Pilot Study for Could Your Candidate Shoot Someone on 5th Avenue And Not Lose Votes?
Identifying "Lines in the Sand" in Ingroup Candidate Transgressions

Study Overview

Participants rated the severity of 70 different crimes. These crimes were selected from the National Survey of Crime Severity (Wolfgang, 1985). In the NSCS, 204 different crimes were rated by over 600,000 citizens across the United States. Through a series of standardization procedures, each of the 204 crimes were given a severity score. We made a selection of 70 crimes from the original NSCS that captured both the full range of severity scores (i.e., mild crime – highly severe crime), and captured diverse domains of behaviors (i.e., theft, larceny, violent physical behavior, sexual crimes, etc.). When making selections, a proportional number of crimes were selected in reach range of severity.

However, because the crimes were originally tested several decades ago in the 1980s, we were concerned that perceptions of certain crimes may have changed with the passage of time. For example, some of the selected transgressions involve crimes pertaining to the smoking, purchasing, or possessing of marijuana. Because the buying and selling of marijuana from licensed dispensaries is now legal in many states in the United States, perceptions of marijuana use may be less severe. Thus, in order to ensure severity scores were relevant and an accurate representation of current perceptions in today's society, approximately 25 scenarios were re-phrased, and all 70 transgressions were re-tested. The current pilot study tested the perceived severity of the 70 (i.e., 45 original, and 25 revised) crimes.

Rating procedure

The severity rating procedure and design of the pilot study was closely adapted from the rating procedure used in the original NSCS (Wolfgang, 1985). Before rating each crime, participants were given a set of instructions and practice trials. In the practice section, participants were informed that stealing a bicycle was rated as a 10 on the crime severity scale. Participants were then told to think about an additional crime (i.e., stealing a car), and decide how many times worse stealing a car was than stealing a bike. Directions explained, that if participants thought stealing a car was two times worse than stealing a bike, than they were to rate the crime as a 20. If participants perceived stealing a car was half as bad as stealing a bike, then they would rate the crime as a five (10 divided by 2). If participants believed stealing a car was not a crime, then they would rate it as a 0. Following the procedures from the original NSCS, participants were told they could enter any value they desired between 0 and infinity.

In the current Pilot study, participants read the instructions, completed two practice questions, and then rated the remaining study scenarios. Because 70 crimes needed to be rated, and we did not want to fatigue participants, the scenarios were divided across two studies. All else was identical across the two studies. The original crimes composed the first study, and the enhanced crimes composed the second study.

Participants

One-hundred and fifty Amazon Mechanical Turk workers (Mturkers) in the US completed the first section of the study (with the first set of scenarios) and 150 Mturkers in the US completed the second section of the study (with the second set of scenarios), leaving the total sample size at 300. However, 18

participants were excluded for failing attention checks, and 7 participants were excluded for not completing the severity-rating section of the study. Thus, the final sample size was 273, and was 38.83% female, 10.66% African American, 3.68% Asian American, 77.94% white, 4.78 Latinx, 1.47% Native American, and 1.47 "Other", with an average age of 36.30 (SD = 10.76)

Scoring procedure
Following the procedure from the NSCS, the average was taken for each crime across participants. However, because participants were allowed to enter any value between 0 and infinity for each severity score, the distribution of ratings for each crime ended up positively skewed. For example, a small subsection of participants reported severity scores greater than 1 million for severe transgressions, inflating the average values. Therefore, the log base 10 was taken of each transgression score to account and correct for the positive skew. The logged means of each transgression were used to create the final Transgression Severity measure and Transgression Severity Scores (TSS).

Pilot Study Materials

Below is a copy of the rating procedure that participants completed on Qualtrics in the Pilot Study. After reading an introduction, participants read the following directions and completed the practice scenario. The wording in the practice scenario below follows the wording in the NSCS (Wolfgang, 1985)

For each crime scenario, you will compare the seriousness of the crime to the **seriousness of stealing a bicycle.**

Stealing a bicycle has been given a score of 10 to show its seriousness. You will use this first situation to judge all the other situations. For example, if you think a situation is 20 TIMES MORE serious than the bicycle theft, the number you report should be around 200 (10 multiplied by 20 = 200). Or, if you think it is HALF AS SERIOUS as the bicycle theft, you would report a number around 5 (10 divided in half is 5), and so on.

There is no upper limit; use **ANY** number so long as it shows how serious YOU think the situation is. For example, you could rate a scenario as low as a .001 or as high as 1,000. I**f you think something should NOT be a crime, give it a 0.**

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Consider the following EXAMPLE crime situation: "**A person robs a victim. The victim is injured but not hospitalized."** What number would you give to this situation to show how serious YOU think it is compared to the bicycle theft with a score of 10?

 Possible answers are only provided for practice questions

Please select your score from one of the options below. Remember, 0 means "not a crime"

Answer options: 0, 1, 5, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, 90, 100, 110, 120, 130, 140, 150, 160, 170, 180, 190, 200

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You rated the previous crime, "**A person robs a victim. The victim is injured but not hospitalized",** as a _____ *(piped text of whatever participant selected on previous page)*

This means that you think this scenario should NOT be considered a crime *(This is piped text depending on the severity score participant selected on previous page)*

Is this the answer you intended?

Answer options: Yes, No

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Consider the following EXAMPLE crime situation: "**A person under 16 years old plays hooky from school."** What number would you give to this situation to show how serious YOU think it is compared to the bicycle theft with a score of 10?

Possible answers are only provided for practice questions

Please select your score from one of the options below. Remember, 0 means "not a crime"

Answer options: 0, 1, 5, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, 90, 100, 110, 120, 130, 140, 150, 160, 170, 180, 190, 200

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You rated the previous crime, "**A person under 16 years old plays hooky from school",** as a 5. (whatever participants selected)

This means that you think this crime is **half as serious** than the act of stealing a bike.

Is this the answer you intended?

Answer options: Yes, No

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Now, rather than selecting your score from a list of answers, you are going to TYPE IN what you would rate each crime. **The remainder of the survey will follow this format.**

Consider the following EXAMPLE crime situation: "**A person stabs a victim to death."** What number would you give to this situation to show how serious YOU think it is compared to the bicycle theft with a score of 10?

Please TYPE your answer in NUMERICAL form in the text box below (e.g., 35)

Page Break

Great! Now you are going to move on to the survey scenarios.

Score the remaining survey situations in the same way by comparing each one to the bicycle theft. There are no right or wrong answers. Remember, you may use ANY numbers, as high or low as you wish.

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(presentation of transgressions were randomized)

Below is the first section of transgressions

1. Compared to the bicycle theft scored at 10, how serious is the following crime...

"A person raped a woman, and as a result of the physical injury, she dies."

In the text box below, please type a NUMERICAL value of how serious this crime is

(All transgressions followed the format from above, below are the remaining transgressions)

Below is the remainder of the first section of transgressions

2. **"A person beat their young child with their fists. As a result, the child died."**

3. **"A person robbed a victim at gun point. The victim struggled and was shot to death."**

4. **"A person stabbed their spouse. As a result, the spouse died."**

5. **"A person intentionally injured a victim. As a result, the victim died."**

6. **"A person ran a narcotics ring."**

7. **"A person planted a bomb in a public building. The bomb exploded and 20 people were injured, but no medical treatment was required."**

8. **"A person forcibly raped a woman. No other physical injury occurred. "**

9. **"A person enticed a minor into their car for immoral purposes."**

10. **"A person intentionally set fire to a building causing $100,000 worth of damage."**

11. **"A person beat their young child with their fists. The child required hospitalization."**

12. "A person intentionally set fire to a building causing $500,000 worth of damage."

13. "A person paid another person to commit a serious crime."

14. "A person robbed a victim of $1,000 at gunpoint. The victim was wounded and required hospitalization."

15. "A person killed a victim by recklessly driving an automobile."

16. "A store owner knew that a shipment of cooking oil was bad, but sold it anyway. Only one bottle was sold and the purchaser died."

17. "A legislator took a bribe of $10,000 from a company to vote for a law favoring the company."

18. "A teenager beat their mother with their fists. The mother required hospitalization."

19. "A county judge took a bribe to give a light sentence to a criminal case."

20. "A doctor cheated on claims they made to a federal health insurance plan for patient services."

21. "A legislator took a bribe from a company to vote for a law favoring the company."

22. "A doctor cheated on a plan they made to a Federal health insurance plan for patient services. They gained $10,000."

23. "A factory owner knowingly got rid of the factory waste in a way that polluted the water supply of a city. "

24. "A person paid a witness to give false testimony in a criminal trial."

25. "A person knowingly lied under oath during trial."

26. "A person smuggled marijuana into the country for resale."

27. "A person broke into a display case in a store and stole $1,000 worth of merchandise."

28. "A public official took $1,000 of public money for their own use."

29. "A person sold marijuana to others for resale."

30. "A person illegally received welfare checks of $200."

31. "A person knowingly showed pornographic movies to a minor."

32. "A person ran a place where liquor was sold without a license."

33. "A person loaned money at an illegally high rate."

34. **"A person knowingly bought stolen property from the person whole stole it."**

35. **"A person exposed themselves in public."**

36. **"A person cheated on their federal income tax return."**

37. **" A person ran a place where they permitted gambling to occur illegally."**

38. **"A person knowingly carries an illegal knife."**

39. **"A person was found firing a rifle for which they knew they had no permit."**

40. **"A 16 year old was drunk in public."**

41. **"A person over 16 years of age had sexual relations with a willing female under 16."**

42. **"A person smokes marijuana."**

43. **"A person has marijuana for their own use."**
44. **"A person disturbed the neighborhood with loud, noisy behavior."**

45. **"A person took part in a dice game in an alley."**

46. **"A person was caught playing hooky from school before they were 16."**

47. **"A 16 year old ran away from home."**

Below is the second set of transgressions

1. Compared to the bicycle theft scored at 10, how serious is the following crime...

"In college, a person sold cocaine to others for resale"

In the text box below, please type a NUMERICAL value of how serious this crime is

2. **"A person plants a bomb in a public building. The bomb explodes and 20 people are killed"**

3. **"A person intentionally injures a victim. As a result, the victim dies"**

4. **"A person accidentally shot their friend with a gun on a hunting trip. The person required treatment by a doctor but not hospitalization"**

5. **"A person got a 500 dollar speeding ticket for driving recklessly"**

6. **"A person sent unwanted sexually explicit text messages to coworkers"**

7. **"In high school, a person stole a locked bike and sold it"**

8. **"A person dressed up in blackface for a Halloween costume when they were in college"**

9. **"A person was accused of sexual assault in college"**

10. **"A person was arrested for driving an automobile under the influence of alcohol"**

11. **"A person intentionally set fire to an old building they owned to collect the insurance money"**

12. **"A person got in a physical altercation with a stranger at a bar. The stranger required treatment from a doctor"**

13. **"A person cheated on their federal income tax return and avoided paying 500 dollars in taxes"**

14. **"A teenager got in a physical altercation with their father. The father required treatment from a doctor"**

15. **"A person purchased the services of a prostitute on three separate occasions"**

16. **"When in college, a person stole $500 dollars worth of merchandise on display at a department store"**

17. **"A person over the age of 21 was arrested multiple times for being drunk and disorderly in public"**

18. **"A person used heroin 10 years ago"**

19. **"An employee embezzled $300 from his employer"**

20. **"A person cheated on their Federal income tax return and avoided paying $1,000 in taxes"**

21. **"A person stole 10 dollars of snacks from a concession stand at a recreation center"**

22. **"A person over the age of 21 was arrested for drunk and disorderly behavior in public"**

23. **"A person stole $10 worth of office supplies from their place of work"**

24. **"A person stole merchandise worth $10 from a department store"**

25. **"In college, person worked as a dancer at a Gentleman's club"**

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Demographics

What is your gender?
-Male
-Female
-Other

What is your age in years? Please enter your age in the text box below

What is your race/ethnicity?
-African American
-Asian
-Caucasian
-Latino
-Native American
-Other

Are your beliefs generally liberals or conservative?
-Liberal
-Conservative
-Neutral/Neither

....If Neutral/Neither is Selected
If you had to say which way you lean, would you say you are more liberal or conservative?
-Lean toward liberal
-Lean toward conservative
-Neutral/neither

....If liberal is selected
To what extent are your political beliefs liberal?
-slightly
-moderately
-much
-very much

....If conservative is selected
To what extent are your political beliefs conservative?
-slightly
-moderately
-much
-very much