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Relationship between Social Category and Third-Party Perceptions of Crime

Sara Roderick¹⁰

How social category affects observer perceptions of crime is an interesting topic that can yield many interesting results. Previous research has shown that the social category of individual can hold some influence on how the individual is perceived. Some studies focused on the dispositional qualities attributed to individuals solely based on social category, while other were more concerned with third-party responses to individuals based on social category. Within that same line, this study hoped to replicate findings by Lieberman and Linke (2007) which indicated that the social category of a perpetrator of a crime did indeed have an effect on observer perceptions of that crime. Lieberman and Linke (2007) utilized a between-participants design, while the present study hoped to replicate those findings using a within-participants design. Two surveys were constructed presenting different crime scenarios with perpetrators of varying social-categories. Participants rated three measures relating to the crime such as: how morally wrong the crime was, how much punishment the perpetrator should receive, and how remorseful the perpetrator would be. Ultimately, there were no significant results in regards to social-category, or familiarity, of the perpetrator and crime ratings, but future lines of research are uncovered in relation to degree, or severity of crime committed.

This study's main goal is to determine if social category will have an effect on how an observer of a crime judges the offender of said crime. How does the offender's closeness to the observer (familiar versus unfamiliar) affect how morally wrong the observer rates the crime, how severe of punishment is dealt to the offender, and how remorseful the observer thinks the offender will be? I hope to find out by building upon previous research conducted by Lieberman and Linke (2007).

Lieberman and Linke (2007) also looked at how the social category, or identity, of an offender affected observer perception of a crime committed. They utilized a between-participants design, presenting each participant with one scenario and having him/her rate the moral wrongness of the crime in the scenario received, along with the levels of remorse attributed to the perpetrator of the crime, and how harsh of a punishment should be dealt. The only difference

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in the scenarios given to each participant was the identity of the offender of the crime (family member, schoolmate, or foreigner.)

Lieberman and Linke (2007) found that the crime described to participants was rated as having the same levels of moral wrongness regardless of the social category of the offender. They also found however, that harsher punishments were given to out-group individuals (foreigners, followed by schoolmates) and more lenient punishments were given to in-group members (family members). Additionally, it was found that family members were attributed the highest levels of remorse, followed by schoolmates and foreigners.

First and foremost, before delving into how social category effects judgment and punishment, it may be beneficial to examine how social factors can influence the attributions people make towards others in general. In order to obtain a better understanding of how social-values can have a significant effect on what individuals attribute the behavior of others to, a study by Seta, Schmidt, and Bookhout (2006) looks at how observer social-values influence how that observer attributes causation. Within the study, participants were made to watch videotapes of a group interaction involving members from two different groups, the Greek group (college students in a sorority/fraternity) or the Independents (unaffiliated college students). Each participant was made to answer questions about the group and, in particular a target member. Unbeknownst to the participants, they all were watching the same target member, a member of the Greek group. Group membership was designated by a colored name tag on each of the group members.

The purpose of Seta et al.'s (2006) study was to see how participant social-identity orientation affected how readily participants attributed the opinions and behaviors of the target group member to social category and, on the other hand, dispositional factors. Social identity

orientation was defined by Seta et al. (2006) as how much of one's identity is dependent on social factors, such as how one appears to others. Participants in the main study were administered the AIQ, a questionnaire to discern social identity orientation, and only those participants scoring as either significantly high on social identity or significantly low were recruited. In accordance with Seta et al.'s (2006) hypothesis, that those high in social identity were more likely to attribute the Greek member's behavior and opinions to his Greek membership, while participants low in social-identity did not distinguish significantly between social category and dispositional factors.

Seta et al.'s (2006) study is a great introduction to social category as a means of attribution, and demonstrates how an observer's own perceptions can alter how events are perceived in relation to social category and social identity. By better grasping how social category can affect observer perceptions and how, in turn, observer perceptions can affect perception of social category new questions can be asked in regards to other area influenced by social category.

It is also important to establish a thorough history of research looking at the possible effects social category can exert in regards to decision making and passing judgment. In a study by Gummerum, Takezawa, and Keller (2009), the social category (in-group versus out-group) of interaction partners was found to have an effect on how participants responded when playing economic games. The main goal of Gummerum, et al. (2009) study was to examine altruistic behavior in relation to social category, but the researchers' results are applicable when examining how social category affects perception as a whole.

Gummerum et al. (2009) used three different economic games to examine different aspects of altruistic behavior in regards to social category. They investigated sharing in "the

dictator game,” reciprocity in a “sequential prisoner’s game,” and altruistic punishment in a final third-party punishment game. The dictator game involved participants, told they were playing against either in-group or out-group members, allotting “coins” to the other player (the responder). Gummerum et al. (2009) hypothesized that participants would “give” more to in-group members, which turned out to be supported by the results. In the next game, the “prisoner’s dilemma,” participants were told that they were given a certain number of “coins” by an anonymous second player, and the in-group versus out-group status of that player. The researchers hypothesized that there would be no significant difference in reciprocity rates based on group status. This hypothesis was supported in the results, for no significant differences were found.

Finally, and of most interest in relation to my own study, are Gummerum et al. (2009)’s trials involving the third economic game, the one featuring “altruistic third party punishment.” In the third part punishment game, participants were made to spend some of their “coins” to punish a non-cooperator within the game. Participants were cued as to the non-cooperator’s identity as an in-group or out-group member. In-group members were predicted to actually receive more punishment from the participant than would out-group members. The results of the study support the hypothesis, citing the reason as possibly being based in altruism, as harsher punishment of in-group members may reflect a greater desire to bring in-group members back into the fold, so to speak, or in other words, encourage in-group members to start cooperating (Gummerum et al., 2009).

Overall, I believe the results obtained by Gummerum et al. (2009) do stand out as a testament to how social category can affect interactions and perception, especially when it comes to judging and making decisions related to other individuals. Even in the other economic games

not related to punishment, social category was a factor in how the participants responded, though it seemed to have less of an effect in the case of reciprocity. Overall, Gummerum et al.'s (2009) study is a revealing look into how social category can make even more of a difference in participant perception.

Gollwitzer and Keller (2010) also examined how in-group and out-group status can influence decisions about severity of punishment. However, they wanted to look at how crime frequency specifically moderates the severity of punishment given. For example, the researchers were interested in how severity of punishment differed between first time, in-group offenders and repeated in-group offenders. Gollwitzer and Keller (2010) sought to compare the effect of offense frequency to both repeated and first-time offenders that were members of an out-group and of an in-group. Drawing upon previous research, Gollwitzer and Keller (2010) wished to look more exclusively at the factors that moderated in-group versus out-group punishment severity instead of group membership and punishment exclusively.

Gollwitzer and Keller (2010) hypothesized that offense frequency for out-group members should not affect severity of punitive punishment at all, while, for in-group members, there should be a difference in the severity of punishment depending on the first or repeated offender status of the offender. To be more specific, repeated, in-group offenders would receive harsher punishments than first-time, in-group offenders. Gollwitzer and Keller (2010) explained that repeated offenses by an in-group member made it more difficult to attribute the offensive behavior to situational factors, which resulted in a greater threat to overall group cohesion and maintenance. On the other hand, all out-group offenses, repeated or otherwise, would be seen as an overall threat to one's group and therefore offense frequency would not play as significant of a role.

Gollwitzer and Keller (2010) tested their hypothesis by presenting psychology students with a packet containing a vignette in which a fellow psychology student (in-group) or a biology student (out-group), violated a rule and was caught. Students were asked to rate their levels of outrage/anger, how severe of a punishment the offending student should receive, and to what degree they felt that societal cohesion had been threatened by the act. They found that their hypothesis was indeed supported, and offense frequency did affect the participant's ratings for in-group offenders but did not seem to have any effect on the judgment of out-group members. In line with Gollwitzer and Keller's (2010) hypothesis, repeat-offender in-group members were punished more harshly, were the target of greater amounts of outrage, and were perceived as a greater threat to societal cohesion. On the other hand, first-time in-group offenders were subject to what the researchers deemed the "benefit of the doubt" effect, in which the first-time offender's transgressions were not met with as much anger, perception of threat, or punishment degree. The offense frequency had no significant effect for out-group offenders.

The study by Gollwitzer and Keller (2010) was indeed an interesting one, for it demonstrates the varying ways in which social category could affect judgment. Beyond the implications of social-category itself, it also seems possible that social-category mediates how many other variables come into play, according to the results obtained. This proposition makes the true significance of social-category even more interesting, and I look forward to examining it more closely.

Further research by Wohl and Branscombe (2005) explored social category as it applies to larger groups – focusing on the in-group versus out-group differentiation, and citing previous research describing the hostility typically associated with out-groups and the cooperation and inclusiveness typically associated with in-groups. Wohl and Branscombe (2005) hoped to

examine how recategorization of a group's social category affected the perception of that group by a formally opposed group. In essence, the researchers explained, there are three different levels of social categorization: personal, social, and human. The "personal" level is one's individual category that differentiates one from even in-group members. The "social" level is the true origin of "in-group" versus "outgroup" as it involves the orientation of individuals into distinctive social groups. The third level, "human," is the most inclusive and includes everyone on a species level – in effect making all humans part of one group, and all non-humans the new, ultimate, "out group." Wohl and Branscombe (2005) sought to build upon previous research on this topic by testing its effect on larger populations in which no specific individual interaction occurs – as was the case in most previous research. The individual interaction present in the cited, previous experiments could have interfered with the manipulation of social category in its most basic form.

This being the case, Wohl and Branscombe (2005) decided to conduct four studies examining the effects of social recategorization on larger group with little personal interaction. The populations utilized in this research were German people and Jewish people, and Native Canadians and White Canadians – groups firmly in opposition to each other. The researchers hypothesized that by recategorizing "Germans" into "Humans," the Jewish group would be more inclined towards forgiveness and would lessen the expectation of collective guilt. Collective guilt is a term for how much remorse the offending group is expected to feel in regards to what they did to the victimized group. This same effect was hypothesized for both group sets, Germans and Jews, and Native and White Canadians.

In their first experiment Wohl and Branscombe (2005) used an online survey that Jewish college students, recruited from a school organization, took one of two versions of. In one

version, the “social” version, the Holocaust was framed as being an act of genocide perpetrated by Germans towards the Jews. In the “human” condition, the Holocaust was framed as an act of genocide committed against *people* by other *people*. Participants were then asked to respond, in Likert scale format, to questions asking to what extent modern day German should be held accountable for the action of their ancestors, and how capable and/or willing modern day Jews should be to forgive modern-day Germans for the acts of their ancestors. The researchers’ hypothesis was supported in that those who received the “human” categorization level survey gave ratings more indicative of forgiveness towards modern day Germans and less expectancy that modern-day Germans should be remorseful.

In their second study, again examining the groups of German people and Jewish people, Wohl and Branscombe (2005) tried the same experiment only using a different manipulation of the social-category-level variable. The “human” level survey remained the same, while the “social” level was altered to include less bias-sounding language. In this updated study, the social-level survey included the exact same phrasing as the human-level survey, only it also included a section where the participant indicates if he or she is Jewish or if German decent. In this way, the two group identities were still made prominent while avoiding the biased, blaming language. The results found in Wohl and Branscombe’s (2005) first experiments were replicated using this altered manipulation technique -- further supporting their hypothesis.

In the third experiment, Wohl and Branscombe (2005) sought to examine the effects of social categorization level using another set of oppositional groups. Instead of “German” and “Jewish,” the researchers tested their hypothesis with “Native Canadian” and “White Canadian.” The methodology was much the same as that used in the researchers’ second experiment, the only difference being the labeling of the groups and the crime (“intergroup harm” instead of

“genocide.”) The hypothesis of the researchers was supported, as Native Canadians showed higher rates of willingness to forgive and less attribution of collective guilt in the human-level social category condition than they did in the social-level condition.

In their final experiment, Wohl and Branscombe (2005) returned to examine the German and Jewish populations. The researchers used the same experimental conditions as their previous experiments, only this time the surveys also included question about how similar the participants felt Germans were to themselves, and how similar they felt modern-day Germans were to Nazi-era Germans. The previous results were replicated between the social-level and human-level social categorizations, but it was also found that Jewish participants found a greater difference between modern-day Germans and Nazi-era Germans in the human-level social category condition than did the participants in the social-level social category condition. Further in accordance with Wohl and Branscombe’s (2005) hypothesis, Jewish participants rated themselves as more similar to Germans if they were in the human-social category level condition.

Overall, the results obtained by Wohl and Branscombe (2005) are extremely interesting and revealing. The effect of social category on group perceptions appears clear, and it is very enlightening to see how these effects appear in larger-scale populations. The idea that social-category can influence perceptions to the degree discovered by the researchers is promising in that it hints at the further implications social-category may hold in regards to the perceptions of both in-group and out-group members about other opposing, or offending groups.

Further research conducted by Grier and McGill (1999) also helps to illustrate how social category can influence the perceptions of observers. The researchers Grier and McGill (1999) wished to examine observer causal comparisons and explanations for the behavior of other people. Specifically, the researchers wished to examine what factors moderate whether or not the

observer attributes the behavior of the observed to individual characteristics (within-group comparison), or social-category (across-group comparison). The researchers hypothesized that how typical the race of the observed is perceived to be, in relation to the activity being performed, will have an effect on which type of comparison, within-group or across-group, the observers will utilize. In this manner, it is hoped that the effect of social-category on perceptions of causality will become apparent.

In a pilot study, Grier and McGill (1999) established which activities were associated with which races of people. This study took place in South Africa, and examine the four main races of that area, described by the researchers as: White, Black, Colored, and Asian. One the results of the pilot study established the association between activities and race, the researchers constructed three different scenarios for the participants of the main study to read. Each scenario featured an actor whose behavior was to be explained by the participant. Following the scenario, participants were asked to explain the behavior of the actor in the scene they have read. Participants also rated hoe “informative” it would be to rate the actor’s behavior in relation to members of his (all actors were male) racial group or members of the opposite racial group. In accordance with their hypothesis, Grier and McGill (1999) found that race-related explanations (or across-group comparisons) were made when the race of the actor was atypical of the activity being performed.

The finding that the social-category of an individual can influence the types of causality attributed to his or her actions is very interesting. Grier and McGill (1999) were able to report the differences in the ways in which participants explained the actions of the actor in each scenario, and the interesting conclusion that the researchers arrived at is further testament to how influential the social-category of a person is when it comes to observer perceptions of that person.

Only further research can help clarify the poignant findings of Grier and McGill (1999), as well as the other studies reviewed hitherto.

More in line with my own study, as it is a more recent rendition of the original Lieberman and Linke (2007) study, was conducted by Linke (2012) in order to examine social category in relation to third-part perception of crime, but using a younger population of children in the fourth to ninth grade levels. Once again, Linke (2012) had participants read a scenario in which the only difference between participants was the identity of the offender of the crime. Linke (2012) utilized a between-participants design to collect data on how the subjects rated the crime across a few different variables: the perceived severity of the event, the punishment thought to best fit the crime; psychological states -- this time slightly more fleshed out to include remorse, selfishness, and probability of recidivism attributed to the perpetrator; overall emotional reactions to the crime; and how morally wrong the crime was perceived to be (Linke, 2012).

Although Linke's (2012) study also included a second experiment relating to the social category of the *victim*. I am mainly interested in the results of the study in which the offender's social category was varied, however, as it falls more in line with the past Lieberman and Linke (2007) study, and therefore, with my own. Linke (2012) did indeed find that the crime was rated as less severe when the perpetrator was socially close to the third-party observer (family member). Levels of punishment seemed to remain fairly constant regardless of social closeness, which is speculated to be a by-product of the relative innocuousness of the crime in question (Linke, 2012).

Linke's (2012) study also found that social closeness did seem to have an effect on rates of forgiveness, with family members being allotted more forgiveness than classmates, and lastly, foreign visitors. It was also found that higher levels of remorse were attributed to in-group

members as well as lower levels of selfishness and recidivism. Out-group members did receive higher ratings of possible recidivism and were perceived as less remorseful. Linke's (2012) findings are very interesting, but I would still like to try and replicate similar finding utilizing a within subjects design.

As for my own study, I hope to replicate the results obtained by Lieberman and Linke (2007) utilizing a within-subjects design along with other modifications to the original study design. I predict that the social-category of the offender will have an effect on how the offender is perceived as far as how remorseful he or she is, how much punishment he or she deserves, and how morally wrong the offense was. In line with Lieberman and Linke's (2007) findings, I predict that the more familiar an offender is, the more remorse will be attributed and the more lenient the punishment dealt will be, however, I predict that how morally wrong the crime is deemed will not be effected by the social-category of the offender, as was the case in the original research.

If my hypothesis is supported, it would reinforce the findings of Lieberman and Linke's (2009) study, adding further credibility to the claim that the social-category of an offender influences perception of the offense. The use of a within-participant design is meant to demonstrate more concretely the differences that are potentially inherent within individuals regarding perceptions of an offense, while allowing for an examination of how crime severity also influences any possible effects of social-category or perception – components not featured in the original study by Lieberman and Linke (2009).

Although the results found in some of the previous research examined above in relation to social category and third-party punishment are contradictory to my own hypothesis, such as those found by Gummerum et al. (2009), those studies featured various points of interest, and

therefore each had a slightly different focus. For example, going back to Gummerum et al. (2009), the researchers were more interested in altruistic punishment and not in specific criminal incidents as is the case in Lieberman and Linke's (2007) study -- and therefore my own. Even so, all of the research examined above demonstrates how social-category can play a significant role in how events are perceived and responded to.

In my own study, participants will read eight scenarios, four of which are misdemeanors (thefts under \$500.00) while the remaining four are felonies (thefts over \$500.00.) The monetary values of each theft will vary within the crime classifications, with half of the misdemeanor crimes detailing theft of \$50, and the other half thefts of \$100.00. The felony-class crimes involve two thefts of \$600.00, and two thefts of \$800.00. The social category of the offender will vary between scenarios. In half of each set of crimes the offender will be a "familiar student" while the other half will be an "unfamiliar student." Following each scenario, the participants will rate the three measures (moral wrongness, magnitude of punishment, and levels of remorse) in relation to the offender. I plan to use the varied monetary value and severity of crime to discover if the pattern found in the study by Lieberman and Linke (2007) still holds across the various levels of crime.

Method

Participants

The participants recruited for this study were all Lindenwood University, undergraduate students. Since all participants were recruited through the Lindenwood Participant Pool (LPP), all subjects were either 18 years of age or had a recent parental consent form on record with the LPP. Overall, LPP members are entry-level psychology, sociology, anthropology, and exercise science students, currently enrolled in a class that had signed up for LPP participation for the

semester during which data will be collected. All LPP participants have the incentive of participating in research for LPP Credits, which can then be applied as extra credit in the participating class. All studies recruiting from the LPP are posted online, on a website run by Sona Systems that tracks and monitors participation in posted studies.

Materials and Procedures

In order to have access to this study, which consisted of an online survey hosted on SurveGizmo (See Appendices A and B), participants had to sign up through the Sona Systems web page. The Sona Systems webpage, in addition to displaying all other currently active studies, also displayed a brief description of each study which the participant could read before deciding to sign-up. If the participant did decide to sign up for this study, he or she was directed to another page that contained a link to the survey on SurveyGizmo. The SurveyGizmo survey briefed the participants on their rights, and provided an overview of the study by way of the informed consent statement (see Appendix C). If the participant decided to agree to the consent statement, he or she was then directed to the beginning of the survey itself. Once completed to whatever extent the participant chose, the feedback statement was then displayed, containing a debriefing on the study itself as well as how to reach the P.I. should one have any questions or concerns (See Appendix D). The participants still received compensation, in the form of extra-credit, whether the survey was completed or not.

The survey itself consisted of eight total scenarios, half describing misdemeanor-class thefts and the remaining four describing felony-class thefts. After each scenario, participants were asked to rate the three measures being examined (moral wrongness, magnitude of punishment, and levels of remorse) in relation to the offender's identity, or social category, in each scenario. The offender's social-category altered between a "familiar" and "unfamiliar"

fellow student. The survey was also split into two separate versions. There were two versions of the survey in order to vary which scenarios participants saw in relation to the perpetrator of the crime featured in the scenario. This was done in an attempt to reduce the effects of any potential extraneous variables in relation to the wording or content of the scenarios that was not associated with offender social category or crime severity. For example, in one version of the survey the perpetrator of the low-level misdemeanor crime was “familiar,” while in the second version he/she was “unfamiliar.” Survey versions were switched out on Sona Systems half way through data collection, so each version was available for an equal amount of time. Once all data were collected, the surveys were scored, and offender and crime types were compared across the three measures of moral wrongness, magnitude of punishment, and levels of remorse were compared in relation to the offender of each crime.

Results

Six total repeated measures analyses of variance were conducted to examine the data gathered from 37 total participants ($n = 37$). The first three ANOVAs conducted analyzed morality, punishment severity, and remorse attribution for misdemeanor crimes, while the remaining ANOVAs analyzed morality, punishment severity, and remorse attribution for felony crimes.

Misdemeanors

I conducted a 2 (Degree) x 2 (Familiarity) repeated measures analysis of variance for misdemeanor crimes with morality as the dependent variable. No statistically significant findings were found for the degree of misdemeanor crime or for the familiarity of the perpetrator.

I also conducted a 2 (Degree) x 2 (Familiarity) repeated measures ANOVA for misdemeanor crimes with punishment severity, in this case fine amount, as the dependent

variable. Significance was found in regards to Degree, $F(1,31)= 4.405$, $p=.044$, $\eta^2= 0.124$. As one might expect, the perpetrators of the more severe misdemeanor crimes (thefts of \$100.00) were given a larger fine on average ($M=184.563$, $SD=22.593$) when compared to the fines dealt to the offenders of the misdemeanor thefts of \$50.00 ($M=128.922$, $SD=23.458$).

The third analysis was also a 2 (Degree) x 2 (Familiarity) repeated measures ANOVA for misdemeanor crimes, but with attributed remorse as the dependent variable. No statistically significant findings were found for the degree of misdemeanor crime or for the familiarity of the perpetrator.

Felonies

Moving on to the felony crimes, another 2 (Degree) x 2 (Familiarity) repeated measures ANOVA was conducted using morality as the dependent variable. Significance was found in regards to Degree, $F(1,37) = 10.493$, $p=.003$, $\eta^2 = 0.221$. On a scale of 0 to 6, 0 indicating “not at all morally wrong” and 6 “extremely morally wrong” perpetrators of the more serious felony theft (theft of \$800) received higher scores on average ($M=5.329$, $SD=0.151$) than did those committing the less severe felony theft of \$600.00 ($M= 5.197$, $SD=0.166$).

Secondly, another 2 (Degree) x 2 (Familiarity) repeated measures ANOVA was conducted for felony crimes using punishment severity as the dependent variable, which in this case was length of jail time in years. The main effect of Familiarity approached significance, $F(1,37) = 3.764$, $p=.060$, $\eta^2 = .092$. A familiar offender was sentenced to an average of .987 years, ($SD= 0.196$), while an unfamiliar offender had an average jail sentence of 1.066 years ($SD= 0.270$), ascribed to him or her.

Finally, the last 2 (Degree) x 2 (Familiarity) repeated measures ANOVA was conducted for felony crimes using remorse attribution as the final variable. Significance was found for the

main effect of Degree, $F(1,37) = 4.913, p=.033, \eta^2 = 0.117$. On a scale of 0 (not at all remorseful) to 6 (extremely remorseful), offenders were rated for the amount of remorse participants' felt that that offender would have. For the more severe-degree of felony crime, the remorse attributed on average was 3.974, ($SD= 0.247$). In the case of the less severe felony crimes, the average remorse score was $M=3.513, (SD=0.277)$.

Discussion

This study was meant to replicate the results of Lieberman, and Linke's (2007) study utilizing a within-participant design instead of the original between-participant design the original researchers used. It was hoped that the results obtained in Lieberman and Linke's (2007) study would be supported using this slightly different design. The results the researchers found were as follows: although participant rating of moral wrongness remained fairly consistent throughout, out-group, or unfamiliar offenders were attributed less remorse and dealt harsher punishments. The within-participant design utilized in the present study was selected because it could potentially solidify the findings of the original Lieberman and Linke (2007) study by comparing the effects of social-category in a way that more accurately portrayed how much variation there was within individuals instead of populations, as was the case with the between-participants design. Unfortunately, the results obtained by Lieberman and Linke (2007) were not replicated within this present study using the alternate methodology of the within-participant design. When participant responses were analyzed in relation to crime severity (misdemeanor and felony) and offender social category (familiar and unfamiliar) no significant differences emerged in punishment dealt or remorse attributed, which is inconsistent with Lieberman and Linke's (2007) initial results. Ratings of moral wrongness did however remain relatively the

same between the various scenarios, coinciding with the original findings by Lieberman and Linke (2007).

The only instance in which the familiarity of the offender appears to have had some effect (though only approaching true statistical significance) is in the case of the punishment dealt to the offenders of a felony theft. In accordance with the original hypothesis, unfamiliar offenders were dealt more prison time as punishment than did the familiar offenders on average.

Statistically significant findings were found between the degrees of crime in misdemeanor thefts in relation to punishment dealt, as, per expectation, the more severe degree of misdemeanor crime was deemed worthy of harsher punishment. This significance was however not in relation to offender familiarity – the main focus of this study. The same pattern was found when looking at remorse attributed to offenders of felony crimes. The significant difference was found between the degrees of felony crimes, with the more severe degree netting more remorse for both familiar and unfamiliar offenders, which is not supportive of the original results obtained by Lieberman and Linke (2007), who found statistical significance in relation to remorse and familiarity. No significance was found in relation to punishment or remorse attributed in any other analyses.

To further expand on the obtained results, this time looking at morality, significance was found between degrees of felony thefts and morality. The more severe felony theft was seen as more morally wrong, despite the social-category of the offender. This pattern was not observed for misdemeanors, even when focusing on the degree of crime committed. The lack of significance in relation to morality and familiarity is actually in support of the original hypothesis, as Liberman and Linke's (2007) study demonstrated similar patterns in moral-wrongness consistency.

Although the results of this study are underwhelming, they still are valid contributions to this line of research in that they provide more information as to how to effectively measure the effects of social-category on perception of crime. It is also important to examine some of the potential limitations of this present study in order to understand more about researching this topic as a whole. Finally, by brainstorming some potential modifications to this type of study, one can develop a more effective methodology for future studies that takes into consideration all of the limitations and issues mentioned herein.

First of all, some potential issues that may have interfered with the results obtained need to be addressed in order to better understand how this type of study should be organized in the future. The two different levels of crime, misdemeanor and theft, may have confounded the results instead of adding to the overall understanding of the topic. The distinction between misdemeanor and felony crimes originates from a legal stand point, and therefore may not have been the best distinction to use in this regard, as this study measures the distinctions made by the participants themselves in relation to familiarity – as such, the legal division of crime levels may have added an unnecessary variable.

Furthermore, the multiple degrees of theft within each crime category may have further complicated the original goal of the study. Although it would be interesting to further explore the effects of crime degree on perceptions, it may be best to examine that separately as a separate issue. By including degree of crime in this study, the effect of familiarity, which was ultimately the main focus of this analysis, may have been diluted throughout the course of this study from both the participants' stand point and within the analysis itself.

To address some of the limitations inherent in this study, it is important to consider what could be improved in future research. The sample size in this study was fairly small at $n=37$. A

greater number of participants could have resulted in greater significance in the areas that were approaching significant with this current sample. All participants were also recruited using the Lindenwood Participant Pool, ensuring that all were within a certain age group. In the future, it would be interesting to examine how these results would differ with the inclusion of a larger, more diverse sample.

In addition to the improvements that could be made with a larger sample size, this study may also benefit from a renovation of the overall organization of the survey and crime scenarios presented. As previously stated it may be best to include more similar scenarios and remove the division between felony and misdemeanor crimes. Not only would this make the social-category of the offender more prominent, but it may remove unconsidered confounding variables that could have affected the end results. For future research, it may be beneficial to have more scenarios that do not differ in severity and only vary based on the social-category of the offender. By moving forward with further research in this line while keeping what was learned from this study in mind, it is hoped that eventually a greater understanding of how social category affects perceptions can be obtained.

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Appendix A

Third Party Perception of Crime in Relation to Magnitude of Punishment, Attribution of Remorse, and Levels of Moral Wrongness

Page One

Page exit logic: Page LogicIF: Question "If you do not wish to participate in the research study, or are not at least 18 years old, please decline participation by clicking on the "I choose not to participate" button." is one of the following answers ("I choose not to participate") THEN: Jump to [page 10 - Thank You!](#)

This survey about third party perception of crime in relation to magnitude of punishment, attribution of remorse, and levels of moral wrongness was created by Sara Roderick as a research project in the department of Psychology at Lindenwood University. This survey contains questions pertaining to scenarios describing the crime of theft. After each scenario, participants will be asked to rate how severe of a punishment the crime warrants, how remorseful the offender may be, and how morally wrong the crime is.

In the case of this survey, “third party” refers to an individual who has no personal stake in the crime, but is instead only an outside observer of the event. “Magnitude of punishment” refers to how severe of a punishment one feels the crime warrants – expressed in fine amount or jail-time duration. “Attribution of remorse” refers to how remorseful, or sorry, one believes the perpetrator of the crime is as a result of his/her actions, and finally, “levels of moral wrongness” refers to how morally wrong the crime is.

This survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Although your participation may not result in direct benefits to you, information from this study may help provide additional insight into how third parties perceive a crime in relation to how severe of a punishment the perpetrator should receive, how morally wrong the perpetrator’s actions were, and how much remorse the perpetrator will have. Please read the information below before deciding whether or not to participate.

- **Your responses will be anonymous. No information that identifies you personally will be collected, not even your IP address. The primary investigator will not be able to identify your answers as belonging to you; data will be examined at the group level only.**
- **Your participation is completely voluntary. You may discontinue taking the survey at any time. If you choose not to participate or stop participating before the end of the survey, you will not be penalized in any way; LPP participants will still receive extra credit.**
- **The results of this survey will be used for scholarly purposes only. If you have any questions about the survey itself, please contact the primary investigator, Sara Roderick at 636-577-4192.**

- **Taking this survey could result in some distressing feelings, like guilt, confusion, frustration, stress, anxiety or sadness for some participants, but these feelings are not expected to exceed what one experiences in everyday life. If you find taking the survey causes you significant discomfort and you would like assistance, please stop participating and contact the Lindenwood Student Counseling and Resource Center at 636-949-4889. If you are not a Lindenwood student, contact the P.I., Sara Roderick, for information on how to contact persons in a position to refer you to counseling services.**

ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below.

Clicking on the "agree" button below indicates that:

- **You have read the above information.**
- **You voluntarily agree to participate.**
- **You are at least 18 years of age.**

Page exit logic: Page Logic **IF:** Question "If you do not wish to participate in the research study, or are not at least 18 years old, please decline participation by clicking on the "I choose not to participate" button." is one of the following answers ("I choose to participate in this survey")
THEN: Jump to [page 2 - M1s](#)

If you do not wish to participate in the research study, or are not at least 18 years old, please decline participation by clicking on the "I choose not to participate" button.*

- I choose to participate in this survey
 I choose not to participate

M1s

You witness a student who you know personally steal a textbook left behind by another unknown student. Since you had to purchase the same textbook, you know the item costs \$100.00.

Rate how morally wrong the student's actions were on a scale from 0 (Not morally wrong at all) to 6 (extremely morally wrong.)

- 0: Not at all morally wrong 1 2 3 4 5 6: Extremely morally wrong

The student in the scenario above, as punishment for his/her crime, must pay back the cost of the item stolen plus an additional fine. How large of an additional fine do you think best fits the act?

(Responses will be on a scale of \$0 to \$1,000, as the typical fine for theft of the level expressed in the above scenerio never exceeds \$1,000. Please move the slider until the value matches what you feel the fine for the offense discribed above should be. Slider values do not include dollar signs, but still represent monetary amounts)

0 _____ [] _____ 1000

How remorseful do you think the student would feel after committing the act described above. Please rate on a scale ranging from: 0 (not remorseful at all) to 6 (extremely remorseful)

0: Not at all remorseful 1 2 3 4 5 6: Extremely remorseful

F1d

You witness a student you are not familiar with steal almost \$800.00 in fund raising funds from the locked cabinet of a student organization.

Rate how morally wrong the student's actions were on a scale from 0 (Not morally wrong at all) to 6 (extremely morally wrong.)

0: Not at all morally wrong 1 2 3 4 5 6: Extremely morally wrong

The student in the scenario above, as punishment for his/her crime, must pay back the cost of the item stolen plus serve some jail time. How long of a jail sentence do you feel the student should serve as punishment for the crime committed?

(Seven years is a standard max sentence for 1st time offenders in Missouri, and is therefore the max number of years available for selection.)

Less than one year 1 year 2 years 3 years 4 years 5 years
 6 years 7 years

How remorseful do you think the student would feel after committing the act described above. Please rate on a scale ranging from: 0 (not remorseful at all) to 6 (extremely remorseful)

0: Not at all remorseful 1 2 3 4 5 6: Extremely remorseful

M2s

You are just finishing up a meal at a restaurant when you see another group leave a \$50 tip on the table as they leave. One of the fellow students you came with snags the money off the table and pockets it.

Rate how morally wrong the student's actions were on a scale from 0 (Not morally wrong at all) to 6 (extremely morally wrong.)

0: Not at all morally wrong 1 2 3 4 5 6: Extremely morally wrong

The student in the scenario above, as punishment for his/her crime, must pay back the cost of the item stolen plus an additional fine. How large of an additional fine do you think best fits the act?

(Responses will be on a scale of \$0 to \$1,000, as the typical fine for theft of the level expressed in the above scenerio never exceeds \$1,000. Please move the slider until the value matches what you feel the fine for the offense discribed above should be. Slider values do not include dollar signs, but still represent monetary amounts)

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How remorseful do you think the student would feel after committing the act described above. Please rate on a scale ranging from: 0 (not remorseful at all) to 6 (extremely remorseful)

0: Not at all remorseful 1 2 3 4 5 6: Extremely remorseful

F2s

You overhear a student you do not know bragging about a new tablet he or she has just bought that cost around \$600.00. Another student you are acquainted with overhears too, and decides to steal the device by removing it from its owner's bag when the owner gets up to go to the bathroom.

Rate how morally wrong the student's actions were on a scale from 0 (Not morally wrong at all) to 6 (extremely morally wrong)

0: Not at all morally wrong 1 2 3 4 5 6: Extremely morally wrong

The student in the scenario above, as punishment for his/her crime, must pay back the cost of the item stolen plus serve some jail time. How long of a jail sentence do you feel the student should serve as punishment for the crime committed?

(Seven years is a standard max sentence for 1st time offenders in Missouri, and is therefore the max number of years available for selection)

Less than one year 1 year 2 years 3 years 4 years 5 years
 6 years 7 years

How remorseful do you think the student would feel after committing the act described above. Please rate on a scale ranging from: 0 (not remorseful at all) to 6 (extremely remorseful)

0: Not at all remorseful 1 2 3 4 5 6: Extremely remorseful

M1d

You witness a student, who you do not know personally, steal a handbag that belongs to an unknown student. You happen to know that the handbag costs around \$100.00.

Rate how morally wrong the student's actions were on a scale from 0 (Not morally wrong at all) to 6 (extremely morally wrong.)

0: Not at all morally wrong 1 2 3 4 5 6: Extremely morally wrong

The student in the scenario above, as punishment for his/her crime, must pay back the cost of the item stolen plus an additional fine. How large of an additional fine do you think best fits the act?

(Responses will be on a scale of \$0 to \$1,000, as the typical fine for theft of the level expressed in the above scenerio never exceeds \$1,000. Please move the slider until the value matches what you feel the fine for the offense discribed above should be. Slider values do not include dollar signs, but still represent monetary amounts)

0 _____ [] _____ 1000

How remorseful do you think the student would feel after committing the act described above. Please rate on a scale ranging from: 0 (not remorseful at all) to 6 (extremely remorseful)

0: Not at all remorseful 1 2 3 4 5 6: Extremely remorseful

F1s

You witness a student you know steal an expensive laptop left behind in a classroom by another unknown student. Based on prior knowledge, you know the laptop's worth is approximately \$800.00.

Rate how morally wrong the student's actions were on a scale from 0 (Not morally wrong at all) to 6 (extremely morally wrong.)

0: Not at all morally wrong 1 2 3 4 5 6: Extremely morally wrong

The student in the scenario above, as punishment for his/her crime, must pay back the cost of the item stolen plus serve some jail time. How long of a jail sentence do you feel the student should serve as punishment for the crime committed?

(Seven years is a standard max sentence for 1st time offenders in Missouri, and is therefore the max number of years available for selection.)

Less than one year 1 year 2 years 3 years 4 years 5 years
 6 years 7 years

How remorseful do you think the student would feel after committing the act described above. Please rate on a scale ranging from: 0 (not remorseful at all) to 6 (extremely remorseful)

0: Not at all remorseful 1 2 3 4 5 6: Extremely remorseful

M2d

While walking to your next class, you notice that a \$50 bill falls out of the jacket pocket of someone walking in front of you -- this person does not realize that they have lost the money. An unfamiliar student sees the event too, and takes the money for themselves by picking it up and putting it into their own pocket.

Rate how morally wrong the student's actions were on a scale from 0 (Not morally wrong at all) to 6 (extremely morally wrong.)

0: Not at all morally wrong 1 2 3 4 5 6: Extremely morally wrong

The student in the scenario above, as punishment for his/her crime, must pay back the cost of the item stolen plus an additional fine. How large of an additional fine do you think best fits the act?

(Responses will be on a scale of \$0 to \$1,000, as the typical fine for theft of the level expressed in the above scenerio never exceeds \$1,000. Please move the slider until the value matches what you feel the fine for the offense discribed above should be. Slider values do not include dollar signs, but still represent monetary amounts)

0 _____ [] _____ 1000

How remorseful do you think the student would feel after committing the act described above. Please rate on a scale ranging from: 0 (not remorseful at all) to 6 (extremely remorseful)

0: Not at all remorseful 1 2 3 4 5 6: Extremely remorseful

F2d

You witness an unfamiliar student steal an expensive piece of lab equipment one day in class. You know the equipment is valued at \$600.00.

Rate how morally wrong the student's actions were on a scale from 0 (Not morally wrong at all) to 6 (extremely morally wrong)

0: Not at all morally wrong 1 2 3 4 5 6: Extremely morally wrong

The student in the scenario above, as punishment for his/her crime, must pay back the cost of the item stolen plus serve some jail time. How long of a jail sentence do you feel the student should serve as punishment for the crime committed?

(Seven years is a standard max sentence for 1st time offenders in Missouri, and is therefore the max number of years available for selection)

Less than one year 1 year 2 years 3 years 4 years 5 years
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How remorseful do you think the student would feel after committing the act described above. Please rate on a scale ranging from: 0 (not remorseful at all) to 6 (extremely remorseful)

0: Not at all remorseful 1 2 3 4 5 6: Extremely remorseful

Thank You!

Thank you for your time today. Whether you decided to complete the survey or opt-out, please read below for important information.

If you found that the survey caused you emotional distress and you would like assistance, please contact the Lindenwood Student Counseling and Resource Center at 636-949-4889. If you are not a Lindenwood student, contact the P.I., Sara Roderick, for information on how to contact persons in a position to refer you to counseling services.

If you would like to see the results of my survey after May 15, 2015, please feel free to contact me using the contact information below. Again, thank you very much for your time and effort!

Principal Investigator

**Sara Roderick
Slr305@lionmail.lindenwood.edu
636-577-4192**

Faculty Supervisor

**Dr. Michiko Nohara-LeClair
(636)-949-4371
mnohara-leclair@lindenwood.edu**

Appendix B**V2: Third Party Perception of Crime in Relation to Magnitude of Punishment, Attribution of Remorse, and Levels of Moral Wrongness - copy****Page One**

Page exit logic: Page LogicIF: Question "If you do not wish to participate in the research study, or are not at least 18 years old, please decline participation by clicking on the "I choose not to participate" button." is one of the following answers ("I choose not to participate") THEN: Jump to [page 10 - Thank You!](#)

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THEN: Jump to [page 2 - M1s](#)

If you do not wish to participate in the research study, or are not at least 18 years old, please decline participation by clicking on the "I choose not to participate" button.*

- I choose to participate in this survey
 I choose not to participate

M1s

You witness a student who you do not know personally steal a textbook left behind by another unknown student. Since you had to purchase the same textbook, you know the item costs \$100.00.

Rate how morally wrong the student's actions were on a scale from 0 (Not morally wrong at all) to 6 (extremely morally wrong.)

- 0: Not at all morally wrong 1 2 3 4 5 6: Extremely morally wrong

The student in the scenario above, as punishment for his/her crime, must pay back the cost of the item stolen plus an additional fine. How large of an additional fine do you think best fits the act?

(Responses will be on a scale of \$0 to \$1,000, as the typical fine for theft of the level expressed in the above scenerio never exceeds \$1,000. Please move the slider until the value matches what you feel the fine for the offense discribed above should be. Slider values do not include dollar signs, but still represent monetary amounts)

0 _____ [] _____ 1000

How remorseful do you think the student would feel after committing the act described above. Please rate on a scale ranging from: 0 (not remorseful at all) to 6 (extremely remorseful)

0: Not at all remorseful 1 2 3 4 5 6: Extremely remorseful

F1d

You witness a student you are familiar with steal almost \$800.00 in fund raising funds from the locked cabinet of a student organization.

Rate how morally wrong the student's actions were on a scale from 0 (Not morally wrong at all) to 6 (extremely morally wrong.)

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The student in the scenario above, as punishment for his/her crime, must pay back the cost of the item stolen plus serve some jail time. How long of a jail sentence do you feel the student should serve as punishment for the crime committed?

(Seven years is a standard max sentence for 1st time offenders in Missouri, and is therefore the max number of years available for selection.)

Less than one year 1 year 2 years 3 years 4 years 5 years
 6 years 7 years

How remorseful do you think the student would feel after committing the act described above. Please rate on a scale ranging from: 0 (not remorseful at all) to 6 (extremely remorseful)

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M2s

You are just finishing up a meal at a restaurant when you see another group leave a \$50 tip on the table as they leave. A fellow student you do not know snags the money off the table and pockets it.

Rate how morally wrong the student's actions were on a scale from 0 (Not morally wrong at all) to 6 (extremely morally wrong.)

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F2s

You overhear a student you do not know bragging about a new tablet he or she has just bought that cost around \$600.00. Another student you are not acquainted with overhears too, and decides to steal the device by removing it from its owner's bag when the owner gets up to go to the bathroom.

Rate how morally wrong the student's actions were on a scale from 0 (Not morally wrong at all) to 6 (extremely morally wrong)

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M1d

You witness a student, who you know personally, steal a handbag that belongs to an unknown student. You happen to know that the handbag costs around \$100.00.

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The student in the scenario above, as punishment for his/her crime, must pay back the cost of the item stolen plus an additional fine. How large of an additional fine do you think best fits the act?

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F1s

You witness a student you do not know steal an expensive laptop left behind in a classroom by another unknown student. Based on prior knowledge, you know the laptop's worth is approximately \$800.00.

Rate how morally wrong the student's actions were on a scale from 0 (Not morally wrong at all) to 6 (extremely morally wrong.)

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The student in the scenario above, as punishment for his/her crime, must pay back the cost of the item stolen plus serve some jail time. How long of a jail sentence do you feel the student should serve as punishment for the crime committed?

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M2d

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F2d

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Principal Investigator

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Faculty Supervisor

**Dr. Michiko Nohara-LeClair
(636)-949-4371
mnohara-leclair@lindenwood.edu**

Appendix C

This survey about third party perception of crime in relation to magnitude of punishment, attribution of remorse, and levels of moral wrongness was created by Sara Roderick as a research project in the department of Psychology at Lindenwood University. This survey contains questions pertaining to scenarios describing the crime of theft. After each scenario, participants will be asked to rate how severe of a punishment the crime warrants, how remorseful the offender may be, and how morally wrong the crime is.

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ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below.

Clicking on the "agree" button below indicates that:

- You have read the above information.
- You voluntarily agree to participate.
- You are at least 18 years of age.

If you do not wish to participate in the research study, or are not at least 18 years old, please decline participation by clicking on the "I choose not to participate" button. ***This question is required.**

- I choose to participate in this survey
- I choose not to participate

Appendix D

Thank you for your time today. Whether you decided to complete the survey or opt-out, please read below for important information.

If you found that the survey caused you emotional distress and you would like assistance, please contact the Lindenwood Student Counseling and Resource Center at 636-949-4889. If you are not a Lindenwood student, contact the P.I., Sara Roderick, for information on how to contact persons in a position to refer you to counseling services.

If you would like to see the results of my survey after May 15, 2015, please feel free to contact me using the contact information below. Again, thank you very much for your time and effort!

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