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# The Effect of Political Ideology on Moral Judgments of Minority Group Members

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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

The Effect of Political Ideology on Moral Judgments of Minority Group Members

by

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A THESIS

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## Abstract

There is evidence liberals are more likely to perceive minority group members as victims of racial discrimination and unfair treatment compared to conservatives. We examined whether perceived victim status affects people's moral judgments towards minority groups by exploring the effect of political ideology on people's moral judgments of crimes committed by minority group members. A sample of white University undergraduates ( $N = 365$ ; 299 women; 65 men; 1 non-binary,  $M_{age} = 20.96$ ,  $SD = 8.16$ ) were assessed on their political orientation, completed relevant individual difference measures, and then read a fabricated news article describing an identical looting and assault committed by either a white man, a Muslim man, or an unidentified man. Overall participants were less morally outraged and less punitive towards the Muslim perpetrator compared to the white perpetrator and this relationship was further moderated by political ideology. The findings suggest that not only was liberalism associated with being less morally outraged and less punitive towards a minority group member compared to a white ingroup member but also more outraged and more punitive towards a white person compared to an unidentified person. This study was limited by its use of an all white undergraduate sample with overall ideological orientation skewed towards liberalism. Future research should explore this phenomenon using a non-student sample, should include other minority groups as targets, and test more thoroughly for the ways granting victim status can affect moral judgments.

*Keywords:* Political ideology, crime, moral judgments, outrage, punitiveness, minority group, in-group, out-group.

## **Preface**

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Parker, D. J. The experiments reported in Chapters were covered by Ethics Certificate number REB17-2451, issued by the University of Calgary Conjoint Health Ethics Board for the project “The Effect of Political Ideology on People’s Moral Judgments of Minority Group Members in the Aftermath of Crime” on January 24, 2019.

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## **Introduction**

The last two decades have seen a resurgence in political ideology as a topic of social and psychological research (Jost, Nosek, & Gosling 2008). Defined as a system of ethical ideals and principles on a left/right continuum, political ideologies inform people's beliefs on how society should be structured based on their economic and socio-political views. Left-wing liberal ideologies advocate government intervention and social change to produce greater economic and social equality while right-wing conservative ideologies believe that society will most benefit from the principles of individual responsibility, limited government, and adherence to tradition and hierarchical order (Lipset, Lazarsfeld, Barton, & Linz, J 1954/1962). The definitions of "left" and "right" along the ideological continuum have been relatively stable over the last two centuries and serve as simple yet adequate descriptions in both popular understanding and scientific inquiry (Bobbio, 1996; Laponce, 1981). Not just abstract belief systems, ideologies are a source of behavioural motivation, influencing our lives and decision making (Koestler, 1978). Ideology has been associated with reducing uncertainty (Dember, 1991; McGregor & Marigold, 2003; Hogg, 2007), having a sense of security (Becker; 1975; Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986), one's social identity (Tajfel & Turner 1979), and moral values (Haidt, 2012).

The last decade has seen people's political views in both North America and Europe become more divided along ideological lines and more partisan than at any time in recent history. On issues which directly impact minority groups such as race, immigration, and national security (Abramowitz; 2010; Pew Research Center, *The Partisan Divide on Political Values Grows Even Wider*, 2016; Pew Research Center, *In Western Europe, Populist Parties Tap Frustration*, 2018), left and right-wing ideologies have become more extreme. Given the ability of ideology to affect public policy as well as people's day to day lives, it is important to



understand the effect of political orientation on attitudes and biases towards minority outgroups.

Literature on intergroup relationships has reliably found that regardless of political orientation people are strongly motivated to endorse ingroup favouritism and derogate outgroups (Perdue, Dovidio, Gurtman, & Tyler, 1990). An ingroup is a social group to which a person may identify with due to any similarities such as race, religion, or gender while outgroups are groups which a person does not identify (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). People are generally more lenient towards ambiguous behaviour of ingroup members (Duncan, 1976), more likely to excuse antinormative behaviours of ingroup members (Hewstone, 1990), and are more likely to assign positive attributes to their ingroup compared to their outgroup (Scaillet & Leyens, 2000). We have reason to believe that if ideological orientation is considered in situations involving minority group members who are perceived to be victims then these generally held expectations of ingroup versus outgroup attitudes may not apply. The research here explores whether those who are more ideologically left will view outgroup moral transgressions more leniently compared to ingroup moral transgressions if they perceive the outgroup as victims of past unfair life experiences. Whereas those more ideologically right will not be as likely to grant minority groups victim status and will be more critical of their outgroup and favour their ingroup as is typically found in intergroup relations literature.

Despite being a subject of debate amongst public intellectuals, to my knowledge this topic has yet to be investigated in the social or political psychological literature. The term “regressive left” has been used in the public domain to describe an aspect of liberalism associated with reluctance to condemn immoral behaviours of minority groups. Proponents of this view argue that this phenomenon exists in liberal ideology because of a rise in victimhood culture (Haidt & Haslam, 2016), political correctness, fear of being labelled racist, embracing

multiculturalism at any cost, and an acute sense of moral relativism by holding different cultures and communities do different sets of moral norms (Howell, K., 2015 October 3; Nawaz & Harris 2015). Originally coined by liberal intellectuals concerned about a rise of moral ambiguity associated with liberalism (White, J., 2017 April 7), the term “regressive left” has recently been adopted by right-wing conservative groups and used pejoratively to disparage liberals and left-wing causes (Bokhari, A. 2016, March 21, Bernstein, J. 2016 March 15). The research presented here was not designed to malign any ideological or political movement but rather to explore whether the moral judgment aspect of the “regressive left” exists as it appears in public debate.

An example of a news story used to illustrate this phenomenon is the 2016 German New Years Eve celebrations where approximately 1200 women were sexually and physically assaulted, including cases of rape, in a series of attacks carried out by approximately 2000 refugees and migrants predominantly of North African and Middle Eastern descent. Following the assaults, German media and government officials were hesitant to report the extent of the attacks in an apparent attempt to avoid the uncomfortable reality of having to state the ethnicity of the perpetrators. The German justice minister warned against linking the crimes to the issue of migrants and refugees (Germany shocked by gang assaults on women 2016, January 5) and other German authorities argued there was “no evidence that any of the refugees who recently arrived in Germany were among the attackers” (Petrou, M. 2016, January 7). Only after public protests calling for transparency did the government and police release official statements of the extent of the assaults and who was responsible for them. The German parliament subsequently passed stricter sexual assault-laws allowing for easier deportation of refugees found guilty of sexual crimes although lawmakers on the ideological left have maintained that immigration issues and

sexual assault cases should not be linked as it would be unfair for asylum seekers to be “double punished” and deported for “relatively minor offenses” (Kirchner, S., Noack, R. 2016, July 7).

While such news stories have generated public debate and provide examples of the potential of liberal bias in moral decision making, they do not provide evidence that liberalism is associated with a moral double standard of holding minority group members to a more lenient set of moral standards than they would their ingroup. The current study used an experimental manipulation to explore the effect of political ideology on moral leniency towards the unethical behaviour of minority groups by having undergraduate students read a fabricated news article involving a physical assault and looting committed by either a Muslim man, a white man, or an unidentified man. Moral judgements of outrage, punitiveness, and mitigating attributions towards the perpetrator were measured along with a variety of potential moderators of this relationship including political ideology, and collective white guilt.

### **Political Orientation and Moral Values**

The moral judgments people make in any given situation are based in part on the moral values they deem most important. Haidt and colleagues have proposed that five moral foundations make up the moral value systems in any given culture or society: harm, fairness, ingroup, authority, and purity (Graham, Haidt & Nosek 2009; Haidt, Graham & Joseph 2009). When mapped to political ideology, liberals highly value the moral foundations of harm and fairness (referred to as individualizing values) and give less consideration to the moral foundations of in-group loyalty, tradition and authority, and purity/sanctity (referred to as binding values). In contrast, conservatives tend to value all five moral foundations relatively equally giving slight preference to binding values (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009; Haidt, 2012). The outcome is that when making moral judgments liberalism is associated with a narrower

moral domain compared to conservatism (Haidt, 2012). This narrower domain focuses heavily on issues of fairness and harm relative to other moral values making liberals more likely to concentrate on victims and victim suffering in situations involving harm.

Consistent with this interpretation, higher endorsement of individualizing moral values has been associated with sensitivity to victim suffering, and higher ratings of the severity of victim injuries across different types of crimes, while binding values have been associated with increased victim responsibility (Niemi, & Young 2016). We expect the liberal tendency to be sensitive to victim suffering and to more readily perceive others as victims to lead to moral leniency towards minority outgroups who have ostensibly been victimized. In contrast, the conservative emphasis on binding values and individual responsibility gives greater consideration to the violation of social norms and laws, as well as who is suffering relative to one's own group, which act as important moral issues moderating how much moral consideration victims are entitled.

### **Mitigating Attributions**

The leniency or harshness of people's moral judgments are affected by how people explain the behaviour of harm doers through attributions of causality and responsibility. (Haidt, 2012; Shaver, 1985; Weiner, 1985). To be perceived as morally responsible for causing harm one must have control over their behaviour and be consciously aware of the negative effects of the outcomes. If found responsible, a harm-doer may or may not be blameworthy (culpable for punishment) if mitigating circumstances are present, such as knowingly inflicting harm to prevent an even greater harm. The ideo-attribution effect (Morgan, Mullen, & Skitka, 2010) provides evidence that political orientation can affect the attributions people make when inferring the causes of social problems. Liberalism is associated with attributing social problems

to external circumstances (eg. socio-economic status, environmental risk factors) whereas conservatism is associated with attributing social problems to internal dispositions (eg. individual responsibility, lack of morality, laziness). The ideo-attribution effect has been found to differentiate how liberals and conservatives discern the causes of a variety topics including poverty (Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001; Furnham, 1982; Pandey, Sinha, Prakash, & Tripathi, 1982; Sniderman, Hagen, Tetlock, & Brady, 1986; Sniderman & Tetlock, 1986; Zucker & Weiner, 1993); wealth (Bobbio, Canova, & Manganelli, 2010); homelessness (Pellegrini, Queirolo, Monarrez, & Valenzuela, 1997; Skitka & Tetlock, 1992); unemployment (Gaskell & Smith, 1985; Skitka & Tetlock, 1992); and racial differences in success (Reyna, Henry, Korfmacher, & Tucker, 2006).

While limited, there is evidence of the ideo-attribution effect on perceptions of the causes of criminal behaviour. In a non-experimental survey-based study with law school students and probation officers, liberalism was found to be associated with attributing criminal behaviour to poverty and inequality while conservatism was associated with attributing criminal behaviour to uncaring and immoral individuals (Carroll, Perkowitz, Lurigio, & Weaver, 1987). Liberal reliance on a harm doers' past experiences and environmental risk factors to explain criminal behaviour may enable sympathetic reactions towards harm doers even when it is reasonable to assume the perpetrator of a crime had control over their behaviour that contributed to the suffering of others. These sympathetic reactions may in turn serve to mitigate attributions of responsibility and blameworthiness.

In some situations, the past suffering of harm-doers has been associated with more lenient reactions to criminal behaviour. The severity of self-inflicted injury (ie. cuts and bruises or broken leg) suffered by a harm doer escaping a crime scene has been related to reduced

sentencing (Austin, Walster & Utne, 1976). Even suffering unrelated to a criminal act or enduring a lifetime of hardships has been associated with sympathetic responses and reduced blameworthiness. (Gray & Wegner, 2009; Kalven & Zeisel, 1966). This research has not assessed ideology directly, but the patterns would be assumed to be more characteristic of liberalism than conservatism given the analysis here.

### **White Guilt and Moral Outrage**

Moral foundations and ideo-attributions may be able to explain differing reactions to minority group misconduct as a function of political ideology but the extent to which one's political orientation influences levels of moral condemnation may also be explained in part by self-concern dynamics. Moral outrage is a key component underlying punishment motives (Carlsmith & Darley, 2008) and is commonly considered to be a prosocial manifestation of genuine justice concerns for affected victims (Lerner 2003; Miller & Ratner, 1996; Montada, 1998; Thomas, McGarty, & Mavor, 2009) arising from the violation of moral conduct by individual or ingroup actions (Branscombe, Branscombe, & Doosje, 2004; Tangney 1995). However, in some circumstances moral outrage may not be driven solely by justice concerns. Moral outrage can be self-serving, acting to reduce feelings of guilt, or to boost one's sense of moral status (Jordan, Hoffman, Bloom, & Rand, 2016; Rothschild, Landau, Molina, Branscombe, & Sullivan, 2013). For example, moral outrage towards multinational corporations involved in labour exploitation increased after eliciting guilt in participants by suggesting their in-group shared responsibility for the perceived plight of the subjugated minority group workers (Rothschild & Keefer, 2017). In another example, after Dutch participants were informed their in-group moral status was threatened by reports of Dutch anti-immigration sentiment they became more critical of German misconduct and less critical of ingroup moral transgressions

(Täuber & van Zomeren, 2013). These studies provide evidence that moral outrage is not always related to supporting victims and promoting justice but that it can arise from feelings of guilt or the desire to protect one's personal or group moral status. Thus, it is useful here to consider aspects of political ideology related to prosocial empathic connection with the suffering of disadvantaged groups and feelings of collective guilt which may serve to reduce moral outrage.

Collective white guilt has been correlated with liberalism (Iyer, Leach, & Crosby, 2003) and describes the guilt felt by people who believe their ingroup has privileged status over disadvantaged racial groups due to white oppression and unfair social structures (Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, & Manstead, 1998; Leach, Snider, & Iyer, Smith 2002). Collective guilt is experienced when ingroup members feel responsible for harm perpetrated on a third party (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1994). Feeling collective guilt has also been found to motivate guilt-reduction strategies (McGarty et al. 2005; Stewart, Latu, Branscombe, & Denney, 2010). Therefore, white guilt may affect the way some people on the ideological left make sense of moral transgressions involving harm doing. For example, if the harm doer is perceived to be a victim of immoral ingroup conduct, then a plausible guilt-reduction strategy could be to reduce levels of moral outrage and punitiveness towards the perpetrator of the crime. In other words, liberal leniency towards minority group moral transgressions may be an attempt to alleviate the white guilt they feel for living a privileged and advantaged life at the expense of those who they believe have been oppressed and disadvantaged by social hierarchies that favour white people.

### **The Current Study**

In summary, this analysis suggests that based on moral foundations, ideo-attributions and self-concerns such as white guilt, political ideology will predict differences in the moral judgments people make towards minority group members who have committed a crime. The

current study used a between subjects' experimental manipulation with three conditions, each with an identical fabricated news article describing a physical assault and looting. In condition one the perpetrator is described as a Muslim man, in condition two as a white man, and in condition three as an unidentified man. Muslims were chosen as the target group for several reasons. First, contemporary discourse as seen in the real-world example above often involve Muslim communities and the goal was to choose a group that most closely represents the phenomenon as it exists in everyday discourse. In pursuing this strategy, no claim is being made about the actual correspondence between being Muslim and race or between being white and being liberal or conservative. The comparison of reactions to a Muslim versus a white perpetrator may appear to confound religion and race but our analysis was of participant's experience of the experimental manipulation in terms of ingroup and outgroup identification. Second, a theoretical assumption is that liberalism will be associated with moral leniency due to greater sensitivity to the unfair treatment of minority groups and survey data suggests that Americans believe Muslims are victims of more discrimination than any other religious or ethnic minority groups and that liberals, more than conservatives, strongly believe Muslims are discriminated against (Pew Research Center, Views of Religious Similarities and Differences 2009). In Canada, Arabs are also particularly at risk for experiencing religious discrimination compared to other religious groups (Godley, J. 2018; Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey 2013, 2016c). Lastly, the decision to use a crime presented in the form of a fabricated news article was chosen to reflect reports suggesting there is a growing trend of criticism towards Muslim communities and Islamophobic content in traditional and social news media (Al-Solaylee 2017; Awan, 2016; Matters, 2014; Oboler, 2013).



Although there was no a priori reason to expect white participants to have different levels of moral judgments between an unidentified and white perpetrator the unidentified condition was included as a neutral control to allow for insight into direction of effect if one was found. The dependent variable of moral judgment was divided into three categories. First, moral outrage reactions were assessed in attempt represent the intensity of moral judgment and the extent to which reactions are linked to violation of a moral standards. Second, a measure of punitiveness was included to explore the extent to which participants wanted to punish the perpetrator for their actions. Third, were mitigating moral attributions of responsibility and blame (Shaver, 1985; Weiner, 1985) with the expected tendency for those further left on the ideological spectrum to view Muslims as victims and therefore express less responsibility, and less blameworthiness towards them compared those more ideologically right. Included in the mitigating attributions measure is an item addressing the extent to which people grant the perpetrator an amount of victim status, therefore some of the variance observed by this measure may be capturing those concerns.

## **Hypotheses**

*H1a: Political ideology will moderate the relationship between the perpetrator conditions and moral judgements. The further left people are on the political spectrum the less they will express moral outrage and the less they will express punitiveness in the Muslim condition compared to the white condition and unidentified conditions.*

*H1b: The further right people are on the political spectrum the more they will express moral outrage and the more they will endorse punitiveness in the Muslim condition compared to the white condition and unidentified condition.*

*H2: Mitigating attributions will mediate the relationship between the effect of the perpetrator condition and levels of moral outrage and punitiveness.*

*H3: White guilt will moderate the moderating relationship between political ideology and moral leniency: as white guilt increases the less people will express moral outrage and the less they will express punitiveness in the Muslim condition compared to the white condition and unidentified condition (see Figure. 1)*

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Four-hundred and twelve students from the University of Calgary were recruited through the Department of Psychology Research Participation System and completed an in-person study in exchange for bonus course credit. Forty-seven participants were deleted from the sample: two for incomplete surveys, five for not agreeing to final consent, four for reporting ancestry other than white European, three for reporting religion as Muslim, thirty failed the manipulation check, two participants flagged as multivariate outliers using Mahalanobis' distance, one was a borderline multivariate outlier and also an outlier on three independent scale measures and they were deleted ( $N = 365$ ; 299 women; 65 men; 1 non-binary,  $M_{age} = 20.96$ ,  $SD = 8.16$ ). An a priori power analysis using G\*Power software version 3.1.9.2 recommended a sample size of 300 for the planned analyses described with the expectation of small to medium effect sizes.

Due to the inclusion of constructs such as white guilt and the focal interest in moral judgments towards minority group members' participants were pre-screened to only include those who self-identified in RPS as being of white European descent. The demographics questionnaire also asked participants to identify their ethnic background and religious affiliation

and any students that did not self-select as "White/European", or reported religious affiliation as Muslim, bypassed surveys assessing white guilt and white privilege and/or were assigned to the unidentified perpetrator condition and their data was not used in the analyses. The proposed study involved partial deception as the recruitment materials and consent form described the experiment as "a study of how people make sense of information in the news".

## **Procedure**

The study used Qualtrics software on University of Calgary lab-based computers with an investigator present and took approximately 20 minutes to complete. Upon consent participants completed a demographics survey and the following individual difference measures all on 7 point Likert scales (see Appendix B for all measures):

1. Demographic information
2. Political Ideology scale
3. White Guilt
4. White Privilege scale
5. Multiculturalism ideology
6. Political Correctness
7. Right-Wing Authoritarianism
8. Social-Dominance Orientation

The measures of multiculturalism ideology, political correctness, right-wing authoritarianism and social dominance orientation, were included for exploratory purposes and because they are not directly relevant to the hypotheses, are not considered in the thesis.<sup>1</sup>

Participants were randomly assigned by the survey research platform Qualtrics to one of three

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<sup>1</sup> For exploratory purposes, assessments of belief in white privilege, political correctness (Strauts & Blanton, 2015), and embracing multiculturalism (Berry & Kalin), right wing authoritarianism (Zakrisson, 2005), and social dominance orientation (Pratto et al., 2013) were tested in the moderation and moderated moderation models. Only SDO and RWA are reported in this manuscript.

conditions where they read a fabricated newspaper article describing a physical assault committed by either a white man, a Muslim man, or by an unidentified man with no description (see Appendix B). After reading the article participants answered a manipulation check asking them to describe the perpetrator in as much detail as possible. This was followed by measures assessing their moral judgments of outrage, punitiveness, and mitigating attributions of responsibility and blameworthiness towards the perpetrator. After completing the study participants were fully debriefed in person by the researcher followed by an option to withdraw consent and the participant's data.

## **Measures**

**Demographics.** Participants reported their age, gender, ethnic background, and religious affiliation. Participants selected their ethnic background from the following list: White/Caucasian/European, Black/African-American, East Asian, South Asian, Indigenous (eg. First Nations, Inuit, Metis), Middle Eastern, Hispanic/Latino/South American, Mixed race or other (Please specify). Participants were instructed to choose all that apply to them.

**Political Ideology.** Political ideology was assessed by asking participants how liberal or conservative they are in general, socially, and economically and taking an average of the three scores. Included was a brief definition of liberal and conservative ideological perspectives (ie. How liberal or conservative do you tend to be when it comes to *social policy*?). Examples of typically held liberal and conservative positions on relevant topics were included to help define liberal and conservative ideology (ie. "Liberals believe in government action to help achieve equality for all"). Participants were also asked if they identify with any Canadian political party and how important their party affiliation is to their identity. The political ideology score was

obtained by averaging the participants scores on their general ideological outlook, economic policy, and social policy (see Table 1 for correlations).

**White Guilt.** Swim and Miller's (1999) five-item Likert measure of White guilt includes items written in broad terms designed to assess people's general tendency to experience feelings of White guilt. For example, "I feel guilty about the past and present social inequality of minority groups."

**White Privilege.** Swim and Miller's (1999) five-item Likert measure of belief in the existence of white racial privilege assessed the extent to which people believe that white people have more social influence, more opportunities and more financial security than ethnic minority groups (ie. "White people have certain advantages that minorities do not have in this society.")

**Moral Outrage.** Designed for the purposes of the current study the moral outrage scale consists of 5 items designed to assess people's moral outrage directed at a perpetrator responsible for crime.

1. I find the behaviour of this man to be absolutely horrible.
2. There is never an excuse for such appalling behaviour.
3. The man who did this is a terrible person.
4. I get very angry and upset when I think about the assault of the victim and the suffering they have endured.
5. I am very mad at the man who is responsible for this act of violence.

**Punitiveness Scale.** Designed for the current study Participants responded to two items (7-point Likert) to assess the general levels of punishment they felt that the perpetrator deserved ("The man should be spared nothing and punished to the full extent of the law" and "How much does the perpetrator deserve to be punished for their actions")

**Mitigating Attributions Scale.** Designed for the current study participants responded to two items (7-point Likert) designed to determine the past experiences of the perpetrator that could give them victim status or justify their immoral behaviour (“To what extent do you believe there may be mitigating factors that would make the perpetrator less morally culpable for what he did?” and “To what extent do you believe that the perpetrator may have been the victim of past unfair life experiences?”)

## Results

Prior to conducting analyses regression assumptions were assessed. Shapiro-Wilk’s test of normality found all measures were significantly different from a normal distribution, however regression is considered robust to violations of normality (Ernst & Albers, 2017) so no transformations of the data were conducted. There were no violations of multicollinearity as no independent variables correlated above .70. The measure of social dominance orientation violated the assumption homoscedasticity with other variables so results on this measure should be interpreted with caution. Reliability using Cronbach’s alpha was assessed for all measures (see Table 2 for correlations of all measures and alpha coefficients).<sup>2</sup>

The first step of analyses examined hypothesis one that political ideology would moderate the relationship between the perpetrator conditions and moral judgments of outrage and punitiveness. To further explore hypothesis one an independent samples t-test compared mean scores on moral outrage and punitiveness at one standard deviation below and above the mean on

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<sup>2</sup> Due to the moderate reliability coefficients of items in the punishment and mitigating attributions scales analyses were performed on each of the two items in each scale separately. The overall condition effect was still significant. For main effects, one punishment item was not significant when comparing the unidentified and Muslim conditions and one mitigating attributions item was not significant when comparing the unidentified and white conditions. For the moderation analyses one punishment item was no longer found to have a significant interaction.

political orientation. Second, mediation analyses were conducted to determine if mitigating attributions predicted levels of moral outrage and punitiveness. Hypothesis three analysed a moderated moderation analyses with white guilt moderating the moderated relationship between political ideology and moral outrage and punitiveness (see Figure 1). Exploratory analyses examined all individual differences measures as moderators and moderating moderators<sup>3</sup> (see Table 3 for means and standard deviations of all measures).

### *Main Analyses*

To assess the overall impact of the experimental manipulation, one way analysis of variance showed a main effect of perpetrator condition on moral outrage,  $F(2,362) = 26.72, p < .001, R^2_{\text{Adjusted}} = .13$ , punitiveness  $F(2,362) = 15.73, p < .001, R^2_{\text{Adjusted}} = .08$ , and mitigating attributions  $F(2,362) = 9.38, p < .001, R^2_{\text{Adjusted}} = .05$ . Post hoc analyses using Tukey's HSD examined mean differences in moral judgments between each condition (See Table 4). Overall, participants were less outraged, less punitive, and more likely to give mitigating attributions to the Muslim harm doer compared to the white harm doer, and participants were more outraged, more punitive, and less likely to give mitigating attributions to the white harm doer compared to the unidentified harm doer.

### *Hypothesis 1 - Moderation Analyses of Political Ideology on Moral Judgements*

Two separate regression analyses tested political ideology as a moderator between the effect of the perpetrator condition on the dependent variables of moral outrage and punitiveness

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<sup>3</sup> Strength of attachment and self-identification with a political party did not predict moral judgments as either a moderator including left leaning participants (one hundred and ninety-two participants chose a party associated with liberalism in Canada - Liberal, New Democratic Party, Green Party). No significant relationship was found for attachment or how important to participants self-identities their party of choice was to levels of moral outrage or punitiveness, nor was there a 3-way interaction with political ideology and attachment and identification with a political party including all participants.

(see Table 5). Political ideology scores were mean centered and two contrasts with Helmert coding were used: C1 (-.677, .333, .333) Muslim condition versus unidentified and white conditions combined, and C2 (0, -.5, .5) unidentified condition versus white condition. A significant interaction was found for contrast C1 on moral outrage such that the higher (more liberal) participants scored on the ideology scale the less they reported moral outrage in the Muslim condition compared to the unidentified and white conditions combined. A significant interaction was also found for contrast C1 on punitiveness, such that being higher on the ideology scale (more liberal) was associated with lower punitiveness in the Muslim condition compared to the unidentified and white conditions combined (see Figures 2 and 3). Both interactions were further probed by testing the conditional effects of the perpetrator at three levels of political ideology, one standard deviation below the mean, at the mean, and one standard deviation above the mean (see Table 6).

To further evaluate the hypothesis that those further left on the ideological spectrum would be most associated with moral leniency towards a perpetrator belonging to a minority group independent samples t-tests examined differences between participants one SD below the mean and one SD above the mean on political ideology and their levels of moral outrage, punitiveness, and mitigating attributions in the Muslim condition. There were significant difference between low and high levels of ideology on moral outrage,  $t(37) = -3.43, p = .002$ , punitiveness,  $t(37) = -5.70, p < .000$ ; and mitigating attributions,  $t(37) = 2.36, p = .024$ . This further supports the hypothesis that the further left participants were on political ideology the more lenient they would be towards a Muslim harm doer.

The findings support hypothesis 1a by finding that the further left people were on the political spectrum the less morally outraged and less punitive they were to Muslim harm doer



compared to the unidentified or white harm doers. Hypothesis 1b that people further right on the political spectrum would express more moral outrage and more punitiveness in the Muslim condition was not supported. Participants further right on the political spectrum were less morally outraged in the Muslim condition compared to the white and unidentified conditions and there were no differences in mean scores of punitiveness scores for those further right on the political spectrum. It should be noted that the distribution of political orientation in the sample was skewed towards liberalism (see Figure 4) and therefore not an accurate representation of conservatism. For instance, one standard deviation below the mean on political ideology was still left of center (above 3.5) on a Likert scale of 1-7 leaving our ability to make inferences about conservatism's association with moral judgments of minority group harm doers difficult.

#### *Hypothesis 2 - Mitigating Attributions Mediating Moral Judgments*

Mediation analyses were conducted to determine whether mitigating attributions could explain levels of moral outrage and punitiveness as a function of perpetrator condition. The same contrasts were used as in the moderation analysis (C1 = Muslim versus unidentified and white combined, C2 = unidentified versus white). A moderated mediation analysis with political ideology moderating the mediated relationship between mitigating attributions and moral judgments was not pursued as a moderation analysis did not find a significant relationship between ideology and mitigating attributions.

Hypothesis two that the relationship between perpetrator condition and moral outrage and punitiveness would be mediated by mitigating attributions was supported. As Figures 5 and 6 illustrate, for contrast C1 the standardized regression coefficients between the conditions and mitigating attributions was statistically significant, as were the standardized regression coefficients between mitigating attributions and both dependent variables, moral outrage and

punitiveness. Unstandardized indirect effects were computed for each of 10000 bootstrapped samples, and the 95% confidence interval was computed by determining the indirect effects at the 2.5th and 97.5th percentiles (Hayes & Precher, 2014).

The bootstrapped unstandardized indirect effect for moral outrage was .05, and the 95% confidence interval ranged from .00, .11. Thus, the indirect effect was statistically significant, and mediation occurred between mitigating attributions and the relationship between perpetrator condition and moral outrage for the Muslim condition versus the unidentified and white conditions combined. The bootstrapped unstandardized indirect effect for punitiveness was .10, and the 95% confidence interval ranged from .04, .18. indicating that mitigating attributions mediated the relationship between perpetrator condition and moral outrage for the Muslim condition versus the unidentified and white conditions combined (see Table 7). These findings suggest that people were more likely to perceive the perpetrator in the Muslim condition as having experienced negative past life experiences and this was associated with reduced levels of moral outrage and punitiveness compared to the unidentified and white conditions.

### *Hypothesis 3: White Guilt Moderated Moderation Between Political Ideology and Moral Judgments*

A moderated moderation analysis was conducted to determine if the previously reported moderation model with political ideology moderating the relationship between the conditions and moral judgments would be further moderated by participant levels of white guilt (see Figure 1). No interaction was found for the hypothesized 3-way interaction.

### *Exploratory Analyses*

Right wing authoritarianism was found to have a significant two-way interaction  $b = -.32$ , 95% CI [.02, .32],  $t = -2.90$ ,  $p = .004$ .  $r_{sp}^2 = .02$  such that the lower participants scored on RWA

the less they reported moral outrage in the Muslim condition compared to the unidentified and white conditions combined. Social dominance orientation was found to have a significant two-way interaction  $b = -.28$ , 95% CI  $[-.55, -.02]$ ,  $t = -2.13$ ,  $p = .034$ .  $r_{sp}^2 = .02$  such that the lower participants scored on social dominance orientation the less they reported moral outrage in the Muslim condition compared to the unidentified and white conditions combined. Each predictor was tested separately in the moderated moderation model between political ideology and dependent variables of moral outrage and punitiveness. Right wing authoritarianism was found to significantly moderate the moderation of the relationship between political ideology and moral outrage,  $b = -.14$ , 95% CI  $[-.28, -.00.]$ ,  $t = -2.01$ ,  $p = .045$ .  $r_{sp}^2 = .02$ , such that as people who scored lower in right wing authoritarianism and higher in liberalism, they reported less moral outrage in the Muslim condition compared to the unidentified and white conditions combined. The lowest levels of moral outrage were found for participants one SD above the mean in political ideology and one SD below the mean in right wing authoritarianism (see Table 8). No other predictor variables were significant in the three-way interaction model.

## **Discussion**

The research presented here was designed to explore the effect of political ideology on people's moral judgments towards minority group members. While research on people's attitudes towards ingroups and outgroups has consistently found that people generally tend to favour ingroups and derogate outgroups across many different types of situations (Brown, Vivian, Hewtone, 1999; Scaillet & Leyens, 2000) there has been limited studies of ways in which political ideology may play a role in moral judgments of minority groups. Past research has found that liberalism is associated with a tendency to believe that environmental risk factors and external circumstances explain criminal behaviour, and that this general outlook can lead to

reduced culpability and less punitive sentencing (Carroll, Perkowitz, Lurigio, & Weaver, 1987). However, very few studies have directly measured people's moral judgments towards minority group harm doers as a function of political ideology with an experimental manipulation. Studies including ideology have generally been jury studies assessing legal judgments in the context of the criminal justice system with research questions targeting specific topics such as illegal immigration or the gay panic defense (Clark & Wink, 2012; Salerno et al., 2015). The focus of the current study was to explore the influence of political ideology on the way people think about issues of morality, culpability, and punishment in everyday life when minority groups are involved.

To test this, a sample of white undergraduate students were assessed on political ideology and randomly assigned to read a fabricated news article describing a physical assault and looting committed by either a Muslim man, a white man, or an unidentified man. It was found that the further left participants were ideologically, the less morally outraged and the less punitive they were towards the Muslim harm doer compared to unidentified and white harm doers. The finding that liberal undergraduate students held a minority group member to a more lenient set of moral standards than an ingroup member is consistent with similar observations made in public discourse (Howell, K., 2015 October 3; Nawaz & Harris 2015) and provide an interesting exception to the well supported empirical findings that people generally favour ingroups and are more critical of outgroups (Perdue, Dovidio, Gurtman, & Tyler, 1990). Specifically, the findings here raise questions about what circumstances create the conditions for individual differences (such as political orientation) to override the tendency for ingroups to seek negative aspects of outgroups.

Unfortunately, due to the restricted range of ideology in the sample, the current study was unable to make accurate determinations about the effect of conservative ideology on moral judgments of minority groups. However, the analysis did determine that for participants who were less liberal the effect of ideology on moral judgments got smaller or disappeared altogether. For example, as participants became less liberal the strength of the relationship between political ideology, moral outrage, and punitiveness became weaker and for participants one standard deviation below the mean on political ideology there were no significant differences in mean levels of punitiveness based on perpetrator conditions.

An unexpected finding was the overall effect of the perpetrator condition on participants moral judgements. Regardless of political orientation, participants reported less moral outrage, less punishment, and gave more mitigating attributions in the Muslim condition compared to the white condition. At the outset of this research it was assumed that only a subset of liberalism, such as the very far left, or those who also experience white guilt would be found to be more lenient towards minority groups. To discover that white undergraduate students on average were more lenient towards a minority group was unexpected. Since our student sample was skewed towards liberalism, it can be argued that the overall effects are consistent with the hypothesis that liberalism would be associated with moral leniency towards minority group members because the effect was found at all levels of liberalism, not just those high or low in liberalism, or those who also experience white guilt.

To determine if gender effected moral judgments towards minority group members analyses were performed with and without male participants. For women only, liberalism was still associated with less moral outrage towards the minority group harm doer but it was no longer associated with reduced punishment to the minority group harm doer. This may have been

due to a reduction in power or because women's scores were more highly positively correlated with liberalism and individual difference measures related to liberalism (ie white guilt and white privilege) and negatively correlated with punishment making the effect of ideology on punishment more difficult to detect (see Table 2 for correlations). Furthermore, the predominantly female sample combined with the male harm doer may have had confounding effects related to the role of gender and identity. For example, if the harm doer was female, or gender neutral, characteristics of the sample combined with characteristics of the harm doer may have produced different results.

There are many facets of liberal ideology that may have contributed to the finding of moral leniency towards minority groups. We know that liberalism is associated with greater emphasis on the moral foundations of harm and fairness compared to other moral values and that these values are associated with greater sensitivity to victim suffering (Haidt 2012; Niemi, & Young 2016). In present study, the tendency to perceive people as victims in the fabricated news article may have led to differences in how participants made sense of the moral transgression. This contributes to our understanding of how underlying moral foundations guide liberal and conservative ideologies and moral judgments. For example, participants who were less liberal may have observed the physical assault and looting in each condition as a simple moral dyad with a clear harm doer and innocent victim. However, participants who were more liberal may have identified two victims in the Muslim condition: the innocent bystander as a victim of a physical assault, and the perpetrator as a victim of discrimination and unfair social hierarchies. Once liberals have granted victim status to the minority group member it follows that this would inform their views on the amount of moral condemnation and punishment they deserve. This raises the question of whether moral judgments regarding minority groups are result from the top

down influence of political ideology, or the underlying moral foundations related to moral judgments.

The results found here support the ideo-attribution effect regarding criminal behaviour; an area that has been, to some extent, overlooked in the ideo-attribution literature. As posited by ideo-attribution theory, liberals believe criminal behaviour is caused by environmental risk factors such as lack of opportunity and unfair social systems while conservatives believe criminal behaviour is caused by character attributes such as being immoral or a bad person (Carroll, Perkowitz, Lurigio, & Weaver, 1987; Morgan, Mullen, & Skitka, 2010). Given the simplicity of the design of current study the ideo-attribution effect is a likely explanation for why liberalism was associated with being less morally outraged and less punitive towards a Muslim harm doer for committing an identical crime to an unidentified and white harm doer.

This is notable because no other information or details about the personal history of the perpetrators was given in the article. They were simply described as “Muslim man”, “unidentified man”, or “white man”. Participants were also not aware of the studies purpose to evaluate moral judgments of minority groups. All differences in levels of moral outrage, punitiveness, and mitigating attributions can therefore be assumed to be the result of the one-word descriptions of the harm doers. If this is the case then liberalism would be associated with making assumptions about the past experiences of the perpetrators based on group status alone and that these attributions were strong enough to make the Muslim harm doer appear less blameworthy and deserving of punishment.

Evidence that supports this interpretation is that the extent to which participants gave mitigating attributions to harm doers was predictive of levels of moral outrage and punitiveness. This is consistent with past research (Shaver, 1985; Weiner, 2006) linking attributions of

responsibility and blameworthiness to moral judgments. In the current study, the attribution measure asked participants to what extent they believe there may be mitigating factors that would make the perpetrator less morally culpable for what they did and to what extent the perpetrator may have been the victim of past unfair life experiences. Participants overall gave more mitigating attributions to the Muslim harm doer compared to the unidentified or white harm doers and these attributions were related to less outrage and less punitiveness towards the Muslim harm doer. This supports the interpretation that liberalism may be associated with perceiving minority groups as victims, and that this victim status leads to moral leniency.

Despite these findings, the effect of the conditions on mitigating attributions was not moderated by ideology. The more liberal participants were was not related to giving increased mitigating attributions towards the Muslim harm doer. Given that those further left on the ideological spectrum expressed less outrage and punishment towards the Muslim harm doer compared to the unidentified and white harm doers it would have strengthened the interpretation made here if mediating mitigating attributions were moderated by ideology in a similar pattern. It is possible this was not found because the student sample had a restricted range on political ideology limited to the liberal end of the scale. This may have made the effect of ideology on mitigating attributions difficult to detect given that we assume that conservatism would be associated with giving less mitigating attributions towards the Muslim harm doer compared to liberalism. Another possibility is that the overall condition effects and mediating effects of mitigating attributions were sufficiently robust for most of the participants that ideology would not be a moderate regardless of the distribution of the sample on ideology.

Regardless of political orientation, participants viewed the white perpetrator the most negatively. On average, undergraduate students were the most morally outraged, the most



punitive, and the least likely to give mitigating attributions towards to the white perpetrator. It is notable that this was the case when comparing the white harm doer to the unidentified harm doer suggesting that describing the harm doer as white made the moral transgression appear to be the most offensive and deserving of the most punishment. It is likely that the same underlying mechanism is taking place in the form of moral attributions, fairness, and victim status. In the perception of liberals, minority groups have been victims of prejudice and disadvantaged by existing social hierarchies leading to attributions which excuse immoral behaviour. In contrast, a white harm doer deserves no such consideration as they are privileged, suffer no discrimination and sit atop the social hierarchy, so there is less excuse for immoral behaviour. These findings coincide with a perception held by some in public discourse that there is a strain of liberal ideology that believes that white men are bad and responsible for many of the world's problems (Ferguson, 2018; Prabhu, 2018). It is possible that higher moral outrage and punitiveness towards the white harm doer could be explained in part by the fact that there is a greater statistical probability in Canada that if someone were to be physically assaulted it would more likely be by a white man than a Muslim man. Therefore, if participants past personal experiences had an affect on their moral judgments in the current study it may have biased results.

Another possible explanation for these findings is that liberalism may be associated with self-concern dynamics surrounding issues of white privilege and collective guilt. White privilege is the belief that white people have more social influence, and economic opportunity than ethnic minority groups and white guilt is the feeling of personal responsibility for the existence of these inequalities. It was predicted that participants belief in white privilege would be positively correlated with white guilt and that white guilt would play a role in moral judgments of minority group harm doers for those further left on the political spectrum. While belief in white privilege

was positively correlated with white guilt the hypothesis that white guilt would be associated with reduced moral outrage and punitiveness was not supported. This may have been because there was too high of a correlation between ideology and white guilt to detect an effect or because white guilt is not a facet of liberalism that is associated with moral judgments of minority in the current context.

Participants who scored lower in social dominance orientation and right wing authoritarianism reported less moral outrage towards the Muslim harm doer compared to the unidentified and white harm doers combined. In the context of the current study this makes sense given past research that has found that both right wing authoritarianism (Altemeyer, 1996, 1988; Hodson & Costello, 2007; Sibley & Duckitt, 2008) and social dominance orientation (Altemeyer, 1998; Hodson, Rush, & MacInnis, 2010) are strong predictors of prejudicial attitudes. It is possible that participants who were the least likely to hold prejudice attitudes towards dissimilar others also had a greater propensity to be more lenient towards the Muslim harm doer.

Participants low in right wing authoritarianism and high in liberalism were associated with the lowest levels of moral outrage towards the Muslim harm doer. Right wing authoritarianism has been consistently found to be correlated with conservatism and it represents a facet of right-wing ideology related to resistance to change (Jost et al, 2003). Therefore, this measure may have been tapping into participants who were the most liberal in the sample and the most likely to desire rapid change on social issues regarding race, equality, and fairness. The interaction between right wing authoritarianism and political ideology may have highlighted a combination of ideological traits that would make these participants the most forgiving and most lenient towards minority groups. These participants may have been the most likely to rely on moral foundations of harm and fairness, and ideo-attributions of past experiences to explain

immoral behaviour, while also looking for ways to compensate for the negative effect of prejudice and racial bias they perceive to be prevalent in society.

There may be alternate explanations for the findings here that were not explored in the design of the current study. The association of liberalism with moral leniency of minority groups could be explained by liberals morally typecasting minority group members as victims. Moral typecasting involves labelling the two actors in a moral dyad as either moral agents (doers of good/evil) or moral patients (recipients of good/evil) (Gray & Wegner, 2009). Moral typecasting literature suggests that the categories of agents and patients are mutually exclusive and the more someone is perceived to be a moral patient the less likely they will be perceived to be a moral agent (Gray & Wegner, 2009). If liberals are inclined to see minority groups as victims of discrimination, they may find it difficult to see them as harm doers and therefore be less morally critical of them compared to ingroup members.

In typecasting literature there are two paths to which others may be typecast as patients. First, if someone is perceived to belong to a group that lacks efficacy and the capacity to understand the negative consequences of their actions then they may be typecast as a patient. For example, a human infant is not seen capable of being responsible for harm because they are not capable of inflicting suffering on others and are unable to understand the consequences of their actions. Second, someone can be typecast as a patient if people learn specific details about how they have been treated unfairly in the past. For example, after learning that someone who commits a crime had been routinely treated unfairly by an employer they can be typecast as a moral patient, and subsequently seen as less blameworthy and worthy of less punishment for immoral behaviours (Gray & Wegner, 2011). If liberals are morally typecasting minority group members as patients it is not clear if they are typecasting them by categorizing them as lacking

efficacy and or because they are perceived as victims of past suffering or a combination of both. The overall effect that participants gave more mitigating attributions to the Muslim harm doer than the white harm doer the current provides some evidence that liberalism is associated with typecasting Muslims as patients due past suffering and victim status. If this is the case what makes this study unique is that there was no specific details provided to participants describing past suffering or unfair treatment it was merely assumed based on their status as a minority group member.

Another explanation could be the theory of response amplification which posits that when a person has ambivalent views about an out-group it can create cognitive dissonance when they are asked to make judgments about outgroup misconduct (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986; Katz, 2014). The psychological tension produced from dissonance is then alleviated by responding more intensely (positively or negatively) to members of a stigmatized outgroup in whichever way will reduce discomfort (Katz, 2014). It appears both liberals and conservatives may be equally susceptible to cognitive dissonance and can make biased decisions based in part on their ideological worldviews (Collins, Crawford, & Brandt, 2017). In the current context of moral judgments towards minority groups liberals may experience more dissonance than conservatives motivating them to prioritize their positive beliefs about the inherent goodness of minority group members whom they believe have been treated unfairly. This may lead to response amplification reducing the perceived blameworthiness and individual responsibility of a minority group member who has committed a crime. While this is possible and should explored further, response amplification is typically found when participants have ambivalent feelings towards an outgroup (Bell & Esses, 2002; Katz, Wackenhut, Glass, 1986). If it were the case that liberals have conflicting views about Muslims which creates cognitive

dissonance in situations involving harm doing it does not adequately explain the finding that liberalism was also associated with increased moral condemnation towards a white harm doer. We have no reason to believe that white participants in the current study hold conflicting or ambivalent views towards white ingroup members so there would be no reason for liberals to experience cognitive dissonance when judging white harm doing.

The finding that white participants were more morally critical of the white harm doer could be explained by the black sheep effect. The black sheep effect refers to the tendency to judge likeable ingroup members favourably and deviant ingroup members more negatively compared to comparable outgroup members. The motivation of the black sheep effect is to preserve the societal norms and values of one's ingroup by derogating ingroup misconduct (Marques & Paez, 1994). An ingroup deviant (such as the white man committing a crime in the current study) is seen as posing a threat to ingroup identity and should therefore be derogated more than an outgroup member guilty of the same transgression (Muslim man in the current study). The black sheep effect tends to be found when likable and unlikable ingroup members are compared to likable and unlikable outgroup members (Marques & Yzerbyt, 1988) and when participants strongly identify with their in-group (Branscombe, Wann, Noel, & Coleman, 1993; Marques, Yzerbyt & Leyens, 1988). In the current study there was no manipulation of likableness although it could be assumed that the Muslim, unidentified, and white harm doers are all seen as unlikable due to their immoral behaviour. Furthermore, there was no manipulation or measure of how strongly participants identify with their ingroup of being white. Absent evidence from measures that would more clearly establish a black sheep effect, its role in reactions to white harm doer remains unclear and should therefore be considered in future studies.

## **Limitations**

As is typically found in social science departments on university campuses the student sample used in this study was restricted in range and skewed towards the liberal end of the political spectrum. This limited the current studies ability to fully assess the relationship between conservatism and moral judgments of minority groups. It would be optimal to find a sample with greater variation of political ideological views by using crowd sourcing sites. It may be the case that liberalism is only related to moral leniency of minority group harm doers when the sample consists of university undergraduates in the social sciences as these are some of the most liberally progressive people in society. There may not be the same findings for other demographics of liberals, such as baby boomers, who may have different sets of value systems when making moral judgments. It is also possible that demand characteristics led some psychology undergraduates to guess that the true nature of the study was to examine political orientation and views of minority groups and therefore responded in a socially desirable way.

The decision to include a control group of an unidentified perpetrator served its purpose allowing insight into the direction of effect. However, a drawback of this design was that a method of determining how participants perceived the unidentified man in the control condition was not included, therefore, any differences between the Muslim or white conditions and the unidentified condition should be interpreted with caution. Furthermore, the decision to use an unidentified man as a control did not provide additional information to one of the central motivations of the research regarding perceived victim status and moral judgments. The argument put forth here is that liberalism, but not conservatism, would be associated with perceiving minority groups as victims and that this victim status would drive the outcome of moral leniency. It is possible that a fourth condition should have been included with a crime committed by a recently arrived Muslim refugee. A recently arrived Muslim refugee would be

predicted to be the harm doer most readily granted victim status by liberals and would therefore be associated with the most moral leniency. An addition such as this would provide extra support regarding the relationship between perceived victim status and moral leniency.

The current study used an all-white sample of participants which allowed for a simple design to study people's views of minority groups as well as gave the ability to include measures central to our hypotheses such as white guilt and white privilege. However, white guilt was not related to moral judgments leaving open the question of what facets of liberalism are driving the effect of moral leniency towards minority groups. The all white sample also prevented the current study from addressing whether liberals who are not of white European ancestry may also hold similar views of moral leniency towards minority groups.

## **Implications**

The tendency for people to focus on victim suffering and concern with victim rights and dignity has increased over the last several decades (Ben-David, 2000; Parker, 2008; Young & Stein, 2004). In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century social sciences began examination of causal and moral attributions in social contexts (e.g., Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1967; Nisbett, Caputo, Legant, & Marecek, 1973), including why people derogate (e.g., Lerner & Simmons, 1966) and stigmatize victims (e.g., Goffman, 1963). This knowledge has been relied on to facilitate positive social change. However, some psychologists have begun cautioning academics (Haslam, 2016) and the public (Christakis & Christakis, 2012; Haidt & Haslam, 2016; Lukianoff & Haidt, 2015) of a liberal bias towards increased identification of victims, creating a culture of victimhood arising from overindulgence in the concept of harm (Duarte et al., 2015; Haslam, 2016).

One strength of the current study may be its focus on liberalism. There have been warnings in the past of the negative consequences of liberal bias in social psychology (Tetlock

1994) and that a lack of political diversity may threaten the validity of psychological science (Redding 2001). More recently, Duarte et al. (2015) have suggested the relative neglect of liberalism as a research topic and the focus on conservatism as “abnormal” and “non-normative” may be because the field has a liberal bias. In North American universities the ratio of liberal to conservative social psychologists is approximately 12:1 and is continuing to shift leftward (Gross & Simmons 2007; Rothman & Lichter 2008). The lack of political diversity may lead to confirmation bias, misrepresenting conservative points of view, ideologically biased research questions, and a reluctance to explore politically unpopular research topics (Duarte et al., 2015).

The goal of this study was not to disparage any political movement or ideological orientation. It was to explore the influence of political ideology on moral judgments which have received little attention in political psychological literature. There is ample evidence in other social psychological literature that suggests motivated reasoning can affect attributions and moral judgements. Justice motive research for instance, has provided evidence that people may blame others for harms they had no control over if doing so satisfies the need to see the world as just (Ellard, Harvey, & Callan, 2016; Lerner and Simmons, 1966). The relevance of the justice motive research and other research examining motivated reasoning and moral judgments is that how people come to understand matters of moral consequence depends on underlying goals and value systems. In the case of the justice motive, it is the need to make sense of what has happened in terms of deservingness (Ellard, Harvey, & Callan, 2016; Lerner and Simmons, 1966). In the case of ideology, the assumption is the same: ideology, through motivated reasoning, shapes moral attributions in a manner that serves ideological goals. Liberals attributions are shaped by responsiveness to suffering combined with a social justice worldview that presumes suffering is at the same time evidence of victimization. Once someone has been



granted victim status, even if they are in control of their behaviour, they are not considered fully responsible or blameworthy for their actions due to negative past experiences

The current study also has implications for research studying attributions of criminal behaviour in legal contexts. Studies on jury decision making in law and criminal justice have seldom examined the effect of ideology. As noted by Anwar, Bayer, and Hjalmarsson (2015, p. 3) “given the perception that criminal justice views are related to political ideology, it is surprising that political party does not appear in reviews of more than 100 jury studies” (Devine, Clayton, Dunford, Seying, & Pryce; Devine, 2012). Of the few studies that have examined ideology findings have been mixed, and the research questions varied, answering specific questions targeted at specific policies. Trial consultants might consider incorporating measures of political orientation as part of jury questionnaires, given that the findings presented here add evidence to the few studies that have also found that political orientation can influence jurors’ decision-making (e.g., Clark & Wink, 2012; Salerno et al., 2015).

## **Future Directions**

The findings here suggest that in simple dyadic moral transgressions white university undergraduates were more lenient towards a Muslim than a white person. Future studies should explore whether liberalism would be associated with greater moral condemnation towards political issues that are important to liberals such as comparing a white person with prejudice attitudes towards the LGBTQ community or supporting banning abortion to that of a minority group member who holds the same views. The degree of the moral misconduct should also be examined to see if there is a threshold of moral violation where this effect is no longer found, such as exploring whether a hate crime or rape would still be associated with liberal leniency towards minority group members compared to white ingroup members.

It is unclear for example from the findings of the current study if a norm violation such as lying or using foul language in public would be perceived by liberals to be less offensive if a minority group member was responsible. It is possible that no effect would be found in cases involving more mundane and routine infractions of social norms as they may not be related to more emotionally salient issues regarding victimization of minority groups. The tendency for liberalism to be associated with moral leniency may only appear when explaining more extreme moral violations that tap into the liberal inclination to focus on victims and past unfair treatment.

Future research should also attempt to uncover the reasoning behind liberal leniency towards minority groups. It could be that liberal undergraduate students have reservations of stoking fear and prejudice of Muslims and increasing negative attitudes towards immigrants. These are real concerns that should be taken seriously. Therefore, extensions of this research should be designed to determine the extent that people are hesitant to condemn moral transgressions of minority groups because of deeply held ideological and moral belief systems or for practical concerns about reducing the perpetuation of stereotypes and racism.

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## Tables

Table 1.

*Correlations of Ideology Items*

Measure	1	2	3
1. General Ideology	-		
2. Social Policy	.76**	-	
3. Economic Policy	.67**	.44**	-

*Note.*  $N = 365$ . \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .001$ .

Table 2.

*Correlations and reliability of Predictors, Gender, and Outcome Variables*

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Political Ideology	(.83)									
2. White Guilt	.31**	(.88)								
3. White Privilege	.42**	.56**	(.91)							
4. Political Correctness	.40**	.40**	.47**	(.92)						
5. Multiculturalism	.42**	.41**	.38**	.40**	(.86)					
6. Right Wing Authoritarianism	-.54**	-.06	-.26**	-.21**	-.26**	(.67)				
7. Social Dominance Orientation	-.50**	-.36**	-.37**	-.39**	-.56**	.31**	(.76)			
8. Moral Outrage	-.07	.02	-.03	.07	-.13*	.18**	.02	(.76)		
9. Punitiveness	-.19**	-.14**	-.16**	-.09	-.15**	.24**	.10	.56**	(.60)	
10. Mitigating Attributions	.01	.10	.07	.01	.07	.01	-.13*	-.20**	-.29**	(.52)
11. Gender	.16**	.30**	.22**	.19**	.20**	-.03	-.10	-.02	-.17**	-.20

*Note.*  $N = 365$ . Gender 0 = Male, 1 = female. Entries on the main diagonal are Cronbach's alpha. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .001$  (2 tailed).

Table 3.

*Means and Standard Deviations of All Measures (N = 365)*

	Mean	SD
Political Ideology	4.82	1.25
White Guilt	4.29	1.43
White Privilege	4.80	1.31
Political Correctness	4.36	1.30
Multiculturalism	5.47	.85
Right Wing Authoritarianism	2.75	.85
Social Dominance Orientation	2.01	.89

*Note.* All measures used 1-7 point Likert scales. Higher political ideology is more liberal.

Table 4.

*Main Effects of Perpetrator Condition on Moral Judgments*

Measure	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	$R^2_{\text{Adjusted}}$	Follow up
Moral Outrage	26.72	2, 362	.001	.13	M < U* M < W*** U < W***
Punitiveness	15.73	2, 362	.001	.08	M < W*** U < W***
Mitigating Attributions	9.38	2, 362	.001	.05	M > W*** U > W*

*Note.* Follow up comparisons using Tukey's HSD (only significant comparisons shown). M = Muslim; U = Unidentified; W = White. \*  $p < .05$  (two-tailed). \*\*  $p < .01$  (two-tailed). \*\*\*  $p < .001$  (two-tailed).



Table 5.

*Direct and Moderated Effects Regression Analyses Results.*

	Criterion	Predictor	b	95% CI	SE	<i>t</i>	df	Effect size ( $r_{sp}^2$ )
Direct effects	Moral Outrage	C1	.57***	.37, .76	.10	5.80	362	.08
		C2	.51***	.29, .72	.11	4.62	362	.05
Moderated effects	Moral Outrage	C1	-.43	-1.17, .31	.38	-1.14	359	< .01
		C2	.50	-.38, 1.38	.45	1.11	359	< .01
		Politics	-.04	-.11, .03	.04	-1.13	359	< .01
		C1*Politics	.21**	.06, .36	.08	2.74	359	.02
		C2*Politics	-.00	-.18, .18	.02	.02	359	< .00
Direct effects	Leniency	C1	.39**	.16, .62	.12	3.31	362	.03
		C2	.61***	.35, .87	.13	4.62	362	.05
Moderated effects	Leniency	C1	-.60	-1.5, .28	.45	-1.34	359	< .01
		C2	.27	-.78, 1.3	.53	.51	359	< .01
		Politics	-.15***	-.24, .07	.04	-3.58	359	.03
		C1*Politics	.21*	.03, .38	.09	2.30	359	.01
		C2*Politics	.07	-.14, .28	.11	.63	359	< .01

*Note.* Unstandardized effects shown. Squared semi-partial correlations ( $r_{sp}^2$ ) represent effect sizes. Politics = political ideology scale. Higher on ideology scale is more liberal. C1 = Muslim condition versus unidentified and white condition combined Helmert coding (-.667, .333, .333). Contrast C2 = unidentified versus white condition Helmert coding (0, -.5, .5). \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ .

Table 6.

*Conditional Effects of Political Ideology Moderation at different mean levels*

Moral Outrage					
	Mean	$\beta$	$p$	95% CI	
One SD Below		.31	.021	.05,	.58
At the Mean		.57	<.001	.38,	.76
One SD Above		.83	<.001	.56	1.10
Punitiveness					
	Mean	$\beta$	$p$	95% CI	
One SD Below		.14	.37	-.17,	.63
At the Mean		.40	<.001	.17,	.63
One SD Above		.66	<.001	.34	.97

*Note.* Higher on ideology is more liberal. Contrast C1 = Muslim condition versus unidentified and white combined with Helmert coding (-.667, .333, .333).

Table 7.

*Mediation Effects of Mitigating Attributions on the relationship between Perpetrator Condition and Moral Judgments. N = 362.*

Moral Outrage				95% CI	
Effect	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Lower	Upper
Total	0.57	5.79	< .001	.37	.76
Direct	0.52	5.26	< .001	.32	.71
Indirect (mediation)	0.05			0.00	0.10
Punitiveness				95% CI	
Effect	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Lower	Upper
Total	0.36	3.31	.001	.16	.62
Direct	0.29	2.47	.014	.06	.52
Indirect (mediation)	0.10			0.04	0.17

*Note:* Results are for contrast C1 Helmert coding. Muslim condition versus unidentified and white conditions combined.

Table 8

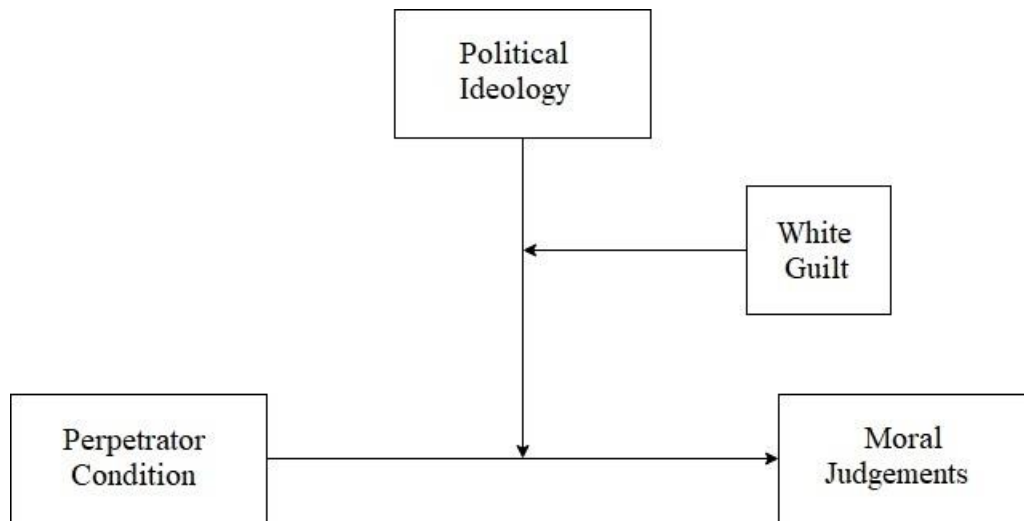
*Conditional Effects of RWA moderating the moderation of Political Ideology on Moral Outrage*

	Mean	$\beta$	$p$	95% CI	
Low Ideology					
One SD Below		.39	= .098	-.07,	.85
Muslim	4.06				
Unidentified	4.04				
White	4.85				
At the Mean		.28	= .068	-.02,	.59
Muslim	4.27				
Unidentified	4.22				
White	4.88				
One SD Above		.18	= .217	-.10	.46
Muslim	4.48				
Unidentified	4.40				
White	4.92				
	Mean	$\beta$	$p$	95% CI	
Mean Ideology					
One SD Below		.71	< .001	.43,	1.00
Muslim	3.84				
Unidentified	4.27				
White	4.83				
At the Mean		.46	<.001	.25,	.66
Muslim	4.18				
Unidentified	4.34				
White	4.93				
One SD Above		.20	=.225	-.12	.53
Muslim	4.53				
Unidentified	4.42				
White	5.03				

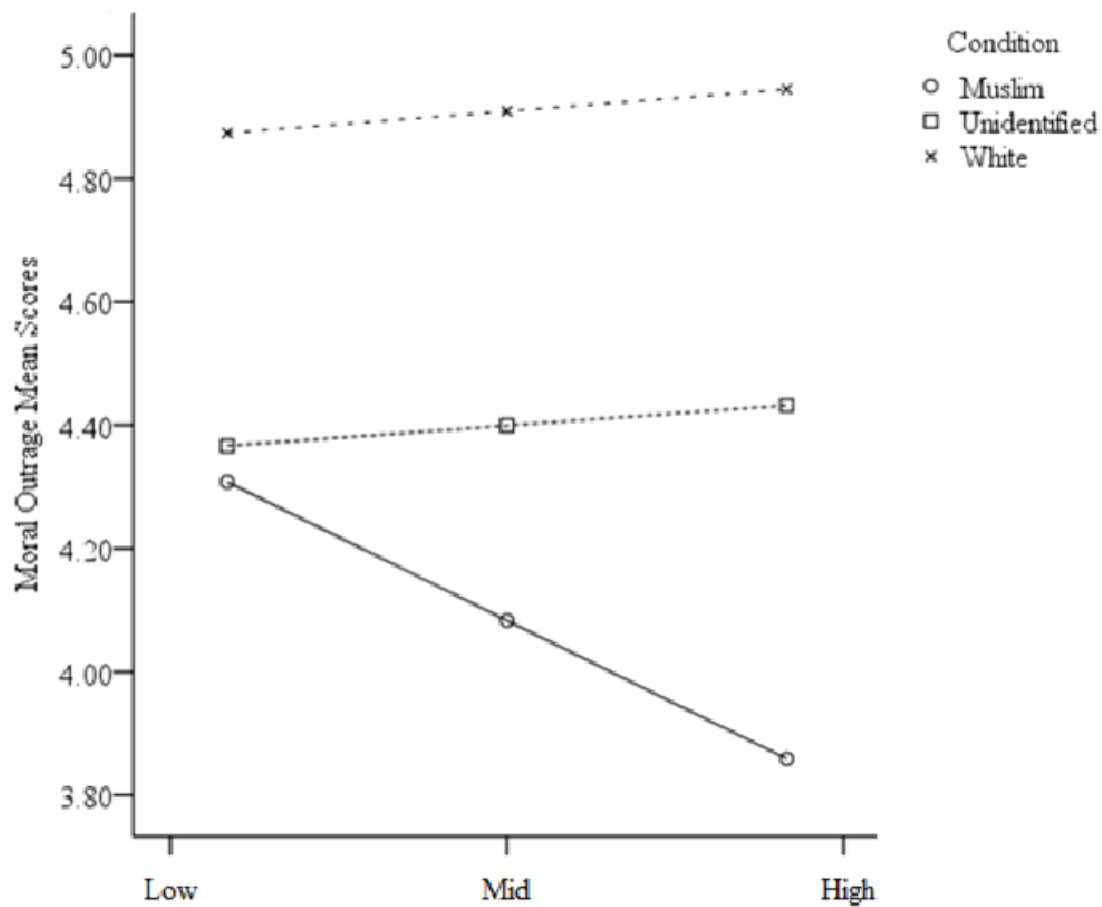
	Mean	$\beta$	$p$	95% CI	
High Ideology					
One SD Below		1.04	< .001	.72,	1.36
Muslim	3.6				
Unidentified	4.49				
White	4.81				
At the Mean		.63	<.001	.34,	.93
Muslim	4.08				
Unidentified	4.47				
White	4.98				
One SD Above		.23	=.376	-.28	.74
Muslim	4.56				
Unidentified	4.44				
White	5.15				

Note: Higher on ideology is more liberal. Contrast = Muslim condition versus unidentified and white combined with Helmert coding (-.667, .333, .333).

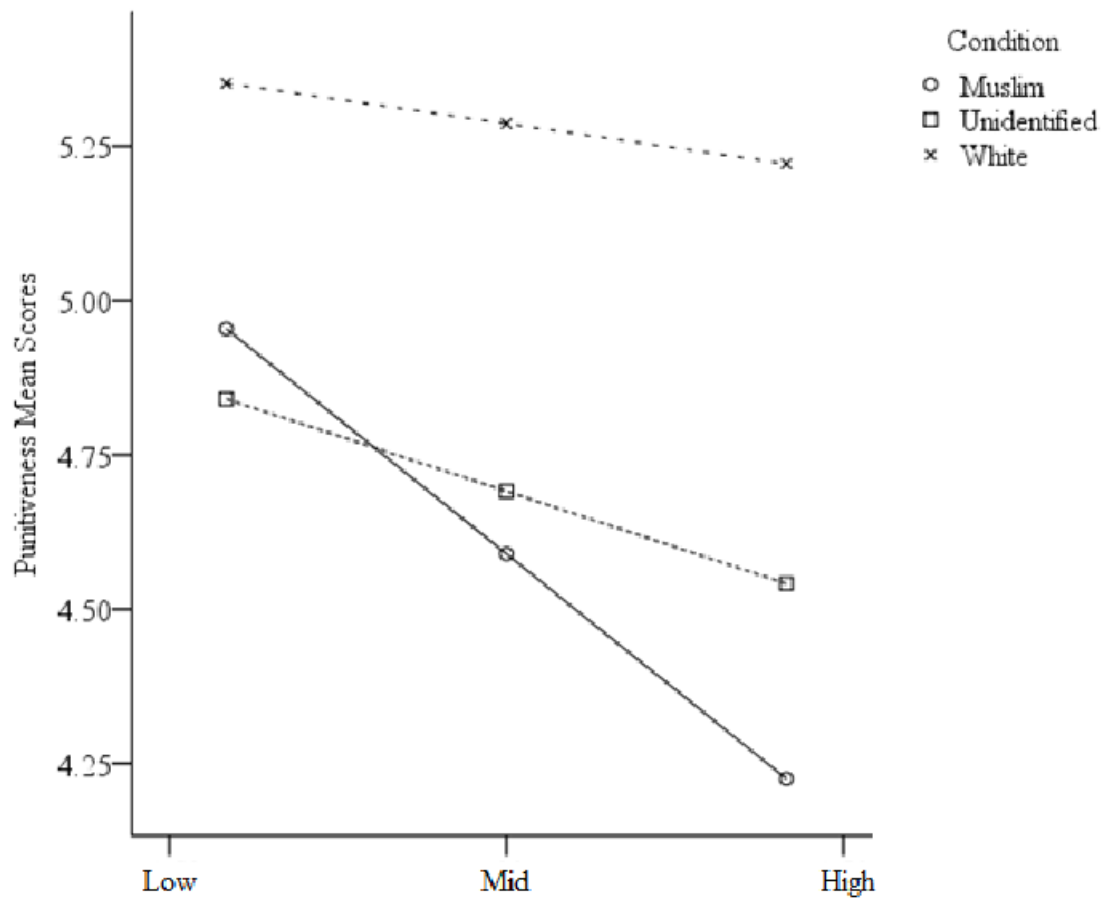
## Figures



*Figure 1.* Moderated moderation model: white guilt moderating the moderation between political ideology and moral judgments as a function of perpetrator condition.

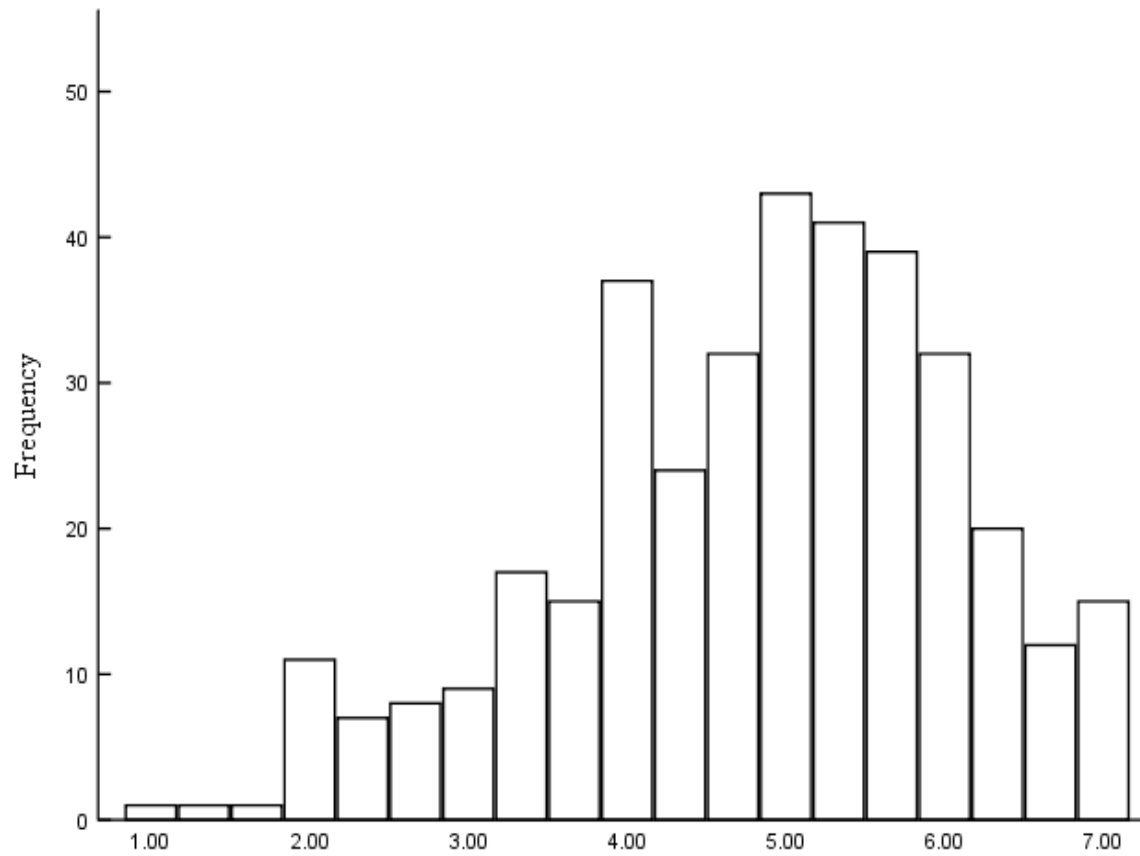


*Figure 2.* Two way interaction between perpetrator condition and political ideology on moral outrage for contrast C1 = Muslim vs unidentified and white. Low and high levels of political ideology are show at one standard deviations above and below the mean. Significant differences in moral outrage were found at Low, Mid, and High levels of ideology (higher ideology scores are more liberal).



*Figure 3.* Two way interaction between perpetrator condition and political ideology on punitiveness for contrast C1 = Muslim vs unidentified and white. Low and high levels of political ideology are show at one standard deviations above and below the mean. Significant differences in punitiveness were found at Mid, and High levels of ideology (higher ideology scores are more liberal).





*Figure 4.* Distribution of political ideology ratings on a 1-7 Likert scale. Higher scores are more liberal ( $N = 365$ ,  $M = 4.82$ ;  $SD = 1.24$ ; median = 5.00; skewness =  $-.49$ ).

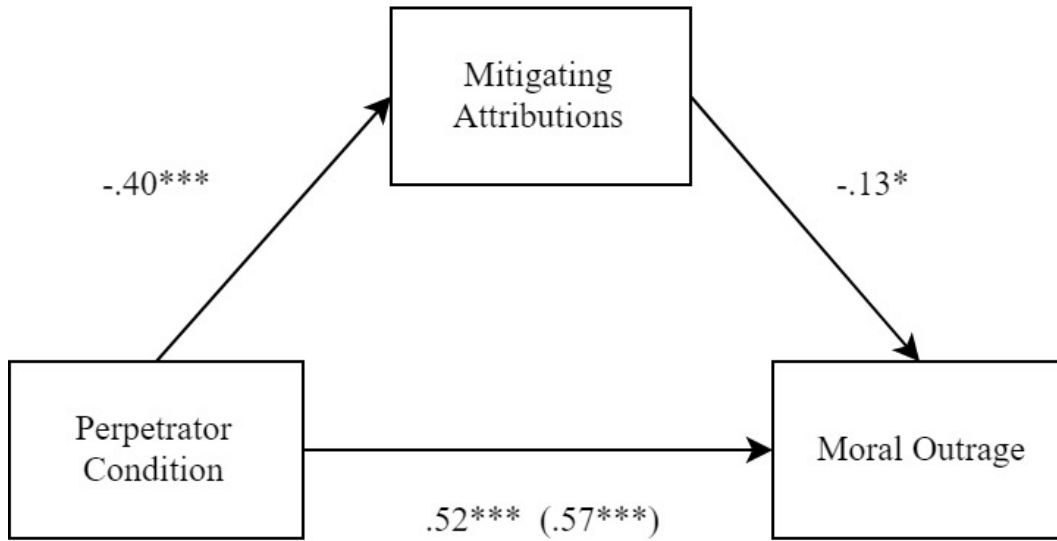


Figure 5. Indirect effect of the relationship between Perpetrator Condition on Moral Outrage through Mitigating Attributions. Standardized paths presented.  
\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

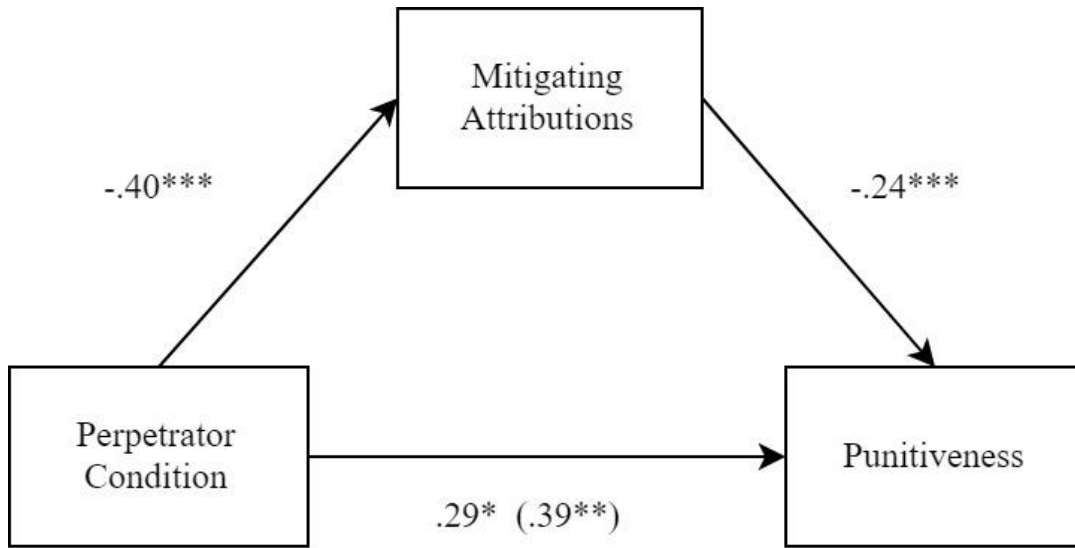


Figure 6. Indirect effect of the relationship between Perpetrator Condition on Punitiveness through Mitigating Attributions. Standardized paths presented.  
\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

## Appendix A: Consent Form



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**Name of Researcher, Faculty, Department, Telephone & Email:**

Daniel J. Parker, Faculty of Arts, Department of Psychology, (250) 857-2666,  
[daniel.parker@ucalgary.ca](mailto:daniel.parker@ucalgary.ca)

**Supervisor:**

Dr. John Ellard, Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Calgary, (403) 220-4690,  
[ellard@ucalgary.ca](mailto:ellard@ucalgary.ca)

**Title of Project:**

How People Interpret Articles in the News

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This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.

Participation is completely voluntary and confidential. You are free to discontinue participation at any time during the study.

**Purpose of the Study**

The study is designed to understand factors that affect how people make sense of newspaper articles. We are interested in how people interpret information in the news and media.

**What Will I Be Asked To Do?**

You will complete a number of individual difference measures including measures of how you think about a variety of social and moral issues. You will then read a short newspaper article describing a looting and physical assault and answer some questions about your feelings towards the newspaper article. The study will take approximately 30 minutes of your time.

Your participation is completely voluntary, you may refuse to participate altogether, refuse to participate in parts of the study, decline to answer any and all questions, or you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of your research participation credit.

**What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected**

No personal identifying information will be collected in this study, and all participants will remain anonymous. Your name, student identification number, and contact information will be accessed through the Department of Psychology Research Participation System solely for the purposes of ensuring you receive course credit for your participation and for contacting you if we need to reschedule a session. This information is not linked in any way to the research information you provide.

Should you agree to participate, you will also be asked to provide your gender, age and ethnic background.

*Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate?*

*There is a low risk that you may find the newspaper article describing the looting and physical assault upsetting. However, the description of the event is not graphic and is not different than anything you may see in news media on a regular basis.*

In addition to receiving course credit for your participation, your participation including the explanation provided at the end of the study will provide you with experience based insights into how psychologists answer research questions using studies such as this.

### **What Happens to the Information I Provide?**

The information you provide online will not be associated with you personally in any way. The data for all participants is combined into a single data set with no identifying information included and will be retained indefinitely. The data will be used for the purposes of the present study and may be made available to other researchers as appropriate.

Should you decide to withdraw from the study, advise the researcher for the session and they will make sure the information you have provided is permanently deleted before you leave. If you finish the study, there will be no way to withdraw the data you have provided because after the session is over, any data gathered is anonymous so we cannot distinguish your data from the data provided by other participants.

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### **Consent**

In selecting the “I agree” button, you 1) understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) agree to participate as a research subject.

- In selecting the ‘I agree’ button, you also fully understand that you are participating in this study as part of your educational experience in the Department of Psychology. If you feel that you have not gained sufficient educational benefit, or have other concerns regarding this experience, you may register your concerns with Mark Holden (RPS Coordinator, [mark.holden@ucalgary.ca](mailto:mark.holden@ucalgary.ca)) and he will ensure that your comments are acted upon with no fear that you will be identified personally.

Please note that, due to the nature of data collection, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed and it is possible that other participants present in the lab may recognize your involvement in this study, although not your actual contributions.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

“I agree” “I do not agree”

## Questions/Concerns

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

Daniel J. Parker  
Department of Psychology  
(250) 857-2666, [daniel.parker@ucalgary.ca](mailto:daniel.parker@ucalgary.ca)  
or  
Dr. John Ellard, Associate Professor  
Department of Psychology  
(403) 220-4690, [ellard@ucalgary.ca](mailto:ellard@ucalgary.ca)

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact the Research Ethics Analyst, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at (403) 220-4283/210-9863; email [cfreb@ucalgary.ca](mailto:cfreb@ucalgary.ca). A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.

## Appendix B: Study Measures

### DEMOGRAPHICS

**Age:** \_\_\_\_\_ years old

**Gender** (select one): ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**What is your ethnic background?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Do you identify as a member of any of the following ethnic groups (select any that apply):**

- ☐ White/European
- ☐ Black/African-American
- ☐ East Asian
- ☐ South Asian (eg., Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan)
- ☐ Indigenous (eg., First Nations Inuit, Metis)
- ☐ Middle Eastern
- ☐ Hispanic/Latino/South American
- ☐ Mixed race or other (Please specify)

**What is your present religion, if any? Are you:**

- ☐ Christian
- ☐ Jewish
- ☐ Muslim
- ☐ Buddhist
- ☐ Sikh
- ☐ Hindu
- ☐ Atheist
- ☐ Agnostic
- ☐ Other (please specify)
- ☐ Nothing in particular

## POLITICAL IDEOLOGY

People's political views may have an impact on how they make sense of news media. Below is a brief description of general political views. You can use it to answer the following questions.



Believe in government action to achieve equal opportunity for all

Pro-choice on abortion – women have the right to choose

Support same sex-marriage

Believe in personal responsibility and limited government intervention

Pro-life on abortion – we should protect all human life

Oppose same-sex marriage

1. How liberal or conservative (in terms of your general outlook) are you?

Very Liberal

1

2

3

4

5

Very Conservative

6

7

2. How liberal or conservative do you tend to be when it comes to *social policy*?

Very Liberal

1

2

3

4

5

Very Conservative

6

7

3. How liberal or conservative do you tend to be when it comes to *economic policy*?

Very Liberal

1

2

3

4

5

Very Conservative

6

7

4. What Canadian political party do you associate with: dropdown choices (Liberal, Conservative, Green, NDP, Bloc, independent, none)

5. How important to your self-identity is being a [their choice for Q4]?

Not at all important

1

2

3

4

5

Extremely Important

6

7

6. How attached are you to the group [their choice for Q4]?

Not at all

1

2

3

4

5

6

A great deal

7



## WHITE GUILT (Swim & Miller, 1999)

Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree (7-point Likert Scale)

*Our views on social issues can in turn reflect our own position in society, including our ethnic, racial, and cultural background. Your responses to the following statements are intended to assess how your own background may inform your views.*

1. Although I feel my behavior is typically non-discriminatory, I still feel guilt due to my association with the white race.
2. I feel guilty about the past and present social inequality of minority groups.
3. I do not feel guilty about social inequality between white people and minority groups.
4. When I learn about racism, I feel guilt due to my association with the white race.
5. I feel guilty about the benefits and privileges that I receive as a white person.

## WHITE PRIVILEGE (Swim & Miller, 1999)

Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree (7-point Likert Scale)

*Please read each question and respond how much you agree or disagree.*

1. White people have certain advantages that minorities do not have in Canadian society.
2. My status as a white person grants me unearned privileges in today's society.
3. I feel that white skin in Canada opens many doors for Whites during their everyday lives.
4. I do not feel that white people have any benefits or privileges due to their race.
5. My white skin color is an asset to me in everyday life.

## POLITICAL CORRECTNESS (Strauts & Blanton, 2015)

Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree (7-point Likert Scale)

*The following questions are related to people's socio-political views and may be relevant to how we think about newspaper articles.*

*To some, "politically incorrect" speech is seen as harmful to society because it perpetuates stereotypes and prejudices, such as sexism and racism. Other people do not think politically incorrect language is harmful and have few concerns about it. We would like to know what you think. For the following questions, please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the statements.*

1. I get anxious when I hear someone use politically incorrect language.
2. I feel angry when a person says something politically incorrect.
3. The use of politically incorrect language around me makes me very uncomfortable.
4. I get mad when I hear someone use politically incorrect language.
5. When a person uses politically incorrect words, I point it out to them to help educate them about the issues.
6. Even if no harm was intended, I correct people if they say something that is politically incorrect.
7. When people show political ignorance in their words, I call this to their attention.
8. I try to educate people around me about the political meaning of their words.
9. I will educate people about the political issues when their choice of words reveals a misunderstanding.

## MULTICULTURALISM SCALE (Berry & Kalin, 1995)

Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree (7-point Likert Scale)

*Please read the following statements about how important multiculturalism is to you in Canada and respond with how much you agree or disagree with the statements.*

1. We should recognize that cultural and racial diversity is a fundamental characteristic of Canadian society.
2. We should help ethnic and racial minorities preserve their cultural heritages in Canada.
3. It is best for Canada if all people forget their different ethnic and cultural backgrounds as soon as possible. (R)
4. A society that has a variety of ethnic and cultural groups is more able to tackle new problems as they occur.
5. The unity of this country is weakened by people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds sticking to their old ways. (R)

6. If people of different ethnic and cultural origins want to keep their own culture, they should keep it to themselves. (R)
7. A society that has a variety of ethnic or cultural groups has more problems with national unity than societies with one or two basic cultural groups. (R)
8. We should do more to learn about the customs and heritage of different ethnic and cultural groups in this country.
9. Immigrant/ethnic parents must encourage their children to retain the culture and traditions of their homeland.
10. People who come to Canada should change their behaviour to be more like us. (R)

#### RIGHT-WING AUTHORITARIANISM (Bizumic & Duckitt, 2018)

Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree (7-point Likert Scale)

*The way we feel about various social issues may effect the way we interpret news media. The following questions will ask for your views on a variety of social norms. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the statements. You can work quickly; your first feeling is generally best.*

1. It's great that many young people today are prepared to defy authority. (Conservatism or Authoritarian Submission) (R)
2. What our country needs most is discipline, with everyone following our leaders in unity (Conservatism or Authoritarian Submission)
3. God's laws about abortion, pornography, and marriage must be strictly followed before it is too late. (Traditionalism or Conventionalism)
4. There is nothing wrong with premarital sexual intercourse. (Traditionalism or Conventionalism) (R)
5. Our society does NOT need tougher government and stricter laws. (Authoritarianism or Authoritarian Aggression) (R)
6. The facts on crime and the recent public disorders show we have to crack down harder on troublemakers, if we are going preserve law and order. (Authoritarianism or Authoritarian Aggression)

*Note.* R indicates the item is reverse scored.

## SOCIAL DOMINANCE ORIENTATION (Pratto et al., 2013)

Extremely Oppose to Extremely Favour (7-point Likert Scale)

*Show how much you favor or oppose each idea below by selecting a number from 1 to 7 on the scale below. You can work quickly; your first feeling is generally best.*

1. In setting priorities, we must consider all groups
2. We should not push for group equality
3. Group equality should be our ideal
4. Superior groups should dominate inferior groups

*Below is a recent news article taken from a Canadian newspaper. Please read it carefully and then answer the questions on following page.*



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## MORAL JUDGMENTS

Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree (7-point Likert scale)

*Think about the news article you just read and indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.*

1. I find the behaviour of this man to be absolutely horrible
2. The man should be spared nothing and punished to the full extent of the law.
3. There is never an excuse for such appalling behaviour.
4. The man involved is a terrible person.
5. I get very angry and upset when I think about the assault of the victim and the suffering they have endured.
6. I am very mad at the man who is responsible for this act of violence.
7. How much does the perpetrator deserve to be punished for his actions?
8. To what extent do you believe there may be mitigating factors that would make the perpetrator less morally culpable for what he did? R
9. How responsible is the perpetrator for his behaviour? Leave this one separate
10. To what extent do you believe that the perpetrator may have been the victim of past unfair life experiences? R
11. To what extent do you think the perpetrators behaviour is a reflection of their character?

## **Appendix C: Debrief and re-consent form**

### **Debrief**

Thank you for participating in our project. Your participation is vital for the success of this research, which is interested in the relationship between political ideology, the concepts of white guilt and white privilege, and people's moral judgments towards perpetrators of crime.

We are specifically interested in differences between liberals and conservatives in regards to their attitudes towards perpetrators of physical assault. We know from past research that conservatives tend to be in favour of more punitive criminal sentencing compared to liberals but there has been little research looking at differences between liberals and conservatives in how they view minority group members who have committed crimes. Therefore, the current study was designed to see if differences between people in their ideological outlook plays a role in their moral judgments of a white person committing a crime compared to a minority group member committing an identical crime. Included in this was our interest in whether believing that white people are privileged and have advantages over minority groups would effect people's moral judgments of minority groups.

In order to test this, we wrote a fictitious news article describing a physical assault committed by either a white man, a Muslim man, or an unidentified perpetrator. After reading the news article participants' moral judgments towards the perpetrator of the crime were assessed. It should be noted that the decision to choose a Muslim man to represent the minority group was not intended to single out Muslims in any way, and we would expect to find differences in people's moral judgments with any minority group (eg., African American, LGBTQ, or Indigenous). Muslim was chosen because survey research indicates that Muslims are amongst the most commonly targeted minority group for prejudice and discrimination.

In this study, you completed seven surveys that have been used in previous research to assess people's social and cultural values on issues related to politics. For example, measures of political correctness, white privilege, white guilt, and multicultural ideology scales have been associated with liberalism while right-wing authoritarianism and social dominance orientation have been associated with conservatism. These measures were chosen because in previous studies they have been found to be related to people's attitudes towards minority groups.

We also want to emphasize in this research, ideology is analyzed using a continuum ranging from conservative to liberal. Participants in this study are not categorized as one or the other. We are interested in assessing ideological differences at the group level as they vary along the ideology continuum. We also understand that our hypotheses about how people leaning left may react differently from people leaning right may or may not reflect how any given individual may react in our situation.

As you now know, there was more to this study than was revealed to you at the beginning.

We do not like to mislead our research participants in this way and only do so if there is no other way to examine the questions we are interested in. In this case, we felt that if participants were told that we were interested in the effect of political ideology on moral judgments of minority groups participants might respond in ways that reflect that awareness rather than how they think about these experiences in everyday life. We try to avoid studies like this as much as possible because the consent you provide to participate at the beginning is not fully informed. This is why it is important at this point to make sure you fully understand what the study was about and then provide you the option of telling us if you approve of us using the information you provided. All information collected is completely anonymous so no one, including us will know how you responded to any of the questions.



## **Final Consent**

In selecting the “I agree” button, you 1) understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) agree that the information you have provided may be used for the research purposes described above.

In selecting the ‘I agree’ button, you also fully understand that you are participating in this study as part of your educational experience in the Department of Psychology. If you feel that you have not gained sufficient educational benefit, or have other concerns regarding this experience, you may register your concerns with Mark Holden (RPS Coordinator, [mark.holden@ucalgary.ca](mailto:mark.holden@ucalgary.ca)) and he will ensure that your comments are acted upon with no fear that you will be identified personally.

Please note that this is the last point at which you can withdraw from this research. If you wish to withdraw select the “I do not agree” option and your data will be destroyed. Please also note that, because others may have been present during this session, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed and it is possible that other participants present in the lab may recognize your involvement in this study, although not your actual contributions.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project now. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information before making your decision.

We understand that aspects of this research may be upsetting for some participants. If you would like to discuss any aspect of the study, including anything that was upsetting, please feel free to talk to the researcher for this session. In addition, if, after leaving the session you experience distress associated with this study, please feel free to contact either the researcher or their supervisor using the information provided below. We have also provided contact information for the University of Calgary SU Wellness Centre. All University of Calgary students are eligible for free counselling services on campus, or alternatively, the Calgary Distress Centre offers a 24-hour crisis line:

### **SU Wellness Centre**

Website: [www.ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/counselling/personal/](http://www.ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/counselling/personal/)

Phone: 403 210-WELL (9355)

or

### **Calgary Distress Centre**

Website: [www.distresscentre.ab.ca/](http://www.distresscentre.ab.ca/)

Phone: 403 266-HELP (4357)

## Questions/Concerns

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

Daniel Parker  
Department of Psychology  
(250) 857-2666, [daniel.parker@ucalgary.ca](mailto:daniel.parker@ucalgary.ca)  
or

Dr. John Ellard, Associate Professor  
Department of Psychology  
(403) 220-4690, [ellard@ucalgary.ca](mailto:ellard@ucalgary.ca)

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact the Research Ethics Analyst, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at (403) 220-4283/210-9863; email [cfreb@ucalgary.ca](mailto:cfreb@ucalgary.ca). A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.