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Attributions for Spousal Violence

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ATTRIBUTIONS FOR SPOUSAL VIOLENCE

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Abstract

The literature on spousal violence suggests that abusive men, their female victims, and others in society often fail to blame abusers for their violent behavior. This failure perpetuates spousal violence because it allows abusers to continue being abusive without being held responsible for their actions.

This study analyzed the attributions of male and female university students concerning written scenarios portraying moderate levels of spousal violence to determine whether observers tend to explain the violence using internal or external attributions. Male participants in the study reported a very low tendency, if any, to engage in spousal violence, while the female participants had very little, if any, experience as victims of abuse during the previous six months.

Four theories were used to formulate the research questions concerning whether respondents would make internal or external attributions for spousal violence: Kelley's Covariation Theory, Jones and Nisbett's Actor-Observer Bias, Shaver's Defensive Attribution, and Backman's Self-Theory. The results indicated that the majority of male and female observers attributed the cause of violence to the abuser by making internal attributions for the abuse. These results offer an element of hope to the spousal violence literature. To the extent that members of society make internal attributions for spousal violence, abusers are held responsible for their behavior and ultimately may feel pressured to stop being abusive.

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Linda L. Ratcliff

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Spousal abuse has been the subject of many studies throughout the past three decades. The subject initially generated interest in approximately the early 1970s. The costs of abuse to society are realized in the lost productivity of victims, their medical and legal expenses, and the expenses involved in providing shelters to victims and their families. Victims and their children also suffer physical, emotional, and economic hardships as a result of abuse. Therefore, society stands to benefit from stopping spousal abuse. Individuals who batter also have the opportunity to benefit from stopping spousal violence, through resolving problematic issues and improving relationships that are important to them.

Women are the primary victims of abuse (Walker, 1983), although they do sometimes initiate abuse and retaliate with violence against an abusive male (Gelles & Loseke, 1989). Women are usually more seriously injured by spousal violence than men (Straus, 1989), and a greater social problem is created by the abuse of women, due to expenses that society incurs to treat injuries and lost productivity at the work-

place (Walker, 1983, p. 86). Thus, in this thesis, only cases involving female victims will be examined.

A number of studies have examined how people explain the causes of spousal violence (Jones, 1992; Dutton, 1988; Coates, Wortman, & Abbey, 1979; Lerner & Miller, 1978; Lerner, Miller, & Holmes, 1976; Lerner & Simmons, 1966; Shaver, 1970, 1975; Walster, 1966). These studies have shown that perceptions of causality in abuse situations can be diverse. One commonality among these studies was that those most responsible for a negative incident tend to rationalize the cause away from themselves (Andrews & Brewin, 1990). They practiced an external attribution style and laid blame on the situation or others involved. Victims of abuse sometimes made external attributions, by blaming themselves for the abuser's behavior (Lerner & Miller, 1978). Others who observed a negative incident, tended to place blame directly on one particular person (Lerner & Simmons, 1966). However, observers may make internal, external, or a combination of attributions for abuse.

The present study is based on attribution theories, which are the foundation for my hypothesis and research questions. Basic tenets of attribution theory are: (a) people explain ordinary events in a common sense way; (b) perceivers use "the criterion of intentionality" (whether the actor knew the consequences of his or her action and

deliberately acted) (Heider, 1958) to attribute causality to either internal or external causes; (c) people protect their self-esteem by making internal attributions for success and external attributions for failure (Weary 1981; Zuckerman, 1979); and (d) perceivers link observable behavior to unobservable causes, such as control, intention, retaliation, anger, etc.

Attribution theory is relevant to spousal violence and the field of communication through the messages abusive couples exchange and their perceptions of causality for their behavior. Messages in an abusive relationship have been found to perpetuate violence in some cases by repeating previous arguments that lead to physical fights (YWCA, 1995). Abusive individuals verbally place blame to escape responsibility for abusive actions.

Verbal messages that abusive men use to explain their violent behavior serve to excuse, justify, and perpetuate the abuse within society. The attributions and verbal messages of abused individuals also perpetuate the problem. Occasionally communication does deter the violence, although many women make attributions that discourage them from escaping abusive relationships. In other words, women are socialized to make attributions which excuse spousal violence, and consequently, they are unable to use communica-

tion effectively to stop the abuse, although there is no evidence that anything the woman does can stop it.

Where abused women make attributions that may keep them from escaping the relationship, the abusers make external attributions that help them retain control of the relationship. Conversely, it is more difficult to predict the type of attributions nonabusive men and nonabused women may make for spousal violence. Different theories explored in this thesis suggest that observers may either blame the abuser in an internal attribution, or identify with the abuser and blame the situation or victim for the violence.

Research on attributions of causality regarding spousal abuse is important because spousal abuse is a major societal and legal issue, and the implications for women involved in violent relationships are far reaching. Consequences of spousal violence include the abused woman's inability to work, as well as the physical and emotional costs that women and their children pay. Women who are victims of violence pay a high price in the areas of self-esteem, physical injury (or death), emotional problems, such as depression, anxiety, and stress, and loss of income due to absence from work (Walker, 1979).

Holding victims responsible for their fate perpetuates spousal violence within society by keeping the myth alive that battered women must have done something to start the

abuse. Consequently, blaming victims relieves the abuser of full responsibility for the violence. Members of society may be more forgiving toward the abuser if they think he did not start the incident and the victim deserved the treatment she received.

The purpose of this study is to determine how observers and actors explain abuse through different means. It will examine the attributions of observers who are: (1) male abusers, (2) male nonabusers, (3) females who are being abused in an ongoing relationship, and (4) females who are not being abused. It will explore how these individuals ascribe the cause or causes of spousal violence. Those actors who abuse or are being abused may feel the cause was situational, caused by the victim, or an isolated incident that was due to circumstances beyond their control. Those who are nonabusive or nonabused may place blame on the abuser on a more dispositional or internal level, that is, something dysfunctional within the abuser. Alternately, since spouse abuse is a societal problem that is sustained by cultural ideology and practices (Dutton, 1986), nonabusive and nonabused individuals also may fail to place blame on the abuser (Davis & Jones, 1960; Glass, 1964; Lerner & Miller, 1978).

The literature review will begin with the definition of spousal violence and a summary of a cyclical model of vio-

lence. Next, a discussion of factors that contribute to spousal violence will be presented. This discussion will focus on socialization of men and women in various societies, how authorities attempt to minimize the violence, and the lack of resources available to victims of spousal abuse. The third section will develop a discussion of the dynamics of abusive relationships, including the communication patterns and attributions that sustain patterns of violence. Fourth, attribution theory will be presented as a framework for predicting the attributions individuals make to explain spousal violence. The section will conclude with a hypothesis and research questions.

Conceptualizations of Abuse

Defining Abusive Behavior.

Domestic violence is a broad topic that includes the physical abuse of individuals by their partners, emotional abuse, and child abuse. Spousal violence, one type of domestic violence, highlights physical violence between married and co-habitating adults of the opposite sex, excluding homosexual relationships. As noted earlier, this study focuses exclusively on men's violence against women in spousal and co-habitating heterosexual relationships.

Physical types of spousal violence have been identified by emergency room personnel as: hitting, kicking, biting, pulling hair, strangling, pushing, burning, shooting, cut-

ting, sitting or jumping on a woman, rape and other forced sexual acts (Sherman, 1992, p. 5). This list of injuries does not cover the full range of actions that may be inflicted upon a victim. In addition to physical abuse, women suffer a large amount of emotional abuse. Follingstad (1990) lists several types of emotional abuse: ridicule, verbal harassment, name-calling, social or financial isolation, jealousy/possessiveness, threats to divorce or abandon the woman, destroying "favorite personal objects," and public humiliation (pp. 108-109). Whether the abuse is physical or emotional, it tends to follow a predictable pattern.

Cycle of Violence Theory

Walker (1984) conceptualized violence as a three-step process that follows a cycle. The Walker cycle theory of violence (1979) explains the first step in the process as a period where tension builds between the couple. The first phase is followed by a battering incident, which constitutes the second phase. A third phase involves loving contrition, in which the man expresses regret and provides reinforcement to the woman. The man shows a period of repentance, in which he is sorry for the violence because of a fear of punishment, rather than being genuinely sorry for the harm. Since the woman is rewarded by the period of contrition, she convinces herself that the abuse has ended permanently.

After a period of time, however, the cyclical process continues with relational tension and abuse.

Over time the tension-building stage becomes longer, the loving contrition stage declines, and the battering incidents increase in severity (Walker, 1979). Jones (1992) offers one explanation for this escalation of the cycle. During the tension-building stage, an abusive man may engage in negative behavior such as insults, name calling, and other put downs. If the woman responds by becoming argumentative instead of compliant and conflict begins, the male's anger may escalate to a higher level. If his response is similar to his previous response, the stage is set to reinforce his previous negative and abusive behavior. The anger builds in increasingly higher layers until the male makes a physical response as a means of control (Jones, 1992, p. 355). In this phase, it is impossible for the female partner to behave in any way that does not act as a catalyst for violence against her. Women who seek medical treatment seem to be puzzled as to why the incident occurred and what, if anything, they could have done to prevent it.

Walker (1984) and Fagan et al. (1983) found a link between loss of control, severity of spousal violence, and nonfamily violence. The more outraged or out of control the man became, the more severe the battering received by the victim. Both Walker and Fagan found abusers to be violent men, both within and outside of the relationship. Abusive

men tend to show high consistency in inflicting violence on others, or they constantly behave in a violent manner toward others.

When partners in a violent relationship have a disagreement, each must find ways to maintain his or her point of view, while trying to influence the other individual (Infante, Chandler, & Rudd, 1989). The abusive male may feel he must take physical action to adjust his spouse's beliefs, which are inconsistent with his, rather than lose control over her. By the same token, the female may try to find ways to appease the male and avoid being battered again. When communicating, each partner in an abusive relationship may rely on certain assumptions about their spouse, and make calculated guesses as to the proper verbal strategy to take to circumvent violence (Infante, Chandler, & Rudd, 1989). Verbal strategies rarely stop the violence for extended periods, and the majority of women remain in dangerous relationships (Walker, 1984).

According to Walker (1979), although most women (86%) realize they are in grave danger by returning to, or staying in an abusive relationship (p. 99), many women report that they believe the abuse will stop. Unfortunately, Walker's research reveals these beliefs to be false; the violence not only continues, but the severity actually escalates and becomes more frequent (Walker, 1979).

In summary, the most urgent problem can best be described as diverse types of physical and emotional torment inflicted on women by their male partners. The abuse follows a three step cycle, which includes a period where tension builds, a period of abuse, and a period of contrition where the male is apologetic and a brief honeymoon ensues. Eventually, however, the cycle escalates and becomes more frequent.

SOCIETAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE ACCEPTANCE OF SPOUSAL VIOLENCE

Society contributes to or perpetuates violence against women through the acceptance of demeaning and violent behavior against them. Social attitudes which demean women and perpetuate spousal violence are detrimental to society and women in particular. The abuse of women is costly to society in terms of lives destroyed and money lost through missed workdays and productivity. Women who are victims of violence pay a high price in the areas of self-esteem, physical injury (or death), emotional problems, such as depression, anxiety, and stress, and loss of income due to absence from work. Family interaction, societal norms and beliefs regarding gender roles, and the structure and practices of patriarchal culture all have been linked to the tacit acceptance of spousal violence within a culture.

Early Family Contributions to Violence

Interpersonal factors such as anger (Miller & Eisenberg, 1988), frustration, control and expectations of others'

actions, as well as a history of being abused during childhood by one's own family members contribute to violence (Gondolf, 1985; Snyder & Fruchtman, 1981). These factors and other obscure reasons may lead an individual to become violent towards others.

Although the importance of intergenerational transmission of spousal violence has been disputed (Gelles & Loseke, 1989), considerable research indicates that abusers and victims of spousal abuse are often former primary family violence victims (Walker, 1988). Female victims of spousal violence are sometimes from abusive families, and have lived within the environment of violence. Similarly, abusive men raised in a violent primary family are more likely to become abusers than other men. Violence seen and experienced during childhood, in the primary family, is thought to contribute to a victim's acceptance of violence in later relationships (Ball, 1977; Pagelow, 1981; Gelles & Straus, 1988). Former childhood abuse victims might not consciously accept spousal violence later in life, but they may give abuse unconscious approval by staying in the relationship. In addition to spousal abuse, the majority (53%) of abusive men may feel entitled to abuse their children (Walker, 1988, p. 99). Child abuse may then increase the chance that its victims will become victims of spousal abuse in later affiliations. However, Dutton (1988) found that family members were not always the first to be abused by the violent man.

He said, "...45% of the generally violent men began their adult violence by abusing nonfamily members" (Dutton, 1988, p. 12).

Traditional Sex Roles and Violence

Considerable research provides evidence of American societal approval and tolerance of wife abuse (Pagelow, 1992; Smith, 1991; Shibles, 1991; Peterson, 1991; Straus, 1980). Greenblat (1985) found, for example, that husbands' sex-role orientation differentiated between those low and high in approval and tolerance of physical force by husbands. Highly traditional individuals who view women as homemakers and men as wage earners often have a very limited tolerance for variance from these roles. Greenblat (1985) found that respondents who endorsed traditional roles in work and family settings were more likely to approve of wives being slapped or beaten by their husbands. Traditionalists sometimes felt their abusive behavior was condoned by society and attributed their actions to a general demeaning attitude toward women.

Women who are employed outside of the traditional homemaker role usually hold less powerful positions than men in both business and society. According to Greenblat (1985), researchers have argued that normative support for the use of force against women is derived from or at least associated with views of women as legitimately having lower social positions and lesser rights than do men (p. 239).

Rigid sex-role orientation among men adds to the stereotype of women being less powerful in society, through limiting their opportunities to hold authoritative jobs. Women are viewed with a diminished image due to their having less legitimate power in business and consequently society (Greenblat, 1985).

Patriarchal Culture and Violence

Martin (1976) argued that societal acceptance of spousal abuse encourages men to dominate and behave violently toward women. Martin found that most sociological studies on the battering of women were reluctant to deal with violence between intimate partners. He "...soon learned that there is a tacit acceptance of woman-battering and that its roots are in historical attitudes toward women, the institution of marriage, the economy, criminal and civil law, and the delivery system of social service agencies" (Pagelow, 1981, p. 7). The relationship between gender inequality and violence against women is reciprocal. Leidig (1981) proposed that just the threat of physical violence against women in a society serves to keep them subordinate and submissive to men. Even though the majority of men in a culture do not abuse women, the threat of violence against women indirectly empowers all men.

Several studies (Van Hasselt et al., 1988; Smith, 1991; Sherman, 1992; Peterson, 1991; Allen et al., 1985) found that societal norms and beliefs were instrumental in the

acceptance of spouse beating. Mushanga (1978) analyzed homicide of wives in east and central Africa and concluded that selection of cultural norms allowing violence against wives was a variable; in this instance violent behavior was attributed to an acceptance of spousal violence among Africans.

Inter-cultural studies (Campbell & Humphreys, 1984; Loizos, 1979) have also identified the battering of women as a variable of male *machismo*. Machismo is "...the culturally ideal man being aggressive, sexually active, violently jealous, and nonexpressive of emotions except for anger" (Loizos, 1979, pp. 177-178). Dobash (1978, 1979), for example, maintained that in a North American society, a man's sexual jealousy was a form of protection of property. Since women in society were considered to be owned by their men, they became property rather than individuals. The men in the Dobash (1978) study felt entitled to beat their spouses to protect their sexual property or rights. Thus, one way that spousal violence is perpetuated within society is through assumed ownership of women by their partners. Included within ownership are sexual privileges that men feel entitled to.

Sex was considered to be the sole property of the male spouse in Loizos' (1979) study of the beating of wives in Southern Italy. Women were considered to be the property of males and the men were expected to protect womens' virtue;

"In this context, women were beaten if they endangered the honor of the family by adultery or premarital sexual liaisons" (p. 177). Loizos found that Italian men felt entitled to abuse women based on the attribution that they (the men) were supporting Italian community standards and protecting their property. Loizos' study found that women were beaten or killed for adultery.

Research suggests that gender differences in power in interpersonal relationships contribute to violence against women (Gerber, 1991; Howard, 1988). For example, Howard (1988) discusses research suggesting that North American men and women do not face each other as social equals, and that sexual relations between men and women are shaped by an imbalance of power. When men and women are not considered to be equals, there has to be a more powerful individual, leaving the other partner submissive to the more powerful person. The dominant individual, or abuser, receives the tacit social message that force is acceptable to gain one's own objectives (Greenblat, 1985).

Straus, et al. (1980) found that gender-based inequality was a factor in causing the violent behavior reported by their national sample of over 2,000 families (p. 83). Straus noted that in the 1983 Berk study, dominant males were more likely to beat and injure their wives (p. 83). Fagan et al. (1983) found lower satisfaction in marriage to be based on power inequalities. Power imbalance and dissat-

isfaction with the relationship, along with frustration and resentment, may cause dysfunctional distressed couples to become angry and violent.

Patriarchal culture and power inequities combined with an apparent acceptance of violence against women perpetuate spousal violence. Studies show that many cultures around the world allow violence against women and minimize its seriousness.

Law Enforcement

Spousal violence has been slow to be recognized as a crime in the United States and elsewhere. According to Okun (1986), "...United States law condoned wife abuse and protected the right of men to beat their wives through the mid-nineteenth century" (pp. 39-40). Dobash and Dobash (1992) point out that the women's movement helped raise awareness of the problem of domestic violence in the 1960s and 1970s. More effective laws defining spousal violence were legislated and enforced. Today, spousal violence is legally classified as an assault in most legal jurisdictions (Harvard L. Rev. 1993, 1510). However, enforcement is still disparate nationwide.

Women who flee from an abusive relationship have several options designed to help them. They can utilize an abuse shelter, obtain a protection or restraining order, gain a legal separation, and/or prosecute the batterer.

Abuse shelters, or safe houses as some cities label them, are usually the woman's first encounter with intervention. Shelters provide immediate safety and support and are a valuable resource in offering counseling, advocacy services, job referral, and in meeting basic needs. Shelters are funded by state and local governments, community groups, and private sources (Mont. Code Ann., 1992). Unfortunately, funding is often inadequate to meet the needs of the community, leaving many women at risk.

In addition to shelters, women have several legal devices to help deter the violence. Finn and Colson (1990) explain that a civil protection order is "a legally binding court order that prohibits an individual who has committed an act of domestic violence from further abusing the victim" (Harvard L. Rev., 1993, 1510). The main aim of protection orders is to protect the woman from future harm. However, the orders are frequently violated and often lead to further violence (Harvard L. Rev., 1993, 1510).

A restraining order must be issued by a District Court judge and is an effort to stop an individual from disturbing another person (YWCA, 1995). Restraining orders cannot stop everyone from committing violence, but do deter some. Violation of a restraining order is both a civil and criminal offense, and the offender may be arrested and brought to court or charged with a misdemeanor (YWCA, 1995).

After women have received immediate help through shelters, civil protection orders or restraining orders, they may decide on legal separation or divorce. A legal separation is similar to divorce except the marriage is not dissolved.

Regardless of the increasing amount of help available to an abused woman, it is often difficult for her to be taken seriously by those in a position to help her. Although efforts to protect battered women have increased, government at all levels is still reluctant to intervene in family conflicts (Harvard L. Rev, 1993, 1502).

Another problem exists in a culture that sees women as less powerful in both society and business. Since the majority of police officers in most cities are male, they tend to reflect the views of patriarchal society. Police officers and others within the criminal justice system who view women as inferior help perpetuate the overall societal acceptance of spousal abuse. Officers sometimes treat spousal violence as a private matter between the couple, rather than a bonafide illegal assault against a member of the community (Goolkasian, 1986). When police officers answer domestic assault calls, they sometimes minimize both the injury sustained and the seriousness of the situation. By tolerating violence against women, society is giving spousal abuse tacit approval. If police officers are given

discretion to handle spousal abuse calls, victims are at their mercy.

Sherman (1984) took a legal perspective and sought to determine if mandatory arrests in cases of spousal violence were helpful to either the victim or the perpetrator. He engineered the Minneapolis Domestic Violence Experiment, in which the effects of arrest were tested for recidivism rates (recommitting the crime). Three options were possible when police officers handled a domestic violence call. They were to arrest, counsel, or separate the abusive couple. Officers performed one of these three responses (which were divided equally) according to a color coded pad. They were to take the top sheet and administer the designated function.

Sherman found arrest to deter selectively, or to deter some from further violence but not others. While he found that arrest stops some offenders, it incites more violence in others. In some perpetrators, the arrest deters them for a short time, but makes them more violent later. However, Sherman (1984) does support mandatory arrest as an effective solution for spousal abuse. According to Sherman,

> ...incarceration is the best way to control assailants, express societal disapproval, and mandate intensive treatment. Thus, significant criminal sanctions best promote the interests of society and of individual victims (Harvard L. Rev., 1993, 1501)

Gelles (1985) also advocates mandatory arrest as an effective preventative device against spousal violence. According to Gelles, mandatory arrest laws are believed to prevent primary and secondary abuse of female partners (Humphreys & Humphreys, 1985). Further, the Los Angeles district attorney's office (1992) compiled statistics that "...suggested that arrest, prosecution, and substantive punishment deter the assailant most effectively" (Harvard L. Rev., 1993, 1523).

Unfortunately, police officers often are less than totally responsive to spousal abuse calls (Sherman, 1984). Goolkasian (1986) called the limited response of police officers a product of stereotypes and misconceptions about spousal abuse.

> ...the classic myths are that domestic violence is a family matter in which state officials should not interfere, that victims provoke incidents of domestic violence, and that victims can easily leave abusive relationships (pp. 2-3).

Enforcement of domestic violence laws and the victims' ability to escape have both been over-estimated.

Very often, the way a police officer negotiates an abuse call depends on the standards of the community. Sherman (1992) explained that the approval a society gives wife battering is reflected in the arrest attitudes of its police officers.

> ...police impose their own morality and priorities in deciding what 'the law' shall be. Given the relative absence of any meaningful court supervision of the cases in which police do not make

> arrests, policing has an enormous opportunity to create its own moral definitions of what is 'serious' enough to merit invoking the law (p. 40).

In most states, police officers are given enormous discretion in deciding whether or not an individual will be arrested (Harvard L. Rev., 1993).

The potential for a problem is created when a beat police officer upholds the standards of society, rather than adhering to the strict letter of the law (Sherman, 1992). Unless spousal violence is defined by a society as a criminal act, it is often overlooked as a societal problem.

Law enforcement's indifference to the problem of abuse and inadequate legal options to stop the reoccurrence of violence against women supports male dominance over women and perpetuates spousal abuse. Women's reluctance to enter the legal system and ultimately flee abusive relationships is exacerbated by a lack of substantial resources. Abused women often have few monetary resources at their disposal. I turn to this issue in the next section.

Economic Inequality

Women in society earn far less (30%) then men, often for performing the same job (Harvard L. Rev., 1993, 1502). What workers are paid defines their importance to an employer and places lesser paid workers in a lower socio/economic class. Society views lower paid workers as having less value as individuals than those who command higher salaries. Much research has been done on the effect of paying men and

women differently in the workplace, and how this inequality permeates society.

Szechtman (1985) framed spousal violence as an economic and legal issue in her Canadian study. She argued that certain legislation perpetuates violence against women by placing value on the individual strictly as a commodity of the workplace.

Szechtman posits that production is based on an economic market value. In other words, a monetary value is placed on both production and reproduction. Since reproduction (childbirth) is outside the realm of the market, gestation has no economic value, and leaves the perception that women are less valuable than men. Very often, there is also inequality in child-care responsibilities and other unpaid household labor. These variables all add to the perceived lower social value of women. Men's dominance in the areas of employment and at home cause women in the United States and elsewhere to be valued less than men, even though women's skills and talents overall are equal to men in most areas.

Thus, according to Szechtman (1985), laws which do not redress the gender-based division of labor in society function to devalue women, support hierarchical family relations, and increase a wife's economic dependence on her husband. As a result, the law indirectly contributes to the perpetuation of violence against women (p. 262). Men can

justify abusing women, because of the perceived low economic and community value of women.

Women's financial dependence on men not only enables men to justify abuse of women, but also encourages women to stay in abusive relationships (Cox & Stoltenburg, 1991). Many women have no monetary resources outside of the relationship. The women who feel the most trapped into staying are those with little education and a menial job, or no job. Cox and Stoltenberg (1991) found that the average abused woman had only a 10th grade education. Again, the message a less educated woman receives in American society and elsewhere is that she is without value.

Even though women in society are underpaid and devalued, they are doing their best to cope with their situation. One coping strategy women develop is the ability to communicate in a way that defuses volatile circumstances. Unfortunately, good communication skills can only help in a limited way. Many women find themselves in violent relationships in spite of excellent verbal abilities.

Society contributes to spousal violence through the acceptance of demeaning and violent behavior against women. Many factors, such as primary family violence and strong sex-role orientation among men also help keep women in a position of being abused. Patriarchal based beliefs and norms in society act to perpetuated violence against women through the tacit approval of its members. Law enforce-

ment's less than supportive execution of domestic violence laws contributes to societal approval of abuse. Finally, economic inequities reinforce the devaluation of women in society, and foster violence in spousal relationships.

Dynamics of Violent Relationships

The communication strategies and interaction patterns of couples in abusive relationships function to perpetuate violence. Couples that desire a harmonious relationship must be capable of coordinating their aspirations to receive equitable and peaceful resolution to conflicts, or the relationship does not survive. The failure of either partner to compromise and come to a peaceful resolution to conflicts can endanger the association. In this section, the part that communication plays in an abusive relationship will be covered. Included within this section will be: communication patterns and strategies, including couples' use of negotiating strategies to manage each other; and their evaluation of the situation and each other.

Couple Interaction in Violent Relationships

Individuals develop communication strategies to manage their relationships. Hewes (1980) illustrated that both partners in a relationship must monitor their messages and be able to gauge which interpersonal communication messages influence her or his partner. Studies show that most couples will weigh their speech for its influence value and

tend to try positive messages before using negative communication (Hunter & Boster, 1987).

Couples also develop skill at interpreting their partner's messages and coordination skills which help them reach consensus when they disagree (Hewes, et al., 1985). Healthy couple communication leaves both partners free to express their opinions to their partner. Each partner can openly discuss their thoughts and each partner listens to what the other has to say. In contrast, Sabourin (1995) found that "...abusive partners were less likely than non-abusive partners to respond to each other submissively..." (p. 277). That is, they fail to listen and yield to the other partner's conversation. Sabourin also found that abusive couples are more likely than non-abusive partners to use escalating aggressive language. When communication fails to influence the other individual in an abusive relationship, the result is a dysfunctional pattern that can lead to serious and harmful consequences for the abused woman.

In violent relationships, certain types and ways of speaking act as a catalyst for inevitable predictable responses (Hunter & Boster, 1987). Individuals who use aggressive or combative language are programmed to respond according to past responses. With subsequent verbal disputes, the individuals become more determined to stop their spouses' inevitable reactions and reciprocate with violence

(Hunter & Boster, 1987). For example, an abusive male might try appealing to a woman's sense of reason to convert her to his viewpoint. If the female refuses to see the male's viewpoint, or disagrees with his position, he may feel he has lost control and must (from his perspective) gain control and power over his spouse through physical violence.

In a battering relationship, the abused woman has to choose her messages carefully, or suffer the consequences of angering her spouse. Walker (1979) found that 91% of the battered women in her study would "...avoid subjects that he [the abuser] did not like to discuss; and avoid starting conversations with him, waiting instead until he began talking to them..." (p. 79). In addition, abuse victims try to cultivate more effective communication patterns in their relationships in an effort to defuse violence from their spouses. Unfortunately, a woman's communication skills and strategies do not seem to have much impact on their spouse's violent behavior (Walker, 1983, p. 94).

Abusive men often select communication tactics that remove responsibility for their actions from themselves. The woman's verbal communication strategies appear to do little to alter this pattern. Women in abusive relationships often do, however, develop verbal adeptness to address anticipated attacks of spousal abuse. For example, they learn to interpret or translate their spouse's verbal and nonverbal messages, and execute adaptive avoidant behavior

(Walker, 1983). Both partners in abusive relationships use communication strategies to manipulate their partners into meeting their demands.

Abusive Men's Communicative Processes

Most abusive men suffer from an inadequate ability to express their thoughts and feelings and have other communication deficiencies (Infante, et al., 1990). They use aggressive language and threats when trying to control their spouses during an argument. The communication of abusive men has been examined for dominance patterns, which involves coding messages as one-up, one-down, and one-across (Sabourin, 1995). According to this coding scheme, "a move towards control...[is] a one-up [message]..., while acceptance or seeking of control...is a one-down [message], a move toward neutralizing control or 'leveling' was designated as one-across" (Sabourin, 1995, p. 276). Abusive men primarily use one-up messages. They respond to their partners by interrupting, talking when their partners are not finished speaking, giving orders, and changing the subject (Sabourin, 1995).

The communication of abusive men also appears to reflect a demeaning and controlling orientation toward women in general. The spouses of abusive men "...reported that their partners had more negative attitudes toward women than did partners of nonviolent men" (Dutton, 1988, p. 9).

Abusive men seem to think of women as inferior to them, and tend to communicate in manipulative and combative ways.

Women's Communicative Responses in Abusive Relationships

Many women develop communication tactics and other bargaining strategies to delay, stop, or end the injurious cycle of abuse. Strategies that appeal to the male's sense of unity and chivalry are sometimes used to control an explosive situation (Harvard L. Rev., 1993). The woman may remind her spouse that they are a couple that has withstood many challenges during their association. The victim may also chide about her partner's possession of greater physical strength, and her less powerful physique (Harvard L. Rev., 1993).

Walker (1986) refers to the strategies developed by many women trapped in abusive relationships as "survival skills," but warns that survival skills keep women from developing appropriate skills to escape the relationship permanently (p. 93). Survival skills, which are largely verbal tactics to delay or end the violence, are successful in the beginning of the relationship, but become unsuccessful in stopping abuse near the end of the association. These skills lose salience near the end of the relationship because the escalating level of violence nullifies the effort. Developing survival skills can be a way of denying the reality of the situation by treating each abusive event while failing to solve the problem on a large scale.

Walker (1983) identified several communication strategies and other bargaining tactics women used in trying to express their anger and retain autonomy, while also avoiding abuse. Battered women in Walker's study said they used these bargaining tactics to get what they wanted: emotionally withdrew, restricted their spouse's freedom, stopped having sex, threatened to leave, used physical force against him or the children, said or did something nice, did what he asked, and showed anger by cursing or shouting either at him, or children or pets (Walker, 1983). These strategies were sporadically effective with some men.

Attributions in Violent Relationships

Within violent relationships both the partners make attributions of each abusive event. Men place blame on the woman or the situation when attributing responsibility, and women sometimes blame themselves or the situation. Men also seem to try to determine the intention of their spouse. Based on their spouse's perceived intentions, they feel compelled to act to adjust her viewpoint to match his.

Abuser's attributions. An abusive man tends to make attributions that place responsibility for violence on others. Abusers tend to attribute the cause of violence to factors beyond their control (Shields & Fox, 1980; Jones & Nisbett, 1971; Kelley, 1971). This observation may be obvious to the majority of nonabusive individuals, and yet not be apparent to those involved in the violence.

Research on the attributions of individuals (Wiley & Crittenden, 1992) found that, "One of the most common attribution patterns found among American men in achievement situations is to take credit for successes but to blame failures on external factors" (p. 261). Assuming the abused man sees the violent incident as a failure, he can relieve his guilt by blaming the woman. By making external attributions about abuse, men defend their self-esteem and ego; "It is ego-enhancing to take credit for success rather than to ascribe success externally, and it is ego-defensive to place fault externally rather than on self" (Weiner, 1992, p. 245). Men also attribute the cause of their behavior to factors beyond their control. The attribution pattern has been labeled self-serving (Bradley, 1978; Fletcher & Ward, 1988) because it allows the abuser to blame the victim and attribute his actions to her behavior (Wiley & Crittenden, 1992, p. 261).

Curtis (1994) argued that "...failures that are ascribed to an external cause, where another person is blamed for the outcome, are often associated with anger and resentment" (p. 256). In the instance of an abusive man, the external cause may be cognitively and verbally attributed to his spouse's behavior, thus escalating the anger and resentment he feels toward her and eventually leading to further abuse, and a continuing cyclical and escalating pattern of abuse.

Research has found that attributions made by abusive men are manifested in repetitive communication strategies which further manage failure and preserve self-image (Mclaughlin, Cody, & O'Hair, 1983). Abusive men tend to deny, justify, excuse, rationalize, or minimize the violence as a defense mechanism to preserve self-esteem and self-concept. Research (McLaughlin, et al. 1983) indicates that batterers tend to manage their failure events through verbal "...evasions, concessions, justifications, and outright denials" (p. 268).

Misunderstood factors that cause abusive men to deny, justify, or blame the victim are found in the individual's background and socialization (Dutton, 1988). An abuser's perception of causality has been previously established during earlier conflicts and is motivational for similar conduct in the future (Dutton, 1988; Straus, 1974). The beliefs and behaviors that lead to spousal violence become an attributional pattern. The abusers' attributions of the causes of their actions partially explain why spousal violence occurs in a repetitive and escalating pattern. If abusers always attribute cause to the same reason or reasons, they feel justified in reacting in a similar manner each time there is conflict.

Abusive men may not determine that they are responsible for the injury they inflict on their spouses. Abusers who do admit responsibility, attribute the cause to their

spouse. One study (Stamp & Sabourin, 1995), which used actual dialogue from abusive men, found that the men would occasionally admit to pushing or hitting, but not accept that the resulting injury was caused by their actions (p. 296).

Walker's (1984) study found a history among abusive men indicating that they tend to behave in manipulative and violent ways to achieve their goals. They were also found to be violent in other areas of their lives and have low self-esteem:

> The batterers [males] are also reported to have a history of temper tantrums, insecurity in relationships, unusual need for the woman to keep his environment stable and non-threatening, pathological jealousy and possessiveness of the women. They have an uncanny ability to be charming, manipulative and seductive to get what they want and hostile, mean and nasty when they don't succeed. In 67% of the cases, the batterer was reported to frequently abuse alcohol (p. 99).

Although the male was found to be a frequent abuser of alcohol, Walker argued that the male was not under the influence of alcohol during most of the battering incidents. This would indicate that another reason, other than being intoxicated, was responsible for the abuse inflicted on the woman.

Betancourt and Blair (1992) brought forward a cognition-attribution-emotion model of violence that states that the perceived control of causes (expectations) and intentions of actions have a major influence on anger. An abusive man becomes angry because of the perceived causes and assumptions of the intent of the other person. Abusive men

want to control and they also consider the intentions of womens' behavior, and those perceived cognitions influence their decision to become angry. Abusive men feel justified in becoming angry if a particular intent is perceived. For instance, if the abuser thinks that his spouse has intentionally done something to anger him, he believes she deserves the abuse, since her actions were deliberate.

Betancourt and Blair also argued that lower levels of empathic emotions, such as pity and sympathy, are sometimes associated with men, and are related to higher levels of violent reactions (p. 345). Since society frowns on men showing empathic emotions, men become programmed to withhold emotions and view them as a sign of weakness. When abusive men become violent, they project a macho image by avoiding the display of empathic emotions. This may enable them to elude the guilt sometimes felt after a battering incident.

Abusive men and others sometimes condone abuse in specific cases. Szechman (1985) believes that although most people object to individual cases of abuse, some feel it is justified in certain instances. Szechman and others (Hershorn; Michael & Rosenbaum; Alan; 1991) posit that cases where self-defense, or child abuse is involved seem to justify abuse of a woman by her partner. When a woman is abusing a child, or attacking her adult partner, Szechman believes most people would justify a man's physical violence against the woman, thus attributing the man's behavior to

retaliation or self-defense against an abusive person. The way other people within society attribute the cause of a violent man's behavior can help relieve his guilt associated with harming the woman and in that way can legitimize his violence. After all, if a man perceives that his behavior is due to self-defense, he can justify the abuse and deny responsibility, thus attributing causality to an external cause.

Abusive men protect their ego and justify their actions through an elaborate attribution process. Abusers manipulate the conflict situation so they can ascribe their violent behavior to something their spouse said or did to anger them. In this way, abusers are able to control their partner through force and absolve themselves of any responsibility for their behavior. An abusive man believes he has the right to get angry and use force if his spouse intentionally (from his perspective) says or does something he disapproves of.

Abused women's attributions for abuse. Abused women find themselves in situations that are not only dangerous, but also complicated and difficult to escape. Abused women often make attributions that excuse their abusers. These women frequently feel trapped and isolated. Curtis (1994) noted that "Individuals who attribute failures in a dysfunctional manner to factors which are stable and uncontrollable often feel helpless and hopeless" (p. 256). Battered women

may often find themselves in a situation where they feel their predicament is uncontrollable and hopeless, due to stable factors, (like his violence, or her lack of resources) which are not likely to change.

Where men often blame their partner for causing the abuse, studies indicate that battered women often feel responsible and blame themselves for provoking the attack (Shields & Hanneke, 1983). The abused woman "...internalizes the blame and will try to find something in her behavior to which she can attribute the incident" (Jensen & Gutek, 1982, p. 128). Some women blame themselves for angering their male partner, when in reality their partner may be normally violent in his dealings with others. The women contribute to their own victimization by attributing a man's abusive behavior to themselves, thus tacitly accepting the man's external attribution of battering. Further, according to Jones (1992), women who believed they were partially responsible for the violence stated that they might use a different strategy next time there is a conflict to avoid being battered (p. 356). Thus, battered women's acceptance of responsibility for the battering may influence their subsequent communication with their abusive partners.

Research indicates that other people also tend to hold a victim of male aggression responsible for her abuse. Jensen and Gutek (1982) found that 92% of those surveyed thought that the victim of sexual harassment and assault

could have done something to prevent the crime. They also found that women with traditional sex-role beliefs were more likely than nontraditional women to blame other women, as well as themselves, for being sexually harassed (Jensen & Gutek, 1982, p. 134). Extending this research to situations of spousal violence, it may hold true that many nonabused women and nonabusive men would blame the victim for the incident. If other people reinforce the victim's pattern of self-blame, they help ensure that she will remain in the abusive relationship, and enable abusers to continue their violence without being held responsible for it.

Complex factors, which individuals may not fully understand, join to cause a person to abuse, and an abuser and victim to excuse the abuse. Each person makes attributions of causality according to individual thought patterns and experiences. Ascriptions of causality depend, in part, on who the person is in the relationship and the extent to which that person is protecting his or her self-image.

ATTRIBUTION THEORY

Attribution theories focus on explaining how individuals attribute cause to events and behaviors. Basic tenets of attribution theories are: people explain ordinary events using common sense; perceivers measure intentionality to attribute cause to either internal or external causes; people protect their self-esteem by making internal attributions for success and external attributions for failure;

perceivers link observable behavior to unobservable causes. Attributional theories provide a useful framework for understanding and predicting the attributions that people make to explain the causes of spousal violence. In this section I will summarize attributional theories that provide important background information for studying attributions for spousal violence, and I will draw from these theories to predict the attributions that different types of observers express following an incident of spousal violence.

Covariation Model

Kelley's (1967) covariation model explains that a correlation between two variables means that knowledge of one variable enables prediction about the second variable (Weiner, 1992, p. 297). He argued that correlation is fundamental to the attribution process to ascribe causality to either personal (internal) or environmental (external) factors. He discovered that covariation factors such as distinctiveness, consensus, and consistency are necessary to make attributions. Distinctiveness examines a particular entity. If a person likes only one television program, that shows high distinctiveness. Consensus examines the opinions of others; when others also enjoy the television program that exhibits consensus. Consistency involves time; if the person enjoys the television program on repeated occasions, that action demonstrates consistency.

When relating consensus, consistency, and distinctiveness to spousal violence, we can see how people make inferences about the cause of the violent behavior. For example, if a man hits a woman regularly (high consistency) and also hits others (low distinctiveness), it can be inferred that an internal cause is responsible. He regularly hits people. However, if a man hits only one woman while she is in the process of hitting him (high distinctiveness), we may infer that the situation was responsible and make an external attribution for the event. If others also hit the woman (high consensus), the attribution is more likely to be external to the abuser.

Kelley's covariation model can be used to elucidate why abusive men and the women they abuse fail to attribute the abuser's behavior to internal causes. In order to make an external attribution to explain spousal abuse, abusive men and abused women may engage in a process of cognitive distortion. This faulty thought pattern may allow them to avoid placing blame on the abuser. During the contrition stage in the cycle of violence, for example, the abuser may convince the victim, and perhaps himself, that he will never be violent toward her again (Walker, 1979). This portrays the abuse as low consistency behavior. Further, although the abuser may be aware that he is violent in other contexts, he may perceive <u>high distinctiveness</u> in that he is only violent toward those he feels "deserve" it (including

his spouse). Finally, if both abusers and victims of abuse observed and/or experienced violence in their childhood families (Walker, 1983), and if others within their community endorse or tacitly approve of spousal violence (Gondolf, 1985), then the couple may perceive a situation of high consensus. As Kelley (1971) shows, the combination of perceived high consensus, low consistency, and high distinctiveness should result in external attributions. This has been found to be true among abusers and the abused woman; they tend to blame external factors such as the situation and the victim for the abuse.

Kelley's research also provides limited insight concerning what observers' attributions for abuse will be. Spousal violence literature characterizes abusive situations in a way that would lead informed observers to make internal attributions which blame the abuser for his abuse. First, as Walker's (1979) cycle of violence indicates, battering occurs repetitively, indicating that abuse is a <u>high consistency</u> behavior. Second, research shows that abusive males are likely to be violent in other relationships in addition to the spousal relationship (Walker, 1984), suggesting a <u>low distinctiveness</u> situation. Finally, although wife battering is still widespread in the United States, the fact that it is now considered illegal conduct should signal to the observer that there is <u>low consensus</u> that spousal violence is acceptable behavior. Based on low consensus, high con-

sistency, and low distinctiveness, the attributions of observers who are informed about the cycle of violence and view it negatively should be internal to the abuser.

The actor-observer bias (Jones & Nisbett, 1972) that has been documented in many studies also might lead observers to make internal attributions for abuse. However, based on the process of identification (Shields & Hanneke, 1983) and defensive attribution theory (Shaver, 1970), observers may attribute cause to external factors. These theoretical predictions are discussed in turn.

Actor-Observer Bias

Jones and Nisbett (1972) built on Kelley's work to explain the process through which individuals may make external or internal attributions. The attribution made depends on who the attributor is. Jones and Nisbett (1972) stated that "there is a pervasive tendency for actors to attribute their actions to situational requirements, whereas observers tend to attribute the same actions to stable personal dispositions" (p. 2). "Statements such as 'I hit him [her] because he provoked me' and 'You hit him [her] because you are an aggressive person' exemplify the anticipated actor-situation and observer-person inferential biases" (Weiner, 1992, p. 243). An abusive man would attribute the cause of his behavior to others or the situation, while an observer would usually link the violence directly to the man.

Research on actor-observer bias (Jones & Nisbett, 1971) supports the divergent attributions of abusers and observers. It was found that there is indeed a tendency for actors to attribute the cause of their behavior to the situation and observers to explain the same actions in terms of stable, dispositional characteristics of the actor (Backman, 1989). The actor(s) and the observer(s) base their judgements on different information. They differ in their knowledge of the context, the actors' emotional state, and their visual perspective. The actor cannot view his behavior very well and if he could, he would still see it from his own perspective. They may also differ in how they view the same information. For example, whether or not aspects of the situation are relevant to either the actor or observer affects the attribution of causality they make. Therefore, relevance affects the attributions of both groups.

An exception to the actor-observer bias may occur if the observer is an abusive man. The abusive observer may identify with the actor and blame the situation or the victim (Coates, Wortman, & Abbey, 1979; Lerner & Miller, 1978; Lerner, Miller, & Holmes, 1976; Lerner & Simmons, 1966; Wortman, 1976). Thus abusers are likely to blame external causes instead of themselves when they are explaining spousal violence, whether their focus is their own violence or the violence of another abusive man.

The process of identification also may extend to nonabusive men. Shields & Hanneke (1983) found a tendency for men to sympathize with the abuser and attribute the abuse to external factors. Male observers of abuse may identify with an abusive man on the basis of shared gender even if they do not act violently toward their own spouses. However, it is also possible that nonabusive men may refuse to identify with the abusive male in order to cognitively differentiate themselves from the acts of spousal violence. In this case the actor-observer bias should apply, and nonabusive men should attribute the abusive man's behavior to internal causes.

Defensive Attribution

Conflicting theories make it difficult to predict how women view the cause of abuse. The actor-observer bias research would predict that non-abused women would blame the abuser for his abusive behavior. Research has found that non-abused observers sometimes view the cause as being internal to the abuser (Andrews & Brewin, 1990). As suggested earlier, the covariation model also predicts internal attributions if observers are knowledgeable about the cycle of abuse.

However, Shaver's (1970) theory of defensive attribution suggests a different possibility. Shaver found that observers practiced a kind of self-preservation when assigning responsibility for an accident. If the person involved

in the accident was similar in any way to the observers, the realization that this catastrophe could happen to them was present. In order to deny that the accident could happen to them, the observers tended to attribute responsibility to the victim.

Applying this reasoning to a situation of observed abuse, nonabused women may see themselves as similar to the abused woman on the basis of gender. Thus, they may blame the victim in a defensive attribution to deny that abuse could happen to them.

The theory of defensive attribution may not apply to female observers who are currently in an abusive relationship themselves. If the abused observer acknowledges her own abusive relationship, it would not make sense to predict that she would deny that abuse could happen to her. However, abused women observers who are in denial of their situation may make attributions as defensive attribution theory predicts, blaming the victim for the violence. Blaming the victim in an external attribution style would allow her to continue denying the reality of her own abusive relationship.

The Self-Theory

The self-theory (Backman, 1989) proposes that people need to present a self-enhancing self-presentation to others. Based on self-theory, public image-management is another reason abusive men place blame on the victim. Since

spouse abuse is now illegal, abusive men may feel compelled to deny responsibility for their violence in public in order to provide a self-enhancing self-presentation (Backman, 1986). Backman argues that reported attributions must be consistent with the actor's desired self-presentation in social situations. Therefore, to avoid damaging self-esteem and being labeled a bad person abusers make external attributions dissolving themselves of blame.

The self-theory (Backman, 1989) is consistent with attribution theory predictions (Jones & Nisbett, 1971; Kelley, 1971) and supports the hypothesis that abusive men have a significant tendency to see their abusive behavior as externally caused. This theory, when combined with the concept of identification with the victim, can be used to predict the attributions that abusive male observers will make. As with the actor-observer bias, an abusive male observer may identify with abusers and make external attributions for their abusive behavior in order to portray all violent men including himself favorably. Some nonabusive men might also identify with an abuser on the basis of gender, and consequently attribute abusive behavior to external causes, in order to present men as a group in a favorable light.

Self-theory also can be used to make predictions about the attributions of women, but it is unclear whether these attributions will be internal or external. First, look at

the abused female who is making attributions about the violence in her own relationship. Self-theory might expect the victims of spousal violence to attribute the abuse to factors which are internal to the abuser. Blaming the abuser for the abuse portrays the woman as a victim, undeserving of and not responsible for the abuse. Abused female observers who identify with the woman being abused may also blame the abuser in order to present all abused women, including themselves, as victims. However, these predictions are inconsistent with research discussed earlier (for example, Shields & Hanneke, 1983 and Jensen & Gutek, 1982), which found that victims tended to make external attributions for a man's abuse, blaming the situation or themselves.

The logic of self-theory also can be used to predict that women may attribute cause to reasons external to the abuser. The abused woman may blame the situation or herself for her partner's abuse as a way to avoid presenting herself as a victim. She may be ashamed to admit publicly that her partner is responsible for his abusive behavior, because this admission might portray her a willing victim of an abusive husband in a violent marriage. Extending this line of reasoning, abused female observers may also blame the situation or the abused woman for the abuser's behavior in order to avoid the implication that she, herself, is a victim. Thus, self-theory makes different predictions about

the attributions of female observers, depending upon whether the women view a "victim" identity as a positive or shameful self-presentation.

Summary

A review of the literature on spousal violence clarifies the many issues involved and illustrates how far society is from solutions of any kind. What is known about the problem is that it is pervasive and continues in cycles that are often passed on within families and reinforced by social structures, beliefs, and practices.

The cycle of violence is thought to start in the child's family of origin. Children see abuse among their parents and may either abuse or be abused when they become adults. Children from abusive families have role models that show them that violence is a way of handling conflict.

The cyclical pattern of violence within an abusive relationship starts with verbal aggression and disputes, and escalates to physical violence. The male involved typically has low self-esteem, poor verbal skills, and a history of violence toward others. After the physical violence, the male usually shows a period of attrition and vows never to cause harm again. The abused woman is sure that he has changed and stays in the relationship. The tension rebuilds and the cycle is repeated with more conflict and physical violence. If an abused woman is lucky, she will escape

before her spouse does permanent harm. However, escaping is not easy for the majority of women.

When a woman reaches the point of escaping, she can go to an abuse shelter, or safe house, if one is available in her vicinity. Typically, shelters are in undisclosed locations and offer a valuable service to women who use them. Unfortunately, many women do not have the resources to locate and arrive at a shelter. Abused women are often isolated by their spouses and do not have financial resources outside of the relationship. Many have menial jobs and little education to rebuild their lives. If the abused woman does escape she typically finds that shelters are understaffed, overcrowded, and poorly funded.

The fact that shelters are under-funded suggests the low priority that our society gives to the problem of domestic violence. Law enforcement has just begun to recognize spousal violence as a punishable crime, even though it is now considered to be a criminal act in every state. In most states enforcement is largely at the discretion of a community's police officers, who may think that whatever they do is ineffective and that spousal violence is a private matter between couples.

Since police officers are often reluctant to interfere in a domestic dispute, the abused woman is left to solve the problem herself. Many women develop defense mechanisms such as fixing his favorite meal, being extra nice, or threaten-

ing to leave to delay or stop the abuse. Several researchers (Walker, 1984; Jensen & Gutek, 1982; Jones, 1992; McLaughlin et al., 1983) have found that defense mechanisms keep the woman from addressing the real problem and ending the abuse.

Abusive men always find a way to avoid responsibility for violence. They usually find external causes for their behavior, such as the woman or the situation. Abused women often hold themselves responsible for the abuse, and research has shown that victims are blamed by many others in society for not stopping the abuse against them. If other members of society make attributions that agree with the abuser and the victim, this helps perpetuate spousal abuse within the culture.

The search for a solution to abuse is hampered by the pervasive attitudes of society, which maintain violence against women. The way that society views and treats women perpetuates spousal violence. Women are seen as less powerful and are afforded less authority in business and social areas. These demeaning attitudes and circumstances send the tacit message that women are less valuable and it is acceptable to abuse them.

Basic tenets of attribution theories help explain why members of society have differing views of responsibility in cases of abuse. While trying to make common sense explanations for abuse, observers use their own background and

knowledge of abuse to guess what the cause might be. Observers and those involved in an abusive pattern perceive the intentions of the couple and attribute cause to either internal or external factors.

Three attribution theories and one psychological theory with attributional implications were used to formulate the hypothesis and research questions in this study. Covariation model (Kelley, 1967) explains how a correlation between variables leads to an ability to predict elements of the second variable based on knowledge of the first. Kelley discovered that covariation factors such as distinctiveness, consensus, and consistency are necessary information to enable a person to make attributions of causality. This theory suggests that although individuals who are informed about the cycle of violence should make internal attributions for abusive behavior, the partners in an abusive relationship are likely to make external attributions.

Second, actor-observer bias (Jones & Nisbett, 1972) is the attribution theory that explains the tendency for actors to attribute their behavior to situational factors, or external events, whereas observers tend to attribute the same actions to internal, or external factors depending on their perspective. This theory predicts that an abusive man will blame the situation or the victim (external), while observers may attribute the cause to something internal to

the abuser. Alternatively, observers may make external attributions if they identify with the abuser.

Third, defensive-attribution (Shaver, 1970) explains how observers of accidents and violence practice self-preservation when attributing responsibility for an event. If an observer is similar to the victim, then the realization that this unfortunate incident could indeed happen to them becomes a reality. This knowledge of vulnerability is too painful to face, so the observer preserves himself or herself by assigning blame to the victim in an internal attribution. Based on this theory, observers who identify with the victim are likely to blame the victim for abuse. Thus, women who identify with an abused woman may blame her for being abused.

The self-theory (Backman, 1989) states that people need to present a self-enhancing self-presentation to the public. The self-theory is consistent with attributional theories which predict that abusers, as well as observers who identify with the abuser, will make external attributions for violence. Self-theory predicts victims will attribute responsibility for abuse to either internal or external factors, depending on whether the image of "victim" is viewed positively or negatively.

RATIONALE

The attributions of observers are important to study as a possible link to finding a solution for spousal violence.

Although much has been learned through studying victims and abusers, how to stop the problem still is not known. Perhaps approaching spousal violence on a larger scale including observers, may reveal a potential source of help previously untouched. Relating the problem to everyone may draw attention and solutions from those not involved directly in the violence.

Research has discovered that society perpetuates myths about patriarchal dominance through tacit approval of abuse. Law enforcement is disparate in cases of spousal abuse, showing society's low priority for stopping the violence. If the pervasive problem of spouse abuse is to be eliminated, there must be greater involvement by members of society who are in a position to handle individual cases of abuse on a daily basis.

The continuing cycle of violence has been traced back to a child's primary family. The abusive family sets the stage for boys to become abusive men and girls to be the victims of abuse in later relationships. The influence of the family is strong and is a powerful role model to be followed, due to the lack of correct information. Knowledge gathered through research that is assimilated by society may be the only way to change faulty assumptions about abuse, therefore stopping the cycle.

Violent husbands have been found to attribute responsibility for their actions to either their partners or the

situations (Shields & Fox, 1980; Jones & Nisbett, 1971; Kelley, 1972; Walster, 1966; Shields & Hanneke, 1983). This finding is consistently supported by the logic of the attribution theories considered in this thesis. Kelley's covariation theory, for example, suggests that abusive men make external attributions for their violence because they view it as low consistency, high consensus, and low distinctiveness behavior. The actor-observer bias theory suggests that abusers will make external attributions because their focus is on the situational factors that impact their behavior rather than on internal dispositions. Finally, the self-theory expects abusers to make external attributions in order to enhance and preserve a positive self-presentation.

One concern in this thesis was whether the abusive male observer would also make external attributions for another man's abusive behavior. To the extent that abusive male observers identify with other abusers, they should engage in similar attributional processes (Shields & Hanneke, 1983). Thus, based on the concept of identification, both the actor-observer bias and self-theory predict that abusive male observers should blame the situation or the victim for the abuse.

Hypothesis: Abusive male observers will make external attributions for abuse by blaming the situation or the victim for their behavior.

It was unclear whether the abused observer of spousal violence would blame the abuser or the situation/victim for abuse. Based on self-theory, women observers who are in an abusive relationship may blame the victim or the situation instead of the abuser in order to avoid a victim identity, which would imply an abusive husband and bad marriage. However, abused female observers might instead accept a victim identity and blame the abuser to reject the portrayal that they, or any victim, deserve to be abused.

Research Question 1: Will abused female observers make internal, external, or both kinds of attributions for abuse?

It was also unclear whether nonabused women observers would make internal or external attributions for abuse. Based on defensive attribution theory, nonabused women may identify with an abused woman on the basis of her gender, and blame her in order to escape the implication that similar abuse could happen to them (Jensen & Gutek, 1982). Alternatively, nonabused women may make an internal attribution for the abuser's violence, consistent with the actor-observer bias. Nonabused women may also make an internal attribution in order to present abused women as victims who are not responsible for abuse.

Research Question 2: Will nonabused women observers make internal, external, or both kinds of attributions for abuse?

It also was not clear whether nonabusive male observers would make internal or external attributions for abusive behavior. The actor-observer bias research predicts that observers should make internal attributions for an abusive man's violence. However, nonabusive men could identify with the abusive man because he is a male, and therefore make an external attribution.

Research Question 3: Will nonabusive male observers make internal, external, or both kind of attributions for abuse?

Summary of Hypothesis and Research Questions

Hypothesis: Abusive male observers will make external attributions for abuse.

Research question 1: Will abused female observers make internal, external, or both kinds of attributions for abuse?

Research question 2: Will nonabused female observers make internal, external, or both kinds of attributions for abuse?

Research question 3: Will nonabusive male observers make internal, external, or both kinds of attributions for abuse?

Chapter 2

METHODS

Participants

Participants in the study were 145 sexually intimate heterosexual male and female students over the age of 19 at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. They were enrolled in various communication, sociology, criminal justice, business, and engineering classes at the University. Homosexuals and those not involved in an intimate relationship (n=25) were eliminated through screening questions on the questionnaire, resulting in 145 usable surveys from the total of 170 collected. Demographic information included age, education level, race/ethnicity, and marital status: 127 (88%) of the subjects were in the 19-25 year old age group, 12 (8%) were in the 26-35 group, 3 (2%) were in the 36-45 group, 2 (1%) were in the 46-55 group, and 1 (.7%) was in the over 55 age group. One-hundred thirty-two (91%) were undergraduate students, 12 (8%) were graduate students, and 1 (.7%) failed to report education status. One-hundred twenty-three (85%) were Caucasian, 13 (9%) were African-American, 4 (3%) were Hispanic, 5 (3%) were Asian. Ninety-two (63%) were either married or living together, and 53 (37%) were not married or living together.

Design

The independent variable of interest in this study was the subjects' involvement or noninvolvement in an abusive relationship. The four planned categories of this variable included abusive males, nonabusive males, abused females, and nonabused females. However, due to the absence of reported abusers and abused in the sample, only two categories could be examined: males and females who reported a low level of abuse. The dependent variable was the type of attribution for abuse, including internal, external, or a combination of both.

Instruments

Abusive men and abused women were to be identified through the use of a modified version of Shepard and Campbell's (1992) Abusive Behavior Inventory (ABI) (Appendixes A & B), which is a 5-point Likert-type scale used to measure both physical and psychological abuse that has occurred in the previous 6 months. The ABI questionnaire is a 30-item instrument which measures both frequency and severity of torment. Different versions of the ABI were used for females and males (Appendix A & B). The male version taps the tendency to be an abuser while the female version taps the amount of abuse experienced.

The rating scale was as follows: 1=never, 2=rarely, 3=occasionally, 4=frequently, 5=very frequently. The 30 items were summarized and averaged to create scores that

would range from 1 to 5. Since normative data on the ABI could not be found in the literature, thresholds for distinguishing high and low ABI scores for males and females were established based on intuitive reasoning. It was decided that a score just below the midpoint on the five-point scale (2.5) would serve as the cut-off point. Thus, an ABI score at or above 2.5 for male participants was selected to indicate a high tendency to participate in spousal violence. An ABI score for men under 2.5 was selected to indicate non-abuse or a low level of participation in abuse. Similarly, female ABI scores over 2.5 were to be interpreted as indicating that the participant had been highly abused by her partner during the past six months. An ABI score under 2.5 for women was chosen to indicate that they had experienced no abuse or low levels of abuse by their partner during the past six months.

Stimulus Situations

Three scenarios depicting moderate abuse were developed from previous literature (Sabourin, 1991) as stimulus situations for the study. Moderate abuse was chosen because "mild" abuse (e.g., hiding her car keys) may not be recognized as abusive and "severe" abuse may overlap with other crimes such as murder. "Moderate" abuse gives the most scope for attribution. Each scenario depicts a male abusing his female partner. Each scenario contained a short description of the interaction between the couple and physical

abuse inflicted on the victim by the abuser. Moderate abuse was defined as an emotional or physical act that causes pain or injury. The three moderate abuse scenarios and the instructions given to participants are shown in Appendix C.

A pre-test was conducted to verify that the three scenarios were perceived as moderately abusive. The pre-test sample consisting of 67 undergraduate male and female students was divided into three approximately equal groups and asked to read one of the three moderate scenarios, as well as one mild and one severe abuse scenario developed specifically for this pre-test (see Appendix D). Thus, although the mild and severe scenarios were identical for all subjects, there were three different scenarios of the moderate version. Twenty three subjects were given moderate scenario version 1, twenty five were given moderate version 2, and nineteen were given moderate version 3. Subjects were asked to rate the severity of the violence within each scenario on seven-point bi-polar scales ranging from extremely mild to extremely severe, no injury to great injury, and not traumatic to extremely traumatic.

The pre-test had two purposes. The first purpose was to establish that the three moderate scenarios were all viewed as equally severe, injurious, and traumatic. The second purpose was to determine whether the moderate scenarios would be perceived as more severe than the mild scenario, yet less severe than the severe scenario.

An alpha level of .05 was used for all statistical tests. Analysis of variance indicated that the 3 moderate scenarios were not perceived to be significantly different (F (2.64) = 2.33, p = .11) in terms of severity. However, due to missing data, this analysis included only one of the three severity items (i.e. extremely mild to extremely severe) as the dependent variable. A subgroup (n=37) of the respondents who provided complete data was used to check perceptions of severity using all three of the severity items. Results were consistent with the larger group of participants in terms of severity: (F (2.34) = 1.10, p = .34). Thus, the pre-test demonstrated that the three moderate situations were perceived as similarly severe. Although all three groups found the scenarios to be moderate, they leaned a little toward the severe end of the scale with the means for version 1 (5.7), and version 2 (5.2) slightly higher than the mean for version 3 (4.5).

T-tests were also conducted to determine whether the moderate scenarios significantly differed from the mild and severe scenarios in terms of perceived severity. T-test results were statistically significant: Moderate\severe, (t (72) = -8.34, $p \leq .0001$); moderate\mild, (t (72) = 4.74, $p \leq .0001$); severe\mild, (t (72) = 4.74, $p \leq = .0001$. Thus, moderate abuse situation versions 1, 2, and 3 were found to be more severe than the mild situation and less severe than the severe situation by all three groups of participants.

Procedures

All questionnaires were administered on campus by the principal investigator. The participants were given the ABI questionnaire, the scenarios, and a consent form and were asked to complete them according to the instructions on the surveys. In responding to the scenarios, subjects were asked to read the scenarios and make attributions for the man's violent behavior. Participants responded to the scenarios before the ABI to avoid any influence of the ABI on the open-ended attribution responses. In accord with the Institutional Review Board for human subjects, and to insure the safety of the women and to encourage frank and honest responses, the surveys were anonymous. Respondents also were free to discontinue their participation at any time. Demographic characteristics were assessed.

Coding

The scenarios ended with participants giving open-ended responses. The coding procedure focused on internal, external, and combination attributions that men and women make for abusive behavior. Answers were grouped into three coding categories: internal, external, or a combination of categories. Internal attributions were those that placed blame for an abusive incident on an internal personality characteristic of the abuser (e.g., he is naturally violent, he has an explosive personality, he needs to control his spouse, or he feels a need to prove his superiority through

a show of physical power). External attributions were those responses that placed blame for an abusive incident on an external factor in the situation. An example of this might be; the circumstances the couple was in caused the abuser to react violently towards the victim, or the victim caused the violence through her behavior.

Some answers attributed blame to both categories in a internal/external type of attribution. Those responses which were attributed to a shared responsibility between internal and external factors were coded into the "combination" category.

Inter-coder reliability was tested by comparing the researcher's coding decisions to those of a trained coder. The coder read and categorized 30 questionnaires (20%), accounting for 90 of the respondents' attributions. Using the Addison-Wesley Formula for testing reliability (Holsti, 1969), coding was found to be reliable with a credibility rating of 96%.

$$CR = \frac{2M}{N1+N2}$$

$$= 2 \times \frac{86}{90+90} = \frac{172}{180} = 95.5, 96\%$$

Analysis

The frequencies and percentages of internal, external, and a combination of internal and external attributions for each group of respondents was tabulated. As indicated earlier, although the groups of respondents (n=145) were planned to include abused women, nonabused women, abusive men, and nonabusive men, only nonabused women and nonabused men appeared in the sample. Examples of each type of attribution for each group of respondents were identified. In addition, the data within the internal and external attribution categories was examined to see if subcategories of attribution types emerged.

Chapter 3

RESULTS

This chapter reports the results of the study. First, I report the Abusive Behavior Inventory (ABI) scores and the way they were distributed. Second, I report the specific types of internal and external attributions made by the participants. Then, the results are reported for research questions two and three. Because high levels of abuse were not found among participants of either sex, the hypothesis and research question one were not able to be analyzed as planned.

Abusive Behavior Inventory

Participants' responses to the items composing the Abusive Behavior Inventory ranged from 1, indicating no abuse, to 4, indicating frequent abuse, with 1 being the most common answer for both males and females. No scores of 5, very frequent abuse, were found among this sample of participants. Among the 61 male particpants in the study, the mean ABI score was 1.24 and the median for males was 1.17. The mean ABI score for the 84 females in the study was 1.29 and the median was 1.13. The difference in ABI scores for males and females is due to the females reporting a slightly higher occurrence of abuse sustained than males reported to have performed.

The distribution of scores for males was divided at the mean (1.24) to create two groups, males with a tendency for low abuse (n=26) and males with a tendency for very low abuse (n=35). The distribution of scores for females was also divided at the mean (1.29) into low abuse (n=34) and very low abuse groups (n=50). However, chi-square analyses indicated no significant differences in the type of attributions made for the low and very low abuse groups for both sexes. Therefore, the two male and two female groups were collapsed together indicating the male tendency for low abuse and female low abuse categories.

Specific Types of Attributions

All participants read and made attributions for the 3 moderate scenarios. There were 4 possible attributions for the abuser's violence in each scenario. The first possible attribution was internal, indicating a personality trait or internal motivation held by the abusive man such as anger, insecurity, a need for control, or another explanation. The second and third possible attributions were external situational and external target. The external situational attribution was used when participants indicated a cause such as stress at work, the abuser had been drinking alcoholic beverages, abuse within the abusive male's primary home, or another explanation. The external target attribution was used if the participants gave a cause indicating that the conflict was the abused woman's fault, such as: she was

nagging, she was out of control, she threatened him, or another explanation. External categories two and three were collapsed together and both were reported in the results section as an external attribution. The fourth attribution was a combination of the internal and external attribution categories. A combination attribution was used when the participants attributed cause to more than one factor, such as, he was drunk (external), but he has a lot of anger (internal), or he could not help hitting her because he came from an abusive family (external) and he feared he was losing control over her (internal).

Examination of the attributions revealed 8 main categories and 1 "other" category. The first four categories involved internal attributions. Anger was the largest category with 38 (26%) of the participants attributing cause to this reason for scenario 1, 18 (13%) for scenario 2, and 31 (21%) for scenario 3. The second category was feeling-threatened with 4 (3%) participants attributing the cause of the abuse to his feeling threatened by the female in scenario 1, 4 (3%) for scenario 2, and 40 (28%) for scenario 3. The third category was control with 15 (10%) participants attributing the cause of the abuse to the male's need for control in scenario 1, 17 (12%) for scenario 2, and 15 (10%) for scenario 3. The fourth category was insecurity with 14 (10%) participants attributing the cause of the abuse to the male's feeling insecure in scenario 1, 0 for scenario 2, and

14 (10%) for scenario 3. Three additional categories focused on external attributions. The fifth category was drinking with 0 participants attributing cause to the abusers drinking of alcoholic beverages for scenario 1, 71 (49%) for scenario 2, and 0 for scenario 3. The sixth category was primary family with 18 (12%) participants attributing cause of the abuse to the abuser's childhood family for scenario 1, 7 (5%) for scenario 2, and 11 (8%) for scenario 3. The seventh category was the nagging category with 18 (12%) participants attributing his abuse to her nagging in scenario 1, 8 (6%) for scenario 2, and 0 for scenario 3. The eighth category was the did not want to category, with 4 (3%) of the participants attributing his abuse to his not wanting to do what she asked, 0 in scenarios 2 and 3. This category seems to blend external (she wanted him to do something) and internal (but he did not want to do it) attributions. The ninth category was the other category with 28 participants (19%) attributing cause of the abuse to various other reasons including internal and external, such as: that is what he wanted to do, she did not have the right to question him, men do not like to be put down, because he was the man he did not have to do what she asked.

Frequency of Internal, External, and Combination Attributions

The hypothesis predicted that abusive male observers would make external attributions for abuse and research

question 1 asked whether abused female observers would make internal, external, or combination attributions. As noted earlier, this hypothesis and research question could not be examined because none of the male or female respondents scored sufficiently high on the ABI to be considered abusive or abused. Thus, all males and females were examined under research questions 2 and 3, which asked whether nonabusive male and female observers would make internal, external, or both kinds of attributions for abuse. The results for each scenario are reported separately. The frequency of participants for each scenario varied because of missing data. Some participants left one or more scenarios blank.

Females. Research question 2 asked whether nonabused female observers would make internal, external, or combination attributions for abuse.

Seventy-eight female subjects made attributions to scenario 1 (housework). Internal attributions were made by 51 (65%) females, external attributions were made by 14 (18%) females, and 13 (17%) females made combination attributions for the cause of the abuse.

Sixty-six female subjects made attributions to scenario 2 (drinking). Internal attributions were made by 21 (32%) females, external attributions were made by 30 (45%) females, and a combination attribution for cause was made by 15 (23%) of the females.

Sixty-five female participants made attributions to scenario 3 (discipline). Internal attributions were made by 41 (63%) females, while 16 (25%) females made external situational attributions, and 8 (12%) made a combination attribution. (See Table I)

Males. Research question 3 asked whether nonabusive males would make internal, external, or both kinds of attributions for spousal violence.

Forty-nine male participants made attributions to scenario 1. Of these 49, 32 (66%) males attributed the abuse to an internal cause, 9 (18%) of the males attributed to an external cause, and 8 (16%) attributed to a combination of internal and external causes.

Thirty-four male participants made attributions to scenario 2. Nine (26%) males attributed the abuse to an internal cause, 17 (50%) males attributed to an external cause, and 8 (24%) attributed to a combination of internal and external causes.

Thirty-four male participants also made attributions to scenario 3. Seventeen (50%) males attributed the cause of the abuse to an internal cause, 16 (47%) males attributed to an external cause, and 1 (3%) made a combination attribution for the cause of the abuse. (See Table II)

TABLE I

FREQUENCIES AND PERCENTAGES FOR TYPES OF ATTRIBUTION FOR FEMALES

ATTRIBUTIONS	SCENARIO 1		SCENARIO 2		SCENARIO 3	
	FREQUENCY	%	FREQUENCY	%	FREQUENCY	%
FEMALES						
INTERNAL	51	65%	21	32%	41	63%
EXTERNAL	14	18%	30	45%	16	25%
COMBINATION	13	17%	15	23%	8	12%
TOTAL	78	100%	66	100%	65	100%

TABLE II

FREQUENCIES AND PERCENTAGES FOR TYPES OF ATTRIBUTIONS FOR MALES

ATTRIBUTIONS	SCENARIO 1		SCENARIO 2		SCENARIO 3	
	FREQUENCY	%	FREQUENCY	%	FREQUENCY	%
MALES						
INTERNAL	32	66%	9	26%	17	50%
EXTERNAL	9	18%	17	50%	16	47%
COMBINATION	8	16%	8	24%	1	3%
TOTAL	49	100%	34	100%	34	100%

Chapter 4

DISCUSSION

This chapter interprets the results of the study and discusses their theoretical and practical implications. First, I address the nature of the sample. Next, I give a summary of the results, compare the findings to attribution theories, and discuss the implications for society. I conclude with limitations of the study and directions for future research.

Levels of Abuse

None of the participants in this study reported inflicting, or being subjected to, high or moderate levels of spousal violence. Consequently, I was unable to test the hypothesis which predicted that abusers would make external attributions for their behavior. I also was unable to explore research question 1, which asked whether abused females would make internal, external, or combination attributions. Research questions 2 and 3, however, were examined. These research questions asked whether nonabusive females and males would make internal, external, or combination attributions for abuse.

The low levels of abuse among participants in this study was surprising in light of the spousal violence literature. The studies and theories included in my literature review suggested that spousal violence is widespread in

society. There are several possible explanations for the low levels of abuse I obtained. First, perhaps previous literature exaggerated abuse levels and the levels were never that high. Alternatively, the low levels of abuse among participants may be a sign that abuse levels in society are decreasing. It is possible that abuse has become less widespread, at least among college educated males. Another possibility is that the ABI instrument is flawed and as the self-theory (Backman, 1989) suggests, abusive male participants protected their self-image by refusing to admit committing any of the abusive behaviors suggested by the Abusive Behavior Inventory.

Attributions for Abuse

Internal attributions. The results of the study showed there was a strong tendency among participants to make internal attributions, placing blame for the abuse on the abuser. This finding was unexpected because a higher level of external attributions is supported by previous research (Shields & Hanneke, 1983; Jones, 1992; Jensen & Gutek, 1982; Backman, 1989; Shaver, 1970; Kelley, 1971). However, these results are consistent with three different theories.

First, the results support the actor-observer bias (Jones & Nisbett, 1972). The actor-observer bias theory contends that actors blame others or the situation for their behavior and observers tend to attribute responsibility to stable internal factors. Divergent attributions are thought

to occur because the actor and observer base their judgements on different information and from different perspectives. The finding that most observers attributed cause to something internal to the abuser supports this theory.

Second, as discussed earlier in this thesis, Kelley's covariation model (1967) suggests that observers who are informed about Walker's cycle of violence theory (1984) may make internal attributions, placing blame on the abuser. This reasoning is supported by the results of this study, which found participants making high levels of internal attributions. Since the abuse occurs repetitively, it can be viewed as a high consistency behavior. The abuser may be violent to others indicating a low distinctiveness situation. In addition, the fact that abuse is illegal in the United States would indicate that there is low consensus that spousal abuse is acceptable behavior. Considering these factors, those attributing cause may tend to make internal attributions.

Since participants in this study were college students, they may be especially informed about violence issues. Research gathered from females in abuse shelters, where education about spousal violence is abundant, showed a tendency for them to place blame on the male (Walker, 1979). Similar education levels among college students (both male and female) could result in internal attributions for spousal violence. This study suggests that at least a certain

segment of society holds abusers responsible for violence.

Third, the self-theory can also be used to explain the high occurrence of internal attributions, particularly among males. If the males in the study had identified with the abuser and tacitly condoned his behavior, they would have tended to make external attributions placing blame on the situation or the victim. However, if they were protecting their self-image, they would make internal attributions blaming the abuser in order to distinguish themselves from the abusive behavior.

The prevalence of internal attributions among study participants may be a hopeful sign for society. Making abusers responsible for their behavior is one way society can put pressure on them to stop being abusive. To the extent that the high number of college students who made internal attributions in this study reflects a changing viewpoint in the general population, perhaps more members of society are viewing abuse as unacceptable behavior. This could be a small step in the direction of stopping abuse.

External Attributions. Although scenarios 1 (housework) and 3 (discipline) showed high levels of internal attributions for both males and females, scenario 2 (drinking) showed a higher level of external attributions. Apparently, characteristics of the second scenario led the respondents to attribute the man's violence to external factors. Respondents to scenario 2 said that "the man has

become dependent on alcohol, and having his wife requesting that he stop made him angry," also "some people can't handle it when they are drinking and don't think or act the way they would when they are sober." The most frequent cause identified for the abuse in scenario 2 was the man's drinking. Perhaps drinking is viewed as an acceptable excuse for socially undesirable conduct such as spousal violence. A person under the influence of alcohol is considered to be unable to control his or her behavior.

A minority of female and male participants also made external attributions for scenarios 1 and 3. The external attributions made by females might be explained by defensive attribution theory. They may have blamed the victim to escape the implication that similar abuse could happen to them. For example, one female participant said that the woman in scenario 3 caused the man to loose his temper when she touched him; "since he was angry, she should not have put her hand on his chest."

The external attributions made by males suggest that the men may have identified with the abuser because he is a male, and thus made attributions from his perspective. Many of the men's external attributions suggest a belief in male supremacy. For example, one male participant said that the woman in scenario 3 did not have the right to question him and that he did not owe her an explanation for his beliefs on child discipline. The participant's statement that he

did not owe her an explanation suggests the underlying message that he is the man so he does not have to account for what he does.

Gender Differences

Although gender differences were not statistically significant, there appeared to be differences in the responses of males and females for one of the scenarios. For scenarios 1 and 2, the results revealed no differences in male and female attributions. The same percentage of males and females made internal attributions for scenario 1, and the percentage of external attributions for scenario 2 were very similar for males and females. However, for scenario 3, there was a difference of 13% in the percentages of internal attributions and a difference of 22% in the percentage of external attributions for males and females. While only 25% of the females made external attributions, 47% of the males attributed the abuse to an external cause.

There apparently is something about scenario 3 that elicited different responses from males and females. Male participants indicated in their open-ended answers that the male in the scenario felt threatened by the female. They seemed willing to excuse the abuse because of the situation. One male indicated that the female threatened the male by touching him, making him feel compelled to defend himself. Several other participants also saw the female's act of placing her hand on his chest as an aggressive behavior

against him, causing him to respond with force against her. These kinds of attributions suggest that male participants were more likely than females to adopt the abuser's point of view. Consistent with the concept of identification, combined with the actor-observer bias, the males in the study may have made fewer internal attributions for the abuse than females because the men identified with the abuser as a male. This tendency toward identification may have been prompted by scenario 3 more than by the other two scenarios.

The fact that even a minority of participants in the study made external attributions suggests that patriarchy is still influential within society. Patriarchy within society gives male members legitimate power by limiting the influence that women have in business and elsewhere. This power is harmful because the potential of women is ignored and is an unused resource that could be very beneficial for society. However, the fact that internal attributions were made by the majority of participants does give us hope for the future. Even though the participants were college students, they are a part of society. Most individuals did seem to hold the abuser responsible for his behavior indicating a low tolerance for abuse. Perhaps in the future abuse will be viewed by all of society as so appalling it simply will not be tolerated.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study is limited in several ways. First, the participants were students and their knowledge levels of abuse may be greater than the general population of citizens within the community, due to abuse being discussed within the classroom. The experimental subjects were younger and better educated than the bulk of the community. Therefore, these students do not represent the general population.

Education levels may make students more aware of issues surrounding spousal violence, and they therefore may more readily place blame for abuse where it belongs: on the abuser. Previous research (Sherman, 1984) has found the average abused woman to have only a 10th grade education and a lower income, and her partner may be of similar education. Less education, as well as other factors are usually present among abusers. According to the Nebraska Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Coalition (1995), abusers usually fit a certain profile, and have a history in which one or more of the following factors are present: unemployment; low income; drug or alcohol addiction; family history of abuse; age 18 to 30; high school drop out or; injury to the head.

On the other hand, there is a diversity of demographics among abusers and the abused, so at least some abusive individuals should be present among college students (Sherman, 1984). According to YWCA (1995) figures, one out of five women are abused in some way. It is possible that

those who are more educated about the issues of spousal violence might give the acceptable or expected answer to questions about abuse, rather than giving an honest response in regard to their behavior. Research (Sudman & Brandburn, 1982) also indicates that participants answering questionnaires tended to underreport socially undesirable behavior when study questions dealt with sensitive subjects. Perhaps these subjects were threatened by the question and may have underreported, even though they may have engaged in abuse or experienced it.

A second limitation of the study is that the social stigma within a classroom setting may have discouraged honest answers to inventory questions. Even though the responses were strictly anonymous, some individuals may have trouble admitting to themselves that they fall into an abusive category.

A third and related limitation is that I was unable to examine all of my research questions because my sample did not include individuals who reported being in an abusive relationship. This study could be replicated using samples that include abusers and abused subjects. Male subjects who have been arrested for abuse, and females who seek shelter from abuse may provide the most reliable subjects to test abuse levels and attributions.

Future research could develop a survey instrument that uses improved communication techniques to reword the ques-

tions so they are less threatening. Also, a survey instrument that tests honesty of response by indirectly asking about abuse may be less leading than the ABI. I used a version of the ABI which asked male participants how often they had performed abusive acts and the female version asked how often they have been subjected to these behaviors. A questionnaire that is less direct, and that does not make assumptions about the sex of abusers and victims, may obtain the most valid responses.

Future research should also assess the degree of identification between participants and those depicted in spousal abuse scenarios. Perhaps follow-up questions could ask participants to identify the similarities between themselves and those depicted in test scenarios. In this way the degree of identification could be calculated along with answers for each group of participants to determine how much the similarities affected the answers given.

Another study about spousal violence might focus on whether education level affects the amount and degree of abuse that victims suffer and abusers perform. The question for research is whether better educated people are victims of abuse less frequently than those who are less educated. Researchers might pinpoint different communication strategies that less educated participants of spousal violence use, or different societal attitudes that enter into the decision or need to abuse others.

Finally, it would be helpful in formulating an eventual solution to spousal violence if researchers could identify whether patriarchal beliefs are conscious or unconscious. That is, researchers could determine whether societal viewpoints that see women as less valuable in all areas are consciously held thoughts, or if members of society are governed by these thoughts on an unconscious level. If members of society hold unconscious thoughts of male dominance that accept patriarchy, increasing awareness levels about violence may change the repetitive cyclical pattern of spousal violence.

This study and others have potential to increase awareness levels of the issues involved with spousal violence and are a step toward finding a solution to the problem. Research which focuses on attribution patterns that participants of spousal violence and other societal members make can support couples in a more immediate way than resocializing the country. If researchers are able to expose attributions and the ways these are communicated, members of society may be able to understand that victims are not to blame for violence. Further research in this area may lead battered women to a better comprehension of their options, such as leaving the relationship, counseling, or legal intervention.

In addition to helping victims of spousal violence, this study and future research that eventually decreases

violence benefits society as a whole by decreasing the costs that are absorbed by the health care system, the legal system, and the workplace through lost productivity. Workers that have not been victimized are unconstrained by the emotional turmoil that is associated with abuse. This liberation is a step toward more fully developing their potential, which benefits all of society.

Appendix A

Behavior Inventory (For Females)

Circle the number indicating your closest estimate of how often the behavior happened in your relationship with your partner during the previous six months.

1= Never

2= Rarely

3= Occasionally

4= Frequently

5= Very Frequently

1. Called you names and/or criticized you 1 2 3 4 5
2. Tried to keep you from doing something you wanted to do (example: going out with friends, going to meetings) 1 2 3 4 5
3. Gave you angry stares or looks 1 2 3 4 5
4. Prevented you from having money for your own use 1 2 3 4 5
5. Ended a discussion with you and made the decision himself 1 2 3 4 5
6. Threatened to hit or throw something at you 1 2 3 4 5
7. Pushed, grabbed, or shoved you 1 2 3 4 5
8. Put down your family and friends 1 2 3 4 5
9. Accused you of paying too much attention to someone or something else 1 2 3 4 5
10. Put you on an allowance 1 2 3 4 5

11. Used your children to threaten you (example: told you that you would lose custody, said he would leave town with the children) 1 2 3 4 5
12. Became very upset with you because dinner, housework, or laundry was not ready when he thought it should be 1 2 3 4 5
13. Said things to scare you (examples: told you something "bad" would happen, threatened to commit suicide) 1 2 3 4 5
14. Slapped, hit, or punched you 1 2 3 4 5
15. Made you do something humiliating or degrading (example: begging for forgiveness, having to ask his permission to use the car or do something) 1 2 3 4 5
16. Checked up on you (examples: listened to your phone calls, checked the mileage on your car, called you repeatedly at work) 1 2 3 4 5
17. Drove recklessly when you were in the car 1 2 3 4 5
18. Pressured you to have sex in a way that you didn't like or want 1 2 3 4 5
19. Refused to do housework or child care 1 2 3 4 5
20. Threatened you with a knife, gun, or other weapon 1 2 3 4 5
21. Spanked you 1 2 3 4 5
22. Told you that you were a bad parent 1 2 3 4 5
23. Stopped you or tried to stop you from going to work or school 1 2 3 4 5

24. Threw, hit, kicked, or smashed something	1 2 3 4 5
25. Kicked you	1 2 3 4 5
26. Physically forced you to have sex	1 2 3 4 5
27. Threw you around	1 2 3 4 5
28. Physically attacked the sexual parts of your body	1 2 3 4 5
29. Choked or strangled you	1 2 3 4 5
30. Used a knife, gun, or other weapon against you	1 2 3 4 5

Please circle the appropriate answers about yourself.

Are you a male or female?

What is your age range? 19-25, 26-35, 36-45, 46-55, over 55

What is your educational background? Undergraduate, graduate student.

Are you Caucasian, African-American, Hispanic, Asian, American- Indian, Other? If other_____

_____.

Are you heterosexual, homosexual?

Are you married or cohabitating with a member of the opposite sex? Married or living together. Please circle the appropriate answer. All responses are anonymous and confidential.

Appendix B

Behavior Inventory (For Males)

Circle the number indicating your closest estimate of how often the behavior happened in your relationship with your partner during the previous six months.

1= Never

2= Rarely

3= Occasionally

4= Frequently

5= Very Frequently

1. Called her a name and/or criticized her 1 2 3 4 5
2. Tried to keep her from doing something she wanted to do (example: going out with friends, going to meetings) 1 2 3 4 5
3. Gave her angry stares or looks 1 2 3 4 5
4. Prevented her from having money for her own use 1 2 3 4 5
5. Ended a discussion with her and made the decision yourself 1 2 3 4 5
6. Threatened to hit or throw something at her 1 2 3 4 5
7. Pushed, grabbed, or shoved her 1 2 3 4 5
8. Put down her family and friends 1 2 3 4 5
9. Accused her of paying too much attention to someone or something else 1 2 3 4 5
10. Put her on an allowance 1 2 3 4 5

11. Used her children to threaten her (example: told you that you would lose custody, said you would leave town with the children 1 2 3 4 5
12. Became very upset with her because dinner, housework, or laundry was not ready when you thought it should be 1 2 3 4 5
13. Said things to scare her (example: told her something "bad" would happen, threatened to commit suicide) 1 2 3 4 5
14. Slapped, hit or punched her 1 2 3 4 5
15. Made her do something humiliating or degrading (example: begging for forgiveness, having to ask to use the car or do something) 1 2 3 4 5
16. Checked up on her (example: listened to her phone calls, checked the mileage on your car, called you repeatedly at work) 1 2 3 4 5
17. Drove recklessly when she was in the car 1 2 3 4 5
18. Pressured her to have sex in a way that she didn't like or want 1 2 3 4 5
19. Refused to do housework or child care 1 2 3 4 5
20. Threatened her with a knife, gun, or other weapon 1 2 3 4 5
21. Spanked her 1 2 3 4 5
22. Told her that she was a bad parent 1 2 3 4 5
23. Stopped her or tried to stop her from going to work or school 1 2 3 4 5

24.	Threw, hit, kicked, or smashed something	1 2 3 4 5
25.	Kicked her	1 2 3 4 5
26.	Physically forced her to have sex	1 2 3 4 5
27.	Threw her around	1 2 3 4 5
28.	Physically attacked the sexual parts of her body	1 2 3 4 5
29.	Choked or strangled her	1 2 3 4 5
30.	Used a knife, gun, or other weapon against her	1 2 3 4 5

Please circle the appropriate answers about yourself.

Are you a male or female?

What is your age range? 19-25, 26-35, 36-45, 46-55, over 55

What is your educational background? Undergraduate, graduate student

Are you caucasian, African-American, Hispanic, Asian, American-Indian, Other? If other_____

_____.

Are you heterosexual, homosexual?

Are you married or living together. Please circle the appropriate answer. All responses are anonymous and confidential.

Appendix C

Moderately Abusive Scenarios

Please read the following scenarios and indicate what you believe is the cause of the behavior.

1. A couple had an argument about her house-keeping. She responded that she did not have much time for cleaning after working full time and caring for the children. She suggested that he help with the house-work. After replying that men do not do house-work, he lost his temper, told her repeatedly to shut-up, and hit her in the face with his head. What do you believe caused the man to hit the woman?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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_____

_____.

2. A couple had an argument about his drinking. He was late arriving home from work because he had stopped at the bar for a few drinks. She commented that he had been drinking more than usual lately and she wanted him to stop.

He became angry, told her to stop nagging and slapped her across the face. What do you believe caused the man to slap the woman? _____

_____

_____

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_____

_____

_____

_____.

3. A couple had an argument about disciplining the children. She believed in taking away privileges and he believed in spanking. He was yelling at her and when he came too close to her physically, she placed her hand on his chest to keep him away from her. He pushed her and she fell and hit her head and back on the cocktail table. What do you believe caused the man to push the woman?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix D

Pre-Test Scenarios

Severe Abuse

A couple had an argument about the woman wanting to have dinner with a female friend who was in town for business. The male partner refused to let her leave the house. After hiding her car keys, the woman became upset and the argument escalated into a heated discussion of his rights as the man of the house. When she disagreed with him, he became so enraged that he grabbed her arm and threw her against the door. She suffered a broken arm and a skull fracture.

Mild Abuse

A couple had an argument about their differing ways of managing the family budget. She wanted to account for each purchase and he wanted a designated amount to spend freely each week. After discussing the situation, neither partner was willing to change or compromise to come to an agreement on their individual ways of spending money. After refusing to change his money spending habits, the male threatened to put the bank account in his name only so the woman would have no access to the couple's money if she did not adopt his style of spending.

Thank you for your participation in this study.

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