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## The influence of suspect-driven techniques on the perceived Guilt, perceived Seriousness of the Crime and the Attribution of Blame

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WITHIN INVESTIGATIVE INTERVIEWS ABOUT SEXUAL ASSAULT ON COLLEGE CAMPUS

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### **Abstract**

This research demonstrates the influence of suspect-driven techniques including *Supplication*, and *Denial of the Victim* compared to *No Comment* on the perceived *Seriousness of the Crime*, the *Attribution of Blame* and the *perception of the Guilt* within a sexual assault scenario on college campus. The technique *Supplication* can be used to decisively appear weaker or submissive to receive a favourable treatment (Baecker & Truong, 2018). The purpose of the *Denial of the Victim* is to appear innocent by blaming the victim for the crime (Sykes & Matza, 1957). The *No Comment* technique represents the control condition because it conveys the least possible information. Since investigative interviews are mostly the only available evidence, one should explore the behavior of suspects to detect if the above-mentioned techniques change the perception of the *Seriousness of the Crime*, the *Attribution of Blame* and the perceived *the Guilt* (Zajac, Westera, Ali, & Powell, 2019).. It is proposed that the gender of the suspect affects the influencing techniques and likewise the dependent variables.

Therefore, a between-participants 3 x 2 design with a sexual assault scenario on college campus was conducted. To test the impact of the suspect's gender and the effectiveness of the above-mentioned techniques both aspects were manipulated. Further, it was expected that the perceived *Seriousness of the Crime* of female suspects is lower than for males, while the difference of the gender might increase when the above-mentioned techniques are used. Moreover, the researcher anticipated that by using *Supplication* or *Denial of the Victim* the perceived *Guilt* will be lower and suspects will be less likely blamed for the crime. The results indicated that the techniques do not influence the perceived *Seriousness of the Crime*, the *Attribution of Blame* and neither the perceived *Guilt*. It is suggested to replicate the study with a greater sample and without the occurrence of a pandemic.

*Keywords:* investigative interviews, perceived seriousness of the crime, sexual assault, perceived guilt, attribution of blame

## **Introduction**

### **Sexual Violence**

The European Agency for Fundamental Rights (2014) interviewed European women and asked them if they experienced any sexual violence during the last 12 months before the interview. Based on the interviews they estimated that there are approximately 3.7 million European women who experienced sexual violence (European Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014). *Sexual Violence* is any sexual activity without the compliance of the victim (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2017; Sepulveres, 2017; Schwartz & Pitts, 1995; Bohmer & Parrot, 1993). Moreover, sexual violence is a threat to autonomy, control and security (Sepulveres, 2017). According to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2017) and Sepulveres (2017), sexual violence can be categorised as sexual assault, child molestation or rape. Comparing the percentual amount of sexual offences in Europe and the Netherlands, it can be stated that the Dutch sexual crime percentage of women who experienced sexual assault since the age of 15 with 45% is higher than the European average of 33 % (Keith, 2014). Moreover, since 2015 there is an increase in sexual offences in the Netherlands (Pieters, 2020; Statista, 2019; Dutch News, 2019). In 2015 there were 6767 registered sexual offences in the Netherlands and in 2018 it had increased to a total of 8224 cases (Statista, 2019).

Sexual offences are increasing and can happen in different places. However, during the last years, sexual violence received attention in American colleges and universities (Holland, Cortina & Freyd, 2018). Resulting in this paper will focus on sexual assault happening to students on the college campus

Since the researchers narrowed it down on sexual assault cases on campus, it is interesting to focus on the reported sexual crimes. Unfortunately, not all sexual offences will be reported to the police, therefore there is no exact number of sexual assaults is not clear. However, sexual assault is more common for non-students, but students are more likely to report a sexual crime to the police (Sinozich & Langton, 2014).

### **Investigations of sexual assault**

Sexual offence cases which are getting reported to the police will be investigated. There are lots of articles about different investigation approaches, diverging interview styles and investigator-driven influencing techniques (Beune, Giebels & Sanders; 2009; Walsh & Bull, 2010; Meissner, Redlich, Bhatt, & Brandon, 2012; College of Policing, 2019). Moreover, numbers of articles dealt with police officers using varying influencing techniques to influence suspects during investigative interviews (Brown, Lloyd-Jones & Robinson, 2008;

St-Yves & Deslauriers-Varin, 2009; Beune, Giebels & Sanders; 2009; Oxburgh & Cherryman, 2012; Verhoeven, 2018). However, interviews are two-way processes indicating that not only police officers are using influencing techniques, but also suspects.

### **Importance of investigative interviews**

Since investigative interviews could be affected by influencing techniques, the importance of interviews during investigations should be considered. During investigative interviews, police officers can use collected evidence to tactically influence the suspects to confess (Hartwig, Granhag, Strömwall & Kronkvist, 2006). However, in sexual assault cases, the investigative interviews are mostly the only available evidence against the suspect (Zajac, Westera, Ali, & Powell, 2019). Therefore, interviews are an essential part during investigations, and it should be explored how suspects behave during interviews and how their behaviour might influence the perception of the opponent (Zajac, Westera, Ali, & Powell, 2019).

Unfortunately, there are barely articles available which carry out the potential influence of suspects-driven techniques during investigative interviews. Further, there are hardly articles about how influencing techniques could be used by the suspects to appear not guilty. Nevertheless, one of the frameworks concerning suspect driven techniques was published by Watson, Luther, Jackson, Taylor and Alison (2018).

### **The framework of suspect-driven influencing techniques**

The framework of Watson. et. al. is based on the idea that the rapport and the relationship between the suspect and the interrogator can be influenced by techniques that the suspect uses. The researchers (2018) analysed 29 police interview transcripts of 25 different suspects. Watson et. al. discovered within the interview transcripts different techniques on 8,857 instances. The targeted individuals for the suspect influencing techniques could be used to reduce perceptions of guilt. For instance, by reducing how the crime is perceived and by shifting the blame towards the victim, the perceived guilt might be reduced. Moreover, some techniques of the model by Watson et. al, might shift the blame towards the victim and reduce the perceived seriousness of the crime. Hence, it will be tested if some of the discovered techniques affect the *Attribution of Blame*, the *perceived Guilt* and the *perceived Seriousness of the Crime*.

Two of the most used techniques are “Denial of the Victim” and “Supplication”. Considering all examined interview transcripts, Denial of the Victim had a frequency of 1569 times and Supplication 845 times (Watson et. al., 2018). Since Denial of the Victim and

Supplication turned out to be key techniques in investigative interviews, the focus will lay on them. However, there is no information about the effectiveness of the technique Supplication and Denial of the Victim available.

### **Introducing Denial of the Victim**

*Denial of the Victim* belongs to the Denial techniques is used to neutralise and rationalise behaviour. Thus, it is part of the neutralisation theory.

The neutralisation theory entails the process of suspects trying to appear not guilty by making the victim responsible for the crime. That leads to a less positive view of the victim and thereby neutralise the disapproval of the society about the suspect (Sykes & Matza, 1957). By using Denial of the Victim, the suspects are trying to convince the other parties that the victim is unworthy of legal protection (Pogrebin, Stretesky, Prabha & Venor, 2006).

Seizing the results of the studies of Pogrebin et. al., (2006) and Schneider and Wright (2001) suspects are likely to justify their crime by moving the blame towards the victim. Moreover, in the study of Henning and Holdford (2005), they found out that offenders are more likely to blame their victim for the crime than themselves. The technique also entails arguing that the victim deserved the deed or that the victim provoked the crime. Similarly, other studies showed that Denial of the Victim is very common, and offenders explained that the crime was caused by the fault of the victim (Pogrebin et. al., 2006; Schneider & Wright, 2001).

### **Usage of Denial of the Victim**

In the study of Reissmann, Doychak, Crossman, & Raghavan (2018) they found out that denial techniques are often used for impression management in intimate partner violence. Denial techniques are also common in other types of crime. In the study of Pogrebin et. al., they examined the used explanations of gun offenders for their vicious crimes. The gun offenders justified their violent behaviour by using Denial of the Victim and Excuses. One of the excuses which were likewise used as an explanation includes defeasibility. The technique Denial of the Victim is expected to change the perception of crime and make it therefore defeasible. Pogrebin et. al. (2006) found out that the offenders made use of Denial of the Victim to either stick to their self-worth or to regain it. By performing that technique, the suspects trying to hold on to their positive beliefs about themselves and also believe in their arguments to excuse the crime (Pogrebin et. al., 2006).

Following the possible uses of Denial of the Victim from above, this research paper will focus on that technique in sexual assault cases. Moreover, seizing the results of the

studies of Sykes and Matza (1957), Pogrebin et. al., (2006) and Schneider and Wright (2001) suspects are likely to justify their crime by moving the blame towards the victim.

Further, as Denial of the Victim is part of the neutralisation theory it is expected that suspects using the technique could change the perception of the crime. Also, it is likely that by using Denial of the Victim and the triggered neutralised disapproval of the society it will lead to a change of the Attribution of Blame. Furthermore, it might be that the neutralised disapproval of the society will likewise lead to a lower perceived Seriousness of the Crime. Moreover, suspects might try to appear less guilty by reducing the authenticity of the victim. However, expanding the idea of Stephenson and Moston (1993) and Weber (2007) it could be claimed that suspects who are trying to reduce the authenticity of the victims are more likely to appear guilty.

Consequently, the Attribution of Blame and the perceived Seriousness of the Crime could be viewed as mechanisms that influence the perceived Guilt.

### **Introducing Supplication**

Besides the Denial of the Victim, there is also *Supplication*. The technique can be categorised as an impression management attempt. That means that people who use Supplication attempt to decisively appear weaker, powerless or submissive to acquire a favourable treatment (Schlenker, 1980; Lai, Lam & Liu, 2010; Franz, Baecker & Truong, 2018). Further, the purpose of Supplication is to evoke sympathy in the other party (Campbell, 2009). Moreover, the technique helps to seem inferior and non-threatening towards their victims (Campbell, 2009).

### **Usage of Supplication**

To appear non-threatening and inferior Supplication can be used. For instance, in the study of Kloess, Seymour-Smith, Hamilton-Giachritsis, Long, Shipley and Beech (2017), the researchers examined how child molesters interact on social networks with their victims and how they are trying to influence them. The researchers found out that Supplication is frequently used by child molesters during online communication to manipulate their victims to make them comply to the will of the offenders including sending messages with sexual content while appearing non-threatening (Kloess, et. al., 2017; Campbell, 2009). Another study revealed that employees that use Supplication are more negatively viewed and seem more incompetent and lazier (Gwal, 2015; Pandit, 2017). Although Supplication is likewise used in the workplace, this study will focus on Supplication within the sexual assault cases.

As mentioned above the aim of Supplication is to appear non-threatening to obtain favourable treatment. In sexual assault cases, it would mean to receive no or only a light sentence. Moreover, to achieve that, suspects are using Supplication with the same aim, to convince the potential jury or officer within investigations that they are harmless and not-intimidating for the victim (Kloess, et. al., 2017; Campbell, 2009). Because the technique helps people to appear inferior, it is expected that if suspects using Supplication their crime will appear as less serious. Furthermore, it is expected that offenders try to evoke pity and appear as a non-threat to make it unnecessary to punish them. Additionally, offenders using Supplication might try to be not accounted for the crime by attempting to appear too weak to cause harm (Kloess, et. al., 2017; Campbell, 2009). Consequently, using Supplication might likewise reduce the perceived Guilt as Denial of the Victim.

### **Gender Differences**

Another factor that might indirectly contribute to perceived guilt is the gender of the suspect. Hetherton (1999) stated that people tend to over idealise women based on cultural beliefs which leads to an underestimated risk of females threatening victims. Supplementary, perpetrator's gender is mostly male while most victims of sexual assaults are female (Sinozich & Langton, 2014). However, the researcher found out that people try to stick to their beliefs that women cannot be a perpetrator, which could have a meaningful influence on the detection of crimes (Hetherton, 1999). The refusal to consider women as a potential perpetrator leads to the uncontrolled and unrestrained continuation of sexual crime committed by women (Hetherton, 1999). Additionally, sexual assault performed by women can be considered as a neglected area (Weare & Hulley, 2019). Though, it could be argued that female offending is evaluated as less serious than male perpetrators who performed a similar crime, which could affect the perceived guilt (Hetherton, 1999). Moreover, most male participants of the study did not report their experienced crime to the police and the victims who did report had negative experiences (Weare & Hulley, 2019).

Taking the above mentioned into thought, one could suggest that the presence of sexual crime executed by females against men is downplayed. Extending the findings of Hetherton (1999), it can be suggested that, Supplication and Denial of the Victim might be more effective for women than for men because cultural beliefs label women as the 'weaker' gender that needs to be protected by men. For instance, by using Supplication women could try to decisively appear weaker and more submissive than without applying the technique.

The technique Denial of the victim might work better for women because people try to stick to their beliefs that women cannot be a perpetrator (Hetheron, 1999). Therefore, Denial of the Victim might work better for women and they might be able to convince the jury or other people that the victim is unworthy of legal protection (Pogrebin, Stretesky, Prabha & Venor, 2006).

### **Purpose of this study**

Taking the above-mentioned into consideration, investigative interviews are a fundamental part of sexual assaults due to lack of evidence. Further, most research is about investigators-driven techniques which are used to influence the suspect. However, this research paper acknowledges investigative as two-way processes. During investigative interviews, suspects could try to influence the police officers or jury that they are not guilty by using influencing techniques. Therefore, the model of Watson et. al. (2018) was used to discover the two most prevalent techniques Supplication and Denial of the Victim. These techniques can be used to decrease the perceived Seriousness of the Crime and shift the blame towards the victim which might reduce the perceived Guilt. Additionally, the gender of the suspect might influence the effectiveness of the techniques.

### **Research Question**

Resulting in this research paper will focus on the influence of the suspect's gender and how suspect-driven techniques influence the perception of crime seriousness, the perception of guilt and the attribution of the blame in investigative interviews. From this, the research question follows. What influence have suspect-driven techniques including Denial of Victim, Supplication and the suspect's gender in investigative interviews concerning sexual assault within college settings on the perceived Seriousness of the Crime, the perceived Guilt and the Attribution of Blame?



## Hypotheses

1. The perceived seriousness of the crime will be lower for females when compared to male suspects.
2. The above-mentioned difference increases when the Denial of the Victim or Supplication is used.
3. The perceived guilt of suspects will be lower when using Supplication or Denial of the Victim when compared to the No Comment condition.
4. Suspects who are using Supplication or Denial of the Victim will be less blamed for the crime when compared to the No Comment condition.

## Methods

### Design

The presented study had a 3x 2 design. The researcher manipulated the suspect-driven influencing technique and the suspect's gender. The first independent variable *Technique* had three levels including Supplication, Denial of the Victims and No Comment. The second independent variable *Gender* had two levels together with female and male. Moreover, the dependent variables the *perceived Seriousness of the Crime*, *perceived Guilt* and the *Attribution of Blame* were be examined.

### Participants

The participants were recruited via the participant recruitment system of the University of Twente called SONA. The platform helps researchers and students to distribute their questionnaires by rewarding each University of Twente student who participated in the study with 0.5 SONA points. Additionally, the researchers made use of convenience sampling by asking their acquaintances to take part in the study. Thus, the survey was distributed by using WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram. All participants were informed that they should possess decent English skills in reading and understanding to join in the online experiment. The used consent form and the questionnaire can be found in Appendix A. Further, the questionnaire was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Twente.

At the beginning of analysing the data, a total of 60 people took part in the study, but after excluding, 49 people remained in the sample. The researcher excluded 11 of the participants because they withdraw from the study.

The sample involved more female ( $N=25$ ) than male ( $N=24$ ) participants. The mean age of all participants was 24.7 years but ranged from 18 to 55 years ( $SD=7.79$ ). The most frequent nationality was German ( $N=41$ ). Besides that, there were other nationalities including Turkish ( $N=3$ ), Other ( $N=3$ ) and Dutch ( $N=2$ ). Further, most participants had a bachelor's degree ( $N=31$ ), followed by a high school degree ( $N=8$ ), Other ( $N=7$ ) and a master's degree ( $N=3$ ),

## **Materials**

The researcher used Qualtrics to create an online experiment. The utilised questionnaire including the scenarios can be found in Appendix A. Furthermore, to participate in the study, the participant needed a technical device, for instance, a smartphone, a tablet or a computer with a stable internet connection

## **Measures**

The researcher used three self-developed scales with a diverging number of items to test the four hypotheses.

The first single-item scale tested the perceived Guilt of the suspect by asking “Based on the evidence above, how likely do you think is it that the suspect is guilty of sexual assault?”. The participants needed to rate on the Seven-Point-Likert-Scale how guilty the fictional suspects are (1=extremely likely, 7=extremely unlikely). The higher the number, the greater the effectiveness of the tested technique. Furthermore, the participants had to rate the confidence level of their decision on a 10-Point-Likert-Scale (1=not confident, 10=confident).

The next single-item scale tested the Attribution of Blame by questioning the participant “Who would you say is most to blame for the situation? Chose by moving the slider either to the left or right.”. The participants used a *Visual analogue scale* ranging from 0 to 100 to indicate who is rather to blame (0= Suspect, 100= Victim). Controlling the slider to the left end would indicate that they blame the suspect for the crime. Directing the slider to the right indicated that they blame the victim for the situation. The benefit of using the slider is that the participants are not forced to reach absolute decisions (Klimek et.al, 2017). Moreover, the participants are not restricted by predefined categories which enables them to

indicate their opinion more freely (Klimek et.al, 2017). Furthermore, it shows smaller differences in opinions better than for instance Likert Scales (Klimek et.al, 2017).

The last single-item scale examined the perceived Seriousness of the Crime by asking “On a scale of 1 (very unserious) to 10 (very serious), how serious do you perceive the above mentioned crime?”. Higher ratings on the 10-Point-Likert-Scale demonstrate the crime is perceived as more serious.

### ***Scenario***

Each survey entailed the same scenario. The researcher merely manipulated the gender of the suspect within the scenarios. Following, the transcript of the interview between the suspect and the investigator was presented. The technique that was used by the suspect within the transcript was manipulated by the researcher. The suspects used Supplication, No Comment or Denial of the Victim to justify their behaviour.

The scenario starts with the police receiving a phone call by the victim asking for help. From the scenario, the reader learns that the victim and the suspect are studying at the same university and know each other. Moreover, the victim describes that the suspect often touched the lower back of the victim. Further, the victim explained that the suspect sent photos with sexual content.

Since the victim and the suspect studying at the same university, they have common fellow friends. The victim lives in a shared apartment together with mutual friends of the suspect. The suspect also had a spare key to the victim’s apartment in case an emergency occurs. On the day when the victim called the police for help, the suspect used the spare key to enter the apartment and waited in the victim’s room. When the victim arrived at the apartment, the suspect imposed the condition that he or she cannot leave until the suspect could touch the intimate parts of the victim’s body. The victim refused and the suspect started to touch the body of the victim. Then, the roommates of the victim came home and the suspect left. From that day on, the victim believed that she or he experienced sexual assault and informed the police about it.

After reading the scenario the participants were randomly assigned to either the No Comment, Supplication or to the Denial of the Victim condition. Depending on the condition the suspect responds to the questions of the interviewer with technique related arguments as “No comment.” in the No Comment condition. The No Comment condition represents the control condition in this research. The technique No Comment suits best to not convey further information since the suspects are always using the same response. Resulting in that the

participants had to answer the above-mentioned questions with no additional information besides the scenario.

Within the Denial of the Victim condition, each argument is purposefully formulated to convince the police officer that the victim was not a victim in the situation and enjoyed the offence. One answer that was used by the suspect in the Denial of the Victim condition was ‘I can only repeat myself. She wanted me to go for it. For a few weeks, she didn’t show up to class or group meetings. But she sent many emails regarding her parts of the work. She clearly looked for contact so I just played along.’.

By using Supplication, the suspect tries to decisively appear submissive. Moreover, the suspect attempts to evoke pity to receive favourable treatment. One answer of the Supplication condition which can be found in the Attachment A is ‘But she completely denied our connection, so I tried to save what I thought we had. I just wanted things to work out for us. So, I came a bit closer to convince her. I told her that she could be happy with me. I thought she had feelings for me and suddenly she rejected me. All I get is rejection these days. Am I so stupid because I thought someone would like me for who I am?’.

## **Procedure**

Firstly, the participants received an overview of the study informing them about the next steps. After that, the participants had to sign a consent form in which they had to agree that they participate completely voluntarily. The next step was to indicate their age, gender and their highest educational degree. Secondly, all participants were assigned to one level of gender and one level of the suspect-driven influencing technique by using the Qualtrics random allocation feature. Thirdly, they read the scenario and one of the six transcripts, following with the dependent variables-related questions. After finishing the questionnaire, the participants were debriefed and received contact information about a help hotline for sexual assault cases in the Netherlands.

## **Data Analysis**

Since the study had six different conditions, the researcher chose to run two-way ANOVA analyses. The first between-subjects variable *Technique* had three levels (No Comment, Supplication, Denial of the Victim) and the second independent variable *Gender* had two-levels (Female, Male). The two-way analyses were used to measure the effect of the two independent variables Technique and Gender on the dependent variables the *perceived Guilt*, the *perceived Seriousness of Crime* and the *Attribution of Blame*. Further, the two-way ANOVA of variance will help to understand whether there are statistically significant

differences between the two independent variable groups. All ANOVA and descriptive analyses will be done by using IBM SPSS Statistics 24. The Alpha of .05 will be considered.

### **Results**

The study was used to test four hypotheses. Firstly, the perceived seriousness of the crime was proposed to be lower for females when compared to male suspects. Secondly, the difference was expected to increase when the suspects used Supplication or Denial of the Victim. The third hypothesis claimed that the perceived Guilt of suspects will be lower when they made use of either Supplication or Denial of the Victim. The last hypothesis asserted that suspects who are using Denial of the Victim or Supplication will be less blamed for the performed crime.

#### **Hypothesis 1 – The perceived Seriousness of the Crime within the control condition**

To test whether the independent variable Gender influences the dependent variable perceived Seriousness of the Crime, the ANOVA analysis was conducted. The analysis revealed that there was a non-statistically significant effect of Gender ( $1,43 = 2.56, p = .12$ ) on the perceived Seriousness of the Crime. Therefore, the first hypothesis needed to be rejected.

#### **Hypothesis 2 – The perceives Seriousness of the Crime and using influencing techniques**

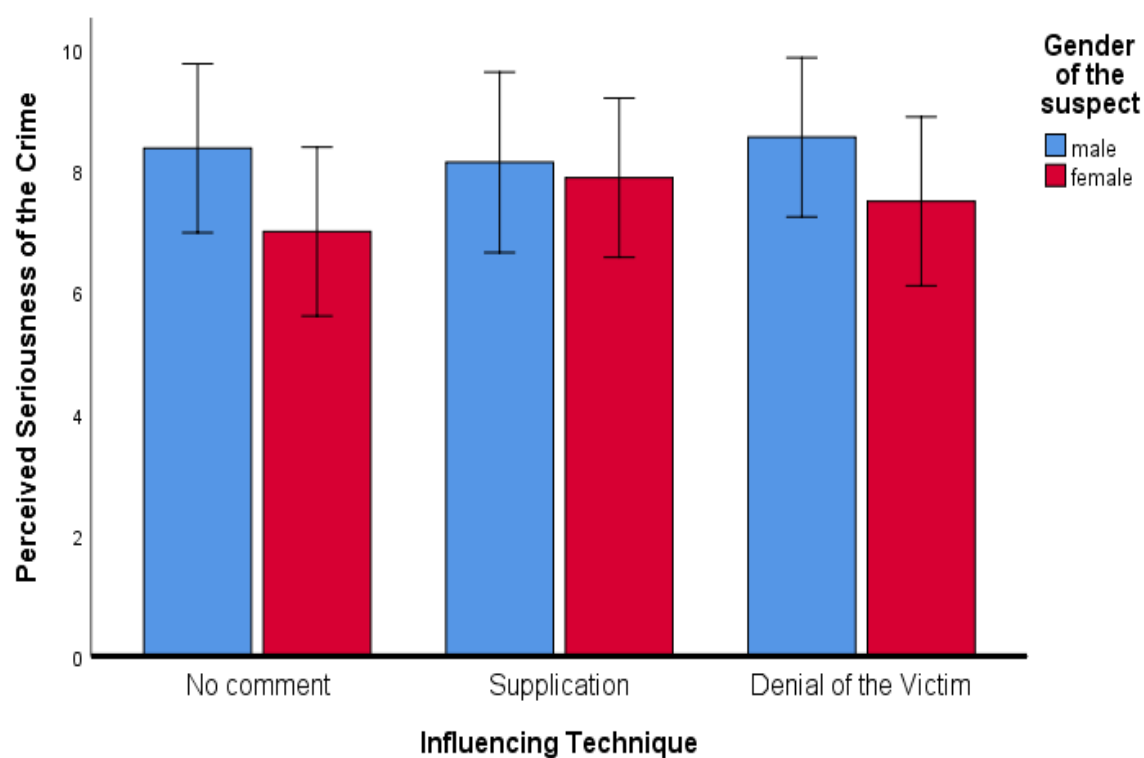
Further, a Factorial ANOVA was conducted to compare the main effects of the used Technique and the interaction effect between the Technique and the perceived Seriousness of Crime. The analysis of variance revealed a non-statistically significant main effect of Technique and yielded an F ratio of  $F(2,43) = .158, p = .85$ . As mentioned above, the Gender also did not have a significant effect on the perceived Seriousness of the Crime. The tested interaction effect between the Gender of the suspect and the used Technique was also statistically non-significant with a  $F(2,43) = .348, p = .71$ .

In Table 2 the Means and Standard Deviation of the dependent variable perceived Seriousness of the Crime separated by the independent variables Gender and the Technique can be found. A higher score indicated a higher rating of the perceived Seriousness of the Crime. In general, the mean of males was always higher than the mean of the female suspects.

The highest score for males was when the suspect used Denial of the Victim ( $M=8.56, SD= 2.01, N=9$ ). The lowest score of male suspects was in the Supplication condition ( $M=8.14, SD= 1.95, N=7$ ). In contrast to that, the highest mean for females can be found in the Supplication condition ( $M=7.89, SD= 1.54, N=9$ ). Moreover, the lowest score for female suspects was in the control condition when using No Comment ( $M=7.00, SD=2.56, N=8$ ).

Additionally, the mean of female suspects in the Denial of the Victim condition was 7.50 ( $SD=1.77$ ,  $N=8$ ).

In Figure 1 the estimated marginal means and the error bars shows the 95% confidence interval of the perceived Seriousness of the Crime separated by the gender and the used technique. Considering Figure 1, all confidence intervals are greatly overlapping which suggest that the difference between the group means is not statistically significant. Consequently, all effects were not statistically significant at the .05 significance level. Due to the results of the ANOVA analysis, the second hypothesis required to be rejected and no further statistical tests regarding the first nor second hypothesis were performed.



*Figure 1.*

Estimated Marginal Means of perceived Seriousness of the Crime

Table 2.

*Descriptive Statistics of the perceived Seriousness of the Crime*

Variable	M	SD	N
Supplication			
Male	8.14	1.95	7
Female	7.89	1.54	9
Denial of the Victim			
Male	8.56	2.01	9
Female	7.50	1.77	8
No Comment			
Male	8.38	1.77	8
Female	7.00	2.56	8
Total			
Male	8.38	1.84	24
Female	7.48	1.94	25

**Hypothesis 3 – The perceived Guilt considering Supplication and Denial of the Victim**

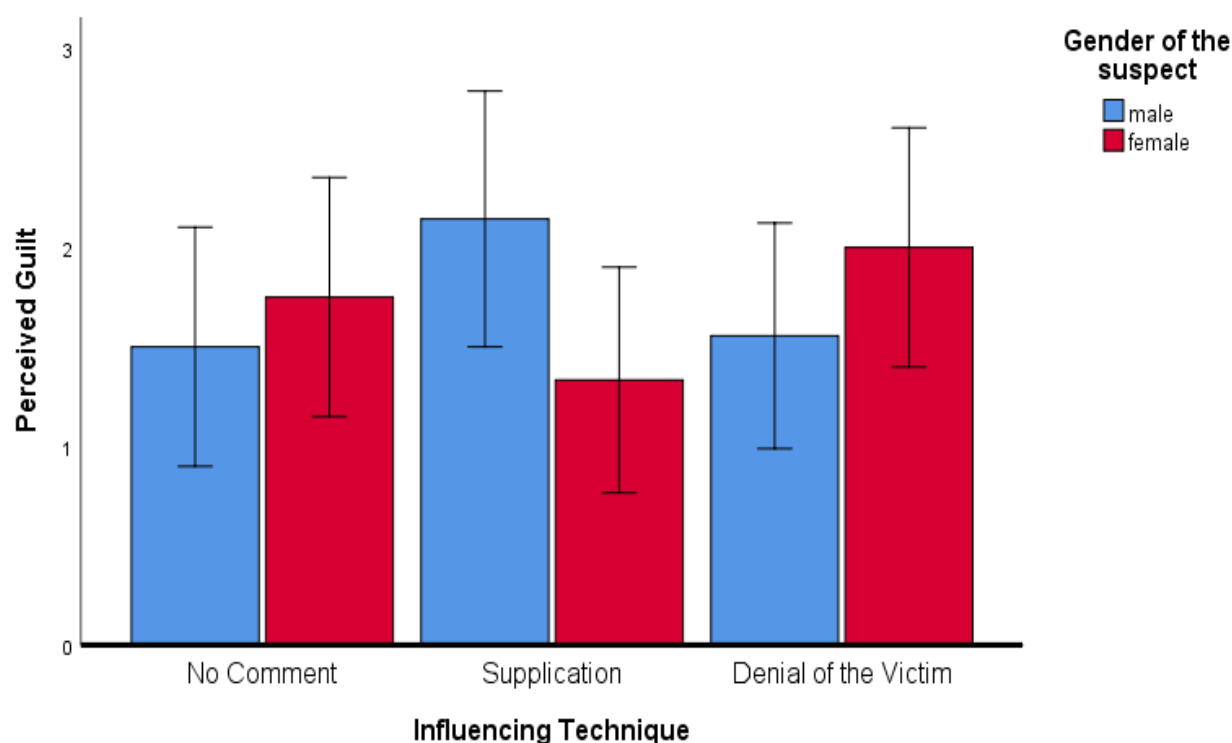
Another time, a Factorial ANOVA was conducted but with the independent variable Techniques and the dependent variable perceived Guilt

The main effect of Gender with an F ratio of  $F(1,43) = .025, p = .88$ ) had a no statistically significant effect on the perceived Guilt. Further, the variable Technique with an F ratio of  $F(2,43) = .014, p = .87$ ), demonstrated that the main effect was not significant. Moreover, the interaction effect was statistically non-significant and yielded an F ratio of  $F(2,43) = 2.573, p = .09$ ).

The means of male and female suspects about the perceived Guilt can be found in Table 3. A smaller mean indicated that the suspect is more likely to be perceived as guilty of the crime. The highest score for males was when they used Supplication ( $M = 2.14, SD = .69, N = 7$ ). The lowest score of male suspects was in the No Comment condition ( $M = 1.50, SD = .76, N = 8$ ). In addition to that, the mean of males in the Denial of the Victim condition was slightly higher than in the control condition ( $M = 1.56, SD = .73, N = 9$ ). The highest mean for females can be found in the Denial of the Victim condition ( $M = 2.00, SD = 1.31, N = 8$ ).

Moreover, the lowest score for female suspects was in the Supplication condition when ( $M=1.33$ ,  $SD=.71$ ,  $N=9$ ). In Figure 2 the estimated marginal means and the error bars show the 95% confidence interval of the perceived Guilt split up by the gender and the used technique. From Figure 2, it can be stated that women who used Supplication have the highest mean, which indicates that the guilt would be more shifted towards the victim. The overlapping confidence intervals demonstrated that the difference between all groups is statistically not significant. However, the overlapping from the perceived Guilt is less than in the perceived Seriousness of the Crime, which explains the better p-value.

Subsequently, the results of the ANOVA did not support the third hypothesis, indicating that suspects who used Supplication or Denial of the Victim do not appear less guilty.



*Figure 2.*

Estimated Marginal Means of perceived Guilt



Table 3.

*Descriptive Statistics of Guilt*

Variable	M	SD	N
Supplication			
Male	2.14	0.69	7
Female	1.33	0.71	9
Denial of the Victim			
Male	1.56	0.73	9
Female	2.00	1.31	8
No Comment			
Male	1.50	0.76	8
Female	1.75	0.71	8
Total			
Male	1.71	0.75	24
Female	1.68	0.95	25

#### **Hypothesis 4 – The Attribution of Blame considering Supplication and Denial of the Victim**

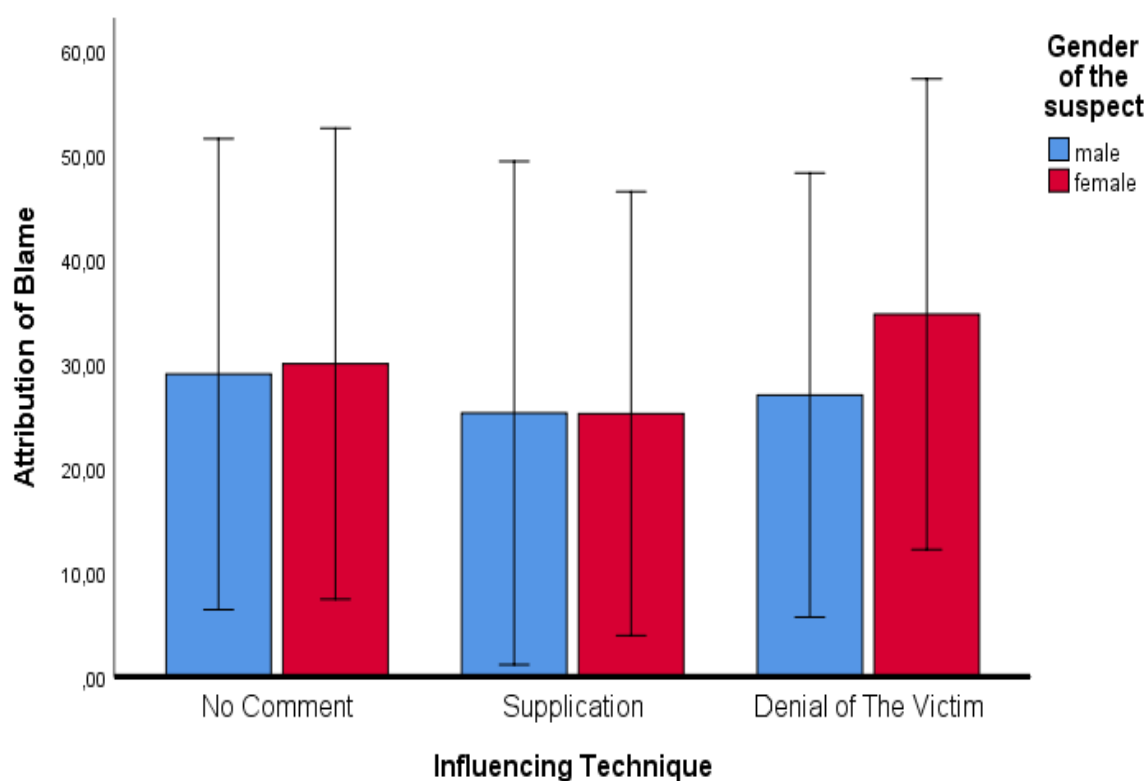
The last hypothesis entailed the Attribution of Blame and was likewise tested by performing an ANOVA analysis.

The independent variable Gender with an F ratio of  $F(1,43) = 1.02, p = .75$  did not have a significant effect on the Attribution of Blame. The *Technique*'s F ratio  $F(2,43) = 1.38, p = .88$  was likewise not statistically significant. Further, there was a non-statistically significant result of the interaction effect  $F(2,43) = .074, p = .93$ .

The descriptive statistics of the Attribution of Blame can be found in Table 4. A higher mean indicated that the blame is more shifted towards the victim. The highest score for males was when they were in the No Comment condition ( $M=29.00, SD= 43.99, N=8$ ). The lowest score of male suspects was in the Supplication condition ( $M=25.29, SD= 15.81, N=7$ ). The highest mean for females can be found in the Denial of the Victim condition ( $M=34.75, SD= 29.63, N=8$ ). Moreover, the lowest score for female suspects was in the Supplication condition ( $M=25.22, SD=26.01, N=9$ ). In Figure 3 the estimated marginal means and the error bars

illustrates the 95% confidence interval of the Attribution of Blame, divided by the gender and the used technique. It demonstrated that the mean of the female and male suspects are very similar. Further, the confidence intervals are overlapping which indicates a non-statistically significant result.

Hence, the fourth hypothesis was not supported due to non-statistically significant results of the ANOVA analysis.



*Figure 3.*

Estimated Marginal Means of Attribution of Blame

Table 4.

*Descriptive Statistics of the Attribution of Blame*

Variable	M	SD	N
Supplication			
Male	25.29	15.80	7
Female	25.22	26.01	9
Denial of the Victim			
Male	27.00	36.40	9
Female	34.75	29.63	8
No Comment			
Male	29.00	43.99	8
Female	30.00	28.95	8
Total			
Male	27.17	33.42	24
Female	29.80	27.24	25

**Discussion**

The study aimed to test the influence of the two techniques Supplication and Denial of the Victim of the model developed by Watson et. al (2018). The techniques and the gender differences of the suspect were tested in an online experiment. Further, the questionnaire entailed different scales the Attribution of Blame, perceived Guilt and the perceived Seriousness of the Crime scale.

**Hypothesis 1 – The perceived Seriousness of the Crime within the control condition**

Originally, the perceived seriousness of the crime was proposed to be lower for females when compared to male suspects. However, the outcomes displayed that Gender does not significantly influence the perceived Seriousness of the Crime, which resulted in the rejection of the first hypothesis.

These findings were contradictory to the explored literature. Due to cultural beliefs, it was expected that females appear as more submissive than males and in the need to be protected (Hetherington, 1999). Hence, she suggested that the society refuse to consider females as a potential perpetrator and over idealise females (Hetherington, 1999).

Also, Hetherton (1999) proposed that offending performed by female suspects could be categorised as less serious than compared to male suspects. However, this study did not confirm the impact of gender differences in the perceived Seriousness of the Crime within a college setting. That could be explained by the fact that she studied sexual violence within a different context than this study. Further, one could propose that Hetherton (1999) was right with her approach, but only in her investigated circumstances. To explain it in more detail, Hetherton (1999) discussed the sexual abuse of children and in contrast to that, this study examined sexual assault within a college setting. Therefore, there were different circumstances which might explain the contradictory results. Consequently, this insight might indicate that society does not refuse to see women as a potential perpetrator on a college campus.

Although women might be considered as a potential perpetrator within college settings, there is still an unrecognition and an underreporting of sexual assault cases with male victims (Lacey & Roberts, 1991; Masho & Alvanzo, 2010; Lowe & Balfour, 2015; Bates, Kaye, Pennington & Hamlin, 2019). The reason for that might be the remaining influence of old cultural beliefs that women are the weaker sex and therefore men must appear strong. If men report that they experienced sexual assault as a victim might influence their perceived perception of strength. Subsequently, the researcher hopes that by the performed study and publishing the results, the awareness of the underreporting of sexual assault cases with male victims will be improved.

### **Hypothesis 2 – The perceives Seriousness of the Crime when using influencing techniques**

Secondly, the gender difference of perceived seriousness was expected to increase when the suspects used Supplication or Denial of the Victim. However, the results indicated that Supplication and Denial of the Victim do not influence the perceived Seriousness of the Crime. The study revealed that regardless of the suspect's gender and no matter if the suspect is using one of above-mentioned influencing technique the perceived Seriousness of the Crime will not be affected.

### **Hypothesis 3 – The perceived Guilt considering Supplication and Denial of the Victim**

The third hypothesis claimed that the perceived Guilt of the suspects will be lower when using Supplication or Denial of the Victim, compared to the No Comment condition.

Reviewing the results, it can be proposed that none of the above-mentioned techniques influences the perception of Guilt. Hence, the hypothesis was rejected, and it can be indicated that the question who is guilty will be answered without considering the gender or one of the two above-mentioned techniques.

### **The perception of the victim**

However, the results of this study were contradictory to the literature. It was expected that if the suspects try to influence the perception of the victim, they will appear more guilty (Stephenson & Moston, 1993; Weber, 2007). The technique the Denial of the Victim can be used to convince other parties that the victim is unworthy of legal protection (Pogrebin, Stretesky, Prabha & Venor, 2006).

Besides the Denial of the Victim, Supplication can be used to decisively appear weaker and submissive to receive favourable treatment because the suspects did not seem guilty for the crime (Schlenker, 1980; Lai, Lam & Liu, 2010; Franz, Baecker & Truong, 2018). Further, the technique can be used to enhance the sympathy in the other party for the victim which was proposed to change the perception of Guilt (Campbell, 2009). In contrast to that, the researcher found out that not Denial of the Victim, neither Supplication had an impact on the perceived Guilt within a college setting. However, Supplication produced higher means than the No Comment condition.

### **The attitude within participants that form the perception of guilt**

Taylor (2007) found out that beliefs, attitudes and certain biases towards sexual assault are factors that potentially influence the perceived Guilt. Additionally, these factors are more influential in opinion formation than objective evidence (Taylor, 2007). Since most of the participants of this online experiment were students or acquaintances of the researcher who conducted the study, they possibly had pre-formulated attitudes and biased thoughts because they might have known the purpose of the study in advance.

### **Hypothesis 4 – The Attribution of Blame considering Supplication and Denial of the Victim**

The last hypothesis asserts that there will be a greater proportion of blame which will be directed towards the victim when the suspects are using Denial of the Victim or Supplication. Considering the findings of the ANOVA, the Attribution of Blame is not affected by the two techniques. Clarifying, by using Denial of the Victim, the suspects were

not able to seem less guilty and were still blamed for their crime. Additionally, people are not likely to shift the blame towards the victim when Supplication is used.

Considering the results of this study it can be argued that people do not change their perception of blame based on the suspect's gender, or the used technique. It might be that people try to decide fairly and appropriate by considering all possible influencing factors.

That could be explained by using the Attribution Theory. The Attribution Theory suggests that people try to attribute and allocate the responsibility of the individual in different situations (Grubb & Turner, 2012). According to Heider (1982), the theory is valuable, since people always actively trying to understand the cause of the events that happened to them. People allocate and attribute blame towards individuals or themselves by considering internal and external factors (Heider, 1982). External factors indicate that the individual had no control about what happened, and the event was caused by factors in their environment (Heider, 1982). For instance, other people who triggered certain actions.

Internal factors demonstrate that the event that happened or that the person behaved in a certain way because of inner beliefs (Heider, 1982). Considering these ideas, it can be suggested that the participants in this study believed that the sexual assault that happened to the victim was caused by external factors since they did not blame the victim for the crime.

### **Limitations**

After discussing the implications of the results, it is important to review the results critically. Due to the occurrence of the Coronavirus, there were extraordinary circumstances for conducting the research. That resulted in limited research possibilities as in a limited number of participants. The extraordinary circumstances aggravated the acquisition of participants to the total number of 60, whereas the strived quantity of participants was at least 100. According to Cohen (1992) to calculate the difference between two independent sample means with an alpha of .10, it is necessary to have at least 50 participants in each cluster. Further, a minimum of 100 participants is fundamental to spot likely effect sizes (Cohen, 1992). The researchers tried to solve the unavailability of participants by contacting their acquaintances, but the striven quantity of participants was not achieved which might affect the explanatory power.

Nevertheless, convenience sampling might lead to a higher quantity of participants but could influence the representativeness of the sample. For instance, the level of education was dominated by bachelor and master students. Additionally, the sample of this research displayed a limited age range and was dominated by German participants. Following that,

Peterson and Merunka (2014) suggested, one should be cautious to interpret and generalise findings which were collected through convenience sampling dominated by college students.

Moreover, one could suggest considering the potential threat of inconsistency induced by the convenience samples of college students (Peterson & Merunka, 2014). Also, behavioural scientists regularly publish and generalise findings of human functioning entirely based on Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic (WEIRD) societies (Henrich, Heine & Norenzayan, 2010). Therefore, it could be proposed that these behavioural researchers are convinced that WEIRD samples represent most of the worldwide population. Consequently, Henrich, Heine and Norenzayan (2010) reviewed the database of the cross-section of behavioural sciences and they demonstrated that WEIRD samples are especially dissimilar when compared to the rest of the world's population.

Although this research paper used a WEIRD sample with a limited age range, it should be emphasized that the WEIRD sample embodies the above-mentioned characteristics and representativeness which the researcher was striven for. Moreover, when considering that the primary interest of the researcher was the victim-offender scenario within a college setting the used sample seems sufficient. Also, students were exactly the targeted audience which explains the reason why so many Bachelor students were part of the sample. Still, the targeted population was Dutch, but most participants were German. Therefore, more Dutch participants would have been beneficial.

Another aspect that could affect the representativeness was that most of the participants were acquaintances of the researcher and the chances are enhanced that they were already informed about the hypotheses of the study. Therefore, some participants might knew the purpose of the study and since convenience sampling is dependent on voluntary partaking, it could be claimed that only people joined who had solid opinions about sexual offences (Moore, 2001). Furthermore, Taylor (2007) argued that pre-formulated beliefs, attitudes and bias influence the perception of people. Regarding this, it can be argued that the participants might try to influence the study according to their favoured outcomes.

When considering the scales of this research one could criticise that each of them only entailed one item. Moreover, psychometric scales are used to measure widespread constructs as behaviours, attitudes or characteristics (Robinson, 2018). Following, the perceived Seriousness of Crime, the Attribution of Blame and the perceived Guilt scale each entailed only one item to measure the concept. According to McIver and Carmines (1981), there are three major problems with single-item scales, which could likewise represent three reasons

why multi-items scales can be superior. The first problem indicates that single-item scales are likely to have a low content validity because it is very questionable that one item can measure an entire complex construct (McIver & Carmines, 1981; Boateng et. al., 2018). By using multiple items to measure one construct the outcome can be more reliable and meaningful than by only using one item (Boateng et. al., 2018). The empathy scale designed by Shen (2010) which can be found in Appendix A could be considered as an example. The scale contains 12 different items which are measured on the 7-Point-Likert-Scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Secondly, single-item scales are likely to meet a lack of accuracy because these scales are limited in their discrimination abilities since it only consists of one item (McIver & Carmines, 1981). Thirdly, the reliability of single scales is sometimes not clear, since it is challenging to calculate it due to the lack of information (McIver & Carmines, 1981). For instance, the Cronbach's alpha can be used to measure reliability. However, one cannot use the test for single scales because the number of items is too low. Therefore, to test the internal consistency can be difficult, but manageable.

However, another method to test the reliability would be test-re-test reliability. By doing so, the reliability of the scale can still be approached. Additionally, if the to be measured construct is unidimensional a single-item scale can be appropriate (McIver & Carmines, 1981). Resulting in that the guilt scale which will be addressed in court by one question can be measured with a single-item scale. Further, the Attribution of Blame and the perceived Seriousness of the Crime scale can be measured by one item, since their concepts can be viewed as unidimensional. However, it still might be interesting to repeat the questionnaire to check the reliability and likewise the validity of the constructs which is directly linked to the interpretation of the developed psychometric instrument (Cook & Beckmann, 2006).

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this research paper revealed that the techniques Supplication and the Denial of the Victim do not influence the perceived Seriousness of the Crime, Blame and does not affect the perceived Guilt. Furthermore, the effectiveness of Supplication and Denial of the Victim is not influenced by the gender of the suspect. People probably arrive at their decisions by considering other factors which could be interesting to investigate. However, the researcher advises performing a similar study with more participants and without the occurrence of a pandemic to achieve a greater generalisability.

Since the study is based on fundamental literature as the study of Watson et. al (2018) this research paper is relevant to future researchers who are enquiring investigative interviews as a



two-way process and are searching for more information about suspect-driven techniques. This study was the first attempt to test the effectiveness of Supplication and Denial of the Victim on the perception of Crime Seriousness, the perception of Guilt, the Attribution of Blame in investigative interviews within a college setting.

Taking these results into consideration, it can be claimed that these are positive outcomes for victims of sexual assault. The study displayed that people are not easily influenced by Supplication or Denial of the Victim. It indicates that people come to conclusions by considering other factors than the gender of the suspect. Thus, if a suspect is performing sexual assault that suspect will not be able to influence the perception of the opposite to appear less guilty or to shift the blame towards the victim. Furthermore, none of the above-mentioned techniques will help the suspect to reduce the perceived Seriousness of the crime.

As mentioned in the paper of Zajac, Westera, Ali, and Powell (2019), investigative interviews are mostly the only available evidence against the suspect. Therefore, it is important to underline that the perception of the crime and the suspect will not be biased by Supplication or Denial of the Victim. Therefore, investigative interviews as evidence are crucial and not likely to be misinterpreted when considering the above-mentioned techniques.

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## Appendix

### Appendix A

# The perception of suspects of sexual assault in investigative interviews

---

## Start of Block: Introduction

Q3 The perception of suspects of sexual assault in investigative interviews Thank you for responding to this invitation to take part in this study! Please read the following information carefully. Purpose of the study? The study is conducted by Jil Braun and Sarah Mertins. Both are undergraduate Psychology students at the University of Twente and are supervised by Dr. Steven Watson. This project is part of our Bachelor Thesis and the outcomes will only be used for research purposes. This may include a presentation at an academic conference or publication in an academic journal. What will I have to do? As a participant you will read information about an accusation of sexual assault. Then we will ask you to read interviews with the person accused of the crime. After this, you will be asked if you think the suspect is guilty or not and how confident you are of this decision. Finally, you will complete some questionnaires about your perceptions of the suspect. Who can take part? Anyone over the age of 18 can take part. Though you should not take part if you think you are likely to be distressed by a fictional description of a sexual assault. In addition, you should be aware that all materials are presented in English. Risks of taking part: The interview transcripts will describe details of accusations of sexual assault. If you feel that this subject is likely to cause you distress you should not take part in this study. We have provided details of local helplines that you can contact for support at the bottom of this introduction. We will repeat these details at the end of the experiment. You can also contact our supervisor via email to ask any questions before taking part if you are unsure if you should take part. (s.j.watson@utwente.nl.) You will be able to ask us any questions and discuss any concerns with us if needed. You will find our contact details below. How can I withdraw? You always have the opportunity to withdraw from the study without explaining the reason and without any penalty. You can withdraw the study by closing your browser or tab window at any time. However, once the study is complete we are unable to remove any of your data as we are unable to identify participants because all data is entirely

anonymous. Data storage and security: If you are taking part in this research, you consent that the Researchers are allowed to collect and keep your data anonymously (without sufficient detail for personal identification) according to the Data protection act (1998) and GDPR guidelines (2018). Anonymous data may be made available to the scientific community by being hosted on the open science framework (<https://osf.io/>), however, we reiterate that you will not in any way be personally identifiable. Benefits: If you are a student at Twente University then you will be credited 0.5 SONA-points for taking part in this study. Otherwise there are no benefits to taking part but we hope you find the experience interesting. Contact details Jil Braun: [j.braun@student.utwente.nl](mailto:j.braun@student.utwente.nl) Sarah Mertins: [s.mertins@student.utwente.nl](mailto:s.mertins@student.utwente.nl) In case you feel distressed before or after taking the survey, there is Dutch hotline specified for Sexual assaults which has a 24hours service. Further, students of the University of Twente might get in contact with their study related study advisor if they need someone to talk to. **Sexual Assault: 0800-0188 (24 hours)**

---

**Q5 If you would like to participate please read and agree to the following:** 1. I confirm that I am over the age of 18 and can consent to take part in the study by myself. 2. I have read the information sheet and fully understand what the study entails and why it is being conducted. 3. I understand that the researchers will be able to access my data, however the data will remain anonymous. 4. I agree to take part in this study, understanding what it involves. 5. I understand I can withdraw my data at any time by closing the browser or tab window. Once the data has been submitted, the data will not be able to be removed due to the data being anonymous.

**Thank you for participating!**

I read and understood all the above mentioned and agree to participate in the study. Further, I partake out of my own free will and I am informed that I can withdraw from the study at any time without providing a reason.

☐ I agree (1)

☐ I disagree (it will end the survey) (2)

*Skip To: End of Survey If If you would like to participate please read and agree to the following: 1. I confirm that I a... = I disagree (it will end the survey)*

---

Page Break

**End of Block: Introduction**

---

**Start of Block: Demographics**

Demographics2 Please indicate your gender.

- ☐ Male (1)
- ☐ Female (2)
- ☐ Other (3) \_\_\_\_\_



Demographics3 What is your age?

\_\_\_\_\_

Q15 Please indicate your current educational level

- ☐ Bachelor student (1)
- ☐ Master student (2)
- ☐ VWO/ Abitur/ highschool degree (3)
- ☐ Realschulabschluss/MAVO (4)
- ☐ Hauptschulabschluss/VBO (5)
- ☐ Other (6)
-

Demographics1 What is your nationality?

- ☐ German (1)
- ☐ Dutch (2)
- ☐ Other (3) \_\_\_\_\_

**End of Block: Demographics**

---

**Start of Block: Scenarios\_MEN\_Suspect\_NoComment**

Q43 In the following, you will be presented with a text that describes the accusations against a suspect. You will then be presented with the transcript of the investigative interview between the suspect and the police officer where these accusations are discussed.

---

Q11 Introduction:

Name of the suspect: Mr de Jong

Alleged Offence:On

05/01/2020 the police received a phone call from Miss Mijer, alleging that she required immediate help. The police attended and spoke to Miss Mijer. She made a number of accusations against the suspect, Mr de Jong: Miss Meijer says that Mr de Jong is a student on her course at university and friends with her flatmate Mr Willemson and is often at her home address late into the night.

Miss Mijer alleges that Mr de Jong has often made her feel uncomfortable. She alleges instances where Mr de Jong would stand very close to her during conversation, and would often touch her waist or lower back when walking past her.

Miss Mijer accuses Mr de Jong of sending her photos with sexual content.

The day Miss Mijer informed the police she stated that he used his spare keys to get into her room and waited for her. Since her flatmates were not at home at this moment, he could just enter the open room of Miss Mijer. When she got into the apartment he wouldn't let her out unless she would let him touch intimate parts of her body. She refused and he started to touch her breasts, telling her that she will find it arousing herself if she just lets it happen. Then her roommate came home, so he left. Miss Mijer is scared of how far he would go, which is why she called the police. She believes he is the victim of sexual assault.

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Q32 Transcript

Police interviewer: Hello, my name is police constable Maathuis, 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. Do you understand?

Mr de Jong: Yes, I understand. 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 de Jong: Yes, that's okay.

Police interviewer: Good stuff. So, you've been arrested on an allegation of sexual assault against another student, Miss Mijer. This is alleged to have happened numerous times. So, do you want to start from the basics and just tell me what you think?

Mr de Jong: No comment.

Police interviewer: No comment, okay. I've still got to go through all the questions. I know you've already indicated you're going to say "no comment", but I have to just cover everything anyway. Do you have a lot of private contact with Miss Mijer?

Mr de Jong: No comment.

Police interviewer: Can you explain why Miss Mijer accuses you of sending her photos with sexual content?

Mr de Jong: No comment.

Police interviewer: Okay. Can you explain why these allegations of sexual assault have been made against you?

Mr de Jong: No comment.

Police interviewer: What can you say about the accusation of touching Miss Mijer inappropriately several times?

Mr de Jong: No comment. Police interviewer:: OK, I think we should move on to the incident that happened on the 5th of January 2019, when you waited for Miss Mijer in her room. Please explain in your own words what happened right after that.

Mr de Jong: No comment. Police interviewer: Can you tell me why you think she called the police?

Mr de Jong: No comment.

Police interviewer: Okay Mr de Jong, I've got no further questions. I'm going to conclude the interview, and the time is now 12.15.

#### **End of Block: Scenarios\_MEN\_Suspect\_NoComment**

#### **Start of Block: Scenarios\_MEN\_Suspect\_DenialofVictim**

Q22 In the following, you will be presented with a text that describes the accusations against a suspect. You will then be presented with the transcript of the investigative interview between the suspect and the police officer where these accusations are discussed.

#### **Q27 Introduction:**

Name of the suspect: Mr de Jong

Alleged Offence: On

05/01/2020 the police received a phone call from Miss Mijer, alleging that she required immediate help. The police attended and spoke to Miss Mijer. She made a number of accusations against the suspect, Mr de Jong: Miss Meijer says that Mr de Jong is a student on her course at university and friends with her flatmate Mr Willemson and is often at her home address late into the night.

Miss Mijer alleges that Mr de Jong has often made her feel uncomfortable. She alleges instances where Mr de Jong would stand very close to her during conversation, and would often touch her

waist or lower back when walking past her.

Miss Mijer accuses Mr de Jong of sending her photos with sexual content.

The day Miss Mijer informed the police she stated that he used his spare keys to get into her room and waited for her. Since her flatmates were not at home at this moment, he could just enter the open room of Miss Mijer. When she got into the apartment he wouldn't let her out unless she would let him touch intimate parts of her body. She refused and he started to touch her breasts, telling her that she will find it arousing herself if she just lets it happen. Then her roommate came home, so he left. Miss Mijer is scared of how far he would go, which is why she called the police. She believes he is the victim of sexual assault.

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Q29

Transcript

Police interviewer: Hello, my name is police constable Maathuis. 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. Do you understand?

Mr de Jong: Yeah, I understand.

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 de Jong: Yeah, I understand that.

Police interviewer: Good stuff. So, you've been arrested on an allegation of sexual assault against another student, Miss Mijer. This is alleged to have happened numerous times. So, do you want to start from the basics and just tell me about that? Mr de Jong: In class, I saw her giving me these signals, you know? She would have that seducing look and wink at me. Miss Mijer always came to class lightly dressed and sent me a lot of emails, apparently for group work, trying to get in contact with me. So I don't understand why she's now saying she wasn't interested.

Police interviewer: So, why did she accuse you of touching her without her consent? Mr de Jong: I think she wants to get back at me. She is always hanging around with men in the lectures and she seems to get along with them really well, too. I don't have any doubts she plays around with them as well. Just like she does with me. You should have seen how she presents herself. Always leaning in to me so that I can see everything. Don't tell me these aren't explicit signals. She is just making that up if you ask me. She wanted me to make a move on her. She was even flirting with me. If you knew her, you wouldn't be interviewing me. She is known for flirting and sleeping around. Just a typical troublemaker who will make up anything to save herself.

Police interviewer: Alright. Miss Mijer told us about receiving a lot of intrusive photos from you. What do you say about these?

Mr de Jong: I can only repeat myself. She wanted me to go for it. For a few weeks, she didn't show up to class or group meetings. But she sent many emails regarding her parts of the work. She clearly looked for contact so I just played along.

Police interviewer: So Miss Mijer explicitly said she wanted sexual contact with you?

Mr de Jong: She didn't say it like that but her eyes and behaviour did. Also, from what I see at parties, she does not hold back at flirting at all.

Police interviewer: OK so now I know a bit more. I think we should move on to the incident that happened on the 5th of January 2019, when you waited for Miss Mijer in her room. Please explain in your own words what happened on that day.

Mr de Jong: She was all dressed up that day and couldn't keep her eyes off of me during class. I got the feeling that we could finally take a step further. So I thought I would just do what she was used to. I used the key and when she showed up she asked me what I wanted from her. I told her not to pretend that nothing was going on between us. I approached her and when I came closer she immediately pushed my hands away. I think she was just joking around so I tried to take her top off. She started yelling and that's where her roommate came in. She acted like our connection didn't exist all of a sudden! In one minute she wanted me and in the next she was acting like she didn't. I don't see how I can be blamed for her suggesting she wants me one minute, then flipping out the next. We didn't even do anything. I don't understand what her problem is, she clearly likes this kind of attention.

Police interviewer: To check if I got you right: you're saying that no sexual assault happened that day? Mr de Jong: I did nothing she didn't want and isn't doing all the time with other people anyway. She threw herself at me. And if I made a move on her, then it was just because she made me do it. Has she put me in a lot of trouble here?

Police interviewer: I just need to try and establish what happened for now. Let's take a short break then, just for the recording the interview is being terminated at 12:15

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#### **End of Block: Scenarios\_MEN\_Suspect\_DenialofVictim**

#### **Start of Block: Scenarios\_MEN\_Suspect\_Supplication**

Q23 In the following, you will be presented with a text that describes the accusations against a suspect. You will then be presented with the transcript of the investigative interview between the suspect and the police officer where these accusations are discussed.

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Q28 Introduction:

Name of the suspect: Mr de Jong

Alleged Offence: On

05/01/2020 the police received a phone call from Miss Mijer, alleging that she required immediate help. The police attended and spoke to Miss Mijer. She made a number of accusations against the suspect, Mr de Jong: Miss Meijer says that Mr de Jong is a student on her course at university and friends with her flatmate Mr Willemson and is often at her home address late into the night.

Miss Mijer alleges that Mr de Jong has often made her feel uncomfortable. She alleges instances where Mr de Jong would stand very close to her during conversation, and would often touch her waist or lower back when walking past her.

Miss Mijer accuses Mr de Jong of sending her photos with sexual content.

The day Miss Mijer informed the police she stated that he used his spare keys to get into her room and waited for her. Since her flatmates were not at home at this moment, he could just enter the open room of Miss Mijer. When she got into the apartment he wouldn't let her out unless she would let him touch intimate parts of her body. She refused and he started to touch her breasts, telling her that she will find it arousing herself if she just lets it happen. Then her roommate came home, so he

left. Miss Mijer is scared of how far he would go, which is why she called the police. She believes he is the victim of sexual assault.

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### Q31 Transcript

Police interviewer: Hello, my name is police constable Maathuis, 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 or say may be given in evidence. Do you understand?

Mr de Jong: Yes, I understand

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 de Jong: Yes, that's okay.

Police interviewer: Good stuff. So, you've been arrested on an allegation of sexual assault against another student, Miss Mijer. This is alleged to have happened numerous times. So, do you want to start from the basics and just tell me what you think?

Mr de Jong: I really don't know why she would say that. I don't understand why I am interviewed. She's in my class and we'd been talking a lot over e-mail but I would never deliberately make her feel bad, I'm horrified that she's upset.

Police interviewer: You are accused of having touched Miss Mijer inappropriately several times. She reported that you touched her back and waist without her consent.

Mr de Jong: I don't know what to say. This is a lot to take in and I don't know how to handle this situation. I wouldn't touch anybody inappropriately! I am just doing my studies and that's hard enough; someone wants to get me in trouble for sure. I can't believe I would be in this much trouble just for being polite and putting a friendly hand on someone. Look at me, I am just trying to keep my life together.

Police interviewer: What do you say about her accusations of you sending her photos with sexual content?

Mr de Jong: I didn't know what I was doing... I'm so stressed at the moment. My boss wants me to do more hours but I have to revise to keep my grades up. I needed someone to talk to, you know? And she didn't seem to mind because she kept responding and talking about the project we were working on. I didn't think I was doing anything bad. I thought she felt something for me and it made me feel a bit better.

Police interviewer: We are trying to investigate what happened for now. Let's move on to the incident that happened on the 5th of January 2019, when you waited for Miss Mijer in her room. Please explain in your own words what happened that day. Mr de Jong: Okay, let's see... I wanted to talk to her about us so I went to her room and waited for her. When she came in I could feel that tension between us and we had been talking so I didn't think I was doing anything wrong. But she completely denied our connection so I tried to save what I thought we had. I just wanted things to work out for us. So I came a bit closer to convince her. I told her that she could be happy with me. I thought she had feelings for me and suddenly she rejected me. All I get is rejection these days. Am I so stupid because I thought someone would like me for who I am?

Police interviewer: So why do you think Miss Mijer called the police?

Mr de Jong: I don't know. Maybe she doesn't want me to be happy? I have no one left, don't you see that? I am so overwhelmed right now, this is just too much.

Police interviewer: To check if I got you right: you're saying that no sexual assault happened that



day?

Mr de Jong: I told you I needed someone to talk to and to get a clear picture of what was going on between us. She stood there pretty as she is and I was sure she wanted to be with me. It was just an innocent mistake, I wouldn't be capable of assaulting someone! I thought both of us wanted to take things a step further. I didn't want to hurt her. Look at me, I couldn't do something like that! How could someone do this to me? Sorry but I can't handle this. Do you mind taking a short break?

Police interviewer: Yes, we can take a five-minute break. Just for the recording the interview is being terminated at 12:15.

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### End of Block: Scenarios\_MEN\_Suspect\_Supplication

### Start of Block: Scenario\_WOMEN\_Suspect\_NoComment

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Q24 In the following, you will be presented with a text that describes the accusations against a suspect. You will then be presented with the transcript of the investigative interview between the suspect and the police officer where these accusations are discussed.

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#### Q33 Introduction

Name of the suspect: Ms Witte

Alleged Offence: On

05/01/2020 the police received a phone call from Mr de Vries, alleging that he required immediate help. The police attended and spoke to Mr de Vries. He made a number of accusations against the suspect, Ms Witte. Mr de Vries says that Ms Witte is a student on his course at university and friends with his flatmate Ms Oost and is often at his home address late into the night.

Mr de Vries alleges that Ms Witte has often made him feel uncomfortable. He alleges instances where Ms Witte would stand very close to him during conversation, and would often touch his waist or lower back when walking past him.

Mr de Vries accuses Ms Witte of sending him photos with sexual content.

The day Mr de Vries informed the police he stated that she used her spare keys to get into his room and waited for him. She got the keys in case of any emergencies, like for instance if her friend, Ms Oost would forget her keys at home. Since his flatmates were not at home at this moment, she could just enter the open room of Mr de Vries. When he got into the apartment she wouldn't let him out unless he would let her touch intimate parts of his body. He refused and she started to touch his body, telling him that he will find it arousing himself if he just lets it happen. Then his roommate came home, so she left. Mr de Vries is scared of how far she would go, which is why he called the police. He believes he is the victim of sexual assault.

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#### Q36 Transcript

Police interviewer: Hello, my name is police constable Maathuis, 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. Do you understand?

Ms Witte: Yes, I understand

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

Ms Witte: Uh, yes that's fine.

Police interviewer: Good stuff. So, you've been arrested on an allegation of sexually assaulting another student, Mr de Vries. This is alleged to have happened numerous times. So, do you want to start from the basics and just tell me about the contact with Mr de Vries?

Ms Witte: No comment. Police interviewer: No comment, okay. I've still got to go through all the questions. I know you've already indicated you're going to say "no comment", but I have to just cover everything anyway. Did you two have a close relationship?

Ms Witte: No comment.

Police Interview: Can you explain why you have been accused of repeatedly touching Mr de Vries inappropriately?

Ms Witte: No comment. Police interviewer: Okay. Can you tell me more about the pictures you sent Mr de Vries although he asked you to stop?

Ms Witte: No comment.

Police interviewer: OK, I think we should move on to the incident that happened on the 5th of January 2019, when you broke into Mr de Vries' room. Please explain in your own words what happened on the evening of that date.

Ms Witte: No comment. Police interviewer: Can you tell me why you think he called the police? Ms Witte: No comment.

Police interviewer: Okay Ms Witte, I've got no further questions. I'm going to conclude the interview, and the time is now 12.15.

#### **End of Block: Scenario\_WOMEN\_Suspect\_NoComment**

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#### **Start of Block: Scenario\_WOMEN\_Suspect\_DenialofVictim**

Q25 In the following, you will be presented with a text that describes the accusations against a suspect. You will then be presented with the transcript of the investigative interview between the suspect and the police officer where these accusations are discussed.

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#### **Q34 Introduction**

Name of the suspect: Ms Witte

Alleged Offence: On

05/01/2020 the police received a phone call from Mr de Vries, alleging that he required immediate help. The police attended and spoke to Mr de Vries. He made a number of accusations against the suspect, Ms Witte. Mr de Vries says that Ms Witte is a student on his course at university and friends with his flatmate Ms Oost and is often at his home address late into the night.

Mr de Vries alleges that Ms Witte has often made him feel uncomfortable. He alleges instances where Ms Witte would stand very close to him during conversation, and would often touch his waist or lower back when walking past him.

Mr de Vries accuses Ms Witte of sending him photos with sexual content.

The day Mr de Vries informed the police he stated that she used her spare keys to get into his room and waited for him. She got the keys in case of any emergencies, like for instance if her friend, Ms Oost would forget her keys at home. Since his flatmates were not at home at this moment, she could just enter the open room of Mr de Vries. When he got into the apartment she wouldn't let him out unless he would let her touch intimate parts of his body. He refused and she started to touch his body, telling him that he will find it arousing himself if he just lets it happen. Then his roommate came home, so she left. Mr de Vries is scared of how far she would go, which is why he called the police. He believes he is the victim of sexual assault.

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#### Q37 Transcript

Police interviewer: Hello, my name is police constable Maathuis. 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. Do you understand?

Ms Witte: Sure, I understand.

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

Police interviewer: Good. So, you've been arrested on an allegation of sexually assaulting another student, Mr de Vries. This is alleged to have happened numerous times over the course of the last six months. So, do you want to start from the basics and just tell me about the contact with Mr de Vries?

Ms Witte: Yes, sure. Mr de Vries and I have a few courses together. We met a few months ago at a party and had a lot of fun. Well, I was not the only one who fell for him and he didn't waste the chance to get with as many girls as possible. I am still kind of into him and I felt this connection between us a lot of times.

Police interviewer: OK. What do you say about the accusation of sending him photos with sexual content?

Ms Witte: He is flirting with a lot of girls and he is not the guy for a relationship I guess. So you have to leave a lasting impression to catch his attention. It's not as if he wouldn't send around intimate photos.

Police interviewer: Alright. What do you say about the accusation of having touched Mr de Vries inappropriately several times?

Ms Witte: Touched him inappropriately? I wouldn't call it like that! Other girls are doing the same and he likes this attention. It's totally innocent. It's nothing he isn't begging for from other women in our year all the time! And also, I see him doing the same to other girls, too. I didn't do anything he hasn't done before, that I can tell you.

Police interviewer: You're saying that he explicitly said that he wanted this contact?

Ms Witte: I can't remember everything about our conversations. What I can definitely say is that it is totally unnecessary that you are interviewing me here. I was only reacting to the signals I received.

Police interviewer: OK, I think we should move on to the incident that happened on the 5th of January 2019, when you broke into Mr de Vries' room. Please explain in your own words what

happened on the evening of that date. Ms Witte: So, I heard from my friend, who is Mr de Vries' roommate, that he would talk about me all the time. Who would know that he didn't like me then? Before, in class, he looked over to me so many times! He never said anything that would imply that he has a negative impression of me. However, I decided to go over and see if I could get lucky. You're making it a bigger deal as it actually was. My friend says that's exactly what he has done to the girl in history class. And It's nothing unusual for us to use the others' keys. Well, and it's actually quite uncomfortable for me to talk to strangers about these intimate topics. I basically showed him what he could have and tried to charm him so to say. I let him put his hands on me but he never explicitly said that he was bothered by me. If you're asking me then it's exactly what he wanted. I mean he's still a man and he enjoyed touching me! And you're treating me like a criminal here.

Police interviewer: I just need to try and establish what happened for now. So you're saying that no sexual assault has happened that day?

Ms Witte: I don't really know what else to tell you. I had the feeling that's what we both wanted, that's why we are at least equally guilty. I mean, I just read the signals. He made me act like that. Maybe I came off a bit too strong, but I wanted to solve that tension so I told him not to leave. He accused me of many bad things, as if I was some kind of stalker! Of course I got mad! It's not like I was beating him or something. It got heated but nothing more happened.

Police interviewer: Okay, thank you. Let's take a short break, just for the recording the interview is being terminated at 12:15.

#### **End of Block: Scenario\_WOMEN\_Suspect\_DenialofVictim**

#### **Start of Block: Scenario\_WOMEN\_Suspect\_Supplication**

Q26 In the following, you will be presented with a text that describes the accusations against a suspect. You will then be presented with the transcript of the investigative interview between the suspect and the police officer where these accusations are discussed.

#### **Q35 Introduction**

Name of the suspect: Ms Witte

Alleged Offence:On

05/01/2020 the police received a phone call from Mr de Vries, alleging that he required immediate help. The police attended and spoke to Mr de Vries. He made a number of accusations against the suspect, Ms Witte. Mr de Vries says that Ms Witte is a student on his course at university and friends with his flatmate Ms Oost and is often at his home address late into the night.

Mr de Vries alleges that Ms Witte has often made him feel uncomfortable. He alleges instances where Ms Witte would stand very close to him during conversation, and would often touch his waist or lower back when walking past him.

Mr de Vries accuses Ms Witte of sending him photos with sexual content.

The day Mr de Vries informed the police he stated that she used her spare keys to get into his room and waited for him. She got the keys in case of any emergencies, like for instance if her friend, Ms Oost would forget her keys at home. Since his flatmates were not at home at this moment, she could

just enter the open room of Mr de Vries. When he got into the apartment she wouldn't let him out unless he would let her touch intimate parts of his body. He refused and she started to touch his body, telling him that he will find it arousing himself if he just lets it happen. Then his roommate came home, so she left. Mr de Vries is scared of how far she would go, which is why he called the police. He believes he is the victim of sexual assault.

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### Q38 Transcript

Police interviewer: Hello, my name is police constable Maathuis. 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. Do you understand? Ms Witte: Sure, I understand. Police interviewer: The black box there on the wall is recording everything. If this investigation did go further, this recording can be used in court. Do you understand?

Ms Witte: I understand that.

Police interviewer: Good. So, you've been arrested on an allegation of sexually assaulting another student, Mr de Vries. This is alleged to have happened numerous times. So, do you want to start from the basics and just tell me about the contact with Mr de Vries?

Ms Witte: Yes, Sir, I can try. Mr de Vries and I have some courses together and I am a lot at his house because I am hanging out with his flatmate. I think I first saw him at a party. I don't really know anybody and most of the people at the university are avoiding me. I had some troubles adapting so I tried to go out and make some friends. He was basically the only one talking to me. Of course I fell for him right away. It was quite hard for me to see that he was more interested in other girls. I mean, I also would not choose myself if I had to. So I wouldn't describe the contact we had as a relationship. He had more contact with the popular girls.

Police interviewer: Okay. How can you explain the accusation of touching Mr de Vries inappropriately then?

Ms Witte: I... you know I was really in love with him. I tried to be like the other girls. Like the popular ones he would go out with. I didn't mean to be perceived like that. I just wanted some attention from the boy who I guess was just pretending to be interested in me. I know touching him there was not the appropriate way to do this and usually this is not me. But that's how all of the girls flirt and I just wanted to be normal like them. You don't want to know how it is to be no one. I was practically invisible and this time, I did want to be seen for once. I am at university and I have never had a boyfriend before. You can't imagine how lonely I feel most of the time... sometimes I can't deal with it.

Police interviewer: So he said explicitly that he wanted this contact?

Ms Witte: I just assumed that someone who has been flirting with another person like this, it is something serious. But I was wrong, obviously. I had just thought that it was important to him, too. Maybe I am just not worth it.

Police interviewer: What about the photos you send him?

Ms Witte: I'm just not so confident with my body and just wanted to know if I look that bad as I think. In the past they always teased me because I don't have any curves.

Police interviewer: OK, I think we should move on to the incident that happened on the 5th of January 2019, when you broke into Mr de Vries' room. Please explain in your own words what happened on the evening of that date.

Ms Witte: It's quite upsetting for me to talk about that. I was so excited about seeing him and I

thought it was what he wanted, too. So I went over to his room but he was so mad when I showed up and he came in. I didn't think of it as breaking in and I didn't want to offend anybody or step over other lines. I couldn't break into someone's room with bad intentions. That's just not me. I can't believe he would accuse me of harming him in any way. I just wanted a relationship with him and he started yelling at me to get out and to leave him alone. It breaks my heart to sit here like a criminal.

Police interviewer: Can you tell me a bit more about what happened in Mr de Vries' room?

Ms Witte: I can try but I don't know what else I could possibly tell you. I thought he would feel something for me, so I was ready to begin a serious relationship with him. I mean, I know that was stupid. Look at me! I am definitely not looking like the other girls. But I tried to put as much effort in it as I could because I was so in love with him. I was already in his room when he came in, because I wanted to surprise him. When he saw me he became really mad and looked at me as if I was the grossest thing he had ever seen. How would you feel if the person you're in love with is creeped out by you? It was the worst feeling ever. He told me to leave but I didn't want to let go. After a while I decided to leave because I couldn't take it anymore. He rejected me and used my feelings for him to push his own ego. Can I please grab a tissue in the hall? I am too distressed to talk. I need a few minutes if that is okay.

Police interviewer: Okay, thank you. Let's take a short break, just for the recording the interview is being terminated at 12:15.

#### **End of Block: Scenario\_WOMEN\_Suspect\_Supplication**

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#### **Start of Block: FinalQuestions**

##### **Q1**

Please complete this questionnaire about the case you have just read and consider the information below.

Sexual assault is defined as "touching someone inappropriately against someone's will with or without using violence" (National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings and Sexual Violence against Children, 2019). The Public Health Service of Amsterdam (2020) states that sexual assault is often used interchangeably with sexual abuse, containing all sexual behaviours that carried out without the victims consent.

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Q2 Based on the evidence above, how likely do you think is it that the suspect is guilty of sexual assault?

- ☐ Extremely likely (1)
  - ☐ Moderately likely (2)
  - ☐ Slightly likely (3)
  - ☐ Neither likely nor unlikely (4)
  - ☐ Slightly unlikely (5)
  - ☐ Moderately unlikely (6)
  - ☐ Extremely unlikely (7)
- 

Q3 On a scale of 1 (not confident) to 10 (confident), how confident are you with your judgement?

- ☐ 1 (1)
- ☐ 2 (2)
- ☐ 3 (3)
- ☐ 4 (4)
- ☐ 5 (5)
- ☐ 6 (6)
- ☐ 7 (7)
- ☐ 8 (8)
- ☐ 9 (9)
- ☐ 10 (10)

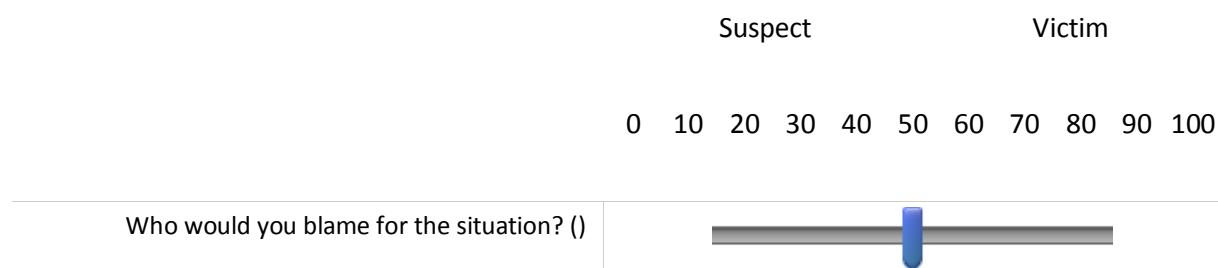
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Q4 How much sympathy do you feel for the suspect?

- ☐ A great deal (1)
- ☐ A lot (2)
- ☐ A moderate amount (3)
- ☐ A little (4)
- ☐ None at all (5)
- 

Q5 Who would you say is most to blame for the situation?

Chose by moving the slider either to the left or right.





Q6 On a scale of 1 (very unserious) to 10 (very serious), how serious do you perceive the above mentioned crime?

- ☐ 1 (1)
  - ☐ 2 (2)
  - ☐ 3 (3)
  - ☐ 4 (4)
  - ☐ 5 (5)
  - ☐ 6 (6)
  - ☐ 7 (7)
  - ☐ 8 (8)
  - ☐ 9 (9)
  - ☐ 10 (10)
-

Q7 How much empathy do you feel for the suspect?

[illegible]

transcript. (11)  
(11)

I can identify with  
the suspect in the  
transcript. (12)  
(12)



#### End of Block: FinalQuestions

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#### Start of Block: Block 9

**Q39 Debriefing** This study investigates some of the ways suspects are thought to try to persuade police officers that their story is true in police interviews. In particular in this study we compared the effectiveness of two of these methods, supplication – trying to appear weak and in need of assistance rather than punishment, and denial of the victim – claiming that the victim was a bad person and not worthy of protection, against an interview where the suspect provides no information. We wanted to know how these different techniques affected perceptions of guilt concerning sexual assault accusations. At present there is very little research on how suspects try to convince police officers of their story in investigative interviews and even less on how effective different methods of persuasion might be.

In addition, we are investigating whether there are differences in the effectiveness of supplication and denial of the victim strategies depending on the gender of the suspect. Research in organizational psychology suggests that supplication may be more effective in building sympathy and empathy for females rather than males, and so may be more effective for female rather than male suspects. Similarly, there are cultural expectations about willingness to engage in sex and vulnerability that might make people downplay the seriousness of the alleged crime when there is a male victim, especially when accompanied by denial of the victim arguments. In case that you have found this study upsetting, or you have been a victim of sexual assault yourself, please do not hesitate to use the contact information for the support service below. Sexual assault center Netherlands: 0800-0188 (24 hours)

#### End of Block: Block 9

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