ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis:	CHANGING THE CONVERSATION: THE USE OF PERSON-FIRST LANGUAGE IN CRIMINAL LABELS
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Scholars in various fields have reassessed the language used to address stigmatized groups to foster a more inclusive society. Criminologists study arguably the most stigmatized group in society, those who commit crime, yet fall behind in utilizing inclusive language. The current study assesses the language of the felony label affecting more than 19 million Americans, building upon previous research that has analyzed the effects of inclusive language in criminal labels. Specifically, this study utilizes a randomized survey experiment to explore the effect of using the term "convicted felon" versus "person convicted of a felony" on participants' willingness to interact with and comfort with proximity to justice-involved people. This research finds that although there was no significant difference in comfort or willingness between language types, various participant identities and whether they had previous experience with justice-involved people were strongly related to their criminal justice attitudes. These findings suggest that participants' experiences and identities may

play a more significant role in determining their attitudes toward justice-involved people than the language presented in survey questions.

CHANGING THE CONVERSATION: THE USE OF PERSON-FIRST LANGUAGE IN CRIMINAL LABELS

by

Rhiannon Little

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Positionality Statement

As a White woman who has never experienced incarceration or criminal justice contact, my positionality to the subject matter significantly shapes my perspective in approaching this research. I acknowledge that my background influences the way I understand criminal justice issues and the language used to describe justice-involved people. I recognize that the criminal justice system disproportionately affects minoritized communities, and as someone who has not faced these disparities, I am aware of my limitations in understanding. As someone who has not interacted with the criminal justice system, I approach this research with a certain level of detachment from the experiences of those directly involved. My positionality shapes my commitment to understanding and challenging biases, particularly in the language used to describe justice-involved people. I recognize the importance of fostering inclusivity and empathy in the way we discuss and perceive those with felony convictions. In conducting this research, I strive to approach this topic with sensitivity and openness, recognizing the limitations of my own perspective and seeking to amplify the voices of those with lived experiences within the criminal justice system.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The nuanced influence of language on attitudes and perceptions is a crucial aspect of social discourse, especially concerning stigmatized groups. Scholars in fields such as disability studies and mental health advocacy have reassessed the language used to refer to stigmatized groups, aiming to foster more inclusiveness (Crocker and Smith 2019; Bury et al. 2023). Although preferences may vary among different groups, it is important to challenge social biases and stigma through a thoughtful assessment of language. Criminologists study one of the most stigmatized groups in society yet falls behind in utilizing inclusive language to address them.

Criminal justice professionals are divided between incorporating more inclusive language and maintaining stigmatizing terminology, reflecting the diverging perspectives regarding the way language impacts justice-involved people. In 2016, the Department of Justice (DOJ) announced its language policy enforcing a shift towards more inclusive, person-first language when referring to justice-involved people (Jackman 2021). However, the policy was met with pushback from criminal justice officials who argued that stigmatizing justice-involved people is productive and deserved (Derespina 2016). Language shifts have been made in disability, mental health, and substance abuse prevention scholarship, but the 2016 DOJ policy is one of the first official efforts in criminology to promote more inclusive terminology.

Labeling theorists acknowledge the broader implications of labeling on reintegration and reentry, as well as the varying connotations affecting the level of stigma different labels carry (Becker 1963; Tannenbaum 1938). The stigma associated with labels impacts not only the perceptions of justice-involved people and their ability to engage with their communities (Moore, Stuewig, and Tangney 2016), but also their behavior. For example, adults who were formally adjudicated were more likely to recidivate within two years of release compared to those who had their adjudication withheld (Chiricos et al. 2007). A large body of research supports the notion that labels pose barriers for formerly incarcerated individuals (Agboola 2017; Moore et al. 2016; Pager 2003; Wiley, Slocum, and Esbensen 2013) but few studies examine how the language of labels influences attitudes toward them.

The limited research that exists on the specific language of labels has found that the use of crime-first language increases the stigmatization of justice-involved people and leads to more punitive attitudes than person-first language (Denver, Pickett, and Bushway 2017; Imhoff 2015; Lowe and Willis 2020). This body of research primarily focuses on certain crime types, such as violent crimes or sexual offenses. The broader label of “convicted felon” has not yet been examined, despite it being described as the “most consequential of any that the criminal justice system has to administer” (Bontrager, Bales, and Chiricos 2005). The felony label imposes significant collateral consequences for an individual’s civic engagement (e.g. the right to vote, serve on juries, hold public office) and access to public assistance (e.g. public housing, federal loans) (Whittle 2018). Understanding the profound impact of the felony label is crucial for fostering a more equitable criminal justice system.

The current study seeks to examine whether the use of crime-first and person-first language in survey questions leads to different perceptions of justice-involved people. The traditional crime-first language in “convicted felon” is contrasted with the person-first language in “person convicted of a felony” through the random assignment of two survey versions using each language type. This research is significant because it assesses whether the recent efforts to move towards person-first language are productive and analyzes the role language plays in criminal labels, which may have implications for labeling theory.

To conduct this research, I used electronic survey responses from U.S. adults who were randomly assigned crime-first language (i.e. “convicted felon”) or person-first language (i.e. “person convicted of a felony”). Specifically, I looked at 1) *comfort with proximity* or how comfortable participants would be if they were close in physical proximity to a justice-involved person and 2) *willingness to interact* or how willing participants would be to interact with a justice-involved person in a professional or community setting. Data for each language type were compared to determine whether language type led to a significant difference in responses.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

A Linguistic Approach to Stigma

Every day, Americans consume approximately 100,000 words through various communication methods (Bohn and Short 2009). Within this expansive realm, the nuanced influence of words becomes apparent, each word carrying its own meaning and connotation. The impact of language extends beyond communication, influencing our attitudes and perceptions of ourselves and those around us. Critically analyzing the words we use signifies their role in creating and perpetuating social biases and stigma. Confronting this linguistic influence is crucial in challenging the social frameworks built upon stigmatizing language.

Person-First Movement

Scholars in disability studies have historically pushed for the use of person-first language to refer to stigmatized groups, incorporating it into legislation (Flink 2021; Vivanti 2020). Person-first language (PFL) emphasizes a person's humanity before acknowledging a stigmatized attribute or experience (e.g. 'person with epilepsy') which indicates that the attribute is only one component of that individual's complex identity (Vivanti 2020). It also suggests that people with disabilities are complete human beings deserving of the same rights, protections, and opportunities as everyone else. PFL opposes identity-first language (IFL), which identifies the characteristic before the person and may not acknowledge the person at all (e.g. 'an epileptic'). IFL was believed to treat a person's disability as their only defining feature, contributing to the broader dehumanization and stigmatization of the community (Vivanti 2020).

Several groups have since thoughtfully discussed and refined their language to determine their most preferred variations of terms. Many members of the deaf community consider their impairment a core part of their identity and choose to acknowledge it first (Crocker and Smith 2019). Similarly, many neurodivergent individuals were found to prefer the terms "autistic," "autistic person," and "person on the spectrum" (Bury et al. 2023). Still, scholars agree these language discussions are incredibly nuanced and there is no universal consensus, so the preferences of individuals should be prioritized (Botha, Hanlon, and Williams 2023).

Advocates in substance abuse centers have also tried to decrease the stigma surrounding addiction by promoting inclusive language. One prevention program articulates that colloquial language, conflating definitions, and fear-based language can create stigmatizing messaging (Anon 2017). They argue that person-first language is an appropriate way to refer to someone who *has* a problem that can be addressed, rather than implying they *are* the problem. These discussions demonstrate that the language used to describe highly stigmatized groups is impactful, and the potential benefits of a language shift could be explored elsewhere.

Language in Criminology

Criminologists study arguably the most stigmatized group of individuals in society—those who engage in crime—yet fall behind in utilizing inclusive language. This becomes evident in the pervasive use of stigmatizing language, including terms like '*inmate,' 'convict,' 'felon,' 'offender,' 'prisoner,'* and *'criminal.*' These terms, classified as crime-first language (CFL) comparable to identity-first language (IFL), perpetuate stigma. Some scholars question why society labels justice-involved people based on behavior it doesn't want them to repeat, rather than acknowledging the other features that more holistically describe who they are (Willis 2018). Behind criminal labels are layered individuals, who may also be *caregivers, students, friends, athletes, artists, leaders,* and *survivors,* among other diverse attributes. Ultimately, these traits remain overshadowed when a stigmatizing label is imposed.

One of the first official efforts to shift away from stigmatizing language was made by the Department of Justice (DOJ) in 2016. The Assistant Attorney General, Karol Mason, issued a statement promoting person-first language (e.g. 'individual who was incarcerated') as a replacement for "useless and demeaning labels that freeze a person in a single moment in time" (Jackman 2021). Mason wrote that the more inclusive terms would be used in department communications and encouraged other agencies to do the same. However, this policy decision was met with strong pushback. J. Christian Adams, a former DOJ official, said the language shift is an attempt to destigmatize "the most abhorrent behavior" (Derespina 2016). He said, "people who cannot be trusted, who have committed violent crimes in the past, there's nothing wrong with calling them exactly what they are – and that is felons."

The disagreement on the DOJ language policy illustrates a critical divide in perspectives regarding the impact of labeling individuals in the criminal justice system. One viewpoint advocates for a shift in language to alleviate the stigma placed on justice-involved people. Conversely, the opposing viewpoint argues to maintain the stigmatizing language, often citing legal or historical justifications. Unfortunately, there is limited research available to provide clarity in this disagreement. Little is known about the weight of different labels or the potential to reduce stigma from a shift in language. More research is needed to assess the effectiveness of transitioning to more inclusive terminology in the criminology space.

Effects of Labeling

The ongoing debate regarding language policy mirrors the principles of labeling theory, which emphasizes how labels shape an individual's sense of self, behavior, and life outcomes (Jovanoski & Rustemi, 2021). Labeling can be realized through police contact, an official charge or arrest, a court-ordered sentence, incarceration, and several other forms of interaction with the criminal justice system. A large body of research has found that labels in the criminal justice system have effects on recidivism and implications for reentry (Bernberg et al. 2006; Pager 2003; Agboola 2017; Moore et al. 2016). However, labeling theorists acknowledge that different labels have different effects. Coyle (2013) argues that language choices in criminal justice discourse have "significant ramification[s]." The impact of criminal labeling in general is important to acknowledge, as well as the specific differences between certain labels and their applications.

Labeling Theory

Labeling theory originates from Tannenbaum's (1938) concept of the "dramatization of evil," where individuals are tagged with deviant labels and isolated from others. Ostracized people find refuge with others who have been tagged, which drives them further into deviant behavior. Lemert (1951) later organized the theory into two stages, with primary deviance being the initial deviant act and secondary deviance being the subsequent act that results from the internalization and acceptance of a criminal label. Becker (1963) expanded the theory by creating the “outsiders” category for those who are labeled deviant and no longer accepted in the normal group (p. 15). When an individual’s deviance overrides all other aspects of their identity, it becomes their “master status,” shaping the way they interact with society (Becker 1963).

Theorists have also discussed the language of criminal labels and their role in determining the level of stigma a label carries (Becker 1963; Tannenbaum 1938). Becker (1963) articulated that an individual only needs to commit “a single criminal offense” to be labeled a criminal, but “the word [criminal] carries a number of connotations” (p. 33). Further, Tannenbaum (1938) describes a “gradual shift from the definition of the specific acts as evil to a definition of the individual as evil” (p. 17). Both labeling theorists highlight how language not only describes actions but also shapes perceptions, influences societal reactions, and contributes to the construction of an individual's identity. Although labeling theory is primarily understood to stress the significance of labeling as a process, theorists also recognize the varying impacts of different words used to form labels.

Initially, numerous researchers suggested labeling theory was too vague, unable to be tested, and empirically invalid (Wellford, 1975). However, the theory was revisited after later iterations provided more clarity and additional studies found data to support it. Paternoster and Iovanni (1989) championed these efforts, arguing that research failing to support labeling theory utilized “grossly misrepresented hypotheses” (p. 360). They evaluated the positions of labeling theory critics, stating they “understood the labeling perspective poorly” and “dismissed it prematurely” (p. 387). They called on other researchers to reconsider, rework, and revitalize the theory.

Overall, labeling theorists suggest deviance is socially constructed, which creates a space for future research to examine the social factors that influence the labeling process. Since labels are not applied universally, continued testing and research into labeling theory is crucial in determining how different populations experience the varying effects of labels. Following the revitalization of labeling theory, recent research has continued to apply its principles and examine the impact of criminal labels on recidivism and reentry.

Challenges for Reentry

There is significant support for the notion that criminal justice contact and subsequent labeling leads to a difference in society’s response to the individual. The post-labeling stigma faced by formerly incarcerated individuals creates barriers to successful reentry (Agboola 2017; Moore et al. 2016). The anticipation of personally experiencing stigma following release impacted individuals’ willingness to engage with the community (Moore et al. 2016). A criminal record makes it more difficult for individuals to apply for and secure a job (Pager 2003; Schwartz and Skolnick 1962). Pager’s (2003) groundbreaking study found that applicants without a criminal record received significantly more callbacks than those with one, and this effect was more pronounced for Black applications compared to their White counterparts.

Research also suggests labeling in the criminal justice system affects behavior. Official intervention, which often results in a label being imposed, was found to lead to increased delinquency for juveniles (Bernburg, Krohn, and Rivera 2006; Wiley, Slocum, and Esbensen 2013) and an increased likelihood of recidivism for adult offenders (Chiricos et al. 2007). Youth who are viewed as delinquent have been found to receive harsher punishments in school (Bowditch 1993). Official intervention also decreases the likelihood that youth will graduate high school (Bernburg et al. 2006, p. 1311), where education has been found to have a direct impact on future employment opportunities.

Beyond shaping perceptions and societal attitudes, the impact of labeling extends to influencing behavioral outcomes, underscoring the profound and far-reaching consequences of these labels on individuals' trajectories and opportunities. Clearly, the broader impact of labels is not disputed by research, but the differences between labels with varied language remain somewhat unclear. There is little known about the way specific terminology influences these outcomes, but research on this subject has somewhat increased in recent years.

Language Influencing Attitudes

In exploring the nuanced relationship between language, attitudes, and perceptions of justice-involved people, a growing body of research tests the effects of person-first language against crime-first language. Studies show the language used in survey questions has the power to influence responses and invoke various attitudes (Denver et al. 2017; Imhoff 2015; Lowe and Willis 2020). Although research primarily focuses on sexual offenses, the impact of language has been found to extend to victims of crime as well (Papendick and Bohner 2017). Beyond shaping perceptions, the influence of labeling language has tangible outcomes, influencing the community acceptance of returning citizens (Jackl 2023). Further research is needed to understand the nuanced relationship between language and attitudes, through contemporary assessments of using person-first language in more significant labels.

Perceptions of Justice-Involved People

The limited research that exists suggests the language used in survey questions primes responses (Denver et al. 2017; Imhoff 2015; Lowe and Willis 2020; Papendick and Bohner 2017). Different words invoke different attitudes and perceptions of justice-involved people. For instance, comparisons between labels like “pedophile” and “person with a sexual interest in children" revealed strong differences in perceptions — “pedophile” evoked more punitive attitudes and an increase in perceived dangerousness and intentionality among respondents (Imhoff 2015). Similarly, the use of labels like “sex offender" and “child sex offender” corresponded with a decrease in respondents’ willingness to volunteer with a justice-involved person in the community (Lowe and Willis 2020). Research has primarily focused on perpetrators of sexual offenses due to public attitudes towards this group being generally negative and hostile (Pickett, Mancini, and Mears 2013).

Beyond this, the type of language used in survey questions has been found to have a lasting impact, influencing participants’ adoption of the language into their own vocabulary (Lowe and Willis 2020). Participants assigned labeling language were more likely to adopt that language themselves compared to those assigned neutral language. Further, the influence of labeling extends beyond perpetrators and reaches victims of crime. Papendick and Bohner (2017) found that the term “survivor,” when used to describe women who have been raped, indicated more strength and positivity for the individual compared to the word “victim.” Simply including labeling language in survey questions has lasting effects for participants’ attitudes, even extending beyond the justice-involved population to victims of crime. However, the impact of language is not uniform across crime types.

The main study driving this research examined the language used in broader criminal labels and compared these effects across crime types. Denver et al. (2017) found that crime-first language (i.e. “convicted criminals”) led to greater stigmatization than person-first language (i.e. “people convicted of crimes”). Respondents viewed those with a violent conviction as most likely to reoffend, despite data trends showing the opposite. This false perception was more pronounced when crime-first terms were used in the questions. This is one of the main studies to date that assesses labels that apply to the general justice-involved population and affect the greatest number of people. Still, the effects of labels are not universal, and different populations should be tested to better understand the nuanced relationship between language and attitudes.

Beyond Perceptions

The public attitudes influenced by labeling language have real-world implications. Negative attitudes toward justice-involved people maintain the desire for social distance from returning citizens, with people opposing the development of public housing and social welfare agencies in their own neighborhoods (Jackl 2023). Assigning participants the terms “person who was formerly incarcerated” and “returning citizen” was found to decrease the enforcement of stereotypes against returning citizens and increase support for post-incarceration transition services compared to the assignment of "ex-convict." Examining public attitudes towards justice-involved people and the willingness to accept these individuals as part of the community is valuable for fostering successful reentry.

Jackl (2023) also articulated that the use of "returning citizen" in survey questions was associated with a significant reduction in harmful stereotypes, while the use of "person who was formerly incarcerated" did not yield significant results. The researcher theorizes this disparity could be due to the person-first language pointing out the individual's incarceration history, while "returning citizen" emphasizes their role as a member of the community. These distinctions are important to understand when determining the least stigmatizing and most appropriate way to refer to justice-involved people to be enforced through policy.

Other factors are important to consider when assessing the endorsement of harmful stereotypes. Racial resentment, prior victimization, and high-quality contact with individuals who have been incarcerated were found to be the strongest predictors of stereotyping (Jackl 2023). For example, a person who has a positive relationship with a family member who was incarcerated may have more positive attitudes towards justice-involved people, regardless of the language they are assigned. Previous experience with the criminal justice system and justice-involved people, as well as other factors influencing perceptions, are important to note when examining the impact of language on attitudes towards this group. Additional research is needed to continue providing more contemporary examinations of the effects of applying person-first language in criminal labels, especially more impactful labels.

Current Research

Previous research on the language of criminal labels can be modeled and improved upon to address some of their limitations. Imhoff (2015) utilized two survey types and randomly assigned participants to the pedophilia label condition or the sexual interest in prepubescent children condition. Their two studies had a sample size of 142 and 203 respectively. The study used a t-test and regression analysis to find that the pedophilia label produced more punitive attitudes. Denver et al (2017) recruited roughly 1000 participants for each version of their survey. They conducted a t-test to compare the difference in means between the crime-first and person-first language groups and found that the use of crime-first language was associated with an increased in perceived recidivism risk for individuals with violent convictions. The current study adopts the two-survey design, with one group receiving more inclusive language and the other receiving more stigmatizing language. This research hopes to apply these specific findings to the broader category of felony convictions.

The current research examines whether replacing stigmatizing language (i.e. "convicted felon" with person-first language (i.e. "person convicted of a felony") affects attitudes towards justice-involved people. The felony label is considered one of the most consequential criminal labels that can be imposed (Bontrager et al. 2005), yet the impact of its language has not been thoroughly examined. Rather than comparing the stigma associated with labels across different crime types or within one specific crime type, this research confronts a broader label affecting more than 19 million Americans with a felony record (Flurry 2017). This study addresses gaps in research through multiple research questions and hypotheses:

RQ1: Does the use of person-first language in felony labels affect respondents' willingness to interact with justice-involved individuals?

> **H1:** Respondents who are assigned the person-first language (i.e. "person convicted of a felony") will report a greater willingness to interact with justice-involved individuals compared to those assigned the crime-first language (i.e. "convicted felon").

RQ2: Does the use of person-first language in felony labels affect respondents' comfort with physical proximity to justice-involved individuals?

> **H2:** Respondents who are assigned the person-first language (i.e. "person convicted of a felony") will report greater comfort with physical proximity to justice-involved individuals compared to those assigned the crime-first language (i.e. "convicted felon").

RQ3: Are responses influenced by previous interactions with the criminal justice system or justice-involved people?

> **H3:** Participants who have previously interacted with justice-involved people or the criminal justice system themselves will report a greater willingness to interact with and greater comfort with physical proximity to justice-involved individuals compared to those who have no previous experience.

Chapter 3: Data & Methods

Data

Collection Method

The current study seeks to examine whether the varied use of crime-first (i.e. convicted felon) and person-first language (i.e. person convicted of a felony) in survey questions leads to different responses regarding participants' level of comfort and willingness to interact with justice-involved individuals. This study utilizes an experiment embedded in an electronic survey hosted on the Qualtrics platform through the University of Maryland (UMD), distributed between January 23rd, 2023, and February 8, 2024. The sampling method for this research is a combination of convenience and snowball sampling.

The experiment utilizes two survey types, one using crime-first language to describe individuals with felony convictions and the other using person-first language. Participants were randomly assigned one of the versions, with the assigned language type consistent throughout the survey. The survey questions were designed by the researcher and the randomization technique was based on a study by Denver et al. (2017). The randomized design enhances the study's internal validity, ensuring the observed differences in responses are due to the varied language types. The total completion time for the survey is estimated to be a maximum of 6 minutes. At the end of the survey, respondents were debriefed with an explanation of the purpose of this study and the use of randomized language.

The survey was disseminated through several social media outlets and group messages, including the researcher's network and University of Maryland student groups. The survey link was also posted on the "Sample Size" subreddit on the Reddit website, where different users post surveys and polls for other users to complete. Respondents were encouraged to share the survey with their own connections to widen the reach of participants beyond those who know the researcher.

Sample

The sample for this survey is comprised of individuals aged 18 years or older with permanent residency in the United States. These requirements were imposed to avoid additional juvenile participant approval and prevent vast differences in responses due to participants living in different countries experiencing different criminal justice systems. Demographic information for each respondent was collected at the start of the survey including their age, race, gender, education, region of permanent residence, religious affiliation, and political ideology. In addition, respondents were asked about their previous experiences with the criminal justice system and/or justice-involved people. The responses of those who have previously interacted with justice-involved people or the justice system themselves may be affected differently by the experiment compared to people who have no experience.

The survey was interacted with by 251 individuals, with 11 beginning but not completing the survey and 30 completing multiple questions but exiting the survey before responding to dependent variable questions or skipping them. Possible explanations for those who did not answer the dependent variable questions are survey fatigue after responding to the demographic questions or discomfort with the survey subject. One response was complete, but the participant age was entered as 17, so it was removed from the dataset due to age requirements. Out of the 251 total responses collected, 209 were deemed complete and usable for analysis. Out of these 209 responses, 103 participants were assigned the crime-first language condition and 106 were assigned person-first language condition.

Measures

The independent variable is *language type* and the dependent variables are *comfort with proximity* and *willingness to interact*. The control variables are *age, region of permanent residence, gender identity, race or ethnicity, education, religious affiliation, political ideology,* and *previous experience with the criminal justice system.* The survey includes seven to ten questions on demographics; four questions on comfort with proximity; three to five questions on previous experiences with the criminal justice system or justice-involved individuals; and four questions on willingness to interact (see Appendix C for full list of questions).

Dependent Variables

Comfort with proximity denotes how comfortable participants would be if they were close in physical proximity to a justice-involved person both in a residential and a school/workplace setting. Participants were asked questions regarding increasingly close physical spaces, inspired by the Bogardus Social Distance Scale (Bogardus 1933). For example, respondents assigned to person-first language were asked, “How comfortable would you be living in a house next door to a person convicted of a felony?” and respondents assigned to crime-first language were asked, “How comfortable would you be living in a house next door to a convicted felon?" The response choices were a range of numbers from zero to four, with zero indicating "very uncomfortable" and four indicating "very comfortable." The scores for each question in this section were combined and averaged, with average scores closer to 0 reflecting general discomfort and scores closer to 4 representing general comfort with physical proximity to justice-involved people.

Willingness to interact denotes how willing participants would be to interact with a justice-involved person in a professional or community setting. Participants were asked questions regarding increasingly personal situations where they would be interacting with a justice-involved person. For example, participants assigned person-first language were asked, "How willing would you be to befriend a person convicted of a felony?" and participants assigned crime-first language were asked, "How willing would you be to befriend a convicted felon?" The response choices were a range of numbers from zero to four, with zero indicating "very unwilling" and four indicating "very willing." The scores for each question in this section were combined and averaged, with average scores closer to 0 representing general unwillingness and scores closer to 4 representing general willingness to interact with justice-involved people.

Independent Variable

Language type denotes whether participants were assigned crime-first language (i.e. 'convicted felon'; coded 0) or person-first language (i.e. 'person with a felony conviction'; coded 1). The specification of a felony conviction was selected due to the severity of crimes classified as felonies, which is well-known to the public and could lead to more varied responses. Although the felony category includes a wide range of offenses, the collateral consequences of a felony conviction do not differ based on crime type. The language used to discuss the felony category is important to analyze because of the weight a felony label carries.

Control Variables

Age was measured to determine whether a generational difference in attitudes influenced the relationship between attitudes and language type. *Region of permanent residence* was measured to assess whether attitudes differed based on geographic location. *Gender identity* was measured as previous research has found a link between fear of crime and gender identity (Fox, Nobles, & Piquero 2009), so a potential difference in attitudes was expected for this study as well. Similarly, *race and ethnicity* has been linked to criminal justice attitudes by previous research (Mbuba, 2010) which warranted its inclusion as a control variable in this study. *Education level* was measured because college education is widely understood to have a liberalizing effect on public attitudes (Velásquez and Eger 2022). *Religion* and *political ideology* were measured to control for the potential influence of the different religious and political values on criminal justice attitudes.

Previous experiences with the criminal justice system were measured using three control variables: *prior conviction, previous interactions,* and *know someone convicted. Prior conviction* denotes whether the participant has ever been convicted of a felony (coded 0 = no, 1 = yes). *Previous interactions* with justice-involved people and the criminal justice system were measured to assess whether these interactions affected responses for the dependent variables. Those with previous experiences may be less influenced by the stigma carried by criminal labels because they have already formed their own understanding and attitudes before the questions are asked. *Know someone convicted* denotes whether the participant reports knowing someone who has been convicted of a felony. Participants being exposed to justice-involved people through some level of a relationship may indicate greater levels of comfort with proximity and willingness to interact with these individuals.

Analytic Strategy

The data collected from this survey were analyzed using SPSS Statistics. First, descriptive analyses examined the sample demographics and frequencies to determine grouping for later analysis. Then, bivariate analysis compared the average scores for each dependent variable across both language types using an independent sample *t-test*. This test was also performed to compare the scores for each dependent variable question individually across language types. Finally, multivariate regression analysis assessed the influence of control variables on the relationship between attitudes towards justice-involved people and language type.

Chapter 4: Results

Descriptive Analysis

The overall mean score for willingness across both sample types ($\mu = 2.848$, SD = .958) was greater than the overall mean score for comfort ($\mu = 1.927$, SD = 1.102). This means that, on average, participants were somewhat willing to interact with justice-involved people and were neither comfortable nor uncomfortable being close in physical proximity to these individuals. The response breakdown to each component of these variables can be found in *Table 5* and visualized in *Figure 2* and *Figure 3* in the Appendix.

When asked if they had been convicted of a felony, all participants selected "No" (*n* = 209, 100%). 117 participants reported not knowing anyone convicted of a felony (56.5%) while 90 participants indicated they do know someone with a felony conviction (43.5%). Responses of "Not sure" were coded as "No" because it is unlikely that this group's attitudes would be affected. Individuals who selected "Prefer not to say" or skipped this question were coded as missing. One participant who selected "Other" and typed "through work" in the text box was coded as "Yes" as the text entry indicated they do know someone with a felony conviction.

97 participants reported having knowingly interacted with someone convicted of a felony (46.9%) while 110 participants indicated they have not (53.1%). Responses of "Not sure" were coded as "No" because being unsure means the interaction did not happen knowingly. Individuals who selected "Prefer not to say" or skipped this question were coded as missing.

The age range of participants is between 18 and 76 years old. Responses were grouped into a "College-age" category for those 18 to 24 years old (73.1%, $n = 133$) and a "25+" category for those 25 years of age and older (26.9%, $n = 49$). This grouping was made to account for the researcher's network primarily consisting of college students, with the age range groupings being based on a report from the National Center for Education Statistics (2023) which concluded 85 percent of full-time undergraduate college students were below age 25 in Fall 2021. Responses with no age indicated were coded as missing. The sample consists of 128 (61.2%) women and 75 (35.9%) men. A total of 6 individuals selected "Non-binary," "Genderqueer," or "Prefer not to say." This group's size was deemed insignificant for analysis and these responses were coded as missing.

Most participants identified as White or European American (58.5%, $n = 121$). Those who selected a race other than White or more than one category were grouped into a "Non-White" category ($n = 86$, 41.5%). This group includes individuals who identify as Asian or Asian American, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, Hispanic or Latin American, Arab, Middle Eastern, or North African, and Native American or Alaska Native. Those who left this question blank, selected "Prefer not to say," or selected "Other" but did not specify their racial or ethnic identity were coded as missing.

The sample consists of participants with some college credit but no degree (45.9%, $n = 95$), those with completed college degrees (44.0%, $n = 91$), and those with no college experience (10.1%, $n = 21$). Those categorized as having "No college experience" indicated their highest level of education was no schooling completed, nursery school to 8th grade, some high school no diploma, high school diploma or equivalent, or trade/technical/vocational training. Those in the “Completed degree” category selected that their highest level of education was: “Associate’s degree,” “Bachelor’s degree,” “Master’s degree,” “Professional degree,” or “Doctorate degree.” Responses of “Prefer not to say,” “Other,” or those with no choice selected were coded as missing.

Most participants selected “South” as their region of permanent residence (*n* = 146, 69.9%), which includes AL, AR, DE, FL, GA, KY, LA, MD, MS, NC, SC, OK, TN, TX, VA, WV. A smaller group of participants selected “Northeast or Mid-Atlantic” as their region of permanent residence (*n* = 45, 21.5%), which includes CT, ME, MA, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT. The remaining participants selected “Midwest” (IL, IN, IA, KS, MI, MN, MO, ND, NE, OH, SD, WI) or “West” (AK, AZ, CA, CO, HI, ID, MT, NV, NM, OR, UT, WA, WY) as their region of permanent residence, and were grouped into an “Other Region” category (*n* = 18, 8.6%). These regional categories were based on the U.S. Census Bureau breakdown (n.d.). This variable was excluded from multivariate analysis due to the lack of diversity in the sample, preventing any meaningful differences between regions from being identified.

Responses for religious affiliation were divided into two categories: “Religious” (*n* = 118, 60.8%) and “No Religion” (*n* = 76, 39.2%). The “Religious” category groups together religions that were selected or manually input, including Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Jewish, Sikh, and Santeria. Individuals who skipped this question, selected “Prefer not to say,” or selected “Other” without indicating a religion not provided in the response categories were coded as missing.

Responses for political affiliation were grouped into three categories: "Liberal" (n = 101, 52.1%), "Not Liberal" (n = 66, 34.0%), and "Not Affiliated" (n = 27, 13.9%). The "Not Liberal" category groups together political affiliations different from "Liberal" that were selected (these include "Conservative," "Progressive," and "Libertarian") or manually typed in the "Other" text box ("Socialist," "Independent Leaning Right," "Moderate," "Centrist," "Leftist," "Marxist," and "Far Left-Anarcho-Communist"). One response where "Other" was selected and "Open" was manually typed in the text box was coded as "Not Affiliated." Participants who skipped this question, selected "Prefer not to say," "I do not know my political ideology," or "Other" without indicating an unlisted political affiliation were coded as missing.

Bivariate Analysis

For the bivariate analysis, an independent-samples *t-test* was conducted to compare the mean values for dependent variables across both language types. Equal variances are assumed for 9 out of 10 variables for these two samples because $p > .05$ for Levene's Test for Equality of Variances. The one-sided p value was used for significance since the research questions are directional and ask whether the use of person-first language *increases* levels of comfort and willingness. The significance level for this analysis was set to the standard value of ($p < .05$).

Average Willingness

H1 predicted that participants assigned to the person-first language type would report a greater willingness to interact with justice-involved individuals compared to those assigned the crime-first language. However, *Table 1* shows the mean score for average willingness was slightly higher for participants assigned crime-first language

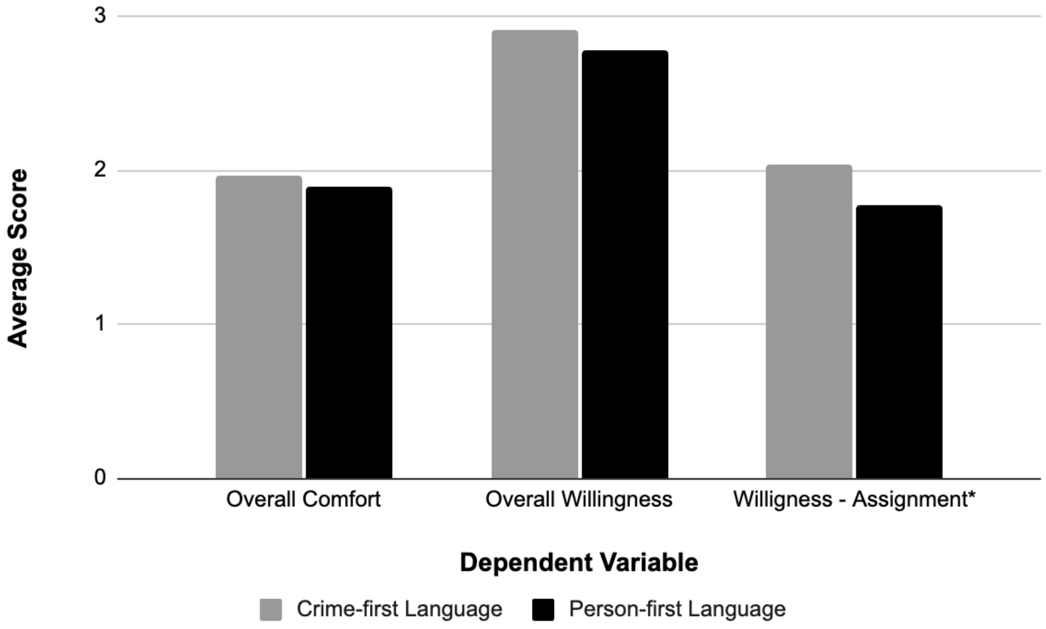
($\mu = 2.912$) compared to those assigned person-first language ($\mu = 2.781$). This means that on average, participants assigned the crime-first language reported being more willing to interact with a "convicted felon" than those assigned person-first language. However, the statistical analysis suggests this difference in means is not significant ($t = 1.032$, $p = .152$). *Figure 1* provides a visual representation of the *t-test* results, showing the difference in means with only one individual question analysis yielding a significant result. Overall, the analysis of average willingness does not support H1 and suggests there is no significant difference in participants' willingness to interact with a person convicted of a felony across the two language types.

Table 1: Independent Samples T-Test Bivariate Analysis

Variable	Crime-First	Person-First	*t*
Average Willingness	2.912 (.954)	2.781 (.961)	1.032
Average Comfort	1.964 (1.163)	1.892 (1.044)	.472
Willingness Assignment	2.039 (1.093)	1.774 (1.115)	1.736*

Note. $*p < .05$ $**p < .01$

Figure 1: Independent Samples T-Test Bivariate Analysis



Average Comfort

H2 predicted that participants assigned to the person-first language type would report higher levels of comfort with proximity to justice-involved individuals compared to those assigned to the crime-first language. However, *Table 1* shows the mean score for average comfort was slightly higher for participants assigned crime-first language (μ = 1.964) compared to those assigned person-first language (μ = 1.892). This means that on average, participants assigned the crime-first language reported higher levels of comfort with being physically close to a person convicted of a felony than those assigned person-first language. However, the statistical analysis suggests this difference in means is not significant (t = .472, p = .319). The difference in means for the average comfort variable was less significant than the difference for the average willingness variable. Overall, the analysis of average comfort does not support H2 and suggests there is no significant difference in participants' comfort with proximity towards individuals with felony convictions across the person-first and crime-first language types.

Individual Variables

Although there was no significant difference found for the average comfort or willingness variables, individual components of each variable were analyzed to address the nuance that may have been lost when the scores were averaged. In the individual analysis, there was one significant difference found although it does not support the hypotheses. Table 1 shows the participants who were assigned the crime-first language ($\mu = 2.039$) reported significantly greater willingness to work on an assignment with a person convicted of a felony ($t = 1.736$, $p = .042$) compared to the group assigned person-first language ($\mu = 1.774$). This individual finding opposes H1, as the difference in means was significant in the opposite direction of the predictions. The bivariate analysis for the remaining seven individual variables did not yield significant results.

Multivariate Analysis

Baseline Models

For the multivariate analysis, several linear regression models were created to account for the effect of each control variable on the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. This analysis used the unstandardized value for beta (β). In the multivariate regression, the baseline model relationship between language type and average comfort was not significant ($\beta = -.072$, $p = .638$). The baseline model relationship between language type and average willingness was also not significant ($\beta = -.137$, $p = .303$). The control variables were incorporated into these models, with significant findings detailed below.

Table 2 illustrates the regression results between language type and average comfort, with the control variables listed in the "Independent Variables" column. As shown in the table, the baseline model was not significant, indicating that language type did not have a strong effect on participants' comfort before incorporating controls.

Table 2: Average Comfort Linear Regression Model

Independent Variables	Unstandardized β	Standard Error
Language Type (Baseline)	-.072	.153
Older (25+)	.438*	.183
Non-White	-.480**	.152
Religious Affiliation	-.368*	.158
Know Someone Convicted	.445**	.153
Previous Interactions	.732**	.145

*Note. *p < .05 **p* < .01

Table 3 illustrates the regression results between language type and average willingness, with the control variables listed in the "Independent Variables" column. As shown in the table, the baseline model was not significant, indicating that language type did not have a strong effect on participants' reported willingness before incorporating controls.

Table 3: Average Willingness Linear Regression Model

Independent Variable	Unstandardized β	Standard Error
Language Type (Baseline)	-.137	.133
Woman	-.275*	.137
Liberal	.408*	.206
Previous Interactions	.406**	.128

*Note. *p < .05 **p* < .01

Age

When controlling for age, the beta value for the baseline model of language type and average comfort was still not significant ($\beta = -.079$, $p = .625$). However, being older than 24 had a significant positive relationship with average comfort ($\beta = .438$, $p = .015$). This means that individuals who reported being older than college-age expressed greater comfort with proximity towards justice-involved people on average compared to the college-age group.

Gender

When controlling for gender, the beta value for the baseline model of language type and average willingness was still not significant ($\beta = -.106$, $p = .425$). However, identifying as a woman had a significant negative relationship with average willingness ($\beta = -.275$, $p = .046$). This means that on average, women in this sample were less willing to interact with justice-involved people compared to men.

Race & Ethnicity

When controlling for race, the beta value for the baseline model of language type and average comfort was still not significant (*β* = -.081, *p* = .588). However, identifying as “Non-White” had a very significant negative relationship with average comfort (*β* = -.480, *p* = .002). This means that on average, non-White participants were less comfortable being close in physical proximity to justice-involved people compared to White participants.

Religion

When controlling for religion, the beta value for the baseline model of language type and average comfort was still not significant (*β* = -.013, *p* = .931). However, identification with a religion had a significant negative relationship with average comfort (*β* = -.368, *p* = .021). This means that on average, participants who identified with a religion were less comfortable being physically close to justice-involved people compared to those with no religious affiliation.

Political Ideology

When controlling for political ideology, the beta value for the baseline model of language type and average willingness was still not significant (*β* = -.059, *p* = .668). However, identifying as “Liberal” was found to have a significant positive relationship with average willingness (*β* = .408, *p* = .049). This means that on average, participants who identified as liberal reported greater willingness to interact with justice-involved people compared to other political ideologies.

Previous Experience

Since no participants reported having a felony conviction, there was no data to test the effect of personal experience with the criminal justice system on attitudes. However, a large portion of the sample reported knowing or interacting with someone convicted of a felony, so these variables were incorporated in the regression analysis. When controlling for whether participants knew someone convicted of a felony, the beta value for the baseline model of average comfort and language type was still not significant ($\beta = -.083$, $p = .539$). However, knowing someone who has been convicted of a felony has a very significant positive relationship with average comfort ($\beta = .445$, $p = .004$). This means that on average, participants who know someone convicted of a felony were more comfortable being physically close to justice-involved people compared to those who did not know someone.

When previous interactions were accounted for in the relationship between language type and average comfort, the beta value was still not significant ($\beta = -.007$, $p = .963$). However, previous interactions have a very significant positive relationship with average comfort ($\beta = .732$, $p = <.001$). Similarly, when previous interactions were accounted for in the relationship between language type and average willingness, the beta value was still not significant ($\beta = -.079$, $p = .539$). However, previous interactions have a very significant positive relationship with average willingness ($\beta = .406$, $p = .002$). This means that on average, participants who knowingly interacted with someone convicted of a felony more willing to interact with and more comfortable being physically close to justice-involved people compared to those who had not experienced any interactions. Overall, controlling for previous interactions did not significantly affect the relationship between language type and the dependent variables, but the previous interactions variable was found to have a strong relationship with both dependent variables on its own.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The survey found that the use of person-first language generally did not affect participants' attitudes towards individuals with felony convictions compared to crime-first language. Only one bivariate analysis test suggested a significant difference in means between language types, and this was in the opposite direction as predicted. Overall, H1 and H2 were not supported by the results of this research. However, the multivariate analysis yielded some significant results worth noting. Although accounting for the influence of the control variables did not make the effect of language type any more significant, several control variables had significant relationships with the dependent variables themselves.

Religion, age, race, gender, and political ideology all played a significant role in influencing participants' attitudes towards justice-involved people. This influence could be due to the widely accepted attitudes and values associated with these traits. For example, participants who identified as liberal reported greater willingness compared to other ideologies. This relationship could be explained by the general support for rehabilitative efforts and acknowledgement of systemic issues within the criminal justice system from liberal individuals. Further, women may have expressed lower levels of willingness due to the existing rhetoric exacerbating fear of victimization, making them more hesitant to interact with justice-involved people.

As predicted in H3, participants who had previously interacted with someone convicted of a felony reported greater willingness to interact with and higher levels of comfort being physically close to these individuals. This could mean that exposure to justice-involved individuals in everyday social contexts makes people feel less hostile towards or uncomfortable around other justice-involved people. Whether or not participants knew someone convicted of a felony influenced their attitudes as well, as those who reported knowing someone expressed higher levels of comfort. Being acquainted with someone can be less intimate than engaging in interactions with them, which could explain why previous interactions had a significant relationship with both dependent variables as opposed to one. Previous interactions with a person convicted of a felony can lead to expectations of future interactions, where simply knowing someone convicted of a felony does not carry this same assumption.

Ultimately, the use of person-first language did not make participants more comfortable or willing to interact with individuals convicted of felonies compared to crime-first language. The key finding suggests individual characteristics may play more of a significant role in shaping attitudes than the type of language used, potentially because participants' attitudes towards justice-involved people were established prior to the introduction of the language condition. Although these findings were unexpected, there are many possible explanations that allow language to have a significant influence on attitudes in other capacities.

These results do not provide much clarity in the DOJ policy debate. To fully understand the value in implementing more inclusive language, future research needs to incorporate the attitudes of justice-involved people themselves and assess their behavior following a change in labeling language. However, the results may suggest that the position an individual takes in the debate is closely related to their identities and previous experiences. Perhaps finding common ground between both sides requires a better understanding of how criminal justice attitudes are formed.

The results of this research are different from the findings of previous research, including the study it models most closely, Denver et al. (2017). Denver's research found a significant increase in participants' perceived recidivism risk for individuals with violent convictions when the crime-first language was used. It also found that participants' perceptions were highly dependent on the type of crime conviction in question. There are obvious differences between Denver's research and the current study that may have contributed to these disparate results.

First, Denver's sample reached more than 2500 participants, which is a much larger sample than the current study's 209 responses. Greater sample sizes allow for more generalizable results, where the responses of this study may be biased by the convenience sample and unable to properly represent the general population. Additionally, Denver had a more even spread of participants from different regions in the United States, as well as a greater percentage of participants who are older than college-age. These demographics could account for the difference in attitudes between our samples and insignificant effect of language in the present research.

Further, the emphasis on the felony label in this study may have contributed to the reduced impact of language on attitudes, as it represents a broad category. Denver (2017) incorporated more narrow categories for crime types (violent crimes, non-violent drug crimes, and non-violent property crimes). The felony category leaves room for interpretation from the participants, where some may have been basing their responses on felony murder and others may have been responding with felony drug crimes in mind. Although the felony category is valuable to research because of its significant collateral consequences, specifying crime time may allow for more nuanced findings related to language.

The different framing of survey questions may have also contributed to the disparate findings between the current study and Denver et al. (2017). The questions in Denver's study are framed in terms of perceived recidivism risk, where a higher value reflect negative attitudes towards justice-involved people. Comparatively, the questions in this study are framed in terms of comfort and willingness, where higher values reflect more positive and accepting attitudes towards individuals with felony convictions. Perhaps the negative dependent variable in Denver's study contributed to the more significant influence of language on attitudes.

As the framing of survey questions in this study are somewhat unique, these findings may be indicating a new pattern in public opinion despite data limitations. It is possible that language matters for broader, more general questions, where respondents are thinking less about how inclusivity would impact their personal lives and are more susceptible to influence. For example, a participant in Denver's study could have answered questions about a person's perceived recidivism risk without thinking about ever personally interacting with them. However, when questions move closer to participants' lives, asking about being close in proximity and physical interactions, people have more intense attitudes and the effect of language dissolves. This poses questions for future research with similar style of questions to further examine whether more personal questions remove the significance of language.

Limitations

Sample Size & Demographics

The small sample size for this survey and sample demographics limits the ability to generalize these results. Although efforts were made to reach individuals outside of the researcher's network, through encouraging participants to share the survey with their networks and posting the link publicly online, it is likely that close to all participants are connected to the researcher in some way. The sample in this study was also not randomly selected or large enough for results to be generalizable. The small sample size especially presents limitations when subgroup analysis and comparisons are being conducted across language types. The sample demographics indicate a predominantly White, female, college-age, Southern, and liberal population. These sample demographics are not all consistent with the US population demographics, which limits the generalizability of the results as well. However, participants in this study were randomly assigned a language condition, the two groups are assumed to be comparable, allowing for more robust findings.

Survey Structure

The operationalization of the dependent variables was determined by the researcher as appropriate measures for the dependent variables have not been tested by past research. The Bogardus Social Distance Scale (Bogardus 1933) was loosely used to operationalize the comfort with proximity questions, but the willingness to proximity questions was created with less guidance. There were additional questions asked on the survey that were not considered for analysis, including field of study, graduation year, school name, and nature of relationship or interactions with someone convicted of a felony, among others. Perhaps the inclusion of these questions, especially those that asked for text entry, contributed to survey fatigue, and led to some participants providing incomplete data that was excluded from analysis. Further, participants were only limited to the response categories provided, with no opportunity for open-ended responses. The response categories designed by the researcher may not have exactly reflected participants' attitudes, and qualitative analysis could be explored for this subject in the future.

Implications & Future Directions

This research helps fill the gap in understanding of the effects of more inclusive language in criminal labels. This is one of the first studies to evaluate the language of the felony label, despite the significant weight a felony label carries in terms of collateral consequences (Whittle 2018). Although the findings were not significant in this application of person-first versus crime-first language, this does not mean the felony label is not worth revisiting. In fact, the felony label still carries significant consequences for labeled individuals, so more research on this label is necessary to reduce stigma towards criminal justice involvement and reform the reentry process. Denver et al. (2017) found different effects of language on attitudes depending on crime type. This nuance could be explored with the felony label by examining the effect of language on attitudes toward the wide array of crimes that classify as felonies. Perhaps the scope of the felony category in this study was too broad for language to have a consistent effect on participant attitudes.

This research could be expanded and applied to other US regions. Assessing the effects of language with different demographics could be worth exploring as this study found strong relationships between several control variables and the dependent variables. This research also found evidence that exposure to justice-involved people was related to more accepting attitudes towards these individuals. Beyond language, facilitating more interactions between justice-involved people and those with no experience may be beneficial in reducing stigma and creating more cohesive and supportive communities. One implication of this finding could be the creation of more volunteer opportunities in carceral spaces or ways for incarcerated people to connect with community members on the outside.

Further, recruiting justice-involved participants would be beneficial in assessing which terms are preferred for those most impacted by the labels. This could inform policies like the one implemented by the DOJ to ensure a language shift is supported by stigmatized groups and would increase their perceptions of community support. Overall, future research should aim to further assess the effects of and support for inclusive language while also noting the effect of demographic characteristics and previous exposure to justice-involved people on attitudes.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In conclusion, the results of this research pose valuable questions about the way criminal justice attitudes are formed and reinforced by participants' identities and experiences. These findings point out that measuring the effects of language on attitudes is difficult, as participants' identities have a great influence on their beliefs. Inclusive language in criminal justice should continue to be assessed and incorporate multiple perspectives, including justice-involved people, to ensure the terms being promoted are largely preferred and contribute to reduced recidivism post-release. Ultimately, the goal is to decrease stigma surrounding criminal justice involvement and increase support for returning citizens. Whether this is achieved through a language shift, more facilitated opportunities for justice-involved people to connect with others in their communities, an in-depth analysis of the way identity shapes criminal justice attitudes, or a combination of these things, the creation of more supportive communities is essential for fostering successful reentry.

Appendices

Appendix A. Tables

Table 4: Sample Demographics

	Frequency	Percent
Age		
College-Age (18-24 years)	133	73.1%
25+ years	49	26.9%
Gender		
Woman	128	63.15%
Man	75	36.9%
Race & Ethnicity		
White	121	58.5%
Non-White	86	41.5%
Education		
Some College	95	45.9%
Completed College	91	44.0%
No College	21	10.1%
Political Ideology		
Liberal	101	52.1%
Not Liberal	66	34.0%
Not Affiliated	27	13.9%
Religious Affiliation		

	Frequency	Percent
Religious	118	60.8%
No Religion	76	39.2%
Region of Permanent Residence		
South	146	69.9%
Northeast or Mid-Atlantic	45	21.5%
Other Region	18	8.6%
Prior Conviction		
No	209	100%
Know Someone Convicted		
No	117	56.5%
Yes	90	43.5%
Previous Interactions		
No	110	53.1%
Yes	97	46.9%

Table 5: Descriptive Table

	Frequency	Percent
Willingness Volunteer		
Very Willing	78	37.3%
Somewhat Willing	71	34.0%
Neither Willing Nor Unwilling	38	18.2%
Somewhat Unwilling	14	6.7%
Very Unwilling	8	3.8%
Willingness Assignment		
Very Willing	79	37.8%
Somewhat Willing	65	31.1%
Neither Willing Nor Unwilling	37	17.7%
Somewhat Unwilling	22	10.5%
Very Unwilling	6	2.9%
Willingness Befriend		
Very Willing	56	26.8%
Somewhat Willing	69	33.0%
Neither Willing Nor Unwilling	42	20.1%
Somewhat Unwilling	33	15.8%
Very Unwilling	9	4.3%
Willingness Help		
Very Willing	73	35.1%
Somewhat Willing	77	37.0%
Neither Willing Nor Unwilling	36	17.3%

	Frequency	Percent
Somewhat Unwilling	14	6.7%
Very Unwilling	8	3.8%
Comfort Neighbor		
Very Comfortable	29	13.9%
Somewhat Comfortable	40	19.1%
Neither Comfortable Nor Uncomfortable	56	26.8%
Somewhat Uncomfortable	72	34.4%
Very Uncomfortable	12	5.7%
Comfort Next-door		
Very Comfortable	20	9.6%
Somewhat Comfortable	31	14.8%
Neither Comfortable Nor Uncomfortable	33	15.8%
Somewhat Uncomfortable	84	40.2%
Very Uncomfortable	41	19.6%
Comfort Building		
Very Comfortable	24	11.5%
Somewhat Comfortable	33	15.8%
Neither Comfortable Nor Uncomfortable	42	20.1%
Somewhat Uncomfortable	74	35.4%
Very Uncomfortable	36	17.2%
Comfort Class		
Very Comfortable	54	25.8%

	Frequency	Percent
Somewhat Comfortable	46	22.0%
Neither Comfortable Nor Uncomfortable	63	30.1%
Somewhat Uncomfortable	35	16.7%
Very Uncomfortable	11	5.3%

Appendix B. Figures

Figure 2: Comfort Distribution

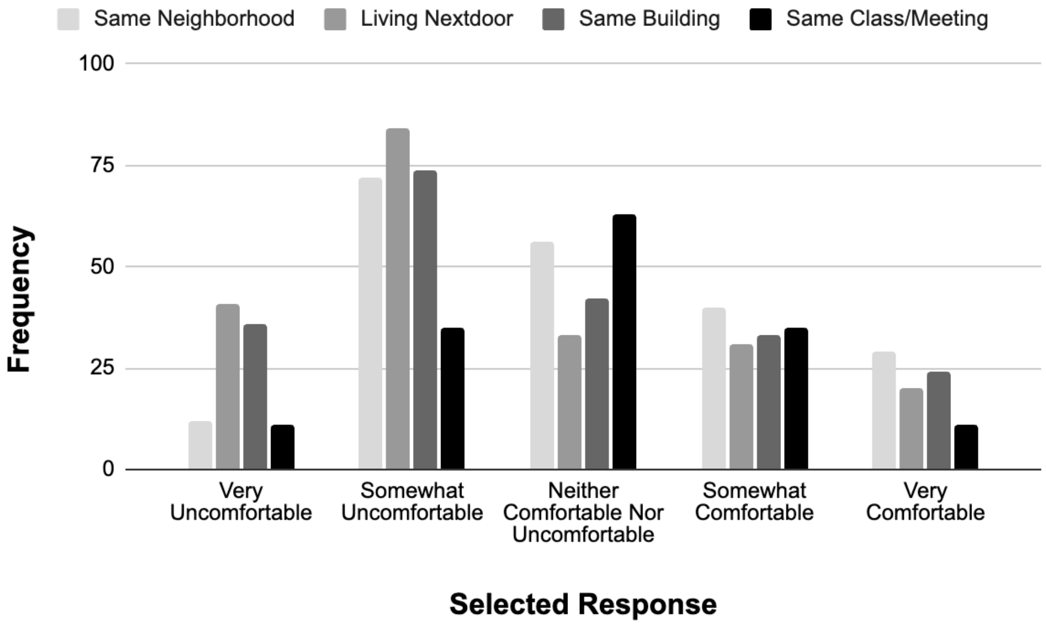
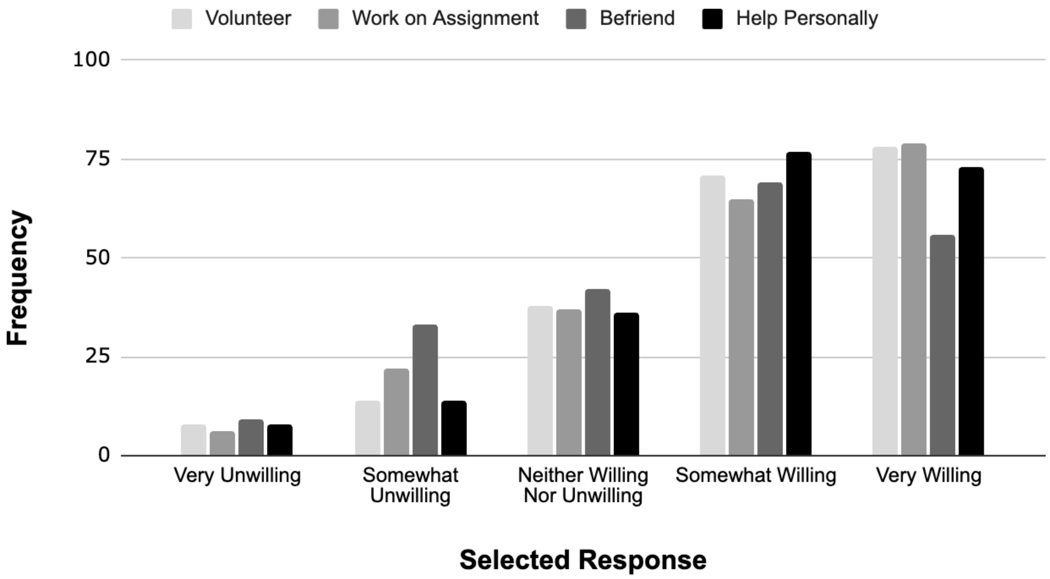


Figure 3: Willingness Distribution



Appendix C. Survey

Note. The questions below appear as they were formatted in the survey. Participants assigned crime-first language were presented with the questions listed below "Comfort with Proximity (Crime-First Language)" and "Willingness to Interact (Crime-First Language)." Participants assigned person-first language were presented with the questions listed below "Comfort with Proximity (Person-First Language)" and "Willingness to Interact (Person-First Language)." All other questions were presented uniformly regardless of assignment.

Introduction:

We are interested in learning about your attitudes toward justice-involved people. This survey will take no more than 6 minutes to complete.

Your responses will remain completely confidential and anonymous. You may exit from this survey at any point and skip any questions. By clicking the "next" button for each question, you are consenting to participate in this research. Thank you for your time.

Demographic Information:

1. Age (free response)
2. Region of permanent residence (select one)
    a. Northeast or Mid-Atlantic (CT, ME, MA, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT)
    b. South (AL, AR, DE, FL, GA, KY, LA, MD, MS, NC, SC, OK, TN, TX, VA, WV)
    c. Midwest (IL, IN, IA, KS, MI, MN, MO, ND, NE, OH, SD, WI)
    d. West (AK, AZ, CA, CO, HI, ID, MT, NV, NM, OR, UT, WA, WY)
    e. My permanent residence is outside of the United States
3. What gender do you most identify with? (select one)
    a. Woman
    b. Man
    c. Transgender Male/Trans Man
    d. Transgender Female/Trans Woman
    e. Non-binary
    f. Genderqueer
    g. Gender non-conforming
    h. Two-spirit
    i. Other (please specify)

   j. Prefer not to say

4. What race and/or ethnicity do you most identify with? (select one or multiple)
   a. Asian or Asian American
   b. Black or African American
   c. White or European American
   d. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
   e. Hispanic or Latin American
   f. Arab, Middle Eastern, or North African
   g. Native American or Alaska Native
   h. Other (please specify)
   i. Prefer not to say
5. What is your highest level of education?
   a. No schooling completed
   b. Nursery school to 8th grade
   c. Some high school, no diploma
   d. High school graduate, diploma, or the equivalent (for example: GED)
   e. Trade/technical/vocational training
   f. Some college credit, no degree
   g. Associate's degree
   h. Bachelor's degree
   i. Master's degree
   j. Professional degree
   k. Doctorate
   l. Prefer not to say
   m. Other (please specify)
6. If college education indicated in question 5 (response options f - k):
   a. What is your graduation year (completed or expected) for your current/most recent education level? (free response)
   b. What is the name of your current/most recent school? (free response)
   c. What is your major/field of study? (free response)
7. What religious affiliation do you most identify with? (select one)
   a. Christian (Catholic, Protestant, or any other Christian denomination)
   b. Buddhist
   c. Hindu
   d. Muslim
   e. Jewish
   f. Sikh
   g. No religion
   h. Prefer not to say
   i. Other (please specify)
8. What political ideology do you most identify with? (select one)

a. Conservative
b. Liberal
c. Libertarian
d. Progressive
e. Other (please specify)
f. I do not identify with any particular political ideology or leaning
g. I do not know my political ideology
h. Prefer not to say

Comfort With Proximity (Crime-First Language):

How comfortable would you be with:

	Very uncomfortable	Somewhat uncomfortable	Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable	Somewhat comfortable	Very comfortable
Living in the same neighborhood as a convicted felon?					
Living in a house next-door to a convicted felon?					
Living in the same building as a convicted felon?					
Attending a class/meeting with a convicted felon?					

Comfort with Proximity (Person-First Language):

How comfortable would you be with:

	Very uncomfortable	Somewhat uncomfortable	Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable	Somewhat comfortable	Very comfortable
Living in the same neighborhood as a person convicted of a felony?					
Living in a house next-door to a person convicted of a felony?					
Living in the same building as a person convicted of a felony?					
Attending a class/meeting with a person convicted of a felony?					

Previous Experience with Justice System & Justice-Involved People:

1. Have you ever been convicted of a felony? (select one)
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Not sure
    d. Prefer not to say
    e. Other (please specify)
2. If yes is selected to question 1: What is the type of felony and approximate year you were convicted? (most recent if more than one) (free response)

3. Do you know someone who has been convicted of a felony (other than yourself if you have been convicted)? (select one)
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Not sure
    d. Prefer not to say
    e. Other (please specify)
4. If yes to question 3: What is the nature of your relationship with the person(s) discussed in the previous question? (e.g. mother, brother, friend) (free response)
5. Have you ever knowingly interacted with someone who has been convicted of a felony? (select one)
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Not sure
    d. Prefer not to say
    e. Other (please specify)
6. If yes to question 5: What is the nature of the interaction discussed in the previous question? (most recent if more than one) (free response)

Willingness to Interact (Crime-First Language):

How willing would you be to:

	Very unwilling	Somewhat unwilling	Neither willing nor unwilling	Somewhat willing	Very willing
Volunteer with a convicted felon?					
Work on a group assignment with a convicted felon?					
Befriend a convicted felon?					

Help a convicted felon if they personally asked you for help?					

Willingness to Interact (Person-First Language):

How willing would you be to:

	Very unwilling	Somewhat unwilling	Neither willing nor unwilling	Somewhat willing	Very willing
Volunteer with a person convicted of a felony?					
Work on a group assignment with a person convicted of a felony?					
Befriend a person convicted of a felony?					
Help a person convicted of a felony if they personally asked you for help?					

Debrief:

The purpose of this survey was to assess whether the use of person-first language in criminal labels affected respondents' attitudes towards justice-involved people. At the beginning of the survey, you were randomly assigned crime-first language (i.e. convicted felon) or person-first language (i.e. person convicted of a felony) and your assigned term was used in your questions.

The researcher will compare the responses for both language types and assess whether there was a significant difference in attitudes. If you would like to be notified once this research is completed and view the results of the study, click here [embedded link] to a separate survey and input your email address. Thank you for your time.

UMD Crisis counseling: 301-314-7651
UMD Help Center: 301-314-HELP (4357)
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 800-273-8255
Lean on Me College Park: 301-494-8808
Text or call 988 for crisis support.

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