

Perceptions of Violence

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INTRODUCTION

- Individuals tend to view authority figures as credible, dependable, and righteous (Jost et al., 2011).
- People also tend to denigrate victims of violence by judging them to have brought their attacks on themselves (e.g., just world beliefs; Gray & Wegner, 2010).
- Individuals with undesirable social characteristics are frequently incorrectly linked with negative social outcomes (Kay et al., 2005).
- We were interested in how perpetrator status (police vs. lay citizen) and victim status (high vs. low) affected people's perceptions and excusal of violence.

METHOD

Participants and Design

- $N = 109$ (out of a target final sample size of 240)
- 62% female, $M_{age} = 19.4$, ($SD = 1.3$)

Interrogation & Confession Scenario

- Participants read a scenario describing an attack by a high or low status perpetrator (off-duty police officer vs. sales consultant) to coerce an admission of guilt from a criminal suspect who was either high or low status (college honor student or career criminal and high school drop out).

Perceptions of Confession & Excusal of Violence

- Participants answered 6 questions to assess the perceived credibility of the confession and their excusal of the perpetrator's attack.
- All judgments made on a 7-point Likert-type scale. See Table.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

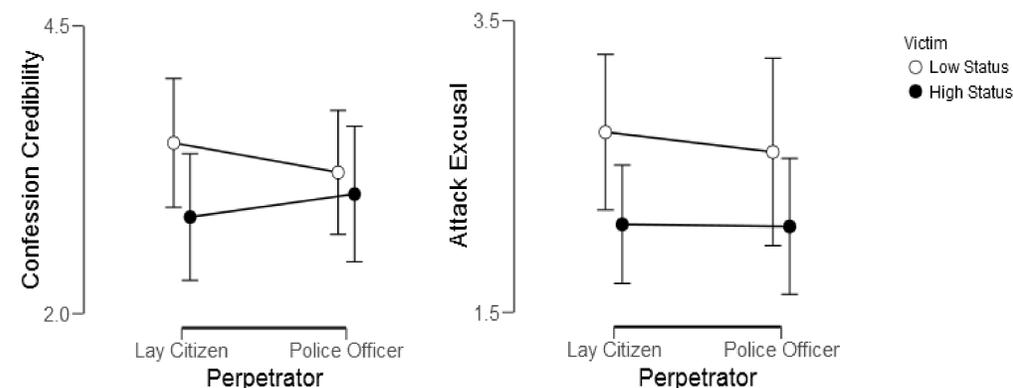
Principal Components Analysis

- The 6 dependent measures loaded on 2 factors, accounting for about 75% of the variance on the items (see Table).
- We averaged items to form two scales assessing perceptions of Confession Credibility and Attack Excusal. The two scales were significantly correlated, $r(107) = .65$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.53, .75].

Item	Confession Credibility	Attack Excusal
[Victim's] confession should be presented during his trial.	0.84	–
[Victim's] confession was honest.	0.88	–
[Victim] is guilty of the murder	0.87	–
[Attacker] was justified.	–	0.90
[Attacker] acted appropriately.	–	0.91
[Attacker] should be charged with a crime. (reverse scored)	–	0.79

Primary Analyses

- An ANOVA revealed no significant effects on Confession Credibility scores, $F_s < 2.4$, $p_s > .05$.
- An ANOVA revealed a significant effect of Victim Status on Attack Excusal scores, $F(1, 105) = 5.22$, $p = .024$, $d = 0.24$ (see Figure). No other effects were significant.
- Equivalence tests indicate the effect of Perpetrator Status on both DVs is effectively zero, $t_s > 2.3$, $p_s < .05$.



DISCUSSION

- The correlation between the two outcome measures indicates that, overall, people who believed the victim's confession was truthful were more likely to excuse the attacker's actions in procuring that confession
- Manipulations of perpetrator status (lay citizen vs. police officer) appear to have no effect on participants' judgments of the confession or excusal of the attack itself.
- However, consistent with prior research, people tended to be more accepting of attacks against a low status victim compared to a high status victim, even though they did not view confession trustworthiness differently as a function of victim status.
- These data may speak to public perceptions of police violence.

REFERENCES

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Kay, A.C., Jost, J.T., & Young, S. (2005). Victim derogation and victim enhancement as alternate routes to system justification. *Psychological Science*, 16, 240–246.