**‘It can’t be that bad, I mean, he’s a guy’: Exploring judgements towards domestic violence scenarios varying on perpetrator and victim gender, and abuse type**

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**Introduction**

I was sat in the backseat of a car a few months ago with a couple who live on my road, Sarah and David. David was driving and Sarah was in the passenger seat. For some reason, we all began discussing what celebrities we found attractive (and no, I will not divulge my choices!). Sarah said that she thought the actor Jamie Dornan ‘was really fit… like *really* fit’. David acted affronted, joking ‘Are you just going to say that in front of me? Like I’m not even here?!’. She replied that she did not care, and laughed. David then mentioned that he found a particular female celebrity very attractive (unfortunately, the name escapes me). With this comment, Sarah turned in the passenger seat, and slapped David on the arm as hard as she could. I could practically feel the stinging sensation it must have produced. ‘What was that for?!’, David exclaimed. Sarah explained that he should not be saying such things in front of her, and should know better. I laughed awkwardly. I then paused and thought, just imagine if the scenario had been reversed. How might I, or anyone as it happens, have reacted differently if David had been the one to slap Sarah? I would have been outraged, shocked, appalled, and would have intervened immediately, questioning his actions and making sure Sarah was ‘OK’. I probably would have wondered whether there was something more sinister going on. Was David abusing Sarah in private? How would I speak to her about it? As is happens however, no such thoughts occurred. We all brushed past it, and drove on.

 This scenario is one that typifies the importance of our perceptions, interpretations prejudices, and stereotypes in how we react to a whole variety of events, including cases of violence between two people. And, whilst I can reassure readers that this incident (as far as I know) is not indicative of a more sinister pattern of behaviour, serious issues and questions still present. Why are acts of aggression such as these tolerated or even found humorous when performed by women? Are the aggressive acts of women ever seen as abuse? If not, why not? Conversely, why are we unable to see men as victims of domestic violence, particularly at the hands of women? And how do we evaluate violence within same-sex relationships? In an attempt to answer some of these questions, this chapter first outlines the possible role of social cognition in informing judgements towards incidences of intimate partner violence, before reviewing existing research examining perceptions and judgements of such abuse. Original research in this area exploring judgements towards hypothetical incidents of domestic violence occurring in opposite-sex and same-sex couples, and of differing abuse types, is then outlined. Finally, outcomes of this research are discussed, as is the need for broader and more inclusive discourse in this area.

**The ‘Domestic Violence Stereotype’**

It has been argued that an extremely narrow conceptualisation of domestic violence exists in society, including in academic circles (Dutton & White, 2013). Operating as a ‘gender paradigm’ within the literature, the idea that domestic violence is predominantly perpetrated by violent men towards helpless women has proven a guiding principle for academic research, as well as policy development and implementation, for nearly 50 years. However, as is increasingly highlighted by a small group of scholars, this representation of domestic violence is dramatically limited, and does not correspond to the statistics available that demonstrate substantial victimisation amongst men (Drijber, Reijnders, & Ceelen, 2013; Dutton & Nicholls, 2005; Dutton & White, 2013), parity of perpetration in men and women (Archer, 2000), and similar prevalence levels within same-sex relationships (Bacchus et al., 2017). Such representations also present domestic violence as largely physical and unidirectional in nature, when in reality violence within relationships encompasses a wide variety of behaviours, such as psychological abuse (Capezza & Arriaga, 2008), and is frequently bidirectional (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Misra, Selwyn, & Rohling, 2012). Why therefore, when evidence exists to the contrary, and in a time when legislative definitions of domestic violence are increasingly broad, inclusive, and purposely highlight that no limit of gender or sexuality exists on the performance or receipt of such behaviours, do such narrow depictions of domestic violence endure?

**The Role of Social Cognition**

The way the brain decodes and responds to social situations and interactions may be in part responsible for the formulation and subsequent propagation of the ‘domestic violence stereotype’. Social cognition describes how people process, store, and apply information about other people and social situations, focusing particularly on the cognitive processes engaged by the brain when making sense of our social world (Hogg & Vaughan, 2014). An important part of this process is the development of schemas, described as patterns of thought or behaviour that organise and build relationships between information, producing a mental structure of preconceived ideas or ‘frameworks’ about how the world operates (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). We build up numerous schemas, including person schemas (e.g., ‘best friend’), role schemas (e.g., a police officer), scripts (e.g., what happens during certain particular ‘events’) and self-schemas (e.g., knowledge about yourself; Hogg & Vaughan, 2014), and use these as sources of information in both familiar and novel situations. Importantly, schema tend to remain unchanged even in the face of contradictory information, and people are more likely to notice things that fit into their schemas and ignore things that do not (otherwise known as ‘confirmation bias’, Plous, 1993).

As part of this process, we will likely build up a representation or ‘script’ for domestic violence, either through direct experience (e.g., growing up witnessing abuse), indirect representations (e.g., in the media), or both. For many this will likely result in a schema representing a ‘traditional’ image of domestic violence, due to the prevalence of this stereotype within society. This stereotype will then become reinforced as information that matches this schema is absorbed and logged, and incongruent information ignored. This will, in turn, perpetuate the stereotype further, and so on. Relationships *between* schemas also exist, providing even greater amounts of information to inform decision making. For example, some of the most well-developed schemas are those about gender. Representations of men, and by association masculinity, as being aggressive, independent, strong, stoic, unemotional and sexually dominant, and of women (and femininity) as non-aggressive, interdependent, weak, passive, emotional, nurturing, and sexually submissive (Bem, 1981; Gerber, 1991; Lueptow, Garovich-Szabo, & Lueptow, 2001) are learnt from a very young age, and from a wide variety of sources (Blakemore, Berenbaum, & Liben, 2009; Ruble, Martin, & Berenbaum, 2006). Children, and the adults they become, also learn associations between these gender characteristics and the corresponding activities, preferences and roles appropriate for each sex. This is particularly important in the case of domestic violence, as it is easy to see how the attributes associated with men and masculinity are more synonymous with perpetration of abuse (particularly physical aggression), and feminine attributes with victimisation.

Other cognitive processes, such as heuristics, then help to shape our reactions to domestic violence by providing mental shortcuts to the wealth of information stored, including our stereotypes (Hogg & Vaughan, 2014). Thus, when confronted with an incident that we think might be domestic violence, heuristics help guide us in our decision-making, (e.g., when determining perpetration, or in deciding whether something is even domestic violence at all). In most instances, such mental processes are useful, as they allow us to engage in rapid decision making, particularly in unfamiliar or ambiguous situations. However, they can produce ‘cognitive biases’ that result in judgemental errors, often by not encouraging or allowing for all of the information to be assessed. In the context of domestic violence, this process can therefore have severe consequences. Specifically, incidences of intimate partner violence which do not ‘fit’ with our pre-existing conceptualisations are likely to be subjected to sub-standard evaluative processes which result in appraisals that seek to preserve our existing schema, for example minimisation or even outright dismissal.

**The Influence of Victim and Perpetrator Gender**

An increasing number of studies have highlighted the possible influence of such processes by examining perceptions of, and judgements towards incidences of domestic violence. For example, recent studies utilising layperson and undergraduate populations show (amongst a whole raft of findings) that incidents are viewed as more serious and are rated as more likely to result in injury when the victim is female, regardless of perpetrator gender (Ahmed, Aldén, & Hammarstedt, 2013; Poorman, Seelau, & Seelau, 2003; Seelau, Seelau, & Poorman, 2003; Seelau & Seelau, 2005). In addition, incidents involving male perpetrators are rated as more serious, more likely to cause injury, and are more likely to receive a recommendation of citation/arrest by police. Interestingly, when interactions between victim and perpetrator gender do occur, it is the most stereotypical version of abuse (male perpetrator, female victim) that receives the highest seriousness ratings, is most likely to have police intervention recommended, and is the most likely to receive a recommendation that the victim call the police (Ahmed et al., 2013; Poorman et al., 2003; Seelau et al., 2003; Seelau & Seelau, 2005). This is supported by earlier studies showing that incidences in which men abuse women are invariably perceived more negatively than those in which women abuse men, as male-on-female violence is rated more severe than female-on-male violence and harsher penalties are awarded to male as compared to female perpetrators (Arias & Johnson, 1989; Feather, 1996; Gerber, 1991; Harris & Cook, 1994; Home, 1994; O'Toole & Webster, 1988; Sorenson & Taylor, 2005; Willis, Hallinan, & Melby, 1996). Other studies suggest that male victims of female perpetrators are also considered least worthy of assistance, with incidences of male-on-female, gay, and lesbian domestic violence more likely to be deemed illegal, and to receive a recommendation of police intervention and action, than female-on-male violence (Sorenson & Thomas, 2009). Such results therefore suggest that violence by men towards women is regarded as particularly serious, with the opposite true for violence by women towards men.

The above studies are further supported by qualitative research, which suggests that both non-abused young adults, and male victim-survivors have strongly held stereotypes about gender, domestic violence, and about male victim-survivors in particular (Shum-Pearce, 2015). For example, non-abused adults believe that ‘men are powerful’, and therefore have control over any given situation, could leave easily, and that they do not need help. This is complemented by the belief that ‘women are incapable of harm’, reflecting the commonly held stereotype of women as weak and physically unintimidating. Male victim-survivors reported that they felt ‘invisible’ and that they ‘shouldn’t need help’ when victimised (Shum-Pearce, 2015), and other studies support the idea that these men feel bound by prevalent stereotypes about gender and violence, characterised by a lack of recognition (Wallace et al., 2018). It is therefore no surprise that male victim-survivors struggle to find support among their social networks upon disclosure (Tsui, 2014; Tsui, Cheung, & Leung, 2010), and that they often shy away from reporting their abuse for fear of embarrassment, ridicule, and the lack of available support services (Barber, 2008).

These ‘internal’ barriers to reporting are likely fuelled through perceptions and stereotypes of abuse held by service providers, and those within the criminal justice system. When interviewing male victim-survivors, McCarrick, Davis-McCabe and Hirst-Winthrop (2016) found that their experiences with police officers were overwhelmingly negative, mirroring earlier work (Buzawa & Austin, 1993). Other studies show that male victim-survivors are more likely to be blamed for their victimisation (Stewart & Maddren, 1997), that prejudice towards male victim-survivors is extreme (George, 1994), and that they are often completely ignored by police and other services (Cook, 2009; George & Yarwood, 2004). When comparing male versus female perpetrator cases, the same actions are judged as actionable when performed by men compared to women (Sorenson & Taylor, 2005), and when cases are progressed, female perpetrators are likely to receive lower sentences or have their cases dismissed (Henning & Feder, 2005). Officers are also less likely to reinforce protection orders in female-perpetrated cases (Connolly, Huzurbazar, & Routh-McGee, 2000; Renzetti, 1989). It is no wonder then that male victim-survivors report believing that officers will not be able to help them to a greater extent than women do (Drijber et al., 2013).

Victim-survivors in same-sex relationships also expect negative experiences with law enforcement (Finneran & Stephenson, 2013), and have difficulty accessing services (Stiles-Shields & Carroll, 2015). Indeed, as outlined in Chapter 4, major barriers are identified in the help-seeking abilities of LGBTQIA+ victim-survivors, including lack of understanding and stigma (Calton, Cattaneo, & Gebhard, 2016). Even counsellors and therapists have been shown to place greater seriousness on violence in opposite-sex compared to same-sex relationships (Wise & Bowman, 1997). This is likely due, in part, to cultural heterosexism, a system of attitudes, biases, and discrimination in favour of opposite-sex sexuality and relationships (Herek, 1995). Moreover, such cultural attitudes will also influence the development of multiple different schemas, including those about relationships, gender, sexuality, and domestic violence. Importantly, the studies outlined above demonstrate that the narrow representation of domestic violence as perpetrated exclusively by men towards women serves to minimise the importance and limit the recognition of male victim-survivors of female abuse, as well as same-sex abuse and those involved. Crucially, such beliefs and attitudes are only further fuelled by the academic, political, and social dialogue purporting domestic abuse as ‘gendered’, as discussed in other chapters of this book.

**Abuse Type**

The stereotype of domestic violence outlined above also suggests that such violence is predominantly physical. However, statistics routinely indicate widespread prevalence of other forms of abuse (such as psychological or emotional aggression; see Black et al., 2011). And yet, even fewer studies have examined the impact of abuse type on perceptions and judgements towards other incidences of abuse. One such study by Langhinrichsen-Rohling and colleagues showed participants one of two videos depicting either a psychologically aggressive conflict or a conflict that involved both psychological and physical aggression. Results indicated that physical aggression added to perceptions of seriousness, above and beyond the effect of psychological aggression (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Shlien-Dellinger, Huss, & Kramer, 2004). Capezza and Arriage (2008) compared physical and psychological aggression more extensively, presenting participants with either a low, medium, or high physical abuse scenario, or a low vs. high psychological abuse scenario. They then asked about the negativity of the behaviour, the acceptability of the behaviour, and the severity of conflict. They found that participants’ judgements became significantly more negative with increasing physical abuse, but no corresponding change was found with increased psychological abuse. Physical abuse is also much more likely to be rated as illegal compared to other forms of violence (Sorenson & Thomas, 2009). These limited results suggest that physical abuse within relationships is considered more serious than psychological forms of aggression. This is alarming considering that psychological aggression has been found to be a larger predictor of victim-survivors’ fears of future abuse (Sackett & Saunders, 1999), and that experiencing this type of abuse is more strongly associated with negative health outcomes, such as depression or substance misuse (Coker et al., 2002).

**The Present Study**

A prevalent stereotype undoubtedly exists regarding intimate partner violence (Dutton & White, 2013), which is related to, and constructed around, deeply-ingrained beliefs about gender (Gerber, 1991). As such, a widespread disbelief and minimisation towards male victim-survivors, as well as victim-survivors within same-sex relationships, exists (Calton et al., 2016; McNeely, Cook, & Torres, 2001), both within the general population, and in specialist populations such as those providing services and support, and those within the criminal justice system. Crucially, negative beliefs also appear to be internalised by victim-survivors and may be partially responsible for chronically low reporting rates in these groups. However, more research is needed to explore judgements made towards scenarios involving male vs. female perpetrators and victim, to understand how these incidences are evaluated against such a stereotype. In addition, research exploring the impact of abuse type on perceptions and judgements (for example, lesser known types of aggression and coercive control), or how gender and abuse type interact (e.g., male perpetrated physical vs. female perpetrated emotional abuse) is needed, as some forms of aggression may be linked to gender stereotypes (e.g., verbal/psychological aggression being thought of as more typical in women). The present study therefore explored undergraduates’ judgements towards hypothetical intimate partner violence scenarios varying by victim-perpetrator gender and abuse type.

**Method**

**Design**

This study adopted a between-subjects design with two factors: abuse type (with three levels: physical, psychological/emotional, and financial) and perpetrator-victim gender (with four levels: male-male, male-female, female-female, and female-male). These factors constituted the independent variables in this study. Thirty questions measuring perceptions of the scenario itself, reaction and intervention preferences, perceptions of the victim and perpetrator, perceptions of the relationship, the outcome of the incident, and the frequency of occurrence acted as separate dependent variables in this study.

**Participants**

Participants were 243 undergraduate students (M = 22.83 years, SD = 5.39, min = 18.00, max = 54.00, 138 women) at a university in West London, United Kingdom. Most were third year undergraduate students (102), coming from a variety of ethnic backgrounds (63% were white, 19% were black, 10% were Asian, with the remainder identifying as belonging to another ethnic group). Furthermore, 87.7% of participants (213) identified as heterosexual, with 4.9% and 3.7% identifying as bisexual and gay respectively (3.7% were asexual or ‘other’). Finally, and importantly for this study, 21.8% of participants (53) reported some history of domestic violence.

**Materials and Procedure**

A vignette depicting an incident of domestic violence was adapted from Seelau and Seelau (2005). This previous study utilized two vignettes for each scenario, giving accounts from the perspective of both the victim and the perpetrator. However, the volume of information provided in these vignettes may have placed too much strain on participants, as well as skew or prime participants’ perspectives through their identification with either the victim or perpetrator based on gender. The vignettes utilised in this study therefore describe the event from a neutral perspective, and are shorter, to provide more control over effects observed. Within these vignettes, variation of victim and perpetrator gender (using different names and associated pronouns), as well as the type of violence, created 12 vignettes in total. All other factors remained constant. Participants read only 1 of the 12 scenarios, and presentation of these vignettes was randomised. An example vignette (male perpetrator, male victim, financial abuse) is given below:

*Please read the following account of a dispute involving a romantically involved couple, Matt and Tom, both 26-year old males. They have been together for approximately two years. They both weigh roughly 11 stone, are both around 5 foot 10 inches tall, and both have full-time jobs.*

*One night Tom returns home late after stopping off at a local bar after work and drinking with friends. Matt is suspicious of Tom, and begins yelling at him and accusing him of being unfaithful. Tom says that Matt is being stupid, that he hasn’t been unfaithful, and that he is tired and wants to go to bed. Matt insists that they continue to talk, again accusing Tom of being more interested in his friends than in him. As the argument escalates, Tom decides he has had enough and goes to leave the room. Matt shouts at Tom to try and stop him leaving. Tom pauses, and then continues towards the bedroom. Matt shouts at Tom again and demands that Tom show him the receipts for the night. When Tom refuses, Matt says that he clearly can’t be trusted and until he can trust him he shouldn’t have access to their money. He insists Tom hands over his wallet so that he can take away his card to the joint account they both pay their wages into. Tom, now visibly upset, hands over his wallet and goes into the bedroom. Tom shuts the door, and Matt stays in the main room.*

Participants then answered thirty questions adapted from previous research in this area (Poorman et al., 2003; Seelau, et al., 2003; Seelau & Seelau, 2005). Most involved answering on a Likert scale from 1 (Not at all) to 7 (Extremely). Some questions (e.g., should the victim in this scenario call the police?) invited categorical responses (e.g., yes or no). An electronic version of the questionnaire battery was presented using the survey software Qualtrics. If participants consented to participation following the briefing, they were asked demographic questions, before being presented with one of the 12 different domestic violence scenarios. They were asked to read this carefully, and to answer the questions presented honestly. Once participants were finished, they were presented with debriefing information, including contact information for local support services if required.

**Results**

Several 3 (abuse type) x 4 (perpetrator-victim gender) between-subject ANOVAs were computed for the 24 questions requiring Likert scale responses. MANOVAs were not appropriate, as few correlations between questions were found. For the four questions requiring categorical responses, separate chi-square analyses were conducted to assess the influence of abuse type and perpetrator-victim gender on participants’ choices. One-way within-subject ANOVAs were computed for the four questions measuring appropriateness of intervention, and judgements of frequency for each perpetrator-victim combination.

**Perpetrator-Victim Gender**

Some main effects were found for perpetrator-victim gender. Importantly, significant differences were found for judgements of seriousness, *F* (3, 231) = 2.58, *p* < .05, with scenarios involving female victims (male perpetrator, *M* = 5.09, SD = 1.55; female perpetrator, M = 4.93, SD = 1.49) rated as more serious than those involving male victims (male perpetrator, *M* = 4.56, SD = 1.29; female perpetrator, *M* = 4.47, SD = 1.45). This suggests that, regardless of perpetrator gender, incidents of abuse towards male victims are not awarded the same gravity as those towards women. It was also much more likely that participants would say that victims should call the police in M-F scenarios than in any other, χ2 (3) = 8.63, *p* < .05. This again points to the seriousness that participants may place on scenarios involving female victims, particularly when at the hands of male abusers. M-F couples were also rated as lowest on closeness (*M* = 3.29, SD = 1.26), compared to F-F couples (*M* = 3.99, SD = 1.47), with M-M and F-M couples falling in-between, *F*(3, 231) = 2.58, *p* < .05. Finally, significant differences were found for ratings of perpetrator masculinity/femininity, *F*(3, 197) = 3.59, *p* < .05. Tukey HSD post hoc tests revealed that participants gave the highest masculinity rating to perpetrators in the M-F scenario (M = 37.74, SD = 29.42) compared to F-F (*M* = 50.97, SD = 22.37) and F-M scenarios (*M* = 51.71, SD = 22.33), with M-M scenarios falling in-between (*M* = 46.13, SD = 24.87). This could suggest that being abusive towards a female victim is also synonymous with increased masculinity.

 Participants also differed significantly in their judgements of appropriateness of intervention by law enforcement, *F*(3, 717) = 4.61, *p* < .01. Predictably, participants believed intervention to be most appropriate in M-F scenarios (*M* = 6.15, SD = 1.15) compared to M-M (*M* = 6.04, SD = 1.24), F-M (*M* = 6.03, SD = 1.25) and F-F scenarios (*M* = 6.01, SD = 1.27). This further supports the idea that participants regard M-F incidents as more serious, and therefore worthy of investigation by police officers. This could partly be due to the fact that participants also rated M-F incidents to be more frequently occurring in society (*M* = 5.55, SD = 1.41) than M-M (*M* = 4.72, SD = 1.51), F-F (*M* = 4.42, SD = 1.52), and F-M scenarios (*M* = 4.6, SD = 1.60), *F*(3, 687) = 64.22, *p* < .01. However, combined with the results for seriousness outlined above, these results most likely suggest a bias in participants towards M-F scenarios.

**Abuse Type**

Several main effects were also found for abuse type. Participants were: more likely to try and intervene, *F*(2, 231) = 3.50, *p* < .05, less likely to do nothing and more likely to call the police, χ2 (6) = 15.26, *p* < .05, more likely to recommend that the victim call the police, χ2 (2) = 25.16, *p* < .001, less likely to recommend the police should talk to the couple and more likely to recommend an arrest, χ2 (2) = 27.09, *p* < .001, more likely to believe the police can help, *F*(2, 231) = 8.08, *p* < .001, believed the perpetrator more capable of harm, *F*(2, 230) = 8.16, *p* < .001, and serious injury, *F*(2, 230) = 9.47, *p* < .001, and more likely to award more severe punishments, *F*(2, 230) = 4.47, *p* < .05, in physical compared to psychological/ emotional and financial scenarios. These results all suggest that participants view physical incidents as more serious, and therefore worthier of police investigation and punishment within the criminal justice system. This is particularly interesting considering that all the types of abuse utilised in this study are covered by the current definition of domestic violence provided by the UK government. An interesting additional finding is that participants rated victims of financial abuse as more feminine than victims of other abuse types, *F*(2, 230) = 4.47, *p* < .05. This suggests that participants may view those who suffer from certain types of abuse as more likely to be one gender or the other. No interactions between factors were found.

**Discussion**

This study examined the influence of perpetrator and victim gender, as well as abuse type, on judgements towards hypothetical domestic violence scenarios. This is the first study to examine these factors in combination, and to do so using such a wide range of measures. A number of differences were found for both factors, with scenarios involving male violence towards women, and physical violence, receiving the most severe ratings. These results support the notion that stereotypes about domestic violence exist, and that these conceptualisations may influence judgements upon occurrence. The importance of such results cannot be understated, as both internal and external reactions to abuse are critical in the decision by victim-survivors to report, as well as the quality of care received once they have done so.

**The Male-Female Effect**

Participants rated scenarios involving female victims as more serious than those involving male victims. This supports findings from previous studies suggesting that participants may view women as more vulnerable, and men less so, in abuse scenarios (Ahmed et al., 2013; Seelau et al., 2003; Seelau & Seelau, 2005; Shum-Pearce, 2015). Differences in evaluations of seriousness are extremely important, as such judgements serve to reinforce negative attitudes towards male victim-survivors, particularly a prevalence of disbelief towards male victimisation (McNeely et al., 2001). Judgements in this study also appeared to reflect a bias towards ‘traditional’ abuse scenarios (e.g., those involving a male perpetrator and a female victim), with a higher probability of a recommendation for the victim to call the police, and a higher level of appropriateness for police intervention, awarded in these situations. This supports previous work (Poorman et al., 2003), and suggests that participants therefore view these scenarios as particularly serious (thus deserving of police involvement). Considering the academic, political and social narrative surrounding domestic violence which places an emphasis on the abuse of women by men, as well as established gender beliefs regarding the qualities of men and women synonymous with perpetration and victimhood respectively, it is unsurprising that participants view violence towards women as more serious, particularly when at the hands of men. However, this presents serious issues for both male victim-survivors of female abuse, and victim-survivors within same-sex relationships. Lesser seriousness placed on abuse in these contexts is likely to be internalised by victim-survivors themselves, resulting in a decreased impetus to report victimisation, and to gain adequate support and assistance (Barber, 2008; Dutton & White, 2013). Furthermore, unfortunately, decisions by victim-survivors in such scenarios not to report may then result in an associated reinforcement of the idea that abuse in this context is less common, and therefore, less important, thus perpetuating the cycle.

**Physical Aggression Equals Abuse**

Mirroring results from previous research (Capezza & Arriaga, 2008; Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2004; Sorenson & Thomas, 2009), physical abuse received higher ratings than psychological/emotional or financial abuse on several measures related to seriousness and intervention. These results therefore suggest that participants’ judgements may be informed by a typically narrow representation of intimate partner violence as almost exclusively involving physical acts of aggression (Capezza & Arriaga, 2008). This again presents serious consequences for victim-survivors of non-physical abuse, as they may not receive support from social networks or services following victimisation, or even believe that they have been victimised in the first instance. This is particularly alarming as the severe impact of psychological abuse on physical and mental health outcomes is outlined in previous research (Coker et al., 2002; Sackett & Saunders, 1999). It is also surprising considering that definitions of domestic violence provided by the UK government, like many Western countries, are increasingly inclusive of various coercive and controlling behaviours, including psychological abuse.

**Limitations**

A number of sample-related issues present. First, this study was conducted using undergraduate students, many of whom were studying a psychology degree programme at the time. In addition, many of these students were in the second or third year of their degree and would have completed modules exploring gender psychology in an applied context, and forensic psychology. As such, these students would have been more informed than typical populations on the issues outlined in this chapter, and may have therefore responded in a manner representative of that increased awareness. Furthermore, approximately 20% of participants reported that they had suffered from domestic abuse at some point in their lives. These participants may have therefore provided judgements that are informed by their own personal experiences, which may have been more sympathetic to victim-survivors, regardless of gender. Future research should seek therefore to obtain more representative samples (e.g., using members of the general public) as well as those within law enforcement and service agencies, in order to capture judgements made by those whose opinions prove pivotal for victim-survivors.

 Methodological limitations also exist. First, the scenarios presented in this study depicted a one-time, unidirectional incident of violence. In reality, domestic violence is often much more complicated, involving a pattern of behaviour over time, with dual perpetration and victimisation. Again, this presented a narrow sample of domestic violence, as dual-perpetration or ‘intimate partner terrorism’ is common (Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2012). Future research should seek to examine how factors such as length of abuse and share of perpetration influence judgements of domestic violence, by male and female perpetrators, and across abuse types.

**Implications and Conclusion**

Research in this area is still in its infancy, and many more studies, specifically those addressing some of the limitations outlined above, are needed. However, the results from research to date provides clear evidence that substantial variation exists in evaluations of domestic abuse scenarios across a variety of measures. Notably, participants appear to be guided by a stereotype of abuse that is narrow, misrepresentative, and not supported by the information available regarding the context, nature, and frequency of domestic violence in Western countries. As already outlined, this has serious implications for victim-survivors who do not meet the “cognitive criteria” created by our schemas and stereotypic beliefs, including critical physical and mental health outcomes associated with internalisation of false-victimhood beliefs, and continued abuse. As such, several important steps are recommended to improve the experiences of all those suffering from intimate partner violence:

1) Greater efforts are needed to challenge the current political and societal narrative that portrays women as the exclusive victim-survivors of domestic violence. For example, the creation of a corresponding, male-oriented version of the ‘Violence Against Women and Girls’ strategy, or making such strategies fundamentally gender inclusive, would help acknowledge the experiences, needs and existence of male victim-survivors, and, importantly, may help rectify inequalities in funding and support (e.g., the absence of male-only refuges in London). In addition, greater explicit recognition of the needs and vulnerabilities of the LGBTQIA+ community in the context of domestic violence is also needed at this level

2) Services (e.g., police forces, prosecution services, and other professional bodies) need to respond, immediately, to the specific needs of male victim-survivors, and those in same-sex relationships, in their provision of training and support. Importantly, whilst many services argue that their training is ‘gender neutral’, this often means that the very specific and nuanced experiences of female, male, and LGBTQIA+ victim-survivors are not fully considered. Put simply, a dedicated effort to provide ‘gender-inclusive’ as opposed to ‘gender neutral’ training is urgently required

3) The academic community must continue investigating which factors influence judgements and attitudes towards domestic violence, in order to inform policy and discourse. Moreover, greater efforts must also be made to use more diverse methodology to examine abuse in ways that are more representative of its occurrence (e.g., occurring over longer periods of time, and with dual-perpetration). Furthermore, non-politicised models of domestic violence require urgent development. In other words, models are required that *account* for gender, but are not determined or driven by specific, political, and gendered narratives (i.e., feminism and the Duluth model)

4) Finally, the media needs to increasingly provide varied and more nuanced representations of domestic violence to audiences, to broaden stereotypical understandings of abuse. This is particularly important considering a) the broad reach of the media (including social media and internet) in today’s world and b) the powerful indirect effects that this type of material can have on stereotype formation. On a broader, societal level, we must increasingly open our minds to the complexities of domestic violence and abuse as a crime, and guard against utilising stereotypes when confronted with a victim-survivor in need of our help.

Only by taking such substantive and immediate actions will we, as a society, begin to break down the powerful and pervasive stereotypes surrounding domestic violence, and thus acknowledge the wide range of perpetrators and victims-survivors, as well as behaviours and circumstances, involved in intimate partner violence. By doing so, we may finally begin to provide all victim-survivors of domestic violence with the acknowledgement, support, and assistance they deserve.

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