

# The Functional Relation Between Social Inequality, Criminal Stereotypes, and Public Attitudes Toward Punishment of Crime

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The public's "appetite" for punishment of crime has led some to compare support for harsh criminal justice policies to a practice of excess, much like craving ice cream. But what drives this appetite for punishment? This study investigates the functional relation between social structural factors of competition and social status, the endorsement of criminal stereotypes, and affective, behavioral and punitive responses to criminals. Results suggest, first, that perceiving criminals as competing against society for resources and power and as having a low social status (e.g., in terms of economic and educational attainment) is associated with perceiving criminals as being cold and untrustworthy, but somewhat competent and efficient. These perceptions are associated with feeling more anger and uneasiness, and less compassion toward criminals. Finally, feeling angry toward criminals is associated with supporting harsh criminal justice policies (e.g., giving law breakers stiffer sentences). The findings suggest that perceptions related to increasing social inequality could engender shifts in the endorsement of criminal stereotypes that are associated with public punitiveness.

**Keywords:** punitiveness, stereotype content model, United Kingdom, structural equation modeling

While punishment of crime is, for all intents and purposes, qualitatively milder than it was only a few hundred years ago (Foucault, 1977), the latter half of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century has seen the introduction of increasingly harsh criminal justice policies in countries such as the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. This punitive trend is evidenced most visibly in growing prison populations (Walmsley, 2013): In the United States, the prison population has risen sixfold in a quarter of a century, with estimates of the prison population in the early 2000s ranging from 1.2 million to 2 million (Cullen, Fisher, & Applegate, 2000; Donohue, 2007). In the United Kingdom, the prison population reached its capacity of 80,000 by 2006 (King, 2008) and grew to over 94,000 by 2013 (Walmsley, 2013). Though prison populations have remained relatively stable in Canada, the country has seen the introduction of increasingly harsh penal policies (e.g., increasing minimum sentences; Webster & Doob, 2015).

Some evidence suggests that this long-term increase in punitiveness is partly the result of public attitudes that supported and pushed for harsher criminal justice policies (Enns, 2014). There is some indication that U.S. punitive attitudes increased steadily from the 1970s until the late 1990s (Enns, 2014). Since the early 2000s, there is a noted dip in public punitiveness (Enns, 2014; Ramirez,

2013) although the proportion of people calling for harsher punishment remains relatively high (e.g., in the 2014 General Social Survey, 57% believed the courts were not harsh enough in dealing with criminals). Although longitudinal analyses for a comparable period are not available for the U.K., sustained widespread dissatisfaction with the severity of sentencing has been noted in Britain over the past decades (Hough & Roberts, 2005). In Britain, public punitiveness has remained relatively high from the mid-1990s until 2010 (e.g., in 1996 around 79% of the British public held the view that sentences were too lenient, in 2010 this proportion was at 74%; Hough, Bradford, Jackson, & Roberts, 2013). In 2010, the U.K. was among the European countries with the highest levels of public punitiveness (Sato & Hough, 2013).

The hypothesis that increasing crime rates are driving public punitiveness is only partly supported. First, crime rates have been decreasing in much of the western world for the past 20 years (Rosenfeld & Messner, 2009; Zimring, 2006). Second, although some evidence suggests an association between the crime rate and public punitiveness, this association appears to be modest at best (Nicholson-Crotty, Peterson, & Ramirez, 2009; Ousey & Unnever, 2012; Ramirez, 2013). Alternatively, it is possible that the public demand for more punitiveness is due to a perceived failing of the courts to be sufficiently punitive. But the evidence in favor of this hypothesis is also weak. For instance, Canadians living in provinces that punish more harshly (e.g., in terms of total prison sentences, and prison sentence lengths) are no more confident in the criminal justice system than those living in less punitive provinces (Sprott, Webster, & Doob, 2013).

An additional hypothesis could be that public punitiveness reflects individuals' emotional responses to crime. Punitiveness is associated with strong negative affective responses to crime, such as anger, and experiencing fewer positive emotions toward criminals, such as sympathy (Gault & Sabini, 2000; Johnson, 2009; Xiao & Houser, 2005). But what could be contributing to sustained

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strong negative emotional responses and punitiveness toward crime? One hypothesis is that affective responses to crime are associated with criminal stereotypes or the increased salience of these stereotypes. The endorsement of specific criminal stereotypes has been linked to increased negative emotional and punitive responses toward criminals. For instance, endorsing stereotypes about Black criminals has been associated with experiencing emotional discomfort (Dixon & Maddox, 2005), demonstrating aggressive behavior (Correll, Park, Judd, & Wittenbrink, 2007) and more punitive responses (Graham & Lowery, 2004). In North America and Europe, punitiveness—in terms of support for harsh criminal justice policies, and support for the death penalty in particular—is robustly associated with what is commonly referred to as racial animus (i.e., a general hostility toward racial minority groups, such as Black and Hispanic people; Ousey & Unnever, 2012; Unnever & Cullen, 2010).

Endorsing stereotypes about criminals more broadly (e.g., about their evil and callous nature) is also associated with making more punitive decisions and expressing more punitive attitudes (Correll et al., 2007; Dixon & Maddox, 2005; Gordon & Anderson, 1995; Graham & Lowery, 2004; Hurwitz & Peffley, 1997; Johnson, 2009; Roberts, 1992). For example, believing that “most criminals commit crimes because they are basically selfish people, unconcerned about the feelings of other people” is associated with endorsing statements such as “criminals should be punished to make the criminals suffer, as the victims of the crimes suffered” (Tam, Leung, & Chiu, 2008, pp. 80, 85). However, research has yet to provide a theoretical framework linking the endorsement of criminal stereotypes to functional emotional responses (i.e., affective responses systematically linked to specific behavioral responses) that engender punitiveness, a type of aggressive behavioral response (Carlsmith & Darley, 2008).

### The Stereotype Content Model and Behavior from Intergroup Affect and Stereotypes Map

According to the stereotype content model (SCM; Cuddy et al., 2009; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002) and behavior from intergroup affect and stereotypes (BIAS) map (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007), social perceptions of others generate appraisals and interpersonal comparisons that engender corresponding changes in emotional responses that motivate functionally related social behaviors (Frijda, 2010; Roseman, Wiest, & Swartz, 1994), as shown in Figure 1. These perceptions, which form the content of social stereotypes, reflect two fundamental dimensions: perceived warmth (i.e., kind, trustworthy, understanding) and perceived competence (i.e., intelligent, efficient, skillful) (Abele, Uchrowski, Suitner, & Wojciszke, 2008; Cuddy et al., 2009; Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007; Judd, James-Hawkins, Yzerbyt, & Kashima, 2005; Wiggins, 1979; Wojciszke & Abele, 2008). Harboring stereotypes about groups' warmth and competence is beneficial in that these perceptions provide a snapshot of what others' intentions are and how capable they are of carrying out those intentions, respectively. Experiencing related emotional responses may also be beneficial, in terms of informing attitudes and judgments, particularly those occurring relatively automatically or at an “intuitive” level (Adolphs, 2009; Haidt, 2001).

Widely endorsed group stereotypes are not arrived at haphazardly, rather they are inferred from perceived social structural factors of competition and social status (Caprariello, Cuddy, &

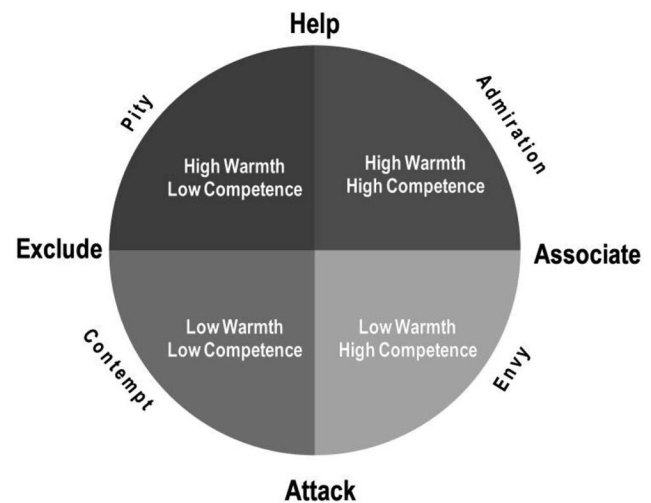


Figure 1. Quadrants of social perception, emotional, and behavioral responses according to the SCM and BIAS map, adapted from Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick (2007). Labels in each quadrant reflect different combinations of perceptions of warmth and competence, resulting in four general stereotypes. Outer labels in smaller font represent emotional responses most likely to be elicited by each stereotype. Labels at each axiom in larger font represent behavioral responses most likely to result from adjoining emotional responses.

Fiske, 2009). Groups perceived as competing against society (e.g., for power, resources and advantages) are inferred as being less warm and trustworthy, while groups perceived as being highly successful (e.g., economically, or in terms of occupational prestige and educational attainments) are inferred as being more competent. Low status groups who are subject to contemptuous prejudice or who are excluded may also elicit a perceived lack of warmth in order to justify their poor or otherwise unjust treatment (Oldmeadow & Fiske, 2007). These frameworks therefore suggest that variation in actual or perceived social structural factors of competitiveness and social status should generate shifts in general criminal stereotypes, and related emotional and behavioral outcomes. The frameworks also suggest potential variation within criminal stereotypes (e.g., stereotypes about low-status criminals vs. powerful white-collar criminals).

These theoretical frameworks were developed to provide a unifying and pragmatic view of social stereotypes and prejudice that “emphasizes systematic processes over seemingly arbitrary [stereotype] contents” (Fiske et al., 2002, p. 878). To date, much of the research applying the SCM and BIAS map has aimed at distinguishing between stereotypes about various social groups (e.g., elderly, students, middle class, homeless, Muslims), (Cuddy et al., 2009), and at improving understanding of various forms of prejudice and discrimination (e.g., ambivalent sexism, anti-immigrant biases, ageism, classism) (Fiske, 2012). These models have also been used to help explain support for social policies geared toward outgroups (e.g., immigration policies; Reyna, Dobria, & Wetherell, 2013). In the context of crime, these frameworks have been applied to better understand perceptions of victims of crime (Wrede, Ask, & Strömwall, 2015), variation in the stereotype content of guilty and wrongfully convicted individuals (Clow & Leach, 2015; Thompson, Molina, & Levett, 2012), and to distinguish between racialized

stereotypes of African Americans in criminal contexts (Hall, Phillips, & Townsend, 2015). Still, no study has considered the association between social structure, criminal stereotypes, and corresponding emotional, behavioral and punitive outcomes.

### Current Study

This research addresses an important gap in the literature by testing the central hypothesis that variance in the endorsement of criminal stereotypes is associated with variation in corresponding emotional, behavioral, and punitive responses. Though the study does not investigate longitudinal changes in perceptions and responses to crime, it aims to provide compelling evidence of a functional relation between perceiving criminals in stereotypical ways and supporting more punitive responses to law breakers.

This research therefore makes two distinct contributions to the study of public punitiveness. First, although previous studies have linked certain aspects of criminal stereotypes (e.g., linking race to crime) to punitiveness, this is the first study to empirically test a unifying theoretical framework addressing the social structural origins and related functions of criminal stereotypes. According to the SCM, criminals are likely to be perceived as competing against society (e.g., given that they have, by definition, broken at least one law and that political discourse conceptualizes criminals as competing against victims in a zero sum sense; Zimring, 2001). The prevailing stereotype that criminals are typically poor and uneducated (Chapman, 2013; Emsley, 1996; MacLin & Herrera, 2006; Roberts, 1992) suggests that criminals are also likely to be perceived as having a low social status. Variation in such perceptions should be associated with corresponding variance in inferences of criminals' warmth and competence.

Second, the study expands on the SCM and BIAS map by testing whether broad social factors, such as the perceived social structure, can come to directly and indirectly shape punitive attitudes. According to the BIAS map, variation in perceptions of criminals' warmth and competence should be associated with specific emotional and behavioral outcomes. Though the BIAS map does not make specific predictions regarding punitive attitudes toward criminals, the four possible combinations of criminal stereotype content: high warmth—high competence (HW-HC), high warmth—low competence (HW-LC), low warmth—high competence (LW-HC) and low

warmth—low competence (LW-LC)—and their expected emotional, behavioral, and punitive outcomes are summarized in Table 1.

In light of evidence suggesting that angry affective responses toward criminals are strongly associated with punitiveness (Johnson, 2009), punitiveness is most likely to be associated with LW-LC criminal stereotypes, corresponding emotions of contempt, and desires to attack criminals (a form of active harm; Cuddy et al., 2007). Anger is an emotion typically elicited in response to indignation and behavior thought to be illegitimate and competitive in a zero sum sense (Fiske et al., 2002). Emotions related to contempt and anger are disgust and resentment, which have moral overtones and contribute to the formation of moral judgment (Haidt, 2001). Desires to attack and exclude criminals should also be associated with more punitive attitudes, given that punitiveness can be seen as a form of aggression (e.g., as revenge or retaliation; Carlsmith, Wilson, & Gilbert, 2008) and the exclusionary consequences of punishment (Pettit & Western, 2004).

A parasitic view of criminals (i.e., as LW-HC or "free riders") may also elicit ambivalent emotions of envy, which can result not only in admiration but also in resentment, feelings of injustice (in outcomes), anger, and desires to exclude criminals (Fiske et al., 2002). Though less likely, viewing criminals in a positive light (i.e., as HW-HC or HW-LC) may elicit positive emotions such as admiration and pride, or ambivalent emotions such as pity, which can also elicit paternalism and the justification of subordination, especially toward outgroups (Fiske et al., 2002).

The following study uses structural equation modeling (SEM) to simultaneously test the hypothesized direct and indirect associations between perceived social structural determinants, endorsed criminal stereotypes, and individuals' emotional, behavioral and punitive responses toward criminals. The model also adjusts for political ideology and individual differences (e.g., race), which have been shown to correlate with public punitiveness in prior research (e.g., politically conservative individuals tend to be more punitive; Carroll, Perkowitz, Lurigio, & Weaver, 1987; Cochran & Chamlin, 2006; King, 2008).

Table 1  
*Hypothesized Pathways Linking the SCM and BIAS Map to Punitiveness*

Social structure	Social stereotype	Emotion	Behavior	Punitiveness
+ Status – Competition	+ Competence + Warmth (HW-HC)	+ Admiration	+ Help + Associate	– Punitiveness
+ Status + Competition	+ Competence – Warmth (LW-HC)	+ Envy	+ Associate + Attack	± Punitiveness
– Status – Competition	– Competence + Warmth (HW-LC)	+ Pity	+ Help + Exclude	± Punitiveness
– Status + Competition	– Competence – Warmth (LW-LC)	+ Contempt	+ Exclude + Attack	+ Punitiveness

Note. + = greater; – = less; ± = uncertain association.



## Method

### Participants and Procedure

Participants ( $N = 172$ ) were London (U.K.) university students who filled out a survey at a booth (in 2009–2010) located on campus for the chance to win one of several cash prizes ranging from £25 (\$35 USD) to £200 (\$300 USD) and/or a £2.50 (\$3.50 USD) voucher for university catering services (depending on the university). All students who walked by the booth and volunteered to participate were eligible to complete the paper questionnaire. Participants first completed a section on more general criminal stereotypes before completing the SCM and BIAS map measures, and lastly answered questions about themselves. Participants provided written informed consent. This study was approved by the London School of Economics and Political Science Research Ethics Committee.

### Measures

All measures for the SCM and BIAS map were adapted from Fiske et al. (2002) and Cuddy et al. (2007, 2009). Following the methodology established by Fiske and colleagues, projective questions were used to measure criminal stereotypes and responses to these stereotypes. Participants were told that “we [were] interested in how society views criminals as a group. We [were] not interested in [their] personal beliefs, but in how [they] think criminals are viewed by people in society.” These projective questions are designed to minimize social desirability effects and to tap into cultural stereotypes (Fiske et al., 2002).

**Competitiveness and social status.** Criminals’ perceived competitiveness was measured based on three items: “if resources go to members of this group, to what extent does that take resources away from the rest of society?” (1 = *Not at all*, 7 = *To a great extent*), “if members of this group get special breaks (such as preference in hiring decisions), how much does this make things more difficult for the rest of society?”, and “the more power members of this group have, how likely is it that the rest of society will have less power?” (1 = *Not at all [difficult or likely]*, 7 = *Extremely [difficult or likely]*). Criminals’ perceived social status was measured based on the three following statements: “how prestigious are the jobs typically achieved by members of this group?”, “how economically successful have members of this group been?”, and “how well-educated are members of this group?” (1 = *Not at all [prestigious or successful or educated]*, 7 = *Extremely [prestigious or successful or educated]*).

The measures of perceived competitiveness and social status may, at first glance, appear counterintuitive in the context of studying criminal stereotypes. For instance, the idea that criminals would ever receive “special breaks” may appear unlikely. But such a view of criminals as receiving special breaks is embodied, for instance, in the “club fed” stereotype about prisons, whereby efforts are at times made to reduce the seeming “special perks” received by prison inmates (e.g., weight-training facilities, in-cell televisions, access to movies; Tepperman, 2014). Making use of generalized measures of perceived competitiveness and social status therefore allows for a “catch-all” approach to studying the structural determinants of these stereotypes, and is also essential to provide a point of comparison for stereotypes about various social groups.

A confirmatory factor analysis suggested a good fit for dimensions of competitiveness and social status,  $\chi^2(8, N = 172) = 7.8$ ,  $p > .05$ ,  $\chi^2/df = .97$ , comparative fit index (CFI) = 1, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)  $\leq .001$ . Each item loaded highly and statistically significantly on its respective factor ( $ps \leq .001$ ) and did not cross load. Competitiveness and status did not correlate significantly. For the sake of parsimony, mean perceived competitiveness and social status were used in the SEM.

**Competence and warmth.** Criminals were rated on five competence (i.e., competent, skilful, efficient, intelligent, goal-oriented) and five warmth (i.e., warm, nice, well-intentioned, trustworthy, good-natured) traits on a scale of 1 (*Not at all*) to 7 (*Extremely*). A confirmatory factor analysis suggested a good fit for the two dimensions of warmth and competence,  $\chi^2(21, N = 172) = 45.31$ ,  $p \leq .01$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.16$ , CFI = .97, RMSEA = .08, with each item loading highly and statistically significantly on its respective factor ( $ps \leq .001$ ) and not cross loading. Warmth and competence correlated positively,  $r = .57$ ,  $p \leq .001$ . Each item was treated as an observed indicator of unobserved latent variables reflecting perceived warmth and competence in the SEM.

**Emotional responses.** Participants were asked to rate the extent to which society feels 24 emotional responses toward criminals as a social group on a scale of 1 (*Not at all*) to 7 (*Extremely*). All emotional responses as presented in Table 2. Reliability analyses suggested that emotional responses specified by the SCM, that is, envy (e.g., envious, jealous,  $a = .75$ ), admiration (e.g., respectful, proud, admiring, inspired, fond,  $a = .74$ ) and contempt (e.g., frustrated, hateful, disgusted, angry, uneasy, resentful, contemptuous, ashamed,  $a = .72$ ), were adequate, except for pity (e.g., pitying, sympathetic, compassionate,  $a = .45$ ). However, exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses,  $\chi^2(53, N = 172) = 111.69$ ,  $p \leq .001$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.11$ , CFI = .93, RMSEA = .08, suggested a somewhat different typology of emotional responses to criminals than that specified by the SCM. The analysis identified four distinct emotional responses to criminals: anger, uneasiness, envy, and compassion. The first two factors split the negative emotion of contempt into emotions suggesting anger (e.g., angry, disgusted, hateful) and a weaker and more diffuse emotion suggesting uneasiness (e.g., uneasy, tense, anxious, fearful). The third factor of envy was a mixture of envy and admiration (e.g., envious, jealous, admiring, inspired), and the last factor compassion was a mixture of pity and admiration (e.g., compassionate, fond, secure). All items loaded on their respective factors statistically significantly ( $p$ 's  $\leq 0.01$ ).<sup>1,2</sup> Latent variables representing these four emotional responses were estimated in the SEM.

**Behavioral responses.** Participants rated the extent to which society is likely to demonstrate 4 behavioral response types toward criminals as a social group on a scale of 1 (*Not at all likely*) to 7 (*Very likely*). Each behavior type was measured by two separate items, and the mean of these items was used in the SEM.

<sup>1</sup> Emotions “disappointed,” “proud,” and “resentful” loaded poorly on factors and were dropped from the analysis.

<sup>2</sup> Certain emotions loaded significantly on more than one factor: “fearful” loaded significantly on uneasy and angry; “uneasy” loaded significantly and positively on uneasy, but negatively on envy; “admiring” and “inspired” loaded significantly on compassion but also on envy. These cross-loadings suggest that envy was associated with positive evaluations and partly explains the correlation between envy and compassion.

Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics for Perceived Social Structure, Stereotype Dimensions, Emotional, and Behavioral Responses*

	Mean	(SD)	Difference ( <i>t</i> ) test
Social structure			$t(171) = 18.93, p \leq .001$
Competitiveness	4.95	(1.27)	
Status	2.64	(1.02)	
Stereotype dimensions			$t(171) = 19.11, p \leq .001$
Competence	3.46	(1.18)	
Warmth	1.79	(.81)	
Emotional responses			
Angry (A)	5.87	(1.30)	
Fearful (A, U)	5.69	(1.45)	
Uneasy (U)	5.60	(1.42)	
Disgusted (A)	5.53	(1.47)	
Hateful (A)	5.40	(1.31)	
Frustrated (A)	5.38	(1.49)	
Tense (U)	5.23	(1.40)	
Anxious (U)	4.89	(1.71)	
Resentful	4.86	(1.75)	
Disappointed	4.60	(1.72)	
Ashamed (A)	4.37	(1.79)	
Contemptuous (C)	4.26	(1.72)	
Pitying (C)	3.76	(1.62)	
Sympathetic (C)	2.60	(1.33)	
Envious (E, U)	2.48	(1.67)	
Compassionate (C, E)	2.42	(1.28)	
Jealous (E)	2.35	(1.63)	
Inspired (C, E)	2.02	(1.34)	
Admiring (C, E)	1.92	(1.30)	
Comfortable (C)	1.75	(1.16)	
Respectful (C)	1.73	(1.14)	
Proud	1.71	(1.20)	
Fond (C)	1.70	(1.10)	
Secure (C)	1.68	(1.01)	
Behavioral responses			
Exclude (Ex)	4.28	(1.34)	
Demean (Ex)	3.92	(1.43)	
Fight (At)	3.32	(1.39)	
Attack (At)	3.06	(1.49)	
Cooperate (As)	2.22	(1.10)	
Help (H)	2.14	(1.14)	
Associate with (As)	2.04	(1.01)	
Protect (H)	1.90	(1.05)	

*Note.* A = "anger" emotional response type; U = "uneasiness" emotional response type; E = "envy" emotional response type; C = "compassion" emotional response type; Ex = "excluding" behavioral response type; At = "attacking" behavioral response type; As = "associating" behavioral response type; H = "helping" behavioral response type.

**Punitiveness.** Participants rated the extent of their agreement on a scale of 1 (*Disagree strongly*) to 7 (*Agree strongly*) with statements: "People who break the law should be given stiffer sentences," "Offenses against laws and norms in our society should be punished as severely as possible," and "The use of harsh punishment should be avoided whenever possible." A latent variable reflecting punitiveness was estimated in the SEM.

**Covariates.** Participants indicated their age, sex, ethnicity (1 = White British, 2 = Other White background, 3 = British Indian, 4 = British Bangladeshi, 5 = British Pakistani, 6 = British other Asian, 7 = Black British Caribbean, 8 = Black British African, 9 = Black other background, 10 = British Chinese, 11 = Other Chinese background, 12 = Other ethnic group, 13 = Mixed), parental socioeconomic background (1 = working class, 2 = lower middle class, 3 =

middle class, 4 = upper-middle class, 5 = upper class) and political views or affiliation (1 = very liberal, 7 = very conservative).

## Analytical Strategy

SEM was used to simultaneously test the hypothesized associations. This analytical approach was used because SEM includes a measurement model that allows for the estimation of latent or unobserved variables (i.e., perceived competence and warmth, affective responses, and punitiveness). The structural part of the model also allows for the simultaneous estimation of direct and indirect associations between variables of interest. Indirect associations specify pathways by which an independent variable *X* is associated with a dependent variable *Y* through an intervening variable *Z*. Finally, it is possible to test the fit between the hypothesized model and the observed data, based on statistical criterions. A CFI close to .95 suggests a good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999), while a CFI greater than .90 suggests a reasonable model-data fit (Marsh, Hau, & Wen, 2004). A RMSEA of less than .05 suggests a good fit, between .05 and .08 suggests a fair fit, while a value greater than .1 indicates a poor fit (Browne & Cudeck, 1992). Chi-square measures of fit are sensitive to sample size and violations of distributional assumptions (Bentler, 1990), and so a chi-square/degrees of freedom ratio allows us to compensate for sample size. A ratio of less than 5 is typically considered to demonstrate an acceptable fit (Wheaton, Muthen, Alwin, & Summers, 1977).

The model allowed perceptions of the social structure to predict stereotype content. Stereotype content was allowed to predict each emotional response. Negative emotional responses of anger and uneasiness were allowed to predict harmful behaviors such as attacking and excluding. The ambivalent emotion of envy was allowed to predict helping and associating behaviors, but also the harmful behavior of attacking. Lastly, the ambivalent emotion of compassion was allowed to predict helpful behaviors such as helping and associating, but also the harmful behavior of excluding. Punitiveness was regressed on stereotype content, emotional, and behavioral responses, while adjusting for covariates (i.e., age, sex, parental socioeconomic background, political orientation, and ethnicity).

Although the SEM simultaneously estimated all of the hypothesized associations, it can be thought of as being composed of three steps or components. The first step links social structure to social perception. The second step links social perception to affect, and the third step links affect to behavior. Components within each step (i.e., social structural determinants, social perception, affective responses, behavioral responses) were allowed to correlate with each other.

The model was estimated by using the weighted least squares means and variances adjusted estimation method. This method is appropriate for ordinal variables. Reported indirect associations are based on the product of coefficients method, and standard errors are delta method standard errors (MacKinnon, Lockwood, Brown, Wang, & Hoffman, 2007). Results of power analyses (MacCallum, Browne, & Sugawara, 1996) suggested power of 1 and a minimum sample size of  $N = 58$  for the estimated model ( $\alpha = .05$ ,  $df = 774$ ,  $N = 167$ ,  $RMSEA_{null} = 0.05$ ,  $RMSEA_{alternative} = 0.08$ ).

## Results

### Sample Statistics

Participants' mean age was 21.93 (min = 18, max = 56). The sample consisted of 106 men and 66 women. Sixty percent of the sample reported spending most of their youth in the United Kingdom. White British students made up 32% of the sample, while 19% were White students from a non-British background. The remainder of the study was 26% Asian British (e.g., Indian, Bangladeshi, Pakistani), 6% British African or Caribbean, and 16% were from other ethnic categories (e.g., Chinese British and non-British, Mixed or Other). The sample was approximately equally distributed in terms of social class, with 30% reporting being from the working class or lower-middle class, 40% from the middle class and 30% from upper-middle and upper class. Participants were slightly more liberal than conservative ( $M = 3.14$ ,  $SD = 1.47$ ).

Compared to the London population (Office for National Statistics, 2012, 2014), the sample had slightly more males (sample: 61.63% vs. London: 49.32%), slightly less individuals with a White British background (sample: 32% vs. London: 44.9%), slightly more with a White non-British background (sample: 19% vs. London: 12.6%), comparable levels with a Black British background (sample: 6% vs. London: 7%), and considerably more individuals with an Asian British background (sample: 26% vs. London: 12%).

### Descriptive Statistics

In absolute terms, criminals were perceived as being somewhat competitive but as having a considerably low social status (see Table 2). Criminals were perceived as being low on dimensions of warmth and competence in absolute terms, but were perceived as being significantly more competent than warm. On average, criminals were most likely to elicit negative emotions such as anger and fearfulness, and least likely to elicit positive emotions such as security or fondness. Criminals were most likely to elicit behaviors such as excluding and demeaning, and least likely to elicit protecting and associating behaviors. Correlational analyses suggested moderate correlations between emotional responses (Table 3) and between behavioral types (Table 4).

### Structural Equation Model Results

**Fit statistics.** The estimated SEM had an acceptable to good fit with the data, as shown in Figure 2,  $\chi^2(774, N = 167) = 1044.46$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 1.35$ , CFI = .90, RMSEA = .05.

Table 3

*Bivariate Correlations Between Emotional Responses to Criminals*

	Uneasiness	Envy	Compassion
Anger	.30***	-.11	-.46***
Uneasiness		.03	-.24**
Envy			.53***

Note. Correlations between emotional responses were obtained using confirmatory factor analysis in MPLUS.

\*\*  $p \leq .01$ . \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ .

Table 4

*Bivariate Correlations Between Behavioural Responses to Criminals*

	Exclude	Associate	Help
Attack	.32***	.07	.05
Exclude		-.25***	-.24***
Associate			.48***

\*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ .

### The SCM: Social structure and criminal stereotype content.

With respect to the social structural determinants of criminal stereotypes, perceiving criminals as being more competitive was expectedly associated with perceiving criminals as lacking warmth. In contrast, perceiving criminals as having a higher social status was associated with perceiving criminals as demonstrating more competence, but also as being warmer.

**The BIAS map: Criminal stereotypes, emotional, and behavioral responses.** Variation in criminals' perceived warmth and competence was associated with different affective responses. Emotions of uneasiness were associated with perceiving criminals as being less warm and more competent. Similarly, emotions of anger were associated with perceiving criminals as being less warm, and marginally associated with increased perceived competence. The emotion of envy was strongly associated with perceiving criminals as being more competent. In contrast, compassion, the only positive emotional response, was strongly associated with perceiving criminals as being warmer.

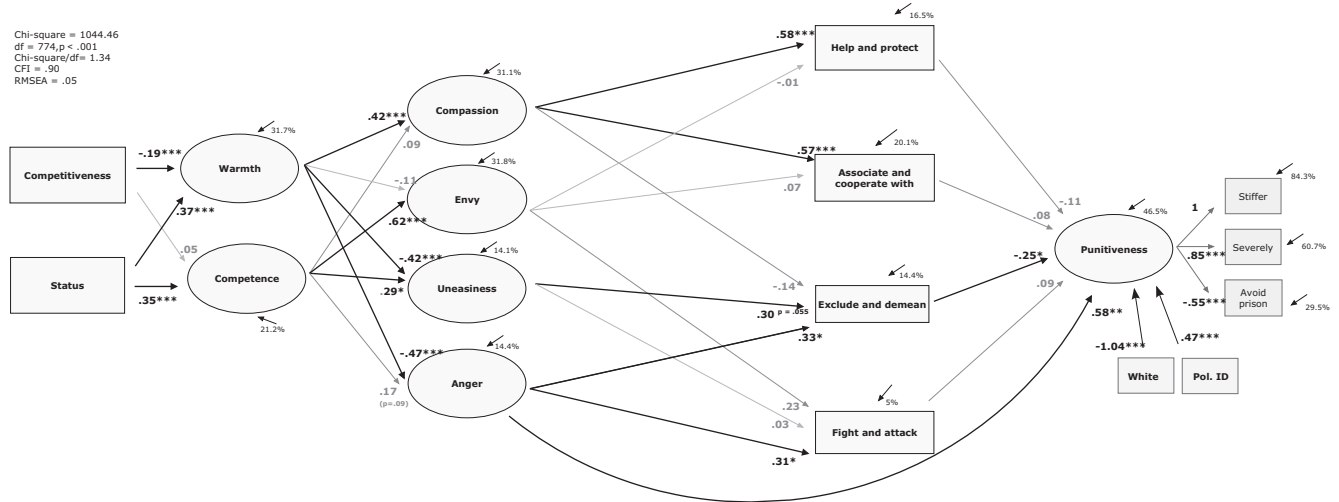
Attacking behavior was positively associated with emotions of anger, but not with the weaker emotions of uneasiness or envy. Excluding behavior was positively associated with emotions of uneasiness and anger. Both positive behavioral responses, helping and associating, were positively associated with emotions of compassion but not with envy.

**Punitiveness, the SCM, and BIAS map.** Though all perceptions and response types were allowed to predict punitiveness, punitive attitudes were only directly associated with feeling more anger and showing less desires to exclude criminals.

There were significant indirect associations between punitiveness and the social structural determinants and content of criminal stereotypes. Perceiving criminals as being warmer was indirectly associated with decreased punitiveness, through decreased emotions of anger ( $\beta = -.27$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Perceiving criminals as being more competitive against society was indirectly associated with increased punitiveness, through decreased perceived warmth and increased anger ( $\beta = 0.05$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Similarly, perceiving criminals as having a higher social status was indirectly associated with decreased punitiveness, through increased perceived warmth and decreased anger ( $\beta = -.10$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

Political conservatism was significantly associated with increased punitiveness. Compared to non-White individuals, White individuals were significantly less punitive. Because age, gender, and parental socioeconomic status were not significantly associated with punitiveness, they were dropped from the model to improve the fit of the model with the observed data, and for the sake of parsimony. All other paths were nonsignificant. Criminal stereotypes, responses to these stereotypes, and individual differences accounted for 46.5% of the variance in punitiveness.





**Figure 2.** Structural equation model depicting estimated pathways linking perceptions, emotional, and behavioral responses, to punitive attitudes. Ovals represent latent variables, rectangles represent manifest variables. Significant pathways are bolded, nonsignificant pathways are in dark gray. For visual clarity, nonsignificant paths to punitiveness are not shown. The nonsignificant associations between emotions and punitiveness are as follows: envy  $\beta = -.16$  (NS); uneasiness  $\beta = .07$  (NS); compassion  $\beta = .09$  (NS). The nonsignificant associations between social perception and punitiveness are: warmth  $\beta = .40$  (NS); competence  $\beta = -.48$  (NS). The residual correlation between competitiveness and social status is  $r = .04$  (NS), and between warmth and competence is  $r = .52^{***}$ . Residual correlations between emotions are as follows: anger and compassion  $r = -.39^{***}$ , anger and uneasiness  $r = .32^{***}$ , anger and envy  $r = -.15$  (NS), compassion and envy  $r = .52^{***}$ , compassion and uneasiness  $r = -.07$  (NS), envy and uneasiness  $r = -.09$  (NS). Residual correlations between behaviors are as follows: exclude and attack  $r = .30^{***}$ , attack and help  $r = .07$  (NS), attack and associate  $r = .08$  (NS), help and associate  $r = .35^{***}$ , associate and exclude  $r = -.18^{*}$ , exclude and help  $r = -.15$  (NS). \*  $p \leq .05$ . \*\*  $p \leq .01$ . \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ .

## Discussion and Conclusion

Individuals in the U.K., U.S.A., and Canada seem to demonstrate what some have called an “appetite” for the harsh punishment of law breakers, despite decreasing crime rates, growing prison populations (in the U.K. and U.S.A.), and little public knowledge of actual crime and sentencing trends (Cullen et al., 2000; Doob & Roberts, 1984; King, 2008; Loader, 2009; Roberts, 1992; Roberts & Hough, 2005). This study provides evidence that such punitive attitudes are directly associated with experiencing emotions of anger, and indirectly associated with endorsing beliefs suggesting that criminals have a low social status, are competitive against society, and are stereotypically cold and untrustworthy. Although previous research has demonstrated that feeling angry about crime and endorsing stereotypes about criminals both independently help explain punitive attitudes (Johnson, 2009), the present study is the first to demonstrate a functional relation between endorsing criminal stereotypes, experiencing anger toward criminals, and supporting harsh criminal justice policies. Stereotypes about criminals’ lack of warmth are particularly important in predicting emotional responses such as anger, uneasiness, and a lack of compassion. Comparatively, stereotypes about criminals’ competence are most important in predicting emotions of envy. Of note, a perceived lack of competence and warmth are positively correlated, suggesting a reverse “halo effect” (Conway, Pizzamiglio, & Mount, 1996) such that criminals perceived as being less warm are also seen as being less competent.

Though the findings largely supported predictions made by the SCM and BIAS map, some important differences emerged. In particular, in the context of emotional responses to criminal stereotypes, the broader emotion of contempt was split into emotions of anger and uneasiness. This discrepancy may be related to substantive issues in emotional responses toward crime (e.g., fear of crime), which is further discussed below with respect to desires to exclude criminals. These differences may also be due to the methodological approach used in this study. As opposed to using means to represent emotion types specified by the BIAS map, this study empirically tested the assumption that emotion items reflected specific latent emotional responses.

Building on previous studies investigating the content of criminals stereotypes (Clow & Leach, 2015; MacLin & Herrera, 2006), the present study sought to identify the social structural determinants of these stereotypes. The findings demonstrate functional links between perceiving criminals as being competitive against society and as having a low social status, and perceiving criminals as lacking warmth and competence. These results have two important implications. First, although some evidence suggests that attribution errors generate stereotypical perceptions that criminals commit crimes because they are essentially evil (Carroll et al., 1987; Roberts & White, 1986; Tam, Au, & Leung, 2008), the present findings suggest that inferences about criminals’ lack of warmth are not arrived at strictly on the basis of their criminal behavior. Rather, criminals’ cold and untrustworthy nature is as-

sociated with their perceived low social status. Perceiving low status criminals as lacking warmth may function in part to justify their unequal treatment under the law (e.g., by suggesting that low status criminals are justly punished because they are in fact cold and untrustworthy; Oldmeadow & Fiske, 2007).

These findings bring new light to evidence suggesting that the devastating effect of harsh criminal justice policies have been felt most strongly by those in the margins of society—for example the youth, the poor, the homeless, ethnic minorities, and those with mental health problems (Bazemore, 2007; Bobo & Johnson, 2004; Curry & Klumpp, 2009; Garland, 2004; Harcourt, 2008; Helms, 2009; James & Glaze, 2006; Pettit & Western, 2004; Robinson & Darley, 2007; Teplin, 1990). Such policies are often justified on the basis of public opinion polls indicating a widespread belief that court sentences are too lenient and that harsher sentences are needed (Bottoms, 1995; Casey & Mohr, 2005; Garland, 2004; Loader, 2009; Useem, Liedka, & Piehl, 2003). The present findings suggest that these policies' tendency of leading to an overrepresentation of low status individuals in the criminal justice system might actually be perceived as justified because of stereotypes linking a perceived low social status to a perceived evil and callous disposition.

A second implication is that changes in perceptions of social structural determinants, notably in perceptions related to social inequality, may result in detrimental shifts in widely endorsed criminal stereotypes and in a related increase in public punitiveness. A longitudinal analysis of increases in the United States' incarceration rate over the past 50 years revealed corresponding increases in objective measures of income inequality (as suggested by the income ratio between those in the top 5% and those in the bottom 20%) and in public punitiveness (Enns, 2014). In the U.S., public punitiveness (e.g., support for the death penalty) has been argued to reflect a form of prejudice linked to the institutional discrimination against Black individuals (Cochran & Chamlin, 2006). Incarceration itself is a key factor emerging from and contributing to existing social and structural disparities between White and Black individuals in the U.S. (Western, 2006; Western, Kling, & Weiman, 2001). The present findings may therefore contribute to research on the association between "racial animus" and public punitiveness, particularly in terms of the functional link between perceived low social status and demands for harsher punishment. Though the present study cannot demonstrate that the observed long-term increase in punitiveness is due in part to shifts in social perceptions and emotional responses to crime as a result of increasing inequality, future studies may seek to establish such a longitudinal association.

In contrast to a Marxist view suggesting that those in power use incarceration as a method of social control (Garland, 1990), the present findings may suggest that social inequality generates more punitiveness writ large. First, increases in inequality could raise the salience of harmful criminal stereotypes and therefore contribute to public support for harsh criminal justice policies. Second, increases in the proportion of "low status" people (e.g., those experiencing low income) could contribute to public endorsement of stereotypes *justifying* increased use of harsh punishments against marginalized groups.

The results also suggest that desires to exclude criminals, a behavioral response that is associated with experiencing uneasiness or fearfulness, is associated with expressing less support for

harsh criminal justice policies. Previous research demonstrates that being fearful of crime—a type of diffuse anxious or uneasy emotional response (Gray, Jackson, & Farrall, 2011)—is associated with increased punitive attitudes (Dowler, 2003). However, the present findings suggest that when considering anger and uneasiness in tandem, it is the former that most strongly predicts punitiveness. These findings suggest that in considering affective responses to criminals, there is a distinction between feeling uneasy and angry toward criminals. Though both emotions are predicted by stereotypes about criminals' lack of warmth, uneasiness predicts a desire to exclude and demean criminals, while anger predicts a desire to exclude and demean, as well as fight, attack, and punish criminals. The findings may suggest that individuals draw a clear distinction between punishing and excluding criminals. In other words, while individuals who feel uneasy (and, to a lesser extent, angry) toward criminals may want to exclude criminals they do not want to punish them harshly. Though not investigated in the present study, desires to exclude criminals may be linked to other attitudes and preferences (e.g., support for the police, labeling offenders, removing prisoners' voting rights). Still, exclusion was the most endorsed behavioral response to criminals and is a key component of punishment in the context of criminal justice (e.g., whether punishment is thought of in terms of prison sentences, or in terms of its exclusionary social implications; Pettit & Western, 2004). Future research may therefore seek to more concretely distinguish between punishment preferences associated with uneasy, as opposed to angry, responses toward crime. Moreover, further investigation of positive emotional responses toward criminals (e.g., compassion) and support for less or alternative punitive responses (e.g., rehabilitation) is warranted.

### Limitations and Future Research

While this study identifies a functional link between perceptions of the social structure, endorsing criminal stereotypes, and supporting harsh criminal justice policies, some limitations suggest interpreting the findings with caution. First, the study employed the "criminal" construct which in itself is problematic as it can further reify the concept that a select group of individuals who have broken the law are categorically distinct from the "ingroup." However, the methodological approach adopted in the study was successful in capturing variance in the ways that individuals perceive "criminals," potentially capturing a more nuanced understanding of the "criminal" construct.

Second, the correlational nature of the study precludes making causal claims about the directionality of the observed associations. To the extent that emotion influences cognition, the directionality of the social perception → affect association could be reversed, such that angry emotional responses to crime also influence the endorsement of criminal stereotypes. Indeed, some evidence suggests that perceptions of injustice can engender anger, which, in turn, leads to aggressive behavior and blaming cognitions (Jones & Fitness, 2008). The directionality of the social perception → affect association should therefore be tested experimentally in future research.

Although the study sought to establish systematic cognitive, affective, and attitudinal processes and not to estimate the prevalence of such responses in the population, the use of a U.K. student sample limits the generalizability of the findings. Future studies



may seek to replicate the findings in a more representative U.K. sample, and elsewhere.

Lastly, the study sought primarily to apply the SCM and did not consider additional factors that could also explain punitiveness (e.g., trust in the criminal justice system, perceived racial threat, economic individualism). However, the study adjusted for factors typically associated with punitiveness, including ethnicity and political orientation. As with all studies, there is a risk that unobserved variables could help explain the observed associations between criminal stereotypes and punitiveness, and future research may seek to replicate the findings while considering additional confounds.

### Conclusion

This research demonstrates that criminal stereotypes are associated with feeling uneasy and angry toward criminals, and expressing support for harsh criminal justice policies, but also that these stereotypes are functionally related to perceptions of social structural factors linked to social inequality. The policy implications of these results are threefold.

Anxieties about democratic politics and crime stem, in large part, from concerns about the public's ability to understand crime and justice issues, and about political campaigns that pander to public demands for harsher punishment (Hough & Roberts, 2005; Miller, 2013). The findings therefore first suggest that penal populism, or political platforms which insist that criminals are worthless and cruel, likely contribute to public punitiveness. Efforts could be made to change the way in which individuals perceive and feel about criminals. Political and advocacy group media campaigns should aim to attenuate punitive trends by countering stereotypical perceptions of criminals (e.g., by presenting positive counterstereotypical affirmations; Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000; Sritharan & Gawronski, 2010), particularly for stereotypes about individuals who may be seen as unjustly punished (e.g., nonviolent offenders, those in pretrial detention).

An additional, more novel, approach would be to harness angry emotional responses toward crime advantageously (Robinson & Darley, 2007) by shifting these responses away from offenders toward the detrimental impact of unjust penal practices (e.g., on the children of incarcerated individuals, and communities; Western & Muller, 2013; Wildeman, 2014) and to the criminogenic conditions that are insufficiently addressed by the state (e.g., concentrated disadvantage; Miller, 2013). Although such strategies have previously been used to transform acts seen as morally acceptable to being seen as morally condemnable (e.g., drunk driving; Robinson & Darley, 2007), the possibility of advantageously shifting the public's anger toward crime is worth considering.

Second, the findings suggest that emotions of uneasiness, which result from stereotypical perceptions of criminals, are associated with desires to exclude but not punish criminals. Taking these public responses and desires seriously could therefore mean implementing penal policy reforms that are seen as exclusionary but that are less harmful. For instance, civil remedies could ensure liability, while reducing the harms of harsh punishment (i.e., incarceration; Robinson & Darley, 2007). Public opinion surveys suggest that individuals are generally in favor of alternatives to prison (e.g., participating in training programs, receiving treatment and counseling, community corrections orders) for nonviolent and

young offenders (Hough & Roberts, 2005; Mackenzie et al., 2012). Still, the many obstacles that come with such alternatives (e.g., "net widening," degrading punishments) should be taken into account (Worrall & Hoy, 2013).

Finally, the present findings suggest that punitiveness must be situated in its social-structural context. In addition to directly impacting incarceration rates (Enns, 2014), growing inequality could also indirectly contribute to increased public punitiveness by bolstering damaging stereotypes that suggest that criminals are cruel and callous, and deserving of angry responses as opposed to compassion. Ironically, putting into place policies that are particularly harmful for social groups already in the margins of society may further justify their exclusion and punishment. Policies that reduce social structural inequalities (e.g., improving educational attainment; Hout, 2012; Moretti, 2004) could ultimately decrease public demands for harsh criminal justice policies. Moreover, such social-structural policy interventions could also have the added benefit of reducing crime (Deming, 2011; Machin, Marie, & Vujić, 2011) and the victimization of largely vulnerable populations (e.g., single mothers, men experiencing residential instability, individuals living in disadvantaged neighborhoods, and individuals with lower incomes; Bunch, Clay-Warner, & Lei, 2015; Lauritsen & Carbone-Lopez, 2011).

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