



Vicarious Threat Conditioning of Police-Threat Associations: Implications for Behavior and Trust in the Police



Madeleine Stults, Vincenzo Olivett

Research Advisor: Dr. David S. March, Ph.D., Department of Psychology

Introduction

Increased media coverage of police violence shapes public concern over negative police-civilian interactions.

- **Existing Research:**
 - Automatic police-threat associations and resulting civilian defensive behaviors.
 - Vicarious threat conditioning resulting in threat associations similar to direct threat exposure.
- **Remaining Questions:**
 - What drives these associations, and what are their psychological implications?
- **Using videos of police-civilian encounters, we examined the effect of exposure to police violence on:**
 - Automatic police-threat associations
 - Psychological and behavioral consequences (trust & intentions towards police)
- **Hypotheses:** Vicarious video exposure to police violence can result in automatic police-threat associations akin to threat conditioning with physical stimuli, and result in more negative explicit and automatic associations towards law enforcement.

Objectives

- (1) Investigate whether vicarious exposure to police violence increases automatic police-threat association.
- (2) Examine related consequences for trust and behavioral intentions around police.



Methodology

1. **Affective Misattribution Procedure (AMP):**
 - a. indirect measure of automatic associations towards police
2. **Video Exposure to Police Violence:**
 - a. method and measure for vicarious threat exposure
 - b. high-violence videos vs. low-violence videos
3. **Post-Exposure AMP:**
 - a. measure change in implicit attitudes towards police
4. **Self-Report Trust and Behavioral Intentions Towards Police:**
 - a. direct measure of explicit attitudes towards police



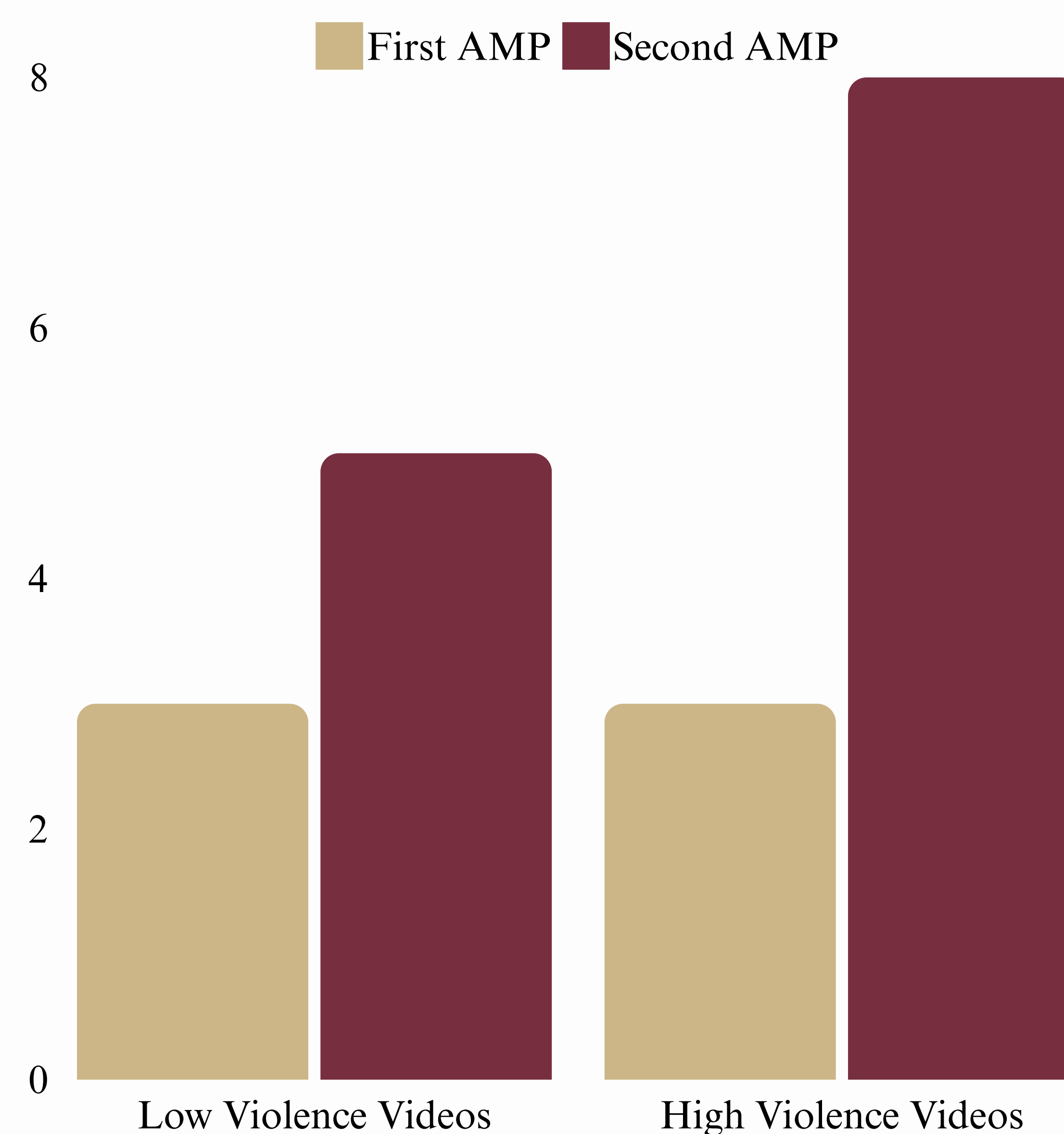
Implications

Additional psychological implications

- acute stress
- physical health outcomes
- persistent threat responses and heightened general threat sensitivity

Racial differences in severity of psychological implications

- Primary socialization regarding police encounters (e.g. the "Police Talk")
- Generations of vicarious and direct exposure to police violence in non-White families, leading to a greater police-threat association over time
- Greater aversion towards police due to increased risk of direct/indirect exposure to police violence in minority communities



Anticipated Results

Participants viewing high-violence videos will experience a stronger increase (as compared to the low-violence group) in automatic police-threat association and negative consequences regarding trust and behavioral intentions towards police.

