

### Abstract

We investigate people's willingness to advocate for time or money in contexts where we hold constant the wage rate, varying only whether the *stealing* happened in time or money. Our dependent measure is whether people would complain to the employer about the violation. Across 9 preregistered studies (N>5900), we find support for the following hypotheses:

- ✓ **H<sub>1</sub>: People are more willing to complain when stealing is framed in units of money versus units of time**
- ✓ **H<sub>2</sub>: Complaining about time is perceived as pettier than complaining about money**
- ✓ **H<sub>3</sub>: Reflecting on how stealing time and money are similar increases perceived harm of stealing time and reduces perceived pettiness of complaining**

### Method

You agreed to participate in a survey that was advertised as: "Complete this survey and earn:

<b>\$2 for ten minutes of your time</b> (stealing money)	<b>\$1 for five minutes of your time.</b> (stealing time)
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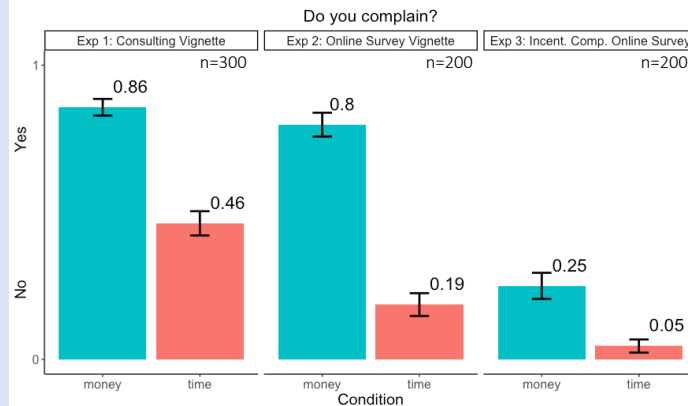
You completed the survey exactly as instructed. It took a full ten minutes to complete. Once complete, you received confirmation that you would be paid \$1. **DV: Would you complain?**

### References

- Kim, T., Zhang, T., & Norton, M. I. (2019). Pettiness in social exchange. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*.
- Okada, E. M., & Hoch, S. J. (2004). Spending time versus spending money. *Journal of consumer research*.
- Chugh, D., Bazerman, M. H., & Banaji, M. R. (2005). Bounded ethicality as a psychological barrier to recognizing conflicts of interest..

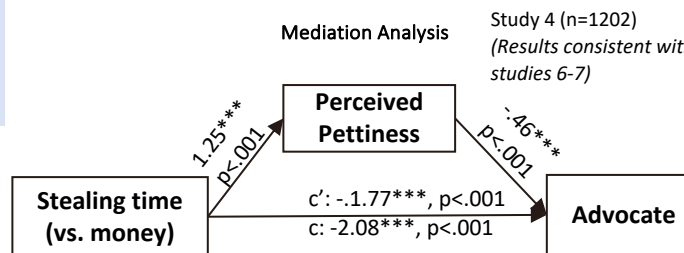
### Exp 1-3: Take my time, but don't touch my money!

People are 2-3 times more likely to complain if the stealing is framed in terms of money versus time. This pattern holds in higher stakes (exp. 1: \$50/hr), lower stakes (exp. 2: \$1/5min), and incentive compatible settings (exp. 3 : \$1/5min)



### Exp 4-7: No matter how you frame it, it feels petty to complain about time.

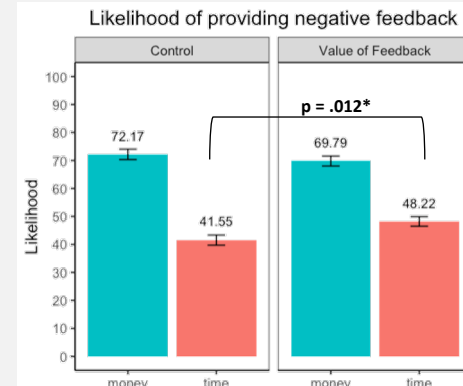
Perceived pettiness consistently predicts willingness to complain<sup>1</sup>. Traditional time-money inconsistencies do not moderate people's unwillingness to advocate for their stolen time.<sup>2</sup> We were unable to moderate the effect by making the opportunity cost of time more salient (describing what you would do with that time), by invoking a moral standard (asking about how moral the employer's behavior was), or by changing the descriptive norm (introducing a collective petition).



### Exp. 8: Moderation through an injunctive norm

We moderate people's willingness to complain about time by manipulating the norm around the value of feedback.

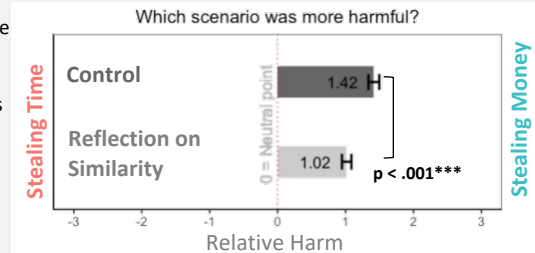
2 between (Time vs Money) x 2 between (Norm vs Control) (n=1202)



### Exp 9: Moderation through reflection on harm

When people reflect on the similar consequence of stealing time and money<sup>3</sup>, they perceive stealing time as relatively more harmful,  $t(597) = 3.79, p < .001$ , which lowers the perceived pettiness of complaining about time,  $t(597) = -1.96, p = .050$ .

2 within (Time vs Money) x 2 between (Reflection vs Control) (n=599)



### Summary

- People are less willing to advocate for their time despite it being their most precious resource
- Having time stolen does not seem as harmful as having money stolen and complaining about time feels petty
- Providing a reason why complaining is valuable makes people more willing to advocate for their time
- Reflecting on how stealing time and money have similar consequences makes people more likely to see the harm in stealing time