

**Psychological abuse in the context of control and coercion:
Investigating how severity of abuse and denial of the victim influence the
tendency to blame the victim**

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Abstract

Control and coercion is a form of intimate partner violence that has been prosecuted in the UK since 2015. One of the measures used in investigating a case of this type of abuse is interviewing the suspect. However, conversations with the investigator offer many opportunities for the suspect to influence the investigation. One of these influence behaviors is the use of denial of the victim arguments, which are intended to portray the victim as the perpetrator. Therefore, this study investigated how the denial of the victim arguments and the perceived severity of the abuse influenced the tendency to blame the victim. Additionally, it was examined how societal beliefs, such as belief in a just world and sexist attitudes affect this relationship. The participants of this study received a randomly distributed fictitious description and an investigative interview about a control and coercion case, with varying severity of abuse (moderate or high), and suspect justifications (denial of the victim arguments or no comment). The study results found that denial of the victim arguments lead to increased victim blame and decreased suspect blame, perceived guilt of the suspect, and veracity of stated allegations by the victim. Furthermore, the moderation analysis revealed that the belief in a just world increased suspect blame and perceived guilt, but only for the case description with high severity of abuse. In addition, hostile sexism increased victim blame, decreased suspect blame, perceived guilt, and veracity of allegations. Similar to benevolent sexism which led to increased victim blame and decreased suspect blame. These insights underscore the need for interventions to address suspect justifications and societal biases, aiming to reduce victim blaming and improve support for survivors of intimate partner violence.

Keywords: intimate partner violence, control and coercion, investigative interviews, suspect justifications, denial of the victim, victim blaming

Introduction

According to research by Breiding et al. (2014), almost half of all women (48.4%) and men (48.8%) have experienced psychological aggression from an intimate partner at least once in their lives. Despite the high incidence, victims of psychological abuse in intimate relationships face significant challenges in seeking justice for their suffering. This type of abuse is often underestimated in society as the psychological impacts are not directly visible and therefore difficult to detect. Furthermore, according to Heise et al. (2019), the issue of determining a threshold for psychological violence has been a persistent challenge, even though standardized measures for physical and sexual violence have already been developed and accepted. However, research confirms that emotional abuse is just as harmful as physical and/or sexual abuse (Dye, 2019). Although the abuse refers mainly to emotional suffering, these harmful actions have a major impact on the lives of the victims. A study examining psychological abuse in romantic relationships found that those who experienced this type of abuse in relationships demonstrated higher levels of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress (Peatee, 2018). In addition, the affected victims continue to suffer from the negative effects on their health and welfare for a long time even after separation (Daw et al., 2022).

A term often used to describe behaviors associated with psychological abuse is "control and coercion." According to Stark (2012), the tactics used by the perpetrators of this abuse can be divided into coercion (behaviors used to hurt and intimidate), and control (behaviors used to isolate and regulate) of the victim. The distinguishing factor between this form of psychological violence and others lies in the relational aspect, which enables the perpetrator to exploit the partner's weaknesses through intimate insights from the relationship (Stark, 2012). To address this issue, a law was introduced in 2015 in the UK to recognize controlling and coercive behaviors within intimate relationships. This legislation acknowledges and prosecutes the psychological and physical aspects of intimate partner

violence (IPV). By recognizing that IPV is often a continuous experience for victims rather than a series of isolated incidents, the law seeks to facilitate legal intervention before situations escalate into more serious assaults or homicide. The law encompasses a range of behaviors such as isolation, surveillance, threats, humiliation, and control exercised by the perpetrator over the victim (Crown Prosecution Service, 2023).

Interviews for prosecution

The criminal prosecution of psychological abuse in relationships presents several challenges. Barlow et al. (2019) identified systematic problems within police responses to past cases of control and coercion, such as the mixed classification of cases, delayed or lack of contact after the initial report made by the victim, as well as a narrow focus on physical assaults instead of the recognition of the overall patterns of abusive behavior (Barlow et al., 2019). Therefore, interviews serve as a crucial method to uncover crimes of control and coercion. This tool offers the police the opportunity to investigate the events from the perspective of the victim and the suspect. However, it is important to note that conducting interviews to solve such crimes presents its own set of challenges. Suspects involved in cases of control and coercion may engage in manipulative behavior which is difficult to detect and designed to mislead the investigations (CPS, 2023). These behaviors also serve to encourage the individuals around the abusers to adopt their perception of the violent events, resulting in the minimization of the credibility of the victim (Veldhuis, 2024). In addition, the perception of gender roles on the part of the investigator or decision maker may influence the assessment of such a crime, as they may tend to unconsciously introduce gender stereotypes or biases about the victim (Tolmie, 2017). Gaining a basic understanding of the challenges associated with investigating cases of psychological abuse leads us to a deeper examination of the factors hindering the pursuit of justice for the victim. To understand how individuals can be influenced in their assessment of blame and the motivation behind shifting blame from the

suspect to the victim, it is important to gain a deeper insight into the psychological process of blame attribution and its underlying dynamics.

Attributions of blame

Shaver (1985) states that when it comes to assigning blame for an unfortunate event or a moral violation, the initial aim is to search for someone who can be held responsible for the negative events. To achieve this state, people look for various explanations that serve as satisfactory answers (Shaver, 1985). To understand how individuals handle the assignment of blame, the attribution theory by Harold H. Kelley offers insight into the psychological function behind the attribution of a particular action (Schmitt, 2015). The theory states that specific behavior can be attributed either to internal causes, such as the individual itself, or to external causes such as the stimulus and/or the circumstances of the situation. However, there are several biases characterized by certain motivations that influence this attribution process (Schmitt, 2015). One of these motivations is the self-serving bias, which states that individuals tend to attribute responsibility for desirable outcomes to themselves and responsibility for undesirable outcomes to external factors (Shepperd et al., 2008). The motive of this bias is either to increase a sense of self-worth or to prevent one's self-confidence from being compromised (Schmitt, 2015). For observers and interviewers, blaming the victim could be self-serving as it distances them from the possibility of becoming victims themselves. This distance may give them the impression that they can maintain control over their own safety. Furthermore, suspects could benefit from this bias by shifting blame and responsibility away from themselves. This allows them to maintain a positive self-perception and avoid the negative implications of facing their wrongdoing.

Victim blaming is a prevalent bias in abuse cases, through which certain assumptions and stereotypes are attributed to victims, making them responsible for the abuse they have experienced (Capezza & Arriaga, 2008). This bias is exercised not only by the perpetrators

but also by bystanders and society, with each group having different reasons for attributing blame (Schoellkopf, 2012). However, according to Shaver (1985), those who assess the events are not always aware of the reasons for their blame. Individuals who believe in a just world have a desire to defend this belief by attempting to restore injustice in the world by assuming that the victim deserves the harmful consequences (Dalbert, 2009). Therefore, there is a possibility that individuals with this bias will blame innocent victims for their misfortunes (Shaver, 1985). These insights indicate that the belief in a just world also supports the self-serving bias, by suggesting that the misfortunes that happened to the victim would not happen to the observers who perceive themselves as good people, who are thus safe from such negative outcomes. This belief could lead observers to conclude, that the victim must be a bad person who, due to their own flaws or wrongdoings, must be at fault for their misfortunes. According to Furnham (2003), the belief in a just world offers a sense of control over one's fate. Advocates of this belief feel less susceptible to negative events since they perceive themselves as undeserving of such consequences (Furnham, 2003). After gaining insight into the psychological processes of blame attributions and the associated victim blaming attitudes, it is important to recognize the impact one's own prejudices and external influences can have on the assessment of blame. Therefore, it is important to pay particular attention to how suspects might exploit these psychological dynamics of blame attribution during an investigative interview.

Suspect behavior and justifications

During police investigations, it is visible that suspects have personal objectives that shape the course of the interview. These goals are attempted to be achieved through influence techniques, which, according to Watson et al. (2022), are actions that are intended to change the interviewer's beliefs and behavior. One category of influence behaviors is the use of justifications, which are based on the techniques of neutralization by Sykes and Matza (1957)

and serve to rationalize the suspect's deviant behavior to themselves. Kaptein and Van Helvoort (2018) state that these techniques are implemented by using linguistic methods to alleviate self-blame. Such behaviors are intended to protect the suspect's sense of self-worth and to justify immoral actions as acceptable (Kaptein & Van Helvoort, 2018). While suspects might sometimes use these behaviors strategically to manipulate the interviewer's perceptions, these justifications are likely to reflect self-serving cognitive biases. They could serve the function of helping the suspect reduce guilt and maintain self-esteem, similar to the techniques of neutralization described by Sykes and Matza (1957). Consequently, using these justifications behaviors has the potential to influence the relationship between the alleged victim or witness and investigators (Watson et al., 2022).

Denial of the victim

According to Sykes and Matza (1957), one of these justifications is the denial of the victim, in which the suspect presents himself as an avenger whose actions were a legitimate retaliation or penalty for the victim, who should be perceived as wrongdoer. In this phenomenon, the suspect attempts to portray the injured person not as a victim, but as someone who deserves the harmful actions (Sykes & Matza, 1957). In the context of an interview, the denial of the victim may manifest itself as the suspect describing the event in a way that highlights the victim's alleged mistakes or provocations. For instance, the suspect might claim that the victim initiated the conflict and behaved immorally. According to Watson et al. (2022), this behavior can potentially influence the investigator's perception of the victims, making them appear less credible and worthy of help. Meanwhile, the suspect's actions come across as acceptable and justified (Watson et al., 2022). Therefore, the denial of the victim might influence the outcome of the investigation by altering the perceived roles of the parties involved.

Research in the area of intimate partner violence has further examined how social

phenomena such as the belief in a just world and sexism affect the effectiveness of denial of the victim on the attributions of victims and suspects. It was found that these biases influence individuals' perceptions and judgments in cases involving the denial of a victim. Specifically, individuals who hold sexist or just world beliefs are more susceptible to these justifications, leading them to attribute less blame to the victim (Gallmeister, 2023). This is further supported by research by Wüller (2021), who discovered that higher levels of hostile sexism were associated with lower perceived empathy toward the victim, but only when suspects utilized denial of the victim. According to Glick and Fiske (1996), sexism can be described as a prejudice characterized by hostile attitudes towards the female gender, which serves as a multidimensional construct and includes the two attitudes of hostile and benevolent sexism. Hostile sexism includes typical prejudices, such as the attitude that women are incapable of handling demanding tasks. Moreover, benevolent sexism includes attitudes and behaviors related to reinforcing male dominance and maintaining traditional gender stereotypes. Despite its subjectively positive intent, benevolent sexism threatens women's independence and professionalism (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Research by Glick et al. (1997) revealed that men who endorse hostile sexism were associated with less favorable assessments of women in nontraditional roles. In addition, those who endorse benevolent sexism were linked to positive evaluations of women in traditional roles, and negative ones of those who deviate (Glick et al., 1997). Based on these insights, the finding that sexism magnifies the effects of denial of the victim may be attributed to the nature of these arguments, which involves justifications that lower the perceived credibility of the victim. Individuals with sexist attitudes already tend to undermine the perspective of a female victim, therefore they are probably more willing to accept and even promote these justifications.

While past research highlights how the use of denial of the victim arguments affects blame attributions, as well as how biases such as the belief in a just world and sexism

influence this relationship, little is known about how the perceived severity of abuse influences these dynamics. Understanding whether and how the severity of abuse experienced by the victim affects the relationship between denial of the victim arguments, biases, and perceptions of blame would offer insightful knowledge for the field of intimate partner violence.

The severity of abuse and its impact on blame attributions

An earlier meta-analytic study by Robbennolt (2000) on outcome severity and responsibility assessment found that more severe outcomes of a negative incident led to increased attributions of responsibility to the accountable individual (Robbennolt, 2000). Furthermore, Idisis and Edoute's (2017) recent research on the attribution of severity and blame in rape cases revealed that as the severity of the rape event increased, participants tend to assign more blame to the perpetrator and moderately less to the victim. This indicates that although participants tended to attribute less blame to the victim as the severity of the assault increased, they still placed some blame on the victim. Moreover, the victim's behavior before, during, and after the assault influenced the perceived severity of the case (Idisis & Edoute, 2017; Ostermann & Watson, 2024). Based on these findings, it is hypothesized that higher perceived severity of abuse will lead to increased blame attributed to the suspect and decreased blame attributed to the victim.

The research gap and current study

As previously mentioned, suspects often use denial tactics during investigative interviews to shift responsibility for the harmful events from themselves to the victims. These justifications exploit long-standing societal attitudes and stereotypes, such as beliefs about gender roles and power dynamics, to manipulate perceptions of victim blame for personal gain. Based on these insights in past literature, there is a need to draw explicit connections between the aforementioned concepts. Denial of the victim arguments are expected to interact

with the severity of the abuse and impact the blame attributions. It is predicted that as the severity of abuse is moderate, the use of the suspect's denial tactics leads to increased attributions of blame to the victim instead of the suspect. In addition, when the severity of abuse gets more severe, it is assumed that the use of denial of the victim arguments by the suspect will be less effective, which would result in greater blame attributed to the suspect. Furthermore, individuals high in belief in a just world may be more willing to accept denial arguments offered by suspects to reconcile perceived injustice, particularly in cases of severe abuse. Therefore, the belief in a just world is expected to strengthen the association between the severity of abuse and suspect justifications.

Uncovering the impact of the severity of the abuse and the suspect's use of justifications can lead to a more sophisticated understanding of the perception of victim blame, thereby contributing to the refinement of legal and policy frameworks to combat intimate partner violence. Ultimately, this research highlights the urgency of addressing victim blaming of psychological abuse, occurring in the context of control and coercion. The findings of this study are intended to help provide a basis for achieving more compassionate and informed responses to those affected by such violence. Therefore, the primary research goal of this study is to investigate how different cases of psychological abuse, occurring in the context of control and coercion within intimate relationships and varying in severity, influence the tendency to blame the victim. Building upon existing literature, it was hypothesized that:

H1: As the severity of abuse increases, victim blame will decrease, and suspect blame will increase.

H2: The use of denial of the victim will increase suspect blame in less severe allegations, except when people endorse sexist or just world beliefs.

H3: The use of denial of the victim is only expected to increase victim blame when the severity of the allegations is low and when individuals endorse high levels of sexism or just world beliefs.

Methods

Design

A between-participants design was conducted. The study included the two independent variables Suspect Justification with two conditions (Denial of the Victim and No Comment), and the Severity of the Abuse differing in two levels (Moderate, and High). In the Denial of the Victim condition, the suspect justified his behavior by shifting blame onto the victim and asserting that the victim was untrustworthy, had a bad character, or directly provoked any negative actions. The No Comment condition is included as a control measure, in which the suspect refrains from providing any justification for the questions asked by saying "No comment". For the variable Severity of Abuse, two cases were prepared, differing in frequency and extent of the psychological abuse in the context of control and coercion within intimate relationships.

The dependent variables in the study included Victim Attribution, Suspect Attribution, Perceived Guilt, Perceived Veracity, and Perceived Crime Seriousness. The variable Perceived Crime Seriousness was a within-participants measurement that served as a manipulation check to ensure participants accurately perceived the intended severity of abuse. Additionally, Belief in a Just World and Sexist Attitudes were introduced as moderators.

Participants

The research sample consisted of individuals of all ages, genders, and education levels who volunteered to participate in this study. The inclusion criteria were fulfilled by participants who were at least 18 years old and spoke English or German. Participants who did not reach the specified age group or spoke neither English nor German were excluded.

The participants were recruited via the research platform BMS test subject pool SONA of the University of Twente. Additionally, convenience sampling was used as participants were recruited through the researcher's social networks. A total of 170 participants took part in the study, of whom 40 were excluded because they withdrew participation before the end of the study. Among the participants, 94 identified as female, 33 as male, one as she/they, and two did not indicate their gender. The age ranged from 18 to 67, with a mean age of 30.42 ($SD = 12.61$). Most of the participants were German (80%), 9.23% were Dutch, and the remaining 6.92% came from other countries, including Poland, Britain, Turkey, Guatemala, Austria, and Bulgaria. Additionally, 3.85% of the participants did not indicate their nationality. Overall, 39 participants experienced Moderate Severity/Denial of the Victim, 30 encountered High Severity/Denial of the Victim, 28 faced Moderate Severity/No Comment (control), and 33 experienced High Severity/No Comment (control).

Materials

The suspect interview scenarios used in this study were adapted from prior work by Schmuck, Wüller, and Watson (2021), who investigated the effect of denial of the victim arguments within simulated suspect interviews. These scenarios were modified to fit the specific context of the current study to allow for descriptions that differed in the severity of psychological abuse described in the allegations. All the study materials, including the information sheet, questionnaires, case descriptions, investigative interviews, and debriefing can be found in Appendix A.

Case description

The participants received a fictional case description that contained information about the victims' allegations against the suspects. These allegations related to psychological abuse committed by the suspect occurring in the context of control and coercion during the relationship. These case descriptions were created in two different versions, based on the

severity of the abuse (moderate, and high), an overview is shown in Table 1. Depending on the case descriptions, there was an increase in psychological abuse, which falls under a range of behaviors covered by the control and coercion law (surveillance, threats, humiliation, social restriction, control of finance) (CPS, 2023). These two case descriptions were formulated in detail to ensure that the differences in the extent of psychological abuse were identified. This was intended to allow participants to make judgments about the severity of the situation and its possible impact on the tendency to blame the victim and/or the suspect.

Table 1

Overview of Controlling and Coercive Behavior presented in the Case Descriptions

Types of controlling/coercive behavior	Allegations against the suspect (Case description for the moderate degree of severity)	Allegations against the suspect (Case description for the high degree of severity)
Surveillance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Demands access to phone/social media - Takes phones and reads messages - Accusations of cheating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bans access to social media - Holds passwords, and monitors messages - Accusations of cheating - Forbids contact to men online
Threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sends angry/upset messages when the victim returns home from work later than expected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sends messages threatening violence when the victim returns home from work later than agreed upon after work
Humiliation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Undermines victim's self-confidence by regularly criticizing her appearance and eating behavior - Tries to dictate diet and clothing choices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Destroys victim's self-confidence by constantly insulting her appearance and weight - Complete controls of diet, and clothing choices
Social restriction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Starts arguments to prevent the victim from seeing friends/family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does not allow contact unless he is present

	- Insists on immediate response to calls	- Rarely agrees to meetings, and argues about seeing other social contacts
	- Gives exact time for return	
Control of finances	- Exerts increasing control over victim's property	- Complete control over the victim's property and finances
	- Sets spending rules	- Sets strict spending rules and bans
	- Has victim's passwords	
	- Monitors her purchases	- Requires her to send wages from work to his account
	- Accounts for her expenses	- Decides what she is allowed to buy

Investigative interview

The fictional investigative interview, which the participants received as an interview script, included a conversation between a police officer and the suspect regarding the allegations of psychological abuse within the intimate relationship. The investigative interview script is available in two versions. The questions posed to the suspect during the fictional investigative interview were identical in both versions. Whereas the responses of the suspect were tailored to one of the experimental conditions. This ensured consistency and a direct comparison of responses between the Denial of the victim condition and the No comment condition.

One version is adapted to the Denial of the victim condition. Throughout the interview script, the suspect answered the questions by shifting blame onto the victim and asserting that the victim was untrustworthy, had a bad character, or directly provoked any negative actions. For this condition, all responses had to consist exclusively of denial of the victim arguments and no other form of argument. One representative example response was: "Like I said, she twists things and always acts like I'm some villain. She is always making accusations like that when all I'm doing is trying to find out where she is and who she's with because she never tells me anything". Furthermore, in the second version, which refers to the condition No

Comment, the suspect consistently answers every question the officer asks with "No comment" and thus refuses to make any statement. The suspect expressly points out that this is not an admission of guilt and adheres to these instructions to mitigate the assumption that silence indicates guilt. This control condition was chosen to ensure that perceived differences between the two conditions were attributable to the presence or absence of the denial of the victim responses rather than to other factors. With example responses such as: "Okay, but I have been advised to respond with no comment because it is easy to say something that can make you look guilty in interviews about this kind of thing even when you've done nothing wrong" and "No comment".

Measures

The questionnaire, which was hosted via the online platform Qualtrics, consisted of five different scales measuring the socio-demographics, Belief in a Just World, Sexist Attitudes, Perceived Crime Seriousness, and Victim and Suspect Attributions (see Appendix A and B). The questionnaire was provided in English and German, as these were the languages that were fluently spoken by the researcher and expected to be understood by the majority of study participants.

Socio demographics

To receive information about the socio-demographics of the participants, they had to answer questions concerning their age, gender, nationality, and highest level of education.

Belief in a Just World

The moderator Belief in a Just World scale was assessed using *the General Belief in Just World Scale* by Dalbert et al. (1987). The scale consists of six items and aims to measure the belief that the world functions in a fair and just manner (Dalbert et al., 1987). A 5-Point-Likert scale was used to give participants the ability to indicate their level of agreement ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A representative example item of the

scale is: "I am confident that justice always prevails over injustice." The scale demonstrated a moderate internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of .67.

Sexiest attitudes

The moderator Sexist Attitudes was measured using the *Ambivalent sexism inventory* by Glick and Fiske (1996). The inventory consists of two scales, each featuring 11 items. The responses for this measure were scored on a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree). An example item from the scale assessing hostile sexism is: "Most women interpret innocent remarks or acts as being sexist." While an exemplar from the subscale measuring benevolent sexism is "A good woman should be set on a pedestal by her man." Benevolent sexism and hostile sexism are analyzed as separate constructs. Both scales showed high internal reliability, with benevolent sexism having a Cronbach's alpha of .76, and hostile sexism yielding a Cronbach's alpha of .89.

Perceived Crime seriousness

To measure the dependent variable Perceived Crime Seriousness, a scale comprising four items was created based on the items developed by Ostermann and Watson (2024), who drew inspiration from the research by Stylianou (2003). The scale aims to encompass the two dimensions of the seriousness of a crime, as stated by Stylianou (2003). These dimensions include the perceived consequences and the moral wrongfulness of the crime (Stylianou, 2003). To measure participant's level of agreement with the items, a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) was used. In order to assess the perceived consequences, the following items were included: "The alleged actions are violent.", "The victim would likely be psychologically disturbed if the allegations are true." In addition, the moral wrongfulness of the crime was assessed by the subsequent items such as: "The alleged behaviors are immoral.", and "The alleged actions were inherently wrong." The participants answered the items twice: first as a pre-measure after reading the case

description and subsequently as a post-measure following the investigative interview. The pre-scale of perceived crime seriousness demonstrated a low internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of .47, while the post-scale yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .72, indicating that the scale showed adequate internal consistency after the interview.

Blame attribution of the victim and the suspect

The dependent variables Victim and Suspect Attribution were measured on a self-created scale with 10 items. When designing the items, inspiration was drawn from the Blame Attribution Scale used by Schmuck (2021). However, several modifications were necessary so that the items adequately measure the intended concept of this study. The scale aims to measure equivalent attributions, as there are items that address attributions to the personality and behavior of both the suspect and the victim. The items include the names of the victim and the suspect, to mitigate any potential confusion regarding blame attribution. Furthermore, the 10 items were presented in a randomized order to avoid potential order effects. The responses for this measure were scored on a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree), with higher scores reflecting a stronger association with the measured construct. Five of these items measure the attribution of blame to the victim, with an example item being: "Ms. Smith's actions or behaviors were responsible for the conflicts in the relationship." In addition, the other five items evaluate the attribution of blame to the suspect, with a representative example item such as: "Mr. Brown's alleged actions toward Ms. Smith are due to Mr. Brown's personality." To gain a deeper insight into the attributions of the victim and suspect, a text field appears at the end of the questionnaire. In this text field, the participants are asked: "We would like to give you the opportunity to explain why you answered the way you have on the previous questions about who was responsible for causing the alleged behaviors. You can use the text box below to give any explanation you like, and we would also like to remind you that your reasons are entirely anonymous and cannot be

traced back to you personally." This allows participants to formulate detailed perspectives and provides valuable qualitative insights into their attributions. The scale showed high internal reliability for both victim attribution items ($\alpha = .86$) and suspect attribution items ($\alpha = .84$).

Perceived guilt and veracity

The dependent variables Perceived Guilt and Perceived Veracity were measured using separate scales, each with one self-created item. For Perceived Guilt, the item measured the participant's assessment of the suspect guilt of controlling and coercive behavior. For this item, a legal explanation of controlling and coercive behavior was presented, so that the participants are sufficiently informed about the current legal background of this kind of abuse. The response for this item was scored on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (Extremely sure he is innocent), to 6 (Extremely sure he is guilty), with higher scores reflecting a stronger association with the measured construct of guilt. By omitting the neutral midpoint in the scale, participants are encouraged to take a clear stance, which reflects the determination that is required in real legal judgments. The representative item is: "Do you think Mr. Brown is legally guilty of controlling and coercive behavior?" Furthermore, the item for Perceived Veracity evaluated the participant's perceived veracity for the stated allegations against the suspect. The representative example item is: "Do you think the stated allegations are true?". The responses for this measure were scored on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (Extremely sure the allegations are false), to 6 (Extremely sure the allegations are true). This measurement of Perceived Guilt and Perceived Veracity represents a meaningful advancement over earlier studies, which often did not assess these two dimensions.

Procedure

After clicking a web link, the respondents were directed to the online Qualtrics platform, where the survey was hosted. The participants received an information sheet containing background details, the research purpose, instructions, and contact details. The

hypotheses were not disclosed to the participants to avoid bias. However, they were informed that the study would involve a confrontation with a sensitive topic that could potentially cause distress. This was done to ensure that the participants were fully aware of the nature of the study. Additionally, information regarding a hotline for abuse in intimate relationships was presented (in English, German, and Dutch). These languages were chosen because the study was conducted in the Netherlands, and it was expected that most study participants would speak and understand at least one of them. Subsequently, the participants read and accepted the consent form.

Following this, participants provided information on their socio-demographic characteristics. Additionally, they were forwarded to answer questions concerning the Belief in a Just World and Ambivalent Sexism. The reason for including these two measures in the initial phase of the survey is to prevent possible bias in responses due to exposure to the subsequent case scenario or script.

After the participants answered the questions, they received a fictional case description that contained information about the victims' allegations against the suspect. The case description was available in two different versions, based on the severity of the psychological abuse (Moderate and High). Each participant was randomly assigned to one of the two case descriptions. This assignment was facilitated by the true random assignment option via the platform Qualtrics. This guaranteed an unbiased allocation of participants among the two severity levels of psychological abuse in the scenario. After the participants were done investigating the case description, they were asked to answer questions concerning the perceived seriousness of the crime. This served as a pre-measure to capture the participant's initial perceptions of the seriousness of the crime.

Following this, participants proceeded to read an investigative interview script, which was available in two versions, differing in the justifications of the suspect (Denial of the

Victim and No Comment). Again, with the evenly distribute option in Qualtrics, each participant was randomly assigned to one of the two interview scripts. After the participants finished reading, they were forwarded to the last part of the online experiment. In this part, they responded to questions concerning the perceived seriousness of the crime (post-measure), and their attribution of blame to the victim or the suspect. In addition, participants were allowed to freely express their thoughts and reasons for blaming the victim and/or the suspect in a presented text field.

After completing the questionnaire, respondents received a debriefing, which included information about the researcher's email address and details regarding a hotline for abuse in intimate relationships. This contact information could have been used for questions about the survey. Furthermore, the participants received the option to withdraw their consent for their participation.

Data Analysis

The statistical software SPSS version 28.0.1.1 developed by IBM was used to analyze the collected data. Four 2x2 analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were executed to examine the main effects and two-way interaction effects of Suspect Justification and Severity of Abuse on Victim Attribution, Suspect Attribution, Perceived Guilt, and Veracity. Additionally, a 2x2x2 ANOVA 2(Time: pre-post) x 2(Suspect behavior) x 2(Seriousness) was conducted to investigate the variable Perceived Crime Seriousness, which was a between-participants measurement that served as a manipulation check.

Furthermore, an exploratory moderator analysis was carried out to explore how Belief in a Just World and Sexist Attitudes moderated the relationship between Suspect Justification and Severity of Abuse on the outcome variables. Significant moderations were probed with a simple slope analysis.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics including the mean scores, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients of the dependent variables are presented in Table 1. The variables were approximately normally distributed, apart from the Perceived Crime Seriousness scale which did show indications of a negative skew. The correlations show that most variables are positively correlated with each other, except for the predominantly negative correlations of Victim Blame and Hostile Sexism with other variables. Specifically, Victim Blame is associated with less Suspect Blame, Perceived Guilt, Veracity, and Crime Seriousness. Additionally, Hostile Sexism is associated with more Victim Blame and less Suspect Blame, Perceived Guilt, Veracity, and Crime Seriousness. All items of the scales were measured on a 5-point Likert scale except the items for Perceived Guilt and Veracity, which were measured on a 6-point scale.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for the Study Variables

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Victim Blame	2.53	0.92	-							
Suspect Blame	3.69	0.83	-.71	-						
Perceived Veracity	4.08	0.78	-.50	.62	-					
Perceived Guilt	4.20	1.03	-.54	.64	.63	-				
Crime Seriousness (b)	3.92	0.71	-.29	.38	.37	.39	-			
Crime Seriousness (a)	3.72	0.88	-.50	.59	.50	.51	.68	-		
Belief in a Just World	2.73	0.62	.02	.11	.17	.30	.03	.04	-	
Benevolent Sexism	2.66	0.62	.20	-.16	.100	-.11	.05	-.09	.11	-
Hostile Sexism	2.51	0.79	.40	-.33	-.31	-.33	-.23	-.30	-.03	.15

Note. **bold** = Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), *italics* = Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed), (b) = before, (a) = after.

Manipulation Check

To ensure that the manipulation of severity was effective, an independent samples t-test was executed to assess whether perceptions of the severity of the crime differed significantly between the two groups before the exposure to the investigative interview. The t-test showed that the perceived severity was indeed higher in the high severity group ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 0.75$) compared to the moderate severity group ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 0.61$). This difference was statistically significant, $t(128) = -3.07$, $p = .003$.

Hypothesis Tests

The two-way *ANOVA* revealed no significant main effects of Severity of Abuse on any of the dependent variables (Victim Blame, Suspect Blame, Perceived Guilt, and Perceived Veracity). However, there was a main effect of Suspect Justifications on all dependent variables whereby Denial of the Victim leads to higher Victim Blame but reduced Suspect blame, and Perceived Veracity and Guilt. There were no significant interaction effects. The results can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

Means per Experimental Condition for the Dependent Variables resulting from the ANOVA.

Independent Variable	Dependent Variables							
	Victim Blame		Suspect Blame		Perceived Veracity		Perceived Guilt	
Suspect Justification	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
DoV	3.02	0.78	3.33	0.73	3.85	0.80	3.90	1.06
NoC	1.99	0.77	4.11	0.73	4.31	0.80	4.52	1.05
Hypothesis tests	$F = 57.41$, $df = 1$ (126), $p < 0.001$		$F = 36.32$, $df = 1$ (126), $p < 0.001$		$F = 10.84$, $df = 1$ (114), $p = .001$		$F = 11.36$, $df = 1$ (114), $p = .001$	
Severity of Abuse	Victim Blame		Suspect Blame		Perceived Veracity		Perceived Guilt	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>

Moderate	2.48	0.78	3.69	0.75	4.05	0.81	4.18	1.08
High	2.53	0.77	3.76	0.73	4.11	0.78	4.24	1.03
Hypothesis tests	$F = 0.14, df = 1$ (126), $p = .709$		$F = 0.31, df = 1$ (126), $p = .580$		$F = 0.19, df = 1$ (114), $p = .668$		$F = 0.10, df = 1$ (114), $p = .752$	
Interaction Term	Victim Blame		Suspect Blame		Perceived Veracity		Perceived Guilt	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
DoV / Mod	2.93	0.74	3.25	0.77	3.86	0.69	3.94	0.94
DoV / High	3.11	0.72	3.41	0.63	3.85	0.77	3.85	1.03
NoC / Mod	2.03	0.80	4.12	0.59	4.25	0.61	4.42	0.93
NoC / High	1.95	0.83	4.10	0.88	4.38	0.87	4.62	1.07
Hypothesis tests	$F = 0.966, df = 1$ (126), $p = .327$		$F = 0.486, df = 1$ (126), $p = .487$		$F = 0.22, df = 1$ (114), $p = .640$		$F = 0.66, df = 1$ (114), $p = .420$	

Note. **bold** = Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), DoV = Denial of the Victim, NoC = No Comment, VB = Victim Blame, SB = Suspect Blame, Mod = Moderate Severity of Abuse, High = High Severity of Abuse.

Denial of the Victim and its Effect on Perceived Crime Seriousness

The repeated measures ANOVA found the expected interaction effect on perceptions of Perceived Crime Seriousness, specifically between Time and Suspect justifications ($p < .001$). The results are in Appendix C. Tests of simple effects revealed that perceptions of Perceived Crime Seriousness were only affected by the presence of Denial of the Victim at the second time point, but not at the first time point (see Table 3). This aligns with the expectations, as at the first time point, the participants had not yet been confronted with the experimental manipulation (Suspect Justifications), and thus the perception of the crime's seriousness should remain the same. The findings suggest that exposure to the suspect's denial arguments reduces the perceived seriousness of the crime, as evidenced by the absence of change in the "No Comment" interviews.

Table 3

Simple Effects of Denial of the Victim on Perceptions of Perceived Crime Seriousness at Different Time Points

Independent Variables	Perceived Crime Seriousness			
	Time 1		Time 2	
Suspect Justification	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
DoV	3.87	0.69	3.44	0.83
NoC	4.00	0.69	4.03	0.83
Hypothesis tests	$F = 1.07, df = 1 (126), p = .304$		$F = 16.14, df = 1 (126), p < .001$	

Note. **bold** = Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), Time 1 = Perceived Crime Seriousness before, Time 2 = Perceived Crime Seriousness after.

Moderator Analyses and Follow-up Tests

It was investigated whether the moderator's Belief in a Just World, Hostile and Benevolent Sexism have an effect on the relationship between the independent variable's Suspect Justifications (Denial of the Victim vs No Comment) and Severity of Abuse (Moderate vs High) and the dependent variables (Victim and Suspect Attributions, Perceived Guilt, Perceived Veracity, and Perceived Crime Seriousness). A representation of all significant main and interaction effects can be found in Appendix D.

Belief in a Just World

The results revealed that the only significant effects found across all dependent variables were the main effect of Belief in a Just World on Perceived Guilt, and the interaction effect between Belief in a Just World with the independent variable Severity of Abuse on Suspect Blame. The results can be found in Tables 4 and 5 and explained in more detail below.

Perceived Guilt. The main effect analysis of Belief in a Just World on Perceived guilt was Statistically significant ($p = .011$), indicating that individuals' belief in a just world

influences their perceptions of the suspect's guilt of controlling and coercive behavior. To further explore this main effect, a simple regression analysis was conducted, which revealed a moderate positive relationship between Belief in a Just World and Perceived Guilt (see Table 4). These results suggest that higher levels of Belief in a Just World are associated with increased perceptions of the suspect's guilt of controlling and coercive behavior.

Table 4

Regression Analysis of the Moderator Belief in a Just World on the Dependent Variable Perceived Guilt

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	2.86	0.41		6.96	< .001
Belief in a Just World	0.49	0.15	0.30	3.34	.001

Note. **bold** = Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Suspect Blame. Furthermore, the interaction effect between Belief in a Just World and the independent variable Severity of Abuse on Suspect Blame was found to be statistically significant ($F(1, 122) = 4.36, p = .039, \eta^2 = .035$). This was followed by an analysis in PROCESS using Model 1 with 5000 bootstrap samples, which indicated that there is only a significant difference in Suspect Attributions when Belief in a Just World is high. In particular, individuals with a high Belief in a Just World attributed more blame to the suspect when the Severity of the Abuse was high compared to when it was moderate. The results are shown in Table 5. Afterward, the data file was split to further determine the relationship between Belief in a Just World and Suspect Attributions at the two levels of severity. There was no statistically significant relationship found when the Severity of the Abuse was moderate, but when there is a high Severity of Abuse, then an increase in Belief in a Just World leads to increased Suspect Blame (see Table 5). The results indicate that individuals

with a high Belief in a Just World tend to attribute more blame to the suspect, but only in cases with a high severity of abuse.

Table 5

Regression Coefficients from the Moderation Analysis of Severity of Abuse and Belief in a Just World (BJW) on Suspect Blame/Conditional Effects at Different Levels of BJW

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Moderation Analysis results				
Severity of Abuse	-1.16	0.65	-1.78	.078
Belief in a Just World	-0.07	0.16	-0.47	.642
Severity of Abuse *Belief in a Just World	0.48	0.23	2.04	.043
Conditional Effects at Different Levels of BJW				
2.11	-0.16	0.21	-0.76	.448
2.73	0.14	0.14	0.97	.332
3.35	0.44	0.20	2.15	.033
Conditional Effect of BJW at Different Levels of Severity of Abuse				
Moderate	-0.07	0.16	-0.46	.646
High	0.40	0.17	2.36	.022

Note. italics = Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed), BJW = Belief in a Just World, the levels of BJW correspond to -1 SD (2.11), the mean (2.73), and +1 SD (3.35), positive betas indicate higher perceptions of abuse, while negative betas indicate lower perceptions.

Benevolent Sexism

The moderation analysis demonstrated that the only statistically significant effects found across all dependent variables were the main effect of Benevolent Sexism on Victim Blame and Suspect Blame.

Victim Blame. The main effects of Benevolent sexism on Victim Blame ($F(1, 122) = 13.74, p < .001, \eta^2 = .101$), and Suspect Blame ($F(1, 122) = 5.82, p = .017, \eta^2 = .046$) were significant. To further explore these main effects, simple regression analyses were performed, which found a significant positive relationship between Benevolent Sexism and Victim

Blame, and a significant negative relationship between Benevolent Sexism and Suspect Blame (see Table 6). The results of the simple regression analysis indicate that individuals with higher levels of Benevolent Sexism tend to attribute more blame to the victim and less blame to the suspect in cases of abuse compared to individuals with lower levels of Benevolent Sexism.

Table 6

Regression Analysis Outcomes of the Moderator Benevolent Sexism on the Dependent Variables Victim Blame and Suspect Blame

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Victim Blame	0.48	0.13	0.33	3.88	<.001
Suspect Blame	-0.29	0.12	-0.22	-2.49	<i>.014</i>

Note. **bold** = Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), *italics* = Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Hostile Sexism

The moderation analysis revealed that there was a main effect of Hostile Sexism on all the dependent variables. Furthermore, there were two two-way interaction effects, between Hostile Sexism and Severity of Abuse on Perceived Guilt, and between Hostile Sexism and Suspect Justifications on Perceived Veracity. Moreover, one three-way interaction effect was found between Hostile Sexism, Severity of Abuse, and Suspect Justifications on Suspect Blame. The results can be found in Tables 7, 8, 9, 10, and 12 and are explained in more detail below.

The moderator Hostile Sexism had a statistically significant main effect on Suspect Blame ($F(1, 122) = 16.98, p < .001, \eta^2 = .122$), Victim Blame ($F(1, 122) = 24.35, p < .001, \eta^2 = .166$), Perceived Guilt ($F(1, 110) = 12.20, p < .001, \eta^2 = .100$), and Perceived Veracity ($F(1, 110) = 6.53, p = .012, \eta^2 = .056$). To further explore these main effects, simple regression analyses were performed (see Table 7). The simple regression analyses revealed that higher

levels of Hostile Sexism increase the attribution of blame to the victim, but decrease blame attributions towards the suspect, perceptions of the suspect being guilty of control and coercion, and the allegations being true.

Table 7

Regression Analysis of the Moderator Hostile Sexism on all the Dependent Variables

Dependent Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Suspect Blame	-0.36	0.09	-0.34	-4.15	< . 001
Victim Blame	0.46	0.10	0.39	4.86	< . 001
Perceived Guilt	-0.44	0.11	-0.34	-3.89	< . 001
Perceived Veracity	-0.26	0.09	-0.27	-3.00	. <i>003</i>

Note. **bold** = Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), *italics* = Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Perceived Guilt. In addition, the interaction effect between Hostile Sexism and the independent variable Severity of Abuse was statistically significant ($F(1, 110) = 4.46, p = .037, \eta^2 = .039$). This was followed by an analysis in PROCESS, using the same model as described in the prior section, which showed that there is only a significant difference in Perceived Guilt when Hostile Sexism is low. Specifically, when Hostile Sexism is low, an increase in Severity of Abuse is associated with higher Perceived Guilt. However, when Hostile Sexism is high, the relationship between Severity of Abuse and Perceived Guilt becomes non-significant. The results are shown in Table 8. Afterward, the data file was split to further examine the relationship between Hostile Sexism and Perceived Guilt at the two levels of severity. There was no statistically significant relationship found when the Severity of the Abuse was moderate, but when there is a high Severity of Abuse, then an increase in Hostile Sexism leads to decreased Suspect Guilt (see Table 8).

Table 8

Regression Coefficients from the Moderation Analysis of Severity of Abuse and Hostile Sexism (HS) on Perceived Guilt/Conditional Effects at Different Levels of HS

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Moderation Analysis results				
Severity of Abuse	1.49	0.58	2.58	.011
Hostile Sexism	-0.18	0.16	-1.13	.261
Severity of Abuse* Hostile Sexism	-0.54	0.22	-2.44	.016
Conditional Effects at Different Levels of HS				
1.67	0.58	0.25	2.33	.022
2.47	0.15	0.18	0.85	.399
3.26	-0.28	0.25	-1.13	.260
Conditional Effect of HS at Different Levels of Severity of Abuse				
Moderate	-0.18	0.16	-1.14	.261
High	-0.72	0.16	-4.51	<.001

Note. **bold** = Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), *italics* = Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed), HS = Hostile Sexism, positive betas indicate higher perceptions of abuse, while negative betas indicate lower perceptions.

Perceived Veracity. Furthermore, the interaction effect between Hostile Sexism and the independent variable Suspect Justifications was statistically significant ($F(1, 110) = 4.10$, $p = .045$, $\eta^2 = .036$). The follow-up analysis in PROCESS showed that there is only a significant difference in Perceived Veracity when Hostile Sexism is low and moderate. In particular, at low levels of Hostile Sexism, Suspect Justifications (No Comment and Denial of the Victim) significantly decreased Perceived Veracity, with a similar but weaker effect at moderate levels. At high levels of Hostile Sexism, the impact of Suspect Justifications on Perceived Veracity diminished. The results are shown in Table 9. Afterward, the data file was split to further determine the relationship between Hostile Sexism and Perceived Veracity at the two levels of Suspect Justifications. There was no statistically significant relationship

found when the suspect used denial of the victim arguments, but when the suspect did not comment, then an increase in Hostile Sexism led to a decrease in the perceived veracity of the stated allegations of the victim (see Table 9).

Table 9

Regression Coefficients from the Moderation Analysis of Suspect Justifications and Hostile Sexism (HS) on Perceived Veracity/Conditional Effects at Different Levels of HS

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Moderation Analysis results				
Suspect Justifications	-1.32	0.43	-3.06	.003
Hostile Sexism	-0.41	0.12	-3.54	<.001
Suspect Justifications *Hostile Sexism	0.36	0.17	2.16	.033
Conditional Effects at Different Levels of HS				
1.67	-0.71	0.19	-3.85	<.001
2.47	-0.43	0.13	-3.27	.001
3.26	-0.15	0.19	-0.78	.439
Conditional Effect of HS at Different Levels of Suspect Justifications				
No Comment (Control)	-0.42	0.11	-3.63	<.001
Denial of the Victim	-0.06	0.12	-0.47	.641

Note. **bold** = Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), *italics* = Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed), HS = Hostile Sexism, positive betas indicate higher perceptions of abuse, while negative betas indicate lower perceptions.

Suspect Blame. Lastly, the three-way interaction between Hostile Sexism and the independent variable Severity of Abuse and Suspect Justifications was statistically significant ($F(1, 122) = 4.50, p = .036, \eta^2 = .036$). First, the simple regression between Hostile Sexism and Suspect Blame separately across each of the four experimental groups was tested. The results are presented in Table 10. The analysis revealed that Hostile Sexism was only negatively associated with Suspect Blame in moderate severity cases when denial of the victim arguments were used, but not when the suspect responded with no comment.

Moreover, in cases of high severity of abuse, Hostile Sexism was only negatively associated with Suspect Blame when the suspect did not comment. The suspect's denial of the victim arguments had no significant impact in the high severity case. Afterward, the effects of the categorical variables at different levels of Hostile Sexism (-1 SD, the mean, and +1 SD) were tested using PROCESS Model 2 with 5000 bootstrap resamples (see Tables 11 and 12). The analysis revealed significant main effects consistent with the main analysis. Denial of Victim arguments and higher levels of Hostile Sexism reduced Suspect Blame. However, none of the interaction effects were significant. This indicates that the occurrence of the three-way interaction is driven by the different relationships between Hostile Sexism and Suspect Blame at the various levels of the categorical variables. It suggests that Hostile Sexism does not change the efficacy of the independent variables, but rather that Suspect Justifications and Severity of Abuse influence the strength of the relationship between Hostile Sexism and Suspect Blame.

Table 10

Regression Coefficients from the Moderation Analysis of Hostile Sexism (HS) on Suspect Blame at different Levels of the Experimental Groups

Severity of Abuse	Suspect Justifications		<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Moderate	No Comment (Control)	HS	-0.13	0.14	-0.92	.367
	Denial of the Victim	HS	-0.33	0.15	-2.18	.035
High	No Comment (Control)	HS	-0.63	0.16	-3.92	<.001
	Denial of the Victim	HS	-0.18	0.15	-1.19	.244

Note. **bold** = Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), *italics* = Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed), HS = Hostile Sexism, negative betas indicate lower attributions of suspect blame.

Table 11

Regression Coefficients from the Moderation Analysis of Suspect Justifications and Hostile Sexism (HS) on Suspect Blame

Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Suspect Justifications	-1.19	0.43	-2.79	.006
Severity of Abuse	-0.11	0.18	-0.61	.544
Suspect Justifications*	0.31	0.25	1.27	.205
Severity of Abuse				
Hostile Sexism	-0.39	0.11	-3.55	<.001
Suspect Justifications*	0.12	0.16	0.78	.437
Hostile Sexism				

Note. **bold** = Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), *italics* = Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed), positive betas indicate higher attributions of suspect blame, while negative betas indicate lower attributions.

Table 12

Regression Coefficients from the Moderation Analysis of Severity of Abuse and Hostile Sexism (HS) on Suspect Blame

Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Severity of Abuse	0.37	0.42	0.90	.372
Suspect Justifications	-0.88	0.17	-5.20	<.001
Suspect Justifications*	0.34	0.25	1.37	.172
Severity of Abuse				
Hostile Sexism	-0.24	0.11	-2.26	.026
Suspect Justifications*	-0.19	0.15	-1.24	.217
Hostile Sexism				

Note. **bold** = Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), *italics* = Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed), positive betas indicate higher attributions of suspect blame, while negative betas indicate lower attributions.

Additional Exploratory Analysis

Additional exploratory analyses were conducted to explore how the study sample's characteristics affect the results.

Correlation Analysis

The correlation analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between Age and Hostile Sexism (see Table 13). This indicates that as the age of the participants increased, their scores on Hostile Sexism tended to increase as well. No other significant correlations were found between Age and the remaining variables.

Table 13

Correlation Coefficients between Age and the other Study Variables

Variables	1
Age	-
Victim Blame	-.06
Suspect Blame	.08
Perceived Veracity	.06
Perceived Guilt	.02
Crime Seriousness (b)	-.14
Crime Seriousness (a)	-.11
Belief in a Just World	-.09
Benevolent Sexism	.13
Hostile Sexism	.25

Note. **bold** = Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), *italics* = Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed), (b) = before, (a) = after.

Independent-Sample T-Test Analysis

The independent-sample t-test revealed significant differences between participants who completed the survey in German and those who completed it in English. Specifically, the scores for Perceived Guilt, Perceived Crime Seriousness (both before and after reading the investigative interview), Belief in a Just World, and Hostile Sexism differed significantly between the two groups. The results are presented in Table 14. The results suggest that

participants who completed the survey in English were more likely to view the suspect as legally guilty and perceive the crime as more serious before and after being confronted with the investigative interview than those who completed it in German. Additionally, those who did the English survey showed a higher Belief in a Just World compared to those who completed the German version. Moreover, participants who completed the survey in German exhibited higher levels of Hostile Sexism compared to those who completed it in English. No significant differences between the survey languages were found in the Victim Blame, Suspect Blame, Perceived Veracity, and Benevolent Sexism scores.

Table 14

T-test scores comparing participant responses by Survey Language (German vs. English)

Variable	German		English		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
Victim Blame	2.55	0.91	2.47	0.95	0.46	128	.645	0.086
Suspect Blame	3.64	0.84	3.80	0.80	-1.05	128	.298	-0.195
Perceived Guilt	4.06	1.08	4.46	0.90	-2.02	116	<i>.046</i>	-0.390
Perceived Veracity	4.00	0.79	4.22	0.76	-1.47	116	.144	-0.285
Crime Seriousness (b)	3.76	0.66	4.25	0.69	-3.94	128	<.001	-0.734
Crime Seriousness (a) *	3.52	0.84	4.12	0.85	-3.83	82.787	<.001	-0.717
Belief in a Just World	2.63	0.58	2.93	0.66	-2.61	128	.010	-0.487
Benevolent Sexism	2.72	0.59	2.55	0.66	1.52	128	.132	0.283
Hostile Sexism	2.69	0.77	2.15	0.70	3.84	128	<.001	0.716

Note. * = Welch's correction for unequal variances was applied for this outcome variable, **bold** = Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), *italics* = Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed), GE = German, EN = English, (b) = before, (a) = after.

Discussion

The effects of the severity of abuse and suspect justifications on perceptions of crime seriousness, veracity of the stated allegations, victim blame, suspect blame, and guilt of controlling and coercive behavior were tested. It was found that the use of denial of the victim increased victim blame, and decreased suspect blame, perceived guilt, and the veracity of the stated allegations. Additionally, the exposure to the suspect's denial of the victim arguments reduced the perceived seriousness of the crime. The moderation analysis revealed that a high belief in a just world led to an increase in the perceived guilt of the suspect, as well as increased suspect blame in cases of high severity of abuse. Moreover, higher levels of hostile sexism were associated with increased victim blame and decreased suspect blame, perceived guilt, and perceived veracity of the allegations. In addition, Individuals with higher levels of benevolent sexism tended to attribute more blame to the victim and less blame to the suspect.

The Impact of Sexist Attitudes

The study findings reveal that higher levels of hostile sexism are associated with increased blame attributed to the victim, lower attributions of blame towards the suspect, as well as decreased perceived guilt, and veracity of the stated allegations. These observed main effects are largely consistent with the expectations that are built based on previous literature. These discoveries can be explained by the sexist attitude of hostile sexism, which commonly involves negative prejudices and antipathy against women, as well as the perception of women as seeking to manipulate men to gain control (Glick & Fiske 1996). Therefore, individuals high in hostile sexism may tend to justify the abusive behavior of men, resulting in increased blame towards female victims of intimate partner violence. Additionally, when the participants with increased levels of hostile sexism were exposed to an interview where the suspect did not comment on any of the questions of the officer, they had a decreased perception of the veracity of the stated allegations of the victim. The missing provision of a

statement by the suspect might have led to uncertainty about the allegations of the victim.

Therefore, it is possible that individuals with high levels of hostile sexism may fill these gaps of missing information with their own sexist biases, which could cause doubts about the credibility of the victim's accusations against the suspect.

Moreover, the examination of the influence of benevolent sexism on attributions and perceptions in cases of control and coercion yielded insightful discoveries. Two significant effects emerged, which indicate that individuals with higher levels of benevolent sexism tend to attribute less blame to the suspect and more blame to the victim. This effect can be explained by the phenomenon of benevolent sexism itself, as it is a form of sexism in which women, who conform to traditional gender roles are viewed positively and those who deviate are viewed negatively (Glick et al., 1997). In this study, the victim's behavior described by the suspect deviates from traditional gender roles (e.g., going out to parties and flirting with other men), therefore individuals with benevolent sexist attitudes may be more likely to attribute blame to the victim.

Furthermore, the study outcomes reveal that the use of denial of the victim arguments led to an increase in victim blame and a decrease in suspect blame. These findings are consistent with results from similar studies, which found that denial of the victim increased the attribution of blame for the victim (De Simone, 2021; Wüller, 2021), and reduced suspect blame (Gallmeister, 2023). Due to the consistency of this effect, this study confirms findings from previous research by providing further evidence of the strong influence of denial of the victim arguments on blame attributions. In addition, the use of denial of the victim not only led to a decrease in the attribution of blame to the suspect but also lowered the assessment of the suspect's guilt of controlling and coercive behavior and the veracity of the victim's stated allegations. These findings contradict previous similar studies, which found no effect of denial of the victim arguments on the perceived guilt of the suspect (Schmuck, 2021;

Gallmeister, 2023).

One explanation for why this research observed these large main effects of the denial of the victim may be the high number of participants from older generations who participated in the study. Older individuals might have different views on blame attributions compared to younger individuals, which could make them more susceptible to arguments that shift blame away from the suspect to the victim. To test this assumption, additional exploratory analyses were conducted examining the demographic factors of the study sample. These analyses revealed that older individuals in the sample tended to have higher scores on the measure of hostile sexism. This finding aligns with past research by Hammond et al. (2017) who investigated the differences in sexist attitudes across ages and found higher levels of hostile sexism in late adolescence and older ages. In addition, participants who completed the survey in German showed an increased level of hostile sexism. Thus, it turns out that the reason this research found these large main effects of denial of the victim in comparison to the other studies is that the sample had more participants who scored high in hostile sexism. This increased sexist attitude may have led to the participants being more susceptible to the suspect's denial of the victim arguments and consequently more likely to attribute blame to the victim and diminish the suspect's blame and guilt attributions. By demonstrating both an increase in victim blame and a decrease in suspect blame, this research goes beyond previous similar studies that primarily focused on one aspect of blame attribution.

Moreover, denial of the victim arguments led to a decrease in the perceived crime seriousness of the case. These results are consistent with the argument that the purpose of the denial of the victim is to make the victim unworthy of the victim status. The arguments used in the case description are designed to make the suspect portray himself as innocent and provoked by the victim. Through these denial of the victim arguments, the image of the victim deviates from that of the "ideal victim", who, according to Christie (1986), should be

perceived as helpless, and unable to defend themselves, to gain legitimate victim status recognition in society. In addition, a study by Lewis et al. (2019) offers data-driven evidence that supports the ideal victim concept by revealing that laypeople use various traits associated with this concept to evaluate and characterize individuals who report having faced a misfortune event. Therefore, the suspect's denial arguments may have influenced participants to perceive the victim as deviating from the image of the "ideal victim", thereby perceiving the allegations as less serious. In comparison, the absence of denial of the victim arguments in the no comment interviews could have resulted in a more stable perception of crime seriousness over time.

The Impact of Similarity on Guilt Attribution

It was found that individuals who scored high in hostile sexism and were presented with the case description with high severity of abuse yielded lower ratings of the suspect's guilt of controlling and coercive behavior. The reason why the case description with high severity of abuse led to a lower perception of the suspect's guilt might be explained by having a look at the defensive attribution theory. According to Shaver (1970), the defensive attribution theory suggests that the probability that an observer will blame a subject for an event is influenced by the perceived similarity to that subject. A distinction is made between situational similarity (the circumstances) and personal similarity (the beliefs, values, and character traits) (Shaver, 1970). Shaver (1970) discovered that observers who perceived their personal traits to be similar to those of the subject, assigned less responsibility for the event to the subject. Typically, this psychological mechanism is discussed in the context of blame attribution to the victim. However, in this context, we might see an inversion of this concept. It is possible that when individuals with hostile sexist attitudes are confronted with severe abuse allegations against someone who seems to have similar traditional views and beliefs, they experience cognitive dissonance. To mitigate this dissonance, these individuals may

rationalize the suspect's violent behavior by attributing it to external factors such as alleged provocations by the victim. This rationalization could reduce the perceived severity of the abuse, leading to a lower assessment of the suspect's guilt among those with hostile sexist attitudes. However, this interpretation should be scientifically investigated to confirm whether the inversed defensive attributions explain the observed outcomes in guilt perceptions among individuals with hostile sexist attitudes.

The Impact of the Belief in a Just World

The moderation analysis revealed that higher levels of the belief in a just world led to increased perceptions of the suspect's guilt of controlling and coercive behavior, as well as increased blame attributions of the suspect in cases of high severity of abuse. These surprising findings contrast with previous similar studies, which have found that a higher belief in a just world predicts a lower perception of suspect guilt (Schmuck, 2021), and reduced suspect blame (Valor-Segura et al., 2011; Strömwall et al., 2012). An interesting aspect of these results is that suspect blame increases with belief in a just world only when the severity of the abuse is high. Based on these findings, it could be hypothesized that participants with a higher belief in a just world perceive severe cases of domestic violence as a clear injustice, which makes the suspect's guilt more obvious and thus indisputable. Looking back at the analysis outcomes, there was no significant association between the moderator and suspect or victim blame after the participants read the case with moderate severity of abuse. This suggests that the effect of belief in a just world on blame attributions may depend on the perceived severity of the crime. Based on the results of this study, it can be proposed that individuals with a stronger belief in a just world might not perceive the same level of moral injustice in cases of moderate severity as in cases of high severity. This difference could be the reason for a more neutral attitude toward the attribution of blame. However, this interpretation needs to be

empirically tested in future studies to confirm whether the severity of the crime moderates the relationship between the belief in a just world and blame attributions.

Limitations and Future Research

One notable limitation of the study is that the sample consisted of predominantly German participants. In Germany in particular, control and coercion are not explicitly listed as separate criminal offenses in the criminal code and are rather treated under different legal frameworks. These legal differences may have influenced participant's perceptions and interpretations of the severity of psychological abuse the victim has experienced. These differences could limit the transferability of the study results to other legal environments. Therefore, it is advisable to enhance the generalizability of the study findings by recruiting participants who have diverse legal systems. However, it is worth mentioning that before the study was conducted, care was taken to consider and minimize this limitation. During the study, participants received an explicit legal definition of controlling and coercive behavior, which was intended to help them recognize and understand this form of abuse. Moreover, providing this definition was intended to reduce the risk of misunderstandings regarding the interpretation of the case description.

The second limitation concerns the vignette method used in the study. This method has the advantage of maintaining consistency between case descriptions and controlling for desired variables. However, it may not represent the complete experiences of people in abusive relationships but rather simplify them. To address this limitation in advance, the case descriptions were designed based on information on psychological abuse from existing literature. In addition, care was taken to present participants with background information and detailed descriptions of the victim's allegations. These measures attempted to give participants the impression that they were reading a real case description and research interview. Moreover, it was ensured that the psychological abuse was portrayed to a degree that

minimized the risk of distress to the participants. Nonetheless, future researchers should consider incorporating mixed-method approaches by combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews, as it could provide a more comprehensive understanding of control and coercion in intimate relationships.

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate how influential the combination of sexist attitudes and the use of denial of the victim arguments can be regarding the attribution of blame in cases of control and coercion. Denial of the victim arguments led to an increase in victim blame and a decrease in suspect blame, perceived guilt of the suspect, and the credibility of stated allegations. Furthermore, the belief in a just world increased suspect blame and perceived guilt only in cases of high severity of abuse. Another important finding was that higher levels of hostile and benevolent sexism were associated with increased victim blame and decreased suspect blame. These study outcomes highlight the need for interventions to address the influence of suspect justifications and societal biases, intending to reduce victim blaming and improve support for survivors of intimate partner violence. Therefore, this study provides valuable insights into the complex dynamics of blame attributions in cases of intimate partner violence.

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Appendix A

English version of the survey (published on Qualtrics)

Start of Block: Start of Block: Information Sheet

Q1 Information sheet

Study background and purpose

Thank you for your interest in participating in this research study. This study aims to investigate how people feel about allegations of psychological abuse in intimate relationships.

Instructions

After you have agreed to participate in this research study, you will answer a few questions about yourself and your perspectives. You will then be asked to read a fictional case report that describes allegations of psychological abuse in an intimate relationship. After the case description, you will receive an investigative interview script that shows the conversation between a police officer and the suspect. At the end, you have to answer a questionnaire based on your perception and judgment of the materials you have read.

Conditions of participation

To take part in this study you must be at least 18 years old.

Risk of participation

Please keep in mind that as part of your participation, you will be confronted with fictional allegations and an interview script about psychological abuse in an intimate relationship. If you believe that this topic might cause you distress, we advise you to not take part in this study. However, if you still decide to take part in this study, you have the option to close the browser at any time. If you do so, we will not include your data in the study. All data collected is anonymous. Please note that this also means that once you complete the study, you can no longer delete your data because it will not be possible to trace your data afterward.

Contact details and hotline information

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, feel free to contact: c.schomaker@student.utwente.nl or the research supervisor: s.j.watson@utwente.nl.

If you or someone you know is experiencing abuse in an intimate relationship, please remember that resources are available to provide support. You can contact the following hotlines:

English-speaking support:

National Domestic Violence Hotline:

Hotline: 1-800-799-7233

Website: <https://www.thehotline.org/>

German-speaking support:

Beratung und Hilfe für Frauen:

Hotline: 116 016

Website: <https://www.hilfetelefon.de/>

Hilfetelefon Gewalt an Männer:

Hotline: 0800 1239900

Website: <https://www.maennerhilfetelefon.de/>

Dutch-speaking support:

Veilig Thuis:

Hotline: 0800-2000

Website: <https://veiligthuis.nl/>

If you want to participate in this study, please read the following statements and give your consent. Please note that you must agree to every statement in order to take part in the study:

- I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
- I understand that my data will be stored anonymously.
- I understand that filling in the survey will take approximately 25 minutes.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing.
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- I understand that the research will provide descriptions of abuse within intimate relationships, and I do not believe that this is likely to cause me distress.
- I understand that I can cancel my participation in this study at any time without needing to provide an explanation. To do this I can close my internet browser window.
- I understand that I am free to contact the researchers involved in the study to seek further clarification and information.

Q2 By signing below, you acknowledge that:

- You have fully understand and accept the terms mentioned above (1)

End of Block: Start of Block: Information Sheet

Start of Block: Demographic questions

Q3 Demographic questions

Please state your age:



Q4 What gender do you identify yourself with:

- Male (1)
 - Female (2)
 - Non-binary / third gender (3)
 - I prefer a different label (*Please indicate this in the text box below*) (4)
-

I prefer not to say (5)



Q5 What is the highest education level you achieved:

- None (1)
 - Primary school (2)
 - Highschool (3)
 - Bachelor's degree (4)
 - Master's degree (5)
 - Other (*please indicate this in the text box below*) (6)
-

I prefer not to say (7)



Q6 Do you have an ongoing education?

- None (1)
- Primary school (2)
- Highschool (3)
- Bachelor's degree (4)
- Master's degree (5)
- Other (*please indicate this in the text box below*) (6)
- I prefer not to say (7)



Q7 State your nationality:

- Type in your nationality, for example, Dutch, German, etc. (1)

- I prefer not to say (2)

End of Block: Demographic questions

Start of Block: Start of Block: Questionnaires



Start: BJW Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement:

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Somewhat Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Somewhat Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
I think basically the world is a just place. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that, by and large, people get what they deserve. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am confident that justice always prevails over injustice. (21)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am convinced that in the long run people will be compensated for injustices. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I firmly believe that injustices in all areas of life (e.g., professional, family, politics) are the exception rather than the rule. (13)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think people try to be fair when making important decisions. (14)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Ambivalent Sexism Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement:

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Somewhat Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Somewhat Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
No matter how accomplished he is, a man is not truly complete as a person unless he has the love of a woman. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Many women are actually seeking special favors, such as hiring policies that favor them over men, under the guise of asking for "equality." (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In a disaster, women ought not necessarily to be rescued before men. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Most women interpret innocent remarks or acts as being sexist. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Women are too easily offended. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People are often truly happy in life without being romantically involved with a member of the other sex. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Feminists are not seeking for women to have more power than men. (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Many women have a quality of purity that few men possess. (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Women should be cherished and protected by men. (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Most women fail to appreciate fully all that men do for them. (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Women seek to gain power by getting control over men. (11)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Every man ought to have a woman whom he adores. (12)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Men are complete without women. (13)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Women exaggerate problems they have at work. (14)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Once a woman gets a man to commit to her, she usually tries to put him on a tight leash. (15)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When women lose to men in a fair competition, they typically complain about being discriminated against. (16)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A good woman should be set on a pedestal by her man. (17)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

There are actually very few women who get a kick out of teasing men by seeming sexually available and then refusing male advances. (18)



Women, compared to men, tend to have a superior moral sensibility. (19)



Men should be willing to sacrifice their own well-being in order to provide financially for the women in their lives. (23)



Feminists are making entirely reasonable demands of men. (24)



Women, as compared to men, tend to have a more refined sense of culture and good taste. (25)



Start of Block: Case descriptions (moderate)

Moderate severity Below you will be presented with a description of a case including psychological abuse in the context of control and coercion within an intimate relationship. Please take the time to read this carefully.

Case description

Background: Ms. Smith and Mr. Brown met during college and have now been dating for two years. The couple were very happy, but when the two moved in together, Ms. Smith claimed that Mrs. Brown's behavior towards her changed, leading to a call to the police.

Ms. Smith made the following allegations to police about Mr. Brown:

- Ms. Smith accuses Mr. Brown of starting an argument every time she wants to see friends and family and tells her to call often and that she must pick up the phone directly when he calls while she is out with friends. In addition, she states that he gives her an exact time for her return.
- Ms. Smith accuses Mr. Brown of sending her angry or upset messages when she gets home from work later than expected. She claims that these messages cause her to feel pressured to conform to Mr. Brown's expectations and timelines.
- Ms. Smith accuses Mr. Brown of demanding access to her phone and social media accounts. She states that he regularly takes her phone and reads her messages and accuses her of cheating on him if he sees any communication with other men.
- Ms. Smith accuses Mr. Brown of undermining her self-confidence by regularly criticizing her appearance and accusing her of eating too much. Furthermore, she states that he is always trying to tell her what she should eat and how she should dress.
- Ms. Smith accuses Mr. Brown of exerting increasing control over her property and finances by setting rules for her spending and having her banking passwords. This includes monitoring her purchases, and accounting for her expenses, thereby limiting her financial independence.

The police are investigating these allegations. So far there is no evidence for or against these accusations other than Ms. Smith's allegations.

End of Block: Case descriptions (moderate)

Start of Block: Case description (high)

High severity Below you will be presented with a description of a case including psychological abuse in the context of control and coercion within an intimate relationship. Please take the time to read this carefully.

Case description

Background: Ms. Smith and Mr. Brown met during college and have now been dating for two years. The couple were very happy, but when the two moved in together, Ms. Smith claimed that Mrs. Brown's behavior towards her changed, leading to a call to the police.

Ms. Smith made the following allegations to police about Mr. Brown:

- Ms. Smith accuses Mr. Brown of not allowing her contact with friends or family unless he is with her. She states that he rarely agrees to these meetings and always argues before and after that she should not continue seeing other people since they are now in a relationship.
- Ms. Smith accuses Mr. Brown of sending her messages threatening violence every time she returned home later than agreed upon after work. These messages triggered fear for her safety, forcing her to comply with Mr. Brown's demands.
- Ms. Smith accuses Mr. Brown of banning her from accessing her social media accounts. She claims he has the only passwords to her accounts and monitors her phone every day to check her phone for any messages or male contacts. She states that he claims she is cheating on him and therefore forbids her from having contact with other men online.
- Ms. Smith accuses Mr. Brown of destroying her self-confidence by constantly calling her unattractive and accusing her of needing to lose weight. Furthermore, she states that it got to the point where he now decides on what she is allowed to eat and what clothing she is allowed to wear.
- Ms. Smith accuses Mr. Brown of having complete control over her property and finances by setting strict rules and bans on her spending. She states that he made her send her wages from work into his bank account so that he can decide what she is allowed to buy.

The police are investigating these allegations. So far there is no evidence for or against these accusations other than Ms. Smith's allegations.

End of Block: Case description (high)

Start of Block: Measure after case description

Crime seriousness 1 Thinking about the allegations you have read, please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements about the alleged behaviours:

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Somewhat Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Somewhat Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
The alleged actions are violent. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The victim would likely be psychologically disturbed if the allegations are true. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The alleged behaviours are immoral. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The alleged actions were inherently wrong. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Measure after case description

Start of Block: Investigative interview (Denial of the victim)

DoV condition **Investigative Interview**

The following is an interview script between a police officer and Mr. Brown. Please read the script carefully.

Officer Benson: Good afternoon, Mr. Brown. Thank you for being here today. My name is Officer Benson, and I would like to speak with you about some allegations of controlling and coercive behavior that have been raised against you by your former partner Ms. Smith.

Mr. Brown: Okay. What do you want to know?

Officer Benson: We have received information from Ms. Smith who has expressed concerns about the dynamics of your relationship. We need to understand both sides of the story so that we can better assess the situation. First, let us discuss how you and Ms. Smith met and how your relationship developed.

Mr. Brown: We met in college and things were great for a while. We had been together for two years, but lately, she had been making everything up and twisting everything.

Officer Benson: It has been stated that after moving in together, there was a noticeable change in your behavior towards Ms. Smith. Can you tell me about that?

Mr. Brown: Well, I mean living together is stressful, but I wouldn't believe her if she's saying I'm the one who changed. I have just been trying to make things work, you know, and recently she hasn't been making that easy for me.

Officer Benson: Ms. Smith claimed that you started to restrict her contact with friends and family. Can you elaborate on that?

Mr. Brown: Her telling it to you like that is just the kind of twisting of words I'm talking about. All I've done is say I want to spend more time with her, but she is always out partying with her friends, some weeks I barely even saw her. Me asking her to spend some time with me is hardly a crime even if she's making it out to be.

Officer Benson: Ms. Smith also claimed that you accused her of infidelity. Can you speak about that?

Mr. Brown: Yeah, I know she cheated on me. I mean, ask around, everyone knows she cheats on everyone she's ever been with. I guess to start with I thought I'd be different for some reason. She started to spend so much time with what she claimed were her friends and family, of course, there must be something going on. I mean, if I question her loyalty, she can hardly blame me when she's off most nights getting drunk with God knows who. I am a good boyfriend to her, and she treats me like this? I still do not understand how she behaves or why she's making these allegations.

Officer Benson: Ms. Smith accused you of sending intimidating messages to her when she returned home later than expected. What is your response to that?

Mr. Brown: Like I said, she twists things and always acts like I'm some villain. She is always making accusations like that when all I'm doing is trying to find out where she is and who she's with because she never tells me anything. She's totally unreliable. I just wanted to know where she was, that is all. If your partner was out God knows where with God knows who you'd be asking where the hell they were too wouldn't you?

Officer Benson: Ms. Smith has mentioned instances where you controlled her social media and communications. Can you explain that?

Mr. Brown: That's not fair. All I did was only to make sure she did not cheat on me. If your partner was sat in the house with a smirk on her face texting people and on social media all day chatting to other people who wouldn't want to know who they were talking to. She was always texting men online, going out with her friends, and flirting.

Officer Benson: Ms. Smith says you have been controlling what she can eat and how she dresses, do you have any response to that?

Mr. Brown: I suppose by now I'm not surprised she'd be saying something like that to you. You really can't believe a word she says, but I can't blame you because I was a fool myself to trust her as long as I have. Look, she doesn't take care of herself. She drinks too much alcohol and eats crap food after she's been out to the bars and clubs. If I comment on that then that's a crime now is it? She's just such a deceitful lying person making that out to be me abusing her. As for how she dresses, mate, nobody would be happy if their partner went out to town without them with pretty much everything on display. Who is she showing all that flesh for? Because it isn't me. I don't see how me getting upset by that makes me the bad guy. She knows how much that upsets me and she does it anyway.

Officer Benson: It has also been brought to our attention that you took control of Ms. Smith's finances. Can you clarify that?

Mr. Brown: Well, she is the one wasting money by going out and getting drunk, she had no control over her finances, and here she is making these allegations against me. She can't take care of her money, but me helping her is abuse. That's not right, is it? Everything I have to put up with from her and now I'm accused of this too?

Officer Benson: I have one last question, what do you think was the reason why Ms. Smith felt like she was not able to deal with the difficulties in your relationship on her own and called the police?

Mr. Brown: It is ridiculous. She does not have any reason to complain and call the cops when she is the one causing all the relationship problems, and the one starting all the arguments. If she has called you, it's just to put me in my place. Honestly, I knew she could be nasty, but I didn't know she could be this nasty.

Officer Benson: Thank you for providing your perspective, Mr. Brown. We will be investigating this case, and if necessary, we may contact you again. If you have any additional information you would like to share, please feel free to do so.

Mr. Brown: Okay, thank you.

End of Block: Investigative interview (Denial of the victim)

Start of Block: Investigative interview (No comment)

No Comment condition **Investigative Interview**

The following is an interview script between a police officer and Mr. Brown. Please read the script carefully.

Officer Benson: Good afternoon, Mr. Brown. Thank you for being here today. My name is Officer Benson, and I would like to speak with you about some allegations of controlling and coercive behavior that have been raised against you by your former partner Ms. Smith.

Mr. Brown: Okay, but I have been advised to respond with no comment because it is easy to say something that can make you look guilty in interviews about this kind of thing even when you've done nothing wrong.

Officer Benson: We have received information from Ms. Smith who has expressed concerns about the dynamics of your relationship. We need to understand both sides of the story so that we can better assess the situation. First, let us discuss how you and Ms. Smith met and how your relationship developed.

Mr. Brown: No comment.

Officer Benson: It has been stated that after moving in together, there was a noticeable change in your behavior towards Ms. Smith. Can you tell me about that?

Mr. Brown: No comment.

Officer Benson: Ms. Smith claimed that you started to restrict her contact with friends and family. Can you elaborate on that?

Mr. Brown: No comment.

Officer Benson: Ms. Smith also claimed that you accused her of infidelity. Can you speak about that?

Mr. Brown: No comment.

Officer Benson: Ms. Smith accused you of sending intimidating messages to her when she returned home later than expected. What is your response to that?

Mr. Brown: No comment.

Officer Benson: Ms. Smith has mentioned instances where you controlled her social media and communications. Can you explain that?

Mr. Brown: No comment.

Officer Benson: Ms. Smith says you have been controlling what she can eat and how she dresses, do you have any response to that?

Mr. Brown: No comment.

Officer Benson: It has also been brought to our attention that you took control of Ms. Smith's finances. Can you clarify that?

Mr. Brown: No comment.

Officer Benson: I have one last question, what do you think was the reason why Ms. Smith felt like she was not able to deal with the difficulties in your relationship on her own and called the police?

Mr. Brown: No comment.

Officer Benson: Thank you for providing your perspective, Mr. Brown. We will be investigating this case, and if necessary, we may contact you again. If you have any additional information you would like to share, please feel free to do so.

Mr. Brown: Okay, thank you.

End of Block: Investigative interview (No comment)

Start of Block: Measures after investigative interviews

Crime seriousness 2 Thinking about the allegations that were made now you have read what the suspect has to say about them, could you please once again indicate how much you agree with each of the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Somewhat Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Somewhat Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
The alleged actions are violent. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The victim would likely be psychologically disturbed if the allegations are true. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The alleged behaviours are immoral. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The alleged actions were inherently wrong. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Blame attribution Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement:

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Somewhat Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Somewhat Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
Ms. Smith's actions or behaviors were responsible for the conflicts in the relationship. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mr. Brown's behavior directly contributed to the alleged negative aspects of the relationship. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ms. Smith is responsible for the stated tensions that arose between her and Mr. Brown. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mr. Brown is responsible for the psychological distress Ms. Smith claims to have experienced. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ms. Smith's personality explains the way Mr. Brown allegedly treated her. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mr. Brown's alleged actions toward Ms. Smith are due to Mr. Brown's personality. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ms. Smith's responses to Mr. Brown's alleged behavior likely made any conflict in the relationship worse. (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Mr. Brown's decisions are what caused conflict within the relationship. (8)

Ms. Smith's behaviors were responsible for causing any alleged psychological abuse in the relationship. (9)

Mr. Brown is responsible for any psychological abuse Ms. Smith claims to have experienced. (10)

Blame at. text field We would like to give you the opportunity to explain why you answered the way you have on the previous questions about who was responsible for causing the alleged behaviors. *(You can use the text box below to give any explanation you like, and we would also like to remind you that your reasons are entirely anonymous and cannot be traced back to you personally)*

Page Break

Legal explanation

Legal explanation of controlling and coercive behaviour:

An offence is committed by a suspect ("A") against a victim ("B") if: "A" repeatedly or continuously engages in behaviour towards another person, "B", that is controlling or coercive at the time of the behaviour, "A" and "B" are personally connected the behaviour has a serious effect on "B", and "A" knows or ought to know that the behaviour will have a serious effect on "B"

(CPS, 2023)

Controlling behaviour is: a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

Coercive behaviour is: a continuing act or pattern of acts of assaults, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish or frighten their victim.



Perceived guilt For the purpose of this question, assume that the law described above applies in the case of Mr. Brown and Ms. Smith. Using this definition of control and coercion, and all the information you have been shown about the case, please indicate whether you think Mr Brown is legally guilty of control and coercion against Ms. Smith:

	Extremely sure he is innocent (1)	Very sure he is innocent (2)	More likely innocent than guilty (3)	More likely guilty than innocent (4)	Very sure he is guilty (5)	Extremely sure he is guilty (6)
Do you think Mr. Brown is legally guilty of controlling and coercive behaviour? (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Perceived veracity Whether or not you think Mr. Brown is legally guilty of a crime of control and coercion, how likely do you think it is that the allegations Ms. Smith made are true?

	Extremely sure the allegations are false (1)	Very sure the allegations are false (2)	The allegations are more likely false than true (3)	The allegations are more likely true than false (4)	Very sure the allegations are true (5)	Extremely sure the allegations are true (6)
Do you think the stated allegations are true? (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Measures after investigative interviews

Start of Block: Debriefing

Debriefing text

Debriefing

Thank you for your participation in this study. This study aimed to investigate how different descriptions of psychological abuse, occurring in the context of control and coercion within intimate relationships, and varying in the severity of the alleged behaviors change whether people believe the behaviors did or did not occur, and who would be responsible for the behaviors if they did occur. By understanding these dynamics, we want to achieve a deeper insight into when victims are believed or blamed in the context of control and coercion within intimate relationships - as well as when suspect guilt is assumed. In this case, it was not known whether the allegations were true or not, and so there were no right or wrong answers. We only wanted to explore what factors influence how people make these decisions.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, feel free to contact: c.schomaker@student.utwente.nl or the research supervisor: s.j.watson@utwente.nl. If you or someone you know is experiencing abuse in an intimate relationship, please remember that resources are available to provide support. You can contact the following hotlines:

English-speaking support:

National Domestic Violence Hotline:

Hotline: 1-800-799-7233

Website: <https://www.thehotline.org/>

German-speaking support:

Beratung und Hilfe für Frauen:

Hotline: 116 016

Website: <https://www.hilfetelefon.de/>

Hilfetelefon Gewalt an Männer:

Hotline: 0800 1239900

Website: <https://www.maennerhilfetelefon.de/>

Dutch-speaking support:

Veilig Thuis:

Hotline: 0800-2000

Website: <https://veiligthuis.nl/>



Consent withdraw If you are still happy for us to use your data for our research you can either close your browser window or tab, or indicate this by choosing the option below indicating we may use your data. If you wish to withdraw your data, please indicate this by selecting the "remove my data" option. By signing below, you acknowledge that:

- I am happy for you to use my data (1)
- I withdraw from the study, please delete my data (2)

End of Block: Debriefing

Appendix B

German version of the survey (published on Qualtrics)

Start of Block: Start of Block: Information Sheet

Q1 Informationsübersicht

Hintergrund und Zweck der Studie

Vielen Dank für Ihr Interesse an der Teilnahme an dieser Forschungsstudie. Ziel dieser Studie ist es zu untersuchen, wie Menschen zu Vorwürfen psychischen Missbrauchs in intimen Beziehungen stehen.

Anweisungen

Nachdem Sie der Teilnahme an dieser Forschungsstudie zugestimmt haben, beantworten Sie einige Fragen zu Ihrer Person und Ihren Perspektiven. Anschließend werden Sie gebeten, einen fiktiven Fallbericht zu lesen, der Vorwürfe über psychischen Missbrauch in einer intimen Beziehung beschreibt. Nach der Fallbeschreibung erhalten Sie ein Ermittlungsgesprächsskript, welches das Gespräch zwischen einem Polizisten und dem Tatverdächtigen zeigt. Am Ende müssen Sie basierend auf Ihrer Wahrnehmung und Beurteilung der gelesenen Materialien einen Fragebogen beantworten.

Teilnahmebedingungen

Um an dieser Studie teilnehmen zu können, müssen Sie mindestens 18 Jahre alt sein.

Risiko der Teilnahme

Bitte bedenken Sie, dass Sie im Rahmen Ihrer Teilnahme mit fiktiven Vorwürfen und einem Interviewskript über psychischen Missbrauch in einer Beziehung konfrontiert werden. Wenn Sie glauben, dass Ihnen dieses Thema Sorgen bereiten könnte, raten wir Ihnen, nicht an dieser Studie teilzunehmen. Sollten Sie sich dennoch für die Teilnahme an dieser Studie entscheiden, haben Sie jederzeit die Möglichkeit, den Browser zu schließen. In diesem Fall werden wir Ihre Daten nicht in die Studie einbeziehen. Alle erhobenen Daten sind anonym. Bitte beachten Sie, dass dies auch bedeutet, dass Sie Ihre Daten nach Abschluss der Studie nicht mehr löschen können, da eine Rückverfolgung Ihrer Daten im Nachhinein nicht mehr möglich ist.

Kontaktinformationen und Hotline-Informationen

Wenn Sie Fragen oder Bedenken zur Forschung haben, wenden Sie sich bitte an:
c.schomaker@student.utwente.nl oder an den Forschungsbetreuer: s.j.watson@utwente.nl.

Wenn Sie oder jemand, den Sie kennen, in einer intimen Beziehung Missbrauch erlebt, denken Sie bitte daran, dass Ressourcen zur Verfügung stehen, um Unterstützung zu leisten. Sie können folgende Hotlines erreichen:

Beratung und Hilfe für Frauen:

Hotline: 116 016

Website: <https://www.hilfetelefon.de/>

Hilfetelefon Gewalt an Männer:

Hotline: 0800 1239900

Website: <https://www.maennerhilfetelefon.de/>

Wenn Sie an dieser Studie teilnehmen möchten, lesen Sie bitte die folgenden Erklärungen und geben Sie Ihr Einverständnis. Bitte beachten Sie, dass Sie jeder Aussage zustimmen müssen, um an der Studie teilnehmen zu können:

- Ich stimme der Teilnahme an dieser Forschungsstudie freiwillig zu.
- Ich bin damit einverstanden, dass meine Daten anonym gespeichert werden.
- Ich verstehe, dass das Ausfüllen der Umfrage etwa 25 Minuten dauern kann.
- Ich habe mir den Zweck und die Art der Studie schriftlich erklären lassen.
- Mir ist bewusst, dass ich durch die Teilnahme an dieser Studie keinen direkten Nutzen daraus ziehen werde.
- Mir ist bewusst, dass die Studie Beschreibungen von Missbrauch in intimen Beziehungen beinhalten wird, und ich nicht glaube, dass mir dies Kummer bereiten wird.
- Mir ist bewusst, dass ich meine Teilnahme an dieser Studie jederzeit ohne Angabe von Gründen abbrechen kann. Dazu kann ich mein Internetbrowserfenster schließen.
- Mir ist bewusst, dass es mir freisteht, die an der Studie beteiligten Forscher zu kontaktieren, um weitere Erläuterungen und Informationen einzuholen.

Q2 Mit Ihrer Unterschrift erkennen Sie Folgendes an:

- Sie haben die oben genannten Bedingungen vollständig verstanden und akzeptiert (1)

End of Block: Start of Block: Information Sheet

Start of Block: Demographic questions

Q3 Demografische Fragen

Bitte geben Sie Ihr Alter an:



Q4 Mit welchem Geschlecht identifizieren Sie sich:

- Mann (1)
- Frau (2)
- Nicht-binär / drittes Geschlecht (3)
- Ich bevorzuge eine andere Bezeichnung (*Bitte geben Sie dies im Textfeld unten an*) (4)
-
- Ich möchte keine Angaben machen (5)



Q5 Was ist der höchste Bildungsabschluss denn Sie erreicht haben:

- Ich habe keinen Bildungsabschluss (1)
- Grundschule (2)
- Hauptschule (3)
- Realschule (4)
- (allgemeine/fachgebundene) Fachhochschulreife (5)
- (allgemeine/fachgebundene) Hochschulreife (6)
- Berufsausbildung (7)
- Bachelorabschluss (8)
- Masterabschluss (9)
- Sonstiges (*bitte geben Sie dies im Textfeld unten an*) (10)
- Ich möchte keine Angaben machen (11)



Q6 Befinden Sie sich derzeit in einem laufenden Bildungsprogramm?

- Nein (1)
- Grundschule (2)
- Hauptschule (3)
- Realschule (4)
- (allgemeine/fachgebundene) Fachhochschulreife (5)
- (allgemeine/fachgebundene) Hochschulreife (6)
- Berufsausbildung (7)
- Bachelorabschluss (8)
- Masterabschluss (9)
- Sonstiges (*bitte geben Sie dies im Textfeld unten an*) (10)
- Ich möchte keine Angaben machen (11)



Q7 Geben Sie Ihre Nationalität an:

- Geben Sie Ihre Nationalität ein, z.B. Niederländisch, Deutsch usw. (1)

- Ich möchte keine Angaben machen (2)

End of Block: Demographic questions

Start of Block: Start of Block: Questionnaires



Start: BJW Bitte geben Sie an, inwieweit Sie jeder Aussage zustimmen oder nicht zustimmen:

	Stimme überhaupt nicht zu (1)	Stimme eher nicht zu (2)	Stimme weder zu noch widerspreche ich (3)	Stimme eher zu (4)	Stimme voll und ganz zu (5)
Ich glaube, dass die Welt grundsätzlich ein gerechter Ort ist. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ich glaube, dass die Menschen im Großen und Ganzen das bekommen, was sie verdienen. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ich bin zuversichtlich, dass die Gerechtigkeit immer über die Ungerechtigkeit siegt. (21)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ich bin davon überzeugt, dass die Menschen auf lange Sicht für Ungerechtigkeiten entschädigt werden. (33)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ich bin fest davon überzeugt, dass Ungerechtigkeiten in allen Lebensbereichen (z.B. Beruf, Familie, Politik) eher die Ausnahme als die Regel sind. (34)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ich denke, dass die Menschen versuchen, bei wichtigen Entscheidungen fair zu sein. (35)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Ambivalent Sexism Bitte geben Sie an, inwieweit Sie jeder Aussage zustimmen oder nicht zustimmen:

	Stimme überhaupt nicht zu (1)	Stimme eher nicht zu (2)	Stimme weder zu noch widerspreche ich (3)	Stimme eher zu (4)	Stimme voll und ganz zu (5)
Egal, wie erfolgreich er ist, ein Mann ist als Person nicht wirklich vollständig, wenn er nicht die Liebe einer Frau hat. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Viele Frauen fordern unter dem Deckmantel der "Gleichberechtigung" besondere Bevorzugungen, wie z.B. eine Einstellungspolitik, die sie gegenüber Männern bevorzugt. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Bei einer Katastrophe sollten Frauen nicht unbedingt vor Männern gerettet werden. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Die meisten Frauen interpretieren unschuldige Bemerkungen oder Handlungen als sexistisch. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Frauen sind zu schnell beleidigt. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Menschen sind oft wirklich glücklich im Leben, ohne eine romantische Beziehung mit einem Mitglied des anderen Geschlechts zu haben. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Feministinnen wollen nicht, dass Frauen mehr Macht haben als Männer. (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Viele Frauen haben eine Qualität der Reinheit, die nur wenige Männer besitzen. (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Frauen sollten von Männern wertgeschätzt und beschützt werden. (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Die meisten Frauen wissen nicht voll zu schätzen, was Männer für sie tun. (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Frauen versuchen, Macht zu erlangen, indem sie Kontrolle über Männer bekommen. (11)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Jeder Mann sollte eine Frau haben, die er anbetet. (12)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Männer sind ohne Frauen vollständig. (13)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Frauen übertreiben bei Problemen, die sie auf der Arbeit haben. (14)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sobald eine Frau einen Mann dazu bringt, sich an sie zu binden, versucht sie normalerweise, ihn an die kurze Leine zu nehmen. (15)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Wenn Frauen in einem fairen Wettbewerb gegen Männer verlieren, beschweren sie sich in der Regel darüber, diskriminiert zu werden. (16)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Eine gute Frau sollte von ihrem Mann auf ein Podest gestellt werden. (17)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Es gibt nur sehr wenige Frauen, denen es Spaß macht, Männer zu reizen, indem sie sich sexuell verfügbar zeigen und dann männliche Annäherungsversuche zurückweisen. (18)

Frauen haben im Vergleich zu Männern tendenziell ein höheres moralisches Empfinden. (19)

Männer sollten bereit sein, ihr eigenes Wohlbefinden zu opfern, um die Frauen in ihrem Leben finanziell zu versorgen. (23)

Feministinnen stellen völlig vernünftige Forderungen an Männer. (24)

Frauen haben im Vergleich zu Männern tendenziell einen feineren Sinn für Kultur und guten Geschmack. (25)

Start of Block: Case descriptions (moderate)

Moderate severity Im Folgenden wird Ihnen ein Fall beschrieben, in dem es um psychischen Missbrauch im Kontext von Kontrolle und Nötigung in einer intimen Beziehung geht. Bitte nehmen Sie sich die Zeit, dies sorgfältig zu lesen.

Fallbeschreibung

Hintergrund: Frau Smith und Herr Brown haben sich während des Studiums kennengelernt und sind nun seit zwei Jahren zusammen. Das Paar war sehr glücklich, aber als die beiden zusammenzogen, behauptete Frau Smith, dass sich das Verhalten von Herrn Brown ihr gegenüber geändert habe, was zu einem Anruf bei der Polizei führte.

Frau Smith erhob bei der Polizei folgende Anschuldigungen gegenüber Herr Brown:

- Frau Smith beschuldigt Herrn Brown, jedes Mal einen Streit anzufangen, wenn sie Freunde und Familie sehen möchte. Er sagt ihr, sie soll oft anrufen und das Telefon sofort abnehmen, wenn er anruft, während sie mit Freunden unterwegs ist. Außerdem behauptet sie, dass er ihr eine genaue Rückkehrzeit vorgibt.

- Frau Smith beschuldigt Herrn Brown, ihr wütende oder verärgerte Nachrichten zu schicken, wenn sie später als erwartet von der Arbeit nach Hause kommt. Sie behauptet, dass diese Nachrichten dazu führen, dass sie sich unter Druck gesetzt fühlt, den Erwartungen und Zeitplänen von Herrn Brown zu entsprechen.

- Frau Smith wirft Herrn Brown vor, Zugriff auf ihre Telefon- und Social-Media-Konten zu verlangen. Sie gibt an, dass er regelmäßig ihr Telefon nimmt, ihre Nachrichten liest und ihr vorwirft, ihn zu betrügen, wenn er Kommunikation mit anderen Männern sieht.

- Frau Smith wirft Herrn Brown vor, ihr Selbstvertrauen zu untergraben, indem er regelmäßig ihr Aussehen kritisiert und ihr vorwirft, zu viel zu essen. Darüber hinaus gibt sie an, dass er ihr immer sagte, was sie essen und wie sie sich kleiden sollte.

- Frau Smith wirft Herrn Brown vor, dass er zunehmend Kontrolle über ihr Eigentum und ihre Finanzen ausübt, indem er Regeln für ihre Ausgaben festlegt und über ihre Bankpasswörter verfügt. Dazu gehört die Überwachung ihrer Einkäufe und die Abrechnung ihrer Ausgaben, wodurch ihre finanzielle Unabhängigkeit eingeschränkt wird.

Die Polizei untersucht diese Vorwürfe. Bisher gibt es außer den Behauptungen von Frau Smith keine Beweise für oder gegen diese Anschuldigungen.

End of Block: Case descriptions (moderate)

Start of Block: Case description (high)

High severity Im Folgenden wird Ihnen ein Fall beschrieben, in dem es um psychischen Missbrauch im Kontext von Kontrolle und Nötigung in einer intimen Beziehung geht. Bitte nehmen Sie sich die Zeit, dies sorgfältig zu lesen.

Fallbeschreibung

Hintergrund: Frau Smith und Herr Brown haben sich während des Studiums kennengelernt und sind nun seit zwei Jahren zusammen. Das Paar war sehr glücklich, aber als die beiden zusammenzogen, behauptete Frau Smith, dass sich das Verhalten von Herrn Brown ihr gegenüber geändert habe, was zu einem Anruf bei der Polizei führte.

Frau Smith erhob bei der Polizei folgende Anschuldigungen gegenüber Herr Brown:

- Frau Smith wirft Herrn Brown vor, ihr den Kontakt zu Freunden oder Familie nicht zu erlauben, es sei denn, er sei bei ihr. Sie gibt an, dass er diesen Treffen nur selten zustimmt und immer davor und danach argumentiert, dass sie sich nicht mehr mit anderen Menschen treffen soll, da sie jetzt in einer Beziehung sind.
- Frau Smith beschuldigt Herrn Brown, ihr jedes Mal, wenn sie nach der Arbeit später als vereinbart nach Hause kam, Nachrichten mit der Androhung von Gewalt zu schicken. Diese Nachrichten lösten Angst um ihre Sicherheit aus und zwangen sie, den Forderungen von Herrn Brown nachzukommen.
- Frau Smith wirft Herrn Brown vor, ihr den Zugriff auf ihre Social-Media-Konten verboten zu haben. Sie behauptet, er habe die einzigen Passwörter für ihre Konten und überwacht ihr Telefon jeden Tag, um es auf Nachrichten oder männliche Kontakte zu überprüfen. Sie gibt an, dass er behauptet, sie würde ihn betrügen, und ihr daher den Kontakt zu anderen Männern im Internet verbietet.
- Frau Smith wirft Herrn Brown vor, ihr Selbstvertrauen zu zerstören, indem er sie ständig als unattraktiv bezeichnet und ihr vorwirft, dass sie abnehmen muss. Darüber hinaus gibt sie an, dass es so weit gekommen ist, dass er nun darüber entscheidet, was sie essen und welche Kleidung sie tragen darf.
- Frau Smith wirft Herrn Brown vor, durch die Festlegung strenger Regeln und Verbote für ihre Ausgaben die vollständige Kontrolle über ihr Eigentum und ihre Finanzen zu haben. Sie gibt an, dass er sie gezwungen habe, ihren Arbeitslohn auf sein Bankkonto zu überweisen, damit er entscheiden kann, was sie kaufen darf.

Die Polizei untersucht diese Vorwürfe. Bisher gibt es außer den Behauptungen von Frau Smith keine Beweise für oder gegen diese Anschuldigungen.

End of Block: Case description (high)

Start of Block: Measure after case description

Crime seriousness 1 Wenn Sie über die gelesenen Vorwürfe nachdenken, geben Sie bitte an, inwieweit Sie den folgenden Aussagen zu den mutmaßlichen Verhaltensweisen zustimmen:

	Stimme überhaupt nicht zu (1)	Stimme eher nicht zu (2)	Stimme weder zu noch widerspreche ich (3)	Stimme eher zu (4)	Stimme voll und ganz zu (5)
Die mutmaßlichen Taten waren gewalttätig. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Das Opfer wäre wahrscheinlich psychisch gestört, wenn die Anschuldigungen wahr wären. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Die angeblichen Verhaltensweisen waren unmoralisch. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Die angeblichen Handlungen waren grundsätzlich falsch. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Measure after case description

Start of Block: Investigative interview (Denial of the victim)

DoV condition **Investigatives Interview**

Im Folgende ist ein Interviewskript zwischen einem Polizisten und Herrn Brown zu sehen. Bitte lesen Sie das Skript sorgfältig durch.

Officer Benson: Guten Tag, Herr Brown. Vielen Dank, dass Sie heute hier sind. Mein Name ist Officer Benson und ich möchte mit Ihnen über einige Vorwürfe wegen kontrollierenden und erzwingenden Verhaltens sprechen, die Ihre frühere Partnerin Frau Smith gegen Sie erhoben hat.

Herr Brown: Okay. Was möchten Sie wissen ?

Officer Benson: Wir haben Informationen von Frau Smith erhalten, die Bedenken hinsichtlich der Dynamik Ihrer Beziehung geäußert hat. Wir müssen beide Seiten der Geschichte verstehen, damit wir die Situation besser einschätzen können. Lassen Sie uns zunächst besprechen, wie Sie und Frau Smith sich kennengelernt haben und wie sich Ihre Beziehung entwickelt hat.

Herr Brown: Wir haben uns in der Universität kennengelernt und eine Zeit lang lief es großartig. Wir waren seit zwei Jahren zusammen, aber in letzter Zeit fing sie an alles zu erfinden und zu verdrehen.

Officer Benson: Es wurde festgestellt, dass sich Ihr Verhalten gegenüber Frau Smith nach dem Zusammenziehen deutlich verändert hat. Können Sie mir davon erzählen ?

Herr Brown: Nun, ich meine, das Zusammenleben ist stressig, aber ich würde ihr nicht glauben, wenn sie sagt, dass ich derjenige bin, der sich verändert hat. Ich habe nur versucht die Dinge zum Laufen zu bringen, wissen Sie, und in letzter Zeit hat sie es mir nicht mehr so leicht gemacht.

Officer Benson: Frau Smith behauptete, Sie hätten begonnen ihren Kontakt zu Freunden und Familie einzuschränken. Können Sie das näher erläutern ?

Herr Brown: Das sie Ihnen sowas erzählt, ist genau die Wortverdrehung, von der ich spreche. Ich habe nur gesagt, dass ich mehr Zeit mit ihr verbringen möchte, aber sie ist immer mit ihren Freunden auf Partys, und in manchen Wochen habe ich sie kaum gesehen. Das ich sie bitte etwas Zeit mit mir zu verbringen, ist kaum ein Verbrechen, selbst wenn sie es so darstellt.

Officer Benson: Außerdem behauptete Frau Smith, Sie hätten ihr Untreue vorgeworfen. Können Sie dazu etwas sagen ?

Herr Brown: Ja, ich weiß, dass sie mich betrogen hat. Ich meine, fragen Sie sich um, jeder weiß, dass sie jeden betrogen hat, mit dem sie jemals zusammen war. Ich schätze, zu Beginn dachte ich, ich wäre aus irgendeinem Grund anders. Sie fing an so viel Zeit mit ihren angeblichen Freunden und ihrer Familie zu verbringen, da musste natürlich etwas los sein. Ich meine, wenn sie die meisten Abende frei hat und sich mit Gott weiß wem betrinkt, kann sie es mir kaum verdenken, wenn ich ihre Loyalität in Frage stelle. Ich bin ein guter Freund für sie und sie behandelt mich so ? Ich verstehe immer noch nicht, wie sie sich verhält und warum sie diese Vorwürfe erhebt.

Officer Benson: Frau Smith beschuldigte Sie, ihr einschüchternde Nachrichten geschickt zu haben, als sie später als erwartet nach Hause kam. Was ist Ihre Antwort darauf ?

Herr Brown: Wie ich schon sagte, sie verdreht die Dinge und tut immer so, als ob ich der Bösewicht wäre. Sie erhebt ständig solche Vorwürfe, wenn ich nur herausfinden will, wo sie ist und mit wem sie zusammen ist, weil sie mir nie etwas erzählt. Sie ist völlig unzuverlässig. Ich wollte nur wissen wo sie war, das ist alles. Wenn Ihr Partner mit Gott weiß wo, mit Gott weiß wem unterwegs wäre, würden Sie auch fragen, wo zum Teufel sie wäre, nicht wahr ?

Officer Benson: Frau Smith hat Fälle erwähnt, in denen Sie ihre sozialen Medien und Kommunikation kontrolliert haben. Können Sie das erklären ?

Herr Brown: Das ist nicht fair. Ich habe nur dafür gesorgt, dass sie mich nicht betrügt. Wenn Ihre Partnerin mit einem Grinsen im Gesicht im Haus sitzt und den ganzen Tag SMS schreibt und in den sozialen Medien mit anderen Leuten chattet, wer würde nicht wissen wollen, mit wem sie sich unterhält. Sie schrieb ständig SMS an Männer, ging mit ihren Freunden aus und flirtete.

Officer Benson: Frau Smith sagt, Sie hätten kontrolliert, was sie essen darf und wie sie sich kleidet. Haben Sie eine Antwort darauf ?

Herr Brown: Ich nehme an, dass es mich mittlerweile nicht mehr wundert, dass sie so etwas zu Ihnen sagt. Sie können wirklich kein Wort glauben, was sie sagt, aber ich kann es Ihnen nicht verübeln, weil

ich selbst dumm war, als ich ihr noch vertraut habe. Schauen Sie, sie passt nicht auf sich auf. Sie trinkt zu viel Alkohol und isst schlechtes Essen, nachdem sie in Bars und Clubs war. Wenn ich das kommentiere, dann ist das ein Verbrechen, oder was? Sie ist einfach so eine betrügerische Lügnerin, die mir vorgaukelt, ich würde sie missbrauchen. Was ihre Kleidung angeht, Kumpel, niemand wäre glücklich, wenn seine Partnerin ohne sie in die Stadt geht und so ziemlich alles zur Schau stellen würde. Wem zeigt sie ihre ganze Haut? Mir nämlich nicht. Ich verstehe nicht, warum ich dadurch zum Bösewicht werde, wenn ich mich darüber aufrege. Sie weiß, wie sehr mich das aufregt und tut es trotzdem.

Officer Benson: Wir wurden auch darauf aufmerksam gemacht, dass Sie die Kontrolle über die Finanzen von Frau Smith übernommen haben. Können Sie das erklären?

Herr Brown: Nun, sie ist diejenige, die Geld verschwendet, indem sie ausgeht und sich betrinkt, sie hatte keine Kontrolle über ihre Finanzen, und hier erhebt sie diese Anschuldigungen gegen mich. Sie kann sich nicht um ihr Geld kümmern, aber dass ich ihr helfe, ist Missbrauch. Das ist nicht richtig, oder? Alles was ich mir von ihr gefallen lassen muss und jetzt wird mir das auch noch vorgeworfen?

Officer Benson: Ich habe noch eine letzte Frage, was war Ihrer Meinung nach der Grund, warum Frau Smith das Gefühl hatte, die Schwierigkeiten in Ihrer Beziehung nicht alleine bewältigen zu können, und die Polizei rief?

Herr Brown: Es ist lächerlich. Sie hat keinen Grund sich zu beschweren und die Polizei zu rufen, wenn sie diejenige ist, die alle Beziehungsprobleme verursacht und alle Streitereien auslöst. Wenn sie euch angerufen hat, dann nur, um mich in meine Schranken zu weisen. Ehrlich gesagt wusste ich, dass sie böse sein kann, aber ich wusste nicht, dass sie so böse sein kann.

Officer Benson: Vielen Dank für Ihre Sichtweise, Herr Brown. Wir werden diesen Fall untersuchen und gegebenenfalls erneut mit Ihnen Kontakt aufnehmen. Wenn Sie weitere Informationen mitteilen möchten, können Sie dies gerne tun.

Herr Brown: Okay, vielen Dank.

End of Block: Investigative interview (Denial of the victim)

Start of Block: Investigative interview (No comment)

No Comment condition **Investigatives Interview**

Im Folgende ist ein Interviewskript zwischen einem Polizisten und Herrn Brown zu sehen. Bitte lesen Sie das Skript sorgfältig durch.

Officer Benson: Guten Tag, Herr Brown. Vielen Dank, dass Sie heute hier sind. Mein Name ist Officer Benson und ich möchte mit Ihnen über einige Vorwürfe wegen kontrollierenden und erzwingenden Verhaltens sprechen, die Ihre frühere Partnerin, Frau Smith, gegen Sie erhoben hat.

Herr Brown: In Ordnung, aber mir wurde geraten, keine Stellungnahme abzugeben, da es in Interviews über solche Angelegenheiten leicht ist, etwas zu sagen, das einen schuldig aussehen lassen kann, selbst wenn man nichts Falsches getan hat.

Officer Benson: Wir haben Informationen von Frau Smith erhalten, die Bedenken hinsichtlich der Dynamik Ihrer Beziehung geäußert hat. Wir müssen beide Seiten der Geschichte verstehen, damit wir die Situation besser einschätzen können. Lassen Sie uns zunächst besprechen, wie Sie und Frau Smith sich kennengelernt haben und wie sich Ihre Beziehung entwickelt hat.

Herr Brown: Kein Kommentar.

Officer Benson: Es wurde festgestellt, dass sich Ihr Verhalten gegenüber Frau Smith nach dem Zusammenziehen deutlich verändert hat. Können Sie mir davon erzählen ?

Herr Brown: Kein Kommentar.

Officer Benson: Frau Smith behauptete, Sie hätten begonnen, ihren Kontakt zu Freunden und Familie einzuschränken. Können Sie das näher erläutern ?

Herr Brown: Kein Kommentar.

Officer Benson: Außerdem behauptete Frau Smith, Sie hätten ihr Untreue vorgeworfen. Können Sie dazu etwas sagen ?

Herr Brown: Kein Kommentar.

Officer Benson: Frau Smith beschuldigte Sie, ihr einschüchternde Nachrichten geschickt zu haben, als sie später als erwartet nach Hause kam. Was ist Ihre Antwort darauf ?

Herr Brown: Kein Kommentar.

Officer Benson: Frau Smith hat Fälle erwähnt, in denen Sie ihre sozialen Medien und Kommunikation kontrolliert haben. Können Sie das erklären ?

Herr Brown: Kein Kommentar.

Officer Benson: Frau Smith sagt, Sie hätten kontrolliert, was sie essen darf und wie sie sich kleidet. Haben Sie eine Antwort darauf ?

Herr Brown: Kein Kommentar.

Officer Benson: Wir wurden auch darauf aufmerksam gemacht, dass Sie die Kontrolle über die Finanzen von Frau Smith übernommen haben. Können Sie das erklären ?

Herr Brown: Kein Kommentar.

Officer Benson: Ich habe noch eine letzte Frage, was war Ihrer Meinung nach der Grund, warum Frau Smith das Gefühl hatte, die Schwierigkeiten in Ihrer Beziehung nicht alleine bewältigen zu können, und die Polizei rief ?

Herr Brown: Kein Kommentar.

Officer Benson: Vielen Dank für Ihre Sichtweise, Herr Brown. Wir werden diesen Fall untersuchen und gegebenenfalls erneut mit Ihnen Kontakt aufnehmen. Wenn Sie weitere Informationen mitteilen möchten, können Sie dies gerne tun.

Herr Brown: Okay, vielen Dank.

End of Block: Investigative interview (No comment)

Start of Block: Measures after investigative interviews

Crime seriousness 2 Angesichts der Vorwürfe, die nun erhoben wurden und nachdem Sie gelesen haben, was der Verdächtige dazu zu sagen hat, könnten Sie bitte erneut angeben, wie sehr Sie mit jeder der folgenden Aussagen übereinstimmen:

	Stimme überhaupt nicht zu (1)	Stimme eher nicht zu (2)	Stimme weder zu noch widerspreche ich (3)	Stimme eher zu (4)	Stimme voll und ganz zu (5)
Die mutmaßlichen Taten waren gewalttätig. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Das Opfer wäre wahrscheinlich psychisch gestört, wenn die Anschuldigungen wahr wären. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Die angeblichen Verhaltensweisen waren unmoralisch. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Die angeblichen Handlungen waren grundsätzlich falsch. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Blame attribution Bitte geben Sie an, inwieweit Sie jeder Aussage zustimmen oder nicht zustimmen:

	Stimme überhaupt nicht zu (1)	Stimme eher nicht zu (2)	Stimme weder zu noch widerspreche ich (3)	Stimme eher zu (4)	Stimme voll und ganz zu (5)
Die Handlungen oder Verhaltensweisen von Frau Smith waren für die Konflikte in der Beziehung verantwortlich. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Das Verhalten von Herrn Brown trug direkt zu den angeblich negativen Aspekten der Beziehung bei. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Frau Smith ist für die genannten Spannungen verantwortlich, die zwischen ihr und Herrn Brown entstanden sind. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Herr Brown ist für die psychische Belastung verantwortlich, die Frau Smith angeblich erlitten hat. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Die Persönlichkeit von Frau Smith erklärt die Art und Weise, wie Herr Brown sie angeblich behandelt hat. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Die angeblichen Handlungen von Herrn Brown gegenüber Frau Smith sind auf die Persönlichkeit von Herrn Brown zurückzuführen. (6)

Die Reaktionen von Frau Smith auf das angebliche Verhalten von Herrn Brown haben wahrscheinlich jeden Konflikt in der Beziehung verschlimmert. (7)

Die Entscheidungen von Herrn Brown haben zu den Konflikten in der Beziehung geführt. (8)

Das Verhalten von Frau Smith war für jeden mutmaßlichen psychischen Missbrauch in der Beziehung verantwortlich. (9)

Herr Brown ist für jeglichen psychischen Missbrauch verantwortlich, den Frau Smith angeblich erlebt hat. (10)

Blame at. text field Wir möchten Ihnen die Möglichkeit geben, zu erläutern, warum Sie auf die vorherigen Fragen, wer für die mutmaßlichen Verhaltensweisen verantwortlich war, so geantwortet haben. *(Sie können das Textfeld unten verwenden, um eine beliebige Erklärung abzugeben. Wir möchten Sie außerdem daran erinnern, dass Ihre Gründe völlig anonym sind und nicht auf Sie persönlich zurückgeführt werden können.)*

Page Break

Legal explanation

Rechtliche Erklärung von Kontroll- und Zwangsverhalten:

Eine Straftat wird von einem Verdächtigen („A“) gegen ein Opfer („B“) begangen, wenn: „A“ zeigt wiederholt oder kontinuierlich ein Verhalten gegenüber einer anderen Person, „B“, das kontrollierend oder zwanghaft ist. Zum Zeitpunkt des Verhaltens sind „A“ und „B“ persönlich verbunden. Das Verhalten hat schwerwiegende Auswirkungen auf „B“ und „A“ weiß oder sollte wissen, dass das Verhalten schwerwiegende Auswirkungen auf „B“ haben wird.

(CPS, 2023)

Kontrollierendes Verhalten ist:

Eine Reihe von Handlungen, die darauf abzielen, eine Person unterzuordnen und/oder abhängig zu machen, indem sie von Quellen der Unterstützung isoliert, ihre Ressourcen und Fähigkeiten zum persönlichen Vorteil ausgenutzt, ihr die für Unabhängigkeit, Widerstand und Flucht erforderlichen Mittel entzogen und ihr alltägliches Verhalten reguliert werden.

Unter Zwangsverhalten versteht man:

Eine fortlaufende Handlung oder ein Muster von Angriffen, Drohungen, Demütigungen und Einschüchterungen oder anderen Misshandlungen, die dazu dienen, dem Opfer Schaden zuzufügen, es zu bestrafen oder ihm Angst einzujagen.



Perceived guilt Für diese Frage wird davon ausgegangen, dass das oben beschriebene Gesetz im Fall von Herrn Brown und Frau Smith gilt. Bitte geben Sie anhand dieser Definition von Kontrolle und

Nötigung und aller Informationen, die Ihnen zu dem Fall vorgelegt wurden, an, ob Herr Brown Ihrer Meinung nach rechtlich der Kontrolle und Nötigung gegenüber Frau Smith schuldig ist:

	Ich bin mir absolut sicher, dass er unschuldig ist (1)	Ich bin mir sehr sicher, dass er unschuldig ist (2)	Ich denke, er ist eher unschuldig als schuldig (3)	Ich denke, er ist eher schuldig als unschuldig (4)	Ich bin mir ganz sicher, dass er schuldig ist (5)	Ich bin mir absolut sicher, dass er schuldig ist (6)
Glauben Sie, dass sich Herr Brown rechtlich des kontrollierenden und erzwingenden Verhaltens schuldig macht? (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Perceived veracity Unabhängig davon, ob Sie glauben, dass Herr Brown sich rechtlich eines Kontroll- und Nötigungsverbrechens schuldig gemacht hat oder nicht, wie wahrscheinlich ist es Ihrer Meinung nach, dass die von Frau Smith erhobenen Anschuldigungen wahr sind ?

	Ich bin mir absolut sicher, dass die Behauptungen falsch sind (1)	Ich bin mir sehr sicher, dass die Behauptungen falsch sind (2)	Ich denke, dass die Behauptungen eher falsch als wahr sind (3)	Ich denke, dass die Behauptungen eher wahr als falsch sind (4)	Ich bin mir sehr sicher, dass die Behauptungen wahr sind (5)	Ich bin mir absolut sicher, dass die Behauptungen wahr sind (6)
Halten Sie die geäußerten Anschuldigungen für wahr? (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Measures after investigative interviews

Start of Block: Debriefing

Debriefing text
Nachbesprechung

Vielen Dank für Ihre Teilnahme an dieser Studie. Das Ziel dieser Studie ist es, zu untersuchen, wie sich unterschiedliche Beschreibungen von psychischer Misshandlung, die im Kontext von Kontrolle und Zwang innerhalb intimer Beziehungen auftreten und sich in der Schwere der behaupteten Verhaltensweisen unterscheiden, darauf auswirken, ob Menschen glauben, dass die Verhaltensweisen stattgefunden haben oder nicht, und wer für die Verhaltensweisen verantwortlich wäre, wenn sie stattgefunden hätten. Durch das Verständnis dieser Dynamiken möchten wir einen tieferen Einblick dafür erlangen, wann Opfern im Kontext von Kontrolle und Zwang innerhalb intimer Beziehungen geglaubt oder die Schuld gegeben wird - sowie wann die Schuld des Verdächtigen angenommen wird. In diesem Fall war nicht bekannt, ob die Vorwürfe wahr waren oder nicht, daher gab es keine richtigen oder falschen Antworten. Wir wollten erkunden, welche Faktoren beeinflussen, wie Menschen diese Entscheidungen treffen.

Wenn Sie Fragen oder Bedenken zur Forschung haben, wenden Sie sich bitte an:
c.schomaker@student.utwente.nl oder den Forschungsbetreuer: s.j.watson@utwente.nl.

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Website: <https://www.hilfetelefon.de/>

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End of Block: Debriefing

Appendix C

The Tables of the Repeated Measures ANOVA and the Descriptive Statistics for Perceived Crime Seriousness

Repeated Measures ANOVA Results for Perceived Crime Seriousness

Variable	Mean Square	df	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	partial n^2
Time	2.5	1	12.96	<.001	.09
Time* Severity of Abuse	0.03	1	0.13	.721	.00
Time* Suspect Justifications	3.36	1	17.40	<.001	.12
Time* Severity of Abuse* Suspect Justifications	0.48	1	2.49	.117	.02

Note. **bold** = Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Descriptive Statistics for Perceived Crime Seriousness at each time point, level of Severity of Abuse, and use of Suspect Justifications

Variable	Severity of Abuse	Suspect Justifications	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	n
Crime Seriousness (b)	Moderate	No Comment	3.85	0.52	28
		Denial of the Victim	3.67	0.67	39
		Total	3.74	0.61	67
	High	No Comment	4.14	0.82	33
		Denial of the Victim	4.08	0.68	30
		Total	4.11	0.75	63
	Total	No Comment	4.01	0.71	61
		Denial of the Victim	3.84	0.70	69
		Total	3.92	0.71	130
Crime Seriousness (a)	Moderate	No Comment	3.81	0.60	28
		Denial of the Victim	3.35	0.87	39

	Total	3.54	0.80	67
High	No Comment	4.24	0.85	33
	Denial of the Victim	3.54	0.90	30
	Total	3.91	0.94	63
Total	No Comment	4.05	0.77	61
	Denial of the Victim	3.43	0.88	69
	Total	3.72	0.88	130

Note. (b) = before, (a) = after.

Appendix D

Table of Moderators Belief in a Just World, Hostile Sexism, and Benevolent Sexism

Significant Main and Interaction Effects between the Dependent and Independent Variables and the Moderator Variable Belief in a Just World

Predictor variables	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Suspect Blame			
Severity of Abuse* Belief in a Just World	4.36	1	<i>.039</i>
Perceived Guilt			
Belief in a Just World	6.73	1	<i>.011</i>

Note. **bold** = Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), *italics* = Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Significant Main and Interaction Effects between the Dependent and Independent Variables and the Moderator Variable Hostile Sexism

Predictor variables	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Suspect Blame			
Hostile Sexism	16.98	1	<.001
Severity of Abuse* Suspect Justifications* Hostile Sexism	4.50	1	<i>.036</i>
Victim Blame			
Hostile Sexism	24.35	1	<.001
Perceived Guilt			
Hostile Sexism	12.20	1	<.001
Severity of Abuse* Hostile Sexism	4.46	1	<i>.037</i>

Perceived Veracity

Hostile Sexism	6.53	1	<i>.012</i>
Suspect Justifications* Hostile Sexism	4.10	1	<i>.045</i>

Note. **bold** = Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), *italics* = Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Significant Main and Interaction Effects between the Dependent and Independent Variables and the Moderator Variable Benevolent Sexism

Predictor variables	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Victim Blame			
Benevolent Sexism	13.74	1	<.001
Suspect Blame			
Benevolent Sexism	5.82	1	<i>.017</i>

Note. **bold** = Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), *italics* = Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).