

CHAPTER 5

THE PUNITIVE POWER HOLDER:

Social Judgeability Increases the Severity of Punishment

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ABSTRACT

Although the ability to administer punishment to others is part of common definitions of power, the effects of hierarchical power on the severity of punishment considered to be fair has not been systematically investigated. Based on a review of the power literature, I propose that power holders frequently perceive more severe punishment as fairer than people with low power. Moreover, I propose that this increased punitiveness among power holders is attributable to the process of social judgeability: Power holders experience more entitlement to judge others, and therefore have a stronger belief in the objective correctness of their stereotypic beliefs. As a consequence, they are more prone to attribute an offense to negative traits that people stereotypically associate with offenders (e.g., immorality). Social judgeability thus increases the severity of punishment by power holders because they are more inclined to attribute the offense to the offender's bad character, making them less susceptible to extenuating circumstances or other situational attributions. Implications for the psychology of power and punishment are discussed.

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Norm violations are inevitable in corporate life. Employees may harm the organization by staging illness to acquire an extra day off, by surfing the internet during working hours, by harming a co-worker, or even by stealing from the organization (cf. Greenberg, 2002). In such cases, it is usually the responsibility of the direct supervisor to reprimand, punish, or otherwise discipline the norm violator. More generally, in all domains of social life punishment is typically carried out by power holders, such as managers, judges, teachers, and referees. Indeed, the ability to punish is part of common definitions of power. For instance, social power is frequently defined as having control over other people's outcomes, including the rewards and punishments that they receive (Fiske, 1993; French & Raven, 1959; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003). Despite such a conceptual link between power and punishment, little is known about the impact of power relations on people's punitive drive. Are power holders more or less inclined to severely punish norm violators than powerless individuals? In organizational settings it is hard to answer this question by examining punitive behaviors, given that often only power holders have the authority to punish. Yet, both power holders and people who lack power have feelings and thoughts about what punishment would be fair and appropriate for an offender. The present chapter seeks to address the question of whether power holders and people with low power have a different punitive drive by examining their retributive justice judgments.

The main proposition that I advance here is that, due to basic psychological processes that are elicited by a power position in a hierarchical social structure, power holders tend to perceive more severe punishment as fairer than people with low power. Notably, based on social judgeability theory (Yzerbyt, Schadron, Leyens, & Rocher, 1994; cf. Croizet & Fiske, 2000; Goodwin, Gubin, Fiske, & Yzerbyt, 2000), I develop the argument that power holders

often feel more entitled to judge others, and are therefore more likely to rely on the negative stereotypical traits that people typically assume offenders to possess (e.g., evilness, laziness). This process makes power holders relatively more prone to attribute an offense to the offender's negative character traits, and hence less susceptible to situational attributions for the offense, than people with low power. As a consequence, people with high power frequently desire more severe punishment than people with low power when faced with the same offense. In the following pages, I first review the empirical evidence suggesting that power holders indeed are more punitive than people with low power. After that, I describe the underlying processes that I assume to account for such increased punitiveness in more detail.

ARE POWER HOLDERS MORE PUNITIVE?

Although the studies on power reviewed here only offer circumstantial evidence for a stronger punitive drive among power holders than among subordinates, in this section I aim to show that, taken together, the evidence is consistent with the ideas advanced in the present contribution. One of the first relevant experiments was executed by Kipnis (1972), which had the setting of an organizational simulation. Participants were informed that they would supervise a work group of four workers, who conducted tasks for a total of six trials. Participants were either given high power (i.e., they could regularly influence the workers either through persuasion or through coercion) or low power (i.e., they could only influence the workers through persuasion). The results revealed that, not surprisingly, participants with high power were more inclined to attempt to influence the workers than participants with low power. Of interest, however, was that the influence attempts of power holders only rarely consisted of persuasion alone, and in 84% of the cases they used at least one coercive method of influence. Thus, the availability of punishment made power holders strongly inclined to use it as an influence tool.

These findings mirror related findings of how power holders respond to the work

conducted by employees in organizations. For instance, a meta-analysis on performance evaluations revealed that, as power levels increase, evaluations of employees become more negative (Georgesesen & Harris, 1998). Given the importance of performance evaluations for peoples' careers, one might interpret these findings as informative about punishment:

Increased power apparently leads one to be more critical of an employee's performance, and less reluctant to subsequently punish the employee with a poor performance evaluation.

In the legal domain, there are also empirical indications that increased power leads to increased punitiveness, at least under some circumstances. Such an effect is particularly suggested by research on jury nullification. Jury nullification pertains to court juries' power to disregard the literal wording of the law if its strict application would lead to a verdict that would be considered unfair by the community. Hence, nullified juries are supposed to act as the "conscience of the community." In a series of experiments conducted by Horowitz, mock jurors were either given such power to disregard the law (i.e., explicit nullification instructions) or they were not given this power. Results of one experiment revealed that nullification instructions increased the likelihood of a guilty verdict for a drunk driving case, but it decreased the likelihood of a guilty verdict for a euthanasia case (Horowitz, 1985). These findings were replicated and extended in a subsequent experiment (Horowitz, 1988) suggesting that jury nullification power leads to more leniency towards a sympathetic defendant (i.e., euthanasia), but it increases punishment for an offender that is considered to be dangerous for the community (i.e., drunk driving). The finding that jury nullification increases punishment only for potentially dangerous offenders provides an important clue about the underlying psychological processes for why power holders frequently seem more punitive: Potentially dangerous offenders confirm a set of negative character traits that people stereotypically expect from offenders, and power holders are more likely to base their punitive judgments on such negative trait information (Van Prooijen, Coffeng, & Vermeer,

2014).

Research that was conducted in the domain of experimental social psychology provides further indications for a stronger punitive drive among power holders than among people with low power. Although these studies did not assess punishment directly, power has been shown to be associated with various psychological states that are likely to facilitate punitive responses toward offenders. One line of research that is relevant for the present purposes indicates that power leads people to be more action-oriented and approach-motivated (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Kelner et al., 2003; Lammers, Galinsky, Gordijn, & Otten, 2008). This implies not only that power holders are more active in pursuing positive outcomes such as rewards, but also, power holders are more likely to act against undesirable aspects in their environment. An interesting illustration was provided by Galinsky, Gruenfeld, and Magee (2003), who experimentally primed participants with high or low power by having them recall a time in their life when they felt either powerful or powerless. This manipulation is frequently used in the power literature to induce subjective feelings of power independently of actual decision power. Following this manipulation, participants were seated at a table where they had to conduct tasks. In front of them, an annoying table fan was blowing in their face. Results revealed that participants primed with high power were significantly more likely than participants primed with low power to move the fan away, turn it off, or unplug it. Thus, power holders seem more inclined to act against disturbing stimuli in their direct physical environment. Additional research suggests that these findings extrapolate to acting against undesirable people, as evidenced by findings suggesting that power holders are more hostile and aggressive (for an overview, see Keltner, Capps, Kring, Young, & Heerey, 2001). These findings give plausibility to the assumption that power holders are also more likely to desire relatively severe punishment for offenders who harm the collective interest.

Relatedly, power has been associated with increased disinhibited behavior (Keltner et

al., 2003). This means that power holders are more likely to act on their impulses, which can have both antisocial consequences (e.g., sexual harassment; see Bargh, Raymond, Pryor, & Strack, 1995) as well as prosocial consequences (e.g., intervening in an emergency situation; Hirsch, Galinsky, & Zhong, 2011; cf. Van den Bos et al., 2011). Importantly, such behavioral disinhibition induces people to act on the most salient response option in a given situation. It stands to reason that the most salient response option towards an offender is punitive, not forgiving. Research on forgiveness suggests that reconciliatory efforts with offenders typically originate from a deliberate motivational transformation of one's initial destructive impulses (e.g., McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997; see also Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991). In other words, the primary salient motive that a perceiver is likely to feel towards an offender is one that is characterized by revenge or retribution, and only after these initial destructive impulses dissipate, more forgiving responses may occur. Integrating these arguments, power leads people to be more likely to act on their impulses, and the first impulse that most people experience towards an offender is punitive in nature.

In sum, although the majority of the evidence is somewhat indirect, when taken together the studies reviewed here are consistent with the assertion that power holders are more prone to perceive severe punishment as fair for offenders than are people with low power. This suggests the following research proposition:

Research proposition 1: People high in power generally are more punitive towards offenders than people low in power.

In the following section, I propose a theoretical framework that is based on power holders' propensity to stereotype their subordinates (Fiske, 1993) in combination with social judgeability theory (Leyens, Yzerbyt, & Schadron, 1992; Yzerbyt et al. 1994) to account for this greater punitiveness among power holders. I also review recent empirical studies that tested the hypothesized effect of power on punishment.

SOCIAL JUDGEABILITY AS UNDERLYING MECHANISM

Stereotyping and Social Judgeability

The present line of reasoning is rooted in literature on power and basic cognitive processes. Notably, a frequently replicated finding in research on social power is that power holders are more likely to stereotype their subordinates than vice versa (e.g., Brauer & Bourhis, 2006; Goodwin et al., 2000; Neuberg & Fiske, 1987; Rodriguez-Bailon, Moya, & Yzerbyt, 2000). According to Fiske (1993), various natural aspects of a social hierarchy contribute to the explanation of this phenomenon. A first explanation is that there is less need for powerful people to pay attention to the individuating characteristics of subordinates, given that the outcomes of power holders depend less on subordinates than vice versa. As a second explanation, attentional demands are typically higher for powerful people, in that they must be responsive to more people than subordinates are. Such cognitive overburdening increases the likelihood of using heuristic processes—such as stereotypes—in impression formation. And third, power holders—to the extent that they seek to establish interpersonal dominance over subordinates—may endorse stereotypes as a control mechanism, as stereotypes help to prescribe what other people ought to do. In sum, according to Fiske (1993), power holders rely more on stereotypes because they less likely need, are able, and want to form an individuated impression of subordinates. These ideas converge with recent findings suggesting that power holders are generally more likely to process information in abstract terms and by means of heuristic mental processes, such that people “focus on the forest when they are in charge of the trees” (Smith & Trope, 2006; see also Smith, Wigboldus, & Dijksterhuis, 2008).

Although stereotypes may facilitate impression formation to some extent, most people refrain from judging people based solely on these stereotypes. To illustrate, just looking like a “typical” criminal will be insufficient for most perceivers to judge a person as guilty of a

crime—perceivers usually need additional information about the person's behavior, suggesting that he or she is in fact a suspect, and that there is a realistic possibility that the person is guilty. According to social judgeability theory (Leyens et al., 1992), people need to experience a sense of being entitled to judge another person before they incorporate their stereotypic beliefs into their social evaluations. Such a sense of entitlement may be provided by various aspects of a social situation. For instance, additional individuating information about a target person may increase people's feeling that they understand the goals, feelings, and actions of the target person, and that they hence are entitled to judge this person.

This role of individuating information was illustrated by Yzerbyt and colleagues (1994), who tested participants' impressions of target persons belonging to various social categories (i.e., archivists and comedians) on a stereotypically relevant dimension (i.e., introversion-extraversion). They first manipulated the illusion of individuating information: Before the impression formation task, participants listened to a male and a female voice—which simultaneously came from different channels of a headphone—and were instructed to pay attention to the male voice. Half of the participants, then, were told afterwards that the female voice had given individuating information about the target person (in reality, no such individuating information was provided). Interestingly, when participants had the illusion that they had received individuating information, they based their impressions of the target person more strongly on their stereotypic beliefs about the social category. Apparently, the belief of having received individuating information made participants feel more entitled to judge the target person based on their stereotypic expectations.

More relevant for the present purposes, social power has been proposed to be another situational determinant that influences people's feeling of being entitled to judge others (Goodwin et al., 2000; see also Croizet & Fiske, 2000). These feelings of entitlement are based on power holders' confidence in their own abilities. In particular, power holders

frequently experience a sense of competence as a result of the superior expertise, knowledge, skills, or other capacities that have placed them in a powerful position within a social hierarchy. Power holders thus frequently experience their position in the hierarchy as legitimate and deserved. Indeed, the meta-analysis by Georgesen and Harris (1998) reveals that increases in power were not only associated with more negative performance evaluations of employees, but also with more positive self-perceptions. Due to such elevated confidence in one's own capacities, power holders may have a lot of faith in the objective correctness of their subjective beliefs and world views. This subjective belief system contains mental schemas about social categories, that is, stereotypes. This perspective suggests that in comparison with subordinates, power holders more strongly and more rapidly assume that their stereotypic assumptions match objective reality, which consequently renders them more inclined to use these stereotypic assumptions when judging other people.

The process of social judgeability has substantial implications for how people with high versus low power respond to offenders within their social environment. Importantly, offenders constitute a social category that generally raises substantially negative stereotypical expectations. Literature on demonizing, for instance, suggests that people have mental representations of criminal offenders as prototypically evil beings, who are mainly motivated by self-interest, and derive pleasure from harming others (e.g., Darley, 1992; Ellard, Miller, Baume, & Olson, 2002). Such a prototypical evilness schema more specifically assumes offenders to be socially isolated (Baumeister, 1997), lacking uniquely human emotions such as empathy and remorse (Leyens et al., 2000), and having a history of immoral behavior aimed at hurting others (Berkowitz, 1999). Although the demonizing literature applies specifically to the category of criminal offenders, it stands to reason that people's stereotypic expectations of other types of offenders are also negative. For instance, in organizations people may mentally associate continuous poor performance with traits such as laziness,

sloppiness, and a structural lack of motivation or commitment. Such stereotypic expectations assume the offense to be caused by stable negative traits of the employee (e.g., dispositional laziness), and less so by situational forces in the offending employee's social environment (e.g., a divorce, the care for a sick child). People's first impressions of an offense may hence be guided by stereotypes that assume the offense is caused by negative traits of the offender, and these first impressions may be adjusted or corrected by individuating efforts to consider the situational circumstances of an offender (cf. Van Prooijen & Van de Veer, 2010).

Together, these various considerations suggest a second research proposition that explains why power holders are more punitive than subordinates:

Research proposition 2: Power holders are more likely to base the severity of punishment on information or assumptions of bad character traits that are stereotypically associated with offenders.

Specifically, power holders feel more entitled to judge others, and hence, they are more prone to rely on stereotypical expectations when they are evaluating the behavior of offenders. These stereotypical expectations prompt power holders to attribute the offender's behavior to his or her negative character traits, which decreases their susceptibility to situational attributions or mitigating circumstances. Instead, attributing the offense to an offender's negative character traits increases perceptions of blame, accountability, and malevolent intent. Moreover, the offender may more easily be considered a liability for the future, or a possible repeat offender. All of this can be expected to increase the desire to punish the offender. Based on this model, one can infer the hypothesis that power holders generally are more punitive than subordinates, unless the offender clearly has traits or features that are inconsistent with the perceiver's stereotypical expectations. After all, such stereotype inconsistent information forces the perceiver—power holders and subordinates alike—to place more effort into incorporating individuating characteristics in their examination of the

case. In the following, I review a series of recent studies that provide a first test of this line of reasoning.

Empirical Findings

As briefly noted in the beginning of the introduction, an empirical problem in studying the effects of power on punishment is the definitional relation between the two constructs. In particular, power is commonly defined in terms of the possibility to control other people's outcomes by administering rewards and punishments (Fiske, 1993; French & Raven, 1959; Keltner et al., 2003). As a consequence, it is hard to disentangle these two constructs empirically: being given the opportunity to punish another person automatically increases one's power. As such, studying punitive behavior introduces a natural confound between the independent variable (power) and the dependent variable (punishment). A possible solution to this problem is to examine retributive justice judgments, that is, the severity of punishment that perceivers consider to be fair (Carlsmith & Darley, 2008; Hogan & Emler, 1981; Miller & Vidmar, 1981; Van Prooijen, 2006; Van Prooijen & Kerpershoek, 2013; Vidmar, 2002). Retributive justice judgments are typically elicited from a third-person perspective, and provide insight into people's punitive drive. Furthermore, although only power holders are often able to actually impose punishment on others, both people with high and low power are likely to have opinions about what kind punishment is too severe, fair, or too lenient for a given offense. Although retributive justice judgments are punitive preferences that are not necessarily informative about one's willingness or capacity to exercise punitive behavior, they do provide insights into the strength of the underlying punitive sentiments that perceivers experience following an offense.

In a first study, Van Prooijen et al. (2014) primed participants with either low or high power by having participants recall a time in their life when they felt either powerful or powerless (cf. Galinsky et al., 2003). After that, participants read a vignette about a car

salesman who knowingly sold a damaged car to a customer. As a consequence of the car's defects, the customer had a severe accident. Before evaluating retributive justice, however, participants were provided with trait information that either confirmed or disconfirmed stereotypic expectations of the offender as being an intrinsically evil person (cf. Van Prooijen & Van de Veer, 2010). Participants either read a description of the car salesman that was consistent with the assumption of evil character traits (i.e., the car salesman was described as socially isolated, and antisocial in interpersonal interactions), or participants read a description of the car salesman that was inconsistent with the assumption of evil character traits (i.e., the car salesman was described as married with two children, and well-liked by others). Based on the theoretical framework laid out above, it was predicted that retributive justice judgments would be influenced more strongly by this trait information among participants primed with high as opposed to low power. The underlying line of reasoning here is that the evil description reinforces negative stereotypes of offenders, which, in particular, promotes power holders' feeling of entitlement to judge the offender based on these stereotypes. The results indeed revealed that participants who were primed with high power perceived more severe punishment as fair than participants who were primed with low power, but only if the offender was described with evil character traits. Being primed with high power thus elicited a stronger punitive drive, which was attributable to a greater reliance on stereotype-consistent information.

In a second study, these ideas were tested in an organization where differences between actual executives and subordinates were investigated (Van Prooijen et al., 2014). Participants first read a description of a fictitious employee that was negative (i.e., the employee was described as problematic in terms of effort and the quality of work delivered, and as a socially isolated person) or positive (i.e., the employee was described as good in terms of effort and the quality of work delivered, and as a pleasantly sociable person).

Furthermore, executives were asked to imagine that this was an employee under their direct supervision, and subordinates were asked to imagine that this was a direct colleague.

Participants then read two integrity violations committed by this employee, and rated retributive justice after each scenario. The results were consistent with the laboratory experiment: Only power holders' retributive justice judgments were influenced by the trait description of the offending employee, such that power holders recommended more severe punishment than subordinates when the employee was described as having negative traits.

Although these results are promising, they do not provide information about the underlying process whereby power holders' stronger punitive drive emerges from their feelings of entitlement to judge others. One possible way to get an indication of this process is to create a condition where power holders are *not* likely to experience a sense of entitlement to judge others. Building on the line of reasoning laid out in this chapter, I argue that such a condition can be induced by manipulating the legitimacy of a high power position.

The Role of Legitimacy

One of the core assumptions for why power holders feel legitimized to judge others based on their stereotypic beliefs is because of their feelings of greater competence: Power holders frequently obtained their dominant place in the group hierarchy through special skills, intelligence, hard work, knowledge, and creativity. In other words, power holders experience their power position as legitimate, and this legitimacy leads them to have strong faith in the correctness of their stereotypic beliefs and worldviews. However, not all power positions are acquired through such legitimate means. Sometimes, a person without such special abilities can—through for instance luck or nepotism—obtain a powerful position (e.g., people who happen to be the offspring of a powerful manager, and inherit their parents' business). To some extent, through self-serving processes and motivated reasoning, these illegitimate power holders may occasionally perceive their leadership position as legitimate. But in many cases

their position of power can be hard to justify with competence-based arguments, such as when various subordinates clearly outperform the illegitimate power holder on numerous important dimensions. Importantly, when power holders do not experience their superior position as legitimate, they are not expected to have an increased feeling of entitlement to judge others, nor to have faith in the correctness of their stereotypic beliefs and worldviews. Empirical research indeed reveals that only legitimate power holders, and not illegitimate power holders, have an increased sense of entitlement (Lammers et al., 2010). Hence, it is possible to formulate a third research proposition:

Research proposition 3: Illegitimate power holders are less likely than legitimate power holders to rely on the stereotypic expectations that they have from offenders, and can be expected to endorse less severe punishment.

To manipulate power legitimacy, Van Prooijen et al. (2014) first had participants perform tasks in an experiment, and then informed them that they would play a dictator game with another participant (Handgraaf, Van Dijk, Vermunt, Wilke, & De Dreu, 2008; Van Dijk & Vermunt, 2000). A dictator game is an economic game that is characterized by the maximum control that a distributor has over a recipient's outcomes. Notably, the distributor obtains a set of resources, and is instructed to share these resources in any way he or she desires with the recipient. The recipient, in turn, can do nothing but accept the distributor's offer. As such, the distributor has absolute power over the recipients' outcomes in a dictator game. All participants were given the distributor's role and hence were accorded with high power. What was manipulated, however, was how legitimate this power position was. In the legitimate condition, participants were informed that they had performed better than the other on the tasks, and that they therefore would be assigned to the distributor's role. In this condition there was thus a clear contingency between the participants' superior performance and the high power position, imbuing this position with a sense of legitimacy. In the

illegitimate condition, however, participants were informed that they had performed worse than the other on the tasks, but that they nevertheless were assigned to the distributor's role. In this condition, participants thus acquired a high power position despite inferior performance when compared with the other participant, rendering the power position illegitimate.

Following the power legitimacy manipulation, participants were again presented with the scenario of a car salesman, with either evil or non-evil traits, who deliberately sold a damaged car to a customer. Results revealed that the trait manipulation influenced retributive justice judgments made by legitimate power holders, but not those made by illegitimate power holders. Moreover, legitimate power holders were particularly prone to perceiving severe punishment as fair compared to illegitimate power holders if the offender was described as having evil traits, consistent with stereotypical expectations of offenders. This suggests that only power holders who felt entitled to judge others—due to the legitimate basis for their superior position in the social hierarchy—used stereotypic information in their punitive judgments. It must be noted that these findings do not provide solid evidence for the processes proposed in this chapter, given that there are alternative possible explanations (e.g., legitimacy may also influence other variables than feelings of entitlement, such as self-esteem). Nevertheless, the findings presented here are consistent with the processes stipulated by social judgeability theory that I extend here to explain the stronger punitive drive among power holders, and they may stimulate further research on these issues.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The present chapter offers two propositions about the relation between power and punishment, namely (1) power holders frequently endorse more severe punishment for offenders than people low in power do; and (2) this increased punitiveness is due to the process of social judgeability, which means that power holders are more prone to incorporate

negative stereotypic traits that they assume offenders have into their punitive judgments. Thus far, the preliminary evidence for these propositions is encouraging. Although more research is needed to more precisely establish the effects of power on punishment, as well as the underlying psychological processes that are assumed to cause this effect, for now it can be concluded that the empirical data currently available are consistent with the propositions laid out in this chapter.

The insights presented in this chapter may have various implications, for both practical application and future research in organizations and other spheres of social life. In the following I first discuss some of the implications for organizations and organizational justice research. After that, I will turn to possible implications for more general theorizing on the relation between power and punishment.

Organizational Implications

The present propositions were in the specific context of punishment of offenders, but predictions based on the same underlying processes can explain related phenomena in organizations or other hierarchical social structures containing a leader and multiple subordinates. For instance, the present propositions may hold implications for the psychology of abusive supervision. A possible explanation of this phenomenon is that abusive managers hold negative stereotypes of subordinates (e.g., of them being lazy, distrustful, or uncommitted), and that, due to the process of social judgeability, they incorporate these stereotypes into their decisions of how to treat subordinates. This is likely to have substantial consequences for the lives and careers of employees. It may for instance be possible that negative stereotypes influence performance evaluations; an assumption that is consistent with findings that increased power is associated with increasingly negative performance evaluations of employees (Georgesén & Harris, 1998). These considerations may not only inspire future research to examine whether the process of social judgeability indeed accounts

for the negative relation between power and performance evaluations, but may also have practical implications for how organizations should weigh these evaluations in decisions about promotions or pay raises, for example.

Whereas the ideas discussed in this chapter pertained to the punishment of employees who are proven guilty, the processes presented here may be informative for how managers (or judges) decide upon the guilt or innocence of suspected offenders. If someone is accused of a misdeed (e.g., stealing) that is consistent with the general impression that people had a priori of this suspect (e.g., selfish, immoral), it may be predicted that power holders use this trait information in particular to decide upon the suspect's guilt. This is of clear practical importance, as deciding on guilt is a behavioral action that—like punishment—is typically carried out by people high in power. If these power holders excessively rely on trait information instead of objective evidence when determining guilt versus innocence, it will sometimes increase the risk of unfairly punishing, or even firing, an innocent employee. This not only violates justice in an objective sense, but may also be harmful for the organization's reputation as well as for the confidence that other employees have in their leaders.

Another meaningful extension for future research would be to examine the boundary conditions for the effects that are proposed here. One such boundary condition may be the extent to which a sense of social responsibility for the well-being of followers is activated among power holders. Empirical research suggests that in an interaction context where power holders' responsibility for subordinates is salient, power holders show a substantial increase in their efforts to form an individuated impression of subordinates due to a greater motivation for accuracy (Overbeck & Park, 2001; see also Smith & Overbeck, in press). These findings are consistent with research showing that activating communal concerns increases people's sense of social responsibility, which produces decreased self-interested behaviors, and decreased racist responses, particularly among power holders (Chen, Lee-Chai, & Bargh,

2001). These findings suggest that the tendency for power holders to rely more on stereotypes than people with low power does not occur in situations where power holders' responsibility for others is made salient. As such, executives who feel strongly responsible for their employees—due to either their personality or the structure of the situation—may be less prone to the biased forms of information processing that are described in this chapter (cf. Sassenberg, Ellemers, Scheepers, & Scholl, in press). Organizations may seize on this idea by creating a work environment that emphasizes supervisors' responsibilities towards their subordinates. (This social responsibility hypothesis, in conjunction with the expected role of communal concerns, also illustrates one of the various reasons why the process of social judgeability is highly unlikely to generalize to the special power position of parents who decide on how to discipline their children following minor infractions).

An additional boundary condition may be a different construal of power positions in a hierarchical social structure, in that the effect presented here may be attenuated when power is more strongly defined in terms of status and less strongly in terms of control. This could occur notably in organizational settings where power and status are strongly intertwined: Persons who are in control of the outcomes of others (power) are frequently the same people who have high prestige and, accordingly, are held in high esteem by others (status). Research by Blader and Chen (2012), however, reveals that when these two constructs are empirically differentiated, they turn out to have opposite effects on the enactment of fair behaviors. Specifically, an emphasis on power facilitates unfair behaviors towards subordinates, as indicated by a weaker orientation towards distributive justice and the enactment of less fair decision-making procedures. These findings are consistent with the ideas in the present chapter, as most people would consider power holder's inclination to use stereotypic expectations in their punitive decisions as unfair. An emphasis on status, however, leads to a stronger orientation towards distributive justice, and the enactment of fairer decision-making

procedures. Building on the Blader and Chen (2012) findings, one might thus speculate that an increased emphasis on the status of managers (while decreasing the emphasis on their power) stimulates them to be a fairer decision-maker, which may lead to a more careful assessment of all the relevant circumstances that led to the offense before making a punitive judgment.

The preliminary studies testing the process of social judgeability in power holder's punitive judgments (Van Prooijen et al., 2014) manipulated trait information in a way that essentially captures the offender's prior reputation as being positive or negative. In managerial contexts, one might argue that incorporating an employees' reputation into punitive decisions is not necessarily reflective of biased or poor decision-making. It can be morally defensible to be more forgiving towards an offender with an otherwise spotless reputation, as opposed to an offender who was considered a problematic employee on other dimensions even before committing the offense. As such, it would be interesting to test whether the effects of power on punishment are influenced by stereotypes that are less morally defensible. Would power holders also be more inclined to base punitive judgments on social categorizations involving, for instance, ethnicity, political preference, sexual orientation, or gender? Based on the theoretical line of reasoning presented here, I suspect that there are conditions under which power holders indeed may use these categories in the punishment decision-making process—although this may only be expected in the context of an offense that is consistent with the stereotypes that one has about a given social category. This presently is still an empirical question that is impossible to answer based on the evidence presented in this chapter, but one of obvious scientific and practical importance.

Broader Theoretical Implications

The propositions of the present chapter pertain specifically to power holders' punitiveness in terms of third-party punishment. The present propositions do not necessarily

apply to situations where the punishment is enacted by someone who was directly victimized by the offender, which pertains more to the psychology of revenge (e.g., Bies & Tripp, 1996; Bradfield & Aquino, 1999). In the case of revenge, somewhat different psychological dynamics may be at play due to the direct self-relevance of the event, such as the need to reaffirm a sense of self-worth (Gollwitzer & Denzler, 2009; Zdaniuk & Bobocel, 2012). One may wonder whether or not power holders are also more inclined towards revenge than people with low power. Preliminary findings indeed suggest that when the victim has higher relative power than the offender, subsequent revenge is more likely than when the victim has lower relative power than the offender (Aquino, Tripp, & Bies, 2001). People with higher relative power may endorse revenge not only to reaffirm a sense of self-worth, but also by motivations such as re-establishing a sense of dominance, and publicly reconfirming one's superior position. Moreover, it may be relatively more dangerous for people with lower relative power to avenge mistreatment by a person with higher relative power, due to the expected outcome dependence in future interactions. But having said that, the effects of power on revenge paradoxically are *reverse* for absolute power: The more powerful one is in absolute terms in the organizational hierarchy, the *less* likely it is that this person seeks revenge for a direct injustice committed by an employee. This finding was attributed to the normative constraints that managers may experience, as vindictive actions may easily be perceived as unprofessional—particularly when enacted by a powerful person (Aquino et al., 2001). These complex dynamics underscore that the processes associated with revenge are conceptually distinct from the processes associated with third-party punishment.

An issue that has not been sufficiently resolved empirically is the question of what exactly drives the effects that were observed in many of the studies reviewed here: Is the increased punitiveness among power holders due to the psychological consequences of experiencing a high power position? Or is the process actually reverse, and does a feeling of

powerlessness *decrease* the severity of punishment that people consider fair? My argument clearly assumes that these effects are driven by the psychological consequences of experiencing high power, not by the psychological consequences of experiencing low power. The argument presented here is based on the theoretical proposition that only people who are high in power use stereotypical trait information in their retributive justice judgments (see also Fiske, 1993), and studies find an influence of trait information on retributive justice judgments only in high power conditions (Van Prooijen et al., 2014). At the same time, it stands to reason that being powerless also has psychological effects on people, such as feelings of being out of control, uncertainty, and vulnerability. Thus, future research would do well to incorporate control conditions where participants' power position is unknown or not salient, not only in the specific context of the relation between power and punishment, but also in research on social power more generally.

CLOSING REMARKS

Power holders carry the responsibility of coordinating the actions of their followers, and have the opportunity to use incentives such as rewards and punishment to facilitate this. The presence of a punishment system, as well as a power holder who enacts it, is important for the healthy functioning of organizations or other task-oriented social structures: Research reveals that people are more cooperative, and commit fewer transgressions, when they are in a social system where offenses are punished (Balliet, Mulder, & Van Lange, 2011). This does not imply that power holders can enact their punitive decisions in an unrestricted fashion without consequences. For instance, when punishment is considered procedurally unfair, it *decreases* followers' willingness to cooperate and contribute to the common good (Van Prooijen, Gallucci, & Toeset, 2008). It is thus important for power holders to consider carefully all the relevant background information to evaluate an offense and determine appropriate punishment. The propositions of the present chapter suggest that stereotypic trait

information is among the background variables that power holders use to determine punishment—more so than people with low power do. This insight is informative about the underlying psychological processes through which power holders determine punishment, and raises concern about the possibility that an increase in power may undermine the fairness and objectivity of punishment. It is therefore possible to conclude that hierarchical power has substantial implications for punitive decision-making.

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