


Power & Punishment: When Power Causes a Change of Conscience

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Broadly speaking, punishment is interwoven into the fabric of some of the most important structures in our society, with implications for the maintenance of power, the administration of justice, and the legitimacy of institutes. Although it is unclear when punishment first formally emerged, it is clear that punishment requires a formal social structure to be implemented. Yet in spite of the importance of social structures to punishment, the psychology of punitiveness has virtually ignored the impact of societal-level factors on the construct. Even though psychology explores individuals' motivations and not social systems, the expression of punitive sentiments does not occur in a societal vacuum. The motives and goals underlying such sentiments are informed by the context in which they exist. In the proposed set of studies, we explore the role of experienced social power in shaping punitive drives and desires. Specifically, we suggest feelings of power focus punitive goals on protecting the future as opposed to rectifying the past.

Prior work on the psychology of punishment has focused upon the motivations of punishment, exploring theories such as retribution, deterrence and incapacitation. Under a deterrence theory of punishment, individuals punish in order to reduce crime within society. Under a retributive theory of punishment individuals punish in order to inflict pain upon the perpetrator proportional to his wrongs. Psychological evidence indicates that motives for punishment frequently resemble retribution (Baron, 2009; Carlsmith, Darley, & Robinson, 2002; Darley, Carlsmith, & Robinson, 2000; Darley & Pittman, 2003). However, we argue there may be a systematic bias within psychology literature as a result of the very nature of norm violations, which carry with them implicit power manipulations. By defiling the law and rules of society, the perpetrator is putting themselves above the law and above individuals who follow the law. Norm violations may therefore implicitly manipulate subjective feelings of power. Further, such manipulations focus attention on the individual victim and perpetrator further biasing towards retribution because while a retributive account focuses upon the specific goals of the individual a deterrence account focuses upon the larger goals of society. We suggest that power changes results in several cognitive changes that alter the motivational factors associated with punishment.

We seek to explore how power shapes punitive motives - both because power is inextricably linked to punishment and power significantly alters cognitive motivational processes. By definition, power is partially defined as the ability to punish (Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003). The act of punishment is therefore both a symbolic and literal execution of power. As postulated by Durkheim (1933), the act of punishing brings the perpetrator down. It involves implicitly putting the collectivity and their rules above the perpetrator. However, psychology has yet to examine any association between the two constructs.

In our own work, we have found that in personnel decision power increases punitiveness generally, but also increases the importance of process and decreases the importance of outcome in punitive decisions. We suggest that the cognitive changes brought about by power may change punitive desires in number of ways. Approach motives are associated with high power (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002;

Keltner, et al., 2003). We therefore suggest power is likely to increase punitive sentiments generally because punishment, or aggression more generally, is an approach response. Moreover, we propose that the more specific cognitive changes brought about by power that may lead to changes in punitive goals. Power leads people to be more likely to treat others as means to an end (Gruenfeld, Inesi, Magee, & Galinsky, 2008; Kipnis, 1972, 1976). This shift may lead to an increased willingness to use perpetrators to lower crime rates. Furthermore, it increases perceived psychological distance, and therefore individuals with high power have a broader cognitive focus (Smith & Trope, 2006). A more distant construal may lead to a greater emphasis on long-term societal factors as opposed to individual level factors (Liberman, Trope, & Stephan, 2007). Finally, power reduces empathy. Reduced empathy in psychopathic individuals is a postulated mechanism for a number of behavioral changes in psychopaths (Blair, 1995). Such individuals both fail to make the moral/conventional distinction and make more utilitarian punitive decisions (Bartels & Pizarro, 2011; Blair, 1995).

Through a series of studies we will examine if feelings of power change the levels and goals of punishment. We suggest that power leads individuals to punish based on factors traditionally associated with the deterrence view of punishment and that a lack of power leads individuals to punish based on factors associated with a retributive view of punishment. Through systematically manipulating factors that should influence deterrence or retribution, we can examine how power influences punitive goals. Specifically we suggest that: (1) power increases punitive desires; (2) high power leads individuals to focus on deterrence motives; (3) low power leads individuals to focus on victim restitution; (4) effects of high power are mediated by increased objectification of perpetrators; and (5) effects of low power are driven by increased identification with the victim.

	Description	Null Hypothesis
Study 1: Intention	IV: Power (high, low), Outcome (moderately upsetting, extremely upsetting); Process (likely to repeat, unlikely to repeat) DV: Punishment severity	Feelings of power will lead punishment harsher punishments of offenders that are likely to repeat and less harsh punishments of gruesome crimes.
Study 2: Outcome bias	IV: Power (high, low), Outcome (Bad, good); Prevalence (high, low) DV: Punishment severity	Feelings of power will lead to increased outcome bias when the crime is prevalent; however, when prevalence is low and punishments cannot reduce crime levels power will reduce outcome bias.
Study 3: Omission bias	IV: Power (high, low), action (omission; commission); Process (likely to repeat, unlikely to repeat) DV: Punishment severity	Feelings of power will lead punishment to be based on overarching goals rather than specific actions.
Study 4: Victim sympathy	IV: Power (high, low), Outcome (moderately upsetting, extremely upsetting); prevalence (high, low) DV: Memory	High power individuals are less likely to remember emotional details about the victim and the crime, but are more likely to remember details about the social context of the crime.

I am seeking your generous financial support to be used for two purposes with regards to this research project: (1) to fund data collection; and (2) to share the results of my research at a conference. Data will be collected in a series of experiments online using a representative panel. The data obtained through this panel will be of high quality, allowing for a more appropriate and rigorous tests of hypotheses and increasing the generalizability of any findings. However, the panel can be expensive to use. A conservative estimate is approximately \$2 dollars per subject. Assuming 35 subjects per cell, the total cost of subjects comes to \$2,800.

In addition, I anticipate this research would be of interest to the JDM community. I hope to present my results at SJDM. The psychology departments limits graduate student travel funds to \$300 annually (including conference registration), and thus the majority of travel expenses will have to be paid out of pocket. I am therefore asking for an additional \$400 to help defray expenses. The total cost of the proposal is \$3,200, and I truly appreciate your consideration

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