



Perceived media bias and third person effect: Comparisons of Americans, Korean Americans, and Koreans in the United States

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ABSTRACT

The current study examined the third person effect (TPE) in relation to media coverage of the shooting incident at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (i.e., Virginia Tech.) in April of 2007. TPE refers to tendency to perceive that media coverage influences others (i.e., the third persons) to a greater extent than self (i.e., the first person). Three groups (non-Korean Americans, Korean Americans, and Koreans living in the United States) were compared with one another for their perceptions of media coverage. Specifically, this study investigated how much individuals perceived media to influence themselves versus the American public and the Korean American public. Additionally, the current study examined the extent to which individuals' focus on the shooter and their perceptions of media bias were related to TPE. The results showed support for TPE in terms of media coverage resulting in negative feelings toward Korean Americans and Koreans. As individuals focused more on the shooter and also perceived greater media bias against Korean Americans, they thought that the media coverage of the incident would be more likely to influence the American public to have negative feelings about Koreans and Korean Americans.

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On April 16, 2007 in the United States, a college student killed 32 students and faculty in classrooms on the campus of at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, commonly known as Virginia Tech. The perpetrator also injured 17 people and eventually killed himself. In the aftermath of the incident, national and international media outlets delivered extensive coverage of the incident. The perpetrator (Seung Hui Cho) was identified as a person who emigrated to the US from Korea. As much as the attack itself was tragic, the perpetrator's ethnicity was shocking, especially to Korean Americans and Korean communities in the US.

Depending on how to categorize the perpetrator, he could be seen as having one of three social identities. First, the perpetrator was an American who had lived in the US for most of his life. Second, the perpetrator was a Korean American as a young immigrant. Third, the perpetrator was a Korean national who was attending a college in the United States. These three social identities of the perpetrator made it relevant to examine three groups of individuals who watched media coverage of the shooting incident and had the same social identities with the perpetrator. Thus, the current study focused on the three groups relevant to media influence perceptions: non-Korean Americans (hereafter, Americans), Korean Americans (with either US citizen or permanent resident status), and Koreans temporarily living in the US (i.e., Korean nationals studying or working in the US and their family members).

The current study used the third person effect (TPE) model that Davison (1983) characterized as estimating a

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greater media influence on others than on self. That is, media's "greatest impact will not be on 'me' or 'you,' but on 'them'—the third persons" (Davison, 1983, p. 3). TPE has been observed across diverse forms of media messages such as defamatory articles in newspapers, political campaigns, movie ratings on the Internet (Duck, Hogg, & Terry, 1998; Hong & Park, 2011; Perloff, 1993). Applying TPE to a real-life case—the O.J. Simpson trial, Driscoll and Salwen (1997) found that African Americans exhibited greater TPE than did Whites. Past research showed that media influence was estimated to be greater on out-group members than on in-group members when the media message was favoring out-group members, but individuals estimated greater media influence on themselves than on out-group members when the media message was favoring one's own group (Duck et al., 1998; Elder, Douglas, & Sutton, 2006). Generally, TPE was more likely to occur when media influence was perceived as harmful than when media influence was beneficial (Eveland & McLeod, 1999; Perloff, 1996).

Past research on TPE examined receiver variables (e.g., age, gender, race), message variables (e.g., socially desirable versus undesirable contents, rap music lyrics, advertising contents), and social distance between the first person (participants in research) and the third persons (others whom media are assumed to influence) by varying the types of the third persons (Andsager & White, 2007). In general, the factors affecting TPE can be grouped into three categories: characteristics of participants, others whom participants perceive media to influence, and message topics (the contents or effects of news coverage).

In the context of the Virginia Tech shooting incident, individuals might have differed in the extent to which they perceived media coverage of the incident and the perpetrator as negative depending on whether or not they shared the same ethnicity with the perpetrator. Asians and Asian Americans are stereotyped as the model minority in the US, being academically successful and staying out of trouble. A person with Korean ethnicity being the perpetrator of the deadliest school shooting in the US to date may bring some concerns to Koreans and Korean Americans regarding what the American public will think about Koreans and Korean Americans. The United States had other school-shootings (the Columbine shooting) and past incidents of racial backlash (e.g., anti-Muslim attitudes after the 9/11 terror, riots after the Rodney King case). Collective guilt and fear of a racial backlash were mentioned as reasons why the Korean President, the Korean ambassador to the US, and other Koreans and Korean Americans in leader positions offered public apologies and condolences regarding the Virginia Tech shooting incident (Chong, 2008; Hong, 2007; Lim, 2007).

With regard to the third person effect (TPE), the characteristics of the shooting incident makes three dimensions of TPE relevant. First, participant groups are individuals who form the media influence perception. Americans, Korean Americans, and Koreans in the US are three groups of participants in the current study who assess how much influence media coverage has on themselves and on others. Second, comparison groups are others whom participant groups perceive media to influence. In the current study, two types of comparison groups are American public

and Korean American public. With regard to the shooting incident, participants, especially Koreans and Korean Americans, may be concerned about what most Americans in general would think about individuals share the same ethnicity with the perpetrator. On the other hand, especially in the case of Koreans living the US, they may be also concerned about what Korean Americans would think about Koreans coming to the US and studying in American universities. International students and expatriates from Korea are temporarily residing in the US, but Korean Americans are either US citizens or permanent residents who have settled in the US. Koreans temporarily living in the US and Korean Americans may have different perspectives on social issues in the US. Third, the object groups are others about whom media coverage could generate negative feelings. Because of the ethnicity of the perpetrator, individuals may perceive that the public may view two object groups (Koreans and Korean Americans) negatively by association. In short, TPE was examined with the American public and the Korean American public as the comparison groups for the participants in the current study (Americans, Korean Americans, and Koreans living in the US) to estimate the effects of media coverage of the incident on generating negative feelings toward two types of object groups (Korean Americans and Koreans). Fig. 1 illustrates the three dimensions of TPE that were used to create three types of TPE.

This paper constructed three types of TPE. The first type was *American TPE for Korean Americans* that specified American public as the comparison group and Korean Americans as the object group. That is, American TPE for Korean Americans was assessed by comparing individuals' perceptions of how the media coverage of the incident affected self to have negative feelings toward Korean Americans with their perceptions of how the media coverage of the incident affected American public to have negative feelings toward Korean Americans. The second type was *American TPE for Koreans* that designated American public as the comparison group and Koreans as the object group. American TPE for Koreans involved comparing individuals' perceptions of how the media coverage of the incident affected self to have negative feelings toward Koreans living in Korea with their perceptions of how the media coverage of the incident affected American public to have negative feelings toward Koreans living in Korea. The third type was *Korean American TPE for Koreans* that specified Korean American public as the comparison group and Koreans as the object group. Korean American TPE for Koreans included comparing individuals' perceptions of how the media coverage of the incident affected self to have negative feelings toward Koreans living in Korea with their perceptions of how the media coverage of the incident affected Korean American public to have negative feelings toward Koreans living in Korea.

1. Research questions and hypotheses

With the American public as the comparison group and Korean Americans as the object group, it is expected that for media coverage of the incident generating negative feelings about Korean Americans, people may perceive greater media influence on the American public than on

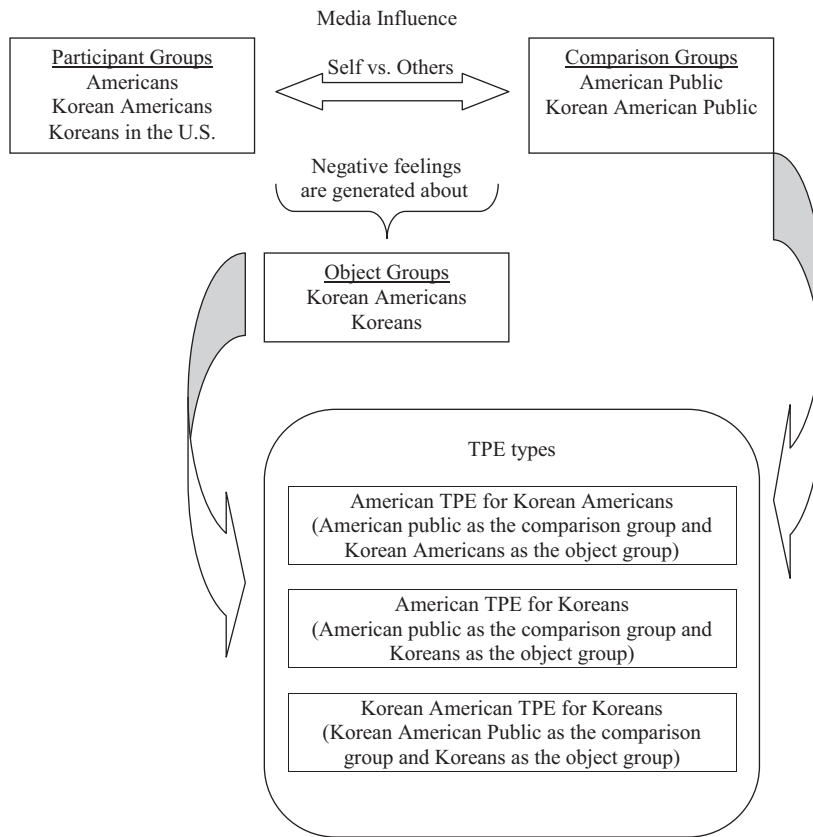


Fig. 1. Group categories used for creating different types of third person effect (TPE). Participant groups make the perception of media influence on self and comparison groups. Comparison groups are whom participant groups perceive media to influence. Object groups are whom media coverage generates negative feelings about.

themselves (hereafter, American TPE for Korean Americans). With the American public as the comparison group and Koreans as the object group, it is also expected that for media coverage of the incident generating negative feelings about Koreans, people may perceive greater media influence on the American public than on themselves (hereafter, American TPE for Koreans). But because three participant groups can differ from one another for the size of TPE, the following research question is posed:

Research Question 1: Will Americans, Korean Americans, and Koreans living in the U.S. differ from one another for the sizes of American TPE for Korean Americans (RQ1a) and American TPE for Koreans (RQ1b)?

With the Korean American public as the comparison group and Koreans as the object group, it is expected that for media coverage of the incident generating negative feelings about Koreans, people may perceive greater media influence on the Korean American public than on themselves (hereafter, Korean American TPE for Koreans). Considering that Korean Americans and Koreans may perceive smaller social distance among themselves, however, Korean Americans and Koreans may not be different from one another as they could be from Americans.

Research Question 2: Will Americans, Korean Americans, and Koreans differ from one another for the size of Korean American TPE for Koreans?

1.1. Media bias against Koreans and Korean Americans

Individuals may vary in their perception of bias in media messages. Media can be perceived as biased even when the media content is neutral (Vallone, Ross, & Lepper, 1985). Additionally, individuals estimate public opinion based on the media content to which they are exposed, assuming that other people are also exposed to the same media content (Gunther, 1998; Gunther & Christen, 1999, 2002). In other words, individuals regard public opinion on an issue as unfavorable when they themselves judge media coverage of the issue as unfavorable.

In the case of the Virginia Tech shooting incident, individuals might perceive that media coverage of the shooting incident contained a negative bias against an ethnic and social group to which the perpetrator belonged. Thus, individuals might believe that other people could feel unfavorably toward the group as a result of media influence. In addition, if individuals perceive media bias as negative and harmful, they may be more likely to overestimate media influence on others rather than media influence on themselves.

Hypothesis 1. The extent to which individuals perceived the media coverage of the incident to be negative about Korean Americans and about Koreans will be positively related to the size of American TPE for Korean Americans and Koreans (H1a) and the size of Korean American TPE for Koreans (H1b).

1.2. Focus on the shooter

Paying attention to the perpetrator who was identified sometimes as a Korean American or as a Korean may influence the size of TPE when media was perceived to influence other people's perception of Korean Americans or Koreans. Since individuals have tendency to project their own attitudes and behaviors onto others (Gershoff, Mukherjee, & Mukhopadhyay, 2008; Ross, Greene, & House, 1977), individuals who pay close attention to the perpetrator may believe that others do as well. The identity of the perpetrator could have become more salient as individuals were more likely to pay attention to the perpetrator, and as they might have been more likely to perceive that Americans evaluated the incident based on the salient feature of the incident, namely the perpetrator. In sum, as individuals paid more attention to the perpetrator discussed in media, they could have been more likely to perceive Americans as having negative feelings about Korean Americans and Koreans. Similarly, the more likely individuals were to pay attention to the perpetrator, they might have been more likely to perceive Korean Americans to be more influenced by media coverage of the incident generating negative feelings about Koreans.

Hypothesis 2. Focusing on the perpetrator will be positively related to the size of American TPE for Korean Americans and Koreans (H2a) and the size of Korean American TPE for Koreans (H2b).

Table 1 specifies independent and dependent variables for each research question and hypothesis. Measurement item examples are also shown in Table 1.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

A total of 419 non-Korean Americans, Korean Americans, and Koreans living in the US participated in the current study. After institutional review board (IRB) approval was obtained on April 20, 2007, data collection began on April 21 and ended on April 26. Each participant completed questionnaire once during the data collection period. Because the incident might have become less salient as time went on, and thus resulted in an attenuated effect of the stimulus information about the identity of the perpetrator, both online and offline data collection methods were employed for speedy data collection. Student participants were recruited from Universities in Michigan, USA. Non-student participants were recruited by using snow-ball sampling from the authors' personal contacts and by visiting public places such as airports and laundromats. Student participants received extra credit and non-student participants received monetary incentive

(2–5 dollars) for research participation. Table 2 shows demographic information of participants.

2.2. Measures

All the measurements used 5-point Likert response format (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). The questionnaire was translated from English to Korean by a person fluent in both languages and back-translated by another person fluent in both languages. Any discrepancies in translation were discussed and resolved via a group discussion. American participants received the English version of questionnaire. Korean American and Korean participants were provided with options of choosing either the English or the Korean version of questionnaire. Table 3 shows means, standard deviations, and correlations of main variables.

2.2.1. Media bias against Koreans

The extent to which individuals perceived that the media was portraying Koreans negatively was measured with two items ($\alpha = .84$). The items were "The media coverage of the incident is predominantly negative about Koreans" and "The media coverage of the incident is biased against Koreans."

2.2.2. Media bias against Korean Americans

The extent to which individuals perceived that the media was portraying Korean Americans negatively was measured with two items ($\alpha = .93$). The items were "The media coverage of the incident is predominantly negative about Korean Americans" and "The media coverage of the incident is biased against Korean Americans."

2.2.3. Focus on the shooter

Three items ($\alpha = .92$) measured the extent to which individuals focused on the shooter. The items were "When I think of the shooting incident, I tend to focus on the shooter (Seung Hui Cho)," "When I think of the shooting incident, I tend to pay attention to the shooter (Seung Hui Cho)," and "Regarding the shooting incident, the shooter (Seung Hui Cho) comes to my mind first."

2.2.4. Third person effect (TPE)

TPE scores were calculated in three ways. First, American TPE scores for Koreans included the American public as the comparison group to whom individuals were compared for media influence concerning the object group of Koreans. Second, American TPE scores for Korean Americans specified the American public as the comparison group and Korean Americans as the object group. Third, Korean American TPE scores for Koreans specified the Korean American public as the comparison group and Koreans as the object group. Items measuring TPE are summarized in Table 1.

Because TPE was assessed as three types, TPE became dependent variables that were measured three times for each participant. That is, three scores of TPE were nested within each individual. On the other hand, focus on the shooter and media bias perception were measured once for each participant. Hierarchical linear modeling (HLM)

Table 1

Summary of research questions, hypotheses, measurement items, third person effect (TPE) types, and findings.

	Independent variables (IV)	Examples of survey questions for IV	Dependent variables (DV)	Survey questions for DV (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree)	Comparison group of TPE	Object group of TPE	Summary of findings
RQ1a	Three groups of participants: Americans, Korean Americans, and Koreans living in the US	Participants were categorized as belonging to one of three groups (Americans, Korean Americans, and Koreans living in the US) based on their answers to the questions below “Indicate your ethnicity” “Are you a citizen of the US?” “Are you a citizen of Korea?” “Are you a permanent resident in the US (i.e., a green card holder)?”	American TPE for Korean Americans	Scores on the item, “The media coverage of the incident affects me so that I get negative feelings toward Korean Americans,” were subtracted from scores on the item, “The media coverage of the incident affects American people so that they get negative feelings toward Korean Americans.”	American public	Korean Americans	No difference among the three groups of participants (see Table 3)
RQ1b	Three groups of participants: Americans, Korean Americans, and Koreans living in the US		American TPE for Koreans	Scores on the item, “The media coverage of the incident affects me so that I get negative feelings toward Koreans living in Korea,” were subtracted from scores on the item, “The media coverage of the incident affects American people so that they get negative feelings toward Koreans living in Korea.”	American public	Koreans	No difference among the three groups of participants (see Table 3)
RQ2	Three groups of participants: Americans, Korean Americans, and Koreans living in the US		Korean American TPE for Koreans	Scores on the item, “The media coverage of the incident affects me so that I get negative feelings toward Koreans living in Korea,” were subtracted from scores on the item, “The media coverage of the incident affects Korean American people so that they get negative feelings toward Koreans living in Korea.”	Korean American public	Koreans	Korean American TPE for Koreans was greater among American participants than among Korean American participants (see Table 3)

Table 1 (Continued)

	Independent variables (IV)	Examples of survey questions for IV	Dependent variables (DV)	Survey questions for DV (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree)	Comparison group of TPE	Object group of TPE	Summary of findings
H1a	Media bias against Koreans (MBK)	"The media coverage of the incident is predominantly negative about Koreans."	American TPE for Korean Americans and Koreans	American TPE for Korean Americans and American TPE for Koreans were treated as one type of TPE, namely, American TPE, in hypotheses testing because American TPE for Korean Americans and American TPE for Koreans were strongly correlated with one another ($r = .64$)	American public	Korean Americans and Koreans	No significant relationship between MBK and American TPE
	Media bias against Korean Americans (MBKA)	"The media coverage of the incident is biased against Korean Americans." (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree)					Positive relationship between MBKA and American TPE (see Table 4)
H1b	Media bias against Koreans (MBK)	(1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree)	Korean American TPE for Koreans	Scores on the item, "The media coverage of the incident affects me so that I get negative feelings toward Koreans living in Korea," were subtracted from scores on the item, "The media coverage of the incident affects Korean American people so that they get negative feelings toward Koreans living in Korea."	Korean American public	Koreans	No significant relationship between MBK and Korean American TPE
	Media bias against Korean Americans (MBKA)						No significant relationship between MBKA and Korean American TPE (see Table 4)
H2a	Focus on the perpetrator (FP)	"When I think of the shooting incident, I tend to focus on the shooter (Seung Hui Cho)." (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree)	American TPE for Korean Americans and Koreans	American TPE for Korean Americans and American TPE for Koreans were treated as one type of TPE, namely, American TPE	American public	Korean Americans and Koreans	Positive relationship between FP and American TPE (see Table 4)
H2b	Focus on the perpetrator (FP)		Korean American TPE for Koreans	Scores on the item, "The media coverage of the incident affects me so that I get negative feelings toward Koreans living in Korea," were subtracted from scores on the item, "The media coverage of the incident affects Korean American people so that they get negative feelings toward Koreans living in Korea."	Korean American public	Koreans	No significant relationship between FP and Korean American TPE (see Table 4)

Table 2

Demographic information of participants in each group.

	American participants	Korean American participants	Koreans living in the US
<i>n</i>	156 students 67 non-students	3 students 54 non-students	40 students 99 non-students
Age	<i>M</i> = 26.59 <i>SD</i> = 10.36 Range = 18–67	<i>M</i> = 35.81 <i>SD</i> = 9.18 Range = 21–65	<i>M</i> = 31.82 <i>SD</i> = 4.72 Range = 21–50
Gender	62.2% women	66.7% women	64% women
Ethnicity	81.4% White 8.6% African American 0.9% Native American 1.8% Asian American excluding Korean American 2.3% Hispanic 0.9% Mixed 4.1% Unidentified		
Citizenship or resident status	All US citizens	42% US citizens 58% permanent residents in the U.S. Participants had lived in the US for 10.36 years on average (<i>SD</i> = 5.5)	All South Korean citizens

can help analyze repeatedly measured data, treating the within-individual repeat measures as level-1 data and the between-individual as level-2 data (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). That is, as shown in Table 3, because the three TPE scores were moderately correlated with one another, it was necessary to separate within-individual level variance (variance across the three types of TPE) and between-individual level variance (variance across individuals) in the total variance of TPE. HLM examined TPE type distinction as a level-1 predictor explaining within-individual level variance of TPE. HLM examined the effects of continuous variables (media bias and focus on the shooter) and categorical variables (social group categories of Americans,

Korean Americans, and Koreans living in the US) as level-2 predictors explaining between-individual level variance of TPE.

3. Results

3.1. Preliminary analysis

Table 3 shows ANOVA results for comparing the three participant groups (Americans, Korean Americans, and Koreans living in the US) for each of the variables. Means and standard deviations for each group are also provided in Table 3 Compared to Americans, Korean Americans

Table 3

Correlations, means, standard deviations, and ANOVA results.

		Media bias against Koreans	Media bias against Korean Americans	Focus on the shooter	American TPE for Korean Americans	American TPE for Koreans	Korean American TPE for Koreans
Media bias against Korean Americans		.64**					
Focus on the shooter		.27***	.26***				
American TPE for Korean Americans		.12*	.23***	.14**			
American TPE for Koreans		.19***	.23***	.10*	.63***		
Korean American TPE for Koreans		-.02	-.03	-.02	.26***	.45***	
Total	<i>M</i>	2.44	2.64	3.27	0.91	0.75	0.27
	<i>SD</i>	(0.97)	(1.02)	(1.10)	(1.20)	(1.14)	(1.09)
Americans	<i>M</i>	2.07 _a	2.22 _a	2.73 _a	0.81 _a	0.68 _a	0.38 _a
	<i>SD</i>	(0.76)	(0.83)	(1.06)	(1.07)	(0.94)	(0.92)
Korean Americans	<i>M</i>	2.99 _b	3.23 _b	3.88 _b	0.96 _a	0.61 _a	-.01 _b
	<i>SD</i>	(1.05)	(0.97)	(0.75)	(1.32)	(1.39)	(1.08)
Koreans in the US	<i>M</i>	2.82 _b	3.07 _b	3.88 _b	1.06 _a	0.91 _a	0.25 _{ab}
	<i>SD</i>	(0.98)	(1.02)	(0.77)	(1.31)	(1.30)	(1.29)
		<i>F</i> (2, 416) = 43.88, <i>p</i> < .001, $\eta^2 = .17$	<i>F</i> (2, 415) = 49.53, <i>p</i> < .001, $\eta^2 = .19$	<i>F</i> (2, 416) = 78.90, <i>p</i> < .001, $\eta^2 = .28$	<i>F</i> (2, 414) = 1.96, <i>p</i> = .14, $\eta^2 = .01$	<i>F</i> (2, 414) = 2.13, <i>p</i> = .12, $\eta^2 = .01$	<i>F</i> (2, 414) = 4.61, <i>p</i> = .01, $\eta^2 = .02$

df = 414; Means with different subscripts (a and b) in each column are significantly different from one another at *p* < .05.

* *p* < .05.

** *p* < .01.

*** *p* < .001.

and Koreans living in the US were more likely to perceive media bias against Koreans and Korean Americans and more likely to focus on the shooter, whereas Korean Americans and Koreans in the US did not differ from one another. As shown in Table 3 for American TPE for Koreans and American TPE for Korean Americans, the three participant groups did not differ from one another. On the other hand, for Korean American TPE for Koreans, Americans had greater TPE scores than did Korean Americans, while Koreans living in the US did not differ from either Americans or Korean Americans.

American TPE for Korean Americans and American TPE for Koreans were treated as one type of TPE, namely, American TPE, in the main analyses because American TPE for Korean Americans and American TPE for Koreans were more strongly correlated with one another ($r = .64$) than with Korean American TPE for Koreans as shown in Table 3. Additionally, when the main analyses were done separately for American TPE for Korean Americans and American TPE for Koreans, the results for American TPE for Korean Americans were highly similar to the results for American TPE for Koreans (the predictors significant for American TPE for Korean Americans were also significant for American TPE for Koreans). Korean American TPE for Koreans was treated as another type of TPE, namely, Korean American TPE.

3.2. Overview of main analyses

HLM examined the effects of both within-individual level (level-1) predictors and between-individual level (level-2) predictors on TPE types (American TPE and Korean American TPE). At the within-individual level, the three dependent variables (i.e., TPE scores) were measured for each participant and the TPE scores were either for the American public or the Korean American public as the comparison group. For between-individual level predictors, in addition to media bias against Koreans and Korean Americans and focus on the shooter, two dummy-coded social group category variables, Korean Americans (0 = non-Korean American participants as the reference group, 1 = Korean American participants) and Koreans (0 = non-Korean American participants as the reference group, 1 = Korean participants living in US), were included in the analysis. Intraclass correlation (ICC) was .40, $\chi^2(415) = 1230.24$, $p < .001$, indicating that 40% of the variance in the TPE scores was attributed to the between-individual level and 60% of the variance was attributed to the within-individual level.

Within-individual level predictors, the type of TPE was included in the analysis to explain the within-individual level variance of TPE scores. The results showed that American TPE significantly differed from zero, coefficient = 0.83, $SE = 0.05$, $t(415) = 16.08$, $p < .001$, and Korean American TPE differed from zero, coefficient = 0.27, $SE = 0.05$, $t(415) = 5.02$, $p < .001$. Differentiating TPE scores into American TPE and Korean American TPE explained 38% of the within-individual variance in TPE scores. American TPE scores had a significant amount of variance across individuals, between-individual variance = 0.86, $\chi^2(414) = 1784.30$, $p < .001$. Korean American TPE scores also had a significant

amount of variance across individuals, between-individual variance = 0.67, $\chi^2(414) = 950.24$, $p < .001$.

Between-individual level predictors were introduced to the analysis to see if any of them would explain the between-individual level variance in TPE scores. The between-individual level predictors explained 8.68% of the between-individual level variance in American TPE and 2.26% of the between-individual level variance in Korean American TPE. The analyses involving between-individual level predictors provided testing of the hypotheses and research questions as discussed below.

3.3. Research questions and hypotheses testing

Research Question 1 asked whether Korean Americans and Koreans, compared to Americans (i.e., non-Korean Americans), would exhibit a greater or smaller size of American TPE (the American public the comparison group of “the third person” and Korean Americans and Koreans as the object groups). As shown in Table 4, compared to Americans, Korean Americans showed smaller American TPE, coefficient = -0.36 , $p = .04$. Koreans, however, did not differ from Americans, coefficient = -0.12 , $p = .37$.

Research Question 2 asked whether Korean Americans and Koreans, compared to Americans, would exhibit a greater or smaller size of Korean American TPE (the Korean American public as the comparison group of “the third person” and Koreans as the object group). As shown in Table 4, compared to Americans, Korean Americans showed smaller Korean American TPE, coefficient = -0.58 , $p < .01$. Koreans, however, did not differ from Americans, coefficient = -0.22 , $p = .13$.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that individuals’ perceptions of media bias against Koreans and Korean Americans would be positively related to the sizes of TPE. Perception of media bias against Korean Americans was a significant and positive predictor of American TPE, coefficient = 0.26, $p < .001$, but not of Korean American TPE, coefficient = 0.02, $p = .79$. Perception of media bias against Koreans was not a significant predictor of either American TPE (coefficient = 0.02, $p = .81$) or Korean American TPE (coefficient = 0.03, $p = .70$).

Hypothesis 2 predicted that focus on the shooter would be positively related to the sizes of TPE. For American TPE, the extent to which individuals focused on the shooter was a significant and positive predictor, coefficient = 0.11, $p = .04$. Focus on the shooter, however, was not a significant predictor of Korean American TPE coefficient = 0.05, $p = .41$.

4. Discussion

Results from the current study indicated that Korean Americans, compared to Americans, exhibited a smaller TPE in terms of media coverage resulting in negative feelings toward Korean Americans and Koreans when the comparison group was the American public. Although the ANOVA results did not show such a difference, HLM analysis showed the difference between Korean Americans and Americans for American TPE when other variables (media bias and focus on the shooter) were included in the model. In other words, compared to Americans, Korean Americans perceived less discrepancy between themselves and

Table 4
Hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) results of the final model.

Fixed effect	Coefficient	se	t-ratio	p-value
American TPE				
Intercept, γ_{10}	0.92	0.08	11.81	<.001
Korean Americans, ^a γ_{11}	−0.36	0.17	−2.09	.04
Koreans living in US, ^b γ_{12}	−0.12	0.13	−0.90	.37
Media bias against Koreans, γ_{13}	0.02	0.07	0.24	.81
Media bias against Korean Americans, γ_{14}	0.26	0.07	3.99	<.001
Focus on the shooter, γ_{15}	0.11	0.05	2.04	.04
Korean American TPE				
Intercept, γ_{20}	0.42	0.08	5.08	<.001
Korean Americans, γ_{21}	−0.58	0.18	−3.16	<.01
Koreans living in US, γ_{22}	−0.22	0.14	−1.53	.13
Media bias against Koreans, γ_{23}	0.03	0.07	0.39	.70
Media bias against Korean Americans, γ_{24}	0.02	0.07	0.27	.79
Focus on the shooter, γ_{25}	0.05	0.06	0.82	.41
Random effect	Variance component ^c	df	χ^2	p-value
American TPE, u_{1j}	0.78	409	1646.73	<.001
Korean American TPE, u_{2j}	0.65	409	927.02	<.001
Level-1 effect, r_{ij}	0.52			

Equations illustrating the model with no level-1 intercept: $TPE_{ij} = \beta_{1j}(\text{American TPE}_{ij}) + \beta_{2j}(\text{Korean American TPE}_{ij}) + r_{ij}$; $\beta_{1j} = \gamma_{10} + \gamma_{11}(\text{Korean Americans}_j) + \gamma_{12}(\text{Koreans living in US}_j) + \gamma_{13}(\text{media bias against Koreans}_j) + \gamma_{14}(\text{media bias against Korean Americans}_j) + \gamma_{15}(\text{focus on the shooter}_j) + u_{1j}$, $\beta_{2j} = \gamma_{20} + \gamma_{21}(\text{Korean Americans}_j) + \gamma_{22}(\text{Koreans living in US}_j) + \gamma_{23}(\text{media bias against Koreans}_j) + \gamma_{24}(\text{media bias against Korean Americans}_j) + \gamma_{25}(\text{focus on the shooter}_j) + u_{2j}$, TPE_{ij} is TPE for TPE i ($i = 1, 2, 3$) in individual j ($j = 1, 2, \dots, J$); # grand-mean centered; r_{ij} is a random error; u_{1j} is the unique increment to the American TPE slope associated with individual j ; and u_{2j} is the unique increment to the Korean American TPE slope associated with individual j .

^a Dummy-coded with 0 = non-Korean American participants, 1 = Korean American participants.

^b Dummy-coded with 0 = non-Korean American participants, 1 = Korean participants temporarily living in US.

^c Variance component pertains to estimated variability in the American TPE and in the Korean American TPE that are left unexplained after including predictors in the model.

other Americans in terms of negative feelings toward the group of Korean Americans and Koreans as a result of media coverage of the event. These results are consistent with past research findings that individuals' cultural orientations (collectivism vs. individualism) were related to the size of TPE (Lee & Tamborini, 2005; Willnat, Takeshita, & Lopez-Escobar, 2002). It has been argued that individuals in collectivist culture are more likely to perceive themselves as interdependent with other people than those in individualist culture are (Triandis, 1995). Thus, the former are less likely to see themselves as unique or different from others than the latter are (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Given that individuals' own differentiation from others is one of the psychological mechanisms underlying TPE, it is possible that individuals with collectivist orientations are less likely to exhibit TPE than those with individualist orientations. In the current study, Korean Americans exhibited less TPE than Americans did, perhaps because Korean Americans might have acquired or maintained collectivist orientations through socialization and interactions with their Korean or Korean American family members or friends.

However, the lack of difference in TPE between Koreans and Americans may be because the comparison groups were the Korean American public and the American public with whom Koreans living in the US may not feel interdependent. Koreans' collectivistic tendency may have not been activated so that both Americans and Koreans living in the US were similar in assessing the amount of media influence on the comparison groups versus self.

The current study also found that, in terms of media coverage resulting in negative feelings about Koreans, Korean

Americans exhibited less TPE than Americans did when the comparison group was the Korean American public. One explanation might be that Korean Americans perceived media coverage of the event as undesirable for the group with whom they shared the same ethnicity (Korean) and also perceived that they shared this belief with other Korean Americans. As a result, they exhibited little TPE. On the other hand, Americans exhibited TPE when the comparison group was the Korean American public perhaps probably because the desirability of influence might have not been salient among Americans.

As individuals perceived more media bias against Korean Americans and Koreans, they estimated larger media influence on Americans than on themselves when the media influence could be about generating negative feelings about Korean Americans and Koreans. These results were consistent with the prediction that media bias, perceived as negative and harmful, was related to the size of TPE, implying that individuals' motivations for self-enhancement may be an explanation for TPE. However, individuals' perceptions of media bias were related to TPE when individuals estimated media influence on Korean Americans (Korean American TPE for Koreans). One explanation is that when individuals estimated media influence on Korean Americans, they might have reasoned that Korean Americans would not have negative feelings toward the group with whom they shared the same ethnicity despite their perceptions of media bias. Thus, these results indicate that the relationship between media bias perception and the size of TPE can depend on two factors: the comparison group type on whom individuals estimate media

influence and the object group type on whom media contents focus.

Lastly, as individuals were more likely to focus on the shooter, they showed greater American TPE (i.e., estimating greater media influence on Americans than on themselves concerning media content potentially generating negative feelings about Korean Americans and Koreans). As predicted, individuals who were more likely to focus on the shooter might have believed that Americans did so as well and that Americans developed negative feelings about Korean Americans and Koreans. However, focus on the shooter was not significantly related to Korean American TPE when the comparison group was the Korean American public, perhaps because individuals might have considered that Korean Americans would not develop negative feelings about the group with whom they shared the same ethnicity.

The current finding may need to be interpreted cautiously, however, because of three main limitations. First, due to the difficulty with locating Korean American participants in the short data collection period, the number of Korean American participants was small, compared to American and Korean participants. Second, participants filled out the questionnaire on different dates. Participants who completed the questionnaire later might have had more exposure to media coverage of the incident than those who completed the questionnaire earlier. When the different dates that the participants filled out the questionnaire were checked to see if they substantially affected any of the current findings, they did not. Nevertheless, it is possible that other factors unmeasured in the current study could have had indirect effects on the some of the findings across the different dates. Third, the generalizability of the current findings can be limited because the Virginia Tech shooting was a unique incident. Future research may need to examine whether the TPE findings of this study can apply to other incidents or situations involving other ethnic groups.

This study focused mostly on perceptions regarding media coverage of the shooting incident and did not examine how this perception would relate to behaviors or manifest itself in the real world. But when cautiously speculated, a couple of possibilities may exist. First, perceptions about media bias and media influence may generate efforts to take actions about media content. Past research on TPE examined behavioral willingness or intentions to restrict certain content of media (e.g., censoring harmful contents) (Andsager & White, 2007). On the 16th and 17th of April 2007, the Asian American Journalists Association (AAJA) issued media advisories to ask for caution in mentioning racial identifiers and nationality and immigration status of the perpetrator in news coverage in order to avoid unfair treatment of people with a certain racial and national heritage. But it has been reported that AAJA received numerous e-mails opposing AAJA's media advisories (Wu, 2007). AAJA's media advisories and some people worrying about AAJA's action perpetuating racism may reflect the current findings about TPE, focus on the shooter, and concern about media bias against Koreans and Korean Americans.

Second, negative consequences may result from perceiving that media can influence the American public to

have negative feelings about Koreans and Korean Americans. Although visible racial backlashes of a large scale with regard to the Virginia Tech shooting incident have not been reported, other instances of racial backlashes and discrimination in the past may have provided reasons for Asian Americans to worry about prejudice. For example, perceptions of prejudice and discrimination after the 1992 Los Angeles riots were related to Korean Americans' lower levels of happiness and greater mental health issues in the areas nearby where the riot happened (Sasao & Chun, 1994). Even positive stereotype perceptions (e.g., good at math, the model minority) can bring stress to Asian Americans. For example, when an ethnic identity is heightened, concerns about failing to meet public or external expectations can make Asian Americans to have difficulty with concentration and perform poorly (Cheryan & Bodenhausen, 2000). Additionally, violation of a positive stereotype can result in negative consequences. For example, for the same inaccurate answers to math questions, Asian American students received lower grades than European American students (Ho, Driscoll, & Loosbrock, 1998). The most of school-shootings in the United States were done by white Americans (Newman & Fox, 2009). But a massive murder done by a Korean American perpetrator may violate the model minority image. Ethnic minority people pay more attention to individuals on news who share the same ethnicity than ethnic majority people do (Knobloch-Westerwick, Appiah, & Alter, 2008). As Chong (2008) aptly put it, "We want race to matter when we are fighting the onslaught of racial backlash and stereotyping, and yet we do not want race to matter because it is the consideration of race that produces backlash in the first place" (p. 28).

Aforementioned, caution needs to be exercised in interpreting the current findings and speculating implications thereof. Given the negative consequences of social tragedies, however, the present study highlights the need to examine issues affecting Asian Americans including Korean Americans and Koreans in the US. For example, what are the short-term and long-term effects of media contents and social tragedies featuring Asian Americans? Considering that Asian Americans consist of diverse ethnicities from Asia, how will Asian Americans of different origins differ from one another in their responses regarding socially and ethnically prominent incidents? Insofar as the answers to such questions may have a bearing on the psychological well-being of Asian Americans, it may be worthwhile for researchers to further investigate the effects of salient incidents involving Asian Americans.

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