Chapter 10

"Bitch-Ass Pussy!": Perceptions of Abused Men Predicted by Media, Educational, and Experiential Topic Exposure

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Abstract

Where women are considered "appropriate" victims of intimate violence, abused men are stigmatized for their gendered failure. The resulting gender role stress/conflict (GRS/C) abused men experience necessitates understanding what influences societal perceptions of males abused by female romantic partners. To gauge public masculinity rhetoric framing abused men, a community sample ($N = 1,969$) of males ($n = 828$) and females ($n = 1,114$) described their perceptions of a hypothetical abused man and reported any prior exposure to this topic. Quantitative survey results suggested a variety of sources influencing likelihood of projecting masculinity-challenging gender role narratives onto victimized men. We found varying impacts of topical education, media exposure, and personal experience on the tendency to describe these men in particular ways. We discuss findings in terms of how masculinities (and threats to them, which affect GRS/C) are rhetorically constructed by various sources, with implications drawn for further contextualization of O'Neil's (1981a) GRS/C model and applications for men and women in American culture. Ultimately, the fact that overwhelmingly stigmatizing perceptions were influenced by many and varied topical exposure sources suggests there are very few outlets currently portraying abused men in realistic, supportive, or otherwise "positive" ways.
KEY WORDS: Intimate Partner Violence, Male Victim, Manhood, Media Exposure, Primary Prevention, Stigma

Introduction

In the United States, over 32.2 million men will be physically victimized in their lifetimes, with exponentially more psychologically abused by female partners (Black et al., 2011). Abuse outcomes typically include direct and indirect/chronic physical injury and major, chronic psychosomatic trauma symptoms. These outcomes are further compounded as they interact with the relational violence itself, societal judgment, *and* internal identity threats (Choudhary et al., 2015; Hines & Malley-Morrison, 2001). Because sexed-females long have been viewed as the "appropriate" or typical victims of intimate violence (Dobash & Dobash, 1978; George, 1994; Hammock et al., 2015; Russell et al., 2019), abused men face additional challenges when victimized. Men have fewer support resources and are more likely to be stigmatized for their victimization than are women (Hines et al., 2007; Lehman & Santilli, 1996; Hammock et al., 2015). Believed to result from a variety of sources, societal rhetoric – as expressed by individuals' narratives – has the potential to affect public impressions and effect social change (e.g., Baker & Bevacqua, 2017). However, particularly with partner abuse, sources' relative influences in and manner of perpetuating stigma remain unclear; our study was designed to determine these influences.

We examine "abused man" topical information-exposure sources as predictors of stigmatizing perceptions known to contribute to gender role stress and/or conflict (GRS/C) for abused men. In this chapter, we begin by addressing factors prior research identified as shaping masculinity-tied abuse perceptions connected to abused men's GRS/C. Our literature review introduces the context of abused men's stigma by looking at the nature and sources of their potential GRS/C. We then present the methods of our community-sampled survey study, followed by our data on info-sources' respective roles in influencing people's "abused man" narratives. Finally, we discuss these findings in terms of implications for O'Neil's (1981a) gender role conflict model and practical suggestions for reducing abused men's stigma.

Literature Review

To our ground our study, in this section, we present 1) key concepts related to men's gender role stress and conflict, 2) apply these concepts to the context of abused men's stigmatization, and 3) review potential sources influencing stigmatization of abused men.

Nature of gender role stress and conflict

The roles expected of particular *sexes* (i.e., normatively binary categorical differences based on observable physical traits; male/female) in our society are intrinsically tied to their *gender*, or socially constructed expectations for interpersonal performance (Bem, 1981; Muehlenhard & Peterson, 2011). Because gender is presumed by many to directly correspond to sex (e.g., masculine males and feminine females), expectations are highly ingrained both societally and personally. Whether conforming or challenging, people's lived identities are subject to constant monitoring and regulation for their "fit" with expected norms. As such, *gender roles* involve the constant challenges and social pressures (presented by media and individual others) to conform to societally accepted, often sex-typed, macro-norms (Bem, 1981). Unsurprisingly, such pressures can result in *gender role stress/conflict*, or the detrimental outcomes of these burdens on individuals perceiving restrictions to their preferred gender enactments (Eisler & Skidmore, 1987; O'Neil, 1981b).

Originally hypothesized by O'Neil (1981a, 1981b), GRS/C is believed to hinder identity-performance abilities and is observable via limitations on emotional expression and "control, power, and competition issues" resulting from the "masculine mystique and value system" pushed by the "masculine socialization process" in a particular culture (O'Neil, 1981a, p. 63).

These factors closely align with hegemonic masculinity components (Connell, 2000), frequently discussed in studies of men abused by women. Abused men in heterosexual relationships are frequently stigmatized (and thus, avoid seeking support) for not meeting masculinity expectations that they deny or ignore pain, refuse assistance, and maintain control over others in their lives (Eckstein, 2009; Migliaccio, 2001). As a result, internalization of identity failure (i.e., GRS/C) for abused men remains a primary barrier to their psychological, physical, and behavioral health.

Nature of stigmatizing GRS/C for abused men

According to O'Neil's model, through *gender role socialization*, which begins early and continues throughout life, individuals learn to adopt behaviors, values, and attitudes that constitute masculinity and femininity (O'Neil 1981a, 1981b). This process is hypothesized to directly affect norms associated with a particular gender enactment. In the case of masculinity, stereotype-based cultural ideals inform what "manhood" is, or at least, "should" be (Connell, 2000; Courtenay, 2000), which lends to the *masculine mystique*. In the past, this value system was thought to be beneficial and aspirational for men (see Kimmel, 2006). However, research consistently finds these values are detrimental to all sexes because they devalue women and deny men opportunities to embody feminine styles (e.g., Helgeson, 1994; Kaplan & Marks, 1995). Thus, even when identifying attributes of masculinity or femininity positively, a masculine mystique remains harmful to everyone.

The masculine mystique implies that femininity and femaleness are inferior, which then contributes to men's overall "fear of femininity" (see Gallagher & Parrott, 2011). This is seen in boys' striving to be stoic, self-reliant, dominant – to avoid having others identify them as feminine (Connell, 2000). Deviating from this normative masculinity, as do men in abusive relationships, is significantly stigmatizing. Abused men are frequently subject to others' viewing them as possessing feminine attributes (Eckstein & Cherry, 2015; George, 1994; Migliaccio, 2001), aspects which become negative or identity-threatening to men, even when the attributes are otherwise "positive" in nature. When men in abusive heterosexual relationships face this stigma, it can contribute to their GRS/C. For example, Eckstein (2009, 2010) found that although abused men deviated from masculine ideologies, when interpreting their own victimization, these men still clung to dominant cultural narratives in attempts to avoid GRS/C and to reinforce or re-establish their masculinity (e.g., "I'm not a victim of *her*; it's the system.") in norm-congruent ways.

This GRS/C management is not only internal for abused men. Cultural rhetoric is distributed and reinforced both by media and via interpersonal encounters. In the initial stage of this project, we explored the nature of the cultural rhetoric surrounding abused men and found that people's stigmatizing messages were entirely based on stereotypical, hegemonic masculine role expectations. Overwhelmingly (99.5%), and in keeping with O'Neil's (1981a) "masculine mystique," people denigrated abused men for failing at masculinity while also derogating femininity as a "lesser" personality or relational characteristic (Eckstein & Cherry, 2015). Almost 94% of all messages, which were often accompanied by emasculating slurs, directly blamed the man for his own victimization; the additional 25.3% of responses that excused or gave a rationale for the man's abuse did so only in the process of blaming him for not subsequently fixing those issues himself (Eckstein & Cherry, 2015). Clearly, victimized men's stigma is directly related to their potential GRS/C. What remains unexamined are its specific contributors, which our current study was designed to explore.

<Figure 10.1 about here>

Sources of GRS/C socialization

O'Neil's (1981a) GRS/C model included multiple contributors to gender socialization processes. Specifically, his model showed the ways biological sex, "environment" (i.e., family, peers, and school), and the interactions of these sources were purported to affect the manner in and degree to which GRS/C would exist for individual men. Our study explored (and this section previews) three of these information-sources for their influence on the socialization processes described by O'Neil (1981a). Their relative contributions are as yet unclear, but three main sources in O'Neil's (1981a, 1981b) model are typically discussed in gender relations literature (e.g., Babarskiene & Gaiduk, 2018): social interactions, media, and educational outlets.

Interpersonal exposure

Labeled "environment" by O'Neil (1981a), interpersonal interactions shape relational communication and gender understandings both indirectly and directly. For example, partner violence can be learned about from family and peers *indirectly*, by observing others' behaviors or hearing messages regarding someone else's experiences with abuse, or they may learn *directly* by experiencing abuse (e.g., as victim or perpetrator) themselves. Both learning methods involve facing others' *attributions*, or underlying beliefs about causes, regarding abuse victims (Harris & Cook, 1994; Koepke et al., 2014). In other words, any message inherently communicates a meta-message or value statement about a condition and people with that condition.

Both direct and indirect learning experiences influence people's lives, but actually encountering violence distinguishes victims' perceptions. Certainly, those without personal abuse experience can rely on both interpersonal- and media-disseminated cultural rhetoric to make sense of the topic (e.g., see Hockett et al., 2016; Koepke et al., 2014). But having gone through abuse oneself also may personally bias any alternate understandings of the same experience happening to someone else (e.g., see Khan & Rogers, 2015). For example, Eckstein and Quattro (2021) found that those who previously experienced technology-mediated abuse were less likely to understand this abuse type in its full complexity. No matter how they encounter it, those who experience violence – whether through first-hand victimization or supporting a victimized loved one – are likely to understand it differently than someone with no personal experience (Davies, 2019). Our study was designed to test this assumption. Although people may not (knowingly) have personal experience with abused men, other exposure sources shape the larger rhetoric of abused men's masculinity.

Media exposure

Although the extensive media-influence field is beyond the scope of this chapter, we acknowledge a 50+ year history of cultivation analysis. It is important to note that media clearly shape and/or reflect societal communication of cultural "norms" that reinforce beliefs and behaviors (Carlyle et al., 2014; Coyne et al., 2011; Kretz, 2019; Paluck, 2009). Scholars and policy-makers generally agree that media influence perceptions, but remain divided on its ability to *directly*/immediately change values and beliefs (e.g., direct effects versus cultivation models), particularly those related to gender and relational norms, which are established early in socialization (Galloway et al., 2015; Jesmin & Amin, 2017; Lippman, 2018; Oliver et al., 1998). O'Neil (1981a) hypothesized that mass media contribute to GRS/C by supporting sex-stereotypes and reinforcing masculine norms. But before examining how media affects

perceptions regarding abused men, it is first necessary to determine if it actually might, as we do in this study.

<u>Educational exposure</u>

Finally, educational outlets are touted as the primary means by which people are "taught" their understandings of masculinity and its accompanying social norms. Being "educated" on a topic is directly related to people's knowledge type and understanding extent, with attributional, attitudinal associations included (Mansoori-Rostam & Tate, 2017). As a result, education is frequently used in attempts to reduce stigma; and these interventions show some success in eliciting positive attitudes and/or healthy behaviors *when* pupils do not experience contradictory messages in their daily lives outside of school (Corrigan & Penn, 1999). For example, this is the main assumption of *primary prevention education*, which holds that early-socialized attitudes and knowledge foster sensitivity to damaging behaviors otherwise taught by family or society. However, despite knowing that first impressions are highly influential, gender- and abuse-related topics are often avoided when teaching children (Monsoori-Rostam & Tate, 2017).

Increased topic-exposure frequency, a tactic highly conducive to (but not often practiced in) educational settings, generally positively affects gendered attitudes when that information is consistent and reinforced over time (Anderson & Whiston, 2005). However, what people actually learn in school or other formally taught/delivered programs may not always be that which is intended by educators. For example, Eckstein and Sabovik (2021) found that despite ostensibly being taught gender equality, some students in a primary prevention program aimed at addressing interpersonal violence remained unchanged in, and in some cases increased, their negative attitudes toward victims. Thus, formal curricula's efficacy in shaping gendered attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors remains uncertain and dependent on many factors (Mansoori-Rostam & Tate, 2017), a primary concern being that of content. Education can reinforce *or* challenge societal myths contributing to GRS/C. Both the presence *and* manner (e.g., situated in what course/academic discipline, framed by which educator/s) must be examined.

Ultimately, to begin countering negative messages for abused men, whose victimization life-context affects and is e/affected by physical, interpersonal, home/family, and work life (all aspects of O'Neil's GRS/C model), it is necessary to determine the source/s of cultural narratives driving the masculine socialization process. After the source/s of these narratives are determined, we can begin exploring the relative role of different information sources in shaping people's perceptions of men abused in heterosexual relationships. Thus, we proposed the following:

> **RQ1: What are the primary sources of public gender narratives regarding people's perceptions of abused men?**
>
> **H1: Personal experience will predict male abuse perceptions, such that those with/out interpersonal exposure will differ in describing abused men.**
>
> **H2: Media sources will predict male abuse perceptions, such that those with/out topical media exposure will differ in describing abused men.**
>
> **H3: Educational sources will predict male abuse perceptions, such that those with/out topical education exposure will differ in describing abused men.**

Methods

Sampling, participants, and procedures

After obtaining our university's IRB approval, we implemented community-based (i.e., not a college-student sample) social network sampling in Midwestern and Northeastern U.S. states. Specifically, trained research assistants and colleagues at other universities recruited anyone ≥ 18 years old who was willing to share their perceptions of abused men. Data were obtained in-person at locations convenient for participants (e.g., homes, libraries). Recruiters collected/stored consent forms separately from questionnaires, which we then identified only by reference numbers (i.e., no master matching-list).

On the survey form, participants first read the following: *"Imagine one of your current male friends was being abused by his wife or girlfriend…"*. Next, they were instructed to write all of their perceptions of this man, with no additional prompts or examples provided to guide those responses. Finally, participants indicated via open-response any prior exposure to the topic of men abused by women. Exact wordings of these items are provided in the Appendix.

Analyses

Results discussed in this chapter were part of a larger data collection project in which we (Eckstein & Cherry, 2015) used a constant comparative open-coding method to analyze the qualitative data from the first (i.e., "Describe this man") survey question. In that study, we observed concept-indicators to note re-emerging themes based on participants' specific phrasing and word choice. Additional information on the coding process and resulting traits used to describe an abused man are discussed in that qualitative-focused article (Eckstein & Cherry, 2015). In the present analysis, we quantitatively coded those eleven qualitative categories as dependent, outcome variables; they included: perceiving the abused man as possessing (a) a Passive Personality, (b) a Weak Physicality, or being (c) an overly Positive Relator, (d) Physically Beaten, (e) Stigmatized, (f) a Past Abuse Victim, (g) a Substance Abuser, (h) Negatively Internalizing, (i) Negatively Externalizing, (j) Normal, and (k) actually using Emasculating slurs (e.g., "bitch-ass pussy") against the man (see Table 10.2 for representative category exemplars). This category "master list" (Strauss, 1987) was applied to data by two coders – one of us (author) and an advanced student trained to independently assess each response, allowing for co-occurring codes within participants (inter-rater agreement κ > .81 across all categories). Further descriptions of coding and resulting themes are described in Eckstein and Cherry (2015) and in this chapter's following discussion.

Findings

A total of $N = 1,957$ participants (42.3% male, 56.9% female identified), ranging in age from 18 to 93 years old ($M = 30.74$ years, $SD = 13.38$), completed the survey study. Educational achievement ranged from completing some high school (1.1%), a high school diploma (26.6%), some college (35.1%), a college degree (29.3%), to a graduate degree (8.0%) of study.

In the following subsections, we present results according to each research question/hypothesis; these generally took the form of topic-exposure trends, followed by effects of influence (i.e., each stigmatizing descriptive category as dependent variable) from each info-source/independent variable. We describe each finding without replicating Tables' statistics.

Exposure trends

For two-tailed significance tests ($\alpha = .05$), statistical power to detect effect sizes was .96 for small ($d = .20$) and 1.00 for medium ($d = .50$) and large ($d = .80$) *t*-tests effects, and over .99 for all complete-sample regression effects. Out of the overall sample, 77.2% ($n = 1,510$)

indicated having no prior exposure to the notion of an abused man. Abused-man topic-exposure was reported by 1.5% of the overall sample.

RQ1: What are the primary sources of public gender narratives regarding people's perceptions of abused men?

Those who reported prior exposure (n = 447, 22.8% of all participants) indicated their exposure sources, including a college or high school class, via media, or through personal experience. Overall educational attainment predicted having had some form of exposure to the concept of abused men, b = .22, SE = .06, Wald = 13.35, p < .001, 95% CI [1.11, 1.41]. People with any kind of exposure to the topic of abused men tended to be significantly younger, more likely female, and higher educated overall than those with no prior exposure (see Table 10.1).

Of those exposed to the topic of abused men, 6.6% reported male abuse personal experience, which included victimized friends or family or a male participant reporting it himself (although these were not distinguished in this study, in an effort to maintain privacy and minimize potential trauma in this large community-sampled study). Those with personal experience with/as an abused man were significantly older than those not reporting this exposure type. There were no educational attainment differences in terms of personal experience (see Table 10.1).

<INSERT TABLE 10.1 ABOUT HERE>

Next, those indicating topic exposure via any media (4.7% of total sample, 20.6% of those with any abused-man topic-exposure) reported M = 0.22 (SD = .46, $range$ = 0 to 2 sources) types of media exposure – either reading a book or article (2.5% of the total sample) or viewing a film or TV show (2.7% of the total sample) mentioning the topic. The distribution of media types was relatively equal among those with any topical media exposure (see Table 10.2 for these statistics), who were typically older than those without this exposure (see Table 10.1 for these statistics). Sex and educational attainment were not significantly associated with overall or individual media exposure types.

Finally, exposure via formal education was reported by 14.7% of the total sample. Over 64% of the exposed subsample reported M = 0.67 (SD = .53, $range$ = 0 to 3) sources of topical education, including mention of abused men in a high school or college-level general health class (2.2% of overall sample), women's studies class (overall sample = 1.1%), abusive relationships class (overall sample = 2.7%), or via an invited guest-speaker (e.g., local women's center/shelter) presentation not specific to abused men (overall sample = 1.1%), and/or an "other" (not abuse/gender/health-specific) class (overall sample = 8.2%). Tables 10.1 and 10.2 show those who reported educational topic-exposure primarily experienced this in "other" classes (i.e., those not distinguished by participants). Among the topically-exposed subsample, those reporting "any" educational exposure, in a health class, and/or in an abuse class were significantly younger than those who were not introduced to it via these sources. Those whose educational exposure occurred in an "other" class had higher educational achievement than those without this exposure source. Exposures via women's center presentations or women's studies classes were unrelated to age or educational attainment (see Table 10.1).

<INSERT TABLE 10.2 ABOUT HERE>

Exposure influence

Participants characterized the abused man using descriptors ranging from 0 to 4 categories; n = 3,099 characteristics coded into M = 1.60 (SD = 0.70) categories per respondent.

Abused-man descriptions were overwhelmingly (over 93.7% of all descriptors) negative and derogatory (see Eckstein & Cherry, 2015 and Table 10.2 for participant-quoted examples of each category). Thus, with the exception of the Normal (e.g., "just like any other man") category, analyses showing use of particular traits refer to likelihood of stigmatizing the man as blameworthy for causing and/or not stopping his own victimization due to a variety of his own physical, personality, and communicative traits/tendencies.

Chi-square proportion-differences across the entire sample found that those reporting any kind of prior exposure to the topic differed from those without prior exposure; exposed participants were more likely to identify the man as a Negative Internalizer ($\chi^2 = 7.75$, $p < .01$, φ =.06) and an overly Positive Relator ($\chi^2 = 3.84$, $p < .05$, φ =.04). Next, to test comparative influences among the exposed subsample, we ran Wilcoxon ranked-sign tests whereby each exposure source was paired with every other source type to determine which had greater influence in predicting category-use (i.e., each source-type pairing repeated for all 11 descriptors, with each iteration including only the subsample who used a particular descriptor). We discuss these results in the following, respective source-type sections.

H1: Personal experience will predict male abuse perceptions, such that those with/out interpersonal exposure will differ in describing abused men.

Across the entire sample, personal experience with an abused man did not predict likelihood of describing him using particular categories (see Table 10.2). However, when limited to the exposed subsample, comparative-influence results showed that personal experience played a significantly higher role than all formal education sources (except Health classes) in predicting use of the Positive Relator category (see Table 10.3). Further, experience was a consistently stronger predictor than "other" classes and most other exposure sources (i.e., education and media types, except women's studies classes) of labeling the man as Passive Personality, Negative Internalizer, Weak Physicality, Positive Relator, Past Abuse Victim, and using actual Emasculating slurs against him. Thus, H1 was not supported across the entire sample, but was supported in nuanced ways for the topic-exposed subsample.

H2: Media sources will predict male abuse perceptions, such that those with/out topical media exposure will differ in describing abused men.

Supporting H2, among those with any topical exposure, group-difference results showed those reporting viewed media were significantly less likely to view abused men as having blameworthy, Passive Personalities than were those who received their exposure from other sources, $\chi^2 = 5.58$, $p < .05$, $\varphi = .11$ (Table 10.2). Comparative findings reveal that media types did not significantly differ from each other; they were statistically similar to one another in predicting people's perceptions (Tables 10.2 and 10.3) across the whole sample and in the exposed subsample.

Overall media exposure did comparatively differ from other exposure types for those reporting any topical exposure. Media sources were less influential than women's studies classes and more influential than every other educational source in predicting using the following categories to describe abused men: Passive Personality, Negative Internalizer, Weak Physicality, Positive Relator, and using Derogatory/Emasculating phrases against them.

H3: Educational sources will predict male abuse perceptions, such that those with/out topical education exposure will differ in describing abused men.

Among the exposed subsample, those with any educational exposure were less likely to describe the abused man as Previously Abused than those with any other exposure types $\chi^2 = 5.11$, $p < .05$, $\varphi = .11$. People whose educational exposure was via a women's center presentation were more likely to describe abused men as Negative Internalizers ($\chi^2 = 3.82$, $p < .07$, $\varphi = .09$) and as Stigmatized ($\chi^2 = 3.71$, $p < .06$, $\varphi = .09$) than those receiving exposure via any other sources, whereas those educated via an "other" class were less likely to identify the man as a Negative Externalizer, $\chi^2 = 4.42$, $p < .05$, $\varphi = .10$. Thus, H3 was generally supported.

Comparative results among education types (see Table 10.3) show a decreasing order of influence ranging from health (most influential), women's studies, abuse, and "other" classes to the women's center presentation (least influential), respectively. This trend was found for those using descriptive categories of Internalized Negativity, Previously Abused, Passive Personality, Weak Physicality, and using actual Emasculating slurs against him; describing the man as Normal was similarly influenced by these educational sources. Of note for deviating from this trend was the role of women's studies classes, which (typically in the top two education influencers) were *most* predictive of using Negative Externalizer and Negative Internalizer labels. These classes were the only education type more influential than media in predicting these descriptions, as media was generally more influential than the other education sources.

<INSERT TABLE 10.3 ABOUT HERE>

Interactive influences

We concluded by examining potential confounding variables and interactions. As discussed in Eckstein and Cherry (2015), sex was largely insignificant across most outcome-perceptions; although sex predicted prior topical exposure in our current study (i.e., females more exposed), it did not predict likelihood of using particular descriptive categories. Women were slightly more likely to report prior media exposure and slightly less proportionally likely than men to report personal experience, though these only approached significance (see Table 10.1).

Notably, however, a significantly higher proportion of women (than men) indicated topic-exposure via a women's studies class; no sex-differences emerged for other education sources. Thus, in sex-segregated subsamples, we re-ran regression tests of women's studies classes' influence; combined with logistic interaction (sex × WS$_{class}$) models, results showed sex did not predict using any categories where women's studies classes influenced those results.

Next, we focused on potential age and educational attainment confounders. Youth was a significant predictor of labeling Weak Physicality: $b = .01$, $SE = .00$, Wald $= 11.20$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.98, .99], with those who perceived him this way significantly younger ($M = 29.09$ years, $SD = 12.46$) than those who did not employ this descriptive trait ($M = 31.37$, $SD = 13.68$), $t(1061.36) = 3.52$, $p < .001$, $d = .17$. Youth also predicted using actual Emasculating slurs against the hypothetical man, though this only approached significance: $b = .01$, $SE = .01$, Wald $= 3.17$, $p = .08$, 95% CI [.97, 1.00]. Age did not independently predict any other descriptors.

Finally, across the total sample, those who described the abused man as Physically Beaten had significantly less overall educational attainment ($M = 1.62$ on a 5-point scale, $SD = 1.26$) than those who did not use this description of the man ($M = 2.17$, $SD = .94$), $t(1772) = 2.11$, $p < .05$, $d = 49$. Thus, higher levels of educational attainment predicted *not* perceiving the abused man in terms of this (non-culpable) victimization experience: $b = .69$, $SE = .33$, Wald $=$

4.22, $p < .05$, 95% CI [.26, .97]. Because age typically accompanies educational attainment, we ran regression models to determine the influence of age, education level, and their interaction in predicting use of Physically Beaten. The final model suggested that, although they influenced interactively ($\beta_{Intaxn} = .20$, $p < .05$), this was largely a function of youth ($\beta_{Age} = .18$, $p < .001$) accounting for "lower" education levels ($\beta_{Edu} = .08$, ns) relating to use of this descriptor. However, as noted previously, age on its own (i.e., outside of the interactive model) did not predict the binary logistic outcome of identifying the man as Physically Beaten. No other characteristic categories were predicted by overall educational attainment level.

Discussion

In our previous work, we explored the nature of stigmatizing reactions people have when asked to describe a man abused by a female partner (Eckstein & Cherry, 2015). In this current study, we went further to examine the impact of topical education, media exposure, and personal experience on the tendency to describe these men in particular ways. Understanding how exposure to the topic of abused men affects people's likelihood (or not) of stigmatizing abused men themselves has theoretical implications for a GRS/C model and practical implications for educators and activists dealing with this issue.

Implications for GRS/C: Abused men, masculine mystique, and fear of femininity

Many GRS/C studies importantly focus on the degree of GRS/C in particular samples and various outcomes associated with experiencing it. In other words, a lot of research looks at the "resulting," right-hand side of O'Neil's (1981a) model. This study contributes to the GRS/C literature by examining the "environmental influences" (i.e., the left-hand side) of the model. As such, this study furthers an understanding of socialization sources influencing masculinity as it is valued and experienced by individuals.

Participants in this study overwhelmingly perceived a hypothetical abused man negatively. Highly stigmatizing, blaming, derogating descriptions (e.g., "What a pussy!") of this man predominated. This is notable not for the fact that abused men were stigmatized by the people in our sample (not surprising, as found in prior research), but because perceptions are highly likely to guide people's actual real-world behavior, particularly in violent situations (Stratmoen et al., 2020; Yule & Grych, 2020). In the current study, people consistently framed the abused man as gender- and relationally-deviant. Further, people blamed the man himself (rather than other potential environmental or interpersonal factors) for his own deviant condition. This tendency to blame victims not only for experiencing abuse, but also for being supposedly "complicit" in its continuation lends itself to explanation via O'Neil's model. Masculine mystique patterns of socialized control and competition require men to constrain not only themselves, but also to regulate and restrict others' genders (O'Neil, 1981b). Therefore, by attributing otherwise positive, yet feminine, characteristics (e.g., Positive Relator, Passive Personality) to abused men, this sample suggested that males unable (or unwilling) to end their own victimization violate masculine normativity and are thus worthy of stigmatization.

In general, prior topical exposure to abused men did not correspond to less stigmatization of them. All types of educational exposure predicted using a variety of blaming, derogating terms to describe abused men, but for those who indicated having had them, women's studies classes were most strongly related to people's perceptions – in largely negative, biased ways. This speaks to the importance of verifying – not just theorizing/assuming – that topical exposure (particularly education) is accurate and positive. Confirming the (positive or negative) effects of exposure can reduce risk of further perpetuating topical stigma.

The fact that women's studies courses (primarily taught at the college-level) generally exerted the most influence across exposure types lends further credence to O'Neil's (1981a) model and its emphasis on the fear of femininity as a driving force of GRS/C. In this study, people whose educational exposure included women's studies courses largely exhibited fear of femininity – as shown in their use of Emasculation, Passive Personality, and overly Positive Relator (attributes associated with femininity and thus, deviant gender norms for sexed-males) categories. Use of these descriptors illustrates maintenance of a "masculine mystique" in which men are expected to be stoic, strong, and controlling of (not controlled by) others (Connell, 2000). Accordingly, these perceptions (especially when communicated) not only harm the abused man, but denigrate the exact traits supposedly "valued" in women. These negative views of abused men, reinforced through education (but in this study, primarily women's studies courses), hurt both men and women. Gender itself may be explored in positive, sex-affirming ways, but it is clear that even courses intended to redress inequalities may be sources of negativity for men who are abused by women. The fact that overwhelmingly stigmatizing perceptions were associated with many and varied topical exposure sources suggests there are very few outlets currently portraying abused men in realistic or supportive ways. These sources, particularly influential on people's perceptions, suggest opportunities for improvement in anti-stigma education.

Applications to lived stigmatizing exposure

Formal education environments are believed prime locales for advancing not only information, but also opinions and attitudes surrounding a topic (Connell, 2000; O'Neil, 1981a, 1981b). Given that attitudes (based on formative perceptions) are typically formed early, targeting children's school curricula is a common tactic (Hust et al., 2017). However, this early-education or primary-prevention approach assumes that what is being taught is accurate, free of discriminatory bias, and does not further perpetuate stigma. Our results suggest that education sources were not particularly helpful, from a post-hoc statistical standpoint, in minimizing use of stigmatizing labels to describe an abused man. In fact, many education sources were affiliated with particularly derogatory labeling of this victim. Because the classroom plays a significant role in not only education, but also boys' and girls' socialization from childhood into adulthood (O'Neil, 1981a, 1981b), it is worrisome that additional exposure *to* education may increase men's stigma.

Far from helping, courses where people typically receive exposure to the topic (e.g., health and abuse-specific coursework) were tied to actually enhanced (or more implicit) stigmatization of these men. For example, the Physically Beaten theme still blamed abused men (i.e., for not stopping their own abuse) but focused a bit more on abuse outcomes than on the man's supposed internal flaws. People who used this theme tended to focus on describing bruises or scars visibly observable on such a man (see Eckstein & Cherry, 2015 for more), but then went on to attribute even these external results to internal characteristics of the man. Notably, and supporting the notion that educational sources were largely *un*helpful in reducing stigma, those who used this seemingly less obviously stigmatizing label had achieved *less* education than those who used other, more derogatorily emasculating labels. However, this was also found to be a function of those with higher educational attainment being older and perhaps of a different generation; older participants (with more education completed) were less likely to use this *relatively* sympathetic theme.

Demographic factors were of further interest when viewed across the entire sample. A majority of respondents had no prior exposure to this topic; they had not studied, experienced,

read, or viewed anything related to abused men. That in itself is alarming, given the prevalence of men in the U.S. who actually report abuse. As a reminder, 25.7% (roughly 1 in 4) of men in the U.S. reported physical abuse from a romantic partner, with 13.8% of U.S. men (roughly 1 in 7) reporting severe violence, and psychological abuse victimization experienced by almost half of U.S. men (Black et al., 2011). In our current study, those most likely to have heard about men being abused were younger participants, those who had achieved higher education levels, and/or those identifying as female. The fact that so few reported "personal experience" (either personally or via friends/family) is not surprising because abuse is typically underreported (e.g., Othman et al., 2014). However, it also demonstrates the validity of the GRS/C model's inclusion of *restrictive emotionality*, whereby men find it difficult to express emotion and demonstrate vulnerability – an emotional restriction caused by fear of femininity and of lacking masculinity (O'Neil, 1981b). It is possible male abuse personal experience was underreported due to this GRS/C pattern.

Noted by O'Neil (1981a), media are another main source of socialization. Although personal experience (either self or other) and media sources certainly played a role in forming some people's negatively stigmatizing perceptions, it was also these two sources (and not as much education) that predicted describing the man in ways that did not obviously discriminate. This finding lends credence to work that endorses positive encounters with stigmatized individuals to reduce associated stigma (Corrigan & Kosyluk, 2013; Corrigan & Penn, 1999). Basically, positive contact via personal interactions with a potential stigma target allows for perspective-taking and accompanying stigma-reduction. The primary barrier to this exposure source is the circular causality of stigma: to reduce it through interaction with a victim, those victims must disclose their stigmatized trait, which they are unlikely to do while stigma exists.

Taken together with the known role of schooling in socialization, the fact that media sources such as films/shows, newspapers/magazines, and online content related to some of the less stigmatizing characterizations points to the potential for future educators to rely more on cultural (as opposed to theoretical) tools in their topical education. Distributing non-stigmatizing messages through media such as television, online social media, and film may be crucial for not only activists outside academia, but also for those within the education system. Education on the topic should not cease, as these sources potentially reinforcing stigma may be the very ones needed to fight or resist it (Corrigan & Kosyluk, 2013).

Additionally, media may overlap and be mediated/moderated by/with other information sources. For example, entertainment education, although it has shown mixed results (Hoffman et al., 2017), may raise awareness of health and interpersonal issues when tailored to specific audiences (Hust et al., 2017). Even when not intentionally educational, media still expand awareness (e.g., Kahlor & Eastin, 2011). However, scholars and activists (i.e., typical advocates of progress) may have comparatively little influence on media content. The sources over which educators and activists have the most control are usually more formal educational settings such as school classrooms and community programs. The influence of peers at school, in the community, and/or within families is clearly established as a (if not *the*) primary shaper of people's gendered understandings (Arbeit, 2018; Brutsaert, 2006; DeKeseredy et al., 2018; Hertzog & Rowley, 2014; Lobel et al., 1999; Marcell et al., 2011; to name just a few). Thus, potential remains for individual educators to incorporate media and to tailor their formal curricula according to particular students to also harness peers' influence (Rogers et al., 2018). Even the incorporation of *current* research, rather than outdated misconceptions related to controversial (or *seemingly* uncontroversial) topics, can help distinguish ideas "commonly

believed" versus "actually practiced" (Hertzog & Rowley, 2014) or clarify when media portrayals are/not accurate (Kahlor & Eastin, 2011).

Finally, it is important that the influence of cultural rhetoric also be countered among those purporting to teach gender/sex equality. Clearly illustrating O'Neil's (1981b) discussed patterns of socialized control, power, competition, and homophobia (all GRS/C contributors), the labels attributed to abused men in this study emphasized a "masculine mystique" by drawing on cultural narratives that fear feminine attributes, particularly when embodied by males supposed to be "opposite" from females – in gender expressions and sexuality. These common perceptions of masculinity as a stoic, strong, control-based gender can be harmful if perpetuated as "actual/embodied" versus "idealistic/normative" concepts. For example, where it may be necessary for women's studies courses to establish the larger concepts of patriarchy and masculine hegemony, it is equally important for professors in those courses to discuss the ways those forces limit both males and females in our culture. No one man can fully embody hegemonic masculinity; and, as shown in our study, many men *and* women embody or communicate complicit masculinity forms that reinforce harmful, essentializing stereotypes (e.g., see Connell, 1995; Eckstein, 2010). Acknowledging this, though perhaps challenging for those advancing particular worldviews, is but one step in showing the complexity of gender as it operates in all our lives.

Limitations and directions for future research

A primary limitation of our study was the lack of knowledge regarding the specificity (e.g., education level, media titles/programs) and extent (e.g., exposure hours across what time periods) of people's various exposure types. Due to the exploratory nature of this project, and to avoid priming participants, we used an open-ended question to assess prior topical exposure. This meant we were unable to standardize the extent to which people responded to particular exposure types. For example, if they reported exposure via a Women's Center guest presentation, we had no way of knowing if that occurred as part of a health, abuse, or "other" class. As such, we were unable to assess how/when the abused-man topic was covered in each class.

Similarly, participants with experiential exposure did not always differentiate between personal experience types (e.g., self, relative, friend, or acquaintance victimization). Establishing the differences in personal experience types could provide richer understanding of how they impact perceptions of abused men. Future research should establish both the type and nature of relationship among those with personal experience exposure. Many in this study reporting "personal experience" were among the most derogatory, victim-blaming, and emasculating slur-users. If only positive interactions reduce stigma (Corrigan & Penn, 1999), it is important to know whether the victimized man they know is liked, respected, and/or off-putting.

Finally, respondents may have reported only their most memorable exposure sources. Using a checklist level-indicator (as done by Eckstein & Quattro, 2021, for example) would aid in identifying more specific parameters to measure exposure. Now that we know prior exposure affects perceptions, future research must explore factors like receiver-attention (e.g., interest in) and exposure intensity (i.e., duration/length, and frequency) across varying sources.

Conclusion

Stereotypes and judgments initially help us make sense of the world around us; the application of stigma during that process may happen automatically and without ill intent (Barrett, 2017). Indeed, some of the themes associated with abused men in this study were not *intended* to be derogatory, as they included "excuses" for the man's condition. Nonetheless, they

still served to reduce the abused man to something other than masculine (i.e., stoic, strong, controlling), reinforcing the potential for GRS/C experienced by so-called deviant abused males. Unfortunately, it appears that education in its current state may further reinforce stigmatizing characterizations. This is particularly problematic in that GRS/C and damaging gender-beliefs about masculinity do not only harm males. The larger belief system that sets up masculinity as oppositional to femininity reinforces women as "appropriate" abuse victims. By targeting deviant men, male-abuse stigmatizers (a potential majority in the U.S. today) actually attack men *and* women.

TABLE 10.1

Distributions of Exposure-Group Effects by Sex, Age, and Educational Attainment

	Sex			Age			Education		
	Males	Females	Difference	Had	None	Difference	Had	None	Difference
	n (%)	n (%)	χ^2	M (SD)	M (SD)	t (df)	M (SD)	M (SD)	t (df)
ANY EXPOSURE	145 (17.5)	294 (26.4)	21.40 ***	27.49	31.68	6.58 (869.04) ***	2.32	2.12	3.68 (1772) ***
N = 447			φ = .11	(10.94)	(13.87)	d = .34	(.90)	(.95)	d = .22
ANY EDUCATION	93 (64.1)	193 (65.6)	.10	26.06	30.29	3.46 (220.51) **	2.38	2.21	1.71 (383)
n = 287				(9.29)	(13.20)	d = .37	(.89)	(.92)	
Health class	17 (11.7)	25 (8.5)	1.16	23.79	27.89	3.50 (71.16) **	2.16	2.34	1.18 (383)
				(6.73)	(11.24)	d = .44	(.95)	(.90)	
WS class	2 (1.4)	19 (6.5)	5.51 *	25.29	27.60	0.95 (430)	2.50	2.31	0.91 (383)
			φ = .11	(9.22)	(11.02)		(.89)	(.90)	
Abuse class	12 (8.3)	41 (13.9)	2.94	24.47	27.91	3.22 (103.07) **	2.20	2.34	1.03 (383)
				(6.52)	(11.37)	d = .37	(.86)	(.91)	
Other class	60 (41.4)	101 (34.2)	2.14	27.37	27.55	0.17 (430)	2.51	2.21	3.27 (383) **
				(10.53)	(11.19)		(.90)	(.88)	d = .34
Women's Center	4 (2.8)	17 (5.8)	1.95	25.52	27.59	0.84 (430)	2.21	2.33	0.55 (383)
				(9.07)	(11.03)		(.79)	(.91)	
ANY MEDIA	23 (15.9)	69 (23.5)	3.39 [i]	33.86	25.76	5.11 (111.10) ***	2.30	2.33	0.27 (383)
n = 92			φ = .09	(14.44)	(9.07)	d = .67	(.97)	(.88)	
Read	12 (8.3)	37 (12.6)	1.82	33.82	26.68	3.39 (54.51) **	2.35	2.32	0.26 (383)
				(14.29)	(10.18)	d = .58	(1.00)	(.89)	
Viewed	13 (8.9)	39 (13.3)	1.78	34.22	26.59	3.72 (57.03) ***	2.32	2.32	0.02 (383)
				(14.17)	(10.12)	d = .62	(.96)	(.89)	
PERS. EXPER.	14 (9.7)	15 (5.1)	3.30 [i]	32.81	27.13	2.63 (430) **	2.19	2.33	0.76 (383)
n = 29			φ = .09	(12.70)	(10.74)	d = .48	(.98)	(.90)	

Notes. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. [i]$p \leq .07$. All percentages are within-sex %s.

TABLE 10.2

Stigmatization Use by Exposure (Source Type & Frequency) to Abused Men

Stigma Type	Any exposure	Education						Media			Personal Experience
		Any Education	Health class	WS class	Abuse class	Other class	WC Present	Any Media	Read	Viewed	
	N = 447	n = 287	n = 43	n = 21	n = 53	n = 161	n = 21	n = 92	n = 49	n = 52	n = 29
	64.2	9.6	4.7	11.9	35.9	4.7	20.6	11.0	11.6	6.5	
PASSIVE PERSONALITY n = 1,222 (62.4%)	282	180	27	9	37	98	14	51	29	25*	21
"Weak-minded, no backbone"	63.1	62.7	62.8	42.9	69.8	60.9	66.7	55.4	59.2	48.1	72.4
NEGATIVE INTERNALIZER n = 563 (28.8%)	152**	93	18	6	16	49	11*	30	15	17	11
"Edgy, sad, lonely"	34.0	32.4	41.9	28.6	30.2	30.4	52.4	32.6	30.6	32.7	37.9
WEAK PHYSICALITY n = 540 (27.6%)	122	77	13	4	13	45	6	23	10	13	7
"Thin, a little nerdy around the edges"	27.3	26.8	30.2	19.0	24.5	28.0	28.6	25.0	20.4	25.0	24.1
POSITIVE RELATOR n = 237 (12.1%)	66*	43	5	4	11	25	0	14	9	9	2
"Forgives anything, stays in bad situation"	14.8	9.6	11.6	19.0	20.8	15.5		15.2	18.4	17.3	6.9
NEGATIVE EXTERNALIZER n = 165 (8.4%)	39	21	6	2	4	8*	1	8	5	4	2
"Outwardly rude to females"	8.7	7.3	14.0	9.5	7.5	5.0	4.8	8.7	10.2	7.7	6.9
EMASCULATED n = 134 (6.8%)	31	21	3	1	4	12	1	9	6	3	1
"Bitch ass pussy"	6.9	7.3	7.0	4.8	7.5	7.5	4.8	9.8	12.2	5.8	3.4
PAST ABUSE VICTIM n = 43 (2.2%)	12	4*	0	0	0	4	0	1	1	1	0
"Probably abused as child"	2.7	1.4				2.5		1.1	2.0	1.9	
STIGMATIZED n = 23 (1.2%)	4	3	0	0	1	2	1[i]	1	1	0	0
"Shame" & "Humiliation"	0.9	1.0			1.9	1.2	4.8	1.1	2.0		
PHYSICALLY BEATEN n = 18 (0.9%)	4	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
"Unexplained-cuts & bruises"; "flinchy"	0.9	0.3				0.6					
SUBSTANCE ABUSER n = 17 (0.9%)	4	3	0	0	0	3	0	1	1	0	0
"Probably a drunkard" & "Druggie"	0.9	1.0				1.9		1.1	2.0		
NORMAL n = 159 (8.1%)	32	20	4	2	5	10	0	7	3	6	2
"No specif. character. Any man can be abused"	7.2	7.0	9.3	9.5	9.4	6.2		7.6	6.1	11.5	6.9

Notes. First column (Stigma Type) values are descriptive of total reports (N = 3,099) from the entire sample (N = 1,957). Second column (Any Exposure) values are percent of total (n = 447) participants for each stigma category with types of exposure to abused men. All percentages, except first row (which are % of each exposure type out of total participants indicating *any* topic-exposure) are % *within* each exposure type who indicated a particular stigma category and may be > 100% due to participants identifying more than one category in their descriptions of the abused men.
*p < .05. **p < .01. *** p < .001. [i] p < .06.

TABLE 10.3

Comparisons Among Exposure Types in Predicting Characteristics Used to Describe Abused Men

Descriptor Used	Education (class types)								Media				Personal Experience	
	Health		Abuse		Other		WC Prsnt.		Read		Viewed			
	z	r	z	r	z	r	z	r	z	r	z	r	z	r
PASSIVE														
WS Class	-3.00**	.18	4.13***	.25	8.60***	.51	ns		3.24**	.19	2.74**	.16	2.04*	.12
Abuse Class	ns		---		5.20***	.31	3.08**	.18	ns		ns		-2.25*	.14
Other Class	-6.40***	.38	-5.29***	.32	---		7.91***	.47	-6.38***	.38	-6.69***	.40	-7.31***	.44
WC Present.	-2.08*	.12	-3.22**	.19	-8.01***	.48	---		-2.29*	.14	ns		ns	
NEG. INTERN.														
WS Class	-2.45*	.20	2.13*	.17	5.72***	.46	ns		2.07*	.17	2.29*	.19	ns	
Other Class	-3.75***	.30	-4.06***	.33	---		4.90***	.40	-4.30***	.35	-3.97***	.32	-4.90***	.40
WEAK PHYS.														
WS Class	-2.18*	.20	2.18*	.20	5.98***	.54	ns		ns		2.18*	.20	ns	
Other Class	-4.20***	.38	-4.21***	.38	---		5.57***	.50	-4.81***	.44	-4.28***	.39	-5.49***	.50
RELATOR														
WS Class	ns		ns		3.90***	.48	2.00*	.25	ns		ns		ns	
Other Class	-3.92***	.48	-2.33*	.29	---		5.00***	.62	-3.02**	.37	-3.02**	.37	-4.43***	.55
WC Present.	-2.24*	.28	-3.32**	.41	-5.00***	.62	---		-3.00**	.37	-3.00**	.37	ns	
Pers. Exper.	ns		2.50*	.31	4.43***	.55	ns		-2.11*	.26	-2.11*	.26	---	
NEG. EXTERN.														
WS Class	ns		ns		1.90ⁱ	.30	ns		ns		ns		ns	
Other Class	ns		ns		---		2.33*	.37	ns		ns		-1.90ⁱ	.30
WC Present.	-1.89ⁱ	.30	ns		-2.33*	.37	---		ns		ns		ns	
EMASCULAT.														
WS Class	ns		ns		3.05**	.55	ns		1.89ⁱ	.34	ns		ns	
Other Class	-2.32*	.42	-2.00*	.36	---		3.05**	.55	ns		-2.32*	.42	-3.05**	.55
WC Present.	ns		ns		-3.05**	.55	---		-1.89ⁱ	.34	ns		ns	
Pers. Exper.	ns		ns		3.05**	.55	ns		-1.89ⁱ	.34	ns		---	
PAST VICTIM														
WS Class	ns		ns		2.00*	.58	ns		ns		ns		ns	
Other Class	-2.00*	.58	-2.00*	.58	---		2.00*	.58	ns		ns		-2.00*	.58
NORMAL														
WS Class	ns		ns		2.31*	.41	ns		ns		ns		ns	
Other Class	ns		ns		---		3.16**	.56	-2.11*	.37	ns		-2.31*	.41
WC Present.	-2.00*	.35	-2.24*	.40	-3.16**	.56	---		ns		-2.24*	.40	ns	

Note. Table shows only those pairings for which results were significant using Wilcoxon signed-ranks test z-scores. Negative scores indicate that exposure source in header row was more influential than exposure source in first column (e.g., Health class influenced more than WS Class), whereas positive scores indicate column source to be more influential than header row source (e.g., WS Class influenced more than Read Media).
*p < .05. **p < .01. *** p < .001. ⁱ p < .06. r = z/√N$_{pairs}$, per Rosenthal (1994).

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APPENDIX

Imagine one of your current male friends was being abused by his wife or girlfriend…

What would be the characteristics of this man?

Have you ever received education (read a book about, received a lecture or class) that discussed male abuse victims? If so, what was it (what class, book, etc.) and what did it cover?