

# #MeToo and Perceptions of Sexual Harassment in an International Context

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## Introduction

How does thinking of Cosby, Trump, and Weinstein influence perceptions of sexual harassment around the world?

- Thinking about these American cases should increase the perception that sexual harassment is a large problem in the United States.

But do American cases increase or decrease the perceived seriousness of sexual harassment in other countries?

- If the public thinks in terms of national problems, the U.S. cases should result in contrast effects, making sexual harassment in other countries seem less extreme by comparison.
- If #MeToo succeeded in framing sexual harassment as a global gender issue, the U.S. cases should result in an assimilation effect, making sexual harassment seem more extreme across national borders.

## Methods

### Participants

Representative probability-based panels in the U.S. ( $N = 2843$ ), the Netherlands ( $N = 2357$ ), and Germany, ( $N = 3770$ ).

### Design & Materials

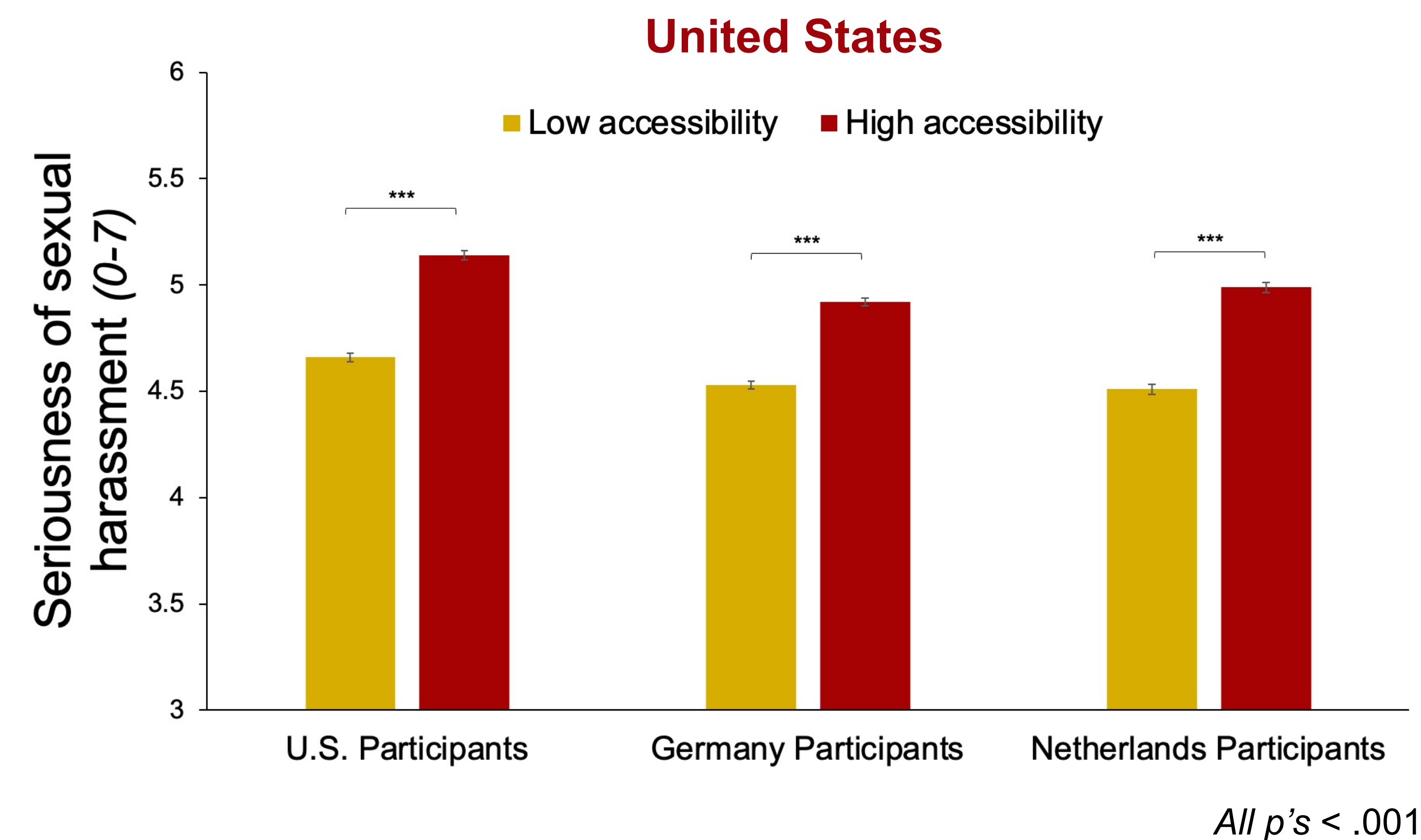
Within each country, participants were randomly assigned to a 2 (case question asked before vs after dependent variables) x 2 (U.S. judged first vs. second) between-subjects design. All participants judged the severity of sexual harassment in the U.S. and one of Germany or the Netherlands.

**Case question:** "In the United States, a number of women have recently accused prominent media personalities and politicians of sexual harassment or sexual assault. Examples include the actor Bill Cosby, the movie producer Harvey Weinstein, and President Donald Trump. Have you heard of any of these cases?" [Yes; No]  
If Yes, "Which case have you heard of?"

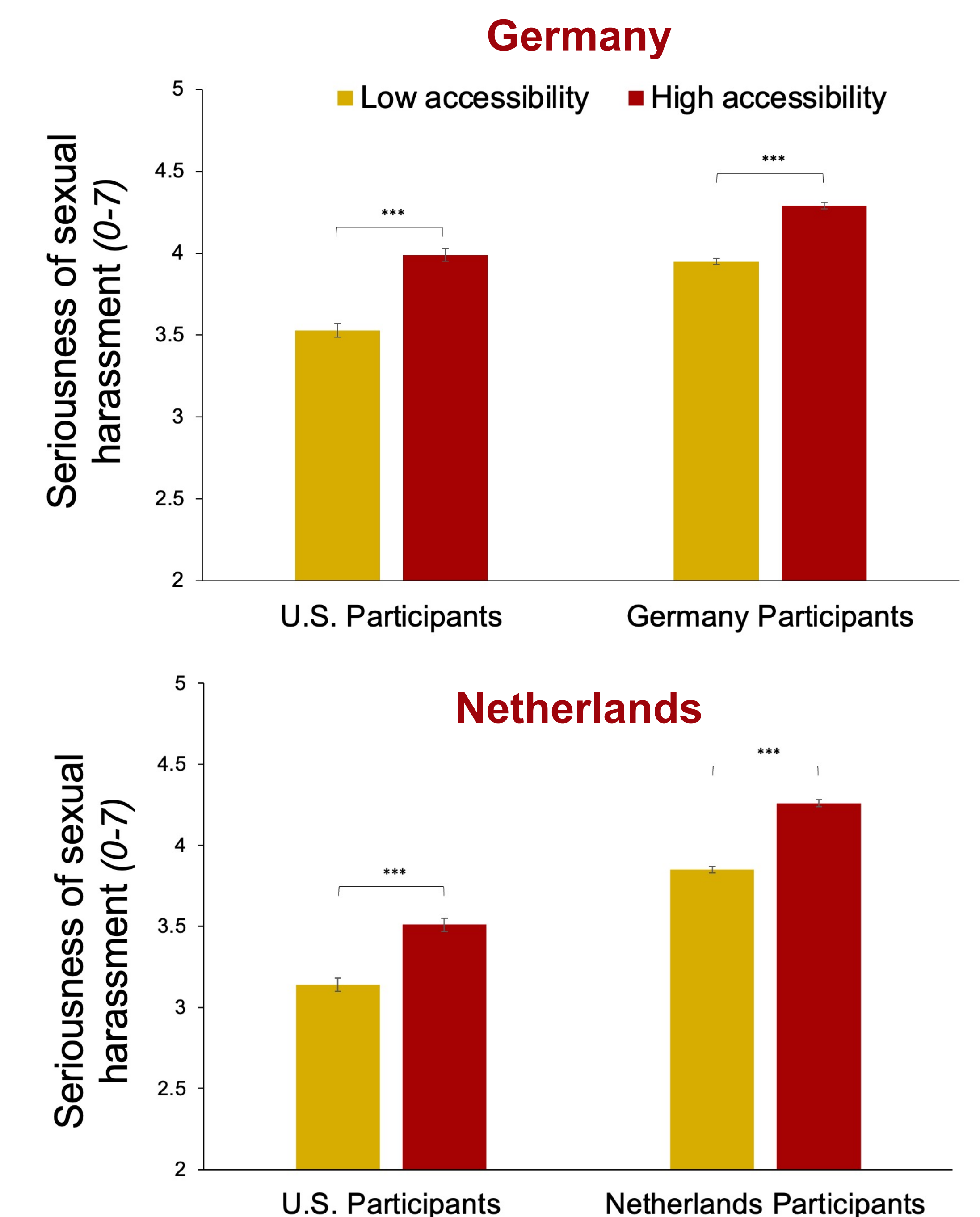
**Dependent measure:** "How serious of a problem do you think workplace sexual harassment is in [the United States/Germany/Netherlands]?"

## Results

Perceived seriousness of sexual harassment in the U.S., Germany, and the Netherlands increased after being reminded of Trump, Weinstein, & Cosby



- The effect of case accessibility was independent of sample country, judgement order, and participant gender
- Women considered sexual harassment a more serious problem than men, across all countries and independent of the case manipulation.
- Case knowledge was high, with > 60% of people knowing all 3 cases in all countries



## Conclusion

Reminding people of famous U.S. harassment cases made sexual harassment seem a more serious problem across countries

- No contrast effects: Rendering U.S. cases highly accessible also made sexual harassment seem worse in Germany & the Netherlands
- This assimilation effect was independent of judgement order, sample country, and participant gender

#MeToo was successful at making sexual harassment a global gender issue, not a country-specific one

- The general assimilation effect suggests that #MeToo successfully framed sexual harassment as a global gender issue, which invites the inclusion of cases in one country into the representation of the gender issue in other countries.
- Hence, countries do not benefit from extreme cases in other countries, even when the case country was judged first.

Similar principles apply to organizations

- Prominent cases in a specific organization may similarly affect perceptions across organizations and industries.