

Perception of workplace social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment post #MeToo in Scandinavia

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In this study we examined how people perceive social-sexual behavior of women and men, and how these perceptions were associated with beliefs about the outcomes of the #MeToo movement, sexism, traditional values, and gender equality. In addition, we examined the effect of having experienced sexual harassment on such perceptions. Analyses were performed on a Norwegian snowball social media sample covering 321 women and 168 men, aged 18–59 ($M = 33.1$). Outcome variables covered perceptions of scenarios that described opposite-sex social-sexual behaviors performed by female and male actors within the workplace environment. Path analysis showed that negative beliefs about the outcomes of the #MeToo movement was the principal predictor for perception of female and male social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment for women and men participants. Traditional values, gender equality, and hostile sexism toward women were all associated with perception of social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment, however the effects of these variables were only indirect and fully accounted for by the effect of negative #MeToo beliefs. For women, having experienced sexual harassment was associated with hostile sexism toward men, but had no effect on the perceptions over and above the effect of the other variables in the model. The predictors on participants' perceptions were highly similar for women and men and for evaluations of female and male actors. Theoretical and methodological implications are discussed.

Key words: #MeToo, hostile sexism, perception, sexual harassment, social-sexual behavior.

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INTRODUCTION

Definitions of sexual harassment typically include “unwanted sexual attention” (McMaster *et al.*, 2002) or “unwelcome sexual advances” (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 1980). The Norwegian Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act defines sexual harassment as a subclass of general harassment that involves “unwanted sexual attention that is distressing to the target.” The focus on the target’s perspective and their perception of behavior as unwanted or unwelcome leaves room for interpretation as to what types of sexual attention constitute sexual harassment on an individual level. Some types of sexual attention or social-sexual behaviors may be perceived as sexually harassing, while others may be more accepted, depending on the interpretation of the person subjected to it (Rotundo, Nguyen & Sackett, 2001). Third parties observing social-sexual behavior might support the target or engage in the behavior of the actor, depending on their perception and interpretation. They may, therefore, influence on how behavior is sanctioned or further motivated. Within legal processes, the perspective of the “reasonable person standard” is commonly used, to engage a third party when defining harassment behavior. To what degree observers consider such behavior as sexual harassment is recently

found to be contingent on the respondent’s gender and on specific situational factors in which this behavior occurs (Kessler, Kennair, Grøntvedt, Bjørkheim, Drejer & Bendixen, 2020). However, the perception of social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment may also be influenced by individual differences in prior experiences, attitudes, and beliefs, including beliefs about the outcomes of the ongoing #MeToo movement.

Around 20% of the employees of both genders in Norway report to have experienced sexual harassment within the last 6 months (Nielsen, Bjørkelo, Notelaers & Einarsen, 2010). While most academic research and media reports focus on men’s sexual harassment of women, sexual harassment is also directed toward men (Nielsen *et al.*, 2010), and apparently more often so from other men (McLaughlin, Uggen & Blackstone, 2012). Recent numbers for the Norwegian workplace context suggest that 2% of men and 8% of women report experiencing undesired sexual attention in the workplace on a monthly basis or more frequent (Dammen, 2020).

Sexual harassment in the workplace may not only have negative impact on the person being directly targeted (Willness, Steel & Lee, 2007); findings suggest that just working in an environment that is characterized by hostility and misogyny, may also have negative consequences for one’s well-being (Miner-Rubino & Cortina, 2007). Thus, sexual harassment may have negative consequences for observers of such behaviors, as well as the working environment in general. To what degree observers perceive social-sexual behavior in their workplace as sexual harassment is likely to affect one’s willingness to support the target, intervene, and to report this behavior to the management.

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Since the #MeToo tweet by Alyssa Milano in October 2017, the #MeToo movement has become a global phenomenon that has led to more debate about and media coverage of sexual harassment (Ennis & Wolfe, 2018). In an analysis of over 2,000 tweets that were published within 24 hours after the initial #MeToo tweet, Schneider and Carpenter (2019) showed that most of the tweets contained positive social reactions (42.4%), while only 14.2% of the tweets displayed negative social reactions. The most common negative reaction was categorized as Egoism, highlighting one's own emotions and reactions, for instance “#MeToo is just making me angry,” followed by Backlash/Disbelief, for instance “#MeToo is dumb. It paints all men as sexual predators” (Schneider & Carpenter, 2019). Following the #MeToo movement, a US survey showed that 43% of the participants believed that the movement had gone “too far” (Smith, 2018). The issue of false accusations has been one of the controversies of the movement, and in a national US poll 15% of adults reported that #MeToo made them more concerned for “men and the false allegations of sexual harassment or assault they could face” (Piacenza, 2018). A survey has shown that male managers reported to be “afraid” to mentor women or to be alone with them, fearing to be falsely accused of sexual harassment (Sandberg & Pritchard, 2019). Although the perception of the whole movement and its impact has rarely been studied, it has provoked a discussion about sexual harassment. Considering all the controversy around the movement, and the lack of research on the matter, it is important to study how beliefs about the #MeToo movement along with other relevant individual factors may be related to the perception of social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment in the period following #MeToo.

Possible correlates of observers' perception of social-sexual behavior

Beliefs and values. The beliefs and values one hold may influence the way people perceive social-sexual behavior. Certain behaviors might challenge one's values or beliefs about said behavior. The #MeToo movement shed light on the problem of sexual harassment and has engaged many people on social media and beyond (Ennis & Wolfe, 2018). People's beliefs about the movement and its outcomes, and factors associated with their perception of the movement as positive and necessary or as destructive and harmful was studied by Kunst, Bailey, Prendergast and Gundersen (2019) using samples from Norway and the United States. They reported that hostile sexist attitudes toward women and belief in rape myths were associated with perceiving less benefits of the #MeToo movement, and more harm. Conversely, a stronger feminist identity was associated with perceiving more benefits and less harm from the #MeToo movement. Personal and observed harassment experiences also affected the perceptions, but not in a consistent manner across the Norwegian and US samples. There was no effect of age on any of the outcomes. While women reported having more positive feelings toward the movement and perceived the movement to have more benefits and less harm than men, these gender effects were fully accounted for by the effects of sexism, rape myths, feminist ideology, and harassment and assault experiences in the statistical model (Kunst *et al.*, 2019). Similarly to the findings of

Kunst *et al.* (2019), Kende, Nyúl, Lantos and colleagues (2020) found that gender system justification, meaning the motivation to justify current gender arrangements, is negatively associated with support for the #MeToo movement. Furthermore, women with lower gender system justification considered the movement to be more empowering, which in turn resulted in greater support for the movement (Kende *et al.*, 2020). However, neither Kunst and colleagues (2019) nor Kende and colleagues (2020) predicted perceptions of social-sexual behavior. Nevertheless, because beliefs about #MeToo outcomes were strongly associated with hostile sexism, we may assume that people who find the movement more beneficial and less harmful will perceive social-sexual behavior more as sexual harassment. There are currently no studies on how beliefs about the outcomes of the #MeToo movement may influence people's perception of social-sexual behaviors as sexual harassment.

Sexism and how one sees women and men may also have an impact on social-sexual behavior perception. The relationship between women and men as social groups have unique characteristics different from any other intergroup relations. Historically men have possessed more structural control of political, legal, and economic institutions than women, and the social roles of women and men are often differentiated (Glick & Fiske, 2011). However, women and men also have enjoyed close romantic relationships and alliances (Glick & Fiske, 2011). These intergroup relations are assumed to create attitudinal ambivalence with feelings of both antagonism and attraction toward the same attitude object (Glick & Fiske, 2011), captured in the following stereotypical trait descriptions: *Men are bad but bold and women are wonderful, but weaker* (Eagly & Mladinic, 1994; Glick, Lameiras, Fiske *et al.*, 2004). People commonly hold both hostile and benevolent attitudes toward women and men (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 1999). Hostile sexist attitudes include misogynic or misandrist beliefs about women and men, while benevolent attitudes reflect beliefs such as women being weaker and have a need for protection, or that men can provide that protection as they are more bold and more likely to take risks.

Studies have shown that hostile sexism toward women is associated with stereotypical beliefs about rape, often referred to as rape myths (Abrams, Viki, Masser & Bohner, 2003; Bendixen, Henriksen & Nøstdahl, 2014; Bendixen & Kennair, 2017; Stockdale, 1993), and higher sexual harassment proclivity in men (Diehl, Rees & Bohner, 2012; Siebler, Sabelus & Bohner, 2008). In the same way, hostility toward men is found to be associated with higher tolerance of men being sexually harassed (Russell & Oswald, 2015). When studying tolerance of, and attitudes toward sexual harassment, hostile sexism toward women was found to be the strongest predictor for both women and men (Russell & Trigg, 2004). Also, more hostility toward women seem to be related to less severe evaluations of hostile work environment behaviors (Wiener, Hurt, Russell, Mannen & Gasper, 1997). Recently, hostile sexism toward women was also found to be strongly positively associated with perceived harm of the #MeToo movement in Norwegian and US samples (Kunst *et al.*, 2019). They further found that hostile sexism was related to less perceived benefits of the movement. In contrast, benevolent sexism toward women has not show any association with perception of hostile work environment behavior (Russell &

Trigg, 2004; Wiener *et al.*, 1997) nor perceived harm and benefits of the #MeToo movement (Kunst *et al.*, 2019). Still, against the backdrop of the #MeToo movement and the scarce number of studies, the effect of benevolent sexism (i.e., women should be protected and cherished by men) on perception of social-sexual behavior warrants further examination. This is of particular importance because benevolence toward women and men might reflect traditionalistic or conservative beliefs that are not gendered (Bendixen & Kennair, 2017), and because several studies have found the two benevolence constructs to overlap considerably (Bendixen & Kennair, 2017; Glick *et al.*, 2004; Rollero, Glick & Tartaglia, 2014).

In addition to sexism, traditional values and beliefs about gender equality may reflect an important factor influencing perception of social-sexual behavior. Perception of social-sexual behavior may be influenced by traditional values and gender equality. Cross-cultural comparisons show that more conservative ideology is associated with higher levels of sexism (Christopher & Mull, 2006). Women from a less gender egalitarian and more traditional society have been found to perceive social-sexual behavior less as harassment compared to women from a more gender egalitarian and less traditional society (Toker, 2016). While this has been investigated on a national level, how traditionalism and gender equality beliefs on an individual level may relate to the perception of social-sexual behaviors has yet to be studied in detail.

Own experiences. Experiences may influence perception. If someone has been subjected to certain behavior or a certain environment or culture, they might develop a certain sensitivity or, in contrast, habituation for certain behaviors. Having experienced sexual harassment may lead to a higher perception of social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment, due to increased awareness that may sensitize a person toward specific topics and actions. Conversely, people with such experiences may also be desensitized and, therefore, perceive social-sexual behavior less as sexual harassment. The few studies that have investigated this link specifically have not found a relationship between experience and perception (Runtz & O'Donnell, 2003). There was neither an effect of personal knowledge of another person's experience on perception of social-sexual behavior (Runtz & O'Donnell, 2003). However, compared to a control sample who had not experienced sexual harassment, people who had been sexually harassed showed more negative emotional reactions and attitudes toward videos showing social-sexual behavior (McDermut, Haaga & Kirk, 2000). Still, these findings do not provide a sufficient evidence to make any strong predictions on how own experience with sexual harassment influences the perception of social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment with regard to sensitizing or desensitizing judgements. We will, therefore, explore this issue.

Demographics. Lastly, demographics such as gender or age may influence perception. Different generations, for example, may view behavior differently, due to the culture and environment they grew up in. Women tend to rate social-sexual behavior more as sexual harassment compared to men (Kessler *et al.*, 2020; Rotundo *et al.*, 2001). Using a variety of outcome measures of perceptions of sexual harassment, Rotundo *et al.* (2001) reported,

from their meta-analysis of 62 studies, an average effects size of $d = 0.33$ for hostile work environment behaviors. The effects were similar for responses to scenarios and checklists. Gender differences were smaller for coercive behaviors and quid pro quo type of harassment.

While people of different generations may perceive social-sexual behavior differently, there are no consistent age effects on perception of social-sexual behaviors. Some studies have found no age effect in perception of sexual harassment (Baker, Terpstra & Cutler, 1990; Fitzgerald & Ormerod, 1991; Foulis & McCabe, 1997), while others have found that older participants were more likely to perceive social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment compared to younger participants (Frazier, Cochran & Olson, 1995; Hendrix, 2000; Ohse & Stockdale, 2008). It is possible that these differences occurred because younger generations are more sex positive and liberal. Because the #MeToo movement was very present on social media, and particularly among young female users, it may have influenced the perception of social-sexual behavior differently across age cohorts and gender. This remains to be examined. What types of social-sexual behaviors are perceived as sexual harassment needs to be investigated for women and men across age groups, and whether those perceptions are influenced by the same factors to the same degree for both genders. Differences might influence how interventions against sexual harassment in the workplace would function for different groups.

The current study: aims and hypotheses

The data collection is part of a larger sexual harassment project. Data covers scenarios with additional situational features, and participant values, attitudes, beliefs, and harassment experiences, in addition to demographics. In a previous paper, using the same data set, we showed that *situational* prototypical #MeToo features, such as male over female actor, superior over subordinate actor, repeated over single case harassment, private over public settings, personal over general targets, and sexualized over non-sexualized physical contact, all increased the perception of social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment (Kessler *et al.*, 2020). In the current study, we aim to investigate how underlying individual differences, such as age, own experience with sexual harassment, traditional values, and egalitarianism relates to hostile and benevolent sexism and beliefs about outcomes of the #MeToo movement and how all these factors predict the perception of workplace social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment using scenarios. Although women consistently evaluate social-sexual behavior more as sexual harassment than men do (Kessler *et al.*, 2020; Rotundo *et al.*, 2001), this study investigates whether women and men differ in what factors predict such perceptions, including beliefs about the outcome of the #MeToo movement and sexism.

The following hypotheses are tested:

H 1: People with hostile sexist attitudes toward women will perceive social-sexual behavior toward women less as sexual harassment. The same holds for hostile sexist attitudes toward men and peoples' perception of sexual harassment of men.

H 2: Hostile sexism toward women will be associated with more negative and less positive beliefs about the outcomes of the #MeToo movement.

H 3: If the above hypotheses are supported, we expect people with positive beliefs about the outcomes of the #MeToo movement to perceive social-sexual behavior more as sexual harassment, and those with negative beliefs about the outcomes to perceive social-sexual behavior less as harassment. We also expect beliefs about the #MeToo outcomes to be better predictors than sexism, and to account for the effect of sexism because of the better specificity of the former in relation to the outcome variables.

In addition to the above hypotheses we want to examine how benevolence, traditional values, egalitarianism, age, and prior sexual harassment experience are related to hostile sexism, beliefs about the outcome of the #MeToo movement, and perception of social-sexual behavior for in a more comprehensive model as outlined above.

METHODS

Design and participants

Two versions of a web-based questionnaire on perception of social-sexual behavior were developed. The two versions differed only in their question order, and the assignment to either version was random. A total of 522 participants responded to the questionnaire. Participants who did not identify as either male or female ($n = 5$), and were 60 years or older ($n = 9$) were excluded from analyses due to lack of representativeness for that age segment. We also excluded participants with monotonous (i.e., response set), extreme (i.e., only endpoints), or inconsistent patterns of responding on central sections of the questionnaire ($n = 19$). The final sample eligible for analysis comprised of 489 participants between 18 and 59 years (66% women: $M = 33.3$, $SD = 9.4$; 34% men: $M = 32.9$, $SD = 9.3$). The majority (64.4%) of the participants reported currently to be employed, 33.1% reported to be students, and 2.5% were unemployed or retired. As many students also reported to work during their studies, we asked participants to give information about their years of job experience. 80% of the sample had one or more years of job experience.

Procedure

Both an introduction text and the link to the web-based questionnaire was initially shared on two of the co-authors' private Facebook profiles and then subject to snowballing (spreading throughout social networks by sharing the link to the survey). The participants were informed about the study being both voluntary and that all data would be anonymized, meaning all possible identifiers, such as the IP-address, were removed from the data before being transferred to the researchers in August 2018. Data collection took place between April 2018 and June 2018. The Norwegian Centre for Research Data (Project ID: 60048), the Data Protection Official for Research for all universities in Norway, approved the procedure.

Measurements

Scenarios to measure perception of social-sexual behavior. Four hypothetical workplace scenarios were constructed to measure to what extent different social-sexual behaviors were rated as sexual harassment. Three scenarios fall under the definition of hostile work environment harassment. Hostile work environment type harassment includes seemingly

less severe behaviors that nevertheless decrease the quality of the work environment, due to sexism or homonegativity (Rotundo *et al.*, 2001). The fourth scenario described a quid pro quo harassment situation and was omitted from the analyses, as the scenario led to a ceiling effect which was discussed in a previous paper (Kessler *et al.*, 2020). Before responding, participants were presented with the legal definition of sexual harassment from the Norwegian Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act: "Sexual harassment is defined as any form of unwanted sexual attention that has the purpose or effect of being offensive, frightening, hostile, degrading, humiliating or troublesome." The first scenario contained a sexist joke, the second scenario described a repeated invitation to a date following a polite rejection, and the third scenario a hug that lasted "a little too long" as a congratulating gesture. All scenarios were set either in the workplace or at work related gatherings such as a summer or Christmas party, and the behaviors involved two colleagues. The harassment scenarios we used overlap to some extent with the categories used by Schneider and Carpenter (2019) in their analysis of Tweets using the #MeToo hashtag. For detailed wording of each scenario see the Appendix. All scenarios displayed opposite-gender social-sexual behavior of both female and male actors. Each participant responded to all scenarios, rating both female and male behavior, but we randomly allocated participants to scenarios describing male actor or female first (question order manipulation). For each scenario each participant rated their perception of whether this was sexual harassment on a six-point Likert scale with anchors 1 (*Not at all*) and 6 (*Yes, absolutely!*).

Traditional values and gender equality. Traditional values were measured with a single item reading *It is important to preserve the traditional values in our society*. Gender equality was measured using two items; *It is important that our society has gender equality*, and *It is important that women and men have equal opportunities in our society*. These items were designed for this study. All three statements were presented in the same section and rated on a five-point Likert-Scale ranging from 1 (*Completely disagree*) to 5 (*Completely agree*). The Spearman-Brown reliability for the two Gender equality items was 0.69. The two item scores were averaged to form a Gender equality scale. Because the distribution of scores was highly negatively skewed, the scores were squared. Higher scores on the two measures indicate higher traditional values and more gender equality, respectively.

Sexist attitudes. Sexism was measured with the Norwegian 16-item short-form Ambivalent Sexism Scales (Bendixen & Kennair, 2017; Glick & Fiske, 1996). Each statement was rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Completely disagree*) to 5 (*Completely agree*). Internal consistency for Hostile sexism toward men (4 items) was good, $\alpha = 0.77$, but low for Hostile sexism toward women (4 items), $\alpha = 0.62$. Following Bendixen and Kennair's (2017) recommendations and prior analysis of the short-form scales, benevolent sexism toward women and men was treated as one 8-item construct rather than two separate constructs.¹ Internal consistency was good, $\alpha = 0.78$. Item scores were averaged with higher scores reflecting more sexism.

Beliefs about the outcomes of the #MeToo movement. To measure people's beliefs about the #MeToo movement, we constructed a scale containing 10 statements that referred to both positive (beneficial) and negative (harmful) outcomes of the movement, including one item on people's familiarity with the movement. A full description of the item wordings is provided in the Appendix. The participants rated their responses on a five-point Likert scale with alternatives ranging from 1 (*Completely disagree*) to 5 (*Completely agree*). Both exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses suggest that the items reflect two underlying constructs: positive and negative beliefs about the #MeToo movement outcomes (See the Appendix for details). The confirmatory factor analyses indicated acceptable fit for the data on a two-dimensional model covering five negative and three positive items. The internal consistency for the five negative beliefs about the movement outcomes was acceptable ($\alpha_{\text{Total}} = 0.80$, $\alpha_{\text{Women}} = 0.78$, $\alpha_{\text{Men}} = 0.78$). However, the alphas for the three positive beliefs were on the low end ($\alpha_{\text{Total}} = 0.62$, $\alpha_{\text{Women}} = 0.57$, $\alpha_{\text{Men}} = 0.65$). This is of course mainly due to the low number of items in

the scale. The inter-item correlations were moderate ($r = 0.29$) or higher. The items scores were averaged for each scale. The two scales were negatively correlated ($r_{\text{Total}} = -0.50$, $r_{\text{Women}} = -0.44$, $r_{\text{Men}} = -0.52$).

Having experienced sexual harassment. At the end of the questionnaire, participants were again presented with the legal definition of sexual harassment. They then responded “Yes”, “No,” or “I don’t know” to the following question: *Based on this definition, have you experienced sexual harassment in the last year?* Those who responded in the affirmative were coded 1.

Statistical analysis

All analyses were performed using Stata/MP 16.1 for Mac (StataCorp, 2019). In addition to simple t -tests, estimation of effect sizes for gender differences, and association among variables, we predicted perception of social-sexual behavior on female and male actors using path (structural equation modelling [SEM]) analyses on observable variables. Path analysis is equivalent to a hierarchical multiple regression analysis but allows for multiple outcome variables. We first defined age, experience with sexual harassment, traditional values, and gender equality as background predictors in the model. The sexism scales were treated as secondary predictors, and the two #MeToo outcome beliefs as the most proximate predictors. The model was tested separately for women and men. Mediation (MEDSEM; Mehmetoglu, 2017) and moderation effects were examined throughout. For the latter, we applied hierarchical multiple regression analysis allowing for interactions. For all analyses robust standard errors were applied.

RESULTS

Looking first at gender differences in the predictors and the outcome variables, we found that more women (33%) than men (13%) reported having experienced sexual harassment in the past year, $\chi^2(1, N = 465) = 21.61$, $p < 0.001$. Women and men reported being equally traditional, $t(487) = 1.41$, $p = 0.16$, $d = 0.13$, but women reported higher gender equality than men, $t(487) = -4.05$, $p < 0.001$, $d = -0.39$. Furthermore, relative to men, women were less hostile toward women $t(487) = 5.63$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.54$, but more hostile toward men, $t(487)$

$= -3.81$, $p < 0.001$, $d = -0.36$. Women also reported lower levels of benevolence than men, $t(487) = 5.10$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.49$. Regarding the #MeToo movement outcomes, women held less negative, $t(486) = 7.68$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.73$, and more positive, $t(486) = -3.86$, $p < 0.001$, $d = -0.37$, beliefs than did men. Finally, for perceptions of social-sexual behavior, women rated the behavior of both male actors, $t(485) = -3.32$, $p = 0.001$, $d = -0.32$, and female actors, $t(486) = -6.61$, $p < 0.001$, $d = -0.63$, more as sexual harassment than did men. See Tables 1 and 2 for details on Means and SDs for women and men, respectively.

Looking next at the bi-variate associations in Tables 1 and 2, having experienced sexual harassment was only weakly associated with other variables for men. For women, these experiences were associated with lower age, less traditional values, more hostility toward men, and more positive and less negative beliefs about the #MeToo outcomes. Women and men who endorsed more traditional values were more likely to have negative #MeToo beliefs, and less likely to have positive #MeToo beliefs. In addition, men who endorsed traditional values had more hostile attitudes toward other men and perceive social-sexual behaviors less as sexual harassment. Women who endorsed gender equality also held less traditional values less hostile attitudes toward other women. Furthermore, people who endorsed gender equality reported more positive and less negative beliefs about the #MeToo outcomes. For both genders, endorsing hostile attitudes toward women and traditional values was associated with reduced likelihood of rating social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment regardless of the sex of the actor. People who endorsed hostile attitudes toward men were more likely to ratings of social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment. Of all possible predictors, negative beliefs about the #MeToo outcomes evinced the strongest association with perceptions of social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment. In comparison, beliefs in positive #MeToo outcomes showed less strong associations. The above patterns of associations were similar for women and men. The

Table 1. Correlations (Pearson's r), Means, SDs, for All Variables: Women, $n = 304$ (Listwise Deletion)

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.
1. Age	–										
2. SHE (0,1) ¹	-0.20**	–									
3. Traditional values	0.09	-0.18**	–								
4. Gender equality (squared)	0.03	0.01	-0.19**	–							
5. HS tw. women	-0.03	-0.11	0.38**	-0.27**	–						
6. HS tw. men	0.12*	0.20**	0.07	0.02	0.30**	–					
7. Benevolent sexism	0.06	-0.00	0.26**	-0.14*	0.34**	0.27**	–				
8. Positive #MeToo beliefs	0.13*	0.16**	-0.26**	0.26**	-0.49**	-0.14*	-0.13*	–			
9. Negative #MeToo beliefs	0.01	-0.21**	0.41**	-0.25**	0.63**	0.06	0.25**	-0.46**	–		
10. HWE-male actor	0.14*	0.12*	-0.15**	0.15**	-0.24**	0.18**	-0.10	0.17**	-0.39**	–	
11. HWE-female actor	0.13*	0.13*	-0.14*	0.18**	-0.22**	0.11	-0.08	0.18**	-0.33**	0.78**	–
<i>M</i>	33.46	0.33	3.02	24.05	1.63	1.72	1.32	4.57	2.34	2.14	2.17
<i>SD</i>	9.35	0.47	0.90	2.76	0.71	0.63	0.42	0.53	0.83	1.01	0.94

Notes: SHE = sexual harassment experience, HS = hostile sexism, HWE-male = hostile work environment male actor, HWE-female = hostile work environment female actor. Correlations = 0.12 or higher are significant at $p < 0.05$, correlations = 0.15 or higher are significant at $p < 0.01$.

¹Point biserial correlation.

* $p < .05$;

** $p < .01$.

Table 2. Correlations (Pearson's *r*), Means, SDs, for All Variables: Men, *n* = 158 (Listwise Deletion)

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.
1. Age	–										
2. SHE (0,1) ¹	–0.07	–									
3. Traditional values	–0.11	–0.12	–								
4. Gender equality (squared)	0.05	–0.13	–0.20*	–							
5. HS tw. women	–0.05	0.08	0.36**	–0.25**	–						
6. HS tw. men	0.23**	–0.08	–0.24**	–0.08	0.14	–					
7. Benevolent sexism	–0.05	0.02	0.31**	–0.24**	0.47**	0.20*	–				
8. Positive #MeToo beliefs	0.16*	–0.03	–0.31**	0.32**	–0.46**	0.06	–0.23**	–			
9. Negative #MeToo beliefs	–0.18*	0.05	0.38**	–0.29**	0.63**	–0.07	0.30**	–0.52**	–		
10. HWE-male actor	0.19*	0.10	–0.22**	0.02	–0.15	0.26**	0.03	0.27**	–0.38**	–	
11. HWE-female actor	0.02	0.12	–0.24**	0.03	–0.16*	0.24**	–0.08	0.15	–0.30**	0.67**	–
<i>M</i>	32.72	0.13	3.15	22.89	2.05	1.51	1.57	4.35	2.97	1.86	1.62
<i>SD</i>	9.10	0.33	1.08	3.64	0.80	0.50	0.68	0.65	0.87	0.80	0.70

Notes: SHE = sexual harassment experience, HS = hostile sexism, HWE-male = hostile work environment male actor, HWE-female = hostile work environment female actor. Correlations = 0.16 or higher are significant at $p < 0.05$, correlations = 0.21 or higher are significant at $p < 0.01$.

¹Point biserial correlation.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

ratings of the scenarios of a female actor correlated strongly with the ratings of a male actor ($r_{women} = 0.78$; $r_{men} = 0.67$).

Next, we performed separate path analyses (SEM) on observable variables for women and men. We removed all non-significant associations, and we present only the findings from the most parsimonious model. The model revealed similar patterns of associations for women and men, with the exception of the own sexual harassment experience effect for women. For both genders, hostility toward men was positively associated with age ($\beta_{men} = 0.24$, $Z = 3.31$, $p < 0.001$, $\beta_{women} = 0.17$, $Z = 3.05$, $p = 0.002$). With increasing age, participants reported more hostile sexism toward men (but not toward women). Furthermore, for both women and men, higher traditional values were associated with higher rates of hostility toward women ($\beta_{men} = 0.30$, $Z = 6.87$, $p < 0.001$, $\beta_{women} = 0.34$, $Z = 6.87$, $p < 0.001$) as well as higher rates of benevolent sexism ($\beta_{men} = 0.30$, $Z = 4.28$, $p < 0.001$, $\beta_{women} = 0.26$, $Z = 4.86$, $p < 0.001$). Benevolent sexism did not affect any of the other variables in the model. Gender equality was associated with less hostility toward women ($\beta_{men} = -0.17$, $Z = -2.31$, $p = 0.02$, $\beta_{women} = -0.21$, $Z = -3.99$, $p < 0.001$). In the model, hostile sexism toward women predicted both the positive #MeToo beliefs ($\beta_{men} = -0.44$, $Z = -7.09$, $p < 0.001$, $\beta_{women} = -0.49$, $Z = -11.24$, $p < 0.001$), and the negative #MeToo beliefs ($\beta_{men} = 0.61$, $Z = 12.77$, $p < 0.001$, $\beta_{women} = 0.65$, $Z = 20.13$, $p < 0.001$). Hostile sexism toward men was positively associated with the perception of male social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment, although the effect was small and not significant when accounting for the effect of negative #MeToo beliefs for men. Except for having experienced sexual harassment, the models for women and men show that the mechanisms in perceiving social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment were similar for the two genders. The predictors in the model for women explained 44.7% and 24.0% of the variance in negative and positive #MeToo outcomes, respectively, and 18.9% and 11.5% of the variance in perceptions of female and male behavior. In comparison, the model for men explained 39.1% and 19.4% of

the variance in negative and positive #MeToo outcomes, respectively, and 16.1% and 9.0% of the variance in perceptions of female and male behavior.

As we can see from Fig. 1, hostile sexism toward women did not directly affect the perceptions of female or male actors' behavior. The effect was fully accounted for by beliefs in negative outcomes of the #MeToo movement. For testing the indirect effect of hostile sexism toward men on the perception of male social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment, we performed Mediation analyses (MEDSEM) with 5000 Monte Carlo replications. For women, negative #MeToo beliefs accounted for 33% of the effect of hostility toward men (indirect effect: $z = 2.83$, $p = 0.005$). For men, the effect of hostility toward other men was fully mediated by negative #MeToo beliefs. In contrast to positive beliefs in the #MeToo movement outcomes, negative beliefs had a marked impact with perceptions for both genders and both male actors ($\beta_{men} = -0.37$, $Z = -5.66$, $p < 0.001$, $\beta_{women} = -0.41$, $Z = -8.42$, $p < 0.001$) and female actors ($\beta_{men} = -0.30$, $Z = -4.23$, $p < 0.001$, $\beta_{women} = -0.34$, $Z = -6.51$, $p < 0.001$).

Additional analyses

We finally examined possible interaction effects among the predictors in the above model in several multiple regression models. In general, the effects were additive, but for men, traditional values appeared to moderate the effects of hostility toward other men on the evaluation of social-sexual behavior when accounting for negative #MeToo beliefs. The regression analyses suggest that men evaluate other men's behavior as more harassing particularly when they simultaneously hold more traditional values and more hostile attitudes toward other men ($t = 2.38$, $p = 0.019$). We looked more closely into this interaction and added female harassment evaluations as an extra control. Again, hostility toward own gender interacted significantly with traditional values, ($t = 3.59$, $p < 0.001$). As shown in Fig. 2, men higher on traditional values and higher on hostility toward other men evaluated male social-sexual behavior

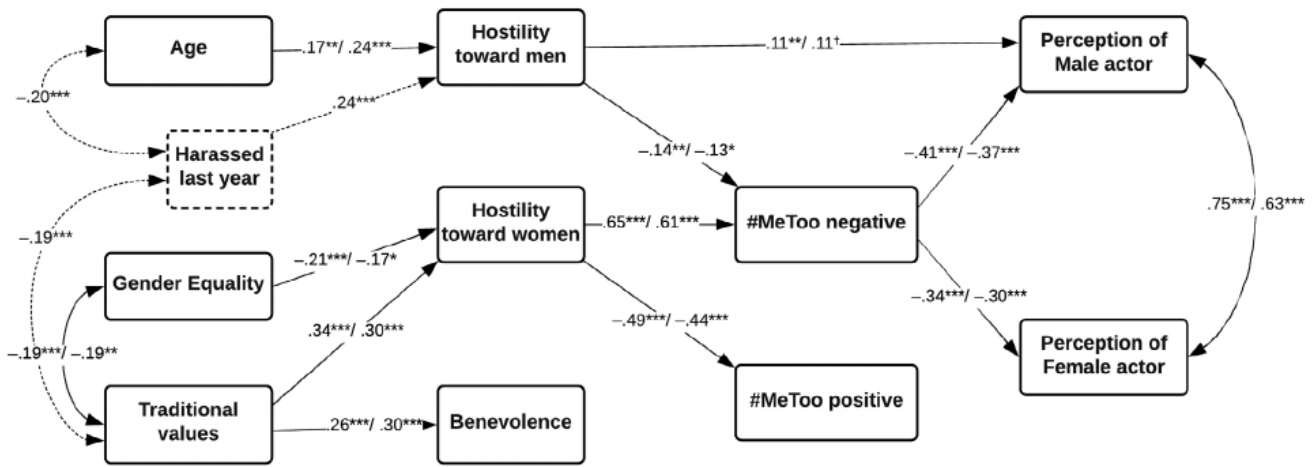


Fig. 1. Factors associated with the perception of opposite-sex socio-sexual behavior as sexual harassment for male and female actors. Standardized path coefficients for all significant predictors in the tested model. † $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Coefficients are presented separately for women (before the slash, $n = 304$) and men (after the slash, $n = 168$). Dotted box and lines apply to women only.

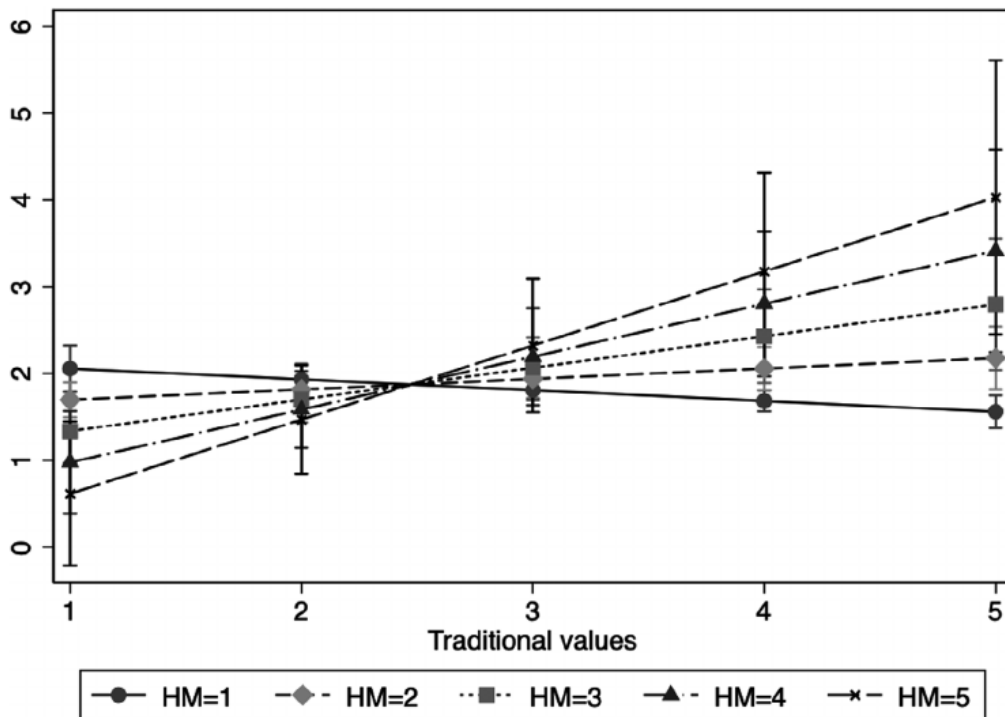


Fig. 2. Predictive margins with 95% CIs for men's evaluation of female targets of social sexual behavior as sexual harassment at different levels of traditional values and hostile masculinity (HM).

more as sexual harassment, while hostility in combination with non-traditional values resulted in lower evaluations of such behavior as sexual harassment.

We re-ran the above analysis substituting gender of the actor (male to female). When controlling for male harassment evaluations and negative #MeToo beliefs, hostility toward own gender again interacted significantly with traditional values on female harassment evaluations ($t = -3.57, p < 0.001$). As shown in Fig. 3, men lower on traditional values and higher on hostility toward other men evaluated female social-sexual behavior more as sexual harassment, while a combination of hostility and traditional values resulted in lower evaluations of such behaviors as sexual harassment.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to explore how values, attitudes, beliefs, and experiences influence the perception of social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment. Earlier findings have shown some factors such as gender (Rotundo *et al.*, 2001) and sexist attitudes (Wiener *et al.*, 1997) to function as predictors for the perception of sexual harassment. However, there is a lack of investigation of the #MeToo movement and people's attitudes toward it, as well as examining predictors not only for male, but also for female actors. The current study contributes to the field of sexual harassment perception research, as it shows how different factors influence

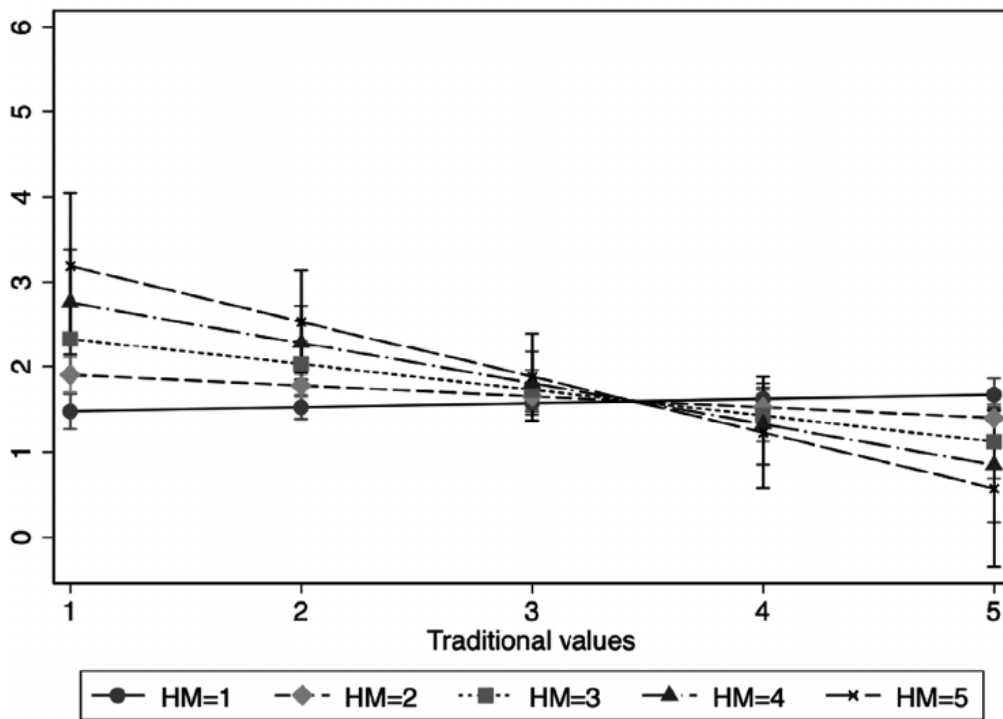


Fig. 3. Predictive margins with 95% CIs for men's evaluation of male targets of social sexual behavior as sexual harassment at different levels of traditional values and hostile masculinity (HM).

said perception. While some of the factors have been studied before, and the results of this current study are in line with those results, some of the factors, such as the #MeToo beliefs are original contributions to the field. As definitions, as well as laws, of sexual harassment put emphasis on the target's interpretation and perception of behavior and whether that behavior is undesired, it is warranted to examine if and how individual differences influence such categorization. For this study, we investigated the perspective of observers, as studies have shown that sexual harassment is not only associated with negative consequences for the target, but also for the observer and the work environment. Moreover, if and how an observer may intervene or support the target, may also be dependent on their perception of the social-sexual behavior they are witnessing. Despite the gender differences in the level of reported sexism, belief about the benefits and costs of #MeToo, and perceptions of social-sexual behavior in female and male actors, we found that the patterns of associations between these variables were largely the same for female and male observers. One significant difference between the genders was that having experienced sexual harassment was related to hostile sexist attitudes for women, but not for men. The first hypothesis was partially supported. People with hostile sexist attitudes toward women perceived social-sexual behavior toward women less as sexual harassment. However, and in contrast to H1, hostility toward *men* was associated with perception of social-sexual behavior *more* as sexual harassment regardless of the gender of the actor. The second hypothesis was supported, as hostile sexism toward women was associated with more negative and less positive beliefs about the #MeToo movement. These findings were fully in line with those reported by Kunst *et al.* (2019) on the relationship between hostility toward women and beliefs about the #MeToo outcomes.

In support of the third hypothesis, negative #MeToo beliefs were associated with perception of social-sexual behavior less as sexual harassment. In turn, higher hostile sexism toward women was associated with more negative and less positive #MeToo beliefs. This was found for both women and men. However, in contrast to H3, positive beliefs about the outcomes of #MeToo were associated with increased perception of social-sexual behavior as harassment, but not when the effect of negative beliefs was accounted for. In support of the second part of H3, the effect of hostile sexism toward women fully mediated by the negative #MeToo beliefs. Hostility toward men, moreover, had a small direct effect on the perception of the behaviors of male actors. This was also found for both women and men.

The additional moderation analyses may shed some light up on the lack of support for the effect of hostility toward men (H1) among men. The analysis suggests that men's hostility toward their own gender interacts with their level of traditional values, and that men who are hostile toward other men perceive social-sexual behavior that targets males more as harassment if they had less traditional values. When considering female targets, the effect was reversed. Men with hostile attitudes toward other men and *higher* traditional values perceived such behavior less as sexual harassment. Future research should examine how men's hostile sexism toward their own gender may be moderated by political orientation and values. It is possible that men who hold hostile attitudes toward other men and have low traditional values are men who are politically liberal, more feminist and socially aware.

In addition to the above hypotheses, we explored how gender equality, age, benevolent sexism and sexual harassment experiences affected the perception of social-sexual behavior, as prior findings on these individual differences were contradicting (Foulis & McCabe, 1997; McDermut *et al.*, 2000; Ohse &

Stockdale, 2008; Runtz & O'Donnell, 2003; Russell & Trigg, 2004; Wiener *et al.*, 1997). First, benevolent sexism was not associated with the perception of social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment. Although our study looked at perceptions, this is in line with previous findings for tolerance of sexual harassment (Russell & Oswald, 2015; Russell & Trigg, 2004). Benevolent sexism could have had two opposite effects on perception of social-sexual behavior as harassment: it might motivate chivalrous, protective behavior increasing harassment perception (especially men perceiving harassment of women) or increase traditionalist, conservative values reducing harassment perception. In hindsight, given the moderate associations with traditional values, benevolence might reflect some form of traditionalistic or conservative beliefs (see also Bendixen & Kennair, 2017). Second, age was positively associated with higher ratings of social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment for women, but the age effect was mediated by the other variables in the model. It has been suggested that the #MeToo movement, that largely took place on social media, could have led to a "generation gap" (Weller, 2018), as younger people were exposed to the conversation about sexual harassment to a larger extent. Hence, our study does not support the generation gap in perception of sexual harassment post #MeToo. Third, gender equality was associated with higher perception of sexual harassment. This seems to apply only for women, the effect was mediated by hostile sexism toward women. Nevertheless, the association between gender equality and hostile sexism toward women is in line with previous findings (Glick *et al.*, 2004). Finally, and in line with previous findings, more women than men reported to have been exposed to sexual harassment (Cantor, Fisher, Chibnall *et al.*, 2015; Fasting, Brackenridge & Sundgot-Borgen, 2003; Hill & Kearn, 2011). Still, we found no direct effect of last year's sexual harassment experience on sexual harassment perception. This was in line with some previous findings (Runtz & O'Donnell, 2003) and suggest that personal harassment experiences may not affect perception when observing other being subject to social-sexual behavior. However, experience with sexual harassment was associated with higher rates of hostility toward men among women. A reasonable explanation for this association is that prior negative sexual encounters with men have affected women's antagonism against men in general. For men, sexual harassment experiences did not have any effect on their antagonism against women.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

We tested a complex path model including several factors that could be associated with perception of work related social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment. Still, the cross-sectional design of the study does not permit any causal inferences of the relationship between the variables under study, and we cannot address any specific effect of the #MeToo movement regarding changes in social-sexual behavioral. Nevertheless, the findings suggest that the negative beliefs about the movement were more strongly associated with harassment perception than any other factors in the model.

The current study introduces a new measurement of beliefs about the #MeToo movement. Factor analysis suggests two dimensions reflecting negative and positive beliefs. It showed a

high internal consistency for the negative outcome beliefs, and this dimension of the measurement was a robust predictor of sexual harassment perception. The strong association with hostile sexism toward women provides further validation. The positive beliefs dimension was less internally consistent. In the current sample, from a highly gender egalitarian nation (Grøntvedt & Kennair, 2013), there was no association with the outcome measures. The three items: *The movement has been an important contribution to the society's debate*, *The movement has more positive than negative outcomes*, and *The movement has uncovered the scale of sexual harassment* may have lacked some specificity to fully grasp positive influences of #MeToo. Moreover, positive beliefs were clearly associated with less hostile sexism toward women and may, therefore, be a valuable factor when studying sexual harassment perception. Still, for an alternative and recently published measure of positive #MeToo beliefs with partly different items, researchers may want to consider Kunst and colleagues (2019).

The restricted array of social-sexual behavior covered by the scenarios is a possible limitation. Various types of sexual harassment happen frequently in the workplace, such as gender discrimination, spreading of sexual rumors, objectifying comments or derogation of sexual orientation, and gender identity. In addition, only opposite-gender sexual harassment was addressed, neglecting sexual harassment based on sexual orientation or sexual harassment directed toward sexual minority groups, even though those groups are more exposed to sexual harassment (Hill & Kearn, 2011; Hill & Silva, 2005; Mitchell, Ybarra & Korchmaros, 2014). We do advise future researchers to consider same-gender sexual harassment and to focus more on harassment toward sexual minority groups.

We measured being sexually harassed during the last year with a single item. Studies have shown that merely asking about experiences with sexual harassment and naming specific types of sexual harassment and then asking a person whether they have experienced that specific type of harassment may lead to inaccurate prevalence estimates (see e.g., Timmerman & Bajema, 1999). Moreover, when asking participants about their sexual harassment experiences, we only included experiences within the last year. While one might argue that newer experiences may be more influential, older experiences may be even more formative or traumatic. The results and conclusions drawn about sexual harassment experiences should, therefore, be regarded with caution. Future studies examining sexual harassment experiences are advised to use a more detailed measure and maybe consider different time periods. Although we defined sexual harassment as part of the question by referring to the law, and the prevalence rates for women and men were within the expected range, the reliability of this measure remains unknown. The same holds for the single-item measure Traditional values. However, we consider sexual harassment experiences and traditional values important for understanding sexual harassment perceptions and advise future researchers to apply more reliable and valid measures.

Finally, the scenarios for female and male actors were worded slightly differently (i.e., job description of actor, type of joke). However, even though the joke contents are typically gender differentiated, jokes may still be *functionally* similar across gender. The difference in wording may, therefore, not have

affected the perception of social-sexual behavior to a large extent (see also Kessler *et al.*, 2020).

CONCLUSION

This is the first study to show that beliefs about outcomes of the #MeToo movement are associated with perceptions of workplace sexual behavior by women and men. In addition to studying the perceptions of these types of behaviors from a stereotypical perspective (i.e., men are actors, women are targets), we also looked at perceptions of women as actors and men as targets. Regardless of the actor being female or male, the negative beliefs about the #MeToo movement, such as fear of false accusations, totally overshadowed the effects of positive beliefs about the outcomes. This is one of the most controversial perceived negative outcomes of the #MeToo movement, however previous research challenges the justification for moral panicking (Kessler *et al.*, 2020). Possible implications of the findings would include education and conversation about alleged negative outcomes. Hostile sexism toward women needs to be addressed and integrated in such interventions. Ultimately, this may provide increased societal consensus as to what social-sexual behaviors are considered as harassing and to which degree. More consensus could facilitate actors, targets, and observers to identify problematic behavior, to speak up about their experiences and to reduce unwanted experiences.

CONFLICTING INTERESTS

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NOTE

¹The two benevolence scales correlated $r = 0.73$. A confirmatory factor analysis (SEM) showed that a two-factor solution did not provide a better fit than a single-factor solution.

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APPENDIX A. FACTOR ANALYSES OF THE 10 ITEMS MEASURING #METOO CAMPAIGN BELIEFS

First, we ran an Exploratory Principal Component Analysis on the 10 items. The analysis returned two factors with Eigenvalues above 1 ($F_1 = 3.72$, $F_2 = 1.39$). When we performed an oblimin rotation, the analysis returned the following factor loadings:

	F1	F2	Uniqueness
1. I have familiarized myself with the message of the campaign	-0.29	0.58	0.57
2. The campaign has been an important contribution to the society's debate	-0.50	0.57	0.42
3. The campaign has gotten too much attention	0.67	-0.32	0.45
4. The campaign has more positive than negative outcomes	-0.40	0.51	0.57
5. The campaign has been used by women to denigrate men	0.78	-0.05	0.39
6. The campaign has resulted in more compassion for victims of sexual harassment	0.07	0.59	0.65
7. The campaign has uncovered the scale of sexual harassment	-0.10	0.69	0.52
8. The campaign has contributed to a negative portrayal of men in general	0.75	0.01	0.43
9. The campaign has led to mocking of individuals	0.68	0.10	0.53
10. The campaign has created a showground for people who want attention	0.80	-0.09	0.35

Strong and positive loadings on the first factor reflect negative beliefs about the #MeToo campaign outcomes and positive loadings on the second factor reflect positive beliefs, being familiar and beliefs about compassion for the victims. The rotated factors were negatively associated (−0.46).

Next, we performed two Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) on all 10 items and performed comparisons of a model with one general underlying construct with a model reflecting two constructs (five negative and five positive #MeToo beliefs). We grouped the analyses by gender to examine the coefficients for women and men separately. In general, the model with one underlying construct provided a particularly poor fit, $\chi^2(88) = 301.99$, RMSEA = 0.101 [0.089, 0.114], TLI = 0.80, SRMR = 0.10. In comparison, the two-construct model provided a significantly better fit, $\chi^2(84) = 187.00$, RMSEA = 0.072 [0.058, 0.086], TLI = 0.90, SRMR = 0.09, as evident from the Likelihood ratio test: $\chi^2(4) = 114.99$, $p < 0.001$. Still, when the Common fit indexes for satisfactory fit were applied (RMSEA values lower than 0.08 for the 90% CI upper range, Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) values above 0.95, and SRMR below 0.08) neither the second model fit was acceptable (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The above models indicated that the compassion item (#6) was lesser associated with the constructs for both women and men. This item was removed from the remaining models.

Finally, we compared two models with 5 negative and 3 positive items. In the first of these models we included items #2, #4, and #1 (familiarized oneself) and removed item #7 (uncovered the scale of the problem). In the second model, we included items #2, #4, and #7, and removed item #1. Both models provided a better fit to the data than the above 10-items two-construct model. The fit indexes for the Model with #1 included was: $\chi^2(50) = 118.16$, RMSEA = 0.075 [0.058, 0.093], TLI = 0.92, and SRMR = 0.08. Comparably, the fit indexes for model with #7 included at the expense of #1 was slightly better: $\chi^2(50) = 109.04$, RMSEA = 0.070 [0.052, 0.088], TLI = 0.93, and SRMR = 0.07. Given that item #1 does not cover any evaluation of the campaign outcome but merely reflect being familiar with the content, there are both conceptual and empirical reasons for preferring the final model (i.e., excluding the familiarity item).

Note. RMSEA = Root mean squared error of approximation, TLI = Tucker-Lewis index, SRMR = Standardized root mean squared residual.

APPENDIX B.

Wording Scenarios

Male Actors

Scenario 1 (Joke)

At a lunch break, both men and women employees are sitting in the cafeteria. A man at one of the tables tells a sexualized/debasing joke about how women become prettier when one has had a couple of beers. Some people at the table chuckle.

Scenario 2 (Invitation to date)

A woman is attending the summer party at work as a man sits down next to her. They get along well and enjoy each other's company throughout the evening. The man says that he wants to meet again the next day, but the woman is not interested, and she declines politely. Two days later she receives a message on Facebook where the man again asks her if she has changed her mind about the date. The woman declines again.

Scenario 3 (Contact)

A female engineer has signed a sizable contract for a project. While in the office landscape, a male colleague comes up to her. He congratulates her and gives her a hug that lasts a little too long.

Female Actors

Scenario 1 (Joke)

At a lunch break, both men and women employees are sitting in the cafeteria. A woman tells a sexualized/debasing joke about how men with nice cars try to compensate for having a small penis. Some in the room chuckles.

Scenario 2 (Invitation to date)

A man is attending the Christmas party at work as a female colleague comes up to him. They get along well and enjoy each other's company throughout the evening. The woman says that she wants to meet again the next day, but the man is not interested, and he declines politely. Two days later he receives a message on Facebook where the woman again asks him if he has changed his mind about the date. The man declines again.

Scenario 3 (Contact)

A male architect has signed an important customer. While in the office landscape, a female colleague comes up to him. She congratulates him and gives him a hug that lasts a little too long.

