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Bachelor Thesis

Acceptability of Coercive and Controlling Behaviours in Intimate Relationships: The Effect of Gender, Ambivalent Sexism, and Masculinity.

Faculty of Behavioural, Management and Social Sciences (BMS)
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Abstract

Since 2015 England and Wales criminalized coercive and controlling behaviours (psychological, financial, and emotional abuse). The Serious Crime Act (2015) pays attention to the processes within a relationship used to intimidate and subordinate a partner and that are found to be precursors of later use of physical violence. Still, many other European countries do not explicitly prosecute psychological violence within an intimate relationship only allowing the prosecution of distinct acts of violence. With the concept of coercive and controlling behaviours it is crucial to understand factors influencing as how acceptable people rate different behaviours that fall under this construct. Prior research indicated that the gender of the perpetrator is a decisive factor for the evaluation of coercive and controlling behaviours (Simon et al., 2001; Sylaska & Walters, 2014). The present study aims to identify the extent to which the gender of the perpetrator, adherence to masculine gender norms, and ambivalent sexism (benevolent sexism and hostile sexism) influence the acceptability towards coercive and controlling behaviours within an intimate relationship. Additionally, the influence of adherence to masculine gender norms on victim blame has been analysed. The participants (N = 134) read a hypothetical scenario which was manipulated in terms of perpetrator gender and victim gender (male perpetrator and female victim or female perpetrator and male victim). In both cases, the perpetrator showed similar acts of coercive and controlling behaviours. Additionally, measurements of attitudes towards masculinity, ambivalent sexism and victim blame were answered. The results generally suggest a low level of acceptability towards coercive and controlling behaviours within the present sample for both (male and female) perpetrator conditions. Additionally, high levels of hostile sexism were found to enhance the acceptability towards coercive and controlling behaviours. The effects of benevolent sexism and masculinity were not found to be significant. The overall low acceptability towards coercive and controlling behaviours and the effect of hostile sexism should be considered for educational purposes and for more appropriate social services for victims of IPV who seek or try to seek help. Future research is needed to account for the shortcomings of the present study and to have more qualitative insight into the effects found within the present study.

Keywords: Acceptability of Coercion and Control, Ambivalent Sexism, Coercive and Controlling Behaviours, Intimate Partner Violence, Gender, Victim Blame

"In our family portrait we look pretty happy
Let's play pretend, act like it goes naturally."

Pink (Family Portrait, 2001)

Introduction

On the fourth of July in 1997 – 24 years ago – with 138 votes against, a law was passed in Germany that authorized the prosecution of rape within a marriage. Twenty-four years later there is still no law that explicitly prosecutes domestic violence. The only possibility for prosecuting attacks within an intimate relationship or the family setting is the use of other legislations that pursue everything from insults to sexual attacks or to homicide (Deutscher Bundestag, 2014). Hereby, the domestic environment is not taken into account for prosecution, and the offenses are being prosecuted separately. The seriousness and prevalence of domestic violence have been estimated by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) based on anonymous self-reports of women from all European states. Hereby, 22% of women indicated experiences of physical or sexual violence by their male partner. Although the number for psychological violence within the partnership is twice as high with 43% (FRA, 2014), the prosecution of sexual or non-physical abuse is still unsatisfactory. Psychological violence comprised by the law is limited to threats and unreasonable harassment. With that restriction, there is no possibility to take the relationship into account and to connect distinct acts by including coercive and controlling behaviours (Bettinson & Bishop, 2015). This disregard of psychological abuse (including coercive and controlling behaviours) as a means of considering the relationship of perpetrator and victim is not restricted to the German law. Throughout many European countries, the law is not clearly regulated when it comes to intimate partner violence.

A legal system that recognizes and legislates the effect of coercive and controlling behaviour on the development of domestic violence and the importance of understanding the relationship as a whole is that of England and Wales. The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) describes the types of domestic violence as being "psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional abuse" (CPS, 2017). The Serious Crime Act (2015) criminalized psychological, financial, and emotional abuse within relationships, where previously often only sexual or physical abuse were unlawful (Tolmie, 2018). These three forms of abuse are captured within the concept of coercive and controlling behaviours (McMahon & McGorrery, 2016). Hereby, *coercive behaviour* refers to acts that are used to frighten, penalize, or injure the victim (CPS, 2017). This can take the form of intimidation, actual attacks, or threats of possible assaults. *Controlling behaviour* describes acts that subordinate the victim by "isolating them from

sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour" (CPS, 2017). To name just a few, controlling where to go to, whom to meet, monitoring how much money to spend or the time spent on the phone or going as far as threatening to kill are examples of coercion and control.

The present study first aims to identify how the gender of the perpetrator and victim influences the acceptance towards the use of IPV in heterosexual relationships. The focus lies on coercive and controlling behaviours. Understanding factors influencing the acceptance towards coercive and controlling behaviours amplifies the understanding of how acceptable people rate behaviours that fall under the concept of coercive and controlling behaviours. Additionally, as perceived acceptability of coercive and controlling behaviours affects the help-seeking behaviour of victims and the help giving of friends, family, or social services (Tsui, 2014), gaining insight into the gender effects on acceptance of coercive and controlling behaviours can help to understand where future interventions with regard to help-seeking should focus on. Hereinafter, the concept of coercive and controlling behaviours will be explained in more detail, also regarding gender differences affecting people's acceptability. Furthermore, masculine gender norms and ambivalent sexism will be introduced and potential effects on the acceptability will be discussed.

Coercive and controlling behaviours

Both terms – coercive and controlling – are derived from the initial term *coercive control* introduced by Evan Stark (2007) as a means of redefining interpersonal violence against women. While offences of domestic violence are seen and used as distinct actions, Stark typifies coercive control as an ongoing series of acts that harm women (Hanna, 2009). Stark (2007) further describes domestic violence as only being one part of intimate partner violence (IPV). Next to domestic violence, IPV integrates intimidation, isolation, and control. As opposed to concentrating only on physical abuse, coercive control offers a broader context and maximises the understanding of the perpetrators' motive and the continuing harm the victim is exposed to (Tolmie, 2018). Additionally, various studies identified coercive and controlling behaviour as a predictive variable for the use of physical violence within intimate relationships (Beck & Raghavan, 2010; Myhill & Hohl, 2016; Loveland & Raghavan, 2017). Including coercive and controlling behaviour in the context of IPV and domestic violence, therefore, seems to give a more accurate and extensive picture of interpersonal violence and

the risk-behaviours leading to the use of physical attacks with a more sophisticated view on the victim.

Nevertheless, male victims seem to be neglected in the discussion around coercive and controlling behaviour. While the discussion around domestic violence is accompanied by questioning the extent to which women and men are perpetrators or victims (Archer, 2000; Kimmel, 2002) most scholarly articles and media coverage concerning IPV and coercive and controlling behaviour focus on female victims and male perpetrators (Carmo, Grams, & Magalhães, 2011; Costa et al., 2015; Weare & Bates, 2020). But a growing body of evidence suggests that men are more often victims of IPV than originally presumed (Bates, 2019). Men experiencing IPV described experiences of physical attacks such as biting and hitting (Drijber, Reijnders, & Ceelen, 2013) but also psychological assaults, including controlling behaviours like manipulation or isolation from friends and/or family (Bates, 2019). Dutton and Nicholls (2005) coined the term 'gender paradigm' to describe this imbalance. They describe gender paradigm as "the concept that intimate partner violence is primarily perpetrated by males against females in defence of patriarchy, a hierarchical social arrangement commuting power to males" (Dutton, 2012, p. 99). Dutton and Nicholls (2005) critically investigated studies that seemed to support the view of the violent man and the victimised woman and concluded that the seemingly bilateral distribution of IPV is based on women compared to men being more likely to report attacks rather than the actual numbers of IPV attacks.

While the reasons for help-seeking might differ between the genders, the general number of reports of experiences of IPV or coercive and controlling behaviours is very low for both genders compared to the number of instances of IPV (Coker, Derrick, Lumpkin, Aldrich, & Oldendick, 2000). While 13.2 % of men and 25.3 % of women experienced IPV only 17.8 % of women and 4.9 % of men reported those incidents (Coker et al., 2000). Whereas the number of psychological violence attacks outnumbers physical assaults, women, as well as men, are even less likely to seek help in case of psychological violence (Duterte et al., 2008). Many female victims do not seek victim services because they believe that violence is to some degree accepted within the society and that, based on patriarchal gender roles, violence is perceived as a "normal" behaviour within relationships (Worden & Carlson, 2005; Lelaurain, Graziani, & Lo Monaco, 2017). Therefore, they do not evaluate the circumstances as severe enough for seeking help, especially in the case of psychological violence (Lelaurain et al., 2017).

Men, on the other hand, do not seek help because their problem is not recognised in today's society (Weare & Bates, 2020). This is due to the victimization of men generally not being perceived as being as severe as female victimization (Dutton & White, 2013). This is supported by the finding of Simon et al. (2001) that generally a woman hitting a man is more accepted than vice versa. Additionally, the study performed by Bates (2019) identified various barriers for men seeking help in situations of perceived IPV. These barriers included that men feared being perceived as weak or as the perpetrator themselves, with the women only showing aggression to defend themselves. This is in line with a study by Weare and Hulley (2019) where men mentioned that concerns about not being believed, or feelings of shame and self-blame hindered them from seeking help in situations of being forced to penetrate women. This illustrates that the help-seeking behaviour of men and women is influenced by the perception and acceptability of IPV within the population.

Especially important is the fact that for female as well as male victims, experiences of IPV and controlling and coercive behaviour result in enormous distress (Resnick, Acierno, & Kilpatrick, 2010). The consequences can be physical and psychological in nature (Hines & Douglas, 2009) and can have long-term impacts on the health of the victims (Coker, et al., 2002). Despite this severity of consequences the victims undergo, and the high numbers of IPV perpetrations (FRA, 2014; Office for National Statistics, 2020), the rates for help-seeking among victims of IPV remain incredibly low (Coker et al., 2000). Taking together these findings, it is assumed that gender is a significant factor influencing the acceptability towards IPV and coercive and controlling behaviours. Considering the findings above, the prediction is as follows:

> H1: The coercive and controlling behaviour of a male perpetrator is less accepted than the coercive and controlling behaviour of a woman.

The second aim of this study is to investigate potential moderator variables affecting the acceptability towards coercive and controlling behaviours within relationships. Considering previous findings in the literature, the focus will be on the effect of masculinity based on traditional gender roles and ambivalent sexism. The former focuses on perceptions of men and how that influences the acceptability of coercive and controlling behaviours and the extent of victim blame. The latter concentrates on perceptions of women.

Masculine gender roles

Gender role norms shape people's expectations of women's and men's position within society and the acceptance of different behaviours. The term gender was introduced by feminists to describe behaviours that are more socially constructed and not linked to actual biological differences between women and men (Cislaghi & Heise, 2020). In most existing social systems, the male or masculine gender is privileged over the female gender (Heise et al., 2019). Norms that are related to one's gender are learned in childhood and manifested in the social context (Heise et al., 2019; Cislaghi & Heise, 2020). In the case of the masculine gender, this can be through phrases like "Boys don't cry" or by watching movies in which the male character is strong and often reacts in a violent way (Mahalik et al., 2003). These norms, therefore, dictate that "men should be powerful, self-reliant and emotionally controlled" (Bates, 2019, p. 26). Women on the other hand learn to be vulnerable and to rely on the help of men (Blum, Mmari, & Moreau, 2017). Certainly, it is an individual decision whether to conform to these social expectations which might both result in advantages or disadvantages for the person.

Gender role norms also shape people's perception of coercive and controlling behaviours within relationships. Hine (2019) argues that the traditional perception of the use of IPV is based on stereotypes of masculinity and femininity that are acquired through social cognition. Social Cognition Theory describes the processing and storage of social information (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). A fundamental part of Social Cognition Theory are schemas. Schemas define how we organize and group information. The schemas we form influence our perception and might result in a more traditional picture of IPV (Hine, 2019) that presumes that men are in the role of the perpetrator. This traditional picture is therefore not in line with a woman being aggressive and coercive towards her male partner. The perceptions of a strong and tough man consequently do not correspond with men being the victim of female perpetrated violence (Weare & Bates, 2020). Consequently, male victims are often not believed nor helped.

The perceptions and expectations on masculinity result in some men being reluctant to seek help in situations in which they are victims of coercive and controlling behaviours. On the one hand, this is due to their own perception and conformity to traditional gender roles (Berger, Levant, McMillan, Kellecher & Sellers, 2005). On the other hand, they fear disbelief or stigma from friends, family, or official help services (Machado, Santos, Graham-Kevan, & Matos, 2016; Bates, 2019; Weare & Bates, 2020). Another aspect that is influenced by traditional gender roles is the extent to which a victim is blamed for violent behaviours in

relationships. This is a result of people prototyping what a victim should look like and what gender the victim should have (Taylor & Sorenson, 2005). Dutton and White (2013) found that assaults committed by a female perpetrator compared to a male perpetrator are generally perceived as less violent. Additionally, when a woman is acting violently towards her male partner the victim is blamed more often (Taylor & Sorenson, 2005). This amplification of victim blame towards men results from two possible positions. Firstly, some might expect women to only use violence in case of self-defence or stigmatize men as not being appropriate victims (Eckstein, 2010). Secondly, other findings suggest that men are being more blamed if they do not behave in a masculine way (Davies, Rogers, & Whitelegg, 2009). Being in the role of a victim or, for example, not fighting back means that they do not fulfil their masculine gender expectations.

Hence, gender norms are likely to influence our perception of coercive and controlling behaviours. It is expected that people who strongly support masculine gender role norms perceive a male victim as violating masculine gender norms and thus blame a male victim more fiercely. Based on the described findings, the next hypotheses are as follows:

> H2: Participants supporting masculine gender role norms have a greater acceptance of controlling or coercive behaviour by a male perpetrator against a female victim than vice versa.

> H3: Participants supporting masculine gender role norms are more likely to blame a male victim for the abuse they receive than a female victim.

Ambivalent sexism

While the previous section was composed around the masculine gender norms this section illustrates sexist beliefs towards women. Ambivalent sexism extends the traditional view that sexism is solely prejudicial in nature to a more multidimensional picture of sexist attitudes towards women. The distinction is made between *hostile sexism* and *benevolent sexism* (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Hereby, *hostile sexism* refers to an aversive prejudice towards women evoked by overgeneralisations. This means that people have negative feelings or thoughts about women. This evokes hostility and antipathy towards women just because of their gender (Alport, 1954). *Benevolent sexism*, on the other hand, is defined "as a set of interrelated attitudes toward women that are sexist in terms of viewing women stereotypically and in restricted roles but that are subjectively positive in feeling tone (for the perceiver) and also

tend to elicit behaviours typically categorized as prosocial (e.g., helping) or intimacy- seeking (e.g., self-disclosure)" (Glick & Fiske, 1996, p. 491). Although the concepts describe miscellaneous beliefs and views on women, no distinction is made on the effect it has on the perceived position of women: both undermine the women's position in society and subordinate them to the male gender.

While it seems obvious that hostile sexism results in negative influences on women, the impact of benevolent sexism seems to be more subliminal but is also negative in nature. The effects differ depending on the type of women; while career women or feminists – not representing the traditional gender roles - should be treated with hostility, housewives – representing the traditional gender roles – are treated benevolently (Chen, Fiske, & Lee, 2009). Therefore, sexism does not only affect women at their workplace but also in a relationship or marital setting. Independent from the situational circumstances and the type of women, both benevolent and hostile behaviour towards women inherently convey that the woman is weak and that the man is superior (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Thus, sexism towards women is a means by which the inequality of traditional gender roles is fostered and maintained.

Within a relationship, sexism and male dominance are closely related. Hostile and benevolent sexism are described as being "complementary tools of control" (Glick, Sakalli-Ugurlu, Ferreira, & de Souza, 2002, p. 292). Consequently, protection and attachment as well as hostile behaviour have the common goal of control (Renzetti, Lynch, & DeWall, 2015). Researchers often regard harassment and controlling behaviours towards women as rooted in a general hostility. Results not only suggest a positive association between hostile sexism and the use of IPV (Anderson & Anderson, 2008; Renzetti, et al., 2015) but also between hostile sexism and the tolerance of IPV (Glick et al., 2002; Russell & Trigg, 2004). The connection between benevolent sexism and IPV is more complex. While Russell and Trigg (2004) found no effect of benevolent sexism on sexual harassment, results by Viki and Abrams (2002) show that participants high in benevolent sexism attribute more blame on victims of rape violating traditional gender roles. Correspondingly, Glick et al. (2002) found hostile sexism to be a legitimising factor for wife abuse. People with benevolent sexist attitudes, on the other hand, legitimise abusive behaviour towards a wife only if the woman does not fulfil or disregards the traditional gender roles. These results suggest a strong connection between the execution and acceptance of IPV and ambivalent sexism.

Based on the findings that hostile sexism is positively related to the use and acceptance of IPV the following hypothesis is generated:

H4: Participants high in hostile sexism have a greater acceptance of a male perpetrator showing coercive and controlling behaviours against a female victim than vice versa.

People with high benevolent sexist beliefs regard a woman as inferior to the man. Therefore, a woman who is in the superior role and neglecting the traditional gender roles is perceived as misguided. This results in the fifth hypothesis being as follows:

H5: Participants high in benevolent sexism have a lower acceptance of a female perpetrator showing coercive and controlling behaviours against a male victim than vice versa.

Method

Design

A vignette was used in which the gender of the perpetrator (male and female) was manipulated and acted as the independent variable. Hence, the study was experimental in nature. A factorial, between-subjects design was employed with the mentioned independent variable and two moderator variables. The first being ‘masculine gender roles’ and the second being ‘ambivalent sexism’ with two subcategories, namely hostile and benevolent sexism. Next to the dependent variable ‘acceptability towards coercive and controlling behaviours’ the moderation effect of ‘masculine gender roles’ on the dependent variable ‘victim blame’ was analysed. A questionnaire asking about participants previous experiences with interpersonal violence was added because other researchers were interested in this topic. Therefore, this questionnaire will not be discussed in the present paper.

Participants

Participants were recruited using opportunity sampling. The experiment was shared by the researchers via social media and via the universities Test Subject Pool System (SONA) to students of the behavioural, management and social sciences faculty (Students in psychology and communication studies are required to earn points by participating in studies via SONA). Participants needed to be 18 or older to be able to give their consent. Originally, 186 people responded to the questionnaire, yet 49 incomplete responses needed to be deleted and three participants withdrew after the debriefing resulting in 134 participants (22.4 % men and 77.6 % women). The age ranged between 18 and 66 with a mean of 23.98 (*SD* = 7.73). Most participants were German (81.3 %), 14.9 % were Dutch and 2.2 % indicated being from other

countries and the remaining 1.5 % preferred to give no answer. A majority of participants indicated being heterosexual (86.6 %). Most participants (87.3 %) reported currently being in a relationship or experiences with relationships and 12.7 % never had been in a relationship before. In terms of education, 70.9 % had a high school or higher graduation. Before publishing the questionnaire, the study was approved by the ethics committee of the University of Twente.

Materials

Attitudes towards masculinity (MRNI-R)

To measure participants attitudes towards social norms that are linked to the male gender, the Male Role Norms Inventory-Revised (MRNI-R) was used which adopts a 7-point Likert scale with 1 being 'strongly disagree' and 7 being 'strongly agree' (Levant, Rankin, Williams, Hasan, & Smalley, 2010). The MRNI-R had been chosen because it not only measures men's personal conformity to traditional gender roles but also people's attitudes towards masculinity and gender roles specified for men. Thus, it was possible to include women's attitudes as well. Eight items have been removed from the original 40 items because they belonged to a subscale measuring negativity towards sexual minorities which was not of interest in the present study. Additionally, one item had been rephrased to heighten participants identification with this item. While the original item said, "The President of the U.S. should always be a man" the item in our study was changed to "The President of one's country should always be a man". The test also shows good convergent and concurrent validity (Levant, et al., 2010) and Cronbach's Alpha shows an excellent internal consistency (.94).

Ambivalent Sexism (ASI)

Hostile and benevolent sexism towards women was measured using the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) developed by Glick and Fiske (1996). The scale consists of 22-items, of which eleven items measure each benevolent and hostile sexism. It adopts a 0 to 5-point Likert scale without a midpoint, with 0 being 'Disagree strongly' and 5 being 'Agree strongly'. Glick and Fiske (1996) demonstrated a good validity of their scale and that for both genders the total score correlated with ambivalent sexism towards women. Additionally, the computed Cronbach's Alpha (.85) suggests a good internal consistency of the items.

Acceptability of coercive and controlling behaviours

To measure participants acceptability towards the displayed coercive and controlling behaviours within the script a questionnaire with 20 items was developed. Each item was

linked to a specific behaviour that was described in the story (see Appendix A). The behaviour that occurred first in the story also appeared first in the questionnaire so that the behaviours of higher severity were listed last. This also allowed the participants to be better able to map between the items and the behaviours in the story they read. A gender-neutral wording was chosen so that the questionnaire could be used for both scenarios and the questions were kept simple to be appropriately understood by all participants (Clark & Watson, 1995). Participants were asked to rate the acceptability with the help of a bar slider ranging from 0 to 100. This selection was chosen to have a higher variance in scores thus having more power for the statistical tests. As found by Hasson and Arnetz (2005) a main disadvantage of Likert scales is that the displayed categories do not sufficiently represent a continuous and subjective phenomenon such as the acceptability towards coercive and controlling behaviours. The scale ranged from 'very unacceptable' to 'very acceptable' with a mid-point labelled as neutral. To test if the measurement of the acceptability of coercive and controlling behaviours is reliable and thus can be used in further analyses Cronbach's Alpha was computed and showed excellent internal consistency (.93) with no item being removed.

Blame measurement

The last measure was developed to analyse the extent to which the participants blame the perpetrator, the victim, or circumstances beyond their control for the fight at the end of the night in the story. To have a measurement that can be answered by all participants independent from which storyline was shown to the participant the answer options were 'Emma', 'Mark', and 'Circumstances beyond Mark and Emma's control'. A 1 to 5-point Likert scale was adopted with 1 being 'not at all' and 5 being 'fully' regarding the extent to which the fight was due to the perpetrator, the victim, or other circumstances. While analysing the answers to this question the options 'Mark' and 'Emma' were treated as either the perpetrator or victim dependent on the script the participants had read. The three variables were analysed as separate dependent variables as they were measuring three different properties.

Script: coercive and controlling behaviour

A script was developed in which behaviours that are representative of coercive and controlling behaviours are described within a fictional story between a couple (see Appendix B). The storyline was the same for every participant with only the gender of the perpetrator and the victim being manipulated. While in one story the woman (Emma) was the perpetrator and the man (Mark) was the victim, the gender changed in the other with the man being the perpetrator and the woman being the victim. It was randomized which participant would see

which story with both stories being equally distributed resulting in 67 participants being in the female perpetrator condition (Female = 51, Male = 16) and 67 participants in the male perpetrator condition (Female = 53, Male = 14). The storyline of the script was developed so that the severity of the displayed behaviour increases as the story progresses. For example, one of the first things the perpetrator does is to tell the partner what they should wear. But the story ends with threatening physical violence against the partner. In total, 20 coercive or controlling behaviours were displayed. The behaviours described within the script are based on the definition of coercive and controlling behaviours by the Crown Prosecution Act (CPS, 2017). The behaviours include, for example, acts of monitoring the whereabouts of the partner, trying to isolate the partner from friends or taking control over finances.

Procedure

An online questionnaire was developed via Qualtrics. After opening the link, participants were given an opening statement explaining the topic of the study and the course of the questionnaire. Afterwards, they were asked to give their informed consent. Participants now completed various questions regarding their demographics, their level of masculinity and ambivalent sexism before they were given the script. Here, the participants either read the story with the female perpetrator and the male victim or vice versa. After that, they were asked to rate their acceptability of the displayed behaviours. Three questions were used to assess whom the participants blame for the fight at the end of the night. To minimize missing data, the questionnaires were built around a force response so that participants could not continue without having answered all questions. Having finished the questionnaire, the participants were given the debrief explaining the manipulation and some possibilities to call or websites to visit if they experienced any physical or psychological threat by a partner. Lastly, after having explained the manipulation, the participants were asked again if they want their data to be deleted or if their data can be used for the analysis.

Data analysis

In order to analyse the data, the statistics program SPSS (version 27) was used. For each scale, (acceptability of coercive and controlling behaviour, hostile and benevolent sexism and attitudes towards masculinity) the mean score per participant was calculated and further used for the analysis. High scores on each scale indicated high levels of the construct being measured and low scores indicated low levels of acceptability, hostile and benevolent sexism or masculinity. Next, the Mann-Whitney U test was applied to test the effect of the

independent variable gender on the acceptability of coercive and controlling behaviours. This test was chosen because the assumptions for an independent samples t-test could not be satisfied. The moderation effects of attitudes towards masculinity and ambivalent sexism were analysed using the PROCESS macro for SPSS. The data was transformed to achieve a normal distribution. The assumptions were checked and satisfied in the benevolent sexism and hostile sexism setting. For the moderation effect of masculinity, all assumptions were satisfied except for the homoscedasticity of the data. Yet, it has been decided to ignore this violation for further analysis. To analyse the influence of masculinity on the victim blame a regression analysis was computed using PROCESS macro. Hereby, the three possibilities (blame Emma, blame Mark, or blame circumstances beyond their control) have been evaluated separately as three dependent variables. Depending on the condition, 'Emma' and 'Mark' have been treated either as victim or perpetrator.

Results

Descriptive statistics

For the described findings below the *Mean* and *Standard Deviation* and the statistical values for the Mann Whitney U-test can be found in Table 1. The acceptability of the coercive and controlling behaviours displayed within the narrative showed a right skewed distribution. As expected, the scores indicate overall low acceptability. Female participants scored slightly lower on the overall acceptability but with a higher range (0.00 – 90.50) compared to the male participants' scores of acceptability where the highest given value for acceptability was 27.00. The difference between female and male participants was significant. Most behaviours were rated between 0 and 20 representing low scores of acceptability compared to the full range of the scale (0-100). Few participants rated some behaviours as highly acceptable with scores ranging up to over 90.

The distribution of the results for masculinity, displaying participants attitudes towards masculine gender norms was also found to be right skewed. Here, the scores were also found to be relatively low. Male participants scored slightly higher on the masculinity scale than female participants and the difference was found to be significant. Hostile sexism is positively skewed. The scores for male participants and female participants did not differ significantly. Benevolent sexism was slightly right skewed. As opposed to masculinity and hostile sexism female participants scored slightly higher on benevolent sexism than male participants with no significant difference between the gender of the participants.

The attributed blame was measured per victim, perpetrator, and circumstances beyond the control of the couple in the story. Participants attributed little blame on the victim in both

conditions resulting in a right skewed distribution. Female participants attributed less blame to the victim than male participants. The distribution for the perpetrator blame was left skewed indicating high levels of blame for the perpetrator. Female participants and male participants attributed equally high levels of blame to the perpetrator. Lastly, the blame for the circumstances shows a right skewed distribution. Male participants blamed the circumstances slightly higher than female participants.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics per Measurement and Gender of the Participants

Measurements	Total	Male participants	Female participants	Mann Whitney U-test
	Mean (SD)	*Mean (SD)*	*Mean (SD)*	*U-value (p-value)*
Acceptability	14.08 (12.83)	15.10 (6.15)	13.79 (14.20)	1122.00 (.02*)
Masculinity	1.69 (0.67)	1.94 (0.74)	1.62 (0.64)	1146.50 (.03*)
Hostile sexism	2.18 (0.71)	2.21 (0.72)	2.17 (0.71)	1492.50 (.72)
Benevolent sexism	2.55 (0.71)	2.52 (0.90)	2.56 (0.65)	1683.00 (.51)
Victim blame	1.83 (0.99)	2.00 (1.08)	1.78 (.95)	1395.50 (.34)
Perpetrator blame	4.59 (0.79)	4.60 (0.56)	4.59 (0.84)	1683.50 (.40)
Circumstances blame	2.04 (1.20)	2.20 (1.32)	1.99 (1.16)	1447.50 (.52)

Note. Acceptability as an abbreviation for 'Acceptability towards coercive and controlling behaviours', * = significant.

Further, Pearson's correlations for the measurements used are displayed in Table 2. All correlations were found to be positive and significant. The strongest correlations have

been found for hostile sexism and masculinity, benevolent sexism and masculinity and benevolent and hostile sexism.

Table 2

Correlation Matrix Demonstrating the Relationship Between the Moderator Variables and the Dependent Variable Acceptability Towards Coercive and Controlling Behaviours.

	Acceptability	Masculinity	Hostile sexism	Benevolent sexism
	r (p)	*r (p)*	*r (p)*	*r (p)*
Acceptability	1			
Masculinity	.30 (<.01**)	1		
Hostile sexism	.25 (<.01**)	.64 (<.01**)	1	
Benevolent sexism	.27 (<.01**)	.67 (<.01**)	.62 (<.01**)	1

Note. Acceptability as an abbreviation for 'Acceptability towards coercive and controlling behaviours', * = significant.

Acceptability of coercive and controlling behaviours

The Mann-Whitney U test was computed to investigate the effect of the gender of the perpetrator and victim on the acceptability of coercive and controlling behaviours to test the first hypothesis, that the coercive and controlling behaviour of a male perpetrator is less accepted than coercive and controlling behaviour of a woman. All assumptions were checked, and the distributions of acceptability of coercive and controlling behaviours were visually assessed as being similar. A *Median* of 10.85 (*IQR* = 0.00 - 85.40) indicates overall lower acceptability in the condition with the male perpetrator compared to the female perpetrator condition with a *Median* of 12.5 (*IQR* = 0.00 - 90.50). Therefore, behaviours performed by a female perpetrator were considered as being more acceptable than those behaviours performed by a man, but these differences were found to be not statistically significant (U = 1864.50, p = .09).

Additional tests for the individual behaviours

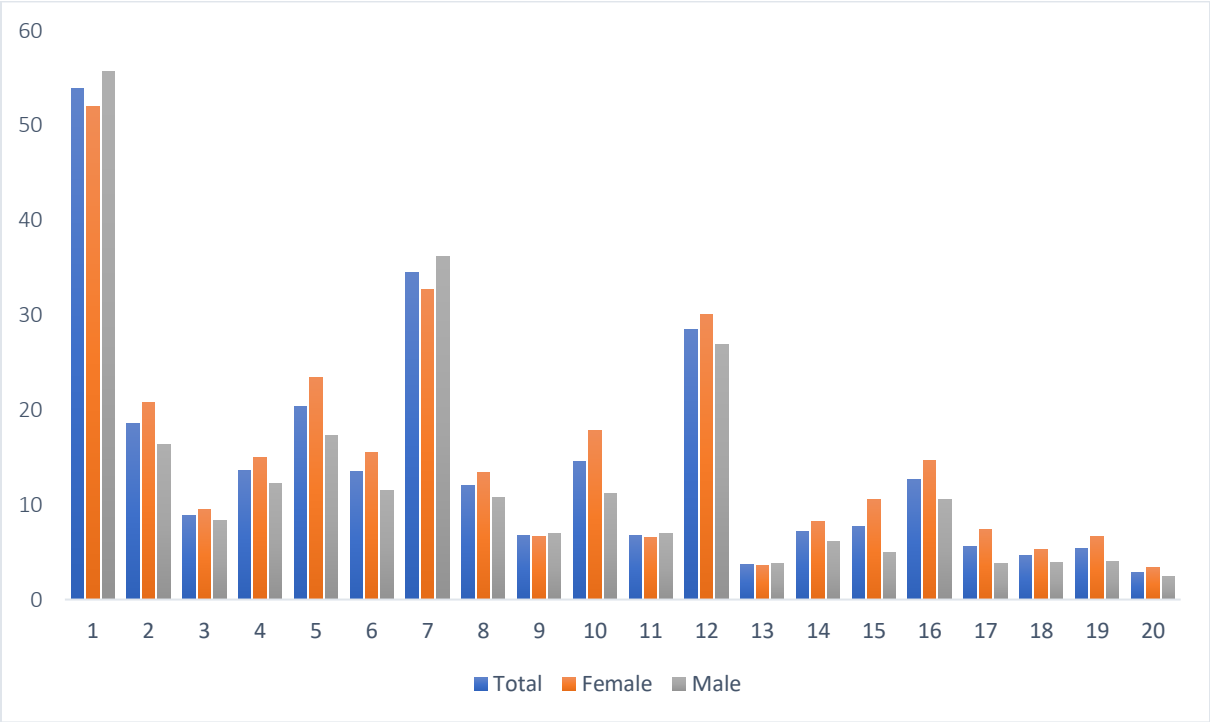
Additional tests were performed to investigate the differences in acceptability for each behaviour. The mean scores per behaviour had been calculated for each behaviour and both categories (male perpetrator and female perpetrator) and included in Appendix C. Additionally, the results for the Mann Whitney U-test have been added to demonstrate significant differences between the perpetrator conditions per behaviour. It was found that as opposed to the non-significance for the overall acceptability, the difference for four behaviours has been found to be significant. These are the following behaviours: 'Telling their partner how much alcohol they can drink', 'Telling their partner how much money they can spend', 'Insulting their partner' and 'Accusing their partner of cheating with no reasonable evidence'. Here, the acceptability was significantly lower for the male perpetrator condition (see Appendix C).

As mentioned beforehand, the narrative and the corresponding questionnaire were designed so that the coercive and controlling behaviours would progressively increase and the corresponding acceptance would decrease. Although, as displayed in Figure 1, the overall acceptability does decrease, it is not a linear relationship but rather displaying some peaks. Especially questions one, seven, and twelve seem to be the most acceptable behaviours with scores ranging between 20 and 60. As it can be derived from Figure 1, the most acceptable behaviour was the first one (Showing up at their partner's house unexpectedly) and the least acceptable behaviour was the last one (Threatening physical violence against their partner).

Additionally, the behaviours are rated nearly equal in most cases for both conditions (see Figure 1). In general, most behaviours are rated as slightly more acceptable for the female perpetrator condition. This is especially true for behaviours 13 (Placing a tracking app on the partners' phone to monitor the partner's whereabouts WITHOUT their consent (e.g., Find My Friends or Snap Map) to 20 (Threatening physical violence against their partner) where the severity of the behaviours increases (except behaviour 16: 'Getting angry if their partner talks to others of the sex they are physically attracted to') and the acceptability decreases. Only behaviours 1 'Showing up at their partner's house unexpectedly' and 7 'Video-calling or texting their partner multiple times a day without prior agreement' have been rated as more acceptable for the male perpetrator condition. These are the behaviours that were generally perceived as most acceptable (see Figure 1). Behaviours 9 and 11 were also rated as more acceptable within the male perpetrator condition but these differences were smaller than 0.5.

Figure 1

Acceptability per Behaviour and Gender of the Perpetrator



Note. This figure demonstrates the acceptability of coercive and controlling behaviours per behaviour displayed within the narrative. The scores display the overall acceptability per behaviour and the acceptability for the male and female perpetrator condition.

Moderation effect of attitudes towards masculinity

Effect of masculinity on the acceptability of coercive and controlling behaviours

PROCESS macro for SPSS was used to test the second hypothesis, participants supporting masculine gender role norms have a greater acceptance of controlling or coercive behaviour by a male perpetrator against a female victim than vice versa. First, the assumptions were checked and satisfied. Note that three outliers have been detected within the data set. Nevertheless, these cases seemed to be not influential in altering regression lines. The threshold of 1 indicated by Cook and Weisberg (1982) has not been exceeded, therefore, it has been decided to not delete these three values.

The overall regression model had an R^2 of 0.11. This model was significant, $F(3, 128) = 5.50$, $p < .01$. Within this model, no main effect was found for the gender of the perpetrator on the acceptability ($b = 0.25$, $SE = 0.17$, $t = 1.48$, $p = .14$, *95% CI* [-0.08, 0.58]), therefore the acceptability was not significantly higher in the female perpetrator condition. Masculinity

was found to be a significant predictor, $b = 0.21$, $SE = 0.07$, $t = 2.92$, $p = .00$, *95% CI* [0.07, 0.35]. Hence, with higher levels of masculinity acceptability of coercive and controlling behaviours also increased. The interaction effect of gender and masculinity was non-significant, $b = 0.08$, $SE = t = 0.91$, $p = 0.36$, *95% CI* [-0.27, 0.10]. See Appendix D for a presentation of the effects.

Effect of masculinity on the blame towards the victim, the perpetrator, and the circumstances

To test the third hypothesis that participants supporting masculine gender role norms are more likely to blame a male victim for the abuse they receive than a female victim, a regression analysis was performed using PROCESS. This way, three analyses were performed, each for the three dependent variables measuring the extent to which the victim, the perpetrator or the circumstances beyond Mark's and Emma's control are blamed dependent on the gender of the perpetrator. First, the effect of masculinity on the victim blame was analysed. The model had an R^2 of 0.10 and was significant, $F(3, 130) = 4.77$, $p < .01$. The gender of the perpetrator was not significant ($b = -0.55$, $SE = 0.45$, $t = -1.24$, $p = .22$, *95% CI* [-1.44, 0.33]). Hence, no significant difference was found for the male or female perpetrator condition on the victim blame. Neither was masculinity found to be a significant predictor ($b = 0.26$, $SE = 0.16$, $t = 1.61$, $p = .11$, *95% CI* [-0.06, .58]). The interaction effect was found to be non-significant too ($b = -0.05$, $SE = 0.25$, $t = -0.18$, $p = .85$, *95% CI* [-0.44, 0.53]). That means that participants high in masculinity did not blame a female victim less than a male victim.

Next, the effect of masculinity on the perpetrator blame was analysed. The model explained a significant proportion of variance in perpetrator blame, $R^2 = 0.11$, $F(3, 130) = 5.11$, $p < .01$). The gender of the perpetrator was not significant ($b = 0.12$, $SE = 0.36$, $t = 0.34$, $p = 0.74$, *95% CI* [-0.59, 0.83]). Masculinity was found to be a negative and significant predictor of perpetrator blame ($b = -0.34$, $SE = 0.13$, $t = -2.65$, $p = 0.01$, *95% CI* [-0.59, 0.83]). Hence, higher levels of masculinity predict lower levels of perpetrator blame. The interaction effect was non-significant ($b = 0.10$, $SE = 0.20$, $t = 0.53$, $p = .60$, 95% CI [-0.29, .49]). This means that participants who scored high on masculinity did not blame a male perpetrator more. Lastly, the blame of circumstances was analysed. The model had an R^2 of 0.04 and was not significant, $F(3, 130) = 1.63$, $p = .19$. The gender of the perpetrator was not a significant predictor ($b = 0.42$, $SE = .56$, $t = 0.75$, $p = 0.46$, *95% CI* [-0.69, 1.53]). Masculinity positively and significantly affected the blame of the circumstances ($b = 0.47$, $SE = 0.24$, $t = 2.00$, $p = 0.05$, 95% CI [0.01, .94]). Participants who scored higher on masculinity

therefore blamed the circumstances more. The interaction effect was not significant (b = -0.29, SE = 0.31, t = -0.92, p = 0.36, 95% CI [-0.90, 0.33]) resulting in highly masculine participants not blaming the circumstances less in the female perpetrator condition.

Moderation effect of ambivalent sexism

Effect of hostile sexism on the acceptability of coercive and controlling behaviours

To test the fourth hypothesis, participants high in hostile sexism have a greater acceptance of a male perpetrator showing coercive and controlling behaviours against a female victim than vice versa, PROCESS macro was used. The R^2 of the overall model was 0.13. The overall model was significant, $F(3, 128) = 6.26$, $p < .01$. The effect of the gender of the perpetrator was significant in this model (b = 0.52, SE = .19, t = 2.70, p = .01, *95% CI* [0.14, 0.91]). Meaning that the overall acceptability was higher when the perpetrator was female compared to a male perpetrator. Hostile sexism did show a significant effect as well (b = .23, SE = .06, t = 3.78, $p < .01$, *95% CI* [0.11, 0.35]). Higher levels of hostile sexism therefore predicted higher levels of acceptability. The interaction effect of hostile sexism and the gender of the perpetrator was significant (b = -0.18, SE = .08, t = -2.13, p = 0.04, *95% CI* [-0.35, -0.01]). The differences in acceptability of coercive and controlling behaviours based on the gender of the perpetrator and the level of hostile sexism are as follows. At lower levels of hostile sexism, the acceptability of coercive and controlling behaviours was higher for the female perpetrator condition, b = .26, SE = .09, t = 3.05, $p < .01$, *95% CI* [0.09, 0.43]. This effect was also true for the mean level of hostile sexism (b = .13, SE = 0.06, t = 2,19, p = .03, *95% CI* [0.01, 0.25]). This effect changed for higher levels of hostile sexism. Here, the acceptability was no longer higher for the female perpetrator condition, b = 0.09, SE = 0.09, t = 0.04, p = .97, *95% CI* [-0.17, 0.17]. A visual presentation has been added in Appendix D.

Effect of benevolent sexism on the acceptability of coercive and controlling behaviours

PROCESS macro was used to test the last hypothesis whether participants high in benevolent sexism have a lower acceptance of a female perpetrator showing controlling or coercive behaviours against a male victim than vice versa. The overall model had an R^2 of 0.12 and the model was found to be significant, $F(3, 128) = 5.77$, $p < .01$. The effect of the gender was significant (b = 0.50, SE = 0.23, t = 2.2, p = .03, *95% CI* [0.05, 0.96]). Hence, the acceptability was found to be higher for the female perpetrator condition. The effect of benevolent sexism had been found to significantly enhance the acceptability of coercive and controlling behaviours (b = 0.22, SE = 0.06, t = 3.5, $p < .01$, *95% CI* [0.10, 0.35]). The interaction effect between benevolent sexism and the gender of the perpetrator was not

significant (b = -0.15, SE = 0.09, t = -1.77, p = .08, 95% CI [-0.33, 0.02]). Therefore, participants high in benevolent sexism did not rate the coercive and controlling behaviours perpetrated by a woman as significantly less acceptable. See Appendix D for a visual presentation.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate the effects of perpetrator gender, masculine gender norms and ambivalent sexism on the acceptability of coercive and controlling behaviours. Additionally, the effect of masculine gender norms on the attributed blame on the victim has been analysed dependent on the gender of the perpetrator. Only one initial hypothesis could be confirmed, namely hypothesis four, with participants high in hostile sexism having a greater acceptance of a male perpetrator showing coercive and controlling behaviours. In the following, the distinct findings will be discussed for each variable.

Acceptability of coercive and controlling behaviours

The first hypothesis, that the coercive and controlling behaviour of a male perpetrator is less accepted than coercive and controlling behaviour of a woman, could not be validated. Within the present sample, a difference was found with lower acceptability in the male perpetrator condition, but this effect was not significant for the whole scale measuring acceptability. It was only found to be significant for some behaviours. Although a difference in mean scores could be observed between the male and female perpetrator condition within the present sample, this difference is only small and only significant for a small number of behaviours. Additionally, it cannot be concluded that the findings within the present study can be generalised to the population level. But the direction of the effect of the gender of the perpetrator is supported by previous research, where female perpetrated deeds were perceived as less severe than male perpetrated IPV (Simon et al., 2001; Dutton & White, 2013). Additional findings support this. In a study by Scarduzio, Carlyle, Lockwood Harris, and Savage (2016) participants rated female perpetrated IPV as more acceptable as they perceived female aggression as having an external cause (e.g., self-defence) and male aggression as being internally caused (e.g., no anger management).

Nevertheless, this rather small effect and the generally negative attitude towards the behaviours displayed within the narrative illustrate that participants views on coercive and controlling behaviours are opposed to the expectations of victims which perceive psychological assaults as accepted within the society (Lelaurain, Graziani, & Lo Monaco, 2017). Additionally, the attitude towards coercive and controlling behaviours within the

present sample contrasts with the finding that men are not perceived as legitimized victims of IPV (Dutton & White, 2013). A reason for this overall low acceptability might be the high level of education within the present sample. Findings by Tran, Nguyen, and Fisher (2016) suggest that people with lower educational levels do rate attacks of IPV as more acceptable than people with a higher educational level.

Considering the findings of Simon et al. (2001) and the comprehensive gender discussion around domestic violence another potential reason might be that gender plays a role when it comes to physical violence. As demonstrated by Seelau and Seelau (2005) domestic violence was perceived as more serious in the case of a male perpetrator against a female victim and men were perceived to injure a female victim more seriously. Contrary, people might not make this distinction between men and women if it comes to psychological assaults. A study by Hamby and Jackson (2010) revealed physical differences between men and women to be a main factor in the evaluation of the seriousness of IPV. Men are seen as physically superior compared to women. But this difference cannot account for psychological violence where gender might not be regarded as a reason for more severe attacks.

Further, that the effect was only found to be significant for some behaviours and not for all could be due to various reasons. One reason might be that no power analysis was performed reducing the probability of finding a significant effect (Cohen, 1992). Subsequently, the sample size might have been too small to detect a significant effect. As described, the results suggest that the effect did show the expected direction. With a p-value being lower than .10 it is not ruled out that a type 2 error occurred. A higher sample size might have enabled to discover a significant difference (Cohen, 1992). Further research is needed to inspect whether an effect of the gender of the perpetrator is present or not. Additionally, the restriction in sample variability should be acknowledged and further research would be valuable to investigate a more heterogeneous sample representative of the population.

Attitudes towards masculine gender norms

Masculinity was not found to moderate the effect of the gender of the perpetrator with the interaction effect not being significant. The second hypothesis, participants supporting masculine gender role norms have a greater acceptance of a male perpetrator against a female victim, could therefore not be supported. The only effect that was found to be significant within this model was the positive effect of masculinity on the acceptability of coercive and controlling behaviours independent of the gender of the perpetrator. It was expected that

people highly supporting masculine gender role norms would show more acceptance of men demonstrating behaviours that are linked to masculine norms (Bates, 2019; Hine, 2019). However, this result suggests that supporting masculine gender role norms might be more dependent on behaviours that are typically perceived as masculine than on the gender displaying these behaviours. This finding is in line with the reasoning of Próspero (2008) arguing that masculinity is not exclusively male it rather describes behaviours of aggression or dominance that can be displayed by both genders. West and Zimmerman (1987) used the term 'doing gender' to describe the phenomenon of men doing masculinity rather than being masculine. If learned through socialisation both men and women can learn that behaviours, in this case masculine behaviours, show a specific result and this realization might influence the attitudes towards masculine behaviours.

Another indicator for the attitudes towards masculinity being more dependent on the behaviour as such is the finding that whilst the interaction effect between masculinity and the gender of the perpetrator was non-significant, masculinity was a significant predictor for less perpetrator blame. Following the reasoning of Próspero (2008), it seems that having positive attitudes towards masculinity enhances people's tolerance level towards coercive and controlling behaviours. In favour of West's and Zimmerman's (1987) theory is the finding that masculinity increases the blame of the circumstances beyond the control of the couple. Having learned through socialisation that coercive and controlling behaviours are a means of reaching one's goal, blaming the circumstances might be a mean to divert the blame away from the perpetrator. Important to note is that female and male participants had very similar scores on the masculinity scale. The effects observed therefore hold for participants of both genders. Nevertheless, to investigate whether masculinity describes a behavioural construct independent of the male gender further research is needed. The Male Role Norm Inventory that was used in this study only assesses gender norms that are linked to the male gender (Moore & Stuart, 2005). Therefore, it was not assessed within this study whether masculine behaviour, in general, was perceived as more acceptable when participants scored high on the MRNI-R.

Ambivalent sexism

The expected effect of ambivalent sexism was partially confirmed. First, the hypothesis that participants high in benevolent sexism have a lower acceptance of a female perpetrator could not be confirmed. The effect was found to be in the direction hypothesized but the interaction effect between benevolent sexism and the gender of the perpetrator was not

significant. Previous findings suggested that people who score high on benevolent sexism evaluate women based on their behaviour. Women, not conforming to their traditional gender roles, and behaving superior towards their male partners are perceived as inappropriate (Glick et al., 2002). Nevertheless, previous research found mixed results between the relationship of benevolent sexism and attitudes towards IPV (Sakall, 2001; Herrero & Rodríguez-Díaz, 2019). The current study could not identify an interaction effect of benevolent sexism and the gender of the perpetrator. Only a significant effect was found for benevolent sexism on the overall acceptability of coercive and controlling behaviours.

Second, opposed to benevolent sexism, The moderation effect of hostile sexism and gender was confirmed in the present study. The fourth hypothesis could therefore be confirmed with participants scoring high on hostile sexism accepting coercive and controlling behaviours more when executed by a male perpetrator. This finding is in line with previous research indicating higher acceptability of coercive and controlling behaviours towards women among people with sexist beliefs (Glick et al., 2002; Russell & Trigg, 2004; Herrero, Rodríguez, & Torres, 2017). This effect results from people high in hostile sexism viewing women as inferior and the use of IPV as a means of controlling the women and to sustain the inequality between the genders (Juarros-Basterretxea, Overall, Herrero, & Rodríguez-Díaz, 2019). That a main effect of hostile sexism on the acceptance towards the use of coercive and controlling behaviours was found can be explained with the findings of Herrero, Rodríguez and Torres (2017) that people high in hostile sexist also show positive attitudes towards the general use of violence within social relationships. These findings suggest that traditional gender role norms do play an important role and tend to influence heterosexual relationship structures.

However, hostile sexism as being directed towards women is normally described in terms of enhancing the acceptability of IPV for men. In the present study female, and male participants have been found to score almost equally on hostile and benevolent sexism. Previous research indicates that hostile sexism in men and women results in equal levels of sexist attitudes (Greenwood & Isbell, 2002) and that hostile sexism is more prevalent in young adults – female and male – compared to people in middle adulthood (Hammond, Milojev, Huang, & Sibley, 2017). Again, considering the young age of the present sample it is not ensured that the present result can be generalized to the population level. For the present sample, the results indicate hostile sexism to be a significant predictor for male and female participants' acceptability of coercive and controlling behaviours.

Strengths, limitations, and implications

The present research did show some strengths and limitations. A first strength of the current study is the digital execution of the study. As with the topic being rather sensitive, this allowed participants to answer the questionnaires in an environment they feel comfortable in. Another strength was the vignette. The vignette showed excellent internal validity with the displayed behaviours being good examples of coercive and controlling behaviours (Gould, 1996). As outlined by Hughes and Huby (2004) written vignettes have the advantage of low cognitive demand for the participants compared to videotaped situations. Especially regarding the young age of the participants (M = 23.98), the story tried to offer an everyday setting incorporating topics that are not too far away from potential experiences in this age group. Additionally, the vignette was not too long to ensure that participants do not lose interest (Hughes & Huby, 2004).

Besides the mentioned strength, the study also has some limitations. First, the appropriateness of the vignette was not tested. Hence, it is not validated if the vignette was a reasonable measurement instrument. Further, limitations of the sample regarding age and a higher educational level might have influenced the results by limiting the amount of acceptability. Tran, Nguyen, and Fisher (2016) found that a lower level of education was a predictor of higher acceptability of coercive and controlling behaviours in male perpetrated conditions. Further, Simon et al. (2001) found differences in acceptability towards IPV dependent on the age of the participants. With the restricted age range and the high amount of university students within the present study, it is unlikely to offer a representative sample of the population. Additional restrictions to the sample were the high number of female participants (77.6%) and the low variance in nationality with only 2.2% being from other countries than the Netherlands or Germany. A study by Sylaska and Walters (2014) found significant differences in IPV acceptance between female and male participants. Hence, having a high number of female participants within the present sample might have influenced the overall result of the low acceptability towards coercive and controlling behaviours. Additionally, cultures where people adhere more to traditional gender roles, were found to be more accepting of IPV (Dietrich & Schuett, 2013). Thus, the present study offers limited insight into the acceptability towards coercive and controlling behaviours mainly having participants from the Netherlands and Germany.

Although a hypothetical scenario has various advantages when gathering participants reactions or perceptions towards a specific behaviour it also has limitations. A main shortcoming of vignettes is the possibility that participants do not engage with the story as

emotionally as they would do when actually engaging in a (simulated) situation (Collett & Childs, 2011). Consequently, participants might have evaluated the behaviours displayed within the story differently if they would have actually engaged in the situation rather than merely reading about the conflict. Another shortcoming that is linked to the methods used is that all information gathered is based on self-reports. Most shortcomings relate to the self-presentation of the participants and challenge the credibility of the given answers. Participants might tend to answer consistent for all questions or try to answer in a socially desirable way (Paulhus & Vazire, 2007). This can result in an inaccuracy of the results. The present study did not account for this possibility.

With the limitations of this study, there are various implications for future research. First, it would be valuable to investigate the effects found in the present study with a sample possessing more variance in age, educational level, or nationality. This would enhance the reliability of the results found in this study and clarify if the missing significance for other results is due to a missing effect or due to the mentioned shortcomings of the study. Another factor that was not investigated within this study is the acceptability towards coercive and controlling behaviours within same sex relationships. Particularly as masculinity is found to be an influencing factor in the execution and perception of IPV in male same sex relationships (Goldenberg, Stephenson, Freeland, Finneran, & Hadley, 2016). While in heterosexual relationships the dominating behaviours result from clearly distinct gender roles, it was found that some men in homosexual relationships try to achieve an imbalance in the relationship by using dominant behaviours (Goldenberg, et al., 2016). Hence, IPV in male same sex relationships can result from the influences of stereotypical gender roles and masculinity.

Additionally, as some behaviours were more variable in their acceptability than others and as the behaviours did not progressively increase in perceived severity as intended, further research might help to identify properties a behaviour must show to be less acceptable than others. For example, ‘Monitoring their partner’s whereabouts using tracking apps WITH their consent (e.g., with Find My Friends or Snap Maps)’ was found to be one of the most accepted behaviours in the present sample, although it is an example of coercive and controlling behaviours (CPS, 2017). Crowther-Dowey, Gillespie, and Hopkins (2016) found that various behaviours, like monitoring the whereabouts of a partner, that fall under the concept of coercive and controlling behaviours are misinterpreted as demonstrations of love and concern for the victim. Although the overall acceptability was found to be very low, for some behaviours which were hypothesized to be evaluated as equally acceptable this did not hold true (e.g., Telling a partner how much alcohol they can drink was rated as more acceptable

than telling the partner how much money they can spend). Here, further research might help to clarify if people misconceive certain coercive and controlling behaviours as acts of love or concern for the partner or if there are other factors that are not considered within this study that influence potential differences.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the results of this study show that the people in the present sample have overall low acceptability of the coercive and controlling behaviours as displayed within the narrative. Additionally, the results assume a positive effect of hostile sexism on the acceptability of male perpetrated coercive and controlling behaviours. The hypothesized effects for masculinity and benevolent sexism could not be verified. The limitations of the sample (e.g., age, educational level) and the shortcomings of the methods used should be taken into account when interpreting the present results. It is emphasized that further research should focus on male same sex relationships especially with regard to the effect of masculinity. The results of the current study offer a framework for understanding properties influencing the extent to which people rate coercive and controlling behaviours within an intimate relationship as acceptable. The information can be useful in tailoring education and the supply of social services for victims of IPV and coercive and controlling behaviours. Especially important for victims of IPV might be the result of the overall low acceptability towards coercive and controlling behaviours within the sample. This information can be used to take away the fear of the victims that the behaviours would be accepted in the society (Lelaurain, Graziani, & Lo Monaco, 2017). Hence, educating people about potential negative impacts which can result from coercive and controlling behaviours and to use the information gathered within the study to help victims seek help can be a step in the direction of weaken the negative outcomes of coercive and controlling behaviours.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Acceptance of coercive and controlling behaviour questionnaire

Very unacceptable					Neutral					Very acceptable	
0	10	15	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100

1. Showing up at their partners house unexpected.
2. Telling their partner what they should wear.
3. Making their partner feel guilty about their choice of clothes.
4. Not being comfortable with their partner going out with friends.
5. Telling their partner how much alcohol they can drink.
6. Telling their partner how much money they can spend.
7. Video-calling or texting their partner multiple times a day without prior agreement.
8. Getting angry with their partner if they don't respond to your calls and/or message within 30 minutes.
9. Demanding the passwords to their partner's social media accounts.
10. Monitoring their partner's activity on social media.
11. Covertly checking their partner's social media interactions on their phone.
12. Monitoring their partner's whereabouts using tracking apps WITH their consent (e.g., with Find My Friends or Snap Maps).
13. Placing a tracking app on the partners phone to monitor the partner's whereabouts WITHOUT their consent e.g., Find My Friends, Snap Maps.
14. Pursuing their partner to check their whereabouts.
15. Pursuing their partner specifically to make sure they are not cheating.
16. Getting angry if their partner talks to others of the sex they are physically attracted to.
17. Insulting their partner.
18. Accusing their partner of cheating with no reasonable evidence.
19. Demanding their partner leave their friends and go home with them.
20. Threatening physical violence against their partner.

Appendix B

Script containing coercive and controlling behaviour

Version 1:

Mark was about to leave the house to meet with some friends from high school. They wanted to head to a party together. While he was looking for his favourite aftershave Emma, his girlfriend of one year, showed up unexpectedly at his door. “I’d rather you wore another outfit. That shirt is really tight. Don’t want any girls to think they might want to try it on with you.” “I am already late.” Mark responded and continued getting ready. Emma was right behind him and asked if he would not rather stay with her tonight instead. “Honey, I haven’t seen them in a while. Please don’t start this discussion again.” Emma sighs and says, “don’t spend too much money on alcohol. I don’t like my man being drunk.” Mark gave her a kiss and left for the party.

Some time passed and as Emma hasn’t heard anything from Mark, she started texting him. She asked how his night was going and when he will be home again. She did not receive an answer and started thinking about how good he looked. She tried to video call him, but he did not respond. She texted him several times and got very upset that he did not answer at all. She started sending messages demanding that he contact her so she could be sure he was okay, and then to demand to know what he was doing and who he was with. She started checking his Instagram feed to see if she could see what he was doing. She made sure he told her his social media passwords, so she logged in his account, so she was also able to see the stories of his friends. She was furious when she did not find any information. And still, Mark did not reply.

She was so annoyed by his behaviour that she opened the tracking app she had installed on Mark’s phone that he didn't know about. He was at a club in town not far away and so she decided to jump on her bike to get to him. Arriving at the club, she sees Mark sitting at the bar next to a girl. She started screaming “How dare you! I know you’d be chatting to some girl when you weren’t talking to me. You will go home with me now.” Mark tried to say something, but Emma was faster “you bloody cheat. I knew it. I knew it all along. We go home now. No discussion or else you’ll see what will happen to you.”

Version 2:

Emma was about to leave the house to meet with some friends from high school. They wanted to head to a party together. While she was looking for her favourite lipstick Mark, her boyfriend of one year, showed up unexpectedly at her door. “I’d rather you wore another outfit. The dress is really short. Don’t want any guys to think they might want to try it on with you.” “I am already late.” Emma responded and continued getting ready. Mark was right behind her and asked if she would not rather stay with him tonight instead. “Honey, I haven’t seen them in a while. Please don’t start this discussion again.” Mark sighs and says, “don’t spend too much money on alcohol. I don’t like my girl being drunk.” Emma gave him a kiss and left for the party.

Some time passed and as Mark hasn’t heard anything from Emma, he started texting her. He asked how her night was going and when she will be home again. He did not receive an answer and started thinking about how good she looked. He tried to video call her, but she did not respond. He texted her several times and got very upset that she did not answer at all. He started sending messages demanding that she contact him so he could be sure she was okay, and then to demand to know what she was doing and who she was with. He started checking her Instagram feed to see if he could see what she was doing. He made sure she told him her social media passwords, so he logged in her account, so he was also able to see the stories of her friends. He was furious when he did not find any information. And still, Emma did not reply.

He was so annoyed by her behaviour that he opened the tracking app he had installed on Emma’s phone that she didn't know about. She was at a club in town not far away and so he decided to jump on his bike to get to her. Arriving at the club, he sees Emma sitting at the bar next to a guy. He started screaming “How dare you! I knew you’d be chatting to some guy when you weren’t talking to me. You will go home with me now.” Emma tried to say something, but Mark was faster “you bloody cheat. I knew it. I knew it all along. We go home now. No discussion or else you’ll see what will happen to you.”

Appendix C

Acceptability of coercion and control

Table 3

Mean Acceptability per Behaviour, Condition, and Statistical Values for Mann Whitney U-Test

Acceptability per behaviour as displayed in story	Mean acceptability in total	Mean acceptability for female perpetrator condition	Mean acceptability for male perpetrator condition	Statistical values for Mann Whitney U-test
	Mean (SD)	*Mean (SD)*	*Mean (SD)*	*U-value (p-value)*
(1) Showing up at their partner's house unexpectedly	53.88 (29.62)	52.04 (28.51)	55.72 (30.80)	2503.00 (.25)
(2) Telling their partner what they should wear	18.55 (20.42)	20.80 (21.00)	16.31(19.73)	1952.00 (.19)
(3) Making their partner feel guilty about their choice of clothes	8.91 (15.26)	9.50 (15.99)	8.33 (14.59)	2164.50 (.72)
(4) Not being comfortable with their partner going out with friends	13.60 (18.95)	14.96 (18.99)	12.25 (18.95)	2068.50 (.43)
(5) Telling their partner how much alcohol they can drink	20.37 (21.55)	23.43 (21.80)	17.31 (21.01)	1760.50 (.03*)
(6) Telling their partner how much money they can spend	13.51 (19.53)	15.51 (19.61)	11.52 (19.40)	1798.50 (.05*)
(7) Video-calling or texting their partner multiple times a day without prior agreement	34.45 (29.17)	32.75 (29.42)	36.15 (29.03)	2413.50 (.45)

(8) Getting angry with their partner if they don't respond to your calls and/or messages within 30 minutes	12.06 (19.29)	13.37 (21.03)	10.75 (17.43)	2144.50 (.65)
(9) Demanding the passwords to their partner's social media accounts	6.79 (17.34)	6.63 (17.45)	6.96 (17.36)	2198.00 (.83)
(10) Monitoring their partner's activity on social media	14.51 (20.96)	17.84 (23.15)	11.19 (18.09)	1817.50 (.05)
(11) Covertly checking their partner's social media interactions on their phone	6.75 (16.08)	6.57 (16.48)	6.93 (15.79)	2216.00 (.90)
(12) Monitoring their partner's whereabouts using tracking apps WITH their consent (e.g., with Find My Friends or Snap Maps)	28.51 (31.81)	30.10 (31.42)	26.93 (32.35)	1948.00 (.19)
(13) Placing a tracking app on the partners phone to monitor the partner's whereabouts WITHOUT their consent (e.g., Find My Friends or Snap Map)	3.72 (13.74)	3.64 (14.71)	3.79 (12.81)	2326.50 (.69)
(14) Pursuing their partner to check their whereabouts	7.16 (14.78)	8.24 (17.10)	6.09 (12.05)	2200.00 (.84)
(15) Pursuing their partner specifically to	7.73 (15.50)	10.51 (18.98)	4.96 (10.41)	1858.00 (.07)

make sure they are not cheating				
(16) Getting angry if their partner talks to others of the sex they are physically attracted to	12.64 (19.77)	14.69 (20.32)	10.60 (19.17)	1861.00 (.08)
(17) Insulting their partner	5.60 (14.06)	7.40 (15.54)	3.80 (12.26)	1691.00 (.01**)
(18) Accusing their partner of cheating with no reasonable evidence	4.60 (13.27)	5.30 (14.33)	3.90 (12.19)	2040.50 (.34)
(19) Demanding their partner leave their friends and go home with them	5.34 (13.77)	6.69 (14.76)	4.00 (12.68)	1811.50 (.04*)
(20) Threatening physical violence against their partner	2.90 (13.51)	3.39 (14.63)	2.39 (12.37)	2059.00 (.33)

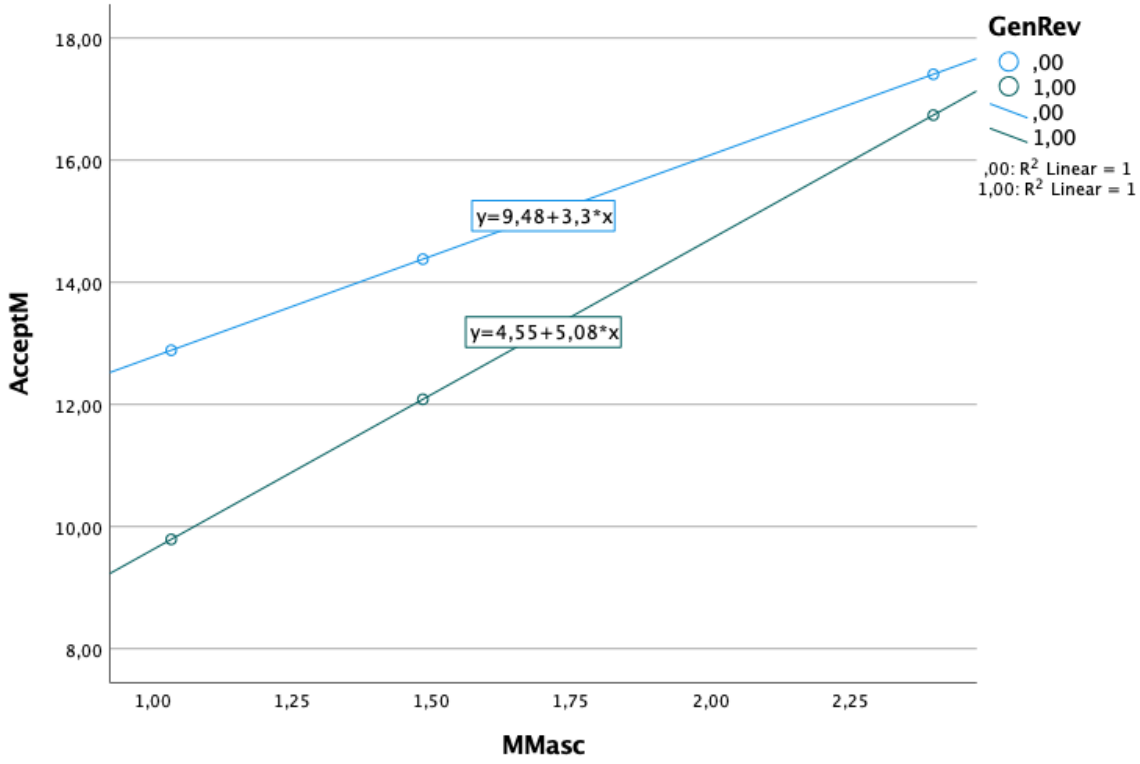
Note. Per acceptability the Mean and the Standard Deviation are given and the statistical values for the Mann-Whitney-U-Test include the *U*-value and the *p*-value, * = behaviours that show a significant difference between the acceptability per condition.

Appendix D

Graphical demonstration of the moderation effects

Figure 2

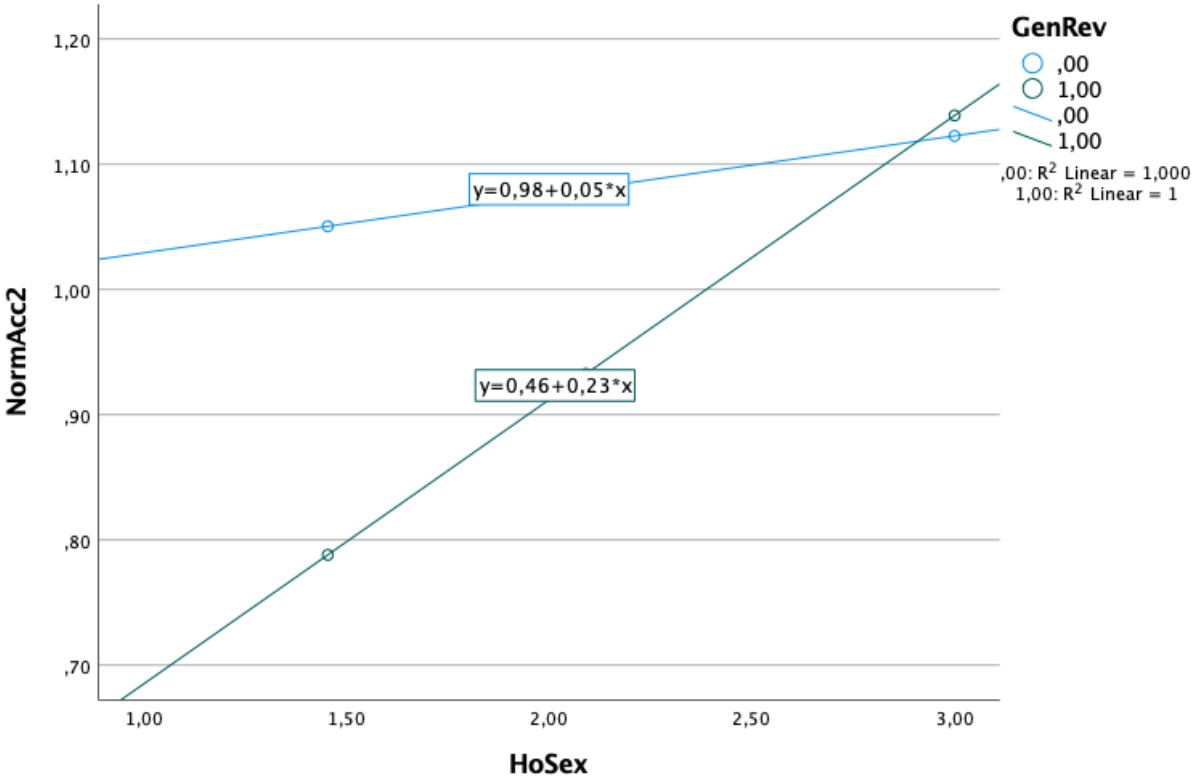
Interaction effect of masculinity and the gender of the perpetrator



Note. Demonstration of the effect of masculinity per gender on the mean acceptability of coercion and control, with 1 = male perpetrator condition and 0 = female perpetrator condition.

Figure 3

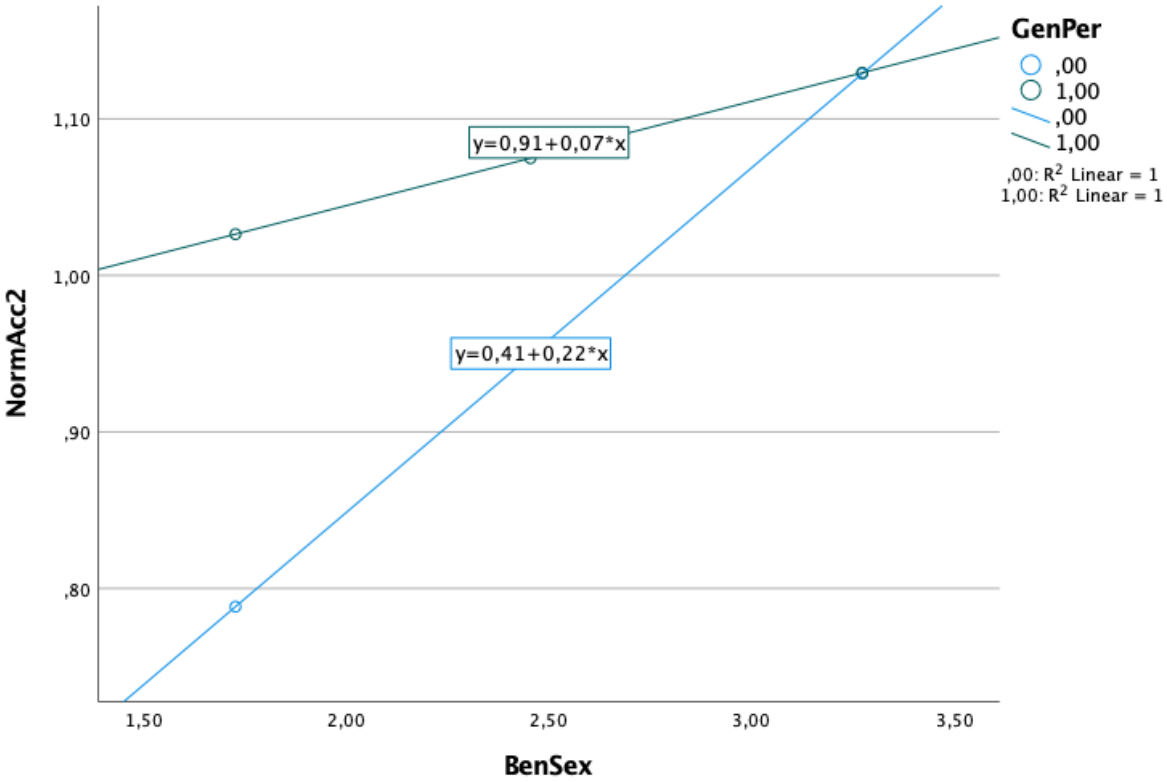
Interaction effect of hostile sexism and the gender of the perpetrator



Note. Demonstration of the effect of hostile sexism per gender on the mean acceptability of coercion and control, with 1 = male perpetrator condition and 0 = female perpetrator condition.

Figure 4

Interaction effect of benevolent sexism and the gender of the perpetrator



Note. Demonstration of the effect of benevolent sexism per gender on the mean acceptability of coercion and control, with 0 = male perpetrator condition and 1 = female perpetrator condition.