

Gender Differences in Perceptions of Personal Growth After Dating Violence

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INTRODUCTION

Intimate partner violence (IPV) victimization is associated with a variety of negative correlates, such as psychological distress, posttraumatic stress disorder, and symptoms of anxiety and depression (Lagdon et al., 2014). A more limited body of research (e.g., Valdez & Lilly, 2015; Žukauskienė et al., 2019) suggests that IPV victimization also has the potential to yield positive outcomes such as posttraumatic growth (PTG).

Research on attitudes toward IPV (Erickson et al., 2017; Hammock et al., 2015; Sylaska & Walters, 2014) suggests that respondent gender and gender dyad characteristics (i.e., female victim and male perpetrator; male victim and female perpetrator) may influence its perception. For example, Hammock et al. (2015) found that female respondents tend to view IPV as being more harmful than do male respondents. Further, Erickson et al. (2017) found that partner abuse perpetrated by men against women tends to be perceived as more serious than partner abuse perpetrated by women against men.

THE CURRENT STUDY

Very little is known about attitudes toward posttraumatic growth for survivors of IPV. The current study investigated undergraduate perceptions of the possible impact of IPV, including posttraumatic growth and posttraumatic depreciation. Specifically, differences in attitudes related to the respondent's gender and the gender dyad in a fictional scenario were explored in the current study.

METHOD

- **N = 182** undergraduate students. Respondents were predominantly:
 - Women (68%)
 - Between 18 and 21 years old (94%)
 - White/Caucasian (65%)
- **Materials:**
 - **Demographic form:** gender, age, ethnicity
 - **Scenarios:** Each respondent read one of two author-constructed scenarios depicting partner violence. The scenarios varied by cross-gender dyad (i.e., female victim with a male perpetrator; male victim with a female perpetrator). In both scenarios, the victim has been physically and psychologically abused by their partner.
 - **Questionnaire:** After reading a scenario, each respondent answered a 32-item author-constructed survey. The questionnaire evaluated the respondents' perceptions of potential positive and negative effects of intimate partner violence. The survey was comprised of a combination of subscales (α values ranging from .68 to .87) and individual items.
- **Procedure:**
 - Respondents read the informed consent and agreed to participate in this online study.
 - Each respondent read a scenario depicting intimate partner violence. The scenarios were randomly and evenly distributed.
 - They each responded to a questionnaire about their perceptions of the scenario.

RESULTS

- Analyses were conducted using a series of 2 (respondent gender) x 2 (cross-gender dyad: female victim with a male perpetrator; male victim with a female perpetrator) ANOVAs. Follow-up simple effects analyses were conducted for statistically significant interactions.
- Main effects for respondent gender (see Table 1)
 - Women were more likely than men to indicate that IPV victims would not see the potential for their lives to change and would doubt themselves after the end of an abusive relationship.
- Main effects for gender dyad (see Table 2)
 - Compared to when the victim in the scenario was a man and the perpetrator was a woman, respondents were more likely to indicate that the victim would not think that their lives could improve after the abuse when the victim was a woman and the perpetrator was a man.
- Significant interactions (see Table 3)
 - Analyses initially revealed six statistically significant interactions, but after simple effects planned analyses were conducted, statistically significant differences emerged on only three of these items.
 - Items for which no significant differences emerged included items related to whether the victim would:
 - value his or her own life less
 - feel less capable of coping with negative experiences in the future
 - experience posttraumatic growth in terms of seeing new possibilities
 - A statistically significant difference did emerge for perceptions of the prevalence of positive changes experienced after a traumatic event. Specifically, the gender dyad had a statistically significant effect for men ($p < .05$), but not for women ($p = .25$).
 - A statistically significant difference also emerged for perceptions of the likelihood that the victim will doubt his or herself. Again, the gender dyad had a statistically significant effect for men ($p < .05$), but not for women ($p = .64$).
 - A statistically significant difference also emerged for perceptions of the likelihood that the victim will no longer see the chance for his or her life to improve. The gender dyad had a statistically significant effect for men ($p < .05$), but not for women ($p = .98$).
 - Specifically, men indicated that, compared to female victims with male perpetrators, male victims with female perpetrators would experience more positive changes, be less likely to doubt themselves, and be less likely to think that there was no chance of life improving after experiencing IPV.

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DISCUSSION

This study explored perceptions of the possible impact of intimate partner violence, including posttraumatic growth and posttraumatic depreciation. Results suggest that women tended to be more aware of the potential impacts of IPV than were men. Women, for example, were more likely to indicate that victims may find it difficult to see how their lives may improve and that victims may doubt themselves after experiencing abuse.

The significant interactions suggest that, compared to women, men's perceptions were more likely to be influenced by the gender dyad in the scenario. Specifically, men did not view the effects of abuse against male victims by female perpetrators as seriously as they did abuse against female victims by male perpetrators. Women, however, did not make these distinctions. These findings are consistent with previous research (e.g., Erickson et al., 2017; Hammock et al., 2015) that suggest that respondent gender and gender dyad characteristics may impact perceptions of IPV.

It is noteworthy that most of the statistically significant findings from this study were on items relating to posttraumatic depreciation (e.g., doubting oneself after abusive experiences). This could suggest that, compared to posttraumatic growth, respondent gender and the gender dyad may play larger roles in the perception of the negative impact of traumatic experiences.

The current study is not without limitations. For example, the sample is comprised of undergraduate students, which may limit the generalizability of these findings to the general population. Future researchers interested in this area may choose to include a more diverse sample, compare perceptions of different types of partner abuse (e.g., sexual abuse, physical abuse, psychological abuse), or compare perceptions of partner abuse among a wider variety of gender dyads (e.g., same-sex dyads).

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Table 1

Variable	Main Effects of Respondent Gender		F(1,178) ^a	Cohen's d
	Male Respondents	Female Respondents		
	M (SD)	M (SD)		
Relating to others- Growth	6.90 (2.13)	7.08 (2.19)	0.27	-0.08
New possibilities- Growth	10.98 (2.79)	11.12(2.85)	0.13	-0.05
Personal strength- Growth	9.49 (2.58)	9.82 (2.88)	0.64	-0.12
Spiritual change- Growth	9.54 (2.61)	9.70 (2.32)	0.23	-0.06
Spiritual change- Depreciation	8.76 (2.34)	8.89 (2.27)	0.09	0.06
Appreciation of life- Growth	10.95 (2.90)	11.67 (2.95)	2.52	-0.25
Positive changes	47.36 (17.99)	46.05 (18.41)	0.14	0.07
Negative changes	57.78 (18.04)	59.50 (17.74)	0.33	-0.10
Perceived harmfulness	3.09 (0.86)	3.34 (1.03)	2.79	-0.27
Values other people more	3.25 (1.35)	3.50 (1.25)	1.60	-0.19
Thinks life will never change	3.03 (1.16)	3.41 (1.17)	4.20*	-0.33
Struggles to trust others	4.58 (0.72)	4.76 (0.53)	3.63	-0.30
Doubts self	4.27 (0.83)	4.62 (0.70)	8.37**	-0.45
Harder to find meaning	3.73 (0.89)	3.85 (0.93)	0.69	-0.14
Less able to deal with stress	3.25 (1.06)	3.37 (1.18)	0.40	-0.11
Less likely to ask others for help	3.53 (1.15)	3.54 (1.17)	0.00	-0.01
Less confident about what is important	3.47 (1.18)	3.63 (1.13)	0.71	-0.14
No longer sees chance for life to improve	2.44 (1.15)	2.55 (1.15)	0.27	-0.10
Less able to cope	2.92 (1.18)	3.07 (1.27)	0.50	-0.12
Does not feel as close to others	3.29 (1.18)	3.46 (1.24)	0.76	-0.14
Values own life less	2.98 (1.18)	3.23 (1.25)	1.47	-0.20
Harder time seeking out new opportunities	3.31 (1.05)	3.54 (1.09)	1.75	-0.22

Notes. N = 180 - 182.
^aFor items "Positive changes" and "Perceived harmfulness", $df = 1,176$. For item "Negative changes", $df = 1,177$.
^{*} $p < .05$. ^{**} $p < .01$.

Table 2

Variable	Main Effects of Gender Dyad		F(1,178) ^a	Cohen's d
	Female Victim/ Male Perpetrator	Male Victim/ Female Perpetrator		
	M (SD)	M (SD)		
Relating to others- Growth	7.18 (2.13)	6.87 (2.21)	0.35	0.14
New possibilities- Growth	11.13 (2.77)	11.02 (2.89)	0.23	0.04
Personal strength- Growth	9.58 (2.91)	9.85 (2.66)	1.11	-0.09
Spiritual change- Growth	9.57 (2.33)	9.73 (2.49)	1.23	-0.06
Spiritual change- Depreciation	8.98 (2.34)	8.73 (2.24)	1.49	0.11
Appreciation of life- Growth	11.49 (2.66)	11.37 (3.22)	0.16	0.04
Positive changes	46.06 (18.29)	46.90 (18.27)	1.27	-0.05
Negative changes	59.99 (16.96)	57.90 (18.65)	0.67	0.12
Perceived harmfulness	3.28 (0.98)	3.24 (0.99)	0.07	0.03
Values other people more	3.36 (1.30)	3.48 (1.27)	0.68	-0.09
Thinks life will never change	3.23 (1.26)	3.35 (1.10)	0.06	-0.10
Struggles to trust others	4.76 (0.50)	4.65 (0.69)	2.99	0.18
Doubts self	4.56 (0.72)	4.45 (0.79)	2.57	0.14
Harder to find meaning	3.85 (0.93)	3.78 (0.90)	0.26	0.07
Less able to deal with stress	3.33 (1.14)	3.34 (1.15)	0.10	-0.01
Less likely to ask others for help	3.60 (1.15)	3.46 (1.17)	1.16	0.12
Less confident about what is important	3.62 (1.16)	3.55 (1.14)	0.37	0.06
No longer sees chance for life to improve	2.64 (1.11)	2.40 (1.17)	4.12*	0.21
Less able to cope	3.02 (1.23)	3.01 (1.26)	0.61	0.01
Does not feel as close to others	3.37 (1.18)	3.44 (1.27)	0.07	-0.05
Values own life less	3.14 (1.21)	3.15 (1.26)	0.50	-0.01
Harder time seeking out new opportunities	3.47 (1.03)	3.45 (1.14)	0.18	0.02

Notes. N = 180 - 182.
^aFor items "Positive changes" and "Perceived harmfulness", $df = 1,176$. For item "Negative changes", $df = 1,177$.
^{*} $p < .05$. ^{**} $p < .01$.

Table 3

Variable	Interactions Between Respondent Gender and Gender Dyad				Overall F(1,178) ^a		
	Male Respondents		Female Respondents				
	Female Victim/ Male Perpetrator	Male Victim/ Female Perpetrator	Female Victim/ Male Perpetrator	Male Victim/ Female Perpetrator			
Relating to others- Growth	6.86 (2.12)	6.94 (2.17)	-0.04	7.32 (2.13)	6.83 (2.25)	0.22	0.66
New possibilities- Growth	10.39 (2.85)	11.52 (2.68)	-0.41	11.46 (2.70)	10.77 (2.98)	0.24	4.15*
Personal strength- Growth	8.96 (2.71)	9.97 (2.40)	-0.39	9.86 (2.97)	9.78 (2.80)	0.03	1.49
Spiritual change- Growth	8.93 (2.57)	10.10 (2.56)	-0.46	9.86 (2.18)	9.53 (2.46)	0.14	3.85
Spiritual change- Depreciation	9.29 (2.46)	8.29 (2.15)	0.43	8.84 (2.29)	8.95 (2.27)	-0.05	2.32
Appreciation of life- Growth	10.43 (2.63)	11.42 (3.09)	-0.35	11.97 (2.55)	11.55 (3.31)	0.21	3.02
Positive changes	41.96 (14.98)	52.23 (19.30)	-0.60	47.90 (19.43)	44.10 (17.21)	0.21	6.00*
Negative changes	59.43 (16.34)	56.29 (19.59)	0.17	60.24 (17.36)	58.73 (18.25)	-0.08	0.08
Perceived harmfulness	2.96 (0.84)	3.20 (0.89)	-0.27	3.42 (1.02)	3.27 (1.04)	0.15	1.55
Values other people more	3.11 (1.31)	3.39 (1.38)	-0.21	3.48 (1.29)	3.53 (1.21)	-0.05	0.30
Thinks life will never change	3.14 (1.24)	2.94 (1.09)	0.18	3.27 (1.27)	3.57 (1.05)	-0.25	1.86
Struggles to trust others	4.75 (0.44)	4.42 (0.89)	0.47	4.76 (0.53)	4.77 (0.53)	-0.01	3.16
Doubts self	4.50 (0.58)	4.06 (0.96)	0.55	4.59 (0.78)	4.65 (0.61)	-0.09	4.59*
Harder to find meaning	3.79 (0.88)	3.68 (0.91)	0.12	3.87 (0.96)	3.83 (0.91)	0.04	0.06
Less able to deal with stress	3.39 (1.03)	3.13 (1.09)	0.25	3.30 (1.19)	3.45 (1.17)	-0.13	1.30
Less likely to ask others for help	3.71 (1.08)	3.35 (1.20)	0.31	3.56 (1.19)	3.52 (1.16)	0.03	0.75
Less confident about what is important	3.61 (1.17)	3.35 (1.20)	0.20	3.62 (1.17)	3.65 (1.10)	-0.03	0.60
No longer sees chance for life to improve	2.82 (1.06)	2.10 (1.14)	0.66	2.56 (1.13)	2.35 (1.17)	0.01	4.00*
Less able to cope	3.21 (1.17)	2.65 (1.14)	0.49	2.94 (1.26)	3.20 (1.29)	-0.21	4.53*
Does not feel as close to others	3.50 (0.92)	3.10 (1.15)	0.35	3.32 (1.28)	3.62 (1.19)	-0.24	3.32
Values own life less	3.29 (1.08)	2.71 (1.22)	0.50	3.08 (1.26)	3.38 (1.22)	-0.24	5.22*
Harder time seeking out new opportunities	3.43 (0.88)	3.19 (1.19)	0.22	3.49 (1.09)	3.58 (1.09)	-0.08	0.91

Notes. N = 180 - 182.
^aFor items "Positive changes" and "Perceived harmfulness", $df = 1,176$. For item "Negative changes", $df = 1,177$.
^{*} $p < .05$. ^{**} $p < .01$.