**Supplementary Procedure**

***Scenario List***

***COVID-Related Scenarios***

* This single parent is a health care worker and has to work during the pandemic. No one is available to watch their children.
* This person is considered a high-risk individual, but their family members are not engaging in social distancing.
* This person's roommate keeps hosting parties despite the on-going pandemic.
* This person has recently been tested for COVID-19. They are lost in the downtown area.
* This person requires at-home oxygen to help with their COVID-19 treatment. They are unable to walk to their mailbox.
* This person posts on social media that they are completely out of essentials (like toilet paper and hand soap) due to panic buying.

***Everyday Scenarios***

* This person is locked out of their house.
* This person’s car has broken down on the side of the road. They have no way home.
* This person is going door-to-door asking for non-perishable food items.
* This person is being harassed on the train by other passengers.
* This person appears to have dementia and is wandering aimlessly on the street.
* This person is out of breath and coughing on a hiking trail. They appear to be having an asthma attack.

**Study 2:**

***Imagined Scenario Transcript Examples***

Younger Adults

1. I would use online sources to help them find somewhere to stay. Find locations, help call leads, help pack their stuff. I have a vehicle so I could help move items if needed.
2. I would go talk to them to see if they could tell mee anything and if not I would call maybe the hospital or take them there…
3. I would donate any extra supplies I have, as long as I could verify that I wasn't being scammed.
4. I would help this person report their roommate. Inform their roommate in how this pandemic will keep going if you keep doing this.

Older Adults

1. I would see what I have in my house and give them something that was non-perishable. I would feel sad for that person and want to help.
2. If I had extra, I would be willing to share with them and hope that others would as well. I have had trouble getting essentials as well and could not afford…
3. Call for help immediately, hopefully you have a cell phone to help them, most people hiking have a cell or unit to contact someone if you find…
4. I would not. There are just too many scammer and hustlers pretending to be in need around this town. I wouldn't even answer the door and I might call the cops to report them.

**Supplementary Results**

**Study 1:**

**Effects of Episodic Simulation on Phenomenological Experiences**

Subjective theory of mind was measured by asking participants to rate their consideration of the thoughts and feelings of the person in need. To test whether episodic simulation, story type and age influenced these phenomenological measures, each measure was submitted to a separate 2 (Condition: No-helping vs. Imagine Helping) X 2 (Story Type: Everyday vs. COVID-19) X 2 (Age: Younger vs. Older Adults) mixed ANOVA.

For the emotional concern index, there was a main effect of age, *F* (1, 198) = 7.35, *p* = .007, ηp2 = 0.036, reflecting older adults’ (*M* = 4.33, *SE* = 0.09) higher emotional concern compared to younger adults (*M* = 3.96, *SE* = 0.12). None of the other main effects or interactions were significant, *p*’s > .066.

For scene imagery index, there was a main effect of condition, *F* (1, 198) = 13.89, *p* < .001, ηp2 = 0.066, reflecting greater scene imagery ratings in the episodic simulation (*M* = 4.07, *SE* = .09) compared to judging journalistic style condition (*M* = 3.91, *SE* = .10). We also found a main effect of story type, *F* (1, 198) = 8.14, *p* = .005, ηp2 = 0.039, such that scene imagery was greater in the COVID-related (*M* = 4.05, *SE* = .10) compared to everyday scenarios (*M* = 3.94, *SE* = 10). Further, there was an interaction between condition and story, *F* (1, 198) = 6.46, *p* = .012, ηp2 = 0.032, suggesting that the effect of condition on scene imagery differed across story types. Follow-up t-tests revealed that scene imagery was higher after episodic simulation of everyday scenarios (*M* = 4.03, *SE* = .10) compared to judging journalistic style (*M* = 3.73, *SE* = .11), *t* (199) = 4.12, *p* < .001. Conversely, for COVID-related stories, scene imagery did not increase after episodic simulation (*M* = 4.05, *SE* = .10) compared to judging journalistic style (*M* = 4.00, *SE* = .10), *t* (199) = 0.91, *p* = .365. Furthermore, t-tests revealed that baseline scene imagery was higher for COVID-related compared to everyday scenarios, *t* (199) = 3.60, *p* < .001, but there was no difference in scene imagery across stories following episodic simulation, *t* (199) = 0.32, *p* = .747. None of the other main effects or interactions were significant in the mixed ANOVA, *p*’s > .183.

For subjective theory of mind, our mixed ANOVA revealed a main effect of condition, *F* (1, 198) = 9.30, *p* = .003, ηp2 = 0.045, reflecting greater consideration of the thoughts and feelings of the person in need after episodic simulation (*M* = 5.07, *SE* = .08) compared to judging journalistic style (*M* = 4.95, *SE* = .07). There was also a main effect of story, *F* (1, 198) = 5.62, *p* = .019, ηp2 = 0.028, reflecting greater consideration of the thoughts and feelings of the person in need in everyday (*M* = 5.11, *SE* = .08) compared to COVID-related scenarios (*M* = 4.91, *SE* = .08). We also found a main effect of age, *F* (1, 198) = 15.12, *p* < .001, ηp2 = 0.071, driven by older adults’ higher (*M* = 5.27, *SE* = .08) consideration for the thoughts and feelings of the person in need compared to younger adults (*M* = 4.75, *SE* = .12). Further, there was an interaction between story and age, *F* (1, 198) = 7.45, *p* = .007, ηp2 = 0.036, suggesting that subjective theory of mind differs for younger and older adults across story types. Follow-up t-tests revealed that older adults’ subjective theory of mind was higher for everyday (*M* = 5.43, *SE* = .08) compared to COVID-related scenarios (*M* = 5.10, *SE* = .10), *t* (99) = 4.34, *p* < .001. Conversely, younger adults’ subjective theory of mind did not differ between everyday (*M* = 4.78, *SE* = .12) and COVID-related scenarios (*M* = 4.71, *SE* = .13), *t* (99) = 0.88, *p* = .379. None of the other interactions in the mixed ANOVA were significant, *p*’s > .068.

**Study 2:**

**Willingness to Help by Condition and Story Manipulation with Safety Ratings as a Random Factor**

To assess whether participants’ ratings of how safe it is to help in each story influenced the best fit model generated for Study 2, the same model was reproduced with the addition of safety ratings as a random factor. Replicating the main analysis from Study 2, best fit model estimates indicate that there was an effect of Condition, *B* = 0.42, *SE* = 0.08, *t*(1715) = 4.94, 95% CI [0.24, 0.58], such that willingness to help was higher following episodic simulation of helping relative to judging journalistic style (see Figure 2 for observed means). As with the findings of the main analysis, we found an interaction between condition and age which was explained by older adults’ higher willingness to help in the journalism condition, *B* = 0.37, *SE* = 0.17, *t*(265.4)= 2.25, 95% CI [0.05, 0.70], but not in the episodic simulation condition, *B* = 0.10, *SE* = 0.16, *t*(228.6) = 0.60, 95% CI [-0.22, 0.41]. Thus, the addition of participant safety ratings as a random factor did not change the overall findings of the best fit model.

**Table S1**

*Best fit model for Willingness to Help - Study 2 with safety ratings as a random factor*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Study 2 – Willingness to Help** | | |
| *Predictors* | *Estimates* | *CI* | *p* |
| (Intercept) | 4.46 | 3.88 – 5.03 | **<0.001** |
| Condition | 0.42 | 0.25 – 0.58 | **<0.001** |
| OA x No Helping | 0.37 | 0.05 – 0.70 | **0.024** |
| OA x Imagine Helping | 0.10 | -0.22 – 0.41 | 0.550 |
| **Random Effects** | | | |
| σ2 | 1.81 | | |
| τ00 id | 1.09 | | |
| τ00 StoryNumber | 0.40 | | |
| |  | | --- | |  |   τ00 safety | 0.34 | | |
| ICC | 0.48 | | |
| N id | 187 | | |
| N StoryNumber | 12 | | |
| N Safety | 7 | | |
| Observations | 1897 | | |
| Marginal R2 / Conditional R2 | 0.011 / 0.485 | | |

*Note*: Reference groups for contrasts were the Journalism Condition, and Younger Adults

**Effects of Episodic Simulation on Phenomenological Experiences**

In keeping with Study 1, emotion scales were averaged to form an emotional concern index, and ratings of scene coherence and detail were averaged to form a scene imagery index. To test whether episodic simulation, story type and age influenced participants’ phenomenological experiences, we conducted separate 2 (Condition: No-helping vs. Imagine Helping) X 2 (Story Type: Everyday vs. COVID-19) X 2 (Age: Younger vs. Older Adults) mixed ANOVAs on emotional concern, scene imagery, and subjective theory of mind.

For the emotional concern index, our mixed ANOVA revealed a main effect of condition, *F* (1, 167) = 20.25, *p* <.001, ηp2 = 0.108, reflecting higher emotional concern after episodic simulation (*M* = 4.22, *SE* = .09) compared to when judging journalistic style (*M* = 3.96, *SE* = .10). There was also an interaction between condition and age, *F* (1, 167) = 4.33, *p* =.039, ηp2 = 0.025, suggesting that the effect of condition on emotional concern differed in younger and older adults. Follow-up t-tests revealed that older adults exhibited greater emotional concern after episodic simulation (*M* = 4.42, *SE* = .11) compared to younger adults (*M* = 4.07, *SE* = .12), *t* (185) = 2.11, *p* = .037. When judging the journalistic style, there was no difference in emotional concern between older (*M* = 4.12, *SE* = .13) and younger adults (*M* = 3.94, *SE* = .13), *t* (185) = 0.90, *p* = .317. None of the other main effects or interactions were significant, *p*’s > .126.

For the scene imagery index, our mixed ANOVA revealed a main effect of condition, *F* (1, 167) = 21.42, *p* <.001, ηp2 = 0.114, reflecting participants’ higher scene imagery ratings after episodic simulation, (*M* = 4.09, *SE* = .11) compared to when judging journalistic style (*M* = 3.78, *SE* = .11). There was also a main effect of story, *F* (1, 167) = 18.33, *p* <.001, ηp2 = 0.099, reflecting higher scene imagery in COVID-related (*M* = 4.05, *SE* = .11) compared to everyday stories (*M* = 3.85, *SE* = 11). None of the other main effects or interactions were significant, *p*’s > .132.

Finally, for subjective theory of mind, our mixed ANOVA revealed a main effect of condition, *F* (1, 167) = 7.94, *p* =.005, ηp2 = 0.045, reflecting participants’ higher consideration of the thoughts and feelings of the person in need after episodic simulation (*M* = 5.08, *SE* = .09) compared to when judging journalistic style (*M* = 4.92, *SE* = .10). None of the other main effects or interactions were significant, *p*’s > .195.

**ANCOVA Controlling for COVID Case Numbers**

To assess whether shifts in COVID case numbers influenced our findings, we conducted a 2 (Condition: No-helping vs. Imagine Helping) X 2 (Story Type: Everyday vs. COVID-19) X 2 (Age: Younger vs. Older Adults) mixed ANCOVA on participants’ willingness to help, controlling for the 7-day average number of COVID-19 case numbers as a covariate in the model. Case numbers were obtained from the CBC News Coronavirus Tracker. Our analysis revealed a main effect of condition, *F* (1, 166) = 6.03, *p* = .015, ηp2 = 0.035 wherein participants reported an increased willingness to help after episodic simulation (*M* = 5.00, SE = .093) compared to when judging journalistic style (*M* = 4.68, SE = .100). Our analysis also revealed a main effect of story, *F* (1, 166) = 12.02, *p* <. 001., ηp2 = 0.068, such that willingness to help was higher in the everyday (*M* = 5.10, SE = .09) compared to the COVID-related scenarios (*M* = 4.58, SE = .10). There were no other significant main effects or interactions in the ANCOVA, *p*’s > .152.

**Study 3:**

**Willingness to Help by Condition and Story Manipulation with Safety Ratings as a Random Factor**

To assess whether participants’ ratings of how safe it is to help in each story influenced the best fit model generated for Study 3, the same model was reproduced with the addition of safety ratings as a random factor.

**Table S2**

*Best fit model for Willingness to Help - Study 3 with safety ratings as a random factor*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Study 3 – Willingness to Help** | | |
| *Predictors* | *Estimates* | *CI* | *p* |
| (Intercept) | 4.65 | 4.20 – 5.10 | **<0.001** |
| Condition | 0.31 | 0.14 – 0.48 | **<0.001** |
| OA – No Helping | -0.30 | -0.63 – 0.03 | 0.077 |
| OA – Imagine Helping | -0.01 | -0.33 – 0.30 | 0.929 |
| **Random Effects** | | | |
| σ2 | 1.74 | | |
| τ00 Id | 0.96 | | |
| τ00 StoryNumber | 0.30 | | |
| τ00 Safety | 0.45 | | |
| ICC | 0.50 | | |
| N Id | 192 | | |
| N StoryNumber | 12 | | |
| N Safety | 7 | | |
| Observations | 1933 | | |
| Marginal R2 / Conditional R2 | 0.017 / 0.504 | | |

*Note*: Reference groups for contrasts were the Journalism Condition, and Younger Adults

Replicating the main analysis from Study 3, best fit model estimates indicate that there was an effect of Condition, *B* = 0.31, *SE* = 0.09, *t*(1744) = 3.50, 95% CI [0.14, 0.48], such that willingness to help was higher following episodic simulation of helping relative to judging journalistic style (see Figure 2 for observed means). Similarly, there was a trend for older adults to report lower willingness to help than younger adults in the journalism condition, *B* = -0.30, *SE* = 0.17, *t*(272.31)= 1.77, 95% CI [-0.63, 0.03], but not in the episodic simulation condition, *B* = -0.01, *SE* = 0.16, *t*(233.23) = 0.16, 95% CI [-0.33, 0.30]. Thus, the addition of safety ratings as a random factor did not significantly change the findings of best fit model.

**Effects of Episodic Simulation on Phenomenological Experiences**

In keeping with Studies 1 and 2, emotion scales were averaged to form an emotional concern index, and ratings of scene coherence and detail were averaged to form a scene imagery index. To test whether episodic simulation, story type and age influenced participants’ phenomenological experiences, we conducted separate 2 (Condition: No-helping vs. Imagine Helping) X 2 (Story Type: Everyday vs. COVID-19) X 2 (Age: Younger vs. Older Adults) mixed ANOVAs on emotional concern, scene imagery, and subjective theory of mind.

For the emotional concern index, our mixed ANOVA revealed a main effect of condition, *F* (1, 162) = 16.01, *p* <.001, ηp2 = 0.090, reflecting higher emotional concern after episodic simulation (*M* = 4.16, *SE* = .09) compared to when judging journalistic style (*M* = 3.87, *SE* = .09). None of the other main effects or interactions were significant, *p*’s > .133.

For the scene imagery index, our mixed ANOVA revealed a main effect of condition, *F* (1, 162) = 24.16, *p* <.001, ηp2 = 0.130, which was driven by higher scene imagery after episodic simulation (*M* = 3.85, *SE* = .11) compared to judging journalistic style (*M* = 3.44, *SE* = .11). There was also a main effect of story, *F* (1, 162) = 5.30, *p* =.023, ηp2 = 0.032, such that participants reported higher scene imagery in COVID-related (*M* = 3.73, *SE* = .11) compared to everyday stories (*M* = 3.56, *SE* = .11). None of the other main effects or interactions were significant, *p*’s > .065.

For subjective theory of mind, our mixed ANOVA revealed a main effect of condition, *F* (1, 162) = 39.24, *p* <.001, ηp2 = 0.195, reflecting greater consideration of the thoughts and feelings of the person in need following episodic simulation (*M* = 5.16, *SE* = .09) compared to judging journalistic style (*M* = 4.67, *SE* = .10). We also found a main effect of story, *F* (1, 162) = 18.79, *p* <.001, ηp2 = 0.104, reflecting greater consideration of the thoughts and feelings of the person in need in everyday (*M* = 5.14, *SE* = .09) compared to COVID-related scenarios (*M* = 4.78, *SE* = .09). Further, there was an interaction between condition and age, *F* (1, 162) = 6.99, *p* =.009, ηp2 = 0.041, suggesting that the effect of condition on subjective theory of mind differed across age groups. Follow-up t-tests revealed that younger adults exhibited an increase in subjective theory of mind after imagining helping (*M* = 5.10, *SE* = .13) relative to judging journalistic style (*M* = 4.82, *SE* = .14) of the stories, *t* (94) = 3.29, *p* = .001. Similarly, older adults also exhibited an increase in subjective theory of mind after imagining helping (*M* = 5.22, *SE* = .12) relative to judging journalistic style (*M* = 4.53, *SE* = .15) of the stories, *t* (101) = 6.42, *p* < .001. Thus, while episodic simulation increased consideration of the thoughts and feelings of the person in need in both age groups, older adults exhibited a greater difference between conditions. None of the other main effects or interactions were significant, *p*’s > .529.

**ANCOVA Controlling for COVID Case Numbers**

To assess whether shifts in COVID case numbers influenced our findings, we conducted a 2 (Condition: No-helping vs. Imagine Helping) X 2 (Story Type: Everyday vs. COVID-19) X 2 (Age: Younger vs. Older Adults) mixed ANCOVA on participants’ willingness to help, controlling for the 7-day average number of COVID-19 case numbers as a covariate in the model. Case numbers were obtained from the CBC News Coronavirus Tracker. Our analysis revealed a main effect of condition, F (1, 161) = 15.75, *p* < .001, ηp2 = 0.089 wherein participants reported an increased willingness to help after episodic simulation (M = 4.96, SE = .098) compared to when judging journalistic style (M = 4.38, SE = .110). Our analysis also revealed a main effect of story, F (1, 161) = 20.91, *p* <. 001., ηp2 = 0.115, such that willingness to help was higher in the everyday (M = 4.95, SE = .10) compared to the COVID-related scenarios (M = 4.39, SE = .10). There was also a significant interaction between condition and age, F (1, 161) = 4.82, *p* = .030, ηp2 = 0.029. Follow-up t-tests revealed that the interaction was driven by younger adults’ (M = 4.61, SE = .14) greater willingness to help than older adults (M = 4.20, SE = .15) in the no-helping condition, t (195) = 1.98, *p* = .049. There were no other significant main effects in the ANCOVA, *p*’s > .125.

**COVID Information Consumption Across Studies 1-3**

The amount of COVID-related information consumed by participants was measured by asking participants to rate statements such as “I watch news on COVID topics”, “I read about COVID-19 (the novel coronavirus)” from 1-never to 5-often. To test whether this changed across Studies 1-3 and should be considered in our analyses, we conducted a separate 3 (Study Number: 1 vs 2 vs 3) X 2 (Age: Younger vs. Older Adults) ANOVA on participants’ average ratings of such statements. The analysis revealed a main effect of age, *F* (1, 582) = 13.95, *p* <.001, ηp2 = 0.023, reflecting younger adults’ (*M* = 2.58, *SE* = 0.04) higher ratings of information consumption compared to older adults (*M* = 2.39, *SE* = 0.04). None of the other main effects were significant, *p*’s > .393.

Younger adults’ higher ratings of consuming COVID-related news topics in the current project is in line with recent work on their use of the internet for Health Information Seeking Behaviours related to COVID-19 (Beaudoin & Hong, 2021). In terms of whether this difference in media consumption may influence our age-related hypothesis, we might expect that younger adults would rate COVID scenarios as being more vivid, given that their greater media consumption gives them more to draw on. However, across all three studies, COVID-related scenarios were rated as more vivid than everyday scenarios, but, importantly, there was no effect of age on vividness ratings. As such, while younger adults may be consuming more COVID-related media, it does not translate to an increase in participants’ subjective vividness ratings of these scenarios and thus is unlikely to influence willingness to help in the current studies. Instead, younger adults’ higher rate of consumption may reflect their greater media use overall.

**Supplementary Figures**

**Figure S1.**

*Scatter plots displaying the repeated measures correlations between willingness to help and phenomenological experiences in Study 1.*

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**Figure S2.**

*Scatter plots displaying the repeated measures correlations between willingness to help and phenomenological experiences in Study 2.*

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**Figure S3.**

*Scatter plots displaying the repeated measures correlations between willingness to help and phenomenological experiences in Study 3.*

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