

**Gender Bias in Family Courts: How Does Gender Influence Custody Decisions when
Intimate Partner Violence Is Involved?**

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Abstract

Literature established that family court proceedings in custody disputes lack objectivity, and mothers are disadvantaged in court when raising Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) allegations towards the father. Moreover, case studies have shown that the court tends to give more weight to the father's testimony, and the credibility of the mother decreases when the father makes alienation claims. This study posed a first experimental approach in the literature to confirm prior case studies and literature reviews. Using a novel design, we created a 2 (gender of the parent: male and female) x 3 (IPV Condition: No IPV, IPV Allegation, IPV + Alienation) within-subject design which investigated the effect of the independent variables parent gender and IPV condition on custody decision in favour of the mother, the father, a third party, or shared custody (dependent variable). Six family court case vignettes are provided to each participant, who is then asked to imagine themselves serving as the judge in each scenario. Contrary to previous studies, we found no disadvantage towards mothers, nor a perceived decrease in credibility. Notably, victims, regardless of gender, received a higher credibility rating than the abuser, across conditions. The findings suggest that gender does not appear to be the primary factor influencing this effect. However, we found that the gender of the judge affected custody decisions. Female participants in this study more often assigned sole custody to the mother when she raised IPV allegations, whereas male participants tended to prefer shared custody, regardless of whether IPV was mentioned. Conclusively, this study could not confirm prior case study literature referring to a sole gender bias towards litigants, but suggested that this issue might include underlying mechanisms like the gender of the judge, influencing the custody decisions. Relevant insights for future research are discussed.

Keywords: Family Court, Divorce, Gender Bias, Credibility, Custody Decisions, Sexism

Divorce rates have been rising in the USA and Europe for a number of years (Amato, 2014b). Divorce can occur for various reasons and is often used to resolve failed marriages. Importantly, divorce itself is not necessarily harmful for the people involved. Rather, the possible interparental conflict about custody or legal arrangements may negatively impact children and pose potential challenges to their development in the future (Amato, 2014b). For instance, younger children have a higher risk for lower self-esteem, psychological distress, and academic struggles (Amato, 2000). The cause lies in the immediate environment, evolving from interparental conflict, disputes about custody, or poor parental skills (Leon, 2003). When a decision about custody cannot be made and the child is adversely affected by the divorce process, family courts in Germany have implemented a framework to protect the child and act in the best interests of the child (Bilson & White, 2005). This principle protects children's rights by carefully evaluating the family environment. Relations with parents or siblings are assessed and observed. Moreover, relevant authorities and parties are asked to give a nuanced opinion from their expert's viewpoint. Acting in the best interest of the child was established to protect children from the negative consequences of contested divorce. Moreover, Germany intends to provide preventative interventions to protect children before severe harm occurs.

Preventive interventions comprise the involvement of authorities like the youth authority ("Jugendamt"). To prevent the child from the possible risks of divorce, a strategy that requires authorities to step in before a situation evolves into a crisis was established. If suspicion of child maltreatment rises, the youth authority must assess the situation and bring attention to the court (Hämäläinen et al., 2012). For instance, during the investigation process, potential endangerment in the child's immediate environment and health-related information are assessed and provided by medical professionals to determine whether the parents are adequately caring for their child. According to the "least restrictive" approach, the system favours keeping children with their parents unless there is a significant risk to their well-

being, such as neglecting the child's needs or abuse by the parents. Almost 50% of child maltreatment investigations resulted in serious cases, which led to court involvement, with child neglect being the most prevalent (Destatis, 2022, August 22).

When the court gets involved in the discourse, judges commission psychologists and legal professionals to receive a nuanced understanding of the family situation. The experts will analyse the family dynamic, the interaction between the parents and the child, and conduct psychological tests. One example of a psychological test is the Parental Image Questionnaire for Children and Adolescents ("Elternbildfragebogen für Kinder und Jugendliche"). This questionnaire provides insights into children's perceptions of their parents. The test helps the psychologist to understand the relationship between parent and child better and identify risks that are a possible threat to the child. The judge receives the final examination report, which includes the psychologists' evaluation based on tests conducted with the family and a recommendation aligned with the child's best interests. The judge will then decide whether to follow the report or take an alternative approach. Gudjonsson et al. (2010) found that the majority of the judges (78%) in Iceland followed the psychological examination report, as they argued that the judges trust the expertise of the psychologists. Moreover, Chorn and Kovera (2019) found that 89% of judges blindly follow the suggestions of experts without questioning their reliability. The reason lies in the fact that the judges are not properly trained to identify unreliable evidence or flaws in the psychological report.

A well-known and influential case in which blind acceptance of these reports has led to severe consequences was the case of Norbert Kuss (OLG Saarbrücken, 2017). He was falsely sentenced to 683 days in prison due to a flawed psychological assessment. The methodological errors went unnoticed by judges until a new expert re-evaluated the case. This case shows that decisions are complex, pose risks of misjudgment and require a high level of objectivity and neutrality of the judges. However, literature established that judges can be

biased towards litigants (Breger, 2013; Ross-Plourde et al., 2021). There are two forms of biases. Explicit biases are conscious beliefs or attitudes, while implicit biases operate unconsciously, influencing thoughts and actions without awareness (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). In the legal setting, the implicit bias often operates through extralegal factors. That means, factors that are not associated with legal frameworks influence the court process of decision-making. Such factors include racial, attractiveness, or personal characteristics. For instance, black people are sentenced more harshly in court when committing a crime than white people (Eberhardt et al., 2004). Similarly, Goodman-Delahunty and Sporer (2009) found that attractive people receive less punishment than unattractive people. In the context of the family court, the characteristics of the parent, like emotionality, caring ability, or relationship with the other parent, can play a crucial role (Wallace & Koerner, 2003). Gender bias, another form of implicit bias, leads to an unconscious preference for one gender, often resulting in favourable treatment. In contrast to these factors that could change as the case progresses, gender is a fixed characteristic that can subtly affect how parents are viewed and handled in court.

Gender bias in court

According to the Implicit Social Cognition Theory by Greenwald and Banaji (1995), implicit gender bias occurs because of repeated exposure to such stereotypes. In other words, the more often we hear the association between “mother and nurturing” or “men and strong”, the more deeply it becomes embedded in our brain and our unconscious processing. Through media or historical predisposition, gender roles have been set in the public opinion (Ward & Grower, 2020). For instance, when seeing repeatedly advertisements of cooking utensils used by women, unconsciously we process a shortcut connection “women + cooking”. On the other hand, for example, men who are advertised on television as strong fighters are then unconsciously processed in the shortcut “men + fight”. These embedded shortcuts, also called heuristics, are helpful in other areas of life, such as fast decision making in stressful

situations, but can pose illegitimate biases that are reinforced by media, outdated and unreachable standards (Ward & Grower, 2020). Implicit Social Cognition Theory explains why individuals are perceived and treated in a particular way, often in ways that are unfair and unbalanced towards other parties. In family court proceedings, these implicit biases towards litigants can affect the judge's decision.

In court, mothers face higher expectations in their parental role than fathers (Breger, 2013). Judges frequently compare mothers to the "ideal mother" stereotype in court. According to Mottarella et al. (2008), the ideal mother is a stay-at-home mother who is devoted and compassionate. She is criticised by society for choosing to pursue a career or further education after becoming a parent. Mothers are subjected to this strict categorisation more frequently than fathers (Ross-Plourde et al., 2021). When mothers make a mistake, judges punish them more severely than when fathers make the same error. For example, Walzer and Czopp (2011) conducted a study involving a scenario where a parent left their child in a hot car. Their findings showed that mothers received harsher judgments than fathers. Notably, male participants tended to impose stricter penalties on mothers compared to fathers. The study further showed that male participants perceived mothers as less capable of caregiving, even when mothers made the same mistake as fathers. These results highlight differing societal expectations, especially among male individuals, regarding mothers' roles.

There are a multitude of reasons why women are often disadvantaged in court. Existing literature has investigated factors such as emotionality, unconscious association, or personality attributes (Brandt, 2021; Lens et al., 2013; Zaccour, 2018). All of these subject areas can influence judges decisions which warrants a comprehensive review. An example of parental standards discrepancies was shown by Deutsch and Saxon (1998). According to them, men were more appreciated for taking care of their children than mothers, while mothers were criticised more for working full-time. These expectations not only affect

societal views but may also influence the outcomes of legal proceedings, especially in custody cases.

Moreover, Hardesty et al. (2015) found that in custody disputes, changes in custody were not justified by the nature of the violence, but rather by the characteristics of the mother. Having a pleasant and controlled disposition revealed a positive effect, and more credibility was attributed to the mother, while a hostile disposition decreased credibility. Landström et al. (2018) found similar results but attributed it to the fact that the emotional response failed to elicit compassion in the receiver. Mothers in courtrooms, for instance, could still experience the aftermath of the experienced violence and seem distressed or overwhelmed with emotions. This emotional response could be misinterpreted by the judge and, therefore, categorised as not credible (Brandt, 2021).

Lens et al. (2013) studied the (in)effectiveness of emotions in court. Whether emotionality is advantageous or not depends on the evaluator's perception of the evaluator about the severity and response to the crime. For instance, if a crime is perceived to be severe, it is responded to with intense emotional expression, and the victim is perceived as more believable. However, if the victim responds with high emotion to a low perceived severity of the crime, the victim appears less credible. In the context of custody disputes, judges could evaluate the severity of the crime as moderate, but the emotional response of the mother could discredit her, as it does not match the expectation of the judge.

Judges use biased views of women's emotions to justify custody decisions that undermine the credibility of the mother. The study by Zaccour (2018) showed that judges' views on women, more specifically on mothers, become apparent in their choice of words. They found that men (fathers and lawyers) in custody cases often use psychiatric labels such as "hysterical" or "crazy" to describe mothers. These labels promote gender bias further because they affect the testimony of the mothers in court. When someone is stamped as hysterical, their credibility decreases. A mother is disbelieved when she raises allegations of

abuse by the father, especially if she appears emotionally overwhelmed while discussing the matter (Zaccour, 2018). Often, fathers discredit the mother to cover up their abuse. This credibility dilemma becomes especially problematic in custody cases involving Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), where allegations made by mothers are not only dismissed but used against them in court.

Intimate Partner Violence

Brandt (2021) highlights the presence of biases against mothers in legal discussions, especially in cases involving Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). IPV refers to physical, sexual, or emotional harm inflicted on a partner in a relationship (Stewart et al., 2013). According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), 35% of women worldwide experience IPV (Jenabi & Khazaei, 2018). Mothers who bring IPV allegations to the court are frequently viewed as unreliable, and their claims are dismissed, even when evidence is in favour of them (Dragiewicz, 2010). This response highlights underlying gender biases and sexist stereotypes that depict women as overly emotional or exaggerating, while portraying men as more rational and credible by default. As a result, sole custody may be granted to the abusive parent, leading to harmful consequences (Silberg & Dallam, 2019).

Fathers are more responsible for abusive behaviours, and partners who engage in IPV are 40% more likely to abuse their children (Dixon et al., 2007). Serious physical and psychological problems in the child can be the result of this abuse. According to Dixon et al. (2007), maltreated children may behave violently toward their future children and relationships. According to Silberg and Dallam's (2019) research, 88% of the children in the study said that the parent continued to abuse them after the custody dispute was resolved. According to these findings, courts could act negligently and place children at risk when they overlook or fail to identify such dangers posed by an abusive parent.

Alienation

Parental alienation is defined by Harman et al. (2019) as one parent's potential to harm the relationship between the other parent and their child. For instance, trying to limit contact with the other parent could be considered alienating behaviour. It poses a threat to 1% of children in the US and is acknowledged as a risk in family conflicts (Bernet et al., 2010b). Here, the parent who is accused of IPV will make an effort to prove to the child that they have been hurt by the other parent, although this might not have been true. The parent uses alienation claims in an attempt to influence the final custody decision. Research by Meier & Dickson (2017) shows that fathers are responsible for initiating 82% of alienation claims. Additionally, fathers' allegations tend to be more successful than those made by mothers. In fact, about 33% of mothers lose custody when fathers' alienation claims are accepted, even in the absence of evidence (Birchall & Choudhry, 2021). According to research (Meier, 2020), this strategy was effective in court, particularly when the mother made IPV claims, since judges were more likely to accept the father's claims of alienation than the mother's claims of violence.

A potential explanation for why fathers are more successful when making parental alienation claims lies in their use of manipulative strategies to affect the credibility of the other parent. Watson et al. (2024) found that coercive individuals often use psychological manipulation during investigative interviews. Such behaviours like tactics to discredit the accuser are defined under the term DARVO, which means Deny, Attack, and Reverse Victim and Offender. This is a strategy in which the perpetrator denies the accusation, attacks the accuser and repositions themselves as the victim. These manipulation techniques are further reinforced when people are sexist. Higher sexism changes the perception of how blame and guilt are assigned. For instance, Orywahl (2024) found that people who strongly adhere to traditional gender roles are less likely to blame male perpetrators. In the family court context, a father accused of IPV may employ DARVO by denying the abuse, questioning the mother's mental stability and reframe the situation as he is the victim of parental alienation. Moreover,

judges with higher sexism could then blame the father less, which decreases the credibility of the mother. When judges are not trained to detect the manipulation, these tactics can impact judges' reasoning and result in a custody decision far from the best interest of the child.

Research gap

Research has so far established that gender bias towards mothers in family court exists and that mothers are disadvantaged in court when they raise IPV allegations (Dragiewicz, 2010). Moreover, they are less believed, because they are perceived as “hysterical” and “overexaggerating” (Zaccour, 2018). When fathers claim an alienation attempt of the mother as a response to the IPV allegations, the father receives custody despite abusive behaviour (Meier, 2020). However, these papers identifying the disadvantages of women are solely based on case studies and literature reviews (Hunter & Melville, 2001). Case studies do give rich information, as they use real-world scenarios and data, reinforcing ecological validity. Nevertheless, they do not cover a broad sample, nor can they be generalised to other phenomena of sexism or gender bias, as they are specific in their nature and are limited to one instance. Causal relationships can not be identified, which makes it difficult to understand the underlying bias and create interventions to mitigate it. It is not possible to replicate the case studies, and therefore, it is not possible to prove whether these effects actually occur. Therefore, researchers call for the need for experimental studies that actively manipulate variables to trigger implicit biases (Martínez-Baquero & Vallejo-Medina, 2024; Silberg et al., 2013). This study aims to investigate the relationship between IPV and alienation within the family court process. Research has shown that mothers are at a disadvantage in court when they accuse the father of IPV, and that family court proceedings in custody disputes are biased (Dragiewicz, 2010; Meier, 2020). Furthermore, case studies have demonstrated that when the father makes accusations of alienation, the court will give greater weight to his testimony, and the mother's credibility would decline (Zaccour, 2018). Therefore, the research question evolves: *How does the gender of the parent influence the judges' decision to award custody*

when *Intimate Partner Violence and Alienation claims* are involved? The following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: *Mothers are less likely to be perceived as credible when they make IPV allegations than fathers.* As mothers are seen as “hysterical” and “overexaggerating”, their testimony is given less credibility than fathers, who appear more content and emotionally stable than mothers (Zaccour, 2018).

H1B: *Higher scores on the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory and Ambivalence towards Men Inventory predict the credibility ratings of the parents.* Hostile sexism may cause mothers’ IPV allegations to be dismissed, because hostile sexism towards women includes beliefs that women are manipulative or prone to exaggeration, which can undermine the credibility of mothers’ IPV allegations. Benevolent views of men may reinforce the perception of fathers as stable and truthful.

H2: *When women raise IPV allegations and the father uses alienation claims, it is more likely that the custody will be awarded to the father.* Fathers’ claims will be given more weight because of the underlying implicit gender bias against mothers (Birchall & Choudhry, 2021).

H2B: *Higher scores on the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory and Ambivalence towards Men Inventory predict the custody decision.* As a follow-up to Hypothesis 2, we predict that higher sexism scores towards women influence the custody decision in favour of the father. This is because sexist attitudes may lead to mothers being perceived as overly emotional and not being able to protect the child, thus giving more weight to fathers’ alienation claims (Meier, 2009).

Methods

Design

The study is a 2 (Parent Gender: Mother vs. Father) \times 3 (IPV Condition: No IPV, IPV Allegation, IPV + Alienation) within-subject design which investigated the relationship between the gender of the parent (independent variable) and the custody decision towards the mother, the father, a third party, or shared custody (dependent variable). Additionally, Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) served as a second manipulated independent variable. This results in six conditions, each represented by a specific vignette within the narrative of a family court case.

Participants

A total of 137 participants started this online study. Of these participants, 53 did not complete the entire study, resulting in incomplete data for some vignettes. Only participants who completed the study were included in the final analysis. The final sample of 84 participants, including 57 women, 35 men, and 2 non-binary individuals, aged between 18 and 49, was recruited ($M = 22$, $SD = 3.87$). The majority were of German nationality (German: 51, Dutch: 20, Other: 13). Participants were recruited through advertisements on social media and the researchers' network. If eligible, participants from the University of Twente could receive SONA points in return for their participation. SONA is a system used at the University of Twente that allows students to participate in studies and earn SONA points, which are required for graduation. To reach a broader pool of participants, this study was also shared on platforms like SurveySwap and SurveyCircle, where researchers exchange studies to increase participation. The inclusion criteria required participants to be at least 18 years old and to have sufficient proficiency in English or German, as the Survey was available in both languages. Sufficient refers to the ability to understand and answer the questionnaire without difficulties. The research was approved by the Humanities & Social Sciences (HSS) Ethics Committee with the reference number 250355.

Materials

Vignettes

Six case vignettes were developed to represent different experimental conditions (see Appendix A). The vignettes covered a baseline story, which gave information about the parents' and children's age and hobbies, and a story about how the parents met. Moreover, information about the divorce was given, for instance, that because of ongoing problems, the mother/father decided to divorce. All six vignettes stated that the Child Protection Service (CPS) had visited both parents' homes and found them to be tidy and safe. It was also mentioned that both parents lived an equal distance from each other and from the child's school. This was done to make the vignettes comparable to each other and to control for external factors that could influence custody decisions, such as living conditions or proximity to school. In the manipulated vignettes, additional information relevant to the manipulation was given. In Condition Victim-Mother, the mother initiated the divorce and reported abuse by the father. An example of an abusive allegation was, for instance, pushing, leaving bruises, or bite marks. Building on that, Condition Victim-Mother + Alienation was identical but included an additional parental alienation claim made by the father in response to the mother's abuse allegation. An example of an alienation claim was, for instance, an attempt to limit the other parent's contact with the child or the allegation that abuse accusations were strategically made to gain sole custody. Condition Control-Mother and Control-Father served as control vignettes, each involving a divorce initiated by either the mother or the father, without any claims of abuse or alienation. In the Victim-Father Condition, the father reported abuse by the mother. Condition Victim-Father + Alienation included the same abuse allegation, with the addition of an alienation claim by the mother, in response to the father's allegation of IPV.

Custody Decision

After reading each vignette carefully, participants were asked to indicate through a multiple-choice question to whom they would assign custody: to the mother, the father, a third party, or shared custody. In a text box, they could evaluate and explain their decision. In

addition, they were asked to assess, on a 5-point Likert scale, how credible (1 = extremely uncredible to 5 = extremely credible), sympathetic (1 = extremely unsympathetic to 5 = extremely sympathetic), and capable of caring for the child (1 = very poor to 5 = excellent) they perceived each parent to be.

Sexism Scales

This study employs two measures of sexist attitudes. The first is the Ambivalence Sexism Inventory (ASI), which assesses statements reflecting ambivalent attitudes towards women (see Appendix B) (Glick & Fiske, 1996). The second is the Ambivalence Towards Men Inventory (AMI), which evaluates similar attitudes toward men (see Appendix B) (Glick & Fiske, 1999). I selected this comprehensive approach to ensure a balanced assessment and reduce potential bias introduced by the statements. Given that the study is a within-subjects design, it is also important to consider objectives that serve as counterpoints to the primary hypothesis, such as examining attitudes related to attitudes towards the father.

Ambivalence Sexism Inventory (ASI). In this study, the short version of the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) was utilised to assess benevolent and hostile sexism towards women (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Benevolent sexism reflects traditional, idealised views of women as nurturing and in need of male protection (e.g., Q2: *Women should be cherished and protected by men*), while hostile sexism assesses negative attitudes towards female dominance (e.g., Q3: *Women seek to gain power by getting control over men*). The scale consists of 12 items, with six measuring benevolent sexism and six measuring hostile sexism, and participants responded using a 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Furthermore, Cronbach's Alpha indicated a reliability of the ASI scale with $\alpha = 0.86$, with the ASI Hostile subscale $\alpha = 0.88$ indicating good reliability among items (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). However, the ASI Benevolent subscale showed a rather moderate reliability of $\alpha = 0.67$. This could indicate that the Benevolent items of sexism towards women are not as strongly related as the Hostile items.

Ambivalence Towards Men Inventory (AMI). The short version of the Ambivalence Towards Men Inventory (AMI) was utilised to assess benevolent and hostile sexism towards men (Glick & Fiske, 1999). Benevolent sexism means the stereotypes about the ideal, financially stable, and protective male (e.g. Q3: *Every woman needs a male partner who will cherish her.*), while the hostile sexism describes the patriarchy and the advantaged and abusive positions man might use (e.g. Q2: *When men act to “help” women, they are often trying to prove they are better than women.*). It included 12 items, six of benevolent sexism and six of hostile sexism, and participants were asked to answer these questions on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). This questionnaire was used in the context of this study because it not only measures discriminatory gender bias but also reinforces men-advantaged bias, which sometimes seems to be an underlying catalyst for implicit gender bias. Furthermore, Cronbach’s Alpha indicated a reliability of the AMI scale with $\alpha = 0.76$, with the AMI Hostile subscale $\alpha = 0.79$ and AMI Benevolent subscale $\alpha = 0.78$, indicating acceptable reliability (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

Procedure

The link that was sent by email or is on SONA allows the participant to access the study. The participant first read the study details and was then asked to provide informed consent. The participant was informed that he is allowed to withdraw from the study at any moment. As the case vignettes describe the sensitive topic of IPV, a trigger warning was given before proceeding with the study and relevant contact information was provided by the researcher. The true purpose of investigating implicit gender bias was not revealed to reduce the risk of socially desired responses. To ensure this, a cover story about judicial case load was introduced, and participants were asked to fill out questions about case fatigue. The cover story described how judges might feel fatigued and overworked when dealing with custody decisions, and that this is the aim of the study. To take order effects into consideration, the six vignettes were then presented in a randomised order. The participant was instructed to put

themselves in the judge's perspective. The participant must choose whether the custody decision applies to the mother, the father, shared custody or a third party after each scenario. The participant was asked to provide more details about their decision in an open-ended question. After that, questions about the perceived credibility, sympathy and caring ability of the mother and the father were assessed. Moreover, the attention check was applied, in which the participant needed to select one or multiple statements about the specific vignette. Two of the three statements were correct, and if the participant chose one of the correct statements, the attention check was successful. For example, one case vignette described the case of Taylor from Munich, whose father enjoys photography and art. The options were: *The child's name is Taylor*; *The child is from Munich*; *The father enjoys swimming*. In this case, the last option would be the wrong option. If they had selected the incorrect option, participants' explanation in the open-ended response box was evaluated to check whether the error occurred because of not carefully reading the details or because of rushing through the answers. If the latter is the case and inattention was observed (e.g., nonsensical entries like = 'kdfnv'), the participant was excluded from the dataset to ensure data quality. After reading and rating all case vignettes, the short versions of the ASI and AMI were presented. The questionnaires were presented at the end to avoid revealing the aim of the study to the participants. Finally, demographics, including questions about gender, age, experiences with or witnessing IPV, and whether the participants' parents are still together, divorced, or separated, were asked. After that, the participants were reminded that they could withdraw at any time and request that their data be deleted by contacting the researcher. Additionally, the researcher's contact information and hotlines/websites for victims of intimate partner violence were provided to participants in case they felt stressed or uneasy throughout the study.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis

An attention check was conducted, and participants who failed to select at least one correct answer out of the three possible options were excluded. To test the first hypothesis, an assumption test for the repeated measure ANOVA was run for linearity, homoscedasticity, normality, sphericity and independence was conducted to ensure the validity of the analysis. If one of the assumptions was violated, a non-parametric test, namely Friedman's test, was run. Similar to the ANOVA, it measures effects in a repeated within-subject design, which is given in the present study, where the six conditions are examined by every participant. To examine the effects of the vignettes on *credibility*, a repeated measures ANOVA was performed, allowing for a comparison of differences between the manipulated conditions in credibility scores. When the ANOVA provided a significant result, a simple effects analysis with Bonferroni-adjusted pairwise comparisons was run to assess parent-specific credibility differences within each condition. Hypothesis 1B was tested using a linear regression model, as the outcome variable, *credibility*, is a continuous variable. To test the second hypothesis, the data were coded into binary variables (Father and Other), and chi-square tests were performed. The chi-square test was used because the dependent variable, *custody decision*, is categorical with the levels mother, father, shared custody, and third party. The purpose of the test was to investigate whether the control condition and experimental condition significantly differ. More specifically, the chi-square test allows to assess if the observed values differ from the expected values according to hypothesis 2. The ASI and AMI scores prediction towards custody decision was analysed using a mixed effects regression model, as the outcome variable *custody decision* is coded binary (father, other). This analysis investigated whether participants with higher sexism scores were more likely to assign custody to the father.

Qualitative Analysis

Participants expanded their explanation of the custody decision in a text box after the custody decision. The qualitative analysis aimed to emphasise the findings of the quantitative analysis and provide richer information about the participants' reasoning. I reviewed the first

12 participants’ responses across conditions to identify recurring ideas and patterns. Based on this review, codes were developed to reflect key concepts mentioned across responses and conditions. The codes described general themes that were associated with the participants’ answers. The coding was done with ATLAS.ti (ATLAS.ti Scientific Software Development GmbH, 2025).

Exploratory Analysis

Chi-square tests were used to analyse whether female and male participants differed in their custody decisions across all six vignettes. The sample consists of more females (57) than males (35). All participants were included in the analysis since chi-square accounts for these group differences by calculating expected frequencies.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The distribution of custody decisions varied across the conditions (see Table 1). In both control groups, where no allegations of abuse were made, participants chose shared custody the most (98%). However, if the mother raised allegations of abuse, sole custody was given to the mother in 38% of the participants. When alienation claims were involved, the percentage of sole custody to the mother dropped slightly, and shared custody was chosen the most, with 45%. When the father made abuse allegations towards the mother, most custody was given to the father (52%). When alienation claims were involved, sole custody for the father was more than halved and shared custody was the most prevalent choice (55%).

Table 1

Total Numbers of Custody Decision across Conditions (N = 84)

	Mother	Father	Third Party	Shared Custody

Control Mother	1	1	0	82
Control-Father	2	1	0	80
Victim-Mother	32	0	20	32
Victim-Mother + Alienation	30	3	13	38
Victim-Father	0	44	8	32
Victim-Father + Alienation	5	20	13	46

An overview of the ASI and AMI scores can be found in Table 2. The ASI total scores were mostly normally distributed but showed a slight positive skew, indicating a potential floor effect. That suggests that more participants reported lower levels of sexism scores toward women. The AMI was normally distributed and showed no signs of floor/ceiling effects. ASI and AMI total scores were positively correlated, $r(82) = .70, p < .001$. Among the subscales, AMI Benevolent and ASI Hostile were strongly correlated, $r(82) = .77, p < .001$, whereas AMI Hostile and AMI Benevolent subscales showed only a weak relationship, $r(82) = .13, p = .23$.

Table 2

Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations of the Scores on ASI and AMI Scales

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	ASI	ASI- H	ASI- B	AMI	AMI- H	AMI- B	Credibility M
ASI	2.24	0.69							
ASI-H	1.91	0.84	.92						
ASI-B	2.58	0.70	.88	.61					
AMI	2.51	0.62	.70	.59	.68				

AMI-H	2.80	0.85	.26	.13	.36	.77			
AMI-B	2.21	0.80	.81	.77	.68	.74	.13		
CredibilityM	3.38	0.47	-.25	-.27	-.17	-.20	-.05	-.26	
CredibilityF	3.31	0.38	-.07	-.04	-.08	-.07	-.08	-.03	.68

Note. $N = 84$. Correlations with $p < .05$ are in bold. ASI = Ambivalent Sexism Inventory;

ASI-H = ASI Hostile subscale; ASI-B = ASI Benevolent subscale; AMI = Ambivalence

Toward Men Inventory; AMI-H = AMI Hostile subscale; AMI-B = AMI Benevolent subscale;

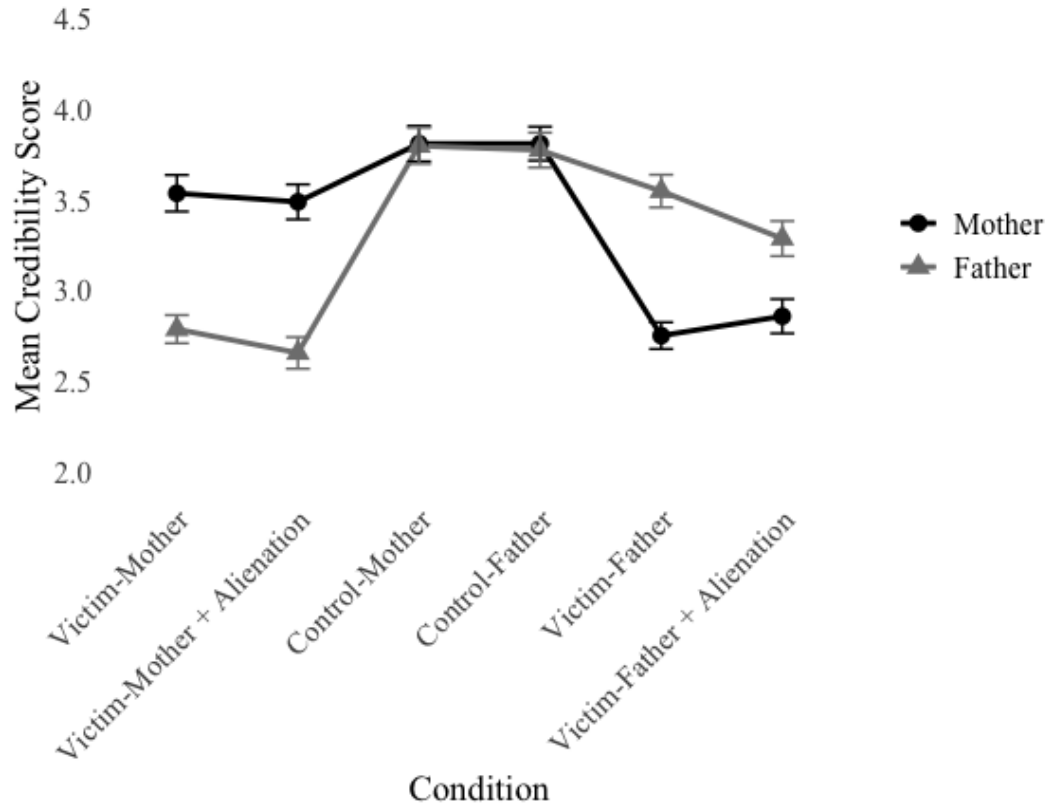
CredibilityM = mean credibility of all conditions of mother; CredibilityF = mean credibility of all conditions of father.

Credibility

As shown in Figure 1, credibility scores were highest for both parents in Control-Mother and Control-Father. The mean credibility scores varied between parents depending on the condition. In Conditions Victim-Mother and Victim-Mother + Alienation, the mother was rated as more credible, while in Conditions Victim-Father and Victim-Father + Alienation, the father had higher credibility. Notably, credibility was higher for parents raising allegations of violence.

Figure 1

Credibility Scores among Conditions for Father and Mother



The first hypothesis: “*Mothers are less likely to be perceived as credible when they make IPV allegations than fathers.*”, was tested using a 2 (Credibility Score Parent: mother vs. father) and 3 (IPV Condition: No IPV, IPV Allegation, IPV + Alienation) repeated measure ANOVA to see how credibility ratings differed depending on the gender of the parent and the condition. No significant main effect was found for the effect of gender of the parent on credibility scores, $F(1, 1003) = 1.38, p = .24, \eta_p^2 < .001$. Moreover, no main effect was found for the effect of IPV Condition on credibility scores, $F(1, 1003) = 0.15, p = .70, \eta_p^2 = .001$. However, a significant interaction effect of the gender of the parent and the IPV Condition was found $F(1, 1003) = 83.62, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .08$, indicating that credibility ratings differed between mothers and fathers depending on the IPV condition presented.

To test where the difference in the condition lies, a simple effects analysis with Bonferroni-adjusted pairwise comparisons was conducted. In the Victim-Mother Condition, participants rated the mother as significantly more credible ($M = 3.54, SD = 0.92$) than the

father ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 0.71$), $\beta = 0.79$, $SE = 0.26$, $t(984) = 3.00$, $p = .003$ (for the full output see Appendix C). Hypothesis 1 is rejected, as fathers, rather than mothers, are perceived as less credible when the mother raises IPV allegations.

Hypothesis 1B: “*Higher scores on the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory and Ambivalence towards Men Inventory predict the credibility ratings of the parents.*”, was tested with a linear mixed effects regression model. Neither scores on the ASI, $b = -0.08$, $SE = 0.09$, $t(81) = -0.95$, $p = .35$, nor scores on the AMI, $b = -0.03$, $SE = 0.10$, $t(81) = -0.36$, $p = .72$ were predictors for the credibility ratings (for the full output see Appendix D). In other words, sexist attitudes towards women and men did not influence the credibility ratings of the father or the mother. Therefore, Hypothesis 1B can be rejected.

Custody Decision

To test the second hypothesis: “*When women raise IPV allegations and the father uses alienation claims, it is more likely that the custody will be awarded to the father.*”, a series of Chi-square tests were performed to analyze if participants custody decisions differ across conditions, and if the father is at an advantage. Victim-Mother and Victim-Mother + Alienation showed no significant difference in custody decisions ($p = .24$, $X^2 = 1.36$, $df = 1$). Moreover, no significant difference was found between Victim-Mother + Alienation and Control-Mother ($p = .61$, $X^2 = 0.28$, $df = 1$). In other words, the alienation claims of the father did not seem to influence the decision of the participant in favour of the father. Therefore, the hypothesis can be rejected.

Hypothesis 2B: “*Higher scores on the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory and Ambivalence towards Men Inventory predict the custody decision.*”, was tested with a logistic mixed effects regression analysis, with custody decisions coded as 1 for decisions in favour of the father and 0 for all other outcomes (mother, shared custody, and third party). This coding was done to test whether participants with higher sexist scores would favour the father over other options. Neither scores on the ASI, $b = -0.02$, $SE = 0.41$, $z = -0.06$, $p = .96$, nor scores on the AMI, $b =$

0.37, $SE = 0.46$, $z = .81$, $p = .42$, showed a significant effect on the custody decision. In other words, higher levels of sexist scores did not predict an increased likelihood of favouring the father over other custody options. It can be concluded that Hypothesis 2B can be rejected.

Qualitative Analysis

In total, 13 codes grouped into three categories were established. The first code category, *Maltreatment of Child*, explores the reason for the participants' custody regarding children's safety and possible abuse. This category includes three codes: *inability/lack of care*, *safe environment for child*, and *source of symptoms*. They describe when participants argued that the parents will or will not receive custody because of their inability to take care of the child, because the child is not safe in the parent's presence, or because the child exhibits signs of distress linked to the family court situation. Participants indicated that abusive behaviour of the parents leads the child to be in an unsafe environment, and therefore that abusive parent should not be granted sole custody. The total frequency of quotes in this category was observed in Condition Victim-Mother with 27 quotes, with *inability/lack of care* most often rated with 14 quotes. This suggests that participants were concerned about the child's well-being when the father was the accused abuser, which is reflected in the fact that no participant awarded sole custody to the father in this condition.

The second code category was *Parental Characteristics*, which included the codes *abusive behaviour of parents*, *false accusations*, *initiator of divorce*, *life of parents (hobbies/jobs)*, *no visible problems*, and *reasoning of parents*. These codes describe how participants reasoned their custody decisions based on the specific traits or behaviours of the parents. For example, participants reasoned: "[...] accusation of the father physically abusing the mother [...]", and "[...] mom is a teacher, I think it'll make more sense to believe she can take good care of the child." Participants argued that the victim initiating the divorce added their credibility in comparison to the abuser, because this serious step suggested that the allegations were genuine and not fabricated. In total, most quotes were coded in Condition

Control-Mother with *no visible problems* (63) and Condition Victim-Father with *abusive behaviour of parents*. Moreover, it suggests that when participants saw no visible problems, like in the control group, almost every participant indicated shared custody. However, if allegations of abuse were introduced, participants reasoned that such abusive behaviour should not result in the parent receiving sole custody. Moreover, the credibility of the victims was higher than that of the abusers. This shows that participants used traits of the parents to guide their custody decisions.

The third category was *Provided information* with 4 codes: *Missing psychological report*, *no evidence*, *not enough information*, and *plausible explanations*. These codes explain how participants assessed the quality of the information while deciding who would get custody. Important documents, including a psychological report, were missing, according to some participants, which made it difficult to make a decision. Others stated that the material offered was insufficient to make a judgment, or that the parents' statements were not supported by proven data. On the other hand, other participants emphasised that specific details or explanations in the case were believable and helped them make a better conclusion. Most codes in this category were quoted in Condition Victim-Mother and Victim-Father + Alienation (44), with the subcode *no evidence* being the most frequent one across Conditions Victim-Mother, Victim-Mother + Alienation, Victim-Father and Victim-Father + Alienation. This suggests that the abuse allegations still raised some doubts, and participants were hesitant in making confident decisions when no evidence was present. This can also be seen in the custody distributions, where shared custody was either the most or the second most common choice.

Exploratory Analyses

Chi-square analysis was performed to determine if male and female participants differed in their custody decisions across all conditions. As shown in Table 4, Condition Victim-Mother and Victim-Mother + Alienation showed significant differences between

female and male participants. In the Victim-Mother Condition, female participants gave custody most often to the mother (26), followed by shared custody (16), and third party (15). In contrast, male participants chose mostly shared custody (16), with fewer selecting the mother (5) or a third party (4). In the condition Victim-Mother+Alienation, female participants indicated custody most often to the mother (26), followed by shared custody (18), a third party (11), and the father (2). Male participants assigned shared custody most often (18), followed by the mother (4), third party (2), and father (1). In the condition Control-Father, all female participants indicated shared custody(57). Male participants most often assigned shared custody (21), followed by the mother (2), with third party and father each receiving one assignment. These results suggest that female participants were less likely than males to assign shared custody when the mother raises abuse allegations, and more likely to grant sole custody to the mother.

Table 4

Chi-Square Results Comparing Male and Female Participants' Custody Decision

	X ²	df	p
Control-Mother	2.73	2	.26
Victim-Mother	9.56	2	.01
Victim-Mother+Alienation	12.04	3	.01
Control-Father	9.59	3	.02
Victim-Father	2.55	2	.28
Victim-Father+Alienation	3.75	3	.29

Discussion

Prior studies suggest that women face disadvantages in family court proceedings, especially when raising allegations of IPV (Breger, 2013; Dragiewicz, 2010; Meier, 2020). It was hypothesized that claims of alienation made by the father would be more likely to succeed, resulting in the mother losing custody. Furthermore, it was hypothesized that levels of sexist attitudes would predict this relationship. A second hypothesis proposed that mothers would be perceived as less credible than fathers, and that higher levels of sexism would predict lower credibility ratings for mothers. The findings did not support these hypotheses. There was no evidence that mothers were disadvantaged in custody decisions, nor were they perceived as less credible than fathers. Exploratory analysis revealed that female participants in this study favoured custody towards the mother in the condition where the mother raised abusive claims towards the father. In contrast, male participants favoured shared custody regardless of abuse claims.

The study aimed to find substantial differences in custody decisions between the condition where the mother raises IPV allegations towards the father and the condition where the father responds to the IPV allegations with alienation claims. The results of this study do not support this assumption, as the father's alienation claims did not result in custody being awarded to him. Therefore, alienation claims by the father are not found to be influential in custody decisions. In fact, qualitative data revealed that the abuse condition highly mattered in participants' decision-making. Several participants remarked that if the IPV allegations were true, they would have granted custody to the victim or proposed shared custody with limited parental rights for the abuser, although no evidence was displayed. This highlights participants' caution and indicates that IPV allegations still carry weight in forming perceptions, which further supports the argument that domestic violence concerns outweigh parental alienation in custody decisions. This study found that when the mother was a victim and the father used alienation claims, participants believed the mother significantly more than the father. The reasoning expressed concerns that the father's abusive behaviour might

negatively affect the child and that the father may attempt to discredit the mother, portraying her as an unfit or incapable parent.

Notably, in the condition where the mother is the victim, female participants assigned custody more often to the mother compared to male participants. Even when alienation claims by the father were made, the female participants awarded custody to the mother. This may indicate that female participants in this study are more sensitive to allegations of IPV towards women and may be more likely to believe IPV allegations made by victims. This has also been established by Pozzulo et al. (2009), who found that female judges rated victims of abuse as more credible than males, and male participants rated the alleged abuser more credible than females. By contrast, male participants in this study may have taken a more evidence-based approach in deciding custody outcomes and hence chose shared custody most often in the IPV condition. Supporting this, literature has shown that male judges are less likely to convict the abuser in domestic violence cases than female judges (Laneuville & Possebom, 2024). These gender differences may reflect broader patterns in how male and female judges in family court decisions interpret and evaluate allegations of abuse made by mothers or fathers.

Allegations of violence are not the only factor that can outweigh alienation claims when making a custody decision. A lack of evidence and the fear of rash conclusions seem to influence participants' decisions in this study as well. Participants indicated that they perceived a lack of evidence and therefore found no justification for limiting one parent's custody. Additionally, some participants expressed concerns that restricted contact with one parent could lead to significant negative impacts based on their personal experiences. This also aligns with the research of Wallace and Koerner (2003), who found that judges prioritise stability in the child's life and emphasise the importance of fostering a good relationship with both parents. However, when IPV allegations were raised, participants tended to give IPV allegations more weight than alienation claims and assign higher credibility to the victim than

to the alleged abuser. To understand why alienation claims were not persuasive, it is important to consider how these claims are generally perceived in court. Paquin-Boudreau et al. (2022) demonstrate that judges regarded abuse claims as more credible and persuasive than alienation claims, especially when no psychological testimony was present. As mentioned earlier, psychological testimony is regarded as highly important and influential in judicial decision-making (Chorn & Kovera, 2019; Gudjonsson et al., 2010). Due to the absence of these conclusive reports, participants generally opted for a cautious approach rather than making an absolute decision and giving sole custody to a possible abuser. Following Wallace and Koerner (2003), it would be interesting to investigate how judges see specific aspects as important when acting in the best interest of the child and how these aspects interact when IPV allegations (or evidence) are present.

That participants weighted abuse allegations more heavily than alienation allegations also explains the finding that the victim in the vignettes was always considered as more credible than the abuser. On one hand, this can be explained by the fact that victims are generally more believed than abusers in sexual assault cases, especially when explicitly labeling the accuser as the victim (Flusberg et al., 2022). This victim-framing increased the credibility of the accuser. It implies that language and framing do have an effect on our perceptions, which could apply to this study as well. In the manipulated conditions, the victim opened the discussion and initiated the discourse about the abuse. In the open-ended response of the custody decision, participants expressed that they tended to believe the victim's account, particularly noting that the victim initiated the divorce proceedings. This observation alone could potentially shape the participants' perception, which suggests that the initiation of such actions may serve as an initial indicator of credibility.

However, compared to the control condition, the victim's credibility was weaker in the experimental conditions. This could imply that when victims raise IPV allegations, a little credibility gets lost. Jones (2010) says that this can be explained by the lack of evidence. "He

said, she said” might limit the perceived credibility, and people tend to be careful with allegations, only believing them once they are confirmed. For instance, in Germany, it follows a rule in court: “*Im Zweifel für den Angeklagten*” (“the benefit of the doubt”), which describes that if there are doubts or an unclear situation, the accused is protected. In the open-ended question, *no evidence* was one of the most frequently used explanations of the participants, indicating that participants were not certain in their judgment based on the information provided.

This decrease in credibility because of uncertainty might also be due to self-protection of one’s beliefs. As discussed in the introduction, heuristics help us to process information faster (Ward & Grower, 2020). Not only stereotypes but also beliefs about victims can impact our fast-paced perceptions. For instance, the representative heuristics make us search for cues about an event that confirms our belief about this event. We often expect victims of abuse to show signs of emotional distress, so we look for such cues when assessing their credibility. If these signs are absent, the victim’s credibility may decrease. In the present study, little information was given about the parents. However, some participants reasoned that the parents’ hobby or profession (e.g., hiking or working as a kindergarten teacher) made it difficult to believe that this parent could cause harm. Additionally, all of the vignettes included the information that both parents’ houses were evaluated by the Child Protection Service as clean and safe. The given information could have led the participant to question the victim’s allegations of abuse, as the environmental information indicated safe surroundings for the child. In turn, this could have reduced the credibility not only of the abuser but also of the victim. It appears that in this sample as well, participants referred back to heuristics and mental shortcuts when judging victims’ credibility. It is interesting to note that participants measured degrees of sexism did not predict these trends. This implies that situational doubt and caution may be more influential for the decline in credibility for victims in alienation conditions than implicit sexist attitudes.

In the present study, the mean score of sexism towards men was higher than the mean score of the ASI. This could imply that especially hostile sexism is higher towards men than towards women. This aligns with research from Glick et al. (2004), who investigated hostile and benevolent attitudes from women and men towards members of both genders.

Interestingly, they found that women hold more hostile sexist attitudes towards men. This could lie in the reason that women feel frustrated with the male dominance and therefore decide to attribute “harsher” implications towards men (Glick et al., 2004). As the participants’ sample consisted predominantly of women ($n = 57$), this could explain why the AMI-Hostile subscale was rated the highest on average. Moreover, there is an increasing movement of feminism, which has gained significant importance in recent years. This shift from sexism towards women to sexism towards men could potentially contribute to a transformation in societal views on sexism, especially in a rather young sample. Such dynamics might explain the observed scores in this study.

Limitations

The first limitation focuses on the age of the sample. The participants in this sample were predominantly students, with an average age of 22 years. For one, the participants needed to imagine themselves into the role of the judge and had presumably no judicial degree. This could imply that the sample cannot adequately represent the judges that are being criticised by the literature, thus threatening the ecological validity of the study. This means that the effects of this sample might not reflect real-world effects, because the sample is not representative of real judges. Moreover, the average age of the sample may not represent the average age of judges in real settings. Literature shows that older generations are more prejudiced and rely more on stereotypes than younger generations (von Hippel et al., 2000). This could also be the reason why no effects in custody decisions were established in this study design. In prior literature about gender bias in custody disputes, the study design and sample were somewhat different. Real cases, with real judges, were analysed and compared,

implying that an online study with vignettes and an average sample age of 22, lay students did not provide the same effects as case studies and literature reviews.

Moreover, this study was an online study that could have been accessed by anyone. As this poses multiple advantages, for instance, a higher response rate in a faster time, it also has limitations. Although I included an attention check, participants could have freely answered without actively thinking about the case vignettes, thus not reflecting possible implicit bias. Furthermore, other variables such as environment, background noise or multitasking, are uncontrollable for the researcher, which may influence the participants' decision making.

Conclusion

This study aimed to confirm prior literature that suggested women are disadvantaged in court when raising IPV allegations. This study could not confirm these hypotheses. However, findings of credibility suggested a higher credibility towards victims in general, disregarding gender. Still, the credibility ratings of victims were reduced when raising allegations, which suggests that a lack of evidence or uncertainty might impact the statements of the abuser and victim. Participants' gender appeared to have an impact on their judgment, specifically that female participants were more likely to award sole custody to the mother in the vignette where the mother was the victim. This could indicate that females consider IPV allegations more severe than males, who reasoned that their most frequent decision to share custody was with a more rational and evidence-based approach. Additionally, the consistently high credibility ratings for victims may suggest growing public awareness and sensitivity towards IPV in younger populations. This research could not confirm prior literature, which could indicate that the present lay sample could not replicate the effects compared to real-world judges in courtrooms. Further research could investigate what other factors, for instance, confounding variables such as divorce initiation, impact on custody decisions. More specifically, implementations of interventions like mock trials or judicial training are used to identify manipulation techniques and flaws in external experts' opinions. The gender of the

judge may play a larger role than anticipated when evaluating litigants' credibility. This could provide deeper insights into family court proceedings and enhance our understanding of how they align with the 'best interests of the child' principle.

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Appendix

Appendix A

Condition 1: Victim-Mother

Family Court Report

Case 2045

In the matter of:

Amtsgericht Hamburg

Date of Hearing:

13.06.2020

Case Information:

Child

Luca is a 10-year-old child from Hamburg. The child is currently in the process of switching from primary school to the fifth grade of high school. Luca likes to read comics and play Minecraft with his friends.

Mother

The mother is a 40-year-old bank accountant. She likes to read and play the guitar. She gives guitar lessons to younger children in a school.

Father

The father is a 39-year-old Human Resource Specialist. He likes to play football in his football club and is also a voluntary trainer for the kids' club.

Parent-Relationship

In high school, the parents met each other. It was love at first sight. However, over the past

years, the married couple has struggled with problems. They decided to break up and the mother filed for divorce.

Both parents currently live within 15-minute walking distance away from the high school that Luca will be visiting soon. For now, the parents have agreed that Luca will switch between them every week, spending one week with the father and the next with the mother.

School Psychologist Report:

The school psychologist, Mrs. Krämer, has reached out to the Child Protection Service. She mentions that she is worried about Luca. His clothes are dirty, and he is regularly late to class. Recently, he has consistently arrived at school without lunch, although he is sitting hungry behind his desk. Mrs. Krämer asked the parents about the situation a few weeks ago, but they said that everything was fine with Luca. In a private conversation, however, the mother mentions to Mrs. Krämer that the couple is currently going through a divorce. They are not living together anymore because the situation at home is not going great. The mother says that the father has physically abused her multiple times, pushed her and slammed doors.

The Child Protection Service has visited the family at their apartments. Both parents appeared normal, the homes were tidy, and their interactions with the child were appropriate and affectionate.

Condition 2 : Victim-Mother + Alienation

Family Court Report

Case 4509

In the matter of:

Amtsgericht Frankfurt

Date of Hearing:

25.07.2018

Case Information:

Child

Alex is an 8-year-old child from Frankfurt, currently in third grade at a local primary school.

Alex enjoys drawing, playing board games, and watching nature documentaries. Alex is visiting the speech therapist Mr. Miller, because the child has difficulties with pronunciation and grammar.

Mother

The mother is a 38-year-old marketing specialist who enjoys hiking and painting.

Father

The father is a 40-year-old IT consultant who enjoys running and playing chess.

Parent-Relationship

The mother met Alex's father at work, and they married ten years ago. Due to ongoing conflicts, the mother filed for divorce. Both parents live a 15-minute walk apart. For the time being, they have agreed that Alex will alternate between them each week, spending one week with the father and the next with the mother

Speech Therapist Report

The speech therapist, Mr. Miller, has raised concerns about Alex's well-being after observing

behavioral changes. According to him, Alex has become more anxious, often appearing nervous, avoiding eye contact, and doing excessive nail-biting. Teachers also noted that Alex hesitates to speak about his parents. Mr. Miller seeks a conversation with both parents. In a private moment, the mother says that the father was physically violent for a long time during their marriage, describing instances of fights where he shoved her, threw a chair through the room, and created an unsafe environment. She believes his behavior was a significant factor in their separation. Mr. Miller confronts the father with these allegations, and in a private conversation, he denies everything. The father says that it is true that they are arguing a lot, and these fights lead to a divorce, however, the arguments were never physical. He says that the mother is just using this claim to receive sole custody of Alex, which the father does not approve. He mentions that the mother is not able to take care of Alex alone.

The Child Protection Service has visited the family at their apartments. Both parents appeared normal, the homes were tidy, and their interactions with the child were appropriate and affectionate.

Condition 3: Control-Mother

Family Court Report

Case 1908

In the matter of:

Amtsgericht Berlin

Date of Hearing:

30.05.2023

Case Information:**Child**

Jordan is an 11-year-old from Berlin, visiting the 5th grade of the Albert-Schweitzer Gymnasium in Berlin. Jordan enjoys playing soccer and is a member of the youth football club.

Mother

The mother is a 40-year-old marketing manager who enjoys cooking and yoga.

Father

The father is a 40-year-old graphic designer. He likes to go to the gym and play board games.

Parent-Relationship

The parents have been together for 15 years and married 10 years ago. However, the mother filed for divorce after facing some difficulties in their relationship. Both parents live 15 minutes apart. For now, Jordan alternates between them weekly, spending one week with the father and one week with the mother.

The Child Protection Service has visited the family at their apartments. Both parents appeared normal, the homes were tidy, and their interactions with the child were appropriate and affectionate.

Condition 4: Control-Father

Family Court Report

Case 1449

In the matter of:

Amtsgericht Düsseldorf

Date of Hearing:

13.04.2023

Case Information:

Child

Quinn is a 9-year-old from Düsseldorf, attending the 4th grade at the Friedrich-Wilhelm School in Düsseldorf. Quinn likes drawing and is part of the local art club.

Mother

The mother is a 36-year-old lawyer who enjoys gardening and reading mystery novels.

Father

The father is a 38-year-old architect. He enjoys cycling and playing video games.

Parent-Relationship

The parents have been together for 12 years and married 10 years ago. However, the father filed for divorce after facing some difficulties in their relationship. Both parents live 15 minutes apart. Currently, Quinn alternates between them weekly, spending one week with the mother and one week with the father.

The Child Protection Service has visited the family at their apartments. Both parents appeared

normal, the homes were tidy, and their interactions with the child were appropriate and affectionate.

Condition 5: Victim-Father

Family Court Report

Case 3567

In the matter of:

Amtsgericht Dortmund

Date of Hearing:

16.12.2009

Case Information:

Child

Sam is a 9-year-old student at Winfried Primary School in Dortmund. He enjoys playing football, drawing, and spending time with friends.

Mother

Sam's mother is a 34-year-old sales professional working in Dortmund. She likes to swim and paint.

Father

Sam's father is a 35-year-old sales professional working in Dortmund. He likes to go camping and fishing with his friends.

Parent-Relationship

The mother met Sam's father in college 14 years ago, and they married 12 years ago. A few years later, Sam was born. Because of ongoing problems in their marriage, the father filed for divorce. Both parents live 15 minutes apart. For now, Sam alternates between them weekly, spending one week with the father and one week with the mother.

Child Protection Report

Attention has come to the Child Protection Service (CPS) because of the teacher, Mrs. White. The teacher is worried about Sam's wellbeing. She noticed an increased hostile and aggressive behavior towards other children. Once, Sam hit a classmate after he refused to give back a Lego set.

Therefore, Mrs. White sought a conversation with both parents. The father informed Mrs. White in a private conversation that the mother had been physically abusing him for several years, often leaving bruises and bite marks on his arms. He says that this is the reason for the previous shouting and yelling, when the family still lived together.

The Child Protection Service has visited the family at their apartments. Both parents appeared normal, the homes were tidy, and their interactions with the child were appropriate and affectionate.

Condition 6: Victim-Father + Alienation

Family Court Report

Case 2078

In the matter of:

Amtsgericht Munich

Date of Hearing:

20.08.2016

Case Information:**Child**

Taylor is a 9-year-old child from Munich, currently visiting the 4th grade of the Isar primary school. Taylor enjoys playing the piano and riding her bike around the neighborhood.

Mother

The mother is a 34-year-old kindergarten teacher who has a passion for art and is a member of a running club.

Father

The father is a 34-year-old nurse who enjoys photography and art.

Parent-Relationship

The parents have been together for 14 years. Recently, they have been experiencing a breakdown in their relationship. The father filed for divorce. Both parents live about a 10-minute drive from each other. For now, Taylor alternates between them every week, spending one week with the mother and the next with the father.

Child Protection Report

Taylor's teacher, Mrs. Lange, noticed a decline in Taylor's behavior and academic performance over the past few months. The child appeared more withdrawn and often distracted in class. Taylor's schoolwork has also been impacted, and he was often late to class or forgot his assignments. However, when Mrs. Lange confronted Taylor about whether

everything was right at home with his parents, Taylor seemed reluctant and hesitant to speak about the family situation. Mrs. Lange seeks a conversation with the family. The father told Mrs. Lange that he had been a victim of physical abuse by the mother. He described multiple incidents where the mother pushed him during arguments and left scratches all over his body. The mother, in a private conversation with Mrs. Lange, strongly denied the allegations of physical abuse. She acknowledged that the marriage had been stressful and they had had heated arguments, but she said there had never been physical violence. The mother accused the father of attempting to manipulate the situation by making false allegations and trying to limit her access to their child, Taylor. She says that the father was using these claims to gain sole custody and restrict her relationship with their child.

The Child Protection Service has visited the family at their apartments. Both parents appeared normal, the homes were tidy, and their interactions with the child were appropriate and affectionate.

Appendix B

Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI)

1. Many women have a quality of purity that few men possess
2. Women should be cherished and protected by men
3. Women seek to gain power by getting control over men
4. Every man ought to have a woman whom he adores
5. Men are incomplete without women
6. Women exaggerate problems they have at work
7. Once a woman gets a man to commit to her, she usually tries to put him on a tight leash
8. When women lose to men in a fair competition, they typically complain about being discriminated against
9. Many women get a kick out of teasing men by seeming sexually available and then refusing male advances
10. Women, compared to men, tend to have a superior moral sensibility
11. Men should be willing to sacrifice their own well being in order to provide financially for the women in their lives
12. Feminists are making unreasonable demands of men

Scoring:

Hostile Sexism = average of items 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12

Benevolent Sexism = average of items 1, 2, 4, 5, 10

Ambivalence Sexism Towards Men (AMI)

1. Even if both members of a couple work, the woman should be more attentive to taking care of her man at home.
2. When men act to “help” women, they are often trying to prove they are better than women.
3. Every woman needs a male partner who will cherish her.
4. A woman will never be truly fulfilled in life if she doesn’t have a committed, long-term relationship with a man.
5. Men act like babies when they are sick.
6. Men will always fight to have greater control in society than women.
7. Men are mainly useful to provide financial security for women.
8. Even men who claim to be sensitive to womens rights really want a traditional relationship at home, with the woman performaning most of the housekeeping and child care.
9. Men are more willing to put themselves in danger to protect others.
10. When it comes down to it, most men are really like children.
11. Men are more willing to take risks than women
12. Most men sexually harass women, even if only in subtle ways, once they are in position of power over them.

Scoring:

Hostile Sexism = average of items 2, 5, 6, 8, 10, 12

Benevolent Sexism = average of items 1, 3, 4, 7, 9, 11

Appendix C

Table 3

Results of the Simple Effects Model Testing the Effects of Parent Gender and Condition on Credibility Scores

	Estimate	SE	T(984)	p
Control Mother	0.02	0.26	0.07	.94
Victim-Mother	0.79	0.26	3.00	.003
Victim-Mother + Alienation	1.20	0.26	4.53	<.001
Control Father	0.09	0.26	0.32	.75
Victim-Father	-0.76	0.26	-2.86	.004
Victim-Father + Alienation	-0.44	0.26	-1.67	.10

Note. Estimate refers to the average difference of credibility scores between mothers and fathers. Positive mean differences indicated higher credibility for the mother.

Appendix D

Table 4

Results of the Linear Mixed Effects Model Testing the Effects of ASI, AMI, Parent Gender, and Condition on Credibility Scores

	b	SE	t	p
Intercept	3.46	0.19	18.24	< .001
ASI	-0.08	0.09	-0.95	.35
AMI	-0.03	0.10	-0.36	.72
Parent (Father)	-0.07	0.05	-1.27	.20
Control-Mother	0.64	0.09	7.00	< .001
Victim-Mother + Alienation	-0.09	0.09	-0.97	.33
Control Father	0.63	0.09	6.87	< .001
Victim-Father	-0.01	0.09	-0.13	.90
Victim-Father + Alienation	-0.09	0.09	-0.97	0.33

Note. b refers to the unstandardized regression coefficient. The condition Victim-Mother was the reference category.

Appendix E

AI Statement

During the preparation of this work the author used the following tools and service to support specific tasks. After using each tool/service, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the work.

ChatGPT (openAI): Receiving feedback on the clarity of sentences and grammar.

Grammarly: Spelling mistakes and grammar.

Goblin.tools: Finding more formal and academic words.

Qualtrics: The Translator tool of Qualtrics to translate the study from English to German.

ATLAS.ti: Coding of qualitative data (but no use of the AI tool)