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The attribution of blame in cases of control and coercion within intimate relationships

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Abstract

Controlling and coercive behaviour is a form of intimate partner violence that is especially detrimental to the victim's mental health. Prosecuting these cases is difficult as there is often lack of objective evidence which makes investigative interviews the most important opportunity to gather evidence against the suspect. Suspects are highly manipulative and make use of argumentation techniques that influence decision making of the interrogator. This study's focus lays on the effectiveness of denial of the victim and denial of injury arguments in decreasing guilt judgement of the suspect, attributions of blame towards the suspect, perceived seriousness of the behaviour, and suggested sentence. Oftentimes, holding sexist attitudes or believing in a just world is associated with attributing more blame to the victim. This study tested whether the effectiveness of the suspects arguments depend on whether the recipient of the argument holds sexist beliefs or higher beliefs in a just world. Participants of this study filled out an online questionnaire containing a neutral description of the controlling and coercive behaviour case and a vignette of the interrogation which was, randomly assigned, either a vignette in which the suspect used denial of injury or denial of the victim arguments. The main findings of this study were that denial of the victim arguments and denial of injury arguments decreased attribution of blame to the suspect, perceived seriousness of the behaviour, and suggested sentence, but not guilt judgement. Sexism and belief in a just world led to more effectiveness of the denial of injury and denial of the victim claims by the suspect.

The attribution of blame in cases of control and coercion within intimate relationships

The prevalence of intimate partner violence during a women's lifetime is higher than a women's prevalence for diabetes, depression, or breast cancer (Miller & McCaw, 2019). Intimate partner violence is defined as "physical violence, sexual violence, stalking or psychological aggression (including coercive acts) by a current or former intimate partner" by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Breiding et al., 2015, p. 11).

This paper focusses on coercive control, in which one partner uses non-physical acts to harm and frighten their partner and make them dependent on them (The Crown Prosecution Service, n.d.). According to the government of the United Kingdom, these behaviours include "assaults, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim" (The Crown Prosecution Service, n.d.).

There is not one incident that defines the crime of controlling and coercive behaviour as it is the case for physical violence as it is something that develops over time (Nevala, 2017; Stark & Hester, 2019). Control and coercion can be more subtle as it involves many incidences over a longer period of time. This also means that coercive and controlling behaviour can occur before victims might become aware of the abusive behaviour (The Crown Prosecution Service, n.d.). This type of control can lead to a stronger emotional attachment of the victim to the offender, as the victim experiences a power imbalance, making them less capable of fending for themselves and, therefore, perceiving themselves even more in need of the offenders' resources (Midson, 2016). This may lead to a vicious cycle from which it is difficult to break out. Examples of controlling and coercive behaviours are isolating a person from their friends and family; monitoring a person via online communication tools or using spyware; repeatedly putting them down such as telling them they are worthless; controlling their partner's ability to go to school or place of study; threats to hurt or kill; or taking wages, benefits, or allowances (The Crown Prosecution Service, n.d.-a).

Control and coercion is not only the most devastating form of abuse but also the most common one (Stark, 2013). Hamberger et al. found that studies agree that control and coercion impact a victim's life in every dimension (2017). This includes deprivation of economic resources, relationships with friends and family, education, sexuality, and everyday life activities. Furthermore, intimate partner violence is associated with adverse mental health effects such as anxiety and depression (Frye, 2007). Next to these more immediate effects, control and coercion is one of the best predictors for homicide within an intimate partner

relationship (Stark, 2013). This effect is found in both directions as some women may kill their abusers if they see no way out. In fact, it is the level of control experienced rather than the severity that predicts homicide within a relationship. As Stark (2013) shows, many of the women that end up killing their abuser did not experience the most extreme forms of abuse but frequent, low-level assaults as well as rules on how to dress, who to meet, or what to cook. These low-level assaults are more difficult to prove and, therefore, more difficult to prosecute.

<div align="center">**Theoretical background and current state of research**</div>

Legal situation

In 2011, the Council of Europe on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence (CoE Istanbul Convention), defined violence as the following: "a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women and shall mean all acts of gender based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life" (Council of Europe, n.d.). In doing so, the CoE Istanbul Convention criminalizes non-physical acts against women as well without being legally binding. Every European member state has signed the CoE Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe, n.d.). This means that it is up to the member states themselves in which way and if they criminalize control and coercion (Council of Europe, n.d.).

The United Kingdom added controlling and coercive behaviour as a new offence type to their legislation (The Crown Prosecution Service, n.d.). In doing so, the United Kingdom is one of the leading countries when it comes to prosecuting control and coercion, which is why this paper mainly refers to findings and definitions from the United Kingdom. However, setting a legal framework is only the first step when it comes to the prosecution of these crimes. This is highlighted by the fact that in contrast to physical violence, coercive acts are more difficult to prosecute. Physical and sexual assaults usually include physical harm and, therefore, are comparably easier to prove as visible marks from the assault may be collected as evidence (Walby et al., 2014; Walby & Towers, 2017). Furthermore, when confronted with cases of physical violence in which control and coercion has been described, police officers tend to not record the controlling and coercive abuse (Barlow et al., 2019). Instead, police officers tend to focus on isolated events and evidence that can be captured photographically (Barlow et al., 2019). If police officers do not recognize cases of control and coercion in the first place, it becomes even more difficult to prosecute the perpetrators.

The difficulty of interviewing suspects in cases of control and coercion

Because of the difficulties in prosecuting cases of control and coercion described above, investigative interviews are one of the few and most important opportunities to gather evidence against the suspect (Watson et al., 2021). Investigative interviews are the questioning of someone who is suspected of being involved in a criminal offence (Griffiths, 2008). The goal of an investigative interview is to gather as much information about the suspects account and the crime as possible (Watson et al., 2021). In cases of control and coercion, there may not be a lot of evidence because there is often a lack of physical evidence. Furthermore, suspects of control and coercion are usually well practiced in manipulating others as they did this in their intimate partner relationships before (Watson et al., 2021). In order to shift attribution of blame during investigative interviews, it is hypothesized that suspects may try to influence interviewers into believing that the crime was a consequence of the circumstances and victim behaviour (Watson et al., 2021).

Attribution theory

Attributions describe how individuals perceive the causes of events and how they attribute responsibility for that event (Marlow et al., 2010). In investigative interviews, one of the most relevant attributions is attribution of blame. Generally, people attribute blame towards individuals on the basis of a subjective assessment (Manusov & Spitzberg, 2008). Heider's attribution theory tries to explain how individuals attribute blame (Manusov & Spitzberg, 2008). The theory has been expanded over time and assumes that attribution is assigned based on different assessments. The reasons behind certain actions are usually individual subjective assessments (Manusov & Spitzberg, 2008). Therefore, it is important to note, that while people may agree that one person is guilty of an act, they may not agree on the attribution of blame to that person. They can very well attribute blame to another person or external factors by arguing that the aggressor was provoked. These assessments are based on different factors which will be explained in the following.

One of these factors is stability (Manusov & Spitzberg, 2008). Stability is an estimation about the stability of the cause. A stable factor is something that persists over time such as a character trait (Manusov & Spitzberg, 2008), for example people may say that one person slapped the other person "because X is aggressive" or they may attribute an unstable, situational factor, for example: "The person slapped another, because he was provoked". This means that if a perpetrator successfully blames an unstable factor for their actions, people may attribute less blame to the perpetrator, which shows that it is possible to change attribution of blame with the right arguments.

Additionally, the attribution of blame is influenced by the factor control (Manusov & Spitzberg, 2008). Control describes the assessment of the level of control the perpetrator had over the cause (Manusov & Spitzberg, 2008). In cases of control and coercion, the cause is the reason why the perpetrator engaged in abusive behaviour. If someone is assumed to have control over the cause, people will attribute greater responsibility to that person than when they do not have control over the cause (Manusov & Spitzberg, 2008). If a perpetrator successfully shifts the estimated control away from themselves, people may attribute less blame to the perpetrator.

Another factor influencing attribution of blame is correspondence (whether an act was in line with that person's characteristics or not; Manusov & Spitzberg, 2008). Generally, aggressive men are found to attribute their own aggressions towards a partner to external factors such as their partners behaviour (Manusov & Spitzberg, 2008). This is caused by the belief that their behaviour was not in line with their character traits (Manusov & Spitzberg, 2008). If perpetrators successfully convince another person that the behaviour does not fit to their character, people would be less likely to attribute blame to the perpetrator. If people hold the assumption that the suspect's character played a role in the crime, they will attribute more blame to the suspect than in a scenario in which situational factors are believed to be more influential (Berry & Frederickson, 2015). Therefore, suspects will try to blame external factors to manipulate the attribution of blame.

Generally, attribution theory describes how people can change their judgements based on individual perceptions. These individual assessments can be influenced further by, for example, techniques of neutralization.

Techniques of neutralization

In investigative interviews, a way of manipulating attribution of blame in are the techniques of neutralization (Sykes & Matza, 1957). Techniques of neutralization describe techniques used by offenders to rationalize behaviour that violates community norms. Furthermore, techniques of neutralization are used by suspects to shield themselves from the blame of others (Harris & Dumas, 2009). Therefore, techniques of neutralization specifically aim at reducing perceived guilt. As manipulation techniques may be especially relevant to changing the attribution of blame, this paper focuses on the techniques of neutralization that are relevant to shifting the attribution of blame. These manipulation techniques are *denial of the victim* and *denial of injury* (Watson et al., 2021), which will be defined in the following.

Denial of the victim

Denial of the victim is the most commonly used strategy by suspects to shift attribution away from themselves and towards the victim (Watson et al., 2021). This is done by claiming negative actions were rightful due to negative behaviours of the victim (Watson et al., 2021). Using this technique, the suspect does not deny that harm was done but blames the victim's behaviour for their own actions (Copes & Deitzer, 2015). This may lead people into believing that the victim deserved what they got, creating a distinction between acceptable and unacceptable victims (Harris & Dumas, 2009). If people are convinced that a victim was an acceptable victim, they are likely to attribute less blame to the suspect as they blame external factors for the behaviour instead of internal factors, which is in line with the arguments from attribution theory.

All in all, denial of the victim is one of the most common strategies used in cases of domestic abuse by domestic violence offenders (Henning et al., 2005) and is, therefore, especially relevant to cases of control and coercion. It is commonly used to minimize the abuser's actions and change the perspective of the victim as deserving of help (Anderson & Umberson, 2001).

Denial of injury

Another commonly used justification is *denial of injury*. In the denial of injury scenario, the suspect tries to minimize the harm, claims that no one was really injured or claims that harm was not intended (Copes & Deitzer, 2015). By reducing the harm that was done, the behaviour may appear more acceptable to observers (Harris & Dumas, 2009). Examples include suspects "[trying to] minimize the interpretation of their behaviour by proposing innocent motives, claiming harm was less severe than alleged, or that harm should be discounted because it will not happen again" (Watson et al., 2021, pp. 18-19). Further, denial of injury directly challenges the suspects account by either minimizing the harm that was done or stating that no harm was done in the first place (Watson et al., 2021). Suspects try to use denial of injury arguments to shift attribution of blame away from themselves and to undermine the victim's credibility (Watson et al., 2021).

Attribution theory and techniques of neutralization

Generally, attribution theory assumes that uncontrollable and unintentional behaviours will lead to less attribution of blame while assumed controllable and intentional causes will lead to more attribution of blame (Manusov & Spitzberg, 2008).

In a study conducted by Watson et al. (2021), denial of the victim was one of the most common strategies used in cases of domestic abuse (Henning et al., 2005) and is, therefore,

especially relevant to cases of control and coercion. In the context of investigative interviews, denial of the victim is commonly used to minimize the abusers' actions and change the perspective of the victim as deserving of help (Anderson & Umberson, 2001). Minimizing the abusers' actions may lead to lower "stability" assessment according to attribution theory (Manusov & Spitzberg, 2008). If the perpetrator tries to explain their behaviour with the behaviour of the victim, they suggest that situational, unstable factors were the reasons for their actions. It may also suggest that the perpetrator had less control over their actions as they did not have any other chance than to react in the way they did. This is also in line with attribution theory and could decrease attribution of blame towards the suspect.

Another technique of neutralization is *denial of injury*. This behaviour might include suspects "trying to minimize the interpretation of their behaviour by proposing innocent motives, claiming harm was less severe than alleged, or that harm should be discounted because it will not happen again" (Watson et al., 2021). Denying that harm was done to the suspect could lead observers into believing that the actions were more acceptable according to attribution theory. If actions are rated as more acceptable, this may lead to less attribution of blame towards the suspect (Harris & Dumas, 2009).

Consequently, it is expected that *denial of the victim* and *denial of injury* will lead to less attribution of blame of the perpetrator following the reasoning from attribution theory.

Dispositional factors influencing the attribution of blame

Generally, the process of attribution is highly complex (Manusov & Spitzberg, 2008). It is not only the interpretation of the suspects behaviours but also the observers own dispositional factors that determine the way people attribute blame (Manusov & Spitzberg, 2008). Two of these dispositional factors are belief in a just world and sexism.

Belief in a just world

One of the dispositional factors predicting victim blaming is the belief in a just world (Grubb & Harrower, 2008). The belief in a just world describes people's belief that the world is a place in which everyone gets what they deserve in life and that everyone deserves what they get in life (Dalbert, 2009; Hafer & Sutton, 2016). This kind of belief is an adaptive belief enabling people to deal with their environment as if it was stable over time (Dalbert, 2009). When confronted with injustices that threaten their world view, such as control and coercion, people will defend their belief in a just world (Dalbert, 2009). If justice cannot be restored in the real world (for example by a sentence for the perpetrator), believers in a just world will adjust their cognitions (Dalbert, 2009). This means that they will adjust their cognitions towards the victim in such a way that suggests that the victim deserved what they got,

increasing attribution of blame to the victim, and decreasing attribution of blame to the suspect (Dalbert, 2009). This leads to two possible outcomes: In the first scenario the observer will assume that justice will be restored by prosecution. In this scenario, the observer will rate the perpetrator as being more to blame. In the second scenario, the arguments of the perpetrator convince the observer that the victim deserved what they got and will therefore rate the victim as being more to blame. As suspects often make use of denial of the victim arguments stating that their own behaviour was simply a logical consequence of the victim's own behaviour, this will trigger the observer's belief in a just world by thinking that the victim got what they deserved.

Sexism

Additionally, sexism has been shown to predict attribution of blame in cases of control and coercion within intimate relationships (Schmuck, 2021; Wüller, 2021). Sexism describes attitudes which are based on stereotypical gender roles and corresponding expected gender role behaviour (De Judicibus & McCabe, 2001). Sexist beliefs can be held by men and by women. Individuals holding sexist beliefs are less likely to believe someone who objects to unwanted sexual attention and may even blame the victim for encouraging the perpetrators behaviour (De Judicibus & McCabe, 2001). Therefore, individuals holding sexist beliefs are more prone to believe that the women would be lying about the harm done to her or. Consequently, they might attribute less blame to the suspect.

In summary, it is predicted that techniques of neutralization such as denial of injury and denial of the victim will influence attribution of blame in cases of control and coercion within intimate relationships. This relationship will be moderated by dispositional factors, more specifically, the belief in a just world and sexism. These assumptions lead to the following hypotheses:

> **H1**: Denial of the victim arguments will decrease guilt perception of the suspect, attributions of blame to the suspect, suggested sentence for the suspect, and perceived seriousness of the behaviour.

> **H2**: Denial of injury arguments will decrease guilt perception of the suspect, attributions of blame to the suspect, suggested sentence for the suspect, and perceived seriousness of the behaviour.

> **H3**: Higher sexism will lead to less attribution of blame towards the suspect, guilt, suggested sentence, and seriousness of the crime when denial of the victim or denial of injury arguments are used.

H4: Higher belief in a just world will lead to less attribution of blame against the suspect, guilt, suggested sentence, and seriousness of the crime when denial of victim or denial of injury arguments are used.

Methods

The independent variable is behaviour of the suspect which has two levels: denial of victim and denial of injury. In the denial of the victim scenario, the suspect justifies their own actions by explaining it with negative behaviour of the victim. In the denial of injury condition, the suspect tries to explain that no harm has been done to the victim and makes justifications among other claims. In order to control for the effect of denial of victim and denial of injury, there will be a pre- and post-measure of attribution of blame, sentence, and guilt.

The dependent variables measured were attribution of blame to the victim, attribution of blame to the suspect, sentence, and guilt while the proposed moderators measured were belief in a just world and sexist attitudes.

The University of Twente's Ethics committee of the Faculty of Behavioural, Management and Social sciences granted ethical approval on the 10.01.2022.

Participants

To be able to determine this study's ideal sample size, the G*Power software was used. Parameters were chosen according to Cohen (2016) who proposes a power level of 0.8, an alpha level of 0.05 and a medium effect size of 0.25. The study compares two different groups and has two measurement times. Therefore, the analysis showed that the required minimum sample size is 128. Participants were recruited via social media networks of the researcher such as Instagram, WhatsApp, LinkedIn and the University of Twente, which provides a sampling platform called SONA test subjects pool, which allows researchers to recruit students from the University of Twente. In total, 184 participants took part in the survey. However, a number of participants' data had to be excluded as they did not finish the survey, resulting in 131 total participants with a mean age of $M = 27.1$ ($SD = 12.0$). 70.2% of the participants are female and 28.2% are male, while 0.8% identify as non-binary and 0.8% preferred to not state their gender. Additionally, 71% of the participants are German, 16% Dutch, and 13% have another nationality than German or Dutch divided over 17 different nationalities. Most participants are high-school graduates (46.6%), bachelors graduates (29.8%), or masters graduates (19.8%). 1.5% of the participants have less than a high-school degree and 2.3% have a doctorate.

Materials

The study was conducted as an online experiment. Before reading the fictional interview scripts, participants were asked to answer questions about their gender, age, nationality, and education. After that, a fictional case scenario was presented to the participants (see Appendix A). To avoid further biases, the information presented to the participants included the allegations hinting at controlling and coercive behaviour against the suspect only (see Appendix A). Then, participants made were asked to make their assumptions about the suspects perceived guilt, attribution of blame, perceived seriousness of the behaviour, and suggested sentence based on the fictional, neutral case description. The fictional case description was the same for all participants. After that, participants were confronted with randomly assigned interview scripts (see Appendix B; see Appendix C). The interview script for the denial of victim scenario has been adapted from studies conducted by Schmuck (2021) and Wüller (2021; see Appendix B). In this scenario, an investigative interview between the suspect and an interviewer is described. The suspect makes use of typical denial of victim statements in order to manipulate the interviewer. Some parts have been shortened to align it with the denial of injury scenario which has been adapted and rewritten as the original interview script contained arguments from both, denial of the victim and denial of injury arguments (Schmuck, 2021; Wüller, 2021; see Appendix B). To be able to link the effects clearly to either denial of injury or denial of the victim arguments, the statements of the suspect have been adapted so that one interview contained denial of injury, but no denial of the victim arguments while the other interview script was written the other way around. In the denial of the victim scenario, the suspect claimed that the victim deserved and caused the suspects negative behaviour due to their own actions. In the denial of injury scenario, the suspect stated that their actions were not harmful to the victim by mentioning, for example, that the victim was not physically harmed and was exaggerating. When participants finished reading the interview script they were asked again about their judgement of guilt, attribution of blame, perceived seriousness of the behaviour, and suggested sentence, this time, based on the interview scripts. In the end, participants answered questionnaires assessing sexism and belief in a just world. These scales are presented below.

Scales and Measures

Attribution of blame

The dependent variable attribution of blame was measured using items from the Revised Gudjonsson Blame Attribution Inventory (Gudjonsson & Singh, 1989). Only the items fitting to attribution of blame have been used to fit the scale to the topic at hand. This

was done due to the fact that the Revised Gudjonsson Blame Attribution Inventory measures several further aspects of attribution of blame, such as mental attribution of blame. Furthermore, the scale is written from an ego perspective, for this study, a third-person perspective is more suitable, which is why the questions have been rewritten. Additionally, the word "crime" has been replaced by "behaviour" within the items to not bias the participants as "crime" implies that the suspect was guilty. Generally, high scores indicate high attribution of blame to the suspect while low scores indicate lower attribution of blame to the suspect on a 7-Point-Likert-Scale with scores ranging from 1 ("*strongly disagree*") to 7 ("*totally agree*"). The scale has seven items in total.

Sentence

In order to assess the suggested punishment of the suspect, participants were asked to rate the sentence the suspect deserved on a 6-point scale ranging from zero years to five years, using a slider scale. The suggested punishment is measured to be able to capture the legal assessment of the participants. In doing so, it can be evaluated whether the suspect's statements have an effect on the participants assessment of the crime. Here, a rather objective, legal assessment is asked. In order to be able to assess the legal consequence, participants were provided with a definition of control and coercion as well as with information about the regular sentences associated with this type of crime. Further, participants were asked to take the point of view of a judge. The question was asked after the case description was presented and after the participants read the interview script. The longer the suggested sentence by the participants, the less effective the denial of injury and denial of victim arguments are assumed to be.

Seriousness of the crime

To be able to specifically capture the effect of the suspects denial of injury and denial of the victim arguments on perceived seriousness of the crime, a scale consisting of 3 items has been created that consisted of the following items: *I think Mr. Coopers behaviour is acceptable*, *Mrs. Miller is exaggerating given that she did not suffer from any injuries,* and *I think Mrs. Miller was hurt*. Seriousness is measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("*strongly disagree*") to 7 ("*totally agree*"). If participants rate the seriousness of the crime as high, it can be assumed that denial of injury arguments made by the suspect were more effective.

Perceived Guilt

In order to assess guilt, a 7-point Likert scale has been created with three items ranging from 1 ("*strongly disagree*") to 7 ("*totally agree*") consisting of the following

statements: *I think Mr Cooper is guilty of the criminal offence of control and coercion*, *If I was on a jury, I would think that Mr. Cooper is not guilty*, and *Mr. Cooper behaved towards Mrs. Miller in a way that can be prosecuted*. A high score indicates a higher guilt judgement.

Belief in a just world

The belief in a just world scale was derived from Dalbert (2009) and consists of six items. The items were measured using a 7-point Likert-Scale (1 = "*Strongly disagree*"; 7 = "*Strongly agree*") asking questions such as *I believe that, by and large, people get what they deserve*. The scale has an internal consistency of .78 (Dalbert, 2009).

Sexism

Sexist attitudes were measured using the "Ambivalent sexism inventory" scale (Glick & Fiske, 1997). The scale consists of 22 items measuring sexism. Items are measured on a 7-point Likert-Scale (1 = "*Strongly disagree*"; 7 = "*Strongly agree*").

Procedure

The study was conducted online where participants were first presented with a consent form. The consent form informed the participants about the content of the study and the procedure of the study without disclosing relevant information about the aim of the study. However, they were told that the study is about a case of control and coercion. In doing so, participants were given the opportunity to not take part in the study if this is a sensitive topic to the participant. If participants needed support, they were also given links to sources that could help them if needed. Sources were given in German, English, and Dutch. Participants were also informed that they may withdraw at any time without giving a reason and that they will face no consequences if they withdraw. Further, contact information of the researcher were presented if questions, unclarities, or concerns arise. After that, participants were asked for their direct consent. If participants agreed to take part in the study, they were asked demographic questions such as their age and gender. Then, the participants filled out the scales for sexist attitudes and belief in a just world before they were confronted with the fictional case description. Following, participants were asked to fill out the pre-measure of the attribution of blame, sentence, and guilt scales. From here on, participants were randomly assigned to either the denial of injury or the denial of victim scenario. After having read both the case description and the interview, participants were directed to the post-measure scales concerning the dependent variables. After finishing the questionnaire, a short debrief was presented which served to explain the background and purpose of the study.

Statistical Analysis

Data was analysed using SPSS 25. SPSS is a statistical analysis tool. In SPSS, a paired t-test was run to test H1 and H2. To test H3 and H4, a repeated measures moderation effects analysis was run. To be able to analyse the moderation effects of a repeated measures in SPSS, the add-on MEMORE was installed (Montoya & Hayes, 2017). SPSS itself is not able to provide a comparison of pre- and post-tests in moderation analyses, MEMORE gives that possibility once installed. Then, MEMORE can be used via the Syntax function in SPSS, though the program makes use of its own code which then has to be adapted so that it fits to one's own analyses. Running this syntax creates an output that consists of four different parts. These are explained in the section moderation analyses effects below.

Results

Descriptive statistics

To be able to get an overview over the correlations between the different variables in the dataset, a correlational analysis was carried out. The results are presented in table 1. It can be seen that especially seriousness of the behaviour and attribution of blame to the suspect have a high mean value on a 7-Point-Likert-Scale. In contrast, suggested sentence has a rather low average score on a 6-Point-Likert-Scale and as suggested by the standard deviation, also have a wider spread between the participants answers. The same can be said about seriousness pre-test and attribution post-test.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and correlations for study variables

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Guilt pre	4.5	0.7	—								
2. Guilt post	4.4	0.7	*.25*	—							
3. Seriousness pre	5.9	0.9	.05	*.23*	—						
4. Seriousness post	5.4	1.2	.06	*.44*	*.61*	—					
5. Attribution pre	5.7	0.9	.08	*.29*	*.62*	*.58*	—				
6. Attribution post	5.2	1.3	-.05	*.34*	*.44*	*.82*	*.66*	—			
7. Sentence pre[a]	1.8	1.1	.10	.03	.19	.08	.07	.10	—		
8. Sentence post[a]	1.5	1.2	.02	*.24*	.15	*.30*	.09	*.32*	*.80*	—	
9. Belief in a just world	3.8	0.9	.05	-.16	*-.38*	*-.38*	*-.37*	*-.45*	*-.18*	*-.24*	—
10. Sexism	2.8	0.8	-.03	*-.27*	*-.51*	*-.58*	*-.54*	*-.60*	-.05	-.15	*.30*

Note. Scales were measured on a 7-point Likert scale unless indicated otherwise.

[a] Measured on a 6-point Likert scale.

p > .05, *p <.05*, **p < .01**, *p <.001*.

Interestingly, the pre-test of suggested sentence only correlated with the corresponding post-test, but not with any other variable. At the same time, the post-test of suggested sentence does correlate with most other variables. The same can be seen with the pre-test of guilt, which does not correlate with any other variable but its post-test. Further, the post-test of guilt correlates with most other variables.

Comparing pre- and post-measures

To be able to determine whether the pre- and post-tests of the dependent variables are significantly different from another, paired t-tests were run. When comparing the pre-test of guilt ($M = 4.5$; $SD = 0.6$) with its post-test ($M = 4.5$; $SD = 0.7$) in the denial of the victim condition, it can be seen that the values are non-significantly different from another, although the score decreased from pre- to post-test, $t(68) = 0.51$; $p = .306$. However, the post-test of guilt in the denial of injury condition ($M = 4.5$; $SD = 0.7$) is significantly different from the pre-test of guilt ($M = 4.3$; $SD = 0.8$), $t(61) = -1.79$; $p = .039$. Interestingly, guilt judgement increased from pre- to post-test. When comparing the pre- ($M = 6.0$; $SD = 0.9$) and post-test of seriousness of the behaviour ($M = 5.3$; $SD = 1.3$), it can be seen that the denial of the victim tests are significantly different from another as assessment of seriousness of the behaviour decreases from pre- to post-test, $t(68) = 5.26$; $p < .001$. In the denial of injury condition, the pre-test of seriousness of the behaviour ($M = 5.9$; $SD = 1.0$) and the post-test ($M = 5.7$; $SD = 1.1$) are significantly different from another, as assessment of seriousness of the behaviour decreases, $t(61) = 1.83$; $p = .035$. Looking at the comparison between attribution of blame towards the suspect ($M = 5.8$; $SD = 0.9$) and its post-test ($M = 5.0$; $SD = 1.3$) in the denial of victim condition, it can be seen that the post-test scores are significantly different from the pre-test scores, $t(68) = 6.87$; $p < .001$. After reading the denial of victim arguments, attribution of blame towards the suspect decreased. The post-test of attribution of blame to the suspect ($M = 5.7$; $SD = 1.0$) in the denial of injury condition is non-significantly different from the pre-test ($M = 5.5$; $SD = 1.2$), $t(61) = 1.64$; $p = .053$. Lastly, the pre- and post-values of suggested sentence were compared. Results show that the post-test of suggested sentence in the denial of the victim condition ($M = 1.3$; $SD = 1.3$) is significantly different from the corresponding pre-test ($M = 1.7$; $SD = 1.2$), $t(79) = 4.93$; $p < .001$. Additionally, the post-test of suggested sentence ($M = 1.3$; $SD = 1.3$) in the denial of injury condition is significantly different from the pre-test of suggested sentence ($M = 1.6$; $SD = 1.16$), $t(79) = 2.99$; $p = .002$.

To summarize, the pre- and post-tests of guilt in the denial of the victim condition and attribution of blame in the denial of injury condition were non-significantly different from another. All other pairs were significantly different. All scores decreased after exposure to

denial of the victim or denial of injury arguments, meaning that participants rated the suspect as less guilty, perceived the behaviour as less serious, attributed less blame to the suspect, and suggested a lower sentence. Interestingly, guilt judgement of the suspect increased from pre- to post-test after exposure to denial of injury arguments.

Moderation effects analysis

To test whether denial of injury and denial of the victim arguments have an impact on the participants guilt, attribution of blame, suggested sentence, and perceived seriousness of the crime moderated by sexism or belief in a just world, moderation analyses were carried out. This allows to test whether the size of any difference between pre- and post-tests differs depending on the extent to which people endorse sexist or beliefs in a just world belief. In total, 16 models have been run, see tables below.

Guilt

Denial of the victim and sexism. Moderation analysis showed that sexism did not statistically significantly predict changes in guilt perception between pre- and post- interview guilt judgements ($b = 0.22$; $SE = 0.11$; $t = 1.93$; $p = .057$), which can be seen in the first row of Table 2 (*difference pre- to post-test*). Here, the difference from pre- and post-test is the outcome variable, meaning that a positive beta value indicates a lower post-test score. The moderation analysis also indicated that it may be the case that changes in guilt scores from pre- to post- interview may have been larger the higher the sexism score was, with beta weights increasing from -0.13 when sexism is 1 SD below the mean to 0.023 when sexism is 1 SD above the mean, which can be seen in the rows two to four of Table 2 (*Conditional effect*). However, even at high levels of sexism, pre-post interview guilt scores were not statistically significant ($p = .087$). Here, a positive beta value also indicates that guilt values increase with higher levels of sexism.

The final aspect of the moderation analysis determined whether sexism predicted guilt scores separately at the pre interview and at post interview. In this analysis, the raw outcome score is the outcome variable, meaning that a negative score indicates a lower post-test score compared to the pre-test score. Here we see that there was clearly no association between sexism and guilt scores before exposure to the interview ($b = -0.05$; $SE = 0.09$; $t = -0.56$; $p = .574$), which is indicated in row 4 of Table 2 (*Pre-test condition*). However, there was a statistically significant negative association between sexism and guilt scores post interview ($b = -0.27$; $SE = 0.09$; $t = -2.82$; $p = .006$), which can be seen in row 4 of Table 2 (*Post-test condition*). This means that people who hold more sexist beliefs were more likely to consider the suspect innocent, but only after they had read the suspects denial of the victim arguments.

This result is in line with our predictions that denial of the victim arguments are more likely to be effective when suspects endorse sexist beliefs. For further details, see table 2.

Table 2

Moderation effect of sexism on guilt in the denial of the victim condition

Moderator variable	Model	b	SE	t	p
	Guilt				
Sexism	Difference pre- to post test	0.22	0.11	1.93	.057
	Conditional effect of DoV on guilt at 1 SD below mean sexism	-0.13	0.13	-1.00	.318
	Conditional effect of DoV on guilt at mean sexism	0.04	0.09	0.52	.604
	Conditional effect of DoV on guilt at 1 SD above mean sexism	0.22	0.13	1.73	.086
	Pre-test condition	-0.05	0.09	-0.56	.574
	Post-test condition	-0.27	0.09	-2.82	**.006**

p > .05, *p* <.05, **p < .01**, *p* <.001.

Denial of injury and sexism. Further, moderation effect analysis shows that sexism does not statistically significantly predict changes from the pre- to post-test values of guilt perception in denial of injury scenarios ($b = 0.15$; $SE = 0.13$; $t = 1.18$; $p = .242$). Furthermore, results indicate that changes in guilt scores are larger the less sexist a person is as the beta weigh is largest when sexism is 1 SD below the mean ($b = -0.33$; $SE = 0.15$; $t = -2.10$; $p = .039$). A negative beta value indicates that guilt scores are lower after the interview when sexism is 1 SD below the mean. This means that denial of injury arguments increased perceived guilt to a lesser extent when the person hearing them holds more sexist beliefs.

The final aspect of the moderation analysis determined whether sexism predicted guilt scores at the pre- and post-values. Here it was found that the effect of sexism on guilt judgement is non-significant before the interview ($b = 0.00$; $SE = 0.11$; $t = 0.01$; $p = .989$). There was also a statistically non-significant association between sexism and guilt scores post-interview ($b = -0.15$; $SE = 0.09$; $t = -1.58$; $p = .119$). This indicates that holding sexist beliefs does not play a role in guilt judgement before or after the interview. For further details, see table 3.

Table 3

Moderation effect of sexism on guilt in the denial of injury condition

Moderator variable	Model	b	SE	t	p
	Guilt				
Sexism	Difference pre- to post test	0.15	0.13	1.18	.242
	Conditional effect of DoI on guilt at 1 SD below mean sexism	-0.33	0.15	-2.10	*.039*
	Conditional effect of DoI on guilt at mean sexism	-0.19	0.11	-1.80	.076
	Conditional effect of DoI on guilt at 1 SD above mean sexism	-0.06	0.15	-0.43	.667
	Pre-test condition	0.00	0.11	0.01	.989
	Post-test condition	-0.15	0.09	-1.58	.119

p > .05, *p <.05*, **p < .01**, *p <.001*.

Denial of the victim and belief in a just world. When looking at the results for the moderation effect of belief in a just world on the relationship between denial of the victim arguments and people's assessment of guilt it can be seen that belief in a just world does statistically significantly predict changes in guilt perception between pre- and post-interview ($b = 0.26$; $SE = 0.09$; $t = 2.69$; $p = .009$), indicating that guilt scores were lower at post-interview. When belief in a just world levels are 1 SD above the mean the effect of belief in a just world on a person's guilt assessment is larger ($b = 0.29$; $SE = 0.12$; $t = 2.28$; $p = .025$). This effect is non-significant at lower levels of belief in a just world.

Further, it was tested whether belief in a just world predicted guilt scores at pre- and post-interview. Here it was found that the effect of belief in a just world on guilt judgement is non-significant larger before the interview ($b = 0.03$; $SE = 0.08$; $t = 0.41$; $p = .676$). However, belief in a just world has a statistically negative association with guilt perception after the interview ($b = -0.23$; $SE = 0.08$; $t = -2.69$; $p = .008$). This means that people who have higher beliefs in a just world were more likely to consider the suspect as being innocent after they had been exposed to denial of the victim arguments. This result is in line with the hypothesis that denial of the victim arguments are more effective when suspects hold stronger beliefs in a just world. For further details, see table 4.

Table 4

Moderation effect of belief in a just world on guilt in the denial of the victim condition

Moderator variable	Model	b	SE	t	p
	Guilt				
Belief in a just world	Difference pre- to post test	0.26	0.09	2.69	**.009**
	Conditional effect of DoV on guilt at 1 SD below mean belief in a just world	-0.19	0.12	-1.53	.129
	Conditional effect of DoV on guilt at mean belief in a just world	0.48	0.09	0.53	*.595*
	Conditional effect of DoV on guilt at 1 SD above mean belief in a just world	0.29	0.12	2.28	*.025*
	Pre-test condition	0.03	0.08	0.41	.676
	Post-test condition	-0.23	0.08	-2.69	**.008**

p > .05, *p <.05*, **p < .01**, *p <.001*.

Denial of injury and belief in a just world. Belief in a just world does not statistically predict changes in guilt perception between pre- and post-interview guilt judgements ($b = 0.00$; $SE = 0.11$; $t = 0.01$; $p = .221$). Moderation analysis also indicated that different levels of belief in a just world are not significantly associated with changes in guilt perception.

Lastly, it was tested whether belief in a just world predicts guilt judgement before and after the interview. Belief in a just world is not associated with pre-interview guilt judgements ($b = 0.00$; $SE = 0.09$; $t = 0.09$; $p = .928$), nor with post-interview guilt judgements ($b = 0.00$; $SE = 0.08$; $t = 0.09$; $p = .928$). This means that denial of injury arguments are not more likely to decrease guilt judgment when participants believe in a just world. For further details, see table 5.

Attribution of blame

Denial of the victim and sexism. Moderation analysis shows that sexism does statistically significantly predict changes in attribution of blame between pre- to post-test ($b = 0.37$; $SE = 0.14$; $t = 2.66$; $p = .009$), meaning that post-test scores of attribution of blame were lower than before the interview. At levels of sexism 1 SD above the mean, attribution of blame towards the suspect increases significantly ($b = 1.13$; $SE = 0.16$; $t = 6.95$; $p < .001$).

This effect is also found at mean levels of sexism and levels of sexism 1 SD below the mean. However, the effect is larger at higher levels of sexism.

Table 5

Moderation effect of belief in a just world on guilt in the denial of injury condition

Moderator variable	Model	b	SE	t	p
	Guilt				
Belief in a just world	Difference pre- to post test	0.00	0.11	0.01	.221
	Conditional effect of DoI on guilt at 1 SD below mean belief in a just world	-0.20	0.15	-1.26	.211
	Conditional effect of DoI on guilt at mean belief in a just world	-0.19	0.11	-1.78	.079
	Conditional effect of DoI on guilt at 1 SD above mean belief in a just world	-0.19	0.15	-1.24	.217
	Pre-test condition	0.00	0.09	0.09	.928
	Post-test condition	0.00	0.08	0.09	.928

p > .05, *p <.05*, **p < .01**, *p <.001*.

Additionally, it was tested whether sexism predicted attribution of blame at pre- and post-interview. Here it was found that sexism predicts attribution of blame before the interview (b = -0.52; SE = 0.11; t = -4.40; p < .001), as well as after the interview (b = -0.89; SE = 0.15; t = -5.62; p < .001). This means that people who are sexist were likely to attribute less blame regardless of having read denial of the victim arguments. However, the effect of sexism on attribution of blame is larger after participants read the suspects denial of the victim arguments, meaning that attribution of blame towards the suspect was lower after participants read denial of victim arguments when people hold sexist beliefs. This result is in line with the prediction that denial of the victim arguments are likely to be more effective when participants hold sexist beliefs. For further details, see table 6.

Denial of injury and sexism. Sexism does significantly predict changes in attribution of blame between pre- and post-interview scores (b = 0.26; SE = 0.12; t = 2.14; p = .036), indicating that attribution of blame scores were lower at post-test scores. At levels of sexism 1 SD above the mean, the changes of attribution of blame towards the suspect scores are

significantly larger (b = 0.39; SE = 0.14; t = 2.71; p = .008). At levels of the mean and 1 SD below the mean of sexism, the changes of attribution of blame scores are non-significant.

Table 6

Moderation effect of sexism on attributions of blame in the denial of the victim condition

Moderator variable	Model	b	SE	t	p
	Attributions of blame towards the suspect				
Sexism	Difference pre- to post test	0.37	0.14	2.66	**.009**
	Conditional effect of DoV on attribution of blame at 1 SD below mean sexism	0.51	0.16	3.16	**.002**
	Conditional effect of DoV on attribution of blame at mean sexism	0.82	0.11	7.17	*<.001*
	Conditional effect of DoV on attribution of blame at 1 SD above mean sexism	1.13	0.16	6.95	*<.001*
	Pre-test condition	-0.52	0.11	-4.40	*<.001*
	Post-test condition	-0.89	0.15	-5.62	*<.001*

p > .05, *p <.05*, **p < .01**, *p <.001*.

Before exposure to denial of injury arguments, sexism is significantly negatively associated with attribution of blame (b = -0.71; SE = 0.12; t = -5.82; p < .001). This association can also be found in post-interview scores as sexism is significantly negatively associated with attribution of blame (b = -0.97; SE = 0.14; t = -6.90; p < .001). This means that people who are more sexist are more likely to attribute less blame to the suspect. The association is larger after participants were exposed to denial of injury arguments. This result is in line with the prediction that denial of the victim arguments are likely to be more effective when participants hold sexist beliefs. For further details, see table 7.

Denial of the victim and belief in a just world. Moderation analysis showed that belief in a just world did not statistically significantly predict changes in attribution of blame between pre- and post-interview attribution of blame scores (b = 0.21; SE = 0.13; t = 1.66; p = .099). However, the changes in attribution of blame scores are statistically significantly larger in higher levels of belief in a just world (b = 1.02; SE = 0.16; t = 6.09; p < .001). When belief in a just world is 1 SD below the mean, the change is the smallest, at mean levels of belief in a just world, the change is larger compared to 1 SD below average.

Table 7

Moderation effect of sexism on attributions of blame in the denial of injury condition

Moderator variable	Model	b	SE	t	p
	Attributions of blame towards the suspect				
Sexism	Difference pre- to post test	0.26	0.12	2.14	*.036*
	Conditional effect of DoI on attribution of blame at 1 SD below mean sexism	-0.04	0.14	-0.33	.741
	Conditional effect of DoI on attribution of blame at mean Sexism	0.17	0.10	1.69	.095
	Conditional effect of DoI on attribution of blame at 1 SD above mean sexism	0.39	0.14	2.71	**.008**
	Pre-test condition	-0.71	0.12	-5.82	***< .001***
	Post-test condition	-0.97	0.14	-6.90	***< .001***

p > .05, *p <.05*, **p < .01**, *p <.001*.

Finally, the last aspect of moderation analysis determined whether belief in a just world predicted attribution of blame scores separately at the pre-interview and at post-interview. Results show that belief in a just world is significantly negatively associated with attribution of blame at pre-interview scores ($b = -0.38$; $SE = 0.11$; $t = -3.49$; $p < .001$). At post-interview, the association is statistically negatively significant as well ($b = -0.60$; $SE = 0.15$; $t = -3.84$; $p < .001$). This means that people holding beliefs in a just world were more likely to attribute less blame to the suspect. This effect is stronger after people have read denial of the victim arguments. For further details, see table 8.

Denial of injury and belief in a just world. Moderation analysis shows that belief in a just world does not quite predict changes in attribution of blame between pre- and post-interview ($b = 0.19$; $SE = 0.10$; $t = 1.93$ $p = .057$). When belief of a just world is 1 SD below the mean or at mean, the changes in attribution of blame are non-significant. At levels of 1 SD above the mean of belief in a just world, the changes in attribution of blame between pre- and post-test are statistically significant ($b = 0.37$; $SE = 0.14$; $t = 2.55$; $p = .013$), indicating more attribution of blame towards the suspect.

Table 8

Moderation effect of belief in a just world on attributions of blame in the denial of the victim condition

Moderator variable	Model	b	SE	t	p
	Attributions of blame towards the suspect				
Belief in a just world	Difference pre- to post test	0.21	0.13	1.66	.099
	Conditional effect of DoV on attribution of blame at 1 SD below mean belief in a just world	0.62	0.16	3.72	***<.001***
	Conditional effect of DoV on attribution of blame at mean belief in a just world	0.82	0.11	6.96	***<.001***
	Conditional effect of DoV on attribution of blame at 1 SD above mean belief in a just world	1.02	0.16	6.09	***<.001***
	Pre-test condition	-0.38	0.11	-3.49	***<.001***
	Post-test condition	-0.60	0.15	-3.84	***<.001***

p > .05, *p <.05*, **p < .01**, ***p <.001***.

Additionally, it was tested whether belief in a just world is associated with a person's attribution of blame assessment, separately, before and after the interview. Here it was found that the association between belief in a just world and attribution of blame is statistically significantly negative at pre-interview scores ($b = -0.36$; $SE = 0.11$; $t = -3.06$; $p = .003$). After exposure to denial of injury arguments, attribution of blame and belief in a just world are statistically significantly negative as well ($b = -0.56$; $SE = 0.14$; $t = -4.01$; $p < .001$). It can be seen that the effect is larger after exposure to denial of injury arguments. This means that believing in a just world decreases attribution of blame scores even more after reading denial of injury statements. For further details, see table 9.

Suggested sentence

Denial of the victim and sexism. Sexism does statistically non-significantly predict changes between pre- and post-interview scores of suggested sentence ($b = 0.11$; $SE = 0.09$; $t = 1.17$; $p = .242$). At 1 SD above the mean of sexism, the change in score between pre- to post-interview is largest and statistically significantly positive ($b = 0.48$; $SE = 0.11$; $t = 4.32$; $p < .001$). A statistically significant change between pre- to post-test values of suggested sentence was also found at mean levels of sexism and 1 SD below mean levels of sexism. However, as sexism increases, the effect on change in suggested sentence increases from pre- to post-score.

Table 9

Moderation effect of belief in a just world on attributions of blame in the denial of injury condition

Moderator variable	Model	b	SE	t	p
	Attributions of blame towards the suspect				
Belief in a just world	Difference pre- to post test	0.19	0.10	1.93	.057
	Conditional effect of DoI on attribution of blame at 1 SD below mean belief in a just world	-0.02	0.14	-0.19	.849
	Conditional effect of DoI on attribution of blame at mean belief in a just world	0.17	0.10	1.68	.098
	Conditional effect of DoI on attribution of blame at 1 SD above mean belief in a just world	0.37	0.14	2.55	*.013*
	Pre-test condition	-0.36	0.11	-3.06	**.003**
	Post-test condition	-0.56	0.14	-4.01	***< .001***

p > .05, *p <.05*, **p < .01**, *p <.001*.

Additionally, it was tested whether sexism is associated with suggested sentence before and after exposure to denial of the victim arguments. It was found that sexism is statistically non-significantly associated with suggested sentence at pre-interview scores ($b = 0.04$; $SE = 0.15$; $t = 0.25$; $p = .799$). Furthermore, after exposure to denial of the victim arguments, sexism was found to be statistically non-significantly associated with suggested sentence as well ($b = -0.07$; $SE = 0.17$; $t = -0.40$; $p = .683$). For further details, see table 10.

Denial of injury and sexism. Sexism statistically significantly predicts changes in suggested sentence between pre- and post-interview scores ($b = 0.29$; $SE = 0.11$; $t = 2.69$; $p = .008$), indicating that post-test scores were lower. Moderation analysis indicated that changes in suggested sentence scores from pre- to post-interview may have been larger the more sexist the person reading the denial of injury script was, with beta weights increasing from .03 at 1 SD below the mean to .53 at 1 SD above the mean ($p < .001$).

Table 10

Moderation effect of sexism on suggested sentence in the denial of the victim condition

Moderator variable	Model	*b*	*SE*	*t*	*p*
	Suggested sentence				
Sexism	Difference pre- to post test	0.11	0.09	1.17	.242
	Conditional effect of DoV on suggested sentence at 1 SD below mean sexism	0.29	0.11	2.65	**.009**
	Conditional effect of DoV on suggested sentence at mean Sexism	0.38	0.07	4.94	*<.001*
	Conditional effect of DoV on suggested sentence at 1 SD above mean sexism	0.48	0.11	4.32	*<.001*
	Pre-test condition	0.04	0.15	0.25	.799
	Post-test condition	-0.07	0.17	-0.40	.680

p > .05, *p <.05*, **p < .01**, *p <.001*.

Sexism does not predict suggested sentence at pre-interview scores, as this effect was found to be statistically non-significant (*b* = -0.04; *SE* = 0.14; *t* = -0.32; *p* = .748). In contrast, it was found that sexism is negatively statistically significantly associated with post-interview scores of suggested sentence (*b* = -0.34; *SE* = 0.16; *t* = -0.20; *p* = .043). This means that people who are more sexist were more likely to suggest a lower sentence, but only after they had read the suspects denial of the victim arguments. For further details, see table 11.

Denial of the victim and belief in a just world. Moderation analysis showed that belief in a just world statistically significantly predicts changes in suggested sentence between the pre- and post-interview (*b* = 0.18; *SE* = 0.08; *t* = 2.28; *p* = .025), showing that suggested sentence was lower after participants read the interview. A stronger belief in a just world led to a larger difference between pre- and post-interview scores of suggested sentence with beta weights increasing from .21 at 1 SD below the mean to .56 at 1 SD above the mean (*p* < .001).

Table 11

Moderation effect of sexism on suggested sentence in the denial of injury condition

Moderator variable	Model	*b*	*SE*	*t*	*p*
	Suggested sentence				
Sexism	Difference pre- to post test	0.29	0.11	2.69	**.008**
	Conditional effect of DoI on suggested sentence at 1 SD below mean sexism	0.36	0.13	0.27	.780
	Conditional effect of DoI on suggested sentence at mean sexism	0.28	0.09	3.10	**.002**
	Conditional effect of DoI on suggested sentence at 1 SD above mean sexism	0.53	0.13	4.10	***< .001***
	Pre-test condition	-0.04	0.14	-0.32	.748
	Post-test condition	-0.34	0.16	-0.20	*.043*

p > .05, *p <.05*, **p < .01**, *p <.001*.

Belief in a just world does not predict suggested sentence at pre-interview scores, as this effect was found to be statistically non-significant (b = -0.23; SE = 0.13; t = -1.67; p = .098). In contrast, it was found that belief in a just world is negatively statistically significantly associated with post-interview scores of suggested sentence (b = -0.42; SE = 0.14; t = -2.82; p = .005). This means that people holding stronger beliefs in a just world were more likely to suggest a lower sentence, but only after they had read the suspects denial of the victim arguments. For further details, see table 12.

Denial of injury and belief in a just world. Belief in a just world does statistically non-significantly predict the change in suggested sentence from pre- to post-interview scores (b = 0.13; SE = 0.09; t = 1.48; p = .142). At 1 SD below the mean of belief in a just world, the change from pre- to post interview in suggested sentence scores is non-significant. However, at the mean and 1 SD above the mean, the change in suggested sentence scores is statistically significantly larger. The effect is largest at 1 SD above the mean (b = 0.42; SE = 0.13; t = 3.17; p = .002).

Table 12

Moderation effect of belief in a just world on suggested sentence in the denial of the victim condition

Moderator variable	Model	*b*	*SE*	*t*	*p*
	Suggested sentence				
Belief in a just world	Difference pre- to post test	0.18	0.08	2.28	*.025*
	Conditional effect of DoV on suggested sentence at 1 SD below mean belief in a just world	0.21	0.10	1.95	.054
	Conditional effect of DoV on suggested sentence at mean belief in a just world	0.38	0.07	5.06	***<.001***
	Conditional effect of DoV on suggested sentence at 1 SD above mean belief in a just world	0.56	0.10	5.18	***<.001***
	Pre-test condition	-0.23	0.13	-1.67	.098
	Post-test condition	-0.42	0.14	-2.82	**.005**

p > .05, *p <.05*, **p < .01**, *p <.001*.

The last aspect of the moderation analysis determined whether belief in a just world predicted suggested sentence at the pre- and the post-interview. At pre-interview, the association between belief in a just world and suggested sentence is non-significant (b = -0.14; SE = 0.12; t = -1.18; p = .240). At post-interview, the association is statistically significantly negative (b = -0.28; SE = 0.13; t = -2.04; p = .044). This means that participants who hold stronger beliefs in a just world were more likely to suggest a lower sentence, but only after exposure to denial of injury arguments. For further details, see table 13.

Seriousness of the behaviour

Denial of the victim and sexism. Analysis showed that sexism statistically significantly predicted changes in perceived seriousness of the behaviour between pre- and post-interview scores (b = 0.34; SE = 0.15; t = 2.26; p = .026), showing that seriousness of the behaviour was judged as less serious after participants read the interview. Furthermore, results indicate that changes in perceived seriousness of the behaviour scores may have been larger, the more sexist a person is with beta weighs increasing from 1 SD below the mean to 1 SD above the mean. At levels of 1 SD above the mean of sexism, the changes in perceived seriousness of the behaviour are the largest (b = 0.94; SE = 0.17; t = 5.43; p < .001).

Table 13

Moderation effect of belief in a just world on suggested sentence in the denial of injury condition

Moderator variable	Model	b	SE	t	p
	Suggested sentence				
Belief in a just world	Difference pre- to post test	0.13	0.09	1.48	.142
	Conditional effect of DoI on suggested sentence at 1 SD below mean belief in a just world	0.14	0.13	1.07	.286
	Conditional effect of DoI on suggested sentence at mean belief in a just world	0.28	0.09	3.01	**.003**
	Conditional effect of DoI on suggested sentence at 1 SD above mean belief in a just world	0.42	0.13	3.17	**.002**
	Pre-test condition	-0.14	0.12	-1.18	.240
	Post-test condition	-0.28	0.13	-2.04	*.044*

p > .05, *p <.05*, **p < .01**, *p <.001*.

Additionally, it was found that sexism is statistically significantly negatively associated with perceived seriousness of the behaviour before the interview (b = -0.51; SE = 0.12; t = -4.10; p < .001). Sexism is also statistically significantly negatively associated with perceived seriousness of the behaviour after the interview took place (b = -0.85; SE = 0.15; t = -5.38; p < .001). The effect of sexism is larger after participants were exposed to denial of the victim arguments. For further details, see table 14.

Denial of injury and sexism. Sexism does statistically non-significantly predict changes in perceived seriousness of the behaviour between pre- to post-interview scores (b = 0.18; SE = 0.13; t = 1.39; p = .168). However, results suggest that higher levels of sexism are associated with a larger change in scores of perceived seriousness of the behaviour with beta weighs increasing from 1 SD below the mean to 1 SD above the mean. Changes in scores of perceived seriousness of the behaviour from pre- to post interview are largest and statistically significant at 1 SD above the mean (b = 0.35; SE = 0.15; t = 2.29; p = .025).

Sexism is statistically significantly negatively associated with perceived seriousness of the behaviour before (b = -0.66; SE = 0.12; t = -5.35; p < .001) and after the interview took place (b = -0.85; SE = 0.13; t = -6.23; p < .001). However, it can be seen that the effect of sexism is stronger at post-interviews values, after the participant has read denial of injury arguments. For further details, see table 15.

Table 14

Moderation effect of sexism on perceived seriousness in the denial of the victim condition

Moderator variable	Model	b	SE	t	p
	Perceived seriousness of the behaviour				
Sexism	Difference pre- to post test	0.34	0.15	2.26	*.026*
	Conditional effect of DoV on perceived seriousness at 1 SD below mean sexism	0.38	0.17	2.21	*.030*
	Conditional effect of DoV on perceived seriousness at mean sexism	0.66	0.12	5.42	***<.001***
	Conditional effect of DoV on perceived seriousness at 1 SD above mean sexism	0.94	0.17	5.43	***<.001***
	Pre-test condition	-0.51	0.12	-4.10	***<.001***
	Post-test condition	-0.85	0.15	-5.38	***<.001***

p > .05, *p <.05*, **p < .01**, *p <.001*.

Table 15

Moderation effect of sexism on perceived seriousness in the denial of injury condition

Moderator variable	Model	b	SE	t	p
	Perceived seriousness of the behaviour				
Sexism	Difference pre- to post test	0.18	0.13	1.39	.168
	Conditional effect of DoI on perceived seriousness at 1 SD below mean sexism	0.04	0.15	0.31	.753
	Conditional effect of DoI on perceived seriousness at mean sexism	0.35	0.11	1.85	.069
	Conditional effect of DoI on perceived seriousness at 1 SD above mean sexism	0.20	0.15	2.29	.025
	Pre-test condition	-0.66	0.12	-5.35	***<.001***
	Post-test condition	-0.85	0.13	-6.23	***<.001***

p > .05, *p <.05*, **p < .01**, *p <.001*.

Denial of the victim and belief in a just world. Belief in a just world does not predict changes in perceived seriousness of the behaviour between pre- and post-interview scores ($b = 0.12$; $SE = 0.13$; $t = 0.92$; $p = .35$). At levels of 1 SD above the mean of belief in a just world, the change in perceived seriousness of the behaviour scores is largest ($b = 0.78$; $SE = 0.17$; $t = 4.36$; $p < .001$).

Before the interview, belief in a just world is statistically significantly negatively associated with perceived seriousness of the behaviour judgements ($b = -0.24$; $SE = 0.12$; $t = -2.01$; $p = .048$). After having read the interview script, belief in a just world is negatively statistically significantly associated with perceived seriousness of the behaviour judgements as well ($b = -0.37$; $SE = 0.16$; $t = -2.27$; $p = .026$). The effect of belief in a just world on perceived seriousness of the behaviour is larger after participants have read denial of the victim arguments. For further details, see table 16.

Denial of injury and belief in a just world. Belief in a just world does not predict changes in perceived seriousness of the behaviour between pre- and post-interview judgements ($b = 0.03$; $SE = 0.11$; $t = 0.31$; $p = .75$). At levels of 1 SD below the mean, at the mean and 1 SD above the mean of belief in a just world, the change in perceived seriousness of the behaviour scores is not statistically significantly associated with a participant's belief in a just world.

Table 16

Moderation effect of belief in a just world on perceived seriousness in the denial of the victim condition

Moderator variable	Model	b	SE	t	p
	Perceived seriousness of the behaviour				
Belief in a just world	Difference pre- to post test	0.12	0.13	0.92	.359
	Conditional effect of DoV on perceived seriousness at 1 SD below mean belief in a just world	0.54	0.17	3.05	**.003**
	Conditional effect of DoV on perceived seriousness at mean belief in a just world	0.66	0.12	5.26	***<.001***
	Conditional effect of DoV on perceived seriousness at 1 SD above mean belief in a just world	0.78	0.17	4.36	***<.001***
	Pre-test condition	-0.24	0.12	-2.01	*.048*
	Post-test condition	-0.37	0.16	-2.27	*.026*

p > .05, *p <.05*, **p < .01**, *p <.001*.

Table 17

Moderation effect of belief in a just world on perceived seriousness in the denial of injury condition

Moderator variable	Model	b	SE	t	p
	Perceived seriousness of the behaviour				
Belief in a just world	Difference pre- to post test	0.03	0.11	0.31	.753
	Conditional effect of DoI on perceived seriousness at 1 SD below mean belief in a just world	0.16	0.15	1.06	.293
	Conditional effect of DoI on perceived seriousness at mean belief in a just world	0.20	0.11	1.82	.073
	Conditional effect of DoI on perceived seriousness at 1 SD above mean belief in a just world	0.24	0.15	1.50	.136
	Pre-test condition	-0.52	0.10	-4.87	***< .001***
	Post-test condition	-0.55	0.12	-4.37	***< .001***

p > .05, *p <.05*, **p < .01**, ***p <.001***.

The final aspect of moderation analyses determined whether belief in a just world predicted perceived seriousness of the behaviour scores separately at pre- and post-interview. There is an association between belief in a just world and perceived seriousness before the interview took place (b = -0.52; SE = 0.10; t = -4.87; p < .001), as well as after the interview took place (b = -0.55; SE = 0.12; t = -4.37; p < .001). The effect of belief in a just world on perceived seriousness of the behaviour scores is slightly larger after participants had read denial of injury claims made by the suspect. For further details, see table 17.

Discussion

This study aimed at identifying whether denial of injury or denial of the victim arguments impact an observer's judgement of guilt of the suspect, attribution of blame to the suspect, perceived seriousness of the behaviour, and suggested sentence. Furthermore, it was tested whether the mediator's sexism and belief in a just world impact an individual's judgement of denial of injury or denial of the victim arguments presented by the suspect. Interestingly, denial of the victim arguments had no direct effect on guilt while denial of injury arguments increased perceived guilt of the suspect. In contrast, both denial of the victim and denial of injury arguments reduced attributions of blame, perceived seriousness of the behaviour, and suggested sentence. Generally, sexism and belief in a just world

strengthened the effects of denial of the victim and denial of injury arguments. Additionally, denial of the victim arguments reduced guilt when participants held higher sexist beliefs, while denial of injury arguments only increased perceived guilt when people scored particularly low on sexism.

Summary of results

In the present study, attribution of blame scores significantly decreased from pre- to post-test measures in the denial of the victim condition, while attribution of blame values in the denial of injury condition were not significantly different from another. Denial of the victim arguments specifically aim at changing attributions of blame (Watson et al., 2021), which is why it is not surprising that this effect was found in this study as well. This result is in line with the findings of Wüller (2021) in a similar scenario. However, denial of injury arguments were not effective in changing people's attribution of blame towards the suspect.

In both scenarios, the denial of the victim and denial of injury condition, pre- and post-interview scores were significantly different from another in suggested sentence and perceived seriousness of the behaviour. This indicates that the arguments made by the suspect led to a change in suggested sentence and perceived seriousness of the behaviour. Denial of injury arguments specifically aim at mitigating the harm that was done, therefore, decreasing perceived seriousness of the behaviour (Copes & Deitzer, 2015). A study by Vermeulen (2023) found that perceived seriousness and suggested sentence were associated with another, indicating that perceived seriousness of the behaviour influences suggested sentence. The present study was able to replicate this association, however, in both cases, the correlation is small. This hints at the fact that suggested sentence is influenced by many different factors other than seriousness of the behaviour.

It was hypothesized that people will perceive the suspect to be less guilty when denial of the victim or denial of injury arguments were used. However, denial of the victim arguments had no direct effect on guilt. Nonetheless, when participants held higher sexist beliefs, denial of the victim arguments reduced guilt judgement of the suspect. This shows that denial of the victim arguments are only effective in changing guilt judgement when the receiver is biased in some way. Further, denial of injury arguments led to an increase of perceived guilt of the suspect. Yet, these arguments only increased perceived guilt when people scored low on sexism.

Attribution of blame as the key factor in judgement

Attribution of blame is the only dependent variable in which all combinations, denial of the victim or denial of injury, sexism as well as belief in a just world were associated with

less attribution of blame to the suspect. Generally, holding sexist beliefs or believing in a just world reduced attribution of blame to the suspect already before participants read the interview script. Holding sexist beliefs is likely to influence whether people blame the victim for encouraging the perpetrators behaviour (De Judicibus & McCabe, 2001). As explained above, hearing denial of the victim arguments may trigger sexist beliefs of blaming the victim as denial of the victim arguments are designed to follow the same line of argumentation. This might also be a reason why higher sexism leads to less attribution of blame to the suspect already before the interview. Similarly, people holding beliefs in a just world are more likely to believe that the victim got what they deserved and, by that, shift attributions away from the suspect, as they think that there must be a good reason why the victim deserved this (Dalbert, 2009; Hafer & Sutton, 2016).

The fact that attribution of blame to the suspect is reduced by all other variables is in line with attribution theory. It is interesting that attributions of blame were reduced in all scenarios because attribution of blame correlates with the post test of guilt, perceived seriousness of the behaviour (pre- and post-test) and the post-test of suggested sentence. This means that denial of injury and denial of the victim arguments do not influence guilt, suggested sentence, and perceived seriousness of the behaviour in every setting, but it does so with attributions of blame, whether someone is already biased or not. Further, the correlations of attribution of blame indicate that less attribution of blame towards the suspect leads to less reduced guilt, less suggested sentence, and less perceived seriousness of the behaviour. This is underlined by the fact that guilt is not influenced by denial of the victim arguments and is affected only when participants were biased in the first place. Further, attribution theory also proposes that people can objectively agree on the fact that someone is guilty but may hold differing amounts of attribution of blame to that person. This explains why guilt stayed relatively stable and does not change in unbiased participants, but attributions of blame are affected. Attribution of blame is therefore the most important factor in investigative interviews as it can be influenced by denial of the victim and denial of the injury arguments and has great impact on other variables such as suggested sentence, perceived guilt, and seriousness of the behaviour.

Furthermore, denial of injury and denial of the victim arguments do not impact guilt judgement, this may hint at the fact that mainly soft factors are influenced by these arguments. Perceived seriousness and attribution of blame are softer and can be assessed on a scale from low to high, whereas the question for someone's factual guilt is more of a hard "yes" or "no"

answer as it is more absolute. This can also explain why guilt was less affected than the other variables.

This study's findings suggest that denial of the victim and denial of injury arguments are generally very effective in changing individual assessments of attribution of blame, perceived seriousness of the behaviour, and suggested sentence, especially when people hold sexist or belief in a just world beliefs. However, attributions of blame towards the suspect are always reduced when denial of injury or denial of the victim arguments are given, independently of someone's individual biases. Furthermore, attribution of blame is likely to influence the other variables as well, which makes everyone susceptible to denial of injury or denial of the victim arguments.

Implications for practice and future research

Generally, controlling and coercive behaviour is the most common and the most devastating from of abuse as it is the best predictor for homicide within an intimate partner relationship in both directions (Stark, 2013). However, suspects in cases of control and coercion may, whether knowingly or unknowingly, manipulate the interviewer with denial of the victim or denial of injury techniques. This paper shows that these techniques are often effective in doing so, which could potentially transfer to real life situations such as police interrogations.

Sleath and Bull (2012) found that police officers can hold biases on different matters such as rape as well as every other individual. Relying on stereotypical beliefs in legal decision making was also demonstrated by Dick (2020) who showed that judges rely on sexist stereotypes when making decisions. The prevalence of sexist attitudes and their impact in decision making sparks concern in relation to this study's findings that denial of the victim and denial of injury arguments are more effective when people hold sexist beliefs. In practice, this can lead to decision making in favour of the perpetrator rather than the victim. The same can be said about beliefs in a just world because a relationship between belief in a just world and victim blaming was found (Sleath & Bull, 2012). This shows that beliefs in a just world and sexist beliefs are in fact changing perceptions of police officers, making cases of control and coercion even more difficult to prove than they already are.

The combination of Sleath & Bulls findings and this study's findings have a great impact in everyday lives of victims as police officers and legal representatives have a unique role in enabling victims to get their rightful justice. Police officers react to denial of the victim and denial of injury arguments in a way that is detrimental to the alleged victims. If police officers hold beliefs in a just world or sexist beliefs, these arguments are even more effective,

making it even harder for the victims to achieve their abuser's prosecution. Hence, action is needed. Here, awareness is the first step to recognizing these techniques and being able to minimize its impact. Further, recognizing manipulation techniques such as denial of the victim or injury arguments in cases of control and coercion, should become part of police officers training. However, Sleath & Bull (2012) did not find an effect of specialist training for police officers regarding levels of victim blaming. Possibly, the specific trainings they looked at were not successful in reducing victim blaming but may be successful in reducing other cognitive biases. Charman et al. (2019) present a number of techniques that could be integrated into specialist training to be able to overcome biases during decision making in cases of control and coercion. One way that has been proven to be effective in criminal cases was to train people to consider why the opposite site would have a better case (Charman et al., 2019). Generally, training people to constantly considering alternative interpretations led to less biases (Charman et al., 2019). Being able to reduce cognitive biases could lead to fair decision making in legal situations (Dick, 2020). One aspect that could be implemented into this type of training could be more intense training in practice interrogation interviews. Soon to be police officers should train with more real life interrogation settings while, at the same time, getting to know the theory and working mechanisms of denial of injury and denial of the victim arguments in combination with personal biases as training in real life settings can be effective in reducing biases (Page, 2007).

Generally, findings about the effectiveness of trainings are not unambiguously. However, the difference between trained interrogation officers and non-trained interrogators has been shown in a recent study (Hudepohl, 2023) indicating that training indeed can be effective. Combining this finding with the findings from the present study calls for a training approach that specifically targets reducing the impact of denial of the victim and denial of injury arguments on attribution of blame first.

Limitations

Firstly, this study's participants were mainly young students without, most likely, any training in interrogation techniques. This may make the results less generalizable to experts as a recent study showed that there is a difference between a non-expert and an expert sample in assessing guilt of a suspect (Hudepohl, 2023). Therefore, it can be assumed that the effects found in this study would be weaker in a group of police officers. However, Sleath and Bull (2012) showed that police officers also hold biases, such as rape myth acceptance and that these biases lead to increased victim blaming in police officers as well. This fact makes it likely that similar effects can be found in police officers for guilt judgement, attribution of

blame to the suspect, suggested sentence, and perceived seriousness of the behaviour when confronted with denial of the victim or denial of injury arguments.

Secondly, controlling and coercive behaviour might be something that is not well known to many people. This may lead to a less informed judgement of suggested sentence, perceived seriousness of the behaviour, or guilt as they are more difficult to assess with less knowledge about the matter. However, to counteract this issue, participants were given a definition of controlling and coercive behaviour to help them in making a more informed decision. Providing a definition certainly helps participants in decision making but it will still be difficult to recall all facts from the definition after reading the interview script. Implementing a fact check test at the end where questions about controlling and coercive behaviour are asked could help filter out the less informed answers.

Conclusion

Generally, denial of the victim and denial of injury arguments are effective in decreasing people's attributions of blame towards the victim, suggested sentence, and perceived seriousness of the behaviour, but not in absolute guilt. This effect is strengthened when people hold sexist or belief in a just world beliefs. In the case of guilt judgement, denial of the victim arguments are effective for people holding biases such as sexist or belief in a just world beliefs only. Furthermore, attribution of blame is the key variable that is influenced by denial of injury and denial of the victim arguments, regardless of a person's bias. These findings can have an impact in everyday lives of victims as police officers and legal representatives have a unique role in enabling victims to get their rightful justice. Police officers react to denial of the victim and denial of injury arguments in a way that is detrimental to the alleged victims. These findings are alarming if they can be replicated in expert samples as well. If police officers hold beliefs in a just world or sexist beliefs, Denial of injury and denial of the victim arguments are even more effective, making it harder for the victims to achieve their abuser's prosecution. Therefore, developing effective anti-bias training is one of the major tasks for police forces to increase prosecution of the perpetrators.

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Appendix A

On 07/01/2022 the police received a phone call from a Miss Miller. Miss Miller made a number of allegations against her partner, Mr Cooper.

Here allegations were that Mr Cooper:

- Demands access to her phone and text messages
- Prevents her from leaving the house without his company or explicit permission
- Tells her where she can go and for how long in her free time
- Sends persistent and unkind text messages after arguments and whenever she is coming home late
- Regularly accuses her of infidelity
- Followed her to a social gathering with friends, a book club, and pushed his way inside her friend's home to demand she returned home with him
- Demands she shares her location with him via phone apps when she is not with him

Miss Miller claims that these behaviours meet the definition of being Controlling and Coercive in an intimate relationship. The accusations are subject to investigation and have not been confirmed.

Appendix B

Denial of injury

Police interviewer: Hello, my name is detective constable Johnson, I will be conducting an interview with you today. So, you do not have to say anything, but it may harm your defence if you do not mention, when questioned, something which you later rely on in court. Anything you do say may be given in evidence. Would you like me to explain the caution?

Mr Cooper: 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 Cooper: Er, yeah, I understand that.

Police interviewer: Good stuff. So, you've been arrested on an allegation of controlling and coercive behaviour against your partner, Mr Cooper. This is alleged to have happened numerous times over the course of the relationship, which to my understanding is the past year. So, do you want to start from the basics and just tell me about the relationship?

Mr Cooper: We have been going out for just over a year and it was really good at the start. I'd say it was good for the first four months. She started to join this book club and she's going there regularly now. I started to think that she might be seeing someone else. I've been asking her about it of course, but I don't think that the big deal she's making it out to be. I definitely don't think our problems are so bad we need to chatting about it in a police interview.

Police interviewer: So, what were your reasons for the suspicion?

Mr Cooper: I don't see why what I'm doing is anything beyond normal to be honest. Wouldn't anyone want to know what their partner was doing and who they were doing it with?

Police interviewer: Did you two argue a lot during the relationship?

Mr Cooper: Definitely not more than any normal couple. We had our disagreements of course but I don't think it's right that she's calling the police because I don't like her hanging out with other men at some book club.

Police interviewer: Can you explain why Miss Miller is saying that you control her free time, such as where she can go and for how long?

Mr Cooper: Of course, I want to know where she is going and who she is going to hang out with. That's not a big issue, you would do the same in my situation, that is normal in any relationship. So yes, I ask that she discusses what she does with me but I don't think that means she gets to say I'm controlling her.

Police interviewer: OK so now I know a bit more about the relationship. I think we should

move on to the incident that happened on the 7th of January 2022, when you went to Miss Miller's book club. Please explain in your own words what happened on the evening of that date.

Mr Cooper: The longer she was at this supposed club the more suspicious I got. So when she was there I tried to call and texted her multiple times but I couldn't get through, but I always have her use that share location thing so I know where she is. I could just feel that there is something off, so I decided to drive to this location. The place I pulled up at did not look like there was a book club inside, it was just some house. By that time, it was already around 9:30pm and I'd asked her to be home by 9 so I thought I should check on her. When she answered the door, she looked really flustered and embarrassed and I knew she didn't want to let me in, so I nudged her to the side so I could see who was there. I asked her a couple of times "where is he, where is he?" and she was just sitting on the ground crying which was a bit dramatic when I'm there checking up on her. She said I had hurt her. But that's bullshit, I know she's saying I shoved her into the wall, but I really just moved her out the way. She didn't even land hard on the ground and I didn't use too much strength when pushing her. Then we had a bit of an argument and she's making out I hurt her arm, but we've had play fights more violent than what I did that night. Honestly this is all being blown out of proportion.

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

Mr Cooper: I don't even know why she called the police. I mean we had a normal argument about her not coming home when she said she would or letting me know she was okay and she was definitely not hurt. It's all a bit of drama over nothing if you ask me.

Police interviewer: Can you tell me about any threatening language that might have been used during the argument?

Mr Cooper: I can't remember exactly what I said but if you're having an argument you do say things you regret don't you? You know how it is, but it doesn't mean I'm abusing her because I got annoyed with her. You're allowed to have arguments in a relationship aren't you? This is all too much for what actually happened, 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 3:43 pm.

Appendix C

Denial of victim

The denial of victim transcript is as follows:

Police interviewer: Hello, my name is detective constable Johnson, I will be conducting an interview with you today. So, you do not have to say anything, but it may harm your defence if you do not mention, when questioned, something which you later rely on in court. Anything you do say may be given in evidence. Would you like me to explain the caution?

Mr Cooper: 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 Cooper: Er, yeah, I understand that.

Police interviewer: Good stuff. So, you've been arrested on an allegation of controlling and coercive behaviour against you partner, Mr Cooper. This is alleged to have happened numerous times over the course of the relationship, which to my understanding is the past year. So, do you want to start from the basics and just tell me about the relationship?

Mr Cooper: We have been going out for just over a year and it was really good at the start. I'd say it was good for the first four months. The only problem is that she's not necessarily the most trustworthy person and lately she is acting very weird. She started to join this book club. It's almost like her new obsession because she's going there quite regularly now. Some nights I barely see her because of this club. I feel like this made me start to think that she might be like seeing someone else again. There were a few things that made me think that actually. And this is when the arguments started.

Police interviewer: So, what were your reasons for the suspicion?

Mr Cooper: Different things. I mean she never used to read a single book in the past. And let's be honest, everyone who knows her knows that she doesn't read books. She'd rather be chatting to other men on social media all the time. Then she would like get really dressed up and do her hair and all that just to go there. Her little skirt barely even covered her up. 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 book club? She couldn't have made it more obvious that something else is going on and I think we both can see that.

Police interviewer: Did you two argue a lot
during the relationship?

Mr Cooper: Yeah, we do and also did in the past because my girlfriend has a hard time understanding what it means to be loyal in a relationship. This was also when our bigger

fights started. I've had to show her how relationships should actually work but she doesn't care and shows no respect to me. Trust me when I say that she thinks she's better than me and only has eyes for herself and other men and this behaviour doesn't help the arguments once she gets going.

Police interviewer: Can you explain why Miss Miller is saying that you control her free time, such as where she can go and for how long?

Mr Cooper: Look, she is a cheater. Who isn't going to want to know what their girlfriend is up to when you know that they can't be trusted to not sleep around. After all of this bullshit that I had to go through before I simply asked her to not be gone for longer than an hour and that I would want her to be back on time and not be late. She freaked out but I just need to be able to trust her. So of course, I want to know where she is going and who she is going to hang out with.

Police interviewer: OK so now I know a bit more about the relationship. I think we should move on to the incident that happened on the 7th of January 2022, when you went to Miss Miller's book club. Please explain in your own words what happened on the evening of that date.

Mr Cooper: Like I said earlier, she's been getting all dressed up recently and, on that night, she did it again. The longer she was at this supposed club the more suspicious I got. She wanted to be back at 9pm and she even promised it to me, but she was not home on time. I tried to call and texted her multiple times, but she wouldn't pick up, so I decided to check her location, because I ask her to always share her location with me so I can be sure she's not going somewhere she shouldn't be again. I could just feel that there is something off, so I decided to drive to this location and to catch her in the act. The place I pulled up at did not look like there was a book club inside, it was just some house. By that time, it was already 9:30pm and my thoughts were all over the place because I knew she must be cheating on me again. I was annoyed and couldn't wait any longer, so I just went in there. When she answered the door, she looked really flustered and embarrassed and I knew she didn't want to let me in, so I just sort of pushed my way in. I mean I wasn't acting normal by now right because there's so much off about this situation and how she's behaving. I kept asking "where is he, where is he?" and she was just standing there speechless which only made me more annoyed because she wouldn't even explain herself. Then we had an argument and one thing I noticed while standing there was that there were also other people in this house including some men. She just keeps lying and lying to me as she promised me before that there weren't any men in this club and 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 Cooper: I don't even know why she called the police. I mean she's the one dressing slutty and lying about meeting other men behind my back. Like I said earlier she is acting totally inappropriately for someone in a relationship and this whole book club thing is just the tip of the iceberg. I don't know what she's told you, but she is a very good actress, and you can't believe a word she says.

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

Mr Cooper: I can't remember exactly what I said once she started going off at me. Who wouldn't be angry when their girlfriend is going out to secretly meet men in other people's houses? You know how it is, I reckon we both probably said quite bad stuff but I was only responding to what she said to me and I was only angry because of what she did anyway. She's always getting into trouble and dragging me into it. Like I said it's all a bit of a blur. This is actually annoying me talking about it all again, 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 3:43 pm.