Differences at the Border:
Views of Crime, Criminals, Punishment, and Treatment Among Canadian and U.S. College Students

By Eric G. Lambert, Kasey A. Tucker and David N. Baker1

Abstract

Crime is universal; views about crime and how to control it vary widely in different cultural and political climates. This study examined cross-cultural views of crime, criminals, punishment and treatment for offenders. Specifically, this study compared Canadian and U.S. college students and their perceptions of these issues to determine whether cultural differences exist and to what degree. Both the independent t-test and ordered ordinal regression indicated that U.S. students tended to be more punitive than their Canadian counterparts on a majority of the indicators. This attitude may be due to the fact that U.S. students were more likely to perceive a higher crime rate.

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1 The authors are all Associate Professors in the Department of Criminal Justice at the University of Toledo, USA

Crime is universal; perceptions of crime and how to control it are not. Everyone has his or her own views about crime and punishment. Most agree that a response to criminal offending is needed, but there is disagreement on how best to respond (Cullen, Fisher, & Applegate, 2000). A sanction that one person views as appropriate will be viewed as too lenient by another, and too harsh by yet another. For theoretical and practical reasons, understanding the public's views toward crime and offenders is crucial, because there is a connection between public opinion and criminal justice policies (Zimmerman, Van Alston, and Dunn, 1988). Sanders and Roberts (2000) argued, "public opinion plays an important role in the sentencing process in Canada and elsewhere" (p. 199). Public views help shape the views of politicians, which in return may result in legislative change (Flanagan, McGarrell, & Brown, 1985; Langworthy & Whitehead, 1986; Ouimet & Coyle, 1991). In the U.S., public opinion has been used to justify the enactment of "three strikes and you're out" sentencing laws for habitual offenders (Roberts & Stalans, 1997). In Canada, public opinion has been used as a justification for toughening the laws for youthful offenders (Bala, 1994). In addition, "public perceptions of the criminal justice system are important because of the interdependency which exists between the general public and the criminal justice system" (Kaukinen & Colavecchia, 1999, p. 367).

Because of the importance of understanding people's views, there has been an increased focus on people's views toward the sanctioning of criminal offenders in both Canada and the U.S. over the past several decades (Roberts & Stalans, 1997). This research is important but incomplete. Almost all of this research on people's views of crime focuses on either Canada or the U.S. but not both nations. Even though Canada and U.S. share a border and are interconnected with one another in many areas, there is a surprising paucity of research on the similarities and differences in criminal justice views of people in each nation. While intra-national research is crucial to understand people's views toward crime, criminals, punishment, and treatment, it is also important to conduct cross-national research for both theoretical and practical reasons. Cross-cultural research provides scholars with a more thorough understanding of people's views. "The importance and utility to social science of rigorous cross-national measures is incontestable. They help to reveal not only intriguing differences between countries and cultures, but also aspects of one's own country and culture that would be difficult or impossible to detect from domestic data alone" (Jowell, 1998, p. 168). Furthermore, cross-national research helps narrow the gap between different cultures and creates bridges so critical information flows more freely. There is a need for more cross-cultural research on people's views of crime, criminals, treatment, and punishment. Examining the views of Canadian and U.S. residents provides a more detailed picture of crime and punishment. Simply put, cross-cultural perspectives on crime and punishment are important; therefore, this study was undertaken to examine the views of crime, criminals, punishment, and treatment among Canadian and U.S. university students in order to determine whether there are cultural differences.

Literature Review

The literature suggests that social orientations influence individuals' views, attitudes, and perceptions, and distinct cultural groups have their own values, views, and norms (Chung &

Bagozzi, 1997; Green, 1982; Yick, 2000). It is unclear whether views would differ between Canadian and U.S. citizens. The two nations have a great deal in common, yet are each unique.

There are many similarities between the two nations. "Canada is the country that most resembles the U.S." (Ouimet, 2002, p. 34). Many Canadians travel to the U.S., read U.S. newspapers and periodicals and watch U.S. movies and TV shows (Lisosky, 2001). In addition, many U.S. residents travel to Canada and interact with Canadian citizens. The two economies are tightly tied to one another (Molot, 2005). Moreover, there are many criminal justice similarities as well between both countries. In both countries, it has been observed that people are concerned with crime and the protection of society (Kaukinen & Colavecchia, 1999; Myers, 1996). Additionally, there appears to be dissatisfaction in both Canada and the U.S. with the sanctioning of criminal offenders and a desire for more punitive sentences (Kaukinen & Colavecchia, 1999; Roberts, 1992, 1994; St. Amand & Zamble, 2001). For example, in a 1993 national sample, about 80% of those surveyed felt that Canadian courts did not provide severe enough sentences for criminals (Cesaroni & Doob, 2003). In a 1991 survey, 85% of U.S. respondents felt the courts were not harsh with criminals (Gaubatz, 1995). Based upon three national surveys conducted in 1988, 1993, and 1999, Cesaroni and Doob (2003) reported that in Canada there had been a decline in support for "rehabilitative, reintegrative, or correctionalist crime control strategies" (p. 440). Similar trends have been observed in the U.S. (Applegate, Cullen, & Fisher, 2002; McCorkle, 1993).

There is a concern that juvenile offenders are treated too leniently in both Canada and the U.S. (Peterson-Badali, Ruck, & Koegl, 2001). In the past several decades, there has been modification to laws in both countries which make it easier to transfer juvenile offenders to adult court (Sprott, 2003). There has also been an increase in punitiveness for offenders, which has led to a toughening of laws in Canada, especially for youthful offenders with the passing of the Youth Criminal Justice Act of 2002 (Hogeveen, 2005). Hogeveen (2005) contends that the rise of punitiveness in Canada is due to the mass media's focus on sensational crimes and politicians' will to exploit the public's concerns about crime. A similar trend of "getting tough" with crime occurred in the U.S. (Applegate et al., 2002; Applegate, Cullen, Turner, & Sundt, 1996; McCorkle, 1993). There is similarity in the coverage of crime stories in both Canada and the U.S. In an analysis of news broadcasts, it was found that there were few differences between Canadian and U.S. television stations in their crime coverage (Dowler, 2004). For example, there were few differences in the types of crimes reported; both focused on street crimes (Dowler, 2004). Many of news stories featuring crime were law and order oriented. Dowler (2004) argued

that "both Canadian and U.S. news makers engage in similar reporting techniques in an attempt to produce crime stories that attract viewers, appease media owners and advertisers, and

generally maintain the status quo" (p. 591). There is also a fair amount of crime coverage in newspapers as well (Baron & Hartnagel, 1996; Roberts & Stalans, 1997). There are misconceptions in both nations about the crime rate. People in each nation perceive crime to be much higher than it really is and perceive violent crime as more prevalent than it actually is (Roberts & Stalans, 1997). In both Canada and the U.S., many people have a fear of being victimized (Keane, 1992; Sprott & Doob, 1997; Weitzer & Kurbin, 2004). Finally, both

Canadians and U.S. residents tend to underestimate the length of sentence a person receives for a particular type of crime (Applegate et al., 1996; McCorkle, 1993; Sprott, 2003; St. Amand & Zamble, 2001). There are many similarities between both nations which suggest that there would be similar views between residents in Canada and the U.S. On the other hand, there are fundamental differences between both countries which suggest that there would be significant differences in crime views.

While there are many similarities between the two nations, Canada is an independent country with its own society and values. There are striking differences between the two societies. "The cultural identity of many Canadians is structured through a perceived dissimilarity with Americans. Simply put, being a 'Canadian' means not being an American" (Dowler, 2004, p. 574). A major difference between the two nations is that Canada has made greater strides in civil rights and equality for different societal groups than is the case in the U.S. "Canada is a more egalitarian society" (Ouimet, 2002, p. 35). Canada is more open to social programs, such as education, medicine, and social assistance (Ouimet, 2002). Canadians are more tolerant of others (e.g., gays and the idea of civil unions) (Lipset, 1990). There is a greater belief in equality and respect for life in Canada. The U.S. is more likely to use military force than Canada. There are differences in views of gun control between the two countries. Canadian residents are more likely to support gun control than are U.S. residents (Hartnagel, 2002). The U.S. has greater access to firearms, particularly handguns, than is the case in Canada, and Canadian citizens are far less likely to report owning a handgun than are U.S. citizens (Ouimet, 1999; Roberts & Stalans, 1997). Canada generally has a lower crime rate, especially in terms of violent offenses, as compared to the U.S. (Sprott, 2003). In general, sentences tend to be more punitive in the U.S. than is the case in Canada (Ouimet, 2002). In addition, the U.S. response to personal crimes, such as sexual assault of children, tends to be more aggressive and swifter with less concern for the accused than is the case in Canada (Petrunik, 2003). There is no longer capital punishment in Canada, whereas the U.S. executes dozens of people per year (Roberts & Stalans, 1997). Because there are few, if any, empirical studies that have compared the views of Canadian and U.S. residents on their crime and crime control views, this exploratory study involving college students at Canadian and U.S. universities was undertaken.

Methods

In the Spring of 2005, a survey of a convenience sample of students at one Canadian university and one in the U.S. was undertaken. The Canadian university was a metropolitan public university located in the province of Ontario, which offered undergraduate, master, and terminal degrees, and had an enrollment of about 42,000 students. The U.S. university was a metropolitan public institution located in the Midwest with enrollment slightly below 20,000 and also offered undergraduate, master, and terminal degrees. At the Canadian university, undergraduate students in 11 classes were surveyed. At the U.S. university, undergraduate students in 15 classes were surveyed. At both universities, the selected classes represented a wide array of majors and included classes required by all majors. The survey was explained to the students, and it was emphasized both verbally and in writing that the survey was voluntary. Students were asked not to complete the survey if they had done so in another class. Students completed the survey during class time. It was estimated that between 90 to 95% of the students present took the survey. For the Canadian university, a total of 409 usable surveys were returned. For the U.S. university, a total of 484 usable surveys were returned. In this study, a total of 893 surveys were analyzed.

In terms of gender for the overall group of respondents, 60% were women and 40% were men. There were more women in the group of students from Canada as compared to the U.S. (65% versus 56%). The median age of the respondents was 20. The mean age was 20.78, with a standard deviation of 4.29. The Canadian respondents were slightly younger than the U.S. respondents (19.39 versus 21.96 years old). For the entire group, 37% were freshmen, 26% were sophomores, 21% were juniors, and 16% were seniors. The Canadian students were more likely to be freshmen as compared to the U.S. students.

The respondents were asked fourteen questions on crime, punishment, treatment, and views of criminals (See Table 1 for specific questions asked). All the questions were answered using a five-point Likert type of response scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Results

The percentage responses for the 14 questions on crime, punishment, treatment, and views of criminals are presented in Table 1. For many of the questions, there appeared to be differences between Canadian and U.S. students. Far more U.S. respondents felt their county had a great deal of crime than did Canadian respondents (89% versus 34%). Likewise, U.S. students were more likely to agree that crime was one of the most serious social problems facing their society than were their Canadian counterparts (62% versus 52%). The Canadian respondents appeared more supportive of treatment for offenders, while U.S. respondents were more supportive of punishment for offenders. For example, 77% of the Canadian students felt the main goals of

dealing with criminals should be treatment and rehabilitation, while 54% of the U.S. students felt this should be the main goal for responding to offenders. Conversely, 68% of the U.S. respondents agreed that criminals need to be punished and not coddled, while 59% of the Canadian students agreed with this statement. U.S. respondents were slightly more likely to feel that imprisonment was a powerful deterrent to crime (55% versus 49%). Overall, a slightly more favorable view of criminals was held by Canadian respondents as compared to U.S. students. For example, only 3% of Canadian respondents felt that criminals committed crimes because they were lazy as compared to 16% of the U.S. respondents. There were also some similarities between the two groups of students. Both groups were divided in their views of whether the courts were or were not harsh enough with criminals. About 45% of Canadian and U.S. students felt that more attention should be paid to crime victims. Similarly, about 40% of each group felt society had a right to seek revenge on violent criminals.

Table 1

Percentage Results of Crime, Criminals, Punishment, and Treatment Views for Canadian and U.S. Respondents (N = 893)

Statement	Canadian Respondents (n = 409)					U.S. Respondents (n = 484)				
	SD	D	U	A	SA	SD	D	U	A	SA
Canada/U.S. has a great deal of crime.	9	37	20	30	4	1	3	7	53	36
Crime is one of the most serious social problems facing society today.	6	28	14	40	12	4	16	18	47	15
Courts generally are not harsh enough with criminals.	3	29	29	31	8	4	27	26	33	10
The main goals for dealing with criminals should be to treat and rehabilitate them.	4	5	15	45	32	4	19	24	40	14
We need more educational and vocational programs to effectively deal with crime and offenders.	1	3	10	52	34	2	8	17	54	19
Showing mercy is more important than seeking revenge.	2	21	29	41	8	4	22	35	32	7

We should stop viewing

criminals as victims of society who deserve to be rehabilitated and start paying more attention to the victims of these criminals.	5	20	29	36	9	4	19	30	38	9
Society has a right to seek revenge on violent criminals.	12	31	17	32	8	10	26	26	30	8
Criminals need to be punished, not coddled.	3	13	24	47	12	4	8	19	54	14
A criminal will only Ago straight@ if the punishment is harsh.	12	47	25	13	2	11	42	32	11	4
Incarceration is a powerful deterrent to crime.	4	26	20	39	10	1	15	29	50	5
Once a criminal, always a criminal.	26	48	13	10	3	18	44	19	16	4
Most people commit crime because they are mentally ill or sick.	24	47	17	11	0	14	47	20	18	2
People commit crimes because they are lazy.	34	51	12	2	1	17	48	19	16	0

Note. Percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding. SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, U = Uncertain, A = Agree, and SA = Strongly Agree.

The Independent t-test was used to determine whether the two groups of students significantly differed from one another on the 14 questions.[1] The results are reported in Table 2. Across the 14 questions, there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups of respondents on 10 questions. Canadian respondents were less likely to feel that their nation had a great deal of crime or that crime was one of the most pressing social problems and were less likely than their U.S. counterparts to feel crime was one of the most serious social issues facing their society. In the bi-variate analysis, there was a significant difference in treatment and rehabilitation views. Canadian respondents were more supportive of having rehabilitation and treatment as the main goals for responding to offenders, were more likely to feel that more educational and vocational programs for offenders are needed, and were more likely to feel that showing mercy was more important than seeking revenge. Conversely, U.S. students were more likely to feel that criminals should be punished and incarceration was a powerful deterrent to crime. On the other hand, Canadian respondents generally had more positive views of offenders. There was no significant difference in views on if courts were harsh enough in sentencing offenders, if society had a right to seek revenge against violent criminals, and if more attention should be paid to crime victims.

Table 2

Differences Between Canadian and U.S. Respondents on their Crime Views (N = 893)

Statement	Canada (n = 409)		U.S. (n = 484)		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	*t*-value
Canada/U.S. has a great deal of crime.	2.84	1.08	4.19	0.78	21.73**
Crime is one of the most serious social problems facing society today.	3.23	1.16	3.50	1.07	3.66**
Courts generally are not harsh enough with criminals.	3.11	1.02	3.20	1.05	1.20
The main goals for dealing with criminals should be to treat and rehabilitate them.	3.96	1.00	3.42	1.05	-7.80**
We need more educational and vocational programs to effectively deal with crime and offenders.	4.14	0.80	3.80	0.91	-6.00**
Showing mercy is more important than seeking revenge.	3.32	0.94	3.14	0.99	-2.80**
We should stop viewing criminals as victims of society who deserve to be rehabilitated and start paying more attention to the victims of these criminals.	3.24	1.04	3.28	1.00	0.70
Society has a right to seek revenge on violent criminals.	2.91	1.19	2.99	1.13	1.00
Criminals need to be punished, not coddled.	3.52	0.98	3.66	0.95	2.14*
A criminal will only Ago straight@ if the punishment is harsh.	2.44	0.94	2.56	0.97	1.73
Incarceration is a powerful deterrent to crime.	3.26	1.08	3.42	0.85	2.44*
Once a criminal, always a criminal.	2.17	1.02	2.44	1.07	3.87**
Most people commit crime because they are mentally ill or sick.	2.16	0.93	2.48	1.00	4.82**
People commit crimes because they are lazy.	1.83	0.76	2.35	0.95	8.86**

Note. SD stands for standard deviation. The Independent t-test was used. The degrees of freedom for the t-test is equal to 549. * p #.05   ** p #.01

To determine whether the two groups were significantly different in their crime views independent of the effects of gender, age, academic standing, and importance of religion, Ordered Ordinal Regression was utilized. Each of the 14 measures presented in Table 1 were entered into an OLS regression as the dependent variable and gender, age, academic standing, importance of religion, and nation of the respondent as the independent variables. The results are reported in Table 3, and the coding scheme for the independent variables is presented in the note. Ordered Ordinal regression is indicated when the dependent variable is measured at the ordinal level (Long, 1997; Menard, 1995). As previously indicated, the 14 questions were answered using a five-point ordinal scale. In the multi-variate analysis, whether the respondent was from Canada or the U.S. had a statistically significant impact on 9 of the 14 questions. Of the independent variables, the nation variable had the most significant relationships. Gender had the next highest number with 8. The importance religion played in a person's life had significant effects for four questions, and academic level had significant effects for the three questions. Only on one question was there a significant impact for age.

Table 3

Ordered Ordinal Regression Results (N = 893)

Statement	Gender	Age	Level	Relig.	Nation	R^2
Canada/U.S. has a great deal of crime.	-.38**	-.01	-.16*	.13*	-2.92**	.37
Crime is one of the most serious social problems facing society today.	-.20	.01	-.13	.16*	-.54**	.03
Courts generally are not harsh enough with criminals.	.07	.03	-.14*	.10	-.22	.01
The main goals for dealing with criminals should be to treat and rehabilitate them.	-.34**	.01	-.21**	.05	.82**	.10
We need more educational and vocational programs to effectively deal with crime and offenders.	-.47**	.02	-.09	.16*	.76**	.08
Showing mercy is more important than seeking revenge.	-.57**	.00	-.16*	.14*	.15	.05
We should stop viewing criminals as victims of society who deserve to be rehabilitated and start paying more	.18	-.03	.06	.04	-.05	.01

attention to the victims of these criminals.						
Society has a right to seek revenge on violent criminals.	.41**	-.02	.07	.09	-.02	.02
Criminals need to be punished, not coddled.	-.06	.00	-.04	.07	-.33*	.01
A criminal will only Ago straight@ if the punishment is harsh.	.15	-.04	.02	.10	-.28*	.02
Incarceration is a powerful deterrent to crime.	.15	-.07	.04	.01	-.21	.01
Once a criminal, always a criminal.	.25*	-.05*	-.03	.02	-.63**	.04
Most people commit crime because they are mentally ill or sick.	-.26*	.01	-.13	.08	-.72**	.04
People commit crimes because they are lazy.	.67**	-.02	.17*	.02	-.09**	.12

Note. Gender was measured as 0 = females and 1 = males. Age was measured in continuous years. Level represented the academic level of the respondent and was measured as 1 = freshman, 2 = sophomore, 3 = junior, 4 = senior. Relig stands for the importance religion played in a person=s life and was measured where 1 = not at all, 2 = not much, 3 = a fair amount, and 4 = a great deal. Nation represented the location of the respondent and was measured as 0 = U.S. and 1 = Canada. The Nagelkerke pseudo R-Squared statistic is reported in the R^2 column.

* p #.05 ** p #.01

In the multi-variate analysis, U.S. respondents were still more likely to feel that their nation had a great deal of crime, crime was a pressing social problem and that offenders should be punished. Canadian respondents were still more supportive of treating offenders and had more positive views of offenders. As in the bivariate analysis, there was no difference in the multi-variate analysis between the two groups in their views on whether courts were harsh enough with criminals, paying more attention to victims, and whether society has a right to seek revenge. There was a change on three questions. In the multi-variate analysis, there was no longer a significant difference between the two groups of students in their views of whether showing mercy was more important than seeking revenge and whether incarceration was a powerful deterrent. While there was no significant difference in the bivariate analysis, in the multi-variate analysis there was a significant difference on whether harsh punishment was necessary to cause an offender to become a law-abiding person. In multivariate analysis, U.S. residents were more likely to agree with this statement.

Discussion and Conclusion

Overall, on the majority of the questions, there were significant differences between Canadian and U.S. students in their views. The significant differences can be attributed in part to the cultural differences between Canada and the U.S. As previously mentioned, Chung and Bagozzi (1997) argued that views toward punishment and rehabilitation arise due to a multitude of factors, including social values of justice, cultural, and socialization. While there are many similarities between the two cultures, there are many significant differences as well. Canadian culture tends to be more egalitarian than the U.S. The differences in the two cultures probably lead to different criminal justice views. Culture is a powerful force which shapes people's views on many social issues. Cultures form different values toward crime, criminals, and how to respond to them. These social values can differ greatly from culture to culture. While Canada and the U.S. share much in common, there are still differences in views of crime, criminals, punishment, and treatment.

The previous literature on views of Canadian residents indicates that there has been an increase of support for more punitive punishments for criminals (Hogeveen, 2005; Kaukinen & Colavecchia, 1999). The literature on U.S. residents indicates that there has been a similar trend for more punitive punishments (Warr, 1995). Even though the literature suggests that there has been a hardening of views on crime and criminals in Canada, this does not mean that Canadian residents are as punitive in their views as U.S. residents. The results of this study suggest that Canadian students are less punitive and have more positive views of offenders than U.S. students. Just because both nations have become more punitive, it does not mean that residents share the same degree of punitiveness. Besides the degree of shift in views, it is also possible that Canadian residents shifted from much more liberal views on crime and criminals than U.S. residents and as such, Canadians will have to shift even more in their views to share the same degree of punitiveness as U.S. residents. In general, the sanctioning of offenders in Canada is more liberal than it is in the U.S. For example, there has been no death penalty in Canada for criminal offenders for many decades (Fattah, 1983). This is not the case in the U.S. People are regularly put to death in the U.S. and have been for several decades. In fact, the U.S. is generally in the top five countries in the world in the number of criminal offenders put to death (Lipset, 1990). Thus, if both nations did not start at the same point in views toward crime, criminals, punishment, and treatment, it is unlikely that they would end up at the same point even after a shift in views.

Another reason for the differences may be the perceived level of crime. In this study, far more U.S. respondents felt that the U.S. had a great deal of crime than did Canadian respondents. The view of a high crime rate could translate into fear of crime, which then could have resulted in more punitive views among the U.S. students. Fear of crime has been linked to punitive views towards crime, criminals, punishment, and treatment (Sprott & Doob, 1997). Garland (2000,

2001) argued that if crime is perceived to be high, the liberal elite will become more punitive. According to Garland, the liberal elite are mainly comprised of the middle class. When this group feels that crime is a threat to them, they can become more punitive in their views. They wish to protect themselves because "crime is no longer something that happens to other people" (Cesaroni & Doob, 2003, p. 435). There is empirical support for this premise (Cesaroni & Doob, 2003). In their study on the matter, Cesaroni and Doob (2003) concluded that "it is not surprising that a liberal elite which is, now, just as likely to view crime as being a problem as is an ordinary member of society, will be just as likely to endorse punitive segregation at least for those crimes that worry them most" (p. 440). Thus, it is possible that U.S. students who perceive crime is as being high in their nation will be more afraid of crime and, in turn, will be more punitive in their views. This is something that needs to be studied in more depth before a firm conclusion can be drawn. In addition, the perception that crime was high in the U.S. probably explains why more U.S. students felt crime was a pressing social issue than did Canadian students. If they perceived a high rate of crime, it means that it is a pressing social problem.

While there was a difference between the two groups of respondents on the majority of the questions, there were also similarities. About 44% of Canadian and U.S. respondents felt that more attention should be paid to the victims of crimes rather than the offenders. Caring about the rights of victims has been found among people in both nations (Kaukinen & Colavecchia, 1999; Myers, 1996). It is hard not to feel sympathy for victims. This type of feeling appears to be prevalent in both countries. Interestingly, while Canadian respondents tended to be more supportive of treatment and rehabilitation efforts for offenders and U.S. respondents tended to be more supportive of punishment for criminals, there was no significant difference when asked if society had a right to seek revenge against violent offenders. About 40% in each group felt that society had a right to seek revenge against violent criminals. It could be that willingness to treat offenders declines as crimes become more violent. As mentioned above, there is support for victims among many of the survey respondents. This support for victims may translate into support for retribution against violent offenders. In the U.S., serial killers and mass murderers, such Ted Bundy or Timothy McVeigh, are used by capital punishment proponents as examples to advocate for the need for the death penalty. They use emotions to justify the need for capital punishment. In fact, one of the leading reasons provided for supporting the death penalty by U.S. residents is emotional retribution (Haas, 1994). It could be emotional revenge is a reason why there was no difference between Canadian and U.S. students on whether it is acceptable for society to seek revenge on violent criminals.

Furthermore, there was no difference between the two groups in their views of whether the courts were harsh enough or not with criminals. It could be that students in both nations are unsure of the actual sentences handed out by courts in their respective nations. As previously indicated, both Canadian and U.S. residents tend to underestimate the length of sentence a person receives for a particular type of crime (Applegate et al., 1996; McCorkle, 1993; Sprott,

2003; St. Amand & Zamble, 2001). It could be that students in both nations, especially lower level students, are ignorant of the actual sentences handed out by the courts in their respective nations and this accounts for the lack of difference found in this study. There is some evidence for this postulation. In the multi-variate analysis, the variable measuring academic level had a significant impact on the courts questions. Those students with higher levels of education were more likely to feel that court sanctions are appropriate than were lower level students. This suggests that education may have an impact on people's view of whether courts are harsh enough with criminal offenders. The impact of education may also account for the interesting findings on this question. In this study, about 40% of the students, regardless of which college they were attending, agreed that courts were not harsh enough with criminals, while approximately 27% were unsure, and about 30% disagreed. The findings in this study are much different than what has been presented in the literature. As already mentioned, in a 1993 national sample, about 80% of those surveyed felt that Canadian courts did not provide severe enough sentences for criminals (Cesaroni & Doob, 2003). In a 1991 survey, 85% of U.S. respondents felt the courts were not harsh with criminals (Gaubatz, 1995). The students were much lower in their agreement than was the general public in both Canada and the U.S. One explanation is that the aforementioned general public polls were done a decade or more ago. It is possible that there is a swing back from punitive views to more liberal views in the last few years. It is also possible that young people hold more liberal views than older individuals. In this study, virtually all the respondents were young. It should be noted that the literature of U.S. crime views is mixed on the impact of age. Tyler and Boeckmann (1997) found that the young were more punitive, while McCorkle (1993) observed that younger individuals were more supportive of rehabilitation and treatment. Another reason for the difference is that college students were surveyed. Education has been found to have a liberalizing effect on views toward crime and punishment (Blumstein & Cohen, 1980; McCorkle, 1993; Tyler & Boeckmann, 1997). Even in this study, there was a liberalizing effect, with academic standing having a significant effect in the multi-variate analysis for the court question.

Far more cross-cultural research is needed before firm conclusions can be drawn. The general population should be studied to determine whether the differences (and similarities) found in this study hold true for the general population. It is unclear whether similar findings would be found in a survey of people in the general populations of both nations. Furthermore, more detailed measures can be used. In this study, single item measures were used rather than indexes. Moreover, other questions about crime, criminals, punishment, and treatment should be utilized. The race/ethnic status of the respondent should be controlled for in the multi-variate analysis in future studies. There was no measure for race/ethnic status (i.e., majority/minority status) in the current study. This is a serious oversight. Race/ethnic status has been found to influence criminal justice views, especially among U.S. residents (McCorkle, 1993; Walker, Spohn, & DeLone, 2000).

There are several explanations presented for the findings. These explanations need to be empirically tested. Finally, future research should examine other factors that help explain the differing views towards crime, criminals, punishment, and treatment. In this study, with the exception of the question about the level of crime in the nation, the pseudo-R-squared for the questions were low (see Table 3). This means that most of the variance for a particular question was accounted for by factors other than gender, age, academic level, importance of religion, and nationality. These factors should be identified and explored in future research.

In closing, Payne, Gainey, Triplett, and Danner (2004) argued that "research on the public's attitudes about punishment is useful in that it generates understanding about a particular culture's most basic values and beliefs" (p.198). Angel and Thoits (1987) argued that views and attitudes of different groups are windows to the salient values of the particular group. Cross-cultural research provides a window through which the crime views of different nations can be better understood. While there were some similarities, there were significant differences on the majority of the measures. It was found that Canadian college students felt there was not as much crime in their nation, crime was not a pressing social issue, were more supportive of treatment of criminal offenders, and had more positive views of offenders as compared to U.S college students. It was argued that cultural differences between Canada and the U.S. was the best explanation that explained the results. Nevertheless, the findings are far from conclusive. This was only a single, limited preliminary study. More cross-national research is needed, especially in light of the potential sociological and political issues that surround the issue. Future cross-cultural research will not only provide a better understanding of crime views, but how and why they differ across cultures. It is strongly hoped that the findings from this study will spur further research. In any event, the differences observed in this study hopefully shed a bit more light on the Canadian and U.S. persons' attitudes toward crime and punishment.

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Endnote

1. In addition to the Independent t-test, two nonparametric tests were used. Specifically, the Kruskal-Wallis H test and the Mann-Whitney U test were utilized. Similar results to the t-test were observed.