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## Retribution as Revenge and Retribution as Just Deserts

Monica M. Gerber · Jonathan Jackson

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**Abstract** Public attitudes towards law-breakers shape the tone and tenor of crime-control policy, and the desire for retribution seems to be the main motivation underpinning punitive attitudes towards sentencing. Yet, there is some confusion in the research literature over what retribution really means. In this paper we distinguish between retribution as revenge (as the desire to punish criminal offenders to retaliate a past wrong by making the offender suffer) and retribution as just deserts (as the preference to restore justice through proportional compensation from the offender). Results from an online survey ( $n = 176$ ) provide evidence of two distinct dimensions of retribution. But we also show that these two dimensions have different ideological and motivational antecedents, and have different consequences in terms of the treatment of criminal offender. We find that retribution as revenge is associated with the motivation to enforce status boundaries with criminal offenders, as well as ideological preferences for power and dominance (as expressed by social dominance orientation) and in-group conformity (as expressed by right-wing authoritarianism). Endorsement of retribution as revenge also predicts the support of harsh punishment and the willingness to deny fair procedures. By contrast, retribution as just deserts is mainly predicted by a value restoration motive and by right-wing authoritarianism. After controlling for revenge, retribution as just deserts predicts support for procedural justice in the criminal courts. We conclude with the idea that beliefs about proportionality and compensation work as a buffer against the negative effects of revenge.

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Why do people call for the harsh punishment of criminal offenders? The guiding motivation seems to be a desire for retribution (e.g. Carlsmith, Darley, & Robinson, 2002), which is defined *inter alia* as the support of punishment to restore justice and balance in society, or as a preference for retaliation and an expression of vindictiveness. Yet, there has been little clarity over what retribution actually means. The first contribution in this paper is to provide conceptual and methodological refinement to the central psychological motivation to punish law-breakers.

Going back to an old distinction (Finckenauer, 1988; Von Hirsch, 1976), we argue that there are two dimensions to retribution. One is concerned with restoring a sense of justice through proportional compensation from the offender (retribution as just deserts). The other comprises a less constructive use of punishment to get back at the offender and make him/her suffer (retribution as revenge). Von Hirsch (1976) first proposed the need to distinguish between both dimensions, but provided no evidence on whether they are indeed empirically different. Other studies have distinguished between a vengeful deservingness perspective and a more constructive moral or justice restoration motive (De Keijser, Van Der Leeden, & Jackson, 2002; Ho, ForsterLee, ForsterLee, & Crofts, 2002; McKee & Feather, 2008), but have combined in their measurements items on the goals of punishment with the sentencing process (Ho et al., 2002) and the message that punishment seeks to communicate (De Keijser et al., 2002).

Clarifying the meaning of retribution as revenge and just deserts, we develop scales to measure each retributive perspective and disentangle the goals of punishment from the process by which punishment is assigned. We then examine whether these two dimensions have different motivational antecedents and whether they relate in different ways to beliefs about how criminal offenders should be treated (preferences for harsh punishment and the denial of procedural fairness). Presenting findings from an online survey ( $n = 176$ ) we provide evidence that retribution as revenge and retribution as just deserts are better conceptualised as being two distinct concepts.

On the one hand, retribution as revenge is found to stem from ideological preferences for group-based dominance (as captured by social dominance orientation, SDO) and collective security (as captured by right-wing authoritarianism, RWA). Harsh treatment of criminal offenders—both in terms of the process of assigning punishment and punishment itself—is positively related to the support of retribution as revenge. On the other hand, retribution as just desert is found to be predicted only by RWA. After controlling for revenge, retribution as just desert is related to the endorsement of fair treatment of criminal offenders.

## **Punishment Goals**

Punishment goals—i.e. people's views on the purpose of punishment—are typically divided into instrumental goals and retributive goals (e.g. Carlsmith et al., 2002;

Vidmar & Miller, 1980). Instrumental goals justify punishment in terms of the future benefits of reducing the likelihood of crime. Our concern in this paper is on retributive goals, however, and these are concerned with retaliating a wrong more than preventing future crimes. Retribution is usually defined as the belief that criminal offenders deserve to be punished for the violation of society's rules, and that this punishment should be proportional to the wrong committed (Banks, 2008; Carlsmith, 2006; Carlsmith et al., 2002; Finckenauer, 1988).<sup>1</sup> Punishment is considered an end in itself; it should be determined by the perceived seriousness of the offence and the intention and responsibility of the offender (Carlsmith, 2006; Vidmar, 2000). Yet, while retribution seems to relate to the repayment of wrongful acts, retribution also captures a rather unstructured range of different non-instrumental aspects of punishment, including concerns about justice, proportionality, morality, social cohesion, deservingness and the retaliation of wrongdoing. Consistent with this, retribution is often measured as a mix of items capturing some of these dimensions (e.g. Okimoto, Wenzel, & Feather, 2011; Orth, 2003; Wenzel, Okimoto, & Cameron, 2012).

Importantly, however, there have been a few attempts to bring structure to the research within this field. Von Hirsch (1976; see also Finckenauer, 1988; Weiner, Graham, & Reyna, 1997) argues for two dimensions to retribution: retribution as just deserts and retribution as revenge. In retribution as just deserts, the criminal offender pays back for the harm done and justice is restored through proportionality and fair process. By paying a debt, positive and negative experiences are distributed and social balance is restored (Weiner et al., 1997). Crucially, in retribution as just deserts both the process to allocate punishment and the severity of the sentence need to be fair (Ho et al., 2002). In retribution as revenge, on the other hand, people want to punish not just to get even (to restore balance) but also to retaliate. Finckenauer (1988) argues that, in retribution as revenge, it is society that evens the score with the offender and not the offender who compensates for the wrong done. Vengeance involves the emotional pleasure of seeing the offender suffer (Nozick in Banks, 2008; Ho et al., 2002; Weiner et al., 1997); the seriousness of the offence does not necessarily limit the harshness of the punishment (Nozick in Banks, 2008; see also Stuckless & Goranson, 1992); and balance is restored even if the suffering inflicted by punishment exceeds the severity of the crime.

There are, then, some important arguments that retribution comprises at least two separate dimensions. Empirical studies also support this claim. For example De Keijser et al. (2002) asked Dutch judges to evaluate a range of items on punishment goals. Using factor analysis, they found two factors for retribution: just desert (what we here call revenge) and moral balance (what we here call just deserts). The first one considered items on deservingness, suffering and vengeance, while the second one included items on restoring legal and moral order in society, as well as beliefs that the offender should compensate society for the harm done. Similarly McKee and Feather (2008) distinguish between a legitimate desire for retributive

<sup>1</sup> There are parallels here to Durkheim's (1964, 1973) argument that punishment should be considered a moral phenomenon: while crime violates the moral order in society, punishment serves an expressive role of reaffirming social bonds and defining the boundaries of social groups.

punishment and personal revenge, finding that vengeance attitudes are positively related to retribution and incapacitation and negatively to the goal of rehabilitation. Finally Ho et al. (2002) highlight as main aspects of vengeance the role of emotions and the intensity of the response, while justice is measured as preferences for a fair and legal response.

Yet, previous studies have either provided no empirical evidence of their distinction (e.g. Finckenauer, 1988<sup>2</sup>; von Hirsch, 1976) or combined in their measurement characteristics of punishment with the message that punishment seeks to communicate (De Keijser et al., 2002) and the process by which sentences are assigned (Ho et al., 2002). In our study we seek to disentangle what we understand as the core components of each retributive perspective (get even/suffer; compensation/proportionality) from the symbolic message punishment should communicate to society (symbolic motives of punishment) and the characteristics of the sentencing process (harshness of punishment and sentencing decisions). Crucially, symbolic motives of punishment and consequences of punishment might be relevant to both types of retribution and we seek to explore these relationships by separating conceptually and practically between these different components.

## This Research

The aims of this paper are threefold. First, we provide further evidence into the distinction between retribution as revenge and just deserts and develop measures that capture the core aspects of retribution. Second, we explore the motivational antecedents of both dimensions of retribution; we look at their relationship with ideological preferences and symbolic motives of punishment. Third, we examine the consequences of retribution as revenge and just deserts; we examine their relationship with preferences for harsh punishment and the denial of procedural fairness. We thus build on previous studies by proposing an encompassing model that describes the different motives that lie behind each retribution dimension, as well as the different consequences they carry in terms of beliefs about how criminal offenders should be treated.

The first hypothesis refers to the definition and measurement of the two dimensions of retribution. We hypothesise that:

**H<sub>1</sub>** One dimension of retribution will capture preferences for getting back at the offender and making him/her suffer (retribution as revenge) while the other dimension will comprise elements of proportionality and compensation (retribution as just deserts).

Based on von Hirsch's (1976; see also De Keijser et al., 2002; Finckenauer, 1988) distinction, we define retribution as revenge as the desire to get even with

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<sup>2</sup> Finckenauer (1988) proposed scales to measure both concepts and some of his items are used for the current research.

criminal offenders by making them suffer.<sup>3</sup> We define retribution as just deserts as the desire to restore justice by allowing the offender to compensate society proportionally to the harm he has done. Following von Hirsch's (Von Hirsch, 1976; see also De Keijser et al., 2002; Finckenauer, 1988) point that in retribution as just desert, the offender pays back for the harm he has done, we also consider a dimension on punishment as a way in which the offender compensates for his wrongdoing. We highlight two dimensions of retribution as just deserts: proportionality and compensation.<sup>4</sup>

We also hypothesise two layers of antecedents: symbolic motives of punishment (because different goals of punishment might communicate different messages to the community) and ideological positions (because people's preferences for how society should be structured may drive how people perceive crime and appropriate institutional response to law-breaking).

Two symbolic justice-related motives of punishment are often named in the literature: the first is status/power and the second is value restoration (Okimoto et al., 2011; Vidmar, 2000; Vidmar & Miller, 1980; Wenzel & Thielmann, 2006). First, through crime, criminal offenders take advantage, assume superiority, and show disrespect for the victim and society (Miller, 2001). Harsh punishment can degrade the offender's status, empower the victim and society, and hereby restore balance. Second, crime threatens common rules and values in society. Punishment symbolically labels the offence as wrong, thereby restoring people's faith in shared values. Importantly, both status/power (Okimoto et al., 2011; Wenzel & Thielmann, 2006; Wenzel et al., 2012) and value (Okimoto et al., 2011; Vidmar, 2000; Wenzel et al., 2012) restoration motives have consistently been found to relate to retributive responses to crime. In our study, we hypothesise that:

**H<sub>2</sub>** Status and power restoration will be positively associated to retribution as revenge.

**H<sub>3</sub>** Value restoration will be positively associated to retribution as just deserts.

We argue that status/power restoration motives are particularly relevant to a revenge perspective on retribution. Retaliating a past wrong by making the offender suffer demeans the status of the offender and returns power to victim and society. Value restoration, in contrast, is argued to be relevant to a just deserts perspective on retribution: moral balance can be restored in society by assigning a punishment that allows the offender to compensate in proportion to the harm that he has done.

<sup>3</sup> To avoid combining the goals of punishment with the process by which punishment is assigned, we do not consider measures on the role of emotions in the decision process or the strength of the response as part of the measurement of retributive punishment. Rather, we consider separate measures on the fairness of procedures by which criminal offenders are punished (in terms of neutrality and whether emotions should play a role, as well as respecting the offender during the sentencing process) and the harshness of punishment.

<sup>4</sup> Note, however, that we have left out from this definition the restoration of moral balance in society. While communicative theories of punishment are often classified as part of retribution (e.g. De Keijser et al., 2002), we consider the restoration of moral balance as not being part of the core concept of just deserts, but rather a symbolic motive of punishment that could be relevant to both types of retribution.

Ideological attitudes are also relevant to punishment goals, in that they are linked to different viewpoints about the causes of crime and the ways in which society should deal with it (Carroll, Perkowitz, Lurigio, & Weaver, 1987). Two ideological dispositions have consistently been found to predict attitudes towards the punishment of criminal offenders: right-wing authoritarianism (RWA, Altemeyer, 1981, 1988) and social dominance orientation (SDO; Sidanius, Mitchell, & Navarrete, 2006). But in line with a dual-motivational model (Duckitt, 2001)—and given that RWA and SDO have different motivational antecedents—they should predict punitive attitudes for different reasons and under different circumstances.

Right-wing authoritarianism has been defined as the covariation of three attitudinal clusters: authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression and conventionalism (Altemeyer, 1981). Capturing the motivational goal of collective security, RWA is thought to be rooted in a personality high in social conformity and made salient by a dangerous worldview. Linked to the support of harsh punishment (e.g. Altemeyer, 1981, 1988; Colémont, Van Hiel, & Cornelis, 2011; McKee & Feather, 2008) and to retributive reactions to criminal offences (Carroll et al., 1987; Feather, 1998), RWA is also associated with moral balance, social constructiveness (Colémont et al., 2011), deterrence and incapacitation, but not with personal vengeance (McKee & Feather, 2008). Overall, people high in RWA seem to be more likely to support punishment if it is conducted by legal authorities, but not if the victim seeks personal revenge (McKee & Feather, 2008). We hypothesise that people high in RWA will be more likely to endorse retribution as revenge to the extent that it is sanctioned by a legal process. RWA should thus be positively associated to both dimensions of retribution.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, high RWA individuals seek to maintain in-group conformity (Thomsen, Green, & Sidanius, 2008) and they should favour harsh punishment to restore people's faith in shared values. The effect of RWA on punitiveness should be mediated by a symbolic motive to restore values. We hypothesise that:

**H<sub>4</sub>** RWA will be positively related to retribution as just deserts and revenge, and its effect will be mediated by a value restoration motive

Social dominance orientation has been defined as a preference for hierarchical relations between social groups as well as for in-group domination over out-groups (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). SDO captures the motivational goal of group dominance, power and superiority. SDO is predisposed by a tough-minded personality and made salient by a competitive worldview (Duckitt, 2001). SDO captures two dimensions: a general preference for inequality, expressed by the subscale of opposition to equality (OEQ), and a preference for one's in-group dominating over out-groups, expressed by group-based dominance (GBD, Jost & Thompson, 2000). People high in SDO have been shown to endorse attitudes that allow reinforcing status boundaries (Thomsen et al., 2008) and are predicted to support punitive attitudes to take away power and status from criminal offenders

<sup>5</sup> While it is also possible to evaluate the separate role of the sub-dimensions of RWA (conventionalism and submission to authorities), preliminary analyses of our data suggest that they relate in similar ways to punitive attitudes and we thus consider them together.

(status and power restoration motive). In fact, SDO has been linked to the support for harsh criminal sanctions (Sidanius et al., 2006), retribution (Pratto et al., 1994) and personal vengeance (McKee & Feather, 2008). However, Okimoto et al. (2011) found that only GBD—and not OEQ—was related to retribution and concluded that people high in GBD compete with criminal offenders for status and power.<sup>6</sup>

Knowing that GBD predicts preferences for personal revenge, we evaluate whether it also predicts state-sponsored revenge in cases where there is no personal involvement. In line with McKee and Feather's (2008) finding on personal revenge, we expect GBD to be especially relevant to retribution as revenge because both seek the goal of power and dominance over others. Group-based competition for power and status is likely to lead to a vengeful response to crime because revenge is especially demeaning to criminal offenders and might help to reinforce status boundaries. A just deserts response, on the other hand, implies a minimum respect for the offender and will not help restoring power and status relationships. Thus, we do not expect GBD to be a relevant predictor of just deserts. We hypothesise that:

**H<sub>5</sub>** GBD will be positively related to retribution as revenge and its effect will be mediated by a status and power restoration motive.

What are some of the consequences of different retribution beliefs? We examine the relationship between retributive dimensions and the beliefs people hold about how criminal offenders should be treated, both doing court proceedings and in the sentencing. Previous research has shown a close relationship between retributive perspectives of punishment, harsh punitive responses (Oswald, Hupfeld, Klug, & Gabriel, 2002) and the denial of voice and respect to criminal offenders (Okimoto et al., 2011). Yet, we expect different preferences for the treatment of criminal offenders depending on people's beliefs about the goals of punishment.

We rely on procedural justice theory to provide an explanation on the relationship between theories of punishment, symbolic motives of punishment and the treatment of criminal offenders. Procedural justice highlights the importance of the process by which outcomes are determined, more than the outcomes themselves (Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler, 1990). According to the group value theory (Lind & Tyler, 1988), people derive information on their social identities and whether they are respected within the group based on the ways in which they are treated. It follows that denying procedural fairness to criminal offenders communicates that they are not considered as members of the in-group (Boeckmann & Tyler, 1997) and clarifies status boundaries.

Harsh treatment of criminal offenders and the denial of procedural fairness to people being prosecuted for a crime are thus likely to go hand in hand with the motivation to get even and restore status and power relationships in society. It is thus argued that those who favour retribution to achieve revenge will be more likely to support harsh punishment and deny procedural fairness to criminal offenders.

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<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, two studies that controlled for RWA found no relationship between SDO and punitive attitudes (Colémont et al., 2011; McKee & Feather, 2008). These inconsistent findings might be due to the confounding of different punishment goals, the fact that they controlled for RWA and authoritarian aggression (which usually includes items on the harsh punishment of criminal offenders) and the fact that they have considered SDO as a whole, while only GBD has been found to predict punitive attitudes.



A just deserts perspective, on the other hand, assumes some level of commitment with legal and fair processes and should thus be negatively related to the denial of procedural fairness.<sup>7</sup> We hypothesise that:

**H<sub>6</sub>** The support for harsh punishment will be positively related to retribution as revenge

**H<sub>7</sub>** Denial of procedural fairness will be positively related to retribution as revenge and negatively related to retribution as just deserts

## Method

### Participants

211 persons from the US participated in an online study posted on Amazon's Mechanical Turk.<sup>8</sup> 35 participants (17 %) were excluded for failing to respond correctly to at least one out of two validation questions embedded in the study. The reported results correspond to 176 participants. The sample was diverse in terms of gender (50 % female), age (*Min* = 17, *Max* = 72, *M* = 34, *SD* = 13.3), occupation (52 % worked, 22 % students, 14 % unemployed) and ideology (56 % leaning to the left, 21 % centre, 24 % leaning to the right); although less diverse in terms of ethnicity (86 % white).

### Procedure

Participants were invited to take part in a study on crime and punishment. They were paid 0.50 US dollars for their participation and requested to give informed consent. Before taking part in the study, an instructional manipulation check (Oppenheimer, Meyvis, & Davidenko, 2009) was used to make sure that participants were reading the instructions. Participants were requested to skip rather than answer a question and only participants who did not answer the question were able to participate in the study. This manipulation was used to screen out people who do random clicking and to increase attention of the remaining participants (Oppenheimer et al., 2009). Participants were then asked to answer a questionnaire measuring background socio-demographic questions, RWA, SDO, punishment goals, symbolic motives of punishment and attitudes towards due process. Finally, respondents were asked to provide information on the type of crime they had in mind when completing the survey, and debriefed.

<sup>7</sup> Given its focus on proportionality, the extent to which a just deserts perspective relates to preferences for harsh punishment should depend on the severity of the crime. Since we are measuring punishment goals in general, we do not specify a hypothesis about the relationship between just deserts and harsh punishment.

<sup>8</sup> Studies on the use of Amazon's Mechanical Turk to collect data have concluded that not only is the data as reliable as data collected through other means, but participants are also more diverse in terms of socio-demographic variables (e.g. Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011).

## Measures

### *Retribution*

Scales of retribution were reviewed (De Keijser et al., 2002; Finckenauer, 1988; Ho et al., 2002; Okimoto et al., 2011) and items were adapted to measure retribution as revenge and retribution as just deserts. Retribution as revenge has been defined as the use of harsh punishment to get even with the offender, and is hypothesised to go hand in hand with the thought that punishment should make the offender suffer. Two subscales were designed to capture retribution as revenge: suffering and getting even. Retribution as just deserts, on the other hand, has been defined as a desire to restore justice by allowing the offender to compensate to society proportionally to the harm he has done. It was measured using two subscales: proportionality and compensation. Table 1 displays the items of each subscale and descriptive statistics. Respondents were instructed to report how important they thought each of these goals was. 7-point likert scales were used for these and all other measures in the survey.

### *Ideological Attitudes*

RWA was measured using 12 items from Duckitt, Bizumic, Krauss, and Heled's (2010) adaptation of Altemeyer's (1998) items. Six items measured conventionalism and six items measured authoritarian submission. Half of the items of each scale were

**Table 1** Items on retribution as revenge and retribution as just deserts

|  | Mean | SD   |
|--|------|------|
| Retribution as revenge   |      |      |
| Suffer   |      |      |
| Infliction of suffering should be an explicit element in every sanction                    | 3.38 | 1.63 |
| Punishment without an element of suffering is no punishment                                | 4.13 | 1.60 |
| Punishment is deserved suffering   | 4.30 | 1.64 |
| Get even   |      |      |
| We should punish to get even with the offender   | 3.00 | 1.63 |
| Society should punish to get back at criminal offenders                                    | 3.50 | 1.72 |
| Society has the right to take revenge on criminal offenders                                | 3.52 | 1.75 |
| Retribution as just deserts  |      |      |
| Proportionality  |      |      |
| The severity of the punishment should be proportional to the harm done                     | 5.69 | 1.10 |
| Criminals should be punished proportionally to the harm done to society                    | 5.53 | 1.18 |
| The severity of the punishment should fit the severity of the crime                        | 5.72 | 1.18 |
| Compensation   |      |      |
| By undergoing punishment, a criminal pays off his debt to society                          | 4.76 | 1.54 |
| Justice is restored when an offender pays back for the harm he has caused                  | 4.86 | 1.46 |
| By means of punishment the criminal offender compensates for the harm he caused to society | 4.73 | 1.55 |

reverse coded to control for acquiescence response bias. Authoritarian aggression items usually refer to crime and punishment issues either explicitly (e.g. ‘Being kind to loafers or criminals will only encourage them to take advantage of your weakness, so it’s best to use a firm, tough hand when dealing with them’, Duckitt et al., 2010) or implicitly (e.g. ‘We should smash all the negative elements that are causing trouble in our society’, Duckitt et al., 2010). While these items might be useful in predicting prejudice and other intergroup attitudes, including them in our study would lead to tautological conclusions of aggression against criminal offenders predicting the support for their harsh punishment. In our study we thus excluded items on authoritarian aggression.<sup>9</sup> SDO was measured using 12 items from Sidanius and Pratto (2001), six for group-based dominance and six for opposition to equality.

### *Symbolic Motives of Punishment*

*Value restoration* was measured using two items adapted from Okimoto et al.’s (2011) other-value restoration scale: ‘Punishment should reinforce for others the values that the offender’s behavior undermined’ and ‘Punishment should express to others that the offender’s behavior violated the values we should all share’. *Status and power restoration motive* was measured using two items. One item was adapted from Okimoto et al.’s (2011) status/power reduction goal scale: ‘Punishment should communicate to the offender that people have low regard for him’. The second item was designed for this study: ‘Punishment should humiliate the offender’.

### *Treatment of Criminal Offenders*

Two scales were developed to measure people’s beliefs about how criminal offenders should be treated: harsh punishment and denial of procedural fairness (see [Appendix](#)). Four items—two positively phrased and two negatively phrased—measured the support for harsh punitive measures (e.g. ‘People who break the law should be given harsher sentences’). Based on procedural fairness literature (e.g. Tyler, 1990) two dimensions were considered to measure denial of procedural fairness: whether the criminal offender should be treated with respect (3 items) and whether the sentencing process should be neutral or allow emotional sentencing (6 items). Descriptive statistics and correlations are presented in [Table 2](#).

### *Type of Crime*

Finally, we asked respondents to report the type of crime they had primarily in mind when completing the survey. We added this control measure since respondents may favour different types of retribution depending upon the type of crime. The options were: property crimes (e.g. theft or burglary), violent crime (e.g. assault or murder), sexual crime (e.g. rape), drug offences, fraud, vandalism and other. Most respondents chose violent crime (64.2 %), followed by property crimes (11.9 %)

<sup>9</sup> To simplify, in the remaining of this paper we refer to right-wing authoritarianism even though it only considers measures on authoritarian submission and conventionalism.

**Table 2** Descriptive statistics and correlations between retribution as revenge, retribution as just deserts, ideological dispositions and the treatment of criminal offenders

|                                | 1     | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5     | 6     | 7     | 8     | 9     | 10   |
|--------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|
| 1. Retribution as revenge      | –     |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |      |
| 2. Retribution as just deserts | .70** | –     |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |      |
| 3. RWA                         | .46** | .41** | –     |       |       |       |       |       |       |      |
| 4. SDO GBD                     | .32** | .13   | .23** | –     |       |       |       |       |       |      |
| 5. SDO OEQ                     | .18*  | .03   | .25** | .59** | –     |       |       |       |       |      |
| 6. Value restoration           | .35** | .43** | .37** | –.07  | .02   | –     |       |       |       |      |
| 7. Status restoration          | .64** | .45** | .27** | .41** | .27** | .38** | –     |       |       |      |
| 8. Harsh punishment            | .59** | .51** | .60** | .23** | .17*  | .35** | .45** | –     |       |      |
| 9. Deny fair process           | .54** | .20** | .28** | .39** | .26** | .07   | .50** | .54** | –     |      |
| 10. Violent crime              | .27** | .21** | .16*  | .11   | .13   | .04   | .26** | .37** | .29** | –    |
| Mean                           | 0.00  | 0.00  | 3.61  | 2.62  | 2.44  | 5.52  | 3.64  | 3.87  | 2.93  | 0.67 |
| SD                             | 1.10  | 0.86  | 1.28  | 1.21  | 1.17  | 1.14  | 1.58  | 1.41  | 0.89  | 0.47 |
| $\alpha$                       | 0.87  | 0.80  | 0.93  | 0.89  | 0.91  | 0.87  | 0.78  | 0.87  | 0.83  | –    |

and drug offences (11.4 %). This measure was recoded into a dummy variable, with 1 corresponding to violent or sexual crime and 0 to the rest.

**Analysis**

The first aim of this paper was to evaluate whether retribution as vengeance and retribution as just deserts in fact measured two different concepts. Confirmatory factor analysis with MPLUS was carried out to model the dimensions specified above (suffer, getting even, proportionality and compensation). A model where all dimensions loaded on one higher order factor was compared to a model where suffering and getting even loaded on one higher order factor (‘retribution as revenge’) and proportionality and compensation loaded on a second higher order factor (‘retribution as just deserts’). Fit statistics were then used to compare the adequacy of both models. In a second stage structural equation modelling was used to examine the relationship between retribution, ideology, symbolic motives of punishment and attitudes towards the treatment of criminal offenders.

**Results**

**The Dimensionality of Retribution**

Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to compare the fit of a one-factor and a two-factor model of retribution. Model 1 predicts that the four sub-dimensions

(getting even, suffer, proportionality and compensation) are part of a second-order factor called retribution. Model 2, on the other hand, predicts that two dimensions capture the relationship between the sub-dimensions: retribution as revenge (getting even and making the offender suffer) and retribution as just deserts (proportionality and compensation). Second-order factors were used given that different dimensions are hypothesised to underlie both retribution types.

The two-factor model showed a very good fit (Model 2:  $\chi^2(49) = 70.3$ ,  $p = .025$ ; CFI = 0.98; RMSEA = 0.05). The fit of the one-factor model was slightly worse (Model 1:  $\chi^2(50) = 89.0$ ,  $p = .001$ ; CFI = 0.96; RMSEA = 0.07), although its fit was still close to conventional levels. While one could reasonably argue in favour of both models, we explore the two-factor option as it provides a slightly better fit. It is also of theoretical interest to evaluate whether these two dimensions of retribution are differentially related to ideological preferences and the treatment of criminal offenders. Figure 1 presents the factor loadings for Model 2.<sup>10</sup>

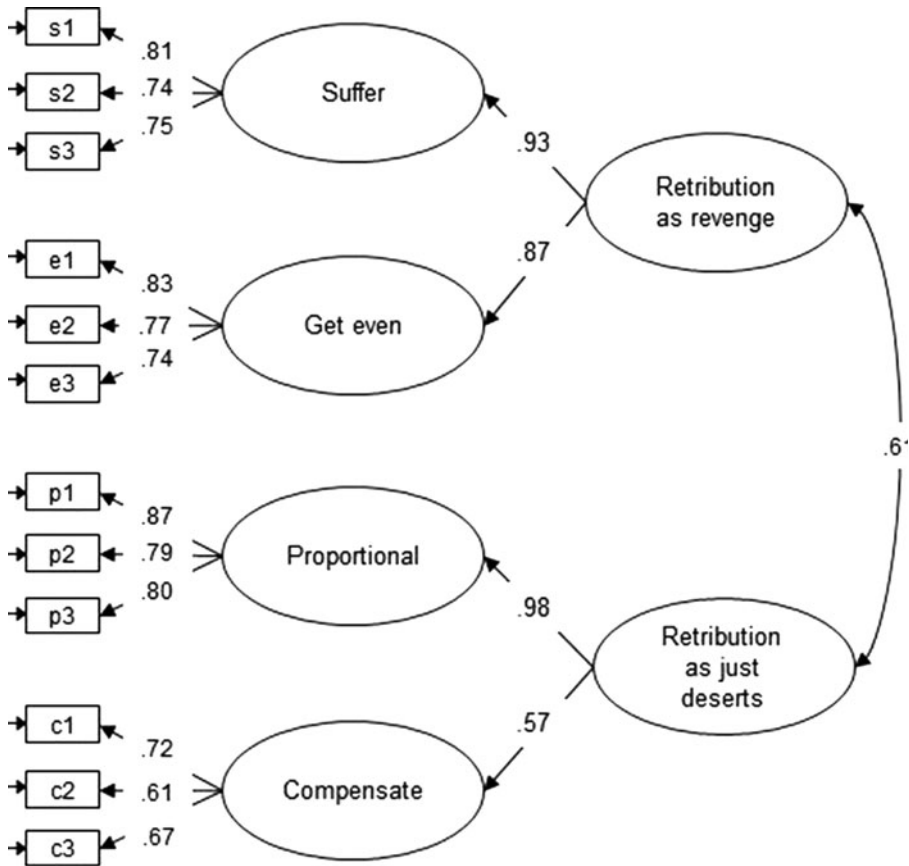
### Ideological and Motivational Antecedents of Retribution as Revenge and Just Deserts

We start by exploring the relationship between retribution as revenge, just deserts, ideological dispositions and symbolic motives of punishment. Table 2 presents the bivariate correlations between all variables in the study. Factor scores derived from Model 2 (Fig. 1) were used for retribution as revenge and just deserts. Means were used for all other variables.

Retribution as revenge was positively and significantly correlated with RWA, GBD, value restoration ( $r > .32$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and particularly with status and power restoration ( $r = .64$ ,  $p < .01$ ), harsh punishment ( $r = .59$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and the denial of fair process ( $r = .54$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The correlation with opposition to equality was very modest ( $r = .18$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Retribution as just deserts, on the other hand, was positively and significantly correlated with RWA, values and status restoration, harsh punishment ( $r > .41$ ,  $p < .01$ ), but not with the subscales of SDO ( $p > .05$ ). The association with the denial of fair process was positive but rather small ( $r = .20$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

Structural equation modelling was then used to model the relationship between retribution, treatment of criminal offenders, ideological dispositions and symbolic motives of punishment. Given that opposition to equality showed only a modest statistical effect on both retribution as revenge and just deserts, we decided to exclude it from the structural equation model. To avoid complicating the model by using second order factors, derived factor scores were used for the sub-dimensions

<sup>10</sup> Note that while a two factor model fits the data better, retribution as revenge and just deserts are still highly correlated ( $r = .61$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and special caution was placed in the remaining analyses to rule out multicollinearity issues. For the following analyses, variance inflation factors (VIF) were all below 3.1, which suggests that despite the high correlation, multicollinearity problems were only moderate. Also note that we do not use likelihood-ratio test to assess relative model fit because a likelihood-ratio test is not appropriate in the context. The null hypothesis in this case (that the correlation between the two factors is 1) implies a parameter that is on the boundary of the parameter space, so the asymptotic Chi square distribution (that is normally used for likelihood-ratio tests) is not appropriate.



**Fig. 1** Confirmatory factor analysis of a two-factor model of retribution. Standardised coefficients are shown. For all coefficients  $p < .01$

of retribution. Parcels were also used to measure RWA, GBD and the denial of procedural fairness.<sup>11</sup> To maintain the dimensions of RWA, one parcel was constructed to measure authoritarian submission and the other one to measure conventionalism. In relation to GBD, items were randomly assigned to one of two parcels. Finally, two dimensions were used as parcels for the denial of procedural fairness: respect and neutrality of procedures.

First, a model was fitted where GBD and RWA predicted symbolic motives of punishment and these, in turn, predicted vengeance and deserts. Vengeance and deserts, on the other hand, were modelled to predict harsh punishment and denial of

<sup>11</sup> Parcels—i.e. indicators that aggregate two or more items by using a sum or average—are often used in structural equation modelling (Little, Cunningham, Shahar, & Widaman, 2002). When using parcels random and systematic error of single items are not incorporated into the model, and model fit and stability are thus improved. While some argue that a model should represent the sources of variance of all items, parceling is recommended for studies—such as this—where the aim is to explore relationships between latent variables and not factor structures.

procedural fairness.<sup>12</sup> This model, however, did not fit the data very well. Modification indices recommended adding direct effects from RWA to retribution as revenge and just deserts, as well as harsh punishment and due process. Also, a direct effect from status/power restoration to denying due process was added. Figure 2 displays the final model, which had a good overall fit:  $\chi^2(127) = 196.74$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 1.55$ ; CFI = 0.97; RMSEA = 0.06.

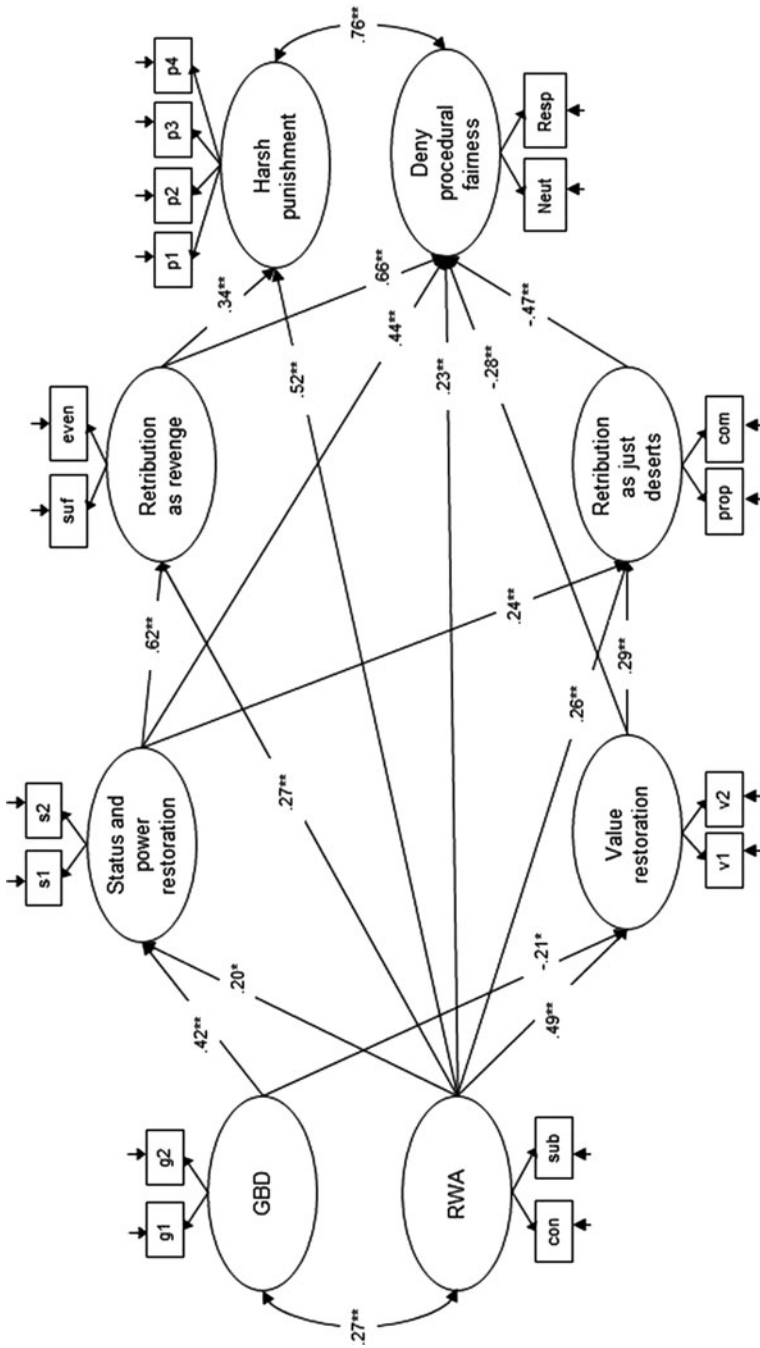
The findings showed that status and power restoration was predicted by GBD ( $\beta = .42$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and to a lesser degree by RWA ( $\beta = .20$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The model predicted 30.9 % of the variance of status restoration. Value restoration, on the other hand, was positively predicted by RWA ( $\beta = .49$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and negatively predicted by GBD ( $\beta = -.21$ ,  $p < .01$ ). 23.3 % of the variance in value restoration was accounted by RWA and GBD.

Status and power restoration was the main predictor of retribution as revenge ( $\beta = .62$ ,  $p < .01$ ), followed by RWA ( $\beta = .27$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Interestingly, both GBD ( $\beta = .26$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and, to a lesser degree, RWA ( $\beta = .12$ ,  $p < .05$ ) had indirect effects on revenge mediated by the restoration of status and power. The model explained 57.7 % of the variance in retribution as revenge. Retribution as just deserts, on the other hand, was predicted by value restoration ( $\beta = .29$ ,  $p < .01$ ), status restoration ( $\beta = .24$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and RWA ( $\beta = .26$ ,  $p < .01$ ). RWA had also indirect effects via value restoration ( $\beta = .14$ ,  $p < .01$ ). GBD, on the other hand, had both a positive indirect effect on just deserts mediated by status restoration ( $\beta = .10$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and a negative indirect effect mediated by value restoration ( $\beta = -.06$ ,  $p < .05$ ). However, the total effect of GBD on just deserts was non-significant. This model predicted 39.5 % of the variance of retribution as just deserts.

It should be noted that the presented model controlled for the type of crime respondents were thinking about when completing the survey. A dummy for type of crime (1 = violent) was added as a predictor of symbolic motives of punishment, retribution and the treatment of criminal offenders. Only status restoration ( $\beta = .22$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and harsh punishment ( $\beta = .22$ ,  $p < .01$ ) were affected by the type of crime: respondents who had violent or sexual crime in mind when completing the survey were more likely to seek punishment to restore status and power relationships in society and were more supportive of applying harsh punitive measures.

Finally, harsh punishment was predicted by retribution as revenge ( $\beta = .34$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and RWA ( $\beta = .52$ ,  $p < .01$ ). After controlling for revenge and RWA, just deserts had no effect on the support for stiff sentences. These variables explained 62.8 % of the variance in harsh punishment. Denial of procedural fairness, on the other hand, was strongly and positively predicted by revenge ( $\beta = .66$ ,  $p < .01$ ), status restoration ( $\beta = .44$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and RWA ( $\beta = .23$ ,  $p < .05$ ). After controlling for these variables, just deserts became a negative predictor of denying procedural

<sup>12</sup> We should note, however, that we do not wish to imply a causal path from ideological dispositions to symbolic motives of punishment, retributive justice and the treatment of criminal offenders. Our use of structural equation model seeks to organise and disentangle variables and their relationships more than proposing that some variables are temporarily prior to others. While it may be possible to argue that RWA and SDO are prior to attitudes towards punishment and criminal offenders, respondents are likely to think of symbolic motives, retribution and the treatment of criminal offenders as dimensions of the same attitude.



**Fig. 2** Structural equation model of retribution, ideological dispositions, symbolic motives and the treatment of criminal offenders. Standardised coefficients are shown. All factor loadings are significant ( $62 < \beta < .96$ ;  $p < .01$ ). Model fit:  $\chi^2(127) = 196.74$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 1.55$ ; CFI = 0.97; RMSEA = 0.06. Error covariance between status and value restoration ( $\beta = .55$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and between deserts and revenge ( $\beta = .49$ ,  $p < .01$ ) were added but are not shown in the model. The model controls for the type of crime respondents were thinking about when completing the survey (1 = violent or sexual crime, 0 = other). Type of crime was only a significant predictor of status restoration ( $\beta = .22$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and harsh punishment ( $\beta = .22$ ,  $p < .01$ )



fairness ( $\beta = -.47, p < .01$ ), and so did value restoration ( $\beta = -.28, p < .01$ ). Taken together these variables explained 75.3 % of the variance in procedural fairness.

It is also worth noting that RWA had both positive and negative indirect effects on the denial of procedural fairness. On the one hand, it had positive indirect effects through revenge ( $\beta = .18, p < .01$ ) and status restoration ( $\beta = .09, p < .10$ ). On the other hand, it had negative indirect effects through just deserts ( $\beta = -.12, p < .05$ ) and value restoration ( $\beta = -.14, p < .05$ ). This is, people high in RWA seek to avenge crimes to restore status relationships, but they are also concerned about values and proportionality. Overall, these indirect effects cancelled each other out and the only significant effect was its positive direct effect on the denial of procedural fairness ( $\beta = .23, p < .05$ ). GBD, on the other hand, had a positive indirect effect on the denial of procedural fairness, through the desire to restore status relationships ( $\beta = .39, p < .01$ ). Both RWA ( $\beta = .14, p < .01$ ) and GBD ( $\beta = .09, p < .01$ ) had positive indirect effects on harsh punishment, mediated by revenge and status restoration.

## Discussion

In this paper we have sought to provide further evidence into the distinction between two types of retribution: namely, retribution as revenge and retribution as just deserts. We have argued that these two dimensions are better conceptualised as being two distinct—albeit empirically associated—concepts. As predicted ( $H_1$ ) a two-factor model of retribution showed a better fit than a one-factor model. One dimension (retribution as revenge) involved dimensions of getting even and making the offender suffer, while the second dimension (retribution as just deserts) comprised dimensions of compensation and proportionality. On the one hand, retribution as revenge was defined as a desire to get even with the offender by making him/her suffer. On the other hand, retribution as just deserts was defined as the desire to restore justice by allowing the perpetrator to compensate proportionally to the harm done.

Second, and perhaps most interestingly, retribution as revenge and just deserts differed in their motivational antecedents and preferences for the treatment of criminal offenders. Our findings suggest that the desires to get even and make the offender suffer are rooted in the motivation to endorse status boundaries with criminal offenders: both a status restoration motive ( $H_2$ ) and the desire to dominate over out-groups (as expressed by GBD,  $H_5$ ) predicted retribution as revenge. Also, as predicted ( $H_4$ ), those high in RWA (here measured as conventionalism and submission to authorities) were more likely to endorse revenge, arguably because in our research revenge was not phrased as a personal matter but as the product of the legal application of the law. Consistent with the motivation to communicate low status to criminal offenders, revenge predicted the support for harsh punitive measures ( $H_6$ ) as well as the denial of procedural fairness ( $H_7$ ). That is, revenge, harsh punishment and the denial of procedural fairness seem to be the preferred

means to re-establish a position of dominance over criminal offenders and communicate that people have low regard for them.

Retribution as just deserts, on the other hand, was rooted in right-wing authoritarianism ( $H_4$ ), and the motivations to restore values ( $H_3$ ) and, contrary to what was predicted, status and power. That is, unlike revenge, just deserts was also motivated by a more constructive desire to communicate good moral values to society. In terms of its relationship with the treatment of criminal offenders, just deserts had positive correlations with harsh punishment and the denial of procedural fairness (although the latter was very small). However, once revenge was controlled for, the effect of just deserts on harsh punishment became non-significant and the effect on the denial of procedural fairness became negative ( $H_7$ ). The high correlation between just deserts and revenge shows that people who support punishment to achieve just deserts tend to support punishment to achieve revenge as well. However, at any given level of vengefulness, concerns about proportionality and compensation may actually reduce people's desires to deny due process and respect to criminal offenders.

The present research also provides interesting information on the differential reasons why people high in SDO and RWA support punitive policies. Consistent with a status boundary enforcement hypothesis (Thomsen et al., 2008), the effect of GBD on revenge was mediated by the motivation to restore status and power relationships with criminal offenders ( $H_5$ ). Past research showed that GBD predicts personal revenge (McKee & Feather, 2008). The present study provides evidence that high GBD individuals will also support state-sponsored punishment to get even with the offender, even if there is no personal involvement. The effect of RWA was more widespread. Consistent with an in-group conformity hypothesis (Thomsen et al., 2008), high RWA individuals sought to restore values in society and the latter mediated their preferences for retribution as just deserts ( $H_4$ ). However, RWA also predicted status and power restoration motives and revenge. This result is inconsistent with findings on the lack of relationship between RWA and personal vengeance (McKee & Feather, 2008). Overall, people high in RWA seem to support punishment to the extent that it is undertaken following legitimised procedures, but not when an individual seeks personal revenge.

Revenge and just deserts might correspond to two different strategies used by high RWA individuals to restore in-group conformity: reforming the criminal offender and including him/her back into society (which might be achieved by restoring values, compensation and a proportional punishment) or excluding the offender from society and protect the identity of the group (which might be achieved through status restoration and vengeance). The preference for one or the other strategy might depend on whether the criminal offender is perceived to be part of the in-group or to belong to an out-group (Boeckmann & Tyler, 1997). People are likely to choose revenge and the exclusion of the criminal offender when they do not feel identified with the offender and when he is perceived to be part of an out-group. In this case, exclusion can help protect the identity of the group. This is also consistent with a negative bias towards out-group members, as proposed by social identity theory (Feather & Souter, 2002; see also Boeckmann & Tyler, 1997 for research on denying procedural fairness). On the other hand, people are likely to

show a positive bias towards in-group members and favour just deserts and the restoration of values when they identify with the criminal offender. Consistent with this argument, previous research (Wenzel & Thielmann, 2006; see also Okimoto & Wenzel, 2010) has found that just deserts was a stronger predictor of punitive decisions when respondents had low identification with the nation, while alternative punishment and the desire to restore values was relevant when respondents were highly identified. However, the opposite might also be true: according to the ‘black sheep effect’ devaluing the offender might help to protect the identity of the group (Okimoto & Wenzel, 2010). Indeed, Marques (1990) showed that reactions to norm violations tend to be stronger when the offender is part of the in-group.

We should note, in closing, that the distinction between retribution as revenge and just deserts is just one of a number of possible dimensions of punishment goals. For example Vidmar and Miller (Vidmar and Miller, 1980; see also Orth, 2003; Oswald et al., 2002) differentiate punishment goals regarding whether they focus on a micro (offender and victim) or macro (society) perspective; it can be argued that retribution as revenge is concerned with the relationship between victim and offender while just deserts refers to concerns about restoring balance in society as a whole. More research is required to evaluate how different dimensions of retribution relate to the objects of punishment. Nevertheless, we hope that this study has provided clear theoretical and methodological tools to explore people’s attitudes towards punishment, while also showing some important antecedents and consequences of people’s motivations to punish rule-breakers.

## Appendix

### Harsh Punishment

- People who break the law should be given harsher sentences.
- The use of harsh punishment should be avoided whenever possible.
- We should make sentences more severe for all crimes.
- If prison has to be used, it should be used sparingly and only as a last option.

### Procedural Justice: Respect

- After committing an offence, criminal offenders lose the right to be treated with respect.
- Despite what has happened, criminal offenders are entitled to treatment with respect and politeness.
- Criminal offenders deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.

### Procedural Justice: Neutral Sentencing.

- When deciding on the appropriate punishment, criminal offenders do not deserve to be treated according to fair rules and procedures.

- It is essential to ensure fairness and consistency when deciding on the appropriate punishment of criminal offenders.
- In deciding a criminal case, it is important to be objective when considering the evidence.
- In deciding a criminal case, it is okay to allow emotions to influence judgements.
- In deciding a criminal case, it is alright to allow anger towards the defendant to play a part in the decision.
- In deciding a criminal case, the decision should be based in part, on subjective, personal feelings.

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