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To cite this article: Kimberley A. Clow & Amy-May Leach (2015) Stigma and wrongful conviction: all exonerees are not perceived equal, *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 21:2, 172-185, DOI: [10.1080/1068316X.2014.951645](https://doi.org/10.1080/1068316X.2014.951645)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1068316X.2014.951645>



Accepted author version posted online: 18 Aug 2014.
Published online: 28 Aug 2014.



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Stigma and wrongful conviction: all exonerees are not perceived equal

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(Received 12 August 2013; accepted 2 July 2014)

Exonerees report experiencing stigma post-incarceration. This research examined whether particular exonerees are stigmatized more than others. Participants read an article about a fictional exoneree who falsely confessed, was misidentified by an eyewitness, or was implicated by a jailhouse snitch, and then reported their perceptions. Participants in the control condition did not read an article. An exoneree who falsely confessed was more likely to be perceived as actually guilty of the crime, less competent, and less warm than the other exonerees, but participants did not express more anger or less pity toward any particular exoneree. Participants did express more pity when rating exonerees than in the control condition, but this did not translate into a greater willingness to offer the exonerees more governmental assistance (e.g., job training, psychological counseling). Exonerees who falsely confess were stigmatized more than other exonerees. The implications for the post-incarceration experiences of exonerees who falsely confess are discussed.

Keywords: exonerees; perceived responsibility; stereotype content model

Increasingly, wrongful convictions are in the public's consciousness. Websites hosted by the Innocence Project, the National Registry of Exonerations, and the Association in Defence of the Wrongly Convicted publically announce – and update – the number of known wrongful convictions in the USA and Canada. Currently, there are over 300 American post-conviction DNA exonerations, over 1000 known exonerations in the USA, and over 70 documented wrongful conviction cases in Canada (AIDWYC, 2012; Innocence Project, 2013; National Registry of Exonerations, 2013). Moreover, popular media publicizes wrongful conviction. For example, a quick search on *The New Yorker's* (2013) website (<http://www.newyorker.com>) found 24 articles that mentioned the phrase 'wrongful conviction' since 2007, including movies and plays about wrongful conviction, announcements of talks by famous exonerees (e.g., Rubin 'Hurricane' Carter), as well as blogs and articles about wrongful conviction cases. Amazon (<http://www.amazon.com>) returned 113 results for a search of new paperback books containing the phrase 'wrongful conviction,' which ranged from academic work to fictional novels. In addition, wrongful conviction has appeared in episodes of popular fictional crime dramas (e.g., 'Cold Case,' 'CSI,' 'Life'), in movies (e.g., 'The Hurricane,' 'Conviction,' 'In the Name of the Father'), and in news programs (e.g., Frontline, 60 Minutes, Fifth Estate).

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In the wake of all this publicity, what people think about wrongful conviction – and exonerees, in particular – becomes an important question. Members of the public form juries (i.e., make decisions in cases involving a wrongful conviction), can influence the introduction of new policies (e.g., compensation statutes for exonerees), and are in positions to help exonerees post-incarceration (e.g., hire or rent properties to exonerees). As such, public opinion regarding wrongful conviction can greatly impact exonerees.

Research in Canada has found that community members are almost unanimously in favor of exonerees receiving financial compensation from the government (Angus Reid, 1995; Clow, Blandisi, Ricciardelli, & Schuller, 2012). In addition, research has found that the majority of community members and university students sampled felt that the Canadian government should be doing more in the realm of wrongful convictions (Angus Reid, 1995; Bell & Clow, 2007). Among undergraduates, senior criminology and criminal justice students were more likely than other students to agree with the Blackstone Ratio, that it is better for 10 guilty people to go free than to convict one innocent person (Ricciardelli, Bell, & Clow, 2009). Although these findings suggest relatively supportive attitudes toward exonerees, much of this research has focused on participants' perceptions of how the Canadian Government is handling – or should handle – the issue of wrongful conviction, rather than on participants' personal perceptions of exonerees.

Recently, researchers have begun to explore people's perceptions of exonerees and the results are not as positive (Clow & Leach, 2013; Thompson, Molina, & Levett, 2012). Clow and Leach (2013) asked Canadian undergraduates to consider 'people in general,' 'people who have been wrongfully convicted of a crime,' or 'people who have been convicted of a crime they actually committed.' Based on these simple instructions, participants who were thinking about people in general (control condition) rated them significantly more friendly, respected, warm, and lazy than participants who were thinking about people who have been wrongly convicted. Moreover, participants who were thinking about actual offenders only significantly differed from participants who were thinking about exonerees on two items: participants felt that offenders were less sincere and more violent than exonerees. Otherwise, the ratings of personality characteristics for exonerees and offenders did not differ. As research has found people to hold negative stereotypes of offenders (e.g., Demski & McGlynn, 1999; Hirschfield & Piquero, 2010; Murphy & Brown, 2000), the fact that ratings of offenders and exonerees did not differ substantially is concerning.

Thompson et al. (2012) found similar views of exonerees in the USA. They presented undergraduates with a scenario, where some people believed the man in the scenario was an exoneree, others thought the man was a parolee, and others were told that the man in the scenario was a transfer student (control condition). Based on the same scenario, participants perceived the man to be less competitive, confident, intelligent, warm, and good-natured when they thought he was an exoneree than when they thought he was a transfer student. In addition, the exoneree was perceived as less confident and competitive, but more warm and good-natured, than the parolee. Thus, whether participants were thinking of a particular exoneree (Thompson et al., 2012) or wrongly convicted persons in general (Clow & Leach, 2013), participants exhibited stigmatizing views.

But all stigmas are not perceived equally. Weiner and colleagues have established that perceptions of whether or not individuals are responsible for their stigmas are important in determining people's emotional reactions toward stigmatized individuals and their willingness to assist them (e.g., Rudolph, Roesch, Greitemeyer, & Weiner, 2004; Weiner,

1993; Weiner, Perry, & Magnusson, 1988). For example, Weiner et al. (1988) found that the more responsible people thought individuals were for their stigmas (e.g., drug abuse vs. Alzheimer's disease), the more they blamed them, the angrier they became, and the less likely they were to offer assistance (e.g., charitable donations and personal assistance). In a second experiment, they manipulated the controllability of each stigma (e.g., drug addiction developed after treating pain for an injury vs. experimentation with recreational drugs). When participants read about a person with a controllable version of the stigma, they rated the person as more responsible for the stigma, reported more anger and less pity toward the person, liked the person less, and were less willing to assist the person. Thus, two people with the same stigma, such as having been wrongfully convicted, may be treated differently if people attribute the stigma to different factors and perceive one person as more responsible for the stigma than another.

Approaching stigma from the perspective of stereotype content, Fiske and colleagues suggested that the content of any social group stereotype can be conceptualized as a combination of warmth and competence, such that the combinations of the two factors result in differing forms of prejudice (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). They proposed four types of prejudice: admiration, paternalistic prejudice, envious prejudice, and contemptuous prejudice. Admiration derives from feelings of pride toward groups perceived as high in warmth and competence (Fiske et al., 2002). These are often our own in-groups (i.e., the social groups we belong to). The prejudice toward these groups is a prejudgement of favourability and is similar to in-group favoritism (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007; Fiske et al., 2002). Paternalistic prejudice, in contrast, derives from pitying groups perceived as high in warmth but low in competence (Fiske et al., 2002). These social groups are perceived as nice and friendly but not particularly smart. Examples of social groups stereotyped as warm but not competent include the elderly and housewives (Eckes, 2002; Fiske et al., 2002). These sorts of stereotypes are hypothesized to lead to paternalistic prejudice, where perceivers feel they should help social group members because they are unable to help themselves (Cuddy et al., 2007; Fiske et al., 2002). Envious prejudice is the opposite of paternalistic prejudice in that it emerges from groups perceived as high in competence but low in warmth (Fiske et al., 2002). Social groups like the rich, Jewish people, and Asians fall into this category. These groups are respected, but not liked, and people do not want to assist them out of fears of competition and jealousy (Cuddy et al., 2007). Finally, contemptuous prejudice emerges from perceptions of low competence and warmth (Fiske et al., 2002). Social groups perceived as unintelligent and unfriendly, such as criminals and welfare recipients, are neither liked nor respected. People derogate these groups and are more likely to want to harm than help them (Cuddy et al., 2007; Fiske et al., 2002).

Attributional analyses of responsibility (Weiner et al., 1988) and stereotypes of competence and warmth (Fiske et al., 2002) might influence perceptions of exonerees as well. In particular, these factors may result in particular exonerees being viewed more negatively than others. For instance, mistaken eyewitnesses, jailhouse snitches, and false confessions are frequent factors in wrongful conviction cases (Garrett, 2008). They differ, however, in terms of the amount of personal responsibility that can be attributed to the wrongly convicted individual. Specifically, people might view a self-incriminating false confession to be more under the control of the exoneree than being misidentified by an eyewitness in a lineup or a jailhouse informant's decision to lie. If so, Weiner et al.'s (1988) findings might suggest that participants would view exonerees who falsely confessed as rather responsible for their wrongful convictions and, thus, view them rather

negatively and be less willing to assist them compared to other exonerees. Fiske et al.'s (2002) research might suggest that exonerees who falsely confess would be viewed as low in warmth and competence, leading to contemptuous prejudice, and desires to harm rather than help the exoneree.

Current study

We tested whether different types of exonerees were stigmatized differently. Participants either read a newspaper article about Daniel Cooper, who was exonerated through DNA evidence (experimental conditions), or they were not presented with an article (control condition). Participants who read an article were told that the original conviction had been due to a false confession, a mistaken eyewitness, or a jailhouse snitch. Based on Weiner's theory of attributions of responsibility (e.g., Rudolph et al., 2004; Weiner, 1993; Weiner et al., 1988), we predicted that participants would stigmatize Daniel Cooper more when he falsely confessed than in the other wrongful conviction conditions. Following from Fiske et al.'s (2002) research, we expected this stigma to be expressed, in part, by ratings of less competence and less warmth when Daniel Cooper falsely confessed than in the other conditions. Specifically, we predicted that participants would be more likely to perceive Daniel Cooper as guilty (*Hypothesis 1*), to rate him lower in both competence and warmth (*Hypothesis 2*), to express greater feelings of anger (*Hypothesis 3*), to express less feelings of pity (*Hypothesis 4*), and to report less willingness to offer government assistance (*Hypothesis 5*) in the false confession condition than in the mistaken eyewitness or jailhouse snitch conditions. Finally, based on previous stigma and wrongful conviction research (Clow & Leach, 2013; Thompson et al., 2012), we expected participants to rate Daniel Cooper higher in competence and warmth in the control condition than in each of the wrongful conviction conditions (*Hypothesis 6*).

Method

Participants

One-hundred and twenty-five Introductory Psychology students (48 men, 77 women; $M_{\text{age}} = 20.35$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 4.72$, age range: 18–48) from a small university in Southern Ontario participated in the study in exchange for extra credit. Nearly a quarter of the participants (24%) self-identified as Caucasian. The other participants self-identified with a wide range of ethnicities, including South Asian (16%), South East Asian (15.2%), Chinese (7.2%), Black (7.2%), and Arab/West Asian (4%).

Materials

Newspaper article

Experimental condition was manipulated with a fictional newspaper article. The newspaper article was a brief story about an individual (Daniel Cooper) being exonerated by DNA evidence after spending 10 years in prison for murder. The article provided basic facts about the crime, the reason for the original conviction, and interviews with Daniel and his mother. All details were modeled after existing newspaper articles on wrongful conviction exonerations.

Participants read the same basic article, with only two differences between conditions. First, we varied the bolded headline. The article's headline always began with 'Daniel

Cooper Wrongfully Convicted.’ and then continued by specifying the reason for the wrongful conviction (‘Daniel Cooper Wrongfully Convicted: False Confession to Blame’ vs. ‘Daniel Cooper Wrongfully Convicted: Mistaken Eyewitness Identification to Blame’ vs. ‘Daniel Cooper Wrongfully Convicted: Jailhouse Snitch to Blame’). Second, approximately halfway through the article, participants were reminded of the experimental condition. In the false confession condition, it read: *A jury convicted him of first-degree murder after they heard evidence that Cooper had initially confessed to having committed the crime. Nonetheless, Cooper maintained that he was innocent and that his confession was wrong.* In the mistaken eyewitness condition, the passage stated: *A jury convicted him of first-degree murder after they heard evidence that an eyewitness said that Cooper had committed the crime. Nonetheless, Cooper maintained that he was innocent and that the eyewitness was wrong.* In the jailhouse snitch condition, the passage stated: *A jury convicted him of first-degree murder after they heard evidence that a jailhouse snitch had said that Cooper had committed the crime. Nonetheless, Cooper maintained that he was innocent and that the jailhouse snitch was wrong.* Otherwise, the newspaper articles were identical across conditions.

Surveys

Dependent measures from Clow and Leach (2013) were used but modified to pertain to ‘Daniel Cooper’ rather than the broad groups of people investigated in previous research. Participants in the control condition completed the same dependent measures about ‘Daniel Cooper (an average person).’ The last page of the survey package consisted of demographic questions (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity). The order of the measures was counterbalanced across participants, except that the demographic questions always appeared at the end of the survey.

Stereotypes. Stereotypes were assessed by asking participants to rate Daniel Cooper on fourteen different positive and negative characteristics, using a 5-point scale (1 = *Not At All* to 5 = *Extremely*). Based on the Stereotype Content Model (Fiske et al., 2002), the characteristics included items related to competence (e.g., confident, competent, intelligent) and warmth (e.g., friendly, liked, warm). In addition, the list included characteristics that have been found to be stereotypical of criminals (e.g., aggressive, violent; Clow & Esses, 2007; MacLin & Herrera, 2006). Ratings of the fourteen characteristics were entered into a principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation and resulted in three extracted factors. The items that loaded on each factor were averaged together to create three different stereotype variables: warmth (*friendly, warm, respected, sincere, trustworthy, and liked*; 33.38% of the variance; $\alpha = 0.84$), competence (*intelligent, confident, weak (reversed), lazy (reversed), mentally ill (reversed), and competent*; 14.20% of the variance; $\alpha = 0.71$), and aggression (*aggressive and violent*; 10.08% of the variance; $\alpha = 0.62$).

In regards to wrongful conviction specifically, a negative stereotype could include perceptions that the exoneree was truly guilty rather than innocent. Thus, we included an additional item in the three experimental conditions. Participants completed the phrase ‘I believe Daniel Cooper is’ by circling *guilty* or *innocent*.

Emotions. We created seven emotion rating scales (*anger, disgust, fear, happiness, pity, sadness, surprise*) that asked participants to rate their specific emotional reactions to

Daniel Cooper from 1 (*Not At All*) to 5 (*Extremely*). The key items were *anger* and *pity* and the other emotions were included as filler. Weiner et al. (1988) found that people who were perceived to be more responsible for their own stigmas were responded to with more anger and less pity than people who were perceived to be less responsible for their own stigmas. Moreover, Fiske et al. (2002) indicated that anger was one of the emotions associated with contemptuous prejudice and that pity was one of the emotions associated with paternalistic prejudice.

Assistance. The assistance items assessed participants' willingness to endorse particular forms of government assistance. The same forced-choice (*yes* or *no*) items from Clow and Leach (2013) were used. Participants were asked to indicate whether they thought that Daniel Cooper was entitled to different forms of government assistance (i.e., career counseling, job training, psychological counseling, monthly living expenses, and subsidized housing). Responses were averaged together to create an overall assistance score (range: 0–1, $\alpha = 0.63$).

Exploratory questions. A few additional questions were added for exploratory purposes. Specifically, we wanted to know more about participants' perceptions of the exoneree, how they viewed the exoneree, and why they thought he was guilty or innocent. After participants indicated whether they believed Daniel Cooper was guilty or innocent, we asked participants why they thought that was the case. Participants were provided with a few blank lines for their open-ended answers.

We did not indicate the exoneree's race in the article. Instead, after participants read the article, we asked them to report the exoneree's race (embedded in filler questions asking about the exoneree's age, occupation, and education). Unfortunately, the majority of participants did not answer this question ($n = 79$, 63.2%). Of those who did respond, the majority thought he was White ($n = 23$, 18.4%), some thought he was South East Asian ($n = 13$, 10.4%) and there were a smattering of other guesses (1–3 participants each). Due to the low response rate, however, we were not able to include the item in analyses.

Participants were also asked to describe Daniel Cooper and given a few blank lines for their open-ended responses. Unfortunately, most participants simply summarized their interpretation of the article as their answer to this question (e.g., 'a person who was put into a bad situation and tried for 10 years to get out of it') rather than their perception of the exoneree (e.g., a personality description). Thus, this question was not included in the analyses.

Procedure

Participants completed the study individually or in small groups. Each participant was randomly assigned to one of the four conditions: false confession, mistaken eyewitness, jailhouse snitch, or control. Control participants did not receive an article. Participants in the other conditions received one of three different newspaper articles containing the experimental manipulation. All participants received the same package of questionnaires. After completing the questionnaires, participants were thanked for their participation and fully debriefed.

Results

Incomplete data prevented some participants from being included in all analyses.

Stereotypes

We predicted that participants would stigmatize Daniel Cooper more in the false confession condition than the other conditions. Specifically, we expected participants to consider Daniel Cooper guilty more frequently when he falsely confessed than when he was wrongly convicted due to a mistaken eyewitness or a jailhouse snitch (*Hypothesis 1*). Perceptions of innocence and guilt did significantly differ across the wrongful conviction conditions, $\chi^2(2) = 6.33, p = .042$. Of the 85 participants in the experimental conditions, only three participants said that Daniel Cooper was guilty; all three participants were in the false confession condition, supporting *Hypothesis 1*. All of the participants in the mistaken eyewitness and jailhouse snitch conditions thought that Daniel Cooper was innocent. When asked why they selected guilty or innocent, the three participants who choose guilty all mentioned the initial confession. None of the participants who selected innocent mentioned the confession or said anything that suggested they thought Daniel Cooper was guilty of some other crime or transgression. Due to the low number of guilty responses, however, this finding should be interpreted with caution.

In addition, we predicted that Daniel Cooper would be perceived as less warm and competent when he falsely confessed than in the other wrongful conviction conditions (*Hypothesis 2*) and that Daniel Cooper would be perceived as more warm and competent in the control condition than in the wrongful conviction conditions (*Hypothesis 6*). A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted on ratings of competence, warmth, and aggression with condition (false confession, mistaken eyewitness, jailhouse snitch, control) as the between-participants factor. There were significant main effects of competence, $F(3, 121) = 4.05, p = .009$, and warmth, $F(3, 120) = 4.38, p = .006$ (see [Table 1](#)). Supporting *Hypothesis 2*, Daniel Cooper was rated significantly lower in

Table 1. Stereotype ratings by condition.

Variable	Condition	<i>M</i>	SD	95% CI	
				Lower bound	Upper bound
Competence	False confession	3.51 _a	0.65	3.26	3.76
	Mistaken eyewitness	3.95 _b	0.56	3.74	4.16
	Jailhouse snitch	3.83 _b	0.53	3.63	4.04
	Control	3.54 _a	0.63	3.33	3.74
Warmth	False confession	2.85 _a	0.74	2.56	3.13
	Mistaken eyewitness	3.19 _b	0.53	2.99	3.40
	Jailhouse snitch	3.23 _b	0.58	3.01	3.46
	Control	3.43 _b	0.71	3.20	3.65
Aggression	False confession	2.07 _a	0.73	1.79	2.35
	Mistaken eyewitness	1.73 _a	0.59	1.51	1.96
	Jailhouse snitch	1.70 _a	0.57	1.48	1.92
	Control	2.11 _a	0.72	1.88	2.34

Note: Scores ranged from 1–5. Means for a variable with different subscripts significantly differ. There was a marginally significant difference in aggression scores ($p = .08$) between the jailhouse snitch and control conditions.

competence and warmth when he falsely confessed than when an eyewitness mistakenly identified him or a jailhouse snitch lied about him. Although participants rated Daniel Cooper as significantly less warm when he falsely confessed than in the control condition (supporting *Hypothesis 6*), ratings of competence did not significantly differ in these conditions (failing to support *Hypothesis 6*). Surprisingly, participants rated Daniel Cooper significantly more competent in the mistaken eyewitness and jailhouse snitch conditions than in the control condition, and warmth ratings did not significantly differ across these three conditions (failing to support *Hypothesis 6*).

Although we did not have any specific predictions regarding aggression (it was a variable that emerged from the factor analysis), there was a significant main effect of aggression, $F(3, 120) = 3.36, p = .021$. Bonferonni post-hoc tests revealed that there was a tendency for participants to rate Daniel Cooper as less aggressive when he was wrongly convicted due to a jailhouse snitch than in the control condition. There were no other significant findings.

Emotions

We predicted that participants would stigmatize Daniel Cooper more in the false confession condition than the other conditions. Specifically, we expected participants to express greater feelings of anger (*Hypothesis 3*) and less pity (*Hypothesis 4*) when Daniel Cooper falsely confessed than when he was wrongly convicted due to a mistaken eyewitness or a jailhouse snitch. A one-way ANOVA was conducted on ratings of anger and pity with condition (false confession, mistaken eyewitness, jailhouse snitch, control) as the between-participants factor. There were significant main effects of anger, $F(3, 118) = 3.11, p = .029$, and pity, $F(3, 118) = 14.92, p < .001$ (see [Table 2](#)). *Hypothesis 3* was not supported: anger toward Daniel Cooper in the false confession condition did not significantly differ from the other conditions. *Hypothesis 4* was not supported: participants expressed significantly more pity toward Daniel Cooper when he falsely confessed than in the control condition and ratings of pity did not differ amongst the experimental conditions.

Bonferonni post-hoc tests were conducted to determine what impact condition had on ratings of anger and pity, as the ratings were not as predicted. There was a tendency for

Table 2. Emotion ratings by condition.

Variable	Condition	<i>M</i>	SD	95% CI	
				Lower bound	Upper bound
Anger	False confession	1.37 _a	0.79	1.06	1.68
	Mistaken eyewitness	1.18 _a	0.48	0.99	1.36
	Jailhouse snitch	1.19 _a	0.40	1.03	1.34
	Control	1.68 _a	1.07	1.33	2.02
Pity	False confession	3.62 _a	0.98	3.22	4.01
	Mistaken eyewitness	3.89 _a	1.17	3.44	4.34
	Jailhouse snitch	3.68 _a	1.28	3.18	4.17
	Control	2.23 _b	1.23	1.83	2.62

Note: Scores ranged from 1–5. Means for a variable with different subscripts significantly differ. There were marginally significant differences in anger scores between the mistaken eyewitness condition ($p = .064$) and the jailhouse snitch condition ($p = .076$) with the control condition.

Table 3. Assistance ratings by condition.

Variable	Condition	<i>M</i>	SD	95% CI	
				Lower bound	Upper bound
Assistance	False confession	0.70 _a	0.27	0.60	0.81
	Mistaken eyewitness	0.75 _a	0.26	0.65	0.85
	Jailhouse snitch	0.82 _a	0.21	0.73	0.90
	Control	0.65 _a	0.31	0.55	0.74

Note: Scores ranged from 0–1. Means for a variable with different subscripts significantly differ. There was a marginally significant difference in assistance scores ($p = .07$) between the jailhouse snitch and control conditions.

participants to express more anger toward Daniel Cooper in the control condition than in the mistaken eyewitness or the jailhouse snitch conditions. In addition, participants expressed significantly more pity toward Daniel Cooper in all three wrongful conviction conditions than in the control condition. There were no other significant findings.

Assistance

We predicted that participants would stigmatize Daniel Cooper more in the false confession condition than the other conditions. Specifically, we expected participants to be less willing to offer government assistance when Daniel Cooper falsely confessed than when he was wrongly convicted due to a mistaken eyewitness or jailhouse snitch (*Hypothesis 5*). A one-way ANOVA was conducted on average assistance ratings with condition (false confession, mistaken eyewitness, jailhouse snitch, control) as the between-participants factor. There was a marginally significant main effect of assistance, $F(3, 121) = 2.32, p = .079$ (see Table 3). Although the means did not significantly differ, participants reported lower rates of assistance in the false confession condition than the mistaken eyewitness and jailhouse snitch conditions. However, the least amount of assistance was reported in the control condition. *Hypothesis 5* was not supported.

Bonferonni post-hoc tests were conducted to determine what impact condition had on assistance, as the ratings were not as predicted. There was a tendency for participants to offer more government services to Daniel Cooper when he was wrongly convicted due to a jailhouse snitch than in the control condition. There were no other significant findings.

Discussion

As predicted, an individual exonerated through DNA evidence who previously falsely confessed to a crime (but later recanted his confession) was perceived more negatively than other exonerees. Specifically, when the exoneree falsely confessed, he was more likely to be perceived as actually guilty, as less competent, and as less warm than when he was wrongly convicted due to a mistaken eyewitness or a jailhouse snitch. It is as if participants are unable to understand why someone would falsely confess unless he or she was abnormal in some way. Although research has found that many individuals who have falsely confessed to police are youth or suffer from mental illness or mental retardation (e.g., Gudjonsson, 2010; Gudjonsson, Sigurdsson, Einarsson, Bragason, & Newton, 2010; Redlich, 2004), researchers stress that ‘normal’ individuals will falsely confess in particular interrogation situations (e.g., Davis & Leo, 2010; Gudjonsson, 2010; Kassin,

2005). In the current study, participants appeared to believe there was something wrong with Daniel Cooper when he falsely confessed rather than perceiving him as a victim of circumstances. Although Daniel Cooper was not viewed as less competent than the average person, he was viewed as significantly less competent than the other exonerees, and he was perceived as significantly less warm in the false confession condition than in all other conditions.

A few participants seemed unable to believe that someone would confess to a crime they did not commit. Three participants thought that Daniel Cooper was guilty despite the DNA exoneration and all three participants said they thought so because he initially confessed to the crime. Possibly, these participants felt that Daniel Cooper was involved in the crime somehow or he would not have confessed; thus, even if the DNA exonerated him from the murder it did not mean he was innocent of the crime entirely. Perhaps these participants thought Daniel Cooper was an accessory or knew the individual who did commit the murder. As so few participants said the exoneree was guilty; however, further research seems warranted to determine the validity and reliability of this finding.

It is possible that some participants who said he was innocent might have had some lingering doubts or beliefs that he must have done something to have come to the attention of police in the first place. For instance, one participant in the false confession condition who said Daniel Cooper was innocent nonetheless wrote: 'since he was not able to clear his name initially, there must have been some doubt about his actions or his alibi, so I would not say he is completely blameless' when asked to describe him. Another participant, also in the false confession condition, said that Daniel Cooper was 'foolish because if he is innocent, why did he confess in the first place?' Although no other participants suggested Daniel Cooper was at fault when asked to describe him, future research may wish to investigate this idea more directly.

Compared to other exonerees, participants did not appear to like or respect false confessors. This does not appear to be contemptuous prejudice (Fiske et al., 2002), however, as mean ratings of competence and warmth in all conditions – including false confession – were above the mid-point of the scales. Moreover, the lower competence and warmth ratings in the false confession condition were not tied to overall higher anger ratings and anger is a common emotional reaction when contemptuous prejudice is involved (Cuddy et al., 2007; Fiske et al., 2002). Nonetheless, warmth and competence factors were discovered in the principal components factor analysis on participants' ratings of Daniel Cooper, suggesting that both are important components of stereotypes of wrongly convicted individuals. Thus, the stereotype content model appears to generalize to stereotypes of exonerees, although it did not seem sensitive enough to differentiate stigma toward different types of exonerees.

Although Weiner et al. (1988) found that participants were angrier with individuals who were perceived to have greater control over contracting their stigmas, our participants did not similarly report feeling more anger toward Daniel Cooper in the false confession condition. Instead, participants expressed significantly less anger toward Daniel Cooper in the mistaken eyewitness and jailhouse snitch conditions in comparison to the control condition, even though anger means were low across all conditions. Perhaps participants realized that being mistakenly identified by an eyewitness or lied about by a jailhouse snitch was not Daniel Cooper's fault (i.e., he was not perceived as responsible for his situation) and participants consequently felt less anger toward him in those conditions. Participants did not appear to perceive Daniel Cooper as similarly free of blame in the false confession condition.

Contrary to our predictions, participants reported significantly more pity toward Daniel Cooper when he was wrongly convicted, regardless of the factor that led to his wrongful conviction. Thus, even when Daniel Cooper falsely confessed, participants expressed more pity toward him than in the control condition. Perhaps the severity of being convicted of a crime that you did not commit elicits pity from others, even if they think that you may have been partly to blame for your situation. Weiner et al. (1988) did find that participants were particularly sympathetic toward individuals who contracted AIDS – regardless of how it was acquired – and they hypothesized that participants may have been forgiving due to the severity of the virus. Similarly, our participants may have felt that wrongful conviction was so terrible that they pitied Daniel Cooper, even if they felt that he was partly to blame.

Higher ratings of pity in the wrongful conviction conditions than the control condition did not translate into greater willingness to offer government assistance. Although other researchers have found pity to be associated with willingness to assist stigmatized individuals (e.g., Fiske et al., 2002; Weiner et al., 1988), we did not replicate this finding. Our participants did report slightly higher assistance in the wrongful conviction conditions than the control condition, but the means did not significantly differ. Possibly, we may not have had enough power to detect differences in willingness to assist across our conditions.

Alternatively, participants may not have felt that exonerees were in great need of assistance. This possibility is troubling. An investigation of the Innocent Project's DNA exonerations found that nearly half of exonerees had not received any sort of government assistance (Innocence Project, 2009). Even in states that did have specific compensation laws, there were often aspects to the law that denied rather than provided compensation. For example, Nebraska does not provide compensation to individuals who pled guilty or falsely confessed (unless they can provide evidence of coercion by law enforcement) and other states, such as Florida, do not compensate wrongly convicted individuals if they have prior felony convictions – even though these may be the very individuals targeted by law enforcement personnel and most at risk of wrongful conviction (Innocence Project, 2009). Furthermore, few statutes provide employment assistance or education, even though these services are advocated for actual offenders (e.g., Anderson, Schumacker, & Anderson, 1991; Innocence Project, 2009; Krienert, 2005; Petersilia, 2005; Westervelt & Cook, 2009). The findings from this research do not suggest that public opinion will assert pressure for this to change any time soon.

Limitations and future research

Further research is needed to assess the generalizability of these findings. As this is a relatively new area of study, additional studies using varied methodologies, different samples, and greater power would give rise to a body of research high in internal and external validity. This is but one study. With one marginal and one low response-based finding, these findings should be interpreted with caution.

In this study, we examined undergraduate students' perceptions. Although past research has found that community members and undergraduates hold relatively supportive views regarding wrongful conviction (e.g., Angus Reid, 1995; Bell & Clow, 2007; Clow, Ricciardelli, & Cain, 2012), the same may not be true about false confessors. Thus, researchers could explore community members' perceptions of exonerees who have falsely confessed. In addition, future research should investigate perceptions of false

confessors with different materials and methods (e.g., behavioral measures, implicit tasks) in order to ensure that these findings can be replicated. Perceptions of personal responsibility associated with wrongful conviction could also be investigated further. For example, we assumed that participants would view falsely confessing to a crime as a more controllable factor than being misidentified by an eyewitness or a lied about by a jailhouse snitch, but we did not directly measure it. Future research could assess how responsible participants actually perceive exonerees to be for their wrongful conviction.

Looking at perceptions of exonerees more broadly, we did not specify the race of the exoneree in this study. Although racial minorities seem particularly victimized by wrongful conviction in the USA (Free & Ruesink, 2012), the majority of exonerees in Canada appear to be Caucasian (AIDWYC, 2014). Most of the participants who answered the race question did assume that the exoneree in our study was White. However, as more than half of our participants did not respond to this question, it is not clear if participants were aware that exonerees in Canada are frequently White, if they realized we did not provide racial information, if they believed the exoneree belonged to an ethnic minority but did not wish to say so and risk possibly appearing socially inappropriate, or if they thought racial information was provided and that they simply could not remember it. Future research may wish to manipulate racial information to investigate if attitudes toward exonerees depend upon the race of the exoneree.

In addition, Clow and Leach (2013) found that participants rated people who had been wrongly convicted as less friendly, respected, warm, and lazy than controls. Similarly, Thompson et al. (2012) found that participants rated an exoneree as less competitive, confident, intelligent, warm, and good-natured than a transfer student. These findings suggest that participants view exonerees as less warm and competent than other people. Thus, we were surprised when participants in the mistaken eyewitness and jailhouse snitch conditions rated Daniel Cooper higher in competence than in the control condition. Perhaps participants are more knowledgeable about eyewitness and jailhouse snitch issues than other possible factors that can lead to wrongful conviction and, thus, when they hear about someone being wrongly convicted due to these factors, they are less likely to stigmatize the exoneree. Researchers should consider examining whether knowledge of wrongful conviction or education can mitigate stigmatizing views of exonerees.

Some of the findings suggested that participants may have been particularly sympathetic toward exonerees who were wrongly convicted due to a jailhouse snitch. Participants tended to be less angry and more willing to help in the jailhouse snitch condition than the control condition. Moreover, participants tended to rate Daniel Cooper as less aggressive in the jailhouse snitch condition than the control condition. Future research may wish to explore perceptions of jailhouse snitches and exonerees more fully to determine the generalizability of these seemingly sympathetic response tendencies.

Finally, Weiner's and Fiske's research are not the only sources of insight into the stigma that exonerees experience. There may be other explanations for this stigma, such as associations with other stigmatized groups. For example, Rozin, Markwith, and Nemeroff (1992) found that objects associated with stigmatized groups (e.g., a sweater owned, but not worn, by an individual with HIV) were devalued. Thus, participants might have negative views about exonerees because they are simply associated with a crime or due to their associations with actual offenders in prison (see Clow et al., 2012). Alternatively, exonerees may be stigmatized because they are perceived as victims. For example, Shechory and Idisis (2006) observed that participants desired greater social

distance from innocent victims of crime. Thus, participants may stigmatize exonerees because they were victims of the criminal justice system (see Westervelt & Cook, 2009). Finally, people may stigmatize exonerees in order to restore their own belief in a just world (Lerner, 1980). If people convince themselves that exonerees were deserving of mistreatment, then people can be reassured that they themselves will never be wrongly convicted. All of these possibilities require further testing.

Conclusion

Our findings suggest that all exonerees are not perceived the same. Exonerees who falsely confess, in particular, appear to be stigmatized more than some other wrongly convicted individuals. Indeed, participants were more likely to believe that someone who falsely confessed was truly guilty of the crime, less competent, and less warm than others. These negative views may partially explain why false confessors are sometimes ineligible for financial compensation for their wrongful convictions. Until we can improve perceptions of false confession, these exonerees are likely to continue to experience considerable stigma and difficulties with reentry.

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