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Department of Psychology

Effect of Political Ideology, Femininity, and Gender on Abortion Stigma

VCU Undergraduate Symposium, Richmond, Virginia

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Introduction

- Abortion stigma refers to negative viewpoints about women who have had abortions, which regard them as inferior to the ideals of womanhood and leads to discrimination (Kumar et al., 2009).
- Conservative individuals tend to hold more opposition to abortion and have more abortion stigma than their liberal counterparts (Bessett et al., 2015).
- An individual's gender may have an influence on their endorsement of stigmatizing attitudes. Women tend to have less abortion stigma as they may need an abortion themselves one day (Patev, Hood, & Hall, 2019).
- Femininity may relate to abortion stigma. Individuals who have abortions challenge social norms of femininity and female sexuality, which elicits these stigmatizing attitudes. (Handschmidt, et al., 2016; Jelen, 2015).

Purpose of the Study

- This study sought to understand the effect of femininity on abortion stigma, beyond the effects of political ideology and gender.
- We predicted that individuals with endorsement of feminine values would hold more abortion stigma.

Method

- Participants were recruited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk. The majority of participants resided in the South (30%).
- Three hundred and eleven participants ($N=311$) were recruited (46.4% men, 52.6% women), with a mean age of 36.66 ($SD = 12.33$). Most participants racially identified as White/Caucasian (79.2%).
- The majority of participants, 47.3% identified as liberal, with 36% of the sample identifying as conservative.

Measures

- Stigmatizing Attitudes, Beliefs, and Actions Scale: 18 items designed to measure abortion stigma at individual and community levels (Shellenberg et al, 2014).
- Political Ideology: one researcher designed item which measures political viewpoints (adapted from Shook & Fazio, 2009).
- Gender: one item assessing an individual's gender identity.
- Personal Attributes Questionnaire: measure of femininity (Spence et. al, 1974).

Results

- A hierarchal regression was done in SPSS (version 26) to determine how an individual's femininity impacts abortion stigma, beyond the effects of gender and political ideology.
- Political ideology was significant, where more conservative values related to higher abortion stigma.
- Gender, after controlling for political ideology, was also found to be significant. Women were found to hold less stigma than men.
- Femininity, controlling for both political ideology and gender, significantly predicted abortion stigma, $b = -.11$, $SE = .16$, $p = .03$. A negative relationship indicated that individuals with more feminine values held less abortion stigma.

Table 1. Standardized coefficients of the relationships between gender, political ideology,

Variable	β	SE	p
Step 1			
Political Ideology	-.54	.28	< .001
Step 2			
Political Ideology	-.53	.28	< .001
Gender	-.11	1.29	.03
Step 3			
Political Ideology	-.52	.28	< .001
Gender	-.08	1.33	.12
Femininity	-.11	.16	.03

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Discussion

- This study aimed to better understand the impact of endorsement of feminine values on abortion stigma, regardless of political ideology or gender.
- Individuals with more endorsement of feminine values held less abortion stigma. These results are counter to our original predication, that individuals with more traditional feminine ideals would hold more abortion stigma.

Limitations

- The majority of the sample identified as White/Caucasian, reducing generalizability of results.
- Women are more likely to endorse feminine traits, which might be an artifact of gender. Femininity endorsement between men and women was not assessed.
- The sample contained more liberal identifying individuals than conservative, so it is a bit difficult to generalize this over all political ideologies.

Conclusions

- More research on factors that influence abortion stigma is needed to have a better understanding of underlying mechanisms leading to increased abortion stigma.
- These findings point to the role of traditional values in better understanding abortion stigma.
- These results can guide creation of educational programs on sexual and reproductive health that can reduce abortion stigma and bias.
- Reducing abortion stigma can ultimately could lead to reducing negative health outcomes for individuals who have had abortions.