

**The Impact of Denial of the Victim and Denial of Responsibility on the
Interviewer's Attributions of Blame and Perceived Seriousness of the Crime in a
Sexual Assault Case**

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate whether suspect behaviours *Denial of the Victim* and *Denial of Responsibility* would affect the judging process of an individual, specifically taking into consideration their attributions of blame and perceived seriousness of a crime. Further, it was tested whether holding ambivalent sexist beliefs could moderate the effect of these suspect behaviours. It was hypothesised that suspect behaviours' effectiveness would be reinforced when ambivalent sexist thoughts were high. These claims were tested by using a between-participant design in a sample made of 97 participants, who completed an online experiment. After data analysis, the results revealed that denial of the victim arguments were effective in increasing attributions of blame to the victim, although they did not reduce attributions of blame to the suspect. Moderation analyses showed that denial of responsibility arguments did not influence respondents' attribution of blame to the suspect when they scored low on hostile sexism. Further, denial of the victim arguments did not influence participants' perceived crime seriousness when the latter was high and when they scored low on benevolent sexism.

In general, this study revealed that suspect behaviours had an impact on individuals' judgment of the crime, and that ambivalent sexism can alter this relationship. More precisely, suspect behaviours did affect attributions of blame, although not altering perceived seriousness as much. Indeed, findings showed that people generally perceived sexual assault as a serious crime. Hence, it would be interesting to examine what the results would be with a less serious crime, or by switching the gender of the victim and the suspect. These findings can be used to expand current literature and provide a framework for acknowledging suspect influence behaviours when portrayed in interviews, with a focus on the crime of sexual assault.

Introduction

The Crime of Sexual Assault

Sexual assault is perhaps one of the most harmful and common crimes worldwide. Sexual assault is defined as any kind of unwanted sexual touching, varying from kissing, grabbing, or fondling to numerous kinds of sexual intercourse (Fairbrother & Rachman, 2004). A key part of this definition is that sexual assault happens without the consent of the individual being harassed. Consent is considered to be lacking if the person reported saying 'No', asked the other individual to stop, or it may also be expressed by the behaviour of the victim. The victim may show the desire for the assailant to stop, may be too intoxicated to provide consent, or might be threatened physically if they refuse to comply (Fairbrother & Rachman, 2004). Sexual assault is a very common crime, especially in some parts of Europe. According to Römken, de Jong, and Harthoorn (2016), at least 18 percent of Dutch women experienced sexual assault at least once in their lives in 2016. Moreover, in the Netherlands, the rate of sex-crimes is higher than the average of other European countries (Keith, 2014).

Along with the frequency of this crime, another key aspect of sexual assault is the offenders' attitudes towards the crime. One of these attitudes is the offenders' excuse-making (Marshall, Marshall, & Ware, 2009). Sexual offenders tend to misinterpret various aspects of their behaviour, by minimising or denying ever committing any offense (Marshall, Marshall, & Ware, 2009). There are standard ways with which offenders try to excuse their behaviour (Henning, Jones, & Holdford, 2005). Offenders often engage in socially desirable responding during court-ordered evaluations, attributing greater blame for the recent offense to their victim than they acknowledge for themselves, usually aiming to minimise the severity of the offense (Henning, Jones, & Holdford, 2005). By displaying this type of responding, suspects aim to influence the interviewer's judging process to be viewed as less worthy of punishment. For judging process, it is intended every aspect of the evaluation process of an individual when analysing a crime, hence its perception (Shaver, 2012). Among the various facets of the judging process of an individual, a psychological analysis of blame is usually

the first criterion taken into account when analysing the occurrence of a crime (Shaver, 2012). Thus, it can be said that attribution of blame is a crucial aspect of a criminal investigation.

Attribution of blame can be defined as determining who is responsible for a specific action, what was its cause and who is to blame (Shaver, 2012). In a study about rape cases by Grubb and Harrower (2009), it is highlighted how important it is to take into account attributions of blame when exploring the judgment process of an interview by analysing a variety of factors influencing attributions of rape victims. In their study, Grubb and Harrower (2009) have reported the tendency of interviewers (i.e., police officers) to denigrate, misjudge or blame the victim for being responsible for their assault, and the damage that this tendency may have on victims.

An example of how damaging it can be to underestimate attributions of blame is the decision taken by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority to reduce the compensation for sex-crime victims if they had consumed alcohol prior to their assault, leading to victim-blaming (Grubb & Harrower, 2009). This example enhances why attribution of blame needs to be considered in a crime such as sexual assault by showing how victim-blaming can lead to an increased tolerance of the crime itself. In this case, victims are perceived as less victimised if they had consumed alcohol before their offence, meaning that they are more likely to be blamed in such a case. Victim blaming may lead to trauma-related guilt for the victim, which can result in significant damage to the victim's health (Kubany et al., 1994). Trauma-related guilt may affect the psychophysical wellbeing of the victim, leading them to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, negative self-esteem, social anxiety, and many other disorders (Kubany et. al., 1994). Hence, analysing observers' attribution of blame is vital to estimate individuals' judging process and examine how people external to the situation perceive who is to blame (Grubb & Harrower, 2009).

As a consequence of the decision by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority to minimise the compensation for sex-crime victims if they had consumed alcohol before being assaulted, sex-related crimes are more likely to be generally tolerated (Frazier & Schauben, 1994). This increase in tolerance may be associated with a lower perceived seriousness of the crime (Frazier

& Schauben, 1994), which is another essential facet of one's judging process. In criminological research, analysing people's perception of crime seriousness has always been vital as popular interpretations of the nature of criminal behaviour constitute a crucial area of investigation (Stylianou, 2003). Although being a subject of criminological research for decades, perceived seriousness of crimes does not seem to have reached a consensus over what people have in mind when they judge seriousness of offences (Warr, 1989). However, Warr (1989) defines perceived seriousness of a crime as judgments reflecting both normative evaluations of offenses (i.e. their wrongfulness), or factual assessments about their harmfulness to sufferers. In sexual assault cases, police officers tend to question the credibility of victims depending on how serious they perceive the crime to be (Wentz, 2020). Sexual assaults are considered more serious only when there has been a physical struggle between the two parties, and when the victim sustained evident physical injuries. This stresses how essential it is to analyse one's perceived seriousness of the crime in sexual assault cases since, when seriousness is underestimated, the crime is less likely to be thoroughly investigated by police officers and prosecutors. (Wentz, 2020).

In order to have a more complete structure of the respondents' judgments of the crime, this study aims to analyse which factors might impact on both attributions of blame and perceived seriousness of the crime.

The Importance of Conducting Interviews in Sexual Assault Cases

Due to the fact that sexual assault is a crime that often lacks physical evidence, thus being the word of the victim against the word of the suspect, the best way to find out what happened and serve justice is to conduct interviews (Ali, Westera, Zajac, & Powell, 2019). Interviews have a key role in investigating a sexual assault case due to the ambiguity of this crime given by people's interpretations of the situations (i.e. one party may assume there is consent while the other does not), and by the ambiguity of the laws themselves. Indeed, when it comes to rape and sexual assault cases, the legal system is still considered as inconsistent since sex crime terminology and elements constituting these

kinds of crimes may change between countries (Tracy, Fromson, Long, & Whitman, 2012). For this reason, the criminal investigation needs an accurate picture directly given by the words of the victim themselves, possible eyewitnesses, and the suspect (Holmberg, 2004). Through interviews, investigators may efficiently establish the circumstances of the criminal act, its consequences, and the intent of the suspect (Holmberg, 2004).

Notwithstanding, it can be challenging for interviewers to distinguish between guilty and innocent suspects. The difficulty of determining who is an actual sexual offender is aggravated by the fact that these suspects may apply several behaviours when interviewed to present themselves as innocent, trying to offer false information in their descriptions of events by omitting or misremembering details, and influencing individuals to perceive them as less worthy of punishment. Individuals often develop post hoc excuses or justifications to explain morally their behaviour (Sykes & Matza, 1957). These behaviours are employed by suspects to shift the locus of causality from internal factors to external and situational factors, often shifting the blame to the victims' behaviours or other environmental elements (Wegner, Abbey, Pierce, Pegram, & Woerner, 2015).

According to Watson, Luther, Jackson, Taylor, and Alison (2018), these behaviours could be used to reduce perceptions of guilt, and modify the relationship between suspect and inquisitor. In their study, Watson et al. (2018) analysed 29 police interview scripts of 25 different suspects in the context of control and coercion cases. Among the identified behaviours, Denial of the Victim and Denial of Responsibility were two of the most commonly used by suspects in police interviews. Although Watson et al. (2018) explored the likelihood of these behaviours to happen in a control and coercion context, research suggests that these behaviours can be used in other crimes as well, including sexual assault (Sykes & Matza, 1957). Due to their frequency, denial of the victim and denial of responsibility are the focus of this study.

Denial of the Victim on Attributions of Blame and Perceived Seriousness of the Crime

As shown by Watson et al. (2018) in a study concerning control and coercion, one of the most prevalent behaviours used by suspects in order to influence their interviewers during suspect interviews is *denial of the victim*. This behaviour involves claiming that the victim directly provoked the negative behaviour or that the behaviour was justified as a consequence of the actions of the victim (Sykes & Matza, 1957). It is worth mentioning that Denial of the victim is a neutralisation technique, meaning that it serves as a means for the suspect to make them feel better about their own transgressions. Neutralisation techniques such as Denial of the Victim may translate into justifications, in which the suspect uses the same arguments to rationalise or justify their transgressions to others (Sykes & Matza, 1957). Hence, Denial of the victim involves justification of deviant behaviours, applied by the suspect in order to deny having done anything wrong and instead claiming that their victim is a bad person worthy of being punished (Sykes & Matza, 2017). An instance of this behaviour might be when a perpetrator claims that their victim deserved to be sexually assaulted because they were wearing “provocative” clothes, or because they were flirting with the suspect. This behaviour can be directly linked to the *attributions of blame* evoked by the suspect since its aim is for others to blame the victim for what happened to them, thus attributing the blame on them. This leads to a more negative perception of the victim by the investigators, influencing their decision-making process by shifting the attributions from the suspect to the victim (Sykes & Matza, 1957).

Denial of the Victim may also be linked to *perceived seriousness of the crime*. Indeed, when the suspect tries to justify his actions by saying that they were provoked by the victim’s behaviour, he tries to convince others to believe that he is not to blame. It is likely that by justifying his actions, it will lead individuals to perceive the crime as less serious by making them believe that the circumstances were not that grave. Additionally, suspects might try to appear less guilty by reducing the credibility of the victim. Hence, it is hypothesised that, when using denial of the victim, it should reduce attributions of blame for the suspect, and increase attributions of blame for the victim.

Moreover, it is hypothesised that denial of the victim will decrease individuals' perceived seriousness of the crime.

Denial of Responsibility on Attributions of Blame and Perceived Seriousness of the Crime

Another behaviour often displayed by suspects of sexual assaults is *denial of responsibility*. Denial of responsibility is a behaviour shown whenever a suspect attributes their action to a factor that is beyond their control (Sykes & Matza, 1957). A typical example of denial of responsibility is when the perpetrator blames his negative action on a mental disorder or to an addiction. This behaviour may be associated to the suspect making himself almost as if he was the victim of the circumstances since he has no direct control over what happened, making himself more acceptable to society (Sykes & Matza, 1957).

When using denial of responsibility, the suspect is thus trying to shift the blame to external factors. For this reason, a link may be created between the usage of denial of responsibility and its influence on an individual's *attribution of blame*. This link is reinforced by the definition of attribution of blame itself, which is establishing who is responsible in a situation and the causes that lead to it (Shaver, 2012). In the case of denial of responsibility, the suspect aims at being perceived as not responsible for what he did, but instead attributing blame to external factors. Thus, when using Denial of Responsibility, there should be a decrease in attribution of blame to the suspect, and therefore an increase in attribution of blame to external circumstances.

Denial of responsibility may be directly associated with *perceived seriousness of the crime* as well. While the suspect tries to convey himself as somebody who had no control over his actions towards the victim, it is expected that he might attempt to make the crime be perceived as less serious in terms of responsibility associated with it due to the lack of any malicious intent on the part of the suspect. According to Montada (2001), attribution of responsibility may be used by individuals as excuses to decrease or deny their blameworthiness. When analysing attributions of responsibility, Montada (2001) distinguished eight basic arguments used by individuals to deny or reduce

blameworthiness. Among these arguments, one was lack of intent. Via lack of intent, people may deny that they intended to cause negative effects through their actions. This may lower the degree of responsibility attributed to them, making them appear less guilty. This leads to perceiving the circumstances as less serious because the suspect is more likely to be judged as careless (i.e. unintended but conscientious execution of the crime), but not as malevolent (Montada, 2001). When an individual is judged as careless but not malevolent, they are more likely to receive a softer sentence since the crime is perceived as less serious (Montada, 2001). Following this line of reasoning, a link can be made between denial of responsibility and perceived seriousness of the crime. It is proposed that denial of responsibility increases attributions of blame on external circumstances while decreasing attributions of blame towards the suspect. Likewise, it is proposed that denial of responsibility may lower the perceived seriousness of the crime as well.

Ambivalent Sexism as a Moderator of the Relationship Between the Suspect Behaviours and the Dependent Variables (Attributions of Blame and Perceived Seriousness of the Crime)

An aspect that may play as a moderator to the extent to which denial of the victim and denial of responsibility affect the judgment of the interviewer is sexism. The term sexism can be used in order to conceptualise a reflection of hostility towards women (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Nevertheless, according to Glick and Fiske (1996), this definition overlooks a crucial part of sexism itself: the positive feelings towards the female gender that oftentimes goes jointly with a sense of sexist antipathy. This theory that portrays sexism as a multidimensional construct is known as *Ambivalent Sexism Theory* (Glick & Fiske, 1996). More explicitly, this theory includes two kinds of sexism: *hostile sexism* and *benevolent sexism*. The first term refers to the antipathy towards the female gender caused by a sexist prejudice, hence leading to a hostile denigration of women in general. Hostile sexists are against any person who poses a menace to the gender hierarchy, ranging from feminist individuals to women who enter masculine domains such as science or sports (Daniels & Leaper, 2011) and who do not fit in their favored ingroup, consisting of women who embrace more traditionally paternalistic

roles (Glick & Fiske, 1996). On the other hand, benevolent sexism may be 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 (for the perceiver)” (Glick & Fiske, 1996, p. 491). In other words, benevolent sexism, albeit appearing at first more positive compared to hostile sexism, does nothing but reinforce patriarchal stereotypes and masculine dominance. Examples of benevolent sexism can be whenever men perceive women as weaker and feel in need to protect them, or when they assume that women should not deviate from gender roles such as mothers and caretakers (Glick & Fiske, 1996).

The theory of ambivalent sexism proposes that these two facets of sexism are not conflicting but complementary ideologies. Indeed, by offering male protection to women in exchange for their compliance, benevolent sexism views women as powerless and needy individuals stuck in their own submissive state. On the other side, hostile sexism acts as a means for men to protect their status quo by punishing those who deviate from traditional gender roles and, in general, spreading a sense of antipathy towards the female community (Glick & Fiske, 1996). It is precisely this latter point that leads to the main interrogative concerning this study: whether and how ambivalent sexism can make denial of the victim more powerful in a sexual assault case.

Hostile Sexism and Denial of the Victim

Concerning the behaviour of denial of the victim and its effect on one’s attributions of blame, it is expected that individuals holding sexist thoughts are more likely to view the victim as the one to blame in the situation. In particular, hostile sexism may play a role in influencing one’s attribution of blame since a hostile sexist is more prone to believe that women are “manipulative temptresses," who can "emasculate" men” (Glick & Fiske, 1996, p.494). Associated to the crime of sexual assault, this can be interpreted as the woman tempting the man, i.e. being flirty with the suspect, being worthy of punishment for acting promiscuously towards him. This view is in line with the goal of somebody portraying the behaviour of denial of the victim, since their aim is usually to make the victim appear

as somebody who *had* to be punished because was, for instance, wearing provocative clothes and/or giving promiscuous signals to the suspect. Thus, it is hypothesised that hostile sexism may act as a moderator in the effect of denial of the victim on the individual's attribution of blame. Specifically, Denial of the Victim is predicted to be more persuasive when hostile sexism is high than when hostile sexism is low.

Benevolent Sexism and Denial of the Victim

Sexist men tend to empathise more with other men than to women due to their dislike towards the female gender (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Thus, in a situation picturing the suspect justifying his actions by blaming it on the victim, a sexist individual would believe the suspect's side of the story. Since benevolent sexists perceive women as inferior when compared to men and so take women less seriously (Glick & Fiske, 1996), victims' opinions or versions of events will probably be given less importance and/or credibility. In the case of denial of the victim, a benevolent sexist may be more likely to believe that the male suspect was provoked, for instance, by the victim's attitudes towards him. Thus, the suspect is not viewed as responsible for the assault to his less credible female victim. Furthermore, another crucial factor encompassing benevolent sexism is women's compliance and complete devotion to men (Glicke & Fiske, 1996). It can be said that since women have to be compliant to the men's wills, a female victim should not deviate from the male's intentions. Hence, in the case of denial of the victim, benevolent sexists may argue that the man had the right to sexually assault the woman, especially after her provoking behaviours towards him, and should have not refused to comply. Consequently, it is hypothesized that Denial of the Victim is predicted to be more persuasive when benevolent sexism is high than when benevolent sexism is low.

Aim and Research Questions of this study

This research aims to explore the effect of suspect behaviours that sexual assaulters may present during an investigative interview. More specifically, this study will focus on the possible effects of the suspect behaviours DoV and DoR on the interviewer's attribution of blame and perceived seriousness of the crime, exploring whether and in what ways can ambivalent sexism act as a moderator of these effects. Hence, the research questions were:

- What are the effects of the influencing behaviours *denial of the victim* and *denial of responsibility* on an interviewer's *attributions of blame* and *perceived seriousness of the crime*?
- Does *hostile sexism* increase the effectiveness of *denial of the victim* on *attribution of blame* and *perceived seriousness of the crime*?
- Does *benevolent sexism* increase the effectiveness of *denial of the victim* on *attribution of blame* and *perceived seriousness of the crime*?

Methods

Design

This study had a between-participants design. The independent variable, *Suspect Behaviour*, had three levels: *No Comment*, *Denial of the Victim*, and *Denial of Responsibility*. In the *No Comment* condition, the suspects consistently responded to questions with “no comment” throughout the interview. This level was implemented as the control condition to be able to analyse the effects of the other two behaviours. In the *denial of the victim*, the suspect answered the questions by justifying his actions with reference to the behaviour of the alleged victim, i.e. “she knows that she turned me on and that I would do something”, and making the complainant appear as someone unworthy of victim status. Finally, in *denial of responsibility*, the suspect answered the interviewer's questions with responses that aimed to shift the responsibility for what happened away from themselves and onto external factors, such as being under the effect of alcohol.

The dependent variables in this study are *Attribution of Blame* and *Perceived Seriousness of the Crime*. Moreover, it is also tested whether the effects of *Suspect Behaviour* on the two dependent variables were moderated by *Benevolent* or *Hostile Sexism*.

Participants

The participants of this research were recruited by both using SONA-system for the University of Twente, and through the use of convenience sampling. The total number of participants was 167 at the beginning of the data analysis. However, 66 participants were excluded from the dataset due to incomplete answers, thus the final sample comprised 97 participants.

The sample was composed of more females ($N=75$) than males ($N=22$). Their age ranged from 18 to 45 ($M_{age} = 21.90$, $SD_{age} = 3.69$). The majority of the participants were of German nationality ($N=47$), followed by Italian ($N=26$), other nationality ($N=13$), Dutch ($N=10$), and prefer not to say ($N=1$). Further, most participants were students ($N=83$), followed by workers ($N=8$), unemployed ($N=4$), and other ($N=2$). The highest obtained or current form of education possessed by participants was a Bachelor's degree ($N=44$), a high-school degree ($N=43$), a Master's degree ($N=7$), prefer not to say ($N=2$), and a PhD ($N=1$).

Materials

Case scenario

Before letting the participants read the interview scripts, they are presented with a scenario stating the allegations against the suspect made by the alleged victim. The scenario depicts the story of a female student who, just after having left a house party, called the local police to say that she was sexually assaulted. Ms. Smith, the name of the alleged victim, describes to the police what happened by saying that, at a certain moment during the party, she did not feel good, so she went to the bathroom. After a while, another student she knew from university went into the bathroom and started

to convince her to stay a little bit more. She describes that although she insisted that she was not feeling well and wanted to leave, he became pushier until he started putting his hands on her, which quickly escalated in assaulting her by touching her breasts and intimate parts. According to the complainant, after she managed to escape him, she left the house and immediately called the local police. The complete scenario can be found in *Appendix C*.

Interview Scripts

After having read the scenario, participants were randomly assigned to read an interview with the suspect in the case. The suspect responded to questions using arguments typical of either No Comment, Denial of the Victim or Denial of Responsibility. In the No Comment condition, the suspect always responds with “no comment” to the interviewer. In the condition of Denial of the Victim, the suspect kept giving answers representative of this behaviour. When displaying the behaviour of denial of the victim, the suspect aims at persuading the interviewer that the victim should not be considered as such since they were responsible for their actions, (i.e. by being flirty to the suspect), thus unworthy of protection. An instance of Denial of the Victim in the interview script was: “Yeah, but she only starts to complain after we’re already into it doesn’t she. Leads me on all night and before, invites me in the bathroom, then randomly decides to change her mind once we start getting into it. What am I meant to think?”. In Denial of Responsibility, the suspect tries to convince the interviewer that he was not responsible for his actions and, instead, blames it on the circumstances and external factors, such as being under the effect of alcohol. An example of an answer typical of this behaviour is: “...I was pretty drunk since the beginning of the party and didn’t really realise what was going on around me. And they got me dancing with Sarah, that’s Ms. Clark. Basically pushed me into her arms.” Each interview script can be found in *Appendix D*.

Measures

The questionnaire consisted of three scales measuring three different concepts and was hosted via Qualtrics. The first scale measured ambivalent sexism and was used prior to the experiment. Next, as post-hoc measures, two scales measuring attribution of blame and perceived seriousness of the crime were used. The questionnaires may be found in Appendix E.

Ambivalent Sexism

To measure ambivalent sexist thoughts, the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory by Glick and Fiske (1996) was used. The scale is composed of 22 items divided into two subscales, one for each aspect of ambivalent sexism, namely hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. Hostile sexism items took into account the categories of Dominative Paternalism (e.g., "The world would be a better place if women supported men more and criticized them less"), Competitive Gender Differentiation (e.g., "A wife should not be significantly more successful in her career than her husband"), and Heterosexual Hostility (e.g., "There are many women who get a kick out of teasing men by seeming sexually available and then refusing male advances"). As for Benevolent Sexism, the categories covered were Protective Paternalism (e.g. "Every woman should have a man to whom she can turn for help in times of trouble"), Complementary Gender Differentiation (e.g., "Many women have a quality of purity that few men possess"), and Heterosexual Intimacy (e.g., "People are not truly happy in life unless they are romantically involved with a member of the other sex"). In the scale, several items were recoded so that high scores would be associated with greater endorsement of sexism in any case.

The scale showed poor Chronbach's alpha coefficients for both Hostile Sexism items ($\alpha=0.46$) and for Benevolent Sexism items ($\alpha=0.55$). However, the Ambivalent Sexism scale established convergent, discriminant, and predictive validity. All items were answered via a 5-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree).

Attributions of Blame

A 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree) measured respondents' attributions of blame. More specifically, this measurement consisted of three scales with one item each, each one measuring a different form of attribution of blame. One item measured attribution of blame for the suspect ("I think Mr. Shelby is responsible for his actions). The second item measured attribution of blame for external circumstances ("I think Mr. Shelby's actions were a result of external circumstances (e.g. alcohol, friends)). The final item measured attribution of blame for the victim ("I think Ms. Clark provoked Mr. Shelby's behaviour"). For the scores of one's attributions of blame, the higher the score, the more attribution of blame for each construct.

Perceived Seriousness of the Crime

A 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree) measured respondents' perceived seriousness of the Crime. The scale consisted of five items (e.g. "I think Ms. Clark's allegations against Mr. Shelby are very serious"). In general, the higher the score on this scale, the more seriously the crime is perceived. Therefore, items 2 ("I think Ms. Clark might be exaggerating how bad Mr Shelby's actions were") and 5 ("I do not think it is necessary for the police to become involved in the dispute between Ms Clark and Mr Shelby") were reverse scored. Cronbach's alpha analysis yielded a good level of reliability ($\alpha=0.80$) for this scale.

Procedure

Ethical approval was obtained by the Ethics Committee. We used the platform *Qualtrics* to generate the online experiment. In order to participate and be able to complete the survey, the participants had to have a technological device and a stable internet connection. The survey is presented in *Appendix E*.

Firstly, the participants were asked to read an information sheet in which the topic of the study as well as its aim and procedure were stated. Then, participants had to read a consent form in

which they had to agree to take part in the study voluntarily. Next, participants filled out a demographic form which included gender, age, nationality, occupation and highest obtained educational degree. Before the start of the experiment, they were asked to fill out a questionnaire on ambivalent sexist thoughts. Then, they were randomly allocated to one of the three fictional investigative interviews. Participants first had to read the case scenario, before they were presented with one of the three transcripts according to their random allocation: denial of the victim, denial of responsibility or no comment. Afterwards, the participants were asked to fill out a post experiment questionnaire regarding the dependent variables: attribution of blame and perceived seriousness of the crime.

After completing the survey, participants were asked to read a debrief in which they could find sexual assault-related hotlines in case they felt disturbed by the study or in which they could discuss issues connected to the topic of the research. The hotlines' numbers were given for three countries, namely Netherlands, Germany, and Italy, which were the likely demographics of the sample. Moreover, participants could choose to withdraw from the study after being debriefed.

Data Analysis

SPSS version 27 is used for analysis. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test whether there was a meaningful difference between the experimental groups, namely *No Comment*, *Denial of the Victim*, and *Denial of Responsibility*, on the dependent variables, being *Attributions of Blame* (*Attribution of Blame for the Suspect*, *Attribution of Blame on External Circumstances*, *Attribution of Blame for the Victim*), and *Perceived Seriousness of the Crime*. Then, a Tukey post-hoc test was run to detect any differences of perception among the participants throughout the study. Moreover, to test whether the control group had different perceptions to the other two experimental groups, a simple planned contrast was made with *no comment* as the reference group. Furthermore, an exploratory moderation analysis was performed in order to see whether *ambivalent sexism* has an effect on the relationship between the suspect behaviours and the dependent

variables. To correlate the constructs, both Pearson's and Spearman's correlations were performed. Spearman's correlations were chosen for analysing variables where the data was ordinal, while Pearson's were used for analysing continuous variables. Moreover, two follow-up tests were performed to further analyse the significant interaction effects. These follow up tests consisted of running a simple linear regression with the moderator as the predictor separately for each level of the Suspect Behaviour conditions.

Results

This study aimed to explore three research questions. The first one concerns the effects of the behaviours Denial of the Victim and Denial of Responsibility on one's Attributions of Blame and Perceived Seriousness of the Crime. The second research question involved whether Hostile Sexism increases the efficacy of Denial of the Victim on Attribution of Blame and Perceived Seriousness of the Crime. The last research questions dealt with analysing whether Benevolent Sexism may increase the effectiveness of Denial of the Victim on Attribution of Blame and Perceived Crime Seriousness.

Descriptives

The means for each dependent variable can be found in Table 1. Specifically, Attributions of Blame was divided into three constructs, respectively Attribution of Blame for the Suspect, Attribution of Blame for External Circumstances, and Attribution of Blame for the Victim. For these dependent variables, the higher the mean, the more participants were likely to attribute blame on each construct. In general, it can be stated that participants had a tendency to attribute the blame towards the suspect or external circumstances rather than towards the victim. The variable Perceived Seriousness of the Crime had the highest mean value among every other dependent variable. The higher the value, the more serious the crime was perceived to be.

Table 1*Descriptive statistics for Attribution of Blame and Perceived Crime Seriousness*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Attribution of Blame Suspect	97	1	5	4.73	.72
Attribution of Blame External	97	1	5	2.08	1.21
Attribution of Blame Victim	97	1	4	1.36	.81
Perceived Crime Seriousness	97	2.40	5	4.53	.58

Correlations

All the correlations between each dependent variable, the suspect behaviours, and moderators are displayed in Table 2 below. Firstly, in Table 2 there are Spearman's correlations, which were made between the Attributions of Blame variables (Attribution of Blame for the Suspect, Attribution of Blame on External Circumstances, Attribution of Blame for the Victim) to check whether they correlate with each other, with Perceived Seriousness of the Crime, and with both Hostile and Benevolent Sexism.

In general, 10 significant Spearman's correlations were found. More specifically, there was a significant positive relationship between Attribution of Blame for the Suspect and Perceived

Seriousness of the Crime, as well as between Attribution of Blame on External Circumstances and Attribution of Blame for the Victim. Two other significant positive relationships were found between Attribution of Blame on External Circumstances with both Hostile Sexism, and Benevolent Sexism. Lastly, Attribution of Blame for the Victim was positively correlated with Hostile Sexism.

As for the significant negative correlations, a negative association between Attribution of Blame for the Suspect and Attribution of Blame on External Circumstances, as well as between Attribution of Blame for the Suspect and Attribution of Blame for the Victim were found. Additionally, another significant negative relationship was detected between Attribution of Blame for the Suspect and Hostile Sexism, and between Attribution of Blame on External Circumstances and Perceived Seriousness of the Crime. Finally, Attribution of Blame for the Victim was negatively correlated with Perceived Seriousness of the Crime.

Further, Pearson's correlations showed a negative significant correlation between Perceived Crime Seriousness and Hostile Sexism. Moreover, a positive significant correlation was found between Hostile Sexism and Benevolent Sexism.

Table 2

Correlation Matrix Picturing the Relationships Found Between Each Dependent Variable, and Moderators

		Attribution of Blame Suspect	Attribution of Blame External	Attribution of Blame Victim	Perceived Crime Seriousness	Hostile Sexism	Benevolent Sexism
Attribution of Blame Suspect	rs	1.000	-.32	-.33	.47	-.34	-.12
	p		.001	.001	<.001	.001	.239

Attribution of Blame External	rs	1.000	.48	-.46	.39	.37
	p		<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
Attribution of Blame Victim	rs		1.000	-.50	.43	.05
	p			<.001	<.001	.61
Perceived Crime Seriousness	r			1	-.56	-.17
	p				<.001	.100
Hostile Sexism	r				1	.37
	p					<.001

* <.05 (*italic*), <.01 (**bold**), <.001 (**bold and italic**)

Attributions of Blame

ANOVAs, Tukey post-hoc, Simple Planned Contrasts

To examine whether Denial of the Victim and Denial of Responsibility had an effect on Attributions of Blame, one-way ANOVAs were performed. The analyses showed that the effect of the Suspect Behaviour variable (Denial of the Victim, Denial of Responsibility, No Comment) was non-significant for Attribution of Blame for the Victim, $F(2,94) = 2.27, p = .109$. The effect was also non-significant for Attribution of Blame on External Circumstances, $F(2,94) = 1.25, p = .292$, and for Attribution of Blame for the Suspect, $F(2,94) = 1.44, p = .242$. In general, respondents had a greater attribution of blame for the suspect when being in the Denial of the Victim condition ($M = 4.90, SD$

= .29), followed by Denial of Responsibility ($M = 4.65, SD = .82$) and then the No Comment condition ($M = 4.63, SD = .85$). Further, participants had a tendency to have a greater attribution of blame for external circumstances when being in the Denial of Responsibility condition ($M = 2.34, SD = 1.13$), followed by No Comment ($M = 2.03, SD = 1.26$), and Denial of the Victim ($M = 1.88, SD = 1.24$). Finally, respondents attributed greater blame towards the victim in the Denial of the Victim condition ($M = 1.59, SD = 1.04$), followed by Denial of Responsibility ($M = 1.31, SD = .78$), and ending with No Comment ($M = 1.18, SD = .46$).

In order to check whether the control condition, No Comment, had a different effect when compared to the other two experimental conditions, a simple planned contrast was performed with the other experimental conditions. Planned contrast revealed that being in the Denial of the Victim condition, $p = .040$, 95% *CI* [.02, .80], increased the Attribution of Blame for the Victim compared to the No Comment condition. Apart from this comparison, no other comparisons were significant.

Perceived Seriousness of the Crime

ANOVAs, Tukey post-hoc, Simple Planned Contrasts

To analyse whether Denial of the Victim and Denial of Responsibility influence Perceived Seriousness of the Crime, a one-way ANOVA was performed. The one-way ANOVA analysis showed that there was a non-statistically significant effect of the Suspect Behaviour variable on Perceived Crime Seriousness, $F(2, 94) = .16, p = .851$. Participants tended to perceive the crime more seriously when being in the No Comment Condition ($M = 4.57, SD = .54$), followed by Denial of the Victim ($M = 4.54, SD = .60$), and Denial of Responsibility ($M = 4.49, SD = .61$). Planned Contrasts were non-significant when checking whether the control condition had a different effect when compared to the other two experimental conditions on Perceived Seriousness of the Crime, $p > .05$.

Moderation Analyses and Follow-up Tests

Table 3 portrays the main and interaction effects between the dependent variables (Attribution of Blame for the Suspect, Attribution of Blame on External Circumstances, Attribution of Blame for the Victim, and Perceived Seriousness of the Crime) and the moderators, being Hostile Sexism and Benevolent Sexism.

Table 3

Main and Interaction Effects for Attribution of Blame for the Suspect, Attribution of Blame on External Circumstances, Attribution of Blame for the Victim, and Perceived Seriousness of the Crime

Dependent Variable	Predictor Variable	df	F	p	η^2
Attribution of Blame Suspect	Suspect Behaviour	2	1.26	.289	.03
	Hostile Sexism	1	13.2	<.001	.13
	Benevolent Sexism	1	.18	.675	.00
	Suspect Behaviour*Hostile Sexism	2	5.88	.004	.12
	Suspect Behaviour*Benevolent Sexism	2	2.37	.100	.05
Attribution of Blame External	Suspect Behaviour	2	1.31	.276	.03

	Hostile Sexism	1	6.36	.011	.07
	Benevolent Sexism	1	6.75	.013	.07
	Suspect Behaviour*Hostile Sexism	2	1.16	.891	.00
	Suspect Behaviour*Benevolent Sexism	2	.63	.534	.01
<hr/>					
Attribution of Blame Victim	Suspect Behaviour	2	3.76	.027	.08
	Hostile Sexism	1	23.68	< .001	.21
	Benevolent Sexism	1	3.79	.055	.04
	Suspect Behaviour*Hostile Sexism	2	2.31	.105	.05
	Suspect Behaviour*Benevolent Sexism	2	1.62	.204	.04
<hr/>					
Perceived Seriousness of the Crime	Suspect Behaviour	2	.44	.648	.01
	Hostile Sexism	1	38.45	< .001	.30
	Benevolent Sexism	1	.37	.547	.00

Suspect Behaviour*Hostile Sexism	2	1.53	.223	.03
Suspect Behaviour*Benevolent Sexism	2	3.55	.033	.08

Attribution of Blame for the Suspect

Hostile Sexism and Benevolent Sexism were examined as potential moderators of the relationship between the Suspect Behaviour variable and Attributions of Blame. Firstly, a General Linear Model was performed with Attribution of Blame for the Suspect as dependent variable, the Suspect Behaviour variable as the predictor, and both Hostile and Benevolent Sexism as moderators of Suspect Behaviour. The analyses showed that there was a significant main effect between Attribution of Blame for the Suspect and Hostile Sexism, $F(1,88) = 13.19, p < .001, \eta^2 = .13$, and a statistically significant interaction effect with Hostile Sexism, $F(2,88) = 5.88, p = .004, \eta^2 = .12$.

To find out in which condition the moderator effect of Hostile Sexism for Attribution of Blame for the suspect was significant, a follow-up test was implemented. A single linear regression was run with Hostile Sexism as the predictor for Attribution of Blame for the suspect separately for each level of Suspect Behaviour. The results implicated that Hostile Sexism is a significant predictor of Attribution of Blame for the suspect only in the Denial of Responsibility condition, $F(1,30) = 15.78, p < .001, R^2 = .345$. In the Denial of Responsibility, Hostile Sexism had a negative significant effect on Attribution of Blame for the suspect ($b = -1.20, t(30) = -3.97, p < .001$). More specifically, in the Denial of the Victim condition, Hostile sexism seemed to have a negative but not significant effect on Attribution of Blame for the Suspect ($b = -.02, t(30) = -.16, p = .87$). Likewise, in the No Comment condition Hostile Sexism had a negative but not significant effect on Attribution of Blame for the Suspect, $b = -.66, t(30) = -1.64, p = .11$.

Attribution of Blame on External Circumstances

Another General Linear Model was performed with Attribution of Blame on External Circumstances as dependent variable. The results showed that there was a main significant effect between Attribution of Blame on External Circumstances and Hostile Sexism, $F = 6.36$, $p = 0.01$, $\eta^2 = .07$, and a main significant effect with Benevolent Sexism too, $F = 6.75$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2 = .07$. However, the interaction effects were non-significant with both Hostile Sexism, $p = .89$, and Benevolent Sexism, $p = .63$.

Attribution of Blame for the Victim

When performing a third General Linear Model with Suspect Behaviour as independent variable and Attribution of Blame for the Victim as dependent variable, the results show three significant main effects. One of them was between Attribution of Blame for the Victim and Suspect Behaviour ($F = 3.76$, $p = .03$, $\eta^2 = .08$). When running a post-hoc test using the Bonferroni correction, it showed that there was a significant difference only in the Denial of the Victim condition when compared with No Comment ($M = .42$, $p = .05$, 95% CI [.001, .83]).

Two other significant main effects were found between Attribution of Blame for the Victim and Hostile Sexism ($F = 23.68$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .21$), as well as with Benevolent Sexism ($F = 3.79$, $p = .05$, $\eta^2 = .04$). However, both Hostile and Benevolent Sexism were non-significant moderators of the relationship between the Suspect Behaviour variable and Attribution of blame for the Victim due to the non-significant interaction effects, $p = .11$, $p = .20$.

Perceived Seriousness of the Crime

Hostile Sexism and Benevolent Sexism were examined as moderators of the relationship between Suspect Behaviour and Perceived Seriousness of the Crime. A General Linear Model was performed with Perceived Seriousness of the Crime as dependent variable. The results revealed that there was a significant main effect between Perceived Seriousness of the Crime and Hostile Sexism,

$F = 38.45, p < .001, \eta^2 = .30$. Moreover, the results indicated that although there was a non-significant effect with Hostile Sexism as moderator, $p = .22$, Benevolent Sexism was instead a significant moderator for the relationship between the Suspect Behaviour variable and Perceived Crime Seriousness, $F(2,88) = 3.55, p = .033, \eta^2 = .08$.

To further investigate Benevolent Sexism acting as a significant moderator for Perceived Crime Seriousness, a follow-up test was performed. A single linear regression was run with Benevolent Sexism as the predictor for Perceived Seriousness of the Crime as dependent variable. The results showed that Benevolent Sexism is a significant predictor of Perceived Seriousness of the Crime only in the Denial of the Victim condition, $F(1,30) = 9.41, b = -.57, p = .005, R^2 = .239$. In the Denial of Responsibility condition, Benevolent Sexism had a positive non-significant effect on Perceived Seriousness of the Crime, $b = .05, t(30) = .22, p = .83$. Finally, Benevolent Sexism had a positive non-significant effect on Perceived Seriousness of the Crime in the No Comment condition, $b = .03, t(30) = -.14, p = .89$.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate whether suspect influencing behaviours during investigative interviews, namely denial of the victim and denial of responsibility, may have an effect on people's perception of the crime of sexual assault. The facets of perception taken into account were attributions of blame and perceived seriousness of the crime.

The results from the ANOVAs showed that denial of the victim did not decrease attribution of blame to the suspect, while being effective in increasing attribution of blame towards the victim. Moreover, simple planned contrasts revealed that denial of the victim was more powerful in increasing attribution of blame for the victim when compared to no comment. For denial of responsibility, analyses showed that people in this condition attributed more blame on external circumstances. As for perceived crime seriousness, suspect behaviours did not have an effect on it as the crime was generally perceived as serious. Finally, the moderator analyses indicated that in the

denial of the responsibility condition, hostile sexism had a negative effect on attribution of blame on the suspect. On the other hand, in the denial of the victim condition, benevolent sexism had a negative impact on perceived seriousness of the crime.

Attributions of Blame

When examining any possible effect of suspect behaviours, it was found that none of the conditions had a significant impact on attributions of blame. The means from the One-way ANOVAs revealed that respondents generally attributed greater blame towards both the suspect and the victim when exposed to denial of the victim's arguments. It can be argued that denial of the victim argumentations might have been efficient in influencing individuals' attributions of blame, but in different ways. Accordingly, Denial of the Victim may result in making the victim appear as worthy of their punishment (Sykes & Mazda, 1957). Nonetheless, it might be the case that for other participants these argumentations served as a reinforcement to believe that the suspect was to blame. In fact, denial of the victim arguments often involve at least some form of admission of the behaviour they are accused of (Boyle, & Walker, 2016).

When conducting a Planned contrast, it was found that participants tended to blame the victim more when being in the Denial of the Victim condition than they did in the No Comment condition. This might be explained by the fact that when employing denial of the victim's arguments, the suspect tries to be as persuasive as possible when convincing the interviewer that the victim was worthy of being punished. This might have reduced the victim's credibility by giving the victim a more negative image (Sykes & Matza, 1957). In general, when answering the first research question, it can be claimed that denial of the victim arguments did not reduce perceptions of blame attributed to the suspect, but they did increase attribution of blame towards the victim. Moreover, denial of the victim arguments seemed to be more persuasive in affecting respondents' attributions of blame when compared to no comment.

Furthermore, Attribution of Blame for the Suspect was negatively correlated with both Hostile Sexism and Benevolent Sexism. Thus, the more ambivalent sexism, the more one is inclined to attribute blame towards the suspect. In fact, individuals holding ambivalent sexist thoughts are characterised by sharing a sense of negative attitudes towards women (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Consequently, individuals who do not possess these sexist beliefs are more likely to empathise with the female victim and attribute blame towards the suspect. Finally, Attribution of Blame for the Victim was negatively associated with Perceived Crime Seriousness and positively related to Hostile Sexism. To put it differently, the more individuals put their blame on the victim, the less they perceived the crime as serious. Consequently, the more these participants blamed it on the victim, the more they were likely to possess hostile thoughts. These findings are supported by the definition of hostile sexism itself, which is holding an antipathy towards the female gender caused by a sexist prejudice (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Moreover, a positive correlation between Hostile and Benevolent Sexism was found, supporting the fact that these two facets of sexism are not conflicting but complementary (Glick & Fiske, 1996).

As for attribution of blame on external circumstances, participants tended to attribute blame to external circumstances the most when being confronted with Denial of Responsibility arguments, according to what was hypothesised. Indeed, individuals might perceive the suspect as being victim of the circumstances as he has no direct control over his actions (Sykes & Matza, 1957). The correlation analyses showed that Attribution of Blame on External Circumstances was positively correlated with Attribution of Blame for the Victim. Likewise, Attribution of Blame on External circumstances was negatively associated with Attribution of Blame for the Suspect. This suggests that these participants were more likely to be influenced by the suspect's arguments, hence not attributing blame to him but to either the victim or to external factors. Lastly, Attribution of Blame on External Circumstances was positively correlated with both Hostile and Benevolent Sexism. This might be explained with the same reasoning behind the fact that individuals holding ambivalent sexist

thoughts are more likely to empathise with other men, hence believing that the suspect had no direct control over his actions (Beneke, 1997).

Moderation analyses showed that the only significant result was with Hostile Sexism, which had a significant interaction effect for the relationship between Attribution of Blame for the Suspect and Suspect Behaviour. A follow-up test indicated that the condition in which Hostile Sexism was a significant moderator was Denial of Responsibility. Accordingly, an increase in Hostile Sexism corresponded to a decrease in Attribution of Blame for the Suspect, meaning that participants exposed to denial of responsibility arguments attributed greater blame towards the suspect when hostile sexist beliefs were low. It could have been that participants with hostile sexist beliefs believed that the male suspect was influenced by external factors. As a matter of fact, ambivalent sexists empathise more with other men (Beneke, 1997). Hence, participants scoring high in Hostile Sexism in the Denial of Responsibility condition were influenced by the suspect's arguments as they probably empathised with the suspect being under the effect of alcohol or persuaded by peers.

Perceived Seriousness of the Crime

As for Perceived Seriousness of the Crime, the descriptives of the one-way ANOVAs illustrated that, in general, respondents perceived the crime as serious due to the high means for this variable. Nevertheless, the means within the conditions were not very different from one another, meaning that, in each condition, the crime was perceived almost as equally serious. This may be explained by the fact that sexual assault is generally perceived as a serious crime (Wentz, 2020). It may be that suspect behaviours could influence individuals' perceived seriousness of the crime in a less seriously perceived crime, or in less serious circumstances. As a matter of fact, sexual assault itself is tended to be perceived as less serious when it involves a male victim because of its minor frequency and because males are generally seen as perpetrators, and women as victims (Hines, Armstrong, Reed, & Cameron, 2012). Furthermore, sexual assault is considered less seriously when it does not involve direct physical contact (Wentz, 2020). Thus, had the victim been male or had the

case scenario been less explicit in depicting physical struggle between the two parties, the crime might have been perceived as less serious. Therefore, suspect behaviours might have had a larger effect on participants' perceptions of crime seriousness. To sum up, due to the low variance in the perceived seriousness of the crime, it was not possible to detect any effect because participants generally perceived the crime as serious.

As for this case, the fact that suspect behaviours did not affect respondents' perceived seriousness of the crime may have implications on the justice system. It can be argued that when the crime is generally seen as serious, people are still going to think of it as a serious crime regardless of whom they attribute the blame to. This finding may have positive implications because serious crimes are generally treated more thoughtfully by the justice system (Grubb & Harrower, 2009). Consequently, it would be more difficult to be influenced by the suspect's behaviours in a sexual assault case because individuals would still be affected by the seriousness of it. All in all, it can be concluded that suspect behaviours did not affect individuals' perceived seriousness of the crime, contrary to what was hypothesised.

Nonetheless, when performing correlation analyses, they showed that Perceived Seriousness of the Crime was negatively related with Attribution of Blame on External circumstances, suggesting that people who perceived the crime as less serious were also more likely to blame it on the alcohol and peer pressure. When performing Pearson's correlations, it was found that Perceived Seriousness of the Crime was negatively associated with Hostile Sexism. Hence, the less serious the crime was perceived to be, the more likely respondents were to support hostile sexist beliefs. Lastly, Perceived Seriousness of the Crime was positively associated with Attribution of Blame for the Suspect. This correlation implies that the more attribution towards the suspect, the more the crime is perceived as serious. This finding goes in line with the fact that, generally, individuals attributing blame towards the suspect have less tolerance towards the crime. As a matter of fact, a decrease in tolerance is associated to a higher perceived seriousness of the crime (Grubb & Harrower, 2009). Hence, the two

constructs were likely to be positively correlated, meaning that, although the suspect behaviours did not have an impact on perceived seriousness of the crime, attributions of blame may well have had.

Hostile and Benevolent Sexism were examined as possible moderators for Perceived Seriousness of the Crime. While Hostile Sexism was found to be a non-significant moderator, Benevolent Sexism had a significant moderation effect only in the condition of Denial of the Victim, meaning that respondents scoring high on Benevolent Sexism perceived the crime as less serious when faced with denial of the victim arguments. The explanation might be that since benevolent sexist individuals view women as inferior, the latter would be taken less seriously because women's opinions are judged as less important and less credible than men's judgments (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Moreover, in the specific condition of Denial of the Victim, an individual holding benevolent sexist thoughts might have been more likely to believe that, since women must be compliant to men's decisions, the female victim should not have shown oppression to the male suspect's intentions (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Hence, the victim's intentions to refuse the suspect's advances might be taken less seriously than the suspect's intentions to get intimate with her.

Limitations and Recommendations

This study was not without its challenges and potential limitations. Dealing with the topic of sexual assault induced researchers to experience difficulties of ethical nature, since the research topic is such a sensitive subject. When writing up the case scenario, researchers tried not to be too explicit in order not to cause excessive discomfort for the respondents. Likewise, when writing the interviews, researchers preferred to keep the suspect's behaviour as mild as possible, yet ensuring that the specific behaviour was shown by the suspect. Thus, researchers had to keep in mind a probable psychological discomfort when constructing the study materials. The fact that researchers tried not to be too extreme in depicting the case scenario might have impeded the situation to appear realistic, especially when portraying the suspect behaviours. Consequently, this might have caused observed effects to be smaller than they would have been in reality. Moreover, to show causality, the behaviours were

specifically isolated in single conditions. However, in reality suspects are more likely to make use of multiple influence behaviours simultaneously, which might also trigger larger effects than the ones observed in this research.

Furthermore, it has to be noted that this study was based on mock interviews. Consequently, newly gained insights may not be applicable in actual police investigations because of the probable differences between this study and reality. Nonetheless, this design proved useful in collecting more participants than it would have been possible with an offline design. In fact, despite working along COVID-19 restrictions, it was possible to carry on this study fully online due to the practicality of conducting an online experiment. Additionally, the use of convenience sampling proved to be an efficient means for researchers to get as many participants as possible, by sharing the survey online with their acquaintances.

Considering the limitations of this study, some recommendations for future research may be useful. A starting point might be to include respondents who come from different stages of the criminal chain. It would be interesting to see whether having police officers, prosecutors, judges, and juries as respondents may yield different findings. For example, having experts in the field might result in the researchers avoiding considering ethical problems regarding the sensitivity of the topic, hence making the case scenario more realistic. This way, the findings may be generalised to real life situations because the mock interviews would be closer to an actual interview in terms of descriptions of violence, suspect behaviours and both parties' depiction.

Another suggestion would be to do the same study with another type of crime involving two parties. Some examples might be mugging, culpable driving, family violence, fraud and scams, physical assaults, or aggravated burglary. By using these types of crime, the same constructs as this study could be measured and used as a comparison to analyse whether people's perceptions of the crime might change from crime to crime and to what extent. Following this suggestion would be interesting as, in this study, suspect behaviours did not influence people's perceived seriousness of the crime because they perceived sexual assault as a serious crime. Thus, it would be useful to

measure the same constructs with a less serious crime. For the same reason, it would be interesting to switch the genders of the two parties to check whether different results are obtained. For instance, since ambivalent sexist men empathise more with men and tend to have an antipathy towards women (Beneke, 1997), it could be more likely that ambivalent sexists would attribute more blame to the female suspect and less to the male victim. Moreover, by having a female suspect, individuals' perceived seriousness of the crime could be lower because women are generally perceived as more innocent than men (Hines, Armstrong, Reed, & Cameron, 2012). Along the same lines, it can be hypothesised that perceived crime seriousness would be lower when having a male victim because of the less likelihood of it happening in real life (Hines, Armstrong, Reed, & Cameron, 2012).

Lastly, although being an asset of this research, the online design of this study might have limited respondents' perceptions of the case scenarios and interviews since they were as well read online. Instead, it would be useful to see whether having respondents observing mock interviews would alter their perceptions and cause larger effects. It would be possible that having participants observing an actual interview would allow them to examine overt behaviours from the suspect, analysing his tone of voice and body language to have more accurate judgments. This way, the suspect behaviours may be more persuasive in influencing participants' perceptions. Alternatively, participants could be negatively influenced by the suspect behaviours because the suspect might sound and appear not convincing.

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the relationship between Suspect Behaviours and one's Attributions of Blame and Perceived Crime Seriousness, considering Ambivalent Sexism as a possible moderator of these effects. We found that Denial of the Victim arguments increased Attributions of Blame towards the victim, although they did not decrease Attributions of Blame towards the suspect, nor influenced Perceived Crime Seriousness when Benevolent Sexism was low.

Further, Denial of Responsibility arguments did not influence respondents' Attribution of Blame to the Suspect when they scored low on Hostile Sexism.

These findings may be fruitful for psychologists who are keen on analysing how suspect behaviours are efficient during investigative interviews, and how their effect can be mitigated. All in all, this paper contributed to current literature on specific suspect behaviours, and their influence in police interviews. Interviews are considered as one of the most powerful tool to gather evidence against the suspect and in favour of the victim (Holmberg, 2004). Hence, this research proves useful not only in spreading knowledge regarding possible suspect behaviours in interviews, but also in making sure that less and less interviewers will be influenced when evaluating the circumstances of such a delicate crime, thus ensuring more justice to its victims.

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Appendix A

Informed consent

CONTENT WARNING:

Before proceeding with the following study, please be aware that the topic of this survey is sexual assault. In case you do not want to be confronted with such a topic please feel free to withdraw from the study.

Information Sheet

Thank you for responding to this invitation to take part in this study! Please read the following information carefully.

Purpose of the study: This study is conducted by Maira De Simone and Samira Kommander. Both researchers are undergraduate Psychology students at the University of Twente and are supervised by Dr. Steven Watson. The outcome of this study will be used for our Bachelor Thesis and may also be used for research purposes. This may include a presentation at an academic conference or publication in an academic journal.

What is your task: As a participant, you will be asked to read information about an accusation regarding the crime of sexual assault. You will be given a description of the allegations by reading a scenario. After that, you will be asked to read an interview between the police interviewer and the suspect of the crime. Next, you will be asked to fill out a questionnaire regarding your judgment of the crime and the suspect.

Who can take part: Anyone over the age of 18 can take part. Nevertheless, 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 you can withdraw: You can withdraw from the study without explaining the reason and without any penalty. You can withdraw by closing your browser or tab 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 policy of the BMS faculty at the University of Twente. 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 of participating in our study: If you are a student at Twente University then you will be credited 0.25 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:

Maira De Simone: m.desimone@student.utwente.nl

Samira Kommander: s.kommander@student.utwente.nl

In case you feel distressed before or after taking the survey, there is Dutch, German and Italian hotline specified for Sexual assaults which has a 24hours service.

Netherlands: 0800-0188

Germany: 08000 116 016

Italy: 06 3751 8282

Further, students of the University of Twente can get in contact with their study related study advisor if they need someone to talk to.

Contact Information for Questions about Your Rights as a Research Participant

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the supervisor of this project by s.j.watson@utwente.nl.

Consent Form for suspect influence behaviour in sexual assault crimes

Taking part in the study

- I have read and understood the information sheet. I have been able to ask questions about the study and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
- I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study and understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason.
- I understand that I can withdraw at any time by simply closing my web browser at any point before the end of the study.
- I understand that taking part in the study involves reading a fictional representation of a sexual assault case and filling out a questionnaire regarding my perceptions of the crime.

Use of the information in the study

- I understand that the information I provide will be used only for the purpose of this study and will be kept in an anonymised form.

Future use and reuse of the information by others

- I give permission for the data that I provide to be stored by the researchers for a minimum of 10 years, in line with the BMS data policy.

By selecting "I agree", you are consenting to the conditions described above.

Appendix B

Debriefing given to participants at the end of the survey

This study investigates the ways in which suspects try to influence police officers' opinions in investigative interviews.

In particular, in this study we compared the effectiveness of two of these behaviours, namely denial of the victim (claiming that the victim directly provoked any negative actions on behalf of the suspect, and so is not worthy of protection) and denial of responsibility (shifting the blame from factors internal to the suspect such as their personality, to external factors such as the environment the suspect finds themselves in), against an interview where the suspect provides no information by responding only with “no comment”.

We wanted to know how these different behaviours affected whether people think the suspect is guilty of the crime, who or what people blame for the events surrounding the event occurring, who people empathise with in the narrative, and finally how seriously the crime is perceived to be. We are also investigating whether there are differences in the effectiveness of denial of responsibility and denial of the victim strategies depending on beliefs about gender roles.

Now that you have been informed about the intent of the study we want to give you a final opportunity to withdraw your data. After you leave the study your data will be anonymous so we will not be able to identify your data to withdraw it later.

If you are happy to take part, you can simply close your browser OR select "I still agree on my participation in the study" below.

If you wish to withdraw please select the "I wish to withdraw from the study" option.

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)

Hilfetelefon (Germany): 08000 116 016 (24 hours)

Telefono Rosa (Italy): 06 3751 8282 (24 hours)

Appendix C

The case scenario

Below you will see a summary of the allegations made by Ms Clark. Ms. Clark alleges that she was sexually assaulted at a party. After reading the allegations you will be provided with an interview transcript with the suspect, Mr. Shelby.

Please read her allegations carefully so that you understand the allegations against the suspect.

Scenario

Name of the suspect: Mr. Shelby

Name of the complainant: Ms. Clark

On the night of the 10th of March 2021, Ms. Clark called the police station of her town. Below are a list of her allegations against Mr. Shelby:

- She alleges that she was s

exually assaulted by a friend of hers, a student named Mr. Shelby, who also studies the same university subject as her.

- She said she had spent some time with Mr Shelby that evening and danced a bit with him, but no more than with others that were there.
- She said she had been dancing with him when she started to feel ill after having too much to drink. She said she told him she needed to go to the bathroom.
- She alleges that she was in the bathroom to get a moment to herself and see if she could feel better when Mr. Shelby entered the room after her.
- She alleges that he started questioning why she was there, she said she started to explain that she was not feeling good and wanted to go home.
- Ms. Clark alleges that at this point Mr. Shelby pressured her verbally to stay at the party and kept coming physically closer to her.
- Ms. Clark says she asserted that she did not feel well and wanted to leave. She states that Mr. Shelby started to yell at her for wanting to leave.
- She then states that when she tried to walk past him he grabbed her and started to kiss her.
- She further accuses him of pushing her into the bathroom wall and putting his hands under her dress.
- According to Ms. Clark, Mr. Shelby started to touch her breast with one hand while touching her intimate parts with the other.
- Ms. Clark stated that she was able to push him off her and immediately left the party without speaking to anyone.
- Ms. Clark called the police after she had left the party.

On the next page, you will read a transcript of the interview between the man accused of sexually assaulting Ms. Clark. Please read it very carefully because we will ask you some questions about it on the following pages.

Appendix D

Fictional Interviews with a suspect using No Comment, Denial of the Victim, and Denial of Responsibility with the Interviewer

No Comment

Police Interviewer: I am inspector White and today is 11th of March 2021. The time is 11:26 am. Can you state your name for the record?

Mr. Shelby: My name is Jack Shelby.

Police Interviewer: And for the record, are you speaking to me voluntarily?

Mr. Shelby: Yes, I am.

Police Interviewer: Good. Thank you, Mr. Shelby. Just so you know, you don't have to necessarily answer the questions. Anything you do say, may be given in evidence. Is that clear?

Mr. Shelby: Yes.

Police Interviewer: Perfect. So, Mr. Shelby, the reason why you're here is because of some accusations from Ms. Clark, from last night on the 10th of March 2021. She claims to have been sexually assaulted by you, so what we're going to do right now is ask you some questions about that night. Is that fine for you?

Mr. Shelby: Sure, go ahead.

Police Interviewer: Alright, good. You were seen to be at the party the night of the 10th. Can you describe to me that night until you went back home?

Mr. Shelby: No comment.

Police Interviewer: I see. Did you have a close relationship with Ms. Clark?

Mr. Shelby: No comment.

Police Interviewer: Do you agree that you entered the bathroom while Ms. Clark was there as well?

Mr. Shelby: No comment.

Police Interviewer: Were you aware of her physical condition that night? She claimed that she was not doing that well and that's why she went into the bathroom. Apparently, she drank too much, so she wanted to go home. Did you know that?

Mr. Shelby: No comment.

Police Interviewer: She told us that you yelled at her aggressively, wanting her to stay. When Ms. Clark wanted to leave the bathroom, you grabbed her and kissed her. Then, according to her, you

pushed her to the wall and started to touch her body parts such as her breasts and intimate parts. Is that correct?

Mr. Shelby: No comment.

Police Interviewer: While you were kissing Ms. Clark did you notice her complaining about your actions or wanting to get away?

Mr. Shelby: No comment.

Police Interviewer: I see. Can you tell me why you think Ms. Clark called the police that night?

Mr. Shelby: No comment.

Police Interviewer: Alright, Mr. Shelby. I have no further questions. Closing the interview at 11:40 am.

Denial of the Victim

Police Interviewer: I am inspector White and today is 11th of March 2021. The time is 11:26 am. Can you state your name for the record?

Mr. Shelby: My name is Jack Shelby.

Police Interviewer: And for the record, are you speaking to me voluntarily?

Mr. Shelby: Yes, I am.

Police Interviewer: Good. Thank you, Mr. Shelby. Just so you know, you don't have to necessarily answer the questions. Anything you do say, may be given in evidence. Is that clear?

Mr. Shelby: Yes.

Police Interviewer: Perfect. So, Mr. Shelby, the reason why you're here is because of some accusations from Ms. Clark, from last night on the 10th of March 2021. She claims to have been sexually assaulted by you, so what we're going to do right now is ask you some questions about that night. Is that fine for you?

Mr. Shelby: Sure, go ahead.

Police Interviewer: Alright, good. You were seen to be at the party the night of the 10th. Can you describe to me that night until you went back home?

Mr. Shelby: I was having a good time until Sarah kicked off. I don't get what she's complaining about. She shows up in this low cut dress with a tiny skirt, dances all night grinding against me then complains when I reciprocate later on. Then, you know we just danced and drank, played games until the party got kinda dead and I left.

Police Interviewer: I see. Did you have a good relationship with Ms. Clark?

Mr. Shelby: Yeah we get on great. We have a few courses together and she's always making sure she's in my study group and flirting on with me. She was the same that night coming on to me. She can't be complaining about me touching her when she spends all night and the weeks before asking for me to do it.

Police Interviewer: Do you agree that you entered the bathroom while Ms. Clark was there as well?

Mr. Shelby: Ah yeah, the bathroom? Yeah, she basically invited me to join her. We'd been dancing and she said she was going to the bathroom. Why bother to tell me if she didn't want me there?

Police Interviewer: Were you aware of her physical condition that night? She claimed that she was not doing well and that's why she went into the bathroom. Apparently, she drank too much, so she wanted to go home. Did you know that?

Mr. Shelby: She's always drunk, but she knew what she was doing to me. Flirting with me and dancing. It's not like she was being subtle. She's not a shy girl you know. Everyone knows she likes to sleep around and she knew what she wanted from me that night as soon as she showed up in that dress. You can't dress up like that, flirt with a guy, then complain if he makes a move on you.

Police Interviewer: She told us that you yelled at her aggressively, wanting her to stay. When Ms. Clark wanted to leave the bathroom, you grabbed her and kissed her. Then, according to her, you pushed her to the wall and started to touch her body parts such as her breasts and intimate parts. Is that correct?

Mr. Shelby: Well, you don't know how Sarah is like. She's always flirting with different guys and that includes me. The last couple of weeks she's always been in my study groups and making sure she's near to me. What am I meant to think? She sleeps around and then starts paying attention to me, and after she invites me into the bathroom suddenly she doesn't want it? Of course I was angry but I didn't do anything she didn't want then she just runs off? She's just acting crazy, as usual.

Police Interviewer: While you were kissing Ms. Clark did you notice her complaining about your actions or wanting to get away?

Mr. Shelby: Yeah, but she only starts to complain after we're already into it doesn't she. Leads me on all night and before, invites me in the bathroom, then randomly decides to change her mind once we start getting into it. What am I meant to think? I'm not going to get punished because of her deciding she didn't want to sleep with someone for once.

Police Interviewer: I see. Can you tell me why you think Ms. Clark called the police that night?

Mr. Shelby: No clue. She leads me on, then walks off and she thinks she's the one that should be angry? I just left the party not long after her since I was starting to get bored anyway. It's ridiculous she's complaining about this. Anyone would have done what I did if they were with a girl acting like she was.

Police Interviewer: Alright, Mr. Shelby. I have no further questions. Closing the interview at 11:45 am.

Denial of Responsibility

Police Interviewer: I am inspector White and today is 11th of March 2021. The time is 11:26 am. Can you state your name for the record?

Mr. Shelby: My name is Jack Shelby.

Police Interviewer: And for the record, are you speaking to me voluntarily?

Mr. Shelby: Yes, I am.

Police Interviewer: Good. Thank you, Mr. Shelby. Just so you know, you don't have to necessarily answer the questions. Anything you do say, may be given in evidence. Is that clear?

Mr. Shelby: Yes.

Police Interviewer: Perfect. So, Mr. Shelby, the reason why you're here is because of some accusations from Ms. Clark, from last night on the 10th of March 2021. She claims to have been sexually assaulted by you, so what we're going to do right now is ask you some questions about that night. Is that fine for you?

Mr. Shelby: Sure, go ahead.

Police Interviewer: Alright, good. You were seen to be at the party the night of the 10th. Can you describe to me that night until you went back home?

Mr. Shelby: Oh, yeah. I was basically dragged to this house party by my friends and as soon as we got in, they started playing drinking games and made me drink a lot. So, as you can imagine, I was pretty drunk since the beginning of the party and didn't really realise what was going on around me. And they got me dancing with Sarah, that's Ms. Clark. Basically pushed me into her arms.

Police Interviewer: I see. Did you have a close relationship with Ms. Clark?

Mr. Shelby: Yeah we get on great. We have a few courses together and we often end up in the same study group. It's almost like something wants us to be hanging out! It was the same that night with our friends pushing us together and getting us drunk. It's not like I was out looking to cause her trouble. It just seemed like everyone wanted us together and we were both pretty drunk.

Police Interviewer: Do you agree that you entered the bathroom while Ms. Clark was there as well?

Mr. Shelby: Yeah, I followed her but I was so drunk that anything around me stopped making sense, so when I saw that she was going away, I thought about following her don't really know why, but the others said I should go and check on her? I don't know, it's not the sort of thing I'd normally do, especially if I wasn't so drunk.

Police Interviewer: Were you aware of her physical condition that night? She claimed that she was not doing that well and that's why she went into the bathroom. Apparently, she drank too much, so she wanted to go home. Did you know that?

Mr. Shelby: Yeah, but she wasn't any more drunk than I was. It's not that I wasn't having fun, but I can't say that I noticed she was feeling that bad. If she was so ill why would everyone encourage me to go in and see her?

Police Interviewer: She told us that you yelled at her aggressively, wanting her to stay. When Ms. Clark wanted to leave the bathroom, you grabbed her and kissed her. Then, according to her, you pushed her to the wall and started to touch her body parts such as her breasts and intimate parts. Is that correct?

Mr. Shelby: Uhm, yeah, I guess that we kissed and stuff, but to be honest I was too drunk to process what was happening. Also, the bathroom was really tiny for two people to be in, so I got closer to her because I didn't have space. I might have gone a bit further than I normally would because I was so drunk and because everyone had been pushing us together all night, but I was just caught up in the moment. I'm not the sort of person that would attack someone.

Police Interviewer: While you were kissing Ms. Clark did you notice her complaining about your actions or wanting to get away?

Mr. Shelby: Not really, to be honest. Like I say, I was drunk so I didn't really notice anything wrong with how she responded, until she left. I didn't understand why everyone had encouraged me if she wasn't really into me, I wouldn't have even been in the room if it wasn't for them. I don't think I should be getting in trouble when everyone was telling me to go in after her.

Police Interviewer: I see. Can you tell me why you think Ms. Clark called the police that night?

Mr. Shelby: She must have been upset by what happened, but like I say I don't really think I'm responsible for any of this. If my friends hadn't got me drunk and been pushing us together at the party nothing would even have happened.

Police Interviewer: Alright, Mr. Shelby. I have no further questions. Closing the interview at 11:45 am.

Appendix E

Questionnaire Provided to the Participants

Relationship Between Men and Women

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

Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement using the following scale:

The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI)

Relationships Between Men and Women

Below is a series of statements concerning men and women and their relationships in contemporary society. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement using the following scale: 0 = disagree strongly; 1 = disagree somewhat; 2 = disagree slightly; 3 = agree slightly; 4 = agree somewhat; 5 = agree strongly.

- B(I) 1. No matter how accomplished he is, a man is not truly complete as a person unless he has the love of a woman.
- H 2. Many women are actually seeking special favors, such as hiring policies that favor them over men, under the guise of asking for "equality."
- B(P)* 3. In a disaster, women ought not necessarily to be rescued before men.
- H 4. Most women interpret innocent remarks or acts as being sexist.
- H 5. Women are too easily offended.
- B(I)* 6. People are often truly happy in life without being romantically involved with a member of the other sex.
- H* 7. Feminists are not seeking for women to have more power than men.
- B(G) 8. Many women have a quality of purity that few men possess.
- B(P) 9. Women should be cherished and protected by men.
- H 10. Most women fail to appreciate fully all that men do for them.
- H 11. Women seek to gain power by getting control over men.
- B(I) 12. Every man ought to have a woman whom he adores.
- B(I)* 13. Men are complete without women.
- H 14. Women exaggerate problems they have at work.
- H 15. Once a woman gets a man to commit to her, she usually tries to put him on a tight leash.
- H 16. When women lose to men in a fair competition, they typically complain about being discriminated against.
- B(P) 17. A good woman should be set on a pedestal by her man.
- H* 18. There are actually very few women who get a kick out of teasing

men by seeming sexually available and then refusing male advances.

- B(G) 19. Women, compared to men, tend to have a superior moral sensibility.
- B(P) 20. Men should be willing to sacrifice their own well being in order to provide financially for the women in their lives.
- H* 21. Feminists are making entirely reasonable demands of men.
- B(G) 22. Women, as compared to men, tend to have a more refined sense of culture and good taste.

Note. Copyright 1995 by Peter Glick and Susan T. Fiske. Use of this scale requires permission of one of the authors. A Spanish-language version of the ASI is available from the authors. H = Hostile Sexism, B = Benevolent Sexism, (P) = Protective Paternalism, (G) = Complementary Gender Differentiation, (I) = Heterosexual Intimacy, * = reverse-scored item.

Scoring Instructions

The ASI may be used as an overall measure of sexism, with hostile and benevolent components equally weighted, by simply averaging the score for all items after reversing the items listed below. The two ASI subscales (Hostile Sexism and Benevolent Sexism) may also be calculated separately. For correlational research, purer measures of HS and BS can be obtained by using partial correlations (so that the effects of the correlation between the scales is removed).

Reverse the following items (0 = 5, 1 = 4, 2 = 3, 3 = 2, 4 = 1, 5 = 0): 3, 6, 7, 13, 18, 21.

Hostile Sexism Score = average of the following items: 2, 4, 5, 7, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16, 18, 21.

Benevolent Sexism Score = average of the following items: 1, 3, 6, 8, 9, 12, 13, 17, 19, 20, 22.

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1. Attribution of Blame

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

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Somewhat Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Somewhat Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
I think Mr. Shelby responsible his actions (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think Mr. Shelby's actions were a result of external circumstances (e.g., alcohol, friends) (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think Ms. Clark provoked Mr. Shelby's behaviour. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Perceived Seriousness of the Crime (Self-made scale)

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

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Somewhat Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Somewhat Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
I think Ms. Clarks allegations against Mr. Shelby are very serious (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think Ms. Clark might be exaggerating how bad Mr Shelby's action were (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If Mr. Shelby is found guilty, he should face severe punishment for his actions (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think Mr Shelby 's behaviour toward Ms Clark was unacceptable (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I do not think it is necessary for the police to become involved in the dispute between Ms Clark and Mr Shelby (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>