Perceptions of Violence

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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 coercive 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].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Confession Credibility</th>
<th>Attack Excusal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[Victim’s] confession should be presented during his trial.</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Victim’s] confession was honest.</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Victim] is guilty of the murder</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Attacker] was justified.</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Attacker] acted appropriately.</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Attacker] should be charged with a crime. (reverse scored)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Primary Analyses
• An ANOVA revealed no significant effects on Confession Credibility scores, F < 2.4, ps > .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.

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 office) 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