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# Collective Memory and History: An Examination of Perceptions of Accuracy and Preference for Biased “History” Passages

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Claremont McKenna College

**Collective Memory and History: An Examination of Perceptions of Accuracy and Preference for Biased “History” Passages**

submitted to  
Professor Sharda Umanath

by  
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for  
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### Abstract

Collective memory is a socially shared representation of the past. History, contrastingly, strives to be an unbiased, objective, and critical account of the past. Many researchers have argued that the so-called “history” found in school textbooks and curriculums align more with collective memory; however, many individuals do not know of the pervasiveness of collective memory in supposed “history” texts. To examine perceptions of accuracy and preference of American “history” textbook passages, individuals from Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (n= 404) participated in an online study where they were randomly assigned to read one passage that was either negatively biased, neutral, or positively biased regarding the U.S. dropping the atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II. Participants rated their emotional valence of the event and their perceptions of accuracy and preference for the passage. The results suggest that individuals perceive negatively biased passages as less accurate and less preferable, even if their emotional valence matches the bias within the text. Individuals also showed the hypothesized interaction for preference; those who perceived the event as not negative preferred the positive text to the neutral and negative texts. The findings support evidence that individuals are motivated to prefer history passages consistent with their attitudes and rate higher accuracy among positive and neutral texts. The results have broader implications on reporting or dismissing human rights violations within collective memory.

*Keywords:* collective memory, history, biases, emotional valence, accuracy, preference, human rights

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**Background**

Oklahoma House Bill 1380, introduced and sponsored by the United States (U.S.) House of Representatives' member Dan Fisher, could have changed history. The bill proposed reviewing the new guidelines and potentially eliminating state funding for the Advanced Placement (A.P.) U.S. History course in Oklahoma (Kamenetz & Turner, 2015). The critics of the new A.P. framework claimed that the guidelines radically reflected a negative perspective of American history and intentionally neglected a positive view (Kamenetz & Turner, 2015). Representative Fisher argued that the new A.P. history curriculum removed the perspective of “American exceptionalism” from its contents (Kamenetz & Turner, 2015). Other states, including Texas, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Colorado, joined in Oklahoma’s protest of the “revisionist” version of American history (Lerner, 2015). The states criticized the framework for not encouraging enough patriotism and instead promoting a debate of American exceptionalism, rather than teaching it as a principle (Lerner, 2015). The Oklahoma House of Representatives’ Common Education Committee passed the bill, but Representative Fisher promised that the House would not cut funding from the A.P. program, like the bill had originally stated (Kamenetz & Turner, 2015). Representative Fisher later withdrew the bill, though, because of the spreading national controversy surrounding it (Lerner, 2015).

A.P. courses provide rigorous coursework in a multitude of subjects. When completed with a passing score on a specific subject’s examination, the course can be

transferred to college credit or simply allow students to understand different subjects at a more challenging pace to prepare them for college (“AP United States History: Including the Curriculum Framework”, 2015). The specific A.P. course for U.S. History develops students into critical analyzers of major events in American history (“AP United States History: Including the Curriculum Framework”, 2015).

Prior to 2015, the College Board had reframed the A.P. U.S. History curriculum to broaden U.S. history to a list of key concepts that did “not promote any particular political position or interpretation of history” (Hartmann, 2015). In other words, it deviated from the more traditionally taught curriculum using the guiding principle of American exceptionalism. The new framework encouraged debating the issue of American exceptionalism using key historical events as arguments for either side of the debate (Lerner, 2015). The state representatives who supported the Oklahoma bill resented the inclusion of moral dilemmas, such as U.S.-run internment camps and the dropping of the atomic bombs during World War II (Hartmann, 2015).

In Oklahoma, representatives believed the new A.P. course imposed a threat to the current curriculum and historical rhetoric. The integral issue debated in the above example centers around the “history” that is taught in schools. History textbooks are used as political and cultural tools that are used to reflect the goals and opinions of a nation-state or group (Blatz & Ross, 2009; Obradović, 2016; Podeh, 2000; Roediger, Zaromb, & Bulter, 2009). Hence, the “history” taught in schools and found in American history textbooks closely aligns with another concept— collective memory (Roediger, Zaromb, & Butler, 2009).

### **Collective Memory versus History**

Collective memory is a socially shared representation of the past that plays an integral role in maintaining the identity of a group (Roediger & Abel, 2015; Wertsch & Roediger, 2008). Collective memory can change over time to reflect shifting sentiments within society (Roediger & Abel, 2015; Wertsch, 2009). Collective memory, introduced in the 1920s by Maurice Halbwachs, is studied within many different scholarly avenues, such as history, anthropology, sociology, psychology, literature, and philosophy (Hirst & Manier, 2008; Roediger & Abel, 2015). The nature of collective memory makes it hard to fit within just one academic discipline (Wertsch & Roediger, 2008). Additionally, researchers typically study collective memory research from the sociological, historical, and philosophical perspectives because other social factors mediate the construction of collective memories that are not specific to psychology (Hirst & Manier, 2008; Zelig & Nachson, 2012). Thus far, psychology researchers have qualitatively studied collective memory; however, the empirical study of collective memory research has recently begun to spread (Roediger & Abel, 2015). When thinking about collective memory, a few conceptual oppositions are typically addressed to help explain what collective memory is and what it is not (Roediger & Abel, 2015). Among the oppositions, one is particularly relevant to the present study— history versus collective memory. History is typically defined as an academic and objective representation of the past (Wertsch, 2009). Collective memory; however, reveals how groups interpret history (Bikmen, 2013). Collective memory is very connected to history; however, in the 1920s, near the beginning of collective memory research, Halbwachs defined "formal history" as the antithesis of collective memory (Halbwachs, 1925/1992; Wertsch, 2009). After

Halbwachs' research, historian Peter Novick (1999) continued studying the oppositions of collective memory and history (Wertsch, 2009).

Wertsch (2009), in many ways, borrows from Novick in his distinction between collective memory and history. He suggests, though, that collective memory and history are not dichotomous terms after all and instead lie along a continuum. Almost anything, Wertsch (2009) argues, can be considered a mixture of both collective memory and history. Wertsch (2009) constructed a chart to categorize the particular tendencies of collective memory and history. The first distinction—that collective memory is “subjective” and history is “objective”—is important to the present study. A portion of the chart that displays only the first distinction and the underlying distinctions underneath the categories of “subjective” and “objective” from Wertsch’s (2009) collective memory versus history table can be found below.

Collective Memory	History
"Subjective"	"Objective"
Single committed perspective	Distanced from any particular perspective
Reflects a particular group's framework	Reflects no particular social framework
Unself-conscious	Critical, reflective stance
Impatient with ambiguities about motives and the interpretation of events	Recognizes ambiguity

The table provides an outline for the differences between collective memory and history, but Wertsch makes it clear that the two columns reflect the tendencies of one versus the other (Wertsch, 2009). When it comes to supposed “history” textbooks, the passages do not neatly fit into the category of history. They often reflect a certain

perspective, typically one that aligns with a nation's identity (Roediger, Zaromb, & Butler, 2009).

### **The Value of Studying History Textbooks in Collective Memory Research**

In one attempt to push back against the Oklahoma lawmakers' new bill, Moin Nadeem, an Oklahoma high school student, started a Change.org petition (Hartmann, 2015). He responded to the situation by stating, "it's our right to learn. The state can't say what we can and what we can't learn" (Hartmann, 2015). Arguably, the state and other national institutions perhaps do have the power to control what is learned, and that power dynamic results in learning a curriculum that is based on the most current cultural values and politics (Roediger, Zaromb, & Butler, 2009). Curriculums change throughout the years to reflect the current and most present perspective of history, or the collective memory of the present. It is this very reason that collective memory can affectively be studied by analyzing textbooks used by students during their formative years in school (Roediger, Zaromb, & Butler, 2009).

Through data collection, Roediger, Zaromb, & Butler (2009) confirmed the usefulness of studying collective memory through textbooks. They found that 85 percent of students' knowledge for the Civil War and 77 percent of students' knowledge for World War II came from history textbooks and school teachers (Roediger, Zaromb, & Butler, 2009). To further support the argument of the efficacy of studying textbooks in collective memory research, Ward (2006) argued that textbooks have the very unique quality of being a representation of the national identity within a country (Roediger, Zaromb, & Butler, 2009). Authorities of nation-states have the power to influence the learned national heritage and identity of a nation-state, alongside its core and collective

values (Roediger, Zaromb, & Butler, 2009). The evidence shown here of the role that textbooks play in studying collective memory is a key reason for the use of history textbooks in the present study.

### **Collective Memory and Emotional Valence**

In Zaromb, Butler, Agarwal, and Roediger's (2013) study on the collective memory of three wars, the researchers asked participants to rate their emotional valence for the events they recalled from the wars. From looking at the emotional valence ratings, the patterns suggested that younger and older adults shared similar emotions toward the events (Zaromb, Butler, Agarwal, & Roediger, 2013). Contrastingly, for the event of the U.S. dropping the atomic bomb during World War II, the older and younger adults had dichotomous valence ratings (Zaromb, Butler, Agarwal, & Roediger, 2013). The researchers posited the opposite valences to the historical contexts in which the two groups learned about the event (Zaromb, Butler, Agarwal, & Roediger, 2013).

Endorsement of specific narratives can affect attitudes in the present (Bikmen, 2013). The younger adults had learned about the event through historical sources; whereas, the older adults had lived during the event and thus used their lived experiences to influence their ratings of the emotional valence (Zaromb, Butler, Agarwal, & Roediger, 2013). Older adults also tend to show a positivity bias in memory, which could support the finding that they viewed the specific event as positive when the younger adults viewed it as negative (Mather & Carstensen, 2005; Zaromb, Butler, Agarwal, & Roediger, 2013). The researchers suggested that the dichotomous valence could best be attributed to the generation differences from the changing narrative of the event across time (Zaromb, Butler, Agarwal, & Roediger, 2013). Thus, the emotional valence of collective memories

can depend on the social influences that change narrative structures over time. In support of this claim, a study conducted by sociologist, Lynn Spigel (2005), indicated that students' perceptions mapped onto television portrayals of the progressive emancipation of women occurring since the 1950s (Anderson, 2001). The notion that individual's perceptions are dictated by what they consume could have implications on how they perceive other knowledge regarding topics they have previously learned.

Memory acts as a means to shape future behavior and thought (Anderson, 2001). When individuals consume knowledge of historical events, there are various factors that influence what is remembered and what functional use it might have for the individual in the future (Anderson, 2001). Because memory shapes individual's perceptions and behaviors, it can dictate how and what they remember. Individual's memories are largely dependent on the social contexts they are immersed in (Reese & Fivush, 2008; Halbwachs, 1950/1980). Halbwachs (1950/1980) postulated that memory had social purposes, and individuals are motivated by these social purposes to remember in a certain way (Reese & Fivush, 2008). The social context of our memories means that the way individuals perceive incoming information stems from what they previously consumed. In other words, individuals learn about an event from a specific lens, choose to retain and understand the memory of the event based on their immediate social context, and then interact with new information about the event with a predetermined valence of the collective memory. Thus, in the present study, emotional valence is predicted to interact and determine perceptions for information individuals have previously encountered.

### **Collective Memory and Accuracy**

Collective memory is highly dependent on social contexts (Halbwachs, 1950/1980; Reese & Fivush, 2008). To some researchers, a function of collective memory is that it lives outside of the self within society (Hirst & Manier, 2015). Irwin-Zarecka (1994) argued that collective memory is best located in the shared resources of a group, rather than in the individual. Some researchers even go so far as to argue that collective memory is not about the individual at all (Hirst & Manier, 2015). The problem with this assessment, though, is that collective memories must be located in the individual (Hirst & Manier, 2015). It is here, in the individual, that collective memories are transmitted and remembered. Collective memory employs individual memory. The individual imposes all of the biases and different social contexts to change the perception and reception of the collective memory.

In terms of the memory mechanisms involved in creating and retaining collective memories, repeated retrieval plays an integral role in the strengthening of collective memories (Roediger, Zaromb, & Butler, 2009). Repeated retrieval over the course of a long period of time induces the spacing effect. The spacing effect promotes long-term retention of certain information (Roediger, Zaromb, & Butler, 2009). If a particular collective memory is repeated over the course of a period of time, it will be retained in memory (Roediger, Zaromb, & Butler, 2009).

Another means for collective memory retention is the feedback students receive in school settings (Roediger, Zaromb, & Butler, 2009). Feedback refers directly to the accuracy of one's memory performance of certain information (Roediger, Zaromb, & Butler, 2009). One of the functions of feedback, especially in schools, is to correct memory errors (Roediger, Zaromb, & Butler, 2009). Collective memory narratives can be

shaped by feedback (Roediger, Zaromb, & Butler, 2009). The feedback can help shape an accurate or inaccurate collective memory. In some cases, accuracy of collective memories can lead to celebrations— for instance, the shared acceptance of the accuracy of the signing of the Declaration of Independence on the Fourth of July (Roediger, Zaromb, & Butler, 2009). An inaccuracy, however, can lead to group disagreements (Roediger, Zaromb, & Butler, 2009). There are limitations to establishing something as objectively true, and consensus changes over time with regards to the accuracy of certain events, especially with relation to events presented in textbooks (Roediger, Zaromb, & Butler, 2009). Though it is hard to come to a consensus about truth, retrieving inaccurate information repeatedly over time supports remembering inaccurate information, just as retrieving accurate information over time leads to remembering accurate information (Roediger, Zaromb, & Butler, 2009). Feedback during the retrieval stage of memory formation can mediate the effects of learning and retaining accurate information; however, feedback can also have the opposite effect if inaccurate information is spread by group members (Roediger, Zaromb, & Butler, 2009). Therefore, accurate and inaccurate information is repeatedly learned and rehearsed and thus perceived as an individual's accurate version of history.

### **Collective Memory and Preference**

Researchers have found that information that is aligned with our beliefs and supportive of our preferences is remembered more so than information not aligned with our preferences (Blatz & Ross, 2009; Loewen, 1995). Additionally, individuals do not prefer hearing or remembering injustices that their in-group has committed (Blatz & Ross, 2009). History texts are typically written by those in power, and they can choose to

promote their own superiority (Blatz & Ross, 2009). Government authorities can manipulate textbooks, monuments, memorials, and rituals to aid in shaping collective memories (Hirst, Cuc, & Wohl, 2012). Political elites are human, so they share the same motivations as ordinary people. Thus, ordinary people remember history in line with their current motivations, and political elites, who are not immune to this behavior, do the same (Blatz & Ross, 2009). The cyclical process of this issue permeates into collective memory texts and suggests that texts are typically written, and preferred, from the perspective of self-promotion.

Collective memory tends to change with the times, reflecting the identity and framework of the present cultural and societal ideals (Wertsch, 2009). The changing nature of collective memory results in differences produced in textbooks and institutions but also in different generations and across different countries. There is almost always more than one narrative for how a group remembers an event (Bikmen, 2013; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). More than one narrative of an event results in differences in remembering certain events among individuals in the same society living in the same era. Some researchers argue that there is a constant battle between those in power and the civilians that also want to control the past of a collective memory (Wertsch & Roediger, 2008). Family discussions, museums, monuments, memorials, history textbooks, and national holidays all become sources of contestation for the presentation of historical events. In one example of the dispute of how to remember an event, the National Air and Space Museum in the Washington D.C. Smithsonian system began the construction of an exhibit dedicated to remembering the bombing of Hiroshima (Wertsch & Roediger, 2008). U.S. veterans, the U.S. Congress, and members of the public all became a part of

what was called a "history war" (Wertsch & Roediger, 2008). For the veterans and other community members, they expected the exhibit to reflect the bomb as a means to an end for World War II (Wertsch & Roediger, 2008). The exhibit had already begun plans to reflect on the debate of dropping the bomb and the result of the suffering inflicted on Japan and its civilians (Wertsch & Roediger, 2008). In the end, the exhibit was not displayed as it had originally been intended, and there was little debate regarding the perception of the public historical event (Wertsch & Roediger, 2008). The issue of the portrayal of the bomb occurred in the early 1990s, however, there have been several issues in the portrayal of this one event. Essentially, "history wars" depicts different groups' preferences of a specific collective memory narrative.

### **The Collective Memory of the Atomic Bomb's Usage in the Present Study**

The treatment of the U.S. dropping the atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki in World War II in history textbooks is different across countries and across decades. Following the war, the U.S. treated the atomic bomb as having played a central role in Japan's pressured surrender (Roediger, Zaromb, & Butler, 2009). However, during the Cold War, the textbooks had already changed to reflect the narrative of the bombs' development, and during the Cuban Missile Crisis, one textbook discussed the bomb in terms of a nuclear war (Roediger, Zaromb, & Butler, 2009). In the late 1990s, the textbooks began to teach various interpretations of the bombs (Roediger, Zaromb, & Butler, 2009). Internationally, there have been several treatments of the bombs in textbooks (Roediger, Zaromb, & Butler, 2009). Japan questioned the attacks and the motives for dropping such a devastating bomb that killed so many civilians (Roediger, Zaromb, & Butler, 2009). In Canadian textbooks, the main discussion revolves around

the role Canada plays in mining the uranium for the bomb, and in the British textbook, the country discusses the European scientists' involvement in the making of the bomb (Roediger, Zaromb, & Butler, 2009). Italy's textbooks treated the bomb as a motivational means for President Truman to show dominance, especially towards the Soviet Union, and they argue that the bombs had no military justification (Roediger, Zaromb, & Butler, 2009). In Russia, the textbooks contain yet another depiction of the event. The narrative portrays that the bombs were dropped to scare the Soviet Union into complying with any of the U.S.'s demands following the war (Roediger & Wertsch, 2015). The various interpretations of this specific event lead to more controversy.

Besides the different ways in which the atomic bomb is treated in different textbooks, different people have varied perceptions of the event. As discussed earlier, in the Zaromb, Butler, Agarwal, and Roediger's (2013) study on the collective memory of three wars, the researchers found that the event resulted in very different perspectives between older and younger adults. The researchers specifically reference how interesting it is that younger adults perceived the event as negative compared with older adults who perceived it as positive (Zaromb, Butler, Agarwal, & Roediger, 2013). As mentioned previously, the researchers posit the difference in the ratings to the public portrayals of the atomic bombs in the media and history textbooks that were presented differently across generations (Zaromb, Butler, Agarwal, & Roediger, 2013). The older adults, having either lived through the war or having grown up in the post-World War II era, perceived the event as positive because of its media and cultural portrayal (Zaromb, Butler, Agarwal, & Roediger, 2013). The different treatments of the event within

different history textbooks and the dichotomous emotional valence of older and younger adults presents an interesting event for the present study on collective memory to analyze.

### **Current Study**

The current study aims to examine the change in the collective memory narrative with respect to the particular event of the atomic bombings. It seeks to understand how the perception of the event could determine the perception of a presented history textbook. The other goals of the current study relate to the understanding of individual's perception of history. Using perceived accuracy and preference measures, the present study will determine if individuals disentangle accuracy and preference from one another. In perceiving something as accurate but not preferred, an individual will have understood a text to be more in line with history as opposed to collective memory. If accuracy is low and preference is high, an individual will have shown their understanding to be more in line with collective memory texts. In looking at perceptions of accuracy and preference, the present study aims to understand the reception of history textbooks within the context of the emotional valence of a certain historical event. The research seeks to contribute to the empirical field of collective memory research with these different measures. Previous collective memory studies have gathered a collection of individual's schematic narrative templates, or the recollection of important events in a specific historical context. The introduction of a text instead gathers individual's perceptions of the text to understand if they can detect a bias.

Before conducting the major study, a pilot study was conducted to determine the valence of the history passages. Participants from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) rated passages to determine the negatively biased, neutral, and positively biased texts for

use in the main study. In the main study, participants from MTurk rated the emotional valence of the dropping of the atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II. Participants were then asked to read one of three passages (negative, neutral, or positive) that were randomly assigned to them. They then filled out questionnaires at the end to measure perceived accuracy and preference for the text. The above research design seeks to understand whether individuals can detect biases within history texts and if perceived accuracy and preference for texts depends on emotional valence ratings of the event.

### **Hypotheses: Perceptions of Accuracy**

*Hypothesis 1:* The effect of the directional bias of the text on perceptions of accuracy will depend on the emotional valence of the event.

*Hypothesis 2:* Among those who perceive the event as negative, perceptions of accuracy will be highest for the negative text followed by the neutral text and the positive text.

*Hypothesis 3:* Among those who perceive the event as not negative, perceptions of accuracy will be highest for the positive text followed by the neutral text and the negative text.

### **Hypotheses: Preference**

*Hypothesis 4:* The effect of the directional bias of the text on preference will depend on the emotional valence of the event.

*Hypothesis 5:* Among those who perceive the event as negative, preference will be highest for the negative text followed by the neutral text and the positive text.

*Hypothesis 6:* Among those who perceive the event as not negative, preference will be highest for the positive text followed by the neutral text and the negative text.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

404 individuals participated in the present research project. Participants were recruited using Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk), an online marketplace where people provide the service of participating in online studies and various other human intelligence tasks. Participants were comprised of 221 women and 183 men, ranging in age from 18 to 81 years old ( $M_{age} = 39.36$  years;  $SD_{age} = 12.58$  years). All participants gave consent to participate in the study and were monetarily compensated with \$1.25 for their time. Most participants were college educated with about 16 years of education ( $M_{education} = 15.29$  years;  $SD_{education} = 2.13$  years). 310 participants identified as White or Caucasian followed by 40 African American/Black, 24 Asian/Asian American, 23 Latino/Hispanic, and seven of another ethnicity or race. Distributions of the data sets appeared relatively normal.

88 people were removed from the sample because they did not complete the survey, failed the attention check, did not attend high school in the U.S. or were not citizens of the U.S. Participants were required to have attended high school in the U.S. because doing so would have presumably exposed them to textbooks written from the U.S. perspective. They also would have been taught America's collective memory of history as opposed to any other countries' collective memory. The comprehension check ensured that participants were fully attending to the study and carefully reading the instructions and passage.

An additional 16 participants were removed from the sample that were recruited from Sona Systems, the psychology research study portal for undergraduates seeking research credit for their enrollment in lower level psychology courses at Claremont McKenna College. Participants were still granted a half credit for their participation in the study; however, the results were dropped from the statistical analyses. Participants from the sample were obtained with the intention to compare them to the MTurk sample; however, the collection was incomplete and, consequently, was not analyzed for the current research study.

### **Design**

A 2 (perceived emotion of historical event: negative or not negative) x 3 (history passage with directional bias: negative, neutral, or positive) between-subjects design was used to address the research questions. The directional bias of the passage, the manipulated variable, was randomly assigned to participants. Each participant read one history passage. Participants were asked an initial question in the beginning of the study about their perception of the emotional valence of the event. Based on their response to the perceived emotional valence of the event, participants were then broken into two groups named "negative" or "not negative" for the emotional valence independent variable. The negative group included any individual who perceived the event as negative. The not negative group included all of the individuals who perceived the event as positive or neutral. The dependent variables were perceived accuracy and preference measured with two separate multiple-item questionnaires.

### **Materials**

**Emotional valence.** Participants responded to a three-item questionnaire about the emotional valence of the event, the importance of the event in the context of the war, and the level of detail known about the event. The questions were taken from the Zaromb, Butler, Agarwal, and Roediger (2013) article about the collective memory of the three wars. For the interest of the current study, only the first question was used as an independent variable. In the Zaromb, Butler, Agarwal, and Roediger (2013) study, the researchers used a 10-point scale; however, the current study used a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*). Please see Appendix A to preview the questionnaire.

**History passages.** Each participant was randomly assigned to read one passage. The passages were taken from history textbooks used in the U.S. to teach history. One text was the positively biased passage extracted from *The Americans: Reconstruction to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Another text, which was more neutral, came from an online history textbook entitled *American History: From Pre-Columbian to the New Millennium*. The negatively biased passage was extracted from Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*. All three passages covered the same topic— the dropping of the atomic bombs over Japan during World War II. The passages were selected following a pilot study conducted on MTurk. 50 participants were recruited and compensated \$0.50 to read five different passages about the same event taken from American history textbooks. The participants were instructed to read the passages carefully and choose the most negative text and the most positive text. They were informed that they could look back at the passages. Participants then ranked the passages from the most negative (1) to the most positive (5). 40 participants were excluded during the pilot study because they failed to

pass the attention check, or they chose a different positive or negative text that did not correspond with their response of the ranked texts from most negative to most positive. Passages were then chosen for use in the current study by adding up the frequency of their rankings. The passage with the lowest score determined the negative text because it received the greatest amount of low value rankings. The highest value passage became the most positive because it received the greatest number of high value rankings. The middle-ranked passage became the neutral passage because it received a score that ranked it third among the other passages most frequently. The two passages that were excluded based on the rankings were taken from *Outline of U.S. History* and *The American Yawp*.

The topic choice of the passages was based on the Zaromb, Butler, Agarwal, and Roediger (2013) study on the collective memory of three wars. The researchers found that the dropping of the bombs elicited a dichotomous emotional valence rating for younger versus older adults. Younger adults found the event to be negative, and older adults perceived it as positive. The topic was chosen because of the high level of controversy and split emotional valence found in the previous study. Additionally, the event has received various treatments within different textbooks (Shin & Sneider, 2012). Additionally, the treatment of this event is different universally (Roediger, Zaromb, & Butler, 2009). Please see Appendix B to preview the texts.

**Accuracy.** Participants responded to an accuracy questionnaire with four items ( $\alpha = .87$ ). They rated the passages on such items like the believability and the perceived accuracy of the passage. One item was reverse-scored and asked if the passage seemed biased. There was a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*). Please see Appendix C to preview the questionnaire.

**Preference.** Participants were asked to rate how preferable the passage was based on a four-item questionnaire ( $\alpha = .60$ ). The questionnaire attempted to understand if the passage they had read was more preferable than any other passage they had read previously. The questionnaire was designed to understand if the text's bias and an individual's own perception of the event accounted for their preference of the passage. Two items were reverse-scored. They asked if the individual perceived the passage as having not accounted for all perspectives or being different from any material they had previously read on the same event. There was a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*). Please see Appendix D to preview the questionnaire.

### **Procedure**

Participants on MTurk were given a link to complete the study online using Qualtrics survey software. Each participant read a consent form and agreed to participate in the online study on perceptions of history of an event in World War II. They were aware that they would read a short passage and respond to a few questionnaires following the passage.

Participants were first asked to assign a value for the emotional valence, importance, and level of detail known about an event— America dropping the atomic bombs over Japan during World War II.

Next, the participants were asked to read one of three passages. Participants read either a negatively biased, positively biased, or neutral passage. After having read the passage, the participants completed a reading comprehension question about the text. They were asked the date the second bomb was dropped and the place the Americans dropped the second bomb. There were four answer choices and each contained a date and

place. Most of the places had been referenced in the text. The reading comprehension question assessed how closely participants read the text and how attentive they were to the questions in the study. After completing the comprehension question, participants answered a four-item questionnaire for the text on the perceived accuracy of the text that included the believability and truthfulness of the passage. They completed a four-item preference questionnaire for the text on how preferable they perceived the passages based on whether or not they agreed with the passage and if they preferred reading the passage over any other history account. After they completed the preference questionnaire, they answered demographic questions about their age, gender, ethnicity, highest level of education achieved, if they attended a U.S. high school, and if they were citizens of the U.S. The participants were then thanked for their time and debriefed about the study. They received compensation for their participation after they completed the study.

## **Results**

### *Preliminary Analyses*

Preliminary analyses revealed various data about the different groups in each condition. 135 participants were randomly assigned to read the neutral text; 135 participants were randomly assigned to read the negatively biased text; and 134 participants were randomly assigned to read the positively biased text. 338 participants were categorized under the "negative" emotional valence group. 66 individuals were categorized under the "not negative" emotional valence group. The individuals in this category rated the event as neutral or positive.

To test the independent variables' effects on the dependent variables of the mean ratings of accuracy and preference, two 2 (emotional valence ratings of the historical

event: negative or not negative) x 3 (directional bias of the text: negative, neutral, or positive) Analysis of Variances (ANOVA) were run on the two dependent variables of perceptions of accuracy and preference. The data of the means for the two analyses can be found in Table 1. Additional analyses were run to test whether the demographic variables of age, gender, number of years in school, and ethnicity confounded with any of the independent variables contributing to the significant differences seen in the two dependent variables of preference and perceptions of accuracy. All additional analyses were non-significant indicating that the demographic variables had no significant effect on perceptions of accuracy and preference.

#### *Hypothesis 1*

Hypothesis 1 predicted that the effect of the directional bias of the text on perceptions of accuracy would depend on the emotional valence of the event. There was no significant interaction between the directional bias of the passage and the emotional valence of the event on perceptions of accuracy,  $F_{(2, 398)} = .50, p = .605$ , indicating that the first hypothesis was not supported. The directional bias of the text on perceptions of accuracy did not depend on the emotional valence of the event.

#### *Hypothesis 2*

Hypothesis 2 predicted that among those who perceived the event as negative, perceptions of accuracy would be highest for the negative text followed by the neutral text and the positive text, respectively. The results showed that among those who viewed the event as negative, perceptions of accuracy were highest for the neutral text ( $M = 5.94, SD = 0.88$ ) followed by the positively biased text ( $M = 5.93, SD = 0.92$ ), and the negatively

biased passage was rated lowest on perceptions of accuracy ( $M= 5.00$ ,  $SD= 1.22$ ). The results did not support the original hypothesis based on the mean scores.

### *Hypothesis 3*

Hypothesis 3 stated that among those who perceived the event as not negative, perceptions of accuracy would be highest for the positive text followed by the neutral text and the negative text, respectively. The mean scores showed that among those who viewed the event as not negative, perceptions of accuracy supported the original hypothesis. The positive text was rated highest on accuracy ( $M= 5.86$ ,  $SD= 0.91$ ) followed by the neutral text ( $M= 5.56$ ,  $SD= 1.13$ ) and the negative text ( $M= 4.61$ ,  $SD= 1.35$ ).

### *Main Effects*

There was a significant main effect of the directional bias of the text on the perceptions of accuracy,  $F_{(2, 398)} = 22.98$ ,  $p < .001$ . Regardless of the emotional valence, perceptions of accuracy for the directional biases of the text were significantly different. Post hoc analyses revealed that participants who read the negative text ( $M= 4.94$ ,  $SD= 1.24$ ) perceived the text to be significantly less accurate than those who read the positive text ( $M= 5.92$ ,  $SD= 0.91$ ) and the neutral text ( $M= 5.86$ ,  $SD= 0.94$ ), regardless of the emotional valence ratings. There was no significant difference between the positive and neutral texts; however, people found the positive text to be most accurate than the neutral text.

There was a significant main effect of the emotional valence of the passage on the accuracy ratings of the passage,  $F_{(1, 398)} = 4.02$ ,  $p = .046$ . Participants who viewed the event as negative rated perceptions of accuracy significantly higher than those who viewed the

event as not negative, regardless of the directional bias of the passage. See Figure 1 for the mean differences on the accuracy ratings.

#### *Hypothesis 4*

Hypothesis 4 hypothesized that the effect of the directional bias of the text on preference would depend on the emotional valence of the event. There was a significant interaction between the directional bias of the passage and the emotional valence of the event on the ratings of preference,  $F_{(2, 398)} = 3.32, p = .037$ , indicating that the directional bias of the passage on the ratings of preference of the text depended on the emotional valence of the event.

#### *Hypothesis 5*

Hypothesis 5 stated that among those who perceived the event as negative, preference would be highest for the negatively biased text followed by the neutral text and the positively biased text, respectively. The results showed that the negative text was rated the lowest ( $M = 3.80, SD = 1.09$ ). The neutral text was rated the highest on preference ( $M = 4.54, SD = 0.85$ ) and the positive text was rated second highest on preference ( $M = 4.41, SD = 0.96$ ). The direction of the preference ratings was different from the initial hypothesis.

#### *Hypothesis 6*

Hypothesis 6 stated that for those who perceived the event as not negative, preference would be highest for those who read the positively biased text followed by the neutral text and the negatively biased text. The results showed the same pattern where the positively biased passage was rated the highest ( $M = 4.97, SD = 0.79$ ) followed by the

neutral text ( $M= 4.74$ ,  $SD= 1.05$ ), and the negatively biased passage was rated least preferable ( $M= 3.51$ ,  $SD= 0.82$ ). The hypothesis was supported by the mean scores.

#### *Main Effects*

There was a significant main effect of the directional bias of the text on the preference ratings of the passages,  $F_{(2, 398)} = 26.41$ ,  $p < .001$ , indicating that there was a significant difference between preference ratings based on the directional biases of the passages. Preference, in general, was highest for the neutral text followed by the positive text and the negative text, respectively. Post hoc analyses indicated that participants who were randomly assigned to the negative text ( $M= 3.75$ ,  $SD= 1.06$ ) viewed it as significantly less preferable than those randomly assigned to the positive text ( $M= 4.49$ ,  $SD= 0.95$ ) and neutral text ( $M= 4.58$ ,  $SD= 0.89$ ), across both emotional valence conditions. There was no significant difference between preferring the positive and neutral text across the emotional valence conditions.

There was no significant main effect for the emotional valence of the event on the preference ratings,  $F_{(1, 398)} = 1.44$ ,  $p = .230$ , indicating that the emotional valence of the event did not affect the preference ratings of the passages. See Figure 2 for the mean differences of preference.

#### *Additional Analyses*

An additional set of analyses were run on the dependent variables that did not include the neutral emotional valence within the not negative categorical independent variable. This led to a 2 (emotional valence of the event: positive or negative) x 3 (directional bias of text: neutral, negatively biased, or positively biased) ANOVA to analyze the effects of the independent variables on the dependent variables of perceptions

of accuracy and preference. The new means, standard deviations, and sample sizes for each group are shown in Table 2. The main effect for the directional bias of the text was still significant,  $F_{(2, 398)} = 12.85, p < .001$ . Again, the negative text ( $M = 4.90$ ) was significantly lower in perceptions of accuracy than the neutral text ( $M = 5.69$ ) and the positive text ( $M = 5.93$ ). The emotional valence's effect on the perceptions of accuracy was not significant,  $F_{(1, 398)} = 1.91, p = .168$ . There was also no significant interaction between the directional bias of the text and emotional valence on the perceptions of accuracy,  $F_{(2, 398)} = .76, p = .471$ , indicating that the first hypothesis was not supported when the neutral condition was taken out. For the preference dependent variable, there was a significant main effect for the directional bias of the text,  $F_{(2, 398)} = 16.82, p < .001$ . The negative text ( $M = 3.73$ ) was significantly less preferable than the neutral text ( $M = 4.64$ ) and the positive text ( $M = 4.78$ ), respectively. The main effect of the emotional valence did not meet significance,  $F_{(1, 398)} = 2.55, p = .098$ . The emotional valence did not significantly affect the preference of the text. The fourth hypothesis was not supported either,  $F_{(2, 398)} = 2.52, p = .082$ , indicating that there was no significant interaction between the directional bias of the text and the emotional valence of the event when the neutral condition was eliminated from the emotional valence ratings.

Three additional analyses were run to look at different patterns in the results. The first was a 2 (directional bias of the text: neutral or positive) x 2 (emotional valence of the event: negative or not negative) ANOVA on the same two dependent variables of perceptions of accuracy and preference. The negative text was eliminated from the analysis to further understand how the negative emotional valence group perceived the neutral and positively biased texts. There were no significant main effects for the

emotional valence of the event,  $F_{(1, 398)} = 2.245$ ,  $p = .135$ , or the directional bias of the text,  $F_{(1, 398)} = .914$ ,  $p = .340$ , on perceptions of accuracy. There was also no significant interaction,  $F_{(1, 398)} = .984$ ,  $p = .322$ , between the emotional valence of the event and the directional bias of the passage on perceptions of accuracy. For preference, there was a main effect of emotional valence,  $F_{(1, 398)} = 6.298$ ,  $p = .013$ , where preference of the text was significantly higher for individuals that perceived the event to be not negative. There was no main effect for the text group,  $F_{(1, 398)} = .116$ ,  $p = .734$ , nor was there a significant interaction between the directional bias of the text and emotional valence of the event,  $F_{(1, 398)} = 1.453$ ,  $p = .229$ .

An additional analysis was also run with age as a covariate to look specifically at younger adults, aged 18 to 23 years old, versus older adults, aged 62 to 87 years old. These specific age ranges were used in the Zaromb, Butler, Agarwal, and Roediger (2013) study examining collective memories of younger and older adults. To look at age as a covariate in the study, a 2 (emotional valence of the event: negative or not negative) x 3 (directional bias of the text: negative, neutral, or positive) ANCOVA was run. For accuracy, there was a significant main effect for the directional bias of the text,  $F_{(2, 398)} = 5.602$ ,  $p = .007$ . Again, we saw a similar pattern to the main analyses where the negative text was significantly lower in perceptions of accuracy than the neutral and positively biased text. There were, however, no other significant main effects for either age,  $F_{(1, 398)} = .274$ ,  $p = .603$ , nor the emotional valence,  $F_{(1, 398)} = .996$ ,  $p = .324$ . There was also no significant interaction on the perceptions of accuracy,  $F_{(2, 398)} = .268$ ,  $p = .766$ . When looking at preference, there was only one significant main effect; the directional bias of the text had a significant main effect,  $F_{(2, 398)} = 6.744$ ,  $p = .003$ . The negative text was,

again, significantly lower than the other two texts for preference. There were no main effects for age,  $F_{(1, 398)} = 1.206$ ,  $p = .278$ , or emotional valence for the event,  $F_{(1, 398)} = .892$ ,  $p = .350$ . There was also no significant interaction,  $F_{(2, 398)} = 1.164$ ,  $p = .322$ .

An additional analysis was run for a 2 (emotional valence of the event: negative or not negative) x 3 (directional bias of the text: negative, neutral, or positive) x 2 (dependent variables of scale type: perceptions of accuracy and preference) ANOVA where the dependent variables were used as within- subject independent variables. A significant three-way interaction between the three variables of the emotional valence, the directional bias of the text, and the dependent variable scales would indicate that the three variables interact with one another. The statistical analysis revealed no significant three-way interaction between the three variables (see Figure 3). There was a significant interaction between the scale type and the emotional valence,  $F_{(1, 398)} = 13.389$ ,  $p < .001$  (see Figure 4), indicating that the scale type differed across the two different emotional valences. Across both emotional valence conditions, accuracy was rated higher than preference. There was also a significant main effect of the directional bias of the text,  $F_{(2, 398)} = 30.484$ ,  $p < .001$ , for the between-subjects effects. The directional bias of the text differed significantly across the emotional valences and scale types. The 2 x 3 x 2 ANOVA looked at the interaction of the two scale types, the dependent variables, to determine how they interacted with the independent variables of directional bias of the text and emotional valence.

### Discussion

The data found that the directional biases of the passages affected individuals' perceptions of accuracy and preference. The statistical information provided preliminary

results that showed that the negatively biased text was perceived as the least preferable and least accurate account of the historical event of the atomic bombings during World War II.

The overarching research question posed how individuals perceive history textbook passages. By comparing the three different directional biases within the passages, individuals perceive non-negative texts as more accurate and more preferable, even when they view the event as negative. The neutral passage represented an account that featured both positive and negative sides of the event. The neutral passage significantly differed from the negative passage in both preference and perceived accuracy ratings. The positively biased passage, for those who did not view the event as negative, prevailed as highest in perceptions of accuracy and preference. The neutral text was slightly higher in both preference and perceived accuracy for those who viewed the event as negative.

Although non-significant, the data suggests that those who view the event as negative found the neutral passage as the most accurate and most preferable among the passages followed by the positive passage and negative passage. Alternatively, and non-significantly, those who did not perceive the event as negative perceived the positive text as most accurate and most preferable followed by the neutral and negative passages, respectively.

Based on the results from the statistical analyses, the data showed that those who received the negatively biased passage reported it as statistically less accurate than the positively biased passage and neutral passage, regardless of an individual's emotional valence toward the event. Among those who viewed the event as not negative, the

positive text was rated highest in accuracy followed by the neutral text and the negative text. The opposite was not the case for those who viewed the event as negative though; perceptions of accuracy were highest for the neutral text followed by the positive text and the negative text. Thus, overall, regardless of the emotional valence toward the event, perceptions of accuracy were higher for the positive and neutral passages, and the negative text was always rated lowest for perceptions of accuracy.

One possible explanation for these results is supported by Rotella and Richeson's (2013) study on collective guilt and accuracy for recalled memories of in-group wrongdoings. Rotella and Richeson (2013) found that members who read about their in-group's perpetration of atrocities forgot about the details of the events and did not accurately recall the event because of its threatening nature. The researchers manipulated identification within the in-group, but individuals were still motivated to forget about the atrocities regardless of their proximity of in-group identification (Rotella & Richeson, 2013). The researchers found that individuals were motivated by the threat of their in-groups' wrongdoings and were driven to use defensive reactions (Rotella & Richeson, 2013). The same type of mechanisms could have played a role in the results of the present study. If individuals are motivated to forget and inaccurately recall the events of an in-group atrocity, they will then perceive the negatively biased text as less accurate than the positively biased passage or neutral passage. The neutral and positive text will likely induce less threat and motivate less defensive reactions because of how it portrays the actions of the in-group. The event used in the present study depicted an atrocity committed by Americans. The participants in the sample were all American citizens;

thus, the passage subject framed participants as members of the in-group. This identification likely induced the defensive mechanisms related to inaccurate recall.

It is not yet known whether it is the failure of encoding or retrieving the memory that is to blame for the inaccuracy of the memory; however, based on the literature driving the predictions in the present study, accurate and inaccurate information is committed to memory based on the feedback related to the retrieval process (Roediger, Zaromb, & Butler, 2009; Rotella & Richeson, 2013). The retrieval process, mediated by feedback confirming the retrieved memory, induces learned inaccurate information (Roediger, Zaromb, & Butler, 2009). The present study attempts to look at the retrieval process to understand how individuals retrieve their recollection of the collective memory to compare it to the text and determine the accuracy of the text. In the process of retrieving information, individuals could have retrieved information that matched that of the text. Perceivably, if individuals are motivated to forget information about atrocities, they could have perceived the negative text as less accurate based on their own inaccurate recall.

Another possible explanation for the results could be that groups have a slight positivity bias in memory—they tend to recall past events more positively with time (Bellehumeur, Laplante, Lagacé, & Rodrigue, 2011; Halbwachs, 1925/1994, 1950/1992; Laurens & Roussiau, 2002). Groups continuously attempt to maintain the positive image of their in-group through collective memories and through positive recall of events (Bellehumeur, Laplante, Lagacé, & Rodrigue, 2011).

The data also showed that those who perceived the event as negative reported more accuracy across all passages compared to those who did not view the event as

negative. A possible explanation for these results could be explained using Kensinger and Schacter's (2006) study. They recruited participants for their study who perceived the final game of the 2004 American League Championship Series between the Boston Red Sox and the New York Yankees as positive (Red Sox fans), negative (Yankees fans), or neutral (neither Red Sox nor Yankees fans) (Kensinger & Schacter, 2006; Schacter, Gutchess, & Kensinger, 2009). The researchers found that those who viewed the event as negative were more consistent in their memory descriptions than those who viewed the event as positive (Kensinger & Schacter, 2006; Schacter, Gutchess, & Kensinger, 2009). The researchers concluded that negative emotions may contribute to greater accuracy of memory (Kensinger & Schacter, 2006; Schacter, Gutchess, & Kensinger, 2009). Other studies conducted on emotion and memory have shown that negative emotions increase the level of details known about the memory too (Schacter, Gutchess, & Kensinger, 2009). The results of these studies could explain why those who viewed the event as negative reported more accuracy across all passages compared to those who did not view the event as negative.

For the preference measure, individuals' emotional valence affected how preferable they perceived the text depending on the directional biases in the passage. Consistent with the hypotheses, the directional bias of the passage on preference depended on the emotional valence of the event. Among those who perceived the event as not negative, preference was highest for the positively biased passage followed by the neutral passage and the negatively biased passage. Again, this could reflect the bias in individuals for preferring information aligned with their beliefs (Blatz & Ross, 2009; Loewen, 1995). Individuals do not prefer remembering injustices their in-group has

committed (Blatz & Ross, 2009). Therefore, the results support the previous research suggesting that individuals would prefer the positively biased passage compared to any other treatment of a negative event. Not all of the hypotheses for preference were supported. Among those who perceived the event as negative, preference was highest for the neutral passage, followed by the positively biased text and the negatively biased text. The negatively biased passage did show a different outcome from the perceptions of accuracy. Among those who viewed the event as negative, they preferred the negatively biased text more so than those who viewed the event as not negative. This result supports the direction of the unsupported hypothesis regarding those who viewed the event as negative. Had the preference ratings been higher for the negatively biased passage, the three preference measure hypotheses would have been supported. The results continue to support that individuals do not prefer hearing about their in-group committed atrocities (Blatz & Ross, 2009). There also is a general bias within history textbooks. Because individuals distance themselves from or forget atrocities, this could account for the dismissal of in-group perpetration of atrocities in textbooks, education, and popular culture (Rotella & Richeson, 2013; Hein & Selden, 2000).

The preference measure supported the hypotheses more so than the perceptions of accuracy measure. The overall negative perception of the event could have affected the perceptions of accuracy over the preference of the passage. Individuals can arguably determine if a text seems accurate, but their preference for it could reflect the effect of their emotional valence toward the event.

In the last additional analysis of the 2 x 3 x 2 ANOVA with the inclusion of the two dependent variables as within-subject factors, the most salient finding was that there

was a significant interaction between the scale type and the emotional valence. The significant interaction determined that the accuracy scale had overall higher scores than the preference scale across both conditions of emotional valence; however, the negative emotional valence score was higher on the accuracy scale than the not negative emotional valence, and the opposite was true for the preference scale. Among those who perceived the event as negative, their ratings on the accuracy questionnaire were higher than those who did not perceive the event as negative. A possible explanation for this difference could be that those in the negative emotional valence group were more accepting of the atrocity within the text. The details of the event could seem more accurate to those who have repeatedly read and retrieved this information. The matching negative directional bias with the negative emotional valence could support why it was rated more accurate. If individuals have already accepted the event as negative based on their emotional valence, perhaps they also believe the text to be more accurate than those who do not view the event as negative. The preference scale could be lower than perceptions of accuracy because individuals might accept that a text is accurate but still not prefer to read or remember the event (Blatz & Ross, 2009). The statistical analysis for the three-way interaction presented the opportunity to ensure that accuracy and preference were different measures in the present study. The results suggest that individuals do not necessarily prefer texts which they perceive as accurate. Alternatively, they do not have to prefer a text to determine it as accurate. These results could have further implications on accurate texts that depict an in-group as having committed mass atrocities. Based on the results, individuals could still view the texts as accurate even if they do not prefer

reading the text. Overall, however, the negatively biased passage was rated lowest across the two emotional valences and across scale types.

The finding that the negatively biased passage was perceived as the least accurate and least preferable across conditions is both interesting and important. Even among individuals who perceived the emotional valence of the event to be negative, those individuals still perceived accuracy and preference to be lower than the other passages. This begs the question of whether individuals do not prefer reading negative texts or see them as accurate, or if the chosen passage could account for the low ratings. The negatively biased passage, taken from Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*, affected individuals' perceptions significantly. Howard Zinn is described as a historian who writes "history from the perspective of marginalized and disadvantaged communities" (Menkart, 2016). In fact, the text is so negative that Arkansas legislature wrote a bill to ban Zinn's books from appearing in classrooms (Menkart, 2016). The same bill, HB 1834, would also require students from kindergarten to high school to recite the Pledge of Allegiance daily (Menkart, 2016). There is a general bias against mainstream America and against the collective narrative told by the majority. Individuals in the present study not only did not prefer the passage, but they also perceived it to be more inaccurate than the neutral and positive passages. The positive passage resulted in comparatively higher ratings of accuracy and preference. For those who did not view the event as negative, these individuals both found the text to be most accurate and most preferred of the passages. Thus, it can be hypothesized that a more positively biased account of the event perhaps resonated more with the individuals who did not perceive the event as negative. They perhaps perceived the event as not negative because of a

previous collective memory account that provided a more positive account of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This could relate to why they preferred the text and perceived it as more accurate because their previous experiences with the event were consistent with what they read in the present study. The neutral text perhaps provides a more nuanced account of the event that individuals who perceived the event as negative found to be accurate and more preferable than any of the other passages. The neutral passage could also be more negatively biased than positively biased which could account for why the individuals who perceived the event as negative found it to be more accurate and more preferable.

Researchers recommend that to teach students history curriculum, educators should focus on how memory is constructed. Educators who give honest feedback to students and encourage the construction of their own memories instead of eager acceptance of the imposed interpretations help students learn and develop independently (Thelan, 1989). With an approach toward the construction of memories instead of accepting the history taught, students do not merely rely on authority figures to understand the past (Thelan, 1989). History textbooks as cultural tools allow history texts to become a part of memory (Obradović, 2016). The use of history textbooks can be positive, though, if they were to function as a means to teach an in-group's past, with the aim of instilling belonging, but also with the aim to teach youth how to critically examine the past of an in-group to manage present challenges (Obradović, 2016). In the case of Serbia, history textbooks focus on in-group belonging and rarely acknowledge the in-group's committed wrongdoings (Obradović, 2016). Researchers argue that it is a disservice to individuals within the education system for educational material to not

examine different perspectives (Chapman, 2007; Lazare, 2004; Rotella & Richeson, 2013). Limiting perspectives is also harmful to victims in need of acknowledgment, apologies, and reparations (Chapman, 2007; Lazare, 2004; Rotella & Richeson, 2013).

Within the present study, a few methodological limitations could have affected the outcome of the data. First, individuals overwhelmingly perceived the event as negative. Most of the data followed normal distributions; however, the emotional valence of the event did not appear normally distributed because of the large majority of individuals that perceived it as negative. The groups were separated into a negative group and a group that did not perceive the event as negative because it provided a better breakdown of the sample into two groups to yield more statistical power. The second group could have perceived the event as positive or neutral; however, an individual within the group, more importantly, did not perceive the event as negative. The group that perceived the event as not negative was a large enough group to compare the two when the neutral condition was included in the analysis.

A possible explanation for the large majority of the sample perceiving the event as negative may stem from the collective memory told about the event. Previously, older adults perceived the event as a positive historical event due to the context of their relationship with the war (Zaromb, Butler, Agarwal, & Roediger, 2013). Zaromb, Butler, Agarwal, and Roediger (2013) found that older adults in their study perceived the dropping of the atomic bombs as positive because of how positively it was portrayed in public media and history textbooks. The difference between the older adults and younger adults' perceptions could be explained by Wertsch's concept of the schematic narrative templates that can be constructed in multiple ways (2002). The consumption of popular

media changes the perception of historical events, especially now that we are consuming more and more external and public information (Hunt, 2002). Additionally, collective memory, when replaced in society with a new narrative, becomes distributed across society and stabilizes once more as a product of its dynamic properties (Hakoköngäs & Sakki, 2016; Jovchelovitch, 2012; Markova, 2003). Collective memory also continuously replaces itself to represent the group's present needs (Hakoköngäs & Sakki, 2016; Halbwachs, 1925/1980).

A possible explanation for the uneven divide between older and younger adults in the present study could be because of the sample and distribution of ages, as well. The sample, collected completely from Amazon's Mechanical Turk website, had a large frequency of mid-twenty to late thirties aged individuals. The individuals who could have grown up during World War II would have to be at least 75 years old to have the possibility of remembering the atomic bombs. There were not many people included in this age range, as the oldest participant was 81 years old. Additionally, though they may have been taught about the atomic bombs in school as a positive event that positively impacted the war, they could have read updated information in the media that provided an explanation for how the event could have been negative. Because the collective memory for the event has changed, it is possible that the older individuals have been exposed to the new collective memory and also find it to be more historically accurate.

The present study looked at just one event from one country. Using just one event measures one particular collective memory, but it does not allow an overarching study of collective memory across different contexts and historical periods. This particular event's treatment within history textbooks has changed over time to reflect the shifting

sentiments toward it. There are other events that have also changed throughout history and remain controversial. Looking deeper into the different “history wars” could be an interesting future direction. Other countries could also be used to understand how different events are perceived internationally. By using just one country, as well, the study does not look at how different countries remember events and perceive collective memory. Different countries may teach history from various perspectives that aligns more with analytical history.

Future studies could look at a different historical event, such as slavery. In a lot of textbooks, the treatment of the event within texts has been perceived as not as negative as it potentially should be (Grochowski, 2016). Slavery has a very controversial nature within history texts that might be interesting in a future study including the emotional valence ratings and perceptions of accuracy and preference. Looking at different historical events and their treatment within different texts could be an interesting future study. Additionally, it would be interesting to ask a demographic question asking about people’s level of interaction with history. Presumably, the more someone reads history, the more comfortable they are with different versions and articulations of the same history displayed in different texts. A future study could also look at different regions within the U.S. to determine if different areas perceive history texts differently. Essentially, rural and urban areas may have differences between their curriculums. The differences could also be in large part due to the different political leanings within different regions. I would expect different political ideologies to perceive different events through a particular lens. Future studies could attempt to identify different in-groups and

test which demographics are the strongest determinants for affecting perceptions of history texts.

### **Discussion: Human Rights Section**

The intersection of research of psychology and human rights has a short history (Twose & Cohrs, 2015; Velez, 2016). The emergence of human rights discourse happened to coincide with the pervasiveness of maturing theories within psychology, and the two developed under the context of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948 (Velez, 2016). Even with their coinciding historical context, human rights and psychology research did not intersect until much more recently (Twose & Cohrs, 2015; Velez, 2016). Psychology relates to the social psychological basis of human rights (Velez, 2016). It specifically interacts with group membership, identity, and interactions across collectives (Velez, 2016). Psychology can also empirically support and methodologically study human rights violations (Velez, 2016). Additionally, psychology can aid in refining human rights definitions and supporting advocacy measures for preventing human rights violations (Velez, 2016). Psychology and human rights positively intersect, and many concepts within psychology can also intersect to support a psychological approach to human rights. Collective memory is one such concept. Collective memory can play a central role in the presence or dismissal of human rights abuses by in-groups. The present study's results can be interpreted from a human rights' lens and applied specifically to the collective memories of human rights violations.

The present research study could support the claim that individuals do not prefer reading about human rights violations. The results of the study showed that individuals

did not prefer reading negative accounts of a negative event compared to a positive account of the same negative event. Individual's preference to avoid reading negative accounts about injustices committed by their in-group is one possible explanation for the results of the study (Blatz & Ross, 2009). Individuals preferred more positive texts compared to the negative texts, and they perceived the negative texts as less accurate. Even when individual's emotional valence was negative, and matched the directional bias of the passage they read, they still interpreted the passage as less accurate and less preferable. This implies that individuals, regardless of the type of severity of the atrocity or injustice committed by their in-group, will perceive a perhaps truthful but negative text as less accurate and less preferable. The results imply that individuals negatively interact with gross human rights violations within written accounts of their in-group's past.

Within the individual, memory affects attitudes and actions in a powerful way (Griffin & Bollen, 2009). Griffin and Bollen (2009) studied the effect of memory on race and racial attitudes and impressions under the context of the civil rights movement, an integral movement for broadening the civil and political rights, intertwined with human rights, of marginalized racial groups ("Civil Rights Movement", 2009). A collective memory can be shaped by historical events, but only to the extent that the event is emotional, well talked about, collective by nature, and is part of a person's life in the long-term (Griffin & Bollen, 2009). The researchers felt that the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s met the criteria for shaping a collective memory, and they found that it had left an important mark on most Americans (Griffin & Bollen, 2009). It, however, left an unremarkable memory in that it was made up of depoliticized and easily digestible facts (Griffin & Bollen, 2009). Common to the shallowness of other historical events of

the same nature, the memory of this particular event did not create as much of a deep impression on the individuals as once thought (Griffin & Bollen, 2009). The shallowness can be associated with the attitude that equality is embraceable, but the implementation of such legal equality is, ironically, not as embraceable or palatable to the average individual (Griffin & Bollen, 2009). Interacting with the civil rights movement impacted individuals to the extent that it changed their attitudes of race and race relations; however, the effect of the collective memory was not strong enough to induce the actual practice of equality. It merely encouraged the notion that the idea of equality was good.

Griffin and Bollen's (2009) research extends previous literature on collective memory by understanding how past memories correlate with how people perceive national issues in the present. In terms of racial attitudes in the present, the collective memory of the civil rights movement impacted the beliefs and attitudes held by individuals (Griffin & Bollen, 2009). The impact was shallow for this particular event, but the study shows the effectiveness of even diluted collective memories of the past to shape mainstream ideas about national issues. It further supports the notion that individual memories can be shaped to fit a certain national ethos. The national ethos typically exudes just one perspective, and it may not include the importance of the event within its perspective. This supports the notions that individuals, whether conscious of it or not, as members of the collective, are partly responsible for the thin presence of human rights violations within collective memory.

Political actors and cultural figures also play an important role in the partial or full dismissal of human rights violations. Oftentimes, those responsible for distributing an in-group's history will stray from the complete history or erase the entire history from

memory sites if it negatively portrays the in-group (Rotella & Richeson, 2013). Examples of intergroup conflict resulting from ignored atrocities committed by an in-group include Japanese textbooks' erasure of the complete list of wartime atrocities committed against China (Hein & Selden, 2000; Lind, 2008; Rotella & Richeson, 2013) and Turkey and their allies' refusal to name the Ottoman Empire's killing of over a million ethnic Armenians a genocide (Balakian, 2003; Rotella & Richeson, 2013).

With respect to the former erasure of atrocities within Japanese textbooks, the systematic results of World War II could be at the root of the information disparities. In comparison to the literature regarding German committed human rights violations, namely the Holocaust, after World War II, the Japanese erased most of the history of their in-group human rights violations (Hein & Selden, 2000). Part of the problem extends back to the destruction of Germany's government post-World War II (Hein & Selden, 2000). The Japanese government survived the post-World War II settlements that destroyed Germany's political system (Hein & Selden, 2000). Germany, post-World War II, was required to make a variety of reparations, including: compensation to victims and, in the interest of collective memory research intersecting with human rights violations, the development of high school curriculum to critically disapprove of wartime atrocities and racism (Hein & Selden, 2000). Alternatively, the Japanese were not forced to make the same reparations (Hein & Selden, 2000). As a result, Japanese popular media and academic textbooks instead disregarded the wartime atrocities they had committed (Hein & Selden, 2000). The Japanese Ministry of Education even approved the "Society for the Creation of New Textbooks" to write a middle school textbook that erased the military brothel system from the history within the textbook (Hein & Selden, 2000). The historical

and political context at the end of World War II led to the erasure of the human rights violations within the textbooks. Without the inclusion of in-group atrocities, individuals, especially in their formative years, strengthen a positive collective memory of their in-group's past without acknowledging the negative aspects.

In terms of the latter example of intergroup conflict resulting in ignored atrocities, Turkey and its allies have denied the mass killings of the Armenians as a genocide (Balakian, 2003; Rotella & Richeson, 2013). Scholars have studied the intentional silencing of mass violence by regimes who hide their crimes and intimidate the public in order to control information's possession and reach (Üngör, 2014). The regimes distribute propaganda to encourage a different narrative of denial for their crimes (Üngör, 2014). In the case of Turkey and the Armenian genocide, the Turkish government denies the genocide as such and instead misrepresents and manipulates the public memory of the event (Üngör, 2014). The event still has a collective memory passed on within communities rather than through collective memories distributed by the Turkish government who denies the genocide (Üngör, 2014). The public is not allowed to voice their disagreement with the government's denial because of the peer pressure surrounding academic settings (Üngör, 2014). Out of fear of solitude for holding a view against the government, few individuals denounce anti-Armenian publications (Üngör, 2014). There are many factors that play into the public's and government's denial. Revealing the truth would induce guilt and a reparative period of compensation and acknowledgement of the victims (Üngör, 2014). Additionally, in revealing the atrocity, the Turkish would have to reevaluate their collective identity (Üngör, 2014). Their collective identity has never acknowledged the genocide, and those who do deny it have their identity taken from

them (Üngör, 2014). They are essentially accused of being Armenian if they speak out against the denial (Üngör, 2014). The Turkish created a new identity after the atrocities and the construction of a public memory followed (Üngör, 2014). The new, official textbooks reported on history of the in-group, completely ignoring the history of ethnic minorities and the mention of the atrocities (Üngör, 2014). The new identity created in tandem to the history shaped an identity without any violence (Üngör, 2014).

When governments allow textbook authors to erase parts or all of the human rights violations they have committed or intentionally silence the violence of a mass killing considered a genocide, in-group members are not able to remember the human rights violations to their full extent. Instead, they remember the parts of history that portrays their in-group in a positive light, further motivating their preference for positively biased texts. It also illuminates differences between the in-group and out-groups. The out-groups could include the very people who had their human rights violated. As such, intergroup reconciliation is hindered when groups do not accept their own wrongdoings (Doosje, Brandscombe, Spears, & Manstead, 1998; Kofta & Slawuta, 2013). Understandably, engaging in the remembrance of committed atrocities is bad for an in-group's positive image (Doosje, Brandscombe, Spears, & Manstead, 1998; Kofta & Slawuta, 2013).

Aligned with the results of the present study, positive passages are thus more conducive to an in-group's positive image, but the effect of which could lead to forgetting or the dismissal of the event from memory. The effects of an in-group's failure to remember atrocities could lead to the suppression of the victim's group (Kofta & Slawuta, 2013; Brandscombe, Schmitt, & Schiffhauer, 2007). In-groups' collective

memory for genocides and mass killings can form in one of two ways: an in-group can deny the atrocity and form prejudices against the victim's group, or the in-group can employ empathy in their remembrance and become motivated to reconcile their past with the victims (Kofta & Slawuta, 2013). The perceptions of cultural closeness to the victim's group determines how in-groups will remember the event (Kofta & Slawuta, 2013). Perpetrators can also respond to their own human rights violations by denying the existence of it all together (Cohen, 2001; Kofta & Slawuta, 2013), justifying their actions (Dresler-Hawke, 2005; Kofta & Slawuta, 2013; Wohl, Branscombe, & Klar, 2006), or dehumanizing the victims (Bandura, 1999; Castano & Giner-Sorolla, 2006; Kofta & Slawuta, 2013). In each of these instances, the memory of the event is not remembered accurately.

Reasonably, victims expect perpetrators to remember the atrocities they have committed against them (Pennebaker, Paez, & Rimé, 1997; Rotella & Richeson, 2013). The ability for perpetrators to remember and accept responsibility for violations is necessary for full apologies and reconciliation attempts (Lazare, 2004; Rotella & Richeson, 2013). When this occurs, perpetrators and victims are able to overcome intergroup tension because it is the very refusal to admit a human rights violation by an in-group that creates intergroup tension (Rotella & Richeson, 2013).

Education plays an important role in mediating the reconciliation and prevention of future conflict after atrocities are committed (Kofta & Slawuta, 2013). Education can be used to build peaceful societies (Salomon, 2011). The United Nations supports building cultures of peace through dialogue to resolve conflict (Salomon, 2011). The issues involved in creating a peaceful culture involve the development of the youth

within society and the actual creation of a society that is peaceful (Oppenheimer, 2009; Salomon, 2011). The ripple effect is necessary to create a society where peace education programs affect not only the people who receive the programming but all others in the vast regions of society (Salomon, 2011). A peaceful society cannot first exist without creating a collective narrative that then positively impacts the society's ethos (Salomon, 2011). Therefore, educational programs established to build peaceful societies must affect the social ethos (Salomon, 2011). Educational peace programs are typically targeted at children and youth; however, these groups may not be the most efficient groups to encourage the peace process (Salomon, 2011). It is unclear what the most effective way to change the society's ethos is, but peace education, like education for human rights, antiracism, and tolerance, has the unifying goal of changing society to support peace (Salomon, 2011). The need for education in mediating the effects of conflict and positively impacting a society's ethos relates to creating collective memories that acknowledge human rights violations but also encourages peace moving forward. Individuals in societies can learn how to change their ethos through educational peace programs. It is especially important for citizens to interact with the country's collective memory because it can effectively change the individual citizen's values (Gibson, 2004). A citizen's values changing, however, is highly dependent on the perspective and motivation of the collective memory.

Collective memory can be an effective, but often ignored, means for victims to understand the past that includes human rights violations. In the context of the conflict in the Western Sahara with the violations committed by the Kingdom of Morocco on the Sahrawi people, Arnos-Martínez, Beristain, and González-Hidalgo (2014) study the

implications of the human rights violations and the impact of them at multiple levels of society. Because there are limited studies about the Sahrawi and a lack of narratives about human rights violations, the need for a collective memory from the victims' perspective is important (Arnosó-Martínez, Beristain, & González-Hidalgo, 2014). The women play a large part in the collective memory for the Sahrawi people, and the researchers argue that their collective memory could play a role in preventing future violence (Arnosó-Martínez, Beristain, & González-Hidalgo, 2014). Essentially, when the truth is acknowledged by those in power, and they engage in specific dialogue regarding the event, those in power can facilitate a more effective peace process amongst the Sahwari people and others in the Western Sahara (Arnosó-Martínez, Beristain, & González-Hidalgo, 2014). Collective memories that include human rights violations are important for the victims and civilians because they play a major role in the attitudes of remembering the past.

Collective memory has many implications on human rights violations. Collective memories can effectively impact individual's goals and beliefs about national issues; however, even in the case of highly memorable and important historical events, like the civil rights movement, individuals can still show a lack of understanding for the full breadth of the event and its importance. Collective memories can be lacking in their ability to move individuals to act on their beliefs and attitudes. Political actors play a role in how and which collective memories are encoded in individuals. Political actors are motivated to portray their country in a positive light; thus, collective memory dispersed to individuals about past atrocities committed by the country could be missing parts or whole pieces of an event. Political actors are highly motivated by social, political,

psychological, and economic reasons that then translate into how the public identity and collective memory are created and maintained in the society. Past atrocities are silenced by the motivating factors, and an identity distinct from the human rights violations is created to ensure feelings of exclusion are heavily linked to exposing a violation committed by the in-group. The dynamics between the in-group and out-groups increase the in-group's motivations to hide certain aspects of the event and control the collective memory for the period of time for which the event occurred. For out-groups, or those who have had their human rights violated, they are in need of acknowledgement and recognition from the in-groups. Education can mediate the effects of silencing human rights violations. Peace programs geared toward changing the national ethos through education can affect how human rights violations are understood, but they also can ensure that countries do not repeat human rights violations in the future. Collective memories can have a powerful role in facilitating dialogue and preventing future injustices. The positive impact of collective memories on human rights violations is dependent on whether or not countries and in-groups report, acknowledge, and educate their citizens and group members about past human rights violations. Largely, though, collective memory aids in the dismissal of human rights violations because of the link to positive in-group identification.

### **Conclusion**

The present study examined the perceptions of accuracy and preference for biased “history” passages across individuals who viewed the event of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II as negative or not negative. The results suggested that individuals do not prefer and do not perceive high accuracy in negatively

biased texts. Individuals preferred and rated higher accuracy in the positively biased and neutral texts across both emotional valence conditions. The present study has various implications on the role of collective memory in remembering or ignoring human rights violations. Collective memory studies are important because of their very real implications on individual memory, in-group identity, and human rights. There are plenty of directions for future collective memory and history studies.

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Table 1

Mean scores for perceptions of accuracy and favorability of the passages are shown in the table below.

	Negative Emotional Valence	Not Negative Emotional Valence
<b>Perceptions of Accuracy Ratings</b>		
Positively biased passage	5.93 (0.92) <i>n</i> = 115	5.86 (0.91) <i>n</i> = 19
Negatively biased passage	5.00 (1.22) <i>n</i> = 114	4.61 (1.35) <i>n</i> = 21
Neutral passage	5.94 (0.88) <i>n</i> = 109	5.56 (1.13) <i>n</i> = 26
<b>Favorability Ratings</b>		
Positively biased passage	4.41 (0.96) <i>n</i> = 115	4.97 (0.79) <i>n</i> = 19
Negatively biased passage	3.80 (1.09) <i>n</i> = 114	3.51 (0.82) <i>n</i> = 21
Neutral passage	4.54 (0.85) <i>n</i> = 109	4.74 (1.05) <i>n</i> = 26

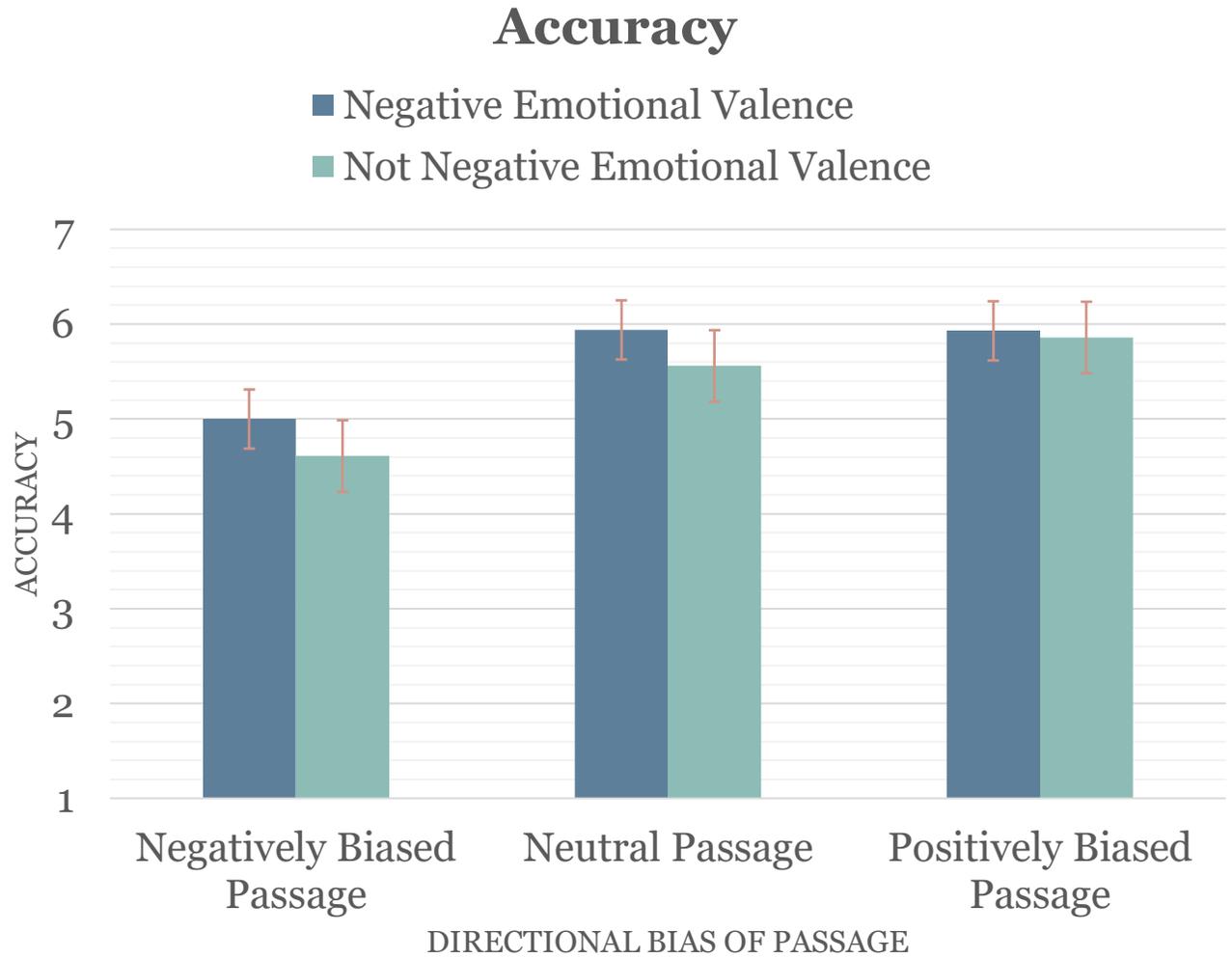
*Note.* Standard deviations are reported in parentheses.

Table 2

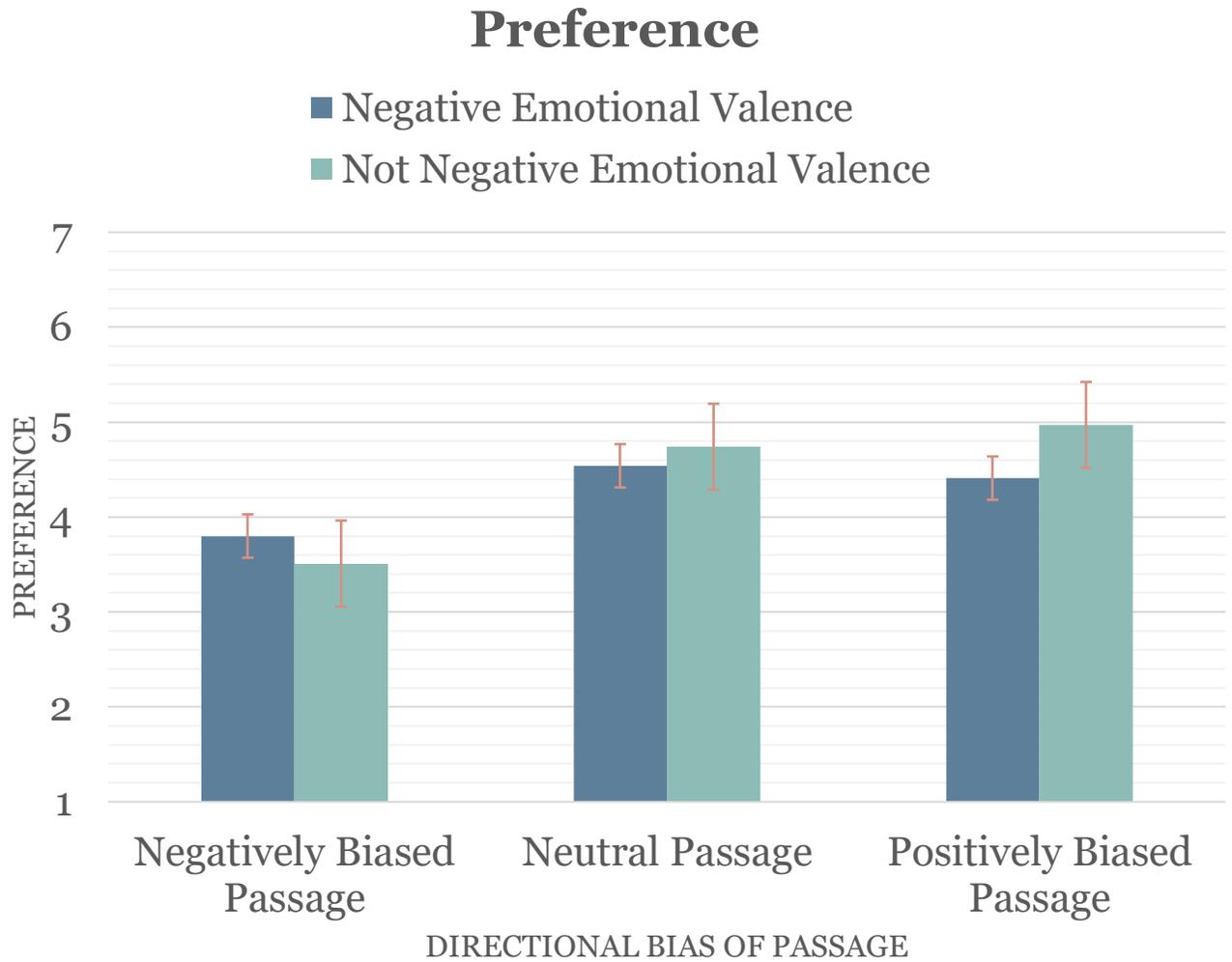
Mean scores for perceptions of accuracy and favorability of the passages are shown in the table below for Negative Emotional Valence and Positive Emotional Valence.

	Negative Emotional Valence	Positive Emotional
Valence		
Perceptions of Accuracy Ratings		
Positively biased passage	5.93 (0.92) <i>n</i> = 115	5.92 (0.98) <i>n</i> = 13
Negatively biased passage	5.00 (1.22) <i>n</i> = 114	4.81 (1.27) <i>n</i> = 13
Neutral passage	5.94 (0.88) <i>n</i> = 109	5.44 (0.94) <i>n</i> = 16
Favorability Ratings		
Positively biased passage	4.41 (0.96) <i>n</i> = 115	5.15 (0.80) <i>n</i> = 13
Negatively biased passage	3.80 (1.09) <i>n</i> = 114	3.65 (0.78) <i>n</i> = 13
Neutral passage	4.54 (0.85) <i>n</i> = 109	4.74 (1.00) <i>n</i> = 16

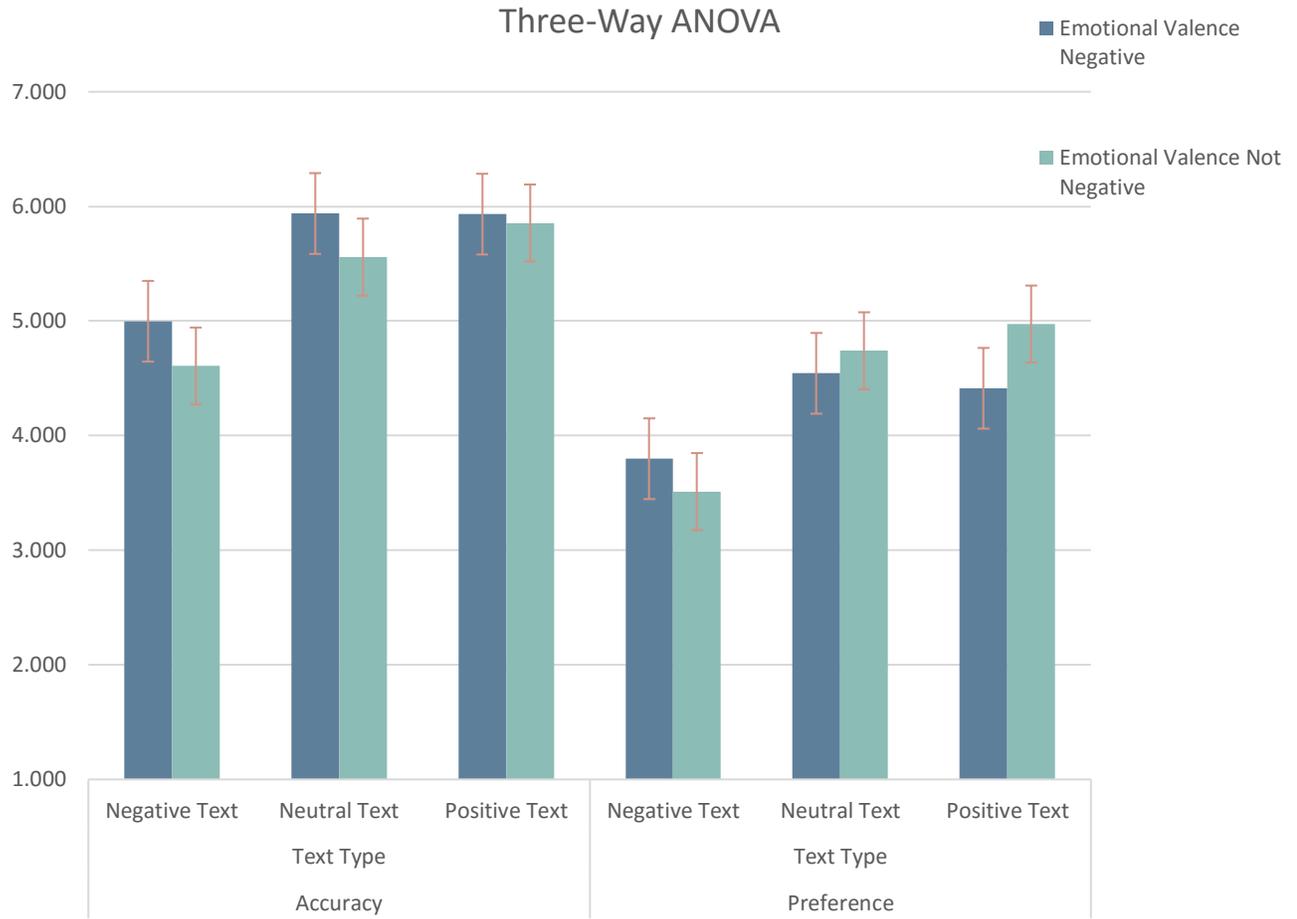
*Note.* Standard deviations are reported in parentheses.



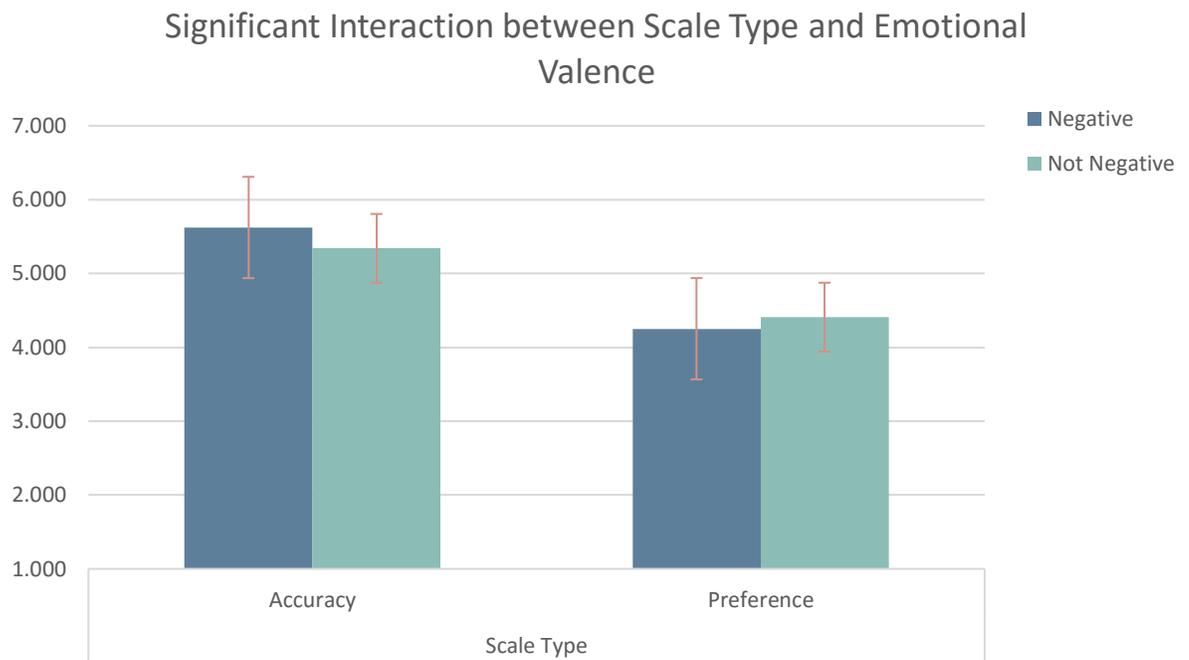
*Figure 1.* The figure above depicts the mean differences on the accuracy ratings of the directional biased passages (neutral, negative, and positive) between those who viewed the event as negative and those who did not view the event as negative. Error bars of the confidence interval are represented in the graph.



*Figure 2.* The figure above depicts the mean differences on the preference ratings of the directional biased passages (neutral, negative, and positive) between those who viewed the event as negative and those who did not view the event as negative. Error bars of the confidence interval are represented in the graph.



*Figure 3.* The figure above depicts the mean differences on the three-way ANOVA of the directional bias of the text (negative, neutral, and positive) between those who perceive the event as negative or not negative on the two scale types (accuracy and preference). Errors bars of the confidence interval are represented in the graph.



*Figure 4.* The figure above depicts the mean differences of the significant interaction between the emotional valence of the event (negative and not negative) and the scale types (accuracy and preference). Errors bars of the confidence interval are represented in the graph.

**APPENDIX A.**

Please rate the following for the event of America dropping the atomic bombs over Japan during World War II.

Please rate the emotional valence of the event.  
1= *Extremely negative* to 7= *Extremely positive*

Please rate the importance of the event in the context of the war.  
1= *Not important* to 4= *Extremely important*

Please rate your level of detail known about the event.  
1= *Not detailed* to 4= *Extremely detailed*

Zaromb, F., Butler, A. C., Agarwal, P. K., & Roediger, H. L. (2013). Collective memories of three wars in United States history in younger and older adults. *Memory & Cognition*, 42(3), 383-399.

**APPENDIX B.**

**Instructions:** Please read the following passage carefully. You will be asked questions about the passage after you have read it. You may take as long as you need to read the passage.

## Neutral Passage

America had the bomb. Now what?

When Harry Truman learned of the success of the Manhattan Project, he knew he was faced with a decision of unprecedented gravity. The capacity to end the war with Japan was in his hands, but it would involve unleashing the most terrible weapon ever known.

American soldiers and civilians were weary from four years of war, yet the Japanese military was refusing to give up their fight. American forces occupied Okinawa and Iwo Jima and were intensely firebombing Japanese cities. But Japan had an army of 2 million strong stationed in the home islands guarding against invasion.

For Truman, the choice whether or not to use the atomic bomb was the most difficult decision of his life.

First, an Allied demand for an immediate unconditional surrender was made to the leadership in Japan. Although the demand stated that refusal would result in total destruction, no mention of any new weapons of mass destruction was made. The Japanese military command rejected the request for unconditional surrender, but there were indications that a conditional surrender was possible.

Regardless, on August 6, 1945, a plane called the Enola Gay dropped an atomic bomb on the city of Hiroshima. Instantly, 70,000 Japanese citizens were vaporized. In the months and years that followed, an additional 100,000 perished from burns and radiation sickness.

Two days later, the Soviet Union declared war on Japan. On August 9, a second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, where 80,000 Japanese people perished.

On August 14, 1945, the Japanese surrendered.

Critics have charged that Truman's decision was a barbaric act that brought negative long-term consequences to the United States. A new age of nuclear terror led to a dangerous arms race.

Some military analysts insist that Japan was on its knees and the bombings were simply unnecessary. The American government was accused of racism on the grounds that such a device would never have been used against white civilians.

Other critics argued that American diplomats had ulterior motives. The Soviet Union had entered the war against Japan, and the atomic bomb could be read as a strong message for the Soviets to tread lightly. In this respect, Hiroshima and Nagasaki may have been the first shots of the Cold War as well as the final shots of World War II. Regardless, the United States remains the only nation in the world to have used a nuclear weapon on another nation.

Truman stated that his decision to drop the bomb was purely military. A Normandy-type amphibious landing would have cost an estimated million casualties. Truman believed that the bombs saved Japanese lives as well. Prolonging the war was not an option for the President. Over 3,500 Japanese kamikaze raids had already wrought great destruction and loss of American lives.

The President rejected a demonstration of the atomic bomb to the Japanese leadership. He knew there was no guarantee the Japanese would surrender if the test succeeded, and he felt that a failed demonstration would be worse than none at all. Even the scientific community failed to foresee the awful effects of radiation sickness. Truman saw little difference between atomic bombing Hiroshima and firebombing Dresden or Tokyo.

The ethical debate over the decision to drop the atomic bomb will never be resolved. The bombs did, however, bring an end to the most destructive war in history. The Manhattan Project that produced it demonstrated the possibility of how a nation's resources could be mobilized.

Pandora's box was now open. The question that came flying out was, "How will the world use its nuclear capability?" It is a question still being addressed on a daily basis.

**Instructions:** Please read the following passage carefully. You will be asked questions about the passage after you have read it. You may take as long as you need to read the passage.

Negative Passage:

And then, on August 6, 1945, came the lone American plane in the sky over Hiroshima, dropping the first atomic bomb, leaving perhaps 100,000 Japanese dead, and tens of thousands more slowly dying from radiation poisoning. Twelve U.S. navy fliers in the Hiroshima city jail were killed in the bombing, a fact that the U.S. government has never officially acknowledged, according to historian Martin Sherwin (*A World Destroyed*). Three days later, a second atomic bomb was dropped on the city of Nagasaki, with perhaps 50,000 killed. The justification for these atrocities was that this would end the war quickly, making unnecessary an invasion of Japan. Such an invasion would cost a huge number of lives, the government said—a million, according to Secretary of State Byrnes; half a million, Truman claimed was the figure given him by General George Marshall. (When the papers of the Manhattan Project—the project to build the atom bomb—were released years later, they showed that Marshall urged a warning to the Japanese about the bomb, so people could be removed and only military targets hit.) These estimates of invasion losses were not realistic, and seem to have been pulled out of the air to justify bombings which, as their effects became known, horrified more and more people. Japan, by August 1945, was in desperate shape and ready to surrender. New York Times military analyst Hanson Baldwin wrote, shortly after the war: The enemy, in a military sense, was in a hopeless strategic position by the time the Potsdam demand for unconditional surrender was made on July 26. Such then, was the situation when we wiped out Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Need we have done it? No one can, of course, be positive, but the answer is almost certainly negative. The United States Strategic Bombing Survey, set up by the War Department in 1944 to study the results of aerial attacks in the war, interviewed hundreds of Japanese civilian and military leaders after Japan surrendered, and reported just after the war: Based on a detailed investigation of all the facts and supported by the testimony of the surviving Japanese leaders involved, it is the Survey's opinion that certainly prior to 31 December 1945, and in all probability prior to 1 November 1945, Japan would have surrendered even if the atomic bombs had not been dropped, even if Russia had not entered the war, and even if no invasion had been planned or contemplated. But could American leaders have known this in August 1945? The answer is, clearly, yes. The Japanese code had been broken, and Japan's messages were being intercepted. It was known the Japanese had instructed their ambassador in Moscow to work on peace negotiations with the Allies. Japanese leaders had begun talking of surrender a year before this, and the Emperor himself had begun to suggest, in June 1945, that alternatives to fighting to the end be considered. On July 13, Foreign Minister Shigenori Togo wired his ambassador in Moscow: "Unconditional surrender is the only obstacle to peace..." Martin Sherwin, after an exhaustive study of the relevant historical documents, concludes: "Having broken the Japanese code before the war, American Intelligence was able to—and did—relay this message to the President, but it had no effect

whatever on efforts to bring the war to a conclusion." If only the Americans had not insisted on unconditional surrender- that is, if they were willing to accept one condition to the surrender, that the Emperor, a holy figure to the Japanese, remain in place-the Japanese would have agreed to stop the war. Why did the United States not take that small step to save both American and Japanese lives? Was it because too much money and effort had been invested in the atomic bomb not to drop it? General Leslie Groves, head of the Manhattan Project, described Truman as a man on a toboggan, the momentum too great to stop it. Or was it, as British scientist P. M. S. Blackett suggested (*Fear, War, and the Bomb*), that the United States was anxious to drop the bomb before the Russians entered the war against Japan? The Russians had secretly agreed (they were officially not at war with Japan) they would come into the war ninety days after the end of the European war. That turned out to be May 8, and so, on August 8, the Russians were due to declare war on Japan, but by then the big bomb had been dropped, and the next day a second one would be dropped on Nagasaki; the Japanese would surrender to the United States, not the Russians, and the United States would be the occupier of postwar Japan. In other words, Blackett says, the dropping of the bomb was "the first major operation of the cold diplomatic war with Russia..." Blackett is supported by American historian Gar Alperovitz (*Atomic Diplomacy*), who notes a diary entry for July 28, 1945, by Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal, describing Secretary of State James F. Byrnes as "most anxious to get the Japanese affair over with before the Russians got in." Truman had said, "The world will note that the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, a military base. That was because we wished in this first attack to avoid, insofar as possible, the killing of civilians." It was a preposterous statement. Those 100,000 killed in Hiroshima were almost all civilians. The U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey said in its official report: "Hiroshima and Nagasaki were chosen as targets because of their concentration of activities and population." The dropping of the second bomb on Nagasaki seems to have been scheduled in advance, and no one has ever been able to explain why it was dropped. Was it because this was a plutonium bomb whereas the Hiroshima bomb was a uranium bomb? Were the dead and irradiated of Nagasaki victims of a scientific experiment? Martin Shenvin says that among the Nagasaki dead were probably American prisoners of war. He notes a message of July 31 from Headquarters, U.S. Army Strategic Air Forces, Guam, to the War Department: Reports prisoner of war sources, not verified by photos, give location of Allied prisoner of war camp one-mile north of center of city of Nagasaki. Does this influence the choice of this target for initial Centerboard operation? Request immediate reply. The reply: "Targets previously assigned for Centerboard remain unchanged." True, the war then ended quickly. Italy had been defeated a year earlier. Germany had recently surrendered, crushed primarily by the armies of the Soviet Union on the Eastern Front, aided by the Allied armies on the West. Now Japan surrendered. The Fascist powers were destroyed. But what about fascism-as idea, as reality? Were its essential elements-militarism, racism, imperialism-now gone? Or were they absorbed into the already poisoned bones of the victors? A. J. Muste, the revolutionary pacifist, had predicted in 1941: "The problem after a war is with the victor. He thinks he has just proved that war and violence pay. Who will now teach him a lesson?" The victors were the Soviet Union and the United States (also England, France and Nationalist China, but they were weak). Both these countries now went to work-without swastikas, goose-

stepping, or officially declared racism, but under the cover of "socialism" on one side, and "democracy" on the other, to carve out their own empires of influence. They proceeded to share and contest with one another the domination of the world, to build military machines far greater than the Fascist countries had built, to control the destinies of more countries than Hitler, Mussolini, and Japan had been able to do. They also acted to control their own populations, each country with its own techniques-crude in the Soviet Union, sophisticated in the United States-to make their rule secure.

**Instructions:** Please read the following passage carefully. You will be asked questions about the passage after you have read it. You may take as long as you need to read the passage.

Positive Passage:

The taking of Iwo Jima and Okinawa opened the way for an invasion of Japan. However, Allied leaders knew that such an invasion would become a desperate struggle. Japan still had a huge army that would defend every inch of homeland. President Truman saw only one way to avoid an invasion of Japan. He decided to use a powerful new weapon that had been developed by scientists working on the Manhattan Project—the atomic bomb. Led by General Leslie Groves with research directed by American scientist J. Robert Oppenheimer, the development of the atomic bomb was not only the most ambitious scientific enterprise in history, it was also the best-kept secret of the war. At its peak, more than 600,000 Americans were involved in the project, although few knew its purpose. Even Truman did not learn about it until he became president. The first test of the new bomb took place on the morning of July 16, 1945, in an empty expanse of desert near Alamogordo, New Mexico. A blinding flash, which was visible 180 miles away, was followed by a deafening roar as a tremendous shock wave rolled across the trembling desert. Otto Frisch, a scientist on the project, described the huge mushroom cloud that rose over the desert as “a redhot elephant standing balanced on its trunk.” The bomb worked!

President Truman now faced a difficult decision. Should the Allies use the bomb to bring an end to the war? Truman did not hesitate. On July 25, 1945, he ordered the military to make final plans for dropping two atomic bombs on Japanese targets. A day later, the United States warned Japan that it faced “prompt and utter destruction” unless it surrendered at once. Japan refused. Truman later wrote, “The final decision of where and when to use the atomic bomb was up to me. Let there be no mistake about it. I regarded the bomb as a military weapon and never had any doubt that it should be used.” On August 6, a B-29 bomber named Enola Gay released an atomic bomb, codenamed Little Boy, over Hiroshima, an important Japanese military center. Forty-three seconds later, almost every building in the city collapsed into dust from the force of the blast.

Hiroshima had ceased to exist. Still, Japan’s leaders hesitated to surrender. Three days later, a second bomb, code-named Fat Man, was dropped on Nagasaki, leveling half the city. By the end of the year, an estimated 200,000 people had died as a result of injuries and radiation poisoning caused by the atomic blasts. Yamaoka Michiko was 15 years old and living near the center of Hiroshima when the first bomb hit.

Emperor Hirohito was horrified by the destruction wrought by the bomb. “I cannot bear to see my innocent people suffer any longer,” he told Japan’s leaders tearfully. Then he ordered them to draw up papers “to end the war.” On September 2, formal surrender ceremonies took place on the U.S. battleship Missouri in Tokyo Bay. “Today the guns are silent,” said General MacArthur in a speech marking this historic moment. “The skies no longer rain death—the seas bear only commerce—men everywhere walk upright in the sunlight. The entire world is quietly at peace.”

**APPENDIX C.**

Accuracy questionnaire

(1 to 7 scaling with *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*)

The passage seemed believable.

The passage seemed truthful.

The passage seemed accurate.

\*The passage seemed biased.

\*Reverse-scored

**APPENDIX D.**

Preference questionnaire

(1 to 7 scaling with *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*)

I agreed with most or all of what was said in the passage.

\*The passage did not account for all perspectives.

\*The passage was different than any account I have read on the same subject material.

I would prefer reading this passage as opposed to any other about this event.

\*Reverse-scored

**Demographics:**

What is your age?

What is your gender?

Woman

Man

Other

What is your ethnicity?

White/Caucasian

Asian/Asian American

Latino/Hispanic

African American/Black

Other

Are you a citizen of the United States?

Yes

No

Did you go to high school in the United States?

Yes

No

How many years of education have you had? (High school= 12 years)