Manipulation of blame in cases of control and coercion within intimate relationships

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Abstract

Control and coercion in intimate relationships often happens without evidence and is therefore, rarely punishable by law. When no physical evidence exists, suspect interviews become more and more important in intimate relationship cases regarding control and coercion. Control and coercing relationships are often characterised by patterns of threat, intimidation or harassment of the victim. During these interviews different behaviours are shown to influence the interviewers view of the crime and the victim to the suspect's favour. One of these behaviours is the usage of denial of the victim arguments. This study explores the phenomenon of "denial of the victim," where perpetrators justify their actions by attributing responsibility to the victim's character or behaviour. Utilizing Attribution Theory, we differentiate between two types of denial: "provocative behaviour," which emphasizes specific actions of the victim, and "attacking character," which generalizes perceived flaws in the victim's personality. Our research aims to understand how these distinctions affect blame attribution and the perception of domestic violence cases. We hypothesize that while both forms of denial impact victim attributions, provocative behaviour is likely to exert a stronger influence on the overall perception of both the victim and the suspect. The participants of this study were randomly distributed to a fictious description of a case and then to either no interview or an investigative interview in which one time the victim's character was attacked by statements of the suspect and the other one were the victim showcased provocative behaviour in the eyes of the suspect. The study results show that there is no significant difference in the attribution of blame independent of the arguments given by the suspect. However, the change in the attribution of blame to the victim and suspect could be predicted by the level of sexism.

Introduction

Domestic violence is a serious issue that affects many individuals and families across the world. In the Netherlands, it remains a significant concern, with 1.2 million people experiencing domestic abuse in 2020 alone (CBS, 2021). Domestic violence can take many forms, extending beyond just physical and sexual violence. It can include psychological aspects such as isolation, threats, intimidation, harassment, and emotional abuse, all of which can have long-lasting effects on the well-being of those affected (Respect, 2017). Most often domestic violence is divided into psychological and physical abuse. In many places only physical forms of domestic violence are punishable by law, however psychological abuse does not count as a crime everywhere. Fortunately, non-physical abuse becomes more and more prosecuted by the law. However, in many cases there is no physical evidence to support that psychological abuse took place, and therefore the crime could be difficult to prosecute (Barlow et al., 2020). Domestic violence with psychological abuse is often referred to as being a key part of coercing and controlling behaviour.

Coercing behaviour is presented by the perpetrator through (non-) physical abuse by harming, punishing or frightening their partner in such a way that they will become their subordinates and/or dependent on them (The Code for Crown Prosecutors, 2017). Controlling behaviour is generally presented by behaviour which forces the victim into a dependent role amongst other things by isolating them from their environment (The Code for Crown Prosecutors, 2023). An additional factor affecting prosecution rates for control and coercion is that where it co-occurs with physical violence. Reality shows that, there is a tendency for investigators to prioritise collecting evidence to prosecute the physical abuse. As a result, victims often don't report psychological abuse because they think without evidence there will be less to no punishment for the perpetrator (Wolf et al., 2003).

Most of the non-physical abuse leaves no physical evidence, therefore, investigative interviews with the perpetrators are often conducted to get more information of the situation at hand. That is why Interviews are not only crucial in finding some evidence but also in trying to get an overview of the situation/relationship. For example, abusive text messages can be dismissed as a heated argument, here interviews can help to establish if this behaviour is a recurring pattern, in which case the text messages would be more crucial. Therefore, interviews are an important part in providing critical evidence which could decide the verdict of a perpetrator in a positive or negative way. However, in these interviews, perpetrators attempt to influence the perceived view of them, in a for them favourable outcome by using

different strategies (Watson et al., 2022). This is done to justify their own behaviour or to shift the blame on the victim or a third party (Watson et al., 2022). Additionally, by giving statements in certain ways, the perpetrators try to change the view of what happened to one in which they seem less responsible and therefore might end up with a lesser penalty.

Interviewing perpetrators

By changing their perceived image into a positive one a change in the interviewer's point of view of the situation in favour of the suspects may happen. This not only has an influence on the outcome of the interviews and crimes but also how these sorts of crimes are viewed in the public eye in general. Publicity on these cases as well as the way the media portrays them shows a certain picture to other victims all around the world. A famous example for this would be the Case Depp vs Heard. Only the last process was all over the world not only in social media but also live streams out of the courtrooms could be accessed. It cannot be said for certain who the victim and who the perpetrator is/was but the representation in the media was against the official victim and in favour of the TV favourite star Johnny Depp. Such a portrayal of denial of the victim cases have a high influence on the victim as well as the general view of society on domestic abuse cases (Lombard and Whiting, 2015). This reduces the chance of reported non-physical domestic abuse cases since there is not only a chance of being not taken serious but also ridiculed. However, it also shows, why these interviews are so important. They can be used to study the various kinds of influencing behaviour used by the suspects to justify their behaviour (Watson et al., 2022).

Watson et al. (2022) analysed 29 interviews of control and coercion cases. In these interviews different influencing behaviours were identified that were actively used to influence the interview. The most common behaviours used, were either attempting to shift the blame onto the victim or to justify their own behaviour. It means that suspects try to explain their behaviour in such a way that the interviewer's perception about who is at fault and who is to blame is shifted negatively towards the victim or at least lets the suspect's behaviour be deemed as less extreme (Watson et al., 2022).

Denial of the victim

The behaviour whereby suspects try to convince interviewers that the alleged victims bear responsibility for the actions of the perpetrator, resembles "denial of the victim". Denial of the victim (DoV) occurs when someone justifies negative behaviour towards the victim by claiming the victim deserved it because of their own bad character or action (Langford and

Williams, 2023). Sykes and Matza (1957) describe this behaviour as one technique of neutralization. These techniques are cognitive processes which are used by people to justify their (criminal) behaviour and to undermine the credibility of the victim. The goal is to make other people believe that the perpetrators behaviour was an acceptable response to certain behaviour and therefore a victim doesn't exist. In this case neutralization means the reduction of negative aspects of the perpetrator based on their shown/observed negative behaviour. To rectify their negative behaviour, perpetrators tend to search for a trigger or an excuse which lead to their actions and is therefore responsible for them instead of themselves (Sykes & Matza. 1957).

The goal is to make the perpetrator appear to have done the right thing and that it is not their fault since the victim deserved it and/or 'asked for' what happened to them to happen (Watson et al., 2022). The behaviour of the perpetrator must be perceived as an appropriate response rather than harm done to the victim or a violation of the law. Research done by Schmuck et al. (2021) showed that DoV arguments increased the negative view on the victim and enforced a 'neutral' or even 'positive' view on the suspect by shifting the attribution of blame towards the victim. This leads to a bigger focus on why the victim is responsible and normalizes the perpetrators behaviour (Schmuck et al., 2021).

Attribution Theory and Blame

Blame attribution is the process of trying to create and/or construct causal explanations for certain behaviour (Grub & Turner, 2012). As mentioned above, cases of domestic violence often have a shift in the attribution of blame. This can be achieved through multiple ways.

Kelley's model of the attribution theory focusses on how other people attribute causes of behaviour and the process thereof (Schmitt, 2015). There are three factors that behaviour can be attributed to: stimulus, circumstances of the moment and the person itself. People are generally and actively trying to make sense and interpreting everything that happens around them (Schmitt, 2015). Personal as well as situational factors play an important role during this process because they influence the way of interpreting based on the observer which leads to biases. Every observer is biased in a different way, which leads to multiple different interpretations of one situation. Therefore, these biases are linked to motivations which helps the observer to bring attribute causes to situations. Schmitt (2015) states that these motivations can be based in the need to present oneself in a positive light to others or the need to believe in effective control.

Therefore, when perpetrators use denial of the victim arguments, they are used to present themselves in a positive light (Schmitt, 2015) and to shift the attribution of blame onto the victim. Perpetrators explain their behaviour by shifting blame onto the stimulus, for example negative victim behaviour; the circumstances of the moment, for example negative feelings caused or provoked by the victim's behaviour; or a mix of them both, for example when victim has shown negative behaviour one of the two or both were appropriate as a reaction (Schmitt, 2015). As a result, interviewer's might, consciously or unconsciously, shift their opinion on who is to blame onto the victim which is in favour of the perpetrator and might end with lenient consequences or none at all. Furthermore, studies done by Mitic (2023) and Schmuck et al. (2021) also show specifically that DoV arguments affect at least the victim attributions, although not so much suspect attributions. All these experimental studies show that there is in fact a shift of attribution of blame in scripted interviews in favour of the suspect. By splitting DoV different affects might be visible. By attacking the character the victim's flaws are often generalized to their overall deservingness of sympathy. It only affects the internal attributions. When blaming provocative behaviour, the focus is primarily on specific actions that may have instigated a response (Grub & Turner, 2012). This may affect the attribution of the victim and reduce the internal attributions to the suspect. Mitic (2023) also states that sexism seems to be playing a role in conducting these studies. The experiments so far all show stronger or sometimes even only apparent effects when the person observing the arguments scores higher in benevolent or hostile sexism (Mitic, 2023, and Schmuck et al., 2021).

Sexism

An individual's belief in traditional gender roles can shape how they perceive certain behaviours as controlling or coercive, which in turn affects their tendency to shift blame attribution. Glick and Fiske (1997) argue in their theory of ambivalent sexism that sexism is a multidimensional construct consisting of hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. Benevolent sexism focuses on the traditional male gender role in a more positive tone as in; if the woman behaves in the traditional way that is expected of her by the man she should be rewarded (Glick & Fiske, 1997). Hostile sexism however states that the woman should be punished if she does not behave in a traditional accepted way (Glick & Fiske, 1997). This does not mean that benevolent sexism can be seen as positive since the woman still has to behave in a societally accepted traditional way. Individuals who hold their sexist beliefs in high regards were more likely to justify violence towards a female victim if the victim was for example

unfaithful (Viki & Adams, 2002). Being unfaithful is against the "traditional way of a woman" and may enhance justification against the violence which was afflicted against her.

Regarding suspect interviews, the given arguments might have a bigger influence on the shifting in blame if the victim did not behave according to what is expected. The victims might already be perceived as someone deserving the punishment/violence which justifies the suspects behaviour in their eyes. It is therefore expected that individuals with high sexist beliefs are more likely to attribute the blame to the victim.

The study

Previous studies done by Wüller (2021), Schmuck (2021) and Mitic (2023), already measured denial of the victim and whether different aspects/attributes (could)/have an influence on it. The results were that there was a change in perception of the victim when denial of the victim arguments were used. However, the focus in the previous studies lies on denial of victim in general and there is no distinction made between different strategies/categories of denial of the victim.

Since denial of the victim was used on a broad base, in this study denial of the victim will be split into two differentiations ('provocative behaviour' and 'attacking character') with each one having their own independent interview, building upon Wüller (2021) and Schmuck (2021). By splitting DoV into two distinctive forms, this study aims to assign the observed effects to specific arguments. On the one hand we identified, the *provocative behaviour* which aims to minimise the suspects responsibility to explain their own behaviour. Whereas the *attacking character* aims to increase internal attribution towards the victim. *Provocative behaviour* is expected to have a higher impact on victim attributions and suspect attributions, while *attacking character* is more likely to only impact victim attributions.

Methods

This research was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Behavioural and Management and Social Sciences faculty of the University of Twente (approval number 221380) and is in line with the legal requirements of the researchers' country. All participants gave written informed consent in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki.

Design and variables

This study has an experimental design which was conducted via a questionnaire with 169 participants. The questionnaire consisted of three different conditions, which will be elaborated on in Materials and Procedure. The study has one independent variable *denial of the victim* which is divided into three levels. These levels are *provocative behaviour, attacking character* and *no information*. The levels are presented as different ways suspects of a crime are responding to allegations of abuse within stimulated investigative interviews. In the *provocative behaviour* an interview will be given in which the behaviour of the victim is used as justification for the suspects behaviour by the suspect and in the *attacking character* the suspects use the victims character as justification for his behaviour. In the *no information* condition, there is no interview given to the participant and this condition will be used as a control condition.

The dependent variable was *attribution of blame*. *Sexism* is used as an exploratory moderator.

Participants

The number of participants needed for this study was determined through G*power analysis ($\alpha = 0.05$, $\beta = 0.80$, $f = 0.25$) and is 159. Participants were recruited over the University of Twente intern system for psychology students (SONA) and the researcher's personal network.

A total of 169 people participated of which one was deleted because they did not agree with the informed consent. The participants were between 18 and 76 years of age with a mean age of 26.72 and a standard deviation of 12.26. Out of the 168 participants 31% were male, 66.7% female, 0.6% self-defined and 1.8% preferred not to say their gender. The nationalities of the participants were 50% German, 37.5% Dutch and 12.5% had other nationalities. The participants were randomly assigned to one of the three levels of information. All in all, the participants were randomly and evenly distributed during the experiment, therefore each group had $n = 56$ participants.

Materials and Procedure

All the materials used in the study (introduction, informed consent, different versions of the investigative interview, questionnaires, debriefing) was designed and developed by the researcher and can be found in Appendix E. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the three level of information.

The study was created in the online survey tool Qualtrics which could then be distributed via web-links on social media and SONA.

Starting the study through clicking the web-link, participants were presented with information about the research. The content of the study was briefly explained as well as the procedure and the risks of taking part. An explanation on how to withdraw from the study was also provided. Since the study deals with a sensitive topic, multiple web-links to offer support were also given. The contact information of the first researcher was given at the end in case of unclarities or follow up questions. By acknowledging all of the above-mentioned participant gave their informed consent to go on with the study.

In the beginning of the study, participants were not informed about what the hypotheses of the study were as well as the three different levels of information. However, after the participation, they were debriefed about this information to give full disclosure.

After the informed consent was given, demographic questions about age, gender, nationality and their level of education were asked. Participant were also asked about their (romantic) relationship status, while not been given a definition about what counts as a romantic relationship to not give a limitation to the responses. The experimental study then starts with questionnaires, a case description and/or no investigative interview. The contents of these items are explained below. After finishing the questionnaires, the participants received a full debrief over the study. The debrief included again web-links for support for example for inter partner violence, in case participants started to feel distressed through the study. Participants were also given another opportunity to withdraw from the study and have their data deleted, in case they changed their mind after having been debriefed, by closing the web browser. If the participants still agreed to the participation of the study after the debrief they had to click on a button which said 'accept'.

Ambivalent Sexism

After the demographics, sexism was measured through the Ambivalent Sexism inventory (ASI) by Glick and Fiske (1996). The questionnaire consisted of 22 statements

either examining hostile or benevolent sexism. Eleven items measured hostile sexism, predicting negative perceptions about women that do not act according to the traditional gender role, trough for example: "*Women exaggerate problems they have at work.*" Another eleven items measured benevolent sexism, which predicts sympathy for women who act in traditional gender roles, trough for example:" *Women should be cherished and protected by men."* All items were measured with a 5-point Likert-Scale which ranges from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The Cronbach's alpha showed an internal consistency of .87 for hostile sexism and benevolent sexism combined.

Case scenario

After the sexism questionnaire, participants were first presented with the definition of the crime of Control and Coercion. They were told that coercive and controlling behaviours in intimate relationships are a crime in the UK. Coercion and control were defined as "any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, (…) following types of abuse: psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional" (CPS, 2017).

Afterwards, the case description was presented to the participants. This description included allegations that were made by the female victim about her boyfriend, giving an insight into past situations that occurred before the victim called the police. These situations described the behaviour of the suspect which were amongst others jealous behaviour, wanting to see the victim's phone, and control over social activities, frequently asking about the victim's whereabouts. Furthermore, it also described the incident that led the victim to call the police, which was a verbal altercation after the suspect followed the victim to a meet-up with friends. The case description was the same across all experimental conditions.

Investigative interviews scripts

Followed by the scenario, depending on which condition the participants were in, they were presented with a fictive/simulate investigative interview script between a police officer and the suspect. Two different interview scripts were given: either one in which the character of the victim was attacked (*attacking character*) or one in which the victim's behaviour (*provocative behaviour*) was blamed. The participants in the *no interview* condition did not receive a script of the investigative interview. Participants in this condition were only presented with the case description and then forwarded to the first questionnaire. The participants were randomly assigned to the three different conditions.

In the '*attacking character'* interview, the victim's character sentences like:" *And she's a liar and I don't see why you would even believe anything she's got to say.".* Arguments like these are used to highlight the victim in an untrustworthy way and make the suspect seem less suspicious because all the attention is diverted on the victim. The suspects behaviour appears to be understandable due to the victim's bad character. Grub & Turner (2012) describe this as a scrutinization of the victim and generates a shift in focus, namely from the suspect to the victim. Whereas in the '*provocative behaviour'* interview sentences such as: "*I just need to be able to trust her but with her behaviour it's hard.*" are used to focuses on the victim's provocative behaviour. Arguments like these make it seem as if the victim often behaves in such a way and the suspect therefore, only tried his best to cope with that.

Attention check

To ensure that the participants read the case description as well as the investigative interview script, two items were used as an attention check. The items were: *"To what extent did Mr Clark try to convince the police officer that Miss Taylor is a bad person?"* and *"To what extent did Mr Clark try to convince the police officer that he is a good person?."* Participants were asked to answer these questions using a 5-point Likert Scale (1= not at all; 5= to a great extent). In the conditions of '*attacking character'* and '*provocative behaviour'* participants answers should show to a great extent that they believed Mr Clark tried to convince the police that Miss Taylor is a bad person as well as the fact that he is good person. Whereas the answers for the' *no information'* condition should be neutral or slightly leaning to a bad impression of Mr. Clark.

Attribution of blame

After the manipulation check, participants were presented with a questionnaire about how much blame they attributed to the suspect and how much blame they attributed to the victim. These questions consisted of ten items based on the *Items Assessing General Victim Blame* by Eigenberg & Policastro (2015). The only change to the items made, was that the victim's as well as suspect's name were added for clarification. As in Wüller (2021), five of the items measured the attribution of blame for the victim and five measured the attribution of blame to the suspect. An example for attribution of blame to the suspect is: *"Mr Clark's behaviour towards Miss Taylor is the result of his personality.",* whereas an example for attribution of blame to the victim is: *"Mr Clark had very good reasons for his behaviour throughout his relationship with Miss Taylor."* Participants had to indicate the extent to which

they agreed with the statements, which was measured with a 5-point Likert-Scale (1= strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree). The items measuring the blame to the suspect had a Cronbach's alpha of .71 and the items measuring the blame to the victim had a Cronbach's alpha of .78.

Guilt

Participants were also asked with two items if they thought the suspect was guilty of the allegations against him. The two items were *"I think Mr. Clark is guilty of control and coercion"* and *"Mr. Clark behaved toward Miss Taylor in a way that can be defined as controlling and coercive behaviour."* Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with these statements, using the 5-point Likert-Scale (1= strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree). The Cronbach's alpha was .84.

Punishment

The last question for the participants was to determine the severity of the punishment they think the suspect deserves, assuming the suspect was guilty. The sentencing Council (2021) states that individuals could serve a prison sentence of maximum five years if they were found guilty of incidents containing control and coercion in the United Kingdom. Since coercion and control crimes are not punished in the Netherlands, a scale based on the United Kingdom punishment was used. Participants were informed of the possible punishment and its duration in the United Kingdom and should thereon indicate how much punishment they think the suspect should receive. For this, participants, regardless of whether they believed the suspect is guilty or not, should assume that the suspect was indeed guilty and determine the duration of the punishment. On the scale, years (0 to five years) and months (per four months) of imprisonment could be chosen using a slider.

<div align="center">**Results**</div>

All analyses were done in the Statistic software IBM SPSS version 27.

Descriptive statistics

For the dependent and the moderator variables means were computed. Table 1 shows the mean scores, standard deviations and minimum to maximum scores. The scales for *Guilt* as well as *Blame Suspect* show some negative skew, whereas there is a positive skew for the *Blame Victim* scale. This shows that participants tended to assume guilt and suspect blame but also assume victims were not to blame. The average score for sexism was moderate, indicating that participants held somewhat sexist views. A one-way ANOVA between guilt, blame on the suspect and blame on the victim was conducted. The dependent variables show that they are not normally distributed (Appendix A,B,C), therefore a Kruskal-Wallis test was done for the inferential statistics.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistic

	M	*SD*	Minimum	Maximum
Sexism	2.57	0.37	1.73	3.86
Guilt	4.43	0.72	2	5
Blame Suspect	3.60	0.48	2.50	5
Blame Victim	1.86	0.74	1	4

Inferential statistics

To estimate the relationship between the dependent variables and the moderator Pearson's correlation coefficient (Table 2) was used. The analysis showed that *Sexism* correlated negatively with *Blame of the Suspect* and *Guilt,* yet positively with *Blame of the Victim. Blame of the Victim* shows a negative correlation with *Guilt* as well as *Blame of the Suspect.*

Table 2

Correlation Matrix for the Correlations between Guilt, Sexism, Blame Suspect and Blame Victim

	1	2	3	4
1. Sexism	-			
2. Blame Suspect	-.11	-		
3. Blame Victim	**.31**	-**.49**	-	
4. Guilt	-*.19*	**.45**	-**.58**	-

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

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

Next, a Kruskal-Wallis test was calculated, to see if there are statistical differences between the independent variables and the dependent ones. The overall results of the test can be seen in Table 3, where no significant differences were found among the dependent variables *Guilt* , *Blame of the Suspect* and *Blame of the Victim*. This means that there are no statistically differences of *Guilt* , *Blame of the Suspect* and *Blame of the Victim* across the three different levels of information.

A general linear model with *Blame of the Suspect* and *Blame of the Victim* as independent variable and *Sexism* scores as a continuous predictor was conducted to check for any moderation effects. The results show that there is a negative effect observed of *Sexism* on *Blame of the Suspect* (b = -0.58, SE = 0.23, t = -2.54, p = .01). Whereas there is a positive relationship between *Sexism* and *Blame of the Victim* (b = 0.72, SE = 0.24, t = 3.00, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that *Sexism* positively predicts *Blame of the Victim* and negatively predicts *Blame of the Suspect*. Although, *Sexism* and *Guilt* have a weak negative relationship, the Kruskal-Wallis test indicates no significant differences.

Table 3

Kruskal-Wallis Test general information and test results

	Guilt				Blame Suspect				Blame Victim			
Level of information	No interview	Attacking character	Provocative behaviour	Total	No interview	Attacking character	Provocative behaviour	Total	No interview	Attacking character	Provocative behaviour	Total
N	56	56	56	168	56	56	56	168	56	56	56	168
Mean Rank	79.43	85.54	88.54		83.24	86.86	83.40		85.28	85.49	82.73	
M	4.38	4.43	4.47	4.43	4.00	4.05	4.02	4.03	1.85	1.90	1.83	1.86
SD	0.68	0.77	0.72	0.72	0.70	0.69	0.70	0.05	0.69	0.82	0.73	0.74
Kruskal-Wallis H				1.12				0.20				0.11
df				2				2				2
p				.56				.9				.95

Discussion

This study aimed to test whether the Denial of the Victim arguments consisting of '*attacking character*' and/or '*provocative behaviour*' affect the attribution of blame to the victim. Additionally, the predicting effect of Sexism on the attribution of blame was tested. The main findings of this study were that '*attacking character*' and '*provocative behaviour*' arguments have no significant effect on the attribution of blame. Additional analysis showed that Sexism has a positive effect on the attribution of blame of the victim and a negative effect on the attribution of blame of the suspect.

Effects of '*attacking character*' and '*provocative behaviour*' on Attributions of Blame

The results of this study do not support the assumption that '*provocative behaviour*' minimises the attribution of blame on the suspect and that '*attacking character*' increases the attribution of blame on the suspect. These findings stand in contrast to the findings of Wüller (2021) and Mitic (2023).

Further, it was hypothesized that *attacking character* is more likely to only impact victim attributions. Analysis also shows that there is no impact on victim attribution. This is also a contradiction to the findings of Schmuck et al. (2021). Although there is a small indication that participants assumed victims were not to blame and assumed the suspect guilty, which would partially concur with the findings of Schmuck et al. (2021). Mitic (2023) also shows that Denial of the Victim might even slightly increase attributions. Since there were no affects found between the variables, but other studies did, for example Mitic (2023) and Schmuck et al. (2021), there could be floor effects which would indicate that rather than the theory not being accurate, there are some limitations in this study which influence the results (McHugh, 2014 and Gibbons, 2012). Compared to the afore mentioned studies where Denial of the Victim was not separated into two individual parts and effects were found, the separation could have been a factor here as in it was not done clear enough or with big enough of a differentiation between '*attacking character*' and '*provocative behaviour*'. Therefore, the lack of significant effects could be due to the fact that Denial of the Victim is divided into two arguments instead of keeping them mixed as was done by for example Wüller (2021).

Effect of Sexism

Exploratory moderator analysis has shown that Sexism has a significant effect on the dependent variables. It was found that Sexism can be used to positively predict the attribution of blame of the victim and to negatively predict the attribution of blame of the suspect. This is aided by the findings of Schmuck et al. (2021) which state that participants would not only attribute the blame to the victim when there actually was negative behaviour displayed by them, but also when there were false claims made by the suspect about negative behaviour of the victim. Although, the Ambivalent Sexism Theory differentiates attitudes towards women between hostile and benevolent sexism, Glick & Fiske (1997) argue that the two versions of sexism share common assumptions about attitudes of women. Both forms of sexism assume traditional gender roles for the women and use these as a way to justify patriarchal social structures. This also indicates that sexist beliefs play a role in the attribution of blame. Schomaker's (2024) study supports this assumption. She found large main effects of DoV and sexism, which seemed to be driven by a higher level of hostile sexism in her older, non-student participants. The participants in the current study were mostly in their twenties and therefore, not only living in a society with positive changes to the 'traditional female gender role' but might also be more open to diversity in and between the gender roles. A study by Tóth (2006) for example shows that the behaviour towards women has changed in the last 15 years in Hungary into a more western European way. Boehnke (2011) also measured a shift in the gender role attitude during the last 50 years under aspects such as education, family background and the influence of cultural climate. Scandurra et al. (2017) state that a person's level of sexism is linked to their socio-demographic features. They found out for example that a conservative and religious person scores higher on being sexist than a person that has friends in the LGBTQ community. Therefore, this study, supports past studies that sexism has an influence on the attribution of blame but leaves the degree to which sexism influences blame open.

Limitations

The first limitation that could be seen in this study is, that the participants got written fictive interviews and a fictive case description. This could underestimate the true impact and size of any effect tested in this study. Text often gives not enough information whereas observing such an interview gives verbal and non-verbal cues (Remland, 1994). These additional cues can be used to interpret the heard as well as seen impressions in multiple

layers. Verbal cues can give an idea over the emotional state by different intonations on the voice. Observing the facial expressions can give a hint to the trueness of what is said, depending on if the expressions fit what is currently talked about. Therefore, observing an interview or watching a video of the interview, may show a more realistic and empathic approach to the whole scenario. Remland (1994) also states that attitudes and feeling are more easily visible in nonverbal communication, since people have less control over their nonverbal cues (e.g. widened eyes, nose scrunching) than their verbal communication. A written text is often dry and open to interpretation. The feelings and intentions of a written text are open to the interpretation of each reader. Furthermore, texts are not a good example to accurately reflect real life practice. This study uses a very controlled environment and as a result sacrifices ecological validity. The Amber Heard vs Johnny Depp trial can be used as a good example on how easily people's attribution of blame can be (unconsciously) influenced in an uncontrolled environment. On the other hand, experimental studies can be used for laying the groundwork to see in which way the study could be implemented in the outside world. A text might not give nonverbal cues, but it does build a base line and is open to multiple changes in variables. Since domestic violence and denial of the victim are a sensitive topic to begin with, getting access to interview video material and the allowance to use it in a study is not as easy as creating a fictive interview based on video material. Interviews are also less open for variable manipulation and might, therefore, be only used once.

A second limitation to this study could be the language of the study. The language and country in which the study is done can have an influence on the results. The study was done in English which is for most participants their second if not third language. Denizer (2017) states that a person's mother tongue always interferes with learning a second language regardless which language it is. Asians, for example, have a problem with learning languages through progressive western teaching methods (Biggs ,2003). Not using a non-native language can also lead to a reduction of vocabulary and therefore lead to comprehension problems. While the case scenario as well as the interview scripts were controlled multiple times to leave as little room for multiple interpretations as possible, the language barriers could lead to misunderstanding the written text or interpreting it in multiple possible ways. Additionally, different languages often also mean different countries of origin and cultural background and can therefore influence the manner in which, in this case, control and coercion is regarded. The study was done in the Netherlands where there is, not yet a law against control and coercion. Therefore, the study used the UK as an example, since they have laws against it. Yet, having to imagine rules has a different effect than growing up with certain rules. Societal

control and coercion are more frowned upon in western countries and might, even without laws, have a negative stigma. That negative stigma might be endorsed in countries which also have laws against it. The negative stigma can also have an unconscious effect on the data. Knowing that the negative stigma exists, might lead participants to be not completely truthful while filling in the questionnaires and as a result biases in the study will be created.

Thirdly, as seen by Schomaker (2024) a higher diversity in age could lead to more significant results. A more diverse participating group in terms of age might have as an effect that more heterogenic perceptions of socially acceptable gender roles and - different behaviour towards these roles, such as acceptable and unacceptable, as well as different stages of evolution in these roles and their acceptance of them, would be represented. Since nowadays negative behaviour towards women is more frowned upon and talked about than in earlier generations. Literature to prove this would be by Brünker et al. (2020) and the consequences of the #metoo movement on social media. There is also the possibility of giving socially desired answers. Although the study was anonymous, participants may have been influenced by the fact that it is a sensitive topic to give a more socially desirable response. Thinking of the 'better image' a socially acceptable answer might lead to an influence of the reliability and validity of the study by conceal their real attitude, thoughts and behaviour (Van de Mortel, 2008). While the current study did not control for this phenomenon, future research should.

Conclusion and future research

The goal of this study was to test if splitting denial of the victim arguments into *'provocative behaviour'* and *'attacking character'* has an effect on the attribution of blame towards the suspect and victim. The findings of this study show that there is no significant difference on attribution of blame by splitting denial of the victim arguments into *'provocative behaviour'* and *'attacking character'*. Since there are multiple studies who found an effect between denial of the victim arguments and the attribution of blame, this study has shown that splitting the DoV arguments might limit their effectiveness, therefore, should be used in combination and the focus should lie on other parts of the study. This study has also shown that sexism can be used to predict the shift in the attribution of blame of the suspect and the victim. The focus for future research should therefore not be in differentiating the DoV arguments but focusing on sexism in combination with male behaviour and socially acceptable behaviour. These results could also influence policework and the juridical law, considering that police forces or judges are also influenced by their beliefs and should

therefore be informed of the impact Denial of the Victim arguments can have. Also, in 2019 only 38% of all the police officers in the Netherlands were female. Eisenberg (2010) found that numerous studies state that women generally score higher than men on measures of empathy. Since domestic violence is a sensitive topic researching if female officers have a higher success rate than male officers might be future research idea. Keeping the empathy in mind, doing the study splitted by gender and then comparing the results might also lead to new possibilities of implementing changes in the work field. It might also be interesting for future studies to execute one study in multiple countries, with different laws, and compare results. Since there might be completely different results for the same study when done in countries with a more traditional view of women. Another approach for future research might be manipulating factors which influence the decision making of a person which could lead to a more in depth insight into the decision making process of an individual. For example once with the usage of audio or video material and once with only written materials. By comparing results of a written interview or a video/audio interview nonverbal cues could be integrated in the study.

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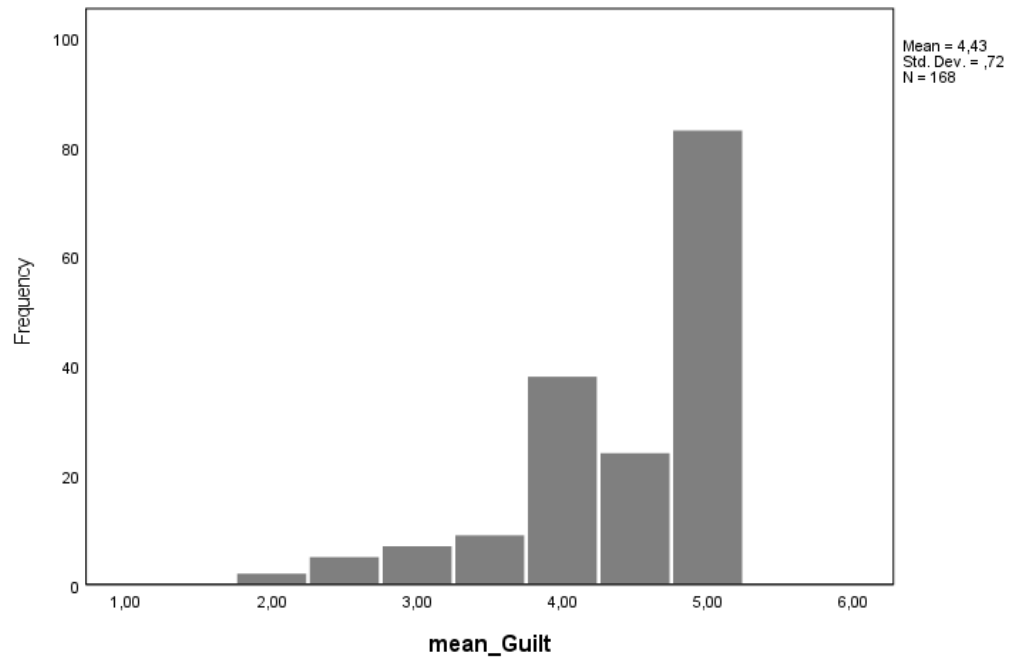
Appendix A

Histogram Blame Suspect
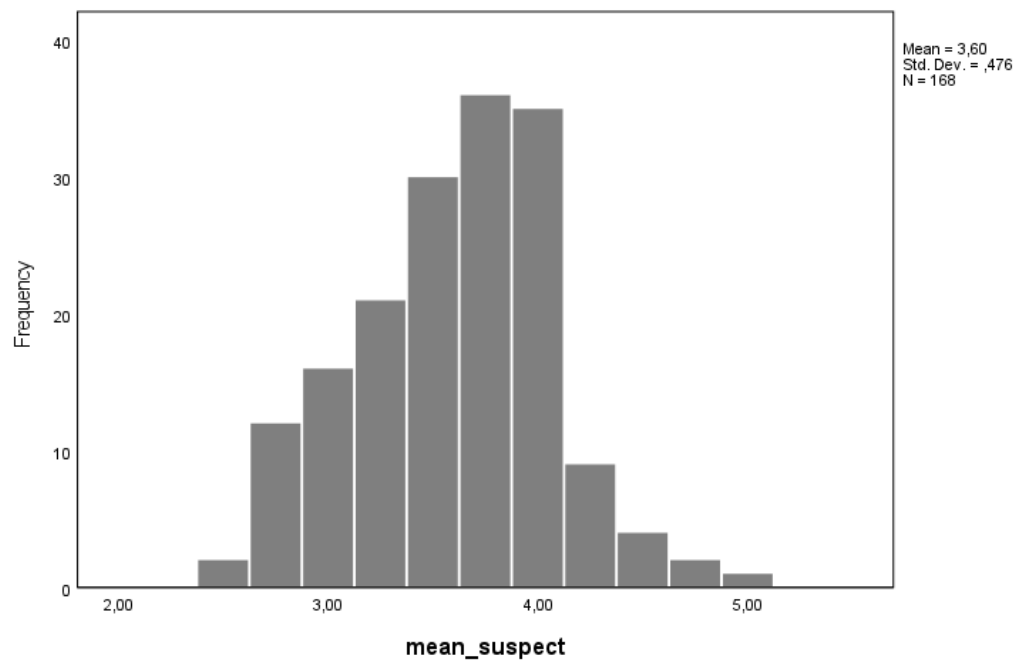
Appendix B

Histogram Blame Victim
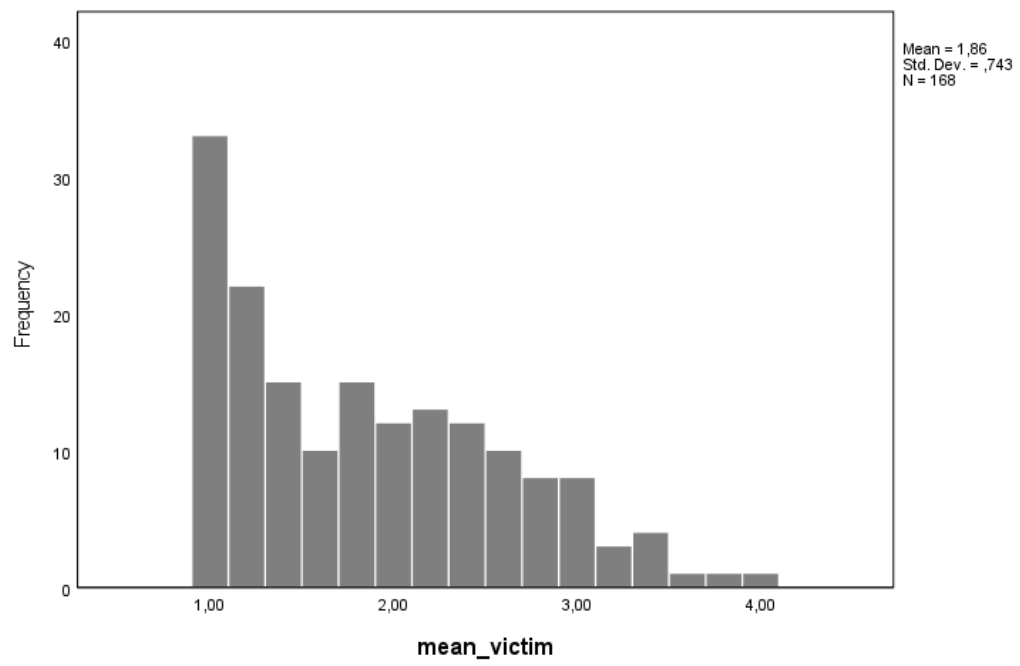
Appendix C

Histogram Sexism
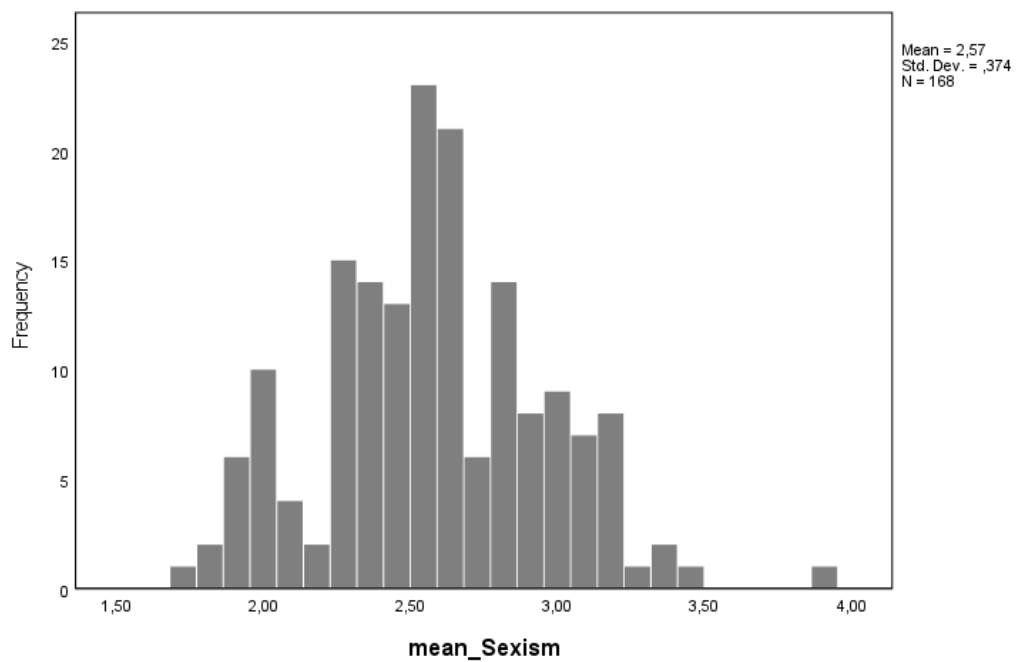
Appendix D

Histogram Guilt

Appendix E

Consent Form, Questionnaire, Case description, Interviews and Debriefing

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Q3
What is the study about?
The goal of this study is to investigate how people think about aspects of control and inter partner violence in intimate relationships.

Am I eligible to take part?
To participate in this study, it is required that you are over the age of 18.

Do I have to take part?
No, it is your decision whether you want to participate in this study or not. You can withdraw from the study at any time without having to explain the reason and without facing any consequences by closing your browser window or tab. If you close your browser before the end of the study, all the data you will have entered will be deleted and you will no longer be included as a participant. However, once you completed the questionnaire, we will not be able to withdraw your data because all data is being collected anonymously.

What will happen when I agree to take part?
If you consent to take part in this study, you will be directed to the questionnaire which will take you approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. The questionnaire starts with some demographic questions which will only ask for basic information to preserve anonymity. Next, you will be asked about some of your personal beliefs. After that, you will read soe information about an alleged case of Control and Coercion in an intimate relationship. After this you will be asked some questions about the case. The descriptions of the relationships might be distressing if you have experienced or witnessed inter partner violence. Please keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers and that we want to know your personal option regarding these topics and not all behaviours described necessarily reflect abusive behaviours.

Risks of taking part
Please keep in mind that the case description and the questions that are being asked are about sensitive topics and that, as a participant, you will be exposed to allegations of controlling relationship behaviour. If you think these descriptions are likely to upset you, please do not start the experiment. If you start the experiment and later do not feel comfortable feel free to stop by closing your browser window. If you need help or want to talk about the subject of inter partner violence you can go to www.verbreekdestilte.nl or call 0900 9999 001.

What will happen to my data and to the results of this study?
This study is being conducted by one psychology master student of the University of Twente and the collected data will be analysed for a master thesis, and might also form the basis for research publications or academic presentations. Any presentation of results will only be done with aggregated data and not data from an individual participant. The data collected in the study will be anonymous. The researcher cannot see who completed the survey and so those with access to the data should also not be able to identify any participants from their personal data. The data will be stored without identifying details and only deidentified information will be shared with anyone outside the research

team. Anonymous data might be made available to the research community in line with the principles of open science. For example, at osf.io. Anonymised data will be stored for at least 10 years in line with the data retention policies for scientific research in the Netherlands.

Contact details
Researcher: Leni Schierjott: l.schierjott@student.utwente.nl
Research supervisor: Steven Watson: s.j.watson@utwente.nl
Ethics Committee: ethicscommittee-cis@utwente.nl

If you want to participate in this study, please read the following statements and give your consent:

 - I confirm that I voluntarily agree to take part in this study and that I am over the age of 18.
- I have read the information provided above and understand the purpose of this study and that it will include discussion of domestic abuse.
- I understand that my data will be collected anonymously and that I should not be   personally identifiable.
- I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time. If you read and understand the statements above and want to consent to take part in this study, then you can click the button at the end of the page.

-----

consent

○ I consent (1)

○ I do not consent (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If   = I do not consent

End of Block: Informed consent

Start of Block: Demographics

Gender Gender

○ Male (1)

○ Female (2)

○ Self-defined (3) _____

○ Prefer not to say (4)

Page Break

Age
Age

You are not allowed to partake in this study if you are younger than 18 years

_____

Skip To: End of Survey If Condition: AgeYou are not allowed to p... Is Less Than 18. Skip To: End of Survey.

Page Break

Nationality Nationality

○ Dutch (1)

○ German (2)

○ Other (3) _____

Page Break

Education Education

◯ Didn't finish Secondary School (1)

◯ High-School Diploma (2)

◯ College Education (3)

◯ Bachelor's Degree (4)

◯ Master's Degree (5)

◯ Other (6) _____

◯ Prefer not to say (7)

Page Break

Relatie **What is your relationship (including dating) experience?**

○ Previously had/ currently in a romantic relationship (1)

○ Never had a romantic relationship (2)

○ Prefer not to say (3)

Skip To: End of Block If What is your relationship (including dating) experience? = Never had a romantic relationship

Skip To: End of Block If What is your relationship (including dating) experience? = Prefer not to say

Page Break

Cheating
Cheating

Have you ever been cheated on by any current or former partner in a romantic relationship? Here we define cheating as engaging in any form of sexual activity with someone that was not a part of your romantic relationship where the sexual activity was not agreed to by you and your partner in advance.

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

○ Prefer not to say (3)

Page Break

cheated on
Cheated on

Have you ever cheated on your partner in a romantic relationship? Here we define cheating as engaging in any form of sexual activity with someone that was not a part of your romantic relationship where the sexual activity was not agreed to by you and your partner in advance.

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

○ Prefer not to say (3)

Sexism
Sexism

Below is a series of statements concerning men and women and their relationships in contemporary

society. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement.
 How much do personally you agree with the following statements:

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

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

There are actually very few women who get a kick out of teasing men by seeming sexually available and then refusing male advances. (18)	○	○	○	○	○
Women, compared to men, tend to have a superior moral sensibility. (19)	○	○	○	○	○
Men should be willing to sacrifice their own well-being in order to provide financially for the women in their lives. (20)	○	○	○	○	○
Feminists are making entirely reasonable demands of men. (21)	○	○	○	○	○
Women, as compared to men, tend to have a more refined sense of culture and good taste. (22)	○	○	○	○	○

End of Block: Ambivalent Sexism

Start of Block: no interview case description

no interv Coercive and controlling behaviours in intimate relationships are a crime in the UK since 2015. The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) prosecutes criminal cases that have been investigated by the police and other investigative organizations in England and Wales. They define the crime as "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 following text will describe an accusation of Control and Coercion. Please take your time to read it carefully as we will ask you questions about it later.

Alleged Offence:

On 07/01/2021 the police received a phone call from Mr Cooper's girlfriend: Miss Miller, alleging that she required immediate help.

Please see Miss Miller's brief description of the events leading up to the police phone call on 07/01/2021:

・Miss Miller alleges that Mr Cooper is a very jealous individual within their relationship and that he regularly accuses her of infidelity.

・Miss Miller accuses Mr Cooper of constantly demanding access to her phone and texts.

・Miss Miller accuses Mr Cooper of frequently preventing her from leaving the house unless he accompanies her.

・Miss Miller accuses Mr Cooper of taking control over aspects of 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 Miss Miller called the police she states that she went to a baby shower of a friend of hers. She believed that Mr Cooper somehow must have managed to track her location to follow her. According to Miss Miller, Mr Cooper approached the house, pushed his way inside and they had a heated argument in which he accused her of infidelity. She said Mr Cooper got very angry and threatened her. She felt very scared, so she called the police.

・This behaviour has been going on for 1 year and upon reflection Miss Miller believes she is the victim of coercive and controlling behaviour.・ Mr Cooper denies that the allegations are true and the investigation is ongoing.

End of Block: no interview case description

Start of Block: interview attacking character

attack

Coercive and controlling behaviours in intimate relationships are a crime in the UK since the end of 2015. The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) prosecutes criminal cases that have been investigated by the police and other investigative organisations in England and Wales. They define the crime as: "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).

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・Miss Miller accuses Mr Cooper of frequently preventing her from leaving the house unless he accompanies her.

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・She also states that he sends her abusive text messages after arguments and whenever she is coming home late. ·

· The night Miss Miller called the police she states that she went to a baby shower of a friend of hers. She believed that Mr Cooper somehow must have managed to track her location to follow her. According to Miss Miller, Mr Cooper approached the house, pushed his way inside and they had a heated argument in which he accused her of infidelity. She said Mr Cooper got very angry and threatened her. She felt very scared, so she called the police.

· This behaviour has been going on for 1 year and upon reflection Miss Miller believes she is the victim of coercive and controlling behaviour. Ms Miller denies having ever been unfaithful and in the course of the investigation, no evidence was found which could indicate that Mr Cooper's accusations have any truth to them.

Page Break

interview The following text will show an interview with Mr Cooper. Please read it carefully as we will ask you some questions about it afterwards.

Police interviewer: Hello, my name is detective constable Johnson, I will be conducting an interview with you today. So, 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 Cooper: 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 Cooper: Er, yeah, I understand that.

Police Interviewer: Good stuff. So, you've been arrested on an allegation of controlling and coercive behaviour against you partner, Mr Cooper. 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 Cooper: We have been going out for just over a year and it was really good at the start. I'd say it was good for the first four months. The only problem is that she's not necessarily the most trustworthy person and lately she changed into being aggressive and evasive. If you ask around you'll hear plenty of people tell you she's not someone to trust with other men around, especially after she's been drinking.

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

Mr Cooper: Most of all her behaviour about her phone. She's so sneaky and I can't ever be sure that she's talking to who she says she's talking to. She doesn't exactly have the best reputation for being faithful or honest.

Police Interviewer: OK, you mentioned before about arguments, did you two argue a lot during the relationship?

Mr Cooper: Yeah, we do and also did in the past because my girlfriend has a hard time understanding what it means to be loyal in a relationship. Ask any of her ex's about that. She doesn't seem to know how relationships should actually work and shows no respect to me or anyone else. She can be really nasty with people when she's in the mood. Trust me when I say that she is snooty as hell and only has eyes for herself and other men. Would you trust someone like that?

Police Interviewer: Can you explain why Miss Miller alleges you take control over aspects of her free time, such as where she can go and for how long?

Mr Cooper: Man, I just told you! She is a cheater. That's just what she is as a person. And she's a liar and I don't see why you would even believe anything she's got to say.

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 7th of January 2021, when you went to the baby shower Miss Miller was at. Please explain in your own words what happened on the evening of that date.

Mr Cooper: She said that it was a baby shower but I didn't feel like I could trust her about that,and of course she isn't the type to respond to texts or calls from a boyfriend. So I decided to use the tracking app I installed on her phone a few days before to check her location and I decided to drive to the location and to see what she was up to. By that time, it was already like 9:30pm and I was already thinking that she was being her usual lying self, so I just went in there. When she answered the door, she looked really flustered and embarrassed and I knew she didn't want to let me in, so I just sort of pushed my way in. I saw multiple men standing in the hall behind her which confirmed she was being her normal unfaithful self. I kept asking "which one is it, which one?" and she was just standing there speechless which shows she doesn't even have enough respect for her partners to talk to them or be honest about what she's doing. Then we had an argument and because she loves to cause drama in front of other people. She just keeps lying and lying to me same as she lies to everyone else and this honestly proves it to me that my suspicion was justified this whole time.

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

Mr Cooper: I don't even know why she called the police. I mean, probably because she loves to cause a scene and get other people in trouble. Nothing is ever her fault. This whole baby shower thing is just the tip of the iceberg and I bet you'll find plenty of people she's got into trouble in the past. I don't know what she's told you, but if you ask around people will tell you that she is a very good actress and that it is better not to believe a word she says. Also, it's not like I check her phone all the time. I only do that because she isn't the sort of person that can be trusted to be honest about who she is talking to.

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

Mr Cooper: I can't remember exactly what I said but I'm sure you can imagine what it is like to be in a relationship with someone like that. You know how it is, I reckon we both probably said quite bad stuff. 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.

Page Break

necessary Please answer the following questions about the case you just read

	Not at all (1)	A little (2)	Somehwat (3)	To a large extent (4)	To a great extent (5)
To what extent did Mr Cooper try to convince the police officer that Miss Miller is a bad person? (1)	○	○	○	○	○
To what extent did Mr Cooper try to convince the police officer that Miss Miller provoked his behaviour? (2)	○	○	○	○	○

End of Block: interview attacking character

Start of Block: interview provoke

provoke
Coercive and controlling behaviours in intimate relationships are a crime in the UK since the end of 2015. The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) prosecutes criminal cases that have been investigated by the police and other investigative organisations in England and Wales. They define the crime as: "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 following text will describe an accusation of Control and Coercion. Please take your time to read it carefully as we will ask you questions about it later.

Alleged Offence: On 07/01/2021 the police received a phone call from Mr Cooper's girlfriend: Miss Miller, alleging that she required immediate help. Please see Miss Miller's brief description of the events leading up to the police phone call on 07/01/2021:
・Miss Miller alleges that Mr Cooper is a very jealous individual within their relationship and that he regularly accuses her of infidelity.
・Miss Miller accuses Mr Cooper of constantly demanding access to her phone and texts.
・Miss Miller accuses Mr Cooper of frequently preventing her from leaving the house unless he accompanies her.
・Miss Miller accuses Mr Cooper of taking control over aspects of 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 Miss Miller called the police she states that she went to a baby shower of a friend of hers. She believed that Mr Cooper somehow must have managed to track her location to follow her. According to Miss Miller, Mr Cooper approached the house, pushed his way inside and they had a heated argument in which he accused her of infidelity. She said Mr Cooper got very angry and threatened her. She felt very scared, so she called the police.

· This behaviour has been going on for 1 year and upon reflection Miss Miller believes she is the victim of coercive and controlling behaviour. Ms Miller denies having ever been unfaithful and in the course of the investigation, no evidence was found which could indicate that Mr Cooper's accusations have any truth to them.

Page Break

interview The following text will show an interview with Mr Cooper. Please read it carefully as we will ask you some questions about it afterwards.

Police interviewer: Hello, my name is detective constable Johnson, I will be conducting an interview with you today. So, 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 Cooper: 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 Cooper: Er, yeah, I understand that.

Police Interviewer: Good stuff. So, you've been arrested on an allegation of controlling and coercive behaviour against you partner, Mr Cooper. 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 Cooper: We have been going out for just over a year and it was really good at the start. I'd say it was good for the first four months. The only problem is that lately she is acting very weird. I mean who goes out dressed like she does when they are in a relationship?! I mean that is just asking for attention. And she won't even tell me where she is going. I mean of course I would find out that she's going to parties where she went and that there were other men at these parties. And do you know what she said about going out dressed like that? She said that "all her friends dress like that"-, what's that got to do with anything? Her friends aren't in relationships so she's just trying to wind me up with arguments like that.

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

Mr Cooper: Most of all her behaviour about her phone. I mean why can't I pick up the call if it says it's her mum? That would only make sense if it wouldn't actually be her mum that's calling, right? And honestly? With her cheating in the past I think her behaviour gives me enough reason when a person I know is calling her and she can't come to the phone at the moment. She makes it so obvious.

Police Interviewer: OK, you mentioned before about arguments, did you two argue a lot during the relationship?

Mr Cooper: Yeah, we do and also did in the past because my girlfriend has a history of going off with other men. This was also when our bigger fights started. We had a massive blowout once because I didn't want her to leave the house. Like a few days ago she's gone out dressed up obviously made me go crazy. So, I tried talking to her normally but she just shouts at me so yeah of course I also start shouting at her. And then she says that I don't believe her and that I am the problem but with her behaviour? How am I meant to respond?

Police Interviewer: Can you explain why Miss Miller alleges you take control over aspects of her free time, such as where she can go and for how long?

Mr Cooper: Man, I just told you! She is a cheater. After all of this bullshit that I had to go through before I just want to know where she is and with whom. I just need to be able to trust her but with her behaviour it's hard. This is actually annoying me talking about it all again.

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 7th of January 2021, when you went to the baby shower Miss Miller was at. Please explain in your own words what happened on the evening of that date.

Mr Cooper: Like I said earlier, she's been getting all dressed up recently and on that night she did it again. The longer she was at this supposed baby shower the more suspicious I got. The baby shower already started during the day. She also wanted to be back at 9pm 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 use the tracking app I installed on her phone a few days before to check her location. I could just feel that there is something off, so I decided to drive to this location. The place I pulled up

at did not look like there was a baby shower going on anymore it was just some house, no cars in front of it or in the driveway. By that time, it was already like 9:30pm and my thoughts were all over the place because I knew she must be cheating on me again. I was annoyed and couldn't wait any longer, so I just went in there. When she answered the door, she looked really flustered and embarrassed and I knew she didn't want to let me in, so I just sort of pushed my way in. I kept asking "where is he, where is he?" and she was just standing 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 in this house including some men. She just keeps lying and lying to me as she promised me before that there weren't any men at this baby shower and this honestly proves it to me that my suspicion was justified this whole time.

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

Mr Cooper: I don't even know why she called the police. I mean she's the one dressing slutty and lying about meeting other men behind my back. Like I said earlier she is acting weird and this whole baby shower thing is just the tip of the iceberg. Also, it's not like I check her phone all the time. I only check her phone when she's acting suspiciously.

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

Mr Cooper: 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 all dressed up and not telling you where she is headed or when she will be back. You know how it is, I reckon we both probably said quite bad stuff but I wouldn't have been saying anything in anger if she hadn't been lying to me and winding me up the whole time. 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.

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necessary? Please answer the following questions about the case you just read

	Not at all (1)	A little (2)	Somehwat (3)	To a large extent (4)	To a great extent (5)
To what extent did Mr Cooper try to convince the police officer that Miss Miller is a bad person? (1)	○	○	○	○	○
To what extent did Mr Cooper try to convince the police officer that Miss Miller provoked his behaviour? (2)	○	○	○	○	○

Attribution

Coercion and control definition: "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). Please complete this questionnaire about the case you have just read. Indicate how much you agree with the following statements about the suspect (Mr Cooper) who has been interviewed.

Based on the evidence provided in the case above, how much do you agree with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
Mr Cooper's behaviour was the reason Miss Miller was feeling distressed. (1)	○	○	○	○	○
Miss Miller is a victim of Control and Coercion in this case. (2)	○	○	○	○	○
Miss Miller provoked Mr Cooper's behaviour. (3)	○	○	○	○	○
Miss Miller asked to be victimized. (4)	○	○	○	○	○
I think Miss Miller is a bad individual. (5)	○	○	○	○	○
Mr Cooper enjoys having control over Miss Miller's life. (6)	○	○	○	○	○
Miss Miller deserved to become a victim of Control and Coercion, because of her behaviour prior to the offence. (7)	○	○	○	○	○
I think Mr Cooper is a good individual. (8)	○	○	○	○	○
Miss Miller played a role in her own victimization. (9)	○	○	○	○	○
I think Mr Cooper is a manipulating individual. (10)	○	○	○	○	○

Guilt **Coercion and control definition**: "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). Please complete this questionnaire about the case you have just read. Indicate how much you agree with the following statements about the suspect (Mr Cooper) who has been interviewed.
 Based on the evidence provided in the case above, how much do you agree with the following statements:

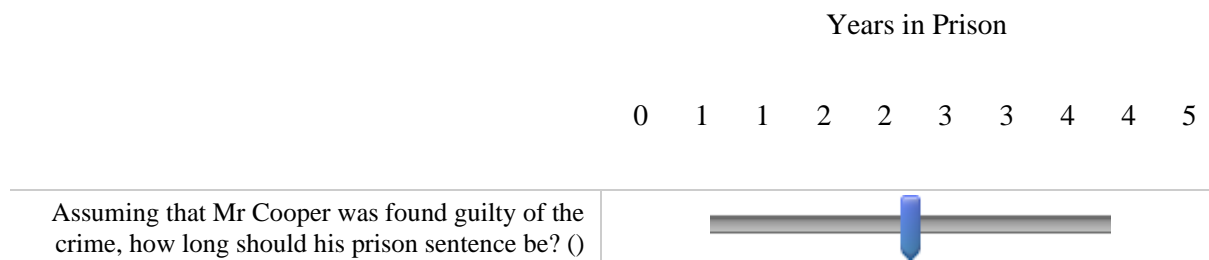|	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
Mr Cooper behaved toward Miss Miller in a way that can be defined as controlling and coercive behaviour. (1)	○	○	○	○	○
I think Mr Cooper is guilty of Control and Coercion. (2)	○	○	○	○	○

Q23
Coercive and Control definition: "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). In the UK, crimes in the context of control and coercion are punishable by a maximum sentence of five years in prison. Five years in prison is for the most serious crimes.

For this question we would like you to disregard whether you believe Mr Cooper is guilty or not, and to answer the question as though he was guilty. In the case Mr Cooper was guilty.
In the case Mr Cooper was guilty, how long of a prison sentence do you feel would be appropriate?

Please select how many years the suspect should be sentenced to jail ranging from 0 to a max of 5 years.

Years in Prison

0   1   1   2   2   3   3   4   4   5

Assuming that Mr Cooper was found guilty of the crime, how long should his prison sentence be? ()	

End of Block: Punishment

Start of Block: End of survey/Summary

End of survey
Thank you for your participation in this research. This data will be used to explore how people attribute blame in cases of Control and Coercion. The behaviour in the case you have read was an example of controlling and coercive behaviour. The case presented in this study was fictional, none of the described behaviour have happened, but similar cases do occur.

Research has found that suspects use a variety of manipulation techniques within police interviews to take their side during disputes. The manipulation technique used in this study is two forms of Denial of the Victim. These forms are 'provocative behaviour' and 'attacking character'. By using arguments going into the direction of one of the two forms, the suspect admits to committing some of the alleged behaviour, but justifies it by arguing that the victim's behaviour was unacceptable and therefore their negative behaviour was an understandable response to the negative behaviour of the victim.
To test whether these techniques have an impact on how people attribute the blame in this case, two versions of the interview were used. Some of the participants were presented with an interview version in which Mr Cooper extensively attacked the character of the victim or an interview version in which Mr Cooper gave the vicimts provocative behaviour as a reason for his actions. Some of the participants were only presented with a case description, to test whether receiving an interview (no justification for the behaviour) has an influence on attribution of blame.

I hope that this study will help to understand how blame is attributed in cases of Control and Coercion.

Now, after your participation in this study, we want to remind you that all your data is collected completely anonymously and confidentially. I am aware that some of the information provided in this survey may be sensitive and might disturb you. If this
study has caused any personal issues for you, I advise you to visit the following website that includes information and support on domestic violence (Control and Coercion) or call the following number:

www.verbreekdestilte.nl or call 0900 9999 001.

If after reading the debriefing about this research you wish to withdraw your participation, please feel free to do so. By closing your browser window this questionnaire will stop and your data will not be saved.
Additionally, feel free to contact the researcher of this study in any case of questions.

Contact details
Researcher: Leni Schierjott: l.schierjott@student.utwente.nl Research supervisor: Steven Watson: s.j.watson@utwente.nl

End of Block: End of survey/Summary