

ADVANCES IN GROUP PROCESSES

Edited by Will Kalkhoff, Shane R. Thye
and Edward J. Lawler

ADVANCES IN
GROUP PROCESSES

VOLUME 40

ADVANCES IN GROUP PROCESSES

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ADVANCES IN GROUP PROCESSES VOLUME 40

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

CONTENTS

<i>List of Contributors</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Preface</i>	<i>xi</i>
Chapter 1 Interpreting Events Involving Police: Liberals, Conservatives, and Moderates in the Face of Ambiguity <i>Jessica L. Collett and Kayla D. R. Pierce</i>	<i>1</i>
Chapter 2 Through the Looking Glass: Self, Inauthenticity, and (Mass) Violence <i>Kimberly B. Rogers, Kaitlin M. Boyle and Maria N. Scaptura</i>	<i>23</i>
Chapter 3 The Effect of Cultural Trust in the Presence of Second Order Trust on Cooperation in a Behavioral Experiment <i>Joshua Doyle</i>	<i>49</i>
Chapter 4 It's About Showing Good Faith, Not Avoiding Shows of Weakness: Reworking Leifer's "Local Action" to Build a Robust Theory of Reciprocity <i>Simon Friis and Ezra W. Zuckerman Sivan</i>	<i>71</i>
Chapter 5 The Diffusion of Binary Versus Continuous Behavior on Social Networks <i>Philipp T. Schneider, Vincent Buskens and Arnout van de Rijt</i>	<i>91</i>
Chapter 6 Interactional Contexts of Workplace Inequality: Differential Emotional Responses to Men and Women in Authority Positions <i>Kate Hawks, Karen A. Hegtvedt and Cathryn Johnson</i>	<i>115</i>
Chapter 7 Sentiments and Status: The Dyad? The Triad? Or Both? <i>Alison J. Bianchi, Yujia Lyu and Inga Popovaite</i>	<i>141</i>

Chapter 8 Cohesion and Solidarity in Consistent and Inconsistent Status Structures	<i>161</i>
<i>Cayce Jamil</i>	
<i>Index</i>	<i>185</i>

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PREFACE

Advances in Group Processes is a peer-reviewed annual volume that publishes theoretical analyses, reviews, and theory-based empirical chapters on group phenomena. This series adopts a broad conception of “group processes.” This includes work on groups ranging from the very small to the very large, and on classic and contemporary topics such as status, power, trust, justice, conflict, social influence, heuristics, identity, decision-making, intergroup relations, and social networks. Previous contributors have included scholars from diverse fields including sociology, psychology, political science, economics, business, philosophy, computer science, mathematics, and organizational behavior.

Several years ago, we added an editorial board to this series to broaden the review process and draw upon the collective expertise of some of the top scholars in the discipline. That board consists of Jessica Collett, Joseph Dippong, Ashley Harrell, Karen Hegtvedt, Will Kalkhoff, Jeff Lucas, Jennifer McLeer and Jane Sell. This group of scholars has made this series better and we are grateful for their service, guidance, and advice.

The first two chapters in this volume use affect control theory (ACT) to address important contemporary social problems. Collett and Pierce fill a gap in the literature on public perceptions of the police by using ACT to link these perceptions to political identity. Their use of ACT allows Collett and Pierce to capture perceptions indirectly, which mitigates response bias problems endemic to research on the police. A sample of 517 MTurk respondents read seven (bogus) headlines concerning different events, and the headlines varied in ambiguity. Both quantitative and qualitative analyses reveal the mechanisms by which readers interpret ambiguous headlines about the police and “fill in the gaps” to align their interpretations with preexisting political beliefs. The study sheds needed light on how political identity influences police perceptions, and it highlights how media coverage may worsen the related political divide and impede social change. Rogers, Boyle, and Scaptura use the affect control theory of self (ACT-Self) to examine another pressing social problem: mass shootings. Results from a qualitative autobiographical analysis as well as a survey study expose strained masculinity as a source of male self-inauthenticity that can lead to violent fantasies and actions. Importantly, the study highlights men’s perceptions of women’s feelings about them, accurate or not, as a “possible intervention point” for reducing mass violence.

The second section of this volume focuses on topics related to social exchange and influence. Joshua Doyle advances and tests a theory of “third order inference” and examines the relative power of group (second order) and cultural (third order) information about social trust on the decision to cooperate in a multi-actor

public goods experiment. Unexpectedly, and contrary to findings from Correll et al.'s (2017) theory of status advantage in meritocratic settings, results reveal that manipulated knowledge of group members' supposed views about social trust in the immediate context (i.e., second order trust) "carried the day" and overwhelmed the influence of manipulated information about the social trust of "most other people" (i.e., third order cultural trust). Doyle raises several pressing questions to be sorted out in future research and discusses important practical implications for addressing the challenges of resolving uncertainty and inducing cooperation in modern, complex societies. Next, Friis and Zuckerman Sivan offer a theoretical analysis of reciprocity that builds on Leifer's theory of local action and improves upon it by offering a more general yet nuanced account of how givers employ "reverse bargaining" to construct a sense of debt in a receiver while simultaneously mitigating suspicion that they furtively desire a positive return on investment. The theory clarifies the role of reverse bargaining in social exchange and usefully synthesizes competing views of reciprocity in the literature. Turning to influence processes, Schneider, Buskens, and van de Rijt offer the first theoretical and empirical analysis of whether the type of decision being made (i.e., binary vs. continuous) affects the likelihood of optimal investment behavior in small, networked groups. Drawing on binary diffusion models and (continuous) models of opinion updating, they create an elegant model that compares binary and continuous decision-making. Contrary to predictions derived from simulations, results from a laboratory experiment lead the authors to conclude that whether a decision process is binary or continuous does not seem "critical." Interestingly, though, they were able to improve the fit of their model by adjusting their simulations to reflect the noisier decision process of "real" human participants. By extending the model to apply to larger and more varied network types and lengthier time spans, this line of work could have important practical implications for addressing contemporary social problems, including people's reluctance to invest in pro-environmental behaviors.

The last three chapters in Volume 40 address questions related to status processes and status-based inequality. Using vignette methods, Hawks, Hegtvedt, and Johnson examine the gendered nature of subordinates' emotional responses to the behaviors of authorities in workplace settings. In general, and as expected, the enactment of "fair" behaviors by a manager, regardless of their gender, elicited reports of more positive (and less negative) emotional responses among workers. Hawks and her colleagues also find that impressions of "competence" and "warmth" link male versus female manager behaviors to positive emotional responses among employees in ways that reflect gender stereotypes, though the findings for negative emotions are more nuanced than expected. The study advances our understanding of how gender stereotypes contextualize subordinate responses to superordinate behaviors in ways that operate to sustain gender inequality at work. Next, Bianchi, Lyu, and Popovaita take a fresh look at the role of sentiments in status processes. To advance the debate about whether sentiments function as status characteristics or whether they alter/moderate status processes, Bianchi and her colleagues offer a "deep dive" into the most relevant theoretical, empirical, and methodological issues at stake, and they offer new,

interdisciplinary insights that should serve to steer future research priorities. Finally, Cayce Jamil revisits Pugh and Wahrman's classic 1983 analysis of "Neutralizing Sexism in Mixed-Sex Groups." He specifically explores the heretofore unanswered question of whether status interventions designed to reduce inequalities in task groups could have unintended negative consequences for group solidarity. Jamil's replication of Pugh and Wahrman's study did not produce a baseline difference in influence along gender lines; this time there was no difference to be neutralized. Furthermore, contrary to speculation by earlier researchers, the standardized status intervention employed by Jamil did not have negative consequences for solidarity. While further work remains to be done on the relationship between status and solidarity, Jamil's findings give us some confidence that status interventions do not solve one problem while creating another.

Will Kalkhoff, Shane R. Thye and Edward J. Lawler
Volume Co-Editors

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CHAPTER 1

INTERPRETING EVENTS INVOLVING POLICE: LIBERALS, CONSERVATIVES, AND MODERATES IN THE FACE OF AMBIGUITY

Jessica L. Collett and Kayla D. R. Pierce

ABSTRACT

Purpose: We show political divisions in perceptions of police officers even before the divisive political and social events of 2016. We do so using respondents' interpretations of surprising and ambiguous headlines involving police officers (e.g., assumptions about what happened or who was involved).

Methodology/Approach: We use affect control theory's ABO event structure and derivations of this structure to construct a set of headlines that describe ostensibly good people (A) doing bad things (B) to other good people (O) or are ambiguous on one or more of these components. We present 517 MTurk respondents with a set of seven headlines and collect quantitative and qualitative data on their reactions to, and interpretations of, these headline events.

Findings: Police headlines generate interest among readers. When interpreting events, respondents are less likely to modify or redefine police officers compared to other actors. However, assumptions related to ambiguous events involving police differ by political orientation. Liberals view police more negatively than conservatives, in part because they imagine them doing worse things to slightly better people. Qualitative analyses support and shed light on the mechanisms underlying this and other partisan effects.

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Research Limitations: The research was designed to examine interest in headline structure, not specific actors. Thus, the patterns unique to police and political differences were not an original focus. We believe these inductive results are informative, but a study expressly designed to test hypotheses regarding perceptions of events with police officers is recommended for future work.

Practical and Social Implications: Understanding the political divide in perceptions of police and the potential of media coverage for exacerbating these effects is essential and related to ACTs growing interest in meaning divergence.

Keywords: Affect control theory; morality; police/policing; political polarization; media; social psychology

The summer of 2016 was pivotal for Black Lives Matter (BLM) with the back-to-back shootings of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile in early July. Demonstrations – including a deadly one in Dallas – swept the country in the following weeks. National news outlets covered this surge, and in August, NFL players – beginning with Colin Kaepernick – began protesting during the National Anthem. Black Lives Matter was on the national stage as a wider (and whiter) audience realized what social science research had shown for over a decade: whether conscious or unconscious, police officers’ perceptions of Black men led them to see even benign situations as threatening and to use excessive, even deadly force, in these encounters (e.g., Correll et al., 2002; Richardson, 2014).

Police brutality and reform increasingly became political issues (Stout, 2020), confidence in police officers became polarized (Brady & Kent, 2022), and the Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton struggled politically as she walked a line between BLM activists and police unions. As the public considered the influence of police officers’ perceptions of Black men – and, to a lesser extent, women (Crenshaw et al., 2015) – in this disturbing trend, we uncovered the significant effect this national conversation had on perceptions of another group: police officers themselves.

A few weeks before the shootings of Sterling and Castile, as part of a larger study, we asked participants to interpret events presented as headlines. A subset of these headlines included police officers. In this chapter, we use mixed methods analyses of this data to document the emergent divides in the country on perceptions of police officers as realized through the interpretation of events, using affect control theory (ACT) to inform our analyses. Specifically, we find important political divisions in the interpretation of events involving the police. Although preliminary, alongside other recent work in ACT, we believe our findings demonstrate the potential of sociological social psychology for understanding these perceptions, their patterns, and the potential durability of these beliefs (Hunzaker & Valentino, 2019; Kiley & Vaisey, 2020).

We found that in the summer of 2016, regardless of age, race, and political leanings, readers were equally drawn to headlines involving police officers and

rated these headlines as more interesting than identical headlines with different actors (e.g., mothers, caregivers). However, despite similar levels of interest, the free-response interpretations of the events we solicited diverged significantly by political orientation (Boyle & Meyer, 2018). In the case of headlines involving police, liberals were significantly more likely than moderates or conservatives to imagine they were tied to police behaving badly toward victims who are generally seen as good (e.g., his partner, a black person, someone innocent), whereas those with more conservative views assumed that victims of police violence are particularly bad (e.g., a gunman, criminal, or attacker) and deserving of negative treatment.¹ Even in ambiguous events where there is no mention of the police (e.g., *Boy shot* or *Dog stabbed*), when respondents were prompted to discern what happened, liberals were more likely than conservatives to mention police as the potential culprit. Our results suggest that pre-existing schemas regarding police influence readers' assumptions and these schemas are tied to political orientation (Hunzaker & Valentino, 2019). Specifically, liberal and conservatives' inferences and explanations of events involving police differ in systematic ways, potentially reinforcing biases and politically polarized perceptions of police. Given the course of the BLM movement and increased political polarization and "sectarianism" (Finkel et al., 2020) since our data were collected, we believe our work offers a conservative test of the existence of politically divided perceptions of police today.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

People's impressions of actors, including police officers, play an important role in how they view and interact with the world around them (Heise & Smith-Lovin, 1981). People consciously or unconsciously use the meanings they ascribe to actors to generate expectations for behavior. These meanings are often tied to identities – like police officers, gunmen, or racists – and deeply influence how people experience and understand the social world (Averett & Heise, 1987). In social psychology, researchers have largely assumed that cultural meanings and expectations for identities are widely shared within a culture, meaning that almost everyone in the United States would have similar meanings for such role identities as police officer (for exceptions, see Sewell & Heise, 2010; Smith-Lovin & Douglass, 1992). For example, in data collected in 2021, police officers were still viewed as somewhat good in the United States.² However, consistent with recent work on meaning subcultures (e.g., Boyle & Meyer, 2018; Jacobs, 2022; Rogers, 2018, 2019) and political sectarianism influencing media consumption, core values, and more (Finkel et al., 2020), we argue that rating of police may reflect the center of quite polarized evaluations between groups rather than a widespread impression.

Affect Control Theory

People want to live in a world that makes sense, where things go as expected. For example, we expect good people to do good things to good people. Consider learning that a mother hit a child. That event has an actor (*A*: a mother), a behavior (*B*: hit), and an object (*O*: a child). In ACT, impressions for actors, behaviors, and objects fall along three dimensions: evaluation, potency, and activity. Mothers are expected to be kind to their children because both mothers (2.90) and children (2.21) have quite positive ratings on the evaluation dimension (how good or bad one is thought to be).³ Parents are also seen as high in the potency dimension (2.30 for parent, 2.43 for mother), a measure of agency or power, compared to children who are seen as somewhat weak and vulnerable (−1.68). It is especially upsetting to hear of a good and powerful person abusing someone who is not only good but also weak or dependent.

According to ACT, unexpected events produce deflection – a gap between what is happening in the situation and what one would expect from actors based on their identities (MacKinnon, 1994). Because extreme deflection is associated with discomfort and even distress, people are motivated to engage in cognitive and interpretive strategies to try to reduce it. For instance, to reduce deflection, people will frequently reassess the event, ensuring that the actor, behavior, and object were originally as assumed or to prompt a redefinition. Did the mother actually hit *a brat*? Or is she not a mother, but *a monster*? Was she *disciplining* her child, rather than hitting them? Research suggests that in interpreting an unexpected event like this, observers are most likely to change their perceptions of the behavior (Curdy, 2018; Nelson, 2006; Pierce & Collett, n.d.). For example, hitting would be reinterpreted as disciplining, something we would expect a mother to do to a child before either the mother or child were redefined.

Actors with positive evaluations are not always expected to act benevolently. Although mothers are generally expected to be kind and caring, individuals will consider the other actor involved in the encounter to determine expectations for the mother's behavior (MacKinnon, 1994). For example, if a mother encounters a child molester, simulations in Interact suggest her most likely behaviors are to sentence, incarcerate, or prosecute. ACT can also predict how people fill in missing identities based on established fundamental sentiments. For example, someone might use a mother's behavior toward another person to determine who that other is. If the mother is disciplining an alter, Interact simulations suggest that alter is her child or step-child. Understanding how observers fill in the gaps is important because complete information about events is often unavailable in social life (Hunzaker, 2016) and interpretations can be patterned socially, including by political beliefs (Boyle & Meyer, 2018; Hunzaker & Valentino, 2019).

Perceptions of Police and Police Behavior

Previous research on perceptions of policing and police officer behavior finds important differences across demographic groups and communities (e.g., Brown & Benedict, 2002; Pryce & Chenane, 2021). Results consistently show that Black people are more likely than other racial groups to believe that law enforcement and

the criminal justice system are unfair and to hold negative perceptions of police officers (e.g., [Hurwitz & Peffley, 2005](#); [Weitzer & Tuch, 2004](#)). This is particularly true among economically disadvantaged communities and in urban environments ([Hagan et al., 2018](#); [Schuck et al., 2008](#)), as middle-class Black people living in the suburbs historically have perceptions more similar to their White neighbors than disadvantaged Black people ([Weitzer, 1999](#)). However, this “safe haven” effect may have eroded since that research was conducted over two decades ago.

There is less research on the connection between political orientation and perceptions of police than on the influence of race and residential context, but existing work suggests the two are related. For example, [Drakulich et al. \(2020\)](#) show that 2016 voter turnout was higher among people who either supported BLM or the police than among people with more tepid views on the issue, indicating that the issue motivated people politically. [Federico et al. \(2013\)](#) show that “binding” moral foundations (e.g., authority, ingroup-loyalty, and purity) are linked to political ideology, with conservatives scoring higher on these dimensions compared to liberals, and [Silver et al. \(2022\)](#) demonstrate that these also matter for predicting support of the police and lack of support for BLM. Scoring high on dimensions of national identity and loyalty to the state also predict support for the police, leading some to argue that negative perceptions related to race and class stem from communities’ estrangement from the state ([Weitzer, 2010](#); [Wolfe & McLean, 2021](#)). This, and the heteronormative culture associated with the police and other state institutions ([Miles-Johnson, 2013](#)), may contribute to the more negative evaluations of police the LGBTQ community has compared to their heterosexual counterparts, even controlling for race, class, age, and other potential predictors ([Owen et al., 2018](#)).

If observers enter situations believing police or law enforcement is unfair, then this will impact their interpretation of events ([Braga et al., 2014](#); [Hurwitz & Peffley, 2005](#); [Jacobs, 2022](#)). For example, using a factorial survey with vignettes, [Seron, Pereira, and Kovath \(2004\)](#) find that liberals reported much more misconduct in situations involving police than conservatives, and Black respondents’ misconduct ratings were higher than those of White respondents. [Jacobs \(2022\)](#) found that liberals had significantly more negative views of a police officer involved in a “politically salient” situation (i.e., arresting a jaywalking immigrant) than conservatives, but there were no political differences if the police were involved in an “apolitical situation” (i.e., helping a lost child).

Although beliefs about police officers are thought to result from previous positive or negative experiences with law enforcement ([Bartsch & Cheurprakobkit, 2004](#)), ACT predicts that even those who have never interacted with the police have fundamental sentiments about them that influence expectations ([Sargent et al., 2020](#)). Following from ACT, if someone believes a police officer is good, then they will expect them to behave benevolently toward others who are also good. If someone has a more negative perception of the police, then they may expect them to behave poorly, even – or especially – when interacting with someone good.

To date there is little research combining ACT and policing. However, as part of a study of cultural meanings of occupations, Quinn and colleagues ([Quinn, Freeland, Rogers, et al., 2023](#)) collected data on perceptions of police across time. [Fig. 1.1](#) reports these ratings (from 2019, 2020, to 2021) alongside data collected

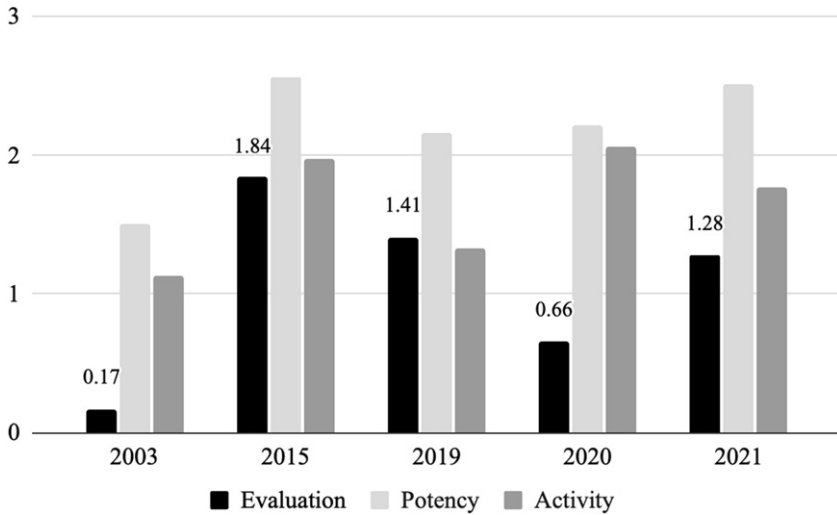


Fig. 1.1. Police Officer EPA Ratings Over Time. *Note:* 2003 ratings drawn from Francis and Heise (2006); 2015 ratings drawn from Smith-Lovin et al. (2019); 2019–2021 ratings are unweighted means shared by Quinn with the authors from data collected for Quinn et al. (2023).

at Indiana University between 2002 and 2004 (Francis & Heise, 2006) and an online sample in 2015 (Smith-Lovin et al., 2019). Among Midwest college students in the earlier 2000s, there were more neutral perceptions of police than in more recent studies – when police became somewhat good on the evaluation dimension. There was a notable dip in the evaluation rating in 2020 (the era of George Floyd and BLM protests). Despite the subsequent rise, the mean evaluation score in 2021 ($M = 1.28$, $SD = 2.45$) is still lower than in 2019 ($M = 1.41$, $SD = 2$).⁴ Particularly important for the current research, the measure’s standard deviation steadily, and significantly, increased over the three most recent surveys ($F [109,190] = 0.67$, $p < 0.05$). This spread, indicated by the growing standard deviation, may be an indicator of increased polarization. Coupled with recent research by Jacobs (2022) showing that Republicans and Democrats assign different labels to law enforcement in the same situation – with Democrats using jerk or bully more frequently than their Republican peers who tended to favor cop or police officer – we argue the fundamental sentiments of police officers could be shifting across partisan lines.

The Current Study

The data here come from a larger study on headlines as events. Specifically, we were exploring whether individuals were more interested in surprising, yet complete, headlines (i.e., events, in ACT language) or more ambiguous headlines. To create the ambiguous headlines, we use the complete headlines but leave certain

components unspecified. This allows us to not only test interest between full and ambiguous headlines, but to pinpoint the type of missing information most likely to pull readers in.

Put another way, our headlines vary in structure and by components. For variation in structure, we use ACT’s general event structure of Actor (A), Behavior (B), and Object (O). In our headlines, *structure* is which of the A, B, and O components of an event are included (see [Table 1.1](#)). To make the headlines sufficiently different, yet comparable, we vary the specific *components* (identities and behaviors) but keep their affective ratings rather similar. Specifically, we use actors who are generally seen as somewhat or quite good and with some power or agency (e.g., caregiver, police officer, father), behaviors that are bad and vary on activity (e.g., from stabbing to abandons), and objects that are generally good and somewhat weak or dependent (e.g., infant, dog, elderly woman).

In this chapter, we move away from the broader findings and center our attention on police officers. We focus on headlines involving police officers as actors – regardless of headline structure – but also include instances where respondents brought police into events even when there was no mention of them (e.g., identifying the likely actor in a “reported shooting” as “poorly trained police”) in our qualitative analyses. We begin by detailing our methods and coding strategies. We then present quantitative and qualitative data demonstrating the politicization of perceptions of the police. We close with a brief discussion of our results, limitations, and potential for future research.

METHODS AND DATA

From Events to Headlines

To craft headlines, we used each component to create all the possible full information events (ABO) and wrote these events in six different ways (ABO, AB, AO, BO, A/O+B, and B) (see [Table 1.1](#)). To make headlines with the AB structure read more like a news headline, we put “who a” in front of the actor and behavior. For example, a headline with caregiver as the actor and stabs as the

Table 1.1. Event Structures and Their Popularity.

Event Structure	Examples of Event With Same A-B-O	Selected to Read
ABO	Police officer shoots boy	39%
AB	Who a police officer shot	9%
AO	A police officer did this to a boy	15%
BO	Boy shot	10%
B	Reported shooting	11%
A/O+B	Police officer involved in shooting	16%

Components Key: *A* = Actor (man/woman, father/mother, police officer, caregiver), *B* = Behavior (attacks, kills, stabs, shoots, abandons, abuses), *O* = Object (boy/girl, infant, elderly woman/elderly man, dog).

behavior would read, *Who a caregiver stabbed*. Similarly, we added “reported” to each B structure headline (e.g., *Stabbing reported*). In the case of adults, parents, children, and the elderly, we varied the gender of the identities mentioned (man/woman, father/mother, boy/girl, and elderly man/elderly woman) so that each gender was presented 50% of the time. For example, 50% of the headlines involving parents described an actor (A) who was a father and the other 50% involved mothers.⁵ The EPA ratings of all the actors, behaviors, and objects used in our headlines can be found in [Table 1.2](#).⁶

After pre-testing suggested that the B headline prompted respondents to claim that a police officer or other good and powerful person was harmed, we decided to add an A/O+B structure where we intentionally made it ambiguous whether the person in the headline is the actor or the object. The 2015 shooting of *Jemel Roberson*, a significant event in the larger BLM movement, shows the importance of ambiguous situations like these. *Roberson*, a security guard, was detaining the man who caused the disturbance at the club where *Roberson* worked when police assumed that *Roberson* himself was the person they had been called about and fatally shot him. To capture this, we included the phrase,

Table 1.2. EPA Ratings for the Components in the Headlines.

	Evaluation	Potency	Activity
<i>Actors</i>			
Man	0.99	1.23	0.69
Woman	1.76	0.61	0.71
Father	2.17	2.14	0.92
Mother	2.90	2.43	1.35
Police officer	1.84	2.57	1.97
Caregiver	2.24	1.17	0.71
<i>Behaviors</i>			
Attacks	-3.07	1.67	2.84
Shoots	-3.06	1.61	2.97
Abuses	-3.68	0.06	1.95
Stabs	-3.64	1.80	2.59
Kills	-3.63	2.15	2.23
Abandons	-3.19	-0.43	-0.60
<i>Objects</i>			
Boy	1.26	0.20	1.99
Girl	2.03	0.57	0.85
Elderly man	0.93	0.13	-0.71
Elderly woman	1.34	-0.32	-0.77
Senior citizen	1.46	-0.79	-1.59
Infant	2.51	-2.75	1.11
Dog	2.33	1.51	2.37

Note: EPA ratings are from the 2015 USA Online Dictionary ([Smith-Lovin et al., 2019](#)) except “dog” and “caregiver” which were collected for the authors with the occupational data used by [Quinn et al. \(2023\)](#).