

**RESEARCH ETHICS AND SEXUALITY: THE INFLUENCE OF
PERSONAL IDEOLOGIES**

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

Research Ethics and Sexuality: The Influence of Personal Ideologies

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The purpose of this study is to determine the degree to which participants maintained their original ideologies after being exposed to a synopsis of an unethical experiment. The study primarily screened for anti-gay prejudices in participant responses with the intent to determine if another's sexuality influenced the participant's view on the ethicality of the experiment. Participants were asked to complete a preliminary set of questionnaires to determine their background knowledge on unethical experiments and attitudes towards science. They were then requested to complete the second part of the study where they were exposed to a condition of the unethical experiment and administered additional questionnaires. The second set of questionnaires were designed to reassess their attitudes towards science and obtain information on their views of the LGBT community. This study focuses on the Tearoom Trade Study and how the knowledge of another's sexual identity could potentially influence an individual's opinion on whether an unethical experiment is justifiable or not. I hypothesize that support for victims involved in unethical research will decrease when they are a part of the LGBT community and will increase when the victim is heterosexual.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this to my mother. Thank you for always believing in me and encouraging me to never give up on what I want. You have shown me that with hard work and dedication I can achieve anything I set my mind to. It has been encouraging to watch your achievements in academia, and I can only hope that I am half as successful as you are. To our many publications to come. I love you Dr. Lohmann.

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Lastly, I would like to thank my family and loved ones for their encouragement, support, and love. To my parents and Savina, you have been my rock through this process and I can never thank you enough. Thank you for providing never ending laughter and for believing in me.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Advances in psychological science have continued to expand and produce new areas of study. With increased advances, a broadened practice of scientific research has evolved. While the operations and ethicality of scientific research is well elaborated on today, it has not always been as protective of its participants in the past. In fact, “experiments in the past often exploited more vulnerable patients (Brazier, 2008).” The history of unethical treatment has influenced the regulations of current experiments and has prompted researchers to analyze reported cases. The practice of unethical research not only effects the involved victims, but the willingness of other’s participation in future studies while impacting support of future research (Freimuth et al., 2001). While the practice of ethics in research has evolved, it is important to examine how the mistreatment of a minority population can “affect perceptions of the severity of the ethical problems of a study (Naveira, 2016).” The Tuskegee Study and the San Antonio Contraceptive Study have been scrutinized for targeting minorities and the deviant nature of their study. The Tuskegee Study was detrimental to African American individuals who had contracted syphilis. These subjects were told they were being studied to find a medical cure and when one became available researchers observed them deteriorate rather than save their lives. Similarly, researchers conducting the San Antonio Contraceptive study replaced subjects birth control pills with placebos. Due to the populations that were targeted, they have received more consideration and publicity than the Tearoom Trade study. The ethicality of the Tearoom Trade study has been controversial and many social scientist do not recognize it as a sociological study because of the “distasteful interaction” that it is associated with. During Humphreys’ study, he observed several

individuals whom he persuaded to tell him about their personal lives. After observing them in public, he recorded their license plate numbers and tracked them down a year later (Nardi, 1995). Using the information they told him, he “invaded the privacy and threatened the social standing” of his subjects (Nardi, 1995). Humphreys’ methodology and research has since been questioned, but allegations that he is a pornographer rather than a researcher and the varying opinions on the ethicality and legality of the experiment has deterred many researchers from further investigation (Gray, 1998). Less care and attention has been given to the measure of exploitation subjects endured. This issue is significant, as it is important that studies are consensual and that researchers do not breach confidentiality. Extensive research has not been done on this study or topic. As a result of the subjects being involuntarily outed, it has been assumed that involved individuals would not likely comply to discussing their experiences. Therefore, it would be beneficial to develop more knowledge on how other individuals view unethical study procedures when minority groups are targeted rather than the majority. I hypothesize that support for victims involved in unethical research will decrease when they are a part of the LGBT community and will increase when the victim is heterosexual.

CHAPTER II

METHODS

Participants

A total of 123 participants, all subject pool students from Texas A&M University, participated in online the study. All students at Texas A&M University with a Qualtrics account had access to participate in the study. Participants ranged in classification from freshman to senior level students. Participants identified as female (n = 93), male (n = 27), and female-male transgendered (n = 1). Two people chose not to identify with a gender. The majority of participants identified as either White/Caucasian (n = 85) and Hispanic-American/Latino (n = 16).

Materials

The study took place online through the Psychology department's Culture in Mind Research Collaboratory (CMRC) Qualtrics account. Since the study was conducted online, participants had the option to take it on a range of technological devices (e.g., computer, tablet, smartphone), during their preferred time, and from any location with internet access. The study did not require them to use any specialized software. Data was collected and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Design

The study was divided into two parts. During the first timepoint, participants were screened for their background knowledge on unethical research and were asked to report any unethical studies they were aware of. Participants were administered the AGLT and homonegativity scales to determine their attitudes and ideologies toward the lesbian, gay,

bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community. The scale included questions like “gay men have all the rights they need” and “gay men should stop complaining about the way they are treated in society, and simply get on with their lives.” Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement to the statements using a Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree). Additionally, the prejudice response scale (1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree) and the Color-Blind Racial Attitudes Scale (1 = strongly disagree and 6 = strongly agree) were administered to assess their racial attitudes and prejudicial ideologies. We conducted a repeated measures design with a between subjects factor during the second timepoint. Participants responded to the same questionnaires administered during part I and were randomly assigned to a condition of the Tearoom Trade Study (Homosexual/Heterosexual). The heterosexual condition was designed to stimulate the concept of a secret being exposed to one’s family whereas the heterosexual condition included an excerpt that summarized the Tearoom Trade study.

Procedure

Participants were required to complete part I before they were given access to part II. However, it was not required that they complete part II. Part I opened on April 4, 2018 and part II opened April 5, 2018. The study closed on May 1, 2018. I then cleaned the data, assigned participants new identifications, and used SPSS to analyze the data collected.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

A mixed ANOVA was conducted to determine whether time point and exposure to scientific ethics violations affected science attitudes. No significant interaction was found between time point and ethics condition ($F(1, 120) = .968, p = .327$) on science attitudes. Additionally, there was not a significant main effect of either time point ($F(1, 120) = .001, p = .976$) or a significant main effect of ethics condition ($F(1, 120) = 2.038, p = .156$). Overall, science attitudes did not change over time from time point 1 to time point 2 and science attitudes did not differ based upon whether participants were exposed to either an ethics violation towards minority or majority group members.

A mixed ANOVA was conducted to determine whether time point and exposure to scientific ethic violations affected homonegative attitudes. No significant interaction was found between time point and ethics condition ($F(1, 118) = 1.510, p = .222$) on homonegative attitudes. Additionally, there was not a significant main effect of either time point ($F(1, 118) = 1.344, p = .249$) or a significant main effect of ethics condition ($F(1, 118) = .763, p = .393$). Overall, if homonegative attitudes were expressed, they did not change over time from time point 1 to time point 2 and homonegative attitudes did not differ based upon whether participants were exposed to either an ethics violation towards minority or majority group members.

A mixed ANOVA was conducted to determine whether time point and exposure to scientific ethic violations affected heterosexuals tendency to be hostile toward homosexuals. No significant interaction was found between time point and ethics condition ($F(1, 118) = 1.940, p = .166$) on hostile interactions. However, there was a significant main effect of time point ($F(1,$

118) = 4.017, $p = .047$) on hostility. Specifically, participants reported higher levels of hostility in time point 1 ($M = 2.56$, $SD = 1.29$) compared to time point 2 ($M = 2.78$, $SD = 1.31$). No significant main effect of ethics condition was found ($F(1, 118) = .051$, $p = .822$). Overall, hostile interactions did not change over time from time point 1 to time point 2 and hostile interactions did not differ based upon whether participants were exposed to either an ethics violation towards minority or majority group members.

A mixed ANOVA was conducted to determine whether time point and exposure to scientific ethics violations affected prejudicial responses. No significant interaction was found between time point and ethics condition ($F(1, 118) = .148$, $p = .701$) on prejudicial responses. Additionally, there was not a significant main effect of either time point ($F(1, 118) = .018$, $p = .893$) or a significant main effect of ethics condition ($F(1, 118) = 1.386$, $p = .241$). Overall, if prejudicial responses were expressed, they did not change over time from time point 1 to time point 2 and prejudicial attitudes did not differ based upon whether participants were exposed to either an ethics violation towards minority or majority group members.

A mixed ANOVA was conducted to determine whether time point and exposure to scientific ethics violations affected symbolic racism. No significant interaction was found between time point and ethics condition ($F(1, 118) = .830$, $p = .364$) on symbolic racism. However, there was a significant main effect of time point ($F(1, 118) = 12.039$, $p = .001$) on symbolic racism. Specifically, participants reported higher levels of symbolic racism in time point 1 ($M = 3.42$, $SD = .882$) compared to time point 2 ($M = 3.62$, $SD = .885$). No significant main effect of ethics condition was found ($F(1, 118) = .100$, $p = .752$). Overall, symbolic racism did not change over time from time point 1 to time point 2 and symbolic racism did not differ

based upon whether participants were exposed to either an ethics violation towards minority or majority group members.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Although laws have been passed and the LGBT community is more widely accepted, they are still a marginalized population. While the negative effects of the Tea Room Trade study are undeniable, it is important that unethical treatment involving minority groups are no longer practiced or accepted. Preventing future exposure of minority groups to unethical conditions is imperative and can be achieved by ensuring that precautionary procedures are followed when conducting research. Therefore, it is important that the public supports ethical research and upholds universal standards for all groups of people.

While there were few changes in ideologies between part I and part II of the study, the results indicate that participants did not find unethical treatment to be acceptable in any condition. More specifically, another's sexuality did not negatively influence participants' thoughts on the ethicality of an experiment nor did it deduct their support for victims of unethical violations. However, participants still were discriminatory toward LGBT members and the African-American population. They reported to have had more negative and hostile thoughts about the LGBT community. Additionally, they did not perceive racial discrimination to be a prevalent problem that prevented African Americans from living a fulfilled life. Such ideologies have made minority groups susceptible to unethical treatment in the past. Thus, understanding how marginalized groups are targeted is essential in enforcing procedures that prohibit unethical violations from reoccurring.

Although my hypothesis was not consistent with my results, my findings indicate that our university values ethical research regardless of the group of people involved. It is likely that

the population could have largely affected my results. University students are thought to be more open minded and accepting due to the knowledge they have available to them. Additionally, since the study was announced in many psychology classes, it is likely participants have learned about unethical treatments during their time at Texas A&M University. Another limitation is the time period between the two parts of the study. Participants were given access to part II of the study once they completed the first portion. Therefore, had they taken them back to back a reliable measure was not taken. Lastly, it is more difficult to construct a condition in which a majority group is discriminated against. Considering a good comparison was made, it is not equivalent to the damage associated with outing a member of the LGBT community.

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