

Moral outrage and dehumanization towards women (and their male partner) who decide to abort

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Despite abortion has been legalized in several Western countries, it still continues to be a socially disapproved and morally condemned practice. The negative attitudes that surround abortion often affect the women who decide to interrupt their pregnancy. Research evidence has shown that women who abort frequently report to experience devaluation and denigration which negatively impact on their physical and mental health. Few studies have examined this stigma from the perspective of the perceivers, leaving individuals' reactions towards social actors involved in the decision to interrupt pregnancy largely unexplored. To fill this gap, we conducted two experimental studies aimed to analyze the role of moral emotions (i.e., moral outrage) in affecting the perceived humanness of a woman (Study 1 and 2) and her male partner (Study 2) involved in abortion decisions.

In Study 1, participants were randomly assigned to evaluate a woman who chose to abort (vs. not abort) with her preborn described as a fetus (vs. a child). As expected, we found that regardless of their personal attitude towards abortion, participants reacted with moral outrage against the woman who decided to abort (vs. not abort) and perceived her as less human. Contrary to our expectations, the lexical markers describing the pre-born (fetus vs. child) did not influence the woman's perception.

In Study 2, we examined the perception of the male partner involved in the decision to abort. Participants were randomly assigned to evaluate a woman (vs. a man vs. a couple) who chose to abort (vs. not abort).

Results confirmed that the decision to abort negatively affected the perception of both partners. The present findings suggest that the choice to abort may have potential negative consequences for both women and men in terms of discrimination in social situations.