

INTRODUCTION

If male victims had been more active in the #MeToo movement, how might we have judged them?

Men are less likely to disclose their victimisation than women

- Data from the National Crime Victimization Survey in the U.S. revealed that 15% of male victims disclosed to authorities, compared to 30% of female victims.¹
- Gender norms may influence whether a male victim acknowledges their attack as an assault if it was committed by a female perpetrator.²

Victim blame inhibits disclosure

- Victims can be silenced by negative reactions from professionals, friends and family, and uncertainty about whether their experience 'qualifies' as an assault.³
- Masculine ideals around toughness and invulnerability contradict the existence of the male victim, and the shame associated with violating those ideals may inhibit disclosure.¹
- A common negative reaction victims receive is victim blaming, where they are perceived to bear some responsibility for their own assault.

Many factors influence the formation of victim blame judgments

- Male victims are blamed more for their attacks than female victims.⁴
- This may be because male observers blame male victims more than female observers.⁵
- Men are perceived to have 'enjoyed' their assault more if their perpetrator was female.⁶
- Male victims are believed to have had more control of the circumstances leading to their assault if their perpetrator used verbal coercion.⁷
- The socioeconomic status of the perpetrator has been shown to foster sympathy towards them, and away from the victim.⁸
- There is some evidence that shame may interfere with perspective taking, resulting in increased levels of externalising behaviour, such as blame attributions.⁹

The current study investigated measure of victim blame (VB) against a fictional heterosexual male in a scenario like those associated with the #MeToo movement depicting a verbal directive by an authority figure. Hypotheses include:

- H1: Perpetrator Gender: Victim blame will be highest when the perpetrator is female
- H2: Perpetrator Authority: Victim blame highest when perpetrator possesses high social status
- H3: There will be an interaction effect between Perpetrator Gender and Perpetrator Status
- H4: Participant Gender: A main effect of Participant Gender would be moderated by shame-proneness.

METHOD

Participants

- 208 students (156 females, 51 males, 1 gender non-binary)
- Aged from 16-58 ($M = 21.46$, $SD = 5.76$)

Vignettes

- Fictional news article depicting a courtroom prosecution of around a case of verbal sexual coercion against a heterosexual male by an individual who possessed some authority over the victim. This method was chosen to emulate the way in which #MeToo stories were conveyed to the public.
- Participants were presented with one of six possible version of the articles
- Perpetrator Gender; Unspecified Gender, Male, Female
- Perpetrator Social Influence; Member of Parliament, Real Estate Agent

Self-report Scales

- Experience of Shame Scale* measures levels of shame as they relate to aspects of the self.
- Short-Form Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale* measures social desirability.
- Victim Blame Scale* measures judgments of blame and assault severity against victims. An additional question added to ask whether participants perceived the sexual act, or the act of taking the perpetrator to court would be more distressing for the victim.

Procedure

Participants completed all measures in an online study.

RESULTS

Table 1
Correlations between participant gender and self-report measures

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Participant Gender	-				
2. Victim Blame	-.34**	-			
3. Perceptions of Victim Distress	.02	.20**	-		
4. Marlowe-Crowne SDS	.05	.03	-.14*	-	
5. Experience of Shame Scale	.16*	-.12	.13	-.40**	-

Note: ** $p < .01$. * $p < .05$

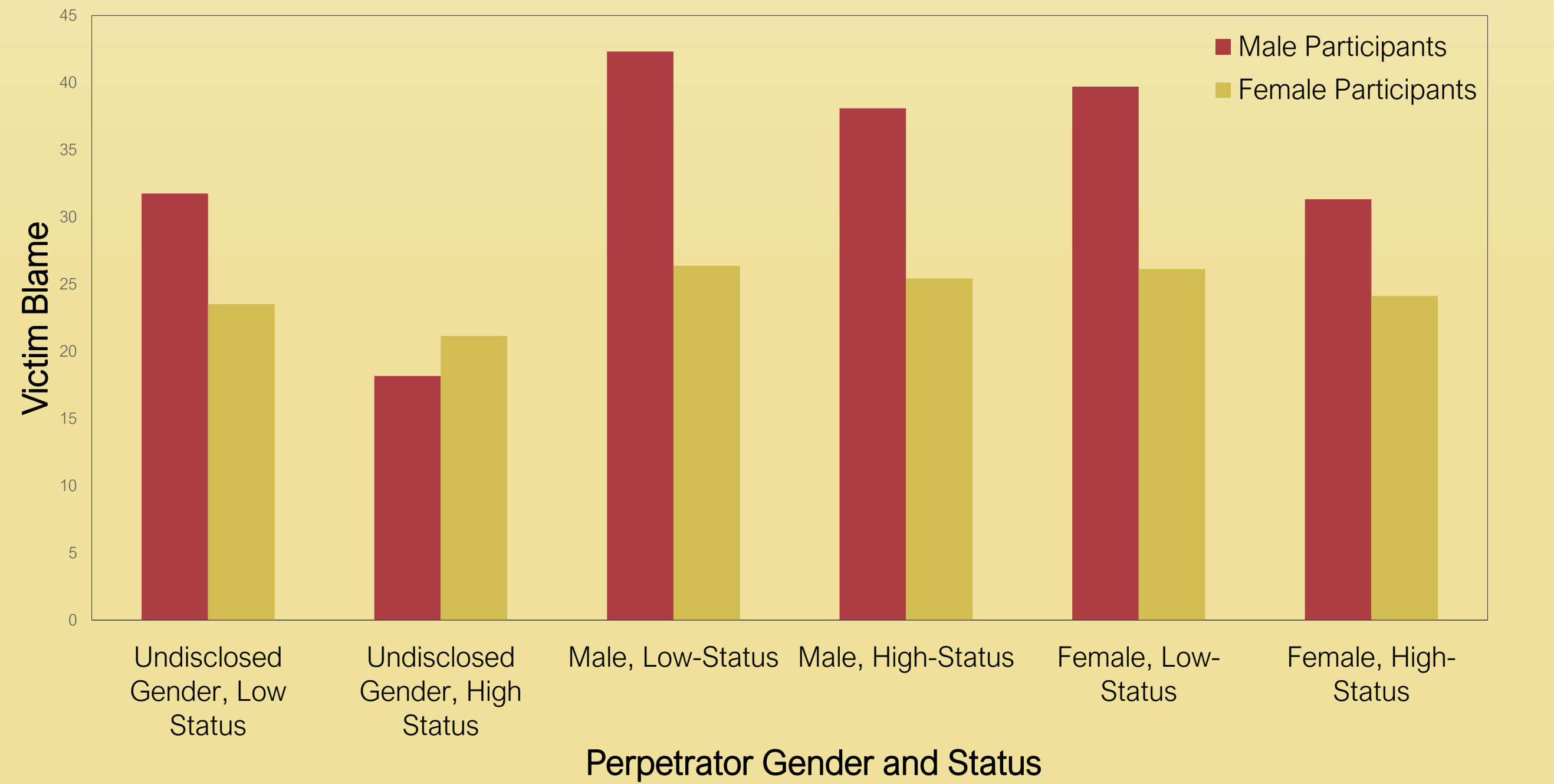


Figure 1. Victim Blame means across all conditions, by participant gender.

Analysis of Covariance

- Perceptions of Victim Distress, and Participant Gender were significant covariates
- A main effect of perpetrator gender was found. Post-hoc analyses show a significant difference between Unspecified Gender and Male Perpetrator; $F(1,137) = 7.66$, $p = .006$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$.
- No main effect for Perpetrator Status
- No significant interaction between Perpetrator Gender and Perpetrator Status.

Table 2
Significant and Non-Significant Univariate Effects in the Analysis of Covariance

Source of Variation	df	F	p	partial η_p^2
Participant Gender	1	34.887	.000	.149
Perceived Victim Distress	1	12.399	.001	.058
Perpetrator Gender	2	4.416	.013	.042
Perpetrator Status	1	2.831	.094	.014
Perpetrator Gender x Perpetrator Status	2	.253	.776	.003

- Shame was moderated by Participant Gender on measures of victim blame; $B = .27$, $p = .01$ and shame was a significant predictor of victim blame among males only; $\beta = -.30$, $p = .04$.

CONCLUSIONS

- H1, H2, and H3 were not supported. However, a significant difference between attributions of blame towards victims of a male perpetrator and victims of a perpetrator of an unspecified gender emerged, suggesting that gender plays a role in the perception of perpetrators and their victims.
- H4 was supported, but the direction of the relationship between shame-proneness and victim blaming was unexpected. Men who are shame-prone may be more likely to sympathise with a victim, resulting in lower levels of victim blame. Men who are low on shame-proneness are more likely to blame male victims.
- Attributions of victim blame are related to perceptions of victim distress, but the causal direction of this relationship could not be established
- The topical nature of sexual assault in NZ politics may have confounded Perpetrator Status.
- Future studies might benefit from exploring victim blame among community samples, and by further exploring the relationship between shame and victim blame among men

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