

Impacts of Relationship Legitimacy on Perceptions of Violence



This research study investigated the impacts of social legitimacy on perceptions of sexual violence. The goal of this project was to demonstrate the ramifications of social processes on perceptions of violence. Legal processes have not provided equity to queer individuals when it comes to available resources, protections or knowledge. Marriage equality does not negate the impacts of violence experienced. Understanding how legitimacy factors into perceptions of sexual violence can provide individuals with a more expansive understanding of sexual violence and can help identify weaknesses within formal resources that need to be addressed.

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01 Introduction

Equality in the eyes of the law does not guarantee equality in the eyes of the individual, and this is reflected in the lived experiences of queer individuals, who consistently report higher rates of discrimination, oppression and violence when compared at large to heterosexual and/or cisgender counterparts (Gillum, 2017). Johnson et al. (2006) identify the phenomenon of legitimacy as a social process used in creating systems of value and definition at an individual or societal level. Understanding how same-sex and LGBTQ+ relationships are legitimized in comparison to heterosexual relationships can provide insight into how these seemingly unconscious processes result in consequential outcomes for LGBTQ+ individuals.

02 Objective

The objective of this research project was to investigate the impact of individual attitudes of legitimacy with respect to the gender of both offender and victim in the context of sexual assault. This study seeks to investigate how these variables interplay with the ability to perceive and identify situations of sexual violence as criminal. Finally, attitudes are studied to observe how gender impacts perceptions of blame and deservingness of punishment for the offender and victim of sexual assault.

03 Methodology

Data were gathered at Stockton University via Qualtrics. This survey was administered remotely and participants accessed the survey via Sona Labs.

- 330 total respondents
- 308 usable data sets

Six randomly-assigned conditions with variations in gender of offender and victim.

Included genders were male, female, nonbinary and transgender, with multiple combinations of each gender identity.

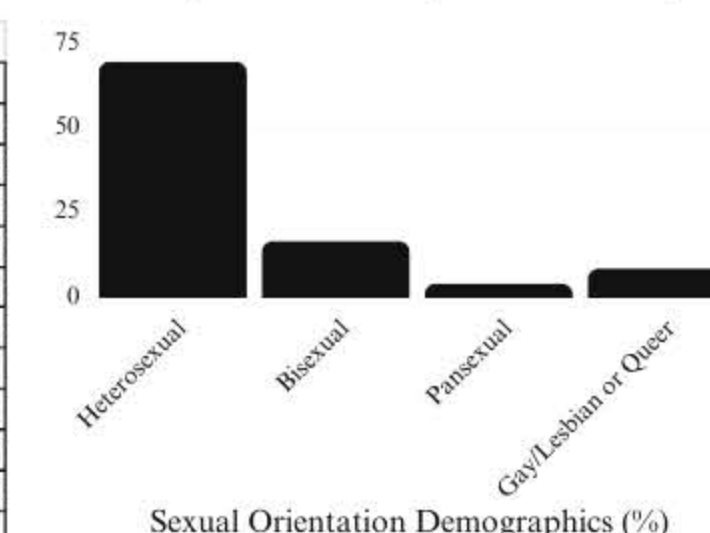
Respondents received compensation in the form of extra credit for academic courses.

04 Analysis

Data were analyzed via regression, ANOVA, assumptions of skewness, homogeneity of variance and no multicollinearity.

Model Summary						
DV	Model	Condition	Beta	R ²	Significance	
Crime	3	F-F (reference)	46.207	0.032	<0.001	
		M-M	0.289			0.654
		T-T	0.376			0.564
		T-NB	0.532			0.41
		NB-T	0.381			0.561
		NB-NB	-0.664			0.309
		Legal Legit.	0.068			0.942
Offender Pun.	3	F-F (reference)	13.465	0.029	<0.001	
		M-M	-0.072			0.755
		T-T	-0.145			0.536
		T-NB	-0.15			0.518
		NB-T	-0.133			0.575
		NB-NB	-0.215			0.361
		Legal Legit.	-0.146			0.663
Social Legit.	0.36	0.008				

Descriptive Statistics			
DV	Condition	Mean	Std. Deviation
Crime	F-F	47.58	4.699
	M-M	47.925	2.578
	T-T	47.98	2.14
	T-NB	48.038	2.038
	NB-T	47.84	1.973
	NB-NB	48.843	4.876
	Legal Legit.	1.04	0.201
Offender Pun.	Social Legit.	1.48	0.501
	F-F	13.86	0.857
	M-M	13.811	0.899
	T-T	13.726	1.201
	T-NB	13.679	1.298
	NB-T	13.68	1.219
	NB-NB	13.608	1.511
Legal Legit.	1.04	0.201	
Social Legit.	1.48	0.501	



05 Results/Findings

Gender dynamic accounted for 3.2% of variance in perceptions of crime and 2.9% of variance in perceptions of offender deservingness of punishment. Only when social legitimacy was overlaid in analyzing crime perceptions and offender punishment were the results significant ($\alpha = 0.024; 0.008$). Beta weights were mostly positive for perceptions of crime (i.e. most identified the actions as criminal regardless of gender identity), but had an inverse relationship when respondents were asked about offender punishment (i.e. overall less attitude towards punishment when the offender and victim are of the same gender identity).

IMPLICATIONS

Understanding the mitigating role of gender in perceptions of criminality and culpability can help identify where weaknesses lie in social and legal resources for victims of sexual violence.

06 Conclusion

Gender dynamics alone had insignificant impacts on perceptions of criminality and offender deservingness of punishment. However, it was significant when mediated by the factor of social legitimacy, as depicted. Understanding the process of social legitimization and its subsequent impacts on perceptions of individuals and groups can help address systems where comprehensive knowledge is lacking. This analysis discussed perceptions of crime and offender deservingness of punishment, but further analysis should be done on the impacts of gender dynamics on blame of offender and victim, punishment of victim, and appropriateness.

The findings of this study suggest that legitimization processes are relevant to understanding perceptions of violence in the LGBTQ+ community. Acknowledging that perceptions of social legitimacy impact attitudes surrounding sexual violence is important to further discuss and address inequity in the systems available for victims of sexual victimization.

Related Literature

- Gillum, T. L. (2017). Adolescent dating violence experiences among sexual minority youth and implications for subsequent relationship quality. *C & A. Child & Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 34(2), 137-145. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10560-016-0451-7>.
- Johnson, C., Dowd, T. J., & Ridgeway, C. L. (2006). Legitimacy as a social process. *Annual Review of Sociology* 32, 53-78. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/29737731>.