Beyond Stereotypes - The Role of Gender and Denial of Victim in Coercive Control

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Abstract

Coercive control is widely considered a gendered crime. The victim is stereotypically seen as female and the perpetrator is male. Coercive control is characterised by a pattern of threats, intimidation, and assault to scare, punish, or harm the victim. Physical evidence might not be present. Therefore, police and prosecution rely on interviews with the individuals involved. However, underlying biases and the accounts given by the victim and suspect may alter how the situation and individuals are perceived. This research examined the effects the gender and the use of denial of victim statements had on the attribution of blame and the perception of guilt and seriousness of the crime. Gender role endorsement, ideal victim characteristics, and perceived similarity with the individuals as influencing factors were explored. In an online study, participants were randomly presented with a case description with either a female or male victim as well as an investigative interview with the suspect or a control interview. Multiple questionnaires had to be answered by the participant before finishing the study. Overall, male suspects as well as male victims were blamed more for the same behaviour as their female counterparts. An increase in suspect blame prevailed when gender roles were barely or moderately endorsed. Denial of victim statements that co-occurred with ideal victim characteristics decreased suspect blame. If the victim was female and perceived as an ideal victim then denial of the victim statements reduced victim blame. The results of this study highlight the importance of stereotype awareness and victimhood.

Keywords: Gender, denial of victim, attribution of blame, gender norms, ideal victim

Beyond Stereotypes - The Role of Gender and Denial of Victim in Coercive Control

In the European Union, 22% of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a partner since the age of 15 (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2015). However, domestic abuse is not always physical. Coercive control is a lesser-known form of domestic abuse. Manipulation, intimidation, domination, threatening behaviour, and violence are all patterns of coercive control (Barlow et al., 2020; Loveland & Raghavan, 2017; Myhill et al., 202; Stark, 2007). Controlling behaviour generally involves patterns that force the victim into a dependent role by isolating them, and regulating their actions and resources (Barlow et al., 2020; The Code for Crown Prosecutors, 2023). Coercion refers to threats, intimidation, and any abuse meant to frighten, harm, or punish the victim (Barlow et al., 2020; The Code for Crown Prosecutors, 2023). To be considered unlawful, these behaviours have to be repeated patterns and occur within an intimate relationship, significantly affecting the victim, and the perpetrator must be aware of their impact (The Code for Crown Prosecutors, 2023). The effects of coercive control on the victim are immediate, often get worse over time, and can cause long-term harm (Stark, 2010; Walby & Towers, 2018). This type of abuse can influence an individual's independence, self-esteem, and sense of safety, therefore it is often referred to as similar to the impacts of being held hostage, the victims are made to feel alone, powerless, and trapped (NSW Government, n.d.).

Coercive control is an extremely nuanced crime and can look different for every victim. While the abuse often includes physical and sexual violence, characteristics of psychological violence are always visible over a period of time (Stark, 2010). Prosecution of coercive control is difficult due to law enforcement's overemphasis on investigating only violent crimes, for instance, a single (sexual) assault, and neglecting the psychological aspects of coercive control

(Bishop, 2016). As physical evidence might be lacking, law enforcement generally wants to elicit corroborating accounts from the victim and perpetrator to establish a legal case (Barlow et al., 2020). However, the ambiguity of the crime is what makes it difficult for authorities to take action. Law enforcement is usually very well-trained to investigate and prosecute physical and sexual violence in relationships (Barlow et al., 2020; Myhill et al., 2023). Yet, patterns of verbal violence and the absence of physical evidence of control and coercion have not been explored enough, which makes it difficult for police to respond to claims made by victims (Barlow et al., 2020). Therefore, for the prosecution, interviews with the victim and suspect become the primary source of gathering information and evidence (Watson et al., 2022). Interviews provide law enforcement with insights into the dynamics of the relationships. Police officers are looking for a series of interrelated events that show clear patterns of coercive control, such as threats, isolation, or controlling the victim's whereabouts and daily life (Barlow et al., 2020; Myhill et al., 2023).

Interview Dynamics

After having received a statement from the victim, law enforcement commonly follows up on the claims by questioning the suspect. Watson et al. (2022) researched how suspects behave during interviews and what strategies, consciously or unconsciously, they use to be perceived as innocent. Watson et al. (2022) found that the suspect's behaviour is not always about being perceived as completely innocent but reducing their moral responsibility for the crime. This type of behaviour requires them to use techniques of neutralisation, which is a cognitive process in which individuals justify their negative actions to themselves (Sykes & Matza, 1957). Meaning, that individuals try to 'neutralise' their values temporarily to act out certain behaviours that otherwise would not fit into their belief system. Sykes & Matza (1957)

include five different concepts in their techniques of neutralisation which cover appeal to higher loyalties, condemnation of the condemners, denial of responsibility, denial of injury, and denial of victim.

Techniques of neutralisation are often referred to as justification. Justification, whether consciously or unconsciously used by the suspect, aims to minimise any negative attributions allocated to them by shifting the responsibility onto external causes (Watson et al., 2022). Note, a key aspect of the theory is that suspects may believe their arguments as they believe their own version of events is true due to a distortion of cognitive bias (Kaptein & van Helvoort, 2019). To shift blame, relational behaviour techniques are most common in control and coercion. Instead of explaining the evidence, offenders seek to persuade the interviewer to believe that the victim's account is less credible and that the suspect's statement is to be believed (Watson et al., 2022). The most common form of justification in investigative interviews is denial of the victim (Watson et al., 2022).

Understanding Denial of Victim

Denial of Victim arguments claim that the suspect actions were due to the victim, thus, attacking the victim's character to imply that they deserved the negative treatment, are not a victim, and essentially undermine their credibility as a witness (Watson et al., 2022). For instance, by shifting the blame onto the victim and reducing their culpability in the situation by rationalising their actions through the counteractions of the other person involved, or claiming that the victim deserved a certain type of behaviour directed towards them (Sykes & Matza, 1957; Watson et al., 2022). The goal of the perpetrator is to make the interviewer believe that their behaviour was an acceptable response and that there was no criminal act, thus there is also

no victim (Sykes & Matza, 1957). For instance, controlling their partner's whereabouts after past infidelity.

Denial of the victim can mislead and cause doubts in third parties about the victim's claims (Sykes & Matza, 1957). Therefore, denial of the victim can also serve to manipulate perceptions and deflect blame, resulting in a higher tendency for victim blame (Watson et al., 2022). By shifting the blame away from the perpetrator, third parties might question the validity of a victim's statement (Sykes & Matza, 1957; Watson et al., 2022). Particularly in coercive control, denial of the victim is a potentially effective tool for the perpetrator as cases are often solely built on the victim's allegations. Therefore, perpetrators try to dismiss or minimise the allegations. However, Schmuck et al. (2021) have found that denial of victim arguments only changed the blame that was attributed to the victim, yet it did not decrease the blame towards the suspect. This shows that denying a victim their victimhood status and focusing on their actions and characteristics offers the possibility to look for reasons why the victim is responsible and, thus, normalise the suspect's behaviour (Eigenberg & Policastro, 2015; Valor-Segura et al., 2016). These rationalisations are not only used by perpetrators but are also visible in societal attitudes towards victims. Society tends to endorse victim blame which highlights the issue of the perception of abuse.

Attribution Theory and Blame

Victims of abuse are often judged by others in society as being responsible for their fate (Yamawaki et al., 2012). A theory that can help explain this attribution of blame is Kelley's (1967) Attribution Theory. The Attribution Theory suggests that individuals assign behaviour either to internal (dispositional) or external (situational) factors. Meaning, that the cause of an event is either due to societal influence or the circumstances or due to the characteristics or

actions of the individuals involved (Kelley, 1967). Suspects that make use of denial of victim

arguments, therefore, shift the causes of their behaviour from internal causes to external causes

by attributing the blame for their behaviour to the behaviour of outside influences and

circumstances (Grubb & Turner, 2012).

Looking one step further from simply attributing blame to the victim, Grubb and Turner

(2012) suggested that bystanders attribute causes in such a way that it defends their self-esteem

and sense of safety. This defensive attribution works in two ways. For one, individuals are more

likely to blame victims if they perceive themselves to be similar to them as this creates a sense of

distance (Pinicotti & Orcutt, 2019). Second, if individuals perceive themselves to be similar to

the suspect they may engage in cognitive strategies to distance themselves from the negative

actions and to protect their self-esteem and sense of moral integrity (Pinicotti & Orcutt, 2019). In

this process, the individual may experience some cognitive dissonance, a discomfort that is

caused by holding conflicting values and beliefs (Grubb & Turner, 2012; Pinicotti & Orcutt,

2019). To reduce the cognitive dissonance, individuals may downplay the severity of the

suspect's actions and justify the behaviour to distance themselves from the negative implications

of perceiving themselves to be similar to the suspect. This process of rationalisation directly

influences denial of the victim as it affects the perception of the victim from an innocent

individual to an individual who is partially responsible for their own suffering. Attribution of

blame might be even further mediated by traditional gender roles (Van der Bruggen & Grubb,

2014).

Gender Dynamics

Expectations of certain gender roles still intersect with abusive behaviour in relationships

and, in many ways, create a barrier for victims to become aware of and report their abuse.

Through the integration of gender roles into daily life, societal biases influence how society, support services, and law enforcement respond to abuse claims (Sleath & Bull, 2012, 2017). Existing research about gendered crimes shows varying opinions, yet statistics from Crime Survey for England and Wales indicate that most domestic violence crimes are considered gendered crimes (Johnson, 1995, 2008; Office for National Statistics, 2012; Stark, 2007, 2010; Walby & Turner, 2018). Gendered crimes can impact individuals of any gender, however, they are shaped by societal gender norms and attitudes, power dynamics, stereotypes, and societal expectations (Ostermann & Watson, 2024). This plays a significant role in both perpetration and victimhood, and reflects a broader societal issue not only of abuse in relationships. Current research mainly focuses on the use of denial of victim statements on female victims, yet it is unclear whether the same findings hold if the gender of the victim differs.

Male victims might be more vulnerable when denial of victim statements are used against them than female victims are. For one, traditional concepts and views about gender roles and power are still prevalent and, thus, also impact an individual's acceptance of deviation from an ideal victim, for instance, male victims. The disregard for male victims mainly stems from beliefs about physical strength inequality between male and female partners (Huitema & Vanwesenbeeck, 2016). Male victims of female perpetrators are blamed more for being abused since the male victim is seen as stronger and thus believed to be able to escape the situation if they wanted to (Huitema & Vanwesenbeeck, 2016; McKimme et al., 2014). Further, male individuals are perceived in a narrative that believes them to be powerful and able to protect themselves (Huitema & Vanwesenbeeck, 2016). However, De Haas (2012) has found that 14.7 to 19.7% of male and 6.9 to 9.7% of female Dutch respondents have reported having used sexually coercive tactics to persuade someone into sex, with the most common tactic being

continuous arguing after refusal of the partner. Thus, defying the notion that abuse in a relationship has to correlate with physical strength. Yet, common media representation of male victims does not align with the traditional gender norms, they are perceived as the dominant partner in a relationship and this pre-set belief interferes with the general acknowledgement and acceptance of them being victims (Huitema & Vanwesenbeeck, 2016). Therefore, male victims are often faced with scepticism and disbelief if they report being abused (Bates, 2019; Drijber et al., 2013; Moore, 2021). As a consequence, male victims, in the Netherlands, tend not to report their abuse to authorities as they believe that law enforcement would not investigate their report further (Drijber et al., 2013).

Overall, the perpetuation of normalising abusive behaviour has fostered a society which makes it difficult for victims to speak out about their experiences. This holds to be especially true if they do not fit into society's view of a victim (Bates, 2019; Clark, 2022). Seeking out support can become increasingly more difficult the further an individual deviates from the norms society has set for a victim.

Meeting the Golden Standard - The Ideal Victim

Victims of abuse are predominantly depicted as female, young, and helpless. This idea of a gold standard for a victim was first introduced by Christie in 1986. The most popular characterisation of an ideal victim defines an individual by five attributes: They are 1) weak, 2) completing a respectable project, and 3) not to be blamed. The victim should further be attacked by 4) a 'big and bad' offender, who is 5) unknown (Schwöbel-Patel, 2018; van Wijk, 2013). More recent research has incorporated many more attributes of an ideal victim and has highlighted the misogyny and sexism the theory is based on. All these characteristics are associated with the victim being female, i.e., a "white, virginal damsel in distress" (Clark, 2022;

Schwöbel-Patel, 2018). Non-ideal victims, thus, include non-female victims, people of colour, people in the LGBTQIA+ community, sex workers, etc. (Clark, 2022). Individuals who fall at the bottom of the hierarchy of victimhood are more likely to be blamed for the abuse they have encountered (Clark, 2022; Randall, 2010).

What prevailed over the decades is the common understanding that an ideal victim is societally always viewed as deserving and worthy of their victim status. Eventually, the difference between an ideal and a non-ideal victim lies in society's acceptance of their victim status which is influenced by a preset mould of characteristics that have to be fulfilled. Looking at control and coercion cases, being perceived as an ideal victim aids in influencing social and institutional support as well as legal outcomes. Consequently, it is important to recognise and address these biases to ensure that all victims are treated equally and receive the same support.

The Current Study

Research in the area of control and coercion has overall focused on female victims in marriage. Violence by female perpetrators and male victims has not been regarded as closely as for male perpetrators and female victims (Jovanoski & Sharlamanov, 2021). Thus, it is unclear whether the previous findings on neutralisation techniques, specifically denial of the victim, in investigative interviews, attribution of blame, and the perception of guilt and seriousness of the crime also apply if the victim deviates from the norm. Therefore, this research aims to investigate whether the use of denial of victim statements made by the suspect will have an impact on how blame and guilt are attributed as well as whether it affects how serious the crime is perceived. Further, this research will account for gender bias and the difference in perception of blame, guilt, and seriousness by varying the gender of the victim and suspect.

Moreover, this research will explore whether an individual's endorsement of traditional gender norms will affect their judgement if the gender of the victim does not match their beliefs. Besides, another focus point is the victim's perception of being an ideal victim and the perceived similarity to the participant as well as the participants perceived suspect similarity.

Methods

Design

This research used a 2x2 between-participants design with the independent variables being *Gender of Victim* (male victim or female victim) and *Denial of Victim* (denial of victim statements or control). To specify, the *Gender of Victim* variable compared a male victim with a female suspect to a female victim with a male suspect. The *Denial of Victim* variable provided participants with either a transcription of a fictional investigative interview between the suspect and a police officer in which the suspect repeatedly used *Denial of Victim* arguments or a control interview of similar length that was irrelevant to the crime and scenario presented. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions.

The dependent variables were *Suspect Blame, Victim Blame, Perceived Guilt,* and *Perceived Seriousness.* The moderators were *Gender Role Endorsement, Ideal Victim, Perceived Suspect Similarity,* and *Perceived Victim Similarity*.

Participants

Participants were recruited via SONA (recruitment system University of Twente) and the researcher's social network, including social media. Overall, 196 participants opened the survey link. Out of these participants, 57 participants (29%) were excluded due to not agreeing with the informed consent ($n = 13$) and not finishing the survey ($n = 44$).

The remaining sample consisted of a total of 139 participants, with 79 identifying as female (56.8%), 56 male (40.3%), 1 (0.7%) as non-binary, and 3 (2.2%) preferred not to disclose their gender. The participant's ages ranged from 18 to 61 years old, with a mean of 24.5 years ($SD = 8.42$). Participants were mainly Dutch ($n = 60$, 43.2%), followed by German ($n = 51$, 36.7%), and most other participants indicated to be from a European country ($n = 17$, 12.23%). Further, a majority of the participants indicated to be, at the time of participation, actively enrolled at a university ($n = 113$, 81.3%). Looking at relationships and sexuality, 76.3% ($n = 106$) of participants stated that they currently are or had been in a meaningful and committed romantic relationship. 71.2% of participants identified as heterosexual ($n = 99$) and 28.8% identified as queer[1] ($n = 40$).

The participants were approximately evenly split among the four experimental conditions of male victim with denial of victim statements ($n = 38$), male victim without denial of victim statements ($n = 33$), female victim with denial of victim statements ($n = 33$), and female victim without denial of victim statements ($n = 35$).

Materials

Case Description

The case description provided the participant with a definition of coercive control, an overview of the most important information about the events surrounding the victim and the suspect, including a recall of events according to the victim and information about the relationship between the victim and the suspect. Depending on the condition, the description is either presented from the view of the male victim or the female victim, apart from the genders,

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[1] The author is aware that some consider the term queer to be a slur, however it is used because the term queer is being reclaimed and used as an umbrella term among younger individuals and the LGBTQAI+ community (Worthen, 2023).

the allegations are identical. The description explains that the police had received a call from the

victim in which they requested immediate help. More details were provided in bullet points in

which the victim offered a brief description of the events leading up to the phone call. However,

the police do not yet know whether these allegations are accurate. In the case description, the

victim claims that their partner is a jealous and controlling person who frequently requests to

know about the victim's whereabouts as well as demanding access to the victim's phone. The

reason for the call was that the victim's partner had tracked their location and followed them to a

meet-up that the victim had with their friends at which it came to a verbal escalation and

altercation. The victim further states that the suspect had shown controlling behaviour in the past

year of their relationship and that they believed to be a victim of coercive control.

Denial of Victim

  Investigative Interview. The investigative interview section provided participants with a

transcript of the conversation between the police and the suspect. Before reading the interview,

the participants were told they should read the text carefully as they would be asked questions

about it. There were two variations of the investigative interview, namely one with a male victim

and female suspect and one with a female victim and male suspect. Both investigative interviews

displayed denial of victim statements by the suspect. The transcript of the investigative interview

showed the general procedure of the interview. First, the suspect was made aware of the

interview procedure, i.e., that the conversation was being recorded, followed by an explanation

as to why they were arrested. The police officer then asked questions concerning the relationship

between the victim and the suspect and asked the suspect to explain the incident that the victim

had reported to the police. The suspect answered all the questions of the police officer, yet they

justified their behaviour by using denial of victim arguments, thus attacking the victim's

character and making them responsible for their actions. For instance, by stating that their

relationship was perfect until their partner started acting weird and that they were not trustworthy

or loyal. As well as that they said that their partner was "Always out partying, always flirting

with other men/women!". Towards the end of the interview, the suspect specifically said "I don't

know what he's told you, but he is a very good actor, and you can't believe a word he says."

(male victim condition), after which they are asked by the police interviewer to repeat the

threatening language that was used during the suspect's and victim's altercation. The suspect

does not elaborate on which terms were used but rather blames the victim for always dragging

them into trouble.

  Control Interview. The control condition did not receive a transcript of the investigative

interview. The participants in the control group were only presented with the case description but

not the arguments of the suspect. Instead of the investigative interview, the control condition

received an interview with Harry Styles (singer/celebrity) about his latest album and musical

inspiration. The control interview was about the same length and presented in a similar format as

the investigative interview. Identical to the investigative interview, participants were instructed

to read the text carefully as they would be asked questions about it afterwards to ensure that they

not only skim over it. The interview with Harry Styles was chosen as it holds no relevance to the

topic of victimhood or control and coercion.

Scales and Measures

  Socio-Demographics. The socio-demographic questionnaire asked about participants'

gender, age, nationality, level of education, student status, and sexuality. Additionally,

participants were also asked whether they had ever been in a meaningful and committed

romantic relationship before. No definition of a romantic relationship was given to not limit and dictate the participant's responses.

Gender Role Endorsement. The *Gender Role Belief Scale (GRBS)* (Kerr & Holden, 1996) was used to investigate participants' gender role ideologies. The scale included 20 items to which participants expressed their agreement on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly disagree*; 7 = *Strongly agree*). The scale was updated in word use to make it relevant for the current life. For instance, the word lady was replaced by woman as the word 'Lady' is now commonly used as a derogatory term. A further example is that question four "*The initiative in courtship should usually come from the man.*" was changed to "*In dating, the man should always make the first move/take the first step.*" The Gender Roles Endorsement scale had a Cronbach's alpha of . 61.

Attention Check. An attention check was presented to all participants. Depending on the condition, investigative interview or control interview, the participants were either asked "Who called the police stating that they required immediate help?" and "Who was interviewed by the officer?" (investigative interview) or "Who called the police stating that they required immediate help?" and "Who was interviewed?" (control interview). If participants failed to answer the attention check correctly, they would be asked to re-read the case description and investigative interview or control interview after which they would be shown the attention check again.

Manipulation Check. A manipulation check was added to see whether participants recognised the denial of victim statements in the interview. Mitic (2023) created statements for this, which were slightly altered and used in this research. The statements were slightly changed due to the gender difference of the victims, for instance, the statements for the male victim condition were "*To what extent did Ms. Hendriks try to convince the police officer that Mr.*

Willem is a bad person?" and "*To what extent did Ms. Hendriks try to convince the police officer that she is a good person?*". Notably, this behaviour was not depicted in the case description, only in the investigative interview. The manipulation check was incorporated to examine whether there was a difference between how well participants could recognise behaviour that was present in comparison to when it was not. The statements were scored on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *Not at all*; 5 = *To a great extent*).

Attribution of Blame. The scale measuring suspect and victim blame was loosely based on the *Items Assessing General Victim Blame* by Eigenberg & Policastro (2015). Similar to Wüller (2021), the attribution of blame scale consisted of ten items, of which four items that measure victim blame were first introduced by Eigenberg & Policastro (2015). None of the items included names or genders and only referred to the individuals involved as victim and suspect. Notably, suspect and victim blame were measured by separate items. Five items measured the attribution of blame for the victim, for instance: *"The victim played a role in their own victimisation."*, and five items measured the attribution of blame to the suspect, for example: "*The suspect is responsible for her own actions."*. Participants were asked to rate their agreement on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly disagree*; 5 = *Strongly agree*). The items measuring suspect blame had a Cronbach's alpha of .65 and the items measuring victim blame had a Cronbach's alpha of .36.

Perceived Guilt. Participants were presented with two questions regarding their perception of guilt that were already used by Schmuck (2021). The names used were changed for this research, "*I think the suspect is guilty of control and coercion*", "*The suspect behaved toward the victim in a way that can be defined as controlling and coercive behaviour.*". The statements were ranked on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly disagree*; 6 = *Strongly agree*), an

even number Likert scale was chosen to ensure that participants clearly attribute guilt. The scale

reached a Cronbach's alpha of .76.

       Perceived Seriousness. Mitic's (2023) three-item scale measuring the *Perceived*

Seriousness of the scenario was utilised. The scale was scored on a 5-point Likert scale (1 =

Strongly disagree; 5 = *Strongly agree*) and adopts Stylianou's (2003) findings of perceived

consequences and wrongfulness as the two characteristics of perceived seriousness. The item

representing the perceived consequences were "*I think Ms. Hendriks' behaviour harmed Mr.*

Willem." and the items for the perceived wrongfulness of the crime were "*I think Ms. Hendriks'*

motives were wrongful." and "*I think Ms. Hendriks' behaviour was immoral.*" (male victim

condition). Depending on the gender of the victim and suspect, the names were changed. The

items measuring the perceived seriousness of a male victim had a Cronbach's alpha of .54 and

the items regarding the perceived seriousness involving a female victim reached a Cronbach's

alpha of .75.

       Ideal Victim Scale. A scale, including characteristics of an ideal victim, was created to

measure the participant's perception of the presented victim. The scale follows the characteristics

presented by Christie (1986), van Wijk (2013), and Schwöbel-Patel (2018). These ideal victim

characteristics included the perception of the victim as physically and mentally weak yet

respectable. For instance, items were "*Mr. Willem is physical weak*", "*Mr. Willem is not to blame*

for Ms. Hendriks's behaviour", and "*Mr. Willem's claims are substantiated.*". A total of eight

items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly disagree*; 5 = *Strongly agree*), the scale

showed a Cronbach's alpha of .49 for male victims and a Cronbach's alpha of .24 for female

victims.

Perceived Similarity Scale. Participants were asked to rate their similarity to the victim on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = *Extremely Dissimilar*; 6 = *Extremely similar*). The items were based on previous rape blame research by Burt and DeMello (2003) and sexual assault research by Miller et al. (2011). The scale included two items for each participant of which one was measuring the perceived suspect similarity and one the perceived victim similarity. The surnames of the individuals involved were used. Therefore, it was not mentioned whether they were the victim or the suspect: "*How similar do you feel to Mr. Willem?*" and "*How similar do you feel to Ms. Hendriks?*".

Procedure

Before the start of the data collection, ethical approval was received by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Behavioural, Management, and Social Sciences at the University of Twente (Request number: 240121). Participants received the link for participation either after signing up via SONA systems or after expressing interest in taking part. The study was presented using the online survey tool Qualtrics.

The questionnaire first provided participants with information about the research itself, how long it would approximately take, and the responsible researchers. Further, participants were explicitly informed that the research would cover the topic of coercive control. Websites for support with abuse were included to help participants who are personally affected, the aim was to guide those who need help without requiring them to take part in a study that may harm them. Before continuing with the questionnaire, participants had to accept the informed consent. The second page of the questionnaire covered the participant's socio-demographics which were followed by the gender role belief scale. The scale was presented early to ensure that participants were not influenced by the details of the fictional scenario. After participants had filled in their

answers, they were forwarded to one of the two case descriptions, either male victim and female suspect or female victim and male suspect. For the distribution of participants, the random, equal allocation function of Qualtrics was used. The case descriptions were nearly the same except that they were written in gender-specific terms. After the case description, participants were again randomly allocated to either a transcript of an investigative interview with the suspect or a control interview with Harry Styles. The investigative interview offered an insight into the relationship between the victim and suspect from the suspect's point of view. Throughout the interview transcript, the suspect made use of denial of victim statements, thus trying to invalidate responsibility accredited to them by the victim's claims. Having finished the interview, regardless of which, participants filled in the attention check to verify that they had thoroughly read the presented interview. If they answered the questions incorrectly, the participant was redirected to the interview page and instructed to re-read the text and then answer the question again. After the attention check was successfully completed, participants were presented with the manipulation check. This check was followed by the scales for attribution of blame, perceived guilt, perceived seriousness, ideal victim, and perceived similarity. Lastly, participants were presented with the debriefing in which the full aim of the study was explained, including the use of different genders and the different interviews. Participants were also given the option to withdraw their responses from the study in case they felt uncomfortable with their answers being used. An active withdrawal was utilised for this, if participants wanted their data to be excluded they had to indicate this by choosing "*I disagree with my response being used*". None of the participants retracted their consent after being debriefed.

Results

Manipulation Check

A manipulation check was conducted to inspect whether participants had made their own interpretations of the scenario presented to them. The results of the independent t-test showed that participants who were in the *Denial of Victim* condition ($M = 4.54$, $SD = 0.61$) and did receive the case description as well as the investigative interview perceived to a greater extent that the suspect was trying to convince the police that the victim is a bad person in contrast to the *Control* condition ($M = 1.76$, $SD = 1.31$), $t(137) = 16.16$, $p <.001$. In comparison to the *Control* condition ($M = 1.63$, $SD = 1.18$) who did not read the investigative interview with the suspect, participants in the *Denial of Victim* condition ($M = 3.01$, $SD = 1.21$) also indicated that the suspect was trying to convince the police that they were a good person ($t(137) = 6.79$, $p = <.001$). The analysis of the manipulation check revealed that there was no manipulation present which was not accounted for.

Descriptive Statistics

For all dependent variables (*Suspect Blame, Victim Blame, Perceived Guilt, and Perceived Seriousness*) and moderators (*Gender Role Endorsement, Ideal Victim, Perceived Suspect Similarity, and Perceived Victim Similarity*) means were computed. Table 1 shows the mean scores, standard deviations, and minimum to maximum scores. Further, Table 2 shows a correlation matrix with the association between the dependent variables and the moderators. The analysis showed that *Suspect Blame* positively correlated with *Perceived Guilt, Perceived Seriousness* and, *Ideal Victim* and correlated negatively with *Victim Blame* as well as *Perceived Suspect Similarity.* In contrast, *Victim Blame* negatively correlated with *Perceived Guilt* as well

as with *Perceived Seriousness* and positively correlated with *Perceived Suspect Similarity.* Both,

Perceived Guilt and *Perceived Seriousness* correlated positively with each other and displayed a

positive correlation with *Ideal Victim*, yet, showed a negative correlation with *Perceived Suspect*

Similarity. Lastly, *Gender Role Endorsement* was displayed to be positively correlated with

Victim Blame and *Perceived Suspect Similarity*. All correlations are consistent with the

expectations of the pre-existing research findings.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics For the Dependent Variables and Moderators

	M	*SD*	**Minimum**	**Maximum**
Suspect Blame	4.01	0.61	1.6	5
Victim Blame	2.37	0.52	1.4	3.8
Perceived Guilt	5.09	0.82	2.5	6
Perceived Seriousness	4.00	0.67	2	5
Gender Role Endorsement	3.57	0.45	2.6	4.8
Ideal Victim	3.07	0.40	2	4
Perceived Suspect Similarity	1.78	1.04	1	5
Perceived Victim Similarity	2.63	1.31	1	6

5-point Likert Scale: Attribution of Blame, Perceived Seriousness, Ideal Victim
6- point Likert Scale: Perceived Guilt, Perceived Similarity
7-point Likert Scale: Gender Role Endorsement

Table 2

Correlation Matrix for the Correlations between the Dependent Variables and the Moderators

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Suspect Blame	-							
2. Victim Blame	-.37	-						

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
3. Perceived Guilt	**.56**	**-.43**	-					
4. Perceived Seriousness	**.59**	**-.50**	**.57**	-				
5. Gender Role Endorsement	-.15	**.30**	-.15	*-.19*	-			
6. Ideal Victim	**.28**	*-.20*	**.30**	**.48**	.03	-		
7. Perceived Suspect Similarity	**-.33**	**.45**	**-.48**	**-.50**	**.31**	-.15	**-**	
8. Perceived Victim Similarity	.03	<.01	.06	-.02	-.04	-.06	.09	-

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

Hypothesis Testing

Multiple two-way ANOVAs were conducted to examine the effects of the independent variables (*Denial of Victim* and *Gender of the Victim*) on the dependent variables (*Suspect Blame, Victim Blame, Perceived Guilt,* and *Perceived Seriousness*). Below the summary for all analyses per dependent variable can be found. The means, standard deviations, and F test results are presented in Table 3. No main or interaction effects for *Denial of Victim* were found, only *Gender of Victim* had a positive main effect on *Suspect Blame* and *Victim Blame*, meaning that male suspects were blamed more than female suspects and that male victims were blamed more than female victims. Further, *Gender of Victim* also positively influenced *Perceived Seriousness* as the case presenting a female victim was judged as a more serious crime in comparison to the same scenario involving a male victim. *Perceived Guilt* was not predicted by either of the two independent variables.

Table 3

Group Means per Experimental Condition for the Dependent Variables

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable							
Victim Gender	Suspect Blame		Victim Blame		Guilt		Seriousness	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Male	3.83	0.56	2.50	0.51	5.01	0.74	3.78	0.59
Female	4.20	0.61	2.24	0.49	5.18	0.88	4.23	0.68
Hypothesis test	$F = 14.91$, $df = 1, 135$, $p = <.001$, $\eta_p^2 = .099$		$F = 9.06$, $df = 1, 135$, $p = .003$, $\eta_p^2 = .063$		$F = 1.78$, $df = 1,135$, $p = .185$, $\eta_p^2 = .013$		$F = 17.04$, $df = 1,135$, $p = <.001$, $\eta_p^2 = .112$	
Denial of Victim	Suspect Blame		Victim Blame		Guilt		Seriousness	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Yes	4.09	0.61	2.34	0.54	5.15	0.83	3.96	0.67
No	3.93	0.61	2.40	0.49	5.04	0.81	4.04	0.68
Hypothesis Test	$F = 3.39$, $df = 1,135$, $p = .068$, $\eta_p^2 = .024$		$F = 0.83$, $df = 1,135$, $p = .365$, $\eta_p^2 = .006$		$F = 0.72$, $df = 1,135$, $p = .398$, $\eta_p^2 = .005$		$F = 0.35$, $df = 1,135$, $p = .557$, $\eta_p^2 = .003$	
Interaction	Suspect Blame		Victim Blame		Guilt		Seriousness	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Male / DoV	3.93	0.49	2.52	0.56	5.12	0.73	3.76	0.60
Male / Control	3.72	0.61	2.47	0.45	4.88	0.75	3.80	0.58
Female / DoV	4.28	0.68	2.14	0.45	5.18	0.94	4.18	0.68
Female / Control	4.13	0.54	2.34	0.52	5.19	0.84	4.28	0.68
Hypothesis Test	$F = 0.12$, $df =$		$F = 2.00$, $df =$		$F = 0.77$, $df =$		$F = 0.08$, $df =$	

$$1,135, p = .727, \qquad 1,135, p = .159, \qquad 1,135, p = .382, \qquad 1,135, p = .784,$$
$$\eta_p^2 = .001 \qquad \qquad \eta_p^2 = .015 \qquad \qquad \eta_p^2 = .006 \qquad \qquad \eta_p^2 = .001$$

Exploratory Analyses

Moderation of Gender Role Endorsement

A general linear model with *Gender of Victim* and *Denial of Victim* as independent variables and *Gender Role Endorsement* as a moderator, interacting with both independent variables separately and combined, was conducted to check for a moderation effect on all outcome variables. The outcome of this model is summarised in Table 4. The observed effect of *Gender of Victim* on three of the four outcome variables remained after adding the moderator variable only for *Suspect Blame* a significant effect was found. Further, *Gender Role Endorsement* also showed a significant positive main effect on *Victim Blame* ($b = 0.34$, $SE = 0.17$, $t = 2.01$, $p = .047$) and a negative effect on *Perceived Seriousness* ($b = -0.29$, $SE = 0.22$, $t = -1.30$, $p = .196$), this explains that the more an individual endorses gender norms the more likely they are to attribute blame to the victim, while at the same time they perceive the crime to be less serious.

Table 4

Main Effects and Moderation Effects of the Independent Variables and Moderator Gender Role Endorsement on the Dependent Variables.

	Suspect Blame			Victim Blame			Perceived Guilt			Seriousness		
	F	*df*	*p*	*F*	*df*	*p*	*F*	*df*	*p*	*F*	*df*	*p*
Victim Gender	7.37	1	**.008**	0.77	1	.382	1.02	1	.314	2.04	1	.156
Denial of Victim	1.12	1	.292	0.43	1	.512	0.59	1	.446	0.20	1	.657

Gender Role Endorsement	3.31	1	.071	17.14	1	**<.001**	2.68	1	.104	6.08	1	*.015*
Victim Gender * Denial of Victim	1.40	1	.239	0.37	1	.544	0.07	1	.795	1.88	1	.173
Victim Gender * Gender Role Endorsement	4.94	1	*.028*	0.23	1	.635	0.71	1	.402	0.86	1	.355
Denial of Victim * Gender Role Endorsement	0.66	1	.420	0.31	1	.578	0.44	1	.510	0.15	1	.704
Victim Gender * Denial of Victim * Gender Role Endorsement	1.37	1	.245	0.13	1	.717	0.12	1	.729	1.91	1	.169

italics = Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
bold = Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
df = (1, 131).

While *Gender of Victim* showed to have a main effect on the blame attributed to the

suspect on its own, *Gender Role Endorsement* demonstrated to also be of importance. An

interaction effect between *Gender Role Endorsement* and *Gender of Victim* on *Suspect Blame*

was recorded. Table 5 displays the results of the simple regression analysis between the

moderator *Gender Role Endorsement* and the dependent variable *Suspect Blame.* The analysis

found that *Gender Role Endorsement* as an overall model was only associated with reduced

Suspect Blame for male suspects. Hayes' (2013) PROCESS macro was utilised to run an

additional moderation analysis to probe this interaction. For this moderation analysis, PROCESS

Model 1 with a bootstrap of 5000 was used, the effects of the moderator were examined at the

mean and one standard deviation above and below the mean. Table 6 presents the outcome of the

moderation analysis, including the mean values for male and female victims across all three levels of *Gender Role Endorsement* and its effect on *Suspect Blame*

The interaction between *Gender of Victim* and *Gender Role Endorsement* was significant, indicating that the effect of *Gender of Victim* on *Suspect Blame* varies depending on the level of *Gender Role Endorsement.* This means that low or moderate *Gender Role Endorsement* led to an increase in *Suspect Blame* but only if the suspect was male.

Table 5

Simple Regression Between the Moderator Gender Role Endorsement and the Dependent Variable Suspect Blame at the Two Different Levels of Victim Gender

Gender of Victim		B	SE	t	p
Male	(Constant)	3.83	0.55	7.01	<.001
	Gender Role Endorsement	0.00	0.15	0.00	.998
Female	(Constant)	5.74	0.56	10.25	<.001
	Gender Role Endorsement	-0.43	0.16	-2.77	.007

Table 6

Gender of Victim Scores Across All Three Levels of Gender Role Endorsement on Suspect Blame

Gender of Victim	Gender Role Endorsement	M	M	B	SE	t	p
Male Victim vs Female Victim	Low	3.83	4.40	0.57	0.14	4.14	<. 001
Male Victim vs Female Victim	Middle	3.83	4.21	0.38	0.10	3.88	<.001
Male Victim vs Female Victim	High	3.83	4.02	0.18	0.14	1.34	.182

Note. Low = 3.12, Middle = 3.57, High = 4.02

Moderation of Ideal Victim

The perception of the victim as an ideal victim was measured to check for a moderation effect on the four different outcome variables. A general linear model with *Gender of Victim* and *Denial of Victim* as independent variables and *Ideal Victim* as a moderator was used. Table 7 summarises the outcome of this model. *Ideal Victim,* as a variable, had a significant positive main effect on multiple of the dependent variables. Additionally, a simple linear regression was used to investigate the effect of *Ideal Victim* on *Suspect Blame* ($b = 0.42$, $SE = 0.13$, $t = 3.39$, $p <.001$), *Perceived Guilt* ($b = 0.62$, $SE = 0.17$, $t = 3.72$, $p <.001$), and *Perceived Seriousness* ($b = 0.81$, $SE = 0.13$, $t = 6.47$, $p <.001$). If the victim was perceived to fit the *Ideal Victim* standards, the suspect was attributed more blame and guilt and the crime was perceived to be more serious. Further, a moderation effect for *Gender of Victim* and *Denial of Victim* on *Victim Blame* ($F(1, 131) = 7.90$, $p = .006$, $\eta_p^2 = .057$) was found. The influence of these results are discussed with the two-way and three-way interactions.

Table 7

Main Effects and Moderation Effects of the Independent Variables and Moderator Ideal Victim on the Dependent Variables

	Suspect Blame			Victim Blame			Perceived Guilt			Seriousness		
	F	*df*	*p*	*F*	*df*	*p*	*F*	*df*	*p*	*F*	*df*	*p*
Victim Gender	0.00	1	.953	0.60	1	.440	0.00	1	.941	0.19	1	.664
Denial of Victim	3.61	1	.060	3.10	1	.081	3.61	1	.060	2.60	1	.109
Ideal Victim	6.38	1	*.013*	3.32	1	.071	11.04	1	**.001**	32.73	1	**<.001**
Victim Gender * Denial of Victim	0.24	1	.622	7.90	1	**.006**	0.60	1	.439	0.64	1	.426

Victim Gender * Ideal Victim	0.22	1	.641	0.22	1	.642	0.02	1	.890	0.70	1	.403
Denial of Victim * Ideal Victim	4.57	1	*.034*	3.28	1	.072	4.03	1	*.047*	2.29	1	.133
Victim Gender * Denial of Victim * Ideal Victim	0.14	1	.707	8.78	1	**.004**	0.35	1	.555	0.47	1	.493

italics = Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
bold = Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
df = (1, 131).

The analysis displayed two two-way interactions of *Denial of Victim* and *Ideal Victim* on

Suspect Blame and *Perceived Guilt*. A simple linear regression that split the data for when

Denial of Victim statements were presented and when not was conducted to establish an

overview of these effects, Table 8 summarises the outcome. Hayes' (2013) PROCESS Macro

was utilised to run further analysis on the two-way interactions of *Denial of Victim* and *Ideal*

Victim on *Suspect Blame* and *Perceived Guilt*. Model 1 with a bootstrap of 5000 was used, the

effects of the moderator were examined at the mean and one standard deviation above and below

the mean. Table 9 presents the difference of *Suspect Blame* and *Perceived Guilt* between the

Denial of Victim and the *Control* group across all three levels of *Ideal Victim*. The interaction

between *Denial of Victim* and *Suspect Blame* showed to be of significance at the highest level of

Ideal Victim indicating that the use of *Denial of Victim* statements was effective for reducing

Suspect Blame but only if the victim was perceived to fit perfectly into the *Ideal Victim*

characteristics. The interaction between *Denial of Victim* and *Ideal Victim* showed an overall

effect on *Perceived Guilt*, no significance across the different levels of *Ideal Victim* was found.

Table 8

Simple Regression Between the Moderator Ideal Victim and the Dependent Variables Suspect Blame and Perceived Guilt at the Two Different Levels of Denial of Victim

Denial of Victim		*B*	*SE*	*t*	*p*
Suspect Blame					
Denial of Victim	(Constant)	2.16	0.48	4.47	<.001
	Ideal Victim	0.63	0.16	4.06	<.001
Control	(Constant)	3.47	0.61	5.69	<.001
	Ideal Victim	0.15	0.20	0.75	.453
Perceived Guilt					
Denial of Victim	(Constant)	2.51	.66	3.82	<.001
	Ideal Victim	0.86	.21	4.06	<.001
Control	(Constant)	4.13	.81	5.12	<.001
	Ideal Victim	0.30	.26	1.14	.259

Table 9

Denial of Victim Scores Across All Three Levels of Ideal Victim on Suspect Blame and Perceived Guilt

Denial of Victim	Ideal Victim	*M*	*M*	*B*	*SE*	*t*	*p*
Suspect Blame							
Denial of Victim vs Control	Low	3.84	3.87	0.03	0.14	0.22	.822
Denial of Victim vs Control	Middle	4.09	3.93	-0.16	0.10	-1.64	.104
Denial of Victim vs Control	High	4.34	3.99	-0.35	0.14	-2.52	.012
Perceived Guilt							
Denial of Victim vs Control	Low	4.80	4.92	0.12	0.19	0.62	.533
Denial of Victim vs Control	Middle	5.15	5.04	-0.11	0.13	-0.82	.415
Denial of Victim vs Control	High	5.49	5.16	-0.33	0.19	-1.77	.078

Note. Low = 2.67, Middle = 3.07, High = 3.48

A three-way interaction of *Gender of Victim*, *Denial of Victim*, and *Ideal Victim* on

Victim Blame was found (F(1, 131) = 8.78, p = .004, η_p^2 = .063). A simple linear regression split

by all four levels of the experimental groups was run to get a first overview of this interaction.

Table 10 indicates that a greater belief that the victim corresponded to an *Ideal Victim* predicted

reduced *Victim Blame* only when the victim was female and the suspect used denial of victim

arguments. PROCESS Macro by Hayes (2013) with a bootstrap of 5000 and model 2 was utilised

to further analyse the three-way interaction. The moderator was examined at the mean and one

standard deviation above and below the mean. Table 11 shows that when *Denial of Victims*

statements were made, female victims were always blamed less than male victims, regardless of

how much they represented an *Ideal Victim*. In the *Control* condition, when *Denial of Victim*

statements were not used, male and female victims did not differ in the extent to how much they

were blamed. Table 11 also shows that *Denial of Victim* reduces *Victim Blame*, but only when

the victim is female and is rated as highly corresponding to an *Ideal Victim*. *Denial of Victim*

consistently results in higher *Victim Blame* for male victims compared to female victims and

reduces *Victim Blame* for female victims if they are perceived as representing an *Ideal Victim*.

Table 10

Simple Regression Between the Moderator Ideal Victim and the Dependent Variable Victim Blame.

Denial of Victim	Gender of Victim		*B*	*SE*	t	*p*
Denial of Victim	Male	(Constant)	2.88	0.64	4.50	<.001
		Ideal Victim	-0.12	0.21	-0.57	.571
	Female	(Constant)	4.23	0.57	7.48	<.001
		Ideal Victim	-0.66	0.18	-3.73	<.001
Control	Male	(Constant)	3.58	0.61	5.91	<.001

		Ideal Victim	-0.37	0.20	-1.84	.076
Female	(Constant)		1.19	0.75	1.58	.123
		Ideal Victim	0.37	0.24	1.54	.133

Table 11

Ideal Victim Scores Across All Three Levels for Both Levels of Denial of Victim and Gender of Victim on Victim Blame

Denial of Victim		**Ideal Victim**	**M**	**M**	**B**	**SE**	**t**	**p**
Denial of Victim	Male vs Female	Low	2.62	2.31	-0.14	0.14	-1.04	.300
Control	Male vs Female	Low	2.47	2.34	-0.01	0.12	-0.10	.923
Denial of Victim	Male vs Female	Middle	2.48	2.18	0.12	0.16	0.75	.452
Control	Male vs Female	Middle	2.47	2.34	0.03	0.16	0.18	.857
Denial of Victim	Male vs Female	High	2.35	2.05	0.16	0.12	1.31	.193
Control	Male vs Female	High	2.47	2.34	0.29	0.14	2.10	.037

Gender of Victim		**Ideal Victim**	**M**	**M**	**B**	**SE**	**t**	**p**
Male Victim	Denial of Victim vs Control	Low	2.58	2.54	-0.37	0.15	-2.40	.017
Female Victim	Denial of Victim vs Control	Low	2.22	2.41	-0.34	0.12	-2.79	.006
Male Victim	Denial of Victim vs Control	Middle	2.49	2.46	-0.31	0.15	-2.11	.036
Female Victim	Denial of Victim vs Control	Middle	2.16	2.35	-0.14	0.15	-0.92	.361
Male Victim	Denial of Victim vs Control	High	2.41	2.37	-0.11	0.12	-0.90	.368
Female Victim	Denial of Victim vs Control	High	2.10	2.29	-0.08	0.15	-0.55	.586

Note. Low = 2.67, Middle = 3.07, High = 3.48

Moderation of Perceived Suspect Similarity

To assess the possibility of an interaction effect of *Perceived Suspect Similarity* on all outcome variables, a general linear model with *Gender of Victim* and *Denial of Victim* as independent variables and the moderator was conducted. The analysis showed a negative main effect of *Gender of Victim* on *Suspect Blame*. Thus, if *Perceived Suspect Similarity* was added as an additional variable then the male suspect was attributed more blame ($b = -0.75$, $SE = 0.26$, $t = -2.87$, $p = .005$). Additionally, *Perceived Suspect Similarity* had a positive main effect on *Victim Blame* ($b = 0.24$, $SE = 0.08$, $t = 3.06$, $p = .003$), as well as negative main effects on *Suspect Blame* ($b = -0.27$, $SE = 0.09$, $t = -2.84$, $p = .005$), *Perceived Guilt* ($b = -0.43$, $SE = 0.12$, $t = -3.51$, $p < .001$), and *Perceived Seriousness* ($b = -0.26$, $SE = 0.10$, $t = -2.66$, $p = .009$). Table 12 shows that if there was an increased perceived similarity to the suspect, more blame was attributed to the victim. Simultaneously, the suspect was attributed less blame, they were perceived to be less guilty, and the crime was considered to be less serious. No interaction effects were found.

Table 12

Main Effects and Moderation Effects of the Independent Variables and Moderator Perceived Suspect Similarity on the Dependent Variables

	Suspect Blame			**Victim Blame**			**Perceived Guilt**			**Seriousness**		
	F	*df*	*p*	*F*	*df*	*p*	*F*	*df*	*p*	*F*	*df*	*p*
Victim Gender	9.28	1	**.003**	0.91	1	.343	2.16	1	.144	3.32	1	.071
Denial of Victim	2.39	1	.124	0.29	1	.593	1.48	1	.226	0.15	1	.703
Perceived Suspect Similarit	14.67	1	**<.001**	30.75	1	**<.001**	38.97	1	**<.001**	37.28	1	**<.001**

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Victim Gender * Denial of Victim	0.74	1	.393	0.06	1	.809	0.24	1	.623	0.60	1	.440
Victim Gender * Perceived Suspect Similarity	2.35	1	.128	0.06	1	.803	1.96	1	.164	0.01	1	.942
Denial of Victim * Perceived Suspect Similarity	0.33	1	.568	0.00	1	.960	0.72	1	.399	0.01	1	.929
Victim Gender * Denial of Victim * Perceived Suspect Similarity	0.77	1	.381	0.75	1	.388	0.04	1	.836	0.59	1	.442

italics = Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
bold = Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
df = (1, 131).

Moderation of Perceived Victim Similarity

To assess the possibility of an interaction effect of *Perceived Victim Similarity*, a general

linear model with *Gender of Victim* and *Denial of Victim* as independent variables and the

moderator was conducted. No main or interaction effects of *Perceived Victim Similarity* were

found (all p >.05). A summary of this analysis can be found in Table 13 (See Appendix A).

Summary

Overall, the exploratory analyses showed that *Gender Role Endorsement*, *Ideal Victim*, and *Perceived Suspect Similarity* affect the outcome variables. *Perceived Victim Similarity* was not a predicting factor. *Gender Role Endorsement* was only an important factor for *Suspect Blame* if it was low or average and only for female victims with male suspects, then the male suspect was blamed more. If a victim was perceived as a highly *Ideal Victim*, then *Denial of Victim* statements were effective for reducing *Suspect Blame*. If the victim was in addition also female, then the use of *Denial of Victim* statements reduced *Victim Blame*. *Perceived Suspect Similarity* was only effective on its own, meaning that the more a participant identified themselves with the suspect the more likely they were to blame the victim. On the other hand, an increase in *Perceived Suspect Similarity* also led to less attribution of blame and guilt towards the suspect as well as that the crime was not perceived as that serious.

Discussion

This study aimed to test the effect of the gender of the victim and suspect as well as the suspect's use of denial of victim statements on the attribution of blame, the perception of guilt, and the seriousness of the crime. Additionally, the influence of gender role endorsement, ideal victim characteristics, and perceived similarity to the suspect and victim were considered. The results revealed that male victims and male suspects were blamed more as well as that coercive control was perceived to be more serious if the victim was female. However, no direct effect of the suspect's use of denial of victim statements was found. Individuals who endorsed gender norms were more likely to blame the victim and perceive the crime as less serious, while male suspects were blamed more if gender roles were hardly or moderately endorsed. The perception of the victim as a so-called ideal victim has shown to be important as the crime was perceived as

more serious and the suspect was attributed more blame as well as guilt. Further, high ideal

victim scores also lead to less victim blame. In particular, female victims were blamed less in

comparison to their male counterparts. If a female victim was perceived as a highly ideal victim,

then the use of denial of victim statements reduced victim blame. Lastly, when people perceived

themselves as being more similar to the suspect then the victim was blamed more and the suspect

was blamed less as well and the crime was perceived to be less serious overall.

The Bias of Gender

This research has shown that the gender of individuals involved in coercive control cases

matters. Male victims were blamed more for their victimhood than their female counterparts.

Male suspects were also blamed more for the same behaviour as female suspects. This means

that males regardless of victim or suspect are held more responsible for either being abused or

being the abuser. When a male victim was involved, coercive control was judged to be less

serious than when the victim of the same crime was female. This tendency to blame male victims

more was already suggested by earlier research as well as that attribution of blame is often

coupled with a conservative view on masculinity (Bates et al., 2019; Grubb & Turner, 2012;

Huitema & Vanwesenbeeck, 2016; Janovski & Sharlamanov, 2013; Malonda-Vidal et al., 2021).

Male victimhood challenges the traditional gender role division that frames men solely as

perpetrators. So, while male victims inherently contradict and challenge the ideal victim

characteristics, they do portray the ideal perpetrator and are blamed for the abuse regardless

(Huitema & Vanwesenbeeck, 2016). This duality complicates the perception of male victims as

stereotypes of male invulnerability and a focus on their aggressor potential makes it difficult to

recognise their victimhood. The findings of this study support the pre-existing notion that

coercive control is still considered a gendered crime, with male perpetrators and female victims

(Dutton & White, 2013; Josolyne, 2011). It is crucial to recognise and address the existence and reality of male victimhood to develop a comprehensive understanding and ensure that all victims are provided with the necessary support.

The findings of this study, which match already existing concerns about gender division, are alarming and can partially be traced back to a lack of understanding regarding the dynamics of coercive control (Jovanoski & Sharlamanov, 2013). Numerous opportunities to identify and support male victims are missed due to a lack of understanding of the issue (Huitema & Vanwesenbeeck, 2016; Jovanoski & Sharlamanov, 2013). Consequently, professionals are still less likely to recognise male victims as well as male victims themselves fear not being believed (Bates, 2019). The same crime committed to different gendered victims will ultimately still have the potential to cause the same amount of harm. Male victims suffer equally as much as female victims as well as that male victims still face a shortage of resources in addition to legal and social obstacles.

The trajectory of a strong and independent male and a submissive and helpless female and the general acceptance of conservative gender norms might be the underlying cause for the increase in blaming the victim and perceiving the crime as less serious. Notably, this research also found that individuals who were confronted with a female victim, and who slightly believed in traditional gender norms, blamed male suspects more. On the contrary, this also means that individuals who strongly believed in gender norms blamed male suspects less. As suggested by traditional gender roles, masculinity is constituted through asserting power, being bold, and aggressiveness (Bates et al., 2019; Malonda-Vidal et al., 2021). Therefore, this finding could be explained by the perception of the male suspect as fitting into his assigned role and doing what he, as a male, is supposed to do. Other research in the area of abuse and the use of justification

techniques in interviews has identified sexism as an important predictor for how guilt and blame

are attributed (Mitic, 2023; Schmuck et al., 2021; Wüller, 2021).

Overall, individuals who agreed and endorsed the conservative gender norms presented to

them reacted differently to gendered crimes by blaming the male involved, regardless of victim

or suspect, more than the female. Therefore, it can be argued that an individual's belief in

traditional gender roles may be a deciding factor in coercive control crimes. Their perspective on

traditional norms further perpetuates the idea that certain characteristics are attributed to a gender

such as that men are strong or self-reliant and that women are weak and in need of protection

(McKimme et al., 2014). These characteristics are also projected onto perpetrators and victims in

which the victim is then perceived as weak and in need of help (Clark, 2022).

The Golden Standard

If a victim was perceived to fit the ideal victim characteristics then the suspect was

attributed more blame and guilt as well as that coercive control was perceived to be a more

serious crime. Besides, the use of denial of the victim statements has also shown to be effective,

however only under certain conditions. If the victim was perceived to fulfil all the requirements

of an ideal victim then the suspect's use of denial of the victim statements was effective to the

extent that the suspect was blamed less. This result contradicts findings by Schmuck (2021) as

they found that denial of the victim arguments were not effective in reducing suspect blame but

did increase the blame attributed to the victim. In this study, the suspect was likely attributed less

blame as the use of denial of victim statements rationalised and justified the suspect's behaviour

to the participant. Yet, the suspect' statements did not have any negative influence on the victim

themselves. This implies that the victim might not be directly negatively affected. However, the

reduction in blame attributed to the suspect may complicate the building of a legal case for the

victim or, in case of prosecution, the suspect may receive a weaker punishment. In direct contrast

to this finding, this study also showed that female victims who were perceived to fit all the

characteristics of an ideal victim actually benefited from the suspect's use of denial of the victim

statements as it reduced the blame that was attributed to the female victim. For male victims, it

did not matter whether denial of the victim statements were made about them or not. Meaning,

that the use of denial of the victim arguments was not effective in the way that the suspect

intended to but rather actively worked against the suspect if the victim was female and perceived

to represent an ideal victim.

   Being perceived as an ideal victim often already implies that the victim is female. In this

study, the combination of both factors, once the subjective perception of the person and their

objective gender, hyper conforms with the norms that are set for a victim to the extent that

actively speaking badly about them was to the victim's advantage. Theory concerning ideal

victims suggests that conforming to the victim stereotypes guarantees an individual immediate

victim status without having to prove themselves to be worthy of it (Drijber et al., 2013; Long,

2021). The findings of this study suggest that the overall perception of the female victim is more

resilient than the manipulation by the suspect. Not conforming to the ideal victim stereotypes

may add other stressors for the victim as they do not experience the same treatment and are often

confronted with a lack of support. Apart from an increase in psychological distress, non-

conforming victims may also face challenges accessing social or legal support services. As a

consequence, they may not be able to escape the relationship and face the chance of re-

victimisation.

   To summarise, the ineffectiveness of denial of victim statements in this study for

changing victim blame in the favour of the suspect was most likely due to the inherent perception

of the victim. The ideal victim archetypes supposedly made it harder for the suspect to justify their actions when using denial of victim statements, thus reducing the effectiveness of the statements. Furthermore, ideal victims are inherently seen as more innocent and less deserving of blame due to internal factors attributed to them (Van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014). Therefore, future research in coercive control should account for the perception of the victim on their own to further investigate the effectiveness of denial of the victim statements.

Identifying with the Suspect

In line with the prior predictions made about defensive attribution theory, when the suspect was perceived to be similar to oneself then coercive control was perceived to be less serious, the suspect was also found to be less guilty and was blamed less. Next to that, perceived suspect similarity also led to more victim blame. In this study, similarity was only a deciding factor for perceived similarity to the suspect but not for the perceived similarity with the victim. Participants received no information about the physical appearance of the suspect and victim, and there was no difference between having read the interview with the suspect and not. Thus, the judgments made about similarity are most likely purely based on a feeling. The consequences of this change in perception are damaging for the victim (Grubb & Turner, 2012; Pinicotti & Orcutt, 2019). The bias can affect law enforcement's response to claims made by the victim as well as legal judgments in court as the actions of the suspect may be seen as a result of the victim's behaviour or characteristics and are not caused by the internal factors of the suspect. Overall, the implications of these findings emphasise the importance of addressing potential biases in social and legal settings to ensure a fair and supportive treatment of the individuals involved.

Implications

The most important implication of this research was that interviews with suspects can be crucial in how a crime is perceived. Bystanders can be actively influenced in how they perceive the victim and the suspect as well as that factors such as gender of the individuals involved and gender role endorsement are central. This is problematic as the findings may highlight potential biases that may be prevalent in society. Victims who do not fit the characteristics of what an ideal victim is supposed to look like might have it harder with how they are perceived by others and possibly shy away from reporting their experiences. Solutions should be found to ensure that victims do not have to wonder whether they will be believed purely because they are male or in any other way do not fit into the stereotypes that are upheld for victimhood. Moore (2021) suggests different points to overcome the barriers to seek help. These suggestions include increasing public awareness, improving training for support services, and highlighting the unique needs of male victims. Male victims report that different factors prevent them from disclosing their abuse, ranging from stigmatisation, lack of support services, shame, and fear of police responses (Bates, 2020; Lyosa et al., 2022; Moore, 2021; Taylor, 2022).

While this research did not explore how media affects an individual's response to coercive control it can be argued that it can be utilised to challenge current victimhood narratives and stigmatisation (Edwards et al., 2011; Ramsey, 2015). Raising public awareness and changing attitudes should be a priority. Online campaigns may also be useful for educating on stereotypes and misinformation (Reynolds et al., 2023; Wenhold & Harrison, 2021). Support services need to ensure that male victims receive adequate support targeted to their specific problems (Moore, 2021; Rodriguez et al. 2020; Wiener, 2017). Simultaneously, it is crucial to find the right balance of supporting all victims and not to over-prioritise the support of one specific group of victims. Therefore, interventions concerning victimhood could focus on hosting specialised training for

legal professionals and law enforcement to recognise and mitigate (gender) biases. The end-stigmatisation of victimhood and understanding for all victims regardless of their gender should be ensured.

Limitations

The current study had important limitations that need to be addressed. First, the generalisability of the obtained results is limited as the participant sample was biased due to young age (Nielsen et al. 2023). On average participants were 24.5 years old and were currently studying at a university. Meaning, that the sample might show representative results for young Dutch and German students, yet it has limited generalisability for non-students and an older population. Additionally, the study was only available in English which automatically excluded participants that are not able to read or understand this language. Hence, possibly older participants might have been excluded. Research has shown that there is a generational gap in how gender norms are perceived and endorsed (Camilo & Minas, 2023; Dogan Gangal et al., 2024; Treleavan, 2015). Generation X (1965 to 1980) has more traditional gender views than Generation Y (1981 to 1996) or Generation Z (from 1997 to 2012) (Camilo & Minas, 2023; Dogan Gangal et al., 2024; Treleavan, 2015). Therefore, the results of this study might only reflect the attitudes of Generation Y and Z as most participants were part of this age group. Therefore, future research should make an effort to reach participants who are not represented in this current study to offer a more comprehensive reflection of society.

It also has to be taken into account that the topic of this research might have been subject to socially desirable answers. Even though the study was anonymous, participants may have made an effort to give more socially desirable responses. While a manipulation check was implemented, the questions only checked for whether participants had made their own

interpretations of the information presented to them. Adapting answers to what participants perceive as social desirability responses can significantly impact reliability, and validity, and distort the results (Krumpal, 20a3). This means that participants' answers may not reflect their true feelings, attitudes, and behaviour (Van de Mortel, 2008). However, there is no certainty that this has affected the results of this study. There are no signs of skewed data and it is unlikely that this has been a problem yet the possibility cannot be excluded. Thus, future research might benefit from the inclusion of a check which targets participants' tendency to give socially adequate answers.

While this research has provided participants with a general case description as well as an investigative interview, these scenarios were only presented in written form. Participants were not engaging with either the victim or the suspect and had to rely on the information reported to them. Overall, the ecological validity of this study has to be considered. The study was conducted online through Qualtrics, meaning participants had free range under which conditions they took part. This freedom might have impacted how they answered questions and the general perception of the study. In contrast, prior research by Watson et al. (2022) analysed real investigative police interviews to understand the effects of strategies used in interviews. Nevertheless, future research should explore the possibility of making the material provided to the lay participant as realistic as possible by, for instance, providing them with a voice recording of the investigative interview or even video material. Especially given the research by Hudepohl and Watson (2023) which showed that students rather focus on veracity in their judgments whereas police officers focus on whether there is sufficient evidence for prosecution. Thus, future research should aim to include both, lay people and professionals who are confronted with

coercive control, such as police officers, to acquire a more accurate understanding of the results produced in his study.

Conclusion

This research examined the influence denial of the victim statements and the gender of the victim have on the attribution of blame and guilt and the perception of the seriousness of the crime in coercive control cases. Other factors, such as endorsement of traditional gender norms, the concept of an ideal victim, and perceived similarity to the individuals involved were explored. Overall, this research has shown that gender matters as the male individual, regardless of victim or suspect, was blamed more. Contrary, denial of the victim statements were only effective in reducing suspect blame under certain conditions, specifically when the victim fitted into the societal standards that are set for them. Interestingly, if, in addition to fitting the ideal victim characteristics, the victim was also female then talking negatively about the victim only reduced the blame attributed to them. Therefore, this research has shown that accounting for the perception of the victim regardless of the scenario and suspect can help to understand underlying social and psychological mechanisms that affect victimhood. After all, fair, equal, and adequate support should be accessible to any victim, regardless of their gender, nationality, or sexuality.

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Appendix A

Table 11

Main Effects and Moderation Effects of the Independent Variables and Moderator Perceived Victim Similarity on the Dependent Variables

	Suspect Blame			Victim Blame			Perceived Guilt			Seriousness		
	F	*df*	*p*	*F*	*df*	*p*	*F*	*df*	*p*	*F*	*df*	*p*
Victim Gender	1.70	1	.195	2.04	1	.156	0.79	1	.376	2.74	1	.100
Denial of Victim	0.44	1	.511	0.44	1	.510	0.88	1	.350	2.54	1	.113
Perceived Victim Similarity	0.03	1	.858	0.08	1	.773	0.42	1	.521	0.25	1	.616
Victim Gender * Denial of Victim	0.08	1	.781	0.08	1	.780	0.63	1	.428	0.62	1	.433
Victim Gender * Perceived Victim Similarity	0.17	1	.679	0.03	1	.864	0.16	1	.686	0.01	1	.908
Denial of Victim * Perceived Victim Similarity	0.02	1	.886	1.39	1	.241	2.10	1	.150	2.18	1	.142
Victim Gender * Denial of Victim * Perceived Victim Similarity	0.24	1	.622	0.14	1	.713	0.18	1	.676	0.53	1	.467

df = (1, 131).

Appendix B

Case Description – Male Victim

Coercive and controlling behaviours are a common form of abuse in intimate relationships. The Crown Prosecutive Services defines it in the following way:

"Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse: psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional." (CPS, 2017).

Case Description The text below describes an accusation of control and coercion. The police do not yet know whether the allegations are true or not. Please take your time and read the text carefully as you will be asked questions about it afterwards.

Alleged Offence: On 03/02/2024 the police received a phone call from Ms. Hendriks's boyfriend: Mr. Willem, alleging that he required immediate help.
Please see Mr. Willem's brief description of the events leading up to the police phone call on 03/02/2024:

- Mr. Willem alleges that Ms. Hendriks is a very jealous individual within their relationship and that she regularly accuses him of infidelity.
- Mr. Willem accuses Ms. Hendriks of constantly demanding access to his phone and texts.
- Mr. Willem accuses Ms. Hendriks of frequently preventing him from leaving the house unless she accompanies him.
- Mr. Willem accuses Ms. Hendriks of taking control over his free time activities, such as where he can go and for how long.
- He also states that she sends him abusive text messages after arguments and whenever he is coming home late.
- The night Mr. Willem called the police he stated that he went to a bar with his close friends like he does every Wednesday. He mentions that Ms. Hendriks has access to his location and must have tracked it to follow him. According to Mr. Willem, Ms. Hendriks entered the bar, walked directly towards the table and then they had a heated argument in which she accused him of infidelity. He said Ms. Hendriks got very angry and threatened him. He felt very scared, so he called the police.
- Mr. Willem claims that this behaviour has been going on for 1 year, and upon reflection, Mr. Willem believes he is the victim of coercive and controlling behaviour.

The police are currently investigating whether or not these allegations are accurate.

Case Description – Female Victim

Coercive and controlling behaviours are a common form of abuse in intimate relationships. The Crown Prosecutive Services defines it in the following way:

"Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse: psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional." (CPS, 2017).

Case Description The text below describes an accusation of control and coercion. The police do not yet know whether the allegations are true or not. Please take your time and read the text carefully as you will be asked questions about it afterwards.

Alleged Offence: On 03/02/2024 the police received a phone call from Mr. Willem's girlfriend: Ms. Hendriks, alleging that she required immediate help.
Please see Ms. Hendriks's brief description of the events leading up to the police phone call on 03/02/2024:

- Ms. Hendriks alleges that Mr. Willem is a very jealous individual within their relationship and that he regularly accuses her of infidelity.
- Ms. Hendriks accuses Mr. Willem of constantly demanding access to her phone and texts.
- Ms. Hendriks accuses Mr. Willem of frequently preventing her from leaving the house unless he accompanies her.
- Ms. Hendriks accuses Mr. Willem of taking control over her free time activities, such as where she can go and for how long.
- She also states that he sends her abusive text messages after arguments and whenever she is coming home late.
- The night Ms. Hendriks called the police she stated that she went to a bar with her close friends like she does every Wednesday. She mentions that Mr. Willem has access to her location and must have tracked it to follow her. According to Ms. Hendriks, Mr. Willem entered the bar, walked directly towards the table and then they had a heated argument in which he accused her of infidelity. She said Mr. Willem got very angry and threatened her. She felt very scared, so she called the police.
- Ms. Hendriks claims that this behaviour has been going on for 1 year, and upon reflection, Ms. Hendriks believes she is the victim of coercive and controlling behaviour.

The police are currently investigating whether or not these allegations are accurate.

Investigative Interview – Male Victim

Read the interview below carefully as you will be asked questions about it afterwards.

Police interviewer: Hello, my name is Detective Jansen, I will be conducting an interview with you today. Just as a reminder, you do not have to say anything, but it may harm your defence if you do not mention, when questioned, something which you later rely on in court. Anything you do say may be given in evidence. Would you like me to explain the caution?

Ms. Hendriks: No, that's fine.

Police interviewer: The black box there on the wall is recording everything. If this investigation did go further, this recording can be used in court. Do you understand?

Ms. Hendriks: Er, yeah, I understand that.

Police interviewer: Great. So, you've been arrested on an allegation of controlling and coercive behaviour against your partner, Ms. Hendriks. This is alleged to have happened numerous times over the course of the relationship, which to my understanding is the past year. So, do you want to start from the basics and just tell me about the relationship?

Ms. Hendriks: Yeah sure. We have been going out for just over a year and it was really good at the start. I'd say it was really perfect for the first four months. The only problem that I discovered is that he's not necessarily the most trustworthy person and lately he is acting very weird. He started to hang out more with all these people he called his friends. It's like obsessive, he's always with them, basically day and night. They also go out together, to bars and clubs and all that. Some nights I barely see him because of this. I feel like this made me start to think that he might be, like, seeing someone else. There were a few things that made me think that actually. And this is when the arguments started.

Police interviewer: So, what were your reasons for the suspicion?

Ms. Hendriks: Different things. I mean he has a reputation, you know? Always out partying, always flirting with other women! And every time he goes out, he gets really dressed up and spends hours fixing his hair. Am I really meant to think he puts so much effort into his looks just to grab a simple drink with his friends in the city? We all know why he does it, he wants the attention and he wants to get with other women. He couldn't have made it more obvious that something else is going on and I think we both can see that.

Police interviewer: Did you two argue a lot during the relationship?

Ms. Hendriks: Yeah, we do and also did in the past because my boyfriend apparently has a hard time understanding what it means to be loyal in a relationship. This was also when our bigger fights started. I've had to show him how relationships should actually work but he doesn't care and shows no respect to me. Trust me when I say that he thinks he's better than me and only cares about himself and other women and this behaviour doesn't help the arguments once he gets going.

Police interviewer: Can you explain why Mr. Willem is saying that you control his free time, such as where he can go and for how long?

 Ms. Hendriks: Look, I am sure he is a cheater. Who isn't going to want to know what their boyfriend is up to when you know that they can't be trusted to not sleep around? After all of this bullshit that I had to go through before I simply asked him to not be gone for longer than an hour and that I would want him to be back on time and not be late. He freaked out but I just need to be able to trust him. So of course, I want to know where he is going and who he is going to hang out with.

 Police interviewer: Ok so now I know a bit more about the relationship. I think we should move on to the incident that happened on the 3rd of February 2024, when you went to where Mr. Willem and his friends were. Please explain in your own words what happened on the evening of that date.

 Ms. Hendriks: Like I said earlier, he's been getting all dressed up recently and, on that night, he did it again. The longer he was with his friends the more suspicious I got. He wanted to be back at 1am and he even promised it to me, but he was not home on time. I tried to call and texted him multiple times, but he wouldn't pick up, so I decided to check his location, because I ask him to always share his location with me so I can be sure he's not going somewhere he shouldn't be again. I could just feel that there was something off, so I decided to drive to this location and to catch him in the act. Turns out he was at a bar, partying again. By the time I arrived, it was already 1:30am and my thoughts were all over the place because I knew he must be cheating on me. I was annoyed and couldn't wait any longer, so I just went in there. When he saw me, he looked really flustered and embarrassed and I knew he didn't expect me to show up and confront him. I mean I wasn't acting normal by now, right? Because there's so much off about this situation and how he's behaving. I kept asking "Where is she, where is she?" and he was just sitting there speechless which only made me more annoyed because he wouldn't even explain himself. Then we had an argument and one thing I noticed while standing there was that there were also other people at their table including some women. He just kept lying and lying to me as he promised me before that there weren't any women he was friends with and that were out with them and this honestly proves to me that my suspicion was justified this whole time.

 Police interviewer: Can you tell me why you think he called the police?

 Ms. Hendriks: I don't even know why he called the police. I mean he's the one that's lying about his whereabouts and meeting other women behind my back. Like I said earlier he is acting totally inappropriately for someone in a relationship and this whole party persona thing is just the tip of the iceberg. I don't know what he's told you, but he is a very good actor, and you can't believe a word he says.

 Police interviewer: Can you tell me about any threatening language that might have been used during the altercation?

 Ms. Hendriks: I can't remember exactly what I said once he started going off at me. Who wouldn't be angry when their boyfriend is going out to secretly meet women? You know how it is, I reckon we both probably said quite bad stuff but I was only responding to what he said to me and I was only angry because of what he did anyway. He's always getting into trouble and dragging me into it. Like I said it's all a bit of a blur. This is actually annoying me talking about it all again, can we take a break please?

 Police interviewer: Yes, that's fine, let's take a short break then. Just for the recording the interview is being paused at 3:43 pm.

Investigative Interview – Female Victim

Read the interview below carefully as you will be asked questions about it afterwards.

Police interviewer: Hello, my name is Detective Jansen, I will be conducting an interview with you today. Just as a reminder, you do not have to say anything, but it may harm your defence if you do not mention, when questioned, something which you later rely on in court. Anything you do say may be given in evidence. Would you like me to explain the caution?

Mr. Willem: No, that's fine.

Police interviewer: The black box there on the wall is recording everything. If this investigation did go further, this recording can be used in court. Do you understand?

Mr. Willem: Er, yeah, I understand that.

Police interviewer: Great. So, you've been arrested on an allegation of controlling and coercive behaviour against your partner, Mr. Willem. This is alleged to have happened numerous times over the course of the relationship, which to my understanding is the past year. So, do you want to start from the basics and just tell me about the relationship?

Mr. Willem: Yeah sure. We have been going out for just over a year and it was really good at the start. I'd say it was really perfect for the first four months. The only problem that I discovered is that she's not necessarily the most trustworthy person and lately she is acting very weird. She started to hang out more with all these people she called her friends. It's like obsessive, she's always with them, basically day and night. They also go out together, to bars and clubs and all that. Some nights I barely see her because of this. I feel like this made me start to think that she might be, like, seeing someone else. There were a few things that made me think that actually. And this is when the arguments started.

Police interviewer: So, what were your reasons for the suspicion?

Mr. Willem: Different things. I mean she has a reputation, you know? Always out partying, always flirting with other men! And every time she goes out, she gets really dressed up and spends hours fixing her hair. Am I really meant to think she puts so much effort into her looks just to grab a simple drink with her friends in the city? We all know why she does it, she wants the attention and she wants to get with other men. She couldn't have made it more obvious that something else is going on and I think we both can see that.

Police interviewer: Did you two argue a lot during the relationship?

Mr. Willem: Yeah, we do and also did in the past because my girlfriend apparently has a hard time understanding what it means to be loyal in a relationship. This was also when our bigger fights started. I've had to show her how relationships should actually work but she doesn't care and shows no respect to me. Trust me when I say that she thinks she's better than me and only cares about herself and other men and this behaviour doesn't help the arguments once she gets going.

Police interviewer: Can you explain why Ms. Hendriks is saying that you control her free time, such as where she can go and for how long?

Mr. Willem: Look, I am sure she is a cheater. Who isn't going to want to know what their girlfriend is up to when you know that they can't be trusted to not sleep around? After all of this bullshit that I had to go through before I simply asked her to not be gone for longer than an hour and that I would want her to be back on time and not be late. She freaked out but I just need to be able to trust her. So of course, I want to know where she is going and who she is going to hang out with.

Police interviewer: Ok so now I know a bit more about the relationship. I think we should move on to the incident that happened on the 3rd of February 2024, when you went to where Ms. Hendriks and her friends were. Please explain in your own words what happened on the evening of that date.

Mr. Willem: Like I said earlier, she's been getting all dressed up recently and, on that night, she did it again. The longer she was with her friends the more suspicious I got. She wanted to be back at 1am and she even promised it to me, but she was not home on time. I tried to call and texted her multiple times, but she wouldn't pick up, so I decided to check her location, because I ask her to always share her location with me so I can be sure she's not going somewhere she shouldn't be again. I could just feel that there was something off, so I decided to drive to this location and to catch her in the act. Turns out she was at a bar, partying again. By the time I arrived, it was already 1:30am and my thoughts were all over the place because I knew she must be cheating on me. I was annoyed and couldn't wait any longer, so I just went in there. When she saw me, she looked really flustered and embarrassed and I knew she didn't expect me to show up and confront her. I mean I wasn't acting normal by now, right? Because there's so much off about this situation and how she's behaving. I kept asking "Where is he, where is he?" and she was just sitting there speechless which only made me more annoyed because she wouldn't even explain herself. Then we had an argument and one thing I noticed while standing there was that there were also other people at their table including some men. She just kept lying and lying to me as she promised me before that there weren't any men she was friends with and that were out with them and this honestly proves to me that my suspicion was justified this whole time.

Police interviewer: Can you tell me why you think she called the police?

Mr. Willem: I don't even know why she called the police. I mean she's the one that's lying about her whereabouts and meeting other men behind my back. Like I said earlier she is acting totally inappropriately for someone in a relationship and this whole party persona thing is just the tip of the iceberg. I don't know what she's told you, but she is a very good actress, and you can't believe a word she says.

Police interviewer: Can you tell me about any threatening language that might have been used during the altercation?

Mr. Willem: I can't remember exactly what I said once she started going off at me. Who wouldn't be angry when their girlfriend is going out to secretly meet men? You know how it is, I reckon we both probably said quite bad stuff but I was only responding to what she said to me and I was only angry because of what she did anyway. She's always getting into trouble and dragging me into it. Like I said it's all a bit of a blur. This is actually annoying me talking about it all again, can we take a break please?

 Police interviewer: Yes, that's fine, let's take a short break then. Just for the recording the interview is being paused at 3:43 pm.

Control Interview – Harry Styles

Read the interview below carefully as you will be asked questions about it afterwards.

Harry Styles On 'Fine Line', Stevie Nicks And His Definition Of Success
 Interviewer: Your most recent album seems tied up in the '70s, which is a decade you didn't actually live through. What is it about that era that draws you in?

 Harry Styles: There's a freedom in the music that is so inspiring. If you go back and listen to so much of that music, and you listen to songs from Tapestry and Harry Nilsson songs, they sound so fresh. I think it's crazy that something that was made so long ago, you can listen to it now and be like "I want my drums to sound like these drums, and I want my strings to sound like these strings." I think that's really incredible. And I think it's just the freedom, it's people doing what they wanted to do. Obviously, the music business has changed so much since then — there was a lot more of everybody hanging out together and playing songs, and I feel like music is a lot more competitive now.

 Interviewer: And is it maybe a little more produced now? Less organic?

 Harry Styles: I think we just have different technology. When we came to do my first solo album, I had this thing where I wanted to do everything to tape. And then I kind of realized that The Beatles didn't use tape because it was really cool to use, they used it because it was the best technology they had [at the time] and it sounded the best. And now we just have different ways of recording stuff and you can make stuff sound really nice — so we kind of abandoned the tape thing. Overall what draws me to that time with music is just the freedom.

 Interviewer: Was making "Fine Line" sound like the music of the '70s a conscious choice?

 Harry Styles: I'm not listening to stuff so much anymore being like "I just want my stuff to sound like this." You grow up listening to what your parents listen to. For me, it was the Stones, Beatles, Fleetwood, a lot of Queen, Elvis Presley, Shania Twain, Savage Garden, Norah Jones. That was kind of like the base of what my first experience with music was, and I feel like you can't help but have a lot of references from what you grew up listening to.

Interviewer: Speaking of Fleetwood Mac, I saw you've gotten to know and work with Stevie Nicks. What's that like, to get to know someone who was the soundtrack of your childhood and go out on stage with them?

Harry Styles: It borders on an out-of-body experience. "Dreams" was the first song I knew all the words to; I used to sing it in the car with my mom. Every time I'm with her, you want to be, obviously, present, right? I'm trying to enjoy being with her and soaking in. But I think at the same time, while you're in the room with her, I'm sitting there thinking about being 10-years-old and singing the song.

Interviewer: Does it matter if you're super famous yourself?

Harry Styles: I don't think so, because ultimately we're all humans. It's not like paralyzing starstruck, it's

more like I try and appreciate what my 10-year-old self would think of it. I think ultimately you meet and you're kind of in awe of them, but at the same time you get to hang out with them on this human level, where you're just talking and it's really amazing. Those are the moments that kind of mean the most because it's real. And when everything else about being in music goes away, that's the stuff that I think you end up telling your grandkids.

 Interviewer: There's a lot of us who wanted to be a rock star and ended up being lawyers. You've gone the other way. Is it funny listening back to yourself? What do you wish you could tell your 16-year-old self?

 Harry Styles: I guess like "Don't worry." In the early years, I spent a lot of time worrying about what would happen and getting things wrong and saying the wrong thing and doing the wrong thing. I'm trying to let go of the worrying thing, and that's what I've loved the most about this album, rather than the first one. I think I had a lot of fear — whether it was conscious or subconsciously — just about getting it wrong. When I listen back to the first album now, although I still love it so much, I feel like I was almost bowling with the bumpers up a little bit. I can hear places where I was playing it safe. I think with this one, after touring with an album that wasn't necessarily a radio record and people came to see the show, I realized that the only thing that people really want is for you to do what you want to do. Ultimately, I think if people believe in you, you can make a bad record, you can make a bad song, and people will still come to a show if they're interested and want to come see you. I think the only time people go "You know what? I'm done with this," is when it stops being authentic. You can't really blame people for that. If there's an artist I loved and I felt like they were faking it, I can't say that I'd keep going to the shows. I think that was a big thing for me, just trying to worry less. The worst thing that can happen is that I make a record that I think everybody else wants to hear, and then it doesn't do well. And you sit there going "Well I wish I'd just made the record that I wanted to make." I think if you're making what you want to make, then ultimately no one can tell you you're unsuccessful, because you're doing what makes you happy. That's the biggest thing that I learned this time.

 Interviewer: Can you tell us about a favorite song on the album?

 Harry Styles: My two favorite songs on this album are probably "Cherry" and "Fine Line." "Cherry" is the fifth song on the album. It's one of my favorites, mostly because of how it came about. When I started making this album I felt like it had to be big. The last record wasn't really a radio record: The single from it was a 6-minute piano ballad, so it wasn't the typical formula. So I felt a bit of pressure that I wanted to make something that worked. I was trying this stuff one night in the studio, and I was worried because I just wasn't really liking anything that I was doing. I felt like I was trying too hard. That's when I make the music that I like the least, is when I'm trying to write a pop song or I'm trying to write something fun. Everybody left for the weekend, and it was me, Tyler Johnson, and Sammy Witte. It was two or three in the morning, and we were having a drink and just talking. I was saying how I have all these records that I'd love to make, I love all this kind of music and in five years I want to make this kind of record, and in 10 years I want to make this kind of album, and then I'll get to make the music that I really want to make. And Tyler just said "You just have to make the music that you want to make — right now. That's the only way of doing it, otherwise you're going to regret it."

 Interviewer: And "Cherry" was the result of that?

 Harry Styles: Yeah, so we stayed and Sammy started playing the guitar riff, and we did it through the night and recorded it. Everybody came back in the morning and listened to it ... I heard it when it was

finished and was like "This is the kind of music I want to make."

 Interviewer: How did you write "Fine Line?"

 Harry Styles: "Fine Line" I wrote during a gap in the tour. It was January 2018 and I was at my friend Tom's house, who I work with, and we just started strumming this thing, and we started layering these vocals, and it turned into this 6-minute thing. I had it for a long time and I kept listening to it during the tour, like I'd listen to it before I went to bed. Just sonically I loved the song, and I loved the lyrics of the song. When we wrote it, I kind of knew it was the last song of an album, and we ended up taking it to Bath, in England, where I was making this record for a while. I wanted it to turn into something else at the end, I wanted like a big crescendo ending. While we were in Bath, Sammy started playing this little thing on the piano, and I tweaked it a little bit and I was like "That has to go at the end of 'Fine Line.' " Now when I listen to it, it's one of those things where I'm just proud that it's mine, I'm so happy. It's one of those songs that I've always wanted to make.

Scale – Gender Role Endorsement

Please rate the following statements based on how much you agree with them.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Slightly disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Slightly agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
It is disrespectful for a man to swear in the presence of a woman. (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Women should not expect men to offer them their seats on the bus or train. (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Queer relationships should be as socially accepted as heterosexual relationships. (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
In dating, the man should always make the first move/take the first step. (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
It bothers me more to see a woman who is pushy than a man who is pushy. (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
When sitting down at a table, it shows respect when the man holds the chair for the woman. (6)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Women should have as much sexual freedom as men. (7)
○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

Women should appreciate the protection and support that men have traditionally given them. (8)
○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

Women with children should not work outside the home if they don't have to financially. (9)
○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

I see nothing wrong with a woman who doesn't like to wear skirts or dresses. (10)
○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

The husband should be regarded as the legal representative of the family in all matters of law. (11)
○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

I like women who are outspoken. (12)
○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

Except in very special circumstances, a man should never allow a woman to pay for the bill. (13)
○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

Some equality in marriage is good, but generally the husband should have the main say-so in family matters. (14)

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Men should continue to show courtesies to women such as holding open the door or helping them on with their coats. (15)

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

It is ridiculous for a woman to work as a mechanic and for a man to be a kindergarden teacher. (16)

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

A woman should be as free as a man to propose marriage. (17)

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Women should be concerned with their family duties and taking care of the house rather than with the desire for a professional career. (18)

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Swearing and obscenity are more repulsive when a woman does it rather than a man. (19)

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

There are some professions and types of business that are more suitable for men than women. (20)

○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

Attention Check

Male Victim – Control Interview

Who called the police stating that they required immediate help?

    ○ Mr. Willem (1)

    ○ Ms. Hendriks (2)

What song was discussed in the interview?

    ○ Fine Line (1)

    ○ Watermelon Sugar (2)

Female Victim – Control Interview

Who called the police stating that they required immediate help?

    ○ Mr. Willem (1)

    ○ Ms. Hendriks (2)

What song was discussed in the interview?

    ○ Fine Line (1)

    ○ Watermelon Sugar (2)

Male Victim – Investigative Interview

Who called the police stating that they required immediate help?

○ Mr. Willem (1)

○ Ms. Hendriks (2)

Who was interviewed by the officer?

○ Mr. Willem (1)

○ Ms. Hendriks (2)

Female Victim – Investigative Interview

Who called the police stating that they required immediate help?

○ Mr. Willem (1)

○ Ms. Hendriks (2)

Who was interviewed by the officer?

○ Mr. Willem (1)

○ Ms. Hendriks (2)

Manipulation Check

Male Victim

Please rate the following statements.

	Not at all (1)	A little (2)	A moderate amount (3)	A lot (4)	To a great extent (5)
To what extent did Ms. Hendriks try to convince the police officer that Mr. Willem is a bad person? (1)	○	○	○	○	○
To what extent did Ms. Hendriks try to convince the police officer that she is a good person? (2)	○	○	○	○	○

Female Victim

Please rate the following statements.

	Not at all (1)	A little (2)	A moderate amount (3)	A lot (4)	To a great extent (5)
To what extent did Mr. Willem try to convince the police officer that Ms. Hendriks is a bad person? (1)	○	○	○	○	○
To what extent did Mr. Willem try to convince the police officer that he is a good person? (2)	○	○	○	○	○

Scale – Attribution of Blame

Please rate the following statements based on how much you agree with them.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
The suspects' behaviour was the reason the victim was feeling distressed. (1)	○	○	○	○	○
The victim played a role in their own victimisation. (2)	○	○	○	○	○
The victim provoked the suspect's behaviour. (3)	○	○	○	○	○
The suspect is responsible for their own actions. (4)	○	○	○	○	○
The suspect enjoys having control over the victim's life. (5)	○	○	○	○	○
The victim would deserve any controlling or coercive behaviour directed toward them because of their own behaviour. (6)	○	○	○	○	○
I think the victim is a bad individual. (7)	○	○	○	○	○
I think the suspect is a good individual. (8)	○	○	○	○	○

I think the suspect is a manipulative individual. (9)	○	○	○	○	○
I think the victim is a manipulative individual. (10)	○	○	○	○	○

Scale – Perceived Guilt

Please rate the following statements based on how much you agree with them.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Agree (5)	Strongly agree (6)
I think the suspect is guilty of control and coercion. (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○
The suspect behaved toward the victim in a way that can be defined as controlling and coercive behaviour. (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○

Scale – Perceived Seriousness

Male Victim

Please rate the following statements based on how much you agree with them.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
I think Ms. Hendriks' behaviour harmed Mr. Willem. (1)	○	○	○	○	○
I think Ms. Hendriks' motives were wrongful. (2)	○	○	○	○	○
I think Ms. Hendriks' behaviour was immoral. (3)	○	○	○	○	○

Female Victim

Please rate the following statements based on how much you agree with them.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
I think Mr. Willem's behaviour harmed Ms. Hendriks. (1)	○	○	○	○	○
I think Mr. Willem's motives were wrongful. (2)	○	○	○	○	○
I think Mr. Willem's behaviour was immoral. (3)	○	○	○	○	○

Scale – Ideal Victim

Male Victim

Please rate the following statements based on how much you agree with them.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
Mr. Willem is physically weak. (1)	○	○	○	○	○
Mr. Willem is mentally weak. (2)	○	○	○	○	○
Mr. Willem is sensible. (3)	○	○	○	○	○
Mr. Willem is a respectable person. (4)	○	○	○	○	○
Mr. Willem is not to blame for Ms. Hendriks' behaviour. (5)	○	○	○	○	○
Ms. Hendriks is stronger than Mr. Willem. (6)	○	○	○	○	○
Mr. Willem did not know Ms. Hendriks well. (7)	○	○	○	○	○
Mr. Willem's claims are substantiated. (8)	○	○	○	○	○

Female Victim

Please rate the following statements based on how much you agree with them.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
Ms. Hendriks is physically weak. (1)	○	○	○	○	○
Ms. Hendriks is mentally weak. (2)	○	○	○	○	○
Ms. Hendriks is sensible. (3)	○	○	○	○	○
Ms. Hendriks is a respectable person. (4)	○	○	○	○	○
Ms. Hendriks is not to blame for Mr. Willem's behaviour. (5)	○	○	○	○	○
Mr. Willem is stronger than Ms. Hendriks. (6)	○	○	○	○	○
Ms. Hendriks did not know Mr. Willem well. (7)	○	○	○	○	○
Ms. Hendriks' claims are substantiated. (8)	○	○	○	○	○

Scale – Perceived Similarity

Please rate the following statements.

	Extremely dissimilar (1)	Dissimilar (2)	Somewhat dissimilar (3)	Somewhat similar (4)	Similar (5)	Extremely similar (6)
How similar do you feel to Mr. Willem? (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○
How similar do you feel to Ms. Hendriks? (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○