions, please contact either of the investigators: Dr. Charles Collyer (collyer@uri.edu, 401-258-9834) or Melissa Marcotte (mmarcotte_2422@my.uri.edu). If you have concerns about this research and would prefer to talk with a University representative, please contact the Vice President for Research and Economic Development, Dr. Peter Alfonso (peteralfonso@uri.edu, 401-874-4576).

Thank you for your participation in this research study.

If you are completing this study for extra credit, please print off the page, sign it, and give it to your T.A. or professor. Student signature_____

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