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# Battered Women Who Kill: Stereotype Influence Through The Media

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BATTERED WOMEN WHO KILL:  
STEREOTYPE INFLUENCE THROUGH THE MEDIA

by

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Bachelor of Arts, College of St. Scholastica, 2015

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Science

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May  
2018

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This thesis, submitted by Sonja Bauman in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Science from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.



Dr. Cheryl Terrance, Chairperson

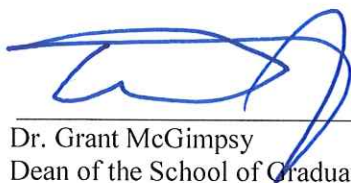


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May 3, 2018

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## **Abstract**

Research has suggested that stereotypes have significant influence over how individuals view women who experience domestic violence (Ayyildiz, 1995; Browne, 1989, 1993; Callahan, 1994; Goodmark, 2008; Jenkins & Davidson, 1990; Mahoney, 1991; Russell & Melillo, 2006; Schneider, 1986; Terrance & Matheson, 2003; Wimberly, 2007). It has also been suggested that battered woman syndrome may not be a complete or appropriate explanation of the emotions and experiences of battered women (Ayyildiz, 2007; Callahan, 1994; Schneider, 1986; Wimberly, 2007). The current study examined the influence of stereotype fit and battered woman syndrome nomenclature on public perceptions of a battered woman who killed her abuser. Participants read one of four newspaper scenarios that varied the stereotype fit of a battered woman and the use of battered woman syndrome nomenclature. They then indicated the degree to which the woman fit the image of a battered woman, her responsibility in the events described in the scenario, and whether or not they viewed her as the victim or perpetrator of a crime. Overall, women were found to be more likely to view the battered woman as a victim and believe she acted in self-defense. Men were more likely to view the woman as a victim only if she fit the stereotypical image of a battered woman. Participants also indicated that they viewed the woman as being mentally stable and believed she was innocent of committing a crime. Together, results indicate that women and men differ in their perceptions of battered women who kill. Implications are discussed.

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

There are times when women experience physical, emotional, and/or psychological violence in an intimate relationship that can be perpetuated over long periods of time. In the United States, family violence accounts for a significant number of crime victims. U.S. Department of Justice (2005) reported that 11% of the total number of crime victims between 1998 and 2002 were victims of family violence. Specifically, women are reported as being 84.3% of the victims of spouse abuse and 85.9% of victims of abuse between significant others (U.S. Department of Justice, 2005). Women may feel trapped in these abusive relationships through a cycle of violent threats towards them and possibly their children, frequent physical assaults by their partner, lack of financial resources, and little knowledge as to where to find help in the community (Mahoney, 1991; Walker, 2000). In some cases, these physical assaults, economic abuse, and psychological abuse may lead an abused woman to resort to lethal violence against her partner (Browne, 1989, 1993).

When an abused woman resorts to an act of lethal violence against her abuser and is then charged with a crime, a common plea entered on her behalf is a plea of self-defense (Crocker, 1985; Mahoney, 1991; Schneider, 1980; Walker, 1992). Not only are self-defense pleas often controversial in their very nature, but crimes that are lethal and considered heinous are often times the ones that are publicized in the local media. Media can be very influential on how the public perceives current events within the community, state, country, or even internationally. Due to the unique nature of the case of an abused woman killing her husband, it is likely to be

reported on in the media and this can have a subtle but distinctive impact on the case (Meyers, 1994).

From extensive interest in media influence, several studies have shown that lay people, even when asked to be part of an impartial jury, are influenced by pre-trial publicity (Hope, Memon, & McGeorge, 2004; Kovera, 2002; Ruva & McEvoy, 2008; Shaw & Skolnick, 2004). From these studies, it has also been demonstrated that media can have a strong impact on potential jurors and on the public's understanding of an event in their community. Ruva and McEvoy (2008) found that participants exposed to positive pretrial publicity were more likely to give not guilty ratings of the defendant and those exposed to negative pretrial publicity were more likely to give guilty ratings of the defendant. Hope, Memon, and McGeorge (2004) also found that negative pretrial publicity increased the rate of guilty verdicts given by participants. Media has the ability to change public opinion, support stereotypes, and play to the sensibilities of the majority culture (Browne, 1993; Carlson & Worden, 2005; Greer, 2007; Howe, 1997; Meyers, 1994). In an effort to understand the impact of media in cases involving a battered woman charged in the murder of their abusive partner, this study will examine how pre-trial publicity impacts perceptions of the abused woman, her circumstances, and the public's belief of guilt.

### **Battered Women and Self-Defense**

Self-defense laws have very specific criteria that need to be met in order for it to be used as a successful defense in court. The three criteria that need to be met are that self-defense was a reasonable reaction to the situation, there was a reasonable and honest belief of imminent threat or death to oneself or someone else, and the amount of force used in self-defense was a reasonable amount of force (Schneider, 1980, 2000). These laws were created with the intent to

be universally applicable to situations where a person needed to use physical violence to protect themselves from an assailant (Schneider, 1980, 2000).

However, these laws take the perspective of one-time violent events such as an attack by a stranger or even a fight between possible equals such as two men fighting in a bar. These laws on self-defense are lacking in their ability to cover the scope of the situation in which an abuse victim would attack or kill her abuser, yet this is the most commonly used defense strategy in these cases (Terrance, Plumm, & Rhyner, 2012). These laws do not take into account the physical size differences between men and women that would cause an abuse victim to feel the need to use a deadly weapon against her abuser (Crocker, 1985; Mahoney, 1991; Schneider, 1980, 2000). The laws are also unable to address the chronic abuse suffered by the victim as they were created in the mindset of one-time violent attacks. Browne (1987) has indicated that self-defense laws often fail to account for the possible collective effects of repetitive violence, assaults, and threats as well as an abused woman's ability to predict future violent attacks and their magnitude. Abused women can become sensitized to subtle cues that are significant indicators to them but may be overlooked by others or seen as trivial (Mahoney, 1991; Schneider 1980, 2000).

The circumstances of a battered woman who kills or attacks her abuser are rather unique in the social and psychological factors that influence them. Battered women often experience continuous fear and threats which could influence their understanding of what actions they are able to take to protect themselves (Steiner, 2012). Social support for battered women is also key and can sometimes be very difficult for them to find due to society's often unwillingness to discuss or address the topic of domestic violence. Often times the most dangerous time for a domestic violence victim is the month or two after leaving the relationship (Steiner, 2012). Legal

professionals and jurors need to take this into consideration when evaluating if self-defense is applicable to these cases. An expert witness on battered women may need to be introduced or consulted for these cases so that fact finders, such as attorneys, judges, and jurors, involved in the case understand the complexity of the situation (Schneider, 1980, 1986). Through expert witnesses this specialized knowledge can be introduced to the court and often when it comes to a battered woman who killed her abuser, experts rely upon the battered woman syndrome in an attempt to explain the woman's circumstances (Angel, 2015; Callahan, 1994; Crocker, 1985; Mahoney, 1991; Schuller, 1992; Schuller & Rzepa, 2002; Terrance & Matheson, 2003).

### **Battered Woman Syndrome**

Battered woman syndrome was discussed by Walker (1979) who postulated an escalating cycle of violence or wife abuse in an attempt to explain why women stay in these violent relationships and why they may resort to committing acts of violence against their abusers (Walker, 1979). Research has suggested that the use of the term 'syndrome' presents battered woman syndrome as a formal diagnosis (Schneider; 1986; Terrance, Plumm, & Rhyner, 2012). The use of the phrase battered woman syndrome can be interpreted by some to mean that it is a mental illness (Schneider, 1986). However, this is not true. Battered woman syndrome is not a DSM diagnosis but used by the legal system in an attempt to describe the mental state and reasoning behind a woman's attack or murder of her abuser (Angel, 2015).

Battered woman syndrome is similar to the concept of insanity in that it is strictly a legal concept; just as one cannot be diagnosed as insane neither can one be diagnosed with battered woman syndrome, yet they are both used by the legal system to describe certain defendants and their situations. Unlike insanity, battered woman syndrome is rarely if ever used as an entire defense strategy, most often it is used as evidence to support a self-defense strategy in cases

where a woman attacks or kills her abuser. Some lawyers find it difficult to use battered woman syndrome as defense evidence since it is not a diagnosable disorder they have a harder time explaining its relevance and importance to the jury and judge (Angel, 2015).

While the concept of battered woman syndrome is an initial step to explaining these abusive relationships and what the women experience during them, the theory may need to be updates or even reworked in order to make it more applicable to the legal system. Little research has been done with the focus of improving the concept of battered woman syndrome since it was postulated by Walker (1979). Battered woman syndrome should be cautiously used in such a way that is considers the societal influences, addresses the misconceptions held by the public, and addresses the public's understanding of reasonableness.

**Arguments against battered woman syndrome.** There are some arguments against the use of battered woman syndrome. One the major issues some experts have with its use is the fact that it is labeled as a syndrome. Research has shown this confuses jurors as to the nature of the concept leading them to believe it is a mental illness the woman is diagnosed with (Angel, 2015; Carlson & Worden, 2005; Crocker, 1985; Mahoney, 1991; Russell & Melillo, 2006; Schuller, 1992; Schuller & Rzepa, 2002; Schuller, Wells, Rzepa & Klippenstine, 2004; Terrance & Matheson, 2003). Researchers have also argued that battered woman syndrome focuses too much on the mental state of the woman when she killed or attacked her abuser and too much on the theory of learned helplessness (Schuller & Hastings, 1996). The theory of learned helplessness was originally created by Seligman and Maier (1967) based on their observations of animal behavior. They found that when animals were consistently shocked and never given an option to escape the harm they eventually stopped seeking the escape even when an escape was made available. It has been argued that it is far too simplistic to be applied to women who experience

domestic violence (Schuller & Hastings, 1996). As it has been demonstrated through previous research, some jurors interpret the use of battered woman syndrome evidence as showing that there is distorted thinking on the part of the woman that is not considered rational or reasonable and this is the reason some experts feel that battered woman evidence needs to focus less on the psychological state of the woman (Crocker, 1985; Russell & Melillo, 2006; Schuller & Hastings, 1996; Schuller, Wells, Rzepa, & Klippenstine, 2004; Terrance & Matheson, 2003).

Controversy over the use of battered woman syndrome often extends from the use of the learned helplessness theory and its application to battered woman syndrome. The theory itself implies that through the repeated abuse, the woman becomes helpless to cope with the abuse and will not seek escape from the abuse. However, in legal cases where battered woman syndrome is used as evidence the woman has in some manner escaped her abuser by attacking or killing them. Therefore, the theory does not do an accurate job at describing the situation and psychology behind a battered woman's circumstances (Schuller & Hastings, 1996). Schuller and Hastings (1996) also state "...the testimony is more likely to be associated with explanations of excuse rather than justification" (pg. 169), particularly if jurors perceive the woman's actions as a type of psychological dysfunction. Some lawyers argue against the use battered woman syndrome because of its incorporation of the theory of learned helplessness, causing it to become an ineffectual source of evidence in defending a battered woman who killed her abuser (Angle, 2015). The various stereotypes that battered woman syndrome calls to mind will often follow the framework of cultural stereotypes held about battered women.

**Battered women and stereotypes.** There are a number of stereotypes within society about abusive relationships, motives for staying in the abusive relationship, and why women may resort to lethal force against their abusers. Some people will say that these women who are

abused knowingly and willing put themselves in these dangerous relationships and that they are masochists and enjoy the abuse (Schuller & Vidmar, 1992). This is a dangerous way of thinking about domestic violence and abuse as it implies that these women do not need or deserve help from outside sources. One of the many misconceptions include the question, why do women stay in these abusive relationships? This can be a very detrimental line of thinking on the part of the lay person (Schuller & Vidmar, 2012).

If society believes that a woman is knowingly being abused and chooses to stay in the relationship despite the abuse, they may believe that she understands the consequences of that choice. The public often does not understand how dangerous it is for a woman to leave her abuser. Over 70% of abuse victims who are killed by their abusers, are killed after they have left or ended the relationship (Steiner, 2012). In many situations, the abuser will also continue to stalk the abuse victim after the victim has ended the relationship. Other negative outcomes include harassment of the victim through the family court system and denial of crucial financial resources. Often in the family courts the abuse victim and her children are forced to spend time, sometimes unsupervised, with the abuser (Steiner, 2012). Another common misconception is that women who attack or kill their abuser react in an unreasonable way to the situation as they could simply leave or contact the authorities. Again, this implies that many people believe it is the woman's fault for not taking less physically aggressive action sooner. Taken together, when it comes to cases where domestic abuse victims attack or kill their abuser, the public tends to respond in a manner that blames the victim for her situation.

### **Pretrial Publicity**

The impact of pre-trial publicity has been an area of great interest to psychological researchers who are also interested in the legal field. In studies conducted on pre-trial publicity,



researchers have shown that information presented through the media concerning a major crime can influence on the perceptions of evidence and overall verdicts rendered by mock jurors (Hope, Memon, & McGeorge, 2004; Kovera, 2002; Ruva & McEvoy, 2008; Shaw & Skolnick, 2004). When study participants were presented with the court cases relating to the crime, researchers have seen a significant effect of pre-trial publicity on the results of the various studies (Hope, Memon, & McGeorge, 2004; Kovera, 2002; Ruva & McEvoy, 2008; Shaw & Skolnick, 2004). Each study focuses on a different aspect of pre-trial publicity and the varying affects.

Kovera (2002) explored the effects of pretrial publicity on mock juror's perception of evidence in a trial. Participants were either exposed to pro-defense pre-trial publicity or pro-prosecution pre-trial publicity. Results indicated that participants who were exposed to pro-defense publicity were more likely to request evidence that would prove the innocence of the defendant and that would corroborate the story of the victim (Kovera, 2002). Participants also requested more evidence of the defendant's guilt than those participants exposed to pro-prosecution publicity or those not exposed to any biased media on the case (Kovera, 2002). Additionally, the author found that participants who were exposed to pro-prosecution publicity or were not exposed to any biased media, asked for evidence that proved the credibility of the victim (Kovera, 2002). Overall, this study demonstrated that exposure to biased media reports on a criminal trial can affect what type of evidence the mock jurors find most important to deciding the case (Kovera, 2002). This aspect of media influence could be very influential in different kinds of cases including the case of a battered woman who killed her abuser as the media could help or hinder her case.

In a second study conducted by Kovera (2002) on pretrial publicity, the researcher explored whether or not exposure to rape stories within the media would have an effect on participants attitudes towards the issue of rape. Results indicate that exposure to rape media did not affect those who had strong attitudes towards rape, whether they were pro-defendant or pro-victim. However, rape media did have an influence on those who had neutral attitudes on the subject (Kovera, 2002). This demonstrates the idea that media may not have a significant influence on those that hold strong beliefs on a subject but can possibly sway the mindsets of those who maintain a neutral attitude or are ill-informed on a topic. In cases involving a battered woman who killed, there are often many stereotypes at play. People with strong beliefs regarding battered women may not be swayed by pre-trial publicity, but those who do not hold strong beliefs may be open to various interpretations presented in the pre-trial publicity according to this study.

Hope, Memon, and McGeorge (2004) conducted a study on how information contained in pre-trial publicity could cause pre-decisional distortion on mock juror verdicts in a trial. Results indicated that the mock jurors who were exposed to negative pre-trial publicity (pro-prosecution news stories), rendered more guilty verdicts than the control condition which contained participants how were not exposed to any pre-trial publicity (Hope, Memon, & McGeorge, 2004). In an examination of the pre-decisional distortion scores, the authors found that the overall mean of the scores for the experimental group was greater than the overall mean of the control group (Hope, Memon, & McGeorge, 2004). Looking at the results in their entirety, one can see that the participants exposed to negative pre-trial publicity had higher scores in their pre-decisional distortion and rendered more guilty verdicts. This indicated a correlation between pre-decisional distortion and the verdicts rendered by the mock jurors, all due to the type of

publicity the mock juror was exposed to (Hope, Memon, & McGeorge, 2004). In other words, the distortion of the evidence mediated the verdicts, when it was evaluated by the mock jurors who were exposed to negative pre-trial publicity (Hope, Memon, & McGeorge, 2004).

Another aspect of pre-trial publicity to be considered is the delay between the receiving of information about a criminal case through the media and the retrieval of that information during a trial. Ruva and McEvoy (2008) conducted a study that examined how the exposure to positive or negative pre-trial publicity would affect juror's decision making, but also how the delay between the receiving information through a media source and presentation of evidence during a trial might affect juror's source-memory errors. While the participants in the study were specifically told not to use any information besides what was presented through the trial, the researchers still found that pre-trial publicity had a strong biasing effect in many of the areas they measured (Ruva & McEvoy, 2008). Mock jurors exposed to pre-trial publicity that favored the prosecution were almost two times as likely to convict the defendant than those not exposed to any pre-trial publicity (Ruva & McEvoy, 2008). The researchers included exposure to pro-defense pre-trial publicity in their study and found that jurors exposed to this type of publicity were less likely to convict the defendant and were more likely to view the defendant as credible (Ruva & McEvoy, 2008).

In the analysis of the effect of the delay between pre-trial publicity and the trial, the researchers found that both negative and positive pre-trial publicity result in nearly identical rates of source-memory errors (Ruva & McEvoy, 2008). Another interesting result from the study was that negative pre-trial publicity affected participant's ratings of the attorneys creating a bias towards the prosecution. Positive pre-trial publicity also had a similar but smaller effect on the ratings of the attorneys, causing those participants exposed to any pre-trial publicity to favor one

side over the other (Ruva & McEvoy, 2008). The combination of source-memory errors and the biasing effects of pre-trial publicity indicated in this study could have major implications in a trial, including the trial of a battered woman. Perceptions could be unintentionally influenced by the biasing stories they are exposed to in the media and their implicit beliefs about battered women, possibly having a strong cumulative effect on their perception of the woman and her innocence or guilt.

Taken together, these studies have shown how pre-trial publicity can affect how jurors view the prosecution, the defense, the defendant, and their interpretation of evidence in court. The impact of pre-trial publicity is demonstrated to be widespread within the court of law, influencing a number of factors that could affect the outcome of a court case. Public life and often private beliefs are difficult to fully separate from the legal system, especially when an individual is being asked to make a decision regarding the guilt or innocence of another individual. When a case involves a controversial situation, such as that of a battered woman who killed her abuser, there may be strong beliefs and even stereotypes that can influence an individual's perception of the woman and the situation.

### **Current Study**

Women who experience abuse face many challenges including protecting themselves against deadly violence. Some battered women will themselves resort to lethal violence in an attempt to protect themselves from their abuser. When this occurs, and the woman is charged with a crime she continues to face challenges in the legal system including equal treatment under the law. The stereotypes that are implied in the use of battered woman syndrome and the cultural stereotypes concerning battered women can negatively impact a woman's right to equal treatment under the law, especially under the laws of self-defense. The laws are often unable to

adequately encompass the experiences of a battered woman and ineffective at allowing the court to interpret a battered woman's understanding of what is considered reasonable. However, information presented to the public through the media is open to different interpretations.

Battered women who kill their abusers also present an interesting dichotomy in their public identity. Battered women are the victims of horrible physical, psychological, and emotional violence and if they kill their abusers after using lethal force they also become the perpetrators of a violent crime. If the case of a battered woman who kills becomes a story within the media, public perceptions could be influenced through the type of information presented through the media and the stereotypes the public has towards battered women. In turn, this media exposure could be detrimental to the woman's claim of self-defense in court.

The current study examined the influence of the stereotype fit of a battered woman and battered woman syndrome nomenclature on public beliefs of the mental stability of the battered woman, whether or not she acted in self-defense, if she was responsible for the events that's took place, her guilt of committing a crime, her status as a victim or perpetrator of a crime, and her husband's status as a victim or perpetrator of a crime. Participant gender was also examined based on findings of gender difference from past research (Clow, Lant, & Cutler, 2013; Terrance, Plumm, & Kehn, 2014). A vignette in the form of a newspaper scenario discussing the case of a battered woman who killed her abusive partner was used to present the different conditions. The vignette included versions where the woman fits the stereotype of a battered woman and on where she does not fit the stereotype. Within the stereotype fit conditions, the battered woman syndrome (BWS) nomenclature was varied where either the nomenclature was used, or it was not used. It was hypothesized that women would be more likely to believe the battered woman acted in self-defense, rate her as not guilty, see her as being mentally stable, view her as a victim,

and view the abusive husband as a perpetrator. It was also hypothesized that when the battered woman was presented as stereotypical, participants would perceive her to be acting in self-defense, rate her as not guilty, perceive her to be less responsible for the events, view the battered woman as a victim, and her husband as a perpetrator. The final hypothesis was that when BWS nomenclature is present the participants would view the battered woman as less mentally stable, will not believe she acted in self-defense, more likely to rate her as guilty, and less likely to view her as a victim.

## CHAPTER II

### METHOD

#### Participants

Participants (men  $n = 104$ ; women,  $n = 147$ ) were individuals from Amazon's Mechanical Turk. Participants' ages ranged from 18-81 ( $M = 38.55$ ,  $SD = 12.85$ ) and the majority of participants were White/Caucasian (78.1%). Participants from Amazon's Mechanical Turk received monetary compensation of \$0.25 for their participation.

#### Materials

**Vignette.** Newspaper scenarios were created for this study and differed according to a 2 (stereotype fit: stereotypical vs. non-stereotypical) X 2 (BWS: present vs. absent) between-subjects factorial design. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions. The vignette was in the style of a news story about an abused woman who killed her abusive husband and was charged for the act of killing her abuser.

All versions of the vignette (see Appendix B) were identical with the exception of manipulations to reflect the degree of stereotype fit of the battered woman and the use of battered woman syndrome nomenclature in the vignette. Stereotype fit was manipulated by varying the extent to which the woman is isolated from family and friends, whether or not she worked outside the home, and if she had previously attempted to leave the relationship. Within the stereotype fit condition, a paragraph was used to describe the abusive situation. In that paragraph participants were presented with information that the defendant "suffered from battered woman syndrome" accompanied by this short description, "which is a theory based on the work of Dr.

Lenore Walker. This theory is used to describe the psychological reality of a woman who has experienced escalating cycles of violence in an intimate relationship.” Alternatively, that information was removed and replaced with the defendant being described as “a battered woman.” This was done to present the two different BWS nomenclature (present vs. absent) conditions.

### **Questionnaires and Measures**

**Demographics.** Participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix C) that assessed several common demographic factors such as gender, ethnicity, and age.

**Attentional Check.** Participants were asked to forgo responding to two questions, instead they were asked to select the blue triangle below the questions (see Appendix D). This was done in order to reveal any participants who were not reading the questions and were simply randomly clicking on answers to the questions. Only participants who successfully answer the attentional check were included in the analyses.

**Manipulation Check.** Participants were asked to respond to seven items that assessed whether the woman in the vignette fits various aspects of what is considered to be a stereotypical battered woman (see Appendix E). The seven items included the degree to which participants, (a) perceived Jane to be isolated from family, (b) perceived Jane to have financial resources, (c) perceived Jane to be dependent on her husband, (d) perceived Jane to be isolated from friends, (e) perceived Jane as having a close relationship with her neighbor, (f) perceived Jane as being trapped in the relationship, and (g) believed Jane to be a battered woman. Items on the manipulation check were summed (reverse coded for negative items) and averaged to create a composite score for the scale ( $\alpha = 0.80$ ). Higher scores indicated greater stereotype fit.



**Perceptions of the Vignette.** Participants completed a questionnaire (see Appendix F) in which they responded to a number of items related to their perceptions of the vignette using a 7-point Likert-type scale. The Likert-type scale ranged from “strongly disagree” (0) to “strongly agree” (6).

***Mental Stability.*** Participants were asked to respond to one item that assessed their perception about the mental stability of the woman in the vignette. Specifically, participants were asked to what degree they (a) perceive Jane as being mentally stable.

***Self-Defense.*** Participants were asked to respond to eight items that assessed the extent to which they viewed the battered woman as acting in self-defense. The items included participants belief that (a) Jane’s action were justified, (b) Jane acted in self-defense, (c) John was abusive, (d) Jane’s actions were reasonable, (e) Jane’s only option was to use deadly force to stay alive, (f) Jane had other options to stay alive besides using deadly force, (g) Jane’s husband would have killed her if she had not taken action, and (h) Jane should have left the relationship sooner. The eight items were summed (reverse coded for negative items) and averaged to create a composite score for the scale ( $\alpha = 0.84$ ). Higher scores indicated belief that the battered woman acted in self-defense

***Victim/Perpetrator Status.*** Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they perceived the battered woman (Jane) and her deceased husband (John) as (a) a victim and (b) a perpetrator.

**Responsibility Scale.** Participants were asked to respond to a questionnaire (see Appendix G) that assessed the extent to which they assigned responsibility to the battered woman. Specifically, participants were asked to respond to six items rating them on a scale from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (7). The items included participants belief that, (a) Jane

had control over the events that occurred, (b) Jane acted carelessly, (c) Jane's behavior was responsible for the events described in the newspaper scenario, (d) Jane is at fault for the death of her husband, (e) Jane is to blame for the death of her husband, and (f) Jane was responsible for the death of her husband. The six items were summed and averaged to create a composite score for the scale with lower scores indicating a greater belief that Jane was responsible for the events that occurred ( $\alpha = 0.88$ ).

**Private Belief of Guilt.** Participants were asked to respond to a single item (see Appendix H) to indicate their private belief regarding the battered woman's guilt of committing a crime. Participants were asked to rate the guilt of the battered woman based on their private belief, ranging from not guilty (-5) to guilty (+5).

## **Procedure**

Participants were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), a crowdsourcing internet marketplace that allows individuals to coordinate the use of human intelligence to collect data for various studies. After signing up for the study, participants were directed to Qualtrics, an online survey system. Participants completed a consent form (see Appendix A), which provided information about the purpose of the study and the researcher's contact information. Participants were then, via Qualtrics, randomly assigned to read one of four possible vignettes, varying the battered woman's stereotype fit and the use of battered woman syndrome nomenclature. Specifically, participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions stemming from a 2 (stereotype fit: stereotypical vs. non-stereotypical) x 2 (BWS: present vs. absent) between subject's factorial design.

Following the vignette, participants answered a series of questions regarding demographic information, the stereotype fit of the battered woman, their perception of the

woman's mental stability, perception of the woman acting in self-defense, the woman's responsibility for the events that occurred, the woman's victim/perpetrator status, the woman's husband's victim/perpetrator status, and finally their private belief of her guilt/innocence.

## CHAPTER III

### RESULTS

#### Attentional Check

A total of 298 participants completed the study. Of these, 47 failed the attentional check and were removed from the analyses. Analyses were subsequently conducted on the remaining 251 participants (men  $n = 104$ ; women,  $n = 147$ ).

#### Manipulation Check

An independent samples t-test was conducted on the extent to which the participants viewed the battered woman as fitting the stereotypical image. On average, participants presented with the stereotypical representation of the battered woman were more likely to rate her as being stereotypical ( $M = 4.44$ ,  $SD = 0.93$ ), than those presented with the non-stereotypical representation ( $M = 5.00$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ),  $t(249) = -4.78$ ,  $p < .001$ .

#### Perception of Mental Stability

A 2 (BWS: present vs. absent) x 2 (stereotype fit: stereotypical vs. non-stereotypical) x 2 (participant gender) analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted on the extent to which the participants viewed the battered woman as being mentally stable. Neither the main effect for BWS condition, stereotype fit condition, participant gender, nor their interactions attained significance,  $F_s < 1$ . Overall, participants viewed the battered woman as being mentally stable, ( $M = 4.31$ ,  $SD = 1.36$ ),  $t(250) = 3.62$ ,  $p < .001$ .

#### Self-Defense

A 2 (BWS: present vs. absent) x 2 (stereotype fit: stereotypical vs. non-stereotypical) x 2 (participant gender) ANOVA was conducted on the extent to which participants viewed the battered woman as acting in self-defense. Results indicate a main effect for participant gender,  $F(1, 243) = 10.29, p = .002, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .041$ . Women ( $M = 5.16, SD = 1.03$ ) were more likely to believe the battered woman acted in self-defense compared to men ( $M = 4.73, SD = .96$ ). Overall, participants believe the battered woman acted in self-defense, ( $M = 4.98, SD = 1.02$ ),  $t(250) = 15.22, p < .001$ .

### **Responsibility**

A 2 (BWS: present vs. absent) x 2 (stereotype fit: stereotypical vs. non-stereotypical) x 2 (participant gender) ANOVA was conducted on the extent to which participants viewed the battered woman as being responsible for the events described in the vignette. Neither the main effect for BWS condition, stereotype fit condition, participant gender, nor their interactions attained significance,  $F_s < 1$ . Overall, participants were neutral to the battered woman's responsibility for the events described in the vignette.

### **Victim/Perpetrator Status**

**Jane Victim or Perpetrator.** The two items assessing the perceptions of the victim or perpetrator status of the battered woman were analyzed using a 2 (BWS: present vs. absent) x 2 (stereotype fit: stereotypical vs. non-stereotypical) x 2 (participant gender) multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA).

Multivariate significance was indicated for the interaction between stereotype fit and participant gender, Pillai's = .029,  $F(2, 238) = 3.49, p = .032, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .029$ . Univariate significance was attained for the item "to what degree do you perceive the battered woman to be the victim of a crime,"  $F(1, 239) = 6.60, p = .011, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .027$ .

Simple effect analysis of stereotype fit condition at each level of participant gender yielded significance for men,  $F(1, 247) = 4.47, p = .035, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .018$ . Men exposed to the stereotypical presentation ( $M = 6.13, SD = 1.08$ ) were more likely to rate the battered woman as a victim of a crime compared to men exposed to the non-stereotypical presentation ( $M = 5.66, SD = 1.42$ ).

The two-way interaction between stereotype fit condition and BWS condition also attained multivariate significance, Pillai's  $s = .029, F(2, 238) = 3.58, p = .029, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .029$ . Univariate significance was attained for the item "to what degree do you perceive Jane to be the perpetrator of a crime,"  $F(1, 239) = 6.48, p = .012, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .026$ . Simple effect analysis of stereotype fit condition at each level of BWS condition yielded significance for the BWS present condition,  $F(1, 239) = 4.59, p = .033, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .019$ . Participants exposed to the stereotypical presentation/BWS present condition ( $M = 4.37, SD = 1.87$ ) were less likely to rate the battered woman as a perpetrator of a crime compared to participants exposed to the non-stereotypical presentation/BWS present condition ( $M = 3.63, SD = 1.78$ ).

**John Victim or Perpetrator.** The two items assessing the perceptions of the victim or perpetrator status of the abusive husband were analyzed using a 2 (BWS: present vs. absent) x 2 (stereotype fit: stereotypical vs. non-stereotypical) x 2 (participant gender) MANOVA.

Multivariate significance was indicated for the two-way interaction between participant gender and stereotype fit condition, Pillai's  $s = .030, F(2, 237) = 3.60, p = .029, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .030$ . Univariate significance was attained for the item "to what degree do you perceive John to be the perpetrator of a crime,"  $F(1, 238) = 6.86, p = .009, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .028$ . Simple effect analysis of stereotype fit condition at each level of participant gender yielded significance for women,  $F(1, 239) = 6.59, p = .011, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .027$ . Women exposed to the non-stereotypical presentation ( $M$

= 6.15,  $SD = 1.09$ ) were more likely to rate the abusive husband as a perpetrator of a crime compared to women exposed to the stereotypical presentation ( $M = 5.61$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ).

Multivariate significance was also indicated for the two-way interaction between participant gender and BWS condition, Pillai's  $\lambda = .037$ ,  $F(2, 237) = 4.54$ ,  $p = .012$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .037$ . Univariate significance was attained for the item "to what degree do you perceive John to be the perpetrator of a crime,"  $F(1, 238) = 5.64$ ,  $p = .018$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .023$ . Simple effect analysis of BWS condition at each level of participant gender yielded significance for men,  $F(1, 239) = 6.93$ ,  $p = .009$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .028$ . Men exposed to the BWS absent condition ( $M = 6.04$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ) were more likely to rate the abusive husband as a perpetrator of a crime compared to men exposed to the BWS present condition ( $M = 5.42$ ,  $SD = 1.51$ ).

### **Private Belief of Guilt**

A 2 (BWS: present vs. absent) x 2 (stereotype fit: stereotypical vs. non-stereotypical) x 2 (participant gender) ANOVA was conducted on the extent to which participants believed the woman should be found guilty of committing a crime. Results indicate a main effect of gender,  $F(1, 242) = 5.79$ ,  $p = .017$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .023$ . Women ( $M = -1.53$ ,  $SD = 2.65$ ) were more likely to believe the battered woman was not-guilty compared to men ( $M = -0.64$ ,  $SD = 2.59$ ). Overall, participants believed the battered woman was not-guilty, ( $M = -1.16$ ,  $SD = 2.66$ ),  $t(249) = -6.92$ ,  $p < .001$ .

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **DISCUSSION**

A battered woman who kills their abuser presents an interesting dichotomy as she is at the same time the victim of a violent crime and the perpetrator of a violent crime. How the public interprets this dichotomy as presented through the media may lend some insight into how the information presented in the media could influence public perceptions of battered women who kill. In particular, past research has found that media often presented women through the lens of stereotypes and rarely gives them a voice. In other words, women are more likely to be seen in images rather than have stories written from their perspective in online media sources (Easteal, Bartels, Nelson, & Holland, 2015; Howe, 1997; Jia, Lansdall-Welfare, Sudhahar, Carter, & Cristianini, 2016).

It has been suggested through past research that battered women still face negative stereotypes and they are not well understood by the public (Ayyildiz, 1996; Callahan, 1995; Goodmark, 2009; Jenkins & Davidson, 1990; Mahoney, 1991; Russell & Melillo; 2006; Schneider, 1986; Terrance & Matheson, 2003). In what manner these stereotypes are influential and how the public interprets the dichotomy presented by a battered woman who kills her abusive spouse is an important starting point in terms of learning how the public perceives battered women and their actions. This study examined how the public views battered women who react violently to their abusers and if the stereotypical presentation of a battered woman and battered women syndrome nomenclature in the media have an impact on the public's perceptions.



Walker's (1979) theory of battered woman syndrome and the cyclical theory of violence represented an initial attempt to explain the experiences of women who are victims of intimate partner violence. In recent years, some have argued against the use of battered woman syndrome stating that it perpetuates negative stereotypes against battered women and provides a very narrow definition of who a battered woman is (Ayyildiz, 1996; Callahan, 1995; Goodmark, 2009; Schneider, 1986; Terrance & Matheson, 2003; Wimberly, 2007). Accordingly, it was hypothesized that when battered woman syndrome nomenclature was presented, participants would view the woman as more stereotypical, mentally unstable, and be less willing to view her as a victim. Results failed to yield significant main effect for BWS nomenclature. Therefore, the introduction of BWS nomenclature appeared not to influence public perception of the battered woman. This can be seen as a positive as the BWS nomenclature is in no way negatively affecting the public perception of the battered woman as was hypothesized. In particular, this finding demonstrates that there is little concern surrounding the inclusion of BWS nomenclature in online newspaper reports as it does not have an effect.

The stereotypical image of a battered woman has been widely studied in psychology and the legal field (Dowd, 1994; Mahoney, 1991; Jenkins & Davidson, 1990; Russell & Melillo, 2006; Schneider, 1980; Terrance & Matheson, 2003; Wimberly, 2007). This stereotypical image includes many features such as the woman being isolated from family and friends, not working outside of the home, and never having attempted to end the abusive relationship. Some of the literature has suggested that when a woman who experienced intimate partner violence does not fit this stereotypical image she will not be seen as a 'legitimate' battered woman and consequently it is unlikely she will be viewed as a victim (Jenkins & Davidson, 1990; Mahoney, 1991; Russell & Melillo, 2006). Based upon previous research, it was hypothesized that the

victim who fit the stereotypical image of a battered woman would more likely be viewed as legitimate victim.

As expected, the victim who fit the stereotypical presentation of the battered woman was more likely to be viewed as being stereotypical. This indicates that the manipulation of the stereotypical presentation of the battered woman was salient. Interestingly, overall participants viewed the battered woman as stereotypical. This suggests that perhaps the stereotypical image of a battered woman may not be as influential as previously thought since despite the manipulation of the stereotypical presentation of the battered woman, overall, participants were still more likely to rate her as stereotypical. Also, it was previously hypothesized that the battered woman who fit the stereotypical image would be more likely to be seen as 'legitimate' battered women compared to women who don't fit the stereotypical image (Jenkins & Davidson, 1990; Mahoney, 1991; Russell & Melillo, 2006). Since the battered woman in the current study was viewed as stereotypical, perhaps the image of a stereotypical battered woman may no longer be influential. Alternatively, individuals may be broadening their understanding of who can experience domestic violence. In other words, it is possible individuals are becoming more accommodating to a greater variety in women's experiences with domestic violence.

The findings on the stereotype fit representation of the battered woman, showing that it has different effects based on the gender of the participant and effects if the participants view her as a stereotypical battered woman, also demonstrate that information presented in the media could persuade public perception of a case. Past research has demonstrated this effect on jury decision making (Hope, Memon, & McGeorge, 2004; Kovera, 2002; Ruva & McEvoy, 2008; Shaw & Skolnick, 2004). Corresponding to the current study, Shaw and Skolnick (2004) demonstrated in their research that participants who were untrained mock jurors were heavily

influenced by prejudicial pretrial publicity compared to trained mock jurors. The public could be considered untrained jurors and typically jurors receive no training before serving on a jury. As the stereotype fit manipulation was presented in a media format, this finding from the current study reinforces the idea that information presented in the media can be very influential on the perceptions individuals have of a court case. Also similar to the current study, Ruva and McEvoy (2008) found that exposure to pretrial publicity had significant impact on guilty verdicts. Specifically, participants exposed to positive pretrial publicity were less likely to render guilty ratings. Conversely, those exposed to negative pretrial publicity were more likely to render guilty ratings. In a similar vein, the current study also showed that the representation of the battered woman as stereotypical or non-stereotypical influenced various perceptions that participants had of her and her circumstances. This information presented in the media, including descriptions of individuals and the various perspectives on a story, can possibly affect jurors who may participate in a court case they see described in the news.

Previous research in the area of violence against women has demonstrated gender differences in perceptions of various events or circumstances (Clow et. al., 2013; Terrance et. al., 2014). This study hypothesized that there would be a significant main effect of gender, such that women would be more likely than men to view the battered woman in a favorable manner. Consistent with this hypothesis, women were more likely than men to view the battered woman as a stereotypical, believe she acted in self-defense, and rate her as being not-guilty. As the majority of domestic violence perpetrated against women is done by men (U.S. Department of Justice, 2005), reducing this gap between men and women's perspectives on domestic violence may be a helpful in reducing violence against women by possibly inducing men to feel more empathy for battered women.

There was also an interaction of gender and BWS condition such that men were influenced by the presence of battered woman syndrome. This finding suggests that when men were not presented with battered woman syndrome nomenclature they were more likely to rate the abusive husband as the perpetrator of a crime. This is an interesting finding as it would have been expected that men exposed to the BWS nomenclature should have been more likely to rate the abusive husband as the perpetrator of a crime. This is due to the idea that battered woman syndrome presents a woman who is more vulnerable (Schneider, 2000). Future research may wish to conduct a more in-depth study in order to fully understand the implications of this finding by explicitly examining men's views on intimate partner violence, their understanding of battered woman syndrome, and in particular their views on the man and woman involved in the violent relationship. There has been previous research regarding gay men's experience of domestic violence, women's domestic violence against men, and treatment for violent men (Bacchus et. al., 2017; Harway, 2012; Hines, 2010; Katz, 2015) and future research may benefit from expanding on this area of study by examining men's perception of intimate partner violence perpetrated against women by other men.

The stereotypical representation of the battered woman also proved to be particularly influential on men's views of the battered woman as a victim with results indicating an interaction between the stereotype fit of the battered woman and participant gender. The results indicated that men were more likely to view the battered woman as a victim when she was presented in a stereotypical manner. This finding indicates that men may be more sympathetic to a woman they view as vulnerable compared to a woman they may view as more self-sufficient. Results from this study also indicate that when the battered woman was presented as non-stereotypical, women were more likely to rate the abusive husband as the perpetrator of a crime.

Results from past research has shown that women are more empathetic compared to men and the gender difference can be attributed to motivation such that women can be motivated through introspection while men are motivated by rewards (Klein & Hodges, 2001; Toussaint & Webb 2005). Jones (2006) also found that participants were more likely to sympathize with the victim of intimate partner violence based on similarities between the victim and the participant. As such, women who participated in the current study may have been more motivated to sympathize and/or empathize with a woman they viewed as being similar to themselves compared to a woman they may have found to be dissimilar. In order to fully understand this finding future research should examine the similarities and difference between the women who participate in the study and their levels of empathy towards the stereotypical presentation of the battered woman and the non-stereotypical image of the battered woman.

The interaction of BWS nomenclature and stereotype fit was influential with the item that asked participants if the battered woman was the perpetrator of a crime. When the battered woman was presented as “suffering” from battered woman syndrome and presented as stereotypical, participants were less likely to rate her as being the perpetrator of a crime. This finding supports the idea that participants are less likely to view a battered woman as a perpetrator when she fits the mold of a stereotypical battered woman, helping her claim of self-defense. This implies that battered woman syndrome nomenclature may only be influential under certain circumstances where it fits with the stereotypical representation of the battered woman. This may translate into participants attributing less blame towards the battered woman for her actions. Future research may wish to address this through the use of scales relating specifically to blame attribution.

Results from the current study highlight the impact of gender differences on perspectives of battered women. It suggests that men may not be able to sympathize or understand the circumstances of women who experience intimate partner violence due to lack of experience. Through the current national discussion, the public is beginning to understand how widespread violence and harassment of women is in the United States and that the majority of women have experienced it during their lifetime. This could account for the gender difference evidenced in the current study. Due to women's experiences with domestic violence, accounting for 73% of domestic violence victims (U.S. Department of Justice, 2005), women may be able to empathize with a battered woman. While men, who are less likely to have experiences such violence and harassment, may be unable empathize with a battered woman.

Overall, participants viewed the battered woman as being mentally stable, acting in self-defense, and being not-guilty. Past research has indicated that battered women may be seen as having distorted thought processes therefore may be unable to act reasonably (a key component to the claim of self-defense) (Callahan, 1995; Dowd, 1994; Schneider, 1980, 1986; Terrance, Plumm & Kehn, 2014). It has also been discussed in the literature that women being able to present their actions as reasonable in the court of law can be in key in reducing their sentences and the rate of guilty verdicts (Callahan, 1995; Crocker, 1985; Dowd, 1994; Schneider, 1980, 1986) These results suggest that the public may be more willing to believe a battered woman's actions were taken in self-defense and more flexible in their interpretations of the facts they are presented with than those who have to sit on a jury. Past research on self-defense has suggested that if juries were able to interpret the facts from the perspective of the battered woman rather than the reasonable man standard more women would be acquitted of their crimes on the basis of

justifiable self-defense and the findings of this study support those hypotheses (Crocker; 1985; Dowd. 1994; Schneider, 1980).

## **Conclusion**

In recent years, various social movements have worked to create a public dialogue on taboo topics, including violence against women. These social movements tend to be somewhat specific in the issues they address, such as the #metoo movement speaking out against sexual assault. However, they still provide the opportunity to address other topics in the area of violence against women. Even with this increased social discussion in the media on the topic of violence against women there are still very few people who even have a basic understanding of the complexity of the circumstances a woman victimized by intimate partner violence faces.

Current social influences such as the #metoo movement, that began right before data collection, should be considered when examining the significance of stereotypes. Due to the broader conversation surrounding violence against women and the variety of women who have come forward with stories of violence, the stereotypes of women who experience violence may no longer be salient. The national conversation on greater social equality for women and women speaking up after they have been assaulted could potentially be influential on how individuals view women who have experienced violence. As part of the movement, that has created a public dialogue on the topic of violence against women, a variety of women from different social classes and with different experiences of violence and harassment have come forward to tell the public about their experiences. The stories that are presented to the public through the media on different women and their different stories may be changing how the public views violence against women. The public may be beginning to understand that anyone, any woman, can be the victim of violence. Future research may examine how social movements influence public

perception and attitudes towards violence against women by combining and analyzing the results from previous research and more current research on the topic of violence against women.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

While the current study contributes to the literature on battered women and has possible implications for the understanding of the influence of media, it is worth noting the methodological limitations and directions for future research. This study relied upon individuals registered on Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) and living in the United States. The ethnic heterogeneity of the sample was better than that found in a group of undergraduate students from a midwestern university (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011), but it is not as diverse as hoped with 78% participants reporting being White/Caucasian. Greater diversity in the participant sample may produce more varied results as past research has shown that participants are more likely to sympathize with a victim they view as being similar to themselves (Jones, 2006). The use of MTurk also limits the sample to those individuals who have consistent access to a computer and/or the internet. Using MTurk does have the advantage of gaining a geographically and developmentally diverse sample (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). This allows for better generalization of the finding to the United States.

The current study employed a written vignette to present the different conditions to participants. Previous research has argued that written vignettes are not reflective of real life situations (Denk, Benson, Fletcher, & Reigel, 1997; Kinicki, Hom, Trost, & Wade, 1995; Loman & Larkin, 1976; Parkinson & Manstead, 1997). For instance, Denk et. al. (1997) found that vignettes were too simplistic and unable to convey the complexity of end-of-life decisions that were examined in their study. Likewise, Parkinson and Manstead (1997) found that vignettes can be limited in the details provided. Despite these concerns, written vignettes allow for control



over information presented and the vignette used in the current study was modeled after an actual online report of a similar situation in order to make it as similar to a real online newspaper report as possible.

Parkinson and Manstead (1997) also argue that participants can stop reading the vignette or become overly involved in the information provided. As the study was conducted online, participants not reading the vignette is a possible limitation of this study. Participants were required to remain on the vignette webpage for one minute however in order to ensure the participants read the vignette or acknowledge the necessary information, future research may wish to extend the time participants are required to remain on the vignette webpage or perhaps present a video vignette. Loman and Larkin (1976) argue for video vignettes in order to allow participants to capture more of the ambiguities of everyday life. Kinicki et. al. (1995) also argue for the use of video vignettes as they believe written vignettes are less likely to have the information in them retained and remembered by participants. Future research may wish to use this type of approach to the presentation of the condition as video reports are also common in online new consumption.

Another limitation of this study may be that the manipulation of the battered woman syndrome nomenclature was not especially prominent. In one version of the vignette included a paragraph with the terminology “battered woman syndrome” along with a short description of what battered woman syndrome is in the field of psychology. The other version used the terminology “battered woman” in the same paragraph. It is possible that these two forms of terminology may not be sufficiently different enough for the battered woman syndrome nomenclature to be salient. Future research may wish to use terminology other than ‘battered woman’ for the BWS absent condition in order to make the manipulation more salient. This

could be done by using terminology such as “frequently attacked by her husband” there by completely eliminating the terminology of “battered woman.”

In the current study, the vignette was presented to participants with no images. In today’s society the number of individuals receiving their news through social media is increasing (Mitchell, Gottfried, Barthel, & Shearer, 2016). Through the use of social media individuals are often presented with an initial headline and in some cases an associated image. Future research may wish to explore the impact of visual images that are associated with the story. Research has shown that images can illicit strong emotional reactions and it may be of interest to see if different types of images of battered women illicit different perceptions of the battered woman and her circumstances (Rodgers, Kenix, and Thorson, 2007; Knobloch, Hastall, Zillman, & Callison, 2003). For instance, Knobloch, et. al. (2003) found that individuals are more likely to select stories with threatening images associated with them compared to stories that contained a more innocuous image while Rodgers et. al., (2007) found that women are more often portrayed as happy in news photos than any other emotion. Expanding on these findings in the context of battered women may be of interest to examine how media images may influence perceptions of battered women.

The current study did not describe ethnicity of the abusive husband nor the battered woman. Clow, Lant, and Cutler (2013) found that though individuals felt they could be impartial and fair jurors, their perceptions of a defendant’s culpability were influenced by the defendant’s ethnicity. As well, Jones (2006) reported that study participants were more likely to sympathize with a victim they viewed as being similar to themselves. Based on these findings, future research may wish to examine these effect in the context of a battered woman who assaulted or killed her abusive husband. The ethnicity of the battered woman and/or her husband may

influence not only the perceptions of guilt but also participants views of the battered woman as a victim.

Despite these limitations, results from this study suggest that overall, men and women have different perceptions of battered women who kill their abusers. It also demonstrated that the stereotype fit of the battered woman presented in the media can influence men. However, participants viewed the battered woman as being a stereotypical battered woman irrespective if she was presented as fitting the stereotypical image or not. Consequently, it is important to continue to examine how the stereotypical representation of a battered woman may be evolving through the continued national discussion around women and violence. Future research can provide insight into how the perspective of battered women may be changing to be more inclusive to different experiences of violence that women face and the social barriers they face to get assistance in leaving an abusive relationship.

## **APPENDICES**

## **Appendix A Informed Consent**

TITLE: Perceptions of the Media  
PROJECT DIRECTOR: Cheryl Terrance, Ph.D.  
PHONE #: 701-777-3921  
DEPARTMENT: Psychology

A person who is to participate in the research must give his or her informed consent to such participation. This consent must be based on an understanding of the nature and risks of the research. This document provides information that is important for this understanding. Research projects include only subjects who choose to take part. Please take your time in making your decision as to whether to participate. If you have questions at any time, please ask.

As part of the study, you will be asked to read a newspaper article that has been published in a local newspaper concerning the case of a battered woman who kill her abusive husband. The purpose of this research is to examine how people make judgments based on the information presented in newspaper articles.

Your participation in the study will last approximately 45-60 minutes. You may experience frustration that is often experienced when completing surveys. The scenario you are being asked to read and some of the questions you will be asked to answer may be of a sensitive nature, and you may therefore become upset as a result. However, such risks are not viewed as being in excess of “minimal risk.” If, however, you become upset by questions, you may stop at any time or choose not to answer a question.

You may not benefit personally from this study. However, we hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study because results will provide a better understanding on how people evaluate issues that may be presented in the media concerning relationship abuse.

You will not have any costs for being in this research study, but you will receive monetary compensation for your participation. The University of North Dakota and the research team are receiving no payments from other agencies, organizations, or companies to conduct this research study.

The records of this study will be kept private to the extent permitted by law. In any report about this study that might be published, you will not be identified. Study results will be presented in a summarized manner so that you cannot be identified. Your study record may be reviewed by government agencies and the University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board. The only other people who will have access to the data are the primary research investigator (Sonja Bauman), her faculty advisor (Dr. Cheryl Terrance), and student research investigators (all of whom have completed IRB training) conducting the study.

No identifying information about participants will be reported or kept. Confidentiality will be maintained by storing your responses in a password protected file. Your name is not being

collected. Data will be stored on a password protected computer in the Social Psychology Research Lab. Data will be stored for a minimum of three years, after which it will be deleted.

Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of North Dakota.

The primary researcher conducting this study is Sonja Bauman. If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the research please contact the research advisor, Dr. Cheryl Terrance at (701) 777-3921 during the day. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, or if you have any concerns or complaints about the research, you may contact the University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board at (701) 777-4279. Please call this number if you cannot reach research staff or you wish to talk with someone else.

If you click continue, this will indicate that this research study has been explained to you, that questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study.

## Appendix B The Vignette

\*underlined: non-stereotypical fit

\*Bold BWS nomenclature

# A Trapped Woman's Escape Through Violence

*By Nora Flewright  
St. Sault Tribune Staff Writer*

On a quiet night eight months ago, gun shots broke the tranquil silence of a suburban neighborhood. Jane Christensen had just shot her husband of 15 years, John Christensen, in what she described as self-defense.

Earlier that evening neighbors had heard them having a heated argument in the backyard though they do not know what the argument was about. Jane claimed that her husband then turned physically violent when they returned to the privacy of their home. She said he punched her in the stomach then grabbed her by the hair and slammed her head against the wall as he had done many times before.

Jane claims that she became disoriented and frightened as he continued to yell threats at her saying she had finally worn him down and he was done with her. She ran upstairs and hid in the closet. Her husband followed, pulling her from the closet, threatening her, and hitting her in the face. He handed her a loaded rifle and she remembers a shot going off through the window screen. She stated that he loaded the rifle, telling her that "she was going to get it, after everyone was asleep." "I knew if I didn't kill him, he would kill me" she said in her statement to the press.

The family's neighbors knew very little about the couple saying they kept to themselves most of the time, but they frequently saw the couple's two children

playing out in the yard. (They knew that Jane worked outside the home as a receptionist at a local dental office and had once taken the children to her parents for about six months as the neighbors described the couple were going through a small rough patch. They say the couple reconciled and Jane returned with the children. vs. They say Jane was a stay at home mom and was devoted to her family. Neighbors also said that the couple showed no signs of having a turbulent relationship and Jane had never appeared to be unhappy, with the exception of the argument on the night of the shooting.)

Jane claims that she (is a battered woman **vs. suffers from battered woman syndrome, which is a theory based on the work of Dr. Lenore Walker. This theory is used to describe the psychological reality of a woman who has experienced escalating cycles of violence in an intimate relationship.**), enduring years of abuse at the hands of her deceased husband. She says it all began about a year and half after they were first married. What started as a slap turned into frequent beatings whenever he became displeased with her or stressed about his work as an accountant.

According to statistics, as many as 93 percent of women serving time for killing an intimate partner were abused by that partner, according to a California state prison study. Seventy-five percent of women in New York prisons have been the victim of abuse as an adult, and data from the New York State Department of Corrections and

Community Supervision shows that 67 percent of women jailed in 2005 for killing someone close to them were abused by their victims. And while men can also be the victims of domestic violence, four out of five victims are women. These are not small numbers: A third of U.S. women have experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner, and one in four has been the victim of severe physical violence by an intimate partner, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

(Jane was in frequent contact with family and friends however, when they were asked about the abuse they said the couple sometime showed signs of having a strained relationship but never any violence. vs. When asked about the couple, many said

they had not spoken to them in years and if there was contact it was mostly through John, though he was always very friendly and cordial.)

Jane has entered a plea of not-guilty by reason of self-defense. Her case will appear in court two months from now. She said she hopes that the public will understand her perspective and why she forced to use lethal violence against her husband. "I loved him with all my heart. But, he hurt me physically and emotionally with frequent beatings and threats made against me and my children. I am thankful he never laid a finger on them but I know in time he would. I am an ordinary woman, who fell in love with a troubled man and saw no way out of his world.



## Appendix C Demographics

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Please identify your gender.

- a) Male
- b) Female
- c) Other
- d) Prefer not to respond

What is your ethnicity?

- a) American Indian/ Alaska Native
- b) Asian or Pacific Islander
- c) Black or African American
- d) Caribbean Islander
- e) White or Caucasian
- f) Mexican or Mexican American
- g) Multi-ethnic
- h) Other Latina or Latin American
- i) Other Race

What is your highest level of school completed?

- a) Less than high school
- b) High school
- c) Some college/ Associate's Degree
- d) Bachelor's Degree
- e) Master's Degree
- f) Doctoral Degree

Politically you are:

- a) Strongly conservative
- b) More conservative than liberal
- c) Middles of the spectrum
- d) More liberal than conservative
- e) Strongly liberal
- f) Hold no political views

What political party do you identify with?

- a) Democrat
- b) Republican
- c) Independent
- d) Other

## Appendix D Attentional Check

Please click on the blue triangle at the bottom of the screen. Do not click on the scale items that are labeled from 1 to 9.

1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9

Very Rarely

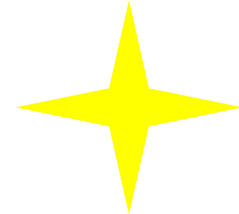
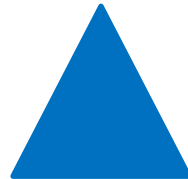
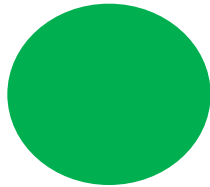
Very Frequently

Please click on the blue triangle at the bottom of the screen. Do not click on the scale items that are labeled from 1 to 9.

1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9

Very Rarely

Very Frequently









**Appendix H**  
**Private Belief of Guilt**

With this questionnaire, you are being asked to circle the one number that best describes your belief that Jane Christianson should or should not be convicted for killing her husband.

Please circle one number that best describes your belief about whether Jane Christianson should or should not be convicted. You are not being asked to state whether there is sufficient evidence for a conviction in a court of law. Rather, you are asked to make a determination based on your personal and private beliefs.

-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
Innocent										Guilty

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