Approaches to Punishment: Examining Stigma as a Mediator Between Empathy and Retributive and Restorative Justice Orientations

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Abstract

The U.S. leads incarceration rates per capita across the globe, underscoring the need to better understand factors that influence support for punitive attitudes. Prior research has demonstrated that factors such as causal attribution style influence justice orientations, however, there is mixed evidence on the influence of cognitive factors. This study examined the relationship between empathy and restorative and retributive justice orientations, with the role of stigma as a mediator. Data were collected from an online sample of $n = 421$ participants who read a vignette depicting a violent-crime scenario and completed various measures. Data was analyzed through EIV regression models which produced mixed results. In the first model, there was a significant positive relationship between empathy and stigma ($a = .2212$, $p = .0004$) and stigma and retributive attitudes ($b = .1399$, $p = .0180$), but there was a negative and nonsignificant relationship between empathy and retributive orientations ($c = -.1026$, $p = .0522$). Stigma was a significant mediator in this model, a$b = .0309$, 95% CI [.0051, .0689]. In the second model, there was a significant and positive relationship between empathy and restorative orientations ($c = .2028$, $p = .0002$), but no statistically significant correlation between stigma and restorative orientations ($b = -.0158$, $p = .7631$). Stigma was not a significant mediator in this model, $ab = -.0037$, 95% CI [-.0295, .0212]. The results suggest that greater empathy is linked to increased perceptions of stigma, which in turn are associated with stronger support for retributive attitudes—effectively offsetting empathy's potential protective influence. Additionally, stigma did not appear to influence restorative orientations, while empathy had a direct impact. Limitations and implications are discussed.

Keywords: *Restorative justice, Retributive Justice, Empathy, Stigma, Labeling*

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Mass incarceration in the United States (U.S.) began in 1973 and steadily increased until its peak in 2009, placing the U.S. among the top three countries globally in per capita incarceration rates (Sentencing Project, 2023; Widra, 2024) Although incarceration rates began to decline after 2010 (Nellis & Pearce, 2026), this trend has recently reversed upwards once again. In 2022— the first increase in 12 years—the U.S. prison population grew by 2% and has continued to rise since (Sentencing Project, 2023). What once appeared to be meaningful progress in reducing the widespread harm inflicted on individuals, families, and communities by decades of mass incarceration now appears to be giving way to a resurgence of punitive policies and rising conviction rates reminiscent of the late 20th century (Nellis & Pearce, 2026).

Among the general U.S. public, concerns about crime have also increased, along with individuals' punitive attitudes about judicial outcomes for individuals who have engaged in acts of harm (Gerber, 2021; Gramlich, 2024). For instance, a 2023 Gallup survey found that 77% of Americans believed crime had increased from the previous year and that 63% endorsed crime as a very or extremely serious problem in the U.S. – an increase from 54% in 2021 (Jones, 2023). Punitive attitudes, often associated with views of *retributive justice*, refer to positive endorsement of criminal justice policies that seek to punish wrongdoers[1] through various forms of sanctioning such as imprisonment, fines, and the death penalty (Gerber, 2021; Maguire & Johnson, 2015; Trajtenberg et al., 2024). The theory of American exceptionalism in the context of justice suggests that U.S. Americans hold a distinctively punitive perspective on crime and punishment compared to other Western nations (Kugler et al., 2013; Murray, 2018). This notion

[1] The term wrongdoer is used in placement of the traditional use of offender, as this research is developed with an emphasis on restorative justice and to encourage future shift in language. This term aims to address the harms committed by an individual rather than adopting a legal label related to punitive action.

is often supported by the U.S. 's continued use of the death penalty, elevated incarceration rates, and other severe policies and practices associated with arrests and incarceration. However, studies have found that U.S. punitiveness may be more largely related to other variables, such as portrayals of crime in media and increased concern for crime more generally (Kugler et al., 2013).

Prior research has demonstrated that no singular factor contributes to individuals' support for punitive approaches toward justice, highlighting that it is instead a combination of situational factors, beliefs, and personality traits that contribute to increased or decreased support for punitive sanctions (Shi, 2022; Wanner & Caputo, 1987). For example, emotions such as anger and fear have been explored, with most of the research having addressed negative emotionality and its relationship to justice attitudes. Other situational factors that may influence punitive attitudes that have been less explored are empathy and stigma surrounding individuals who have engaged in acts of harm or wrongdoing. *Empathy* refers to the ability to share in and understand another's emotions (Cuff et al., 2016) and is linked to a reduction in support for punitive responses (Ciofu et al., 2026;). *Stigma*, defined as the labeling and categorizing of an individual or group of individuals in which the affected members are othered (Link & Phelan, 2001), may be a powerful influence in determining support for sanction responses, as evidence suggests ascribing diminished worth to individuals is associated with more punitive justice responses (Hoogendoorn & Rodríguez, 2023; Viki et al., 2013).

Moreover, research has rarely addressed alternative justice-related attitudes, especially those that center on reconciliation and healing such as restorative justice. *Restorative justice* is defined as criminal-legal sanctioning that emphasizes efforts of interconnected healing between

the wrongdoer, victim[2], and the community, often including support for wrongdoers as they reintegrate back into society (Saulnier & Sivasubramaniam, 2015). Of the research that does exist, Taylor and Bailey (2021) found that empathy significantly predicted individuals' support for restorative justice, while significantly decreasing support for retributive justice.

This study built upon previous literature by examining the relationship between empathy and justice-related attitudes. More specifically, this study examined the concept of stigma as a possible explanatory variable influencing the link between empathy and two justice-related orientations: retributive versus restorative justice. Considering research suggesting views toward justice-orientations may vary based on perceptions of crime severity (e.g., O'Hear & Wheelock, 2020; Taylor & Bailey, 2024), the current study was situated within the context of a violent crime while controlling for other factors (such as race, gender, and right-wing authoritarianism). Researchers have found that perceptions of crime severity are strong predictors of punitive attitudes and decrease support for restorative justice (Gerber, 2021; O'Hear & Wheelock, 2020; Tajalli et al., 2021; Taylor & Bailey, 2024). Therefore, examining these dynamics within the context of a violent crime may help determine whether empathy influences support for restorative justice, even when the offense is perceived as particularly serious.

Potential significant results would yield great developments in this research area. If stigma is found to significantly mediate the relationship between empathy and either retributive or restorative justice orientations, this would support the need to develop interventions aimed at reducing stigma toward justice-involved individuals[3], ultimately facilitating successful societal reintegration and potentially minimizing the likelihood of recidivism. Additionally, a finding that

[2] The term victim refers to an individual who was generally impacted by any type of harm or wrongdoing. Other literature may use the term survivor in place, but given the discussion of interpersonal relationships, the term victim will be used for clarity and due to its prominence in related research.

[3] Justice-involved individuals refer to individuals who have committed acts of harm or violence, or who otherwise may have previously been arrested, charged, or convicted of a legal offense (Wilcox & Taylor, 2020).

shows stigma as a significant influence would warrant further exploration into the key drivers of such stigma, including the roles of public policy, media portrayals, personal exposure to individuals with criminal records, and prevailing narratives—accurate or otherwise—about the criminal legal system. The current study addressed these questions through the lens of two theoretical viewpoints: goals of policy and punishment (Wenzel et al., 2008) and labeling theory (Berk, 2015; Winnick & Bodkin, 2008) to better understand how empathy relates to the maintenance of stigma and how societal labels and stereotypes attached to justice-involved individuals shape public attitudes toward punishment and rehabilitation. By applying these theoretical frameworks, the current study illuminates the psychological and social mechanisms by which stigma operates, and how these processes may influence the degree to which individuals endorse restorative versus retributive justice approaches—particularly in the context of a violent offense.

Theoretical Framework

Goals of Policy and Punishment

Numerous theories over the years have attempted to understand decision-making processes that influences attitudes about and the goals of punishment. One of the most popular theories is that the desire to punish is driven by a fear of crime (Johnson, 2009; Lerner et al., 2014). Lerner et al., (2014) described how fear involves uncertainty and feelings of lack of agency which in turn have relevant influences on risk perception. However, Wanner and Caputo (1987) illustrated how this belief is inconsistent with actual perceptions and feelings about crime, as they found that lower levels of fear were not associated with less punitive attitudes. Similar to fear, anger has been theorized as strongly influencing the desire to punish or humiliate wrongdoers (Hartnagel & Templeton, 2012; Lerner et al., 2014; Unnever & Cullen, 2009). Some

argue that criminal sanctions must address the negative emotions aroused by the committing of a crime, and that particularly contemporary punishments seek to meet the emotional demands of the public (Hartnagel & Templeton, 2012; Johnson, 2009).

Many policymakers address the emotional needs of the public by emphasizing just deserts based measures. *Just deserts* refers to the retributive orientation beliefs that the punishment for a crime should be equivalent and appropriate to the crime that was committed based on its severity in order to restore the balance of justice, similar to the concept of "an eye for an eye" (Carlsmith et al., 2002; Plantz et al., 2023; Wenzel et al., 2008). This perspective focuses on the sanctioning aspect of crime control as opposed to minimizing the possibility of future incidents in addition to addressing the moral outrage evoked by the nature of the crime (Carlsmith et al., 2002; Okimoto et al., 2012; Wenzel et al., 2008). The goal of just deserts-based punishment would therefore be to assess the harm caused by the crime and determine what punishment would be proportional to that harm. Researchers have pointed out, however, that crimes causing the relatively equivalent amount of harm are subject to varying punishments based on different mitigating circumstances that influence the degree of outrage and sympathy aroused in individuals (Carlsmith et al., 2002). The existing influence of such extenuating factors indicate that moral reasoning plays a large role in guiding the decision-making process as it pertains to punishment.

Restorative justice orientations, on the other hand, are centered around harm reparation and value restoration, and seeks to address the aspects of crime that retributive justice orientations do not consider (Saulnier & Sivasubramaniam, 2015). In addition to focusing on the harm done to the community and victim(s) of the crime, there is also a goal to further repair harm brought on the wrongdoer, often through meetings between all parties involved (Moss et

al., 2019: Saulnier & Sivasubramaniam, 2015; Wenzel et al., 2008). Thus, wrongdoers, victims, and individuals among the broader community are all offered opportunities for healing, which often includes rehabilitation for the wrongdoer and the potential to successfully aid them in reintegrating back into society. Proponents of restorative justice argue that the mutually-agreed upon sanctions provide a better opportunity of healing for those involved, along with being a more effective method of reducing costs and recidivism (Saulnier & Sivasubramanian, 2015). Individuals in support of restorative orientations also tend to be seen as more empathic and sympathetic toward wrongdoers, as they tend to desire for wrongdoers to apologize, acknowledge their wrongdoing, and are more willing to grant the wrongdoer voice during the sanctioning process (Okimoto et al., 2012).

Prior research indicates that restorative justice orientations are associated with greater empathy toward individuals who engage in harmful acts (Okimoto et al., 2012; Taylor & Bailey, 2021), whereas retributive justice orientations are linked to heightened anger and discriminatory attitudes toward wrongdoers (Lerner et al., , 2014). In this study, moral reasoning is examined through the lens of empathy to better understand how affective and cognitive processes shape responses to wrongdoing. Recognizing the reasoning and consequences underlying various approaches to criminal behavior is therefore essential for interpreting justice orientations as reflections of broader moral attitudes. These orientations also align with other sociological theories of punishment and social control, particularly labeling theory, which highlights how societal reactions and moral judgments can reinforce stigma and influence future behavior.

Labeling Theory

Labeling is a core component of stigmatization, which involves a dividing of people into distinct categories based on an oversimplification of personality and characteristics (Link &

Phelan, 2001). Labeling theory, which originates from sociological discussions of deviance, posits that societal reactions to and the othering of individuals who engage in deviant acts can perpetuate further deviance by reducing them to a single negative identity (Berk, 2015; Link & Phelan, 2001). Once labeled, individuals may internalize these identities, shaping their self-concept and behavior in ways that reinforce marginalization. Both labeling theory and stigma research draw on attribution theory, which examines how people assign causes to behavior and events (Hegarty & Golden, 2008; Yogev, 2024). A dispositional attribution style—viewing wrongdoing as the result of personal choice or moral failing—tends to elicit more punitive responses (Unnever & Cullen, 2009). This occurs because behavior perceived as controllable are more likely to be stigmatized, attributed to individual deficits or intentional decisions rather than to structural or situational factors (Hegarty & Golden, 2008; Corrigan et al., 2003). Furthermore, people are more likely to help someone if their problems or distress have uncontrollable origins or causes, compared to if the causes are perceived as controllable (Hegarty & Golden, 2008).

Labeling theory describes the consequences of individuals internalizing others' negative judgments and characterizations, often resulting in the adoption of the imposed label and continued behavior consistent with it (Berk, 2015; Link & Phelan, 2001; Winnick & Bodkin, 2008). Over time, the theory has expanded to explain how societal rejection itself can contribute to deviant behavior, as individuals respond to exclusion and limited opportunities created by stigmatizing reactions (Barmaki, 2017; Berk, 2015). Importantly, research has also helped in understanding that labels are not fixed; the traits or behavior deemed socially acceptable evolve across historical and cultural contexts. Thus, what is defined as deviant—and who becomes subject to social rejection—can vary across time and culture (Berk, 2015; Crewe &

Guyot-Diangone, 2016). This is particularly relevant in the context of research examining perceptions of justice-involved populations.

In an experiment examining the effect of linguistic phrasing of criminal record labels on perceptions of recidivism risk, researchers found that language that attributed an act of harm to a person's identity (wrongdoer, ex-con, etc.) caused a significant increase in the participants' perceptions that individuals with violent convictions would continue to commit new crimes (Denver et al., 2017). The stigma associated with violent crime was also linked to the tendency for participants to believe a previous violent conviction would predict reoffending, a finding that is particularly contrary to established research (e.g., Bales & Mears, 2008; Yukhnenko et al., 2023). Denver and colleagues (2017) therefore emphasized the importance of labeling to expand on the social exclusion and negative associations brought about from being labeled.

For this study, labeling theory provided insight into the construction of stigma (Link & Phelan, 2001; Crewe & Guyot-Diangone, 2016). Because labels primarily convey negative evaluations of individuals – often transforming an act or characteristic into a whole identity (Denver et al., 2017) – those with greater stigma against individuals who engage in criminal activity are potentially more likely to endorse greater retributive attitudes toward wrongdoers due to associating them with negative characteristics (e.g., being violent, evil, and unreformable) (Link & Phelan, 2001; Pickett et al., 2013). On the other hand, restorative justice ideology aims to shift the blame and shame from the individual onto the act or offense, creating a space for both accountability of harm and growth of the individual (Saulnier & Sivasubramaniam, 2015). As a result, those who endorse less harmful or negative attributions will have a less absolute belief about the behavior of the wrongdoer and a willingness to understand them (Ahlin et al., 2015; Moss et al., 2019). Given the reduction of complex individuals into simple categories such as

"offender" or "harmful", labeling theory underlies the processes that contribute to stigma. Consequently, the current study seeks to examine the relationship between empathy and justice-orientations with stigma as a mediating variable. The following sections outline a brief review of the literature on empathy, stigma, and retributive and restorative orientations.

Literature Review

Empathy

Definitions for empathy consist of "the ability to anticipate and share others' emotional states" (Pelligra, 2011, p. 170), "Sharing another's feelings by placing oneself psychologically in that person's circumstance" (Lazarus, 1994, p. 287), and "The act of constructing for oneself another's mental state" (Hogan, 1969, p. 308), among others. Although there are variable definitions of empathy throughout the literature, most definitions are grounded in traits such as perspective-taking, understanding, and the separation of self from the other (Cuff et al., 2016). There are also debates as to whether empathy manifests as a cognitive concept, an affective concept, or both. *Cognitive empathy* refers to the ability to process someone else's feelings, while *affective empathy* refers to the ability to feel and experience someone else's feelings (Cuff et al., 2016). Furthermore, empathy has both trait and state influences, as it is considered a stable personality trait but can also vary depending on different situational contexts. For the context of this study, empathy is defined as the capacity to perceive and realize another's context or emotions as if they were their own in order to gain better understanding of the other's mental and emotional condition whilst withholding judgement (Pelligra, 2011; Ickes, 1997; Geer et al., 2000). The current study aims to look at empathy as it relates to both devaluation beliefs (i.e., stigma) and support for various approaches to justice.

Previous research suggests that empathy has been found to soften the intensity of anger aroused by emotional reactions to certain crimes, in turn reducing the desire to punish (Unnever & Cullen, 2009). A study examining whether empathy interventions could reduce stigma held against individuals who inject drugs found that empathy interventions significantly reduced stigma in participants, whereas control conditions and traditional information-interventions did not have a significant impact on held stigma (Clinton & Pollini, 2021). Additionally, a study examining attitudes toward stigmatized groups, found that increasing empathy toward a single member of a stigmatized group (i.e., exposure to a woman with AIDS, a homeless man, and a convicted murderer) increased empathy toward the group as a whole (Batson et al., 1997). In their study, empathy was manipulated by instructing individuals to either listen to a stigmatized individual through an objective lens or a listening perspective lens. Uniquely, the study addressed the limits of empathy, as they observed a delayed effect in increased empathy when it came to the stigmatized group of convicted murderers, as increases in empathy were not seen immediately following presentation of the information for this group but were found weeks later (Batson et al., 1997).

In examination of empathy as a stable attribute, this study looked at how stigma, or devaluation beliefs, held against a hypothetical wrongdoer mediated the relationship between empathy and justice attitudes. In doing so, it was necessary to first understand what emotions or states impact empathy, as well as which aspects of empathy are most significant in informing support for varying justice attitudes.

A 2014 study assessed the causal relationship between diminished empathy and the dehumanization of victims (Stevenson et al., 2014). The researchers based part of their studies on the notions that disgust may wholly impede one's ability to be empathic. They then examined

this logic as it pertained to diminished empathy for juveniles who engaged in sexual wrongdoing and found that participants who had greater disgust sensitivity also had less empathy for and endorsed more dehumanizing beliefs about the wrongdoer (e.g., that he was a superpredator). This study highlights the underlying psychological processes that both influence empathy and attitudes toward wrongdoers, as well as the adverse effects of stigmatizing labels such as "superpredators" (Stevenson et al., 2014). Additionally, a study looking to understand factors that influence adolescents' attitudes toward justice found that perspective-taking was associated with greater restorative attitudes (Rasmussen et al., 2018). Perspective-taking is a cognitive aspect of empathy, as well as a core tenet of restorative justice (Cuff et al., 2016; Davis, 1983; Rasmussen et al., 2018; Taylor & Bailey, 2022). The same study also found that perspective taking moderated the relationship between having experienced discrimination and support for punitive attitudes, meaning that individuals who experienced discrimination and possessed greater perspective-taking ascribed to fewer punitive attitudes. This study highlights the importance of empathy, specifically as it relates to perspective-taking, in shaping both attitudes toward justice and the effects of discrimination. Yet, although prior research has identified links between empathy and support for different justice orientations, the role of stigma as a potential explanatory mechanism remains less clearly understood.

Stigma

The origins of the word stigma from ancient times still influence how we define it today, as stigma originally referred to a physical mark but now symbolizes the devaluation of individuals and loss of social status (Crewe & Guyot-Diangone, 2016). Stigma occurs internally (*self-stigma*), externally (*public stigma*), and systemically (*structural stigma*), impacting individual self-perception, perception and treatment of others, and availability of resources and

opportunities (Crewe & Guyot-Diangone, 2016). The type of stigma addressed in the current study is public stigma (also known as enacted stigma or social stigma), which refers to the behavior and attitudes members of society hold toward labeled individuals or communities (Moore et al., 2013). In their conceptualization of stigma, Link and Phelan (2001) outline four interrelated components: (a) identifying and labeling human differences, (b) linking labeled individuals to negative stereotypes, (c) separating "us" from "them," and (d) resulting experiences of discrimination and status loss among labeled persons. By determining which actions, behavior, or traits elicit social rejection, societies construct and reinforce definitions of deviance (Barmaki, 2017; Berk, 2015). The criteria for what constitutes deviance shift across historical and cultural contexts. Expanding on this framework, Link and Phelan (2014) introduced the concept of stigma power, emphasizing that stigmatization often serves as a means of social control that is used to keep certain groups "down," "out," or "away."

Much of the stigma literature has focused on either self-stigma or stigma related to mental illnesses (Crewe & Guyot Diangone, 2016; Link et al., 1989; Moore et al., 2013; Rüsch et al., 2005), with comparatively less research concerning stigma against people involved in criminal-legal activity. Of the research within this domain that does exist, the majority has focused mainly on those who were convicted for sexual crimes and studies on employment experiences after incarceration (Mingus & Burchfield, 2012; Pickett et al., 2013). The current study seeks to examine stigma—or devaluation beliefs—directed toward individuals who have committed a violent act, in order to assess stigmatizing attitudes prior to any formal criminal intervention or labeling. This approach isolates perceptions based solely on the act itself rather than on subsequent legal designations. Hegarty and Golden (2008) found that participants who initially held more prejudicial beliefs were more likely to view stigmatized traits (homosexuality,

obesity, depression, and alcoholism) as controllable, even after exposure to information intended to reduce bias. These findings suggest that lower levels of empathy may be associated with stronger stigmatizing attitudes, manifesting through processes such as labeling and discrimination, which align closely with retributive justice orientations (Hegarty & Golden, 2008; Johnson, 2009; Levinson et al., 2019).

To examine the issue of labels derived from one's engagement in presumed criminal legal activity and subsequent collateral consequences of having been incarcerated, researchers have investigated public policies that would impact formerly incarcerated individuals diagnosed with mental illnesses' access to resources across conviction types (Kirk & Wakefield, 2018; Pogorzelski et al., 2005). Research has found that individuals with criminal records who required behavioral health resources, especially those who were convicted of a violent offense, were more likely to face challenges finding agencies and programs that were willing to help them. This was primarily due to concerns about staff being unequipped to handle violent actions and the liabilities that are associated with violent clients. This study demonstrated how individuals convicted of violent acts are persistently thought of as violent. Regardless of whether they engaged in such behavior again, the label of "violent" followed them long after they've engaged in the act (Pogorzelski et al., 2005). A similar study found that the presence of violent offense conviction on one's record tended to overshadow positive qualities that individuals possessed, such as meeting skill qualifications (Cerda et al., 2015). Together, these studies demonstrate how stigma may begin at the cognitive level but has real consequences for stigmatized individuals based on preconceived or internal attitudes, notions, and discrimination that are then carried out into external behavior and actions. Understanding how these cognitive and affective processes

shape responses to wrongdoing provides a foundation for examining broader justice orientations—particularly the contrast between retributive and restorative approaches to justice.

Retributive and Restorative Justice Orientations

Retributive justice orientations reflect beliefs about crime that prioritize punishment of the wrongdoer as a means of restoring fairness and moral balance (Saulnier & Sivasubramaniam, 2015). Such orientations emphasize sanctions that deprive the wrongdoer of individuality and autonomy and often involve the endorsement of punitive measures intended to elicit shame or humiliation (Okimoto et al., 2012). Retributive orientations have also been linked to social dominance orientation—an ideology that legitimizes group-based hierarchies and discrimination—as well as higher levels of group-based dominance, right-wing authoritarianism (RWA), and personality traits reflecting self-focus and entitlement, such as narcissism (Colémont et al., 2011; Gerber, 2021; Gerber & Jackson, 2016; Okimoto et al., 2012). RWA beliefs in particular emphasize submission to authority and aggression towards those who violate social norms (Colémont et al., 2011). Therefore those who endorse higher RWA beliefs tend to also support capital punishment, longer sentences, and retributive attitudes. RWA has been found to be a consistent predictor of punitive and retributive attitudes across the literature (McKee & Feather, 2008). Research suggests that individuals who endorse these characteristics are more likely to believe that achieving justice requires the infliction of harm, suffering, or punishment on the wrongdoer (Gerber, 2021).

Restorative justice orientations, on the other hand, focus more on repairing relationships between the wrongdoer, the victim, and the community (Moss et al., 2019). Restorative justice aims to provide opportunities to address harm and find solace for the victim and communities, as well as giving the wrongdoer an opportunity to better themselves and reconcile with the

person(s) they've harmed (Ahlin et al., 2015; Moss et al., 2019; Saulnier & Sivasubramaniam, 2015; Taylor & Bailey, 2021). Modes of restorative justice include restorative circles and mediated meetings between the victim, wrongdoer, and other members of the community (Ahlin et al., 2015; Saulnier & Sivasubramaniam, 2015). Restorative justice orientations are not as prevalent as retributive attitudes, but as of 2020, there were 264 laws referencing or adhering to restorative justice orientations across 45 states (Bauguess & Villaseñor, 2025). Across crime types – violent, property, personal, and minor offenses – restorative justice practices have been shown to reduce PTSD symptomology and desire for violent revenge in victims (Conway, 2024; Nascimento et al., 2022). Restorative justice orientations have been linked to greater empathy and belief in people's ability to change, as well as a lower endorsement of just world beliefs (Moss et al., 2015; Stern et al., 2025; Taylor & Bailey, 2021).

Numerous studies have identified violent crime as a strong predictor of support for punitive attitudes (Gerber, 2021; O'Hear & Wheelock, 2020). Wanner and Caputo (1987) found that the primary factor influencing participants' punitiveness was whether the crime involved violence, with violent offenses eliciting significantly harsher responses. These patterns reflect the tendency for individuals to attribute greater harm and moral severity to violent acts. Consistent with this reasoning, research also indicates that people are more likely to endorse rehabilitative or restorative approaches when responding to nonviolent crimes (Tajalli et al., 2012). There have been mixed results on whether cisgender men or women tend to be more punitive (Gerber, 2021; Haghigi & Lopez, 1998), but studies have consistently shown that White people tend to be more punitive than Black people, and that people with higher education tend to be slightly less punitive than people with lesser education (Gerber, 2021). There is also mixed evidence on whether fear of crime is significantly associated with punitiveness (e.g., Shi, 2022; Wanner &

Caputo, 1987). The existing research suggests that anger plays an important role in shaping punitive attitudes, as perceived norm violations lead to negative emotional arousal (i.e., increased anger), which in turn leads to increased desire for punishment (Johnson, 2009; Wanner & Caputo, 1987). This is supported by research that suggests that sanctions and punishments are designed to provoke an emotional reaction (Hartnagel & Templeton, 2012). Other factors that have been consistently associated with punitive attitudes were causal attributions of crime, political conservatism, and racial prejudice (Johnson, 2009; Unnever & Cullen, 2009; Tajalli et al., 2012).

One study looked at determinants of punitive attitudes in college students by asking them to rate their degree of support for sanctions that were either rehabilitative or punitive (Tajalli et al., 2012). Students from two different universities were presented with six different crime vignettes, and researchers found that the strongest predictor of punitive attitudes was the participants' ideology. Political conservatism was found to be the strongest predictor of punitive attitudes. Additionally, participants with an increased fear of victimization had greater punitive attitudes for most of the crime scenarios; however, experience of victimization did not predict inclinations toward harsher punishments (Tajalli et al., 2012). These findings provide support for previous studies, but also do not explain the mechanism by which certain characteristics predict more punitive attitudes. The current study aims to understand the cognitive factors and traits that influence the decision-making process behind endorsing support for retributive or restorative orientations.

Significance of the Study

Understanding how empathy shapes support for retributive and restorative justice orientations is critical, as these moral frameworks influence public attitudes toward punishment

and rehabilitation. Equally important is examining the role of stigma as a potential mediator in this relationship, given that both systemic and personally held stigmas can translate into real-world consequences for how justice is enacted and experienced. Indeed, studies have shown that the presence of a violent offense on one's criminal record often overshadows other positive qualities an individual may present, which impacts employment and access to health resources (Cerda et al., 2015; Denver et al., 2017; Porgorzelski et al., 2005).

Additionally, this study sought to advance understanding of how and why the effects of stigmatization emerge. Although prior research has primarily examined stigma associated with formal criminal labels such as having a record or being identified as an "ex-con" (Denver et al., 2017; Pogorzelski et al., 2005), the present study focused on justice orientations in response to a violent act independent of any legal designation. This approach offered a unique lens through which to explore how stigmatic attitudes form and how these perceptions influence preferences for different justice responses, including the endorsement of punitive or restorative sanctions. Most importantly, this study sought to provide foundational evidence to inform interventions aimed at reducing retributive attitudes. By examining the role of stigma—both as a direct correlate of justice orientations and as a mediator in the empathy–justice relationship—this work helps determine whether stigma-reduction efforts may effectively diminish punitive responses. Prior research has shown that empathy-based interventions can significantly reduce stigmatizing attitudes (Batson et al., 1997; Clinton & Pollini, 2021), underscoring the importance of extending this understanding to justice contexts. Exploring the multiple pathways that shape restorative and retributive orientations is essential for advancing efforts to transform the punitive trajectory of the U.S. carceral system.

Understanding the determinants of restorative attitudes are also important, as most research focuses primarily on retributive thinking. Restorative justice practices have been found to reduce recidivism rates, increase wrongdoer and victim satisfaction with outcomes, and reduce incarcerations and their subsequent costs (Menkel-Meadow, 2007). However, these findings are highly dependent on how restorative based practices are implemented (delay between incident and judgement, equal granting of voice, etc.) and in which scenarios (high expectations, high severity). Given the current direction of the U.S. and its seeming return to more punitive sanctions that disproportionately impact people of color (Pettit & Gutierrez, 2018), understanding the contributors of restorative thinking are vital to meaningfully implement and support restorative policies in the real world. This study sought to advance the conceptualization and development of restorative justice practices, which may be useful for future studies and intervention implementations.

The Present Study

Previous literature has aimed to understand the processes and mechanisms through which punitive attitudes occur, finding predictors such as racial prejudice, political conservatism, and dispositional attribution styles to be significant contributors, but few have examined the roles of empathy or stigma in the formation of retributive and restorative justice attitudes (Johnson, 2009; Porgorzelski et al., 2005; Tajalli et al., 2012; Unnever & Cullen, 2009). The current study developed conceptual understanding of the processes that influence decision making as it relates to sentencing wrongdoers by examining the mechanistic links among empathy, stigma, and justice attitudes. The study addressed the following questions and hypotheses:

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between empathy and support for (a) retributive and (b) restorative justice?

Hypothesis 1a: It is hypothesized that there will be a significant and negative relationship between empathy and support for retributive justice, such that higher scores of empathy will be associated with lower support for retributive justice.

Hypothesis 1b: It is hypothesized that there will be a significant and positive relationship between empathy and support for restorative justice, such that higher scores of empathy will be associated with greater support for restorative justice.

Research Question 2: Is there a relationship between empathy and stigma (i.e., devaluation beliefs)?

Hypothesis 2: It is hypothesized that there will be a significant and negative relationship between empathy and stigma (i.e., devaluation beliefs), such that higher scores of empathy will be associated with a reduction in stigma scores.

Research Question 3: Is there a relationship between stigma and support for (a) retributive and (b) restorative justice?

Hypothesis 3a: It is hypothesized that there will be a significant and positive relationship between stigma and retributive justice, such that higher scores of stigma will be associated with an increase in retributive justice orientation scores.

Hypothesis 3b: It is hypothesized that there will be a significant and negative relationship between stigma and support for restorative justice, such that higher scores of stigma will be associated with decreased restorative justice orientation scores.

Research Question 4: Does stigma mediate the relationship between empathy and support for (a) retributive and (b) restorative justice?

Hypothesis 4a: It is hypothesized that stigma will mediate the relationship between empathy and support for retributive justice, such that lower scores of empathy will be associated

with higher scores of stigma, which in turn will be associated with higher retributive justice orientation scores.

Hypothesis 4b: It is hypothesized that stigma will mediate the relationship between empathy and support for restorative justice, such that higher scores of empathy will be associated with lower scores of stigma, which in turn will be associated with higher restorative justice orientation scores.

Figure 1.

Proposed Mediation Model for Relationships Between Empathy, Stigma, and Retributive Justice Orientations.

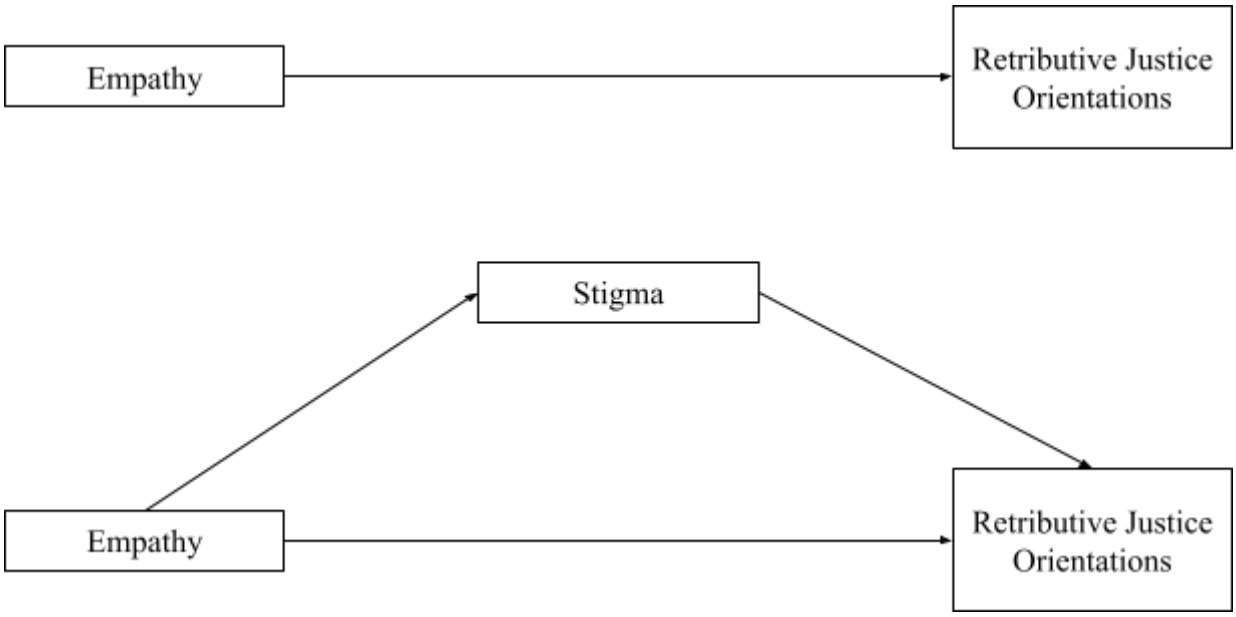
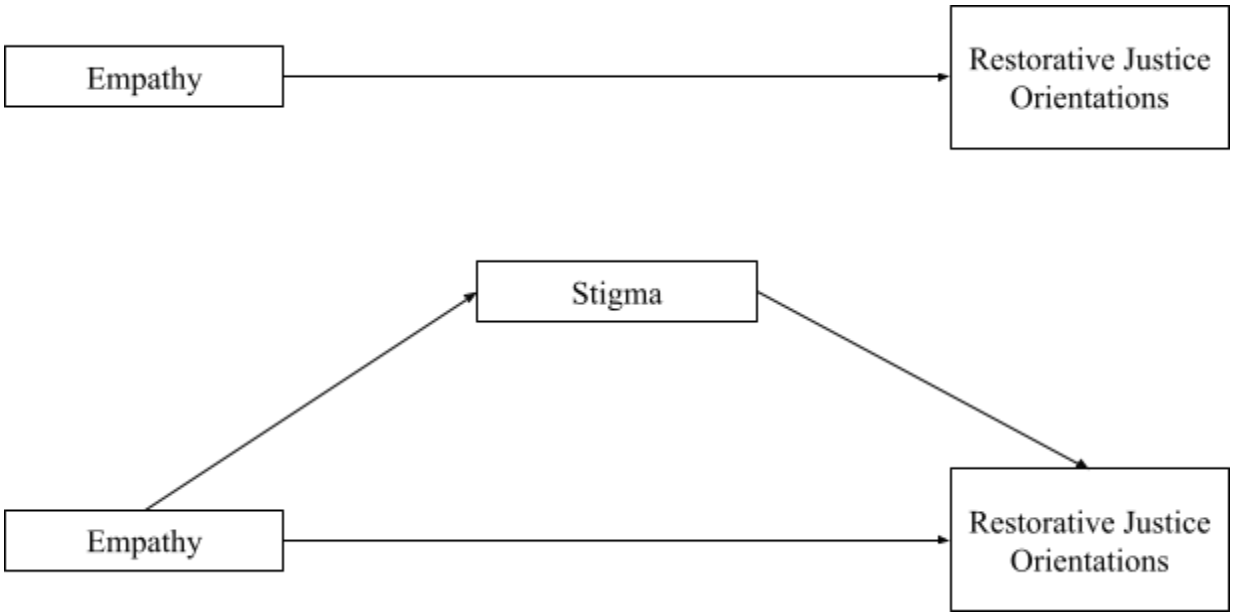


Figure 2.

Proposed Mediation Model for Relationships Between Empathy, Stigma, and Restorative Justice Orientations.



Justification of Causal Order

The basis for having empathy as our predictor variable that precedes both stigma and attitudes toward justice derives from previous studies. Researchers have investigated the mediating role of empathy in the relationship between race and punitive attitudes (Johnson et al., 2002). They found that White participants in the high empathy condition reported more lenient sentencing for Black defendants compared to the control group. Furthermore, Taylor and Bailey (2021) found empathy to be a significant predictor of retributive and restorative justice orientations. Many studies have found that perspective-taking conditions or interventions in which participants were exposed to either high perspective-taking conditions or to narratives of justice-involved individuals were found to have increased support for restorative justice and reduced endorsement of punitive sanctioning (Harney, 2023; Reddan et al., 2024; Rasmussen et

al., 2018). Collectively, these studies support the proposed model, suggesting that empathy may serve as a significant predictor of both restorative and retributive justice attitudes.

We further posit that empathy precedes and predicts stigma, influencing the degree to which individuals endorse stigmatizing beliefs and justice orientations. Clinton and Pollini (2021) found that empathy interventions were effective in reducing the amount of stigma participants held against individuals who inject drugs. Similarly, prior research found that inducing empathy led to more favorable attitudes toward individuals of stigmatized groups such as homeless people and people with AIDS (Batson et al., 1997). A study looking at state empathy specifically, found that empathy reduced cognitive stigma, which measured the devaluation beliefs participants held against stigmatized groups (Peng et al., 2020). Across each of these prior studies, experimental manipulations of empathy have consistently produced reductions in stigmatizing attitudes, supporting our model that positions empathy as a predictor of stigma. Although limited research has directly examined empathy's effect on stigma toward justice-involved individuals, there is little reason to expect that the mechanisms underlying stigma formation differ substantially from those observed in other stigmatized groups. Accordingly, a primary aim of the present study is to extend this body of literature by examining how empathy and stigma jointly contribute to the formation of restorative and retributive justice attitudes.

Although few studies have examined the relationship between stigma and justice attitudes directly, the combination of theory and prior research on similar concepts supports our model of stigma as a predictor of justice orientations. Attribution theory posits that within the occurrence of stigma, stereotyping and labeling precede the separation and alienation (treatment) of stigmatized individuals (Link & Phelan, 2001). According to this model, behavior toward

stigmatized individuals emerge following a cognitive appraisal process in which they are labeled and assigned negative traits. In this study, justice attitudes are conceptualized as the endorsement of particular emotions and actions toward an individual who has committed an act of harm. Thus, one's treatment of that individual is presumed to follow from prior cognitive appraisals and evaluative judgments. Additional support for the notion that stigma precedes the assignment of sanctions or punishment comes from research on related constructs. For instance, Viki et al. (2013) found that participants exposed to dehumanizing portrayals of outgroup members (i.e., low-humanity conditions) were significantly more willing to endorse torture compared to those in high-humanity conditions, illustrating how cognitive devaluation facilitates punitive responses.

As previously discussed, stigmatization involves processes of othering and devaluation that diminish the perceived worth of individuals, often leading to negative attributions, stereotyping, and even dehumanization (Hoogendoorn & Rodríguez, 2023). The aforementioned study illustrates how a construct closely related to stigma—dehumanization—can heighten punitive and harsh responses toward outgroup members. Another study examining dehumanization as it relates to justice outcomes found that dehumanization and moral outrage independently of crime type and severity predicted retributive attitudes, in addition to mediating the relationship between perceived harm and the severity of the punishment (Bastian et al., 2013). This study further highlights the role of dehumanizing or devaluation beliefs in the formation of retributive attitudes. Similarly, Imhoff and Jahnke (2017) found that participants who read vignettes describing individuals as "pedophiles" expressed stronger punitive attitudes than those exposed to descriptions using person-first language (e.g., "people with a sexual interest in children"). This finding underscores how labeling, as a mechanism of stigma, can

directly intensify punitive responses aligned with retributive justice orientations. Collectively, these studies, together with insights from stigma and attribution theory, support our model proposing that stigma precedes attitudes toward justice and punishment. The present study extends this framework by addressing gaps in research on stigma toward individuals who have committed violent acts and by examining how such stigma relates to retributive and restorative justice orientations.

Method

Participants

Participants were $n = 421$ individuals who met the following criteria in order to mimic a potential jury pool: (a) resided in the United States, (b) were at least 18 years old, and (c) could read English. Fritz & MacKinnon's suggested empirical estimates of sample sizes for a power of .80 were used to determine the number of participants needed (Fritz & MacKinnon, 2007). Within a known small-moderate *a* path (Okimoto et al, 2012; Taylor & Bailey, 2021) and an unknown but expected small *b* path, the suggested number of participants was 414. To account for data loss and missing responses, a maximum of 500 participants were to be recruited.

Initially, the survey received a total of 466 responses. 1 participant did not consent and 16 participants did not complete the survey, and were deleted. Furthermore, 5 participants failed the first attention check and 18 participants failed the second attention check, and were removed. There were 4 cases of duplicate responses (8 total responses), therefore responses from the same IP address that were recorded first were included and those recorded at a later time were deleted, resulting in the deletion of 4 more responses. Of those deleted duplicates, 2 of the responses completed the survey in under 3 minutes. Additionally, 1 more response was deleted during

assumption testing. In total, 45 responses were deleted, resulting in a total of 421 valid responses.

Participants ranged in age from 18 to 82, with the most common age group being 25-34 (27.79%), followed by 35-44 (26.60%), 45-54 (20.43%), 55+ (18.53%), with the smallest group being 18-24 year olds (6.65%). Participants were primarily White (30.17%) and Black (25.89%), with the sample consisting of participants who identified as Asian (19.00%), Latinx (14.01%), biracial or multiracial (7.13%), Native American/Alaskan Indian (1.90%), and Middle Eastern/North African (0.48%). Approximately 1.43% of participants identified as "Other". With regards to gender, 43.71% of the participants identified as cis-men, 48.93% identified as cis-women, with 1.43% identifying as transmen and 0.71% identifying as transwomen, and 2.38% identifying as nonbinary, third gender or, gender non-conforming. 2.85% of the participants identified as "Other". For the full demographic breakdown, see Table 1.

Procedures

After approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), participants were recruited through Prolific, a research survey panel firm. Participants accessed the study through an online Qualtrics survey. Participants were first asked to provide informed consent (See Appendix A), after which they completed validated survey measures and provided demographic data (such as age, race, gender, etc.). Participants completed a series of questionnaires assessing empathy, stigma, and justice orientations in response to a violent crime scenario. The empathy and stigma measures were counter-balanced throughout the survey to control for order effects. The measure of empathy also included an attention-check item in which participants were instructed to select "Strongly Agree". Participants read a vignette and completed corresponding measures assessing justice orientations. The vignette detailed a brief description of a violent offense, and participants

were asked to rate the perceived harm severity of the scenario. Participants also answered an attention/understanding check that read as follows: "What kind of item was the stranger holding: (A) Knife (B) Umbrella (C) Cane." Then, participants indicated their endorsement of and agreement with various justice orientations they consider appropriate for the crime. Finally, participants completed a measure assessing right-wing authoritarianism.

Participants received approximately $2 after completion of the 10 minute survey, though final compensation was determined by the recruitment platform (Prolific). This survey was voluntary and participants had the right to withdraw at any point by closing their browser.

Measures

Demographic Information. Information pertaining to the participants demographic characteristics was collected, including age, race, gender, sexual orientation, education, income, religious affiliation, political affiliation, and geographic location (See Appendix B).

Empathy. A modified version of The Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1983) was used as a multidimensional measure of empathy (See Appendix C). The measure consisted of 14-items obtaining statements that captured two different domains of empathy: perspective taking (7 items; e.g., "I try to look at everybody's side of a disagreement before I make a decision.") and empathic concern (7 items; e.g., "I am often quite touched by things that I see happen."), . Participants were asked to rate their agreeability to each statement on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The scores were summed so that higher scores indicate greater levels of empathy. The original scale also included measures for fantasy and personal distress, which were not included in the modified measure to focus on the aspects of empathy that pertain to attitudes relating to others. The scale's internal consistency has ranged from α = .71 to α = .77 in previous research (e.g., Davis, 1980). However, other studies have found

reliabilities of α = .78 and α = .80 for empathic concern and an α = .81 for perspective taking subscales (Sommerlad et al., 2021; Taylor & Bailey, 2022), demonstrating sufficient reliability. The internal consistency of the measure in the current study was α = .88, ω = 0.88.

Stigma. A modified version of the Devaluation/Discrimination Beliefs Scale (Winnick & Bodkin, 2008) was used as a measure of stigma (See Appendix D). The measure consisted of 12 items that described how people think of someone with a criminal record, for which participants rated their agreeability on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). The original scale was intended to measure anticipated stigma amongst individuals with a criminal record, however, the measure was modified so that the statements reflected the participants' beliefs about a person who has caused harm (e.g., change "Most people would feel that **having a criminal record** is a sign of personal failure" to "Most people would feel that **committing acts of harm** is a sign of personal failure.") The internal reliability of the scale is demonstrated by a reported alpha of α = .82. The scale also showed good predictive validity, as participants who endorsed greater devaluation beliefs also endorsed stigma management strategies such as secrecy and withdrawal (Winnick & Bodkin, 2008). The internal consistency of the measure in the current study was α = .83, ω = 0.84.

Vignette and Perceived Harm Severity. Participants read a vignette that stated the following: *Last Tuesday evening, a man was walking home from work during a heavy rainstorm. When he encountered a road closure along his usual route, he chose to take an unfamiliar, dimly lit side street. As he walked, he saw the silhouette of a stranger approaching from the opposite direction. The stranger appeared to be holding something long and sharp in his hand which was only an umbrella, though the man could not clearly make out what it was in the rain and darkness. Feeling startled, the man reacted abruptly. As the stranger drew closer, the man*

stepped forward and forcefully shoved him. The shove caused the stranger to fall backward hard onto the wet pavement, striking his head on the ground. The man who had caused the injury did not stop to check on him. Instead, he immediately turned away and hurried the rest of the way home. The vignette had a Flesch–Kincaid readability score of 71.7, corresponding to approximately a 7th-grade reading level (See Appendix E). Immediately after presentation of the vignette, participants were asked to rate the harm severity of the crime committed in the vignette scenario using a one question-item ("How severe do you perceive this incident to be?") (See Appendix F), which they will rate on a scale of 1 (low severity) to 100 (high severity), as used in previous studies (Taylor & Bailey, 2021). For the purposes of this study, harm severity was used as a validating/attention check measure, as well as to provide additional context to study results. Participants also completed the aforementioned attention check to ensure participants were paying attention to the survey items.

Justice Orientations. Retributive and restorative orientations were measured using a modified version of the Retributive and Restorative Justice Orientations Scale (Okimoto et al., 2012). The scale consisted of 12 items, 6 of which assessed retributive justice orientations ("As a matter of fairness, an offender should be penalized.") and 6 that assessed restorative justice orientations ("For justice to be reinstated, the affected parties need to achieve agreement about the values violated by an incident.") (See Appendix G). The language of the scale was adjusted in order to refer to the specific incident described in the vignette (e.g., change "The only way to restore justice is to punish an offender." to "The only way to restore justice is to punish **the** offender."). Additionally, some items were modified for clarity, so participants were not asked to answer from the perspective of the victim (e.g., change "To restore justice, the offender and I need to reaffirm consensus on our values and rules." to "To restore justice, the offender and **the**

victim need to reaffirm consensus on **their** values and rules."). Scores for items endorsing restorative justice orientations were summed such that higher scores indicated greater support for restorative justice. The same summation was done for retributive justice items, such that higher scores indicated greater support for retributive justice. Participants were instructed to consider the wrongdoer in the vignette when responding to statements and to rate their agreement on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The scale was found to have high internal reliability with a Cronbach's alpha range of .88 to .93 for retributive measures and a range of α = .83 to .85 for restorative justice measures across the three experiments in the study. The scale also showed predictive validity, as higher scores of retributive measures predicted greater support for punishment, while higher scores of restorative measures predicted reduced endorsement of punishment (Okimoto et al., 2012). Additionally, the measures showed high discriminant validity as the restorative orientation was not significantly correlated with narcissistic entitlement and RWA. The internal consistency of the retributive measure in the current study was α = .92, ω = 0.92, while internal consistency for the restorative measure was α = .82, ω = 0.83.

Right-Wing Authoritarianism. Also included in this study was the shortened version of the Right-Wing Authoritarian Scale (Rattazi et al., 2007), which only included the dimension of items for "authoritarian aggression and submission" (See Appendix H). The original scale also has a subset of items for "conservatism", but conservatism is not as highly correlated with punitiveness as traditional RWA attitudes, and was therefore not included. This measure is included as a control for justice orientations as RWA was found to be a strong predictor of punitive attitudes (Okimoto et al., 2012). The measure consists of 7-items that describe general sentiments toward the state of leadership and morality in America (e.g., "Obedience and respect

for authority are the most important values children should learn.”). Participants were asked to rate their agreeability to each statement on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The authoritarian aggression and submission subscale was found to have good reliability, with a Cronbach’s alpha of .72. The scale also demonstrated both discriminant and predictive validity, as researchers found that traits such as openness or agreeability did not positively correlate with RWA and participants that with higher RWA scores supported more punitive attitudes and traditional moral ideals (Ratazzi et al., 2007). The internal consistency of the measure in the current study was $\alpha = .94$, $\omega = 0.94$.

Data Preparation and Assumption Testing

Data cleaning procedures were first conducted using Microsoft Excel and all subsequent analyses were conducted using R (Version 2026.01.1). First, missing and duplicated IP address entries were identified and deleted ($n = 21$). Any participants that failed the attention checks were also deleted ($n = 23$). After data cleaning was completed, assumptions of the Generalized Linear Model were assessed, including linearity, independence of errors, normality, multicollinearity, and assessment of multivariate outliers.

First, Mahalanobis distance was calculated to check if multivariate outliers influenced the regression. Three participants exceeded the critical threshold, $\chi2(4, p < .001) = 18.47$, indicating they were multivariate outliers. For closer assessment, Cook’s distance was calculated to identify influential cases. Of the influential cases, one overlapped with exceeding Mahalanobis distance critical value, and was subsequently removed. Then, linearity was examined by reviewing scatterplots for the independent and dependent variables; the results show the plot distributed roughly in a straight diagonal line. Next, independence of errors was assessed through the Durbin-Watson test. A value close to 2 and a p-value > 0.05 provided sufficient evidence

suggesting no autocorrelation in the residuals and that independence was met for path *a* (*DW* = 2.0079, *p* = 0.533), path *b* for the retributive model (*DW* = 2.0377, *p* = 0.652), and the restorative model (*DW* = 1.8298, *p* = 0.0399). Although the significant *p*-value in the restorative model demonstrated a slight departure from independence, the *DW* value remained within a commonly accepted range of 1.5 to 2.5, suggesting that any existing autocorrelation is minimal and unlikely to have significantly biased the model estimates. Bootstrapping was used to estimate indirect effects, as it does not assume normality and provides more robust inference (Efron, 1979). Indirect pathways were evaluated using 10,000 resamples to obtain bootstrapped standard errors and 95th percentile confidence intervals (CIs). Additionally, to assess the assumption of homoscedasticity, residuals vs. fitted plots were inspected and suggested that the assumption of homoscedasticity was largely met. The residuals for the *a* path and both *b* paths were distributed with relatively constant variance across the range of fitted value. For further confirmation, the Breusch-Pagan test was conducted for each model, with a *p*-value greater than .05 supporting homoscedasticity for path *a* (*p* = 0.4916), and path *b* for the retributive model (*p* = 0.1644) and the restorative model (*p* = 0.1555). Lastly, a variance inflation factor (VIF) was conducted on each regression model to test for multicollinearity, of which little to no correlation was found between the variables in each model (<1.1).

Results

Preliminary Analysis

Means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and correlations among all study variables were calculated (See Table 2). A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to examine whether any key demographic characteristics (e.g., race, gender, age, etc.), RWA, or harm severity significantly influenced the principal variables of interest (empathy, stigma, and

justice orientations). Race, education level, and harm severity were shown to significantly predict stigma. However, RWA and harm severity were significant predictors across both justice orientations. Additionally, race and U.S. region were significantly associated with retributive justice, while age, sexual orientation, political affiliation, and region were significantly associated with restorative justice. Therefore, RWA, harm severity, race, region, age, sexual orientation, and political affiliation were included in the main analyses as covariates for their respective variables.

Main Analysis

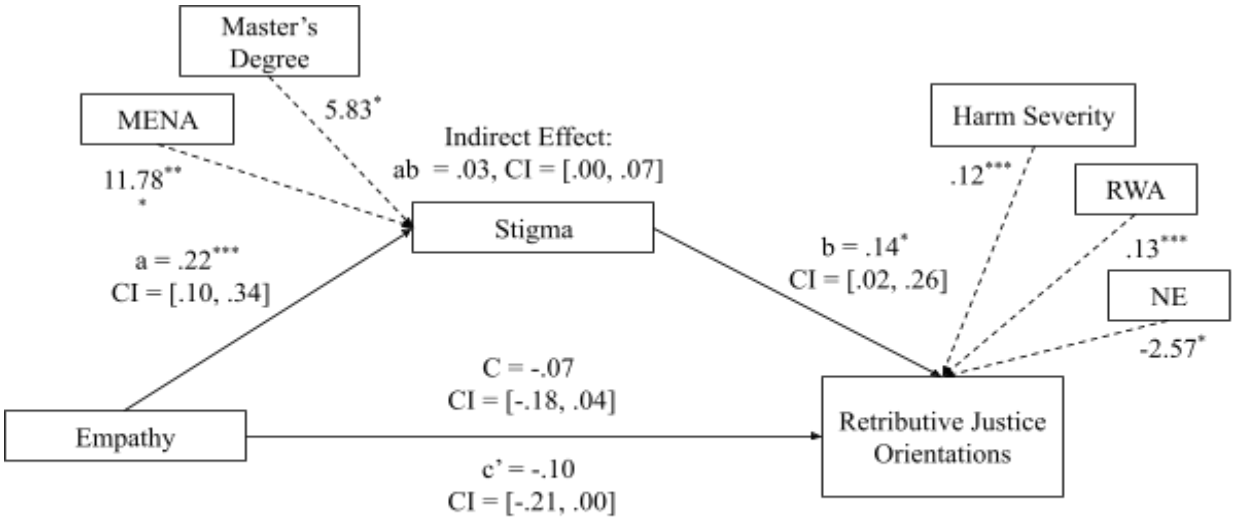
The PROCESS macro was used to conduct mediation analyses. EIV regression was implemented in PROCESS. After calculating McDonald's omega to obtain reliability estimates, the estimates were entered in PROCESS macro to obtain reliability-adjusted estimates. With the estimates adjusted for random measurement error, the regression coefficients for each pathway were calculated (Hayes et al., 2025). Two mediation models were fit to the data, one with retributive justice as the dependent variable and one with restorative justice as the dependent variable. The mediation models were both run twice, one without covariates and once with, with the directions and significance of the relationships being the same with the inclusion and exclusion of covariates. The below results discuss the mediation models including covariates to provide extra context to the results.

To assess hypotheses 1a, 2, 3a, and 4a an errors-in-variables (EIV) mediation analysis (Model 4) was conducted. Hypothesis 1a was not supported as the direct effect of empathy on retributive justice was negative and nonsignificant ($c = -.1026$, $p = .0522$), which was also the case for the total effect ($c' = -.0717$, *BootSE* = .0536, 95% CI [-.1760, .0351])). Hypothesis 2 was partially supported in the opposite direction, as results showed that empathy positively and

significantly predicted stigma (a = .2212, p = .0004). Regarding covariates, participants who identified as being of Middle Eastern or North African (MENA) descent were significant and positively predicted stigma (b_{MENA} = 11.7824, p < .0001), along with those whose highest level of education was a master's degree ($b_{master's}$ = 5.8286, p = .0299). In support of hypothesis 3a, stigma positively and significantly predicted retributive justice orientations (b = .1399, p = .0180). In partial support of hypothesis 4a, the analysis showed significant indirect effects of empathy on retributive justice through stigma (ab = .0309, *BootSE* = .0164, 95% CI [.0051, .0689]). In the total effect model, RWA (b_{RWA} = .1317, p < .0002) and harm severity (b_{sev} = .1226, p < .0001) both significantly and positively predicted retributive justice. On the other hand, identifying as being from the Northeast (NE) region of the United States was significantly and negatively correlated with retributive justice orientations (b_{NE} = -2.5739, p = .0326). The other covariate of demographic race was not significant.

Figure 3.

Results of Mediation for Relationships Between Empathy, Stigma, Retributive Justice Orientations, and Covariates.

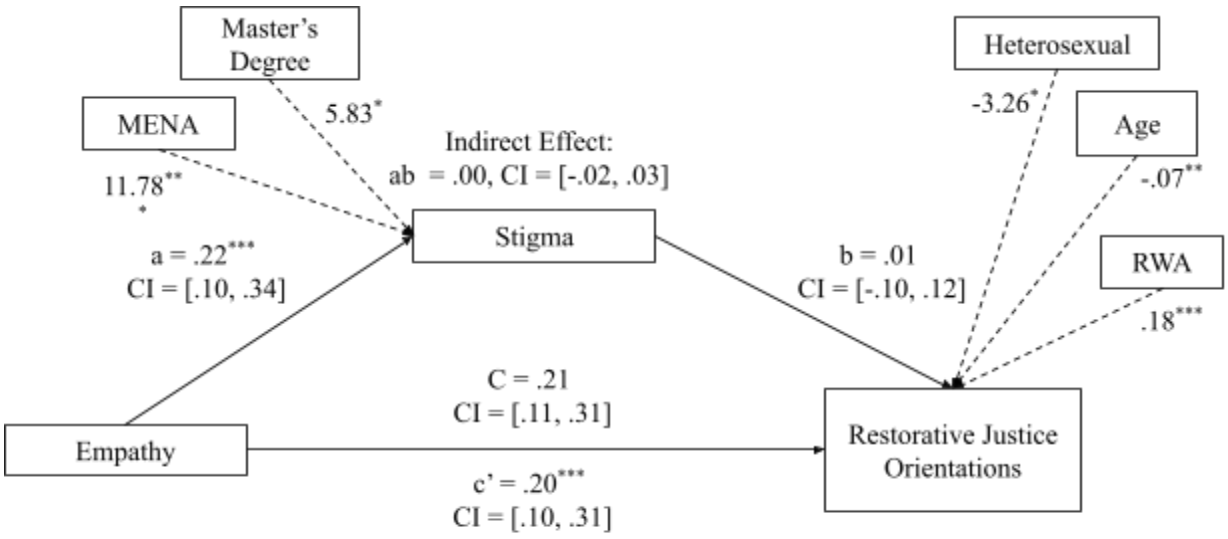


Note. $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $p^{***} < .001$, dashed line indicates covariates

Another EIV mediation analysis (Model 4) was run with restorative justice as the outcome variable. In support of hypothesis 1b, empathy positively and significantly predicted restorative justice orientations in the direct (c = .2028, p = .0002) and total effects (c' = .2050, *BootSE* = .0501, 95% CI [.1145, .3107]). Hypothesis 3b was not supported, as stigma was not significantly associated with restorative justice orientations (b = .0101, p = .8528). In the total effect model, RWA was a positive and significant predictor (b_{RWA} = .1830, p < .0001) ,while age (b_{age} = −.0740, p = .0040) and identifying as heterosexual (b_{het} = −3.2624, p = .0404) were negative predictors of restorative justice, while harm severity (b_{sev} = .0211, p = .2045), political affiliation and demographic region were not significant predictors. Hypothesis 4b was also not supported, as the indirect effects of empathy on restorative justice through stigma were not significant (ab = .0022, *BootSE* = .0124, 95% CI [-.0220, .0283]).

Figure 4.

Results of Mediation for Relationships Between Empathy, Stigma, Restorative Justice Orientations, and Covariates.



Note. $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$, dashed line indicates covariates

Discussion

This study sought to understand the roles of empathy and stigma as they relate to justice-related decision-making. It was hypothesized that there would be a significant and negative relationship between empathy and retributive justice, however results showed that this association was not significant. Results supported the hypothesis that there would be a significant and positive relationship between empathy and restorative justice. It was also hypothesized that empathy would have a significant and inverse relationship with stigma, but the results showed a significant and positive relationship. Additionally, it was hypothesized that increased scores of stigma would be associated with increased scores of retributive justice orientations, which was supported. However, the results did not support the hypothesis of a significant negative relationship between stigma and restorative justice orientations. Furthermore, it was hypothesized that stigma would significantly mediate the relationship between empathy and retributive justice, such that higher empathy scores would be associated with a decrease in stigma scores, which would then result in decreased support for retributive justice. Stigma was found to mediate the relationship through inconsistent mediation, where empathy increased stigma and stigma increased retributive justice but empathy and retributive justice were still negatively correlated. Finally, it was hypothesized that stigma would mediate the relationship between empathy and restorative justice, such that higher scores of empathy would be associated with lower scores of stigma which would then be associated with higher scores of restorative justice. Stigma was not found to be a significant mediator in the relationship between empathy and restorative justice. The results from this study suggest a complex cognitive process in which distinct effects of empathy and stigma on restorative and retributive justice orientations occur.

Considering the retributive model, the data suggested a mediation where empathy positively predicted stigma, but only influenced retributive justice orientations through its influence on stigma. Other researchers have previously found a significant and negative relationship between empathy and retributive justice orientations (Harney, 2023; Reddan et al., 2024; Taylor & Bailey, 2021) as well as stigma (Batson et al., 1997; Clinton & Pollini, 2021; Peng et al., 2020). However, these findings suggest a moral amplification pathway in which empathy can heighten perceptions of harm and moral concern, along with increased sensitivity to norm violation, all of which can lead to increased perceptions of stigma and stronger support for retributive justice (Cameron et al., 2022; Camara et al., 2025). People high in empathy may be more attuned to perceived social norms and emotional reactions concerning people who commit acts of harm. This, along with the dispositional nature of the empathy measure and the target not being specified, may have depicted feelings of empathy that defaulted to a more empathic response to the victim in the scenario. Results from the retributive model suggest that people higher in empathy tend to endorse fewer retributive justice orientations, but the protective effect of empathy is counteracted by the more influential extent to which empathy increases stigma.

Participants who scored higher in stigma were more likely to endorse more favorable perceptions of retributive justice orientations. To this writer's knowledge, no other studies have looked directly at the relationship between stigma against individuals who have committed acts of harm and retributive justice. However, studies that examined related concepts to stigma, such as dehumanization or the effects of labeling, found harsh labeling and dehumanization conditions to be associated with greater punitive outcomes (Hoogendoorn & Rodríguez, 2023; Viki et al., 2013). Therefore, the results of this study support existing literature pertaining to the role of negative attributions in punitive decision-making.

With regards to the covariates in the model, stigma was influenced by empathy, identifying as someone of MENA descent, and having obtained a master's degree as the highest level of education. With regards to the MENA covariate, only n = 2 participants out of 421 participants identified as MENA, with an average stigma score between the two being 67 (out of 72). Therefore, there isn't enough data with MENA participants to confirm whether this association is significant. Similarly, those participants who obtained a masters as their highest educational degree demonstrated attitudes that were positively associated with greater stigma endorsement compared to that of participants who had completed some high school. Retributive justice orientations were significantly and positively influenced by RWA, harm severity, and being from states in the Northeast. This suggests that individuals who perceived the vignette in the scenario as more harmful were more supportive of retributive justice orientations, similar to individuals who were higher in RWA. This is consistent with prior literature that found RWA to be linked to punitiveness (Gerber, 2021; Okimoto et al., 2012), and the concept of empathic blame, or the impact of perceived suffering on the judgement of a wrongdoer (Patil et al., 2017). The finding that being from the Northeast region of the United States is negatively correlated with stigma is consistent with prior literature and demographic statistics that show the Northeast region having the lowest incarceration rate and implementing progressive prison policies (The Sentencing Project, n.d).

The dual role of empathy is further demonstrated in the restorative model. The findings suggested that there was no mediation present, as empathy positively predicted restorative justice orientations but stigma was not a significant predictor. This finding that empathy was positively correlated with restorative justice is consistent with prior research that found a positive relationship between empathy and restorative justice (Ciofu et al., 2026; Taylor & Bailey, 2021).

The results suggest that stigma, as a cognitive process, may not necessarily influence individuals' attitudes about restorative justice-based sanctions. As previously mentioned, stigma has not previously been examined in the context of justice orientations, therefore outcomes may vary upon further examination. However, the findings further support the notion of competing empathy pathways and justice orientations as multidimensional and layered. The prosocial or relationship-repair oriented empathy pathway is well established and similar to the existing empathy-altruism hypothesis, in which individuals higher in empathy tend to endorse more helping behaviors and desires (Cameron et al., 2022; Eisenberg et al., 2010). Thus, the model illustrates how individuals higher in empathy tend to be higher in openness and willingness to restore relationships, independent of stigmatic attitudes.

Pertaining to the restorative model, significant covariates were age, heterosexuality and RWA, such that greater age and identifying as heterosexual were associated with lower scores of restorative justice and higher scores of RWA were associated with higher scores of restorative justice. Age has more often been examined in its positive relationship to punitive or retributive attitudes (Tajalli et al., 2012). Prior research has found that essentialists or fixed beliefs about individuals tend to increase with age, which opposes the change and growth-oriented values of restorative justice (Tam et al., 2009). Heterosexuality in this case is measured as being more significant compared to the baseline of individuals who selected "Other" as their sexual orientation (n=17). Previous literature has not examined heterosexual identity and restorative justice specifically, but have found non-heterosexuals and heterosexuals to have similar levels of punitive attitudes pertaining to the death penalty (Worthen et al., 2012). The same study found the relationship between sexuality and support for capital punishment to be mediated by empathic concern. Heterosexuals had the greatest range and lowest minimum, along with the

greatest average, score for empathy. It is possible that participants that identified as heterosexual and scored low on empathy endorsed fewer restorative justice attitudes. Although RWA is typically associated with punitive attitudes and lower support for restorative orientations (Colémont et al., 2011; Mckee & Feather, 2008), these results suggest that restorative justice may not be uniformly perceived as lenient or incompatible with authoritarian values. Meaning, individuals higher in RWA may support restorative justice when it is perceived as a mechanism for repairing social disruption, promoting accountability, and facilitating the reintegration of offenders into established social hierarchies (Gromet & Darley, 2011; Wenzel & Thielmann, 2017). From this perspective, restorative practices may be viewed not as alternatives to punishment, but as compatible strategies that reinforce conformity and reduce future deviance.

The results of this study highlight the importance of conceptualizing justice orientations as multidimensional and context-dependent, suggesting that support for restorative justice can emerge from both prosocial and order-maintenance motivations (Colémont et al., 2011). It is important to note, that these findings were in the context of responding to a violent crime scenario, which may have affected the dual endorsement of retributive and restorative attitudes. Additionally, the study demonstrates the unique ways in which empathy, particularly when the target is unspecified, can contribute to different cognitive pathways.

Implications and Future Directions

The findings from this study provide important direction for future research while also advancing the conceptual understanding of retributive and restorative justice. This study suggests that empathy simultaneously fuels both moral condemnation (i.e., norm violation) and prosocial (i.e., harm repair) motivations. This pattern is reflected in the nonsignificant indirect effects observed in the restorative model: although empathy was positively associated with stigma,

stigma did not contribute to the motivational pathway leading to restorative orientations. Therefore, the moral amplification framework emphasizes the importance of target-specific empathy measures and interventions, as interventions aiming to increase unspecified-empathy can actually result in greater stigma toward individuals who commit acts of harm. Future studies examining justice orientations should more accurately examine target-specific empathy and target-specific stigma to better understand the exact influences of empathy as a context-dependent concept. There are also additional implications for intervention development. Future studies should reexamine both the retributive and restorative models by deploying target-specific empathy measures. The findings of this study demonstrate the need for multidimensional intervention practices, where the different motivational pathways for retributive and restorative justice are addressed. Therefore, target-specific empathy interventions should be used to motivate the restorative pathway and stigma reduction interventions should be used to reduce the retributive pathways.

The findings that public stigma directly influences retributive justice and empathy directly influences restorative justice suggest that justice orientations are moral orthogonal concepts that are influenced by distinct psychological factors and are not exclusive (Okimoto et al., 2012; Wiltermuth et al., 2010). While retributive and restorative justice orientations are often conceptualized as the opposite ends of a continuum, this framework instead posits each orientation as multidimensional attitudes that can be held simultaneously and independent of each other. Therefore, those who support restorative orientations would not necessarily be less supportive of retributive orientations. A study examining the neural basis for moral inferences found four independent dimensions of moral inference, supporting our finding of independent and simultaneous varied justice attitudes (Chen et al., 2026) Furthermore, the results of this study

are consistent with moral foundations theory that describes five distinct primary moral foundations (care–harm, fairness–justice, loyalty–betrayal, authority–subversion, and sanctity–degradation) that independently influence moral judgements (Doğruyol et al., 2019). This notion that retributive and restorative justice are orthogonal concepts are also supported by the data, as retributive justice and restorative justice did not predict each other. This conceptualization of justice orientations is vital to understanding how the shift to restorative justice based practices and attitudes does not automatically mean a reduction in retributive based practices. Theoretically it is possible for an individual to have a greater sense of justice, scoring high on both restorative and retributive orientations. This would manifest as someone who believes in the importance of accountability and acknowledgement of wrongdoing, as well as the need for incapacitation and deterrence. Therefore, previous studies in which participants were asked to choose between one orientation or the other should be reexamined in light of findings that both modes of thinking can be held simultaneously.

Future research would benefit from disentangling the targets of empathy, as well as examining moderating factors such as moral emotions, beliefs about wrongdoer change, and ideological commitments, to better understand when empathy promotes condemnation versus restoration. As this study was one of the first to examine the direct relationship between stigma and justice orientations, future studies should reexamine the relationships to better establish an understanding of stigma's role in justice-oriented thinking and determine whether the results are replicable or not. Additionally, this study examined empathy, stigma, and justice orientations in a relatively neutral violent crime scenario where the violence was reactive as opposed to premeditated. The type of crime depicted in the scenario, the culpability of the wrongdoer, as well as the severity of the offense, may impact the mechanistic link between the principal

variables. The implications and findings from this study would be most pertinent to Black and Latinx communities that are most impacted by the criminal legal system. Therefore, future studies should explicitly mention and examine race as a factor and influence on sanctioning. Studies that manipulate the crime scenario and race of both the wrongdoer and victim would allow researchers to understand if stigma and prejudice work distinctly or together to influence justice attitudes.

Although our sample was pooled from the general U.S. population, a study on a wider scale with a greater sample size should be conducted to reevaluate the findings of this study. Participant data pertaining to race, age, sexual orientation, etc., was collected but data on previous experiences of stigma or discrimination on the basis of sex, race, sexual orientation, and justice involvement was not collected. Including these variables would add nuance to the variation in experience, perception, and presentation of stigma based on the intersectionality of participant's demographic identities. Previous studies have shown that for some ethnic minorities, primarily Black and Latinx individuals, their experiences of racial stigma were more harmful or impactful than their experiences of criminal-legal stigma (Moore et al., 2024), therefore examining how one's experience of stigma impacts their perception of stigma would further clarify the results of the study. While mass incarceration and punitiveness continue to increase in the U.S., other Western countries show movement away from retributive policies (Cohen, 2021; Prison Policy Initiative, 2025; Romero-Seseña, 2025). A cross national study that examines the justice attitudes of people from other countries – such as Sweden, London, and Norway – would aid in examining whether the cognitive processes found in this study are consistent across countries. In relation to regional differences, future studies should also seek to explore the role of public policy in the formation of justice attitudes. These studies would be

particularly beneficial if the order in which justice attitudes and public policy affect each other could be determined.

Limitations

It is important to consider the findings of this study in the context of its limitations. First, the measures used in the study were adapted from existing scales to fit the needs of this study. It is possible that the scales used did not accurately capture the intended concepts. Particularly, the use of "most people" in the modified *Devaluation Beliefs Scale* may not have accurately captured people's personal beliefs, instead measuring their perception of existing social stigma held by their communities or society. Furthermore, empathy and stigma in this study were not target-specific, despite both constructs being highly variable depending on their context. These constructs were examined globally to mimic the varying characteristics and beliefs of juror members before they are exposed to the details of the case. However, the outcomes and findings may be more pertinent or accurate when measured specifically for beliefs about the wrongdoer/victim. Peng et al., (2020) highlighted the importance of state empathy – the context-dependent and target specific aspects – in social stigma, while this study examined empathy as a trait attribute. This can be accomplished by reordering the measures and presenting the vignette first, followed by measuring every construct with regards to the individuals in the vignette. Concerning the actual crime scenario, race was not explicitly mentioned, leaving room for implicit biases and assumptions about the race of the wrongdoer and victim to influence results. Deploying a mixed methods design in which participants can name their assumptions would be helpful, or alternatively specifying demographic details of the characters in the vignette. This study also utilized surveys in a remote setting, so there was no way to validate the responses of participants. Translating this study into an experimental context where stigma and

empathy are manipulated (via interventions or primers) may provide better insight into the decision-making process. The findings of this study were supposed to provide insight into the justice attitudes of the general U.S. population, which would require a larger sample size, therefore generalizability is also a limitation of this research. Researchers may also benefit by looking at specific sub-populations that impact policy more. Lastly, due to the independent variables of empathy and stigma being measured rather than manipulated, this research cannot draw causal inferences from the results.

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to examine the different cognitive factors that influence or contribute to support for retributive and restorative justice orientations. More specifically, this study sought to examine the potential mediating role that stigma plays in the relationship between empathy and justice orientations. While not all of the proposed hypotheses were supported, the results provided meaningful insights into the cognitive processes behind justice-oriented thinking. Overall, this study found that retributive and restorative justice attitudes may be distinctly influenced by different cognitive factors, recontextualizing the way in which justice attitudes are measured and defined. Empathy was found to indirectly increase retributive attitudes through the mediating effects of stigma, emphasizing the need for research that examines different motivations and targets of empathy. Stigma was not a significant influence for restorative attitudes, with empathy directly contributing to increased restorative justice orientations, which illustrates the different cognitive processes that are most relevant to different types of justice-thinking. This study served to better understand the decision-making process as it relates to justice outcomes and improve the conceptualization of justice attitudes as a whole. It is our hope that this research will contribute to the foundational basis and

understanding of cognitive biases and decision-making, in addition to guiding intervention designed to reduce punitive attitudes and increase restorative justice orientations.

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Table 1

Demographics Characteristics Table

Sociodemographic Characteristics of Participants

Demographic	*n*	%
Age Group		
18–24	28	6.65
25–34	117	27.79
35–44	112	26.60
45–54	86	20.43
55+	78	18.53
Race		
White, non-Latinx	127	30.17
Black or African American	109	25.89
Latinx	59	14.01
Asian or Asian American	80	19.00
Biracial or Multiracial	30	7.13
Arab, Middle Eastern, or North African	2	0.48
Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, or American Indian	8	1.90
Other	6	1.43
Gender		
Cis Man	184	43.72
Cis Woman	206	48.93
Transman	6	1.43
Transwoman	3	0.71
Nonbinary, third gender, or nonconforming	10	2.38
Other	12	2.85
Sexual Orientation		
Heterosexual	330	78.38
Gay or Lesbian	21	4.99

Bisexual	46	10.93
Asexual	7	1.66
Other	17	4.04
Education		
Completed some high school	15	3.56
High school diploma or GED	80	19.00
Completed some college	106	25.18
Associate Degree	60	14.25
Bachelor's degree	103	24.47
Master's degree	36	8.55
Doctoral, or other professional degree	21	4.99
Income		
$0-$9,999	26	6.18
$10,000-$49,999	149	35.39
$50,000-$99,999	146	34.68
$100,000-$149,999	61	14.49
$150,000+	39	9.26
Religion		
Christianity	154	36.58
Catholicism	59	14.01
Islam	5	1.19
Judaism	2	0.48
Buddhism	16	3.80
Hinduism	2	0.48
None	151	35.87
Other	32	7.60
Political Affiliation		
Democrat	196	46.56
Republican	91	21.62

Independent	115	27.32
Libertarian	2	0.48
None	17	4.04
Region		
Midwest	77	18.29
Northeast	75	17.81
Southeast	137	32.54
Southwest	54	12.83
West	78	18.53

Table 2

Correlations, Means, Standard Deviations, and Reliabilities Among Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	*M*	*SD*	ω
Empathy	—	—	—	—	—	—	53.67	8.23	.88
Stigma	.212**	—	—	—	—	—	52.79	8.02	.84
RWA	-.136**	-.024**	—	—	—	—	22.95	11.40	.94
Restorative Justice	.194**	.039	-.134**	—	—	—	28.44	6.80	.92
Retributive Justice	-.055	.115*	.236**	.049	—	—	30.39	7.76	.83
Harm Severity	.153**	.099*	080.	.091	.358**	—	75.48	21.18	—

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$, ω = McDonald's omega

Appendix A

Consent Form

Institutional Review Board
1204 Marie Mount Hall ● 7814 Regents Drive ● College Park, MD 20742 ● 301-405-4212 ● irb@umd.edu

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Project Title	**Approaches to Punishment: Examining the Impact of Empathy and Stigma on Justice Attitudes**
Purpose of the Study	This research is being conducted by Terrill O. Taylor, PhD and Eman Azam at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because as a general member of the public, your participation will provide valuable insight into the development of retributive or restorative attitudes. The purpose of this research project is to understand the mechanisms behind decision-making processes as they pertain to punitive attitudes towards individuals who have engaged in harmdoing, particularly through the influence of empathy and presence of stigma.
Procedures	Survey Study Procedures: • Structure: After completion of the consent form, you will be invited to complete the survey. Following survey completion, you will be asked to provide your name and email address via a separate Qualtrics link which you will automatically be rerouted to at the end of the survey so • Duration: Completion of the survey should take approximately 12 minutes. • Content: The survey contains a variety of questions, including but not limited to, questions pertaining to demographic factors (age, race, gender and sexual orientation, etc.), as well as measures of empathy and stigma. The survey also includes a vignette in which a violent crime scenario is depicted, prior to a measure of participant's restorative/retributive attitudes in response to the vignette. The survey will end with a measure of right-wing authoritarianism.
Potential Risks and Discomforts	There are no risks from participating in this study, however, exposure to the vignette in which a violent crime scenario is described is based off of a real-life case and may produce mild discomfort.
Potential Benefits	There are no direct benefits from participating in this research. However, we hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of influences and contributors of punitive attitudes. Understanding whether stigma plays an important role in the development of these attitudes, will allow future research to target stigma in reducing retributive attitudes towards individuals who have engaged in harm.

Confidentiality	Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized by storing data in a secure location, e.g., a university affiliated Box account and a password protected computer. Should you participate in this study, the information you provide will be confidential. We will guard your confidentiality and protect all information about you and your participation in this study to the extent permitted by law. Confidentiality can only be broken if a study participant reports immediate harm to subjects or others. If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.
Compensation	You will receive _____. You will be responsible for any taxes assessed on the compensation. **NOTE**: Due to an increase in computer-automated respondents (i.e., bots) in scientific research, steps will be taken to ensure the validity of responses before compensation is processed. Participant IP addresses will be collected in Qualtrics for data quality purposes. IP addresses will be discarded at the conclusion of the study.
Right to Withdraw and Questions	Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify. If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigators: **Terrill O. Taylor, PhD** **2147K Biology-Psychology Building** **2094 Campus Dr.** **College Park, MD 20742** **totaylor@umd.edu** **(301) 405-5791** **Eman Azam** **eazam@umd.edu** **(443) 938-4300**
Participant Rights	If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: University of Maryland College Park

	Institutional Review Board Office 1204 Marie Mount Hall College Park, Maryland, 20742 E-mail: irb@umd.edu Telephone: 301-405-0678 For more information regarding participant rights, please visit: https://research.umd.edu/research-resources/research-compliance/institutional-review-board-irb/research-participants This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.	
Statement of Consent	Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form. If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.	
Signature and Date	**NAME OF PARTICIPANT** **[Please Print]**	
	SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT	
	DATE	

Appendix B

Demographic Information Questionnaire

Please enter your age (18-100).

Please select the race that best describes you.

- ☐ Arab, Middle Eastern, or North African
- ☐ Asian or Asian American
- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ Biracial or Multiracial
- ☐ Latinx
- ☐ Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, or American Indian
- ☐ White, non-Latinx
- ☐ Other []

Please select the option that best describes your gender.

- ☐ Cis man
- ☐ Cis woman
- ☐ Nonbinary, third gender, or nonconforming
- ☐ Transman
- ☐ Transwoman
- ☐ Other []

Please select the option that best describes your sexual orientation.

- ☐ Asexual
- ☐ Bisexual
- ☐ Gay or lesbian
- ☐ Heterosexual
- ☐ Other []

Please select the option that best describes your level of education.

- ☐ Completed some high school
- ☐ High school diploma or GED
- ☐ Completed some college
- ☐ Associates degree
- ☐ Bachelor's degree
- ☐ Master's degree
- ☐ Doctoral, or other professional degree

Please select the option that best describes your household income

- ☐ $0-$9,999
- ☐ $10,000-$49,999
- ☐ $50,000-$99,999
- ☐ $100-$149,999
- ☐ $150,000+

Please select the option that best describes your religious affiliations.

- ☐ Buddhism
- ☐ Catholicism
- ☐ Christianity
- ☐ Hinduism
- ☐ Islam
- ☐ Judaism
- ☐ None
- ☐ Other []

Please select the option that best describes your political affiliation.

- ☐ Democrat
- ☐ Republican
- ☐ Independent
- ☐ Libertarian
- ☐ None

Please select the location that best describes the geographical region you are from.

- ☐ Midwest
- ☐ Northeast
- ☐ Southeast
- ☐ Southwest
- ☐ West

Appendix C

Shortened Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1983)

The following statements inquire about your thoughts and feelings in a variety of situations. Please read each item and indicate how well it describes you by rating it on a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

1. I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me.
2. Sometimes I don't feel very sorry for other people when they are having problems. (-)
3. When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective toward them.
4. Other people's misfortunes do not usually disturb me a great deal. (-)
5. When I see someone being treated unfairly, I sometimes don't feel very much pity for them. (-)
6. I am often quite touched by things that I see happen.
7. I would describe myself as a pretty soft-hearted person.
8. I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the "other guy's" point of view. (-)
9. I try to look at everybody's side of a disagreement before I make a decision.
10. I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective.
11. If I'm sure I'm right about something, I don't waste much time listening to other people's arguments. (-)
12. I believe that there are two sides to every question and try to look at them both.
13. When I'm upset at someone, I usually try to "put myself in their shoes" for a while.
14. Before criticizing somebody, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place.

Appendix D

Modified Devaluation/Discrimination Beliefs Scale (Winnick & Bodkin, 2008)

The following statements describe various beliefs about people who have committed acts of harm. Please rank your agreeability with each item on a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 6 (Strongly Agree)..

1. Most people would accept someone who has committed acts of harm as a close friend.
2. Most people believe that someone who has committed acts of harm is just as smart as the average person.
3. Most people believe that someone who has committed acts of harm is just as trustworthy as the average person.
4. Most people would let a fully rehabilitated individual who has committed acts of harm take care of their children.
5. Most people feel that committing acts of harm is a sign of personal failure.
6. Most people would not accept someone who has committed acts of harm as a teacher in the public schools.
7. Most people think less of a person who has committed acts of harm.
8. Most employers will hire someone who has committed acts of harm if they are qualified for the job.
9. Most people in my community would treat someone who has committed acts of harm like anyone else.
10. Most women would not date someone who has committed acts of harm.
11. Most people will not take the opinions of someone who has committed acts of harm seriously.

12. Most employers prefer not to hire people who have committed acts of harm.

Appendix E

Violent Crime Scenario

Please read and consider the following scenario closely:

Last Tuesday evening, a man was walking home from work during a heavy rainstorm. When he encountered a road closure along his usual route, he chose to take an unfamiliar, dimly-lit side street. As he walked, he saw the silhouette of a stranger approaching from the opposite direction. The stranger appeared to be holding something long and sharp in his hand, which was only an umbrella, though the man could not clearly make out what it was in the rain and darkness. Feeling startled, the man reacted abruptly. As the stranger drew closer, the man stepped forward and forcefully shoved him. The shove caused the stranger to fall backward hard onto the wet pavement, striking his head on the ground. The man who had caused the injury did not stop to check on him. Instead, he immediately turned away and hurried the rest of the way home.

Appendix F

Measure of Harm Severity

On a scale from 0 to 100 with 100 being the highest, how severe or harmful do you perceive this incident to be?

Less harmful Most harmful

0 100

Appendix G

Concrete Justice-Restoring Intervention Response Statements (Okimoto et al., 2012)

Please think about the upperclassman you just read about in the vignette as the wrongdoer and respond to the following items indicating how well you agree with each statement. Please rate each statement on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

1. As a matter of fairness, the offender should be penalized.
2. The only way to restore justice is to punish the offender.
3. Justice will only be served when the offender is penalized.
4. Only a punishment restores the justice disrupted by the incident.
5. For the sake of justice, some degree of suffering has to be inflicted on the offender.
6. The offender deserves to be punished.
7. For justice to be reinstated, the affected parties need to achieve agreement about the values violated by the incident.
8. To restore justice, the offender and victim need to reaffirm consensus on their values and rules.
9. Without the offender's sincere acknowledgement of having acted inappropriately, the injustice is not completely restored.
10. A sense of justice requires that the offender and victim develop a shared understanding of the harm done by the incident.
11. Justice is restored when the offender has learnt to endorse the values violated by the incident.
12. For a sense of justice, we all - including the offender, the victim, and I - need to reaffirm our belief in shared values.

Appendix H

Shortened Right-Wing Authoritarianism Scale (Ratazzi et al., 2007)

The following statements describe ideals about governing and morality. Please respond to the following items by rating each statement on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

1. Our country desperately needs a mighty leader who will do what has to be done to destroy the radical new ways and sinfulness that are ruining us.
2. The majority of those who criticize proper authorities in government and religion only create useless doubt in people's minds.
3. The situation in our country is getting so serious, the strongest method would be justified if they eliminated the troublemakers and got us back to our true path.
4. What our country really needs instead of more "civil rights" is a good stiff dose of law and order.
5. Obedience and respect for authority are the most important values children should learn.
6. The fact of crime, sexual immorality and the recent public disorders all show we have to crack down harder on deviant groups and troublemakers, if we are going to save our moral standards and preserve law and order.
7. What our country needs most is disciplined citizens, following national leaders in unity.