Observing Coworkers' Violations and Managers' Discipline: The Effect of Violation and Punishment Severity on Coworkers

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The purpose of this two-part study is to understand how disciplinary actions impact coworkers on other coworkers. Study one determines how a coworker's perception of the severity of a violation is related to desire for retributive justice, attitude towards the violator, and how the severity of a violation impacts perception of appropriate discipline. Study two examined reactions when punishments are too mild, appropriate or severe. Results yielded a complex relationship where the violation's severity interacted with the punishment's severity. One finding was that under-punishing has a more pronounced impact on coworkers than over-punishing.

Keywords: punishment, discipline, observers, justice

INTRODUCTION

While punishment is by its very nature unpleasant for both the violator and the person who must administer it, it is unfortunately a reality that people do things in organizations that warrant punishment (Vardi & Wiener, 1996). In modern organizations this responsibility to administer punishment typically falls on managers (Butterfield, Treviño, Wade, & Ball, 2005).

Research on punishment in organizational settings has mainly concentrated either on looking at the manager's response to a subordinate's violations (Ashkanasy & Gallois, 1994; Crant & Bateman, 1993; Green & Mitchell, 1979; Kipnis & Cosentino, 1969; Klaas & Wheeler, 1990; Miner, 1976; T. R. Mitchell, Green, & Wood, 1981; T. R. Mitchell & O'Reilly, 1983) or on how punishment affects the violator, such as what makes it more or less effective(Aquino, Tripp, & Bies, 2001; Arvey & Ivancevich, 1980; Arvey & Jones, 1985; Zitek & Krause, 2017).

Many of these studies have found negative outcomes associated with punishment episodes. For example, a number of these studies have found that while punishment may be effective in changing an employee's behavior in the short term, recipients often experience resentment, hostility and can even engage in sabotaging behaviors in response to being punished (Arvey & Ivancevich, 1980; Arvey & Jones, 1985; Butterfield, Treviño, & Ball, 1996). There also have been serious challenges raised about the effectiveness of punishment as a performance motivator (Atwater, Waldman, Carey, & Cartier, 2001). Researchers have also considered the consequences of the punishment as it impacts the manager (Butterfield et al., 1996; Neale, Butterfield, Goodstein, & Tripp, 2020; Wang & Murnighan, 2017). These studies imply that managers should avoid punishment and look to other methods to influence employees to avoid misconduct.

However, managers have more to be concerned about than their own discomfort in administering punishment or the effectiveness of the punishment as reflected in the recipient's behavior. In recent years

researchers have extended research beyond the punishment giver or receiver to examine punishment as a social experience by considering observers' reactions (Treviño, 1992). It may be that punishing an individual does indeed have the negative consequences suggested in past studies, however, it may also be that not punishing an individual has negative outcomes for the observers. If this is the case, then managers avoiding the punishment process to circumvent potential negative outcomes for the violator would be contributing to the classic situation of the needs of the few outweighing the needs of the many. In such a scenario, managers would need to consider both perspectives – that of the violator and the observers – in order to find a solution that minimizes the impact on all parties.

There is a growing amount of research on the importance of third parties in organizations (M. S. Mitchell, Vogel, & Folger, 2015; J. O'Reilly & Aquino, 2011; Jane O'Reilly, Aquino, & Skarlicki, 2016). Darley and Pittman (2003) describe the psychological processes that cause third parties to take an interest in whether organizational members are treated fairly. Other studies have found that third parties actively assign blame to violators for actions that had no impact on the third party (Alicke, 1992; Shaver, 1970; Walster, 1966). Research also shows that third parties will sanction violators even when the sanctions are costly to them and the violation itself had no effect on the third party (Fehr & Fischbacher, 2004; Turillo, Folger, Lavelle, Umphress, & Gee, 2002). Research on observer reactions has grown to include areas such as reactions to layoffs (Skarlicki, Barclay, & Pugh, 2008; Skarlicki, Ellard, & Kelln, 1998) and mistreatment of coworkers by managers (J. O'Reilly & Aquino, 2011; Skarlicki & Kulik, 2005). However, there is still little known about how third parties react to the punishment of other organizational members. This paper begins to help fill that gap.

OVERVIEW AND STUDY CONTEXT

I conducted two studies to address the lack of basic understanding of key aspects in this area regarding third party impact. Study one was primarily done to see if there was consensus among observers regarding the levels of seriousness associated with common violations and to discover what most people would consider appropriate punishment for various common violations. Study one also allowed me to have a baseline to use for Study two. Study two would examine the scenario further by considering how observers react to a manager's punishment that they considered to be too lenient, appropriate or too severe and how these reactions impacted important organizational variables.

STUDY 1: VIOLATION SEVERITY, DESIRE FOR RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE, AND ATTITUDESS TOWARD THE VIOLATOR

My goal in this first study was to understand coworker perceptions regarding the severity of a violation and then to determine if these perceptions impacted their attitude towards the violator and their desires for retributive justice. Darley & Pittman (2003) propose that an observer's desire for compensatory and retributive justice is a function of the moral outrage elicited by a violation. They propose both cognitive and affective reactions influence the amount that an observer desires retribution. In their model, high moral outrage results in a desire for retribution and compensation, while a low moral outrage would only result in a desire for compensation alone. However, no one has examined the nature of that relationship empirically.

The desire for retribution may be a result of a person's sense that the social order has been violated. Fiske & Tetlock (1997) examined "taboo trade-offs" (e.g. asking people to estimate the monetary value of their children) and found that the more that one of these trade-offs violated a social norm, the greater the moral outrage. Rather than desire for retribution being only sought for with high moral outrage offenses, it may be that desire for retribution is simply proportional to the amount of moral outrage. For example, a mild norm violation results in a mild desire for retribution and a severe violation results in a strong desire for retribution. These two perspectives provide competing predictions for how people will react to various levels of violation severity. To execute a more focused exploration of this phenomenon, I have chosen to addresses only one of these perspectives while acknowledging that future research from additional angles will be necessary. For the purposes of this study, I propose that:

H1: *A coworker's desire for retribution is directly proportional to how serious the coworker assesses the violation to be.*

While it is likely that being aware of a violation by a coworker will result in a desire for retribution, this is not the only potential reaction. For example, the coworker might have to work directly with the violator or interact with them as part of a team. Knowing that a coworker has violated norms could result in poor attitudes towards the violator, such as not wanting to work with him or her. Attitudes towards a coworker who has committed a violation may be independent of the coworker's desire for retribution, such that a coworker could want punishment for the violator, but still feel good about them as an employee. Alternatively, it could be that the attitude towards the violator is simply a mirror of their desire for retribution, i.e. as desire for retribution increases, a positive attitude towards the violator decreases. While desire for retribution and the attitude towards the violator are separate constructs, it is likely that they function in very similar ways. Therefore, I propose that:

H2: *A coworker's attitude towards the violator is directly inversely proportional to how serious the coworker assesses the violation to be.*

The second purpose of this study is to determine what coworkers feel is the appropriate discipline for a given violation. It is possible that coworkers are comfortable with mild punishments up to a point, and then they would want more severe punishments for more severe violations. However, if the desire for retribution is directly proportional to the severity of the violation, then the punishments that are seen as appropriate should also gradually increase as the violation becomes more severe. Therefore, I propose:

H3: *A coworker's assessment of what punishment is appropriate will be directly proportional the how serious the coworker assesses the violation to be.*

This data will also allow me to identify what punishment is seen as appropriate for any given violation and by extension allow me to know what punishment is too mild or too severe. This will be key information for setting up parameters for study 2.

Methods

Sample

To test my hypotheses I recruited subjects from Amazon's Mechanical Turk system. 445 subjects completed useable surveys. 62.9% were male, and the average age was 30. 12.4% of subjects were Asian, 5.6% were Black or African American, 4% were Native American, 4% were Hispanic or Latino, 75.1% were White, 1.1% identified themselves as Other and 1.3% identified themselves as Multi-Ethnic. I also collected data on education level and income to control for their effects. Neither gender, age, ethnicity, education or income had any significant affect on the variables.

Procedure

Subjects were directed to the survey website where they were assigned to one of eight conditions. The conditions were designed to vary in their severity from mild to severe, based on the author's intuitions. After reading a single scenario, subjects were asked to rate the severity of the violation so that it could be validated empirically. Table 1 contains each of the proposed imaginary conditions, with the author's order of severity based on subjects' responses.

TABLE 1
SEVERITY PROMPTS WITH ORIGINAL ORDER AND REVISED ORDER BASED ON SUBJECT RESPONSES

Severity Order	Subjects were instructed to "Imagine the following was true:"
1	Your coworker John spends time everyday doing personal things on company time. For example, he checks sports scores and shops on the Internet.
2	Your coworker John frequently takes home supplies from work. For example, pens, a stapler, copy paper, etc.
3	Your coworker John calls in sick when he is not ill to do personal things, like going fishing.
4	Your co-worker John travels as part of his job. Your company pays for travel related expenses that an employee incurs. However, Jack padded his expense report to include things that he did not buy as well as overstating the cost of things that he did buy.
5	Your co-worker John got in a heated argument with another employee from a different group. He threatened the employee and then shoved him out of his way.
6	Your coworker John stole a company laptop that contains sensitive employee information.
7	Your co-worker John likes Susan (who is one of John's employees) very much. Susan is not interested in John. John has asked her to go on a date several times and Susan has indicated to him that she is uncomfortable dating her boss. John tells Susan that he is thinking about giving a promotion to another of his employees, but if Susan will go out with him he will see that she gets the promotion.
8	Your coworker John embezzled a substantial sum of money from the company to build himself a new swimming pool.

Subjects were then asked, "If a coworker of yours did this behavior, rate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements." Subjects were then asked about their desire for retribution, attitude towards the violator and what they thought the appropriate punishment would be.

Variables

Severity was measured with a single item "Rate how serious you think this behavior is." Responses were measured using Likert scales ranging from "extremely mild" (1) to "extremely serious" (7).

The coworker's Desire for Retribution was measured using a three item measure consisting of two items developed by Neihoff, Paul & Bunch (1998), with a third item (question #3) that was added by Peterson (2012) in a previous study. Neihoff, et al. labeled this as "Retributive Justice" and they used the measure post punishment. Since it is used before any retribution for violations, the items more accurately reflect a pre-punishment scenario. Therefore, I chose to label it differently. The two-item measure had a coefficient Alpha of .91 in the Neihoff, et al. study. For the current study the modified measure had a coefficient Alpha of .90. Responses were measured using Likert scales ranging from "strongly agree" (1) to "strongly disagree" (7). The items were:

1) The actions of the worker should have been punished
2) The employee deserved to be disciplined
3) It would bother me if this person was not punished

Attitude Towards the Violator was measured using a three-item scale developed by Peterson (2012). The measure had a coefficient Alpha of .89. Responses were measured using Likert scales ranging from "strongly agree" (1) to "strongly disagree" (7). The items were:

1) If I were a coworker, I would be motivated to work with this person
2) This person is a valuable employee
3) If I were a coworker, I would be motivated to have this person on my team

The three questions were consolidated with simple averaging after confirming their relatedness with Cronbach's Alpha. All statistics were conducted using the consolidated measure.

Appropriate Punishment was measured with a single item: "the appropriate action would be:" with the following choices:

1) No punishment
2) Verbal Reprimand
3) Written Reprimand
4) Suspension Without Pay
5) Termination
6) Other (indicate in box below)

Results

Table 2 contains the descriptive statistics, reliabilities and correlations of the variables.

TABLE 2
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS, RELIABILITIES AND CORRELATIONS AMONG MEASURES

Variables	Mean	s.d.	1	2	3	4
1. Severity	5.25	1.63				
2. Punishment	5.52	1.36	.705**			
3. Attitude Towards Violator	2.49	1.19	-.659**	-.573**	(.89)	
4. Desire for Retribution	5.33	1.61	.802**	.688**	-.665**	(.90)

** Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
Reliabilities of the scales are bold and on the diagonal

Table 3 contains descriptive statistics for each of the conditions of severity. The mean for each condition indicates the subjects' perceived severity for each violation.

TABLE 3
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR SEVERITY

Condition	N	Mean	s.d.
1	52	3.08	1.47
2	54	3.98	1.73
3	54	4.59	1.13
4	55	5.27	1.16
5	53	5.98	0.77
6	55	6.05	1.06
7	57	6.30	0.89
8	63	6.49	0.86

Hypothesis 1 stated that a coworkers' desire for retribution is directly proportional to how serious the coworker assesses the violation to be. Table 4 shows the results of the regression of severity on desire for retribution by condition. For all eight conditions severity is significantly positively correlated with the desire for retribution.

TABLE 4
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS FOR SEVERITY TO DESIRE FOR RETRIBUTION BY CONDITION

Condition	Mean	s.d.	B	SE B	β	R^2
1	3.39	1.61	0.85	0.10	0.78	0.60**
2	4.40	1.55	0.70	0.08	0.78	0.61**
3	4.65	1.49	0.92	0.13	0.70	0.49**
4	5.47	1.22	0.76	0.10	0.72	0.52**
5	5.90	1.10	0.66	0.18	0.47	0.22**
6	5.98	1.19	0.58	0.12	0.60	0.36**
7	6.04	1.20	0.50	0.17	0.37	0.14**
8	6.56	0.75	0.70	0.12	0.60	0.36**

**Significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

Additionally, the means for desire for retribution for each of the eight conditions are in the same order as are the means for severity, which suggests that the relationship between severity and desire for punishment is uniform across the various levels of severity from mild to severe. However, this alone is not enough to support the argument that the slopes do not differ. To fully support hypothesis 1, not only do the means need to be in the proper order, the slopes of the conditions need to be the same. To test if the slopes of the regression lines are the same, I tested the null hypothesis H_0: $B_i=B_j$ where B_i is the regression coefficient of for one condition and B_j is the regression coefficient for another condition. This test needs to be conducted on all combinations of the eight conditions for a total of 28 tests.

To test this I created a dummy variable of condition*severity. I then ran a multiple regression on desire for retribution with condition, severity, and the condition*severity dummy for each combination of conditions. None of the 28 combinations had significant differences between the slopes of regression of severity on desire for retribution. Thus hypothesis 1 was fully supported. Table 5 lists the p-values for the combinations of severity and desire for retribution.

TABLE 5
P VALUES FOR TEST OF SLOPE DIFFERENCES FOR REGRESSION OF SEVERITY ON DESIRE FOR RETRIBUTION

Condition	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	**.85**							
2	0.23	**.70**						
3	0.67	0.14	**.92**					
4	0.51	0.66	0.33	**.76**				
5	0.36	0.85	0.25	0.63	**.66**			
6	0.27	0.86	0.18	0.60	0.96	**.68**		
7	0.07	0.27	0.05	0.18	0.51	0.40	**.50**	
8	0.39	0.98	0.27	0.72	0.88	0.91	0.38	**.70**

Diagonal represents slope of regression

Hypothesis 2 stated a coworkers' attitude towards the violator is directly inversely proportional to how serious the coworker assesses the violation to be. Table 6 shows the results of the regression of severity on

attitude towards the violator. Severity was significantly negatively correlated with attitude towards the violator across all eight of the severity conditions.

TABLE 6
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS FOR SEVERITY AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE VIOLATOR BY CONDITION

Condition	Mean	s.d.	B	SE B	β	R^2
1	3.35	1.12	-0.46	0.09	0.60	0.36**
2	3.33	1.20	-0.31	0.09	-0.45	0.20**
3	2.72	1.49	-0.35	0.12	-0.37	0.14**
4	2.56	0.90	-0.42	0.09	-0.54	0.29**
5	2.28	0.97	-0.57	0.16	-0.45	0.21**
6	2.41	1.25	-0.78	0.12	-0.67	0.45**
7	1.86	0.94	-0.75	0.10	-0.70	0.49**
8	1.60	0.72	-0.67	0.11	-0.60	0.37**

**Significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

The means that attitude towards the violator were also in the same order as severity with the exception of conditions five and six where the values were switched (six was more negative than five). Condition five involved a physical altercation and condition six involved sexual harassment, so while subjects found sexual harassment to be more serious than a physical altercation, they felt more negatively towards the employee who assaulted. Since the means for attitude towards the violator were not in the order as severity, it is likely that the slopes were not the same for all conditions. I repeated the slope tests described previously with attitude towards the violator as the dependent variable. Condition six (sexual harassment) and condition seven (laptop theft) had significantly steeper slopes than conditions one through four. In fact, the four most severe conditions had slopes greater than the four most mild conditions, but only six and seven were significantly different from the one through four. Thus, hypothesis 2 was not supported since although severity significantly predicts attitude towards the violator, the relationship across levels of severity is not strictly linear.

TABLE 7
P VALUES FOR TEST OF SLOPE DIFFERENCES FOR REGRESSION OF SEVERITY ON ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE VIOLATOR

Condition	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	**-.46**							
2	0.23	**-.31**						
3	0.44	0.81	**-.35**					
4	0.73	0.41	0.63	**-.42**				
5	0.54	0.18	0.27	0.38	**-.57**			
6	0.03*	0.01*	0.01*	0.01*	0.28	**-.79**		
7	0.04*	0.01*	0.02*	0.02*	0.33	0.82	**-.75**	
8	0.20	0.05*	0.08	0.10	0.61	0.52	0.62	**-.67**

*Significance level <.05
Diagonal represents slope of regression

Hypothesis 3 stated a coworker's assessment of what punishment is appropriate will be directly proportional to how serious the coworker assesses the violation to be. Table 8 shows the results of the regression of severity on appropriate punishment. Severity significantly predicted the punishment considered appropriate for all conditions except for condition five, with a p-value of .84.

TABLE 8
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS FOR SEVERITY AND PUNISHMENT BY CONDITION

Condition	Mean	s.d.	B	SE B	β	R^2
1	1.98	0.87	0.29	0.07	0.49	0.24**
2	2.65	1.12	0.26	0.08	0.41	0.17**
3	2.65	1.08	0.35	0.13	0.36	0.13**
4	3.53	1.10	0.59	0.10	0.62	0.39**
5	3.68	1.07	0.73	0.17	0.53	0.27**
6	3.96	1.14	0.51	0.13	0.48	0.23**
7	4.42	0.94	0.54	0.12	0.51	0.26**
8	4.95	0.53	0.42	0.09	0.52	0.27**

**Significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

The means appropriate punishment are in the same order as severity with condition two and three having the same mean. The slope of the regressions were all the same with the exception of condition four (expense padding) which had a higher slope than condition one (personal activities on company time) and condition two (taking home supplies). The slope of condition four was steeper than conditions one or two.

TABLE 9
P VALUES FOR TEST OF SLOPE DIFFERENCES FOR REGRESSION OF SEVERITY ON ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE VIOLATOR

Condition	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	**.29**							
2	.79	**.26**						
3	.70	.57	**.35**					
4	.02*	.02*	.13	**.59**				
5	.01*	.02*	.07	.46	**.73**			
6	.13	.11	.36	.63	.30	**.51**		
7	.08	.08	.28	.77	.36	.86	**.54**	
8	.34	.33	.67	.29	.11	.63	.47	**.42**

*Significance level <.05
Diagonal represents slope of regression

STUDY 2: VIOLATION SEVERITY AND PUNISHMENT SEVERITY

The purpose of Study 2 was to determine how observers react when a manager's punishment is too lenient, correctly appropriate, or too severe. When faced with a violation a manager has to decide what punishment to apply. The violator, the manager and observers all have an interest in how severe of a punishment is applied. However, each may have different judgments regarding the punishment. For

example, a violator would be happiest if a punishment was as mild as possible. A manager might not enjoy giving a severe punishment and would perhaps welcome a mild punishment, as well. Beyond those more well-known biases, observers may feel very different about what punishment should be applied.

Since observing a violation and punishment would not be generally unpleasant for the observer, it seems logical that from a justice perspective, observers would desire that the punishment be of similar intensity to the violation. If the punishment was too lenient or too severe, observers would be less satisfied with the incident. However, there is a question of whether mild, moderately severe and severe violations are perceived differently. For example, maybe with mild violations observers do not really mind if the punishment is too mild, but do not like it when it is too severe. And conversely, maybe they do not mind overly harsh punishment when there was a severe violation, but are very upset when it is too lenient. However, my own intuition is that people do not think about their reactions to punishments very deeply and that their assessment of a fair punishment is determined by how severe the violation was. Therefore, I propose:

H1: *An observer's desire for punishment and their attitude towards the violator are a direct result of the severity of the violation and are independent of the severity of the resulting punishment.*

I follow that rationale with another assumption that the severity of the punishment impacts an observer's feelings towards the manager assigning the punishment. More specifically, an observer will view the manager adversely if they deem the manager has applied a punishment that is not proportionate (too mild or severe) to the violation. Also, perceptions of justice should be affected by what punishment is applied. If an observer feels that the organization punishes unfairly, it is likely that they would consider leaving the organization. Combining that rationale with the previous logic I also propose:

H2: *Positive attitude towards the manager will be highest when the observer deems punishment appropriate as opposed to a punishment that is considered overly mild or severe; this relationship will be true regardless of the severity of the violation.*

H3: *Perceptions of justice will be highest when the observer deems the punishment is appropriate as opposed to a punishment that is considered overly mild or severe; this relationship will be true regardless of the severity of the violation.*

H4: *Intentions to leave an organization will be lowest when the observer deems the punishment is appropriate as opposed to a punishment that is considered overly mild or severe; this relationship will be true regardless of the severity of the violation.*

Methods

Sample

Subjects for study 2 were also recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk system. Subjects were given a small monetary sum for completing a five-minute survey about employee attitudes. 397 subjects completed the survey. 64% were male and the average age was 27.41. In terms of ethnicity, 78.6% were White, 9.8% were Asian, 4.5% were Hispanic or Latino, 4% were Black or African American, 2.3% were Multi-ethnic, .5% were Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and .3% were some other race. I also collected data on education level and income to control for their effects. Ethnicity, age, education and income did not have any significant affect on the variables. However, gender was significant on two of the variables.

Procedure

Subjects were directed to the survey website where they were assigned to one of nine conditions made up of combinations of violation severity and punishment severity. Based on the Study 1 results, I selected prompts representing three levels of violation severity (mild, moderate and severe) and chose three punishments for each violation that represented a mild, appropriate and severe punishment for that specific

violation, again based on responses from Study 1. Table 10 contains the prompts for each of the nine conditions.

TABLE 10
PROMPTS FOR STUDY 2

Condition	Prompt
1	Imagine the following was true: Your coworker John spends time everyday doing personal things on company time. For example, he checks sports scores and shops on the Internet. In response, your manager does nothing.
2	Imagine the following was true: Your coworker John spends time everyday doing personal things on company time. For example he checks sports scores and shops on the Internet. In response, your manager gives him a written warning.
3	Imagine the following was true: Your coworker John spends time everyday doing personal things on company time. For example he checks sports scores and shops on the Internet. In response, your manager terminates him.
4	Imagine the following was true: You have a coworker named John who travels as part of his job. Your company pays for travel related expenses that an employee incurs. However, John padded his expense report to include things that he did not buy as well as overstating the cost of things that he did buy. In response, your manager gives him a verbal warning.
5	Imagine the following was true: You have a coworker named John who travels as part of his job. Your company pays for travel related expenses that an employee incurs. However, John padded his expense report to include things that he did not buy as well as overstating the cost of things that he did buy. In response, your manager gives him a suspension without pay.
6	Imagine the following was true: You have a coworker named John who travels as part of his job. Your company pays for travel related expenses that an employee incurs. However, John padded his expense report to include things that he did not buy as well as overstating the cost of things that he did buy. In response, your manager terminates him.
7	Imagine the following was true: You have a coworker named John who embezzled a substantial sum of money from the company to build himself a new swimming pool. In response, your manager gives him a written warning.
8	Imagine the following was true: You have a coworker named John who embezzled a substantial sum of money from the company to build himself a new swimming pool. In response, your manager terminates him.
9	Imagine the following was true: You have a coworker named John who embezzled a substantial sum of money from the company to build himself a new swimming pool. In response, your manager terminates him and has him arrested in front of his coworkers.

Subjects were shown one of the nine prompts and then asked how they felt about this situation. They were then asked to answer some questions about those feelings. Finally, they were presented with questions about their desire that the violator be punished, their attitude about the violator, their attitude about the manager, their perceptions of justice and any possible intentions to leave the organization. Each subject received only one prompt.

Variables

Severity was manipulated by presenting scenarios from study 1 designed to represent mild (condition 1, doing personal activities at work), moderate (condition 4, expense padding) and severe (condition 8, embezzlement) violations. Punishment was manipulated by choosing punishments from study 1 that represented mild, appropriate and severe punishments. For example, for the mild violation (doing personal things on work time): no punishment is the mild option, a written warning is the appropriate option and termination is severe. Desire for Retribution and Attitude Towards the Violator were measured using the same measures as study 1. Alphas for these measures were .82 and .89 respectively.

Attitude Towards the Manager was measured using a four item scale originally developed by Neihoff, Paul & Bunch (1998). In that study, this measure had a coefficient Alpha of .88. For this study the measure had a coefficient Alpha of .96. Responses were measured using Likert scales ranging from "strongly agree" (1) to "strongly disagree" (7). The items were:

1) The manager's actions demonstrated highly effective supervision skills
2) I respect the manager for his actions
3) If I were a coworker, I would feel that the manager did the right thing
4) If I were a coworker, I would be motivated to work for this manager

The four questions were consolidated with simple averaging after confirming their relatedness with Cronbach's Alpha. All statistics were conducted using the consolidated measure.

Justice Perceptions were measured using a three-item measure developed by Neihoff, Paul & Bunch (Niehoff et al.). In that study, this measure had a coefficient Alpha of .87. For this study, the measure had a coefficient Alpha of .96. Responses were measured using Likert scales ranging from `strongly agree' (1) to `strongly disagree' (7). The items were:

1) The employee was treated fairly by the supervisor
2) If I were a coworker, I would feel the discipline was fair
3) The discipline was fair based on the behavior of the employee

The three questions were consolidated with simple averaging after confirming their relatedness with Cronbach's Alpha. All statistics were conducted using the consolidated measure.

Intention to leave was measured using a modified version of a three-item measure developed by Adams & Beehr (1998). In that study, this measure had a coefficient Alpha of .88. For the current study the measure had a coefficient Alpha of .93. Responses were measured using Likert scales ranging from "strongly agree" (1) to "strongly disagree" (7). The items were:

1) If I were working in this group, I would be planning to leave my job for another in the near future
2) If I were working for this manager, I would often think of quitting this job and finding another
3) If I were working with this person, I would like to quit this job and find another in the near future

The three questions were consolidated with simple averaging after confirming their relatedness with Cronbach's Alpha. All statistics were conducted using the consolidated measure.

Results

Hypothesis 1 stated that desire for punishment and attitude towards the violator are a direct result of the severity of the violation, i.e. they will be independent of the severity of the punishment. To test this hypothesis, I conducted two separate one-way ANOVAs for both desire for punishment and attitude towards the violator. Since I am comparing three levels of violation severity or punishment severity, I used Tukey's HSD to reduce the likelihood of type 1 errors.

First, to test for differences caused by the severity of the violation, I created a dummy variable representing the conditions in which the violation was either mild, moderate or severe (i.e. 123; 456, 789) and used this as the factor. Desire for punishment was significant for all three combinations as was attitude towards the violator. Table 11 contains the means, differences and p-values for desire for punishment and attitude towards the violator.

TABLE 11
MEANS, MEAN DIFFERENCE AND SIGNIFICANCE FOR DESIRE FOR PUNISHMENT AND ATTITUDE TOWARD THE VIOLATOR BY SEVERITY OF THE VIOLATION

Dependent Variable	(I) Severity	(I) Mean	(J) Severity	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.
Desire for Punishment	Mild	4.58	Moderate	-1.47154*	0.00
			Severe	-1.79318*	0.00
	Moderate	6.04	Mild	1.47154*	0.00
			Severe	-.32164*	0.03
	Severe	6.37	Mild	1.79318*	0.00
			Moderate	.32164*	0.03
Attitude Toward the Violator	Mild	1.70	Moderate	.55495*	0.00
			Severe	1.31286*	0.00
	Moderate	2.46	Mild	-.55495*	0.00
			Severe	.75791*	0.00
	Severe	3.02	Mild	-1.31286*	0.00
			Moderate	-.75791*	0.00

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Secondly, I created a dummy variable representing the conditions in which the punishment was either mild, appropriate or severe (i.e. 147, 258, 369) and used this as the factor. Neither desire for punishment nor attitude towards the violator were significant between the conditions. Table 12 contains the means, differences and p-values for desire for punishment and attitude towards the violator. Based on the combined results of these two tests, hypothesis 1 was fully supported.

TABLE 12
MEANS, MEAN DIFFERENCE AND SIGNIFICANCE FOR DESIRE FOR PUNISHMENT AND ATTITUDE TOWARD THE VIOLATOR BY SEVERITY OF THE PUNISHMENT

Dependent Variable	(I) Severity	(I) Mean	(J) Severity	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.
Desire for Punishment	Mild	5.59	Appropriate	-0.0398	0.97
			Severe	-0.19012	0.46
	Appropriate	5.63	Mild	0.0398	0.97
			Severe	-0.15033	0.61
	Severe	5.78	Mild	0.19012	0.46
			Appropriate	0.15033	0.61
Attitude Toward the Violator	Mild	2.48	Appropriate	0.04521	0.94
			Severe	0.22487	0.23
	Appropriate	2.44	Mild	-0.04521	0.94
			Severe	0.17966	0.39
	Severe	2.26	Mild	-0.22487	0.23
			Appropriate	-0.17966	0.39

Hypothesis 2 stated that positive attitude towards the manager will be highest when the punishment is appropriate as opposed to too mild or too severe and this relationship will be true regardless of the severity of the violation. To test this, I ran a series of three one-way ANOVAs: one for mild violations, one for

moderate violations and one for severe violations. Again, I used Tukey's HSD for post hoc comparison. In each instance, I used severity of the punishment as the factor on attitude towards the manager. For each of the punishment severity conditions, mild violations resulted in significantly lower appraisals of the manager's competency while there were not significant differences between the appropriate and severe punishments across all three violation severity levels. Table 13 contains the means, mean differences and p-values for attitude towards the manager for the various combinations of violation severity and punishment severity.

TABLE 13
MEANS, MEAN DIFFERENCE AND SIGNIFICANCE FOR ATTITUDE TOWARD THE MANAGER BY SEVERITY OF VIOLATION AND SEVERITY OF THE PUNISHMENT

Violation Severity	(I) Punishment Severity	(I) Mean	(J) Punishment Severity	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.
Mild	Mild	3.10	Appropriate	-1.70000*	0.00
			Severe	-1.09643*	0.00
	Appropriate	4.80	Mild	1.70000*	0.00
			Severe	0.60357	0.15
	Severe	4.20	Mild	1.09643*	0.00
			Appropriate	-0.60357	0.15
Moderate	Mild	4.19	Appropriate	-1.50978*	0.00
			Severe	-1.61211*	0.00
	Appropriate	5.70	Mild	1.50978*	0.00
			Severe	-0.10233	0.91
	Severe	5.80	Mild	1.61211*	0.00
			Appropriate	0.10233	0.91
Severe	Mild	2.19	Appropriate	-3.63834*	0.00
			Severe	-3.28243*	0.00
	Appropriate	5.83	Mild	3.63834*	0.00
			Severe	0.35591	0.45
	Severe	5.48	Mild	3.28243*	0.00
			Appropriate	-0.35591	0.45

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Hypothesis 3 stated that justice perceptions will be highest when the punishment is appropriate as opposed to mild or severe, and this relationship will be true regardless of the severity of the violation. To test this, I used the same procedure as described for hypothesis 2 with justice as the dependent variable. Findings here were somewhat more complicated. For mild and severe violations, the hypothesized relationship was present. However, the severe condition for moderate violations resulted in a slightly higher perception of justice, although not statistically significant. And for the severe violation, while the means were in the proposed order, again, the severe punishment, while lower than the appropriate punishment, was not statistically significant. Therefore, hypothesis 3 was partially supported, with mild violations fully supported, severe violations following the pattern, but not quite significant and moderate violations showing a different pattern. Table 14 contains the means, mean differences and p-values for justice perceptions for the various combinations of violation severity and punishment severity.

TABLE 14
MEANS, MEAN DIFFERENCE AND SIGNIFICANCE FOR JUSTICE PERCEPTIONS BY SEVERITY OF VIOLATION AND SEVERITY OF THE PUNISHMENT

Violation Severity	(I) Punishment Severity	(I) Mean	(J) Punishment Severity	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.
Mild	Mild	3.35	Appropriate	-1.58519*	0.00
			Severe	-0.54074	0.25
	Appropriate	4.93	Mild	1.58519*	0.00
			Severe	1.04444*	0.01
	Severe	3.89	Mild	0.54074	0.25
			Appropriate	-1.04444*	0.01
Moderate	Mild	4.21	Appropriate	-1.57504*	0.00
			Severe	-1.68908*	0.00
	Appropriate	5.79	Mild	1.57504*	0.00
			Severe	-0.11404	0.90
	Severe	5.90	Mild	1.68908*	0.00
			Appropriate	0.11404	0.90
Severe	Mild	1.92	Appropriate	-4.35837*	0.00
			Severe	-3.66925*	0.00
	Appropriate	6.28	Mild	4.35837*	0.00
			Severe	0.68911*	0.02
	Severe	5.59	Mild	3.66925*	0.00
			Appropriate	-0.68911*	0.02

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Hypothesis 4 stated that intentions to leave will be lowest when the punishment is appropriate as opposed to mild or severe and this relationship will be true regardless of the severity of the violation. To test this hypothesis I used the same procedures as outlined for hypotheses 2 and 3. Again, a more complicated relationship than what was proposed occurred. For mild violations, the proposed pattern was present, but the mild condition was not quite significantly different than the appropriate condition. The severe punishment for the moderate violation resulted in the lowest intentions to leave, significantly lower than the mild or the appropriate punishments. For the severe violation, I found the proposed pattern, but the difference between the appropriate punishment and the severe punishment was not significant. Therefore, hypothesis 4 was not supported, although some evidence of the proposed pattern was present. Table 15 contains the means, mean differences and p-values for intention to leave for the various combinations of violation severity and punishment severity.

TABLE 15
MEANS, MEAN DIFFERENCE AND SIGNIFICANCE FOR INTENTION TO LEAVE BY SEVERITY OF VIOLATION AND SEVERITY OF THE PUNISHMENT

Violation Severity	(I) Punishment Severity	(I) Mean	(J) Punishment Severity	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.
Mild	Mild	3.49	Appropriate	.65926	0.09
			Severe	-.20159	0.80
	Appropriate	2.83	Mild	-.65926	0.09
			Severe	-.86085*	0.02
	Severe	3.69	Mild	.20159	0.80
			Appropriate	.86085*	0.02
Moderate	Mild	3.59	Appropriate	.44605	0.22
			Severe	1.10583*	0.00
	Appropriate	3.15	Mild	-.44605	0.22
			Severe	.65978*	0.04
	Severe	2.49	Mild	-1.10583*	0.00
			Appropriate	-.65978*	0.04
Severe	Mild	5.17	Appropriate	2.35507*	0.00
			Severe	2.09350*	0.00
	Appropriate	2.81	Mild	-2.35507*	0.00
			Severe	-.26158	0.02
	Severe	3.07	Mild	-2.09350*	0.00
			Appropriate	.26158	0.02

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

DISCUSSION

Looking at these two studies in tandem, we can see several things. First, there seems to be sufficient agreement among observers about how serious various violations are, but some variability still exists. These findings suggests that we generally agree about which violations are more severe than others, but we may disagree about the absolute level of seriousness. There also seems to be a very straight and simple relationship between the severity of the violation and the related assessments by observers. Their desire for retribution was directly proportional to how serious they thought the violation was. Likewise, their attitude towards the violator was directly inversely proportional to the seriousness of the violation. And the punishments that they felt were appropriate were similarly in direct proportion to how serious the violation was. Study 1 produced exactly the results that I assumed it would.

However, study 2 had much more interesting findings. First, as hypothesized, the manager's choice of punishment did not have any effect on how much observers wanted retribution against the violator. The first surprise was that observers were much more sensitive to being too mild than they were to being too severe. I did find that the severity of the violation did not affect this relationship, i.e. being too mild was seen as worse than being appropriate or too severe regardless of how severe the violation was.

This has interesting implications for a manager. While a mild punishment might be the most ideal in the violator's estimation and easiest on the manager, observers deem this punishment the worst managers can choose. Managers should consider that what is the most tempting choice in a punishment episode may have severe consequences when considering observers' reactions.

While perceptions of justice had a relationship that was closer to what was hypothesized, it appears that this relationship is much more complicated, as well. Logically, the hypothesis should have been proven, as the variables are linearly related, however, in practice, it behaves differently. This suggests that people use a different mechanism to determine if justice has been done. Observers' intentions to leave is an even more complicated relationship, where the severity of the punishment may impact some observers and not others. This should not be a surprise as staying or leaving a job is a very complicated decision and is based on many criteria.

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