

Innocence, Anger, and Excess:
Constraining and Restricting Female Victims of Intimate Partner Violence

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ABSTRACT

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(Under the direction of Julia T. Wood, Lawrence B. Rosenfeld, and Della Pollock)

The purpose of this study was to explore the tension between two dominant stereotypes of female victims of intimate partner violence: an innocent victim, or an assertive survivor. 10 female and 10 male participants listened to one of two audio recordings of a woman's experience with intimate partner violence and participated in an interview regarding what they heard. The participants in this study were quite aware of the dominant stereotypes and suggested that women who have been targets of intimate partner violence should not be too much of either. Also, their understandings of intimate partner violence often supported common myths about intimate partner violence. Ultimately, this study has suggested that women who are victims of violence are often constrained by narrow definitions of acceptable feminine behavior and that deviations from those norms has serious consequences for female victims of violence.

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“She didn’t really sound like sad or pitiful. She just kind of sounded like angry.”

“You can act angry and at the same time not have a tone like that. You could still be angry and, you know, have it be a righteous anger.”

“The tone of her voice is very angry, and [the jury] may interpret that as she is exaggerating the story. She’s just mad and wants to get revenge on him, get back at him. And she’s probably just making up a few too many details.”

These statements were made by college students responding to a woman’s narrative about her experience as a target of intimate partner violence. What these participants were astutely aware of was a tension between two predominant stereotypes of women who have been targets of intimate partner violence: the upset, hurt victim and the angry, assertive survivor. Although most women do not fit exclusively in either of these extreme categories, the categories are often applied as standards by which a good victim is measured.

Others’ perceptions of women who have been targets of intimate partner violence affect how those others respond to the women. That is, the extent to which these women are perceived to fit the expectations of “good” female victims of violence, and thus appear believable, credible, and worthy of sympathy and concern, has important consequences socially and legally. Therefore, it is important to examine how people respond to women who have been targets of intimate partner violence who do and do not fit traditional stereotypes and the expectations those stereotypes imply.

This study assesses how people respond to women whose accounts of experiencing intimate partner violence do and do not conform to traditional views of women. While the study investigates the responses that various self-presentations provoke, it is not intended to be a manual for being an “effective victim.” Rather, this project is a critical, interpretive study that seeks to explore the complexity of victimhood for women who are victims of intimate partner violence.

Review of the Literature

Statistics of reported violence note that more than 5.3 million women over the age of 18 are abused by partners each year (Center for Disease Control, 2004). According to the U.S. Department of Justice, in 2004, 21% of all nonfatal violent crimes committed against women were perpetrated by intimate partners (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2006). Because these statistics only include reported violence, the actual prevalence of violence among intimate partners is likely much higher.

Defining Intimate Partner Violence

Definitions of intimate partner violence, as well as the terms used to describe it, vary. Among researchers there is consensus that intimate partner violence includes physical assaults between romantic partners, married or otherwise (Wood, 2006). Beyond that concurrence, scholarly conceptions of intimate partner violence differ. Some scholars restrict the term to physical violence, while others include emotional, verbal, and other non-physical abuse (Wood, 2006). Not satisfied with using the single term, intimate partner violence, to refer to distinct kinds of aggression, Johnson (in press) classifies intimate partner violence into three major types: situational couple violence, violent resistance, and intimate terrorism, with intimate terrorism being the most severe and dangerous type of violence. Situational

couple violence, also called common couple violence, is characterized as violence that is not rooted in an attempt by one partner to control another (Johnson, in press; Johnson & Leone, 2005). This type of violence is brought on by situational triggers rather than deeply enmeshed power dynamics (Johnson, in press; Johnson & Leone, 2005). Violent resistance is also not an attempt to control one partner through violence. Instead, it is violence committed by the abused partner upon the perpetrator of ongoing violence in an attempt to stop the violence (Johnson, in press). Intimate terrorism, previously called patriarchal terrorism, is the most serious type of violence between intimates. It is an attempt by one partner to use violence and other strategies to control another partner and is deeply entrenched in issues of power and gender (Johnson, in press; Johnson & Leone, 2005).

Both men and women perpetrate violence. While a few researchers (e.g., Felson, 1999; Strauss, 1999) claim that men and women do so at equal rates in heterosexual relationships, a majority of researchers and clinicians maintain that men are the primary perpetrators of intimate partner violence, especially forms of it that inflict serious harm and are motivated by the desire to have power and control over their partners (Jacobson & Gottman, 1998; Johnson, 2001; Wood, 2006). This struggle over power and control is deeply enmeshed in dominant gendered roles and narratives in our culture (Wood, 2006). That is, masculinity in our culture has been constructed in a way that is strongly associated with violence and dominance (Katz, 2003; Lloyd, 1999; Wood, 2004).

Competing Expectations and Stereotypes of Victims

Women are often blamed for violent and sexual attacks against them. For instance, their reputations, choice of clothing, and other behaviors may lead others to call into question their status as victims. One of the less obvious ways that women are secondarily victimized

is through the way society constructs the role of the victim and, specifically, what counts as appropriate female victim behavior. That is, for a woman, the problem of intimate partner violence does not necessarily end when she seeks help. One of the ways she continues to be confined and constrained is through the stereotypes of female victims, often informed by misconceptions about intimate partner violence and culturally entrenched images of women and femininity. Existing stereotypes of female victims of intimate partner violence shape the way individuals think about those women. Further complicating these expectations is the tension between two predominant stereotypes.

The innocent victim. Initial well-intended efforts to reduce self-blame of victimized women told and (continues to tell) women that what happened to them was not their fault and that there was nothing they could have done to stop the crime committed against them (Haaken, 1999). This advice is empowering to many women who have been the victims of a crime, and it is helpful in combating common myths about violence against women that suggest that the victim is responsible for the crime committed against her and/or for not stopping that action (DeVasto, 2003; Jacobson & Gottman, 1998). However, this advice may lead women and those who perceive and judge them to feel that women must embody an impossibly perfect image of a poor, innocent victim.

Many women do feel they are at least partially responsible for violence committed against them and know that they are not as innocent and pure as a sympathetic female victim is expected to be (Lamb, 1999b). Just as women are more likely to perceive themselves as at fault for being victimized if they do not fit the virginal model, there are attributions of blame often present in the legal process. For instance, some law enforcement officers may doubt women's complaints if they have engaged in less than innocent, perfect behavior preceding

the crime (Schuller & Stewart, 2000). Furthermore, some prosecutors are more likely to believe a victim will be credible on the stand only if she seems to have a good reputation (Stanko, 1982). Women who are not perceived as innocent and pure are often viewed as less credible and worthy of sympathy.

Purity and innocence are not the only expectations of a “good” female victim. Victims are also expected to be highly emotional (Davis, 2004; Kaufmann, Drevland, Wessel, Overskeid, & Magnussen, 2003). Kaufmann et al. (2003) found that the emotional expression of a victimized woman had a greater effect on her perceived credibility than did the strength of the substance of her report. A less clear story told by a very upset woman was perceived as more credible than a more clearly story told by a less obviously upset woman (Kaufmann et al., 2003). Emotional expressiveness is important because it is interpreted as showing that the victimized woman is experiencing lasting suffering from the crime committed against her. “Eternal suffering” is another key element of a “good” victim (Lamb, 1999b). In fact, Lamb reports accounts of women being told that they would not be “convincing ‘victims’ because they were doing so well” (pp. 116-117) following their abuse. Bowling, a researcher in Public Health who studies domestic violence protective orders (DVPO) recently noted, “The judge wants to see fear. You have to act scared to get a DVPO. If you’re mad or angry, you won’t get one” (personal communication). As someone who observed many DVPO hearings, Bowling had the opportunity to witness first-hand the type of affect that is advantageous for women plaintiffs in courtrooms.

Many women who have been victims of intimate partner violence, as well as other violent crimes, are often expected to perform this type of victim role, because being “weak, passive, and fearful” (Allard, 1997, p. 76) indicates that suffering has, in fact, occurred and,

therefore, someone must be punished. Konradi (1996) provides a specific case in which a woman felt that she had to conceal that she was a backpacker because that might make her “appear to be too self-reliant” and thus she would not be seen as someone who could have been a victim of an assault. This woman was a victim of sexual assault rather than intimate partner violence. However, the idea of a female victim as fragile and weak is consistent with stereotypes of women who are victims of intimate partner violence as well (Lamb, 1999b).

The aggressive, assertive survivor. While the “innocent victim” is a dominant and important stereotype of women who have been targets of intimate partner violence, it is not the only stereotype that emerges from the literature. Another competing image is that of an aggressive, assertive survivor. This woman is more confident and assertive than her innocent victim counterpart. She is proactive in responding to the abuse and takes charge of her situation, despite being a victim of violence (Frohmann, 1997). Some prosecutors are reluctant to represent victims whom they think will not be aggressive and assertive enough to follow a case through to conclusion (Stanko, 1982).

Although this stereotype is less pervasive in the literature, it is not without presence and effect. Others can conjure up the angry, assertive survivor as an alternative to a victim who is *too* emotional and upset. Conversely, others can imagine an upset, emotional victim as an alternative to an angry, assertive survivor. There is, then, a tension between these two stereotypes of women who are targets of intimate partner violence. Thus, when many encounter a victim who seems upset and hurt, they believe that she should be angrier (see Frohmann, 1997); however, when encountering an angry, assertive woman, some find her to be cold, unaffected and, thus, not a credible woman victim. Is there is a middle ground and, if so, what are the effects of being forced into such a narrow, confined space?

The purpose of this study is to explore the tension between these two stereotypes by examining responses to embodiments of them. That is, the study seeks to discover if participants perceive a woman who has been the target of intimate partner violence differently depending upon which of the two dominant victim/survivor stereotypes she represents.

RQ: How do participants respond to the two different stereotypes of women who have been victims of violence?

Method

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted in the spring of 2005. Eight participants (five women and three men) read one of two versions of a first-person account of intimate partner violence. Version A presented a very emotionally upset victim (a “good victim”) while version B presented an angry, matter-of-fact victim (a “bad victim”).ⁱ The major findings of the pilot study related to the ways in which participants mirrored the demeanor of the victimized woman and reconstructed the woman in version B to make her more like a victim who conformed to traditional expectations. In addition, participants noted that there was no direct relationship for them between feeling sympathy for, or liking, a woman who has been abused and deciding to return a guilty verdict if charges were pressed against the husband for the violence.

Participants and Materials

Participants. Participants in the present study were 20 undergraduate students—10 men and 10 women—at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. The ages of participants ranged from 18-51, with an average age of 22.6 years. Most participants were

white but there were two Asians s and one black. They represented diverse majors offered at the university, and no majors were repeated among those who had declared a major. This diversity means that participants have been exposed to a wide variety of academic experiences, providing them with different lenses through which to view not only their school work but, perhaps, other life experiences as well.

The men and women in this study learned about it through an email sent to their university email accounts or through a friend or instructor who knew about the study. Initially, the study was not promoted as a study focusing specifically on intimate partner violence but rather more broadly as research about responses to personal narratives. Upon arrival, participants were informed about the specific nature of the content of the recording they would hear in order to give them an opportunity to decline participation if they did not want to listen to such a story. This strategy was employed as an effort to attract a group of participants with diverse interests rather than only those people who were interested in the subject of intimate partner violence.

Materials. Participants responded to one of two versions of an audiotape of a woman's account of experiencing intimate partner violence. The audiotape was made by an actress who was a white woman in her 30s without a pronounced accent. She read both versions in order to maintain as much consistency as possible between the two tapes. Also, the verbal aspects of the two recordings were almost identical. However, the upset/emotional version had more verbal hedges (e.g., I think, maybe) and the angry/assertive version had some instances of swearing. The main difference between the two recordings was the affect conveyed in them through variations in paralanguage. The upset/emotional recording was read with a more hesitant, quiet, tentative tone, and at points the woman seemed as if she was

crying or on the verge of doing so. In the other recording, the tone was more assertive, strong, and confident: this woman sounded angry, not only at her husband but also at her self for staying in the relationship. The scripts for these recordings are found in Appendices A (upset/emotional version) and B (angry/assertive version).

Several validity checks were conducted in order to ensure that the recording accurately portrayed these two different stereotypes of victims. First, the written scripts, complete with non verbal direction, were reviewed by several people who were not directly involved in the project. These people were asked to give their general impressions of the scripts, and they were modified accordingly.

Once the written scripts were modified, the audio recordings were made. Students in my Interpersonal Communication course—as part of a lesson on verbal communication, nonverbal communication, and listening—heard one of two versions of the recording and were asked to give their general impressions of the woman in the recording, seeking to determine if the portrayal was (1) realistic and (2) reflected the intended stereotype. Following this, participants listened to the other version of the recording and were asked to give advice about ways to improve the believability of both versions.

Participants indicated that the upset/emotional portrayal was realistic and reflected the intended stereotype. However, they perceived a general lack of affect in the angry/assertive portrayal and felt the affect that was present was radically inconsistent with the verbal message. Upon reviewing their feedback, I agreed that the verbal message was too passive, rather than relatively neutral. My students assisted me further by indicating which parts of the script for version B they regarded as too passive. A new angry/assertive script was

written, removing some verbal hedges and adding some swearing that was intended to make the woman seem angrier. Then the angry/assertive version was rerecorded.

Procedures

Standard IRB procedures were followed, including informing participants of their rights and obtaining informed consent. During the review of the consent form, participants were informed that they would be listening to a recording of a woman talking about her experience with intimate partner violence, at which point they were reminded that they could end their participation in the study or decline to be involved at any time with no penalty. No participants declined participation at that point or at any point during the study.

Following signing the consent form, participants listened to one of two versions of a three-minute audio recording of a woman's story of her experience with intimate partner violence. After listening to the recording, participants engaged in an interview about what they heard, lasting between 10 and 30 minutes, depending on the participants' responses. I conducted each interview using a semi-structured interview technique. A list of the guiding questions I asked is in Appendix C; however, because every participant was unique, each interview followed a slightly different path. Most of the questions found in Appendix C were followed up by asking why participants felt a particular way or what part of the story led them to their conclusions. For instance, when a participant described the woman in the tape, I would often ask, "What makes you think that?" or, "Can you think of a particular part of the story that makes you think that?" This strategy was an attempt to not only discover *what* participants thought but also *why* they thought it.

At the conclusion of the interview, participants responded to the following questions about the woman on the recording:

1. Do you think this woman works outside of the home?
2. How old do you think she is?
3. What race do you think she is?
4. What do you think her socioeconomic status is?
5. What do you think her level of education is?

While these questions were not the main focus of the study, they were collected to determine if the participants viewed the woman differently along these factors based upon the recording that they heard.

Following the interview and the brief survey, participants were debriefed. I described each version of the account and gave participants an opportunity to add any additional comments they had. Few participants added any comments other than, “It sounds interesting.” At that point, the participants’ involvement was finished.

Analysis Process

Analysis of the ideas and concepts in these interviews was guided by grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). That is, I did not go into the interviews and/or analysis seeking *a priori* themes or categories that might be present in the data. Rather, I looked for common themes and ideas that emerged from the responses of the participants. I was not only looking for emergent concepts, but also for the way those ideas interrelated with one another, both within one individual’s interview as well as across the interviews of all participants.

As ideas and concepts emerged, I used verification processes to assess the concepts I had seen. I did this in two ways. First, I asked participants to confirm or critique concepts I saw emerging. This was accomplished merely by asking questions such as, “It seems like you are saying x. Am I hearing you correctly?” or by asking if a particular idea seemed to be

an adequate description of a particular statement or set of statements. Second, because the participant interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed, I was able to review previous interviews to consider information that might not have previously seemed relevant until a concept became more obvious through later interviews. This helped to ensure I was not missing information that was not initially overlooked.

Results

Women, including women who are victims of intimate partner violence, have to negotiate very tricky expectations and stereotypes of women in order to be believed and supported. If they go too far toward any stereotype of femininity (e.g., angry, insensitive bitch or helpless, innocent victim), they risk being perceived as not credible or not sympathetic. A “good” woman victim is *somewhat* innocent and helpless and also *somewhat* angry and assertive, but not too much of either. Even when describing a traumatic experience that could understandably arouse strong emotions, women are expected not to be excessive in any way, not to be overly helpless or overly angry.

As noted previously, the literature references at least two conflicting stereotypes that may affect individuals’ perceptions of women who have been victims of intimate partner violence. As stated in the literature review, one stereotype depicts a fragile, helpless, scared, and upset victim who is incapable of helping herself. This stereotype can have differing effects. For instance, it is possible that an innocent, virginal woman could motivate others (jurors, for instance) to feel a need to protect this poor innocent victim. As Allard (1997) notes, a predominant expectation of victims of intimate partner violence is that they be “weak, passive, and fearful” (p. 76). However, a victim is sometimes seen as so virginal and innocent that one would have a hard time believing she has actually been through something

horrible or that she did not contribute in some way to the altercation(s). For instance, Frohmann (1997) cited a district attorney who said of a victim he did not find credible, “She’s timid, shy, naïve, virginal, and she didn’t do all the right things [such as calling the police immediately and fighting back]. I’m not convinced she is even telling the truth. She’s not even angry about what happened to her” (p. 158). While this lawyer was speaking about a rape victim, the criteria used to judge victimhood are often consistent across various types of violence against women (Lamb, 1999a).

As this lawyer noted, another most commonly encountered stereotype of a female victim is of an angry, assertive woman who appears strong following the attack(s). This stereotype can undergird an assumption that she should have been able to protect herself or must not have been badly hurt since she is not highly upset and eternally suffering. For instance, as noted previously, Konradi (1996) cited the instance of a woman whose lawyer feared that jurors would not be sympathetic to her if they knew she was a backpacker—the attorney felt she would seem too strong and capable of resistance to have been a victim of sexual assault. Additionally, a strong, assertive woman is often perceived as more likely to have provoked the attack against her (Lamb, 1999b).

The present study provides empirical evidence for the co-existence of these seemingly irreconcilable stereotypes. Although I do not assume that women who have experienced violence must fit into one of these two categories, participants in this study were inclined to assume precisely that. Further, participants expressed discomfort with perceived excesses in the woman whose account of abuse they heard. A majority of participants who heard the upset version regarded the woman as too upset, passive, and helpless, whereas a

majority of participants who heard the angry version viewed the woman as too angry, too bitter, too self-sufficient.

Because participants listened to one of two relatively distinct deliveries of a woman's experience with intimate partner violence—one told in a very fragile, hurt manner and the other in an angry, assertive tone—it is not entirely surprising that they would describe the women in these recordings somewhat differently. However, what was surprising was the degree of divergence in participants' views based on no substantive differences and only nonverbal variations in the recorded account.

Participants in this study described the perceptions they had and the attributions they made regarding the victim. Their descriptions included perceptions of the woman as an innocent victim as well as a provoking bitch, the two predominant stereotypes that emerged from the data. Next, I discuss the congruency between participants' comments and myths about intimate partner violence. In presenting excerpts from respondents, I use pseudonyms to protect respondents' identities.

Being Feminine

All but one of the participants, regardless of the tape they listened to, described the woman as feminine in some way. One version of femininity was a more traditional type in which the woman was small, passive, and meek. Another was a strong but angry bitch who some participants described as insensitive and perhaps having provoked the attack on her.

The innocent victim. All of the participants who heard the emotional/upset recording described the woman as weak, innocent and otherwise conventionally feminine. For instance, Michael said, "She seemed very innocent." Leslie described her as, "especially sensitive, very shocked, and overwhelmed." Several participants, such as Garrett, described

her as a “small woman.” Being small, innocent, sensitive, and overwhelmed are all quite traditionally feminine, passive descriptions and were used by many of the participants listening to the upset/emotional recording, all of whom saw the woman in ways that could be described as feminine.

All but one of the participants who listened to the angry/assertive tape also described the woman in ways consistent with conventional understandings of femininity. The characterizations in response to the angry/assertive recording sometimes described her as Michelle did, saying, “She’s pretty defenseless against him, or as Kira did, noting, “he has that power over her and she’s kind of helpless.” However, it is important to note that the passive, feminine descriptions were often paired with attributions of assertiveness. For example, Kira began her statement above by saying, “You can tell she’s really angry [by] just like the language she used. And she’s kind of like frustrated that he has that power over her and she’s kind of helpless.” Additionally, 3 of the 9 participants’ only references to the victim’s femininity were about her being a good mother.

Still, it was not uncommon for participants who heard the “angry/assertive” recording to describe the woman as passive or weak, either overlooking her nonverbal communication and relying on her verbal communication (which tends not to be the case in general communication interactions, see Wood, 2007b, or reconstructing her in a way that made more sense to them, leaving out the parts of the story that were incongruent with how they expected her to behave. For instance, Ken, who heard the angry/assertive version, repeatedly described the woman as “passive” despite her more assertive tone. Nick, responding to the same version, at first noted that he, “would have expected from a lot of people kind of like the sound of crying or kind of sobbing, and kind of like a helpless sound, but hers was more

of a, um, just more of an angry tone.” However, later when he was asked to describe how he felt when listening to the recording, Nick said, “I guess I kind of felt the helplessness from her standpoint,” which is inconsistent with what he had said earlier, yet entirely consistent with an entrenched image of women, in general, and women victims, in particular.

While many participants described the woman with the angry/assertive tone as passive or feminine, only one participant who heard the upset/emotional version described that woman as strong in some way. Aaron said:

I was pretty impressed, I guess, with her strength. I mean, it takes a lot to be able to stand up and dust yourself off and check your face and then go downstairs [to prepare breakfast for children]. I mean, that takes a lot of courage.

While Aaron’s recognition of this woman’s strength is encouraging and notable, it is important also to recognize the gendered quality of strength he attributed to and admired in her. That is, her strength is feminine strength and staying in an abusive relationship for the sake of one’s family would likely not be considered strong behavior by a man.

Similarly, the only person who praised the strength of the woman in the angry/assertive recording without qualifying it by saying she should be more feminine or by describing her as weak in some way was Danielle, an 18-year-old black woman. When asked what she thought the woman was like, Danielle said, “She didn’t sound weak. [. . .] She had some kind of fire. Later, when asked how she felt when listening to the recording, Danielle said, “I felt proud, in a way, too that she wasn’t like the timid, weak kind, just taking whatever comes at her.” Because Danielle’s responses were so different from the other participants who listened to the same recording and because she was the only black

participant, it may be that she was raised to be more accepting and supportive of strength in women than the other participants, as Johnson (2000) notes is often the case in African-American families.

The insensitive, provoking bitch. Not all participants viewed the woman in the angry version as sufficiently feminine in a conventional sense. Of all the participants who listened to the angry/assertive recording, half of them felt that the woman should be *more* traditionally feminine. That is, either they expected her to be more conventionally feminine in some way (which most indicated she could do by crying more) or supposed that she would need to be in order to gain sympathy from a listener. Luke said that he was “pretty sure her lawyers would have her crying.” After critiquing her for seeming “cavalier about being abused,” Brock noted that, “If she were in an abusive relationship, you’d probably be able to hear her voice quivering or her start crying or something.” From Holly’s perspective, “there wasn’t as deep emotion as I would have expected.” She also noted that she “always expected women in that situation to be more docile.” Additionally, Nick said that he expected “the sound of crying or sobbing and kind of like a helplessness sound.” These participants felt that the woman they heard was not traditionally feminine enough. As Allard (1997) notes:

To successfully defend herself, a battered woman needs to convince a jury that she is a “normal” woman—weak, passive, and fearful. If the battered woman deviates from these characteristics, the jury may not associate her with that of the stereotypical woman. (p. 75-76)

The respondents’ statements here corroborated Allard’s conclusions: certain presentations of self would more sympathy than others, and being a good victim means being “weak, passive, and fearful.”

Darrin was the most critical of the woman's attitude and affect:

She could probably be more compelling if she took a more victimized tone in a sense. Even if she is being aggressive and she is taking it to a jury, if she makes it seem she's less [. . .] bitter and has less of a motive involved—less of a stake in it—and more as if she was aggressed upon, then the jury would be more likely to sympathize with her.

Notably, in the narrative that all participants heard, the woman specifically accounts for all the events of the day, making it clear through her verbal communication that she did not provoke her husband and was, in fact, “aggressed upon.”

Many participants went beyond asserting that the woman should be more feminine and criticized her for being an angry woman. Kira, who listened to the angry/assertive recording, described the woman by saying, “She didn't really sound like sad or pitiful. She just kind of sounded like angry.” Later, this respondent noted that she thought anger was a normal response in such a situation: “I wasn't surprised that she was angry because she probably, like, realized. Like, if I was in the situation, I would realize how stupid I was to stay in the situation.” Many participants who responded to the same recording were more critical. For example, Michelle suggested that the woman had probably provoked her husband prior to the attack in the narrative. When asked why she thought that, Michelle said, “I don't remember any specific things, but like the tone of her voice [at the beginning of the narrative].” Luke had a strong sense that this woman was out for revenge and had a vendetta against her husband, describing her as having “an angry tone in her voice” that demonstrated to him that she was in an “aggressive mood.” Later, he said that anger could be an indicator that she was lying.

Too Much: An Excess

Without being led or prompted, many participants readily suggested the alternative to the stereotype portrayed in the recording they heard. For instance, Taryn, responding to the upset/emotional recording said, “She wasn’t outraged, she was just kind of complacent.” For Taryn, the alternative stereotype was anger and frustration: “outrage.” After listening to the angry/assertive version, Luke noted that her tone of voice “wasn’t really sad about the whole situation. She was more mad.” Similarly, Kira said, “She didn’t really sound like sad or pitiful. She just kind of sounded like angry.” Conversely from Taryn, Luke and Kira’s perspectives, the alternative to being angry was being upset and hurt: “sad.” Like Taryn, Luke, and Kira, most participants were quite aware of a polar alternative to the affective presentation they heard.

Along with this presented alternative, just over half of the participants who heard each version felt that the woman they heard was in some way “too much” of the stereotype she exemplified: too upset and helpless or too angry. Ana, who listened to the upset/emotional recording, spoke of her own experience as a child in a family in which intimate partner violence occurred and being criticized for being “too calm.” Ana said:

If you sound too calm about it, [other people] can be like, “Well, she wasn’t really affected. It’s not really a big deal,” and I’ve gotten that a lot as a victim of domestic violence from my father. [. . .] I do get reactions from people who have not been through something like that where they just don’t understand that you can process something and that you can be calm and rational about it and that you can be explanatory. And so they’re like, “Yeah,

right, that happened to you. Then why are you, like, at UNC? Why aren't you living on the street or something?"

Ana experienced these expectations first-hand, but even those who did not have direct experience with being "too much" of one stereotype were actively involved in disciplining the stereotype in others.

Darrin presented the clearest example of criticism for being too assertive. Responding to the angry/assertive recording, he said, "You can act angry and at the same time not have a tone like that. You could still be angry and, you know, have it be a righteous anger." For Darrin, there were acceptable and unacceptable forms of anger, and the anger expressed by the woman in the recording was unacceptable. According to him, "certain parts of it seem fabricated just because the tone is *so* aggressive. [. . .] Something in it made me believe her but not trust her." As Darrin's comments indicate, the consequences of being "too much" can be devastating. In fact, several participants who listened to the angry/assertive version interpreted the affect as reasonable suspicion that the woman was lying or failing to disclose part of the story. Luke said, "Like I said, with the tone of her voice, her voice is very angry, and they [the jurors] may interpret that as she is exaggerating the story." Another participant felt that the story "seemed so unreal" based on the victim's angry tone. Holly, responding to the angry/assertive recording, was "surprised that she seemed so disgusted with him and yet was still just going about her life." Holly noted that she would have had more sympathy for the woman had she "made it sound a lot more as if she were a victim." Holly insisted that the woman was too nonchalant about her experience and should have been more upset. Responding to the same recording, Luke said:

The tone of her voice is very angry, and [the jury] may interpret that as she is exaggerating the story. She's just mad and wants to get revenge on him, get back at him. And she's probably just making up a few too many details. They would probably expect someone to be crying and really emotionally broken after events like this, especially if she was finally hoping for something to make it all stop. If she's making that final reach, one would think she was, would get emotional instead of angry.

Alternating between a hypothetical juror's perspective and his own, Luke suggested that this woman seemed too angry to be completely believable. Interestingly, except for Taryn, who reported having a friend who was wrongfully accused of intimate partner violence, no participants who responded to the innocent/upset recording suggested that the woman on the recording was lying.

Respondents who heard the angry/assertive recording were not the only participants to describe the woman as excessive. Some of the people who heard the upset/emotional recording also felt that the woman was too exemplary of a prototypical victim. For instance, Sharon stated that the woman was too emotional to be effective in the courtroom. She said, "Well, if she presented herself as a helpless victim, I think [the jurors] might have some problems with that because she does have a will in the situation [. . .] Sometimes that comes across as self-pity, and I think people are turned off by that." Later, Sharon added, "The legal institution has a lot of trouble with emotions. They deal in facts and figures and seem to be almost turned off by emotions." At least in court, Sharon suggested that the woman would need to develop some "objective distance," noting later that such distance may help her move past the event and never go back to her abusive partner. Other respondents stated

that the woman seemed too shaken considering the history of abuse. Although they did not necessarily discount her story as truthful, they felt that her response to the events was unjustified or unreasonable. For example, Leslie said, “She strikes me as especially sensitive, very shocked, and overwhelmed for it not to be the first time.” In Leslie’s eyes, this woman was suffering far too much emotionally for someone who had been abused before. Leslie could not understand why the woman could have been surprised by the incident described in the tape if there had been previous incidents of intimate partner violence in that relationship. Finally, Misha stated that the woman was too upset and passive when she should have, in Misha’s judgment, been fighting back. In her opinion, “any reasonable person, when it came to your safety, would step up to the plate.”

Femininity and Excess: Connections

Stereotypes of women do not exist in a vacuum. They both affect and are affected by culture, and they have strong ties to the performance and construction of femininity, or what it means to be female in our culture. Regardless of whether the woman in this study was seen as too angry, too aggressive, too upset, too passive, too shocked, too innocent, or too bitter, she was frequently seen as being in an excess of something, an issue that plagues almost all women, whether victims of violence or not. Being excessive, secreting, overflowing, is dangerous for a woman. The grotesque body is a central focus of carnivalesque; it “is the open, protruding, extended, secreting body, the body of becoming, process and change” (Russo, 1997, p. 325), set in contrast with the classical body that is stable and contained. Just as a woman’s body can be grotesque, so too can her self and her actions. Almost anything outside of very narrow traditional gender boundaries can be considered a threat to masculinity (and the social order), and the response is often to attempt

to contain the excess. However, the grotesque female does not have to be extraordinarily freakish or bizarre. In fact, “any *woman*, could make a spectacle out of herself if she was not careful” (Russo, 1997, p. 319). The acceptable bounds of femininity are so narrow that a woman can easily find herself in excess by deviating what seems like only a small amount from the norm. The descriptions of this woman as “too much” are representative of the fear of and the perception of the excess of femininity in our culture.

In many ways, the responses to these recordings reveal important connections between conceptions of femininity and power through excess. For instance, the woman in both versions was described as conventionally feminine. However, in the angry/assertive version, many participants expected her to be more feminine or feminine in other, more acceptable ways (i.e., passive, dependent). That is, some participants were somewhat accepting of her assertive, aggressive nature but felt that she should tone down her anger. Some anger was acceptable, but too much anger left participants uncomfortable and unsure of how to respond to the woman. In fact, Nick noted that, “You try to comfort and console somebody when you see them cry, but when they’re just really upset [angry], it feels like [. . .] there’s more you need to figure out before you do the consoling process.” Nick stated that he would not know what an angry woman, like the one he heard on the recording, would want from him, so he did not know how to respond to her. This comment demonstrates that an angry woman is perceived as unpredictable, possibly making those around her uncomfortable when they cannot easily determine how to respond to her or predict what she may say or do next.

Nick was not the only participant who wanted to (re)construct the woman in a way that would require her to be protected, either by him, herself, the court, police, or some other

agency. Both Nick and Brock said that they would likely attempt to assault the perpetrator on behalf of the woman. On the other hand, Darrin noted that he believed that an extremely angry woman could protect herself and did not need help:

Well, if she was upset and hurt, then others would probably feel that she wouldn't be in a position to be doing anything about it, and so they'd be more likely to consider doing actions on her behalf. But since she's obviously so angry about it [. . .] they'd probably assume that, well, she's going to do something about it. She'll fix the situation.

According to Darrin, upset women need help, but angry women can help themselves. Using this logic, it may be that some participants wanted the woman to be more upset so that they would be able to help her. The underlying implication is that both men and women are more comfortable with women who are fragile (but not too fragile) and need help than with women who can help themselves, confining women to a very traditionally feminine role.

Many participants described the woman in both recordings as physically small, emphasizing ideas of containment—if the woman is small she is less threatening and can be more easily controlled. Although nothing in the recording or my comments to participants indicated the size of the woman, participants described her as physically unimposing. Misha, responding to the upset/emotional recording, described the woman's voice as “smaller and more menial” during several parts in the recording. Also responding to the upset/emotional woman, Aaron supposed that, “physically she's not a match for him,” and Garrett described her as a “small woman.” Brock, who listened to the angry/assertive recording, referred to her as “submissive,” noting that he would probably beat up a guy who hit a woman: “I don't think necessarily taking things into your own hands is the right way, but I just don't have any

tolerance for guys that hit girls.” Here, Brock depicted the woman (or “girl” as he called her) as unable to protect herself. Ken heard the angry/assertive recording and noted that the story reminded him of Ibsen’s play *A Doll’s House*, a story in which Nora, the female lead, is very fragile and small and often described by her overbearing controlling husband as “a little skylark,” “a little squirrel” (Ibsen, 1993, p. 863), or other tiny animals. By comparing this situation to the main female character in Ibsen’s play, Ken seemed to suggest that he also saw this woman as small, helpless, and overpowered by her husband.

Participants were more likely to describe the victim as physically small when they heard the upset/emotional recording, but participants responding to both recordings used other adjectives with connotations of smallness in a less literal way. Sometimes they described her as being this way while others suggested that she should be more contained (i.e., smaller). Describing her as hesitant, unaware, and afraid also emphasizes the idea of containment and smallness. For instance, Kyle felt that the woman in the upset/emotional recording had a “reluctance to speak” and “a lot of hesitation.” In response to the same recording, Ana said she was “confused” and “seems to not understand.” Sharon described the upset/emotional woman she heard as “completely trapped, as if she has no options.” As noted before, in response to the angry/upset recording, Nick felt that he would know how to help her if she was less angry and Holly expected her to “be more docile.” Kira, also responding to the angry/assertive woman, said that her husband “has that power over her and she’s kind of helpless.” These images of smallness and containment (re)construct this woman as safer, more acceptable, and less threatening because her excess is confined and disciplined in some way.

Presence of Intimate Partner Violence Myths

Many of the statements and beliefs these participants made exemplified common myths about male perpetrated intimate partner violence (Jacobson & Gottman, 1998). In fact, six of the ten myths were present among the data set, many of which were emphasized by numerous participants. Table 1 presents a summary of how many times each myth appeared in among each story version as well as a total prevalence of the myths in the data. As with other numerical data in this paper, these figures are intended to provide a summary of the data in a clear and understandable way, not as a reductionist analysis.

In some ways in this data, the first and seventh myths Jacobson and Gottman (1998) present were often connected: “Both Men and Women Batter,” (p. 34) and “Women Often Provoke Men into Battering Them” (p. 46). These myths were present through statements that expressed doubt about the woman’s lack of provocation in this story. For instance, Taryn who heard the upset/emotional woman said, “I’m angry at the fact that her husband hit her, but I mean, maybe she attacked him first.” Michelle, responding to the angry/assertive

Table 1: Presence of Intimate Partner Violence Myths

MYTH	Upset/Emotional	Angry/Assertive	Total
Men and Women Batter/ Women often Provoke Men to Batter	1	4	5
Batterers Can’t Control Their Anger	2	0	2
Psychotherapy is Better than Imprisonment	4 (unsure) 2 (more certain)	4 (unsure) 2 (more certain)	8 (unsure) 4 (more certain)
Women Can Stop Battering by Changing Their Own Behavior	1	4	5
Women Who Stay in Abusive Relationships Must Be Crazy	5	0	5

woman, also wondered if the man had been provoked: “It could be that they had argued and she had maybe slapped him and he punched back.” Nick, who also heard the angry/assertive recording, wondered if perhaps the woman had provoked her husband with verbal abuse:

“All she said [was that] he said something about how ugly she was, but I’d be curious to see what events led up to that or, you know, if there’s maybe even verbal abuse from both sides.” Whereas many participants wondered if the woman had also been involved in the fight or if the man had been provoked—possibilities that were not justified by the victim’s recorded account—no participants supposed that the man had inflicted more violence than was stated in the recording. The terrifying implications here, although qualified (often without being asked to do so) by many participants as not implying such, are that intimate partner violence is an acceptable response to provocation and that intimate partner violence by men tends to be in response to provocation by women.

Jacobson and Gottman’s (1998) fourth myth—“Batterers Can’t Control Their Anger” (p. 42)—was exemplified through statements suggesting that the man had been pushed over the edge by his wife or other factors. Kyle stated in response to the upset/emotional recording, “Everybody has a certain temperance for stuff and then after a threshold it just kind of [. . .] maybe that’s [the violence is] a kind of release for the husband, I guess,” suggesting that after a certain point, the man could no longer control his anger and had to act out in rage. He later wondered if maybe “job factors” or “money issues” were to blame. He did qualify his statements by saying, “It’s simply not an excusable outlet, but it’s an outlet nonetheless.” However, Kyle’s qualification does not change the fact that he believed this man could not control himself. Misha, who listened to the upset/emotional recording, blamed testosterone for some men’s inability to control their anger: “Obviously testosterone has something to do with aggressive levels,” she stated. Her statements implied that some men are simply unable to control their responses to hormonal activity.

Myth number six is that “Psychotherapy is a More Effective ‘Treatment’ Than Prison” (p. 44). Eight of the 20 participants specifically said that they were unsure if the police should necessarily be called and/or that the man in this scenario should necessarily be convicted and go to jail. Four of those eight were more adamant about not calling the police and/or not sending the husband to jail. Some participants specifically recommended counseling while others recommended talking about the situation as a couple without calling the police. Still others said that they were unsure if they would render a guilty verdict if they were on the jury. While being opposed to or uncertain about calling the police and/or convicting the husband do not necessarily mean that those participants would recommend psychotherapy, it does demonstrate an uncertainty about the helpfulness of imprisonment. Moreover, it suggests that prison may not only be ineffective but also inappropriate, suggesting that this issues should not be a legal problem but rather a private one.

In response to the upset/emotional version he heard, Kyle opposed imprisonment or a jail sentence because that would break up the family. Instead, he advocated “some kind of marriage counseling or a rehab clinic I think would be appropriate if the jury were understanding enough about the situation.” Listening to the same recording, Misha argued that the most effective way for the woman to handle the problem would be to talk about it with her husband. Responding to the other recording, Kira, like several other participants, wondered if calling the police would cause more violence. She added that if the police are called, “Then you have the whole possibility of it going to the court system, and things like that, and dragging the kids into it. And sometimes I just think that’s more unnecessary work than it needs to be,” indicating that the problem can be solved between the two of them. When asked if she thought the husband should be punished, Kira said, “Yes. I mean, I don’t

know how extreme,” and suggested that his wife and children leaving him might be punishment enough. Also responding to the angry/assertive recording, Ken similarly stated that police involvement would overcomplicate the issue: “I don’t know if police being called immediately would help matters because that can sort of complicate things with the law involved.” He added that if the violence continued, the police should be called, seeming to ignore the part of the recording that had stated that violence had already occurred previous to this assault. He said that couple or individual counseling would be appropriate: “I think that it would require some counseling first to sort of reconcile herself with her husband, and then perhaps she can walk out,” noting that leaving, also, was not a productive option in his eyes.

Not all participants stated that imprisonment was inappropriate: several said that the husband should go to jail or he would never stop being abusive. Danielle said of the angry/assertive version of the story she heard:

I think a lot of times these cases just get sort of brushed through and because someone else didn’t get in trouble, then the next guy comes along and it’s like, “Well they didn’t really do anything about it for this guy, so why would they [punish] me?” But if there’s a stricter punishment, it doesn’t change people’s hearts sometimes but it will change them and make them think about what they do. [. . .] The consequences will be immediate, not like 50 years down the road.

Related to the myth that jail time is not needed is the belief that “Battered Women Could Stop the Battering by Changing Their Own Behavior” (p. 53). In some ways participants alluded to this myth when they suggested that the woman provoked her husband: if only she would not make him mad he would not hit her. However, acceptance of this myth

was most obvious in Misha's assertion that it was the woman's responsibility to let her husband know she was being hurt:

He's probably not realizing like what he does really hurts, considering he does it repetitively. [. . .] He definitely does realize he hits her, but he doesn't realize that she's also hurt emotionally by his comments and whatnot. [. . .] She's not saying anything so obviously he's not getting any clue that, "Hey, this is bad. This is wrong [. . .] You're really hurting your wife." I mean, I'm sure he might realize it at times, but if she doesn't say anything, then, you know, he won't really realize what he does is wrong.

According to Misha, if this woman would only change her response to the violence, the violence would likely stop. Later, she says she would encourage the woman to talk to him about "how he feels about her or what he thinks about her physical appearance."

The myth that "Women Who Stay in Abusive Relationships Must be Crazy" (Jacobson & Gottman, 1998, p. 49) was more implicit but still present in many responses. For instance, after listening to the upset/emotional recording, Michael said, "I'm trying to think of why she would still be there or why she hadn't done anything or why it was still happening." He never stated that she was crazy, but he did indicate that her behaviors did not make sense to him. Others also wondered why she would still be in the relationship after being abused. Many participants noted her disassociative behavior—for instance, stating that what happened seemed like a movie—as a reason she might stay, portraying her as being very distant from reality and unaware of her circumstances. Participants were aware of reasons that many women do not leave abusive relationships:

“I don’t know if she’s broke and completely dependent upon him.”

(Leslie, upset/emotional)

“It just sounded like she was just totally stuck in the cycle that she doesn’t seem to know a way out of.” (Sharon, upset/emotional)

“It seems like there’s just so much to lose and you have the kids going through it.” (Kyle, upset/emotional)

“I can see how [being a victim of intimate partner violence] can almost be sort of like embarrassing because she is married to a guy who is now hurting her physically.” (Jacob, upset/emotional)

Despite being aware of these reasons, many respondents still insisted that it was illogical—if not clinically insane—to stay in an abusive relationship.

This research suggests that not only are long-standing myths about intimate partner violence still present in the ways people think about intimate partner violence, but also that they guide how individuals perceive men and women involved in violent relationships as well as the appropriate responses to those people. Individuals use these myths to construct and guide their beliefs about how people in violent relationships function as well as how they “should” behave.

Conclusions, Limitations, and Directions for Future Research

This study demonstrated that the two stereotypes of female victims of intimate partner violence are present in individuals’ perceptions of women in violent relationships and that neither one is perceived unequivocally as the preferred option. Those who listened to the upset/emotional woman often felt that she was *too* hurt, *too* upset, *too* fragile, while those who heard the angry/assertive women frequently commented that she was *too* angry, *too*

aggressive, *too* domineering. These characterizations seem to construct a narrow safe ground for women in which they should be upset, but not too upset, and angry, but not too angry. The conceptions of women who are victims of violence are sometimes informed by erroneous thinking, or myths, about violence in intimate relationships, making it even more difficult to negotiate a balance between the two.

Often, the tension between these stereotypes was not only present between participants but also within individual respondents' statements. That is, many of the participants negotiated the tension between various expectations of female victims of intimate partner violence, sometimes expecting the woman to be more passive and other times wanting her to display more assertiveness and dominance. This struggle suggests that individuals are, to some extent, aware of these conflicting expectations and many have not resolved them within themselves. For instance, when asked what verdict he would offer if on a jury for the present case, Michael (responding to the upset/emotional recording) said, "I don't know. I would have to I think I would have to see what other people [on the jury] thought about it to really make up my mind." Michael was unable to resolve his uncertainties about the event he heard, many of which were related to the believability of the story.

When participants assumed the role of a juror—either on their own volition or when I asked them to consider such a position—they seemed to be less tolerant of ambiguity in the presentation of the woman. For instance, during that portion of the interview, participants were more likely to offer up concrete ideas about one and only one way that the woman *should* behave. As noted in the analysis, Sharon, who heard the upset/emotional recording was aware that the woman may have feelings that conflicted with the masculine tone of a

courtroom but advised that she set those aside and have “objective distance” about the situation. Likewise, Darrin, responding to the angry/assertive version, suggested that she must display an appropriate degree of anger in order to not seem vindictive. This intolerance of ambiguity while in the imagined juror role underscores that the tension in feminine representations generates discomfort for many people.

In addition to highlighting the comfort surrounding femininity, the findings in this study also note the effects of listener positioning on listener responses. Many participants noted that they would view or respond differently to the woman on the tape depending on what their relationship to her was. As a friend, they may comfort her and offer a place to stay. As a shelter worker they may prize any indication of strength and discourage more passive responses. If on a jury, they would expect her to be more factual and serious, while also being very feminine and hurt. Sometimes the participants’ imagined positioning was due to their own supposition of their role relative to the woman. Some people placed themselves in particular roles, such as a friend or juror. However, I also prompted the participants to imagine themselves in various positions, asking them to consider how they might respond if they were a friend, sibling, juror, or other role.

A third influence on participant positioning may have been the tone of the recording they heard. The emotional/upset recording was told in a lyric, expressive style, recounting an event that had happened without directly addressing an audience at all. In many ways, she may have seemed to be telling the story introspectively, for herself. The angry/assertive recording, while varying very little from the script of the emotional/upset recording, was told in a way that seemed more reflective, deliberative, and political. At the end of the angry/assertive recording, the woman says, “Can you believe I even fucking thought, ‘At

least you aren't bleeding'?" This slight variation from the emotional/upset version—" I remember that I even thought, 'At least you aren't bleeding.'"—may have invited the listener to respond in some way to the somewhat rhetorical question offered. Stating the idea in this way may open up the listener to be critical of this woman's actions, since it may suggest that she is in fact critical of herself.

The idea of a confined but acceptable middle ground is treacherous for women. Not only does it reject any type of femininity that is seen as too threatening or dangerous, but it also provides little space in which women can actually exist. This pressure to conform to a very narrow version of victimhood extends beyond women who have been targets of violence, partially because women are always already positioned in a victim role. Because women are often constructed as potential victims before even being attacked in some way, they are expected to embody that image, at least to some extent, once they are the target of violence. Thus, women who are victims of violence often become bound in the tension between very narrow bonds of acceptable victim presentation.

Future research would be helpful to explore how this tension is negotiated for women who are victims of violence as well as women in other contexts. That is, even in more ordinary contexts, such as at school or in the workplace, women risk being seen as bitches if they are too assertive or aggressive (Wood, 2007a). Likewise, women are sometimes perceived as hysterical if they cry and otherwise display "excess" emotion (Wood, 2007a).

The limitations of the present study provide directions for future research. First, several participants said that they thought that the recording they heard was an actress reading a script and wondered about its authenticity. Those participants were able to suspend their suspicions or curiosity and respond to the recording as if it were a genuine story;

however, the study may have been more effective if the recording seemed less constructed or artificial to the participants. Additionally, this study could be replicated with a real woman (as opposed to a recording) to provide nonverbal cues to the listeners. Further, additional research could extend this study by simulating a jury situation in which participants would work as a group to evaluate a testimony that they have heard, similar to the one provided in this study. These studies would provide more understanding about how people perceive women who have been victims of intimate partner violence.

A delimitation of this study was the decision to use college-aged students as participants, as opposed to a more diverse sample. While these students' perceptions can tell us a great deal about how they respond to women who are victims of intimate partner violence, they may not be representative of other populations. Thus, it would be helpful to conduct a similar study with different populations.

An additional delimitation of the present study was the choice to study female victims of intimate partner violence. Certainly, men and women are victims of intimate partner violence and are subject to stereotypes of various sorts. This study does not seek to make conclusions about male victims of intimate partner violence, and while it is important to also examine how stereotypes constrain men as well, that question is beyond the scope of this study.

Despite the limitations, this study provides valuable information about how people respond to victims of intimate partner violence, and begin to explore the ways in which issues of excess constrain women, including women who are victims of violence, into very narrow middle grounds of acceptable action and presentation of self. We must continue to

explore how these issues of excess and containment function for women who have experienced violence in relationship as well as women and girls in other contexts.

APPENDIX A

The following is the script used for the upset/emotional version:

I was standing in front of my closet. It was about 6:30, I think because I had already taken a shower. I was standing there trying to decide what to wear to work. I was alone because the kids were still in bed and he was downstairs.

Well, I guess I should tell you that before he went downstairs he looked at me and said, "My God, you are an ugly woman," or something like that. was the first thing he said to me that morning. But I didn't say anything back because, you know, I didn't want to like make him really mad or anything so I just didn't say anything.

So I was standing there with my back to the door and I was getting a dress or something out of the closet and I could hear him coming in the room. I heard his steps on the stairs and I could tell he was at the door.

He walked towards me really quickly, like he only took about 2 steps and he was right there. He just had, he had this angry look on his face. I can't really describe it but I can see it. He always gets that way before he hits me. Then it was kind of like everything was really slow like someone hit the slow motion button or something. I felt like I was watching it in a movie because it was almost like it was someone else and not me. Like this couldn't really be happening to me.

He didn't say anything to me or anything. He just looked at me right in the eyes and then he punched me in the cheek as hard as he could. And all I could think was the times I had held his hand. I guess that's why it was like it couldn't really be happening because it was like it couldn't be the same person, can't be the person I married. And it's not like it was the first time, but I guess it just never seemed real to me ever. I just couldn't, well, I just didn't want to believe it.

Before I could really think about what was happening I was falling to the floor. I tried to grab on to the clothes hanging in my closet to stop me, but I fell anyway. The clothes were on top of me and I couldn't really see him, and by the time I could move, he was gone.

I heard him next door in our son's room waking him up and telling him it was time for breakfast. I just sat there. I just sat in the closet. I guess I didn't know what to do next. It all just happened so quickly that I sort of felt confused. I knew what happened, but I felt like my brain couldn't think right. And then it just started hurting so much.

It was like my whole face was on fire. I wished that I could just stay there in the closet, but I could hear the kids asking him where I was, and I knew he'd do it again if I didn't go down there.

So I got up, and my whole body hurt so it took a long time. I felt my face and I could tell it wasn't bleeding. I remember that I even thought, "At least you aren't bleeding."

APPENDIX B

The following is the script used for the angry/assertive version:

I was standing in front of my closet. I know it was about 6:30, because I had already taken a shower. I was standing there trying to decide what to wear to work. I was alone because the kids were still in bed and he was downstairs. I should tell you first that before he went downstairs he looked at me and said, “My God, you are an ugly woman.” It was the first thing he said to me that morning. But I didn’t say anything back because, I didn’t want to like make him really mad or anything so I just didn’t say anything.

So I was standing there with my back to the door and I was getting a dress or something out of the closet and I could hear him coming in the room. I heard his steps on the stairs and I could tell he was at the door.

He walked towards me really quickly. He only took about 2 steps and he was right there. He just had, he had this angry look on his face. I can’t really describe it but I can see it clear as day. He always gets that way before he hits me. Then it was like everything was really slow, as if someone hit the slow motion button or something. I felt like I was watching it in a movie I had seen before because it was almost like it was someone else and not me but I knew damn well what would happen next.

He didn’t say anything to me or anything. He just looked at me right in the eyes and then he punched me in the cheek as hard as he could. And at the time all I could think about were the times I had held his fucking hand. I think that’s why it was like it couldn’t really be happening because it was hard to believe he was the same person I married. It’s not like it was the first time, but even though it sounds crazy, it just never seemed real to me then. I think I just didn’t want to believe it.

Before I could really think about what was happening I was falling to the floor. I tried to grab on to the clothes hanging in my closet to stop me, but I fell anyway. The clothes were on top of me and I couldn’t really see him, and by the time I could move, he was gone.

I heard him next door in our son’s room waking him up and telling him it was time for breakfast. I just sat there. I just sat in that closet. For a while I didn’t know what to do next. It all happened so quickly that I felt confused for a while. I knew what happened, but I felt like my brain couldn’t think right. And then the pain came.

It was like my whole face was on fire. I wished that I could just stay there in the closet, but I could hear the kids asking him where I was, and I knew he’d do it again if I didn’t go down there.

So I got up, and my whole body hurt like hell so it took a long time. I felt my face and I could tell it wasn’t bleeding. Can you believe I even fucking thought, “At least you aren’t bleeding”?

APPENDIX C

The following questions were used as a basic guide for the interview process. These questions were not always asked exactly as written, in this order, or to all participants, but there were used as a rough guide for the interview process.

1. What do you think would happen next in this story? Why?
2. What do you think would happen long-term in this relationship? Why?
3. What do you think *should* happen next in this story? Why?
4. What do you think this woman was like? Why?
5. If you had to describe her, what would you say? Why?
6. What were you feeling when you listened to the recording? Did the story evoke any emotion in you?
7. What were you thinking when you listened to the recording?
8. Do you think the police should be called? Why or why not?
9. If this case went to court, how do you think a jury would respond to what you heard? Why?
10. If this woman went to a battered women's shelter, how do you think they would respond to her? Why?
11. If she were your friend or sister and she told you this, how would you respond? Why?
12. What part(s) of the story do you think you would be most likely to remember later if you thought about this story? Why?

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Notes

ⁱ After further research, the positioning of these types of victims as “good” and “bad” no longer seemed appropriate or accurate because, for many, each could be an acceptable type of victim behavior.