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Psychologists' Judgments of Psychologically Aggressive Actions When Perpetrated by a Husband Versus a Wife

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Research literature suggests that clinical judgments of men's versus women's behavior and symptoms typically rate the men as more pathological and dangerous. To determine whether this view would extend to assessments of psychologically aggressive actions, two separate versions of a survey listing potentially psychologically abusive behaviors perpetrated by either a wife toward her husband or the identical actions perpetrated by a husband toward his wife were sent to a nationwide sampling of practicing psychologists. Results indicated that psychologists, irrespective of demographics, rated the husband's behavior as more likely to be psychologically abusive and more severe in nature than the wife's use of the same actions. Psychologists did not differentially rely on any of the three contextual factors (i.e., frequency/duration, intent of the perpetrator, and perception of the recipient) to influence their determination that a behavior was "psychological abuse" dependent upon whether the initiator of the psychological actions was the husband or the wife. Future research could assess more directly the rationale for the psychologists' differing views of male versus female behavior. In addition, more normative information is needed to inform mental health professionals as to the prevalence and severity of psychologically aggressive actions in the general population.

The study of physical abuse, and more recently of psychological abuse, in intimate relationships has focused almost exclusively on women as the victims and men as the perpetrators (e.g., Migliaccio, 2001; Simonelli & Ingram, 1998). The earliest books to be published were about battered women (e.g., Martin, 1976; Walker, 1979) and the bulk of the research literature has focused on the incidence and prevalence of physical abuse, impacts of abuse, and correlates of perpetration. While some sociological surveys (e.g., Straus, 1977-1978) or emergency room commitment rates (e.g., Coontz, Lidz, & Mulvey, 1994) have indicated similar rates of physical violence for men and women, and some authors have raised concerns regarding the plight of battered men as well (e.g., Steinmetz, 1977-1978), other authors (e.g., Dobash, Dobash, Wilson, & Daly, 1992) do not believe these data accurately reflect the reality of physical abuse in the "real world."

While it is still uncertain whether actual rates of the use of physical force are comparable by males and females, it is typically granted that the impact of violence by men toward women produces greater harm as evidenced by women's emergency room visits, their need for medical care, and women's deaths at the hands of their partners (e.g., Germain, 1984). Harned (2001) reported that being the recipient of physical violence in a *dating* relationship is more severe for women than men, although Coker and colleagues (2000) found that poor mental and physical health was associated with severe physical dating violence for both male and female recipients. Stets and Straus (1990) presented evidence to suggest that physical violence in marital relationships is more traumatic physically and psychologically for women. There is mounting evidence, however, that the use of physical force by females is quite prevalent, especially in milder forms in dating relationships, where rates of females using force typically matches or exceeds that of the males (e.g., Harned, 2001; Katz, Kuffel, & Coblentz, 2002). The prevailing assumption, however, both with professionals and lay persons, seems to be that men are more likely to engage in using physical force and that the impact of such by a man is greater than that exhibited by a woman.

While the perpetration of *physical* abuse, especially without weapons, seems inherently more dangerous when engaged in by a man toward his partner, there is only one study (Harned, 2001) to date which suggests that the perpetration of *psychological* abuse is inherently more harmful when engaged in by men as opposed to women. Most anecdotal information which makes a case for the negative effects of psychological aggression perpetrated by men typically derives from the battered women literature. If battering men engage in psychologically aggressive actions, the physical threat usually implied in their daily behavior would certainly render any psychological aggression as more salient. But, because psychological aggression occurs in most relationships without the threat of accompanying physical force, we currently have very limited information as to whether psychological aggression is differentially applied or more harmful when men versus women engage in it. (Note: To clarify nomenclature, "psychological aggression" is used in this article to denote the full range of aggressive actions of an emotional/verbal/mental nature while "psychological abuse" is used similarly to most of the research literature wherein the implication of the term is that egregious actions likely to result in psychological harm have taken place. Thus, psychological aggression as a concept encompasses psychological abuse, but also includes behaviors at the mild or moderate levels of the continuum. The literature in this area has yet to resolve the best way to handle the terminology.)

The bulk of literature on psychological abuse focuses on women as the victims of psychological abuse which has the force of implying that this is the more common and serious scenario. There are some notable exceptions in the research on psychological abuse by those investigators who asked male and female participants about their own behavior as well as that of their dating partners (e.g., White & Koss, 1991) or focused specifically on men who reported being the recipient of psychologically aggressive behavior (e.g., Simonelli & Ingram, 1998). Some very recent research by Hines and Malley-Morrison (2001) reported similar effects of "psychological abuse" on male recipients as have been reported by female recipients in the literature. Furthermore, Hines and Malley-Morrison (2001), Molidor (1995), and Simonelli and Ingram (1998) all indicated that men reported being recipients of actions designated as psychological abuse on questionnaires at similar rates to females. However, the assumption for most professionals that men are the most likely perpetrators of psychological abuse may follow if one assumes that men are the more likely perpetrators of physical abuse. If mental health professionals believe that men are more culpable and harmful in this form of maltreatment, it is likely that they would view the perpetration of particular behaviors differently when exhibited by a man versus a woman in a marital relationship. It was expected that the same psychological action engaged in by a husband toward his wife would more likely be viewed as psychological abuse than when a wife engaged in the behavior toward her husband.

Psychological aggression has become an area of investigation in its own right in the last 15 years as researchers have begun to attempt to measure it, look at its relationship with physical abuse, and determine the impact of psychological aggression upon recipients. While the area of psychological abuse is fraught with definitional and conceptual problems (see Follingstad, 2003), researchers have forged ahead to conduct studies, often defining psychological abuse as a function of the measure they used or devised. Unfortunately, there has been little effort to provide normative information regarding how professionals or the general public view particular behaviors which make up the items on psychological abuse measures. As a beginning step toward understanding professionals' views of psychological abuse, Follingstad and DeHart (2000) investigated the degree to which psychologists viewed specific psychological behaviors as constituting psychological abuse. Using categories of psychological abuse and items from the literature, a sample of psychologists were solicited to rate 102 items regarding a husband's behavior toward his wife, and, from these data, five clusters of psychological actions were identified which varied in terms of being rated as "always," "maybe," or "never" psychological abuse as well as in terms of severity (see Measures section for more specific information about the clusters). From that study, what was still unknown was whether the psychologists would have rated the behaviors similarly if the survey had indicated that these were behaviors of a wife toward her husband.

Whether these assumptions—that gender influences who is more likely to engage in physical abuse and that behaviors by one gender can more readily be interpreted as abuse—extend over into professional judgments of *psychological* actions engaged in by men versus women in intimate relationships has yet to be investigated. There are numerous studies which suggest that gender, in general, affects professional judgments (e.g., Dohrenwend & Dohrenwend, 1976; Gove & Tudor, 1973; Harris, 1977). Clinical assessments regarding dangerousness and commitment have indicated that gender is considered relevant for professionals' decision-making (e.g., Holstein, 1987; Warren, 1982). And, if sex differences in clinical judgments of behavior (broadly defined) are any indication, we would then hypothesize that mental health professionals would likely view a man's psychological actions as more malignant than the same actions by a woman. In general, mental health professionals (i.e., psychologists, social workers, psychiatrists) do not view male and female behaviors as equally disordered. For instance, Lowery and Higgins (1979) reported that experienced clinicians rated male clients as more disturbed than female clients with the same case description. Their study surveyed 120 professional therapists who rated the severity of cases of depression, schizophrenia, and alcoholism. Sex of the patient was varied in the vignettes, and by virtue of being male, those patients were viewed as more seriously pathological and in need of more restrictive treatments. Similarly, Wrobel (1993) found an effect of client gender on clinicians' assessments, such that men and women clients with descriptions of cognitive and affective symptoms of depression were respectively diagnosed as having more serious problems of organicity versus depression. Teri's (1982) study adds to the body of literature in which males are

rated differentially than females regarding mental health variables by professionals. Case descriptions of clients with relationship problems varied as to whether the person behaved in line with expected gender stereotypes or not. On ratings of prognosis and future functioning, women clients were believed to have a more positive prognosis and a higher level of expected functioning than males were expected to exhibit. While two studies did not support poorer ratings for male clients by mental health professionals, their methodology may explain the disparate results. Zygmond and Denton (1988) used an extremely narrow sexual problem for the clients, thus potentially limiting the amount of variability which could be generated with a more ambiguous diagnosis, and Poole and Tapley (1988) required clinicians to rate general behaviors rather than make diagnostic or prognostic evaluations from their clinical vignettes.

The specific behavior of physical aggression has been "stereotypically more closely associated with males than females" (Coontz, Lidz, & Mulvey, 1994, p. 370), with gender stereotypes reserving the aggressive, dominant perception for men and the submissive, nurturant perception for women. Because of the historical view of male and female differences regarding aggression along with the literature suggesting that professionals rate males as more pathological and impaired, the major hypothesis for this study is that professionals' judgments of psychological aggression will also view these actions by males as more problematic than these actions by women. That is, similar actions will be viewed as more abusive and more severe when engaged in by a man toward his wife than when exhibited by a woman toward her husband.

The prior study by Follingstad and DeHart (2000) which established psychologists' ratings of behaviors by a husband toward his wife was used for comparison purposes with a comparable sample of psychologists who rated the same behaviors by a wife toward her husband. The same methodology was adapted but the language was reversed for this study to indicate that a wife was the initiator of these actions. The participants rating the wife's behaviors were expected to similarly rate psychologically aggressive behaviors along a continuum such that items rated as more seriously abusive in the prior study would also be rated as more severe when a wife engaged in the behavior. However, the participants were expected to rate behaviors by the wife as less likely to be psychological abuse and as less severe in nature than the same behaviors by the husband. This hypothesis was expected to hold true: (a) for all of the items combined; (b) for the clusters of items previously devised using the psychologists' ratings on the husband's data (i.e., threats to physical health, control over personal freedoms, general destabilization, domination and control, and ineptitude/poor relationship behavior); and (c) for many of the individual items. Female psychologists, compared to male psychologists, were expected to rate the wife's behaviors as even less likely to be psychological abuse than the husband's behaviors. Because demographic variables of the psychologists were not related to their ratings in the prior study, it was expected that no other demographic variables would influence the psychologists' ratings of the wife's behaviors. In the prior study, psychologists rated the contextual variable of the frequency/duration of the behavior as more important when deciding whether a particular behavior was psychological abuse than the intent of the husband or the wife's perception. When psychologists rated the wife's behavior in this study, it was expected that the husband's perception of harm would be a more important variable for determining whether to label a behavior as psychological abuse than the woman's intentions. Psychologists may need to be convinced that the woman was able to inflict harm on her spouse before rating a behavior as psychological abuse.

METHOD

Participants

For each of the two studies, surveys were mailed to 1,000 psychologists sampled in a random fashion from the American Psychological Association's membership rosters. Because the goal was to obtain responses from practicing psychologists, professionals from Divisions 29, 42, and 43 were sampled (i.e., Psychotherapy, Psychologists in Independent Practice, and Family Psychology). The psychologists received a packet containing a cover letter, instructions, the survey and a postage-paid return envelope. The purpose of the study was described to the participants as the desire to establish normative information regarding whether specific behaviors were viewed as constituting psychological abuse. The second study informed the participants that this survey only investigated psychological abuse from a female partner toward her husband because a previous study of a husband's behavior toward his wife had already been conducted. Informed consent was implied by the voluntary return of the survey.

The surveys for the second study were mailed approximately 9 months to 1 year following the initial data collection. Of the 1,000 surveys mailed for the second sample, 103 surveys were returned due to death or relocation of recipients, while completed surveys numbered 263. The response rate of 26% was substantially lower than that obtained in the previous study of husband-to-wife behaviors (45%) using identical methodological procedures. The lower response rate was in itself informative, as were several incomplete surveys returned with comments. These few participants were reluctant to consider whether behaviors enacted by a woman were abusive because they perceived that women lacked the requisite power to effectively enact psychologically abusive behaviors and they could not comprehend that females could coerce male partners into submission using only psychological tactics.

Demographics of the First Sample. The psychologist sample (see Follingstad & DeHart, 2000) consisted of 449 clinicians randomly selected from relevant divisions of the APA. Fifty-six percent of the psychologists were male ($N = 251$) and 44% were female ($N = 198$). The median age of the psychologists was 52 with a range from 26 to 88. Racial breakdown indicated that 97% were Caucasian with less than 1% each of African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans. Most participants were married (78%), 5% identified as cohabiting, 8% as divorced, 2% as separated, 2% as widowed, and 5% as single. The majority of participants (75%) identified private practice as their primary employment setting, 8% worked primarily in academic settings, 5% in a hospital setting, 5% in clinics, 1% in federal or state agencies, and 6% worked in other settings. Number of years of practice following the doctorate ranged from 1 to 55 years, with the median length of psychological practice being 18 years. Most (316) participants performed up to one third of their applied work with couples, 90 participants performed 34% to 67% of applied work with couples, and nine performed over two thirds of their applied work with couples. About two thirds knew at least one woman close to them who had been a victim of psychological abuse in an intimate relationship, and about one third of participants identified themselves as having been victims of such abuse.

Demographics of the Second Sample. The demographics which follow pertain to the version in which the wife initiated the behaviors. There were 147 male (56%) and 116 female (44%) psychologists in the sample. Participants ranged in age from 32 to 80, with the median age being 52. Ninety-six percent of the participants were White, 2% were

Native American, and less than 1% each were African Americans or Hispanic. Most participants were married (78%), 5% identified as cohabiting, 9% as divorced, 2% as separated, 3% as widowed, and 5% as single. The majority of participants (72%) identified private practice as their primary employment setting, 10% worked primarily in academic settings, 8% in a hospital setting, 8% in clinics, 5% in federal or state agencies, and 5% worked in other settings. Number of years of practice following a doctorate degree ranged from 2 to 50 years, with the median length of psychological practice being 19 years. Most (189) participants performed up to one third of their applied work with couples, 50 participants performed 34% to 67% of applied work with couples and three performed over two thirds of applied work with couples. Thirty-eight percent of participants resided in the north, 22% in the southeast, 9% in the southwest, 16% in the midwest, and 16% in the West. About two thirds reported knowing at least one person close to them who had been a victim of psychological abuse in an intimate relationship, with the median number of victims known being two. Just under one half of the participants (47%) identified themselves as having been victims of such abuse, and slightly over one half of those who had been personally victimized were female.

Measures

Psychological Abuse Survey. In the prior study, 102 psychologically aggressive items were identified from the research literature and clinical cases focusing on psychological abuse. The authors adopted some descriptions of psychologically aggressive behaviors directly from the literature and modified others for the survey, in order to provide participants with a wide range of relatively non-overlapping items. For the first study, all of the behaviors were exhibited by a husband toward his wife (HTOW) whereas the second study was characterized by the wife engaging in the behaviors toward her husband (WTOH). The 102 selected items were grouped thematically as fitting the following categories of psychological abuse identified in the literature and are listed in Table 1: (a) treatment as inferior, humiliation, degradation; (b) isolation, restriction or monopolization of mobility, information or social activity; (c) emotional or sexual withdrawal or blackmail; (d) verbal attacks/criticism; (e) economic deprivation; (f) threats of physical harm or threats to physical health; (g) destabilizing the woman's perception of reality; (h) use of male privilege and/or rigid gender role; (i) control of personal behavior; (j) jealousy/suspicion; (k) intimidation or harassment; and (l) failure to live up to role expectations. To enhance the likelihood that psychologists would take the time to complete the survey, two forms of the survey were devised with each form consisting of 51 behaviors and comprising roughly one half of the items for the identified categories of psychological abuse. The same forms were used for the second study, but the roles were changed such that the wife was the perpetrator and the husband was the recipient of the behaviors. Two of the items, which were considered unable to be reversed, were eliminated (i.e., "wanted to use spouse as prostitute" and "was stingy in giving spouse money to run the household").

The prior study (Follingstad & DeHart, 2000) with the psychologists rating the husband's perpetration of the behaviors identified five clusters which appeared to be mostly influenced by how likely the item was viewed as "psychological abuse" and the severity ratings. The cluster analysis used squared Euclidean distance measures and the Ward clustering method to ensure that item groups were combined in a manner that minimized within-group variance. The first two clusters (each with four items) were rated as equally severe in nature as evidenced by the high percentage of psychologists rating the behavior as "always" abusive and the high mean severity ratings. The first cluster involved serious threats to the woman's physical well-being while the second cluster involved serious

TABLE 1. Item Clusters and Percentages of Items for the Two Surveys

Items	Husband to Wife			Wife to Husband		
	Yes	Maybe	No	Yes	Maybe	No
Cluster A: Threats to physical health and destabilization-prisoner						
Threatened to hurt spouse	99	1	0	93	8	0[b]
Threatened to hurt spouse's family/children/friends	99	0	1	93	7	0[b]
Threatened to disfigure spouse permanently	98	2	0	97	3	0
Prevented spouse from getting medical care	95	5	0	93	6	1
Forced spouse to eat from a bowl on the floor	100	0	0	91	8	2[ab]
Would not let spouse leave the house	94	6	0	79	8	3[a]
Would not let spouse sleep	89	11	0	72	26	2[a]
Cluster B: General destabilization (intimidation, isolation/restriction/monopolizing, degradation, destabilizing perceptions)						
Harassed spouse at work	95	4	1	81	18	1[a]
Demanded spouse's unconditional obedience	94	6	0	82	10	8[ab]
Forced spouse to beg for something essential	94	5	1	82	13	6
Called spouse derogatory names (e.g., whore)	93	7	0	76	24	0[a]
Tried to make spouse believe s/he was crazy	92	8	0	90	9	2
Tried to turn family/friends against spouse	88	10	2	81	16	2
Would not let spouse go anywhere without him/her	88	10	2	66	27	7[ab]
Threatened to hurt a pet	86	10	4	89	10	2
Controlled info by limiting phone and car use	85	13	2	76	20	5
Treated spouse as inferior	85	14	1	54	35	10
Threatened to take children away from spouse	83	16	1	77	23	0
Would not let spouse socialize with family/friends	83	15	2	58	36	7[a]
Damaged spouse's personal belongings	80	19	1	72	24	4
Denied spouse access to money	80	18	2	69	26	5
Threatened to have spouse committed to institution	79	20	1	64	35	2
Tried to convince others spouse was crazy	78	18	4	61	37	2[a]
Physically abused a pet	77	20	3	76	16	8
Threatened to deny spouse economic support	72	24	4	38	46	16[a]
Threatened to hurt himself or herself	52	41	7	61	32	7
Cluster C: Dominating/Controlling (jealousy/suspicion, control of personal behavior, isolation/restriction/monopolization, emotional withholding/blackmail, verbal abuse, treatment as inferior)						
Threatened to humiliate spouse in public	83	15	2	74	22	4
Insulted spouse in front of others	81	18	1	76	23	1
Made spouse account for whereabouts at all times	80	19	1	50	38	12[a]
Would not allow spouse to speak/look at other members of the same sex	80	18	2	59	33	8[a]
Decided what spouse could eat	78	18	4	37	43	20[ab]
Chose spouse's friends	77	20	3	42	42	16[a]
Decided activities in which spouse could engage	77	20	3	45	46	9[a]
Threw tantrums, breaking objects in the house	76	23	1	59	36	5[a]
Blamed spouse for things totally unrelated to him/her	74	23	3	58	35	7[a]
Made spouse ask every time s/he needed money	73	22	5	50	29	11[a]
Kept spouse from self-improvement activities	71	25	4	49	40	11[ab]
Listened to spouse's phone conversations secretly	70	24	6	60	34	6
Forced spouse to discuss past sexual relationships	68	31	1	33	49	18[a]
Intruded in spouse's work with immediate demands	68	28	4	58	34	8[a]

TABLE 1. continued

Items	Husband to Wife			Wife to Husband		
	Yes	Maybe	No	Yes	Maybe	No
Decided whether spouse could smoke or drink	66	27	7	35	45	20[a]
Monitored spouse to always know where s/he was	66	31	3	35	53	12[a]
Followed spouse when s/he was away from home	65	32	3	38	52	10[a]
Refused to let spouse work outside the home	65	29	6	62	28	10
Insisted spouse answer any question s/he asked	5	29	6	24	55	21[a]
Treated spouse as inferior	65	28	7	54	35	10
Threatened to reveal secrets spouse had confided	64	31	5	64	29	7
Made decisions about spouse's appearance	63	32	5	13	56	31[ab]
Blamed spouse for his or her own problems	63	32	5	52	34	14[a]
Played cruel jokes on spouse	61	38	1	82	16	2
Checked spouse's belongings to confirm suspicions	61	33	6	31	53	16[a]
Criticized spouse's sexual performance/desirability	61	32	7	51	41	8
Left for long periods with no explanation	60	31	9	61	35	5
Used needed money for own addictions/ hobbies	52	32	11	59	27	14
Acted rude to guests to discourage visitors	56	35	9	49	39	12
Stayed angry until spouse cooperated	55	38	7	43	41	16[a]
Refused to pay fair share to maintain family	54	34	12	15	48	37[a]
Swore at spouse	52	44	4	37	51	12[a]
Denied spouse any private time	52	43	5	24	63	13
Threatened to have an affair	52	35	13	52	34	13[a]
Expressed jealousy of any members of the same sex in contact with spouse	51	42	7	32	48	20[a]
Would not let spouse talk about his/her feelings	51	36	13	53	33	14
Yelled and screamed at spouse	49	49	2	33	61	6[a]
Wanted spouse to be involved only in his/her interests	46	35	19	37	40	23
Assumed a frightening look, stance or mood	40	55	5	16	59	25[ab]
Was insensitive to spouse's sexual needs	40	47	13	27	61	12
Was reluctant to share spouse with the children	39	43	18	40	46	15
Was jealous and suspicious of spouse's friends	38	52	10	27	49	23
Criticized spouse's personal characteristics or ideas	37	56	7	32	58	11
Criticized spouse's strong points	37	50	13	25	55	20
Accused spouse of an affair/being promiscuous	35	59	6	17	65	17
Checked to see if spouse went where s/he indicated	34	56	10	10	65	24[a]
Verified that spouse was still home after s/he left	34	52	14	14	61	24
Denied spouse his/her own companionship	34	52	14	32	55	13
Withheld supportive behavior	34	49	17	28	54	18
Threatened to leave the relationship	32	55	13	31	58	11
Made major decisions without spouse	30	60	10	17	64	19[a]
Withheld affection/tenderness	30	58	12	23	62	15
Criticized spouse's weak points	30	58	12	23	62	15
Expressed disgust or hatred for other members of the opposite sex	25	48	27	12	51	38
Displayed radical mood changes	21	54	25	16	62	22
Used poor judgment when caring for children	12	52	36	25	49	26[a]
Cluster D: Ineptitude (rigid gender roles, role failure)						
Insisted on holding all money when out together	42	40	18	36	42	22
Expected dinner/housework done on his/her schedule	40	47	13	14	51	35[a]

TABLE 1. continued

	Husband to Wife			Wife to Husband		
Criticized spouse's physical appearance	37	60	3	37	60	2
Told spouse s/he could not manage alone	34	56	10	17	68	14[a]
Burdened spouse with errands to occupy his/her time	30	52	18	16	57	28[a]
Refused to talk about things important to spouse	30	51	19	24	55	21
Criticized the way spouse handled house/children	9	66	5	25	66	10
Would not let spouse drive when out together	29	49	22	13	60	28[a]
Did not do fair share of tasks and childcare	23	47	30	15	52	34
Refused to go to functions important to spouse	22	52	26	20	63	17
Refused to talk about problems (sulked, etc.)	20	53	27	22	50	29
Moved spouse far away from his/her support system	17	69	14	23	59	18
Refused to see spouse's family	17	59	24	18	59	24
Mismanaged the family's money	17	54	29	6	61	33
Was reluctant to have children	14	36	50	7	47	47
Did not live up to commitments	13	60	27	14	64	22
Showed more interest in own than spouse's activities	13	50	37	4	58	38
Showed a loss of sexual interest	9	55	36	8	58	35

[a]indicates $p < .05$ for both subsamples for the Abuse variable.
[b]$p < .05$ for both subsamples for the Severity variable.

degradation, isolation, and control of the woman. The third cluster consisted of 19 behaviors which would be destabilizing to the recipient, and included items representing psychological abuse categories of intimidation, degradation, isolation, restriction, monopolization, and destabilizing perceptions. The fourth cluster involved 56 items of lesser domination and control, while the fifth cluster's 18 items depicted the mildest ones with the potential to be abusive, but which could alternatively be interpreted as ineptitude on the part of the husband, such as role failure and boorish behavior, rather than behaviors intending to cause harm.

Because only one half of the items were located on each form of the survey, the overall reliability was calculated using each half. For the HTOW version, Cronbach alphas were .96 and .96, and for the WTOH version, the alphas were .95 and .96. The reliability estimates for the clusters were conducted similarly, using the items in a cluster from the first form, followed by using the items from the second form. Thus, for each cluster, there are two Cronbach alphas. In addition, these reliability estimates were calculated separately for the HTOW data and the WTOH data. The Cronbach alphas are as follows for the HTOW data: Cluster A—.90 and .89; Cluster B—.85 and .71; Cluster C—.94 and .94; and Cluster D—.85 and .91. For the WTOH data, the alphas are as follows: Cluster A—.63 and .74; Cluster B—.84 and .80; Cluster C—.94 and .94; and Cluster D—.82 and .88. Thus, the internal consistency for the clusters which were originally formed are quite high, and this remains true for the data from the WTOH sample for which the same clusters were used.

Analyses from the HTOW study indicated that the clusters appear to be reasonably distinct from each other in terms of their items being labeled as "psychological abuse" and the severity level assigned to them (Follingstad & DeHart, 2000). Cluster D is significantly different from all other clusters, as is Cluster C. Clusters B and A, while different from C and D, are not statistically different from each other. However, the items in Cluster

A represented those for which there was the highest agreement among the professionals that the behaviors were psychologically abusive, while Cluster B represented somewhat more of a range within items considered to be fairly severe.

For purposes of comparison, the clusters of items which were identified in the original study were also formed for the data involving the wife as the perpetrator of psychological abuse with one exception (see Table 1). Because the original study had generated two small clusters of similarly severe psychological abuse items and which were only distinguishable by the fact that they loaded on the two different forms, these two clusters (except for the elimination of the prostitution item) were combined into Cluster A (with 7 items) for this study. Thus, the third cluster from the prior study now became Cluster B (with 19 items), the fourth cluster became Cluster C (with 56 items), and the fifth cluster became Cluster D (with 18 items). (Note: A separate cluster analysis performed on the data from the WTOH study yielded quite similar clusters, suggesting that grouping the items into clusters from the HTOW study for comparison was a reasonable strategy.)

Participants read each item describing a psychologically aggressive behavior and decided whether they believed the behavior (a) is *never* abusive no matter what the circumstances ("no"); (b) *might be* considered abusive in some contexts or under some conditions ("maybe"); or (c) is *always* abusive, no matter what the circumstances ("yes"). The scoring for this variable is designated as "no" = 1, "maybe" = 2, and "yes" = 3. If the participant designated a behavior as "always" abuse, the participant then rates the severity of the abuse on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not severe to 5 = very severe). If participants chose the "maybe" category, they then use 5-point Likert scales (ranging from 1 = not at all to 5 = very much so) to rate the extent to which (a) the frequency/duration of the behavior, (b) the wife's intention to create psychological distress, and (c) the husband's perception of harm to himself, would influence whether they would classify the behavior as abusive. Because mean scores on frequency/duration, intent, perception, as well as the severity rating were calculated using ratings by a subsample of participants (i.e., those who chose "maybe" or "yes" responses), a possibility of limited reliability remains for these ratings.

Demographics for the psychologists completing the husband-to-wife form (HTOW) (N = 449) and those completing the wife-to-husband form (WTOH) (N = 263) were equivalent with no significant differences emerging between the two groups. For each of the items of the two forms of the survey, the percentage of respondents who identified the behavior as definitely not abusive, as possibly abusive, and as definitely abusive was calculated (see Table 1).

To determine whether there were differences between the two forms of the survey which each consisted of one-half of the items, that is, Forms A and B, means for the five potential ratings were calculated for each form in each study. A MANOVA using all five ratings of Form A as the dependent variables with the two forms of the survey constituting the independent variable indicated that there was no overall significant difference (F (1,710) = .01, p = .92). The same finding occurred for Form B when a MANOVA, utilizing all five ratings for that form, compared that form across both studies, (F (1,710) = .07, p = .79). Thus, the two forms appear to be basically comparable.

RESULTS

Initially, all five ratings by psychologists (i.e., whether the behavior is psychological abuse [ABUSE], the degree to which frequency/duration [FREQ/DUR], intention of the perpetrator [INTENT], and perception of the recipient (PERCEPT) influenced a participant's determination that a behavior is psychological abuse, and the severity of the action [SEVERITY]) were included in a MANOVA to determine whether, overall, psychologists

made different ratings dependent upon whether the husband or wife was committing the action. The overall MANOVA was significant [F (1,206) = 6.00, p < .02]. How frequently psychological actions were labeled "abusive" was significant in subsequent univariate tests [t (206) = 3.85, p < .0001], with the means indicating that actions by a husband were more likely to be considered psychologically abusive than those by a wife. Subsequent ratings of the severity of those actions by those who decided the actions were definitely "abusive" indicated significantly higher ratings of severity if the actions were perpetrated by a husband as compared with a wife [t (206) = 3.81, p < .0001]. While there was a trend, [t (187) = -1.86, p < .064], for participants who used the "maybe" category to more seriously consider the intent of a wife's actions compared to considering the intent of a husband's actions when deciding whether to label particular actions as psychological abuse, the three contextual factors were not utilized differentially to make determinations of psychological abuse if the initiator of the action was a husband or a wife.

While the overall data supported the hypothesis of differential rating of husbands' versus wives' behavior, exploratory analyses looking at subsets of the 100 items and the individual items themselves were conducted to better understand where the differences were apparent. Because of the large number of analyses that were to be conducted to assess differences at the item level, a random set of one-half of the participants for each of the surveys was generated on which to conduct the analyses. To provide cross-validation, the other half of the participants were subsequently subjected to the same analyses. In order to protect against significance occurring by chance, only those findings which resulted in p values at the .05 level for *both* samples were considered significant (Anderson, 2001).

The four major clusters (A, B, C, and D) were used for comparing the psychologists' ratings between the two studies. Clusters A, B, and C were all highly significantly different from each other in both samples (see Table 2) in that psychologists always rated the husband's actions toward his wife as more likely to be psychological abuse than a woman's perpetration of the same behaviors toward her husband. While Cluster D was significantly different for one of the samples, and demonstrated a trend in the other, the criterion of being significant at the .05 level for both samples was not met. The items in Cluster D represent the mildest actions and those which are potentially more controversial as to whether they represent "psychological abuse." Demographic variables such as participant sex, ethnicity, or marital status either did not influence the psychologists' ratings of the clusters of items across both samples or produced inconsistent findings with one exception. For Cluster B, which consists of items representing moderately severe controlling, isolating, monitoring, and destabilizing actions, female psychologists rated the items as more likely to be psychological abuse (M = 2.82) than the male psychologists (M = 2.75), no matter who perpetrated the actions. However, the mean differences were only .7 apart on a 3-point scale, suggesting that, clinically, this difference would not likely have much impact upon male and female psychologists' real-life determinations of psychological abuse. In addition, the three other clusters did not show any sex differences.

To further delineate the psychologists' view of husband to wife versus wife to husband psychological aggression, analyses were conducted on the severity ratings of behaviors which were elicited when participants labeled a particular behavior as definitely "psychological abuse." Overall, both cross-validation samples of the participants rated the severity of the total items differentially for the husband to wife versus wife to husband versions (see Table 2), with the husband's actions rated as more severe. Regarding the individual clusters, only Clusters A and B were rated as significantly different in terms of severity with the husband's behavior rated as more severe than that of the wife, even though all of the behaviors which participants rated in terms of severity were first designated as

TABLE 2. Means for Subsamples of the HTOW and WTOH Versions of the Survey With *F* Values and Significance Levels

Dependent Variables	Subsample 1					Subsample 2				
	HTOW *M*	WTOH *M*	*df*	*F*	*p*	HTOW *M*	WTOH *M*	*df*	*F*	*p*
Abuse										
Overall	2.49	2.29	1,354	28.72	.0001	2.48	2.29	1,352	24.76	.0001
Cluster A	2.96	2.86	1,354	20.56	.0001	2.96	2.85	1,353	23.58	.0001
Cluster B	2.82	2.71	1,354	11.63	.0007	2.83	2.68	1,353	15.92	.0001
Cluster C	2.51	2.25	1,354	37.03	.0001	2.48	2.27	1,353	25.24	.0001
Cluster D	2.05	1.90	1,354	8.44	.004	2.03	1.95	1,353	2.62	.107
Severity										
Overall	3.60	3.34	1,353	12.38	.0005	3.58	3.32	1,352	12.34	.0005
Cluster A	4.66	4.29	1,346	35.44	.0001	4.64	4.24	1,353	38.65	.0001
Cluster B	3.84	3.57	1,346	38.65	.0001	3.81	3.45	1,353	15.02	.0001
Cluster C	3.15	3.02	1,346	1.79	.182	3.08	2.89	1,353	3.71	.055
Cluster D	2.63	2.63	1,346	0.00	.997	2.55	2.60	1,353	0.18	.674
Frequency/ Duration										
Overall	3.64	3.64	1,349	0.00	.977	3.69	3.62	1,340	0.36	.550
Intent Overall	3.64	3.67	1,349	0.09	.770	3.72	3.72	1,340	0.00	.997
Perception										
Overall	3.45	3.48	1,342	0.03	.860	3.61	3.50	1,343	0.98	.320

HTOW: Behaviors perpetrated by the husband toward the wife.
WTOH: Behaviors perpetrated by the wife toward the husband.

"psychologically abusive" (See Table 2). The only demographic variable which demonstrated significant results on severity ratings across both subsamples was the sex of the participant. For Clusters A and B, female psychologists generally rated the psychologically aggressive behaviors as more severe in nature, irrespective of who engaged in them [F (1,353) = 5.50, $p < .022$ and F (1,354) = 4.70, $p < .031$ for Cluster A; F (1,353) = 4.21, $p < .041$ and F (1,354) = 9.44, $p < .002$ for Cluster B].

Analyses at the individual item level revealed that 43 of the 100 items were rated significantly differently by both subsamples of the psychologists dependent upon who was the perpetrator for the ABUSE variable. Many of these items indicated very large differences with p values greater than .0001. In addition, 17 other items were significant at the .05 level for one of the two cross-validation samples. All but one of the significant items were rated as more likely to be psychological abuse when engaged in by a man than by a woman, the exception being the item indicating that the person used poor judgment in relation to the children. (Note that items which were rated significantly different between the two surveys are indicated by [a] on Table 1.) There were fewer individual items which were rated differently on the two surveys in terms of severity. Only nine items were rated by both of the randomly generated subsamples as more severe psychological abuse when exhibited by a man than when exhibited by a woman toward their spouse. Thus, while many more items are likely to be perceived as psychological abuse when perpetrated by a man, professionals who label the behaviors as "psychologically abusive" do not differ that often in terms of the degree of severity they assign to the action. (The nine items which were rated differently in terms of severity are indicated by [b] on Table 1.)

Psychologists did not rate the three contextual variables differently as to the degree to which the factors would influence a determination of psychological abuse if the psychologists originally thought the behavior "might be" abusive (see Table 2). Neither the frequency/duration of the behavior (FREQ/DUR), the intention of the perpetrator (INTENT), nor the perception of the recipient (PERCEPT) were rated differently by the psychologists as likely to influence their decision whether a behavior was psychological abuse if they were making the determination regarding a husband's behavior versus a wife's behavior. The lack of overall findings for these three variables was consistent with the lack of significance when utilizing item clusters and individual items as the object of analysis. None of the demographic variables influenced the ratings of the overall contextual variables.

When the data from both studies were combined, psychologists rated the frequency and/or duration variable as more likely to influence them to designate a behavior, about which they were previously uncertain, as psychological abuse than either knowing the intention of a person to harm their spouse [t (207) = 3.72, $p < .0001$] or knowing the perception of the person on the receiving end of the behavior [t (207) = 7.21, $p < .0001$]. Also, knowing the intent of the perpetrator when engaging in a psychological action was rated as more likely to influence psychologists' judgments of psychological abuse than knowing the perception of the recipient [t (207) = 3.36, $p < .001$]. For the HTOW data alone, the first two comparisons remained significant [t (101) = 3.37, $p < .001$ and t [101) = 4.87, $p < .0001$, respectively] but the psychologists did not consider knowing the intentions of the husband versus knowing the perception of the wife as likely to differentially affect their judgments [t (101) = 1.01, $p < .32$]. In contrast, using only the WTOH data, there was a trend for psychologists to consider the frequency/duration of a behavior as more important for judging it to be psychological abuse than the perpetrator's intention [t (105) = 1.19, $p < .059$]. The frequency/duration was rated as significantly more likely to affect judgments of psychological abuse than knowing the perception of the recipient of the action [t (105) = 5.30, $p < .0001$] and knowing the woman's intention was considered more important for labeling a behavior as psychological abuse than knowing the husband's perception [t (105) = 4.15, $p < .0001$].

DISCUSSION

As hypothesized, psychologists deciding whether particular actions were definitely, maybe, or never psychological abuse were more likely to consider actions of a husband toward his wife to be abusive than when a wife engaged in the identical behaviors toward her husband. Thus, the stereotypical association between physical aggression and males (Coontz, Lidz, & Mulvey, 1994) appears to extend to an association of psychological abuse and males. Analyses to determine where this difference was most salient indicated that three of the four clusters of psychological actions were highly discrepant (while the fourth narrowly missed significance in both samples) and that almost one half of the individual items were perceived differently as to their "abusiveness" dependent upon the gender of the perpetrator. Even some of the more severe items (i.e., "wouldn't let spouse socialize with family/friends," "threatened to deny spouse economic support," "wouldn't let the spouse go anywhere without him/her") resulted in fairly large percentages of psychologists more likely to classify the behavior as *possibly* abusive (rather than definitely abusive) when a wife engaged in the behavior than when a husband acted the same way. While the psychologists were not asked to give rationales for their decisions, some themes for the items which were considered less offensive for a wife to engage in were as follows: (a) Men may not be able to be trusted, so

it is less of a problem and probably not abusive for a wife to monitor her husband (e.g., "Made spouse account for whereabouts at all times;" "Would not allow spouse to speak/look at other members of the opposite sex;" "Checked spouse's belongings to confirm suspicions;" "Followed spouse when he/she was away from home"); (b) Women don't have the same responsibility/equality regarding support of the household (e.g., "Refused to pay fair share to maintain family;" "Threatened to deny spouse economic support;" "Made spouse ask every time he/she needed money;" "Made major decisions without spouse"); (c) It is possible that women engage in certain behaviors as a way of taking care of the man or because he cannot take care of himself, therefore she is not actually controlling him (e.g., "Decided what spouse could eat;" "Chose spouse's friends;" "Decided activities in which spouse could engage;" "Made decisions about spouse's appearance"); and (d) Women do not have as much power as men, therefore certain actions would not have much impact (e.g., "Demanded spouse's unconditional obedience;" "Tried to convince others spouse was crazy;" "Kept spouse from self-improvement activities;" "Assumed a frightening look, stance or mood"). The mildest behaviors found in the fourth cluster were not rated much differently as to whether a husband or wife did the behavior, probably because the behaviors already were perceived by the psychologists as least likely to constitute psychological abuse irrespective of the gender of the person engaging in the behavior.

The findings suggested that, *overall*, if a psychologist decided that behavior was psychologically abusive, that the perception of the behavior was still different if it was engaged in by the husband as opposed to the wife. Thus, if psychologists thought an action by a wife toward her husband was actually "abusive," they did not think it was as bad, problematic, or pathological than if the husband engaged in that behavior. This disparity was most evident in the two most serious clusters of items wherein the husband's actions were viewed as more severe in nature. Thus, it appears that equality of severity ratings is evident when milder and moderate items are being considered, but less so when items of a more severe nature are being rated. This discrepancy in severity ratings is again likely to be the result of the themes listed above regarding the discrepancy in rating the behavior as abusive—the wife would not have the same responsibilities to maintain, she would be unlikely to carry out her threats, her actions would have less impact on the man than vice versa, and women might need to engage in some of these actions to keep the man's behavior in check. Regarding individual items, only nine items out of 102 were viewed differently when perpetrated by a husband versus a wife, suggesting that differences in severity ratings consist of a trend for the psychologists to rate more severe items differently without the difference being starkly evident on individual items. However, three of the most severe items were among those with the different severity ratings, and while it appears that the psychologists clearly felt they had to label these items as psychologically abusive based on their content, they rated a wife's actions as less *severe* than a husband's actions for the following items: "Threatened to hurt spouse;" "Threatened to hurt spouse's family, children or friends;" and "Forced spouse to eat from a bowl on the floor." One likely reason could be that the psychologists were taking the viewpoint that a man's threats would be more frightening and that the woman might not be able to physically carry out the threats. That view, however, would raise the issue as to whether the potential *impact* of an action should influence the rating of its severity or whether some extreme behaviors should be viewed as offensive/psychologically abusive irrespective of the possible impact.

Frequency/duration of a behavior was almost always viewed by psychologists as a more important contextual factor to consider when deciding whether to call a behavior psychological abuse than either of the other contextual factors—the perpetrator's intention to harm or the recipient's perception of harm. As stated in the prior study, psychologists may desire

a more objective indicator for determining when a behavior has moved beyond being problematic to becoming "psychological abuse," and knowledge of frequency and/or duration of a behavior would allow for a more behavioral assessment than the murky appraisal of a person's genuine intentions or of a partner's reaction to an event while partialling out potential biases, motivations, or distortions which might be present. However, when comparing psychologists' ratings regarding the importance of the perpetrators' intentions versus the recipients' perceptions, the psychologists rated the wife's perspective as more important for determining that psychological abuse had occurred whether she was the perpetrator of the action or the recipient of it. While current sensitization about wife battering would seem an explanation for psychologists' preference for the perspective of a woman who is a potential recipient of psychological abuse over the potential perpetrator's perspective, it is less easy to understand why psychologists would reverse their preference when a woman is the potential perpetrator. Because more of the psychologists were rating the woman's actions as "not" or "maybe" psychological abuse to begin with, it is possible that they were already judging her intentions as unlikely to be malignant, but considered it wise to check their perspective against other data that might be available. In addition, if the psychologists typically viewed the woman's actions as less severe, they may have subsequently considered the man's viewpoint as not particularly important for making the larger determination of labeling the behavior as psychological abuse or not. That is, if a wife's intentions are viewed as benign, then even if the man perceived the behavior otherwise, the assumption would be that he is likely mistaken and therefore his viewpoint would not need to be weighed as heavily. When a husband engages in the listed behaviors, the findings suggest that the man's actions, at the outset, were more often judged as abusive and severe; therefore, it is likely that the psychologists believed, by virtue of his actions, that they know the man's intentions, and therefore were more willing to take into consideration the wife's perceptions as to whether she felt psychologically harmed.

Because the prior study with only ratings of the husband's actions found demographic variables to have no real influence on the ratings, the fact that demographic variables overall and specifically regarding the ratings of the wife's actions did not have much influence on the ratings of abuse or severity was somewhat expected. Due to the small number of non-Caucasian psychologists in the sample, appropriate analyses could not be conducted for ethnicity. Of course, education as a factor had no variability, rendering it unuseable for analysis. However, the psychologists who participated were reasonably balanced for sex and marital status, and two variables were added to determine whether someone close to the person or the person himself/herself having been in a psychologically abusive relationship would influence ratings. On only one cluster did female psychologists rate the items as more abusive and on only two clusters did female psychologists rate the severity of items they had already designated as psychologically abusive as more severe than male psychologists. However, these mean differences were so small as to be unlikely to impact clinical decision-making. Interestingly, there were no significant interactions of the demographics with the different surveys, such that when female psychologists did rate behaviors as more likely to be abusive or as more severe, they made these determinations regardless of the sex of the perpetrator of them.

Because this study attempted to provide a wide range of psychologically aggressive behaviors for psychologists to rate, it is of note that so many of the items were rated by a substantial number of psychologists as "always abusive" based solely on a very brief description. For example, "blaming spouse for own problems" was endorsed as always psychological abuse by 63% of the psychologists for the husband's behavior and by 52% for the

wife's behavior. "Swearing at a spouse" was judged to be abusive by 52% of the psychologists when the husband swore and by 37% of the psychologists when the wife swore. While there has certainly been much sensitization regarding intimate aggression and victimization in recent years, it is hard to understand how so many psychologists could unequivocally determine that most of these items are always abuse with no knowledge from the brief scenario as to the context or the impact of the behavior. While almost every item might be considered psychological aggression, there are numerous contextual factors which might prevent a professional from moving many of these behaviors into the range of abuse. Consider the following questions with regard to "swearing at a spouse." What if the person swore in a joking manner? What if it were a mild swear word? What if it were the first time the person had ever sworn at the spouse? What if the spouse had just engaged in reprehensible behavior toward the partner, who then swore in retaliation? What if the recipient of the swearing was a person who swore all the time himself/herself, such that swearing had no impact on them? What if the swearing was used for impact to get the partner to pay attention because he/she would not listen to important information otherwise? Additional contextual factors could be raised as well and the differential impact of swearing across relationships ranges vastly. Thus, the labeling of psychological actions as "psychological abuse" may require much more development of the concept and factors influencing it before psychologists can isolate most psychological actions as "abusive" within a relationship (see Follingstad, 2003). For example, the current use of checklists which briefly describe a behavior the researcher considers "psychological abuse" may need to be modified in order to more accurately assess whether an egregious action actually occurred.

There are several limitations of this study. First of all, while the items on the survey include many items found on current measures of psychological abuse and represent a range of psychological dimensions, they do not constitute a systematic way of assessing psychologically abusive actions. Some dimensions may be overrepresented and some may require more description before judgments can be even cursorily made. Second, because the study utilizing the survey in which the wife engaged in behaviors toward her husband had a poorer return rate, questions can be raised regarding why this survey was less likely to be returned by psychologists than the version using the husband as the perpetrator. However, some of the spontaneous comments of those returning the survey not completed did suggest that a number of professionals had difficulty perceiving that women could be effectively psychologically abusive, further adding to the view that men are more likely to be the psychologically aggressive individuals in relationships. Third, while this research design investigated psychologists' impressions as to how salient several contextual factors would be for their decision making regarding psychological abuse, further research will be required to empirically demonstrate whether their perceptions are borne out in judgments made regarding cases in which these factors vary. Fourth, this study could not include at this time the issue of the impact of behaviors, other than through indirectly asking whether the recipient's perception of harm would be important for making these decisions. Thus, participants had to basically assume that behaviors which seemed more severe would have more serious impacts while behaviors perceived as milder would be viewed as having low impact. While one would expect that there would be a reasonable correlation between these in the real world, there could certainly be behaviors which would be objectively rated as severe, but have low impact, and vice versa.

The findings of this study suggest that clinical judgments regarding the assessment of psychological abuse parallel prior literature wherein professionals judged men's interpersonal actions as more likely to be dangerous, pathological, and as having menacing implications than the same behaviors exhibited by women. What is uncertain is whether these judgments were based upon predictions these clinicians made based upon actual

experiences with clients, whether these judgments are representative of what actually exists (i.e., men are more dangerous and menacing in terms of psychological interactions), or whether these judgments are based upon heuristics which may lead to errors in decision making. It is possible that the tendency of persons toward producing consistent, therefore stable, perceptions even when they might make logical errors in so doing (Amabile & Hastorf, 1976) may influence the judgment to perceive a woman's actions as less problematic than a man's actions. Because women have been historically viewed as less aggressive and more affiliative, professionals might utilize this view and even apply it in a general way to descriptions of aggressive behavior by women by assuming it either must not be particularly abusive, or if it is abusive, it must not be particularly severe. If this is the case, clinicians may need to examine their assumptions to see whether they have different standards for identical behavior exhibited by men and women in intimate relationships. Another study might investigate this type of decision making of professionals to understand the rationales, assumptions, stereotypes, etc., which might be influencing the differences found in this study. What exactly do psychologists consider or weigh when inferring that egregious psychological behavior has occurred?

Another area of investigation triggered by this study could be an assessment of whether the various categories/dimensions of psychological aggression are differentially influenced by particular contextual factors. This research could move away from sterile descriptive sentences of psychological actions to situations in which couples' more complex interactions are the setting for the psychological actions. The field of psychological abuse is in dire need of a more sophisticated understanding of psychological actions which takes into account normative information both of prevalence and attitudes, objective (if possible) standards, and the influence of short-term and long-term contexts on the interpretation of behaviors in intimate relationships.

At worst, the findings of this study suggest that there is an inherent (and potentially biased) view that men's psychological behavior is more likely to constitute "psychological abuse" and is likely to be more severe than women's identical behavior when we have little normative information regarding this phenomenon. Rather, the mental health field's exposure to the phenomenon of psychological abuse has typically been the anecdotal information regarding psychological components of physically abusive relationships. And, there may be an underlying assumption fueling this view of men's actions that could be an erroneous parallel to the physical abuse phenomenon—that the impact of a man's psychological actions are, by virtue of being exhibited by a man, likely to have a more deleterious impact than a woman's psychological actions against her partner. At best, this study's findings raise intriguing questions which could stimulate interesting research as to why judgments about psychologically aggressive behavior are made differently simply on the basis of gender.

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Patterns of Mutual and Nonmutual Spouse Abuse in the U.S. Army (1998–2002)

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The pattern and severity of substantiated mutual and nonmutual spouse abuse between U.S. Army enlisted personnel and their spouses was determined for 1998 to 2002. The number of nonmutual and mutual abuse victims was equal in 1998, but by 2002 there were about twice as many non mutual as mutual victims. The rate per thousand of mutual abuse decreased by 58% while that of nonmutual abuse decreased by 13%. The rate per thousand of female victims was always greater than male victims for non-mutual abuse and the severity of abuse of female victims was always more severe than male victims. The active duty female had the highest risk of becoming a victim. These patterns of mutual and nonmutual domestic abuse in the U.S. Army suggest that prevention and educational approaches could be developed that would be useful to prevention specialists and to clinicians as the Army pursues avenues to reduce domestic violence.

When there has been abuse by both spouses toward each other, such incidents are known as bidirectional or mutual abuse. When there is a sole victim and sole perpetrator, this is known as unidirectional or nonmutual abuse. For simplicity, we use the terms "mutual" and "nonmutual abuse" in this article. This article describes the differences in mutual and nonmutual domestic violence in married U.S. Army couples. Our paper focuses on the differences in rates per thousand in both types of abuse and presents these rates in the combinations of active duty Army soldiers and civilian spouses. Finally, we present additional data on the severity of abuse and the groups of men and women, active duty and civilian, who appear to be at greatest risk of abuse based on these data.

BACKGROUND OF RESEARCH ON MUTUAL AND NONMUTUAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Understanding the dynamics of domestic violence is important for the prevention and treatment of victims and offenders of this widespread public health problem. Much of the domestic violence literature has emphasized the abuse of women by men (e.g., Heywood