8-15-2017

From Negative Biases to Positive News: Resetting and Reframing News Consumption for a Better Life and a Better World

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From Negative Biases to Positive News: Resetting and Reframing

News Consumption for a Better Life and a Better World

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A Capstone Project Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Applied Positive Psychology

Advisor: Emily Esfahani Smith

August 1, 2017

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Keywords
negative bias, negativity bias, journalism, news, agenda setting, framing, well-being, constructive journalism, positive psychology, positive emotion, positivity

Introduction

If it bleeds, it leads. This touchstone of journalism makes intuitive sense to most people. Sensational, sometimes violent news often finds its way to the top of Page One in the morning newspapers or at the top of the web page on internet news sites. Why is this so? Journalists and readers also want to hear good news, right?

The culprit might be the all-too-human propensity for negativity. Research psychologists have found that human beings are subject to powerful negative biases, which may influence news production and consumption. This paper will review the research literature about negative biases and their effects on people, as well as literature about two media effects, agenda setting and framing. This paper argues that these biases may result in news coverage that is both inaccurate and harmful to the well-being of those who consume it. Positive psychology interventions may be able to mitigate or neutralize negative media effects. This paper presents a half-day workshop that introduces and trains attendees in relevant positive psychology strategies to mitigate or neutralize negative effects of the news.

This paper will begin with a description of negative biases and how they may be active in news production and consumption, and how negative news impacts well-being. Next the paper will introduce positive psychology and describe how it has been a positive response to the negative focus of traditional psychology. The half-day workshop will then be presented. While the workshop is informed by research, testing should be done to determine the extent to which it mitigates and combats the negative effects of negative news.

This work is important because many journalists and news consumers accept the news as a factual and accurate reporting of reality. News consumers need to know that there are negative biases in their own psychology and the news. These negative biases may lead to unduly negative

news coverage that has detrimental effects on the well-being of news consumers. By attending the half-day workshop described in this paper, news consumers may be able to improve their well-being and develop a more accurate picture of the state of the world.

The news often reports and emphasizes negative topics. For example, the front page of the July 18 *Wall Street Journal* (2017) is dominated by two headlines: "Health Bill on Brink of Collapse" and "China Seizes Market for Military Drones." Headlines about the growth of Netflix and a group of aspiring girl scientists visiting from Afghanistan are in smaller, less prominent fonts. The news is often negative despite the fact that this period of human history is characterized by many positives. For example, network evening news shows in the US tripled their coverage of crime, especially murders, during the 1990s, a time when the murder rate plummeted (Center for Media, 1997). As crime has fallen, so too have rates of HIV infection, homelessness, divorce, extreme poverty, war, murder, youth drug use, underage drinking, smoking, air pollution, and hunger (Roser, 2017; Pinker, 2011). At the same time the rates of many positive things have increased, including longevity, educational attainment, high school graduation rates, vaccination rates, access to mobile phones, democracy, transportation, and human rights (Roser, 2017; Pinker, 2011). The gap between the way the world is reported and statistical evidence that paints a picture of progress is stark. In 2015, despite the roll call of human progress noted above, only 6% of Americans believed the future was going to be better (Haden, 2016).

But maybe negative news has no negative effects. Human progress continues despite the negative news, right? Unfortunately, research demonstrates that negative news has negative effects on well-being. This research will be examined below. The gap between negative news and the positive present may be an effect of cognitive biases people are prone to. Research in

recent years has shown that there are many ways in which people are biased. Julian Simon,

Amos Tversky, and Daniel Kahneman were pioneers who demonstrated that humans were much

less rational than was previously believed (Thaler, 2015).

Cognitive biases

For many years, economists argued that humans made decisions by rationally weighing

costs and benefits. In economic rational choice theory, "all action is fundamentally 'rational' in

character and...people calculate the likely costs and benefits of any action before deciding what

to do" (Scott, 2000, p. 126). During the latter half of the 20th Century, scholars questioned and

tested this perspective. Herbert Simon (2000) found that humans make decisions within *bounded*

rationality. When deciding complex issues, humans often come up with a good enough decision

(satisfice) that may not reflect a thorough, rational weighing of all costs in benefits (Simon,

2000). Then, starting in the 1970s, Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman (2011, 1991, 1981,

1979, 1973) were making discoveries that would shape the nascent field of behavioral

economics. Tversky and Kahneman found that people made decisions based on rationality *and*

psychological idiosyncrasies. These became known as cognitive biases. Research in cognitive

biases has been so vigorous in recent years that at least 188 have been identified (Manoogian,

2016).

A cognitive bias is "a systematic deviation from a standard of rationality, an error

frequently committed by the human mind" (Caviola, Mannino, Savulescu, & Faulmüller, 2014,

p. 1). There are many ways to classify cognitive biases, including by such categories has "too

much information" or "not enough meaning" (Manoogian, 2016). An example of a cognitive

bias is the availability heuristic, first described by Tversky and Kahneman (1973). This

heuristic, or mental shortcut, is the tendency for humans to make predictions about the

probability of something happening based on the ease to which it comes to mind. For example, if someone in the United States were asked "What is the most popular sport in the world," he may say football or baseball because these come to mind easily in the United States. However, the most popular sport in the world is soccer, a less popular sport in America (Giulianotti, 2012).

Cognitive biases can be positive or negative. While this paper will focus on negative biases, people also have positive ones. For example, when stimuli in the environment are low in intensity, the positive motivational system is more responsive than its negative counterpart (Ito & Cacioppo, 2005). Another example is that individuals have unrealistically positive self-assessments when comparing themselves to others and protect themselves from information that threatens this positively tilted self-perception (Hepper & Sedikides, 2012; Cummins & Nistico, 2002; Hoorens, 1995; Taylor & Brown, 1988). This effect shows up in studies of driving. One study found that more than 77% of Swedish drivers and 88% of American drivers assess themselves as safer than average (Svenson, 1981). While most positive biases put the self in a more positive light, negative biases tend to show others and the rest of the world in a more negative light (Rozin & Royzman, 2001; Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001).

For the purposes of this paper, negative biases are defined as systematic errors in perception or judgment that make phenomena, thoughts, assessments, and the like seem worse than they really are. This paper will suggest that the negativity of the news, coupled with the negativity bias in news consumers, may be detrimental to the emotional well-being among news consumers and make the world seem worse than it really is. Here emotional well-being will be defined as "the emotional quality of an individual's everyday experience—the frequency and intensity of experiences of joy, stress, sadness, anger, and affection that make one's life pleasant or unpleasant" (Kahneman & Deaton, 2010).

Negative biases have been extensively studied in psychological research. They have been found to be more powerful than positive biases. Rozin and Royzman (2001), in their wide-ranging review of negative bias literature, found "in most situations, negative events are more salient, potent, dominant in combinations, and generally efficacious than positive events" (p. 297). This means that negative events, compared to positive ones, draw attention more easily, are more potent, are more dominant, are more complex (differentiation), and create lasting memories more easily. Baumeister et al. (2001) completed an in-depth research review that same year and found that "when equal measures of good and bad are present…the psychological effects of bad ones outweigh those of the good ones. This may in fact be a general principle or law of psychological phenomena, possibly reflecting the innate predispositions of the psyche" (Baumeister et al., 2001, p. 323). An example of this is a workplace performance review. Regardless of the positives shared with an employee during a performance review, he will often focus on the negative comments and not the positive ones. Likewise, if a performer receives a mixed review in a newspaper column, she will often focus most on the comments perceived to be negative or critical (M. Regni, personal communication, July 24, 2017).

This paper will examine five negative biases: negative bias in attention, negativity potency, negativity dominance, greater negativity differentiation, and negative bias in memory. This is not an exhaustive list of negative biases in the literature. These were chosen because they all have an extensive research base in the literature and may have effects in the news consumption process. Determining how each of these biases interact with news consumption will need further research. This paper will suggest linkages between news and negative biases. Regardless, the existence of negative biases in the news has been well established in the news

media studies literature (Lengauer, Esser, & Berganza, 2012; Soroka & McAdams, 2015; Geer, 2012) and will be discussed in greater detail below.

Negative bias in attention

Negative events are more powerful than positive ones in getting people to pay attention. "(B)ad information, at least in the form of undesirable trait terms, has more power than good information for attracting attention in an automatic, nonintentional fashion" (Baumeister et al., 2001, p. 341; Pratto & John, 1991). In a study where participants rated the likability of people according to their photos, negative attributes were found to garner more attention both according to participant ratings and looking time studies (Fiske, 1980). In another study (Ohira, Winton, & Oyama, 1998), Japanese university students read positive and negative words presented to them. They consciously recalled more of the negative words and they rejected negative stimuli more successfully than positive stimuli. Negative stimuli were associated with more eye blinks, a reflection of greater cognitive activity while attending to stimuli and reading words. In a study where subjects assessed drawn pictures of faces (e.g., smiling, frowning, threatening), the participants found the threatening faces in groups of faces more quickly than the non-threatening ones (Öhman, Lundqvist, & Esteves, 2001). In another study, researchers asked participants whether they wanted to hear bad news or good news first. They found that 77%-88% of subjects wanted to hear the bad news first (Marshall & Kidd, 1981). These studies suggest that news consumers will pay attention and respond more strongly to negative information.

One example of the negative grabbing viewer news was on a recent Dr. Oz television show (2017, July 18). The host explored the topic of sexual assault during massage therapy. Dr. Oz opened the show this way: "Today we are exposing predators that prey on you at your most

vulnerable moments. We are going to infiltrate the world of sexual assault during the one time you let down your guard down for an hour of relaxation in privacy: a massage" (Öz, 2017). At no point did Dr. Oz put this in context and state whether this was a growing problem, but by using words like "predator," "infiltrate," and "sexual assault," he gave the appearance that massage could be dangerous. By opening the show using negative and sensationalist language, he likely gained the attention of viewers.

Negativity potency

A key finding of negative bias research is that negative experiences, thoughts, and emotions are more potent than positive ones of equal power. This effect is negative potency (Rozin & Royzman, 2001). A study using electroencephalography, a method of monitoring electrical currents in the brain, found higher amplitudes and shorter latencies in response to negative stimuli than in response to positive stimuli. Negative information showed more activation than neutral or positive information (Carretiéa, Mercadoa, Tapiaa, & Hinojosab, 2001). Negative information can grab the attention of citizens and affect their voting behavior. For example, economic downturns have a stronger impact on the outcome of elections, whereas economic upswings do not. Bloom and Price (1975) studied US House of Representative elections over a 40-year span. They found that negative economic news hurt the incumbent party, while positive news did not help the incumbent party. Voters attended to the negative news but were not affected by the positive.

Loss aversion (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; Tversky & Kahneman, 1991) is another demonstration of this effect. Loss aversion means that "losses loom larger than corresponding gains" (Tversky & Kahneman, 1991, p. 1047). When outcomes are uncertain, people are more

averse to losing an amount than gaining the same amount. In the news, loss aversion appears in stories about lost jobs and lost industries. An article from *The Huffington Post* shows how loss aversion may manifest in news stories. In the article, "NAFTA at 20: One Million U.S. Jobs Lost, Higher Income Inequality," Lori Wallach (2014) decried the one million jobs lost to NAFTA, but she did not describe the benefits, such as the increase in regional trade, economic growth in border states, and supply chain improvements that have helped large, complex industries like auto manufacturers (NAFTA, 2014). She did not note how difficult it is to accurately tally the net number of jobs lost. Nor did Wallach recognize that the size of the economies of the three countries involved in NAFTA doubled in the early years of the agreement, a period also characterized by rapid economic growth (Hufbauer, 2005). But Wallach's one million jobs figure likely left a strong effect on the reader's mind given loss aversion. President Trump ran a successful presidential campaign, and one of his signature promises was getting the United States out of the NAFTA agreement. He argued that the agreement caused job losses in America (Jagannathan, 2017), but he never gave a sophisticated cost-benefit analysis of NAFTA. Trump only emphasized the losses, and he may have leveraged loss aversion to rhetorical success in a presidential campaign.

Negative dominance

Negative dominance is another powerful bias. When positive and negative events, objects, individuals, traits, and the like are mixed, and an individual must make holistic appraisals, the negative elements are weighted more heavily (Rozin & Royzman, 2001). Negativity dominance has been found to exist in impressions of people (Hamilton & Zanna,

1972; Hodges, 1974), personality trait adjectives (Levin & Schmidt, 1969; Wyer & Watson, 1969), and personality descriptions (Miller & Rowe, 1967).

An example of this effect in politics and the news is Hillary Clinton. In most respects, she has led an exemplary life. She grew up as a church-going Girl Scout. Clinton was an outstanding student who attended prestigious universities. She practiced law and became a law professor. Later she served as secretary of state, U.S. senator from New York, first lady of Arkansas, and the first lady of the United States (Hillary for America, n.d.). She is widely praised for her work ethic, public service, and intelligence. Nonetheless, her favorable rating stands at 39% (Price, 2017). Why is she so unpopular?

Scholars debate this point, but it may be because she was involved in a scandal regarding her email server, and some blame her for the death of four Americans at the US consulate in Benghazi, Libya. Neither of these has led to prosecution. Clinton also may suffer from a "guilt by association" effect because of her husband's sexual dalliances. Nonetheless, given her strong curriculum vitae, the animosity she engenders seems inflated. The potency of the negatives likely skews the general impressions people have about Clinton toward disapproval.

Clinton may be the victim of other aspects of negative dominance, which play out when subjects rate the morality of people's actions (Birnbaum, 1972) and impressions of character (Richey, Koenigs, Richey, & Fortin, 1975). These negative impressions, once formed from a first impression, are difficult to change (Briscoe, Woodyard, & Shaw, 1967; Freedman & Steinbruner, 1964).

Journalists are often blamed for negative news. This is certainly a fair critique, for if the news is negative, those who write the stories and air TV news programs certainly are responsible. However, news consumers often prefer negative news. One Russian news outlet

only reported good news one day and lost two-thirds of its readers (Epstein, 2014). News

consumers, on the other hand, are often portrayed as innocent victims of journalisms negative

biases (Trussler & Soroka, 2013). However, Trussler and Soroka demonstrated that consumers

showed negativity dominance in their behavior as they read news stories. Subjects claimed to

prefer positive stories, but eye movement studies that were part of Trussler and Soroka's

research showed preference for the negative, especially by participants who expressed interest in

current affairs. This suggests that even consumers who are interested and knowledgeable about

the news are drawn to negative news regardless of their professed preference for the positive.

Negativity differentiation

Compared to positive information, negative information is processed in a more thorough,

detailed, and complex manner, a phenomenon described as negativity differentiation (Rozin &

Royzman, 2001). One consistent finding in this literature is that vocabulary used to describe

negative phenomena is much richer than the vocabulary for describing positive phenomena

(Peeters, 1971). The structure of language also shows some negative orientations. For example,

when describing chance, "risk" is often used (i.e., a negative chance) instead of "opportunity" (a

positive chance). Similarly, words like "murderer," "accident," and "catastrophe" have no

common antonyms. Rozin and Royzman (2001) generated a list of pain and pleasure descriptors

in English and found more than twice as many (31) pain words—for example sharp, aching,

burning, cutting—as pleasure words—for example thrilling, delicious, exquisite, sumptuous—

which totaled 14.

Negative emotions are also more complex and differentiated than positive emotions.

Rozin and Royzman (2001) examined nine emotion taxonomies, descriptions of human emotions

by scholars. Seven of the nine taxonomies listed more negative than positive emotions. In three of the taxonomies—those of Charles Darwin, Robert Woodworth, and Paul Ekman—the negative emotions outnumbered the positive ones by at least two to one. Two taxonomies had the same number of positive and negative emotions, and none contained more positive than negative emotions. Taken together, the negative to positive ratio of the nine emotion taxonomies was more than 3:2.

These findings echoed earlier research done by Carlson (1966), who reviewed emotion terms in 172 introductory psychology textbooks. Carlson recorded 20 pleasant emotion terms, and 30 unpleasant emotion ones. He found that 74.8% of the pages referred to negative emotions. Carlson also asked students to name emotion terms; 35.2% were positive and 61% were negative. Averill (1980) had judges place Anderson's (1965) personality traits into emotional and non-emotional traits. Among the non-emotional traits, there was a small prevalence of positive traits (57%), but when assessing the emotional traits, the negative ones made up a clear majority (74%).

However, it is important to note that these negative biases are not necessarily relevant to survival in the modern world. Deadly violent threats were common everyday occurrences for humans living in prehistoric times. In the current age, few people face these threats due to the steady decrease of violence (Pinker, 2011). However, brain structures and processes have not evolved to this new (more peaceful) normal. Therefore, the brain is still looking for threats that have largely disappeared from the modern world.

A look at the local section of a newspaper shows this negative differentiation in action. On page three of the Metro section of a recent edition of *The Washington Post* (2017, July 19), the Local Digest notes that a bicyclist died of injuries, a man's body was found in a pool, and a

slain man's sketch was released to the public. Based on this a news consumer might think that death by bicycle accident, drowning, and murder were the most common causes of death. Page Four features stories about the death of a man who was shot by police, and another notes that an arrest was made in the shooting of a one year old. None of the stories in *The Post*'s July 19 Metro section discuss common causes of death, such as cancer, heart attack, or lower respiratory disease, the top three causes of death in the US (CDC, 2017). On Page 6 there are 11 obituaries. Presumably these are more representative of causes of death because the obituaries report about people *who* died, not *how* they died. Of these 11, three died of cancer, three from heart disease, two from strokes, one from Parkinson's disease, one from pneumonia, and one from an accident. All but one of these causes of death were degenerative diseases old age. None were victims of violence. In contrast, deaths reported in the rest of the Metro section were caused by uncommon, but more dramatically negative, causes including accidents and murder.

Negative bias in memory

People also show negative biases in memory. That said, memory is complex. No one remembers everything, and for good reason. Too many memories would be too much information. Therefore, memories tend to form from important or highlighted information from experiences. Emotional memories are susceptible to particular kinds of admissions and omissions. For example, a "weapon focus" effect happens when a crime victim remembers the weapon used at a crime but does not remember other aspects of the incident (Kihlstrom, 2006; Reisberg & Heuer, 2007). In other studies involving threats, experiment participants remember the snake well but have a poor recall of the setting around the snake. Their memory for a neutral item, such as a squirrel, was much worse (Kensinger, Piguet, Krendl, & Corkin, 2005;

Kensinger, Gutchess, & Schacter, 2007). Brain studies have shown that when areas associated with affective processing are engaged in encoding memory, the emotional item is given a memory boost while the background information gets no such boost (Waring & Kensinger, 2011; Kensinger, Garoff-Eaton, & Schacter, 2007a). On the other hand, processing information in a more controlled setting may allow for encoding where a more balanced variety of information is processed (Kensinger, Gutchess, & Schacter, 2007; Steinberger, Payne, & Kensinger, 2011).

Memory for negative information includes more item-specific details than memories of neutral or positive information. Test subjects have a harder time remembering a positive item (e.g. a balloon) than a negative detail (e.g. a dirty toilet) (Kensinger et al., 2006; Kensinger, Garoff-Eaton, & Schacter, 2007b). Negative items are integrated with more perceptual processing than positive inputs. (Mickley & Kensinger, 2008; Mickley Steinmetz & Kensinger, 2009), and negative memories form more quickly (Kensinger et al., 2006). Ultimately, the valence of an incident has an impact on the way an event is encoded into memory, and it affects the details that are later remembered about an event (Kensinger, 2011).

In summary, humans are biased toward the negative in many ways. Negative information grabs our attention more strongly than positive information. Negative phenomena and thoughts are more potent than positive ones. When people form impressions from a mix of positive and negative information, the negative dominates. When they consider negative information, people think more about and sift through the nuances of it more than when the information is positive. And negative memories form more quickly and remain in memory longer than positive ones.

While negative biases are evident in both news production and consumption, they are not all bad. The press has been called the Fourth Estate (Carlyle, 1841) because, like the three estates from the *Estates General* of revolutionary France, the press has a great deal of power to

influence people, politics, and policy. In its role as a check on government, journalists will naturally seek out its problems. In the United States, the reporting of Woodward and Bernstein for *The Washington Post* epitomized the importance of this role (Gentzkow, Glaeser, & Goldin, 2006). Their work unearthed criminal activity by officials in the Nixon Administration that caused the president to resign. Surely this oversight function of the press is good for democracy as a protection against the overreach of leaders. As Stuart Soroka (2006) writes, "We might consequently expect that media emphasize negative information in part because it is their job to do so" (p. 374).

However, in recent years scholars have found an intensification of negativity in the news (reviewed in Lengauer, Esser, & Berganza, 2012). As was noted in the introduction, network evening news shows in the US tripled their coverage of crime, especially murders, during the 1990s, a time when the murder rate plummeted (Center for Media, 1997). Three phenomena seem to be at play here in the recent intensification of negativity in journalism. First, the professional and cultural norms of journalists have changed. As was noted above, the aggressive reporting of the likes of Woodward and Bernstein played a crucial role in exposing government misdeeds at the highest levels. However, this critical journalism, an assumption that the government is not to be trusted, has become a cultural norm for many journalists (Westerstahl & Johansson, 1986). Second, the relationship between journalists and public relations professionals has grown more negative. In recent decades, the management of message and spin has become more powerful and professionalized. These non-journalistic sources of news are direct competitors to journalists. Coupled with the critical journalism that started in the 1970s, journalists have grown more combative toward the growing public relations establishment (Blumler, 1997; Zaller, 1999). Finally, competition in journalism has created more negativity.

A more combative approach makes journalists and news sources appear more independent in a bid to win greater market share (Benson & Hallin, 2007; Zaller, 1999).

Negative biases in journalists and news consumers are not the only effects that skew the news. Agenda setting and framing effects direct the news in ways that highlight the negative. To understand these negative bias effects in full, it is important to understand agenda setting and framing effects, which will be investigated below.

Agenda Setting

News does not just happen. It is created by journalists and editors. In other words, the news is constructed, not just reported. News is constructed based on what journalists decide is news (Shoemaker, 2006). This construction sets the agenda for new consumption. In media studies, the agenda setting function of the media is defined as the process by which journalists and editors determine what news gets reported and disseminated. This process of news selection happens at both conscious and unconscious levels (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

To understand the news construction and agenda setting process, it is important to investigate what news is and differentiate it from information, the raw material of news. Information is defined as "knowledge obtained from investigation, study, or instruction" (Merriam-Webster, 2017a). News is defined as "material reported in a newspaper or news periodical or on a newscast listened to the news on the radio" and "matter that is newsworthy" (Merriam-Webster, 2017b) Newsworthy is defined as "interesting enough to the general public to warrant reporting" (Merriam-Webster, 2017c). Therefore, a key difference between news and information is that news must be newsworthy, and to be newsworthy it must be *interesting enough to the general public*. If information is important but not interesting, it may not become

news. If something is interesting but not important, then it may become news. It is easy to find current examples of this unfortunate dichotomy.

An example of news interesting to the public is the coverage of O.J. Simpson's parole hearing. Simpson is a former football star whose murder trial in the 1990s and subsequent legal troubles have been periodic fodder for the news. The tragic fall from grace of a good looking and popular football star provides a compelling story, and the "unsolved mystery" aspects of the murder of his ex-wife and her boyfriend provide true crime drama. It is understandable what makes this an interesting story for many news consumers.

Only July 20 Simpson had a hearing with a judge regarding parole for a 2007 robbery conviction. While "(t)he public remains transfixed on Simpson more than two decades after he was acquitted in the murders of ex-wife Nicole Brown Simpson and Ron Goldman" (Perez, 2017, p. A1), one would be hard pressed to find a convincing argument about how this story is important in public affairs or in the daily lives of news consumers. It is interesting; it is entertaining; it is not important.

An example of important information that is receiving little news coverage is the just-released World Health Organization (WHO) report that reported a dramatic increase in life-saving tobacco control policies in last decade (WHO, 2017). According to this report, tobacco control policies "have saved millions of people from early death, as well as hundreds of billions of dollars in the past decade" (WHO, 2017). This story is clearly more important than O.J. Simpson's parole hearing because the trends reported in the former story impacts millions of lives. Nevertheless, it was O.J., not WHO, that made it above the fold on the front page of the July 20 *USA Today* newspaper.

This interesting/important dichotomy is unfortunate because lifesaving news, like successful tobacco control policies, can inform citizens and set the agenda in public policy debates. While the trend toward tobacco control policies is positive, it is easy to imagine that if this story were on Page One, these policies might be much higher on the public policy agenda and save *even more* lives. Instead, the public is more focused on O. J. Simpson's parole hearing than programs that save millions of lives, in part because journalists and editors have set the agenda this way.

This dichotomy also reflects the news' frequent tilt toward the negative. Simpson's churn through the criminal justice system is a negative narrative, including an infamous murder trial and acquittal and a robbery conviction a decade later. The less-covered WHO report is much more positive. Millions of lives are being saved via tobacco control policies, but few people know. The WHO story might inspire positive emotions like gratitude, hope, and inspiration and therefore improve the well-being of news consumers. Instead, news consumers learn about the next chapter in the sordid life of O. J. Simpson.

This interesting/important dichotomy is one way that the news is constructed and the public news agenda is set. Another way that news is constructed is based on availability of information or stories. Reporting the news is a time- and cost-intensive process that requires journalists to look for evidence, interview witnesses and experts, and verify facts. Government agencies provide information to journalists and the public with their releases of data, reports, and press releases (Bennett, 2004). Public relations (PR) firms craft news stories through their own press releases to construct news for journalists (Davis, 2000). Mark Fishman (1988) studied a California newspaper with a circulation of 45,000 and a full-time news staff of 37. He found that the government and news staff were very attuned to each other, and that the reporters got most of

their news from official government sources. What held true in 1980 held true 30 years later. A

2010 Pew study found that nearly two-thirds of news stories originated from government

sources. Only 14% came from journalists, and the remaining 23% came from other sources,

including universities and interest groups. Much of the information gathered by reporters is fed

to them by bureaucracies, especially government (Pew, 2010).

Journalists rely heavily on information provided by governments and PR firms. What is

fed to them has been digested and makes the work of reporting much easier. While standards of

high-quality journalism direct reporters to do their own reporting (Society of Professional

Journalists, 2011), the rapid news cycle and the business of journalism—stories need to be

produced every day—means that these shortcuts are temptations that most journalists utilize

(Davis, 2000).

These insights about the news gathering process are important for news consumers to

understand. News is not like fruit to be picked from trees; it does not naturally appear. Much of

the news is pre-processed by government agencies, PR firms, and other organizations and

individuals who wish to shape and frame the news. It is good for consumers to be skeptical

because news is *constructed*, and the news consumption agenda is set by journalists.

How journalists choose stories shows negative biases. Journalism scholar Pamela

Shoemaker (2006) puts it this way:

Hard' news and 'breaking' news are generally bad news—crime, political conflict,

threats to the health of the public, sex scandals, dire economic forecasts, war, and death—

but a hard or breaking news story is analogous to hearing about the car crash. The bad

news comes first, and then later news stories tell us about 'developing' aspects of the

event. If developments are negative, they are more likely to become news. Stories

develop until the problems are resolved. Problem resolution is good news, which most of

the time means no news. (pp. 107-108)

O. J. Simpson's parole hearing is an example of Underwood's hard or breaking news. It

involves crime and is salient because it connects to the narrative of the murders of Nicole

Simpson and Ron Goldman and the O. J. Simpson scandals. The long-running O. J. Simpson

crime narrative is often given precedence over more important, more positive stories such as the

WHO report discussed above.

Regardless of how reporters, editors, and government officials set the agenda, there is a

correlation between what the news media presents and what the public believes is important. In

their seminal Chapel Hill study, Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972) found a strong

correlation between what Chapel Hill, North Carolina, voters thought was the most important

election issue and what the local and national news media reported was the most important issue.

These correlations were held true in studies of public perceptions of the petroleum supply in

Germany in the 1970s, drugs in America in the 1980s, environmental news in the US from the

1970s through the 90s, and crime and shark attacks at the start of 21st century (McCombs, 2014).

In short, what the news deems important, news consumers deem important.

In summary, news is often constructed by journalists and editors based on what they

believe will interest audiences. This means important and positive stories, like the WHO story,

may be left out of the news while interesting and negative stories, like O.J. Simpson's parole

hearing, *do* get coverage. This demonstrates how journalists often tilt toward the negative

because these "hard" and "breaking" stories are more interesting for news consumers. Negative

biases may explain this orientation both in journalists and news consumers. News often comes

preprocessed, in the form of press releases, from sources like government sources, PR firms,

universities, and other organizations that seek to tell their own story. These organizations, unlike

journalists, are not constrained by a code of ethics. While the press releases from these

organizations may be true, there is good reason for news consumers to be skeptical. The

workshop proposed in this paper will suggest ways that news consumers can set their own news

agenda, via a healthy news diet, to counteract the agenda setting of journalists and news

organizations.

Framing

Agenda setting involves *which* issues are presented. Framing involves *how* issues are

presented (Weaver, 2007). In a news story, a frame is "a central organizing idea or story line

that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events weaving a connection among them. The

frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue" (Gamson & Modigliani,

1987, p. 143). Iyengar (1991) has identified two kinds of frames, episodic and thematic.

Episodic frames are ones in which a story is presented as a distinct event involving one incident.

The top story in the July 20 *New York Post* website was told in an episodic frame. The story

described a murder that was captured on surveillance video. Apparently one man became angry

at another, started yelling at him, and then stabbed him in the chest. The victim died the same

day (DeGregory & Prendergast, 2017). The *Post* gave no larger frame to the story, like how this

story reflects or does not reflect broader trends in murders in New York City. It would be easy

for a reader to surmise that the world is a dangerous place and that one may be stabbed by an

angry stranger. This episodically framed story also reflects what media studies scholar George

Gerbner (1998) called the mean world syndrome, a belief that the world is more dangerous than

it actually is, a belief caused by the exposure to crime and violence in the mass media. A belief

that murder is more likely in New York City would in fact be wrong. Last year New York had

the lowest murder rate ever recorded for the city (Kirby, 2017).

Episodic frames are very common in the news because they make for good stories. When

consuming news that is presented in episodic frames, people tend to blame any problems on

individuals. For example, if poverty is presented in an episodic frame, poor individuals in the

story are more likely to be blamed for their poverty. Therefore, episodically framed stories are

often inaccurate and negative.

Thematic framing is when events or people are placed in some broader context. News

that is framed thematically is less common. The thematic framing of news requires a big-picture

approach that may include some history, the role of many actors in an issue, and follow-up to

track the long-term arc of the issue. An example of a thematically framed story is Jen Kirby's

article about New York City's 2016 murder rate. Kirby digs into statistical details that paint a

broad picture of New York City crime over the course of a year, including data about the

decrease in shootings, murders, and felonies. Her picture is not all rosy, for she describes how

the murder rate spiked in other cities, and Kirby contrasted conditions in New York to Chicago.

Kirby's thematically framed story provides a more accurate picture of murder in New York

because it reflects the big picture and broad trends. If a news consumer wishes to determine if

the New York's murder rate is rising or falling, Kirby's story answers this question, whereas the

episodically framed story of a stabbing in front of a Brooklyn bodega says something about the

mental state of the alleged perpetrator—one witness said he was a methamphetamine addict

(DeGregory & Prendergast, 2017)—but it says nothing about the state of crime in the Big Apple.

Thematic frames allow for more complexity and ambiguity, which more accurately

reflects our complex and ambiguous world. When consuming news presented in thematic

frames, people tend to blame problems on society and institutions. Therefore, thematically framed stories point readers toward big solutions, not blame of individuals.

News framing and the distinction between episodic and thematic frames are important for news consumers. People should know that how stories are told and what is emphasized are choices made by journalists. Most news stories are told in episodic frames. Iyengar (1991) found that between 1980 and 1986, two-thirds of stories about poverty concerned a particularly poor person. During the same period, three-quarters of the approximately 2000 stories about terrorism featured live reports of events, while only a quarter of the stories examined terrorism as a general problem.

These episodic frames are more compelling to consumers because they involve stories of individuals. While these stories are more engaging, individual stories often do not reflect bigger, broader, and more important realities, evidence and trends. For this reason, news consumers should look for thematic frames in the news they consume. News in thematic frames is more likely to capture the background, trends, and important influences on the incidents or situations described in the news. In the workshop described later in this paper, news consumers will be encouraged to seek news sources that tell stories in thematic frames.

The Negative Effects of Negative News

Negative news has many negative effects. For example, in a poll conducted by the National Public Radio (NPR), the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the Harvard School of Public Health (2014), a quarter of those polled said that the news was one of their biggest daily stressors. In a study, the researcher found that exposure to the news was directly related to depression and anxiety (McNaughton-Cassill, 2001).

Negative news induces negative mood and emotion and causes people to catastrophize personal worries (Johnston & Davey, 1997). Negative news directs attention toward the negative and enhances memory of negative events (Mickley & Kensinger, 2008; Mickley Steinmetz & Kensinger, 2009; Kensinger et al., 2006). Negative news also affects approach and avoidance responses and increases aggressive tendencies (Bushman & Geen, 1990). The negative moods and emotions have many detrimental effects, both to emotional well-being and health. Bad news can strongly affect a person's mood, especially if the news is strongly emotional and emphasizes suffering (Gregoire, 2015). When hearing negative news, as opposed to positive news, consumers feel less emotionally stable and more fearful about possible harm to themselves (Aust, 1985).

TV programs that induce negative moods and emotions, such as anxiety, anger, and disgust, will likely affect how individuals interpret their lives, the kinds of memories recalled, and the level and amount of worry (Davey, 2012). In one study participants watched positive-, neutral-, and negative-valenced TV news bulletins. The negative valence group showed increases in anxiety and sad mood. The effects went beyond the content of the news bulletins. The negative valence group participants also showed a significant increase in tendency to catastrophize personal worries. Thus, negative news bulletins can cause anxiety and sadness in the short term and a tendency to catastrophize concerns (Johnston & Davey, 1997).

Violent TV news induces negative emotions. One pair of studies demonstrated that violent TV news induced primarily negative emotions that varied depending on the type of violence portrayed. Viewers reacted with other-critical emotions, including anger and contempt. The investigators saw these responses as "reflecting a concern for the integrity of the social order and the disapproval of others" (Unz, Schwab, & Winterhoff-Spurk, 2008, p. 141). They also

found that "emotions shown in reaction to the suffering of others, like sadness and fear, occur much more rarely" (Unz, Schwab, & Winterhoff-Spurk, 2008, p. 141).

Negative video in news stories elicits many negative effects. It increases attention and the amount of memory needed to process a message. This increases the ability to retrieve the images from memory. Negative video enhances the recognition of information during the video and inhibits recognition of information that came before the violent video. The use of negative video increases the negative emotional impact, which increases arousal and makes that arousal more negative (Lang, Newhagen, & Reeves, 1996). In an experiment that tested approach and avoidance ratings for TV news images, participants rated the images according to latency-to-response effects. Anger-inducing images were the most memorable, followed by fear- and disgust-inducing images (Newhagen, 1998). In an experiment that captured subjects' psychophysiological responses to real news stories, Soroka and McAdams (2015) found that negative news caused stronger and more sustained reactions compared to positive news. They found "that participants react more strongly to negative than to positive news content.... Our demonstration makes clear that the asymmetry carries over to regular news content as well" (Soroka & McAdams, 2015, p. 13).

Does media violence generate thoughts and emotions related to aggression? A pair of studies explored this question (Bushman & Geen, 1990). In the first experiment participants watched very violent and less violent videos. Participants in the former group exhibited more aggressive thoughts than the latter group. In the second experiment, aggressive thoughts increased with the level of violence in the videos. Physiological responses, in the form of higher systolic blood pressure, were noted in addition to the aggressive cognitions and increased hostility in the most violent videos (Bushman & Geen, 1990).

The negative emotions elicited by negative news—anxiety, anger, aggression, and the like—have been shown to be detrimental to emotional well-being and health. These negative emotions increased anxiety and stress, panic attacks and problems with central nervous system function, respiratory response, digestive system function, cardiovascular function, and immune response (Murphy, 1996).

Anger can have a direct impact upon cardiovascular health through the release of corticosteroids and catecholamine, stress hormones that can produce a cascade of negative effects. Anger is also considered a causal factor for bulimic behavior as well as the development of Type 2 diabetes. Anger is associated with an increase in risk of road accidents while driving. In adolescents, anger is also associated with unhealthy behaviors, including increased use of cigarettes, alcohol, and caffeine as well as a lack of physical exercise (Staicu & Cuţov, 2010). Aggression, which is strongly associated with anger, also causes negative health effects. While aggression is not always verbalized or acted out, it can lead to physical or emotional harm to others (Legg, Gabbey, & Jewell, 2016). Aggression is a causal factor in cardiovascular disease and has been linked to cancer, ulcers, smoking, and psoriasis (Johnson, 1990). Also, aggression aggravates peer relationships (Yamasaki & Nishida, 2009).

Research has shown that negative news has a detrimental impact on well-being. A relatively new sub-field in the social sciences, positive psychology, shows promise in combatting negativity, resetting the news agenda, and reframing the news for improved well-being.

Positive psychology and the news

During the latter half of the 20th century, the field of psychology made many strides in treating mental illness. After World War II, American psychology's primary focus changed

from three goals—curing mental illness, making lives better, and identifying and nurturing high talent—to the one goal of curing mental illness (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). This was a somewhat understandable shift in emphasis toward the negative (i.e., pathology focus). The United States was emerging from a horrific war that left physical and mental scars on hundreds of thousands of soldiers and sailors. The creation of the Veterans Administration in 1946 initiated a funding stream for the treatment of mental illness for veterans. The following year the National Institutes for Mental Health were founded, and, despite its name, the new organization focused on treating illness, not enhancing good health (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). In the United States, the field of psychology grew rapidly as it followed paths created by a massive government funding stream. Outside of this dominant stream, important psychological work toward making life better was done by Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, and other humanistic psychologists (Matsumoto, 2009), but this sub-field never gained traction within mainstream academic psychology. In short, psychology itself seemed to be the subject of negative biases.

At the turn of the millennium, Martin Seligman (2011) and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi founded positive psychology to engage all people, not just the clinical population, in building psychological strengths for a flourishing life. It was a positive turn from the negative focus in psychology. In many ways, it built on the work of humanistic psychology while emphasizing empirical study and evidence (Srinivasan, 2015). One definition of positive psychology is "the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions" (Gable & Haidt, 2005). Christopher Peterson (2008), one of positive psychology's early leaders, defined positive psychology in more succinct and pithy terms: "the scientific study of what makes life most worth living."

Despite its relative youth, the field has flourished and studies have proliferated that demonstrate the efficacy of positive psychology interventions. Peterson (2006, 2008; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) surveyed the first ten years of positive psychology and noted many important findings. In a relatively short time, positive psychology research revealed much about how to live well. Among its findings: Most people are happy and resilient. Happiness, character strengths, and positive relationships cushion many of life's slings and arrows. People with higher life satisfaction tend to have more success at school and work, have better relationships, and enjoy better health. Trauma sometimes leads to disorders, but more often it leads to growth. Engaging work provides meaning and purpose. More money brings more happiness, but at diminishing levels as income rises. Religious beliefs may not rest on empirical proof, but religious people have better mental and physical health. Crisis reveals character. Hedonism feels good, but pursuit of a good life leads to longer lasting happiness. Good days have common traits, notably autonomy, competence, and connection to others (Peterson, 2006, 2008; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). In short, the work of positive psychology has been a refreshingly positive retort to the negative focus of psychology.

Positive emotion research has been an important facet of positive psychology. A powerful counterweight to negative bias is what Fredrickson (2009) calls positivity. Positivity is the multi-faceted power of positive emotions, which Fredrickson lists as joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, hope, pride, amusement, inspiration, awe, and love. Positive emotions feel good, broaden cognitive scope, and build personal resources (Fredrickson, 1998, 2009; Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002). Fredrickson and colleague Christine Branigan (2005) conducted a randomized trial where subjects were primed with positive, negative, or neutral emotions. The positively primed subjects generated more possibilities when asked an open-ended question. This and other

studies suggest that positive emotions broaden our cognitive scope (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005) and builds physical, psychological, personal, and social resources (Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008).

In the Open Heart Study (Fredrickson et al., 2008) subjects either took a loving-kindness meditation course or were put in a placebo group. Those in the meditation group experienced more positivity that grew with time. Most interventions diminish with time, but positive emotion did not for those in the Open Heart Study. The subjects' loving-kindness meditation practice increased daily experiences of positive emotions. As daily positive emotion experiences increased, so too did mindfulness, a sense of purpose in life, and social support. Meantime, participants reported fewer illness symptoms. These increased personal resources predicted improvements in life satisfaction and fewer depressive symptoms (Fredrickson et al., 2008).

Positive emotions are good for your health and build resilience. More positivity leads to decreases in blood pressure, pain, and disease risks. The risks of hypertension, diabetes, and stroke all go down with the experience of more positive emotions. Positivity leads to fewer colds and better sleep. Therefore, by adding more positive emotion to life, individuals will experience many benefits (Fredrickson, 2009). If journalists wrote stories that elicited more positive emotions, they could improve the well-being of news consumers. One of positive psychology's newest sub-fields, Constructive Journalism, is trying to do just that.

"Constructive journalism is an emerging form of journalism that applies techniques from the field of positive psychology to news work to create more productive, engaging news stories while remaining committed to journalism's core functions" (McIntyre, 2015). Practitioners aim to change the field and move it away from its negative focus and instead elicit positive emotions and explore solutions to problems. McIntyre (2015) argues that journalists should consider using

constructive journalism techniques, citing the press' responsibility to minimize harm (Society of Professional Journalists, 2011). Constructive journalism also calls for reporters to move away from an attempt at objectivity and engage in shaping the story for positive impact, both emotionally and toward solutions. Cathrine Gyldensted (2015), one of constructive journalism's founders, asserts that stories should do five things: They should expand the mind, storm the brain, change the question, tell the story right, and move the world. In her view, constructive journalism stories expand the mind by moving away from a disease model of the world. Victims play a major role in many news stories. Gyldensted urges journalists to move the spotlight away from victims toward victors and models of well-being. Next, she suggests that constructive journalism stories storm the brain by building PERMA, Martin Seligman's (2011) construct for well-being: positive emotions, more engagement, better relationships, meaning in life, and seeking and savoring achievement.

Positive News is an exemplary source of constructive journalism stories. Founded in 1993, it describes itself as "the constructive journalism magazine. Online and in print we offer quality, independent reporting on progress and possibility. As a magazine and a movement, we are changing the news for good" (Positive News, n.d.). It offers thematically framed stories, such as "The Under-Reported Decline of Global Poverty" (Hervey, 2017) and "Rage Against the Latrine: The Safer, More Sustainable Loo That's Changing Lives" (Zeldovich, 2017). These articles report uplifting stories of human progress using broad, thematic frames.

Gyldensted (2015) asserts that constructive journalism stories should change the questions they use when reporting and interviewing by adding questions about learning curves, overcoming setbacks, solutions, and visions for the future. Constructive journalism stories should tell the story right by closing right. A seminal study by Kahneman, Fredrickson,

Schreiber, and Redelmeier (1993) demonstrated that the peak and end of an experience are the most memorable parts. Therefore, ending a story with what Gyldensted (2015) calls a constructive closing paragraph can increase well-being in news consumers. Finally, Gyldensted calls on journalists to move the world. So much journalism is oriented toward the past. This is of course understandable and necessary because they are reporting on past events. However, an orientation toward the future can transform the conflicts into possibilities.

Constructive journalism is focused on news production. While the number of constructive journalism outlets expand, none of the biggest news organizations has adopted constructive journalism as its philosophy. But even if news outlets do not change how they report the news, that does not mean consumers are helpless to change the way they consume news. This paper concludes by proposing a half-day positive psychology workshop to empower consumers with tools to combat negative news biases, determine their own news diets, set news consumption agendas, and cast news stories in thematic frames. While the workshop is informed by research, testing will determine the extent to which it mitigates and combats the negative effects of bad news.

Half-Day Workshop

From Negative Bias to Positive News: Reframing the News and Resetting Your News Diet for a Better Life and a Better World

This half-day workshop is designed to help news consumers learn about negative biases in their own psychology and in the news to change their news diet and how they get information about the world.

- Attendees will first examine and evaluate their own news diet and consider changes to it.

- After that, they will understand and identify negative biases and learn how negative news can be countered with positive news and the positive emotions it elicits.

- Participants will then understand agenda setting and framing of the news and how consumers can develop and implement their own news agenda and diet.

- Next, attendees will learn about books and websites that demonstrate the depth and breadth of human progress. The good news in these sources may be able to elicit positive emotions.

Introduction: Your current news diet

Americans consume a great deal of print and digital news but rarely seem to reflect on or analyze the effects of what they are consuming. This news diet—the intake of local, regional, national, and international news from print and digital media sources—has a powerful impact on both emotional well-being and people's understanding of the world. To appreciate the impact of news diet on oneself one should assess it.

Part One Lesson Plan: Your Current News Diet

The objectives of Part One of the workshop are for participants to learn about their news diet and complete a self-assessment to gain awareness of daily news intake and sources.

Lesson Plan:

After greeting workshop attendees and attending to logistical details, the presenter will begin the workshop with a think-pair-share activity. The presenter will ask this question: "Cast your mind back to a time you read a news story you really loved, one that really inspired you. What was it about?" The presenter will give attendees time to think about this for 30 seconds to one minute. Then the presenter will share her own story that is an answer to this question. The point of telling this story is to demonstrate how stories of solutions to problems can be uplifting. Often news stories report on problems but do not look at the broader thematic frame, nor do they report back later when a solution to the problem has been solved or overcome. Research by Gyldensted (2011) and McIntyre (2015) has shown that experiencing stories that elicit positive emotion makes consumers feel positive emotions, which have positive effects on emotional well-being.

The presenter will then tell the story of how President Jimmy Carter decided to eradicate a disease that had ravaged millions of humans for thousands of years. In 1986, Carter began work toward eradicating Guinea worm disease. Thirty years ago, an estimated 3.5 million people a year in 21 tropical countries were afflicted with Guinea worm (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, n.d.). While rarely fatal, Guinea worm disease is painful. The parasitic worm emerges from a painful boil, usually from a person's leg or foot. It can take days or weeks for the parasite to emerge from the wound because Guinea worms are often a meter long (Ruiz-Tiben & Hopkins, 2006). With the help of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the WHO, and UNICEF, Carter led a successful campaign to push the disease to the brink of extinction (CDC, n.d.). In 2016 only 25 cases were reported (WHO, 2017). Guinea worm disease is set to be the second human disease eradicated, after small pox. With steadfast commitment and perseverance, Jimmy Carter has made the lives of millions of people better.

The presenter will then direct attendees to reflect and recall the best news story they have experienced. After giving them a minute to reflect, the presenter will ask them to turn to someone and take turns sharing their best news stories. Then the presenter will ask volunteers to share best news stories with the whole group. After sharing a few stories (no more than five minutes), the presenter will ask the group "How do people feel? Did thinking about, sharing, and hearing best news stories change how you felt?" The presenter will call on some people. If attendees feel more positive emotion after the think-pair-share activity, tell them that is good because experiencing more positive emotion has many health and psychological benefits, and later in the workshop attendees will learn about the science of positivity and positive emotions' effects on well-being.

The presenter says, "The stories we shared parallel some of the principles of constructive, journalism (CJ). You will learn more about CJ later, but for now here is a definition: 'Constructive journalism is an emerging form of journalism that applies techniques from the field of positive psychology to news work to create more productive, engaging news stories while remaining committed to journalism's core functions'" (McIntyre, 2015).

The presenter writes "interest, inform, inspire" on chart paper. She asks, "Did anyone hear an interesting story? What made it interesting?" The presenter will repeat the same kinds of questions for "inform" and "inspire." She then says, "Over the course of this workshop we will seek out stories that interest, inform, and inspire, and create a news diet that provides stories that interest, inform, and inspire.

The presenter will start this section by writing "Diet" on chart paper, and then she will ask the attendees what they think "diet" means. Follow-up questions will include "How is diet

important?" "What happens if your diet is healthy?" "Unhealthy?" "What are the long-term effects of a healthy or unhealthy diet?"

The presenter will share that just as the food you put in your body affects your health, so too does the news you consume. She will share these three research findings about how the stream of negative news degrades mental health: "In a poll conducted by National Public Radio (NPR), the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the Harvard School of Public Health (2014), a quarter of those polled said that the news was one of their biggest daily stressors. One study found that exposure to the news was directly related to depression and anxiety (McNaughton-Cassill, 2001). Another study found that those who watch negative TV news bulletins showed increased anxious and sad moods as well as a significant increase in the tendency to catastrophize personal worries" (Johnston & Davey, 1997).

The presenter will then define news diet for the attendees, which is "the intake of local, regional, national, and international news from print and digital media sources." The presenter will ask the group what some news sources are and write responses on chart paper.

The presenter will then ask participants to stand for an activity. She says, "I am going to ask you a question and then you move to the place in the room to reflect your opinion. Let me first state the question, and then I will show you where you can stand. The question is 'in general, what do you think the quality of your news diet is? Is it healthy, mixed, or unhealthy?' Those of you who think your news diet is healthy will stand toward this end of the room, with the far wall being a 'completely healthy' news diet. The wall on the other side of the room is where you will stand if you have a 'completely unhealthy news diet.' I assume most if not all of us will stand somewhere between these two extremes. Now go find the spot that represents your news diet."

Once everyone has found their spot, the presenter will ask attendees to look around. She

will ask the group "What is the news diet of the people attending this workshop?" "Does

anything stand out or surprise you about the group?" "About yourself?" The presenter will then

ask everyone to return to their seats. If attendees are energized and want to discuss this exercise,

the presenter will allow that discussion to continue for up to three minutes and then move on.

The presenter then introduces the News Diet Self-Assessment (Figure 1) by saying,

"Next you will assess your news diet. I will pass out the News Diet Self-Assessment handout"

(Figure 1). "Please fill this out. If you have any questions, ask me." The presenter will

circulate, answer questions, and help participants. Once all the attendees have finished, the

presenter will ask the group about their responses. She will first ask, "Will someone volunteer to

share what he or she put down for print news sources?" When this person shares, the presenter

will ask people to raise their hands if they subscribe to and/or read the source shared. The

presenter will then call on other people to share a print source that had not yet been mentioned

until all print sources written down by participants have been mentioned. The presenter will then

call on someone else to share which news channels and programs he or she watches. When each

source is mentioned, participants will raise their hands if they also watch that channel or news

program. This process will continue through all the news sources on the handout, or if time is

running short, the presenter will shorten this sharing session so that there is time for the group to

discuss the reflection question, which is this: "Do you notice any patterns, or do you have any

general thoughts after doing this self-assessment?"

To finish this workshop session, the presenter will ask this question of the group:

"Having just completed a news diet self-assessment, think about one thing you can do to improve

your diet. Note that we will work on this later in more depth, so just think of one thing to get

your brain primed for work we will do later." The presenter will take some responses and then

release the group for a five-minute bio break.

Figure 1: News Diet Self-Assessment Handout

News Diet Self-Assessment

Directions: You will be asked to reflect on your news diet (defined below). To the best of your ability, answer all the questions, but do not worry if you cannot remember all your news sources. The objective of this exercise is to create a good (i.e., not necessarily perfect) picture of your news diet.

News Diet: *The intake of local, regional, national, and international news from print and digital media sources.*

List all print news that you are subscribed to and/or read regularly:

List news channels and programs you watch:

List internet news sites you regularly visit:

List social media platforms you regularly visit:

List other sources of news that you regularly consume:

Reflection question: Read through your News Diet Self-Assessment. Do you notice any patterns, or do you have any general thoughts after doing this self-assessment? Feel free to use the back of the paper if you run out of room.

Part Two: Understanding and Countering Negative Biases with Positivity

Humans naturally pay more attention to, respond to, and think about the negative. In psychology, these tendencies are called negative biases, which are systematic errors in perception or judgment that make phenomena, thoughts, assessments, and the like seem worse than they really are. Part Two will begin with an introduction to negative biases. After that attendees will learn about the power of positive emotion: positivity.

Part Two Lesson Plan: Negative Biases and Positivity

The instructor will begin by writing down "If it bleeds, it leads" on chart paper. She will then ask, "What does this mean? To what degree do you think it is true?" The presenter will call on participants to discuss these questions for two or three minutes if the participants seem interested in the subject or want to explore it.

The presenter will say, "This news industry truism reflects a salient trait of journalism: Bad news gets the consumer's attention. Humans naturally pay more attention to, respond to, and think about the negative. These tendencies are called negative biases, which are systematic errors in perception or judgment that make phenomena, thoughts, assessments, and the like seem worse than they really are."

The presenter then asks participants to generate a list of common situations where people notice, think about, talk about, and so on negative things more than positive things. If attendees are not generating ideas, the presenter can suggest some or all of the following: things you notice about your spouse or child, what bosses at work seem to notice, when we look at the mirror, what we spend time thinking about, what we notice about our house or yard, comparing ourselves to others.

The presenter will next ask table groups to put common situations generated by the group into categories. The point of this activity is for attendees to think about the nature of negative biases and how they play out in life. This is done *before* they learn about negative biases in the psychology research literature in order to prime them for learning about the science of negative biases. The presenter will tell the table groups to start categorizing negative situations, and she will then circulate, observe, and ask questions. This categorization activity may be difficult, so the presenter should coach groups through it if they need help. If many groups need help, she can stop the process and then coach one of the tables in front of all attendees and then let all the groups continue having seen the activity modeled.

After all groups have finished, the presenter will ask tables one at a time to share one negative bias category. The presenter will write the category on chart paper and ask if other groups came up with the same or a similar category. The presenter will call on each table one at a time until all categories have been put up on chart paper.

The presenter says to the whole group, "Thank you for generating those categories of negative biases. I had you do this because I wanted to get you to think about negative biases before we dig into the science of them."

"Now I am going to present five categories of negative biases. These are not all the categories, but you will be able to see how they operate in news production and consumption. I will describe the scientific findings about five different categories of negative bias. It will be interesting to see how they are similar to and different from what you came up with." The presenter passes out the "Negative Biases" handout (Figure 2) and reads aloud through "…innate dispositions of the psyche." After reading these sections, she asks, "Are there any questions?" The presenter answers them and then proceeds. Next, she will ask someone to read the first

negative bias explanation. The presenter will then ask the whole group if the negative bias that was read about fits with any of the categories that their group generated. The presenter will proceed through all five biases in this manner. After finishing this she will ask the group if there are any questions about negative biases.

Next the presenter will ask, "Why do you think humans are biased toward the negative?" She will write down the ideas that attendees give. Then the presenter will explain that the most widely accepted explanation is that negative biases helped humans survive, something like this: "For most of the history of our species, humans faced real dangers to life and limb every day. If we did not possess, or develop via evolution, mechanisms to sense, analyze, and respond to the negative—dangers to life and reproduction—we would have gone extinct as a species." The presenter asks the group, "Can you think of any ways that a negative bias, like noticing threats, might have saved early *homo sapiens* on the African savanna?" She will take one or two answers and then move on.

The presenter will go on to explain positivity: "Humans may be biased toward the negative, but we can counteract negativity with positivity. Barbara Fredrickson (2009) defines positivity as the whole range of positive emotions including joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, hope, pride, amusement, inspiration, awe, and love. Just as negative biases helped humans survive on the African savanna long ago, so too have positive biases helped humans over the long history of our species. While negative emotions protect us from dangers, positive emotions communicate what we are doing right or what is right about the environment. Fredrickson (2009) connects these emotions to adaptive benefits in her book *Positivity*. For example, the positive emotion *interest* gives a positive emotional signal that one's surroundings are safe and that new opportunities might be in the environment. The positive emotion *inspiration* gives a

positive emotional signal that the excellence that one sees in another human should be imitated because the behavior may be beneficial for survival and healthy functioning in life.

The presenter will then pass out the "Increasing Positivity" handout (Figure 3). She will read the first paragraph and then ask participants to read the next two paragraphs and bullet points in turn. The presenter will ask for thoughts, insights, and questions as each paragraph or bullet point is read.

After presenting and leading a discussion about increasing positivity and using positivity to improve the news consumption experience, the presenter will say this: "Increasing positivity is all well and good, but the world is getting worse, right? Is not this strong focus on the positive just sticking one's head in the sand?"

To end this session, the presenter will show the first minute of a video interview of Charles Kenny, author of the book *Getting Better*, by *Vox* editor Ezra Klein (2014) (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m6C8soxbN2w). This video explains how humanity has made incredible progress in recent years. Kenny explains positive global trends, including significant increases in life expectancy, human rights, democracy, and school enrollment, as well as decreases in child mortality, murder rates, and battlefield deaths. Kenny concludes his introductory remarks by saying that, aside from the significant problem of climate change, "almost every other trend is just in the right direction worldwide and improvement has been faster in countries that were furthest behind" (Kenny & Klein, 2014).

This one-minute introduction to the video is packed with positive news. It is presented here to jar participants—positively!—toward considering that maybe there is a great deal of good news out there but we are not hearing about it. Another intention is to have attendees reflect on this positive news as they take a 10-minute break before Part Three of the workshop.

Figure 2: Negative Biases Handout

<div align="center">Negative Biases</div>

Negative Biases: systematic errors in perception or judgment that make phenomena, thoughts, assessments, and the like seem worse than they really are. Negative biases have been thoroughly studied in psychological research. The quotes below are from two seminal reviews of the research literature about negative biases.

- "(I)n most situations, negative events are more salient, potent, dominant in combinations, and generally efficacious than positive events" (Rozin & Royzman, 2001, p. 297).

- "(W)hen equal measures of good and bad are present…the psychological effects of bad ones outweigh those of the good ones. This may in fact be a general principle or law of psychological phenomena, possibly reflecting the innate predispositions of the psyche" (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001, p. 323).

In this workshop, you will gain a detailed understanding of five negative biases (described below). The objective is for you to gain awareness of negative biases so that you will be motivated to commit to a healthy news diet and increase positivity (explained in the "Increasing Positivity" handout).

- **Attention to negative stimuli**: Negative events are more powerful than positive ones in eliciting attention. (Carretiéa, Mercadoa, Tapiaa, & Hinojosab, 2001; Fiske, 1980; Ohira, Winton, & Oyama, 1998)

- **Negative potency**: Negative experiences, thoughts, and emotions are more potent than equal positive ones (Rozin & Royzman, 2001; Baumeister et al., 2001).

- **Negativity dominance**: When positive and negative events, objects, individuals, traits, etc. are mixed and an individual must make holistic appraisals, the negative elements are weighted more heavily (Rozin & Royzman, 2001; Baumeister et al., 2001).

- **Greater negativity differentiation**: Negative information is processed in a more thorough, detailed, and complex manner (Rozin & Royzman, 2001; Baumeister et al., 2001)).

- **Negativity Bias in Memory**: Negative memories are susceptible to particular kinds of admissions, omissions, and distortions (Rozin & Royzman, 2001; Baumeister et al., 2001).

Figure 3: Increasing Positivity Handout

Increasing Positivity

Positivity: the whole range of positive emotions including joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, hope, pride, amusement, inspiration, awe, and love (Fredrickson, 2009)

Barbara Fredrickson, in her book *Positivity*, recommends several strategies for increasing positivity. Suggestions for applying positivity to news consumption follow the description of activities for individuals.

- Spot the strengths in the world: Take time to see what is going right...in the people, places, and things around you. When consuming the news, pay attention to the ways in which people are solving problems and improving life.
- Savor the good things: Take time to enjoy the good things in life. Savor the good stories in the news, such as stories about acts of kindness and service.
- Savor the past: Reflect and savor the best things from your past. Regarding the news, reflect on human progress in recent decades, such as how the threat of nuclear war declined significantly after the fall of the Berlin Wall.
- Savor and anticipate the good things in your future: The positive trends that have propelled progress—technologies like mobile phones and accessible transport, and norms like vaccinating children and sending them to school—are here to stay. These trends show no signs of slowing down.
- Savor accomplishments and the praise of others: If you do something well, savor (but do not over-analyze) what you have done well. If others praise you, say thank you and savor it. Savor the accomplishments of the recent past and present. Just as Jimmy Carter's work saved millions from Guinea worm disease, others have saved millions of lives in campaigns against malaria, heart disease, stroke, and Alzheimer's disease.
- Random acts of kindness: People who do favors and kindnesses to others are happier. "Random" is important, because psychological research shows that if we make special kindnesses a part of our to-do list, it will become routine, not special. Hence, acts of kindness at different times and of different kinds may have more positive impact than regular small kindnesses. *Good News Network* publishes many stories of random acts of kindness that can make readers feel positivity and inspire them to do similar good deeds.
- Practice Gratitude: Imagine life without one or some of the blessings you have. In work not included in *Positivity*, Koo, Algoe, Wilson, and Gilbert (2008) found that imagining life without the object of gratitude increased positive affect more than more traditional gratitude exercises. Imagine the world without the recent progress made in peace, safety, medical care, democracy, human rights, and the like and the fact that we have made amazing progress.

- Connect with others: Social connection is very strongly connected to emotional well-being. Tell others about the underreported story of human progress by encouraging them to read *The Better Angels of Our Nature* by Steven Pinker or *Progress: Ten Reasons to Look Forward to the Future* by Johan Norberg. Have them take the news quiz on the homepage of Gapminder.org or watch and then discuss one of Hans Rosling's TED Talks about human progress.
- Feel compassion for others: Loving concern for others is good for physical and mental health. Read stories from *Positive News* and *Good News Network* that highlight individuals performing acts of service to make the world a better place.

Part Three: Constructing the News

News does not just happen. It is created by journalists and editors. This recognition that the news is constructed, not just reported, may help news consumers construct their own news. Participants will construct their own "newspaper" and reflect on the news construction process.

Part Three Lesson Plan: Constructing the News

Lesson Plan:

The presenter will review the content up to this point in the workshop. Then she will ask the question, "Why do stories make the news?" She will call on participants and write down responses on chart paper.

During most of Part Three, the participants will be working in groups of approximately six. The presenter will then pose this question: "In your group of six, discuss what you think makes a news story positive, and what makes a news story negative. You are not asked to find technical definitions; just come up with definitions that you can agree to. You will have four minutes to do this." The groups will then discuss these questions while the presenter circulates to observe and ask questions. After four minutes, the presenter will ask each group to report to the whole group. The presenter will write down these definitions on chart paper.

The presenter explains, "For the purposes of this workshop, I will define positive news story as 'an emotionally positive and accurate story about the world,' and a negative news story as 'an emotionally negative and inaccurate story about the world.' I will add this definition: 'An inaccurate news story is one this is either factually incorrect in part or whole, or strongly biased toward a negative or positive presentation.' Therefore, a story may contain elements of truth but be inaccurate. A story that focuses on the negative facts without recognizing existing positive ones means the story is inaccurate."

She will then explain the next activity: "Each table or group of six will get a major newspaper. News comes in many forms but for this activity we will stick with a traditional format, newspapers. Each group will find up to three negative stories and three positive stories. As you work, discuss why you decided the stories were positive or negative. You may base this on your criteria or my criteria. Are there any general questions before I pass out the papers? I can answer specific ones as I come around." The presenter then passes out different newspapers to different tables. She will pass out one complete newspaper to each group of six, and each group will get a different newspaper: *The New York Times, The New York Post, The Washington Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal,* or *USA Today.* She will circulate and assist as groups work on this project.

When all the groups have finished, with the whole group the presenter asks each table to share one positive and one negative story, as well as why they deemed the stories positive or negative. Then the presenter will ask everyone else in the room, "Why did this story make it into the news?" and call on people for responses. She will work her way around to every group this way.

Next the presenter will show the complete six-minute video interview of Charles Kenny, author of the book *Getting Better* and *The Upside of Down* (described in the "Human Progress Websites, Blogs, and Books" handout), by *Vox* editor Ezra Klein (2014) (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m6C8soxbN2w). The point of showing the whole video is for participants to see that there are broad, powerful, and durable trends in human progress that will likely continue into the future. The positive changes in the world progress that has propelled progress—technologies like mobile phones and accessible transport, and norms like vaccinating children and sending them to school—are here to stay. The Klein/Kenny interview shows, in six

minutes, that there is a mountain of evidence that demonstrates that human progress is broad,

powerful, and durable. These trends are more powerful, durable, and important than the often

petty scandals and controversies that get top billing in the news.

After the Klein/Kenny interview ends, the presenter asks the whole class, "Which stories

reflect a greater impact on everyday people, what the newspapers are reporting or what Charles

Kenny is reporting?" After some discussion, she asks the rhetorical question, "What would the

news be like if the stories that were reported were the ones that Charles Kenny talked about?" If

attendees protest that the negative news is more accurate or more important, tell them that the

next exercise is meant to challenge their perception of the world.

Next, the presenter will say, "We will now do an exercise to see how accurately *you*

perceive your place in the world. You all have heard of the 1%, right? The richest 1%? In the

United States this group is vilified as rich and selfish manipulators. Do you think you are in the

global 1%? On a Post-it note write down whether or not you think you are in the global 1%.

Next you will find out if you are in the 1%. Here is how we will do it. Determine your after-tax

income. I will model. Assume you make $75,000 a year. If you know your after-tax income,

write that down. If not, by multiplying your income by .7 you will determine your approximate

after-tax income; then write it down." The presenter lets participants do this. Once everyone is

done she writes "$32,500 after tax income = Global 1%" (Global Rich List, n.d.).

Presenter asks group, "Does this surprise you? Any guesses about what the median

global income is?" After taking guesses from attendees she will say, "It is approximately

$10,000." Presenter pauses to let sink in. "Reflect on this question: How do your problems

compare to most other people on the planet? Are you surprised how you compare to the rest of

the world? Might our negative biases make us think things are much worse?"

Presenter says, "It should be clear that from income and material measures, most Americans are doing much better than most other humans. Many people think things in the world are getting worse. In a recent poll, only 6% of Americans stated they believe the world will be better in the future (Dahlgreen, 2016). Nearly two-thirds of US respondents think the world is getting worse. Even experts paint a very dire picture of our present. In 2013, US Joints Chiefs of Staff Chairman Martin Dempsey told a Senate committee 'I will personally attest to the fact that (the world is) more dangerous than it has ever been' (Zenko, 2013). Dempsey said that even as there are very few international armed conflicts and battle death rates are near record lows (Kenny & Klein, 2014). Donald Trump ran a successful campaign on the slogan 'Make America Great Again,' suggesting the past was better. Make America Great Again? Fifty years ago life expectancy was 16 years less than it is now. Infant mortality rates were three times higher. Per person income has risen 167 percent, and that figure is adjusted for inflation and purchasing power. There is much less hunger in America and the time children spend in school has more than doubled (Your Life in Numbers, n.d.). America has never been better!

After a dramatic pause, the presenter will say "Let's find out more about the state of the world!"

The presenter will then pass out a card to each table (Figure 4, "Constructing Positive News"). Each group will complete the project following the directions on the card. The presenter will make her way around the room to answer questions or provide help. Once all groups are done, the stories will be shared one at a time and then tacked to a wall/board.

The presenter will then ask the participants what, if anything, they learned from this exercise. She will spend five to ten minutes taking comments from participants. After that she will give the group a five- to ten-minute break.

Figure 4: Constructing Positive News

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Constructing Positive News

You table group will work together to write a headline and a 20-100 word article about the circled topic: population, health, food, energy, environment, technology, growth & inequality, work & life, public sector, global connections, war & peace, politics, violence & rights, education, media, culture. These categories come from Our World in Data, a website that takes an evidence-based, big picture view of the world. Use ourworldindata.org first, and then go to humanprogress.org, yourlifeinnumbers.org, and/or gapminder.org to gather your information. THE KEY is to write a very short article (can be a one-sentence lead) with a catchy headline. Here's an example:

Cell Phone Revolution Transforms Life in East Africa!

Kenya's M-Pesa mobile money service turned ten this year, having served more than 18 million people since 2007. M-Pesa has enabled Kenyans, even the poorest, to pay bills by phone and leverage financial services. Access to mobile money even lifted 2% of Kenya's households out of poverty. Mobile money services are relatively new in the US, but they have been going strong for 10 years in Kenya. [source: Monks, K. (2017, February 24). M-Pesa: Kenya's mobile money success story turns 10. CNN.com. Retrieved from http://www.cnn.com/2017/02/21/africa/mpesa-10th-anniversary/index.html]

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Part Four: Changing Your News Diet

News does not just happen. It is created by journalists and editors. This recognition—

that the news is constructed, not just reported—may help news consumers construct their own

news agenda.

In the previous activity attendees constructed the news based on a different agenda:

reporting on what is going *right* in the world. In Part Four, participants will determine their own

news agenda and news diet.

Part Four Lesson Plan: Setting Your News Consumption Agenda and Changing Your

News Diet

Lesson Plan:

The presenter shares the following with participants: "News does not just happen. It is

constructed by journalists and editors, and they determine the news that gets fed to the public.

This is known as journalism's agenda setting function, defined as the process by which

journalists and editors determine what news gets reported and disseminated. Agenda setting

happens at both conscious and unconscious levels (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Agenda setting is

a powerful effect. Studies have shown that what major news outlets deem to be important is

believed to be important by the general population. This recognition that the news is

constructed, not just reported, may help news consumers question if what is in the news reflects

the real world. In this construction process, journalists set the news consumption agenda for

news consumers.

The presenter says something like, "I propose that you set your own news consumption

agenda with positive psychology in mind. First, think about the kind of news stories you want to

read, watch, or listen to. Then put these news stories into three categories: What stories interest,

inform, and inspire you. Stories that interest you are ones that you want to read for their own

sake. Stories that <u>inform</u> are ones that you may not be interested in intrinsically, but these stories may be important. For example, even if an election is not interesting to you, as a citizen you should consider being informed before casting your vote, so you might want to read about candidates' positions. Finally, stories that <u>inspire</u> are ones that make you better. These stories make you feel more optimistic or happy. These stories demonstrate that there may be problems in the world, but they are tractable and good people are working toward solutions.

The presenter will then say "On a piece of paper, make three columns. At the top of the first column put <u>interest</u>, at the top of the second put <u>inform</u>, and at the top of the third put <u>inspire</u>. Now take a few minutes and think of examples of news stories for each." The presenter say something like this: "I am interested in stories about science, so I follow *Science News* on Twitter and subscribe to the twice-a-month print edition. *Science News* is interesting to me because it features stories about people expanding the boundaries of knowledge through science, but there are no true crime or celebrity gossip stories. For example, the website recently featured stories about how cows produce powerful HIV antibodies that may help with drug development (Cunningham, 2017) and how the development of a genetically modified moth might help against crop pests (Thompson, 2017). These stories may be too nerdy for you, but they interest me, and many of them show how science continues to make life better and create more opportunities for positive change.

"I don't like much of the mainstream news, but I feel like I should be an informed citizen and follow national politics, so I have an online subscription to the *Christian Science Monitor*, which is a respected national news publication that practices constructive journalism. They describe themselves this way: 'We want to help you to see news events as starting points for constructive conversations. We seek to cut through the froth of the political spin cycle to

underlying truths and values. We want to be so focused on progress that together we can provide a credible and constructive counter-narrative to the hopelessness-, anger-, and fear-inducing brand of discourse that is so pervasive in the news' (Christian Science Monitor, n.d.).

"For inspiration, I have a print and online subscription to *Positive News*. The print edition comes out quarterly, but I check the website every few days for stories of inspiration. Here's how they describe their philosophy: 'Positive News is the constructive journalism magazine. Online and in print we offer quality, independent reporting on progress and possibility. As a magazine and a movement, we are changing the news for good' (Positive News, n.d.). Now when you make your list you don't have to name your news source like I did. Just write down the kinds of stories you would like to read, ones that will <u>interest</u>, <u>inform</u>, and <u>inspire</u> you."

The presenter will circulate, offer assistance, and answer questions as attendees work on their interest/inform/inspire lists. When the attendees are done, she will ask for volunteers to share examples of kinds of stories that <u>interest</u>, <u>inform</u>, and <u>inspire</u>.

Presenter says, "The next step is to write a news agenda consumption statement of purpose. The goal of this is to set an intention for your future news consumption. Let me give you examples: 'I will seek stories that interest me, topics that include....' Then you will use the same language frame for inform and inspire. Here's an example." The presenter will read aloud the following news agenda statement:

"I will seek stories that interest me on these topics: space travel, astronomy discoveries, medical breakthroughs, human rights, genetics, international news, green energy, and psychology. I will seek stories that inform me by reading the *Christian Science Monitor* every day and listening to the *Monitor*'s daily audio edition.

I will seek stories that inspire me, topics that include people overcoming life challenges, stories about children who succeed despite setbacks and challenges. I can find these stories on *Positive News* and *Good News Network*.

The presenter will then give attendees time to write their news agenda statement of purpose. Once everyone has finished she will ask for volunteers to share their news agendas.

The presenter says, "The final activity I will do is to introduce constructive journalism news sources and human progress data websites and blogs. I am going to pass out two handouts that describes constructive journalism news sources as well as human progress data websites and blogs." The presenter passes out the handouts (Figures 5 and 6) and, as describes each of the news sources and websites on the handouts.

The presenter wraps up the workshop: "Today we investigated negative biases, in our psychology and in the news, as well as agenda setting effects in the news. We have learned about how positivity may be able to counteract negative bias in the media, for we already know from research, notably that of Barbara Fredrickson, that positivity can counteract the negative effects of negative emotions. You have learned how to construct positive news as well as set your own news consumption agenda and diet. Going forward, I hope that you start getting your news from constructive journalism sources and see the progress that most news organizations ignore. Thank you for attending and stay in touch."

Figure 5: Constructive Journalism Sources

Constructive Journalism Sources

"Constructive journalism is an emerging form of journalism that applies techniques from the field of positive psychology to news work to create more productive, engaging news stories while remaining committed to journalism's core functions" (McIntyre, 2015).

Consider subscribing to or regularly reading the following constructive journalism news sources:

The Christian Science Monitor (https://www.csmonitor.com/) has a weekly print edition and a daily (except weekends) online edition. The paper is a well-established, reputable, Pulitzer Prize winning news source. The *Monitor* aspires "to be so focused on progress that together we can provide a credible and constructive counter-narrative to the hopelessness-, anger-, and fear-inducing brand of discourse that is so pervasive in the news" (Christian Science Monitor, n.d.).

Vox (https://www.vox.com/) is an online news source that frequently highlights positive stories, including the Charles Kenny human progress interview you saw during the workshop, as well as stories about falling teen birth rates (Sitrin, 2017), the SpaceX launch of a reusable rocket that will make space flight cheaper (Resnick, 2017b), and beautiful photos of bees (Resnick, 2017a).

The Huffington Post "Good News" (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/topic/good-news) and **Good News Network** (https://www.goodnewsnetwork.org) are two excellent online sources for stories about people doing good and overcoming challenges.

Humans of New York (http://www.humansofnewyork.com) started as an attempt to photograph ten thousand New Yorkers and morphed into a storytelling project about a diverse selection of Gotham citizens. Humans of New York shifts the agenda away from the rich, powerful, and famous toward the perspective of real people.

Images and Voices of Hope (ivoh) (http://ivoh.org/) is a nonprofit organization that seeks to create positive change through their work in media. They publish several stories each week highlighting the positive and meaningful impact of media on society.

Now determine your news diet. Subscribe to the regular online newsletters for the news outlets described above and limit your news consumption to these sites. Consider giving up TV news, which tends to have more images of violence and high-arousal content that can trigger stress and anxiety (Johnston & Davey, 1997).

Figure 6: Human Progress Websites, Blogs, and Books

Websites and Blogs About Human Progress

Gapminder (https://www.gapminder.org/): Gapminder was founded by physician and statistician Hans Rosling, a TED Talk regular who died in February 2017. His son Ola now runs the Gapminder Foundation, which aggregates social and economic statistics on Gapminder Tools, a user-friendly statistics platform that makes it easy to view trends in income, mortality, education, and the like. There are several entertaining and informative videos about such topics as poverty, population, health, and wealth.

Human Progress (http://humanprogress.org/): This website is both a data aggregator and blog that features stories and information about human progress. In a recent blog post, Marian Tupy (2017, July 21) listed forty ways in which life has gotten better, including the following: more people than ever own a personal computer, the expected average years of schooling has never been higher, global coal consumption is trending downward, thus easing CO_2 emissions, and chlorofluorocarbon consumption has reached an all-time low.

Our World in Data (https://ourworldindata.org/): Directed by Max Roser at Oxford, this website provides dozens of charts, maps, and infographics that show how humans have made progress according to most metrics (the environment being a significant exception).

Your Life in Numbers (http://yourlifeinnumbers.org/): Here is how they describe their site: "Is life getting better or worse? Watching the news, it's easy to become pessimistic. But don't forget that reporting is often selective. Bad news leads to higher ratings, while good news is seldom covered. So, what is the real state of humanity? Consider the changes that have occurred in the world over the last half-century" (Your Life in Numbers, n.d.). Your Life in Numbers allows users to compare the world when they were born with the world today.

Books About Human Progress

Diamandis, P. H., & Kotler, S. (2012). *Abundance: The future is better than you think*. New
        York, NY: Simon and Schuster. The authors paint a picture of accelerating progress due
        to breakthroughs in computing, energy, medicine, and scientific research. Our
        interconnected world means innovations are shared and spread quickly.

Eggers, W. D., & Macmillan, P. (2013). *The solution revolution: How business, government, and social enterprises are teaming up to solve society's toughest problems*. Brighton, MA: Harvard Business Review Press. The authors argue that increasing collaboration between sectors is hastening progress in repairing stubborn social problems.

Kenny, C. (2012). *Getting better: Why global development is succeeding--and how we can improve the world even more*. New York, NY: Basic Books. Kenny's book tells the story of rapid progress in poor countries thanks in great part to globalization.

Kenny, C. (2014). *The upside of down: Why the rise of the rest is good for the West*. New York, NY: Basic Books. Many critics of globalization have voiced concerns about the rise of developing countries, especially giants like India and China, are a threat to the West. Kenny argues that globalization brings greater trade, stability, and peace to all countries, rich and poor.

Norberg, J. (2016). *Progress: Ten Reasons to Look Forward to the Future*. London, England. Oneworld Publications. This is a short, excellent introduction to the current state of human progress.

Pinker, S. (2012). *The better angels of our nature: Why violence has declined*. New York, NY: Penguin Books. This long and deeply researched book tracks the decrease of violence from the Renaissance to today. Pinker convincingly demonstrates that since the fall of the Berlin Wall, violent and crime and war have decreased dramatically.

Ridley, M. (2010). *The rational optimist: How prosperity evolves*. New York, NY: Harper. Ridley argues that the cumulative nature of human learning means that ideas mix and mate at an accelerating pace. In today's interconnected world, this mix happens faster and faster, bringing greater prosperity around the world.

Shermer, M. (2015). *The moral arc: How science makes us better people*. New York, NY: Henry Holt. This detailed book tracks the rise of liberal democracy, civil rights and liberties, equality before the law, open borders, and the expansion of compassion toward all people and even animals.

Wright, R. (2001). *Nonzero: The logic of human destiny*. New York, NY: Vintage. The author applies game theory to the study of human history and argues that increasing cooperation has made humankind more peaceful and prosperous.

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