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# WORKPLACE SEXUAL HARASSMENT PERCEPTION

The effect of prototypical #MeToo features and individual differences across gender identity and sexual orientation

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Norwegian University of
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Thesis for the Degree of Philosophiae Doctor

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Norwegian University of Science and Technology
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Und Danke, Mama und Papa. Für alles.

Nolite te Bastardes Carborundorum.

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Andrea Melanie Kessler

**Norsk sammendrag**

Seksuell trakassering i jobbkontekster er et meget vanlig sosialt og politisk problem som først kom til syne på 1960-tallet i USA. På tross av at nye lover og fremgangsmåter for å hindre seksuell trakassering på jobb da ble innført, har ikke tallene gått ned. Hvordan personer oppfatter sosial-seksuell atferd og hvis de identifiserer slik atferd som seksuell trakassering, er vesentlig for å forstå hvordan personer ser på atferd, og hvilke faktorer, både personlige og situasjonsavhengige, som kan påvirke oppfattelsen. For å øke vår forståelse av situasjonsavhengige faktorers påvirkning, er det svært relevant å ta sosiale bevegelser i betraktning. #MeToo-bevegelsen er en innflytelsesrik bevegelse på sosiale medier som har påvirket både villighet til å snakke og lære om seksuell trakassering, og villighet til å rapportere om seksuell trakassering. Men #MeToo bevegelsen har stort sett kun tatt én bestemt type trakassering i betraktning. Faktorer som var til stede i nesten alle berømte og mest omtalte #MeToo saker, blir derfor kalt prototypiske #MeToo faktorer. Disse omfatter quid pro quo trakassering over et utrygt arbeidsmiljø (hostile work environment) trakassering, en mannlig over en kvinnelig aktør, en aktør av høyre status over en aktør av lavere eller samme status, flere saker over engangstilfeller, private situasjoner over offentlige situasjoner, seksualisert fysisk kontakt over ikke-seksualisert fysisk kontakt, og personlige over generelle kommentarer.

I denne avhandlingen skal jeg undersøke hva som påvirker bedømmelsen av sosial-seksuell atferd som seksuell trakassering, mens vi tar hensyn til både situasjonsavhengige faktorer (prototypiske #MeToo faktorer; Paper I og Paper III) og individuelle, personlige faktorer (Paper II). I tillegg, skal oppgaven ta hensyn til noen temaer som har blitt forsømt i tidligere forskning. Dette gjelder seksuell trakassering blant det samme kjønn, kjønnsidentitet og seksuell orientering. Disse temaer blir undersøkt i Paper III.

I den første undersøkelsen, som ble analysert i Paper I og Paper II, samlet vi inn data i 2017 og analyserte svar fra 489 deltakere (321 kvinner, 168 menn, alder 18-59; M = 33.1). En ny datainnsamling ble gjennomført i 2020 for å ta opp noen tidligere limitasjoner omtalt i Paper I og Paper II. I denne datainnsamlingen deltok 888 individer

(503 kvinner, 342 menn, 43 trans/genderfluid/ikke-binære deltakende, alder 18-59; M = 33.48). Datainnsamlingen tilsiktet å rekruttere seksuelle minoriteter (63.3% av utvalget identifiserte seg som heterofil, 7.9% homofil, 10.7% bifil, 3.2% panfil, og 1.9% valgte «annet»; 2.9% identifiserte seg som aseksuell i tillegg til sin seksuelle orientering). Seksuelle minoriteter vil be kalt LGBP+ (lesbian, gay, bi, pan, annet).

Vi oppdaget at generelt, førte prototypiske #MeToo faktorer til en høyre oppfatning av sosial-seksuell atferd som seksuell trakassering. Paper III viser at hendelser i private situasjoner ikke nødvendigvis førte til en høyre oppfatning av seksuell trakassering enn offentlige situasjoner, men at det var mer avhengig av hvilke typer trakassering som ble beskrevet. I tillegg, fant vi at individuelle forskjeller hadde en fremtredende påvirkning på oppfatningen. Negative holdninger om #MeToo-bevegelsen førte til at deltakerne oppfattet sosial-seksuell atferd mindre som seksuell trakassering. Det samme var sant for fiendtlig sexisme mot kvinner. Det var noen kjønnsforskjeller; det var mer sannsynlig at kvinner oppfattet sosial-seksuell atferd som seksuell trakassering – men, dette var bare sant for situasjoner med en kvinnelig aktør og en mannlig utsatt. Da vi la til trans/genderfluid/ikke-binære deltakere i Paper III, viste denne gruppen samme tendenser som kvinner, og var forskjellig fra menn. Disse forskjeller var signifikante, men rimelig små. Kjønnsforskjeller generelt var ikke like sterke som effektene fra #MeToo-faktorer. Det var ingen signifikante forskjeller mellom LGBT+ og heteroseksuell deltakere.

I sin helhet, viser denne oppgaven at prototypiske #MeToo-faktorer og holdninger om #MeToo-bevegelsen påvirker oppfatning av seksuell trakassering. #MeToo bevegelsen har hatt, og fortsetter å ha, en påvirkning på hvordan vi ser på seksuelt trakasserende atferd. Resultatene i denne oppgaven viser videre til en del praktiske implikasjoner som kan være viktig å ta hensyn til når nye regler og retningslinjer mot seksuell trakassering blir utviklet. Paper I og Paper III viser at moralsk panikk virker ikke å være begrunnet, og at ingenting taler imot en mangfoldig arbeidsplass. Til slutt, «reasonable person»-standarden som er brukt i juridiske system viker både begrunnet og passende, siden mennesker av forskjellige kjønn og seksuell orientering er stort sett enige om hva seksuell trakassering er.

**Abstract**

Workplace sexual harassment is a highly prevalent social and political issue that emerged within the 1960s in the US. However, with more concrete laws against, and policies addressing, workplace sexual harassment, there has been no visible decline in prevalence. Perception of social-sexual behavior and identification of such behaviors as sexual harassment is vital in understanding how people view and understand seemingly ambiguous behavior as either sexual harassing or not. In addition, certain situational or individual factors might influence how people perceive the same behaviors as more or less sexual harassing. To gain more understanding of the influence of situational factors, it is important to consider the most recent social movement concerning sexual harassment: the #MeToo movement, a powerful online movement that influenced engagement, power structures in some industries and willingness to report sexual harassment. However, it also addressed a specific type of sexual harassment to a large degree. Almost all famous #MeToo cases frequently covered in the media had certain features. These include quid pro quo over hostile work environment type harassment, male over female actor, superior over subordinate or equal actor, repeated over single case harassment, private over public settings, sexualized over non-sexualized physical contact and personal over general targets. These features are hence categorized as prototypical #MeToo features.

This thesis seeks to study what factors may influence the perception of social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment, examining both situational features (Paper I and Paper III) as well as individual differences (Paper II) as predictors. Moreover, this thesis sets out to elucidate generally neglected topics within sexual harassment research, such as same-gender harassment, gender identity and sexual orientation. These topics were part of Paper III.

The first study, which was analyzed in Paper I and Paper II, collected data in 2017 and covered 489 participants (321 women, 168 men, aged 18-59; $M = 33.1$). A new data collection was conducted in 2020 to address previous limitations, resulting in Paper III, which covered 888 participants (503 women, 342 men, 43 trans/genderfluid/non-binary participants, aged 18-59; $M = 33.48$). Data collection aimed at recruiting sexual

minorities (63.3% of the sample self-identifying as heterosexual, 7.9% homosexual, 10.7% bisexual, 3.2% pansexual and 1.9% opted for "other"; in addition to their sexual orientation, 2.9% identified as asexual). Sexual minorities will be referred to as LGBP+.

We found that in general, prototypical #MeToo features led to a higher perception of social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment. In Paper III, we found that private situations were not necessarily viewed more as sexual harassment than public situations, but that perception as sexual harassment was much more dependent on the type of sexual harassment. We also found that individual differences did influence perception, as negative #MeToo beliefs as well as hostile sexism toward women decreased the likelihood of behavior to be perceived as sexual harassment. Some gender differences were present, as women were generally more likely to perceive behavior as sexual harassment – however, this was only true for behavior by women toward men. When adding trans/genderfluid/non-binary participants in Paper III, this group showed the same tendencies as women, and again differed from men. While these gender differences were significant, the effects were rather small. Gender effects were generally not as strong as the effects found for prototypical #MeToo features. Lastly, we did not find any significant differences between LGBP+ participants and heterosexual participants.

Taken together, this thesis illustrates that prototypical #MeToo features, as well as beliefs about the outcomes of the #MeToo movement, influence the perception of sexual harassment. Therefore, the #MeToo movement seem to have had, and may continue to have an influence on how people view sexually harassing behaviors. Moreover, these findings may have several practical implications to be applied to work guidelines and sexual harassment policies. First, Paper I and Paper III suggest that fear of false allegations, and the general idea that women and men cannot work together, also named *moral panicking*, does not seem to be justified. Therefore, the results suggest that a gender diverse workplace would not lead to more false allegation. Furthermore, the "reasonable person standard" used in the juridical system, seems justified and appropriate, as people across gender and sexual orientation generally agree on what sexual harassment entails.

**List of papers**


**Paper I**

Kessler, A. M., Kennair, L. E. O., Grøntvedt, T. V., Bjørkheim, I., Drejer, I., &
Bendixen, M. (2020). The effect of prototypical #MeToo features on the
perception of social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment. *Sexuality & Culture,*
*24*(5). 1271-1291.doi:10.1007/s12119-019-09675-7


**Paper II**

Kessler, A. M., Kennair, L. E. O., Grøntvedt, T. V., Bjørkheim, I., Drejer, I., &
Bendixen, M. (2021). Perception of workplace social-sexual behavior as sexual
harassment post #MeToo in Scandinavia. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*
https://doi.org/10.1111/sjop.12763


**Paper III**

Kessler, A. M., Kennair, L. E. O., Grøntvedt, T. V., & Bendixen, M. (*submitted*). The
influence of prototypical #MeToo features on the perception of workplace
sexual  harassment across gender identity and sexual orientation (LGBTQ+).

# Table of Contents

Appendix

    Scenarios used within Paper I and Paper II

    Three additional scenarios developed for Paper III

    Additional Information

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Sexual harassment: An overview

Sexual harassment is a political and social issue that has been highly discussed within both general media as well as psychological research for decades (Cortina & Areguin, 2021; Thomas & Kitzinger, 1997; Timmermann & Bajema, 1999). However, there are types of sexual harassment, as well as groups subjected to it, that have received little attention in the scientific literature and general media coverage (Cortina & Areguin, 2021). This thesis aims to examine how people of different gender identities and sexual orientations perceive sexual harassment, and whether there are common situational features in sexual harassment scenarios. Moreover, hopefully the results have practical implications that may in turn help reduce sexual harassment. This thesis focuses on workplace sexual harassment, but it will first provide a general overview of sexual harassment.

While there is not one singular universally accepted definition of sexual harassment, almost all definitions include some variation of the term "unwanted sexual attention" (McMaster et al., 2002). This is also reflected by terms used in jurisdiction, where Norwegian law uses "unwanted sexual attention" (Norwegian Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act §13, 2017), and the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission uses "unwelcome sexual advances" (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 1980). Both scientific and legal definitions put the emphasis on the target's[1] perception of the behavior, instead of defining specific behaviors as sexual harassment. As such the behavior itself is not defined as sexual harassment, but rather whether the person subjectively experiences such behavior – as either wanted or unwanted. The target's perception of situations and behavior is therefore fundamental to the study of sexual harassment. A range of behaviors *could* be perceived as sexual

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[1] In this thesis, I have decided to use the word "target" to describe people who have been subjected to sexual harassment. While the word target does not necessarily take into account forms of harassment that are not directly targeted toward one person, such as sexist jokes directed at a whole room, I am still opting for this word over "victim" or "survivor". "Victim" can indicate helplessness, and has been rejected by some of the people who have been subjected to sexual harassment and "survivor" may not be fitting given the types of harassment mostly discussed in this thesis. This is not to rate or evaluate these terms. All terms have their justification and are useful in different contexts. For this thesis, I consider "target" to be the most fitting.

harassment, but they may also be perceived as acceptable if the target does not feel distressed by them. For example, one person might feel flattered being asked out on a date, another person might find it uncomfortable or inappropriate in a certain situation. To describe the behavior in and of itself, independent from the target's perception, Rotundo and colleagues (2001) use the term *social-sexual behavior*. Social-sexual behavior is defined as social behavior with a sexual component (Rotundo et al., 2001). Therefore, social-sexual behavior as such is not harassment, but can be, if the target feels the sexual component of the behavior is unwanted, unwelcome or undesired. The central role of the target also poses a challenge for observers of social-sexual behavior, as observers judging social-sexual behavior do not only have to judge behavior as such, but the reaction or feelings of the target need to be a part of judging the behavior. Therefore, the central role of the target and their perception may make it difficult for third parties to judge social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment.

This thesis will now outline some ways to categorize sexual harassment. The term sexual harassment comprises several different behaviors, and there are severeal models and theories categorizing these behaviors into subtypes of sexual harassment. The Tripartite Model categorization system by Fitzgerald is seen as widely accepted and well-validated (Cortina, 2001; Fitzgerald, et al., 1995; Stark et al., 2002). There are three different types of sexual harassment presented within this model, which represent a broad spectrum of behaviors: Sexual coercion, unwanted sexual attention, and gender harassment. Sexual coercion is often referred to as "quid pro quo" harassment – exchanging sexual favors for potential advancements in the workplace, as well as making threats to harm one's career (i.e. withholding privileges or promotions or threating to terminate someone) if sexual favors do not occur.

Unwanted sexual attention is the expression of sexual interest that is experienced as unwelcome by the target (Fitzgerald, Swan, & Fischer, 1995). Not all forms of sexual harassment are intended to be perceived as harassing, but can be the result of poor communication or bad social skills – for instance assuming that sexual interest is mutual and not being able to read signals or accepting someone's rejection. Unwanted sexual attention can be both verbal, non-verbal (sending inappropriate e-mails or pictures, as well as gestures) or even physical (hugging or kissing someone against their will).

Gender harassment is defined as hostile attitudes based on gender or sex (Fitzgerald, Gelfand, & Drasgow, 1995). Therefore, behaviors that humiliate someone on the base of their gender fall under the definition of gender harassment. An example for this would be sexism and sexist comments.

Sexual harassment is a highly prevalent phenomenon in several contexts, such as school, university, work, and everyday life (Bendixen & Kennair, 2017a; Cortina & Areguin, 2021; Fasting et al., 2003; Kabat-Farr & Cortina, 2014; Latcheva, 2017). When examining prevalence according to the model presented, 0.6% of women and 0.3% of men reported sexual coercion, 19% of women and 9% of men reported having been subjected to unwanted sexual attention and 82% of women and 65% of men had been subjected to gender harassment (Vargas et al., 2019). Another study examining only women showed that 90% of women had been subjected to gender harassment, with almost no reports of unwanted sexual attention or sexual coercion (Leskinen et al., 2011). While men reported gender harassment less than women did, between 37% and 46% of men in different professions reported having been subjected to gender harassment, while between 10% and 27% also reported unwanted sexual attention or coercion (Kabat-Farr & Cortina, 2014). The study also found large overlaps, as both unwanted sexual attention and sexual coercion seldom occurred without gender harassment (Kabat-Farr & Cortina, 2014). There are also several studies on prevalence that did not specify which type of harassment occurred. Prevalence can therefore vary in different studies.

Regardless of how sexual harassment is operationalized, and regardless of type of behavior, sexual harassment has been shown to be associated with various negative mental health symptoms. Being subjected to sexual harassment is associated with higher levels of depression and anxiety, increased symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), lower self-esteem, poor academic outcomes, increased suicide risk and suicide attempts (Bendixen et al., 2018; de Haas et al., 2009; Gradus et al., 2008; Magnusson Hanson et al., 2020; Malik et al., 2014; Marx et al., 2021; McClain et al., 2020; Mushtaq et al., 2015). These associations have been shown for different age groups and for both women and men. Sexual harassment is therefore not only a social issue, but can also be viewed as a public health issue.

To examine gender differences in sexual harassment, the majority of studies show that women are more likely to be subjected to sexual harassment than men (see Basile et al., 2020; Cortina & Areguin, 2021; Foster & Fullagar, 2018; Richman et al., 1999; Sharma et al., 2021; Vargas et al., 2019). However, there are a few studies that show women and men experience sexual harassment to a similar degree (Berdahl & Aquino, 2009; Nielsen et al., 2010), and it has been shown that most men experience at least some form of workplace gender harassment in their life (Vargas et al., 2019). Indeed, it has been demonstrated that how questions on sexual harassment experience were asked influenced prevalence and having people report whether they have experienced these or not (Timmerman & Bajema, 1999). Merely asking whether someone had been subjected to sexual harassment led to lower case numbers than presenting a number of concrete social-sexual behaviors (Timmerman & Bajema, 1999). However, men are less likely than women to label their own social-sexual experiences performed by female actors as negative (Berdahl & Aquino, 2009). Most men reported that they do not consider their social-sexual experiences to be anxiety provoking, stressful, bothersome, or upsetting (Berdahl, 2007; Berdahl et al., 1996; de Haas et al., 2009). In some cases, men even report experiencing such behaviors as "very positive" (Berdahl & Aquino, 2009, p. 37). The definition of sexual harassment states that it is not defined by the behavior itself, but by the target's interpretation. Therefore, while the social-sexual behaviors as such may be experienced at an equal frequency for women and men, those behaviors may not necessarily be defined as sexual harassment, if men do not perceive them as unwanted. This might contribute to different rates in various prevalence studies, in addition to different ways sexual harassment is operationalized (see Timmerman & Bajema, 1999).

## 1.2 Perception of social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment

Perception has been studied for decades and has been defined as something being presented to our senses, so that we can gain knowledge (Graham, 1869). Perception can be influenced by a number of factors, such as motivation, (Balcetis & Dunning, 2006), sensory and motor information (Harris et al., 2015), as well as cultural background (Matsumoto, 1989).

As mentioned above, the perception of social-sexual behavior by the target is vital to whether or not this behavior is categorized as sexual harassment. One person might experience the behavior as welcome or flattering, another person might experience the same behavior as unwelcome and uncomfortable.

It has been argued that as a group, women and men perceive social interactions differently, due to in-group processes (Tannen, 1990). This theory differs categorically between the genders. For instance, regarding social-sexual behavior, men might perceive behavior more as flirtation, women might be more likely to experience behavior as uncomfortable. This could also be due to the fact that men on average are physically stronger than women (Wells, 2007). Therefore, women could perceive behavior toward them by men as more threatening as it would be the other way around. Looking at not only the target's perception but also the perception of a possible observer, there are some indications for gender differences at place as well. For one, men observing other men's behavior might be less likely to perceive it as sexual harassment, as they might be driven by in-group favoritism (Tajfel, 1982), therefore rather supporting someone of their own gender than another gender (Tajfel, 1982). The same could be true for women, who could perceive social-sexual behavior more as harassment when the target is female. The theory of favoritism would lead to gender differences independent of the situation that is to be perceived. This leads to the question whether the situation at hand really has less influence on perception than people favoring their own gender. However, the theory that women and men differ in their perception of social-sexual behavior (Tannen, 1990), completely leaves out all those people identifying outside of the gender dichotomy. It is therefore unclear how not only other gender identities, but LGBTQ+ people in general would fit into this theory. The theoretical idea of in-group favoritism however could be used for this group as well; therefore, LGBTQ+ people could be more likely to perceive social-sexual behavior toward other LGBTQ+ people as harassment. However, it has been shown in more than one way that the group of LGBTQ+ is not a heterogenous group but differs largely in their experiences (Macapagal et al., 2016; Robinson & Espelage, 2013). Therefore, any theory regarding in-group processes or in-group favoritism would have to take into account not LGBTQ+ people as one group, but individual groups depending

on gender identity and sexual orientation. While both Tannen (1990) and Tajfel (1982) view women and men as categorically different, there are other ways to explain gender differences in perception of social-sexual behavior. Reis et al. (2014) focuses more on gender difference as dimensional, meaning that individual differences that align more or less with one gender category explain differences, not the gender itself (Reis et al., 2014). This is one of the main focuses of this thesis; to find what individual differences, aside from gender, may influence perception of social-sexual behavior. This theoretical direction may also be more helpful in both examining and explaining differences in perception including all gender identities, not only cisgendered women and men. While the mentioned theories have taken into consideration the process of perceiving social interactions, and the occurrence of gender differences as a category or a dimension, the focus of this thesis, namely the specific influences of situation and individual features on the perception of social-sexual behavior is slightly different. Therefore, it is challenging to tie existing theories to this topic.

This thesis sets out to examine how the perception of social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment might be influenced by both situational features and individual differences. This means that when presented with a certain behavior that might be sexually harassing, we aim to examine how that behavior will be perceived in different situations, with different contextual features, and by different participants. Some studies have found that men are less likely than women to perceive social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment (Leigh et al., 2021; Rotundo et al., 2001), whereas another study found that women and men were in overall agreement (Atwater et al., 2021). Atwater and colleagues, however, examined either behaviors toward a female target, or did not specify the gender of the target, merely describing the behavior. Thus, further research on gender differences is warranted.

Other than gender, this thesis examines other features that may influence perception of social-sexual behavior, both situational and individual. I will first outline the situational, prototypical #MeToo features tested within Paper I and Paper III, and then outline the individual differences that were tested within Paper II.

## 1.3 Workplace sexual harassment

In the US, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) differentiates between two types of sexual harassment, namely a hostile work environment and quid pro quo sexual harassment (EEOC, 1980). Quid pro quo ("something for something") sexual harassment, also called sexual coercion, is characterized by the promise of some form of reward, or some form of harm or the use of threats (e.g. withholding a promotion or terminating a position) to compel an individual to perform a sexual favor to either obtain the reward or avoid the punishment. Hostile work environment is defined as "unwelcome conduct that is based on race, color, religion, sex (including sexual orientation, gender identity, or pregnancy), national origin, older age (beginning at age 40), disability, or genetic information (including family medical history)" (EEOC, 1980). Quid pro quo sexual harassment is less prevalent than harassment creating a hostile work environment (Kabat-Farr & Cortina, 2014; Leskinen et al., 2011; Vargas et al., 2019). Still, recent numbers show that there are around 10% of people (12.2 % women and 9.5% men) in the State of New York who reported quid pro quo sexual harassment (Pinto et al., 2019).

Sexual harassment in the workplace differs from other types of harassment in some regards. While other types of sexual harassment may occur in places where one can remove themselves from the situation (e.g., when being subjected to cat calling in the streets or inappropriate touching at the dance floor at a club), most people depend on their work. If one experiences sexual harassment at work either as the target or as an observer, most likely, they will not be able to remove themselves from this situation without facing repercussions of some kind. Moreover, power differentials exist in most workplaces. This may not only lead to quid pro quo sexual harassment in the workplace, but also makes it harder for people to report sexual harassment, as they may face repercussions for speaking up (McDonald, 2012; Pina & Gannon, 2012; McLaughlin et al., 2012).

### 1.3.1 Consequences of workplace sexual harassment

Looking at the consequences of workplace sexual harassment specifically, it has been shown that being subjected to workplace sexual harassment led to a reduced job

satisfaction in women and men (Alrawadieh et al., 2021; Hutagalung & Ishak, 2012; Lim & Cortina, 2005; Lonsway et al., 2013; Rabelo & Cortina, 2014; Vargas et al., 2019). Moreover, employees subjected to sexual harassment were more likely to show an increased willingness to change jobs (Merkin, 2008; Vargas et al., 2019). Furthermore, sexual harassment has been shown to be associated with a more negative psychological wellbeing (Alrawadieh et al., 2021; Vargas et al., 2019), for both women and men.

In addition to the negative consequences for the target, this thesis will now look at the organization and general work environment. A study has found that the organization itself endures negative consequences due to sexual harassment. Workplace sexual harassment led to greater relationship and task conflict, lower team cohesion and a worse team financial performance (Raver & Gelfand, 2005). Hence, sexual harassment in the workplace does not only lead to various negative psychological symptoms in the target, but to consequences that may turn out to be negative for both target and organization, such as turnover intentions. Turnover intentions are not only a stressor for those experiencing it, but changing employees frequently also leads to a higher cost for the organization, due to hiring, training and productivity loss costs (Waldman et al., 2010). Thus, there is much incentive to reduce sexual harassment, not only for the improvement in quality of life of the targets, but to improve one's organization.

## 1.4 Historical and cultural context

Sexual harassment as a social and political issue emerged in the mid-1970s, as feminist groups began tackling the issue of the treatment of women in the workplace (Timmerman & Bajema, 1999). The term 'sexual harassment' was coined by American writer and feminist Lin Farley in 1975 (Farley, 2017). First, Farley testified before the New York Human Rights Commission Hearings on Women and Work, where she used the term sexual harassment and defined it as "unwanted sexual advances against women employees by male supervisors, bosses, foremen or managers" (Testimony given by Lin Farley, 1975). Farley also wrote the book 'Sexual Shakedown. The Sexual Harassment of Women on the Job', which highlighted sexual harassment in the workplace (Farley, 1980). It has been argued that the coining of the term sexual harassment and the

development from individual experiences to a more social and political issue was a feminist success (Thomas & Kitzinger, 1997). After sexual harassment was first brought to public attention, organizations started to enforce codes of practice, such as workplace etiquette and counselling services (Timmerman & Bajema, 1999). In 1980, the EEOC added new guidelines to describe two types of sexual harassment, quid pro quo harassment and hostile work environment harassment (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 1980). Gender harassment had already been part of the Civil Rights Act that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex. Sexual harassment as we understand it currently has therefore only been documented for around 40 years, which makes it a relatively new field of research, as well as a relatively new social and political issue. In Norway, the equality law §8 prohibited "harassment based on sex/gender and sexual harassment". This equality law had been in place, however slightly differently worded since 1978 (see Norwegian Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act, 2017). Sexual harassment became part of the Norwegian Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act § 13 in 2002, on the basis of an agreement of the European Economic Area (EEA) (see Norwegian Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act, 2017). A report by the World Policy Analysis Center conducted in 2017 examined 193 countries and found that 68 countries do not have any laws prohibiting sexual harassment in the workplace, and of the countries that had protecting laws, 6 had laws exclusively protecting women but not men (WORLD Policy Analysis Center, 2017). Moreover, 41 countries do not have laws prohibiting gender-based discrimination (WORLD Policy Analysis Center, 2017). This leaves millions of working women and men without any legal protection in the case of sexual harassment at work.

One of the most famous cases of workplace sexual harassment were the allegations against Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas by American lawyer and academic Anita Hill in 1991 (Totenberg, 2018). While Thomas became a Supreme Court Judge, Hill faced major repercussions from her coming forward, receiving threats to her own and her family's safety, public ridicule, insults, and racist reactions (Totenberg, 2018). Hill's integrity was being questioned continuously after the hearings, and several books have been written about her and her allegations (Lewis, 2007). Hill faced what is called rape culture acceptance (Blumell & Mulupi, 2021). Rape culture acceptance is

characterized by victim blaming, discrediting the person coming forward and questioning the timing of the accusations, for example making accusations public after several years had passed (Blumell & Mulupi, 2021). While one may argue that Hill's testimony is a relic of the past, a study did show that rape culture acceptance has been displayed in an even larger degree in a much more recent case (Blumell & Mulupi, 2021), that of Christine Blasey Ford. Ford accused supreme court nominee Brett Kavanaugh of sexual assault in 2018. In comparison to Hill's testimony, rape culture acceptance had gotten even more severe in 2018 (Blumell & Mulupi, 2021). Ford also received threats of violence and death, and had to resign from teaching at Palo Alto University (Mak, 2018).

Hill's testimony influenced public attention to workplace sexual harassment and even the passing of laws. Shortly after the hearings, a law giving targets of workplace sexual harassment the right to seek federal damage awards, back pay, and reinstatement was passed, and numerous organizations established new anti-harassment policies (Editorial, 2011). In the year following the hearings, sexual harassment complaints in the US were up 50%, showing that women came forward more frequently after seeing Hill testify (EEOC, 2020). The year following Hill's testimony is often referred to as the "Year of the Woman", characterized by female voter rebellion (Totenberg, 2018). Hill's testimony continues to carry historical significance within the fight against sexual harassment. It had a large influence on public perception, and the conversation around sexual harassment, contributing to the manifestation of sexual harassment as a social and political issue.

### 1.4.1 The #MeToo movement

Considering more recent history, the #MeToo movement was said to be the "most high-profle example of digital feminist activism" (Mendes et al. 2018, p. 236). Tarana Burke, a human rights activist, originally created the #MeToo movement in 2006 (Brockes, 2018; Ohlheiser, 2017). The #MeToo movement was originally created to show solidarity to women and girls of color, as well as display the magnitude of the sexual harassment problem (Brockes, 2018).

On October 5, 2017, the New York Times published an article about Harvey Weinstein, outlining his decades long sexual misconduct against multiple women (Kantor & Twohey, 2017). In response to this article, Alyssa Milano, an American actress, published the following statement on twitter:



*Figure 1*: Screenshot of the tweet by Alyssa Milano on October 15 2017.

The tweet gained attention rapidly, as the hashtag #MeToo was used over 12 million times within 24 hours (CBS, 2017). Mendes and colleagues called the #MeToo movement the 'most high-profile example of digital feminism' (Mendes et al., 2018, p. 236). The #MeToo movement had important effects. Sexual harassment and sexual abuse were covered by the media to a much larger extent after the #MeToo movement started, with more of the articles on sexual harassment coming from women (Ennis & Wolfe, 2018). Moreover, there were a number of high profile #MeToo cases, most famously in the US, with famous actors, musicians, and Hollywood executives facing allegations, such as Harvey Weinstein, Kevin Spacey, Bill Cosby, R. Kelly and many more (Kantor & Twohey, 2017; Leung & Williams, 2019; Mallenbaum et al., 2018; Romano, 2018). Aside from the film and music industry, which received a lot of the coverage of the #MeToo movement, politicians and people in public offices also faced

allegations, leading to at least 200 men losing their positions of power in the US, and nearly half of them being replaced by women (Carlsen et al., 2018).

While the #MeToo movement was characterized by many cases and media attention on Hollywood executives and political officials, it has also influenced everyday life in many ways. Eight months after Milano's #MeToo tweet in October 2017, Google searches for "sexual harassment" and/ or "sexual assault" were 86% higher than the years prior, with up to 54 million searches recorded in the 6 months following the initial #MeToo tweet (Caputi, Nobles, & Ayers, 2019). The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission reported a 13% increase in sexual harassment reports in 2018, representing the first increase in sexual harassment charges in over a decade (EEOC, 2020). Similarly, in Canada, more women reported sexual misconduct after the #MeToo movement became public than before (Cotter & Rotenberg, 2018). Furthermore, both women and men reported to be more likely to speak out about sexual harassment in the workplace and were more thoughtful about potentially problematic behavior (Atwater et al., 2021).

In spite of this momentum, the #MeToo movement did not provoke the same kind of reaction in every country or region. For example, while many people, primarily, but not exclusively women, shared their experiences online in the US, the movement grew much slower and not to the same extent in Japan (Hasunuma & Shin, 2019), and was largely ridiculed in some countries such as Finland and Denmark (Sletteland, 2018). Unlike in the US and Sweden, where the movement focused on incidences in the personal sphere, in Norway, where this data collection took place, #MeToo was primarily focused workplace sexual harassment and was therefore more aimed toward on organizations and the general problem than on personal experiences (Sletteland, 2018).

While the #MeToo movement sparked interest in sexual harassment and sexual assault and led to more people reporting misconduct (Caputi, Nobles, & Ayers, 2019; Cotter & Rotenberg, 2018), it also sparked a discussion about moral panicking (Phillips & Chagnon, 2021). Moral panicking is a social concept that is said to highlight how media coverage perpetuates formalized social control through exaggerated and fear-mongering

coverage (Cohen, 2011). The concept of moral panicking has been used to analyze social reactions to various issues, such as drug use or immigration (Critcher, 2008; Goode & Nachman, 2009; Garland, 2008). Horsely (2017) argued that moral panicking shifts the focus from the actual problem to social reactions, leading to a lack of actual problem solving or improvement. Moral panicking has been very present during the #MeToo movement. Actor and director Woody Allen referred to the #MeToo movement as a 'witch hunt' (BBC News, 2017), wording that can be categorized as a form of moral panicking (Phillips & Chagnon, 2021). The discourse following the #MeToo movement, that initially aimed to show the overwhelming prevalence of sexual harassment, sexual assault, abuse, and rape (CBS, 2017; Mendes et al., 2018), was shifted to false allegations, political correctness, and the questioning of 'due process' (Phillips & Chagnon, 2021). The #MeToo movement, and thereby the discourse about sexual harassment, sexual assault, abuse and rape, has been named 'sex crime hysteria' (Johnson & Taylor, 2018), 'emotion driven and faith based' and a 'danger to justice' (Kipnis, 2017), and the tendency to 'believe all victims' (Levine, 2018) was said to be 'a threat' (Johnson & Taylor, 2018; Kipnis, 2017). It was argued that policies were 'favoring the victim' instead of being just and fair (Phillips & Chagnon, 2021). Donald Trump, at this time the president of the US called the time following the #MeToo movement 'a scary time for boys', again shifting the focus away from the issue and on to a social reaction. Even though statistically speaking, false accusations are extremely rare (Lisak et al., 2010), the #MeToo movement still sparked a reaction of moral panic that not only shifted the discourse away from the original problem at hand, and dismissed women as liars (Phillips & Chagnon, 2021), or simply not being able to tell 'bad sex' from rape (Brawley, 2018), but also influenced the working conditions for women.

Post #MeToo, some men were reluctant to hire women, and more likely to exclude women from social interactions (Atwater et al., 2021). Forty-three percent of employed, American men somewhat or strongly agreed that they were afraid of false allegations, i.e., being accused of sexual harassment or sexual abuse while being innocent (Atwater et al., 2021). Another survey deducted in the UK showed that after the #MeToo movement, men were reluctant to mentor women (Sandberg & Pritchard, 2019). This

ultimately leads to disadvantages for women in the workplace, as fewer women may be hired or women may receive less mentoring than their male colleagues.

While fully acknowledging the importance and the influence of the #MeToo movement, it is important to mention the ways in which the movement has been criticized. First, media coverage of the movement often did not distinguish between harassment, abuse or even rape (Ennis & Wolfe, 2018). The tweet by Alysa Milano encouraged women to speak out about harassment and assault, and it was shown that the hashtag #MeToo was often used with words such as *abuse*, *assault,* and *rape* (Schneider & Carpenter, 2019). The lack of a clear distinction could potentially lead to the trivialization of serious crimes, which could be hurtful and even harmful to the survivors of such crimes. In addition, there appeared to be confusion regarding which behaviors were of interest, the seriousness of the allegations as well as the prevalence of these behaviors. To have a conversation about sexual harassment, there must be some common ground as to what sexual harassment is, and where to draw the line between sexual harassment and possibly more serious offenses such as assault and rape. Thus, those covering the #MeToo movement in the media have been criticized for their lack of differentiation between harassment, abuse, assault, and rape (Ennis & Wolfe, 2018).

The #MeToo movement was often criticized for not being inclusive (Hemmings, 2018; Ison, 2019; Onwuachi-Willig, 2018). While Tarana Burke, a woman of color, originally initiated the movement, it did only gain worldwide attention until after Alyssa Milano encouraged women to share their stories on social media (CBS, 2017). This neglect of women of color within the #MeToo movement has been criticized (Hemmings, 2018; Zarkov & Davis, 2018), as those gaining most attention and support were largely privileged, white, cis[2] women (Gill & Orgad, 2018; Zarkov & Davis, 2018). There was also little attention and support for disabled women (Flores, 2018; Trott, 2018), lesbian, bisexual, queer or trans women (Ison, 2019), sex workers (Cooney, 2018), as well as overweight people (Trott, 2020). As the initial tweet only addressed women, both men and all those not identifying as female and male, were potentially excluded. Furthermore, when there was talk of male victimization, the focus remained on the

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[2] Cis gendered describes a person whose biological sex they were assigned at birth matches their gender identity.

prototypical harasser, namely a powerful white man, instead of the specific problem of male victimization and stigmatization (e.g., Kevin Spacey; Romano, 2018).

## 1.5. Situational and individual factors possibly influencing perception

### 1.5.1 Prototypical #MeToo features

There are varying amounts of prototypical items depending on category. Items containing more prototypical features are more likely to be identified as a member of a given category. The categorization of highly prototypical features occurs faster and happens with higher certainty (Rosch, 1999). For example, we are more likely to identify a sparrow, than a penguin, as a bird. While the sparrow contains all the prototypical features, having feathers and wings and a beak, being able to fly and chirp, a penguin lacks some of these features, such as its ability to fly. The categorization of a sparrow into the category bird would therefore be quicker and more certain for most people.

For the studies presented within this thesis, we set out to consider what could be defined as prototypical features of sexual harassment – which features could lead to harassment being categorized quicker and with higher certainty. As the #MeToo movement, and the media coverage of sexual harassment that followed largely focused on a rather specific type of harassment, we defined the features displayed in these cases as prototypical #MeToo features.

A post-hoc consideration of 262 cases listed by *vox.com* (North, Grady, McGann, Romano, 2020), showed that there were features that were shared by most cases. The full list can be found in the appendix of Paper III. First, all cases were brought forward by people who, despite remaining anonymous at times, shared their personal experiences. This was also the case within the #MeToo movement itself, as it was most common to share one's personal experiences, rather than discussing sexism or discrimination against women as a systemic problem. This can be seen as a shared feature of the cases evaluated. The majority of cases were all brought forward by people who shared their personal experiences. Aside from the personalized aspect of the #MeToo movement, the most prominent shared feature was the actor holding more

power than the target, a feature that was shared by 93% of cases. Only ten cases did not include this feature, and eight cases were not included as there was no clear information about the power dynamics. While in some cases, there was a direct power relationship, as the actor was the direct superior of the target, in other cases, the actor's status was considered to be relevant by the target, as they felt pressured, threatened or intimidated. Considering the next relevant feature, the typical gender constellation among the #MeToo cases listed was a male actor and a female target. This constellation was observed in around 90% of cases. There were fifteen cases of male-male harassment, and six cases of female-male harassment. Only two cases showed some form of female-female harassment. In five of the cases depicting the most prototypical gender constellation, the male actor was alleged to have harassed both women and men. Next, around 84% of the cases showed repeated behavior. Within this list, there was merely a distinction between isolated cases, and a pattern of behavior, independent of whether the actor subjected multiple people or subjected one person repeatedly. Thirty-five cases did depict single case incidences; seven cases did not have enough information available to determine whether the behavior occurred repeatedly. Thirty percent of cases showed typical quid pro quo behavior, which is considerably lower than the other features detected. However, fifty percent of the ten most reported on cases (determined through most google searches) have shown quid pro quo behavior, and it has been depicted in the Harvey Weinstein case, the most notorious and mentioned case. Moreover, as quid pro quo has the lowest prevalence of the different types of sexual harassment (Kabat-Farr & Cortina, 2014; Leskinen et al., 2011; Vargas et al., 2019), it is overrepresented in this list. Eighty-seven percent of cases depicted cases of workplace sexual harassment. Situations such as after-work parties or private "auditions" were also categorized as workplace situations. Another feature shared by sixty-two percent of cases was that the behavior happened in private, not in public, though twelve percent of cases depicted behavior occuring both in private and in public. Finally, seventy-eight percent of cases involved some form of physical harassment, with fourteen percent of these cases of physical harassment going so far as rape. Moreover, age difference was considered, although there were only seventeen percent of the cases that shared this feature, and, moreover, a number of cases were made public by people preferring to stay anonymous,

therefore, this feature is impossible to detect in some of the cases. Finally, ten percent of cases involved an underaged target.

While some studies did study attractiveness and its influence on the perception of social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment (Golden, Johnson & Lopez, 2001), it was not considered in this list. For one, attractiveness is highly subjective, as one might be attracted by power or influence, others might be attracted by intellect or physique. Attractiveness may be rated in studies, but then we would need to include several raters and pictures of all cases. Therefore, attractiveness was not considered in this study. Another feature that was not considered was ethnicity. While it is important to acknowledge intersectionality and the fact that women of color are more likely to be subjected to sexual harassment (Berdahl & Moore, 2006; Buchanan, Settles, & Woods, 2008), the list considered here were the most prominent cases within the US, and, as shown above, most of the people accused of sexual misconduct were powerful men. Historically, white men are more likely to be in positions of power than any other group (Elliot & Smith, 2004), and the majority of actors within the list presented were, in fact, white men. The same is the case for women, as only 3.7% of Hollywood movies have a woman of color as a lead (McTaggart, Cox, & Heldman). The list used here is therefore primarily white, but this may be highly influenced by the fact that a lot of cases depicted actors and targets with Hollywood careers. Moreover, and similarly to the feature attractiveness, the fact that some cases were brought forward anonymously, makes it difficult to consider the ethnicity of the target. While ethnicity is an important topic and is important to consider when studying sexual harassment perception, it was decided not to examine it in this study.

Finally, the list mentioned and considered here is not exhaustive, and was last updated in 2020. There are more cases that could have been considered. Nevertheless, it provides a basis for considering the relevance of the prototypical features tested in Paper I and replicated in Paper III.

Bringing this consideration of prototypical sexual harassment back to the definition of prototypicality by Rosch (1999), which states that an item is not only more likely to be identified as part of a category, but the categorization happens faster and with more

certainty, it is a possibility that the cases containing most of the prototypical #MeToo features are more likely to be categorized as sexual harassment than cases containing fewer or none of these features.

In line with the post-hoc consideration, the following features seem to be present in the overwhelming majority of cases, and should therefore be considered prototypical #MeToo features:

*Position of power*

Many cases discussed during and after the #MeToo movement featured men in high positions of power, who used their power to get sexual favors (e.g., Harvey Weinstein; Kantor & Twohey, 2017). A few of the cases discussed publicly occurred between people of equal status. In general, the actor having any form of authority over the target might indicate that potential harm may follow if the target rejects behavior or reacts negatively to it. Some studies indicate that social-sexual behavior is more likely to be perceived as sexual harassment if the actor is of a higher status than the target (Atwater et al., 2021; Blumenthal, 1998; Bursik & Gefter, 2011; Dougherty et al., 1996; Gordon et al., 2005; Hendrix et al., 1998; Rotundo et al., 2001).

*Gender constellation*

The tweet posted by Alyssa Milano in 2017 was specifically addressed to women, encouraging them to comment "me too." if they had experienced sexual harassment or sexual assault. Almost all cases reported on in the media focused on women as targets (Carlsen et al., 2018). The few cases where men or boys came forward, the narrative was often not necessarily about male victimization, but rather focused on the male actor's position (e.g. Kevin Spacey). It is possible that most people might think of a male actor harassing a female target when thinking about sexual harassment, which makes this specific gender constellation a prototypical #MeToo feature. It has been shown that even prior to #MeToo, this gender constellation was more likely to be perceived as sexual harassment than any other constellation (Gutek et al., 1983; McCabe & Hardman, 2005; Runtz & O'Donnell, 2003). It is also the constellation that has been most typical in research.

*Repetition of Behavior*

There were very few single case instances among the most notorious #MeToo cases. Often, women came forward reporting many instances of sexual misconduct, and often, there were many women alleging wrongdoing by the same person (e.g. Harvey Weinstein; Kantor & Twohey, 2017; Bill Cosby; Mallenbaum et al., 2018). There are few studies to this date that have examined repetition of behavior as a possible influence on perception. Those that have, found that social-sexual behavior is more likely to be perceived as sexual harassment when it happened repeatedly compared to one-time incidents (Atwater et al., 2021; Ellis et al., 1991; Hurt et al., 1999). Similarly, court cases were rated as more severe when behaviors were exhibited repeatedly (Kath et al., 2014).

*Quid pro quo and hostile work environment*

Many #MeToo cases that received prominent coverage were cases of quid pro quo harassment. In the Harvey Weinstein case for example, women reported that Weinstein had promised them to further their career in exchange for sexual favors or threatened to ruin their career if they did not engage in said behavior (Kantor & Twohey, 2018). While hostile work environment harassment is more prevalent (Kabat-Farr & Cortina, 2014; Leskinen et al., 2011; Vargas et al., 2019), 30% of depicted cases and 50% of the most notorious cases showed quid pro quo behavior. This is especially relevant when considering that this is the least prevalent form of sexual harassment (Vargas et al., 2019). Gender harassment, the most prevalent type of harassment (Vargas et al., 2019), was seldom the focus of famous #MeToo cases.

*Sexualized over non-sexualized physical contact*

As a response to the #MeToo tweet, and using the #MeToo hashtag, women often shared experiences that contained sexualized physical contact such as the touching of the face, waist, buttocks, breasts or genitals. The hashtag was often used together with words such as abuse, assault, or rape (Schneider & Carpenter, 2019; D'Efilippo 2018). Therefore, many people may have associated the #MeToo movement with sexualized physical contact. The cases frequently receiving most media coverage also included sexualized physical contact, such as the Harvey Weinstein case (Kantor & Twohey,

2018), the Kevin Spacey case (Romano, 2018), the R. Kelly case (Leung & Williams, 2019), and others. It has been shown that sexual harassment including sexualized physical contact is more likely to be perceived as sexual harassment (Dougherty et al., 1996; Lee & Guerrero, 2001; Rotundo et al., 2001). Behaviors including non-sexualized physical contact, such as patting someone's shoulder or shaking their hand, are less likely to be perceived as sexual harassment (Lee & Guerrero, 2001; Rotundo et al., 2001).

*Private over public settings*

Within the #MeToo movement, many cases described sexual harassment in private settings, meaning sexual behavior happening behind closed doors. This led to targets being alone with their experience and beeing unaware of the existence of other targets being harassed by the same actor. In the Harvey Weinstein case, women claimed to have been harassed and assaulted within private hotel rooms and offices, and have even claimed to have been offered money to keep sexual abuse private (Kantor & Twohey, 2018). Therefore, private settings are defined as a prototypical #MeToo feature. However, there are no studies that have investigated whether private settings actually increase the perception of social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment. On the one hand, harassment in private settings removes the possibility for immediate support from colleagues, as well as the presence of witnesses that can attest to the harassment's occurrence, and possibly leads the target to feel more threatened by the harasser. On the other hand, a target might feel even more distressed when behavior happens publicly, yet without receiving support. More research on the influence of private and public settings is therefore warranted.

*Personal over general targets*

Rather than addressing general sexism or general gender discrimination, the #MeToo movement consisted primarily of people sharing personal stories as well as bringing forward allegations due to misconduct against them (Gill & Orgad, 2018). The post-hoc consideration revealed that in the cases that specifically talked about sexist comments, comments were typically addressed toward the person making the allegations, not at for example women in general. Sexist or otherwise degrading comments have been shown

to be perceived more as sexual harassment when directed at one person than comments directed to a group of people (Rotundo et al., 2001).

### 1.5.2 Individual factors

The situation is not the only influence on how we perceive behavior and whether we categorize it as sexual harassment. While some theories see women and men in entirely different roles (Eagly, 1987), and therefore theorize that they would perceive social interactions differently on a group level (Tannen, 1990), another view point is to lay more focus on individual differences aside from gender (REF).

Individual differences, such as one's attitudes, beliefs, and experiences, might also influence how we see the world and categorize what we see. There are several individual differences that have been shown to influence how one perceives social-sexual behavior. First, this thesis outlines people's beliefs and attitudes that may have an influence on how one perceives certain behavior.

*#MeToo beliefs*

Research on the beliefs and attitudes people have about the #MeToo movement is sparse, but a few studies have been published on this topic. People's beliefs that the #MeToo movement led to fewer benefits and more harm have been found to be associated with hostile sexist attitudes toward women as well as a belief in rape myths (Kunst et al., 2019). Believing that the #MeToo movement led to more benefits and less harm, however, was associated with a stronger feminist identity (Kunst et al., 2019). Moreover, another study found that gender system justification, which is defined as a motivation to justify the current gender roles, was negatively associated with support for the #MeToo movement (Kende et al., 2020). Also, women who reported lower gender system justification reported to find the #MeToo movement more empowering, which also increased their support for the movement (Kende et al., 2020). Therefore, it seems that the beliefs and attitudes people have about the #MeToo movement are linked to a other concepts and therefore are a factor worth examining when investigating sexual harassment perception. To this date, there are no studies that have examined the influence of #MeToo beliefs on perception of social-sexual behavior.

*Sexism*

Traditionally, we differentiate between hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. Hostile sexism describes misogynic or misandrist beliefs about women and men, while benevolent sexism is characterized by the belief that women are weaker and need protection, which men, who are believed to be more bold, strong, and risk-taking can provide (Glick & Fiske, 2011). It has been shown that people who hold hostile sexist beliefs often also hold benevolent sexist beliefs (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 1999). Hostile sexism has been shown to be associated with higher tolerance of sexual harassment (Russell & Oswald, 2015; Russell & Trigg, 2004), and with stereotypical beliefs about rape (Abrams et al., 2003; Bendixen et al., 2014; Bendixen & Kennair, 2017b; Stockdale, 1993, Yamawaki, Darby, & Queiroz, 2007; Yamawaki, 2021; Rollero & Tartaglia, 2019). Moreover, a recent study has found that hostile sexism as well as benevolent sexism did not have a significant influence on whether social-sexual behavior was believed to have positive or negative outcomes (Leigh, Thomas & Davies, 2021). Whether or not sexism influences the direct rating of social-sexual behavior scenarios as sexual harassment or not remains to be examined.

*Traditionalism and Gender Egalitarianism*

It has been shown that a more conservative ideology is associated with higher levels of sexism (Christopher & Mull, 2006). Comparing the United States and Turkey, Toker (2016) found that women from the United States were more likely to perceive social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment than women from Turkey. The United States are more gender egalitarian and less traditional than Turkey (Toker, 2016). Thus, traditionalism and gender egalitarianism appear to have an effect on perception, but there is very little research on this subject. Therefore, this association should be tested in a more gender egalitarian nation such as Norway. Also, the study by Toker (2016) only examined women, but it has been shown that women tend to hold less traditional values and more egalitarian values than men do (Bryant, 2003; Emmers-Sommer, 2014; McDaniel, 2008). Possible effects of traditionalism and gender egalitarianism should therefore be examined for women and men.

*Being subjected to sexual harassment[3]*

There is no clear evidence whether being subjected to sexual harassment influences perception of social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment. There are two theories that might apply here, which is being sensitized or desensitized due to being subjected to sexual harassment. The first theory would lead to an increase in perceiving behavior as sexual harassment, as the target has experienced this themselves and are therefore more attentive, empathetic, and perhaps more informed than others. One study has found that women who have been subjected to sexual harassment, especially repeatedly, reported changing their behaviors, such as changing their clothing, body language and avoiding certain areas (Mellgren et al., 2018). It is possible that these women would be more likely to perceive social-sexual behaviors as sexual harassment in the future. In this case, those who have been subjected to sexual harassment would be more likely to label behaviors as sexual harassment. On the other hand, people who have been subjected to sexual harassment may become desensitized to sexual harassment. This may come out of protective denial, thinking that what has happened to them cannot be that bad, and thereby, normalizing the behavior. The same study showing changes in behavior in women who have been subjected to sexual harassment also found that women reported being tired, used to such behavior, and annoyed that both they themselves and public in general find it normal (Mellgren et al., 2018). When becoming desensitized, those who have been subjected to sexual harassment would be less likely to perceive behaviors as harassment.

Research on the influence of being subjected to sexual harassment on perception is sparse. Runtz & O'Donnell (2003) found no association between being subjected to sexual harassment with perception, nor an association between having observed sexual harassment and perception. On the other hand, people who have been subjected to sexual harassment have been shown to exibit more negative emotional reactions when being exposed to video material of social-sexual behavior (McDermut et al., 2000).

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[3] In Paper II, we refer to this as "own experience with sexual harassment". Still, I have decided to change this term to "being subjected to sexual harassment", as experience might also refer to being an observer of sexual harassment (second hand experience). I therefore want to use the term "being subjected to" within this thesis, however, in Paper II, this variable remains labeled "own experience with sexual harassment"

These findings are not sufficient to make any predictions, which is why this matter will be examined exploratively in this thesis.

### 1.5.3 Role of observer

Often, sexual harassment is described as a dyadic process, between the actor and the target. But sometimes, observers are present in situations where sexual harassment occurs. There are several reasons why the role of the observer is important.

First, observers may experience something defined as bystander stress. The term 'bystander stress' was first used by Kimberly Schneider in 1996 to explain her findings that knowing about sexual harassment at work, or observing it, led to lower levels of job satisfaction, life satisfaction and mental health (Schneider, 1996). A later study has shown that observing hostile behavior against women, combined with experiencing a lack of response from the organization sanctioning sexual harassment, has a negative effect on the observers, such as lower psychological wellbeing, higher levels of job burn-out, as well as lower levels of job satisfaction (Miner-Rubino & Cortina, 2007). Other studies have found similar effects for those who work with targets of sexual harassment (Miner-Rubino & Cortina, 2004; Richman-Hirsch & Glomb, 2002). Sexual harassment is hence not only an isolated phenomenon, but affects those observing, as well as the work environment as a whole. Preventing and reducing sexual harassment may therefore have a bigger impact than previously thought.

Moreover, how an observer perceives the situation and whether they categorize the behavior they witness as sexual harassment may influence the situation itself. The observer may join the harassing behavior if they categorize it as harmless joking or may express sympathy and support for the target if they categorize it as sexual harassment. Having a witness attest to the allegations may even be relevant to the target in deciding whether to come forward and report the behavior. However, observers are not only an important factor in potentially harassing situations, they are also impacted by what they witness themselves. There is little research on how observers should act when observing a potentially harassing situation. However, it has been shown that women who have self-reported sexual harassment are less likely to be considered for a promotion, compared to those whose sexual harassment was not reported by themselves but by an

observing coworker (Hart, 2019). Therefore, it could be important to examine the role of the observer to a larger degree, as their behavior not only in witnessing and offering support is relevant, but their reporting sexual harassment could be helpful for the targets. It has also been shown that observers of sexual harassment were more likely to report behavior when the organization communicated clear zero tolerance policies (Jacobson & Eaton, 2018). However, under any circumstances, it is only possible for observers to report behavior if they perceive it in the same manner as the target does. How observers perceive sexual harassment is vital to their possible reporting. Therefore, it is vital to study factors that influence how observers perceive sexual harassment.

### 1.5.3.1 Reasonable person standard

The importance of observers can be seen in the juridical system as well. Here, the question of culpability of an alleged harasser is often decided based on the accounts of a "reasonable person". The "reasonable person", formerly called the "reasonable man" is a hypothetical figure created by the court of law (Gardner, 2015). It is used not only as a tool to educate law students, but also to communicate cases to the jury of a court (Gardner, 2015). How the "reasonable person" would have reacted in similar circumstances as the person on trial is used to determine wrongdoing and guilt (Alicke & Weigel, 2021). The use of such a hypothetical figure is called the "reasonable person standard" (Alicke & Weigel, 2021). While the "reasonable person" should represent a common figure, the "reasonable person standard" has been criticized for using a false objectivity to favor some groups over others (Moran, 2003). It has also been argued that the "reasonable person" leaves some room to justify unjust behaviors, as a "reasonable person" may have reasonable fears, interests, and emotions, and may act upon them (Gardner, 2015). Within sexual harassment cases, it was argued that due to gender differences in how women and men perceive sexual harassment, the "reasonable person" needed to be replaced with a "reasonable woman" (Shoenfelt et al., 2002). Because even though the "reasonable person" was meant to be gender neutral, it was argued that it is still male-biased (Newman, 2007). In the US, courts started replacing the reasonable person standard with the reasonable woman standard in the early 90s (Peterson, 1999). While research finds gender differences in perception of social-sexual behavior (Rotundo et al., 2001), not all support the idea of a "reasonable woman

standard". A meta-analysis found that gender differences in perception are rather small (Blumenthal, 1998), and the analyses instead shed light on the impact power differentials between actor and target had. Another study, while not objecting to the "reasonable woman standard", argues for more focus on individual differences instead of gender (Wiener & Vardsveen, 2018). To this day, both the "reasonable person standard" and the "reasonable woman standard" are used in the US (Shoenfelt et al., 2002). One study examined how using the "reasonable woman standard" over the traditional "reasonable person standard" has impacted court decisions and found that in cases where the "reasonable woman standard" was used, plaintiffs had a slightly higher probability of winning the case (Perry et al., 2004). However, when controlling for other variables, such as specific characteristics of the case, judge gender and the year in which the case was presented, the authors described the impact of the "reasonable woman standard" as 'positive, but weak' (Perry et al., 2004, p. 22). So, while there is some evidence that introducing the "reasonable woman" has impacted court decisions, research is not at all conclusive as to how much of an impact there is. The effectiveness and actual "reasonableness" of this tool continues to raise doubts (Moran, 2003). Where people in general draw the line between social-sexual behavior and sexual harassment may be important to evaluate the reasonable person standard. Finally, it is important to point out that sexual minorities and trans/genderfluid/non-binary people have been left out of the conversation. While the "reasonable woman standard" was put into action to address gender differences and give women a voice, it creates a gender dichotomy that does not fit everyone.

## 1.6 Sexual harassment and the LGBTQ+ community

In both research and media coverage, sexual harassment is often portrayed very heteronormatively, displaying only opposite-gender attraction, and often focusing on a male actor and a female target. However, same-gender harassment is also prevalent (Bendixen & Kennair, 2017a). Among girls, slut-shaming is a common tool of derogation, while among boys and men, homonegative[4] comments are common

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[4] In this thesis, I will be using the word "homonegativity" instead of the more common "homophobia". Homophobia is most commonly defined as "dislike of or prejudice against gay people" (Oxford Languages), and homonegativity is defined as "a prejudicial attitude or discriminatory behavior directed

(Bendixen & Kennair, 2017a). This thesis sets out to be inclusive and will therefore also discuss same-gender sexual harassment.

Even though sexual harassment of sexual minorities is highly prevalent (see Hoel et al., 2017), this group is often excluded from both the public discourse (Ison, 2019; Trott, 2020) and sexual harassment research (Cortina & Areguin, 2021). Collecting and analyzing data from sexual and gender minorities may be more complicated, as the group of LGBTQ+ people is smaller than that of heterosexual and cis people. Therefore, recruiting LGBTQ+ people is a challenge that may be time-consuming and may require more resources. Similarly, analyzing data on smaller groups is more difficult, as case numbers tend to be low and he choice of statistical analysis method can lead to complications. Lastly, what terms to use and how to address groups outside of the normative is challenging. Still, a complicated data collection, analyses or usage of terms does not justify exclusion, data collection from LGBTQ+ people is not out of reach, and would help to paint a more complete and inclusive picture of sexual harassment perception.

The exclusion of sexual and gender minorities in earlier research is especially problematic, as sexual minorities are more likely to be subjected to sexual harassment than heterosexuals and cisgendered people (Crothers et al., 2017; Earnshaw et al., 2018; Elipe et al., 2018; Hoel et al., 2017; Kosciw et al., 2017; Pollitt et al., 2018). In work contexts, it gender diverse people (transgender, non-binary and genderqueer) are over two times more likely to experience workplace harassment than their male cisgender peers, independent of sexual orientation (Waite, 2021).

Sexual and gender minorities can be seen as a vulnerable group, as they show higher rates of depression, anxiety, PTSD, suicidal tendencies and suicide (Johns et al., 2019). It has already been stated that being subjected to sexual harassment and some of the negative mental health outcomes mentioned above have been shown to be associated. Therefore, research should not exclude sexual minorities, especially research that

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toward an individual because of his or her homosexual orientation" (Morrison et al., 1997). Therefore, homophobia and homonegativity can be used synonymously. However, I believe that the term homophobia still indicates being scared of homosexuality, while homonegativity more clearly states the negativity toward a specific group.

possibly holds practical implications on how to reduce and prevent sexual harassment within the workplace.

How minorities perceive sexual harassment is important for the same reason as to why it is important to examine how women and men perceive sexual harassment; to gain understanding of the degree of consensus between genders. However, by excluding sexual and gender minorities from research, every consensus we potentially find may only be valid for cisgendered, heterosexual people. This leads to the problem that minorities, if they differ from how cisgendered, heterosexual people view sexual harassment, may have other lines that may be crossed in the process, or may feel less support from others. In any case, including the perspectives of sexual and gender minorities is crucial to sexual harassment research in general, and perception of sexual harassment specifically.

## 2. Aims and hypotheses

The aim of this thesis is to widen the perspective on the perception of social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment. This includes examining both situational and individual features that may influence this perspective. Moreover, the aim was to find a less heteronormative way of studying sexual harassment, meaning the inclusion of same-gender sexual harassment as well as the inclusion of people with different gender identities and sexual orientations, as data on these groups are almost non-existent (Cortina & Areguin, 2021).

The first paper focuses on the influence of prototypical #MeToo features on the perception of social-sexual behavior. Here, the aim was to investigate how prototypical #MeToo features may influence the perception of social-sexual behavior and whether gender differences could be found for perception.

The second paper focuses on the influence of individual differences on the perception of social-sexual behavior. The aim is to examine how attitudes and beliefs influence perception of social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment.

The third and final paper again focuses on prototypical #MeToo features – however, in addition to the investigation of prototypical #MeToo features on new scenarios, the aim is expanded to include neglected groups and behaviors. One aim is to examine the effect of prototypical #MeToo features on the perception of same-gender sexual harassment, the other is to include sexual minorities both as participants and as actors and targets within the hypothetical scenarios.

### 2.1 Hypotheses Paper I

H1: Women will evaluate social-sexual behaviors more as sexual harassment than men will.

H2: Social-sexual behavior will be perceived more as sexual harassment if it contains prototypical #MeToo features (i.e., quid pro quo, male actor, superior position, repetition, personalized targeting, private setting, and physical contact).

**2.2 Hypotheses Paper II**

H1: 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.

H2: Hostile sexism toward women will be associated with more negative and less positive beliefs about the outcomes of the #MeToo movement.

H3: 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.

**2.3 Hypotheses and research questions Paper III**

H1: Women will evaluate social-sexual behaviors more as sexual harassment than men do (Kessler et al., 2020; Rotundo et al., 2001).

H1.1: Men will evaluate social-sexual behaviors less as sexual harassment than women do if the actor is female and the target is male (Kessler et al., 2020).

H2: Social-sexual behavior will be perceived more as sexual harassment if it contains prototypical #MeToo features; male over female actor, superior over subordinate actor, repeated over single case harassment, private over public settings and sexualized physical contact over non-sexualized physical contact (Kessler et al., 2020).

In addition, we aim to explore the following research questions:

RQ1: How will both heterosexual and sexual minorities participants perceive same-gender social-sexual behavior? Same-gender harassment has rarely been studied and it is therefore not clear whether it will be perceived less as sexual harassment, as media has had a more heteronormative perspective (such as a male actor and a female target), or if especially participants of sexual minorities will perceive such behavior more as harassment, as they might be more aware of this type of behavior.

RQ2: How will the sexual orientation of the actor influence the perception of social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment? E.g., will participants who identify as a sexual minority differ from heterosexual participants in their perception of same-gender and opposite gender social-sexual behavior, and particularly so if target and/or actor is homosexual?

RQ3: To what extent will people perceive the hypothetical scenarios as prevalent and realistic?

RQ4: Will people's rating of scenarios as realistic and common influence their perception of those scenarios as sexual harassment?

# 3. Methods

## 3.1 Design and procedures

For all papers presented within this thesis, an online questionnaire was used. Participants were recruited online by sharing the link to the survey via Facebook. For the third paper, we also reached out to LGBTQ+ groups to recruit sexual minorities and gender identity minorities. The link was shared within several LGBTQ+ groups on Facebook on the Norwegian website *Gaysir* for two weeks as well as on *Gaysir's* Facebook profile. *Gaysir* is a website that describes itself as an online community for gay, bisexual, trans people and all other queer people. The website covers local news about queer life, as well as personal stories and information on sex. Members of the site can also communicate on their online forum (www.gaysir.no).

### 3.1.1 Expanding the design for paper III

Paper III functioned as a replication for parts of Paper I while also expanding the research. Paper III built upon Paper I by using some of the same measures and scenarios but set out to uncover a wider perspective on sexual harassment by using new scenarios, measures and participants.

Firstly, scenarios were altered to widen the spectrum of behaviors shown. This was done as Paper I did not include any behaviors that could be classified as derogatory harassment, i.e., comments meant to reduce a competitor's mate value. As this behavior is prevalent (Bendixen & Kennair, 2017a), especially in same-gender constellations, we added two derogatory scenarios. The scenarios added were a homonegative comment as well as a comment on a person's sexual standards (often referred to as slut shaming). We also added an objectifying comment on an individual outer appearance, as this too is a highly prevalent type of harassment.

Moreover, scenario descriptions were not exclusively opposite gender social-sexual behavior, but also included same-gender actor and target constellations. While same-gender sexual harassment is prevalent (Bendixen & Kennair, 2017a), there is very little research on perception of same-gender sexual harassment. It has been shown that same-gender behavior among women was perceived as the least harassing of all gender

constellations (Bitton & Shaul, 2013). There were no gender differences in perceiving the three other possible gender constellations (Bitton & Shaul, 2013). However, research is very sparse and therefore, further investigation is warranted.

Furthermore, LGBTQ+ perspectives were included in the study. First, we aimed to recruit as many people as possible from the LGBTQ+ community, so as to investigate whether the behavior shown in scenarios would be perceived differently. Not including LGBTQ+ perspectives in sexual harassment research results in said research being heteronormative and not displaying the full population. Sexual harassment, which, as already stated, is often dependent on how the person subjected to the behavior categorizes said behavior, should be investigated with minority groups in mind. Understanding whether there are differences in how gender identity and sexual orientation affect the perception of social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment is relevant for workplace etiquette and human recourses. Similar to moral panicking, some people may also be reluctant to hire LGBTQ+ people, as they might be worried of allegations of homonegativity, or are simply concerned that some behaviors might be perceived differently by a different group. Generally, women, as well as LGBTQ+ people should have equal opportunities to be hired, mentored, and included in social work events. If moral panicking, or fear of false allegations, is hindering them, then there should be investigations into whether moral panicking is justified.

Therefore, within the third paper, we expanded data collection to include not only women and men, but also everyone outside of the gender dichotomy, in addition to everyone else on the sexual orientation spectrum.

Furthermore, we added sexual orientation as an additional feature so as to investigate whether participants of different genders and sexual orientations would perceive social-sexual behavior differently when the target and/ or actor was homosexual. This gives important information about not only the perspectives of LGBTQ+ people, but how they are viewed as targets and actors.

Operationalization *gender* within Paper III

Gender was operationalized with two separate items. The first item read "What is your sex[5] (assigned at birth)?" where participants could choose between *woman*, *man*, and *other/ do not want to answer*. The second item read "What is your gender identity?". Here, we offered the following choices: *man, woman, both man and woman, neither man nor woman, non-binary*. Numbers of participants who identified as neither woman nor man were low (4.8%). As such, we combined the latter categories. We analyzed three groups: cis-women, cis-men and a third group, which will be referred to as *trans/genderfluid/non-binary*. Participants that had a mismatch between their biological sex (first item posted) and their gender identity (second item posted) were categorized as transgender.

Operationalization *sexual orientation* within Paper III

Sexual orientation was operationalized with two items. The first item asked for the participants' sexual orientation, using the following categories: homosexual, bisexual, pansexual, heterosexual and other. Even though 36.7% of the sample identified as other categories than heterosexual, we combined all sexual orientations beside heterosexual into one group, here referred to as LGBP+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Pansexual, other). This was done as four or more individual groups would have been too small to generate any meaningful results. Moreover, we used an additional item reading "Would you describe yourself as asexual?", with the options *Yes* and *No*. As few participants (n = 26) identified as asexual, we did not analyze these participants as a group. They remained in the original sample and depending on their sexual orientation in addition to their asexual identity, analyzed them either in the hetero or LGBP+ group. We did not analyze data separately for participants of different sexual orientations, however, we did include sexual orientation as a predictor within the analyses.

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[5] In Norwegian, there is no difference between sex and gender, as both are translated as the Norwegian word "kjønn". When asking about *sex* assigned at birth and *gender* identity, both times, "kjønn" was used – therefore, we added "identity" and "assigned at birth" for more clarity.

## 3.2 Measures

### 3.2.1 Perception of social-sexual behavior: Rating of hypothetical scenarios

To measure perception of social-sexual behavior, we created hypothetical scenarios describing social-sexual behavior in the workplace. The scenarios were based on the list published by Rotundo et al. (2001). The categories used within the list were: derogatory attitudes (personal and impersonal), unwanted dating pressure, sexual propositions, physical sexual contact and nonconsensual physical contact, and sexual coercion (Rotundo et al., 2001). For this study, we were most interested in ambiguous behavior, namely scenarios that could or could not be interpreted as sexual harassment. However, we still aimed to include one of the more explicit categories for reference and, to cover quid pro quo harassment. Sexual propositions described by Rotundo and colleagues (2001) as "explicit requests for sexual encounters" (p. 916) were not used as they were among the more explicit behaviors described. The other rather explicit behavior described was sexual coercion. This category was chosen for this study, as it holds the same characteristics as quid pro quo behavior ("Requests for sexual encounters or forced encounters that are made a condition of employment or promotion", p. 916, Rotundo et al., 2001). Since we were interested in studying more ambiguous behavior and comparing them to the more prototypical quid pro quo harassment, this category was also included. Therefore, we ended up using the following four categories of the list published by Rotundo et al. (2001): derogatory attitudes (impersonal as baseline, personal as additional feature), unwanted dating pressure, nonconsensual physical sexual contact, and sexual coercion. The participants were asked to evaluate said behavior ("Is this sexual harassment?") on a scale from 1 (*Not at all*) to 6 (*Absolutely!*). The participants were then given several additional features to re-evaluate the scenario, such as "if the man was the woman's boss" or "if they were equal colleagues". Within the first two studies, only opposite-gender harassment was described, however the third study also described same-gender harassment.

*Scenarios Paper I and Paper II*

The first scenario, based on the derogatory attitudes categorized by Rotundo et al. (2001) described a sexist joke made during a lunch break. The second scenario, based

on the category of unwanted dating pressure, described someone asking out their colleague on a date repeatedly. The third scenario, falling under the category of nonconsensual physical contact (Rotundo et al., 2001), described a congratulatory hug. The last scenario described quid pro quo behavior which falls under the category of sexual coercion (Rotundo et al., 2001). While all four scenarios were used within the first paper, we excluded the last scenario, quid pro quo behavior, from the second paper. This was due to a ceiling effect found within the first paper. Moreover, by excluding the quid pro quo scenario, the second paper could focus merely on hostile work environment sexual harassment, which made the whole paper more coherent. All scenarios used within Paper I, II and III can be found in the appendix.

*Scenarios of Paper III*

The first two scenarios used in Paper III were equal to the scenarios *Date* and *Hug* used in the first study since Paper III aimed to replicate our findings from Paper I on these specific scenarios. The scenarios describing sexism and quid pro quo behavior were excluded from Paper III. Within this study, we aimed to examine scenarios that would provoke variance in the responses. The sexist comment, representing gender harassment, was not rated as sexual harassment within the first paper, while quid pro quo behavior was overwhelmingly rated as sexual harassment. Therefore, those two scenarios were not used for the third paper, leaving only hostile work environment scenarios. This made the paper more coherent. Instead, three new scenarios were added. The goal when creating the scenarios was to find scenarios that showed ambiguous behavior, meaning that there would be some variation not only between participants, but also when rating the additional features. The first newly added scenario described a homonegative comment. There are some similarities to the category personal derogatory comments (Rotundo et al., 2001) which were described as "behaviors that are directed at the target that reflect derogatory attitudes about the target's gender" (p. 916). While we explored derogatory attitudes toward a target's gender within Paper I, in Paper III, we aimed to explore derogatory attitudes toward a target's sexual orientation. Therefore, while the scenario changed and is currently better adapted to same-gender sexual harassment, the scenario somewhat still falls under the category of personal derogatory comments introduced by Rotundo et al., (2001). The same applies to the case for the

second newly added scenario, namely a comment on low sexual standards. Again, the target's gender was not the target of derogatory attitudes, but their sexual standards or sexual decision-making were. This was to create a realistic same-gender sexual harassment scenario. Finally, we created a scenario showcasing an objectifying comment on somebody's body. This scenario is the only scenario that does not fall under any of the categories created by Rotundo et al., (2001). However, the goal of creating this scenario was to show the actor's sexual interest similarly to the excluded category of sexual propositions, but more ambiguous. Here, there were no explicit requests or propositions, but merely a comment displaying some sexual interest in the target's body. The aim was that this scenario would lead to more variance among the participants than a more explicit scenario.

All the newly created scenarios fall under the category of hostile work environment harassment. Scenarios were discussed within a group of psychology bachelor students in order to evaluate how to present scenarios in a manner that seemed realistic for the participants. All scenarios used within Paper I, II and III can be found in the appendix.

*Gender constellations*

Papers I and II only described opposite-gender harassment with participants of the study rating both male harassers and female targets as well as male targets and female harassers. This is common in sexual harassment research. In Paper III, we opted for four gender constellations, including same-gender harassment (constellations target-actor: woman-woman, woman-man, man-woman, man-man). This was to include all possible forms of sexual harassment and gain a wider perspective of same-gender sexual harassment. As the questionnaire would have been too comprehensive, participants only responded to one of the four possible gender constellations each. Which constellation they responded to was randomized.

### 3.2.2 Prototypical #MeToo features

After each baseline rating of the scenario, we added the prototypical #MeToo features. However, not all features were applied to all scenarios. This is further discussed within the limitation part of this thesis. See Tables 1 and 2.

*Table 1*: Additional prototypical #MeToo features used in Paper I.

| #MeToo features | Scenarios | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Joke | Invitation to Date | Hug | Quid pro quo |
| Personalized | × | | | |
| Repeated | × | | | |
| Private Setting | | | × | × |
| Power differential | × | × | × | × |
| Sexualized Contact | | | × | |


*Table 2*: Additional prototypical #MeToo features used in Paper III.

| #MeToo features | Scenarios | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Invitation to Date | Hug | Homonegative comment | Comment low standards | Objectifying comment |
| Repeated | × | × | × | × | × |
| Private Setting | × | × | × | × | × |
| Power differential | × | × | × | × | × |
| Sexualized Contact | × | × | | | × |
| Additional feature: Sexual orientation | | | | | |
| Target lesbian/gay | × | × | × | × | × |
| Actor lesbian/gay | | × | × | | × |
| Target & Actor lesbian/gay | | × | × | | × |

There were several changes from Paper I to Paper III in measuring prototypical #MeToo features. First, we did not continue to use the prototypical feature personal vs general target in Paper III because all scenarios within Paper III were targeting someone on a personal level. Moreover, we aimed to apply the prototypical #MeToo features to more scenarios than within Paper I. This was to assure that the features would have the same effect over different scenarios and could be applied to different types of behaviors. However, some features could not be added to all scenarios as they would not have portrayed realistic situations anymore. An example for this was sexualized physical contact which would not have been realistic in the derogation harassment situations, namely the homonegative comment and the comment on low standards. However, in contrast to Paper I, no additional feature was applied to just one scenario, but all were applied to at least three. Finally, we added sexual minority of the target, actor and both target and actor as additional features. While we added a target from a sexual minority to all scenarios, we only had actors and both actor and targets from a sexual minority to three scenarios. This was done because adding this feature to scenario 1 (date) and scenario 4 (comment on low standards) seemed to change the content of the scenario. For example, within the date scenario it did not make sense to add the actor being homosexual as this was either implied by them asking out a person of the same gender or it was implied that they were not if they were asking out a person of the opposite gender. Therefore, only the targets from a sexual minority were added as an additional feature to these two scenarios.

### 3.2.3 Measuring individual differences

To measure sexism for Paper II, we used the Norwegian 16-item short form Ambivalent Sexism Scales (Bendixen & Kennair, 2017b; Glick & Fiske, 1996). Statements were rated on a five-point Likert scale, with the anchors 1 (*completely disagree*) and 5 (*completely agree*). Four items measured hostile sexism toward women, four items measured hostile sexism toward men. Benevolent sexism was measured as one 8-item construct as opposed to two separate constructs as was done for hostile sexism. This was done following recommendations and prior analyses on this construct (Bendixen & Kennair, 2017b).

Beliefs about the outcome of the #MeToo movement were measured using a scale constructed for this study specifically. Ten statements were presented to participants. These referred to both positive (beneficial) and negative (harmful) outcomes of the #MeToo movement. Participants rated these statements on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 5 (*completely agree*). Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses were conducted (see Paper II for a more detailed description) and led to two final scales of five items for positive #MeToo beliefs and three items for negative #MeToo beliefs.

The items measuring traditional values and gender egalitarianism were designed specifically for this study. Traditional values were measured with a single item: "It is important to persevere the traditional values in our society". Gender egalitarianism was measured with 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". The items were presented within one section of the questionnaire and were all rated on a five-point Likert scale with the anchors 1 (*completely disagree*) and (*completely agree*).

To measure being subjected to sexual harassment, participants were first presented with the legal definition of sexual harassment. They were then asked: "Based on this definition, have you experienced sexual harassment in the last year?". Participants could respond with "Yes", "No" or "I don't know". Next, they were asked whether they found this experience to be distressing. Those who answered with "Yes" to both questions were coded as having been subjected to sexual harassment in the further analysis.

## 3.3 Statistics

### 3.3.1 Paper I and Paper III

Analyses in the first and third paper were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics 25 (IBM Corp., 2017). Within the first paper, to analyze the baseline ratings of the scenarios, we performed several mixed-model ANOVAs (profile analyses) with gender of actor (Female vs. Male) as the within-subjects factor, and Participant gender (Man vs. Woman) as between-subject factor. In addition to main effects of Gender of actor, and Participant gender the analysis provided tests of moderation (interaction). In the first

paper, we also added Question order (female actor first vs. male actor first) as a between-subject factor. This was not done for the third paper, as we did not have varying question orders within this data collection. Assumptions were tested throughout. When the assumption of homogeneity of covariance (Mauchly's test of Sphericity) was violated, we reported Greenhouse–Geisser Epsilon-adjusted degrees of freedom and corresponding p-values to reduce the probability of Type-I errors. Next, we aimed to examine the influence of the prototypical #MeToo features. To do this, we first performed a mixed-model ANOVA with the scenarios and Gender of actor as the within-subjects factors and Participant gender as the between-subject factor. For the first paper, question order was dropped for this analysis due to the lack of any consistent effects in the prior analyses. We reported on the three contrasts between the scenarios.

In the third paper, which was pre-registered (https://osf.io/xc873/), we used mixed-model ANOVAs. To test gender differences, the ANOVA was performed with the five scenarios as the within-subject factor, and participant gender (cis-woman vs. cis-man vs. transgender/genderfluid/non-binary), actor gender (woman vs. man), gender constellation (same-gender vs. opposite-gender), and participant sexual orientation (hetero vs. sexual minority) as between-subject factors. To analyze the effect of the prototypical #MeToo features, we then performed an ANOVA with the situational feature as the within-subject factor, and, as above, participant gender (woman vs. man vs. transgender/genderfluid/non-binary), harasser gender (woman vs. man), gender constellation (same-gender vs. opposite-gender), and participant sexual orientation (hetero vs. sexual minority) as between-subject factors. We report Wilk's Lambda F-values, eta squared, power, and estimated marginal means (*MM*) throughout.

### 3.3.2 Paper II

Analyses in the second paper were performed using Stata 16.1 (StataCorp, 2019). First, we estimated gender differences using simple t-tests. To predict the perception of social-sexual behavior, we used path analyses (structural equation modelling, SEM). This analysis was equivalent to a hierarchical multiple regression. However, it allowed for more than one outcome variable. The two outcome variables examined were perceptions of social-sexual behavior in two gender constellations, with a female actor

and male target, and a male actor and female target. Predictors were defined at different levels of the model. Background predictors were age, experience with sexual harassment, traditional values and gender equality. Secondary predictors were hostile sexism toward women and men and the most proximate predictors were the two #MeToo belief outcomes. Because prior harassment experience was included in the model for women and not for men (prevalence was too low for men), the path model for women and men was tested separately. Moderation (interaction) effects as well as mediation effects (MEDSEM; Mehmetoglu, 2017) were examined.

# 4. Results

This chapter summarizes the main findings from Paper I, II and III. Detailed results as well as tables and figures can be found within the papers themselves.

## 4.1 Paper I

The first hypothesis of this paper was supported as women were more likely to rate all the scenarios combined as sexual harassment than men – particularly when the actor was female, and the target was male. The effect size was moderate ($\eta_P^2 = .062$). This gender difference was found for all four scenarios tested. To sum up the gender differences for each scenario, in the first scenario, women were more likely than men to rate the sexist joke as harassment, however, the effect was small to moderate ($\eta_P^2 = .032$). Women were also more likely to perceive the second scenario, the date, as harassment. Again, the effect was small ($\eta_P^2 = .028$). The third scenario, the congratulatory hug, showed a moderate between-subjects effect ($\eta_P^2 = .050$). Finally, the quid pro quo scenario showed a small effect ($\eta_P^2 = .021$). To sum up, while women were more likely to rate all scenarios as harassment than men, the effect sizes were small to moderate.

In addition to the mere perception of the scenarios, we also examined how women and men perceived female and male actors. Here, we found that women were less likely than men to make a distinction between female and male actor. This was found for the first three scenarios and effect sizes were small to moderate (Sexist comment: $\eta_P^2 = .035$, Date $\eta_P^2 = .028$, and Hug $\eta_P^2 = .050$). In the last scenario, describing a quid pro quo harassment situation, both women and men perceived the scenario more as harassment when the actor was male. The effect size for this difference between perception of a male actor vs. a female actor was moderate ($\eta_P^2 = .043$). All participants were more inclined to perceive quid pro quo behavior as harassment than in the three scenarios describing hostile work environment. Here, we found a large effect size ($\eta_P^2 = 0.93$).

Next, we tested the influence of the prototypical #MeToo features. The first prototypical #MeToo feature we examined was the power differential between actor and target. Participants across gender were more likely to rate social-sexual behavior as sexual

harassment when the actor was in a position of power. We found effect sizes (Cohen's $d$) between $d = .77$ and $d = 1.33$ in the three hostile work environment scenarios and between $d = .44$ and $d = .55$ in the quid pro quo scenario. Repeated behaviors were more frequently perceived as sexual harassment than single case behavior and this for both female actors ($d = 1.17$) and male actors ($d = 1.03$). The effect was strong in both cases. This difference in perception was found across genders.

Next, we examined the prototypical #MeToo feature of personal targeted jokes in contrast to more general comments. Participants were more likely to perceive social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment when it targeted one person directly. This was true across gender, with large effect sizes for both women $d = 1.38$ and men $d = 1.68$.

The next prototypical feature examined was the scenario happening in private in contrast to public settings. We found that both women and men were more likely to view all four scenarios as harassment when they happened in private situations. The effect size was large when participants were perceiving male actors $d = .76$ and moderate when perceiving female actors $d = .56$.

The final prototypical #MeToo feature was sexualized in contrast to non-sexualized physical contact. Again, both women and men were significantly more likely to rate social-sexual behavior as harassment. The effect size was strong both when examining male actors $d = 2.41$ and female actors $d = 2.14$. This prototypical #MeToo feature was the one that led to the biggest effect sizes.

## 4.2 Paper II

The second paper focuses on individual differences and their influence on perception of social-sexual behavior. First, we examined gender differences concerning both the predictors, i.e., the individual differences, and the outcome variables, i.e., the perception of social-sexual behavior in two different gender constellations.

Traditionalism was the only predictor that did not show any gender differences. We found gender differences for the other predictors as well as the outcome variables. Women were more egalitarian than men, the effect size was moderate ($d = -0.39$). When examining sexism, we found that women were more hostile toward men and men

were more hostile toward women, meaning that each gender was more hostile toward the opposite gender. Effect sizes were moderate ($d = -0.36$ for hostile sexism toward men; $d = 0.54$ for hostile sexism toward women). Looking at benevolent sexism, women reported lower levels, again with a moderate effect size ($d = 0.49$). Beliefs about the outcomes of the #MeToo movement, showed significant gender differences as well. Women were more positive ($d = -0.37$) toward the #MeToo movement, and less negative ($d = 0.73$). Thirty-three percent of women reported to have been subjected to sexual harassment within the last year, and 13% of men reported the same.

There were also gender differences for the outcome variables. Women were more likely to rate social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment. When looking at behavior by male actors, the effect size was small to moderate ($d = -0.32$) and the effect size was moderate when viewing female actors ($d = -0.63$).

Next, we examined bivariate associations. This was done separately for women and men, to examine whether associations between predictors and outcomes were different. For men, having been subjected to sexual harassment was only weakly associated to other variables. For women, we found associations between being subjected to sexual harassment and lower age, less traditionalism, higher hostile sexism toward men, and more positive and less negative beliefs about the #MeToo movement. For both women and men, higher traditionalism was associated with less positive and more negative beliefs about the #MeToo movement – in contrast, higher egalitarianism was associated with more positive and less negative beliefs about the #MeToo movement. Taking the outcome variables into account, hostile sexism toward women, high traditionalism and high negative beliefs about the #MeToo movement were associated with a lower perception of social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment. Negative beliefs about the #MeToo movement showed the strongest association with the outcome variables. In comparison, positive #MeToo beliefs showed much weaker associations.

The main analyses of this paper were the path analyses. The model was tested separately for women and men because being subjected to sexual harassment in the past year had an effect for women, but not for men (and was removed from the latter model). Similar patterns of associations were found for women and men. We found that

negative beliefs about the outcomes of the #MeToo movement was the central predictor for the perception of social-sexual behavior as more negative beliefs led to fewer perceptions as sexual harassment. This was true for both women and men. Another predictor that had a direct effect on perception was hostile sexism toward men. More hostile sexism led to a higher perception as sexual harassment – however, this was only true for the gender constellation with a male actor and a female target. Hostile sexism toward women, while not having a direct effect on perception, did function as a predictor of negative #MeToo beliefs. Here, greater hostility toward women led to more negative #MeToo beliefs. Hostility toward women also led to less positive #MeToo beliefs, however, positive #MeToo beliefs did not further influence any other predictors or the outcomes.

Both gender egalitarianism and traditional values were significant predictors for hostile sexism toward women; more gender egalitarianism predicted less hostility, whereas more traditionalism predicted less hostility. Moreover, traditional values positively predicted benevolent sexism. Like positive #MeToo beliefs, benevolent sexism did not further predict any other factors. Age only influenced hostility toward men, as older age led to higher rates of hostility toward men. All these associations were found for both women and men. As mentioned, being subjected to harassment in the last year was the only predictor that was relevant for women, but not men. Women who had been subjected to sexual harassment were more likely to be hostile toward men.

Generally, when examining possible interaction effects among predictors, the effects were additive. However, for men, traditional values were shown to moderate the effects of hostility toward other men on perception of social-sexual behavior, when accounting for negative #MeToo beliefs. Men tended to rate other men's behavior more as harassment when they also held more traditional values and more hostile attitudes toward other men. For male participants, there was a significant interaction between hostile sexism toward one's own gender and traditional values. Men who scored *higher* on traditional values, and *higher* on hostile sexism toward other men rated male behavior *more often* as harassment. However, hostile sexism toward men in combination with non-traditional values led to rating male behavior less as harassment. We re-ran the analyses for the other gender constellation with female actors and male

targets. Here, we found that men who scored *lower* on traditional values, and *higher* on hostility toward other men rated female behavior *more* as sexual harassment. A combination of high traditional values and high hostility however led to the opposite effect.

## 4.3 Paper III

The first hypothesis predicted women would rate a wider spectrum of behavior as sexual harassment than men did and aimed to replicate findings from Paper I. Hypothesis 1 was supported. A significant gender difference was found across all scenarios. The effect size was moderate ($\eta_p^2 = .047$). As we added a third gender group in the third paper, we also examined gender differences for this group. Women and transgender/genderfluid/non-binary participants did not differ in their perception. However, men were less likely to rate behavior as sexual harassment than both women and transgender/genderfluid/non-binary participants.

Hypothesis H1.1 was tested using the same analyses, but using only the subsample of opposite-gender constellations. In line with Hypothesis H1.1, we found that men were less likely to perceive social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment if the actor was female and the target was male. The effect size was moderate ($\eta_p^2 = .046$).

The second hypothesis set out to examine the prototypical #MeToo features. First, a private vs. a public setting showed to influence perception. However, this effect was significantly different across scenarios, indicating that different scenarios were influenced differently whether they were described as occurring in private or in public. The only scenario that was perceived *more* as harassment in a private setting was the congratulatory hug ($\eta_p^2 = .078$). The other four scenarios were all perceived more as harassment when happening in private. The scenarios date ($\eta_p^2 = .009$) and objectifying comment ($\eta_p^2 = .008$) showed small, but significant effects, homonegative comment ($\eta_p^2 = .062$) and comment on low standards ($\eta_p^2 = .043$) showed medium effects. This does not support the second hypothesis.

All other prototypical #MeToo features did increase the likelihood of perceiving behavior as sexual harassment. There was a significant effect ($\eta_p^2 = .302$) for the power

differentials, as participants were more likely to rate behavior as sexual harassment when the actor was of higher status than the target. This effect was strongest for the scenarios Date ($\eta_p^2 = .131$), Hug ($\eta_p^2 = .128$), and Objectifying comment ($\eta_p^2 = .131$). Repeated behavior also increased perception as sexual harassment for all scenarios. The effect was biggest for the scenarios Date ($\eta_p^2 = .383$), Objectifying comment ($\eta_p^2 = .127$), and Homonegative comment ($\eta_p^2 = .204$). For the additional feature of sexualized physical contact, we found a very strong effect ($\eta_p^2 = .544$). The effect was especially large for the scenario Hug ($\eta_p^2 = .558$), however, sexualized touching generally increased the rating of behaviors as sexual harassment. This was true for both women and men.

We also examined how same-gender social-sexual behavior was perceived, and what influence gender identity and sexual orientation had on perception. Opposite-gender social-sexual behavior was perceived more as sexual harassment than same-gender social-sexual behavior, however, the effect size was small ($\eta_p^2 = .016$).

Sexual orientation of the participants did not have any effect on the perception of social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment, neither on the levels of perception, ($p = .188$), nor on the profile of scenarios ($p = .641$).

We set out to explore how participants would perceive behavior if the actor, target, or both were not heterosexual. Within the first scenario (Date), there was a significant effect for minority status of the target, as well as a significant effect for gender constellation. Therefore, participants were more likely to rate this behavior as sexual harassment when displayed in an opposite-gender constellation rather than a same-gender constellation. Also, minority status of the target led to a higher perception as sexual harassment. The second scenario included all three additional features (actor being a sexual minority, target being a sexual minority, both being a sexual minority). Here, we also found a significant minority status effect. Minority status of the target led to a higher perception as harassment, however, when both actor and target had a minority status, the perception was closer to the baseline. The third scenario (homonegative comment) also included all three additional features. Here, we found a significant effect for minority status, however, it was the opposite of the previous

effects. While in the previous two scenarios, minority status of the target led to a higher perception as sexual harassment, in the third scenario, participants rated the behavior significantly less as sexual harassment when the target was of a minority status. All additional features, meaning sexual minority status of the actor, and sexual minority status of both actor and target, led to less perception as sexual harassment. There were moderating effects for gender of actor, and gender constellation. The scenario was perceived more as sexual harassment when the actor was male. Moreover, same-gender harassment was perceived more as harassment than opposite-gender harassment when directed toward a sexual minority. The fourth scenario (Comment Low Standards), did not show any significant effects. For the final scenario (Objectifying Comment), a significant effect was found for minority status. Similar to the second scenario, behavior was perceived more as harassment when the target was a sexual minority, and perception was closer to the baseline again when both actor and target were sexual minorities. The behavior was perceived more as harassment when a female actor targeted a sexual minority, relative to a male actor.

Finally, participants rated the scenarios used as realistic and common. Most scenarios were rated with scores over 3.5, therefore being perceived as realistic. A male actor asking a female colleague on a date, and a homonegative comment between two males were rated as most realistic and common. An objectifying comment with a male actor and a male target was on the other hand not perceived as either realistic, or common. Objectifying comments were perceived as more common when targeting women, comments on low standards however were perceived as more common and realistic when targeting men. However, the ratings as realistic and common did not have any significant effect on the ratings as sexual harassment.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 General discussion

All three papers broaden our understanding of perception of social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment. All papers paint a similar picture of social-sexual behavior perception: that women and men, and as observed in Paper III also the group of as transgender/genderfluid/non-binary participants, largely, but not entirely, agree on what sexual harassment entails. Still, there are some differences as male participants tended to rate behavior slightly less as harassment, especially when the actor was female and the target was male. Thus, we can state that there is consensus across genders on what kinds of social-sexual behavior are rated as sexual harassment. The same goes for heterosexual participants and sexual minorities, who did not differ in their perception of social-sexual behavior. Generally, all three papers suggest that there is no reason to assume that a gender diverse workplace would result in challenges due to different perceptions of when lines are crossed or even false allegations.

Furthermore, Paper I and Paper III show that aside from gender or sexual orientation, perception is also influenced by the type of sexual harassment described. Thus, when considering interventions against sexual harassment, or even just covering it in the media, one should be aware that different types of sexual harassment are perceived differently.

### 5.2 Discussion of specific findings

### 5.2.1. Prototypicality of sexual harassment

This thesis set out to examine whether sexual harassment can be prototypical and whether the same ideas of prototypicality which apply to other categories, also apply to sexual harassment. According to Rosch (1999), more prototypical members of a category are easier to identify and therefore, are more likely to be placed within a category. First, we aimed to identify how a prototypical sexual harassment situation would look like, using 262 #MeToo cases and identifying shared features. The results from this post-hoc consideration showed that there are several prototypical features that are shared by the majority of #MeToo cases. These features were opposite gender

harassment, more specifically: male over female actor, superior over subordinate or equal actor, repeated over single case harassment, private over public settings, sexualized over non-sexualized physical contact and personal over general targets. Our findings show that in line with Rosch's theory, social-sexual behavior is more likely to be labeled as sexual harassment when containing prototypical features. Future research could test other parts of Rosch's theory, for example whether participants need less time categorizing social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment when more prototypical behaviors are present, or whether they would categorize it with higher certainty.

### 5.2.2 Gender differences across all papers

While we aimed to be inclusive in this thesis, the first two papers only examined women and men. Therefore, these binary gender differences are discussed first. Men were generally less likely to rate social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment than women. In the first paper, we found the biggest gender difference for the gender constellation of a female actor and a male target. Thus, a woman behaving sexually toward a man was rated less as sexual harassment by men. Another study has shown that men experienced such behavior toward themselves as rather positive (Berdahl & Aquino, 2009). The gender differences we found in all papers, while small, are consistent with previous research (Rotundo et al., 2001). To some extent, one could argue that these findings support the idea that women and men view social interactions differently (Tannen, 1990). On the other hand, and as will be discussed, there were a number of other influences, such as both individual differences, but also situational features, that heavily influenced perception.

Across different social-sexual behaviors, there was general agreement as to what sexual harassment entails. In fact, when looking at the prototypical #MeToo features, both the perception of women and men were similarly influenced by these features. There was also similarity in which features were most influential and led to participants, both female and male, to mostly agree when perceiving behavior as harassment. Furthermore, independent of gender, those participants who held negative #MeToo beliefs were more likely to rate behavior as harassment. This suggests that while gender may play some role within perception of social-sexual behavior, gender may be

secondary to situational features when perceiving social-sexual behavior. It is therefore unlikely that our findings suggest the idea that women and men perceive social interactions differently (Tannen, 1990) and are performing their different gender roles (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Wood, 1991). Both women and men were influenced by situational features and their own individual beliefs and attitudes far more than their gender. Therefore, these findings do support the idea that individual differences might be more important when viewing gender differences, while also expanding on this idea with adding situational features, which also had a high impact on perception.

The fact that the model we tested in Paper II showed similar patterns for women and men dovetails with the findings from the first paper. Again, we find that generally, women and men are quite similar in how their beliefs and attitudes influences their perception. The only difference being that for women, being subjected to sexual harassment was influential, while it was not for men. However, this finding needs to be interpreted with caution, as the data on sexual harassment experience may not be ideal. This will be discussed further within the limitations section below.

This may also influence the degree to which women find their sexual harassment experiences distressing – both high prevalence and frequent media coverage may lead to the fear that harassment, assault and even rape are frequent and that one is likely to experience it. It may therefore not only be the experience itself that is distressing for women more so than men, but the anticipation that harassment might occur again in the future.

Moreover, we found that more specific beliefs, such as the beliefs about the outcomes of the #MeToo movement were more likely to predict perception, while more abstract beliefs and attitudes such as traditional values and gender egalitarianism did not predict perception. Furthermore, negative #MeToo beliefs were the most relevant predictor for both women and men.

All of these findings, showing clear influences of pervious experiences with sexual harassment, beliefs, attitudes and also the situation that is perceived, show that while gender does have some influence, there are a number of other factors of importance. The idea that women and men are inherently different, both in their lived gender roles

(Eagly, 1987) and in their social interaction (Tannen, 1990), does not seem to be supported.

The third paper underlines the findings of the first two papers. This more inclusive sample covering gender diverse participants makes it possible to discuss gender identity. Again, we find a large consensus, this time not only among women and men, but also among transgender/genderfluid/non-binary participants, as well as LGBP+ participants. The gender difference that we found in Paper I, that men were slightly less likely to rate behavior as sexual harassment compared to women, was replicated in this paper. In addition, we found that transgender/genderfluid/non-binary participants did not differ from cisgendered women in their perception, however, and similar to cisgendered women, they were more likely to perceive social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment compared to cisgendered men. However, generally, when adding the prototypical #MeToo features, all participants across gender showed a large agreement about the influence of those features. Therefore, while small gender differences did occur, with men differing from the other two groups, the consensus across genders was still recognizable. This was similar to Paper I.

Theories that differ between women and men often do not take into account those existing outside of this gender dichotomy (Eagly, 1987; Tannen, 1990, Tajfel, 1982). One might argue that in-group favoritism could be found for other gender identities, but we did not find any support for that, as transgender/genderfluid/non-binary people did not differ from cisgender women in their perception of social-sexual behavior. These two groups, while having very different social roles, as well as gender roles, and could in some cases have different biological sexes as well, did not differ anyway. Transgender/genderfluid/non-binary people were similarly influenced by the prototypical features presented. Future research should take all gender identities into account when researching gender differences in perception with a focus on individual differences, as this was not done in the studies presented here.

### 5.2.3 Gender constellations and male victimization

There are few studies that consider different gender constellations when researching sexual harassment. The findings of both Paper I and Paper III suggest that men, more

than women and transgender/genderfluid/non-binary people, perceive various gender constellations differently. Men were less likely to perceive social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment when males were targeted by female actors.

This does not seem to fit the idea of in-group favoritism (Tajfel, 1982). We would expect men to show sympathy especially for their in-group, meaning other men. However, there might be another theoretical framework to explain this, for example using evolutionary framework. It has been shown that men tend to overestimate female behavior as sexual interest (Bendixen et al., 2019). It has also been shown that while women tend to regret the sexual relations they have had, men regret the missed opportunities to engage in sexual relations (Galperin et al., 2013). It is possible that men, when perceiving other men being targeted by a woman, would interpret the female behavior as a display of sexual interest, and a possible opportunity for sexual relations. Both could be seen as something rather positive.

The findings may suggest that men are not fully aware of the problem of male victimization. Possibly this is because men are more likely to experience the social-sexual behavior they themselves are subjected to by female actors as something positive (Berdahl & Aquino, 2009). However, this is not true for all men, and may make it more difficult for men who do feel uncomfortable or distressed to speak up and gain support. Everyone, especially other men, need to be further educated on male victimization and how to offer support to a male target. Understanding rather than dismissing their experience as something positive may be vital for victimized men to feel comfortable and receive help. This needs to be addressed within educational interventions and should be kept in mind going forward when working on further interventions.

In Paper III, we included same-gender harassment. We found that on average, people tend not to perceive same-gender behavior as harassment to the same degree as opposite-gender harassment. It could be that people are not as attentive to same-gender attraction and same-gender harassment. Coming back to the prototypicality of sexual harassment in the #MeToo movement, there were very few cases of same-gender harassment. Therefore, the fact that same-gender social-sexual behavior was perceived less as sexual harassment may also be a result of the underrepresentation of same-

gender harassment in the media coverage of sexual harassment in general and #MeToo specifically. More education on the prototypical way in which sexual harassment is often presented in the media, as well as education on the high prevalence of same-gender harassment seems warranted, so that observers are informed about this form of sexual harassment and can offer support to their peers in cases of same-gender sexual harassment.

**5.2.4 LGBP+ and transgender/genderfluid/non-binary participants**

Paper III is to our knowledge the first study to examine the perception of social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment of sexual and gender minorities. We did not find any differences in perception of social-sexual behavior between heterosexual participants and lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual or people identifying as another sexual orientation. This suggests that sexual orientation, like gender, does not influence sexual harassment perception to a large degree. Therefore, people agree largely as to where the line between social-sexual behavior and sexual harassment goes. The situation in which harassment occurs seems far more important than sexual orientation. This again shows that individual beliefs, attitudes and experiences, as well as the situation, which is to be perceived, carries more weight than one's sexual orientation. The findings on sexual orientation are difficult to explain using one of the theories that have been mentioned previously, as neither theory has included sexual orientation. Future models and theories should take into account that both sexual orientation and gender identity are not dichotomous.

Overall, our findings suggest that people, regardless of their sexual orientation, are fit to work together and will most likely not face large discrepancies when perceiving social-sexual behaviors.

Similarly, transgender/genderfluid/non-binary participants did not differ significantly from cisgendered women and cisgendered men on which behaviors should be rated as sexual harassment. While there were slight differences between cis women, cis men and transgender/genderfluid/non-binary participants, the overarching point is the same as with sexual orientation: Overall, there seems to be a large consensus as to what qualifies as sexual harassment. This suggests that within a gender and sexuality diverse

workplace, there should be no concern for large discrepancies in how social-sexual behaviors are viewed by different groups.

### 5.2.4.1 Perception of sexual minorities as actors and targets

We examined the perception of sexual minorities as actors and targets in an explorative manner. Results were inconclusive. A homosexual person being targeted in scenarios such as asking for a date, receiving a congratulatory hug or receiving an objectifying comment led to a higher perception of sexual harassment. There was no difference in the scenario describing a comment on low standards for sexual partners. In fact, the likelihood of being rated as sexual harassment even decreased in the scenario displaying a homonegative comment. Generally, this suggests that social-sexual behavior targeting a gay or lesbian person was not automatically perceived as harassment to a larger degree. Rather, the behavior in the scenario presented was crucial. On average, participants were attentive to the type of social-sexual behavior more than they focused on actor and target. The homonegative comment was perceived less as sexual harassment when both actor and target were gay or lesbian compared to all other options. This suggests that there might be some effect of behavior appearing within the same group, i.e., that certain comments or terms are acceptable to use within the in-group, but not acceptable for an outsider to use against a member of that particular group or out-group (O'Dea & Saucier, 2020). However, when viewing other scenarios, homonegative comments were still more likely to be perceived as sexual harassment than asking for a date or the congratulatory hug on a baseline level. This suggests that, while participants were not more likely to perceive social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment in every scenario with behavior targeting sexual minorities, they were still aware of the fact that homonegative comments can be rated as sexual harassment. This may suggest a general awareness of the potential harmfulness of homonegativity.

### 5.2.5 Contradicting findings for public and private settings

While the effect of almost all prototypical #MeToo features could be replicated within Paper III, the private setting showed different effects in this paper.

In contrast to Paper I, we found that private settings did not necessarily lead to participants perceiving behavior more as sexual harassment, but that this depended on the type of sexual harassment presented. The only scenario that did lead to a higher sexual harassment perception within Paper III was the congratulatory hug. This was the only scenario within Paper I where we added a private and public additional feature to be responded to. Therefore, the expansion of the methods of Paper III has reached its goal to broaden and expand the findings of Paper I. The other four scenarios tested in Paper III (date, homonegative comment, comment on low standards and objectifying comment) were perceived *less* as harassment when happening in private and *more* as harassment when happening in public. The congratulatory hug may seem more as a threat, which may be experienced as even more threatening without bystanders or possible support from others. Whereas the other scenarios, especially homonegative comments or a comment on someone's low standards, are more shame inducing when they occur around bystanders witnessing this shaming. Using a shameful comment in private may not have the same magnitude as being shamed in public.

While in-group processes and gender role theory focus mostly on gender and its influence, evolutionary framework does provide some insights into why this situational feature led to different perceptions. Sexual strategy theory argues that some forms of sexual harassment are meant to show sexual interest (solicitation), mostly happening between genders, while other forms of sexual harassment are meant to shame potential competitors (derogation), mostly happening within same gender constellations (Bendixen & Kennair, 2017a). These findings seem dovetail with this theoretical framework. The scenarios displaying solicitation were perceived more as harassment when happening in private, as being confronted with sexual interest in private might be perceived more as uncomfortable or even threatening. Situations displaying derogation however were perceived more as harassment when happening in public. This fits the narrative of sexual strategy theory, as derogation, meant to shame competitors (Bendixen & Kennair, 2017a), would work only if potential partners are present to observe the derogation.

**5.3 Limitations and future research**

The data collection process provides some limitations to the three studies presented within the thesis. First, when posted on social media, the description of the study contained the terms *#MeToo* as well as *sexual harassment*. Wording of studies can influence people's motivation to participate. It is therefore possible that people who had already heard of the #MeToo movement or were interested in the topic of sexual harassment may have answered the survey more than other people. It is also possible that people with firsthand experiences of sexual harassment were more likely, or perhaps less likely, to click on the survey link. However, as the numbers compare to other prevalence estimates found in representative studies in Norway (Sivertsen et al., 2019), this seems unlikely. The system used to distribute the survey, namely sharing it on social media, could also have led to a specific group answering the survey, as it was shared mainly by psychology students, at least initially. However, looking at age, the sample is not a student sample.

Furthermore, the data was collected in Norway, one of the most gender egalitarian countries of the world (World Population Review, 2022a). It is possible that the perception of sexual harassment in other countries, cultures and societies would differ from our findings.

Another methodological limitation worth discussing is the usage of the within-design in Paper I and Paper III. Using within-subject designs may sometimes increase the risk of anchoring, particularly if items of similar content are blocked (Gehlbach & Barge, 2012). Participant ratings of the first scenario might have an effect on their ratings on the next scenario as well as on their ratings of features within each scenario. However, anchoring may be less of an issue in our questionnaire design because the scenarios depicted behavior of partly different content. Furthermore, instructions about the scenarios also made it more clear that the participants were expected to rate each scenario on a general basis first, followed by new ratings when additional information was given (i.e., contrasting).

Still, studies using within-subject designs are more time consuming, as each participant needs to rate all four scenarios and additional features. On the other hand, using a

within-subject design allowed for a smaller sample without compromising power. Applying a between-subjects design without increasing the number of participants considerably would have increased the risk of false negatives (i.e., possible effects remain undetected (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2014). At the time of the conceptualization of this study perception of social-sexual behavior had not been studied in a way that systematically included features of the depicted situations. Hence, applying a within-subjects design, using each person as their own control across various conditions (features) was considered more cost-effective than an alternative between-subject design.

In Paper III, we applied a mixed within-between design, having the same participant rate all five scenarios, while being randomly assigned to one of four gender constellations. As we aimed to replicate the results from Paper I, using the same within-subjects design was the best option, especially as one objective was to recruit sexual minorities, however, we were aware that this could result in limiting sample size. Moreover, as we found in Paper II, individual differences did influence perception of sexual harassment. By having participants rating one of four gender constellations we could keep the length of the questionnaire down, thereby reducing the time and risk of attrition and drop-out (Chen, 2011).

The post-hoc consideration to identify the frequency of possible prototypical #MeToo features included 262 cases, almost all of which taking place in the US. The list is not exhaustive, neither does it cover cases in European countries, including Norway, where this data collection took place. The goal of this post-hoc consideration however was to investigate the pattern of the most typical features in a public list of highly published cases. A fundamental limitation of this study is that we cannot tell whether there are important features that were not included and might even have been more relevant than the features we have tested. Future research should attempt to test the relevance of the features included in this research and discover whether competing features or models can more accurately predict what influences whether social-sexual behaviors will be perceived more as sexual harassment. Women of color have been involved in the fight against sexual harassment and the activism aiming to make sexual harassment visible and ultimately reduce it through politics and policies in the US (see Ohlheiser, 2017).

Norway, however, is a much less ethnically diverse country than the US (World Population Review, 2022b, 2022c). While many people in Norway do have a migration background, many of the immigrants in Norway come from Europe (Statistisk Sentralbyrå, 2022), primarily caucasian countries (World Population Review, 2022b). Within these studies, conducted in Norway, it was decided not to add ethnicity as a variable, as this was not the focus of this study. As this data collection took place in the whole of Norway, it is not certain that we would have sampled enough variance of ethnicity within the whole of Norway. While Norway's capital, Oslo, is more multicultural, Norway is primarily an ethnically homogenous country. Therefore, we decided not to focus on ethnicity in this study. However, in a country such as the US, where there is a long history of systemic racism (Feagin, 2006), a more diverse population (World Population Review, 2022c) and in which African American women have been a driving force behind the visibility of sexual harassment (see Ohlheiser, 2017), it is highly warranted to include ethnicity in a replication of this study.

While the first two papers excluded both sexual minorities and everyone outside of the gender dichotomy, and focused only on opposite-gender harassment, the third paper was able to address these limitations. A strength of the last paper is therefore its inclusion of not only same-gender harassment, but also LGBP+ and transgender/genderfluid/non-binary participants. Surely the low case numbers, especially for transgender/genderfluid/non-binary participants, are a limitation. However, the inclusion of diverse groups in general can still be seen as a strength.

How we collected data on gender can also be seen as a limitation. To this date, there are no clear guidelines on how to operationalize gender outside of the dichotomy. It is worth noting that trans/genderfluid/non-binary gendered people might not feel welcome to participate when categorization of gender leaves out important gender categories (Haupert, 2019). In the study presented in Paper III, when asking for the participant's biological sex, there was one category for other/ do not want to answer, however, these options are not in the same category and should be separate. Including the term "intergender" as well as the option not to answer seems more appropriate for future research. However, including biological sex might be perceived non-inclusive which means that including trans woman and trans man as gender identities might be more

ideal. Furthermore, the option to fill in one's gender identity as a free text could be helpful and welcomed by some, however, here we would have to consider protection of anonymity. While we are aware that how we operationalized gender may not have been ideal, we are still convinced of the fact that we were able to examine both gender identity and sexual orientation within this thesis is a strength.

In all three papers, participants were requested to rate hypothetical scenarios. These scenarios do not reflect the whole spectrum of social-sexual behavior that occurs in the workplace. We did attempt to improve the scenarios we used in the second study, but it is not possible to let participants rate many more scenarios than they did. This is to not overburden participants. Too long questionnaires can result in fatigue attrition, participants not answering truthfully or not reading the questions properly, or in people not answering the questionnaire in the first place (Herzog & Bachman, 1981; Iglesias & Torgerson, 2000). As we are at the mercy of those that want to answer, presenting a questionnaire that is of reasonable length is important. Still, we acknowledge that the scenarios used are not an exhaustive list of possible social-sexual behaviors found in the workplace. Moreover, using hypothetical scenarios has been criticized, mainly because results of studies using hypothetical scenarios may not translate to reality. In other words: we do not know whether participants would react in the same manner to an actual real-life situation (Exum & Bouffard, 2010). Several factors that might be relevant have been left up to the participant's imagination, such as attractiveness or physique of the people described in the scenario, or the overall environment of their workplace. We cannot be sure that the factors that we believe to be relevant when using hypothetical scenarios are the factors that actually have the most influence (Exum & Bouffard, 2010). In this study, we still chose hypothetical scenarios, as they are not only economical, but have some other advantages, such as offering all participants a common context and allowing for the collection of data on subjective perceptions (Exum & Bouffard, 2010).

The prototypical #MeToo features studied in Paper I and Paper III of this thesis were not applied to all scenarios presented in Paper I. In some cases, it was considered that the addition of some features (such as sexualized physical contact) would make the scenario appear less realistic, for example when telling a sexist joke. In other cases,

however, the feature "repeated behavior" should have been added to all scenarios (study I), but was not. This feature should have been applied to all scenarios in Paper I. In Paper III, we addressed this omission and applied all prototypical #MeToo features to all scenarios where they were relevant. The exception were the scenarios: homonegative comment and comment on low standards, as adding sexualized contact to this scenario might take away from the intention behind the scenario (e.g., shaming someone, not showing sexual interest).

In our studies, we described scenarios of workplace sexual harassment within an office or at an office party. However, there are workplaces that do not use office spaces, rather they take place in another environment, such as on farms or in shops. This may have led to different perceptions. It is therefore important to examine workplace sexual harassment in general and the perception of behaviors, in other employment situations. One work environment that has often been excluded from the discussion of workplace sexual harassment is precarious work. In precarious work situations, there is a significant lack of permanent employee rights (Benach et al., 2014). The working conditions of precarious work are typically characterized by limited legal protection, low stability and low wages (Benach et al., 2014). Examples of this are farm work, day laborers, and domestic workers, such as housekeepers or nannies working in private homes. Precarious work also bears a high risk for sexual harassment (Benach et al., 2014), which is problematic, as employees have little to no legal protection or employee rights. The #MeToo movement, as well as other social movements demanding better policies in offices or better working conditions, tend to neglect precarious work (Fitzgerald, 2019). Therefore, more research and practical implications for this type of work situation is warranted.

The findings from Paper II addressing the research question examining whether having been subjected to sexual harassment is a predictor of perception is to be interpreted with caution. As being subjected to sexual harassment was studied using just one item, this is not enough to give a full picture of how this experience might have influenced perception. Moreover, we only asked about being subjected to sexual harassment within the last year. Therefore, people who might have been subjected to a series of sexually harassing behaviors throughout their life, but have been able to get out of that situation

within the last year, would not appear in our study as 'having been subjected to sexual harassment'. A potentially better option would have been to use a standardized measurement such as the Sexual Experience Questionnaire (SEQ) (Stark et al., 2002). Therefore, Paper II may not have addressed being subjected to sexual harassment in a sufficient manner. It is possible that a more differentiated view on sexual harassment experiences might give different insights on their possible effects on perception. This would mean collecting data on the kinds of harassment which have occurred, how often they happened, and how distressing they were. The same should be done with those having observed sexual harassment, as this also influences one's well-being (Schneider, 1996). Someone who has observed sexual harassment frequently might perceive social-sexual behavior differently. One's own experience, both being subjected to sexual harassment as well as having observed it, and its effect on one's perception of sexual harassment warrants further research. While the one item measure was used due to space limitations, we do not recommend this in the future.

Future research should focus on the role of the bystander in greater detail. Some studies have focused on bystander interventions or bystander training to identify sexual harassment and intervene (Fenwick et al., 2021). Others have shown that when a coworker reported a woman being subjected to sexual harassment, she did not endure the same disadvantages as women who self-reported (Hart, 2019). Obviously, women should not endure any disadvantages for self-reporting sexual harassment. While some studies on bystander training exist, there is no research on what kind of bystander reaction the target of sexual harassment would *prefer*. One possibility is for bystanders to speak up as the sexual harassment occurs, another is for bystanders to show support to the target after the fact and in private or to seek a conversation with the actor to express one's opposition to sexual harassment. Guidelines or training on how to react to this kind of behavior could have positive effects, as the bystander would not feel helpless in their situation or would have to witness the behavior passively, but could take an active role. However, to achieve this, more research examining which bystander reactions are preferred by the target, and which reactions are most efficient in reducing sexual harassment is warranted. With such findings and guidelines following those findings, targets would likely receive not only more support, but the kind of support

they actually hope for. This could have effects on reporting sexual harassment, and the overall work environment. These positive effects could not only affect the target themselves, but the workplace and organization as a whole.

In summary, the limitations mentioned suggest that all results of these first investigations from this perspective should be viewed with caution. The manner of data collection may have led to a self-selection bias and the scenarios used do not cover all possible workplace situations. Neither do they address work situations that do not take place in offices or classical workplaces, such as work in homes or in nature. This study did not consider ethnicity and could have been more thorough when collecting data on gender identity or sexual orientation. The data collection took place in Norway, one of the most gender egalitarian countries with a relatively high tolerance for diversity of sexuality and gender identity (Røthing, 2008). This means that the findings are not necessarily generalizable. Further research in other countries, societies, and cultures as well as other work contexts is therefore warranted. Including studies that challenge the taxonomy of features and the current prototypical approach to sexual harassment perception.

# 6. Practical implications

This thesis leads to some practical implications concerning workplace policy and the juridical system of the "reasonable person standard". Within the workplace, social-sexual behavior perception is relevant as it is highly likely that workers are faced with some forms of social-sexual behavior within in their workplace (Kabat-Farr & Cortina, 2014; Leskinen et al., 2011; Nielsen et al., 2010; Vargas et al., 2019). How a person and their colleagues perceive such a situation can be relevant not only for that situation itself, but possibly for work etiquette and human recourses cases. In the juridical system, the "reasonable person standard" has been used for decades, but continues to be questioned (Alicke & Weigel, 2021; Moran, 2003).

## 6.1 Moral panicking and the diverse workplace

Moral panicking, i.e., the fear of false accusation and the belief that women and men cannot effectively work together, has been a significant part of the media coverage of the #MeToo movement. While we do not directly test moral panicking, our data allows us to make some inferences that that may inform our understanding of moral panicking. Some have argued that moral panicking is unwarranted (Horsely, 2017) and it is worth noting that gender-balanced workplaces experience significantly less gender harassment, for both women and men (Kabat-Farr & Cortina, 2014; Dobbin & Kalev, 2021). However, some men still report concerns about working with women or including women in social work gatherings (Sandberg & Pritchard, 2019; Atwater et al., 2021).

None of the three studies presented within this thesis did test moral panicking directly. However, the results may be interpreted as providing some insight on moral panicking. The fact that all genders generally agreed on what sexual harassment entails, and which situational features increase the likelihood of a situation to be perceived as harassing may suggest that moral panicking is indeed unwarranted. It seems unlikely that fear of false accusation or the fear that women might misunderstand flirting or jokes as harassment is warranted, given that these studies show consensus not only between women and men, but all genders. Therefore, these findings may indicate that there are

no clear disadvantages to gender diverse workplaces and that moral panicking is unjustified.

However, increasing diverse workplaces is not simple. Education of those in charge of the hiring process on the fact that hiring women and transgender/genderfluid/non-binary people across sexual orientation entails more advantages for the work environment might not solve the problem. Hiring women and gender minorities into a predominantly male workplace may subject these people to more harassment, as research has shown (Clancy et al., 2020). While hiring women or gender nonconforming people into male dominated workplaces might over time lead to more diversity and therefore less sexual harassment, it may also lead to a temporary increase. Some researchers have called for change on a more systemic and structural level (Kang & Kaplan, 2019), and some countries, such as Germany and Norway have enforced a "women quota", stating that at least 30% of board members, or 40% in the case of Norway, need to be female (Abdul, 2021; Norwegian Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act, 2017). However, even with structural and systemic change, some women and gender minorities will have to enter male dominated workplaces, which could subject them to more workplace sexual harassment. This thesis cannot present a final solution for this challenge. Moreover, the fact that we did find gender differences at least when perceiving a female actor and a male target, suggests that there might be some differences in perception between genders, but also between people based on their individual beliefs as illustrated in Paper II. However, as these differences are not only gender-based, but based on individual differences and situational features, it is possible that misunderstandings and differences in perception might occur in non-diverse workplaces as well. Overall, the data we collected seems to support diverse workplaces and their potential to exist without increase of false allegations. It is also important to make a clear distinction between misunderstandings in communication or perception that may occur in any workplace and moral panicking as a social concept which posits that diverse workplaces are dangerous for men, because of the risk of false allegations (see Burn, 2019). While misunderstandings in communication and perception should be addressed, for example with open communication in the workplace, zero-tolerance policies and a clear concept by human resources (Jacobsen & Eaton, 2018), these do not qualify as moral panicking.

While not testing moral panicking directly, the results may therefore indicate that moral panicking, the fear of false allegations and misunderstanding between genders, may be unwarranted. While this has been argued before (Horsely, 2017), our data could make some inferences that may inform this understanding of moral panicking.

## 6.2 Reasonable person standard

All three papers presented in this thesis lead to some practical implications concerning the "reasonable person standard". Paper I and Paper III suggest that women, men, and transgender/genderfluid/non-binary participants across sexual orientation largely agree when rating social-sexual behavior. This agreement could be seen both at the baseline, and when adding prototypical #MeToo features. Paper II also suggests that similar individual differences such as hostile sexism or beliefs about the #MeToo movement influence both women and men. Therefore, all papers suggest that there seems to be large consensus when perceiving social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment. While men generally are less likely to rate social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment, overall, gender differences are less than half a standard deviation unit. In any way, the addition of features to a situation has the greater influence, compared to gender.

The "reasonable person standard", i.e., the hypothetical figure that is used in court to discuss whether a "reasonable person" would have acted in the same way, is based on the idea that there is one "reasonable person". This concept is only useful if people agree when perceiving the behavior discussed in a case or on trial. Our findings suggest that this "reasonable person standard" seems justified for workplace sexual harassment cases. Since gender differences are rather small, there may not be a need for the "reasonable woman standard" in cases like this. On the one hand, women on average seem to have a shared experience when it comes to fear of sexual assault and how they use resources to protect their safety, while men do not share this experience (Mellgren & Ivert, 2018). On the other hand, at least in workplace harassment cases, the overall agreement shows that men, on average, are aware of potentially problematic behavior. While the "reasonable woman standard" may be justified in cases concerning sexual assault, rape and maybe even some forms of sexual harassment, people seem to agree on what types of social-sexual behaviors in the workplace are problematic. Moreover,

creating the "reasonable woman standard" turns the previously inclusive "person" into the generic masculine which means that the system automatically becomes binary and thus does not apply to all people. Our findings show that transgender/genderfluid/non-binary people do not differ from cis women in their perception and have shown an overall agreement with cis men. Therefore, one overarching category as the "reasonable person standard" could be an inclusive solution.

# 7. Conclusions

The aim of this thesis was to examine what influences whether social-sexual behavior will be perceived as sexual harassment. Furthermore, this thesis aimed to be inclusive and take into account both sexual and gender minorities, as well as a broader spectrum of gender constellations. All papers present findings that show how both prototypical #MeToo features, and individual differences influence harassment perception. The papers also show that, in general, there seems to be a large consensus as to what sexual harassment consists of, which applies across sexual orientation and gender. Thus, the "reasonable person standard" which is based on the question how a reasonable person would react in the same circumstances presented in for example a criminal trial or a workplace sexual harassment case, seems justified. This thesis provides a first set of features that may specify what a "reasonable person" empirically will deem harassment. There seems to be no reason to believe that a gender diverse workplace should result in a general disagreement between women, men, and other gender identities when it comes to sexual harassment or that it would result in false allegations.

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Figure 1: Screenshot of the tweet by Alyssa Milano on October 15th 2017. Retrieved
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**Paper I**

**ORIGINAL PAPER**

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# The Effect of Prototypical #MeToo Features on the Perception of Social-Sexual Behavior as Sexual Harassment

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**Abstract**

The #MeToo movement has to a large degree addressed a specific type of sexual harassment, focusing on quid pro quo over hostile environment type sexual harassment. Prototypical #MeToo features include 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. We predict that these prototypical #MeToo features that gained attention during the campaign will increase peoples' perception of which social-sexual behaviors are considered to be sexual harassment. Predictions were tested in a sample of 489 Norwegian participants (66% women). The results suggest that men tend to rate female actions as less harassing than male actions, while women did not make such a difference. We also observed a bias toward prototypical types of sexual harassment, as people perceive these more as sexual harassment compared to less prototypical but equally harmful types. Implications for future research on, and prevention of, sexual harassment are discussed.

## Introduction

While there is no universally accepted definition for sexual harassment, most definitions agree that it contains "improper behavior that has a sexual dimension" (O'Donohue et al. 1998, p. 112). The term is also often defined as "unwanted sexual attention" (McMaster et al. 2002), a definition used in the Norwegian Equality and

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Anti-Discrimination Act §13 (2017), while the term "unwelcome sexual advances" is used in U.S. law (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission 1980). The terms unwanted or unwelcomed sexual attention imply that the focus of those definitions does not lie primarily on the harasser, but rather on the person exposed to the attention, and their perception of such attention. This leaves room for interpretation as to what sexual harassment actually entails (see Lewitin 1991), which makes the definition and general modern concept of sexual harassment somewhat opaque. If sexual harassment is not defined by the behavior, but rather by how said behavior is perceived, there is a wide range of behaviors that have the potential to fall under the concept of sexual harassment (Golden et al. 2001), depending on who perceives and evaluates it. People of different generations or of different cultures may have different understandings about what behavior may be seen as relatively harmless and what behavior may be seen as harassing, depending on their own experiences and societal factors. Hence, Rotundo et al. (2001) introduced the term social-sexual behavior in order to include behaviors that potentially could be perceived as sexual harassment and that contains sexual elements such as impersonal, derogatory jokes, unwanted dating requests, or physical contact. How social-sexual behavior is perceived could be influenced by both contextual factors, such as the situation and individuals involved, and individual factors, such as general attitudes or own personal experiences.

Till (1980) defined five types of behavior as sexually harassing, which were later categorized further into three groups, namely sexual seduction, gender harassment and quid pro quo harassment (Fitzgerald et al. 1988). U.S. law divides sexual harassment in the workplace into two categories; quid pro quo harassment and hostile work environment type harassment (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission 1980). Hostile work environment type harassment includes seemingly less severe behaviors that nevertheless decrease the quality of the work environment, due to e.g. sexism or homonegativity, while quid pro quo harassment "involves sexual conduct combined with the granting of employment benefits" (Rotundo et al. 2001, p. 915). Studies have shown that both men and women tend to perceive social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment when it contains quid pro quo behavior, whereas there is less gender agreement whether gender harassment or hostile work environment type harassment is perceived as sexual harassment (Gutek and O'Connor 1995; Rotundo et al. 2001; Wiener and Hurt 2000).

Provided the lack of a clear definition and the variation in how individuals interpret different social-sexual behaviors as sexual harassment it is difficult to assess the prevalence of sexual harassment. Timmerman and Bajema (1999) discuss in detail how variation in definitions and methodology might influence prevalence estimates. Even with varying definitions and hence varying prevalence, sexual harassment is a widespread problem. In a meta-analysis of studies from Europe for instance, one out of every two to three women and one out of every ten men had experienced sexual harassment at some point in their life (Timmerman and Bajema 1999). However, the estimates varied considerably between how questions were phrased (one question vs. several questions with examples of behaviors), and to what extent sexual harassment was defined to participants. More recent data from the European Institute for Gender Equality shows that on average 55% of women residing in an EU country have

experienced at least one incident of sexual harassment (Latcheva 2017). Sexual harassment starts early as it occurs in both high school, with prevalence rates between 40 and 63% (Bendixen et al. 2016; Fasting et al. 2003; Hill and Kearl 2011), and in university, where between 50 and 75% of female students report to have experienced sexual harassment (Cantor et al. 2015). In most studies, female participants report slightly higher prevalence in sexual harassment than male participants (Hill and Kearl 2011; Fasting et al. 2003; Cantor et al. 2015). Other studies find gender differences for physical forms of sexual harassment, such as being held, hugged or kissed against their will, but not for non-physical sexual harassment, like comments on their body or homonegative comments (Bendixen et al. 2016). Sexual harassment is also common in the workplace, as 24% of women in an American study reported to have experienced some form of it in various work sectors (Ilies et al. 2003). A Norwegian study has shown that 18.4% of employees have experienced unwanted sexual behavior at least once within the last 6 months. The study showed no significant gender differences between men and women (Nielsen et al. 2010). Sexual harassment thus continues to be a prevalent problem both in the USA as well as in more egalitarian countries such as Norway. The varying estimates of prevalence might in part be an effect of how different people perceive social-sexual behaviors. Asking simpler questions of whether or not sexual harassment has occurred, compared to more elaborate questions describing different situations and examples of social-sexual behaviors, might produce different prevalence of sexual harassment (see Timmerman and Bajema 1999).

While sexual harassment has been a re-occurring topic in the media, in the fall of 2017, the #MeToo movement brought increased attention to the matter by using the social media platform Twitter. Originally, the hashtag #MeToo had been initiated in 2006 by Tarana Burke, a civil rights activist, and was meant to draw attention to the problem of sexual harassment (Ohlheiser 2017). In 2017, the American actress Alyssa Milano encouraged people to share their experiences with sexual harassment and sexual assault by using the hashtag #MeToo. Within 24 h, the hashtag was used 12 million times (CBS 2017), making the #MeToo campaign the "most high-profile example of digital feminist activism" (Mendes et al. 2018, p. 236). During and after #MeToo, sexual harassment has been covered in the media to a much larger extent (Ennis and Wolfe 2018).

Although the #MeToo campaign brought attention to sexual harassment, it has been criticized for not being inclusive (Hemmings 2018; Onwuachi-Willig 2018), placing powerful and privileged women into the center of the campaign (Zarkov and Davis 2018). More specific criticism was expressed about the way media reported about the campaign, as many of the articles written about the #MeToo campaign were not precise enough with regards to language, using the words "harassment" and "assault" synonymously instead of distinguishing them from each other (Ennis and Wolfe 2018). Given the imprecise language in the media coverage it is likely that there is variation in how different social-sexual behaviors are categorized as sexual harassment.

Already during the first 24 h after the initial tweet was published, and throughout the media coverage of the #MeToo movement, one of the negative reactions was the fear of false accusations (Example Tweet: "This #MeToo is dumb. It paints all

men as sexual predators", Schneider and Carpenter 2019). This fear of false accusation has been discussed in public, leading to the statement by President Trump that it is a 'very scary time for young men in America'. In 2019, a survey from the UK and the USA showed that men reported to be concerned to mentor women, fearing to be falsely accused of sexual harassment (Sandberg and Pritchard 2019). The fact that many men did not feel comfortable working with women anymore, in turn led to the conclusion that #MeToo has added disadvantages to women's work lives (Sandberg and Pritchard 2019). During the #MeToo movement, while many people acknowledged the positive consequences of the campaign, many also claimed that they feared that the movement would lead to an environment in which it would be impossible to flirt, joke, ask women out on dates and so on. The fear of false accusation, or moral panicking, was one of the most prominent and important negative consequences of the movement and may have led to a clear disadvantage for women in their workplaces (Sandberg and Pritchard 2019).

Schneider and Carpenter (2019) analyzed over 2000 #MeToo tweets that were published within 24 h after Milano's initial tweet. When analyzing what form of harassment was reported most frequently, Schneider and Carpenter found that around 30% of the tweets focused on sexual assault or rape, and around 40% did not specify what kind of harassment or assault they had experienced. The remaining tweets primarily focused on gender harassment, sexist comments and cat calls (4.6%), stalking, threats and coercion (5.6%) as well as unwanted sexual attention and touching (18.9%). In the tweets that had additional information about context or situation of the harassment experience, the workplace was the most common (31.8%), followed by school (18.8%) and family or friend (14.6%).

While tweets shared on Twitter were largely not classifiable or did not specify what form of harassment was experienced (Schneider and Carpenter 2019), the media coverage of the campaign often focused on a very prototypical form of sexual harassment. Cases that gained most media attention primarily described quid pro quo harassment (Schneider and Carpenter 2019). In addition, harassment types that included prototypical #MeToo features such as male over female actor, superior over subordinate actor, repeated over single case harassment, private over public settings and personal over general comments were frequently reported during the campaign. When using the term *prototypical sexual harassment*, we therefore mean a form of sexual harassment that includes these prototypical #MeToo features.

## Prototypical #MeToo Features Portrayed by Media

We assume that social-sexual behavior containing prototypical #MeToo features will be perceived more as sexual harassment based upon the theory of categorical perception. According to the central theory of categorization, an item can be classified as part of a category when it contains certain necessary elements (see Gries 2003). It has been suggested that it is not always possible to categorize elements on the grounds of binary elements, leading to the prototype theory (Rosch 1999), stating that there are more and less prototypical items within one category. The item that contains more prototypical features is more likely to be identified as

a member of this category. The categorization of more prototypical items is also much quicker and happens with higher certainty (Rosch 1999). Since the #MeToo campaign mainly covered harassment that contained the prototypical features mentioned above, it is likely that, in line with the prototype theory, perceiving social-sexual behavior and rating it as sexual harassment could be affected by the presence of such prototypical features. The following features are considered to be prototypical #MeToo features:

### Actor and Target Gender

To distinguish the perception of the action from the action itself, a person who performs social-sexual behavior is termed actor, not harasser. Several studies have shown that situations with a male actor and a female target are perceived as sexual harassment more often than any other constellation of actor and target (Gutek et al. 1983; Hendrix et al. 1998; McCabe and Hardman 2005; Runtz and O'Donnell 2003), but see Wayne et al. (2001) for contradicting findings. The initial tweet posted by Alyssa Milano in 2017, was specifically addressed to women, asking them to write the words "me too" as a response if they had experienced sexual harassment or assault. Even though men also spoke up about such experiences, media largely focused on women as targets and men as actors (Carlsen et al. 2018) when reporting about the #MeToo campaign.

### Position of Power

The difference in position of power between actor and target indicates that there is potential for negative consequences depending on the target's reaction to the social-sexual behavior. Studies have shown that social-sexual behavior is perceived more as sexual harassment when the actor has a formal authority over the target (Blumenthal 1998; Bursik and Gefter 2011; Dougherty et al. 1996; Gordon et al. 2005; Hendrix et al. 1998; Rotundo et al. 2001). In the #MeToo campaign position of power was prominent, and media reports largely focused on sexual harassment cases of politicians, CEOs and other celebrity high-profile men (Carlsen et al. 2018), and to a larger degree neglecting sexual harassment between people of equal status.

### Repetition of Behavior

Whether social-sexual behavior occurs just as a single case or if it is repeated could influence whether it is perceived as harassment or not. Studies have suggested that social-sexual behavior is more likely to be perceived as harassment when it happens more than once (Ellis et al. 1991; Hurt et al. 1999). This is further sustained in a more recent study of U.S. sexual harassment court cases (Kath et al. 2014). Typically, the media coverage of the #MeToo campaign focused on repeat offenders that were accused by several women for sexual harassment or abuse, such as Harvey Weinstein and Al Franken.

## Personalized Versus General

Sexual harassment in general can take the form of sexist or otherwise degrading comments (Rotundo et al. 2001). Comments that are directed specifically at one person are more likely to be perceived as sexual harassment, compared to comments that are directed towards a group of people (Rotundo et al. 2001). The original tweet addressed women on a personal level ("If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted…"), and did not ask women to share experiences with sexism or degrading comments towards women in general. Women therefore typically shared experiences where the social-sexual behavior was directed towards them personally, much more so than towards women in general.

## Private Versus Public Settings

To our knowledge, there are currently no studies that have investigated the perception of social-sexual behavior in a private versus public settings. It is plausible to assume that social-sexual behavior will be perceived more as sexual harassment when the target is alone, due to the fact that they cannot get immediate help or support. On the other hand, it is also possible that a situation may seem more distressing for the target when others are present, but do not offer support, and instead downplay the actor's actions as harmless. In the #MeToo campaign, many people have reported experiences of sexual harassment when they were alone with the actor. A significant part of the #MeToo campaigns success was the fact that people could connect and gain support that they had not yet received. In fact, sharing an experience did lead to a lot of positive social reactions on Twitter, with people expressing emotional support, validation and advocacy (Schneider and Carpenter 2019). The feeling of not being alone with the experience they had was a substantial part of the #MeToo campaign for many people—therefore it is plausible that social-sexual behavior that happens in private settings is perceived more as sexual harassment, as the lack of support seems to be a substantial part of distressing experiences.

## Sexualized Physical Contact

The degree of physical contact established in a situation may also affect the perception of social-sexual behavior. Some types of physical contact, for example touching the face, waist, buttocks, breasts or genitals, are considered to be varying degrees of sexualized physical contact and therefor are more likely to lead to a perception of social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment (Dougherty et al. 1996; Lee and Guerrero 2001; Rotundo et al. 2001). Forms of physical contact that are considered less sexualized, as patting another person's shoulder or shaking hands, are less likely to perceived as sexual harassment (Lee and Guerrero 2001; Rotundo et al. 2001).

During the #MeToo campaign, many women shared experiences that contained sexualized physical contact. The hashtag was often used in line with the words abuse, assault or rape (D'Efilippo 2018; Schneider and Carpenter 2019), suggesting

that many people may have connected #MeToo with sexualized physical contact. Therefore, sexualized physical contact is considered a prototypical #MeToo feature. However, it is important to differentiate between harassment that contains physical contact and abuse, assault or rape. During the #MeToo campaign, those concepts have not always been separated clearly.

## The Current Study

Perceiving social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment is contingent upon a number of factors. The #MeToo campaign has mainly focused on a specific form of sexual harassment we have defined as prototypical. While it has been shown that some of the prototypical features, as well as other contextual variables, lead to a higher perception of the behavior as sexual harassment, it has not yet been studied how prototypical sexual harassment is perceived post #MeToo. In this study, we aim to investigate how the perception of social-sexual behaviors as sexual harassment is influenced by the presence of prototypical #MeToo features. Further, we will consider how social-sexual behaviors are perceived differently by men and women.

The following hypotheses are tested:

**H1** Women will evaluate social-sexual behaviors more as sexual harassment than men will.

**H2** Social-sexual behavior will be perceived more as sexual harassment if it contains prototypical #MeToo features (i.e., quid pro quo, male actor, superior position, repetition, personalized targeting, private setting, and physical contact).

## Methods

### Design and Subjects

The data collection is part of a larger sexual harassment project. Data covers scenarios with additional situational features, and participant ideology, identity, values, attitudes, beliefs and harassment experiences, in addition to demographics. In the current paper, we will focus on various situational prototypical #MeToo features that are predicted to affect the perception of social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment and possible gender differences. In a separate paper (in preparation) we examine a number of individual factors' influence on perception of social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment.

Five hundred and twenty-two participants responded to one of two versions of a web-based questionnaire on sexual harassment judgment. We also sampled additional data from a fourth-wave feminist group (145 women), but these data were omitted from the current analyses. The two versions of the questionnaire differed only with regard to question order. Assignment to either version was random. Participants who did not identify themselves as man or woman ($n = 5$) and those aged

60 or older ($n=9$) were omitted from analyses. Moreover, using SPSS anomaly screening procedures, suggested removal of participants with highly unlikely, inconsistent, monotonous and extreme patterns of responding. The final sample eligible for analysis covered 489 participants (66% women), aged between 18 and 59 (Women: $M=33.3$, $SD=9.4$; Men: $M=32.9$, $SD=9.3$).

## Procedure

The introduction text and a link to the questionnaire was first shared on two of the student co-authors' private Facebook profiles and then subject to snowballing (spreading throughout the social network by sharing). The introduction text informed the participants about the study, stressing that the participation was both voluntary and anonymous. The data collection took place between April and July 2018. Before being transferred to the researchers in August 2018, all personal identifiers (i.e., IP-addresses) were removed from the data. The research was approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (Project ID: 60048), which is the Data Protection Official for Research for all universities in Norway.

## Measurements

### Perception of Social-Sexual Behaviors as Harassment

To measure to what extent various social-sexual behaviors were perceived as harassment, we constructed three scenarios that fall under the definition of *hostile work environment* harassment, and one *quid pro quo* scenario. Scenario 1 contains a sexist joke, Scenario 2 describes an invitation to a date, and Scenarios 3 a hug between colleagues as a congratulating gesture. Scenario 4 contained a suggestion of sexual favors in exchange for employment advances (i.e., quid pro quo). The categories we have chosen overlap somewhat with the categories used by Schneider and Carpenter ([2019](#)) when analyzing the reaction on Twitter to the initial #MeToo tweet. To identify the content of each scenario, we use *Joke* to refer to Scenario 1, *Invitation to date* to refer to Scenario 2, and *Contact* to refer to Scenario 3 throughout the paper. All four scenarios covered opposite-gender social-sexual behavior of either a female or a male actor (See "[Appendix](#)" for wording of each of the eight scenarios). Half of the participants responded to male actor first (default), the other half to female actor first. The participant read the first scenario, then rated their perceptions of that scenario on a 6-point Likert-Scale with anchors 1 (*not at all*) and 6 (*yes, absolutely!*). These initial ratings were treated as baselines. Following this, we provided the participants with additional information about the situation, including all of the #MeToo features mentioned above, and participants were asked to re-evaluate the scenario based on these features. This procedure was repeated for each of the eight scenarios.

In all four scenarios (successively for female and male actors), participants re-evaluated (made a new rating of their perceptions) if the actor had been superior to the target (*The man is the woman's boss*), equal (*The man is a colleague of equal*

*status*) or higher in power than the target (*The women is the man's boss*). In the *Joke* scenario the participants also evaluated if the behavior had occurred repeatedly (*It was a single incident* vs. *The man often makes such jokes*), and if the behavior had been focusing on a specific target (personalized) or directed toward women or men in general. In the *Contact* and *Quid pro quo* scenarios participants re-evaluated if the target and actor had been alone. Finally, in the *Contact* Scenario, the participants also re-evaluated the behavior if the physical contact was non-sexualized (*The man gives the woman a friendly pat on the back*) or sexualized (*The man's hands touch the woman's buttocks*). For analyses including these additional features, we computed *differences* scores (re-evaluations score—baseline score). Positive scores reflect ratings in the direction sexual harassment relative to baseline.

## Statistical Analysis

All analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics 25. Effect sizes for ANOVAs are reported as Partial Eta Squared and Cohen's d's for effect sizes for pairwise comparisons. We have applied the general conventions for small ($\eta_P^2 = .01$, $d = .20$), medium ($\eta_P^2 = .06$, $d = .50$), large ($\eta_P^2 = .14$, $d = .80$), very large ($\eta_P^2 = .27$, $d = 1.20$), and huge ($\eta_P^2 = .50$, $d = 2.00$) effects throughout (Cohen 1988; Murphy et al. 2014; Sawilowsky 2009).

## Results

### Participant's Gender Differences

To test Hypothesis 1, we performed several mixed-model ANOVAs (profile analyses) with Gender of actor (Female vs. Male) as the within-subjects factor, and Participant gender (Man vs. Woman) and Question order (Female actor first vs. Male actor first) as between-subject factors. In addition to main effects of Gender of actor, Participant gender and Question order, the analysis provides tests of moderation (interaction). Assumptions were tested throughout. When assumption of homogeneity of covariance (Mauchly's test of Sphericity) was violated, we have reported Greenhouse–Geisser Epsilon-adjusted degrees of freedom and corresponding *p*-values to reduce the probability of Type-I errors.

In Scenario 1, women rated the joke as more harassing than men. The effect was small-to-moderate, $F(1, 480) = 15.86$, $p < .001$, $\eta_P^2 = .032$, power = .978. Furthermore, with a male actor the joke was perceived as slightly more harassing than when a woman told the joke, $F(1480) = 5.99$, $p = .026$, $\eta_P^2 = .01$, power = .607. The latter effect was qualified by a Participant gender × Gender of actor interaction, $F(1, 480) = 17.23$, $p < .001$, $\eta_P^2 = .035$, power = .990. While women made similar evaluations regardless of gender of actor, men considered jokes from women as less harassing. There were no effects of question order.

A similar between-subjects effect was found in the second scenario, Invitation to date, $F(1, 481) = 13.98$, $p < .001$, $\eta_P^2 = .028$, power = .962. In addition, question

order significantly affected the ratings, $F(1, 481) = 5.72$, $p = .012$, but only when the actor was a man (significant Gender of Actor × Question order interaction), $F(1, 481) = 59.17$, $p < .001$, $\eta_P^2 = .110$, power = 1. The finding suggests that when the less stereotypical scenarios of the female actor were evaluated first and male actor thereafter, the socio-sexual behavior of male actors was evaluated more as harassment. None of the other effects were significant.

In the *Contact* scenario, we also found that women rated physical touching significantly more as harassment than men. The between-subjects effect was moderate, $F(1, 480) = 25.37$, $p < .001$, $\eta_P^2 = .050$, power = .999. Similar to the *Joke* scenario, the social-sexual behavior was rated significantly more as harassment when the actor was a man, $F(1, 480) = 12.86$, $p < .001$, $\eta_P^2 = .026$, power = .947, and this effect was moderated by participant sex, $F(1, 480) = 11.42$, $p < .001$, $\eta_P^2 = .023$, power = .921. As seen in Table 1, relative to women and relative to physical touching by male actors, men rated touching by women less as harassment.

In the Quid pro quo situation (Scenario 4), women rated the behavior significantly more as harassment than men, $F(1, 475) = 10.14$, $p = .002$, $\eta_P^2 = .021$, power = .888, and participants rated the behavior more as harassment when the actor was a man compared to when the actor was a woman, $F(1, 475) = 21.49$, $p < .001$, $\eta_P^2 = .043$, power = .996. Question order had some effect on the evaluations of men actors, but the effect was small ($\eta_P^2 = .017$), and also in the opposite direction of that reported for Scenario 2.

### Influence of #MeToo Features on the Perception of Social-Sexual Behavior

To test Hypothesis 2, we first performed a mixed-model ANOVA with the four scenarios and Gender of actor as within-subjects factors, and Participant gender as between-subject factor. Question order was dropped for this analysis due to the lack of any consistent effects in the prior analyses. We report on the three contrasts between the scenarios. In the first contrast, *Joke* was rated markedly more as harassment than *Invitation to date*, $F(1, 473) = 205.42$, $p < .001$, $\eta_P^2 = .303$, power = 1). In the second contrast, *Contact* differed only slightly from *Joke* or *Invitation to date*, $F(1, 473) = 5.26$, $p = .022$, $\eta_P^2 = .011$, power = .629). In the third contrast, *Quid pro quo* was rated substantially more as harassment than the three hostile work environment scenarios, $F(1, 473) = 6390.45$, $p < .001$, $\eta_P^2 .931$, power = 1). Adding to this, across all scenarios there was an overall within-subjects effect of Gender of actor,

**Table 1** Estimated marginal means for men and women when rating female and male actors across four social-sexual behavior scenarios (Sc)

| Participant | Women | | Men | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Actor | Female | Male | Female | Male |
| Sc 1: Joke | 2.66 | 2.55 | 1.98 | 2.33 |
| Sc 2: Invitation to date | 1.72 | 1.76 | 1.37 | 1.45 |
| Sc 3: Contact | 2.13 | 2.14 | 1.53 | 1.78 |
| Sc 4: Quid pro quo | 5.70 | 5.79 | 5.44 | 5.62 |

Scale scores 1 (*Not at all*) to 6 (*Yes, absolutely!*), anchors only

$F(1, 473)=20.21$, $p<.001$, $\eta_P^2=.041$, power $=.994$), suggesting that the social-sexual behavior was perceived moderately more as harassment when the actor was a man versus a woman. Finally, and as shown in Fig. 1, Participant gender had an effect on the ratings across all four scenarios, $F(1, 473)=31.23$, $p<.001$, $\eta_P^2=.062$, power $=1$) with men generally rating the scenarios moderately less as harassment.

Additional tests of Hypothesis 2 included analyses of the evaluative effects of introducing specific features and factors within each scenario (i.e., conditions). All four scenarios included additional information on power differentials. The remaining scenarios covered information on recurrence of behavior (Scenario *Joke*), private setting (Scenarios *Contact* and *Quid pro quo*), personalized targeting (Scenario *Joke*), and sexualized touching (Scenario *Contact*). We performed Profile Analyses (within-subjects repeated measures ANOVA) on differences scores for all conditions and for female and male actors separately. Pairwise comparisons were made for each condition.

For the effect of position/power, the participants were asked to re-evaluate the behavior presented under the condition that the actor was either in a subordinate, equal, or superior position. The findings are summarized in Table 2. Across all eight scenarios, the behavior of actors in superior positions were evaluated as markedly more harassing compared to those in equal or subordinate positions (Cohen's *d* between .77 and 1.33 in the three hostile work environment scenarios, and between $d=.44$ and $d=.55$ in the *Quid pro quo* scenario). The ratings were similar for female and male actors. The three scenarios on hostile work environment were generally not valuated as sexual harassment. However, when applying the scores above 3.5 (i.e., the upper half of the 6-point scale) as a criterion for evaluating the behavior as sexual harassment, the behavior of male actors in superior positions were rated as harassment by the majority of the participants in the Joke and in the Invitation to
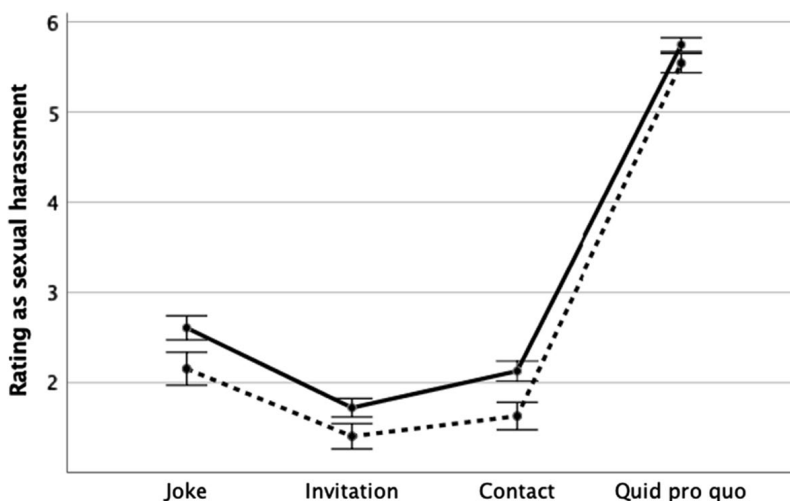


**Fig. 1** Women (solid line) and men's (dotted line) ratings of socio-sexual behavior as sexual harassment across four scenarios of social-sexual behavior. Ratings for female and male actors are aggregated. Scale scores 1 (*Not at all*) to 6 (*Yes, absolutely!*), anchors only

**Table 2** Profile analysis of each scenario (Sc) with power differentials (subordinate vs. equal vs. superior position) as within-subjects factor

|  | $df^1$ | $F$ | $\eta_P^2$ | Post-hoc contrasts |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Male actor* | | | | |
| Sc1: Joke | 1.22, 586.69 | 450.30 | .484 | a=.12, b=.97, c=1.02 |
| Sc2: Invitation to date | 1.75, 841.37 | 571.04 | .543 | a=−.43, b=1.33, c=1.05 |
| Sc3: Contact | 1.44, 688.40 | 315.81 | .397 | a=−.27, b=.95, c=.77 |
| Sc4: Quid pro quo | 1.58, 757.36 | 76.96 | .139 | a=.13, b=.44, c=.45 |
| *Female actor* | | | | |
| Sc1: Joke | 1.13, 542.29 | 396.16 | .453 | a=.17, b=.98, c=1.02 |
| Sc2: Invitation to date | 1.77, 857.17 | 566.24 | .539 | a=−.40, b=1.33, c=1.06 |
| Sc3: Contact | 1.52, 731.25 | 288.39 | .375 | a=−.22, b=.89, c=.77 |
| Sc4: Quid pro quo | 1.67, 804.48 | 113.39 | .191 | a=.19, b=.52, c=.55 |

[1]df's are Greenhouse–Geisser epsilon-adjusted. All tests were significant at $p < .001$ and with power=1. Post-hoc contrasts: a=subordinate versus equal, b=equal versus superior, and c=subordinate versus superior. Positive *d*-values reflect behavior being rated more as sexual harassment in higher position

date scenarios, but not in the Contact scenario. For female actors in superior positions, their behavior was considered sexual harassment only in the Invitation of date scenario. In the *Joke* and *Quid pro quo* scenarios, the behavior of actors in subordinate positions, were rated less as harassment compared to similar behavior in equal positions. However, in the *Invitation* and *Contact* scenarios, the behaviors of those in subordinate positions were rated somewhat more as harassment compared to those holding equal positions.

In the *Joke* scenario the participants were also asked to re-evaluate the social-sexual behavior under the condition that it was a single incident versus a repeated form of behavior. For male actors, there was a large effect of repeated behavior, $F(1, 484) = 668.18$, $p < .001$, $\eta_P^2 = .580$, power=1). Similar effects could be found for female actors, $F(1, 484) = 518.50$, $p < .001$, $\eta_P^2 = .517$, power=1. The effect of repeated behavior over a single incident was very strong for both male actors ($d = 1.17$) and for female actors ($d = 1.03$). When applying the above criterion, we found that only when the scenario described repeated invitation (i.e., third time) it was considered sexual harassment by the majority of the participants regardless of gender of actor. Furthermore, we examined the effect of personal targeting of a woman or a man versus telling a joke that could be generally offending for women or men. For male actors, the effect of personal targeting was very large, $F(1, 482) = 1354,74$, $p < .001$, $\eta_P^2 = .737$, power=1, $d = 1.68$. A similarly very large effect was evident for female actors, $F(1, 478) = 919.08$, $p < .001$, $\eta_P^2 = .658$, power=1, $d = 1.38$. Only when the joke was targeting a specific person was it considered sexual harassment by the majority of the participants regardless of being told by a female or male actor.

Next, we examined the effect of being alone versus being in public in the *Contact* and the *Quid pro quo* scenarios. For male actors, there was a strong effect of physically touching a woman when she was alone relative to being in public, $F(1,$

$480) = 276.06$, $p < .001$, $\eta_P^2 = .365$, power $= 1$, $d = .76$. In comparison, this effect was moderate for female actors, $(F(1, 479) = 146.99$, $p < .001$, $\eta_P^2 = .235$, power $= 1$, $d = .56$. Still, regardless of being alone or in public, the majority of participants did *not* consider this behavior to be sexual harassment. When the woman was in public relative to being alone in the *Quid pro quo* scenario, the behavior was rated markedly *less* as harassment, $F(1, 481) = 202.94$, $p < .001$, $\eta_P^2 = .297$, power $= 1$, $d = .64$. This was even more pronounced when the female actor targeted the man in public, $F(1, 483) = 299.59$, $p < .001$, $\eta_P^2 = .383$, power $= 1$, $d = .79$.

We finally examined the effect of sexualized versus non-sexualized physical contact on the perception of social-sexual behavior (Scenario 3). Compared to a male actor touching a woman on the shoulder, his touching her buttocks was rated markedly more as sexual harassment, $F(1, 481) = 2796.92$, $p < .001$, $\eta_P^2 = .853$, power $= 1$, $d = 2.41$. The effect was equally strong for female actors, $F(1, 482) = 2217.42$, $p < .001$, $\eta_P^2 = .821$, power $= 1$, $d = 2.14$. Only when the scenario involved touching of buttocks was it considered sexual harassment by the majority of the participants.

## Discussion

The aim of this study was to better understand how prototypical #MeToo features and individual attitudes influence the rating of social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment. We found that prototypical #MeToo features are associated with a higher perception of social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment, which has been shown in previous research for some features [e.g. gender of actor, Runtz and O'Donnell (2003), and position of power, Bursik and Gefter (2011)], but not all of the features used in this study (e.g. private setting). All prototypical features were positively associated with higher recognition of social-sexual behaviors as sexual harassment, which lends support to our definition of such features as #MeToo prototypical sexual harassment. This study advances the understanding of how both contextual features influence perception of sexual harassment.

In support of the first hypothesis, we found that women perceived social-sexual behavior more as sexual harassment than men did. This supports previous findings showing that women tend to evaluate a wider spectrum of social-sexual behaviors as sexual harassment (Rotundo et al. 2001). There was more gender agreement when perceiving quid pro quo scenarios then hostile work environment scenarios, in line with previous findings (Gutek and O'Connor 1995; Rotundo et al. 2001; Wiener and Hurt 2000).

The gender difference in the current study occurred mainly because men rated female behavior toward other men less as harassment, while women largely rated the behavior equally, regardless of whether it was performed by a female or male actor. This adds to prior studies that have shown that men generally tend to perceive potentially harassing social-sexual behavior less as harassment, but more as an invitation to sexual actions (Rotundo et al. 2001). In addition, there is the stereotypical belief that men should always welcome sexual advances, which could be a reason why men, in comparison to women, are less likely to report sexual victimization (Stemple and Meyer 2014). Relative to women, men regret more the sexual opportunities

they did not pursue and regret less the casual sex they had (Kennair et al. 2016). Therefore, men may perceive sexual advances by women as a positive opportunity rather than as harassment. However, why this applies to how one perceives behaviors toward other men needs to be addressed in further research.

We found that all the prototypical #MeToo features prominent in the media coverage increased the likelihood of social-sexual behavior to be rated more as sexual harassment. First, the scenario displaying quid pro quo behavior was rated as sexual harassment far more than scenarios displaying hostile work environments. In accordance with previous findings (Gutek et al. 1983; Runtz and O'Donnell 2003), a scenario with a male actor and a female target was rated more as sexual harassment than a female actor and a male target. In addition, and also in line with previous findings (e.g., Rotundo et al. 2001), behaviors of actors in superior positions of power were rated more as sexual harassment compared to an equal or subordinate actor. Repeated behavior was rated more as sexual harassment over single incident behavior, and personal targets were rated more as sexual harassment over general targets. Furthermore, the current study suggests that the behavior will be perceived more as sexual harassment when the target is alone compared to social-sexual behaviors in a public setting. The effect of this has not been examined in previous studies. Lastly, sexualized physical contact had the largest impact on the perception of social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment. In summary, the second hypothesis was fully supported as all of the prototypical features were associated with a higher rating of the social-sexual behavior as sexual harassment.

The current results have some important cautionary implications. First, they highlight that there are systematic differences in the perception of what constitutes sexual harassment, due to contextual factors and gender. The high influence of the prototypical #MeToo features suggests that the #MeToo campaign and its coverage might have influenced how people categorize sexual harassment. Also, as the aim ultimately must be to reduce sexual harassment, we need to communicate more detailed, effectively and perhaps less polarizing, in order to educate the population at large about sexual harassment. Further, the prototypical nature of such an influential campaign may come to reduce our recognition of other forms of sexual harassment that may have equally adverse effects (Bendixen et al. 2018). Education and conversation concerning other relevant types of sexual harassment are warranted, addressing other forms of hostile workplace types of harassment such as the spread of sexual rumors, slut-shaming, and discrimination of sexual minorities.

One of the most frequently discussed criticisms of the #MeToo movement was the fear of false accusation. The #MeToo movement has been called a "witch hunt" (Wright 2018) and concerns of being falsely accused have been raised. In line with this, people were worried that, due to the raised awareness of sexual harassment, all types of flirting, dating or joking in the workplace would be perceived as harassment (Bonos 2018). Many men reported to be afraid to mentor women (Sandberg and Pritchard 2019), which may lead to less cross-gender cooperation, which could be disadvantageous to the work environment and work effectiveness. While women do rate social-sexual behavior more as sexual harassment than men do, the ratings are still low for the hostile work environment scenarios. While all scenarios could technically fall under the Norwegian Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act's definition

of sexual harassment (i.e., if these behaviors are perceived as unwanted and in addition emotionally distressing from the target's point of view, they are considered to be sexual harassment), neither telling a sexist joke, asking a co-worker on a date, nor physical contact (giving a hug) were generally rated as harassment by the participants. The Norwegian Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act aims to protect anyone who would feel those actions are unwanted or caused emotional distress, however, the Act does not regulate penal action. The behaviors were rated as sexual harassment only when it was repeatedly performed, when that physical contact was sexualized, and only when performed by a person holding a superior position. Evidently, moral panicking is not justified and various forms of social-sexual behavior in the workplace are not necessarily seen as problematic by the majority of the participants, at least not in a gender egalitarian and sexually liberal nation such as Norway (Kennair et al. 2016; Grøntvedt and Kennair 2013). To what extent this result is generalizable to other, less egalitarian countries remains to be examined.

It is also worth noticing that social-sexual behaviors that contain #MeToo features may not necessarily be sexual harassment. Sexual relationships between employer and employee, or even quid pro quo situations containing sexual favors can be initiated by both parties, or be examples of sexual bribery. In line with feminist theory and female empowerment, we do not wish to diminish female sexual agency or suggest that women cannot initiate desired sexual relations.

### Limitations and Future Research

Because we have analyzed post #MeToo data only, the most obvious limitation to our study is that we cannot make any causal inferences regarding the influence the #MeToo campaign has had on the perception of sexual harassment. The findings suggest that, when people evaluate social-sexual behavior that contains prototypical #MeToo features, they are more likely to evaluate such behavior as sexual harassment. As studies prior to the #MeToo campaign also have shown that some factors, such as superior status (Bursik and Gefter 2011; Rotundo et al. 2001) or repetition of behavior (Kath et al. 2014) have an impact on such perceptions, it remains unresolved whether the magnitude of the effects reported in our study were caused by the campaign or not. However, this is, to our knowledge, the first study post #MeToo that takes all of the characteristic features of the #MeToo campaign into account and perform empirical tests on their impact on the perception of social-sexual behavior.

Another possible limitation is the restricted sample of social-sexual behavior covered by scenarios. We fully acknowledge the need to study a broader array of social-sexual behavior that frequently takes place in the workplace, e.g., gender discrimination, comments about one's body or sexual orientation, or spreading of sexual rumors. However, the scenarios that we studied were typical situations that were reported about during the #MeToo movement. Further, the wording in two of the scenarios differed slightly for female and male actors (i.e., job descriptions and type of joke). Although joke *contents* are typically gender differentiated jokes may still be functionally similar across gender. Hence, the difference in wording may not have affected the perception of social-sexual behavior to a great extent.

Finally, the questionnaire covered opposite-gender sexual harassment only, not paying attention to same-sex sexual harassment or the harassment of sexual minorities. The #MeToo campaign has been criticized for neglecting women of color as well as sexual minority groups (Hemmings 2018; Onwuachi-Willig 2018; Zarkov and Davis 2018), albeit these groups tend to be more exposed to sexual harassment (Buchanan and Ormerod 2002; Grant et al. 2011; Hill and Kearl 2011; Hill and Silva 2005). Future researchers are therefore advised to consider same-sex sexual harassment and to focus more on minority groups.

## Conclusion

This study has advanced the understanding of factors that may affect people's perception of sexual harassment. We discovered that men tend to rate female behavior less as sexual harassment than male behavior—a difference in perception that we did not find among female participants. It is not possible to assert that the #MeToo campaign has resulted in the prototype formation addressed in this study. However, post #MeToo we observe a bias toward prototypical forms of sexual harassment. People probably perceive these more as sexual harassment compared to less prototypical but equally harmful types. Not perceiving and recognizing sexual rumoring, slut-shaming and homo- and transnegativity as sexual harassment could have severe negative consequences, as people experiencing these non-prototypical forms of sexual harassment may feel unable to speak up or report such behaviors. Not recognizing such behaviors as sexual harassment may lead to more tolerance towards them, in comparison to more prototypical sexual harassment.

The study also suggests that, at least in Norway, the moral panicking due to the #MeToo movement is not justified, as the majority of the participants in this sample were very liberal in the perception of most of the social-sexual behaviors. Cross-gender cooperation in the workplace is still possible and no reduction in cooperation among genders is warranted. While we consider the #MeToo campaign to be important and necessary, a more balanced and precise coverage of sexual harassment and its perception is needed to help recognize and ultimately reduce not only prototypical, but all types of sexual harassment.

## Compliance with Ethical Standards

**Conflict of interest** The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

**Informed Consent** The participation was both voluntary and anonymous. Participants gave their informed consent electronically by approving their responses at the final page of the questionnaire.

## Appendix

### 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.

Scenario 4 (Quid pro quo)

A female lawyer eats lunch in the cafeteria. A male colleague begins a conversation that is polite at first, but then changes to less appropriate topics that concerns the woman's private sex life. The male colleague puts his hand on the woman's thigh and says that he might be able to influence her future career.

### 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 chuckle.

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.

Scenario 4 (Quid pro quo)

A male real estate agent eats lunch in the cafeteria. A female colleague begins a conversation that is polite at first, but then changes to less appropriate topics that concerns the man's private sex life. The female colleague puts her hand on the man's thigh and says that she might be able to influence his future career.

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# Paper II

# Personality and Social Psychology

# 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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*Perceptions of and reactions to the #MeToo movement*

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 ones 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 to 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 we 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 tree 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 ($\alpha_{Total} = 0.80$, $\alpha_{Women} = 0.78$, $\alpha_{Men} = 0.78$). However, the alphas for the three positive beliefs were on the low end ($\alpha_{Total} = 0.62$, $\alpha_{Women} = 0.57$, $\alpha_{Men} = 0.65$). 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 ($r_{Total} = -0.50$, $r_{Women} = -0.44$, $r_{Men} = -0.52$).

*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 | 013* | 0.13* | –0.14* | 0.18** | –0.22** | 0.11 | –0.08 | 0.18** | –0.33** | 0.78** | – |
| *M* | 33.46 | 0.33 | 3.02 | 24.05 | 1.63 | 1.72 | 1.32 | 4.57 | 2.34 | 2.14 | 2.17 |
| *SD* | 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 $p < 0.01$.
[1]Point 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** | – |
| *M* | 32.72 | 0.13 | 3.15 | 22.89 | 2.05 | 1.51 | 1.57 | 4.35 | 2.97 | 1.86 | 1.62 |
| *SD* | 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 $p < 0.01$.
[1]Point 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
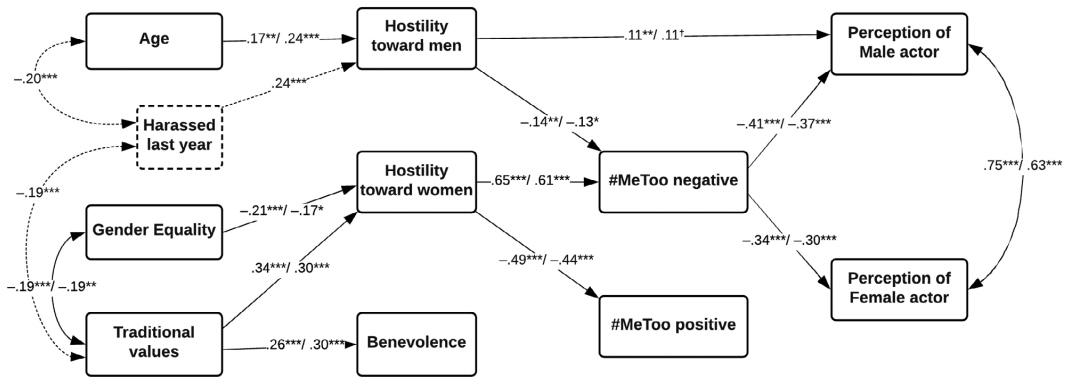
Fig. 1. Factors associated with the perception of opposite-sex socio-sexual behavior as sexual harassment for male and female actors. Standardized path coefficients for all significant predictors in the tested model. †$p < 0.10$, *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$. Coefficients are presented separately for women (before the slash, $n = 304$) and men (after the slash, $n = 168$). Dotted box and lines apply to women only.
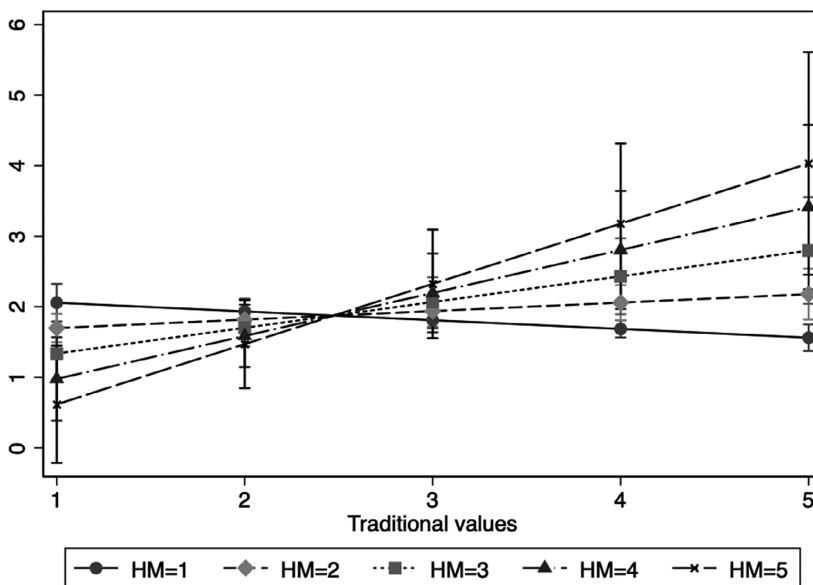


Fig. 2. Predictive margins with 95% CIs for men's evaluation of female targets of social sexual behavior as sexual harassment at different levels of traditional values and hostile masculinity (HM).

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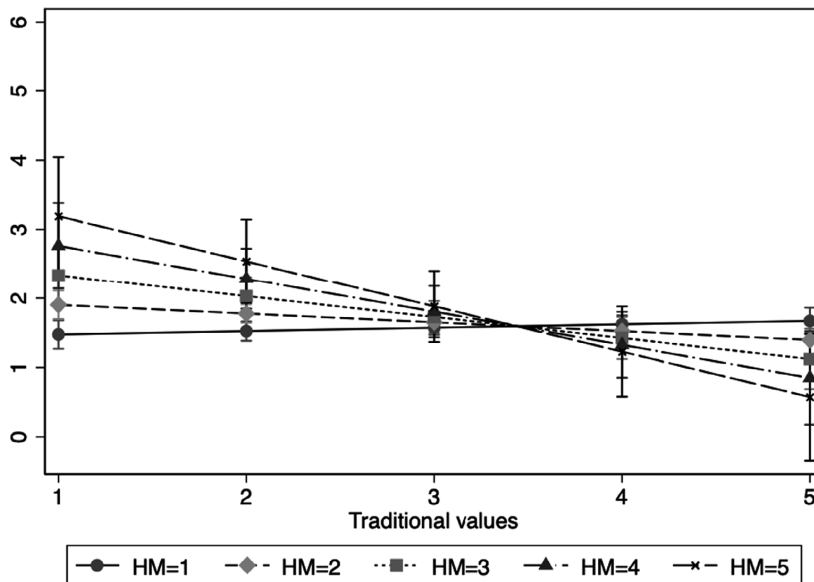
*Fig. 3.* Predictive margins with 95% CIs for men's evaluation of male targets of social sexual behavior as sexual harassment at different levels of traditional values and hostile masculinity (HM).

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 & Kearl, 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 & Kearl, 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

[1] The 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 (F1 = 3.72, F2 = 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 chuckle.

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.

# Paper III

This paper is awaiting publication and is not included in NTNU Open

**Appendix**


**Scenarios used within Paper I and Paper II:**

Within Paper I and II, scenarios were described using two constellations; female actor and male target as well as male actor and female target. For wording on scenarios, we only display the first gender constellation. Wording was similar for the other constellation.


Scenario 1 (Sexist Joke)

> At a lunch break, both male and female 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 chuckle.

Scenario 2 (Invitation to date)

> A woman is at summer party at work when a female colleague sits down next to her. They get along well, sit together and talk throughout the evening. The approaching woman says that she wants to meet the other woman again the next day, but she is not interested and politely says no. Two days later, the woman gets a message on Facebook, where the other woman asks if she's changed her mind about the date. The woman says no again.

Scenario 3 (Hug)

> A female engineer has signed a large project. She's at the office when a female colleague walks by. The colleague congratulates her by giving her a hug lasting a little too long.

Scenario 4 (Quid pro quo) – used only in Paper I

> A male real estate agent eats lunch in the cafeteria. A female colleague begins a conversation that is polite at first, but then changes to less appropriate topics that concerns the man's private sex life. The female colleague puts her hand on the man's thigh and says that she might be able to influence his future career.

**Additional information:**

These additional features were posted under each scenario after the participants' initial response (baseline). The additional features shown here as an example are for the gender constellation woman-women, but were the same in all gender constellations.

The two women are alone in the room

The two women are with other colleagues

The woman often makes such comments about…

This is the only time the woman has made such a comment

The woman commenting is the other woman's boss

The woman commenting is the other woman's equal colleague

The woman commenting is the other woman's employee

The woman commenting is openly lesbian/gay

The woman receiving the comment is openly lesbian/gay

Both women are openly lesbian/gay

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