

The Color of Cruelty:
Exploring Punitive Attitudes About Race and Crimes Against Animals

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Abstract of Thesis

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Survey research and vignettes were evaluated by 317 college students to test whether race of offender or type of crime is more significant in determining levels of punishment in criminal cases involving animal cruelty. Findings indicate that almost every respondent was concerned about animal cruelty, but they view certain animals as more worthy victims than others. The race of the offender had no significant impact on punitive attitudes. Exploring the “Racial Stereotypes Approach,” this study addresses how racialized attitudes translate into particular beliefs about the criminal justice system and policy, specifically as they apply to animal cruelty crimes.

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Introduction

Much of the country was shocked on July 17th, 2007 when famed professional football star Michael Vick was officially indicted on federal conspiracy charges related to running an illegal dogfighting ring. The media became saturated with coverage of the trial, during which there was a noticeable polarization between many white and black citizens as they debated whether Vick was unfairly persecuted (both by the justice system and the media), because of his skin color. The event also sparked a heated debate, highlighting the drastic differences in attitudes about appropriate treatment of animals and “acceptable” levels of violence. Vick’s conviction also coincided with increasing awareness of animal mistreatment being recategorized from a social nuisance to a criminally punishable activity.

The significance of race and sentencing has a long history of scholarly study. However, as a result of animal welfare issues only recently coming to the forefront as a legitimate social concern, very little work has explored race and crime in regards to a non-human victim. While studies have investigated causes and consequences of animal abuse along with characteristics of offenders, there is still much left to be discovered concerning society’s perception of these animal cruelty crimes and those who commit them. An examination of the literature pertaining to racial stereotypes (and their subsequent impact on punitive attitudes), along with the growing discussion on animal cruelty suggests that race may also be a factor in how society views these offenders.

First, this project will address the validity of considering animals legitimate victims of crime by discussing the public’s attitudes regarding the use of animals and what is considered humane/appropriate behavior. Next, it will discuss race and crime

literature and how prevailing racial stereotypes are maintained among society. Specifically, using the “Racial Stereotypes Approach,” this study will address how these stereotypes translate into particular beliefs about minorities in the criminal justice system. Lastly, it will address the difficulties facing animal cruelty researchers and why race might factor into a person’s decision about just punishments for these crimes given the existing literature about the intersection of race and crime. Albeit animal cruelty is one small subsection of the criminal justice system, the findings of this study lend themselves to a broader discussion of the current state of animal welfare and race and crime in the United States.

Literature Review

Concern for Animals

Animal welfare certainly has not been a universal concern among Americans; about half of respondents in 1980 claimed not to care whether animals receive humane treatment (Kellert 1980). However, there has been a growing interest as shown by a 1998 poll of Americans which found that two-thirds of the respondents agreed that “an animal’s right to live free of suffering should be just as important as a person’s right to live free from suffering” (Agnew 1998:178). Social scientists also have documented public concern regarding how the criminal justice system responds to cruelty (Vollum et al. 2004). A recent survey in Texas found that 78% of household respondents believed that intentional acts of animal cruelty should be a felony. An impressive 80% believed that police should place more focus on these incidents, and at least half believed that cases of animal cruelty should be taken as seriously as violence against humans (Vollum et al. 2004). More recently, a 2008 study by the Humane Research Council found that 72% of U.S. adults say they have a favorable opinion of the animal protection movement, and it ranks among the top three social causes (of eight listed in the survey [“Wave 1” 2008]). Even with growing interest, the Uniform Crime Report and the National Crime Victimization Survey do not keep track of offenses against animals. Despite a lack of scholarship and no systematic data collection on this issue, the growing concern for animal welfare in the U.S. suggests that animals should be considered “worthy unit of analysis” (Bickerstaff 2003:2) and taken seriously as victims of abuse.

Racial Stereotypes

While the data on animal welfare issues is lacking, there is an abundance of scholarly discussion about racial stereotypes among criminal justice/sociology professionals. Numerous studies have documented the fact that minorities are consistently incarcerated at a higher rate (Tonry 2006) and receive harsher punishments than do whites (Steffensmeier & Demuth 2006). Mauer (1999) estimates that one third of young African-American adults is currently on probation or in prison, and their per capita incarceration rate is more than seven times that of white Americans (Williams 2005). This drastic racial disparity has lead sociologists to analyze the mechanisms contributing to the statistics, and the creation and maintenance of negative racial stereotypes has been found to be responsible, in part, for the substantial inequality. Many white people continue to subscribe to racial stereotypes about minorities (Bobo 2001: 274), thus it is likely that unbalanced treatment by the criminal justice system is representative of an overarching belief system in which blacks are believed to be more “naturally” criminal (Flexon 2006). Stereotypes are essential to how blacks (and as a result, whites) are treated by the system, as these typecasts are crucial in determining one’s judgments and behaviors (Monteith et al. 1998; Glaser 2005).

Given that many people learn about crime through “informal portrayals as opposed to formal education” (Flexon 2006: 92), the media greatly contributes to prevailing stereotypes (Bobo 2001). Through the use of “implicit visual propositioning,” (Abraham & Appiah 2006), in which visual images are juxtaposed with purposely chosen verbal statements, the media is able to suggest meaning beyond the narrative (185). For example, by using an offender’s mug shot during a report of a crime, race becomes a critical part of the story (Lipshultz et. al 2003) and essentially supports existing negative

stereotypes of the black community. In addition to the use of imagery, the media reinforces prejudicial attitudes (Eberhardt, et al. 2004) through the use of unfavorable adjectives (i.e. – criminal, unintelligent, jobless, etc.) to describe African Americans (Abraham & Appiah 2006; Lapchick 2000). The role of “violent perpetrator” is almost always cast as an African American male (Fair 1994; Gilliam 2002; Johnson 1991; Oliver 1999).

Constant reinforcement of the association between black offenders and violent crime stories has created a process through which viewers attach racial meanings to particular social relations (Fair 1994). Stereotypes become cues to the viewer as to the context of a situation, leading to a warped “understanding” of the relation between blacks and crime (Abraham and Appiah 2006) where individuals subconsciously construct mental categories based on social aspects like race and gender (Devine & Monteith 1999). Ultimately, this process legitimizes the idea that black people are a problem (Grover and Soothill 1996). Flexon (2006) suggests “cognitive associations” are then triggered when certain words are said. For example, “young, black male” activates very specific images based on one’s beliefs about the members of that group, and these images provide a framework by which to evaluate a situation. Depending upon how much information one has, “people will remember and interpret prior experience...[as] stereotype confirming behavior of the classified group” (Flexon 2006:25).

Attitudes About Criminal Sentencing and Policy

In addition to legitimizing certain social arrangements, stereotypes also “provide ideological support for social and political systems” (Jost and Major, 2001: 4) which is particularly important to this study as it explores opinions about the criminal justice system. According to the “Racial Stereotypes Approach” suggested by Steen et al.

(2005), cultural stereotypes about race and criminality are to blame for harsher treatment of minority offenders as a result of the widely-held belief that they are more dangerous. Decisions are made based upon the triggering of this idea, which contributes to indirect institutionalized discrimination both in the streets and in the court room (Zatz 1987). The “traditional racism” of yesteryear which blatantly assumed blacks were inferior to whites has transformed into a new social ill: “modern racism,” (Flexon 2006) by which minorities are considered to be treated equally by the system when in reality the injustices have merely become harder to distinguish.

“Modern racism” not only contributes to the maintenance of stereotypes, but it also influences policy attitudes. For example, despite statistical evidence stating the opposite, many people believe there is no racial bias in the dispensation of the death penalty (Glaser 2005) or that harmful racial profiling practices do not exist (MacDonald 2001). Glaser et al. (2004) found that beliefs like these (specifically, that the death penalty is not racially biased) are most frequently held by the same members of society who support the practice. Thus, it would follow that those who believe the criminal justice system is fair (most of whom are white), would also support harsher punishments for offenders (Flexon 2006). Unfortunately, many of those who support more punitive measures also rely on stereotyped information about blacks and criminality (Young 2004; Peffley et al. 1997).

Research has shown that the public prefers longer sentences for convicted offenders (Roberts et al. 2007; McCorkle 1993; Zimmerman, et al. 1988), and white males tend to be most punitive in penalty beliefs (Fitzgerald & Ellsworth 1984). Many scholars interested in this phenomenon have employed the racial stereotypes approach

asserting that policy beliefs are correlated with subscription to (or rejection of) negative stereotypes. Gilliam et. al (2002) found that when white respondents were exposed to racial stereotypes in the news, they “endorsed more punitive policies to address crime, expressed more negative stereotypic evaluations of blacks and felt more distant from blacks as a group” (755). Distortions in crime reporting contribute to the justification of over-policing of black communities as well as raise support for strict criminal policy (Grover & Soothill 1996). Given these discrepancies, it is important for social scientists to understand the mental process leading to the public’s attitudes.

The nature of jury-duty creates an excellent set of subjects for exploring sentencing/policy attitudes. Jurors sometimes assess decisions based on stereotypical crime scripts (i.e. - black defendant, white victim [Ellsworth 1993]), and these scenarios are very important to how a juror processes information and makes decisions (ForsterLee et al. 2006; Flexon 2006). Subscription to these typecasts makes stricter punishments easier to rationalize and more acceptable (ForsterLee et al. 2006). Peffley et al. (1997) found that white people who ascribed to negative stereotypes about black people judged those in the black community more harshly in areas of welfare and crime.

The “White Male Dominance Effect” (Bowers et al. 2001) states that majority or all-white juries are significantly more likely to convict a black defendant as well as assign a harsher punishment, particularly in inter-racial cases. This effect is evident in many studies where white subjects recommend longer sentence for a black offender (Sommers et al. 2000, Gilliam et al. 2000, ForsterLee et al 2000). Sommers et al. (2000) assert that when race is a critical factor in a trial, jurors will compensate for negative stereotypes and try to appear as fair as possible by delivering lighter sentences. However, when race is

not explicitly discussed, white jurors are more likely to act upon stereotypical beliefs and rate a black defendant as more guilty.

Blacks follow a similar pattern of decision-making based on race, frequently supporting less punitive measures for black offenders and deeming them less guilty (Sommers et al. 2000; Abwender & Hough 2001). This is largely attributed to a long history of maltreatment from the criminal justice system which has fostered mistrust and skepticism among many in the black community (Young 1991). Psychiatrists William Grier and Price Cobbs suggest that facing negative stereotypes and unequal treatment by the system creates a unique black identity in which group solidarity becomes much more important than punishing offenders (Jaret and Reitzes 1999). Hence, depending on where one's social status places them in the criminal justice system, attitudes towards it will vary. "Fairness" has differing definitions for victims of prejudice than those who are treated less punitively (Sommers et al. 2000; Cohn et al. 1991).

The literature has certainly demonstrated the importance of offender race on one's sentencing attitudes, but the victim's race has been shown to be just as (if not more so) important (Durham et al. 1996). For example, Blume et al. (2004) found that the death penalty was very rarely used when a murder victim was black, but an offender (particularly a black offender) with a white victim was most likely to receive a death sentence. Given that both offender- and victim-race are critical to sentencing attitudes for a wide range of criminal activities, this project will explore the significance of race in a new type of crime: one in which the victim is an animal.

Animal Cruelty

For the purposes of this study, it is critical to explore opinions about contemporary animal cruelty issues. Unfortunately, very little (if any) work has explored race and crime in regards to a non-human victim. This could be a result of animal welfare issues only recently becoming a valid social concern. Additionally, (and perhaps as a result of its “newness,”) animal cruelty is a complicated crime due to its ambiguous definition both in the court system and by the public (Elder et al. 1998; Solot 1997). What one person considers “cruelty” might be completely normal to another. Kellert and Felthous (1985), two well-known authors in human/animal relationship literature, define animal cruelty as “the willful infliction of harm, injury, and intended pain on a nonhuman animal” (1114). However, society’s use of animals provides an interesting contradiction to this definition: raising and slaughtering animals for human consumption, clothing or experimentation are very easily classified as “cruelty” based on this definition yet they are, for the majority, considered morally acceptable in American culture (Solot 1997). Additionally, every year 16 to 20 million animals are used in research in the United States, but society generally believes that the benefits outweigh the costs (Shanks 2003: 13).

Animal interactions are often deemed uncivilized based upon particular characteristics (i.e. – if the practice was necessary to prevent pain, if the action was in specialized places like a slaughterhouse or on a street corner, what kind of animal is harmed, etc. [Elder et al.1998]). For example, dogs have become domesticated in the U.S. so consuming one would be evaluated as highly unorthodox and savage-like, yet to eat parts of a cow or pig is perfectly sanctioned by the majority of society. Many of the acts that Kellert and Felthous deem unquestionably inhumane would be judged as completely

acceptable to others, leaving a large grey area in the determination of cruelty (Solot 1997). In fact, even within the animal welfare movement there are “competing moral philosophies” (Shanks 2003: 15) which highlights the difficulty facing the criminal justice system (and its citizens) in defining what constitutes cruelty.

Poaching and Dogfighting

The types of crimes against animals selected for exploration in this study were poaching and dogfighting, selected for numerous reasons. Both “sports” were selected for their illegality and similar frequency: about 5% of citizens hunt, and experts estimate that for every animal killed legally there is one that is poached, so this is assumed to be an accurate estimate of poachers as well (“Poaching” 2008). Similarly, about 4.6% citizens engage in dogfighting (“Factsheets” 2001). Those who engage in either activity are subject to punitive action by the criminal justice system. Both are stereotypically representative of a certain subculture in America (poaching is associated with white, rural culture, and dogfighting is typically viewed as a black, urban activity). Furthermore, these crimes were chosen because they are violent, and individuals generally respond much more punitively to violent offenses than other crimes (Payne et al. 2004). While norms about animal practices vary significantly, Elder et al. (1998) suggests that the most “critical dimensions of context include animal species, human actor(s), rationale for and methods of harm, and site of action involved in the practice.” Each of these elements varies between dog fighting and poaching and clear differences are important when using vignettes (Singer et al. 2007). For example, dogfighting involves dogs who maul each other, often in one’s basement or garage, while poaching generally involves wild animals shot with either guns or arrows, usually in the woods or an outdoor park. These obvious differences were crucial in the selection of these two activities as crime types.

The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) defines poaching as a “broad term that includes, but is not limited to, killing endangered and threatened animals, killing animals out of their hunting season, using illegal weapons, killing animals on closed land, or leading others to kill animals illegally as an unlicensed guide” (“Poaching” 2008). While thousands of poachers are arrested yearly, it is estimated that only about 1 to 5 percent are caught (“Reward” 2008). In fact, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources approximates that poachers kill as many animals as the legal sportsmen do if not more (“Illinois” 2003). In 2006, the National Park Service reported that poaching has aided in the decline of at least 29 species of animals, a pattern which has been steadily increasing each year (“Factsheets” 2001). As recently as May of 2008, two men illegally killed over six-hundred animals in Wisconsin, leaving their dead bodies in the woods to rot (“Portage” 2008). A month later in Arizona, a large mule deer was killed illegally and similarly left in the woods to decay (“Reward” 2008). Wildlife officials suggest that this type of behavior highlights the lure of the “thrill” of the kill that poaching provides.

States have the right to regulate the killing of animals for profit or recreation, and poaching laws and penalties vary accordingly. The Maryland Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) condemns “illegal hunting” (“Red Hawk” 2005), and offers cash rewards to citizens who contribute to the conviction of a poacher (“Guide” 2008). Just recently, two young men from Maryland were charged with five counts of Natural Resource violations, each with a maximum fine of \$1,500 and/or six months of imprisonment for a first offense. The men in Wisconsin were charged with 82 citations (none of which were criminal) and two misdemeanors for which they could pay a \$2,000

fine or spend between two or three months in jail. Casey Pheiffer, manager of the HSUS's Wildlife Abuse Campaign, suggests that the states with the strictest anti-poaching laws also have the lowest occurrences ("Portage" 2008).

The other crime type was dogfighting, and while the media focused significantly on Michael Vick during his 2007 trial for conspiracy charges related to an illegal dogfighting ring, he has plenty of company in the industry. More than 140,000 people are involved in dogfighting in the U.S. and 250,000 dogs fight in pits each year (Vera 2008). HSUS describes the sport: "scarred pit bulls on painfully short chains, tires designed to strengthen dogs' jaws hung from trees, treadmills to increase endurance, and, most chillingly, pits that hold dogs while they maul each other until one of the animals is unwilling, or unable, to continue" (Simmons 2007). John Goodwin, deputy manager of Animal Fighting Issues for HSUS, suggests that dogfighting goes hand-in-hand with other crimes: "when you have violent people betting large sums of money, you're going to have problems. Dogfighting is heavily linked to gambling, drugs, prostitution, gangs, and guns" (Simmons 2007).

Similar to poaching, individual states dictate their own laws and punishments concerning animal fights, but fighting dogs is a felony offense in all of them (Specht 2008). In Indiana, for example, dogfighting is punishable by up to three years of imprisonment and/or up to \$10,000 in fines ("Indiana" 2008). However, in a newfound effort to eradicate the blood sport, some offenders have received much harsher punishments. Terry "O.G." Kendrick, a dogfighter who has been "in the game" since the 80's, faces up to twenty-six years in prison after being convicted of dogfighting and trafficking marijuana in Ohio (Perry 2008). In over twenty-four states, a person might

also face felony charges for attending a fight (“Delaware” 2008). For example, in March of 2008 the Governor of Oregon strengthened the state’s dogfighting law and made attending a fight or possessing dogfighting equipment punishable by up to three years in prison and/or a maximum \$125,000 fine (“Oregon” 2008). Federal legislators have taken notice to the recent increase in concern over these issues, and as a result of President Bush’s signature on the “The Animal Fighting Prohibition Enforcement Act” in May of 2007 (Simmons 2007), it is now a felony to transport animals across state lines for the purposes of fighting.

Race, Crime, and Animals

As discussed, existing animal welfare literature largely suggests that citizens’ care, at least somewhat, about the well-being of animals. Likewise, race and crime literature generally argues that race is a critical factor in sentencing, and that stereotypes contribute to harsher sentences for minority offenders. This study tested of both of these claims and explores how they interact with each other via public opinion about those who commit violent crimes against animals. Given that there is no literature explicitly linking these two genres, this exploratory study developed as a result of a curiosity and lack of research regarding if/how race intertwines with attitudes about animal welfare. As sentencing decision-makers (both judges and juries) are the most likely to use racial stereotypes in cases in which sentencing precedence is vague as is the case with animal cruelty (Steen et al. 2005), it is extremely important to explore the public’s opinions in order to gauge a deeper understanding of the implications of race, animals, and the criminal justice system. This study examines these attitudes, specifically exploring whether the race of the offender or the type of animal cruelty is more significant in determining one’s punitive attitudes.

Methods

Survey and Vignettes

Following in the methodological footsteps of Seron et al. (2006), this study used a factorial survey, an approach which “combines the features of sample surveys and randomized experiments, presenting to respondents vignettes or short descriptions of complex social situations about which they are asked to make judgments” (931).

Vignettes, or “short scenarios in written or pictorial form, intended to elicit responses to typical scenarios” (Hill 1997:177), essentially creates an experiment within a survey.

This means that researchers are able to provide a social situation for respondents to react to, and by varying the vignettes, it mimics an experiment.

This method has proved useful for exploring judgments about complicated social situations (Sorenson & Taylor 2005; Koropecyj-Cox et al. 2007; Barter & Renold 1999), particularly complicated perceptions, beliefs and attitudes (Hughes 1998).

Vignettes are an effective tool for exploring racial attitudes as they expose prejudices even when the respondent claims racial tolerance (Peffley et al. 1997; Koropecyj-Cox et al. 2007). Social desirability biases are reduced because a respondent is able to project his/her opinions on a hypothetical situation as opposed to a direct question about race which might make him/her uncomfortable (Alexander and Becker, 1978; Hughes, 1998). Thus, vignettes are excellent for investigating one’s punitive opinions about cruelty and race as scholars have had great success using vignettes to explore recommended jail sentences for hypothetical offenders. For example, very similar to this project, Abwender and Hough (2001) used a vehicular-homicide vignette in which the defendant’s race varied, and respondents recommended sentences.

While some authors suggest that vignettes occasionally encourage socially desirable responses and it takes probing to reveal genuine responses (Barter & Renold 1999), using a self-administered survey greatly reduces the likelihood of this occurrence. An additional advantage of surveys is that they are useful for examining attitudes about sensitive issues on a large-scale (Kuran & McCaffery; Fujiyoka 2005). Surveys are strong on reliability, and close-ended questions provide uniformity in responses.

Subjects for Study

The sample consisted of 317 undergraduate students, purposively selected from a small, private, liberal arts University on the East Coast. Students were from foundational liberal-arts courses (specifically, Introduction to Criminal Justice, Introduction to Sociology, and a Sociology Course which focuses on the development of writing skills). This provided a pool of students which included over 19 different majors, members of each year in school (freshman through senior), etc. Several demographic characteristics were controlled for in the analysis: race (1 = African American, 2 = White, 3 = Asian American, 4 = other), gender (1 = male, 0 = female), political party (1 = Democrat, 2 = Republican, 3 = Independent, 4 = other), and status in school (1 = freshman, 2 = sophomore, 3 = junior, 4 = senior). These demographics were collected for several reasons. The race of the respondent was asked based on the tendency of blacks and whites to have differing opinions about sentencing depending both on their own and offender race. Gender was requested as scholars have found that gender strongly influences sentencing across all racial-ethnic groups (Steffensmeier & Demuth 2006). Political party was asked as republicans/conservatives typically have more punitive views about sentencing and the CJ system. For example, Jacobs and Carmichael (2004) found a relationship between Republican ideologies/political conservatism and whether or not a

state had the death penalty. Given that the surveys were distributed among intro-level sociology and criminal justice courses, the respondent's major was asked in order to ensure that there was not a disproportionate number of "advanced sociology students whose training would have primed them to concerns about gender, race, or social class" (Koropecky-Cox et al. 2007: 419). All of this demographic information was included in order to ensure that the sample was representative of the students at GW and was not skewed on any specific category.

Student samples provide convenient data collection and a great opportunity to test theories before using a broader, more expensive sample (Dasgupta & Hunsinger 2008: 95). Dasgupta and Hunsinger (2008) assert that "starting small with student samples before moving on to more ambitious nonstudent samples to establish external validity has been successfully utilized by several programs of research" (94). More generalizable samples take significantly more money to access, and compensation is typically more important to these respondents (Dasgupta & Hunsinger 2008). Students were ideal for this project because they did not require financial compensation and the study only took a few minutes for them to complete. Essentially, "graduate students and early-career investigators may not have the flexibility to embark on studies that use nonstudent samples because of the long and uncertain time line for completion" (Dasgupta & Hunsinger 2008: 96).

The suggestions that a) students' behaviors and attitudes might differ from actual jurors given different life experiences such as income and education (Hastie & Pennington 1983) and b) that research should be replicated with non-student samples before making drastic generalizations (Peterson 2001) are certainly worth considering

when making claims about the population. However, Flere and Lavric (2008) explored the validity of using student samples to explore cross-cultural issues and concluded that findings based on students can be used (with some caution) as a predictor of results that would be found with a national sample.

College students have been employed to explore perceptions about criminals and criminality by scholars in the past (Bell et al. 1994). For example, Pratto et al. (1997) found that results of an attitude-oriented questionnaire given to college students replicated prior findings derived from a 1992 voter sample. Golebiowska (2000) also used a sample of students from a medium-size liberal arts university to identify characteristics associated with a “typical gay man” and a “typical racist.”

Durham and Dane (1999) used students to explore cross-racial issues as they apply to eyewitness testimony and jury duty. Of particular importance to this project is that studies have used college respondents to examine the impact of racial stereotypes with results that corresponded to the larger population (Correl et al. 2002; Correll et al. 2006).

Perhaps more important is that projects concerning animal welfare attitudes have used college students as respondents (Gallup & Beckstead 1988; Braithwaite & Braithwaite 1982). For example, Betchart et al (1991) used a Likert-scale questionnaire to assess animal cruelty attitudes as they vary by gender. Given that students have been used to evaluate attitudes towards different demographic groups (Whitley 2001) along with animal welfare opinions, and that vignettes have been used to explore student’s opinions about many subjects (Castaneda & Collins 1998), it would follow that they were appropriate for this project.

Measurement

This project used a 4-category independent variable: offender race (black/African American or White/Caucasian) and animal crime (poaching or dogfighting). Vignettes allowed for the exploration of the influence of these two specific variables (race of the offender or type of cruelty) by exchanging them in each situational context (Barter & Renold 1999). Black and white offenders were chosen for the vignettes given the discussed racial disparity among black and white citizens in incarceration rates and sentencing (Tonry 2006; Steffensmeier & Demuth 2006; Mauer 1999; Williams 2005). Blacks are the most disproportionately and highly represented ethnic group in jails in the United States (Tonry 2006). Given that past studies have found that minorities receive harsher punishments, if race were a factor in this study, a white offender would be the most likely to receive a lenient sentence in comparison to an offender of another ethnicity so it provides a useful “control” variable.

Respondents were able to discern the offender’s race via race-specific names. Calling upon the work of Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004), who used typically white- and black-sounding names to explore racial discrimination in the labor market, this piece used names which the authors thoroughly researched as representative of each respective group. Bertrand and Mullainathan collected the birth certificates of all babies born in Massachusetts during the years 1974 and 1979, then separated racially distinctive names (those that had the highest ratio of frequency in one group versus the other [2004: 995]). To double check the reliability of using these names, a survey was conducted in which respondents were asked to identify the race and they concluded that the race attributed to each name most often corresponded to the data from the birth certificates (those which did not were removed from the project). The most common name for African-American

males was “Darnell,” and for white males, “Brad.” The two last names were also selected from an Appendix of those found to be most frequent for each population. The final names selected were Darnell Jackson (black offender) and Brad McCarthy (white offender). Scholars have documented an audiences’ ability to pick up on racial cues in naming; Anderson-Clark et al. (2008) successfully employed vignettes to uncover prejudice among elementary school teachers who ranked students with African American-sounding names as having lower achievement scores. Male names were selected as a result of the finding that gender is almost always correlated with the commission of animal abuse. For example, Flynn (2001) found that in a study of over 265 college undergraduates, more than a third of male respondents had reported abusing animals while less than 10% of females did (74).

As many researchers have had success constructing vignettes about actual experiences (Barter & Renold 1999), the stories were based off true crime reports released by the Humane Society of the United States (for complete vignettes/survey, see Appendices 1 and 2). The scenarios were presented as followed (the name of the offender changed, everything else remained the same, creating 4 unique vignettes):

Last week, Darnell Jackson was charged with the illegal poaching of three antelope in Nevada. The buck and two does were discovered about 3 miles southeast of the Golden Eagle regional sports complex in Nevada. Jackson killed the animals out of season without a valid hunting license. The animals were shot multiple times, and their bodies were left at the site of the shooting. Recovered from Jackson's home were illegal trapping devices, two guns and several mementos from prior hunting excursions (i.e. - the antlers of a large mule deer).

Brad McCarthy was recently brought up on charges related to dogfighting. Evidence found at his Arizona home included 17 adult pit bulls and one puppy chained to trees throughout the property, along with several decomposing bodies. The majority of the dogs exhibited overt signs of physical injuries consistent with those sustained in dog fights. Police also seized equipment commonly used to condition dogs for fighting, including tires hung from trees designed to strengthen a dogs' jaws and treadmills to increase endurance. Found in McCarthy's basement was a pit used to host the fights.

After reading the story, respondents were asked if charges should be brought, and if the answer was yes, they were provided a set of options from which to choose the

appropriate punishment: a) community service, b) jail for less than a year, c) jail for more than a year or d) other (for which respondents were asked what this alternative sentence would be). This was designed to imitate the process of jurors or decision makers in the criminal justice system (Seron et al. 2006). Respondents were also asked why they selected the sentence they chose and a content analysis was performed on the responses.

In keeping with the method of Seron et al. (2006), quantitative responses were coded using an ordinal scale, with each answer corresponding to a numeric value.

Vignettes were pre-tested by graduate students prior to distribution among the sample population. These respondents verified that each respective name elicited the same racial association and provided feedback regarding the construction of the crime stories and the survey.

Results

The responses of those who selected “Other” were evaluated and it was determined that there were not enough themes to warrant the creation of additional variables. Even when there may have been enough responses to create a new category (i.e. - there were 6 students who recommended that the offender pay a fine), it was not possible to order the new categories (for example, is a fine more or less severe than community service?). Thus, these cases were dropped, leaving 267 useable surveys. Tables 1-4 highlight the sociodemographic factors of these cases.

Table 1: Respondent Race

Race	Frequency	Valid Percent
<i>African-American</i>	17	6.4
<i>White</i>	183	69.1
<i>Asian-American</i>	33	12.5
<i>Other</i>	32	12.1
<i>Total</i>	265	100.00

Table 2: Respondent Gender

Gender	Frequency	Valid Percent
<i>Female</i>	147	55.1
<i>Male</i>	120	44.9
<i>Total</i>	267	100.00

Table 3: Respondent Political Party Affiliation

Party	Frequency	Valid Percent
<i>Democratic</i>	152	57.4
<i>Republican</i>	47	17.7
<i>Independent</i>	44	16.6
<i>Other</i>	22	8.3
<i>Total</i>	265	100.00

Table 4: School Status

Year	Frequency	Valid Percent
<i>Freshman</i>	148	55.6
<i>Sophomore</i>	58	21.8
<i>Junior</i>	30	11.3
<i>Senior</i>	30	11.3
<i>Total</i>	266	100.0

Table 5 highlights the number of each scenario (only the usable cases) completed by the

students. 53.6% of students received a dogfighting vignette, and 46.4% received a poaching vignette. 22.1% of those who received a dogfighting vignette and 21.7% of those who received a poaching vignette had a white offender. 31.5% and 24.7%, respectively, had a black offender. The difference in percentages of those who received a black offender is a result of both random distribution and the dropped cases.

Table 5: Vignettes

Vignette Scenario	Total Number of Cases	% of Total Cases
<i>Black dogfighter</i>	84	31.5%
<i>White dogfighter</i>	59	22.1%
<i>Total</i>	143	53.6%
<i>Black poacher</i>	66	24.7%
<i>White poacher</i>	58	21.7%
<i>Total</i>	124	46.4%

For the analysis, the dependant variable was dichotomized, changing “community service,” “less than a year in jail” and “more than a year in jail” to a binary of community service versus any time in jail (regardless of length). This was done because the survey included an open-ended choice for sentencing (“more than a year” could equate to 4 years or 25 years, there is no way to know what the respondent had in mind). Additionally, logistic regression requires binary dependant variables so community service versus jail time proved a successful way to analyze the data.

Table 6 shows the frequency of whether or not charges should be brought against the offender (for both crimes). It is important to note that almost all respondents believed the behavior was a crime. When asked whether or not the offender should face charges, regardless of offender race or crime committed, 99.6% of respondents agreed that he should.

Table 6: Charges

Were charges recommended?	Frequency	Valid Percent
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<i>No</i>	1	.4%
<i>Yes</i>	266	99.6%
<i>Total</i>	267	100.0%

Table 7 shows the frequency of a respondent recommending any jail time for the offenders. Again, regardless of race or crime, 67.8% of respondents recommended some time in jail and 32.2% recommended community service for the offender.

Table 7: Community Service or Incarceration

Sentence	Frequency	Valid Percent
<i>Community Service</i>	86	32.2%
<i>Jail</i>	181	67.8%
<i>Total</i>	267	100.0%

Tables 8 and 9 demonstrate the cross-tabulations between punitive response and the two main independent variables: race (white versus black offender) and crime (poaching versus dogfighting). Cross-tabs are a simple but highly effective way to test the association between two variables. They were important in order to establish whether or not there is a relationship prior to more rigorous/sophisticated tests which would establish causation. By examining the cross-tab in Table 8, it is apparent that there is no relationship between race of offender and sentence (students recommended community service for 30.8% of the white offenders and 33.3% of the black offenders, and they recommended jail time for 69.2% of the white offenders and 66.7% of the black offenders). However, Table 9 reveals a very different result: students recommended jail time for only 29.8% of the poachers, but for 70.2% of the dogfighters. While the results of these correlations lead to the conclusion that crime type is related to sentence, before

making this conclusion it is important to perform a significance test to determine if this relationship is due to chance.

Table 8: Cross-tabulation, Sentence by Race of Offender

	White Offender	Black Offender	Total
<i>Community Service</i>	36 30.8%	50 33.3%	86 32.2%
<i>Jail time</i>	81 69.2%	100 66.7%	181 67.8%
<i>Total</i>	117 43.8%	150 56.2%	267 100.0%

Table 9: Crosstabulation Sentence by Crime

	Dogfighting	Poaching	Total
<i>Community Service</i>	16 18.6%	70 81.4%	86 100.0%
<i>Jail time</i>	127 70.2%	54 29.8%	181 100.0%
<i>Total</i>	143 53.6%	124 46.4%	267 100.0%

When correlations were run between sentence and race/crime, the only significant factor was type of crime. Tables 10-13 show these results. The Pearson's correlation coefficient measures the strength of the linear relationship between two variables, in this case, white versus black offender and sentencing, and poaching versus dogfighting and sentencing. Testing the correlation between race and sentencing revealed a correlation

coefficient of $-.027$ for a black offender and $.027$ for a white offender. Testing the correlation between crime type and sentencing revealed a coefficient of $-.483$ for poachers and $.483$ for dogfighters. Since the closer the correlation is to either 1 or -1, the stronger the relationship, it is evident that offender race was insignificant compared to the crime type. The results demonstrate that when the crime type is dogfighting, the likelihood that a respondent recommended jail time increases. Similarly, when the crime type was poaching, the likelihood decreased. The correlation tests report that while offender race and sentence was not significant, the tests of crime type and sentence were significant at the $.001$ level (two-tailed). In other words, the chance that the observed relationship between crime type and sentence is due to random chance is less than $1/1000$.

Table 10: Correlation, Black offender by sentence

		Is offender black (Darnell)?	Did respondent recommend prison in any form?
Is offender black (Darnell)?	<i>Pearson Correlation</i>	1	$-.027$
	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	.	$.658$
	<i>N</i>	267	267
Did respondent recommend prison in any form?	<i>Pearson Correlation</i>	$-.027$	1
	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	$.658$.
	<i>N</i>	267	267

Table 11: Correlation, White offender by sentence

		Is offender white (Brad)?	Did respondent recommend prison in any form?
Is offender white (Brad)?	<i>Pearson Correlation</i>	1	$.027$
	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	.	$.658$
	<i>N</i>	267	267
Did respondent recommend prison in any form?	<i>Pearson Correlation</i>	$.027$	1
	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	$.658$.
	<i>N</i>	267	267

Table 12: Correlation, Dogfighting by sentence

		Did respondent recommend prison in any form?	Is offense dogfighting?
Did respondent recommend prison in any form?	<i>Pearson Correlation</i>	1	.483(**)
	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	.	.000
	<i>N</i>	267	267
Is offense dogfighting?	<i>Pearson Correlation</i>	.483(**)	1
	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	.000	.
	<i>N</i>	267	267

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 13: Correlation, Poaching by sentence

		Did respondent recommend prison in any form?	Is offense poaching?
Did respondent recommend prison in any form?	<i>Pearson Correlation</i>	1	-.483(**)
	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	.	.000
	<i>N</i>	267	267
Is offense poaching?	<i>Pearson Correlation</i>	-.483(**)	1
	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	.000	.
	<i>N</i>	267	267

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Correlations only show the degree to which these two variables relate; they do not speak to causation. Thus, Tables 14-19 show the results of the logistical regression analysis used to estimate the effects of the predictor variables. As linear regression is unable to analyze the impact of categorical variables, the independent variables were coded as dummy variables. Table 14 shows the constant, and Table 15 demonstrates the Model Chi-Square (which tests whether the model as a whole predicts occurrence better than chance). Since it has a significance level of .000, it is concluded to be a useful model.

Table 14: Variables in the Logistic Regression Equation

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 0	Constant	.744	.131	32.284	1	.000	2.105

Table 15: Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients

	Chi-square	df	Sig.
<i>Step</i>	73.221	9	.000
<i>Block</i>	73.221	9	.000
<i>Model</i>	73.221	9	.000

The R-Square indicates how well the statistical model explains variation in the dependant variable. Using the Nagelkerke R-Square, it is shown that 33.5% of the variation in sentencing can be explained by variations in crime type.

Table 16: Model Summary

-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
262.367(a)	.240	.335

a Estimation terminated at iteration number 5 because parameter estimates changed by less than .001.

Logistic regression is highly effective at predicting whether an event will occur, and is especially useful for analysis on two types of dependent variables, as is the case with this project. As shown in Table 17, the only significant factor in determining punitive attitudes was the type of crime. The odds ratio, noted in the chart as Exp(B), indicates how many times higher the odds of occurrence are for each one-unit increase in the independent variable. As the table highlights, respondents were about 11 times more likely to recommend jail time for the dogfighter than the poacher. These results suggest that sentence does not vary based on race of the offender. Whiteness or blackness does not appear to be associated with a particular punishment. The main effect was type of crime.

Table 17: Logistical Regression by Sentence

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1(a)						
Respondent is black	.771	.741	1.081	1	.298	2.161
Respondent race is "other"	-.518	.461	1.263	1	.261	.596
Respondent is Asian	-.094	.478	.039	1	.844	.910
Respondent is male	.042	.315	.018	1	.894	1.043

	Respondent is Democrat	.854	.529	2.603	1	.107	2.349
	Respondent is Republican	.520	.601	.749	1	.387	1.682
	Respondent is Independent	.892	.614	2.114	1	.146	2.441
	Type of crime	2.384	.331	51.890	1	.000	10.848
	Offender race	-.295	.313	.884	1	.347	.745
	Constant	-.809	.582	1.931	1	.165	.445

Table 18: Logistical Regression by White offender

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1(a)	Respondent is black	1.591	1.156	1.895	1	.169	4.909
	Respondent race is "other"	.564	.702	.646	1	.421	1.758
	Respondent is Asian	-.824	.626	1.733	1	.188	.439
	Respondent is male	.193	.508	.145	1	.704	1.213
	Respondent is Democrat	1.202	.934	1.655	1	.198	3.325
	Respondent is Republican	1.190	1.009	1.390	1	.238	3.286
	Respondent is Independent	1.221	1.002	1.485	1	.223	3.390
	Type of crime	2.147	.511	17.677	1	.000	8.557
	Constant	-1.258	.960	1.715	1	.190	.284

Table 19: Logistical Regression by Black offender

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1(a)	Respondent is black	-.230	1.064	.047	1	.829	.795
	Respondent race is "other"	-1.822	.732	6.197	1	.013	.162
	Respondent is Asian	1.230	.877	1.966	1	.161	3.421
	Respondent is male	-.054	.435	.015	1	.902	.948
	Respondent is Democrat	.343	.719	.228	1	.633	1.409
	Respondent is Republican	-.014	.851	.000	1	.987	.986
	Respondent is Independent	.481	.847	.322	1	.570	1.617
	Type of crime	2.964	.505	34.483	1	.000	19.368
	Constant	-.725	.728	.992	1	.319	.484

As highlighted above by Tables 6 and 7, respondents felt that animal abuse was important and deserving of being considered a crime (recall that 95.6% of respondents

said that charges should be brought regardless of which crime they received and 60.3% of all respondents recommended the offender spend time in jail). In the qualitative responses there were certainly those who thought that animal abuse is “sad, but in comparison there are much more pressing and important issues for the justice system to deal with,” but a general theme was that the criminal justice system should pay attention to these types of crimes; this corresponds to the literature suggesting an awareness and concern for animal welfare issues. Respondents frequently accused these offenders of being “inhumane” and “cruel,” and that “anyone who can intentionally harm helpless animals does not deserve to be free.”

Regardless of an overarching theme that animal cruelty should be considered a criminal offense, this project also revealed the substantial “grey area” surrounding the definition of animal abuse. First, the fact that 50 respondents offered their own unique sentence recommendation highlights the wide variety of opinions about what constitutes cruelty and how it should be handled. Second, sentencing explanations from respondents ran the gamut, ranging from suggesting that the offenders be “made examples of with harsh penalties” to the polar opposite, that “going to jail for animal cruelty is extreme.” Some believed animal related crimes are no big deal because they are “just animals” while others said that “animal cruelty is just as bad as hurting humans...just because they can't communicate doesn't mean they can't feel pain.” Norms about animal practices are largely based on cultural context and while it is clear that there are several factors which directly influence these norms (namely species, human actor, rationale, etc.), there still exists a large amount of ambiguity in defining these norms. In fact, there were striking differences in what respondents’ considered the level of severity of dogfighting and

poaching: poaching was considered a much less serious offense. There were students who noted that they “do not believe in hunting for sport” and that hunters have a “sick desire to kill something,” but overall, poaching was deemed not “serious enough for incarceration” and that it was “victimless and minor.”

Dogfighters, however, were harshly criticized by the majority of the respondents. Not only did they use graphic language to describe the activity (“serious”, “immoral”, “murder” of dogs, “large scale”, “pathetic”, “evil”), but they specifically noted that harming dogs is wrong. One student expressed that he “loves dogs, and it hurts [him] to see people use them for fighting.” Reiterating this same feeling, students repeatedly argued that “it’s sick to make dog’s fight,” “he killed puppies...that’s horrible,” and that dogfighters are “horrible people.” There were no comparable statements about the deer/antelopes from the poaching vignette.

Discussion

Given that race has proven to be such a salient factor in sentencing decisions in the past, the insignificance of race in this project means that there were other influencers at work and speaks largely to the complicated nature of animal cruelty crimes. Poaching largely was not considered a very serious crime, likely as a result of its definition: it is not drastically different from that of the legal form of hunting (though hunting proponents would like to suggest otherwise). As a result of the similarities between the illegal and legal forms of hunting, it is likely that respondents applied their ideas and opinions about legal hunting to the poaching scenario. For example, Chuck Horn, a Department of Natural Resources conservation warden supervisor, attempted to lessen the severity of poaching by claiming that many poachers use some of the animal for consumption or clothing. Horn is not the only advocate of the “benefits” of this behavior; Muth and Jamison (2000) suggest that the “sport” provides meat, income for fur, trophies and wall-mountings to keep the memories “alive” (841). They also suggest that it offers “sociocultural benefits” (842) like kinship, highlighting that the form of violence with “value” depends on who is in control of the values of society. Several respondents for this study echoed these beliefs, suggesting that poaching is “just a breach of hunting season,” which “is not a reason for jail.”

In many areas of the United States, shooting wildlife is not only acceptable but an activity that takes skill and practice (Tallichet & Hensley 2005). Both hunting and poaching are generally considered a product of white culture and thus may not be

interpreted by dominant society as deserving of the label “cruelty” regardless of its illegality. Bryant (1979) suggests that this type of animal-related crime may be one of the oldest forms of sanctioned norm violation. Driscoll (1995) found that hunting was approved by 56.4% of respondents, and an overwhelming 92.5% approved of fishing. In fact, the ratings of different species on usefulness and importance correlated almost perfectly, suggesting that respondents felt the value of a certain animal was dependent upon how useful it was to humans. Many animals in the United States, notably fish and wildlife, are considered property of the public which is why hunting and fishing are regulated by law. It is no surprise then, that for students in an urban environment like George Washington University (and most universities, in that case) wildlife is distant, thus, unimportant (Tallichet & Hensley 2005). This study found that the antelopes were of little value as several students suggested “there shouldn’t be a punishment” for simply killing “wildlife.”

The subconscious technique of distancing themselves from the antelopes as living beings is arguably the result of a long history of pro-hunting socialization which separates animals based on their usefulness to humans. These animals are often viewed as objects/property who serve not only as food, but often as “ornaments” to be hung on the wall (Hirschman 1994). In fact, they are no longer referred to as animals but rather, “game” (Dahles 1993). Most citizens do not believe killing animals for food is objectionable (Elder et al. 1998), and it is generally assumed that consumption of the animal is the purpose of poaching (although the HSUS suggests that this is most often not the case). Agnew (1998) suggests that a more utilitarian attitude towards animals could be why some respondents “may perceive more benefits from abuse given their greater

direct dependence on animals as a source of livelihood” (201). Additionally, as poaching is performed in a secluded area and not often witnessed by the community, it is easier to suggest that the animal does not suffer and that it does not harm the social good (Elder et al. 1998). For these reasons, it is logical that many respondents interpreted poaching as a crime less deserving of incarceration.

While poaching was negatively related to sentencing, dogfighters were highly likely to receive incarceration for more than a year. Bickerstaff (2003) suggests that the unacceptability of companion animal abuse is a result of the high visibility of pets in American’s everyday lives. “The cult of the pet” (Muth & Jamson 2000) has placed domestic animals as actors in the roles of human relationships. As a result, harm beyond euthanasia of a pet whom is suffering is considered irrational and inhumane (Elder et al. 1998), and is likely to create anger and disgust by members of the 63% of homes (71.1 million) in the U.S. that own a pet (APPMA 2008). Companion animals are found in 70% of homes with children under six (Rollin 2004). Consumers spend more than five billion dollars a year on veterinary services and many even invest in one of the 600 pet cemeteries in the United States (Stephens & Hills 1996).

Companion animals make up a significant part of the American lifestyle, and in many homes they are considered members of the family (Rollin 2004; Long et al. 2007). Pet owners often sustain meaningful relationships with their animals, in which the dog or cat functions as a confidant, friend, playmate, etc. Animals essentially “represent living assets in the lives of an appreciable number of Americans” (Long et al. 2007: 148) and fill statuses in social groups. In effect they are “required to play the role of surrogate

humans in many social contexts” (Bryant 1979: 410). As they have no social groups of their own, these animals naturally join that of their human owners.

Not all pets get this luxury, however, as a clear hierarchy exists within the companion animals. Different animal species influence one’s attitudes towards animal cruelty issues (Agnew 1998). An animal becomes human companions, family members, etc., to the degree that they are able to become anthropomorphized, charged with human feelings and thoughts (Hirschman 1994; Sanders & Arluke 1993: 378). Owning a pet, dogs in particular, results from the tendency of humans “to project onto their pets...their most cherished values and expectations” (Menache 1998). For example, “when the doorbell rings the dog barks and the person jumps up from the chair. Why? Apparently - to the person - they both ‘wonder who is at the door’” (Rasmussen & Rajceki 1995). Fish, for example, are very difficult to humanize, thus they fall towards the lower end of the spectrum. Animals like these are “more likely to be objectified and commoditized - viewed as food for self or others, discarded down a toilet or in a garbage can” (Hirschman 1994: 625). Essentially, animals are considered deserving of a moral status (or not) based on the social construction of “humanness.”

Given the tendency for humans to anthropomorphize certain animals, it would follow that, as Agnew (1998) suggested, the more alike an animal is to a human, the less likely it is to be abused. Allen et al. (2002) found that respondents recommended harsher punishments for offenders who abused animals that were more similar to humans, likely a result of feeling empathy for a “similar” being. A study of 422 adults about the concern for the use of animals found that the most concern was for violent abuses, especially

dogfighting (Wells & Hepper 1997). The findings of the present study echo this result as respondents clearly believed that abusing dogs is wrong.

Crime, as discussed, is a socially-constructed, contextual phenomenon which depends on many different characteristics. It seems that who qualifies as a “victim” follows a similar trend, as this project points to a clearly ranked system of victimhood. While dogs were clearly ranked as having more value than antelope, respondents also indicated that animals are still very much considered “lower” than humans. Many students expressed that the offender should be incarcerated to avoid future violence towards humans. That violence against animals is largely considered a “warning sign” for violence against humans demonstrates that animals are still not yet fully considered legitimate victims of crime. In fact, several students suggested that jail would be extreme considering he “was not harming humans.” This conveys a distinct hierarchy of life, atop which humans are perched. And, while dogs fall closely below the first tier, the lives of antelope, or, “wildlife,” are decidedly of little value.

Stereotypes

A second possible explanation exists for the disparity in sentences. The tiered system of life discussed above often does not include pit bulls and other “aggressive breeds” which are often cast below their more socially-accepted counterparts. Both pit bulls and their owners have developed a damaging stigma among society, and given the drastic disparity in sentencing attitudes between the two different crimes, the Racial Stereotypes Approach would suggest that it is highly likely that the Vick incident had an effect on the results.

The prevailing stereotypes about pitbulls are important to examine as they are the most commonly abused animal in the world of dogfighting. Fighting dogs might have

been perceived as a higher risk to society than were the antelopes. Pitbulls are generally considered a deviant breed, largely a result of negative coverage by the media which asserts that they are “naturally vicious” (Borrows & Fielding 2005). Burrows & Fielding (2005) found that respondents considered pit bulls different from other types of dogs and supported that all pit bulls be neutered (arguably to control or limit this population). During the 1990’s, the “dangerous dog” problem became a significant issue in poor, urban neighborhoods as violent dogs became symbolic for many gang members (Arluke 2003: 35). Some have even called them “four-legged guns” (Arluke 2003: 36). The media encourages these associations via news coverage of pit bull attacks, rap music, gang representations in movies, etc. The media similarly supported a prototypical representation of black masculinity which “challenge[s] hegemonic constructions of whiteness” (Gray 1995: 402). These images have served to create one single image of black heterosexual masculinity: the “super star athlete, indignant rapper, [and] ‘menacing’ gang member;” essentially, one of “hyper-blackness based on fear and dread” (402). All of these stereotypical views of blacks as criminal, physically strong and prone to violence have created one blurred image of the African American male that threatens and offends many Americans. When this image is combined with an animal that has indeed become “weaponized,” (Arluke 2003: 36), the dominant culture’s sanctity of dog ownership is directly threatened. The new role of these dogs as deviant animals and their association with criminal activity has tagged both the animals and their owners as dangers to society.

As expected by the Racial Stereotypes Approach, during the very public media trial of Vick, photos of him were constantly displayed alongside accusations. So, even if

viewers were unfamiliar with whom he was prior to seeing the story, by the end of the news clip they knew exactly what he looked like. It is important to recall Abraham and Appiah's (2006) "implicit visual propositioning," (185) a tactic which has become a contemporary form of prejudice as it is often used to stereotype the black community. Given the established influence of the media on racial attitudes, it would follow that the trial of Michael Vick served to heighten the negative reaction that respondents had towards dogfighters. Since dogfighting has recently gained more legitimacy as a crime (arguably as a result of the intense coverage of Vick's case), it is likely that respondents in this project viewed the dogfighting vignettes via the context of a criminal activity, which thus triggered some of the racial stereotypes. Since people have come to associate dogfighting with a black, male image, this stereotype may have been so prevalent that the "white" name, Brad McCarthy, was not given adequate consideration: the respondent may have simply assumed blackness. In fact, several respondents specifically referenced Vick, arguing that the offender "should have learned from the Vick trial" and that "if Vick went to jail, so should the offender." This follows Gilliam et. al's (2002) assertion that white respondents exposed to stereotypes "endorse more punitive policies to address crime" (755).

Limitations

As with any project, there are certainly potential limitations to this study. First, there are potential issues with using someone else's research. In this case, Bertrand and Mulainathan's work (2004) was used to derive the names used in the vignettes. While names were re-tested to ensure they reflected intended race, one cannot be sure that the original authors followed appropriate protocol or that their results were derived from a

methodologically sound project. Their piece, however, detailed their entire procedure and their methods were solid.

In respect to my sample, I would have needed to oversample the black population as they make up a significantly lower percent of the population at GW: less than 10% (“GW” 2007: 134). However, minorities made up almost 31% of my sample. Another potential issue in regards to demographics involves the academic status of respondents: over half of the students were freshmen. This likely has implications on the results due to an assumed immaturity and an underexposure to educational resources beyond one’s close friends and family. I would suggest that many of these young people are yet to develop their own views and opinions in regards to criminal justice issues, and more time in an academic setting would likely provide opportunities to become more informed about these issues.

Additionally, there are potential generalizability limitations based on my non-random sample. All of the respondents attended the same university, and student samples generally tend to be more liberal than the rest of the population (Roberts et al. 2007). Colleges often educate its students to be aware of racial prejudices (Dasgupta & Hunsinger 2008), and those with higher education are generally less likely to base judgments on stereotypes. Students are also more likely to have high levels of liberalism and political correctness (Plous & Williams 1995). However, given that this work is exploratory in nature as very little (if any) work has explored race and crimes against animals, the results are still a worthwhile contribution to the literature.

A methodological limitation of this research is that within my dependant variable there was one open-ended category (“one year of prison or more”). The inclusion of this

variable with infinite possibilities made it unwise to use an ordered logistical regression. Future research should use a dependant variable with distinct, ordered categories so that one could do more sophisticated analysis on the results and gain an even deeper understanding of the mechanisms at work. Additionally, a more extensive study would include hypothetical offenders of other ethnicities in order to make a more accurate statement about race and crime, versus simply black versus white.

Conclusion

The results of this study coincide with other research that suggests animals are becoming beings worthy of moral consideration and their abuse deserves serious attention (Rollin 2004; Wells & Hepper 1997). Unfortunately, this piece also highlighted the need for a more concrete definition of cruelty. Violence against animals is “inevitably interpreted in culturally specific ways” (Elder et al. 1998) and individuals still differ on which violent behaviors are worthy of punishment. One way to come by this definition is to explore each animal use/abuse separately rather than lump them all together as “cruelty” as has been done in the past. There is evidently a wide range of discrepancy in between animal norms, thus future research should work towards the development of a much more specific definition of animal cruelty which addresses not only illegal practices, but also legal (i.e. - factory farming) and socially accepted practices (i.e. - wearing fur).

If the current unspecific definition remains as it stands, “we let those political and social actors with the greatest power determine our definition of animal abuse” (Agnew 1998: 180). Although more research about the opinions of the public will not necessarily allow for the creation of a “clean” definition of animal cruelty (disagreement exists even among the animal welfare movement), it will certainly allow researchers to get a better understanding of where most people “draw the line.” Future research should also explore the nuances by which race is a factor in this type of crime. Is there genuinely no effect of race on animal cruelty opinions? Or perhaps is it an intervening

factor in a manner which this project just did not explore? The potential for future topics in this arena is endless.

As this study shows, it would seem that animal norms in the United States are in the process of changing. According to the National Opinion Research Center, the percentage of married men (the predominant group of hunters) who hunt has fallen from 33% in 1975 to 20% in 1995 (Flynn 2002) so it can be presumed that poaching may be decreasing as well. And, based on the outrage caused by the Michael Vick incident, it would seem that dogfighting, too, is becoming more of a serious offense in the eyes of many Americans. The level of concern expressed for the abused animals in this study leads one to believe that “future years may see a shift in the way society uses animals, away from their manipulation and toward care for their well-being” (Wells & Hepper 1997). The evolution of this change is important to understand and is certainly worth studying.

As to why the Racial Stereotypes Approach seemed to have a limited influence here could very well have to do with the ambiguity surrounding the definition of animal cruelty as a crime. Ultimately, both of these activities are illegal. The law says that they are punishable offenses. However, whether a respondent took it seriously depended on the animal involved and the activity he was engaging in. This highlights that the legitimacy of animals as victims follows more of a spectrum pattern than a simple “yes” or “no.” Scholars are faced with two competing literatures: a) the race and crime literature which says that race is a factor in sentencing, then, b) the animal cruelty research in which there is much less consensus. Arguably as a result of its newness as a social phenomenon, fewer scholars have investigated this type of crime, thus the

literature consists of a variety of topics/conclusions/etc. This project found that race may not be a linear factor, rather, that it is quite complex and depends on several conditional variables.

Animal cruelty is still a largely under-studied and misunderstood area of crime. However, it is clearly an important area of research. It is encountered in almost every area of life, from factories, to laboratories, to an individual's garage. Rollin (2004) argues, the "time has come for sociologists to acknowledge the significant and extensive role that nonhuman animals play in the lives of humans" (83). Animals are highly involved in our everyday lives, so "it would seem to well justify the research attention of sociologists" (Bryant 1979: 417). Animal practices "are a powerful basis for creating difference and hence racialization" based on "ideas about hierarchies of living things" (Elder et. al 1998). This hierarchy and it's relation to race remains largely misunderstood. Studying animal-related crimes allows for the more thorough understanding of how humans organize their social world, how they both use and abuse power, and how they view their connection to other living things. In essence, to genuinely understand society, we must understand all of our social interactions: including those with animals.

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Appendix 1 – Vignettes

Last week, Darnell Jackson was charged with the illegal poaching of three antelope in Nevada. The buck and two does were discovered about 3 miles southeast of the Golden Eagle regional sports complex in Nevada. Jackson killed the animals out of season without a valid hunting license. The animals were shot multiple times, and their bodies were left at the site of the shooting. Recovered from Jackson's home were illegal trapping devices, two guns and several mementos from prior hunting excursions (i.e. - the antlers of a large mule deer).

Last week, Brad McCarthy was charged with the illegal poaching of three antelope in Nevada. The buck and two does were discovered about 3 miles southeast of the Golden Eagle regional sports complex in Nevada. McCarthy killed the animals out of season without a valid hunting license. The animals were shot multiple times, and their bodies were left at the site of the shooting. Recovered from McCarthy's home were illegal trapping devices, two guns and several mementos from prior hunting excursions (i.e. - the antlers of a large mule deer).

Brad McCarthy was recently brought up on charges related to dogfighting. Evidence found at his Arizona home included 17 adult pit bulls and one puppy chained to trees throughout the property, along with several decomposing bodies. The majority of the dogs exhibited overt signs of physical injuries consistent with those sustained in dog fights. Police also seized equipment commonly used to condition dogs for fighting, including tires hung from trees designed to strengthen a dogs' jaws and treadmills to increase endurance. Found in McCarthy's basement was a pit used to host the fights.

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Appendix 2 – Survey

1.)

Should charges be brought against Mr. Jackson?

- a) Yes (If so, please go on to question two.)
- b) No (If not, please go on to question three.)

2a.) If you were on a jury for Mr. Jackson’s case, what sentence would you recommend? (Please select one.)

- a) community service
- b) incarceration (less than a year)
- c) incarceration (one year or more)
- d) other (please explain): -

2b.)

Why did you recommend this sentence?

Demographic Information:

3.)

What race do you most closely identify yourself with?

- a) African-American
- b) White
- c) Asian-American
- d) Other

4.)

What ethnicity do you most closely identify yourself with?

- a) Hispanic
- b) Non-Hispanic

5.)

What is your gender?

- a) Female
- b) Male
- c) Other

6.)

How would you define your political affiliation?

- a) Democratic
- b) Republican
- c) Independent
- d) Other

7.)

What is your school status?

- a) Freshman
- b) Sophomore
- c) Junior
- d) Senior

8.)

What is your major? _____