

Attitudes about Women, Sexuality, and Abortion

Phoebe Xoxakos, Kathryn R. Klement, & Dr. Brad J. Sagarin

Northern Illinois University

Author Note

Phoebe Xoxakos, Psychology, Northern Illinois University

This document is a partial submission to *Huskie Commons* of the required SEF Final Report, submitted in partial fulfillment of the SEF Program of Northern Illinois University Spring 2017 Grant.

### Attitudes about Women, Sexuality, and Abortion

Prior to the SEF program, we had conducted two studies exploring the relationship between anti-abortion attitudes and attitudes about women and sexuality. We found significant positive correlations between anti-abortion attitudes and ambivalent sexism (hostile and benevolent), female purity beliefs, and three domains of disgust (sexual, moral, and pathogen). The studies funded by SEF were designed to further this past work.

#### **Study 1**

Specifically, Study 1 was designed to investigate the perceptions of women who have abortions. Participants recruited via Amazon Mturk ([www.mturk.com](http://www.mturk.com)) completed a questionnaire composed of descriptions of women, varying race (White, Black, Latina, and Asian), pregnancy cause (consensual sex and rape) and pregnancy outcome (miscarriage and abortion). Each participant read every description and rated each woman on traits related to warmth and competence (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). Participants then completed the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick & Fiske, 1996) and several demographics questions. In our results we were surprised to find no differences across race. Thus the only significant difference we found was between the abortion/sex condition and all other conditions, in that women who had consensual sex and an abortion were rated less warm and less competent than women who were raped and had an abortion.

#### **Study 2**

The purpose of Study 2 was to determine whether gender or sexism was driving abortion attitudes. Thus Study 2 was designed to determine whether men would be viewed similarly to women if they were in the position to be pregnant and have children. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions in which participants were either an inhabitant on

Planet Corianus, where women bore children, or Planet Andorra, where men bore children. Participants then completed measures of abortion attitudes (Begun & Walls, 2015; Wolf, 1991), ambivalent sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Glick & Fiske, 1999), rape myth acceptance (McMahon & Farmer, 2011; Melanson, 1999), and disgust (Tybur, Lieberman, & Griskevicius, 2009). We found two significant differences, the first being people in the Planet Corianus (pregnant women) condition reported significantly higher benevolent sexism than the participants in the Planet Andorra (pregnant men) condition. The second significant difference we found was that participants from the Planet Andorra (pregnant men) condition reported significantly higher levels of rape myth acceptance than participants in the Planet Corianus (pregnant women) condition.

### **Study 3**

As for Study 3, we are going to further examine the relationship between abortion and the three domains of disgust: pathogen, moral, and sexual. The study will consist of seven conditions (miscarriage, abortion, menstruation, irritable bowel syndrome, nocturnal emissions, tubal ligation, and execution) in which the participant will read a short description of one of the conditions and answer comprehension questions about the passage. The participants will complete the Three-Domain Disgust Scale (Tybur et al., 2009) to determine which condition and domain stand out the most. We think that the abortion condition will have high means for all types of disgust; for menstruation, high sexual and pathogen, but not moral; for nocturnal emissions, high sexual and pathogen, but not moral; for IBS, high pathogen, but not sexual and moral; for tubal ligation, probably high means all around; for miscarriage, high pathogen, but not sexual and moral; for execution, high moral, but not pathogen or sexual.

**Study 4**

Study 4 is designed to probe further into the relationship between race and abortion attitudes. Again, we saw no differences across race (White, Black, Latina, Asian) in Study 1, though data reflect that the women who are most likely to obtain abortion care (particularly government-subsidized abortion care) are low SES women of color. Study 4 will consist of four conditions, a 2 (Black and White) X 2 (abortion and miscarriage) design. A single picture and description of the woman in the image will be presented to the participants. The participants will then complete measures regarding sexism, racism, abortion, and disgust.

**Study 5**

Study 5 will specifically be an extension of Studies 1 and 3, although this study is in alignment with all previous studies. The purpose of Study 5 is to qualitatively examine attitudes and judgements individuals have and make about abortion and women who seek abortion. It will be a between-subjects study in which the participants will read a description of a pregnant woman and answer some questions about her. The questions will be open-ended questions in which the participants can respond by typing out their answers. For example, questions like the following will be asked: What should the woman do about the pregnancy she does not want to maintain?; Do people in general think that women should have the right to make decisions about their own bodies?; Generally, how do people view women who have abortions?

**Accomplished Objectives**

Our original objectives were to examine how abortion attitudes are related to negative attitudes about women. Specifically, we wanted to find out if abortion attitudes are founded in sexism, or in attitudes and beliefs about child-bearing. Thus, we designed the project to disentangle the relationship between abortion attitudes and attitudes toward women to see if the

results from previous research are due to women's biological role in bearing children, or sexist attitudes toward women as a gender.

I can confidentially say that we met part of our objectives. While partially meeting our objectives may seem less than ideal, it was an important concept to learn. Often in research, things do not go as planned and schedules must change. Learning this concept, and actually experiencing the complete research process first-hand early in my research career is extremely beneficial. I have learned the importance of flexibility while also meeting deadlines. It is important to note that we have set a firm foundation in this area of research, a foundation that will allow us to further our research goals, along with allowing other researchers to expand upon this area of knowledge.

### **Reflection**

The SEF program had an enormous effect on my academic experience. The lab that I am currently in with Kathryn Klement and Dr. Brad Sagarin has always been an enriching and inclusive lab where research and learning are the primary goals. Adding the SEF program to such an already amazing lab has a huge impact on me as a person, a student, and a researcher. The SEF program allowed us to create five new studies as an extension to our research. With the help of the SEF program I partook in designing research projects, creating and submitting IRB forms, creating studies in Qualtrics, disbursing studies to participants through Amazon Mturk, interpreting data we collected, formulating write-ups, presenting at conferences, creating visual aids for the conferences (PowerPoints and posters), and I learned additional skills on how to work as an effective team member. Since the SEF program, I have presented at three conferences and am on the authorship list of at least three manuscripts, which will go on my CV

when I apply to graduate schools. All of these experiences, as a result of being in the SEF program, will allow me a better chance of being accepted and attending a graduate school.

## References

- Begun, S., & Walls, N. E. (2015). Pedestal or gutter exploring ambivalent sexism's relationship with abortion attitudes. *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work, 30*, 200-215. doi: 10.1177/088610991455521
- Fiske, S. T., Cuddy, A. J., Glick, P., & Xu, J. (2002). A model of (often mixed) stereotype content: competence and warmth respectively follow from perceived status and competition. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 82*, 878-902. doi: 10.1037//0022-3514.82.6.878
- Glick, P., & Fiske, S. T. (1996). The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory: Differentiating hostile and benevolent sexism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 70*, 491-512. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.70.3.491
- Glick, P., & Fiske, S. T. (1999). The Ambivalence toward Men Inventory: Differentiating hostile and benevolent beliefs about men. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 23*, 519-536. doi: 10.1111/j.1471-6402.1999.tb00379.x
- Guttmacher Institute. (2014, July). Induced abortion in the United States. Retrieved from [https://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/fb\\_induced\\_abortion.html](https://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/fb_induced_abortion.html)
- McMahon, S., & Farmer, G. L. (2011). An updated measure for assessing subtle rape myths. *Social Work Research, 35*, 71-81. doi: 10.1093/swr/35.2.71
- Melanson, P. S. K. (1999). Belief in male rape myths: A test of two competing theories. Retrieved from [http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/obj/s4/f2/dsk2/tape15/PQDD\\_0003/NQ31935.pdf](http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/obj/s4/f2/dsk2/tape15/PQDD_0003/NQ31935.pdf)

Tybur, J. M., Lieberman, D., & Griskevicius, V. (2009). Microbes, mating, and morality:

individual differences in three functional domains of disgust. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 97, 103.

Wolf, S. S. (1991). Attitudes toward abortion (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations. (Order no. 9207909)