

**The effect of Denial of the Victim and Benevolence Arguments in a Simulated  
Investigative Interview on Attribution of Blame**

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### **Abstract**

Suspect interviews become critical when investigating cases of Control and Coercion, because there is often no physical evidence. However, suspects may use influencing behaviors to mislead the interviewer and direct the interview in the suspect's favor. This study tested whether Denial of the Victim and Benevolence arguments have an effect on attributions of blame towards the suspect and victim. Suspects may use Denial of the Victim to argue that the victim's bad character provoked the alleged behavior of the suspect. Benevolence may be used to argue that the suspect is a good person who would not engage in the alleged behavior. Further, it was tested whether Denial of the Victim and Benevolence affect perceived guilt, seriousness of crime, credibility of the suspect and victim, and suggested punishment. Finally, moderation analyses were used to test whether Belief in a Just World and Ambivalent Sexism (Hostile and Benevolent) have an effect on the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Participants completed a questionnaire after reading a case description and investigative interview script. These were used as manipulations. Participants received one of the four interview scripts.

The main findings were that Benevolence arguments decreased internal attributions of blame towards the suspect, and decreased how serious the alleged crime is perceived to be. Further, exploratory analyses showed that Hostile Sexism increases the internal attribution of blame to the victim that participants hold when Denial of the Victim arguments have been used.

## Introduction

Intimate partner violence is an act or pattern of harmful behavior that included various forms, which are all directed against an intimate (ex)partner: physical violence, sexual violence, emotional abuse, economic abuse, isolation, threats, stalking, harassment and intimidation (Respect, 2017; Williamson, 2010). Controlling and coercive behavior, a form of (non-)physical abuse, is often a component of intimate partner violence. One partner acts in an abusive way that harms, punishes or frightens their partner, and makes them subordinate and/or dependent on them (The Code for Crown Prosecutors, 2017). In Western Societies, life time prevalence of intimate partner violence for women is 21% and annually 6% (World Health Organization, 2018). Despite the high prevalence and severe consequences of intimate partner violence, successfully prosecuting the crimes remains difficult. This is especially in cases of controlling and coercive behavior. First, psychological abuse is not included within the legal system in all countries (Jeney et al., 2020). Only a few countries consider psychological abuse within an intimate relationship as a separate offence.

Second, there is need for evidence to proceed to prosecution, which is difficult because there is often no physical evidence in cases of psychological abuse (Barlow et al., 2019). Police officers rely in their decision making whether to prosecute or not on the best information available (Barlow et al., 2019). Much of that information is evidence of intimate partner (physical) violence, such as photographs of the assault and/or reports on injuries from the victim. While there could be evidence for psychological abuse, such as text messages, phone logs, bank details and access, or witness statements which could be used by the police to prosecute the suspect, such evidence is less common and more ambiguous than evidence for physical abuse. Therefore, the police tends to focus on prosecuting only the physical and/or sexual aspects of intimate partner violence, even when these assault cases co-occur with control and coercion (Barlow et al., 2019). This presents a challenge for policing and

making judgements in cases of intimate partner violence. To form correct judgments and to prosecute, conducting an investigative interview could become critical (Watson et al., 2022).

The aim during an investigative interview is to elicit an accurate account from the suspect, which could help gather evidence regarding whether intimate partner violence has taken place. However, to minimize the likelihood of being prosecuted, suspects make an attempt to influence the interviewer's beliefs and behavior in investigative interviews. Suspects use influencing behaviors, which is any behavior that is aimed at changing beliefs of the interviewer, to direct the interview in the suspect's favor (Watson et al., 2022). Based on analyses of investigative interviews in cases of control and coercion, Watson et al. (2022) identified different influencing behaviors that suspects use during an interview. Some of those behaviors are an attempt to shift blame to the victim or justify their own behavior. By doing this, suspects may shift perceptions about who and what is to blame for that incident to seem less extreme in their behavior and to warrant less or no punishment.

### **Denial of Victim**

Watson et al. (2022), found that *Denial of the Victim* was a frequently used behavior to attempt to influence interviewers in investigative interviews. Denial of the Victim arguments attempt to minimize the negative actions of the suspect. By using Denial of the Victim, suspects claim that because of the victim's bad character and/or negative behavior towards them, negative actions from the suspect toward the victim are an acceptable response, and therefore justified. The use of Denial of the Victim arguments are aimed to make the victim appear deserving of what happened to them, and thereby deprive them of victim status.

The Denial of the Victim influencing behavior is based on the 'Techniques of Neutralization', developed by Sykes and Matza (1957). Techniques of neutralization are cognitive processes in which offenders rationalize their behavior that violated community norms that they would normally endorse. Going against those norms may cause a feeling of

guilt or shame. Using techniques of neutralization, such as Denial of the Victim, allows the suspect to reduce these feelings of guilt and shame, and thus protect their self-image. In order to free themselves from the incongruence between norms they endorse and their actual behavior, suspects must consider the adopted neutralization technique as valid and actually believe their arguments. Even when the suspect is willing to bear responsibility for the acts and any harm they may have caused, the suspect may attempt to neutralize the behavior. In doing so, the suspect may manipulate the perception of the situation in such a way that the negative behavior and possible harm of abuse was not wrong given the circumstances.

As mentioned above, Denial of the Victim arguments are used by the suspect as a technique of neutralization. The negative behavior of the suspect and/or caused harm is argued by the suspect as a rightful punishment because the victim is portrayed as the wrongdoer who deserved this situation. Victims of intimate partner violence are often judged by others, outsiders, as being responsible for their own fate (Yamawaki et al., 2012). This response, on how victims are being perceived by others, could be explained using the attribution theory (Grubb & Turner, 2012).

### **Denial of the Victim arguments and Attribution Theory**

Attribution theory relates to how others assign responsibility to all aspects involved within an event (Heider, 1958). Individuals are described as active information processors, who use logical modes of sense making to interpret events. By doing so, individuals are trying to understand and control the world around them (Grubb & Turner, 2012). Attribution theory differentiates between two types of attribution: internal- and external attribution. Internal attributions indicate that individuals, because of their personality or beliefs, are responsible for their behaviour. External attributions indicate that an individual's behaviour is the result of external circumstances (Grubb & Turner, 2012). Victims could be blamed more in cases where internal attribution is utilized, because more emphasis is placed on the victim as an

individual while making judgements. Victims are often judged by others as being responsible for what happened to them (Grubb & Turner, 2012). Suspects could utilize internal attribution by using Denial of the Victim arguments, in which they claim that the victim's bad behaviour or/and character provoked the suspect's negative actions. Thus, by emphasizing the negative behaviour of the victim during an investigative interview, the attribution of blame to the victim by the interviewer could be increased.

Schmuck et al. 2021 conducted a research on the effects of Denial of the Victim arguments within suspect interviews and how they affect the receiver of the arguments. This research showed that while Denial of the Victim arguments increased the attribution of blame to the victim, it did not increase the attribution of blame to the suspect. One explanation could be that Denial of the Victim arguments only emphasize the bad character of the victim, and do not say anything about the suspect's character. Therefore, Denial of the Victim might only affect internal attributions of blame to the victim, but not to the suspect.

This indicates that if Denial of the Victim affects attributions of blame to the victim, other behaviours might target directly attributions of blame to the suspect. Suspects tend to use multiple different behaviours in an investigative interview to influence the interviewer. Therefore, other behaviours could be taken into consideration, such as Benevolence. Watson et al. (2022) identified Benevolence as an influencing behaviour that suspects use during an investigative interview. Benevolence is behaviour in which the suspect seeks to portray themselves in a more favourable light, whereas Denial of the Victim arguments seek to portray the victim in an unfavourable light. By using Benevolence, it is anticipated that Denial of Victim arguments might appear as more credible, which could affect attributions of blame to the suspect.

### **Benevolence**

For the suspect's arguments to be perceived as convincing by the interviewer, suspects establishing themselves as a trustworthy source of information becomes important. Trust acts as a benchmark for interviewers to determine whether to believe and accept the information from the suspect. One of the behaviours that might be used to establish that is *Benevolence*. Benevolence arguments are intended to portray the suspect as someone who holds good intentions and would behave in the best interest of others generally, and in particular of the victim (Watson et al., 2022). Furthermore, statements are likely to be made in which suspects indicate they are a good person who would never, or not normally, engage in alleged criminal behavior. Benevolence arguments highlight the atypicality of alleged behavior by the suspect, suggesting that behavior is externally caused (Watson et al., 2022).

This theoretically proposes that Benevolence arguments may have an effect on attributions of blame. Benevolence arguments argue that the suspect's alleged behavior is atypical, because in general the suspect is a good person. By trying to maximize their own positive characteristics, the suspect might bias the interviewer in investigative interviews when interpreting events. This bias could lead to the perception that the suspect's actions are the result of external circumstances, rather than their personality (Grubb & Turner, 2012). Consequently, the interviewer might be likely to attribute less blame to the suspect. Thus, one of the goals for the suspect is to use influencing behavior to shift attributions of blame away from themselves towards the victim (Auburn et al., 1995).

In sum, we expect that Benevolence has an effect on the attribution of blame towards the suspect, whereas Denial of the Victim has an effect on the attribution of blame towards the victim. However, both Benevolence and Denial of the Victim may also have an impact on legal decision making: it may change individual's perceptions on the appropriateness or extent of possible punishment of the suspect. The possible effect on legal decision making could be explained through the concept of *justified punishment*.

## **Justified punishment**

Punishment is a fundamental and essential aspect of our daily life: social behavior is often shaped by our use of punishment and our reaction to its use. The process by which individuals make the decision whether to punish others or not could be explained by *indirect reciprocity*. Through indirect reciprocity, individuals who have been helpful in the past would more likely receive help from others (Milinski, 2016). For indirect reciprocity, the reputation of the individual must be known: a proportion of previous interactions in which they have helped others (Milinski, 2016; Nowak, 2006). Thus, a positive reputation increases the likelihood that the individual will receive help. In the context of punishment, punishing a “bad” individual is not considered to harm the punisher’s reputation. Punishing a “good” individual, however, would harm the punisher’s reputation (Milinski, 2016). Thus, punishing an individual who has a negative reputation is considered as justified.

In the context of suspect interview behavior, suspects might use Denial of the Victim arguments to emphasize the victim’s bad character or provocation, which could give the victim a negative reputation. Consequently, punishing the suspect would be considered as less appropriate, which could affect legal decision making. The behavior that a suspect shows during an investigative interview might be presented as evidence in a court, and the court will decide if and how severe to punish the suspect. Similarly, suspects might use Benevolence to portray themselves as a good person, which could give the suspect a positive reputation. However, punishing would only be considered as less appropriate if Benevolence is accompanied by Denial of the Victim. This is because deviating from good behavior would not be sufficient to prevent punishment, unless that deviation from good behavior is toward an individual that deserves the negative behavior. In other words: the suspect’s alleged negative behavior may be justified if the victim has a negative reputation. Thus, it is expected that Benevolence might affect perceptions of seriousness of crime, but only in combination with

Denial of the Victim. Denial of the Victim, however, might have a direct effect on how serious the crime is perceived to be. Consequently, the recipients of arguments may believe that the suspect deserves less punishment.

### **Belief in a Just World**

Another theory that is related to the concept of justified punishment is the *Belief in a Just World* (Lerner, 1980). According to this theory, the world is a just place where individuals get what they deserve. One's just-world beliefs are threatened when they believe something bad happened to a good person. In order to protect their sense of justice and reaffirm their beliefs, individuals could use several strategies. One of the most prominent strategies is that individuals can decide that the victim deserves to suffer. For example, a victim's misfortune could be attributed to their own negative behavior, their character could be judged as bad or they could be seen as unworthy. This belief could lead to victim-blaming attitudes, in which individuals believe that victims directly or indirectly contributed to their own fate (Valor-Segura et al., 2011). This rationalization allows individuals to maintain their belief that as long as they are careful and "good", similar misfortune will not happen to them (Lerner, 1980; Valor-Segura et al., 2011).

Individuals who hold a strong Belief in a Just World tend to blame victims of intimate partner violence more than those with a weaker belief in the world as a just place (Valor-Segura et al., 2011). In context of suspect interview behavior, a suspect might use Denial of the Victim and portray the victim as a bad character who provoked the suspect prior to the incident. An interviewer that holds strong beliefs in a just world might believe the victim deserves to be punished for the negative behavior, in order for the world to remain a just place. In contrast, individuals with a high belief in a just world might be disinclined to severely punish the suspect who used Benevolence arguments in an investigative interview. If

an individual believes the suspect is a good person, then it would not make sense that the suspect is actually guilty of the crime or that it was as bad as claimed by the victim.

In sum, holding beliefs in a just world might lead to minimizing the impact of the alleged behavior, and therefore affect legal decision making. Interviewers will then be more likely to believe that the victim deserved the abuse, or that the suspect does not deserve a (severe) punishment. Using Denial of the Victim in combination with Benevolence arguments might reinforce the change in perception of the interviewer. This perception could lead to the decision not to prosecute the suspect.

### **Ambivalent Sexism**

Sexism might also play a role in how individuals attribute blame to suspects and victims. Glick and Fiske (1997) introduced the *Theory of Ambivalent Sexism*, in which they argue that sexism is a multidimensional construct, composed of two sexist attitudes: Hostile Sexism and Benevolent Sexism. Hostile Sexism serves to justify male power and traditional gender roles: if a woman does not behave as expected in her traditional gender role, she must be punished (Glick & Fiske, 1997). Benevolent Sexism, in contrast, serves to justify male and traditional gender roles in a more subjectively positive tone: if a woman does behave as expected in her traditional gender role, she must be rewarded (Glick & Fiske, 1997). However, Benevolent Sexism should not be perceived as positive attitudes towards women, because it relies on the stereotypical thought that women need to be protected by men because of their weaknesses (Lee et al., 2010).

Studies have shown that individuals who hold sexist beliefs were more likely to justify violence by a male partner if the female partner is seen as unfaithful (Haj-Yahia, 2003; Viki & Adams, 2002). Being at risk of committing adultery or being unfaithful would suggest that the woman is not fulfilling her traditional gender role (e.g. not being a good romantic partner), which may enhance justification of the violence.

In context of suspect interview behavior, Denial of the Victim arguments might have an effect on how blame is attributed towards the suspect and victim. If the suspect argues that the victim has behaved badly (e.g. she cheated), the victim is being portrayed as someone who did not behave according to what is expected from her as a woman. Individuals who hold high sexist beliefs would more likely perceive the victim as a bad person who deserved the punishment, and would more likely justify the alleged behavior of the suspect. Thus, it is expected that individuals who hold high sexist beliefs would likely attribute more blame to the victim.

### **Current study**

Because it is difficult to successfully prosecute intimate partner violence, particularly controlling and coercive behavior, the investigative interview becomes a crucial component. However, to minimize the likelihood of being prosecuted, suspects use influencing behaviors in attempt to mislead the interviewer and direct the interview in their favor. Watson et al. (2022) identified different influencing behaviors that suspects use during an interview. It has been shown that Denial of the Victim arguments do affect attributions of blame to the victim, but do not affect attributions of blame to the suspect. Benevolence arguments argue that the suspect is a good person who would, normally, not engage in the alleged behavior. Consequently, Benevolence could have a more direct effect on internal attributions to the suspect, which will be tested in this study. We expect that the combined use of Denial of the Victim and Benevolence might be especially effective in changing perceptions of the suspect and victim. This is because by using Benevolence, Denial of the Victim arguments might appear as more credible, which could affect the attributions of blame towards the suspect and victim.

Further, we predict that Denial of the Victim increases perceptions that the victim deserved negative behavior, while Benevolence changes perceptions of how much the suspect

deserves to be punished. Because using both arguments during an investigative interview might reinforce the perception of the interviewer, we predict that the effects on legal decision making is stronger when both Denial of the Victim and Benevolence arguments are being used. Therefore, when both type of arguments have been used, participants might not give the suspect a long prison sentence. Finally, we expect that the above mentioned effects will be stronger when individuals hold high Belief in a Just World, Hostile Sexism or Benevolent Sexism beliefs.

## Methods

### Design

The design in this study a 2x2 between participants design, with two independent variables: *Denial of the Victim* and *Benevolence*. The first independent variable has the levels *Denial of the Victim* and *no interview*. In the *Denial of the Victim* condition, the suspect tried during an investigative interview to justify their alleged negative behavior, by implying that the victim is a bad person who caused that negative behavior. The second independent variable has the levels *Benevolence* and *no interview*. In the *Benevolence* condition, the suspect argued during an investigative interview that he is a good person who would (normally) not engage in the alleged negative behavior. In the *no interview* condition, participants did not receive an investigative interview script. Thus, there are four conditions, in which participants received either *Denial of the Victim* arguments, *Benevolence* arguments, both *Denial of the Victim* and *Benevolence* arguments, or neither (*no interview*).

The dependent variables measured in this study were *attributions of blame*, *credibility of the victim's allegations*, *credibility of the suspect's account*, *perceived guilt of the suspect*, *seriousness of crime* and *suggested punishment*. *Belief in a Just World* and *Sexism (Hostile and Benevolent)* were exploratory moderators in this study.

### Participants

Based on a G\*Power-analysis, 152 participants were needed in order to observe a partial eta squared of 0.05, which was the smallest effect size of interest in this study. Further, an alpha level of 0.05 and power level of 0.8 was selected.

The participants were recruited using a non-probability sampling method, via the SONA recruitment system of the University of Twente and via the researcher's personal (social media) network. Through the SONA system, Bachelor students of the University of Twente are able to participate in current studies. The inclusion criteria was that participants

had to be an adult (18 years or older). Prior to participation, all participants had to provide informed consent.

For this research, 278 individuals have started the study. From the 278 participants, 97 did not complete the questionnaire, and 11 completed the questionnaire more than once. Therefore, the data of participants that did not complete the questionnaire were excluded from this analysis. As for duplicates, only the first responses were saved and the second responses have been excluded. The studied sample of this research were 170 adults. Out of these 170 adults, 42 were male (24.7%), 123 female (72.4%) and 5 (2.9%) defined themselves as non-binary/third gender. Participants were aged between 18 and 55 years old, most of them were German (28.2%) or Dutch (25.9%). The remaining participants (45.9%) had another nationality, for example: American, Serbian, British and Turkish. Further, most participants had a High-School degree (38.8%) or Bachelor's Degree (27.6%).

### **Procedure and Materials**

All study materials, including the informed consent, the case description, the different versions of the investigative interview scripts, the questionnaire and the debriefing can be found in Appendix M.

Prior to the start of the research, the ethical approval was given by the Ethics Committee of the faculty of Behavioural and Management and Social Sciences at the University of Twente (request number 221293). After the ethical approval, a web-link to the online questionnaire was published on the SONA System of the University of Twente and on social media. After clicking on the web-link, participants were presented with information about the research: content of the study, procedure, risks of taking part, how to withdraw, web-links to offer support, and contact information in case of unclarities. The information about the content of the study, however, did not disclose the hypotheses. Giving all this information was to ensure participants were well-informed before giving informed consent.

After participants gave informed consent, demographic information was asked: gender, age, nationality and educational level. The course of the questionnaire and its contents are explained in detail below. After completing the questionnaire, the participants were presented with a written debrief to explain the background and purpose of the study. The debrief included web-links that offer support, in case the participants felt distressed about the topic. Finally, if the participants wanted to withdraw from this study after reading the information in the debriefing, they could do so by closing the web browser.

### ***Moderators***

After the demographics, two questionnaires that were used in this study as exploratory moderators were presented. The two exploratory moderators were Belief in a Just World and Ambivalent Sexism. Belief in a Just World was measured using the “Global Belief in a Just World” scale from Lipkus (1991). The scale included seven items, each measured using the 5-point Likert Scale (1= strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree). One example item of the scale is *“I Believe that people get what they deserve.”* The Cronbach’s alpha showed that the Belief in a Just World scale has an internal consistency of .81.

The second exploratory moderator was Ambivalent Sexism (Hostile and Benevolent Sexism), measured with the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) by Glick and Fiske (1996). The scale consisted of 22 items, with each statement questioning either Hostile or Benevolent Sexism. Hostile Sexism attitudes predict antipathy and negative perceptions about women that not act in traditional gender roles, while Benevolent Sexism attitudes predict sympathy and positive perceptions about women who do act in traditional gender roles. Eleven items measured Hostile Sexism, as for example, *“Women seek to gain power by getting control over men”*, and eleven items measured Benevolent Sexism, as for example, *“Every man ought to have a woman whom he adores”*. These items were measured separately with a 5-point Likert-Scale (1= strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree). The Cronbach’s alpha showed that the

Hostile Sexism scale has an internal consistency of .90, and the Benevolent Sexism scale has an internal consistency of .81.

### ***Case description***

After the moderators, participants were first presented with the definition of the crime of Control and Coercion. They were told that coercive and controlling behaviours in intimate relationships are a crime in the UK, and was defined as “any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse: psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional” (CPS, 2017).

Then, the case description was presented to the participants. This description included allegations that were made by the victim about her boyfriend, describing all situations that occurred before the victim called the police. These situations described the behaviour of the suspect: jealous behaviour, control over social activities of the victim, control over finances and insulting the victim. Furthermore, it also described the incident that prompted the victim to call the police. The evening of the incident, the suspect tracked down the victim by using a tracker he had planted on her phone, because she texted the suspect that she would be home later than agreed. Upon arrival, the suspect took the victim outside, which led to a heated discussion. In this discussion, the suspect accused the victim of cheating, called her names, scolded and threatened to leave her. The case description was the same across all experimental conditions.

### ***Investigative interview script***

After reading the scenario, each participant was presented with an investigative interview script between a police officer and the suspect. Three different interview scripts were given: either one with only Denial of the Victim arguments, one with only Benevolence

arguments or one with both Denial of the Victim and Benevolence arguments. Participants in the no interview condition did not receive a script of the investigative interview. Participants in this condition were asked to continue with the questionnaire and answer questions about the case of the suspect and victim. The participants were randomly assigned to the four different conditions.

In the Denial of the Victim interview, the suspect tries to justify his negative behaviour by emphasizing that his behaviour is the result of the victim's bad behaviour. For example, one of the suspect's argument in the denial of the victim condition was: *"I ask her to do these things because she is a cheater. The problem is she wants to go out and meet other guys and get drunk with her girlfriends all the time"*. In the Benevolence interview, the suspect tries to emphasize his good character. His negative behaviour is something he would not normally engage in because it does not fit his character. He tries to do this by saying, for example, *"I wouldn't normally do anything like that. As I said, that's not how I am. You can talk to my ex-girlfriends and they'll all say I'm not the type to be controlling or to cause arguments"*. In the Denial of the Victim and Benevolence interview, the suspect uses both type of arguments to portray the victim as a bad person and himself as a good person. Both Denial of the Victim and Benevolence arguments occur combined throughout this interview script.

### ***Attention check***

To ensure that the participants read both the case description and investigative interview script, two items were used as an attention check. The items were: *"To what extent did Mr Clark try to convince the police officer that Miss Taylor is a bad person?"* and *"To what extent did Mr Clark try to convince the police officer that he is a good person?."* Participants were asked to answer these questions using a 5-point Likert Scale (1= not at all; 5= to a great extent). In the Denial of the Victim condition, participants should answer they

believe that to a great extent Mr Clark tried to convince the police officer that Miss Taylor is a bad person. In the Benevolence condition, participants should answer they believe to a great extent that Mr Clark tried to convince the police officer that he is a good person. In the Denial of the Victim and Benevolence condition, participants should score high on both items: they believe to a great extent that Mr Clark tried to convince the police officer that Ms Taylor is a bad person and he is a good person.

### ***Attribution of Blame***

After the manipulation check, participants were presented with items that are based on the Internal Attribution of Blame to the Suspect and Victim, and the External Attribution of Blame to the Suspect and Victim. The 12 items of this scale were inspired by items of existing questionnaires: *The Revised Gudjonsson Blame Attribution Inventory* (Gudjonsson & Singh, 1989), *The Attribution of Blame Scale* (Fazio et al., 1997) and *Items Assessing General Victim Blame* (Eigenberg & Policastro, 2015).

Gudjonsson's (1989) revised scale was designed to measure three factors: mental element attribution, external attribution and guilt feeling attribution. For this study, only the external attribution items were relevant. Eigenberg and Policastro's (2015) scale was designed to measure general victim-blaming. The Attribution of Blame scale by Fazio et al. (1997) measured causal attributions of blame, which composed victim blame, suspect blame, alcohol blame and societal blame. For this study, only the suspect blame items were relevant.

Most of the overlap between the three questionnaires was in attributions of blame to the suspect. Therefore, these overlapping items were taken from the existing questionnaires and adapted to the case description and investigative interview script. The items measuring attribution of blame to the victim are mirrored: the content of the item is the same as for attribution of blame to the suspect, but the phrasing of the item is directed to the victim. In our final scale, an example of the items on Internal Attribution of Blame to the Suspect is: "*Mr*

*Clark's behaviour towards Miss Taylor is the result of his personality.*” An example of the items on Internal Attribution of Blame to the Victim is: *“Mr Clark's behaviour towards Miss Taylor is the result of her personality.”* To measure External Attribution of Blame to the Suspect, one item was for example: *“Mr Clark had very good reasons for his behaviour throughout his relationship with Miss Taylor.”* To measure External Attribution of Blame to the Victim, one item was for example: *“Miss Taylor had very good reasons for her behaviour throughout her relationship with Mr Clark.”* Participants had to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the statements, which was measured with a 5-point Likert-Scale (1= strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree).

Results of the Cronbach's alpha showed that Internal Attribution of Blame to the Suspect scale has a low internal consistency of .53, whereas Internal Attribution of Blame to the Victim has a high internal consistency of .89. Further, External Attribution of Blame to the Suspect scale has an acceptable internal consistency of .72, whereas External Attribution of Blame to the Victim has a low internal consistency of .28.

### ***Perceived Credibility***

The questionnaire continues by measuring the perceived credibility of both the suspect and victim. These items were taken from the study of Rozmann and Nahari (2020) on measuring credibility. To measure the perceived credibility, two items were formulated where the content of the items is the same, only the questioning is directed to either the suspect or the victim. The perceived credibility of the victim's allegations was measured by two questions: *“Were Miss Taylor's allegations truthful or deceptive?”* and *“Indicate how confident you are with this decision.”* For the perceived credibility of the suspect's account, the same questions were used to measure credibility: *“Was Mr Clark's account in the investigative interview truthful or deceptive?”* and *“Indicate how confident you are with this decision”*.

Truthful was scored as 1 (participant believe the victim/suspect) and deceptive as -1 (participant does not believe the victim/suspect), and multiplied by the confidence rate (number ranging from one to six, 1 = no confidence; 6 = completely confident). The result of this indicated perceived credibility: -6 (confidently deceptive) to 6 (confidently truthful).

### ***Perceived Guilt***

After the perceived credibility of the suspect and victim, participants were asked to indicate whether they thought the suspect was guilty of the victim's allegations. To measure this, two items were used that were developed in the study by Schmuck et al. (2021). The two items were *“I think Mr. Clark is guilty of control and coercion”* and *“Mr. Clark behaved toward Miss Taylor in a way that can be defined as controlling and coercive behaviour.”* Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with these statements, using the 5-point Likert-Scale (1= strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree). The Cronbach’s alpha showed that the Perceived Guilt scale has an internal consistency of .86.

### ***Seriousness of Crime***

After the Perceived Guilt items, participants were presented with items to measure how serious they perceived the described offence to be. The three items that were used are based on a study of Stylianou (2003). Stylianou (2003) argues that the extent of how seriously an act is perceived depends on two characteristics: perceived consequences and perceived wrongfulness. Perceived consequences are acts that cause any psychological/and or physical harm. Based on perceived consequences, the item *“I think Mr Clark’s behaviour harmed Miss Taylor”* was developed. Perceived wrongfulness are the moral aspects of an act, such as the motive and purpose of the suspect, which influence perceived seriousness of a crime beyond perceptions of physical/psychological harm (Stylianou, 2003). Based on perceived wrongfulness, two items have been developed: *“I think Mr Clark’s motives were wrongful”* and *“I think Mr Clark’s behaviour was immoral.”* All items have been measured with a 5-

point Likert Scale (1= strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). Results of the Cronbach's alpha showed that the Seriousness of Crime scale has an internal consistency of .80.

### ***Suggested Punishment***

Finally, the participants were asked to determine the severity of punishment they think the suspect of this case should receive. In the UK, if an individual is found guilty of incidents falling under control and coercion, a prison sentence of maximum five years could be imposed (Sentencing Council, 2021). Because crimes of control and coercion are not punished in the Netherlands, the choice was made to have the participant indicate a punishment by using a scale based on UK punishments. It was explained to the participants beforehand that the scale is based on UK punishment and what the maximum punishment is for that crime. In addition, a definition of control and coercion was given. Regardless of whether the participants believe the suspect is guilty or innocent, they were asked to indicate of how much punishment they think the suspect should receive as if he was found guilty. On the scale, years (0 to five years) and months (per four months) of imprisonment could be chosen using a slider.

### **Data Analysis**

For this study, the gathered data was analysed using SPSS version 28. The study included Denial of the Victim and Benevolence as predictor (independent) variables, and Attribution of Blame (External and Internal Attribution of Blame to the Suspect/Victim), Credibility of the Suspect and Victim, Perceived Guilt, Seriousness of Crime and Suggested Punishment as outcome (dependent) variables. Pearson's correlation was used to measure the correlation for continuous variables, whereas Spearman's rho was used to measure for ordinal variables. Further, to test for possible main effects of and interaction effects between the predictor and outcome variables, Two-Way ANOVAs were conducted. Finally, a moderator analysis using PROCESS Model 1 was conducted to test whether the moderators (Belief in a

Just World, Hostile- and Benevolent Sexism) have an moderation effect on the relationship between the predictor and outcome variables.

## Results

### Descriptive statistics

For both the dependent variables and moderator variables, the mean scores, standard deviations, and the minimum and maximum scores were calculated. The scales Perceived Guilt, Credibility of the Victim and Suggested Punishment were highly negatively skewed. Therefore, a Log10 transformation was computed to make the data more normally distributed for analyses. After this transformation, the data was sufficiently close to a normal distribution. Both original and transformed scores are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics.*

	Mean ( <i>M</i> )	Standard Deviation ( <i>SD</i> )	Minimum	Maximum
Belief in a Just World	2.48	0.73	1	4
Hostile Sexism	2.17	0.82	1	4.36
Benevolent Sexism	2.43	0.70	1	4.27
Internal AoB S	3.54	0.73	2	5
External AoB S	2.09	0.88	1	4.33
Internal AoB V	2.03	1.05	1	5
External AoB V	2.56	0.67	1	4
Credibility of the Victim	2.96	2.92	-6	6
Credibility of the Victim (Log10)	0.52	0.27	0	1.11
Credibility of the suspect	-1.75	3.74	-6	6
Perceived Guilt	4.07	0.87	1	5
Perceived Guilt (Log10)	0.25	0.18	0	0.70
Seriousness of crime	3.79	0.92	1	5
Suggested Punishment	1.07	1.12	0	5
Suggested Punishment (Log10)	0.26	0.21	0	0.78

Internal AoB S = Internal Attribution of Blame to the Suspect

External AoB S = External Attribution of Blame to the Suspect

Internal AoB V = Internal Attribution of Blame to the Victim

External AoB V = External Attribution of Blame to the Victim

Belief in a Just World, Hostile- and Benevolent Sexism, Internal- and External Attribution of Blame to the Suspect and Victim, Perceived Guilt and Seriousness of Crime are scores on 1-5 Likert Scales.

Credibility of the Suspect and Victim are scores ranging from -6 to 6.

Suggested Punishment is scored on 0-5 years.

### **Inferential statistics**

To estimate the relationship between the continuous variables, Pearson's correlation and Spearman's rho coefficients were used (Table 2). This table shows a significant positive correlation between the variables External Attribution of Blame to the Victim and External Attribution of Blame to the Suspect ( $r = .19, p = .014$ ). The analysis showed a significant negative correlation between Internal Attribution of Blame to the Suspect and the variables External Attribution of Blame to the Suspect ( $r = -.39, p = <.001$ ), Internal Attribution of Blame to the Victim ( $r = -.33, p = <.001$ ) and Hostile Sexism ( $r = -.22, p = .004$ ).

Further, the analysis showed a significant negative correlation between the variable Seriousness of Crime and External Attribution of Blame to the Suspect ( $r = -.66, p = <.001$ ), Internal Attribution of Blame to the Victim ( $r = -.66, p = <.001$ ), Hostile Sexism ( $r = -.37, p = <.001$ ), Benevolent Sexism ( $r = -.37, p = <.001$ ) and Belief in a Just World ( $r = -.30, p = <.001$ ).

Finally, the variable Suggested Punishment was positively correlated with the variables External Attribution of Blame to the Victim ( $r_s = .20, p = .011$ ), Perceived Guilt ( $r_s = .18, p = .020$ ), Seriousness of Crime ( $r_s = .24, p = .002$ ) and Credibility of the Victim ( $r_s = .22, p = .004$ ). Suggested Punishment was negatively correlated with Credibility of the Suspect ( $r_s = -.23, p = .003$ ). The variables Credibility of the Suspect and Credibility of the Victim were negatively correlated ( $r_s = -.40, p = <.001$ ).

**Table 2**

*A Pearson Correlation Coefficient and Spearman's rho correlation Matrix Showing the Relationship Between the Continuous, Ordinal and*

*Moderator variables*

Pearson Correlations	Internal Attribution of Blame to the Suspect	External Attribution of Blame to the Suspect	Internal Attribution of Blame to the Victim	External Attribution of Blame to the Victim	Perceived Guilt	Seriousness of Crime	Hostile Sexism	Benevolent Sexism	Belief in a Just World	Spearman correlations	Credibility Victim	Credibility Suspect	Suggested Punishment
Internal Attribution of Blame to the Suspect	1	<b>-.39</b>	<b>-.33</b>	-.02	.31	<b>.42</b>	<b>.22</b>	-.09	-.07		.40	-.27	.10
External Attribution of Blame to the Suspect		1	<b>.70</b>	.19	-.59	<b>-.66</b>	<b>.55</b>	<b>.46</b>	<b>.32</b>		-.56	.51	-.03
Internal Attribution of Blame to the Victim			1	.05	-.50	<b>-.66</b>	<b>.56</b>	<b>.42</b>	<b>.24</b>		-.60	.41	-.08

External Attribution of Blame to the Victim	1	.06	.01	-.07	.12	.04		.03	.06	<b>.20</b>
Perceived Guilt		1	<i>.71</i>	<i>-.34</i>	<i>-.30</i>	<i>-.22</i>		<i>.56</i>	<i>.46</i>	<b>.18</b>
Seriousness of Crime			1	<b>-.37</b>	<b>-.37</b>	<b>-.30</b>		<i>.62</i>	<i>-.55</i>	<i>.24</i>
Hostile Sexism				1	<i>.59</i>	<i>.29</i>		<i>-.42</i>	<i>.32</i>	<i>-.12</i>
Benevolent Sexism					1	<b>.38</b>		<i>-.28</i>	<i>.23</i>	<i>-.11</i>
Belief in a Just World						1		<i>.21</i>	<i>.23</i>	<i>.08</i>
Spearman correlations										
Credibility of Victim								1	<i>-.40</i>	<i>.22</i>
Credibility of Suspect									1	<i>-.23</i>
Suggested Punishment										1

*italics* = Significant at the 0.01 level.

**bold** = Significant at the 0.05 level.

### **Attention check**

An attention check was conducted to ensure participants have read both the case description and the investigative interview script. Results of a t-test showed that participants who received Denial of the Victim arguments ( $M = 4.18, SD = 1.04$ ), compared to the participants that did not receive Denial of the Victim arguments ( $M = 2.37, SD = 1.20$ ), believed to a greater extent that Mr Clark tried to convince the police officer that Miss Taylor is a bad person ( $t(168) = -10.54, p = .006$ ). Further, results of a t-test showed that participants who received Benevolence arguments ( $M = 4.36, SD = 0.83$ ), compared to participants that did not receive Benevolence arguments ( $M = 2.96, SD = 1.34$ ), believed to a greater extent that Mr Clark tried to convince the police officer that he is a good person ( $t(168) = -8.21, p = <.001$ ). This indicated that participants have read both the case description and investigative interview script.

### **Confirmatory hypothesis tests**

To investigate whether the use of Denial of the Victim and Benevolence arguments affect the Attribution of Blame, Perceived Guilt, Seriousness of Crime, Credibility of the Victim, Credibility of the Suspect and Suggested Punishment, Two-Way ANOVAs were conducted. The dependent variable Attribution of Blame was divided into four variables: Internal Attribution of Blame to the Suspect, External Attribution of Blame to the Suspect, Internal Attribution of Blame to the Victim, and External Attribution of Blame to the Victim. Results showed that there is a significant effect for Benevolence on Internal Attribution of Blame to the Suspect, Seriousness of Crime and Perceived Guilt, which will be explained in detail below. A representation of all results can be found in Appendices A, B, C, D, E and F.

#### ***Internal Attribution of Blame to the Suspect***

The Two-Way ANOVA that was conducted to investigate whether Denial of the Victim and Benevolence arguments affect Attribution of Blame to the Suspect, showed no

significant main- or interaction effect for Denial of the Victim. For Benevolence, a significant main effect was found ( $F(1, 170) = 4.58, p = .034$ ). This indicated that when Benevolence arguments were used during the investigative interview, participants held less internal attributions of blame to the suspect. However, the difference between participants that received the Benevolence condition and participants that did not receive the Benevolence condition is small: ( $M = 3.42, SD = 0.74$ ) vs. ( $M = 3.66, SD = 0.70$ ).

### ***Seriousness of Crime***

Further, the Two-Way ANOVA that was conducted to investigate whether the use of Denial of the Victim and Benevolence arguments have an effect on how serious the crime is perceived to be, showed only a significant main effect for the Benevolence condition ( $F = 1, 170) = 4.46, p = .036$ ). This indicated that participants perceived the crime as less serious when the suspect used Benevolence arguments during the investigative interview. There is a small difference between participants that received Benevolence arguments ( $M = 3.64, SD = 0.93$ ), and participants that did not receive Benevolence arguments ( $M = 3.94, SD = 0.90$ ).

### ***Perceived Guilt***

Finally, the Two-Way ANOVA that was conducted to investigate whether the use of Denial of the Victim and Benevolence arguments have an effect on how guilty the suspect is perceived to be, showed an almost significant effect for Benevolence ( $F(1, 170) = 3.61, p = .059$ ). This indicated that participants who received Benevolence arguments perceived the suspect as less guilty of the crime ( $M = 3.97, SD = 0.87$ ), in contrast to participants that did not receive Benevolence arguments ( $M = 4.18, SD = 0.85$ ).

Furthermore, the results showed an almost significant interaction effect between the Denial of the Victim and Benevolence conditions ( $F(1, 170) = 3.58, p = .060$ ). Because of this, a follow up test of simple effect was conducted. Results showed that when both Denial of the Victim and Benevolence arguments have been used, Benevolence arguments reduced the

perception of guilt ( $M = 3.88$ ,  $SD = 0.87$ ,  $p = .007$ ), compared to when only Denial of the Victim arguments have been used ( $M = 4.32$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ ). However, Benevolence arguments would not reduce the perception of guilt ( $M = 4.06$ ,  $SD = 0.87$ ) if Denial of the Victim arguments have not been used ( $M = 4.05$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ).

### **Exploratory Moderator Analysis**

For this study, it was investigated if the moderators Belief in a Just World and Hostile- and Benevolent Sexism have an effect on the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. To investigate this, moderation analyses using PROCESS Model 1 were conducted. The conditions Denial of the Victim and Benevolence were set in separate analyses as the independent variables. The main and interaction effects across all dependent variables are shown in Appendices G, H, I, J, K and L, and the significant effects will be explained in more detail below.

#### ***Belief in a Just World***

##### *Denial of the Victim*

There was a significant interaction effect between the moderator Belief in a Just World and Denial of the Victim on External Attribution of Blame to the Victim ( $b = .36$ ,  $SE = .14$ ,  $t = 2.48$ ,  $p = .014$ ). This indicated that Belief in a Just World increases the External Attribution of Blame to the Victim only when Denial of the Victim arguments have been used ( $b = .25$ ,  $SE = .11$ ,  $t = 2.31$ ,  $p = .023$ ), compared to when Denial of the Victim arguments not have been used ( $b = -.11$ ,  $SE = .10$ ,  $t = -1.16$ ,  $p = .250$ ). The conditional effects of Denial of the Victim on External Attribution of Blame to the Victim showed no difference when Belief in a Just World is at the mean sample level ( $b = -.07$ ,  $SE = .10$ ,  $t = -.73$ ,  $p = .469$ ) or one standard deviation above the mean ( $b = .19$ ,  $SE = .15$ ,  $t = 1.26$ ,  $p = .209$ ), but only when Belief in a Just World is one standard deviation below the mean ( $b = -.34$ ,  $SE = .15$ ,  $t = -2.30$ ,  $p = .023$ ).

Furthermore, a significant interaction effect was found between the moderator Belief in a Just World and Denial of the Victim on Credibility of the Suspect ( $b = 1.77$ ,  $SE = .79$ ,  $t = 2.23$ ,  $p = .027$ ). This result indicated that Belief in a Just World increases how credible the suspect is perceived to be when Denial of the Victim arguments have been used ( $b = 2.09$ ,  $SE = .62$ ,  $t = 3.36$ ,  $p = .001$ ), compared to when Denial of the Victim arguments not have been used ( $b = .32$ ,  $SE = .49$ ,  $t = .64$ ,  $p = .523$ ). Here, the conditional effects of Denial of the Victim on Credibility of the Suspect showed no difference when Belief in a Just World is at the mean sample level ( $b = .40$ ,  $SE = .56$ ,  $t = .72$ ,  $p = .473$ ) or one standard deviation below the mean ( $b = -.88$ ,  $SE = .80$ ,  $t = -1.11$ ,  $p = .270$ ), but only when Belief in a Just World is one standard deviation above the mean ( $b = 1.69$ ,  $SE = .81$ ,  $t = 2.09$ ,  $p = .038$ ).

Finally, significant main effects were found for Belief in a Just World on External Attribution of Blame to the Suspect ( $b = .28$ ,  $SE = .11$ ,  $t = 2.51$ ,  $p = .013$ ) and Seriousness of Crime ( $b = -.31$ ,  $SE = .12$ ,  $t = -2.57$ ,  $p = .011$ ). Denial of the Victim had a significant main effect on External Attribution of Blame to the Victim ( $b = -.96$ ,  $SE = .37$ ,  $t = -2.59$ ,  $p = .010$ ). This indicated that when Belief in a Just World increases, participants were more likely to assume the suspect's behavior was due to external circumstances, and perceived the crime as less serious. When Denial of the Victim arguments have been used, participants were less likely to attribute blame to the victim.

### *Benevolence*

The analyses that were conducted to test for a moderation effect between Belief in a Just World and Benevolence on the dependent variables showed no significant interaction effects. However, significant main effects were found of Belief in a Just World on External Attribution of Blame to the Suspect ( $b = .31$ ,  $SE = .13$ ,  $t = 2.48$ ,  $p = .014$ ). This indicated that when Belief in a Just World increases, participants were more likely to attribute blame to the suspect.

## Hostile Sexism

### *Denial of the Victim*

Hostile Sexism was measured to test for moderation effects. The results showed a significant interaction effect between Hostile Sexism and Denial of the Victim on Internal Attribution of Blame to the Victim ( $b = .37, SE = .16, t = 2.29, p = .023$ ). Results indicated that this interaction is driven by the effect depending on the level of Hostile Sexism, as both receiving Denial of the Victim arguments ( $b = .89, SE = .10, t = 8.57, p < .001$ ) and not receiving Denial of the Victim arguments are in the same direction and significant ( $b = .52, SE = .12, t = 4.22, p < .001$ ). The conditional effects for Denial of the Victim on Internal Attribution of Blame to the Victim showed no difference when Hostile Sexism was one standard deviation below the mean ( $b = -.09, SE = .18, t = -.46, p = .648$ ) and at the mean sample level ( $b = .22, SE = .13, t = 1.65, p = .100$ ), but only when Hostile Sexism was one standard deviation above the mean ( $b = .52, SE = .19, t = 2.79, p = .006$ ).

Further, a significant interaction effect was found between Hostile Sexism and Denial of the Victim on Credibility of the Victim ( $b = -1.21, SE = .50, t = -2.41, p = .017$ ). This indicated that, as Hostile Sexism increases and Denial of the Victim arguments have been used, the victim is perceived as even less credible ( $b = -1.98, SE = .34, t = -5.76, p < .001$ ), compared to when no Denial of the Victim arguments have been used ( $b = -.76, SE = .37, t = -2.08, p < .001$ ). Here, the conditional effects for Denial of the Victim on Credibility of the Victim showed no difference when Hostile Sexism was one standard deviation below the mean ( $b = .75, SE = .58, t = 1.30, p = .195$ ) or at the mean sample level ( $b = -.24, SE = .41, t = -.58, p = .562$ ), but only at one standard deviation above the mean ( $b = -1.23, SE = .58, t = -2.12, p = .036$ ).

Finally, significant main effects were found of Hostile Sexism on External Attribution of Blame to the Suspect ( $b = .62, SE = .10, t = 6.27, p < .001$ ), Internal Attribution of Blame

to the Victim ( $b = .52, SE = .12, t = 4.53, p < .001$ ), Perceived Guilt ( $b = -.29, SE = .11, t = -2.63, p = .009$ ), Seriousness of Crime ( $b = -.32, SE = .12, t = -2.77, p = .006$ ), Credibility of the Suspect ( $b = 1.72, SE = .48, t = 3.61, p < .001$ ) and Credibility of the Victim ( $b = -.76, SE = .36, t = -2.13, p = .035$ ). This indicated that when Hostile Sexism increases, participants were more likely to hold external attributions of blame to the suspect, whereas they were more likely to hold internal attributions of blame to the victim. The crime was perceived as less serious. Further, when Hostile Sexism increases, participants were more likely to perceive the suspect as truthful, whereas they were less likely to perceive the victim as truthful.

### *Benevolence*

The analyses that were conducted to test for a moderation effect between Hostile Sexism and Benevolence on the dependent variables showed no significant interaction effects. However, significant main effects were found of Hostile Sexism on Internal Attribution of Blame to the Suspect ( $b = -.24, SE = .09, t = -2.65, p = .009$ ), External Attribution of Blame to the Suspect ( $b = .63, SE = .10, t = 6.56, p < .001$ ), Internal Attribution of Blame to the Victim ( $b = .73, SE = .11, t = 6.49, p < .001$ ), Perceived Guilt ( $b = -.33, SE = .10, t = -3.17, p = .002$ ), Seriousness of Crime ( $b = -.45, SE = .11, t = -4.14, p < .001$ ), Credibility of the Suspect ( $b = 1.73, SE = .46, t = 3.79, p < .001$ ) and Credibility of the Victim ( $b = -1.43, SE = .35, t = -4.08, p < .001$ ). This indicated that when Hostile Sexism increases, participants were more likely to attribute less blame to the suspect, whereas they would attribute more blame to the victim. Participants perceived the suspect less likely to be guilty, and perceived the crime as less serious. Further, when Hostile Sexism increases, participants were more likely to perceive the suspect as truthful, whereas they were less likely to perceive the victim as truthful.

### **Benevolent Sexism**

Finally, Benevolent Sexism was measured to test for a moderation effect on the dependent variables. The results showed a significant interaction effect between Benevolent Sexism and Denial of the Victim on Credibility of the Victim ( $b = -1.20$ ,  $SE = .61$ ,  $t = -1.97$ ,  $p = .050$ ). This result indicated that Benevolent Sexism increases how credible the victim is perceived to be when Denial of the Victim arguments have been used ( $b = -1.77$ ,  $SE = .44$ ,  $t = -.40$ ,  $p < .001$ ), compared to when Denial of the Victim arguments not have been used ( $b = -.56$ ,  $SE = .42$ ,  $t = -1.33$ ,  $p = .186$ ). The conditional effects of Denial of the Victim on Credibility of the Victim showed no difference when Benevolent Sexism is one standard deviation below the mean ( $b = -.68$ ,  $SE = .61$ ,  $t = -1.11$ ,  $p = .267$ ), at the mean sample level ( $b = -.28$ ,  $SE = .43$ ,  $t = -.65$ ,  $p = .516$ ), or one standard deviation above the mean ( $b = .12$ ,  $SE = .61$ ,  $t = .20$ ,  $p = .845$ ).

Further, significant main effects were found of Benevolent Sexism on External Attribution of Blame to the Suspect ( $b = .63$ ,  $SE = .12$ ,  $t = 5.24$ ,  $p < .001$ ), Internal Attribution of Blame to the Victim ( $b = .54$ ,  $SE = .15$ ,  $t = 3.72$ ,  $p < .001$ ), Perceived Guilt ( $b = -.35$ ,  $SE = .13$ ,  $t = -2.78$ ,  $p = .006$ ), Seriousness of Crime ( $b = -.43$ ,  $SE = .13$ ,  $t = -3.26$ ,  $p = .001$ ) and Credibility of the Suspect ( $b = 1.32$ ,  $SE = .56$ ,  $t = 2.34$ ,  $p = .020$ ). This indicated that when Benevolent Sexism increases, participants were more likely to attribute blame to both suspect and victim, perceived the suspect less likely to be guilty, perceived the crime as less serious, and were more likely to perceive the suspect as truthful.

### *Benevolence*

Finally, significant main effects were found of Benevolent Sexism on External Attribution of Blame to the Suspect ( $b = .54$ ,  $SE = .12$ ,  $t = 4.54$ ,  $p < .001$ ), Internal Attribution of Blame to the Victim ( $b = .65$ ,  $SE = .15$ ,  $t = 4.47$ ,  $p < .001$ ), Perceived Guilt ( $b = -.37$ ,  $SE = .13$ ,  $t = -2.91$ ,  $p = .004$ ), Seriousness of Crime ( $b = -.43$ ,  $SE = .13$ ,  $t = -3.31$ ,  $p = .001$ ), Credibility of the Suspect ( $b = 1.26$ ,  $SE = .56$ ,  $t = 2.25$ ,  $p = .026$ ) and Credibility of the

Victim ( $b = -1.44$ ,  $SE = .43$ ,  $t = -3.35$ ,  $p = .001$ ). This indicated that when Benevolent Sexism increases and Benevolence arguments have been used, participants were more likely to attribute blame to both suspect and victim, perceived the suspect less likely to be guilty, and perceived the crime as less serious. Further, when Benevolent Sexism increases, participants were more likely to perceive the suspect as truthful, whereas they were less likely to perceive the victim as truthful.

## Discussion

This study tested whether Denial of the Victim affects attributions of blame to the victim, Benevolence affected attributions of blame to the suspect, and both Denial of the Victim and Benevolence together affected attributions of blame to the suspect and victim. The main findings of this study were that Benevolence arguments decreased the internal attribution of blame to the suspect, and decreased how serious the crime was perceived to be. Results showed an almost significant interaction effect between Denial of the Victim and Benevolence on Perceived Guilt. A follow up test of simple effects showed that Benevolence arguments did lower the perception of guilt, only when both Benevolence and Denial of the Victim arguments have been used. Further, participants that scored high on Belief in a Just World, perceived the victim as less credible when Benevolence arguments have been used, whereas the suspect's statements were perceived as more credible when Denial of the Victim arguments have been used. Finally, Denial of the Victim increased internal attribution of blame toward victims, but only when recipients of Denial of the Victim arguments scored high for Hostile Sexism.

### **The effects of Denial of the Victim and Benevolence on Attributions of Blame**

The results of this study support the hypothesis that individuals will attribute less blame to the suspect when Benevolence arguments have been used in an investigative interview. By using Benevolence arguments, the suspect emphasizes the atypicality of his negative behavior and suggests that his behavior is externally caused (Watson et al., 2022). Consequently, participants that received Benevolence arguments might believe that the suspect's negative behavior is the result of external circumstances, and thus hold less internal attributions of blame.

Further, it was hypothesized in this study that Denial of the Victim would affect attributions of blame to the victim. Exploratory moderator analyses showed that Denial of the

Victim arguments can affect attributions of blame to the victim, but this is conditional on the participant's level of Hostile Sexism. Thus, Hostile Sexism increases the internal attribution to the victim that participants hold when Denial of the Victim arguments have been used. This result partially replicates what Schmuck et al. (2021) found in their study: Denial of the Victim affects attribution of blame to the victim, but not attribution of blame to the suspect. (Ambivalent) Sexism has been related to attitudes that justify violence against women (Valor-Segura et al., 2011).

In the context of the police force, police officers that hold sexist beliefs tend to blame the victim for their own victimization and believe that they should not arrest the suspect (Lila et al., 2013). Thus, these results suggest that a plausible way to reduce the impact of Denial of the Victim arguments, is to reduce Hostile Sexism beliefs. One approach might be to offer police officers training on the effects Hostile Sexism could have on attitudes and decision-making within a police officer's work (Lila et al., 2013). Once awareness is created, step-by-step strategies to reduce Hostile Sexism can be implemented. In addition, assessments in a police officer application process could be used to obtain information about the applicant's Hostile Sexism beliefs. Whether long-term training could actually reduce Hostile Sexism could be studied in the future with a field study.

In addition, a significant interaction effect was found between Hostile Sexism and Denial of the Victim on Credibility of the Victim. This indicated that individuals high in Hostile Sexism are more likely to assume that the suspect is telling the truth about the negative behavior of the victim. As mentioned above, high Hostile Sexism is associated with more victim blame. It seems likely that our finding is more or less identical to the finding of Schmuck et al. (2021). According to Schmuck et al. (201), participants would attribute blame to the victim when they actually engaged in negative behavior, but also when the suspect falsely claims the victim has engaged in negative behavior. We found that individuals high in

Hostile Sexism, which is associated with victim blame, would assume that the victim did engage in the negative behavior the suspect accuses them of. Therefore it is plausible that Denial of the Victim increases attribution of blame to the victim for the same reason as in the study of Schmuck et al. (2021).

Further, an almost significant interaction was found between Denial of the Victim and Benevolence on Perceived Guilt. To further investigate this, a test of simple effects was conducted. Benevolence arguments did lower the perception of guilt when both Benevolence and Denial of the Victim arguments have been used, but not when only Benevolence was used. This indicated that combining both Denial of the Victim and Benevolence arguments may be strong enough to affect guilt judgements of others.

Finally, there was a positive correlation between External Attribution of Blame to the Victim and External Attribution of Blame to the Suspect, but not between External Attribution of Blame to the Victim and the other dependent variables. This positive correlation shows that individuals who make one kind of external attribution tend to make external attributions generally, but these were not associated with legal outcome variables. Internal Attributions to the suspect and victim, on the other hand, were negatively correlated. This indicated that individuals did not make internal attributions generally as they did for external attributions, but did blame a specific person. Here, attributions to the suspect were associated with legal outcome variables.

### **The effect of Denial of the Victim and Benevolence on Seriousness of Crime and Suggested Punishment**

It was hypothesized that the effects on legal decision making is stronger when both Denial of the Victim and Benevolence arguments are being used in an investigative interview. We have found in this study that only Benevolence arguments decreased how serious the crime was perceived to be.

Looking further at the results, a positive but weak correlation was found between Seriousness of Crime and Suggested Punishment. This result suggests that individuals make punishment decisions by also considering other factors – perhaps some that not have been measured in this study. One explanation could be the fact that Control and Coercion is not considered a crime in the sample population. It might be possible that participants did not fully understand the seriousness of the suspect's behavior, as they are not familiar with the concept of Control and Coercion. Furthermore, the behavior of Control and Coercion is often romanticized in literature and film, allowing this behavior to be seen as the norm. Consequently, it could have affected their decision-making process.

### **The effects of the moderators**

Exploratory moderator analyses have shown main effects between both Benevolent and Hostile Sexism and the independent variables. Similar effects were found for Internal Attribution of Blame to the Victim, Perceived Guilt, Seriousness of Crime, and Credibility to Suspect and Victim. This is interesting, because the Ambivalent Sexism Theory makes a distinction between hostile and benevolent sexism. As mentioned before, hostile sexism encompasses negative attitudes, such as derogatory beliefs about women and dominative paternalism (Glick & Fiske, 1997). Benevolent sexism, on the other hand, encompasses positive attitudes towards women, such as protective paternalism and idealization of women (Glick & Fiske, 1997). Thus, it was not expected that individuals scoring high on Benevolent Sexism would be more likely to attribute blame to the victim, perceive the crime as less serious and perceive the suspect as credible. Glick and Fiske (1997) argue that even though hostile and benevolent sexism may differ in the attitudes towards women, they do share common assumptions, such as for example that women are the weaker sex. Both hostile and benevolent sexism assume traditional gender roles, and both function to justify and control for patriarchal social structures. The two forms are related because they share three

subcomponents: power, gender differentiation and sexuality. Each subcomponent has its hostile and benevolent aspect, and comprise the critical issues in relationships between men and women (Glick & Fiske, 1997). In addition, Hostile Sexism and Benevolent Sexism tend to positively correlate, which means that people scoring high on one, also tend to score high on the other. A similar effect was found in a study of Chapleau et al. (2007) about ambivalent sexism and rape myth acceptance. This study found that specific components of benevolent sexism are responsible for the positive association with rape myth acceptance. For example complementary gender differentiation, which is the belief that women are elegant ladies. If women violate this stereotype, the perception might change and people would believe that the women is (partially) responsible for the crime against her (Chapleau et al. 2007).

### **Limitations and future research**

First, a limitation could be that participants received a written case description and investigative interview script, which might underestimate the true size of any effects. In this study, we did find the effect of the use of Benevolence arguments by presenting participants a written script. This indicates that the effect is found due to the content of the investigative interview script. However, nonverbal cues, through for example a video, may represent a more realistic situation of an interview scenario. Remland (1994) discussed that true feelings and attitudes are more likely to be shown in nonverbal communication, rather than verbal communication. Because individuals have more control over their words than their nonverbal signals, nonverbal messages such as facial expressions, voice changes and body movements ought to be decoded when they are not consistent. Presenting a recorded video of the interview may give the participant a more complete picture, in which they would gain more understanding about the alleged crime and the suspect. Consequently, this could perhaps lead to a stronger effect of Benevolence and Denial of the Victim arguments. Thus, it would be

interesting to test whether not only the content of an interview script has an effect on the participant's perception, but also nonverbal communication of the suspect.

Second, a limitation of this study was that the questionnaire was only available in English. Given that English is not the native language of the majority of participants, they might have struggled with the questionnaire. Participants need to completely understand the scenario and investigative interview script in order to answer the questions as they are intended, which could become difficult because of the language. To ensure that participants have read and understood the case description and investigative interview script, a manipulation check was used in this study. The manipulation check indicated that individuals did understand both the case description and investigative interview script. Therefore, conducting a manipulation check could be useful to limit the risk of language barriers.

Further, the overrepresentation of female participants ( $N = 123$ ), compared to male participants ( $N = 42$ ), could be a limitation in this study. This overrepresentation could have resulted in gender bias. Women tend to perceive similarity between female victims of intimate partner violence and themselves because of shared gender (Feather, 1996). Further, it could be assumed that female participants may have more knowledge and understanding of the female victim's situation (Feather, 1996). Therefore, a female participant could be more defensive of the victim. This could lead to different ratings, in which they would rate more favorable toward the victim and less favorable toward the suspect.

Finally, to control for the limitation of the "*no comment*" condition that was discussed in the study of Schmuck et al. (2021), this study used a "*no interview*" condition. It was concluded that using *no comment* in an interview script might influence the participant in thinking that not answering the questions makes the suspect appear guilty. Even though giving no comment does not mean the suspect has confessed, individuals tend to assume the suspect is guilty (Nakane, 2011; The Crown Prosecution Service, 2018). To ensure that

participants stayed neutral, a “*no interview*” condition was used in this study, which could be considered a strength. Participants in this condition were presented only the case description to read the victim’s allegations, but were not presented the investigative interview script.

## **Conclusion**

This study aimed to test whether Denial of the Victim and Benevolence arguments have an effect on the attribution of blame towards the suspect and victim. The findings of this study showed that Benevolence arguments did decrease the internal attribution of blame towards the suspect. Although we found an effect, the use of a written investigative interview script might have underestimated the true size of the effects. Future research could incorporate a recorded video of the interview to test whether nonverbal cues of the suspect have a stronger effect on the attribution of blame towards the suspect and victim. Further, exploratory analyses showed that Hostile Sexism increases the internal attribution to the victim that participants hold when Denial of the Victim arguments have been used. As sexist beliefs might justify violence against women and negatively affect legal judgement, the police force must be aware that a possible way to reduce the impact of Denial of the Victim arguments is to reduce sexism beliefs. This could begin as early as an assessment at the recruitment process. In addition, training could be developed for police officers already working in the field. Finally, it was found in this study that only Benevolence arguments decreased how serious the crime was perceived to be. The correlation between Seriousness of Crime and Suggested Punishment suggests that individuals may consider other factors in their decision to punish others. Future research could test what those factors may be to get a deeper insight in the decision-making process of individuals.

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### Appendix A

*Two-Way ANOVA showing the effects of Denial of the Victim and Benevolence on Attribution of Blame*

	Internal			External			Internal			External		
	Attribution of			Attribution of			Attribution of			Attribution of		
	Blame to the			Blame to the			Blame to the			Blame to the		
	Suspect			Suspect			Victim			Victim		
	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>									
Denial of the Victim	.28	1	.598	1.12	1	.292	.15	1	.150	.56	1	.455
Benevolence	4.58	1	.034	.13	1	.724	1.02	1	.313	.98	1	.324
Denial of the Victim*Benevolence	.10	1	.753	.28	1	.598	.96	1	.329	1.65	1	.201

*italics* = Significant at the 0.01 level.

**bold** = Significant at the 0.05 level.

## Appendix B

*Two-Way ANOVA showing the effects of Denial of the Victim and Benevolence on Perceived Guilt*

	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Denial of the Victim	.07	1	.787
Benevolence	3.61	1	.059
Denial of the Victim*Benevolence	3.58	1	.060

*italics* = Significant at the 0.01 level.

**bold** = Significant at the 0.05 level.

### Appendix C

*Two-Way ANOVA showing the effects of Denial of the Victim and Benevolence on Seriousness of Crime*

	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Denial of the Victim	.17	1	.678
Benevolence	4.46	1	.036
Denial of the Victim*Benevolence	.29	1	.589

*italics* = Significant at the 0.05 level

**bold** = Significant at the 0.01 level

### Appendix D

*Two-Way ANOVA showing the effects of Denial of the Victim and Benevolence on Credibility of the Suspect and Credibility of the Victim*

	Credibility of the Suspect			Credibility of the Victim		
	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Denial of the Victim	.26	1	.612	.57	1	.452
Benevolence	1.16	1	.284	.00	1	.975
Denial of the Victim*Benevolence	.30	1	.583	.29	1	.591

*italics* = Significant at the 0.05 level

**bold** = Significant at the 0.01 level

### Appendix E

*Two-Way ANOVA showing the effects of Denial of the Victim and Benevolence on Suggested Punishment*

	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Denial of the Victim	.02	1	.887
Benevolence	1.61	1	.207
Denial of the Victim*Benevolence	.02	1	.890

*italics* = Significant at the 0.05 level

**bold** = Significant at the 0.01 level

## Appendix F

### Mean and Standard Deviation scores

*Mean and Standard Deviation Scores for all the Dependent Variables on the Two Independent Variables Denial of the Victim and Benevolence*

Dependent variables	Denial of the Victim				Benevolence			
	Yes		No		Yes		No	
Internal Attribution of Blame to the Suspect	<i>M</i> = 3.51	<i>SD</i> = 0.69	<i>M</i> = 3.57	<i>SD</i> = 0.77	<i>M</i> = 3.42	<i>SD</i> = 0.74	<i>M</i> = 3.66	<i>SD</i> = 0.70
External Attribution of Blame to the Suspect	<i>M</i> = 2.16	<i>SD</i> = 0.87	<i>M</i> = 2.02	<i>SD</i> = 0.88	<i>M</i> = 2.12	<i>SD</i> = 0.90	<i>M</i> = 2.07	<i>SD</i> = 0.86
Internal Attribution of Blame to the Victim	<i>M</i> = 2.15	<i>SD</i> = 1.07	<i>M</i> = 1.91	<i>SD</i> = 1.01	<i>M</i> = 2.11	<i>SD</i> = 1.02	<i>M</i> = 1.95	<i>SD</i> = 1.07
External Attribution of Blame to the Victim	<i>M</i> = 2.52	<i>SD</i> = 0.65	<i>M</i> = 2.60	<i>SD</i> = 0.70	<i>M</i> = 2.51	<i>SD</i> = 0.68	<i>M</i> = 2.62	<i>SD</i> = 0.67
Perceived Guilt	<i>M</i> = 0.24	<i>SD</i> = 0.18	<i>M</i> = 0.25	<i>SD</i> = 0.19	<i>M</i> = 0.27	<i>SD</i> = 0.18	<i>M</i> = 3.94	<i>SD</i> = 0.19

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Seriousness of	<i>M</i> =	<i>SD</i> =						
Crime	3.76	0.93	3.82	0.92	3.64	0.93	3.94	0.90
Credibility of	<i>M</i> =	<i>SD</i> =						
the Suspect	1.61	3.87	1.89	3.62	2.05	3.63	1.44	3.86
Credibility of	<i>M</i> =	<i>SD</i> =						
the Victim	0.53	0.26	0.50	0.28	0.52	0.29	0.52	0.25
Suggested	<i>M</i> =	<i>SD</i> =						
Punishment	0.26	0.21	0.26	0.22	0.24	0.21	0.28	0.22

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## Appendix G

### Table of Moderator Belief in a Just World on Denial of the Victim

*Interaction and main effects between the dependent and independent variables and the moderator variable Belief in a Just World*

Predictor variables	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<b>Internal</b>				
<b>Attribution of</b>				
<b>Blame to the</b>				
<b>Suspect</b>				
Denial of the Victim	.23	.41	.57	.566
BJW	-.03	.10	-.29	.769
Denial of the Victim* BJW	-.12	.16	-.78	.434
<b>External</b>				
<b>Attribution of</b>				
<b>Blame to the</b>				
<b>Suspect</b>				
Denial of the Victim	-.56	.46	-1.22	.226
BJW	.28	.11	2.51	.013
Denial of the Victim* BJW	.30	.18	1.69	.094

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**Internal**
**Attribution of****Blame to the****Victim**

Denial of the	-.40	.57	-.72	.472
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Victim

BJW	.25	.14	1.81	.072
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Denial of the	.27	.22	1.24	.216
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Victim\* BJW

**External****Attribution of****blame to the****Victim**

Denial of the	-.96	.37	-2.59	.010
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Victim

BJW	-.11	.09	-1.21	.227
-----	------	-----	-------	------

Denial of the	.36	.14	2.48	.014
---------------	-----	-----	------	------

Victim\* BJW

**Perceived Guilt**

Denial of the	.48	.47	1.02	.309
---------------	-----	-----	------	------

Victim

BJW	-.19	.12	-1.65	.099
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Denial of the Victim* BJW	-.19	.18	-1.04	.301
<b>Seriousness of Crime</b>				
Denial of the Victim BJW	.36	.49	.73	.464
Denial of the Victim* BJW	-.31	.12	-2.57	.011
Denial of the Victim* BJW	-.19	.19	-.98	.327
<b>Credibility of the Suspect</b>				
Denial of the Victim BJW	-3.98	2.03	-1.96	<b>.052</b>
Denial of the Victim* BJW	.32	.49	.64	.523
Denial of the Victim* BJW	1.77	.79	2.23	<b>.027</b>
<b>Credibility of the Victim</b>				
Denial of the Victim BJW	1.03	1.59	.65	.52
Denial of the Victim* BJW	-.74	.39	-1.93	.055

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Denial of the	<i>-.57</i>	<i>.62</i>	<i>-.92</i>	<i>.359</i>
Victim* BJW				
<b>Suggested</b>				
<b>Punishment</b>				
Denial of the	<i>.05</i>	<i>.63</i>	<i>.09</i>	<i>.931</i>
Victim				
BJW	<i>.12</i>	<i>.15</i>	<i>.77</i>	<i>.444</i>
Denial of the	<i>-.02</i>	<i>.24</i>	<i>-.09</i>	<i>.928</i>
Victim*BJW				

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*italics* = Significant at the 0.01 level.  
**bold** = Significant at the 0.05 level.  
BJW = Belief in a Just World.

## Appendix H

### Table of Moderator Belief in a Just World on Benevolence

*Interaction and main effects between the dependent and independent variables and the moderator variable Belief in a Just World*

Predictor variables	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<b>Internal</b>				
<b>Attribution of</b>				
<b>Blame to the</b>				
<b>Suspect</b>				
Benevolence	-.53	.39	-1.34	.181
BJW	-.14	.11	-1.26	.201
Benevolence*BJW	.12	.15	.76	.450
<b>External</b>				
<b>Attribution of</b>				
<b>Blame to the</b>				
<b>Suspect</b>				
Benevolence	-.30	.46	-.65	.517
BJW	.31	.13	2.48	.014
Benevolence*BJW	.15	.18	.83	.407
<b>Internal</b>				
<b>Attribution of</b>				
<b>Blame to the</b>				
<b>Victim</b>				

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Benevolence	-.46	.56	-.82	.412
BJW	.21	.15	1.37	.171
Benevolence*BJW	.26	.22	1.19	.237
<b>External Attribution of blame to the Victim</b>				
Benevolence	-.32	.37	-.87	.387
BJW	-.01	.10	-.12	.901
Benevolence*BJW	.09	.14	.61	.545
<b>Perceived Guilt</b>				
Benevolence	.23	.46	.50	.615
BJW	-.17	.13	-1.35	.177
Benevolence*BJW	-.19	.18	-1.04	.298
<b>Seriousness of Crime</b>				
Benevolence	.48	.47	1.01	.313
BJW	-.22	.13	-1.65	.101
Benevolence*BJW	-.32	.18	-1.74	.084
<b>Credibility of the Suspect</b>				

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Benevolence	<i>-.98</i>	<i>2.02</i>	<i>-.49</i>	<i>.63</i>
BJW	<i>.89</i>	<i>.56</i>	<i>1.58</i>	<i>.116</i>
Benevolence*BJW	<i>.17</i>	<i>.78</i>	<i>.21</i>	<i>.831</i>
<b>Credibility of the</b>				
<b>Victim</b>				
Benevolence	<i>2.67</i>	<i>1.54</i>	<i>1.73</i>	<i>.085</i>
BJW	<i>-.35</i>	<i>.43</i>	<i>-.80</i>	<i>.423</i>
Benevolence*BJW	<i>-1.17</i>	<i>.60</i>	<i>-1.96</i>	<i>.051</i>
<b>Suggested</b>				
<b>Punishment</b>				
Benevolence	<i>-.26</i>	<i>.61</i>	<i>-.42</i>	<i>.674</i>
BJW	<i>.09</i>	<i>.17</i>	<i>.54</i>	<i>.587</i>
Benevolence*BJW	<i>.02</i>	<i>.24</i>	<i>.10</i>	<i>.924</i>

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*italics* = Significant at the 0.01 level.

**bold** = Significant at the 0.05 level.

BJW = Belief in a Just World.

## Appendix I

### Table of Moderator Hostile Sexism on Denial of the Victim

*Interaction and main effects between the dependent and independent variables and the moderator variable Hostile Sexism*

Predictor variable	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<b>Internal</b>				
<b>Attribution of</b>				
<b>Blame to the</b>				
<b>Suspect</b>				
Denial of the Victim	.47	.31	1.53	.129
HS	-.07	.10	-.76	.448
Denial of the Victim*HS	-.25	.13	-1.84	.068
<b>External</b>				
<b>Attribution of</b>				
<b>Blame to the</b>				
<b>Suspect</b>				
Denial of the Victim	.30	.32	.92	.358
HS	.62	.10	6.27	.000
Denial of the Victim*HS	-.08	.14	-.55	.584

---

**Internal****Attribution of****Blame to the**

Victim

Denial of the                      -.59                      .37                      -1.57                      .119

Victim

HS                      .52                      .12                      4.53                      .000

Denial of the                      .52                      .12                      4.53                      **.023**

Victim\*HS

**External****Attribution of****blame to the****Victim**

Denial of the                      .11                      .30                      .38                      .702

Victim

HS                      -.01                      .09                      -.13                      .895

Denial of the                      -.09                      .13                      -.70                      .486

Victim\*HS

**Perceived Guilt**

Denial of the                      .36                      .36                      1.02                      .309

Victim

HS                      -.29                      .11                      -2.63                      .009

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Denial of the Victim*HS	-0.15	.15	-0.95	.343
<b>Seriousness of Crime</b>				
Denial of the Victim	.33	.38	.88	.379
HS	-0.32	.12	-2.77	.006
Denial of the Victim*HS	-0.18	.16	-1.10	.273
<b>Credibility of the Suspect</b>				
Denial of the Victim	.72	1.54	.47	.64
HS	1.72	.48	3.61	.000
Denial of the Victim*HS	-0.22	.67	-0.33	.743
<b>Credibility of the Victim</b>				
Denial of the Victim	2.39	1.16	2.06	<b>.041</b>
HS	-0.76	.36	-2.13	<b>.035</b>

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Denial of the	-1.21	.50	-2.42	<b>.017</b>
Victim*HS				
<b>Suggested</b>				
<b>Punishment</b>				
Denial of the	.34	.49	.69	.492
Victim				
HS	-.01	.15	-.06	.951
Denial of the	-.16	.21	-.76	.451
Victim*HS				

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*italics* = Significant at the 0.01 level.

**bold** = Significant at the 0.05 level.

HS = Hostile Sexism.

## Appendix J

### Table of Moderator Hostile Sexism on Benevolence

*Interaction and main effects between the dependent and independent variables and the moderator variable Hostile Sexism*

Predictor variable	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<b>Internal</b>				
<b>Attribution of</b>				
<b>Blame to the</b>				
<b>Suspect</b>				
Benevolence	-.42	.31	-1.36	.175
HS	-.24	.31	-1.36	.175
Benevolence*HS	.08	.13	.57	.571
<b>External</b>				
<b>Attribution of</b>				
<b>Blame to the</b>				
<b>Suspect</b>				
Benevolence	.27	.32	.84	.400
HS	.63	.10	6.56	.000
Benevolence*HS	-.08	.14	-.58	.558
<b>Internal</b>				
<b>Attribution of</b>				

---

**Blame to the**
**Victim**

Benevolence	.26	.38	.69	.494
HS	.73	.11	6.49	.000
Benevolence*HS	-.02	.16	-.12	.902

**External****Attribution of****blame to the****Victim**

Benevolence	-.26	.30	-.87	.387
Hostile Sexism	-.09	.09	-1.06	.291
Benevolence*HS	.07	.13	.52	.603

**Perceived Guilt**

Benevolence	-.07	.35	-.19	.849
HS	-.33	.10	-3.17	.002
Benevolence*	-.08	.15	-.54	.591

HS

**Seriousness of****Crime**

Benevolence	-.48	.37	-1.28	.202
HS	-.45	.11	-4.14	.000

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Benevolence*	.07	.16	.42	.671
HS				
<b>Credibility of the Suspect</b>				
Benevolence	.14	1.54	.09	.929
HS	1.73	.46	3.79	.000
Benevolence*	-.29	.67	-.43	.665
HS				
<b>Credibility of the Victim</b>				
Benevolence	-.46	1.18	-.39	.696
HS	-1.43	.35	-4.08	.000
Benevolence*	.07	.51	.15	.884
HS				
<b>Suggested Punishment</b>				
Benevolence	-.54	.49	-1.10	.275
HS	-.17	.14	-1.15	.251
Benevolence*	.15	.21	.71	.481
HS				

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*italics* = Significant at the 0.01 level.

**bold** = Significant at the 0.05 level.

HS = Hostile Sexism.

## Appendix K

### Table of Moderator Benevolent Sexism on Denial of the Victim

*Interaction and main effects between the dependent and independent variables and the moderator variable Benevolent Sexism*

Predictor variable	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<b>Internal</b>				
<b>Attribution of</b>				
<b>Blame to the</b>				
<b>Suspect</b>				
Denial of the Victim	.54	.40	1.34	.181
BS	.03	.11	.28	.778
Denial of the Victim*BS	-.25	.16	-1.57	.119
<b>External</b>				
<b>Attribution of</b>				
<b>Blame to the</b>				
<b>Suspect</b>				
Denial of the Victim	.41	.43	.95	.343
BS	.63	.12	5.24	.000
Denial of the Victim*BS	-.11	.17	-.64	.525

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**Internal**
**Attribution of****Blame to the****Victim**

Denial of the	- .15	.53	-.28	.780
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Victim

BS	.54	.15	3.72	.000
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Denial of the	.16	.21	.76	.451
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Victim\*BS

**External****Attribution of****blame to the****Victim**

Denial of the	.24	.37	.66	.513
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Victim

BS	.18	.10	1.78	.077
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Denial of the	-.13	.15	-.91	.364
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Victim\*BS

**Perceived Guilt**

Denial of the	.10	.46	.22	.826
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Victim

BS	-.35	.13	-2.78	.006
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Denial of the Victim*BS	-.03	.18	-.15	.884
<b>Seriousness of Crime</b>				
Denial of the Victim BS	.22	.48	.47	.640
Denial of the Victim*BS	-.43	.13	-3.26	.001
Denial of the Victim*BS	-.12	.19	-.63	.529
<b>Credibility of the Suspect</b>				
Denial of the Victim BS	1.25	2.04	.61	.540
Denial of the Victim*BS	1.32	.56	2.34	<b>.020</b>
Denial of the Victim*BS	-.40	.81	-.49	.622
<b>Credibility of the Victim</b>				
Denial of the Victim BS	2.65	1.54	1.72	.087
Denial of the Victim*BS	-.56	.43	-1.32	.188

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Denial of the	-1.20	.61	-1.97	<b>.050</b>
Victim*BS				
<b>Suggested</b>				
<b>Punishment</b>				
Denial of the	.66	.62	1.07	.285
Victim				
BS	-.01	.17	-.07	.944
Denial of the	-.28	.24	-1.14	.257
Victim*BS				

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*italics* = Significant at the 0.01 level.

**bold** = Significant at the 0.05 level.

BS = Benevolent Sexism.

## Appendix L

### Table of Moderator Benevolent Sexism on Benevolence

*Interaction and main effects between the dependent and independent variables and the moderator variable Benevolent Sexism*

Predictor variable	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<b>Internal</b>				
<b>Attribution of</b>				
<b>Blame to the</b>				
<b>Suspect</b>				
Benevolence	-.27	.40	-.69	.494
BS	-.10	.11	-.95	.345
Benevolence*BS	.01	.16	.07	.946
<b>External</b>				
<b>Attribution of</b>				
<b>Blame to the</b>				
<b>Suspect</b>				
Benevolence	-.07	.433	-.15	.877
BS	.54	.12	4.54	.000
Benevolence*BS	.07	.17	.39	.700
<b>Internal</b>				
<b>Attribution of</b>				

---

**Blame to the**
**Victim**

Benevolence	.34	.53	.65	.518
BS	.65	.15	4.47	.000
Benevolence*BS	-.06	.21	-.26	.792

**External****Attribution of****blame to the****Victim**

Benevolence	-.65	.37	-1.77	.079
BS	.00	.10	.03	.977
Benevolence*BS	.23	.15	1.56	.121

**Perceived Guilt**

Benevolence	-.20	.46	-.43	.668
BS	-.37	.13	-2.91	<b>.004</b>
Benevolence*	-.02	.18	-.11	.909

## BS

**Seriousness of****Crime**

Benevolence	.03	.47	.06	.949
BS	-.43	.13	-3.31	-.682
Benevolence*BS	-.15	.19	-.81	.421

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---

**Credibility of  
the Suspect**

Benevolence	.25	2.04	.12	.902
BS	1.26	.56	2.25	<b>.026</b>
Benevolence*	-.32	.81	-.40	.691
BS				

**Credibility of  
the Victim**

Benevolence	-1.66	1.56	-1.07	.287
BS	-1.44	.43	-3.35	<i>.001</i>
Benevolence*	-.02	.06	-.29	.770
BS				

Suggested

Punishment

Benevolence	-.11	.62	-.19	.853
BS	-.14	.17	-.79	.428
Benevolence*BS	-.04	.24	-.17	.864

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*italics* = Significant at the 0.01 level.

**bold** = Significant at the 0.05 level.

BS = Benevolent Sexism.

## Appendix M

### Consent Form, Questionnaire and Debriefing

#### Effect of Denial of Victim and Benevolence arguments on attribution of blame

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##### Start of Block: Introduction

##### Introduction **What is the study about?**

This study investigates how people attribute blame to victims and suspects of domestic violence in intimate relationships.

##### **Am I eligible to take part?**

To participate in this study, it is required that you are over the age of 18.

##### **Do I have to take part?**

No, it is your decision whether you want to participate in this study or not. You can withdraw from the study at any time without having to explain the reason and without facing any consequences by closing your browser window or tab. If you close your browser before the end

of the study, all the data you will have entered will be deleted and you will no longer be included

as a participant. However, once you have completed the questionnaire, we will not be able to withdraw your data because all data is being collected anonymously and so it is impossible to identify your data after this point.

##### **What will happen when I agree to take part?**

If you consent to take part in this study, you will be directed to the questionnaire which will take

you approximately 20 minutes to complete. The questionnaire starts with some demographic questions which will only ask for basic information to preserve anonymity. Next, you will be asked about some of your personal beliefs. After that, you will read an account about an alleged case of Control and Coercion in an intimate relationship. You will then read a transcript of an investigative interview with the suspect of the described case. After this you will be asked some questions about the case and the interview. Finally, you will be asked questions about your attitudes. Please keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers and that we want to know your personal opinion regarding these topics.

##### **Risks of taking part**

Please keep in mind that the case description and the questions that are being asked are about sensitive topics and that, as a participant, you will be exposed to descriptions of controlling relationship behavior. If you think these descriptions are likely to upset you please do not start

the experiment. If you start the experiment and later do not feel comfortable, feel free to stop by

closing your browser window. At the end of the study we will share links to relevant websites that can offer support around issues concerning domestic violence. If you do not wish to

participate based on this information and this information has caused any personal issues, we advise you to visit these websites for more information and support on domestic violence (Control and Coercion):

**English:**

<https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/what-is-domestic-abuse/coercive-control/>

**Dutch:** <https://www.huiselijkgeweld.nl/organisaties/voor-wie-hulp-zoekt>

**What will happen to my data and to the results of this study?**

This study is being conducted by a psychology master student of the University of Twente, and the collected data will be analyzed for a master thesis. Throughout the whole questionnaire no identifiable information is being collected. The collected data itself will be treated with absolute confidentiality and will not be identifiable or traceable. The data will be stored securely on a password protected device. No individual responses will be presented but only aggregated data. The results of the study may be submitted for publication and used for further research in this area.

**Contact details**

Research supervisor: Steven Watson

If you want to participate in this study, please read the following statements and give your consent: I confirm that I voluntarily want to take part in this study and that I am over the age of 18. I have read the information sheet and understand the purpose of this study and that it will include discussion of domestic abuse. I understand that my data will be collected anonymously and that I will not be personally identifiable. I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time

If you read and understand the statements above and want to consent to take part in this study, then you can click the button at the end of the page.

I consent (3)

I do not consent (4)

**End of Block: Introduction**

---

**Start of Block: Demographics**

Gender Gender

- Male (1)
  - Female (2)
  - Non-binary / third gender (3)
  - Prefer not to say (4)
- 

Age Age

---

---

Nationality What is your nationality?

---

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Education What is your highest level of education?

- Didn't finish Secondary School (1)
- High-School (2)
- College Education (3)
- Bachelor's Degree (4)
- Master's Degree (5)
- Ph.D. or other higher qualification (6)
- Prefer not to say (7)

**End of Block: Demographics**

---

**Start of Block: Belief in a Just World**

BJW How much do you personally agree with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
I feel that people get what they are entitled to have (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that a person's efforts are noticed and rewarded (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that people earn the rewards and punishments they get (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that people who meet with misfortune have brought it on themselves (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that people get what they deserve (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that rewards and punishments are fairly given (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I basically feel that the world is a fair place (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**End of Block: Belief in a Just World**

---

**Start of Block: Ambivalent Sexism**

Ambivalent Sexism Sexism 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. How much do personally you agree with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
No matter how accomplished he is, a man is not truly complete as a person unless he has the love of a woman. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Many women are actually seeking special favors, such as hiring policies that favor them over men, under the guise of asking for "equality." (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In a disaster, women ought not necessarily to be rescued before men (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Most women interpret innocent remarks or acts as being sexist. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Women are too easily offended. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

People are often truly happy in life without being romantically involved with a member of the other sex.

(6)

Feminists are not seeking for women to have more power than men. (7)

Many women have a quality of purity that few men possess. (8)

Women should be cherished and protected by men. (9)

Most women fail to appreciate fully all that men do for them. (10)

Women seek to gain power by getting control over men. (11)

Every man ought to have a woman whom he adores. (12)

Men are complete without women. (13)

Women exaggerate problems they have at work. (14)

Once a woman gets a man to commit to her, she usually tries to put him on a tight leash. (15)

When women lose to men in a fair competition, they typically complain about being discriminated against. (16)

A good woman should be set on a pedestal by her man. (17)

There are actually very few women who get a kick out of teasing men by seeming sexually available and then refusing male advances. (18)

Women, compared to men, tend to have a superior moral sensibility. (19)



Men should be willing to sacrifice their own wellbeing in order to provide financially for the women in their lives. (20)



Feminists are making entirely reasonable demands of men. (21)



Women, as compared to men, tend to have a more refined sense of culture and good taste. (22)



### End of Block: Ambivalent Sexism

### Start of Block: Case description

Case description Coercive and controlling behaviours in intimate relationships are a crime in the UK since 2015. The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) prosecutes criminal cases that have been investigated by the police and other investigative organizations in England and Wales. They define the crime as “Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behavior, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been

intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse: psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional.” (CPS, 2017).

**Case description:** the following text will describe an accusation of Control and Coercion. Please take your time to read it carefully as we will ask you questions about it later.

**Alleged offence:** On 05/08/2022 the police received a phone call from Miss Taylor, alleging that she wanted to make a complaint about her partner, Mr Clark.

Please see a brief description of Miss Taylor’s allegations against Mr Clark:

- Mr Clark is very jealous within their relationship and accuses her of infidelity
- Mr Clark complains when she goes to see her friends without him and demands she is home by 10 pm
- Mr Clark demands access to her phone to check messages and social media
- Mr Clark handles all money in the relationship and has access to her private bank account to see where she has spent money
- Mr Clark regularly insults her and her free time activities. The night Miss Taylor called the police she stated that she had a girls night out and went downtown for drinks. Near midnight, she sent a message to Mr Clark that she would be home later than planned. Mr. Clark somehow traced her location and, upon arriving at the cafe, he took Miss Taylor outside. Miss Taylor alleges that in a heated discussion Mr Clark accused her of cheating, called her names and threatened to leave her
- Miss Taylor claims this behaviour has been occurring throughout their almost year long relationship and she believes she is a victim of coercive and controlling behaviour
- Mr. Clark denies that the allegations are true and the investigation is ongoing.

**End of Block: Case description**

---

**Start of Block: Interview script DoV**

Interview script The following text will show an investigative interview with Mr Clark. Please take your time to read it carefully as we will ask you questions about it afterwards.

**Police interviewer:** Good morning, my name is police officer Smith and I will be conducting an interview with you today. I will first explain your legal rights. You do not have to say anything, but it may harm your defence if you do not mention, when questioned, something which you later rely on in court. Anything you do say may be given in evidence. Would you like me to explain the caution?

**Mr Clark:** No, that’s fine.

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

**Mr Clark:** Er, yes, I understand that

**Police interviewer:** Great. So, you’ve been arrested on an allegation of controlling and coercive behaviour against your partner, Miss Taylor. This is alleged to have happened over

the course of the relationship, which to my understanding is almost a year. So, do you want to start from the beginning and just tell me about your relationship with Miss Taylor?

**Mr Clark:** We have been together for almost a year now, and in the first few months it was really great. Lately she's been acting weird. She can't be trusted. When we first got together, she hardly ever went out and enjoyed staying home on the weekends. Now she is always out with her girlfriends and I hardly see her in the evenings or weekends. I think that she might be seeing someone else again

**Police interviewer:** Do you have reasons for any complaint in your relationship?

**Mr Clark:** I am suspicious because she is unreliable. As I said, she never went out before and now suddenly it's always a different group she goes out with, colleagues I've never heard her talk about or friends she hasn't seen in years. And especially how she looks when she goes out. She would get really dressed up and do her hair and all that make-up. Little dresses and high heels. Am I really meant to think she wasn't doing that to attract someone's attention? I mean would you get all dressed up like that to go to a dinner or for some drinks when you already have a partner at home? And especially every single time she goes out at night with her supposed friends? She couldn't have made it more obvious that something else is going on and I think we can both see that.

**Police interviewer:** Ok. And did you two have arguments during the relationship about her going out?

**Mr Clark:** Yeah, we argue a lot, especially in the last couple of months. She just does not understand what a relationship means; being honest and loyal to one another. I've had to show her how relationships should actually work but she doesn't care and shows no respect to me. No she still does not understand it. Believe me, she can't be trusted, she is so selfish and only thinks only herself and going out to meet up with who knows who. She wanted to go out once and I did not want to let her go, and that turned into a huge fight. She had been to a dinner party the night before and didn't get home until around midnight, even though she said she would get home on time. That obviously made me go crazy because she's gone out all dressed up like that and comes home too late and falling down drunk. So I confronted her and asked why it took her so long to come home and she just came up with all these excuses and tried to make me think I'm the problem like I'm the one getting drunk with strangers all the time. It's obvious she's hiding something, I mean, why else would she not respond to my text messages when she's out?

**Police interviewer:** Miss Taylor alleges that you tell her where she is allowed to go in her free time and tell her when she has to be home?

**Mr Clark:** I ask her to do these things because she is a cheater. The problem is she wants to go out and meet other guys and get drunk with her girlfriends all the time. Ask around and everyone will tell you she'll sleep with anyone after a few drinks. If I give her boundaries it's only because she needs them because she can't be trusted without them. I want to be able to trust her, you know, honesty and loyalty. I want to know where she'll be when she is leaving the house and when to expect her home. I have to do that because of what she's done in the past.

**Police interviewer:** So now I know a little bit more about your relationship with Miss Taylor. I think we should move on to the incident that happened on the 5th of August 2022, when you went to the café Miss Taylor was at. Please explain in your own words what happened on that evening

**Mr Clark:** Like I said, she's always going out and getting drunk and sleeping around. She decided she was going out and didn't listen to me when I asked her to come back at a

reasonable time. She said she was going to have some drinks downtown with friends and that she wouldn't be home too late. Around 11 pm I sent her a message to check where she is, but she didn't respond. I sent her several messages and the longer she did not reply or come home, the more suspicious I got. Around midnight, she sent a text message saying she was still downtown and will come later home than planned. I just could feel that there is something off, so I decided to use "Find My Friends" on my iPhone. I decided to drive to the café and catch her in the act. I walked into the cafe to look for her and found her at the bar busy ordering drinks. When she saw me I could tell she was up to something from how she reacted. I asked her to take me to her friends to see who she is with, but she didn't want to. Now I was sure there'd be someone she was sleeping with there, or that she wanted to sleep with at least. I kept asking where her friends were then but there was no response, so again I'm thinking she's probably there with a guy. That made me even more angry and I took her outside to find out what she is still doing here and who she was with. I kept asking who exactly she was with and to bring me to the guy she was obviously with, but she just stood there, saying nothing at all and not even responding to me really. She always does that to wind me up. I'm sure you can imagine how it feels to have someone cheating on you and they won't even talk to you. We stood there arguing outside, and I just noticed how many men there actually were in that café. She just keeps lying and lying to me as she said multiple times before that she only goes out to catch up with her girlfriends. This honestly proves it to me that my suspicion was justified this whole time.

**Police interviewer:** Can you tell me why you think she called the police?

**Mr Clark:** I don't even know, how should I know? I mean she's the one that goes out that often in her slutty outfits and lies about meeting other men behind my back. All of that can't be innocent. I don't know what she's told you, but she is a very good actress. She's like that, she knows how to wrap you around her finger like that. That's how we got together. She seems so sweet and innocent but she'll string you along and just take everything you've got while doing whatever she wants.

**Police interviewer:** Can you tell me about any disrespectful or threatening language that might have been used during the altercation?

**Mr Clark:** As soon as we went outside the café she started going off at me. She asked me what I was doing here, calling me bad names and telling me I should fuck off home. Who is she to tell me to fuck off? Everyone would be angry when their girlfriend is going out every weekend to meet other men right? I probably said some bad stuff as well, both of us probably weren't that nice to one another. Who isn't going to respond like that when someone's shouting in their face and lying at them all the time. You know, talking about this actually gets me really annoyed, can we take a break please?

**Police interviewer:** Yes, that's fine. Let's take a short break then. Just for the recording, the interview is being paused at 10:58 am.

End of Block: Interview script DoV

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Start of Block: Interview script Benevolence

Interview script The following text will show an investigative interview with Mr Clark. Please take your time to read it carefully as we will ask you questions about it afterwards.

**Police interviewer:** Good morning, my name is police officer Smith and I will be conducting an interview with you today. I will first explain your legal rights. You do not have to say anything, but it may harm your defence if you do not mention, when questioned, something which you later rely on in court. Anything you do say may be given in evidence. Would you like me to explain the caution?

**Mr Clark:** No, that's fine.

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

**Mr Clark:** Er, yes, I understand that

**Police interviewer:** Great. So, you've been arrested on an allegation of controlling and coercive behaviour against your partner, Miss Taylor. This is alleged to have happened over the course of the relationship, which to my understanding is almost a year. So, do you want to start from the beginning and just tell me about your relationship with Miss Taylor?

**Mr Clark:** We have been together for almost a year now, and in the first few months it was really great. Lately I feel like things are different from the beginning of our relationship. We now hardly see each other in the evenings. I wouldn't normally think anything of it either, everyone needs a night out sometimes right? Still, with things the way they are at the moment I find it hard to stay relaxed about these kind of things.

**Police interviewer:** Do you have reasons for any complaint in your relationship?

**Mr Clark:** Well in the beginning of our relationship we liked having the weekends at home and watching Netflix or something together. I'm not really the kind that likes to go out and get drunk all the time. I mean, women can do what they want, right? I'm not the kind of guy to tell people what they can and can't do. But there comes a point where you do start to say or do things you wouldn't normally do when you're feeling under a lot of pressure.

**Police interviewer:** Ok. And did you two had arguments during the relationship about her going out?

**Mr Clark:** I'm just not the type to provoke arguments or like to argue, I've actually always been like that. I generally try to avoid causing conflict unless there's no other option. But there may have been some arguments recently.

**Police interviewer:** Miss Taylor alleges that you tell her where she is allowed to go in her free time and tell her when she has to be home?

**Mr Clark:** I wouldn't normally do anything like that. As I said, that's not how I am. You can talk to my ex-girlfriends and they'll all say I'm not the type to be controlling or to cause arguments. I am loyal and honest you know. I want to know where she'll be when she is leaving the house and when to expect her home, only because we're in a really stressful period of our relationship right now.

**Police interviewer:** So now I know a little bit more about your relationship with Miss Taylor. I think we should move on to the incident that happened on the 5th of August 2022, when you went to the café Miss Taylor was at. Please explain in your own words what happened on that evening.

**Mr Clark:** Like I said earlier, I am not really the kind of guy to go out all the time, but I am also not the type to tell other people they can't go out if they want to. She said she was going

to have some drinks downtown with friends and that she wouldn't be home too late. Normally that would be no problem but I couldn't get hold of her when I sent her a message to check where she is at around 11. Since I was worried I did send her several messages and the longer she did not reply or come home, the more worried I became. Around midnight, she sent a text message saying she was still downtown and will come later home than planned. I know plans change and I wouldn't normally get so upset by that but I just could feel that there is something off, so I decided I had to use "Find My Friends" on my iPhone. I would never normally look for her like that, but I was worried. I walked into the cafe to look for her and found her at the bar busy ordering drinks. Given everything that was going on I did feel like I had to ask her to take me to her friends to meet who she is with and we ended up arguing outside. I wish we didn't argue because that really isn't the kind of person I am but I couldn't respond any other way in that moment.

**Police interviewer:** Can you tell me why you think she called the police?

**Mr Clark:** I don't know? We did argue because of everything that is going on but that is so out of character for me, but I was just overwhelmed by everything.

**Police interviewer:** Can you tell me about any disrespectful or threatening language that might have been used during the altercation?

**Mr Clark:** I was so startled by the situation that I may have used some bad words in the moment. But like I said several times, I really don't like to argue, let alone use nasty language to make my point. I probably said some things I wouldn't normally say. You know, talking about this actually makes me a bit upset, can we take a break please?

**Police interviewer:** Yes, that's fine. Let's take a short break then. Just for the recording, the interview is being paused at 10:58 am.

**End of Block: Interview script Benevolence**

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**Start of Block: Interview script DoV + B**

Interview script The following text will show an investigative interview with Mr Clark. Please take your time to read it carefully as we will ask you questions about it afterwards.

**Police interviewer:** Good morning, my name is police officer Smith and I will be conducting an interview with you today. I will first explain your legal rights. You do not have to say anything, but it may harm your defence if you do not mention, when questioned, something which you later rely on in court. Anything you do say may be given in evidence. Would you like me to explain the caution?

**Mr Clark:** No, that's fine.

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

**Mr Clark:** Er, yes, I understand that

**Police interviewer:** Great. So, you've been arrested on an allegation of controlling and coercive behaviour against your partner, Miss Taylor. This is alleged to have happened numerous times over the course of the relationship, which to my understanding is almost a

year. So, do you want to start from the beginning and just tell me about your relationship with Miss Taylor?

**Mr Clark:** We have been together for almost a year now, and in the first months it was really great. Lately I feel like she's been acting weird, different from the beginning of our relationship. We now hardly see each other in the evenings. I wouldn't normally think anything of it either, everyone needs a night out sometimes right? But still, she recently has been going out more often with her girlfriends and I hardly get to see her. I just feel like she can't be trusted. Police interviewer: Do you have reasons for any complaint in your relationship?

**Mr Clark:** Well in the beginning of our relationship we liked having the weekends at home and watching Netflix or something together. I'm not really the kind that likes to go out and get drunk all the time. I mean, women can do what they want, right? I'm not the kind of guy to tell people what they can and can't do. But of course I get suspicious when she is unreliable. She never went out before and now suddenly it's always a different group she goes out with, people I've never heard her talk about or friends she hasn't seen in years. And especially how she looks when she goes out. She would like get really dressed up and do her hair and all that make-up. Little dresses and high heels that definitely attract some attention. Am I really meant to think she wasn't doing that to attract someone's attention? I mean would you get all dressed up like that to go to a dinner or for some drinks when you already have a partner at home? She couldn't have made it more obvious that something else is going on and I think we both can see that.

**Police interviewer:** Ok. And did you two have arguments during the relationship about her going out?

**Mr Clark:** I'm just not the type to provoke arguments or like to argue, I've actually always been like that. I generally try to avoid causing conflict unless there's no other option, and lately there were no other options. She just does not understand what a relationship means, being honest and loyal to one another. People around me know that I'm loyal to commitments and think this is important. I've had to show her how relationships should actually work but she doesn't care and shows no respect to me. Believe me, she can't be trusted, she is so selfish and only thinks only herself and going out to meet up with who knows who. She wanted to go out once, but I did not want to let her go, and that turned into a huge fight. She had been to a dinner party that night before and didn't get home until around midnight, even though she said she would get home on time. That made me obviously go crazy because she's gone out all dressed up like that and comes home too late and falling down drunk. So I confronted her and asked why it took her so long to come home and she just came up with all these excuses and tried to make me think I'm the problem like I'm the one getting drunk with strangers all the time. It's obvious she's hiding something, I mean, why else would she not respond to my text messages when she's out?

**Police interviewer:** Miss Taylor alleges that you tell her where she is allowed to go in her free time and tell her when she has to be home?

**Mr Clark:** I wouldn't normally do anything like that. As I said, that's not how I am. You can talk to my ex-girlfriends and they'll all say I'm not the type to be controlling or to cause arguments. I am loyal and honest you know, but she is not. She is a cheater and that's why I have to ask her to do these things. The problem is she wants to go out and meet other guys and get drunk with her girlfriends all the time. Ask around and everyone will tell you she'll sleep with anyone after a few drinks. If I give her boundaries it's only because she needs them because she can't be trusted without them. I want to be able to trust her, you know, honesty

and loyalty. I want to know where she'll be when she is leaving the house and when to expect her home.

**Police interviewer:** So now I know a little bit more about your relationship with Miss Taylor. I think we should move on to the incident that happened on the 5th of August 2022, when you went to the café Miss Taylor was at. Please explain in your own words what happened on that evening

**Mr Clark:** Like I said earlier, I'm not really the kind that likes to go out and get drunk, but I'm also not the type to tell women they can't go out if they want to. She decided she was going out and didn't listen to me when I asked her to come back at a reasonable time. Around 11 pm I sent her a message to check where she is, but she didn't respond. I sent her several messages and the longer she did not reply or came home, the more suspicious I got. Around midnight, she sent a text message saying she was still downtown and will come later home than planned. Normally I'm totally fine with people doing their own thing, but because of how she has been acting lately I felt there is something off, so I decided to use "Find My Friends" on my iPhone. I would never normally look for her like that, but it was suspicious so I decided to drive to the café and catch her in the act. I walked into the cafe to look for her and found her at the bar busy ordering drinks. When she saw me I could tell she was up to something from how she reacted. I asked her to take me to her friends to see who she is with, but she didn't want to. Now I was sure there'd be someone she was sleeping with there, or that she wanted to sleep with at least. I kept asking where her friends were then but there was no response, so again I'm thinking she's probably there with a guy. That made me even more angry and I took her outside to find out what she is still doing here and who she was with. I wish we didn't argue because that really isn't the kind of person I am but I couldn't respond any other way in that moment. I kept asking who exactly she was with and to bring me to the guy she was obviously with, but she just stood there, saying nothing at all and not even responding to me really. She always does that to wind me up. I'm sure you can imagine how it feels to have someone cheating on you and they won't even talk to you. We stood there arguing outside, and while standing I just noticed how many men there actually were in that café. She just keeps lying and lying to me as she said multiple times before that she only goes out to catch up with her girlfriends. This honestly proves it to me that my suspicion was justified this whole time.

**Police interviewer:** Can you tell me why you think she called the police?

Mr Clark: I don't know? We did argue because of everything that is going on but that is so out of character for me. I wouldn't normally let it turn into an argument, I just wanted answers that I didn't get. She is the one that kept on lying about meeting other men behind my back. All of that can't be innocent. I don't know what she's told you, but she is a very good actress. She's like that, she knows how to wrap you around her finger like that. That's how we got together. She seems so sweet and innocent but she'll string you along and just take everything you've got while doing whatever she wants.

**Police interviewer:** Can you tell me about any disrespectful or threatening language that might have been used during the altercation?

**Mr Clark:** Like I said several times, I really don't like to argue, let alone use nasty language to make my point, but as soon as we went outside the café she started going off at me. She asked me what I was doing here, calling me bad names and telling me I should fuck off home. Who is she to tell me to fuck off? Everyone would be angry when their girlfriend is going out every weekend to meet other men right? I probably said some bad stuff, as well as she did, both of us probably weren't that nice to one another. Who isn't going to respond like that

when someone's shouting in their face and lying at them all the time. You know, talking about this actually gets me really annoyed, can we take a break please?

Police interviewer: Yes, that's fine. Let's take a short break then. Just for the recording, the interview is being paused at 10:58 am.

**End of Block: Interview script DoV + B**

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**Start of Block: No interview**

No interview Please continue the questionnaire to answer some questions about the case of Mr Clark and Miss Taylor

**End of Block: No interview**

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**Start of Block: Man. check**

Man. check Please answer the following questions about the case you just read

	Not at all (1)	A little (2)	Somewhat (3)	To a large extent (4)	To a great extent (5)
To what extent did Mr Clark try to convince the police officer that Miss Taylor is a bad person? (1)	<input type="radio"/>				
To what extent did Mr Clark try to convince the police officer that he is a good person? (2)	<input type="radio"/>				

**End of Block: Man. check**

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**Start of Block: Attributions of blame**

Attribution of blame Coercion and control definition: “Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse:

psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional.” (CPS, 2017).

Please complete this questionnaire about the case you have just read. Indicate how much you agree with the following statements about the suspect (Mr Clark) and the victim (Miss Taylor)

of the case above. 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)
Mr Clark's behaviour towards Miss Taylor is the result of his personality (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think that Mr Clark's behaviour towards Miss Taylor was out of his character (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mr Clark's behaviour seemed to be consistent with who he is as a person (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mr Clark had very good reasons for his behaviour throughout his relationship with Miss Taylor (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mr Clark behaved as he did because of factors was out of his control (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I think that  
Mr Clark  
behaved the  
way he did  
because he  
was under  
pressure to  
do so (6)

Mr Clark's  
behaviour  
towards Miss  
Taylor is the  
result of her  
personality  
(7)

Mr Clark  
behaved out  
of character  
because Miss  
Taylor  
provoked  
him to do so  
(8)

Miss  
Taylor's  
character is  
the reason  
why Mr  
Clark  
behaved the  
way he did  
(9)

Miss Taylor  
had very  
good reasons  
for her  
behaviour  
throughout  
her  
relationship  
with Mr  
Clark (10)

Mr Clark behaved as he did toward Miss Taylor because factors outside of her control were making her behave out of character (11)

    

If Miss Taylor's provoked Mr Clark it was due to external pressures (12)

    

#### End of Block: Attributions of blame

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#### Start of Block: Credibility of victim's allegations

Credibility victim Were Miss Taylor's allegations against Mr Clark truthful or deceptive?

- Truthful (1)
- Deceptive (2)
- 

Credibility victim Indicate how confident you are with this decision

1      2      3      4      5      6

Not confident - completely confident ( )



#### End of Block: Credibility of victim's allegations

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**Start of Block: Credibility of suspect's account**

Credibility suspect Was Mr Clark's account in the investigative interview truthful or deceptive?

- Truthful (1)
- Deceptive (2)
- 

Credibility suspect Indicate how confident you are with this decision

1      2      3      4      5      6




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**End of Block: Credibility of suspect's account**


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**Start of Block: Perceived guilt**

Perceived guilt Coercion and control definition: "Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse: psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional." (CPS, 2017).

Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements about the suspect (Mr Clark) who has been interviewed.

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. Clark is guilty of control and coercion (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mr. Clark behaved toward Miss Taylor in a way that can be defined as controlling and coercive behaviour (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Perceived guilt

Start of Block: Seriousness of crime

Seriousness of crime Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements about the suspect (Mr Clark) who has been interviewed:

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
I think Mr Clark's behaviour harmed Miss Taylor (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think Mr Clark's motives were wrongful (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think Mr Clark's behaviour was immoral (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**End of Block: Seriousness of crime**

**Start of Block: Suggested punishment**

Suggested punishment Coercive and Control definition: “Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behavior, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse: psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional.” (CPS, 2017). In the UK, crimes in the context of control and coercion are punishable by a maximum sentence of five years in prison. Five years in prison is for the most serious crimes.

For this question we would like you to disregard whether you believe Mr Clark is guilty or not, and to answer the question as though he was guilty. In the case Mr Clark was guilty, how long of a prison sentence do you feel would be appropriate? Please select how many years the suspect should be sentenced to jail ranging from 0 to a max of 5 years.

Years in prison

0 1 1 2 2 3 3 4 4 5

Assuming that Mr Clark was found guilty of the crime, how long should his prison sentence be? ()



End of Block: Suggested punishment

Start of Block: Debriefing

Debriefing Thank you for your participation in this research. This data will be used to explore how people attribute blame in cases of Control and Coercion. The behaviour in the case you have read was an example of controlling and coercive behaviour. The case presented in this study was fictional, none of these things have happened, but similar cases do occur.

Research has found that suspects use a variety of manipulation techniques within police interviews to take their side during disputes. Two manipulation techniques have been used in this interview: Denial of the Victim and Benevolence. By using Denial of Victim arguments, the suspect admits to committing some of the alleged behaviour, but justifies it by arguing that the victim's behaviour was unacceptable and therefore their negative behaviour was an understandable response to the negative behaviour of the victim. By using Benevolence, the suspect admits to committing some of the alleged behaviour, but justifies it by arguing that their negative behaviour is something they would normally never engage in because it does not fit their character. To test whether these techniques have any impact on how people attribute the blame in this case, three versions of the interview were used. Some of the participants were presented with one of the three versions: an interview version where the suspect (Mr Clark) gave extensive answers incorporating Denial of the Victim arguments, an interview version where the suspect gave extensive answers incorporating Benevolence arguments or an interview version where the suspect gave extensive answers incorporating both Denial of Victim and Benevolence arguments. Some of the participants were only presented with the case description, to test whether receiving no interview (no arguments) has an influence on attributing blame. We hope that this study will help us to understand how blame is attributed in cases of Control and Coercion.

Now, after your participation in this study, we want to remind you that all your data is collected completely anonymously and confidentially. We are aware that some of the information provided in this survey may be sensitive and might disturb you. If this study has caused any personal issues for you, we advise you to visit these websites that include information and support on domestic violence (Control and Coercion):

**English:** <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/what-is-domestic-abuse/coercive-control/>

**Dutch:** <https://www.huiselijkgeweld.nl/organisaties/voor-wie-hulp-zoekt>

If after reading the debriefing about this research you wish to withdraw your participation, please feel free to do so. By closing your browser window this questionnaire will stop and

your data will not be stored.

Additionally, feel free to contact the researchers of this study in any case of questions:

Contact details

Research supervisor: Steven Watson

We want to thank you for participating in this study!

**End of Block: Debriefing**

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