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## Sexism, rape myths and feminist identification explain gender differences in attitudes toward the #metoo social media campaign in two countries

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### ABSTRACT

On October 15, 2017, actress Alyssa Milano popularized the #metoo campaign, which sought to expose the prevalence of sexual harassment and assault in public domains by encouraging victims to share their experiences on social media using the hashtag *metoo*. The online campaign rapidly grew to a global phenomenon, which was generally well supported. However, some criticized the campaign online as a *battle of the sexes*, which pits men against women. Our cross-cultural research investigated whether gender differences in attitudes and feelings toward #metoo are due to underlying differences in ideologies and experiences that only partly overlap with gender. We surveyed respondents in the United States, where the campaign began, and in Norway, a highly gender-egalitarian country. In both countries, men expressed less positivity toward #metoo than women and perceived it as substantially more harmful and less beneficial. These gender differences were largely accounted for by men being higher than women in hostile sexism, higher in rape myth acceptance, and lower in feminist identification. The results, hence, suggest that gender differences in attitudes to social media campaigns such as #metoo might be best characterized as dimensional ideological differences rather than fundamental group differences.

In 2006, civil rights activist Tarana Burke introduced the phrase “me too” to raise awareness about the widespread nature of sexual harassment and assault (Ohlheiser, 2017). Over a decade later on October 15, 2017, American actress Alyssa Milano encouraged women who had experienced sexual harassment or assault in public domains to share their stories on social media by posting the term as a hashtag (i.e., #metoo). Milano’s suggestion sparked a global movement, and within a day 85 million people had shared the hashtag in an effort to expose the prevalence of sexual harassment and assault (CBS, 2017).

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Although the social media campaign was generally well received, some criticized it. For instance, filmmaker Michael Haneke called the campaign a “witch hunt” (T. Wright, 2018), and Texas attorney general aide Andrew Leonie asked, “Aren’t you also tired of all the pathetic ‘me too’ victim claims?” (Astor, 2017). These negative statements by men might reflect gender differences in reactions to the campaign. In general, men tend to be more tolerant of sexual harassment than women (Russell & Trigg, 2004). Indeed, a recent YouGov poll showed that even in Norway, one of the most gender egalitarian countries in the world (UNDP, 2016; World Economic Forum, 2016), more men than women believed that the campaign had gone too far and would have no positive effect (Keldsen, 2018). Possibly because of these more negative reactions by men, some characterized #metoo as a “battle of the sexes,” which pits women against men (Fallon, 2018). Note that in this article, we use the term *gender* to refer to individuals’ self-identified group membership, which often, but not always, overlaps with their biological sex.

Men might oppose the campaign more than women due to group-level processes. For instance, men and women might have an evolved tendency to perceive social interactions between the sexes in inherently different ways (Geary, 1998; Tannen, 1990). Thus, the same encounters might be judged by women as sexual harassment, but by men as harmless flirtation. Even when men and women judge the same encounter similarly, men might be incentivized to oppose the #metoo campaign due to in-group favoritism and a motivation to support other men (Tajfel, 1982). These explanations for gender differences in reactions to #metoo thus emphasize intergroup variability and intragroup consistency.

In contrast to group-based perspectives that treat men and women as fundamentally distinct and motivated by in-group favoritism, there stands a more dimensional perspective on gender differences (Reis & Carothers, 2014; Wood & Eagly, 2012). In this view, men and women’s attitudes toward #metoo might be explained largely by individual differences in ideological or experiential dimensions that only partially align with gender. Suggestive of this possibility, many individual men expressed support for #metoo (Vagianos, 2017), and some individual women harshly criticized the campaign (BBC, 2018).

In our research, we examined gender differences in attitudes and feelings toward #metoo, arguably one of the most far-reaching and consequential social media campaigns to date. Insofar that men and women differentially support the #metoo campaign, we tested whether these gender differences could be explained by ideologies (hostile sexism, benevolent sexism, feminist identity, rape myth acceptance, and belief in a just world) and experiences (victim or perpetrator experiences, pornography consumption) that only partially align with gender. To establish the cross-cultural generalizability

of these findings, we compared the United States and Norway, which are two countries differing in gender equality.

### ***Men and women differ in ideologies related to sexual misconduct***

Men and women differ substantially in their attitudes toward the social issues that are at the core of the #metoo campaign. Most centrally, men, compared to women, demonstrate greater tolerance of sexual harassment, are more positive toward sexual assault, and are more likely to blame rape victims for their assault (Anderson, Cooper, & Okamura, 1997; Payne, Lonsway, & Fitzgerald, 1999; Rotundo, Nguyen, & Sackett, 2001; Russell & Trigg, 2004; Sakallı-Uğurlu, Yalçın, & Glick, 2007; van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014). Importantly, these gender differences are often due to differences in underlying ideologies and experiences.

First, gender differences in sexist attitudes toward women might explain men and women's differential responses to the #metoo campaign. Classic and enduring work by Glick and Fiske (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Lee, Fiske, & Glick, 2010) identifies one form of sexism, *hostile sexism*, as involving blatantly misogynic stereotypes and attitudes toward women that construe women as sexually manipulative and inferior. Hostile sexism thus coheres with initial definitions of prejudice as antipathy (e.g., Allport, 1954), and can serve to justify men's exploitation of women as sexual objects. Indeed, men are typically higher in hostile sexism than women (Glick et al., 2000), and hostile sexism is associated with a greater tolerance of sexual harassment, increased moral disengagement from sexual harassment, and even a higher proclivity to commit sexual assault (Abrams, Viki, Masser, & Bohner, 2003; Masser, Viki, & Power, 2006; Page, Pina, & Giner-Sorolla, 2016; Russell & Trigg, 2004).

Glick and Fiske (1996) further introduced another form of sexism, termed *benevolent sexism*, which involves an apparently positive, yet patronizing, stance toward women (i.e., that women need to be cherished and protected). Likely due to this positivity, women and men seem to endorse benevolent sexism to a similar degree (Glick et al., 2000), and in more recent work benevolent sexism predicted more nuanced attitudes toward sexual misconduct. Specifically, benevolent sexism predicted both opposition to, and support of, gender equality (Hideg & Ferris, 2016; Sibley & Perry, 2010) and attitudes surrounding sexual harassment and assault (Abrams et al., 2003; Masser, Lee, & McKimmie, 2010; Russell & Trigg, 2004). One reason for the nuanced influence of benevolent sexism is that it is not directed at women, per se. Often, it elicits the paternalistic protection of traditional women (e.g., housewives), but hostility toward nontraditional women (e.g., scientists, promiscuous women; Bareket, Kahalon, Shnabel, & Glick, 2018; Fowers & Fowers, 2010; Sakallı-Uğurlu, 2010).

Furthermore, in addition to general sexism, men and women differ in their support of specific ideologies related to sexual misconduct. Men tend to accept rape myths more than women (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). Rape myths involve various beliefs, including blaming rape victims for their assault, absolving the perpetrator of blame, and downplaying rape's serious adverse consequences for the victim (Payne et al., 1999). Importantly, the more individuals endorse rape myths, the more they accept rape and interpersonal violence and show a greater proclivity for sexual aggression and coercion (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). Because men endorse rape myths more than women do, men might be more likely than women to relativize and downplay the experiences of individuals posting the hashtag #metoo, and to place the blame on victims instead of perpetrators.

Moreover, men being lower than women in feminist identification might explain gender differences in attitudes toward #metoo. Politicized social identifications, such as feminist identification, are particularly strong predictors of collective action (van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008). Previous research has shown that feminist identity, indeed, is associated with greater engagement in gender-related collective action (Nelson et al., 2008; Yoder, Tobias, & Snell, 2011) and predicts willingness to confront sexism, sexual harassment, and other misogynistic issues (Ayres, Friedman, & Leaper, 2009; Myaskovsky & Wittig, 1997). Individuals who identify as feminists likely also see the #metoo campaign as beneficial because its goal is to achieve social change by highlighting that sexual harassment and assault are still common phenomena that need to be addressed. However, because men are substantially less likely to identify as feminists than women (McCabe, 2005), it follows that men might be less invested in the #metoo campaign and perceive it as less beneficial.

Last, we propose that beliefs in a just world (BJW) might explain gender differences in reactions to #metoo. People high in BJW generally are convinced that the world is a just place where bad things happen to bad people and good things happen to good people (Dalbert, 1999; Lerner, 1980). Thus, people high in BJW might defensively slander rape victims and twist their character so that the victims' fates seem deserved. Indeed, BJW is related to less positivity toward rape victims, support of more lenient sentences for rapists and more victim blaming, thus placing less blame on the perpetrator (Kleinke & Meyer, 1990; Sakallı-Uğurlu et al., 2007; Strömwall, Alfredsson, & Landström, 2013). Accordingly, because people high in BJW likely believe that victims who draw attention to their experiences through the #metoo campaign are in some way blameworthy, they might see the campaign as being less beneficial and more harmful. However, evidence has been mixed in terms of gender differences in BJW (e.g., Sakallı-Uğurlu et al., 2007; Whatley, 1993), suggesting that the construct might play less of a role in explaining gender differences in attitudes toward #metoo.

### ***Men and women differ in experiences related to sexual misconduct***

In addition to differing in ideologies relevant to #metoo, men and women also tend to differ in experiences related to sexual harassment and assault. Women are 10 times more likely than men to become victims of sexual violence (NSVRC, 2015). Although many victims of sexual abuse do not acknowledge that what happened to them was rape, those who do tend to show less tolerance and more negative attitudes toward rape and tend to engage in less victim blaming (Anderson et al., 1997; Miller, Amacker, & King, 2011). Thus, women might be more positive toward #metoo because they are more often victims of sexual misconduct.

Although women are far more likely to become victims of sexual violence, perpetrators are almost exclusively men (Sedgwick, 2006). Experience as a perpetrator has been linked to more positive attitudes toward rape (Anderson et al., 1997). Thus, men's greater perpetrator experiences might explain gender differences in attitudes toward #metoo.

Finally, experiences with pornographic media might influence attitudes toward sexual misconduct. Pornography has a broad range of themes, and some content is even designed to be empowering to women (Fritz & Paul, 2017). Yet, exposure to certain pornography might encourage detrimental attitudes toward women and foster a belief that women ultimately endorse sexual violence. The consumption of mainstream pornography, and pornography involving rape or other scenes of violence specifically, is related to increased sexual aggression, a greater proclivity to make unwanted sexual advances, greater bystander passivity, and a higher likelihood to commit sexual assault (Allen, Emmers, Gebhardt, & Giery, 1995; Foubert, Brosi, & Bannon, 2011; P. J. Wright, Tokunaga, & Kraus, 2016). Men's tendency to consume more pornographic material than women (Hald, 2006) might thus account for gender differences in attitudes toward #metoo.

### ***The contexts of comparison***

Due to the proliferation of the #metoo hashtag on social media worldwide, an important aspect of the #metoo campaign is its global dimension. Different cultural contexts have differing levels of gender equality, which could shape culturally-contingent reactions to #metoo. Thus, it is important to consider such cultural variation to establish the generalizability of potential findings. The #metoo campaign originated in the United States, a relatively gender egalitarian nation. People in the United States score lower in hostile and benevolent sexism, compared to those from countries like South Korea and Cuba (Glick et al., 2000). Yet, the United States is less gender egalitarian than countries such as Norway. People in Norway score even lower in hostile and benevolent sexism than in the United States. Although the United States and Norway are quite

similar on cultural dimensions such as power distance, individualism, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, and indulgence, masculinity is much higher in the United States, which reflects the presence of more traditional gender roles (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). Indeed, the World Economic Forum (2016) recently ranked Norway as the third most gender-egalitarian country in the World; the United States was placed at 45 out of 144.

These cross-cultural differences in gender egalitarianism between the United States and Norway likely have socio-historical roots. For instance, although women in Norway were granted the right to vote and run for election in 1907, it was another 13 years before women in the United States obtained these rights in 1920. Most importantly, differences between the countries are also evident in the current socio-political contexts. Norway has had female prime ministers for four terms, but a woman has yet to serve as head of state in the United States. Nearly half (40%) of the lawmaking body in Norway is composed of women, compared to 19% of the US Congress (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2017). Women's political participation in Norway has impacted policies relevant to issues of gender inequality, specifically improving childcare (Bratton & Ray, 2002). Country differences in gender inequality are also reflected in terms of sexual violence. In 2014 (i.e., the latest data available for both countries), Norway had a prevalence of 21.9 and the United States of 37.0 rape incidents per 100,000 population (UNODC, 2017).

Importantly, the #metoo campaign made a similar impact in both countries, exposing sexual harassment and assault in various domains. Several public figures in both countries suffered professional repercussions due to allegations of sexual misconduct. For instance, in the United States, comedian Louis C.K.'s film, *I Love You, Daddy* was pulled from distribution; television anchor Matt Lauer was fired by the National Broadcasting Company; and Democrat senator Al Franken resigned from political office. In Norway, Trond Giske, deputy leader of the Norwegian Labor Party, Kristian Tonning Riise, leader of the Norwegian Young Conservatives, Ulf Leirstein, deputy leader of the Progress Party's parliamentary group, and Davy Wathne, sports journalist and anchor at the largest Norwegian TV-channel NRK, resigned from their positions in response to allegations of sexual harassment. Hence, the United States and Norway provide an interesting comparative context as the #metoo campaign had a strong impact in both cultures yet they differ in their degree of gender egalitarianism.

### ***This research***

Although social media campaigns have a unique potential to achieve social change, their inherent value is often perceived differentially by social groups. Yet, very little knowledge exists about the factors explaining why some groups show positivity toward specific social media campaigns and perceive



them as beneficial but others perceive them as harmful. Here, we believe that psychological research has the potential to provide critical insights. Focusing on the #metoo campaign, we investigated the factors underlying men and women's differential attitudes and feelings toward #metoo. A group-based perspective would frame #metoo as a *battle of the sexes* and argue that men and women are distinct types who react differently to #metoo due to fundamental group processes (e.g., Geary, 1998). By contrast, dimensional perspectives would emphasize that mean gender differences reflect women and men's relative positions on underlying dimensions that only partially align with gender (Reis & Carothers, 2014; Wood & Eagly, 2012). We propose that ideological differences in sexism, rape myths, feminism, and BJW, along with differences in experiences with pornography, sexual harassment and assault might explain gender differences in attitudes toward #metoo. Thus, we hypothesize that gender differences in attitudes toward #metoo will be mediated by ideological and experiential differences.

## Materials and methods

Supplementary online materials (SOM) for this article can be found at [https://osf.io/5p7fh/?view\\_only=ca95b9ecfa1f47d39bc33ba93341ea2c](https://osf.io/5p7fh/?view_only=ca95b9ecfa1f47d39bc33ba93341ea2c).<sup>1</sup>

## Participants

A power simulation for structural equation modeling using the *semTools* package (Jorgensen, Pornprasertmanit, Schoemann, & Rosseel, 2018) in R suggested that 203 participants would provide a 90% chance to fit a moderately complex model ( $df = 40$ ) with a hypothesized root mean square of approximation (RMSEA) = .05 (i.e., a satisfactory fit), and an alternative RMSEA = .10 (i.e., an unsatisfactory fit). This number of participants also exceeded the number of participants necessary ( $N = 172$ ) to have 90% chance to observe medium ( $f = .25$ ) gender differences at a .05 significance criterion using analysis of variance.

## Norwegian sample

In total, 206 Norwegian participants ( $M_{age} = 30.78$ ,  $SD_{age} = 12.15$ ; gender: 52.4% women, 46.6% men, 1% other) were recruited through online social networks for a study on “online social media campaigns” in November 2017. As financial incentive, all participants could take part in the drawing of a gift voucher of 200 NOK (ca. \$25). Most participants (85.9%) reported that they knew about #metoo before taking the study. On average, participants reported having seen 17.90 #metoo hashtags ( $SD = 37.91$ ) on social media, after we removed one value (999) that emerged as a multivariate outlier (see SOM). Of all participants, 85.4% were native Norwegians and 14.6% had at



least one parent with an ethnic minority-group background; 86.9% reported living in cities and 13.1% in more rural areas. On average, participants had completed 3.96 years ( $SD = 2.76$ ) of higher education.

### US sample

Via the online panel Amazon Mechanical Turk, 227 participants ( $M_{age} = 35.31$ ,  $SD_{age} = 10.77$ ; gender: 48.2% women, 50.8% men, 1% other) were recruited in November 2017 for the study, which was described in the same way as it was to the Norwegian sample. Participants received \$1.50 for their participation. Similar to the Norwegian sample, most participants (74%) reported that they knew about #metoo before participating in the study. Participants reported having seen an average of 17.45 #metoo hashtags ( $SD = 20.06$ ) on social media, after we removed three values (500, 500, and 400) that emerged as multivariate outliers (see SOM). Of all participants, 83.7% were White/Caucasian, 5.7% African American, 5.3% Hispanic, 4.4% Asian, and less than one percentage indicated to have a Native American or another ethnic background; 79.7% reported living in cities and 20.3% in more rural areas. On average, participants had completed 7.69 years ( $SD = 6.08$ ) of higher education.

Group comparisons showed that the US sample did not differ from the Norwegian sample in terms of gender,  $\chi^2(1) = .62$ ,  $p = .431$ , place of living,  $\chi^2(1) = 3.45$ ,  $p = .063$ , and number of #metoo hashtags seen,  $t(246.45) = .12$ ,  $p = .903$ , but the US sample was slightly older,  $t(404.47) = 4.07$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = .39$ , more educated,  $t(322.96) = 8.26$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = .79$ , and had less prior knowledge about the campaign,  $\chi^2(1) = -9.35$ ,  $p = .002$ .

### Procedure

Participants completed an online questionnaire comprising the measures described in the following sections. At the end, they were debriefed and received contact details. All measures were forward-back translated from English into Norwegian by bilingual teams. The research was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the first author.

### Measures

Unless otherwise stated, responses were scored on 7-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 7 (*totally agree*). All predictor variables were presented in random order. Although often ignored in cross-cultural research, measurement invariance has to be established before groups can be validly compared (Chen, 2008). In the present study, we used multigroup structural equation modeling to identify versions of the measures that showed acceptable measurement invariance. Specifically, for each measure, we evaluated factor solutions both in terms of *configural* and *metric*

invariance. Configural invariance is achieved when the underlying factor structure is the same in both countries. Metric invariance is achieved when the factor loadings in addition are identical in both groups. Importantly, metric invariance must be established to make valid mean score comparisons. When describing the measures, we provide brief information about the measurement invariant versions that were used in analyses; detailed information about the underlying tests can be found in the SOM. Two measures that showed unacceptable measurement invariance or reliability (i.e., a measure of feminist ideology and a measure of intentions to behaviorally support the #metoo campaign) were excluded from analyses (see SOM for further details).

### *Predictor variables*

***Ambivalent sexism inventory.*** Participants completed the 22-items Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Eleven items measured hostile sexism (e.g., “Women seek to gain power by getting control over men”) and a further 11 measured benevolent sexism (e.g., “A good woman should be set on a pedestal by her man”). Translations of the scale into Norwegian were obtained from Gundersen and Kunst (2018). One item of the benevolent sexism dimension and four items of the hostile sexism dimension had to be omitted from the factor solution to achieve metric measurement invariance. The resulting 10-item benevolent sexism scale (Norway:  $\alpha = .80$ ; United States:  $\alpha = .91$ ) and the 7-item hostile sexism scale (Norway:  $\alpha = .91$ ; United States:  $\alpha = .94$ ) showed satisfactory reliability in both countries.

***Feminist identity.*** A feminist identity scale was adopted from Szymanski (2004). Participants indicated their agreement with four items such as “I consider myself a feminist.” The scale showed satisfactory metric measurement invariance and reliability in both countries. (Norway:  $\alpha = .91$ ; United States:  $\alpha = .93$ ).

***Rape myths.*** The 20-item short-form version of the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (Payne et al., 1999) was used to measure the extent to which participants endorsed various rape myths. Participants indicated their agreement with statements such as, “Although most women wouldn’t admit it, they generally find being physically forced into sex a real ‘turn-on.’” After deleting three items, acceptable metric measurement invariance and reliability was achieved (Norway:  $\alpha = .86$ ; United States:  $\alpha = .93$ ).

***BJW.*** The six-item scale developed by Dalbert (1999) was used to measure participants belief in a just world. Participants indicated their agreement with statements such as, “I think the world generally is just” and “I think people mostly get what they deserve.” The scale showed metric measurement

invariance and acceptable to satisfactory reliability (Norway:  $\alpha = .75$ ; United States:  $\alpha = .93$ ).

***Pornography use.*** Three items were adopted from Foubert et al. (2011) to measure exposure to different types of pornography. On binary scales (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*) participants were asked whether they had seen scenes during the last 12 months in videos, movies, magazines, books, or online that contained (a) “graphic sex acts (including penetration)” (i.e., mainstream pornography); (b) “sodomasochistic portrayals of bondage, whipping, and spanking but without an explicit lack of consent” (i.e., sadomasochistic pornography); and (c) “sexually explicit rape depictions in which force is used with explicit lack of consent” (i.e., rape pornography). Rather than capturing all experiences with pornography, these items focus on the specific types of pornography that have been linked to detrimental attitudes toward sexual harassment and assault (e.g., P. J. Wright et al., 2016).

***Experiences with sexual harassment and assault.*** Extending previous research, we used a broad measure of experiences with sexual misconduct. On separate binary scales (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*), participants were asked whether (a) they personally or any of their (b) acquaintances, (c) friends, (d), family members, or (e) romantic partners had experienced sexual harassment. The same questions were asked concerning sexual assault. We kept participants’ personal experiences separate but mean scored questions concerning acquaintances, friends, family members, and romantic partners to create a peer harassment experiences scale (Norway:  $\alpha = .74$ ; United States:  $\alpha = .85$ ) and a peer assault experiences scale (Norway:  $\alpha = .70$ ; United States:  $\alpha = .78$ ).

***Perpetrator experiences with harassment and assault.*** On binary scales (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*), we also asked participants whether they thought that any of their past behavior could be regarded as sexual harassment or rape using the following items: “In retrospect, do you think that any of your past behavior could be perceived as sexual harassment?” and “In retrospect, do you think that any of your past behavior could be perceived as sexual assault?”

### ***Outcome variables***

As we could not be certain that every participant knew about #metoo, the following short description was presented after participants had completed the variables presented previously and right before they completed the outcome variables presented in the following sections:

On October 15, the American actress Alyssa Milano posted a tweet, in which she encouraged women who had experienced sexual harassment or assault to go public and post “me too” on social media platforms. The goal was to draw attention to the extent of such behavior. Within 24 hours, 4.7 million people had shared the hashtag #metoo on Facebook, and the campaign continued to grow to a global phenomenon the following weeks.

**Feelings toward #metoo.** On a sliding-response scale (0 = *extremely negative* to 100 = *extremely positive*), participants rated how they felt toward the #metoo campaign.

**Perceived benefit of the #metoo campaign.** Participants were asked to indicate their agreement with four statements about the perceived benefit of #metoo, created based on a review of public responses to the campaign: “The campaign sheds light on an important challenge that society faces;” “The campaign is important because it gives victims of sexual assault a voice;” “The campaign gives a good and precise picture of how wide-spread sexual assaults actually are;” and “The campaign is important because it makes it easier for victims of sexual assault to out themselves.” Note that these statements did not refer to the gender of the victims, which avoided implying that the #metoo campaign dealt only with female victims. One additional item was not used due to a translation error (i.e., “The campaign focuses on a lack of culture that has been overlooked for long times”). The resulting four-item scale showed satisfactory metric measurement invariance and acceptable to satisfactory reliability (Norway:  $\alpha = .79$ ; United States:  $\alpha = .88$ ).

**Perceived harm of the #metoo campaign.** Participants completed items also created based on public responses to the campaign: “The campaign legitimizes false accusations;” “The campaign does more harm than good;” “The campaign wrongfully labels a lot of people as sexual assaulters;” and “The campaign creates an exaggerated vigilantism/witch hunt.” After deleting one additional item (i.e., “The campaign overdramatizes the actual number of sexual assaults”), the scale showed metric measurement invariance and acceptable to satisfactory reliability (Norway:  $\alpha = .77$ ; United States:  $\alpha = .80$ ).

## Analyses

Analyses were conducted in R version 3.4.1 and Mplus 7.2. Due to the low number of participants reporting *other* as gender, gender analyses were conducted with participants identifying as men and women only.

Results

Correlations between the outcome and ideological variables are displayed in Table 1, and correlations with demographic and experiential/behavioral variables in Table 2. A series of 2 (country: Norway, United States)  $\times$  2 (gender: women, men) analyses of covariance were conducted to test for country and gender differences in measures using continuous scales. For categorical measures, corresponding logistic regressions were conducted. In all analyses, we controlled for demographic variables that differed between countries (i.e., age and education). In terms of outcome variables dealing with feelings and attitudes toward #metoo, we also controlled for prior

Table 1. Zero-order correlations between individual ideologies and attitudes toward #metoo.

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
1. Feminist identity	-	-.65***	-.25***	-.48***	-.22**	.45***	.46***	-.48***
2. Hostile sexism	-.53***	-	.35***	.67***	.21**	-.51***	-.50***	.63***
3. Benevolent sexism	-.23***	.29***	-	.17*	.35***	-.10	-.14*	.16*
4. Rape myths	-.27***	.66***	.30***	-	.22**	-.51***	-.51***	.52***
5. BJW	-.24***	.22***	.39***	.15*	-	-.07	-.06	.18*
6. Positive feelings	.50***	-.48***	-.05	-.38***	-.05	-	.76***	-.71***
7. Perceived benefit	.41***	-.48***	.00	-.48***	.02	.70***	-	-.63***
8. Perceived harm	-.47***	.69***	.21**	.63***	.18**	-.58***	-.62***	-

Note. Right-hand side estimates are for the Norwegian sample and left-hand side estimates for the US sample. BJW = belief in a just world. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Table 2. Correlations between demographic variables and experiences and attitudes toward #metoo.

	Positive Feelings Toward #metoo		Perceived Benefit of #metoo		Perceived Harm of #metoo	
	Norway	United States	Norway	United States	Norway	United States
1. Age	-.06	.00	-.05	.03	-.09	-.07
2. Gender <sup>a</sup>	-.26***	-.18**	-.27***	-.20**	.33***	.25***
3. Education	.08	.04	.01	.00	-.18*	.12
4. Living place <sup>b</sup>	-.07	-.12	-.02	-.01	.01	.06
5. Prior knowledge about #metoo	.06	.15*	.08	.20**	-.09	-.12
6. #metoo hashtags seen	-.09	.29***	-.01	.25***	.11	-.12
7. Peer harassment experiences	.08	.25***	.12	.29***	.09	-.32***
8. Personal harassment experiences	.04	.17*	.02	.18**	-.12	-.15*
9. Peer assault experiences	.10	.19**	.11	.26***	-.13	-.18**
10. Personal assault experiences	-.09	.14*	-.22**	.12	.02	-.21**
11. Harassment perpetrator	-.06	.02	-.06	-.00	.08	.04
12. Assault perpetrator	.02	-.00	-.07	-.03	-.03	.15*
13. Mainstream pornography use	-.07	.06	-.11	.09	.18*	-.02
14. Sadoomasochistic pornography use	-.05	.01	-.08	-.00	.12	.03
15. Rape pornography use	-.12	-.01	-.08	-.08	.12	-.01

Note. <sup>a</sup>coded as 0 = women, 1 = men. <sup>b</sup>coded as 0 = city, 1 = rural/district. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

knowledge about the campaign. We focused on main effects for all variables except for mainstream pornography and peer assault experiences, which were the only variables for which the interaction between country and gender was significant (full statistical details can be found in the SOM).

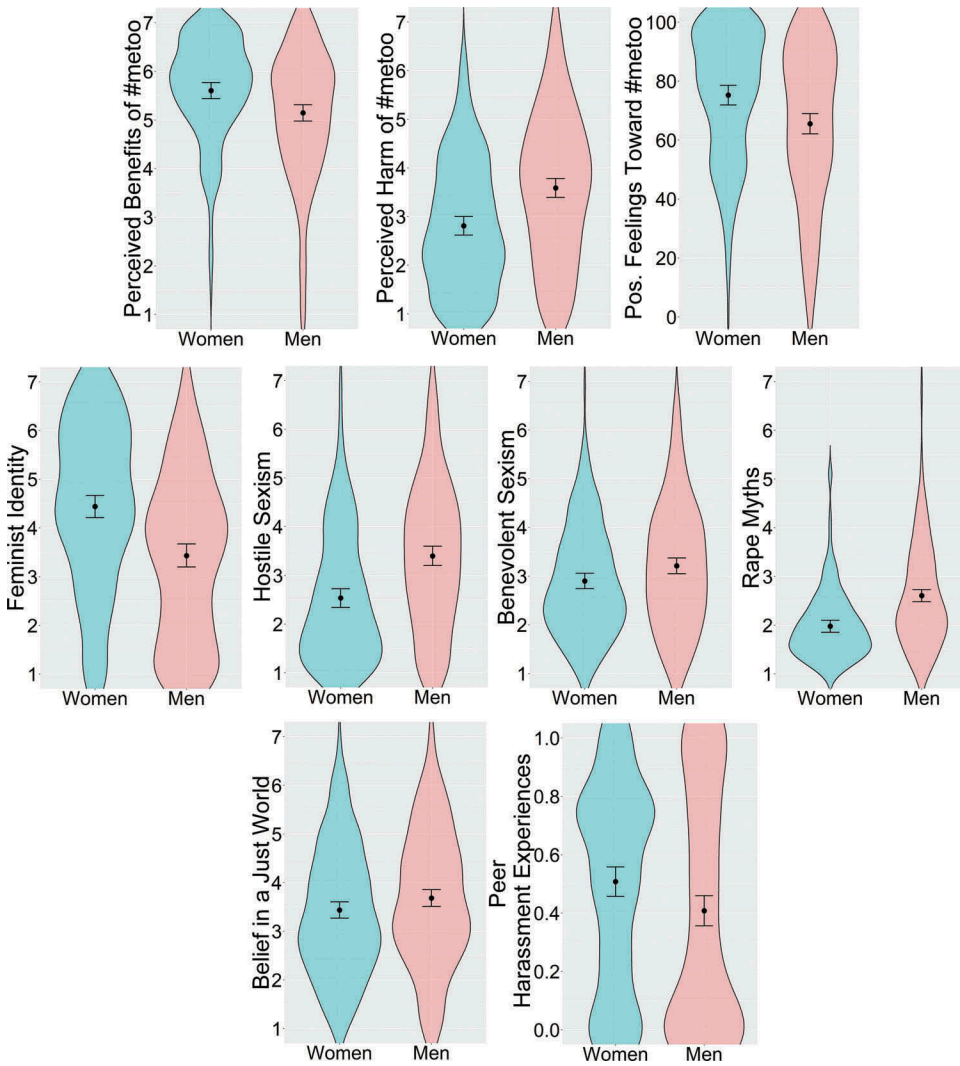
### Country differences

Means and standard errors for the country differences can be found in the SOM. In terms of ideologies, Norwegian participants showed higher feminist identification, lower benevolent sexism, and lower BJW, than US participants. No differences were observed in terms of hostile sexism or rape myths. In terms of experiential and behavioral variables, US participants consumed more sadomasochistic and rape pornography. No additional differences were observed for this set of variables. In terms of outcome variables, Norwegian participants perceived the #metoo campaign as more harmful than US participants. No differences were observed in terms of positive feelings toward, or perceived benefit of, the #metoo campaign. This pattern of results remained the same when analyzing only data from participants who knew about #metoo *a priori* (see SOM).

### Gender differences

As displayed in Figure 1, women, compared to men, displayed higher feminist identification,  $F(1, 402) = 36.88, p < .001, \eta^2 = .09$ ; lower hostile sexism,  $F(1, 402) = 39.49, p < .001, \eta^2 = .08$ ; lower benevolent sexism,  $F(1, 402) = 6.88, p = .009, \eta^2 = .02$ ; lower rape myth acceptance,  $F(1, 402) = 49.40, p < .001, \eta^2 = .10$ ; and lower BJW,  $F(1, 402) = 4.18, p = .042, \eta^2 = .01$ . In terms of experiential and behavioral variables, more men than women reported being a perpetrator of sexual harassment (26.5% vs. 7.8%),  $OR = 2.07, 95\% CI [1.55, 2.86], z = 4.77, p < .001$ , and recently consuming mainstream pornography (71.1% vs. 47.9%),  $OR = 1.83, 95\% CI [1.46, 2.30], z = 5.25, p < .001$ . By contrast, men reported fewer peer harassment experiences than women (see Figure 1),  $F(1, 401) = 6.46, p = .011$ . Moreover, fewer men than women reported personal harassment experiences (20.9% vs. 57.6%),  $OR = .44, 95\% CI [.35, .55], z = -7.19, p < .001$ , and personal assault experiences (10.0% vs. 23.5%),  $OR = .59, 95\% CI [.43, .78], z = -3.53, p < .001$ . No gender differences were observed for experiences as perpetrator of assault (4.7%<sub>Men</sub> vs. 2.8%<sub>Women</sub>),  $OR = 3.40, 95\% CI [.70, 24.43], z = 1.43, p = .154$ ; peer assault experiences ( $M_{Men} = .26, SE_{Men} = .02$  vs.  $M_{Women} = .28, SE_{Women} = .02$ ),  $F(1, 400) = 1.94, p = .165$ ; sadomasochistic pornography consumption (28.9%<sub>Men</sub> vs. 21.7%<sub>Women</sub>),  $OR = 1.22, 95\% CI [.95, 1.57], z = 1.52, p = .128$ ; or rape pornography consumption (22.3%<sub>Men</sub> vs. 20.3%<sub>Women</sub>),  $OR = 1.00, 95\% CI [.77, 1.31], z = .03, p = .976$ .

In terms of outcome variables, women, compared to men, showed more positive feelings toward #metoo,  $F(1, 391) = 15.69, p < .001, \eta^2 = .04$ ; saw it as



**Figure 1.** Significant gender differences and response distributions are presented. Points represent estimated marginal means; error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

more beneficial,  $F(1, 401) = 14.49$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .04$ ; and saw it as less harmful,  $F(1, 401) = 30.81$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .07$ , see Figure 1. Finally, the interaction between country and gender was significant for mainstream pornography consumption,  $OR = .67$ , 95% CI [.53, .84],  $z = -3.45$ ,  $p < .001$ , and peer assault experiences,  $F(1, 400) = 5.96$ ,  $p = .015$ ,  $\eta^2 = .01$ . Specifically, men were more likely than women to consume mainstream pornography, especially in Norway, and women reported more peer assault experiences than men in the United States, but not in Norway (see SOM). The pattern of results remained the same when analyzing only data from participants who knew about #metoo *a priori* (see SOM).



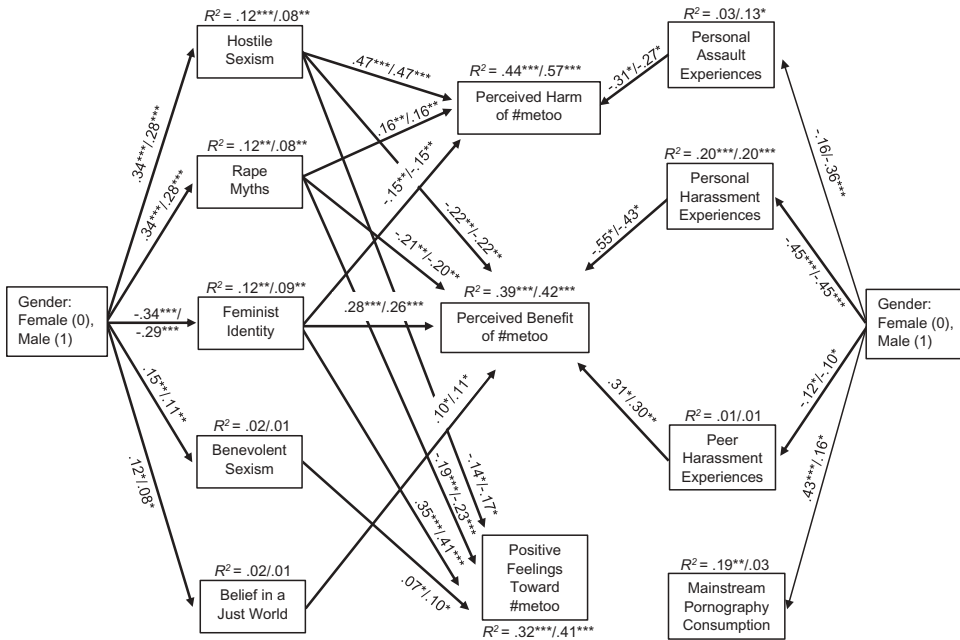
### *Test of mediation model*

We hypothesized that gender differences in reactions to #metoo would be mediated by ideological and experiential factors that only partially align with gender. To investigate this hypothesis, we first tested an unconstrained, fully-saturated multigroup path model in which the associations of gender with the outcome variables were expected to be mediated. As potential mediators, we included the ideological factors (i.e., hostile and benevolent sexism, rape myth acceptance, feminist identity, and BJW) and experiential/behavioral factors (i.e., peer harassment experiences, personal harassment experiences, personal assault experiences, and mainstream pornography consumption) that were related to at least one outcome variable in zero-order terms and demonstrated gender differences (see [Tables 1](#) and [2](#)). Given the presence of categorical mediators, robust weighted least squares was used as the estimator.

Next, we tested whether our model could be simplified by constraining paths to be equal for both countries. Wald's test showed that all parameters could be constrained without deteriorating model fit, except for the associations between gender and personal assault experiences, between gender and mainstream pornography consumption, and between benevolent sexism and the perceived benefit of #metoo (see SOM). Correlations were allowed to vary across countries. Constraining the parameters resulted in a model with satisfactory fit,  $\chi^2(36) = 39.62$ ,  $p = .312$ ,  $CFI = .997$ ,  $RMSEA = .022$ , 90% CI [.000, .055]. In this model (see [Figure 2](#)), gender (0 = *female*, 1 = *male*) predicted higher hostile sexism, benevolent sexism, rape myth acceptance, and BJW, but less feminist identification, personal harassment experiences, and peer harassment experiences in both countries. Moreover, gender predicted fewer personal assault experiences in the United States and more mainstream pornography consumption, especially in Norway. Note that even though paths are constrained to be equal, the standardized coefficients can vary slightly between countries due to different standard deviations.

Of the potential ideological mediators, hostile sexism and rape myth acceptance predicted higher perceived harm, lower perceived benefit, and lower positive feelings toward #metoo while feminist identity had the opposite relationship with each measure in both countries. In addition, benevolent sexism predicted higher positive feelings toward #metoo. In terms of experiential mediators, personal assault experiences predicted less perceived harm of #metoo. Whereas personal harassment experiences predicted less perceived benefit of #metoo, peer harassment experiences predicted higher perceived benefit. Mainstream pornography consumption did not predict any outcome variable.

In the model, the relationship between gender and perceived harm of #metoo (Norway:  $\beta = .12$ ,  $p = .163$ ; United States:  $\beta = .10$ ,  $p = .147$ ) and gender and positive feelings toward #metoo (Norway:  $\beta = -.05$ ,  $p = .544$ ;



**Figure 2.** Path model with standardized coefficients are displayed. Bold paths are constrained to equality across samples. The first values represent estimates for Norway and the second values for the United States. Only significant paths are displayed. For presentational purposes, correlations between variables are not displayed.  $*p < .05$ ,  $**p < .01$ ,  $***p < .001$ .

United States:  $\beta = -.05$ ,  $p = .539$ ) were nonsignificant, suggesting full mediation, whereas the relationship between gender and the perceived benefit of #metoo was still significant (Norway:  $\beta = -.22$ ,  $p = .017$ ; United States:  $\beta = -.18$ ,  $p = .015$ ), suggesting partial mediation. We calculated the product indirect relationships using the delta method for standard errors. This method was chosen instead of bootstrapping or Monte Carlo simulation as it is less computationally demanding, but produces very similar results, with sample sizes akin to those in our research (Bollen & Stine, 1990). All indirect relationships were significant, except for the relationship between gender and perceived harm of #metoo as mediated by personal assault experiences, between gender and the perceived benefit of #metoo as mediated by BJW, and peer harassment experiences, and the relationship between gender and positive feelings toward #metoo as mediated by benevolent sexism (see Table 3).

We conducted an exploratory follow-up estimation of the model with participants who knew about #metoo before taking part in the study only. The model also showed close fit to this subset,  $\chi^2(36) = 41.66$ ,  $p = .238$ ,  $CFI = .993$ ,  $RMSEA = .030$ , 90% CI [.000, .065], yet, the relationships among hostile sexism and the outcome variables were stronger, whereas feminist identity showed fewer significant relationships, and rape myth acceptance

**Table 3.** Indirect relationships between gender<sup>a</sup> and the outcome variables.

Mediator	Outcome Variable	Norway			United States		
		$\beta$	SE	$p$	$\beta$	SE	$p$
Hostile sexism	Perceived harm	.16	.03	<.001	.13	.03	<.001
Rape myths	Perceived harm	.06	.02	.004	.05	.02	.006
Feminist identity	Perceived harm	.05	.02	.011	.04	.02	.012
Personal assault experiences	Perceived harm	.05	.04	.226	.10	.05	.058
Hostile sexism	Perceived benefit	-.08	.03	.007	-.06	.02	.005
Rape myths	Perceived benefit	-.07	.02	.003	-.06	.02	.004
Feminist identity	Perceived benefit	-.09	.03	<.001	-.08	.02	<.001
Belief in a just world	Perceived benefit	.01	.01	.120	.01	.01	.120
Personal harassment experiences	Perceived benefit	.24	.12	.035	.20	.09	.030
Peer harassment experiences	Perceived benefit	-.04	.02	.113	-.03	.02	.110
Hostile sexism	Positive feelings	-.05	.02	.027	-.05	.02	.019
Benevolent sexism	Positive feelings	.01	.01	.098	.01	.01	.097
Rape myths	Positive feelings	-.07	.02	.001	-.07	.02	.002
Feminist identity	Positive feelings	-.12	.03	<.001	-.12	.03	<.001

Note. <sup>a</sup>0 = Female, 1 = Male. Only indirect effects involving significant paths are displayed in Figure 2.

showed no significant relationships with the outcome variables (see SOM). Results suggested that all direct associations were fully mediated.

## Discussion

This study cross-culturally investigated underlying factors that explain why men and women differ in their attitudes and feelings toward #metoo, arguably one of the most pervasive and consequential social media campaigns to date. Gender differences were primarily explained by underlying differences in ideologies. This finding emphasizes that such gender differences are often best conceptualized as men and women's relative position on underlying dimensions that only partially align with gender (Reis & Carothers, 2014; Wood & Eagly, 2012), rather than men and women being fundamentally different types engaged in a 'battle of the sexes' (also see Geary, 1998).

On average, participants' stance on #metoo was relatively positive, with mean scores being above the midpoint on the perceived benefit scale and feeling thermometer, and below the midpoint on the perceived harm scale. However, consistent with a large body of research showing that men generally have more positive and tolerant attitudes toward rape and harassment than women and tend to blame its victims (Anderson et al., 1997; Payne et al., 1999; Russell & Trigg, 2004; Sakallı-Uğurlu et al., 2007), substantial gender differences were observed on all outcome variables, with men generally being less supportive of #metoo. Importantly, these gender differences were largely accounted for by our proposed mediators.

In terms of ideologies, men's tendency to score higher than women on hostile sexism, to endorse rape myths to a greater degree, and to identify less as feminist explained why men were less positive toward #metoo than

women, perceived it as having less benefit and as causing more harm. Benevolent sexism was, in zero-order terms, related to more perceived harm of #metoo in both countries, less perceived benefit of #metoo in Norway, and was otherwise unrelated to the outcome variables. However, although men scored higher in benevolent sexism than women, benevolent sexism was only weakly and positively related to positive feelings to #metoo in the multivariate path models. This finding likely resembles a suppressor effect. Possibly, when controlling for hostile sexism and rape myth acceptance, the unique variance in benevolent sexism might have primarily captured the considerate and protective aspects of benevolent sexism concerning traditional women, which could explain the positive associations (Hideg & Ferris, 2016; Sibley & Perry, 2010). However, it is important to note that because the indirect relationship that was mediated by benevolent sexism was nonsignificant, it did not account for any gender differences.

BJW also played only a minor role in explaining gender differences in reactions to #metoo, as it was only weakly related to perceiving #metoo as being more beneficial in our model. This finding contrasts with previous research, in which BJW predicted more negativity toward rape victims and more tolerance toward sexual transgressions (Kleinke & Meyer, 1990; Sakalli-Ugurlu et al., 2007; Strömwall et al., 2013). Individuals who believe in a universal moral principle that rewards good people and punishes bad people might see the #metoo campaign as a means to bring just punishment to those who have committed sexual harassment and assault. However, given the weak relationship and the lack of mediation, the role of BJW was minor in this study.

Experiential and behavioral variables also played only minor roles in explaining gender differences in feelings and attitudes toward #metoo. In terms of zero-order correlations, sexual harassment and assault experiences were consistently related to more positive and less negative attitudes toward #metoo in the United States, but not so in Norway. Because women reported higher personal and peer harassment experiences across countries and higher personal assault experiences in the United States, these variables were included as potential mediators in the path model. However, in this model that controlled for the ideological variables as predictors, personal harassment experiences, unexpectedly, predicted less perceived benefit of #metoo. This relationship could suggest that victims of harassment believe that the campaign has led to an inflationary use of the term *sexual harassment*, thereby trivializing their own experiences. Alternatively, victims of harassment might perceive hashtag campaigns as an ineffective means to achieve social change in a legislative environment that seems to protect harassers more than their victims. Future research could address these possibilities.

The cross-cultural scope of this study provided some indication of the generalizability of our findings. Strikingly, the associations among most of our

main predictors and outcome variables and their mediating roles in terms of gender differences were the same across Norway and the United States. This finding suggests that men and women's attitudes toward online social media campaigns targeting misogyny might have similar roots across these two cultures. This consistency also suggests that the content of the campaign did not change markedly when it spread from the United States to Norway. Norwegians tend to have a high proficiency in the English language, arguably due to high consumption of US media (Education First, 2017). Thus, this lack of a language barrier might have facilitated the spread of identical information about #metoo and prevented the emergence of a more culturally dependent version of the campaign in Norway. Yet, when interpreting our findings, one has to keep in mind that Norway and the United States are relatively similar cultures. Hence, it remains possible that attitudes and feelings toward #metoo do depend on cultural differences on dimensions such as perceived gender egalitarianism and injustice, which were not assessed empirically in this research.

Although the relationships among variables were fairly consistent across countries, there were some country differences in terms of overall reactions to #metoo. One might have expected Norwegian participants to be generally more positive toward #metoo than US participants due to Norwegians displaying lower sexism, lower endorsement of rape myths, and higher feminist identification. Yet, although Norwegians, compared to US participants, showed lower benevolent sexism, higher feminist identification, and substantially lower BJW, Norwegians actually reported that #metoo was relatively more harmful. Hence, Norwegians, who arguably belong to a more gender-egalitarian population, seemed to acknowledge the potential downsides of the #metoo campaign more than US participants did, and thus Norwegians possibly demonstrated a more nuanced view of #metoo. It is, however, important to keep the absolute scores in mind. Although Norwegians scored close to the midpoint of the perceived harm scale, they clearly scored above the midpoint in terms of perceived benefit and positive feelings (see SOM). Thus, although Norwegians acknowledged the potentially negative aspects of the campaign more than US participants did, they were still generally supportive. Furthermore, country comparisons should be treated with caution, given that we used nonrepresentative samples. Participants in Norway were recruited through online social networks and US participants were recruited through an opt-in online panel. Future research could thus test for country differences using representative samples and, optimally, compare countries that differ even more in their gender egalitarianism than Norway and the United States.

### ***Practical and theoretical implications***

Sexual harassment and assault are, unfortunately, still frequent phenomena in most parts of the world. Given the advance of modern communication

infrastructure and the subsequent ability to cost-effectively and directly reach out to a large number of individuals online, social media campaigns have a unique potential to achieve social change globally and at a fast pace. However, they are seldom uniformly received and can lead to enthusiastic support among some groups but resistance and negativity among others. Thus, social media campaigns have the potential to both achieve social change and to divide and polarize social groups (e.g., men and women). Yet, very little is known about the psychological factors underlying these different reactions. Understanding these underlying factors can inform how social media campaigns might be tailored to specific audiences. For instance, based on the results from this research, one way to reduce the opposition toward #metoo that is rooted in hostile sexism (i.e., negative attitudes toward women) might be to highlight that the campaign raises awareness about sexual violence experienced by both women and men.

Beyond providing insights into the mechanisms underlying gender differences in attitudes toward #metoo specifically, our research demonstrates how applied social psychological research can help understand attitudes toward social media campaigns more generally. For instance, our results suggest that politicized social identities, such as feminist identity in this case, that are well-known for predicting collective action offline (van Zomeren et al., 2008), might have comparable effects in terms of online collective movements. Similarly, our results suggest that the extent to which individuals' endorsement of broader ideologies and beliefs either conflict or align with the goals of an online campaign might determine whether individuals perceive the campaign as advantageous or harmful. Speaking to the potency of such a social psychological approach, our model was able to explain between 32% and 57% of the variance in attitudes and feelings toward #metoo.

### ***Limitations and future directions***

It is important to note that, whereas the associations between gender and perceived harm, and between gender and positive feelings toward #metoo were fully mediated, the association between gender and the perceived benefit of #metoo was only partially mediated. On the one hand, this lack of full mediation could indicate that the perceived benefit of #metoo falls more firmly along gender group lines. On the other hand, it is possible that other potential mediators, unaccounted for in our research, were at play. For instance, although pornography consumption played a minor role in our models, it is possible that other types of media consumption might have explained gender differences in our outcome variables. For instance, gender differences in consumption of violent video games, soap operas, and romantic-themed movies that relate to more tolerance of sexual harassment, more tolerance of sexual assault, and more victim blaming (Dill, Brown, & Collins,

2008; Kahlor & Eastin, 2011; Ward, Seabrook, Manago, & Reed, 2016) may have played a role. Gender-specific use of social media might also play an important role in reactions to #metoo, given that it is an online social media campaign. Whereas we are unaware of studies connecting social media consumption to harassment-related beliefs or sexism, it would be of interest to test whether the type and frequency of social media use and potentially their interaction with such ideologies play a role. For instance, the number and context of *me too* hashtags might differ across different social media platforms. Further, it would be of interest to assess a more objective measure of exposure to *me too* hashtags, as retrospective measures are prone to biases and can be less accurate (e.g., when exposed to a certain hashtag very frequently, people might lose a sense of the exact number of hashtags they have seen).

We also highlight the limitation that many of the statements measuring sexism, feminist identity, and rape myth acceptance specifically focused on female targets. Hence, the predictive power of these ideological measures likely depends on whether individuals perceive #metoo as primarily giving a voice to female victims or victims of sexual violence generally. Yet the consistent correlations between the ideological variables and attitudes toward #metoo suggest that participants, to a large extent, perceived #metoo as dedicated to female victims, even though male and gender nonbinary victims also came forward in the media.

We assessed self-reported feelings toward #metoo and its perceived benefit and harm, rather than behavioral reactions to it. To investigate the extent to which such attitudes and feelings align with behavior, future studies might assess behavioral support of #metoo, for instance, by measuring the extent to which participants like or comment on different type of content related to online campaigns and share hash tags themselves.

We also draw attention to the fact that we had to drop items from various scales to achieve measurement invariance in this study. This makes direct comparisons of the mean scores observed here with those of future research challenging. For such comparisons to be meaningful, one would need to compare means derived from factorial solutions that are invariant across the current two populations and the new populations investigated in replications. We are glad to share our data for such a purpose.

Finally, we encourage future work to employ a longitudinal approach. Investigating online social media phenomena that rapidly and unexpectedly evolve, peak, drop and reemerge, using longitudinal designs is challenging. Even still, the cross-sectional design of our study limits the interpretation of our findings. Although we identified consistent relationships among attitudes toward #metoo and variables that are known to predict attitudes toward rape- and gender-related issues over time, our data cannot speak to causality. Indeed, given that the focus of the #metoo campaign is to challenge existing



misogynic attitudes and behaviors, it would be of interest to test longitudinally if and for whom the campaign causes attitude change. Based on the results from this study, future research could test whether the #metoo campaign reduces negative attitudes toward victims (e.g., rape myths) and women (e.g., hostile sexism) or whether being high in these ideologies *a priori* makes people resistant to any possible positive effects of #metoo.

## Conclusion

To conclude, this article aimed to investigate whether gender differences in attitudes and feelings toward #metoo could be explained by underlying ideologies and experiences. Generally consistent with a dimensional perspective on gender differences, results showed that men's more negative stance toward #metoo could largely be explained by men being higher in hostile sexism, higher in rape myth acceptance, and lower in feminist identification compared to women. These findings were consistent across two countries, Norway and the United States, differing in their degree of gender egalitarianism. Together our research provides important insights into why some groups see social media campaigns that aim to expose the prevalence of misogynistic behavior as beneficial, but others see them as harmful. More generally, it demonstrates how social psychological approaches can improve understanding of attitudes toward social media campaigns across cultures.

## Notes

1. The supplementary materials include outlier analyses, measurement invariance tests, detailed statistical information for group comparisons and follow-up path analyses.

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