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**Faculty of Science and Technology**

**Department of Psychology**

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**Final Year Project Dissertation  
(2017-2018)**

**Factors affecting victim blaming in cyber and  
traditional bullying: a mixed methods study**

**by**

**Felicity Thompson**

**Supervisor**

**John McAlaney**

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# Signed Project Proposal Form



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Student name: FELICITY THOMPSON

Student e-mail address: i7210636@bournemouth.ac.uk

Date of submission: 08/05/2018

Project Title: The effect of locus of control and online or offline setting on likeliness to blame victims of harassment.

Supervisor name: JOHN MCALANEY

Supervisor signature for approval of proposal:

## Introduction:

Many children and adolescents have been found to attribute blame for harassment scenarios to the victim (Chapin & Coleman, 2017; Hara, 2002; Rigby & Slee, 1991). Just World Theory (Lerner, 1980) has been used to explain victim-blaming (Chapin & Coleman, 2017; Hayes, Lorenz & Bell, 2013) by stating that people describe the victim as deserving, in order to diminish the worry of it happening to themselves (Weber, Ziegele & Schnauber, 2013). Belief in a Just World has been argued as a separate, yet similar construct to locus of control (Maes, 1994), and studies have shown that harassed students often have an external Locus of Control (Radcliffe, Wang & Swearer, 2016; Atik & Güneri, 2013; Marsh et al, 2011), whilst people with an internal locus of control attribute greater blame to potential criminals (Sosis, 1974; Phares & Wilson, 1972). Consequently, the present study will examine locus of control as a predictor of victim-blaming in harassment scenarios. Moreover, harassment in online and offline settings have been found to produce different emotions, with embarrassment due to onlookers' presence being more prominent in offline scenarios, and anger due to the longevity of online scenarios (Asher, Stark & Fireman, 2017). In light of the literature, the present study seeks to extend research into the motivations for victim-blaming by investigating a link between of locus of control and online or offline setting on the extent to which respondents blame the victim of different harassment incidents.

## Method:

The present study will assess respondents' locus of control using Rotter's (1966) Locus of Control Scale. Internal and External locus of control will then be predictor variables. Age and gender will also be recorded to use as predictor variables. The final predictor

variable will be the setting of the vignettes presented, either online or offline. The participants will complete the locus of control questionnaire, and then be presented with different cyberbullying vignettes. The researcher will ask them to rate the extent to which they feel that the victim or perpetrator is to blame on a Likert-type Scale. The final section of the study will use a questionnaire to gauge respondents' experiences with cyberbullying and victimisation.

### **Ethics Issues:**

All participants will provide informed consent and be made aware of their right to withdraw at any time. In order to counteract any psychological harm from viewing victimisation scenarios, there will be leaflets concerning counselling provided. The intentions of the locus of control scale will not be mentioned at the beginning of the study in order to avoid any demand characteristics, and the participants will not be told about the online and offline conditions until the end of the study. To combat this deception, all participants will be fully briefed and debriefed at the beginning and end of the experiment. No identifiable data such as name will be recorded.

### **References (this may begin on a second page):**

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# Confirmation of Ethics Approval



Dear Felicity Thompson,

Your checklist (The effect of locus of control and online or offline setting on likeliness to blame victims of harassment) has now been reviewed and APPROVED in line with [BU's Research Ethics Code of Practice](#).

You can now save and/or print off a hard copy of the checklist at <https://ethics.bournemouth.ac.uk>.

This approval relates to the ethical context of the work. Specific aspects of the implementation of the research project remain your professional responsibility.

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Test	Ethics 1 - End of course quiz
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I, Felicity Thompson, confirm that I have met my project supervisor, Dr John McAlaney, to request an extension to the 7,000 word limit for my final year dissertation, which is a project that uses a qualitative methodology or complex series of experiments. I realise that the maximum extension to the dissertation word limit is 2,000 words, making the word limit of any dissertation 7,000 words.

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## **Acknowledgements**

Thank you to John McAlaney for supporting me throughout this year. Your calming and knowledgeable approach has enabled me to complete this project with genuine enjoyment and interest.

**Dissertation Word Count: 6991**

## **Abstract**

Research has found noticeable differences between online and offline bullying scenarios. In addition, victim blaming has been noted as a key justification for witnesses deciding not to intervene when witnessing victimisation. Studies investigating predictors of victim blaming have found that locus of control, gender and past experiences (as victim, bully or both) have an effect on victim blaming tendencies. The present study utilised a mixed methods approach to investigate and understand whether these predictors translate onto online bullying scenarios. Findings suggested that these predictors do not necessarily translate to victim blaming in cyberbullying scenarios. Implications for future research are discussed.

**Abstract Word Count: 100**

# 1 Introduction

It is estimated that cyberbullying is prevalent in 20-40% of young people across Europe and the United States of America (Tokunaga, 2017); a proportion which has been argued to be facilitated by the ease of use and accessibility of communication mediums (Motswi & Mashegoane, 2017). Despite this, often only a small proportion of those who witness cyberbullying incidents actually intervene (Allison & Bussey, 2016; Dillon & Bushman, 2015). The high prevalence of cyberbullying alongside the low prevalence of bystander intervention highlights the importance of investigating factors preventing witnesses from standing up for the victims.

Tokunaga (2010) highlights inconsistencies in the literature regarding the precise meaning of cyberbullying and suggests an integrative definition in order to diminish issues of conceptual clarity:

“Cyberbullying is any behaviour performed through electronic or digital media by individuals or groups that repeatedly communicates hostile or aggressive messages intended to inflict harm or discomfort on others” (p.278).

## 1.1 Social Cognitive Theory of Morality

The Social Cognitive Theory of Morality (SCTM; Bandura, 1991) suggests moral disengagement as an explanation for why the majority of people will not intervene when they witness an offline bullying incident. Moral disengagement is described as a series of mechanisms that people use to avoid feeling guilty about acting immorally, or in the case of cyberbullying, not intervening. SCTM says that this is achieved by justifying the actions of the bully using methods such as victim blaming and diffusion of

responsibility. Many studies have shown direct links between moral disengagement and passive bystanding in cyberbullying (Allison & Bussey, 2016; Van Cleemput, Vandebosch, & Pabian, 2014; Desmet et al, 2012), however, there is a gap in the literature in regards to factors influencing the specific mechanisms of moral disengagement used by witnesses who do not intervene in cyberbullying incidents. Diffusion of responsibility has been found to be related to the Bystander Effect (Darley & Latané, 1968) and therefore, can be argued to be a result of being in a group (Allison & Bussey, 2016); however the present study is interested in responses to cyberbullying at the individual level. Consequently, the present study seeks to address this gap by beginning to understand factors influencing victim blaming independently.

The majority of studies investigating the link between moral disengagement in general and cyberbullying employ experimental methods, which, whilst having the ability to confidently suggest relationships between variables, might be prone to confirmation bias and therefore inadvertently ignore factors behind participants' responses which were not envisioned a priori (Braband & Lerner, 1974). An exception to this is Desmet et al (2012) who used focus groups to investigate the determinants of intervention in bystanders. This study provided profound themes which had not been seen in previous research; such as the connection between online and offline bullying and the suggestion that reinforcing the bully and comforting the victim are not mutually exclusive. In order to follow the previous literature, the present study will employ a mix of both quantitative and qualitative methods in order to fully understand victim blaming and its effect on witnesses of traditional and cyberbullying.

## **1.2 Victim Blaming**

Victim blaming here refers to a scenario where onlookers of a bullying incident believe that the victim has done something to initiate the treatment they received from the perpetrator. Victim blaming has been argued to be a form of secondary victimisation of an already vulnerable party (Campbell & Raja, 1999), and can lead to the original act against the victim being deemed acceptable, as in the following example. A contemporary example of victim blaming in a cyberbullying scenario can be seen in the 2010 case of Jessica Leonhardt or “Jessi Slaughter”:

Leonhardt was an 11-year-old girl who was subject to cyberbullying from masses of users on social media website 4chan following attention seeking claims and comments that she had made on YouTube. A key reason that has been suggested for why the cyberbullies received little reprimand from witnesses was that the onlookers blamed the bullying on Leonhardt’s earlier actions. This meant that the incident spiralled out of control with nobody standing up for the victim. (Daily Mail, 2016)

Leonhardt’s case highlights the importance of understanding the theoretical explanations and drivers of victim blaming.

## **1.3 Theoretical explanations of victim blaming**

Lerner (1965) suggested Just World Theory (JWT) as an explanation for why people might blame the victim. The theory posits that people do so in order to maintain their belief that the world is just. Lerner argues that in doing this, people diminish the possibilities of whatever misfortunes they have witnessed happening to themselves – as they are good and therefore undeserving of adversity. There is a multitude of

research supporting the existence of JWT, however many of the studies conducted prior to 1978 have noticeable methodological issues (Lerner & Miller, 1978). One example of this can be seen in Braband & Lerner's (1974) study in which children were told that they had a spare 10 minutes in which they could choose to either help a fictitious other child or read comic books. Studies such as this manipulated the conditions to show one scenario where the person described is responsible for their unfortunate position and one where they are not. The issue with many of the earlier studies that employ this type of methodology is that they inadvertently also change the participants perception of the character in aspects other than the intended variable of responsibility. In the case of Braband & Lerner's (1974) study, the fictitious child in the responsible condition was guilty of breaking a machine, which could be argued to have caused the participant to think that the child is naughty or stupid, therefore creating a confounding variable of likeability. More recent research has provided further support for the link between Belief in a Just World and victim blaming (Landström, Strömwall, & Alfredsson, 2016; Stromwell, Alfredsson, & Landstrom, 2013; Stromwell, Alfredsson, & Landström, 2013; van den Bos & Maas, 2009) and these can be argued to have much more rigorously controlled methodologies. Whilst JWT provides an explanation of victim blaming offline, many of the studies supporting it are researching incidences such as sexual assault which is less frequent and might be argued to cause more emotional distress to an onlooker, who would have to be present. It can therefore be argued that, due to the high prevalence of cyberbullying mentioned earlier and the geographical distance between people interacting online, it may not apply to victim blaming in online bullying scenarios. Additionally, Furnham (2003) argues that modern research on JWT has moved away from perceiving the phenomena as associated with negative concepts such as prejudice and towards more positive view such as its use as a coping mechanism.

Attribution Theory (Weiner, 1972) suggests an alternative explanation for why people attribute blame to victims of scenarios where responsibility might actually lie elsewhere. Specifically, The Defensive Attribution Hypothesis (DAH; Walster, 1966) argues that people attribute blame for undesirable incidences to the victims in order to avoid fear of their own harm or blame by maintaining belief in control over their own lives. Victim blaming is here suggested to help maintain this belief by diminishing the concern of said incident occurring to themselves, through ensuring that they do not act in whatever way the victim did which they perceive to have caused the misfortune. DAH is a similar construct to JWT, however, its basis lies in the belief in personal control over one's life, rather than belief in the circumstantial way in which the world works – "fate". A meta analysis by Burger (1981) found that the body of research testing attributions of blame for an accident generally supported DAH, especially when experimental realism was high. Similarly to the majority of research on JWT, Burger (1981) and much of the other research on DAH focusses on offline incidences where emotions are likely to be affected by all of the senses, which might demonstrate the theories inability to explain online responses to witnessing victimisation.

Whilst SCTM, JWT and DAH all provide sound theoretical grounding and are leading the research into understanding victim blaming, they were all shaped before cyberbullying was a prominent issue and therefore cannot be assumed to apply to the online environment. Accordingly, the present study suggests the Online Disinhibition Effect (Suler, 2004) in order to consider victim blaming in the online domain. This theory proposes that the online environment lessens inhibitions and causes people to act in a way in which they might feel restrained to act in an offline context. In the context of a cyberbullying scenario, the theory would explain victim blaming partially through anonymity, which refers to a reduced sense of social responsibility due to the

ability to be anonymous on the internet. This here might mean that people do not feel a sense of duty to stand up for a victim when they are online and justify their actions to maintain their own sense of self by blaming the victim. Dissociative imagination is another factor of online disinhibition and refers to the perceived lessened impact of one's actions, in this case intervening, due to the belief that online worlds and personas are fabricated. This would explain non-intervention in cyberbullying further and provides another reason why people might have to justify their actions through blaming the victim. This theory is supported by findings that people feel more justified in lying online via email than offline via pen and paper (Naquin, Kurtzberg, & Belkin, 2010). Furthermore, Udris (2014) supports the application of the theory to the cyberbullying context with findings that those scoring highly in Online Disinhibition were more likely to be cyberbullies. Although the theoretical underpinnings are integral to the understanding of victim blaming, the present study seeks to understand specific factors affecting victim blaming.

#### **1.4 Differences between Offline and Online Bullying**

The consequences of cyberbullying can be argued to be more severe than those of traditional bullying, due to the pervasive nature of modern communication mediums (Dillon & Bushman, 2015). Specifically, the inability for victims to evade the perpetrators once in their homes means that victimisation from cyberbullying can be inescapable. In addition, the asynchronous nature of online interactions means that the perpetrator can detach himself from any instant consequences which might deter them from acting in a similar way offline (Wright, 2017). Online and offline settings have been argued to produce different emotions: embarrassment due to onlookers' presence in offline bullying scenarios and anger in online bullying scenarios, due to the longevity of content posted online (Asher, Stark, & Fireman, 2017). Likewise, witnesses of offline

and online bullying face different challenges when deciding whether or not to stand up for the victim, by addressing the perpetrator or providing support to the victim.

Research has found that there is a greater perceived social risk of intervening when the incident is online, because it will likely remain online, being constantly viewed by others (Dillon & Bushman, 2015). These findings might be taken to suggest that victim blaming is more extreme in online bullying scenarios than offline bullying scenarios, as there is more motivation for bystanders to justify non-intervention.

### **1.5 Locus of Control and Victim Blaming**

Whilst there is a paucity of literature regarding such factors, many parallels can be drawn from research into victim blaming in traditional bullying and other victimisation incidences.

The idea of Locus of Control (LOC; Rotter, 1966) has been built on by both social learning and attribution psychology and refers to the attribution of events in one's life to either external or internal forces. If someone has an external LOC then, in the event that they were bullied, they would perceive the cause to be external, such as that they were in the wrong place at the wrong time. Conversely, someone with an internal LOC would perceive the incident as their own fault, such as that they have behaved in an undesirable way. LOC has been found to predict victim blaming in cases of child abuse and rape, as well as occupational accidents (Muller et al., 1994; Steensma, den Hartigh, & Lucardie, 1994), however there is currently no research on how LOC relates to victim blaming in traditional and cyberbullying incidences. The aforementioned differences between JWT and DAH can be considered akin to LOC, with Belief in a Just World an indication of external LOC; and DAH an indication of internal LOC (Maes, 1994). Therefore, the present study views LOC as the most relevant representative of this area of research in the investigation of victim blaming attitudes

than belief in fate. The majority of research linking LOC and victim blaming is dated, thus there is a need to update the link between victim blaming and LOC with modern scenarios.

### **1.6 Gender and Victim Blaming**

Gender differences have been extensively studied in regards to victim blaming and there is a general consensus that males attribute higher levels of blame to victims of bullying than females (Hara, 2002; Thornberg & Knutsen, 2011). One explanation for this is the finding that females are more easily able to attribute responsibility to external forces, which has been argued to be due to having higher levels of empathy (Sinclair, 2012). Despite the clear differences in traditional bullying scenarios, it is not clear whether these gender differences translate to cyberbullying, considering the aforementioned distinctions between offline and online setting. Additionally, Tokunaga (2010) found in a meta-synthesis that whilst males are more commonly bullied in the traditional sense, females may be more susceptible to cyberbullying. These discrepancies emphasise the need for research into the specific gender differences in victim blaming in cyberbullying and traditional bullying.

### **1.7 Past Experiences and Victim Blaming**

Moral disengagement is a trait which has been demonstrated more in children who have been involved in traditional or cyberbullying than those who have not (Pornari & Wood, 2010). Additionally, research has found associations between negative past experiences with bullying and victim blaming (Chapin & Coleman, 2017; Gray, Palileo, & Johnson, 1993; Muller et al., 1994) and one study notes that their results might be influenced by personal experiences (Holfeld, 2014). Whilst it might be intuitive to

assume that victim and perpetrator are a dichotomy, research has consistently found that a small proportion of victims of bullying become bullies themselves (Dulmus, Sowers, & Theriot, 2006; Unnever, 2005). Furthermore, Dulmus et al (2006) found that these bully-victims were more likely to blame other victim of bullying. These findings are consistent with DAH and the idea that people are motivated to maintain a sense of control over their lives in order to prevent bad things happening to them, in this case again.

### **1.8 Present Study**

In accordance with the literature, the present study seeks to address the gap and investigate whether factors related to victim blaming in traditional bullying scenarios translate to online bullying scenarios. Due to the sensitive subject matter, an anonymous and non intrusive self-report methodology will be utilised. Furthermore, a mix of fixed answer and open-ended questions will be posed in order to allow for both elaboration and comparison of answers. To address the factors influencing victim blaming in cyberbullying scenarios, the following hypotheses will be explored:

**H1:** Victim blaming scores will be higher for the online scenarios than the offline scenarios.

**H2a:** Participants with internal locus of control will provide higher victim blaming scores than participants with external locus of control

**H3:** Participants who have had negative experiences as either bully or victim online will provide higher victim blaming scores than participants who have not.

**H4:** There will be an interaction between setting, locus of control, gender and experience

In addition to the hypotheses stated above, the present study seeks to explore participants' self-reported justifications and explanations for different levels of victim blaming.

## **2 Method**

### **2.1 Design**

An independent, mixed methods 2x2x2x2 design was used. An online questionnaire was created in Qualtrics (Appendix 1), which took around 10 minutes to complete. The dependent variable was levels of blame attributed to the victim of the scenarios.

In regard to the quantitative section, the independent variables were setting (online/offline), gender (male/female), and locus of control scale (internal/external). Past experience (yes/no) was collected from the qualitative questions (discussed next), and these answers were coded and included as a fourth independent variable in the analysis of variance (ANOVA).

In order to supplement the data collected in the quantitative section, qualitative, open-ended questions were also asked. The purpose of this was to find out participants' justifications for their levels of blame attributed to the victim, and whether negative online experiences as either bully or victim had any impact on the victim blaming scores. The answers to these were analysed separately using an inductive, interpretative thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was undertaken according to the steps outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006) due to its ability to reveal themes within the data whilst remaining flexible (Passmore & Rehman, 2012).

### **2.2 Participants**

Research has shown that samples of at least 20 per condition should be used in order to ensure that the data is robust enough for ANOVA (Simmons, J, Leif D. Nelson, & Uri Simonsohn, 2011). Accordingly, 115 participants were recruited using opportunity sampling, through social media website "Facebook". 27 participants did not complete

the survey; therefore, the final sample was 88, which still permits over 20 per condition. Age ranged from 19 to 73 ( $M = 31.07$ ,  $SD = 15.22$ ) and gender was mixed, with almost three quarters (69%) female. This sample is not representative of the general population due to opportunity sampling methods and therefore results may lack ecological validity.

## **2.3 Materials**

### 2.3.1 Quantitative materials

#### Bullying vignettes

Participants read one of four vignettes and were afterwards asked to provide victim blaming scores for the scenarios depicted. Vignettes were used because of their success in provoking attributional thoughts and emotions around morally ambiguous topics (Coccaro, Noblett, & McCloskey, 2009). The vignettes in the questionnaire depicted four different scenarios, two online and two offline. All depicted a girl, "Amy", who was subjected to bullying. Two scenarios (one offline, one online) depicted Amy having an intimate aspect of her life displayed to others. The other two scenarios portrayed Amy being picked on for dressing promiscuously. A literature review by Allison & Bussey (2016) noted that many of the studies using hypothetical scenarios did not provide context around the incident, which can be argued to increase the possibility of answers being subject to hypothetical bias. In order to combat this, the present study included context around the victim's attitudes and behaviours leading up to the bullying incident, as well as her reaction afterwards. A pilot study was conducted on five students from non-psychology courses. The scenarios were reformed in response to the results of this study, in order to elicit higher levels of blame in some respondents. The responses from the pilot study were not included in the final sample.

### Victim blame scale

The measure for victim blaming score was based on the vignette viewed by the participant. Participants were asked to rate on a 6-point Likert-type scale (Likert, 1932; Figure 1) the extent to which they blamed the victim and the perpetrator. Despite not being validated scales, the use of a 5- to 7-point scale has been suggested to improve reliability and validity (Dawes, 2008).

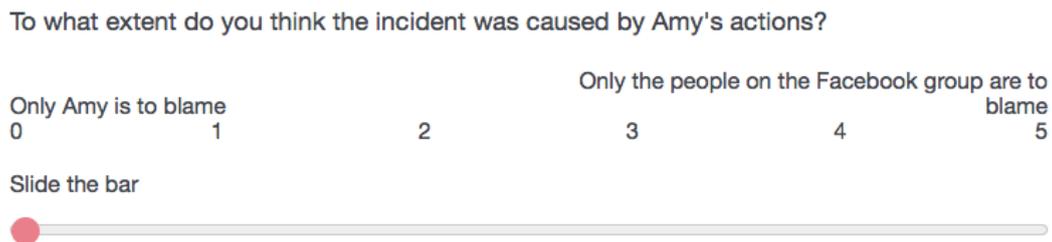


Figure 1: Example victim blaming scale shown after the vignette

Four additional victim blaming questions adapted from Weber, Ziegele, & Schnauber (2013) were asked in order to minimise response biases (Figure 2). The participants were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed with the statements shown in Figure 2. The order that the statements appeared in was randomised to reduce any order effects.

Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements.



Figure 2: additional victim blaming questions

### Locus of Control Scale

Rotter's (1966) Locus of Control Scale was used to assess LOC. The scale consists of 29 questions comprising 2 choices such as "Many of the unhappy things in people's lives are partly due to bad luck" and "People's misfortunes result from the mistakes they make" and the respondent must choose which they most agree with. 6 questions are filler items and a high score indicates an internal LOC. The scale was created prior to the creation of Cronbach's Alpha, therefore the present study calculated it at  $\alpha = .70$ , above the threshold for an acceptably reliable measure and consistent with previous studies (Lange & Tiggemann, 1981). A median score for this sample was attained and participants were separated into either the External or Internal group for inclusion in the ANOVA.

### **2.3.2 Qualitative Materials**

#### Online experiences

Online experiences were captured with the open-ended question “Have you ever had a negative interaction with another person online? If so, please describe the situation below.” Verbatim was coded using qualitative data coding (Appendix 2) and participants were split into either yes or no condition in order to be included as an independent variable in the ANOVA. Qualitative data coding was used because it enables qualitative data to be understood by analytical tools and tested empirically.

#### Justifications

After providing their victim blaming scores, participants were asked to justify their choice with the question “Please explain why you gave these answers.” Verbatim was analysed using thematic analysis in order to identify and understand the justifications which people gave for their victim blaming scores.

### **2.4 Procedure**

Participants were given a link to the survey in Qualtrics, an external survey building website. The survey was named “Perception of Online Behaviours” in order to diminish any demand characteristics. The initial screen displayed an information page, with consent given by clicking “Next”. Anonymity was guaranteed in order to diminish social desirability as much as possible. After completing demographic questions, the participants were randomly assigned to a scenario using Qualtrics randomiser tool. The participants completed the relevant questions in this section and then all went on to

complete LOC and experiences questions. After completing all of the questions, participants viewed debrief form detailing the entire study and providing contact information for any follow up questions.

# Results

The present study sought to explore the following hypotheses:

*H1: Victim blaming scores will be higher for the online scenarios than the offline scenarios.*

*H2a: Participants with internal Locus of Control will provide higher victim blaming scores than participants with external Locus of Control*

*H2b: Males with an internal Locus of Control will provide higher victim blaming scores for online scenarios than females with external Locus of Control.*

*H3: Participants who have had negative experiences as either bully or victim online will provide higher victim blaming scores than participants who have not.*

Despite contradiction in the literature (Lubke & Muthén, 2004), victim blaming scores collected using Likert scale will here be analysed as continuous data, because multiple previous researchers have shown this method to be acceptable and useful (Harwell & Gatti, 2001).

## **3.1 Assumptions**

Due to the sample size being larger than 50, A Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to test for normality on the dependent variable victim blaming scores. The victim blaming scores were not normally distributed, ( $p < .001$ ), which was expected due to the majority of people consistently attributing lower levels of blame to the victim than the perpetrator (Schacter, Greenberg, & Juvonen, 2016). Levene's statistic was not statistically significant, ( $p = .465$ ) meaning homogeneity of variance assumption was met. Despite the normality assumption being violated, parametric tests were

considered robust enough to be used for analysis, however, results should be taken with caution.

As mentioned in the introduction, even some recent studies had methodological issues with hypothetical scenarios. In order to combat these and ensure that the scenarios within the online and offline settings did not differ significantly from each other, the victim blaming scores of both conditions within each setting were compared using two-tailed independent samples t-tests. Differences in victim blaming scores for Offline group 1 ( $M = 3.35$ ,  $SD = 1.64$ ) and Offline Group 3 ( $M = 4.00$ ,  $SD = .93$ ) were statistically not significant  $t(35.02) = -1.65$ ,  $p = .108$ ,  $d = -11.24$ , and differences in victim blaming scores for Online group 2 ( $M = 4.20$ ,  $SD = 1.281$ ) and Online group 4 ( $M = 4.04$ ,  $SD = .93$ ) were statistically not significant  $t(41) = 0.46$ ,  $p = .65$ ,  $d = 5.15$  therefore, online scores and offline scores were combined to create dichotomous setting: online and offline, to be included in the ANOVA.

### **3.1 Descriptive statistics**

88 participants completed the questionnaire (27 male, 61 female) and age range was 19 to 73 years ( $M = 31.07$ ,  $SD = 15.22$ ). Participants mostly attributed little blame to the victim, with almost three-quarters (69.3%) choosing four or five (five being only the perpetrators are to blame) on the victim blaming score. Figure 3 shows bar charts of victim blaming scores by each independent variable.

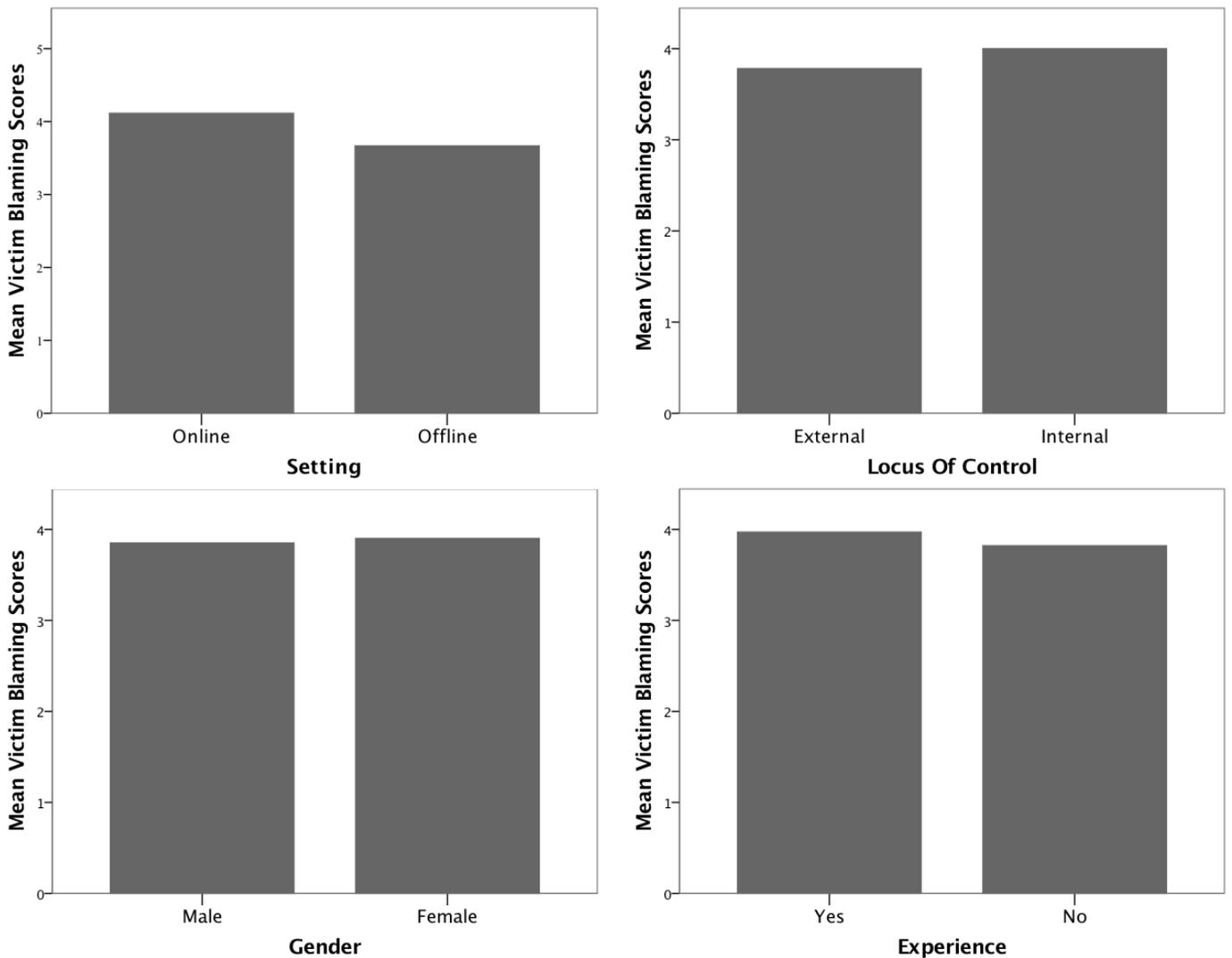


Figure 3: Bar chart representation of mean victim blaming scores by independent variables

### **3.2 Inferential Statistics**

It is reiterated that due to the normality assumption being violated, the results of the ANOVA should be taken with caution.

Results of the ANOVA showed that none of the independent variables had a significant effect on victim blaming scores. None of the null hypotheses could be rejected. A four-way between-subjects ANOVA was conducted on the influence of Setting, Locus of Control, Gender, and Experience on victim blaming scores. Setting had no statistically

significant effect on victim blaming scores,  $F(1, 72) = 0.24, p = .629, \eta_p^2 < .01$ . Locus of Control also had no statistically significant effect on victim blaming scores,  $F(1, 72) = 0.14, p = .714, \eta_p^2 < .01$ . Gender differences in victim blaming scores were statistically not significant,  $F(1, 72) = 0.087, p = .769, \eta_p^2 < .01$ . Experience had no statistically significant effect on victim blaming scores,  $F(1, 72) = 0.043, p = .836, \eta_p^2 < .01$ . Finally, the interaction between Setting, Locus of Control, Gender and Experience was not statistically significant,  $F(1, 72) = 1.86, p = .176, \eta_p^2 < .01$ . No post hoc analysis needed.

### **3.3 Thematic Analysis**

In order to supplement the quantitative data, the present study sought to understand participant's justifications for the victim blaming scores they provided. Five main themes were generated from the data provided in the justifications question (*Please explain why you gave these answers*) and the experience question (*Have you ever had a negative interaction with another person online? If so, please describe the situation below*). These themes were anti-bullying, perpetrators issues, accountability, anonymity and miscommunication will be discussed sequentially. A full theme table is also in Appendix 1.

#### **Theme one: Negative perceptions of bullying**

An overarching theme which appeared from a majority of participants' justifications of victim blaming scores was that the bullying depicted in the vignettes was not acceptable under any circumstances.

Condition 2: *"No one has the right to make fun/bully her"*

Condition 2: *“There is no excuse for bullying”*

Participants felt that no matter what “Amy” had done, the blame for the incident lay mostly on the bullies. This concept was surprising due to the findings in previous studies showing that the justification of bullying does occur (Hara, 2002).

Within the theme of negative perceptions of bullying a sub-theme was identified, which was that people can be themselves. The meaning of this appeared to be that Amy was perceived to be justified in wearing or acting whatever and however she desired.

Condition 2: *“Amy has the right to wear what she wants and not be judged for it”*

Condition 4: *“People should have the freedom to dress how they like and no one deserves to get bullied”*

The participants felt that people should be able to “self-express” (Condition 4) without facing bullying as a result. This finding was also surprising as previous studies have found that bullying is deemed more acceptable when the victim is someone who behaves in a way which makes them seem strange (Desmet et al, 2012).

#### Theme two: Perpetrators issues

Another theme which appeared in both the justifications question and the past experiences question was that the perpetrators personal issues caused the bullying incident, which was why Amy was not seen by participants as blameworthy. In the

justifications question many participants believed that the bullying incident depicted in the scenario was reflective of an internal issue within the perpetrator.

Condition 2: *"It's their problem not hers"*

Condition 4: *"Amy was the recipient of other people's prejudices and perceptions"*

Similarly, in the experiences question, one self-professed bully believed that his actions as an online perpetrator were the result of his experience as a victim offline and implicative of a superiority complex.

Experience: *"This led me to abuse others anonymously - I think this was because I used to get bullied in real life, so The Internet was my way of feeling powerful..."*

Furthermore, it was apparent that Amy was not perceived to have any control over such issues, which seemed to further explain why she was not attributed any blame by some.

Condition 4: *"She can't be held responsible for other people's preconceptions"*

This is consistent with the literature, which suggests that bullies are considered to be unpopular and have low self-esteem (Desmet et al, 2012; Frisén , Jonsson , & Persson , 2007).

### Theme three: Accountability

Another theme which emerged from the justifications question was the idea that the bullying depicted in the vignettes could have been avoided by Amy, therefore she should have expected some sort of reaction like this. The participants seemed to feel that Amy had some degree of responsibility, due to acting in a way which was likely to cause a reaction, although this did not necessarily translate to blame.

Condition 3: *“Amy sent the photo so should understand the consequences”*

Condition 4: *“School is about fitting in rather than standing out, so I feel she could have maybe prevented the incident by fitting in more and dressing similar to everyone else”*

Condition 1: *“Whilst her actions have caused this reaction, she should not blame herself and did not have it coming”*

This was consistent with theme one – that bullying is never acceptable no matter what a person has done to cause a retaliation. It could be seen, however, as conflicting with theme two – that perpetrators issues were the cause of the bullying, although blaming Amy and blaming the bully were not dichotomous. This concept is consistent with Desmet et al (2012) who discovered that participants might provide support for both the bully and victim at the same time.

Additionally, a sub-theme which appeared within the theme of accountability from the experience question was the idea that negative online experiences are “...easy to ignore...” (E). Some participants who noted that they had had negative experiences

online felt that ignoring unwanted messages or interactions was sufficient to stop them from continuing.

Experience: *"Run of the mill trolling which I have either laughed at or ignored"*

Experience: *"Rudeness and negative comments that I deleted and chose not to respond to"*

Experience: *"It's not that bad I just ignore it".*

#### Theme four: Anonymity

Anonymity appeared from the experiences question as a cause of bullying online, thereby providing another justification for blaming the perpetrator rather than the victim. Participants felt that perpetrators of negative online experiences were often motivated by the fact that they were unidentifiable. The concept of "...keyboard warriors" also came up which is a colloquial term for people who act more confident online due to the perceived invisible barrier of the keyboard.

Experience: *"Some people aren't too bright and like to be keyboard warriors"*

Experience: *"arguments over text that people won't face up to in person"*

This is consistent with the Online Disinhibition Effect's concept of anonymity as it suggests that bullies feel less inhibited by having to take responsibility for their actions, as they can harass people online without it being traced back to them. This theme is

also consistent with Wright's (2017) suggestion that cyberbullies are motivated by the lack of consequences associated with bullying offline. This theme was not reflected in the justifications question.

#### Theme five: miscommunication

Finally, the theme of miscommunication appeared from the experience question as a driver for negative online experiences. This seems to provide an alternative to blaming either the victim or the perpetrator, by attributing the blame to no one.

Miscommunication here refers to the difficulties participants expressed in interpreting other people's tone or intent online.

Experience: *"In general things said online rather than face to face are often taken a different way to what was intended, and this can lead to miscommunication"*

Experience: *"Sometimes it's hard to work out a person's tone online"*

This theme is supported by Runions & Bak (2015) who suggest miscommunication as a potential cause of victim blaming. Their reasoning is that conversations held in the cyber context might cause misattributions of intentions might be made, causing individuals to attribute blame where they might not otherwise.

## **4 Discussion**

The present study sought to investigate whether factors associated with victim blaming in traditional bullying and other victimisation scenarios were also applicable to cyberbullying scenarios. In addition, to explore explanations for amount of blame attributed to victims, justifications for answers were obtained. Whilst none of the null hypotheses could be rejected, the findings from other studies and the qualitative section of this study provide some explanation for why this might be.

### **4.1 Findings**

The hypothesis that participants would provide higher victim blaming scores for the online scenarios than the offline scenarios was not supported by the quantitative data. This is not consistent with previous research, which has found that people are less likely to intervene when a bullying incident is online as compared with offline. A possible explanation for this is that factors other than victim blaming are responsible for the lower intervention rates online. Darley & Latané (1968) suggest the bystander effect as an explanation for why people might not intervene. The bystander effect argues that the diffusion of responsibility felt from being one of many people who witness an online bullying incident is a barrier to intervention. This idea is supported by research (Bastiaensens et al, 2014) however, Allison & Bussey (2016) note that this theory does not explain the processes bystanders go through when deciding whether or not to intervene, and suggest that SCTM is still superior in explaining non-intervention. With this in mind, future research might consider all factors of moral disengagement in one study, but still separately.

The hypothesis that participants with an internal LOC would provide higher victim blaming scores than participants with an external LOC was not supported by the quantitative data. This is not consistent with previous studies, which have found that having an internal LOC can predict higher victim blaming scores (Muller et al, 1994; Steensma et al, 1994). As previously indicated these studies are dated, meaning their findings cannot be assumed to apply to a modern population. Accordingly, a possible explanation for the failure to replicate these findings in a cyberbullying context might be that victim blaming attitudes in general are now much less existent, although future studies would be required to test this theory. From the qualitative data, the theme of negative perceptions of bullying can be argued to support this explanation. A majority of participants felt that there was no excuse for bullying, and this might reflect a contemporary opinion that people are responsible for ensuring that they do not bully others, rather than ensuring they do not fall victim to bullying. This explanation is in accordance with the quantitative data, which shows that a majority of people ascribed little or no blame to the victim.

The hypothesis that males would ascribe more blame to the victim than females was not supported by the quantitative data. This is in line with previous studies (Landström et al., 2016; Stromwell, Alfredsson, & Landstrom, 2013; Stromwell, Alfredsson, & Landström, 2013) which also failed to find any significant gender differences in victim blaming scores. These studies were conducted in Sweden, using Swedish samples, which the authors suggest might account for the lack of gender differences, due to the higher levels of gender equality (Mencarini & Sironi, 2012) . With this in mind, the lack of gender differences in the present study might indicate fewer gender inequalities in general amongst the sample. Equally, the overrepresentation of females in the present study might account for the lack of gender differences. Previous

literature has found that males blame the victim more than females (Hara, 2002; Thornberg & Knutsen, 2011) however with a disproportionate number of males, the present sample was not representative of the population's gender distribution.

The hypothesis that participants who have had negative experiences online would provide higher victim blaming scores than those who have not was not supported by the quantitative data. This is inconsistent with previous studies which have found that victims of bullying are more likely to blame other victims of bullying for the incident (Chapin & Coleman, 2017; Dulmus et al, 2006; Gray et al, 1993; Muller et al, 1994). A possible explanation for this is that all of the participants in the present study were over 19 years old, meaning none of them are within the typical age range for bullying, which research has indicated is 11-13 (Eslea & Rees, 2001). As the present sample uses much older participants, it might be argued that even if they were bullied, they no longer identify themselves as a bully victim. In order to test this explanation, future research might reproduce the present study on a sample of participants aged 11-13. This explanation is supported by the qualitative data, as one participant noted that he understood his actions as online bully perpetrator to have been caused by his experiences as an offline bully victim. This hindsight suggests a participant who has left that aspect of his personality in the past and can now reflect upon it without the influence of emotion.

#### **4.2 Strengths and Limitations**

The present study, whilst not providing any significant effects, has furthered research into the factors influencing witnesses' decisions to intervene in cyberbullying scenarios. Victim blaming has here been considered a potential reason for witnesses failing to

intervene and investigated as such. Whilst previous studies have explored reasons for not intervening when witnessing an online bullying incident (Dillon & Bushman, 2015) the present study focussed on victim blaming individually as justification process used to reduce feelings of guilt from passive bystanding. Additionally, the present study extended the experimental realism of previous studies using hypothetical scenarios by including information about the lead up to the bullying incident, personal information about the victim and information about the subsequent reaction of the victim, although the use of hypothetical scenarios might still provide difficulties in generalisability.

Although there are clear strengths in the present study, it does also have some limitations. Firstly, although the extra information mentioned previously was included, the use of hypothetical scenarios might still have reduced ecological validity and experimental realism. In order to further reduce these issues, Allison & Bussey (2016) suggest the use of recall paradigms in order to combat this, however, they do note that these might be subject to biases from the participants respect. In addition, whilst the scenarios in the present study included context and the victim's name and response to the incident in order to combat hypothetical bias, this might have lowered the generalisability of the responses to alternative scenarios. One way that future research might combat this could be to reproduce the present study as a within-subject study, therefore allowing participants responses to be recorded for all four scenarios.

Another limitation is that the present study might have been affected by sample representation bias. There were 27 incomplete responses which had to be excluded from analysis, and a reason for this might have been that upon reading the questions, people who had experienced bullying in the past did not feel comfortable continuing. This is reflected in the qualitative data, where very few of the participants who specified

having experienced bullying online elaborated on this. This could be argued to suggest that those who have experienced bullying are less prepared to discuss their experiences, which might also be a potential confounding variable of the present study. In order to combat this, future studies might want to use only a sample of bullied participants, however there is no guarantee that a larger sample would increase the chances of elaboration.

A limitation which was highlighted by the qualitative aspect of the present study was that viewing the perpetrator as blameworthy for an incident did not necessarily translate to viewing the victim as completely innocent. Many participants noted that whilst they felt that the victim depicted in the scenarios had some part in causing the incident, they still considered the perpetrator to be completely to blame, due to the fact that bullying was not the appropriate response. This finding was supported by Stromwell, Alfredsson, & Landström (2013) who found that maximum attribution of blame to the perpetrator did not always reflect minimum attribution of blame to the victim. Future studies might adapt the present study to measure participant blaming and victim blaming separately.

### **4.3 Future research directions and implications**

The findings of the present study can be used to influence methods of cyberbullying prevention through the encouragement of intervention from witnesses. Due to the multitude of studies finding links between moral disengagement and passive bystanding in cyberbullying, future studies should investigate the effects of other mechanisms which shape moral disengagement, separately. In addition, future studies should reproduce the present study on a sample of people who have been victims of

bullying recently. Lastly, future research might benefit from including other types of qualitative data collection, such as interviews or focus groups in order to further explore experiences and justifications.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

The aim of the present study was to investigate whether previously determined predictors of victim blaming translated into a cyberbullying context. In addition, justifications for victim blaming scores were attained. None of the predictors (online and offline setting, locus of control, gender and past experiences) were found to have a significant effect on victim blaming scores. Furthermore, the qualitative data provided explanations for this and highlighted limitations in the general research area of factors influencing intervention in bullying scenarios.

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## Appendices

Appendix 1: Full questionnaire with brief/debrief, all vignettes, victim blame scale and LOC questionnaire

### Perceptions of online behaviours

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Start of Block: Brief/Demographics

Brief Perceptions of online behaviours This study is looking at how personality factors and experiences influence the extent to which victims of harassment are blamed for their situations. Taking part in the study involves answering a short questionnaire about your personality and online experiences. Afterwards, you will be shown a scenario, and you will be asked to rate the extent to which you think that the victim is to blame. You will not be required to submit any biographical information other than your sex and age and all your data will remain confidential and known only to the researcher (Felicity Thompson). You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time including the withdrawal of your data after participation. If there are any questions before or after completing the survey, please contact the researcher (details below and will be shown again at the end). If you are happy to take part in the study, having information about the nature of the study and what participation in the study involves, please click next. Felicity Thompson Bournemouth University  
I7210636@bournemouth.ac.uk

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Page Break

Gender What is your gender?

- Male (1)
  - Female (2)
  - Other (3)
- 

Age How old are you?

0 100

---

Age (1)	
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---

---

Page Break

**End of Block: Brief/Demographics**

---

**Start of Block: Intro scenarios**

Intro Now you are going to read a short text describing a scenario involving a girl called Amy. After reading the scenario, you will be asked a few questions about your perceptions of the incident.

---

Page Break

**End of Block: Intro scenarios**

---

Start of Block: Scenario 1

Scenario 1 Amy is at a party where she doesn't know many people. There is a girl there who does not like Amy, because she slept with her boyfriend. The girl comes over while Amy is talking to her friend and starts shouting abuse at her, one of the girl's friends then lifts Amy's skirt up high and shows her underwear to the people at the party. Amy is mortified and runs home crying.

Page Break



Blame1a Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements.

Completely agree Completely disagree

0 1 2 3 4 5

Amy had it coming (1)	
Amy provoked the incident (2)	
Amy has herself to blame (3)	
Amy could have prevented the incident (4)	

Page Break

---

Blame 1b To what extent do you think the incident was caused by Amy's actions?

Only Amy is to blame      Only the people at the party are to blame

0      1      2      3      4      5

Slide the bar (1)	
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---

Page Break

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Why1 Please explain why you gave these answers

---

---

Page Break

---

End of Block: Scenario 1

---

Start of Block: Scenario 2

Scenario 2 Amy is not very popular at school. She likes to wear provocative clothes and people often make fun of her, but sometimes she gets a kick out of the attention

she gets. One day after school Amy goes on Facebook and sees that someone has made a page calling her a slut. Many people have commented horrible things about Amy. Seeing this page upsets her and she pretends to have a stomach ache to miss school the next day.

---

Page Break



Blame2a Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements.

Completely agree      Completely disagree

0      1      2      3      4      5

Amy had it coming (1)	
Amy provoked the incident (2)	
Amy has herself to blame (3)	
Amy could have prevented the incident (4)	

---

Page Break

Blame 2b To what extent do you think the incident was caused by Amy's actions?

Only Amy is to blame    Only the people on  
the Facebook group  
are to blame

0    1    2    3    4    5

Slide the bar (1)	
-------------------	--

---

Page Break

Why2 Please explain why you gave these answers

---

---

Page Break

End of Block: Scenario 2

---

Start of Block: Scenario 3

Scenario 3 Amy is beginning a new relationship with a boy, and she decides to send him an intimate photo of herself. One day her boyfriend sends this photo to his friend, who then sends it on a WhatsApp group chat which Amy is in. Amy is only friends with about a quarter of the people in the chat, and it seems like everyone is making fun of

the way she looks. Amy is mortified and leaves the chat.

---

Page Break



Blame 3a Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements.

Completely agree      Completely disagree

0      1      2      3      4      5

Amy had it coming (1)	
Amy provoked the incident (2)	
Amy has herself to blame (3)	
Amy could have prevented the incident (4)	

---

Page Break

Blame 3b To what extent do you think the incident was caused by Amy's actions?

Only Amy is to blame    Only the boyfriend  
and his friend are to  
blame

0    1    2    3    4    5

Slide the bar (1)	
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---

Page Break

Why3 Please explain why you gave these answers

---

End of Block: Scenario 3

Start of Block: Senario 4

Scenario 4 Amy is not very popular at school. She likes to wear provocative clothes and people often make fun of her, but sometimes she gets a kick out of the attention she gets. One day she is eating her lunch and a group of people in her class come up to her and start making fun of her. They all start laughing and calling her a slut. Amy is upset and fakes a stomach ache to be sent home.

---

Page Break



Blame 4a Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements.

	Completely agree	Completely disagree				
	0	1	2	3	4	5
Amy had it coming (1)						
Amy provoked the incident (2)						
Amy has herself to blame (3)						
Amy could have prevented the incident (4)						

Page Break

Blame 4b To what extent do you think the incident was caused by Amy's actions?

Only Amy is to blame      Only the people making fun of her are to blame

0      1      2      3      4      5

Slide the bar (1)



---

Page Break

Why 4 Please explain why you gave these answers

---

---

Page Break

End of Block: Senario 4

---

Start of Block: LOC

LOC intro Now you will be asked some questions about your perceptions of the world. Please choose from the 2 options the answer which you agree with most.

---

Q16 1

- Children get into trouble because their parents punish them too much. (1)
  - The trouble with most children nowadays is that their parents are too easy with them. (2)
- 

Q17 2

- Many of the unhappy things in people's lives are partly due to bad luck. (1)
  - People's misfortunes result from the mistakes they make. (2)
- 

Q18 3

- One of the major reasons why we have wars is because people don't take enough interest in politics. (1)
  - There will always be wars, no matter how hard people try to prevent them. (2)
- 

Q19 4

- In the long run people get the respect they deserve in this world. (1)
  - Unfortunately, an individual's worth often passes unrecognized no matter how hard he tries. (2)
-

Q20 5

- The idea that teachers are unfair to students is nonsense. (1)
  - Most students don't realize the extent to which their grades are influenced by accidental happenings. (2)
- 

Q21 6

- Without the right breaks one cannot be an effective leader. (1)
  - Capable people who fail to become leaders have not taken advantage of their opportunities. (2)
- 

Q22 7

- No matter how hard you try some people just don't like you. (1)
  - People who can't get others to like them don't understand how to get along with others. (2)
- 

Q23 8

- Heredity plays the major role in determining one's personality. (1)
  - It is one's experiences in life which determine what they're like. (2)
-

Q24 9

- I have often found that what is going to happen will happen. (1)
  - Trusting to fate has never turned out as well for me as making a decision to take a definite course of action. (2)
- 

Q25 10

- In the case of the well prepared student there is rarely if ever such a thing as an unfair test. (1)
  - Many times exam questions tend to be so unrelated to course work that studying is really useless. (2)
- 

Q26 11

- Becoming a success is a matter of hard work, luck has little or nothing to do with it. (1)
  - Getting a good job depends mainly on being in the right place at the right time. (2)
- 

Q27 12

- The average citizen can have an influence in government decisions. (1)
  - This world is run by the few people in power, and there is not much the little guy can do about it. (2)
-

Q28 13

- When I make plans, I am almost certain that I can make them work. (1)
  - It is not always wise to plan too far ahead because many things turn out to be a matter of good or bad fortune anyhow. (2)
- 

Q29 14

- There are certain people who are just no good. (1)
  - There is some good in everybody. (2)
- 

Q30 15

- In my case getting what I want has little or nothing to do with luck. (1)
  - Many times we might just as well decide what to do by flipping a coin. (2)
- 

Q31 16

- Who gets to be the boss often depends on who was lucky enough to be in the right place first. (1)
  - Getting people to do the right thing depends upon ability, luck has little or nothing to do with it. (2)
-

Q32 17

- As far as world affairs are concerned, most of us are the victims of forces we can neither understand, nor control. (1)
  - By taking an active part in political and social affairs the people can control world events. (2)
- 

Q33 18

- Most people don't realize the extent to which their lives are controlled by accidental happenings. (1)
  - There really is no such thing as "luck." (2)
- 

Q34 19

- One should always be willing to admit mistakes. (1)
  - It is usually best to cover up one's mistakes. (2)
- 

Q35 20

- It is hard to know whether or not a person really likes you. (1)
  - How many friends you have depends upon how nice a person you are. (2)
-

Q36 21

- In the long run the bad things that happen to us are balanced by the good ones. (1)
  - Most misfortunes are the result of lack of ability, ignorance, laziness, or all three. (2)
- 

Q37 22

- With enough effort we can wipe out political corruption. (1)
  - . It is difficult for people to have much control over the things politicians do in office. (2)
- 

Q38 23

- Sometimes I can't understand how teachers arrive at the grades they give. (1)
  - There is a direct connection between how hard I study and the grades I get. (2)
- 

Q39 24

- A good leader expects people to decide for themselves what they should do. (1)
  - A good leader makes it clear to everybody what their jobs are. (2)
-

Q40 25

- Many times I feel that I have little influence over the things that happen to me. (1)
  - It is impossible for me to believe that chance or luck plays an important role in my life. (2)
- 

Q41 26

- People are lonely because they don't try to be friendly. (1)
  - There's not much use in trying too hard to please people, if they like you, they like you. (2)
- 

Q42 27

- There is too much emphasis on athletics in high school. (1)
  - Team sports are an excellent way to build character. (2)
- 

Q43 28

- What happens to me is my own doing. (1)
  - Sometimes I feel that I don't have enough control over the direction my life is taking. (2)
-

Q44 29

- Most of the time I can't understand why politicians behave the way they do. (1)
- In the long run the people are responsible for bad government on a national as well as on a local level. (2)

-----

Page Break

End of Block: LOC

Start of Block: Qualitative

Q5 Have you ever had a negative interaction with another person online? If so, please describe the situation below.

\_\_\_\_\_

End of Block: Qualitative

Thank you for participating in this study, which looked at personality and experiences on likeliness to blame victims. Specifically, this study is investigating how locus of control, past online experiences and online or offline setting influences the extent to which people are blamed for being the victim of harassment.

Locus of Control is the name given to whether people attribute responsibility for experiences in their life to internal (internal locus of control) or external (external locus of control) forces. A person with an internal locus of control would say “I will get good grades if I study hard”, whilst a person with an external locus of control would say “I will get good grades if the exams are suited to me”.

Debrief:

The results of this study will help determine whether onlookers of bullying and harassment situations are influenced by their own experiences and locus of control. Additionally, the results will advocate any differences between online and offline harassment settings.

If you have any further questions regarding this study, the researcher, Felicity, can be contacted by email (shown below).

Once again, thank you for taking part in this study.

Felicity Thompson  
Bournemouth University  
I7210636@bournemouth.ac.uk

Appendix 2: Qualitative data coding of experiences question for ANOVA

Text	Y/N
Not that I can remember	N
Accused of trolling on house price crash dot com forum	Y
No I have not.	N

yes I have	Y
Nothing serious	N
Yes I was bullied all the time	Y
Someone got their sister to message me to say that I had been mean and that she is going to have words (I wasn't mean) (She didn't have words)	Y
No	N
Messages from someone I have blocked on my phone	Y
When I was younger social media would be a platform to argue with people. There would be posting on each other,Äôs walls and abuse via private messages going forwards and backwards. As I and others have grown older social media is more of	N

a platform used to have an insight into another,Äôs life as opposed to communicating, specifically Facebook.	
No	N
Facebook wickedness	Y
No	N
No	N
Bullying	Y
Not that I recall	N
Yes, on a few occasions, usually about homelessness. Some people seem to think that the homeless are all addicts and should not be given any help to get back on track, I disagree.	Y
Only during Brexit, which brought the worst out in so many people. The issues	Y

changes from reasonable political argument and opinion to a verbal slanging match. Horrible.	
Just run of the mill trolling which I have either laughed at or ignored.	Y
No	N
Yes. At work. Emails often come across with the wrong tone i think.	Y
Bebo someone slut shaming me	Y
Yes rudeness and negative comments that I deleted and chose not to respond to	Y
No	N
No	N
People that get personal rather than discussing things like politics in an adult fashion	Y

None	N
No	N
No	N
Perverts messaging me on Facebook but it's not that bad I just ignore it- someone once uploaded a video of me having sex with someone else without my consent	Y
NO	N
Unkind messages over whatsapp	Y
I have had numerous occasions. Me and my sister made a parody video of a girl who made a makeup tutorial video. We didn't mention her name but she took offence. The police came to my school after she called them and we got into trouble. We meant it light heartedly and	Y

didn't mention her name. I have also had many people anonymously call me names via social media website tumblr. This led me to abuse others anonymously - I think this was because I used to get bullied in real life so The Internet was my way of feeling powerful and picking on other people. I also used to troll on people on YouTube for fun.

No

N

No

N

Nah

N

No

N

mainly bitchy girls at school/arguments over text that people won't face up to in person, and random dick pics on kik messenger before I deleted it

Y

Not me personally	N
no	N
No	N
Ni	N
None	N
Yes. When i was in secondary school, a group of girls hacked into my facebook password and gave it to a lot of people so they could read my messages	Y
Call of duty. Dont know you so try and give you a load of verbal	Y
I've responded to a twitter user who thought it would be funny to make a joke of the death of Anthony Knockeart's (Professional Footballer) dad after he	Y

scored the winner against the team they supported	
negative chat about brexit on xbox live	Y
Once I posted a picture of a fry up and someone called me a cunt. I thought it was a lovely fry up, but they disagreed. I guess a fry up can't please everyone.	Y
No I have not	N
No	N
I've been told to slit my wrists	Y
Creepy men	Y
Once, a particularly offensive comment following a balanced opinion I made about the result of a rugby match. I blocked them.	Y

Yes. When discuss the gun control issue with certain Americans. I tend to ,Äòagree to disagree,Äô if things start to get too personal from their side.	Y
No	N
Political differences caused end of former friendship.	Y
No	N
No	N
No	N
Bullied in a WhatsApp group	Y
No	N
No	N
N/A	N
No. I don't interact with people online.	N

Yes, a girl got offended about my tweet because she thought it was about her and decided to get all her friends to reply to it	Y
No.	N
no	N
N/a	N
No	N
No	N
No, I rarely share posts / comments and all social media,Äôs are private to friends only	N
No	N
No	N
I,Äôve had random racism targeted me for no reason by bigots behind a keyboard.	Y
Not really	N

No	N
Some people aren't too bright and like to be 'keyboard warriors.' It's easy to ignore them though	N
I have not had one really bad negative interaction online but just in general things said online rather than face to face are often taken a different way to what was intended and this can lead to miscommunication and sometimes arguments	N
n/a	N
No	N
Can't think of anything. Sometimes it is hard to work out a persons tone online in statements.	N

Yes, formspring, anonymous messaging	Y
I've been involved in some friendship group drama through online messaging and chats. Usually they originate from offline issues and just manifest and unfold through online communications	Y
no	N
no comment	N
yes	Y
No	N
Hacked my snaps and tried blackmailing me into leaking nudes	Y

Appendix 3: Reflexive comments and theme table for qualitative section

Justifications for victim blaming scores

### **Initial thoughts:**

“Lifting her clothes was unacceptable behaviour” seems to attribute the blame to the bully, however there is also a feel that Amy could have prevented the incident (Amy made a choice ...)..

There’s a feel that Amy should be allowed to dress or act how she wants (“Everybody is entitled to dress as they wish”) however is it also clear that she should expect negative consequences if she chooses to do so (“...should understand the consequence”, “...Amy may have to expect reactions”)

Comments such as “the other girl sounds like a jealous bitch” and “it’s their problem not hers” imply that the bullies are perceived to have personal issues which might be the cause of Amy’s situation. However, there is also mention of Amy’s own issues such as “She seems to be quite insecure...”

### **Theme generation:**

- Inappropriate response from bully
- Amy responsible for incident
- Amy should have expected but not to blame
- Bully’s personal issues
- Everyone should be allowed to act/dress how they want

- People should attempt to fit in

### Negative online experiences

#### **Initial thoughts:**

Mostly victims although some bullies as well, slight crossover (bully-victims)

Messaging seems to be the most common form of negative interaction (eg “unkind messages over whatsapp”). Bullying was disclosed but not detailed. “Anonymous messaging” appears to be a common factor, suggests that people are rude over internet because they are anonymous? Many mention that it is “easy to ignore them” however this is not mentioned by those who disclose bullying. Arguments around specific, national and international issues spark negative interactions eg “usually about homelessness”, “only during Brexit”. Some mention of other people getting too personal “people that get personal”. “sometimes it’s hard to work out a person’s tone online” implies that miscommunication is a common cause of negative experiences.

#### **Theme generation:**

- Messaging
- Against Bullying
- Anonymity

- Easy to combat
- Miscommunication

**Themes:**

- **Anti-bullying** - Participants feel that the bullying of Amy was unacceptable, inappropriate and unnecessary
  - **People can be themselves** - Participants feel that Amy should be allowed to act or dress how she wants without being shamed for it
- **Perpetrator issues** - Participants feel that the bullying was the result of personal issues within the perpetrator
- **Avoidable** - Participants feel that the bullying in the scenarios could have been avoided by acting in a way which did not cause a reaction
  - Easily ignored - Participants feel that ignoring negative interactions online is sufficient to stop them continuing
- **Anonymity** - Participants feel that negative online experiences are often a result of the perpetrator being unidentifiable
- **Miscommunication** - Participants feel that it is not always easy to correctly interpret people's tone or intent online

Theme table:

Theme	Sub-theme	Description	Quotes
-------	-----------	-------------	--------

<p>Negative perceptions of bullying</p>		<p>Participants feel that the bullying of Amy was unacceptable, inappropriate and unnecessary</p>	<p>“lifting her clothes was unacceptable behaviour” (1)</p> <p>“she did not deserve to have this done no matter what. It was not appropriate to do this bullying in front of others at all” (1)</p> <p>“this is not the way to deal” (1)</p> <p>“I don’t believe that kind of behaviour (lifting up the skirt) is ever justified.” (1)</p> <p>“Whilst her actions have caused this reaction, she should not blame herself and did not have it coming” (1)</p> <p>“The others at the party acted inappropriately and bullied Amy. They should have ignored her if they did not have anything positive to say to her.” (1)</p> <p>“What they did to Amy is bullying and should not be accepted” (1)</p> <p>“Not right for anyone to do that, no matter the situation” (1)</p> <p>“Whilst I do not agree with the people at the party’s actions at all...” (1)</p> <p>“The situation could have been resolved without abuse” (1)</p> <p>“Her behaviour was being commented on but it is not necessary for people to bully” (2)</p> <p>“But she doesn’t deserve to be bullied</p>
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			<p>and can dress the way she wants” (2)</p> <p>“I fell that the slut shaming on Facebook was inappropriate” (2)</p> <p>“Doesn’t mean she deserved any public shaming” (2)</p> <p>“Those people could have refrained from making comments about her clothes. If you don’t agree with someone, don’t involve yourself” (2)</p> <p>“Because that’s bullying. It’s no one else’s business whether she chooses to wear provocative clothing. Not liking the way someone else is no excuse to mock and ridicule that person. It’s their own SUBJECTIVE perception of the association between provocative clothing and sexual promiscuity” (2)</p> <p><b>“No one has the right to make fun/bully her” (2)</b></p> <p>“People shouldn’t make fun of her because of what she wears” (2)</p> <p>“Slut shaming is wrong” (2)</p> <p><b>“There is no excuse for bullying” (2)</b></p> <p>“Slut shaming is not acceptable, regardless of what someone wears or how they conduct themselves”(2)</p>
Negative perceptions of bullying	<b>People can be themselves</b>	Participants feel that Amy should be allowed to act or dress how she	“Everybody is entitled to dress as they wish” (2)

		wants without being shamed for it	<p><b>“She should be allowed to be who she wants to” (2)</b></p> <p>“Amy should not be blamed for being who she is”(2)</p> <p>“Amy should be able to wear what she wants and not be judged for it” (2)</p> <p>“Of course she is well within her rights to wear what she wants” (2)</p> <p>“She has a right to be as she wants” (4)</p> <p>“Amy has the right to self-express through the clothes she wears.” (4)</p> <p>“Amy should be able to be who she wants to be and wear what she wants to wear without other people judging her and making her feel bad for it” (4)</p> <p>“Amy should be able to dress how she likes although if it causes trouble maybe avoid in certain situations for her own piece of mind” (4)</p> <p>“Everyone is free to live how they like” (4)</p> <p>“People should have the freedom to dress how they like and no one deserves to get bullied” (4)</p> <p>“she has the right to wear what she wants without being harassed” (4)</p>
<b>Perpetrators issues</b>		Participants feel that the bullying was the result of personal issues	<p>“the other girl sounds like a jealous bitch” (1)</p> <p>“people are arseholes” (1)</p>

		within the perpetrator	<p>“Others are just jel of her crackin rig” (2)</p> <p><b>“It’s their problem not hers”(2)</b></p> <p>“She can’t be held responsible for other people’s preconceptions” (4)</p> <p><b>“Amy was the recipient of other people’s prejudices and perceptions” (4)</b></p> <p>“Other people should be able to control themselves” (4)</p> <p>“There will always be people out there with nothing better to do than judge others” (4)</p> <p>“People that get personal rather than discussing things likely politics in an adult fashion” (E)</p>
<b>Accountability</b>		Participants feel that the bullying in the scenarios could have been avoided by acting in a way which did not cause a reaction	<p>“Amy made a choice to sleep with the girl’s boyfriend, therefore the incident at the party is the consequence of her actions” (1)</p> <p>“Amy shouldn’t have slept with someone else’s boyfriend, doing this will obviously cause a reaction” (1)</p> <p>“Amy’s actions in sleeping with the boyfriend are the cause of the reaction in the girl, so in this sense she could have prevented it, and she has provoked this reaction in the girl” (1)</p> <p>“Whilst her actions have caused this reaction, she should not blame</p>

			<p>herself and did not have it coming" (1)</p> <p>"Some may argue that what the girl did wasn't bad at all in proportion to what Amy did" (1)</p> <p>"Amy may have expected that her presence would not have been welcomed at the party" (1)</p> <p>"She did still sleep with someone in a relationship, so is still partly to blame" (1)</p> <p>"Amy was in the wrong for sleeping with the boyfriend" (1)</p> <p>"It was not completely out of the blue, they had a motive in that they wanted revenge for what Amy did" (1)</p> <p>"She wants the attention" (2)</p> <p>"She likes the attention and did provoke the incident" (2)</p> <p>"She seems to be quite insecure and therefore is looking for ways to attract attention" (2)</p> <p>"Amy can reduce the impact by not participating within this group of social media activities" (2)</p> <p>"The goal of Amy was to get a reaction, once she got a different reaction to the one she wanted, she didn't like it" (2)</p> <p>"Although she could have prevented it by wearing less provocative clothes..." (2)</p>
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			<p>“Although if she didn’t act that way it probably wouldn’t have happened” (2)</p> <p>“While Amy may have to expect reactions...” (2)</p> <p>“Amy shouldn’t have sent the pictures because they were personal” (3)</p> <p>“Sharing pictures of yourself that you wouldn’t want other people to see is high risk” (3)</p> <p>“If amy hadn’t sent it it wouldn’t have happened” (3)</p> <p>“Amy sent the photo so should understand the consequences” (3)</p> <p>“Amy should not have sent the photo to her boyfriend” (3)</p> <p>“Amy should take more care with who she is willing to share this with as this was only the beginning of a new relationship” (3)</p> <p>“The incident could have totally been prevented by Amy” (3)</p> <p>“School is about fitting in rather than standing out so I feel she could have maybe prevented the incident by fitting in more and dressing similar to everyone else” (4)</p> <p>“Amy can choose to wear clothing that doesn’t offend people” (4)</p> <p>“Amy isolated herself” (4)</p>
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			<p>“Whilst Amy’s choice of clothing might have bought greater attention to her...” (4)</p> <p>“Amy knows her provocative style of dressing will draw attention to her” (4)</p> <p>“Amy should be able to dress how she likes although if it causes trouble maybe avoid in certain situations for her own piece of mind” (4)</p> <p>“She could have avoided the situation by dressing more appropriately, especially If she is aware that she is dressing inappropriately...” (4)</p> <p>“Technically it could have been less likely if she wore less attention-grabbing clothing, however...” (4)</p>
Accountability	<b>Easily ignored</b>	Participants feel that ignoring negative interactions online is sufficient to stop them continuing	<p>“Run of the mill trolling which I have either laughed at or ignored” (E)</p> <p>“Rudeness and negative comments that I deleted and chose not to respond to” (E)</p> <p>“I blocked them” (E)</p> <p>“It’s easy to ignore them” (E)</p> <p>“Its not that bad I just ignore it”(E)</p>
<b>Anonymity</b>		Participants feel that negative online experiences are often a result of the perpetrator being unidentifiable	<p>“Mainly bitchy girls at school/arguments over text that people won’t face up to in person” (E)</p> <p>“Don’t know you so try and give you a load of verbal” (E)</p>

			<p>“Bigots behind a keyboard” (E)</p> <p>“Some people aren’t too bright and like to be keyboard warriors” (E)</p>
<b>Miscommunication</b>		<p>Participants feel that it is not always easy to correctly interpret people’s tone or intent online</p>	<p>“Emails often come across in the wrong tone I think” (E)</p> <p>“A girl got offended about my tweet because she thought it was about her and got all her friends to reply to it” (E)</p> <p>“In general things said online rather than face to face are often taken a different way to what was intended and this can lead to miscommunication” (E)</p> <p>“Sometimes it’s hard to work out a person’s tone online”(E)</p>