

Intimate Partner Violence from the Viewpoint of the Abuser

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A thesis presented to the Honors College of Middle Tennessee State  
University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation  
from the University Honors College

Fall 2024

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## Abstract

Domestic violence is a social issue that affects one in four women and one in seven men over the age of eighteen. While extensive research has been done on the effects of domestic violence on victims, there has been little research on the perpetrators of domestic violence. Being able to recognize domestic violence and support those who have been victims of domestic violence is incredibly important but is not the extent of the issue. There is also importance in recognizing why perpetrators of domestic violence engage in violent acts. Current research on domestic violence perpetrators from legal systems or therapeutic samples is constrained by the ability to obtain accurate accounts of their actions that are filtered through these systems. One of the main constraints within research is the lack of anonymity for those who share their side of the story. The intent of this research is to analyze the viewpoints of perpetrators of domestic violence using an anonymous forum. This allows these perpetrators to share their uncensored stories.

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## Key Words

Domestic Violence- Violent or aggressive behavior within the home, typically involving the violent abuse of a spouse or partner.

Perpetrator- A person who carries out an act of domestic violence.

Abuser- Synonymous with perpetrator. A person who carries out an act of domestic violence.

Victim- A person harmed, injured, or killed because of domestic violence.

## Introduction

Domestic violence has been present throughout history, with the first historical records of domestic violence available from early Roman society. In Roman law, a man was allowed to “beat, divorce, or murder his wife for offenses committed by her, which besmirched his honor or threatened his property rights” (Davis 2). Here, women were seen as property of their husbands and were therefore subject to their control. This view towards domestic violence and its prevalence in society has continued throughout the course of history. Today, domestic violence is defined as a major criminal and social problem by many countries. Currently, “1 in 4 women aged 18 or older in the US have been the victim of severe physical violence by a partner in their lifetime.” (National Domestic Violence Hotline) While there is plenty of research regarding how domestic violence affects victims, there is less research regarding why domestic violence perpetrators commit their actions. I will attempt to analyze 50 Reddit posts of intimate partner violence perpetrators and add insight on the phenomenon of intimate partner violence with my research.

### **Section 1: Defining Domestic Violence**

Domestic violence is defined as “violent or aggressive behavior within the home, typically involving the violent abuse of a spouse or partner” (Oxford English Dictionary). While this definition has traditionally focused on spouses, the definition today is much broader and includes anyone within the same home, or someone with whom a person has had children. Today, the term used by many sociologists to describe violence against a spouse is intimate partner violence. Even so, many people still use domestic violence and intimate partner violence interchangeably. In cases of domestic violence there is always

an abuser and a victim. An abuser can also have more than one victim. There is also the idea of mutual violence, which is a term used to describe partners who are mutually abusive toward one another. There are four forms of domestic violence and domestic abuse is not always physical abuse. The first form of abuse is physical abuse, which is the most recognized form. Physical abuse may include behaviors such as “hitting, slapping, kicking, burning, strangulation, damaging personal property, refusing medical care/controlling medication, coercing partner into substance abuse, or use of weapons” (Women Against Abuse). A second form of abuse is emotional abuse, where an intimate partner seeks to control their loved one. This form of abuse may include behaviors such as “name calling, blaming the partner for everything, extreme jealousy, intimidation, shaming, isolation, controlling what the partner does/where the partner goes, and stalking” (Women Against Abuse). The third form of abuse is sexual abuse, which is based around a power dynamic and includes any sexual behavior performed without consent of the partner. This can include behavior such as “forcing a partner to have sex with other people (human trafficking), pursuing sexual activity when the partner is not conscious or is afraid to say no, hurting partner physically during sex, and coercing partner to have sex without protection/sabotaging birth control.” (Women Against Abuse) The fourth form of abuse is financial abuse, which allows the abuser to maintain power and control over finances. This can include behaviors such as “inflicting harm or injury that would prevent the partner from attending work, harassing the partner at their workplace, controlling financial assets, putting partner on an allowance, or damaging a partner’s credit score.” (Women Against Abuse) All forms of abuse leave the victim (partner) feeling as though they are not able to leave the relationship with their abuser.

Over time, the form of abuse that was used to control the partner at the beginning of the relationship could evolve to include multiple or all forms of abuse.

## **Section 2: Perpetrator and Victim**

There are many different types of perpetrators when it comes to domestic violence, and more specifically when it comes to intimate partner violence. The difference between the two is that intimate partner violence is “...abuse or aggression that occurs in a romantic relationship. ‘Intimate partner’ refers to both current and former spouses and dating partners.” (CDC) This type of domestic violence can include one or all of the types of violence mentioned above. While domestic violence can occur between family members or other acquaintances, intimate partner violence is reserved for violence based on the male perpetrator/female victim model.

There are different indicators of what may cause someone to be violent toward their partner or of what might cause someone to be more prone to experiencing domestic violence. Some indicators of what might cause someone to become a perpetrator of domestic violence include, “violent role models, extrinsic stressors/recent losses, access to partner and weapons, and ambiguous community sanctions against violence.” (Begun 2) While these are not all the things that may cause someone to become a perpetrator of domestic violence, they are good indicators that someone may be more likely to commit an act of domestic violence. When it comes to victims, there are also indicators of what can lead someone to be more likely to become a victim. These include things such as “extrinsic sources of dependency, partner access, salient victim role models, and the cultural context of violence.” (Begun 2)

There are also different typologies of perpetrators that allow for their actions to be categorized (Begun 3). While these are ideal types intended to account for the actions of the perpetrators, they allow for distinction between styles of intimate partner violence seen in relationships. One example is the tyrannical and exploder styles of perpetrators.

1. The tyrannical offender: Uses aggression, intimidation, verbal abuse, and physical assault to frighten, intimidate, or punish their partner. This offender feels justified due to frustration or anger. Has a tendency to minimize violence by admitting verbal abuse and shifting blame. Likely to describe a partner as being submissive.
2. The exploder offender: Experiences violence as being out of control, sudden, and explosive, typically in response to criticism or challenge. Uses violence to silence a partner. Acknowledges violence but blames the partner for provoking them.

In contrast to these typologies of perpetrators (typically men), common couple violence is a form of intimate partner violence that refers to the dynamic between two people within a relationship. Common couple violence is characterized by the fact that the violence is committed by men and women within the relationship mutually. This violence occurs as part of an argument and doesn't escalate or lead to serious injury. (Logan 3) Many instances of common couple violence are caused by alcohol or drug use. This differs from other types of intimate partner violence due to the fact that both parties are participating in the violence, and there is generally no escalation of this violence.

## Thesis Statement

While there is much research regarding domestic violence as well as the effect that domestic violence has on victims, there is a lack of research regarding the relationship and feelings that perpetrators have toward domestic violence and their victims. This thesis will examine thoughts on domestic violence from the perpetrator's viewpoint and how these viewpoints differ or are similar. This will include how these accounts of domestic violence are similar or different, descriptions of the violence, whether the perpetrator minimized or neutralized their role in the violence, and whether the violence was previous or current.

## Literature Review

Literature regarding domestic violence has largely focused on the viewpoint of the victim and the effects that domestic violence has on their lives. Researching domestic violence from the perpetrator's perspective is not to excuse the behavior of perpetrators of domestic violence, but rather to attempt to explain why they committed these acts and how to stop them in the future. Since research on domestic violence victims has been done extensively with no reprieve for the victims themselves, it is time to shift the focus on the other side of the issue, the perpetrator.

## **Domestic Violence**

Domestic violence is an issue that has failed to be thoroughly and correctly addressed across the board, especially in relation to the legal ramifications that domestic violence can have (or in most cases do not have). Really what is domestic violence and why is it so important to study what causes it? *Domestic Violence* by Sally Parsloe delves deeper into the issue of domestic violence and why this violence has continued to go unpunished for the majority of perpetrators. She writes:

Despite the stream of bruised, abused women passing daily before the courts, the law has failed to address itself in more than a piecemeal fashion to the issue of protection of women from men in their own homes. A process which could and should be fast, efficient and informal is bogged down from the beginning to end with unnecessary difficulties.” (Parsloe 1)

Parsloe makes the argument that the issue of domestic violence extends further than an issue within the home or sanctity of marriage. The issue of domestic violence transcends all boundaries and is secondarily supported by the governments in which these issues are happening. This allows for domestic violence to continue to happen due to lack of protection for those who are victims. Parsloe finds that the same issues that rape victims face regarding their right to be protected are felt by those affected by domestic violence. Many of these women and men leave feeling as though they only have themselves to blame because of the actions of their partner.

Blaming the victim is an issue that affects many of those who have been in a domestic violence situation. Diverting the blame allows not only the legal system, but the perpetrator of the violence to allow their act to go unpunished. Victim blaming furthers the emotional turmoil of those who have been victims of domestic violence, making them believe that they deserved what happened to them, and increases their fear around leaving the abusive situation. The issues with victim blaming do not stop with the victim of a

specific domestic violence incident. Victim blaming within instances of domestic violence makes every current or future victim feel as though they did something wrong, or that their story should not be heard. This shifts blame away from the perpetrator.

### **Violence of Men and Women**

Perpetrators of domestic violence rarely speak out about what they have done, especially if their social reputation is at stake because of their actions. When a perpetrator of domestic violence is arrested and convicted for their crimes, it gives researchers the opportunity to study what goes on in the mind of these perpetrators. *Naming and Defining 'Domestic Violence': Lessons from Research with Violent Men* by Liz Kelly and Nicole Westmarland allows for conclusions to be drawn about the acts of domestic violence perpetrators through interviews with those who have been convicted of crimes related to domestic violence. There was no argument about the justifications of perpetrators of domestic violence made in the beginning of this article. Instead, this research solely relied on the words of the perpetrators themselves to lead them to a conclusion.

There were a range of different excuses and justifications for perpetrator's acts of domestic violence used. The most consistent of these was:

...referring to a single incident; indeed, many used the term 'the incident' or 'the episode', which always has as its referent a specific event that had come to the attention of the police/and or precipitated a separation (sometimes temporary) with their partner. This was in turn linked to an invocation of 'hitting' or 'beating' as constituting 'real violence', which served as a distinction through which they placed themselves outside the category of violent men. (Kelly and Westmarland 3)

By placing themselves outside the category of violent men, these perpetrators invalidated the experiences of the women that they abused. These men used the idea that

their violence was a one time “incident” in order to mitigate the extremity of what they had done to their partner.

The severity of the acts that these men committed against their partners still rings true regardless of their explanations and justifications for the act. It is crucial to remember that the perpetrator in these domestic violence situations is nearly always trying to make excuses in order to justify what they have done. Even after they have been convicted of the crime of domestic violence, perpetrators will continue to justify their actions to save their reputation or convince the victim that what happened to them was not serious. This furthers the severity of the issue of domestic violence. Without real answers from these perpetrators, there are great legal and social ramifications, largely stemming from the fact that the actual causes of domestic violence have not been identified using these perpetrator’s accounts. The idea that domestic violence only happens during one specific incident for the majority of perpetrators is utterly false. Unfortunately, these perpetrators continue to uphold that they were not a long-term abuser. For some perpetrators, this is true, but for many being a perpetrator of domestic violence was a part of their entire relationship. It was only when they were caught that these perpetrators of domestic violence started trying to justify their actions. Up to that point in the relationship, it is likely that there was a long history of abuse in the form of physical, emotional, financial, or verbal violence. While it is true that some people simply “snap”, this is more often the case in crimes such as homicide. Domestic violence is very rarely a one-time occurrence, but instead a history of occurrences that were covered up by the perpetrator until they couldn’t anymore, their victim spoke out, or their victim got seriously injured.

## **Seeking Treatment**

The sociological reasons behind domestic violence perpetrators hiding their actions are clear. Within the United States especially, domestic violence goes against societal norms that have been in place for decades. At one time, forms of domestic violence were approved by society and seen as a way for husbands to show their dominance over their wives. Today, societal expectations within marriages have changed in order to protect the victims from types of abuse that are now known to be incredibly harmful to psychological and mental health.

Research into the effects of these types of abuse is widespread, allowing for those in situations involving domestic violence to be more aware that their partner is abusing them. *The Abusive Male Seeking Treatment: Jekyll and Hyde* by J.L. Bernard and M.L. Bernard discusses the psychological states of men seeking treatment in the form of counseling techniques. Bernard and Bernard find that “A positive social facade frequently conceals disturbing personality characteristics.” (Bernard and Bernard 3) This research goes on to discuss effective counseling techniques for these men, some of which include supportive social groups for these men to discuss their actions and how they felt about them. The issue with this type of research on domestic violence perpetrators is that these men volunteered to be part of these groups. Joining these groups and owning up to the acts of violence they committed gave them a way to keep up with societal expectations on how they would act. In many ways, these men were praised for seeking help in the form of counseling. To many these men are seen as heroes paving the way for other known abusers to right their wrongs

## **What Are We Missing?**

In nearly all forms of research on domestic violence perpetrators there is some other societal factor that is causing these men and women to speak out about what they have done. Whether this be legal liability or social expectations, these abusers are not sharing their story for researchers to better understand what caused them to commit acts of domestic violence. These men and women are sharing their story in order to shape the narrative regarding their abuse for legal authorities. They are taking the story away from their victim and putting themselves in what society sees as a vulnerable position. By doing this, these abusers are constructing a narrative that is objectively false in relation to what caused them to commit these violent acts, and what might cause someone to commit an act of domestic violence in the future. Though controversial, perpetrators of domestic violence need an outlet for their real story to be heard. Prior research has not shown domestic violence from a completely unobstructed perspective of the abuser.

### **Why Reddit?**

Reddit is a social media platform that allows users to share content, discuss topics, and ask questions in an anonymous forum. Reddit has been used in recent years in a range of disciplines. *Studying Reddit: A Systematic Overview of Disciplines, Approaches, Methods, and Ethics* by Proferes, Jones, Gilbert, Fiesler, and Zimmer 2021 discusses a systematic analysis of manuscripts. These 727 manuscripts written between 2010 and 2020 used Reddit as a data source. This overview detailed the increasing growth of Reddit as a data source, as well as an increasing range of disciplines using Reddit to access data for their research. Reddit has been used in the Sociology discipline in recent years in order to analyze intimate partner violence related topics. In *Characteristics of Intimate Partner Violence and Survivor's Needs During the COVID-19*

*Pandemic: Insights From Subreddits Related to Intimate Partner Violence* by Kim et al. 2023, a quantitative content analysis was done using Reddit in order to analyze the effects of intimate partner violence seen during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research focused on the increasing rates of intimate partner violence during the pandemic, and used Reddit in order to calculate the frequency of self reported intimate partner violence from the victim.

### Methods

To complete this research, I analyzed posts from the online forum Reddit. Reddit is a website where individuals can share various forms of content including text, photos, and videos. Recent statistics from Alexa, owned by Amazon.com, indicate that Reddit is the sixth most popular site in the United States, ranking just behind Google, Youtube, Facebook, Amazon, and Wikipedia (Alexa Internet, as cited in Tatch 4). This forum allows people to anonymously post their responses to questions asked by the public. This anonymity provides a sense of privacy for the poster to discuss subjects, such as domestic violence perpetration, they may not have otherwise. While there may be certain limitations to Reddit as a forum, this research requires accounts from those who have committed acts of abuse themselves, which is an incredibly hard population to reach. While court records could be seen as an option, in many cases perpetrators of intimate partner violence never go through the court system. Arrests also do not necessarily stop abuse. Because of this, a large majority of abusers have never been involved in the criminal justice system. For these reasons, Reddit is a useful way to research a population that is otherwise hard to reach.

I searched Reddit forums (termed sub-reddits) online using keywords such as domestic violence, perpetrators, and abusers. After doing this, I screened each post returned with these keywords to decide if the post fits the criteria for my analysis. The criteria for a Reddit post to be included in my analysis was: 1. The Reddit post stated that they were perpetrators of domestic violence or 2. The Reddit post had comments made by a perpetrator in an abusive situation where they shared their story and their feelings regarding their actions. After choosing the Reddit posts using the criteria outlined here, I analyzed the posts. These posts came from various sub-reddits that focused on issues such as domestic violence and abuse. The majority of the posts came from the sub-reddits r/DecidingToBeBetter, r/AskReddit, and r/abusiverelationships. Sub-reddits intended for victims of intimate partner violence had posted policies barring perpetrators (including mutual violence perpetration) from participating in that specific forum.

I analyzed 50 posts, as well as the comments made in response to these posts to understand the feelings that perpetrators of domestic violence have toward their actions. These 50 posts equated to 16 pages of text, or 9,573 words in total. The Reddit posts varied in length from a few sentences to multiple pages of information. To organize the data collected from Reddit, I made a Google sheet. Within this sheet I have each of the Reddit posts and include the comments on the Reddit post that fit the criteria for my analysis. After this I manually scanned each line of the Reddit posts looking for common words used throughout the posts. I also looked for common themes in each of the posts. Each of the Reddit posts was scanned line by line manually multiple times to ensure that nothing was missed in the analysis. After the initial reading of the posts, I separated the posts into assigned categories and subcategories to find where there are differences and

similarities between the posts. The categories and subcategories were not decided until after each of the Reddit posts was analyzed multiple times and common words or themes were found. After this, I analyzed the categories and subcategories and added how many of the Reddit posts had words or themes that fit into one or more of the categories and subcategories. Using this information, I separated the categories and subcategories by frequency. This allowed me to determine the feelings that perpetrators of domestic violence have towards their actions and identify exemplary quotes that demonstrated the themes.

## Results

After analyzing 50 posts from the social forum, Reddit, similarities emerged between viewpoints of perpetrators of domestic violence. The first categories I observed and described below include the types of abuse, the relationship roles, and reasons given by perpetrators. Additional themes included the current relationship status, feelings toward their actions, and change.

### **Types of Abuse**

After careful analysis of posts, I divided the admissions of guilt and stories from perpetrators based on the type of abuse that they committed. These stories fit into one or more of these categories of abuse as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Types of Abuse Observed in Reddit Posts (n = 50)	
<u>Type of Abuse</u>	<u>Number of Posts</u>
Physical Abuse	11 posts

Mental Abuse	3 posts
Verbal Abuse	9 posts
Emotional Abuse	12 posts
Financial Abuse	1 post
Not Mentioned	14 posts

Some Reddit posts mentioned multiple types of abuse, while others did not mention the specific type of abuse within the post. It is clear that the most common types of abuse that were admitted from these abusers were physical, verbal, and emotional abuse. An example of the mentions of different forms of abuse are the following posts:

*“Female here and I used to.. like.. whack my first bf in the chest when I was mad.. Very wrongfully so (he was the sweetest guy). I dated someone after who I hit at one point and he smacked me back.. Hard. I was pissed but I've never done it again. I have no idea what possessed me to act like that. I guess immaturity and a lack of communication skills.. I don't know. I feel awful when I think about it even though I prob never actually hurt him. I'm sorry Danny.”*

*“Other kinds of abuse: the mental abuse was the worst. I cheated repeatedly for fear she was cheating on me.”*

*“I'm verbally abusive and emotionally abusive. I say really awful things to my husband. I say terrible, terrible things.”*

## Relationship Roles

The next category that I divided the posts into was relationship roles. While not every post detailed what the relationship was, many of them at least referenced their role in the relationship within the post. The relationship roles detailed within the posts are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Relationship Roles Observed in Reddit Posts (n = 50)	
<b><u>Relationship Roles</u></b>	<b><u>Number of Posts</u></b>
Husband	17 posts

Wife	8 posts
Boyfriend	8 posts
Girlfriend	6 posts
Not Mentioned	11 posts

Among the 39 posts that detailed the relationship role, the majority of the posts were written by husbands. These husbands were recounting and detailing the abuse against their spouse, whether this be a husband or a wife. It cannot be assumed that the husbands writing these posts were in heterosexual relationships, so the focus must be on the fact that most of these posts were written by men. In total, 25 of the 39 posts that admitted and recounted abusive behavior were written by men, while 14 of the 39 posts were written by women. An example of the mention of relationship roles is within the following post:

*“I overreacted once and slapped my (then) boyfriend In public. I would cry to get my way. I threatened to cut myself during an argument, and actually did. There's probably other things, but seeing the massive amount of blood and the large scar that's still there today made me realize how inexcusable and disgusting my behavior was. Coming up with any excuse takes away me owning up to it. I was awful to him. He broke up with me, and started dating another girl. I was heartbroken, but none of it compares to how he must've felt with me. I grew up. Went to therapy. Really looked at myself in the mirror and saw nothing but ugliness. This was years ago. I wish I could apologize to him, but staying out of his life is probably best. He was an amazing and beautiful person. I, unfortunately, was not.”*

*“I was in a relationship that resulted in marriage in my early twenties. We were together for four years, married for three.”*

While both men and women can be perpetrators of domestic violence, more men than women shared their stories and admitted their abuse.

## **Reasons for Domestic Violence**

The final main category I divided the posts into were the reasons the perpetrator (writer of the post) committed an act of domestic violence. In other words, the “why?”. While not every post gave an explanation for the abuse, 18 of them did. The “why?” within the posts are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Reasons for Abuse Observed in Reddit Posts (n = 50)	
<u>Reasons for Abuse</u>	<u>Number of Posts</u>
Toxic Relationship	6 posts
Drugs/Alcohol	4 posts
Generational Abuse	4 posts
“Blacked Out”	3 posts
No Reason	1 post
Mutual Abuse	3 posts
Not Mentioned	29 posts

The reasons that the perpetrators of domestic violence used when writing these posts varied greatly among the posts. Even so, most of these perpetrators used reasonings of toxic relationships, drugs/alcohol, and generational abuse to explain why they committed acts of domestic violence. For this, a toxic relationship is seen as an unhealthy relationship that is not good for the person’s wellbeing. An example of posts containing explanations are the following:

*“My wife was trying to climb out of a 2nd story bathroom window to escape me. I was sitting in the hallway, watching and laughing at her. Out of nowhere, I 'saw' the fear in her eyes. It was precisely the way my mother used to look at my asshole stepfather. I realized I was becoming him.*

*“But all of a sudden I lost control of my emotions. It's like a light switched and I started to grow more and more distressed.”*

*“Many aspects relating to the environment at the time (particularly drugs) and how our relationship started contributed to how I ended up like that, but there are large unknowns for me that I to this day do not understand.”*

Certain perpetrators also used the reasoning of blacking out, or “snapping” to explain their behavior, but these explanations were limited in comparison to other reasons for their behavior.

### **Themes: Relationship Status**

After dividing the Reddit posts into main categories based on type of abuse, relationship role, and reasonings given for the abuse, I divided the posts into further themes. The first of these themes focuses on relationship status. For this theme, relationship status is defined as whether or not the relationship has ended or is still going. Out of the 50 posts, 33 were referring to a relationship that had ended, 10 were referring to a current relationship, and 7 did not specify whether the relationship has ended or is still going on. An example of a post that resembled a current relationship is below.

*“Yes, my current relationship, a marriage which is in very bad shape right now. I'm currently separated from my wife. I'm hopeful for a reconciliation. My wife is not divorcing me, and we're getting counseling from my pastor. But it's definitely bleak right now. The forms of abuse I subjected my wife to are pretty much everything other than physical. Emotional, mental, verbal, financial”*

In contrast, the majority of the posts were former relationships. For example:

*“I was in a relationship with a woman for over 2 years.”*

*“I dated a girl from 2008-2011 that I met as a Junior in high school.”*

### **Feelings Toward Their Actions**

Another significant theme I found when dividing the posts was the idea that these perpetrators of domestic violence felt bad about their actions, and their post served a confessional purpose. Within the 50 posts, 14 of them used the phrase “never again” at some point during their confessional.

*“The day after a night of violence, I'd swear up and down that it would never happen again”*

Of the other posts, many of them explained that they were sorry for their actions. While this was not always a blatant “I’m sorry” phrasing within the post, there was an apology or reference to feeling remorseful for their actions of some kind.

*“What I did though was a terrible thing and should not be forgiven so easily. I still hold the regret of what I did to her and I think she does too.”*

Although much of the literature regarding perpetrators of domestic violence includes victim blaming, this was not a prominent theme within the posts where perpetrators described their feelings toward their actions.

## **Change**

A final major theme within the posts that I found was the idea that something made these people change. While they were at one-point abusers, many of them are not anymore. Within the 50 posts, 15 of them mentioned using therapy in order to change their behavior.

*“Went to therapy. Really looked at myself in the mirror and saw nothing but ugliness.”*

*“I'm working in therapy now to get to that stage. I want women to be protected from people like I was”*

Sobriety was also another agent of change focused on within the posts, with 4 posts containing some mention of stopping use of drugs, stopping use of alcohol, or simply “getting sober”.

*“And that was the night I got sober.”*

None of the posts mentioned the perpetrator being arrested for domestic violence.

### Discussion

This research was done in order to draw conclusions on the perpetrators of domestic violence and how they felt toward their actions. By examining thoughts on domestic violence from the perpetrator's viewpoint and how these viewpoints differed or were similar, I was able to come to a few conclusions regarding perpetrators of domestic violence who post on Reddit.

The major findings within this research regarded how the perpetrators of domestic violence felt toward the violence and their relationship with the victim. The first of these was the types of abuse that these perpetrators admitted to within their posts. Most of these perpetrators admitted to physical, verbal, or emotional abuse while, on the other hand, the mental and financial types of abuse had the least amount perpetrators who admitted to this specific type of abuse. While lack of mental and financial abuse could be the reasoning for the lack of admission of guilt, this could also be due to the fact that these types of abuse have the least amount of education. In *Coerced Debt: The Role of Consumer Credit in Domestic Violence* by Angela Littwin, Littwin discusses how “As consumer spending has permeated American life, violent partners have begun using debt as a means of exercising abusive control, making the consumer credit system an

unknowing partner to domestic violence.” This coerced debt as a form of domestic violence is considered financial abuse and is something that has not come to light until the introduction of the consumer credit system. Because of the recent changes regarding types of domestic violence and what it entails, many people are unaware of what is considered financial or mental abuse. In comparison, physical and verbal abuse are two of the main types of abuse that are discussed within the media as well as research regarding domestic violence. Consumer credit as a form of domestic violence also shows how forms of domestic violence are always changing with society. Because of this, it is important for researchers and policymakers to be aware of new forms of domestic violence as society evolves.

The next major finding was the fact that the relationship roles discussed in relation to domestic violence mainly detailed that the posts were written by husbands. This finding is consistent with much of the research on domestic violence which examines males as perpetrators. *The Abusive Male Seeking Treatment: Jekyll and Hyde* by Bernard and Bernard is an excellent example of the lack of research done on female perpetrators, with only males being included within this study. Female domestic violence perpetrators are not studied or discussed nearly as much and are less likely to share their stories of abuse against their partner. While the majority of the Reddit posts involved one-sided violence from the perpetrator, some of the posts did include mentions of mutual violence among the couple. The lack of mutual violence as a trend within these Reddit posts emphasizes the controversy surrounding mutual violence within couples. The National Domestic Violence Hotline even states within their website that mutual violence is not real, adding that:

“Abuse is about an imbalance of power and control. In an unhealthy or abusive relationship, there may be unhealthy behaviors from both/all partners in response to the abuse, but in an abusive relationship, one person tends to have more control than the other.” (National Domestic Violence Hotline)

The controversy and talk surrounding mutual violence and the validity of it contributes to the fact that mutual violence was not seen often within the analysis of posts. But there is still work to be done regarding mutual violence and how this can affect relationships and policies regarding domestic violence.

Another main finding within the research was the idea that these perpetrators had a reasoning behind what they did and these reasonings were similar among accounts of domestic violence. Many different reasons for their actions were given within the accounts from perpetrators. The vast majority of the reasonings included some type of mental or physical implication that caused them to act the way that they did. This included things such as a bad relationship, generational abuse, or drug/alcohol problems. *People's Accounts Count: The Sociology of Accounts* by Terri Orbuch mentions the use of accounts in order to maintain social order within the social actor's life. Orbuch states that

The current work on accounts focuses on ‘story like’ interpretations or explanations and their functions and consequences to a social actor's life. The concept is useful for gaining insight into the human experience and arriving at meanings or culturally embedded normative explanations. (Orbuch 1)

These accounts are social explanations of events that these perpetrators use in order to get back into the good graces of society and allow them to make excuses of sorts regarding their behavior.

When someone commits an act of domestic violence, they are not always quick to admit that they are sorry for what happened. The idea that these perpetrators felt sorry

for their actions without law enforcement involvement or mandatory counseling is also significant within the research. Of course, these perpetrators would be sorry if they were being forced to undergo some sort of punishment for their actions, but within the anonymity of the research they are not. The idea that nearly all of the perpetrators of domestic violence are sorry for what they did shows that these men and women feel genuine remorse for their actions.

Though the idea of perpetrators of domestic violence showing remorse for the acts they have committed is not completely new, it is new given the fact that these perpetrators did not have any outside reason for saying that they felt remorse within their admissions. Because of the complete anonymity of these posts, there was no reason for these perpetrators to lie about their feelings toward their actions and situation. In comparison, perpetrators who are put through the criminal justice system have a reason to state that they are sorry for their actions and will not commit acts of domestic violence again. In *Apologies and Plea Bargaining* by Etienne and Robbennolt, they state that:

“When a wrongdoer apologizes for his or her conduct, the offense and the intention that produced it are less likely to be perceived as corresponding to some underlying trait of the offender. Accordingly, apologies and expressions of remorse influence beliefs about the general character of the wrongdoer and the entrenchment of the wrongful behavior-wrongdoers who apologize are viewed as being of better character and as being less likely to engage in similar behavior in the future.”

This shows how stating that they are sorry for their behavior, even if not true, can benefit perpetrators that are involved within the criminal justice system and even lead to them getting a more lenient sentence for their crimes. Conversely, the perpetrators within the research do not have a legal system to try to convince of their remorse.

There was another significant finding when it came to change within these perpetrators and their lifestyles. While not all of them mentioned therapy as an outcome for facing their actions as a perpetrator, many of them did. While mandatory therapy is sometimes used by law enforcement in cases of domestic violence, those perpetrators have no choice in the matter. The perpetrators whose accounts were used in the research chose to go to therapy to better themselves as people and stop committing acts of domestic violence of their own accord. The idea that these perpetrators are seeking out therapy shows that they believe therapy is one of the best ways for them to think about their tendencies and move on from them. In seeing this, mandatory therapy as a result of a domestic violence conviction is a good step in stopping the continuation of domestic violence acts from perpetrators.

Some of these perpetrators also mentioned sobriety as their agent of change. This can be interpreted in the same way as the use of therapy as an agent of change. In *The "Drunk Bum" Theory of Wife Beating* by Kantor and Straus, they state that "Our findings show that excessive drinking is associated with higher wife abuse rates." Though alcohol abuse is only one form of anti-sobriety, this shows how lack of sobriety can contribute to rates of domestic violence. The perpetrators who mention sobriety as their agent of change are some of the select few who realize that there is something wrong with them and not their victim, and they are getting help for these issues. In addition to mandatory therapy, mandatory sobriety or sobriety meetings could be used as a new step when it comes to law enforcement and their requirements when someone is convicted of an act of domestic violence.

Relationship status is also a key finding. Most of the posts were about domestic

violence perpetrated in former relationships. This is an important finding for the literature because one goal for domestic violence programs is for the victim/survivor to end/leave the abusive relationship. This is easier said than done. However, less research on domestic violence has included perspectives from perpetrators after relationships end and if/how they change to maintain healthier future intimate relationships.

The difference in these men and women sharing their stories in this way is the fact that they did so anonymously. This allowed them to be completely open and honest within their admissions. Since law enforcement involvement and mandatory counseling is one of the main pillars regarding research on perpetrator viewpoints up to this point, this new type of anonymous research showed different feedback and levels of guilt from the perpetrators. My conclusions after this new anonymous research being conducted is that these accounts focus on physical violence in previous relationships; primarily by men, but many women post as well; clear themes in perpetrator narratives included “never again,” apologies for their actions and indications of change.

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