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# Perceived Characteristics of Men Abused by Female Partners: Blaming, Resulting, Blaming-Excuses, or Normal?

*Societal stigma communicated about male abuse victims is purported to result from societal messages valuing masculinity and suppression of weakness in men. To test these assumptions, a cross-sample of men and women (N = 1,942) provided open-ended descriptions of a hypothetical "male friend abused by his female romantic partner." This study presents thematic coding of characteristics resulting in 11 categories, which represent larger themes of Blaming, Resulting, Blaming-Excuses, and Normal. Findings are discussed in terms of applications to victims and generalized society, with implications for societal institutions and theories of gender socialization.*

*Keywords:* intimate partner violence, stigma, masculinity, social identity

In 2010, the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey predicted that more than 11.21 million men will be victimized by a romantic partner in the context of intimate partner violence (IPV) (Black et al., 2011). All IPV victims face obstacles in seeking help for their abuse, but in cases of intensified stigma, these support challenges are multiplied (Overstreet & Quinn, 2013). For men especially, physical, psychological, and/or sexual victimization from female romantic partners can result in a dual violation of gendered *and* relational expectations (Eckstein, 2009). To address barriers these men may face in finding support, we explored society's communication of this specific stigmatization through the specific messages societal members use to describe male victims. Knowing the nature of this particular stigma can inform educational interventions and public campaigns; enhance

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theorizing on interpersonal abuse, power, and gender; and aid victims seeking support. To frame our study of male-victim stigma, we first highlight the theoretical bases of how *doing* stigma can be functional for society. Knowing why society finds it useful to characterize abused men in particular ways will inform the presentation of our study and subsequent discussion of perceptions of a man abused by a female partner.

### COMMUNICATING IDENTITY

The meaning of any *stigma* is socially-ascribed. Stigma has the potential to threaten the communication identity of people who are subject to power-displays in their daily interactions. Stigmatizing labels “mark” targets to detract from normality by communicating unwanted statuses (Goffman, 1963). Because identity stigma is determined by historically, socially, and/or culturally embedded systems that pre-exist, it may aid people’s efficiency of cognitive judgments (Becker & Arnold, 1986). Further, stigma also functions to reinforce stigmatizers’ own identities. Perhaps by rationalizing their use of negative labels, stigmatizers are able to articulate *target-narratives* (e.g., Mill, Edwards, Jackson, MacLean, & Chaw-Kant, 2010), or differentiations of self-other identities that allow them to explicitly and implicitly reinforce their own and others’ social positions.

Although varying masculinities exist at any given moment, society in general consciously (or unconsciously) understands what a “man” is expected to be (Bem, 1981). In their reconsideration of hegemonic masculinity, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) propose understanding the way social power operates by accounting for (a) the agency of women in constructing gender, (b) cultural distinctions in how gender operates, (c) differences in ways gender may be embodied, and (d) contradictions inherent for individual men. In terms of how society treats someone with a particular identity, these factors illustrate the importance of accounting for not only the possible differences in how men view themselves and thus, enact identity (Hoffman, Hattie, & Borders, 2005), but also the ways societal members’ differences shape their framing of those men (Mitchell & Ellis, 2013).

For people who seek to clarify their roles in society, maintaining existing power structures necessitates that they curtail any threats to those structures; stigma facilitates that process. In patriarchal hierarchies where masculinity is privileged, norms are challenged when heterosexual men are abused by females (Eckstein, 2010; Migliaccio, 2001). Abused men threaten a “victim” construct historically framed as weak and feminine (Litman, 2003). Indeed, sex comparisons suggest that males may experience more negative stigma attributions than do female victims (Eckstein, 2009; Lehmann & Santilli, 1996). What remains only theorized to this point is the content of that stigma, or the messages society explicitly communicates regarding men in this position. As yet untested, abused males’ stigma may differ foundationally because of perceived masculinity violations (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Pederson & Vogel, 2007).

Because they are applied differently (e.g., associations, character flaws, physical abnormalities) and contain multiple, perhaps competing characteristics (Goffman, 1963), a stigma’s *nature* (how employed and for what ends) and *content* must be clarified. Examination of stigmatizing messages elucidates what is not valued in a

particular context (Smith, 2007). As such, uncovering people's messages about abused men (presumably, typically communicated in guarded or private fashion, due to possible offensiveness) relays societal characterizations of victim identities. Our exploration of this potential stigma for male victims was guided by the following:

RQ1: What is the content of characteristics attributed to abused men?

## METHODS

### Sample and Procedures

Subsequent to IRB approval, social network sampling was used across the Northeast United States; anyone willing and over 18 years of age was eligible to participate in the study regarding a hypothetical male. Data was collected in-person in private locations convenient for participants (e.g., homes, libraries).

After indicating informed consent, participants ( $N = 1,942$ ) read a prompt: "Imagine one of your current male friends was being abused by his wife or girlfriend...". Men ( $n = 828$ ) and women ( $n = 1,114$ ) then wrote as many perceptions of this hypothetical man as they could. Participants were not provided with any prompts or examples to guide their response as either negative or positive traits. Participants (aged 18 to 93 years,  $M = 30.74$ ,  $SD = 13.38$ ) primarily resided in Connecticut (83.8%) and New York (13.1%), and identified as White (77.7%), Black (9.3%), Latino (7.3%), Asian-American (2.9%), and Multi-Racial or Other (2.8%).

After separating consent forms from the surveys, each survey was assigned a number for reference purposes. Thus, the 1,000+ surveys were no longer personally identifiable—to researcher (i.e., no identifying master list maintained) or to coders—based on subject numbers. Responses were open-coded for emergent themes using constant comparative application of concept-indicators (i.e., discrepant/converging re-iterative phrases/words) to create a master list (Strauss, 1987) for two trained coders to independently identify thematic categories (inter-rater agreement  $\kappa > .81$  across all categories) using co-occurring codes. In cases where coders disagreed, a third party was brought in to facilitate discussion of particular data until agreement was reached. As this was part of a larger study, participants' responses ranged from 0 to 4 categories coded for the descriptions of the "characteristics of this man" ( $n = 3,099$ ,  $M = 1.60$  categories,  $SD = 0.70$ ).

Codes were assigned within the context of the larger response; in other words, each characteristic was attributed meaning (and thus categorical assignment by coders) based on the larger context (i.e., other supporting statements in the survey) of the response narrative. This allowed coders to know which cases, for example, attributed fault or causality to the characteristic, even when the quote presented in current findings may appear de-contextualized. Thus, the findings we present are coded contextualized by the "voice" provided by that participants' larger written narrative, so as not to extrapolate beyond their intended meaning (even if the de-contextualized statements presented here for brevity appear otherwise).

## RESULTS

Because we present the quotes related only to each category in which they are presented, the attributional meaning of some quotes may appear questionable when taken out of context. However, as noted previously, we coded into these categories only those statements where the participant directly ascribed the meanings (e.g., “fault” or “causality” or “blame”) through other responses in their survey. We did not attribute meaning to (i.e., put their statement into a particular category) participants who did not otherwise indicate it explicitly through other statements not quoted here.

Based on the larger narratives provided by participants in their responses, eleven categories represented four attribution themes to encapsulate perceived characteristics of abused men. Themes—Blaming, Resulting, Blaming-Excuses, and Normal—are presented with exemplars. Themes, along with group-difference- and non-parametric relationship trends, are presented to exhibit the stigma’s nature (e.g., format and goals) and content (i.e., trending themes). As illustrated in Table

Table 1  
*Thematic Categories of Perceived Characteristics of Abused Men*

| Theme/Category  | <i>N</i> (%) <sup>a</sup> | % of theme <sup>b</sup> |
|---|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| BLAMING   |                           |                         |
| <i>Used 2,115 times or 68.3% of all characteristics coded</i>         |                           |                         |
| Passive Personality   | 1,211 (62.4%)             | 57.3                    |
| Weak Physicality  | 536 (27.6%)               | 25.3                    |
| Positive Relator  | 235 (12.1%)               | 11.1                    |
| Emasculation  | 133 (6.8%)                | 0.6                     |
| RESULTING   |                           |                         |
| <i>Used 41 times or 0.1% of all characteristics coded</i>             |                           |                         |
| Stigmatized   | 23 (1.2%)                 | 56.1                    |
| Physically Beaten   | 18 (0.9%)                 | 43.9                    |
| BLAMING-EXCUSES   |                           |                         |
| <i>Used 784 times or 25.3% of all characteristics coded</i>           |                           |                         |
| Negative Internalizer   | 563 (29.0%)               | 71.8                    |
| Negative Externalizer   | 161 (8.3%)                | 20.5                    |
| Past Abuse  | 43 (2.2%)                 | 0.6                     |
| Substance User  | 17 (0.9%)                 | 0.2                     |
| NORMAL  |                           |                         |
| <i>Only one category comprising 0.5% of all characteristics coded</i> |                           |                         |
|   | 159 (8.2%)                |                         |

<sup>a</sup> Column indicates *N* of participants and percent of total sample (*N* = 1,942 participants; *n* = 1,114 women, *n* = 828 men) using this theme or category.

<sup>b</sup> Column indicates how much of the theme (by percent of total *n* = 3,099 characteristics coded into 11 categories) was comprised of each category.

1, most of the perceived characteristics of abused men were coded as thematically Blaming, with Blaming-Excuses representing the second largest theme.

Table 2 illustrates that for all categories except one, men and women did not differ in their perceptions of abused males. Further, overall, most (but not all, as discussed previously) categories were negatively associated with other categories in likelihood of co-use. This suggests that individuals overall were likely to stay on theme/category in describing this hypothetical man. Put another way, most participants reported a particularly simplistic or un-faceted/nuanced perception of a male abuse victim. Additional significant group-difference findings are reported in the text to follow.

## Blaming

Four categories indicted the male for his victimization by noting masculinity violations. Taken separately, the following quotes may not appear to attribute blame. However, as noted previously, we classified into thematic categories only those statements where the participants otherwise noted these characteristics were the “reason” the man was abused. The most frequently used category (see Table 1) resulting from the contextualized data was *Passive Personality*, framing abused men as: “weak-minded, with no backbone” (#664), “less assertive, maybe like a puppy that just got yelled at” (#260), or “completely obedient” to his abuser (#478). These characteristics were almost always mentioned along with rebukes for lacking appropriate masculinity. In other words, participant-responses coded into this category were those which otherwise (in the narrative) blamed failed identities of assertiveness and control as reasons the men were abused.

Next, *Positive Relator*, invoked traditionally valued interpersonal traits as blame-worthy precipitators of victimization for men “too good” at relationships. For example, many believed a victim must be “so totally in love he forgives anything and stays in a bad situation” (#885) because he was “friendly, loyal, caring to others” (#658), “kind-hearted” (#230), “almost too polite” (#284), and “patient, nice, calm, tolerant” (#713) with “so much respect for women, he refuses to hit them” (#681). Accordingly, these messages—confirmed by other statements in the respondents’ surveys—attributed abuse vulnerability to the men “permitting” it.

Another set of Blame categories, when contextualized with each survey’s surrounding narrative, punitively addressed masculine embodiment. *Weak Physicality* described abused men as lacking overall bodily competence, being “scrawny” (#400), “probably thin, a little nerdy around the edges” (#97), and a “small guy ... really thin, sickly-looking” (#147). Independent samples comparisons (Blamed Weak Physicality:  $M = 29.09$  years old,  $SD = 12.46$ ; Did not mention Weak Physicality:  $M = 31.37$ ,  $SD = 13.68$ ) showed Weak Physicality mentioned significantly more by younger participants,  $t(1061.36) = 3.52$ ,  $p < .001$ .

Another punitive category with group-use-differences, *Emasculation*, was employed to denigrate abused men: “Straight-up pussy; doesn’t deserve to live in a man’s skin” (#72), “Gay” (#393), “Bitch ass pussy” (#109). This is the only category in which male and female respondents differed in their likelihood of use; men were significantly more likely to employ descriptors that explicitly emasculated (see Table 2). Phi-coefficients further suggest that both Weak Physicality and Emascu-

Table 2  
*Non-Parametric Difference- and Association-Scores Among Sample's Perceptions of Abused Men*

| Category Characteristic | Sex differences <sup>a</sup> |             | Phi (p) score likelihood associations of dual category co-use |              |            |              |              |          |          |            |        |             |                 |
|-------------------------|------------------------------|-------------|---|--------------|------------|--------------|--------------|----------|----------|------------|--------|-------------|-----------------|
|                         | Men                          | Women       | $\chi^2$  | Neg. Intern. | Weak Phys. | Pos. Relator | Neg. Extern. | Normal   | Emasc.   | Past Abuse | Stigma | Phys. Beat. | Substnc. Abuser |
| Passive Personality     | 517 (62.4%)                  | 694 (62.3%) | .00   | -0.06*       | -0.01      | -0.10***     | -0.18***     | -0.28*** | -0.19*** | -0.03      | -0.03  | -0.01       | -0.01           |
| Negative Internalizer   | 228 (27.5%)                  | 335 (30.1%) | 1.48  | —            | -0.04      | -0.09***     | -0.08***     | -0.16*** | -0.05*   | .06**      | .05*   | .03         | -0.04           |
| Weak Physicality        | 224 (27.1%)                  | 312 (28.0%) | .22   | —            | —          | -0.12***     | -0.14***     | -0.13*** | .01      | .00        | -0.03  | -0.05*      | -0.05*          |
| Positive Relator        | 92 (11.1%)                   | 143 (12.8%) | 1.33  | —            | —          | —            | -0.06*       | -0.04    | -0.07**  | -0.02      | -0.03  | -0.04       | -0.00           |
| Negative Externalizer   | 69 (8.3%)                    | 92 (8.3%)   | .00   | —            | —          | —            | —            | -0.07**  | -0.05*   | -0.02      | -0.03  | -0.03       | .09***          |
| Normal                  | 60 (7.2%)                    | 99 (8.9%)   | 1.70  | —            | —          | —            | —            | —        | -0.07**  | -0.05*     | -0.03  | -0.03       | -0.01           |
| Emasculation            | 70 (8.5%)                    | 63 (5.7%)   | 5.83*   | —            | —          | —            | —            | —        | —        | -0.01      | -0.03  | -0.03       | -0.03           |
| Past Abuse              | 18 (2.2%)                    | 25 (2.2%)   | .01   | —            | —          | —            | —            | —        | —        | —          | -0.02  | -0.01       | .02             |
| Stigmatized             | 9 (1.1%)                     | 14 (1.3%)   | .12   | —            | —          | —            | —            | —        | —        | —          | —      | -0.01       | -0.01           |
| Physically Beaten       | 11 (1.3%)                    | 7 (0.6%)    | 2.54  | —            | —          | —            | —            | —        | —        | —          | —      | —           | -0.01           |
| Substance User          | 7 (0.8%)                     | 10 (0.9%)   | .02   | —            | —          | —            | —            | —        | —        | —          | —      | —           | —               |

Note. N = 1,942 participants (n = 1,114 women, n = 828 men) reporting 3,099 characteristic categories. Categories are listed by descending use.  
<sup>a</sup>Delineations show sexes communicating each category and "within sex" percentages.  
 \* p < .05. \*\* p < .01. \*\*\* p < .001.

lation represented extreme judgments, as participants using these punitive categories were significantly less likely to simultaneously employ most of any of the other categories to describe abused men (see Table 2).

## Resulting

Outcome-specific characteristics not associated with blame categories (based on other quotes in their narratives) were invoked by participants to describe abuse effects or outcomes. Taken separately, it is possible some of these quotes may appear as possible precipitators of abuse. However, we coded into these categories only those statements otherwise verified as outcomes by corresponding statements in a survey.

Some participants recognized that abused men would (or should) be *Stigmatized*, acknowledging “shame” (#509), “humiliation” (#811), or “hurt pride, embarrassed” (#297). But those coded into this category were not instances of participant stigma (although they were often accompanied by explicit stigmatization such as *Weak Physicality* or *Emasculation* from a participant). Rather, the only characteristics coded into this category were those that explicitly acknowledged the cultural perception of how these men would/should feel as a result of their abuse from a female. More often than not, however, acknowledging stigma as a situational outcome did not preclude participants’ blame. As one person exemplified, an abused man should be “embarrassed. I would make fun of him” (#595).

Another Resulting category, *Physically Beaten*, also referenced post-trauma symptomology. Coded into this category were statements such as the hypothetical man possessing “unexplained cuts, bruises” (#866), “bags under the eyes, bloodshot eyes” (#244), and physiological indicators like “skid-ish [*sic*] ... visually a wreck” (#914) and “flinchy” (#894). Again, these statements were verified by coders (using other survey descriptions) as outcomes of, rather than reasons for, a man being abused.

## Blaming-Excuses

Four categories described stereotypical trauma circumstances, while maintaining these outcomes circularly perpetuated continued victimization. In other words, participants acknowledged symptomology was directly caused by female perpetrators, but did not exculpate male victims; rather, perceived “ineffective” coping (i.e., allowing abuse to affect his body/behaviors) was attributed to further victimization.

To explain why heterosexual men would tolerate abuse from females, participants labeled the hypothetical victim as a *Substance Abuser*: “alcoholic” (#18), “probably a drunkard” (#760), or a “druggie” (#137). Although recognized as coping tools, substances further attributed guilt to male inadequacies. Indeed, a significant positive association (see Table 2) occurred between Substance Abuser and another Blaming-Excuses thematic category—Negative Externalizer.

The *Negative Externalizer* category included descriptions of men’s reactive, yet undesirable and blameworthy, interpersonal communication. These men supposedly invited victimization by being “outwardly rude to females” (#23) and overcom-



pensating for their identity-threat: “Strong, macho, egotistic. On outside, making everyone know he’s the man in the relationship; on the inside always deeper issues he’d never share” (#202).

A third Blaming-Excuse category, *Negative Internalizer*, included psychological symptomology resulting from *and* fault-worthy for victimization (e.g., failure to seek support): “Shy. Low self-esteem. He won’t go out or invite friends to his house” (#96), “Reclusive” (#450), and “Edgy, sad, and lonely” (#683). Once again, when taken on their own (as presented here for brevity), these statements do not necessarily blame or appear negative toward men. However, responses were coded into this category only if the larger survey clearly involved descriptions of internal characteristics perceived to exist solely because of abuse—reasons for which the participant then attributed blame to the abused man. This observation is further supported by its likelihood of co-occurrence with the category of Past Abuse (see Table 2).

*Past Abuse* entailed characteristics for which men were seen as victimized “because of” an “overbearing mother” (#11) or “probably abused as a child” (#560). The finding that Negative Internalization and Past Abuse were significantly positively associated with one another suggests that these participants believed men were not only subject to “causal” reasons in their past, but were also held responsible for allowing the cycle to continue in their adulthood—in essence, not “manning up” to prevent their victimization.

## Normal

Finally, some participants unambiguously framed abused men as *Normal*. We use this label not to indicate the experience as a normative one, but rather, to emphasize the degree to which a subset of respondents emphasized the experience of abuse could happen to anyone. These responses were noticeably absent of any causal attributions. For example, “he’d have no specific characteristics. Any man could be abused, regardless” (#85). Variations of this category included descriptions of such specificity as to indicate real-life (self-)references or to emphasize anyone’s potential susceptibility. For example, one young male described the hypothetical man as “hard-working, on his own since 16 years old, now full-time worker at [business] and student” (#376). By explicitly marking the absence of *ab*-normality, these participants were effectively de-stigmatizing abuse (e.g., not victim-blaming) and/or problematizing gender prescriptions. Indeed, those using this category were significantly less likely to also use many Blame and Blaming-Excuses categories (see Table 2).

## DISCUSSION

As is the case with most relational violence, victims deal not only with the abuse experience, but also with identity-threats from outsiders who communicate (verbally and implicitly) predominantly blaming societal messages (see Smith, 2007). Examining the categorical content and attributions of a stigma illuminates the ways and reasons it is employed by society. Interestingly, the societal perceptions of a hypothetical abused man in this study mirror reports of felt-stigma from abused men

in previous research (e.g., Eckstein, 2009, 2010). In those studies, abused men self-perceived the largely gender-normative rules guiding their experiences and directing their stigmatization. It appears that people thinking about the characteristics of an abused man also frame much of his abuse-identity as gendered, and thus relational, transgression. To re-appropriate Migliaccio's (2009) quote, for participants in this study, "doing relationships" is "doing gender." These findings support theories of gender (and sex) differentials as well as suggest implications for men dealing with their victimization stigma.

### Theoretical Implications

Our study supplements with qualitative descriptions the recent quantitative findings (Eckstein, 2015) that abused males' felt-stigma may differ from females' stigma (but not necessarily their victimization experiences) in key ways. First, female victims' gender identities typically are not implicated in their victimization in the same way. Although both male and female victimization has been attributed (although not without controversy) to "feminine" traits such as passivity and subservience (Murnen, Wright, & Kaluzny, 2002), we argue that the culpability for possessing these traits is not blame-worthy for the identities of women, who may otherwise be rewarded for these traits in other contexts (Bem, 1981). Stigmatized targets are held responsible for both initiating and failing to end *discrediting* conditions (Goffman, 1963). Although perceptions of stigma culpability vary by condition (e.g., moral, physical, behavioral) (Becker & Arnold, 1986), abused men are clearly blamed for not only causing their own abuse (and thus, stigma), but also for failing to stop it once it has begun (e.g., Emasculation category and all in the Blaming-Excuses theme).

Next, positive interpersonal skills (e.g., Positive Relator category)—encouraged by teachers, counselors, and scholars—are rarely blamed for negative outcomes, let alone indicative of personal failures as they appear to be for abused men (Pearson & VanHorn, 2004). Rather than increasing the interpersonal communication abilities of abused men, it appears these otherwise constructive tools are actually viewed as blame-worthy in the case of abused men. Although perceived-culpable-stigmas clearly elicit Blame, as was found in this study, it is encouraging that in other contexts, perceptions of uncontrollability may reduce negative reactions from outsiders (Weiner, Perry, & Magnusson, 1988). Participants' use of Resulting theme categories in this study could indicate minimization of perceived victim culpability. However, because of the low incidence of this theme, and based on associations with co-use of other themes, it is more likely stigma still exists for male abuse victims *because* they are *men* who are believed to be using "feminine" relational skills.

Finally, lending to the complexity of abused men's stigma is the attribution of characteristics often ascribed to abusers. Descriptors such as "rude," "insecure," "jerk," "overcompensating," or "overbearing mother" imply victimization from females is not acceptable for psychologically healthy men. Interestingly, similar characteristics have been attributed to men who *abuse* (Amuchástegui, 2009). Instead of seeing men as responsible for not controlling their own relationships, these participants viewed men's culpability as due to their *overuse* of certain masculine char-

acteristics (e.g., dominance, too much instrumental communication). Rather than view these men as only passive, some participants appeared to see no other explanation than to re-frame the victims as the “bad guy,” deserving of abuse. Such responses are reminiscent of victim-blaming for women in the 1970s, but differ in that the fault for victimization is still tied to men *doing gender wrong*. Thus, this study lends support to theories of gender role enforcement via communicative means and also introduces questions as to the appropriateness of particular stigma management strategies (e.g., Meisenbach, 2010) in abusive contexts.

Used both as blameworthy “causes” and as post-abuse “outcome” descriptors, these categories suggest abused men are affected not only by relational victimization, but also by secondary effects from culpable stigmas (Eckstein, 2010). The many negative outcomes of stigma (e.g., increased economic difficulty, psychodynamic symptomology, and social barriers; Mill et al., 2010) suggest that cursory application (i.e., lumping attributions) may exacerbate identity-coping problems (e.g., see Meisenbach, 2010) for men abused by intimate partners. In other words, if abused men are blamed for being too feminine *and* too masculine, what are their options?

### Practical Applications

Explicit, blaming stigmatization is a cultural remedy to manage those—with stigma perceived as controllable or avoidable—likely to receive “anger and little pity,” barriers to support, and “punish[ment] or neglect” (Weiner et al., 1988, p. 739). Examining the categorical content with contextualized attributions of a particular stigma can illuminate the ways and reasons it is employed by society. But beyond the theoretical power of explanations, uncovering attributional motives—and highlighting them in authoritative contexts (e.g., Public service announcements, counseling and support-group sessions, educational systems) may allow victims and others to see stigma’s truly constructed nature.

Research on other types of stigma suggests that “merely” introducing people (actually or hypothetically) to someone in their lives who has experienced the trait may go far toward remedying faulty perceptions and reducing stigma (Stathi, Tsantila, & Crips, 2012) and making those with the stigma feel better about their condition (Frable, Platt, & Hoey, 1998). This approach meets the “Targeted” and “Local” aspects of successful strategies recommended by Corrigan and Kosyluk (2013). But to face the obstacle of “outing” oneself as a victim would first require institutional support through the public dissemination methods just mentioned (e.g., Masters, 2010). Certainly, the women’s movement of the 1970-80s can be largely credited with increasing the visibility of domestic abuse in general (Frieze, 2008). To harness the policy and funding that resulted from those efforts, male victims would be served from similar educational campaigns headed by groups with credibility (i.e., the “Credible” dimension of successful stigma management tactics; Corrigan & Kosyluk, 2013) already established in their work with women. These are steps that male victims themselves have reported as necessary for increasing support and services for their abuse experiences (Tsui, Cheung, & Leung, 2010).

On a more micro level, the nature of specific men’s communication must be addressed—particularly in homosocial settings. By employing gender-based ad hominem attacks, participants in this study illustrated stigma’s social control mech-

anism (Mill et al., 2010). Individual contradictors of gender normativity challenge collective systems that “establish the priorities, social structures, hierarchies... customs, habits, and patterns of interaction that determine and regulate” our society (Chesebro & Fuse, 2001, p. 206). This tool of social control may be particularly present in homosocial relationships (Bird, 1996). Certainly, in this study the only sex-difference was men’s significantly higher likelihood of employing Emasculation (especially that accompanied by physical threats).

Individual young men in the U.S. increasingly may embody “inclusive masculinities” in their daily interactions with other men (Anderson, 2008; Klugman, 2015). However, although the acceptability of heterosexism (or *homophobia*) may be becoming a non-issue for many men (McCormack & Anderson, 2010), it also appears that the one area in which society lags in inclusiveness is male-female relationships (Anderson, 2012; Sweeney, 2013). As such, individual men must begin verbalizing challenge (or using silence, to shun) to flawed understandings of male-female relationships, particularly in abuse contexts. Works on men’s interpersonal interactions suggest this is not wishful thinking; rather, studies of men’s daily lives and programs showcasing this applied approach have uncovered great success in other, non-abusive realms (e.g., Eckstein & Pinto, 2013; Flood, 2011; Piccigallo, Lilley, & Miller, 2012; White, 2006). And certainly, these non-stigmatizing individuals do exist. As found in this study, some individuals have gone out of their way to frame abused men as Normal, or at least similar in masculinity characteristics to non-abused men.

### Limitations and Future Research Directions

Geographic limitations to our sampling strategies may have contributed to the homogeneity of our sample and thus, minimize generalizability of these findings. However, these results mirror previous research using abused males’ self-reports (e.g., Eckstein, 2009, 2010) of how they are treated when their victimization becomes known to others. As such, it may be that the perceived characteristics of men uncovered in this study would differ in other populations more by degree than by kind. Clearly, work on masculine constructions has been conducted in non-abusive contexts as it is perceived distinctly according to generation (Thompson, Jr., 2006), locale (Emslie, Hunt, & O’Brien, 2004), country (Sugihara & Katsurada, 1999), religion (Abbott, 2006), ethnicity (Zang, 2012), and class and region (McMahan, 2011). Further understanding of masculinity overall would benefit from exploration of abused-male-perceptions and masculinity in similar subgroupings. Based on research that shows various aspects of stigma may intersect with gender and other factors in unique ways (Boysen, Ebersole, Casner, & Coston, 2014), it would be interesting to see if those nuanced, intersectional perceptions of abused males mirror beliefs about men and masculinities culturally, as they appear to do in this study.

### CONCLUSION

Male IPV victims are frequently subjected to limitations in social services, blame for their victimization, and often verbal and/or physical attacks to “punish” their masculine deviance (Muller, Desmarais, & Hamel, 2009). More often discussed theo-

retically as an explanation for men's lack of support-seeking, the communication content of IPV-stigma particular to heterosexual male victims is rarely explicitly explored. This study represents an initial step toward understanding the makeup of that stigma. We argue that, with a few exceptions, people construe abused men as culpable for their own victimization; society attributes this blame through a lens of stereotypical masculinity. The theoretical explanation that society maintains order by gender-framing victims as feminine and powerless is thus reproduced in the perceived characteristics of abused men. In addition to reinforcing stereotypical notions and violent consequences for women, these tactics further re-victimize the men who experience violence from female partners.

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