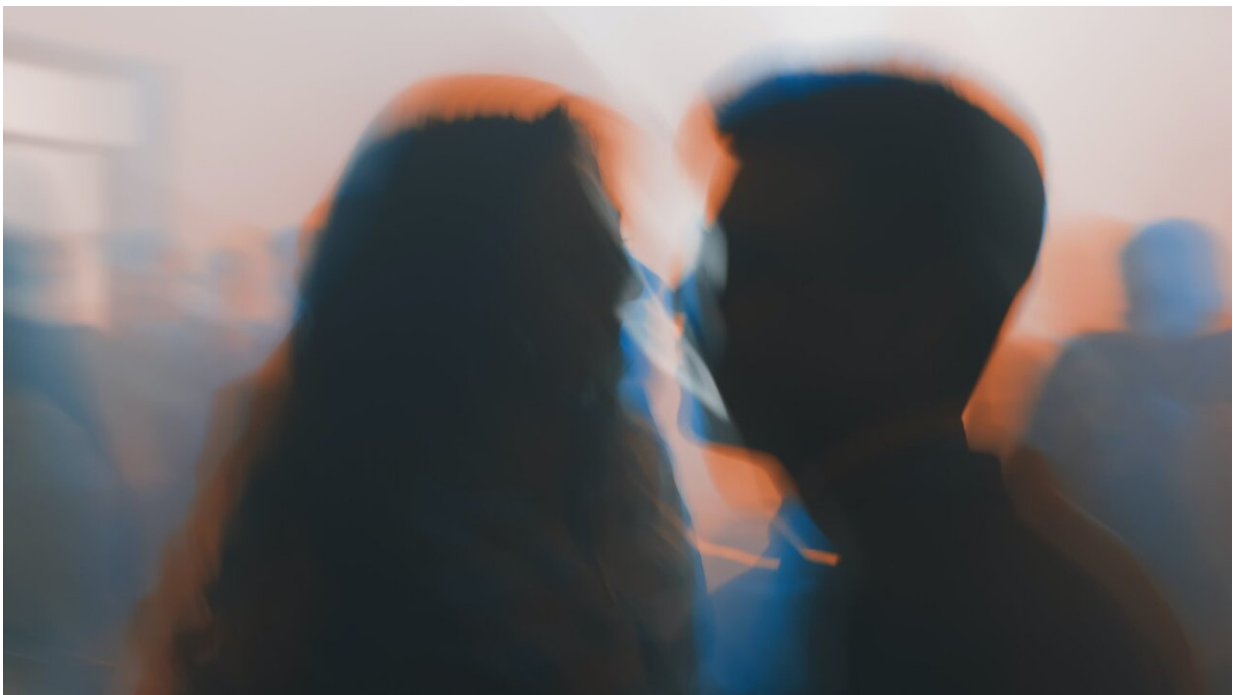


# New research shows the prevalence of 'himpathy' towards perpetrators of workplace sexual harassment

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Managers spend much of their time managing conflict and struggle to know how to respond when a "he said, she said" workplace dispute occurs. However, a new study shows how employees' intuitive moral values might give rise to feelings of sympathy toward alleged

perpetrators and anger toward their accusing victims. The research, published in *Organization Science*, also offers novel insights into what enables perpetrators to go unpunished and why their victims experience backlash for coming forward.

The research team (which included Samantha Dodson, postdoctoral research fellow at the University of British Columbia; Rachel Goodwin, assistant professor of management at Syracuse University; and Kristina Diekmann and Jesse Graham, professors from the University of Utah) focused on recent well-publicized cases of sexual harassment.

"We show that third parties—or people like you and me who watched the #MeToo Movement happen—evaluate victims and perpetrators based on their [moral values](#)," said Goodwin. "These moral concerns can bias our [emotional responses](#), credibility judgments, and motivations to resolve injustice either in favor of the accused or the accuser. For example, we found that people who highly endorse values such as deference to authority, in-group loyalty, and purity tend to be more likely to support the [perpetrator](#) rather than the victim."

Workplace sexual [misconduct](#) perpetuates costly gender inequality at work and in society. Efforts to encourage reporting of gender-based discrimination (e.g., sexual misconduct) at work have increased; however, victims who report sexual misconduct in organizations often face significant sanctions for doing so. Women who make sexual misconduct complaints often experience organizational and third-party retaliation for reporting misconduct (involuntary transfer, poor performance appraisals, job loss, ostracism), which can take a severe toll on their well-being.

In contrast, men accused of engaging in sexual misconduct rarely experience transfers or terminations, and are less likely to be terminated or resign than their victims. Further, termination of those accused of

sexual misconduct may not prevent perpetrators from gaining power in other organizations. Although there are recent high-profile cases in the media of men accused of [sexual misconduct](#) facing significant penalties, suggesting that organizational responses to sexual harassment allegations have changed following the #MeToo Movement, most of the accused escaped repercussions altogether or recovered from this career setback within a few short years.

This new research explains one reason this may be happening by showing that some people—including [managers](#)—may be morally biased against sexual harassment victims and in favor of accused perpetrators. The work was inspired by women like Christine Blasey-Ford, who publicly came forward with #MeToo accusations, despite the "himpathetic" individuals they were likely to encounter.

**More information:** Samantha J. Dodson et al, Moral Foundations, Himpathy, and Punishment Following Organizational Sexual Misconduct Allegations, *Organization Science* (2023). [DOI: 10.1287/orsc.2022.1652](https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2022.1652)

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