Attitudes towards Victimization: 
Blaming and Self-Blame

Whether the latter can prevent the former and more

Masterthesis Victimology & Criminal Justice – Tilburg University

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“Just because you feel good, doesn’t make you right.”

*Skunk Anansie* (Hedonism)
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Foreword and Acknowledgments

This is the first paragraph of my thesis, the last part of the master program in Victimology and Criminal Justice at Tilburg University. My interest in victimology started a few years earlier when I - as a law student - first attended a lecture in victimology, which was organized by the enthusiastic staff of INTERVICT. A little later, dr. Antony Pemberton and prof. dr. mr. Rianne Letschert taught me my first insights in victimological methodology. During that course, the idea for this thesis began to grow. We had to design an experiment based on a very interesting study by Kim Lens Msc (see Lens, van Doorn, Pemberton, & Bogaerts, 2013), in which the emotional appearance of a victim as shown in a Victim Impact Statement, was evaluated by participants. My fellow students Susan Mathijsen and Hatice Selçuk and I designed a study to research whether observers of a victim would think differently about a victim that experienced positive consequences from victimization than victims that would only describe negative consequences (through a fictional Victim Impact Statement). Another research question that I had in mind was whether observers of a victim would think differently about a victim that experienced and expressed guilt than victims that would only assign blame to the perpetrator of the victimization. By now, I have turned this research idea into a master thesis, which includes all the methods that I learned in the above-mentioned course. My thesis was supervised by Antony and examined by Antony and Rianne, who I would like to thank for their enthusiasm and their willingness to share their enormous amount of knowledge with their students. I furthermore want to thank prof. mr. Tijs Kooijmans for giving me the opportunity to conduct an experiment in one of his lectures (while assisted by Caia Vlieks and Jurgen Braspenning), the staff and volunteers of Victim Support Holland (dr. Sonja Leferink, Lara Sayaner, Jan Beijer, Thea Nijbakker, Paul Tieman, Gerard Zandvliet, Tsai-Yen Chew) who made it possible to conduct the interviews for this thesis and last but not least friends and family, most importantly my parents and Joeri Wissink for their support and helpful comments on previous unfinished versions of this thesis. Though I will (hopefully) graduate by defending my thesis, which means that I will no longer be a student in victimology, I hope I will enjoy my journey of learning & victimology much longer through other ways.
1. Introduction

“Few aspects of victimization are as interesting as the phenomenon of self-blame” is how Miller and Porter (1983, p. 139) start their article. It indeed is an intriguing concept, just like blame that is assigned to the victim not by herself\(^1\), but by others. As Symonds (1975) writes: “There seems to be a marked reluctance and resistance to accept the innocence or accidental nature of victim behavior. Such reluctance is shown by community responses, police behavior, family reactions, and, surprisingly, by the victims themselves.” (p. 19). Hereby, the main topic of this thesis is given: attitudes towards victimization, blame and self-blame. In general, both blame (blaming the victim) and self-blame are seen as problematic: self-blame would be related to trauma and blaming the victim to secondary victimization. This thesis tries to find a new and more positive angle to look at the relation between blame and self-blame: can the latter prevent the former (and more)?

The framework that is chosen to find an answer to this question is the Belief in a Just World, a concept developed by (inter alia) Melvin Lerner, roughly fifty years ago. As will be explained more clearly in the next chapter, the Belief in a Just World is a robust belief settled in our minds, which implies that we think that the world is just. Every counterfactual experience (called “threat” to the belief), such as the confrontation with an innocent victim, needs to be brought in accordance with this belief. There are several ways to do this, e.g. by blaming the victim (stating that the victim caused the victimization at least partly) or victim derogation (linking the characteristics of the victim, for example her attractiveness or intelligence to the cause of the victimization). In this way, the threats are neutralized and we can again believe that the world is just, even though in fact the world has not become just, because a negative response was given to the victim, which can harm the victim even more. Ullman (2005) has argued that “negative social reactions have a detrimental impact on victims’ adjustment” (p. 505).

I will argue that while a victim feels a sense of guilt, which indeed might be very unpleasant for the victim, there could still be a positive element to this: when she expresses the feeling of self-blame, she should receive less negative reactions from others through the Belief in a Just World-mechanism, because she is not such a big threat to the belief.

\(^1\) In this thesis, the victim will be portrayed as a female for readability purposes. A female victim is chosen because, as will be explained later, in the experiment and interviews conducted, a vignette about a female victim is used. In the literature study, a lot of research reviewed is done on female victims. This however does not mean that a similar victim could not be male.
How I exactly came to this hypothesis will be explained in chapter 3, after the general theory on self-blame and the theory of the Belief in a Just World have been discussed through a literature review in chapter 2. After the hypotheses have been crystalized, the experiment that was set up to test the hypotheses and the results are discussed in chapter 4.

The experimental study consists of a vignette study in which a female rape victim is presented through a legal Victim Impact Statement. In practice, a victim can use the Victim Impact Statement to express feelings and consequences of a crime within the criminal justice system. In this experimental study, this instrument is chosen to represent a victim who either explicitly expresses self-blame or a victim who does not express this feeling. Through a short questionnaire, participants rated the victim, thereby measuring the extent to which they use methods to neutralize the threat that the presented victim poses to their Belief in a Just World.

Chapter 5 deals with the practical side of the legal framework. The set up and the results of a series of interviews with Victim Support Holland, an organization in the Netherlands that assists victims in writing a Victim Impact Statement, will show whether, how and to what extent self-blame is expressed within a Victim Impact Statement in practice. Thus, whereas chapter 4 deals with reactions on a victim measured within an experimental setting, chapter 5 examines whether self-blame reaches observers in legal practice. Additionally, the reactions of specific observers, namely staff of Victim Support, are examined.

In chapter 6, a conclusion will be given by discussing what role self-blame can have in attitudes towards victimization when examined from the perspective of the Just World Theory. This conclusion will be based on the three parts of this thesis: the literature review from chapter 2, the results for the experiment as laid down in chapter 4 and the results from the interviews as presented in chapter 5.
2. An overview of the literature

2.1. Self-blame

It has been widely recognized that victims experience a feeling of guilt and that they often accept a certain degree of responsibility for the occurrence of the victimizing event (Coates, Wortman, & Abbey, 1979; Frazier, 1990, 2003; Frieze, 1979; Janoff-Bulman, 1979; Karuza & Carey, 1984; Libow & Doty, 1979; Littleton, Magee, & Axsom, 2007; Medea & Thompson, 1974; Miller, Handley, Markman, & Miller, 2010; Miller & Porter, 1983; Moor & Farchi, 2011; Peterson, Schwarz, & Seligman, 1981; Symonds, 1975; Thornton et al., 1988; Ullman, 1996; Ullman & Najdowski, 2011), even when they are not to blame for their victimization or to a lesser extent than they feel (Miller & Porter, 1983; Ross & DiTecco, 1975). They also blame behaviors that are not causally linked to the victimization (Alicke, 2000).

Before diving into the body of research that has already been published on self-blame, it is important to be clear on the definition of self-blame. Blame is a psychological construct referring to evaluation of responsibility or attribution. Elements that make up the foundations of blame are intention, causation and foresight (personal control) (taken from the culpable control model, Alicke, 2000, p. 557). In this thesis, self-blame (of a victim) means the assigning of responsibility by a victim to the self. The victim experiences blame for what has happened to an extent that can range from having played a role in the realization of the victimization to taking full responsibility for becoming a victim. This range therefore has two dimensions: a degree of attribution and an object of blame: the event (the cause) or being the victim of that specific event (the occasion) (Miller & Porter, 1983).

Apart from distinguishing between cause and occasion, self-blame can be characterological or behavioral (Janoff-Bulman, 1979). Characterological (self-)blame refers to the situation in which someone is blamed on the basis of the character of that person,

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2 Furthermore, at this point it is important to notice that not all research on self-blame in victims define victims in the same way. Although the majority of the articles reviewed in this chapter research self-blame following sexual assault or rape, the self-blame literature also concerns victims of illnesses, accidents and victims of crimes, such as hate speech, (domestic) violence or rape. Miller & Porter (1983) argue that different events and effects have different impacts in terms of self-blame on the victim, as is also shown in this paragraph. However, limiting this literature review to victims of rape because this is the kind of victim that will be researched in the empirical study of this thesis, will give a too limited view on self-blame. Where the context of victimization is important, this will be made clear in this review.

3 This research will (at this point) not judge whether this responsibility is justified or rational.
involving relatively stable, uncontrollable variables (e.g. being a careless person or being a weak person), whereas behavioral (self-)blame relies on specific behaviors in a specific situation (e.g. having behaved incautiously or not having resisted), which are much less fixed and much more controllable. In the literature, this distinction is perceived to be important to different adjustment outcomes (paragraph 2.1.3.). Moreover, Janoff-Bulman (1979) linked the distinction to the theory of a Belief in a Just World in the sense that characterological (self-)blame can be compared to derogation and behavioral (self-)blame to blaming the victim. On the other hand, Lerner (2003) uses the term “self-derogation” for (characterological) self-blame. Since this is related to the observer’s perspective rather than the self-blame perspective, this topic will further be dealt with in paragraph 2.2. Frazier (1990) however, doubts whether people can distinguish between characterological and behavioral self-blame.

2.1.1. Signs of self-blame

Having delineated the concept of self-blame, we can have a look at what kinds of victims show signs of self-blame. Questions that can be evoked in victims due to their victimization, which can lead to a certain degree of self-blame are the following (Miller & Porter, 1983):

- **Intrapersonal questions** (the “why-now”-question): questions that relate to the negative event in relation to similar, earlier experienced situations in which the outcome was non-victimizing. Miller & Porter (1983) expect this kind of questions to rise in the event of task failure rather than in real victimizing events such as rape.

- **Interpersonal questions** (the “why me and not someone else”-question): according to Miller & Porter (1983), this question is related to victimizing events such as rape, accidents and disease.

  According to Miller et al. (2010), “following distressing events, people naturally reflect upon how their experiences might have turned out more favorably had specific antecedents occurred differently” (p. 1122). This counterfactual thinking often goes hand in hand with self-blame.

  Medea and Thompson (1974) describe several stages of the recovery of the rape victim and place self-blame in the third stage, being the stage of *painfully reliving the incident*, that follows the stages of *initial reaction* (such as shock or anxiety or, on the other hand, extreme calmness) and *returning to normal life style*. In this third stage, the victim has to “re-establish her security” and she has to “resolve any negative feelings she may have about herself” (p. 101-105). This is where guilt can come into play, for example because she
thinks she did not do enough to avoid or stop the assault. Lerner and Miller (1978) also conclude that self-blame should not take place in the first stage.

2.1.2. The extent of blaming the self

The amount of blame that victims assign to themselves is dependent on several factors. First of all, the severity of the victimization influences the way people assign blame. Although in accordance with the Just World Theory, as will be discussed in paragraph 2.2., observers of the victim will assign more blame to the victim when the consequences of the victimization are more severe for the victim, the victim herself will - in the case of battered women - blame herself less and the perpetrator more (Frieze, 1979; Miller & Porter, 1983). However, rape victims will blame themselves more when the severity of the sexual assault increases (Wyatt, Notgrass, & Newcomb, 1990).

As can be seen, the effect might be different in victims of different kinds of victimization, or in more general terms, when the need to identify an explanation for the occasion of the victimization increases (Miller & Porter, 1983). Hence, a second factor that influences the assigning of self-blame is the type or nature of victimization and the kind of question that the victim seeks to answer (see paragraph 2.1.1.). Miller and Porter argue that “[p]erhaps a traumatic victimization, such as a rape or accident, is more likely to provoke a causal analysis than more chronic types of victimization [for the victim]” (1983, p. 150). Moreover, rape victims show higher levels of self-blame than other kinds of victims (Moor & Farchi, 2011).

A third factor is the duration or frequency of the victimization. On the one hand, the model of Shaver (as referred to in Littleton et al., 2007) explains that self-blame is highest when there is a low number of similar traumatic experiences in the past, when the negative event is likely to recur or has become chronic and when it does not often happen to others. On the other hand, in the literature, past victimization is also positively correlated with self-blame (see below; Miller et al. 2010), which could be explained as follows. Rather than self-blame related to the occurrence of the event or being victim of the event, the self-blame can now turn to blaming oneself for continuing to be a victim. The feeling of responsibility for the occurrence of the event and being a victim can decrease, while the feeling of guilt for the tolerance of the victimization can increase (Miller & Porter, 1983). Related to this are the

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4 Here, it is argued that battered women are less inclined to find an explanation for the event than for example rape victims, because battered women are often confronted with a cycle of violence rather than a single event, which makes the interpersonal question less prominent.
findings of Miller et al. (2010) that victims of sexual assault who had experienced sexual assault earlier, blamed themselves to a greater extent. Furthermore, Peterson et al. (1981) found that characterological self-blame increases with the number of bad life events. Although this does not have to be continuous violence in the strict sense, because the perpetrator does not necessarily have to be the same person, we again see that the more often victimization takes place, the greater the extent of self-blame is.

Fourthly, victim characteristics influence the extent to which victims blame themselves, such as psychological well being (Miller et al., 2010; Peterson et al., 1981) and age at the time of the victimization (Littleton et al., 2007; Wyatt et al., 1990). Littleton and Breitkopf (2006) and Miller et al. (2010) had also expected to find a link between the alcohol-use frequency and self-blame, because Koss, Figueredo, and Prince (2002) demonstrated a positive relationship here. In paragraph 2.2., more will be explained about individual differences in the strength of the Belief in a Just World. It is argued that this influences the amount of blame that is assigned to a victim by a bystander. At this point it needs to be noted that for self-blame, the individual differences are also relevant (Hafer & Olson, 1989).

Fifthly, the social environment of the victim is important in the development of self-blame. If the victim encounters a lot of negative attitudes from people who know that they have been victimized, this can lead to self-blame, especially when the negative attitudes include the blaming of the victim for the occurrence of the event. In the case of rape:

“The rape victim’s first reaction is usually to see the rape as a freakish accident or an isolated event and to see the rapist as a lunatic. But when the authorities and her family treat her with the same horror and contempt that should be directed at the rapist, she is forced either to question society’s attitude toward rape or to begin to doubt herself. Unfortunately, the latter is what most often happens” (Medea & Thompson, 1974, p. 26).

Finally, the time that has passed since the victimization is important for the extent to which victims blame themselves. Levels of both characterological and behavioral self-blame decrease over time (Frazier, 2003; Koss & Figueredo, 2004; Littleton et al., 2007). The extent of self-blame seems to decrease faster than the amount of blame the victim assigns to others (family, perpetrator) in case of child sexual abuse (McMillen & Zuravin, 1998).

Because the factors intertwine, complex research designs are needed to distinguish the different factors and their relative strength. Furthermore, it is apparent that the factors that are named throughout the literature on self-blame are not directly linked to the earlier named culpable control model (Alicke, 2000). Although elements of intention, causation and foresight might be present implicitly (for example: through the endurance of continuous
violence we could suspect foreseeability), the model does not seem to fully explain the presence of self-blame on its own.

A last thing to note when thinking about the extent of self-blame is that although self-blame can go so far as to assign all the responsibility to the self, the existence of self-blame does often not exclude the role of the perpetrator in the victimization event. Rather, the blame assigned to perpetrator or others is often still larger than the victim’s own perceived responsibility (Frazier, 1990, 2003; Janoff-Bulman, 1979).

2.1.3. Self-blame: good or bad?
A pressing question that is much researched in psychology when it comes to self-blame is what effect this portrayal of the self has on the victim: whether it is good (“adaptive”) or bad, mostly from the perspective of recovery from the victimizing event. Although assigning of responsibility to the self has been associated with depression from at least the nineteen-sixties (Miller & Porter, 1983), some possible positive functions of self-blame, especially behavioral self-blame, were also found. Although there were little empirical studies, especially Janoff-Bulman (1979) was prominently present in the literature. A shift towards more exclusively negative findings, away from Janoff-Bulman’s initial findings, started around the nineteen-nineties.\(^5\)

The positive findings can best be explained through the three pathways mentioned by Miller and Porter (1983) and McMillen and Zuravin (1997). First of all, it can serve the “perceived control over one’s life”, secondly, it can help to “preserve the essential belief that the world is a ‘just’ and orderly place where bad things do not happen by chance – even to oneself” and thirdly, it can “give meaning to events that are otherwise incomprehensible” (p. 140).

- **Perceived control.** This first pathway is future-oriented. By having knowledge of the past and attributing outcomes to ones own actions (behavioral self-blame), one can

\(^5\) See for example the reviewed literature in McMillen and Zuravin (1997) and the correlation between self-blame and negative outcomes as cited in Miller et al. (2010) and Moor and Farchi (2011), where all references which include this correlation are from 1990 and later. When Moor and Farchi (2011) refer to literature that supports the claim that self-blame is adaptive, the literature is published before 1995. The literature that has been included in this chapter is divided as follows. Positive notes on self-blame are to be found in the following articles: Coates et al., 1979; Janoff-Bulman, 1979; Janoff-Bulman & Frieze, 1983; Lerner & Simmons, 1966; Medea & Thompson, 1974; Peterson et al., 1981; Thornton et al., 1988. Research papers that did not find the positive effects of self-blame or prioritize the negative elements are: Feiring et al., 2000; Frazier, 1990, 2003; Grubb & Harrower, 2009; Koss et al., 2002; Koss & Figueredo, 2004; Littleton & Breitkopf, 2006; Miller et al., 2010; Moor & Farchi, 2011; Ullman 1996; Ullman & Najdowski 2011; Ullman et al., 2007; Wyatt et al. 1990. Even Janoff-Bulman, one of the most prominent researchers who proposed that self-blame could be adaptive, adjusted her assumptions (Frazier 2003).
facilitate future control over future outcomes. This pathway, which was suggested by Janoff-Bulman (1979), seems to be most prominent in the literature supporting the positive effects of self-blame.

- *Maintaining the Belief of a Just World.* This pathway refers to the Belief in a Just World-theory that will be discussed to a greater extent in paragraph 2.2. It is more general than the first pathway because it does not only refer to situations related to the self, but believing that the world is a just place in general.

- *Giving meaning to the event.* With hindsight, a victim can understand why the victimization has happened to him or her. Furthermore, people have the need to blame at least someone for the event. “Self-blame can serve the defensive purpose of denying the intolerable conclusion that no one is responsible” (Chodoff et al. as cited by Lerner & Miller, 1978).

Of course, those different pathways cannot always be clearly distinguished. For example, Miller and Porter (1983) mix elements of the past with elements that lead to future control:

“Blaming negative outcomes on dispositional qualities, even undesirable ones, may not lead to depression or helplessness if these qualities are no longer seen to characterize the self. In fact, blaming the traits of a ‘former self’ might even facilitate the adjustment process since this type of blame would have the advantage of both explaining the past and engendering optimism in the future” (p. 148).

The above quote furthermore hints at the difference mentioned above concerning characterological and behavioral self-blame. As explained earlier, characterological self-blame refers to the situation in which a victim blames herself because of her character, which has a relatively fixed status, in contrast to the more malleable behavioral aspect that may underline blame. It is therefore often stated in the early literature on self-blame that behavioral self-blame is more suited to the future oriented pathway (for example Janoff-Bulman, 1979; Lerner & Simmons 1966; Peterson et al., 1981). However, Miller and Porter (1983) showed an example of characterological self-blame that also fits the pathway of perceived control, because the relatively fixed character traits were changed, and so in the future those “bad” traits that caused the victimization (in the perception of the victim) can be controlled.

Medea and Thompson (1974) combine control and the need to restore the Belief in a Just World:

“What appears to be guilt, however, may be the way the woman’s mind interprets a positive impulse, a need to be in control over her life. If the woman can believe that somehow she got herself into the
situation, if she can feel that in some way she caused it, if she can make herself responsible for it, then she’s established a sort of control over the rape. It wasn’t someone arbitrarily smashing into her life and wreaking havoc. The unpredictability of the latter situation can be too much for some women to face: if it happened entirely without provocation, than it could happen again. This is too horrifying to believe, so the victim creates an illusion of safety by declaring herself responsible for the incident.” (p. 106).

It is not clear in this quote whether “control” means gaining control over oneself in case of potential future events (first pathway) or whether the word control means giving meaning to the event and explaining to oneself why this event happened (third pathway), but because, as said, those pathways often intertwine, the exact distinction is not as important as recognizing self-blame as a concept with a potential for positive effects on the victim.

Despite the above, behavioral self-blame is now mostly associated with poor recovery (Frazier, 2003; Grubb & Harrower, 2009; Koss et al., 2002; Koss & Figueredo, 2004; Littleton & Breitkopf, 2006; Miller et al., 2010; Ullman & Najdowski, 2011; Ullman, Townsend, Filipas, & Starzynski, 2007; Wyatt et al., 1990). Poor recovery includes distress, ineffective coping, revictimization, psychological symptoms, etc. (Miller et al., 2010). While Libow and Doty (1979) still questioned whether self-blame was normal or pathological, Moor and Farchi (2011) see rape-related self-blame as a symptom of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Feiring, Rosenthal, and Taska (2000) label self-blame as a “cognitive component of stigmatization”.

Moor and Farchi (2011) do recognize the possible positive effect of the pathway of perceived control, but argue that, when during this process, the victim is confronted with blame from observers (which happens often to rape-victims due to persistent rape-myths) “there is a greater likelihood that this search will turn into severe-self-faulting” (p. 450), which is negatively correlated with positive adjustment. Also Brickman et al. (1982), Coates et al. (1979) and Thornton et al. (1988) perceive possible positive effects of gaining control over one’s life with an eye on future events, but they distinguish between effects that self-blame can have on the victim herself and the effect that self-blame can have on others. Although self-blame might put the victim in a position that, via one of the pathways, she can recover more easily from the victimization, this attitude might cause bystanders to interpret the victim’s self-blame should as an expression of inappropriateness or maladaptation. The latter might be due to the fact that the bystanders are not aware of the “nature and utility” (Thornton et al, 1988, p. 420) that self-blame might have.
More often, although it is said that future control is better for the adjustment of the victim (Frazier, 1990), the future oriented pathway is said to be flawed in itself, because future behavior cannot be controlled by evaluating or blaming one’s own past behaviors of the past (for example Frazier, 1990, 2003). This is especially true for victims of rape (Ullman, 1996). Therefore, in the study of Frazier (2003), reported behavioral self-blame is positively correlated with distress. Although both behavioral and characterological self-blame are thus labeled as “bad”, in some studies we can still find different levels of “bad”. For example, Koss et al. (2002) found that characterological self-blame was correlated positively with maladaptive beliefs, global distress and re-experiencing memories, while behavioral self-blame was “only” significantly correlated with global distress.

Miller et al. (2010) also deny the positive effect of giving meaning to the event by stating that “retrospective imaginings of how [the victims] might have prevented their assault (...) inversely predicted psychological well-being” (p. 1123).

Furthermore, self-blame does not only impair the victim from a coping perspective, but, according to Feiring et al. (2002), “sexually abused adolescents who are higher in self-blame attributional style are expected to have smaller friendship networks, be less satisfied with emotional support from friends, and feel less competent in friendship and romance” (p. 313). This is not related to one of the pathways or directly to the recovery from the victimization itself, but nevertheless can be viewed as a negative effect that correlates with higher degrees of self-blame.

Apart from the research by Thornton et al. (1988) that was mentioned above, a factor that is still under-exposed so far, is the reactions of the victim’s surroundings, both in the social environment (friends, family, colleagues, etc.) as well as in the institutional environment with which the victim is confronted in the case of a criminal offence (police, lawyers, victim support, etc.). Ullman and Najdowski (2011) point to research by Wyatt et al. (1990), which “showed that self-blame was correlated with fewer supportive responses from persons told about the rape and more involvement of formal authorities, who typically have negative responses to victims” (p. 1935). Their own experiment (Ullman & Najdowski, 2011) found that characterological self-blame is negatively correlated with positive reactions, but that behavioral self-blame can not be used to predict more positive or more negative reactions from bystanders. Also in an earlier study, Ullman (1996) found that both characterological

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6 In this research, people who are confronted with the victim will be called “bystander” or “observer”, regardless of their social, familial or institutional bond. If there is a need to distinguish between a special bond and other bystanders/observers, this will be made clear in the text.
self-blame and behavioral self-blame did not mediate the relationship between social reactions and adjustment. This is in line with the findings of Coates et al. (1979), who were the first to research the phenomenon of reactions of bystanders related to expressed self-blame. They found that although observers think that a victim who displays self-blame has more difficulty in recovering, the self-blame did not change the amount of blame those observers assigned to the victim.

In contrast to the lack of significant relationships in the abovementioned research, Thornton et al. (1988) did find that self-blame evoked more negative reactions, more specifically, more blaming the victim. This effect was stronger in lay-observers than in professional counselors. In the study, there was no difference between behavioral and characterological self-blame.

Apart from the little amount of research done on the subject, Ullman and Najdowski (2011) note that “research has focused much more on negative social reactions than on positive social reactions, but it is also possible that positive reactions reduce victims’ attributions of self-blame” (p. 1935). This quote points at a gap in the research that this thesis will try to fill.

This research examines another hypothesized positive side of self-blame, namely its influence on positive or less negative reactions of bystanders in relation to the Just World Theory. Moreover, another innovative side of this research is that it will explore the reactions from bystanders to explicitly expressed self-blame, rather than the way self-blame develops as a consequence of these reactions. A last clear differentiation from the existing body of research is that the reactions on self-blame are measured from the perspective of the bystander rather than through self-report of the victim (chapter 4 fully elaborates the method used).

Before turning to the exact hypothesis, the theory of the Belief in a Just World needs to be explained in more detail.

2.2. The Belief in a Just World

“A Fundamental Delusion”, is how Lerner (1980), the “founding father” of the Belief in a Just World (BJW), describes his own theory. The just world hypothesis states the following:

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7 It is important to note that the nature of the reactions (positive or negative) is in both studies measured trough self-report from the side of the victim. Those results could be colored by the initial feelings of the victim. The experimental study that is conducted for this thesis (see below and see chapter 4) will measure reactions directly at the side of the observer.
“Individuals have a need to believe that they live in a world where people generally get what they deserve. The belief that the world is just enables the individual to confront his physical and social environment as though they were stable and orderly. Without such a belief it would be difficult for the individual to commit himself to the pursuit of long-range goals or even to the socially regulated behavior of day-to-day life. Since the belief that the world is just serves such an important adaptive function for the individual, people are very reluctant to give up this belief, and they can be greatly troubled if they encounter evidence that suggest that the world is not really just or orderly after all.” (Lerner & Miller, 1978, p. 1030-1031).

That the belief is fundamental is already made clear through the quote. That the belief is actually a delusion is something we can imagine if we think about it rationally: the world is not actually just. People do not actually always get what they deserve. It does not become just, even when people employ strategies to make it look like justice is restored (Lerner, 1980). Paradoxically, the fact that people have this delusion might make the world even more unjust at some times.

This paragraph will review the literature on the Belief in a Just World.

2.2.1. The scope of the belief and threats to that belief

As made clear by the above explanation of the just world hypothesis by Lerner & Miller (1978), people have the need to believe that the world is generally a just and orderly place. This belief is not simply an explicit conviction, but a psychological mechanism, steering motivated behavior. People will “arrange their cognitions so as to maintain the belief that people get what they deserve” (Lerner & Simmons, 1966, p. 204). This means that when processing information, people will frame what they experience in such a way that it is in accordance with their Belief in a Just world (Lerner, 1980). Even when information does not fit into this framework, they try to alter the information: the BJW is a strong enough to cause people to “adhere to it, even in the face of obviously conflicting evidence” (Pemberton, 2012, p. 45). Therefore, “the perception of justice or injustice may be the consequence rather than the origin of the perceivers cognitive operations” (Lincoln & Levinger, 1972, p. 202).

Within the theory of a Belief in a Just World, justice is framed in terms of deservingness: in general, people get what they deserve. People are seen as deserving when they have behaved in an appropriate manner or when they are “good” (Lerner & Simmons, 1966). Moreover, it also works the other way around: people deserve what they get (Lerner, 1971a). This “other side of the coin” of deservingness is the starting point on which observers will base their reactions towards victims, as will be shown below.
Generally, small inconsistencies with this believe do not really threaten the fundamental worldview. Bigger threats, however, are not as easily tolerated. As a rule of thumb, the bigger the threat, the more problematic this threat is and the higher the need to restore the belief that the world is just (Hafer, 2000; Van den Bos & Maas, 2009). In the just world literature, a threat is generally comprised of the (undeserved) suffering of the self or someone else. This thesis delineates the suffering of the self or someone else as a “confrontation with victimization of either oneself or someone else”. Sometimes, a threat to a just world becomes salient through a request for help by an innocent person (Pancer, 1988): because someone is in need, observers realize that this person is suffering.

However, suffering can only comprise a threat if it is real and when it might influence the way an observer thinks about his individual chances of having to suffer. Lerner (1971a) showed that if people are aware that suffering is simulated in an experimental setting, they do not employ strategies (see paragraph 2.2.2.) to reconfirm their BJW. The same is true for observers who see that the victim is unaffected by what bystanders would normally recognize as suffering (Lerner & Simmons, 1966). Furthermore, incongruities that take place far away, in another environment, are not a direct threat, because those negative events “have little relevance for their own fates” (Lerner & Miller, 1978, p. 1031). Indeed, “the closer we feel to victims the more vulnerable we are to their suffering” (Lerner, 1971a, p. 54). Other elements that make the threat to the BJW stronger are the continuance and persistence of suffering, a feeling of powerlessness in helping the victim (Lerner & Simmons, 1966) and the innocence of the victim (Correia & Vala 2003; Correia, Vala, & Aguiar, 2001, 2007). In the earlier research (Correia et al., 2001; Correia & Vala, 2003), the statement that an innocent victim (meaning that there are no reasons within the victim that have lead to victimization) poses a greater threat to the BJW was inferred from degrees of victim blaming and victim derogation (see paragraph 2.2.2.; see also Hafer, 2000, 2002). In the 2007-study, Correia et al. also found evidence for the same hypothesis through an emotional modified stroop task, which provides further evidence for this hypothesis.

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8 Just as in the paragraph before, where it was noted that research on self-blame does not only entail victims of crime (or even more specifically: of rape or sexual assault, as will be the case in the experimental study in this thesis as laid down in the next chapter), the research on BJW does not limit itself to victims of crime (see also Pemberton, 2012). Rather, classic research by learner involves an experimental setting in which observers witness a victim getting electrical shocks (Lerner & Simmons, 1966). However, examples of kinds of victims (in the broad sense of the word) that are also brought in relation to BJW are: victims of crime (Grubb & Harrower, 2009; Jones & Aronson, 1973; Van den Bos & Maas, 2009), oppressed and disadvantaged groups (Ryan, 1976), victims of accidents (Correia et al., 2007; Haynes & Olson, 2006), police aggression (Lincoln & Levinger, 1972), mentally ill people (Novak & Lerner, 1968) and diseases, such as AIDS/HIV (Correia et al., 2001). For a more exhaustive overview, see Hafer and Bègue, 2005, p. 132-134.
Most research into the Belief in a Just World is done on an interpersonal scale. Only recently, research on group-level, characterized by “us-them-thinking”, has emerged (e.g. Aguiar, Vala, Correia, & Pereira, 2008; Correia et al., 2007, Correia et al., 2012). Results from this research points in the direction that suffering of in-group victims is more threatening than that of out-group victims, just like the mechanism that is triggered when one is confronted with a similar victim (see below) or, on the other hand, the mechanism triggered when being confronted with suffering in another environment (see above). This thesis however, will continue to focus on the interpersonal level.

Another way in which we can distinguish “levels” in the Belief in a Just World is by differentiating the level of consciousness in which the BJW is processed. Terms that describe the divide are: experiential versus rational, heuristic versus systematic or preconscious versus conscious. The difference between the two is that at the experiential level, the reactions are automatic, intuitive and scripted, whereas the responses are rational or thoughtful on the conscious level (Lerner, 2003). The BJW is often processed implicitly (Hafer & Bègue, 2005; Pemberton, 2012), so on the unconscious level, where it can also be threatened without the subject being aware of this threat. Moreover, it is mostly the experiential process that has been brought in relation with responses to victims on the basis of a just-world mechanism (Van den Bos & Maas, 2009). Those processes seem to have a different outcome than rational responses (Van den Bos & Maas, 2009). The passing of time may alter the level of processing (Correia et al. 2001; Lerner, 2003). Maybe that is why Lerner (1998) used the terminology “preconscious” and “conscious” to indicate the difference between the unconscious and conscious level because the first often precedes the second.

Up until now, it has been stated that people have a Belief in a Just World (which can be implicit or explicit) and that inconsistencies with this belief pose a threat to this BJW. But why do we call this a threat? Why can people not just live with a counterargument to justice? Janoff-Bulman and Frieze (1983) argue that a threat to the Belief in a Just World can be framed in the changes of the following perceptions: the belief in the personal invulnerability, the belief that the world is meaningful and the self being positive (Janoff-Bulman & Frieze, 1983). This means that a threat makes us feel vulnerable and helpless if we think that

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9 It must be noted that the study of Lincoln and Levinger (1972) might be classified as one of the first studies that started to work with a “group level” because the stimuli that was used, was a photo showing “white uniformed policemen attacking black males” (p. 204). Here, it is clear that an “us-them” frame is used. However, the authors did not explicitly state this and the questionnaire used was clearly interpersonal.
injustices can occur at every moment (Symonds, 1975; Walster, 1966): our security is taken away (Haynes & Olson, 2006). In even stronger terms, apart from the victim herself, even observers become “virtually incapacitated” when they do not have a Belief in a Just World (Lerner & Simmons, 1966). Moreover, we suffer from the “primitive fear of contamination by the unlucky victim” (Symonds, 1975, p. 20).

Furthermore every time we are afraid that injustice can befall ourselves, we start to doubt our capacity to fulfill our own long-term goals by just means because we lose our confidence (Correia & Vala, 2003; Hafer, 2002) and because the world does not seem manageable and predictable anymore (Lerner, 1980). By fearing that our own long-term goals are in danger because of injustice and because the threat has taught us that injustice can happen at any time, “the value of our implicit contracts would be brought into serious doubt” (Coates et al., 1979, p. 25).

Here, we touch upon the distinction between ultimate justice and immanent justice (Maes, 1994). Immanent justice can be explained as justice on the short term. A threat to the BJW needs a “quick fix”, whereas in case of ultimate justice (justice over the long run) the threat can be repaired later. This can mean that an observer does not have to repair the threat himself, he could also believe that this victim now experienced some “bad event”, but will experience a “good event” to compensate for this bad event later.

From the above, especially from a perspective of immanent justice, it can indeed be concluded that it would be our psychological downfall if we give up our BJW due to the threat of seeing another one suffering. The encounter with undeserved suffering needs a response. The range of responses people can choose from will be discussed in the paragraph below.10

2.2.2. Reactions to a threat to the Belief in a Just World
People who encounter a threat to their Belief in a Just World are generally inclined to “restore justice” (Lerner & Miller, 1978). As a follow up on the earlier mentioned rule of thumb that the bigger the threat, the higher the need to restore the BJW, it could be stated that the higher the need to restore the BJW, the stronger “justice-restoring response” (called strategy below)
(Lincoln & Levinger, 1972). Pemberton (2012) phrases this as follows: “The higher the level of injustice, the more people need to take (cognitive, affective or behavioural) action to protect their just world beliefs” (p. 48) (See also Lerner, 1971a; Van den Bos & Maas, 2009).

How do people get from threat to action?

To repair a threat to the BJW, people have to bring this threat within the framework of the BJW and then dismantle the threat so that it is no longer any threat. Bringing the threat within the framework of the BJW happens by means of stating that “people deserve what they get”. A victim “got” victimization, hence that victim deserves victimization.

Observers have a range of arguments or strategies to convince themselves that this statement is true. Lerner (1980) has categorized the strategies as follows. First of all, there are protective strategies, which involve “general ways of thinking about the world” (Hafer & Bègue, 2005, p. 145): focusing more on ultimate justice or distinguish the own (just) environment from the (unjust) environment in which the victim lives.

Secondly, there are rational strategies that do not deny injustice, but try to prevent it from happening (again) and try to repair where injustice has already occurred. For example, in reaction to injustice, people could offer a victim compensation.

Finally, people can use irrational strategies. Four different victim-focused irrational strategies can be distinguished (Hafer & Bègue, 2005; Lerner, 1980; Pemberton, 2012):

- **Blaming the victim.** In this strategy, the cause of the event is reinterpreted by assigning behavioral responsibility (see par. 2.1.) to the victim. The cause of the event can now be found within the actions of the victim. Together with victim derogation, this strategy is most researched in the literature (Hafer & Bègue, 2005).

- **Victim derogation.** This is a reinterpretation of the personal characteristics of the victim. Janoff-Bulman (1979) has compared derogation to characterological blame (see par. 2.1.). The character of the victim is seen as the (deserving) cause of the victimization. To put it in an extreme form: “she is so weak that she deserves to be raped”.

- **Reinterpretation of the outcome.** When observers engage in this strategy, they argue that the consequences that the victim experienced as a result of the victimization are not as bad as they seem. Actually, the victim might have gained something (positive) from the victimization, which makes the victimization not an unjust event.

- **(Psychological) distancing.** This cognitive strategy decreases the psychological link to the victim. By assuring oneself that one is different from the victim, the likelihood of becoming victimized oneself decreases in the perception of the observer.
The remainder of this thesis will deal with this last category of strategies, hereafter called *irrational victim strategies*. The more severe the consequences are for a victim, the more likely it is that this kind of strategy is used to repair the threat (Pemberton, 2012). We have to keep in mind that these strategies are not objectively solving the problems (Lerner, 1980).

**Blaming the victim**

The theory of blaming the victim can be explained through BJW as well as through the Defensive Attribution Hypothesis (DAH) (Maes, 1994; Walster 1966). People are willing to assign responsibility to a specific person for the occurrence of the negative event, for if they have to attribute the negative event to environmental factors, “then presumably it could happen to anyone. The more negative the event, the more likely is this defensive attributional pattern” (Frieze & Bar-Tal, 1979, p. 19). DAH reflects “the motivation of people to attempt to defend themselves cognitively against threatening prospects” (Lerner & Miller, 1978, p. 1041). Within the process, responsibility is matched to the outcome (Walster, 1966).

The difference between DAH and BJW as explained above, is that DAH focuses mainly on control and personal security, whereas the core ideas of BJW are justice and the search for meaning (Maes, 1994). Despite this slight difference, in both cases the goal of the mechanism is quite similar: “to promote feelings of security and invulnerability” (Maes, 1994, p. 80). The outcome is also similar. Just as within the theory of BJW, Walster (1966) argues that it is reassuring to blame a victim for the negative outcome, because “[w]e then simply need to assure ourselves that we are a different kind of person from the victim, or that we would behave differently under similar circumstances, and we feel protected from catastrophe” (p. 74). Because the two are so similar and sometimes even seem mixed, the literature on blaming the victim is taken into account as a whole in this paragraph.

As the most researched reaction to victimization,\(^{11}\) it seems that bystanders employ the strategy of blaming the victim quite easily. Karuza and Carey (1984) argue that observers will engage in blaming the victim even if they have no information about the behavior of the victim.

The tendency to and the extent of blaming the victim increase with the severity of the injustice befalling the victim (Jones & Aronson, 1973; Miller & Porter, 1983). Furthermore,

\(^{11}\)Lerner and Miller (1978) critique studies that investigate the assigning of responsibility for the fact that often a confound can be found, such as the victims’ character or the perception of the amount of need the victim is in.
the need to explain the suffering by using behavioral blame becomes more apparent when the
victim is more attractive or more respectable (Jones & Aronson, 1973; Lerner & Miller,
1978). Initially, the attractive or respectable person is “good” and therefore deserving.
Victimization of such a person makes the threat to the BJW more apparent than when a less
deserving person is victimized. The need to explain the suffering thus leads to a higher extent
of blaming the victim in case of a respectable or attractive victim.

It is often posed in the literature that blaming is a common reaction, especially in the
case of rape victims and that this is enhanced by rape myths (e.g. Grubb & Harrower, 200912).
Grubb and Harrower (2009) even state that “this propensity to blame victims of rape
translates worryingly into a tolerance of the crime itself” (p. 64). With this statement, it is
called into question whether blaming the victim reduces the perpetrator’s blame. This is an
intriguing question that is not answered in the literature. In the empirical part of this thesis
(chapter 4) I will return to this issue.

However, just as victims often do not deny or exclude the responsibility of the
perpetrator when they blame themselves (Frazier, 2003), observers do not exclusively blames
victims (Frieze, 1979). Rather, “observers first and foremost include strategies in reaction to
the perpetrators behaviour” (Pemberton, 2012, p. 61). Victim blaming could thus be seen as a
“last resort”: when observers cannot find any other source to blame (Jones & Aronson, 1973).

In the paragraph on self-blame, it has been showed that, especially before 1990, self-
blame was seen as adaptive, because self-blame could be used to control and alter future
behavior. In the case of blaming the victim, one could argue that this strategy is adaptive for
the observer in the same way: the observer can understand the cause of the victimization,
which can guide future behavior (Correia & Vala, 2003; Karuza & Carey, 1984; Lipkus,
Dalbert, & Siegler, 1966). Dalbert (1998) argues that there is no clear answer on whether the
Belief in a Just World is adaptive or not, but that there is a positive correlation between BJW
and life satisfaction. Either way, the research on the Belief in a Just World has been focusing
more on the positive side of this mechanism over the last few years, especially related to the
well being of the observer (Furnham, 2003).

12 Grubb and Harrower (2009) state that “numerous studies have pointed to the tendency of observers to
denigrate the rape victim, holding them responsible for assault” (p. 63). It is unclear whether Grubb and
Harrower mean derogate when they state denigrate, because they link it automatically to responsibility (blaming
the victim). Also the literature they point at mostly discusses blaming the victim. However, derogation might be
interpreted as “characterological blame”. In that sense, the immediate link between denigration (as derogation)
and blame is more understandable.
Victim derogation

Although assigning responsibility to the victim that is not merited by the facts of the matter does not sound very friendly, derogation seems even crueler. However, victim derogation is not as “automatic” as the response of blaming the victim. It follows from the literature that the strategy of derogation is only used under certain circumstances. As will be shown below, blaming the victim is often preferred to derogation, so when the possibility to blame is present, it seems likely that the strategy of derogation is used to a lesser extent (Lerner 1971a; Lerner & Miller, 1978). The same is true for a situation in which there is a possibility to compensate the victim (Lerner, 1971b). By concluding that the victim is to blame for the victimization, it can be concluded that no injustice has occurred. However, it should be noted that the behavioral responsibility cannot be determined objectively (Lerner & Miller, 1978). Furthermore, when the subject of the victimization is highly attractive, enjoys high status or is similar to the observer, the likelihood of choosing derogation as a strategy to restore the BJW decreases (Lerner & Miller, 1978). That victims similar to the observer are often not derogated as strongly as dissimilar victims is corroborated by various authors (Haynes & Olson, 2006; Lerner, 1971a, 1980; Lerner & Miller, 1978; Lodewijks, Wildschut, Nijstad, Savenije, & Smit, 2001; Montada, 1998; Novak & Lerner, 1968). Similarity can be based on different characteristics of victim and observer, such as gender, race, social status, etc. (Grubb & Harrower, 2009).

A third element that might moderate victim derogation is the possibility for the victim to escape her fate. When the victim has a fair chance of escaping her fate (negative consequences/the suffering), the strategy of blaming the victim seems to be preferred, because the victim has been given an opportunity to escape, but did not act upon escaping (Lerner & Miller, 1978).

When derogating a victim, the link between the self and the “threatening entity” (the victim) is weakened (Correia et al. 2012), or, in other words: the observer is disassociated from the victim (Hafer, 2002). This makes the threat smaller, because as said, when the threat does not have a direct link with the personal fate, the BJW is harmed less.

Reinterpreting the outcome of the event

When engaging in the strategy of reinterpretation of the outcome (by some authors also called “minimization of the suffering” (Correia et al., 2001)), the observer reduces the “perception of wrongdoing by the offender” (Pemberton, 2012) and thus reduces the severity of the threat that is posed to the BJW.
The first way to reach a positive conclusion about the outcome of the victimization is to draw on the existing phenomenon of posttraumatic growth. “There is a body of literature suggesting that people exposed to even the most traumatic events may perceive at least some good emerging from their struggle with such tragedies as rape” (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). This process is called posttraumatic growth (PTG). Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996) developed a scale to measure PTG, which contains the following factors: relating to others (for example: “putting effort in relationships”, “accepting to need others”), new possibilities (such as: “I developed new interests” and I’m able to do better things with my life”), personal strength (e.g. “a feeling of self-reliance”), spiritual change (such as: “I have a stronger religious faith”) and appreciation of life (e.g. “an appreciation for the value of my own life”). The scale contains 21 items in total. Women tend to score higher on the scale than men (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996).

A more “subtle way” to reinterpret the negative outcome in the direction of a positive outcome is “system justification theory” or “victim enhancement” (Hafer & Bègue, 2005; Kay, Jost, & Young, 2005) in which a negative characteristic is complemented by a positive characteristic rather than that the negative element is ignored. A typical illustration: “poor but happy” versus “rich but unhappy”. People try to find characteristics that “make up” for the negative event, such as: “victimized but strong”, or “victimized but having valuable life experience”.

Psychological Distancing

The strategy of psychological distancing is strongly related to another category of strategies to restore the BJW, namely the protective strategy of creating two worlds: one for the victim and one for the self (the observer) (Pemberton, 2012). Furtermore, the strategy of distancing works on the basis of a similar rationale as victim derogation, because the link between the observer and the victim is weakened (Correia et al., 2012; Hafer & Bègue, 2005). Therefore, the victimization is not directly concerned with the observer’s own fate anymore.

Although this thesis mainly focuses on psychological distancing, distancing can also materialize in a behavioral way, as shown by Pancer (1988). With an experimental setting, he found that “subjects [observers] maintained greater distances from a table which featured high salience appeal for donations than one which featured a low salience appeal” (Pancer, 1988, p. 137-138). In this case, the appeal for donations, so for help, was seen as a threat to BJW (see above). From this study, Pancer (1988) concluded that people are inclined to avoid information that threatens their BJW, especially when their BJW is strong.
The strategy of distancing is used to a higher extent when the victim is similar to the observer, because, as stated before: “the closer we feel to victims the more vulnerable we are to their suffering” (Lerner, 1971a, p. 54; see also Correia et al., 2007).

2.2.3. Relation between the different strategies

Having explored the different strategies that could be employed by observers to restore their belief that the world is a just place, it can be said that reactions that follow from those strategies can be labeled as negative reactions towards victims, or even as secondary victimization: after the victim has gone through the initial victimization, the negative responses victimize the victim again (Brickman et al., 1982; Correia & Vala, 2003; Correia et al., 2001, 2007).

Those negative reactions can be cumulative, because different strategies can be used at the same time (Correia et al., 2001; Hafer & Bègue, 2005; Pemberton, 2012), but certain circumstances are likely to trigger specific a certain strategy or are reason to avoid a specific strategy, as was already shown above. This is why some researchers, such as Haynes and Olson (2006) argue that that strategies are “alternative avenues” (p. 667) for dealing with a threat. However, this does not mean that they do not recognize that one observer can have multiple reactions towards the victim, even a mix of positive and negative responses.

If observers have a “legitimate and easy opportunity” to help or compensate victims, they will often do so instead of turning to an irrational victim strategy. This means that prosocial behavior is often preferred to a negative response to a victim (Haynes & Olson, 2006). However, the observer needs to be confident that justice is re-established though his helping behavior, otherwise derogation will not be avoided (Lerner, 1971a). Furthermore, the opportunity to help is often costly in terms of money, time or effort, so that the opportunity is no longer “legitimate and easy”, and sometimes the opportunity is absent at all.

Apart from the question whether compensation is possible and costly or not, Kenrick, Reich, and Cialdini (1976) commented on research that suggests that derogation and compensation are alternative routes to restoring equity. They state that if this is a true “hydraulic model”, compensation should not only exclude the need for derogation, but derogation should also exclude the need for compensation. Although they are willing to accept the first link, they say there is no evidence for the second. Derogation does, in their opinion, therefore not function as an “equity restoration device”.

Only taking into account the four irrational victim strategies, the relation between derogation and blaming the victim has been researched the most. Haynes and Olson (2006)
investigated victim derogation versus blaming the victim directed at victims of traffic accidents while they manipulated a given amount of responsibility at the side of the victim (crossing a street legally or illegally) and the likeability of the victim (“good victim” – volunteer and a “bad victim” – drug dealer). Their research revealed that the condition with a likeable victim and the condition in which the victim is given high responsibility go hand in hand with blame, while low responsibility or the bad victim trigger derogation.

2.2.4. Moderators of the irrational victim strategies

Stokols and Schopler (1973) conducted a study in which they let participants rate the responsibility, deservingness and attractiveness of either a careless person or an innocent victim that both experienced the same negative consequence\footnote{In this case, both presented ‘victims’ became pregnant (unwanted) and had a miscarriage after that, one because of careless use of birth control while having sex with her boyfriend (careless), the other due rape (innocent victim). Moreover, the severity of the consequences was varied per condition. In my view, the comparison between the careless and the innocent victim is somewhat problematic as a measure of responsibility for the negative event, because in this case the negative event is the miscarriage. In both cases, the responsibility is not linked to this negative event, but to act of having sex. Here, the responsibility is combined with another factor: willingness to engage in having sex. Because in my view willingness and responsibility are two (closely linked but) distinct concepts, there is no ceteris paribus in the manipulation of responsibility. Furthermore, the existence of rape myths might provide for an extra confound: social thoughts about responsibility might be different in case of rape than in case of careless use of birth control, especially within a relationship.} that was portrayed in a written vignette. They found that severity of consequences was negatively related to the evaluation of the attractiveness (victim derogation), but also that the careless person was seen as more responsible (blaming the victim) and more deserving. Innocent victims were rated more favorably. Those results are not in line with the BJW-findings, because the careless person should pose a lower threat to the BJW and therefore, it would be expected that the strategy of blaming the victim would be used less than when confronted with an innocent victim. However, there is one aspect of the study that might mediate the effect: the participants knew that they were going to discuss the issues with another participant before they started the rating the victim they had read about. This means that the participants were triggered to consciously overthink their reactions. Furthermore, this research design might bring about more socially accepted answers. The same is true for the study of Lincoln and Levinger (1972), which showed that observers of aggression derogated the victim, but they enhanced their rating of the victim when it would be made available to the victim or the public.

Moreover, the employment of strategies is dependent on the form of the BJW that is active. As Montada (1998) states: “It might well be that the correlation between GBJW [General BJW] and the tendency to blame victims is higher when respondents are not required
to consciously reflect and to weigh up the causal contributions and responsibilities of various agents or agencies when relevant information is provided” (p. 227). Furthermore, as already mentioned above, it is important whether an observer thinks on the level of immanent or ultimate justice. Especially immanent justice needs a quick response to restore justice in a short time frame, which makes the employment of irrational victim strategies more likely.

Originally, it was assumed that, because of the fact the Belief in a Just World is so fundamental, it is a uniform belief. However, research revealed that individuals differ in their strength of the BJW (for a review, see Furnham, 2003), and with that, the strength of the responses. Therefore, scales were developed, by, for example, Rubin and Peplau (1975; see for an overview of other scales Furnham, 2003) to measure the extent to which individuals believe in a just world. Unfortunately, even with the knowledge of today about the BJW, it is difficult to find an accurate measure, because the belief is nestled unconsciously in people’s minds. Moreover, “there may only be a loose correspondence between explicitly endorsing just world beliefs and the role the justice motive plays in peoples behaviour” (Pemberton, 2012, p. 47; furthermore: Hafer & Bègue, 2005). One element that might make the difficulties in measuring less problematic is that it is argued that the individual differences are largest within a rational mind-set (Van den Bos & Maas, 2009). This rational mindset is easier to measure than the unconscious form of BJW. Moreover, within an individual, the BJW seems to be stable across the life span (Furnham, 2003). Despite any kind of difficulties to measure the (exact) strength of the BJW, several studies (e.g. Van den Boos & Maas, 2009) distinguish between strong and weak believers. Those studies tend to find that strong believers react more strongly towards threats to the BJW.

Another aspect that might influence the way people react to a threat towards their BJW is gender (Calhoun, Selby, & Warring, 1976; Drout & Gaertner, 1994; Lerner, 1971b). The body of research on this subject however, provides inconsistent findings. This might be due to the fact that the factor of gender intertwines with other factors that play a role in the studies. It is often difficult to detangle the different aspects that play a role. As an illustration, some of the findings that relate to BJW and gender are presented below, but this thesis will not dive deeply into the factor of gender.

Firstly, having done a meta-analytic review, O’Connor, Morrison, McLeod, & Anderson (1996) found that men and women do not differ significantly in their strength of their Belief in a Just World. Secondly, Coates et al. (1979) showed that women feel more threatened when encountering a female rape victim in a high threat condition (meaning that the victim was portrayed as highly vulnerable), but this did not influence their rating of the
victim compared to a low threat condition. This might be due to the fact that women feel more similar to the female victim. Moreover, women are more extreme in similarity judgments (Novak & Lerner, 1968). However, compared to male participants, the women empathized more with the victim, but rated the victim as much less attractive. So, although women are less inclined to attribute responsibility to victims than males (Calhoun et al., 1976, Grubb & Harrower, 2009), the study by Coates et al. (1979) seems to suggest that the levels of victim derogation are higher in women. Grubb and Harrower pose that also derogation is lower in women, but as already explained in footnote 12, the concept of derogation (or denigration) in their study unclear and could also mean blame. Thirdly, Brown and Testa (2008) found that women show more compassion towards the victim while men showed more compassion with the perpetrator in a vignette study portraying a female rape victim. The authors did not specify whether this effect was due to better identification.

Apart from understanding why a BJW-response takes place, it is still important to have in mind that they can have some serious consequences. Above, it was already mentioned that the responses could be labeled as secondary victimization. Furthermore, it is argued that the employment of the above strategies, mainly blaming the victim and derogation – because those two are the most researched, have an impact on the helping response (Pancer, 1988). Secondly, because of (the fear of) secondary victimization through the responses or strategies, victims are less inclined to report assaults to authorities (Grubb & Harrower, 2009).

Those consequences emphasize the importance of doing research into the four irrational victim strategies. This thesis combines research into this subject with another issue that is said to have serious consequences: self-blame. How those two themes are hypothesized to interact will be shown in the next chapter.
3. **Hypotheses**

Paragraph 2.1. discussed research examining the reactions evoked by self-blame. The reason to conduct further research on this topic is twofold. Besides the fact that the literature review exposes a gap in the literature - namely research exploring possible positive reactions to expressed self-blame - there are reasons to believe that those positive reactions do exist (see below). It is therefore relevant to draft some hypotheses in this research direction. Because, as mentioned, Coates et al. (1979) were the first to examine the reactions of bystanders to a victim that expresses self-blame, it is interesting and important to have a look at their reasons to research this topic.

First of all, Coates et al. (1979) review research by Jones and Wortman and Forrest and Hokanson (1975) who “have suggested that people may learn that they can elicit a more sympathetic and helpful reaction from others by blaming themselves” (Coates et al., 1979, p. 32). Secondly, they refer to Godfrey and Lowe (1975) who show “that by taking personal responsibility for her negative outcome, the less coerced victim appeared to be an admirable kind of person who was in control of her life rather than a pawn of external forces” (p. 32). Although I understand that those links could be seen as exploratory, I think the arguments are not solid enough as a foundation for a hypothesis. Forrest and Hokanson (1975) researched interactions between two persons, in which one expressed aggressive behavior. They hypothesized that self-harming (rather than self-blaming) behavior is more effective in diminishing this aggressive behavior than reacting in a similar aggressive manner or by reacting very friendly. In this research, both the initial situation (being confronted with aggression rather than a neutral starting point) and the reaction to this initial situation (self-harming rather than self-blaming) are different from what Coates et al. (1979) researched. Furthermore, Godfrey and Lowe (1975) explored whether people who volunteered to be in a victimizing situation or people who have a good reason (operationalized as: contributing to “worthwhile research” (p. 947)) to be in the victimizing situation are devaluated less than unwilling victims. The difference with the research by Coates et al. (1979) is that in this case, the victim has an intrinsic reason to become a victim which reason is present before the victimization takes place, rather than that the victim blames herself post-victimization. Lerner and Miller (1978) have argued that the study by Godfrey and Lowe (1975) is difficult to

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14 Unfortunately, this research could not be traced back for this thesis because it was published in a book (Jones, E.E., & Wortman, C.B. (1973). *Ingratiation: An Attributional Approach*. Morristown, NJ: General Learning Press) that was not available in the University library or the Inter Library Loan system.
interpret in the framework of BJW because they argue that participants might have thought that the volunteers experienced no or less suffering in comparison to the willing victims. Even if observers perceive the same level of suffering in both conditions, they might have thought that the reason the volunteer had to participate would amount to personal gratification. In this way, justice was achieved before the participant had to restore the BJW through, for example, derogation.

Rather than taking the above research as a starting point for my hypotheses like Coates et al. (1979) did, I took another point of departure. From the literature review in the previous chapter, it can be derived that victimization of others is a threat to the BJW of the victim’s observers. An innocent victim is a bigger threat to the Belief in a Just World than a non-innocent victim, whereby a victim that expresses self-blame states that she is non-innocent. This is in line with the literature, because innocence is normally framed as: there is no information given that can lead to the conclusion that the victim had responsibility in the occurrence of the victimization. Furthermore, larger the threat to the Belief in a Just World, the larger the need to repair this threat. The threat can be repaired by using different strategies, such as irrational victim strategies. To recall, those are blaming the victim, derogating the victim, distancing from the victim and reinterpreting the outcome. Those literature-based assumptions are the foundations of the following main hypothesis:

H: People who encounter a victim who blames herself for the victimization are less inclined to employ irrational victim strategies than people who encounter a victim who does not blame herself for the victimization.

Because there are different irrational victim strategies, this main hypothesis can be turned into 4 sub-hypotheses:

H1: People who encounter a victim who blames herself for the victimization are less inclined to blame this victim than people who encounter a victim who does not blame herself for the victimization.

H2: People who encounter a victim who blames herself for the victimization are less inclined to derogate this victim than people who encounter a victim who does not blame herself for the victimization.
H3: People who encounter a victim who blames herself for the victimization are less inclined to reinterpret the outcome for this victim than people who encounter a victim who does not blame herself for the victimization.

H4: People who encounter a victim who blames herself for the victimization are less inclined to psychologically distance themselves from this victim than people who encounter a victim who does not blame herself for the victimization.

Furthermore, the literature as reviewed in chapter 2 has posed some interesting hypotheses and suggestions that could also be tested with the data that was gained from the experiment (see chapter 4).

First of all, Grubb and Harrower (2009) stated that assigning responsibility for the victimization to the victim (blaming the victim) leads to a tolerance of the offence. I interpret this as implying a reduction of blame for the offender. Therefore, it is hypothesized that when the responsibility of the victim increases, the responsibility of the offender decreases.

H5: Responsibility of the victim correlates negatively with responsibility of the offender.

Secondly, it was already explained that both perceived similarity and eagerness to meet the victim are used to measure psychological distancing. However, those two items can also be used to examine the finding by several researchers, e.g. Novak and Lerner (1968) and Lerner (1971a) that people who perceive to be similar to a victim are less eager to meet the victim. They are more vulnerable to the threat that the victim poses to the Belief in a Just World, because the victimization of a similar victim is perceived to have more relevance for one’s own fate (contrary to Lerner & Miller 1978, p. 1031). Because the threat to the BJW is higher and the observer will feel more vulnerable, it is predicted that observers will be less eager to meet the victim. Therefore, a negative correlation is predicted.

H6: The eagerness to meet the victim correlates negatively with the perceived similarity to the victim.

Thirdly, Haynes and Olson (2006) found in their study that when people encounter a victim with a high responsibility for the occurrence of the victimization, the strategy that is chosen to repair the threat that was posed to their Belief in a Just World is mainly blaming the victim,
while they will engage most in derogation when they encounter a victim with a low responsibility for the occurrence of the victimization.

H7: Observers in the (high-responsibility) self-blame condition engage more in blaming the victim than they engage in victim derogation, while observers in the (low-responsibility) control condition engage more in victim derogation than they do engage in blaming the victim.
4. Study 1: an experiment

In the chapter above, a set of hypotheses has been outlined. To test this hypothesis, an experimental study was designed. This chapter will subsequently deal with the research design of the study, the results of the analyses and a discussion on the results.

4.1. Research Design

Participants in this study were confronted with a vignette in which a female rape victim shared her experiences following a rape. Participants were randomly assigned to either a condition in which the victim expressed self-blame or a condition in which the victim did not state that she had a role in the occurrence.

4.1.1. Participants

Participants were recruited during the break of a lecture in criminal law at Tilburg University. Out of the 80 students present, 63 (79%) participated ($N = 63$: 23 male, 37 female$^{15}$, ages ranged from 17 to 25, $M_{age} = 19.87$ years, $SD = 1.873$). Criminal law students were chosen because they could be seen as a representation of the social environment of the victim portrayed in the vignette (see par. 4.1.2.). Furthermore, this population has the additional characteristic of serving as a proxy for legal professionals (Kampen, De Keijser, & Schoep, 2013), which is important since this study is brought in relation to legal practice via the VIS and the interview study as laid down in the next chapter.

4.1.2. Procedure

Just before the start of the lecture, the study was announced, providing the following information to the students: that the study was conducted as part of a master thesis at Tilburg Law School, that the study consisted of a short story (casus) and a short questionnaire which would be distributed at the start of the lecture break, that the questions in the questionnaire would query students’ students opinions (so that there are no right or wrong answers), that the questionnaires would be treated confidentially and that the handouts would be collected at the end of the break. For questions about the study, participants were referred to an e-mail

$^{15}$ Three participants failed to supply their age as well as their gender. Those were the only missing data in their questionnaire, so it was decided to leave them in the sample.
address on the last lecture slide (no questions or comments were received). Furthermore, participants were told to read the vignette and answer the questionnaire individually without consulting other participants. If the students did not want to take part in the study, they were asked to put the questionnaire aside.

The goal of the instructions was to provide the participants with enough information to directly start at the beginning of the lecture break. On the other hand, the goal of the study itself was not revealed, so that students would not be biased due to the instructions.

At the beginning of the break, the vignettes and questionnaires were handed out, whereby participants were randomly assigned to one of the two experimental conditions. On the first page of the handout, the instructions were repeated. The study made use of a between subjects design, with one independent variable, namely self-blame as reported by the fictional female victim of rape. This variable was manipulated through the vignette: a fictional but realistic Victim Impact Statement (VIS), a legal tool which the victim can use to express consequences of the victimization and feelings within the criminal justice system. Self-blame was either reported in terms of the explicitly naming of causes rooted in the behavior of the victim (self-blame condition, $N = 25$, see appendix A) or not mentioned at all (control condition, $N = 38$, see appendix B). The rest of the story was held constant. After reading a version of the VIS, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire with questions concerning the portrayed victim. Both the VISes and the questionnaire were in Dutch for reasons of authenticity and convenience for the participants.

**Victim Impact Statement**

The VIS consists of a less than 1 A4 story about a girl going out with friends, meeting a young man at a bar. The guy and the girl have a nice evening together: they have a couple of drinks, dance and talk. At the end of the night, the friends of the girl have already left the place and the guy offers to cycle her home. However, the night doesn’t end as the girl planned, because it turned out that the guy wanted to have sex with her. She resists, but he rapes her at her home. From here on, the two conditions differ.

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16 In Dutch criminal law, a victim of a crime that is prosecuted has the right to give a Victim Impact Statement (VIS) when the crime can be sentenced with at least a maximum of 8 years of prison sentence or when the prosecution concerns a crime specifically named in art. 51e (1) Criminal Code of Procedure. In the case of rape, a victim is eligible to give a VIS because rape can be sentenced through a maximum of 12 years of imprisonment (art. 242 of the Dutch Penal Code). The victim is only allowed to address the consequences of the victimization. A VIS can be orally presented and/or handed in in writing. For authenticity of the VIS in this study, several real VISes were consulted (see Korver, 2012; Lens, Pemberton, & Groenhuijsen, 2010). Moreover, the VIS used in this study is based on the VIS used by Lens, Van Doorn, Pemberton, & Bogaerts (2013) in their study.
In the self-blame condition (see appendix A), the victim declares that the rape has changed her life. Although she realizes that she has given the guy rise to think that she liked him, she still states that he should not have done this to her. This story is based on the theory of self-blame as reviewed in paragraph 2.1. of this thesis. Rape victims often show signs of self-blame. Moor & Farchi (2011) have even argued that rape survivors show a greater extent of self-blame than survivors of other kinds of trauma. However, the blame at the side of the perpetrator was not left out (Frazier, 2003). Furthermore, in their feeling of self-blame victims of sexual assault focus mainly on the interpersonal (“why-me”) question and blame themselves for the occasion of the victimization (rather than why this perpetrator victimized them) (Miller & Porter, 1983). This has been taken into account while drafting the VIS. Finally, items that are associated with behavioral self-blame are woven into the story. The victim claims to have consumed alcohol, flirted with the young man, gave rise to him to think that she liked him, should have made her boundaries more clear to him, should have been more cautious, did not think anything would be wrong in letting him cycle her home, etc. Items such as “I should have resisted more”, “I should have been more cautious” (Ullman & Najdowski, 2011, p. 1941, Frazier, 2003, appendix), “I used poor judgment”, “I put myself in a vulnerable position” and “I didn’t do enough to protect myself” (Frazier, 2003, appendix) were thus all present in the story in the form of a narrative.

In the control condition (see appendix B), the victim merely states that the rape has changed her life and that the guy should have had no reason to do this to her.

**Questionnaire**

The questionnaire in this study consisted, of 10 items (see appendix C), in which all irrational victim strategies (see par. 2.2.2.) were represented. All questions could be answered on a bipolar 7-point Likert-scale (1-7, with 4 explicitly marked neutral). Due to time constraints, it was not possible to incorporate (extensive) existing scales to measure (recognized) self-blame. For the same reasons, it was not possible to include a BJW-scale to measure the individual strength of BJW. The scale with the least items (Maes) still has 4 items, and this scale only measures ultimate justice. More general scales have at least 6 items (see for an overview Furnham, 2003).

Taking the above into account, this study can still be seen as a typical BJW-study, because it consists of a written report that entails suffering that has taken place a while ago. The participant is not related to the victim (Lerner & Miller, 1978).
### 4.1.3. Variables and measures

Please note that this paragraph will repeatedly refer to the questionnaire. The whole questionnaire can be found in appendix C. Additionally, an overview of the questions is given below in table 4.1.

Table 4.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q. no.</th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>With regard to the manipulation check</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q8</td>
<td>Recognized self-blame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>With regard to irrational victim strategy 1: blaming the victim</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q7</td>
<td>Amount of blame assigned to the victim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>With regard to irrational victim strategy 2: victim derogation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1</td>
<td>General impression of the victim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3</td>
<td>Sympathy for the victim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4</td>
<td>Intelligence of the victim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>With regard to irrational victim strategy 3: reinterpreting the outcome</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q9</td>
<td>Authenticity of the consequences as expressed by the victim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q10</td>
<td>Expected posttraumatic growth (PTG)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>With regard to irrational victim strategy 4: psychological distancing</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2</td>
<td>Perceived similarity with the victim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5</td>
<td>Eagerness to meet the victim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6</td>
<td>Amount of blame assigned to the perpetrator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Independent variable: reported self-blame**

The independent variable manipulated in this study was the reported self-blame by the victim portrayed in the VIS in the vignette. As explained in paragraph 4.1.2., different existing items of behavioral self-blame, such as “I should have resisted more” and “I should have been more cautious” were contained in the vignette in the form of a narrative. Those items were absent in the control condition.
Manipulation check

A manipulation check was included in the questionnaire to test whether the manipulation was successful. This was done in line with research by Coates et al. (1979) and later Thornton et al. (1988): “one item that was intended for use as a check on the self-blame manipulation was concerned with the extent to which the victim appeared to consider herself responsible for what had occurred” (p. 415). In this study, Q8 concerned the question to what extent the victim had expressed self-blame in the VIS.

This question was purposely placed relatively at the end of the questionnaire, at least after the questions to what extent the participants assigned blame to the perpetrator and the victim (see the section on the dependent variables), so that those questions would not be influenced by the manipulation check.

Dependent variables

Apart from gender and age, almost all the outcome measures of the study are related to the four irrational victim strategies. Those will be discussed below. Only the amount of responsibility that is assigned to the perpetrator by the participant (Q6, “the perpetrator is innocent” to “the perpetrator is fully responsible”) is not directly related to the BJW-responses. This measure was included to see how the blame assigned to the victim is related to blame assigned to the perpetrator (see hypothesis 5 in chapter 3).

Irrational victim strategy 1: blaming the victim

Q7 of the questionnaire was related to the strategy of blaming the victim. The respondent had to rate the amount of (behavioral) blame at the side of the victim (“the victim is innocent” to “the victim is fully responsible”). Taking rape as the cause of victimhood, there is a fair chance that the victim will be blamed: “support sources may be more likely to react with blaming or other negative reactions, particularly if they subscribe to rape myths that hold victims responsible for rape” (Ullman & Najdowski, 2011, p. 1936). Moreover, Moor & Farchi (2011) have written the following: “The particular prejudiced ideology facing rape victims consists of a set of recognizable and widely shared culturally agreed upon victim-blaming attitudes” (p. 449).
Irrational victim strategy 2: victim derogation

In victim derogation, the character of the victim is downgraded in order to be able to argue that the victim is less deserving (in terms of justice). In the questionnaire, three questions addressed the character of the victim:

- Q1: What is your general impression of the victim? (“extremely negative” to “extremely positive”);
- Q3: How sympathetic do you think the victim is? (“not at all” to “very”);
- Q4: How intelligent do you think the victim is? (“not at all” to “very”).

Irrational victim strategy 3: reinterpreting the outcome

Firstly, the strategy of reinterpreting the outcome was measured by asking the participants whether they believed that the consequences that were expressed by the victim in the VIS were authentic (Q9, “totally unsure” to “totally sure”). If a participant is not sure the consequences that were expressed were real, this is an indication that he tried to reinterpret the outcome.

Secondly, as explained in paragraph 2.2.2., an observer can reinterpret the outcome through believing that the victim has actually gained something from the victimization, which is also captured in the theory of posttraumatic growth. Because it was assumed that participants were not familiar with this theory, it was shortly explained before asking the participant to what extent he expected that the victim portrayed in the VIS experienced PTG (Q10, “not at all” to “very much”). In paragraph 2.2.2. it was stated that women tend to score higher on PTG scales than men. In this study, only the victim in the vignette was rated on PTG, so a relative difference between men and women cannot have biased the outcome.

Irrational victim strategy 4: psychological distancing

Psychological distancing was measured through two questions in the questionnaire:

- To what extent can you identify with the victim? (meaning: to what extent are you similar to the victim) (Q2, “not at all” to “totally”);
- How eager are you to meet the victim? (Q5, “not at all” to “very”).

It should be noted that the participant is not related to the portrayed victim. Special bonds such as (perceived) friendship can therefore not bias the answers to these two questions.

For three out of the four strategies, more than one question was developed. Still, the questions are analyzed separately. However, the correlations between the items that represent the same
strategy have been calculated (see paragraph 4.2.) to see whether they indeed represent the same concept.

4.2. Results

Table 4.2. gives an overview of all conducted t-tests, table 4.3. gives an overview of all conducted correlations.

Manipulation Check

On average, participants recognized that the victim in the self-blame condition ($M = 3.76, SE = .302$) attributed significantly more responsibility to herself than the victim in the control condition ($M = 2.39, SE = .260$); $t(61) = 3.385, p = .001; r = .40$. Furthermore, it is important to note that a correlation showed no significant relationship between blaming the victim and the reported self-blame ($r = -.07, p > .05$) (see table 4.3.), which means that two concepts were not mixed up or used interchangeably by the participants. This can further confirm that the manipulation check was successful: the participants were affected by the experimental conditions.

Irrational victim strategy 1: blaming the victim

Participants engaged less in victim blaming when in the self-blame condition ($M = 2.80, SE = .321$) than when reading the statement which does not provide information about the attribution of blame to the self ($M = 3.29, SE = .253$), but this result was non-significant $t(61) = -1.205, p > .05; r = .15$. Thus, hypothesis (H1) was rejected.

Irrational victim strategy 2: victim derogation

The general impression of the victim is not significantly more positive when the participant is reading the statement of the self-blaming victim ($M = 4.20, SE = .200$) than when reading the neutral statement ($M = 4.00, SE = .156$); $t(61) = .796, p > .05; r = .10$.

Furthermore, Participants felt not significantly more sympathy for the victim who expressed self-blame ($M = 4.48, SE = .201$) than for the victim who was neutral about her own responsibility ($M = 4.29, SE = .130$); $t(61) = .834, p > .05; r = .10$.

There was also no significant difference found in the rating of the intelligence of the victim between the self-blame condition ($M = 3.76, SE = .240$) and the control condition ($M = 3.76$,
From the above, it can be concluded H2 should be rejected.

When looking at the table of correlations (see table 4.3.), it can be concluded that the three different questions that were asked to test victim derogation are at least marginally significantly correlated. From this we can assume that the questions tap into the same concept (victim derogation). The general impression of the victim is positively correlated with how sympathetic the victim was rated \( (r = .453, p < .001) \) and to the rating of the intelligence of the victim \( (r = .247, p < .10) \). Moreover, the rating of the intelligence of the victim was also positively related to how sympathetic the victim was rated \( (r = .560, p < .001) \).

**Irrational victim strategy 3: reinterpreting the outcome**

Firstly, there was no significant difference in the extent to which participants believed that the victim indeed experienced the consequences as were written in the statement between the self-blame condition \( (M = 4.72, SE = .268) \) and the control condition \( (M = 4.53, SE = .222) \); \( t(61) = .554, p > .05; r = .07 \).

Secondly, Participants who read the statement of the victim in the self-blame condition \( (M = 3.76, SE = .279) \) believed that the victim had benefited from posttraumatic growth (PTG) significantly more than participants who read the statement of the victim in the control condition \( (M = 2.97, SE = .234) \); \( t(61) = 2.146, p < .05; r = .26 \).

This means that there was evidence found that observers reinterpret the outcome to a more positive outcome when the victim blamed herself more, in contrast to what was hypothesized (H3) on the basis of the PTG-measure, but not on the basis of the authenticity measure. The two measures are not significantly correlated \( (r = .189, p > .05) \).

Furthermore, the table of correlations (table 4.3.) showed that the extent to which participants recognize self-blame in the victim is positively correlated with the authenticity of the consequences as expressed by the victim \( (r = .257, p < .05) \) and the expected PTG \( (r = .378, p < .01) \).

**Irrational victim strategy 4: Psychological distancing**

Participants would not significantly identify more with the victim when reading the statement of the self-blaming victim \( (M = 3.68, SE = .355) \) than when reading the neutral statement \( (M = 3.21, SE = .251) \); \( t(61) = 1.113, p > .05; r = .14 \).
Participants did not want to meet the victim who engaged in self-blame significantly more ($M = 3.04, SE = .308$) than the victim who was neutral about her own responsibility ($M = 2.47, SE = .232$); $t(61) = 1.493, p > .05; r = .19$.

The two measures that were used to test psychological distancing were not significantly correlated ($r = .113, p > .05$).

The above indicates that H4 should be rejected.

**Distribution of blame**

From the statement by Grubb & Harrower (2009) that blaming the victim in cases of rape seems to indicate a tolerance of the crime of rape, it was hypothesized that the responsibility of the victim correlates negatively with responsibility of the offender (H5). A significant negative relationship between the amount of blame attributed by the participants to the perpetrator and to the victim was indeed found, $r = -.311, p < 0.5$. H5 therefore was supported.

Another way to look at the “distribution of blame” is to look at the “total amount of blame” that is distributed among perpetrator and victim (there were no more parties in this study that could be blamed), and see whether self-blame of the victim influences this. Therefore, a sum variable of Q6 and Q7 was constructed, ranging from 2 (lowest possible blame for perpetrator (1) plus lowest possible blame for victim (1)) to 14 (highest possible blame for perpetrator (7) plus highest possible blame for victim (7)). In the self-blame condition ($M = 8.24, SE = .366$), the sum of the responsibility (of the victim and the perpetrator together) was lower than in the control group ($M = 9.00, SE = .250$); which difference is marginally significant: $t(61) = -1.775, p = .81; r = .22$.

This indicates that when the victim engages in self-blame, participants distribute less blame in total.

**A victim similar to the participant**

In relation to the theory, it was hypothesized that the eagerness to meet the victim would correlate negatively with the perceived similarity to the victim (H6). However, no significant relationship was found between the two variables ($r = .113, p > .05$).

**Different strategies in different conditions**

To measure whether blaming the victim or derogation was the more prominently used strategy, a new variable was computed, whereby the mean derogation-score of the participant
was subtracted from the blaming the victim-rating (Q7) of the same participant. The mean derogation score was calculated from the means of the derogation-related questions in the questionnaire (Q1, Q3 and Q4), which can be justified by the fact that the three items of derogation correlate positively with each other, showing that they all three belong to the same concept. All of the above was possible because all initial items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale, meaning that relative ratings are comparable. The new variable has another range: -6 (lowest possible score in blaming the victim (1) minus highest possible score in victim derogation (7)) to 6 (highest possible score in blaming the victim (7) minus lowest possible score in victim derogation (1)). This newly computed variable results in an answer to the question whether one participant, uses more blaming the victim or more victim derogation as a BJW-restoring response: a negative outcome of the blame-rating minus the mean derogation-score shows that derogation is used more, whereas a positive outcome would show a higher extent of blaming the victim within the participant.

No significant evidence was found that can support the hypothesis (H7) that in a case of high responsibility at the side of the victim, in this experiment in the self-blame condition ($M = -1.347$, $SE = .373$), the strategy of blaming the victim was used more by the participants than in case of a low responsibility at the side of the victim, in this experiment in the control condition ($M = -.728$, $SE = .311$), $t(61) = -1.266$, $p > .05$; $r = .16$. Rather, a dependent t-test revealed that participants used the irrational victim strategy ‘derogation’ ($M = 4.069$, $SE = .199$) more than they used the irrational victim strategy ‘blaming the victim’ ($M = 3.10$, $SE = .097$) regardless of the condition they were in; $t(62) = -4.053$, $p < .001$; $r = .46$.

Table of correlations
Apart from the already mentioned correlations within the discussed hypotheses and strategies, the table of correlations (see table 4.3.) shows the following (marginally) significant relationships:

a) The general impression of the victim is positively correlated with the eagerness to meet the victim ($r = .262$, $p < .05$) and the blame assigned to the perpetrator ($r = .354$, $p < .01$);

b) The extent to which participants feel similar to the victim is positively correlated with the extent to which they find the victim sympathetic ($r = .365$, $p < .01$);

c) The extent to which participants rate the victim as sympathetic is positively correlated with how eager they are to meet the victim ($r = .281$, $p < .05$), the extent to which they assign blame to the perpetrator ($r = .449$, $p < .001$) and how sure they are that the
consequences the victim expressed are authentic ($r = .325, p < .01$). Moreover, it is negatively correlated to the amount of blame they assigned to the victim ($r = -.278, p < .05$);

d) The rated intelligence is positively correlated with the eagerness to meet the victim ($r = .274, p < .05$);

e) The eagerness to meet the victim is positively correlated with the amount of blame assigned to the perpetrator ($r = .261, p < .05$) and the extent to which the participants recognized self-blame in the victim ($r = .216, p < .10$);

f) The amount of blame assigned to the perpetrator is positively correlated to how authentic the participants the story (consequences) of the victim rate ($r = .256, p < .05$);

g) The amount of blame assigned to the victim is positively related to the expected PTG ($r = .218, p < .10$).
With regard to the manipulation check

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q. No.</th>
<th>Self-blame condition</th>
<th>Control Condition</th>
<th>T-test result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q8</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>.302</td>
<td>2.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With regard to irrational victim strategy 1: blaming the victim

| Q7     | 2.80 | .321 | 3.29 | .253 | -1.205 | .233 |

With regard to irrational victim strategy 2: victim derogation

| Q1     | 4.20 | .200 | 4.00 | .156 | .796 | .429 |
| Q3     | 4.48 | .201 | 4.29 | .130 | .834 | .408 |
| Q4     | 3.76 | .240 | 3.76 | .166 | -.011 | .991 |

With regard to irrational victim strategy 3: reinterpreting the outcome

| Q9     | 4.72 | .268 | 4.53 | .222 | .554 | .582 |
| Q10    | 3.76 | .279 | 2.97 | .234 | 2.146 | .036 |

With regard to irrational victim strategy 4: psychological distancing

| Q2     | 3.68 | .355 | 3.21 | .251 | 1.113 | .270 |
| Q5     | 3.04 | .308 | 2.47 | .232 | 1.493 | .141 |

With regard to the sum-variable of Q6+Q7 (distribution of blame)

|     | 8.24 | .366 | 9.00 | .250 | -1.775 | .81 |

With regard to blame minus mean derogation (different strategies)

|     | -1.347 | .373 | -0.728 | .311 | -1.266 | .210 |
### Table 4.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>General impression of the victim (Q1)</th>
<th>Perceived Similarity with the victim (Q2)</th>
<th>Sympathy towards the victim (Q3)</th>
<th>Perceived intelligence of the victim (Q4)</th>
<th>Eagerness to meet the victim (Q5)</th>
<th>Perpetrator blame (Q6)</th>
<th>Victim blame (Q7)</th>
<th>Self-blame by the victim (Q8)</th>
<th>Authenticity of consequences (Q9)</th>
<th>PTG (Q10)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General impression of the victim (Q1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.222**</td>
<td>.453**</td>
<td>.247**</td>
<td>.262**</td>
<td>-.204</td>
<td>.209</td>
<td>.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Similarity with the victim (Q2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.365**</td>
<td>.117</td>
<td>.202**</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td>-.027</td>
<td>.166</td>
<td>.174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sympathy towards the victim (Q3)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.560**</td>
<td>.281**</td>
<td>.449**</td>
<td>-.278**</td>
<td>.134</td>
<td>.325**</td>
<td>.092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived intelligence of the victim (Q4)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.274**</td>
<td>.030</td>
<td>.153</td>
<td>-.062</td>
<td>.070</td>
<td>.198</td>
<td>-.078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eagerness to meet the victim (Q5)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.261**</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>.216</td>
<td>.092</td>
<td>.196</td>
<td>.124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perpetrator blame (Q6)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>-.311**</td>
<td>-.013</td>
<td>.101</td>
<td>.256</td>
<td>.043</td>
<td>.148</td>
<td>.218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim blame (Q7)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>-.070</td>
<td>-.057</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>.431</td>
<td>.655</td>
<td>.087</td>
<td>.042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-blame by the victim (Q8)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.257**</td>
<td>.378**</td>
<td>.042</td>
<td>.189</td>
<td>.138</td>
<td>.543</td>
<td>.022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity of consequences (Q9)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.257**</td>
<td>.378**</td>
<td>.042</td>
<td>.189</td>
<td>.138</td>
<td>.543</td>
<td>.022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTG (Q10)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.257**</td>
<td>.378**</td>
<td>.042</td>
<td>.189</td>
<td>.138</td>
<td>.543</td>
<td>.022</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Bold + **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).  **Bold + *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).  **Bold. Correlation is marginally significant at the .10 level (2-tailed).
4.3. Discussion

4.3.1. Main hypothesis
As has been shown in paragraph 4.2., the results did not provide support for the four sub-hypotheses. Only with regard to the third irrational victim strategy, reinterpretation of the outcome of the event (H3), a significant result was found concerning the expectancy of PTG. While it was hypothesized that a confrontation with a victim who expresses self-blame could be compared to the confrontation with a non-innocent victim, which would therefore be less threatening in terms of BJW than a confrontation with an innocent victim, the need to employ an irrational victim strategy would be diminished, the results show that the reinterpretation of the outcome was stronger. In both conditions, the vignette did not give rise to think that the victim experienced PTG, but the participants who read the VIS in the self-blame condition reinterpreted the outcome of the victimization in a more positive way by expecting that the victim gained something.

The lack of significant results of the four sub-hypothesis leads to the conclusion that the main hypothesis should be rejected. The study did not offer support for the conclusion that people who encounter a victim who blames herself for the victimization are less inclined to employ irrational victim strategies than people who encounter a victim who does not blame herself for the victimization (because the latter is more innocent, which poses a higher threat to the Belief in a Just World of the observer, which makes the need to employ a strategy to repair this threat higher) (H). This means that, on the basis of this sample, it could not be said that self-blame can lead to less negative reactions from observers or bystanders.

However, it could first of all be stated that the significant result that was found which implies that the reinterpretation of the outcome on the basis of expected PTG is stronger when encountering a victim, might not be qualified as a negative result that is as bad as, for example, blaming the victim. It was found that observers of a victim in the self-blame condition think that this victim has had a better recovery or a less severe trauma from the victimization than the non self-blaming victim. This result is striking in itself, since self-blame is in the literature associated with poorer recovery or a more severe trauma. At the same time, the other measure that was used to test the strategy of reinterpretation of the outcome also points at positive results when looking at the correlation: recognized self-blame is positively correlated with the perceived authenticity of the expressed consequences, which is in line with the hypothesized direction.
A second relevant finding that could be taken from the lack of significant results is that the results are at least not significant contrary to the hypotheses (apart from the PTG measure as explained above). Other research has suggested that “the benefits of receiving positive social reactions are modest, negative social reactions can have a clear negative impact on victims’ recovery by exacerbating symptoms of psychological and physical distress” (Brown & Testa, 2008, p. 4). In that sense, victims who express self-blame might not be better off than victims who do not express self-blame (as hypothesized), but at least they are not worse off, which is even more important.

Furthermore, when looking at the results of the t-tests, it appears, although not significant, the results almost exclusively point in the hypothesized direction. This might give rise to expect that with more participants (and thus a higher power) or with a stronger manipulation, clearer results could have been achieved.

Two other aspects could be named that might have had an effect on the results. First of all, there might not be any perceived difference in the level of innocence of the two presented victims in the vignette because some people might perceive the participation in the criminal justice system via the VIS as “non-monetary compensation”: the victims were already allowed to restore justice through giving the VIS. In this case, neither of the victims could pose a threat to the BJW, or at least the threats were equally high. Secondly, when the BJW is brought into the conscious level, the effect of the BJW seems to get smaller in terms of irrational victim strategies. Whether this was the case in this study is difficult to tell. However, the short timeframe in which the participants had to fill out the questionnaire, the order of the questions and the anonymity of the answers should have reduced the possibility for the participants to answer the questions on a more conscious level to a maximum.

4.3.2. Other hypotheses derived from literature
Apart from the main hypothesis, which was turned into four sub-hypotheses, three other hypotheses that were derived from the literature were tested (H5, H6 and H7).

With regard to H5, as hypothesized, a negative relationship was found between the amount of blame attributed by the participants to the perpetrator and to the victim. This could be interpreted as in line with the statement by Grubb & Harrower (2009) that blaming the victim in cases of rape seems to indicate a tolerance of the crime of rape, because as blaming the victim increases, the blame assigned to the perpetrator decreases. However, a correlation does not give a direction of a causal relationship. Therefore, despite the significant
relationship, one needs to be cautious in concluding that blaming the victim leads to tolerance of the crime itself.

The distribution of blame was considered through the total amount of blame, which resulted in the conclusion that when the victim engaged in self-blame, participant distributed less blame in total. This result could indicate that when the information about the victimization includes information about responsibility, the observer is less inclined to be judgmental about the responsibility at the side of any actor. This however is speculative, since there was no explicit hypothesis tested that was based on the literature.

The second literature-derived hypothesis that was tested (H6) predicted that the eagerness to meet the victim correlates negatively with the perceived similarity to the victim. No significant relationship was found. There are no factors known, other than already named (low number of participants, weak manipulation), that could account for the discrepancy with the literature.

The last literature-derived hypothesis (H7) did also not lead to findings of significant differences between the two conditions. One of the possible explanations for not finding the same pattern as Haynes & Olson (2006) might be that the responsibility at the side of the victim was not recognized as such in the self-blame condition by the participants, for example because they do not see self-blame as actual blame or responsibility but only as a reaction to the victimization. This could be confirmed by the results of the earlier discussed t-test on the blame that was assigned to the victim by the participants, which showed that on average, the participants in the self-blame condition only scored a 2.8 on the 1-7 Likert scale on which everything below a score of 4.0 can be marked as below neutral (not at all – neutral). Also, it can be recalled that there was no significant difference in the amount of blaming the victim between the two experimental conditions. The lack of a difference in recognized blame would mean a lack of the high-responsibility condition that would be needed to find evidence that supports the claim of Haynes and Olson (2006). However, if this premise is accepted, so compared to the study of Haynes and Olson all participants of this study were in a low-responsibility condition, the fact that the derogation strategy was used more is in accordance with their hypothesis.

4.3.3. Exploratory findings
The correlation table (see table 4.3.) showed more (marginally) significant results than the ones discussed within the discussion of the hypotheses. None of the non-hypothesized correlations were strong enough to call into question whether the constructs are independent.
A few findings are interesting enough to highlight in its own right. Since these results are not related to specific hypotheses, they should be considered as exploratory.

First of all, the impression participants had of character of the victim seems to be related to the amount of blame that is assigned to the victim (negative relationship) as well as the perpetrator (positive relationship) (see correlation (a) and (c) in par. 4.2., section “table of correlations”).

Secondly, the finding that the eagerness to meet the victim and the extent to which the participants recognized self-blame in the victim are positively correlated (see correlation (e) in par. 4.2.), is interesting in the light of the earlier mentioned result that people who have read the statement of the victim who expressed self-blame expect more PTG in the victim (a better recovery or a less severe trauma) than the people who read the statement of the non-self-blaming victim. Both findings suggest a less negative expectation of the consequences of self-blame than what was found in the literature. This does not mean that the literature is wrong in stating that self-blame can have negative consequences for the victim, but it does indicate that observers of a victim do not always expect such detrimental consequences.

Thirdly, as correlation (f) in par. 4.2. indicates, there is a positive relationship between the extent to which people believe the story of a victim and the amount of blame they assign to the perpetrator. This correlation has clear implications for the institutional environment of the victim: the criminal justice system, where the blame assigned to the perpetrator is converted into punishment. Especially when realizing that the perceived authenticity of the expressed consequences is positively correlated with the recognized self-blame by the victim and the extent to which the victim is seen as sympathetic, one can question to what extent the victim can have an influence on the judge that assigns punishment to the perpetrator.

Finally, the amount of blame assigned to the victim is positively related to the expected PTG (correlation (g) in par. 4.2.). It could be argued that people try to “compensate” negative elements with positive elements, blame being the negative element and PTG the positive.

4.4.4. Limitations and directions for future research

As already shortly discussed above, there are a couple of limitations to this study. Only a small number of participants took part in the study, leading to a low power, and only 10 questions were posed in the questionnaire, which means that there was no room for including existing (validated) scales to measure the irrational victim strategies. Moreover, the personal level of the BJW could not be measured.
Those limitations are due to the fact that the first criterion for selecting participants had been that they were students in criminal law. To recruit these students without monetary compensation would be difficult. Moreover, it was important that students would not be biased towards the questionnaire because they knew the goal of the study. It was therefore best to let all the participants work on the questionnaire at the same time. This resulted in conducting the study in the break of a lecture, where only 80 people were available, of which only 63 were willing to take part. Although the response rate was quite high (approximately 80%), the number of participants per condition was too low to result in high-powered analyses. The break of the lecture did also limit the timeframe available for the students to work on the questionnaire.

Another limitation of this study is that the manipulation was too weak. This was not expected beforehand. In addition, the case of rape was specifically chosen because it was expected to strengthen the manipulation because rape is often associated with blaming the victim. However, with hindsight, it could be said that this on the other hand might have weakened the manipulation rather than strengthened, because blaming the victim is not only associated with responsible victims, but also with innocent victims, so that this would not differentiate the two experimental groups (see Correia et al., 2001). A stronger manipulation could for example look like the statement by a victim in a vignette used in the study of Coates et al. (1979): “All in all, I just really do feel that it was my fault, and I was to blame” (p. 39). However, it is still questionable whether this manipulation is strong enough when taking into account the following comment by Correia et al. (2001):

“As shown by the check on manipulation, the observers assigned significantly different degrees of innocence to the victim in the “innocent victim” and “noninnocent victim” condition, but in the condition in which the victim was supposed to be innocent, he/she was not perceived to be completely innocent, this is probably related to the stigma associated with HIV-infected people” (p. 338)

In the vignette of this study, the victim was not infected with HIV but a victim of rape. However, also rape victims are often confronted with stigma (rape myths, see paragraph 2.1.3; Grubb & Harrower, 2009). Moreover, from the manipulation check, which proved to be successful, we can still conclude that the self-blaming victim was not rated “fully responsible” (non-innocent), and the non-self-blaming victim was not rated “fully innocent”. This could have affected the results.

Finally, it would have been nice to also test some of the gender-based results of BJW-research within the sample of the experimental study of this thesis. Again, due to a limited
sample size, the power of those analyses would be too small. Therefore, no separate hypothesis is tested within this line of research.

The above-mentioned limitations of this study could be eliminated in future research with a larger group of participants, a longer time frame and a stronger manipulation. With regard to this stronger manipulation, it is recommended that future research focuses on different kinds of victimhood, that might influence the attitude towards the presented victim in general (not related to the expressed self-blame).
5. **Study 2: a series of interviews with Victim Support Holland**

As explained, the negative side of self-blame prevails in the literature. This has implications for the way professional support deals with the expression of self-blame. Especially in the framework that was used in the experimental study for this thesis, Victim Support is a primary provider of support, because they help victims decide whether they want to make a VIS and, if so, they advice on the content of this VIS. Victim assistance services are normally associated with giving the following basic messages to the victim: “You are safe now!”, “You did nothing wrong! You carry no blame for the victimization” and “You are not alone!” (Kirchhoff, 2005, p. 59). Furthermore, Pemberton (2012, p. 56) argues that “a large part of Victim Support’s work involves measures to reduce secondary victimization and deliver emotional support to victims (…), efforts to fill in the void in the societal reaction to victimization”. In relation to the results of the experiment, the question rises whether those messages, more specifically the message “you did nothing wrong” is appropriate or helpful to the victim.

Although the hypothesis that self-blame would lead to more positive or less negative reactions was not confirmed, the effects of self-blame were not as “detrimental” either in terms of reactions from bystanders. Especially when realizing that Victim Support Holland, at least the staff that does support victims in making a VIS, does not intend to have a specific therapeutic role, and that victims have specific goals with issuing a VIS (such as showing others the consequences of the victimization and influencing the height of the punishment for the offender (Lens et al., 2010)) it is worthwhile researching how they approach self-blame and self-blaming victims within their service of helping to write a VIS. This means that although the current literature states that self-blame is “bad” in terms of recovery or coping, this should not be the primary concern of VSH. Moreover, the above should be seen in relation to the finding of the experimental study above that authenticity of the story of the victim is positively correlated with the amount of blame assigned to the victim.

In order to research whether and how self-blame plays a role in the legal framework, an explorative interview study was conducted, including five semi-structured interviews with staff of Victim Support Holland (VSH; Slachtofferhulp Nederland (SHN)) were held.
5.1. Research design

5.1.1. Participants
Within the explorative setting, five staff members of VSH, who assist victims in writing a VIS, were interviewed. Even in this low number of interviews, the numbers of gender and profession were balanced: 3 males and 2 females participated, 2 trained volunteers and 3 professionals took part in the study. Furthermore, the participants come from different ‘legal regions’ in the Netherlands.

5.1.2. Procedure
The interviews were organized after a meeting with dr. S. Leferink, a senior policy advisor at the head quarters of VSH, who recruited the participants (convenience sample). The participants agreed to be interviewed about the coming into existence of a VIS in practice.

Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was tape-recorded in order to guarantee an accurate account (written afterwards – all the accounts can be found in appendices F – J: interview #1 - #5). All the interviews were held in Dutch for the convenience of the participants and because the discussed issues concern Dutch Law. The accounts were made anonymous. Instead of names, numbers are used in this thesis, so that that the accounts cannot directly be linked to one of the participants.\footnote{Staff members of VSH were named and thanked in the foreword and acknowledgments. Therefore, the accounts are not completely anonymous. Also, the statements in the result section correspond to the interview number of the full accounts as displayed in the appendices. However, there are no direct links between names and account numbers.}

The interviews were based on a semi-structured interview guide (see appendix E), which started with the reading out loud of the story of a victim (see appendix D), very similar to the vignette of the self-blame condition of the experimental study of chapter 4. The only difference with this story about the girl getting raped by a boy she meets when going out and afterwards feeling a sense of guilt is that the story is written a bit less structured. This lack of structure was also brought in speech in the interview. The goal of this minor difference was that this interview was aimed at researching how this story would be turned into a VIS by the VSH-staff member. After listening to the story, the participant was asked to freely discuss what he or she would do when hearing this story and how this story would end up in a VIS. At this point, the hypothesis or exact topic of this thesis were not yet clear to the participant, so that the participant would not be biased.
After this first questions, several explicit issues were discussed to be sure that every participant at least provided his or her views about what I set as “minimum standards”: questions like: what advice do you give a victim, which part of the story is included in the VIS. Sometimes, the questions were already covered by the first part of the interview.

After a short explanation the topic and main hypothesis of the thesis, the same questions were asked again, now with a focus on self-blame. Finally, some closing questions related to self-blame were asked (such as: how often do you see victims express self-blame? is there a difference between the written and spoken version of the VIS when it comes to self-blame?).

5.2. Legal intermezzo: the right to give a Victim Impact Statement

Before turning to the results and discussion on the results of the interviews, it is important to be a bit more clear on what a VIS is and how it works, because the staff-members of VSH will refer to this, or at least work on the basis of its legal implications. To be able to fully understand the comments of the participants, it is important to understand the background of the VIS.

As referred to in footnote 16, the right to give a VIS is rooted in art. 51e of the Dutch Criminal Code of Procedure (CCP). This article is relatively new in criminal procedure, the right to give a VIS only exists since the 1st of January 2005 and in its current scope not even a year (the last change in the law was effectuated by the first of September, 2012 (Stb. 2012, 370) which is really short, especially when compared to the time of existence of the criminal law or the current law books in criminal law. However, there has been some development over the years, going hand in hand with “emancipation of the victim”.

There are two versions of the Victim Impact Statement: oral and written (in Dutch commonly referred to as “SSV”, schriftelijke slachtofferverklaring). The oral version can be used to accompany the written version of the VIS, and the right to issue an oral VIS does not annul the right to give a written VIS only. Each year, approximately 3000 written statements are filed and 300 victims speak in court (Lens et al., 2010). With regard to the expression of self-blame, there should be no difference between the two forms of the VIS.

18 This paragraph is loosely based on an own, unpublished paper, written in relation to the course “Current Issues” within the master program Victimology & Criminal Justice at Tilburg University (January 2013).
The Victim Impact Statement is now regulated in the CCP in title Book 1- IIIA. The current rules formally limit the scope of the Victim Impact Statement from certain perspectives. First of all, in terms of entitlement, only a victim that has reached the age of 12 that is defined a victim on the basis of art. 51a CCP can automatically give a VIS herself if she meets the other requirements. Otherwise, the judge has to give specific permission. Since the latest change of law, representation is now possible for legal representatives of a younger child or, when the victim has passed away (also applicable for older victims), a maximum of three surviving relatives are allowed to give a VIS. Secondly, a VIS can only be issued in certain cases, according to art. 51e (4) CCP: criminal offences in which the accused can, according to the statutory description of the offence, be sentenced with at least a maximum of 8 years of custody, as well as some specified criminal offences such as child pornography and assault. Content-wise, the Victim Impact Statement is limited to the consequences that these criminal offences have had on the victim himself. Finally, the scope is limited in time; a victim may only speak for 10-15 minutes.

When looking at the reasons to implement the Victim Impact Statement in the first place, the explanatory memorandum (Kamerstukken II 2000/01 27 632, nr. 1-3) names four reasons: 1) it would have a beneficial influence on the victim, 2) it would give the judges valuable information on the case, 3) it would enhance deterrence in general and 4) it would enhance deterrence specifically aimed at the suspect/convicted. As mentioned above, the reasons for a victim to give a VIS do sometimes deviate from those reasons (Lens et al., 2010). When a victim decides to give a VIS, Victim Support Holland offers to assist the victim in writing the VIS.

5.3. Results and discussion

5.3.1. General procedure

In the first phase of the interview, the participants were confronted with the story of the rape victim. Two of the participants (#3 and #4) commented that the story looked like a police report that they could receive from the police if they refer the victim to VSH. Apart from the police report, VSH also receives the indictment that will lead the criminal trial. This shows that a VIS will only be prepared under the assistance of VSH if is already clear that the victim will be allowed to give the VIS, rather than shortly after the victimization (when the police investigations are still running).
Although the formal reports are present, it stands out that most of the participants (four out of five) do not consider those documents as most important. When drafting a VIS, they are not looking for the facts of the story, but rather the feelings and emotions of the victim, because those are seen as the consequences – the only legally allowed content of the VIS. A common framework is used to get to these feelings and emotions: all the participants try to let their client (the victim) recall or even relive three moments in time: the moment of the victimization, the moment shortly after and a period longer after (“now”). In the vignette, the beginning of the third paragraph (where the boy turns his head and kisses the girl/where the atmosphere starts to change, is seen as the beginning of the victimization (rather than the actual rape) in terms of feelings and emotions.

When writing the VIS, the staff-members of VSH try emphasize the consequences that the victimization has had in an emotional manner. This is imperative, since consequences are always emotional (#1). Apart from writing the VIS for the victim, the staff members try to explain to the victim how the criminal procedure works, what the victim can expect and which legal framework governs their speech (see par. 5.2.). When victims do not want to work within this framework, for example because they want to address the suspect personally instead of indirectly via the judge or when they want to talk about other aspects of the crime than the consequences it has had for them personally, VSH might advise the victim to file the VIS individually without formal assistance of VSH (see interview #5).

A last important aspect of the general working method of SHN that was brought forward in the interviews is that all staff-members agree upon the fact that they do not give therapeutic support (although for the victim it might sometimes feel like that, and staff-members see it as their job to refer people to professional therapeutic help if they see that the recovery of the victim is poor) but rather assist the victim in their legal role (by #1 called: “facilitating what the victim wants”, by #2 called “lawyer light”). From the interviews, it could also be concluded that all staff-members have a very personal approach (also explicitly mentioned in interview #1). The training they have had seems general enough to leave room for individual differences. On the one hand, this might enhance the possibility to work on the basis of individual wishes of the clients (victims). On the other hand, it shows that a single topic is handled differently by different staff-members, as we will see when looking at how self-blame was approached.
5.3.2. Working with self-blame

When reading the story of the victim to the participants, different reactions emerged with regard to the expressed self-blame. In interview #1, it was mentioned as one of the first things in the first phase of the interview, and seen as a problem or a difficulty to handle. Questions that the participant would ask the vignette-victim in relation to the signaling of her self-blame are: “can you imagine that the boy reacted in this way?”, “which role did the alcohol play in the whole situation?” and “what did you think of the fact that your friends left without you?”. As indicated by these questions and as I felt throughout the interview, there seemed to be a thin line between self-blame as expressed by the victims’ story and blaming the victim, because the participant (implicitly and probably unintentionally) connected the victimization to behavioral causes (at the side of the victim, such as letting it happen, drinking alcohol and not staying with friends). This would contradict the main hypothesis of this thesis, because the hypothesis would predict that the expression of self-blame by the victim would diminish blaming the victim. Participant #1 however seems to find reason to blame the victim in the expression of self-blame by the victims’ story.

The explicitly named reason that in interview #1 the self-blame was seen as a problem was the fact that VSH does not support the victim as being a co-perpetrator, but only as a victim. This is related to the role of the victim in the criminal justice system: the victim is exclusively seen as the harmed party, whereas the suspect is exclusively seen as harm doer. Furthermore, because the VIS is often linked to a claim for damages within the criminal procedure, there would be a chance that the stressing of own behavioral clues could lead to a lowering of the damages. Also with regard to the punishment of the perpetrator, “extenuating circumstances” could diminish the sentence.

Despite those “risks”, participant #1 would include the feeling of self-blame in the VIS if the victim would want this, because after all, it is an emotion, and “there is no other truth than emotion” (within a VIS).

In interview #2, the participant also immediately pointed out the expression of self-blame. In this interview, the feeling of disbelief about self-blame prevails. It is stressed that although people frequently describe their own behavior, playing a role in a situation is not the same as being responsible. Participant #2 found it highly peculiar that a victim would blame herself and suspects that this would be linked to the self-image of the victim. It could also be “talked into a victim” by for example friends or religion. Although participant #2 would, just like participant #1, include a feeling of self-blame in the VIS if the victim would insist, he would first ask two questions to test if the self-blame is true self-blame. This is curious,
because his reason to not hold on to the story as much as to the emotions of the victim (see par. 5.3.1.), is that in the VIS, the feelings have to be written down as they are felt by the victim: he argues that this does not have to be a correct representation of the truth. Two questions he asks are: “what do you really feel?” and “from the legal perspective, is it smart to express self-blame?”. With this last question, he aims at instructing the victim that the lawyer of the suspect can make use of the statement by the victim to lower the suspicions towards his client and secondly, that everything the victim puts in the VIS can be read or heard by the suspect, which can make the victim vulnerable.

Participant #3 also recognizes the expressed self-blame, but more as one element in a wider palette of emotions than as a specific issue that needs to be prioritized. He states that he often sees victims of sexual assault who blame themselves. He would however react to this emotion by telling the victim that it is not his fault. Like participant #2, participant #3 states that it does not matter whether emotions are justified to put them in a VIS. Therefore, he would put all the emotions as expressed by the victim in a VIS, including self-blame. An important consideration in this is that a victim who wants to give a VIS, wants to express herself. It is not the role of a bystander to correct what she should express. Moreover, participant #3 does not believe it is unhealthy for the victim to express self-blame. This relates to the hypothesis by Janoff-Bulman (1979) that self-blame could be adaptive. It seems that other participants do also still see self-blame as adaptive, although the literature has changed to a more negative perspective since the 1990’s (see paragraph 2.1.3.). Participant #2, for example, states that for a victim, it might be helpful to think he has played a role in the victimization (compared to the situation that he would think that it happened for no reason). Participant #4 recognizes self-blame as a “normal mechanism to cope”. Furthermore, although on another ground than the mentioned pathways of adaptive self-blame (see paragraph 2.1.3.), participant #1 states that self-blame could be seen as self-protection, because a victim does not “have to hear it [that she is to blame] from some one else” if she blames herself.

The result that self-blame is still seen as a feeling that could have positive effects for the coping of the victim also relates to the finding of the experimental research (see chapter 4) that observers did not see detrimental consequences of self-blame, but rather expected a victim who expresses self-blame to experience more PTG.

Like participant #3, participant #4 sees self-blame as one of the many emotions, and it is mainly linked to shame. Self-blame is seen as a normal reaction: victims often play scenarios in their head. This could be compared to the earlier quoted Miller et al. (2010, p.
“following distressing events, people naturally reflect upon how their experiences might have turned out more favorably had specific event antecedents occurred differently”.

The main approach taken by participant #4 is to ascertain whether the victim can handle the emotions (if not, give advice to see a psychologist) and giving the VIS, because the main reason to give a VIS should be to gain something from it, rather than to get more depressed. As important as the well being of the victim is the legal framework (see par. 5.2.). In relation to self-blame, this implies that a victim cannot directly say that she is to blame, because blame is not a consequence of the crime, but a factual cause or reason. Therefore, self-blame should be mentioned in neutral terms that relate to consequences. Moreover, the victim should not be presented in bad light. Factual claims about blame can help the accused to plead innocent.

Lastly, participant #5 claims, like participant #4, not to judge the role of the victim in her victimization. Therefore, the victim will always be told that it was not her fault. Like participant #2, participant #5 thinks that self-blame is not justified. Unlike the other participants, participant #5 uses the indictment in writing the VIS, because according to her, the indictment is the leading document of the whole trial. For example, the indictment accuses the suspect of bodily harm caused by a knife; the victim can never say that she was afraid because of the gun, even though it was a gun in the recollection of the victim. That the indictment is the starting point also implies that the victim can never talk about self-blame in the VIS, because the indictment only assigns blame in the direction of the perceived perpetrator. That the victim is not a suspect automatically means that legally, the victim is not to blame.

Concluding, it can be said that VSH does not have one, standardized way to in- or exclude self-blame in/from the VIS. Whether this leads to big differences in practice for people who express self-blame cannot be stated with certainty on the basis of this explorative research, because often indirect terms are used to describe feelings and emotions. Further research could possibly shed more light on this. However, it is at least clear that VSH does not have a therapeutic goal when assisting victims in writing a VIS. In that sense, self-blame should not be an “obstacle” that should be treated or avoided.
6. Conclusion

This thesis has discussed attitudes towards victimization. First of all an attitude of the victim towards her own victimization: self-blame. After that, attitudes of others were examined, more specifically, their irrational victim strategies expressed as a result of their Belief in a Just World, such as blaming the victim. The title of this thesis asks whether self-blame can prevent blaming the victim, and more – the “more” meaning the other irrational victim strategies: victim derogation, reinterpreting the outcome of the event and psychological distancing. This is a bold question to ask, leading to a hypothesis that will most likely not be whole-heartedly confirmed. Let’s see how far we got.

Self-blame is seen as a common reaction to victimization, especially in case of sexual assault-victims, although the extent to which people blame themselves is dependent upon several factors such as the severity, type, duration and frequency of the victimization, the social environment of the victim and individual victim characteristics. Self-blame can take the form of characterological blame, in which case the victim blames her character for the event or occurrence of the victimization or the form of behavioral blame in which specific actions are seen as leading to the victimization. Especially of the first type it is argued that it would violate the victim’s recovery. Behavioral self-blame has acquired the same label of “evilness” over the last years. Earlier, it was seen as adaptive, for it could help the victim to perceive control over situations, maintain a Belief in a Just World or give meaning to the event of victimization. However, despite the negative attitudes towards self-blame in the more recent literature, it is still acknowledged that there is a lack of research looking into the reactions of others in relation to self-blame, especially when it concerns positive reactions. That is the research gap that this thesis tries to fill.

To find a basis for positive responses to victims who express self-blame, the literature on the Belief in a Just World was further explored. This literature states that individuals believe that the world is generally just and that people get what they deserve. The notion of victimization threatens this belief, unless the observer of the victimization can argue that because the victim got victimized, she deserved it. This is possible through irrational victim strategies, as named above. Those strategies can be labeled as a negative attitude towards the victim. However, not all victims pose a threat to the BJW: if a victim is not innocent, the deservingness is clear without employing a strategy. It was therefore hypothesized that if a victim blames himself, in the eyes of the observer, this victim is not innocent and therefore not a threat to the BJW. Because the irrational victim strategies do not have to be employed,
or at least to a lesser extent, the self-blaming victim will be confronted with less negative responses from bystanders. This hypothesis was tested through an experimental study.

Before turning to this study, it is important to note that the above touches upon a very important distinction, that will get even more attention when talking about the second study conducted for this thesis: a series of explorative interviews. Namely, when a victim blames herself, this is a feeling of the victim that she has in someway had responsibility for the victimizing event. This does not mean that the feeling is a correct representation of reality. However, in the eyes of the bystander, who accepts the self-blame as a cause for the victimization and thus accepts the deservingness of the victimization, the blame implicitly has become somewhat more “real”. This is why conscious overthinking or social norms might work as a moderator for irrational victim strategies: in those circumstances, people will often not accept real responsibility at the side of the victim. The main issue here is thus that the concept of self-blame changes slightly.

The experiment was conducted through distributing a fictional Victim Impact Statement among criminal law students. One part of the group got a VIS showing the story of a female rape victim, pointing out that although she finds that the perpetrator was totally wrong, she felt that she acted in a way that might have (co-)caused the rape (self-blame condition). In the other condition, the victim only blamed the perpetrator. After reading one of the statements, the students had to fill out a questionnaire with questions about the victim.

Although the results failed to corroborate the main hypothesis, some signs suggest that this line of inquiry should not be disbanded yet – and therefore further research is needed. First of all, although non-significant, the results almost exclusively pointed in the direction of the hypothesis. Secondly, the results were “not as bad as” a pessimistic reader of the self-blame literature could expect. Finally, correlations showed some interesting results: observers did not seem to see the negative side of self-blame as much as it is recognized in the literature and the authenticity of the story of the victim is positively related to the height of the blame assigned to the perpetrator. This last finding is very interesting in the light of the criminal justice system, where blame at the side of the perpetrator is transformed into punishment.

To dive a bit deeper into the practical side of the VIS and the criminal justice system, a series of semi-structured interviews with staff members of Victim Support Holland was conducted. This research could be labeled as an explorative study, since it is a first attempt to discover whether and how the feeling of self-blame does or fails to enter the VIS in practice and thus, implicitly, how the staff member of VSH responds to the victim who expresses self-blame.
The main outcome of the study is that this depends on the staff-member: having interviewed five of them, five different approaches to self-blame appeared. Some participants labeled self-blame as an emotion, which should be part of the VIS or which should be watched with suspicion. Another participant labeled self-blame as a factual cause to the crime, which a victim is not allowed to talk about. For another participant, self-blame was excluded by the notion that the victim is a victim in the criminal trial, not a suspect.

Although interesting in itself, it is even more interesting to link those approaches to the shift of perspective as commented on above. While in the victim, self-blame is a feeling, something psychological, not all the staff-members of VSH tend to approach it as such: some of them view it from a legal perspective, because it will enter the criminal justice system. In legal terminology, blame is linked to criminal liability, which is not easily accepted. Therefore, staff-members seem to be hesitant towards expressed self-blame. Only when they approach it as a feeling, it can enter the VIS and they even see it as adaptive.

It might be expected that other observers of the victim within the legal field will also look at self-blame from a legal perspective. It is therefore worth researching how self-blame can be brought forward by the victim as an emotion, just like she can express anger or anxiety in a VIS.

As a conclusion, the question whether self-blame could prevent blaming the victim (and more) indeed was a bold question to ask, and the hypothesis that self-blame would at least lower the amount of negative attitudes towards victimization was not significantly corroborated. However, this innovative and explorative research has shown, through different angles, psychological and legal, that research into this topic is relevant, viable and necessary.
7. Bibliography


Legal sources:
8. **List of abbreviations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BJW</td>
<td>Belief in a Just World</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCP</td>
<td>Criminal Code of Procedure</td>
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<tr>
<td>DAH</td>
<td>Defensive Attribution Hypothesis</td>
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<td>PTG</td>
<td>Posttraumatic growth</td>
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<td>PTSD</td>
<td>Posttraumatic stress disorder</td>
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<td>SHN</td>
<td>Dutch for Victim Support Holland (VSH): <em>Slachtofferhulp Nederland</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>SSV</td>
<td>Dutch: <em>Schriftelijke slachtofferverklaring</em> (written version of the VIS)</td>
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<tr>
<td>VIS</td>
<td>Victim Impact Statement</td>
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<tr>
<td>VSH</td>
<td>Victim Support Holland (<em>Slachtofferhulp Nederland - SHN</em>)</td>
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Appendix A: Vignette experiment – self blame condition

“Wat begon als een gewone avond, eindigde voor mij in een nachtmerrie! Ik was op stap met vriendinnen, toen ik hem (lees: de verdachte) zag staan aan de bar. Ik kende hem niet, maar we raakten met elkaar in gesprek en kletsten zo’n half uur over van alles en nog wat. Er werd wat geflirt over en weer. We hadden allebei al wat gedronken en waren in voor een dansje.

We verloren de tijd uit het oog, mijn vriendinnen waren al naar huis en we besloten samen de kroeg te verlaten. Hij bood aan met me mee naar huis te fietsen, omdat ik anders alleen de stad door moest. We fietsten samen naar mijn appartement. Bij de voordeur wilde ik afscheid van hem nemen door middel van een kus op zijn wang. Hij draaide zijn hoofd en zoende me vol op mijn mond. Vanaf dat moment werd de sfeer grimmiger. Ik zocht snel mijn sleutels in mijn tas om de deur te openen. Ik wilde niet dat hij mee naar binnen zou gaan of me verder aan zou raken. Ik stak de sleutels in het slot en ging snel naar binnen.

Hij had echter andere ideeën en was sterker dan ik. Hij duwde de deur open en drong naar binnen. Toen hij eenmaal binnen was begon hij me uit te kleden en zoende me overal. Niets leek hem tegen te houden. Hij gooide me op de bank en zei: “dit wilde je toch?!” Daarna ben ik verkracht.

Deze verkrachting heeft mijn leven op z’n kop gezet. Ik weet heus wel dat ik hem aanleiding heb gegeven om hem te laten denken dat ik hem ook leuk vond. We hadden allebei wat gedronken en ik heb met hem geflirt, maar dat geeft hem toch niet het recht te doen wat hij heeft gedaan? Ik had duidelijke grenzen moeten stellen en ik had voorzichtiger moeten zijn, maar toch wil ik, hier in de rechtszaal, graag benadrukken dat ik nooit had gedacht dat mijn menselijkheid zo aangetast had kunnen worden. Dit had hij niet mogen doen.”
Appendix B: Vignette experiment – control condition

“Wat begon als een gewone avond, eindigde voor mij in een nachtmerrie! Ik was op stap met vriendinnen, toen ik hem (lees: de verdachte) zag staan aan de bar. Ik kende hem niet, maar we raakten met elkaar in gesprek en kletsten zo’n half uur over van alles en nog wat. Er werd wat geflirt over en weer. We hadden allebei al wat gedronken en waren in voor een dansje.

We verloren de tijd uit het oog, mijn vriendinnen waren al naar huis en we besloten samen de kroeg te verlaten. Hij bood aan met me mee naar huis te fietsen, omdat ik anders alleen de stad door moest. We fietsten samen naar mijn appartement. Bij de voordeur wilde ik afscheid van hem nemen door middel van een kus op zijn wang. Hij draaide zijn hoofd en zoende me vol op mijn mond. Vanaf dat moment werd de sfeer grimmiger. Ik zocht snel mijn sleutels in mijn tas om de deur te openen. Ik wilde niet dat hij mee naar binnen zou gaan of me verder aan zou raken. Ik stak de sleutels in het slot en ging snel naar binnen.

Hij had echter andere ideeën en was sterker dan ik. Hij duwde de deur open en drong naar binnen. Toen hij eenmaal binnen was begon hij me uit te kleden en zoende me overal. Niets leek hem tegen te houden. Hij gooide me op de bank en zei: “dit wilde je toch?!” Daarna ben ik verkracht.

Deze verkrachting heeft mijn leven op z’n kop gezet. Het was vooraf al wel duidelijk dat hij met mij probeerde te flirten. We hadden allebei wat gedronken en hij was duidelijk aangeschoten. Toen hij met me naar huis ging, ging hij eigenlijk al de fout in. Ik heb mijn grenzen aangegeven, maar hij luisterde niet. Ik was zelf voorzichtig, toch heeft hij mij dit aangedaan. ik wil hier in de rechtszaal graag benadrukken dat ik nooit had gedacht dat mijn menselijkheid zo aangetast zou kunnen worden. Dat had hij niet mogen doen.”
Appendix C: Experiment Questionnaire

Geef alsjeblieft zo eerlijk mogelijk antwoord op de volgende vragen. Nogmaals, er zijn geen goede of foute antwoorden, we zijn enkel geïnteresseerd in je mening. Selecteer slechts 1 antwoord per vraag!

1. Wat is je algemene indruk van het slachtoffer?

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<tr>
<th>Extreem negatief</th>
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2. In hoeverre kun jij je identificeren met het slachtoffer?

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3. Hoe sympathiek vind je het slachtoffer?

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4. Hoe intelligent vind je het slachtoffer?

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5. Hoe graag zou je het slachtoffer willen ontmoeten?

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6. In hoeverre vind je dat de verdachte schuldig is aan het misdrijf?

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7. In hoeverre is volgens jou het slachtoffer zelf schuldig aan het misdrijf?

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8. In hoeverre vindt, volgens jou, het slachtoffer zichzelf schuldig aan het misdrijf?

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9. In hoeverre ben je er zeker van dat het slachtoffer de beschreven gevolgen ook daadwerkelijk heeft ervaren?

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10. Uit onderzoek is gebleken dat sommige slachtoffers naast negatieve gevolgen ook positieve gevolgen kunnen ondervinden van een traumatische situatie, bijvoorbeeld omdat zij het gevoel hebben daarna meer persoonlijke kracht te voelen, meer open staan voor veranderingen in hun leven of omdat ze hun bestaande relaties met anderen beter vormgeven na deze gebeurtenis. Dit wordt ook wel *posttraumatische groei* genoemd.

In hoeverre denk je dat dit slachtoffer posttraumatische groei meemaakt?

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¹⁹ Mistakenly, this question ranges from “totally sure” to “totally sure” rather than from “totally unsure” to “totally sure”. However, from reactions from participants, it was clear that they understood that the latter was meant. It helps that all questions are asked in the same “direction”: 1 being “no”/”not”, 7 being: “totally”/”very”
Appendix D: Vignette interviews

Ik was op stap met vriendinnen en toen zag ik hem staan. Ik kende hem niet, maar we raakten aan de praat. We waren een tijdje aan het kletsen over van alles, ongeveer een half uur lang. We waren ook wel wat aan het flirten en het scheelt denk ik wel dat we allebei wat alcohol op hadden. Na een tijdje praten gingen we dansen.

We hadden niet echt door hoe snel de tijd ging. Ik weet nog dat mijn vriendinnen in de tussentijd naar huis gingen. Toen we klaar waren met dansen ging ik samen met hem de kroeg uit en toen bood hij aan om met me mee te fietsen, want anders zou ik alleen naar huis moeten door de stad. We fietsten dus samen naar m’n appartement. Ik nam afscheid en omdat ik het een leuke avond vond wilde ik hem een kus op zijn wang geven.

Maar toen bleek dus opeens dat hij iets anders van plan was. Hij draaide zijn hoofd en zoende me vol op mijn mond. Dat wilde ik helemaal niet, ik vond de sfeer gelijk minder fijn. Ik zocht mijn sleutels snel en probeerde de deur open te doen. Ik vond het vanaf daar wel genoeg, ik wilde niet dat hij mee zou gaan.

Maar hij was sterker dan ik, hij duwde de deur open. Toen hij binnen was begon hij me uit te kleden en me overal te zoenen. Niets leek hem tegen te houden. Toen gooide hij me op de bank en zei: “dat wilde je toch”? Toen heeft hij me verkracht.

Ik ben nu zo ondersteboven van de situatie. Ik denk dat ik hem zelf de aanleiding heb gegeven om te denken dat ik hem leuk zou vinden. Ik zei dus al dat we wat gedronken hadden en ik heb ook wel een beetje met hem geflirt. Ik had gewoon gelijk duidelijker moeten zijn.

Ik ben nu bij slachtofferhulp, bij jullie, want ik heb gehoord dat ik spreekrecht mag uitoefenen. Ik wil graag zeggen dat hij dit niet had mogen doen.
Appendix E: Interview questions

1. Casus / wat besproken wordt n.a.v. het verhaal en wat mij opvalt
   (vignette: what is being discussed in relation to the vignette and what strikes the interviewer)

2. De totstandkoming van de verklaring (VUL AAN MET BOVENSTAANDE)
   (the realization of the VIS – to be supplemented with discussed under 1)
   
   • waar letten jullie op bij het verhaal van het slachtoffer?
     (what do you specifically look at when hearing the story of a victim?)
   
   • Wat adviseren jullie aan slachtoffers?
     (what advice do you give to a victim?)
   
   • Welk deel van het verhaal komt in de verklaring?
     (what part of the story is included in the VIS?)
   
   • Op welk gebied stellen jullie vaak aanvullende vragen?
     (about what subjects do you ask additional questions?)
   
   • Zijn er guidelines voor het opstellen van een verklaring
     (are there any guidelines for preparing a VIS?)

3. De totstandkoming van de verklaring (Self-blame)
   (the realization of the vis (self-blame))
   
   • Waar letten jullie op bij het verhaal van een slachtoffer met self-blame?
     (what do you specifically look at when hearing the story of a victim who expresses self-blame?)
   
   • Wat adviseren jullie aan slachtoffers met self-blame?
     (what advice do you give to a victim who expresses self-blame?)
   
   • Welk deel van het verhaal komt in de verklaring als het gaat om self-blame?
     (what part of the story is included in the VIS when it concerns self-blame?)
   
   • Op welk gebied stellen jullie aanvullende vragen als het gaat om self-blame?
     (about what subjects do you ask additional questions when it concerns self-blame?)
• Zijn er guidelines voor omgaan met self-blame?
  (are there guidelines for dealing with self-blame?)

4. Overig
  (Miscellaneous – related to self-blame)

• Hoe vaak zien jullie een vergelijkbare houding van self-blame?
  (how often are you confronted with a victim who expresses self-blame?)

• Hoe verhoudt self-blame zich tot het leggen van schuld bij de dader? Hoe groot is de
totale schuld?
  (How does self-blame relate to the attribution of blame to the perpetrator? How extensive is the total
amount of assigned blame?)

• Welke rol ziet u voor uzelf / ziet SHN in de bijstand van het slachtoffer
  (which role do you see for yourself/for VSH in the assistance of the victim?)

• Is er verschil tussen de geschreven of de gesproken versie?
  (is there a difference between the written and the oral version of the VIS?)

• Is er verschil met slachtoffers van andere delicten?
  (is there a difference between this statement (rape) and victims of other crimes?)

• Zou er verschil zijn als de plannen van de staatssecretaris door gaan (uitbreiding)?
  (would there be a difference if the plans of the government (expanding the victims rights) would come
true?)

• Of het twee-fasen model
  (or when the two-phase-model would be introduced?)
  [the two-phased-model is a model whereby the judge first gives his opinion about the guilt of the
accused, and then, in a second hearing, decides upon punishment. The VIS would then be given in the
second phase].
Appendix F: Interview # 1

Datum 29 april 2013
Plaats Den Bosch
Functie Vrijwilliger – nog niet heel lang ervaring met SSV’s

1. Casus / wat besproken wordt n.a.v. het verhaal en wat mij opvalt

Stap 1: UITLEG GEVEN OVER SSV
Uitleg geven over de SSV: je moet vertellen wat het met jou gedaan heeft en wat er emotioneel is overgebleven. Er wordt uitgelegd wat er verteld mag worden (wettelijk kader).

Improvisatie wordt afgeraden.
Een SSV kan ook worden ingediend zodat iemand anders deze voorleest.

Stap 2: EIGEN SCHULD BENOEMEN
Het eerste uit het verhaal dat wordt opgepakt is de eigen schuld (dat je zegt dat je het niet zo ver had mogen laten komen).

De volgende vragen worden gesteld:
kan je het je voorstellen dat de jongen zo reageerde?
Welke rol speelt de drank?
Wat vond je ervan dat je vriendinnen weg gingen?

Het wordt als een PROBLEEM benoemd dat het slachtoffer zelf niet al te handig heeft gemanoeuvreerd.
!! Het valt mij op dat dit punt nog lang als een “probleem” in de lucht blijft hangen.

Stap 3: EEN EMOTIE NAAR VOREN HALEN
Focus gaat naar het moment dat het slachtoffer bang wordt (in de casus: dat de jongen/dader zijn hoofd omdraait en het slachtoffer vol op haar mond zoebt).
De reden dat deze angst centraal wordt gezet is dat er wordt geprobeerd het slachtoffer te laten herbeleven wat er door hem/haar is heengegaan. Zo komen de emotionele gevolgen beter naar voren (dingen die men naar heeft gevonden zijn emotie).


Gevoelens opschrijven (= iets opschrijven over de emotionele stressreactie) dat is het begin van de SSV.

**Overig**

De aanpak is heel persoonlijk en verschilt dus per SHN-medewerker. In de training voor het geven van een SSV is vooral gericht op het naar voren halen van emoties en het noteren van citaten. Dat is belangrijk omdat een SSV wordt geschreven voor iemand anders.

Hij vindt dit moeilijk en niet juist, hij vindt dat iemand zelf moet schrijven.

De SSV gaat bijna altijd gepaard met een vraag naar smartegeld.

Een slachtoffer moet er altijd op worden gewezen dat er vragen kunnen worden gesteld door de verdediging – maar dat een slachtoffer als getuige wordt opgeroepen naar aanleiding van de SSV lijkt hem een zeer theoretisch geval. Hij ziet dit niet voorkomen in de praktijk.

**2. De totstandkoming van de verklaring**

**Waar letten jullie op bij het verhaal van het slachtoffer?**

gevoelens

niet heel erg op inconsistenties: “ik vind waarheidsvinding niet belangrijk, er is geen andere waarheid dan de emotie”

**Wat adviseren jullie aan slachtoffers?**

Alles opschrijven → dit leidt tot een persoonlijke aanpak

De verklaring op schrift stellen
Welk deel van het verhaal komt in de verklaring?
De emotie die het slachtoffer uit

Op welk gebied stellen jullie vaak aanvullende vragen?

Zijn er guidelines voor het opstellen van een verklaring?
De training die zich richt op emoties.

3. De totstandkoming van de verklaring (Self-blame)
!! Hij geeft aan dat het goed was dat hij niet van te voren wist over de opzet van mijn studie.
Hij geeft aan het een moeilijk punt te vinden.

Waar letten jullie op bij het verhaal van een slachtoffer met self-blame?
het was vanaf het begin af aan een probleem
Zelf nog niet veel meegemaakt
Medeschuld komt veel voor
SHN staat slachtoffers niet bij in de rol van medeschuldige. Wel laat hij vaak doorschemeren:
“doe niet zo stom”, maar hij moet zich daar terughoudend in opstellen

Wat adviseren jullie aan slachtoffers met self-blame?
Ik weet niet of daar advies over is
In de training komt het niet aan de orde

Welk deel van het verhaal komt in de verklaring als het gaat om self-blame?
Geen verschil met eerdere antwoorden. Als het slachtoffer het voelt kan het er in komen.
De SSV is bedoeld om het slachtoffer een stem te geven en te vertellen wat het misdrijf heeft gedaan. Daar hoort dit dan ook bij, dus kan het zelfs als prominent element erin worden gebracht.
Voorbeeld: er zou in kunnen staan: “wat ben ik stom geweest” (niet het minder emotionele “ik was een beetje dom”). Dit is ook een emotie. De SSV moet emotioneel over komen, omdat het gaat om het overbrengen van gevoelens. Daarbij is wel van belang dat stom zijn niet gelijk is aan schuldig zijn.
Op welk gebied stellen jullie aanvullende vragen als het gaat om self-blame?
Nog niet meegemaakt

Zijn er guidelines voor omgaan met self-blame?
Nee. Komt in de training niet aan de orde.

4. Overig

Hoe vaak zien jullie een vergelijkbare houding van self-blame?
In het algemeen wordt het ontraden in verband met het smartegeld dat daardoor verlaagd zou kunnen worden

Hoe verhoudt self-blame zich tot het leggen van schuld bij de dader? Hoe groot is de totale schuld?
Wat hier speelt is de relatie met straf en schadevergoeding. Daar kunnen “verzachtende omstandigheden” meewegen. Hij kan niet beoordelen hoeveel gewicht self-blame in de schaal legt.

Welke rol ziet u voor uzelf / ziet SHN in de bijstand van het slachtoffer?
[Al gezegd: staat slachtoffer niet bij als medeschuldige]

Persoonlijk: het doel is om het slachtoffer zijn/haar stem te laten horen. Wat het slachtoffer zegt wordt begrensd door fatsoen en wettelijk fatsoen en wettelijk kader (de gevolgen worden besproken, niet de toedracht).

SHN faciliteert wat het slachtoffer wil. Ze moeten het zelf zeggen, ook als dat minder goed is dan wat SHN zou opschrijven. SHN doet te veel aan “ghost writing”. Hij wil dicht bij het slachtoffer blijven. Als het slachtoffer tevreden is, dan is het doel bereikt.

Is er verschil tussen de geschreven of de gesproken versie?
Nee.

Is er verschil met slachtoffers van andere delicten?
Het is naar om jezelf te blamen.
Zou er verschil zijn als de plannen van de staatssecretaris door gaan (uitbreiding)?
Niet voor self-blame.
Persoonlijk is hij niet zo voor. Er moet een zorgvuldige afweging worden gemaakt door de rechter als het gaat om strafmodaliteit en –omvang. Iemand die voor het eerst in de rechtszaal komt is emotioneel en kan dat niet. Het zou geen recht doen aan het recht.

Of het twee-fasen model?
Niet voor self-blame
De knip is essentieel. Het is Zot dat er zelfs een SSV kan worden gegeven als er vrijspraak in de lucht hangt. Met knip kan een slachtoffer zich ook anders uiten (niet in mate van self-blame maar in overtuiging van verwijten maken. De addressaat kan dan de dader worden)

ACHTERAf
Secundaire victimisatie moet worden voorkomen.
Is self-blame hetzelfde als een pessimist? Het pakt altijd goed uit (of je hebt gelijk, of het is alleen maar beter). Misschien vergelijken met een functioneringsgesprek: zelf al de kritiek uiten zodat het gras voor de voeten van de baas wordt weggemaakt. Het gaat om personen die moeilijk tegen kritiek kunnen. Het is een soort van zelfbescherming, wil het niet van een ander horen.

WAT VERDER NOG OPVIJL
Er leek een heel dunne lijn te bestaan tussen blaming de victim en self-blame. Het leek voor interviewee logisch dat er “blame” was, omdat het slachtoffer in de casus zelf risico had genomen. Hij gaf ook aan niet te houden van zaken waarin alcohol in het spel was, omdat deze mensen zich zelf begeven in een gevaarlijke situatie.
Appendix G: Interview # 2

Datum 06 mei 2013
Plaats Rotterdam
Functie Vrijwilliger (kort op het gebied van SSV – hoofdtaak: voegingen)

1. Casus / wat besproken wordt n.a.v. het verhaal en wat mij opvalt

Stap 1:
Via vraag en antwoord er achter komen wat de emotie is

Stap 2:
Wat gelijk opvalt is dat het slachtoffer zichzelf de schuld geeft. Dit moet worden benoemd.

!! wat mij opvalt is dat het hier bij blijft. Het moet worden benoemd, maar er gaan geen verdere vragen heen.

Stap 3:
Het markeren van drie momenten:
het moment dat het gebeurt (verbazing/shock/freeze/calm/etc). Wat gebeurde er nu en hoe uitte zich dat?
Kort na dat het gebeurde: wat deed je, hoe uitte zich dat, wat waren de gevoelens en emoties
en wat gebeurde er cognitief? Dit is vaak waar de emotie los komt. Er moet ook worden gekeken naar wie die emotie toe gaat
Langere periode daarna: (= kort erna tot nu): Zijn er bijvoorbeeld problemen op het werk of
op school. Schuldgevoelens kunnen hier een rol gaan spelen. Het gaat hier om emoties.

SSV
Minder accent op het feit zelf (voldoende beschreven in pv’s etc.). Het gaat er meer om wat
het met het slachtoffer heeft gedaan.

Een voorbeeld is dat mensen wantrouwende of alerter zijn. Mensen zijn vaak veranderd.
Een SSV moet worden opgeschreven in de woorden van het slachtoffer, dit hoeft niet correct te zijn. Voorbeeld: een slachtoffer had veel moeite met zich uiten, maar ze had gedichten geschreven. Voor hem was dit de ultieme SSV omdat het dicht bij iemand zelf blijft.

Hier speelt wel mee dat het slachtoffer moet weten dat alles wat er wordt opgeschreven ook door de dader wordt bekeken. Wil je dat wel i.v.m. kwetsbaarheid?

Verder moet je alert zijn: dat je geen dingen opschrijft die vragen uitlokken bij de advocaat van de verdachte (bijvoorbeeld over het bewijs/delict/persoon van de dader /strafmaat/alles wat ver af gaat staan van de gevolgen).

Overig
Er is verschil tussen een voeging (rapporterend) en een SSV (de eigen woorden van iemand). Daarom nodigt hij de mensen uit om zelf te praten. Beide stukken (voeging en SSV) zijn volledig, ze verwijzen niet naar elkaar.

2. De totstandkoming van de verklaring

Waar letten jullie op bij het verhaal van het slachtoffer?
Emoties op de drie momenten (zie boven)

Wat adviseren jullie aan slachtoffers?
Niet zo veel adviezen omdat je ongemerkt sturend kan zijn.
Vooral het wettelijk kader (accent op de gevolgen (privé, studie, werk, relatie, etc.). Van een rechter heeft hij gehoord dat een rechter wil weten wat het met die persoon heeft gedaan, het juridisch kader moet niet te dominant worden, dat is al zo bij de rest van de stukken.

Welk deel van het verhaal komt in de verklaring?
De emotie (niet anders dan bovenstaand)

Op welk gebied stellen jullie vaak aanvullende vragen?
Niet anders dan bovenstaand
Zijn er guidelines voor het opstellen van een verklaring?
Er is een training van 1 dag.
Hij heft een eigen checklist, gebaseerd op de checklist van de voegingsprocedure, die ziet op:
hoe uit zich het, zijn er vormen van stress aanwezig, wat zijn de verschijningsvormen, heeft het slachtoffer al hulp, wat zijn de beperkingen die het slachtoffer zich uit?
Het belangrijkste is: HOE UIT ZICH DAT? – hierop doorvragen.

3. De tostandkoming van de verklaring (Self-blame)

Waar letten jullie op bij het verhaal van een slachtoffer met self-blame?
Een rol spelen is niet hetzelfde als schuld hebben.

Er wordt doorgevraagd: hoe kom je op dit idee?
Je komt het wel tegen bij huiselijk geweld situaties.

Het is merkwaardig om de schuld bij jezelf te leggen, dat kan te maken hebben met je zelfbeeld. Misschien vinden sommige slachtoffers het prettiger om er zelf een rol in te hebben gespeeld dan dat het zomaar gebeurt. Wordt misschien ook aangepraat.
Twee vragen stellen:
1) wat voel je echt? (het kan bijvoorbeeld zijn “aangepraat” door het geloof)
2) is het juridisch wel zo verstandig om dit te uiten?

Wat adviseren jullie aan slachtoffers met self-blame?
Zie onderstaand

Welk deel van het verhaal komt in de verklaring als het gaat om self-blame?
Hij heeft niet de neiging het in de SSV te zetten, maar het komt er wel in als het slachtoffer dat wil. Echter niet klakkeloos, eerst weten of het echt is of dat het is aangepraat.
De vraag is ook wat je ermee wil bereiken (een lagere strafmaat??) En je moet kijken of je de advocaat geen aanleiding geeft om het slachtoffer ook als getuige te laten oproepen. Het kan juridisch dus niet zo slim zijn.

Op welk gebied stellen jullie aanvullende vragen als het gaat om self-blame?
Zie eerder: is het echt / is het juridisch verstandig
Zijn er guidelines voor omgaan met self-blame?
Nee, maar wel een waarschuwing in de training dat een advocaat naar punten zoekt die hij kan gebruiken om aanvullende vragen te stellen. Dit zag niet specifiek op self-blame

4. Overig

Hoe vaak zien jullie een vergelijkbare houding van self-blame?
Zelf nog niet gezien. Wel dat ze het eigen gedrag beschrijven, maar niet dat ze de schuld op zich willen nemen.
(Alleen mishandelingen / roofovervallen / 1 minder zware zedenzaak behandeld)

Hoe verhoudt self-blame zich tot het leggen van schuld bij de dader? Hoe groot is de totale schuld?
Deze vraag kan hij niet beantwoorden met zijn ervaring

Welke rol ziet u voor uzelf / ziet SHN in de bijstand van het slachtoffer?
“Advocaat Light”
Algemeen heeft SHN de taak van emotionele opvang, dit is niet per se juridisch.

Een SSV’er heeft de taak schade in kaart te brengen en het verhaal te vertellen. Het is voor het slachtoffer niet makkelijk een weg te vinden in juridische zin.
Er is absoluut geen therapeutisch doel.

Is er verschil tussen de geschreven of de gesproken versie?
Bij SHN Rotterdam gebruiken ze 1 variant, de mix van gesproken/geschreven. Een schriftelijke versie komt in het dossier en als cliënt dit wil wordt deze voorgelezen. Mensen in het wilde weg laten praten helpt niet. Dit wekt ook irritatie bij de rechter.
Er is dus 1 aanpak.

Is er verschil met slachtoffers van andere delicten?
In beginsel is het hetzelfde stramien. Zelf weinig ervaring met zedendelicten.

Zou er verschil zijn als de plannen van de staatssecretaris door gaan (uitbreiding)?
Dan wordt het wettelijk kader breder.
Persoonlijk vindt hij dit weinig toevoegen, de meeste slachtoffers willen de meest zware straf. Je moet dan dus nog meer doen dan nu aan het managen van verwachtingen, want de straffen zullen niet omhoog gaan.

**Of het twee-fasen model?**

Dit zou zuiverder zijn als het spreekrecht wordt uitgebreid (theoretisch).

In de SSV gaat het al over de dader.
Appendix H: Interview # 3

Datum 06 mei 2013
Plaats Breda
Functie Juridisch Medewerker (geen voegingen)

1. Casus / wat besproken wordt n.a.v. het verhaal en wat mij opvalt
De casus lijkt erg op een aangifte die hij zou kunnen krijgen van de politie samen met het dossier.

Stap 1: ontvangen van de informatie
De SHN-medewerker krijgt de aangifte en de tenlastelegging. Bij zedenzaken doet de politie al wat moeilijker over het doorgeven van e aangifte, maar dat is niet zo erg. Hij doet namelijk niet veel met de aangifte – het gaat over de gevolgen, niet de gebeurtenis!

Stap 2: Uitleg geven aan het slachtoffer
Dit maakt het gesprek rustiger omdat mensen een idee krijgen van wat ze moeten verwachten. Het gesprek heeft de functie van sturen (wettelijk kader) en kalmeren.

De juridische procedure wordt uitgelegd, de TLL wordt laten zien. Er wordt voor gewaarschuwd dat alles bij naam en toenaam wordt genoemd. Dit geeft ook een stukje voorbereiding over of iemand naar de zitting wil of niet.

Dan begint het gesprek

Stap 3: het gesprek
In de casus zou het moment bij haar thuiscentraal staan. Het afscheid is onschuldig, maar wel een cruciaal punt. Dat zal vermoedelijk een grote rol gaan spelen. Daar is ook dat het slachtoffer denkt: “had ik dat niet zo mogen doen?”. Er wordt op gewezen dat wat het slachtoffer heeft gedaan niet fout is. Verder wordt er niet al te veel gestuurd, vragen worden zo open mogelijk gesteld. De kunst is om te proberen dat de ander de richting aan geeft. Wel proberen om dieper te gaan over wat het slachtoffer aandraagt.

Stap 4: emoties er uit halen
Emoties op dat moment
Emoties kort daarna (bijvoorbeeld over het onderzoek in het ziekenhuis)
Emoties op de middellange termijn
Emoties op de lange termijn (bijvoorbeeld over werk of studie)
Steeds vragen: hoe was …..

Het gesprek wordt door het slachtoffer bepaald, wat er niet aan bod komt blijft liggen. Er zijn geen dingen die niet aan bod zouden moeten komen.

Stap 5: de verklaring
De verklaring wordt geschreven in de ik-vorm, en er wordt tegen de rechter regesproken. (verdachte is dus de 3e persoon).

De grenzen van de betamelijkheid moeten in acht worden genomen (soms kan dat een klein beetje worden opgerekt, bijvoorbeeld als het slachtoffer uit de grond van zijn/haar hart zegt: “dat was echt kut”).
Er wordt gewaarschuwd dat men niet te ver mag gaan. Niet alleen omdat je er dan uitgezet kan worden, ook omdat dit en discussie kan laten ontstaan over iets wat de moeite niet waard is. Advocaten kunnen wel blij zijn met een dergelijke afleiding.

Het streven is om authentiek te zijn. Spreektaal is belangrijk. Het moet opvallen.

Als mensen het zelf willen schrijven kan dat, dan wordt vooral de taal bekeken, niet de inhoudt. Het doel van de SSV is primair dat het goed moet zijn voor de verwerking. Een bijeffect is dat de verdachte hoort wat hij heeft aangericht.

2. De totdankoming van de verklaring

Waar letten jullie op bij het verhaal van het slachtoffer?
Geen nieuwe aanvullingen

Wat adviseren jullie aan slachtoffers?
Een persoonlijke insteek. Er zijn ook mensen binnen SHN die zeggen dat het gestructureerd moet worden. Er is daar discussie over binnen SHN. Hij vindt dat er met een gestructureerd
verhaaltje met kopjes een soort “boodschappenlijstje” ontstaat, waarbij het risico bestaat dat een rechter maar 1 onderdeel leest.

**Welk deel van het verhaal komt in de verklaring?**
De gevolgen

**Op welk gebied stellen jullie vaak aanvullende vragen?**
Geen nieuwe aanvullingen

**Zijn er guidelines voor het opstellen van een verklaring?**
Er zijn uitgangspunten en aandachtspunten, maar alles hangt af van het slachtoffer – het kan zijn dat iemand ergens niet over wil praten. Dat moet je dan zo laten.

3. **De totstandkoming van de verklaring (Self-blame)**

   !! Niet echt een verandering t.o.v. sectie 2.

**Waar letten jullie op bij het verhaal van een slachtoffer met self-blame?**

**Wat adviseren jullie aan slachtoffers met self-blame?**
Proces uitleggen / adviseren wat je er mee kunt doen. Geen therapie geven. Er eventueel wel naar verwijzen.

**Welk deel van het verhaal komt in de verklaring als het gaat om self-blame?**
Alle emoties. Het is niet van belang of die terecht zijn. Als je het hebt over iemands angst weet je ook niet of dat een terechte angst is. Alles komt er dus in.

Iemand die spreekrecht wil uitoefenen wil zich laten horen. Dit moet je niet verbieden, als iemand die drive heeft.

Hij gelooft niet dat het averechts werkt om self-blame te uiten.

Mensen moeten oppassen het schuldgevoel als slecht te benoemen. Dit is een standaard oplossing voor een standaard probleem, maar we hebben geen standaard problemen.
Je moet meegaan in gevoelens. vragen waar de schuldgevoelens vandaan komen niet wegrederen – dat is aan een therapeut of slachtoffer zelf.

Op welk gebied stellen jullie aanvullende vragen als het gaat om self-blame?
Zie boven

Zijn er guidelines voor omgaan met self-blame?
Niet specifiek / niet aners

4. Overig

Hoe vaak zien jullie een vergelijkbare houding van self-blame?
Bij zedenzaken reglematig, anders bijna niet. Huiselijk geweld is niet te vergelijken met zedenzaken (daar zie je het “eigenlijk te weinig”)

Hoe verhoudt self-blame zich tot het leggen van schuld bij de dader? Hoe groot is de totale schuld?
Een rol ergens in hebben is niet gelijk aan ergens schuld aan hebben. In zijn perceptie heeft een slachtoffer nooit schuld. Een advocaat kan daar wel op aansturen.

Welke rol ziet u voor uzelf / ziet SHN in de bijstand van het slachtoffer?
Algemeen SHN: opvang = een luisterend oor bieden, de weg wijzen Specifiek (self-blame): doorverwijzen / het is niet raar

Is er verschil tussen de geschreven of de gesproken versie?
Het streven is om iemand die spreekrecht uitoefent de verklaring voor te laten lezen. Het is dus dezelfde verklaring. De verklaring kan nooit meewegen met het bewijs, want de verklaring mag niet gaan over de feiten. Het gevolg mag geen invloed hebben op de bewijsbaarheid.

Is er verschil met slachtoffers van andere delicten?
Zie “hoe vaak zien jullie een vergelijkbare houding”
Zou er verschil zijn als de plannen van de staatssecretaris door gaan (uitbreiding)?
Zie hieronder – vragen samen beantwoord

**Of het twee-fasen model?**
Het gaat nu goed.
Als het twee fasen model komt gaat het effect weg, nu hebben mensen het idee dat hun verklaring effect heeft. Ook het leereffect voor de dader gaat dan weg.
Appendix I: Interview # 4

Datum 3 juni 2013
Plaats Rotterdam
Functie Juridisch Medewerker

1. Casus / wat besproken wordt n.a.v. het verhaal en wat mij opvalt

De casus ziet eruit als een aangifte. De aanmelding komt vaak via het OM. Er wordt dan al met een slachtoffer gepraat of hij of zij spreekrecht of een SSV zou willen gebruiken/maken. De tenlastelegging is dan al bekend bij de medewerker.

STAP 1
Doornemen wat het is om een SSV te maken of gebruik te maken van je spreekrecht:
wat is de rol van het slachtoffer in de rechtszaak en in het dossier?
Wat mag je wel en niet?

Je probeert een antwoord te vinden op de volgende 3 vragen:
1) waarom zitten ze hier?
2) willen ze het echt doen?
3) benadrukken dat je je strikt moet houden aan het wettelijk kader.
Je mag bijvoorbeeld niet zeggen, zoals in casus: “dat hij dit niet had mogen doen”. Dat kan alleen indirect, gesproken via de rechtbank.

Ander voorbeeld: soms willen mensen de verklaring gebruiken om iemand vrij te pleiten, bijvoorbeeld in een huiselijk geweld zaak. Daar is de verklaring niet voor.

STAP 2
Je pakt de TLL erbij en vraagt iets meer over wat er gebeurd is. Daarbij zeg je wel dat de verklaring die slachtoffers bij SHN geven niet hetzelfde zijn als en verklaring bij de politie en dat datzelfde geldt voor een spreekrecht verklaring. Ze mogen het ook altijd nog lezen. De volgende vragen staan centraal in deze stap:
1) wanneer is het gebeurd?
2) wat is er gebeurd?
3) hoe ging het verloop?
   - hoe ging het kort de eerste uren) na het delict (bijvoorbeeld: politieonderzoek)
   - hoe gaat het nu? (het heeft effecten op…..)
   - vooruit kijken: verwerking en de zitting.


VERDER:
Weinig mensen voeren spreekrecht uit bij zedenzaken, dit heeft vooral te maken met de [ongewenste] confrontatie met de verdachte. De verdachte is vaak aanwezig op zitting als hij vast zit. Het kan ook deel uitmaken van het advies aan iemand, iemand kan bijvoorbeeld in een crisis raken door de confrontatie.

2. De totstandkoming van de verklaring

Waar letten jullie op bij het verhaal van het slachtoffer?
De verwerking, kijken of ze het aan kunnen, het idee wat ze hebben bij het spreekrecht (niet iemand ervan af praten, maar dingen naar voren brengen).

Wat adviseren jullie aan slachtoffers?
Bespreek dingen met een psycholoog.
Het uitvoeren van het spreekrecht moet een meerwaarde hebben voor het slachtoffer.

Welk deel van het verhaal komt in de verklaring?
Hangt af van wat iemand raakt of wat heel erg speelt. Het is vaak goed voor het slachtoffer om zelf het verloop in te zien van de verwerking.

Het delict en de gevolgen zijn kopjes die in de verklaring komen. De verklaring is ongeveer 1-1,5 A4. Het tijdspad wordt in de gaten gehouden en het moet pakkend zijn.
Op welk gebied stellen jullie vaak aanvullende vragen?
[Zie bovenstaand]

Zijn er guidelines voor het opstellen van een verklaring?
Niet specifiek.

3. De totstandkoming van de verklaring (Self-blame)

Waar letten jullie op bij het verhaal van een slachtoffer met self-blame?
[Zie hierboven: hoe ziet het eruit, hoe uit zich het? Is er hulp gezocht?]
Het gesprek bij SHN is dienstverlening, we laten iemand praten en dingen in perspectief plaatsen. We hopen dat iemand een goed verwachtingspatroon krijgt, daarmee help je/doe je concreet iets: het slachtoffer krijgt grip terug.

Er wordt gekeken hoe een slachtoffer er in zit. Er wordt een spiegel voorgehouden, en er wordt eventueel doorverwezen.

Wat adviseren jullie aan slachtoffers met self-blame?
[Hoewel het niet inde verklaring komt, zie vraag hieronder]
Aangeven dat het een mechanisme is om grip op de zaak te krijgen.
Het kan er bij horen, het is normaal.

Welk deel van het verhaal komt in de verklaring als het gaat om self-blame?
In de verklaring komt eigenlijk geen self-blame.
Het zou neutraal moeten worden verwoord, want men mag het niet hebben over de feitelijkheden [Feitelijke aanleiding voor delict].

Het slachtoffer moet ook niet in een kwaad daglicht worden gesteld:
geen feitelijkheden
zorgen dat de verdachte niet kan zeggen “zie je wel”
Op welk gebied stellen jullie aanvullende vragen als het gaat om self-blame?
Peilen hoe diep iemand er in zit.

Zijn er guidelines voor omgaan met self-blame?
Bovenstaande is standaard SHN-advies.

4. Overig

Hoe vaak zien jullie een vergelijkbare houding van self-blame?
Heel veel slachtoffers laten het hele verhaal door hun hoofd spelen inclusief “als nou dit en als nou dat”. Ze nemen scenarios door. Zedenslachtoffers doen dat nog meer, om de opbouw te zien, zeker achteraf. Mensen zijn op zoek naar waar de grens is overschreden. Het is ook logisch dat mensen dit doen (in zekere gradaties) om grip op de zaak te krijgen.

Hoe verhoudt self-blame zich tot het leggen van schuld bij de dader? Hoe groot is de totale schuld?
Het slachtoffer wordt bij gestaan, en iedere cliënt moet als nieuw beschouwd worden, ook al denk je wel eens: die zal het eerder meemaken dan ik. Maar je geeft geen oordeel. Dat zou niet eerlijk zijn. Het gaat niet over wat er wel of niet is gebeurd, het gaat niet om verwijten bij het slachtoffer. Een slachtoffer mag bij een SSV/spreekrecht toch ook niet over de verdachte of over feitelikheden praten.

Welke rol ziet u voor uzelf / ziet SHN in de bijstand van het slachtoffer?
[Zie bovenstaand]
Het slachtoffer neutraal bijstaan, doen aan verwachtings-management en helpen bij het opstellen van een SSV/ helpen bij het uitoefenen van spreekrecht. Dit kan een empowerment-gevolg hebben, maar dat hangt er ook af of er verder hulpverlening is. In ieder geval kunnen mensen erkenning voelen door het gesprek.

Is er verschil tussen de geschreven of de gesproken versie?
Nee.
Is er verschil met slachtoffers van andere delicten?

Zedenzaken: aparte categorie. De verwerking is anders dan bij andere delicten en je moet goed opletten waar iemand in de verwerking zit.

Nabestaande: aparte categorie. Ze hebben veel persoonlijke verhalen, er is meer zelf geschreven.

Bedreiging is vaak de lichtste vorm.

Verder zijn er nog geweldsdelicten.

Zou er verschil zijn als de plannen van de staatssecretaris door gaan (uitbreiding)?

Rotterdam gaat al vrij ver met het indirect zeggen van dingen zoals “wat heeft iemand beziend”. (dit gaat eigenlijk over de dader).

De vraag is: wat wil je dan zeggen en heeft dit meerwaarde? Mensen hebben toch geen invloed op de rechter.

Of het twee-fasen model?

Het gaat dan niet tegelijkertijd over de schuld bij de verdachte en de schuld van het slachtoffer. Je zou dan ook meer over feitelijkheden kunnen praten.

ACHTERAF

Als mensen een schuldgevoel hebben zou dat verminderd kunnen worden door een slachtoffers-dadergesprek als mensen daar extra concrete vragen aan de dader kunnen stellen [zoals: waarom ik?]. Informatie over de gebeurtenis zelf en of iemand berouw toont kan helpen.
Appendix J: Interview # 5

Datum 7 juni 2013
Plaats Middelburg
Functie Juridisch Medewerker

1. Casus / wat besproken wordt n.a.v. het verhaal en wat mij opvalt

We werken niet heel veel met het verhaal zelf. De feiten zijn bekend, en we willen juist weten wat de gevolgen zijn voor het slachtoffer voor het schrijven van de SSV. We baseren alles op de tenlastelegging, niet op het verhaal van het slachtoffer alleen, omdat de tenlastelegging de basis is van de rechtszaak. Het verhaal moet dus binnen de kaders van de tenlastelegging vallen.

Voorbeeld: het slachtoffer vindt dat ze verkracht is, maar de tenlastelegging gaat uit van aanranding. De SSV moet dan ook worden gebaseerd op de tenlastelegging (aanranding).

Voorbeeld: in de tenlastelegging staat dat het slachtoffer is mishandeld met een bijl, maar het slachtoffer zegt dat het om een hamer gaat. Gebruik toch het woord “bijl”.

Stap 1:

Vragen aan het slachtoffer hoe het is om zoiets mee te maken. Er wordt vooral gefocust op het punt waar de verdachte over de grens gaat. In het geval van de casus: “zoende me vol op mijn mond”. Vragen hoe het slachtoffer dit ervaren heeft. Het gaat dan niet om de details maar om emoties: was het slachtoffer bang? Zorgde ze oor verzet? Was ze zo onder invloed dat ze het maar liet gebeuren?

De vragen die ik stel zijn neutraal.

Eigen schuld & alcohol: zeggen dat hij toch haar grens had moeten respecteren.

Stap 2:

Vertellen over de gevolgen: hoe was het direct daarna? Ook hier weer niet te veel sturen, het gaat erom wat er uit komt bij het slachtoffer, dus alleen praten waar het slachtoffer over wil praten en hierbij vierdieping aanbrengen.
Voorbeeld: het slachtoffer zegt dat ze bang was. Vragen: hoe bang was je? Waar uitte zich dat in? Je moet daar soms “even onaardig zijn”, dan komt de emotie weer los. Als het slachtoffer dat wil zorg je dat de emotie in de SSV tekst naar voren komt. Soms moet je dus doorvragen naar de emoties. De emotie moet dan ook weer even gevoeld worden.

**Stap 3:**
Vragen wat ze ervan vinden. Als medewerker wil je behalve de gevolgen ook weten wat de slachtoffers vinden en wat ze nu willen. Uiteindelijk schrijf je alles netjes op. Soms vraag je bijvoorbeeld: wat zou je willen zeggen als de dader nu naast je zat?

Je levert maatwerk.

[De stappen lopen wel door elkaar heen, die zijn bijna nooit gestructureerd].

### 2. De totstandkoming van de verklaring

**Waar letten jullie op bij het verhaal van het slachtoffer?**
Hoe het spreekrecht zo verwoord kan worden dat het binnen de grenzen van de tenlastelegging past (welke bewoordingen kunnen worden gebruikt). Dit om te voorkomen dat de advocaat van de verdachte met het verhaal aan de loop kan gaan. Het verhaal moet goed overkomen. Er moet een lading in worden gelegd, er moet naar evenwicht worden gezocht.

**Wat adviseren jullie aan slachtoffers?**
Advies over wat ze wel en niet mogen zeggen. Ook hier speelt weer dat de grenzen van de tenlastelegging belangrijk zijn. Bijvoorbeeld: een slachtoffer van stalking heeft vaak een omvangrijk verhaal dat veel incidenten omvat, maar er mag alleen gesproken worden over de incidenten die meegenomen zijn in de tenlastelegging.
Als het slachtoffer problemen heeft met het kader waarbinnen SHN opereert (bijvoorbeeld de grenzen van de wet) adviseren ze wel eens de verklaring op persoonlijke titel in te brengen.
(dus niet in naam van SHN). Dat wil niet zeggen dat SHN niet helpt met het opstellen van de verklaring.
Maak jezelf niet te kwetsbaar: vraag jezelf af wat je wil delen (ook met de verdachte en diens advocaat). Voorbeeld: een jongen die bedreigd werd door klasgenoten kan wel gaan zeggen dat hij nog steeds heel bang is, maar dat is misschien niet handig als de verdachte nog steeds zijn klasgenoot is. → Verdachten kunnen soms later nog vervelend zijn. Het ligt er dus een beetje aan hoe het slachtoffer er in staat. Het is een recht, maar het hoeft niet. Dit speelt vooral bij huiselijk geweld-zaken, jonge mensen en stalking. Hier dus ook rekening houden met de bewoordingen.

**Welk deel van het verhaal komt in de verklaring?**
Er komen drie delen in de verklaring:
- wat iemand heeft meegemaakt
- wat de gevolgen daar van zijn (ook immaterieel)
- wat het slachtoffer daar van vind

**Op welk gebied stellen jullie vaak aanvullende vragen?**
Vragen om emoties naar boven te halen.

**Zijn er guidelines voor het opstellen van een verklaring?**
Niet te veel op het verhaal ingaan, maar vooral de gevolgen beschrijven. Verder houden aan de kaders van de wet en van de tenlastelegging.

**3. De totstandkoming van de verklaring (Self-blame)**

**Waar letten jullie op bij het verhaal van een slachtoffer met self-blame?**
Als er een tenlastelegging is, gaat justitie er van uit dat het feit kan worden bewezen. Dat betekent voor ons dat er geen schuld is bij het slachtoffer, want als je voor de rechter komt dan ben je al verder dan die vraag. De schuldvraag aan de kant van het slachtoffer doet niet meer ter zaken.
Toch kan het slachtoffer natuurlijk wel schuld voelen, maar het slachtoffer moet binnen het kader van de tenlastelegging blijven. Het komt dus niet erg terug als emotie. In een gesprek wordt door SHN ook benadrukt dat de verdachte over de grens van het slachtoffer is gegaan.
Wat adviseren jullie aan slachtoffers met self-blame?
Je moet een advocaat geen dingen in handen geven.

Welk deel van het verhaal komt in de verklaring als het gaat om self-blame?
Als het slachtoffer toch volhoudt, dan wordt het op een bepaalde manier verwoord, bijvoorbeeld: “zich erg rot voelen”. Het wordt schuld wordt niet gebruikt. Wat wel kan: “Ik voel me schuldig **TERWIJL** hij het fout deed”. Dan wordt dus de machteloosheid benadrukt [en juist gezegd dat het slachtoffer geen schuld heeft].

Op welk gebied stellen jullie aanvullende vragen als het gaat om self-blame?
Het kan een gevoel zijn, maar het is geen reëel gevoel.

Zijn er guidelines voor omgaan met self-blame?
SHN is er voor het slachtoffer, onbevooroordeeld. Zelfs als het slachtoffer niet helemaal zuiver zou zijn.

4. Overig

Hoe vaak zien jullie een vergelijkbare houding van self-blame?
Niet vaak. Misschien soms bij burenruzie. Maar we krijgen ook niet altijd die informatie. [Maar 1 kant zien, zie onderdeel 3].

Hoe verhoudt self-blame zich tot het leggen van schuld bij de dader? Hoe groot is de totale schuld?
[Alleen kijken naar slachtofferkant, zie onderdeel 3].

Welke rol ziet u voor uzelf / ziet SHN in de bijstand van het slachtoffer?
Een rol zoals een advocaat die heeft. We geven geen therapie, hoewel een SSV’s of de gespreken die worden gevoerd om tot een SSV te komen wel als therapeutisch ervaren kunnen worden. “Je raakt iets aan”.

Is er verschil tussen de geschreven of de gesproken versie?
Nee.
Is er verschil met slachtoffers van andere delicten?
Zeden en huiselijk geweld zijn wel anders.

Zou er verschil zijn als de plannen van de staatssecretaris door gaan (uitbreiding)?
Niet voor self-blame.

Of het twee-fasen model?
Je kunt dan meer zeggen, dan weet je namelijk waarvoor iemand veroordeeld is. [vergelijk met grenzen van de tenlastelegging].