

Evaluations of Social Exclusion: Influences of Sexual Identity and Political Ideology

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PSB3E-BT15: Bachelor Thesis

Group 17

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June 26th, 2025

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Abstract

This study examines how individuals evaluate the seriousness of social exclusion with ambiguous evidence to identify the effect of the sexual orientation of the alleged victim and the political ideology of the observer. An online, vignette-based experiment was used to test this, among a convenience sample of $N = 146$ participants. Participants were asked to read through vignettes describing an individual claiming to be the victim of social exclusion due to their sexual identity. Claims made by non-heterosexuals were found to be taken more seriously than those made by heterosexuals. More liberal/left-leaning participants were found to take claims more seriously overall, compared to conservative/right-leaning participants. Political ideology was found to moderate the effect of sexual orientation on the evaluation of claims of harm, with liberal/left-leaning participants evaluating claims made by non-heterosexuals as more serious than those made by heterosexuals. More conservative/right-leaning participants, however, did not seem to evaluate the seriousness of claims made by heterosexuals versus non-heterosexuals differently. These findings are challenged by methodological limitations of the study, including a primarily left-leaning sample, which reduces the confidence in these results and their generalizability.

Keywords: sexual orientation, political ideology, harm allegations, ambiguous harm, social exclusion

Evaluations of Social Exclusion: Influences of Sexual Identity and Political Ideology

Imagine: A person feels socially excluded and not accepted by their colleagues but has no evidence for this beyond their subjective feeling. How should companies proceed to process such claims and make a decision on whether to evoke consequences despite a lack of physical evidence? Social exclusion at the workplace can have strong negative impacts on an individual but also on an organizational level (Scott et al., 2014; Bellani & D'Ambrosio, 2011) and should be regarded seriously. In cases without physical evidence beyond the verbal report of the victim, however, it is difficult for companies to decide what actions to take. Punishing an innocent person solely based on verbal allegations can have serious negative consequences for the accused, but dismissing true allegations due to a lack of evidence can result in the victim feeling unsafe and overlooked (Hoskins, 2022). Therefore, it is important to understand the mechanisms underlying decision-making in response to allegations of harm in the workplace that lack physical evidence.

Lack of evidence other than verbal accounts of subjective experiences results in judgement that is more prone to the influence of biases and stereotypes, implicit and sometimes explicit assumptions one has about the environment and the people around them (Edgcumbe, 2019; Charman et al., 2017). Which biases one holds can differ depending on an individual's background and their social upbringing (Skinner et al., 2020; Skinner et al., 2017; Payne & Hannay, 2020). With biases and stereotypes taking on a bigger role in judgements without evidence, the identity of the alleged victim becomes more influential in considering how to proceed. Identity cannot be excluded from decision-making, as research has shown that even if identity is not specified, this blank will be filled with assumptions (Hester & Gray., 2020). This is especially relevant for evaluations of individuals with certain identities, such as being part of a

minority group, like the LGBTQ+ community, which are more often negatively affected by implicit biases (Herek, 2009). Because of these differences in how people with a certain identity are evaluated and perceived, it is important to investigate how this presents in allegation cases without physical evidence.

The identity of the victim, however, is not the only factor influencing this process of evaluation. The identity of the observer can also affect the perception and evaluation of others (Hester & Gray, 2020; Graso et al., 2022). For instance, the political ideology of an observer affects how observers make and evaluate moral decisions (Graham et al., 2009). It is therefore not only important to understand how the identity of the victim influences the evaluation of allegations, but also to take the observer's identity into consideration.

Hence, I will investigate the question of whether harm allegations are evaluated differently if the claimant is part of the LGBTQ+ community than those from heterosexuals and how this is moderated by the observer's political ideology.

Theoretical Framework

Humans are social individuals, thriving in social environments where we feel accepted and a sense of belonging (Schreiner, 2010; Lambert et al., 2013). As a threat to this, social exclusion can be devastating and proves to have significant negative effects on both mental and physical health (Bellani & D'Ambrosio, 2011; Filia et al., 2025). Social exclusion can result in psychological harm, including feelings of sadness, helplessness, and even physical pain responses (Williams & Nida, 2022; Wesselmann et al., 2016). It has further been linked to psychological disorders such as depression (Reinhard et al., 2019; Williams, 2007). These patterns of harm also extend to more specific contexts, such as the workplace, where social exclusion impacts both the individual, leading to reduced job satisfaction and an increased

burnout risk, and organizational outcomes, lowering productivity, and raising turnover rates (He et al., 2020; Reece et al., 2021). Recognizing the seriousness of social exclusion in the workplace, and actively addressing it, is therefore beneficial for all parties involved.

In the absence of objective evidence, however, it is important to consider other factors that might influence how we evaluate and judge harms like social exclusion. Two important factors are biases and stereotypes (Edgcumbe, 2019; Charman et al., 2017), assumptions that individuals have about the world and people around them, which are not necessarily harmful but can become so if they foster discrimination. The effects of this can be seen regarding minority groups such as the LGBTQ+ community, who are facing discrimination and microaggressions due to their sexual orientation (Nadal et al., 2016; Casey et al., 2019). Virtually all people have biases and rely on stereotypes to an extent, which are partially shaped by environmental and social experiences, such as media, peer, and parental influences, making them differ between individuals (Beukeboom & Burgers, 2019; Bigler & Lieben, 2006; Schultner et al., 2024; Skinner-Dorkenoo et al., 2023). Further, biases can have active influences on an individual's behavior, even if that individual is consciously working to inhibit their biases (Schultner et al., 2024). Now, looking at allegations of harm in the workplace: The less physical evidence exists for such allegations, the more room there is for the observer to rely on individual biases, be it implicitly or explicitly (Allport, 1955, as cited in Schoth & Lossi, 2017; Hirsch et al., 2016), which may lead to unfair decision making. In order to understand how decision-making can be improved in cases where objective evidence is lacking, it is essential to consider the key factors that influence such evaluations, specifically, the influence of biases people might hold against people with certain identities and how they influence evaluations of ambiguous harm allegations.

The effect of LGBTQ+ identity on perceptions of harm allegations

In our society, perceptions of those around us are still shaped by our biases and stereotypes, with minority groups being more heavily affected by the resulting negative consequences (Nadal et al., 2016; Casey et al., 2019). As part of a minority group, LGBTQ+ individuals have been exposed to various forms of discrimination for many years (Parmenter et al., 2020; Casey et al., 2019). This includes physical and non-physical forms of harassment in many areas of life, including the workplace (Mills & Oswin, 2024). While there have been efforts to reduce discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals at the workplace, it remains a common issue (Valfort, 2017; Di Marco et al., 2021), with some research showing that over fifty percent of LGBTQ+ individuals have faced harassment at work (Brassel et al., 2019). Nevertheless, as awareness of LGBTQ+ discrimination is growing, so too, is societal acceptance and protection of LGBTQ+ groups (Keleher & Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2020). We are therefore currently experiencing two simultaneous dynamics: On the one hand, LGBTQ+ individuals continue to face discrimination and stigma, on the other hand, this history of discrimination invites individuals and groups to purposefully and subconsciously compensate for stigmatization with protectionist behaviour (Lisnek et al., 2025; Rucker & Richeson, 2021). This ambiguity in public perception also particularly affects how this community is perceived and judged when investigating allegations of harm without physical evidence, where evaluation is more strongly directed by biases (Allport, 1955, as cited in Schoth & Lossi, 2017; Hirsch et al., 2016).

A possible explanation for the persistence of discrimination is provided by Herek (2009), who argues that implicit biases, subconscious attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals, can shape perception and judgement, often resulting in prejudice. He argues that biases and prejudice often emerge from society. Most people are raised with the implicit assumption that heterosexuality is the norm, a phenomenon called heteronormativity and not aligning with this norm is considered

abnormal or deviant. This is visible in the underrepresentation of non-heterosexual individuals in media, for example (Herek, 2009). Heteronormativity and the implicit biases and prejudice related to it can lead to heterosexuals perceiving LGBTQ+ individuals as less trustworthy, credible and assigning them self- or joint-responsibility more often for harm done to them (Herek, 2009). Research further shows that LGBTQ+ individuals are more often the target of harassment at the workplace than heterosexuals (Di Marco et al., 2021). This harassment ranges from overt verbal abuse and mistreatment to more ambiguous discrimination including social exclusion, harmful jokes or negative attitudes (Di Marco et al., 2021). LGBTQ+ individuals therefore have to be more worrisome about discrimination or stigmatization they might experience at the workplace, sometimes even to the extent that they decide which job or career to pursue in hopes of avoiding mistreatment (Brassel et al., 2019).

This research would lead me to hypothesize that harm allegations made by LGBTQ+ individuals will be judged as less severe than those made by heterosexuals.

However, from another point of view, there is more recent research showing that non-heterosexual individuals might be taken more seriously compared to heterosexual individuals, contrary to the initial assumption. As society evolves, people become more accepting of previously marginalized identities such as non-heterosexuals (Keleher & Smith, 2012). Furthermore, individuals who are more aware of the struggles and discrimination that non-heterosexuals endure might also give them more belief to unwittingly counteract this discrimination (Morris et al., 2019).

Based on these theories, I would hypothesize that harm allegations made by LGBTQ+ individuals will be judged as more serious than those made by heterosexuals.

Due to this conflicting baseline, the results of this research can potentially develop in two directions.

Therefore, my first hypothesis is an exploratory one:

H1: The seriousness of claims of harm made by LGBTQ+ individuals will be evaluated differently than ones made by heterosexuals, whichever direction this effect might go.

Political Ideology in Perceptions of Harm Allegations

While the identity of an alleged victim is expected to influence how harm is evaluated, the identity of the observer can play an equally important role. An indicator of how an individual perceives and evaluates the world around them is their political ideology, which describes an individual's values, opinions, and political affiliation (Swigart et al., 2020). In research, political ideology is usually defined as a spectrum spanning from liberal to conservative or from left to right (Jost et al., 2008). Within this spectrum, an individual's political ideology influences their decision-making and moral judgement in distinct ways.

One theory that discusses the question of how and why an individual's political ideology affects their decision-making is the Moral Foundations Theory (Graham et al., 2009). Moral Foundations Theory proposes that liberals and conservatives use different moral foundations in everyday life, which can affect how they assess different situations, including contexts such as evaluations of ambiguous harm allegations. When making moral decisions, evaluating what is wrong or right, liberals tend to put more focus on the possible consequences for the individuals involved. Conservatives, however, put more emphasis on following moral rules put in place by authorities, such as earlier generations (Graham et al., 2009). This is consistent with the findings of Jost et al. (2003) that conservatives are less likely to accept change in social structures and hierarchies, wanting to maintain established tradition and the status quo. Furthermore,

conservatives were shown to not only tolerate but even justify inequalities resulting from social hierarchies due to their trust in existing systems and the belief that inequalities are an innate part of how society functions (Jost et al., 2003).

Moral Foundations Theory has received both support and criticism since it was first presented, especially in regard to how valid the differences in the exact moral foundations are (Kivikangas et al., 2021). Nonetheless, Moral Foundations Theory remains a widely used theoretical framework to explain the differences in moral judgement between conservatives and liberals and has proven to provide relevant explanations beyond other variables previously used to determine ideological tendencies (Yilmaz et al., 2019). Building on this theoretical framework, recent research by Gray and Kubin (2024) extends the discussion by exploring how these ideological differences also shape perceptions of victimhood. They propose that conservatives and liberals perceive victimhood differently, with liberals sharing the belief that some groups, such as minorities, are more at risk of being victims of a crime than other groups, while conservatives believe all groups share an equal risk of being a victim. This ideological divide in perceived vulnerability has been demonstrated in research on sexual assault allegations, for example, where conservatives were found to be more skeptical of such allegations and more concerned about false accusations, while liberals tended to take these claims more seriously and showed greater support for victims (Lambert & Raichle, 2000; O'Connor et al., 2021; Ortiz & Smith, 2022). Although sexual assault is not the focus of this study, these patterns illustrate how political ideology can influence harm evaluations, insights that translate to ambiguous claims of social exclusion.

Given these patterns, my second hypothesis is the following:

H2: Conservatives will judge harm allegations as less severe compared to liberals.

However, due to liberals being more aware of structural discrimination of marginalized groups and conservatives exhibiting a willingness to defend existing social hierarchies and the status quo, these results might be skewed by the identity of the claimant which will be discussed based on the example whether the claimant is part of the LGBTQ+ community or not.

The Interaction Between Political Ideology and LGBTQ+ Identity

The finding that liberals tend to be more aware of structural discrimination that minority groups might encounter (Gray & Kubins, 2024), raises the question whether an observer's political ideology moderates the perception of harm allegations made by LGBTQ+ versus heterosexual individuals. This aligns with findings that conservatives are more likely to blame victims and accept inequality as a natural result of social hierarchies, whereas liberals are less accepting of inequality and more attuned to individual consequences when applying moral rules (Graham et al., 2009; Gray & Kubins, 2004; Jost et al., 2003). Furthermore, conservatives often hold the belief that heterosexuals and LGBTQ+ individuals have fundamental differences, a belief called social essentialism, while liberals value trait essentialism, the assumption that sexual orientation cannot be changed (Hoyt et al., 2019). These beliefs can lead to increased prejudice and blame aimed at LGBTQ+ individuals from conservatives (Hoyt et al., 2019).

At a broader level these differences can also be seen in political campaigns of conservative versus liberal parties. During the 2025 elections in Germany, all major liberal parties included awareness of the discrimination LGBTQ+ individuals face in their election programs and efforts to improve LGBTQ+ rights in various domains, such as family laws or the medical field, while major conservative parties either did not mention LGBTQ+ rights at all or focused on limiting medical access for gender affirming care and family rights for LGBTQ+ families (*Bundestagswahl-bw.de*, z.d.). Furthermore, Tomczak et al. (2022) found that left-

winged parties show more support for same-sex marriages, while right-winged parties hold the belief that marriage should be reserved for a union between a man and a woman. In Poland, regions that are high in support for right-winged parties have even established so-called “LGBTQ-free zones” (Tomczak et al., 2022).

Higher levels of homophobia correlate with more conservative and right-wing political orientation (Woodford et al., 2012; Falgares et al., 2022) while left-leaning and liberal political views correlate with lower levels of homophobia and more support for LGBTQ+ rights (Hindenlang et al., 2025; Hackimer et al., 2021; Woodford et al., 2012).

Based on the aforementioned research showing the effect of political ideology on LGBTQ+ attitudes, my third hypothesis is:

H3: Participants scoring on the more conservative/right-leaning side of the political spectrum will evaluate harm allegations made by LGBTQ+ individuals as less severe than those made by heterosexuals and vice versa for participants scoring on the more liberal/left-leaning side of the spectrum.

Methods

This study was a part of a larger research project¹, investigating how the identity of both claimant and observer affects the perception and evaluation of harm allegations. More specifically, I explored the effect of the alleged victim’s sexual identity and the observer’s political ideology.

Participants

¹ The full study was part of a bachelor thesis research project. Participants answered demographic questions regarding their gender, political ideology, immigrant status and sexual orientation, as well as filling out a Benevolent sexism subscale and the Big Five trait inventory. In total, the survey included 5 different vignettes, describing experiences of either social exclusion or verbal sexual harassment. Participants were randomly assigned to different sub-conditions of each vignette and the order of the vignettes was randomized to control for order effects. The variables investigated by other members of the group (i.e. gender, immigrant status and attractiveness) are beyond the scope of this thesis and will therefore not be discussed.

After receiving ethical approval, we recruited participants through convenience sampling, utilizing social media platforms and student group chats to fill out our survey, which explored perceptions of workplace harm. Specifically, we used a standardized, prewritten prompt including the topic of the study and its expected duration to invite their participation. Participants were invited if they were above the age of 16 and demonstrated sufficient comprehension of English to complete the survey. While 281 responses were recorded, only 146 met all requirements, specifically reaffirming consent as the final step of the study. Therefore, the final sample size was $N = 146$, with 67% ($N = 98$) being female, 32% ($N = 46$) being male and, less than 1% ($N = 2$) being participants who identified as non-binary or preferred not to say.

Procedure and Study Design

After providing informed consent, participants were asked to indicate their political ideology before proceeding to the main part of the experiment.

During the main part of the study, participants were asked to read through and evaluate a vignette portraying an individual experiencing social exclusion, using a between-subjects experimental design. The vignette described an ambiguous scenario depicting allegations of non-physical harm, namely social exclusion in the workplace. Social exclusion was described in ambiguous terms, focusing on the experience of the alleged victim rather than objectively describing harm being done to the individual. Within these sub-conditions, the content of the scenarios remained the same, with only the identity of the claimant being manipulated.

In order to isolate the effect of the claimant's sexual identity on the seriousness evaluation of harm, a short scenario was invented, one portraying a heterosexual individual claiming harm and the other portraying a non-heterosexual. The type of harm, social exclusion, was kept the same in both scenarios. Social exclusion was described as the claimant feeling

excluded and made fun of due to their sexual identity, and a feeling of the claimant feeling the need to hide their identity. To ensure ambiguity in the allegations, the focus of both scenarios was on the claimant subjectively feeling left out opposed to colleagues objectively excluding the claimant. The workspace was either described as traditional (non-heterosexual condition), implying more traditional views on topics such as gender roles and sexual identity to ensure that exclusion of a non-heterosexual individual would be seen as realistic, or progressive (heterosexual condition), implying more open-minded and non-traditional views on topics such as gender roles and sexual identity. In both scenarios, the victim felt socially excluded based on comments made by colleagues, which suggested negative attitudes towards the sexuality of the claimant. All other wordings and elements of the scenarios other than those directly connected to the sexual identity were held constant. Upon completion of the survey, participants were debriefed on the purpose of the study and were again given the option to confirm or rescind their consent.

The exact scenarios used are the following:

LGBTQ condition

“Mark works in a socially and quite traditional conservative company. He often finds himself a bit different from other employees. Though everyone is friendly, he frequently hears offhand jokes about “rainbow flag politics” or comments like “not making everything about gender issues these days.”

As a gay man, Mark finds these comments troubling and directed at him personally. When he discusses his personal life, coworkers assume he has a wife and family, reacting awkwardly when he corrects them. He does not feel like he belongs. He feels he has to downplay his identity to be included in this environment.

While no one is outright hostile, he feels tolerated rather than fully accepted and worries that being more open might affect how seriously he is taken.”

Heterosexual condition

“Mark works in a socially liberal and quite progressive company. He often finds himself a bit different from other employees. Though everyone is friendly, he frequently hears offhand jokes about “traditional family stuff” or remarks like “we do not need 1950s types around here.”

As a straight man, Mark finds these comments troubling and directed at him personally.

When he discusses his personal life, coworkers seem surprised that he values a traditional family structure and expresses pride in being a husband and father. He does not feel like he belongs. He feels he has to downplay his identity to be included in this environment.

While no one is outright hostile, he feels tolerated rather than fully accepted and worries that being more open might affect how seriously he is taken.”

Measures

Evaluations of Seriousness

To assess the perceived seriousness of the harm presented in the vignette, participants were asked to fill out a 3-item scale, modeled after the scales used in Reynolds et al. (2020). Participant were asked to indicate whether “The behaviour the individual is describing is (...)”: “serious,” “concerning,” and lastly “harmful” and had to indicate the extent to which they agreed with each of the items on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. A reliability analysis was conducted to evaluate the internal consistency of the scale, yielding Cronbach’s α as .86, suggesting high reliability.

Political Ideology

Among other demographic items, we asked all participants to self-report their political ideology using a single-item Likert scale ranging from 1 = very liberal/left-leaning to 7 = very conservative/right-leaning.

Results

To test whether evaluations of the seriousness of social exclusion differed based on the sexual orientation of the target (coded as 0 = LGBTQ+, 1 = heterosexual), the political ideology of the observer, and the interaction between these variables, I conducted a linear regression analysis using PROCESS, version 4.2 (Hayes, 2022).

Preliminary Analysis

The data was examined to confirm that the assumptions required for linear regression were met. The examination of a P-P plot indicated a normal distribution of residuals (see Appendix, Figure 1). Further, the evaluation of scatterplots confirmed linearity, and residual plots showed a random scatter, indicating no violation of homoscedasticity (see Appendix, Figure 2). Multicollinearity was ruled out as all Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) were below 4.

Descriptive statistics indicate that the sample is predominantly liberal/left-leaning, with an average score on the moderating variable “political ideology” of $M = 2.61$, $SD = 1.25$. Specifically, only 7.5% of participants positioned themselves on the conservative/right-leaning side of the spectrum, 76.7% of participants positioned themselves on the liberal/left-leaning side of the spectrum, and 15.8% of participants indicated being moderate/neither.

Overall the model including sexual orientation, political ideology and the interaction provides a weak but significant model fit ($F(3, 142) = 10.87$, $p < .001$, $R = .43$, $R^2 = .19$, $MSE = 1.58$), with a little less than 20% of the variation in seriousness ratings being explained by all three variables combined.

Hypothesis 1: The Effect of Sexual Orientation

My first hypothesis examined whether the sexual orientation of the alleged victim would influence the evaluation of the seriousness of the social exclusion. Due to conflicting findings in previous research, I could not confidently propose a specific directional hypothesis. Results showed that the LGBTQ-condition negatively correlates with seriousness ratings ($r = -.36$), indicating that seriousness evaluations decreased with a higher LGBTQ condition (coded 0 = LGBTQ, 1 = heterosexual). On average, allegations made by LGBTQ+ individuals were rated as more serious ($M = 5.32$, $SD = 1.29$, 95% CI [5.01, 5.63]) than those made by heterosexual individuals ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 1.29$, 95% CI [4.03, 4.62]). This difference was statistically

significant ($b = -0.97$, $SE = 0.21$, $t(142) = -4.64$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-1.38, -0.56]$), with a moderate effect size ($\beta = -.35$), indicating that LGBTQ+ individuals' allegations were indeed evaluated as more serious than those made by heterosexual individuals. Although my hypothesis was exploratory, these results suggest that harm, in the form of social exclusion, experienced by LGBTQ+ individuals is evaluated as more serious than equal harm experienced by heterosexual individuals.

Hypothesis 2: The Effect of Political Ideology

My second hypothesis predicted that participants scoring higher on political ideology, therefore positioning themselves on the more conservative/right-leaning side of the political spectrum, would evaluate subjective social exclusion experiences as less serious than participants who scored lower on political ideology, positioning themselves on the more liberal/left-leaning side of the political spectrum. Supporting this, the results suggest that political ideology and seriousness evaluation show a slight negative correlation ($r = -.095$), indicating that with increases on the political ideology scale, signifying more conservative/right-leaning positioning, allegations were evaluated slightly less serious. This is reflected in the means as well with liberal/left-leaning participants ($M = 4.90$, 95% CI $[4.65, 5.16]$, $SD = 1.34$) evaluating allegations as more serious than conservative/right-leaning participants ($M = 4.27$, 95% CI $[3.12, 5.43]$, $SD = 1.72$). Participants identifying as moderate/neutral on political ideology scored between liberal/left-leaning participants and conservative/right-leaning participants ($M = 4.59$, 95% CI $[4.00, 5.19]$, $SD = 1.37$). While the difference between average seriousness scores is small, it is statistically significant ($b = -0.38$, $SE = 0.13$, $t(142) = -2.86$; $p = .005$, 95% CI $[-0.64, -0.12]$), with a moderate effect size ($\beta = -.34$). These findings suggest that participants with more

liberal/left-leaning political ideology evaluated harm as more serious than participants with more conservative/right-leaning political ideology, which supports my second hypothesis.

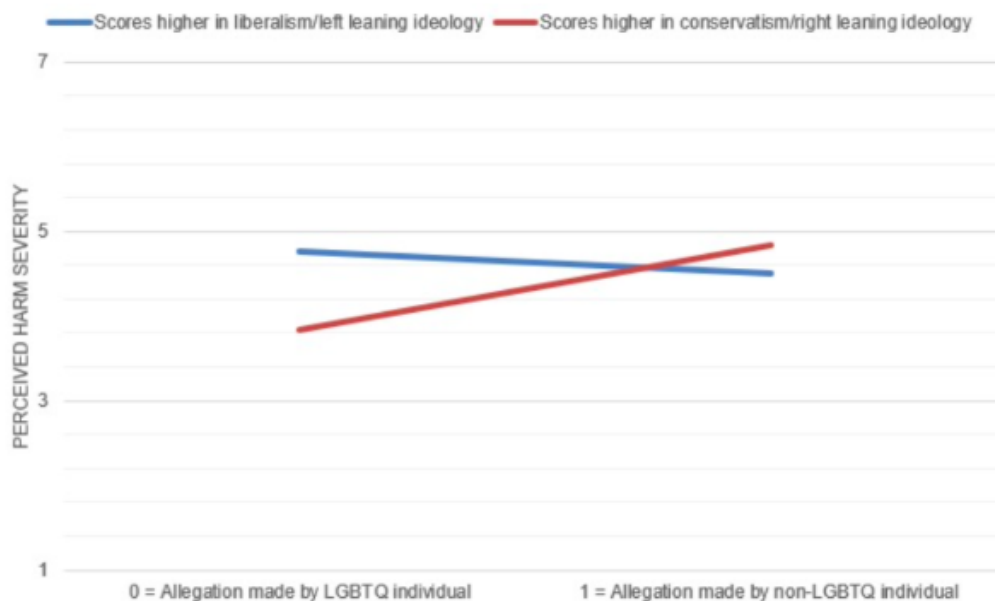
Hypothesis 3: The Interaction Between Sexual Orientation and Political Ideology

For my third hypothesis, I predicted that participants scoring more liberal/left-leaning on political ideology would evaluate social exclusion of an LGBTQ+ individual as more serious than that of a heterosexual individual, and conversely that participants scoring more conservative/right-leaning on political ideology would evaluate social exclusion of an LGBTQ+ individual as less serious than that of a heterosexual individual. Results show that the interaction between sexual orientation of the alleged victim and political ideology of the observer does have a statistically significant effect on the evaluation of the seriousness of allegations ($b = 0.51$, $SE = 0.17$, $t(142) = 3.00$, $p = .003$, 95% CI [0.18, 0.85]), indicating a moderate negative effect ($\beta = -.36$). To further examine this significant interaction between sexual orientation and political ideology, I conducted a simple slopes analysis (see Figure 3) at low (-1 SD), average (mean), and high (+1 SD) levels of political ideology, which corresponded to raw political ideology scores of 1.36 (low), 2.61 (mean) and 3.85 (high). The interaction between political ideology of the observer and sexual orientation of the alleged victim was significant at low levels ($b = -1.61$, $SE = 0.30$, $t(142) = -5.44$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-2.19, -1.02]) and mean levels ($b = -0.97$, $SE = 0.21$, $t(142) = -4.64$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-1.38, -0.56] of political ideology. At high levels of political ideology, however, the effect of sexual orientation on the evaluation of harm seriousness was not significant ($b = -0.33$, $SE = 0.30$, $t(142) = -1.10$, $p = .274$, 95% CI [-0.92, 0.26]).

This significant interaction between political ideology and sexual orientation at low and moderate levels of political ideology, indicates that participants with very to somewhat liberal/left-leaning (low) and somewhat to slightly liberal/left-leaning (mean) political views

evaluated harm experienced by an LGBTQ+ individual as more serious than harm experienced by a heterosexual individual. At high levels of political ideology, corresponding to a politically moderate/neutral position on the scale, the interaction was not significant, suggesting that participants with more centrist political views did not significantly differentiate between LGBTQ+ and heterosexual individuals in their evaluations of harm. However, because one standard deviation above the mean still falls within the liberal/left-leaning to moderate range, the simple slopes analysis does not offer insight into the effect of political ideology at truly conservative levels. These results provide partial support for my third hypothesis, specifically the prediction that more liberal/left-leaning individuals evaluate claims made by LGBTQ+ individuals as more serious than those made by heterosexuals.

Figure 3: Visualization of Simple Slopes of Interaction Between Sexual Orientation of Claimant and Political Ideology of Participant



Note: Figure 3, x-axis represents sexual condition of claimant; y-axis represents score of seriousness evaluation; blue line represents participants at low levels of political ideology (1.37), red line represents participants at high levels of political ideology (3.86) in the simple slopes analysis

Discussion

This study aimed to investigate how the sexual orientation of the victim and the political ideology of the participant influence the evaluations of harm allegations. While I expected the sexual orientation of the alleged victim to shape the evaluation of seriousness, I was uncertain regarding its directionality. Further, I anticipated participants identifying as more liberal/left-leaning to evaluate social exclusion experiences as more serious overall, specifically if coming from LGBTQ+ individuals, rather than conservative/right-leaning participants, who I anticipated to evaluate harm experienced specifically by heterosexuals as more serious. This was tested by means of a, predominantly liberal/left-leaning, convenience sample evaluating harm experiences presented in a vignette. Results indicated that claims made by non-heterosexual individuals are evaluated to be more serious compared to those made by heterosexual individuals. Moreover, political ideology affected how allegations of harm were evaluated, with liberals evaluating allegations as more serious than conservatives did. In addition to these individual effects, political ideology shaped the effect of sexual orientation on the evaluation of harm allegations, with highly liberal/left-leaning individuals evaluating harm allegations made by non-heterosexual individuals as more serious compared to heterosexual individuals, while more moderate or conservative/right-leaning individuals displayed no such difference. These results indicate important implications for the theoretical explanations and assumptions regarding the effect of identity on the evaluation of harm allegations.

Theoretical Implications

The first implication concerns how the political ideology of the observer affects the seriousness evaluation of harm allegations made by non-heterosexuals versus heterosexuals. With previous research and the current political state showing that more conservative individuals

usually have higher negative attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals (Tomczak et al., 2022; Woodford et al., 2012; Falgares et al., 2022), while liberals tend to be more accepting and supportive of LGBTQ+ individuals (Hindenlang et al., 2025; Hackimer et al., 2021; Woodford et al., 2012; *Bundestagswahl-bw.de*, z.d.), I expected this to also show in the results of the current study. Indeed, more strongly liberal/left-leaning participants did evaluate claims made by LGBTQ+ individuals as more serious than claims made by heterosexuals, which supports the aforementioned body of research. However, contrary to my expectation, participants with more conservative/right-leaning scores on political ideology did not show significant differences in the evaluation of seriousness for both groups. That said, given the left-skewness of the sample, this implication is more accurately interpreted as those with strongly liberal/left-leaning political views showing more concern for non-heterosexuals, than for heterosexuals while those with more moderate political affiliation seem to be concerned about the harm experienced by both groups to an equal extent.

The second implication addresses how evaluations of harm allegations are influenced by the observer's political ideology. Political ideology was hypothesized to affect harm allegation evaluations based on the Moral Foundations Theory (Graham et al., 2009), proposing that conservatives rely on different moral foundations when evaluating moral decisions, often exhibiting more distrust towards victims and claims of harm overall (Lambert & Raichle, 2000; Gray & Kubins, 2024), partly due to a more general acceptance of inequalities resulting from established social hierarchies (Jost et al., 2003). The findings are in line with Moral Foundations Theory, showing that more liberal/left-leaning individuals do evaluate claims of harm as more serious than more conservative/right-leaning individuals. Further, they provide more support for

the notion that conservatives are more distrusting towards individuals claiming to be victims of harm.

Third, I examined how the sexual orientation of an individual experiencing harm affects the evaluation of said harm. Due to differing baselines in theory and previous research, however, I could not, with enough confidence, predict the directionality of this effect. Results revealed that claims made by non-heterosexuals were evaluated more seriously than those made by heterosexuals. This is in line with my assumption that certain populations, such as younger, educated individuals, are becoming more accepting of LGBTQ+ individuals and therefore might be more aware of the discrimination and struggles that non-heterosexuals can experience, which might lead to a more serious evaluation of claims made by non-heterosexuals (Lisnek et al., 2025; Rucker & Richeson, 2021). However, I also hypothesized that the results could be opposite, with claims made by non-heterosexuals being evaluated as less serious. This was based on the possibility that people might have unconscious biases against LGBTQ+ individuals and, due to this, evaluate them and their claims of harm as less trustworthy (Herek, 2009). Evidently, this was not the case in this study. A possible explanation might be that society is indeed becoming more accepting of LGBTQ+ individuals overall (Keleher & Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2020), and this reflects in their evaluation. However, other research has shown (Di Marco et al., 2021) that discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals at the workplace is an ongoing issue, even despite this. Another possible explanation for why harm experienced by heterosexuals was not evaluated as more serious compared to non-heterosexuals might be due to a methodological issue rather than a theoretical one. Given that the experiment was conducted through an online survey distributed by psychology students at a university in the Netherlands, it is likely that the

sample was not representative of the general population and not comparable to other, more generalizable research.

Practical Implications

The results of this study show that evaluations of ambiguous harm can be influenced by both the identity of the alleged victim and that of the observer, and are therefore not impartial. Thus, it is important to consider the identities of all parties involved if a company faces harm allegations without objective evidence.

To counteract one-sided biases, it might be beneficial to ensure diversity, particularly in respect to political ideology, when establishing who should be included in decision-making processes. With more liberal individuals possibly being more attuned to systemic inequality, while more conservative individuals might prioritize neutrality and consistency, having a broader range of political ideologies represented could lead to a more balanced approach, reducing biases in either direction.

A different approach could be offering awareness training to HR personnel and individuals in management positions, about the impact of identities in decision-making and how to possibly counteract this with more in-depth documentation or clearer guidelines to follow when faced with ambiguous harm allegations. While inherent biases are difficult to fully counteract, anti-bias training has been shown to produce positive outcomes if administered correctly (Carter et al., 2020).

Nonetheless, it is important to be wary of the limitations of this research before basing practical suggestions on it. Regardless of the immediate applicability to direct changes in organizations however, these findings highlight a clear need for awareness, showing that decision-making around social exclusion is not impartial.

Limitations and Future Research Suggestions

When interpreting the above-mentioned results, it is important to consider the limitations of this study, the most immediate of which is the sample. The sample was heavily left-leaning, with only 7.5% of the sample being on the conservative/right-leaning side of the political spectrum. Therefore, results found regarding conservatives' behavior have very limited generalizability to anything beyond the specific sample used. Furthermore, given that the sample was taken by convenience and sought out by psychology students, there are high chances of the sample being predominantly younger individuals, who hold a higher education status. While society overall has become more accepting of LGBTQ+, younger generations specifically show more positive attitudes towards LGBTQ+ (Keleher & Smith, 2012) which suggests that age might be a moderating factor in the evaluation of claims made by non-heterosexuals versus heterosexuals. Additionally, education levels also seem to influence attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals (Lambert et al., 2006; Ohlander et al., 2005). However, these demographics were not reported, making it impossible to evaluate whether any moderation effects occurred because of them. Due to this, it would be highly recommended to increase the scale of the study with a more balanced sample and to either control for the effects of age and education level or report these demographics and include them in the analysis to determine their exact effects.

Another limitation is the design of the scenario. In this study's scenario, either a gay or a straight man made claims of social exclusion. Gay women were not included in the scenario, nor were transsexual or nonbinary individuals, therefore, it is unclear how well these effects translate to the treatment of gay women or transsexual and non-binary individuals. Attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals can differ depending on whether the individual in question is a homosexual man or woman (LaMar & Kite, 1998). Future research should replicate the current study while

differentiating between identities within the LGBTQ+ community, examining whether harm allegations made by, for example, lesbian women, or transgender individuals are evaluated differently, to assess the generalizability of the present findings across LGBTQ+ subgroups.

Moreover, stereotypicality of gay men and women also shows to affect attitudes towards homosexuals, which in turn is moderated by gender of the observer (Cohen et al., 2009). To assess if and how these differences might present in allegations of ambiguous harm, future research should create scenarios picturing either stereotypical or non-stereotypical gay men and women and compare the evaluations of those.

Conclusion

The present study yields support for the notion that our moral judgements regarding ambiguous harm claims are deeply affected by both our identity and that of the claimant. The goal in the judgement of claims of harm is justice and fairness, but what is perceived as just and fair seems to depend on who is judged and who is judging. If claims made by a non-heterosexual are evaluated to be more serious, especially if the observer is liberal/left-leaning, is that fair? How can we ensure that these decisions are not made in a way that benefits some more than others? If identity is inseparable from how we make decisions, instead of removing identity from the calculation, the aim should be to understand how identity influences our decisions and how this plays out in real-life situations. The next step should be to investigate how, considering the effect of identity, decision-making processes should be approached to ensure fairness. Additionally, I recommend further research on how political and sexual identity influence other sectors that are highly reliant on individuals' judgements, such as law enforcement or politics.

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Appendix

Figure 1: P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual

Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual

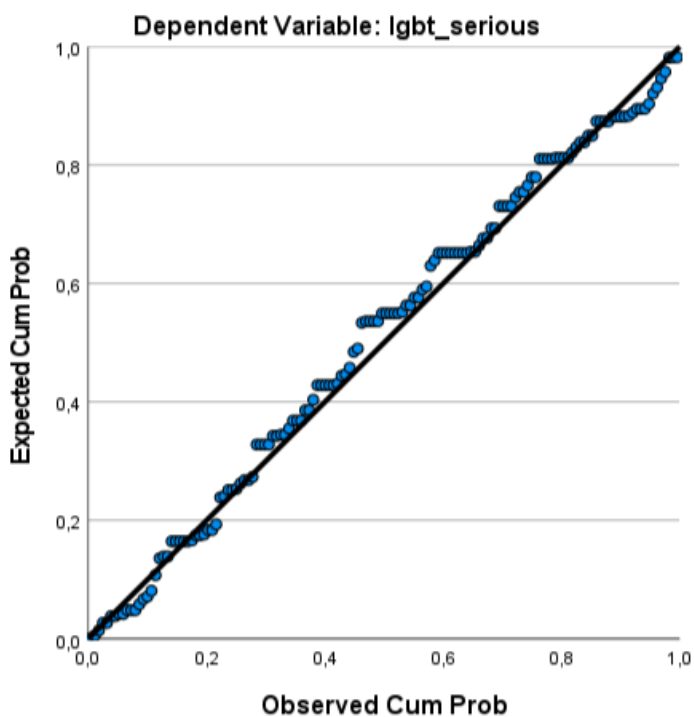
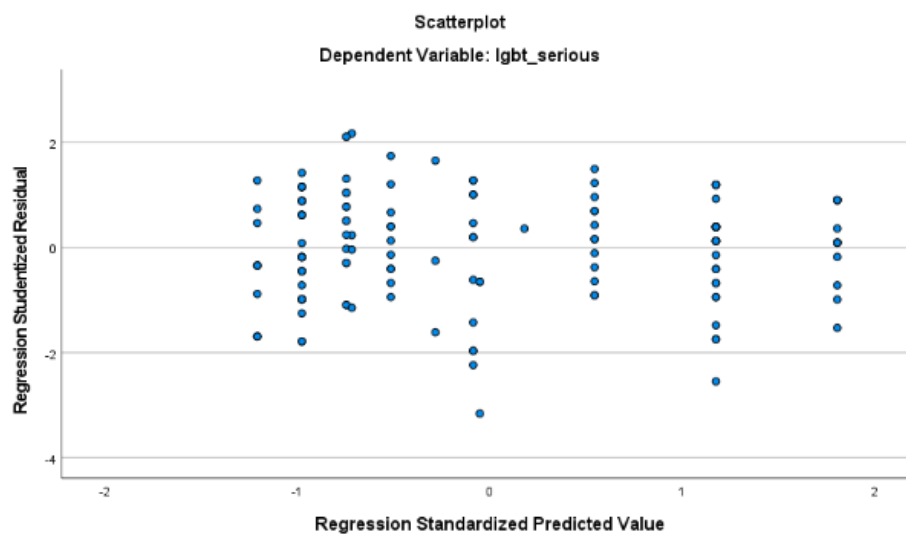


Figure 2: Scatterplot of standardized residuals



Acknowledgements - Usage of Artificial Intelligence

I acknowledge the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in the process of developing this thesis. Specifically, I used OpenAI's ChatGPT (<https://chat.openai.com>) to generate materials for background research and receive feedback and assistance with grammar and clarity of expression. No original content was generated by artificial intelligence, and no AI-generated material has been presented as my own work.