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## Perceptions Of Child Abuse And Neglect In Cases Of Intimate Partner Violence

Katlin Rhyner

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PERCEPTIONS OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT IN CASES OF INTIMATE  
PARTNER VIOLENCE

by

Katlin Jo Rhyner  
Bachelor of Science, Kutztown University, 2012

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

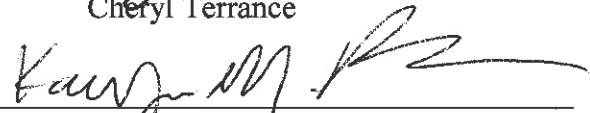
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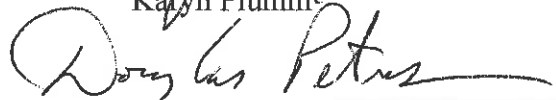
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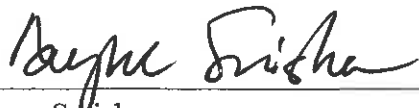


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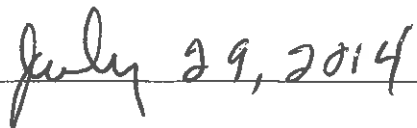


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July, 16, 2014

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## Abstract

The current study examined perceptions of child abuse and neglect within the context of heterosexual intimate partner violence. Participants were asked to read a vignette describing a situation where a child either saw, heard, or was physically injured in an intimate partner violence altercation that took place between his parents. Within abuse exposure condition, the gender of the victim was also varied. Participants were asked to decide the extent to which the situation constitutes child abuse and neglect, as well as how much blame and responsibility should be assigned to each parent involved in the incident. Overall, it was found that men were more likely than women to believe the victim's behavior represented child abuse and neglect. Additionally, it was found that the perpetrator's actions were seen as abusive only when the child was physically harmed in the situation. When assessing responsibility, women held the perpetrator of abuse more responsible than did men. Lastly, participants thought that the female victim was more likely to be involved in future abuse than the male victim. Implications are discussed.



## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

When a child is exposed to intimate partner violence, the child can experience possible long term side effects such as high anxiety and issues with learning (Margolin, 1998). Although these effects do not occur in every child, the prevalence is high enough that it begs the question of what can be done to help encourage normal development in these children. One solution that some states have implemented, is to cite the parents for failure to protect and label the children as being abused or neglected. This label allows the children to subsequently be removed from the homes and placed in the care of someone else (Kantor & Little, 2003). This subject can be controversial among advocates for children because there are many cases in which punishing parents for failure to protect results in more negative consequences for the child and abused parent, than would have occurred without the punishment (Ewen, 2007). Examinations of lay-people's perceptions of what constitutes child abuse or neglect in the presence of intimate partner violence, may help to shed light on how the laws should be shaped and how children can be best helped in these situations.

#### **Intimate Partner Violence**

The prevalence of intimate partner violence against women has been found to be between 1.8 million and 4 million every year in the United States (Straus & Gelles, 1986). When looking at a span of just one year, 2.7% of women in a telephone survey reported being a victim of severe physical violence (Breiding, Chen, & Black, 2014).

These numbers, however, are just estimates due to lack of reporting of incidents from victims. Reports of male victimization of domestic violence are even more difficult to acquire than female victimization, due to the fact that men are more unlikely to report being abused than are women. This difficulty in finding an accurate number and lack of reporting may be the case because many times men who do report being abused are ridiculed, and their reports are more frequently dismissed by the legal system (Harris & Cook, 1994; Migliaccio, 2001).

In a national survey it was found that duration of violence, frequency of victimization, fear of bodily injury, and number of life threats were significantly higher for female victims of domestic violence in opposite sex relationships than for male victims. The survey also found that female victims were significantly more likely to report sustaining an injury, receive hospitalization or medical treatment for their injuries, lose time from work, report an incident to the police, and obtain a temporary restraining order against the abuser (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Additionally, it has been found that overall, women are more likely than men to be victims of severe physical violence by an intimate partner (Breiding et al., 2014).

A telephone survey of 8,000 U.S men and 8,000 U.S. women reported 7% of the surveyed men admitting to being physically abused by a current or previous opposite sex partner. The same survey found that 22.1% of women reported abuse, which suggests that women are more likely to be victimized than men. In this survey, 64% of the abused women reported that the abuser had been a current or former partner or date, while only 16.2% of men reported that their abuser was a partner or date (Tjaden & Thoennes,

2000). This survey suggest that females are more likely to be victimized by a partner or date than are men.

In another survey of over 6,000 American families, it was found that 12.4% of wives reported using violence against their husbands while only 11.6% of men reported using violence against their wives (Straus & Gelles, 1990). In one study of 450 college undergraduates it was suggested that men and women commit similar rates of physical aggression (Cerccone, Beach, & Arias, 2005).

Taken together, although the focus has been on female victims, men are also victimized in domestic abuse. It has, however, been shown that men are more likely to use weapons, engage in more than one violent acts during one incident, and cause more serious injuries to the victim (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). It has also been found that in cases where one spouse kills the other, four out of five times the victim is female and the perpetrator is male (Statistics Canada, 1999). Thus, while women may be the most victimized, men too are victims of intimate partner violence. Irrespective of the gender of the victim of intimate partner violence, children are also present in many of these households.

### **Impact of Exposure to Intimate Partner Violence on Children**

According to Humphreys and Absler (2011), the occurrence of intimate partner violence in the presence of children has historically been downplayed and blamed on the mother. When looking at case studies, it has been found that social workers minimize or fail to report instances of intimate partner abuse and often cite it as a simple marital conflict. It is also many times regarded as a problem that the woman alone has to rectify, and nothing in need of state intervention. When there is an intervention, it usually focuses

on changing the woman and her role as a mother instead of the violent actions of the offending man. The workers involved in protecting children are also not concerned with intimate partner violence until/unless it directly starts affecting the child (Humphreys & Absler, 2011).

Much of the data on prevalence of child exposure to intimate partner violence is inconsistent due to failing to define “exposure” to intimate partner violence, as well as not measuring involvement of children in intimate partner abuse studies (Osofsky, 2003). Estimates of children witnessing physical and verbal domestic abuse are around 3.3 million children every year (Carlson, 1984; Jaffe, Wolfe, & Wilson, 1990). As shown by past research, the co-occurrence rate of child abuse and intimate partner abuse has been reported to be between 40% and 60% (Shipman, Rossman, & West, 1999) or between 30% and 60%. The majority of studies identify the mother as the victim and the father/partner as the abuser (Edelson, 1999).

It has long been known that witnessing intimate partner violence during childhood can have negative effects on children. One study suggested that when hearing parents fighting, a child may fear for his or her mother’s safety, have guilt for not intervening, and feel confusion about where their loyalties should lie (Saunders, 1998). Although witnessing intimate partner abuse can in fact have negative effects, the actual effects on the child varies. The effects of witnessing intimate partner abuse can include emotional, behavioral, and learning issues (Margolin, 1998). It has also been found that witnessing violence between parents can increase the risk of children being bullied, especially with girls (Mustanoja, Luukkonen, Hakko, Räsänen, Säävälä, & Riala, 2011).

In some cases a child who witnesses intimate partner abuse may be resilient and experience few negative consequences, even later in life. One study showed that developmental level, chronicity of exposure, physical closeness to the incident, and emotional attachment to the victim all have larger negative impacts on a child's well being than just the act of witnessing intimate partner violence (Margolin, 1998).

One problem with studying the specific effects on the impact of witnessing intimate partner abuse on children is that it can be hard to separate the variable of intimate partner abuse from child abuse and neglect (Kantor & Little, 2003). As previously noted, the high co-morbidity between child abuse and intimate partner abuse creates a difficulty when trying to identify the cases where there is only intimate partner abuse but no child abuse or neglect. These cases are necessary to identify the specific effect of a child only witnessing abuse, but not being abused him or her self. Furthermore, measuring the specific effect of witnessing intimate partner abuse without the child being physically abused can be very difficult. This task is made much harder due to the high variability of differences in effects on witnessing abuse from the children (Margolin, 1998).

An issue with research on the impact of intimate partner violence on children, is that it is usually conducted with children in the criminal justice system or in shelters, which represents only the most severe cases of abuse and not the less severe cases. When only the children who have been removed from their homes due to severe abuse are studied, it tends to make the effects look more severe than these effects may be in reality (Margolin, 1998). It is important to also find the effects of witnessing abuse on children

who are never removed from the home, or whose parents never separate. These children may be affected differently from the children in the shelters.

When looking into the adaptation of children from abused families, it has been found that not all children suffer negative effects from being exposed to intimate partner violence. One study found that 54% of children exposed to intimate partner violence on various levels of exposure maintained positive adaptation as they aged. These same children were also all characterized as having easygoing temperaments (Martinez-Torteya, Bogat, von Eye, & Levendosky, 2009).

One study examined children in a shelter for battered women and found that the problems children experienced from witnessing intimate partner abuse could be put into five categories with varying degrees of severity. The categories were average problems, low problems and high self-esteem, high behavioral difficulties and high self-esteem, high behavioral or emotional problems and low self-esteem, and low behavioral problems with high anxiety and depression. The results of this study indicated that the specific effects of witnessing intimate partner abuse can have a large variability from child to child (Hughes & Luke, 1998).

In summary, exposure to intimate partner abuse has shown to have effects on the children involved. The levels of exposure, whether the child is abused him or herself, sees the abuse happen to a parent, or only hears the abuse towards a parent, is very difficult to separate, which leads to problems with drawing inferences about the effect of exposure level. Studying the effects of each level exposure is important, because many abuse cases involve the child's exposure at one specific level. Furthermore, most research in this area has focused on the effects of maternal abuse with very little data on paternal abuse and its

effects on the children who witness it. Because men are also abused, looking at this effect is necessary.

### **Failure to Protect Laws**

The issue of whether or not to consider having a child in the presence of intimate partner abuse constituted as child neglect has been debated for a considerable amount of time. Currently, 48 of the 50 states consider acts of omission by parents to be abuse (Hart, 1992). Many states, including Alaska, Georgia, Utah, and Minnesota, have attempted to implement laws where a child can be removed from a home for being exposed to intimate partner violence (Kantor & Little, 2003). These laws are labeled as failure to protect laws and are used as a response to shield children from the possible negative side effects that occur after being exposed to intimate partner violence (Ewen, 2007). With the implementation of these laws, the abuser is cited with abuse and the victim of the abuse may be charged with failure to protect the child (which may be classified as neglect or abuse) because it is thought that it is the responsibility of both parties (the abuser and the victim) to remove the child from the potentially harmful situation. This system can cast blame on the victim of the situation, who is usually female, for abuse in which she has not caused (Ewen, 2007).

This law allows the state to remove a child from a home with intimate partner abuse, even if the child has not been directly abused. Some lawmakers assume that in a situation of intimate partner violence occurring in the presence of children, the benefits of removing the child from the home would outweigh the costs, but this is not necessarily the case. It has been shown that when the child has a strong emotional attachment to the mother this action may cause more harm than good, this is especially the case when the

state does not have a proper and stable placement for the child. Some believe that removing the child and mother from the home together and putting both parties in a safe environment, is the best solution for many cases of intimate partner abuse (Enos, 1996).

Removing a child from the home and placing him or her into foster care can be a traumatic event. Children in the care of the state have been shown to have significantly more behavioral problems than those who stay with their parents (Heflinger, Simpkins, & Combs-Orme, 2000). Foster care in particular, has been shown to have negative effects on children that may not have been present previously. These problems are made especially present when the child is moved from home to home and not given the chance to be in a stable living environment (Fisher, Stoolmiller, Mannering, Takahashi, & Chamberlain, 2011).

One problem with these failure to protect laws is that they are vaguely defined. The vague definitions allow a broad range in implementation, which can lead to discrepancies in usage (Fugate, 2001). One example of how the definitions can be too vague is that most laws do not specify whether the child must be watching the intimate partner abuse, or if just hearing the abuse occur is enough. Another example is that some states consider witnessing intimate partner violence as child neglect whereas others consider it to be child abuse (Kantor & Little, 2003). This lack in specification can lead to ambiguities that allow for biased practices of removing children from their homes.

In some cases, laws defining the witnessing of intimate partner abuse as child maltreatment have had to be repealed due to the problems that the implementation of these laws created. One such instance was in Minnesota. The Minnesota law stated that: “Neglect means that the parent or other person responsible for the care of the child: (iv)



subjects the child to ongoing domestic violence by the abuser in the home environment that is likely to have a detrimental effect on the well-being of the child” (Neglect or Endangerment, 2000).

After the implementation of this law, the legal system was flooded with cases of children being taken from their parents due to the presence of intimate partner abuse. The system was incapable of supporting the overwhelming numbers of children and did not have the resources to help the abused parent remove him or her self from the situation to regain placement of the child. The law enforcers assigned with the task of upholding these laws were also not properly trained in what these laws were supposed to mean (Kantor & Little, 2003). The law enforcers therefore were not able to carry out these laws fairly. Due to these issues, various activist groups have effectively had some of these laws repealed.

One study suggested that a possible side effect of these failure to protect laws is that abused parents are forced to leave the abusive situations before they are ready. Many abused individuals cannot leave the abusive situations due to lack of financial support without the abusive individual (Lindgren & Renck, 2008). Before one can leave such a situation, he or she must first find a way to become financially stable on his or her own. When the threat of having ones child forcibly removed is presented, one may make the decision to leave before being ready or without being able to support him or her self. Such a decision can cause negative effects on the child and mother such as poverty and homelessness (Dziegielewski, Campbell, & Turnage, 2005). Leaving an abusive home too early without a backup plan in place may also cause an unstable lifestyle for the child.

This lifestyle may be due to the mother being forced to move from place to place in search of stability (Long, 2010).

### **Parental Blame**

According to Jacobs (1998), with failure to protect laws, women are much more likely to be charged with failure to protect their children from harm than men, even when the case situations are very similar. This may in part stem from societal expectations wherein mothers, more than fathers, are expected to protect their children. However, mothers in cases of intimate partner violence may be putting themselves at serious risk while trying to protect the child.

There is a misconception among Americans that women in abusive situations willingly choose abusive partners and choose to remain in the situation. It is also perceived that women are partially responsible for the abuse that they suffer from (Harrison & Willis Esqueda, 1999). Courts rarely take into account the many reasons in which a mother might fail to protect her child from abuse. Mothers could have a fear of retaliation by the abusive individual if action is taken against him or legal and familial pressures, including the fear of having the children removed from her care if action is taken to leave the abusive situation. Mothers may also have a dependence on the abusive individual that is economic or emotional in nature which prevents them from leaving (Panko, 1995).

Men also face abusive situations in which they feel as though leaving is not an option. In one study it was found that men refuse to leave abusive situations because they want to stay and try to protect their children. Similar to female victims, male victims fear that they will not gain custody of their children and so they chose to stay in a violent

situation. Furthermore, men fear the social stigma attached to a male being abused by a female so they stay in the abusive relationship so that no one can perceive them as not being masculine (Eckstein, 2011).

In one study of maternal blame, researchers examined the perception of responsibility of both the mother and the father in a hypothetical scenario in which the father committed a violent act against a child which resulted in either severe injury or death of the child. It was found that the mothers were held accountable in both situations, but more so when the child was hospitalized as opposed to when the abuse resulted in death. It was also found that the mother was held more responsible when there was a history of abuse as opposed to when there was not (Terrance, Plumm, & Little, 2008). Very little research has been conducted on how much the father is blamed in situations of abuse, the current study examined this issue.

Taken together, these findings suggest that failure to protect laws may be unfair by holding the non-offending parent responsible for a crime that they did not commit, and in fact were the victim of said crime. Given the high incidence of intimate partner abuse against women, and the social perception that these women willingly choose to remain with an abusive partner, these mothers may be held accountable for crimes they have not committed, and as a result have their children taken from them. The current study examined where lay persons assigned the blame in intimate partner abuse situations, and whether either the mother or the father will receive a more harsh punishment for an identical situation.

## **Attribution Theory**

The decisions made by observers about failure to protect cases may be affected by multiple factors that impact where blame and responsibility is placed. These factors may be explained using Attribution Theory, which deals with how an observer uses information to come to a causal explanation for an event. According to Kelly's (1973) Covariation Model, there are three types of casual information which influence a person's judgments; consensus, distinctiveness, and consistency. Consensus is the extent to which other people will behave similarly in a similar situation, distinctiveness is the extent to which the person being judged will behave similarly in similar situations, and consistency is the extent to which the person being judged behaves the same way every time the particular situation occurs. When an observer is missing pieces of these three parts, he or she may use past experiences to shape his or her judgments. Missing pieces of information, along with inaccuracies about the perceptions of the three types of causal information, may lead to skewed perceptions of the cause of a situation, such that too much may be attributed to a person's personality and not enough to the situation.

Attribution Theory has been used many times to show how observers of a situation attribute blame and responsibility to the people involved (Grubb & Harrowe, 2008). More specifically, it has been found that events with negative consequences are more likely than events without negative consequences to lead to judgments of responsibility and blame (Shaver & Drown, 1986). In cases of intimate partner violence, research has shown that observers assigned responsibility to both the abuser and the victim, instead of just to the abuser (Delgado & Bond, 1993). Additionally, laypeople attribute an abusive situation more to the characteristics of the couple instead of looking

at just the abuser (Follingstad et al., 1989), as well as attributing responsibility to characteristics of interpersonal violence victims instead of the situation in which the victims are in (Reddy, Knowles, Mulvany, McMahon, & Freckelton, 1997). Taken together, this may suggest that the victims will be blamed for the abuse endured instead of the situation being blamed.

Many times the people who help abused individuals and their children, such as caseworkers, neighbors, family members, and even jurors, are merely onlookers to the situation. Thus, they may not have all of the relevant information needed to make an accurate judgment, and instead fall back on the heuristic described by Attribution Theory. This may lead them to make attribution errors, and attribute blame to the victim. These possible attribution errors may be caused by the observer having past experiences that may alter the observer's perceptions of the situation. If individuals are attributing blame to the victims of interpersonal violence, this blame can in turn cause biases in how these cases are handled in court or in support systems such as shelters, and directly affect how abused individuals receive, or more importantly fail to receive, support from their community.

**Observer Gender.** The gender of the observer of the situation has been found to alter the perceptions of blame and responsibility. Past research has revealed that men not only place more blame on female victims in general, but they are also more likely to place more weight on behavior and personality characteristics of female victims in instances of rape (Anderson, 1999). This pattern of victim blaming has also been shown in cases of child sexual abuse, men are more likely than women to blame the victims (Back & Lips, 1998; Waterman & Foss-Goodman, 1984).

Female observers of cases of violence have historically had the opposite reaction than male observers. Females tend to place less blame on the victims and hold perpetrators as being more responsible for their actions (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Shlien-Dellinger, Huss, & Kramer, 2004). One reason for this perception may be that women have been found to be more empathetic towards victims of abuse than are men (Schult, & Schneider, 1991).

Taken together, it was expected that perceptions of an abusive situation would be perceived differently depending on whether the observer is male or female. This difference of perception may have negative consequences in the reinforcement of failure to protect laws, such that depending on whether the law enforcers are mainly male or female, the case ruling may go in very different directions. Additionally, victims may not be able to gather as much social support from men than women.

### **Purpose**

Taking into account the high rate of intimate partner violence cases in which children are present, there is no doubt that these children need protection. The solutions many states have introduced are the failure to protect laws. These laws, however, are laced with problems and ultimately may lead to blaming the victims of intimate partner violence. Considered in light of previous research (e.g. Terrance et al., 2008) showing the high rate of maternal blame in cases of child neglect, results of this study may be able to suggest implications for changes in social support for victims.

Witnessing this abuse can have many negative effects on children. As a result, some have argued that witnessing abuse alone is equal to child abuse. There are problems with this type of definition. In fact, witnessing abuse does not necessarily have as many

negative effects as other types of abuse. As previously discussed, when this situation is defined as abuse, it may lead to negative consequences for both the victim of the intimate partner violence as well as the child, such as the victim being charged with failure to protect or the child being removed from the home and put into foster care.

One goal of the current study was to find what participants perceive as representing child abuse or neglect, due to the lack of clarity in the laws. The second goal of the current study was to examine whether mothers are held more responsible and blamed more than fathers in intimate partner violence situations. To this end, the proposed study examined perceptions of what is considered child abuse or neglect within the context of intimate partner violence. Furthermore, the study examined perceptions of blame attributed to parents.

First, it was hypothesized that the child watching and hearing an intimate partner abuse situation would be considered to be more in line with parental neglect than parental abuse. Furthermore, when the child steps in the middle of the altercation and is hit as a result it would be considered high in both abuse and neglect. Second, it was hypothesized that when the mother was the victim she would be held more responsible for the child than when the father was the victim. Finally, it was also hypothesized that the mother would be blamed more than the father for the child's exposure to the abusive incident.

## CHAPTER II

### METHODS

#### **Participants**

The study consisted of 243 (age:  $M = 26.14$ ,  $SD = 10.82$ , men = 124, women = 119) undergraduate students from the University of North Dakota and MTurk online survey system participants. The ethnicity of participants was reported as 163 Caucasian, 4 Latina, 5 African American, 10 Native American/ Alaskan Native, 56 Asian or Pacific Islander, and 4 Multi-ethnic. Fifty-two participants (21.4%) reported being a victim of abuse, 32 (13.2%) verbal abuse, 29 (11.9%) physical abuse, and 21 (8.6%) sexual abuse. Moreover, 134 participants (55.1%) reported knowing someone who has been abused, 76 (31.3%) verbal, 94 (38.7%) physical, 69 (28.4%) sexual. Students of the University of North Dakota participated in exchange for class credit in various psychology courses. Participants recruited via MTurk received \$.25 in exchange for participation.

#### **Materials**

**Scenario.** The study was a 3 (abuse exposure: hearing vs. seeing vs. physical) x 2 (victim gender) x 2 (participant gender) factorial design, and consisted of a short case study describing a child's experience of witnessing violence between his parents. The case studies were presented in the form of a caseworker's report and included a police report that described the same incident. The scenarios varied gender of the victim (mother or father) and level of abuse exposure. In one situation, it was described that the child only heard the incident from the top of the stairs without seeing anything. In another



situation, it was reported that the child came down the stairs and witnessed the altercation. In the third situation, it was reported that the child witnessed the altercation and stepped in between the parents to stop it, and was pushed as a result. The three situations varied between the mother abusing the father and the father abusing the mother (Appendix B, C, and D).

**Demographics.** Participants were given a demographic form that asked basic background information such as socioeconomic status, age, parent's education, history of abuse, number of children and gender (Appendix A).

**Manipulation check.** Participants were asked to indicate who the aggressor was (mother or father), what the gender of the child was (male or female), and what level of exposure to the violence the child experienced (heard, saw, or was physically injured). Only participants who successfully passed manipulation checks were included in the analyses (Appendix F).

**Future Involvement in Abuse.** Perceptions of the victim's and perpetrator's future involvement in abuse were measured using the items (a) whether the mother/father would be likely to be involved in a future abusive situation, and, (b) whether the mother/father would be likely to abuse the child in the future. Questions were assessed on a six point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not likely) to 6 (very likely). Higher scores indicated a higher likelihood that the victim or perpetrator would be involved in future abuse.

**Child Abuse and Neglect.** Whether the incident was considered to be child abuse or neglect for the victim's and perpetrator's actions was measured using two items on a six point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). The

item assessing the incident as child abuse was (a) "To what extent would you regard the mother's/father's behavior as child abuse?" The item assessing whether the incident constituted child neglect was (b) "To what extent would you regard the mother's/father's behavior as child neglect?" Higher scores indicate the behavior of the victim or perpetrator being viewed as more like child abuse or neglect.

**Failure to Protect.** Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they believed each of the victim and perpetrator "failed to protect the child," on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Higher scores reflect a stronger belief that the parent failed to protect the child.

**Criminal Responsibility.** Criminal responsibility of the victim and perpetrator was measured using four items on a six point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Perpetrator criminal responsibility (Cronbach's alpha = .84) and victim criminal responsibility (Cronbach's alpha = .85) were measured by combining the items, (a) "The mother/father should be held criminally responsible," (b) "The mother/father was responsible for what the child saw/heard," (c) "The mother/father is to blame for the child's exposure to the violence," and (d) "The mother/father could have prevented the child's exposure to the violence." Higher scores reflect a higher degree of responsibility by the victim or perpetrator.

**Parenting Traits.** Parenting traits were collapsed into a scale to measure the parenting skills and personality traits of the victim of abuse. The scales consisted of the extent to which the victim (Cronbach's alpha = .76) was nurturing, honest, warm, and generous. Traits were assessed using a five point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Participants were asked their agreement on an

identical scale measuring the parenting traits of the perpetrator (Cronbach's alpha = .83). Higher scores indicated the victim or perpetrator being more nurturing, honest, warm, and generous.

### **Procedure**

Participants signed up for the study through either the University of North Dakota Sona Systems, or through Amazon's MTurk system. Both systems are online research management tools, used to recruit participants for studies. After signing up, participants were directed from the recruiting site to the Qualtrics site, which is an online survey system, to participate in the study. Students received class credit for participation, and MTurk participants were paid for their time. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the six abuse scenarios, that stemmed from a 3 (abuse exposure: hearing vs. seeing vs. physical) x 2 (victim gender) x 2 (participant gender), and asked to read a brief police report and caseworker report in order to evaluate the structure and usability of the forms. Prior to reading the vignette, participants filled out a demographic form. After completing the demographic questionnaire, the participants were randomly assigned to one of the six vignettes. After reading the vignette, participants answered a series of questions about the scenario that measured whether the situation constitutes child abuse or neglect as well as how much blame should be attributed to each parent.

## CHAPTER III

### RESULTS

#### **Future Revictimization**

Perceptions of the extent to which the individuals involved in the intimate partner violence incident would also be involved in future abusive situations was assessed separately using two items for each the victim and the perpetrator.

**Victim Future Involvement in Abuse.** A 3 (abuse exposure: hearing vs. seeing vs. physical) x 2 (victim gender) x 2 (participant gender) multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted on the two items assessing the victim's future involvement with abuse.

Results failed to yield a multivariate main effect for abuse exposure,  $Pillai = .06$ ,  $F(2, 458) = 1.73$ , *ns*. A multivariate main effect was indicated for victim gender,  $Pillai = .06$ ,  $F(2, 228) = 6.82$ ,  $p = .001$ . Univariate significance was attained for the item assessing the likelihood that the victim would be involved in a future abusive situation  $F(1, 229) = 13.35$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .06$ . When the father was the perpetrator and the mother was the victim, she was significantly more likely to be assumed to be involved in a future abusive situation ( $M = 4.19$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ) than when the mother was the perpetrator and the father was the victim ( $M = 3.60$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ). A multivariate main effect was also indicated for participant gender,  $Pillai = .06$ ,  $F(2, 228) = 6.97$ ,  $p = .001$ . Univariate significance was attained for the item assessing the likelihood that the victim would abuse the child in the future,  $F(1, 229) = 6.23$ ,  $p = .013$ ,  $\eta^2 = .03$ . Male participants ( $M =$

2.76,  $SD = 1.37$ ) were more likely than female participants ( $M = 2.39$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ) to believe that the victim would abuse the child in the future.

Results also indicated a significant multivariate two-way interaction involving abuse exposure and participant gender  $Pillai = .05$ ,  $F(4, 458) = 2.65$ ,  $p = .033$ . Univariate significance was attained for the item that assessed the likelihood of the victim being involved in a future abusive situation  $F(1, 229) = 11.53$ ,  $p = .024$ . Simple effect analysis of participant gender at each level of exposure yielded significance only for the physical exposure condition such that women ( $M = 4.28$ ,  $SD = 1.32$ ) were more likely than men ( $M = 3.44$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ) to rate the victim as being likely to be involved in a future abusive situation. Ratings of the likelihood for the victim to be involved in a future abusive situation in the future, failed to differ within the other two abuse exposure conditions (hearing: men,  $M = 3.74$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ; women,  $M = 3.77$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ; seeing: men,  $M = 4.10$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ; women,  $M = 4.20$ ,  $SD = 1.42$ ).

Finally, a significant two way interaction between victim gender and participant gender was also indicated,  $Pillai = .03$ ,  $F(2, 228) = 3.11$ ,  $p = .046$ . Simple effect analysis of victim gender at each level of participant gender yielded significance for the item that assessed the likelihood of the victim being involved in a future abusive situation,  $F(1, 229) = 17.78$ ,  $p = .024$ . Female participants ( $M = 4.56$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ) were more likely than male participants ( $M = 3.81$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ) to rate the victim as being likely to be involved in a future abusive situation, when the victim of abuse was female. Ratings of the likelihood of the male victim being involved in a future abusive situation failed to differ across participant gender (female participants:  $M = 3.60$ ,  $SD = 1.41$ ; male participants:  $M = 3.60$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ).

**Perpetrator Future Involvement in Abuse.** A 3 (abuse exposure: hearing vs. seeing vs. physical) x 2 (victim gender) x 2 (participant gender) MANOVA was conducted on perceptions of the perpetrator's future involvement in abuse. Neither the main effects for abuse exposure,  $Pillai = .02$ ,  $F(4, 458) = .93$ , *ns*, victim gender,  $Pillai = .02$ ,  $F(2, 228) = 1.35$ , *ns*, or participant gender,  $Pillai = .01$ ,  $F(2, 228) = .83$ , *ns*, nor their interactions attained significance.

Two one sample t-tests were conducted to assess the likelihood of future abuse for the perpetrator. Overall, participants viewed the perpetrator as being likely to be involved in a future abusive situation  $t(241) = 13.60$ ,  $p = .001$ , ( $M = 4.46$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ). Additionally, participants viewed the perpetrator as being likely to abuse the child in the future  $t(241) = 2.25$ ,  $p = .026$ , ( $M = 3.68$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ).

### **Child Abuse and Neglect**

Perceptions of the extent to which the incident constituted child abuse or neglect was assessed separately on the two items for each the victim and the perpetrator.

**Victim.** A 3 (abuse exposure: hearing vs. seeing vs. physical) x 2 (victim gender) x 2 (participant gender) MANOVA was conducted using two items that assessed whether the victim's behavior could be construed as child abuse or neglect. The item assessing the extent to which the behavior constituted child abuse was (a) "to what extent would you regard the victim's behavior as child abuse?" The item assessing the extent to which the victim's behavior constituted child neglect was (b) "to what extent would you regard the victim's/perpetrator's behavior as child neglect?"

Neither the main effects for abuse exposure,  $F(4, 346) = 1.04$ , *ns*, nor victim gender  $F < 1$ , attained significance. A significant main effect was indicated for

participant gender,  $Pillai = .04$ ,  $F(2, 172) = 3.10$ ,  $p = .048$ . Univariate significance was attained for the item assessing whether the victim's behavior was regarded as child abuse,  $F(1, 173) = 5.55$ ,  $p = .02$ ,  $\eta^2 = .03$ , and for the item assessing the victim's behavior as being child neglect,  $F(1, 173) = 5.45$ ,  $p = .021$ ,  $\eta^2 = .03$ . Men perceived the victim's behavior as constituting child abuse and neglect (child abuse:  $M = 1.76$ ,  $SD = 1.56$ ; child neglect:  $M = 1.95$ ,  $SD = 1.44$ ) more than women (child abuse:  $M = 1.20$ ,  $SD = 1.40$ ; child neglect:  $M = 1.47$ ,  $SD = 1.44$ ). None of the interactions attained significance.

**Perpetrator.** A 3 (abuse exposure: hearing vs. seeing vs. physical)  $\times$  2 (victim gender)  $\times$  2 (participant gender) MANOVA was conducted assessing whether the perpetrator's behavior could be viewed as child abuse or neglect.

Multivariate significance was attained for level of abuse exposure,  $Pillai = .08$ ,  $F(4, 418) = 4.56$ ,  $p = .008$ . Univariate significance was attained for whether the abuse exposure was seen as child abuse,  $F(2, 209) = 4.81$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .04$ . Tukey's post hoc comparisons indicated that the physical exposure ( $M = 3.24$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ) was significantly more likely than the hearing form of exposure ( $M = 2.60$ ,  $SD = 1.43$ ) to be seen as constituting as child abuse. The physical exposure condition did not differ significantly from the seeing exposure condition, and the hearing exposure condition did not differ significantly from the seeing exposure condition.

Significance was not attained for victim gender,  $F(2, 208) = 1.23$ , *ns.*, participant gender,  $F(2, 208) = 1.94$ , *ns.*, nor any interactions.

### **Failure to Protect**

Perceptions of whether the parents failed to protect the child was assessed separately using one item for each the victim and the perpetrator.

**Victim.** A 3 (exposure: hearing vs. seeing vs. physical) x 2 (victim gender) x 2 (participant gender) ANOVA was conducted using the item a.) "The victim failed to protect the child" to assess the extent to which the victim was perceived as failing to protect the child. No significant main effects were attained for abuse exposure,  $F < 1$ , victim gender,  $F < 1$ , or participant gender,  $F(1, 230) = 1.26$ , *ns*. None of the interactions attained significance.

A one sample t-test was conducted to analyze whether the victim was perceived as failing to protect the child when compared against the midpoint. No significant main effects were found,  $t(241) = -.267$ , *ns*, such that the participants rated the victim as being neutral in failing to protect the child ( $M = 3.48$ ,  $SD = 1.45$ ).

**Perpetrator.** A 3 (abuse exposure: hearing vs. seeing vs. physical) x 2 (victim gender) x 2 (participant gender) ANOVA was conducted using the item a.) "The perpetrator failed to protect the child" to assess the extent to which the perpetrator was perceived as failing to protect the child. A significant main effect was attained for abuse exposure,  $F(2, 229) = 4.36$ ,  $p = .014$ . Tukey's post hoc comparisons indicate that the perpetrator was viewed as failing to protect the child more in the physical exposure condition ( $M = 4.91$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ) when compared to the hearing exposure condition ( $M = 4.34$ ,  $SD = 1.32$ ). The physical exposure condition did not differ significantly from the seeing exposure condition, and the hearing exposure condition did not differ significantly from the seeing exposure condition. No significant main effects were attained for victim gender,  $F < 1$ , nor participant gender,  $F(1, 229) = 2.01$ , *ns*. None of the interactions attained significance.



## **Criminal Responsibility**

Criminal responsibility was assessed for both the victim and perpetrator using a scale that consisted of four questions about the responsibility of the victim and perpetrator. These items included, (a) "The perpetrator/ victim should be held criminally responsible," (b) "The perpetrator/victim was responsible for what the child saw/heard," (c) "The perpetrator/ victim is to blame for the child's exposure to the violence," and (d) "The perpetrator/ victim could have prevented the child's exposure to the violence."

**Victim.** A 3 (abuse exposure: hearing vs. seeing vs. physical) x 2 (victim gender) x 2 (participant gender) ANOVA was conducted assessing the criminal responsibility attributed to the victim for the child's exposure to the abuse incident. No significance was found for exposure  $F < 1$ , victim gender  $F < 1$ , nor participant gender  $F(1, 230) = 2.99$ , *ns*. None of the interactions attained significance.

**Perpetrator.** A 3 (abuse exposure: hearing vs. seeing vs. physical) x 2 (victim gender) x 2 (participant gender) ANOVA was conducted assessing the responsibility of the perpetrator for the child's exposure to the situation. No significance was found for abuse exposure,  $F < 1$ , nor victim gender,  $F < 1$ . A significant main effect was attained for participant gender  $F(1, 230) = 6.31$ ,  $p = .013$ ,  $\eta^2 = .03$ , such that women ( $M = 4.85$ ,  $SD = .94$ ) were more likely than men ( $M = 4.59$ ,  $SD = .96$ ) to rate the perpetrator as being criminally responsible. None of the interactions attained significance.

## **Parenting Traits**

Parenting traits assigned to the parents were analyzed separately for each the victim and the perpetrator.

**Victim.** A 3 (abuse exposure: hearing vs. seeing vs. physical) x 2 (victim gender)

x 2 (participant gender) ANOVA was conducted assessing the parenting traits of the victim. No significance was attained for abuse exposure,  $F < 1$ , victim gender,  $F < 1$ , or participant gender,  $F(1, 230) = 2.43$ , *ns*. None of the interactions attained significance.

A one sample t-test was conducted to analyze whether the victim was perceived having more positive parenting traits when compared against the midpoint. Results yielded significance,  $t(242) = 5.33$ ,  $p = .001$ , such that the participants rated the victim as having more positive parenting traits ( $M = 3.23$ ,  $SD = .67$ ).

**Perpetrator.** A 3 (abuse exposure: hearing vs. seeing vs. physical) x 2 (victim gender) x 2 (participant gender) ANOVA was conducted assessing the parenting traits attributed to the perpetrator. Neither the main effects for abuse exposure,  $F(2, 230) = 1.97$ , *ns*, or victim gender,  $F(1, 230) = 2.10$ , *ns*, attained significance. A significant main effect was found for participant gender,  $F(1, 230) = 5.83$ ,  $p = .017$ . Men ( $M = 2.72$ ,  $SD = .78$ ) rated the perpetrator's parenting traits as being significantly more positive than women ( $M = 2.47$ ,  $SD = .81$ ). None of the interactions attained significance.

## CHAPTER IV

### DISCUSSION

Estimates of children witnessing intimate partner violence situations are over 3 million children yearly (Carlson, 1984; Jaffe, et al., 1990). Witnessing this violence has been thought to cause problems in the development of the children involved, (Margolin, 1998) and so the government has attempted to create laws to protect these children by allowing them to be removed from the home. Known as "Failure to protect," the laws that address this issue are vague, unclear, and do not give sufficient guidance as to what should be done in these situations. The implementation of these failure to protect laws is often inconsistent due to the ambiguities in their definitions. For instance, some may consider the abused parent failing to protect a child if the child witnesses violence, while others may consider the parent as failing to protect the child only if the child is physically harmed. With this in mind, examining how intimate partner violence incidents involving children are perceived by the general public is needed for a greater understanding of the topic.

An understanding of how differing levels of exposure to violence may affect opinions of how an intimate partner violence situation involving a child should be handled, is necessary in order to shed light on perceptions surrounding this topic. Additionally, where the perceived blame lies in regards to both the victim and the perpetrator should be examined to ensure not only that victims are not receiving blame unfairly in intimate partner violence situations, but also to examine differences in victim

blaming as a function of victim gender. How blame is attributed by onlookers and how this blame may differ from person to person also needs to be examined to see what affects amount of blame placed on victims. Inappropriate blame placement may lead to victims not receiving the support they deserve both from their social support groups, such as friends and family, as well as from the community, including organizations such as shelters. With this in mind, this study aimed to examine perceptions of blame on the mother and the father as both the victim and perpetrator of intimate partner violence in which a child was involved, as well as how differences in the amount of exposure the child experiences may alter these perceptions.

### **Abuse Exposure**

Many studies examining the negative effects of exposure to intimate partner violence on children, fail to define the term "exposure." The lack of a definition leads to confusion as to how much abuse the child actually must be exposed to in order to experience the negative consequences (Osofsky, 2003). The current study aimed to examine perceptions of different types of abuse exposure to children to see how onlookers may differ in their perceptions of the situations. It was hypothesized that the child had to be physically harmed in order for the situation to be seen as child abuse, and that seeing and hearing intimate partner violence would be seen as child neglect. This hypothesis was partially confirmed.

The level of exposure had an effect on whether the perpetrator's behavior was perceived as constituting child abuse, such that when the child was physically harmed, the behavior of the perpetrator was seen as being more like child abuse than when the child just heard the altercation between the parents. No difference was found when the

child was hit when compared to the child watching the fight, or when comparing the child seeing the fight to the child hearing the fight. This result in part supports past research, where it has been found that when an event has negative consequences, participants are more likely to attribute blame and responsibility to the people involved (Shaver & Drown, 1986).

This finding suggests that participants recognized a difference between a child being involved in a situation physically, as opposed to simply hearing it, which did in part support the hypothesis. Participants failed to recognize a difference between the child being physically harmed versus watching the abuse, or between the child seeing the abuse versus hearing the abuse. Taken together, these results suggest that laypeople may not view a child seeing and hearing intimate partner violence as being abusive, and because of this perception, they may not believe the child is in need of help unless the child is being physically abused. Furthermore, the individuals who are assigned to help these children, such as caseworkers and workers in battered women shelters, may not see the situation as abusive unless the child is physically harmed during an altercation, which may lead these individuals to giving less support to these victims. Although these individuals may have more experience in the area of children being exposed to abuse and consequently hold different perceptions than laypeople, they do not necessarily have training in legalities surrounding the issue and therefore may instead hold similar views to the participants in the study.

A child being physically harmed is the most prototypical form of child abuse. Taken with the consensus and past experience aspect of Attribution Theory, where individuals use past experience along with knowledge of what most people will do in a

situation, this may be why participants viewed the physical harm condition as being more like child abuse than the seeing and hearing conditions. Additionally, the lack of difference between the child seeing the fight between the parents and being hit during the fight, suggests that participants failed to notice a difference between the two conditions, and instead measured them as being equally representative of child abuse. Furthermore, the fact that there was no significant difference between the child seeing the abuse and the child hearing the abuse suggests that participants failed to distinguish between those conditions as well. This goes to show that there are many differing opinions of what constitutes "child abuse." With this in mind, a jury may hold a parent who 'allows' his or her child to be physically harmed during an altercation equal to a parent who 'allows' his or her child to witness intimate partner violence. Moreover, the parent who 'allows' his or her child to witness the violence, may be held equally responsible to a parent who only 'allows' his or her child to hear the intimate partner violence.

Although witnessing abuse may be harmful to a child, these results suggest that a jury may be more likely to charge an abusive parent who 'allows' his or her child to be harmed during a fight as opposed to a parent who only 'allows' his or her child to hear intimate partner violence. This is one reason why the laws regarding this type of situation should be more clearly defined. If these laws are not clearly defined, additional possible charges and punishment may be applicable to victims of intimate partner violence and the enforcers of the law may have difficulty deciding when the situation constitutes child abuse, and when the situation constitutes child neglect.

With respect to perceptions of failing to protect, irrespective of perpetrator gender and level of abuse exposure, the victim was viewed as being neutral (participants neither

agreed or disagreed) in failing to protect the child. This finding does not support past research, which has found that generally the mother is blamed for a child being harmed by the father. In one study, the child was portrayed as being severely injured or killed as a result of the abuse (Terrance et al., 2008) which may have an impact on the blame assigned to the mother. The lack of victim blame in the current study for failure to protect the child could be due to the child not being severely harmed, or even harmed at all, in any of the scenarios. Future research should examine different levels of injury assigned to the child to see if this has an impact on the perception that the victims fail to protect the child.

Even with the non-significant effect of the victim failing to protect the child, the victims were still being seen as neutrally responsible, instead of not being responsible at all. This result may imply that even though laypeople may not see the victim as being responsible for the event, they may not see the victim as being completely a victim, which may make the onlookers less empathetic to the victim's situation. This lack of empathy may lead to less help from support groups such as family members and case workers, and may lead to onlookers not seeing the victim as a 'real' victim.

The failure to note a difference between differing degrees of exposure and the victim failing to protect the child could be problematic for the individuals who help the victims of these situations, such as the victims social support groups. If no difference in severity is seen between a child hearing an abusive situation and actually being struck, service agencies that are meant to help the battered parent and child, may suggest that the child be removed from the home, and his or her parents care, for just hearing a fight occur. Additionally, when victims are seen as also being responsible for failing to protect

the child, a child could be removed from the victim's care, even when the victim is a competent parent.

Perpetrators were seen as failing to protect the child only for the condition where the child was physically harmed, when compared to the condition where the child only heard the altercation. This result suggests that the child must be physically harmed for the participants to hold the perpetrator more responsible than the other conditions, for failing to protect the child. No difference was found between the condition where the child was physically harmed, and the condition where the child saw the altercation. Thus, it may be the case that a perpetrator who 'allows' his or her child to witness intimate partner violence may be charged with failure to protect a child at the same rate as a perpetrator who 'allows' his or her child to be harmed during a fight between parents.

When the child was physically harmed during the fight, women endorsed the idea that a female victim would be likely to be involved in future abusive situations. This finding suggests that women may be more likely than men to endorse the myth that battered women are searching for an abusive relationship, and then voluntarily remaining in the situation (Harrison, & Willis Esqueda, 1999). Although it is possible for a woman to be involved in more than one abusive situation in her lifetime, it is a common misconception that most or all victims will be revictimized. Research has shown that prior victimization has no relationship to future victimization, and instead, race, income, and drug use are better predictors of revictimization (Mears, Carlson, Holden, & Harris, 2001).



## **Victim Gender**

In cases of intimate partner violence, focus has generally been placed on female victims. Female victims have in fact been shown to be more likely to seek help for abuse, as well as be seriously injured from an intimate partner. In fact, intimate partner violence is one of the leading causes of serious injuries to women every year (Kimmel, 2002). With a focus on female victims, myths and misconceptions are brought about for a female victim that are not always associated with a male victim.

As stated previously, one common misconception is that abused women search out abusive situations and choose to remain in abusive situations they are in. This myth may cause abused women to be perceived as partially responsible for the abuse they endure (Harrison & Willis Esqueda, 1999). The current study found that when the mother is the victim of abuse, she is thought to be significantly more likely to be involved in a future abusive situation than when the father is the victim. This result suggests that many participants may be endorsing the misconception that female victims are somehow predestined to be in an abusive situation, whether that be due to the idea that victims are searching for the situation or because victims are unable to stay out of this type of situation due to a personality characteristic. One aspect of attribution theory is that onlookers may use past experience to make a causal judgment about a situation. Female victimization of intimate partner violence is the most stereotypical scenario and therefore participants may have used their knowledge of this stereotype to make judgments on the likelihood of the female victims being involved in future abuse. This result could benefit from future research examining the rationale behind participants responses.

The assumption that a female victim is more likely to be involved in future abuse may have implications for custody issues, such that the people involved in deciding whether a child should be removed from a parent during custody battles who endorse these ideas of female revictimization, may be less likely to award custody to mothers who are involved in abusive situations. Additionally, this focus on female revictimization could reflect a hesitancy to acknowledge male victims and their likelihood for re-entering an abusive situation. Future research examining the extent to which people endorse myths and misconceptions regarding abused men and women is warranted to address this issue. Moreover, research focusing on male rates and perceptions of revictimization will help to shed light on the probability of abused men entering future abusive situations and what is thought about their circumstances.

A difference between the parenting traits of the victim based on gender was expected, but no difference was found. Past research has revealed that many battered women become more sensitive and responsive to their children to make up for the exposure to intimate partner violence (Letourneau, Fedick, & Willms, 2007). Additionally, it has been shown that abused mothers will many times compensate for the child's exposure to the abuse by becoming more effective parents overall (Levendosky, Huth-Bocks, Shapiro, & Semel, 2003). The lack of a difference found in the present study may be due to a failure to emphasize with the parent-child relationship within the vignette. Furthermore, very little research has been conducted examining the parent-child relationships between battered men and their children. This lack of research may be hiding the possibility that battered fathers are perceived similarly to battered mothers

when it comes to parenting. This issue merits further investigation for additional clarification on the topic.

### **Participant Gender**

Perceptions of blame and responsibility have been shown to differ depending on the gender of the participant. It has been shown that men are more likely than women to place blame on victims (Anderson, 1999) and women are more likely to empathize with victims and hold perpetrators more responsible for their actions than are men (Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2004). This differences may be due, in part, to women being more likely to identify with the victims of abuse, which may lead to higher blame towards the perpetrators (Kleinke & Meyer, 1990).

Male participants believed that the victim (irrespective of the gender) would be more likely to abuse the child in the future than did female participants. This finding relates to past research, which has found that in rape cases, men are more likely than women to blame a victim's personality characteristics as being the reason for the victimization (Anderson, 1999). This suggests that men attribute personality characteristics to victims that, in turn, cause these individuals to be involved in abusive situations instead of focusing on the situational aspects of abuse. This characteristic approach to abuse may be why men assume that the victim will then be likely to take his or her situation out on the child. Moreover, this finding shows that men endorse the idea that the abused will become abusers in the future.

Male participants also believed that the victim's behavior was more like child abuse and neglect than female participants. These results suggest that men place more blame on the victim than women, and assign the victim responsibility for actions he or

she did not commit. This finding supports past research, which has found that women place less blame on victims than men (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, et al., 2004). It also has been found that men hold victims more responsible than do women (Terrance, Plumm, & Thomas 2011). Furthermore, in cases of child sexual abuse men show higher levels of victim blaming than do women (Back & Lips, 1998; Waterman & Foss-Goodman, 1984) which may hold true for physical abuse as well.

The difference between men and women's perceptions of the victim are particularly interesting because they imply that social support and service agencies used to help the victim could intervene differently depending on whether the person who helps was male or female. Additionally, if a victim was taken to court for child abuse and neglect, the outcome could be very different based on whether the deciding body (such as the judge, jury, or social worker) is predominantly male or female. Men may be more likely to blame the victims and assume that female victims will be involved in future abuse. This can be problematic because this difference in perception between men and women may lead to the laws being enforced unfairly, with very different outcomes from case to case. Past research has found that when a person is instructed to empathize with the victim of a situation instead of the abuser, the onlooker may shift his or her attribution of blame away from the victim (Skiffington, Parker, Richardson, & Calhoun, 1984). This type of training may help to reduce male victim blaming on the part of jurors and victim support networks, such as caseworkers, in cases of domestic violence which involve children.

The measurement of criminal responsibility was used to take blame a step further, by examining who should be held legally responsible for the situation. No significant

difference was found for criminal responsibility of the victim, even though men believe, more so than women, that the victim's behavior constitutes child abuse and neglect. This may suggest that men recognized a difference between the victim's possibility of preventing the situation, and the perpetrator's actual responsibility for the situation occurring. This result implies that even though men believe more so than women that the victim's behavior constitutes child abuse and neglect, when it comes to actually helping the victim, a male in a position to suggest what happens to the victim (such as a case worker or a person on a jury) may not try to punish the victim any more than women who hold the same positions.

Women were more likely than men to rate the perpetrator as being responsible. This supports the idea that women, more so than men, hold perpetrators as being more responsible for their actions and the situation (Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2004). Additionally, women are generally more empathetic towards victims (Schult, & Schneider, 1991) which may explain why they are more harsh when judging the perpetrators. It may be the case that women more easily related to the victim in the study, and because of this were more empathetic towards the victim. This result could suggest that women may be more likely to offer victims of abuse social support and help after the victim has been involved in a intimate partner violence situation. Men may benefit from empathy training to help them relate to victims, and understand the victim's situation which may in turn allow them to offer more support to victims of abuse.

A difference was found on the perceived parenting traits of the perpetrator such that men believed the perpetrator was significantly more nurturing, warm, honest, and generous than women. This result could be due to men, more so than women, being able

to relate to the abuse situation and empathizing with the perpetrator. Additionally, it has been found that in studies of intimate partner violence, participants attribute blame more to the situation of abuse rather than the abuser (Summers & Feldman 1984). With this in mind, men may be endorsing these positive traits in the abusers more so than women, because men are attributing the abuse more to the situation. Future research should examine specific reasons for these positive endorsements. Implications for this result could be that male caseworkers, jurors, and family and friends who give the victims and perpetrators social support, may perceive batterers as being more fit parents. This idea that a batterer is a fit parent may lead to the batterers being able to gain custody of the children involved. Within the court system, expert testimony has been used to make jurors aware of this biased perception of the perpetrators parenting traits that men are more likely to hold, may help to decrease the likelihood of male jurors being more likely than female jurors, to assign more positive parenting traits to perpetrators.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

The results of this study are informative, but also raise more questions on the issue. The study examined only a situation in which an eleven-year-old boy was involved in an intimate partner violence situation in various levels of exposure. Studies have found that when female children are victims of physical and sexual abuse, it is seen as more traumatic and severe than when male children are victims of abuse (Bornstein, Kaplan, & Perry, 2007). When this is taken into account, future research should include a female child to see if participants will judge the parents more harshly and believe that the involvement in physical abuse is more severe for a female child than a male child. Further, younger children may be seen as being more helpless and as having less control

over the situation. Conversely, participants may see involvement in abuse by younger children as less severe due to the child being too young to know better. Due to this unanswered question, future studies should vary the age of the child in the situation to see if parents are held more or less at fault for younger children, as opposed to older children. Moreover, going into more detail on the relationship of the parents involved in the violence, and altering whether they are both biological parents or whether or not they are married, may have an effect on the perceptions of the situation. Participants may judge a victimized parent more harshly if the abuser is not the biological parent of the child, and see the victim as being more responsible or 'choosing' to stay in the situation.

The current study focused on perceptions of laypeople who may have friends in family in similar situations to the scenarios, or who may one day be on a jury of a case similar to the scenarios. This study gained valuable insight on the perceptions of these individuals, but future studies may benefit by narrowing the participant pool to examine perceptions of particular groups of people. More specifically, future studies may want to examine the perceptions of judges and caseworkers who work with abuse victims. These groups of people may have more knowledge and experience in the area, which may alter their perceptions on the scenario and reduce possible biases towards the victims and perpetrators. Moreover, 21 percent of the current sample reported being a victim of abuse. Future studies could examine the impact the involvement in abuse may have on participant's responses and how the abuse may alter their perceptions of the situations.

The sample for the current study was gathered completely online, which may have lead to different outcomes than in lab data would have. Although it has been found that there are considerable advantages to collecting online data as compared to in lab data,

such as being able to collect larger and more diverse samples, there are also disadvantages, such as higher rates for drop out and repeated participation (Birnbbaum, 2004). Additionally, there have been noted differences between results of online and in lab data. One study found that online data collection reduces social desirability, therefore changing the outcomes of some studies (Joinson, 1999). Many of the studies looking at the validity and accuracy of online data were conducted when online data collection was newer and more novel, and because of this, some of these findings may not hold true to today. Future studies may reinforce the notion of online data being accurate by also collecting in lab data, and comparing it to the online data to check for differences.

## **Conclusion**

Taken together, results gleaned from this study indicate perceptions of how an intimate partner violence situation in which a child is involved should be handled is not consistent across gender of the onlooker or gender of the victimized parent. Also, differences between levels of exposure were not always taken into account. These perceptions, taken with the vagueness of the laws, create room for injustices and practices that do more harm than good for the children involved, such as allowing the victims of the situation to be seen as responsible for failing to protect the child. This perception may lead to a victim of intimate partner violence being seen as an unfit parent, even in cases where no evidence of being unfit exists, which may in turn lead to his or her child being removed from his or her care. Although the current study established valuable information on the topic, more research should be conducted in this area to help shed more light on the vague lines of the laws, and also to help highlight the discrepancies between gender of the victim and perceptions of the situation.



## CHAPTER IV

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A: Demographic

Please respond to each of the following items to the best of your ability:

1. How old are you?

\_\_\_\_ years old

2. What is your gender?

Male

Female

3. What is your ethnicity? (check one)

\_\_\_\_ White (Caucasian/European or European American)

\_\_\_\_ Mexican or Mexican American

\_\_\_\_ Other Latina or Latin American

\_\_\_\_ Black or African American

\_\_\_\_ Native American/ Alaskan Native

\_\_\_\_ Caribbean Islander

\_\_\_\_ Asian or Pacific Islander

\_\_\_\_ Multi-ethnic

\_\_\_\_ Other

4. Do you have a history of abuse? (circle one)

Yes

No

4a. If so, which type? (circle all that apply)

verbal

physical

sexual

5. Do you know anyone who has been abused?

Yes

No

5a. If so which type? (circle all that apply)

Verbal

physical

sexual

## APPENDIX B

\*Names of parents were changed to reflect parent gender manipulation. Names are italicized.

### Police Report – Hearing

On March 23, 2013 at approximately 6:35 pm, responding officer Tom Martin arrived at 234 Main street for a disturbance of the peace. After arriving officer Tom Martin found a white female approximately the age of 35 with bruises on her arms and face. The responding officer also found a white male who was approximately 35 years of age with no injuries, and a ten year old boy with no injuries. The white female, *Sarah* Thomas, reported that her husband, *Mike* Thomas, had become angry and started hitting her. The child, Shawn, had been standing at the top of the stairs listening while the altercation occurred. At the time of the reporting officers arrival, the child was upset and crying but did not appear to be physically injured. The neighbor who had called the police reported to the responding officer that she had heard screaming coming from the home and called the police. *Mike* Thomas will be charged with assault and the case will be turned over to child protective services for the child.

\*\*Note: The names and identifying information have been altered to protect the identities of the individuals involved in the case

## **Caseworker Report**

**Case Name:** *Thomas*    **Childline #:** *65846546*    **Date:** *4-12-13*    **Time of Report:** *7:15 pm*  
**Caseworker Taking Report:** *Leah Jones*    **Assigned Caseworker:** *Matthew Hagman*

### **PARENT INFORMATION**

**Father:** X Biological    Legal

Name: Mike Thomas    Date of Birth: 1-19-1977    City/State of Birth: Grand Forks, ND

Address: 5268 Main Street    Phone: 701-545-8648

Employer: \*\*\*\*\*

☒ Full Time Employment ☐ Part Time Employment    Social Security # \*\*\*\*\*

**Mother:** X Biological    Legal

Name: Sarah Thomas    Date of Birth: 1-13-1977    City/State of Birth: Grand Forks, ND

Address: 5268 Main Street    Phone: 701-545-8648

Employer: \*\*\*\*\*

☒ Full Time Employment ☐ Part Time Employment    Social Security # \*\*\*\*\*

### **CHILD INFORMATION**

Child(ren's) Name:	D.O.B.	Gender	SS#	Lives With	Grade/School	City/State Born
Shawn Thomas	07/07/02	Male		Mother and Father	4 <sup>th</sup> grade	Grand Forks, ND

**What are the circumstances and extent of maltreatment? (Include when maltreatment occurred, duration, injury)**

*Neighbor, Shelly Smith said that the police were called to the home of Mike and Sarah Thomas on 4-12-13 due to a loud fight between the couple. According to the reporting source, upon arriving the child, Shawn Thomas, told the reporting source that the father, **Mike** Thomas, was yelling at the mother, **Sarah** Thomas. The child said that he (the child) was standing at the top of the stairs listening to the fight. He reported that he heard a slapping sound, multiple times, and his mother repeatedly asking his father to stop. The child, Shawn Thomas, was crying and very upset that his parents fight so often. The father admits to fighting with the mother and said that he did not know that the child had heard the altercation.*

**Describe functioning of children. (Are there any special needs, habits, and supports, school achievement?)**

*Shawn-does well in school. Clean and dressed appropriately.*

**Describe functioning of adults in the household. (Include mental health/ substance abuse, domestic violence, special needs)**

*Mother-Works full time, normal functioning*

*Father- Works full time, normal functioning*

**How do caretakers parent? Discipline? (Include supervision of children, physical discipline, mental injury)**

*Child reports being grounded or having his video games taken away.*

**Any environmental concerns? Yes No (If yes describe, include concerns with housing, utilities, food, structural, rodents, insect infestation)**

*Home is Clean*

**Reporting source:** Neighbor, Shelly Smith

Phone # 701-456-4651

## APPENDIX C

\*Names of parents were changed to reflect parent gender manipulation. Names are italicized.

### Police Report – Witness

On March 23, 2013 at approximately 6:35 pm, responding officer Tom Martin arrived at 234 Main street for a disturbance of the peace. After arriving officer Tom Martin found a white female approximately the age of 35 with bruises on her arms and face. The responding officer also found a white male who was approximately 35 years of age with no injuries, and a ten year old boy with no injuries. The white female, *Sarah* Thomas, reported that her husband, *Mike* Thomas, had become angry and started hitting her. The child, Shawn, had been standing at the top of the stairs listening when the fight started then went downstairs and witnessed the altercation. At the time of the reporting officers arrival, the child was upset and crying but did not appear to be physically injured. The neighbor who had called the police reported to the responding officer that she had heard screaming coming from the home and called the police. *Mike* Thomas will be charged with assault and the case will be turned over to child protective services for the child.

\*\*Note: The names and identifying information have been altered to protect the identities of the individuals involved in the case

## **Caseworker Report**

**Case Name:** *Thomas*    **Childline #:** *65846546*    **Date:** *4-12-13*    **Time of Report:** *7:15 pm*  
**Caseworker Taking Report:** *Leah Jones*    **Assigned Caseworker:** *Matthew Hagman*

### **PARENT INFORMATION**

**Father:** X Biological    Legal

Name: Mike Thomas    Date of Birth: 1-19-1977    City/State of Birth: Grand Forks, ND  
Address: 5268 Main Street    Phone: 701-545-8648  
Employer: \*\*\*\*\*  
☒ Full Time Employment ☐ Part Time Employment    Social Security # \*\*\*\*\*

**Mother:** X Biological    Legal

Name: Sarah Thomas    Date of Birth: 1-13-1977    City/State of Birth: Grand Forks, ND  
Address: 5268 Main Street    Phone: 701-545-8648  
Employer: \*\*\*\*\*  
☒ Full Time Employment ☐ Part Time Employment    Social Security # \*\*\*\*\*

### **CHILD INFORMATION**

Child(ren's) Name:	D.O.B.	Gender	SS#	Lives With	Grade/School	City/State Born
Shawn Thomas	07/07/02	Male		Mother and Father	4 <sup>th</sup> grade	Grand Forks, ND



**What are the circumstances and extent of maltreatment? (Include when maltreatment occurred, duration, injury)**

*Neighbor, Shelly Smith said that the police were called to the home of Mike and Sarah Thomas on 4-12-13 due to a loud fight between the couple. According to the reporting source, upon arriving the child, Shawn Thomas, told the reporting source that he had been standing at the top of the steps when he heard the father, **Mike** Thomas, yelling at the mother, **Sarah** Thomas. The child then went downstairs and witnessed his father hitting his mother. The child said that he asked his parents to stop fighting but the parents did not listen. The child, Shawn Thomas, was crying and very upset that his parents fight so often. The father admits to fighting with the mother and said that he did not know that the child had been watching the altercation.*

**Describe functioning of children. (Are there any special needs, habits, and supports, school achievement?)**

*Shawn-does well in school. Clean and dressed appropriately.*

**Describe functioning of adults in the household. (Include mental health/ substance abuse, domestic violence, special needs)**

*Mother-Works full time, normal functioning*

*Father- Works full time, normal functioning*

**How do caretakers parent? Discipline? (Include supervision of children, physical discipline, mental injury)**

*Child reports being grounded or having his video games taken away.*

**Any environmental concerns? Yes No (If yes describe, include concerns with housing, utilities, food, structural, rodents, insect infestation)**

*Home is Clean*

**Reporting source:** Neighbor, Shelly Smith

**Phone #:** 701-456-4651

## APPENDIX D

\*Names of parents were changed to reflect parent gender manipulation. Names are italicized.

### Police Report – Physical

On March 23, 2013 at approximately 6:35 pm, responding officer Tom Martin arrived at 234 Main street for a disturbance of the peace. After arriving officer Tom Martin found a white female approximately the age of 35 with bruises on her arms and face. The responding officer also found a white male who was approximately 35 years of age with no injuries, and a ten year old boy with a bruise on his side and a cut on his arm. The white female, *Sarah* Thomas, reported that her husband, *Mike* Thomas, had become angry and started hitting her. The child, Shawn, had been standing at the top of the stairs listening when the fight started then went downstairs and witnessed the altercation. She said that the boy told them to stop and then stepped in between them to make them stop and was pushed out of the way by the father, *Mike* Thomas. *Sarah* reported that the boy fell over a rug and landed on a table. *Mike* Thomas admitted to pushing the child, Shawn out of the way but he said that he had no intention to harm Shawn. The neighbor who had called the police reported to the responding officer that she had heard screaming coming from the home and called the police. *Mike* Thomas will be charged with assault and the case will be turned over to child protective services for the child.

\*\*Note: The names and identifying information have been altered to protect the identities of the individuals involved in the case

## Caseworker Report

**Case Name:** *Thomas*    **Childline #:** *65846546*    **Date:** *4-12-13*    **Time of Report:** *7:15 pm*  
**Caseworker Taking Report:** *Leah Jones*    **Assigned Caseworker:** *Matthew Hagman*

### PARENT INFORMATION

**Father:** X Biological    Legal

Name: Mike Thomas    Date of Birth: 1-19-1977    City/State of Birth: Grand Forks, ND  
Address: 5268 Main Street    Phone: 701-545-8648  
Employer: \*\*\*\*\*  
☒ Full Time Employment ☐ Part Time Employment    Social Security # \*\*\*\*\*

**Mother:** X Biological    Legal

Name: Sarah Thomas    Date of Birth: 1-13-1977    City/State of Birth: Grand Forks, ND  
Address: 5268 Main Street    Phone: 701-545-8648  
Employer: \*\*\*\*\*  
☒ Full Time Employment ☐ Part Time Employment    Social Security # \*\*\*\*\*

### CHILD INFORMATION

Child(ren's) Name:	D.O.B.	Gender	SS#	Lives With	Grade/School	City/State Born
Shawn Thomas	07/07/02	Male		Mother and Father	4 <sup>th</sup> grade	Grand Forks, ND

**What are the circumstances and extent of maltreatment? (Include when maltreatment occurred, duration, injury)**

*Neighbor, Shelly Smith, said that the police were called to the home of Mike and Sarah Thomas on 4-12-13 due to a loud fight between the couple. According to the reporting source, upon arriving the child, Shawn Thomas, had lacerations on his left leg and a brush burn on his left arm. The child told the reporting source that he had been standing at the top of the stairs listening to his parents fight and went downstairs to make them stop. When he got downstairs, the father, **Mike** Thomas, was yelling at the mother, **Sarah** Thomas. The child, Shawn Thomas, then stepped in between the parents to try and make them stop and was pushed out of the way by the father. After being pushed, the child, Shawn Thomas, fell over a rug and landed on a table consequently receiving the injuries. The child, was crying and very upset that his parents fight so often. The father admits to pushing the child out of the way but says that he did not mean to cause harm to the child. The child had pictures taken of the injuries and was bandaged.*

**Describe functioning of children. (Are there any special needs, habits, and supports, school achievement?)**

*Shawn-does well in school. Clean and dressed appropriately.*

**Describe functioning of adults in the household. (Include mental health/ substance abuse, domestic violence, special needs)**

*Mother-Works full time, normal functioning*

*Father- Works full time, normal functioning*

**How do caretakers parent? Discipline? (Include supervision of children, physical discipline, mental injury)**

*Child reports being grounded or having his video games taken away.*

**Any environmental concerns? Yes No (If yes describe, include concerns with housing, utilities, food, structural, rodents, insect infestation)**

*Home is Clean*

**Reporting source:** *Neighbor, Shelly Smith*

**Phone #:** *701-456-4651*

\*Mother and Father refers to victim and perpetrator for analysis, victim/perpetrator gender varied depending on the condition.

#### APPENDIX E: Scenario Questions

**1. Based solely on the information gained from the news article, please answer the following questions.**

a. To what extent would you regard the mother's behavior as child abuse?

1	2	3	4	5	6
Not at all			Completely		

b. To what extent would you regard the father's behavior as child abuse?

1	2	3	4	5	6
Not at all			Completely		

c. To what extent would you regard the mother's behavior as child neglect?

1	2	3	4	5	6
Not at all			Completely		

d. To what extent would you regard the father's behavior as child neglect?

1	2	3	4	5	6
Not at all			Completely		

**2. Please rate the degree to which you agree with the following statements**

a. The father was responsible for what the child saw/heard

1	2	3	4	5	6
strongly disagree					strongly agree

b. The mother was responsible for what the child saw/heard

1	2	3	4	5	6
strongly disagree					strongly agree

c. The father is to blame for the child's exposure to the violence

1	2	3	4	5	6
strongly disagree					strongly agree

d. The mother is to blame for the child's exposure to the violence

1	2	3	4	5	6
strongly disagree					strongly agree

e. The mother should be held criminally responsible

1	2	3	4	5	6
strongly disagree					strongly agree

f. The father should be held criminally responsible

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

strongly disagree  
agree

strongly

g. The father failed to protect the child

1

2

3

4

5

6

strongly disagree  
agree

strongly

h. The mother failed to protect the child

1

2

3

4

5

6

strongly disagree  
agree

strongly

i. How likely is it that the father would physically abuse the child in the future?

1

2

3

4

5

6

not likely  
likely

very

j. How likely is it that the mother would physically abuse the child in the future?

1

2

3

4

5

6

not likely  
likely

very

k. How likely is it that the mother would be involved in an abusive relationship in the future?

1

2

3

4

5

6



not likely  
likely

very

l. How likely is it that the father would be involved in an abusive relationship in the future?

1

2

3

4

5

6

not likely  
likely

very

m. Listed below are a number of words. To the right of each word, please circle a number from 1 to 5 that corresponds to the degree you feel it applies to the mother.

Strongly disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Neutral = 3, Agree = 4, Strongly agree = 5

Warm	1	2	3	4	5
------	---	---	---	---	---

Honest	1	2	3	4	5
--------	---	---	---	---	---

Nurturing	1	2	3	4	5
-----------	---	---	---	---	---

Generous	1	2	3	4	5
----------	---	---	---	---	---

n. Listed below are a number of words. To the right of each word, please circle a number from 1 to 5 that corresponds to the degree you feel it applies to the father.

Strongly disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Neutral = 3, Agree = 4, Strongly agree = 5

Warm	1	2	3	4	5
------	---	---	---	---	---

Honest	1	2	3	4	5
--------	---	---	---	---	---

Nurturing	1	2	3	4	5
-----------	---	---	---	---	---

Generous	1	2	3	4	5
----------	---	---	---	---	---

## APPENDIX F: Manipulation check

1. Who was the aggressor?

a.) Mother

b.) Father

2. What was the level of the child's exposure to the abuse?

a.) heard

b.) witnessed/saw

c.) physically injured

3.) What gender was the child involved in the situation?

a.) male

b.) female

## CHAPTER V

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