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Bachelor Thesis

The impact of ambivalent sexism on the perceived level of abuse of coercive and controlling behaviours

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Abstract

The legal system of England and Wales was amongst the first European legal systems that criminalised coercive and controlling behaviours within intimate relationships. Most European laws focus on actual bodily harm (ABH) and a lot of psychological abuse aspects are not illegal (Barlow, et al., 2020; McMahon & McGorrery, 2016). Moreover, since coercive control is not unlawful in Germany and the Netherlands, it was investigated how abusive these behaviours were perceived in the sample. This study explored the role of subject justifications based on ambivalent sexist beliefs on the perception of coercive and controlling behaviours as abusive. In this study participants (N = 140) read a fictional story that illustrated a coercive and controlling relationship. There were three conditions. The first condition included justifications from the perpetrator based on benevolent sexist beliefs. The second condition included justifications based on hostile sexist beliefs. The last condition included a description of the relationship without any justifications. The study revealed that most coercive and controlling behaviours were consistently viewed as highly abusive. Moreover, this study did show that hostile and benevolent sexist justifications did not predict abuse perceptions. However, significant negative correlations showed that holding high levels of hostile or benevolent sexism decreases the perceived level of abuse of coercive and controlling behaviours. Also, significant associations as well as significant negative correlations were found between avoidant attachment style, past experience of abuse and the perceived level of abuse. Thus, people with past abusive experiences and avoidant attachment styles generally view coercive control as less abusive. These findings highlight their vulnerability of either perpetrating coercive control or becoming victim to it. The main conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that although coercive control is not illegal in the countries the sample was drawn from, participants considered most behaviours as highly abusive.

Key words: Perception of Coercive Control, Suspect justifications, Ambivalent Sexism, Coercive and Controlling Behaviours

Introduction

Violence within intimate relationships is a prevalent issue present throughout all European countries. Through anonymous self-reports the European Union Agency for Fundamental rights (FRA) revealed that 22% of women experienced domestic abuse from their male partner. Strikingly 43% of women, almost double, experienced psychological abuse within their relationships (FRA, 2014). Although these findings reveal the prevalence of the psychological components of abuse, most European laws fail to prosecute those actions. The main focus of European laws is on actual bodily harm (ABH) and a lot of psychological abuse aspects are not viewed as crimes nor illegal (Barlow, et al., 2020; McMahon & McGorrery, 2016). One example is Germany. Currently, there are no specific German laws for domestic violence or psychological abuse. The German law individually prosecutes specific crimes like sexual assault, insults, harassment or homicide (Deutscher Bundestag, 2014). One of the few legal systems that recently started to acknowledge and define psychological abuse within intimate relationships, including coercive control as a serious and punishable offence is that of England and Wales (McMahon & McGorrey, 2016).

According to Hamberger et al. (2017) there are a minimum of 22 definitions for coercive control. Contrary to domestic violence which is often focused on physical aggression, coercive control is frequently centred around behaviours and strategies that are not necessarily violent in the sense of inflicting bodily harm (Stark, 2007). These strategies include isolating the victim or excessively monitoring them in order to sustain a dominant role over them (Stark, 2007). The following definitions of coercive control from the UK Home Office (2015) will be used for this research because these definitions include specific controlling and coercive behaviours that are punishable by UK law. The Home office (2015) defines coercive behaviour as: “an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim”, while controlling behaviour is defined as: “a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour” (Home Office, 2015). It is argued that abuse including coercive control often has more enduring and severe consequences on victims than only physical abuse (Brennan et al., 2019).

Since many coercive and controlling behaviours are not punishable by law in majority of European countries, it is of great interest to gain insights on how abusive people from these countries perceive those behaviours to be.

The present study explores how justifications of behaviours associated with coercive control affect to what extent people consider coercive and controlling behaviours as abusive. The justifications will be offered by a coercive control perpetrator. The focus on the subject in this study is chosen since it is argued that subjects of coercive control crimes often use tactics to shift blame towards their victims (Watson et al., 2021). The justifications either tap into benevolent or hostile sexist beliefs (Schmuck et al., 2021). For the scope of this thesis the focus of the coercive control will be male on female abuse in heterosexual relationships (Stark, 2007). This is because although there is an ongoing debate of gender symmetry and male victims in coercive control, most research still indicates that the majority of victims are female (Hester, 2011; Kelly & Westmarland, 2016; Walby & Towers, 2018; Williamson, 2010).

In the following text, coercive control will be explained in different contexts. Since people still hold ambivalent sexist beliefs to certain extents (Glick & Fiske, 1996), it might be that holding such beliefs leads to people categorising some coercive and controlling behaviours as not abusive. Therefore, ambivalent sexism will be presented as a possible justification of controlling and coercive behaviour that could potentially influence and moderate abuse perceptions of coercive control.

Coercive control and law enforcement

The UK specifically criminalised coercive and controlling behaviours in England and Wales in 2015 (McMahon & McGorrey, 2016). Nonetheless, conviction rates remain minimal (Barlow et al., 2020). Even though research shows that around 60-80 % of domestic violence victims that reach out for help are also subjected to coercive control (Rees at al., 2006; Stark, 2007; Tolman 1989), in 2016 only 27 sentences for coercive control were executed (Barlow et al., 2020). Moreover, there seems to be a lack of knowledge among police officers regarding the recognition of specific behaviours that count as coercive and controlling, as well as a frequent lack of evidence in the prosecution of coercive control (Barlow et al., 2020). In addition, Myhill (2017) argues that cases involving physical violence are considerably more often rated as ‘high risk’ by police officers in comparison to cases that solely involve coercive control. Unawareness and lack of knowledge regarding coercive control poses a great threat to victims since many researchers agree that the coercive and controlling components of abusive

relationships often bear the most persistent and detrimental consequences for victims (Crossman et al., 2015; Golding, 1999; Harne & Radford, 2010; Pitman, 2016). Examples of the consequences victims must endure include living in constant fear due to continuous coercion and threats against themselves, loved ones or financial abuse to reinforce invisibility and further isolate victims (Dobash & Dobash, 1992). Moreover, victims are often severely psychologically distressed because of identity loss, lowered confidence and low self-esteem (Humphreys & Thiara, 2003). Developing psychological disorders like depression or posttraumatic stress disorder is also one of the many consequences victims of coercive control are faced with (Anderson & Anderson, 2008).

It is striking that police officers and service providers often solely focus on physical violence as high risk since research shows that coercive and controlling behaviours are a significant preceding factor of physical aggression within relationships (Beck & Raghavan, 2010; Myhill & Hohl, 2016). More importantly, there is an association between high levels of control and domestic homicide (Campbell et al., 2003).

Acceptability of coercive control by general public

It is challenging to measure general acceptability of coercive control since coercive control is often a cumulative process where the continuity of the coercive and controlling behaviours is central (Stark 2007). This means that singular incidents in a coercive and controlling relationship are often seen as a minor incident. Only considering singular incidents and failing to recognise the patterned behaviours makes the abuse deniable. This can diminish victims ongoing and pervasive suffering from this situation. Stark (2013) even depicts coercive control as the abuse that is ‘hidden in plain sight’.

A study measuring the acceptability of coercive control by Lagdon et al. (2022) found that more than one third of participants of their sample had never heard of the term coercive control, nor knew the meaning. These findings indicate that conducting research on this topic is crucial. Lagdon et al. (2022) compared the publics’ acceptability of coercive control by using one scenario where the controlling and coercive behaviours were depicted as either very ‘obvious’ or ‘less obvious’. Examples in the obvious scenarios are: destruction of the victims property or forbidding the victim to meet friends. Examples of the less obvious scenario are: visiting the victim at work to eat lunch or taking the victim shopping to slowly replace the victims wardrobe. The findings of the study showed that the more obvious scenario yielded less acceptability (Lagdon et al., 2022). This outcome is consistent with domestic abuse studies where more severe and violent perpetrator behaviours like hitting or verbal abuse are

consistently evaluated as unacceptable (e.g. Carlson & Worden, 2005). Despite these findings it is often highlighted that coercive control is hard to conceptualize and lay people and professionals, including police officers, often struggle to recognize 'minor' incidents as being part of a pattern of abusive behaviour (Barlow et al., 2020). One explanation for that could be that domestic violence perpetrators regularly employ tactics to shift their responsibility to external factors (Henning et al., 2005). One of the most employed tactics suspects of coercive control use is "denial of the victim" (Watson et al., 2021). Suspects use this tactic to suggest that their actions towards the victims is the result of the victims' bad actions or bad character and thus justified and deserved (Watson et al., 2021). These tactics are shown to be especially effective for people that possess underlying sexist beliefs towards women (Schmuck et al., 2021). Studies have shown that ambivalent sexist beliefs contribute to victim blaming in cases of rape and therefore facilitating the tactic denial of the victim. (e.g. Abrams et al., 2003).

Ambivalent sexism

The exploration of the use of ambivalent sexism as a justification of coercive control can propose a framework as to why many nonviolent behaviours are not necessarily perceived as abusive. The theory of ambivalent sexism aims to explain deeply rooted causes of sexist attitudes.

Ambivalent sexism is composed of two types of sexism; hostile and benevolent sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Hostile sexism is characterized by the belief that women that fail to adhere to traditional gender roles need to be reprimanded for their behaviour. Benevolent sexism on the other hand, refers to a form of sexism were men idealise women as 'pure creatures' that need protection and support (Glick & Fiske, 1996). This form of sexism suggests that women are fragile and that they should carry out traditional gender roles. Men exhibiting benevolent sexism as well as many women often perceive these actions and intentions as positive (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Benevolent sexism enables men to uphold a positive self-image of being selfless by sacrificing personal needs to take care of and provide for women. Furthermore, benevolent sexism is socially more acceptable than hostile sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996). It is a key addition to hostile sexism by upholding and justifying men's power and privilege over women and (unconsciously) restricts women in the fight against gender inequality. Benevolent sexism makes it seem that the power men hold over women is used for their benefit. This leads to women accepting male dominance while not pursuing independence (Glick & Fiske, 1996).

A study by Moya et al. (1999) showed that unemployed women (that financially depended on a man) scored higher in benevolent sexism. The same study also researched women's responses when confronted with scenarios that elicited discrimination (e.g. husband does not allow wife to leave the house at night). The study revealed that discrimination that was justified by perpetrators in a benevolent and protective way was seen as more acceptable than the same acts of discrimination justified in a hostile way (Moya et al., 1999).

These findings are relevant for this thesis since the study aims to build from them. Moya et al. (1999) findings raise the question if a coercive and controlling scenario in which the perpetrator uses justifications that tap into benevolent sexist beliefs for his behaviour will be more accepted and is seen as less abusive in comparison to a hostile justification. Thus, the first hypothesis is:

H1: A justification of controlling and coercive behaviour that taps into benevolent sexist beliefs will lead to a lower level of perceived abuse of those controlling and coercive behaviours when compared to justifications based on hostile sexist beliefs or a control group where no justifications are offered.

It is often argued that coercive control within intimate relationships is inherently sexist and often a gendered process with males being the perpetrators and females being the victims (Hester, 2011; Kelly & Westmarland, 2016; Walby & Towers, 2018; Williamson, 2010). According to Glick et al. (2002), hostile as well as benevolent sexism are used as "complementary tools of control" in relationships. Moreover, hostility and even seemingly positive behaviours like protection are used to maintain control (Renzetti et al., 2013). Various research shows that hostile sexism is correlated to toleration, use and legitimisation of domestic violence (Renzetti et al., 2013; Glick et al 2002). In contrast to that, benevolent sexism only excuses abusive behaviour towards women if they deviate from traditional gender roles (Glick et al., 2002). These findings indicate that both hostile sexist beliefs as well as benevolent sexist beliefs affect the acceptance and execution of domestic violence. Therefore, it could be predicted that justifications based on hostile or benevolent sexism are more effective for individuals holding these beliefs. This would in turn lead to individuals holding these beliefs categorising coercive and controlling behaviours as less abusive. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H2: Benevolent sexist beliefs will increase the effectiveness of benevolent sexist justifications, while hostile sexist beliefs will increase the effectiveness of hostile sexist justifications.

Attachment style

Intimate partner violence is often associated with adult attachment style. Attachment can be divided into two subcategories. The first is a secure attachment style and the second an insecure style. According to Bowlby (1969) the main cause for acquiring one of those attachment styles can be traced back into the childhood. It is argued that the cause stems from caregivers either being nurturing and attentive or insensitive and dismissive during childhood (Bowlby, 1969). These early childhood experiences impact relationship behaviours in adulthood due to an internalisation of a 'working model' (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Dutton & White (2012) categorise insecure attachment into either anxious or avoidant attachment styles. Individuals with high levels of attachment anxiety are often afraid of being rejected or abandoned (Lee et al., 2014). Furthermore, they worry about receptiveness and accessibility of their partner and are clingy. Moreover, people scoring high on attachment avoidance have low regard for themselves and are distrustful of others and therefore tend to avoid close relationships (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Ultimately, both of these types of attachment increase the likelihood of violent behaviour and disagreement in relationships (Lee et al., 2014). Moreover, since individuals holding insecure attachment styles tend to be distrustful of their partner, they often feel the need to dominate them. This in turn leads to hostile behaviour towards their partner and facilitates perpetrators execution of interpersonal violence during their relationships (Allison et al., 2008; Buck et al, 2012; Mauricio & Gormley, 2001). Therefore, it can be expected that participants holding insecure attachment styles have a greater acceptability of coercive control and perceive it as less abusive since they themselves are more likely to endorse coercive control. Thus, attachment-avoidance and attachment-anxiety are added as control variables.

Past experience with abuse

It is expected that participants' past experiences with interpersonal violence will have an effect on how abusive they consider behaviours indicative of coercive control to be. According to Carlson & Worden (2005) people that exhibit coercive and controlling behaviours or behaved that way in the past will be more likely to accept coercive and controlling behaviours and blame the victims for experiencing the abuse. Furthermore, victims of coercive control are likely to engage in self blaming and attribute the abuser's behaviour as a deserved consequence for their own actions (Candela, 2016; Goldner, 2004). Therefore, past experience with coercive control will be included as a control variable.

In summary, the current study evaluates if coercive control justified by perpetrators using arguments that tap into benevolent sexist beliefs will be more accepted and viewed as less abusive by the public than coercive control justified by perpetrators using arguments that tap into hostile sexist beliefs (H1). Furthermore, participants levels of hostile and benevolent sexism will be added as moderators for the perception of coercive control as abusive (H2). Additionally, participants attachment style and past experiences with coercive control will also be measured and included as control variables.

Methods

Design

The current study was an experimental design using a vignette in which the justification of the perpetrators controlling and coercive behaviour was manipulated and used as an independent variable. The perpetrator either used justifications that tapped into benevolent or hostile sexist beliefs. Moreover, a neutral control condition was added. In all three conditions the same coercive and controlling behaviours are given but the neutral condition offers no justifications of the behaviours. All participants were randomly allocated to one of the three groups. Thus, 48 participants were in the benevolent sexism group (Male=20, Female=27, a different gender identity=1), 44 in the hostile sexism group (Male=13, Female=28, Prefer not to say=1, a different gender identity=2) and lastly, 48 in the control group (Male=12, Female=34, Prefer not to say=1, a different gender identity=1). For the study a between-subjects design was applied. Ambivalent sexism including the subcategories benevolent and hostile sexism was also added as a moderator variable. Lastly, two control variables were added to the analysis. The first control variable is attachment style with the subcategories attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety, while the second control variable is past experience of abuse.

Participants

To recruit participants convenience sampling was used. The study was published via SONA (Universities Test Subject Pool) and shared via the social media platforms WhatsApp, Snapchat and Instagram. Additionally, participants got recruited by providing them with a QR code of the study link and asking them to take part. The study link got also directly send to the researchers' friends and acquaintances. To participate in the study, respondents had to be at least 18 years old. All in all, 207 responses were collected of which 54 got deleted due to incompletion of the survey. Moreover, one response got deleted because the participant did not give their consent to participate. Additionally, two responses were deleted since the

participants were under 18. Lastly 10 responses got deleted because the participants did not appropriately take part in the study, either by only choosing the same answer for every item on a scale or skipping the script by being on the page for under 5 seconds. This resulted in a total of 140 responses that were used for analysis. From these responses, 45 were male and 89 female while two respondents preferred not to reveal their gender and four respondents chose their own preferred description. The age range of the participants was from 18 to 58. Most participants had either German *(N*=116*)* or Dutch *(N*=15*)* nationalities. Before publishing the study, it was approved by the ethics committee of the University of Twente (Request number: 220443)

Materials

Script for coercive and controlling behaviour

For the present study a script with behaviours that represent coercive control was created (Appendix B). The chosen behaviours originally derive from the definition of coercive control by the Crown Prosecution Act (CPS, 2017). In total 20 behaviours were used which were based on a scale measuring the acceptability of coercive and controlling behaviours by Thomas (2019). These behaviours were displayed as a fictional story in a heterosexual couple with the male partner being the perpetrator and the female being the victim. At the beginning of the script the general relationship dynamic is explained. First, the reader gets provided with a brief timeline of different coercive and controlling behaviours that occurred in the relationship. This is done to accurately describe the cumulative nature of coercive and controlling relationships. Next, one evening where the perpetrator uses multiple coercive and controlling behaviours is described to the reader. Examples of the displayed behaviours are the perpetrator showing up at his partners house unannounced, criticising his partners clothing choice, physically following his partner, insulting her and demanding her to immediately go home with him. The expressed coercive and controlling behaviours were the same for all three experimental groups and increased in severity over time. The distinction between experimental groups was made in the way the preparator justified his act towards his partner in a confrontational conversation at the end of the script. For the benevolent sexism group, the perpetrator used justifications of his behaviour that tap into benevolent sexist beliefs. One example of such belief is that the perpetrator continuously highlights that the displayed coercive and controlling behaviour is solely due to feelings of concern and devotion towards the victim. For the hostile sexism group, the perpetrator used justifications that tap into hostile sexist beliefs for his coercive and controlling behaviours. One example is that the perpetrator justifies the controlling and coercive behaviours by highlighting how the victim fails to

behave in a traditional female gender role. Lastly, for the control group the expressed coercive control was displayed with no justifications and no confrontational conversation at the end. Meaning that the participants had to rate the controlling and coercive behaviours without being influenced by justifications given from the perpetrator. All three conditions were randomly and equally distributed within all participants.

Questionnaire for perceived level of abuse for coercive and controlling behaviours

To measure participants acceptability of the coercive control behaviours displayed in the script a questionnaire was created (Appendix A). The chosen behaviours originally derive from the definition of coercive control by the Crown Prosecution Act (CPS, 2017). In total 20 behaviours were used based on a scale measuring the acceptability of coercive and controlling behaviours by Thomas (2019). Every item in the questionnaire was present in the fictional story (Appendix A). The order of the controlling and coercive behaviours was the same for the questionnaire and the script. To ensure more variance and higher strength for statistical analyses participants were asked on a scale from 0 to 100 to indicate whether they perceived the displayed behaviours as abusive. The range of the scale was 0 meaning "definitely not abusive" to 100 "definitely abusive" the mid-point was at 50 meaning 'neutral'. The Cronbach's alpha computed for the sample showed excellent internal consistency (α=.95).

Ambivalent Sexism (ASI)

To measure Hostile and benevolent sexism the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) was used (Glick and Fiske, 1996). The ASI consists of 22-items. Eleven of the items measure benevolent sexism and the other eleven items measure hostile sexism. Moreover, the ASI uses a 6-point Likert scale. The scale ranges from a score of zero being 'Disagree strongly' to five being 'Agree Strongly'. A high score on this scale indicates a high score of sexism. The scale demonstrated good validity for both genders (Glick & Fiske, 1996). For this sample, the Cronbach's Alpha for hostile sexism showed good internal consistency (11 items; α=.87). Furthermore, the Cronbach's Alpha for benevolent sexism showed good internal consistency as well (11 items; α=.83)

Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R)

To measure adult attachment styles the ECR-R was used (Fraley et al., 2000). The scale is argued to be among the most reliable tools to measure interpersonal behaviours within intimate relationships (Fairchild & Finney, 2006). The scale measures attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance and uses a 1-7-point Likert scale (Fraley et al., 2000). A score of one

indicates “Strongly Disagree”, while seven indicates “Strongly Agree”. The ECR-R measures individual differences concerning attachment in intimate relationships. The ECR-R entails 36 items and can be divided into two sub-scales. The first 18 items measure attachment-anxiety while the last 18 items measure attachment-avoidance. Multiple items from both sub-scales are reversed. A high average score on the subscales indicates a high level of attachment-avoidance/anxiety. The Cronbach’s alpha for attachment anxiety in this sample showed excellent internal consistency (18 items; α=.95). Moreover, the Cronbach’s alpha for attachment avoidance also showed excellent internal consistency (18 items; α=.94).

Extended–Hurt, Insulted, Threaten, Scream screening tool (E-HITS)

The E-HITS by Feltner et al. (2018) was used to measure the samples past experience with abuse in intimate relationships. The tool includes five questions that are based on a scale from 0 (not applicable) to 5 (frequently). The questions of the E-HITS aim to measure intimate partner violence experienced within the last 12 months. The violence measured by this tool includes physical and sexual violence as well as verbal abuse. To capture past experience with abuse of this sample, adjustments were made. Participants were asked to indicate whether they ever experienced abuse in a relationship instead of limiting it to the past 12 months. Also, participants were specifically asked to report the abuse they experienced even if it was by a partner from the past and not only from current relationships. The scale asked participants for e.g. how often their partner screamed or cursed at them or how often their partner threatened them with harm. According to Chan et al. (2010) the E-HITS showed good test/re-test reliability and internal consistency. In this sample the tool demonstrated acceptable internal consistency (5 items; α=.78).

Procedure

This research was conducted through the online platform Qualtrics and took approximately 25 minutes to complete (excluding the cases that took more than one hour). First participants were provided with information about the research topic and the progression of the questionnaire. Participants had to give informed consent before starting the questionnaire. Before being provided with the script participants had to answer questions regarding ambivalent sexism, attachment style and their past experience with coercive control. Furthermore, these questions, except for the ones concerning ambivalent sexism, were all included as control variables. Participants were assigned to read one of the three vignettes and after reading these were asked to rate the described behaviours in terms of how abusive they perceived those behaviours to be. Next, participants had to answer demographic questions

concerning their age, gender and nationality. At the end of the survey a debrief section was included that every participant had to read before reaffirming their consent to the use of their data for further analysis. Lastly, before and after the study, participants were provided with information for resources in case of experiencing physical or verbal abuse from a partner.

Data analysis

For statistical analysis of the data, the statistics software SPSS (version 25) was used. To get an overview of the data, means, standard deviations and correlations of the scales were calculated. To test the effect of the independent variables benevolent and hostile sexism on the dependent variable perceived level of abuse an ANCOVA was used while controlling for the variables past experience and attachment style (H1). Attachment style got divided into two subcategories. The first one is attachment anxiety and the second one is attachment avoidance. Next, to test the moderation effect of hostile and benevolent sexism on the dependent variable level of abuse, a moderation analysis was planned by using the PROCESS macro for SPSS (PROCESS model 1) while controlling for past experience of abuse and attachment style (H2). Nevertheless, the first analysis showed no association between the moderators which made this analysis redundant.

Results

Descriptive statistics

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations and correlations of all scales. There are significant negative correlations between the dependent variable level of abuse and all variables included in the study. Meaning that an increase of these variables leads to a decrease of perceived abuse. First, the independent variable benevolent sexism negatively and significantly correlates to the dependent variable level of abuse (r=-.22, p< 0.01). Next, a significant negative correlation between the independent variable hostile sexism and level of abuse is shown (r=-.23, p< 0.01). Moreover, there is a significant negative correlation between the control variable attachment avoidance and level of abuse (r=-.31, p< 0.01). The control variable past experiences of abuse is also negatively and significantly correlated to the dependent variable (r=-.33, p< 0.01). Lastly, the control variable attachment anxiety is negatively and significantly correlated to the perceived level of abuse (r=-.20, p< 0.05).

Table 1

Descriptives of all scales including their correlations (Pearson's correlation coefficient)

	N	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Benevolent Sexism	140	1.49	0.74	-	.41**	.15	.18*	.14	-.22**
2. Hostile Sexism	140	1.30	0.77		-	-.03	.14	.13	-.23**
3. Attachment Anxiety	140	3.35	1.28			-	.59**	.32**	-.20*
4. Attachment Avoidance	140	2.85	1.06				-	.23**	-.31**
5. Past experiences of abuse	140	2.06	2.83					-	-.33**
6. Level of abuse	140	80.79	15.93						-

Note. *p<0.05; **p<0.01.

Individual behaviours

Table 2 displays the descriptive statistics for the individual coercive and controlling behaviours. Coercive and controlling behaviours in this sample were generally evaluated as highly abusive and were negatively skewed. Therefore, the interquartile ranges and medians are included into the table. “Placing a tracking app on the partners phone to monitor the partner’s whereabouts WITHOUT their consent (e.g., Find My Friends, Snap Maps.)” was evaluated as the most abusive with the highest mean score. The least abusive behaviours in this sample with the lowest means are: “Showing up at their partners house unexpected”, “Video-calling or texting their partner multiple times a day without prior agreement.” and “Monitoring their partner’s whereabouts using tracking apps WITH their consent (e.g., with Find My Friends or Snap Maps).”

Table 2

Descriptives for individual behaviours of coercive control

			Percentiles		
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Lower Quartile	Median	Upper Quartile
1. Showing up at their partners house unexpected.	50.01	27.18	30.00	55.00	69.75
2. Making their partner feel uncomfortable for going out with friends.	81.74	19.56	72.25	87.50	100.00
3. Telling their partner what they should wear.	79.47	22.54	71.00	85.00	98.75
4. Making their partner feel guilty about their choice of clothes.	85.38	20.57	79.00	91.50	100.00

5. Telling their partner how much alcohol they can drink.	75.71	20.55	66.25	79.00	91.75
6. Telling their partner how much money they can spend.	84.37	19.92	75.00	90.50	100.00
7. Demanding the passwords to their partner's social media accounts.	86.54	21.75	80.00	96.50	100.00
8. Video-calling or texting their partner multiple times a day without prior agreement.	58.23	27.83	40.00	64.00	78.00
9. Getting angry with their partner if they don't respond to your calls and/or messages within 30 minutes.	80.68	22.33	72.25	86.00	100.00
10. Monitoring their partner's activity on social media.	83.74	23.26	77.25	92.00	100.00
11. Covertly checking their partner's social media interactions on their phone.	88.71	19.49	85.00	99.00	100.00

12. Monitoring their partner's whereabouts using tracking apps WITH their consent (e.g., with Find My Friends or Snap Maps).	53.69	34.92	24.25	54.00	88.75
13. Placing a tracking app on the partners phone to monitor the partner's whereabouts WITHOUT their consent (e.g., Find My Friends, Snap Maps.)	95.89	14.14	100.00	100.00	100.00
14. Physically pursuing their partner to check their whereabouts.	89.39	18.87	84.25	100.00	100.00
15. Physically pursuing their partner specifically to make sure they are not cheating.	88.63	17.96	81.25	96.00	100.00
16. Getting angry if their partner talks to others of the sex that their partner is physically attracted to.	82.20	22.99	74.00	89.00	100.00
17. Insulting their partner.	89.11	18.00	84.00	100.00	100.00
18. Accusing their partner of cheating with no reasonable evidence.	86.91	19.78	81.00	94.50	100.00

19. Demanding their partner leave their friends and go home with them.	89.70	17.96	85.00	99.50	100.00
20. Regularly giving your partner the 'silent treatment' and not responding to their attempts to communicate and/or ignoring them.	85.70	19.11	78.00	90.00	100.00

Perception of controlling and coercive behaviours as abusive (H1)

Before analysing the data, the assumptions were checked. This revealed that the assumption of normality was violated and the abuse scores were negatively skewed. Furthermore, outliers were detected in the data. To achieve a normal or near to normal distribution and include the outliers into the analysis the variable measuring the level of abuse was log10 transformed. After transforming the variable, the skewness was reduced and a normal distribution was achieved. The logged mean score for level of abuse was used for a one-way ANCOVA. Moreover, the logged means and standard deviations of the abuse means for the conditions are reported. The raw abuse mean was used to compute correlations between the variables (Table 1).

The analysis revealed that there was no significant main effect between the logged abuse score and the experimental conditions [$F(2, 134 = 1.60.\ p = .21,\ \eta 2 = .02$]. Meaning that the perceived level of abuse for controlling and coercive behaviours did not significantly differ based on justification built on either hostile ($M = 1.15$, $SD = 0.29$) or benevolent sexist beliefs ($M = 1.22$, $SD = 0.23$) when compared to a control condition with no justification of those behaviours ($M = 1.24$, $SD = 0.29$).

While conducting the ANCOVA between perceived levels of abuse and the experimental conditions the control variables attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance and past experience were included. The ANCOVA revealed that there is a significant association between attachment avoidance and the logged score for perceived level of abuse [$F(1, 134 = 6.44.\ p = .012,\ \eta 2 = .05$]. Moreover, correlations (Table 1) showed a negative significant relationship between attachment avoidance and the raw score for perceived level of abuse.

Meaning that participants with more avoidant attachment styles are less likely to perceive coercive and controlling behaviours as abusive. Additionally, there was a significant main effect for past experiences of abuse and the logged abuse score [$F(1, 134 = 4.70.\ p = .032, \eta 2 = .03$]. Moreover, a negative significant correlation between past experiences of abuse and the raw score for perceived level of abuse is shown (Table 1). This indicates that participants that experienced abuse in the past are less likely to perceive coercive and controlling behaviours as abusive. Lastly, no significant interaction between attachment anxiety and the logged abuse score was found [$F(1, 134 = 0.53\ p = .470, \eta 2 < .01$].

Moderation effect of ambivalent sexism (H2)

To test whether high levels of benevolent or hostile sexism decrease the extent to which coercive and controlling behaviours are viewed as abusive when paired with the corresponding condition a moderation analysis was anticipated. The previous analysis revealed no effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable. Thus, this analysis is deemed as redundant and not executed.

Discussion

This study explored the effect of justifications based on ambivalent sexist beliefs on the perception of coercive control as abusive (H1). Moreover, the impact of holding ambivalent sexist beliefs on the abuse perception was explored (H2). Lastly, attachment style and past experience with abuse were added as control variables. This study aimed to build upon Moya et al. (1999) findings, where it was discovered that discrimination justified by perpetrators in a benevolent and protective manner was seen as more acceptable than the same acts of discrimination justified in a hostile manner. This study showed that justifications based on hostile or benevolent sexist beliefs do not influence the abuse perception of controlling and coercive behaviours in this sample. Moreover, there was no moderation effect of hostile and benevolent sexism found in this sample. Nevertheless, negative significant correlations were discovered between hostile sexism and the dependent variable perceived level of abuse and between benevolent sexism and the perceived level of abuse. Furthermore, all three control variables attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance and past experience of abuse were negatively and significantly correlated with the dependent variable perceived level of abuse of controlling and coercive behaviours. The following section will discuss the distinct findings for each variable.

Perception of controlling and coercive behaviours as abusive

As already mentioned, justifications of controlling and coercive behaviours based on ambivalent sexist beliefs did not influence the abuse perception of coercive control in this sample (H1). Denial of the victim is a commonly exploited strategy for coercive control perpetrators (Watson et al., 2021). The perpetrators justifications of his controlling and coercive behaviour did not work as intended in this sample. The perpetrator does not deny his actions against his victim. Rather he admits them but shifts blame of his action towards the victim. It was argued that the justifications based on sexist beliefs would prove to be especially effective for individuals scoring high on sexism (Schmuck et al., 2021). Meaning that participants with high levels of sexism would categorise the coercive and controlling behaviours as less abusive based on these justifications. However, the mean scores (Table 1) show that this sample generally had low scores of hostile and benevolent sexism. Meaning that for most people in this sample these justifications were not effective nor necessarily changing their perception of the perpetrator's actions. One reason the justifications did not change abuse perceptions could be made by comparing the results of this research with the study by Schmuck (2021). Her study demonstrated that denial of the victim arguments changed people's perception of the victim but not of the perpetrator (Schmuck, 2021). Similar to that study, Mertins (2020) researched the effect of denial of the victim arguments in sexual assault cases. Mertins study demonstrated that the arguments employed by the perpetrators also failed to change participants perceptions of their behaviour because the perpetrators were still held responsible for their actions (Mertins, 2020). Therefore, it is important to focus on the effect of these arguments on the perception towards victims. This is important since victim blaming is still argued to be an important factor regarding sexual abuse cases (Abrams et al., 2003).

Furthermore, mean scores for the perception of controlling and coercive behaviours as abusive show that most behaviours were consistently evaluated as abusive by most participants. These findings however are not unusual since the sample mainly consists of a very homogenous group of people pursuing higher education. Numerus research shows that people with high levels of education tend to be less likely to engage in or condone interpersonal violence in comparison to lower educated individuals (Godbout et al., 2009; Siegel & Williams, 2001; Simon et al, 2001). The culture the sample was drawn from could also pose an explanation as to why the justifications based on sexism were not successful. The study of Moya et al., (1999) that this research was partially build from was based in Spain whereas the sample from this study was predominately German and Dutch. Cultural differences regarding the importance of gender norms could have played a role. To reinforce

this argument, a study by Allen et al. (2009) shows that women from Latin-American backgrounds that hold benevolent sexist beliefs are likely to report lower rates of interpersonal violence committed by males. Since sexism scores of this sample were generally low (Table 1) and justifications based on sexist beliefs did not predict abuse perception, it might be that people from the countries the sample was drawn from do not place as much importance on gender norms.

Despite of the high means for perceived level of abuse and low levels of hostile and benevolent sexism in this sample, there were still significant negative correlations between benevolent and hostile sexism and the perceived level of abuse (Table 1). Meaning the higher the level of either hostile or benevolent sexism of participants in this sample, the less likely they viewed the displayed coercive and controlling behaviours as abusive. So, even though the ambivalent sexist justifications did not change the abuse perceptions in this sample, holding sexist beliefs did to an extent. This finding can be further explained by literature. Multiple studies investigating the relationship between interpersonal violence and sexism found associations between holding hostile sexist beliefs and perpetrating interpersonal violence including psychological abuse (Makin-Byrd & Azar, 2011; Renzetti et al., 2018; Torres et al., 2012). Moreover, a study by Forbes et al. (2004) found a positive association between hostile sexist beliefs and sexual and verbal coercion. Lastly, a study by Ibabe et al. (2016) found correlations between hostile and benevolent sexism and the perpetration of domestic abuse. It is often argued that perpetration of interpersonal violence leads to a greater acceptability of intimate partner violence and vice versa (Renzetti et al., 2013; Glick et al 2002). This study demonstrated that holding high levels of ambivalent sexist beliefs lower the perception of abusiveness of coercive and controlling behaviours in this sample. Meaning that individuals in this sample holding sexist attitudes could be at risk of perpetrating or accepting intimate partner violence including coercive control since they evaluate the behaviours as less abusive than people with lower levels of sexism.

Next, the control variable attachment avoidance showed a significant association with the perceived level of abuse for controlling and coercive behaviours. Moreover, a significant negative correlation was detected between those variables (Table 1). Meaning that people with high levels of attachment avoidance in this sample perceive coercive and controlling behaviours as less abusive than people with lower scores of attachment avoidance. Having high levels of attachment avoidance might lead to people perpetrating coercive control since literature suggests that holding insecure attachment styles is significantly predictive of the perpetration of interpersonal violence (Allison et al., 2008; Buck et al, 2012;

Mauricio & Gormley, 2001). The literature suggests that anxious attachment styles are also associated with the perpetration of interpersonal violence. In this study a significant negative correlation was found between attachment anxiety and perceived level of abuse for coercive control. Meaning that individuals with high scores of attachment anxiety perceived the displayed coercive control as less abusive. However, once the model included the variables past experience with abuse and attachment avoidance, the association was no longer significant. This suggests that the relationship between attachment avoidance and past experience of abuse might be more predictive for the perceived level of abuse of controlling and coercive behaviours.

The second control variable past experience with abuse was also significantly associated with the perceived level of abuse for controlling and coercive behaviours. Furthermore, a negative significant correlation with perceived level of abuse was discovered. Meaning that participants experiencing abuse in the past tend to evaluate the behaviours as less abusive than participants with no abusive experiences. There are various factors that may lead to abuse victims perceiving the behaviours as less abusive. First, it is argued that coercive control victims often self-blame instead of attributing the abuse as a wrongdoing of their partner (Candela, 2016). Moreover, they tend to believe their partner abusing them is justified because they must have misbehaved in some way (Candela, 2016). Furthermore, it is often observed that abused women either stay in the abusive relationship or return to their abuser after leaving them (Herbert et al., 1991). One reason as to why victims stay and may feel trapped in such relationships is that self-blaming for the abuse makes them depressed and helpless with low self-esteem (Porter, 1981). Lastly, Herbert et al. (1991) suggest that women with abuse experience employ “cognitive strategies” to perceive their abusive relationship as positive. Past experience of abuse does not only lead to evaluating the abuse as less harmful but could also increase the perpetration of abuse (Dichter et al., 2018). The study by Dichter et al. (2018) showed that coercive control victims are more likely to respond to their abusers with physical violence than people that do not experience coercive control. Moreover, domestic abuse victims may even respond to the abuse they endure by killing their partner to protect themselves (Walker, 1984). Responding violently towards their abuser increases the risk of people, including law enforcements, disregarding the abuse victims received prior to retaliating and label them as being equally violent and controlling as their partner (Hamby, 2014; Swan et al., 2008). Ultimately, these insights show how vulnerable people with past abusive experiences are. Also, it highlights the importance of further conducting research and

raising awareness about abuse victims to ensure fairness in the legal system in case they start to perpetrate abuse themselves.

Moderation of ambivalent sexism

This study found no effect of ambivalent sexist justifications of coercive and controlling behaviours on the perceived level of abuse of those behaviours. Therefore, there could not be a moderation between ambivalent sexism and the justifications based on these sexist believes (H2). As already mentioned, the means for hostile and benevolent sexism (Table 1) showed that this sample scores generally low on ambivalent sexism. Moreover, the controlling and coercive behaviours were generally seen as very abusive and unacceptable (Table 2).

This study focused on the perpetration of coercive control as a gendered process. Even though the justifications based on sexist beliefs did not predict perception of abusiveness in this sample, possessing higher levels of sexism did. Meaning that the gendered perpetration of coercive control displayed in this study was only found to be predictive of abuse perceptions for people with higher levels of benevolent or hostile sexism in comparison to the other participants. Not finding gendered processes is argued to be common due to convenience sampling in studies dealing with interpersonal violence perpetration (Hardesty & Ogolsky, 2020; Raghavan et al., 2019). It is argued that the captured sample mostly represents the population the sample is drawn from and therefore reflects the interpersonal violence rates of that population (Raghavan et al., 2019). Since the sample of this study consists mostly of higher educated university students the interpersonal violence rates are generally lower (e.g. Godbout et al., 2009). In comparison to that, Johnson (2006) argues that most female victims of interpersonal violence are represented in samples drawn from clinical settings.

Limitations

Sampling

Some limitations that may affect the results of the study are worth noting. The study got mainly distributed by sharing the link via social media, directly sending it to friends and acquaintances, distributing QR-codes of the study link to students and via the Sona system of the University of Twente. Therefore, most of the study population is young, educated and predominately from Germany and the Netherlands. Thus, the sample demographic is not representative for to the general public. Having a more culturally diverse sample might affect the results of the study. This is assumed since people from cultures that reinforce traditional

gender roles are more accepting of interpersonal violence (Dietrich & Schuett, 2013). However, the results also highlight that coercive and controlling behaviours were generally evaluated as highly abusive in this sample. These results show that the many individuals from the population the sample is drawn from recognise that the behaviours are not acceptable even if they are not unlawful. Most participants from this sample were female. According to Sylaska & Walters (2014), there are significant variations for the acceptance of interpersonal violence between males and females. The negative skew and ceiling effects in the data could possibly be explained by the high numbers of female participants. Thus, the overall result might be affected by the high number of female participants.

Procedure

Since the experimental condition had no effect on the dependent variable, the use of a fictional vignette might also pose a limitation to the study. It was aimed to elicit an emotional connection between the perpetrator that uses justifications based on ambivalent sexism and the participants. To support this claim, Collett & Childs (2011) argue that participants may not be as emotionally invested while reading a vignette in comparison to a simulated scenario. Therefore, participants may have perceived the justifications of the behaviour differently if they would have been more emotionally invested into the story. More realistic means like VR or using Video material should be considered. This could elicit more emotional connection between the perpetrator and the participants and thus make the justifications more effective.

Another implication regarding the procedure is the reliance on self-reports only. Self-reports bear the risk that participants are inclined to respond in socially acceptable ways (Paulhus & Vazire, 2007). Since the study did not take the social desirability bias into account this could have influenced the results.

Implications for future research

For future research it would be crucial to conduct this study on a more diverse sample. Meaning that cultural differences, socio economic status, gender and nationality should all be considered. This could increase the reliability of the results and possibly lead to better generalisation of the results. Another interesting aspect could be considering same sex relationships for this research. It is often argued that coercive control stems from gender asymmetry, underlying sexist beliefs and a need for power, dominance and control from males (Hester, 2011; Kelly & Westmarland, 2016; Walby & Towers, 2018; Williamson, 2010). Furthermore, Goldenberg et al. (2016) argue that homosexual individuals perpetrating

interpersonal violence often try to create gender roles that are already widely established in heterosexual relationships by asserting dominance. This study showed that sexist justifications did not predict the perceived level of abusiveness of coercive control. Conducting more research on same sex relationships and coercive control could help to better understand the dynamics of coercive control within intimate relationships by challenging the widely used gendered approach to explain coercive control. Furthermore, it could help in finding different underlying reasons as to why people perpetrate or fall victim to coercive control.

Although most controlling and coercive behaviours were found to be highly abusive, there were still some behaviours that were consistently evaluated as less abusive. The mean scores for the behaviours "Showing up at their partners house unexpected", "Video-calling or texting their partner multiple times a day without prior agreement." And "Monitoring their partner's whereabouts using tracking apps WITH their consent (e.g., with Find My Friends or Snap Maps)." Are each under 60 and thus significantly lower than the means of the other coercive and controlling behaviours (Table 2). This is striking since the behaviours all fall under coercive control (CPS, 2017) but it seems that participants failed to recognise them as such. Moreover, Crowther-Dowey et al. (2016) discovered that behaviours like monitoring the whereabouts of one's partner are easily disguised as an action out of love or concern. Therefore, it could be argued that justifications based on benevolent sexist believes may be more effective for specific coercive and controlling behaviours even if they are not that effective for coercive and controlling behaviours overall. Thus, further research on specific behaviours and reasons as to why they are not seen as abusive could play an important role to create better support systems for victims.

Conclusion

This study showed that justifications of abuse based on ambivalent sexist beliefs do not predict the perceived level of abuse of those behaviours. However, this study showed that attachment avoidance and past experience of abuse proved to be an important predictor for the abuse perception of coercive and controlling behaviours. Meaning that people high in attachment avoidance or with past abusive experiences are more vulnerable in either perpetrating coercive control or being victimised by coercive control. This highlights the importance of further conducting research on the relationship between these variables and coercive control to gain more insights and better understand the underlying factors that contribute to execution and acceptance of coercive control. Generally, the study demonstrated that coercive and controlling behaviours were perceived as unacceptable and abusive. The

countries the sample was drawn from do not yet have laws against coercive control. Nevertheless, the general unacceptance in this sample can be a basis for more research aimed at the general population for investigating the perception of coercive and controlling behaviours. This could help inform the debate of implementing laws against coercive control in these countries. Furthermore, this study is one of few studies that examined the perception of coercive and controlling behaviours with the definitions of the recently established UK law in western European countries outside of the UK.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Questionnaire for acceptability of coercive and controlling behaviours

Definitely not abusive				Neutral				Definitely abusive	
10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100

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

Appendix B: Script displaying coercive and controlling behaviour

Group A: Tom is in a two-year relationship with Lisa. From the start of the relationship, Tom was always very involved and protective of Lisa. After dating for a couple of weeks, Tom started to visit Lisa at her house unannounced. He often brought flowers or just wanted to hang out. Lisa sometimes felt confused by that behaviour since she was often forced to change plans at the last minute because she had not expected Tom to visit. Still, she often cancelled her plans to stay with Tom because she felt guilty leaving him alone when he'd come by with a gift.

After a couple of months, Tom started to make remarks about Lisa's clothing choices. He often commented that her dresses were too short and other men would look at her and think she is single if she dresses in a way that shows off her body. When Tom and Lisa went out together, he would often tell her that it is important for him that she does not get too drunk.

When Lisa's and Tom's relationship became more serious, he asked her to give him all her social media passwords to be able to access her accounts at all times. A year after Tom and Lisa started dating, Tom took Lisa's debit cards and pin codes to manage her spending.

After two years of dating, Lisa decided one night to go to her friend's birthday party. Tom asked Lisa to keep him up to date with what she was doing that night. After a while Tom has not heard anything from his girlfriend yet, so he started to text her. He wanted to know what Lisa was doing and at what time she would be home. Lisa did not respond, so he video called her but she did not reply. He continued to text and call her repeatedly. He started sending messages insisting that she immediately contact him to let him know what she was doing.

Since he got no response, Tom started checking Lisa's social media to see if she posted anything. After logging into his girlfriend's account and checking her friend's posts, he was still unable to see what Lisa was doing. So, he decided to go to the party himself.

To track Lisa down, Tom opened a tracking app that he installed on her phone months ago without her knowledge. As Tom detected the party's location, he decided to drive to the bar to check up on his girlfriend. Arriving at the bar, Tom saw his girlfriend sitting next to another man. He came up to her and asked "Are you serious? You are not returning my calls or texts and here you are talking and laughing with this random dude?" As Lisa tried to reply Tom added: "I am so disappointed in you! I always trusted you and thought you knew not to behave like a stupid bitch. Yet here you are trying to cheat on me. Let's go home immediately!"

As both sat in the car on their way home, Lisa tried to explain herself but Tom stayed silent throughout the rest of the night and ignored his girlfriend.

The next day Lisa felt frustrated and wanted to talk to Tom about their relationship. She asked him why he is always so controlling and doesn't seem to trust her. Tom replied: "I am not controlling. I love you more than myself. I only want to make sure you are safe. I am always worried sick if you don't answer my calls. She replied: "You always tell me what to wear and how to spend my money, also I haven't seen my friends in months since you always come over unannounced." Tom replied: "I am only watching out for you, we live in a sick world and I know what's best for you. You don't understand how other men think when they see you in those clothes, especially when you are drunk. They could do whatever to you and it would be my fault for not looking out for my girl. Also, I always come over and treat you like a princess, don't you enjoy spending time with your man?" Lisa replied: "Are you serious? The one time I go out, you just show up at my friend's birthday party, insult me and accuse me of cheating! How did you even know where I went? Tom responded: "You are my little princess and I love you, I am always looking out for you, so I checked your GPS. I only lost my temper because I felt disappointed that my girl misbehaved in such a way, especially after all of my sacrifices for you."

Group B: Tom is in a two-year relationship with Lisa. From the start of the relationship, Tom was always very involved and protective of Lisa. After dating for a couple of weeks, Tom started to visit Lisa at her house unannounced. He often brought flowers or just wanted to hang out. Lisa sometimes felt confused by that behaviour since she was often forced to change plans at the last minute because she had not expected Tom to visit. Still, she often cancelled her plans to stay with Tom because she felt guilty leaving him alone when he'd come by with a gift.

After a couple of months, Tom started to make remarks about Lisa's clothing choices. He often commented that her dresses were too short and other men would look at her and think she is single if she dresses in a way that shows off her body. When Tom and Lisa went out together, he would often tell her that it is important for him that she does not get too drunk.

When Lisa's and Tom's relationship became more serious, he asked her to give him all her social media passwords to be able to access her accounts at all times. A year after Tom and Lisa started dating, Tom took Lisa's debit cards and pin codes to manage her spending.

After two years of dating, Lisa decided one night to go to her friend's birthday party. Tom asked Lisa to keep him up to date with what she was doing that night. After a while Tom has not heard anything from his girlfriend yet, so he started to text her. He wanted to know what Lisa was doing and at what time she would be home. Lisa did not respond, so he video called her but she did not reply. He continued to text and call her repeatedly. He started sending messages insisting that she immediately contact him to let him know what she was doing.

Since he got no response, Tom started checking Lisa's social media to see if she posted anything. After logging into his girlfriend's account and checking her friend's posts, he was still unable to see what Lisa was doing. So, he decided to go to the party himself.

To track Lisa down, Tom opened a tracking app that he installed on her phone months ago without her knowledge. As Tom detected the party's location, he decided to drive to the bar to check up on his girlfriend. Arriving at the bar, Tom saw his girlfriend sitting next to another man. He came up to her and asked "Are you serious? You are not returning my calls or texts and here you are talking and laughing with this random dude?" As Lisa tried to reply Tom added: "I am so disappointed in you! I always trusted you and thought you knew not to behave like a stupid bitch. Yet here you are trying to cheat on me. Let's go home immediately!"

As both sat in the car on their way home, Lisa tried to explain herself but Tom stayed silent throughout the rest of the night and ignored his girlfriend.

The next day Lisa felt frustrated and wanted to talk to Tom about their relationship. She asked him why he is always so controlling and doesn't seem to trust her. Tom replied: "I am not controlling. You just need to behave like a real woman and respect and listen to your man." She replied: "You always tell me what to wear and how to spend my money, also I haven't seen my friends in months since you always come over unannounced." Tom replied: "I am only making sure you don't do sneaky things behind my back, women just know how to be deceiving, it's in their nature and I know what's best for you. You don't understand how other men think when they see you in those clothes, especially when you are drunk. You basically invite them to touch you. They could do whatever to you and it would be your fault for not listening to me and leaving the house dressed like that. Also, real women don't need to spend all their time and money hanging out with friends. Don't you enjoy spending time with your man like a real woman? Lisa replied: "Are you serious? The one time I go out, you just show up at my friend's birthday party, insult me and accuse me of cheating! How did you even know where I went? Tom responded: "I checked your GPS since you tried to be sneaky

and hide things from your man. You are such a typical disloyal, vicious and sneaky woman. I expect you to respect me and what I say. I lost my temper because you utterly misbehaved and disobeyed your man."

Group C: Tom is in a two-year relationship with Lisa. From the start of the relationship, Tom was always very involved and protective of Lisa. After dating for a couple of weeks, Tom started to visit Lisa at her house unannounced. He often brought flowers or just wanted to hang out. Lisa sometimes felt confused by that behaviour since she was often forced to change plans at the last minute because she had not expected Tom to visit. Still, she often cancelled her plans to stay with Tom because she felt guilty leaving him alone when he'd come by with a gift.

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Tom added: “I am so disappointed in you! I always trusted you and thought you knew not to behave like a stupid bitch. Yet here you are trying to cheat on me. Let’s go home immediately!”

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