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## The Unwilling Spectator: How Secondary Exposure to Trauma Through Journalism Affects Our Emotional Processing

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**The Unwilling Spectator: How Secondary Exposure to Trauma Through Journalism  
Affects Our Emotional Processing**



**Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Science, Mathematics, and Computing  
Of  
Bard College**

**By  
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**Annandale-on-Hudson, New York  
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## JOURNALISM AND SECONDARY TRAUMA EXPOSURE

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## Abstract

Police-brutality, especially directed towards black people, has been a hot-button issue in the media for the past few years. With the constant exposure to the death and brutalization of black bodies, however, some people, especially black people, have reported experiencing emotional defects as a result of these reports. The current study aims to see how exposure to police-brutality related journalism affects implicit emotional processes, such as approach-avoidance motivations. More specifically, the current study seeks to see if the race of the person whom police-brutality is directed towards in these journalistic reports further influences these effects. From a college-aged population, black and white participants ( $N=18$ ) were randomly assigned to one of either two conditions: Black-Civilian or White-Civilian. To measure participant's approach-avoidance behaviors both before and after being exposed to these stories, the current study uses an Emotional Lexical Decision Task (*ELDT*.) Using four 2 (time: pre-exposure, post-exposure) x 3 (valence: negative, positive, neutral) repeated measures ANOVAs, participants' response times to negative words were analyzed to see if there was a main effect of exposure. I hypothesized that across each condition, black participants would have significantly slower response times to negative words after reading the article, compared to white participants. Furthermore, I hypothesized that black participants in the black-civilian condition would have the most significantly slower response times to negative stimuli. The results of the current study found no significant difference in response times to negative stimuli before or after exposure for any race x condition category. Possible explanations for these results and limitations of the current study are discussed.

**Keywords:** *police-brutality, state-violence, journalism, vicarious traumatization, secondary traumatic stress, approach-avoidance, emotional lexical decision task*

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Rodney King. Trayvon Martin. Sandra Bland. Philando Castile. These are the names of four of many black and brown U.S. citizens who have been brutalized and murdered in police interactions within the last three decades. These are also the names of four of the many black and brown U.S. citizens to have their brutalization and death sensationalized in American media. Police brutality refers to use of force by the police that exceeds the force necessary to apply lawful police practices. State-Violence refers to acts of violence committed by the state or military, outside of declared war. While state-violence and police brutality happen to all races, the excessive use of force against and brutalization and murder of black people by the hands of the police happens at disproportionate rates in the in the U.S.(e.g. of the 95 people killed by police in July 2016, 33 were black (MPV, 2016)) Subsequently, the death and brutalization of black Americans in these events are disproportionately reported in U.S. media. Some Americans, especially black youth, have reported the sight of the graphic images and descriptions used in journalistic reports of police brutality to be “traumatizing.” (Adetiba, 2016) The current study examines how exactly exposure to these events, especially on a consistent basis, through journalistic reports affects an individual’s emotional processing. Specifically looking at how these reports of these event affect the emotional processing of the people who identities are most significantly tied to them, black people.

#### **Police Brutality and State-Violence as Phenomena**

Before discussing the depictions of police brutality in journalistic reports, and the subsequent effects that this depiction may have on the emotional and mental health of those

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exposed, it is important to recognize police brutality, especially in racialized contexts, as a phenomenon, as well as how this recognition may mediate the relationship between exposure and emotional processing.

The prolific presence of police brutality incidents in the United States, especially those involving unarmed black citizens, would inspire many studies that assessed police officers' implicit racial biases. A 2002 study conducted by Joshua Correll, Bernadtte Park, Charles Judd, and Bernd Wittenberg used a videogame simulation to assess police officers implicit racial biases when firing at targets. Correll et al.'s study was directly inspired by the shooting of Amadou Diallo, an unarmed black man, who was shot at 41 times and killed by police officers in Bronx, New York on February 4<sup>th</sup>, 1999 (Cooper, 1999). During the task, police officers were asked to "shoot" at armed targets, and to "not shoot" at unarmed targets. Correll et al. found that police officers more accurately shot at armed black targets than at armed white targets but made quicker decisions to "not shoot" at unarmed white targets than at unarmed black targets. These results indicate that police officers hold implicit racial biases that cause them to perceive black people more quickly as suspects or criminals, compared to white people. Correll et al.'s findings also highlight the way the variable of race influences police officers' perceptions of danger. Regardless of armed or unarmed status, police officers perceived black targets to be more dangerous which was indicated by their slower response times to "not shoot" at "unarmed" black targets compared to "unarmed" white targets. Unfortunately, the death of Amadou Diallou (and the subsequent studies that assessed police officers' implicit racial biases that would come after his death,) would not stop the occurrence of police killings of unarmed black people due to a false perception of danger. In the highly sensationalized 2012 Trayvon Martin case, in which Martin was shot in close combat by George Zimmerman, Zimmerman perceived Martin's bag of

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Skittles as a weapon. In more recent news, Stephon Clark, a 22 year old black man from Sacramento California , was shot and killed by police officers in his own backyard because officers thought his phone was a gun (Robles, 2018). When justifying the killing of an unarmed black person, police officers often suggest that this is the result of having to make a “split-second decisions.” But these split-second decisions, like most quick decisions that people make, are derived usually automatic beliefs that they possess. Because they may not have time to process what is happening and to make a fully informed decision before they act, they have to rely on their instincts to guide actions. The results from the studies above, however, suggest that these instincts may be racist in their nature.

Beyond the implicit racial biases that police officers may hold when firing at a target, even more research suggests that police officers hold both explicit and implicit racial biases that influence their interactions with black people in negative ways. In the “Essence of Innocence; the consequences of dehumanizing Black Children” researcher studied whether concepts that make up the ideology of “childhood”, like innocence, perceived age, and responsibility (or lack thereof,) were applied equally to both black and white boys (Goff, 2014 ). In Study 1, Goff et al. found that police officers perceived black boys as older and less innocent, than white or Latino boys. In the Study 2, Goff et al. assessed police officers’ associations between apes and young boys, both black and white. Results here showed that police officers were significantly more likely to associate black boys with apes, than white boys. Furthermore, these animalistic associations predicted increased use of police violence towards black boys. Similar studies have been conducted assessing racial biases against black girls in the classroom, which suggest that they are perceived to be older and more accountable for their actions than white girls (Green, 2017). Therefore, we can assume that this characterization and treatment given to black boys by



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the police, is similarly given to black girls, relative to their white counterparts (i.e. black girls are perceived as older and less innocent than white girls by the police, and therefore experience more police violence.) Police officers instinctually think of black children, and black people in general, as less human and more susceptible to criminality, which consciously and subconsciously rationalizes their use of excessive force and violence.

Not only are these occurrences of police brutality (and the frequency at which they occur) against black and brown people particularly problematic, but also are the ways in which they are dealt with in the American justice system. Often police officers involved in high-profile police brutality cases are not held accountable for their actions. Take, for example, the trial of Darren Wilson, a Ferguson Police officer who shot and killed Michael Brown, an 18-year old unarmed black male, in Ferguson, Missouri. Wilson suspected Brown of stealing from a local gas station, which prompted him to pursue and shoot Brown, even though Brown's hands were reported by bystanders to be up in a position that communicated surrender and compliance. During his trial, Brown was posed as a threat by Wilson's lawyers as a threat, being referred to as "thug," and although Wilson was on trial, Brown's innocence was put up for questioning as well (McLaughlin, 2014). In an effort to dehumanize Brown, the defense stripped Brown of the human ability to act both un-aggressively and un-impulsively, so that his murder could be justified. The dehumanization of Brown also occurred in American media in an effort to garner public support and empathy for Wilson. Ultimately, the jury did not indict Wilson. Even cases in which there is actual visual evidence of police misconduct, such as the Facebook Live recording of the close-range police shooting of Philando Castile, a 32-year old black school teacher in his car on July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2016, Officer Jeronimo Yanez was charged with second-degree manslaughter and two counts of dangerous discharge of a firearm, but would be found not guilty (Smith, 2017). The

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repercussions (or lack thereof,) for police officers who have brutalized black and brown bodies, compared to those who have brutalized white bodies, is a glaring example of institutionalized racism within the American Justice system, as well as the lack of empathy that exists for the lives of black and brown people in this institution.

The reported experiences black individuals have with the police and the reported experiences that white individuals have differ, and because of this disparity, these two groups may possess different schema about police institutions, police brutality and state-violence, which subsequently influence the effect journalistic reports about these events have on the emotional processing of those exposed to them. Schema can be derived from our own personal experience, as well as the experience of others. Because black people more often personally experience negative and traumatic interactions with the police, as well as re-experience the negative and traumatic interactions of other black people with the police, the negative impact on the emotional and mental health of black people when exposed to police brutality and state-violence in journalistic reports may significantly differ from people of other races.

### **Journalistic Reports of Police Brutality and State-Violence**

Journalistic reports of police brutality often include graphic images and descriptions of these events, and these images and descriptions are used prolifically across many news outlets. For example, the image of Michael Brown's body, which laid in the street covered by a white sheet for four hours after his murder, would be used in multiple news reports weeks after his death, even gracing the covers of well known newspapers like the *Daily News*. Another would be the video of Eric Garner, a 43 year-old unarmed black Staten Island resident, who was killed during a chokehold used by a police officer for selling cigarettes on a street corner (Baker, 2015). In the video, Garner can be heard saying "I can't breathe" within his last few breaths.

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These words would make the cover of major publications around the county, engraining Garner's last words into public memory. The prolific use of these images and descriptions in journalistic reports increases the likelihood and frequency that an individual may be exposed to these traumas. Furthermore, the emphasis put on details of these events in journalistic reports can also make the experiencing of these traumas by readers and viewer even more visceral.

Not only can the actual details and images of these events and the re-experiencing of them through the news be traumatizing, but the way in which they are reported by news outlets and journalists can also be quite distressing.

**The Chosen Narrative.** Before the video of Rodney King surfaced, information about police brutality events were primarily derived from narratives provided by the police (Lawrence, 2000). Because these reports were one-sided, they were usually biased against the assaulted or murdered, highlighting them in ways that would garner support and empathy for the police and their actions. Buzzwords like "resisting arrest" and "hostile" are used to justify the excessive use of force by the police during these events (Lawrence, 2000)s. By labeling victims of police brutality as "thugs," or highlighting societally negative attributes (such as making it known that they are "reputed gang members"), the police could further sway public opinion through these reports. The language used to define the victims of police brutality can ultimately be used to halt further examination of these events by the public and any requirement of accountability. However, when the video of four Los Angeles police officers beating Rodney King entered mainstream news, and consequently the non-official societal definitions of these events were beginning to be recognized and legitimized (to varying degrees) by news outlets, the narratives provided by the police began to be challenged.

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**The Construction of Police-Brutality as a Public Problem.** Even though police narratives are now challenged by visual evidence and more diverse perspective of these events, marginalized people still find it hard to have their voices legitimized in the news. The news plays a vital role in the social construction of events, like police brutality, as “public problems.” (Lawrence, 2000) First, they construct an event as a “public problem” by the attention they give to it and frequency at which they report on it. Then they legitimize and delegitimize the opposing voices that surround these events by the way they define these events. For example, if police brutality is defined as problem of poor police training and implicit racial bias, then this definition benefits the communities that are primarily affected by police brutality. If the news defines police brutality as “ a part of the job” or the result of endangered police, however, this benefits police institutions and other institutions that benefit from having the police remain in power. Lastly, they guide the meanings created by the public about these events by the voices they legitimize. Because most news outlets recognize political elites as being the lens through which people vie the world, because of the size of their constituencies, news outlets recognize political elites as “primary definers” or “authorized knowers” when it comes to how these events should be understood (Lawrence, 2000). The interests of political elite, however, often do not align with the interests of marginalized people. When the voices of marginalized people are not legitimized in the news, and the framing of events that most closely affects them by the news puts them at a disadvantage, this can be quite psychologically traumatizing. In reference to black people and police brutality , the personal and shared experiences that black people have with the police, which subsequently guide their schematic beliefs about police interactions, can be negated by the way these presented in the news, which can lead to confusion and these communities questioning the legitimacy of their anxieties when it comes to police interactions

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Furthermore, it may be even more psychologically traumatizing for marginalized people to have their voice legitimized through the attention, frequency, and framing that these events are given by news outlets but not be understood and acted on by those in power. The way news reports frame incidents of police brutality can either work to amplify or decrease the negative impact of traumatic images and descriptions by either uplifting or silencing the voices of communities who are most affected by these events (i.e. black communities.)

### **Secondary Traumatic Stress and Emotion Dysfunction**

Reading, watching, or hearing about police brutality and state-violence events through journalistic reports is an indirect or secondary form of trauma exposure. When people are exposed to the trauma of others, or are exposed to trauma indirectly, vicarious traumatization (*VT*) and Secondary Traumatic Stress (*STS*) can occur (Baird, June 2006). Vicarious Traumatization refers to the negative cognitive changes (i.e. the changes in an individual's thoughts about the self, others, and the world,) that occur when exposed to the trauma of others. *VT* can disrupt schema (i.e. an individual's personal set of beliefs) about the following: trust, intimacy, control, esteem, and safety. *STS*, on the other hand, refers to the symptoms that occur as a result of *VT*. Symptoms of *STS* are similar to those of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (*PTSD*) including exhaustion, hyper-vigilance, avoidance, and numbing. Amount of exposure to the trauma of others and personal history of trauma have been shown to be predictors of the onset of *STS*, but not of *VT* (Baird, June 2006). Another negative outcome that comes as a result of *VT* is *Burnout* (Sprang). *Burnout* is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and decreased feelings of personal accomplishment; and although these studies predominantly assess burnout in populations of mental health professionals and social workers, it is reasonable

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to think that these symptoms also occur in activists who speak out against police brutality injustice and advocate for police reform, but still see no action taken against it by those in power.

Although most research surrounding VT and STS use health professional populations, some research suggests that reexperiencing the trauma of others through journalistic reports can also lead to STS. In one study, researchers found that participants who viewed more than 12 hours of September 11th anniversary coverage, had more posttraumatic-stress disorder like symptoms (Bernstein, 2007). In another study, participants who watched 9 or more hours of the 2013 Boston Marathon Bombing news coverage, along with having with prior violence exposure and having higher autonomic nervous system (ANS) reactivity, were more likely to have the onset of probable PTSD. (Busso, 2014). The results of the two abovementioned studies also highlight how PTSD or PTSD like symptoms were found in populations in close proximity to the attack, or shared identities to those directly affected by the attack (i.e. New Yorkers viewing 9/11 news coverage, Bostonians viewing Boston Marathon Bombing coverage.)

### **Emotions and Lexical Decision**

The current study examines participants approach-avoidance behaviors to negative stimuli before and after being exposed to a journalistic report of police brutality using the Emotional Lexical Decision Task (ELDT)

**What is the Lexical Decision Task?** The emotional lexical decision task is an emotional variant of the lexical decision task (LDT.) The Lexical Decision Task was a psycholinguistic task developed by David E. Meyer and Roger W. Schvaneveldt in the 1970s to assess semantic memory and word recognition. During the task, participants are asked to identify a string of letters as either a word or non-word. Lexical decision tasks measure if the lexical status of a

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word (i.e. word or non-word) facilitates processing and recognition, and variations of the task, such as the ELDT, assess if this facilitation is further influenced by other variables, like valence.

The valence of a word may aid or hinder the lexical processing of the word. *Valence* refers to the intrinsic attractiveness (positive) or aversiveness (negative) of a word. Emotion words can either describe an emotion (i.e. pain,) or elicit one (punishment.) In emotional lexical decisions tasks, positive words have been shown to produce quicker response times than negative and neutral words. Negative words had the fastest response times after positive words, with neutral words having the slowest response times (Maire, 2017).

In the current study, exposure to a journalistic report about police brutality is used to induce a negative mood. There are competing theories about the effects of induced mood states on the processing of emotion words. The first theory suggests that there is lexical facilitation for mood-congruent words compared to mood-incongruent words (Sereno, 2015). One of the first studies to examine how mood states affect word processing is the 1995 Halberstadt, Niedenthal, and Kushner study, which measured the meanings produced by sad-induced participants and happy-induced individuals for homophones. In this study, participants were assigned to either the sad-induced condition or the happy-induced condition (moods were induced by classical music pieces.) Halberstadt et al. then auditorily presented participants with a word that could have either an emotional meaning (e.g. won) or a neutral meaning (e.g. one) and asked participants to write the word they heard. Their results showed that participants who were in the sad-induced mood state more often wrote the word with an emotional meaning for sad-neutral stimuli than participants in happy participants (Sereno, 2015). Olafson and Ferraro (2001,) however, replicated Halberstadt et al study using a lexical decision task., and found that mood-congruent

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effects could be found for both positive and negative stimuli. Other studies have also found similar effects in lexical decision tasks (Ferraro, King, Ronning, Pkarski, & Risan, 2003)

The second theory conversely, is that mood does not facilitate the lexical processing of mood-congruent words, but rather amplifies or diminishes the valence effects that already. Similar to Olafson and Ferraro 2001 study, Sereno, Scott, Yao, Thaden, & O'Donnell investigated the effect of mood on the lexical processing of emotion words. Compared to previous studies, however, they controlled for both arousal and string length. They also controlled the music used to induced mood states such that both sad- and happy- inducing music had the same tempo and used relatively unknown music so that affective associations would not influence lexical processing. Sereno et al.'s results found that positive mood states led to similar response times for both positive and negative words, whereas negative mood states produced similar results as the control group, such that positive words were processed quicker than both negative and neutral words, and negative words were processed quicker than neutral words. These results suggest that positive moods globalize attention such that the effects of valence are decreased, and lexical processing is only facilitated by arousal levels, and negative moods localizes attention such that the valence effects are enhanced. The current study uses the conceptual framework of the latter theory. It is hypothesized that the negative mood induced by the journalistic report on police brutality will not led to mood-congruent effects, but will rather amplify the valance effects of negative stimuli, such that response times will be much slower to negative stimuli as a result of an induced negative mood.

### **Approach-Avoidance Behaviors as a Measure of Emotional Processing**



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Even before psychological discourse on approach-avoidance motivation existed, philosophers like Democritus, Aristippus, and Epicurus defined approach-avoidance motivations as the humanistic tendency to pursue pleasure and to avoid pain (Elliot, 2006). Similar understandings were found in early psychological works, like that of William James (1890) that understood pleasure as a reinforcer of actions and pain as an inhibitor of actions (Elliot, 2006). Theorists in the 1990's, however, began to differentiate between cognitive and motivational definitions of approach-avoidance. A cognitive view of approach-avoidance suggests that individuals direct their behavior towards or away from stimuli that they consciously evaluate as being pleasurable or painful, positive or negative. A motivational view of approach-avoidance, on the other hand, suggests positive and negative stimuli act on individuals implicitly (i.e. unconsciously, automatically) to re-orient and direct behaviors towards or away from those stimuli, even before having a conscious awareness of those things as either positive or negative (Elliot, 2006). In the former understanding, people appear as passive until they make positive or negative evaluations about the stimuli on which they are acting; whereas in the latter understanding, individuals are seen as active, in pursuit of one goal, until they are presented with a stimulus that re-orient and directs their behavior away from that goal or towards another. Furthermore, a motivational conceptual framework for approach-avoidance behaviors highlights its existence in nature, a critical adaptive judgment that has allowed many organisms to evolve, not only humans.

A goal is defined as a cognitive representation of a future object that an individual is committed either to keeping or to moving away from. In current approach-avoidance literature, most researchers uphold the motivational conceptual framework for approach-avoidance and define the two motivations as the following: *Approach-motivation*: positive stimuli that energizes

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approach behaviors (i.e. behaviors that bring or keep stimuli close to the organisms, both psychologically and physically) towards that stimuli; *Avoidance-motivation*: negative stimuli that energizes avoidant behaviors (i.e. behaviors that push or keep away stimuli.) away from that stimuli (Elliot, 2006). The goal in the current study is to correctly identify “words” and non-word. The approach-avoidance behavior that is being measure an individual’s response time to differently valence words, with a specific interest in response times to negative words. Quicker response times would suggest an approach-motivation and slower response times would suggest an avoidance-motivation.

### **The Current Study**

The goal of the current study is to investigate the following (1) how exposure to journalistic reports of police brutality affect individuals emotional processing, specifically their approach-avoidance behaviors toward or away from valenced stimuli (i.e. positive and negative) and (2) how the above effect is influenced by both the race of the participant and the race of the civilian in the new story. The current study is concomitant because it investigates possible changes in the effect of the independent variable (police-brutality exposure) on the dependent variable (approach-avoidance behaviors / ELDT response times,) as a result of changing a characteristic of the independent variable (race of civilian.) It also assesses specific markers (i.e. how outcomes differ across race.) Although previous studies have examined the psychological and physiological outcomes that stem from secondary trauma exposure through journalistic reports, no study has looked at how more implicit processes, like approach-avoidance behaviors, are affected by this sort of exposure, nor has specifically examined the impact journalism reporting on police brutality and state violence specifically.

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Black, white, and non-black undergraduates were chosen for the current study. In this study, the term “Black” refers to both African-Americans and Black Hispanics or Afro Latinx. Afro-Latinx refers to people who descend from Latin countries with African heritage. It is the all-inclusive, gender neutral version of the words Afro-Latina and Afro-Latino. Participants grouped into the “Non-black” category are those who have identified themselves as being neither black, nor white (I.e. Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic, etc.) . Since the current study specifically seeks to examine the specific markers for black people, the inclusion of white and non-black participants helps to see if change in approach behaviors (and the extent to which they change,) when exposed to journalistic reports of police brutality are specific to black people, or are more generalizable across all races. The specific population (i.e. undergraduates) was chosen because young age has been shown to decrease resiliency to vicarious traumatization and secondary traumatic stress. Participants were then further divided into two conditions, Black-civilian or white -civilian through random selection. In the Black-Civilian condition, participants were exposed to a news article reporting on a violent interaction between police officers and a young black male. In the white-civilian condition, participants read a violent interaction between police officers and a young white male.

Although previous studies have examined the effects of traumatic journalism on the emotional health of those exposed (Bernstein, 2007), these studies have used explicit measures, like self-reporting, and have looked at the physiological response that may influence participants emotional states. The current study examines the more implicit ways in which we are influenced by traumatic journalism by assessing approach-avoidance motivations through the use of an emotional lexical decision task. The current study also employs a self-report, 7 point likert scale, where participants are asked to rate the following “on a scale from 1-7 (1= not at all,

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7=Extremely) emotionally affected by the article were you?" Such an explicit measure allow researchers to see if the implicit effects that are occurring after the exposure to the article (which is measured using the Emotional lexical decision task align with explicit awareness of this effect. An individual's awareness of the effect certain stimuli has on them can predict their likelihood to seek out mental health resources or implement self-care in their personal lives.

The research design for the current study was inspired by previous studies that have examined the influence of induced negative moods on lexical processing (Olafson, 2001). During the study, participants perform an ELDT to assess baseline approach-avoidance motivations (i.e. approach-avoidance motivations before exposure to stimulus article,) read a journalistic report of police brutality (i.e. stimulus article,) and then once again perform an ELDT to assess approach-avoidance motivations after exposure. I hypothesized that (1) black participants across each condition would have significantly different response times to negative stimuli compared to white and non-white participants. (2) that black participants in the black-civilian condition would have the most significantly different response times to negative stimuli during the ELDT compared to any other group/condition combination.

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

22 Undergraduates from Bard College participated in the current study. Participants' ages ranged from 18-29 years ( $M_{age} = 21.21$ ). Of the 22 undergraduates that participated in the study, 5 were black (men = 2, women= 3,  $M_{age}= 20.80$ ), 13 were white (men = 7, women= 5, non-binary= 1  $M_{age}= 21.58$ ) 3 were non-white (women= 3,  $M_{age}=19.5$ ) (results were not analyzed for Non-black individuals because of too few participants.) Participants were recruited through the circulation of flyers around campus and on social media sites (for recruitment flyer, see

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Appendix A.) as well as through personal invitation. Participants self-reported their ages, gender, and ethnicity through completion of the demographics questionnaire. Upon completion of the study, participants were entered into a raffle for two chances to win \$50 Amazon gift card. Winners were chosen using a random number generator.

### **Materials**

**Demographics Questionnaire.** Through the completion of a demographics questionnaire, participants self-reported the age, race/ethnicity, and gender with which they most identified. Participants also answered the following question about their prior exposure to journalism covering police brutality: “Within the last year, how often did you see media (social media, T.V. News, newspapers, etc.) cover a story about police violence (e.g. Police brutality?).” Participants answered with one of the following responses: “Never,” “Between 1-2 times” “Between 3-5 times,” or “More than 5 times.” Past studies assessing the effects of trauma exposure through journalism have shown that the amount of time someone has been exposed to trauma secondarily through journalism is positively correlated with negative emotional and mental health outcomes. (For Demographics Questionnaire, See Appendix B)

**Emotional Lexical Decision Task (ELDT)** An emotional lexical decision task (ELDT) was used to measure participants’ approach-avoidance behaviors to negative or threatening stimuli. During the task, a string of letters appeared on the computer screen and participants were instructed to identify the string of letters as an English word or as a non-word (i.e. a string of letters that do not form an English word.) To identify words, participants were instructed to press the “X” key on the keyboard. To identify non-words, participants were instructed to press the

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“M” key on the keyboard. During the trials, a 100 ms fixation cross (+) appeared on the computer screen, followed by the target stimulus (i.e. a word or non-word.) Participants’ response times were not recorded during the trial ELDT; the purpose of the trial ELDT was to get participants acquainted with the task. Participants response times were recorded for subsequent trials.

For the trial ELDT, participants completed one trial of 12 target stimuli (words= 6, non-words= 6) All words used in the Trial ELDT were neutrally valenced (See Appendix to see Trial ELDT word list.) Participants completed two experimental blocks before reading the stimulus article (pre-exposure ELDT,) and two experimental blocks after reading the stimulus article (post-exposure ELDT.) (N= 4) Each block contained two trials (N=8.) Each block consisted of 48 words (16 positive, 16 negative, 16 neutral) and 96 non-words (N=96) (For ELDT Stimulus List, See Appendix C.) A trial refers to when each word in the wordlist (and its relative non-word,) has appeared on the screen. The pre-exposure ELDT and post-exposure ELDT used the same set of stimulus words.

**Likert Scale.** Once they have completed the Lexical Decision Task, participants rated the following question using a 7-point Likert scale: “On a scale of 1-7 (1= not at all, 7= extremely,) how emotionally affected were you by the article you just read?” Participants self reports were used to measure the participant’s awareness of a change in their emotional states, and the degree to which that occurred. (For Likert Scale, See Appendix D.)

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### **Words and Non-words**

Words used in the current study were derived from the Affective Norms for English Words (*ANEW*) (Bradley, 1999) *ANEW* is a database of valence ratings, arousal ratings and usage frequency for hundreds of words in the English language. Valence refers to the emotional category in which the word exists (i.e. positive or negative.) “Neutral” words are words that lack emotionality. Words from each emotional category were used in the current study. String length and arousal ratings were controlled for in each emotional category. String-length refers to the number of letters in a stimulus (both words and non-words.) For string length, short, medium, and long words appeared at the same rate in all three emotional categories. *Arousal ratings* describe the emotional intensity of a word (low, moderate, or high.) For arousal ratings, each emotional category contained three low-, three moderate-, and three high arousal words. In the current study, non-words were created by changing the first vowel in each stimulus word (ex. “Game” v.s. “game”.) The order in which words and non-words appeared in each trial were chosen at random. This was done to reduce expectancy effects (i.e. to reduce facilitation in lexical processing due to knowing the order in which the words would appear.) Because non-words were derived in this way, string length for non-words was also able to be controlled for in each emotional category. Words appeared on the computer’s screen in 14 pt, Times New Roman font.

### **Stimulus Article**

Researchers used a news story depicting a violent interaction between a civilian and two police officers as the stimulus article. The stimulus article primed, or made more accessible, the schematics of police brutality in the minds of the participants. Both conditions used the same

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news article with one differing variable: the race of the civilian in the police interaction. In the black-civilian condition, participants read about a young black male. In the white-civilian condition, participants read about a young white male. All other aspects of the stories remained the same (For Stimulus Article, See Appendix E.)

### **E-Prime**

In the current study, the emotional lexical decision task was programmed and ran using E-Prime Suite. Response times were recorded by measuring from the time the target stimulus appeared on the screen to when the participant identified its lexical status (i.e. identified the target stimulus as either a word (by pressing “X”) or non-word (by pressing “M”)

### **Procedure**

Upon arrival to the laboratory, participants signed the consent form and completed the demographics questionnaire (for Consent Form, See Appendix E.; For Demographics Questionnaire, See Appendix A.) Once all paperwork was completed, participants were escorted to the lab where they would be taking the task. Once seated in front of a computer screen, the researcher instructed the participant to read the first screen, which stated the following:

**Welcome to the State-Violence, Journalism and Emotion Study!**

**Thank you for your interest in the current study!**

**For this study, you will be performing the Lexical Decision Task. During this task, you will be asked to identify words versus non-words (ex. cow v. cew,) and your response times will**



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**be recorded. The overview of the study is as follows: Trial ELDT-> initial ELDT (EDLT1) -  
> stimulus exposure -> second ELDT (ELDT2)**

On the second screen were the instructions for the lexical decision task. The instructions read:

**The Lexical Decision Task**

**You will now be performing the Lexical Decision Task! For this task, you will be asked to identify the string of letters that appear on the screen as either a word or a non-word. If the string of letters on the screen form a word, please press "X". If the string of letters on the screen DO NOT form a word (i.e. a non-word,) please press "M"**

**The first trial is so that you may get comfortable with the task. Your response times during this trial will not be recorded or analyzed. Response times on subsequent trials will be recorded.**

**Press the spacebar to continue.**

Once participants read the first two screens, the study began. The task went as follows:

*Trial Lexical Decision Task.* Participants completed a trial lexical decision task to get them acquainted with the task. Trial data was not analyzed in the results.

*Pre-Exposure Lexical Decision Task.* Once participants were able to get comfortable with the task, they were instructed that the next two blocks would be recorded. The pre-exposure

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ELDT used a different word set from the trial ELDT, which differed in number of words used and usage of valenced words. The purpose of the pre-exposure ELDT was to assess baseline approach-avoidance to negative or threatening stimuli before reading the stimulus article. At the beginning of this portion of the task, participants read the following:

**Your response times on the LDT will be recorded from here on out.**

**Once again, if the string of letters on the screen form a word, please press "X". If the string of letters on the screen DO NOT form a word (i.e. a non-word,) please press "M"**

**Press spacebar to continue.**

*Stimulus Exposure* After completing the pre-exposure LDT, Participants were instructed that they would be reading the stimulus article. They read the following instructions:

**Stimulus**

**You will now read a news article about an hostile interaction between two police officers and a civilian. Although we ask that you read the article thoroughly and carefully, you are not expected memorize any of it. If at any point the content becomes too distressing, you may choose to stop reading the material.**

**Press Spacebar to continue**

*Post-Exposure Lexical Decision Task.* After reading the stimulus article, participants performed another lexical decision task. The purpose of the post-exposure LDT is to the

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assess the effect of the stimulus exposure on the participants response times to differently valences words. The post-exposure ELDT used the same format as the pre exposure ELDT. The same word set was also used in the pre-exposure ELDT was also used in the post-exposure ELDT.

After participants completed the final block in the computerized task, researchers asked participant to rate the affectiveness of the stimulus article using a 7-point Likert scale. Once participants completed the Likert scale, researchers debriefed the participants on the general purposes and specific hypotheses of the current study. The researcher then gave participants a shortened version of the consent form for participants to keep for their personal records personal records.

### **Data Analysis Design**

**Repeated-Measures Factorial ANOVA.** To assess main effects and interactions between time (pre-exposure, post-exposure) and valence (positive, negative, neutral) for the following race x condition categories: black participant x black-civilian, black-participant x white-civilian, white-participant x black-civilian, and white participants x white-civilian, the current study uses six 2x3 repeated measures ANOVAs.

**Paired Sample T-Test.** To get specific comparison of the mean for the response times to negative words before exposure to the stimulus article and response times to negative words after

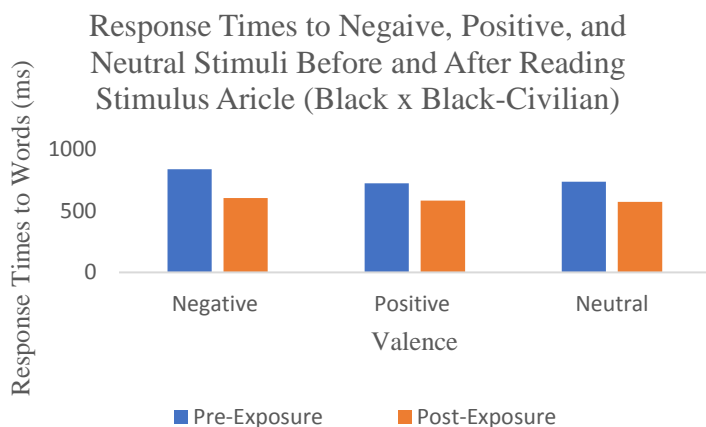
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exposure to the stimulus article, four paired-sample t-tests were used for each race x condition category.

All data was analyzed using SPSS.

### Results

Four 2 (Time: pre-exposure, post-exposure) x 3 (Valence: Negative, Positive, Neutral) repeated measures Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used to test the hypothesized following hypothesis for each group x condition: (1) black participants across each condition, will have slower response times to negative stimuli after being exposed to the stimulus article (2) specifically, black participants in the black-civilian condition (Black x black-civilian) would have the most significantly slowest times to negative stimuli after being exposed to the stimulus article compared to all other race x condition categories.



**Figure 1.** A repeated measures ANOVA revealed no significant main effect of time  $F(1, 2) = 1.659, p = .327$ , no significant main effect of valence  $F(2, 1) = .629, p = .666$ , and an interaction between time and valence approaching significance  $F(2, 1) = 26.62, p = .163$

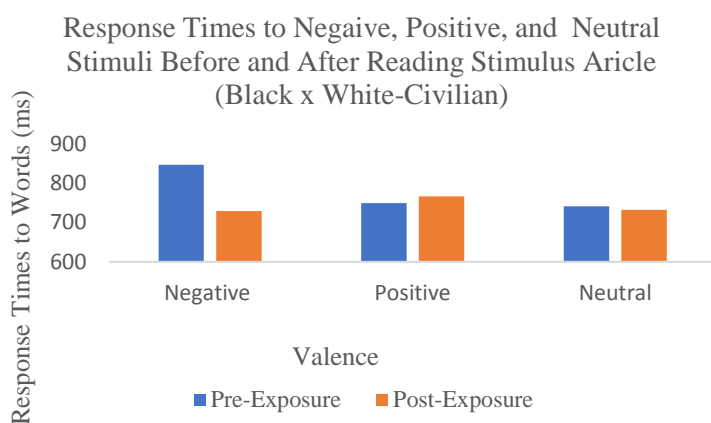
### Black participants in the black-civilian condition (Black x

Black-civilian.) An ANOVA of RTs revealed no significant main effect of time (pre-exposure, post-exposure) on participants response times [ $F(1, 2) = 1.659, p = .327$ ], such that response times to negative stimuli did not differ before reading the stimulus

article and after reading the stimulus article. An ANOVA of RTs revealed no significant main

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effect of valence (negative, positive, neutral,) on participants' response times [ $F(2, 1) = .629, p = .666$ ] such that participants did not significant differ for either positive, negative or neutral stimuli. An interaction between time and valence on participants' response times [ $F(2, 1) = 26.62, p = .163$ ] was also not found. The following are the descriptive of the two independent variables compared in the repeated measured ANOVA: (negative:  $M=839.99, SD= 346.54$ ; positive:  $M=724.78, SD=217.77$ ; neutral:  $M=739.33, SD=212.98$ .) and response times after the stimulus article (negative:  $M=,604.59 SD= 47.10$ ; positive:  $M= 583.19, SD=31.52$ ; neutral:  $M=575.04, SD=44.55$ .) More closely compare the means of response times to negative stimuli before and after exposure, paired-sample t-test were conducted. T-tests revealed that there was no significant difference in response times to negative stimuli before exposure ( $M= 839.99, SD=346.54$ ) and response times to negative stimuli after exposure ( $M=604.59, SD=47.10$ ),  $t= 1.272, p= .331$



**Figure 2. A repeated measures ANOVA revealed no significant main effect of time  $F(1, 1) = 51.513, p = .088$ , A main effect of valence and an interaction between time and valence were not able to be observed because of too few participants in this**

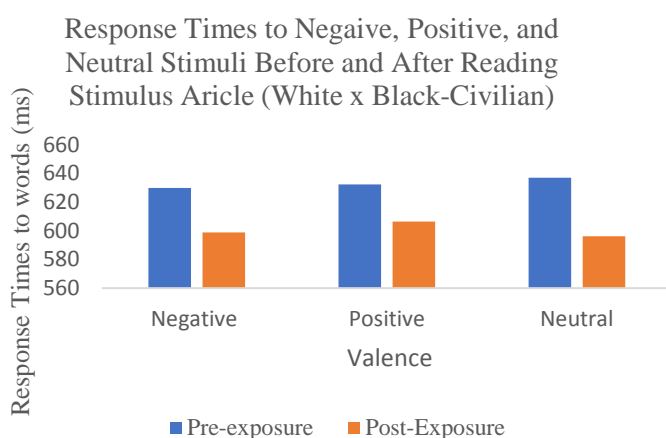
**Black participants in the white-civilian condition (Black x White-Civilian.)** An ANOVA of RTs revealed no significant main effect of time (pre-exposure, post-exposure) on participants response times [ $F(1, 1) = 51.513, p = .088$ ], such that response times to negative

stimuli did not differ before reading the stimulus article and after reading the stimulus article.

The following are the descriptive of the two independent variables compared in the repeated

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measured ANOVA: (negative:  $M = 847.45$ ,  $SD = 279.33$ ; positive:  $M = 749.05$ ,  $SD = 267.97$ , neutral  $M = 741.02$ ,  $SD = 229.03$ ) and after exposure to the stimulus article (negative:  $M = 729.47$ ,  $SD = 229.04$ , positive:  $M = 766.30$ ,  $SD = 317.29$ ; neutral  $M = 732.45$ ,  $SD = 253.14$ ). T-tests revealed that there was no significant difference in response times to negative stimuli before exposure ( $M = 847.45$ ,  $SD = 279.33$ ) and response times to negative stimuli after exposure ( $M = 729.47$ ,  $SD = 222.03$ ),  $t = 3.317$ ,  $p = .186$



**Figure 3. A repeated measures ANOVA revealed no significant main effect of time  $F(1, 4) = 2.75$ ,  $p = .173$ , no significant main effect of valence  $F(2,3) = .042$ ,  $p = .959$ , and no significant interaction between time and valence  $F(2,3) = 1.502$ ,  $p = .353$**

and after reading the stimulus article. An ANOVA of RTs revealed no significant main effect of valence (negative, positive, neutral.) on response times [ $F(2,3) = .042$ ,  $p = .959$ ], such that participants did not significant differ for either positive, negative or neutral stimuli. An interaction between time and valence on participants' response times [ $F(2,3) = 1.502$ ,  $p = .353$ ] was also not found. Descriptives of the repeated-measures ANOVA revealed the following: (negative:  $M = 629.93$ ,  $SD = 137.68$ ; positive:  $M = 632.33$ ,  $SD = 251.17$ ; neutral:  $M = 637.06$ ,

### White participants in the black-

### civilian condition (white x

### black-civilian.) An ANOVA of

RTs revealed no significant main

effect of time (pre-exposure, post-exposure) on participants

response times [ $F(1, 4) = 2.75$ ,  $p$

$= .173$ ] such that response times

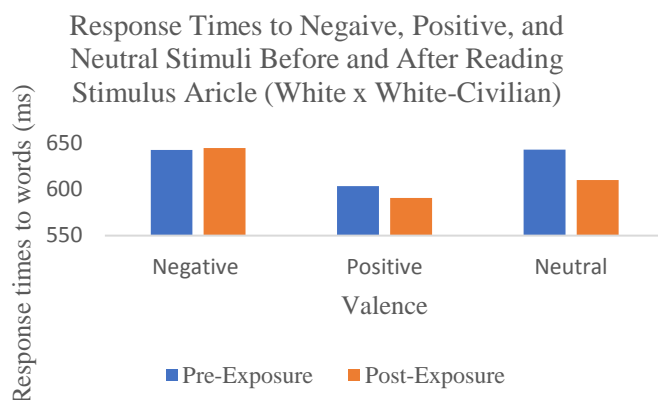
to negative stimuli did not differ

before reading the stimulus article

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$SD=172.98$ .) and response times after the stimulus article (negative:  $M= 598.84$ ,

$SD=188.51$ ; positive:  $M=606.38$ ,  $SD=203.95$ ; neutral:  $M= 596.20$ ,  $SD=138.42$ )



**Figure 3. A repeated measures ANOVA revealed no significant main effect of time  $F(1, 6) = .240$ ,  $p = .642$ , no significant main effect of valence  $F(2, 5) = 1.661$ ,  $p = .280$ , and no significant interaction between time and valence  $F(2, 5) = .645$ ,  $p = .563$**

### White participants in the white-

### civilian condition. An ANOVA of

RTs revealed no significant main

effect of time (pre-exposure, post-

exposure) on participants response

times [ $F(1, 6) = .240$ ,  $p = .642$ ],

such that response times to

negative stimuli did not differ

before reading the stimulus article

and after reading the stimulus article. An ANOVA of RTs revealed no significant main effect of

valence (negative, positive, neutral) on participants' response times [ $F(2, 5) = 1.661$ ,  $p = .280$ ]

, such that participants did not significant differ for either positive, negative or neutral stimuli.

An interaction between time and valence on participants' response times [ $F(2, 5) = .645$ ,  $p =$

$.563$ ] was also not found. The following are the descriptive of the two independent variables

compared in the repeated measured ANOVA: (negative:  $M=642.30$ ,  $SD= 93.60$ ; positive:

$M=603.35$ ,  $SD= 115.70$ ; neutral:  $M=642.67$ ,  $SD=128.96$ .) and response times after the stimulus

article (negative:  $M=644.54$ ,  $SD=133.01$ ; positive:  $M=590.49$ ,  $SD= 99.70$ ; neutral:  $M= 610.00$ ,

$SD= 86.80$ .) A paired sample T-tests revealed that there was no significant difference in

response times to negative stimuli before exposure ( $M= 642.30$ ,  $SD=93.60$ ) and response times

to negative stimuli after exposure ( $M=644.54$ ,  $SD=133.01$ ),  $t= -.043$ ,  $p= .967$

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No race x condition category showed main effects for time (pre-exposure/ baseline, post-exposure or valence (negative, positive, neutral.) Interactions between time and valence were also not found for any category. Furthermore, paired-sample t-tests found no significant difference in response times to negative words before exposure and response to negative words after exposure. A paired-sample t-test for response times to negative words before exposure and response times to negative words after exposure for participants in the black x white-civilian category, suggesting marginally quicker response times after reading the white-civilian stimulus article.

### **Discussion**

Although U.S. media constantly exposes their audiences to the traumatic images and depictions of police brutality, there currently exist no research on the impact of such exposure. The purpose of the current study is to assess the impact of these reports on our implicit emotional processes. Furthermore, the study examines if the race of the participant, as well the race of the civilian involved in a violent interaction with the police, further amplify these effects. The results from the current study indicated that there was no significant difference in participants' response times to negative stimuli before or after exposure to the stimulus article. These results do not support my hypotheses that (1) black participants would have significantly slower response times to negative stimuli after exposure to the stimulus article (2) black participants in the black-civilian condition would have the slowest response times to negative stimuli after being exposed to stimulus article. Additionally, these results were inconsistent with the results in Olafson and Ferraro's study, which suggest that an induced negative mood amplifies valence effects (i.e.



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makes processing of positive words quicker, and the processing of negative words slower, compared to when there is no induce mood.)

### **Implications**

Not only does the results of the current study go against the findings of Olafson and Ferraro's study, which suggest that an induced negative mood localizes attention and amplifies valence effects; the non-existence of a main of effect for valence for any race x condition category would suggest that it does the opposite. Response times for positive and negative stimuli were not significantly different, indicating that the negative mood induced by the stimulus article globalized participants' attention. Participants processed both positive and negative words at almost the same rate, the way that the findings in Olafson and Ferraro suggest an induced positive mood would.

Although the results of the current study do not support my hypotheses, it may support the hypothesis that people are becoming numb to these reports. No race x condition category saw significant differences in response times to negative stimuli before or after exposure, which suggest that exposure to the report about police brutality evoked little to no changes in participants' implicit emotional processing. The non-existence of a main effect for time (pre-exposure, post-exposure) could also be the result of certain limitation of the current study, which will be discussed further.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

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**ELDT Words. Arousal Ratings.** While the current study controls for arousal levels, by including three low-, moderate- and high- arousal words in both the negative and positive stimulus word sets, it may benefit from choosing one arousal level for all words used in the ELDT. Studies show that different arousal levels facilitate lexical processing differently, such that high arousal words enhances processing for both negative and positive word. The non-significant results of the current study may be the result of having multiple arousal levels, and thus multiple abilities to facilitate lexical processing. By picking one arousal level for all words used in the ELDT, lexical facilitation can be controlled for on this level. **Word Frequency.** The current study also does not control for word frequency. As mentioned in the Method, word frequency refers to how often a word is used in the English language. Like valence and arousal, Word frequency has been shown to facilitate lexical processing, such that words that occur more frequently in the English language are processed quicker than words that occur less frequently because of individual's familiarity with them. **Expectancy effects.** Expectancy effects refer to the increased facilitation in

**Stimulus Article.** Although the news story used in the current study reported a violent interaction between a civilian and a police officer (including buzz words like “resisted arrest,”) the existence of other journalistic elements that are common in journalistic reports surrounding incidents police brutality could have increased the likelihood of impacting participants implicitly. As stated in the literature review, not only are the details of the event important to its impact, but so is how journalist frame the events. Definitions of police brutality given by journalists, as well as the voices they choose to legitimize and delegitimize, plays an important role in the impact they have on the communities who are affected (and those who closely identify with those affected,) by police brutality. The emotional impact of the stimulus article in the current study

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could have been significantly different if it framed the violent police interaction in a way that would garner public support for the police.

**Spirituality and Religion.** In future replications of the current study, spiritual and/or religious affiliation should be assessed. Studies have shown that being religion or spirituality makes individuals' more resilient to vicarious traumatization and secondary stress (Sprang). High spiritual and religious affiliations among participants in the current study could also explain the non-significant results found. In the demographics questionnaire, a question about the participants religious or spiritual status could be included.

(Trayvon Martin Shooting Fast Facts, 2018)

**Age and Cohort Effects.** In a future replication of the study, the approach-avoidance behaviors of both younger and older black individuals could be compared to assess if the negative impact of these journalistic reports on police brutality and state-violence exist across all ages or there only characteristic one age group . Additionally, these effects can be investigated across multiple age ranges to see if it is older age or cohort effects that influence the impact that journalistic reports on police brutality have on individuals' emotional health. Cohort effects refer For example, while older age may make an individual more resilient to the vicarious traumatization that stems from watching, reading, or hearing about police brutality in journalistic reports, this age effect may significantly differ for individuals who were around Civil Right's Era, compared to those who grew up in the late 70's, 80's, and 90's.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of the current study suggest no difference between implicit emotional processing of negative stimuli before or after being exposed journalistic reports of police

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brutality. These results could suggest two things: (1) individuals are becoming numb to journalistic reports of police brutality and (2) these results may be the result of the limitations of the current study. While the current study examines the emotional impact of police-brutality and state-violence related journalism, its efforts are in no way to negate the importance of the existence of these reports. The video of the assault of Rodney King acted as the catalyst for news outlets to take the concern of communities of color more seriously, as well as brought attention to these event from people who not be so well versed in these issues. According, one the most effective ways to decrease intergroup bias and violence is to make one group more informed about the other group and their experiences. The aim of the current study, however, is to highlight the ways in which this exposure affects those exposed.

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**Appendix A****Recruitment Flyer**

**Are you interested in the effects of journalism on mental health?**

**Specifically, are you interested in how journalism covering police brutality affects our emotional processing?**

Then you are cordially invited to participate in the **State-Violence, Journalism, and Emotion Study**.

Participants will be entered into a raffle for two chances to win a **\$50 Amazon Gift Card**.

**Sessions will take place in Preston Hall and run approx. 20-25 min.**

For more details, please email Chanya Riddick at [cr9397@bard.edu](mailto:cr9397@bard.edu)

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## Appendix B

## Demographics Questionnaire

**Police Violence, Media Exposure, and Emotion Regulation Study  
Demographics Questionnaire Bard College**

Please answer the following questions as truthfully as possible. For multiple choice questions, please check the answer that most best applies.

Age \_\_\_\_\_

**Gender**

Female\_\_

Male \_\_

Non-Binary\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

**What race do you identify as?**

African-American/Black (Non-Hispanic) \_\_\_\_\_

Afro-Latino/a (Black Hispanic) \_\_\_\_\_

White \_\_\_\_\_

Hispanic (non- black) \_\_\_\_\_

Native American \_\_\_\_\_

Asian/ Pacific Islander \_\_\_\_\_

Other\_\_\_\_\_

**The following question asks you about prior exposure to police violence through media coverage. Please check the one that applies.**

**Within the last year, how often did you see the media (social media, T.V. News, newspapers, etc.) cover a story about police violence (e.g. police brutality)?**

Never\_\_



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Between 1-2 times \_\_\_

Between 3-5 times \_\_\_

More than 5 times \_\_\_

**The last question will ask you about your social justice involvement. Please check the one that applies.**

**How involved are you in in social justice reform and/or activism?**

Not all \_\_\_

Somewhat \_\_\_

Moderately so \_\_\_

Pretty Often \_\_\_

All the time! \_\_\_

## Appendix C

### ELDT Stimulus Word and Non-Word List

#### Trial LDT Stimuli

Stimulus	Lexical Status
apple	word
game	word
carrot	word
lake	word
joke	word
mend	word
learn	word
table	word
upple	non-word
game	non-word

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currot	non-word
loke	non-word
jike	non-word
mand	non-word
liarn	non-word
tuble	non-word

## ELDT Stimuli

Stimulus	Valence	Lexical Status
hug	positive	word
delight	positive	word
dream	positive	word
peace	positive	word
reward	positive	word
secure	positive	word
trust	positive	word
win	positive	word
rescue	positive	word
respectful	positive	word
kind	positive	word
kiss	positive	word
joy	positive	word
heart	positive	word
love	positive	word
butterfly	positive	word
dulight	positive	non-word
dreem	positive	non-word
puace	positive	non-word
riward	positive	non-word
sacure	positive	non-word
trest	positive	non-word
wen	positive	non-word
riscue	positive	non-word
respectful	positive	non-word
kend	positive	non-word
kess	positive	non-word
joy	positive	non-word

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huart	positive	non-word
lave	positive	non-word
batterfly	positive	non-word
corrupt	negative	word
<b>Stimulus</b>	<b>Valence</b>	<b>Lexical Status</b>
betray	negative	word
gun	negative	word
mutilate	negative	word
punishment	negative	word
offend	negative	word
pain	negative	word
murderer	negative	word
horror	negative	word
hostile	negative	word
grief	negative	word
dump	negative	word
dreadful	negative	word
crime	negative	word
assault	negative	word
anger	negative	word
carrupt	negative	non-word
butray	negative	non-word
gon	negative	non-word
matilate	negative	non-word
pinishment	negative	non-word
offund	negative	non-word
paen	negative	non-word
marderer	negative	non-word
harrer	negative	non-word
hisitile	negative	non-word
gruef	negative	non-word
domp	negative	non-word
draadful	negative	non-word
asseult	negative	non-word
angur	negative	non-word
crume	negative	non-word
alien	neutral	word
arm	neutral	word
chair	neutral	word
fabric	neutral	word
egg	neutral	word
honey	neutral	word



## **Appendix E**

### **Stimulus Article**

#### **Black-Civilian Condition**

On Monday October 16th, 2017 a violent altercation ensued between a young man and two Nassau County police officers. While biking home, William Corey, a 21 year old African-American male, decided to use a different route than normal; resulting in him traveling through Hewlett Bay Park, an affluent town in Nassau County. A few minutes into entering the town, Corey was pursued by two police officers parked at the end of Macy Dr., a street in Hewlett Bay Park. According to Corey's attorneys, the officers pursued Corey because they were not familiar with him in the neighborhood. Corey, an aspiring musician and student, was returning from band practice when the altercation occurred. In their report, the Nassau Police Department state that the officers signaled Corey to pull over with the sound of their siren and flashing of their lights, and he failed to respond initially. Corey's Attorney, however, suggests that Corey did not immediately stop because he was confused as to whether the signal was for him or a car on the road. When Corey finally pulled over, the two police officers immediately came out of their car and approached Corey. Attorneys for Corey state that the cops, without warning, yanked Corey off of his bike and slammed him to the ground. Corey resisted arrest, which led one police officer to sit on Corey's back. Although Corey audibly proclaimed his discomfort, the police officer continued to sit on Corey's back, until Corey appeared to be struggling to breathe. Photos show lacerations around Corey's wrists and neck from being pulled off his bike and manhandled. Corey is suffering from minor injuries and recovering at Riverdale Hospital. The name of the cops are being withheld by the Nassau police department.

#### **White-Civilian Condition**

On Monday October 16th, 2017 a violent altercation ensued between a young man and two Nassau County police officers. While biking home, William Corey, a 21 year old Caucasian male, decided to use a different route than normal; resulting in him traveling through Hewlett Bay Park, an affluent town in Nassau County. A few minutes into entering the town, Corey was pursued by two police officers parked at the end of Macy Dr., a street in Hewlett Bay Park. According to Corey's attorneys, the officers pursued Corey because they were not familiar with him in the neighborhood. Corey, an aspiring musician and student, was returning from band practice when the altercation occurred. In their report, the Nassau Police Department state that the officers signaled Corey to pull over with the sound of their siren and flashing of their lights, and he failed to respond initially. Corey's Attorney, however, suggests that Corey did not immediately stop because he was confused as to whether the signal was for him or a car on the road. When Corey finally pulled over, the two police officers immediately came out of their car and approached Corey. Attorneys for Corey state that the cops, without warning, yanked Corey off of his bike and

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slammed him to the ground. Corey resisted arrest, which led one police officer to sit on Corey's back. Although Corey audibly proclaimed his discomfort, the police officer continued to sit on Corey's back, until Corey appeared to be struggling to breathe. Photos show lacerations around Corey's wrists and neck from being pulled off his bike and manhandled. Corey is suffering from minor injuries and recovering at Riverdale Hospital. The name of the cops are being withheld by the Nassau police department.

### Appendix F

#### Consent Form

#### Police-Violence, Media Exposure, and Emotion Regulation Study

#### Consent Form

#### Bard College

Thank you for your interest in the Police-Violence, Media Exposure, and Emotion Regulation study. You are being asked to participate in a study about the effects of media coverage of violent incidents (specifically those having to do with the police) on the emotional health of the people who read about them. We specifically asked you to be a part of this study because you signed up on-line, or in person with the principal investigator (Chanya Riddick). Please read the form carefully and ask any questions you may have before signing and agreeing to participate in the study.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to learn about exposure to violence through media coverage and its effects on the mental health of those exposed. Specifically, we will be investigating how such exposure affects emotion regulation strategies.

**What we will ask you to do:** At the beginning of the study, you will complete a demographics questionnaire. You will then be asked to perform an Emotional Lexical Decision Task (EDLT). During this task, you will identify a string of letters as a word or non-word (ex. “Down” vs. “Dwrn”) as they appear on the computer screen. Words will vary in affect (i.e. positive, negative, and neutral.) In existing research, EDLT has been used to assess the effects of emotions on attention. Your response latency times on the EDLT will be recorded. You will then read a news article about an altercation between a police officer and a civilian. After reading the article, you will perform another EDLT. At the end of the study, the experimenter will debrief you; informing you about the specific hypotheses and purposes of this study.

**Risks and Benefits:** The current study involves reading about police violence. You may find some of the reading material to be sensitive. If you find the materials particularly distressing, and would like to speak to someone about it, please contact Bard Counseling at 845-758-7433 or [counselingservice@bard.edu](mailto:counselingservice@bard.edu), and/or BRAVE, a student-organized intervention and crisis, hotline, at 845-758-7460 ext. 7777 and ask to speak to a BRAVE counselor.

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There are no direct benefits to you as a participant. Your participation, however, will contribute to the growing research on media exposure and mental health.

**Compensation:** Upon completion, your name will be entered into a raffle to win a \$50 gift card. Winners will be chosen at random.

**Confidentiality:** All answers will remain confidential, and records of this study will be kept private. Researchers will omit any identifiable information regarding the subject in public records of this study. Records will be stored away in a locked file; only researchers a part of the current study will have access to them.

**Participation.** Participation is completely voluntary. You may skip questions you do not want to answer and/or withdraw your participation at any point in this study.

**Questions or Concerns?** If you have any questions before or after participating in this study, please contact Chanya Riddick at [cr9397@bard.edu](mailto:cr9397@bard.edu) or 1 347-564-9796 or Thomas Hutcheon at [thutcheo@bard.edu](mailto:thutcheo@bard.edu). If you have any concerns or questions about your rights as a subject in the current study, please direct them to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at [irb@bard.edu](mailto:irb@bard.edu). More information about the IRB can found at <http://www.bard.edu/irb/>.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

The final project that is produced as a result of this study will be permanently and publicly available in the Bard College library and on-line in the Digital Commons.

**Participants must be 18 years or older in order to participate. Only check the following stament if it applies:**

I am 18 years old or older \_\_\_\_\_

Statement of consent: I have read the above information and all my have been questions answered. I consent to participating in this study.

---

Your Name (Print)

---

Your Signature

---

Date

---

Name of the person obtaining consent (Print)

---

Signature of person obtaining consent

---

Date

## **Appendix G**

### **Debriefing Form**

#### **Police-Violence, Media Exposure, and Emotions Study.**

### **Debriefing Form**

#### **Bard College**

Thank you for participating in this study! This debriefing form provides background information to help you better understand the purposes of this study.

You have just participated in a study conducted by Chanya Riddick (Email: cr9397@bard.edu  
Phone: 1-347-564-9796)

You were told the purpose of the current study was to examine the effects of media exposure on the mental health of those exposed. To do this, we examined emotion regulation function using the Emotional Lexical Decision Task after inducing negative emotional states with the stimulus article (i.e. news article.) Specifically, however, we wanted to examine how the race of the participant and the race of the civilian influenced these results. Depending on which condition they were in, participants received one of two versions of the news article: one involving a black-civilian and one involving a white civilian. The participant's condition was chosen completely at random. To protect the integrity of this research, we could not disclose this information at the start of the procedure.

As stated in the consent form, participation in the study is completely voluntary. If you feel so inclined, you may withdraw after reading this debriefing form. Records of your participation will be destroyed upon withdrawal. You will not be penalized for withdrawing.

Data for this study will be collected over the next few weeks. Because of this, it is important that you do not talk, write, email, or disclose information about this project in any way to others. What you communicate to others (especially future participants) may be detrimental to the



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accuracy of the data. We ask that you please keep your comments about the current study to yourself until the study closes.

If you have any current questions about the research, please ask them now. If you have any questions later, please direct them to the principal investigator, Chanya Riddick, at [cr9397@bard.edu](mailto:cr9397@bard.edu). If any adverse effects come as a result of participating this study, please contact Bard College at [irb@bard.edu](mailto:irb@bard.edu).

Please return this debriefing form to the experimenter. Contact information for the researcher and IRB can be found on your copy of the consent form which you may keep for your records.

### **Appendix H.**

#### **IRB Proposal**

Name: Chanya Riddick

Email: [Cr9397@bard.edu](mailto:Cr9397@bard.edu)

Phone: 3475649796

Major: Psychology

Advisor: [Thutcheo@bard.edu](mailto:Thutcheo@bard.edu)

12/5/2017

**Do you have external funding for this research.?**

No

**When do you plan to collect data**

March 2017

**When do you plan to end your data collection for this project?**

May 2017

**What is the title of your project?**

Media Coverage of Traumatic Events and its Effects on Emotional Regulation Function in Young Black Adults.

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### **Will your participants include individuals from vulnerable or otherwise protected populations?**

No

### **Briefly describe how you will recruit participants**

I will recruit participants using multiple methods. First, participants will be recruited through mass department emails and recruitment flyers (see in attached e-mail.) These methods will require people to express their interest in participating in the current study by contacting the email provided ([cr9397@bard.edu](mailto:cr9397@bard.edu).) Once I have been notified of their interest, I will send them a list of questions to verify their eligibility to participate in the study. Once I have reviewed their answers and have determined them to be eligible, I will email the date, time, and location of the study.

I will also approach subjects (or subjects will approach me) at a recruitment table located in highly populated areas on campus (ex. Kline, Campus Center, and Manor House.) Eligibility to participate in the study will be defined by the person meeting the following criteria: must be between 18-22 years of age, identify their race as black or white, and has seen or heard about at least two incidents incident of police violence with-in the last year. Once someone has met each criterium, they will be asked to sign their name and write their email on a sign-up sheet; and will be notified about the date, time, and location of the study in a future email.

**Briefly describe the procedures you will be using to conduct your research. Include descriptions of what tasks your participants will be asked to do, and about how much time will be expected of each individual. NOTE: If you have supporting materials (recruitment posters, printed surveys, etc.) please email these documents separately as attachments to [IRB@bard.edu](mailto:IRB@bard.edu). Name your attachments with your last name and a brief description (e.g., "WatsonConsentForm.doc").**

Upon arrival to the laboratory, participants will review and sign a consent form. Their demographical information (i.e. race, age, prior exposure to violence, etc.) will be retrieved through their completion of a demographic questionnaire (attached in email). To assess current mood, I will ask participants to complete an ecological momentary assessment, or an EMA (attached in e-mail.) Once the participants have completed the EMA, I will escort them into a different room where they will continue the rest of the study, and sit them in front of a laptop or computer. On the computer already will be the start screen for the Emotional Lexical Decision Task. Participants will be prompted to read the instructions. After reading the instructions, I will ask participants if they have any questions. Once it is made clear that participants fully understand what is being asked of them, I will prompt them to begin. The EDLT should take 10 minutes to complete. This is done to assess baseline emotion regulation functioning before being exposed to the stimulus article. I will then distribute the stimulus article, a news report about a violent interaction between a police officer and civilian, to the participant. Participants will be given 5 minutes to read the article. Once the five minutes is over, participants will be given

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one -minute to reflect on what they just read. After one minute is over, I will prompt them to perform another EDLT. The second EDLT should also take 10 minutes to complete. I will then debrief participants about the specific hypotheses and purposes of this study. Participation in the current study is expected to take a total of 45 minutes.

### **Approximately how many individuals do you expect to participate in your study?**

I expect 60 individuals to participate in the current study.

**Please describe any risks and benefits your research may have for your participants. (For example, one study's risks might include minor emotional discomfort and eye strain. The same study's benefits might include satisfaction from contributing to scientific knowledge and greater self-awareness.**

**Risks.** The current study requires participants to read materials about violence, specifically police violence. This subject matter may be sensitive and triggering to some. In the case that participants find the materials particularly distressing, I have provided for them the contact information for both Bard Counseling and BRAVE in the consent form, of which they will receive a copy.

**Benefits.** Participants will be entered in a raffle for a \$50 gift card upon completion of the study. Outside of that, there are no direct benefits to the participant that comes as a result of participating in study. Their participation, however, will help expand existing research on the effects of media consumption and mental health.

### **Have you prepared a consent form and emailed it as an attachment to IRB@bard.edu?**

Yes

### **Please include here the verbal description of the consent process (how you will explain the consent form and the consent process to your participants):**

Upon the participant's arrival to the laboratory, I will hand him or her the consent form. I will verbally explain each section of the consent form, especially stressing the procedure, risk and benefits, and compensation related to the study. Although it is stated in the written consent form, I will verbally reiterate that their participation is completely voluntary and that they may choose to end it at any point in the study. I will then ask participants if they have any questions, and once it is made clear that they understand to what they are consenting, we will begin the study.

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### **What procedures will you use to ensure that the information your participants provide will remain confidential?**

I will keep all answers provided by participants confidential, and records of the study private. I will remove any identifiable information (i.e. name, age, etc.) from public records of the study (e.g. Copies of Senior Project in the Bard College Library and Digital Commons.) Records will be locked away in a file; with only researchers a part of the study having access to them.

### **Will it be necessary to use deception with your participants at any time during this research? Please note: withholding details about the specifics of one's hypothesis does not constitute deception. However, misleading participants about the nature of the research question or about the nature of the task they will be completing does constitute deception.**

Yes

### **If your project study includes deception, please describe here the process you will use, why the deception is necessary, and a full description of your debriefing procedures.**

At the start of the study, participants will be told that the purpose of the current study is to assess media exposure to violence and its effect on emotion regulation functioning. What they do not know, however, is that I will specifically be looking at how their race and the race of the civilian used in the article influences their results on the Emotion Lexical Decision Task, the measure of emotion regulation used in the study. More importantly, they will not know that I will be investigating how these two variables interact with one another to influence these results. During the debriefing process, I will inform participants of the specific independent variables and dependent variables. I will also inform them participants that the race of the civilian in the news article varied depending on the condition he or she was in, and that the condition they were placed in was chosen completely at random.

Participants will also be told that the reading materials used in the study (i.e. the news article) is about an actual event that occurred, and is from a legitimate news source. In actuality, the news article is not real and was created by me for the purposes of this study. The reason for this is because emotional states may not be induced if participants do not believe the event in the news article to be true, which could possibly affect the integrity of my results.

Upon completion of the study, participants will be debriefed on the specific hypotheses, purposes and methods of deception used in the current study, both orally and written. With this knowledge, they will be asked if they are still comfortable with their information and data being used in the study. If the answer is no, their data will be removed from the study and destroyed.

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## Section 3

**If you will be conducting interviews in a language other than English, will you conduct all of the interviews yourself, or will you have the assistance of a translator?**

Not applicable

## Section 4

**If you are a graduate or undergraduate student, has your adviser seen an approved your application?**

Yes