

2021KanePhoebe-abstract

Abstract

In the following thesis project, I investigate if there is a gender bias in the sentencing of violent crimes. The first part of this thesis uses previous research to explore two theories that could explain a possible gender bias. The backlash theory states that women should be sentenced more harshly because they receive more severe treatment as punishment for transgressions against their gender roles – these transgressions being both committing a crime and exhibiting violent or aggressive behavior. The chivalry theory states that, as a result of gender roles placing men in a more powerful, dominant role in society and women in a weak, submissive role, the men in power will feel nurturing and protective over women and will therefore lessen their punishment. About half of past research finds that men are sentenced more severely after committing a violent crime, while the other half finds that women receive harsher sentences. In the second part of this project, I conduct my own content analysis of violent crimes in Indiana over the last 10 years, from 2010 to 2020. I took a sample of 60 cases from this data and conducted statistical analyses to determine if there was a significant difference in sentencing by gender. After conducting these analyses, I found that there was not a significant difference in this sample. This analysis could have been limited by the size of the sample I took or the data I had to throw out because of sentencing data complications.

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