Non-Offending Partners of Those who Have Sexually Offended:

Relationship Decision-Making and Others' Attitudes

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To my participants, who have shown immense vulnerability in speaking to me, and have trusted me with their stories. I am in awe of your candour and honesty, and I sincerely hope that this work does you justice.

DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I declare that this thesis has been composed by myself, that the research reported within this work is my own, and that it has not been submitted for a degree at any other institution.

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ABSTRACT

Because of their association with someone who has sexually offended, non-offending partners of those who have committed a sexual offence are severely affected by courtesy stigma. Whilst traditional streams of research have emphasised the importance of non-offending partners for desistance and safeguarding, and emerging literature has highlighted the traumatic consequences of stigmatisation, researchers and practitioners have thus far neglected this population. Specifically, the impact of the offence on their relationship with the person who has offended, and their role in the relationship decision-making process have been ignored.

To extend current knowledge of this understudied population, this thesis reports four studies that aimed to explore the experiences of non-offending partners, especially regarding their relationship decision-making. Using qualitative (i.e., Grounded Theory, content analysis) and quantitative (i.e., regression analysis, factor analysis) methods, this research assessed (a) the relationship decision-making process, (b) factors predicting relationship continuation, (c) non-offending partners' reasoning for their relationship decision, and (d) attitudes towards non-offending partners and their relationship decision.

Altogether, the findings suggest that, whilst relationship breakdown after an offence is common and the relationship decision is heavily influenced by the specific type of offence committed by their partner, the multitude of offence-related and -unrelated reasons for this decision mirror the heterogeneity of non-offending partners as a population. Here, one factor commonly influencing the relationship decision is others' attitudes towards the non-offending partner and their decision, which the final study of this thesis revealed as affecting relationship decision-making cyclically: Non-offending partners are not only influenced in their relationship decision by others' attitudes, but their relationship decision also impacts others' perceptions of them. These findings are discussed, alongside the limitations of this research, in light of their important theoretical and practical implications.

IMPACT OF COVID-19

Given the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on my initial research plans, I had to make some amendments to the research presented within this thesis. Specifically, for Study One, I had originally planned to recruit participants through leafletting and newspaper advertisements in England. However, from the 26th of March 2020 (6 months after the beginning of my doctoral studies) I was unable to use these recruitment methods because of the nation-wide lockdowns facilitated by The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020 (SI 2020/350). Subsequently, I decided to continue recruitment for Study One through Prolific and social media. This led to a significant negative financial impact due to the fees charged by Prolific, as well as a temporal impact due to having to rethink the recruitment strategy, "filter out" participants after the pre-screening, and liaising with Prolific about restraints regarding the use of their platform for the study's purposes. To avoid further negative impact on the thesis and an even more severe delay to its completion, I decided to begin work on Studies Two and Three while still completing the data analysis for Study One. Specifically, the preregistrations for Studies Two and Three were completed prior to the completion of the data analysis of Study One. Thus, there were some deviations from the pre-registrations which enabled me to account for and assess the findings of Study One in the subsequent studies. Any such deviations from the pre-registrations are noted and explained in the footnotes of the relevant chapters (Chapters 4 and 5).

PUBLICATIONS

Data and literature from this thesis have been reported in the following journal article:

Kamitz, L. C., & Gannon, T. A. (2023). A grounded theory model of relationship decision-making in non-offending partners of individuals accused of sexual offending. *Sexual Abuse*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1177/1079063223115907

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Kamitz, L. C. (2023, March 16 – 18). *A grounded theory model of relationship decision-making in non-offending partners of individuals accused of sexual offending* [Paper presentation]. Annual Conference of the American Psychology-Law Society (AP-LS), Philadelphia, PA, US.

Kamitz, L. C. (2022, September 21 – 24). *A grounded theory model of relationship continuation in non-offending partners of individuals accused of sexual offending* [Paper presentation]. 22nd Annual Conference of the European Society of Criminology (ESC), Málaga, Spain.

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CONVENTIONS USED IN THIS THESIS

Presentation of Studies

All studies within this thesis are numbered independently of the chapter in which they appear.

Presentation of Tables and Figures

Tables and figures appear at the end of the paragraph they are first cited in. All tables and figures are numbered in terms of the chapter in which they appear. They are labelled as figure or table *x.y*. Here, *x* refers to the chapter number, while *y* refers to the order the figure or table is presented in within the chapter.

Abbreviations

Abbreviations are described within the text.

Footnotes

Footnotes appear at the end of a page. Numbering continues independently of and across chapters.

Supplementary Materials

All supplementary materials referenced throughout this thesis can be found online (https://osf.io/hkmbx/?view_only=490b921dd5de4c67b5315c16f36e7390). Information included in the supplementary materials is not required for full comprehension of the studies in this thesis.

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CHAPTER 1 – TERMINOLOGY & PAST PERSPECTIVES

Individuals who have sexually offended are viewed by society as the worst of the worst (Quinn et al., 2004). Fuelled by stereotypes perpetuated by the media (Malinen et al., 2013), the public displays extremely negative emotional reactions to the *sex offender* label and incorrectly assumes individuals who have sexually offended to be more resistant to treatment and more dangerous than individuals who have offended in other ways (e.g., Olver & Barlow, 2010; Rogers & Ferguson, 2011; Rothwell et al., 2021; Willis et al., 2010). Such stigmatisation has been linked to negative outcomes, so-called collateral consequences (Burton et al., 1987), including loss of employment, housing issues (Tewksbury, 2005), depression (Brennan et al., 2018), self-harm, and suicide (Jeglic et al., 2013; Stinson & Gonsalves, 2014).

Through their association with someone who has sexually offended, non-offending partners of individuals who have committed sexual offences (hereafter referred to as *non-offending partners*) are one of the groups most severely affected by so-called courtesy stigma, a stigma by association (Duncan et al., 2020). As a result of such stigma, non-offending partners experience collateral consequences similar to those experienced by people who have offended (Farkas & Miller, 2007). Yet, research investigating non-offending partners has largely focused on their perceived “utility” for decreasing their partner’s recidivism risk (e.g., McAlinden et al., 2017) and safeguarding their children (Azzopardi et al., 2018). Therefore, whilst emerging streams of literature are beginning to centre the voices of non-offending partners (e.g., Armitage et al., 2023; Duncan et al., 2022; Kavanagh et al., 2022), knowledge about their experiences and the consequences of the offending for their relationships is still extremely limited (Iffland et al., 2016).

To provide the necessary background information required to fully understand the context the work in this thesis is situated in, the following two chapters introduce the reader to key terminology and literature concerning non-offending partners. In this chapter I first highlight some terminology used throughout this thesis before offering an introduction to

historical streams of research investigating non-offending partners, which were primarily focused on desistance and safeguarding, while also considering the impact this may have on treatment and for clinicians working with those who have sexually offended.

Terminology

Sexual Offending

Given that the majority of the research reported on in this thesis has been conducted with UK-based participants, in the context of this work, *sexual offending* is defined in accordance with the UK legal framework. According to the Crown Prosecution Service, a sexual offence is any criminal act of a sexual nature. These are non-consensual offences, including offences against children and offences aimed at exploiting the victim for a sexual purpose. Any of these could be committed either in-person or online (Crown Prosecution Service, n.d.). In UK legislation, such offences are encompassed within the Sexual Offences Act 2003, the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015, as well as the Protection of Children Act 1978 (Crown Prosecution Service, 2022b). Where appropriate in this thesis, the specific UK legal definitions for any discussed offences have been included.

Non-Offending Partners

In the context of this work, a *non-offending partner* is anyone who is currently in a relationship with someone who has committed one or more sexual offences. Whilst, generally speaking, non-offending partners may find out about an offence at any point before or during their relationship, for the first three studies of this thesis, which focus on relationship decision-making after finding out about a partner's offence, participants had to have learned of offence accusations while in the relationship. This is further elaborated upon, where relevant, in-text. Additionally, for the purpose of this thesis, a non-offending partner is not the sole victim of their partner's offending behaviour, nor are they in any way involved in the perpetration of their partner's offence. For instance, a non-offending partner may experience sexual intimate partner violence. However, their partner (the person who has offended) must have also committed a sexual offence against at least one third party for

the person in the relationship with someone who has offended to be considered a non-offending partner. Lastly, given the underreporting of sexual offences (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Statistics, 2016) and the vast number of sexual offences that do not lead to conviction (Crown Prosecution Service, 2022a), I have also included non-offending partners of those who have been accused, rather than convicted, of sexual offending, in research, where appropriate. Where this has been the case, the reasoning behind this decision has been provided in-text.

Research investigating the experiences of non-offending partners has frequently used the acronym *NOPs* to refer to this population (e.g., Duncan et al., 2022; Shannon et al., 2013). Despite the fact that this may increase ease of reading, I will refrain from using this term, as any such acronym of a person-first descriptor may inadvertently label, and thus further stigmatise, non-offending partners.

Past Perspectives: On Using Non-Offending Partners for the Benefit of Others

Historically, research and theory have not investigated the experiences of non-offending partners themselves but have rather focused on the "usefulness" they could have for preventing their partner's future offending, and for safeguarding children in the case of non-offending mothers.

Relationships, Intimacy, and the Desistance Process

Desistance is a continued abstinence from offending which has become synonymous with the gradual development that allows individuals to cease offending and supports their non-offending (Laub & Sampson, 2001; Weaver, 2019). Robust and longstanding criminological research has demonstrated that social bonds are crucial to an individual's desistance (Doherty, 2006; W. L. Johnson & Giordano, 2020; Metcalfe et al., 2019; Sampson et al., 2006; Sampson & Laub, 1990). In this context, the evidence for a link between desistance and intimate relationships is especially strong (DeShay & Vieraitis, 2020; King et al., 2007; Walker et al., 2013). Early studies coined this the "marriage effect", but more recent research has also found support for a link between desistance and less

formal monogamous relationships in line with changing social norms (Abeling-Judge, 2018; Barr & Simons, 2015; Seffrin, 2017). Whilst some argue that this relationship may be less powerful than that between desistance and marriage, specifically (Chen & Jaffee, 2018; Gottlieb & Sugie, 2019), a link between desistance and intimate relationships has nevertheless been observed across genders (DiPietro et al., 2018; Rodermond et al., 2016), ethnicities (Craig, 2015; DiPietro et al., 2018; W. L. Johnson & Giordano, 2020) socio-economic backgrounds (Bersani et al., 2008), and different types of offending (Horning et al., 2019; Rayburn & Wright, 2018).

In line with social control (Hirschi, 1969) and strain theories of desistance (Barr & Simons, 2015; Weaver, 2019), Sampson and colleagues (2006) outlined four processes which may underly the relationship-desistance link, based on themes articulated by desisters: First, social ties associated with relationships are hypothesised to create interdependent systems of obligation and support which may increase the cost of criminal actions and their possible negative outcomes (DeShay & Vieraitis, 2020; Hirschi, 1969; Sampson & Laub, 1993). Second, intimate relationships may include obligations which could reduce associations with others outside of the family unit (Osgood & Lee, 1993). This may promote desistance as socialising with peers, especially deviant peers, has been linked to victimisation (Hindelang et al., 1978) and offending (Capaldi et al., 2008; Giordano et al., 2003; Osgood et al., 1996; Warr, 1996). Third, one's partner may serve as a means of social control (Kang, 2019; Liu, 2020; Sampson et al., 2006), for example, through supervision (Wyse et al., 2014) or regulation of one's social life (DeShay & Vieraitis, 2020). Finally, added responsibility arising from a relationship has been hypothesised to cause "cognitive transformations" (Cooley & Sample, 2018; Giordano et al., 2002). For instance, becoming a parent may lead to an increased sense of maturity or greater consideration for others (Boonstoppel, 2019; Horning et al., 2019).

Contrasting perspectives have debated whether research suggests that desistance from sexual offending with age is not as drastic as desistance from other types of offending

(Hanson, 2018), or may even be stronger than desistance from non-sexual offending (Lussier et al., 2021). Nevertheless, the consensus is that most individuals who have sexually offended show patterns of desistance similar to those who have committed non-sexual offences (Hanson, 2018; Thornton et al., 2021). In this context, relationships, and especially intimate relationships, may be as important or even more important for desistance from sexual offending than for desistance from other offences (McAlinden et al., 2017). In interviews with men who had sexually offended against children, themes of *Communion* (i.e., love, friendship, unity) were more common in those men desisting from offending (10 examples) than in those who had a high level of current risk of offending (2 examples; Farmer et al., 2012). Because of their importance, intimate relationships specifically form a pivotal part not only of general theories of desistance, as illustrated previously, but also of theories of desistance from sexual offending, such as the Integrative Theory of Desistance from Sexual Offending (Göbbels et al., 2012). Here, romantic relationships are claimed to play an important role in all theorised stages of the desistance process: 1) Providing the catalyst and social support needed for *decisive momentum* to embark on the desistance process, 2) fulfilling the primary good of relatedness in a pro-social way as required for a reconstruction of the self during *rehabilitation*[1] and 3) *re-entry* into the community, as well as 4) assisting in establishing a sense of *normalcy* during *reintegration* (Göbbels et al., 2012).

Conversely, breakups and relationship conflicts, as well as intimacy deficits, have been linked to initial sexual offending, as well as recidivism (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2005; Larson et al., 2016; Steene et al., 2023; Stephens et al., 2023; Ward et al., 1996). Such intimacy deficits have been theorised to be caused by insecure attachment to romantic partners (Hudson & Ward, 2000; Ward et al., 1996) as well as by a deficit in the theory of mind of those who have sexually offended (Keenan & Ward, 2000; Ward et al., 2000). This could suggest that individuals who have sexually offended may have difficulty attributing

[1] For instance, relatedness is explicitly named as a central factor in the Good Lives Model (GLM, Ward & Gannon, 2006), as discussed later in this chapter.

mental states to their sexual or romantic partners. Whilst also common in individuals who have committed non-sexual offences, intimacy deficits and difficulty establishing intimate relationships have nevertheless been observed in the majority of those who have sexually offended (Ward et al., 1996). Here, long-standing research has demonstrated that individuals with sexual offence histories are more likely to exhibit intimacy deficits than community samples or individuals who have committed other, non-sexual offences (Seidman et al., 1994). Among those who have sexually offended, relationship and intimacy issues may be especially pronounced in people with a predominant sexual interest in children who may struggle to form and maintain age-appropriate relationships (Marshall, 1989). As a result of the demonstrated importance of intimacy deficits, theories aiming to explain sexual offending and re-offending behaviour – such as the Integrated Theory of Sexual Assault (Marshall & Barbaree, 1990[2]) and the Pathways Model of child sexual abuse (Ward & Siegert, 2002[3]) – commonly propose that intimacy and social skills problems affecting intimate relationships are not only more common in those who sexually offend, but may actually be a factor preceding sexual offending behaviour and recidivism.

Given the increased risk of offending associated with intimacy deficits, and the importance of relationships for the desistance process, it is unsurprising that prominent rehabilitation frameworks for those who have sexually offended, such as the Risk-Need-Responsivity Model (Bonta & Andrews, 2017), as well as treatment programmes (e.g., for those who have offended against children, Marshall et al., 1996) commonly place emphasis on relationships, including intimate relationships. One example of this is the Good Lives Model (GLM; Ward & Brown, 2004), a practice framework[4] adapted for use with those who have sexual offence histories (Ward & Gannon, 2006), and as such frequently used to guide their treatment (e.g., HM Prison and Probation Service, 2021). The GLM posits that all

[2] For a critique, see Ward (2002b), for an elaboration of the role of intimacy deficit in the theory, see Marshall (1989).
[3] For an application of the model, see Osbourne & Christensen (2020).
[4] For a description of the structure of practice theories and the nature of the GLM as a practice framework, see Ward & Durrant (2021).

meaningful human behaviours are an attempt to achieve a range of primary human goods. According to the framework, offending behaviour may occur when an individual is unable to achieve these goods in pro-social ways. Subsequently, the aim of treatment should be to equip the person who has offended with the necessary skills and opportunities to achieve these goods prosocially (Ward & Brown, 2004; Ward & Gannon, 2006). Relationships – in the GLM named *relatedness, intimacy,* or *friendship* – are one such primary human good (Ward & Brown, 2004). In fact, the absence of *relatedness*, that is, the absence of different types of pro-social relationships, may be more strongly associated with sexual offending than the absence of many of the other primary human goods (Ward & Mann, 2004).

Using and Abusing Non-Offending Partners for Rehabilitation

Ethical Pitfalls of Using Non-Offending Partners

Whilst a focus on rehabilitation of those who have sexually offended is undoubtedly important, there may be a risk of a "trade-off" between supporting the non-offending partner and their needs, for instance in regard to whether they even want to stay in a relationship after an offence, and dehumanising and using them as a "tool" for their partner's desistance. This may occur specifically if well-intentioned practitioners were to misinterpret whether and how to appropriately incorporate non-offending partners into treatment because of the commonly emphasised importance of intimate relationships to desistance and the critical position they take in many rehabilitation frameworks and programmes. Subsequently, practitioners may be strongly motivated to support the person who has offended to cement or repair an existing relationship, as they, consciously or not, may view it as their duty to supply protective factors to their patients (Fortune & Ward, 2017). This is a serious ethical issue as it may not only jeopardise the agency and wellbeing of the non-offending partner but also the treatment outcomes of the person who has offended.

One way in which practitioners may inadvertently use non-offending partners as "tools" in the rehabilitation process is through pro-social modelling and reinforcement. Here, because clinicians are aware that relationships may be a protective factor, clinicians may

disproportionately promote relationships even without explicitly stating that a non-offending partner or person who has offended should stay in their relationship. Pro-social modelling and reinforcement may promote unwanted, inappropriate, or even criminal behaviour (Trotter & Ward, 2013). It is plausible that, through similar mechanisms, clinicians may influence those in treatment and their partners to remain in their relationships for the sake of promoting desistance only. A further ethical issue may be present in the dilemma practitioners face in weighing up the benefits and costs of the "use" of non-offending partners. This could be considered as an extension of the dual relationship problem which commonly affects those working within forensic and correctional settings (Ward, 2013), but could be exacerbated due to the introduction of yet another party which needs to be considered: The non-offending partner. Thus, the practitioner does not only need to balance the wellbeing of the person who has offended against the risk of harm posed to the community, but also the wellbeing of the non-offending partner and potential risks posed to them by inclusion in treatment. Adding to this, clinicians are often under immense time pressure and may, because of this, not have the time to ascertain how and at which stage of the rehabilitation process a protective factor is appropriately applied (Fortune & Ward, 2017). On one hand, for example, a stable romantic relationship may well be a protective factor to be considered in risk assessment. However, on the other hand, this does not mean that the treatment should solely focus on upholding this relationship at any cost.

Blindly incorporating non-offending partners into treatment programmes because of their perceived utility but without assessing whether this is done sensitively and is, indeed, doing more harm than good could not only dehumanise the non-offending partner by using them as a tool, but could possibly also jeopardise the treatment outcomes of the person who has offended. First, the inappropriate "use" of non-offending partners in rehabilitation programmes may, in fact, go directly against the core principles of such programmes and the frameworks underlying them. For instance, one of the core goals of the GLM, which, as previously noted, places emphasis on *relatedness*, is to equip those who have offended with

the means to achieve primary human goods – such as relationships – through pro-social means (Ward, 2002a). This is theorised to require a respect not only of one's own human rights, but also of the rights of others, such as those of non-offending partners (Ward et al., 2007), as well as to not only reduce harm but to generally improve welfare (Ward & Brown, 2004; Ward & Stewart, 2003; Willis et al., 2013). These guiding principles are entirely at odds with the significant and disproportionate investment of emotional work commonly expected of the non-offending partner during the desistance and rehabilitation process, which is often overlooked (Hall & Harris, 2022). Second, it has been proposed by Ward and Salmon (2010) that it is a practitioner's ethical responsibility to ensure that all treatment provides those who have offended with the ability to function independently once re-integrated into the community. This independence, by its very nature, should mean that those who have offended should not be "trained" to rely on one person – their partner – for their desistance. This not only attacks non-offending partners' agency, but also the accountability of the person who has offended and their agency as an independent person.

Ethically Incorporating Relationships Into Treatment

The previous sections have demonstrated both the importance of stable relationships and risks posed by intimacy deficits to the desistance of those who have sexually offended, as well as the possible ethical risks of incorporating non-offending partners in treatment, such as the negative impact of non-offending partners carrying the responsibility for their partner's desistance. These opposing needs may seem impossible to balance and ultimately reconcile with each other. Nevertheless, I believe that there are some concrete steps practitioners and those working with individuals who have sexually offended may take to ethically incorporate relationships and intimacy into treatment by a) tailoring the treatment programme's contents, and b) considering their own values as they relate to their approach in treating people who have sexually offended.

Considering concrete contents of treatment for those who have offended, it should first be noted that the primary human good of r*elatedness* (as central to the GLM, for

instance) does not have to be achieved through romantic relationships but can also be achieved through intimacy arising from close friendships or family relationships (Ward & Fortune, 2013). Nevertheless, romantic relationships and intimacy skills may be valuable to incorporate in treatment. However, instead of "delivering" (Fortune & Ward, 207, p. 3) relationships as a protective factor to those who have offended, practitioners may instead wish to focus on teaching interpersonal skills and intimacy deficits to address any potential issue in these areas at its root cause. How exactly this is addressed will likely depend on the specific issues the person who has offended is facing. For example, intimacy deficits arising from insecure attachment, as described in previous sections, may call for an attachment-based approach to treatment, as suggested by Hudson and Ward (1997). Alternatively, given the potential role a previously mentioned deficit in the patient's theory of mind could play, treatment could also centre around increasing empathy (Keenan & Ward, 2000; Ward et al., 2000). These approaches build necessary skills relevant to relationships without offloading responsibility onto a non-offending partner. In addition to this, clinicians may want to consider going beyond the acquisition of skills needed to live a life free from offending and, by employing a strength-based approach, also focus on "value orientation" (Ward & Connolly, 2008, p. 91). Value orientation provides those in treatment with additional insight into their needs whilst assessing how they can fulfil those needs without compromising others' rights and wellbeing (Ward & Connolly, 2008). For example, a rehabilitation programme for someone who has sexually offended may indeed be based on their desire or "need" to establish or uphold a stable relationship. However, this should be done by helping them acquire the necessary skills – as described above – and potentially exposing them to opportunities (Ward & Laws, 2010) to meet a potential partner or develop their relationship, rather than forcing a partner to carry the weight of desistance. This would also foster independence, which is crucial to rehabilitation, as described in the previous section. Should non-offending partners however be interested in being a part of the treatment process, Ward (2013) suggests that, to alleviate some of the issues arising from the dual relationship problem (as described in the previous section), the *moral acquaintance group* of the person

in treatment – including therapists, but also family members or romantic partners – should be consulted for discussion. This way their perspectives can be taken into consideration for the treatment plan, while making sure that they are treated with respect and dignity.

In addition to taking concrete and practical steps to tailor treatment contents to be more ethical towards non-offending partners and the person who has offended, clinicians may also consider their own ethical principles which may affect how they interact with non-offending partners. Respect for people's rights and dignity towards those practitioners encounter as part of their work are core principles contained in the American Psychological Association's (2016) Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct, and respect is additionally one of the core primary ethical principles of The British Psychological Society's (2021) Code of Ethics and Conduct. Such codes, and the values encompassed within them should be carefully considered when working in forensic settings as working with those who have offended is proposed to be ideally equal parts psychological and ethical (Ward & Syversen, 2009). Given their closeness to and investment in the rehabilitation process, I argue that this agency, dignity, and respect must be afforded to the community of those who have offended, as well. Thus, it is important that a human rights-based approach to treatment is followed as this may not only encompass those values but also help clinicians balance the conflicting issues of community protection (including protecting the wellbeing of non-offending partners) and promoting the interests of the person who has offended (Ward, 2007). Such a human rights-based approach is already engrained in the GLM, for instance. Here, one of the underlying ethical principles of the framework is the acknowledgement that those who have sexually offended are "people like us" (Willis et al., 2012). As previously mentioned, this should surely extend to their non-offending partner by making sure that their needs are also responded to and that they are not treated like and used as "tools". Finally, it is important that clinicians are aware of the potential ethical implications of their behaviour and approach to treatment and that they engage in reflective behaviour to evaluate the impact they may have on those they treat and their loved ones. This is especially important

as those who have sexually offended and their non-offending partners are particularly vulnerable through the fact that the treatment individuals with offence histories receive is not voluntary (Ross et al., 2008; Trotter & Ward, 2013).

Even though it is clearly possible to take steps to ensure that any incorporation of non-offending partners into the treatment and desistance process is ethical, this has historically not usually been the case. Instead, the undoubtably important focus on the rehabilitation of those who have sexually offended has often risked a "trade-off" between supporting the non-offending partner and their needs, for instance regarding whether they even want to stay in a relationship after an offence, and dehumanising and using them as a "tool" for their partner's desistance. Nowhere is this more evident than in the literature that has historically focused on – and attributed blame to – non-offending mothers whose partners have sexually offended.

Non-Offending Mothers Whose Partners Have Sexually Offended

Whilst this thesis itself does not exclusively focus on non-offending mothers whose partners have sexually offended, to fully understand the context in which research on non-offending partners has been conducted, it is important to acknowledge that the literature has historically almost solely focused on non-offending mothers (for a review, see Azzopardi et al., 2018; Cahalane, 2013). Non-offending mothers, in this context, are those non-offending partners who have one or more children and are in a relationship with someone who has sexually offended either: (a) against the non-offending partner's child; or (b) against another party, often other children. For the purpose of this section, I will refer to the former as *intrafamilial abuse* and the latter as *extrafamilial abuse* where applicable, however, the outcomes for both groups are remarkably similar. As the aim of this chapter, due to the overall aim of this thesis, was to provide a brief introduction to the literature on non-offending partners, any work on the experiences of non-offending mothers whose partner has not committed a sexual offence (e.g., mothers whose children were abused by someone who was not their partner), is not included here.

Research on non-offending mothers, and non-offending partners more generally, has in the past been critiqued as more opinion- than research-based (for a critique of the literature on non-offending mothers, see Tamraz, 1997). Historically, mothers of intrafamilial abuse victims have been villainised (for a review, see Elbow & Mayfield, 1991), and negative societal views towards non-offending mothers remain pervasive (Pretorius et al., 2011).

Whilst victim blame in sexual abuse cases has greatly decreased, this has not translated into decreased mother blame (Azzopardi et al., 2018). This mirrors the general trend of blaming mothers for both offending committed by and against their children that is prevalent in popular cultural narratives (Byers & Collins, 2021). Non-offending mothers whose partners have abused their children are frequently blamed for the abuse by the general public, intervening agencies, medical professionals, and even researchers (Azzopardi et al., 2018; Ehrmin, 1996; McCallum, 2001; McLaren, 2013). For example, a participant in McCallum's (2001) research reported,

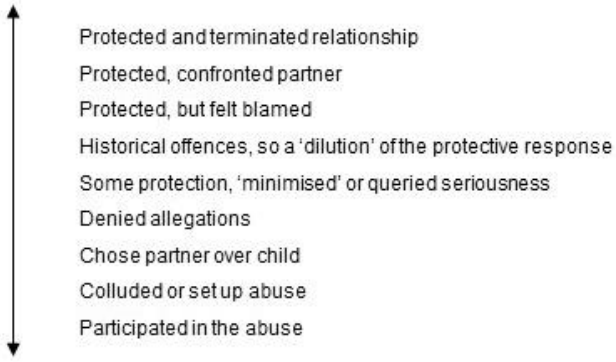
> […] There was a lot of blame placed on the mother which – I understand where they are coming from because they have to make sure, but it's still a lot of blame placed on the mother. And everything moved so quickly in the first few days, but it was almost as if I was also an offender for the first few days […]. (pp. 320-321)

Mother-blaming is often led by the assumption that non-offending mothers must have known about, and even permitted, the abuse (for a review, see Bolen, 2003). The source of stigma against non-offending mothers is both their existing relationship with the person who perpetrated the abuse, as well as their perceived failure to prevent the abuse and safeguard the victim (Holt, 2021). As a result, non-offending partners face a dilemma: On one hand, they may be guided to contribute to their partner's desistance by staying in the relationship with them, as outlined in the previous sections on the influence of intimate relationships on desistance. On the other hand, they may be pressured to end their relationship to effectively protect and safeguard their children (Bolen, 2003; Galloway & Hogg, 2008; McLaren, 2013), which has often been oversimplified as choosing their child

over their partner (for a review, see Azzopardi, 2022). For example, a continuum of non-offending parents' responses to the disclosure of abuse (Galloway & Hogg, 2008; see Figure 1.1) places those who protected their child and terminated the relationship as having the most protective response. Those who protected their child but felt blamed were placed further down the continuum as having a less protective response, despite the fact that being blamed is a frequent reality for non-offending mothers, as illustrated previously.

Figure 1.1

Continuum of Non-Abusing Parents' Reactions to the Disclosure of Abuse, According to Galloway and Hogg (2008)



Note. This figure is based on Galloway & Hogg (2008, p. 237).

Given the inconsistent messaging regarding relationship continuation and the immense societal pressure, as well as the commonly negative interactions that non-offending mothers of intrafamilial and extrafamilial sexual abuse victims report with professional services (Plummer & Eastin, 2007), it is unsurprising that non-offending mothers may experience depression and anxiety after sexual abuse has been disclosed (Green et al., 1995) For example, when comparing mothers whose daughters had been sexually abused to mothers whose daughters had not been sexually abused, those whose daughters had been abused showed significantly higher levels of depression, state anxiety, and trait anxiety (Kim et al., 2007). Despite this, non-offending mothers still lack social and professional support (Pretorius et al., 2011; Serin, 2018; Stitt, 2007). The limited support that

is advertised to them exacerbates their dilemma by prioritising their “value” (Duff et al., 2017, p. 293) in safeguarding their children and decreasing their partner’s recidivism risk (e.g., Duff et al., 2017; Shannon et al., 2013; Wager et al., 2015) rather than focusing on their own needs. For instance, while Duff and colleagues (2017) assessed “a service for non-offending partners of male sexual offenders” (p. 1), and criticised that “there are few programmes aimed at providing support and intervention for an often marginalised group of individuals” (p. 1), the perceived practical implications of such a service named by the authors were directly related to their role in the protection of children:

> The service offers new challenges for NOPs with the aim of making them better understand offending against children, their role in protecting children, and ultimately the protection of children in general. This may act as a model for the development of future services for these individuals. (p. 1)

However, the research and theory focusing on non-offending partners who are not primarily seen in their role as mother has to date been even more sparse than that focusing on non-offending mothers (for a review, see Azzopardi et al., 2018; Cahalane et al., 2013). For example, research claiming to include non-offending partners, or support programmes targeting non-offending partners, such as the previously mentioned programme assessed by Duff and colleagues (2017), have often instead only investigated, and included the experiences, of non-offending mothers specifically (e.g., Shannon et al., 2013; Wager et al., 2015). Because of this, it is important to go beyond the limited population that research has historically examined and instead cast the net wider by exploring the impact of offending on non-offending partners more generally and centre their own, rather than others’ experiences.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that, historically, research aimed at investigating non-offending partners has disproportionately focused on the usefulness these individuals could have as tools for the benefit of others, whilst neglecting their own experiences. Here, non-offending partners have been assessed to be beneficial to the desistance of the person who

has offended by providing a stable relationship (e.g., McAlinden et al., 2017), as promoted in prominent rehabilitation frameworks used with those who have sexually offended (e.g., the Risk-Need-Responsivity Model, Bonta & Andrews, 2017). Whilst this can be navigated ethically by practitioners, for instance, by opting for a human rights-based approach when incorporating non-offending partners into treatment, blindly relying on non-offending partners to carry the responsibility of desistance (Hall & Harris, 2022) is likely to risk the treatment outcomes of the person who has offended as well as jeopardising the non-offending partner's wellbeing. This negative impact of an exaggerated focus on the non-offending partner's role after an offence has occurred is especially apparent in the opinion-based research on non-offending mothers (Tamraz, 1997) that has traditionally used them to safeguard children (e.g., Duff et al., 2017), or even blamed them for the offences committed by their partner (Azzopardi et al., 2018). However, the impact of the offence and its aftermath on non-offending partners' lives and wellbeing has so far been largely overlooked, specifically when considering the non-offending partners outside of their role as mothers. Nevertheless, very recent streams of research (e.g., Armitage et al., 2023; Duncan et al., 2022; Kavanagh, 2022) have begun to investigate non-offending partners' own experiences and acknowledge their victim status as a result of their partners' offending behaviour. The following chapter will provide an overview of this emerging literature before outlining the arising rationale and research agenda of this thesis.

CHAPTER 2 – EMERGING RESEARCH & THESIS AGENDA

Some contents of this chapter have been published in the following journal article: Kamitz, L. C., & Gannon, T. A. (2023). A grounded theory model of relationship decision-making in non-offending partners of individuals accused of sexual offending. *Sexual Abuse*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1177/1079063223115907

Research has firmly linked stable romantic relationships to desistance from offending, including sexual offending. As a result, the literature examining non-offending partners has primarily investigated non-offending partners' role in preventing offending behaviour and safeguarding their children, as shown in the previous chapter. However, as previously highlighted, using non-offending partners as tools in the rehabilitation process comes with a wide range of ethical risks all of which would need to be considered and addressed to avoid traumatising the non-offending partner and jeopardising the treatment outcome of the person who has offended. Despite the immense effort that has gone into examining how non-offending partners could possibly benefit others (e.g., their children or their partners), research has traditionally neglected to investigate how non-offending partners, as individuals, are affected by their partner's offending and its aftermath, as well as how this may affect their relationship. However, whilst this research is still in its infancy, a recently emerging line of enquiry has begun to centre the voices of non-offending partners, paving the way for further work in this field. This chapter continues were the previous chapter left off by providing the reader with an overview of the recent, and more empathetic, literature concerning non-offending partners and the arising justification and agenda for the research conducted for this thesis. Here, I first outline emerging literature centring around non-offending partners' experiences of stigma and the negative consequences that they face as a result before considering the impact the offence may have on the non-offending partner's relationship with the person who has offended and the important role the non-offending partner may play in the relationship decision making. This review of the literature

will highlight the need for the research conducted for this thesis and, thus, lastly, the research rationale and agenda will be discussed.

Emerging Research: Non-Offending Partners' Experiences of Victimhood and Stigmatisation

Whilst previously outlined historical notions of non-offending partners as tools for desistance and safeguarding prevail (see Chapter 1), more recent streams of research, often focusing on partners of individuals who have committed child sexual abuse material (CSAM) offences (e.g., Armitage et al., 2023; Duncan et al., 2022; Jones et al., 2023 Kavanagh, 2022; Salter et al., 2022) have begun to acknowledge non-offending partners' victim status as a result of their partners' offending. Specifically, non-offending partners commonly experience negative outcomes due to an association with a stigmatised person, a process coined courtesy stigma (Goffmann, 1963).

Courtesy Stigma

With raised awareness of their association with someone who has committed a sexual offence, non-offending family members may, through no fault of their own, experience what Goffmann (1963) termed *courtesy stigma*, a stigma by association (Condry, 2013). Consequently, society may treat non-offending family members and the individual who has offended "in some respect as one" (Goffmann, 1963, p.30). The courtesy stigma experienced by non-offending family members is a stigma by contamination combined with the stigma of their new identity as a *family member of a sex offender* (Condry, 2013). Such stigma has been found to cause many collateral consequences for non-offending family members, similar to those experienced by those who have offended. For instance, family members of individuals convicted of sexual offending reported feeling as if they themselves had been convicted of the offence (Farkas & Miller, 2007). These consequences include housing disruption, financial hardship, barriers to employment, social isolation, disruption of family bonds, and community harassment (Cassidy et al., 2021; Evans et al., 2021; Hackett et al., 2012; Kilmer & Leon, 2017; Leon & Kilmer, 2022; Tewksbury & Levenson, 2009).

Non-offending partners are simultaneously one of the groups most severely affected by such negative consequences of courtesy stigma as well as one of the groups most commonly neglected by research (Duncan et al., 2020). As noted in the previous chapter, the limited research that has focused on this population has done so primarily with the aim of benefiting the person who has offended or the children of the non-offending partner. For non-offending partners, stigmatisation commonly goes beyond simply being viewed as being "contaminated" by their partner's sexual offence. Rather, they are seen as directly causally responsible for it (Condry, 2013; Kotova, 2017), a process sometimes coined *contamination by causal responsibility* (Armitage et al., 2023). Here, stigma against non-offending partners often takes the form of blame as they are made responsible for omission, (i.e., not doing anything about an offence they were supposedly aware of; Liddell & Taylor, 2015), commission (i.e., not fulfilling their partner's sexual needs and thus pushing them to offend), and continuation (i.e., not severing ties with their partner; Condry, 2013).

Consequences of Courtesy Stigma

As a result of courtesy stigma, especially due to contamination by causal responsibility, non-offending partners experience similar practical, emotional, and social impacts to those experienced by victims of crime (Brown, 2018; Duncan et al., 2020; Liddell & Taylor, 2015).

Practical consequences most commonly affecting non-offending partners are financial difficulties, employment issues, and residential impact, such as a lack of housing stability (Brown, 2018; Rapp, 2011), which may be exacerbated by media exposure (Duncan et al., 2020). Here, the media's dissemination of the address of the person who has offended, which is common practice, may lead non-offending partners to feel vulnerable and exposed, especially if their children reside in the same home (Duncan et al., 2020). Additionally, non-offending partners report significant psychological and emotional impact related to their partner's offending behaviour (Cahalane & Duff, 2018; Rapp, 2011). As most non-offending partners are seemingly unaware of the offences, offence discovery may lead

to trauma-, shock-, or bereavement-like responses (Duncan et al., 2022; C. Jones et al., 2021). Non-offending partners also report internalised stigma, self-blame, guilt, and shame, resulting from ongoing blame and stigma (Duncan et al., 2020, 2022). In the long term, these factors have been shown to have a negative impact on non-offending partners' mental health, leading to symptoms of depression and anxiety (C. Jones et al., 2021). There is also an immediate social impact on non-offending partners arising from their partner's offending behaviour and associated courtesy stigma. Non-offending partners report being harassed (Rapp, 2011) or ostracised by their community (Liddell & Taylor, 2015), and feeling like their family is being destroyed in cases where their identity is known (Cahalane & Duff, 2018). Others attempt to hide their stigmatised identity (Duncan et al., 2020) which leads to further isolation and a loss of social support (C. Jones et al., 2021; C. Jones et al., 2023; Rapp, 2011).

In many cases, isolation and stigma are exacerbated by intervening agencies, such as the police and social services, which non-offending partners commonly perceive to be judgmental, insensitive, and ignorant (Duncan et al., 2020; Liddell & Taylor, 2015). This is especially the case when support services, as mentioned in Chapter 1, prioritise the "value" (Duff et al., 2017, p. 293) that non-offending partners hold in decreasing their partner's recidivism risk (e.g., Duff et al., 2017; Shannon et al., 2013; Wager et al., 2015; see Hanson & Morton-Bourgon 2005 and Larson et al., 2016 for research linking relationship breakdown and conflict to recidivism).

Unable to Win: The Impact of Offending on Non-Offending Partners' Relationships

In most cases, the offence does not only immediately impact the non-offending partner but may cause significant disruption to their relationship, as well. This may be triggered by the mourning of their partner's psychosocial death (Bailey, 2018). Whilst their partner is physically alive, the image the non-offending partner had of the person who has offended, and their idea of a future together, die (Armitage et al., 2023; Duncan et al., 2020; 2022). Whilst this evokes the same grief experienced by people who mourn a dead loved

one, it is often not interpreted as valid by outsiders (Bailey, 2018). The realisation that their partner may not be the person they thought they had fallen in love with led non-offending partners to lose trust in the person who has offended and their relationship with them (Cahalane & Duff, 2018). As a result, non-offending partners may need to expend significant cognitive effort and engage in “mental gymnastics” (Duncan et al., 2022, p. 288) to maintain a positive view of their relationship after an offence has been disclosed (Armitage et al., 2023; Duncan et al., 2022; Kavanagh, 2022). Some non-offending partners may hold onto an idealised and unrealistic view of their partner (Cahalane & Duff, 2017) or even engage in a minimisation or denial of the offending behaviour (Iffland et al., 2016). For instance, non-offending partners of individuals who had committed CSAM offences disclosed in interviews that they would have never stayed in their relationship if their partner had committed a contact offence (Armitage et al., 2023), thus minimising the impact and risk of image offences. A disruption to the relationship may also be caused by the person who has offended, who may withdraw from their intimate partner (Higgins & Rolfe, 2017), or by an outside influence. For example, Child Protection Services may prevent individuals who have sexually offended from residing in the same household as the non-offending partner to safeguard children living in the home (Duncan et al., 2020).

Given these relationship problems, the cognitive effort required to maintain a positive view of the relationship, the courtesy stigma they experience, and the emotional work required to aid their partners’ desistance (Hall & Harris, 2022), it is unsurprising that non-offending partners may choose to end their relationship. Whilst there is a lack of literature to decisively conclude how many non-offending partners end their relationships, qualitative explorations have suggested that less than 50% of those who have sexually offended may remain in their relationship post-conviction (Lytle et al., 2017). Here, relationship breakdown is more common for individuals who have committed sexual offences than those who have committed non-sexual offences, especially if the victim was a child (Farmer et al., 2015; McAlinden et al., 2017).

When making their relationship decision, non-offending partners find themselves in a no-win situation, where they would be judged both for staying in or leaving their relationship (Armitage et al., 2023). For non-offending partners, who, unlike other family members of those who have offended, are not considered genetically contaminated (Condry, 2013), leaving the relationship is the only way to end courtesy stigma (E. Jones & Giles, 2022) and thus avoid its negative consequences, which I have previously described. Additionally, professionals and the community often urge non-offending partners to leave their relationship (Duncan et al., 2020; E. Jones & Giles, 2022), for instance, to safeguard their children, as outlined in Chapter 1 (e.g., McLaren, 2013). Those who fail to do so are commonly ostracised by their community (E. Jones & Giles, 2022), and even those who have ended their relationships have been found to conceal their identity as a non-offending partner for fear of stigmatisation (Kavanagh, 2022). At the same time, rehabilitation-focused literature, as discussed in Chapter 1, may aim to promote relationship continuation for non-offending partners due to the positive impact the relationship could have on their partner's desistance. Adding to this already complex dilemma, non-offending partners may in fact be unable to make the best relationship decision immediately due to the trauma, shock, and confusion they experience after an offence has been disclosed (Duncan et al., 2020).

Considering the complexity of this no-win situation non-offending partners find themselves in and the importance of the relationship for both the person who has offended and the non-offending partner, it is surprising that research has thus far failed to thoroughly examine their relationship decision-making process (Iffland et al., 2016).

Conclusion

While historic research on non-offending partners has emphasised their importance for desistance and safeguarding, as outlined in Chapter 1, non-offending partner's own views and experiences remain understudied. More recent research, while still in its infancy, has begun to focus on the experiences and support needs of non-offending partners themselves (e.g., Armitage et al., 2023; Duncan et al., 2022). Here, it has become apparent

that non-offending partners commonly encounter stigmatisation due to their association with someone who has sexually offended (Condry, 2013), and may even be held causally responsible for their partners' offending (Armitage et al., 2023). As a result, and through no fault of their own, non-offending partners experience significant negative practical, emotional, and social consequences (Brown, 2018; Duncan et al., 2020; Liddell & Taylor, 2015). Additionally, non-offending partners' relationships with the person who has offended are also frequently affected, for example, due to a loss of trust (Cahalane & Duff, 2018), feelings of grief (Bailey, 2018), and outside interferences (e.g., from intervening agencies; Duncan et al., 2020). Because of this, and the "cognitive gymnastics" (Duncan et al., 2022, p. 288) required to maintain a positive view of the relationship, non-offending partners unsurprisingly may often end their relationships with the person who has offended (Farmer et al., 2015; McAlinden et al., 2017). However, when making their relationship decision, non-offending partners face a dilemma in that they may be judged both for staying with or leaving their partner (Armitage et al., 2023).

Despite the importance of non-offending partners for the person who has offended, and the negative consequences non-offending partners themselves face as a result of an offence, research thus far has largely neglected non-offending partners' perspectives overall and has specifically failed to examine their relationship decision-making (Iffland et al., 2016). Thus, this thesis aimed to address this gap in the literature by increasing understanding of non-offending partners' relationship decision-making processes by investigating affective, behavioural, cognitive, and situational factors which may influence why they may decide to stay with or leave their partner after finding out that their partner has committed a sexual offence.

Rationale and Research Agenda

As shown in this chapter and Chapter 1, the experiences of non-offending partners remain almost entirely understudied. Historically, the limited research that has been conducted has focused on the benefits non-offending partners may provide to others –

especially their partners due to a link between desistance and intimate relationships, and their children due to their possible role in safeguarding. Newly emerging streams of research have recently begun to centre the voices of non-offending partners and, as a result, have exposed the stigmatisation that they, through no fault of their own, face due to their partners' sexual offending behaviour. Such stigma, and the offence itself, heavily affect every aspect of non-offending partners' lives, including their relationship with the person who has offended. For example, it may be of no surprise that non-offending partners commonly choose to end their relationship, perhaps due to relationship disruption and the negative consequences of stigmatisation. However, research investigating non-offending partners' own experiences is still in its infancy. Despite the importance of the relationship for the non-offending partner and the person who has offended, and the pivotal role non-offending partners play in deciding the fate of the relationship, research thus far has failed to investigate the factors influencing why non-offending partners decide to stay in or leave their relationship after finding out about an offence. To address this significant gap in the literature and extend the current knowledge of non-offending partners' realities, the aim of this thesis is to explore the experiences of non-offending partners, specifically regarding their relationship decision-making and factors which may influence this process. As pre-existing research in this area is sparse, this thesis will use a wide range of qualitative and quantitative methods and diverse populations to explore:

- The relationship decision-making process in non-offending partners of those who have committed, or been accused of, sexual offences,
- The factors statistically predicting relationship continuation or termination in non-offending partners,
- Non-offending partners' explicit reasoning for their relationship decision, and
- Attitudes that the general population and professionals working within Criminal Justice System-related agencies hold towards non-offending partners and their relationship decision-making.

Here, I present four original empirical studies addressing the gap in the literature and these aims: In Study One (Chapter 3), I use exploratory qualitative methods (i.e., Grounded Theory) to develop the first descriptive model of relationship decision-making in non-offending partners of those accused of sexual offending. Hypothetical, vignette-based research conducted for Studies Two and Three (Chapters 4 & 5) builds upon Study One by assessing whether this model of relationship decision-making has predictive value and whether it is generalisable to student (Study Two) and general population (Study Three) samples. Due to the importance of other peoples' attitudes towards non-offending partners in their relationship decision-making, as reported by participants in Studies One through Three, the final study, Study Four (Chapter 6), uses factor analysis to develop and evaluate a scale measuring attitudes towards non-offending partners, including attitudes towards their relationship decision. Finally, this scale is used to assess differences in attitudes towards non-offending partners between the general population and professionals working in Criminal Justice System-related agencies (i.e., the police and social services).

The findings presented in this thesis offer a first insight into the processes underlying relationship decision-making in non-offending partners, as well as factors related to this – such as attitudes facing them as a result of their relationship decision and their association with their partner's offence. Due to the complex support needs of this heterogeneous population, which become apparent throughout the research described in this thesis, I hope that the presented findings may increase understanding of non-offending partners' experiences in academics and those working with individuals who have sexually offended and their partners.

CHAPTER 3 – RELATIONSHIP DECISION-MAKING IN NON-OFFENDING PARTNERS OF INDIVIDUALS ACCUSED OF SEXUAL OFFENDING

The contents of this chapter have been published in the following journal article:
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As discussed in Chapter 2, non-offending partners experience a multitude of negative consequences due to their partners' offending behaviour. One such consequence may be a disruption of the non-offending partner's relationship. Here, relationship problems may arise due to a lack of trust after an offence has been committed (Cahalane & Duff, 2018), the mourning of their partner's psychosocial death (Duncan et al., 2020, 2022), and interference from outside influences, such as Child Protection Services (Duncan et al., 2020). Leaving the relationship may be the only solution to avoiding such issues, as well as the only way to end courtesy stigma non-offending partners experience due to an association with their partner's offence (E. Jones & Giles, 2022). Whilst friends, family and professional organisations commonly pressure non-offending partners to end their relationship (Duncan et al., 2020; E. Jones & Giles, 2022), research and practice traditionally focused on rehabilitation have emphasised the danger of relationship breakdowns for the desistance process of the person who has offended (e.g., Larson et al., 2016). Therefore, non-offending partners deciding over the fate of their relationship find themselves in a no-win situation, whilst potentially being unable to make the best relationship decision for themselves due to the trauma, shock, and confusion they experience (Duncan et al., 2020).

Study One: A Grounded Theory Model of Relationship Decision-Making in Non-Offending Partners of Individuals Accused of Sexual Offending

Considering the importance of the relationship for both the person who has offended and the non-offending partner, it is surprising that so far, research has failed to thoroughly examine the process underlying why non-offending partners decide to stay with or leave

their partner (Iffland et al., 2016). Given the dearth of research in this field, the main aim of this study was to develop the first descriptive model of the decision-making process underlying relationship termination or continuation in non-offending partners of individuals who have been accused of sexual offending. Grounded Theory was considered ideal as a method for developing such a model for three main reasons: First, Grounded Theory may be used for inductive analysis of rich, qualitative data gathered from relatively small samples, in areas where existing theory and research are sparse (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Ward et al., 2006). Second, previous research (e.g., Gannon et al., 2008; Polaschek et al., 2001) has established that one key strength of Grounded Theory is its ability for modification of the models created in response to additional data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This is particularly useful here as research into non-offending partners, whilst developing, is still in its infancy. Thus, the model created as part of this chapter may be used as a starting point for future research. Lastly, the use of Grounded Theory as a method has been well-established within forensic psychology, however, primarily for the creation of offence chain models detailing a temporal sequence of events leading up to and following offending behaviour (e.g., Collins et al., 2022; Ford et al., 2021; Gannon et al., 2008; Tyler et al., 2014). Whilst this study does not investigate offending behaviour, it nevertheless aims to describe a chronological process within a forensically relevant population. Additionally, the previous forensic psychological research conducted using Grounded Theory demonstrates that it is well-suited to the study of sensitive topic areas, such as sexual offending (e.g., Gannon et al., 2008).

Thus, using Grounded Theory, I aimed to describe the contributions of affective, behavioural, contextual, and cognitive factors to the decision to stay in or leave a relationship after finding out that a partner has been accused of a sexual offence. I expected that such a theory would contribute to the academic literature by addressing the current lack of research in this field (Duncan et al., 2020; Iffland et al., 2016) and inform professionals working with non-offending partners about their unique situation and needs. It may also inform rehabilitation frameworks for individuals who have sexually offended (e.g., Risk-Need-

Responsivity Model, Bonta & Andrews, 2017; the Good Lives Model, Ward & Gannon, 2006) which place emphasis on relationships.

Supplementary materials for this study can be found online (https://osf.io/9tg8m/?view_only=667ae622bd884c55b9d9d157332bb9a7).

Method

Ethics

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Kent School of Psychology Ethics Committee (ID: 201915736390165958). Prior to the interview, informed consent was given by each participant via a signed consent form. Following the interview, participants were provided with details of community support groups and organisations relevant to their respective locations and given a full debriefing.[5]

Participants

I recruited 23 participants (20 females and 3 males), with ages ranging from 19 to 52 years (M = 31.87, SD = 11.00). Most participants were white (British, Irish, North American, or "Other"; 79.26%, n = 18), two were Asian (Indian or "Other", 8.7%), two were Middle Eastern (8.7%), and one was Black (African, 4.35%). At the time they found out about the accusations, most participants (n = 16, 69.57%) resided in the United Kingdom.

Relationship Characteristics. Twenty-one of the participants' accused partners were male, and two were female. Prior to finding out about the accusations, the duration of the participants' relationships ranged between one month and 240 months or 20 years (M = 57.65 months, SD = 76.22 months, Mdn = *12* months). The participants' total relationship duration ranged from five months to 264 months or 22 years (M = 73.96 months, SD = 80.37 months, Mdn = 36 months). Fourteen participants were in self-defined long-term relationships and the remaining nine participants were married to their partner when they found out about the accusations. Six participants had at least one child that they were raising

[5] Participant handouts can be found in supplementary materials for this study as 'Study One Participant Handouts' (https://osf.io/9tg8m/?view_only=667ae622bd884c55b9d9d157332bb9a7).

with their partner, whereas 17 participants did not have children with their partner who was accused.

Seven participants immediately decided to end the relationship after learning about the accusations. Of those, four participants later reconciled with their partners. The remaining 15 participants decided to stay in the relationship after finding out about the accusations. At the time of the interviews, however, most participants (*n* = 17) were not in the relationship anymore.

Characteristics of the Accusations. All participants reported that they were in the relationship when they first learned of the sexual offence accusations against their partner. However, the alleged offences were said to have taken place prior to the relationship for seven participants. For two participants, their partners' alleged offences were said to have taken place both during and before the relationship. For the remaining 14 participants, the accusations pertained to offences that were alleged to have occurred during the relationship.

The majority (*n* = 20) of participants' partners were accused of one offence, whilst a few (*n* = 4) were accused of committing multiple offences. I classified these offence accusations in line with UK legislation: Fourteen partners were accused of contact offences against adults, of which nine were accused of sexual assault (excl. rape), and six were accused of rape (Sexual Offences Act 2003, §§ 3 & 1). Two partners were accused of committing non-contact, internet-based offences against adults. Here, both were accused of disclosing private sexual photographs or films with intent to cause distress (Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015, § 33). One participant's partner was accused of committing contact offences against children, both rape and sexual assault of children under 13 (Sexual Offences Act 2003, §§ 5 & 7). Lastly, six partners were accused of non-contact, internet-based offences against children. Here, four participants' partners were accused of sexual communication with a child, one was accused of attempted meeting a child following sexual grooming (Sexual Offences Act 2003, §§ 15A & 15), and four were accused of possession of indecent photographs of children (Protection of Children Act 1978, § 1). None of the

accusations against participants' partners pertained to offences against an intrafamilial victim.

Eight participants believed the accusations against their partner to be true when they first learnt of them. Of the eleven participants who did not believe them to be true initially, nine believed the accusations to be true by the time of the interviews.

The accusations against eleven participants' partners were not formally investigated by the responsible Criminal Justice System, although two of these led to consequences for the participants' partner as drawn by an authoritative body that was not related to the Criminal Justice System (e.g., being banned from a university campus). In the remaining eleven cases, a Criminal Justice System investigation led to no charges for two participant's partners. One participant's partner was found 'not guilty' during court proceedings, one received a probation order, one received a suspended sentence, and six received custodial sentences. For a summary of relevant information about each participant, see Table 3.1.

Table 3.1

Study One Participant Information

Participant	Age	Country of Residence	Accusations Against Partner	Victim Age	Criminal Justice Response	Relationship Decision	Current Relationship
P1	19	United Kingdom	Contact	Adult	None	Left, later reconciled	Separated
P2	19	United Kingdom	Contact	Adult	None	Stayed	Separated
P3	23	United Kingdom	Contact	Adult	Custodial sentence	Left	Separated
P4	21	United Kingdom	Contact	Adult	None	Stayed	In relationship
P5	20	United Kingdom	Contact	Adult	None	Left, later reconciled	In relationship
P6	26	United States	Contact	Adult	None	Stayed	Separated
P7	42	Ireland	Contact	Child	Custodial sentence	Left	Divorced
P8	31	United Kingdom	Contact	Adult	None	Stayed	Widowed
P9	29	Israel	Contact	Adult	None	Stayed	Separated
P10	42	United Kingdom	Contact	Adult	Investigated, but no charge	Stayed	Divorced
P11	28	Greece	Contact	Adult	None	Stayed	Separated
P12	23	Ireland	Non-contact (internet)	Adult	None	Stayed	Separated
P13	48	South Africa	Contact	Adult	Investigated, but no charge	Stayed	Separated
P14	29	United Kingdom	Contact	Adult	Partner found 'not guilty'	Stayed	Separated
P15	23	United Kingdom	Non-contact (internet)	Adult	Custodial sentence	Left	Separated
P16	34	United Kingdom	Contact	Child	Probation order	Stayed	Divorced
P17	25	United Kingdom	Contact	Adult	None	Stayed	Separated
P18	21	United States	Contact	Adult	None	Stayed	Separated
P19	45	United Kingdom	Non-contact (internet)	Child	Custodial sentence	Stayed	Separated
P20	52	United Kingdom	Non-contact (internet)	Child	Suspended sentence	Stayed	Married
P21	41	United Kingdom	Non-contact (internet)	Child	Custodial sentence	Left, later reconciled	Married
P22	40	United Kingdom	Non-contact (internet)	Child	Custodial sentence	Left, later reconciled	Married
P23	52	United Kingdom	Non-contact (internet)	Child	Suspended sentence	Stayed	Married

Note. Age = Age in years. Country of Residence = Country the participant resided in when finding out about the accusations. Current Relationship = Relationship status with participant's (ex-) partner at the time of interview.

Participant Recruitment

I recruited both those whose partners were charged with or convicted of sexual offending and those whose partners were accused. The reasons for this were two-fold: First,

sexual offences are underreported (U.S. Department of Justice, 2016), and even those that are investigated by the police often do not result in any charges or a conviction (Crown Prosecution Service, 2022a). Second, individuals who have sexually offended commonly minimise parts of their offending (Schneider & Wright, 2004; Ward et al., 1995), or categorically deny that they have offended, especially in cases where the victim was a child (Ware et al., 2020). Previous studies with small samples of non-offending partners have shown that they may exhibit similar cognitive distortions (Cahalane & Duff, 2018), particularly when choosing to remain in the relationship (Duncan et al., 2022). I did not want to exclude such potential participants to provide a balanced account of the experiences of non-offending partners, especially as a belief in the accusations or denial of them may be a factor in the relationship decision-making process.

Five participants were recruited through leaflets distributed in different UK city centres and universities, and another five participants approached me via their social media accounts or heard about the study by word of mouth. They completed a pre-screen through Qualtrics and arranged a telephone interview. The remaining twelve participants were recruited through the crowdsourcing platform Prolific. Those participants had completed the pre-screen, which was open to all Prolific users, for a reimbursement of £0.12. I made appointments for Zoom audio or video calls with eligible participants through Prolific's anonymous messaging system. Upon interview completion, all participants, regardless of recruitment method, received a reimbursement of £20, either through Prolific or as an Amazon voucher.

Data Collection

All interviews were conducted by me. During the interview, participants were first asked to detail potentially important aspects of their childhood and adult life (e.g., major life events, family background, peer- and intimate relationships). Afterwards, participants were asked to describe events leading up to, during, and following the knowledge of the accusation(s) against their partner. The focus was on the participants' thoughts and feelings,

and on factors which they expressed to be important in their decision to stay with or leave their partner. A semi-structured interview schedule[6] was used as a guideline to ensure important aspects of the participant's narrative were covered while allowing the participants to lead the interview and expand on issues they deemed important. Due to this participant-led approach, and the uniqueness of each individual narrative, the length of the interviews varied from 41 to 127 minutes (*M* interview time = 74:07, *SD* = 21:40). Interviews were recorded with the participants' knowledge and consent. All interviews were subsequently transcribed verbatim.

Analysis

First, each transcript was divided, line by line, into its most basic units of meaning, which are commonly referred to as *meaning units* (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). See below an example of how an interview extract was broken down into several meaning units (illustrated using a slash):

"But I was really shocked.[1]/ And I was just apologising like it was my fault.[2]/ Like, I felt responsible for some reason, even though I never met her or anything.[3]"

Subsequently, during *open coding* (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), raw data was broken down into their conceptual components and meaning units were abstracted into more general meaning units, by allocating descriptive labels to each meaning unit. This was done primarily by coding in gerunds which, in contrast to coding in topics and themes, enables the researcher to study processes, actions, and implicit connections (Charmaz, 2014). Thus, meaning unit [3] from the sample above became "feeling responsible despite never having met her."

[6] The interview schedule can be found in supplementary materials of this chapter as 'Study One Interview Schedule' (https://osf.io/9tg8m/?view_only=667ae622bd884c55b9d9d157332bb9a7).

Every general meaning unit was then assigned one or more low-level concepts, which represent the ideas contained in the data. Subsequently, during *axial* coding, these concepts were linked with each other and arranged into categories, higher-level concepts, based on conceptual similarity and shared characteristics. Thus, meaning unit [3] was assigned the low-level concept “feeling guilty”, and the category “reaction to accusations”. Since Grounded Theory is cyclical in nature, during *comparative analysis* new concepts and categories were generated and refined as they were encountered throughout the analytical process. Following this, the relationships between major categories were identified. Along with their respective concepts, categories were ordered chronologically and integrated into a preliminary model illustrating events before, during, and after an individual’s decision to stay with or leave their partner (*theoretical integration)*. This process was followed for the first 16 transcripts. The remaining six transcripts were used to cross-validate my preliminary model by comparing each transcript’s fit with the already developed categories of the model. During this process of *constant comparison,* existing categories were further refined, and new categories were added where necessary. Validation also ensured that *saturation* was reached, that is, no further data emerged from new transcripts and the model was fully developed, reflecting the relationship decision-making process in the sample.

Any potential biases arising from prior assumptions about the topic were minimised by the fact that I had no previous work experience or contact with non-offending partners or individuals who have sexually offended. Throughout data collection, analysis, and write-up of the findings, I additionally engaged in reflexivity by reflecting on and challenging my potential biases and emotions towards the topic.

Findings

My final model chronologically describes the feelings, thoughts, behaviours, and contextual events leading up to and following the participants’ decision to stay with or leave their partner after finding out that their partner had been accused of a sexual offence. As such, the model can be broken down into four periods:

1. **Background Factors***:* the participant's childhood, adolescence, and adulthood experiences up until the point they met their partner who was accused of a sexual offence.
2. **Relationship Factors:** factors associated with the participant's relationship prior to them finding out about the accusations.
3. **Finding Out:** factors that occurred immediately before, during, and after finding out about the accusations.
4. **Relationship Decision-Making:** factors associated with whether the participant decided to stay with or leave their partner.

Period 1: Background Factors

The data which emerged regarding participants' backgrounds was divided into six main categories with additional subcategories (see Figure 3.1). The first category to emerge was *Childhood Environment*. This encompasses early childhood experiences including relationships with caregivers and peers. A participant's childhood environment was either mostly negative (*n* = 9*;* e.g., experiences of trauma, poor caregiver relationships, absent caregivers, poor parental mental health, poverty) or mostly positive (*n* = 7; e.g., stable and loving caregiver relationships, positive relationships with peers). Some participants experienced a considerable improvement (e.g., being taken care of by grandparents after suffering neglect by parents) or deterioration (e.g., a deteriorating relationship with caregivers, parental death, sudden financial instability) of their childhood environment (*n* = 7). This is depicted by the double-ended arrow connecting the negative and positive *Childhood Environment* pathways in Figure 3.1. Those who had a negative childhood environment, and especially those who lacked support from their caregivers in childhood, would often come to rely on romantic partners for support in later life, whereas those who had a positive childhood environment tended to receive support from their wider family.

For those who described a negative childhood environment at any point, including those who experienced a considerable improvement or deterioration of their childhood

environment, *Experiences of Abuse* at some point during their childhood and adolescence were also common (*n* = 15). These were either sexual (*n* = 5; e.g., sexual abuse through peers or adults, often repeated victimisation) or non-sexual (*n* = 10; e.g., intense bullying, neglect, physical abuse by family members, witnessing domestic abuse) in nature. For many participants who had experienced abuse, this wove its way throughout their lives in the form of repeated victimisation by romantic partners, family, and peers. Eight participants reported not experiencing any abuse during their childhood as depicted by the arrow to the right of *Experiences of Abuse,* feeding into the fourth main category of *Mental Health*. Participants who did not experience abuse reported feeling cared for and respected by their peers and family.

Coping Style, the third main category in this period, describes how those participants who were abused in childhood coped with such experiences. Whilst many participants reportedly developed maladaptive coping styles (*n* = 10; e.g., repressing memories of abuse, minimising abuse, using substances), some reported adaptive coping mechanisms (*n* = 5; e.g., therapeutic intervention, exercise, leaving an abusive environment).

The fourth main category to emerge in this period was *Mental Health.* Participants described having had either predominantly negative or positive *Mental Health* during their childhood and adolescence. Most participants (*n* = 14) reported some poor *Mental Health* as characterised, for instance, by depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and personality disorders. The remaining nine participants described having good *Mental Health* (i.e., lack of psychiatric diagnoses, resilience to challenging life events). Those participants who experienced a negative or mixed *Childhood Environment* and had *Experiences of Abuse* were more likely to experience poor *Mental Health* than other participants.

For some participants, this translated into an unstable *Lifestyle* (*n* = 5) associated with dropping out of school, abusing substances, being homeless, unwanted pregnancy, and not having a stable place of work or social support. Most participants (*n* = 4) who experienced an unstable *Lifestyle* were able to stabilise their *Lifestyle* before entering the

relationship with their partner who was accused of a sexual offence (e.g., by finding work after dropping out of school). This is depicted by the arrow connecting the stable and unstable *Lifestyle* pathways in Figure 3.1. Most participants (*n* = 18) described having a stable *Lifestyle* including academic achievement, stable peer relationships, and stable employment.

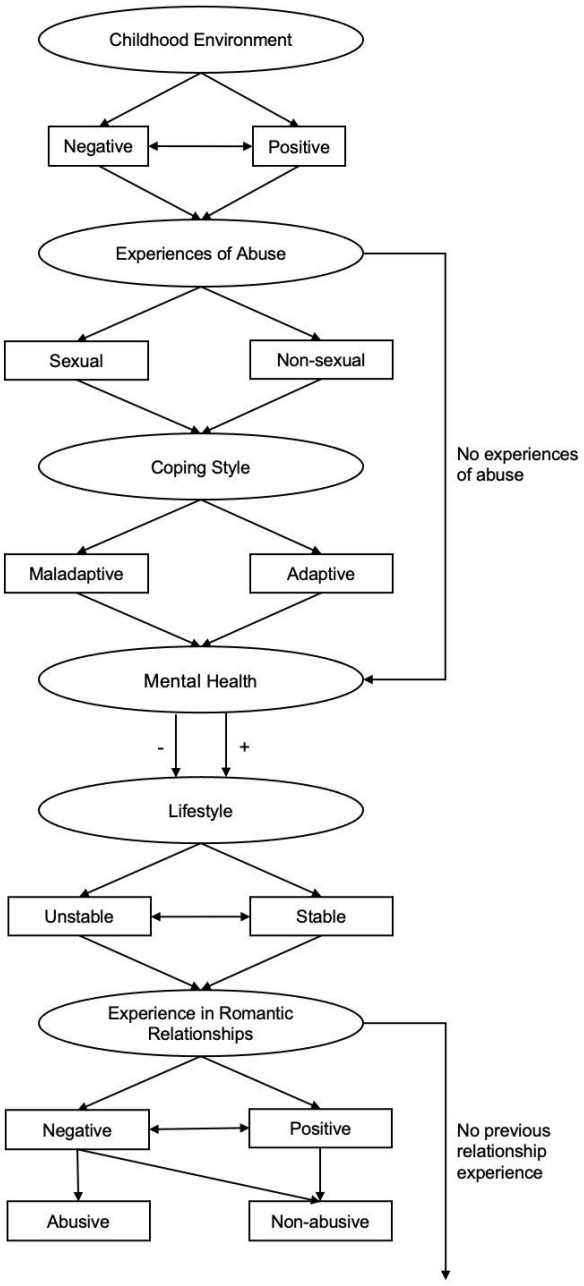
The final main category to emerge in this period was *Experience in Romantic Relationships.* This encompasses any experiences in romantic relationships participants had before meeting their partner who was accused of a sexual offence. Most participants had *Experience in Romantic Relationships (n* = 19) and reported this to be either predominantly negative (*n* = 11) or positive (*n* = 3). Negative *Experience in Romantic Relationships* was often characterised by instability, unhappiness, and feeling like one's needs were not met (e.g., "I feel like I've had experience beyond my years, as they say, in the 'unlucky' and 'with men' department"). Predominantly positive *Experience in Romantic Relationships* was much rarer and usually consisted of stable, consensual, and fulfilling romantic relationships (e.g., "It was the first time that I understood that I want to continue to feel those feelings for the rest of my life"). Some participants (*n* = 5) had both positive and negative *Experience in Romantic Relationships,* as depicted by the arrow connecting the negative and positive *Experience in Romantic Relationship* pathways in Figure 3.1. For instance, some participants described "sabotaging" their relationships or having relationships which were initially positive turn negative (e.g., "He was caring, he was handsome. Until, I guess, he got tired of me and started cheating."). Four participants reported not having had any previous relationship experiences as depicted by the arrow to the right-hand side of *Experience in Romantic Relationships.* For these participants, the relationship with their partner who was accused of a sexual offence was their first romantic or sexual relationship. Participants who had no previous *Experience in Romantic Relationships* reported being naïve about relationships and not knowing what would be considered "normal" and healthy in a relationship (e.g., "It was my first relationship, I don't really have anything to compare it to.

So, it was a lot of asking my friends and my sister ‘Is this good? Do you like him? Is he nice?’”).

Some participants (*n* = 5) who reported having had a negative *Experience in Previous Relationships* also described these relationships as abusive. This abuse could be sexual (e.g., “All they want to do is try and pressurise you into having sex”), emotional (e.g., “It never felt predatory, but looking back at it, there was definitely a strange power dynamic that he was exploiting”), or physical (e.g., “He had split my head open at the back”), and some participants were repeatedly victimised by multiple partners. For some participants, this influenced how they evaluated subsequent relationships, especially the relationship with their partner who was accused of a sexual offence (see Period 2: Relationship Factors). However, most participants who had *Experience in Previous Relationships* (*n* = 14) did not report any abuse occurring in these relationships.

Figure 3.1

Study One Period 1: Background Factors



Period 2: Relationship Factors

The data which emerged regarding the participants' relationship with their partner who had been accused of a sexual offence was split into four main categories, with additional related concepts for some of these categories (see Figure 3.2). The first category to emerge, *Meeting Partner,* encompasses factors related to when and how the participant

met their partner who would later be accused of a sexual offence. Participants reported that their *Age* at meeting, when compared to their partner, played a significant role in their relationship dynamic. Participants who were significantly younger than their partners (*n* = 7) often had less experience in relationships and reported their partner assuming an almost parental role towards them. This power imbalance was at times used by the participants' partners to abuse and manipulate them (e.g., "I felt like he almost became a parent. If I did something that he thought was wrong, then I would be verbally reprimanded."). In comparison, participants who were of a similar *Age* to their partner (*n* = 16) reported being in a similar stage of their lives as their partner and subsequently feeling more equal to their partner.

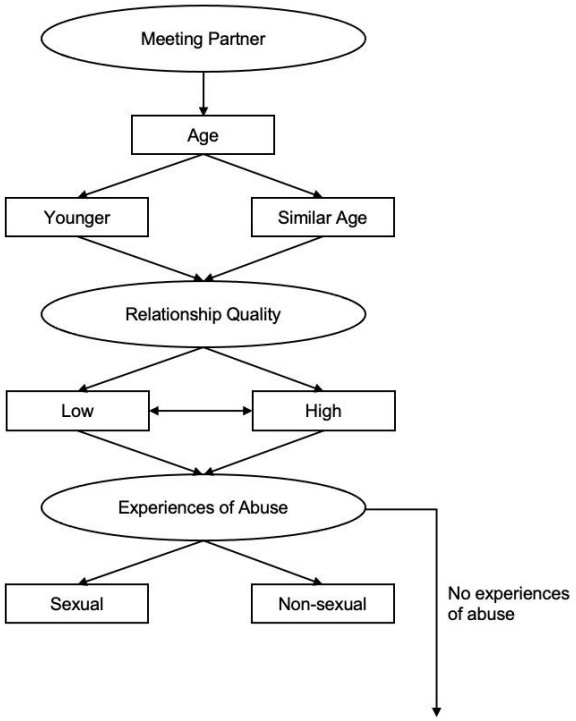
The second category to emerge regarding participants' relationship factors was *Relationship Quality*. The quality of the relationship was either described to be predominantly low (*n* = 6; e.g., unhappiness, high levels of conflict, distant partner) or high (*n* = 9; e.g., stable relationship, contentment, happiness, seeing the partner as a "good person", resolving conflicts constructively). For many participants (*n* = 8) *Relationship Quality* fluctuated throughout the relationship, as depicted by the double-ended arrow connecting low and high *Relationship Quality* in Figure 3.2. Participants were generally more likely to leave the relationship following the accusations if they perceived the *Relationship Quality* to be low. Some reported that they viewed the accusations as a "way out" of an already unhappy relationship. However, an exception to this were cases in which the relationship between the participant and their partner was abusive.

Experiences of Abuse were either sexual (*n* = 2; e.g., assault, rape) or non-sexual (*n* = 5; e.g., emotional abuse, physical abuse, manipulation). Participants who were abused by their partner reported, later down the model, being manipulated into believing their partner over any evidence they might have seen and consequently denying their partner's offence. They appeared to also fear the consequences of leaving their partner. Most participants (*n* = 16), however, did not describe any *Experiences of Abuse*, as depicted by the arrow on the right-hand side of the model in Figure 3.2. This led participants who had experienced abuse

in prior relationships (see Period 1: Background Factors) to evaluate the relationship with their partner who was accused of a sexual offence to be especially positive since they reported feeling lucky to have finally found a non-abusive partner (e.g., “There was no abuse. There was, you know, I felt, Jesus Christ, I’ve hit lucky here”, “So, he was different from the lads. This guy was very easy-going, wasn’t telling me what to do.”).

Figure 3.2

Study One Period 2: Relationship Factors



Period 3: Finding Out

The data which emerged regarding the participants finding out about the accusations against their partner was divided into six main categories, with further related concepts (see

Figure ***3.3***). The first category which emerged was the *Knowledge of Accusations,* which encompasses the factors related to the circumstances surrounding the participants finding out about the accusations. The main concept found to be of importance within this category was the *Source* of the accusations. This was either the participant's partner themselves (*n* = 5), the accuser (*n* = 7), or a third party (*n* = 12). If the participant's partner confessed to having committed an offence, the participant was more likely to believe the accusations. However, the participant's partner may also warn the participant of what they claim to be false accusations, which made participants less likely to believe the accusations. The *Source* could also be the accuser. When this was the case, the accuser often reached out to the participant to warn them about their partner and what they may be capable of. Whether the participant believed the accuser highly depended on the accuser's characteristics, as outlined in the concept "*Victim Characteristics*", under the *Offence Characteristics* category. Lastly, the participant may also have been made aware of the accusations by a third party, who was not directly involved in the incident. In most cases, this was either a witness or an involved authority, namely the Criminal Justice System (*n* = 6). Whilst some participants described such Criminal Justice System involvement as traumatic, others had more positive, and supportive experiences. The engagement of the Criminal Justice System also appeared to affect whether the participant believed the accusations. For example, if the police portrayed the accusations to be lacking credibility, or a jury found their partner "not guilty", participants were more likely to believe that the accusations were false.

The second major category to emerge was *Offence Characteristics*. When considering *Offence Type*, contact offences were often viewed as more serious than non-contact offences, or online offences. Another important concept was *Victim Characteristics* (e.g., victim age, mental illness, victim-perpetrator relationship, victim-participant relationship). The younger the accuser or victim was at the time of the alleged offence, the more likely the participant was to take such accusations seriously. Additionally, if the accuser had previously been in a relationship with the participant's partner, they were more likely to

be discredited and disbelieved. This was due to the assumption that they made the accusations to “punish” the participant’s partner for a breakup or wanted to break up the participant’s relationship to win back their former partner. As previously mentioned, *Consequences*, such as those arising from Criminal Justice System involvement, could also heavily impact a participant’s perception of accusations. Such Criminal Justice System involvement (e.g., imprisonment) appeared to make the accusations more credible. No formal consequences or even acquittal seemingly had the opposite effect, with participants reporting that they believed the Criminal Justice System to make the “right” decision (e.g., “A jury of people have listened to everything. They’ve decided, you know, they’ve come up with their decision, so, you believe it as well.”)

Offence Characteristics heavily influence the participant’s *Initial Reaction* to the accusations, the third category to emerge in this period. *Initial Reaction* could be behavioural (e.g., physically distancing oneself), affective (e.g., anger, sadness, disgust), and cognitive (e.g., confusion, worsened view of one’s partner). How a participant reacted to the accusations was often in part determined by their *Partner’s Reaction*. Some participants reported believing their partner when they denied the accusations and thus did not react strongly. A confession, on the other hand, mostly led to the participant believing the accusations. Overall, participants reported their *Initial Reaction* to be either negative (*n* = 14), indifferent (n = 8) or positive (*n* = 1). A predominantly negative *Initial Reaction* usually eventually led the participant to believe the accusations.

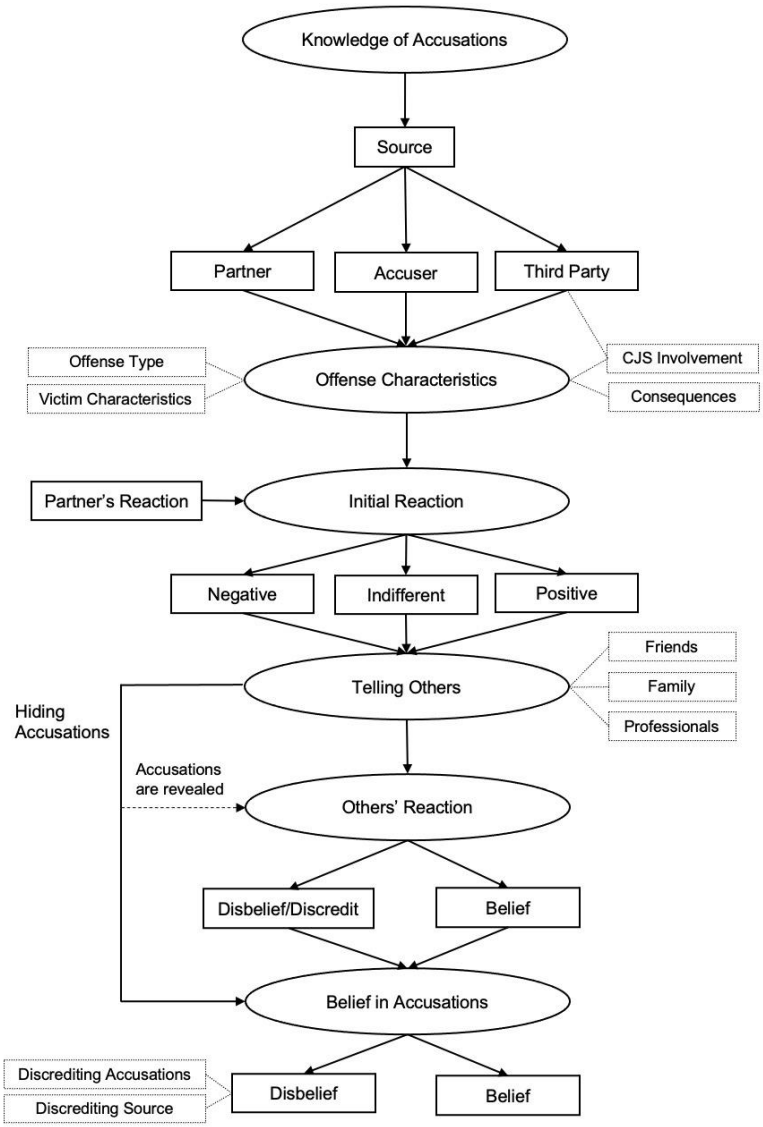
The next category to emerge was *Telling Others*. Many participants (*n* = 10) reported that a negative *Initial Reaction* of shame, guilt, and a fear of judgement caused them to hide the accusations from others (see arrow on the left-hand side of the model in

Figure ***3.3***). This led to a lack of social support outside of the participant's relationship with their partner. When telling others about the accusations, participants confided in either their friends (*n* = 9), family (*n* = 6), or professionals (*n* = 6), for example, a therapist or law enforcement personnel. Some participants confided in multiple groups or individuals. For those who confided in others about the accusations, *Others' Reaction* played an important role in their belief in the accusations with participants tending to mirror others' reactions (i.e., *n* = 5 mirrored disbelief and *n* = 10 took the accusations seriously). In some cases, it also influenced the belief of those who tried to hide the accusations from others, if the accusations were revealed against their will (*n* = 3; e.g., through vigilantes or media exposure), as depicted by the arrow titled "*Accusations are revealed*".

Critically, each category in this period mentioned above had a significant impact on the participant's *Belief in the Accusations*. Those participants who exhibited *Belief* in the accusations (*n* = 13) described their partner's confession (as described in *Partner's Reaction*) to be the most important factor in their unequivocal *Belief* in the accusations. Some also reported favourable *Victim Characteristics* (e.g., trust in the accuser due to emotionality), as mentioned earlier in this period, and seeing evidence to have led them to believe the accusations. On the other hand, those who reported *Disbelief* in the accusations (*n* = 10) supported and justified this by discrediting either the accusations themselves (*n* = 3; e.g., because they are unrealistic, not plausible etc.,), the accuser or source (*n* = 3; e.g., because of unfavourable *Victim Characteristics*) or both (*n* = 4).

Figure 3.3

Study One Period 3: Finding Out



Period 4: Relationship Decision-Making

The data which emerged regarding the participants' decision to stay with or leave the relationship was divided into six main categories, with additional subordinate concepts (see Figure 3.4)

The first category to emerge was the *Initial Consideration* participants reported when considering *Termination Reasons* and *Continuation Reasons*. *Termination Reasons* (see left-hand side of the model in Figure 3.4) considered by participants, following the knowledge

of accusations, were either *offence-related* or *-unrelated*. The only *offence-unrelated* reason for relationship termination considered by participants was relationship dissatisfaction, often arising from low *Relationship Quality* preceding the accusations (see Period 2: Relationship Factors; e.g., “I was already dissatisfied with certain aspects of the relationship”). However, most *Termination Reasons* considered by participants were directly related to the alleged offence, and participants only contemplated these if they had established a *Belief* in the accusations (see Period 3: Finding Out). Participants described considering leaving the relationship because of perceived *Danger*. Here, they stated viewing their partner as a dangerous person, and wanting to protect themselves and possibly their children (e.g., “I know what you’re doing to other people’s children. I don’t trust you around my own”). Participants also reported the *Deception* associated with their partner’s alleged offending behaviour to be a reason why they considered terminating the relationship. This was especially the case when their partner hid the offences over a long period of time or denied accusations when the participant believed these to be true (e.g., “Our whole life felt like a lie”), leading participants to re-evaluate the relationship. Another reason for relationship dissolution considered by participants was perceived *Infidelity* because of the sexual nature of the alleged offence. Participants described feeling as if their partner had cheated on them, or that their partner offended because of a lack of attraction towards them (e.g., “She basically cheated on me”). Additionally, some participants experienced *Outside pressure* to end the relationship, from friends, family, or their community (see *Others’ Reaction* in Period 3: Finding Out) or from intervening professionals. This was exacerbated in cases where the participant’s partner was arrested or convicted (see *CJS involvement* in Period 3: Finding Out), which usually meant that a greater proportion of the community was aware of the offence or accusations or gave them more credibility. Interaction with intervening professionals was often stated to be dismissive and even hostile (e.g., “The whole system is very, very anti-women, anti-children, in fact”). *Outside pressure* was especially salient where social services were involved to safeguard the participants’ children (e.g., “So they just gotta focus on making sure that the women run as fast as they can and take the children with

them"), or in cases where the media reported on the accusations. Participants also reported considering relationship termination because of a sense of empathy, solidarity, and even guilt towards the victim (e.g., "I was just somehow feeling guilty. Like, I felt like I had to make it up to some way"). The last offence-related reason participants considered for terminating their relationship was *Morality*, a sense that leaving their partner after finding out about the accusations was the 'right thing to do' (e.g., "I don't think I thought I had a choice").

Continuation Reasons (see right-hand side of the model in Figure 3.4) considered by participants were similarly either *offence-unrelated* or *-related*. Participants mentioned a greater variety of *offence-unrelated* reasons for considering relationship continuation vs. termination. *Relationship satisfaction*, arising from high *Relationship Quality* (see Period 2: Relationship Factors) was a main offence-unrelated reason for considering relationship continuation (e.g., "I was very, very happy with him, and at this point, I can say I'm still happy to be with him"). Participants also stated the *Love* or *Commitment* they felt towards their partner to be a reason for considering relationship continuation. This was usually the case when the participant had been in the relationship for a long time, and especially when the participant was married (e.g., "When I said my wedding vows, I meant them"). For participants in such long-term committed relationships, having *Children* with their partner was also a commonly named reason for considering relationship continuation (e.g., "I've remained supportive of him for the sake of the children. But I don't think I could forgive it, it's just too horrible"). Additionally, some participants reported the *Abuse* they were subjected to from their partner (see Period 2: Relationship Factors), to be an important reason for considering continuing the relationship. Here, participants described being manipulated into thinking no one else would love them or being isolated by their partner and thus lacking a support system (e.g., "He would constantly say things like, 'No one's gonna love you like I do'"). The last *offence-unrelated* reason for consideration of relationship continuation, as stated by the participants, were *Negative consequences* of leaving the relationship, such as

their partner retaliating or negative cultural implications of having been in a “failed” relationship.

Participants also named several *offence-related* relationship *Continuation Reasons.* The main *offence-related* reason participants described was a *Disbelief* or discrediting of the accusations, as outlined in-depth in Period 3: Finding Out. If participants disbelieved or discredited the accusations, they were likely to report not seeing a reason to consider ending the relationship at all. However, some participants also remained in the relationship despite believing the accusations to be true. For example, some of these participants believed that their *partner had changed* and cited this to be a reason they considered staying in the relationship. This was especially the case when the alleged offence had occurred before they entered the relationship. The more time had passed since the accusations the more likely participants were to judge that this did not reflect who their partner was when they were in the relationship, especially if their partner had actively worked on themselves, for example by attending therapy (e.g., “He did a lot of things to change himself. So, how can I judge him now?”). Additionally, participants reported wanting to aid their partner’s *Desistance* as a reason for considering relationship continuation. Here, participants emphasised the importance of relationships in preventing future offending behaviour (e.g., “I just think that women who stay need to be given a bit of respect and credit. And also, when you look at the figures of reduction in reoffending and rehabilitation, that’s what’s needed”). Such a focus on *Desistance* was also often tied to a *Medicalisation* of the offence, for instance, by viewing their partner’s offending behaviour as arising from an escalating pornography addiction (e.g., “Any other kind of addiction or issue, the person is treated, except this”). Lastly, participants described the *Support* they received to be a reason for considering relationship continuation. Usually, *Support* came from friends, family, or self-organised peer support groups, as professional support (e.g., therapy) was not always accessible. However, in contrast to the *Outside pressure* from intervening professionals some participants noted as a reason for relationship termination, here, some participants

stated that intervening professionals were helpful and provided *Support*. For instance, participants reported being reassured that staying with their partner was an acceptable choice and that other people also stay with their partner following an alleged offence (e.g., “And she said to me, ‘Well, about 50% of couples make it through this.’”).

Overall, all participants named more than one reason for considering either staying with or leaving their partner. Thus, the *Initial Relationship Decision* was usually made after weighing up *Termination Reasons* and *Continuation Reasons*, often both *offence-related* and *-unrelated*. Eventually, seven participants decided on immediate relationship *Termination* (see the left-hand side of the model in Figure 3.4). Some of these participants (*n* = 4) terminated the relationship initially after hearing about the accusations but later decided to reconcile with their partner as marked by the *Reconciliation* box. Often, participants reported *Reconciliation* to be the result of being charmed or manipulated into re-entering the relationship by their partner. The remaining participants (*n* = 16) initially decided to engage in a *Continuation* of the relationship (see the right-hand side of the model in Figure 3.4).

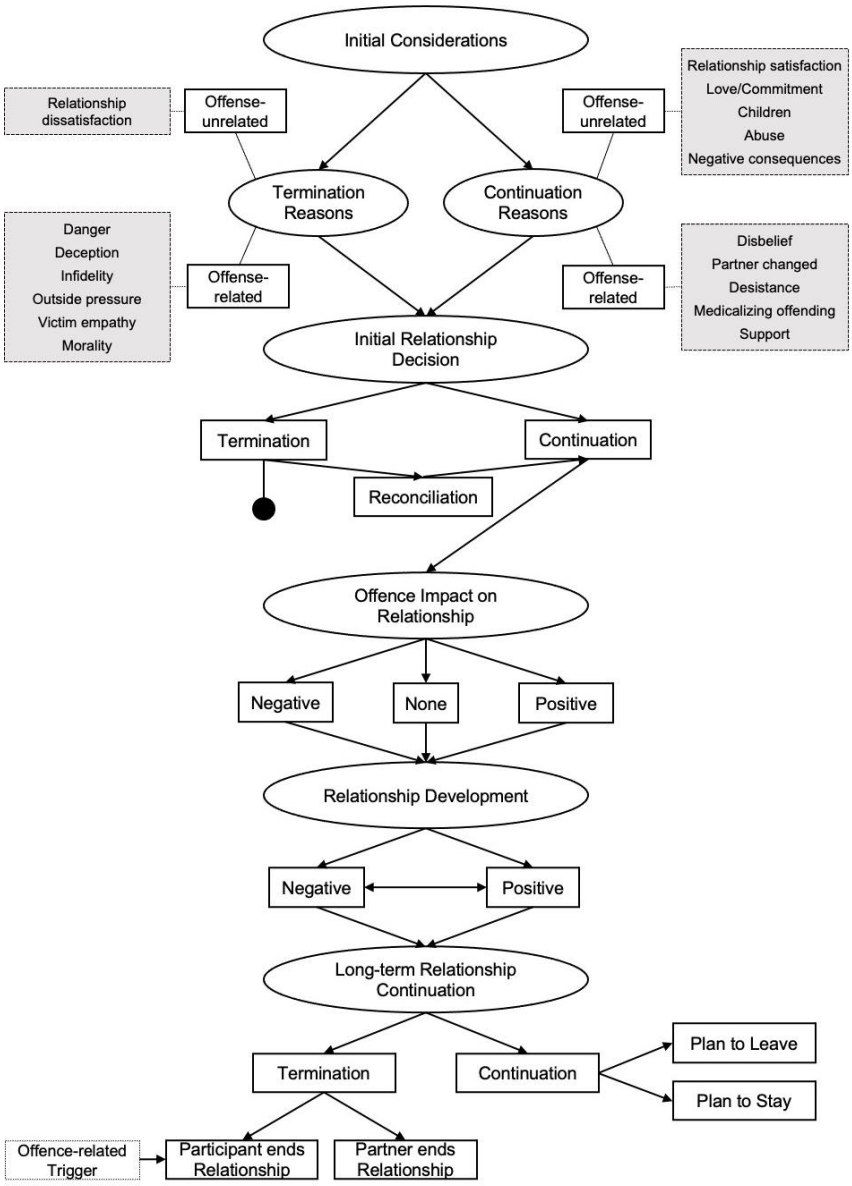
For those participants who continued the relationship, there was often a lasting *Offence Impact on the Relationship*. Participants usually reported the offence as having had a negative impact (*n* = 14; e.g., conflict, stress, not being able to forgive the offence) on the relationship, with only one participant describing a positive impact (increased trust and intensity). For some participants (*n* = 5), the offence did not have any impact on their relationship. This was usually the case when there were other issues in the relationship, such as abuse, which seemed more pressing.

The impact of the offence on the relationship usually also influenced further *Relationship Development*. This was either predominantly negative (*n* = 13; e.g., escalating abuse, increased conflict, dissatisfaction) or positive (*n* = 5; e.g., rebuilding the relationship, regaining trust). One participant reported that the *Relationship Development* was initially positive but later turned negative, as depicted by the arrow connecting the two pathways. A positive *Relationship Development* made *Long-term Relationship Continuation* more likely,

whilst a negative *Relationship Development* made it less likely. *Long-term Relationship Continuation,* the final category to emerge in this period, described the participants' relationship status with their partner at the time of the interview. Most participants (*n* = 14) did not continue the relationship long-term and were not in the relationship anymore (i.e., *Termination*), at the time of the interview. In a few cases (*n* = 3), the participant's partner ended the relationship due to reasons unrelated to the offence. The participants who ended the relationship with their partner after initially continuing it earlier on in this period (*n* = 11), reported escalating abuse, a lack of trust arising from the offence, and relationship dissatisfaction as the main reasons for their decision to leave the relationship. For those who terminated the relationship, this was also sometimes influenced by an *Offence-Related Trigger* (*n* = 4). Such triggers were information that the participant received about the alleged offence after initially finding out about it which subsequently changed their perception of the offence (e.g., finding evidence, having contact with the victim). Very few of the participants (*n* = 6) continued the relationship long-term and were still in the relationship at the time of interview. These participants either planned to stay in the relationship (*n* = 5), usually because of high relationship satisfaction, or were planning to leave the relationship (*n* = 1), because they were still affected by the accusations but not ready to leave their partner yet.

Figure 3.4

Study One Period 4: Relationship Decision-Making



Pathways Followed by Participants

Each participant's progression through the model was plotted to track potential discrete routes or *pathways* followed by non-offending partners in their relationship decision-making. However, the sample was too heterogenous for me to identify any distinct patterns.

Discussion

Using interviews with current and ex-partners of individuals who have been accused of sexual offending, I developed the first descriptive model of relationship decision-making in non-offending partners. The model's key strength lies in its detailed account of why non-offending partners stayed in or left their relationship after finding out that their partner had been accused of a sexual offence. It clearly documents how affective, behavioural, cognitive, and situational factors that arose before, during, and after finding out about the accusations, contributed to such decision-making in my sample. Here, it is sufficiently sensitive to account for the diversity of non-offending partners. In the following section, I interpret the most important aspects of the model and their theoretical implications before discussing potential practical implications. Finally, I consider some key limitations of the current study. Directions for future research are outlined throughout.

Findings and Theoretical Implications

First, this research suggests that relationship decision-making in non-offending partners is dependent on a large variety of factors, not all of which are directly related to the alleged offence, but rather connected to the participant's life experiences prior to and during the relationship. This is especially the case for participants whose partners did not have any interaction with Criminal Justice System-related agencies, for instance those whose partners were accused but never arrested or convicted, and who subsequently may rely on their relationship experience rather than on outside factors. An especially notable reason for staying with their partner, as reported by my participants, which is unrelated to the accusations, was high relationship quality and arising *relationship satisfaction*. It has been firmly established that such satisfaction, alongside other factors stated by my participants (e.g., *commitment*, having *children* with their partner, fear of *negative consequences* of relationship dissolution), is one of the most common reasons for relationship continuation in the general population (Joel et al., 2018; Le et al., 2010). Similarly, the main offence-unrelated reason for leaving the relationship endorsed by my sample, *relationship*

dissatisfaction, has been found to also be a primary reason for relationship dissolution in the general population (Amato & Previti, 2003; Machia & Ogolsky, 2021). Most saliently, however, the model clearly demonstrates that participants were influenced in their decision-making by factors unique to their situation as non-offending partners. In particular, it accounts for the wide range of factors associated with the accusations themselves (e.g., perceived *danger, victim empathy*), as well as how these affected the reaction to the accusations by others (e.g., *outside pressure* to end the relationship, or *support* to continue it) and how the sum of these factors collectively influenced the participant's assessment of their situation. Here, whether the participant believed the accusations to be true or discredited them appeared to be the most notable factor shaping their decision-making process. Perhaps surprisingly, despite its impact on such a *Belief* in the accusations, no pattern emerged to distinguish those whose partners were "only" accused of offending from those whose partners were formally investigated or even convicted. Future research may be conducted to differentiate between these two populations to further understand possible differences and effectively address their individual needs.

Practical Implications

The development of my model has several practical implications for practitioners working with non-offending partners and ex-partners, as well as those working with individuals who have sexually offended who are in relationships. First, whilst some organisations offer services to families of those who have offended (e.g., The Lucy Faithfull Foundation, n.d.) there are currently no targeted support resources for non-offending partners in England and Wales. Non-offending partners in my sample and previous research (Duncan et al., 2022) reported facing various barriers (often financial) to accessing the limited support available and thus relying on self-organised peer support groups. This is concerning given the uniqueness and complexity of their situation demonstrated by my model and the psychological distress they experience as a result of their partner's offending or accusations against their partner (Duncan et al., 2020). My model may be used to inform

potential support programmes for both those whose partners have been accused or convicted, going beyond their usefulness in desistance and safeguarding, as outlined in Chapter 1, and instead focusing on the effect the offence or accusations had on them. For example, such programmes could use my model to help non-offending partners understand the variety of factors which may be related to their stay/leave decision and make the best possible decision for themselves and their families.

A second implication arises for Criminal Justice System-related organisations. Non-offending partners often encounter multiple agencies (e.g., police, child protection services) in the aftermath of their partner's offence, and named their support, or lack thereof, to be crucial in relationship decision-making (see *outside pressure* and *support* in Period 3: Finding Out). My participants reported interactions with these agencies to be inconsistent, ranging from supportive and empathetic to dismissive and hostile. Such particularly negative responses may cause or increase courtesy stigma experienced by non-offending partners, which is often exacerbated by Criminal Justice System-related agencies (Duncan et al., 2020; Liddell & Taylor, 2015). However, there is currently no consistent guidance available to Criminal Justice System-related agencies on how to approach non-offending partners. My model may inform codes of practice – like the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales (Ministry of Justice, 2020) – or training programmes for professionals within these organisations. These may demonstrate the complexity of the relationship decision-making process and the diversity of the population and could enhance perspective-taking towards non-offending partners and thus reduce the courtesy stigma they experience.

In cases where someone's partner was convicted of a sexual offence, rather than merely accused, a final practical implication of my model may be its potential impact on rehabilitation frameworks, such as the Risk-Need-Responsivity Model (Bonta & Andrews, 2017) and the Good Lives Model (Ward & Gannon, 2006), which commonly focus on relationships, as outlines in Chapter 1. Due to the demonstrated efficacy of treatment programmes based upon such frameworks (e.g., Hanson et al., 2009), they are widely used,

for example in the US (e.g., Washington State Department of Corrections, 2022) and the UK (e.g., HM Prison and Probation Service, 2021). Here, my model could illustrate to the treatment provider and the individual who has offended the complexity and difficulty of the decision the non-offending partner had to make, to promote greater empathy and subsequently improve relationship quality. This may especially be used, for instance with those who have sexually offended who have intimacy deficits arising from issues with theory of mind (as discussed in Chapter 1, Keenan & Ward, 2000; Ward et al., 2000). Should a non-offending partner decide to stay in the relationship, treatment programmes may also consider greater involvement of the non-offending partner, in cases in which this is in both partners' best interest. This could be achieved, for instance, by incorporating couples treatment to strengthen the relationship which, as shown in my model, may be particularly susceptible to breakdown after accusations or an offence have been disclosed. Such couples treatment may also address intimacy deficits which are commonly linked to offending behaviour (for a review see Martin & Tardif, 2014). As highlighted previously in this thesis, any treatment incorporating non-offending partners should be conducted especially sensitively and with a particular focus on ethics to ensure that non-offending partners' wellbeing is not jeopardised as a result of them being abused as tools for the rehabilitation process (see Chapter 1 for an in-depth discussion and possible solutions for practitioners).

Lastly, as the accusations against seven participants' partners in my sample pertained offences which were said to have taken place prior to the relationship, my model may also give insight to those who have offended about how to broach the topic of having committed an offence to a prospective or new partner. For instance, treatment providers may consider discussing with the person who has offended the importance of the source from whom the non-offending partner hears about the accusations or preparing them for potential outcomes as applicable to the specific circumstances surrounding their relationship and the offence.

Limitations

The primary strength of the current research is its novelty as it presents, to my knowledge, the first model of relationship stay/leave decision-making in non-offending partners. As such, it gives a detailed description of affective, behavioural, cognitive, and contextual factors contributing to why participants decided to stay with or leave their partner after finding out about the accusations against them. Here, it is flexible enough to accommodate the diversity of the sample.

Despite this strength and the potential practical utility of the model, there are, however, some limitations that require discussion. First, although the model is sufficiently saturated to account for the decision-making process of each participant in my sample, I was unable to find distinct *pathways* through the model followed by different "types" of non-offending partners. A potential explanation for this may be the diversity of non-offending partners as a group, when compared to the samples methodologically similar research has examined (e.g., Collins et al., 2022; Ford et al., 2021). For example, offence chain models developed using Grounded Theory typically include individuals convicted of and detained for a certain offence (e.g., Gannon et al., 2008; Tyler et al., 2014) whereas I included anyone whose partner or ex-partner was accused of any sexual offence. A model of relationship decision-making must be very sensitive to account for such heterogeneity. Whilst my sample size was not unusually small for Grounded Theory research (Charmaz, 2014), and I sought to include non-offending partners with a range of different experiences, it is likely that certain groups were underrepresented which may explain why I was unable to identify pathways through the model. For instance, only one participant's partner was convicted of committing contact sexual offences against children, and some relatively common offences (e.g., exposure, voyeurism) were not represented at all. My sample did also not include any cases of intrafamilial abuse. This contrasts with the overall literature on non-offending partners which has historically disproportionately focused on, and blamed, non-offending mothers (Azzopardi et al., 2018), as discussed in Chapter 1. Nevertheless, as prior research has

established (e.g., Gannon et al., 2008; Polaschek et al., 2001), a key strength of Grounded Theory methodology is its ability for future modification of models in response to additional data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Thus, further research may be conducted with additional samples of non-offending partners and ex-partners of individuals who have sexually offended or been accused of sexual offending to validate and refine the model and any potential pathways.

In addition to the limited sample described above, there are several limitations inherent in Grounded Theory which may have impacted the validity and reliability of my model. Most important is my reliance on retrospective self-reports given by non-offending partners. These may have been affected by memory distortions, self-deception, and impression management strategies. Crucially, most participants in my sample were not in the relationship anymore at the time of the interview. This could have led to a distorted view of the situation, such as a negative re-definition of the relationship (e.g., arising from arguments or jealousy) commonly experienced after a breakup (Kellas et al., 2008). Future research may wish to focus on a balanced sample of those non-offending partners who are currently still in the relationship and those who are not to control for such effects. Finally, my model may represent some researcher bias, for instance, reflecting my pre-existing hypotheses and knowledge from the wider literature on non-offending partners or sexual offending. Given the dearth of existing research and paired with the principles of Grounded Theory employed to reduce such bias (i.e., simultaneous inductive and deductive analysis; reflexivity), I believe these strategies sufficiently minimised researcher biases. Nonetheless, future research should be completed to cross-validate the model and examine pathways to relationship stay/leave decision-making in non-offending partners.

Conclusion

In conclusion, my model represents, to my knowledge, the first attempt to describe the relationship decision-making process in non-offending partners. Given the dearth of research and theory examining the experiences of this population, as described in Chapters

1 and 2, using Grounded Theory methodology allowed me to develop a flexible yet detailed model based on the individual narratives of non-offending partners. Here, it has shown that non-offending partners are influenced by a wide range of factors and weigh up both offence-unrelated and -related reasons for relationship termination and continuation before making their decision. However, the current study was impacted by some of the limitations and characteristics of Grounded Theory. For one, retrospective self-reports may have caused biases in participants' narratives, primarily due to memory distortions. Additionally, whilst Grounded Theory, by its very nature, is not meant to be generalisable, future research could use the model as a starting point to create a more generalisable description of the relationship decision-making process. In the next chapter, I address some of these issues by assessing some of the factors related to relationship decision-making in a vignette-based mixed methods experiment with general population samples.

CHAPTER 4 – A MIXED METHODS EXPLORATION OF RELATIONSHIP DECISION-MAKING FOLLOWING A PARTNER'S OFFENCE

Given the lack of research investigating non-offending partners' experiences, and specifically their relationships, as highlighted in Chapters 1 and 2, in Study One I used qualitative methods (i.e., Grounded Theory) to develop a model of relationship decision-making in non-offending partners. Grounded Theory was ideal for this "first step" in exploring non-offending partners' relationship decision-making as it allowed me to build a detailed, yet dynamic model based on a small number of individual narratives. The resulting model showed that non-offending partners' relationship decision-making process is complex and influenced by both offence-related and -unrelated factors. The study reported within this chapter aims to expand upon the findings from Study One by (a) recruiting from a general population sample to assess the model built during Study One using a mixed methods approach, and (b) conducting a vignette-based experiment to assess how the factors discovered in Study One impact relationship decision-making in "real time". Such a diversification of the methods used may not only add to the robustness of the model built in Study One but may also address memory biases arising from the retrospective self-reports Study One relied upon (e.g., negative re-definitions of the relationship after a breakup; Kellas et al., 2008).

Due to the time constraints of this PhD and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, as detailed in the COVID-19 Impact Statement, the pre-registration for this study was completed prior to the completion of Study One. Therefore, there were some deviations from the pre-registration to suitably assess the findings of Study One. Any such deviations from the pre-registration are noted and explained in footnotes throughout. Supplementary materials for this chapter can be found online (https://osf.io/uyfzg/?view_only=ac2926ddfe3c4075931a9f2964605e03).

Study Two

The main aim of Study Two was to assess whether the factors found to be related to relationship continuation or termination in Study One would be related to, or even statistically predict, relationship decision-making immediately after finding out that a partner has committed an offence, in a large sample of female students. Here, I applied a mixed methods design by combining elements of quantitative and qualitative research (R. B. Johnson et al., 2007). This allowed me to bring together advantages and disadvantages from both types of research and analyse information gathered from every participant (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Using this design, I explored both psychological and situational factors associated with relationship continuation likelihood, as reported by non-offending partners in Study One, specifically:

- *Offence Type*
- *Relationship Duration*
- *Interpersonal Dependency*
- *Perceived Illegality*
- *Attitudes Towards Those who Have Sexually Offended*
- *Sexism*
- *Acceptance of Myths About Sexual Aggression*

Participants were first allocated to one of three vignette conditions which described them witnessing their partner committing either a non-sexual (i.e., violent) or sexual (i.e., sexual assault or rape) offence, before indicating their likelihood of continuing their relationship. This allowed me to assess the influence different *Offence Types* would have on relationship decision-making, an offence-related factor which was found to be impactful for non-offending partners in Study One. The remaining factors hypothesised to influence relationship decision-making were assessed using questionnaire measures. Here,

Relationship Duration was used as a proxy for *Commitment*, an offence-unrelated factor which participants in Study One claimed to be an important reason for deciding to stay with their partner, especially when they had been in their relationship for a long time. Additionally, I assessed *Relationship Satisfaction*, which was also a main offence-unrelated reason for non-offending partners in Study One to decide to remain in their relationship, whilst, conversely, *Relationship Dissatisfaction* was the only offence-unrelated reason named for wanting to leave the relationship. Further, I assessed *Interpersonal Dependency* as a potential predictor for relationship continuation. Whilst this was not explicitly named as a reason for relationship continuation in Study One, research has linked high levels of *Interpersonal Dependency* to a greater likelihood of staying in disadvantageous or even abusive relationships (Bornstein, 2006; Drigotas & Rusbult, 1992). Thus, it may also predict higher levels of relationship continuation in non-offending partners who are in socially stigmatised relationships. The relationship between *Interpersonal Dependency* and intimate partner abuse victimisation (for a review, see Pereira et al., 2020) additionally links to Study One as participants described the *Abuse* they were subjected to by their partner as playing a role in why they decided to stay with them.

The most salient offence-related reason for wanting to stay in the relationship reported in Study One was the belief that the accusations of sexual offending were simply untrue, that is, there was a *Disbelief* or *Minimisation* of the accusations by the participant. Subsequently, in this study, *Perceived Illegality* of one's partner's actions, as described in the vignette, was used as a proxy for a belief in the offending behaviour having occurred (i.e., the opposite of *Disbelief* in Study One). Another offence-related reason for wanting to stay in the relationship reported by participants in Study One was the belief that their partner could change or, more generally, that those who have sexually offended are capable of successfully undergoing treatment and desistance from offending behaviour. In this study, this is reflected by participants' *Attitudes Towards Those who Have Sexually Offended*. Lastly, *Sexism* and *Acceptance of Myths About Sexual Aggression* were included as

offence-related factors connected to blaming victims of sexual violence (Davies et al., 2012; Yamawaki, 2007), and thus being negatively related to *Victim Empathy* and positively related to a minimisation of the offending behaviour. Participants additionally provided a qualitative response outlining their reasons for their indicated relationship decision.

Given the general population's negative attitudes towards those who have sexually offended and the stigma associated with sexual offences (e.g., Olver & Barlow, 2010; Quinn et al., 2004), as well as the courtesy stigma facing non-offending partners (see Chapter 2), I hypothesised that participants would indicate a higher likelihood of staying in the relationship if their partner had committed a non-sexual offence than if their partner had committed a sexual offence, as described in the vignette. Second, I aimed to explore whether factors linked to reasons of relationship continuation for non-offending partners in Study One, as listed above, would predict relationship decision-making in this hypothetical context, and across conditions.[7] I additionally planned to investigate whether the role of any of these factors in predicting relationship continuation would interact with the Offence Type the participant's partner was described as having committed. Lastly, I aimed to conduct directed deductive content analysis on qualitative survey responses to gain additional insight into participants' explicit reasoning behind their relationship decision-making and compare this to the reasoning provided by non-offending partners in Study One. Hypotheses, methods, and analyses were pre-registered (https://osf.io/k43jf/?view_only=411e7b9c2d534107a016d7c5126dcb8b).

Method

Ethics

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Kent School of Psychology Ethics Committee (ID: 202016036992276660). Prior to survey participation, informed

[7] In the pre-registration, I planned to enter these variables into two separate regression models (Hypotheses Two and Three). However, this was an oversight on my part and I decided to enter these into the same regression model to enable me to interpret the contribution of each predictor while holding other predictors constant.

consent was given by each participant via a consent form. Following their participation, participants were provided with details of community support groups and organisations in the UK and given a full debriefing.[8]

Participants

After excluding 17 participants due to noncompletion, completing the study in less than half the median completion time, and failing at least one of four attention checks[9], the final sample comprised 220 female students at the University of Kent.[10] Participants were recruited through opportunity sampling and reimbursed with course credits. They were between the ages of 18 and 53 years (M = 19.85, SD = 4.05), and the majority (85.5%, n = 188) identified as heterosexual and described their ethnicity as white (UK/Irish, European, or "Other"; 74.1%, n = 163). At the time of participation, participants had to have been in a relationship with a male partner for at least two months. This required relationship duration ensured that participants were in a committed relationship while accounting for the fact that the average participant age – and subsequently the average duration of participants' relationships – would likely be low. Despite the existence of perpetration of sexual violence of men by women (for a review, see Fisher & Pina, 2013), sexual offending is gendered in nature (Office for National Statistics, 2020), and one of the vignettes included in this study depicts an offence which, under UK law, can only be committed by men (i.e., rape; Sexual Offences Act 2003, § 1). Subsequently, I chose to only recruit women who were in relationships with men. Participants' current relationship duration ranged between 2 months and 11 years (M = 17.44 months, SD = 18.91 months). A large percentage of participants (44.55%, n = 98) had been in this relationship for less than a year. The majority (74.5%, n = 164) described their relationship status as "in a committed relationship", whilst others

[8] Participant handouts can be found in supplementary materials as 'Study Two Participant Handouts' (https://osf.io/uyfzg/?view_only=ac2926ddfe3c4075931a9f2964605e03).
[9] Participants who failed at least one attention check, when compared to those who did not, scored differently on *Likelihood of Relationship Continuation* [$t(231) = -2.47$, $p = .014$], *Relationship Satisfaction* [$t(231) = -2.46$, $p = .015$], *Ambivalent Sexism* [$t(231) = 2.81$, $p = .005$], and *Acceptance of Myths About Sexual Aggression* [$t(231) = 3.51$, $p = .001$] and were thus excluded.
[10] Participants were only excluded from quantitative analyses as they all provided sensical qualitative responses to the open-ended survey question.

described themselves as dating (20%, *n* = 44), cohabitating (4.1%, *n* = 9), or married (1.4%, *n* = 3). Most participants (99.1%, *n* = 218) did not have any children with their partners. Full demographic features and relationship variables by vignette condition can be found in supplementary materials.[11]

Design

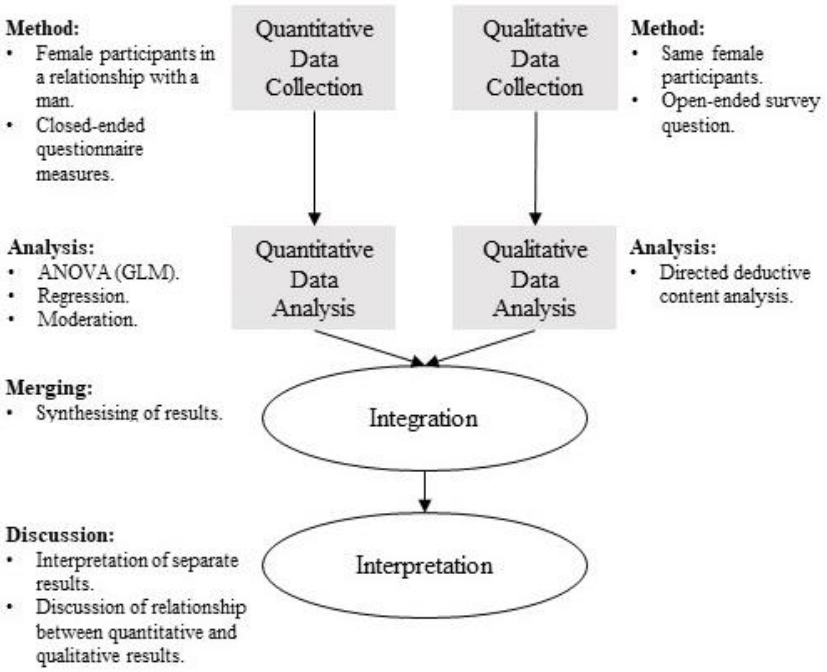
In this study, I applied a mixed methods design by combining elements of qualitative and quantitative research (R. B. Johnson et al., 2007). This approach allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of non-offending partners. Whilst quantitative analyses enabled me to establish general trends in the data, relationships between variables, and the magnitude of such effects, the inclusion of open-ended questions and qualitative analyses complemented this by exploring participants' individual narratives. This aided in further uncovering affective, behavioural, cognitive, and situational factors associated with relationship decision-making in non-offending partners.

I used a questionnaire variant convergent design where quantitative and qualitative data collected during the same phase of the study were analysed separately before being merged (Fetters et al., 2013). Through combining results from both types of data I was able to bring together the advantages and disadvantages of both quantitative and qualitative data and analyse information gathered from every participant (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2018). For a diagram illustrating the design followed for this study, see Figure 4.1

[11] Detailed demographic features can be found in supplementary materials as 'Study Two Demographics' (https://osf.io/uyfzg/?view_only=ac2926ddfe3c4075931a9f2964605e03).

Figure 4.1

Study Two Convergent Study Design



For quantitative data, a randomised experimental vignette design assessed:

(1) The effect of partner's *Offence Type* (physical violence vs. sexual assault vs. rape; between-subjects factor) on relationship continuation likelihood (dependent variable);

(2) The predictive value of factors related to relationship decision-making in non-offending partners as shown in Study One (*Relationship Duration*, *Relationship Satisfaction*, *Interpersonal Dependency*, *Perceived Illegality*, *Attitudes Towards Individuals who Have Sexually Offended*, *Benevolent* and *Hostile Sexism*, *Acceptance of Myths About Sexual Aggression*; the predictors) for predicting relationship continuation likelihood (the criterion); and

(3) The interaction between each of the previously named predictors and the participants' partners' *Offence Type* in predicting relationship continuation likelihood (the criterion).

A directed deductive approach to content analysis was used to analyse explicitly shared reasons for relationship decision-making as gathered through an open-ended survey question – the qualitative aspect of this study.

Materials

For full materials for Study Two, see supplementary materials[12]. I calculated Crohnbach's alpha (α) as a measure of internal consistency for all continuous scales. Throughout this thesis, I interpreted α according to Ponterotto and Ruckdeschel's (2007, p. 1003) guidelines (see Table 4.1). Measures with an internal consistency coefficient falling below "fair" were excluded from analysis.

Table 4.1

Adequacy of Internal Consistency Coefficient α

Items Per Subscale	Rating	Sample Size		
		N < 100	*N* = 100 - 300	*N* > 300
≤ 6	Excellent	.75	.80	.85
	Good	.70	.75	.80
	Moderate	.65	.70	.75
	Fair	.60	.65	.70
7-11	Excellent	.80	.85	.90
	Good	.75	.80	.85
	Moderate	.70	.75	.80
	Fair	.65	.70	.75
≥ 12	Excellent	.85	.90	.90
	Good	.80	.85	
	Moderate	.75	.80	.85
	Fair	.70	.75	.80

Note. This table is based on Ponterotto and Ruckdeschel (2007, p. 1003). A α score below the "Fair" rating is deemed unsatisfactory.

Vignettes. I developed vignettes to depict three scenarios in which the participant witnesses their partner committing an offence. In the vignettes, participants were described

[12] All vignettes and the full scales (including changes made to the AMMSA) can be found in supplementary materials as 'Study Two Materials' (https://osf.io/uyfzg/?view_only=ac2926ddfe3c4075931a9f2964605e03).

as witnessing the offence themselves which allowed me to control for any uncertainty which may arise from hearing about the accusations or offending from a third party or having their partner deny the accusations, as was commonly the case in Study One. The vignettes varied solely by offence type and described the participant's partner committing either a physically violent, non-sexual offence – common assault (Criminal Justice Act 1988, § 39), a sexual assault (Sexual Offences Act 2003, § 3), or rape (Sexual Offences Act 2003, §1). Whilst sexual victimisation of men is a significant issue (for a review, see Fisher & Pina, 2013), to avoid confounding effects of victim gender or age, and because of the previously mentioned gendered nature of sexual violence (Office for National Statistics, 2020), the victim was an adult female stranger in all conditions. Participants provided their partner's first name (in the example below represented as [partner]) which was added to the vignette to increase ecological validity. For reference, the following vignette portrays the participant witnessing their partner committing a sexual assault:

> You and [partner] are at a house party for a friend's birthday. You are both having a really good time dancing and chatting with the other guests. After a while, you spot some of your friends in the corner of the room and walk over to say hi, leaving [partner] behind. You are enjoying yourself so much with your friends, that you completely forget the time. When you check your phone, you realise that it is a lot later than you thought. [Partner] and you had agreed to leave the party by this point because you both have to get up early tomorrow morning. You start looking for [partner] but you can't seem to find him anywhere in the house. Another friend of yours tells you that they had seen [partner] outside. You leave the house, saying goodbye to your friends on the way, and step outside into the night. There does not seem to be anyone out here, but as your eyes adjust to the darkness, you notice two people in the garden. When you walk up to them, you recognise [partner]. He is standing next to a woman you do not recognise. Neither your partner nor the woman

realises that you are approaching them. *You see him touching the woman's breasts. Even though she pushes him away, he tries to touch her again.*

In the physical violence condition, the section marked by asterisks above was instead replaced with "They seem to be arguing about something. All of a sudden, your partner punches the woman." In the rape condition, this section read "You see that he has pulled his trousers down. Even though she tries to push him away, he is holding onto her and pushing her to the ground."

Likelihood of Relationship Continuation. One self-report item assessed likelihood of relationship continuation: "After experiencing this situation, how likely would you be to continue the relationship with [partner's name]?" Participants responded to this item using a seven-point Likert scale (1 = *Extremely unlikely,* 7 = *Extremely* likely). Thus, higher scores indicated a higher likelihood of continuing the relationship.

Reasons for Relationship Decision-Making. One open-ended question assessed participants' reasoning for their indicated relationship decision after witnessing the scenario outlined in the vignette: "What are your reasons for [staying with/leaving] your partner after witnessing the situation described in the vignette?" The question was modified so participants who indicated that they would be more likely to leave ('*Extremely unlikely*' to '*Slightly unlikely*' on *Likelihood of Relationship Continuation*) or stay ('*Neither likely nor unlikely*' to '*Extremely likely*' on *Likelihood of Relationship Continuation*) were presented with the matching question. Participants were required to type an answer containing a minimum of 100 characters.

Perceived Illegality.[13] One self-report item assessed how illegal the participant thought their partner's actions, as depicted in the hypothetical vignette, were: "In the scenario, how likely was it that [partner's name]'s behaviour was against the law?" Participants responded to this item on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *Extremely unlikely*, 7 =

[13] Despite not pre-registering *Illegality* as a predictor, but rather as a manipulation check, I decided to enter it into the model as a proxy for *Disbelief* or minimisation, as found in Study One.

Extremely likely). Thus, higher scores indicated higher perceived illegality of their partner's actions as described in the vignette.

Relationship Duration.[14] Participants responded to "How long have you been in your current relationship?" by indicating their relationship duration in months.

Relationship Satisfaction. Participants' levels of satisfaction with their current relationship were assessed using the Couple Satisfaction Index (CSI; Funk & Rogge, 2007). Participants responded to 16 items (e.g., "My partner makes me happy") using a variety of 6-point Likert scales (e.g., 1 = *Not at all true* to 6 = *Completely true;* 1 = *Extremely unhappy* to 6 = *Perfect*). Aggregated scores ranged from 16 to 96, with higher scores indicating higher levels of relationship satisfaction. In this study, the index achieved "excellent" internal consistency (α = .96).

Interpersonal Dependency. Participants' levels of interpersonal dependency were assessed using the Dependent Personality Questionnaire (DPQ; Tyrer et al., 2004). Participants responded to 8 items on a 4-point Likert scale (e.g., "I rely a lot on my friends and family"; 1 = *Yes, definitely,* 4 = *No, not at all*). Aggregated scores ranged from 8 to 32, with higher scores indicating higher levels of dependent personality. This measure was not found to be sufficiently internally consistent (α = .66) and was thus excluded from analysis.

Attitudes Towards Individuals who Have Sexually Offended. Participants' attitudes towards those who have sexually offended were assessed using the short form of the Attitudes to Sexual Offenders Scale (ATS-21; Hogue & Harper, 2019). Participants responded to 21-items on a 7-point Likert scale (e.g., "I think I would like a lot of sex offenders"; 1 = *Strongly disagree,* 7 = *Strongly agree*). Averaged scores ranged from 1 to 7, with higher scores indicating more favourable attitudes towards individuals who have

[14] Despite not pre-registering relationship duration as a predictor, I decided to enter it into the model as a proxy for *Commitment*, as found in Study One.

sexually offended. In this study, the scale demonstrated “good” internal consistency (α = .89).

Benevolent Sexism. Participants’ levels of benevolent sexism were assessed using the benevolent sexism subscale of the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI; Glick & Fiske, 1996). Participants responded to 11 items on a 5-point Likert scale (e.g., “Women should be cherished and protected by men”; 1 = *Strongly disagree*, 5 = *Strongly agree*). Averaged scores ranged from 1 to 5, with higher scores indicating higher levels of benevolent sexism. In this study, the subscale demonstrated “moderate” internal consistency (α = .77).

Hostile Sexism. Participants’ levels of hostile sexism were assessed using the hostile sexism subscale of the ASI (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Participants responded to 11 items on a 5-point Likert scale (e.g., “Women are too easily offended”; 1 = *Strongly disagree*, 5 = *Strongly agree*). Averaged scores ranged from 1 to 5, with higher scores indicating higher levels of hostile sexism. In this study, the subscale demonstrated “excellent” internal consistency (α = .86).

Acceptance of Myths About Sexual Aggression. Participants’ acceptance of myths about sexual aggression was assessed using the Acceptance of Modern Myths About Sexual Aggression Scale (AMMSA; Gerger et al., 2013). Participants responded to 30 items on a 7-point Likert scale (e.g., “Any woman who is careless enough to walk through dark alleys at night is partly to blame if she is raped”; 1= *Strongly disagree,* 7 = *Strongly agree*). Given the outdated language and grammatical errors in the scale, I changed the wording of some items to increase their clarity after consulting the original German scale (Gerger et al., 2007).[15] Averaged scores ranged from 1 to 7, with higher scores indicating greater acceptance of myths about sexual aggression. In this study, the scale demonstrated “good” internal consistency (α = .89).

[15] Changes made to the AMMSA can be found in supplementary materials as ‘Study Two Materials’ (https://osf.io/uyfzg/?view_only=ac2926ddfe3c4075931a9f2964605e03).

Procedure

The questionnaire was administered using Qualtrics. Before accessing the study, participants who were not eligible to take part in the study were screened out. After providing demographic information (including *Relationship Duration*), participants were randomly allocated to one of the three vignette conditions before indicating their likelihood of relationship continuation and explaining the reasoning behind their decision. They subsequently completed the battery of questionnaire measures (as described in the measures section) in randomised order.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis

I used IBM SPSS Statistics 28 (IBM Corp., 2021) for most quantitative analyses. Moderation analyses were run in SPSS using the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2018). Sensitivity analyses were conducted using G*Power (Faul et al., 2009). The procedure for checking assumptions prior to all analyses followed Field's (2018) guidelines. Throughout this thesis, effect sizes were interpreted according to Cohen's (1988) guidelines apart from Pearson correlation coefficient *r*, which was interpreted according to Funder and Ozer's (2019) guidelines (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2

Effect Size Interpretation Guidelines Used in This Thesis

Interpretation	Coefficient			
	r	η^2_p	*f*	f^2
Very small	.05			
Small	.01	.01	.10	.02
Medium	.20	.06	.25	.15
Large	.30	.14	.40	.35
Very large	.40			

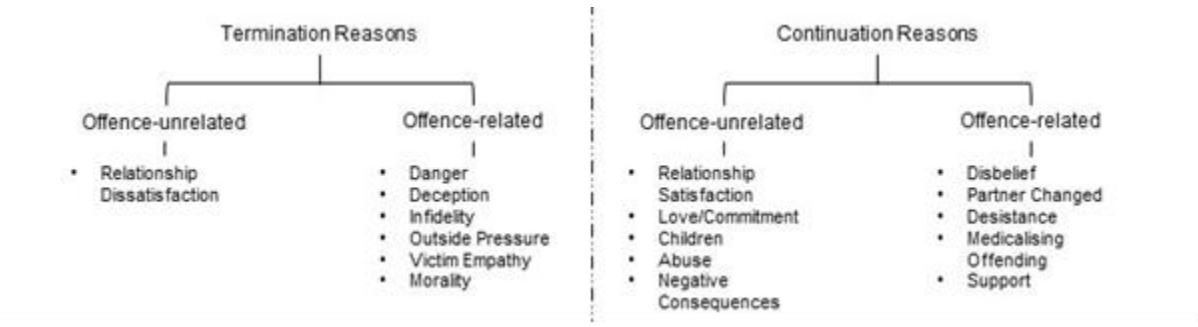
Note. Interpretations for *r* are based on Funder and Ozer (2019). Interpretations for η^2_p, *f* and f^2 are based on Cohen (1988).

Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative survey responses from all participants constituted the raw dataset. I used a directed deductive approach to content analysis to analyse the data. Content analysis has been noted as appropriate even for complex and potentially sensitive topics, and, as a result, has been routinely used in the study of (sexual) violence victimisation and perpetration (e.g., Jimenez-Arista & Reid, 2023; Young et al., 2018). Employing a directed deductive approach allowed me to extent and built upon the findings of Study One (for a discussion of the value of directed deductive approaches for validating and extending previous findings, see Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) by using the offence-related and -unrelated reasons for relationship decision-making explicitly reported by non-offending partners, as predetermined coding categories (see Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2

Study Two Coding Categories



Note. Each bullet point represents a coding category. Coding categories are relationship-decision reasons given by non-offending partners in Study One.

Given that participants usually gave more than one reason for their relationship decision, data was segmented into thematic units based on individual reasons, according to Krippendorff's (2018) guidelines. See below an example of how a participant's response was broken down into several thematic units (illustrated using a slash):

"Because I love him, and if anyone deserves a second chance, it would be him.[1]/ I trust that he would not do it again[2]/ and I would hope that he would do the same for me.[3]"

First, in the deductive phase, we classified each thematic unit according to the predetermined categories, where possible, (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Thus, thematic unit [1] from the example above was categorised as *Love/Commitment*, an offence-unrelated reason for relationship continuation. At this stage, we also identified any data that could not be coded according to these categories. We later analysed such data to determine whether they represented their own, new category or a subcategory of a predetermined category (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Finally, in the inductive phase, we identified potential subcategories emerging from the data (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Therefore, thematic unit [1] from the example above was assigned the subcategory *Emotional Attachment*. Thematic unit [2] from the example above was categorised as *Partner Changed* with the subcategory of *Isolated Incident*, and thematic unit [3] was categorised as *Reciprocity*[16]

Integration

The findings from the quantitative and qualitative analyses were merged (i.e., brought together) so that the qualitative results could be used to validate and enhance the quantitative results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Fetters et al., 2013), and thus create a deeper understanding of the relationship decision-making process. While integration occurred at the study design level as quantitative and qualitative data were collected within the same time frame, results were primarily merged in the discussion section where the relationship between the quantitative and qualitative results and the implications arising from

[16] As this participant was the only one to report *Reciprocity* as a reason for relationship continuation, it was not discussed in-depth in the results.

the combined results are discussed. For a visualisation of the integration process, see Figure 4.1.

Quantitative Findings

Overall, participants indicated a low likelihood of relationship continuation (M = 2.03, SD = 1.43) across conditions. Whilst those in the physical violence condition described a slightly low to moderate likelihood that they would remain with their partner (M = 3.29, SD = 1.55), participants in the sexual assault (M = 1.69, SD = 1.04) and rape conditions (M = 1.24, SD = 0.70) indicated low to very low likelihoods of continuing their relationship.

Effect of Offence Type on Relationship Continuation

A sensitivity analysis showed that, in the overall sample (N = 220), with 80% power and at α = .05, the minimum effect size detectable was small (f = .21). A general linear model (GLM) procedure used to conduct a one-way between-subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA) examined self-reported likelihood to continue the relationship according to whether the participant's partner had committed a physically violent offence (n = 69), a sexual assault (n = 71), or a rape (n = 80). I found a highly significant, large effect of partner's offence type on the likelihood to continue the relationship [$F(2, 217) = 65.58$, $p < .001$; $\eta^2_p = .377$]. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test showed that those whose partner had committed a rape were significantly less likely to continue the relationship (M = 1.24, SD = 0.70), compared to those whose partner had committed a sexual assault (p = .40) or a physically violent offence ($p < .001$). Participants in the sexual assault condition were more likely to indicate relationship continuation (M = 1.69, SD = 1.04) than those in the rape condition (p = .40), but less likely to indicate relationship continuation than those in the physical violence condition ($p < .001$). Thus, women whose partner had committed a physically violent offence were significantly more likely to continue the relationship (M = 3.29, SD = 1.55), compared to those in the rape ($p < .001$) and sexual assault conditions ($p < .001$). For group means, standard deviations, and a summary of post-hoc tests, see Table 4.3.

Table 4.3

Study Two Difference in Relationship Continuation Likelihood Between Conditions

Condition	Condition	*M*(*SD*)	*M Difference*	*p*	*SE*	*95% CI*
Physical violence		3.29 (1.55)				
	Sexual assault		**1.60**	**< .001**	**0.19**	**1.15, 2.05**
	Rape		**2.05**	**< .001**	**0.19**	**1.61, 2.49**
Sexual assault		1.69 (1.04)				
	Physical violence		**-1.60**	**< .001**	**0.19**	**-2.05, -1.15**
	Rape		**0.45**	**.040**	**0.19**	**0.02, 0.89**
Rape		1.24 (0.70)				
	Physical violence		**-2.05**	**< .001**	**0.19**	**-2.49, -1.61**
	Sexual assault		**-0.45**	**.040**	**0.19**	**-0.89, -0.02**

Note. Post-hoc comparisons were conducted using the Tukey HSD test. *M Difference* = mean difference.

Significant ($p < .05$) mean differences are in bold.

Predictors of Relationship Continuation

For scale anchors (i.e., lowest, and highest possible scores on each measure), Table 4.4.

Table 4.4

Study Two Scale Anchors

Variable	*Min.*	*Max.*
Relationship continuation	1.00	7.00
Relationship satisfaction	16.00	96.00
Perceived illegality	1.00	7.00
Attitudes towards those who have sexually offended	1.00	7.00
Benevolent sexism	1.00	5.00
Hostile sexism	1.00	5.00
Acceptance of myths about sexual aggression	1.00	7.00

Note. Min. = lowest possible score on the measure, lower scale anchor; *Max.* = highest possible score on the measure, upper scale anchor.

On average, participants' current *Relationship Duration* was 17.44 months. Participants' *Relationship Satisfaction* and the perceived *Illegality* of their partners' actions were high in the overall sample and in each of the conditions. Participants' *Attitudes Towards Individuals who Have Sexually Offended* were slightly negative in the overall sample and across conditions. Participants' levels of *Benevolent* and *Hostile Sexism* and *Acceptance of Myths About Sexual Aggression* were low in the overall sample and across conditions.

One-way between-subjects ANOVAs showed no difference between conditions in *Relationship Duration* [$F(2,217) = 1.53$, $p = .220$], *Relationship Satisfaction* [$F(2,217) = 0.83$, $p = .439$], *Attitudes Towards Those who Have Sexually Offended* [$F(2,217) = 0.29$, $p = .748$], *Benevolent Sexism* [$F(2,217) = 0.35$, $p = .705$], *Hostile Sexism* [$F(2,217) = 0.26$, $p = .769$], and *Acceptance of Myths About Sexual Aggression* [$F(2,217) = 0.05$, $p = .952$], respectively. However, a one-way between-subjects ANOVA showed a significant medium difference in perceived *Illegality* between conditions [$F(2,217) = 8.48$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .07$]. Here, post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test showed that those in the rape condition perceived their partner's actions as significantly more illegal than those in the physical violence ($p < .001$) or sexual assault conditions ($p = .002$). There was no significant difference in perceived *Illegality* between those in the physical violence and sexual assault conditions.

Most assumptions for conducting multiple regression were met. I observed significant correlations between some of the predictor variables (see Table 4.5), however, according to multicollinearity diagnostics, this did not affect the analysis[17]. Whilst the distribution of residuals was non-normal for the sexual assault and rape conditions, this did not present any issues as the sample sizes of each group were sufficiently large ($n > 30$; Field 2018, p. 782).

[17]Multicollinearity diagnostics can be found in supplementary materials as 'Study Two Multicollinearity' (https://osf.io/uyfzg/?view_only=ac2926ddfe3c4075931a9f2964605e03).

Table 4.5

Study Two Means, Standard Deviations, and Zero-Order Correlations of the Predictors

Variable	*M(SD)*	1	2	3	4	5	6
		Across conditions					
1. Relationship duration	17.44(18.91)						
2. Relationship satisfaction	65.55(13.01)	.00					
3. Perceived illegality	5.67(1.48)	.03	.06				
4. Attitudes towards those who have sexually offended	3.17(0.83)	.03	-.18**	-.09			
5. Benevolent sexism	2.60(0.57)	-.03	-.10	-.07	-.48***		
6. Hostile sexism	2.19(0.65)	.14*	-.01	-.07	.47	.69***	
7. Acceptance of myths about sexual aggression	2.58(0.75)	.07	.00	-.09	.36	.50***	.25***
		Physical violence condition					
1. Relationship duration	18.78(15.10)						
2. Relationship satisfaction	66.46(14.12)	-.08					
3. Perceived illegality	5.36(1.44)	-.07	.06				
4. Attitudes towards those who have sexually offended	3.22(0.83)	.03	-.22*	-.07			
5. Benevolent sexism	2.61(0.51)	-.08	-.25*	.14	-.18		
6. Hostile sexism	2.14(0.60)	.25*	-.17	.02	-.01	.42***	
7. Acceptance of myths about sexual aggression	2.57(0.78)	.10	-.02	.02	.02	.54***	.63***
		Sexual assault condition					
1. Relationship duration	14.23(11.14)						
2. Relationship satisfaction	66.35(10.96)	.02					
3. Perceived illegality	5.38(1.59)	-.12	.06				
4. Attitudes towards those who have sexually offended	3.11(0.84)	-.14	-.06	-.12			
5. Benevolent sexism	2.64(0.61)	.07	-.09	-.07	-.29**		
6. Hostile sexism	2.21(0.70)	-.07	.06	-.12	.09	.41***	
7. Acceptance of myths about sexual aggression	2.61(0.75)	.02	-.04	-.12	.16	.29**	.69***
		Rape condition					
1. Relationship duration	19.13(25.91)						
2. Relationship satisfaction	64.06(13.69)	.05					
3. Perceived illegality	6.20(1.28)	.13	.16				
4. Attitudes towards those who have sexually offended	3.18(0.82)	.10	-.23*	-.09			
5. Benevolent sexism	2.56(0.59)	-.04	-.01	-.20*	-.23*		
6. Hostile sexism	2.20(0.66)	.20*	.06	-.11	-.01	.60***	
7. Acceptance of myths about sexual aggression	2.58(0.72)	.08	.04	-.18	.05	.60***	.74***

Note. $*p \leq .05$. $**p \leq .01$. $***p \leq .001$.

For the entire sample, (N = 220), sensitivity analyses showed that, with 80% power and at α = .05, the minimum effect size detectable was small (f^2 = .04). The minimum effect size detectable was medium for the physical violence (n = 69, f^2 = .23), sexual assault (n = 71, f^2 = .22), and rape (n = 80, f^2 = .20) conditions.

Multiple regression was used to test if *Relationship Duration*, *Relationship Satisfaction*, perceived *Illegality* of the participant's partner's actions, *Attitudes Towards Those who Have Sexually Offended*, *Benevolent* and *Hostile Sexism*, and *Acceptance of Myths About Sexual Aggression* significantly predicted the likelihood of relationship continuation in the overall sample. A significant regression equation was found, predicting

10.2% of the variance [R^2 = .10, F(7,212) = 3.43, p = .002]. *Relationship Satisfaction* (β = .14, p = .041), perceived *Illegality* (β = -.24, p < .001) and *Attitudes Towards Those who Have Sexually Offended* (β = .17, p = .016) were the only significant predictors in the model. The same model was not found to be significant in the physical assault [F(7,61) = 1.38, p = .231] and sexual assault [F(7,63) = 1.99, p = .070] conditions, respectively. However, in the rape condition, the 7 predictors explained 23.7% of the variance [R^2 = .24, F(7,72) = 3.19, p = .005]. Here, only perceived *Illegality* was a significant predictor in the model (β = -.33, p = .003). For regression statistics by vignette condition, see Table 4.6.

Table 4.6

Study Two Regression Results by Condition Using Relationship Continuation Likelihood as the Outcome Variable

Predictor						Correlations		
	b(SE)	*b 95% CI*	*beta*	*t*	*p*	partial	semi-partial	$R^2(p)$
Across Conditions								**.10(.002)**
(Constant)	1.02(0.99)	-0.93,2.97		1.03	.304			
Relationship duration	0.00(0.01)	-0.01,0.01	.05	0.80	.426	.06	.05	
Relationship satisfaction	**0.02(0.01)**	**0.00,0.03**	**.14**	**2.06**	**.041**	**.14**	**.13**	
Perceived illegality	**-0.23(0.06)**	**-0.36,-0.11**	**-.24**	**-3.66**	**< .001**	**-.24**	**-.24**	
Attitudes towards those who have sexually offended	**0.30(0.12)**	**0.06,0.54**	**.17**	**2.42**	**.016**	**.16**	**.16**	
Benevolent sexism	0.24(0.21)	-0.16,0.65	.10	1.18	.238	.08	.08	
Hostile sexism	-0.19(0.20)	-0.59,0.21	-.09	-0.93	.356	-.06	-.06	
Acceptance of myths about sexual aggression	0.04(0.18)	-0.31,0.39	.02	0.22	.828	.02	.01	
Physical Violence Condition								.14(.231)
(Constant)	1.19(2.14)	-3.10,5.47		0.55	.581			
Relationship duration	0.02(0.01)	-0.01,0.04	.16	1.29	.203	.16	.15	
Relationship satisfaction	**0.04(0.02)**	**0.01,0.07**	**.32**	**2.39**	**.020**	**.29**	**.29**	
Perceived illegality	-0.17(0.13)	-0.43,0.09	-.16	-1.30	.200	-.16	-.15	
Attitudes towards those who have sexually offended	0.17(0.24)	-0.31,0.65	.09	0.71	.484	.09	.08	
Benevolent sexism	0.11(0.49)	-0.87,1.09	.04	0.22	.825	.03	.03	
Hostile sexism	0.02(0.42)	-0.83,0.86	.01	0.04	.965	.01	.01	
Acceptance of myths about sexual aggression	-0.20(0.35)	-0.89,0.49	-.10	-0.58	.564	-.07	-.07	
Sexual Assault Condition								.18(.070)
(Constant)	-0.63(1.29)	-3.21,1.96		-0.49	.629			
Relationship duration	-0.01(0.01)	-0.03,0.10	-.11	-0.92	.359	-.12	-.11	
Relationship satisfaction	-0.00(.001)	-0.02,0.20	-.01	-0.09	.928	-.01	-.10	
Perceived illegality	-0.03(0.08)	-0.19,0.12	-.05	-0.43	.670	-.05	-.05	
Attitudes towards those who have sexually offended	**0.43(0.16)**	**0.12,0.74**	**.35**	**2.77**	**.007**	**.33**	**.32**	
Benevolent sexism	**0.52(0.23)**	**0.06,0.98**	**.31**	**2.24**	**.029**	**.27**	**.26**	
Hostile sexism	-0.20(0.25)	-0.70,0.30	-.14	-0.80	.428	-.10	-.09	
Acceptance of myths about sexual aggression	0.17(0.22)	-0.28,0.61	.12	0.74	.460	.09	.09	
Rape Condition								**.24(.005)**
(Constant)	**1.93(0.78)**	**0.37,3.49**		**2.47**	**.016**			
Relationship duration	0.00(0.00)	-0.01,0.01	.03	0.24	.810	.03	.03	
Relationship satisfaction	-0.01(0.01)	-0.02, 0.01	-.12	-1.08	.283	-.13	-.11	
Perceived illegality	**-0.18(0.06)**	**-0.30,-0.06**	**-.33**	**-3.03**	**.003**	**-.34**	**-.31**	
Attitudes towards those who have sexually offended	0.17(0.10)	-0.02,0.37	.20	1.78	.079	.21	.18	
Benevolent sexism	-0.05(0.17)	-0.40,0.29	-.05	-0.31	.758	-.04	-.03	
Hostile sexism	-0.05(0.18)	-0.40,0.30	-.05	-0.30	.769	-.04	-.03	
Acceptance of myths about sexual aggression	0.19(0.16)	-0.13,0.50	.20	1.20	.235	.14	.12	

Note. Significant ($p < .05$) regression models and predictors are in bold.

Interactions Between Offence Type and Predictors of Relationship Decision-Making in Predicting Relationship Continuation[18]

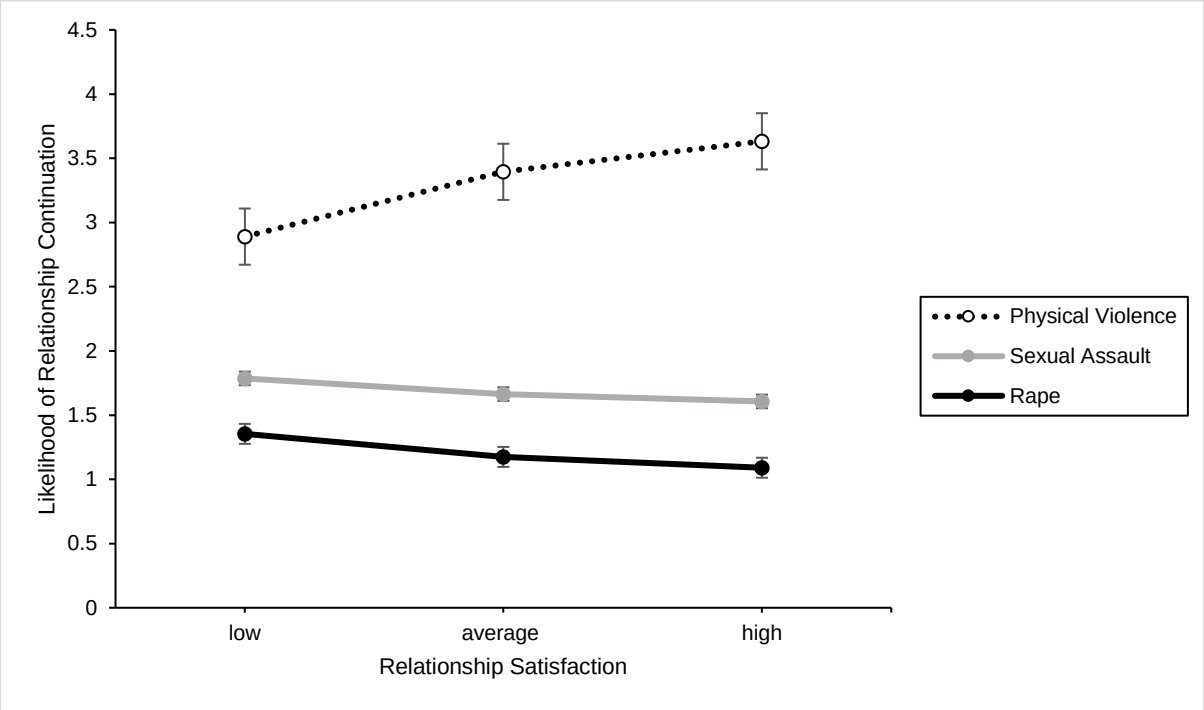
A sensitivity analysis showed that, with 80% power and at α = .05, the minimum effect size detectable was small (f^2 = .06). Most assumptions for conducting linear regression and moderation analyses were met[19] (see Table 4.2 for correlations). Whilst the distribution of residuals was non-normal for the sexual assault and rape conditions, this did not present any issues as the sample sizes of each group were sufficiently large ($n \geq 30$; Field 2018, p. 782).

I ran moderation analyses to test whether *Relationship Duration*, *Relationship Satisfaction*, perceived *Illegality* of their partner's actions, *Attitudes Towards Those who Have Sexually Offended*, *Benevolent* and *Hostile Sexism* and *Acceptance of Myths About Sexual Aggression* predicted the likelihood of relationship continuation differently depending on whether participants' partners committed a physically violent offence, a sexual assault, or a rape. The only significant interaction was found between *Relationship Satisfaction* and offence condition [$F(2,214) = 5.31$, $p = .006$]. A main effect showed that participants were more likely to stay in their relationship if they were more satisfied with their relationship [$b = 0.03$, $t(214) = 3.11$, $p = .002$, 95% CI (0.01,0.05)]. However, this was moderated by the offence condition. Here, the effect of *Relationship Satisfaction* on relationship continuation was only present in the physical violence condition [$b = 0.03$ t (214) = 3.11, $p = .002$, 95% CI (0.01, 0.05)], and not in either of the sexual violence conditions (see Figure 4.3). Thus, among those whose partner committed an act of physical violence, higher levels of *Relationship Satisfaction* predicted a higher likelihood to stay in the relationship. This relationship was not significant in either of the sexual violence conditions.

[18] I conducted moderation analyses rather than the analyses proposed in the pre-registration as this gives a better insight into true interactions between offence type and individual predictor variables, rather than comparing fit of the entire regression model between groups.
[19] Multicollinearity diagnostics can be found in supplementary materials as 'Study Two Multicollinearity' (https://osf.io/uyfzg/?view_only=ac2926ddfe3c4075931a9f2964605e03).

Figure 4.3

Study Two Interaction Between Offence Type and Relationship Satisfaction in Predicting Relationship Continuation



Note. Relationship satisfaction was mean-centred. Plotted x-coordinates represent *b* values of the slopes at 16th (low), 50th (average), and 84th (high) percentiles of relationship satisfaction, respectively. Error bars represent one standard error of the mean.

Qualitative Findings

The qualitative survey responses from all 237 participants (including those who had been excluded from quantitative analyses, as described in the *Participants* section), with a total word count of 9178 words (*M* = 38.73), constituted the raw dataset. On average, participants reported 2.32 reasons for relationship termination or continuation (*Range* = 0,8). Reasons for participants' relationship decisions are presented in ranked order based on how frequently they were named, before presenting new categories that were not directly in line with reasons for relationship decision-making in Study One. Percentages represent

participants who indicated a specific reason within their condition and compared to those who made the same relationship decision.

Termination Reasons

Overall, 196 participants (82.70%) indicated wanting to leave their relationship and subsequently gave reasons for relationship termination ($n_{violence}$ = 45; $n_{sex.\ assault}$ = 68; n_{rape} = 83). In the physical violence condition, participants provided 2.33 reasons, on average (M_{Words} = 40.20, $total_{Words}$ = 1809). In the sexual assault condition, participants gave 2.75 reasons, on average (M_{Words} = 38.66, $total_{Words}$ = 2629). In the rape condition, participants on average provided 3.07 reasons for relationship termination (M_{Words} = 36.04, $total_{Words}$ = 2991). For a visual representation of the most commonly named reasons for relationship termination, in the overall sample and by vignette condition, see Figure 4.4– Figure 4.7.

Figure 4.4

Study Two Relationship Termination Reasons Across Conditions

Figure 4.5

Study Two Relationship Termination Reasons in the Physical Violence Condition

Note. Middle ring represents categories, outer ring represents subcategories. Only categories and subcategories accounting for at least 10% of responses are represented. Empty fields are grouped categories and subcategories accounting for less than 10% of responses.

Figure 4.6

Study Two Relationship Termination Reasons in the Sexual Assault Condition

Figure 4.7

Study Two Relationship Termination Reasons in the Rape Condition

Note. Middle ring represents categories, outer ring represents subcategories. Only categories and subcategories accounting for at least 10% of responses are represented. Empty fields are grouped categories and subcategories accounting for less than 10% of response

Offence-Unrelated. No offence-unrelated reasons for terminating the relationship were given.

Offence-Related.

Infidelity. The most commonly noted offence-related reasons for relationship termination in the overall sample, and for each of the sexual offence conditions were related to interpreting the offence as *Infidelity*, which was named by participants a total of 188 times. Here, 111 participants (56.63% $n_{rape} = 63$, $n_{sex.\ assault} = 46$, $n_{violence} = 2$) labelled the incident as cheating, while 42 participants (21.42%, $n_{sex.\ assault} = 21$, $n_{rape} = 19$, $n_{violence} = 2$) explicitly stated the loss of trust and 20 participants (10.20%; $n_{sex.\ assault} = 15$, $n_{rape} = 5$) felt disrespected because of their partner's infidelity. Additionally, 16 participants (8.16%, $n_{sex.\ assault} = 10$, $n_{rape} = 6$) explained that they felt their partner's infidelity showed a lack of commitment. Sometimes, *Infidelity* was the main reason given for relationship termination (e.g., "I cannot stay with someone who cannot remain loyal because if he valued me and this relationship, he wouldn't do such a thing"). However, in most instances, it was linked to other factors, for example, the nonconsensual nature of the sexual offences. In such cases, participants often clarified that, even if the behaviour described in the vignette was consensual, they would leave their partner as cheating alone would be a sufficient reason to end the relationship (e.g., "If he hadn't forced himself upon her and it was consensual, I would still leave [my partner] due to the fact he would be cheating on me in the process"). *Infidelity* was a much more common reason to leave the relationship in the sexual offence conditions. However, in the physical violence condition, despite no indication of a sexual nature of the offence, a few participants reported wanting to leave the relationship because they suspected the situation they witnessed to be related to their partner's potential unfaithfulness (e.g., "He shouldn't be outside with another girl alone in the dark so he might have some other intentions").

Danger. Participants also described wanting to leave the relationship because of reasons related to perceived *Danger*, a total of 97 times. Here, 37 participants (18.88%;

$n_{violence}$ = 28, n_{rape} = 8, $n_{sex.\ assault}$ = 1) reported fearing for their own safety (e.g., “I would be afraid that he cannot control his temper and in future may also react in a similar way to me”). Participants stated that they perceived their partner to be dangerous because the incident they witnessed changed their view of their partner (6.63%; n_{total} = 14, $n_{violence}$ = 7, n_{rape} = 7), resulting in them viewing their partner as violent (13.27%; n_{total} = 26, $n_{violence}$ = 17, n_{rape} = 9), or as a bad person (6.63%; n_{total} = 13, $n_{sex.\ assault}$ = 7, n_{rape} = 6). In the physical violence condition, perceived *Danger* also resulted from the perception that the attack, as described in the vignette, was unprovoked by the victim (4.08%; $n_{violence}$ = 8). Participants also described wanting to leave the relationship as their partner may be a *Danger* to others, such as their children (1.02%; n_{rape} = 2) or because they were worried about possible reoffending (4.08%; $n_{violence}$ = 4, $n_{sex.\ assault}$ = 2, n_{rape} = 2). *Danger* was the most commonly noted reason for relationship termination for those whose partner “committed” a physically violent offence, and markedly less common for those who were in either of the sexual offence conditions.

Victim Empathy. Feelings of empathy towards the victim were named as a reason for relationship termination a total of 92 times, especially for participants in the sexual offence conditions. Seventy-four participants (37.76%; n_{rape} = 42, $n_{sex.\ assault}$ = 32) stated that the lack of consent given by the victim led them to consider leaving their partner (e.g., “What is totally unacceptable is having sex without her consent and continuing to do so even after she denied”). This was sometimes combined with labelling the incident as a “sex offence” but focusing on the lack of consent rather than labelling the incident was more common. Additionally, 11 participants (5.61%; $n_{sex.\ assault}$ = 7, n_{rape} = 4) reported wanting to end their relationship because of the disrespect their partner had shown towards the victim, while 6 participants (3.06%; n_{rape} = 4, $n_{violence}$ = 4) explicitly indicated relationship termination due to feelings of empathy, and 1 (0.51%; n_{rape} = 1) because of feelings of responsibility towards the victim.

Morality. Themes related to *Morality* were described by participants a total of 34 times. Here, 26 participants (13.27%; $n_{violence}$ = 11, $n_{sex.\ assault}$ = 8; n_{rape} =7) reported their partner’s actions to be morally wrong (e.g., “I would not be able to forgive him for raping

someone as it goes against my most core morals") and 18 participants (9.18%; n_{rape} = 13, $n_{sex.\ assault}$ = 5) found that their partner's actions, as described in the vignette, elicited moral disgust (e.g., "It seems like he is raping the other woman which is disgusting"). Feelings of moral disgust were usually linked to the nonconsensual nature of the offence, or the labelling of the incident as sexual violence.

Outside Pressure. Influences and pressure from other people were named as a reason to end the relationship 11 times. Here, 3 participants each (1.53%) reported fearing judgement (n_{rape} = 2, $n_{sex.\ assault}$ = 1), being worried that there may have been witnesses (n_{rape} = 2, $n_{sex.\ assault}$ = 1), and fearing being publicly shamed ($n_{sex.\ assault}$ = 2, $n_{violence}$ = 1). Additionally, 2 participants (1.02%, n_{rape} = 2) described not wanting to be associated with their partner anymore (e.g., "[My partner] would have a connection with me seeing as we would have been partners at the time"). Whilst it was not a reason for relationship termination for most participants, *Outside Pressure* was reported more commonly in the sexual violence conditions when compared to the physical violence condition.

Deception. Only 3 participants (1.53%; $n_{sex.\ assault}$ = 2, $n_{violence}$ = 1) reported wanting to leave the relationship because their partner was seemingly hiding his offending behaviour from them or was lying to them (e.g., "[He is] doing secretive stuff he wouldn't do if I was there with him").

Reasons not Named in Study One. Participants named a range of reasons for relationship termination which were not explicitly stated by non-offending partners in Study One but may have been included in other phases in the model. A quarter of all participants (n = 49, $n_{rape.}$ = 36, $n_{sex.\ assault}$ = 13) labelled incidents in the rape or sexual assault condition as a *Sexual Offence* and gave this as a main reason for relationship termination (e.g., "Of course I would not continue a relationship with someone who tried to rape another woman"). However, this did not include further explanation as to why such an offence would make the participant want to leave their partner, for instance, that it is morally wrong or akin to infidelity. Similarly, 22 participants (11.22%; n_{rape} = 10, $n_{sex\ assault}$ = 6, $n_{violence}$ = 6) explicitly stated *Not Tolerating* or "accepting" (sexual) violence, and 6 participants (3.06%) in the rape

condition pointed out the *Illegality* of their partner's actions. *Negative Affect*, such as *Sadness* (4.08%; $n_{\text{sex. assault}} = 6$, $n_{\text{rape}} = 2$), *Anger* (3.57%; $n_{\text{sex. assault}} = 3$, $n_{\text{rape}} = 3$, $n_{\text{violence}} = 1$), and *Shock* (1.53%; $n_{\text{rape}} = 2$, $n_{\text{violence}} = 1$) was also reported by participants as a reason to end their relationship. Further, in the sexual offence conditions, 6 participants (3.06%; $n_{\text{rape}} = 4$, $n_{\text{sex. assault}} = 2$) described *Not Being Able to Forgive* their partner, and 5 participants (2.55%; $n_{\text{rape}} = 3$, $n_{\text{sex. assault}} = 2$) stated *Losing Respect* for their partner as reasons for relationship termination as they might present a hindrance to a successful future relationship in that they may, for instance, bring up the offence in future arguments. Additionally, four participants (2.04%) stated not being able to continue the relationship because of *Past Experiences* of abuse ($n_{\text{violence}} = 2$) or cheating ($n_{\text{sex. assault}} = 2$), in previous relationships without, however, indicating that this was primarily the case because of fear of *Danger*. Lastly, in the sexual assault conditions, one participant each (0.51%) described *Deserving Better*, *Being Disappointed*, *Losing Love* for their partner, finding their partner's actions *Unattractive*, thinking their *Partner is Entitled*, and their partner's levels of *Drunkenness* (all sexual assault condition), as well as their *Low Levels of Self-Esteem* and their partner's possible *Offence History* (both rape condition) as reasons to end the relationship.

Continuation Reasons

Overall, 41 participants (17.30%) indicated wanting to stay in their relationship and thus gave reasons for relationship continuation after witnessing their partner's offending behaviour ($n_{\text{violence}} = 32$; $n_{\text{sex. assault}} = 7$; $n_{\text{rape}} = 2$). In the physical violence condition, participants provided 1.84 reasons on average ($M_{\text{Words}} = 44.66$, $\text{total}_{\text{Words}} = 1429$). In the sexual assault condition, participants gave 2.57 reasons, on average ($M_{\text{Words}} = 36.86$, $\text{total}_{\text{Words}} = 258$). In the rape condition, both participants provided one reason ($M_{\text{Words}} = 31$, $\text{total}_{\text{Words}} = 62$). For a visual representation of the most commonly named reasons for relationship continuation, in the overall sample and by vignette condition, see Figure 4.8 – Figure 4.11.

Figure 4.8

Study Two Relationship Continuation Reasons Across Conditions

Figure 4.9

Study Two Relationship Continuation Reasons in the Physical Violence Condition

Note. Middle ring represents categories, outer ring represents subcategories. Only categories and subcategories accounting for at least 10% of responses are represented. Empty fields are grouped categories and subcategories accounting for less than 10% of responses.

Figure 4.10

Study Two Relationship Continuation Reasons in the Sexual Assault Condition

Figure 4.11

Study Two Relationship Continuation Reasons in the Rape Condition

Note. Middle ring represents categories, outer ring represents subcategories. Only categories and subcategories accounting for at least 10% of responses are represented. Empty fields are grouped categories and subcategories accounting for less than 10% of responses.

Offence-Unrelated.

Love/Commitment. Participants described the *Love* they had for their partner, or the *Commitment* they made towards the relationship as a reason for staying with their partner a total of 17 times. Here, 10 participants (24.39%; $n_{violence} = 6$, $n_{sex.\ assault} = 3$, $n_{rape} = 1$) specifically expressed the emotional attachment to their partner (e.g., “Obviously my trust would take a hit, but I have a lot of love for him so will have to take my feelings into account”). In terms of commitment, 5 participants (12.20%; $n_{violence} = 4$, $n_{sex.\ assault} = 1$) stressed the duration of their relationship and thus the time they had invested, while 2 participants (4.88%, both physical violence condition) described having made future plans with their partner.

Negative Consequences. Themes relating to *Negative Consequences* were named as a reason for relationship continuation only twice. Here, one participant (2.44%) in the physical violence condition reported wanting to continue their relationship because of family approval of their partner and being worried to upset their family if they broke up. Additionally, one participant (2.44%) in the sexual assault condition described relationship continuation due to a fear of loneliness.

Offence-Related.

Disbelief. Participants expressed their *Disbelief* or minimised the accusations a total of 24 times. More than half of all participants indicated relationship continuation (53.66%; $n_{violence} = 19$, $n_{sex.\ assault} = 2$, $n_{rape} = 1$) due to the belief that there must be an explanation for their partner’s behaviour or that the situation they witnessed may have been a misunderstanding (e.g., “The situation may not be what the scenario is making you think it is. Could be a misunderstanding”). In the physical violence condition, this was usually tied to the perception that their partner may have acted in self-defence (e.g., “If the woman had done something extremely wrong or if he was protecting himself”). Additionally, 2 participants in the physical violence condition (2.44%) named the incident they witnessed as

an insufficient reason for breaking up with their partner, or their partner as not presenting a threat to them, respectively.

Partner Changed. Participants named the belief that their partner could change their behaviour as a reason for staying in the relationship a total of 23 times. Here, 10 participants in the physical violence condition (24.39%) described believing that the behaviour was out of character for their partner and thus not a true representation of how they may behave going forwards. Some participants (21.95%; $n_{\text{violence}} = 6$, $n_{\text{sex. assault}} = 3$) stated that they would be able to continue the relationship as they could move forward and forgive their partner, with 4 participants (9.76%; $n_{\text{violence}} = 2$, $n_{\text{sex. assault}} = 2$) stressing that their partner's behaviour was an isolated incident which would not be repeated.

Reasons not Named in Study One. Additional offence-related reasons for remaining in the relationship named by 1 participant each were the belief that their partner's actions were his responsibility and decision and that they had previously overcome worse things in the relationship (both physical violence condition), as well as the belief that their partner would also continue the relationship if they committed an offence and the fact that the victim might not be as attractive as the participant (both sexual violence condition).

Discussion

Using a student sample, I applied a mixed methods design to assess some of the factors reported as impacting relationship decision-making by non-offending partners in Study One, in "real time". Whilst *Offence Type* clearly affected relationship continuation likelihood, I found mixed results regarding the predictiveness of variables hypothesised to be associated with relationship decision-making - *Relationship Duration*, *Relationship Satisfaction*, perceived *Illegality* of the partner's offending behaviour, *Attitudes Towards Those who have Sexually Offended*, *Benevolent* and *Hostile Sexism* and *Acceptance of Myths About Sexual Aggression*. Nevertheless, participants' qualitative responses provided additional insight into the reasoning behind their individual relationship decision. Here,

participants often, but not exclusively, reported similar reasons for relationship continuation or termination to “real-life” non-offending partners in Study One.

In the following section, I discuss the most important quantitative and qualitative findings of these studies and their theoretical implications before highlighting potential practical implications. Finally, I outline some limitations of the current study, while describing directions for future research.

Quantitative Findings and Theoretical Implications

In line with my predictions, and previous research demonstrating that relationship termination rates in those who have sexually offended are high (Lytle et al., 2017) those whose partner had committed any type of sexual offence were unlikely to indicate wanting to continue their relationship and additionally less likely to indicate that they wanted to continue their relationship than those whose partner had committed a physically violent assault. Here, those whose partner committed a rape were also less likely to indicate relationship continuation than those whose partner committed a sexual assault. This demonstrates the importance of the specific offence type, as highlighted by non-offending partners in Study One. When assessing the role variables linked to relationship continuation in Study One may have in predicting relationship continuation in this sample, I found mixed results. Taken together, the variables predicted relationship continuation across conditions and in the rape condition, but not in the physical violence and sexual assault conditions. *Relationship Duration, Benevolent* and *Hostile Sexism*, and *Acceptance of Myths About Sexual Aggression* did not significantly predict relationship continuation in the overall sample or any of the conditions. Specifically, the lack of predictive value of *Relationship Duration* was surprising, as research with the general population has suggested that longer *Relationship Duration* may predict relationship stability (Simpson, 1987). In line with research demonstrating the impact of *Relationship Satisfaction* on relationship stability in the general population (e.g., Joel et al., 2018; Le et al., 2010), higher levels of *Relationship Satisfaction* predicted a higher willingness to continue the relationship in the overall sample only. Here,

the only interaction effect demonstrated that *Relationship Satisfaction* significantly predicted relationship continuation for those whose partner had committed a physically violent offence, but not a sexual assault or rape, in contrast to reports from non-offending partners in Study One who described their levels of *Relationship Satisfaction* to be a reason for staying with their partner. Lastly, *Attitudes Towards Those who Have Sexually Offended* predicted a higher willingness to continue the relationship in the overall sample only, whilst lower perceived *Illegality* predicted relationship continuation in the overall sample and the rape condition.

Qualitative Findings and Theoretical Implications

I aimed to use the qualitative survey element to describe participants' hypothetical relationship decision-making in more nuance than the quantitative elements of this study may provide. This is especially useful given the mixed quantitative results. Participants' responses were largely categorised in line with the reasons for relationship decision-making provided by non-offending partners in Period 4 of Study One, using a deductive directed approach to content analysis.

After analysing responses from participants who indicated relationship termination I found no offence-unrelated reasons given for wanting to leave their partner as all participants solely provided offence-related reasons. As participants in this study, in contrast to those in Study One, were all still in relationships with their partners, it is unlikely that they had sufficient reasons to terminate their relationships that were unrelated to the vignettes. This may also be linked to the fact that relationships are commonly evaluated to be more negative after a breakup (Kellas et al., 2008), as discussed in Study One.

Infidelity was a main reason for ending the relationship for those whose partner had "committed" a sexual offence, but not for those whose partner had "committed" a violent offence. This may show that the sexual nature of the offence as an act of *Infidelity*, rather than just morally deplorable (see *Morality*), might be an important factor in why non-offending partners more commonly leave their relationship in cases of sexual offending, as

the quantitative results show. Whilst those who have committed an act of physical violence may be viewed as dangerous towards everyone, those who have committed a sexual offence have additionally violated the norms of their relationship. Thus, non-offending partners of those who have committed sexual offences may view their partner's offending behaviour as a transgression specifically against them and their relationship. However, it is also possible that some participants misinterpreted the offence as consensual sexual activity, which would account for the importance of perceived *Illegality* as shown in the quantitative findings.

Despite being named as a factor for relationship decision-making by participants in Study One, perceived *Danger* was much more common for those in the physical violence condition than the sexual offence conditions. As previously stated, it may be possible that those in the sexual offence conditions did not report possible *Danger* as frequently because they may have evaluated their partner's offending behaviour to be consensual *Infidelity*.

In the sexual offence conditions participants also commonly stated a sense of *Empathy Towards the Victim* as a reason for wanting to leave their partner. This was particularly tied to the lack of consent given by the victim in the vignetted.

Whilst both participants in the physical violence and sexual offence conditions described their partner's actions being morally wrong as a reason for wanting to terminate their relationship, this was more often connected to a sense of moral disgust in the sexual violence conditions. Sexual offences, in comparison to violent offences, often include elements implying disgust-eliciting pathogens. For instance, the rape vignette may imply the presence of semen, indicating a "real" disgust reaction, rather than merely using the word *Disgust* to express anger, as may have been the case in the physical violence condition (Kayyal et al., 2015). Any potential disgust reaction towards their partner's sexual offending behaviour may also once again be linked back to the threat of courtesy stigma, particularly, the fear of contagion by association with a person who has sexually offended (Lynch, 2002).

Additionally, whilst *Outside Pressure* was not a particularly common theme, in contrast to experiences of non-offending partners in Study One, some of those whose partner "committed" a sexual offence described fearing judgement and shame. The fact that participants described this despite only just having "witnessed" the offence not having encountered any reaction from outsiders further indicated that participants may have tried to avoid the potential courtesy stigma associated with being a non-offending partner before it actually occurs.

Deception did also not seem to be an important factor for relationship decision-making, perhaps because participants directly "witnessed" the offence. In contrast, some non-offending partners in Study One were deceived about their partner's offending behaviour for long periods of time, sometimes even years.

Lastly, participants also provided reasons not explicitly stated as such in Study One: In the sexual offence conditions participants very commonly simply labelled the offence and provided this as their reason for wanting to leave the relationship. This was not explicitly stated by participants in Study One perhaps because non-offending partners in Study One responded to an advertisement asking for non-offending partners or ex-partners of those accused of sexual offending, so participants were already aware of the label and did not feel the need to point it out. However, whilst it is not quite the same as the element of *Belief* in Period 3 of Study One, assigning an *Offence Label* similarly requires the participant to believe that the offence has occurred, rather than minimise or deny it.

Occasionally, some participants also reported the *Negative Affect* they experienced, as well as a potential negative impact of the offence on the relationship, and past experiences of abuse and infidelity as relationship termination reasons. Whilst these were not explicitly stated as reasons for relationship termination by participants in Study One, they were often captured by a different part of the model instead: *Negative Affect* was represented in Study One by a negative affective *Initial Reaction* to the accusations (see Period 3). A potential *Negative Impact on the Relationship* was captured by *Offence Impact*

on the Relationship (see Period 4), and past experiences of abuse and infidelity in previous relationships were displayed as *Experience in Romantic Relationships* (see Period 1).

Participants provided both offence-related and -unrelated reasons for relationship continuation. Given that only very few participants in the sexual offence conditions indicated relationship continuation, the data used for this analysis were sparse. Mirroring Study One, the most common offence-unrelated reason for wanting to continue their relationship was the *Love* or *Commitment* they had for their partner, including their *Relationship Duration*. This was the reason named by the only participant who indicated relationship continuation in the rape condition but was not supported by the quantitative analyses.

Additionally, a few participants described fearing *Negative Consequences*, such as loneliness. In terms of offence-related relationship termination reasons, like in Study One, a *Disbelief* or *Minimisation* of the offence was common. However, this was especially the case for participants in the physical violence condition who often expressed the belief that the offence was self-defence. Participants, mainly those in the physical violence condition, also reported that they thought their partner could change because the "*Isolated Incident*" does not represent who their partner truly is.

Practical Implications

Whilst the quantitative results of the study were mixed, the mixed methods approach used by this study nevertheless offers important information about how non-offending partners make their relationship decision in "real time" after an offence has been committed. This may be useful for those working with individuals who have sexually offended or their current or ex-partners, such as clinicians or professions within Criminal Justice-System adjacent fields.

First, the high likelihood of relationship termination, as demonstrated in this study in hypothetical scenarios, and the magnitude of negative affect described by participants may demonstrate how non-offending partners could react immediately after witnessing or finding

out about a partner's sexual offending behaviour. First-responding law enforcement personnel, who currently receive extremely limited or no training on how to interact with non-offending partners, should be made aware of this to be able to disclose offending behaviour sensitively. This may minimise the trauma non-offending partners reported experiencing from police disclosing their partner's offending behaviour to them (Armitage et al., 2023; Duncan et al., 2022). Additionally, despite no mention of any witnesses or others' reactions in the vignettes, some participants reported being worried about judgement from others, just like non-offending partners in Study One. Thus, it is important that those disclosing the offence, such as arresting officers, approach non-offending partners without negative preconceptions and judgement.

Further, the high likelihood of relationship termination following a partner's offence also points towards a need for support resources not only for non-offending partners of those who have offended, but also for former partners of those who have offended. Currently, the predominant focus on safeguarding and desistance support within the limited support that is available for non-offending partners, as discussed in Chapter 1, completely excludes former partners of those who have offended. Future support resources and research should start taking this population into account, especially given that the current research suggests that former partners may make up the vast majority of non-offending partners. Here, there may be a specific focus on the potentially different support needs of those who choose to stay with their partner and those who decide to leave their relationship.

Additionally, the qualitative findings of this study further stressed the importance of constructing the sexual nature of the offences as *Infidelity*. Despite the nonconsensual and criminal nature of their partner's offending behaviour, this may suggest that one of the primary hindrances to relationship success in non-offending partners may be viewing the offending behaviour as an act of *Infidelity*. Whilst *Infidelity* was usually a reason for relationship termination, it may still present a significant problem for those who decide to continue their relationship. In such instances, *Infidelity* should be specifically addressed by

couples therapy, such as the couples therapy I advocated for in Chapter 3. Here, whilst offence-specific treatment needs for the person who has offended may be provided by rehabilitation frameworks, an integrative approach to treating relationship issues caused by perceived *Infidelity* (e.g., Fife et al., 2008) may address individual, relational, and intergenerational issues. Specifically, this treatment recognises the traumatic impact of *Infidelity*, which may be extended to include addressing the nonconsensual nature of the offence, builds relationship skills, promotes an understanding of vulnerability, and addresses forgiveness. All these factors seem appropriate when addressing relationship issues within couples in which one person has committed a sexual offence, thus making such an integrative approach a potentially useful addition to existing treatment. Tailoring treatment in this way also increases the ethicality of incorporating non-offending partners into the rehabilitation process by addressing their needs, as discussed in Chapter 1.

Limitations

Despite the practical utility of this study's findings, it nevertheless had some limitations that warrant discussion. First, as highlighted in the Method section, the DPQ – the measure used to assess interpersonal dependency - did not demonstrate sufficient internal consistency. Thus, interpersonal dependency was not included as a predictor in the analysis. Whilst non-offending partners in Study One did not report *Interpersonal Dependency* as a reason for staying with their partner, research linking high levels of *Interpersonal Dependency* to a greater likelihood of staying in disadvantageous or even abusive relationships (Bornstein, 2006; Drigotas & Rusbult, 1992; Pereira et al., 2020) highlights its potential importance. As a result, future research may consider incorporating an internally consistent measure of *Interpersonal Dependency* to assess whether it predicts relationship continuation in non-offending partners.

Further, recruiting from a student sample led to low mean age and relationship duration in the study population. Additionally, the vast majority of participants did not have children with their partner. As a result, the relationships in this sample may not be

representative, especially because all previously named factors may be potentially important for relationship decision-making in non-offending partners. For example, non-offending partners in Study One explicitly stated wanting to continue their relationship because of their children. Thus, it may be a fruitful approach for future research to consider recruiting an older sample of participants who are in more long-term relationships and some of whom have children to assess the impact of these factors on relationship decision-making.

Lastly, despite the additional insight into the relationship decision-making process provided by participants' qualitative answers, these did not demonstrate the relative importance of each reason for relationship decision-making when compared to each other, especially when participants named two or more reasons. For instance, participants may have named two reasons – say, *Infidelity* and *Danger* – but found one of these to be a lot more important than the other. Future investigations using qualitative and mixed methods approaches should consider giving participants the opportunity to clearly state which reasons for their relationship decision-making are most important to them, and which carry less weight.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the current study provided additional insight into what relationship decision-making in non-offending partners may look like in "real time". Here, taken together with Study One, I have shown that, whilst rates of relationship termination in non-offending partners of those who have sexually offended may be high, the factors influencing this decision and the reasoning behind it are far from straightforward. Despite these insightful findings, the current study had some methodological limitations, as described above. Thus, in the following chapter, I aimed to address these limitations by replicating the current study using a different sample and slightly modified materials.

CHAPTER 5 – REPLICATING A MIXED METHODS EXPLORATION OF RELATIONSHIP DECISION-MAKING FOLLOWING A PARTNER'S OFFENCE

The previous studies reported in this thesis provided much-needed insight into the relationship decision-making process in non-offending partners, both in a retrospective qualitative study with non-offending partners (Study One) as well as in a hypothetical "real time" mixed methods study with a student sample (Study Two). In Study Two, I found that, in line with small-scale preliminary research (Lytle et al., 2017), when directly confronted with a partner's offending behaviour, non-offending partners are very likely to leave their relationship. Nevertheless, there may be factors which influence non-offending partners' decision-making process and make certain individuals more or less likely to remain in their relationship. Despite the value of these findings, some methodological limitations and issues arose during Study Two which warrant addressing to provide an even deeper understanding of non-offending partners' relationship decision-making. Thus, the study reported within this chapter aims to replicate and expand upon Study Two by addressing limitations arising from (a) one of the measures' lack of internal consistency, (b) the student sample, and (c) my inability to establish the relative importance of each relationship decision-making reason named by participants.

Like in the previous chapter, due to the time constraints of this PhD and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, as detailed in the COVID-19 Impact Statement, the pre-registration for this chapter was completed prior to the completion of Study One. Therefore, there were some deviations from the pre-registration to suitably assess the findings of Study One. Any such deviations from the pre-registration are noted and explained in footnotes throughout. Supplementary materials for this chapter can be found online (https://osf.io/uyfzg/?view_only=ac2926ddfe3c4075931a9f2964605e03).

Study Three

Study Three was a replication of Study Two with some modifications to address issues that arose during Study Two. Specifically, I changed the measure used to assess

Interpersonal Dependency as the DPQ did not demonstrate sufficient internal consistency. Most notably, however, I recruited from a community sample rather than a student sample as participants' mean age and relationship duration in Study Two were relatively low. Subsequently, only participants who had been in the relationship for at least a year were eligible to participate. Hypotheses and research questions remained unchanged from Study Two. However, I additionally explored potential differences in relationship continuation between those who had at least one child with their current partner and those who did not, given that non-offending partners in Study One named having children with their partner as an offence-unrelated reason for relationship continuation. I also aimed to investigate how any potential results from the previous research questions and hypotheses may differ between those who had children with their partner and those who did not.[20] Whilst the qualitative responses given by participants in Study Two provided some degree of insight into their decision-making process which the quantitative aspects did not provide, it was not possible to determine how important each of these factors were when compared to each other, especially for participants who provided more than one reason. I aimed to remedy this and assess the relative importance of each relationship termination or continuation reason by asking participants in this study to rank the three most important reasons behind their relationship decision. Apart from these modifications, the materials used, and procedure followed in this study are identical to those in Study Two.

Hypotheses, methods, and analyses were pre-registered (https://osf.io/uv64d/?view_only=4d1ae431166e46aeba494bccfbb91678).

[20] In the pre-registration, I had planned to only assess differences between the two groups for the fit of the regression model predicting relationship continuation.

Method

Ethics

After obtaining ethical approval from the University of Kent School of Psychology Ethics Committee (ID: 202016036992276660) the ethical procedures I followed mirrored those outlined in Study Two.[21]

Participants

After excluding 1726 participants due to not meeting the inclusion criteria, noncompletion, completing the study in less than half the median completion time, and failing at least one of four attention checks[22], the final sample comprised 592 women recruited from local UK subreddits on the social media website Reddit. Such high levels of data exclusion, mainly because of high attrition and ineligibility rates, are typical of studies using Reddit (e.g., Moseson et al., 2021; Shatz, 2017) but are not unique to social media sampling: For instance, researchers frequently have to exclude large sets of data sampled from crowdsourcing platforms (e.g., Amazon MTurk) due to a lack of response quality (Chandler et al., 2014). In fact, data obtained from Reddit may be similar, in terms of reliability and quality, to MTurk and undergraduate lab samples (Jamnik & Lane, 2018; Luong & Lomanowska, 2022) and, if anything, online samples – both those from crowdsourcing platforms and social media (incl. Reddit) have been shown to be more diverse than those obtained during lab studies (Casler et al., 2013).

Participants were entered into a prize draw to win a £10 voucher. They were between the ages of 18 and 64 years (M = 30.03, SD = 6.60), and the majority (70.8%, n = 419)

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[21] Participant handouts can be found in supplementary materials as 'Study Three Participant Handouts' (https://osf.io/uyfzg/?view_only=ac2926ddfe3c4075931a9f2964605e03).

[22] Participants who failed at least one attention check, when compared to those who did not, scored differently on *Likelihood of Relationship Continuation* [without children: $F(1,700) = 101.23$, $p < .001$; with children: $F(1,147) = 30.23$, $p < .001$], *Interpersonal Dependency* [without children: $F(1,700) = 175.66$, $p < .001$], *Perceived Illegality* [with children: $F(1,147) = 11.26$, $p = .001$], *Attitudes Towards Those who Have Sexually Offended* [with children: $F(1,147) = 6.16$ $p = .014$], *Sexism* [without children: $F(1,700) = 284.34$, $p < .001$; with children: $F(1,147) = 23.34$, $p < .001$], and *Acceptance of Myths About Sexual Aggression* [without children: $F(1,700) = 230.99$, $p < .001$; with children: $F(1,147) = 19.49$, $p < .001$] and were thus excluded.

identified as heterosexual and described their ethnicity as white (UK/Irish, European, or "Other"; 90.7%, *n* = 537). Thus, this sample was older than the participants in Study Two and, while more diverse in terms of sexual orientation, was less ethnically diverse than the student sample. At the time of participation, participants had to have been in a relationship with a male partner for at least one year, unlike the participants in Study Two who only had to have been in their relationship for a minimum of 2 months. Subsequently, their current relationship duration was also longer and ranged between 1 and 39 years (*M* = 6.54 years, *SD* = 5.23 years). Participants described their relationship status as "in a committed relationship" (36.8%, *n* = 218), cohabitating (33.6%, *n* = 199), married or in a civil partnership (27.2%, *n* = 161), or "other" (mostly specified as "engaged", 2.4%, *n* = 14), indicating more committed and long-term relationship types than those of participants in Study Two. Whilst most participants in this sample (74.8%, *n* = 443) also did not have children with their partners, participants with children comprised a much larger percentage of the overall sample than in Study Two. Full demographic features and relationship variables by vignette condition can be found in supplementary materials.[23]

Design

Study Three mirrored Study Two's mixed methods experimental design, including all the variables included in Study Three. Additionally, whether participants had children with their partner was added as a between-participants grouping variable in the quantitative analyses. For a diagram illustrating the design followed for this study, as well as Study Two, see Figure 4.1.

Materials

For full materials for Study Three, see supplementary materials[24]. The internal consistency coefficient α for all continuous scales administered in this study was interpreted

[23] Detailed demographic features can be found in supplementary materials as 'Study Three Demographics' (https://osf.io/uyfzg/?view_only=ac2926ddfe3c4075931a9f2964605e03).
[24] All vignettes and full scales can be found in supplementary materials as 'Study Three Materials' (Participant handouts can be found in supplementary materials as 'Study Two Participant Handouts' (https://osf.io/uyfzg/?view_only=ac2926ddfe3c4075931a9f2964605e03).

according to Ponterotto and Ruckdeschel's (2007) guidelines, as established in the previous chapter (see Table 4.1).

Vignettes. Participants were presented with the same vignettes as in Study Two.

Likelihood of Relationship Continuation. To assess the likelihood of relationship continuation, participants completed the same one-item measure as in Study Two.

Reasons for Relationship Decision-Making. Participants' reasoning behind wanting to continue or end their relationship was assessed with the open-ended question, "What would be your top 3 reasons for leaving/staying with [partner's name] after witnessing this situation?" Participants were asked to rank these by importance, with the first reason being the most important.

Perceived Illegality[25]**.** To assess how illegal participants thought their partner's actions, as described in the vignette, were, participants completed the same one-item measure as in Study Two.

Relationship Duration.[26] Participants responded to "How long have you been in your current relationship?" by indicating their relationship duration in years.

Relationship Satisfaction. To assess relationship satisfaction levels, participants completed the CSI (Funk & Rogge, 2007) as in Study Two. In the current study, the index achieved "excellent" internal consistency (α = .95).

Interpersonal Dependency. Participants' levels of interpersonal dependency were assessed using the Interpersonal Dependency Inventory (IDI-6; McClintock et al., 2015), rather than the DPQ which was not sufficiently internally consistent in Study Two. Participants responded to 6 items (e.g., "I need to have one person who puts me above all others"; 1 = *Not characteristic of me,* 4 = *Very characteristic of me*). Aggregated scores

[25] Despite not pre-registering illegality as a predictor, but rather as a manipulation check, I decided to enter it into the model as a proxy for *Disbelief* or minimisation, as found in Study One.
[26] Despite not pre-registering relationship duration as a predictor, I decided to enter it into the model as a proxy for *Commitment*, as found in Study One.

ranged from 6 to 24, with higher scores indicating higher levels of interpersonal dependency. In the current study, the measure demonstrated “good” internal consistency (α = .80).

Attitudes Towards Individuals who Have Sexually Offended. To assess attitudes towards individuals who have sexually offended, participants completed the ATS-21 (Hogue & Harper, 2018) as in Study Two. In the current study, the scale achieved “moderate” internal consistency (α = .87).

Benevolent Sexism. To assess levels of benevolent sexism, participants completed the benevolent sexism subscale of the ASI (Glick & Fiske, 1996) as in Study Two. In the current study, the subscale achieved “good” internal consistency (α = .88).

Hostile Sexism. To assess levels of hostile sexism, participants completed the hostile sexism subscale of the ASI (Glick & Fiske, 1996) as in Study Two. In the current study, the subscale achieved “excellent” internal consistency (α = .92).

Acceptance of Myths About Sexual Aggression. To assess myth acceptance, participants completed the slightly modified AMMSA scale (Gerger et al., 2013) as in Study Two. In the current study, the scale demonstrated “excellent” internal consistency (α = .97).

Procedure

Study Three mirrored the procedure of Study Two. At the end of the survey, participants could choose to provide their email address to be entered into the prize draw.

Data Analysis

For the quantitative aspect of the current study, analyses, checking of assumptions, and interpretation of effect sizes used the same programmes and followed the same guidelines as outlined for Study Two (see Table 4.2 for effect size interpretation guidelines). Additionally, Cohen’s *d* was interpreted according to Cohen’s (1988) guidelines: (0.20 = small, 0.50 = medium, 0.80 = large)

Similarly, for the qualitative aspect of the current study, I used the same directed deductive approach to content analysis, and the same predetermined coding categories, as outlined for Study Two (see Figure 4.2). Integration was also achieved using the same approach as described in Study Two. For a visualisation of the integration process, see Figure 4.1.

Quantitative Findings

In the overall sample, participants indicated a slightly low likelihood of relationship continuation across conditions (*M* = 2.68, *SD* = 1.99). Whilst those in the physical violence (*M* = 3.41, *SD* = 1.98) and sexual assault conditions (*M* = 2.83, *SD* = 2.05) described a slightly low likelihood that they would remain with their partner, participants in the rape condition indicated a low likelihood of continuing their relationship (*M* = 1.76, *SD* = 1.53).

Similarly, participants without children indicated a slightly low likelihood of relationship continuation across conditions (*M* = 2.56, *SD* = 1.96). Those in the physical violence (*M* = 3.30, *SD* = 1.96) and sexual assault conditions (*M* = 2.63, *SD* = 2.03) again reported a slightly low likelihood of relationship continuation whereas those participants in the rape condition described a low likelihood of staying with their partner (*M* = 1.74, *SD* = 1.55).

These results were largely mirrored for participants without children who also indicated a slightly low likelihood of relationship continuation across conditions (*M* = 3.03, *SD* = 2.04). In the physical violence condition, participants reported a moderate likelihood of staying with their partner (*M* = 3.74, *SD* = 2.04), whilst those in the sexual assault condition described a slightly low likelihood of relationship continuation (*M* = 3.34, *SD* = 2.05). Participants in the rape condition again indicated a low likelihood of staying in their relationship (*M* = 1.81, *SD* = 1.47).

Effect of Having Children on Relationship Continuation[27]

A sensitivity analysis showed that, with 80% power and at α = .05, across conditions (n_1 = 443, n_2 = 149), the minimum effect size detectable was small (d = 0.27). For the physical violence (n_1 = 150, n_2 = 50), sexual assault (n_1 = 144, n_2 = 56), and rape (n_1 = 149, n_2 = 43) conditions, the minimum effect size detectable was medium (d = 0.46; d = 0.44; d =. 0.49, respectively).

Due to the large difference in group sizes, and potential arising unequal variances, I conducted a Welch's t-test to assess differences in relationship continuation between those with and without children. Across conditions, there was a significant difference in relationship continuation [F(1,246.04) = 6.24, p = .013] as those with children were more likely to indicate relationship continuation (M = 3.03, SD = 2.04) than those without children (M = 2.56, SD = 1.96). In the sexual assault condition, those with children (M = 3.34, SD = 2.05) were also more likely to indicate relationship continuation than those without children [M = 2.63, SD = 2.03; F(1,99.38) = 4.93, p = .029]. However, there was no significant difference in relationship continuation between those who did and did not have children with their partner in the physical violence [F(1,81.47) = 1.80, p = .184] and rape [F(1,71.38) = 0.09, p = .770] conditions, respectively.

Given the difference in relationship continuation between those who did and those who did not have children with their partner across conditions and in the sexual assault condition, I chose to conduct all following analyses for the overall sample as well as separately for those with and without children.

Effect of Offence Type on Relationship Continuation

A sensitivity analysis showed that, in the overall sample (N = 592), with 80% power and at α = .05, the minimum effect size detectable was small (f = 0.13). For those without

[27] Given that participants in Study One named their children as being important to their relationship decision-making, I decided to investigate the effect of this outright, rather than just comparing the regression model between the two groups, as pre-registered.

children (*n* = 443), with 80% power and at α = .05, the minimum effect size detectable was small (*f* = 0.15). For those with children (*n* = 149) with 80% power and at α = .05, the minimum effect size detectable was medium (*f* = 0.26).

Overall Sample. I used a GLM procedure to conduct a one-way between-subjects ANOVA which examined the likelihood to continue the relationship according to whether the participant's partner had committed a physically violent offence (*n* = 200), a sexual assault (*n* = 200), or a rape (*n* = 192). I found a highly significant, moderate effect of the partner's offence type on the likelihood to continue the relationship [$F(2, 589) = 39.22$, $p < .001$; $\eta^2p = .118$]. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test showed that those whose partner had committed a rape were significantly less likely to continue the relationship (*M* =1.76, *SD* = 1.53), compared to those whose partner had committed a sexual assault ($p < .001$) or a physically violent offence ($p < .001$). Participants in the sexual assault condition were more likely to indicate relationship continuation (*M* = 2.83, *SD* = 2.05) than those in the rape condition ($p < .001$), but less likely than those in the physical violence condition ($p = .005$). Thus, women whose partner had committed a physically violent offence were significantly more likely to continue the relationship (*M* = 3.41, *SD* = 1.99), compared to those in the rape ($p < .001$) and sexual assault conditions ($p = .005$). For group means, standard deviations, and a summary of post-hoc tests, see Table 5.1.

Participants Without Children. A one-way between-subjects ANOVA examined the likelihood to continue the relationship according to whether the participant's partner had committed a physically violent offence (*n* = 150), a sexual assault (*n* = 144), or a rape (*n* = 149). I found a highly significant, moderate effect of the partner's offence type on the likelihood to continue the relationship [$F(2, 440) = 26.64$, $p < .001$; η2p = .108]. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test mirrored the findings in the overall sample. Those whose partner had committed a rape were significantly less likely to continue the relationship (*M* = 1.74, *SD* = 1.55), compared to those whose partner had committed a sexual assault ($p < .001$) or a physically violent offence ($p < .001$). Participants in the sexual assault condition

were more likely to indicate relationship continuation (M = 2.63, SD = 2.03) than those in the rape condition ($p < .001$), but less likely than those in the physical violence condition ($p = .005$). Thus, women whose partner had committed a physically violent offence were significantly more likely to continue the relationship (M = 3.30, SD = 1.96), compared to those in the rape ($p < .001$) and sexual assault conditions ($p = .005$). For group means, standard deviations, and a summary of post-hoc tests, see Table 5.1.

Participants With Children. A one-way between-subjects ANOVA examined the likelihood to continue the relationship according to whether the participant's partner had committed a physically violent offence (n = 50), a sexual assault (n = 56), or a rape (n = 43). I found a highly significant, large effect of the partner's offence type on the likelihood to continue the relationship [$F(2, 146) = 13.15$, $p < .001$; $\eta^2_p = .153$]. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test showed that, like in the overall sample, those whose partner had committed a rape were significantly less likely to continue the relationship (M = 1.81, SD = 1.47), compared to those whose partner had committed a sexual assault ($p < .001$) or a physically violent offence ($p < .001$). Thus, participants in the sexual assault condition (M = 3.34, SD = 2.05) and physical violence condition (M = 3.74, SD = 2.04) were more likely to indicate relationship continuation than those in the rape condition (both $p < .001$). However, unlike in the overall sample or for those without children, there was no significant mean difference between those in physical violence and sexual assault conditions, for those who had children with their partner. For group means, standard deviations, and a summary of post-hoc tests, see Table 5.1

Table 5.1

Study Three Difference in Relationship Continuation Likelihood Between Conditions

Condition	Condition	*M*(*SD*)	*M Difference*	*p*	*SE*	*95% CI*
		Overall Sample				
Physical violence		3.41 (1.98)				
	Sexual assault		**0.58**	**.005**	**0.19**	**0.15, 1.02**
	Rape		**1.65**	**< .001**	**0.19**	**1.21, 2.10**
Sexual assault		2.83 (2.05)				
	Physical violence		**-0.58**	**.005**	**0.19**	**-1.02, -0.15**
	Rape		**1.07**	**< .001**	**0.19**	**0.63, 1.51**
Rape		1.76 (1.53)				
	Physical violence		**-1.65**	**< .001**	**0.19**	**-2.10, -1.21**
	Sexual assault		**-1.07**	**< .001**	**0.19**	**-1.51, -0.63**
		Participants Without Children				
Physical violence		3.30 (1.96)				
	Sexual assault		**0.67**	**.005**	**0.22**	**0.17, 1.18**
	Rape		**1.56**	**< .001**	**0.22**	**1.06, 2.07**
Sexual assault		2.63 (2.03)				
	Physical violence		**-0.67**	**.005**	**0.22**	**-1.18, -0.17**
	Rape		**0.89**	**< .001**	**0.22**	**0.38, 1.40**
Rape		1.74 (1.55)				
	Physical violence		**-1.56**	**< .001**	**0.22**	**-2.07, -1.06**
	Sexual assault		**-0.89**	**< .001**	**0.22**	**-1.40, -0.38**
		Participants With Children				
Physical violence		3.74 (2.03)				
	Sexual assault		0.40	.523	0.37	-0.47, 1.27
	Rape		**1.93**	**< .001**	**0.39**	**0.99, 1.27**
Sexual assault		3.34 (2.05)				
	Physical violence		-0.40	.523	0.37	-1.27, 0.47
	Rape		**1.53**	**< .001**	**0.38**	**0.62, 2.43**
Rape		1.81 (1.47)				
	Physical violence		**-1.93**	**< .001**	**0.39**	**-2.86, -0.99**
	Sexual assault		**1.53**	**< .001**	**0.38**	**-2.43, -0.62**

Note. Post-hoc comparisons were conducted using the Tukey HSD test. *M Difference* = mean difference.

Significant ($p < .05$) mean differences are in bold.

Predictors of Relationship Continuation

For scale anchors (i.e., lowest, and highest possible scores on each measure), see Table 5.2.

Table 5.2

Study Three Scale Anchors

Variable	*Min.*	*Max.*
Relationship continuation	1.00	7.00
Relationship satisfaction	16.00	96.00
Interpersonal dependency	6.00	24.00
Perceived illegality	1.00	7.00
Attitudes towards those who have sexually offended	1.00	7.00
Benevolent sexism	1.00	5.00
Hostile sexism	1.00	5.00
Acceptance of myths about sexual aggression	1.00	7.00

Note. Min. = lowest possible score on the measure, lower scale anchor; *Max.* = highest possible score on the measure, upper scale anchor.

Overall Sample. On average, participants' current *Relationship Duration* was 6.54 years. Participants' *Relationship Satisfaction* and the perceived *Illegality* of their partner's offence were high in the overall sample and each of the conditions. Participants' *Attitudes Towards Individuals who Have Sexually Offended* were slightly negative in the overall sample and across conditions. Participants' levels of *Interpersonal Dependency*, *Benevolent* and *Hostile Sexism* and *Acceptance of Myths About Sexual Aggression* were low in the overall sample and across conditions.

One-way between-subjects ANOVAs showed no difference between conditions in *Relationship Duration* [$F(2,589) = 0.05$, $p = .956$], *Relationship Satisfaction* [$F(2,589) = 1.99$, $p = .138$], *Interpersonal Dependency* [$F(2,589) = 0.10$, $p = .908$], *Benevolent Sexism* [$F(2,589) = 0.86$, $p = .425$], *Hostile Sexism* [$F(2,589) = 0.23$, $p = .797$], and *Acceptance of Myths About Sexual Aggression* [$F(2,589) = 1.12$, $p = .328$], respectively. However, a one-way between-subjects ANOVA showed a significant small difference in *Attitudes Towards Those who Have Sexually Offended* between conditions [$F(2,589) = 3.50$, $p = .031$, η^2_p

= .01]. Here, post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test showed that those in the rape condition had more positive attitudes towards those who have sexually offended than those in the sexual assault condition (p = .035). There was no significant difference in attitudes towards those who have sexually offended between any of the other conditions. Given the small size of this effect, no impact on the main analyses was expected. Additionally, a one-way between-subjects ANOVA showed a significant small difference in perceived *Illegality* between conditions [$F(2,589) = 11.82$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .04$]. Here, post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test showed that those in the rape condition perceived their partner's actions as significantly more illegal than those in the physical violence ($p < .001$) and sexual assault ($p < .001$) conditions. There was no significant difference in perceived *Illegality* between those in the physical violence and sexual assault conditions.

Most assumptions for conducting multiple regression were met. I observed significant correlations between some of the predictor variables (see Table 5.3), however, according to multicollinearity diagnostics, this did not affect the analysis.[28] Whilst the distribution of residuals was non-normal for the sexual assault and rape conditions, this did not present any issues as the sample sizes of each group were sufficiently large ($n > 30$; Field 2018, p. 782).

[28] Multicollinearity diagnostics can be found in supplementary materials as 'Study Three Multicollinearity' (https://osf.io/uyfzg/?view_only=ac2926ddfe3c4075931a9f2964605e03).

Table 5.3

Study Three Means, Standard Deviations and Zero-Order Correlations of the Predictors in the Overall Sample

Variable	*M(SD)*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
				Across conditions				
1. Relationship duration	6.54(5.26)							
2. Relationship satisfaction	64.89(13.91)	.00						
3. Interpersonal dependency	2.19(0.73)	-.14***	-.04					
4. Perceived illegality	6.05(1.28)	.04	.02	-.10**				
5. Attitudes towards those who have sexually offended	3.54(0.85)	.12**	.01	-.13***	.05			
6. Benevolent sexism	2.33(0.76)	-.19***	-.19***	.39***	-.21***	-.39***		
7. Hostile sexism	2.08(0.85)	-.07	-.11**	.38***	-.23***	-.23***	.64***	
8. Acceptance of myths about sexual aggression	2.68(1.24)	-.12**	-.14***	.46***	-.22***	-.25***	.74***	.84***
				Physical violence condition				
1. Relationship duration	6.55(5.42)							
2. Relationship satisfaction	66.38(11.28)	-.12*						
3. Interpersonal dependency	2.18(0.73)	-.12*	.00					
4. Perceived illegality	5.90(1.42)	.11	.06	-.09				
5. Attitudes towards those who have sexually offended	3.50(0.93)	.14*	-.08	-.14*	.02			
6. Benevolent sexism	2.30(0.75)	-.18**	-.13*	.34***	-.19**	-.47***		
7. Hostile sexism	2.06(0.83)	-.12*	-.04	.35***	-.22**	-.27***	.57***	
8. Acceptance of myths about sexual aggression	2.60(1.14)	-.17**	-.03	.48***	-.20***	-.32***	.71***	.81***
				Sexual assault condition				
1. Relationship duration	6.46(4.74)							
2. Relationship satisfaction	64.62(13.70)	.02						
3. Interpersonal dependency	2.21(0.73)	-.19**	-.02					
4. Perceived illegality	5.85(1.31)	(.01	.09	-.07				
5. Attitudes towards those who have sexually offended	3.46(0.86)	008	.06	-.08	.05			
6. Benevolent sexism	2.39(0.79)	-.18**	-.30***	.38***	-.20**	-.40***		
7. Hostile sexism	2.11(0.89)	-.05	-.20**	.40***	-.22***	-.24***	.73***	
8. Acceptance of myths about sexual aggression	2.78(1.39)	-.14*	-.21**	.48***	-.21**	-.25***	.78***	.88***
				Rape condition				
1. Relationship duration	6.62(5.62)							
2. Relationship satisfaction	63.63(16.32)	.07						
3. Interpersonal dependency	2.18(0.74)	-.11	-.08					
4. Perceived illegality	6.41(0.98)	.00	-.06	-.14*				
5. Attitudes towards those who have sexually offended	3.67(0.75)	.14*	.01	-.19**	.02			
6. Benevolent sexism	2.30(0.75)	-.22***	-.14*	.44***	-.27***	-.27***		
7. Hostile sexism	2.07(0.83)	-.03	-.06	.40***	-.28***	-.17**	.60***	
8. Acceptance of myths about sexual aggression	2.67(1.18)	-.05	-.15*	.44***	-.27***	-.17*	.71***	.80***

Note. $*p \leq .05$. $**p \leq .01$. $***p \leq .001$.

Sensitivity analyses showed that, with 80% power and at $\alpha = .05$, the minimum effect size detectable was small for the overall sample ($N = 592$, $f^2 = .03$) and the physical violence ($n = 200$, $f^2 = .08$), sexual assault ($n = 200$, $f^2 = .08$), and rape ($n = 192$, $f^2 = .09$) conditions.

Multiple regression was used to test if *Relationship Duration*, *Relationship Satisfaction*, *Interpersonal Dependency*, perceived *Illegality* of the participant's partner's actions, *Attitudes Towards Those who Have Sexually Offended*, *Benevolent* and *Hostile*

Sexism, and *Acceptance of Myths About Sexual Aggression* predicted the likelihood of relationship continuation in the overall sample. A significant regression equation was found, predicting 33.8% of the variance [R^2 = .34, F(8,583) = 37.29, p < .001]. *Relationship Duration* (β = .16, p < .001), perceived *Illegality* (β = -.31, p < .001) and *Acceptance of Myths About Sexual Aggression* (β = .39, p < .001) were the only significant predictors in the model. The same model was also found to be significant in each of the conditions. In the physical violence condition, a significant regression equation was found, predicting 31.4% of variance [R^2 = .31, F(8,191) = 10.93, p < .001]. Once again, *Relationship Duration* (β = .19, p = .003), perceived *Illegality* (β = -.25, p < .001) and *Acceptance of Myths About Sexual Aggression* (β = .51, p < .001) were the only significant predictors in the model. The model also significantly explained 41.8% of variance in the sexual assault condition [R^2 = .42, F(8,191) = 17.12, p < .001]. Here, *Relationship Duration* (β = .20, p < .001), perceived *Illegality* (β = -.19, p < .001), and *Acceptance of Myths About Sexual Aggression* (β = .41, p = .003) were again significant predictors in the model. Additionally, *Attitudes Towards Those who Have Sexually Offended* (β = .15, p = .040) also significantly contributed to the regression model. Lastly, the model significantly explained 49.4% of variance in the rape condition [R^2 = .49, F(8,183) = 22.35, p < .001]. Here, *Relationship Duration* (β = .17, p < .001), perceived *Illegality* (β = -.45, p < .001), and *Acceptance of Myths About Sexual Aggression* (β = .34, p < .001) were again significant predictors in the model. Additionally, *Benevolent Sexism* (β = .20, p = .017) also significantly contributed to the regression model. For regression statistics by vignette condition, see Table 5.4.

Table 5.4

Study Three Regression Results by Condition in the Overall Sample Using Relationship Continuation Likelihood as the Outcome

Predictor						Correlations		
	b(SE)	*b 95% CI*	*beta*	*t*	*p*	partial	semi-partial	$R^2(p)$
Across Conditions								**.34(<.001)**
(Constant)	**2.67(0.74)**	**1.21,4.12**		**3.60**	**< .001**			
Relationship duration	**0.06(0.01)**	**0.04,0.09**	**.16**	**4.63**	**< .001**	**.19**	**.16**	
Relationship satisfaction	0.00(0.01)	-0.01,0.01	.03	0.74	.463	.03	.03	
Interpersonal dependency	-0.13(0.10)	-0.34,0.07	-.05	-1.26	.208	-.05	-.04	
Perceived illegality	**-0.47(0.05)**	**-0.58,-0.37**	**-.31**	**-8.77**	**< .001**	**-.34**	**-.30**	
Attitudes towards those who have sexually offended	0.13(0.09)	-0.04,0.30	.06	1.49	.136	.06	.05	
Benevolent sexism	0.03(0.14)	-0.25,0.30	.01	0.19	.853	.01	.01	
Hostile sexism	0.17(0.15)	-0.12,0.45	.07	1.17	.244	.05	.04	
Acceptance of myths about sexual aggression	**0.62(0.12)**	**0.40,0.85**	**.39**	**5.40**	**< .001**	**.22**	**.18**	
Physical Violence Condition								**.31(< .001)**
(Constant)	1.81(1.40)	-0.95,4.56		1.29	.198			
Relationship duration	**0.07(0.02)**	**0.02,0.11**	**.19**	**3.02**	**.003**	**.21**	**.18**	
Relationship satisfaction	0.01(0.01)	-0.01,0.04	.08	1.31	.191	.09	.08	
Interpersonal dependency	-0.24(0.19)	-0.61,0.12	-.09	-1.31	.191	-.09	-.08	
Perceived illegality	**-0.34(0.09)**	**-0.51,-0.17**	**-.25**	**-3.94**	**< .001**	**-.27**	**-.24**	
Attitudes towards those who have sexually offended	0.24(0.15)	-0.05,0.53	.11	1.62	.106	.12	.10	
Benevolent sexism	-0.37(0.25)	-0.87,0.12	-.14	-1.51	.134	-.11	-.09	
Hostile sexism	0.22(0.25)	-0.27,0.71	.09	0.88	.380	.06	.05	
Acceptance of myths about sexual aggression	**0.89(0.22)**	**0.46,1.33**	**.51**	**4.03**	**< .001**	**.28**	**.24**	
Sexual Assault Condition								**.42(< .001)**
(Constant)	0.35(1.24)	-2.10,2.80		0.29	.778			
Relationship duration	**0.09(0.03)**	**0.04,0.14**	**.20**	**3.43**	**< .001**	**.24**	**.19**	
Relationship satisfaction	0.00(0.01)	-0.02,0.02	.00	0.07	.948	.01	.00	
Interpersonal dependency	-0.09(0.18)	-0.45,0.26	-.03	-0.52	.605	-.04	-.03	
Perceived illegality	**-0.30(0.09)**	**-0.48,-.12**	**-.19**	**-3.37**	**<.001**	**-.24**	**-.19**	
Attitudes towards those who have sexually offended	**0.30(0.15)**	**0.01,0.59**	**.13**	**2.07**	**.040**	**.15**	**.11**	
Benevolent sexism	0.12(0.26)	-0.38,0.63	.05	0.48	.631	.04	.03	
Hostile sexism	0.40(0.28)	-0.16,0.95	.17	1.41	.159	.10	.08	
Acceptance of myths about sexual aggression	**0.60(0.20)**	**0.20,1.00**	**.41**	**2.99**	**.003**	**.21**	**.17**	
Rape Condition								**.49(< .001)**
(Constant)	**5.11(0.99)**	**3.15,7.07**		**5.15**	**<.001**			
Relationship duration	**0.05(0.02)**	**0.02,0.08**	**.17**	**3.07**	**.002**	**.22**	**.16**	
Relationship satisfaction	-0.01(0.01)	-0.02,0.00	-.08	-1.55	.123	-.11	-.08	
Interpersonal dependency	-0.16(0.13)	-0.40,0.09	-.08	-1.27	.207	-.09	-.07	
Perceived illegality	**-0.70(0.09)**	**-0.88,-0.53**	**-.45**	**-8.04**	**< .001**	**-.51**	**-.42**	
Attitudes towards those who have sexually offended	-0.03(0.11)	-0.25,0.20	-.01	-0.24	.814	-.02	-.01	
Benevolent sexism	**0.40(0.17)**	**0.07,0.72**	**.20**	**2.41**	**.017**	**.18**	**.13**	
Hostile sexism	-0.16(0.17)	-0.48,0.17	-.08	-0.94	.346	-.07	-.05	
Acceptance of myths about sexual aggression	**0.45(0.13)**	**0.19,0.71**	**.34**	**3.38**	**< .001**	**.24**	**.18**	

Note. Significant ($p < .05$) regression models and predictors are in bold.

Participants Without Children. On average, participants' current Relationship Duration was 4.95 years. Participants' Relationship Satisfaction and the perceived Illegality of their partner's offence were high in the overall sample and each of the conditions. Participants' Attitudes Towards Individuals who Have Sexually Offended were slightly negative in the overall sample and across conditions. Participants' levels of Interpersonal Dependency, Benevolent and Hostile Sexism and Acceptance *of Myths About Sexual Aggression* were low in the overall sample and across conditions.

One-way between-subjects ANOVAs showed no difference between conditions in *Relationship Duration* [$F(2,440) = 0.07$, $p = .931$], *Interpersonal Dependency [*$F(2,440) = 0.55$, $p = .580$], attitudes towards those who have sexually offended [$F(2,440) = 1.31$, $p = .270$], *Benevolent Sexism* [$F(2,440) = 0.59$, $p = .557$], *Hostile Sexism* [$F(2,440) = 0.25$, $p = .778$], and *Acceptance of Myths About Sexual Aggression* [$F(2,440) = 1.19$, $p = .306$], respectively. However, a one-way between-subjects ANOVA showed a significant small difference in perceived *Illegality* between conditions [$F(2,440) = 36.70$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2_p = .03$]. Here, post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test showed that those in the rape condition perceived their partner's actions to be more illegal than those in the physical violence ($p = .006$) and sexual assault ($p = .004$) conditions. There was no significant difference in perceived *Illegality* between the physical violence and sexual assault conditions. Additionally, there was a very small difference in *Relationship Satisfaction* between conditions [$F(2,440) = 3.03$, $p = .049$, $\eta^2_p = .01$]. Here, those in the physical violence condition reported being more satisfied with their relationship than those in the rape condition ($p = .038$). There was no difference in *Relationship Satisfaction* between these conditions and the sexual assault condition.

Most assumptions for conducting multiple regression were met. I observed significant correlations between some of the predictor variables (see Table 5.5), however, according to

multicollinearity diagnostics, this did not affect the analysis[29]. Whilst the distribution of residuals was non-normal for the sexual assault and rape conditions, this did not present any issues as the sample sizes of each group were sufficiently large (n > 30; Field 2018, p. 782).

Table 5.5

Study Three Means, Standard Deviations and Zero-Order Correlations of the Predictors in Participants Without Children

Variable	*M(SD)*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
		Across conditions						
1. Relationship duration	4.95(3.44)							
2. Relationship satisfaction	65.30(13.61)	.01						
3. Interpersonal dependency	2.24(0.74)	-.09*	-.05					
4. Perceived illegality	6.05(1.26)	.04	.05	-.11*				
5. Attitudes towards those who have sexually offended	3.25(0.84)	.21***	-.04	-.16***	.01			
6. Benevolent sexism	2.36(0.78)	-.25***	-.20***	.41***	-.16***	-.39***		
7. Hostile sexism	2.07(0.85)	-.19***	-.13**	.41***	-.18***	-.21***	.65***	
8. Acceptance of myths about sexual aggression	2.71(1.31)	-.20***	-.17***	.49***	-.18***	-.24***	.75***	.84***
		Physical violence condition						
1. Relationship duration	4.97(3.75)							
3. Relationship satisfaction	67.20(10.92)	.02						
3. Interpersonal dependency	2.24(0.75)	.02	-.07					
4. Perceived illegality	5.91(1.39)	.06	.14*	-.10				
5. Attitudes towards those who have sexually offended	3.52(0.91)	.28***	-.08	-.17*	.02			
6. Benevolent sexism	2.32(0.79)	-.20**	-.19*	.38***	-.16*	-.53***		
7. Hostile sexism	2.03(0.85)	-.24**	-.03	.38***	-.25***	-.29***	.57***	
8. Acceptance of myths about sexual aggression	2.60(1.22)	-.23**	-.05	.50***	-.20**	-.36***	.71***	.82***
		Sexual assault condition						
1. Relationship duration	4.86(2.99)							
2. Relationship satisfaction	65.35(12.89)	.04						
3. Interpersonal dependency	2.28(0.74)	-.19*	.00					
4. Perceived illegality	5.88(1.29)	.01	.14*	-.05				
5. Attitudes towards those who have sexually offended	3.46(0.85)	.17*	.02	-.10	-.03			
6. Benevolent sexism	2.41(0.79)	-.25***	-.28***	.42***	-.11	-.35***		
7. Hostile sexism	2.08(0.89)	-.22**	-.27***	.43***	-.10	-.18*	.79***	
8. Acceptance of myths about sexual aggression	2.84(1.49)	-.21**	-.23**	.49***	-.13	-.22**	.80***	.91***
		Rape condition						
1. Relationship duration	5.01(3.53)							
2. Relationship satisfaction	63.34(16.28)	.00						
3. Interpersonal dependency	2.19(0.75)	-.13	-.08					
4. Perceived illegality	6.36(1.03)	.03	-.06	-.17*				
5. Attitudes towards those who have sexually offended	3.62(0.76)	.16*	-.03	-.20**	-.02			
6. Benevolent sexism	2.34(0.77)	-.30***	-.16*	.43***	-.24**	-.26***		
7. Hostile sexism	2.09(0.80)	-.11	-.10	.42***	-.23**	-.15*	.59***	
8. Acceptance of myths about sexual aggression	2.70(1.21)	-.18*	-.19*	.47***	-.22**	-.14*	.73***	.78***

Note. *$p \leq .05$. **$p \leq .01$. ***$p \leq .001$

Sensitivity analyses showed that, with 80% power and at $\alpha = .05$, the minimum effect size detectable was small for the overall sample (N = 443, f^2 = .04) and small to medium for

[29] Multicollinearity diagnostics can be found in supplementary materials as 'Study Three Multicollinearity' (https://osf.io/uyfzg/?view_only=ac2926ddfe3c4075931a9f2964605e03).

the physical violence (n = 150, f^2 = .11), sexual assault (n = 144, f^2 = .12), and rape (n = 149, f^2 = .11) conditions.

Multiple regression was used to test if *Relationship Duration*, *Relationship Satisfaction*, *Interpersonal Dependency*, perceived *Illegality* of the participant's partner's actions, *Attitudes Towards those who Have Sexually Offended*, *Benevolent* and *Hostile Sexism*, and *Acceptance of Myths About Sexual Aggression* significantly predicted the likelihood of relationship continuation for those who did not have children with their partner. A significant regression equation was found, predicting 31.8% of the variance [R^2 = .32, F(8,434) = 25.33, p < .001]. *Relationship Duration* (β = .13, p = .003), perceived *Illegality* (β = -.27, p < .001) and *Acceptance of Myths About Sexual Aggression* (β = .46, p < .001) were the only significant predictors in the model. The same model was also found to be significant in each of the conditions. In the physical violence condition, a significant regression equation was found, predicting 32.2% of variance [R^2 = .32, F(8,141) = 8.38, p < .001]. Once again, *Relationship Duration* (β = .17, p = .025), perceived *Illegality* (β = -.21, p = .004) and *Acceptance of Myths About Sexual Aggression* (β = .59, p < .001) were the only significant predictors in the model. The model also significantly explained 40% of variance in the sexual assault condition [R^2 = .40, F(8,135) = 11.27, p < .001]. Here, only perceived *Illegality* (β = -.14, p = .039), and *Acceptance of Myths About Sexual Aggression* (β = .50, p = .004) were significant predictors in the model. Lastly, the model significantly explained 49.8% of variance in the rape condition [R^2 = .50, F(8,140) = 17.39, p < .001]. Here, *Relationship Duration* (β = .24, p < .001), perceived *Illegality* (β = -.45, p < .001), and *Acceptance of Myths About Sexual Aggression* (β = .36, p = .002) were again significant predictors in the model. Additionally, *Benevolent Sexism* (β = .21, p = .027) also significantly contributed to the regression model. For regression statistics by vignette condition, see Table 5.6.

Table 5.6

Study Three Regression Results by Condition for Participants Without Children Using Relationship Continuation Likelihood as the Outcome

Predictor						Correlations		
	b(SE)	*b 95% CI*	*beta*	*t*	*p*	partial	semi-partial	$R^2(p)$
Across Conditions								**.32(< .001)**
(Constant)	**2.01(0.87)**	**0.31,3.71**		**2.32**	**.021**			
Relationship duration	**0.07**	**0.03,0.12**	**.13**	**3.03**	**.003**	**.14**	**.12**	
Relationship satisfaction	0.01(0.01)	-0.01,0.02	.05	1.10	.271	.05	.04	
Interpersonal dependency	-0.04(0.12)	-0.27,0.200	-.01	-0.31	.759	-.02	-.01	
Perceived illegality	**-0.42(0.06)**	**-0.55,-0.30**	**-.27**	**-6.74**	**< .001**	**-.31**	**-.27**	
Attitudes towards those who have sexually offended	0.14(0.10)	-0.06,0.34	.06	1.35	.176	.07	.05	
Benevolent sexism	-0.05(0.16)	-0.37,0.27	-.02	-0.31	.758	-.02	-.01	
Hostile sexism	0.09(0.17)	-0.25,0.42	.04	0.51	.613	.02	.02	
Acceptance of myths about sexual aggression	**0.69(0.13)**	**0.44,0.94**	**.46**	**5.42**	**< .001**	**.25**	**.22**	
Physical Violence Condition								**.32(< .001)**
(Constant)	1.86(1.65)	-1.40,5.13		1.13	.261			
Relationship duration	**0.09(0.04)**	**0.01,0.16**	**.17**	**2.27**	**.025**	**.19**	**.16**	
Relationship satisfaction	0.01(0.01)	-0.01,0.04	.07	1.01	.312	.09	.07	
Interpersonal dependency	-0.24(0.21)	-0.66,0.18	-.09	-1.12	.265	-.09	-.08	
Perceived illegality	**-0.30(0.10)**	**-0.50,0.10**	**-.21**	**-2.96**	**.004**	**-.24**	**-.21**	
Attitudes towards those who have sexually offended	0.21(0.18)	-0.15,0.58	.10	1.16	.248	.10	.08	
Benevolent sexism	-0.52(0.28)	-1.08,0.04	-.21	-1.84	.068	-.15	-.13	
Hostile sexism	0.21(0.28)	-0.35,0.76	.09	0.73	.469	.06	.05	
Acceptance of myths about sexual aggression	**0.94(0.24)**	**0.47,1.42**	**.59**	**3.95**	**<.001**	**.32**	**.27**	
Sexual Assault Condition								**.40(< .001)**
(Constant)	0.08(1.45)	-2.78,2.95		0.06	.955			
Relationship duration	0.03(0.05)	-0.06,0.12	.05	0.64	.521	.06	.04	
Relationship satisfaction	0.00(0.01)	-0.02,0.02	.00	0.06	.951	.01	.00	
Interpersonal dependency	-0.01(0.21)	-0.43,0.41	.00	-0.05	.961	.00	.00	
Perceived illegality	**-0.22(0.11)**	**-0.42,-0.01**	**-.14**	**-2.09**	**.039**	**-.18**	**-.14**	
Attitudes towards those who have sexually offended	0.32(0.18)	-0.03,0.66	.13	1.82	.071	.16	.12	
Benevolent sexism	0.02(0.32)	-0.61,0.65	.01	0.06	.950	.001	.00	
Hostile sexism	0.29(0.38)	-0.46,1.04	.13	0.77	.440	.07	.05	
Acceptance of myths about sexual aggression	**0.68(0.23)**	**0.22,1.14**	**.50**	**2.92**	**.004**	**.24**	**.19**	
Rape Condition								**.50(< .001)**
(Constant)	**5.03(1.15)**	**2.75,7.30**		**4.37**	**< .001**			
Relationship duration	**0.11(0.03)**	**0.05,0.16**	**.24**	**3.91**	**< .001**	**.31**	**.23**	
Relationship satisfaction	-0.01(0.01)	-0.02,0.00	-.09	-1.45	.150	-.12	-.09	
Interpersonal dependency	-0.07(0.15)	-0.35,0.22	-.03	-0.47	.641	-.04	-.03	
Perceived illegality	**-0.69(0.10)**	**-0.87,-0.50**	**-.45**	**-7.23**	**< .001**	**-.52**	**-.43**	
Attitudes towards those who have sexually offended	-0.13(0.13)	-0.39,0.12	-.06	-1.02	.310	-.09	-.06	
Benevolent sexism	**0.43(0.19)**	**0.05,0.80**	**.21**	**2.42**	**.027**	**.19**	**.13**	
Hostile sexism	-0.26(0.19)	-0.63,0.11	-.13	-1.38	.171	-.12	-.08	
Acceptance of myths about sexual aggression	**0.46(0.15)**	**0.17,0.75**	**.36**	**3.13**	**.002**	**.26**	**.19**	

Note. Significant ($p < .05$) regression models and predictors are in bold.

Participants With Children. On average, participants' current *Relationship Duration* was 11.28 years. Participants' *Relationship Satisfaction* and the perceived *Illegality* of their partner's offence were high in the overall sample and each of the conditions. Participants' *Attitudes Towards Individuals who Have Sexually Offended* were slightly negative in the overall sample and across conditions. Participants' levels of *Interpersonal Dependency*, *Benevolent* and *Hostile Sexism* and *Acceptance of Myths About Sexual Aggression* were low in the overall sample and across conditions.

One-way between-subjects ANOVAs showed no difference between conditions in *Relationship Duration* [$F(2,146) = 0.72$, $p = .487$], *Relationship Satisfaction* [$F(2, 146) = 0.20$, $p = .818$], *Interpersonal Dependency* [$F(2,146) = 0.50$, $p = .610$], *Benevolent Sexism* [$F(2,146) = 0.68$, $p = .507$], *Hostile Sexism* [$F(2,146) = 0.55$, $p = .579$], and *Acceptance of Myths About Sexual Aggression* [$F(2,146) = 0.12$, $p = .887$], respectively. However, a one-way between-subjects ANOVA showed a significant small difference in *Attitudes Towards Those who Have Sexually Offended* between conditions [$F(2,146) = 3.47$, $p = .034$, $\eta^2_p = .05$]. Here, post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test showed no significant difference between conditions at the $p \leq .05$ level, however, those in the rape condition had slightly more positive *Attitudes Towards Those who Have Sexually Offended* than those in the physical violence ($p = .055$) and sexual assault ($p = .057$) conditions. Given the small size of this effect, no impact on the main analyses was expected. Additionally, there was a moderate difference in perceived *Illegality* between conditions [$F(2,146) = 5.48$, $p = .004$, $\eta^2_p = .07$]. Here, post-hoc comparison using the Tukey HSD test showed that those in the rape condition perceived their partner's actions as described in the vignette to be more illegal than those in the physical violence ($p = .022$) and sexual assault ($p = .005$) conditions. There was no significant difference in perceived *Illegality* between the physical violence and sexual assault conditions.

Most assumptions for conducting multiple regression were met. I observed significant correlations between some of the predictor variables (see Table 5.7), however, according to

multicollinearity diagnostics, this did not affect the analysis[30]. Whilst the distribution of residuals was non-normal for the sexual assault and rape conditions, this did not present any issues as the sample sizes of each group were sufficiently large (n > 30; Field 2018, p. 782).

Table 5.7

Study Three Means, Standard Deviations, and Zero-Order Correlations of the Predictors in Participants With Children

Variable	*M(SD)*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
				Across conditions				
1. Relationship duration	11.28(6.70)							
2. Relationship satisfaction	63.68(14.73)	.06						
3. Interpersonal dependency	2.05(0.68)	-.11	-.03					
4. Perceived illegality	6.03(1.33)	.09	-.08	-.08				
5. Attitudes towards those who have sexually offended	3.56(0.88)	.03	.07	-.05	.17*			
6. Benevolent sexism	2.26(0.70)	-.13	-.17*	.29***	-.37***	-.40***		
7. Hostile sexism	2.12(0.86)	.04	-.03	.33***	-.35***	-.29***	.60***	
8. Acceptance of myths about sexual aggression	2.60(1.00)	.03	-.07	.37***	-.38***	-.29***	.70***	.87***
				Physical violence condition				
1. Relationship duration	11.26(6.79)							
2. Relationship satisfaction	63.92(12.08)	-.19						
3. Interpersonal dependency	2.01(0.67)	-.21	.15					
4. Perceived illegality	5.86(1.54)	.27*	-.16	-.09				
5. Attitudes towards those who have sexually offended	3.44(0.98)	.05	-.11	-.08	.00			
6. Benevolent sexism	2.26(0.62)	-.20	.04	.20	-.29*	-.31*		
7. Hostile sexism	2.14(0.76)	-.08	-.07	.28*	-.12	-.20	.57***	
8. Acceptance of myths about sexual aggression	2.60(0.87)	-.17	.05	.42***	-.22	-.20	.70***	.81***
				Sexual assault condition				
1. Relationship duration	10.57(5.83)							
2. Relationship satisfaction	62.75(15.57)	.13						
3. Interpersonal dependency	2.02(0.68)	-.05	-.12					
4. Perceived illegality	5.75(1.37)	.04	-.05	-.18				
5. Attitudes towards those who have sexually offended	3.45(0.91)	.01	.14	-.03	.24*			
6. Benevolent sexism	2.33(0.79)	-.12	-.37**	.25*	-.42***	-.54***		
7. Hostile sexism	2.19(0.91)	.06	-.06	.38**	-.50***	-.37**	.58***	
8. Acceptance of myths about sexual aggression	2.65(1.09)	-.02	-.18	.41***	-.50***	-.38**	.75***	.88***
				Rape condition				
1. Relationship duration	12.21(7.65)							
2. Relationship satisfaction	64.60(16.58)	.18						
3. Interpersonal dependency	2.13(0.71)	-.09	-.08					
4. Perceived illegality	6.58(0.76)	-.30*	-.12	.01				
5. Attitudes towards those who have sexually offended	3.85(0.65)	-.06	.18	-.10	.15			
6. Benevolent sexism	2.16(0.68)	-.05	-.05	.46***	-.41**	-.25		
7. Hostile sexism	2.01(0.92)	.14	.06	.33*	-.49***	-.24	.65***	
8. Acceptance of myths about sexual aggression	2.55(1.05)	.27*	.00	.27*	-.53***	-.24	.62***	.90***

Note. *$p \leq .05$. **$p \leq .01$. ***$p \leq .001$.

Sensitivity analyses showed that, with 80% power and at $\alpha = .05$, the minimum effect size detectable was small to medium for the overall sample (N = 149, f^2 = .11) and large for

[30] Multicollinearity diagnostics can be found in supplementary materials as 'Study Three Multicollinearity' (https://osf.io/uyfzg/?view_only=ac2926ddfe3c4075931a9f2964605e03).

the physical violence (n = 50, f^2 = .36), sexual assault (n = 56, f^2 = .31), and rape (n = 43, f^2 = .43) conditions.

Multiple regression was used to test if *Relationship Duration*, *Relationship Satisfaction*, *Interpersonal Dependency*, perceived *Illegality* of the participant's partner's actions, *Attitudes Towards Those who Have Sexually Offended*, *Benevolent* and *Hostile Sexism*, and *Acceptance of Myths About Sexual Aggression* significantly predicted the likelihood of relationship continuation for those who had at least one child with their partner. A significant regression equation was found, predicting 40.9% of the variance [R^2 = .41, F(8,140) = 12.13, p < .001]. *Relationship Duration* (β = .13, p = .050) and perceived *Illegality* (β = -.39, p < .001) were the only significant predictors in the model. The same model was also found to be significant in each of the conditions. In the physical violence condition, a significant regression equation was found, predicting 30.6% of variance [R^2 = .31, F(8,41) = 2.26, p = .042]. Here, only perceived *Illegality* (β = -.31, p = .034) was a significant predictor in the model. The model also significantly explained 47.3% of variance in the sexual assault condition [R^2 = .47, F(8,47) = 5.28, p < .001]. Here, only *Relationship Duration* (β = .27, p = .016), and perceived *Illegality* (β = -.36, p = .006) were significant predictors in the model. Lastly, the model significantly explained 69.6% of variance in the rape condition [R^2 = .70, F(8,34) = 9.73, p < .001]. Here, *Interpersonal Dependency* (β = -.25, p = .034), perceived *Illegality* (β = -.45, p < .001), and *Acceptance of Myths About Sexual Aggression* (β = .49, p = .048) were significant predictors in the model. For regression statistics by vignette condition, see Table 5.8.

Table 5.8

Study Three Regression Results by Condition for Participants With Children Using Relationship Continuation Likelihood as the Outcome

Predictor						Correlations		
	b(SE)	*b 95% CI*	*beta*	*t*	*p*	partial	semi-partial	$R^2(p)$
Across Conditions								.41(< .001)
(Constant)	**4.29(1.47)**	**1.39,7.19**		**2.93**	**.004**			
Relationship duration	**0.04(0.02)**	**0.00,0.08**	**.13**	**1.98**	**.050**	**.17**	**.13**	
Relationship satisfaction	0.00(0.01)	-0.02,0.01	-.03	-0.45	.657	-.04	-.03	
Interpersonal dependency	-0.40(0.21)	-0.82,0.02	-.13	-1.87	.064	-.16	-.12	
Perceived illegality	**-0.60(0.11)**	**-0.82,-0.38**	**-.39**	**-5.40**	**< .001**	**-.42**	**-.35**	
Attitudes towards those who have sexually offended	0.16(0.17)	-0.17,0.48	.07	0.95	.346	.08	.06	
Benevolent sexism	0.25(0.29)	-0.32,0.82	.09	0.87	.384	.07	.06	
Hostile sexism	0.45(0.31)	-0.16,1.05	.19	1.45	.151	.12	.09	
Acceptance of myths about sexual aggression	0.35(0.30)	-0.25,0.94	.17	1.16	.248	.10	.08	
Physical Violence Condition								**.31(.042)**
(Constant)	1.98(2.96)	-4.01,7.96		0.67	.508			
Relationship duration	0.06(0.04)	-0.02,0.15	.21	1.47	.149	.22	.19	
Relationship satisfaction	0.01(0.02)	-0.04,0.05	.04	0.29	.775	.05	.04	
Interpersonal dependency	-0.27,0.45	-1.17,0.64	-.09	-0.60	.555	-.09	-.08	
Perceived illegality	**-0.41(0.19)**	**-0.79,-0.03**	**-.31**	**-2.20**	**.034**	**-.32**	**-.29**	
Attitudes towards those who have sexually offended	0.21(0.29)	-0.37,0.79	.10	0.73	.469	.11	.10	
Benevolent sexism	0.13(0.64)	-1.16,1.42	.04	0.20	.840	.03	.03	
Hostile sexism	0.27(0.61)	-0.96,1.49	.10	0.44	.664	.07	.06	
Acceptance of myths about sexual aggression	0.77(0.65)	-0.54,2.08	.33	1.19	.243	.18	.15	
Sexual Assault Condition								**.47(< .001)**
(Constant)	2.39(2.74)	-3.13,7.91		0.87	.387			
Relationship duration	**0.10(0.04)**	**0.02,0.17**	**.27**	**2.51**	**.016**	**.34**	**.27**	
Relationship satisfaction	-0.01(0.02)	-0.04,0.03	-.04	-0.30	.765	-.04	-.03	
Interpersonal dependency	-0.29(0.36)	-1.01,0.43	-.10	-0.82	.419	-.12	-.09	
Perceived illegality	**-0.54(0.19)**	**-0.93,-0.16**	**-.36**	**-2.86**	**.006**	**-.38**	**-.30**	
Attitudes towards those who have sexually offended	0.39(0.29)	-0.20,0.98	.17	1.34	.187	.19	.14	
Benevolent sexism	0.28(0.51)	-0.74,1.31	.11	0.56	.581	.08	.06	
Hostile sexism	0.44(0.53)	-0.63,1.50	.19	0.83	.414	.12	.09	
Acceptance of myths about sexual aggression	0.37(0.53)	-0.70,1.43	.20	0.69	.495	.10	.07	
Rape Condition								**.70(< .001)**
(Constant)	**5.15(2.18)**	**0.71,9.58**		**2.36**	**.024**			
Relationship duration	-0.01(0.02)	-0.06,0.03	-.07	-0.63	.535	-.11	-.06	
Relationship satisfaction	-0.01(0.01)	-0.02,0.01	-.05	-0.54	.595	-.09	-.05	
Interpersonal dependency	**-0.51(0.23)**	**-.98,-.04**	**-.25**	**-2.21**	**.034**	**-.35**	**-.21**	
Perceived illegality	**-0.87(0.23)**	**-1.34,-0.39**	**-.45**	**-3.74**	**< .001**	**-.54**	**-.35**	
Attitudes towards those who have sexually offended	0.36(0.23)	-0.10,0.82	.16	1.58	.123	.26	.15	
Benevolent sexism	0.52(0.31)	-0.10,1.14	.24	1.70	.098	.28	.16	
Hostile sexism	-0.17(0.37)	-0.92,0.59	-.11	-0.45	.655	-.08	-.04	
Acceptance of myths about sexual aggression	**0.69(0.33)**	**0.01,1.36**	**.49**	**2.05**	**.048**	**.33**	**.19**	

Note. Significant ($p < .05$) regression models and predictors are in bold.

Interactions Between Offence Type and Predictors of Relationship Decision-Making in Predicting Relationship Continuation

In the overall sample, a sensitivity analysis showed that, with 80% power and at α = .05, the minimum effect size detectable was small in the overall sample (N = 592, f^2 = .02). as well as for those without children (n = 443, f^2 = .02), and those with children (n = 149, f^2 = .07. In all three samples, most assumptions for conducting linear regression and moderation analyses were met[31] (for correlations, see Table 5.3 for the overall sample, Table 5.5 for those without children, and Table 5.7 for those with children). While the distribution of residuals was non-normal for the sexual assault and rape conditions, this did not present any issues as the sample sizes of each group were sufficiently large (n ≥ 30; Field 2018, p. 782).

In the overall sample, as well as for those without and with children, moderation analyses were run to test whether *Relationship Duration*, *Relationship Satisfaction*, *Interpersonal Dependency*, perceived *Illegality* of their partner's actions, *Attitudes Towards Those who Have Sexually Offended*, *Benevolent* and *Hostile Sexism* and *Acceptance of Myths Towards Sexual Aggression* predicted the likelihood of relationship continuation differently depending on whether participants' partners committed a physically violent offence, a sexual assault, or a rape. In the overall sample and for both those with and without children, these showed significant interaction effects between offence condition and perceived *Illegality*. Additionally, in the overall sample and for those without children, but not for those with children, these analyses showed significant interaction effects between offence condition and *Benevolent Sexism*, and *Hostile Sexism* respectively.

Illegality. For all interaction statistics, see Table 5.9.

[31]Multicollinearity diagnostics can be found in supplementary materials as 'Study Three Multicollinearity' (https://osf.io/uyfzg/?view_only=ac2926ddfe3c4075931a9f2964605e03).

Table 5.9

Study Three Perceived Illegality Interaction Statistics

	df	*F*	*b*	*t*	95% CI	*p*
		Overall sample				
Illegality	586		-0.87	-6.77	-1.12,-0.62	<.001
Illegality x Offence type	2;586	4.33				.014
Physical violence	586		-0.43	-4.92	-0.60,-0.26	<.001
Sexual assault	586		-0.49	-5.24	-0.68,-0.31	<.001
Rape	586		-0.87	-6.77	-1.12,-0.62	<.001
		Without children				
Illegality	437		-0.81	-5.77	-1.08,-0.53	<.001
Illegality x Offence type	2,437	3.67				.026
Physical violence	437		-0.41	-3.95	-0.61,-0.20	<.001
Sexual assault	437		-0.35	-3.09	-0.57,-0.13	.002
Rape	437		-0.81	5.77	-1.08,-0.53	<.001
		With children				
Illegality	143		-1.36	-4.09	-2.02,-0.71	<.001
Illegality x Offence type	2,143	3.34				.038
Physical violence	143		-0.46	-3.03	-0.77,-0.16	.003
Sexual assault	143		-0.79	-4.87	-1.11,-0.47	<.001
Rape	143		-1.36	-4.09	-2.02,-0.71	<.001

Note. Outcome variable = Relationship continuation likelihood. Illegality = main effect, Illegality x Offence type = interaction effect, Physical violence = effect of Illegality on relationship continuation likelihood in the physical violence condition, Sexual assault = effect of Illegality on relationship continuation likelihood in the sexual assault condition, Rape = effect of Illegality on relationship continuation likelihood in the rape condition.

In the overall sample and for those without and with children, significant interactions were found between perceived *Illegality* and partner's offence type. Main effects showed that perceived *Illegality* predicted relationship continuation across conditions in that participants who perceived their partner's actions to be more illegal were less likely to stay in their relationship. However, for the overall sample and both those with and without children, this effect was stronger for those in the rape condition than those in the sexual assault and physical violence conditions. For those without children (see Figure 5.2), the effect was weakest in the sexual assault condition, while for the overall sample (see Figure 5.1) and those with children (see Figure 5.3) it was weakest in the physical violence condition.

Figure 5.1

Study Three Interaction Between Offence Type and Perceived Illegality in Predicting Relationship Continuation in the Overall Sample

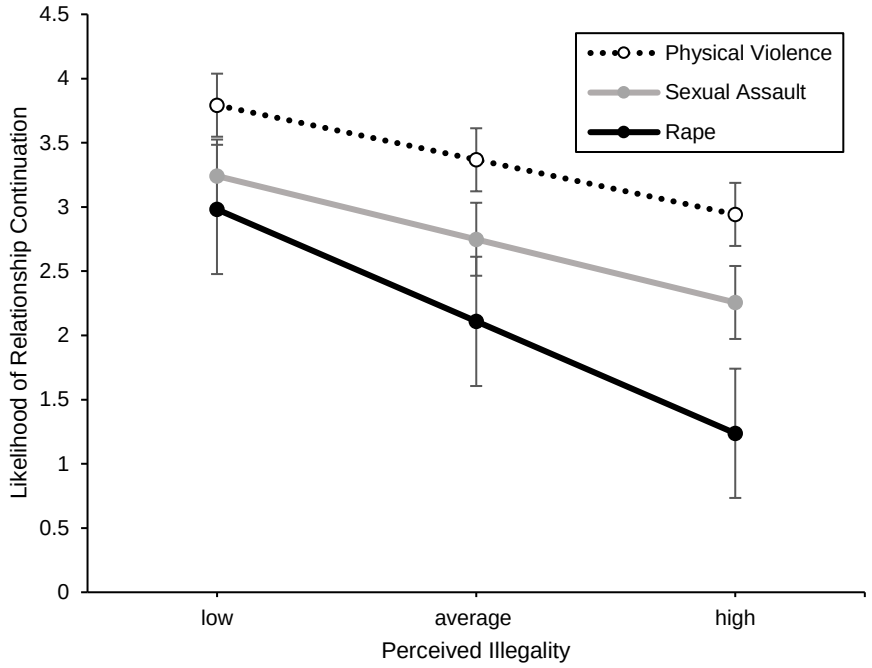
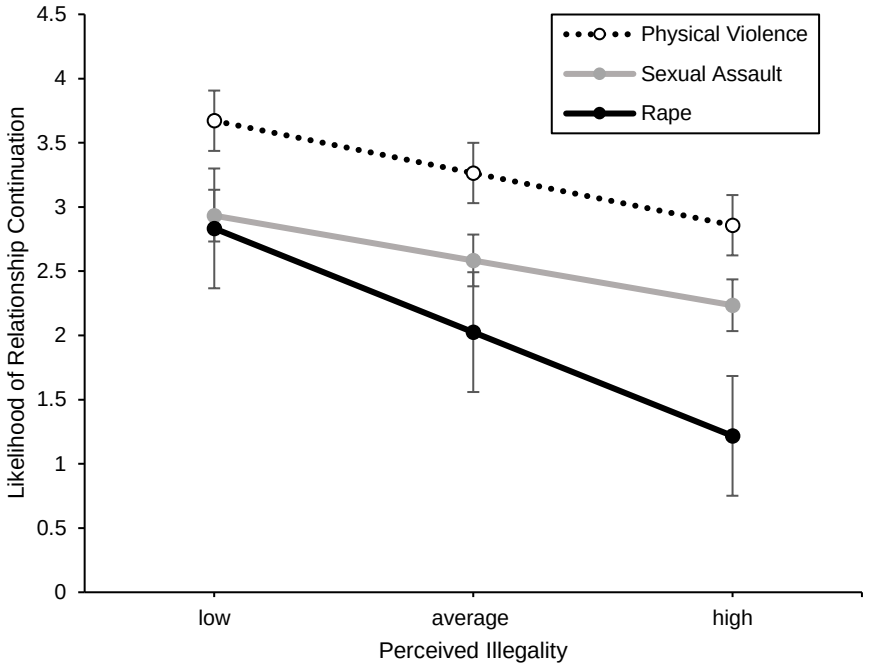


Figure 5.2

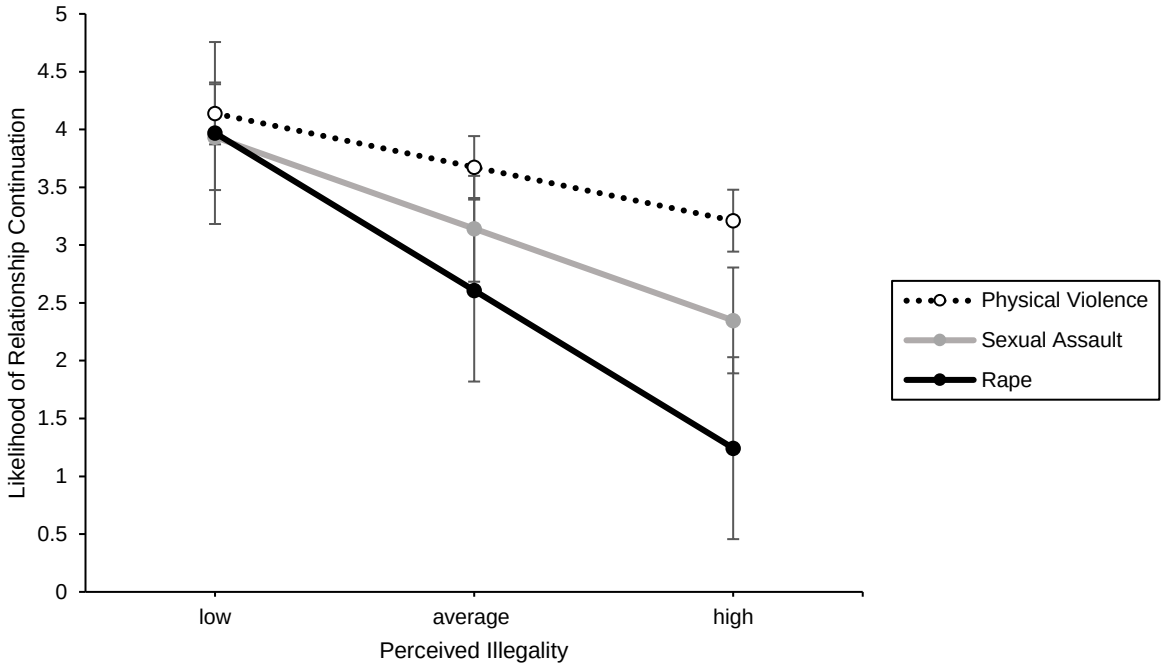
Study Three Interaction Between Offence Type and Perceived Illegality in Predicting Relationship Continuation for Participants Without Children



Note. Perceived *Illegality* was mean-centred. Plotted x-coordinates represent *b* values of the slopes at 16th (low), 50th (average), and 84th (high) percentiles of perceived *Illegality*, respectively. Error bars represent one standard error of the mean.

Figure 5.3

Study Three Interaction Between Offence Type and Perceived Illegality in Predicting Relationship Continuation for Participants With Children



Note. Perceived *Illegality* was mean-centred. Plotted x-coordinates represent *b* values of the slopes at 16th (low), 50th (average), and 84th (high) percentiles perceived *Illegality*, respectively. Error bars represent one standard error of the mean.

Benevolent Sexism. For all interaction statistics, see Table 5.10.

Table 5.10

Study Three Benevolent Sexism Interaction Statistics

	df	*F*	*b*	*t*	*95% CI*	*p*
	Overall sample					
Benevolent sexism	586		0.92	5.48	0.59,1.26	<.001
Benevolent sexism x Offence type	2;586	3.5				.031
Physical violence	586		0.51	3.08	0.19,0.84	<.001
Sexual assault	586		1.11	7.02	0.80,1.41	<.001
Rape	586		0.92	5.48	0.59,1.26	<.001
	Without children					
Benevolent sexism	437		0.90	4.86	0.54,1.27	<.001
Benevolent sexism x Offence type	2;437	4.66				.010
Physical violence	437		0.41	2.26	0.05,0.76	<.001
Sexual assault	437		1.18	6.44	0.82,1.54	<.001
Rape	437		0.90	5.86	0.54,1.27	<.001

Note. Outcome variable = Relationship continuation likelihood. Benevolent sexism = main effect, Benevolent sexism x Offence type = interaction effect, Physical violence = effect of benevolent sexism on relationship continuation likelihood in the physical violence condition, Sexual assault = effect of benevolent sexism on relationship continuation likelihood in the sexual assault condition, Rape = effect of benevolent sexism on relationship continuation likelihood in the rape condition.

In the overall sample and for those without children, significant interactions were found between *Benevolent Sexism* and partner's offence type. Main effects showed that *Benevolent Sexism* predicted relationship continuation across conditions in that participants who had higher levels of *Benevolent Sexism* were more likely to stay in their relationship. In both the overall sample (see Figure 5.4) and those without children (see Figure 5.5), this effect was strongest in the sexual assault condition and weakest in the physical violence condition.

Figure 5.4

Study Three Interaction Between Offence Type and Benevolent Sexism in Predicting Relationship Continuation in the Overall Sample

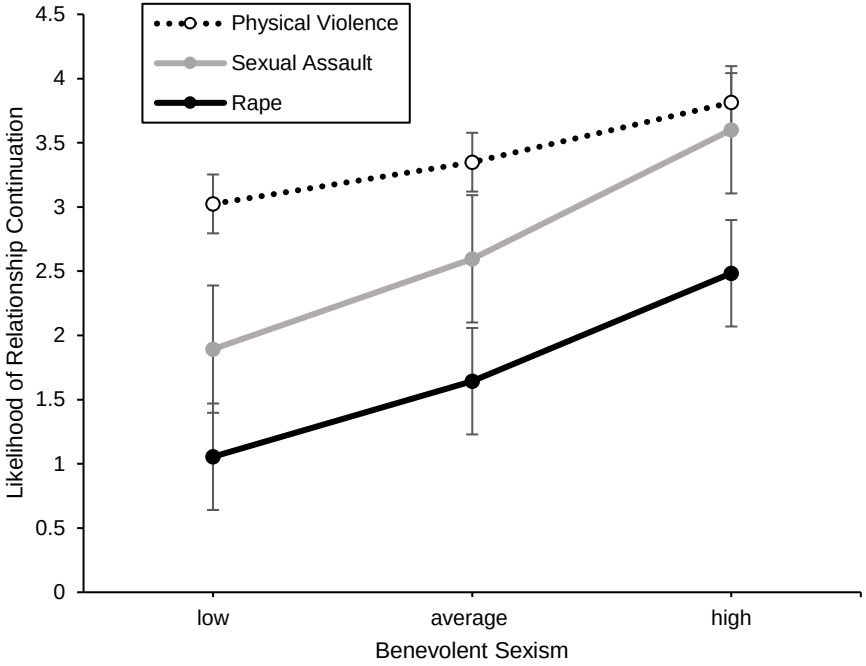
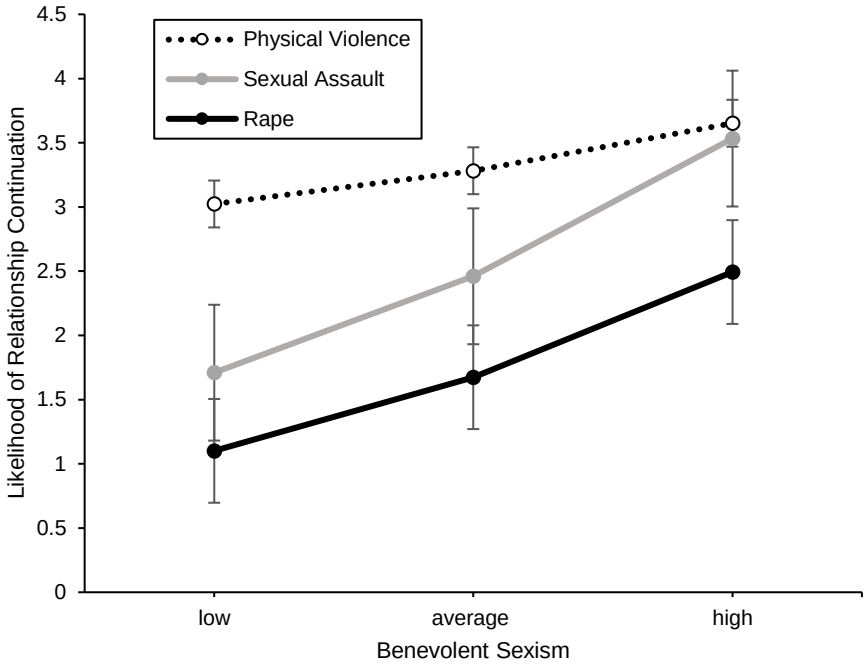


Figure 5.5

Study Three Interaction Between Offence Type and Benevolent Sexism in Predicting Relationship Continuation for Participants Without Children



Note. Benevolent Sexism was mean-centred. Plotted x-coordinates represent *b* values of the slopes at 16th (low), 50th (average), and 84th (high) percentiles of *Benevolent Sexism*, respectively. Error bars represent one standard error of the mean.

Hostile Sexism. For all interaction statistics, see Table 5.11.

Table 5.11

Study Three Hostile Sexism Interaction Statistics

	df	*F*	*b*	*t*	*95% CI*	*p*
	Overall sample					
Hostile sexism	586		0.75	5.16	0.46,1.03	<.001
Hostile sexism x Offence type	2;586	3.7				.025
Physical violence	586		0.94	6.62	0.66,1.21	<.001
Sexual assault	586		1.27	9.64	1.01,1.53	<.001
Rape	586		0.75	5.16	0.46,1.03	<.001
	Without children					
Hostile sexism	437		0.49	4.05	0.35,1.02	<.001
Hostile sexism x Offence type	2;437	3.46				.032
Physical violence	437		0.92	5.78	0.61,1.23	<.001
Sexual assault	437		1.28	8.25	0.98,1.59	<.001
Rape	437		0.69	4.05	0.35,1.02	<.001

Note. Outcome variable = Relationship continuation likelihood. Hostile sexism = main effect, Hostile sexism x Offence type = interaction effect, Physical violence = effect of hostile sexism on relationship continuation likelihood in the physical violence condition, Sexual assault = effect of hostile sexism on relationship continuation likelihood in the sexual assault condition, Rape = effect of hostile sexism on relationship continuation likelihood in the rape condition.

In the overall sample and for those without children, significant interactions were found between *Hostile Sexism* and partner's offence type. Main effects showed that *Hostile Sexism* predicted relationship continuation across conditions in that participants who had higher levels of *Hostile Sexism* were more likely to stay in their relationship. In both the overall sample (see Figure 5.6) and those without children (see Figure 5.7), this effect was strongest in the sexual assault condition and weakest in the rape condition.

Figure 5.6

Study Three Interaction Between Offence Type and Hostile Sexism in Predicting Relationship Continuation in the Overall Sample

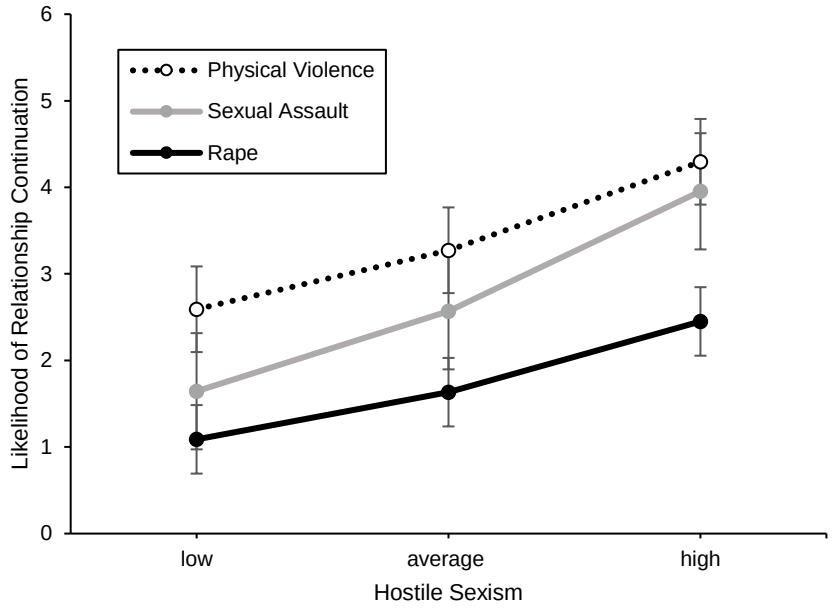
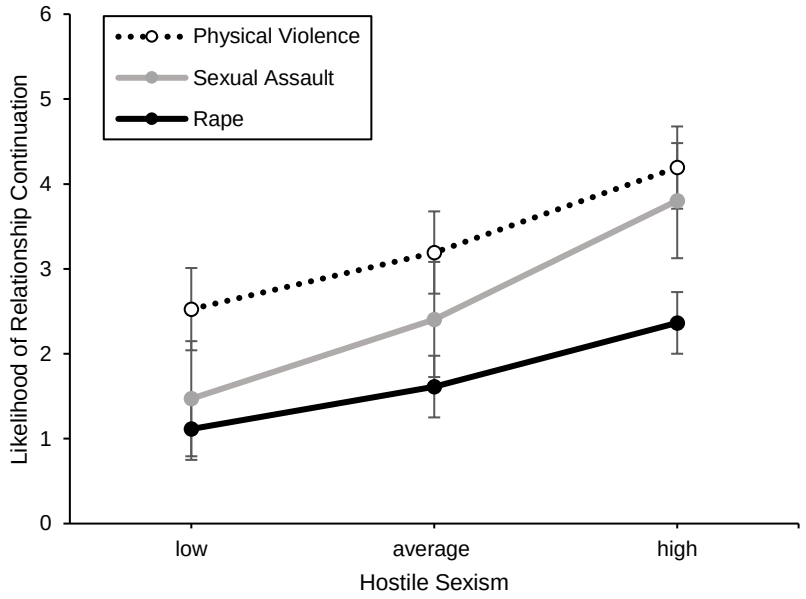


Figure 5.7

Study Three Interaction Between Offence Type and Hostile Sexism in Predicting Relationship Continuation for Participants Without Children



Note. Hostile Sexism was mean-centred. Plotted x-coordinates represent *b* values of the slopes at 16th (low), 50th (average), and 84th (high) percentiles of *Hostile Sexism*, respectively. Error bars represent one standard error of the mean.

Qualitative Findings

The qualitative survey responses from all 528 participants, with a total word count of 8499 words (*M* = 16.10), constituted the raw dataset. Whilst most participants provided the three reasons for relationship termination or continuation I asked for, some participants (*n* = 29, 5.29%) only provided two reasons. Here, these participants either gave an invalid answer (e.g., “N/A” or “-“) or stated that the two previously mentioned reasons were “enough” to justify their decision. Reasons for participants’ relationship decision are presented in ranked order based on how often they were named, before presenting new categories that were not directly in line with reasons for relationship decision-making in Study One. Percentages represent participants who indicated a specific reason within their condition and compared to those who made the same relationship decision.

Termination Reasons

Overall, 407 participants (77.08%) gave reasons for relationship termination ($n_{violence}$ = 106; $n_{sex.\ assault}$ = 136; n_{rape} = 165). The total length of participants’ responses was 1445 words (*M* = 13.63) in the physical violence condition, 2479 words (*M* = 18.23) in the sexual assault condition, and 2241 (*M* = 13.58) in the rape condition. Most participants (*n* = 382) provided 3 reasons for relationship continuation, whilst some participants (*n* = 25) only provided 2 reasons. For a visual representation of the most commonly named reasons for relationship termination, in the overall sample and by vignette condition, see Figure 5.8 – Figure 5.11.

Figure 5.8

Study Three Relationship Termination Reasons Across Conditions

Figure 5.9

Study Three Relationship Termination Reasons in the Physical Violence Condition

Note. Middle ring represents categories, outer ring represents subcategories. Only categories and subcategories accounting for at least 10% of responses are represented. Empty fields are grouped categories and subcategories accounting for less than 10% of responses.

Figure 5.10

Study Three Relationship Termination Reasons in the Sexual Assault Condition

Figure 5.11

Study Three Relationship Termination Reasons in the Rape Condition

Note. Middle ring represents categories, outer ring represents subcategories. Only categories and subcategories accounting for at least 10% of responses are represented. Empty fields are grouped categories and subcategories accounting for less than 10% of responses.

Offence-Unrelated. No offence-unrelated reasons for terminating the relationship were given.

Offence-Related.

Infidelity. In the overall sample, themes relating to interpreting their partner's behaviour as *Infidelity* were named as a reason for relationship termination 369 times and thus most commonly. Here, 224 participants (55.04%; $n_{\text{sex. assault}} = 107$, $n_{\text{rape}} = 104$, $n_{\text{violence}} = 13$) simply gave the label of "cheating" as a reason. In the sexual violence conditions, attaching the label of cheating to their partner's actions was the most commonly named secondary reason for relationship termination ($n = 60$ each), however, it was not the most common primary reason. One-hundred-and-six participants also reported that their partner's perceived *Infidelity* led to a loss of trust (26.43%; $n_{\text{rape}} = 56$, $n_{\text{sex. assault}} = 37$, $n_{\text{violence}} = 13$). Across conditions, however, losing trust was a secondary or tertiary reason for relationship termination for most participants who indicated it ($n = 90$). Some participants (5.90%; $n_{\text{sex. assault}} = 14$, $n_{\text{rape}} = 10$) elaborated that their partner's *Infidelity* made them feel disrespected, which was most commonly a tertiary reason for relationship termination ($n_{\text{total}} = 15$). Additionally, 14 participants described that their partner's perceived infidelity demonstrated their partner's lack of commitment (3.49%; $n_{\text{sex. assault}} = 8$, $n_{\text{rape}} = 5$, $n_{\text{violence}} = 1$) and 2 reported *Feeling Rejected* ($n_{\text{sex. assault}} = 1$, $n_{\text{rape}} = 1$).

Danger. In total, reasons for relationship termination relating to perceived *Danger* were mentioned by participants 295 times. Here, this was linked by 72 participants (17.69%; $n_{\text{violence}} = 57$, $n_{\text{sex. assault}} = 2$, $n_{\text{rape}} = 1$) to perceiving their partner's actions as intentionally harmful. This was the most common reason for relationship termination in the physical violence condition, where it was also the most commonly named primary reason ($n = 47$). Often, perceived danger was also tied to a changed view of their partner (14.96%; $n_{\text{violence}} = 25$, $n_{\text{rape}} = 23$, $n_{\text{sex. assault}} = 12$). Additionally, 58 participants (14.46%; $n_{\text{violence}} = 35$, $n_{\text{rape}} = 19$, $n_{\text{sex. assault}} = 4$) described fearing for their own safety after witnessing the scenario described in the vignette, and some described that their partner's actions made them a violent

(12.22%; $n_{violence}$ = 35, n_{rape} = 10, $n_{sex.\ assault}$ = 4) or simply a “bad” person (2.99%; n_{rape} = 9, $n_{sex.\ assault}$ = 3). Perceiving their partner to be a threat to their children’s safety was named as a reason to end their relationship by 16 participants (3.99%; $n_{violence}$ = 10, n_{rape} = 5, $n_{sex.\ assault}$ = 1). Lastly, some participants reported possible reoffending (2.00%; $n_{violence}$ = 5, $n_{sex.\ assault}$ = 2, n_{rape} = 1), the lack of provocation for the assault (1.00%; $n_{violence}$ = 4), and their partner’s unpredictability due to potential mental illness (1.00%; n_{rape} = 4) as threats to their own or others’ safety.

Victim Empathy. In total, reasons for relationship termination related to *Empathy* towards the victim were stated 98 times. In the sexual violence conditions, the lack of consent given by the victim was pointed out by 86 participants (21.45%; $n_{sex.\ assault}$ = 62, n_{rape} = 24). In the sexual assault condition, the lack of consent was the second-most named primary reason for relationship termination (n = 37), and in the rape condition, it was the third-most named primary reason for relationship termination (n = 16). Additionally, 11 participants (2.47%, $n_{sex.\ assault}$ = 7, n_{rape} = 3, $n_{violence}$ = 1) described the disrespect towards the victim and 1 participant (0.25%, $n_{sex.\ assault}$ = 1) mentioned feeling empathy towards the victim as reasons to end the relationship. Neither of these two reasons was named by any participant as a primary reason for relationship termination.

Deception. Thirty-six participants (8.98%; $n_{violence}$ = 19, $n_{sex.\ assault}$ = 14, n_{rape} = 13) reported indicating a wish to end the relationship because they felt deceived by their partner.

Morality. Reasons for relationship termination related to *Morality* were named a total of 28 times. Here, 17 participants (4.24%; n_{rape} = 13, $n_{sex.\ assault}$ = 2, $n_{violence}$ = 2) reported wanting to leave their partner due to feelings of moral disgust. Such feelings of disgust were a secondary or tertiary reason for leaving the relationship for almost all participants who mentioned them (n = 16). Additionally, 11 participants (2.74%; n_{rape} = 8, $n_{violence}$ = 2, $n_{sex.\ assault}$ = 1) explicitly stated that they thought their partner’s behaviour was immoral.

Outside Pressure. Participants described themes related to *Outside Pressure* a total of 14 times. Here, 7 participants (1.75%; $n_{\text{sex. assault}} = 5$, $n_{\text{violence}} = 2$) reported feeling shame, whilst 5 participants (1.25%, $n_{\text{rape}} = 4$, $n_{\text{sex. assault}} = 1$) named the public setting of the offence as a reason to leave their partner. In the rape condition, one participant each (0.25%) stated that they wanted to end their relationship because they did not want an association with their partner or because they feared judgement for being with their partner. None of the reasons related to *Outside Pressure* was named as primary reasons for relationship termination.

Reasons not Named in Study One. Ascribing a specific *Offence Label* was a common reason (35.66%; $n_{\text{rape}} = 90$, $n_{\text{sex. assault}} = 49$, $n_{\text{violence}} = 4$) for relationship termination, especially in the sexual offence conditions, where it was the most named primary reason for wanting to end the relationship ($n_{\text{rape}} = 84$, $n_{\text{sex. assault}} = 40$). Further, some participants (7.48%; $n_{\text{violence}} = 24$, $n_{\text{rape}} = 5$, $n_{\text{sex. assault}} = 1$) stated that they wanted to end the relationship because their partner committed an act of *Violence Towards a Woman* (e.g., “The fact that she’s a woman”). Additionally, 16 participants (3.99%; $n_{\text{violence}} = 11$, $n_{\text{rape}} = 5$) described *Not Tolerating* the offence, whilst 7 participants (1.75%; $n_{\text{rape}} = 4$, $n_{\text{violence}} = 2$, $n_{\text{sex. assault}} = 1$) pointed out that their partner’s actions were *Illegal*. Some participants also named *Negative Affect* such as shock (1.50%; $n_{\text{rape}} = 4$, $n_{\text{violence}} = 1$, $n_{\text{sex. assault}} = 1$), sadness (1.25%; $n_{\text{sex. assault}} = 3$, $n_{\text{rape}} = 2$), and anger (0.75%; $n_{\text{violence}} = 2$, $n_{\text{rape}} = 1$) as a reason to end their relationship. Six participants (1.50%; $n_{\text{rape}} = 5$, $n_{\text{violence}} = 1$) reported wanting to leave because they had *Experienced Abuse* in a previous relationship. Further, 4 participants each (1.00%) mentioned their partner’s possible *Offence History* ($n_{\text{rape}} = 2$, $n_{\text{violence}} = 1$, $n_{\text{sex. assault}} = 1$), and the fact that they would *Not be Able to Forgive* them ($n_{\text{rape}} = 3$, $n_{\text{violence}} = 1$). Additionally, 3 participants (0.75%, $n_{\text{rape}} = 3$) described *Being Disappointed* in their partner, whilst 2 participants (0.50%) named finding their partner’s actions *Unattractive* ($n_{\text{violence}} = 1$, $n_{\text{rape}} = 1$). Lastly, one participant each (0.25%) reported *Deserving Better*, *Losing Respect* for their partner (both sexual assault condition) and the fact that their partner’s offence would make them *Unable to Have an Intimate Relationship* with their partner (rape condition) as reasons for relationship termination.

Continuation Reasons

Overall, 121 participants (22.92%) gave reasons for wanting to stay in their relationship after witnessing their partner's offending behaviour ($n_{violence}$ = 59, $n_{sex.\ assault}$ = 46; n_{rape} = 16). The total length of participants' responses was 1225 words (*M* = 20.76) in the physical violence condition, 835 words (*M* = 18.15) in the sexual assault condition, and 274 (*M* = 17.13) in the rape condition. Most participants (*n* = 117) provided three reasons for relationship continuation, whilst a few participants (*n* = 4) in the physical violence condition provided two reasons. For a visual representation of the most commonly named reasons for relationship continuation, in the overall sample and by vignette condition, see Figure 5.12 – Figure 5.15.

Figure 5.12

Study Three Relationship Continuation Reasons Across Conditions

Figure 5.13

Study Three Relationship Continuation Reasons in the Physical Violence Condition

Note. Middle ring represents categories, outer ring represents subcategories. Only categories and subcategories accounting for at least 10% of responses are represented. Empty fields are grouped categories and subcategories accounting for less than 10% of responses.

Figure 5.14

Study Three Relationship Continuation Reasons in the Sexual Assault Condition

Figure 5.15

Study Three Relationship Continuation Reasons in the Rape Condition

Note. Middle ring represents categories, outer ring represents subcategories. Only categories and subcategories accounting for at least 10% of responses are represented. Empty fields are grouped categories and subcategories accounting for less than 10% of responses.

Offence-Unrelated.

Love/Commitment. Reasons for relationship continuation related to *Love* or *Commitment* towards their partner were reported by participants a total of 63 times. Here, 44 participants (36.36%; $n_{\text{sex. assault}} = 21$, $n_{\text{violence}} = 15$, $n_{\text{rape}} = 8$) described the feelings they had towards their partner as a reason for continuing the relationship. In the sexual offence conditions, it was the most commonly named reason overall, as well as the most commonly named primary reason for relationship continuation ($n_{\text{sex. assault}} = 9$, $n_{\text{rape}} = 5$). Further, 9 participants (7.44%; $n_{\text{sex. assault}} = 4$, $n_{\text{violence}} = 3$, $n_{\text{rape}} = 2$) mentioned the attraction they felt towards their partner, whilst 7 participants (5.79%; $n_{\text{sex. assault}} = 5$, $n_{\text{rape}} = 2$) pointed to the duration of their relationship. Additionally, 3 participants in the physical violence condition (2.48%) stated not wanting to end their relationship because they were committed to their partner.

Negative Consequences. Potential *Negative Consequences* arising from a breakup were named as a reason to continue the relationship a total of 33 times. Twenty participants (16.53%; $n_{\text{sex. assault}} = 12$, $n_{\text{violence}} = 4$, $n_{\text{rape}} = 4$) reported being financially dependent on their partner and thus unable to end the relationship (e.g., “I couldn’t afford to live by myself”). Additionally, 6 participants (4.96%; $n_{\text{violence}} = 3$, $n_{\text{sex. assault}} = 2$, $n_{\text{rape}} = 1$) wanted to avoid the emotional pain associated with a breakup, while 5 (4.13%; $n_{\text{sex. assault}} = 2$, $n_{\text{rape}} = 2$, $n_{\text{violence}} = 1$) did not want to disappoint their family who approved of the relationship. Lastly, 2 participants each (1.65%) were afraid of loneliness ($n_{\text{violence}} = 2$) or reported a distrust of men ($n_{\text{rape}} = 1$, $n_{\text{sex. assault}} = 1$) which made them believe that a new partner might be worse.

Relationship Satisfaction. Themes related to *Relationship Satisfaction* were mentioned a total of 28 times. Here, 18 participants (14.88%; $n_{\text{sex. assault}} = 7$, $n_{\text{violence}} = 6$, $n_{\text{rape}} = 4$) explicitly stated being satisfied in their relationship, while 6 participants (4.96%; $n_{\text{violence}} = 3$, $n_{\text{sex. assault}} = 3$) described trusting their partner, and 4 participants (3.31%; $n_{\text{sex. assault}} = 4$) reported that their partner is a good person.

Children. Nineteen participants (15.70%; $n_{\text{sex. assault}} = 11$, $n_{\text{violence}} = 5$, $n_{\text{rape}} = 2$) who had children with their partner stated this to be, usually a primary, reason for relationship continuation (e.g., “We have children together and I am pregnant”). Specifically, participants named the belief that their children need a present father to grow up healthily and shared custody as reasons for staying with their partner.

Reasons not Named in Study One. One participant each (0.83%) described wanting to continue their relationship because of their *Familiarity* with their partner or because they had *No Other Option* (both in the rape condition).

Offence-Related.

Disbelief. Responses indicating a *Disbelief* or minimisation of the offending behaviour were given a total of 82 times. Over half of participants who indicated relationship continuation (51.24%; $n_{\text{violence}} = 46$, $n_{\text{sex. assault}} = 11$, $n_{\text{rape}} = 5$) described that their partner’s actions may be a misunderstanding. In the physical violence condition, it was the most named primary reason for relationship continuation ($n = 31$). Further, 11 participants (9.09%; $n_{\text{violence}} = 10$, $n_{\text{sex. assault}} = 1$) minimised their partner’s behaviour by reporting that their partner does not present a threat, while 6 participants (4.96%; $n_{\text{sex. assault}} = 3$, $n_{\text{violence}} = 2$, $n_{\text{rape}} = 1$) decided that their partner’s actions were an insufficient reason to end the relationship. Lastly, one participant each (0.83%) stated wanting to continue their relationship because they did not interpret their partner’s actions as infidelity, they had an open relationship, or they claimed to understand their partner’s behaviour (all in the sexual assault condition).

Partner Changed. A total of 47 responses contained themes implying the participant’s belief that their partner could change his behaviour and not commit an offence again. Twenty-seven participants, especially those in the physical violence condition (22.31%; $n_{\text{violence}} = 19$, $n_{\text{sex. assault}} = 4$, $n_{\text{rape}} = 4$) reported that their partner’s actions were not representative of their partner’s character, while 14 (11.57%; $n_{\text{violence}} = 7$, $n_{\text{sex. violence}} = 6$, n_{rape}

= 1) described the offence as an isolated incident. Additionally, 6 participants (4.96%, $n_{sex. assault}$ = 4, $n_{violence}$ = 1, n_{rape} = 1) stated that they would be able to forgive their partner.

Desistance. Only 1 participant (0.83%) in the sexual assault condition described wanting to stay with their partner to protect others from their partner's actions.

Reasons not Named in Study One. Additional reasons for continuing the relationship named by participants were the belief that their partner would *Reciprocate Their Forgiveness* or has previously forgiven them for a transgression (3.31%; $n_{sex. assault}$ = 2, $n_{violence}$ = 1, n_{rape} = 1), the fact that their partner was *Possibly Drunk* (2.48%; $n_{violence}$ = 2, $n_{sex. assault}$ = 1), and the view that their *Partner's Actions are his Responsibility* (1.65%; $n_{violence}$ = 1, $n_{sex. assault}$ = 1).

Discussion

Recruiting from a general population sample, rather than a student sample, the current study replicated the mixed methods design previously applied in Study Two while addressing some of Study Two's key limitations. Here, like in Study Two, I again found support for the hypothesis that *Offence Type* would affect relationship continuation likelihood, in that those who witnessed their partner "committing" a sexual offence- as depicted in a hypothetical vignette scenario – were more likely to indicate wanting to leave their relationship than those who witnessed their partner "committing" a non-sexual violent assault. Specifically, participants were additionally more likely to want to leave the relationship if their partner "committed" a rape, rather than a sexual assault. Despite recruiting from a general population rather than a student sample, I again found mixed, albeit different, results regarding the predictiveness of variables hypothesised to be associated with relationship decision-making when compared to Study Two. Similar to the previous study, participants' qualitative responses in the current study provided additional insight into their relationship decision-making which demonstrated that their reasoning was similar, but not identical, to that shown by non-offending partners in Study One.

In the following sections, I summarise important quantitative and qualitative findings of these studies and in light of their theoretical implications before discussing potential practical implications. Lastly, I highlight key limitations of the current studies, while directions for future research are described throughout.

Quantitative Findings and Theoretical Implications

Recruiting from a general population sample, rather than a student sample as in Study Two, allowed me to assess how different types of offending behaviour and variables related to relationship decision-making may influence the relationship decision of non-offending partners in more long-term relationships. Specifically, I found that there was indeed an effect of having children on relationship continuation as those who had children were more likely to stay in the relationship following an offence across conditions, and in the sexual assault condition. This supports the findings of Study One, in which participants noted wanting to stay for their children's sake. Additionally, it also ties in with research suggesting that having children with a partner may lead to increased relationship stability (Rhoades et al., 2010) even in violent or abusive relationships (Hendy et al., 2003). However, this effect was not significant for those whose partner had committed a physically violent offence or a rape. This is supported by literature suggesting that seeing a partner's behaviour as not just potentially dangerous to oneself but to one's children (see *Danger* in Study One) may instead lead to relationship termination (Moe, 2009). This indicates that there may be a more complex interaction, for instance, with additional factors, which is supported by research suggesting that women are more likely to leave abusive relationships when they have access to external resources, such as childcare (for a review, see Anderson & Saunders, 2003).

Mirroring the results of Study Two, participants were overall unlikely to want to continue their relationship following their partner's offending behaviour. In line with my predictions, those whose partner had committed a rape were less likely to indicate relationship continuation than those whose partner had committed a physically violent

offence or a sexual assault. This directly replicates the findings of Study Two as well as mirroring the results of previous investigations by other researchers (Lytle et al., 2017), and the reports of non-offending partners in Study One who highlighted the importance of *Offence Type* to their relationship decision making. In the overall sample, and for participants without children, those whose partners committed a sexual assault were additionally less likely to want to continue their relationship than those whose partners committed an act of physical violence, as previously shown in Study Two. However, participants who had at least one child with their partner, showed no significant difference in relationship continuation when their partner committed a sexual assault or a physically violent offence.

Unlike in Study Two, the predictors linked to relationship continuation in Study One predicted relationship continuation across conditions and for those who did and did not have children with their partner. These regression models also predicted larger amounts of variance in Study Two when compared to Study Three. Here, *Relationship Duration*, which was not a significant predictor in Study Two, commonly predicted relationship continuation in that those who had been in their relationship for a longer period were more likely to continue their relationship across conditions and in each of the conditions in the overall sample, as well as across conditions for those without and with children. For those without children, *Relationship Duration* additionally predicted relationship continuation in the physical violence and rape conditions but not in the sexual assault condition, whilst, for those with children, it predicted continuation for those in the sexual assault but not the physical violence and rape conditions. Thus, *Relationship Duration* may be a more general predictor of relationship continuation, perhaps especially for individuals who, like the participants in the current study, have been in their relationship for a longer time. This mirrors the general population with research suggesting that longer *Relationship Duration* may predict relationship stability (Simpson, 1987) and higher levels of distress following a breakup (Sprecher et al., 2016).

Whilst *Relationship Satisfaction* predicted relationship continuation in the overall sample in Study Two and was reported to be a reason to stay with one's partner in Study

One, this was not replicated in any condition or across conditions in the current study. This is also in direct opposition to research showing the impact of *Relationship Satisfaction* on relationship stability in the general population (e.g., Joel et al., 2018; Le et al., 2010).

Additionally, *Interpersonal Dependency*, which was not included in Study Two, only predicted relationship continuation in the rape condition for those with children in that those lower in *Interpersonal Dependency* were more likely to continue the relationship. Lower perceived *Illegality*, however, which, in Study Two only predicted relationship continuation in the overall sample and rape condition, was the only predictor to predict relationship continuation across all conditions and samples in the current study. Here, interaction effects additionally demonstrated that perceived *Illegality* had the strongest effect on relationship continuation in the rape condition, furthering the previously described notion that this predictor was more important for participants whose partners had “committed” rape. Such an importance of perceived *Illegality* links to a *Belief*, or *Disbelief*, in an offence having occurred, as described in Study One and discussed in Study Two. The fact that this had the strongest effect in the rape condition may be tied to some participants’ qualitative reporting that they perceived the offence, as described in the vignette, as consensual infidelity, rather than sexual violence. Given the explicit description of the behaviour as not consensual (i.e., “Even though she tries to push him away, he is holding onto her and pushing her to the ground.”), this points to a degree of minimisation occurring after a partner’s offending behaviour, even in a fictional scenario.

There was very limited evidence for the predictive value of *Attitudes Towards Those who Have Sexually Offended*, and there also seemed to be no clear differentiation between those whose partner had “committed” a sexually violent or physically violent offence. Similarly, the evidence for *Benevolent Sexism* as a predictor of relationship continuation was equally limited. However, an interaction effect in the overall sample and for participants without children showed that *Benevolent Sexism* had the strongest effect on relationship continuation in the sexual assault condition, and the weakest effect in the physical violence

condition. This pattern was partially mirrored by the role of *Hostile Sexism*, which similarly had the strongest effect on relationship continuation in the sexual assault condition and the weakest effect in the rape condition (in the overall sample and for those without children). However, replicating the results of Study Two, there was no evidence for *Hostile Sexism* as a predictor in the model in the current study.

Acceptance of Myths About Sexual Aggression, which was not a significant predictor in Study Two, was a significant predictor across conditions and for each condition in the overall sample and for those without children. However, for those with children, it only positively predicted relationship continuation in the rape condition. However, as previously observed for other predictors, this did not reliably differentiate between those in the sexual violence and non-sexual violence conditions. Whilst the measure used (AMMSA, Gerger et al., 2013) specifically assessed *Acceptance of Myths About Sexual Aggression*, higher scores on this scale may also be representative of more general judgemental and victim-blaming attitudes towards female victims of male violence. In fact, research has demonstrated that acceptance of myths about rape or sexual aggression may not only predict endorsement of sexual violence but rather endorsement of hostile and violent behaviour towards women and girls generally (Collibee et al., 2021; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). Whilst this broadly links *Acceptance of Myths About Sexual Aggression* back to the concept of *Victim Empathy*, as described as a reason for relationship termination in Study One, it also points to the possibility that such *Victim Empathy* may be equally as important for relationship decision-making in partners of people who have committed other, non-sexual, offences against women and girls.

Qualitative Findings and Theoretical Implications

Like in Study Two, I aimed to use the qualitative survey element to describe participants' hypothetical relationship decision-making using a deductive directed approach to content analysis. Categorising these responses in line with the reasons for relationship decision-making provided by non-offending partners in Period 4 of Study One might also

give additional insight into the potential generalisability of the model created in Study One. In addition to the mere description of themes in Study Two, I was also able to evaluate how important participants found each reason they provided since each participant ranked their reasons for relationship termination or continuation. The most commonly named reasons for participants' relationship decision-making by condition are displayed in Table 5.12. Only themes described by at least two participants are discussed below.

Table 5.12

Study Three Most Common Reasons for Relationship Decision by Condition

Condition	Most Common Reason Overall	% (*n*)	Most Common Primary Reason	% (*n*)
	Relationship Continuation Reasons			
Physical Violence (*n* = 59)	Misunderstanding	77.97% (46)	Misunderstanding	52.54% (31)
Sexual Assault (*n* = 46)	Feelings for Partner	45.65% (21)	Feelings for Partner	19.57% (9)
Rape (*n* = 16)	Feelings for Partner	59% (8)	Feelings for Partner	31.25% (5)
	Relationship Termination Reasons			
Physical Violence (*n* = 106)	Intentional Harm	53.77% (57)	Intentional Harm	44.34% (47)
Sexual Assault (*n* = 136)	Infidelity	78.68% (107)	Offence Label	29.41% (40)
Rape (*n* = 165)	Infidelity	63.03% (104)	Offence Label	50.90% (84)

Note. Percentages represent the percentage of participants who indicated a specific reason for their relationship decision within their condition and compared to those who made the same relationship decision.

Replicating the findings of Study Two, participants gave no offence-unrelated reasons for relationship termination. As previously discussed, this may be linked to the fact that, at the time of their participation in the study, participants were still in their relationship – in contrast to non-offending partners in Study One. This makes it unlikely that participants in the current study and in Study Two, had sufficient reasons for terminating their relationship that are unrelated to the offence, that is, the vignette they were presented with. This is also possibly linked to the fact that relationships are commonly more negatively evaluated after a breakup (Kellas et al., 2008), which I highlighted in both Studies One and Two.

Mirroring Study Two, in terms of offence-related reasons for relationship termination named explicitly in Study One, *Infidelity* was again frequently named. However, the ranking

system employed in the current study shed light on the possibility that, whilst naming *Infidelity* as a reason for relationship termination was common, it was not usually named as the most important reason, as illustrated in Table 5.12. As previously discussed in Study Two, this may demonstrate that the sexual nature of the sexual offences described in the vignettes may be an important factor in why non-offending partner more frequently leave their relationship in cases of sexual offending, when compared to violent offending, as shown in the current study and Study Two. However, the current study demonstrates that this may not be the main reason why non-offending partners of those who have committed sexual offences have such high rates of relationship breakdown. The comparatively lower importance of *Infidelity* additionally shows that, whilst some participants may have misinterpreted the scenarios described in the vignettes as consensual sexual activity, as proposed in Study Two, this was not the case for most participants. *Danger* was once again a common relationship termination reason, but mainly in the physical violence condition, where the intentional harm perpetrated by their partner was most often named as the most important reason for breaking up with them. In the sexual offence conditions, *Danger* was again considered more seldom. In the sexual violence conditions, on the other hand, *Victim Empathy* seemed to play a more important role than in the physical violence condition. Here, it was a frequent primary reason for relationship termination, especially when linked to the victim's lack of consent, albeit not the most named primary reason. In contrast to Study Two, *Deception* was named as a reason for relationship continuation more often, across conditions. This may be linked to the fact that participants were in their relationship longer than in Study Two and thus felt more deceived by unexpected actions of their partner who they thought they knew extremely well. Additionally, those in longer-term relationships may rely more on their partners (including financially) and thus, being deceived by their partners could have more serious consequences. Like in Study Two, some participants described their partner's actions as morally wrong, or morally disgusting. In the current study, this was especially the case in the rape condition. As discussed in Study Two, the rape vignette may imply the presence of semen, a disgust-eliciting pathogen, which could lead to "real" *Disgust*

rather than using the word *Disgust* as synonymous with anger (Kayyal et al., 2015). Additionally, as previously stated, a reaction of *Disgust* may also be linked to a fear of courtesy stigma due to the impression that the stigma associated with sexual offending is contagious (Lynch, 2002). Some participants also once again named *Outside Pressure* as a reason for leaving their partner. However, this was not as common a theme here as it was in Study One. Remarkably, however, it was still named by participants even though, unlike in Study One, the offence had only just "occurred", and participants had not actually encountered any reactions from outsiders. This indicates that participants may have tried to avoid the potential courtesy stigma associated with being a non-offending partner before it actually occurs.

Once again, like in Study Two, participants provided reasons for relationship termination that were not explicitly reported as such by non-offending partners in Study One. Most notably, replicating the results of Study Two, ascribing an Offence Label was a common reason for relationship termination in the sexual offence conditions. In fact, it was the most frequently named primary reason for wanting to end their relationship in both the sexual assault and rape conditions. As already discussed in Study Two, one reason for this may be that the sampling for Study One required non-offending partners to be aware that their partners had committed, or at least been accused of committing, a sexual offence, whereas the vignettes in Study Two and the current study left this open to the participant's interpretation. Because of this, participants in Study One may not have felt the need to stress the obvious: that a primary reason for their relationship termination was simply that an offence had been committed. Nevertheless, the importance of *Offence Type* and *Belief* in Study One, whilst not necessarily identical to labelling the offence, point to the fact that similar mechanisms may influence relationship decision-making in the different populations.

Similarly, other reasons given for relationship termination in the current study and Study Two that were not captured as an explicit reason in Period 4 of Study One were often captured by a different part of the model instead: *Negative Affect* was represented in Study

One by a negative affective *Initial Reaction* to the accusations (see Period 3). A potential *Negative Impact on the Relationship*, as described by participants in the current study and Study Two was captured by *Offence Impact on the Relationship* (see Period 4) in Study One. Lastly, *Past Experiences* of abuse and infidelity in previous relationships were displayed as *Experience in Romantic Relationships* (see Period 1) in Study One.

Like in the previous two studies, participants again provided both offence-unrelated and -related reasons for staying with their partner. However, it was difficult to assess reasons for relationship continuation in the sexual offence conditions specifically, as the vast majority of participants indicated wanting to leave their partner after they "committed" a sexual assault or rape. Like in Studies One and Two, *Relationship Satisfaction* and *Love* and *Commitment* were important reasons for continuing the relationship. This was especially observed in the sexual offence conditions where the emotional attachment towards one's partner was not only the most commonly named reason overall but also the most commonly named primary reason for relationship continuation. *Negative Consequences* were more frequently given as a reason than they were in Study Two, with many participants describing a financial dependence on their partner. As participants in the current study were older and in longer-term relationships it is likely that they relied more on their partners for financial support. However, this theme did not seem to discriminate between those in the sexual offence conditions and those in the physical violence condition. Additionally, participants reported wanting to continue their relationship due to being satisfied with their relationship and partner, or because they had *Children* with them. This was likely named in this study, and not in Study Two, as more participants had children with their partner and participants' relationships were, again, longer-term.

In terms of offence-related relationship continuation reasons, participants, like in Study Two, reported a *Disbelief* in the offence or minimised it. Here, in the physical violence condition, the perception that the offence may have been a misunderstanding was the most named primary reason for relationship termination, although it was markedly less common

for those in the sexual offence conditions. Like in Study Two, participants in this study also cited the belief that their partner would change as a reason for staying with them, particularly in the physical violence condition. Lastly, a few participants described wanting to forgive their partner because of *Mutual Forgiveness*, the belief that their partner would forgive them, too, or had already forgiven them for a past transgression. Whilst this was not represented as a reason for relationship continuation in Study One, it may instead be captured by other parts of the model developed in Study One, such as a positive *Relationship Development* (see Period 4).

Practical Implications

Despite the mixed quantitative results of the current study, in conjunction with participants' qualitative statements the findings of my research nevertheless offer insights into non-offending partners' "real-time" relationship decision-making beyond those gained from the findings of Study Two. These may be useful to practitioners or those in Criminal Justice System-adjacent fields who work with individuals who have sexually offended or their current or ex-partners.

The high likelihood of relationship termination, as shown previously in Study Two and as replicated in the current study, as well as the negative affect experienced by non-offending partners illustrate how those whose partners have committed a sexual offence may react to finding out or witnessing the offending behaviour. As previously noted, first-responding law enforcement officers should be made aware of the potentially traumatic impact of the offence on the non-offending partner to be able to minimise the trauma non-offending partners commonly describe experiencing as a result of an offence disclosure (Armitage et al., 2023; Duncan et al., 2022). Along similar lines, despite no mention of witnesses or others' reactions in the vignettes participants were presented with, a few participants described wanting to leave their partner due to a fear of being judged if they were to stay with them, as observed in Study Two and mirroring the experiences of non-offending partners in Study One. This makes it even more important that those disclosing the offence, especially

arresting officers, are non-judgemental in their attitudes and approach of non-offending partners, as previously noted. However, very little is known about public or law enforcement attitudes towards non-offending partners. Such attitudes would first need to be examined by future research to build potential guidelines for professionals encountering non-offending partners.

Second, my inability to find and reliably replicate specific predictors of relationship decision-making for non-offending partners points further to the heterogeneity of non-offending partners and the complexity of their circumstances. Whilst the specific *Offence Type* seems to play a large role in relationship decision-making, like in Study One, there are many factors related to the non-offending partner's life which are not related to the offence but could uniquely affect their decision-making and their subsequent support needs. That is, whilst the primary reason some non-offending partners may consider for staying with their partner may be emotional attachment, others might consider staying for financial or childcare reasons and thus require more practical support. Those working with non-offending partners, for instance, social service professionals or counsellors, should be aware of these diverse support needs to be able to fully support non-offending partners.

Lastly, the qualitative findings of the current study support the importance of viewing the sexual nature of sexual offending as *Infidelity* for non-offending partners' relationship decision-making, thus replicating the findings of Study Two. Whilst it was not usually named as a primary, but rather as a supplementary reason for terminating the relationship in the current study, the importance of *Infidelity* may provide useful avenues for supporting non-offending partners, especially those that decide to remain in their relationship. As previously discussed, incorporating an integrative approach to treating relationship issues (e.g., Fife et al., 2008) into the treatment of those who have sexually offended may not only address issues arising from perceived *Infidelity* but also increases the ethicality of incorporating non-offending partners into treatment by specifically addressing their needs.

Limitations

Whilst there was some evidence for the predictive value of the factors named as reasons for relationship decision-making in Study One, the quantitative results overall were mixed and the results of Study Two did not replicate fully in the current study. Here, I found sample differences and subsequently different results when using Reddit for participant recruitment (the current study) than when recruiting from a student sample (Study Two). For example, relationship continuation likelihood was much higher for those in the current study than Study Two. One specific issue arising from differences in sampling was that participants in the current study, unlike those in Study Two, were entered into a prize draw. Therefore, monetary compensation may have been a primary motivator for participation. Thus, it is possible that such participants also relied more on their partners for financial support and that, subsequently, the importance of financial dependency in the relationship decision-making process may have been particularly stressed in the current study. However, this is not to say that financial dependency should be completely disregarded, especially as it has been shown to lead dependants to stay in and tolerate disadvantageous or even abusive relationships (for a review of the relationship between domestic violence and dependency, see Bornstein, 2006).

Additionally, another issue arising from the current sample and that recruited for Study Two was the fact that the vast majority of participants indicated wanting to leave their partner. While this was more drastic in Study Two than in the current study, it was still the most common “reaction” to the vignettes, especially in the sexual offence conditions. Whilst this gives insight into just how devastating a sexual offence may be for non-offending partners and their relationship prospects, it also limits the number of responses shedding light onto why individuals would stay with their partner after an offence has been committed. Future research may wish to specifically examine those who choose to stay with their partner or conduct hypothetical research in which all participants are called to detail possible reasons for staying with their partner – even if they eventually decide to leave the

relationship. Similarly, whilst the current study recruited from an older sample who were in longer-term relationships than Study Two did, there was still a lack of participants with children, especially when investigating the individual vignette conditions separately. Thus, the insight into the reasoning for wanting to stay in the relationship (as discussed above), as well as the relationship decision-making process in participants with children, could not be examined to the same extent as the relationship-termination decision, and the decision-making for participants without children. To address these issues, future research may include more representative and diverse samples to examine differences, for instance, those that might arise from different relationship "types" (e.g., long-term stable, financially dependent, with children, "just dating", etc.,) and assess the interactions between these and other potential predictors of relationship decision-making.

Lastly, a final limitation of the current study, as well as of Study Two, is that factors such as *Acceptance of Myths About Sexual Violence* and *Sexism* may not only be linked to the endorsement of sexual violence, but violence towards women and girls more generally (Collibee et al., 2021; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). This could have caused the lack of differentiation in their predictive value for relationship continuation between those whose partner committed a sexual offence or non-sexual offence, as the victim in each vignette in these studies was female. Whilst I purposefully limited the vignettes to keep the victim's characteristics (female stranger) constant, future research may wish to diversify not only the victim's characteristics (e.g., age, gender, relationship with the participant), but also the offence type, due to the importance of *Victim Characteristics* and *Offence Type*, as demonstrated in Study One.

Conclusion

Thus far, the current study and Studies One and Two have found that, whilst non-offending partners may be likely to leave their relationship, the factors associated with this decision and the reasoning behind it are complex. Despite the obvious importance of offence-related factors (e.g., perceived *illegality* of the offence), the impact of offence-

unrelated factors unique to each non-offending partner – such as their personal characteristics, relationship factors, and outside influences – should not be underestimated. For example, participants in the current study reported more reasons for relationship continuation related to financial and care responsibilities (e.g., *Children* and *Negative Consequences*) which were unlikely to have factored into the decision-making process for the younger participants in Study Two. Thus, non-offending partners seem to weigh the risks (e.g., to psychological & physical well-being, to their children) and benefits (e.g., financial stability) of relationship continuation against the downsides (e.g., emotional pain) and benefits (e.g., less judgement of peers or professionals) of relationship termination, as relevant to their specific situation. Given the complexity of the situation and the heterogeneity of non-offending partners as a population, as described in-depth in Study One, non-offending partners' support needs may be equally as unique and multifaceted. However, the lack of guidelines Criminal Justice System-related agencies and other practitioners receive on how to interact and effectively co-operate with non-offending partners risks further traumatisation and exacerbation of courtesy stigma, as was frequently described in Study One. Additionally, non-offending partners are terrified of judgement from agencies such as the police and social services, which was not only reported by "real-life" non-offending partners in Study One, but also by participants in the current study and Study Two who, despite only reading about a partner's offence in a hypothetical vignette described being aware of potential stigma and shame. Despite the fact that non-offending partners commonly fear shaming and express experiencing judgment, extremely limited research to date has explored the general public's and intervening agencies' attitudes towards non-offending partners. Exploring such attitudes and subsequent intervention, especially for those in frequent contact with non-offending partners, may be paramount to improving non-offending partners' experiences and reducing the harmful impact of their partners' offending behaviour. Therefore, in the next chapter, I aimed to develop and validate a measure to assess attitudes towards non-offending partners in both a general population sample and in

professionals working for Criminal Justice System-adjacent agencies who may often encounter non-offending partners (i.e., police and social services).

CHAPTER 6 – ASSESSING ATTITUDES TOWARDS NON-OFFENDING PARTNERS OF THOSE WHO HAVE COMMITTED SEXUAL OFFENCES

In Studies One through Three of this thesis I used quantitative and qualitative methods to assess relationship decision-making in non-offending partners. These previous studies, both with the target population and general population samples, have shown that non-offending partners of those who have committed, or been accused of committing, sexual offences may be more likely to leave their relationship than those whose partners have committed other, violent offences due to a complex array of factors. Such factors may be offence-related or -unrelated but are not only unique to non-offending partners as a population but additionally vary widely from individual to individual due to the heterogeneity of this population. Because of this, previous chapters have repeatedly emphasised the complexity of non-offending partners' support needs and the arising vulnerability of this population to stigmatisation by groups that could provide such support, especially in the aftermath of a relationship decision. For example, participants in all studies of this thesis reported fearing judgement for their decision to remain in the relationship from friends and family. Additionally, non-offending partners in previous research (Armitage et al., 2023; Duncan et al., 2022) and in Study One of this thesis disclosed inconsistent, judgmental, or even hostile interactions with agencies (e.g., police, social services, probation) in the aftermath of an offence. Such negative interactions, rather than providing the required support, may instead exacerbate trauma and courtesy stigma.

These interactions have mainly been investigated regarding how non-offending partners think they are perceived, rather than how they are actually perceived by others. Here, the research examining others' attitudes towards non-offending partners has been extremely limited. Aside from the very specific focus on mother-blaming in cases of intrafamilial sexual abuse, as highlighted in Chapter 1, to my knowledge, only one peer-reviewed article measuring attitudes towards non-offending partners has been published thus far (Plogher et al., 2016). What is more, to date, research has completely failed to

investigate the attitudes towards non-offending partners held by Criminal Justice System-adjacent professionals. This is concerning given that non-offending partners may not only commonly encounter such professionals, but because these professionals' attitudes and reactions towards them may have an especially powerful impact, as described, for instance, in Study One of this thesis.

Whilst the previously mentioned research by Plogher and colleagues (2016) set out to develop a scale measuring attitudes towards non-offending partners and showed higher scores on this measure to predict higher intent to discriminate against non-offending partners, this measure has several shortcomings, especially if it was to be used in real-life settings and with professional samples: First, it solely assessed stereotypes towards romantic partners of individuals who are on the US Sex Offender Registry. This is likely to impact how those completing the measure may view this population, perhaps due to a perceived higher severity of their partner's offence when compared to the severity of offences committed by those who are not on the registry. Additionally, because of a mention of the registry, the items on this scale are unlikely to translate into cultural contexts different from the US context. While some, especially not English-speaking countries, do not have registries for those who have sexually offended in the first place (e.g., Germany; Thomas, 2011), registration laws in the countries that do have them often differ from US legislation. This is specifically the case as the US allows all individuals, even those who are not US citizens or are not currently located in the US, to freely search for individuals on the registry (The United States Department of Justice, n.d..), which sets the US registry apart from those registries in most other countries such as the UK which do not allow general public access (Beard, 2023). As a result, non-offending partners of those on the registry in the US may be perceived as a special case because the lack of privacy and the restrictions imposed upon them due to their partner's offending behaviour are extremely severe. Whilst it is undeniably important to consider the experiences of this population, this ultimately means that the

measure constructed by Plogher and colleagues (2016) is not viable for use with non-offending partners from outside the US.

Second, item development was neither informed by the experiences of non-offending partners themselves nor by the views of professionals working with non-offending partners. Rather, items were constructed after consulting a small general population sample (*N* = 166). Whilst this may be useful to assess how, for instance, friends and family may react to the non-offending partner, it neglects the important role professionals in Criminal Justice System-adjacent agencies, and their attitudes, play in the aftermath of an offence, as highlighted above. To ensure higher levels of content validity, items constructed for the purpose of such a measure must be constructed with the input or evaluation of the target population (Boateng et al., 2018) – in this case those commonly working with non-offending partners.

Third, Plogher and colleagues' (2016) "attitudes toward sex offenders' partners scale" was also exclusively administered to a general population sample, with a sample size unusually small for factor analysis (*N* = 168). Whilst the accepted general rule of thumb for factor analysis is to recruit at least 10 participants per scale item (Nunnally, 1978), even less conservative estimates recommend sample sizes of, at the very least, 200 participants (Comrey, 1988; Comrey & Lee, 1992; Guadagnoli & Velicer, 1988). Given that the scale administered in Plogher and colleagues' (2016) research contained 51 items, this insufficient sample and respondent-to-item ratio may lead to unstable loadings and factors, non-replicable factors, as well as results which are not generalisable to the entire target population (for a review, see Boateng et al., 2018). Thus, a replication would be required to truly establish the factorial structure of the scale (Guadagnoli & Velicer, 1988).

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the measure labelled non-offending partners as "*partners of sex offenders"*. Any use of the '*sex offender*' label has been highly criticised as it incorrectly evokes the stereotype of the person who has offended as someone who prolifically reoffends and offends against stranger victims, as well as characterising those

who have offended primarily through a behaviour that rehabilitation and treatment aims to eliminate (e.g., Willis, 2018). In this context, specifically, labelling may lead to more negative attitudes towards non-offending partners, as measured by the scale. Previous research by Lowe and Willis (2021) has shown that including the '*sex offender*' label, vs. a neutral descriptor, in attitudinal scales led to more negative attitudes towards those who have committed sexual offences. This effect may translate into real-world interactions as the same authors have also shown that using labels decreased participants' willingness to volunteer with those who have sexually abused (Lowe & Willis, 2020). This is just one example of how, over time, the use of labelling may prime individuals to view a population as more homogeneous and stereotypical (Willis, 2018). Given the stigma non-offending partners already face, as reviewed in Chapter 1, it is of utmost importance to make sure that any measures created do not exacerbate pre-existing stereotypes.

Study Four: Development and Evaluation of a Measure Assessing Attitudes Towards Non-Offending Partners of Those who Have Committed Sexual Offences

To be able to address and counteract potentially negative attitudes towards non-offending partners and their relationship decision held by those who may encounter this population in a professional or personal capacity, and subsequently improve the efficacy of support and reduce traumatisation, the nature of such negative attitudes, as well as their prevalence and magnitude will first need to be examined. Due to the dearth of research in this field and the lack of a suitable scale assessing such attitudes, there are three aims to this study: 1) to develop a new measure of attitudes towards non-offending partners, using non-stigmatising language; 2) to investigate the measure's factorial structure; 3) to validate the arising factorial structure with an independent sample, and 4) to explore professionals' scores on the new measure, and thus their attitudes towards non-offending partners, and compare these to attitudes towards non-offending partners held by a general population sample.

Ethical approval for this research was obtained from the University of Kent School of Psychology Ethics Committee (ID: 202216548027557804) and Kent County Council, as required for social workers' participation. Prior to the interviews and survey participation, informed consent was given by each participant via a signed consent form. Following their participation, participants were provided with details of community support groups and organisations and given a full debriefing. All methods and analyses were pre-registered (https://osf.io/9jw47/?view_only=e1f1aa7e30d3446cac83dea1cabd4244). Supplementary materials for this chapter can be found online (https://osf.io/gjv2q/?view_only=4dfa11d23d61470cbc405038b2603ef8).

Item Development

For item creation, I used content analysis to create items assessing attitudes towards non-offending partners from interviews with social workers and police officers. I recruited four social workers (*n* = 1 adult social services; *n* = 3 children's social services) and five police officers (responsible for the management of those who have sexually offended), all of whom were white (*n* = 8 British, *n* = 1 Other). Six participants were female and three were male, and participants' ages ranged between 31 and 54 years (*M* = 42.33; *SD* = 7.70). I contacted participants via email and conducted 30-minute interviews via MS Teams.[32] Most participants were interviewed by themselves due to scheduling conflicts, but two police officers were interviewed together. In these semi-structured interviews, I asked participants about their previous experiences working with non-offending partners, their attitudes towards non-offending partners, as well as their beliefs about their colleagues' attitudes towards non-offending partners. Social workers participating in the study received a £5 voucher. Due to internal policies, police officers taking part in the study could not be financially compensated. Additionally, I drew on data gathered during previous interviews with non-offending partners (see Study One) and qualitative elements of survey responses from the general public, as

[32] Participant Handouts can be found in supplementary materials as 'Study Four Participant Handouts – Item Development' and Interview Talking Points can be found as 'Study Four Focus Group Talking Points – Item Development' (https://osf.io/gjv2q/?view_only=4dfa11d23d61470cbc405038b2603ef8).

recruited from a student sample (see Study Two) and via Reddit (see Study Three). I used inductive content analysis to create items based on attitudes towards non-offending partners as extracted from all transcripts. Table 6.1 displays all items created at this stage, including the source of each item.

For subsequent content validation, six expert raters, five doctoral researchers and one professor in forensic psychology, were presented with the 60 items I previously created. They indicated to what degree each of these items measured attitudes towards non-offending partners, on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = *Not at all*; 4 = *Absolutely*). Expert raters could also add qualitative responses to indicate potential issues with the quality of an item (e.g., poor wording). I removed any items which received a rating below 3 (*Somewhat*) from any of the expert raters. This resulted in the deletion of nine items. A further item was deleted because of its low mean score and high deviation between responses. Two items were deleted, and two new items were added, based on expert raters' qualitative feedback. Overall, average ratings of the remaining items ranged between 3.67 and 4 (M = 3.89, SD = 0.1). Here, the average score of the lowest-rating expert rater was 3.74, and the average score of the highest-rating expert rater was 4. Some items were also reworded based on qualitative feedback, for instance, to include the term "sexual offence" rather than just "offence", for clarity. Table 6.1 displays the lowest and highest rating per item, items' means and standard deviations, as well as which items were deleted or reworded.

Table 6.1

Study Four Original Items' Content Validity Ratings and Sources

Item	*M*	*SD*	*min*	*max*	Source
1. Non-offending partners of people who have sexually offended deserve to be targeted by the media and vigilantes.˜	**3.67**	**0.52**	**3**	**4**	**NOPs**
2. Non-offending partners of individuals who have committed a sexual offence deserve to be publicly named and shamed.˜	**3.83**	**0.41**	**3**	**4**	**Police**
3. Non-offending partners deserve to be publicly humiliated for being associated with someone who has sexually offended.˜	**4**	**0**	**4**	**4**	**NOPs**
4. Non-offending partners of people who have sexually offended deserve to be socially ostracised.˜	**3.67**	**0.52**	**3**	**4**	**NOPs**
5. I would distance myself from a friend if I found out that they were in a relationship with someone who had sexually offended.	**4**	**0**	**4**	**4**	**NOPs**
6. I would be empathetic towards a non-offending partner of someone who has sexually offended.˜ (r)	**4**	**0**	**4**	**4**	**NOPs**
7. I would judge someone who is in a relationship with a person who has sexually offended.˜	**3.83**	**0.41**	**3**	**4**	**NOPs**
8. It would be hard not to judge a non-offending partner.*	3.83	0.41	3	4	Social Workers
9. Non-offending partners of those who have sexually offended deserve to be treated with respect.˜ (r)	**4**	**0**	**4**	**4**	**Social Workers**
10. I would be understanding towards a non-offending partner of someone who has committed a sexual offence.˜ (r)	**4**	**0**	**4**	**4**	**Police, Social Workers**
11, I would probably have nothing in common with a non-offending partner.†	3.17	0.98	2	4	Social Workers
12. Non-offending partners of people who have sexually offended deserve support.˜ (r)	**4**	**0**	**4**	**4**	**NOPs**
13. Non-offending partners of individuals who have sexually offended should be seen as victims because of the trauma and shock they experience.˜ (r)	**4**	**0**	**4**	**4**	**NOPs, Police**
14. I would be disappointed if someone I knew was in a relationship with a person who has sexually offended.	**3.67**	**0.52**	**3**	**4**	**NOPs**
15. Non-offending partners must realise when their partner has committed a sexual offence. †	2.83	0.75	2	4	NOPs
16. Non-offending partners must be stupid if they do not realise that their partner has committed a sexual offence.˜	**4**	**0**	**4**	**4**	**NOPs**
17. If non-offending partners paid more attention, they would realise that their partner has offended. †	3.33	0.82	2	4	NOPs
18. Non-offending partners who claim they did not know about their partner's sexual offending are lying.˜	**4**	**0**	**4**	**4**	**NOPs**
19. Non-offending partners probably condone their partner's sexual offending.˜	**3.83**	**0.41**	**3**	**4**	**NOPs**
20. Non-offending partners must know that their partner has offended.†	3.33	0.82	2	4	Social Workers
21. Non-offending partners are being manipulative when they claim that they did not know about their partner's offending.†	3.33	1.21	1	4	Social Workers
22. Non-offending partners are only worthy of support if they did not know about a partner's sexual offence.˜	**3.83**	**0.41**	**3**	**4**	**Social Workers**
23. Some non-offending partners may be aware of the offence but choose to do nothing about it so as not to lose their partner.†	3.5	0.55	3	4	Police
24. Non-offending partners of people who have sexually offended are innocent.˜ (r)	**3.83**	**0.41**	**3**	**4**	**NOPs**
25. Non-offending partners of those who have committed sexual offences are bad people.˜	**4**	**0**	**4**	**4**	**NOPs**
26. Non-offending partners are dangerous to be around.†	3.67	0.82	2	4	Social Workers
27. Non-offending partners are just as bad as the person who has sexually offended.	**4**	**0**	**4**	**4**	**Social Workers**
28. Non-offending partners of individuals who have sexually offended are immoral.˜	**4**	**0**	**4**	**4**	**Police, NOPs**
29. Non-offending partners of people who have committed sexual offences should feel embarrassed.˜	**4**	**0**	**4**	**4**	**NOPs, public**
30. Non-offending partners of those who have sexually offended should feel ashamed.˜	**4**	**0**	**4**	**4**	**NOPs, public**
31. Non-offending partners are selfish.†	3.67	0.82	2	4	NOPs
32. Non-offending partners who stay in a relationship with someone who has sexually offended are hypocrites.˜	**4**	**0**	**4**	**4**	**NOPs, public**
33. Non-offending partners do not care about the victim of their partner's sexual offending.˜	**4**	**0**	**4**	**4**	**NOPs**
34. Non-offending partners are disrespecting the victim by staying in the relationship with someone who has sexually offended.˜	**4**	**0**	**4**	**4**	**NOPs, public**
35. Non-offending partners of people who have sexually offended are (weak-)minded.˜	**3.83**	**0.41**	**3**	**4**	**NOPs**
36. Non-offending partners are naive for staying with someone who has sexually offended.	**4**	**0**	**4**	**4**	**NOPs**
37. A non-offending partner who stays in the relationship is only asking for their partner to offend against them.†	3.67	0.82	2	4	NOPs

Item	*M*	*SD*	*min*	*max*	Source
38. Non-offending partners who stay with someone who has sexually offended are putting themselves at risk.	**3.83**	**0.41**	**3**	**4**	**Social Workers**
39. Non-offending partners must be abused by the person who has offended, otherwise they would not stay in a relationship with them.†	3.17	0.75	2	4	Social Workers
40. Non-offending partners of individuals who have committed sexual offences are timid and afraid.˜	**4**	**0**	**4**	**4**	**Social Workers**
41. Non-offending partners who stay in the relationship with someone who has sexually offended must be scared of their partners.˜	**3.83**	**0.41**	**3**	**4**	**Social Workers**
42. Non-offending partners who stay in a relationship with a person who has sexually offended must have no other options (i.e., financially).˜	**3.83**	**0.41**	**3**	**4**	**Social Workers**
43. Non-offending partners of those who have committed sexual offences are vulnerable.˜	**4**	**0**	**4**	**4**	**Social Workers**
44. Non-offending partners of those who have sexually offended are dependent on their partners.˜	**3.67**	**0.52**	**3**	**4**	**Social Workers, Police**
45. Non-offending partners stay in their relationship with someone who has sexually offended because they cannot cope by themselves.˜	**4**	**0**	**4**	**4**	**Social Workers**
46. Non-offending partners who stay in their relationship with a person who has sexually offended are mentally ill.˜	**3.83**	**0.41**	**3**	**4**	**Social Workers**
47. Non-offending partners probably only stay in their relationships for financial reasons.*	3.83	0.41	3	4	Social Workers
48. Non-offending partners who stay in their relationship with an individual who has committed a sexual offence were groomed by their partner.˜	**3.67**	**0.52**	**3**	**4**	**Social Workers**
49. Non-offending partners are stupid for staying in their relationship after finding out about a partner's sexual offending.˜	**3.83**	**0.41**	**3**	**4**	**Social Workers**
50. Non-offending partners who have children are putting them at risk by staying in their relationship with someone who has sexually offended.˜	**3.67**	**0.52**	**3**	**4**	**Social Workers**
51. Non-offending partners of those who have sexually offended can effectively protect their children.˜ (r)	**3.67**	**0.52**	**3**	**4**	**Social Workers**
52. Non-offending partners who stay in their relationship with someone who has committed a sexual offence are not doing enough to protect their children.˜	**4**	**0**	**4**	**4**	**Social Workers**
53. Non-offending partners who stay in their relationship with a person who has sexually offended are prioritising their relationship over their children's wellbeing and safety.˜	**4**	**0**	**4**	**4**	**Social Workers**
54. Non-offending partners who stay with someone who has sexually offended do not care about their children.	**4**	**0**	**4**	**4**	**Social Workers, Police**
55. There is no good reason for a non-offending partner to stay in their relationship after finding out that their partner has committed a sexual offence.˜	**4**	**0**	**4**	**4**	**NOPs, Social Workers**
56. Non-offending partners might have a good reason for continuing their relationship with someone who has sexually offended.˜ (r)	**4**	**0**	**4**	**4**	**NOPs**
57. I don't understand how someone could possibly choose to stay in a relationship with a person who has sexually offended.	**3.83**	**0.41**	**3**	**4**	**Social Workers**
58. Non-offending partners are in denial about their partner's sexual offending.˜	**4**	**0**	**4**	**4**	**Social Workers**
59. Non-offending partners their partner's sexual offending so they can stay in the relationship.˜	**3.83**	**0.41**	**3**	**4**	**Social Workers**
60. Non-offending partners may lie to the police or other agencies and cover up their partner's offending to protect them.*	3.83	0.41	3	4	Police
61. Non-offending partners of people who have sexually offended have a lower IQ than other people.					**Expert Raters**
62. Non-offending partners of people who have committed sexual offences are bad parents.					**Expert Raters**

Note. Content validity scores ranged from 1 to 4; Higher scores = higher rating of content validity. NOPs = non-offending partners recruited during Study 1, public = general public recruited during Studies Two and Three. (r) = reverse coded, † = item deleted due to low expert rater rating, * = item deleted due to expert rater qualitative feedback, ˜ = item reworded according to expert rater feedback.

Retained items are in bold.

Scale Development

During *Scale Development*, the items generated during *Item Development* were administered to a general population sample. First, item analysis was conducted on the resulting data. Subsequently, exploratory factor analysis was used on the remaining items to identify latent constructs of the measure.

Method

Participants.[33] I aimed to recruit at least 10 participants per item as recommended by Nunnally (1978) for factor analysis. The final sample comprised 503 Prolific users (female: 50.3%, male: 48.9%, other: 0.6%, prefer not to say: 0.2%) who resided in the UK. Participants' ages ranged between 18 and 79 (M = 41.08; SD = 14.24). Most participants were white (n = 440, 87.5%), whilst 6% (n = 30) were Asian, 4% (n = 20) were Black, African, or Caribbean, and 2% (n = 10) were from two or more ethnic groups. Four participants (0.8%) preferred not to indicate their ethnic group, and one participant (0.2%) indicated that they belonged to an ethnic group not listed.

Materials and Procedure. The questionnaire was administered using Qualtrics. After providing demographic information about themselves, participants were informed that "the following series of statements will assess your attitudes towards non-offending partners of people who have committed sexual offences. Non-offending partners are not themselves involved in the offending and are also not a victim of their partner". Then, participants were presented with the 50 items previously constructed during *Item Development,* in randomised order, and asked to "indicate the degree to which you agree with each item. Be as honest as possible, there are no right or wrong answers". Here, participants responded using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *Fully disagree*, 7 = *Fully agree*), as recommended for bipolar items (Krosnick & Presser, 2010). Higher scores indicated more negative attitudes towards non-offending partners. Attention checks, of which participants were made aware prior to

[33] Participant Handouts can be found in supplementary materials as 'Study Four Participant Handouts – Scale Development' (https://osf.io/gjv2q/?view_only=4dfa11d23d61470cbc405038b2603ef8).

participation, were conducted throughout the survey. Participants failing two or more of the three attention checks (*n* = 19) were excluded from the analysis, in line with Prolific's attention check policy (Prolific, 2022). The questionnaire took approximately 7 minutes to complete, and participants received £0.70 for their participation.

Analysis and Results

IBM SPSS Statistics 28 (IBM Corp., 2021) was used for most analyses, whilst IBM SPSS Amos 28 (Arbuckle, 2021) was used to compute fit indices and correlations. As established in a previous chapter, the internal consistency coefficient α was interpreted according to Ponterotto and Ruckdeschel's (2007) guidelines and Pearson's zero-order correlation coefficient *r* was interpreted according to Funder and Ozer's (2019) guidelines (for more information, see Study Two). Model fit was interpreted using Hu & Bentler's (1999) cut-off values for fit indices: Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) ≥ .05; Comparative Fit Index (CFI) ≥ .95; Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) ≥ .95.

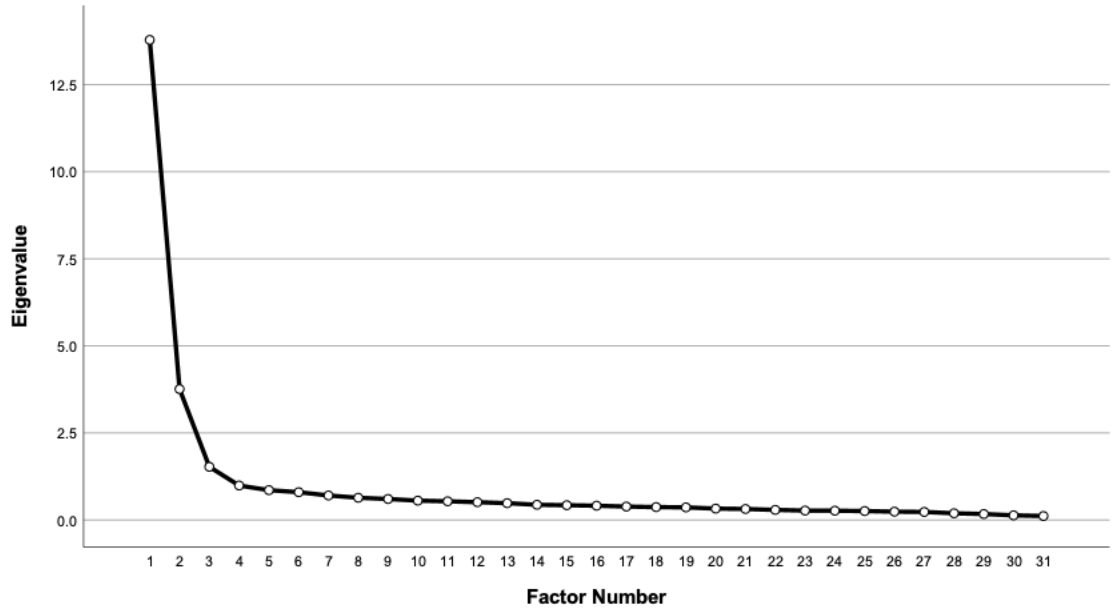
Item Analysis. First, item discrimination indices were computed for each item using the extreme groups method comparing the lowest- and highest-scoring 27% of the population (Anastasi, 1982). Only items with good discrimination indices (≥.30; McGahee & Ball, 2009) were retained. Thus, 16 items were deleted at this stage. Subsequently, I computed inter-item and item-total correlations. Here, 9 items with inter-item correlations below .15 (Clark & Watson, 1995) and 3 items with item-total correlations below .50 (Paulsen & BrckaLorenz, 2017) were examined and considered for deletion. Given the conceptual significance of most items, I chose to only delete two items which had both poor inter-item and poor item-total correlations.

Exploratory Factor Analysis. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (KMO = .96, Kaiser & Rice, 1974) and Bartlett's test of sphericity [$\chi2(496) = 11795.87$, $p < .001$; Bartlett, 1951] indicated that the data were suitable for exploratory factor analysis. Subsequently, exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the 32 items remaining after item analysis. An examination of the scree plot (Cattell, 1966, see Figure

6.1) and the eigenvalues using the Kaiser rule (Kaiser, 1960; see Table 6.2) suggested the retention of four factors.

Figure 6.1

Study Four Exploratory Factor Analysis Scree Plot



Note. The scree plot was created using IBM SPSS Statistics 28 (IBM Corp, 2021).

Table 6.2

Study Four Exploratory Factor Analysis Eigenvalues and Variance Explained

Factor	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
		% of Variance	Cumulative %		% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	13.78	44.48	44.48	13.23	42.77	42.77
2	3.76	12.13	56.61	3.33	10.73	53.50
3	1.52	4.93	61.54	0.80	2.59	56.09
4	0.99	3.20	64.74	1.07	3.44	59.53
5	0.86	2.77	67.51			
6	0.8	2.58	70.09			
7	0.71	2.28	72.37			
8	0.64	2.07	74.43			
9	0.61	1.95	76.38			
10	0.56	1.80	78.18			
11	0.54	1.74	79.92			
12	0.51	1.65	81.57			
13	0.49	1.56	83.14			
14	0.44	1.42	84.55			
15	0.43	1.37	85.92			
16	0.41	1.33	87.25			
17	0.39	1.25	88.50			
18	0.37	1.20	89.70			
19	0.36	1.17	90.87			
20	0.33	1.06	91.93			
21	0.32	1.03	92.96			
22	0.29	0.94	93.90			
23	0.27	0.88	94.78			
24	0.27	0.87	95.64			
25	0.26	0.83	96.48			
26	0.24	0.78	97.25			
27	0.23	0.75	98.00			
28	0.19	0.63	98.63			
29	0.17	0.56	99.19			
30	0.14	0.44	99.63			
31	0.12	0.38	100.00			

The only item with a factor loading below .40 (Item 12 as shown in Table 6.1) was removed at this stage (Raykov & Marcoulides, 2010). The final factorial solution obtained after extracting four factors using the Maximum Likelihood Estimation explained 64.74% of the pre-rotation variance of the measure (see Table 6.2). As resulting factors were assumed

to be correlated, an oblique rotation (Promax with Kaiser normalisation) was performed. All remaining variables loaded significantly on at least one factor. As factor patterns above .30 could be considered significant at this sample size (Hair et al., 2009) three items were interpreted to cross-load on two factors. Given that it was conceptually sensical for these items to cross-load onto both factors, they were retained. After accounting for covariances between error terms of items loading onto the same factor (Collier, 2020), the model achieved a good fit according to the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA = .052, 90% CI = .047-.056, p = .290) and the Comparative Fit Index (CFI = .957). Whilst the Tucker-Lewis Index was slightly low (TLI = .945), it was still within the range considered acceptable by most guidelines (e.g., Bentler & Bonnett, 1980). Table 6.3 shows the factor pattern and structure coefficients after rotation, as well as mean scores and standard deviations for each item. The chi-square statistic indicated poor model fit [$\chi 2(360) = 839.81$, $p < .001$]. However, this is to be expected as the chi-square test assumes multivariate normality (McIntosh, 2006) and nearly always rejects models when the sample size is large (Bentler & Bonnett, 1980).

Table 6.3

Study Four Exploratory Factor Analysis Four-Factor Solution (N = 503)

Item	Original Item Nr	Factor pattern (factor structure coefficients)				*M(SD)*
		Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	
Factor 1: Judgement of Relationship Decision						
1. Non-offending partners who stay in their relationship with a person who has sexually offended are prioritising their relationship over their children's wellbeing and safety.	53	**.86(.85)**	.001(.36)	.04(.51)	-.08(.38)	5.04(1.59)
2. I don't understand how someone could possibly choose to stay in a relationship with a person who has sexually offended.	57	**.85(.77)**	.06(.32)	-.16(.37)	-.03(.33)	5.16(1.66)
3. Non-offending partners who stay in their relationship with someone who has committed a sexual offence are not doing enough to protect their children.	52	**.84(.85)**	.12(.42)	.10(.54)	-.22(.35)	4.82(1.59)
4. Non-offending partners who have children are putting them at risk by staying in their relationship with someone who has sexually offended.	50	**.83(.75)**	-.02(.26)	-.08(.37)	-.05(.29)	5.40(1.43)
5. There is no good reason for a non-offending partner to stay in their relationship after finding out that their partner has committed a sexual offence.	55	**.76(.80)**	.05(.41)	-.03(.50)	.07(.45)	4.48(1.70)
6. Non-offending partners are naive for staying with someone who has sexually offended.	36	**.75(.82)**	-.12(.37)	.14(.58)	.09(.48)	4.59(1.62)
7. Non-offending partners are disrespecting the victim by staying in the relationship with someone who has sexually offended.	34	**.75(.81)**	-.02(.40)	.05(.54)	.08(.47)	4.35(1.71)
8. Non-offending partners who stay in a relationship with someone who has sexually offended are hypocrites.	32	**.73(.77)**	.01(.39)	-.05(.48)	.13(.46)	4.33(1.71)
9. Non-offending partners are stupid for staying in their relationship after finding out about a partner's sexual offending.	49	**.72(.80)**	-.07(.39)	.10(.56)	.11(.48)	4.59(1.63)
10. Non-offending partners who stay with someone who has sexually offended are putting themselves at risk.	38	**.69(.68)**	-.11(.24)	.03(.40)	.03(.33)	5.27(1.37)
11. Non-offending partners who stay with someone who has sexually offended do not care about their children.	54	**.59(.74)**	.19(.51)	.24(.62)	-.14(.43)	3.69(1.67)
12. Non-offending partners might have a good reason for continuing their relationship with someone who has sexually offended. (r)	56	**.58(.59)**	.06(.31)	-.08(.35)	.06(.33)	3.95(1.57)
13. Non-offending partners are only worthy of support if they did not know about a partner's sexual offence.	22	**.55(.56)**	.06(.28)	-.01(.34)	-.01(.29)	4.49(1.77)
14. Non-offending partners are in denial about their partners' sexual offending.	58	**.46(.67)**	-.09(.40)	.29(.61)	.15(.51)	4.29(1.38)
Factor 2: Behavioural Intent						
15. I would be understanding towards a non-offending partner of someone who has committed a sexual offence. (r)	10	.01(.33)	**.94(.83)**	-.10(.47)	-.06(.49)	3.25(1.47)
16. I would be empathetic towards a non-offending partner of someone who has sexually offended. (r)	6	.03(.34)	**.83(.78)**	-.12(.45)	.03(.51)	3.15(1.43)
17. Non-offending partners of those who have sexually offended deserve to be treated with respect. (r)	9	-.001(.30)	**.79(.74)**	-.10(.43)	.02(.48)	2.79(1.38)
18. I would distance myself from a friend if I found out that they were in a relationship with someone who has sexually offended.	5	.22(.47)	**.71(.73)**	-.13(.47)	.003(.50)	3.98(1.79)
19. I would judge someone who is in a relationship with a person who has sexually offended.	7	.19(.43)	**.64(.68)**	-.07(.46)	.001(.47)	4.21(1.67)
20. Non-offending partners of people who have sexually offended deserve to be socially ostracised.	4	-.13(.27)	**.61(.70)**	.18(.53)	.04(.51)	2.16(1.3)
21. Non-offending partners of individuals who have sexually offended are immoral.	28	-.08(.41)	**.57(.79)**	**.31(.69)**	.09(.63)	2.6(1.37)
22. Non-offending partners of those who have committed sexual offences are bad people.	25	-.21(.28)	**.54(.10)**	**.44(.64)**	-.03(.52)	2.32(1.35)
Factor 3: Judgement of Character						

Item	Original Item Nr	Factor pattern (factor structure coefficients)				*M(SD)*
		Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	
23. Non-offending partners of people who have sexually offended have a lower IQ than other people.	61	.01(.44)	-.06(.43)	**.83(.75)**	-.07(.45)	2.84(1.41)
24. Non-offending partners who stay in their relationship with a person who has sexually offended are mentally ill.	46	.16(.53)	-.04(.43)	**.77(.74)**	-.15(.42)	3.02(1.43)
25. Non-offending partners of individuals who have committed sexual offences are timid and afraid.	40	.13(.50)	-.12(.39)	**.73(.71)**	-.03(.45)	3.65(1.35)
26. Non-offending partners of people who have sexually offended are weak(-minded).	35	.04(.51)	.09(.59)	**.60(.78)**	.19(.63)	3.29(1.49)
27. Non-offending partners who claim they did not know about their partner's sexual offending are lying.	18	-.15(.29)	.19(.52)	**.50(.61)**	.11(.50)	2.69(1.28)
28. Non-offending partners do not care about the victim of their partner's sexual offending.	33	-.05(.44)	**.36(.70)**	**.47(.73)**	.08(.61)	3.05(1.45)
29. Non-offending partners of people who have committed sexual offences are bad parents.	62	.11(.50)	.23(.60)	**.44(.69)**	.04(.55)	3.23(1.50)
Factor 4: Shame						
30. Non-offending partners of those who have sexually offended should feel ashamed.	30	.03(.50)	.18(.72)	-.02(.67)	**.81(.93)**	3.25(1.68)
31. Non-offending partners of people who have committed sexual offences should feel embarrassed.	29	.06(.51)	0.11(.67)	-.004(.65)	**.80(.91)**	3.51(1.65)

Note. Estimator = MLE, rotation = promax. Factor loadings ≥ .40 are in bold. CFI = .95; RMSEA = .05, 90% CI = 0.47-0.55, p = .33; TLI = .945.

Original Item Nr = Number of item in Table 6.1. Higher scores = more negative attitudes. (r) = reverse coded.

The first factor comprised 14 items, which are presented in decreasing order of loadings (see items 1-14 in Table 6.3). It had an eigenvalue of 13.79 and explained the highest amount of scale variance (44.48%). Inductive content analysis of the items loading onto this factor revealed that the 12 highest-loading items referred to non-offending partners' relationship decision-making, specifically, whether the participant negatively judges a non-offending partner for choosing to stay in a romantic relationship with someone who has sexually offended (e.g., "I don't understand how someone could possibly choose to stay in a relationship with a person who has sexually offended). Often, this contained judgements of non-offending partners as stupid or naïve, or as being a bad parent for staying in the relationship. Only one item containing the word "stay" loaded significantly onto any other factor (item 24). Thus, this factor was named "*Judgement of Relationship Decision*". Its internal consistency was excellent (α = .95).

The second factor comprised 8 items, which are presented in decreasing order of factor loadings (see items 15-22 in Table 6.3). It had an eigenvalue of 3.76 and explained the second-highest amount of scale variance (12.13%). Content analysis revealed that items loading onto this factor primarily assessed how participants aimed to behave towards a non-offending partner (e.g., "I would be understanding towards a non-offending partner of someone who has committed a sexual offence."). Thus, this factor was named "*Behavioural Intent*". The factor's internal consistency was excellent (α = .92; incl. all cross-loading items).

The third factor, which comprised 7 items (see items 23-29 in Table 6.3) had an eigenvalue of 1.53 and explained the second-lowest amount of scale variance (4.93%). Content analysis showed that items loading onto this factor contained judgements about non-offending partners' inherent characteristics, such as being vulnerable or deceitful, irrespective of their relationship decision (e.g., "Non-offending partners of people who have sexually offended have a lower IQ than other people."). Thus, this factor was named "*Judgement of Character*". Its internal consistency was excellent (α = .90; incl. all cross-loading items).

The fourth and final factor, which comprised 2 items (see items 30 and 31 in Table 6.3) had an eigenvalue of 1.00 and explained the lowest amount of variance (3.2%). Content analysis revealed that items loading onto this factor assessed to which degree participants believed non-offending partners should feel ashamed or embarrassed (e.g., “Non-offending partners of those who have sexually offended should feel ashamed). Thus, this factor was named “*Shame*”. The factor’s internal consistency was excellent (α = .93). Whilst the fourth factor only had two items, I chose to retain a four-factor solution as this markedly improved the model fit when compared to a three-factor solution.

Three items (items 21, 22 and 28) cross-loaded significantly onto *Behavioural Intent* (Factor 2) and *Judgement of Character* (Factor 3). This may offer insight into a potential link between these two concepts, that is, that participants may indicate negative behavioural intent, such as wanting to socially distance themselves from non-offending partners, because they believe non-offending partners to have poor character. This may especially be the case as these items specifically assess poor character as being represented as immorality (e.g., “Non-offending partners of individuals who have sexually offended are immoral”), whilst other items assessing character primarily focus on poor character as represented by vulnerability [e.g., “Non-offending partners of individuals who have sexually offended are weak(-minded).”].

As expected, all extracted factors were significantly positively correlated, at $p < .001$. Each of these correlations was very large. *Judgement of Relationship Decision* was positively correlated with *Judgement of Character* (r = .72), *Behavioural Intent* (r = .50) and *Shame* (r = .60). *Behavioural Intent* was positively correlated with both *Judgement of Character* (r = .73) and *Shame* (r = .76). Lastly, *Judgement of Character* and *Shame* were also positively correlated (r = .76).

Scale Evaluation

During *Scale Evaluation*, the measure created during *Scale Development* was administered to a general population sample. Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to

assess whether the four-factor structure observed during *Scale Development* fit data gathered from an independent sample.

Method

Participants.[34] I again aimed to recruit 10 participants per item as recommended by Nunnally (1978) for factor analysis. Thus, the final sample comprised 308 Prolific users (female: 49.4%, male: 49%, other: 0.6%, prefer not to say: 1%) who resided in the UK. Participants' ages ranged between 18 and 79 (M = 39.84; SD = 13.21). Most participants were white (n = 263, 85.4%), whilst 7.1% (n = 22) were Asian, 2.9% (n = 9) were from two or more ethnic groups, and 2.6% (n = 8) were Black, African, or Caribbean. Five participants (1.6%) indicated that they belonged to an ethnic group not listed, and 2 participants (0.6%) preferred not to indicate their ethnic group.

Materials and Procedure. The procedure for *Scale Evaluation* mirrored that of previous *Scale Development,* with the exception that participants were only presented with the 31-item measure created during *Scale* Development, instead of all items. Participants failing two or more of the three attention checks (n = 11) were once again excluded from the analysis, in line with Prolific's attention check policy (Prolific, 2022). The questionnaire took approximately 5 minutes to complete, and participants received £0.50 for their participation.

Analysis and Results

All analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Amos 28 (Arbuckle, 2021). As established in a previous chapter, the internal consistency coefficient α was interpreted according to Ponterotto and Ruckdeschel's (2007) guidelines and Pearson's zero-order correlation coefficient r was interpreted according to Funder and Ozer's (2019) guidelines (for more information, see Study Two). Model fit was interpreted using Hu & Bentler's (1999)

[34] Participant handouts can be found in supplementary materials as 'Study Four Participant Handouts – Scale Evaluation' (https://osf.io/gjv2q/?view_only=4dfa11d23d61470cbc405038b2603ef8).

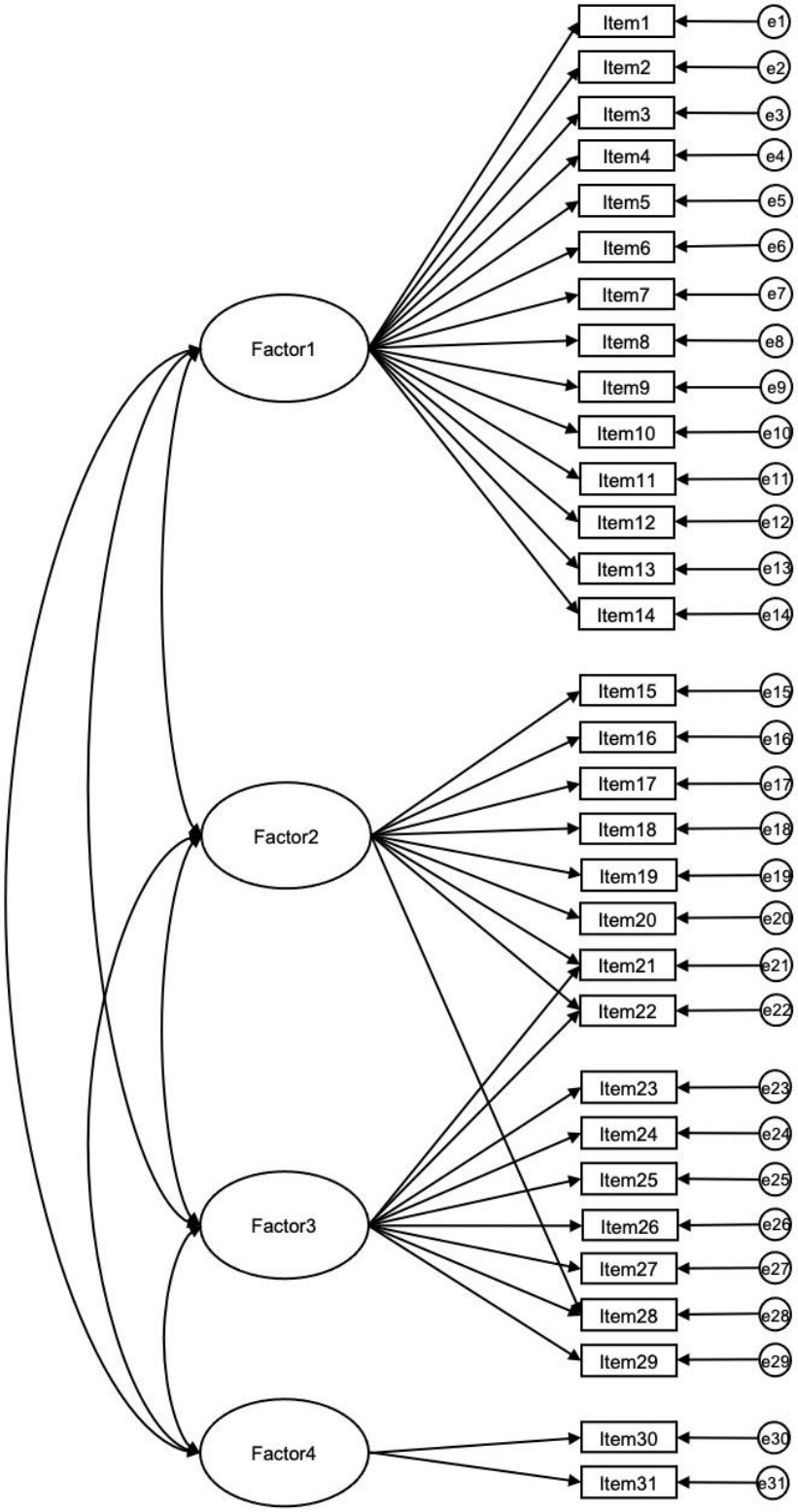
cut-off values for fit indices: Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) ≥ .05; Comparative Fit Index (CFI) ≥ .95; Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) ≥ .95.

I conducted a confirmatory factor analysis to test the oblique four-factor solution that arose from exploratory factor analysis. First, measured variables were screened for non-normality and multivariate outliers. As no kurtosis value of any item was larger than 7, data was interpreted to adhere to univariate normality according to Byrne's (2016) guidelines. However, a large multivariate kurtosis value suggested that multivariate normality was not achieved, and an examination of squared Mahalanobis distance values indicated the presence of multivariate outliers (Byrne, 2016). There were no missing data.

To reduce potential bias on standard error arising from multivariate non-normality, I conducted a maximum likelihood estimation with bootstrapping (1000 samples at 95% bias-corrected confidence level). Figure 6.2 shows the attempted model.

Figure 6.2

Study Four Oblique Four-Factor Solution With Maximum Likelihood Estimation



Note. Covariances between error terms are not represented visually but were accounted for in analysis.

After accounting for covariances between error terms of items loading onto the same factor (Collier, 2020), the model achieved a good fit according to the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA = .053, 90% CI = .047-.060, p = .17) and the Comparative Fit Index (CFI = .955). Whilst the Tucker-Lewis Index was slightly low (TLI = .942), it was still within the range considered acceptable by most guidelines (e.g., Bentler & Bonnett, 1980). The chi-square statistic indicated poor model fit [$\chi^2(361) = 676.57$, $p < .001$]. However, this was to be expected as the chi-square test assumes multivariate normality (McIntosh, 2006) and nearly always rejects models when the sample size is large (Bentler & Bonnett, 1980).

An examination of the regression weights demonstrated that almost all items loaded significantly onto the four factors as hypothesised. Here, items 1 to 14 loaded onto Factor 1 (*Judgement of Relationship Decision*), items 15 to 22 loaded onto Factor 2 (*Behavioural Intent*), items 23 to 29 loaded onto Factor 3 (*Judgement of Character*), and items 30 and 31 loaded onto Factor 4 (*Shame*). As predicted, items 21 and 22 additionally cross-loaded significantly onto Factor 3. However, contrary to the model I observed during *Exploratory Factor Analysis*, item 28 only loaded onto Factor 3 and did not cross-load onto Factor 2. This could possibly be the case as the judgement of non-offending partners as immoral, which I previously hypothesised to be a potential reason for the cross-loadings and a link between its latent constructs, is more explicit in items 21 and 22 (e.g., “Non-offending partners of individuals who have sexually offended are immoral”) when compared to item 28 (“Non-offending partners do not care about the victim of their partner’s sexual offending”). Table 6.4 shows standardised regression weights, standard errors, significance values and confidence intervals for the model. Table 6.5 shows unstandardised regression weights, standard errors, significance values and confidence intervals for the model.

Table 6.4

Study Four Confirmatory Factor Analysis Standardised Regression Weights for the Four-Factor Solution (N = 308)

Item	Factor 1			Factor 2			Factor 3			Factor 4		
	Standardised (SE)	*p*	*95% CI*	*Standardised (SE)*	*p*	*95% CI*	*Standardised (SE)*	*p*	*95% CI*	*Standardised (SE)*	*p*	*95% CI*
Item 1	**.76(.03)**	**.003**	**.69-.82**									
Item 2	**.70(.04)**	**.003**	**.62-.77**									
Item 3	**.80(.03)**	**.003**	**.73-.85**									
Item 4	**.68(.04)**	**.003**	**.58-.76**									
Item 5	**.76(.04)**	**.002**	**.67-.82**									
Item 6	**.76(.03)**	**.002**	**.70-.82**									
Item 7	**.73(.03)**	**.003**	**.66-.78**									
Item 8	**.64(.05)**	**.004**	**.52-.71**									
Item 9	**.79(.03)**	**.003**	**.73-.83**									
Item 10	**.63(.04)**	**.002**	**.55-.71**									
Item 11	**.72(.03)**	**.002**	**.65-.78**									
Item 12	**.64(.04)**	**.001**	**.56-.72**									
Item 13	**.49(.05)**	**.002**	**.38-.58**									
Item 14	**.62(.04)**	**.002**	**.53-.69**									
Item 15				**.65(.05)**	**.002**	**.53-.75**						
Item 16				**.63(.05)**	**.002**	**.51-.72**						
Item 17				**.63(.05)**	**.002**	**.52-.73**						
Item 18				**.69(.04)**	**.001**	**.61-.77**						
Item 19				**.71(.04)**	**.002**	**.63-.79**						
Item 20				**.79(.03)**	**.004**	**.71-.85**						
Item 21				**.51(.15)**	**.002**	**.20-.76**	**.35(.14)**	**.01**	**.11-.67**			
Item 22				**.44(.15)**	**.021**	**.07-.69**	**.43(.14)**	**.003**	**.18-.79**			
Item 23							**.72(.04)**	**.002**	**.64-.78**			
Item 24							**.70(.04)**	**.002**	**.61-.77**			
Item 25							**.54(.05)**	**.002**	**.44-.63**			
Item 26							**.79(.04)**	**.002**	**.70-.84**			
Item 27							**.68(.05)**	**.002**	**.57-.77**			
Item 28				.001(.18)	.98	-.42-.28	**.80(.18)**	**.002**	**.52-1.26**			
Item 29							**.84(.02)**	**.003**	**.79-.88**			
Item 30										**.95(.02)**	**.003**	**.91-.97**
Item 31										**.92(.14)**	**.002**	**.88-.95**

Note. Estimator = maximum likelihood with bootstrapping (1000 samples, 95% bias-corrected confidence level). Significant ($p < .05$) regression weights are in bold. RMSEA = .053, 90% CI = .047-.060, $p = .17$; CFI = .955; TLI = .942. *Standardised* = standardised regression weight.

Table 6.5

Study Four Confirmatory Factor Analysis Unstandardised Regression Weights for the Four-Factor Solution (N = 308)

Item	Factor 1			Factor 2			Factor 3			Factor 4		
	Unstan-dardised (*SE*)	*p*	*95% CI*	*Unstan-dardised (SE)*	*p*	*95% CI*	*Unstan-dardised* (*SE*)	*p*	*95% CI*	*Unstan-dardised* (*SE*)	*p*	*95% CI*
Item 1	1.00(-)	-	1.00-1.00									
Item 2	**0.90(.07)**	**.002**	**0.75-1.04**									
Item 3	**0.95(.05)**	**.002**	**0.86-1.05**									
Item 4	**0.76(.05)**	**.003**	**0.64-0.85**									
Item 5	**1.12(.07)**	**.002**	**0.97-1.26**									
Item 6	**0.94(.06)**	**.002**	**0.84-1.07**									
Item 7	**1.02(.07)**	**.002**	**0.89-1.16**									
Item 8	**0.84(.08)**	**.002**	**0.68-0.99**									
Item 9	**1.11(.07)**	**.002**	**0.98-1.26**									
Item 10	**0.71(.07)**	**.002**	**0.59-0.84**									
Item 11	**1.04(.08)**	**.002**	**0.89-1.21**									
Item 12	**0.83(.09)**	**.002**	**0.67-1.00**									
Item 13	**0.73(.09)**	**.003**	**0.54-0.91**									
Item 14	**0.70(.07)**	**.002**	**0.58-0.85**									
Item 15				1.00(-)	-	1.00-1.00						
Item 16				**0.96(.05)**	**.002**	**0.86-1.08**						
Item 17				**0.85(.08)**	**.002**	**0.69-1.02**						
Item 18				**1.18(.12)**	**.002**	**0.99-1.47**						
Item 19				**1.14(.13)**	**.002**	**0.92-1.44**						
Item 20				**1.18(.13)**	**.003**	**0.98-1.48**						
Item 21				**0.80(.24)**	**.002**	**0.30-1.26**	**0.52(.21)**	**.01**	**0.16-1.00**			
Item 22				**0.61(.22)**	**.022**	**0.10-0.99**	**0.56(.19)**	**.003**	**0.22-1.01**			
Item 23							1.00(-)	-	1.00-1.00			
Item 24							**0.91(.07)**	**.003**	**0.77-1.04**			
Item 25							**0.73(.08)**	**.003**	**0.56-0.88**			
Item 26							**1.20(.10)**	**.002**	**1.03-1.42**			
Item 27							**0.87(.08)**	**.002**	**0.71-1.03**			
Item 28				.00(.30)	.986	-.74-.44	**1.18(.30)**	**.002**	**0.74-1.92**			
Item 29							**1.26(.11)**	**.003**	**1.07-1.49**			
Item 30										1.00(-)	-	1.00-1.00
Item 31										**1.03(.04)**	**.001**	**0.95-1.11**

Note. Estimator = maximum likelihood with bootstrapping (1000 samples, 95% bias-corrected confidence level). Significant ($p < .05$) regression weights are in bold. RMSEA = .053, 90% CI = .047-.060, $p = .17$; CFI = .955; TLI = .942. Uns*tandardised* = unstandardised regression weight.

As observed during *Exploratory Factor Analysis*, all four factors were again strongly significantly positively correlated. Table 6.6 shows correlations and covariances between all factors, as well as standard errors, significance values, and confidence intervals.

Table 6.6

Study Four Correlations and Covariances Between Factors During Confirmatory Factor Analysis

	Correlations			Covariances		
	Coefficient (SE)	*p*	*95% CI*	*Coefficient (SE)*	*p*	*95% CI*
Factor 1 <-> Factor 2	.79(.04)	.001	.71-.86	0.99(0.12)	0.001	0.77-.1.25
Factor 1 <-> Factor 3	.68(.04)	.002	.59-.76	0.91(0.11)	0.001	0.72-1.16
Factor 1 <-> Factor 4	.65(.04)	.001	.56-.72	1.23(0.13)	0.001	0.97-1.49
Factor 2 <-> Factor 3	.83(.04)	.002	.76-.91	0.94(0.12)	0.001	0.74-1.22
Factor 2 <-> Factor 4	.80(.04)	.002	.70-.88	1.28(0.16)	0.001	0.97-1.60
Factor 3 <-> Factor 4	.81(.04)	.002	.73-.88	1.38(0.16)	0.001	1.07-1.71

Note. Estimator = maximum likelihood with bootstrapping (1000 samples, 95% bias-corrected confidence level). Factor 1 = *Judgement of Relationship Decision*, Factor 2 = *Behavioural Intent*, Factor 3 = *Judgement of Character*, Factor 4 = *Shame*.

Comparing Scores Between Professionals and the General Population

During this stage, the measure was administered to a sample of professionals working in Criminal Justice System-adjacent agencies (i.e., police and social services). Subsequently, their scores were compared to those of the general population recruited for *Scale Evaluation* to assess potential differences in attitudes towards non-offending partners between those who might work with this group professionally and the general population.

Method

Participants.[35] I recruited 48 participants, two social workers (4.2%) and 46 police officers (95.8%), all of whom were white (*n* = 48 British).[36] Participants' ages ranged

[35] Participant Handouts can be found in supplementary materials as 'Study Four Participant Handouts – Comparing Scores Between Professionals and the General Population' (https://osf.io/gjv2q/?view_only=4dfa11d23d61470cbc405038b2603ef8).
[36] Participants' genders were not recorded due to a survey error.

between 26 and 64 years (*M* = 44.60, *SD* = 8.36). The two social workers had been working for social services for three and seven years, respectively (*M* = 5.00, *SD* = 2.83), whilst police officers had been working for the police between one and 44 years (*M* = 19.44, *SD* = 9.60). Invitations for study participation and the link to the survey were sent out via email. Social workers participating in the study received a £5 voucher. Due to internal policies, police officers taking part in the study could not be financially compensated. This sample of professionals was compared to the general population sample recruited for previous *Scale Evaluation*.

Materials and Procedure. Like in *Scale Evaluation*, the 31-item measure was administered using Qualtrics. The internal consistency of the overall scale and each subscale/factor was "excellent" for both the general population (α = .96, $\alpha_{Factor\ 1}$ = .93, $\alpha_{Factor\ 2}$ = .91, $\alpha_{Factor\ 3}$ = .90, $\alpha_{Factor\ 4}$ = .93) and the professional sample (α = .95, $\alpha_{Factor\ 1}$ = .93, $\alpha_{Factor\ 2}$ = .82, $\alpha_{Factor\ 3}$ = .90, $\alpha_{Factor\ 4}$ = .80). Overall, those working within the police and social services had slightly positive (*M* = 2.73) attitudes towards non-offending partners, whilst those recruited from the general population had, overall, neither positive nor negative attitudes (*M* = 3.98). For means, medians, and standard deviations of the scale, subscales, and each item by group, see Table 6.7. The questionnaire took approximately 5 minutes to complete. None of the participants recruited from the police or social services failed any of the three attention checks. Eleven participants from the general population sample had already been excluded due to failed attention checks, as described during *Scale Evaluation*.

Analysis and Results

IBM SPSS Statistics 28 (IBM Corp., 2021) was used for all analyses. As established in a previous chapter, Pearson's zero-order correlation coefficient *r* was interpreted according to Funder and Ozer's (2019) guidelines (for more information, see Study Two).

Shapiro-Wilk tests indicated that, whilst the data were normally distributed for the overall scale, they were not normally distributed for the factors and individual items. Because of this, I conducted Mann-Whitney U tests to assess whether attitudes towards non-

offending partners, as evaluated by the items, subscales/factors and overall measure created in this chapter, differed significantly between the general population and professionals working within the police and social services. Overall, those working within the police and social services had more intensely positive attitudes towards non-offending partners than participants in the general population (U = 12061.50, p < .001). This effect was large (r = .37). Additionally, police officers and social workers were also less judgemental of non-offending partners' decision to stay with their partner who has offended (Factor 1; U = 11583.50, p < .001), had more positive behavioural intentions towards non-offending partners (Factor 2; U = 11214.00, p < .001), judged non-offending partners' characters more positively (Factor 3; U = 11624.00, p < .001), and shamed non-offending partners less (Factor 4; U = 11158.00, p < .001) than participants from the general population. These effects were also large (r_{F1} = .33, r_{F2} = .31, r_{F3} = .34, r_{F4} = .31). A similar trend emerged for most of the individual items: I found differences in item scores between professionals and the general public, ranging from small (Item 14: "Non-offending partners are in denial about their partners' sexual offending", r = .14) to large (Item 26: "Non-offending partners of people who have sexually offended are weak(-minded)", r = .37). Here, those working within the police or social services had on average moderately more positive attitudes towards non-offending partners (i.e., scored lower on the items) than those recruited from the general population (r = .26). The only exception to this was Item 18 ("I would distance myself from a friend if I found out that they were in a relationship with someone who has sexually offended"). Whilst police officers and social workers indicated lower agreement with this item than participants from the general population, this difference was not significant (U = 8457.00, p = .104). See Table 6.7 for means, medians and standard deviations for both groups, as well as all relevant test statistics.

Table 6.7

Study Four Comparison of Attitudes Towards Non-Offending Partners Between Professionals and the General Population

	Professionals		General Population						
	Mdn	*M(SD)*	*Mdn*	*M(SD)*	*U*	*z*	*p*	*SE*	*r*
Overall Scale	**2.73**	**2.78(0.81)**	**4.03**	**3.98(1.07)**	**12061.50**	**7.04**	**< .001**	**663.15**	**.37**
Factor 1	**3.57**	**3.45(1.02)**	**4.69**	**4.67(1.18)**	**11583.50**	**6.32**	**< .001**	**663.09**	**.33**
Item 1	**5.00**	**4.40(1.76)**	**6.00**	**5.35(1.61)**	**9719.00**	**3.59**	**< .001**	**647.78**	**.19**
Item 2	**4.00**	**4.06(1.77)**	**6.00**	**5.49(1.57)**	**10814.00**	**5.30**	**< .001**	**645.53**	**.28**
Item 3	**5.00**	**4.19(1.50)**	**6.00**	**5.37(1.46)**	**10514.50**	**4.82**	**< .001**	**647.88**	**.26**
Item 4	**5.00**	**4.54(1.57)**	**6.00**	**5.69(1.38)**	**10513.00**	**4.86**	**< .001**	**642.29**	**.26**
Item 5	**3.00**	**2.92(1.50)**	**5.00**	**4.78(1.82)**	**11478.00**	**6.24**	**< .001**	**654.41**	**.33**
Item 6	**4.00**	**3.88(1.36)**	**5.00**	**5.24(1.50)**	**11110.00**	**5.72**	**< .001**	**649.74**	**.30**
Item 7	**3.00**	**3.02(1.39)**	**5.00**	**4.65(1.70)**	**11277.00**	**5.94**	**< .001**	**653.82**	**.31**
Item 8	**2.00**	**2.63(1.20)**	**4.00**	**3.97(1.59)**	**11021.00**	**5.59**	**< .001**	**648.72**	**.30**
Item 9	**3.00**	**3.25(1.38)**	**5.00**	**4.60(1.72)**	**10671.50**	**5.01**	**< .001**	**654.48**	**.27**
Item 10	**4.00**	**4.06(1.49)**	**6.00**	**5.49(1.38)**	**11222.00**	**5.92**	**< .001**	**646.84**	**.31**
Item 11	**2.00**	**2.69(1.29)**	**4.00**	**3.75(1.76)**	**10049.00**	**4.07**	**< .001**	**652.874**	**.22**
Item 12	**2.00**	**2.54(1.11)**	**3.00**	**3.56(1.58)**	**10601.50**	**4.99**	**< .001**	**643.08**	**.26**
Item 13	**2.00**	**2.23(1.33)**	**4.00**	**3.76(1.81)**	**11075.50**	**5.63**	**< .001**	**654.45**	**.30**
Item 14	**4.00**	**3.92(1.35)**	**5.00**	**4.48(1.39)**	**9145.00**	**2.72**	**.007**	**644.56**	**.14**
Factor 2	**2.44**	**2.45(0.83)**	**3.50**	**3.47(1.21)**	**11214.00**	**5.77**	**< .001**	**662.76**	**.31**
Item 15	**2.00**	**2.50(1.38)**	**3.00**	**3.63(1.57)**	**10661.00**	**5.03**	**< .001**	**650.41**	**.27**
Item 16	**2.00**	**2.50(1.01)**	**3.00**	**3.59(1.58)**	**10487.00**	**4.78**	**< .001**	**647.99**	**.25**
Item 17	**2.00**	**2.27(1.23)**	**3.00**	**2.83(1.37)**	**9181.00**	**2.77**	**.006**	**644.87**	**.15**
Item 18	4.00	3.94(1.78)	5.00	4.40(1.75)	8457.00	1.63	.104	654.33	.09
Item 19	**3.00**	**3.21(1.54)**	**5.00**	**4.60(1.64)**	**10776.00**	**5.19**	**< .001**	**652.36**	**.28**
Item 20	**2.00**	**1.75(0.98)**	**3.00**	**2.85(1.53)**	**10699.50**	**5.12**	**< .001**	**646.20**	**.27**
Item 21	**2.00**	**1.90(1.10)**	**3.00**	**3.18(1.60)**	**11008.00**	**5.58**	**< .001**	**647.97**	**.30**
Item 22	**1.00**	**1.56(0.68)**	**2.00**	**2.70(1.44)**	**11038.50**	**5.68**	**< .001**	**642.13**	**.30**
Factor 3	**2.00**	**1.98(0.77)**	**3.14**	**3.17(1.22)**	**11624.00**	**6.39**	**< .001**	**662.65**	**.34**
Item 23	**2.00**	**1.79(0.99)**	**2.00**	**2.71(1.53)**	**10012.50**	**4.08**	**< .001**	**642.58**	**.22**
Item 24	**1.00**	**1.60(0.82)**	**2.00**	**2.69(1.43)**	**10766.00**	**5.25**	**< .001**	**643.16**	**.28**
Item 25	**2.00**	**2.50(1.15)**	**4.00**	**3.74(1.50)**	**10855.50**	**5.35**	**< .001**	**647.71**	**.28**
Item 26	**2.00**	**1.83(0.81)**	**4.00**	**3.62(1.68)**	**11905.00**	**6.91**	**< .001**	**653.33**	**.37**
Item 27	**2.00**	**2.10(1.13)**	**2.00**	**2.85(1.40)**	**9671.00**	**3.55**	**< .001**	**642.20**	**.19**
Item 28	**2.00**	**2.08(1.01)**	**3.00**	**3.31(1.63)**	**10642.00**	**5.00**	**< .001**	**649.96**	**.26**
Item 29	**2.00**	**1.96(0.90)**	**3.00**	**3.24(1.65)**	**10761.50**	**5.19**	**< .001**	**649.75**	**.28**
Factor 4	**2.00**	**2.14(1.15)**	**4.00**	**3.58(1.64)**	**11158.00**	**5.72**	**< .001**	**658.32**	**.30**
Item 30	**2.00**	**2.10(1.29)**	**4.00**	**3.42(1.65)**	**10811.50**	**5.25**	**< .001**	**651.54**	**.28**
Item 31	**2.00**	**2.17(1.23)**	**4.00**	**3.75(1.74)**	**11188.50**	**5.81**	**< .001**	**653.65**	**.31**

Note. Professionals = participants working for the police or social services (*n* = 48), General Population = participants recruited from Prolific (*n* = 308). Factor 1 = *Judgement of*

Relationship Decision, Factor 2 = *Behavioural Intent*, Factor 3 = *Judgement of Character*, Factor 4 = *Shame.* Higher scores = more negative attitudes towards non-offending partners. All significant differences between the two groups are in bold. Items 12, 15, 16 and 17 were reverse coded.

Discussion

Using exploratory factor analysis, in the current study I developed a scale assessing attitudes towards non-offending partners, which appeared to measure four distinct constructs: (1) Judgement of non-offending partners' relationship decision-making, (2) behavioural intent towards non-offending partners, (3) judgement of non-offending partners' characters, and (4) shaming of non-offending partners. Subsequent confirmatory factor analysis, and the analysis of the measure's psychometric properties, confirmed that this four-factor structure is an adequate fit, making the 31-item scale a reliable, valid, and coherent measure of attitudes towards non-offending partners. Lastly, the study has shown that professionals working for the police and social services, who may encounter non-offending partners in a professional capacity, hold more favourable attitudes towards non-offending partners (i.e., score lower on the measure), when compared to a general population sample.

To my knowledge, the scale is the first measure assessing attitudes towards all non-offending partners which differs from and improves upon a previous scale developed by Plogher and colleagues (2016) through a variety of factors: First, my scale was specifically developed to assess attitudes towards all non-offending partners of those who committed sexual offences, rather than being developed with a predominant focus on a small subset of non-offending partners (i.e., partners of those on the registry). This makes usage of my scale more generalisable across different cultural and legislative contexts. Second, item development and factor analyses of my scale were informed not only by a general population sample, but by non-offending partners themselves as well as professionals likely to encounter them as part of their work. This ensures greater content validity of the scale. Third, in contrast to Plogher and colleague's (2016) measure, the scale developed in the

current study use sufficiently large samples for both exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis which ensures the replicability and thus generalisability of the factor structure observed in the current study (for a review of appropriate determination of sample size for scale development, see Boateng et al., 2018). Lastly, my scale uses non-stigmatising, person-centred language to avoid further stigmatisation and traumatisation of non-offending partners which may inadvertently occur as a result of labelling, as discussed in the introduction to the current chapter.

In the following section, I interpret the structure of the scale and the study's other findings in light of arising theoretical implications. I then outline potential practical implications before discussing some key limitations of this research. Avenues for future research are highlighted throughout.

Findings and Theoretical Implications

Internal consistency coefficients throughout indicated that the 31 items formed a coherent measure across multiple populations. The scale appeared to measure four main constructs: *Judgement of Relationship Decision, Behavioural Intent, Judgement of Character,* and *Shame*. The distinctiveness of these constructs was confirmed through confirmatory factor analysis with an independent population. *Judgement of Non-Offending Partners' Relationship Decision* (e.g., "I don't understand how someone could possibly choose to stay in a relationship with a person who has sexually offended") supports the findings of all previous studies throughout this thesis in which non-offending partners, and those in the general population who imagined themselves in a scenario as a non-offending partner, reported being judged or fearing judgement for their relationship decision. Given that the current study shows that non-offending partners' relationship decision-making may play a big role in others' attitudes towards them, these fears seem to be justified. This ties in with the literature discussed in Chapter 2 which suggests that the courtesy stigma affecting non-offending partners may arise specifically from their refusal to sever ties with their partner who has offended even though they are in the "privileged" position of not being considered

genetically contaminated (Condry, 2013). Specifically, the current research posits that non-offending partners may be judged to be, at best, stupid or naïve for not leaving their partner, given the potential danger their partners who have offended are perceived to pose. At worst, they are simply seen as bad parents who put their needs before those of their children who they are perceived to put at risk by staying in the relationship. The stereotypical construction of the non-offending partner as the mother of an intrafamilial abuse victim, as discussed in Chapter 1, who is aware of and even permits abuse for the sake of her romantic relationship, and thus is responsible for the abuse, seems to be reflected here (e.g., Azzopardi et al., 2018; Pretorius et al., 2011).

Another construct assessed by this scale was participants' *Behavioural Intent* towards non-offending partners (e.g., "I would be understanding towards a non-offending partner of someone who has committed a sexual offence"). This explicitly measured how participants may approach and treat non-offending partners in interpersonal interactions. Additionally, a separate construct measured participants' *Judgement of Non-Offending Partners' Character* which, in line with previous research (Plogher et al., 2016) contained items describing non-offending partners as weak, mentally ill, and deviant because of their association with someone who has sexually offended, irrespective of their relationship decision (e.g., "Non-offending partners of people who have sexually offended have a lower IQ than other people"). One finding of note here was that two items (Items 21 & 22) consistently cross-loaded significantly onto both *Judgement of Character* and *Behavioural Intent*. These items may explain some of the reasons underlying participants' *Behavioural Intent* towards non-offending partners as arising from a *Judgement of Their Character.* Specifically, the two items assessed poor character as being primarily based on immorality (e.g., "Non-offending partners of individuals who have sexually offended are immoral"). Participants may be especially inclined to want to socially distance themselves (as measured by some items of *Behavioural Intent*) from those that they see as immoral and deviant. In contrast, the need for social distance as a means of avoiding courtesy stigma (e.g., Condry,

2013) may not be as linked to perceiving non-offending partners as vulnerable or weak (e.g., “Non-offending partners of those who have committed sexual offences are timid and afraid”).

Lastly, a final construct assessed by the scale was how much *Shame* participants attributed to others’ identity as a non-offending partner (e.g., “Non-offending partners of those who have sexually offended should feel ashamed”). That is, to which degree participants endorsed the belief that non-offending partners should feel guilty or ashamed. Whilst only made up of two items, this construct distinctly corresponds to non-offending partners’ reported perceptions of being shamed for an offence that they themselves did not commit. Such shaming may be both external, as evidenced by the scale developed in the current study, but may also be internalised, as specifically shown by participants in Study One who felt guilty for their partners’ offending. The shaming of non-offending partners may also be linked to a *contamination by causal responsibility* as hypothesised by previous research (Armitage et al., 2023), whereby non-offending partners are blamed and held responsible for the offence committed by their partner.

The final part of this study assessed potential differences in attitudes towards non-offending partners between those who regularly encounter this population in their professional lives (i.e., police officers and social workers), and a general population sample. Here, I found that professionals working with non-offending partners expressed more positive attitudes towards non-offending partners as evidenced by significantly lower scores on the overall measure, each subscale/factor, and almost all items. This mirrors a long-standing line of research that has shown that those working with people who have sexually offended have more positive attitudes towards them than community samples (for a review, see Willis et al., 2010). For instance, those working with individuals who have sexually offended, including police and probation officers, had less negative attitudes towards those with sexual offence histories than teachers (Sanghara & Wilson, 2006) or general community samples (H. Johnson et al., 2007). One potential explanation for this may be that, in line with the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954), the contact between non-offending partners and

professionals could lead to reduced prejudice. Such a decrease in prejudice between two groups has been suggested to arise from the increased knowledge about and empathy towards the outgroup and decreased anxiety or fear of interacting with the outgroup that may result from intergroup contact (Allport, 1954). Some evidence for this already exists for those working with individuals who have sexually offended as professionals' positive attitudes (when compared to the general population) were mediated by their knowledge about sexual abuse (Sanghara & Wilson, 2006).

Without any contact with non-offending partners, the general population may have to rely on stereotypical media portrayals of non-offending partners, as has been demonstrated to be the case with individuals with sexual offence histories (Kjelsberg & Loos, 2008). Whilst such media coverage of non-offending partners' experiences is currently sparse, even those that attempt to paint a sympathetic picture usually fall back on outdated narratives that eventually stigmatise non-offending partners further. For instance, Collette Camden, director of the Channel 4 documentary "Married to a Paedophile" (Camden et al., 2018) claimed in an interview that, "for many [non-offending partners] it's the sudden brutal end of a marriage, and in a manner that denies the usual sympathy and understanding" (Gil, 2018), suggesting an awareness of the trauma non-offending partners face. Nevertheless, the documentary clearly compares the "good" non-offending partner, Kate, who divorced her husband immediately after he had been arrested on suspicion of downloading child sexual abuse images, to the "bad" non-offending partner, Helen, who had decided to forgive her husband and believe him in his denial of the offending behaviour. Luckily for Helen, she gets her redemption arc towards the end of the documentary as her growing doubts about her husband's innocence led her to terminate her relationship and, thus, make what is perceived to be the only acceptable choice.

At the same time, the potential importance of contact in improving attitudes towards non-offending partners could be harnessed to actively reduce prejudice against them. The positive impact of contact on prejudice reductions is not only a robust social-psychological

effect, but contact interventions based on this theory have also generally been shown to be effective at reducing prejudice (for a meta-analysis, see Clochard, 2022). Specifically, the affective components believed to be responsible for prejudice reduction – reduced anxiety and increased empathy – have been found to be major mediators for this effect (for a meta-analysis, see Pettigrew et al., 2011). Whilst it may still be important to increase factual knowledge of non-offending partners' experiences in those working with them and the general population, for instance, through a more nuanced portrayal of non-offending partners in the media, this suggests that affect towards them should not be discounted when trying to reduce prejudice. Specifically, the importance of empathy does not only describe why police officers and social workers may hold more positive attitudes towards non-offending partners, but it also supports my prior suggestion to educate those close to non-offending partners about the emotional difficulty of their situation, for which the model build in Study One of this thesis may be used. Given that previous literature has shown a positive effect of contact on the perceptions of those who have committed sexual offences (Wurtele, 2021), future research may investigate the efficacy of contact-based interventions with non-offending partners.

Practical Implications

In addition to the theoretical implications of the current study, it also has some important practical implications. The factorial structure and items of the scale provide some much-needed insight into the different components of attitudes towards non-offending partners, some of which could be especially impactful for those in contact with this population. For instance, this study has supported the previously posed hypothesis that non-offending partners may be perceived as naïve or even stupid (Plogher et al., 2016), either inherently (*Judgement of Character*) or because of their decision to stay with their partner (*Judgement of Relationship Decision*), which would inevitably influence their treatment by professionals and the general population alike. Additionally, non-offending partners are commonly judged to be bad parents or even as permissive of child abuse, as measured by

several items in this scale and shown by previous research discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis (e.g., Azzopardi et al., 2018; Pretorius et al., 2011). Despite this, non-offending partners are often used to safeguard their children, whilst their own needs are neglected (e.g., Bolen, 2003). The simultaneous construction of non-offending partners as bad parents and safeguards presents a contradiction that, because of its inherent importance to social work practice, should be explored further in both research and practice. Additionally, any practitioner aiming to incorporate non-offending partners into their partner's rehabilitation process should reflect upon their own attitudes and possible judgements to be able to ethically work with non-offending partners, as suggested in Chapter 1.

If future research, as previously suggested, investigates and finds support for a link between increased contact with non-offending partners and more positive attitudes towards them, then contact could be employed to reduce stigmatisation of non-offending partners in professionals likely to encounter them. Such contact could be built into training programmes for those working within Criminal Justice System-adjacent organisations or counselling services. Training programmes may want to particularly appeal to affect, that is, increase empathy and reduce anxiety, to be effective (Pettigrew et al., 2011), as previously stated. Whilst the contact hypothesis facilitators first proposed by Allport (1954) – common goals, equal status, no intergroup competition, and authority sanction – have not been found to be strictly necessary for intergroup contact to have a positive impact (Pettigrew et al., 2011), they could nonetheless contribute to its success. In this specific case, equal status and achieving common goals particularly could be focal points of guidelines for working with non-offending partners. Perceived equal status may especially be hindered if non-offending partners are perceived to be vulnerable or stupid, as previously discussed. Therefore, these stereotypes of non-offending partners as a homogeneous, naïve group should specifically be addressed and challenged in training programmes and guidelines with all agencies. The achievement of common goals, on the other hand, could be tailored to the individual organisation the training programme caters for. For example, probation officers may wish to

focus on the common goal of rehabilitating the non-offending partner's partner, whilst those within children's social services may wish to focus on the common goal of ensuring the wellbeing of the non-offending partner's children. The measure developed in this study could be used to assess attitudes towards non-offending partners at baseline and subsequently after the completion of a contact-based training programme to evaluate the training's efficacy. It goes without saying, however, that any such training programme should be developed and conducted as sensitively as possible to avoid further stigmatisation and traumatisation of non-offending partners. Specifically, it is crucial that any content is carefully considered first to ensure that negative stereotypes are not made more salient, as has been the case in some training programmes aimed at reducing prejudice towards those with sexual offence histories (for a review, see Willis et al., 2010).

In addition to targeted training programmes, given the potentially influential impact of media portrayals of non-offending partners on the general public's attitudes towards them, as discussed above, researchers and practitioners alike may wish to be more proactive to pre-empt further stigmatisation of and negative attitudes towards non-offending partners as perpetuated by the media. For instance, academics and those working with non-offending partners may show a greater engagement with the media to correct such narratives, as recommended by Willis and colleagues (2010) concerning those with sexual offence histories. Whilst approaching the topic with consideration and empathy for those who have been victimised, this may provide a more nuanced view of non-offending partners' situations than the media currently provides.

Limitations

On a more critical note, despite the valuable findings of the current study and their theoretical and practical implications, this research has several limitations. First, the measure's focus on relationship decision-making, as represented by a large number of items, must be critically examined. This may have emerged due to the previous research in this thesis and its primary focus on relationship decision-making. Indeed, the interviews with

non-offending partners and responses from the general public used for *Item Development* were first conducted for Studies One through Three, and thus were at least somewhat, if not mainly, aimed at investigating relationship decision-making. However, it is also possible that the relationship decision they make is largely responsible for how others view a non-offending partner, in line with what participants in Study One reported and those in Studies Two and Three feared. This is supported by the fact that some of the items related to the *Judgement of the Relationship Decision* were constructed from interviews with social workers and police officers conducted specifically for this study (e.g., "Non-offending partners who stay with someone who has sexually offended are putting themselves at risk"; see Table 6.1 for the source of each item). The importance of the non-offending partners' relationship decision for others' attitudes towards them is further backed up by the literature linking courtesy stigma to a failure to end the relationship (e.g., Condry, 2011), which I reviewed in Chapter 1. In fact, non-offending partners' option to end their relationship, and lack of genetic contamination makes them unique when compared to other non-offending family members. This makes non-offending partners' relationship decision, in some regard, their defining feature and explains its importance in the current study.

Second, whilst there is a wealth of research suggesting that attitudes towards social groups predict behaviour towards them (for a meta-analysis, see Wallace et al., 2005), and negative attitudes towards non-offending partners may be linked to an intent to discriminate against them (Plogher et al., 2016) at this point, my scale has not been validated to show such a relationship. Future research should include several outcome measures about distinct behavioural intentions towards non-offending partners, or even directly measure behaviour, and thus assess the scale's predictive value.

Third, this study included a relatively small and not very diverse sample of professionals. Most professionals in this study were police officers working in units specifically responsible for the management of those who have sexually offended. As a result, they may have had more and more sustained contact with non-offending partners

than other professionals who could encounter this population. According to the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954), this could suggest that larger and more diverse samples of professionals (e.g., including more police officers who are not from specialist units) who may only have very brief and limited contact with non-offending partners may not hold the same, generally more favourable attitudes and may instead hold attitudes similar to those of the general population. Future research may wish to investigate larger populations as, despite the brevity of contact between non-offending partners and, for instance, first-responding police officers and investigators, their attitudes and behaviours towards non-offending partners may still be stigmatising and traumatising, as reported in Study One.

Another limitation may be the ambiguity of grouping non-offending partners of all of those who have committed a sexual offence. As sexual offences are a broad category encompassing a variety of different offence types with varying degrees of severity and impact on the victims, those completing the measure may have found it difficult to "settle" on one answer per item which reflects their attitudes towards all individuals in this heterogeneous group. Future research may wish to ask participants after completion of the measure whether they imagined the non-offending partners' partners as having committed a specific type of offence. Additionally, it may also be investigated whether different offence types elicit different attitudes and responses towards non-offending partners by swapping "those who have sexually offended" against "those who have committed a/an [rape/sexual assault/act of voyeurism…]".

Finally, rather than being the result of increased contact, as suggested by the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954), more positive attitudes towards non-offending partners observed in police officers and social workers could also be a sign of social desirability. Whilst participants were ensured of their anonymity, which has been previously shown to reduce response biases caused by social anxiety and social desirability (Joinson, 1999), emails for participation in this study were sent to prospective participants' work email addresses and the scale directly assessed their attitudes towards a population important to their work. Thus,

these participants may have been motivated to respond with exaggerated positive attitudes reflective of the attitudes they believe they should have as police officers and social workers. This potential impact of social desirability has been previously demonstrated to affect responses to profession-relevant attitudes in professionals working within the Criminal Justice System. Here, in a sample of police officers, rape myth acceptance was negatively correlated with social desirability (Venema, 2018). However, correcting for social desirability by correcting scores or excluding those who score high on a social desirability measure may not be the right approach and has been criticised as a possible moderating effect of social desirability may give additional insight into the causes of intergroup variation in attitudes towards non-offending partners (McCrae & Costa, 1983). Nevertheless, assessing social desirability in the responding population, for example, by using a social desirability scale such as the Social Desirability Scale-17 (SDS-17; Stöber, 2001), may give future research additional insight into the causes of the observed intergroup variation in attitudes towards non-offending partners. Additionally, future research may avoid recruiting professionals through official channels and could also compare their scores to those professionals who only infrequently work with non-offending partners. If these two groups demonstrate the same responses, this might point towards a response bias whereas if those frequently working with non-offending partners display more positive attitudes than those who only infrequently work with this population, this may support the validity of the contact hypothesis.

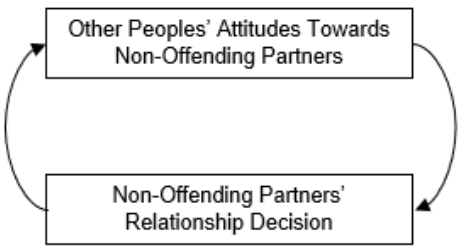
Conclusion

With the input of non-offending partners, professionals working with this population, and the general population, in this study, I developed and evaluated a non-stigmatising measure of attitudes towards non-offending partners. Whilst this measures four distinct constructs, including *Behavioural Intent, Judgement of Character,* and *Shame*, the study reiterated the importance of the non-offending partner's relationship decision as measured by the factor explaining the largest amount of variance in the scale: *Judgement of the Relationship Decision*. Taken together with the findings from Studies One through Three, the

empirical chapters of this thesis suggest that non-offending partners' reasons for relationship decision-making are as complex and heterogeneous as they, as a population, are. One primary reason for relationship termination may be a fear of stigma and other peoples' negative attitudes towards the relationship, as suggested in Studies One through Three. In turn, the current study suggests that attitudes towards non-offending partners may equally be influenced by the relationship decision they make, as the option to make a relationship decision sets them apart from other non-offending family members and could thus be perceived as their defining feature. Hence, other people's attitudes and the non-offending partner's relationship decision may influence each other, as visualised in Figure 5.2. This suggests that fears of judgement because of their relationship decision, which non-offending partners in Study One commonly reported, are well-founded and may lead to them ending their relationship, which in turn may improve others' perceptions of them.

Figure 6.3

Study Four Relationship Between Attitudes Towards Non-Offending Partners and Non-Offending Partners' Relationship Decision



However, on a more optimistic note, the findings of the current study also suggest that those who work closely with non-offending partners hold positive attitudes towards them as a whole and their relationship decision specifically and that these attitudes are significantly more positive than those held by the general population. Thus, there is hope that increased contact with non-offending partners may be a fruitful approach for interventions aimed at improving attitudes towards them. This would be crucial to ensure that

non-offending partners receive the non-judgemental support this thesis has shown they so desperately need, especially in light of their relationship decision.

In the next, and final, chapter of this thesis, Chapter 7, I reviewed the findings of each empirical study reported in this thesis, before discussing the theoretical and practical implications of these findings, limitations of the research conducted, as well as avenues for future research.

CHAPTER 7 – GENERAL DISCUSSION

Sexual violence is recognised as a serious public health issue by both the World Health Organization (World Health Organization, 2021) and associations aimed at reducing sexual offending (e.g., Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abuse, n. d.). Consequently, large amounts of research and theory have been devoted to the investigation of both the predictors and effects of sexual violence perpetration and victimisation. However, one of the third parties most affected by sexual offending – non-offending partners of those who have perpetrated an offence – has been largely neglected by academics. Here, non-offending partners have been primarily researched regarding their "usefulness" for the benefit of others, specifically for supporting their partner's desistance (e.g., McAlinden et al., 2017) and for safeguarding their children (Azzopardi et al., 2018), as discussed in-depth in Chapter 1. Thus, research and academic opinion pieces have historically perpetuated the blame and responsibility non-offending partners face for their partner's offending behaviour, which is often also exacerbated by professionals (e.g., social workers) and the non-offending partner's community (Azzopardi et al., 2018; McLaren, 2013).

Nevertheless, as highlighted in Chapter 2, newly emerging streams of research have begun to rewrite this narrative by centring on the personal experiences of non-offending partners and by acknowledging non-offending partners' victim status, (e.g., Armitage et al., 2023; Duncan et al., 2022; Kavanagh et al., 2022). Such studies have particularly saliently pointed out the large amounts of courtesy stigma that affect non-offending partners (Duncan et al., 2020). These lead to non-offending partners experiencing similar negative consequences compared to those who have actually committed an offence (Farkas & Miller, 2007). Such consequences include, but are not limited to, financial hardship (Brown, 2018), media exposure (Duncan et al., 2020), as well as harassment and ostracism (Rapp, 2011; Liddel & Taylor, 2015). Coupled with the traumatic impact of the offence discovery, the negative emotional and psychological effects of such consequences may lead to shock-, or bereavement-like responses (Duncan et al., 2022; Jones et al., 2021). Because of this,

individuals often try to hide their identity as a non-offending partner, which only exacerbates isolation and lack of support from the community (C. Jones et al., 2021; C. Jones et al., 2023). In many cases, feelings of isolation and stigmatisation are then further heightened through negative interactions with intervening agencies, such as the police and social services (Duncan et al., 2020; Liddell & Taylor, 2015). However, stigma does not only impact the non-offending partner themselves but can also cause significant issues in their relationship with the person who has offended, such as a lack of trust (Cahalane & Duff, 2018). These relationship problems, alongside the cognitive effort of maintaining a positive view of their relationship, the emotional effort of supporting their partner's desistance, and the courtesy stigma they personally encounter often lead non-offending partners to end their relationships (Famer et al., 2015; McAlinden et al., 2017). However, even this relationship decision confronts them with a dilemma as non-offending partners may be judged both for staying with or leaving their partner (Armitage et al., 2023).

Despite the importance of non-offending partners for the desistance and safeguarding process, as acknowledged by traditional streams of research, and the negative impact they face because of their partner's offending behaviour, as pointed out by recently emerging literature, research thus far has only just begun to examine non-offending partners' perspectives. In particular, the impact of the offence on the non-offending partner's relationship with the person who has offended, and the role that the non-offending partner plays in the relationship decision-making process, have been mostly neglected (Iffland et al., 2016).

The aim of this thesis was to offer a first glimpse into the relationship decision-making process in non-offending partners by developing a model of such relationship decision-making based on the narratives of non-offending partners. By statistically assessing the predictive value of some of the factors found to underly this decision-making process, this thesis additionally tested the generalisability of the developed model. To gain a more holistic understanding of the factors underlying the relationship decision, qualitative

perspectives provided by participants were examined throughout. Finally, because of the importance of outsider's attitudes to the relationship decision-making process and non-offending partners' lives as a whole, which became increasingly salient throughout this work, this thesis aimed to assess the attitudes of the general population and Criminal Justice System-adjacent professionals by developing and evaluating a scale measuring such attitudes.

Review of Research Findings

The below sections provide an overview of the main findings from each empirical study presented within this thesis. In line with the aims of this work, I first outline the research conducted primarily on the topic of relationship decision-making (i.e., Studies One through Three) before presenting Study Four and its focus on attitudes towards non-offending partners and their relationship decision. For more in-depth information about the results of each study, please refer to the relevant Results and Discussion sections. In subsequent sections of this chapter, the theoretical and practical implications of these findings, when taken together, as well as the limitations of the work described in this thesis and arising directions for future research will be discussed.

Relationship Decision-Making in Non-Offending Partners of Individuals who Have Sexually Offended

One primary aim of this thesis was to investigate the relationship decision-making process and factors contributing to this in non-offending partners. Due to the dearth of research into the relationship experiences of non-offending partners and specifically their own influence on the relationship, as reviewed in Chapters 1 and 2, such an investigation was necessary to provide a better understanding of the ways in which an offence may impact non-offending partners themselves and their relationships. A greater comprehension of these processes may not only lead to increased knowledge about non-offending partners from an academic standpoint but could also be a first step towards developing effective and tangible practice guidelines for professionals working with this population. Given the paucity

of literature in this field, as illustrated in Chapter 2, I used qualitative and mixed methods approaches to explore this topic with both “real-life” non-offending partners and general population samples.

Study One

The main aim of this first study was to develop a qualitative descriptive model of the relationship decision-making process in non-offending partners of individuals accused of sexual offending. Due to the lack of research investigating the experiences of non-offending partners as a whole, and their relationship experiences specifically, as discussed in Chapter 1, and the fact that this was the first study in this thesis, I chose Grounded Theory for the development of this model. Grounded Theory is considered ideal for such analyses of small amounts of qualitative data when existing theory and research is sparse (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Ward et al., 2006). The descriptive model which emerged during this process outlines how affective, behavioural, cognitive, and situational factors that arose before, during, and after finding out about the accusations, contributed to relationship decision-making in a sample of 23 non-offending partners.

The model highlights how complex and interconnected the large variety of factors influencing the relationship decision-making process may be. Here, non-offending partners may not only consider those factors directly related to the offence but also those related to their life experiences prior to and during the accusations. Thus, many of the reasons for relationship continuation reported by my sample mirrored those observed in the general population, for example, relationship satisfaction, commitment to one’s partner, and having children together (Joel et al., 2018; Le et al., 2010). Similarly, the main offence-unrelated reason for leaving the relationship endorsed by participants in this study, relationship dissatisfaction, has also been found to be a primary reason for relationship termination in the general population (Amato & Previti, 2003; Machia & Ogolsky, 2021). However, most importantly, my descriptive model has highlighted that non-offending partners were influenced in their relationship decision-making by factors that are unique to their situation,

especially when choosing to leave their relationship. Specifically, the model accounts for the variety of factors linked to the accusations (e.g., victim empathy), the reaction to the accusations by others (e.g., support to continue the relationship), and how these factors collectively contribute to the non-offending partner's assessment of their partner and relationship. Here, the main reason for deciding to stay with or leave their partner was, perhaps unsurprisingly, whether the non-offending partner perceived the accusations to be true.

Whilst the model is complex and flexible enough to accommodate the individual narratives of all non-offending partners interviewed as part of this study, despite their hugely heterogeneous experiences, I was unable to uncover any particular pathways through the model followed by different "types" of non-offending partners.

Study Two

Study One provided a detailed insight into the relationship decision-making process in a sample of non-offending partners. The main aim of the following second study was to expand upon the findings of Study One by assessing whether factors found to be related to relationship decision-making in Study One would not only be related to, but statistically predict, relationship decision-making after finding out about a partner's offending behaviour, in a large student sample. A diversification of the methods used, which I achieved by employing a mixed-methods vignette-based design, aimed to add to the robustness of the model built in Study One and addressed memory biases arising from the retrospective self-reports Study One relied upon. Using this design, I explored psychological and situational factors associated with relationship decision-making as reported by non-offending partners in the previous study, specifically: *Offence Type*, *Relationship Duration*, *Interpersonal*

Dependency[37], *Perceived Illegality*, *Attitudes Towards Those who Have Sexually Offended*, *Sexism*, and *Acceptance of Myths About Sexual Aggression.*

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the clearest results emerged from the investigation of the impact of Offence Type: Those whose partner had committed any type of sexual offence were generally very unlikely to want to continue their relationship. Additionally, those whose partner had committed a rape were less likely to want to stay in their relationship than those whose partner committed a sexual assault. Participants in both conditions reported higher levels of relationship termination likelihood than participants in the physical violence condition. An examination of the predictive value variables linked to relationship continuation in Study One may have in predicting relationship continuation in this sample yielded mixed results: When taken together, the variables predicted relationship continuation across conditions and for those whose partner committed a rape, but not for participants whose partner committed a sexual or violent assault. Neither *Relationship Duration*, nor *Benevolent* and *Hostile Sexism*, nor *Acceptance of Myths About Sexual Aggression* predicted relationship continuation in the overall sample or any of the conditions. However, higher levels of *Relationship Satisfaction* and positive *Attitudes Towards Those who Have Sexually Offended* predicted a higher willingness to continue the relationship in the overall sample only, whilst lower perceived Illegality of their partner's actions predicted relationship continuation in the overall sample and the rape condition. Finally, the only significant interaction effect demonstrated that Relationship Satisfaction predicted relationship continuation for those whose partner had committed a physically violent offence, but not a sexual assault or rape.[38]

[37] The scale measuring *Interpersonal Dependency* in this study (DPQ; Tyrer et al., 2004) was not found to be sufficiently internally consistent. Thus, this variable was excluded from analysis in Study Two.

[38] Due to the mixed results by vignette condition and overall large number of predictors, the results of this study and their theoretical implications are not discussed in-depth here. For an in-depth discussion of each predictor variable, please see Chapter 4.

Like in Study One, participants provided both offence-related and -unrelated reasons for their relationship decision, after being asked to enter these into a text field. However, unlike in Study One, no offence-unrelated reasons were given for leaving the relationship, which is unsurprising as participants were all in the relationship at the time of the experiment. Despite this, many of the findings of this qualitative element of Study Two mirrored the findings of Study One: Perceived *Danger* and empathy towards the victim, for instance, were named as reasons for wanting to leave the relationship, whilst *Love* or *Commitment* towards their partner were reported as reasons for staying with their partner. However, in contrast to non-offending partners in Study One, participants in Study Two very frequently described wanting to leave their relationship due to an interpretation of the sexual nature of the sexual offences as *Infidelity*. Additionally, *Outside Pressure* to end the relationship and *Deception* were not particularly common themes in this study perhaps because participants had not been confronted with others' reactions and directly "witnessed" the offending behaviour.

Study Three

Studies One and Two provided insights into the relationship decision-making process in non-offending partners. Here, Study Two examined this in a hypothetical mixed methods study with a student sample thus highlighting some important factors influencing relationship decision-making that non-offending partners may consider when directly confronted with a partner's offending behaviour. Whilst Study Two provided some valuable information on this process, its findings may have been limited by some methodological issues which I aimed to address in a subsequent replication - Study Three.[39] Most importantly, recruiting from a community sample not only increased generalisability but also allowed me to assess relationship decision-making for individuals in longer-term relationships, specifically differences between those who had children with their partners and those who had not,

[39] The variables related to relationship decision-making assessed in this study were the same as assessed in Study Two, with the exception of the impact that having children might have on the relationship decision.

which participants in Study One reported as both a reason to stay with or leave their partner. Additionally, a different, internally consistent, measure was introduced to assess interpersonal dependency. Finally, the relative importance of each relationship decision reason given by participants was examined by asking participants to rank the three most important reasons behind their relationship decision, in order.

Participants who had children with their partner were more likely to indicate wanting to stay in the relationship across conditions and in the sexual assault condition. However, this difference was not observed for those in the physical violence or rape condition. This suggested that there may be a more complex interaction with additional factors, for example the perceived levels of danger for the child associated with the specific offending behaviour, or the feasibility of leaving their partner, for instance regarding childcare.

Replicating the results of Study Two, participants were again overall unlikely to want to continue their relationship following their partner's offence, especially when their partner had committed an act of sexual violence. Unlike in Study Two, however, the predictors, when taken together, predicted relationship continuation in the overall sample and across conditions. Additionally, the amount of variance explained by the model was greater than in Study Two, suggesting that the included predictors may be more important to non-offending partners in longer-term relationships. The findings for the predictive value of each individual predictor were once again mixed and, additionally, differed from those observed in Study Two. Similar to Study Two, the perceived *Illegality* of the participants' partners' actions was a significant predictor across all conditions and samples. Additionally, *Hostile Sexism* again did not predict relationship continuation. However, in contrast to Study Two, *Relationship Duration* and *Acceptance of Myths About Sexual Aggression* were important predictors across almost all conditions and groups. Further, there were no interaction effects between *Relationship Satisfaction* (unlike in Study Two) or any other predictors and relationship continuation, apart from perceived Illegality, and *Benevolent* and *Hostile Sexism*. Here, perceived *Illegality* had the strongest effect on relationship continuation for those whose

partner had committed a rape, whilst *Benevolent* and *Hostile Sexism* had the strongest effect for participants whose partner had committed a sexual assault. These interactions were not found for participants who had children with their partners.[40]

Like in Studies One and Two, participants provided qualitative offence-related and -unrelated reasons for their relationship decision. Again, mirroring Study Two, no offence-related reasons were given for wanting to terminate the relationship. One main difference between Study Three and Study Two was that participants in this study more commonly reported wanting to stay in their relationship due to *Negative Consequences* (e.g., financial impact) or because of their *Children*. This reflects the personal situation of this general population sample who, in comparison to the student sample in Study Two, were more often in longer-term relationships or marriages in which they may rely on their partner for financial, emotional, or practical support. Whilst most other reasons provided by participants in this study were similar to those given in Study Two, participants' ranking of their responses additionally gave insight into the relative importance they attributed to each of the factors they had considered. For example, whilst viewing a sexual offence as *Infidelity* was still commonly reported as a reason for relationship termination, this was not usually seen as the most important reason to leave their partner. Rather, simply labelling the offence as such, or having empathy with the victim were often named as the main reason for wanting to terminate their relationship. However, this difference between the reason named most commonly and the reason named to be most important was not as clearly observed for relationship continuation reasons, where the *Commitment* or *Love* and feelings they had for their partner were both the most common reason overall and the most common primary reason, for those whose partner committed a sexual offence.

[40] Due to the mixed results by vignette condition and overall large number of predictors, the results of this study and their theoretical implications are not discussed in-depth here. For an in-depth discussion of each predictor variable, please see Chapter 5.

Attitudes Towards Non-Offending Partners of Individuals who Have Sexually Offended

The previous studies have demonstrated that non-offending partners of those who have committed, or been accused of committing, sexual offences may be more likely to leave their relationship than those whose partners have committed other offences due to a complex array of factors which vary widely from individual to individual. Because of the heterogeneity of this population, non-offending partners have equally varied and complex support needs. As a result, the danger of stigmatisation by groups that could provide such support, especially in the aftermath of a relationship decision, may be high. This is demonstrated by the fact that participants in the previous studies, and non-offending partners in past research (Armitage et al., 2023; Duncan et al., 2022) have reported a fear of judgement and shame and negative interactions with agencies. Rather than providing the support non-offending partners require, these interactions may instead increase courtesy stigma.

One factor underlying hostile treatment of non-offending partners may be prejudicial attitudes towards them and their relationship decision. As previous research has shown negative attitudes to threaten the therapeutic relationship and treatment outcomes (e.g., for those working with individuals who have sexually offended; Harper et al., 2017), negative attitudes held by those attempting to support non-offending partners (e.g., police, social services) may equally hinder positive outcomes for them. Non-judgemental attitudes towards non-offending partners and their relationship decision may additionally decrease the shaming participants in the previous studies feared encountering should they decide to stay with their partner. Thus, decreasing prejudicial attitudes may allow non-offending partners to make the best relationship decision for themselves. However, there is a dearth of research examining such attitudes, specifically those held by professionals working in Criminal Justice System-adjacent agencies, who may commonly encounter non-offending partners. Additionally, the research that does exist (Plogher et al., 2016) has several shortcomings, including a reliance on the *sex offender* label which may actually further stigmatise non-

offending partners (see Lowe & Willis, 2020 for research on the negative impact of labelling for those who have sexually offended). Given this lack of research, as well as the importance of attitudes towards non-offending partners and the treatment they receive from intervening agencies for themselves and their relationship decision, which emerged throughout this thesis, the aim of this work was to examine attitudes that the general population and professionals working within Criminal Justice System-related agencies hold towards non-offending partners and their relationship decision-making. Whilst this was not initially planned as part of this thesis, it is nonetheless necessary to fully understand non-offending partners' experiences and the factors influencing their relationship decision-making, and consequently provide the best possible support for this heterogeneous group.

Study Four

To investigate and address potentially negative attitudes towards non-offending partners, their prevalence and magnitude had to be examined. Given the lack of research, including the lack of a suitable scale measuring these attitudes, the aims of this study were to: (1) develop a measure of attitudes towards non-offending partners, using non-stigmatising language; (2) investigate its factorial structure; (3) validate the arising factorial structure; and (4) use the measure to compare attitudes towards non-offending partners between professionals working for the police and social services, and the general population.

After analysing interviews with non-offending partners, the general population, police officers and social workers to create items, using exploratory factor analysis, I developed a scale measuring attitudes towards non-offending partners. The scale appeared to measure four main constructs: *Judgment of Non-Offending Partners' Relationship Decision,* which accounted for the largest amount of variance, implies that participants in all previous studies in this thesis, who reported being judged or fearing judgement of their relationship decision, were justified in these fears: Other peoples' attitudes towards the non-offending partner (or non-offending partners in general) influence non-offending partners' decision-making, and

vice versa. This also ties in with literature suggesting that courtesy stigma against non-offending partners may arise specifically due to their "privileged" position of technically being able to sever ties with the person who has offended (Condry, 2011). It further reflects the stereotypical representation of non-offending partners as bad parents, especially bad mothers, which I discussed at length in Chapter 1. Additionally, another construct assessed by this scale – participants' *Behavioural Intent* towards non-offending partners – measured how they may approach or treat this population. A separate construct measured participants' *Judgement of Non-Offending Partners' Character* which, in line with previous research (Plogher et al., 2016) characterises them as weak, mentally ill, or deviant. Cross-loadings between items of the two previously named factors suggested that individuals may be especially inclined to want to socially distance themselves from non-offending partners who they perceive to be devious or immoral, rather than vulnerable or weak. The last construct assessed how much *Shame* is attributed towards an individual because of their identity as a non-offending partner. This also reflects non-offending partners' perceptions of being shamed or feeling guilty for their partners' offending, as suggested by previous studies in this thesis. The distinctiveness of these constructs was confirmed through confirmatory factor analysis with an independent population.

The final part of the study found that those working for the police and social services expressed positive attitudes towards non-offending partners overall, and more positive attitudes than a general population sample. This not only ties in with intergroup contact theory (Allport, 1954) but also offers valuable insights into how prejudice towards non-offending partners may be reduced further.

Theoretical Implications of Findings

The findings of the studies within this thesis, when taken together, provide some valuable theoretical advancements for research investigating the experiences of non-offending partners. Whilst theoretical implications of the findings of each study are discussed

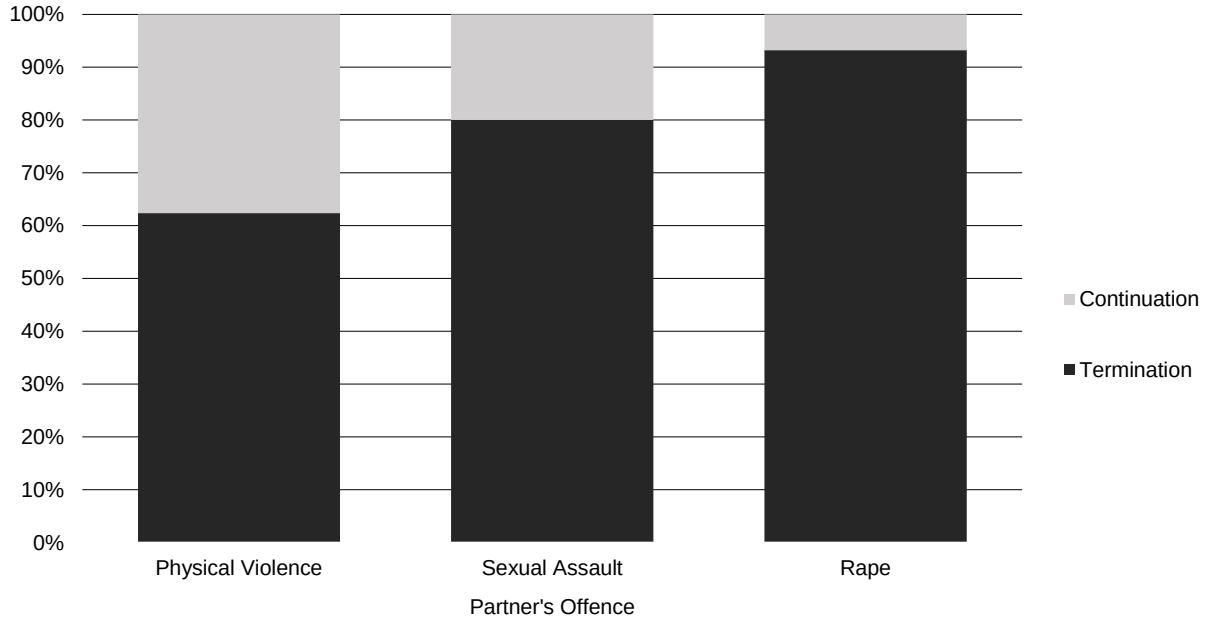
in-depth in the relevant chapter, the most salient overarching themes are subsequently discussed in turn.

Relationship Breakdown After Sexual Offending

One of the most unambiguous findings of the studies within this thesis was that most romantic relationships in which one of the partners commits a sexual offence are likely to break down, either in the short- or long-term. This was hinted at by the participant population in Study One, in which only 2 out of 23 non-offending partners were still in their relationship with the person who had offended at the time of interview, with 7 of these participants having ended the relationship immediately after finding out about the accusations against their partner. However, these high rates of relationship breakdown after an offence especially emerged from the findings of Studies Two and Three. Here, participants reported a very low likelihood of continuing their relationship if their partner was to commit a sexual offence – especially a rape (see Figure 7.1).

Figure 7.1

Studies Two and Three Relationship Decision by Offence Condition



Note. Figure represents percentage of participants from Studies Two and Three choosing to continue or terminate their relationship by offence condition.

Thus, the findings of this thesis are in line with previous research demonstrating that relationship termination rates in those who have sexually offended are high (Lytle et al., 2017). Here, of 25 individuals desisting from sexual offending, less than 50% remained in their relationship after being convicted of an offence. My research expands upon this by demonstrating replicating this in a large sample and showing that, given the high likelihood of relationship termination reported by participants throughout the studies within this thesis, the catalyst behind these relationship breakdowns often seems to be the non-offending partner.

Heterogeneity of Non-Offending Partners

Historically, non-offending partners have often been portrayed as a homogeneous population, especially when considering non-offending mothers – the only “type” of non-offending partner that has traditionally received any academic attention, as highlighted in

Chapter 1. Here, viewing all non-offending partners as “the same” allows for the stereotyping and courtesy stigma that non-offending partners are subjected to, as described in Chapter 2. However, throughout this thesis, it has become increasingly apparent that non-offending partners are, in fact, an extremely heterogeneous group. This heterogeneity in relationship situation, partner’s offence type, and the way in which the non-offending partner found out about the offence – to name but a few factors – made it impossible for me to identify discrete pathways followed by non-offending partners in their relationship decision-making in Study One. In Studies Two and Three I was similarly unable to find and reliably replicate specific predictors of relationship decision-making for non-offending partners because of the heterogeneity of the sample and their circumstances. Whilst factors such as the Offence Type played a significant role in all the above-mentioned studies, non-offending partners must consider a multitude of factors in their relationship decision-making that are not directly related to the offence, but which uniquely affect their lives and subsequent support needs. As a result, those working with and supporting non-offending partners should be aware of these diverse needs to be able to effectively support them, as will be outlined in the following Practical Implications section of this chapter. Additionally, this heterogeneity of non-offending partners presents a challenge for researcher attempting to investigate the experiences of this group, which will be discussed further in the following Limitations and Future Directions section of this chapter.

Impact of Offence Type on Relationship Decision-Making

Whilst the findings investigating variables linked to relationship decision-making were mixed overall, I repeatedly observed the high impact of the partner’s offence type on relationship decision-making in non-offending partners. In Study One, participants named the type of offence their partner was accused or convicted of as important to their decision-making, whereby contact offences were commonly viewed as more serious than non-contact or online offences. Similarly, Studies Two and Three confirmed this by demonstrating clearly that participants were more likely to indicate wanting to leave their partner if they had

committed a sexual offence, especially a rape, than if they had committed a non-sexual offence (see Figure 7.1 above). Consequently, it may be concluded that, irrespective of the variety of other factors, which may vary strongly between non-offending partners as described above, the type of offence that their partner has committed or is accused of may be the only factor influencing relationship decision-making in all non-offending partners.

Relationship Between Relationship Decision-Making and Others' Attitudes

A primary reason for relationship termination expressed by participants across multiple studies in this thesis was a fear of stigma and other peoples' negative attitudes towards the relationship and the non-offending partner themselves. In Study One, participants reported that an *outside pressure* to end the relationship (see Period 4 of the model) had an impact on their relationship decision-making, whilst a few participants in Studies Two and Three reported a fear of *shame* as a reason for ending their relationship if their partner was to commit a sexual offence. However, Study Four additionally suggests that others' views and attitudes may not only influence the non-offending partners relationship decision-making, but that their relationship decision may, in fact, similarly influence others' attitudes towards non-offending partners. This may be especially the case as the option to terminate the relationship and distance themselves from the person who has offended sets non-offending partners apart from most other family members of those who have sexually offended who may be considered "genetically contaminated" (Condry, 2013, see Chapter 2). Thus, a non-offending partner's relationship decision may be perceived by others as their defining feature, as explored in Study Four. This relationship between other people's attitudes and the non-offending partner's relationship decision-making suggests that fears of judgement and shaming due their relationship decision, which non-offending partners commonly reported throughout Studies One to Three, may be well-founded. Eventually, this may lead many non-offending partners to end their relationship which, realistically, could in turn improve others' attitudes towards them.

Practical Implications of Findings

Due to the dearth of literature examining the experiences of non-offending partners, as highlighted in Chapter 1, my findings, taken together, do not only provide novel theoretical insights but are specifically valuable due to their practical implications. Below, I outline potential practical implications of the research presented in this thesis, for: (a) intervening agencies (e.g., police, social services, probation) generally; as well as (b) support services for non-offending partners; (c) treatment and rehabilitation programmes for individuals who have sexually offended, specifically; and (d) the general public.

Implications for Intervening Agencies

Non-offending partners often encounter multiple agencies (e.g., police, social services, probation) in the aftermath of an offence or offence accusations. Chapter 1 explored how non-offending partners may feel "used" by these agencies in assisting their partners' desistance or in safeguarding their children. However, their support, or lack thereof, may not only be crucial for non-offending partners' relationship decision-making but also for their well-being as a whole, as reported by participants in Study One. Despite this, interactions with intervening agencies are commonly described to be inconsistent, ranging from supportive and empathetic, to judgmental or even hostile. Such negative responses may exacerbate the courtesy stigma non-offending partners already face (Duncan et al., 2020; Liddell & Taylor, 2015), as highlighted in Chapter 1. Fear of negative responses has even been described by participants in Studies Two and Three as a reason for wanting to end their relationship, despite the fact that there was no mention of witnesses' or others' reactions to the offence in the vignettes. Thus, it is especially important that those disclosing offending behaviour or working with non-offending partners do so without judgement and negative preconceptions. As a result, the factorial structure of the measure created in Study Four provided some crucial insight into the components comprising attitudes towards non-offending partners. For example, the Study's findings supported those of previous research (Plogher et al., 2016) demonstrating that non-offending partners may be viewed as naïve or

stupid either inherently (see the *Judgement of Character* subscale) or because they are in a relationship with someone who has committed a sexual offence (see the *Judgement of Relationship Decision* subscale), which could lead to them being patronised or belittled by professionals. In addition, several items in the measure constructed during Study Four reiterated the common perception of non-offending partners as bad parents, which has been shown at length by previous literature (e.g., Azzopardi et al., 2018; Pretorius et al., 2011), and was highlighted in Chapter 1. This directly contrasts the fact that non-offending partners are often used to safeguard their children (e.g., Bolen, 2003), which is a contradiction that should be explored further due to its importance to social work practice.

Despite the importance of intervening agencies to non-offending partners' experiences, and the potentially detrimental impact that their negative attitudes may have, there is currently no guidance for intervening agencies on how to appropriately approach non-offending partners. Thus, the insights gained throughout all studies in this thesis may inform training programmes or codes of practice for professionals, similar to the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales (Ministry of Justice, 2020). Here, if future research supports the link between increased contact with non-offending partners and more positive attitudes towards them, as discussed in-depth in Study Four, then intergroup contact theory (Allport, 1954) could form the basis of such training programmes. To reduce stigmatisation, training programmes may especially want to emphasise affective components, such as an increase in empathy and a reduction in anxiety (Pettigrew et al., 2011). The contact hypothesis facilitators proposed by Allport (1954) – common goals, equal status, no intergroup competition, and authority sanction – whilst not strictly necessary for the success of intergroup contact (Pettigrew et al., 2011), may also be incorporated to increase the quality of any training programmes. Specifically, as suggested in the discussion for Study Four, equal status and achieving common goals could be focal points of guidelines and programmes for those who are likely to encounter non-offending partners in a professional capacity. Here, stereotypes of non-offending partners as a homogeneous, naïve

group should be addressed and challenged as equal status may specifically be hindered if non-offending partners are perceived to be vulnerable or stupid, as highlighted above. At the same time, the achievement of common goals could emphasise goals that specifically relate to individual organisations. For instance, those working within the probation service or public protection services may focus on the common goal of rehabilitating the non-offending partner's partner, while ensuring that the non-offending partner's own needs are not neglected.

The findings of the studies presented within this thesis may also provide directions for the contents included in such training programmes and codes of practice: Professionals should be made aware of the high likelihood of relationship termination and the magnitude of negative affect experienced by non-offending partners, as highlighted in Studies One through Three. For instance, it is important that offending behaviour be disclosed sensitively, which is currently not usually the case, as non-offending partners in Study One reported. An increased awareness of this may minimise the trauma non-offending partners in previous research reported experiencing particularly as a result of the way the police disclosed their partners' offending behaviour to them (Armitage et al., 2023; Duncan et al., 2022). Additionally, training programmes may also demonstrate the complexity of the relationship decision-making process and the diversity of non-offending partners as a population, as outlined throughout Studies One through Three, which could enhance perspective-taking towards non-offending partners and thus reduce the courtesy stigma they experience. Finally, the measure developed during Study Four may be used to assess the effectiveness of training programmes and codes of practice by measuring attitudes towards non-offending partners before and after completion.

Implications for Support Services for Non-Offending Partners

Even though non-offending partners may experience significant psychological distress because of their partners' offending, as reviewed in Chapter One and highlighted by previous research (Duncan et al., 2020) and Studies One through Three of this thesis, there

are currently no support services in England and Wales that are specifically aimed at non-offending partners and their needs. Access to the limited support that is available is often restricted by, usually financial, barriers (see Study One; Duncan et al., 2022). However, as highlighted previously in this chapter, non-offending partners' circumstances are complex and unique – unlike those experienced by any other population – as highlighted by the findings of Study One. My inability to replicate predictors of non-offending partners' relationship decision-making in Studies Two and Three further underlines just how heterogeneous non-offending partners are. Here, many factors, even those not directly related to the offence or accusations, uniquely affect them and their subsequent support needs. For example, those primarily considering staying with their partner because of financial or childcare requirements may have different, and more practical, support needs than those who would like to remain in the relationship because they are emotionally attached to their partner.

Thus, those building and providing support services, such as counsellors, should be aware of the diverse support needs of non-offending partners to be able to appropriately support them. The research conducted in this thesis, and specifically the model developed during Study One may inform such support programmes for those whose partners have been accused or convicted of sexual offending, regardless of whether they stay in their relationship. Here, the model of relationship decision-making may be used by those administering support to demonstrate to those accessing support the variety and complexity of factors related to their decision-making. As a result, this may help them understand their own situation better and thus enable them to make the best possible relationship decision for themselves.

Implications for Treatment and Rehabilitation of Those who Have Offended

Potential implications of the research presented in this thesis for those providing treatment to people who have sexually offended will mostly affect non-offending partners whose partner has been convicted of offending and is being treated as part of a

rehabilitation-based programme. Some extremely prominent frameworks which often build the basis for treatment programmes, namely the Risk-Need-Responsivity Model (Bonta & Andrews, 2017) and the Good Lives Model (Ward & Gannon, 2006), place emphasis on the importance of interpersonal relationships. Such programmes are widely used, for instance, in the UK (e.g., HM Prison and Probation Service, 2021) and the US (e.g., Washington State Department of Corrections, 2022) due to their efficacy (for reviews, see Hanson et al., 2009; and Mallion et al., 2020). Because of their widespread usage, and the dearth of research exploring relationships of those who have offended beyond investigating their "utility", despite their central role in treatment, the research conducted as part of this thesis could be vital to inform and improve elements of rehabilitation programmes and frameworks which focus on relationships. It may also provide a greater understanding of non-offending partners' experiences to those who have sexually offended, and the professionals working with them, more generally.

The model developed in Study One, for instance, could illustrate to treatment providers and the person who has offended how complex and difficult the relationship decision the non-offending partner had to make is. This may increase empathy and relationship quality. Similarly, treatment programmes may wish to involve non-offending partners who decide to stay with their partner who has offended. This should only be done if it is in both partners' best interests to avoid "using" the non-offending partner in the ways outlined in Chapter 1. This could be achieved, for instance, by incorporating couples' treatment to address potential issues in the relationship between the non-offending partner and the person who has offended. Addressing potential issues may be particularly fruitful as Studies One through Three of this thesis have suggested that relationships could be particularly susceptible to breakdown after accusations or offending behaviour have emerged. For example, couples therapy may address potential intimacy deficits in those who have offended, which previous research has commonly linked to sexual offending (for a review, see Martin & Tardif, 2014). Additionally, therapy may also wish to tackle an issue

commonly named by participants in Studies Two and Three as a reason for wanting to end their relationship after their partner has sexually offended: Viewing their partner's offending behaviour as infidelity due to its sexual nature. Whilst this was usually a reason for relationship termination, it may still present a significant problem for non-offending partners who choose to stay with their partner. Here, whilst offence-specific needs for the person who has offended would be addressed by a rehabilitation framework, an integrative approach to relationship issues caused by infidelity, as used with general population couples (e.g., Fife et al., 2008) could focus on individual, relational, and intergenerational problems. This treatment especially recognises the potentially traumatic impact infidelity may have, which could be modified to include the nonconsensual nature of the sexual offence. Additionally, it builds relational skills, promotes an understanding of vulnerabilities, and addresses forgiveness.

As some of the accusations against participants' partners in Study One pertained to offending behaviour thought to have occurred before the relationship, the findings of this study may also give those who have offended insight into how to broach the topic of having committed a sexual offence with a prospective or new romantic partner. For instance, those providing rehabilitative treatment may discuss with the individual who has offended the importance of certain factors for the relationship decision-making process, as shown in Study One, such as the importance of the source from whom the non-offending partner hears about the accusations. Additionally, treatment providers may consider using the model developed in Study One, as well as insights from Studies Two and Three to prepare the person who has offended for the potential outcomes of broaching their past offending behaviour to a new partner, as applicable to the circumstances surrounding their relationship and offending. Taken together, the above suggestions may not only help practitioners to incorporate non-offending partners into the rehabilitation process, but to do so ethically, as discussed in Chapter 1.

Implications for the General Public

In contrast to individuals working within the Criminal Justice System, the general public may be unlikely to knowingly encounter non-offending partners in their day-to-day lives. This could especially be the case because non-offending partners may try to hide their identity for fear of stigmatisation and public shaming, as established by prior research (Duncan et al., 2020) and supported by the findings of Studies One through Three of this thesis. As a result, and as discussed in Chapter 2, non-offending partners may be further isolated and experience a loss of the social support they may so desperately need in the aftermath of an offence discovery (C. Jones et al., 2021, C. Jones et al., 2023, Rapp, 2011). However, Study Four of this thesis demonstrated that non-offending partners may in fact be justified in their worries in that they may be judged to be naïve, stupid, or a bad parent, especially if they decide to remain in their relationship with the person who has offended. Here, I additionally found that the general public may have more negative attitudes towards non-offending partners than those working for the police or social services. In line with the intergroup contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954), the somewhat frequent contact between non-offending partners and professionals working in Criminal Justice System-related agencies may be the reason for these reduced levels of prejudice.

Without knowingly having any contact with non-offending partners, members of the general public may rely on media portrayals of non-offending partners to form their impressions of this group. As highlighted in Chapter 6, however, the few available media portrayals of non-offending partners paint a stereotypical picture of them as a group of victims, bad parents, or even enablers of their partner's offending behaviour (e.g., Camden et al., 2018), thus further perpetuating harmful stereotypes and stigmatisation. Given the potential impact of such media portrayals on the general public's attitudes, academics and treatment providers working with non-offending partners may consider being more proactive to pre-empt media stigmatisation against this population. This could be achieved, for example, through greater engagement with the media to correct negative and stereotypical

narratives about non-offending partners whilst remaining respectful and empathetic of the experiences of those who have been victimised. Ultimately, this may improve societal attitudes towards non-offending partners who are stigmatised through no fault of their own, reduce their experiences of ostracism and social isolation, and subsequently improve their wellbeing during the already traumatic offence-discovery period.

Limitations and Future Directions

The findings presented in this thesis provide, to my knowledge, the first examination of the relationship decision-making process in non-offending partners, and also extend greatly upon the minimal existing research into attitudes towards this population. Given the current paucity of literature centring on the experiences of non-offending partners, and the diverse range of methods used throughout my work, the studies reported in this thesis have the potential to contribute significantly to existing academic knowledge, as well as having tangible implications for practice. Despite these theoretical advances and practical contributions, the findings of my research should be interpreted alongside their limitations, which I outline in the following section. The limitations specific to individual studies presented in this thesis have been discussed in-depth in each empirical chapter (Chapters 3 to 6). Here, I therefore provide an overview of general limitations affecting most of my reported research and subsequently arising avenues for future work in this area.

Heterogeneity of Non-Offending Partners

As highlighted previously, one main difficulty facing this research, and, in fact, any research investigating the experiences of non-offending partners, is the heterogeneity of non-offending partners as a population. Due to the diversity of offence types their partners were accused or convicted of, and their personal circumstances, the non-offending partners who took part in this research, for instance, in Study One, were a more diverse group than, say, individuals convicted or detained of certain offences, which have been commonly examined by methodologically similar studies (e.g., Gannon et al., 2008; Tyler et al., 2014). Due to the heterogeneity of this population, certain groups of non-offending partners (e.g.,

those whose partners committed intrafamilial offences, those whose partners committed acts of voyeurism) were not represented. Subsequently, the findings of this thesis, and especially the model built in Study One, should not be seen as strictly generalisable to all non-offending partners, but rather as representative of the non-offending partners who shared their experiences with me. However, a key strength of Grounded Theory, which was used to develop the model in Study One, is its ability for modification of models in response to additional data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; e.g., Gannon et al., 2008; Polaschek et al., 2001). Thus, future research may wish to investigate additional, diverse samples of non-offending partners of those who have committed various sexual offences to refine the model further and increase its validity. Another limitation arising from the heterogeneity of non-offending partners may be the ambiguity of grouping them for the purposes of developing an attitudinal scale, as described in Study Four. Participants completing the scale may have difficulty "settling" on one answer per item as their attitudes could be very different depending on what type of offence the non-offending partner's partner has committed, for instance. Here, future research may again branch out to investigate different "types" of non-offending partners and the attitudes towards them by replacing "those who have sexually offended" with "those who have committed a [specific type of offence]" in the items of the scale to examine this potential effect of offence type on judgements of non-offending partners.

Self-Selection Biases

As all participants participated in the studies reported in this thesis voluntarily, self-selection biases could have influenced some of the findings. For example, participants in Study One, who were not in the relationship anymore at the time of the interview could have "used" the interview to portray their partner negatively, in line with a negative re-definition of the relationship (e.g., due to jealousy) that commonly occurs after a relationship breakdown (e.g., Kellas et al., 2008). On the other hand, participants who were in the relationship at the time of hearing about the study but may have had ongoing legal issues because of their partner's offending behaviour would probably be unlikely to take part due to the fact that they

may be: (a) preoccupied because of the priority that court proceedings etc., may take; and (b) afraid that any details they disclose could be used against their partners in legal proceedings, despite being guaranteed anonymity. Future research may wish to correct this by attempting to recruit more participants who are currently in relationships with someone who has offended, especially those who are in the early stages of discovering their partners' offending behaviour. Here, caution must be exercised to avoid traumatisation, and data collection may be incorporated into support groups to ensure that it is not only beneficial for the research but also for the non-offending partner themselves. Additionally, in Study Three, another issue arising from self-selection bias may be that participants, unlike those in Study Two, could have been motivated to take part due to potential monetary compensation, in the form of a prize draw. Thus, participants in this study may have also relied on their partners for financial support and may have subsequently overstated the importance of financial dependency in the decision-making process, when compared to the general population. However, financial dependency should not be disregarded as a factor influencing the relationship decision in non-offending partners. Rather, future research may incorporate measures of financial dependency to assess its importance, which would mirror research demonstrating that individuals tolerate disadvantageous or even abusive relationships due to financial dependency (for a review, see Bornstein, 2006). In addition, self-selection bias in Study Four may have led to professionals who may be more aware of, engaged with, and interested in, the experiences of non-offending partners to take part in the study, which could have skewed the results to be disproportionately positive. Future research may try to recruit a wider range of professionals, especially those not working long-term with non-offending partners, to investigate whether these results are reliable.

Response Biases

The effect of self-selection biases could also have been exacerbated by response biases. For instance, despite being guaranteed anonymity, participants in Study One who were still in their relationship may have been careful not to disclose the negative aspects of

their relationships in an attempt to present their family as “intact” as possible due to the intense scrutiny they may otherwise face, for example, from social services. Further, response biases may also have affected participants in Studies Two and Three. As participants were most likely aware of the stigma surrounding sexual offending, the high percentage of relationship termination may actually reflect their desire to distance themselves from sexual offending generally and make this evident to the researcher due to social desirability. While this may also obviously play a role in relationship decision-making in “real-life” non-offending partners, future research could investigate the role of others’ attitudes and perceived judgement in this process further. Another effect of such social desirability bias and impression management may be the generally favourable attitudes towards non-offending partners observed in police officers and social workers, despite the fact that non-offending partners often reported facing hostile treatment. As invitations for participation were sent out to participants’ work emails, participants may have been motivated to exaggerate their positive and non-judgemental attitudes. Future research may attempt to decrease the effect of potential biases on these results by avoiding recruiting professionals through official channels, and rather using a pre-screening tool, for instance, as available on crowdsourcing websites.

Small Sample Sizes

Some of the studies reported in this thesis had relatively small sample sizes, which may limit the generalisability of their findings. This may especially be an issue in Study One due to the heterogeneity of non-offending partners as a population, as described previously in this section. However, the comparatively small sample of participants who had children with their partner in Study Three also made it difficult to generalise the effect that having children would have on the relationship decision-making process. In the future, researchers may aim to recruit more participants with children to examine the potential effect further. Additionally, the reader should also consider that the relatively small sample of professionals in Study Four may have influenced the results. Specifically, most participants in this section

of the study were responsible for managing those who had sexually offended and, as a result, may have had more sustained contact with non-offending partners than other professionals would. Thus, future research should recruit more diverse samples of professionals to investigate whether the generally favourable attitudes towards non-offending partners observed in these participants replicate.

Researcher Biases

All research, especially qualitative research, could be influenced by researcher biases. For example, the focus on relationship decision-making in the scale created as part of Study Four may be a reflection of my previous work on the relationship decision-making process. As all studies in this thesis included qualitative aspects, I was mindful to employ strategies (e.g., reflexivity) to minimise such biases sufficiently. Nevertheless, future research should aim to cross-validate any results from this work, especially those from Studies One and Four, to completely eliminate researcher biases.

Conclusion

Non-offending partners experience, through no fault of their own, significant negative impact following the discovery of their partner's offending behaviour, such as financial hardship and ostracism from their community. Despite such negative consequences, and the importance of non-offending partners for aiding their partners' desistance and safeguarding their children, which has been overemphasised by historical avenues of research, non-offending partner's own experiences have been mostly neglected by the literature. While very recent emerging research has begun to examine the impact of their partner's offending behaviour on non-offending partners, such research is still in its infancy. Here, the literature thus far has specifically failed to investigate the impact of a sexual offence on the non-offending partner's relationship, and the role that the non-offending partner themselves plays in the subsequent relationship decision-making process.

Given this gap in the literature, the research reported in this thesis aimed to provide a preliminary understanding of relationship decision-making and related factors in non-

offending partners by employing a variety of different methodologies. Taken together, the findings suggest that non-offending partners are not only likely to leave their relationship after discovering an offence, but they are also in fact more likely to do so than those whose partner has committed a non-sexual offence (Studies Two and Three). However, Studies One through Three have shown that the reasoning behind this relationship decision is complex and influenced by a wide range of offence-related and -unrelated factors. While offence-related factors, such as the type of offence, are undeniably important to non-offending partners' relationship decision-making, the importance of offence-unrelated factors that are unique to each individual, for example, their relationship characteristics and outside influences, should not be underestimated. Overall, non-offending partners seem to weigh the risks (e.g., ostracism) and benefits (e.g., financial support) of relationship continuation against the risks (e.g., less support for childcare) and benefits (e.g., decreased shaming through peers and professionals) of relationship termination. These situations are, just like the non-offending partners facing them, incredibly heterogeneous.

One factor influencing relationship decision-making which became especially salient during Study One, but also emerged during Studies Two and Three were others' attitudes towards the non-offending partner and their relationship decision. This apparent importance of outside influences for the relationship decision-making process, coupled with the risk of increased traumatisation through commonly hostile interactions with professional agencies in the aftermath of an offence (Study One) highlighted the need to further investigate attitudes towards non-offending partners. Thus, the final study of my thesis, Study Four, aimed to develop and evaluate a scale assessing attitudes towards non-offending partners and compare these attitudes between professionals working within Criminal Justice System-related agencies (i.e., police and social services) and a general population sample. Here, I found that the factor influencing individual's attitudes towards non-offending partners the most was their judgement of non-offending partners' relationship decision. Thus, non-offending partners' relationship decision-making and others' attitudes towards them and their

relationship decision seem to influence each other cyclically: Non-offending partners are not only influenced in their relationship decision by others' attitudes, as shown in Studies One through Three, but their relationship decision also heavily impacts others' perceptions of them. However, on a more positive note, professionals working for Criminal Justice System-related agencies (i.e., police officers and social workers) were not only shown to hold positive attitudes towards non-offending partners generally, and their relationship decision specifically, but also held significantly more positive attitudes when compared to those held by participants from the general population. This suggests that increased contact with non-offending partners may be key to reducing stereotypical and negative attitudes towards them, especially in light of their relationship decision.

The empirical findings of this thesis present, to my knowledge, the first investigation of relationship decision-making, and related factors, in non-offending partners. Whilst future research is required to address some of their limitations, the current studies do not only offer valuable theoretical insights into the, thus far understudied, experiences of non-offending partners but also provide tangible practical implications for those encountering this population in a professional capacity. Thus, I hope that both practitioners and academics working with non-offending partners will build upon the work presented in this thesis to develop their understanding of issues facing non-offending partners.

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