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Replication Project Proposal

**Citation:**

Shariff, A. F., Greene, J. D., Karremans, J. C., Luguri, J. B., Clark, C. J., Schooler, J. W., Baumeister, Roy F., & Vohs, K. D. (2014). Free Will and Punishment A Mechanistic View of Human Nature Reduces Retribution. *Psychological science*, 0956797614534693.

**Abstract:**

If free-will beliefs support attributions of moral responsibility, then reducing these beliefs should make people less retributive in their attitudes about punishment. Four studies tested this prediction using both measured and manipulated free-will beliefs. Study 1 found that people with weaker free-will beliefs endorsed less retributive, but not consequentialist, attitudes regarding punishment of criminals. Subsequent studies showed that learning about the neural bases of human behavior, through either lab-based manipulations or attendance at an undergraduate neuroscience course, reduced people’s support for retributive punishment (Studies 2–4). These results illustrate that exposure to debates about free will and to scientific research on the neural basis of behavior may have consequences for attributions of moral responsibility.

**Reason to choose this study**

This study is a good choice for me to try to replicate because my research interests center around issues in the criminal justice system. One of the issues in particular I am interested in is better understanding why people support harsh sentencing for criminal offenders, and in finding ways to reduce support for excessively harsh sentences. Although my current research program focuses more on how race factors into beliefs about sentencing, I am also interested in broadening my understanding of factors that affect people’s thoughts about sentencing.

**Stimuli, procedures, and challenges**

Fortunately, the authors of this paper chose to openly provide their materials online, so I will be able to use their stimuli. I would prefer to attempt to replicate Study 3, with the pop-science articles because these stimuli are most of interest to me. The procedures will be fairly straightforward. Study 3 involves presenting text and articles to read and text questions to answer with multiple-choice response.

Although the published version of Study 3 is a lab study performed with undergraduate students, the authors disclose in the supplemental materials that they already replicated Study 3 twice on MTurk, once successfully and once unsuccessfully. They do not, however, discuss what they think might have happened in the unsuccessful replication, so it may be particularly interesting to see what happens with another attempted replication.

From things we discussed in class, I noticed that many of the analyses in the paper use means and t-tests on their non-linear scale of punishments (their main DV, which, for example, in one part of the sequence goes from 5 years in prison, to 10 years in prison, to 25 years in prison with chance of parole, to 25 years in prison with no chance of parole). Although the experimental presentation should be pretty straightforward, I think one of the challenges of this attempted replication will be using appropriate statistical techniques for analysis.