

Free Will Belief and Perceptions of Procedural Justice in Police-Suspect Interactions

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Abstract

The two studies presented below examine whether observer's perceptions of procedural justice of a police-suspect interaction are influenced by an individual's belief in free will. Within both studies it was hypothesized that free will belief will be related to lower ratings of procedural justice of a police officer's disrespectful treatment of a suspect and be mediated by judgments of deservingness. Both studies used a vignette describing the disrespectful treatment of a suspect by a police officer during an interaction. Participants were asked their perceptions of procedural justice of the interaction and the suspect's level of deservingness of respectful treatment. The first study looked at the correlation between participants' free will belief and their perceptions of procedural justice, which was found to be positively correlated. To identify if a mediational relationship exists between free will belief and perceptions of procedural justice through the lens of deservingness, bootstrap analyses were performed, and a significant, positive mediation was found. The second study manipulated participant's free will belief. Ordinary least squares simple mediation path analysis did not find a mediated relationship either. These studies are the first step in identifying whether and how advances in behavioral and neuroscience research may affect

Hypotheses

- **Belief in free will would be related to higher ratings of procedural justice of disrespectful treatment by a police officer toward a suspect.**
- **The relationship between free will belief and ratings of procedural justice of a disrespectful interaction between a police officer and a suspect would be mediated by judgments of deservingness of respectful treatment.**
- **Those exposed to material expressing doubt regarding free will would rate interactions depicting disrespectful treatment by a police officer toward a suspect as less procedurally just than those in a neutral condition.**
- **The relationship between free will belief and ratings of procedural justice would be mediated by deservingness in that those in the free will doubt condition would consider the suspect as more deserving of respectful treatment and, in turn, judge the disrespectful treatment as less fair.**

Background

The deontological model of retribution focuses on the deservingness, or whether a person is qualified and worthy of the punishment and how blameworthy the offender is. How observers view the treatment of a suspect as being fair and respectful is integral in assessing the role of deservingness within our current retributive system.

Previous studies focused on deservingness had participants read a vignette about a worker who displayed a positive or negative behavior, was either responsible or not responsible for their behavior and was treated respectfully or disrespectfully by their supervisor. Results showed that disrespectful treatment was viewed as more fair when the worker was described as being responsible for their poor behavior (Heuer et al., 1999).

This is consistent with the view that certain individuals deserve their treatment based on the idea that people make choices and are responsible for their actions. The retributive based criminal justice system and the influence that heuristics and cognitive biases have on decision-making leads many to believe that individuals have complete free will over their behavior (Carlsmith & Darley, 2008).

The relationship between free will belief and retributive punishment has been looked at more directly by Shariff and colleagues that assessed how free will doubt affected assessments of retributive punishment. The studies ranged from correlational to experimentally manipulating participant's free will belief. In each of the experiments, participants read a vignette about an individual who was released from a facility that had a 99% success rate. Participants were then asked to assign a length of punishment to an offender. Each of the studies revealed that a lower belief in free will is related to diminished assessments of retributive punishments (Shariff et al., 2014).

When assessing the deservingness of the treatment of suspects, you also have to consider the perceptions of fairness or procedural justice. This is the measure of whether the process used to reach an outcome is perceived as fair, regardless of the actual outcome.

There are 4 pillars that make up procedural justice.

1. Voice: the extent to which the person has the opportunity to be heard and to tell their side of the story.
2. Neutrality: whether the decisions made by an authority are seen as consistent and free of bias.
3. Respect: whether the authority treats each participant with dignity and courtesy regardless of any social group with which they may identify.
4. Trustworthiness: whether the authority makes decisions are done so in a transparent manner (Tyler, 2017).

Research Question

Does free will doubt affect perceptions of fairness of police-suspect interactions?

Methods

Study 1:
N= 123 Mturkers

- Novel vignette described a police-suspect interaction where the suspect was treated in a disrespectful manner.

Procedure

Free Will and Determinism Plus Scale (FAD+) → Novel Vignette → Deservingness and Procedural Justice Question → Demographic Questions

Independent Variable: Free Will and Determinism Plus Scale
Dependent Variable: Global Perception of Procedural Justice Scale

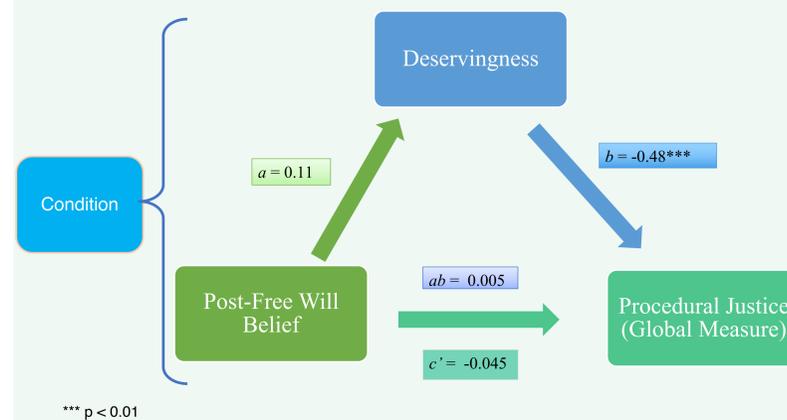
Study 2: Manipulation of Free Will Belief
N = 231 Mturkers

- Free will manipulation and control article both from *The Astonishing Hypothesis* By: Francis Crick

Procedure

Free Will and Determinism Plus Scale → Free Will Manipulation or Control → Novel Vignette → Deservingness and Procedural Justice Question → Manipulation Check and FAD+ Scale → Demographic Questions

Results Study 2



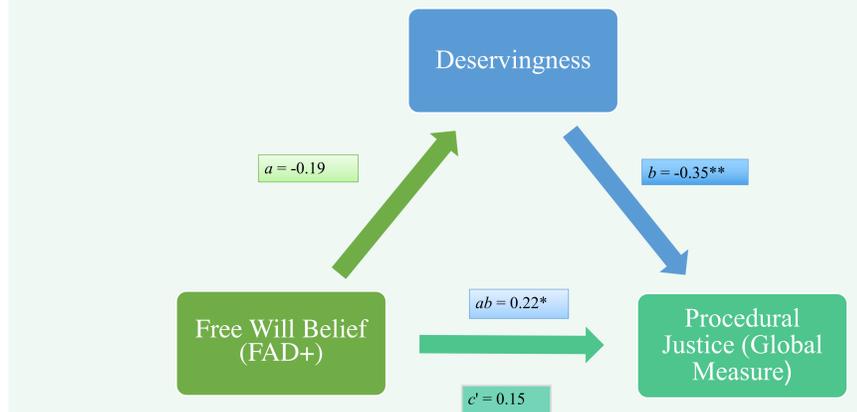
Discussion and Future Directions

- Free will belief does predict global ratings of procedural justice, but this disappears when we factor in political beliefs.
- What is the difference between holding a belief and changing a belief to make assessments of deservingness?
- Deservingness is an important factor when it comes to ratings of procedural justice. If someone believes that a suspect deserves respectful treatment, their ratings of procedural justice will decrease.
- How does dehumanization fit into this model?
- Incorporate a stronger manipulation to challenge longstanding free will beliefs

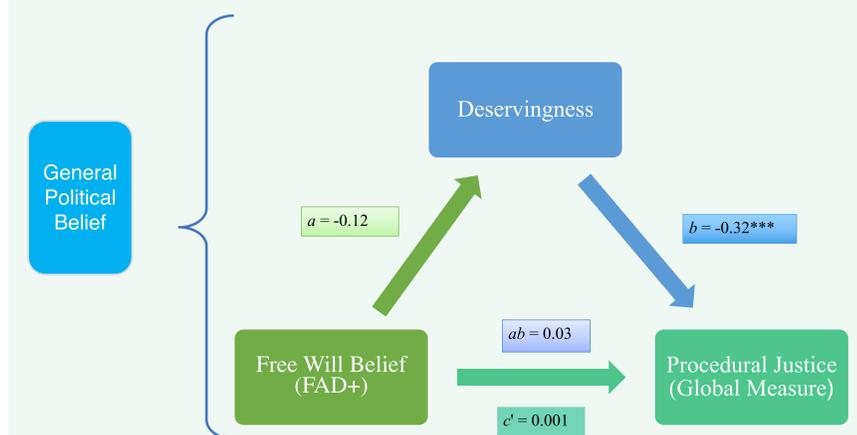
Results Study 1



* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01



* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01



*** p < 0.01

Limitations

- Unclear the strength of the manipulation.
- The perceptions of guilt of the suspect in the vignette is unknown.
- Use of free will instead of biopsychosocial influences.

References

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