

**Sexual Misconducts of Ingroup Members: The Role of Group-Based Guilt in the  
Relation between Perceived Responsibility and the Willingness to Apologize**

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### **Abstract**

Sexual misconduct by men against women is a severe problem in our society. This study explored the role of group-based guilt and perceived responsibility for the wrongful sexual behavior of other male ingroup members towards women. In particular, we examined whether perceived responsibility predicts apology intentions, whereas guilt was anticipated to mediate the relationship. We handed out an online survey to 312 male participants from the United States of America. As hypothesized, the association between perceived responsibility for sexual misconduct by other men and the willingness to apologize for this was positive and significant. Moreover, we found the relation between perceived responsibility and apology willingness was mediated by feelings of group-based guilt. This study testifies that feeling guilt and responsibility for other people's misbehavior induces apology tendencies, thus, providing a reasonable explanation for circumstances that might improve intergroup relationships and release intergroup tensions. The study has some limitations that need to be considered: The correlational design is not suitable for determining causality, and the sample might not be generalizable to the global population.

*Keywords:* perceived responsibility, group-based guilt, intergroup apology, sexual misconduct, intergroup relations, ingroup outgroup

### **Sexual Misconducts of Ingroup Members: The Role of Group-Based Guilt in the Relation between Perceived Responsibility and the Willingness to Apologize**

"Sexual harassment is using what nature gave us to take what isn't ours. It's an act of violence not only against an individual but the group - and it inevitably meets with the wrath of the group" (Marais, n.d.).

With this citation, the American musician, writer, and academic Anthony Marais illustrates that sexual harassment is a severe problem in our society that goes beyond the interpersonal level. About 44% of women report sexual misconduct in their everyday life, ranging from being pressured for a date or a relationship to being touched without consent or sexually assaulted (O'Donohue et al., 1998). Those high numbers of reported sexual misconduct, a ripple effect of our male-dominated world, might contribute to the tense intergroup relationship between the genders (Herrera et al., 2014). In the current research, we examined how men deal with the misbehavior of other men. In particular, we investigated whether men, who are being confronted with the wrongdoing of other men, feel group-based responsibility and guilt. Since apologies are known to have reparative effects on intergroup relationships (Tavuchis, 1991), we further explored whether those feelings of guilt or responsibility are related to intentions to apologize to women. By researching this topic, we aim to address a major problem of our society that has resulted in gender inequality.

#### **The Relation between Group-based Guilt and Responsibility**

In general, we can say that people indeed can feel guilt for a wrongful act by a member of their ingroup, even though they did not participate in this wrongful act. This kind of guilt is termed *group-based guilt* (Doosje et al., 1998). Group-based feelings of guilt originate in the distress of an individual that accepts that their ingroup is accountable for inappropriate and harmful behavior towards another group that goes against the individuals or the group's values and norms (Doosje et al., 1998, 2006). Imhoff et al. (2012) defined guilt as

an "aversive self-focused emotion following from appraisals of responsibility and motivating individuals to commit to reparation intentions". To clarify this concept within the context of the study, we believe that it is likely that some men feel guilty when confronted with stories of other men's sexual misdeeds.

The question is whether this relates to *group-based responsibility*. This term refers to the perceived responsibility or accountability about misdeeds committed by members of the same social group – in this case, the sexual misconduct committed by other individuals of the male gender ingroup. From the viewpoint of the ingroup, group-based guilt relates closely to feelings of group-based responsibility (Kardos et al., 2019). We should note that guilt and responsibility have different theoretical meanings and need to be distinguished, as one can feel guilty without feeling responsible (Zylicz & Poleszak, 2005; Baumeister et al., 1994). Interestingly, if people feel guilty, they often choose to deny or refuse to feel responsible for ingroup members' actions or downplay its severity to avoid or reduce unpleasant emotions like guilt (McGarty et al., 2005; Bilali et al., 2019). Vice versa, the feeling of responsibility for another person's immoral behavior also does not necessarily lead to feeling guilty (Doosje et al., 1998). However, a previous study on interpersonal relationships claims that even though feeling responsible is not a requirement for feeling guilt, evidence exists that responsibility triggers or increases guilt (Baumeister et al., 1994). Whether such feelings of group-based guilt and responsibility are related to men's reparation intentions towards the female outgroup will become clear in the course of this paper.

### **Apologizing in Response to Felt Guilt and Responsibility**

People who feel guilty about an ingroup member's wrongdoing often have the drive to support strategies that repair the misconduct of their group members (Schmader & Lickel, 2006). Guilt has been found to be correlated to positive attitudes, prosocial behavior, or the aim of pursuing a particular positive goal (Graton & Ric, 2017; Schmader & Lickel, 2006),

for instance, to reconstruct a harmonious relationship between the male perpetrator group and the female victim group. Furthermore, multiple studies suggest that guilt for other-caused misconduct predicts intentions for reparative and compensatory behavior or at least some approach tendencies towards the group that was wrongly treated (see e.g., Imhoff et al., 2012; Brown et al., 2008; Mc Garty et al. 2005; Schmader & Lickel, 2006; Doosje et al., 1998). These findings indicate that some men may have reparation intentions or approach tendencies towards women due to feeling guilty for the mistreatment by other men. Moreover, those positive intergroup actions by the ingroup towards the outgroup have a beneficial effect on intergroup reconciliation (Zylicz & Poleszak, 2005) and are likely of great value in the context of gender equality.

Of course, approach tendencies and the desire to reconstruct intergroup harmony do not assure that an intergroup reconciliation will take place. So, how can male ingroup members repair their relationship with the female outgroup? One way to initiate that is for men to apologize to the female victim group for one's group's misconduct. If the ingroup apologizes, it can have a reparative effect on the intergroup's relationship and serves as a beneficial tool for rebuilding social harmony (Tavuchis, 1991). An apology requires acknowledgment of misconduct against another person or an understanding of their position and the desire to repair the damage of the relationship (Tavuchis, 1991). One can break down an apology into six elements: remorse, responsibility, admitting the misconduct, admitting harm towards the victim, a reparation offering, and conceding that it will not happen again (Blatz et al., 2009; Lazare, 2004; Tavuchis, 1991). A study on government apologies has found that 85% of the government apologies went hand in hand with accepting responsibility for their wrongdoings (Blatz et al., 2009). Admitting responsibility for specific misbehavior is, after showing remorse, the most essential purpose of apologizing (Blatz & Philpot, 2010). More than that, acknowledging one's ingroup responsibility correlates with reparation efforts,

which are material or monetary compensations (Čehajić-Clancy et al., 2011). These research findings suggest a close link between perceived responsibility towards other male ingroup members' sexual misconduct and apology intentions towards women.

With respect to the relation between guilt and apology, we found that an interpersonal study detected a positive and significant link between guilt and apology (Dunlop et al., 2015). That study was replicated in an intergroup setting, which found strong support for group-based guilt as the predictor of a government apology by white Australians towards indigenous Australians (McGarty et al., 2005), which reinforced our assumption that this is also the case between men and women. This relation of felt guilt and apology intentions is further supported by Schmader and Lickel (2006). They found that guilt serves as a tool for repairing damage in a relationship, possibly through an apology or other reparative behavior.

Finally, a study from Čehajić-Clancy et al. (2011) has found significant correlations between three similar variables to the ones we use in this study: ingroup responsibility, group-based guilt, and support for reparation policies. Their study was conducted on the background of the Srebrenica Genocide, where thousands of Bosnians were murdered by Serbs after the war in Bosnia Herzegovina in 1995. This study served as an inspiration for the current study, with interest in replicating the results in the context of sexual harassment towards women. However, one minor difference is that we focus on apology willingness rather than reparation policies.

In summary, the relationship between guilt and apology is found to be solid and predictive in previous research. However, it is also essential to investigate the relation with other variables such as responsibility for others' actions, group-based guilt levels, and apology willingness (McGarty et al., 2005). The variables, as mentioned earlier, are manifested as a simple mediation model, with group-based guilt as the mediator on the relationship between responsibility and apology willingness. We arranged the model with

perceived responsibility as the predictor variable, since it is more evident that a certain amount of felt responsibility is necessary before one can feel guilt.

### **The Present Research**

Two hypotheses emerged from the above reasoning. We expect that a feeling of responsibility for the sexual misconduct of male ingroup members predicts the willingness to apologize towards women (Hypothesis 1). Moreover, we hypothesize that the relationship between perceived male responsibility for sexual misconduct and the proclivity to apologize towards women is mediated by group-based guilt (Hypothesis 2). While group-based guilt is being examined as a possible mediator, perceived male responsibility is the predictor variable, and apology willingness is the dependent variable.

## **Methods**

### **Participants and Design**

A total of 354 adult men from the United States participated in this survey study. The participants were recruited through the data collection platform Prolific and received financial compensation of £1.85 British pounds (approximately €2.22). The participants are within the age range of 18 to 79, with a mean age of  $M_{age} = 39.2$  ( $SD = 12.9$ ). Based on pre-registered criteria, shared on the platform AsPredicted<sup>1</sup> beforehand, 42 participants were excluded from our data set due to remarkably short reading time for the stories ( $N = 37$ ), incomplete responses ( $N = 4$ ), or failed attention checks ( $N = 1$ ), resulting in a final sample size of  $N = 312$ . According to a Monte Carlo Power Analysis for Indirect Effects by Schoemann et al. (2017), a minimum of 210 participants were found to be necessary to reach a power of 0.8 with expected correlations of at least 0.25. This suggests that we have enough power to detect the predicted relations.

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<sup>1</sup> See [https://aspredicted.org/Q2B\\_T3T](https://aspredicted.org/Q2B_T3T)



The study is part of a larger group project with different focus points, including a manipulation of empathy; therefore, additional variables were added to and examined through the questionnaire. Before reading the four short stories, participants were assigned to either an objective or empathic condition in our joint questionnaire. The empathy manipulation is not relevant for the research model discussed in this paper. This thesis, therefore, only considers three measures of the above-introduced mediation model. The complete survey is attached in Appendix B.

### **Procedure**

The questionnaire was set up and distributed via the online survey software Qualtrics. First, participants were exposed to information about the research and the procedure. Furthermore, they received information that participation is voluntary and that withdrawing is possible at all times. Contact details for questions or concerns were provided, and all participants were asked whether they consent to partake before starting the survey. If consent was given, the subjects were asked to indicate age and group identification with the male gender group before their opinions of sexism and perceived severity of sexual harassment in our society were recorded. After this, we asked the participants to read four short stories of women sharing their experiences of sexual harassment. After reading, the dependent measures were taken. We integrated four attention check questions to identify inattentive and insincere responding. The survey ends with thanking and debriefing, of which the latter includes contact details of the National Sexual Assault Hotline in case participants desire to share their experiences or thoughts. The completion time varied from 3.87 minutes to 53.6 minutes, with an average time of 12.8 minutes ( $SD = 8.6$ ). The Ethical Committee of Psychology (ECP) from the University of Groningen approved the study.

### **Measures**

As this study is part of a larger project, several measures were taken<sup>2</sup>, whereas the relevant measures are described below. We asked participants to what extent they agree with statements on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very much*.

### ***Perceived Ingroup Responsibility***

The perceived responsibility measure consists of five items. Three items were adapted from a paper by Čehajić-Clancy et al. (2011). The items are as follows: “Men, in general, are responsible for how other men treat women”, “I think that men should carry responsibility for the behavior of other men towards women”, “When thinking about how some men treat women, I feel responsible”. The last two items were created with the influence of an unpublished study by Febrianna and Gordijn (2021): “As a man, I feel responsible for preventing sexual misconduct towards women”, and lastly, “I am ready to take on responsibility for the misbehavior of some men towards women” ( $M = 3.15$ ,  $SD = 1.61$ ; Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .92$ ).

### ***Group-based Guilt***

The guilt measure consists of four items adapted from Zebel, Doosje, and Spears (2009) and the Collective Guilt Acceptance scale (Branscombe et al., 2004) and was adjusted to match the context of the study. The following items were included: “I feel guilty about these kinds of negative things some men have been doing to women”, “I believe that I should repair the damage caused to women by some men”, “I easily feel guilty for the bad effect on a woman’s life brought about by the bad behavior of some men” and lastly the reverse coded item “I feel blameless when I am confronted with these kinds of negative things some men have done to women” ( $M = 3.66$ ,  $SD = 1.66$ ; Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .90$ ).

### ***Apology Willingness***

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<sup>2</sup> empathy, group-based guilt, apology willingness, meta-stereotyping, stereotyping, general emotions, perceived responsibility, and empathy condition check

To assess apology willingness, participants completed seven items. Three items were adapted from a study by Howell et al. (2012) and adapted accordingly. The four remaining items were created based on an unpublished study of the University of Groningen (Febriana & Gordijn, 2021). The items included in this scale are as follows: “I, as a man, would like to apologize to women about these kinds of sexual harassment experiences”, “I think that men should collectively apologize to women about sexual harassment”, “I would feel better if I were to apologize to women about sexual harassment”, “I think apologizing to women is unnecessary” (reverse coded), “I would support a collective apology on behalf of men to women with these kinds of sexual harassment experiences”, “It would be important to apologize to women about sexual harassment” and lastly “If there was a chance to meet a group of women who experienced sexual harassment by men, I would want to apologize on behalf of men” ( $M = 3.82$ ,  $SD = 1.80$ ; Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .95$ ).

## Results

### Assumptions, Means, and Correlations

The first step of the analysis was to combine the items to scales considering reverse coded items. Before analyzing the data, we ensured that the assumptions of normality, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity had not been violated. The independence assumption was met initially, as each participant could only fill out the questionnaire once. The corresponding figures are attached to Appendix A.

All correlations were in the predicted direction (i.e., positive) and significant at  $p < .01$ . Perceived responsibility is highly correlated with apology willingness ( $r = .75$ ). Further, there was a strong relationship between perceived responsibility and group-based guilt ( $r = .72$ ). Finally, there is a positive and significant correlation between group-based guilt and apology willingness ( $r = .74$ ). See Table 1 for an overview of descriptive statistics and correlations.

**Table 1**

*Means, Standard Deviations, and Pearson Correlations*

	Guilt	Responsibility	Apology	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Guilt	-			3.66	1.66
Responsibility	.72**	-		3.15	1.61
Apology	.74**	.75**	-	3.82	1.80

*Note.* N = 312

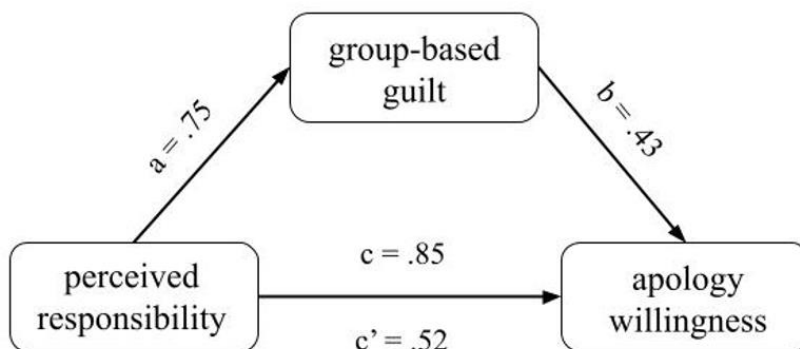
\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Hypothesis Testing**

To test our hypotheses, a regression analysis was performed using the statistical software SPSS (Version 25) and model 4 of the additional macro PROCESS by Hayes (2017). First, a significant total effect of perceived responsibility on the willingness to apologize was found with  $B = .85, t(310) = 20.23, p < .05$ . Thus, in line with Hypothesis 1, we found evidence that perceived responsibility predicts apology willingness. Further, in line with Hypothesis 2, this effect is mediated, as the indirect is significant,  $B = .32$  (95% CI [.23, .42]). This means that the relation between responsibility and apology is significantly reduced by including guilt. However, it should be noted that the direct effect is still significant,  $B = .52$  ( $t(310) = 9.51, p < .05, 95\% \text{ CI } [.41, .63]$ ), suggesting partial mediation (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

*Regression Coefficients for the Relationship between Perceived Responsibility, Group-Based Guilt and Apology Willingness*



### **Discussion**

In this study, we assessed how perceived responsibility and group-based guilt for sexual misbehavior of other men predicts apology intentions towards women. We predicted that perceived feelings of responsibility for the sexual misconduct of other males lead to a willingness to apologize to women on behalf of perpetrator men. The link between guilt and responsibility and guilt and apology has been suggested by previous research (see e.g., McGarty et al., 2005), which led us to assume that group-based guilt is mediating the relationship between responsibility and apology.

The findings are in line with our predictions. First, we found a positive relationship between feeling responsible for sexual misconduct towards women and the willingness to apologize to them for other men's wrongdoings (Hypothesis 1). Second, we found that perceived responsibility for others' misconduct is related to one's apology willingness partly because they feel guilty on behalf of men (Hypothesis 2). In other words, the relation between feeling responsible for the fact that some men engage in sexual misconduct of women and the willingness to apologize to women for this on behalf of men is mediated by feelings of group-based guilt.

### **Theoretical and Practical Implications**

This study introduces new insights into how men regulate their feelings towards sexual misconduct by other men. Our model is correlational; thus, causal terminology must be understood in a correlational context. Furthermore, for the sake of simplicity, the focus in this study lies on sexual misconduct committed by men towards women since the number of cases is significantly higher than sexual assaults committed by women or other gender identities. The approach of this study is not meant to exclude the fact that sexism and sexual misconduct are also committed by women towards men, men towards other men, and within other sexual orientations and gender identities. In the following, we will explain how our research

complements and supports existing research.

As introduced at the beginning of the paper, we partly replicated the results of a previous study that detected a strong predictive link of group-based guilt on governmental apology intentions towards indigenous Australians (McGarty et al., 2005). McGarty and colleagues conducted this study in the context of past wrongs inflicted by white Australians towards Aboriginies. Another study by Čehajić-Clancy et al. (2011) tested a model very similar to ours and found a clear link between ingroup responsibility, group-based guilt, and support for reparations. We replicated these findings with even higher correlations. In other words, we were able to repeat the findings of Čehajić-Clancy et al. (2011) in a very different context. The physical harm done to the victim group in the study by Čehajić-Clancy was very severe and different from the psychological harm done by sexual harassment. They examined perceived guilt and ingroup responsibility for atrocities and genocide practiced against inhabitants of Bosnia Herzegovina by Serbs. Although the contexts of both studies are very different from our study's context, we found a similar pattern. This replication in different research settings underlines the reliability of our findings.

A factor in the study by Čehajić-Clancy et al. (2011) that differs from our study is that Serbs, as a nationality, may identify themselves more strongly with their ingroup than men with the male gender ingroup. Higher group identification may decrease feelings of guilt and responsibility because individuals make positive group-based appraisals of negative events (Kuppens & Yzerbyt, 2014). The male gender group is a loose association group with low ties between perpetrator and non-perpetrator men within the group. Therefore, a lower sense of group entitativity is present (Denson et al., 2006). A lower identification with the whole group, as in loose association groups, prevents group members from denying or downplaying their groups' wrongdoings and leads to felt guilt in some men (Doosje et al., 2006); thus, the desire to apologize may be higher. When comparing the mean responses of both studies, the

average level of guilt appear to be similar, while in our study, the responsibility levels indeed appear to be lower<sup>3</sup>.

When looking at interpersonal relationships, it is not surprising that feelings of responsibility and guilt result in a desire to apologize for one's misdeeds. What does felt guilt and responsibility mean when one has not committed a wrongful act themselves? Interestingly, as indicated before, there appears to be a strong link between negative group-based emotions and group identification and a desire to keep a positive image of ones' group (Kuppens & Yzerbit, 2014). This means in our context that feelings of responsibility and guilt are felt on behalf of the male gender ingroup rather than felt about one's own actions; thus, making the concept of interpersonal guilt and responsibility very different from the concept of group-based guilt.

Moreover, our findings are consistent with a study that showed that accepting a certain degree of responsibility for ingroup misbehavior is a prerequisite for feeling group-based guilt (Brown et al., 2008). In concordance with Schmader and Lickel (2006), guilt motivates positive intentions and approach tendencies that are beneficial for reparative strategies toward the outgroup. Furthermore, in addition to guilt, even perceived responsibility might positively affect reparation intentions and, in the long run, has a positive influence on reconciliation between ingroup and outgroup (Philpot & Hornsey, 2008), in this case between men and women. This research clarifies that rather negative emotional responses to the misbehavior of others can be transformed into positive and prosocial actions. Next, researchers have claimed that taking on responsibility is one of the leading causes of an apology (Blatz & Philpot, 2010). Therefore, we expect the relationship between perceived responsibility and apology willingness to be causal. In relation to guilt, interpersonal and intergroup research found a link

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<sup>3</sup> Čehajić-Clancy et al. (2011):  $M_{responsibility} = 4.17$ ;  $M_{guilt} = 3.48$ ,  $M_{reparation} = 2.89$ ; this study:  $M_{responsibility} = 3.15$ ,  $M_{guilt} = 3.66$ ,  $M_{apology} = 3.82$  (both studies used 7-point Likert scales)

of guilt as a predictor for an apology but causality can only be assumed, not determined (Dunlop et al., 2015; Howell et al., 2012; McGarty et al., 2005).

Nonetheless, our findings suggest that guilt and responsibility, as seemingly negative emotional responses to the behavior of others, can have positive practical implications. To activate those, we should focus on making men more aware of their responsibility for the abuses of the past that happened to women due to their subordinate position in society. Spreading awareness of their responsibility on behalf of their ingroup may make them more willing to apologize. Blatz and Philpot (2010) state that an apology serves as a "small but important part of a program of atonement for an intergroup harm" if carried out under appropriate circumstances. It seems plausible that a prerequisite for an accepted apology or even forgiveness from the victim group is that the sexual misconduct of the perpetrator group must be discontinued. Nonetheless, a note to remain cautious is that group-based responsibility and apology do not serve as universal solutions to inequalities between groups but instead serve as a beneficial tool that contributes positively to regaining gender equality and intergroup harmony.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

This study has some potential limitations that may affect the results. First of all, due to the correlational research design used, it is beyond the scope of the study to imply causality. Secondly, the sample is stratified with a high regional diversity across the United States of America and a high age range. Still, it is a convenience sample of people who signed up on Prolific and can therefore not be generalized to the global male population. Further, there may be biases caused by the study being executed on Monday morning from 8:42 am to 11:03 am, leading to a sample consisting of a high rate of nonworkers, students, or shift workers. Considering that the individuals could choose between different Prolific studies and ended up choosing our study may indicate a particular interest or personal experience, which entails a



possible selection bias within the participant pool. Another vulnerability of the sample is an extrinsic motivation for financial compensation, which might make participants rush through the questionnaire and not respond conscientiously. We attempted to prevent biased results by excluding participants who had insufficient reading time for the stories, and we included attention checks; nonetheless, a residual risk remains.

In replicating this study, we suggest using an experimental design to imply causal relationships. A future study could manipulate perceived responsibility to examine whether it increases the likelihood of guilt and an apology.

Moreover, an attractive pathway for future research is to focus more on the intergroup feeling of regret in this context, seeing that regret has rarely been studied. Imhoff et al. (2012) discuss that regret has different antecedents and consequences than guilt but increases taking the victim's perspective, feeling warm and empathic towards the victim, and increasing openness to engage in intergroup contact. Interestingly, Imhoff et al. (2012) also found guilt to be related to anticipated distress in case of meeting a member of the victim group, whereas regret is closer connected to positive intergroup approaches and attitudes. Therefore, conducting more research on regret is a promising focus for future research projects.

Another potential approach is to conduct in-depth research on the origins of group-based responsibility. Gaining insights on how feelings of responsibility arise in perpetrator group members can benefit in activating apology intentions. Understanding how to provoke feelings of responsibility in a perpetrator group might be an extremely useful medium in intergroup reconciliation.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, the perception of responsibility for other men's sexual misdeeds is positively associated with the willingness to apologize to women, and this may be partly the result of increased feelings of group-based guilt. As Anthony Marais said, sexual misconduct

is not only a problem of an individual or the female gender group. Sexual misconduct and the resulting frustration and wrath of women are global problems that need to be tackled collectively. Mitigating intergroup wrath and tensions can only be solved by the absence of harmful behavior towards women and by men adopting a consistent and shared responsibility for their gender group. Then, maybe over time, humanity can reap the fruits of forgiveness that were sown by the seed of apology. More research needs to be conducted to determine how to bridge this gap between men and women sustainably.

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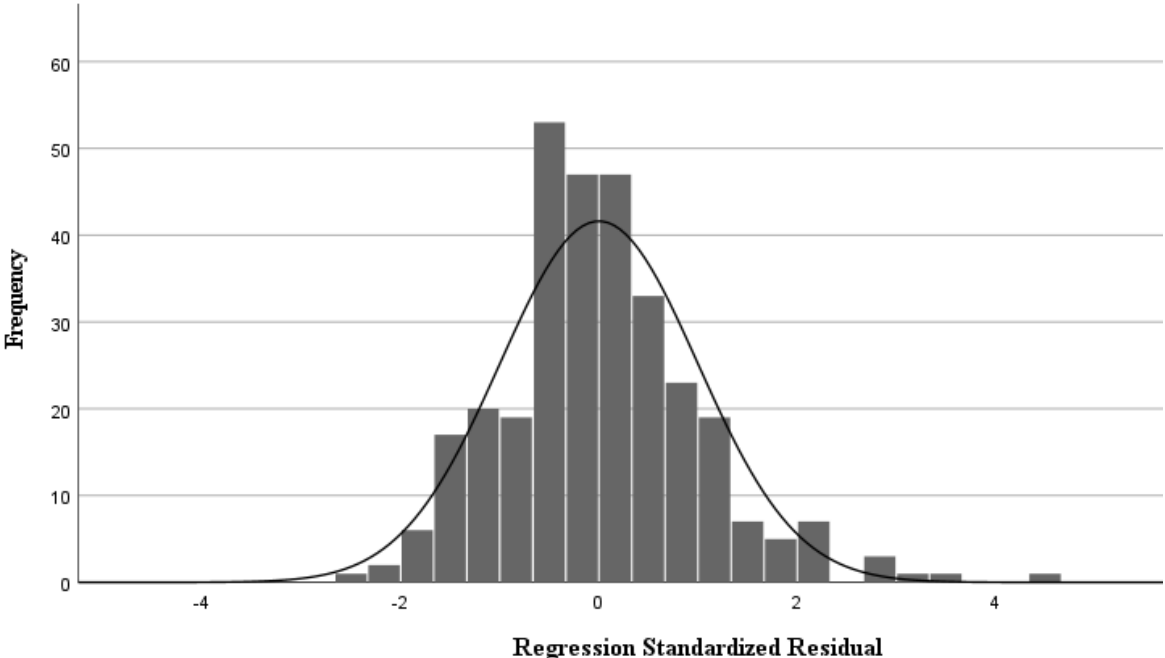
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**Appendix A - Assumptions**

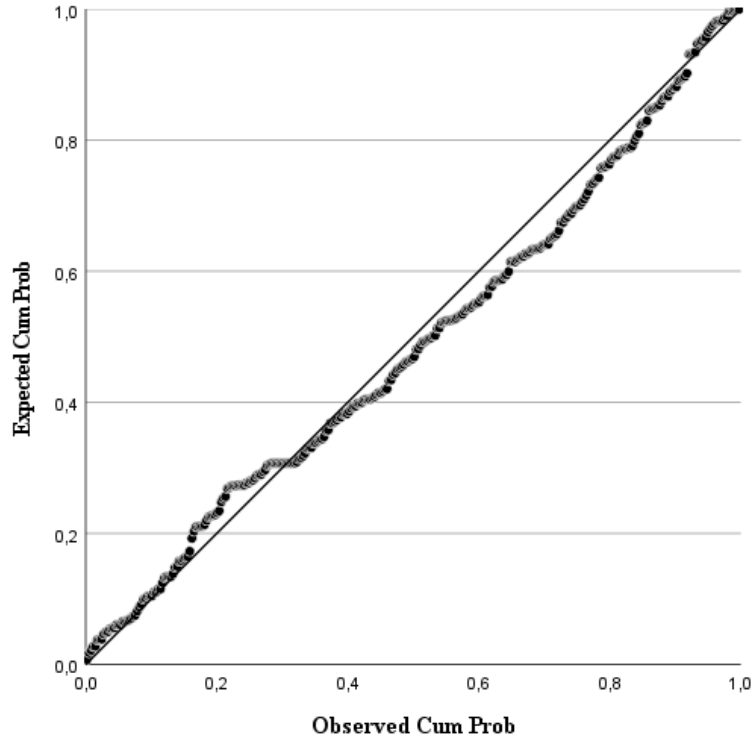
**Figure 2**

*Histogram of Standardized Residuals Indicating a Normal Distribution*



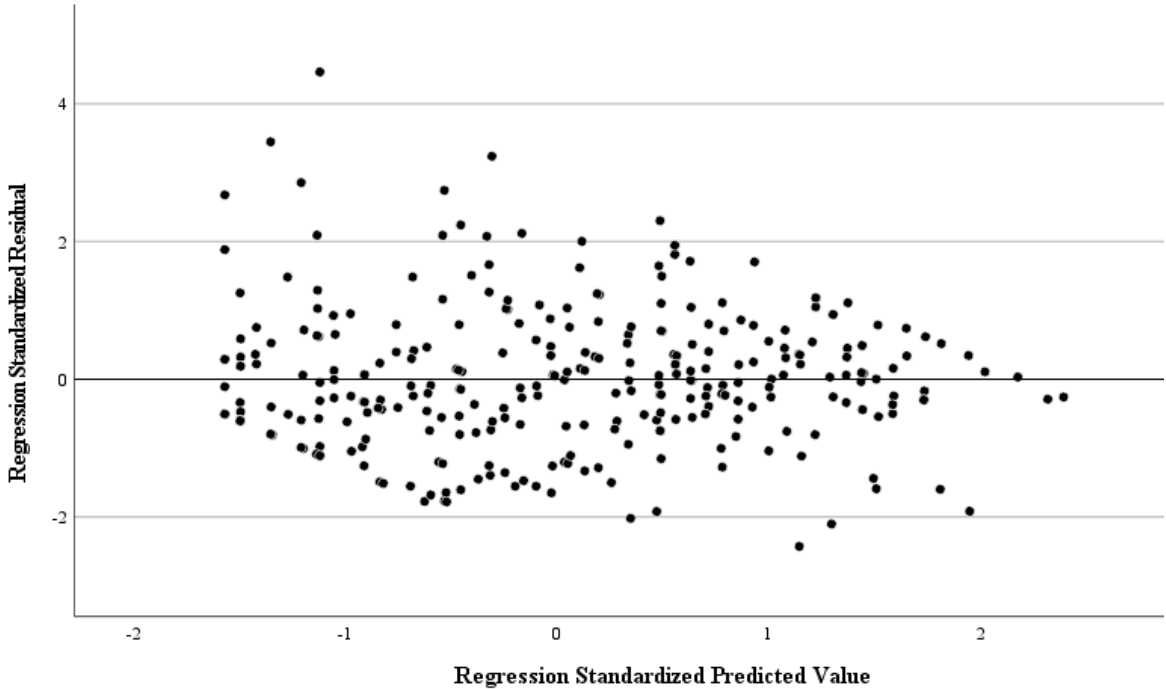
**Figure 3**

*P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residuals (Observed Values vs. Predicted Values)*



**Figure 4**

*Scatterplot of Standardized Residuals and Predicted Values*





## **Appendix B – Survey**

### **“Men’s views of sexual harassment towards women“**

PSB3-BT\_2122-1a-14

#### **Information about the research**

##### **Why am I receiving this information?**

- You are being invited to participate in this research because we are interested in how you, as a man, respond to sexual harassment of women.
- The start date of the research is 16 September 2021 and the end date of the research will be 7 February 2022.

##### **Do I have to participate in this research?**

- Participation in the research is voluntary. However, your consent is needed. Therefore, please read this information carefully. If you decide not to participate, you do not need to explain why, and there will be no negative consequences for you. You have this right at all times, including after you have consented to participate in the research. If there are any questions, do not hesitate to ask.

##### **What do we ask of you during the research?**

- First, we will ask you for your consent to participate.
- When you agree to participate, you will first answer some demographic questions. After that, you will be asked questions regarding your gender identity and your perception of the relations between men and women. Next, a few short stories will be presented to you, where women report their experiences, and you will be asked to share your reactions. After completing the questionnaire, you will receive more information about this research.
- The questionnaire will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.
- You will receive compensation for your participation.

##### **What are the consequences of participation?**

- With our research, we hope to gain more understanding of how men respond to sexual harassment of women. Thus, with your participation, you will contribute to this research. Your participation will also support students with their Bachelor’s thesis.
- We believe there are little to no risks associated with participating in this study. However, it is possible that you may find some questions difficult to answer or would

prefer not to answer them. Please remember that you may always withdraw from the study, which does not have any negative consequences for you.

**How will we treat your data?**

- Your data will be used to write a Bachelor's thesis and a scientific paper.
- Your data is confidential. While no personal data is collected, some information may act as identifiers when combined (i.e., gender, age-range). Only the researchers of this study will have access to it. The data consists of your responses to the questions which will be collected using an online questionnaire. We collect this data for scientific purposes. If the data is published as part of a scientific paper, we will anonymize information that could be used to identify individual participants.
- When the study is finished, the data will be stored on a safe University of Groningen server.
- We will process your Prolific id to be able to pay you for participation. We will remove the Prolific id from the data as soon as all participants have been compensated at the end of the study.

**What else do you need to know?**

- You may always ask questions about the research: now, during the research, and after the end of the research. You can do so by sending an email to [sexistmisbehaviorstudy@gmail.com](mailto:sexistmisbehaviorstudy@gmail.com).
- Do you have questions/concerns about your rights as a research participant or about the conduct of the research? You may also contact the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences of the University of Groningen: [ec-bss@rug.nl](mailto:ec-bss@rug.nl).
- Do you have questions or concerns regarding the handling of your personal data? You may also contact the University of Groningen Data Protection Officer: [privacy@rug.nl](mailto:privacy@rug.nl).

As a research participant, you have the right to receive a copy of this *research information*.

Click the arrow below to proceed.

---

**Informed consent & consent for participating**

“Men’s views of sexual harassment towards women”

In this research we want to study how men perceive sexual harassment towards women. We will first ask for your consent to participate in this research. If you agree to participate in our study, you will automatically be redirected to the questionnaire. The questionnaire will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

This research is carried out by a group of four bachelor students at the University of Groningen in The Netherlands under the supervision of their professor, and meets the ethical guidelines of the University of Groningen. We believe there are little to no risks associated with participating in this study. By agreeing to participate in this study you understand the following:

1. I have the right to receive a copy of this informed consent form by taking a screenshot of this page or asking the researcher for a copy (send an email to [sexistmisconductstudy@gmail.com](mailto:sexistmisconductstudy@gmail.com)).
2. My participation is voluntary, and I can withdraw from this study at any moment without having to give a reason and without any negative consequences.
3. I am allowed to refuse to answer or skip any questions that I do not wish to answer. I do not have to provide any reason for this, and this does not have any negative consequences.
4. My responses are confidential and will not be shared with anyone besides the research team.
5. All my responses will be securely stored and are only accessible to the researchers.
6. After completing the questionnaire, I will receive more information on the purpose of this research.

Do you agree to participate in this study? If you don’t want to participate, click no and you will leave the questionnaire.

- Yes, I want to participate
  - No
-







**Instructions (high empathy condition)****How do they feel?**

We will now present you some stories where women share their experiences. These stories are taken from Youtube. In these stories Mary, Charlotte, Olivia and Lucy describe their experiences with sexual harassment. Please read the stories carefully since upcoming questions will be based on them.

*While reading the stories, try to imagine how these women might feel and how their experiences have affected their life. Try to feel the full impact of what these women have been through.*

You can now start reading.

---

**Story 1****Mary, 33 - "He said: 'I know your kind, you're a little cockteaser aren't you?'"**

"We danced with some younger men we didn't know, as one does, and one came back to the table and sat down. We were chatting, probably flirting a little bit, but all of a sudden he started groping me under the table. Horrified, I shoved his hand away. I don't know exactly how I responded, but I was sure it was something really placating because this is how I had learned to handle these kinds of situations. After that, an angry expression came over his face and he leaned in and hissed at me "I know your kind, you're a little cock-teaser aren't you".

---

**Story 2**

**Charlotte, 26 - "I was telling him to stop, but he was just laughing and thought it was funny and kept doing it."**



"He started inching towards me and cornering me up against the bar. At first I was nervously laughing because I didn't know what else to do and he was just coming towards me. But then he started putting his hand up my dress and sliding it up my body even further and getting into my underwear. That was the moment I said: "No stop, seriously stop!". His

response was just laughter, thought it was funny and kept doing it. I just never told anybody about it."

---

**Story 3**

**Olivia, 45 - "At work the barman used to grab my ass during work with no reason."**



"I used to be a busser in a restaurant and we had a bunch of other workers in the kitchen. They always walk by and just grab your ass. I don't know why but it was like 'oh well' and you just kept on working. It was just something you didn't really pay attention to. I didn't think it was okay. It was very awkward, but you

just work and you need the money and the money was good."

---

**Story 4**

**Lucy, 67 - "I could pass through life without being harassed everywhere I went."**



"I went to the bathroom and when I came back I started wending my way through a lot of small tables very closely jam-packed together. I got 2/3 of the way through the restaurant when I realized not a single man there had glanced at me. At first there was a shock that I was no longer worthy of a glance and then

I had a huge wash of relief coming over me, that I could pass through life without being harassed everywhere I went. The only thing that slowed this barrage down was getting older and heavier. My story is not the tragedy here, the tragedy is that my story is completely



unremarkable. It is average. It is a story of every woman every day. All women have experienced some form of sexual harassment in their lives. Don't tell me that is okay."

---

### **Instructions (low empathy condition)**

#### **Form an objective impression**

We will now present you some stories where women share their experiences. These stories are taken from Youtube. In these stories Mary, Charlotte, Olivia and Lucy describe their experiences with sexual harassment. Please read the stories carefully since upcoming questions will be based on them.

*While reading the stories, try to keep an objective perspective towards what is described.*

You can now start reading.

---

#### **Story 1**

**Mary, 33 - "He said: 'I know your kind, you're a little cockteaser aren't you?'"**



"We danced with some younger men we didn't know, as one does, and one came back to the table and sat down. We were chatting, probably flirting a little bit, but all of a sudden he started groping me under the table. Horrified, I shoved his hand away. I don't know exactly how I responded, but I was sure it was something really placating because this is how I had learned to handle these kinds of situations. After that, an angry expression came over his face and he leaned in and hissed at me "I know your kind, you're a little cock-teaser aren't you".

---

**Story 2**

**Charlotte, 26 - “I was telling him to stop, but he was just laughing and thought it was funny and kept doing it.”**



“He started inching towards me and cornering me up against the bar. At first I was nervously laughing because I didn’t know what else to do and he was just coming towards me. But then he started putting his hand up my dress and sliding it up my body even further and getting into my underwear. That was the moment I said: “No stop, seriously stop!”. His

response was just laughter, thought it was funny and kept doing it. I just never told anybody about it.”

---

**Story 3**

**Olivia, 45 - “At work the barman used to grab my ass during work with no reason.”**



“I used to be a busser in a restaurant and we had a bunch of other workers in the kitchen. They always walk by and just grab your ass. I don’t know why but it was like ‘oh well’ and you just kept on working. It was just something you didn’t really pay attention to. I didn’t think it was okay. It was very awkward, but you

just work and you need the money and the money was good.”

---

**Story 4**

**Lucy, 67 - “I could pass through life without being harassed everywhere I went.”**



“I went to the bathroom and when I came back I started wending my way through a lot of small tables very closely jam-packed together. I got 2/3 of the way through the restaurant when I realized not a single man there had glanced at me. At first there was a shock that I was no longer worthy of a glance and then I had a huge wash of relief coming over me, that

I could pass through life without being harassed everywhere I went. The only thing that





**Group-based guilt**

Based on the stories you have just read, please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements (1 = *not at all*; 7 = *very much*)?

	Not at all 1	2	3	4	5	6	Very much 7
I feel guilty about these kinds of negative things some men have been doing to women	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that I should repair the damage caused to women by some men	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I easily feel guilty for the bad effect on a woman's life brought about by the bad behaviour of some men	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel blameless when I am confronted with these kinds of negative things some men have done to women	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

---













sexual  
misconduct  
towards women

I am ready to  
take on  
responsibility for  
the  
misbehaviour of  
some men  
towards women

**Empathy check**

Now we would like to ask you some questions about the stories you have just read. Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements (1 = *not at all*; 7 = *very much*).

	Not at all 1	2	3	4	5	6	Very much 7
While reading the article, to what extent did you focus on being objective?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
While reading the article, to what extent did you focus on the feelings of the women who told their stories?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Do you have any comments about the study? You can write them down below.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Debriefing**

**Thank you for your participation in this study!**

Please read the following information about this study very carefully. This is important to properly save your responses.

**What was the aim of our study?**

We are especially interested in how empathy with woman who experienced sexual harassment might be related to how men think and feel about this.

The sexual harassment experiences as portrayed in the short stories refer to real experiences of real women. These women were interviewed in the course of the #MeToo movement. The stories were based on three videos that were publicly shared on Youtube. The women on the screenshots do not in all cases match with the women who told the stories in the videos. Name and age of each woman were invented to add credibility. For the sake of better readability, parts of the spoken word have been simplified.

Please note that the examples that are given did occur in reality and are not one off cases. Sexual harassment, sexist comments, inappropriate touching, sexual assault and other sexual offences do happen regularly around the globe.

We hope by studying this issue that we can find ways to improve the situation.

If this study resulted in any negative feelings and thoughts about your own experiences and you would like to talk about it, you can call the free and confidential National Sexual Assault Hotline on 800-656-HOPE or reach out via chat on [www.rainn.org](http://www.rainn.org). We are aware that not only women suffer from sexual harassment. For male victims of sexual assault an online chat with an advocate is available via [www.lin6.org](http://www.lin6.org).

**Finally**

We would like to thank you again for your participation. It is very meaningful for us and possibly helps to add new findings in the research field of intergroup relations.

Also, we ask you kindly not to share the actual purpose of the study with others who might also participate. This could affect the results.

If you are interested in the results of this research, feel free to send an email to [sexistmisconductstudy@gmail.com](mailto:sexistmisconductstudy@gmail.com).

Please click on the arrow below to complete and submit the questionnaire.