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# Contributing Factors that Influence a Student's Decision Regarding a Juvenile Sentence

Secrett Wingard

University of North Georgia, [secrettwingard@gmail.com](mailto:secrettwingard@gmail.com)

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Contributing Factors that Influence a Student's Decision Regarding a Juvenile Sentence

Secrett Wingard

University of North Georgia

## CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

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#### Introduction

On March 21, 2000, 15-year-old Alonza Thomas ran away from home. During Alonza's time away from home, he met a man and went to his apartment. Alonza stayed at his apartment for a couple of days (McNally, 2018). The man cooked for him and gave him a place to sleep. Alonza tried to go home, but the man became irrational and approached Alonza with a gun, stating "You think you're gonna eat my food for free? Live in my house and just walk out? And think things come free like that? No, you're gonna have to rob this store. ...You're gonna do this for me" (McNally, 2018). Fearing for his life Alonza did as he was told; he went to the Fastrip gas station and placed a gun at the clerk's chest. Alonza held his gun the way he saw actors hold their gun in movies such as "Menace II Society" and Boyz n the Hood." He told the clerk to empty the register. The clerk hit his hand on the glass and the gun discharged. Alonza tried to make a run for it, but the store clerk leaped on top of Alonza and began beating him. The clerk and other workers held Alonza at gun point until the officers arrived. Alonza was charged with three counts of second-degree robbery, one count of assault with a firearm and enhancements for personal use of a firearm (McNally, 2018).

On December 21, 2000, Alonza agreed to a plea deal (People v. Thomas, n.d). The prosecution dropped two counts of armed robbery and they charged him with one count of armed robbery and second-degree robbery. As a result, he received a sentence of 13 years in prison. (People v. Thomas, n.d). Some people will view this case and state 13 years was not a suitable punishment for him. They may declare he was only a child, and that he made a bad decision. Furthermore, they may claim an adult forced him to commit the crime and, therefore, he should not be punished so harshly. On the other hand, some believe "he got what he deserved" or "if

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you do the crime you do the time,” with no regard to Alonza’s age. They may argue that it is better to discipline him now, rather than wait until he is an adult and commits a harsher offense. The fairness of Alonza’s sentence is one of the many gray areas in the criminal justice system.

Law enforcement personnel, prosecutors, and judges have discretion. Discretion is the power to act along with one’s own judgment (Law Teacher n.d). A judge considers the offender’s criminal history and the severity of the current crime he/she committed to determine the offender’s punishment. Moreover, the judge also takes into consideration if the offender has a job, children, close ties to the community, church, or any other organizations. Judges acknowledge these bonds to the community and family to determine if the offender’s sentence would drastically impact or adversely influence someone else’s life. For instance, suppose a judge has two trials in the same day, a male offender and a female offender. They both committed the same crime, and they have two children at home. Although they are involved in their childrens’ lives, the judge uses discretion to determine the female’s sentence, while the male receives a more severe sentence than the female. A mother is seen as a nurturer. A child needs their mom; therefore, judges are more likely to separate a father from a child than a mother from a child. Many individuals would consider this to be a double standard. The offender’s race often influences some judges’ decision regarding length of sentence. For example, one Hispanic and one White American may have the same criminal history and committed the same crime, but the Hispanic offender is given a longer sentence compared to the White American, because of their ethnicity. Some people would declare this to be white privilege. Moreover, judges are likely to give offenders who are older a harsher sentence than a younger individual.

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The same factors judges use to determine the appropriate punishment for adults are the factors they use to waive juvenile cases to adult courts. The age a child must be to be identified as an adult varies in each state. In some states, once the child has reached the age of eighteen they are considered an adult. In other states, like Georgia, once the child is seventeen-years-old, they are recognized as an adult. Many individuals believe that children will be children; furthermore, they believe children will make countless mistakes throughout their adolescent years. As a result of their mistakes, children should be taught or receive treatment for their misconduct. The criminal justice system is punishing several children as adults for making mistakes. Children are being punished as adults every day, by serving lengthy sentences in prisons, alongside adult career criminals. This research is centered on individuals' attitudes regarding punishing juvenile delinquents as adults for committing violent offenses. This study will analyze if gender, race, and age influence students' attitudes towards punishing juveniles as adults.

### **Literature Review**

John Dilulio (1995) categorizes children who live in the moment and who are solely concerned with their own interests as super-predators. According to Dilulio (1995), these children have no respect for human life, they kill or harm on impulse, and they have no thought of the future. Dilulio (1995) declared, "while the trouble will be greatest in black inner-city neighborhoods, other places are also certain to have burgeoning youth-crime problems that will spill over into upscale central-city districts, inner-ring suburbs, and even rural heartland" (para. 3). In other words, youth who are black are more likely to commit violent crimes rather than youth that are white.

Michael Moore (2014) argues that the Eighth Amendment's ban on cruel and unusual punishment should prohibit sentences of life in prison without parole for juveniles who did not

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commit murder or intend to kill, and examines the reasoning behind the United States Supreme Court rulings regarding punishing juveniles as adults. In 2005, in *Roper v. Simmons*, the Supreme Court held that the Eighth Amendment's ban on cruel and unusual punishments and the Fourteenth Amendment prohibited the execution of those under the age of eighteen when they committed their crime (Moore, 2014). In 2010, in *Graham v. Florida*, the court considered whether impositions of life without parole sentences could be imposed on juveniles for non-homicide offenses (Moore, 2014). The case established that states must offer, at a minimum, "some meaningful opportunity to obtain release based on demonstrated maturity and rehabilitation" (Moore, 2014, p. 9). Additionally, in 2012, the court in *Miller v. Alabama* examined whether juveniles convicted of homicide could be sentenced to life without parole and in. In the end, it was deemed constitutional, but only if age and other factors are first considered (Moore, 2014).

Juveniles are often forced into adult court based simply on their age and offense (Moore, 2014). Moore (2014) states that the important part of determining the culpability of a group of offenders is to look at any unique characteristics that reduce the individual's responsibility over their actions. "The Supreme Court concluded that juveniles are less culpable than adults, because of three main factors: (1) juveniles are comparatively more immature and irresponsible than adults; (2) "juveniles are more vulnerable or susceptible to negative influences and outside pressures, including peer pressure" and (3) juveniles' character and personality traits are less fixed than adults" (Moore, 2014, p. 12). The Supreme Court has concluded juveniles' lack of control over their environment gives them a greater claim to forgiveness because they cannot escape negative influences (Moore, 2014).

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Moore (2014) argues that the Court should strike down all life sentences for juveniles convicted under the felony murder doctrine. Felony murder has been justified as deterring accidental or negligent deaths during felonies (Moore, 2014). According to Moore (2014), the felony murder doctrine cannot be applied to a group that collectively, by their nature, are immature, irresponsible, and heavily influenced by others; it is the reason why more than a quarter of juvenile defendants will die in prison, and deterrence has little application to juveniles because criminal intent and cost/benefit analysis do not apply to juveniles (Moore, 2014). Moore (2014) stands firmly on the premise that children are vulnerable to peer pressure and negative influences, but in the context of felony murder they are presumed to be able to prevent third parties from committing offenses. Deterrence is less relevant when imposed on children because many will be released at an old age when their risk of recidivism is extremely low (Moore, 2014).

Retribution is the concept that the offenders deserve punishment for their actions (Moore, 2014). Moore (2014) examines how retribution should never be as strong for juveniles as it is for adults, because children are inherently less blame worthy. Moore explains juveniles under the age of fourteen are presumed to not possess criminal intent (Moore, 2014). Juveniles that are between the ages of fourteen and eighteen years old are more likely to follow peer pressure, they are more impulsive, they are shortsighted, and they are reckless (Moore, 2014). Children are not the same as adults; therefore, children's intentions are not the same as adult intentions (Moore, 2014).

Matarazzo, Carrington, and Hiscott's (2001) article focuses on the role of prior dispositions to explain the means of the decision-making in youth court. They assess the relationships between prior and current youth court dispositions as a guide regarding to

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sentencing. The authors explain that the societal- reaction theory proposes that evaluations such as dispositions are one type of “label” and any prior evaluations will have a strong effect on future evaluations (Matarazzo, Carrington & Hiscott, 2001). To state it differently, an individual’s previous criminal history will influence their sentence. This theory is centered on the definitions and actions of deviants and people who label them deviant, and the social interaction between the two groups (Matarazzo, Carrington & Hiscott, 2001). They tested how the current disposition of a case is affected strongly by the previous dispositions instead of the current charges the youth is being convicted for (Matarazzo, Carrington & Hiscott, 2001). They also predicted that the present-day dispositions are reliant on all prior dispositions instead of the most recent prior disposition (Matarazzo, Carrington & Hiscott, 2001).

Their study used data from a Canadian Youth Court Survey, in which the current disposition was the dependent variable and the independent variable was prior dispositions. Additional variables were the seriousness of the offenses, current and prior offenses, as well as age and gender of the offender, which have been shown to have a relation to the harshness of dispositions (Matarazzo, Carrington & Hiscott, 2001). The hypotheses were tested using turnover tables and log –linear models (Matarazzo, Carrington & Hiscott, 2001). The results of the study revealed that dispositions were strongly influenced by prior dispositions rather than directed by the circumstances of the current offense (Matarazzo, Carrington, & Hiscott, 2001). This supported the societal-reaction perspective theory, which states that the labels an offender has can last forever and have a strong influence on future evaluations by youth court judges (Matarazzo, Carrington, & Hiscott, 2001). The findings of this study discovered that it would be tough for young offenders to receive a less severe sentence for the current charges because of

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their prior criminal records (Matarazzo, Carrington, & Hiscott, 2001). This source suggests that prior dispositions play a role in the juvenile's outcome if he or she is punished as an adult.

Cullen, Fisher and Applegate (2000) found that citizens tend to believe that offenders should be locked up for longer periods of time because they do not want perpetrators who committed violent acts such as rape, burglary, and murder to return to the streets. People were asked if they supported capital punishment of juveniles convicted of murder, and between 64% and 86% supported it (Cullen, Fisher & Applegate, 2000). However, when asked to choose between the death penalty and possibility of parole with added restrictions, these numbers changed: 49.9% of respondents chose possibility of parole with added restrictions, while just 42.8% now chose the death penalty. Likewise, when asked to choose between death penalty and life without parole, 47.7% chose life without parole and 43.1% chose the death penalty. When asked a single-item standard polling question, over half of the sample agreed that a sixteen-year-old who is convicted of first-degree murder deserved the death penalty (Cullen, Fisher & Applegate, 2000). This source suggests that when administering a survey or questionnaire, providing an alternative sentence will influence the participant's decision regarding a juvenile's punishment.

Leiber and Jamieson (1995) examined processing patterns regarding juvenile cases. They predicted, using conflict theory, that the structural characteristics of jurisdictions and the juvenile court personnel stereotyping teenagers will result in distinct forms of case processing between African American youth and white youth (Leiber & Jamieson, 1995). To put it differently, the hypothesis for their study was if the offender's race and the judge's attitude towards their race would have a combined influence on case outcomes. The independent variables for their study covered of punishment orientation, racial differences, poverty, racial inequality, and juvenile

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arrest rate (Leiber & Jamieson, 1995). The dependent variable covered the five decision making stages in the juvenile justice system: intake, petition, initial appearance, adjudication, and judicial disposition (Leiber & Jamieson, 1995). The authors utilized logistic regression procedures to test the legitimacy of the hypotheses. The findings showed that the influence of race, decision-maker attitudes, and structural contexts on case outcomes is more delicate and indirect rather than intended and overt (Leiber & Jamieson, 1995). This source suggests that race may play a role regarding which juvenile is being punished as an adult.

Bishop and Frazier (1992) examined the effects that reform initiatives have had on the juvenile justice system to determine whether the system's past pattern of unequal treatment of male and female status offenders and delinquents has been corrected or merely masked. The data used in this study were secondary data. The data were drawn from records of the total population of cases referred to the juvenile justice system from 1985 to 1987 in Florida. They centered their analysis on the last referral for each youth in the data set (Bishop & Frazier, 1992). The dependent variables of this study included intake screening, detention status, court referral, adjudication, and judicial disposition (Bishop & Frazier, 1992). The independent variables for this study consisted of social characteristics, current offenses, offense history, and intra-case processing outcomes. The researchers analyzed the data using logistic regression as the method of estimation, and concluded that "male delinquents are more likely than females to be recommended for formal processing, to be petitioned to court by prosecutors for adjudication, to be detained in secure facilities until adjudication, and to receive judicial dispositions that involve incarceration or similar liberty constraints" (Bishop & Frazier, 1992, p. 24). This source suggests that gender may play a role regarding punishing a juvenile as an adult. In other words, whether

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the offender is a female or male has an impact on people's choice as to whether they should be punished as a juvenile or as an adult.

The point of the juvenile court is to act like a surrogate parent and focus primarily on what would be in the "best interest" of the youth (Mears, Pickett, & Mancini, 2015). The founders of the juvenile court believed that youthful offenders should be protected from the harms of the adult justice system, and children could be "saved" and avoid a life of crime. Mears, Pickett and Mancini (2015) focused on the public's opinion about youth justice, specifically their support for rehabilitation or disciplinary sanctions such as life without parole and the death penalty. The survey forced respondents to choose between sanctioning mainly punishment- oriented justice, rehabilitation-oriented justice, or a balance of the two. 54 percent of respondents preferred a balance justice approach, 31 percent preferred a general rehabilitation-oriented approach, and 15 percent preferred a general punishment- oriented approach. Therefore, 85 percent of the participants supported either a balance justice approach or a general rehabilitation-oriented approach (Mears, Pickett, & Mancini, 2015).

Additionally, the authors explained the balanced justice approach as a sanctioning approach that is comprised of both punishment and rehabilitation. Their study demonstrated that the public supports tough punishment of young offenders, especially violent offenders, but the public also supports rehabilitation (Mears, Pickett, & Mancini, 2015). Though most of the public supports trying juveniles in adult court, they are not necessarily supportive of treating juveniles like adults in sentence length and place of confinement (Mears, Pickett, & Mancini, 2015). This source suggests looking at both punishment and rehabilitation options. The present study will determine if the juvenile's race, age, or gender will influence a student decision whether to punish them as an adult.

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### **Method**

The goal of this research is to determine what circumstances influence individuals to punish juveniles as adults for committing violent crimes. More specifically, what factors play a role in determining if a juvenile should go to prison? The independent variables in this study consisted of the juvenile's age, race, and gender. The dependent variable was the measure of the participant's perception of whether the sentence was fair. Participants were asked their gender, race/ ethnicity, age, and political orientation. The population of this study were students at University of North Georgia which included dual enrolled students, commuters and non-traditional students.

### **Recruiting Procedures**

The survey was located on the university's announcement board. Students from the various campuses had access to the survey; however, only students who possessed a University of North Georgia account could participate in the survey. To obtain a large number of participants, professors from five departments were asked to make an announcement in their classroom about the survey. To acquire other students' opinions, rather than just Criminal Justice students, a recruiting email was sent to Math and Psychology professors as well.

### **Survey Procedures**

The data were gathered by administering a questionnaire through Survey Monkey. Prior to the participants obtaining the questionnaire, each participant had to agree to the consent letter. Each participant could only take the survey once. The survey was open to participants for three weeks, to ensure a greater number of responses and/or data was obtained. On the third week, teachers were sent a reminder email to inform their students to take the survey. The survey

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included fixed-choice questions to guarantee that the questions were lucid and understandable. The survey consisted of seven questions. Four questions centered on the participant's social demographics and the remaining three questions consisted of scenarios. Two of the scenario questions contained six variables and one scenario question contained four variables. The consent letter and the survey that was administered can be found in the Appendix.

Within the scenarios the characteristics of the juvenile was consistently modified and randomly assigned. The scenario questions were grouped in the following manner; age and race, age and gender, and gender and race. Although there are not set statistical guidelines for how large of a sample is needed for factorial surveys (Auspurg & Hinz, 2015), the total number of participants I anticipated was 200. Matarazzo, Carrington & Hiscott (2001) found that variables like the seriousness of the offenses, current/ prior offenses, and age and gender of the offender have a relation to the harshness of dispositions. In this study, the independent variables were the sentence and the age, gender, and race of the juvenile. The dependent variable was the measure of participants' perception regarding the fairness of the sentence. The participants responded to the scenario questions with a scale ranging from one to ten, with one meaning "very unfair" and ten meaning "very fair.

## **Analysis**

Once the data were collected, descriptive statistics was used to analyze participant's responses to each question. In addition, descriptive statistics analyzed what percent of respondents fit into a specific category. Due to the low number of responses to each question in the questionnaire and to ensure the descriptive analysis was more meaningful, the responses were grouped in the following manner. Participants who chose the numerical value of 1 or 2 was identified as very unfair, 3 or 4 was identified as unfair, 5 or 6 was identified as neutral, 7 or 8 was identified as

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fair and 9 or 10 was identified as very fair. The total number of participants was 183. One participant skipped the demographic questions. There were more females than males that participated in the survey. Most of the participants were between the ages of 21-23. There were more white participants than any other race. Minorities made up 26.9% of the sample population. Regarding the participants' political party, 50% were Republicans. Please view table 1 for more information regarding sample demographics.

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Table 1. Description of the sample

Variable	Frequency	Percent
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	108	59.02
Male	73	39.89
Other	2	1.09
Total	183	100
<b>Age</b>		
17 or younger	2	1.1
18-20	61	33.52
21-23	97	53.0
24 or older	22	12.09
Missing	1	.5
Total	183	100
<b>Race</b>		
Multiple ethnicity/other (please specify)	9	4.95
Asian/Pacific Islander	6	3.30
Black or African American	19	10.44
Hispanic	15	8.24
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0	0
White/Caucasian	133	73.08
Missing	1	.5
Total	183	100
<b>Political Party</b>		
Republican	91	50.0
Democrat	36	19.78
Independent	33	18.13
Something Else	22	12.09
Missing	1	.5
Total	183	100

First, we examined the question asking whether a sentence was fair regarding a juvenile being sentenced to life in prison without parole for stabbing and killing his younger sister. Overall, respondents indicated a more satisfactory response to the sentence if the juvenile was a 16-year-old boy. When the juvenile was a 10-year-old boy, 50% of the respondents thought the sentence was “fair” or “very fair,” and when the juvenile was a 14-year-old boy, 62.5% of respondents felt the sentence was “fair” or “very fair.” When the juvenile was a 16-



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For the question asking about a juvenile being sentenced as an adult for selling drugs at school, overall respondents indicated a more satisfactory response to the sentence if the juvenile was white and 16 years old. When the juvenile was 10 years old and an African American, 14.7% of the respondents thought the sentence was “fair” or “very fair,” and when the juvenile was white and 10 years old, 17.7% of respondents felt the sentence was “fair” or “very fair.” When the juvenile was 14 years old and an African American, 12% of the respondents perceived the sentence being “fair” or “very fair,” and for a white 14-year-old juvenile, 24.5 % of respondents believed the sentence was “fair” or “very fair.” When the juvenile was a 16-year-old African American, 27.3% of respondents believed the sentence being “fair” or “very fair,” and 52.1% of respondents held the sentence as “fair” or “very fair” for a white 16-year-old.

If the juvenile was 10 years old, the sentence was perceived to be “fair” or “very fair” just 16.2% of the time, and when the juvenile was a 14-year-old, the a sentence was deemed “fair” or “very fair” 18.25% of the time. If the juvenile was a 16-year-old, 39.7% of the respondents believed the sentence to be “fair” or “very fair.” When looking at an African American defendant, 18% of the respondents indicated that the sentence was “fair” or “very fair” and 31.36% of the respondents indicated that the sentence was “fair” or “very fair” when the juvenile was white. Please see Table 3 for more information.

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Table 3. A \_\_\_\_\_ was sentenced as an adult for selling drugs at school.

	Very Unfair	%	Unfair	%	Neutral	%	Fair	%	Very Fair	%	Total
10-year-old African American	14	41.2%	10	29.4%	5	14.7%	4	11.8%	1	2.9%	34
10-year-old white	9	26.5%	14	41.2%	5	14.7%	4	11.8%	2	5.9%	34
14-year-old African American	8	32%	9	36%	5	20%	2	8%	1	4.0%	25
14-year-old White	6	18.2%	12	36.4%	7	21.2%	5	15.4%	3	9.1%	33
16-year-old African American	6	18.2%	8	24.2%	10	30.3%	6	18.2%	3	9.1%	33
16-year-old White	2	8.7%	0	0%	9	39.1%	9	39.1%	3	13.0%	23
Total											183

When looking at the question asking if a sentence was fair in reference to a 1-year probation sentence for threatening to kill a classmate, overall respondents indicated a more favorable response to the sentence if the juvenile was a boy, with African American boys having higher levels of perceived fairness of the sentence than white boys. When the juvenile was an African American boy, 51.1% of the respondents thought the sentence was “fair” or “very fair” and when the juvenile was a white boy 46% of respondents felt the sentence was “fair” or “very fair.” When looking at the juvenile being an African American girl, 45% of the respondents

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indicated that the sentence was “fair” or “very fair” and 43.5 % of the respondents indicated that the sentence was “fair” or “very fair” when the juvenile was a white girl. When the juvenile was a girl, the sentence was perceived to be “fair” or “very fair” 44.25% of the time and when the juvenile was a boy, the sentence was seen as “fair” or “very fair” for 48.5% of respondents. When the juvenile was an African American, 48% of the respondents viewed the sentence to be “fair” or “very fair.” When the juvenile was white, 44.75% of the respondents viewed the sentence to be “fair” or “very fair.” Please see Table 4 for more information.

Table 4. A (An) \_\_\_\_\_ was sentenced to 1-year probation for threatening to kill a classmate.

	Very Unfair	%	Unfair	%	Neutral	%	Fair	%	Very Fair	%	Total
African American Girl	3	7.5%	7	1.8%	12	30.0%	13	32.5%	5	12.5%	40
African American Boy	3	6.4%	7	14.9%	13	27.7%	12	25.5%	12	25.5%	47
White Girl	6	13.0%	7	15.2%	13	28.3%	11	23.9%	9	19.6%	46
White Boy	9	18%	6	12%	12	24%	13	26%	10	20%	50
Total											183

### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to observe if students were comfortable giving a child a harsh sentence that is often given to an adult; additionally, whether race, age, or gender affect their decision,. A child receiving a harsher sentence, because of the color of their skin, their culture, sexuality, or their age is not using discretion, it is using discrimination. The findings in this study imply that the juvenile’s characteristics such as race, age, and gender do influence students verdict in the length or type of sentence the juvenile should receive.

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The analysis of race influencing a student's decision was surprising, especially since most of the participants were whites and Republicans. In the scenario regarding drugs being sold at school, more participants believed a white juvenile should be punished as an adult than did the percentage consenting to this if the juvenile was African American. There was an average of 13.36% difference between the two races in this scenario. As for the scenario regarding a year's probation for killing a classmate, more participants believed the African American juvenile should be punished as an adult than was the case for a white juvenile. There was an average of 3.25% difference between the two races in this scenario. These findings are complex because the research literature suggests African Americans are more likely to receive a harsher sentence than whites, yet our results were inconsistent. Several lurking variables could have contributed to these inconsistent findings, such as a participant choosing an answer they believed was the "right" answer rather than answering the question as it correlates to their true opinion. Another lurking variable could have been that age or gender of the juvenile has a stronger impact on the participant's decision than believed. Also socialization can also be seen as a lurking variable. The majority of the participants may consider African Americans selling drugs as normal; they may see it as an expectation for them to engage in this lifestyle. On the other hand, a white individual is not supposed to partake in such conduct or behavior.

The analysis of the juvenile's age and it how it effects a student's decision was credible; as mentioned previously, most of the participants were between the ages of 21 and 23. As the literature supports, most of the participants in this study believe juveniles who are 16 years of age should be sentenced as an adult. Very few participants believe a ten-year-old should receive the same sentence as an adult. I am pleased that few of my peers believe a ten-year-old does not deserve to be sentenced to an adult prison. With these findings, it is safe to assume that as a

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juvenile age increases, the punishment for the crime will be equal or greater than what they deserve.

The analysis of gender effects on students' decisions was reasonable. As has been noted, there were more female participants than male participants. The literature supports the findings of this study. Most of the participants believed boys should receive a harsher sentence than a female juvenile. Bishop & Frazier (1992) stated male delinquents are more likely to be processed formally as an adult rather than females. From these findings it is safe to assume, boys are more likely to receive a harsher sentence.

It is important to highlight, as the offenses became more violent, the responses to the perception of fairness to sentence in all variables increased, despite the juvenile's social demographics. The more violent the crime is the more severe the sentence will be. From these findings, if presented with Alonza Thomas' case, they would more than likely agree that his sentence was fair. It is safe to assume this because he was 15 during the time the crime took place and 16 years-old when prosecuted. Also, he is an African American male and armed robbery is a violent offense.

There were some limitations in conducting this study. For instance, the survey was open during Spring Break; so many students were not focus on participating in the survey. In addition, due to the short period of time, the study's data could not be analyzed in a more in-depth manner. To obtain a greater number of participants, in the future surveys should be open during periods where there are no school breaks.

To ensure more diversity, administer the survey to students that attend other universities and not solely University of North Georgia. Furthermore, for future research, the data gathered

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should be analyzed using ANOVA. A two-way ANOVA test would be used to examine the main effects of and the interactions between two factors (OriginLab, n.d). A main effect is one independent variable on the dependent variable (Statistics How To, 2017). An interaction effect is when one explanatory variable interacts with another explanatory variable (Statistics How To, 2017). I would take the results from this research and create a hypothesis. Instead of having white and African American as the only race variables in the scenarios, in the future, one should include Hispanics or Asians. Through various research, it is clear that white and African Americans are treated differently in the criminal justice system. A test should be performed to see if the same applies to different minority groups. There should be more scenarios regarding different violent offenses to test if these findings are for juveniles who committed murders or all violent offenses. Finally, students should be asked their major so one can analyze if the students lack of knowledge, regarding the criminal process, influences their decision.

In the criminal justice system, power is often abused. Discretion is daily abused in the criminal justice system regarding children being sentenced to adult prisons. A child is easily influenced, and many children do not think of the long-term effects of their decision. This way of thinking is learned and developed as one grows up. Why is it okay to punish someone who made the same mistake as Alonza Thomas? It is easy to befriend the wrong person or get caught-up in the wrong crowd, especially in the age group between ten and seventeen. Around this age, the youth are trying to figure out who they are as a person. A solution to this problem would be sending juveniles between the ages of ten and seventeen, who commit violent offenses, to detention centers, so they may be rehabilitated. Once they reach a certain age, and illustrate a change in their behavior or conduct they can return to society, with restrictions as needed.

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## CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

**Appendix**

## Consent Letter

Dear UNG Student,

My name is Secrett Wingard and I am a honors student at the University of North Georgia. I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of our honors classes, and I would like to ask you for your participation. In order to obtain an unbiased sample, it is important that as many students as possible participate. The survey is short, and it will take only about 5 minutes of your time to complete.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to take a brief survey regarding your perceptions of juveniles being punished as adults. Note that your responses will be kept completely confidential and your identity will not be revealed to anyone. In this way, we hope to obtain your frank and honest opinions. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and there will be no negative consequences should you choose not to participate. If you do participate, you may skip questions you are not comfortable answering, and you are also free to stop at any time without penalty. Although there is no direct benefit to you for your participation, the results of the research may help improve the juvenile justice system and laws pertaining to juveniles.

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please feel free to contact Secrett Wingard at [skwing2820@ung.edu](mailto:skwing2820@ung.edu) or the faculty advisor, Matilda Foster at [Matilda.foster@ung.edu](mailto:Matilda.foster@ung.edu). If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the chair of the Institutional Review Board ([irbchair@ung.edu](mailto:irbchair@ung.edu)) or the Assistant Director for Research Compliance, Dr. Troy Smith, 3820 Mundy Mill Road, Oakwood, GA 30566, 678-717-3670, [troy.smith@ung.edu](mailto:troy.smith@ung.edu).

**CONTRIBUTING FACTORS**

Thank you for your consideration. If you agree to participate, please proceed in taking the survey by clicking on the next button.

With kind regards,

Secrett Wingard

## CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

**Questionnaire**

1. What is your gender?
  - Female
  - Male
  - Other (specify)
  
2. Which race/ethnicity best describes you? (Please choose only one.)
  - American Indian or Alaskan Native
  - Asian / Pacific Islander
  - Black or African American
  - Hispanic
  - White / Caucasian
  - Multiple ethnicity / Other (please specify)
  
3. What is your age?
  - 17 or younger
  - 18-20
  - 21-23
  - 24 or older
  
4. Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or something else?
  - Republican
  - Democrat
  - Independent
  - Something else

## CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

5.

## Variable 1:

A 10-year-old boy was sentenced to life in prison without parole for stabbing and killing his younger sister.

On a scale of 1 to 10 with one being very unfair and ten being very fair, how fair was the sentence?      Very Unfair 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Very Fair 10

## Variable 2:

A 14-year-old boy was sentenced to life in prison without parole for stabbing and killing his younger sister.

On a scale of 1 to 10 with one being very unfair and ten being very fair, how fair was the sentence?      Very Unfair 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Very Fair 10

## Variable 3:

A 16-year-old boy was sentenced to life in prison without parole for stabbing and killing his younger sister.

On a scale of 1 to 10 with one being very unfair and ten being very fair, how fair was the sentence?      Very Unfair 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Very Fair 10

## Variable 4:

A 10-year-old girl was sentenced to life prison without parole for stabbing and killing her younger sister.

On a scale of 1 to 10 with one being very unfair and ten being very fair, how fair was the sentence?      Very Unfair 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Very Fair 10

## Variable 5:

A 14-year-old girl was sentenced to life in prison without parole for stabbing and killing her younger sister.

On a scale of 1 to 10 with one being very unfair and ten being very fair, how fair was the sentence?      Very Unfair 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Very Fair 10

## Variable 6:

A 16-year-old girl was sentenced to life in prison without parole for stabbing and killing her younger sister.

On a scale of 1 to 10 with one being very unfair and ten being very fair, how fair was the sentence?      Very Unfair 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Very Fair 10

## CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

6.

Variable 1:

A 10-year-old African American was sentenced as an adult for selling drugs at school. On a scale of 1 to 10 with one being very unfair and ten being very fair, how fair was the sentence? Very Unfair 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Very Fair 10

Variable 2:

A 10-year-old white was sentenced as an adult for selling drugs at school. On a scale of 1 to 10 with one being very unfair and ten being very fair, how fair was the sentence? Very Unfair 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Very Fair 10

Variable 3:

A 14-year-old African American was sentenced as an adult for selling drugs at school. On a scale of 1 to 10 with one being very unfair and ten being very fair, how fair was the sentence? Very Unfair 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Very Fair 10

Variable 4:

A 14-year-old white was sentenced as an adult for selling drugs at school. On a scale of 1 to 10 with one being very unfair and ten being very fair, how fair was the sentence? Very Unfair 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Very Fair 10

Variable 5:

A 16-year-old African American was sentenced as an adult for selling drugs at school. On a scale of 1 to 10 with one being very unfair and ten being very fair, how fair was the sentence? Very Unfair 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Very Fair 10

Variable 6:

A 16-year-old white was sentenced as an adult for selling drugs at school. On a scale of 1 to 10 with one being very unfair and ten being very fair, how fair was the sentence? Very Unfair 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Very Fair 10

## CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

7.

Variable 1:

An African American girl was sentenced to 1-year probation for threatening to kill a classmate. On a scale of 1 to 10 with one being very unfair and ten being very fair, how fair was the sentence? Very Unfair 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Very Fair 10

Variable 2:

An African American boy was sentenced to 1-year probation for threatening to kill a classmate. On a scale of 1 to 10 with one being very unfair and ten being very fair, how fair was the sentence? Very Unfair 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Very Fair 10

Variable 3:

A white girl was sentenced to 1-year probation for threatening to kill a classmate. On a scale of 1 to 10 with one being very unfair and ten being very fair, how fair was the sentence? Very Unfair 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Very Fair 10

Variable 4:

A white boy was sentenced to 1-year probation for threatening to kill a classmate. On a scale of 1 to 10 with one being very unfair and ten being very fair, how fair was the sentence? Very Unfair 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Very Fair 10