Defendant and Juror Social Class and Age: Effects on Jurors' Perceptions of a Crime

by

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Abstract

The presence of a jury is intended to keep criminal trials fair and objective, but sometimes jurors' perceptions, biases, and beliefs in stereotypes affect verdicts. Defendant and juror characteristics such as social class and age, often lead to differing judgments and perceptions, but limited research has been done on the interaction between these characteristics. This study examines the effects defendant and juror social class and age have on perceptions of defendants. Results reveal that more people perceived defendants to be guilty than expected when defendants were of lower social class; lower social class defendants were perceived to be more likely to be falsely accused; younger defendants were seen as more blameworthy when they were rich; younger and wealthier jurors perceived defendants to be the most guilty; and when there is congruence between defendant and juror age and social class, jurors saw defendants as less blameworthy, more remorseful, and less likely to reoffend in the future. This research is important for future work as jurors' verdicts can have a huge impact on the life of defendants, so knowledge about the biasing effects of certain demographic characteristics can further the judicial system's goal of fairness and objectivity.

Keywords: age, blame, criminal, defendant, guilt, judgments, jury, jury consultant, perceptions, social class, stereotypes

Defendant and Juror Social Class and Age: Effects on Jurors' Perceptions of a Crime

The judicial system is grounded in the presumption of fairness and honesty. However, there are many other factors that may affect the verdicts and severity of punishments that defendants receive. These factors may be subtle and the jurors may not even know that they are being influenced by them. Oftentimes, the background and personal characteristics of a criminal or the juror can make a difference even though they do not have direct control over these aspects of their life. In other words, demographic characteristics can shape perceptions of criminality and guilt of a supposed perpetrator. Previous research examining some of these characteristics has demonstrated that factors such as race, social class, and age can influence perceptions of defendants. Below we examine some of this previous work and note a gap in the existing literature: Defendant social class and age have not been examined together. An interaction between these two variables may lead to different perceptions of defendants and the current research will examine this by looking at jurors' perceptions of defendants' perceived guilt, blame, likelihood of being falsely accused, character traits, and possible future behaviors.

Role of Defendant Characteristics

Defendant Race

Much of the previous work regarding the influence of defendant characteristics on perceptions of criminality and guilt has examined the role of defendant race. Previous work that has focused on race has shown that defendants' race alone can have an effect on jurors' verdicts (Forsterlee, Forsterlee, Horowitz, & King, 2006; Kelider, Knuycky, &

Cavrak, 2012; Sommers and Ellsworth, 2000; Stevenson, Sorenson, Smith, Sekely, & Dzwairo, 2009; Willis Esqueda, Espinoza, & Culhane, 2008).

For example, Sommers and Ellsworth (2000) found that American jurors are more likely to judge blacks more harshly, but only when racial issues are not blatant, as most American jurors try to be fair and just. Kelider, Knuycky, and Cavrak (2012) conducted a similar study and found that when jurors have low working memory capacity and are under greater cognitive stress, they are likely to judge black defendants more harshly than white defendants as demonstrated by greater confidence in guilty verdicts.

Effects of defendant race have also been present in simulated murder trials. Forsterlee, Forsterlee, Horowitz, and King (2006) presented four versions of a real trial transcript to White Australian jurors where race of a male defendant and female victim varied. Participants judged black defendants more harshly than white defendants as they imposed on them the severest sentences. Participants also judged white defendants who killed white victims most leniently.

Researchers also found racial effects when judging juvenile sex offenders (Stevenson, Sorenson, Smith, Sekely, & Dzwairo, 2009). Participants were more likely to support registering defendants as sex offenders when the defendants were white rather than black, yet this was only marginally significant. This work also examined participants' beliefs about the risk of the defendant reoffending and his danger to society. Researchers found that women were more likely to believe that the defendant was at a significantly higher risk of reoffending when the victim was white rather than black. However, the results also demonstrated that men believed the defendant to be a significantly greater danger to society when the defendant was black rather than white.

This study shows not only the effects of race alone, but also the effects of the interaction between race and gender on jurors' perceptions of defendants.

Other researchers have extended the examination of the effects of defendant race and have demonstrated that there is a unique interaction between race and the social class of a supposed perpetrator. For example, researchers found that Mexican Americans of low social class were judged more harshly than Mexican Americans of high social class or European Americans (Willis Esqueda, Espinoza, & Culhane, 2008), such that they were given more guilty verdicts and longer sentences. This research shows that one's social class coupled with racial differences can have an effect on jurors' verdicts, suggesting that there can be interactive effects between the demographic characteristics of defendants.

Building on this previous work examining the role of race in shaping perceptions, I now move to focusing on the demographic characteristics of specific interest to this research: Social Class and Age.

Defendant Social Class

Gleason and Harris (1976) found that the social class of a perpetrator affects jurors' verdicts. Those of lower social class were seen as more at fault than those of higher social class, but were not thought to be any more legally guilty. Those of lower social class were also seen as more morally wrong, but their actions were not seen as any more illegal than those of higher social class. Although guilt ratings were not significantly different between the two social classes, jurors may still be tempted to assign different punishments with different severities if given the option.

In addition to this, Osbourne and Rappaport (1985) examined the different effects of variables on sentence severity, such as type of murder (premeditated vs. unpremeditated), defendant race (black or white), and defendant social class (low or high). Of note, social class was the only variable that demonstrated a significant effect on sentence severity. Researchers found that mock jurors gave significantly longer sentences to low social class defendants than high social class defendants.

Similarly, Mazzella and Feingold (1994) found results that suggested the significant effects of social class on perceptions of guilt. In general, mock jurors were likely to find low social class defendants guiltier than high social class defendants. They also recommended greater punishments to low SES defendants. Additionally, significant results were found when examining social class in relation to specific crimes, such that jurors gave low social class defendants significantly greater punishments than high social class defendants for the crime of rape. It was also found that mock jurors perceived low social class defendants to be guiltier than high social class defendants for the crime of theft.

Mazzella and Feingold (2004) examined reasons why defendant social class affects perceptions of perpetrators and have found that traits such as low social class are overrepresented among perpetrators. Jurors often unconsciously find this characteristic relevant and are likely to assume perpetrators of low social class are guiltier than those of high social class as low social class is a known typical characteristic of criminals. Jurors may have less sympathy for individuals of low social class and recommend harsher punishments due to this negative stereotype.

This previous research, albeit somewhat limited, suggests the importance of further examining the role of social class in shaping perceptions of individuals facing criminal charges. What's more, given the previous work demonstrating the interactive effects between different defendant characteristics (e.g., Stevenson, Sorenson, Smith, Sekely, & Dzwairo, 2009; Willis Esqueda, Espinoza, & Culhane, 2008), social class may have a greater effect on these defendant perceptions when combined with another variable such as age.

Defendant Age

Research examining the role of defendant age in biasing perceptions of guilt and criminality has shown that when manipulating defendant age, there is no significant difference in juror ratings for older vs. younger defendants (Pozzulo, Dempsey, Maeder, & Allen, 2010). Although there was no significant difference in guilt ratings, mock jurors did believe that older defendants should be held more responsible for their crimes. So, it is possible that upon further study one would find that mock jurors would be more willing to give harsher punishments to these older defendants overall, and possibly when coupled with another biasing demographic characteristic, such as social class.

Additional research focusing on the effects of specific ages examined how perceptions might change if defendants were presented as 13, 15, 17, or 21 years old (Semple & Woody, 2011). In this work, mock jurors were asked to give verdicts and suggest sentences, and researchers found that 13 and 15 year olds were convicted less often than 17 and 21 year olds. The researchers found no significant differences in sentence recommendations across all four of the defendant ages.

Researchers have also looked for reasons why age affects jurors' perceptions. Loeffler and Lawson (2002) found that younger perpetrators are often assigned more lenient sentences as jurors believe they have a chance of a brighter, more successful, and more promising future. Tang and Nunez (2003) found that jurors' biases often play a role in the way they perceive defendants and it is common for jurors to expect older defendants to be more mature and accountable.

Taken together, this previous work examining the role of defendant social class and age suggests that combining these two variables may also lead to differing perceptions of defendants.

Defendant Age and Social Class

Specifically, previous work has examined the effects of defendant social class and the effects of defendant age separately, but research examining the two variables together is not well represented in the literature. The effects of defendant social class and age have been significant in many different studies, such that perceptions of guilt, blame, and perceptions of future behaviors have been affected. Thus, it is valuable to see how perceptions of the defendant or severity of given punishments change when these two factors are examined together. In general, the current research will examine the effects of age, social class, and the interaction between them and it is anticipated that these variables will have an effect on perceptions of guilt, blame, and other related outcomes.

Role of Participant Characteristics

In addition to examining the role of defendant characteristics in influencing perceptions of criminality and guilt, it is also important to examine the role that

participant characteristics might play. Research on jurors' own social class and age has been more limited, but these factors may also affect perceptions of a crime.

Juror Social Class

There have been some significant findings on the effects of juror social class on jurors' perceptions of criminals, yet much of this has not been conclusive. Keil and Vito (1991) found that higher income jurors judge criminals more harshly and are more supportive of severe punishments than low income jurors. However, Rebovich and Jiandani (2000) and Rebovich and Kane (2002) found that low income jurors judge white collar criminals more harshly than high income jurors. These differing interactions between social class and crime type show the need for continued study on this variable and the current research seeks to further explore if and when these differences in perceptions may emerge.

Juror Age

Work examining the effects of juror age on perceptions of defendants has demonstrated a small, but significant effect. For example, Sealy (1981) conducted a study to look for instances of juror bias. Two simulated trials (one relating to rape and one relating to theft) were presented to participants and they were asked to suggest verdicts. Although Sealy's findings were slim, he did find that people with favorable views towards the jury system were more likely to convict. But, more importantly, he also found a slight tendency for younger and older jurors to acquit. In other words, middle-aged jurors were more likely to judge perpetrators harshly. A study by Higgins, Heath, and Grannemann (2007) also looked at jurors' age and its effects on jurors' perceptions of criminals. Researchers found that older jurors believed the defendant was more

responsible for his/her situation and were more confident in their decisions compared to younger jurors. Although this work demonstrates only a slight tendency towards older jurors making more harsh judgments, it shows that additional future research in this area would be beneficial as jurors' age may play a role in jurors' perceptions depending on context or if it is combined with other factors such as their own social class.

Work examining the potential interactive effects of juror age with another important demographic characteristic has shown that age and gender of the jurors also influences their' verdicts' (Beckham, Spray, & Pietz, 2007). Men were more likely to choose the death penalty than women, with the exception of the youngest men. However, young women were more likely to select it than older women. This study showed that juror's age had a significant effect on sentencing in relation to gender, so it would be interesting to expand this to social class.

Put simply, it is anticipated that perceptions of defendants will be significantly affected by participant age, participant social class, and the interaction between these variables.

Current Research Hypotheses and Questions

Given the previous work, the current research specifically seeks to examine the role that both defendant and juror characteristics can have on relevant outcomes of perceived guilt and criminality. Specifically, it is hypothesized that:

1.) There will be a significant interaction of defendant social class and age, such that the severity of judgments as demonstrated by ratings of perceived guilt, blame, likelihood of being falsely accused, character, and possible future behaviors will depend on the interaction between the perpetrator's social class and age. Specifically, it is

hypothesized that a defendant who is older and of lower social class will receive the

harshest judgments, followed by a young defendant with low social class, followed by an

old defendant with high social class, and thus, a young defendant with high social class

will receive the most lenient judgments.

> a.) A main effect of defendant social class is hypothesized such that a
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> person of lower social class will be judged more harshly (regardless of
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> age) than a person of higher social class.
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> b.) A main effect of defendant age is also hypothesized such that older
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> perpetrators will be judged more harshly (regardless of social class) than
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> younger perpetrators.

2.) The current research also seeks to explore the question of how a jurors' own

age and social class might affect their perceptions of defendants. It is thought that jurors'

age and social class will affect jurors' perceptions, but because of the limited (and mixed)

previous research, no specific hypothesis is formed. However, because of the potential

influence of these factors, the effects of juror age and social class will be analyzed when

looking at the data.

In addition to examining the role of defendant and juror characteristics separately,

we also anticipate that congruence between defendant and juror social class and age will

affect perceptions of guilt. Specifically, research examining the effects of perceived

similarity on assessments of others has demonstrated that people often find others with

similar traits, attributes, and ideals to them more likeable and attractive (LaPrelle, Hoyle,

Insko, Bernthal, 1990). In other words, it is generally hypothesized that:

3.) When juror age and social class are similar to defendant age and social class,

jurors will judge defendants less harshly**.**

Method

Design and Procedure

This study was a 2 (Jim's Age: young vs. old) X 2 (Jim's Social Class: low vs.

high) between subjects design. Each participant was randomly assigned to one of the

four conditions by a story within a survey that manipulated the social class and age of the

supposed perpetrator of a crime (Jim). This was followed by a series of questions

designed to measure participant's perceptions of Jim and beliefs about his guilt and

criminality. The survey was posted on Amazon's Mechanical Turk Service from

December 2012 to January 2013. Participants who agreed to take the survey online were

instructed that they would read a short story and then answer several questions about that

story.

Study Procedure. Participants read about Jim, who was presented as either a 15-

or 30-year-old caterer or guest (the age and social class manipulations, respectively) at a

party hosted by a wealthy family, the Smiths. The story detailed how the Smiths had

hired a few caterers to help assist at their party and had also invited friends and family.

The participants were told that Mrs. Smith had tried on a necklace earlier in the night and

left it in the upstairs bathroom. At the end of the night Mrs. Smith noticed the necklace

was missing even though the party was downstairs. The police decided that someone

must have gone upstairs at some point during the night and after Mr. Smith provided a

physical description of a man he saw go upstairs during the party to a sketch artist, the

participants are told that the police then suspected it was Jim. Because of Jim's

resemblance to the picture drawn by the sketch artist, the police found probable cause to

bring Jim in for questioning. During questioning Jim said he went upstairs, but did not

see the necklace (see Appendix A for the complete story and manipulation).

Participants then responded to a few questions asking them whether they believe

Jim is guilty, whether they believe he could be falsely accused, and their confidence with

these decisions (details provided in the Measures section). After completing these

measures, the participants then read that the police found out that Jim tried to sell the

necklace at a pawnshop and Jim admitted his guilt. Participants then completed

additional questions regarding perceptions of Jim's guilt, character, motivations, and

beliefs about future behaviors. Finally, participants were asked a variety of demographic

questions, including questions about their own age and social class. After completing the

survey, participants were thanked and paid online.

Participants

There were 102 participants in this study who participated through Amazon's

Mechanical Turk service (40 males and 62 females). Through this service, people can

complete a variety of surveys and simple computer tasks for monetary compensation.

The age of participants varied from 19 to 66 with an average age of 39.4.   Social class

varied as well, with 1.9% of participants identifying their class as "upper class", 12.5% as

"upper-middle class", 30.8% as "middle class", 26% as "lower middle class", 20.2% as

"lower working class", and 6.7% identifying as "poverty level". The sample was 1.9%

Alaskan Native, 5.8% Asian, 6.7% Black or African American, 6.7% Hispanic or Latino,

and the majority of participants were white (76%).

The survey was formulated through Qulatrics.com and posted on the Mechanical Turk website and participants were paid 50 cents upon completion of the survey. Originally participants were only paid 25 cents, but because of slow data collection ($n=21$), compensation was increased to 50 cents after a couple of weeks[1].

Measures

After participants read the story about Jim and found out that the police suspected Jim to be the perpetrator, participants were asked to rate their guilt perceptions of Jim.

Perceived Guilt. Participants responded to whether or not they felt Jim was guilty and how confident they were with this decision. Participants selected either guilty or not guilty on the survey and were asked "How confident are you with this decision?" and rated their confidence with this decision on a scale of $1 - 7$ with 1 being the least confident and 7 being the most confident. To form the measure of perceived guilt, a composite variable of these two items was created, such that participants who had believed Jim was not guilty received negative scores for their confidence responses (their ratings were multiplied by -1), whereas participants who believed that Jim was guilty received positive scores for their confidence ratings. In other words, a participant indicating that they were very confident (e.g., 7) that Jim was not guilty, received a negative score (i.e., -7). Thus, the responses ranged on a scale from -7 to 7 with -7 representing the greatest confidence in perceptions of not guilty and 7 representing the greatest confidence in perceptions of guilt ($M = -.182$, $SD = 4.24$).

After answering these questions, participants were told that Jim admitted to stealing the necklace and selling it at a pawnshop, and were asked to respond to several

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[1] No significant differences on the outcomes of interest emerged between participants who were paid .25 cents and those who were paid .50 cents.

additional items: perceptions of blame, the likelihood that Jim could be falsely accused, assessments of Jim's character, and beliefs about future behaviors.

Blame. Participants were asked to rank on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) how they felt about the 2 statements that assessed how much blame they felt should be placed on Jim ("I believe that Jim is to blame for this crime" and "I believe that Jim's behavior was morally wrong"). There was a positive correlation between these 2 variables ($r = .49$, $p < .01$) so they were combined into one composite variable labeled Blame. Lower scores indicate perceptions that Jim is less blameworthy and higher scores indicate perceptions of greater blame ($M = 6.30$, $SD = .823$).

False Accusation. Participants were asked "How likely is it that Jim could be falsely accused?" This variable was measured on a scale of 1 (very unlikely) to 7 (very likely). Lower scores indicate beliefs that Jim is unlikely to be falsely accused and higher scores indicate beliefs that Jim is likely to be falsely accused ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 1.82$).

Jim's Character. Participants were asked to rate Jim on 11 character traits (trustworthiness, likeability, competence, ethicalness, selfishness, attractiveness, intelligence, laziness, aggressiveness, violence, and strength). They were given two options for each personality trait, one negative and one positive (e.g., unethical and ethical), and picked the option from the pair that they thought better described Jim. Negative items were coded as "1" and positive items were coded as "0." These traits were combined to form one composite variable that represented participants' overall view of Jim's character such that lower scores indicated more positive perceptions of Jim and higher scores indicated more negative perceptions of Jim ($M = 7.55$, $SD = 2.18$).

Future. Participants were asked questions about their beliefs about Jim's future ["How likely is it that Jim will commit another crime in the future?" (reverse coded), "What is the likelihood that Jim will never commit another crime again?," and "How likely is it that Jim feels remorse?"] and they ranked their responses on a scale of 1 (very unlikely) to 7 (very likely). Crohnbach's alpha demonstrated that these variables were internally consistent with one another ($\alpha = .74$) so they were combined into one variable. Lower scores conveyed beliefs that Jim was more likely to reoffend and was less remorseful and higher scores conveyed beliefs that Jim was less likely to reoffend and more remorseful ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 1.03$).

Results

Role of Jim's Social Class and Jim's Age

Several analyses were conducted in order to examine the effects that Jim's social class and age would have on participants' perceptions of Jim. Perceived guilt was examined before participants found out that Jim sold the necklace at a pawnshop and admitted his guilt and all other variables were examined (e.g., blame, false accused, and Jim's character) after participants read that Jim sold the necklace at a pawnshop and admitted his guilt. A multivariate ANCOVA was performed to analyze the interactions of the conditions in the 2 (Jim's Social Class Manipulation) X 2 (Jim's Age manipulation) between-subjects design, while controlling for whether participants had committed a crime in the past or had been falsely accused of committing one[2].

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[2] 19.6% of participants responded yes to the question, "Have you ever committed a crime before (excluding parking and traffic tickets)?" 22.5% of participants responded yes to the question, "Have you ever been falsely accused of committing a crime?" No significant differences were found in any of the measures for those who had committed a crime in the past/had been falsely accused versus those who hadn't.

Prior to Jim Admitting His Guilt

Perceived guilt. Results demonstrated no significant interaction or main effects for the measure of perceived guilt, $F(1,96) = 1.16$, $p = .28$, suggesting that neither Jim's social class nor Jim's age significantly affected participants' perceptions of perceived guilt. However, a chi square analysis showed that the number of participants who felt that Jim was guilty (examining the single, dichotomous item of "Do you believe that Jim is guilty or not guilty?") did differ by Jim's social class, $\chi^2(1, N = 102) = 3.90$, $p < .05$. Participants who viewed high social class Jim were more likely to perceive Jim to be not guilty , whereas those who viewed low social class Jim were more likely to perceive him as guilty (see Table 1). These results suggest that there was an effect of Jim's social class on participant's perceptions of perceived guilt such that low social class Jim is perceived as more likely to be guilty than high social class Jim.

After Jim Admits His Guilt

Blame. Results demonstrated a marginally significant interaction between Jim's Social Class and Age on the outcome of blame, $F(1,96) = 2.79$, $p = .10$. Further analysis of blame using simple slopes showed that there is a significant difference between the blame participants attribute to young Jim based on his social class, such that if Jim is young and rich, participants perceive Jim to be significantly more blameworthy ($M = 6.57$, $SE = .16$) than when Jim is young and poor ($M = 5.98$, $SE = .17$; $F(1,97) = 6.20$, $p < .02$). In other words, participants tend to see young Jim as more blameworthy if he is rich, than if he is poor.

False accusation. No significant interactions emerged on the outcome variable of likelihood that Jim would be falsely accused ($p = $ n.s.), however results showed a

significant main effect of Jim's social class, such that participants perceive low social class Jim to be more likely to be falsely accused ($M = 3.90$, $SE = .25$) compared to high social class Jim ($M = 2.68$, $SE = .25$; $F(1,96) = 11.40$, $p < .001$). In other words, participants tend to view wealthier Jim as less likely to be falsely accused.

Jim's character. No significant interactions emerged on perceptions of Jim's character ($p = $ n.s.), however results showed a significant main effect of Jim's social class, such that high social class Jim is rated more negatively ($M = 8.15$, $SE = .31$) than low social class Jim ($M = 6.89$, $SE =.31$; $F(1,96) = 8.15$, $p < .01$). In other words, participants tend to attribute more negative characteristics to Jim if he is wealthier.

Role of Participant's Social Class and Participant's Age

A multivariate ANCOVA was performed to analyze the interactions of the conditions in the 2 (Participant Social Class) x 2 (Participant Age) between subjects design[3] Similar to previous analyses, this test controlled for whether participants had committed a crime or had been falsely accused of committing one in the past.

Prior to Jim Admitting His Guilt

Perceived guilt. Results showed a significant interaction ($F(1,96) = 7.63$, $p < .01$) between participant's social class and age on perceptions of Jim's guilt. Further analysis using simple slopes revealed that younger participants who are also of higher

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[3] In order to create these categorical variables we split the data based on the participant's reported age ("How old are you?") and self-reported social class ("How would you describe your social class?"). Specifically, using a median split, 49% of the participants reported their age to be equal to or less than 38 years (n = 50); whereas 51% of the participants reported to be 39 or older (n = 52). The two categories for participant social class were created by grouping all participants who responded as belonging to lower-middle class or below (n = 55) into a lower social class category, and grouping all participants who responded as belonging to middle social class or above into a higher social class category (n = 47).

social class, perceive Jim (regardless of Jim's social class and age) to be guiltier ($M =$ 1.42, $SE = .91$) compared to both older, higher social class participants ($M = -1.54$, $SE =.84$; $F(1,97) = 5.80$, $p < .02$), and younger, lower social class participants ($M = -1.07$, $SE = .79$; $F(1,97) = 3.97$, $p < .05$). This suggests that the younger and wealthier participants tend to be the most confident of Jim's guilt compared to all other groups.

After Jim Admits His Guilt

Blame, False accused, and Jim's character. Results showed no significant differences based on participant social class or age on the outcomes of blame, false accused, and Jim's character (ps = n.s.), suggesting that participants' social class and age does not significantly affect their perceptions of Jim on these outcomes.

Congruence vs. Incongruence Between Jim's and Participant's Social Class and Age

In order to examine the potential interaction between both Jim's and the participants' Social Class and Age, a multivariate ANCOVA was performed to analyze the interactions of the conditions in a 2 (Social Class similarity) x 2 (Age Similarity) between subjects test[4]. As previously, this test controlled for whether participants had committed a crime or had been falsely accused of committing one in the past.

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[4] In order to examine the role of Jim and participant similarity, two categorical variables were created (Age Similar and Social Class Similar). Age Similar was created by comparing Jim's Age to the previously created categorical variable of Participant's Age, such that if Jim's Age and the Participant's Age were both categorized as "younger" or "older", they were grouped as being similar on their age (n = 52), whereas they were grouped as being dissimilar if they differed on these variables (n = 50). Social class similarity was created by comparing the *perceived* social class of Jim ("You read a story about Jim. What was Jim's social class?") that was asked at the end of the survey. Comparable to the creation of the Age Similar variable, participants whose self-reported social class matched their perceptions of Jim were grouped as having similar social class (n = 59), whereas those who differed were grouped as being dissimilar (n = 43).

Blame. Despite no significant interactions (p = n.s.), results showed that there is a main effect of age similarity (F (1,96) = 7.63, $p < .01$), such that when participants and Jim are of a similar age, they perceive Jim to be less blameworthy (M = 6.07, SE = .12) compared to when they are different ages (M = 6.52, SE = .12). In other words, Jim is seen as less blameworthy regardless of his social class when participants and Jim are of similar age.

Future. There were no significant interactions based on social class and age similarity (p = n.s.), however results showed that there is a significant main effect of social class similarity (F(1,96) = 4.66, $p < .04$), such that when the participants and Jim are of similar social class, they perceive Jim to be less likely to reoffend and to feel more remorseful (M = 4.08, SE = .13), compared to when they are of different social class (M = 3.63, SE = .16). This suggests that Jim is seen as less likely to reoffend and more remorseful regardless of his age when participants and Jim are of similar social class.

No other significant differences emerged when comparing Jim and participant similarity on their social class and age. However, the differences on the outcomes of perceptions of blame and likelihood of reoffending/feeling remorseful in the future suggest that when participants and Jim are more similar, participants tend to judge Jim more positively. This will be discussed further in the Discussion section.

Discussion

The current study aimed to examine jurors' perceptions of defendants and their crimes, specifically the effects of defendant social class and age and juror social class and age on these perceptions. The study looked at how similarities between defendant social class and age and juror social class and age affect perceptions as well.

There were main findings in relation to the hypothesis that there would be a main effect of social class such that defendants of lower social class would be judged more harshly. Defendants of lower social class were seen as more likely to be falsely accused than those of higher social class and, although results for the measure of perceived guilt were not significant, a chi square analysis (see Table 1) showed that there were differences in the number of people who perceived the defendant (Jim) to be guilty depending on defendant social class: More people believed Jim to be guilty than expected when Jim was of lower social class and more people believed Jim to not be guilty than expected when Jim was of higher social class. These results showed that defendant social class does have some effect on perceptions of guilt as lower class defendants are judged more harshly on various measures.

However, the hypothesis was not supported on the measure of defendant's character because results were actually opposite of what was expected. There was a main effect of social class such that higher social class Jim was viewed more negatively (viewed as having a greater number of negative character traits) than lower social class Jim.

There were also mixed results concerning the hypothesis that there would be interaction effects between defendant social class and age on perceptions of the defendant on the measures of guilt, blame, likelihood of being falsely accused, character, and possible future behaviors, such that older, lower social class Jim will be judged most harshly. My research shows that this hypothesis was not supported on the measure of blame as even though there was a significant interaction between these variables, this interaction was not what was specifically hypothesized: Younger defendants were

thought to be more blameworthy than those older defendants when they were rich rather than poor (this is in contrast to the original prediction that young and rich defendants would receive the most lenient judgments).

Given these results, it seems possible that participants had stereotypes of others that were not expected while forming the study. They might have seen the higher social class defendant as having an attitude of entitlement and the younger defendant as immature and greedy. When these two attributes were combined and Jim was younger and of higher social class it was thought that a stereotype of a "snobby rich kid" arose and as a result, participants judged this person harsher than originally anticipated. In support of this, participants were asked to provide comments as to why they felt Jim committed the crime after reading the full story. After descriptively analyzing the comments it was found that many people believed the young and rich Jim was snobby, arrogant, immature, and irresponsible. Many people said he probably stole the necklace because he was used to having everything handed to him so he had a "why not?" attitude. In contrast to this, people did not tend to provide these same types of explanations for younger/lower social class Jim, or older Jim regardless of his social class. This unanticipated stereotype led to harsher judgments of the younger and wealthier Jim, thus possibly biasing the results. In other words, the hypothesis stated that the younger and wealthier defendant would receive the most lenient judgments, but this stereotype likely influenced results so this did not occur. This surprising finding of the idea of the "snobby rich kid" shows that although defendant social class affects perceptions of guilt, it is difficult to discover patterns in these perceptions as specific circumstances such as the presence and belief of stereotypes have a significant effect.

Another main finding was centered on the hypothesis that when juror social class and age are similar to defendant social class and age, jurors will judge defendants less harshly. This hypothesis was supported on the measures of blame and future behavior. It was found that Jim is seen as less blameworthy when Jim and participants are of similar age, and that Jim is perceived to be less likely to reoffend and to be more remorseful when Jim and participants are of similar social class. This finding showed that defendant and juror social class and age are important, but in some circumstances the actual demographics of a defendant and juror do not matter, as long as they are similar.

However, no main effect of defendant age was found on any measure that was studied.   No specific hypotheses were made in regards to the effects of juror age and social class on perceptions of guilt, but through data analyses, it was demonstrated that young and wealthy participants perceived Jim to be guiltier than any other participants. Yet, no results were found on the other outcome measures: blame, likelihood of being falsely accused, Jim's character, and future behavior.

The lack of significant results in these areas could also be explained due to the surprising finding of the unexpected stereotype of the "snobby rich kid" that was mentioned earlier. Some people may have let this stereotype guide their decisions resulting in differing perceptions of younger/lower social class Jim versus younger/higher social class Jim. These differing perceptions for young Jim may be part of the reason there were no main effects of age.   In addition, participants were split into two age groups; older and younger, but the average age of participants (39.4) was higher than "old Jim" who was 30. As a result of this, there was not a strong representative sample of younger participants and the younger group was made up of many participants much

older than "young Jim" who was only 15. This may have led to non-significant results on a majority of the measures, as both groups were comprised of mostly older participants, leading to similar perceptions of Jim from both age groups. Another reason for these non-significant results may be the small sample size of participants. Although 102 participants is a legitimate amount, it is still relatively small to draw conclusions. The limited information given about Jim and his crime may have also contributed to the lack of significant results. The story participants read was brief and they may have felt they did not have enough evidence or facts to make a decision about Jim's guilt, blame, false accusation, character, and possible future behaviors. With such limited information, people may not have felt justified or confident enough to report their perceptions.

In sum, this research generally shows that lower social class defendants tend to be judged more harshly despite people viewing their character as better (possessing fewer negative traits) than those of higher social class. Defendant age alone does not have an effect on jurors' perceptions; however younger defendants are seen as more blameworthy when they are rich which may signify that a stereotype of a "snobby rich kid" is affecting perceptions. In addition, when juror age and social class are taken into account, younger and wealthier jurors perceive defendants to be guiltier than jurors of all other groups. When defendant and juror social class and age are similar, jurors judge defendants less harshly and specifically see them as less blameworthy, and less likely to reoffend and to be more remorseful.

Although the hypotheses were only supported by certain measures, this study is still valuable in showing that defendant social class and age and juror social class and age have an effect on jurors' perceptions of defendants and their crimes. For a variety of

measures such as guilt, blame, likelihood of being falsely accused, character, and future behavior defendant and juror social class and age made a difference in the way jurors judged defendants. This research is necessary and beneficial as a jury's verdict can greatly influence the life of a defendant. This is especially significant in situations that involve extreme judgments, such as the death penalty and life in prison, because something as simple as the congruency between juror's demographic characteristics and those of the defendant can bias perceptions of guilt and criminality.

In addition, people are often influenced by stereotypes and bias (Mazzella & Feingold, 2004 and Tang & Nunez, 2003) and this study helps demonstrate the ways in which those biases can affect certain outcomes such as perceived guilt and blame and the ways in which alternative stereotypes (e.g., the "snobby rich kid") may also influence outcomes such as one's views of a defendant's character traits. Stereotypes are highly prevalent in society so it is vital to study and understand the role they play in changing perceptions of others.

This research can be applied in a variety of ways in the court of law. This information is useful in helping jury consultants form juries that will work to the attorney's advantage. Jury consultants are able to apply their knowledge of common perceptions of jurors and use them to form juries that will judge defendants more or less harshly depending on the desired outcome. For example, if a jury consultant knows a defendant is younger and lower class, he/she can work on selecting jurors that are also younger and lower class as this study has shown when defendant and juror are similar, jurors do not judge defendants as harshly. Consultants are also better able to prepare arguments for the defending attorney and to prepare witnesses when they are aware of the

biases associated with different defendant characteristics. If defendants are younger and of higher social class, consultants know to prepare arguments for attorneys that draw attention away from these traits, as jurors often judge "snobby rich kids" more harshly. Consultants and attorneys will have a better idea of how to prepare and present themselves as research in this field continues.

This study helped gain insight into the effects of defendant and juror social class and age on perceptions of defendants and crimes, but future research is essential. Future work could further examine the interaction between social class and age, but also address the limitations discussed here such as unexpected stereotypes of specific characteristics (e.g., the "snobby rich kid"), the underrepresentation of young participants (e.g., those under 30), the limited sample size, and the limited information provided to participants on defendant and crime. In addition, this study found a variety of significant results and future research should examine which factors have the most significant effects on perceptions. For example, it was found that lower social class defendants are judged more harshly overall, but when defendant and juror social class and age are the same, defendants are judged less harshly. If a juror and defendant are both of lower social class it is unclear whether the defendant's lower social class or the congruence between defendant and juror social class will have a larger effect on jurors' perceptions of guilt as the former was found to lead to harsh perceptions and the latter was found to lead to lenient perceptions. This study also dealt with two vastly different levels of social class. Future research should include middle class defendants rather than just focusing on those defendants of high and low social class and the differences between those two extremes. A future study with a within subject design could be useful to see how one participant

reacts to all four defendant types and how results may change across conditions. It would be extremely useful for future study to look at the interaction between defendant and juror social class and age, but with different crime types such as rape and murder. Some may find these serious crimes much more drastic or personal than a burglary. It would be interesting and important to see how crime type affects results as people may feel differently and make harsher judgments when physical harm is inflicted on another.

The judicial system is meant to be fair and just, but it is difficult when stereotypes and personal perceptions intervene. The current research helps us better understand the effects of certain characteristics on jurors' perceptions of defendants, which is vital as the lives and futures of defendants often depend on these perceptions alone.

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Author Note

Table 1

Crosstabulation of Social Class and Perceived Guilt

Perceived Guilt	Jim's Social Class	
	Lower Social Class	Higher Social Class
Guilty	28	18
(expected count)	*(23)*	*(23)*
Not Guilty	24	34
(expected count)	*(29)*	*(29)*

Note. As shown in the table, participants who read about high social class Jim were more likely to perceive Jim to be not guilty than would be expected, whereas those who read about low social class Jim were more likely to perceive him as guilty than expected.

Appendix A

Below is the entire survey that participants read and completed. The individual items included in this paper as variables are indicated by bolded parenthetical statements following the specific items. If a variable is listed more than once, it means the corresponding items were combined into the mentioned composite variable.

Presented Survey

During this short study, you will be asked to read a short scenario and respond to questions. Please be sure to read the story carefully. Participation is voluntary and the survey should take no longer than 15 minutes.

There will be a series of attention check questions placed throughout this survey. If you fail to answer any of the attention checks correctly you will not get paid.

PLEASE NOTE: You must press "Continue" (>>>) all the way through the survey, or your data will not be counted. This will impact your compensation if you do not click all the way through. You will receive your mTurk validation code at the end of the survey.

Thank you!

--Page Break—

Please read the following story.

The Smiths, a wealthy family, decided to host a holiday party for some close friends and coworkers at their home. They hired a few caterers at minimum to wage to help assist at the party with cleaning, serving food, taking coats, etc. The party was a success and it seemed like everyone had a great time.

At the end of the night, Mrs. Smith went upstairs to her bathroom and immediately noticed that her diamond necklace was missing. She had tried on the necklace before the party started, but had decided not to wear it and she had left it in her bathroom. The home had a bathroom on the main floor, where the party was, but someone must have come upstairs during the party. The Smiths immediately call the police.

-- Page Break --

After questioning, Mr. Smith remembers that he did see someone go upstairs but did not think much of it at the time. Mr. Smith reports that he thought that this person could have just been searching for another bathroom in the home. He remembers it was a tall man with dark hair and provides a physical description to a sketch artist. The police then decide to look for this man.

-- Page Break --

The police suspect that the man might be Jim Johnson,

Low SES/Older Condition- 30 year old caterer who was working at the party. He often managed to pick up jobs with the Catering company when they were short handed.

Low SES/Younger Condition –15 year old caterer who was working at the party. He often managed to pick up jobs with the Catering company when they were short handed.

High SES/Older Condition –30 year old guest who was attending the party. He worked with Mr. Smith at a large corporation.

High SES/Younger Condition –15 year old guest who was attending the party. His dad was a family friend of the Smiths and Jim went to a private school with their son

Jim resembles the drawing by the sketch artist and while checking him out, the police discover that he recently borrowed a lot of money and hasn't been able to pay it back. One of Jim's close friends tells the police that Jim said that he didn't know what he would do. The police determine that they have probable cause to bring Jim in for questioning.

During questioning, Jim says he did go upstairs to use the bathroom, but that he did not steal the necklace. Jim says that he didn't even see a necklace so it must have been taken before he even went upstairs.

-- Page Break –

Please answer the following questions and respond to the following statements:

Do you believe that Jim is guilty or not guilty? (*Perceived Guilt Variable*)

How confident are you with this decision? (Very Not Confident to Very Confident) (*Perceived Guilt Variable*)

-- Page Break --

Jim would be found Guilty if he faced trial for this crime (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree)

It is likely that Jim could be falsely accused (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree)

-- Page Break --

Assuming you were presented with this information, and you were a juror on the case, how would you vote? (Guilty or Not Guilty)

How confident are you with this decision? (Very Not Confident to Very Confident)

-- Page Break --

Assume the police later find out that Jim tried to sell the necklace at a pawn shop and Jim admits he is guilty. Now answer the following questions.

What sentence would you recommend? (1 Year of Probation, 1 Year of Probation and a Payment of $15,000, 6 Months in Jail and a Payment of $15,000, 1 Year in Jail and a Payment of $15,000, 3 years in Jail and a Payment of $15,000)

I believe Jim is to blame for this crime. (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree) *(Blame Variable)*

I believe that Jim's behavior was morally wrong. (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree) *(Blame Variable)*

I believe that Jim's behavior caused harm to society? (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree)

It is likely that Jim will learn from this incident? (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree)

How likely is it that Jim could be falsely accused? (Very Unlikely to Very Likely) *(False Accusation Variable)*

How likely is it that Jim has committed crimes in his past? (Very Unlikely to Very Likely)

Select the number 6 (1 to 7)

How likely is it that Jim will commit another crime in the future? (Very Unlikely to Very Likely) *(Future Variable)*

How likely is it that Jim feels remorse? (Very Unlikely to Very Likely) *(Future Variable)*

What is the likelihood that Jim will never commit another crime again? (Very Unlikely to Very Likely) *(Future Variable)*

How likely is it that Jim will change for the better? (Very Unlikely to Very Likely)

-- Page Break --

Jim committed this crime because of the kind of person he is. (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree)

Jim committed this crime because of the stress of the situation. (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree)

Jim committed this crime because he is a bad person. (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree)

Jim committed this crime because he has an immoral character. (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree)

Jim committed this crime because he was desperate at this point in his life. (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree)

Jim committed this crime as a sudden impulse that was unlike his usual behavior. (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree)

Select the number 3. (1 to 7)

Jim committed this crime as he felt he had no other solution to his money problem. (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree)

Jim is a certain kind of person, and there is not much that can be done to really change that. (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree)

Jim committed this crime as the opportunity presented itself. (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree)

Jim can be rehabilitated and become a good citizen. (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree)

-- Page Break --

Pick which trait you think better describes Jim for each pair:

Untrustworthy/Trustworthy; Unlikeable/Likeable; Incompetent/Competent;

Unethical/Ethical; Selfish/Unselfish; Unattractive/Attractive; Unintelligent/

Intelligent; Lazy/Industrious; Aggressive/Unaggressive; Violent/Non-Violent;

Weak/Strong

(Jim's Character Variable)

-- Page Break --

Name/List all the contributing factors that would help explain why Jim committed this crime.

-- Page Break --

Please respond to the following demographic questions.

Have you ever been falsely accused of committing a crime? (Yes or No)

Have you ever committed a crime before (excluding traffic and parking tickets)? (Yes or No)

How old are you?

How would you describe your social class? (Very Wealthy, Upper Class, Upper-Middle Class, Middle Class, Lower-Middle Class, Lower-Working Class, Poverty Level)

Please specify your race. (American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, Hispanic or Latino, White-not Hispanic or Latino, Other)

What is your gender? (Male, Female, I prefer not to answer)

You read a story about Jim. What was Jim's social class? (Upper Social Class, Upper, Middle Social Class, Middle Social Class, Lower-Middle Social Class, Lower Social Class)

-- Page Break --

Thank you for taking part in this study!

Your validation code for mTurk is ${e://Field/mTurkCode}

If you do not press continue all the way through, your data will not be counted!

Be sure to copy this code now, then press continue >>>.