

# The Impact of Exemplars on Perception Gap of Risk and Behavioral Intentions

## INTRODUCTION

- ❖ Individuals tend to believe that they are less susceptible to health threats than others, termed as unrealistic optimism.
- ❖ Exemplars in health messages often elicits a third-person effect (TPE, Zillmann, 2006; Zillmann & Brosius, 2000).
- ❖ If the increase of exemplars elevates the risk perception levels to both self and others, does it decrease the size of this TPE-like perception gap?

## STIMULI

Condition One:  
Control, no exemplars



Condition Two:  
Exemplar intense



Condition Three  
Non-exemplar intense



## HYPOTHESES & RESEARCH QUESTIONS

H1: The more exemplars used in a health message, the more likely individuals will perceive risks to the health threat, regardless of the format.

H2: After exposure to health messages with exemplars, individuals would perceive others to be more susceptible to the health threat than themselves.

RQ1: Is the magnitude of TPE-like risk perception related to the amount of exemplars used in a health message?

RQ2: Does the risk perception gap predict behaviors/behavioral intentions above and beyond the influence of perceived risks to oneself and to others?

## STUDY DESIGN

- ❖ An online experiment with three conditions (control condition, exemplar intense condition, non-exemplar intense condition) was conducted ( $N = 90$ ).

- ❖ Age: 21 – 65 ( $M = 36.64$ ,  $SD = 10.01$ )
- ❖ Males: 51%; Females: 49%

### Dependent Variables:

- ❖ Perceived risk to self ( $M = 4.54$ ,  $SD = 1.63$ , Cronbach's  $\alpha = .91$ )
- ❖ Perceived risk to others ( $M = 4.81$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ , Cronbach's  $\alpha = .95$ )
- ❖ Prevention intention of self:  
Use sunscreen ( $M = 5.78$ ,  $SD = 1.61$ ), decrease/avoid indoor tanning ( $M = 6.26$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ), cover with clothes ( $M = 5.89$ ,  $SD = 1.42$ ), and check skin regularly ( $M = 5.63$ ,  $SD = 1.58$ )
- ❖ Prevention intention of others:  
Use sunscreen ( $M = 4.94$ ,  $SD = 1.40$ ), decrease/avoid indoor tanning ( $M = 5.12$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ), cover with clothes ( $M = 4.60$ ,  $SD = 1.50$ ), and check skin regularly ( $M = 4.55$ ,  $SD = 1.38$ )
- ❖ Perception gap of perceived risk ( $M = -.27$ ,  $SD = 1.36$ )

### Control Variables:

- ❖ Issue involvement ( $M = 5.43$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ , Cronbach's  $\alpha = .85$ )
- ❖ Multitasking ( $M = 3.92$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ , Cronbach's  $\alpha = .79$ )
- ❖ Video engagement ( $M = 4.77$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ , Cronbach's  $\alpha = .75$ )
- ❖ Response efficacy ( $M = 6.05$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ , Cronbach's  $\alpha = .89$ )
- ❖ Self efficacy ( $M = 5.90$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ , Cronbach's  $\alpha = .90$ )
- ❖ Perceived severity ( $M = 6.21$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ , Cronbach's  $\alpha = .90$ )

## RESULTS

Table 1  
*Perception of Risk to Self*

	Risk to Self		
	Control	Exemplar-less-intense	Exemplar-intense
<i>M</i>	4.62 <sub>a</sub>	4.05 <sub>a</sub>	5.01 <sub>b</sub>
<i>SE</i>	.27	.26	.28

*F(2, 84) = 3.17, p < .05, partial  $\eta^2 = .07$ .*

Note. Means with no subscripts in common differ at  $p < .05$ . Means adjusted for issue involvement, video engagement, and multitasking.

Table 2  
*Perception of Risk to Others*

	Risk to Others		
	Control	Exemplar-less-intense	Exemplar-intense
<i>M</i>	4.94 <sub>a</sub>	4.75 <sub>a</sub>	4.74 <sub>a</sub>
<i>SE</i>	.18	.18	.19

*F(2, 84) = 0.37, p = .69, partial  $\eta^2 = .01$ .*

Note. Means with no subscripts in common differ at  $p < .05$ . Means adjusted for issue involvement, video engagement, and multitasking.

Table 3  
*Perception Gaps across Conditions*

	Perception Gap of Risk		
	Control	Exemplar-less-intense	Exemplar-intense
<i>M</i>	0.32	0.70	-0.27
<i>SD</i>	0.24	0.24	0.25

Note.  $N = 90$ .

Table 4  
*Regression Analyses Testing the Impact of Perception Gap on Prevention Intentions*

	Self-Checking			
	Sunscreen Use	Avoid Tanning	Clothing (Covering)	Self-Checking
First Block				
Issue Involvement	.17	-.06	-.01	.11
Video Engagement	.02	-.03	.22	.37**
Multitasking	.02	-.08	-.06	-.09
Second Block				
Perceived Severity	.05	.37*	-.09	.11
Response Efficacy	-.06	.13	.08	-.01
Self-Efficacy	.42**	-.27*	.40**	.22
Sum of Perceived Risks to Self and Others	.23*	.02	-.19	.17
Perception Gap of Risk	-.19*	-.04	-.09	-.001
<i>R<sup>2</sup> change*</i>				
	.21***	.29***	.13*	.07*

Note.  $N = 90$ .

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

## DISCUSSION

- ❖ Using exemplars could enhance the persuasive power of health messages by elevating the health risk to themselves.
- ❖ However, this effect was not revealed when individuals were asked to report risk perceptions to others.
- ❖ Participants tended to believe that others were more susceptible to the threat than themselves.
- ❖ The exemplar-intense condition showed individuals perceived themselves to be more susceptible to the threat than others.

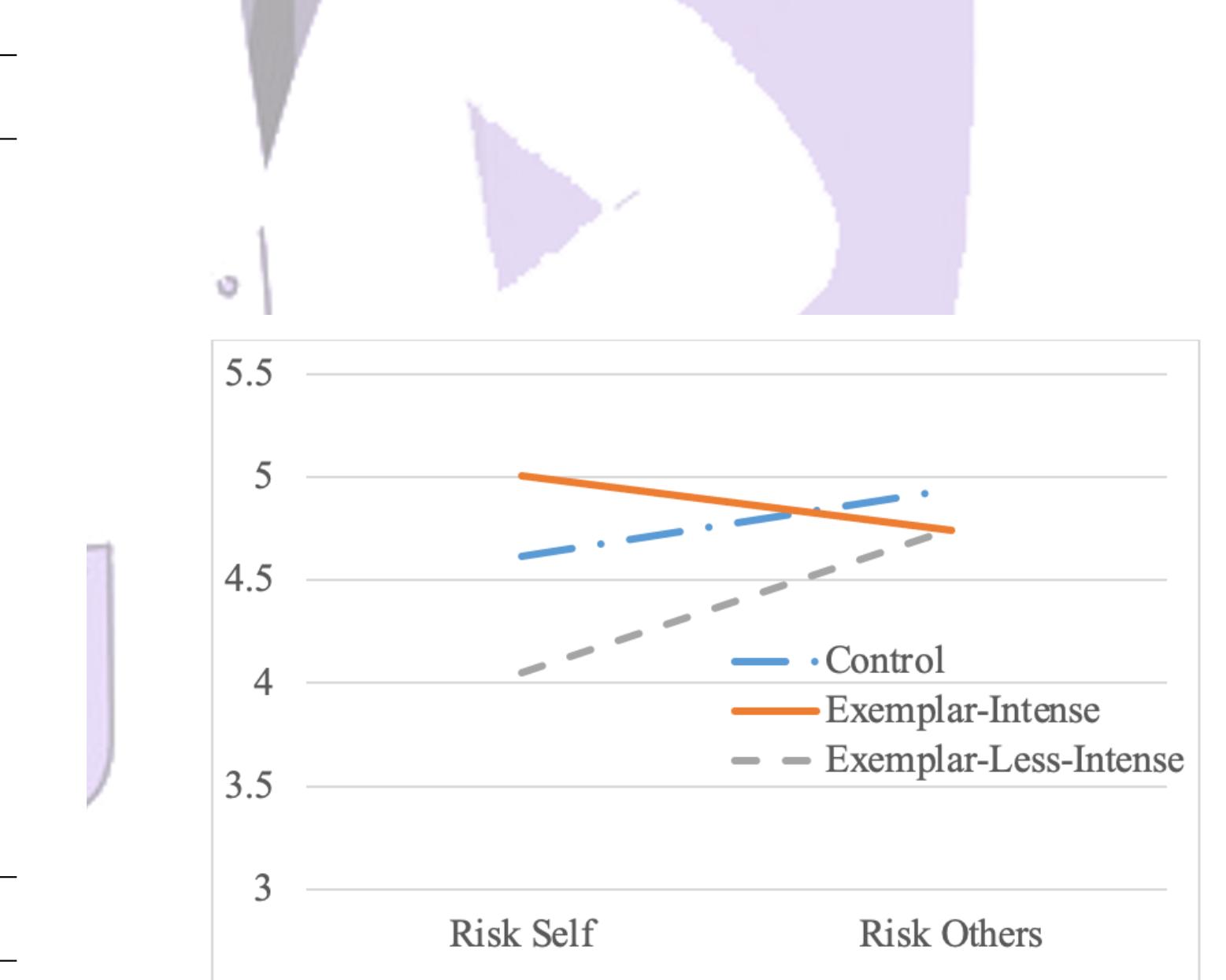


Figure 1. Perceived risks to self and to others across conditions.