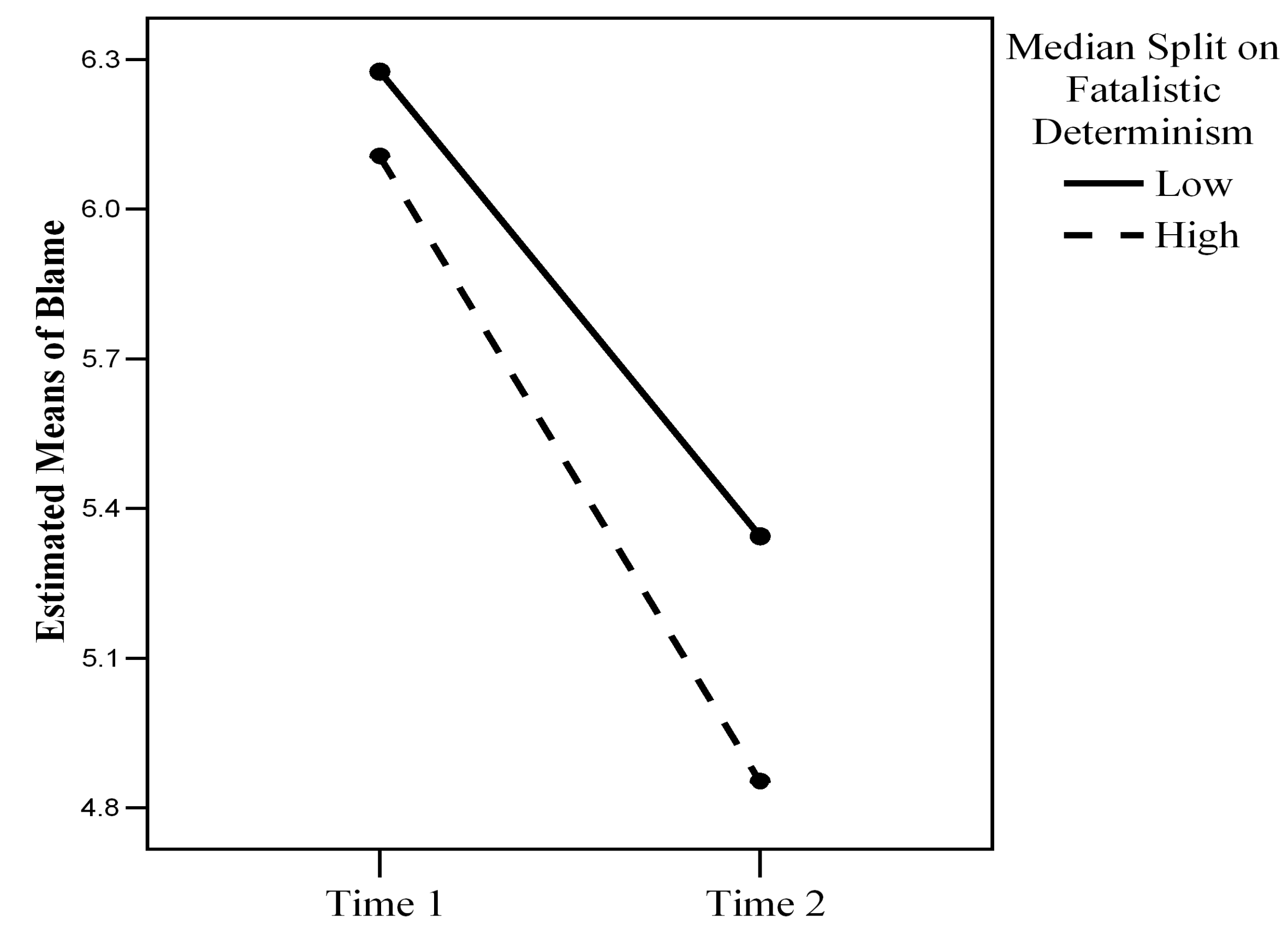


# The Independence of Free Will and Determinism in Judgments of Moral Responsibility

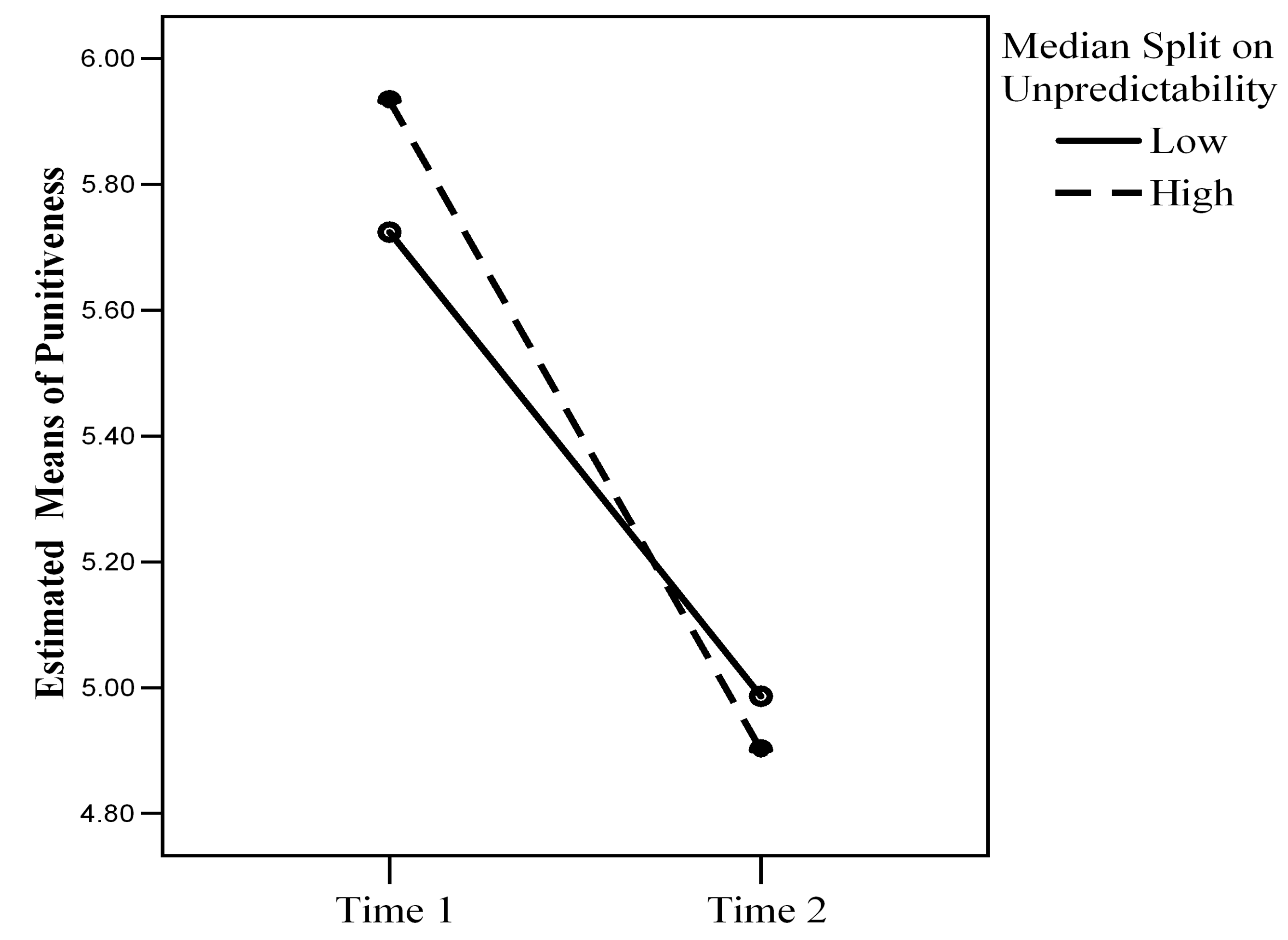
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**Interaction between Fatalistic Determinism and Blame from Time 1 to Time 2**



Estimated marginal means of blame at Time 1 and Time 2 demonstrating the interaction with Fatalistic Determinism. High FD leads to a greater drop in blame assignment at Time 2. The simple effect at Time 1 is not significant,  $F(1, 156) = 3.32, ns$ . The simple effect at Time 2 is significant,  $F(1, 156) = 19.40, p < .001$ .

**Interaction between Unpredictability and Punitiveness from Time 1 to Time 2**



Estimated marginal means of punitiveness at Time 1 and Time 2 demonstrating the interaction with Unpredictability. High U leads to greater assignment of blame and punishment at Time 1. The simple effect of Unpredictability at Time 1 is significant,  $F(1, 156) = 5.45, p < .05$ . The simple effect at Time 2 is not significant  $F(1, 156) = .91, ns$ .

## Abstract

Assignment of moral responsibility is one of the major implications of belief in either free will or determinism. The usual concern is that without free will (a) there can be no moral responsibility and (b) people can no longer be punished for moral transgressions. This concern assumes that belief in free will is incompatible with belief in determinism. Our scale, the FAD-Plus, measures belief in free will and determinism independently and these beliefs are actually uncorrelated (Paulhus & Carey, 2011). Here, we investigated the independent effects of free will and deterministic belief on assignment of moral responsibility. Subjects ( $N = 161$ ) were presented with a description of a child molester and asked to assign ratings of blame and punishment (Time 1). They were then told that the defendant was abused as a child and has several psychological disorders and were asked to redo their ratings (Time 2). Belief in free will was positively correlated with punishment at both times, though the relationship was weaker at Time 2. This finding supports the hypothesis that weaker belief in free will leads to less assignment of moral responsibility. By contrast, there was no correlation with determinism. As expected, punishment and blame decreased after the new information was given. Determinism was positively correlated with a decrease in blame, but not punishment. This finding is consistent with findings that people will still hold a criminal morally responsible for their behavior even when told to imagine that the universe is completely determined (Nichols & Knobe, 2007).

## The FAD-Plus (Paulhus & Carey, 2011)

This 27-item attitude survey was specifically designed to assess four related beliefs:

1. Free Will – freedom of behavior, responsibility for actions
2. Scientific Determinism – there are scientific causes for events
3. Fatalistic Determinism – people have minimal control because the future is predetermined
4. Unpredictability – no one has control, all events are random

The instrument was designed to allow independent assessment of these concepts unlike previous measures which forced free will and determinism to be bi-polar constructs. The FAD-Plus distinguishes between determinism based in scientific causation and fatalistic determinism. Fatalistic determinism asserts that the future is not only predictable, but already set and cannot be changed. Philosophy makes a distinction between these two beliefs, calling them scientific or causal determinism and predestination.

We have found the free will subscale to be uncorrelated with either form of determinism measured by the FAD-Plus (Paulhus & Carey, 2011). This suggests that most people see Free Will and Determinism as compatible, that a universe can be deterministic and people can still have free will.

## References

- Nichols, S. & Knobe, J. (2007). Moral responsibility and determinism: The cognitive science of folk intuitions. *Noûs* 41,663–685.
- Paulhus, D.L., & Carey, J.M. (2011). FAD-Plus: Measurement of beliefs regarding free will and related constructs. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 93, 96–104.

## Research Questions

1. How do individual differences in Free Will belief relate to punishment of criminals?
2. Will belief in determinism change ratings of moral responsibility and punishment?
3. Do causal explanations excuse moral transgressions?

## Method

Participants were presented with a description of a child molester who had already been convicted. They were then asked to assign a prison sentence from two years to life. They were also asked to rate how blameworthy the defendant was on a 7 point scale from "Not at all blameworthy" to "Completely blameworthy". After giving their ratings, they were told that before the sentencing new evidence had been found that the defendant was abused as a child and has several psychological disorders. They were then asked to redo their ratings. This time, the possible prison sentences included an option for no prison time, just psychiatric treatment.

## Results

1. Free Will belief was positively correlated with punishment at Time 1 and Time 2
2. Determinism was uncorrelated with punishment, but Unpredictability correlated with a greater decrease in punishment and blame from Time 1 to Time 2
3. Fatalistic Determinism was only correlated with a greater decrease in blame, not punishment

	Free Will	Scientific Determinism	Fatalistic Determinism	Unpredictability
Time 1	.22*	.01	-.01	.06
Time 2	.17	-.02	-.14	-.09
Change	-.01	.02	.22*	.23*

## Conclusions

1. Free Will belief does predict greater punishment and assignment of moral responsibility
2. Scientific Determinism does not excuse moral responsibility
3. Fatalistic Determinism does excuse responsibility, but not assignment of punishment
4. Consequentialist punishment is still used even if moral responsibility is excused