



# Victims, Perpetrators, and Emotions

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## Introduction

Many daily complex social interactions have both prosocial and antisocial behavior i.e. two people fighting for the same parking spot. Prior work has examined how 3rd party observers, who are often subject to these interactions, subjectively attribute responsibility and blame to both the victims and perpetrators in the situation. Little is known about the specific **emotion** attribution to victims and perpetrators, we aim to explore the main objective which is to examine the affective and emotional (e.g. anger, fear) responses in a set of scenarios involving aggressive interactions between individuals involving victims and perpetrators.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, we will explore how third party viewers emotionally respond to people in these complex social interactions and how that may relate with attributions about the victims or perpetrators in the scenarios.

## Methods and Materials

We analyzed n=70 (47 females, 0 non-binary) participants, all college students at Northeastern University. They were asked to read through 12 scenarios, all of which were true stories adapted from various news channels. Participants were then asked to indicate which emotions they felt the most towards the victim and towards the perpetrator (Figure 1). Participants were also asked to rate on a 6-point likert scale (1 being “not at all” and 6 being “a lot”) how much of each emotion they thought the perpetrators and victims felt (Figure 1). Finally, they answered an empathy<sup>6</sup> and Just World Belief questionnaires.<sup>5</sup>

For Each Scenario:

1 – 12

Which emotions **do** you feel towards the people who got hurt/hurt others?

Which emotions **do you think** the people in the scenario **felt**?

6 Point Likert Scale

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Guilt	<input type="radio"/>					
Fear	<input type="radio"/>					
Disgust	<input type="radio"/>					
Anger	<input type="radio"/>					
Happy	<input type="radio"/>					

Figure 1. Method.

## Abstract

Recently, there has been a continuous increase in reporting of crimes and police brutality. This makes it relevant to **study the dynamics around victims, perpetrators, and third parties**. In our study, participants are given multiple narratives reporting different crimes. After reading through each scenario, the participants were asked questions regarding their feelings and emotions towards both the perpetrator(s) and their victim(s). **It emerged differences in emotions felt by participants toward victims and perpetrators as well as differences in emotion attribution to victims and perpetrators.**

*Participants felt mostly anger, disgust, and fear towards perpetrators while feeling sad, sympathetic and empathetic towards victims.*

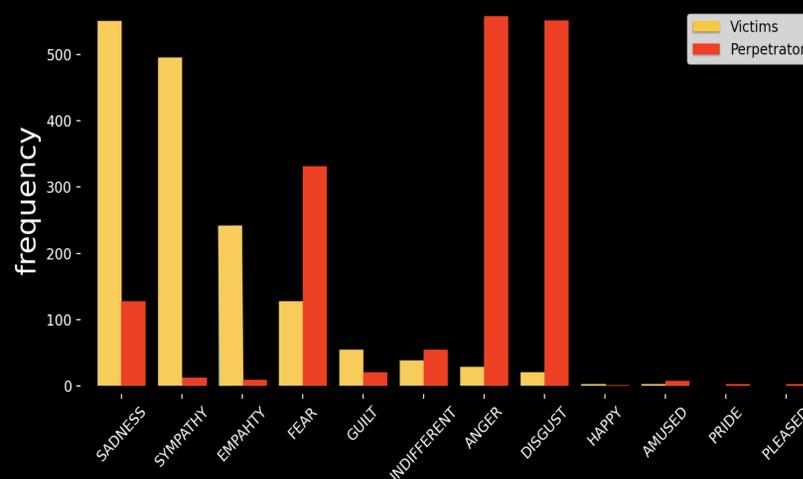


Figure 2. bar chart of emotion frequency experienced by participants toward victims (in yellow) and perpetrators (in red).

*Participants thought victims were more likely to feel fear, anger, and sadness; whereas, perpetrators were more likely to feel anger, pride, and fear.*

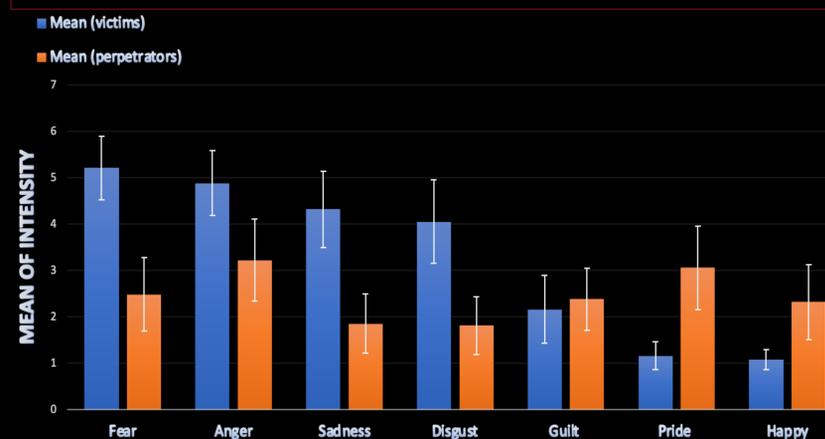


Figure 3. Mean and standard deviation of emotions attributed by participants to victims (in blue) and perpetrators (in orange). Emotions intensity measured with a 6-point Likert scale.

## Discussion

There is a small discrepancy between the same emotions attributed to the victims/perpetrators. From a third-party perspective, people's judgments of good and bad tend to polarize. Generally, people **expressed support and sympathy towards victims** compared to **anger, disgust, and punishment expressed towards perpetrators**. However, people become less sensitive to empathize with the victims or perpetrators' perspective since the participants don't know what it feels like to be in their shoes. Impartial third-party judgments can be distorted by external factors (social context, media, physical harm, etc.) and internal factors (self-perception, shared experience, background, etc.) potentially leading to victim blaming because of the complexity of human perceptions. Further analysis will be conducted regarding personality traits i.e. empathy. Other relevant aspects such as conformity levels will be examined such as the belief in a “Just World” where everyone gets what they deserve. The affective or emotional discomfort resulting from trying to maintain this notion of a fair world and potentially blaming the victim when one's sense of this belief is disrupted.

## Conclusions

**Little is known about whether and how discrete emotions play a role in the dynamics involving victims and perpetrators. Understanding the relationship between affect/emotion and victims/perpetrators may contribute to fundamental theoretical debates about the psychological mechanisms involved.**

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