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Perceptions of Domestic Violence: Leaving vs. Staying in Abusive Relationships

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PERCEPTIONS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: LEAVING VS. STAYING IN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS

by

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Abstract

This study examined whether participants' attributions of blame and responsibility toward a victim of domestic violence were influenced by whether or not the victim left her abuser. It also looked at whether or not educational information regarding the difficulties of leaving a violent partner would affect these attributions. Participants, all adults from the United States, either read a vignette in which a woman victim of domestic violence stayed with her abusive husband, or left him. Prior to reading the vignette, some participants were given information about the problems associated with leaving a violent partner, and some were not. All participants completed a scale measuring victim blame. No main effects of whether the victim left or whether the participant received information were found on attributions of blame, and there was not a statistically significant interaction between the victim leaving and presence of information. An interaction between whether or not the participant was a victim of domestic violence and the presence of information was found on victim blame, but further research should examine this more closely with a study specifically designed to investigate victims and their perceptions.

Keywords: domestic violence, attribution theory, victim blame

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Introduction

Domestic violence is a highly prevalent and problematic concern. In fact, according to one report, one in every four women has experienced some type of domestic violence and 1.5 million women are estimated to be victims of domestic violence each year (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Even more terrifying is that by the end of any given day, more than three women and one man on average are killed due to domestic violence in the United States, with domestic violence comprising 30% of murders of women in 2000 (Domestic Violence Resource Center, 2013). Women who have experienced this abuse are more likely to suffer from emotional problems, lack of self-worth, physical health complications, and are at a higher risk for suicide (Bostock, Plumpton, & Pratt, 2009). Yet, despite these statistics, research on the perceptions of domestic violence has found that many individuals tend to normalize this violence by failing to recognize the violence as unacceptable or even by supporting the perpetrator, making it very hard for these women to seek and obtain help (Bostock et al., 2009).

The services that are currently available for people experiencing domestic violence are contingent upon their being able to leave the abuser, but there are many hardships and dangers that are attached to leaving (Ooms, 2006). While the majority of people assume leaving is the safest option, in reality, more women are killed trying to leave their abusive husbands than at any other point (Browne, 2004). Other difficulties and obstacles associated with leaving an abuser include financial hardships, isolation, loss of a family home, loss of contacts and support systems, and if children are involved, children's distress (Bostock et al., 2009). In a qualitative study where women who had sought help for domestic violence were interviewed, Bostock et al. (2009) found that

women who had reported their abuse often had higher potentials for escalated violence against them. It is clear from these findings that leaving is not only *not* these women's safest option, but potentially riskier than other alternatives. However, the systems in place that deal with domestic violence, such as police, service housing, and helplines, tend to disregard routes other than leaving (Bostock et al., 2009; Ooms, 2006).

These systems are created and maintained by individuals, and are influenced by the way these individuals perceive domestic violence and a woman's choice to leave a violent partner. Based on previous research on domestic violence and blame attribution, the current study examined whether people will hold the victim more responsible in a story depicting domestic violence when the victim had decided to stay with her husband, as opposed to if she had left him. It also investigated whether not having information regarding the dangers of leaving was a factor in these attributions of blame and responsibility to the victim.

Domestic Violence

There have been many definitions of domestic violence. For the purpose of this study, domestic violence was defined according to the United States Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) as instances of abuse in which a partner in a relationship threatens, isolates, terrorizes, manipulates, injures, coerces, or blames the other partner, eventually obtaining control over the other partner. This can occur in emotional, physical, sexual, economic, or psychological contexts (OVW, 2013).

In these instances of domestic violence, third parties may expect that a woman would simply leave her partner. However, there are extensive, documented difficulties

linked with extricating oneself from a domestic violence situation, supported by the

evidence that the majority of women leaving shelters return to their batterers (Peled,

Eisikovits, Enosh, & Winstock, 2000). As mentioned earlier, these difficulties may

include more severe future violence, financial distress, loss of contacts, and even murder

(Bostock et al., 2009; Browne, 2004). Beyond these dangers, women stay with their

batterers for many other reasons. Browne (2004) divided these reasons into psychological

and practical ones. A common psychological issue includes a prisoner of war mentality

that inhibits these women's fight or flight response and ability to plan ahead (Browne,

2004). Additionally, Peled et al. (2000) noted psychological processes such as traumatic

attachment that could motivate women to stay with their abusers. Women may also stay

due to loneliness, embarrassment, and fear (Hendy, Eggen, Gustitus, McLeod, & Ng,

2003). Browne's (2004) practical reasons include employment difficulties, children's

schooling, and custody problems. The issue of custody is especially crucial to consider,

because this often facilitates men in tracking and pressuring women (Browne, 2004).

Ooms (2006) listed some universal themes in women who stay with their batterers that

include fear for their financial situations and their lives, fear for their children's lives, the

belief that their children need their father, as well as an array of cultural reasons. Hendy

et al. (2003) expanded on these issues by including child-care needs and lack of social

support to the practical reasons a woman may stay. In addition, leaving is often made

harder by the sheer lack of assistance in available services, such as the police (Peled et

al., 2000).

Religion is yet another reason why a woman may be inclined to stay in an

abusive relationship, as some religious texts suggest absolute control of the husband over

his wife (NRCDV, 2007). These interpretations of religions include, but are not limited to, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity (NRCDV, 2007). Women may view marriage as a religious commitment, and therefore believe that they cannot get a divorce, or some women may feel that they have failed to maintain religious values of peacekeeping in their relationships, and blame themselves for the violence (NRCDV, 2007). Christian leaders, for example, frequently emphasize biblical passages that instruct women to maintain their marriages and families, rather than passages that stress God's equal love for both partners in a relationship (Ooms, 2006).

It is also important to recognize that many women stay in violent relationships due to carefully thought out and conscious decisions (Peled et al., 2000). While some women are indeed trapped in abusive relationships, many others have made a rational decision having looked at the costs of leaving an abusive partner. These women recognize their partner as being both loving and dangerous, and associate positivity with their partner (Peled et al., 2000).

It is evident that women have numerous motivations for staying in abusive relationships despite their costs, and yet the research indicates that lay individuals are largely unaware of these challenges. In a study that used telephone interviews to discuss domestic violence, Worden and Carlson (2005) found that 63.1% of participants believed a woman could successfully leave a relationship if that is what she really wanted. Even victim advocates have been found to overstress a woman's ability to leave her abuser (Dunn & Powell-Wliams, 2007).

This misconception regarding a woman's ability to leave is also unfortunately reflected in the available systems of support for domestic violence survivors (Bostock et

al., 2009; Ooms, 2006; Peled et al., 2000). In an interview that discussed a community

psychologist's research and perspective, Ooms (2006) reflected on how the current

services fail women who do not leave their abusers because these interventions are only

targeted for women who leave. Bostock et al. (2009) also found that the systems in place

for women victims failed to account for the costs of leaving an abuser. For example, the

temporary housing that is offered by most services is often perceived as unsafe and

isolating by women survivors, to the point that some women compared the extreme

loneliness of these shelters to the domestic abuse itself (Bostock et al., 2009).

Furthermore, Peled et al. (2000) discussed how the standards for a service's or an

intervention's success are based on the woman's ability to leave her abuser and stay

separated. Peled et al. (2000) noted how there are very limited interventions designed for

women who want to stay with their partners, and little research has been done on how to

overcome violence while staying in a relationship. Ooms (2006) also argued that

intervention strategies need to better understand cultural, ethnic, and racial concerns for

female survivors which may affect their ability or choice to leave. For example, the

community psychologist that Ooms (2006) interviewed reminds the reader that many

Latina victims are faced with immigration threats from their abusers. Additionally, Latino

communities tend to have more strict gender roles due to religion and familial values that

may inhibit a woman from leaving due to her sense of responsibility to her family (Ooms,

2006).

     The importance of services for domestic violence victims being able to address

the needs of survivors is indisputable, however. The continuation versus the challenging

of domestic violence has been found to correlate with the ways in which services and

support systems respond to domestic violence (Bostock et al., 2009). Bostock et al.

(2009) found certain factors in services that actually reinforced domestic violence

including ineffective protection, an absence of a safe space, and a lack of recognition of

abuse. These factors all at least partially result from an expectation of the woman to leave

by requiring her to lose her home and other aspects of security in order to receive help

(Bostock et al., 2009). By doing so, these services disregard the dangers and problems

women face in leaving and create the characteristics above, such as a lack of safety and

insufficient recognition of abuse. Intervention strategies that require a woman to leave

also tend to disempower women by neglecting their autonomous choices, and can

therefore lead to more women dropping out of treatment (Peled et al., 2000).

Attribution Theory

Considering the prevalence, severity, and complications of domestic violence, it

may be surprising that some people are inclined to blame the victim, at least to some

degree. However, many people do place some responsibility on abused women, perhaps

partially from an unconscious desire to protect their own sense of security. Heider (1958)

introduced attribution theory by pointing out that humans see cause and effect

relationships even when there are none, and that we make these causal inferences

instantly based on our surroundings. According to Heider (1958), we, as humans,

generally explain others' behavior with internal attributions, attributing their actions to

personality factors, while we explain our own behavior with external attributions, based

on situational factors. These biases in our social perception may be motivated by what

Shaver (1970) called the defensive attribution hypothesis. This hypothesis stated that

people need a sense of control, so we believe that negative things only happen to those who deserve it and not to ourselves. This explains why our victim blaming increases when we feel dissimilar to victims and decreases when we feel more similar to them. Similarly, Lerner (1980) believed it is because of humans' belief in a just world that we tend to make these types of attributions. In his just-world hypothesis, Lerner stated that humans want to believe the world is fair so we tell ourselves people are getting what they deserve when bad things happen to them, also partially explaining victim blaming.

Kelley (1967) expanded on Heider's attribution theory with the covariation model, which identifies the type of information we use to make internal or external attributions about others' behavior. According to this model, we look at the consensus, distinctiveness, and consistency of actions and make judgments by comparing these elements to determine whether behavior is due to internal or external factors. A behavior is considered internally driven if no one else is displaying this particular behavior (lack of consensus), if this behavior occurs in similar situations (lack of distinctiveness), and if the behavior happens every time a situation occurs (high consistency) (Kelley, 1967). When making judgments about actors in a domestic violence situation, it is possible that we use these attributional rules to determine whether behavior is due to situational, or personality-driven, characteristics. For example, when blaming a woman victim, many people are wrongfully driven to believe that most victims are able to leave their relationships, thereby coming to the conclusion that there is a lack of consensus in the woman's decision to stay. In this situation, the woman's choice to stay is considered an internal attribution, and therefore more "blameworthy," while the situational factors that may have influenced her decision are ignored.

Jones and Davis (1965) also discussed the process of making internal attributions with their correspondent inference theory. According to this theory, people pay closer attention to internal behaviors of others when they see corresponding motives and behaviors. If we make the judgment that an action is intentional, then we compare this behavior with alternative ones by looking at choice, non-common effects, social desirability, hedonistic relevance, and personalism. The more voluntary, distinctive (unlike other options), socially unacceptable, personal, or interesting an action seems to be, the more we judge it to be due to dispositional factors, rather than external ones. In relation to domestic violence, it is possible that people are more likely to blame a woman for her own abuse because they view her behavior of staying as voluntary and socially unacceptable, and therefore, internal.

Bradbury and Fincham (1990) separated these internal attributions of blame into three distinct categories when applying them to marriage. They defined attributions of cause as explanations for an event, attributions of responsibility as an actor's accountability, and attributions of blame as an individual's liability for punishment. This present study focused on attributions of responsibility and blame, according to these distinctions.

Attribution Theory and Victim Blaming: Foresight, Provocation, Gender Roles, and Alcohol

Attribution theory can be used to explain the process of victim blaming in domestic violence situations, and may help identify the underlying reasons why individuals often place responsibility on abused women. Skiffington, Parker, Richardson,

and Calhoun (1984) used attribution theory to study domestic violence perceptions by instructing participants to empathize with either the victim or the aggressor in a story depicting domestic violence. It was found that empathy with either character led to making more external attributions for that character, revealing that empathy is an important factor in perceptions of blame in domestic violence. This relates to Shaver's defensive attribution hypothesis (1970). According to this hypothesis, we blame people less when we feel more similar to them in order to maintain a sense of control in the world, which could explain why we blame less when we empathize more.

These attributions of blame can be affected by certain elements of domestic violence situations. Reddy, Knowles, Mulvany, McMahon, & Freckelton (1997) studied factors that led people to make attributions of responsibility to victims, by presenting vignettes of domestic violence to participants and asking questions about their perceptions. They found that attributions of responsibility to women victims were correlated positively with the degree of foresight she was perceived to have, and negatively with the perceived degree of difficulty to stop the abuser. Attributions of causality were most affected by foresight. This study highlighted the idea that victim blaming is heightened when we believe the victim could anticipate the abuse, suggesting that it is her responsibility to get out of the situation. The assumption that women are expected to somehow stop this violence is clear, as the woman's responsibility is perceived as greater as she is more "able" to stop her abuser. Also interesting in this study's findings is that in one variation of the story, responsibility predictors such as the perpetrator's anger and the perpetrator's drunkenness, were the same for blame perceptions of both the victim and her abuser (Reddy et al., 1997). Participants blamed

both the woman the man more when the man was drunk and angry, regardless of the fact

that these factors only influenced the male perpetrator's behavior (Reddy et al., 1997).

This implies the belief that it is the woman's responsibility to be aware of certain

elements that may lead to her partner's abusive behaviors and adjust her behavior

accordingly.

These findings relate to Jones and Davis's correspondent inference theory (1965),

in that it is possible the participants perceived the woman's abuse as being voluntary,

since she did not "stop" her abuser. In this case, the woman is blamed more because her

choice to stay and be abused is considered not only intentional, but also a personality

flaw. This is supported by Lerner's just world theory (1980) as well, since participants

may have been driven to use the factors available to them (in this case, foresight and

ability to stop the abuser) as reasons to believe the woman was getting what she deserved,

and preserve their belief that the world is good.

Even volunteers working with domestic violence victims have demonstrated how

issues of foreseeability can affect victim blame. Volunteers stressed that women needed

to be careful about where they go and when, suggesting that women bear the

responsibility for getting hurt in dangerous situations (Thapar-Björkert & Morgan, 2010).

While none of the volunteers claimed to blame the victims when asked directly about

blame, many of their statements contradicted this, including the expression Thapar-

Björkert and Morgan's (2010) study was titled after, "But sometimes I think….they put

themselves in the situation." The assumption made by this volunteer is that the woman

knows to expect abuse, and therefore the violence she has experienced is her fault.

The idea that foreseeability leads to greater victim blaming and attributions of responsibility also can be seen in a study by McCaul, Veltum, Boyechko, and Crawford (1990). While the incidents of violence presented in this study were acts of rape, as opposed to domestic violence, the findings are still relevant and coincide with the findings of Reddy et al. (1997). After student participants read rape descriptions, they were asked questions and instructed to assign blame to actors in these stories. Foreseeability and victim intention, as determined by inferences about the victim's sexual pleasure, were found to be predictors of victim blaming (McCaul et al., 1990). This relates to Shaver's defensive attribution hypothesis (1970) and Lerner's just world theory (1980), since participants may have been motivated by the belief that bad things, such as rape, only happen to those who deserve it.

Victim blaming in cases of rape is often affected by consistency factors, so that more fault is assigned to victims who have been raped before (Anderson, Beattie, & Spencer, 2001). These consistency factors come from Kelley's covariation model (1967), in which internal attributions are made when a behavior happens every time a situation occurs. This finding, if applied to domestic violence, may help explain people's tendencies to attribute responsibility to victims, because it corresponds with the influence of foresight in domestic violence perceptions. If a woman has been continuously abused, she probably has a greater ability to predict it happening again, and thus is blamed more.

Another factor that tends to increase attributions of blame and responsibility is the perceived provocation by the victim (Pavlou, 2001; Witte, 2004; Witte, Shroder, & Lohr, 2006). In a study conducted by Pavlou (2001), participants read one of four scenarios of domestic violence with different levels of provocation by the victim, ranging from none

to using both verbal provocation and jealousy. Provocation by a victim was positively

correlated with greater attributions of responsibility to the victim. Similarly, Witte

(2004) presented participants with vignettes, manipulating provocation, violence

intensity, and expectation of violence. Victim provocation was again positively

correlated with attributions of responsibility towards the victim of domestic violence.

This study also showed that more responsibility was placed on the victim when the

perpetrator did not seem to have a violent past, suggesting the victim's perceived

provocation was the source of the new abusive behavior. Verbal aggression, in

particular, was found to lead to greater victim blaming in another study using vignettes

(Witte et al., 2006), suggesting that victim provocation is a major factor in victim

blaming. These findings highlight Jones and Davis's (1965) correspondent inference

theory by showing how people make attributions based on corresponding motives and

behaviors. Using this theory, participants in these studies may have assumed the victims

intentionally behaved in ways to elicit violence against them, due to the perceived choice

these women made to be provocative toward their partners. Since the abuse seems

predictable, these women are viewed as having made voluntary and personality-driven

decisions that led to violent outcomes.

In addition to foresight and provocation, stereotypes regarding women's

traditional gender roles may play a part in victim blaming. In a study by Capezza and

Arriaga (2008), the gender role of a wife in a domestic violence story was manipulated to

be either a traditional housewife figure or a non-conforming career woman. They found

that victim blaming was higher for the nontraditional woman than for the housewife, and

concluded that this was due to the perceived warmth of these roles. Women with a non-

conforming occupation and behaviors were associated with less warmth, and therefore more blame (Capezza & Arriaga, 2008). Thapar-Björkert and Morgan (2010) also found that in interviews with volunteers in domestic violence support systems, there existed a readiness to blame women who do not stay within "acceptable," i.e. traditional, forms of behavior, femininity, or dress.

Another factor that influences attributions of responsibility in domestic violence situations is alcohol. Alcohol is an especially interesting influence, since it tends to affect perceptions in contradictory ways. While alcohol is often viewed as an excuse for an abuser's behavior, reducing his responsibility for his actions, it is meanwhile used to place more blame on the victim, for not seeing it coming or adapting to the drunk perpetrators' ways (Reddy et al., 1997). This is an important inconsistency to be aware of, considering that alcohol is a major contributing factor to domestic violence due to its impact on abusive behaviors (Thapar-Björkert & Morgan, 2010). Even volunteers working with victims displayed belief in this domestic violence myth, by stressing the fact that the perpetrators were different, more agreeable people when they were sober ("They're lovely when they're sober"), and emphasizing the victims' responsibility to mold behaviors to the perpetrators' drunkenness (Thapar-Björkert & Morgan, 2010).

Attributions and Leaving

Considering that people hold a strong belief that it is a woman's responsibility to leave her abuser, it would then follow that people's attributions would be affected by whether or not the woman leaves her violent husband. This is supported by the finding that people blame victims more when they returned to their abusers in scenarios depicting

domestic violence (Yamawaki, Ochoa-Shipp, Pulsipher, Harlos, & Swindler, 2012).

Yamawaki et al. (2012) used a minimization scale, a victim blame attribution scale, a

perpetrator excuse scale, and a domestic violence myth scale to assess participants'

perceptions of domestic violence. In this study, 194 undergraduate participants read one

of four scenarios of domestic violence, which differed in the couple's relationship and

whether the victim dropped charges against her abuser and returned to him, and then

participants filled out the scales above. Yamawaki et al. (2012) found that along with

victim blame attribution, the level of minimization for the abuser's actions also increased

when women returned to abusive partners. Yamawaki et al. (2012) also found an

interaction between domestic violence myth acceptance and greater blame effect when

the woman returned, suggesting that the interface of cognitive and situational factors is

important when addressing issues of women leaving or returning to their abusers and

victim blaming.

How is it that this belief in a woman's ability to leave has become so prevalent?

Dunn and Powell-Williams (2007) suggested that society's focus on individualism leads

to this overstress of a woman's choice, as opposed to the recognition of her situational

limitations. Even victim advocates were inclined to emphasize a woman's ability to leave

her husband, and therefore not fully recognize these victims' situations (Dunn & Powell-

Williams, 2007). This relates to general theories of attribution because these advocates

made internal attributions for the victims' choice to stay or leave, rather than realizing the

possible external influences, much like Heider (1958) would have suspected, as well as

Kelley's covariation model (1967) and Jones and Davis's correspondent inference theory

(1965) would predict. This thought-process is unfortunately a prevalent theme in

psychological research regarding domestic violence. Bostock et al. (2009) discussed how the majority of research on the topic has focused on women's psychological resources, thereby reinforcing their responsibility. By concentrating too heavily on women's internal and personal factors, people expect women to leave violent relationships, because they ignore the situational circumstances. They are then likely to blame these women more when they do not successfully withdraw from the violent relationship because they have overlooked the external factors.

A clear example of how people's judgment of blame and responsibility are affected by this overemphasis on agency and internal attributions can be seen in the interviews Thapar-Björkert and Morgan (2010) conducted with volunteers for victims of domestic violence in the UK. These volunteers, who have been trained to offer help and support to these women, still succumbed to the culture of blame and responsibility when it came to the victim's choice to leave her abuser. This qualitative study interviewed 15 volunteers ages 22 – 65 (13 of which were women), and found that victims were still held responsible for their victimization, while the perpetrators' responsibility was lessened, as well as that these volunteers were unconscious of the fact that they were victim blaming (Thapar-Björkert & Morgan, 2010). When explicitly asked, volunteers denied blaming women for staying with their partners or returning to them, yet they still demonstrated their belief that women are responsible for making the "right" choice to leave. One volunteer said of a celebrity domestic violence case: "And I think she had a pretty raw deal…but on the other hand, so did he, because you [*sic*] knew he was violent, but again she kept going back for more, didn't she? And she married him *knowing how violent he was*" (Thapar-Björkert & Morgan, 2010). These beliefs reveal the common perception

that women are complicit in their abuse because they make the choice to stay or come

back for it.

The Current Study

       This study aimed to examine the particular influence of choosing to stay in an

abusive relationship on individuals' attributions of responsibility and blame for the

victim. Further, the study examined whether or not having information regarding the

difficulties of leaving the home would affect these perceptions. By investigating the

effect of this educational information on perceptions of victims' responsibility, this study

tested the hypothesis that information regarding victims' experiences is relevant in

perceptions of blame and responsibility toward women who leave or stay in violent

relationships.

       While research supports the idea that victims are more likely to be blamed for

returning to their abusers (Yamawaki et al., 2012), it does not address victim blame as it

relates to the initial act of leaving a partner as compared to staying with one. By

concentrating on leaving, the current study clearly separated attributions of blame

between women who chose not to leave at all, versus those who left. Previous research

has, however, revealed the negative attitudes that people have towards women who

decide to stay in violent relationships (Thapar-Björkert & Morgan, 2010), suggesting that

people will blame women more who stay with abusive partners. Also, while previous

literature has noted the societal factors that contribute to the expectation of women to

leave violent partners, it has not tested possible solutions for changing this pattern. The

current study addressed these gaps by examining blame attribution as it relates explicitly

to a woman leaving or staying with an abuser, and by proposing that a lack of information regarding the difficulties of leaving the home is a major reason that people blame women who stay in violent relationships.

Based on previous research on attributions and domestic violence, the current study incorporated factors that can lead to greater victim blaming in a vignette depicting domestic violence, such as foresight, provocation, and the perpetrator's use of alcohol (Pavlou, 2001; Reddy et al., 1997; Witte, 2004). This was done in order to establish an inclination to make internal attributions regarding the victim, so that changes in whether the woman in the story left and whether the participant received educational information could have affected these perceptions. Attributions of responsibility and blame were assessed after participants read a short story in which the victim either left her abuser or chose to stay in the relationship, and after half of the participants were given information concerning the difficulties and dangers associated with leaving a violent relationship.

First, it was hypothesized that participants would be more likely to blame the victim in the story in which she stays, as opposed to the story in which she had left. This was hypothesized due to the likelihood that participants would make internal attributions of blame regarding the victim in the story, and that negative attitudes are associated with women who stay with or return to their abusers. This hypothesis was tested by comparing participants' scores on a measure of blame and responsibility attributions between the vignette condition in which the woman stays, and the vignette condition in which the woman had left.

Second, it was hypothesized that participants who were given information on the reasons women stay in violent relationships prior to reading the stories would rate victim

blame and responsibility lower than for those who did not receive this information. This was hypothesized because the information highlights the external factors involved in domestic violence situations.

The final hypothesis was that there would be an interaction between information and effects of staying, such that participants who received information before reading the story would have less disparities in victim-blaming between the leaving and staying conditions, while the participants who did not receive this information would have greater differences between the leaving and staying conditions (with the victim being blamed more when she did not leave). This was hypothesized based on the assumption that higher victim blame toward women who stay in violent relationships is due to making internal attributions about the victim, and that educational information would remove this tendency and reveal external factors in considering the victim's situation.

Method

Participants

Adults from the United States were recruited to participate in this experiment. Responses were excluded if participants did not fill out the blame questionnaire or entered an age below 18 years. The final sample consisted of 397 participants recruited through Mechanical Turk (MTurk), a site through Amazon.com that can advertise surveys and pay participants, and Facebook (www.facebook.com). Two hundred and thirty-one females (58.2%), 152 males (38.3%), and 2 (0.5%) identified as "other" participated. Three hundred and nine (77.8%) participants identified as Caucasian, 31 (7.8%) as African-American, 21 (5.3%) as Latino, 26 (6.5%) as Asian, 10 (2.5%) as Native American, and 2 (0.5%) as other. The mean age of participants was 40.62 ($SD =$

99.34). Participants were compensated $0.25 for participating. All participants were

treated within the APA Ethical Principals of Psychologists.

Materials

     Stimulus Materials. The experimental material included an informational fact

sheet about the difficulties and dangers associated with leaving an abusive relationship,

as well as two alternate vignettes about domestic violence, all presented in an online

survey. The information consisted of 11 facts that were meant to shed light on why so

many victims do not leave abusive partners. This information included facts about

heightened violence, practical problems like finances and custody issues, psychological

problems, and religious beliefs, and included items such as "Women who report abuse

have higher potentials for escalated violence against them by their abusers," and

"Custody problems after leaving often facilitate abusers in tracking and/or pressuring

victims." All facts come from reliable sources regarding domestic violence, with these

two examples coming from Browne (2004). (See Appendix A for the entire fact sheet).

The vignette was presented as a brief written summary of an instance of physical violence

between a male perpetrator and his wife (see Appendix B), and was presented as one of

two alternate conditions. Both stories were identical, except that in Condition A, it is

noted that the woman victim had consciously made the decision to stay with her husband,

and in Condition B, the woman had left her husband, and the abuse occurs at her new

home. This story was created using elements from Reddy et al.'s (1997) vignette, as well

from Witte's (2004) vignette. In the vignette, the husband arrives at their family home (or

at his wife's new home) drunk after watching a football game and gets into a fight with

the wife, in which she yells at him, and the husband punches her. It is mentioned that they

have been married for five years and have a two-year-old daughter.

Measures. The measures included two pre-existing scales and demographic

questions. An edited version of the Victim Blame Attribution Scale (VBAS,Yamawaki,

Ostenson, & Brown, 2009) was used to measure attributions of blame and responsibility

toward the victim. This scale consists of five items that are answered on a 7-point Likert-

type scale (1= *Strongly agree* to 7= *Strongly disagree*), and is designed to assess victim-

blame in stories about domestic violence. Items included statements such as "Susan had

some responsibility for creating this situation," and "Susan should be blamed for being

hit." (See Appendix C for the entire scale). This scale has been shown to have good

reliability (α = .82, Yamawaki et al., 2009) and an internal consistency of .82 (Yamawaki

et al., 2009). The wording of one statement was changed for clarity, and the reliability

was recalculated from the present data (α = .86).

Existing beliefs about domestic violence myths were measured using the

Domestic Violence Myth Acceptance Scale (DVMAS, Peters, 2003). This scale contains

18 items (e.g., "Many women have an unconscious wish to be dominated by their

partners") that are rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1= *Strongly disagree* to 7=

Strongly agree) to assess beliefs about domestic violence myths, including character

blame of the victim, behavioral blame of the victim, excusing the perpetrator, and

minimization. (See Appendix D for the entire scale). This scale has been found to have

convergent validity (*r* = .36 to .65), good construct validity, and reliability (α = .88)

(Peters, 2003).

Demographic questions included in this survey contained questions that asked about participants' age, gender, education level, ethnicity, religious affiliation, and personal history with domestic violence (Appendix E).

Procedure

The study was conducted through Survey Monkey, an online survey site, so that participants could complete the survey on their own personal computers. This survey took about 10 - 30 minutes to complete. Upon providing informed consent (Appendix F), half of the participants, by random assignment, were directed to the informational fact sheet regarding the difficulties of leaving an abusive relationship, while the rest of the participants were not given any information. After receiving or not receiving this information, participants were randomly assigned to read one or the other version of the vignette. After participants read the vignette, they were directed to the Victim Blame Attribution Scale. Participants then completed the Domestic Violence Myth Acceptance Scale and demographic questions. After participants finished answering these questions, they were debriefed about the aims and procedure of the study and thanked for their time (Appendix G).

Design

This study used a 2 (information) x 2 (story condition) between-groups factorial design to look at attributions of blame and responsibility. Information about the difficulties of leaving an abusive relationship was either given to participants prior to reading the story, or not presented at all. For the story condition, the vignette either noted

the woman's choice to stay with her abuser, or that she had left him. The participant's

score on the blame and responsibility scale (VBAS) was then assessed. All other aspects

of the story and study were held constant across conditions.

Results

Manipulation checks were examined, and almost all participants read through the

educational information carefully (between the two manipulation check questions, an

average of 93.2% of participants in one condition answered correctly, and an average of

97.7% of participants in the other condition answered correctly). However, manipulation

check findings revealed that a good portion of participants did not read the story in which

the woman left very closely, with only 66.1% of participants answering the question of

whether the woman in the story left or not correctly. On the other hand, participants did

read the story in which the victim stayed more closely, with 93.4% of participants

answering whether or not the woman left in the story correctly.

A 2x2 ANOVA was carried out to examine the relationship between the effects of

a woman leaving (or staying with) her abuser and the presence of information (or lack of

information) regarding the difficulties of leaving a violent partner on attributions of

blame and responsibility toward the victim in a story depicting domestic violence.

Inconsistent with the first hypothesis, attributions of blame were similar for women who

left ($M = 10.296$, $SD = 6.27$) and women who stayed ($M = 9.96$, $SD – 5.86$). Contrary to

the second hypothesis, there was no main effect of information such that those who

received information scored equally on attributions of blame ($M = 9.936$, $SD = 5.58$) as

those who did not receive information ($M = 10.31$, $SD = 6.530$). Contrary to hypothesis,

there was not a significant interaction between these two factors, $F(1,393) = 1.60$, $MSe = 36.71$, $p = .207$. Somewhat consistent with the third hypothesis, of the participants who received information, there were no significant differences between blame scores for women who left ($M = 10.51$, $SD = 6.16$) and those for women who stayed ($M = 9.43$, $SD = 4.97$). Contrary to hypothesis, this result was also not significantly different for participants who did not receive information, who also had similar blame scores for women who left ($M = 10.07$, $SD = 6.53$) and women who stayed ($M = 10.52$, $SD = 6.64$).

An exploratory 2x2x2x2 ANOVA was then carried out to determine the effects of information, whether the victim in the story left, the gender of participant, and whether or not the participant had ever been a victim of domestic violence on blame attribution. In this analysis, the "other" gender option was excluded, as well as the "prefer not to answer" option for whether the participant had been a victim of domestic violence. There was almost a significant effect of gender on ratings of victim blame, $F(1,354) = 3.648$, $MSe = 32.321$, $p = .057$, such that males approached significantly higher attributions of blame and responsibility ($M = 10.61$, $SD = 5.61$) than females ($M = 9.54$, $SD = 5.74$). There was a significant interaction between receiving information and whether the participant had been a victim of domestic violence as they related to attributions of victim blame, $F(1,354) = 5.366$, $MSe = 32.321$, $p = .021$. Post hoc tests were conducted using Tukey's LSD. Participants who had been victims of domestic violence had lower ratings of blame when they received the information on why women stay ($M = 8.797$, $SD = 4.39$) than when they did not receive information ($M = 10.637$, $SD = 6.08$), while non-victim participants rated victim blame equally when they received information ($M = 10.63$, $SD =$

5.82) and when they did not receive information ($M = 9.74$, $SD = 6.04$). The interaction

is shown in Figure I.
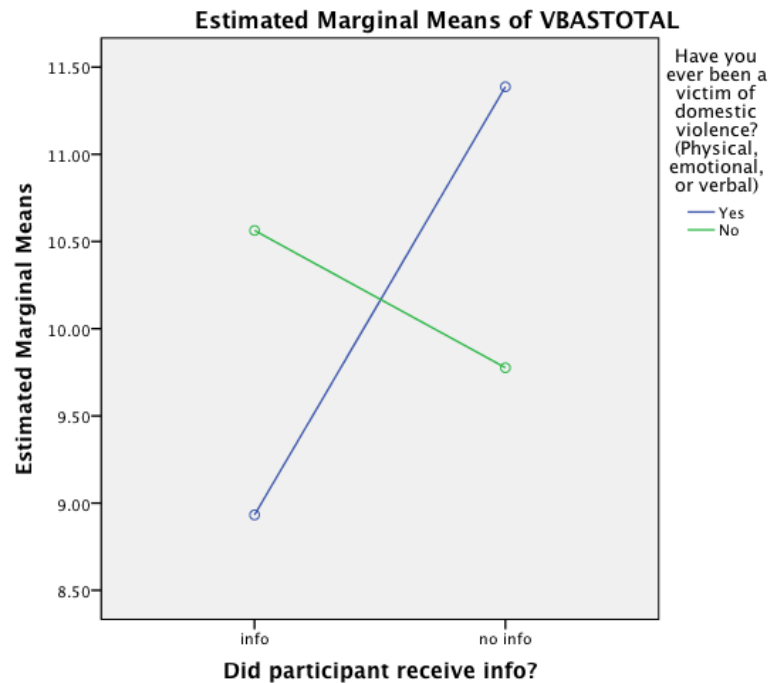
Estimated Marginal Means of VBASTOTAL

Figure I. Interaction between information and participant experience as a victim of domestic violence

A 2x2x2x2 ANOVA was also carried out to examine the effects of belief in

domestic violence myths (as determined by falling below or above the median of 2.3889

on the Domestic Violence Myth Acceptance Scale), gender, whether the participant

received information, and whether or not the woman in the story left on attributions of

blame and responsibility. There was a significant main effect of scores on the Domestic

Violence Myth Acceptance Scale, $F(1, 367) = 46.807$, $MSe = 29.16$, $p < .01$, such that

those who were less inclined to believe in these myths (scores below the median) had

lower attributions of blame ($M = 8.092$, $SD = 4.88$) than those who had higher scores

on the myth acceptance scale ($M = 11.96$, $SD = 5.90$). This effect can be seen in
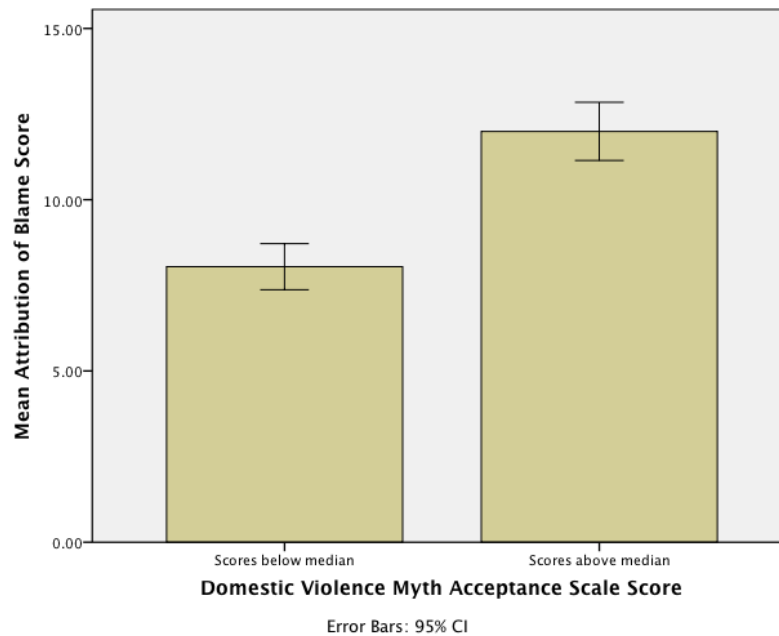
Figure II.

Figure II. Difference in attributions of blame based on
acceptance of domestic violence myths

Discussion

This study investigated whether people's attributions of blame and responsibility

toward a victim of domestic violence were influenced by whether or not the victim left

her abuser, and whether or not having information regarding the difficulties of leaving

would affect these attributions. It was first hypothesized that participants would be more

likely to blame the victim in the story in which she stayed, as opposed to the story in

which she left. It was also hypothesized that participants who were given information

prior to reading the story would rate victim blame and responsibility lower than would

those who did not receive this information. Lastly, it was hypothesized that there would

be an interaction between the educational information and the victim leaving such that

participants who received information would show less disparities in victim-blaming

between the leaving and staying conditions, while the participants who did not get this

information would have greater differences between the leaving and staying stories, so that victims would be blamed more when they did not leave.

Contrary to hypothesis, this analysis did not find any significant differences in blame of women who stayed in relationships versus those who left. This is not consistent with previous research, which shows that women are more likely to be blamed when they return to their abusers than when they leave them permanently (Yamawaki, 2012). For example, even volunteers who work with survivors often do not comprehend why a woman would stay with her abuser and question her decision-making when they assess her situation (Thapar-Björkert & Morgan, 2010).

This analysis was run again using only those participants who answered the manipulation check correctly, and there was still no main effect of whether the woman left her abusive husband on attributions of blame and responsibility. Therefore, this result was not due to how many participants failed to realize that the woman in the leaving condition of the story left her abusive husband (33.9%). Additionally, although the current study had an unexpected large sampling of domestic violence victims (34%), this also does not explain this non-significant result, since no interaction between whether the participant was a victim and whether the woman in the story left or stayed was found.

One possibility for the discrepancy between this study and others is that the equal blame toward women who stayed and women who left may show the extent to which women who stay in relationships are considered powerless. If women who stay in or return to violent relationships are considered weak and inept as Peled et al. (2000) suggests, then perhaps participants did not blame the woman who stayed more than the woman who left because her "choice" to stay was not actually considered an active

choice; if the woman in the story was perceived to have no control over her actions, then ultimately she could not be blamed more for them. If this is the case, then perhaps a measure of victim blame is not the best way to characterize the differences in perceptions of women who stay in violent relationships versus those who leave them. Instead, a measure of perceived helplessness may have shown differences between the two stories.

It is also possible that the vignette did not use the established factors that contribute to victim blame clearly or strongly enough, so that participants did not blame the woman in the story regardless of whether she stayed or left. This is reflected in participants' mean scores on the Victim Blame Attribution Scale ($M = 10.12$, $SD = 6.05$), which is relatively low. Scores on this scale can range from 5 to 35, and previous research using this scale has found average means to be slightly higher, ranging from 14 – 19 (Yamawaki et al., 2012). Research shows that people tend to blame the victim more in situations of domestic violence when she has shown foresight, and when it seems as though she could stop her abuser more easily (Reddy et al., 1997; McCaul et al., 1990). While the vignette in this survey used the foresight factor, it did not illustrate the woman's ability to stop her abuser. This story also included provocation by the victim, which has been shown to increase victim blame (Pavlou, 2001; Witte, 2004; Witte, Schroder, & Lohr, 2006), as well as alcohol, which has been shown to have the same effect (Reddy et al., 1997). While the vignette made use of these two factors, it may not have used them to the degree that was needed to produce higher attributions of blame in the conditions in which the woman stayed, or in which participants did not receive information.

Contrary to the second hypothesis, findings did not reveal a significant effect of information on the Victim Blame Attribution Scale (VBAS) scores, suggesting that information does not affect attributions of blame and responsibility of victims who leave or stay with their abuser. While not significant, the trends show that information may be somewhat helpful. Of the participants who did not receive information, there tended to be higher blame towards women who stayed versus women who left. Alternatively, participants who did receive information tended to blame women who left more than women who stayed. Although these results are not significant, this may point to possible effects of information. Perhaps if the information was framed differently to underscore the most important points, these results could have been significant. Contrary to the third hypothesis, there was no significant interaction between this educational information and whether the woman in the story left or stayed.

Finally, it is also possible that these results are due somewhat to participants' understanding of the educational information and what this information implied. Because the information was solely about the risks associated with leaving violent relationships, this could have swayed participants to blame the woman who left in the vignette more than they might otherwise would have, after having read the dangers associated with leaving. This makes sense with the trend of the data, since while it was not significant, participants who received information displayed higher attributions of blame for women who left than for those who stayed, while participants who did not receive information showed the opposite trend.

Despite the fact that there were no hypotheses about differences in VBAS scores as a result of being a victim of domestic violence, this variable was explored since so

many participants ended up having had that experience. A significant interaction between whether the participant had been a victim of domestic violence and whether the participant received information was found on victim blame and responsibility scores. Victims rated blame lower when they received information than when they did not, while non-victims rated blame equally regardless of information. This finding suggests that information on the difficulties of leaving an abusive relationship may be helpful regarding self-blame. It could be assumed that these participants felt an association with the victim in the vignette. Research shows that women who live with their violent partners blame themselves more than women who have left their partners, and that this self-blame is associated with a lack of social support regarding the violence (Andrews & Brewin, 1990). If victims blame themselves more for staying in relationships, then this educational information might have helped these victim-participants more fully understand the reasons they stayed in a violent relationship for any period of time. Additionally, this information could be viewed as a type of positive social support, since it could serve as a vindication and understanding of a victim's previous or current position, further supporting Andrews & Brewin's (1990) findings.

This result lost significance for females once the data was split according to gender, although the effect remained very close to significance. Also, while the male's effect remained significant, this result remains speculative since there were not many male victim participants. It is possible that these results could have remained significant if the study had been specifically designed to examine victims of domestic violence and their perceptions, and if the educational information was created to serve as a means of communicating reasons and support to victims of domestic violence.

Findings also showed that there was almost a significant effect of gender on VBAS scores, such that males had higher attributions of blame and responsibility than females, which is consistent with the literature on victim-blame (Bryant & Spencer, 2003). This also is supported by research on blame attribution and empathy, in that females may have been more likely to identify with the female victim in the story, and research shows that empathy affects attributions in judging domestic violence situations (Skiffington, et al., 1984). This is supported by Shaver's defensive attribution hypothesis (1970), which states that we blame people less the more we identify with them in order to maintain a sense of control in the world.

Scores on the Domestic Violence Myth Acceptance Scale (DVMAS) had an effect on blame scores, revealing that participants who believed in more domestic violence myths also rated victim-blame higher. This is consistent with the research on victim-blame and domestic violence attitudes because it shows how character blame of the victim, behavioral blame of the victim, minimization of violence, and excusing the perpetrator in general (all components of the DVMAS) relate to specific attributions of blame toward a woman in a story, and the ways in which cognitive ideas interact with assessing situational factors (Peters, 2003; Yamawaki et al., 2009; Yamawaki et al., 2012). If someone is inclined to believe such statements as "A lot of domestic violence occurs because women keep arguing about things with their partners" (Peters, 2003) then it follows that this person would blame the victim in a story in which she argues with her husband and uses provocation.

A limitation of this study is that the vignette may not have provided enough detail or made use of enough factors that contribute to victim blame in order to produce more

varying perceptions of the story. The ratings of blame were all very low for every

condition, which made it difficult for there to be any differences between the conditions.

If the story included more elements that typically lead to victim blaming such as a

woman's ability to stop her abuser (Reddy et al., 1997) then perhaps participants would

have been more inclined to blame the victim when they did not receive information or

when the victim stayed with her abuser.

Another limitation of this study is the way the educational information was

presented. Because the information was exclusively focused on the dangers and problems

associated with leaving an abuser, as mentioned before, it is possible that this led

participants to blame the woman who left in the vignette more than they would have

initially, because they just read the risks linked with leaving. This could possibly be fixed

by providing a more general overview of domestic violence facts, with those specific to

why women do not leave included. A final limitation was that some of the extra analyses

divided up the sample into smaller groups with fewer participants, thereby reducing the

power of the results.

The results found in this study show that there does not seem to be a difference in

attributions of blame and responsibility of women who stay versus women who leave,

and that in general, information does not affect blame of women who stay or leave

violent relationships. However, the trends within these non-significant results point to

possible beneficial uses of information. This is relevant in creating new support systems

for victims of domestic violence and examining the efficacy of shelters. An interesting

finding from this study was that information produced different results for victim-

participants, such that victims blamed the woman in the story less when they received

information. This suggests that information may be a possible way to reduce feelings of self-blame.

Future research should make use of more detailed vignettes to produce more contrasting blame attribution scores. To do so, the stories would have to include more blame-provoking elements. Additionally, future research should look into the effects of information on victims' self-blame. This could be executed by using measures that assess self-blame, as well as attributions of blame toward a victim in a story. It would be interesting to look at measures of perceived powerlessness between women who stay in violent relationships and those who leave, to examine whether this difference may be more salient than blame and responsibility attributions in people's judgments about domestic violence situations. Research on perceptions of domestic violence is crucial because the services available for victims are dependent upon how individuals conceptualize domestic violence and a victim's "choice" to leave an abusive partner. Once people's perceptions of domestic violence can be better understood, we can begin to make the necessary changes to improve the support systems for victims.

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Appendix A:
Information: Difficulties and Dangers of Leaving an Abusive Partner

The information below describes some of the many reasons victims stay with abusive partners. While many people are quick to assume that a victim should always leave an abusive partner, this is a lot harder than it seems, and is sometimes an impossible option for many women. Please read the facts below carefully before moving on with this study.

*50 -60% of women who leave shelters return to their batterers.

*Women who report abuse have higher potentials for escalated violence against them by their abusers.

*More women are killed in the process of trying to leave than at any other point.

*Common negative results of leaving an abusive partner include isolation, financial hardships, children's distress, losing a home, loss of contacts and loss of a support system.

*Many women stay due to fear. This fear includes that for their life, their children's lives, and for their financial situation.

*Many victims feel that their children need their other parent.

*There are major practical issues with leaving. As a result of leaving, people are vulnerable to experiencing problems with their jobs and school, as well as experiencing a negative impact on their children's lives.

*Custody problems after leaving often facilitate abusers in tracking and/or pressuring victims.

*Sometimes, women stay due to psychological problems, due to a prisoner of war mentality. This leads victims to have inhibited fight or flight responses and a decreased ability to plan ahead.

*Religious beliefs and interpretations sometimes prevent women from leaving, as some religious texts suggest absolute control of the husband over the wife. These religions include, but are not limited to, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. Many women are inclined to stay in violent relationships so as not to defy their faith.

*Because society tends to normalize domestic abuse, many services and support systems are not fully supportive of victims experiencing domestic abuse. For example, many victims have reported police not being understanding of their position.

Appendix B:

Vignettes

Story A (staying condition)

Susan and Peter have been married for five years and have a two-year-old daughter. **Susan has contemplated leaving Peter due to his violent behavior, but ultimately, she always decides against it.** On Saturday 17th of June, Peter spent three hours at the pub after the football game. His team had lost that afternoon. Knowing how bad tempered Peter could be when he had been drinking and his team had lost, Susan put the baby to sleep before Peter got home. When Peter arrived **home** drunk, he began to fight with Susan over financial issues. Susan began to yell at Peter, and, as her anger heightened, she began to shout at him, calling him a "cheap asshole." Susan remembers knowing at that moment that he was going to beat her because he had that "expression" on his face. Peter grabbed Susan by the arm and punched her in the face, as he often does when he is upset with her.

Story B (leaving condition)

Susan and Peter **had** been married for five years and have a two-year-old daughter. **In April, Susan left Peter due to his violence behavior, taking the baby with her. However,** on Saturday 17th of June, **Peter called Susan and showed up at her door.** Peter **had** spent three hours at the pub after the football game. His team had lost that afternoon. Knowing how bad tempered Peter could be when he had been drinking and his team had lost, Susan put the baby to sleep **after receiving Peter's call.** When Peter arrived drunk, he began to fight with Susan over financial issues. Susan began to yell at Peter, and, as her anger heightened, she began to shout at him, calling him a "cheap asshole." Susan remembers knowing at that moment that he was going to beat her because he had that "expression" on his face. Peter grabbed Susan by the arm and punched her in the face, as he often does when he is upset with her.

*Bold words represent changes between the two conditions, and are not bold in the actual survey.

The story is an edited version of vignette components from these two studies:

Reddy, P., Knowles, A., Mulvany, J., McMahon, M., & Freckelton, I. (1997). Attributions about domestic violence: A study of community attitudes. *Psychiatry, Psychology, and Law, 4(2)*, 125-145.
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Appendix C:

Victim Blame Attribution Scale (VBAS)

Instructions: Please keep the vignette you just read in mind as you respond to the below questions. Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with each statement on the seven-point scale provided below:

Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly disagree

1. Susan was somewhat at fault for this incident[1]
2. Susan provoked this incident
3. Susan had some responsibility for creating this situation
4. Susan should be blamed for being hit
5. Susan should be punished because she behaved badly

Scoring:
> All five items are reversed scored and then added to measure victim-blame attribution (with higher scores indicating higher blaming of victim).

Yamawaki, N., Ostenson, J., & Brown, C.R. (2009). The functions of gender role traditionality, ambivalent sexism, injury, and frequency of assault on domestic violence perception: A study between Japanese and American college students. *Violence Against Women, 15(9),* 1126-1142.

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[1] Changed from original statement "Susan had some faults in this incident"

Appendix D:

Domestic Violence Myth Acceptance Scale (DVMAS)

Instructions: Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with each statement on the seven-point scale below:
        Strongly disagree 1 2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly agree
Note: these questions are meant to assess your general beliefs, and are not asking about the story you just read.

1. Domestic violence does not affect many people
2. When a man is violent it is because he lost control of his temper
3. If a woman continues living with a man who beat her then its her own fault if she is beaten again
4. Making a man jealous is asking for it.
5. Some women unconsciously want their partners to control them.
6. A lot of domestic violence occurs because women keep arguing about things with their partners.
7. If a woman doesn't like it, she can leave.
8. Most domestic violence involves mutual violence between the partners.
9. Abusive men lose control so much that they don't know what they're doing.
10. I hate to say it, but if a woman stays with the man who abused her, she basically deserves what she gets.
11. Domestic violence rarely happens in my neighborhood
12. Women who flirt are asking for it.
13. Women can avoid physical abuse if they give in occasionally.
14. Many women have an unconscious wish to be dominated by their partners.
15. Domestic violence results from a momentary loss of temper.
16. I don't have much sympathy for a battered woman who keeps going back to the abuser.
17. Women instigate most family violence.
18. If a woman goes back to the abuser, how much is that due to something in her character?

Scoring
        Final score: mean score for all items
        Character Blame of Victim: 5, 3, 14, 18, 10, 16, 7
        Behavioral Blame of Victim: 4, 13, 12, 17, 6,
        Excusing Perpetrator: 2, 9, 15, 8
        Minimization: 1, 10, 11, 16,

Peters, J. (2003). The domestic violence myth acceptance scale: Development and psychometric testing of a new instrument. *Dissertation Abstracts International Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences, 64(*4-A), 1409.

Appendix E:

Demographic Questions

Instructions: Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability.
Your responses are anonymous.

1. Age
2. Gender
    -male
    -female
    -other
3. Education
    -did not complete high-school
    -high-school diploma
    -in college/ some college (if not currently in college)
    -college degree
    -graduate degree
4. Please indicate your ethnicity/race. Select all that apply.
    -Asian
    -Latino/Hispanic/Chicano
    -African American
    -Caucasian
    -Native American
    -Other
5. What is your religious affiliation?
    -Christianity
    -Judaism
    -Islam
    -Hinduism
    -Buddhism
    -Non-religious
    -Other
6. Have you ever been a victim of domestic violence? (physical, emotional, or verbal)
    -Yes
    -No
    -Prefer not to answer
7. Do you know anyone who has been a victim of domestic violence? (physical, emotional, or verbal)
    -Yes
    -No
    -Prefer not to answer

Appendix F:

Informed Consent Form

Domestic Violence and Responsibility

You are invited to participate in this research study about domestic violence. The following information is provided in order to help you to make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask.

This research is being conducted by Kat Arenella as part of a senior thesis research project at Scripps College. You are qualified to participate in this research because you are 18 years of age or over. The purpose of this research study is to examine people's responses to an incidence of domestic violence, with a particular interest in how people view responsibility and fault in a domestic violence situation.

 Participation in this study will require approximately 20 to 30 minutes of your time. You will be asked to read a short story depicting an incidence of domestic violence and to answer some questions about it on an online survey. This story involves descriptions of abuse, much like one would read about in the newspaper or see on a television show. Because this vignette explicitly narrates an instance of domestic violence, this may cause some minimal discomfort for you. If this occurs, you are free to withdraw at any time. If you foresee this information to be upsetting, you may want to refrain from participating. You will also be asked if you have had any experience with domestic violence. Your answer to this question is voluntary, as well as anonymous. Information about psychological treatment is available at locator.apa.org, if you happen to have problems as a result of this study. Hotlines and information regarding domestic violence can be found at domesticviolence.org.

Direct benefits of participating in this research include being paid $0.25.

No identifying information will be obtained during this study. The results from this study will be presented in a senior thesis and may be published or presented. Your responses in this study are completely anonymous. You will not be asked for your name at any point during this study.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time. You may refuse to answer any question, and you may stop participating at any time. Your decision to not participate or to discontinue participation at any time during the study will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

You may ask questions concerning the research before agreeing to participate or during the survey. If you have any questions regarding this research, you may contact Kat Arenella at karenell4168@scrippscollege.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject that have not been answered by the investigator you may

contact Pamela Rowland, the Scripps College Institutional Review Board (IRB) Administrator at prowland@scrippscollege.edu or at (909) 607-3249. You may also contact Jennifer Groscup, the IRB Co-Chair at jgroscup@scrippscollege.edu and Gretchen Edwalds-Gilbert, the IRB Administrative Officer at gedwalds@scrippscollege.edu.

By clicking on the "agree" button below, you are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. By clicking "agree," you also are stating that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented and that you are 18 years old or older. You may print out a copy of this consent form to keep.

Kat Arenella, Principal Investigator

Appendix G:

Debriefing

Perceptions of Domestic Violence and Leaving

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. This information is given for you to learn more about this research project, the part your participation has played in it, and why this research may be important. Please do not discuss this study with anyone else who may participate in the future. Knowledge about the study may influence their responses and could potentially invalidate the information obtained from them. (For this same reason, it is important that you tell the experimenter if you knew details about this study before participating.)

Domestic violence is a highly prevalent and problematic concern. Despite the fact that victims who have been faced with this abuse are more likely to suffer from emotional and health problems, many people are prone to blaming victims for their abuse. Additionally, many people fail to recognize the difficulties and dangers associated with leaving an abusive partner (for example, isolation, increased violence, and financial hardships) and express the widely held belief that it is a victim's responsibility to leave her or his abuser, despite the fact that women who choose to leave are often in the most danger at this time.

This study was designed to investigate whether people's attributions of blame toward a victim of domestic violence are influenced by whether or not the victim leaves, and whether or not the common view that a victim should always leave is due to a lack of information about the hardships associated with leaving. Some of you were given facts about why women stay in abusive relationships prior to reading a domestic violence vignette, while others of you were not. You read one of two stories, both identical except for that in one version, the victim had previously made a conscious decision to stay with her husband, and in the other version, she had left him before the violence takes place. After reading this story, everyone answered the same questions to determine victim blame and responsibility, as well as to assess beliefs in domestic violence myths.

It was hypothesized that participants who are given information before reading the stories would rate victim blame and responsibility lower than for those who did not receive this information. It was hypothesized that participants would be more likely to blame the victim in the story in which she stays, as opposed to the story in which she had left. It was also hypothesized that there would be an interaction between the educational information and the victim leaving such that participants who have received information will show less disparities in victim-blaming between the leaving and staying conditions, while the participants who did not get this information will have greater differences between the leaving and staying stories. This research is important because it may point to the reasons society and services emphasize the victim's "choice" to leave, but do not fully recognize the difficulties and dangers in doing so.

The results of this research will be presented in a senior thesis and possibly published or presented at Scripps College. Again, your responses are anonymous. If you are interested in the results of this study or if you have any additional questions or comments, please contact Kat Arenella at karenell4168@scrippscollege.edu. If you have

any questions about your rights as a research subject that have not been answered by the investigator you may contact Pamela Rowland, the Scripps College Institutional Review Board Administrator at prowland@scrippscollege.edu or at (909) 607-3249. You may also contact Jennifer Groscup, the IRB Co-Chair at jgroscup@scrippscollege.edu and Gretchen Edwalds-Gilbert, the IRB Administrative Officer at gedwalds@scrippscollege.edu. In the event of any problems resulting from participation in the study, referrals for psychological treatment are available at locator.apa.org. Hotlines and information regarding domestic violence can be found at domesticviolence.org and thehotline.org.

   Thank you again for your participation.