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Power, gender and identification with sexual harassment victims

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to examine the effect of power on identification with sexual harassment victims across genders and explores interventions to enhance identification. Limiting to incidents involving a man harassing a woman, this study hypothesized that women in higher (vs lower) power would show greater identification; however, men's identification would not be affected by power. These distinct effects stem from gender differences in the manifestation of power, linked to variations in self-construal–independent versus interdependent self-views in men and women, respectively. Thus, priming of independent or interdependent self-construal in men and women can attenuate gender differences.

Design/methodology/approach – In Experiment 1, 147 participants were assigned to higher-/lower-power conditions. They read a scenario describing sexual harassment and indicated their identification with the victim. Experiment 2 ($n = 208$) was similar, with the addition of independent/interdependent self-construal priming.

Findings – In Experiment 1, women in higher- (vs lower-) power condition demonstrated greater identification; men in higher- and lower-power conditions did not differ in identification. Higher-power men (vs women) exhibited lower identification. In Experiment 2, independent self-construal priming created a similar pattern of gender differences across both power conditions as in Experiment 1, with a reduced effect of power on women's identification and an increased gap between higher-power men and women. Interdependent self-construal priming enhanced identification among higher-power men and possibly among lower-power women.

Originality/value – This paper elucidates gender differences in power manifestation, with implications for judgment of sexual harassment, which can inform intervention development for correcting gender biases.

Keywords Gender, Sexual harassment, Power, Self-construal, Identification

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

According to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center [National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC), 2025], 81% of women and 43% of men reported that they experience sexual harassment (Kearl, 2018). In total, 38% of the reported incidents occurred in the workplace (Kearl *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, most people believe that harassments in workplaces are mistreated and that victims suffer from retaliation after complaining (Kearl *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, it is imperative to uncover the reasons behind the mistreatment of such cases and to create knowledge that will inform the development of strategies to improve treatment. The current research takes a step toward this end.

Research examined biases in the judgment of sexual harassment. People often perceive sexual harassment lightly, viewing it as harmless flirtation (Cohen, 2005), friendly behavior (Good and Cooper, 2016), disrespect or verbal aggression (McKie and Jyrkinen, 2017). Other common phenomena are victim blaming (Bongiorno *et al.*, 2020; De Judicibus and McCabe, 2001; Diekmann *et al.*, 2013; Gramazio *et al.*, 2021) and assuming victim's consent (Goldner, 2018). To attenuate such biases, researchers examined factors affecting people's judgments of sexual harassment. One key element is people's identification with the

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victim (Bongiorno *et al.*, 2020; Diehl *et al.*, 2014; O'Donohue *et al.*, 2003). Identification with the victim and related factors (e.g. empathy) reduce false beliefs justifying sexual harassment (Diehl *et al.*, 2014) and victim-blaming, and increase aggressor-blaming (Bongiorno *et al.*, 2020). Identification is contingent upon individual characteristics (Löffler and Greitemeyer, 2023) and is prone to changes following interventions such as perspective-taking (Tarampi *et al.*, 2016). Knowledge of factors underlying identification can contribute to reducing bias and avoiding mistreatment of sexual harassment.

Gender is central to perceptions of sexual harassment (De Judicibus and McCabe, 2001; Gómez-González *et al.*, 2023; Russell and Trigg, 2004). Furthermore, those who make decisions about such incidents are typically people in power positions (managers, law enforcement authorities). Thus, elucidating the role of power is practically relevant. A recent meta-analysis suggests gender differences in decision-making due to variations in perceptions of power (Galinsky *et al.*, 2024). However, it remains unclear how power affects identification with sexual harassment victims and whether the effect of power is contingent on gender.

We aim, therefore, to examine gender differences in the effect of power positions on identification with sexual harassment victims, and to explore a potential intervention to enhance identification. The tendency to blame victims is affected by empathy and perceived similarity to the victim (Bongiorno *et al.*, 2020; Gramazio *et al.*, 2021); these factors are linked to identification (Cialdini *et al.*, 1997; May, 2011). Hence, identification is a key factor underlying people's view of sexual harassment. It is noteworthy that identification with the victim, although affecting judgments and decisions (Diehl *et al.*, 2014; Liang and Park, 2022), does not guarantee any particular judgment. Additional factors − such as societal expectations, norms, perceived control and organizational factors − may play roles (e.g. Clarke, 2014; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1977; Foster and Fullagar, 2018). Since our goal is to uncover the mechanism underlying sexual harassment judgments in the hope of developing interventions to reduce biases, it is essential to understand the roles of the various factors involved in the process. Therefore, our current research focuses on the identification with victims. Other factors are worth considering in the future.

Sexual harassment occurs in various forms. Aggressors and victims may be of any gender, and in high- or low power (Adikaram and Weerakotuwa, 2022; Wayne, 2000). We focus on harassment involving a man aggressor toward a woman victim, with the incident occurring in the workplace where the victim is subordinate to the aggressor.

To shed light on gender differences in the effects of power, we relied on research suggesting gender differences in self-construal–self-view construed by the socio-cultural environment (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). Men tend to possess an independent self-construal, viewing the self as separate from others; women tend to possess an interdependent self-construal, viewing the self as connected to others (Cross *et al.*, 2011; Gabriel and Gardner, 1999; Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Meyers-Levy and Loken, 2015). Gender differences in self-construal lead to gender differences in the manifestation of power: men (typically independent) view power as a means to advance personal goals, and women (typically interdependent) view power as a means to benefit others (Torelli *et al.*, 2020; Torelli and Shavitt, 2010). These distinct views of power may account for the distinct power-identification effects across genders. If this is the case, interventions priming self-construal may enhance identification and thus can contribute to correcting biases in sexual harassment treatment.

Next, we review the relevant literature and then present two experiments: The first examines gender differences in the power-identification effect, and the second explores self-construal priming as an intervention to enhance identification.

Literature review

Identification with sexual harassment victims

Identification is a psychological process through which individuals develop attachments to others (Meissner, 1980) or define themselves in terms of social groups (Ashforth *et al.*, 2016). Identification is based on shared values or group membership (Fisher and Wakefield, 1998). It leads individuals to attribute desirable group characteristics to themselves, to feel similar to others and to support them (Tajfel and Turner, 1979).

Identification is linked to empathy − other-oriented emotional response − and to perspective taking − the act of taking another person's point of view, which enables understanding the other person (Batson *et al.*, 1997; Cialdini *et al.*, 1997; May, 2011). Despite different emphases, these terms are often used interchangeably (Cialdini *et al.*, 1997). Indeed, people who identify with a social group also tend to empathize with group members (Rütgen *et al.*, 2015; Vanman, 2016). Research shows that women tend to be more empathetic than men (Christov-Moore *et al.*, 2014; Pang *et al.*, 2023; Stuijfzand *et al.*, 2016; Wu *et al.*, 2023). Such differences begin in childhood and amplify as people internalize societal norms (Christov-Moore *et al.*, 2014). Similar patterns exist with perspective-taking (Tarampi *et al.*, 2016). Accordingly, women would tend to identify more than men with women victims, which may lead to gender differences in judgment and decisions (victim blaming, recommended penalty and willingness to help the victim; Bal and Van Den Bos, 2010; Schewe and O'Donohue, 1993; Spaccatini *et al.*, 2023).

Studies about gender differences in identification have not considered differences within each gender category. Yet, each category may demonstrate variability in identification due to factors such as past experience (Klein *et al.*, 2011; Wayne, 2000), sexism (Russell and Trigg, 2004), and perspective-taking (Bongiorno *et al.*, 2020). Another factor that may lead to variability is power position. People's power position may not only affect identification within gender categories, but also may lead to distinct effects across genders, as implied by Galinsky and others (Galinsky *et al.*, 2024), and discussed next.

The roles of power and gender

Power and identification. Power is defined as people's ability to affect others' beliefs and behaviors (Handgraaf *et al.*, 2008). This ability is linked to personal or situational characteristics. The personal perspective views power as control over resources without the interference of others (Galinsky *et al.*, 2003; Keltner *et al.*, 2003). The situational perspective views power as a psychological state and as a property of social relationships, which can be activated consciously or unconsciously (Galinsky *et al.*, 2003).

Power reduces perspective-taking and concern toward others (Galinsky *et al.*, 2006, 2016). Having power means having the resources enabling independence of others, thus creating disconnection, which entails lower identification (Magee and Smith, 2013). Moreover, power is associated with attention to oneself, creating separation (Fiske, 1993). Therefore, powerful people do not think of others as similar to them. Power also reduces empathy toward others (Van Kleef *et al.*, 2008; Woltin *et al.*, 2011), because it leads individuals to prioritize their feelings over others' (Keltner *et al.*, 2008).

The role *of gender.* One key factor in the power-identification relationship is self-construal − people's self-views construed by their socio-cultural context (Cross *et al.*, 2011; Markus and Kitayama, 1991), which involves perception, interpretation and comprehension of one's self in relations to others. Markus and Kitayama distinguish between independent and interdependent self-construals: Independent self-construal represents one's view as separate from others, promoting uniqueness, autonomy and personal achievements; interdependent self-construal represents one's view as connected to others, emphasizing

social roles, relationship and concern toward others. Consequently, interdependents are generally more inclined toward identification with others, express more empathy and exhibit social responsibility (Oyserman *et al.*, 2002). By contrast, independents tend to demonstrate weaker identification (Brewer and Gardner, 1996).

Men tend to possess independent self-construal, while women tend to possess interdependent self-construal (Cross *et al.*, 2011; Gabriel and Gardner, 1999; Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Meyers-Levy and Loken, 2015). Distinct self-construals may lead to gender differences in the manifestation of power. Independent self-construal is linked to a view of power as a tool to advance personal goals; interdependent self-construal is linked to a view of power as a tool to benefit others (Torelli *et al.*, 2020; Torelli and Shavitt, 2010). High power fosters men's agentic characteristics relating to the expansion of the self and fosters women's communal characteristics relating to maintaining social harmony (Rucker *et al.*, 2018). Consequently, women in power tend to resolve conflicts via compromise, while men in power usually prefer a more upfront strategy, with clear winners and losers (Holt and DeVore, 2005).

Thus, power would differently affect men's and women's identification with victims. Because women are generally more interdependent, having power would enhance their communal tendency leading them to identify with others, particularly with women in trouble. For men who are more independent, having power would enhance self-related tendencies, and would not enhance identification (Cross *et al.*, 2011; Gabriel and Gardner, 1999; Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Meyers-Levy and Loken, 2015). This argument is in line with research distinguishing between the effects of self- versus other-focused power on sexual harassment dispositions (Dinh *et al.*, 2022; Stockdale *et al.*, 2020). Self-focused powerholders are more inclined toward sexual harassment (Stockdale *et al.*, 2020), while other-focused power enhances communal feelings and moral licensing, leading people to perceive sexual harassment as more acceptable (Dinh *et al.*, 2022), an issue that will be discussed further.

Altogether, the literature indicates that gender differences in self-construal lead to gender differences in the manifestation of power, resulting in distinct effects of power on identification with the victims. Therefore, we hypothesize:

H1. Power has distinct effects on men's and women's identification with sexual harassment victims, as follows.

H1a. Women with higher (vs lower) power show greater identification.

H1b. Men in higher and lower power do not differ in their identification.

Whereas self-construal may be chronic, it can also be temporarily available in various situations (Trafimow *et al.*, 1991). Accordingly, we would expect that interventions altering self-construal can modify the effect of power on identification in men and women, as follows: Interventions priming independent self-construal in women may lower their identification to match men's typically lower level of identification; interventions priming interdependent self-construal may enhance men's level of identification to match women's typically higher level of identification. These effects should eventually attenuate the predicted gender differences in the effect of power on identification suggested in *H1* above. We thus hypothesize:

H2. Self-construal priming would attenuate gender differences in the effect of power position on identification with sexual harassment victims, as follows:

H2a. Under independent priming, power will not influence identification in both men and women.

H2b. Under interdependent priming, both men and women will demonstrate a higher identification when in higher (vs lower) power.

Overview

We conducted two lab experiments using student participants. Our student-subject pool comprises young adults who are older than in other places, and typically have had work experience. They undergo sexual harassment training as part of our university policy. Experiment 1 tested *H1* about gender differences in the effect of power position, and Experiment 2 tested *H2* about the effect of self-construal priming. In both experiments, participants read through a sexual harassment scenario under one of two power conditions: higher or lower (Galinsky *et al.*, 2015). The participants imagined they were either chief executive officers (CEOs, higher-power) or employees (lower-power) who had heard about a sexual harassment incident in their organization. They then indicated their level of identification with the victim. Experiment 2 was identical to Experiment 1 with the addition of self-construal priming (Trafimow *et al.*, 1991).

The procedures were approved by the Institutional Review Board. To address ethical considerations while avoiding demand characteristic bias, participants were invited to a study dealing with people's reactions to social situations. We emphasized that participation in this study was anonymous, drew the participants' attention that some segments may depict sexual harassment and informed that they could stop their participation at any stage without penalty.

Experiment 1

Methods

Sample and design. Undergraduate students ($N = 147$; 40.1% men, $M_{age} = 25.14$, SD = 1.915) received credit points for their participation in a 2 (man/woman) × 2 (lower/higher power) between-subjects experiment. Participants were randomly assigned to the power conditions. They read the sexual harassment scenario involving a man boss and a woman subordinate (Cigoy, 1993). The dependent variable was the level of identification with the victim. The sample size was determined using G*Power 3.1.9.7 (Faul *et al.*, 2007) to allow detection of a small-to-medium effect ($f = 0.25$), with alpha at 0.05 and power of 0.80. This required 128 participants; we aimed to recruit approximately 150.

The scenario. It was important that the scenario involves sexual harassment, with obvious victim and aggressor. Thus, the scenario was adapted from Cigoy's (1993) review of real sexual harassment incidents brought before the Supreme Court. In the description, a woman was repeatedly asked to go on a date by her manager. When she refused, he mistreated her at work. Importantly, because victims' behaviors may affect identification with them (Bal and Van Den Bos, 2010; Bongiorno *et al.*, 2020; Diekmann *et al.*, 2013), the scenario did not mention the victim's behavior (see Appendix).

Power. To manipulate power position, the introduction to the scenario instructed participants to imagine they were either CEOs or employees of an organization where the incident had occurred to another employee (Galinsky *et al.*, 2015), as follows:

> Imagine that you work in (are the CEO of) a certain company.

> As part of your work, a story was brought to your attention about a case that happened in the company where you work involving a male and a female colleague, who are your colleagues (subordinate to you) […].

As a manipulation check, at the end of the session, participants indicated the extent to which they believed they could use their power to influence the future of the victim (1 = not at all; 5 = very much).

Identification. Consistent with previous studies (Szymanski *et al.*, 1993), identification with the victim, was measured using a single-item scale presented after the scenario, asking, "To what extent can you identify with the victim?" (1 = not at all; 5 = very much). The literature suggests other valid measures of identification, such as the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1983) – a 28-item scale measuring four aspects of empathy, the Relationship Closeness Inventory (Berscheid *et al.*, 1989) – a multidimensional scale addressing various aspects of interconnection and the Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale (Aron *et al.*, 1992) – a single item pictorial measure where people describe their relationships with others using Venn-like diagram. Considering the advantages and disadvantages of single-item scales (Allen *et al.*, 2022), we decided to use a single-item measure because of its usefulness when participants lack the emotional resources to respond to long questionnaires (Allen *et al.*, 2022), as might be the case after exposure to the sexual harassment scenario. We preferred the simple five-point scale on the pictorial measure, due to easier comprehension and use.

Results and discussion

Power manipulation check

An independent sample *t*-test compared the mean perceived empowerment between the conditions. Participants in the higher- (vs lower-) power condition perceived they were more powerful [$M_{\text{high-power}}$ = 4.41, SD = 0.905; $M_{low\text{-}power}$ = 3.51, SD = 1,249, t (131.24) = 4.99, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's d = 0.825; Table 1]. The manipulation was thus effective.

Identification

A two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), with identification as the dependent variable, and participant's gender and power as the independent variables, revealed an insignificant power by gender interaction on identification [$F(1, 143) = 1.96$, $p = 0.16$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.014$]. Because we had directional hypotheses, we examined simple effects consistent with our predictions (Rosnow and Rosenthal, 1995). Women in higher (vs lower) power showed a greater level of identification [$M_{\text{high-power women}}$ = 4.47, SD = 0.718, $M_{\text{low-power women}}$ = 4.05, SD = 1.139, $F(1, 143) = 3.79$, $p = 0.05$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.026$, Cohen's d = 0.505; Figure 1, Table 2]. Men in higher and lower power did not differ in identification [$M_{\text{high-power men}}$ = 4.04, SD = 0.98, $M_{\text{low-power men}}$ = 4.09, SD = 1.201, $F(1, 143) = 0.05$, $p = 0.83$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.000$, Cohen's d = 0]. This supports our predictions that power affects women's, but not men's, identification.

Further analysis revealed a marginally significant difference between higher-power men and women; women showed greater identification [$M_{\text{high-power men}}$ = 4.04,

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for manipulation check in Experiment 1

Power position condition	*n*	$M_{perceived\ power}$	SD
High power	74	4.41	0.905
Low power	73	3.51	1.249

Source(s): Authors' own work

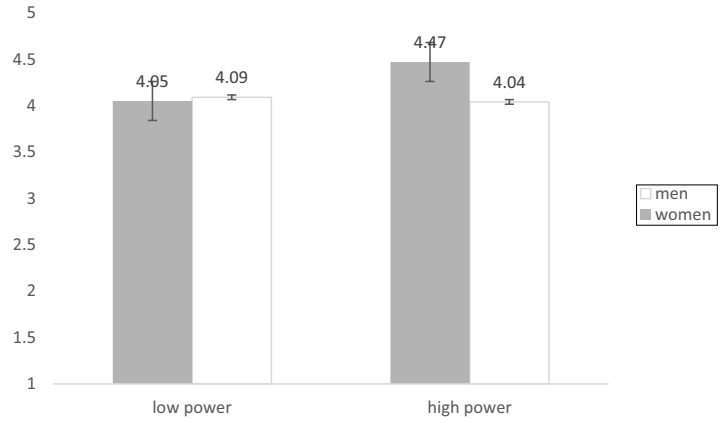


Figure 1. Identification with the victim among men and women in high and low power (Experiment 1)
Note(s): *Error bars represent standard error
Source: Authors' own work

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for results of Experiment 1

Gender	Power position condition	*N*	$M_{identification}$	SD
Men	High power	27	4.04	0.98
	Low power	32	4.09	1.201
Women	High power	47	4.47	0.718
	Low power	41	4.05	1.139

Source(s): Authors' own work

SD = 0.98, $M_{\text{high-power women}}$ = 4.47, SD = 0.718, $F(1, 143) = 3.14$, $p = 0.079$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.021$, Cohen's d = 0.293]. However, men and women in lower power did not demonstrate such effect [$M_{\text{low-power, men}}$ = 4.09, SD = 1.201, $M_{\text{low-power women}}$ = 4.05, SD = 1.139, $F(1, 143) = 0.04$, $p = 0.85$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.000$, Cohen's d = 0].

Experiment 2

This experiment examined the role of self-construal priming in the power-identification effect. Our prediction (*H2*) was that self-construal priming will attenuate gender differences in the effect of power on identification: under independent self-construal priming, power will not influence identification in both men and women; but under interdependent self-construal priming, both men and women will express greater identification when in higher (vs lower) power condition.

Method

Sample and design. Undergraduate students ($N = 207$, 43.3% males, $M_{\text{age}} = 24.26$, SD = 2.00) participated in a 2 (men/women) × 2 (independent/interdependent self-construal) × 2 (lower/

higher power) between-subjects experiment. They received extra credit points or a chance to win $20. The sample size was determined using G*Power version 3.1.9.7 (Faul *et al.*, 2007) to allow for the detection of small-to-medium effects ($f = 0.25$), with alpha at 0.05 and power of 0.80. This required sample of 199; we aimed for 210 participants, and recruited 208, one of which was eliminated due to technical malfunction of the experimental software. The experiment was similar to Experiment 1, with the addition of self-construal priming.

Self-construal. Self-construal was primed using a validated method introduced by Trafimow *et al.* (1991). Participants wrote a paragraph describing how they were different from their friends and family (independent) or similar to them (interdependent). This priming was used and validated across disciplines using various samples (Adam *et al.*, 2015; Chen, 2009; Kühnen *et al.*, 2001; Lalwani and Shavitt, 2009; Lee and Shavitt, 2006; Singelis, 1994; Tilley *et al.*, 2020). Trafimow *et al.* (1991) validated this priming by showing participants under the independent prime described themselves using greater proportion of idiocentric terms (e.g. intelligent) and a smaller proportion of group responses (e.g. Catholic); participants under the interdependent priming demonstrated an opposite pattern. Lalwani and Shavitt (2009) validated this priming using the same test, revealing similar results. Tilley *et al.* (2020) used the collectivism scale (Kim *et al.*, 2005), and showed that those under the interdependent (vs independent) prime reported greater agreement with collectivist values. Chen (2009) and Lee and Shavitt (2006) validated this prime by showing that participants in the interdependent (independent) prime constructed sentences using more plural pronouns. Other studies did not run manipulation checks but showed that this priming leads to effects that are theoretically consistent with independent and interdependent self-construal. For example, Kühnen *et al* (2001) showed that participants primed with independent self-construal were more likely to process stimuli regardless of the contexts, while interdependents considered the contexts and their relations with the stimuli. Altogether, the literature supports this procedure.

Results

Power manipulation check

An independent-sample *t*-test comparing the mean perceived empowerment between the power conditions confirmed that participants in the higher- (vs lower-) power condition perceived they were more powerful [$M_{\text{higher-power}} = 4.41$, SD = 0.851; $M = 3.74_{\text{lower-power}}$, SD = 1.163, $t(206) = 4.76$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's d = 0.66; Table 3]. Thus, the manipulation was effective.

Identification

A three-way ANOVA, with identification as the dependent variable and gender, power and self-construal as independent variables, revealed a significant interaction between self-

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for manipulation check in Experiment 2

Power position condition	*n*	$M_{perceived\ power}$	*SD*
High power	105	4.41	0.851
Low power	103	3.74	1.163

Source(s): Authors' own work

construal, power and gender on identification [$F(1, 199) = 5.39$, $p = 0.02$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.026$]. There was also a marginally significant main effect of gender on identification [$M_{\text{men}} = 3.84$, SD = 0.118, $M_{\text{women}} = 4.11$, SD = 0.103, $F(1, 199) = 2.97$, $p = 0.086$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.015$].

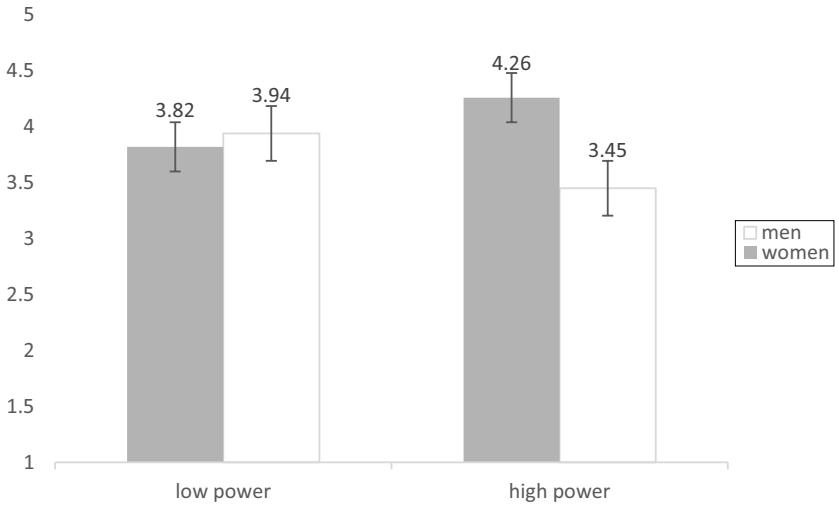
Under the *independent* prime, women in the higher- and lower-power condition did not differ in identification [$M_{\text{independent,high-power}} = 4.26$, SD = 0.919, $M_{\text{independent,low-power}} = 3.82$, SD = 1.037, $F(1, 199) = 2.42$, $p = 0.12$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.012$, Cohen's d = 0.22]. Men also did not differ in their identification across power conditions [$M_{\text{independent,high-power}} = 3.45$, SD = 1.356, $M_{\text{independent,low-power}} = 3.94$, SD = 1.197, $F(1, 199) = 1.84$, $p = 0.18$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.009$, Cohen's d = 0.19; Figure 2, Table 4]. This supports *H2a*. In addition (still under the *independent* prime), women (vs men) in the higher-power condition exhibited greater identification [$M_{\text{high-power men}} = 3.45$, SD = 1.356, $M_{\text{high-power women}} = 4.26$, $SD = 0.919$, $F(1, 199) = 6.86$, $p = 0.009$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.012$, Cohen's d = 0.19]. There was no difference between men and women in lower power [$M_{\text{low-power men}} = 3.94$, SD = 1.197, $M_{\text{low-power women}} = 3.82$, SD = 1.037, $F(1, 199) = 0.11$, $p = 0.74$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.001$, Cohen's d = 0.063]. These trends are similar to results of Experiment 1, but with a larger gap between high-power men and women.

Under the *interdependent* prime, consistent with *H2*b, higher- (vs lower-) power men exhibited greater identification. This effect was marginally significant [$M_{\text{interdependent,high-power men}} = 4.24$, SD = 1.012, $M_{\text{interdependent, low-power men}} = 3.71$, SD = 1.357, $F(1, 199) = 3.02$, $p = 0.08$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.015$, Cohen's d = 0.246]. Interestingly, inconsistent with *H2*b, the higher- and lower-power women did not differ in their identification [$M_{\text{interdependent,high-power women}} = 4.17$, SD = 1.049, $M_{\text{interdependent,low-power women}} = 4.17$, SD = 0.928, $F(1, 199) = 0.000$, $p = 0.985$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.000$, Cohen's d = 0; Figure 2, Table 4]. There were also no differences between men and women in higher power [$M_{\text{interdependent,high-power men}} = 4.24$, SD = 1.012, $M_{\text{interdependent,high-power women}} = 4.17$, SD = 1.049, $F(1, 199) = 0.05$, $p = 0.82$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.000$, Cohen's d = 0] or in lower power [$M_{\text{interdependent, low-power men}} = 3.71$, SD = 1.357, $M_{\text{interdependent, low-power women}} = 4.17$, SD= 0.928, $F(1, 199) = 2.47$, $p = 0.12$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.012$, Cohen's d = 0.22].

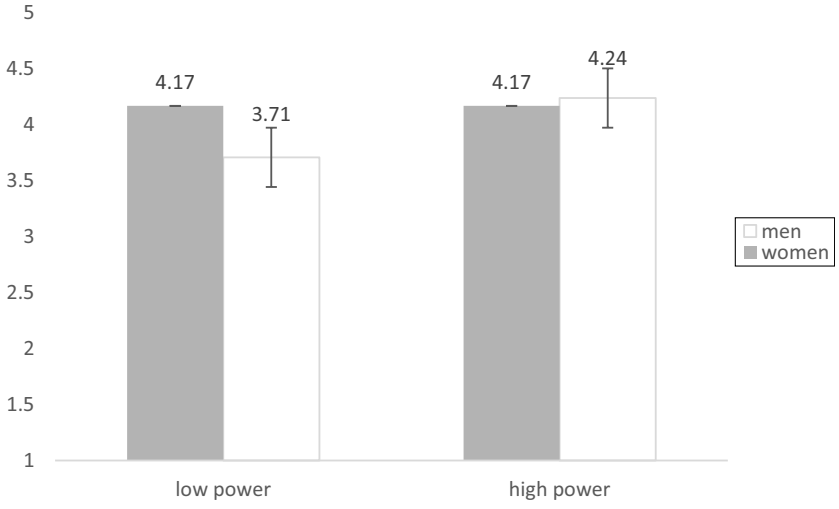
Further analysis revealed a significant difference between higher-power men under the independent (vs interdependent) prime [$M_{\text{independent,high-power men}} = 3.45$, SD = 1.356, $M_{\text{interdependent,high-power men}} = 4.24$, SD = 1.012, $F(1, 199) = 5.74$, $p = 0.02$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.028$, Cohen's d = 0.339]. Thus, interdependent priming enhanced the level of identification of higher-power men.

Discussion

Experiment 2 demonstrates that self-construal priming modifies men's and women's identification with the victims. A comparison of the results across the two experiments suggests that the *independent* prime altered the pattern of power-identification effect in women: Without priming, higher- (vs lower-) power women exhibited greater identification (Experiment 1); with independent priming, this effect was diminished (Experiment 2). The pattern of the power-identification effect in men was similar without priming compared to under independent priming (Experiment 1 vs 2). That is, power position had no effect on men's identification when no self-construal priming was present, and also when men were exposed to independent prime. This supports our premise that the manifestation of power in people with independent self-construal underlies the null effect of power on identification. Interestingly, an exploratory analysis comparing higher-power men without self-construal priming (Experiment 1) with higher-power men under the independent prime (Experiment 2) demonstrated a marginally significant difference, where the independent priming reduced identification [$M_{\text{no self-construal prime, high-power men}} = 4.04$, SD = 0.98, $M_{\text{independent, high-power men}} = 3.45$, SD = 1.356, $F(1, 342) = 3.238$, $p = 0.062$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.019$, Cohen's d = 0.278]. This comparison



(a) Independent priming



(b) Interdependent priming

Figure 2. The role of self-construal in the effect of power on men's and women's identification with sexual harassment victims (Experiment 2)
Note(s): *Error bars represent standard error
Source: Authors' own work

Table 4. Descriptive statistics for results of Experiment 2

Self-construal	Gender	Power condition	*n*	$M_{identification}$	SD
Independent self-construal	Men	High power	20	3.45	1.356
		Low power	17	3.94	1.197
	Women	High power	35	4.26	0.919
		Low power	29	3.83	1.037
Interdependent self-construal	Men	High power	25	4.24	1.012
		Low power	28	3.71	1.357
	Women	High power	24	4.17	1.049
		Low power	29	4.17	0.928

Source(s): Authors' own work

provides further suggestive evidence that it is the independent self-construal that enhances the distance between the higher-power men and the victim, which in turn reduces identification.

The results under *interdependent* priming show that, as predicted, interdependent priming modified the pattern of the power-identification effect in men: Without priming, lower- and higher-power men demonstrate equal identification (Experiment 1). However, interdependent priming created a gap in identification between lower- and higher-power men (Experiment 2), Furthermore, interdependent priming enhanced identification in higher-power men compared to those in independent priming. This supports our premise that the manifestation of power in interdependents underlies greater identification under higher power.

Surprisingly, regarding women, the interdependent prime modified the power-identification effect in an unpredicted way. Another exploratory comparison across the two experiments suggests that the interdependent prime diminished the observed power-identification effect in the women without priming (Experiment 1). That is, without priming, higher- (vs lower-) power women exhibited greater identification. However, with interdependent priming, there was an insignificant difference between higher- and lower-power women in their identification. Perhaps the insignificant difference between lower- and higher-power women is not due to the reduced identification of higher-power women but due to the enhanced identification of lower-power women. This may be a result of the increased perceived oneness of women in general. Indeed, the comparison between higher-power women without self-construal prime (Experiment 1) and higher-power women with interdependent self-construal prime (Experiment 2) demonstrates insignificant difference in identification [$M_{\text{no self-construal prime, high-power women}} = 4.47$, $SD = 0.718$, $M_{\text{interdependent, high-power women}} = 4.17$, $SD = 1.049$, $F(1, 342) = 0.763$, $p = 0.259$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.004$, Cohen's $d = 0.126$]; and so does the comparison between higher-power women without self-construal prime (Experiment 1) and lower-power women with interdependent self-construal prime (Experiment 2) [$M_{\text{no self-construal prime, high-power women}} = 4.47$, $SD = 0.718$, $M_{\text{interdependent, low-power women}} = 4.17$, $SD = 1.049$, $F(1, 342) = 1.39$, $p = 0.239$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.004$, Cohen's $d = 0.127$]. That is, the interdependent prime seems to enhance identification of lower-power women with their woman peers (Vanman, 2016).

Altogether, the results show that interdependent self-construal priming is effective in enhancing identification with sexual harassment victims among higher-power men and possibly among lower-power women.

General discussion

Focusing on sexual harassment involving a woman victim and a man aggressor, we examined the roles of power and gender in identification with the victim and explored a potential intervention to enhance men's identification. We propose that gender differences in the effects of power are due to distinct self-construal across genders, leading to variations in the manifestation of power across genders. Consequently, we suggest, self-construal priming can be used as a potential intervention to modify identification.

Experiment 1 supports our premise of gender differences in the manifestation of power, evident in the distinct effects of power on men's versus women's identification with the victim. Experiment 2 further supports our account by showing that self-construal priming modifies men's and women's identification. Moreover, an interdependent prime has been shown to enhance identification among high-power men and possibly among low-power women. Thus, interdependent self-construal priming can be an effective intervention to enhance identification and may reduce biases in the treatment of sexual harassment.

Our findings support the broader premise of variation in the notion of power across genders: men's view of power focuses on implications for oneself, while women's view of power focuses on implications toward others (Cross and Madson, 1997; Gordon and Chen, 2013; Meyers-Levy and Loken, 2015; Torelli *et al.*, 2020; Torelli and Shavitt, 2010). Such views are linked to gender differences in self-construal (Cross *et al.*, 2011; Gardner *et al.*, 1999; Markus and Kitayama, 1991). Gender differences in the notion of power have implications in other contexts, such as interpersonal relationships and leadership. This knowledge enhances theories on gender, power and related areas.

This research offers practical contributions to organizations and society. It can inform organizations when treating sexual harassment, highlighting the factors to be considered when selecting the people in charge of judging such incidents. Understanding that men and women render different judgments, emphasizes the need for diversity in taskforces to consider a variety of viewpoints to improve decision-making. This is consistent with research suggesting that having women in power positions can decrease gender biases (Stainback *et al.*, 2016). Our research stresses the need to consider the mindsets of taskforce members: people who focus on group harmony and in-group connections would be more suitable. Furthermore, procedures or situations inducing interdependence can intervene to enhance empathy and identification with victims, in various contexts. Practical intervention techniques might be team-building exercises emphasizing group values, or employing team rather than personal evaluations and incentives (Frederiksen *et al.*, 2024; Ladley *et al.*, 2015). Such interventions may attenuate judgment biases and lessen mistreatment of such incidents, which we hope will ultimately reduce the occurrence of harassment.

Limitations and future research

This study is limited to a specific type of incident: a man superior harassing a woman subordinate in the workplace. Notably, sexual harassment may happen in other diverse settings. Future research should extend the examination to various settings and consider the role of context. In addition, the case described in the scenario is a clear one. It is reasonable that more ambiguous cases would have led to greater variability among men and women due to distinct interpretations of the situation. Future research should extend to ambiguous cases.

We focused on identification with the victim. Yet, other factors might play roles in people's judgment. The theories of reasoned action and planned behavior (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1977) suggest avenues for examination of the relationships between various forms of judgment and behavior. Factors such as perceived norms and perceived control (e.g. Foster and Fullagar, 2018) should be examined alongside organizational factors such as

organizational climate, trust and support (e.g. Clarke, 2014). Research should also examine the role of power in behaviors relating to sexual harassment treatment. For example, a recent study showed that participants under high-power condition indicated that they would not promote a women employee who reported experiencing sexual harassment (Hart, 2019). It is important to examine whether this tendency varies across genders, as well as across people that vary in their self-construal due to additional factors (e.g. culture; Markus and Kitayama, 1991). Additional factors might also be involved in the sexual harassment judgments: past experiences, sexism, empathetic tendencies, age, work experience and views regarding gender roles (De Judicibus and McCabe, 2001; Wayne, 2000). Research should address combinations of factors to expand our understanding of the effects of power. Furthermore, recent research examined various types of power: self- versus other-focused power (Dinh *et al.*, 2022; Stockdale *et al.*, 2020), which are analogous to men's and women's manifestations of power due to variations in self-construal. Research suggests that although self-focused power is more likely to lead people to perceive sexual harassment as acceptable, other-focused power may lead people to experience communal feelings and to undergo moral licensing, which would also bias their judgment (Dinh *et al.*, 2022; Stockdale *et al.*, 2020). Similarly, it might be that the interdependent self-construal, and perhaps even expression of identification with the victim, would provide a license to people to be more tolerant toward sexual harassment, which in turn may lead them either to harass or to judge sexual harassment less negatively. Thus, interdependent self-construal priming may backfire and lead to mistreatments of sexual harassment or other gender biases, possibly more so in men, who chronically possess an independent disposition. More research should be devoted to these potential effects to ensure that interventions involving self-construal priming do not lead to a backlash.

Finally, research should also examine specific procedures that can be used in organizational settings to induce interdependence and to enhance empathy and perspective-taking. Field studies in a real-world setting would enhance our findings' validity and practical usefulness.

In sum, this research augments the understanding of the role of gender-based differences in the conception of power in judgment of sexual harassment. It proposes a strategy to attenuate these differences when appropriate. As such, it can contribute to correcting biases in the judgment and treatment of such cases, and other contexts.

Note

[1.] Shortened version; the full version can be provided upon request from the first author.

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Appendix. The scenario used in the experiments [1]

Michelle is part of a […] team […] led by Guy[…]

The relationships […] are very friendly […] Guy asked Michelle to have lunch out […], and they had a good time […] since that lunch, something had changed. […] Guy starting to linger more at her desk and staring at her. […] invited Michelle out on a date […] Michelle politely refused. Guy continued to suggest that they go out together, while Michelle continued to politely decline.

One day, Guy […] wrote: "[…] I can't stand the feeling that you hate me and refuse to go out with me." Michelle got scared and left the room.

In the following week, […] Guy sent her another letter […]: "I know it's worth getting to know you, with or without sex […] We can make a great couple."

[…] she talked to Guy and explained to him that she was not interested.

From that point, something changed in Guy's behavior […]. He excluded her […] burdened her with tasks suitable for more junior positions. […]

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