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Do Gender and Relationship Composition Affect College Students' Perceptions of Intimate Partner Violence Severity?

Jasmine Owarish-Gross
Jasmine.OwarishGross@trincoll.edu

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Jasmine Owarish-Gross

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Abstract

Previous research has examined college students' opinions about the severity of physical abuse in heterosexual, lesbian, and gay couples, but not their opinions regarding the severity of psychological and sexual abuse in the context of these relationships. The main aims of this study were to examine whether participant gender and relationship composition (i.e., heterosexual, lesbian, and gay couples) affected college students' opinions about the severity of physical, psychological, and sexual intimate partner violence (IPV), if abuse in opposite-sex relationships was perceived as more severe than abuse in same-sex relationships, and if prior exposure to IPV was associated with lower IPV severity ratings. Seventy-two undergraduates enrolled in psychology courses at a small, private college in the Northeastern United States were recruited in order to examine these research questions. They read three short vignettes that varied the gender of the victims and perpetrators and then rated the severity of the violence and assigned a blame rating to the victim and perpetrator. Results were consistent with previous research, in that participants rated psychological abuse as the least severe form of abuse. Contrary to previous research, however, male participants in this study did not assign less blame to male perpetrators, nor did the participants view the violence in opposite-sex relationships as more severe than the violence in same-sex couples. Also prior exposure to IPV did not seem to have a large effect on participants' perceptions of IPV severity.

Do Gender and Relationship Composition Affect College Students' Perceptions of Intimate Partner Violence Severity?

Forty-two percent of intimate partner violence (IPV) victims are between the ages of 18 and 24 (Durose et al., 2005), indicating that a significant percentage of college students will experience some type of IPV during their young adult years. An analysis of nearly forty studies on college dating violence noted that approximately 40% of female students admitted to perpetrating violence against their partners and 33% of male students admitted to perpetrating violence against their partners (Sugarman & Hotaling, 1989). Furthermore, there are higher rates of violence within dating couples compared to married couples, suggesting that IPV is an important topic to investigate within a college setting. Intimate partner violence also may encompass sexual and psychological violence and these forms of IPV have high prevalence rates among college students as well. For example, one in three college women are victims of sexual dating violence and one in ten college men are victims of sexual dating violence (Nicholson et al., 1998). A study of psychological violence reported that 81% of males and 88% of females reported experiencing this type of IPV (White & Koss, 1991). Given the prevalence of IPV among college aged individuals, the current thesis study will examine college students' perceptions of IPV severity in order to gain more insight into how college students perceive the different types of IPV.

Domestic Violence and Intimate Partner Violence

The *Shelter* website in the United Kingdom describes domestic violence (DV) as "…when someone close to you (usually your spouse, partner, ex-spouse, or ex-partner) behaves towards you in a way that causes physical, mental, or emotional damage. It need not necessarily be physical violence" (Nicolson, 2010, p. 23). Researchers define dating violence, which is a

form of DV, as "the perpetration of physical, emotional, or threat [of] abuse by at least one member of an unmarried dating couple" (Ward & Lundberg-Love, 2006, p. 66). Another term used to describe DV is intimate partner violence (IPV); IPV will be used instead of DV in this paper to describe dating violence. This is because DV is most often associated with married couples and IPV is a broader term encompassing all types of dating relationships.

There are four different types of IPV; one type is intimate terrorism, which is when "the perpetrator uses violence in the service of general control over his or her partner; the partner does not" (Johnson, 2008, p. 5). A second type is violent resistance where "the partner is violent and controlling—an intimate terrorist—and the resister's violence arises in reaction to that attempt to exert general control" (Johnson, 2008, p. 5). The third type is mutual violent control where "both members of the couple use violence in attempt to gain general control over their partner" (Johnson, 2008, p. 5). The last type is situational couple violence or common couple violence where "the perpetrator is violent (and his or her partner may be as well); however, neither of them uses violence to attempt to exert general control" (Johnson, 2008, p. 5; Nicolson, 2010, p. 40). It is important to acknowledge the different ways in which violence between partners is expressed because most people believe IPV only involves physical aggression. As is evident from the descriptions above, however, the dynamics can differ from couple to couple and can involve psychological control as well as physical control and aggression.

One myth about IPV is that males are the only ones who perpetrate it (Makepeace, 1986) and that it only occurs in heterosexual relationships. Recent research, however, has shown that there is also female-on-male violence, female-on-female violence, and male-on-male violence (Nicolson, 2010) and that IPV occurs with comparable frequency in heterosexual, bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender relationships (Makepeace, 1986). Females are just as likely to be violent

in relationships as males; however, males can inflict more bodily harm on females on account of their larger size (Browne, 1997). The myths about the perpetration and the prevalence of IPV among couples exist because most of the research on this topic has been done with heterosexual couples and largely has excluded same-sex couples, leading people to underestimate the prevalence of IPV in same-sex relationships.

What Accounts for the Development and Perpetration of IPV?

Lenore Walker, an influential researcher on the subject of domestic violence, oversaw a large-scale study by the Battered Women Research Center in Colorado. Specifically, the study recruited 400 battered women with the purpose of exploring how women are affected psychologically by battering and whether they develop the battered woman's syndrome following abuse. Also the study investigated two theories related to the batter woman's syndrome that Walker developed in 1979, which were the cycle theory of battering or violence and learned helplessness (Walker, 1984). Martin Seligman first developed the concept of learned helplessness, but Walker expanded the idea by asserting that battered women develop learned helplessness. This is because they often feel like they have no power to change the abusive situations that they are in, so they stay in the abusive relationships and endure the abuse (Walker, 1984).

Walker also proposed that in the cycle of battering or violence there are three phases: The first is the tension building phase where the anger begins to build up; the second phase is the acute battering incident where the violence occurs; and the third phase is when the batterer acts kind and loving towards the victim (the honeymoon-respite phase.) Then, the cycle starts all over again (Walker, 1984). The honeymoon-respite phase also fosters learned helplessness in victims because they believe that since their partners are being nice again, their partners will stop being

abusive (LaViolette & Barnett, 2000). This cycle was described to show that abuse does not come out of nowhere but, instead, occurs in a repeated cycle. Moreover, it was found that previous exposure to IPV was associated with a greater involvement in subsequent IPV (Walker, 1984). In Walker's study, 24% of the non-batterers had histories of previous exposure to IPV, compared to the 81% of the IPV perpetrators who had histories of previous exposure. Also, 67% of the IPV victims had histories of previous exposure to IPV (Walker, 1984).

Types of IPV

Physical and sexual abuse. There are three major types of IPV, which include physical, sexual, and psychological abuse (Nichols, 2006). Physical abuse has been defined by researchers as the act of "slapping, hitting, kicking, burning, punching, choking, shoving, beating, throwing things, locking a person out of the house, restraining, and other acts designed to injure, hurt, endanger, or cause physical pain" (Nichols, 2006, p. 5). Research shows that it is the most obvious form of abuse, since bruises and other physical injuries can easily be seen (Nichols, 2006). Sexual abuse comprises "sadism and forcing a person to have sex when he or she does not want to; forcing a person to engage in sexual acts that he or she does not like or finds unpleasant, frightening, or violent; forcing a person to have sex with others or while others watch; or forcing a person into acts that make him or her feel sexually demeaned or violated" (Nichols, 2006, p. 5). Another act of abuse that might also be included under sexual abuse is making a woman engage in intercourse without any sort of protection that prevents pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases (Nichols, 2006). One myth that exists about rape in dating relationships is that it only happens to women, but approximately one in twelve victims of rape is actually a male (Pelka, 1997). Also, sexual jealousy may promote sexual abuse; that is, violence in a relationship might

either start or intensify once the people in the relationship have had sex for the first time (Walker, 1984).

Past research has shown that the college environment often provides opportunities for sexual violence, since college students often live away from home and are exposed to situations in which underage drinking is common. Each year, more than 97,000 college students between the ages of 18-24 are victims of either date rape or sexual assault. Most of the perpetrators are under the influence of alcohol at the time of the offense. More importantly, about 78% to about 98% of all rape victims are raped by perpetrators that they know, not strangers, which is often the misconception (Flowers, 2009). Further, the Bureau of Justice from the U.S. Department of Justice in Washington D.C. revealed that as of 2005 most rape victims were raped by current or past boyfriends (Flowers, 2009). Also, almost 60% of the completed rapes on college campuses occur in the apartments or the dorm rooms of the victims, suggesting that the independent lifestyles of college students and the underage drinking may make these occurrences more likely (Flowers, 2009).

Most victims who are raped by their boyfriends or acquaintances do not report the rapes because of confusion about whether the perpetrator did it on purpose or by accident, especially if both parties were drinking (Flowers, 2009). It has been found that some college students view dating violence as a suitable response to being emotionally hurt or threatened, and they see it as being a part of a relationship (Carlson, 1990). This is why victims of sexual violence often do not report these incidences because they accept them as being a part of their relationships (Pirog-Good & Stets, 1989). Also most victims do not report the incidences because the perpetrators are fellow students and they are afraid of their perpetrators finding out about their reports, which might lead to them seeking retribution. Sometimes victims are ashamed to report the incidents,

especially if alcohol was involved since there is a negative stigma associated with victims who report sexual assaults or rapes that occurred while they were under the influence of alcohol. Some research has suggested that if students believe victims were drinking at the time of the sexual assault or rape, then the victims are partially responsible for the assault (Flowers, 2009). In summary, a lot is known about the prevalence of sexual abuse in dating relationships and the effects that it has on victims, but little is known about the attitudes college students have about sexual abuse.

Psychological abuse. Psychological abuse has been defined as "acts of recurring criticism and/or verbal aggression toward a partner, and/or acts of isolation and domination of a partner" (LaViolette & Barnett, 2000, p. 101). The forms of psychological abuse include emotional and verbal abuse, which have been defined as "consistently doing or saying things to shame, insult, ridicule, embarrass, demean, belittle, or mentally hurt another person" (Nichols, 2006, p. 6). It also consists of calling someone names, withholding things such as money or affection, destruction of property, manipulation, and threatening the person, animals, or children. Psychological abuse also entails not helping someone who needs help and making fun of someone's family, socioeconomic status, religion, race or ethnicity, and insulting them or their family and friends (Nichols, 2006). Psychological abuse may be difficult to recognize, but its effects are still apparent. Victims of this type of abuse often exhibit low self-esteem, increasing levels of fear and anxiety, depression, and even possibly post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Johnson, 2008). Also, physical abuse often overshadows psychological abuse because psychological abuse is harder to measure quantitatively and the signs of physical abuse are easier to observe (Walker, 1984).

Of the three main types of IPV, psychological abuse has been researched the least, which is concerning given the frequency with which it occurs and the fact that it often accompanies the other types of IPV (Nichols, 2006). Psychological abuse occurs 22 percent more of the time compared to physical abuse. Relatedly, one study that explored the key problems that college counselors encounter with college students found that college students experience psychological dating violence more often than physical or sexual dating violence (Murray & Kardatzke, 2007). Victims of this abuse also describe it as being more painful than physical abuse, because its scars are not easily observable compared to the noticeable scars of physical abuse (Nichols, 2006; Walker, 1979). Interestingly, a study that analyzed the coverage of IPV in newspapers found that psychological abuse rarely is mentioned in news reports that discuss IPV. The researcher reasoned that perhaps psychological abuse is left out because people generally have a harder time defining it as a form of abuse, compared to physical or sexual abuse (Sims, 2008). For example, it is easier for a victim of physical abuse to fill out a report and tell a police officer that her partner abused her physically, since she can provide evidence of the abuse by showing her bruises or broken bones. It is harder for a victim, however, to explain to a police officer that her partner abused her psychologically by making her feel worthless and harming her self-esteem. This is because the scars from this abuse are invisible, compared to the visible scars of the victim who was physically abused (Sims, 2008). In some cases abusers can engage in psychological abuse before physical abuse, which includes name-calling and lecturing, where the abuser assumes the role of the parent or instructor and the victim assumes the role of a child being disciplined (Pagelow, 1984).

One large-scale survey study in New York evaluated public opinion about psychological abuse. The study was done to assess how people define IPV and what they consider to be IPV

(Carlson & Worden, 2005). The results showed that people had an easier time labeling acts of physical aggression as IPV, compared to acts of psychological aggression. The physical abuse was labeled as abuse most of the time, while psychological abuse was labeled as "sometimes" being considered abuse (Carlson & Worden, 2005). Another important finding from this study was that men were labeled as being the ones who would primarily perpetrate physical acts of aggression. When examples of abuse were explained with women as the perpetrators, the abusive incident was not considered as serious from a legal standpoint (Carlson & Worden, 2005). Also in another study that asked people how they define IPV, the participants were more likely to identify physical and sexual abuse as examples of IPV compared to the psychological examples (Nicolson, 2010). These studies suggest that future research should explore why psychological abuse is not rated at the same level of severity as physical and sexual dating violence.

Violence in Opposite-Sex Relationships vs. Same-Sex Relationships

Research on IPV in same-sex couples is limited, although most studies have shown that abuse among same-sex couples occurs at comparable rates and in similar ways as abuse among opposite-sex couples. In a study by Kelly & Warshafsky (1987), a self-selected sample of 50 gay men and 48 lesbians completed the 17-item version of Straus's (1979) Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS). The results showed that three percent of the participants reported being violent, 47% reported being physically aggressive, and 95% said that they had verbally abused their partners. Although the lesbians in this study reported fewer instances of physical aggression, the levels of violence and psychological abuse between the gay and lesbian couples were very similar (Kelly & Warshafsky, 1987). Renzetti (1992) had individuals in same-sex relationships indicate the frequency with which they encountered sixteen forms of physical abuse and seventeen forms of psychological abuse. The results showed that the participants reported experiencing a wider

range of physical abuse-related events including being scratched, punched, pushed, and shoved, compared to psychological abuse-related events. The types of psychological abuse that occurred the most were being threatened and demeaned (Renzetti, 1992). These results also showed that similar to opposite-sex couples, physical abuse was identified as the most visible type of abuse among same-sex couples.

Most studies show that in same-sex relationships instances of abuse occur over and over again and become more violent as the abusive behavior continues (Renzetti, 1997). Since there are certain social "taboos" that come with being a homosexual and a victim of IPV, there is limited research available on same-sex couples. Moreover, the research findings from this population have yielded very different results (Miller & Wellford, 1997). For example, one study reported that out of 1,566 lesbian couples, only 17 percent said that they had experienced IPV (Loulan, 1987). Another study, however, reported that almost half of the lesbian couples in the study were victims of IPV (Coleman 1990). Moreover, the findings from research on same-sex couples often is limited to self-selected, as opposed to random samples, and most of the studies have been done on lesbian couples, rather than gay male couples. The tension, however, tied to the fear of "outing" participants keeps researchers from finding representative samples, because same-sex couples are not as accepted in society as opposite-sex couples are (Renzetti, 1997). Since the prevalence estimates for same-sex couples are so discrepant, future research that explores attitudes and perceptions about same-sex couples could reveal if IPV among same-sex couples is perceived as being as severe as IPV among opposite-sex couples. Also there might possibly be differences in the perceived severity of IPV among lesbian couples versus IPV among gay male couples.

One myth that supports the belief that IPV only occurs in heterosexual relationships is that women are not as violent or aggressive as men are, so two women in a lesbian relationship could never seriously hurt each other. Also, people falsely believe that since the violence in same-sex relationships is not as serious as the violence in heterosexual relationships, victims of abuse in same-sex relationships can leave their abusive relationships more easily (LaViolette & Barnett, 2000). These assumptions are erroneous, however, since people in same-sex relationships are subjected to more social isolation and stigma compared to people in opposite-sex relationships, which might actually encourage them to stay in their abusive relationships (LaViolette & Barnett, 2000). Since there is the belief that IPV mostly involves a man battering a woman, researchers often find it difficult to figure out who is the victim and who is the perpetrator in IPV involving same-sex couples. Sometimes abusive incidents between two gay men are coined as "just a fight between two guys," and an incident between two lesbians is seen as just a "cat fight" (Renzetti, 1997). One interesting study by Wise and Bowman (1997) of masters and doctoral counseling students examined how they reacted to a vignette about a heterosexual couple and a vignette about a lesbian couple. The same vignette was used twice, but the couple composition was varied in the two vignettes. Researchers found that the participants regarded the battering incident featuring the heterosexual couple as being more vicious than the incident with the lesbian couple (Wise & Bowman, 1997).

There have also been prior studies that have explored college students' attitudes about IPV where the gender composition of the relationship was manipulated. For example, Harris and Cook (1994) examined whether the gender of the victims and batterers affected students' reactions to IPV. The participants were given one of three made-up newspaper reports: one with a husband as the batterer and his wife as the victim, a wife as the batterer and her husband as the

victim, and a battering incident between two gay men. After the participants read the articles they rated the severity of the battering incidents as well as who was to blame. The participants reported the wife-battering report as the most serious compared to the two incidents with male victims (Harris & Cook, 1994). Similarly, through random assignment, Hamby and Jackson (2010) gave participants one of four vignettes: one with a female victim and male perpetrator, one with a male victim and female perpetrator, one with a female victim and female perpetrator, and one with a male victim and male perpetrator. Participants then answered questions about the vignettes, assessing their severity and who was to blame. Similar to the finding of Harris and Cook (1994), male-on-female physical abuse was seen as the most serious and female-on-male physical abuse was seen as the least severe (Hamby & Jackson, 2010). Taken together, these studies suggest that physical abuse in same-sex couples is regarded as less severe. Research, however, has yet to explore how participants would react to vignettes about all three types of abuse (i.e. physical, psychological, and sexual), since past studies have focused on physical abuse only. Additional research examining attitudes about all types of IPV in same-sex couples would be valuable because previous research has focused on just physical abuse.

Gender Effects on Attitudes About IPV

An individual's gender also has been shown to affect how severe they perceive instances of IPV. One large-scale investigation provided evidence for this phenomenon. Specifically, participants read a vignette about a man who abuses his girlfriend physically and she ends up calling the police. The participants then expressed the degree to which they agreed with several statements about the incident, such as whether or not the boyfriend should be arrested (Nicolson, 2010). Overall, 97% of the participants found that the violence that took place was not acceptable. It was notable, however, that the male participants were more negative towards the

woman in the vignette compared to the female participants and more males expressed that they thought that the boyfriend should *not* be arrested. Conversely, more female participants thought that the woman was right to contact the police and that she should leave the relationship (Nicolson, 2010).

In another study with college students, researchers provided participants with domestic violence vignettes that varied by the race of the couple, where the husband battered his wife (Locke & Richman, 1999). Overall, regardless of the race of the couple in the vignette, female participants had more sympathy for the wife. The female participants also held the husband more responsible for the abuse, and they rated the abusive incident as more severe compared to male participants. This suggests that participants' genders might surpass the influence of race in determining blame (Locke & Richman, 1999). In a different study, Bryant and Spencer (2003) analyzed how college students attribute blame in DV. Participants completed both the Domestic Violence Blame Scale (DVBS) and also the Conflict Tactics Scale, which assessed their prior exposure to DV. Compared to female participants, male participants scored higher on the DVBS, and on the scale the husband was the perpetrator and the wife was the victim. Also, participants with prior exposure to DV from their families blamed the DV less on the victim and more on societal factors (Bryant & Spencer, 2003). Although these studies elucidated how gender is implicated in perceptions of IPV severity, a limitation of these studies is that most used vignettes with heterosexual couples where the male is the perpetrator. Accordingly, little is known about how the gender of participants affects how they react to IPV in same-sex couples.

Gender Differences in Empathy

The amount of aggression in intimate relationships has been shown to be lower among people who are more empathetic and who have more emotional intimacy (Marcus & Swett,

2003a), suggesting that there might be a relevant and important connection between the level of empathy in a relationship and the presence of dating violence. Interestingly, there is a gender difference between men and women with respect to empathy. One study of randomly selected adults in the community showed that female participants were more empathetic compared to the male participants (Toussaint & Webb, 2005). No research, however, has investigated possible gender differences in empathy for a victim of dating violence. More specifically, empathy has not been explored as a possible factor explaining the difference in severity ratings and blame often observed between males and females.

Previous Exposure to IPV

Researchers have found that previous exposure to IPV might be another important factor affecting an individual's perceptions about the severity and blame in scenarios of IPV. For example, exposure to IPV is associated with a greater risk of perpetrating IPV in one's own relationship or becoming a victim of IPV. Previous exposure to IPV not only refers to incidents where someone directly witnesses their parents fighting, but it also encompasses hearing violent incidents that take place and seeing the results of violence. People can witness the results of the violence by seeing the injuries that a parent has sustained from an argument, or a parent expressing fear or shame about the abusive incident (Jaffe, Wolfe, & Wilson, 1990).

Several studies on perpetrators and victims of IPV have revealed some of the effects that previous exposure to IPV has on people who witness it as children. Roy (1977) reported that both male perpetrators of IPV and female victims of IPV often talk about having childhoods in which their fathers abused their mothers. Female victims of IPV, who watched their mothers endure the abuse from their husbands, were more likely to tolerate abuse in their own relationships. This is because they grew up learning that violence is a regular part of a marriage.

These female victims also revealed not being able to think of ways to stop the violence (Roy 1977), making the female victims helpless within their own relationships. Similarly, Jaffe, Wolfe, and Wilson (1990), have found that young girls who witness IPV being perpetrated by their fathers against their mothers are more likely during their adolescence to allow their boyfriends to gain control over them through acts of violence. The young girls might tolerate being treated in a similar fashion as their mothers because, as noted by Straus et al. (1980), these girls have observed violence as the preferred method for solving problems in intimate relationships. Since they have learned that violence is the only way to solve these issues, they may be more likely to allow IPV to occur because they never saw their parents solve their issues in other ways, and thus, do not believe that they have an alternative. Murray and Kardatzke (2007) also conducted a study with college students in order to identify specific risk factors for experiencing or perpetrating dating violence. The influence of peers, psychological factors, and family history relating to prior exposure to IPV, all increased the likelihood of being a victim of IPV. Also, alcohol use and violence against women were risk factors for college students serving as perpetrators of IPV (Murray & Kardatzke, 2007).

Other studies have focused on the effects that previous IPV exposure has on males. Male perpetrators of IPV who watched their fathers perpetrate IPV refer to their fathers as being their models for showing them how to be husbands, which likely explains their propensity to perpetrate violence (Jaffe, Wolfe, & Wilson, 1990). Also, other researchers have found that men who watched their fathers be violent are more likely to engage in IPV in their own relationships, compared to men who did not have violent fathers (Straus et al., 1980). Dobash and Dobash (1979), however, found that not all men who have fathers who perpetrated IPV end up perpetrating IPV in their own relationships. Thus, the research suggests that men who witness

their fathers being violent will not all be violent, but they have more of a chance of being violent compared to men who have not had previous exposure to IPV. This is because men who have witnessed violence within their parents' marriages learn that through violence they can dominate over their partners and have control (Jaffe, Wolfe, & Wilson, 1990).

There is limited research describing why previous exposure to IPV increases one's risk of perpetrating IPV or becoming victims of IPV. There are not a lot of theories that have been developed to explain the effect that previous exposure to IPV has on those who witness it. One main theory that addresses the effects of previous exposure to IPV on children who witness it is termed the cycle-of-violence theory and it was developed based on social learning theory. The cycle-of-violence theory states that children who witness violence in their family lives have a greater likelihood of becoming involved with it in their own personal lives when they are older (Jaffe, Wolfe, & Wilson, 1990). This is possibly because the children learn how to perpetrate or tolerate IPV through Bandura's theory of observational learning. Researchers regard this theory to be flawed, however, because it does not clearly address the direct ways in which the violent behavior that parents engage in affect whether or not children will either be perpetrators or victims of IPV. The theory is vague when it mentions that children will be involved in IPV in their personal lives and fails to explain how they will be involved with IPV exactly (Jaffe, Wolfe, & Wilson, 1990).

Another limitation of the previous research on the effects of previous IPV exposure is that most of the research focuses on IPV that occurs between a husband and a wife, where the husband is the perpetrator and the wife is the victim. Little is known about the effects that IPV has on children who witness their mothers being violent towards their fathers, and about the effects that witnessing IPV has on children of same-sex couples. It might be hard to find a

sample of participants who have also witnessed female-on-male, male-on-male, and female-on-female violence between their parents. There has not been a study, however, that has assessed the attitudes that any students with prior exposure to IPV have about IPV scenarios with male-on-female, female-on-male, male-on-male, and female-on-female violence. A study that assessed their attitudes using all these vignettes would be beneficial because based on prior research it is not clear how prior exposure to IPV directly influences the people who are exposed to it and moreover, how the severity of violence among different couple compositions might be evaluated.

The Current Study

Understanding the multitude of factors that shape students' attitudes about IPV is critical given the high frequency with which dating violence occurs in this population, and because the abusive behavior that people exhibit in dating relationships in college can continue in marital relationships (Ward & Lundberg-Love, 2006). Based on the previous research, it is expected that, in the current study, male participants will assign less blame to male perpetrators. This prediction is supported by research showing that male participants were more likely to side with male perpetrators (Nicolson, 2010). In light of research by Toussaint and Webb (2005) showing that males are less empathetic compared to women, males will be expected to be less empathic in the current study. Since empathy likely is tied to how someone reacts to dating violence, this may be one mechanism that accounts for males' lower blame ratings for male perpetrators, should those differences emerge. With respect to predictions about severity ratings of different types of abuse (i.e., physical, sexual, psychological), another prediction is that psychological abuse will be rated as the least severe form of abuse. Carlson and Worden (2005) showed that people were less likely to define psychological abuse as DV and did not perceive the same level of severity associated with psychological abuse as they did with physical and sexual abuse.

A third prediction is that the violence in opposite-sex relationships will be viewed as more severe compared to same-sex couples. Studies by Harris and Cook (1994), Wise and Bowman (1997), and Hamby and Jackson (2010) all showed that the battering incidents between the opposite-sex couples were seen as the more severe compared to the incidents between the same-sex couples. Finally, the last prediction is that the students with prior IPV exposure will rate the different types of abuse less severely and they will assign less blame to the perpetrators. This prediction is an exploratory one given the lack of research on the effects of prior exposure to IPV. The participants who have prior exposure might be desensitized to the vignettes about abuse because they have witnessed IPV. In contrast, the participants without previous exposure to IPV will probably be sensitized to the vignettes, since the abusive situations in the vignettes might include circumstances that they are not used to seeing in relationships. Another exploratory element of this prediction is that the participants with prior exposure to IPV will assign less blame to the perpetrators. This is because females with prior exposure to IPV tolerate abusive relationships since they have come to believe that violence is a natural part of a relationship. Also males with prior exposure to IPV are more likely to model their violent fathers (Straus et al., 1980). This is why female and male participants with previous exposure might be less harsh on the perpetrators and assign equal blame between the perpetrators and the victims.

Although some studies have contributed to our understanding of college students' attitudes about IPV, the current thesis topic will expand upon these studies and fill in some of the gaps. Previous research has focused predominately on physical abuse only, and largely has not explored college students' reactions to psychological or sexual IPV. This study will include all three types of abuse that occur in both same-sex and opposite-sex couples. It also expands on the previous research because it will be examining if participant gender affects severity and blame

ratings assigned in IPV vignettes with physical, sexual, and psychological abuse in opposite-sex and same-sex couples. Also, in order to understand reasons for gender differences in severity ratings, previous exposure to IPV and empathy will be examined to see if there are differences between males and females on these variables.

Method

Participants

The 72 participants all were undergraduate college students enrolled in psychology courses at a small, private college in the Northeastern United States. The sample was made up of 60% females and 40% males. There were 40 (56%) first-year students, 19 (26%) sophomores, 7 (10%) juniors, and 6 (8%) seniors. Race/ethnicity was as follows: 74% White, 12% Mixed Race, 7% Asian or Asian American, 6% Black or African American, and 1% Hispanic or Latino. The mean age of the participants was 19.19 (*SD*= 1.21). Less than half (42%) of the participants reported being in a romantic relationship at the time of the study; 58% reported not currently being in a relationship. Ninety percent of the participants, however, indicated that they had been in a romantic relationship previously. The highest level of education reported by participants for their mothers was: 43% college degree, 33% graduate degree, 14% some college, 7% high school graduate, 1% some graduate school, and 1% junior high or middle school or less. For fathers' the percentages were as follows: 47% graduate degree, 31% college degree, 12% some college, 3% high school graduate, 3% some graduate school, 3% some high school, 1% unknown.

Measures

Demographic questions. Students were asked to indicate the following demographic information: age, gender, race/ethnicity, relationship status, class year, and the highest level of

formal education obtained by both of their parents. (Please see Appendix A: Research Measures, for the complete list of demographic questions.)

Vignettes. There were a total of 12 vignettes that varied by gender and couple composition; specifically, there were four vignettes that varied the couple composition: male-on-female, female-on-male, male-on-male, and female-on-female instances of IPV. For each of these couples, there were three vignettes depicting physical, sexual, and psychological abuse scenarios. The vignettes were adapted from real-life accounts from victims of IPV and were modified in order to make it easier for college students to relate to them (Kirkwood, 1993; Nicolson, 2010; Potter, 2008;). For each vignette the context of the IPV was changed so that the violence took place in a college environment, such as a dorm room. Also, elements of college life, such as drinking alcohol or attending parties were added to the vignettes in order to make them resemble scenarios that would actually occur in a college setting.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four types of gender and couple compositions. They were given three vignettes for the three different types of abuse which all featured couples that matched the specific gender and couple composition that they were assigned to. The events in the vignettes for the three types of abuse were all the same for all the couple compositions. The only differences were the names and pronouns that were used in each of them. The vignettes for the opposite-sex couples used the names Becky and Pete; for the same-sex couples Matt and John and Natalie and Maria were used. (Appendix A)

Some participants (N= 24) were given the three vignettes for a specific couple with the *same names* used for the couple in each vignette, whereas the remaining participants were given the three vignettes for a specific couple composition with different names for the couple in each vignette. This was done in order to make sure that the participants knew that a different couple

was used in each vignette. Using the same names in each vignette could have made some participants think that it was the same couple in each vignette. The new names for the vignettes (Mary, David, etc.) were picked from an Internet search of what the most popular female and male names were for the year 2011. The vignettes and the couple compositions were completely counterbalanced in order to account for possible sequence effects. This included randomly assigning participants to the six possible sequences of scenarios with the three types of violence, which made the desirable sample size a multiple of 24.

Vignette questions. After reading each vignette, participants responded to five questions using a 7-point Likert rating scale. The questions were modeled after those that Hamby and Jackson (2010) developed for their study. Specifically, participants were first asked how severe they thought the abuse was (1= *not severe*, 7=*very severe*), the extent to which each person in the vignette was responsible for the abuse (1= *not responsible*, 7= *very responsible*), if the incident should be reported (1= *definitely not*, 7= *definitely*), if the police, or campus safety, or dorm staff should be told about the incident (1= *definitely not*, 7= *definitely),* and if the victim should seek counseling (1= *definitely not*, 7= *definitely*). (Appendix A)

Previous exposure to IPV. The WIT scale was developed in order to assess indirect exposure to IPV; specifically the participant's exposure to violence between their caregivers (Sullivan, 2004). This study included eight of the 26 items from this scale. The eight items were selected because they asked about witnessing physical abuse between both of their caregivers, and the participants were also asked in another scale about their direct exposure to physical abuse. Participants were asked to indicate whether or not their caregivers pushed or shoved, beat up, slapped, or kicked each other, by responding with either *yes or no* to each statement. A total

score for each participant was calculated for the items of this scale and was called the WIT total score. The Cronbach's alpha for the eight items was .82. (Appendix A)

Recent exposure to IPV. Select items were used from the short form of the revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2; Straus et al., 1996), to determine whether participants have been perpetrators or victims of dating violence. Four of the 12 items from the short form of the CTS2 scale (CTS2S) were selected (Douglas, 2004). These four items were selected because they assessed direct exposure to physical abuse, which related to the eight items of the WIT scale that assessed indirect exposure to physical abuse. These items inquired about whether participants perpetrated or experienced both current and past physical abuse, specifically whether they had been pushed, shoved, slapped, punched, kicked, or beat-up their partners, and/or whether they had perpetrated any of these actions with their partners.

One modification that was made to the scale was to convert the frequency response to a dichotomous response scale using yes or no as the responses. This was done because the participants were not required to be in romantic relationships at the time of the study, and thus it was expected that the frequency of these behaviors might be low for some participants. Two dichotomous variables of CTS perpetrator and CTS victim were constructed from the four items, which were used to distinguish participants who had been victims of IPV and participants who had been perpetrators of IPV. A composite variable of prior IPV exposure also was created, which included the total WIT scores, and the two dichotomous variables of CTS perpetrator and CTS victim. The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was .40, likely because it only contained four items and it had a limited range.

Social Desirability. The Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (MCSDS) was developed by Crowne and Marlowe (1964) and determined whether the participants were prone

to responding in a socially desirable way. All 33 items from the scale were used in this study, with 18 true statements and 15 false statements. The 15 false statements were reversed scored and the total score for each participant was determined by adding up all the responses for all 33 items. It was thought that participants, who were more likely to respond in a socially desirable way on this scale, would be more likely to respond in a socially desirable way on the other study measures as well. This measure was used as one mean of assessing the validity of participants' responses. Sample true and false statements include "before voting I thoroughly investigate the qualifications of all the candidates" and "there have been occasions when I felt like smashing things." The total MCSDS score for the participants were calculated by adding up all of their responses (Leite & Beretvas, 2005). The Cronbach's alpha of this scale for this study was .76. Other studies have reported internal consistencies for this scale that were in the .70s range (Barger, 2002, p. 289). (Appendix A)

Empathy. In order to assess participants' level of emotional empathy, the Multi-Dimensional Emotional Empathy scale (Caruso & Mayer, 1998) was used. Twenty-nine of the 30 items from this scale were used; the thirtieth item ("I feel other people's joy") was excluded due to a technical error. There are positively and negatively worded statements in this scale in order to reduce the likelihood of response bias. The negatively worded statements were reversed scored and the total empathy score was calculated by taking the mean of all the responses. Participants responded to whether they agreed with the statements using a five-point scale (1= *strongly disagree,* 5= *strongly agree*). Sample items from this scale include, "I cry easily when watching a sad movie" and "I don't give others' feelings much thought." There were also six subscales for this scale, which included selected items from the scale (Caruso & Mayer, 1998). The subscales were responsive crying, suffering, emotional attention, feel for others, positive

sharing, and emotional contagion. The scores for these subscales were calculated by taking the mean of the individual items in each subscale and the general empathy score was calculated by taking the mean of the scores of all the subscales (Caruso & Mayer, 1998). The Cronbach's alpha for the 29 items was .86. (Appendix A)

Procedure

Undergraduate students in several psychology courses at Trinity College were invited to participate in this study; both directly by the researcher or in an email. Students were offered research participation credit and/or extra credit for their participation. The surveys were administered during 13 sessions in groups ranging from one to ten participants. Sessions were limited to 10 students so that participants felt a sense of privacy during the survey administration. Participants were only required to attend one session, since the entire survey could be completed within one session. The sessions were about 30 minutes long.

The surveys were distributed during the last month of the fall 2011 semester and during the first two months of the spring 2012 semester. Before the participants took the surveys they read and signed the informed consent. Then they were randomly assigned a survey packet that was either already placed on one of the desks, in order to spread the participants out, or a survey packet that the researcher handed to them randomly. All the surveys were anonymous and only contained the ID numbers on the top, with the surveys being numbered from 1 to 72. After the participants completed the study they were offered a sheet with a list of resources that included the numbers for the counseling center and the women and gender resource action center on campus. This sheet was provided because when the participants were being recruited for the study they were not told that it was about dating violence. In order to reduce any possible risks of

participants having an adverse reaction to the survey, the content of the dating violence vignettes was discussed in the informed consent and the resource sheet was given out.

The first 24 participants were given survey packets with vignettes that had couples with all the same names. For example, if a participant was randomly assigned to a male-on-female IPV packet, the names of the couple for all three vignettes would be Becky and Pete. For the next 48 participants, the names for each of the couples in the vignettes were changed to different names, so not every vignette for the male-on-female violence packet had the names Becky and Pete on them. This was done because of initial participant feedback about being confused about whether or not the same couple was being used in each vignette. Thus, in order to control for a story effect, in which the participants might think that the vignettes talk about the same couples with the same victims experiencing repeated IPV incidences being perpetrated by the same perpetrator, the names of the couples were changed for the remaining 48 participants. The participants were also given the vignette questions, the WIT scale, the CTS2S scale, the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability scale, and the Multi-Dimensional Emotional Empathy scale in their survey packets. Despite the sensitive nature of the vignettes and questions, none of the participants reported an adverse effect during the sessions.

Results

Vignette-Related Questions

Five repeated measures ANOVAs were conducted in order to determine if there were significant differences between male and female participants' ratings of perceived severity of violence, victim blame, perpetrator blame, need for notification, and need for counseling. Mauchly's test was used for each ANOVA in order to assess whether the assumption of sphericity had been violated. In cases where the Mauchly's test showed that the assumption of

sphericity had been violated (χ^2= 11.71, p< .01), the degrees of freedom were calculated using Greenhouse-Geisser estimates of sphericity (ε= .86). In addition, in cases where there was a significant main effect, post-hoc paired t-tests were conducted; in these cases, a Bonferroni correction of .0167 per test was used (.05/4) to control for experiment-wise error. The mean ratings for each vignette question by gender can be seen in Table 1.

Perceived severity of violence. There was a significant main effect of type of abuse on the perceived severity of abuse F(1.71, 109.44)= 60.75, p<.001. There was no effect of participant gender or couple composition on perceived severity ratings, nor were there any significant interaction effects. The difference in the severity ratings for physical abuse (M= 6.67, SD= .67) and the ratings for psychological abuse (M= 5.18, SD= 1.13) was significant, t(71)= 10.32, p<.001, with higher severity ratings for physical abuse. Also the difference in the severity ratings for psychological abuse (M= *5.18,* SD= 1.13) and sexual abuse (M=6.54, SD= .67) was significant, t(71)= -9.43, p<.001, with lower severity ratings for psychological abuse. The difference between the ratings for physical abuse (M= 6.67, SD= .67) and sexual abuse (M=6.54, SD= .67), however, was not significant, t(71)= 1.27, *ns*.

Victim blame ratings. A second repeated measures ANOVA was conducted for the vignette question about the extent to which the victim was responsible for the abuse. There was a significant main effect of type of abuse on the victim blame ratings F(2, 128)= 16.90, p<.001. There was no effect of participant gender or couple composition on victim blame ratings, nor were there any significant interaction effects. The difference between the victim blame ratings for physical abuse (M= 3.19, SD= 1.94) and psychological abuse (M= 1.74, SD= 1.27) was significant, t(71)= 6.02, p<.001, with higher victim blame ratings for physical abuse. Also, the difference between the victim blame ratings for psychological abuse (M= 1.74, SD= 1.27) and

sexual abuse (*M*= 2.83, *SD*= 1.99) was significant, $t(71)= -5.15$, $p<.001$, with lower victim blame ratings for psychological abuse. Victim blame ratings for the physical abuse (*M*= 3.19, *SD*= 1.94) and sexual abuse (*M*= 2.83, *SD*= 1.99) vignettes, however, did not differ $t(71)= 1.37$, *ns*. For the victim blame ratings, although there were no significant gender differences, there seems to be a slight trend in terms of female participants possibly giving higher victim blame ratings for the couple composition of female-male for physical, sexual, and psychological abuse. Also the victim blame ratings given by the female and male participants for psychological abuse were a lot lower than the ratings given for physical and sexual abuse (see Figures 1–3).

Perpetrator blame ratings. Another repeated measures ANOVA was conducted for the vignette question about the extent to which the perpetrator was responsible for the abuse. There was no effect of type of abuse, participant gender, or couple composition on perpetrator blame ratings, nor were there any significant interaction effects.

Opinions about notification and need for counseling. A fourth repeated measures ANOVA was conducted for the vignette question about the extent to which the police, campus safety, or dorm staff should be notified about the abuse. There was a significant main effect of type of abuse on the extent to which participants believed some type of authority should be notified, $F(2, 128)= 153.15$, $p<.001$. The difference in the notify ratings for physical abuse (*M*= 6.44, *SD*= 1.07) and the ratings for psychological abuse (*M*= 2.83, *SD*= 1.61) was significant, $t(71)= 17.36$, $p<.001$, with higher notify ratings for physical abuse. Also the difference in the victim blame ratings for psychological abuse (*M*= 2.83, *SD*= 1.61) and the ratings for sexual abuse (*M*= 5.94, *SD*= 1.45) was significant, $t(71)= -14.45$, $p<.001$, with lower notify ratings for psychological abuse. The difference in the severity ratings between physical abuse (*M*= 6.44, *SD*= 1.07) and sexual abuse (*M*= 5.94, *SD*= 1.45) also was significant, $t(71)= 2.70$, $p<.01$, with

higher notify ratings for physical abuse. There was no effect of participant gender or couple composition on need for notification, nor were there any significant interaction effects. For the notify ratings, although there were no significant gender differences, there seems to be a slight trend in terms of male participants possibly giving lower notify ratings for the couple composition of female-male for all three types of abuse (see Figures 4–6).

A final repeated measures ANOVA was conducted for the vignette question about the need for the victim to seek counseling. There was a significant main effect of type of abuse on participants' opinions as to whether the victim should seek counseling, $F(2, 128)= 10.75$, $p<.001$. The difference in the victim blame ratings for psychological abuse ($M= 4.96$, $SD= 1.52$) and the ratings for sexual abuse ($M= 6.01$, $SD= 1.33$) was significant, $t(71)= -4.89$, $p<.001$, with lower counseling ratings for psychological abuse. Also the difference in the counseling ratings for physical abuse ($M= 5.54$, $SD= 1.54$) and the ratings for psychological abuse ($M= 4.96$, $SD= 1.52$) was significant, $t(71)= 3.00$, $p<.01$, with higher counseling ratings for physical abuse. The difference in the counseling ratings between physical abuse ($M= 5.54$, $SD= 1.54$) and sexual abuse ($M= 6.01$, $SD= 1.33$) were also significant, $t(71)= -2.74$, $p<.05$, with lower counseling ratings for physical abuse.

Although there was no effect of participant gender or couple composition on need for counseling, there was a significant three-way interaction between type of abuse, couple composition, and the gender of the participant $F(6, 128)= 2.31$, $p<.05$. Figure 7 shows that for the physical abuse vignette, male participants were less likely to perceive a need for counseling across all couple types, with the exception of the male-male couple. Males' and females' ratings for the sexual and psychological abuse vignettes were similar, although in the case of sexual abuse, males were less likely to perceive a need for counseling in female-male dyads and for

psychological abuse, males deemed counseling less necessary in female-female dyads (Figures 7-9).

Effects of Family and Relationship Exposure to IPV

Correlations were examined in order to determine if there were any relations between prior IPV exposure and the severity, victim blame, and perpetrator blame ratings for the vignette questions. Since there were low rates of prior and current exposure to IPV reported, a continuous variable for prior exposure to IPV was created, which included all the items on the CTS2S and the WIT scales. As shown in Table 2, prior exposure to IPV was positively correlated with the victim blame ratings for psychological abuse. This suggests that the participants with prior exposure might have been more likely to attribute more blame to the victims of psychological abuse.

Table 2 shows that there was a positive correlation between the gender of the participant and the severity ratings for sexual abuse, suggesting that females perceived the severity of the sexual abuse vignettes to be greater. Also as shown in Table 2, there were positive correlations between the victim blame ratings for physical abuse and sexual abuse, physical abuse and psychological abuse, and sexual abuse and psychological abuse. This suggests that the participants might have rated the victim blame for these three types of abuse in a similar way. Also as shown in Table 2, there was a positive correlation between the perpetrator blame ratings for sexual abuse and psychology abuse. This suggests that the participants might have rated the perpetrator blame for these two types of abuse in a similar way. As displayed in Table 2, the victim blame ratings for physical, sexual, and psychological abuse were all inversely associated with the perpetrator blame ratings for these three types of abuse. This suggests that the participants either perceived the victim or the perpetrator as being the one to blame for the abuse,

and the victim and the perpetrator did not share the blame equally. Finally, as displayed in Table 2, there was a positive correlation between the gender of the participant and perpetrator blame ratings for physical abuse, suggesting that females were more likely to blame the perpetrator in these cases.

Three repeated measures ANOVAs also were conducted to assess whether prior exposure to IPV affected the severity, victim blame, and perpetrator blame ratings that the participants assigned to the vignettes. Mauchly's test was used for each ANOVA in order to assess whether the assumption of sphericity had been violated. In cases where the Mauchly's test showed that the assumption of sphericity had been violated ($\chi^2 = 11.71$, $p < .01$), the degrees of freedom were calculated using Greenhouse-Geisser estimates of sphericity ($\varepsilon = .86$). The continuous variable for prior exposure to IPV was used in these ANOVAs to represent prior IPV exposure. A repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to investigate whether having prior exposure affected how participants rated the severity of the different types of abuse. Prior IPV exposure did not have a significant effect on how participants rated the severity of the three types of abuse and the three-way interactions between the severity ratings, couple composition, and prior IPV exposure and between the severity ratings, the gender of the participants, and prior IPV exposure both were nonsignificant.

Another repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to determine whether having prior IPV exposure affected participants' ratings of how responsible the perpetrator was for the abuse. Prior IPV exposure did not have a significant main effect on how the participants rated perpetrator blame for the three types of abuse; similar three-way interactions to those noted above were conducted and were found to be nonsignificant as well. A final repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to determine whether prior IPV exposure affected how participants

rated how responsible the victim was for the abuse. Prior IPV exposure did not have a significant main effect on how the participants rated the victim blame for the three types of abuse and the two three-way interactions examined were nonsignificant.

Effects of Social Desirability

Five correlations were conducted in order to compare the participants' responses to the five vignette questions and their scores on the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability scale (MCSDS). Overall, most of the correlations were nonsignificant, which suggests that the vignette question ratings do not simply reflect socially desirable responding. As shown in Table 2, there was a positive correlation between the victim blame rating for sexual abuse and the MCSDS total score. This suggests that participants might have answered this question in a socially desirable way. Also as shown in Table 2, there was a positive correlation between the gender of the participants and the MCSDS total score, suggesting that females were more likely to respond to the vignette questions in a socially desirable way. There was also a positive correlation between the counseling rating for physical abuse and the MCSDS total score (r=.25, p<.05). This suggests that participants might have rated whether a victim of physical abuse should seek counseling in a socially desirable way.

Effects of Empathy

An independent samples t-test was conducted in order to investigate whether there were gender differences in the total empathy scores from the Multi-Dimensional Empathy Scale. The results showed that there was a significant difference between males in females on their total empathy scores, $t(66)$=-5.22, p<.001, with females reporting higher levels of empathy compared to males. Another independent samples t-test was conducted to evaluate whether there were gender differences among the participants on their scores for the six empathy subscales and their

general empathy scores. The results showed that there were highly significant differences between males and females on the empathy subscale of responsive crying $t(68)= -5.30$, $p<.001$ and on the general empathy scores $t(68)= -5.21$, $p<.001$. There were also significant differences between males and females on the empathy subscale of suffering $t(68)= -3.30$, $p<.01$, on the empathy subscale of emotional attention $t(68)= -3.30$, $p<.01$, and on the empathy subscale of feel for others $t(68)= -2.28$, $p<.05$. There were no significant differences between males and females on the empathy subscale of positive sharing and the empathy subscale of emotional contagion. As shown in Table 2 there was a positive correlation between the total Empathy score and the MCSDS total score, which suggests that the participants might have possibly rated the items on the Multi-Dimensional Emotional Empathy Scale in a socially desirable way. Also as shown in Table 2, no significant correlations were found between participants' total empathy scores and how they rated the severity of the abuse, the victim blame, and perpetrator blame for the vignettes.

Discussion

Key Findings

The results of this study both support and disprove the proposed hypotheses. Specifically, the hypothesis that psychological abuse would be rated as the least severe form of abuse was supported; physical and sexual abuse were rated as more severe than psychological abuse, with physical abuse rated as the most severe. This is consistent with previous research showing that participants were less likely to identify psychological abuse as a form of abuse since its effects were less visible than the effects of the other two types of abuse (Carlson & Worden, 2005; Nicolson, 2010; Renzetti, 1992). In the vignettes from the current study, the injuries that the victims of physical and sexual abuse would sustain would be more apparent since they were

described as being physical injuries, which might have made rating the severity of these forms of abuse easier for the participants (Walker, 1984). For psychological abuse, however, the injuries that the victims would sustain would not be as apparent since they were described in the vignettes as being emotional and psychological in nature, making it less likely that the abuse would be perceived more severely than physical and sexual abuse.

This relates to another finding from this study, which was that the victims in the psychological abuse vignettes were assigned the least amount of blame. Since the participants did not regard psychological abuse as being as severe as the other forms of abuse, perhaps they were less likely to blame the victims of psychological abuse since these victims incurred fewer injuries from this form of abuse. Relatedly, physical abuse had the highest notify ratings, possibly because the results of this type of abuse are the most visible out of all three types of abuse. The results also showed that participants' perceived need for counseling was the highest for sexual abuse. This could possibly be because past research has shown that the drinking culture on college campuses make the occurrence of sexual abuse more likely in these environments (Flowers, 2009). Thus, participants possibly viewed victims of sexual abuse as needing counseling the most, since sexual abuse is the most well-known form of IPV on college campuses. It is also not unusual for students on college campuses to seek counseling for sexual assault and rape. Also, according to the correlations female participants perceived sexual abuse as more severe. This may be due to the fact that female college students are almost four times more likely to be victims of sexual dating violence compared to male college students (Nicholson et al., 1998).

The hypothesis that male participants would assign less blame to male perpetrators was not supported because there was no significant difference between male and female participants'

perpetrator blame ratings. This suggests that male participants were not more likely to assign less blame to male perpetrators, possibly because unlike other studies where participants only received vignettes about physical abuse, in this study all participants received vignettes about three types of abuse, and each participant was assigned to a different couple composition. Perhaps, the trend of male participants assigning less blame to male perpetrators is a more common occurrence when male participants are only given a vignette with male-on-female physical abuse. For example, Nicholson (2010) reported that when participants were given a vignette with male-on-female physical abuse, male participants assigned less blame to the male perpetrator and took his side over the female's side. Relatedly, in the present study female participants were more likely to assign higher blame ratings to perpetrators of physical abuse. This is consistent with another study, which showed that female participants were more sympathetic towards the victim of a male-on-female physical abuse vignette (Locke & Richman, 1999). Similarly, the female participants in this study regarded the perpetrators more harshly for perpetrating physical abuse. Also, in the current study participants perceived either the victim or the perpetrator as being the one to blame for the abuse, and did not perceive them as sharing the blame equally. This suggests that the participants made clear-cut decisions when assigning blame for the abuse and there was always someone who was clearly the perpetrator and someone who was the victim. They possibly overlooked the possibility that both people in the vignettes could have indirectly or directly contributed to the abuse occurring.

The results of this study also showed that there was no significant difference between male and female participants' victim blame ratings; however, there was a slight trend for female participants to assign the victim a higher blame rating for the female-male couple composition for all three types of abuse. This might be because female participants were responding in a

socially desirable manner. Another finding in this study showed that female participants had higher scores on the CMSDS. Since females are often portrayed more as being the victims of abuse, female participants might have thought that the male victims of abuse imposed the abuse upon themselves, because society portrays males as usually being the perpetrators of abuse. A related finding was that even though there was no significant difference between male and female participants' notify ratings, there was a slight trend for male participants to assign lower notify ratings to the couple composition of female-male for all three types of abuse. This finding suggests that male participants thought that if males were the victims of abuse perpetrated by females others should not be notified about it. They might hold this view since it is a common view in society that a man should be embarrassed if a woman beats him up or rapes him.

The hypothesis that violence in opposite-sex relationships would be rated as more severe was not supported; there were no significant differences between the severity ratings that the participants assigned for each type of couple composition. More specifically, the vignettes with the couple compositions of male-female and female-male were not rated as more severe than the vignettes with the couple compositions of male-male and female-female. This finding is different from past research where participants rated the physical abuse vignette with male-on-female IPV as being more severe than the physical abuse vignettes with the couple compositions of female-male, male-male, and female-female (Hamby & Jackson, 2010; Harris & Cook, 1994; Wise & Bowman, 1997). One possible explanation for why the finding is different in this study is because in the three studies where the male-on-female vignettes were seen as the most severe, the participants were only given vignettes with physical abuse. Perhaps the trend of participants assigning higher levels of severity to the vignettes with opposite-sex couples is a more common occurrence when participants are only given vignettes with physical abuse for all of the couple

compositions. Since each participant received vignettes with three types abuse and the same couple composition, they might have focused more on the *type of abuse* that they were rating, rather than the *couple composition* of the vignettes, since they were each only assigned to one couple composition but they read about more than one type of abuse.

The hypotheses that participants with direct or indirect prior exposure to IPV would rate the different types of abuse less severely and would assign less blame to the perpetrators compared to those without IPV exposure were not supported. One possible reason for these findings is that there was a low number of participants that reported having prior IPV exposure, which likely reduced the power to detect differences between these groups. Even though there was no significant difference between the ratings of participants with prior IPV exposure and the ratings of participants without prior IPV exposure, participants with prior IPV exposure assigned more blame to the victims of psychological abuse. This is an interesting finding because even though the participants with prior IPV exposure did not blame the perpetrators less, they were more likely to hold the victims of psychological abuse accountable. The participants with prior IPV exposure might have blamed the victims more because they possibly were desensitized to abusive situations.

The hypothesis that males would be less empathetic was supported, since female participants reported higher empathy ratings. This relates to past research showing that females are more empathetic than males (Toussaint & Webb, 2005). The finding that female participants are more empathetic might be related to another finding in this study that shows that for the most part, female participants perceive a higher need for counseling compared to male participants. Since females are more empathetic, they might be more inclined to believe that victims of the abuse vignettes need to receive counseling. This relates to past research on gender differences in

academic and psychological help-seeking, because past research has shown that female college students were more likely to ask for help than male college students and males had less positive opinions about seeking help (Gloria, Hird, & Navarro, 2001).

An interesting finding related to help-seeking is that male participants perceived a lower need for counseling for all types of couple compositions for physical abuse, except the couple composition of male-male. For physical abuse for the couple composition of male-male, male participants perceived a higher need for counseling than female participants did. Perhaps this is because males in society are regarded as being able to inflict more bodily harm on victims because of their larger sizes (Browne, 1997). Also since the male-on-male physical abuse vignette involves two men, male participants possibly saw this as being the most physically aggressive abuse scenario. This finding relates to the study by Hamby and Jackson (2010), since they found that participants thought that the scenarios in which males perpetrated the abuse were more severe than the scenarios with female perpetrators, partly because males are much larger and potentially more aggressive than female perpetrators are.

Relatedly, participants seemed to rate whether a victim of physical abuse should seek counseling in a more socially desirable way compared to the other forms of IPV. Male participants might have perceived a greater need for counseling for male-on-male physical abuse because in society, physical abuse is seen as the most severe form of abuse, and men are portrayed as being more aggressive than women. There were also other findings that showed that males perceived a lower need for counseling for female-on-male sexual abuse. This could be because it might be embarrassing for a male victim of sexual abuse to admit that his girlfriend raped him. Male participants also perceived a lower need for counseling for psychological abuse for the couple composition of female-female, since there is the common belief in society that an

abusive incident between two lesbians is seen as just a "cat fight" (Renzetti, 1997). Thus, the male participants might have underestimated the amount of pain that a female perpetrator of psychological abuse couple impose on her partner.

Limitations

Most of the limitations of this study are related to the characteristics of the sample of participants. The sample size was relatively small and there was a disproportionately large number of female participants. This could have affected the results since females might have different views on IPV compared to males. Also, all participants in this study were students from a small, private college in the Northeastern United States, who were in psychology courses. Students in courses within the psychology department might have different opinions about IPV compared to students in other courses; psychology courses encourage students to be compassionate and to think critically. If the participants in this study had been in courses from different departments, the results might have been different. The majority of the participants were also White students, who were mostly first-year students or sophomores with highly educated parents. In summary, the results may lack external validity, since they are only representative of this sample of select college students and may not represent the opinions of emerging adults at other institutions or non-college attending individuals.

Another limitation of this study was that only a small number of the participants reported having prior IPV exposure, which made it difficult to adequately investigate whether participants with prior IPV exposure assign less blame to perpetrators and rate the types of abuse as less severe. Also the selected items from the CTS2S and WIT scales that were used in this study did not ask the participants about their prior exposure to sexual abuse or psychological abuse. Even though there were limitations in this study, the results extended the research that is available on

college students' opinions of IPV by including vignettes that include instances of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse among opposite-sex and same-sex couples. Also the results of this study extended the research that is available on how prior exposure to IPV and empathy affect college students' opinions of IPV.

Implications for Future Research

The limitations from this study suggest that this study should be replicated with a larger and more diverse group of participants. Within this larger and more diverse group of participants, there should be a more even gender and class year distribution, as well as more ethnic and racial diversity. The study should also be replicated using participants from a large university, who are all in different types of courses, in order to see if their perceptions of IPV are different from participants at a smaller college. Also more research needs to be done on the role that prior exposure to IPV might play in influencing the attitudes about IPV.

If possible, this study should be replicated so that the vignette ratings of a group of participants with prior exposure to IPV are compared to the vignette ratings of another group, without prior exposure to IPV. Participants in the former group could be recruited selectively so that only students with prior exposure to IPV are selected to be in this one group. This will allow researchers to more adequately examine the differences in the ratings that these two groups of participants assign to the vignette questions. Also, in a replication of this study, the measures used to assess prior exposure to IPV should be modified. Either the complete WIT and CTS2S scales should be used, or new measures that assess prior exposure to sexual abuse and psychological abuse should be added to this study.

Conclusions

When it came to the severity of different types of abuse, college students perceived psychological abuse as being the least severe when it occurred within both opposite-sex and same-sex couples. It was also apparent that participants did not regard abusive situations between opposite-sex and same-sex couples to be different. Society influences the ways in which college students perceive abuse since female students for the most part followed expected trends when they perceived a higher need for help-seeking for most of the victims of abuse. Male participants largely followed the societal norm that males are less likely to regard help-seeking as important, by perceiving a lower need for help-seeking for most of the victims of abuse. Female participants were more empathetic, which is a finding that is related to a gender expectation for females in society. Also female participants gave answers that were more socially desirable, which suggests that females have a higher need for approval from others. Overall, male and female college students have perceptions about IPV that are not significantly affected by relationship composition or their own genders, but are possibly more affected by societal norms and gender expectations.

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Table 1. **The participant means (and standard deviations) for the total ratings of the five vignette questions for all three types of abuse.**

	Participant	
	Male (*n*=29)	Female (*n*=43)
Severity Ratings		
Physical Abuse	6.55 (.57)	6.74 (.73)
Sexual Abuse	6.34 (.81)	6.67 (.52)
Psychological Abuse	5.21 (1.08)	5.16 (1.17)
Victim Blame Ratings		
Physical Abuse	3.38 (2.03)	3.07 (1.90)
Sexual Abuse	2.79 (1.90)	2.86 (2.10)
Psychological Abuse	1.90 (1.18)	1.63 (1.33)
Perpetrator Blame Ratings		
Physical Abuse	6.10 (1.11)	6.56 (.70)
Sexual Abuse	6.45 (.95)	6.42 (1.26)
Psychological Abuse	6.38 (.90)	6.60 (1.09)
Notify Ratings		
Physical Abuse	6.21 (1.32)	6.60 (.85)
Sexual Abuse	5.69 (1.63)	6.12 (1.31)
Psychological Abuse	2.97 (1.59)	2.74 (1.63)
Counseling Ratings		
Physical Abuse	4.93 (1.58)	5.95 (1.38)
Sexual Abuse	5.79 (1.47)	6.16 (1.21)
Psychological Abuse	4.69 (1.61)	5.14 (1.46)

Note. The standard deviations for the means are in parentheses. The ratings that are listed are the total ratings given by the male and female participants, for the five vignette questions. [a]*N*=72

***Table 2*. Correlations among gender, IPV prior exposure, severity rating, victim blame rating, perpetrator blame rating, Social Desirability total score and Empathy total score.**

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1 Gender (Male= 0, Female= 1)	----											
2 IPV Prior Exposure	.13	----										
3 Severity rating of physical abuse	.14	.05	----									
4 Victim blame rating for physical abuse	-.08	.04	-.06	----								
5 Perpetrator blame rating for physical abuse	.25*	.05	.42**	-.27*	----							
6 Severity rating of sexual abuse	.24*	.09	.22	-.17	.29*	----						
7 Victim blame rating for sexual abuse	.02	.00	.04	.35**	.11	-.29*	----					
8 Perpetrator blame rating for sexual abuse	-.01	.07	.12	-.05	.14	.26**	-.48**	----				
9 Severity rating for psychological abuse	-.02	.15	.16	.07	.17	.15	.10	.00	----			
10 Victim blame rating for psychological abuse	.11	.32**	.03	.23*	.14	-.06	.45**	-.28*	.08	----		
11 Perpetrator blame rating for psychological abuse	.11	-.04	.21	-.07	.23	.23	-.28*	.61**	.09	-.45**	----	
12 MCSDS Total Score	.30*	-.23	.17	.11	.11	.06	.28*	.04	.23	-.11	.15	----
13 Empathy Total Score	.54**	.24	.07	-.05	.18	.11	.17	.06	.21	.11	.12	.43**

Note. $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$
The variable of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) prior exposure includes the items from the WIT and the CTS2s scales. [a]*N=72*
The Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability scale (MCSDS) total score includes all of the items on the MCSDS scale. (*N*=68)
The Empathy total score includes all of the items on the Multi-Dimensional Emotional Empathy Scale. (*N*=68)

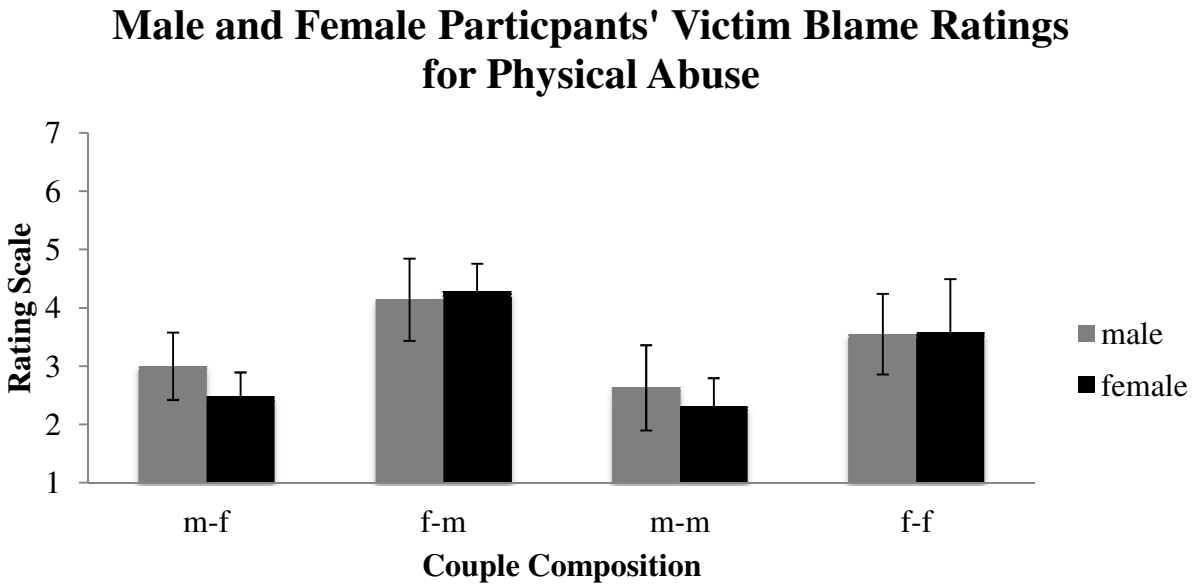

Figure 1. There were no significant differences in victim blame ratings for physical abuse as a function of gender or couple composition. For all the couple compositions, the means were low-to-moderate.

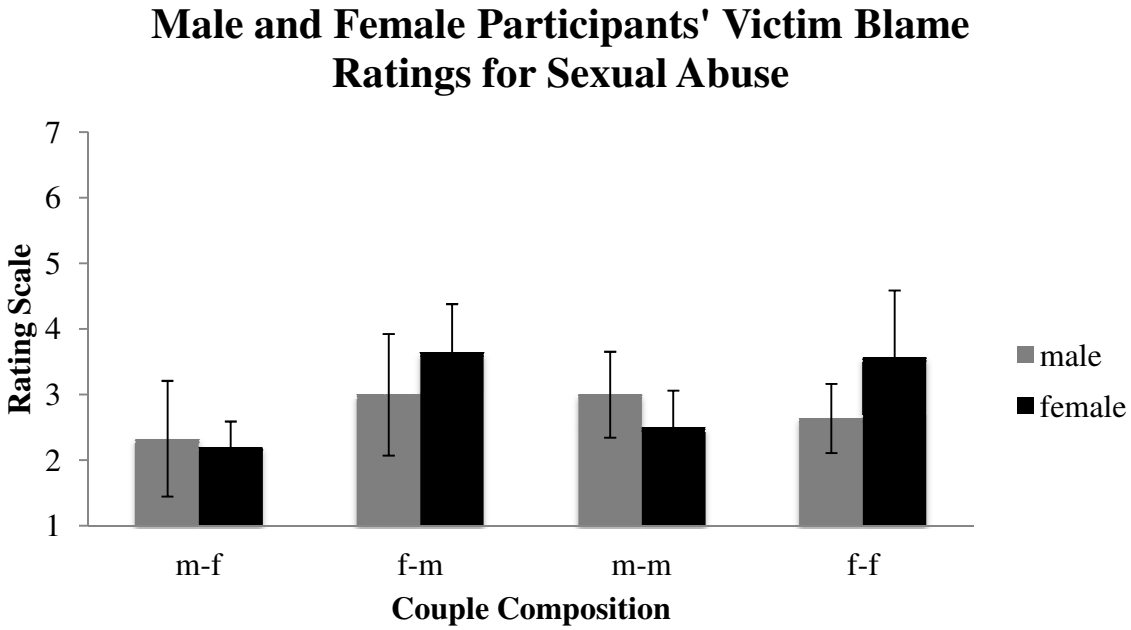

Figure 2. There were no significant differences in victim blame ratings as a function of gender or couple composition. As with victim blame ratings for physical abuse, the means were low-to-moderate for all of the couple compositions.

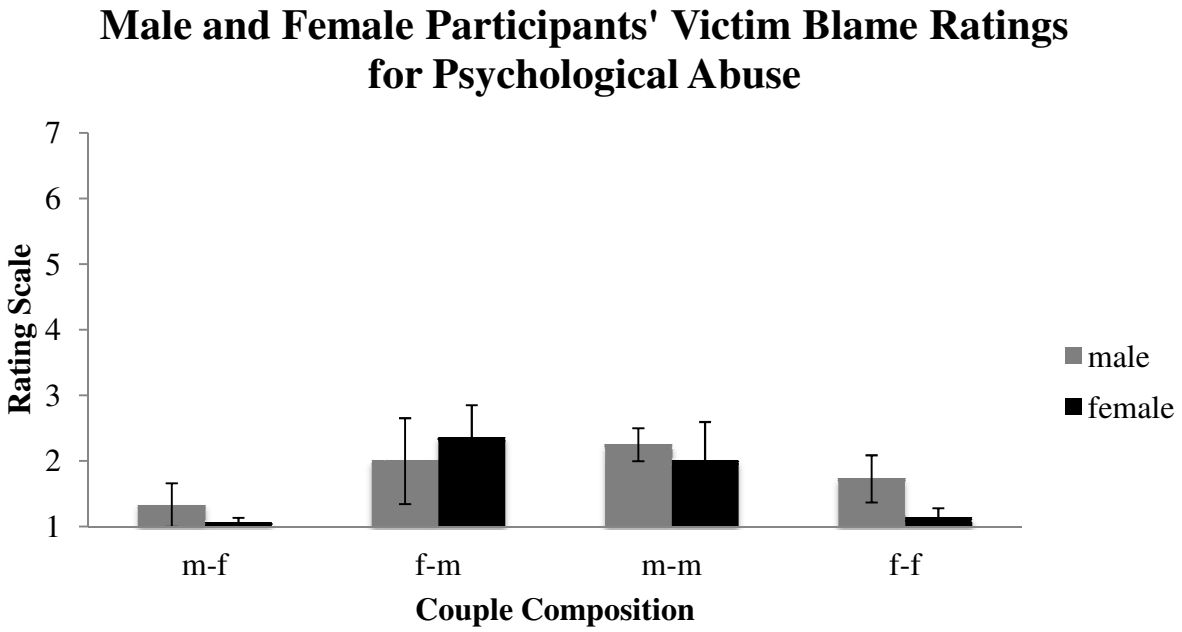

Figure 3. There were no significant differences in victim blame ratings for psychological abuse as a function of gender or couple composition. Although there was no significant three-way interaction between gender, type of abuse, and couple composition, victim blame ratings for psychological abuse were low as opposed to the low-to-moderate ratings for physical and sexual abuse.

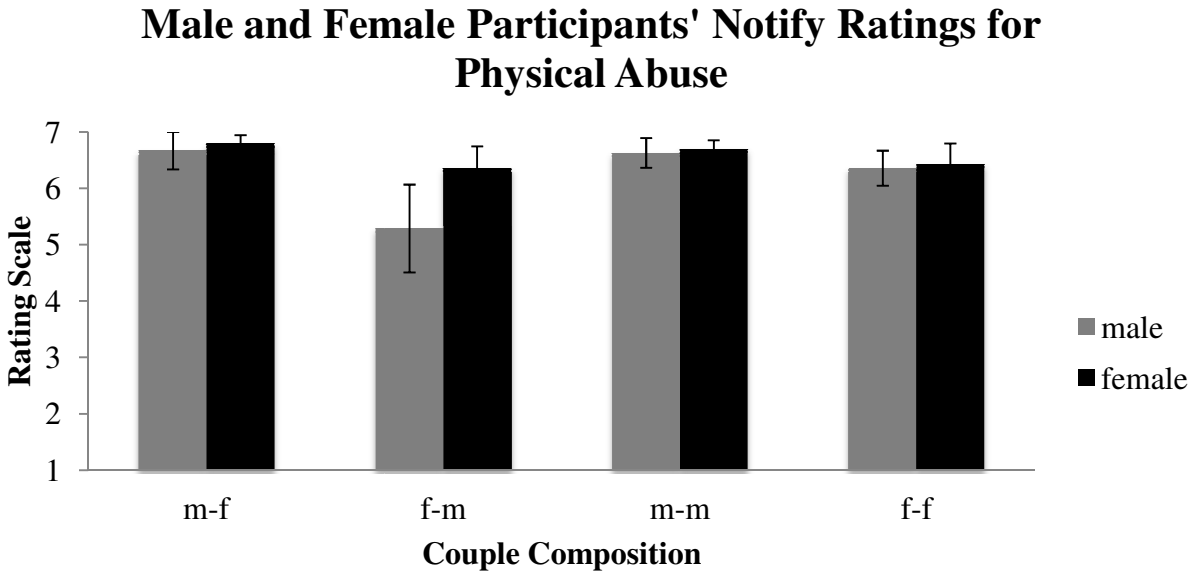

Figure 4. There were no significant differences in notify ratings for physical abuse as a function of gender or couple composition. Although it appears that men tended to give slightly lower notify ratings than women did for the f-m couple, there was not a significant difference.

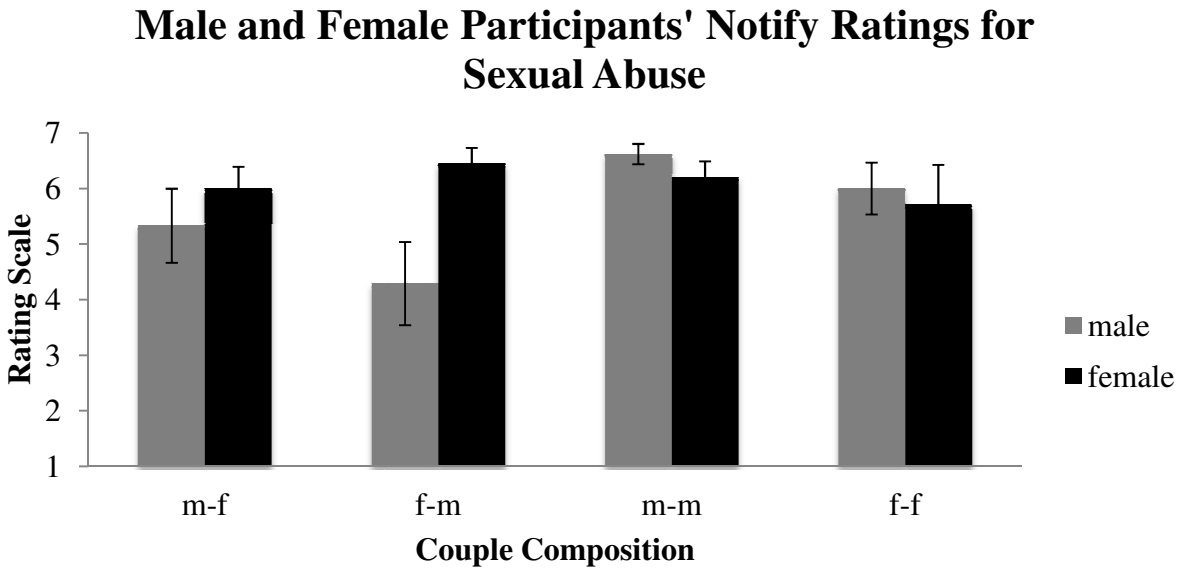

Figure 5. There were no significant differences in notify ratings for sexual abuse as a function of gender or couple composition. Although it appears that there is a greater gender difference for the f-m couple composition for sexual abuse than for physical abuse, this was also not significant.

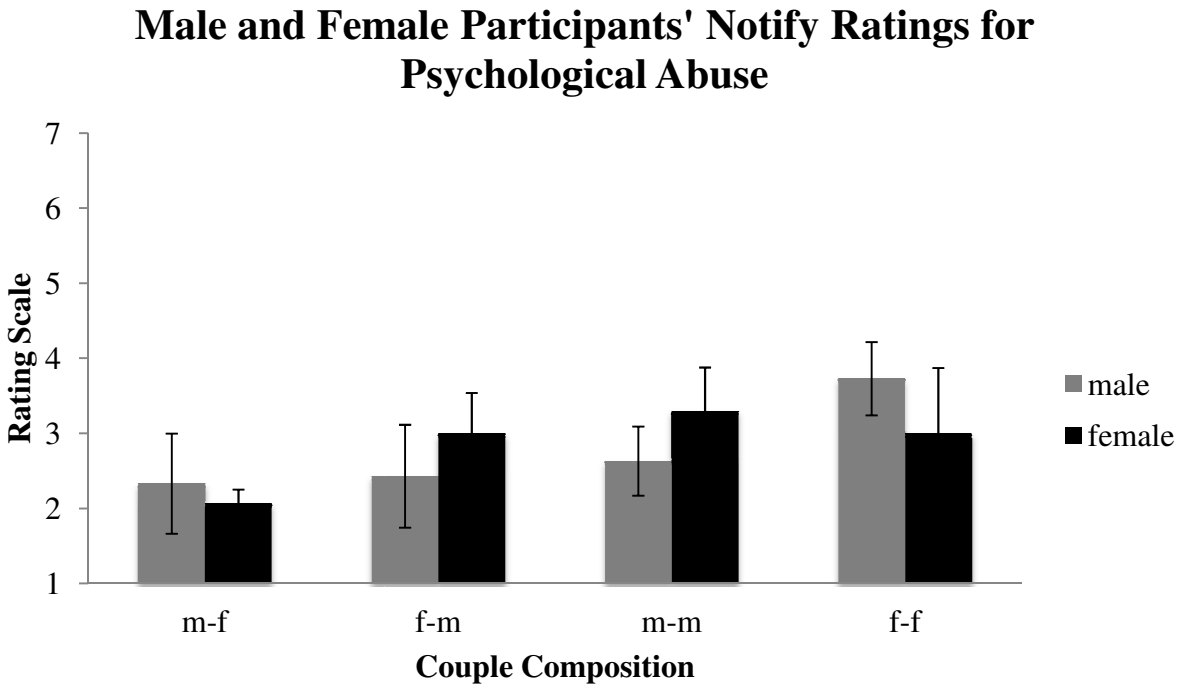

Figure 6. Unlike the figures for the physical and sexual abuse notify ratings, it is apparent that there were no significant differences in notify ratings for psychological abuse as a function of gender or couple composition.

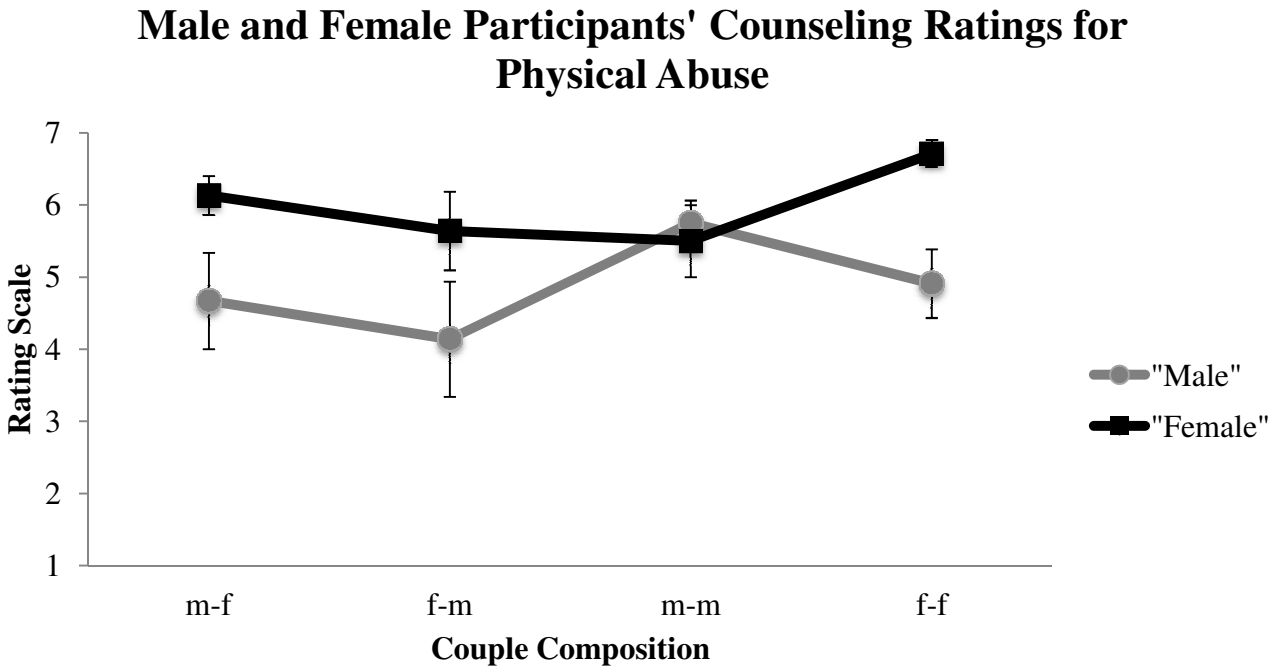

Figure 7. Males largely do not find counseling necessary, but are in agreement with female participants about the counseling ratings for physical abuse for the couple composition of male-male.

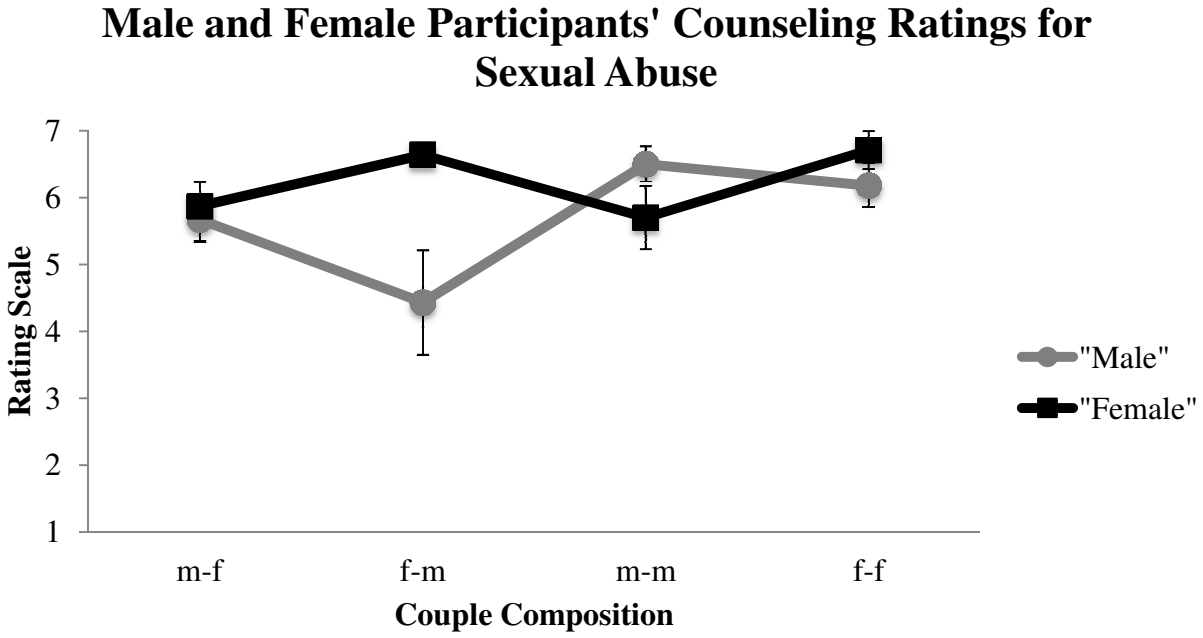

Figure 8. Males and females had similar views on counseling for sexual abuse for the couple compositions of male-female, male-male, and female-female, but for the couple composition of female-male males perceived a lower need for counseling.

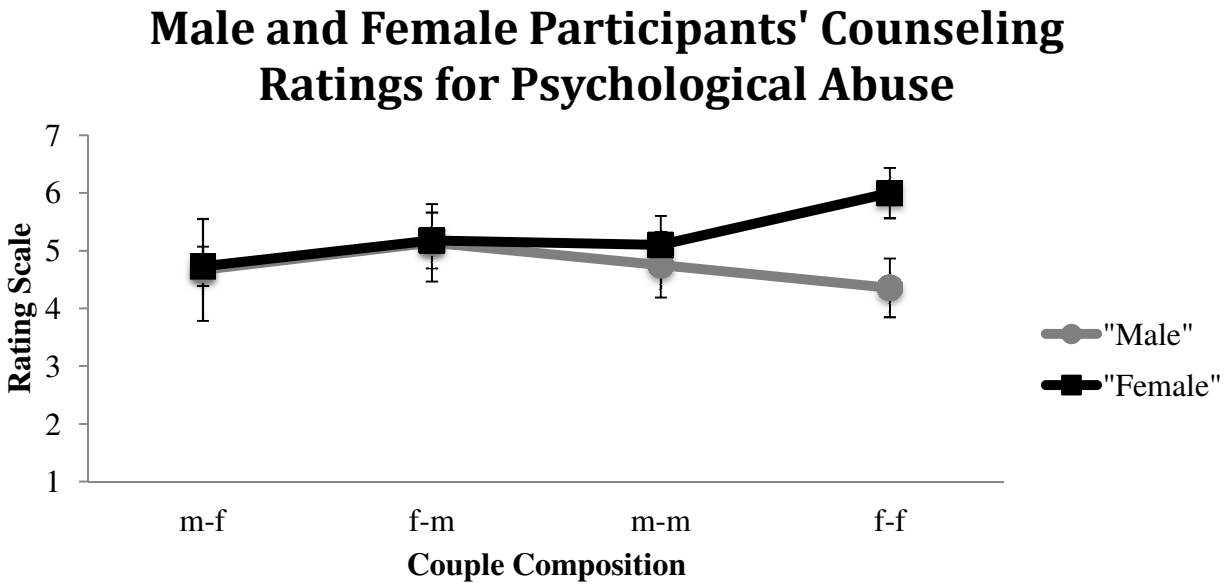

Figure 9. Males and females reported a similar need for counseling for psychological abuse for the couple compositions of male-female, female-male, and male-male, but not for the couple composition of female-female where males perceived a lower need for counseling.

Appendix A: Research Measures

Demographic Questions: (open-ended questions)

1. Age:
2. Gender:
3. Race/Ethnicity:
4. Relationship Status: (yes or no)
    a. Are you currently in a relationship?
    b. Have you ever been in a relationship?
5. Class Year:
6. What is the highest level of formal education obtained by your parents?
    a. Mother:
    Junior high/middle school or less
    Some high school
    High School graduate
    Postsecondary school other than college
    Some college
    College degree
    Some graduate school
    Graduate degree
    Unknown
    b. Father:
    Junior high/middle school or less
    Some high school
    High School graduate
    Postsecondary school other than college
    Some college
    College degree
    Some graduate school
    Graduate degree
    Unknown

Vignettes

Physical Abuse:

Male-on-Female Abuse:

"Becky and Pete are at a friend's party and Becky gets upset when she sees Pete flirting with another girl at the party. She confronts him about it by yelling at him and pouring liquor on him. Pete leaves the party and Becky follows him. They both go to Pete's dorm and Becky apologizes for what she has just done. Pete says that he is upset that she embarrassed him at the party and he approaches her and punches her in the face repeatedly. The more she apologizes for what just happened the more he beats her. Becky gets loose from him by hitting him in the groin. She looks in the mirror and sees that Pete has broken her nose and knocked teeth out of her mouth."

Female-on-Male Abuse:

"Becky and Pete are at a friend's party and Pete gets upset when he sees Becky flirting with another guy at the party. He confronts her about it by yelling at her and pouring liquor on her. Becky leaves the party and Pete follows her. They both go to Becky's dorm and Pete apologizes for what he has just done. Becky says that she is upset that he embarrassed her at the party and she approaches him and punches him in the face repeatedly. The more he apologizes for what just happened the more she beats him. Pete gets loose from her by hitting her in the groin. He looks in the mirror and sees that Becky has broken his nose and knocked teeth out of his mouth."

Male-on-Male Abuse:

"Matt and John are at a friend's party and Matt gets upset when he sees John flirting with another guy at the party. He confronts him about it by yelling at him and pouring liquor on him. John leaves the party and Matt follows him. They both go to John's dorm and Matt apologizes for what he has just done. John says that he is upset that Matt embarrassed him at the party and

he approaches him and punches him in the face repeatedly. The more Matt apologizes for what just happened the more John beats him. Matt gets loose from him by hitting him in the groin. He looks in the mirror and sees that John has broken his nose and knocked teeth out of his mouth."

Female-on-Female Abuse:

"Natalie and Maria are at a friend's party and Maria gets upset when she sees Natalie flirting with another girl at the party. She confronts her about it by yelling at her and pouring liquor on her. Natalie leaves the party and Maria follows her. They both go to Natalie's dorm and Maria apologizes for what she has just done. Natalie says that she is upset that Maria embarrassed her at the party and she approaches her and punches her in the face repeatedly. The more Maria apologizes for what just happened the more Natalie beats her. Maria gets loose from her by hitting her in the groin. She looks in the mirror and sees that Natalie has broken her nose and knocked teeth out of her mouth."

Sexual Abuse:

Male-on-Female Abuse:

"Mary and her boyfriend David are coming back from a party, where they both drank. After they drive back to campus he pins her down in the car, rips off her leggings, and starts to have sex with her. She starts crying so he gets off of her and she is relieved that he stops. Mary allows David to come back to her dorm room after this incident because she thinks that since David stopped having sex with her he must really care about her. When they go to her room, however, David pushes Mary down on her bed. Mary starts crying and then David starts to have sex with her again even though she does not want to and she cries all the way through it."

Female-on-Male Abuse:

"Mary and her boyfriend David are coming back from a party, where they both drank. After they drive back to campus she pins him down in the car, rips off his jeans, and starts to have sex with him. He starts crying so she gets off of him and he is relieved that she stops. David allows Mary to come back to his dorm room after this incident because he thinks that since Mary stopped having sex with him she must really care about him. When they go to his room, however, Mary pushes David down on his bed. David starts crying and then Mary starts to have sex with him again even though he does not want to and he cries all the way through it."

Male-on-Male Abuse:

"James and his partner Robert are coming back from a party, where they both drank. After they drive back to campus Robert pins James down in the car, rips off his jeans, and starts to have sex with him. James starts crying so Robert gets off of him and James is relieved that Robert stops. James allows Robert to come back to his dorm room after this incident because he thinks that since Robert stopped having sex with him he must really care about him. When they go to his room, however, Robert pushes James down on James's bed. James starts crying and then Robert starts to have sex with him again even though he does not want to and he cries all the way through it."

Female-on-Female Abuse:

"Linda and her partner Elizabeth are coming back from a party, where they both drank. After they drive back to campus Linda pins Elizabeth down in the car, rips off her leggings, and starts to have sex with her. Elizabeth starts crying so Linda gets off of her and Elizabeth is relieved that Linda stops. Elizabeth allows Linda to come back to her dorm room after this incident because she thinks that since Linda stopped having sex with her she must really care about her. When

they go to her room, however, Linda pushes Elizabeth down on Elizabeth's bed. Elizabeth starts crying and then Linda starts to have sex with her again even though she does not want to and she cries all the way through it."

Psychological Abuse:

Male-on-Female Abuse:

"Samantha often forgets things and when this happens her boyfriend, Michael goes around and presses his nose on the top of her head and makes the noise 'sssss' every time Samantha forgets something. When he does this it seems like he is letting air out of the top of her head, suggesting that Samantha is an airhead. Michael does this when Samantha shares her opinions during conversations that they have with their friends and when they talk about current events. He also mentions things from her past that he knows will make her feel ashamed. When Samantha talks about any bad grades that she has gotten, Michael says to her, "You're going to fail out of college like your mother did because you're not smart enough to pass all of your classes." Samantha now has a hard time believing in her own intelligence."

Female-on-Male Abuse:

"Michael often forgets things and when this happens his girlfriend, Samantha goes around and presses her nose on the top of his head and makes the noise 'sssss' every time Michael forgets something. When she does this it seems like she is letting air out of the top of his head, suggesting that Michael is an airhead. Samantha does this when Michael shares his opinions during conversations that they have with their friends and when they talk about current events. She also mentions things from his past that she knows will make him feel ashamed. When Michael talks about any bad grades that he has gotten, Samantha says to him, "You're going to

fail out of college like your father did because you're not smart enough to pass all of your classes." Michael now has a hard time believing in his own intelligence."

Male-on-Male Abuse:

"Chris often forgets things and when this happens his partner, Joe goes around and presses his nose on the top of Chris's head and makes the noise 'sssss' every time Chris forgets something. When he does this it seems like he is letting air out of the top of Chris's head, suggesting that Chris is an airhead. Joe does this when Chris shares his opinions during conversations that they have with their friends and when they talk about current events. He also mentions things from Chris's past that he knows will make him feel ashamed. When Chris talks about any bad grades that he has gotten, Joe says to him, "You're going to fail out of college like your father did because you're not smart enough to pass all of your classes." Chris now has a hard time believing in his own intelligence."

Female-on-Female Abuse:

"Jennifer often forgets things and when this happens her partner, Emma goes around and presses her nose on the top of Jennifer's head and makes the noise 'sssss' every time Jennifer forgets something. When she does this it seems like she is letting air out of the top of Jennifer's head, suggesting that Jennifer is an airhead. Emma does this when Jennifer shares her opinions during conversations that they have with their friends and when they talk about current events. She also mentions things from Jennifer's past that she knows will make her feel ashamed. When Jennifer talks about any bad grades that she has gotten, Emma says to her, "You're going to fail out of college like your mother did because you're not smart enough to pass all of your classes." Jennifer now has a hard time believing in her own intelligence."

Vignette Questions: (with Likert ratings from 1 to 7)

1. How severe was the abuse? (1=not severe, 7=very severe)
2. To what extent is_____*responsible for the abuse? (1=not responsible, 7=very responsible)
3. To what extent is_____*responsible for the abuse? (1=not responsible, 7=very responsible)
4. Should the incident be reported? (1=definitely not, 7=definitely)
5. Should the police or campus safety or dorm staff be told about the incident? (1=definitely not, 7=definitely)
6. Should the victim seek counseling? (1=definitely not, 7=definitely)

*** The blanks indicate places where the names of the people in the vignette were placed.**

IPV Exposure Measures

WIT Scale: (Answer yes or no to the following questions if they occurred between your parents and their partners.)

1. When I was growing up, my (step) mother pushed or shoved my (step) father.
2. When I was growing up, my (step) father pushed or shoved my (step) mother.
3. When I was growing up, my (step) mother beat up my (step) father.
4. When I was growing up, my (step) father beat up my (step) mother.
5. When I was growing up, my (step) mother slapped my (step) father.
6. When I was growing up, my (step) father slapped my (step) mother.
7. When I was growing up, my (step) mother kicked my (step) father.
8. When I was growing up, my (step) father kicked my (step) mother.

CTS-2S Scale: (Answer yes if any of the following things have happened in a relationship that you have been in.) (Douglas, 2004)

1. I pushed, shoved, or slapped my partner.
2. My partner pushed, shoved, or slapped me.
3. I punched or kicked or beat-up my partner.
4. My partner punched or kicked or beat me up.

Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale Long Version (Respond to the following with true or false.) (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964)

1. Before voting I thoroughly investigate the qualifications of all the candidates.

2. I never hesitate to go out of my way to help someone in trouble.

3. It is sometimes hard for me to go on with my work if I am not encouraged.

4. I have never intensely disliked anyone.

5. On occasions I have had doubts about my ability to succeed in life.

6. I sometimes feel resentful when I don't get my way.

7. I am always careful about my manner of dress.

8. My table manners at home are as good as when I eat out in a restaurant.

9. If I could get into a movie without paying and be sure I was not seen I would probably do it.

10. On a few occasions, I have given up something because I thought too little of my ability.

11. I like to gossip at times.

12. There have been times when I felt like rebelling against people in authority even though I knew they were right.

13. No matter who I'm talking to, I'm always a good listener.

14. I can remember "playing sick" to get out of something.

15. There have been occasions when I have taken advantage of someone.

16. I'm always willing to admit it when I make a mistake.

17. I always try to practice what I preach.

18. I don't find it particularly difficult to get along with loudmouthed, obnoxious people.

19. I sometimes try to get even rather than forgive and forget.

20. When I don't know something I don't mind at all admitting it.

21. I am always courteous, even to people who are disagreeable.

22. At times I have really insisted on having things my own way.

23. There have been occasions when I felt like smashing things.

24. I would never think of letting someone else be punished for my wrong-doings.

25. I never resent being asked to return a favor.

26. I have never been irked when people expressed ideas very different from my own.

27. I never make a long trip without checking the safety of my car.

28. There have been times when I was quite jealous of the good fortune of others.

29. I have almost never felt the urge to tell someone off.

30. I am sometimes irritated by people who ask favors of me.

31. I have never felt that I was punished without cause.

32. I sometimes think when people have a misfortune they only got what they deserved.

33. I have never deliberately said something that hurt someone's feelings.

Multi-Dimensional Emotional Empathy Scale (Caruso & Mayer, 1998)

	Use this scale for the statements that follow.	Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree
1.	I feel like crying when watching a sad movie.	1 2 3 4 5
2.	Certain pieces of music can really move me.	1 2 3 4 5
3.	Seeing a hurt animal by the side of the road is very upsetting.	1 2 3 4 5
4.	I don't give others' feelings much thought.	1 2 3 4 5
5.	It makes me happy when I see people being nice to each other.	1 2 3 4 5
6.	The suffering of others deeply disturbs me.	1 2 3 4 5
7.	I always try to tune in to the feelings of those around me.	1 2 3 4 5
8.	I get very upset when I see a young child who is being treated meanly.	1 2 3 4 5
9.	Too much is made of the suffering of pets or animals.	1 2 3 4 5
10.	If someone is upset I get upset, too.	1 2 3 4 5
11.	When I'm with other people who are laughing I join in.	1 2 3 4 5
12.	It makes me mad to see someone treated unjustly.	1 2 3 4 5
13.	I rarely take notice when people treat each other warmly.	1 2 3 4 5
14.	I feel happy when I see people laughing and enjoying themselves.	1 2 3 4 5
15.	It's easy for me to get carried away by other people's emotions.	1 2 3 4 5
16.	My feelings are my own and don't reflect how others feel.	1 2 3 4 5
17.	If a crowd gets excited about something so do I.	1 2 3 4 5
18.	I feel good when I help someone out or do something nice for someone.	1 2 3 4 5
19.	I feel deeply for others.	1 2 3 4 5
20.	I don't cry easily.	1 2 3 4 5
21.	I feel other people's pain.	1 2 3 4 5
22.	Seeing other people smile makes me smile.	1 2 3 4 5
23.	Being around happy people makes me feel happy, too.	1 2 3 4 5
24.	TV or news stories about injured or sick children greatly upset me.	1 2 3 4 5
25.	I cry at sad parts of the books I read.	1 2 3 4 5
26.	Being around people who are depressed brings my mood down.	1 2 3 4 5
27.	I find it annoying when people cry in public.	1 2 3 4 5
28.	It hurts to see another person in pain.	1 2 3 4 5
29.	I get a warm feeling for someone if I see him or her helping another person.	1 2 3 4 5

Appendix B: Informed Consent

Informed Consent

As an undergraduate student at Trinity College, you are invited to participate in a voluntary study that is investigating the dynamics of dating relationships at Trinity between opposite-sex and same-sex couples. This study will assess these dynamics by asking students about their opinions related to relationship issues, experiences with dating, and their experiences in their family. Jasmine Owarish-Gross, who is a senior and a psychology major at Trinity, is conducting this study for her thesis project. This study is being offered to students in all class years who are in psychology classes.

Procedures:

If you participate in this study, you will be asked to read vignettes (brief descriptions) about dating violence and answer questions about these vignettes. You will also be asked about your own experience with dating violence, as well as any family history with domestic violence. Then you will be asked questions regarding your opinions about dating violence and how you generally respond to various situations in everyday life. If while completing this study you find that there are questions you feel uncomfortable answering, you do not have to answer them. Also if at any point you would like to withdraw from the study, you can do so by telling the principal investigator who is present and she will terminate your involvement and not include your answers in the study.

Risks:

The measures in this study, as well as the vignettes, contain questions that relate to sensitive issues of domestic violence and might make some participants who have experienced abuse, assault, or other forms of interpersonal violence uncomfortable. If this study makes you uncomfortable, remember that you can skip questions or you can stop the study with no penalty. If you wish to process anything that is brought up as a result of your participation please contact Trinity's Counseling Center (860-297-2415), Trinity's Women & Gender Resource Action Center (860-297-2408) or Professor Laura Holt, Ph.D. in the Psychology Department (860-297-4019) who is overseeing this project. If you need immediate assistance, you may contact the Interval House in Hartford, a domestic violence organization intervention and prevention organization, through their twenty-four hour hotline (1-860-527-0550), or the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence hotline (1-888-774-2900). You will receive a resource sheet at the end of this study that will provide you with this information, which you can decide to take or not take with you at the end of the study.

Benefits:

If you participate in this study you will help to extend the research on students' attitudes about dating violence in college. Also, if you are enrolled in a psychology course with a research participation requirement, this study might fulfill this requirement. In psychology courses where research participation is not required but is granted as extra credit, this study might be able to be

counted as extra credit for your psychology course. In order to receive research participation credit or extra credit you will need to turn in your signed participant participation contract to your psychology professor, which is on the last page of this informed consent

Confidentiality:

The responses collected in this study are **completely anonymous** meaning there is no way to link your responses to your identity. Personal information such as names and student ID numbers **WILL NOT** be collected. The anonymous information will be collected by the principal investigator and only be viewed by the principal investigator and her faculty advisor, and will not be shown to anyone else.

Questions/Concerns

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in this study or anything else, please contact the principal investigator, Jasmine Owarish-Gross, at Jasmine.OwarishGross@trincoll.edu or 551-655-8290. Also if you are interested in finding out the results of this study, contact the principal investigator after June 1st, 2012. The information about the results that you will receive will be based upon the overall group responses and will be group results rather than individual results.

The Institutional Review Board at Trinity College has approved this study. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or further questions about the study, please feel free to contact the chair of the Institutional Review Board, James Hughes, Ph.D. at James.Hughes@trincoll.edu or 860-297-2376.

I appreciate your willingness to consider participating in this research study. Thank you.

☐ **I DO wish to participate**

☐ **I DO NOT wish to participate**

_____ _____.

Participant Signature **Date**

_____ _____.

Principal Investigator Signature **Date**

Appendix C: Participant Participation Contract

Participant Participation Contract

On, _____ _____**,** completed Jasmine Owarish-Gross's study and would like to apply for research participation **credit or extra credit (circle one)** for participating in this study.

_____. _____.
Participant Signature **Date**

_____. _____.
Principal Investigator Signature **Date**

Appendix D: Participant Resource Sheet

Resource Sheet

***Trinity's Counseling Center**

Phone Number: 860-297-2415

***Trinity's Women & Gender Resource Action Center**:

Phone Number: 860-297-2408

***Interval House in Hartford (domestic violence organization intervention and prevention organization):**

24-Hour Confidential Hotline: 1-860-527-0550

***The Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence**

24-Hour Confidential Hotline: 1-888-774-2900