

Running Head: PERSPECTIVE TAKING AND EMPATHY CHANGE

The Effects of Perspective Taking on Changing Levels of Empathy Toward Domestic Abuse  
Against Men in Heterosexual Relationships.

Carey LeClair

Algoma University College

(PSYC 4105)

030593680

April 05, 2007

The Effects of Perspective Taking on Changing Levels of Empathy Toward Domestic Abuse  
Against Men in Heterosexual Relationships.

Various types of domestic abuse (e.g., verbal, physical, psychological, sexual) are associated with significant physical and mental health consequences for both male and female victims. Domestic abuse against women has been in the public eye for many years and much consideration has gone towards helping women; however, some men sometimes find themselves in an abusive situation and in need of help. Therefore it is appropriate to provide services for men as well. The public's attitudes, beliefs, and values regarding domestic abuse against men are not well researched. There are few questionnaires pertaining to attitudes on the frequency of domestic abuse against men and little research on gender roles of men, the abused man's ability to take care of himself, and the need for shelters for men. It is possible that men are not seen as victims, and stereotypical perceptions prevent victims from seeking help. If this is true, then changing this perspective may be an important step in increasing the drastically low report rate of domestic abuse of men, which in turn could increase concern.

Some researchers have attempted to determine prevalence rates of domestic abuse against men (e.g., Harwell & Spence, 2000; Mills, Mills, Taliaferro, Zimble, & Smith, 2003; Roberts, O'Toole, Raphael, Lawrence, & Ashby, 1996); however, it is difficult to obtain accurate prevalence rates because researchers use the method of self-reports to obtain their data. The true number of instances of domestic abuse against men is unknown. This is because men often do not report it for various reasons such as the individual's social background, what the individual perceives as the possible costs and/or benefits of telling the truth, and outright denial (Heckert & Gondolf, 2000). Reluctance to report may also be related to the public's stereotypical expectations of men to be strong and independent. As a result, domestic abuse against men may

be seen as less common than domestic abuse against women. If this is the case, there is a need for public awareness that men can be victims of domestic abuse as well. This lack of awareness may have caused a lack of empathy and understanding toward men in need. Perspective taking is a common method in increasing feelings of empathy, resulting in more positive attitudes toward different individuals and groups.

Perspective taking has been shown to be an effective way of changing attitudes. It is capable of resolving various interpersonal conflicts among people of different groups. Perspective taking is the active consideration of another individual's point of view and the situation that the individual faces. This creates feelings of empathy and distress, and increases motivation to help the individual and the group the individual represents (Batson et al., 1997; Pettigrew, 1997). Those individuals who are encouraged to take the perspective of someone else's experience later report more favourable attitudes toward that person than those who did not take the person's perspective (Vescio, Sechrist, & Paolucci, 2003). Without deliberate perspective taking, it has been shown that reading or hearing about someone's story will produce a degree of overlap between the feelings of one's self and another individual. However with deliberate perspective taking, this overlap increases (Davis, Conklin, Smith, & Luce, 1996). Perspective taking produces more favourable attitudes toward the person whose perspective is being taken. The observer explains the target's behaviour in a way that they would explain their own behaviour. This causes the observer to feel similar emotions to those of the target person (Davis et al., 1996). The effects of perspective taking have been observed toward many different targets such as various out-groups.

Individuals in society often create false perceptions about common out-groups.

Individuals from an in-group (the group an individual belongs to) often view the opposing group

(the out-group) as being less good than the group that individual belongs to. This creates bias, resulting in more favourable attitudes toward the in-group and less favourable attitudes toward the out-group.

Lack of empathy and understanding of various out-groups may explain the persistence of preconceived attitudes. Perspective taking inspires affective cognitive mechanisms (e.g., empathy and arousal) that take precedence over the cognitive barriers prohibiting favourable attitudes (e.g., toward an out-group). Therefore, it provides a direct path to more positive attitudes and these attitudes extend to the out-group that the individual belongs to (Batson et al., 1997; Pettigrew, 1997). It is clear that perspective taking produces feelings (i.e., empathy and arousal) necessary to change preconceived attitudes in certain situations. Studies exploring the function of perspective taking and its effects in various situations are discussed below.

Research has provided consistent evidence that perspective taking promotes empathy arousal and improves intergroup attitudes. For example, Vescio et al. (2003) examined 1) whether perspective taking promotes improved inter-group attitudes toward African Americans even when stereotypes are strongly endorsed, and 2) whether situational attributions contribute to the relation between perspective taking and inter-group attitudes. Perspective taking affected inter-group attitudes (including the endorsement of pro-black attitudes), increased empathy and arousal, and increased the use of situational factors (rather than dispositional ones) to explain the experiences of the African American target (i.e., reduced blaming the target for his experiences).

Perspective taking has also been used in studies attempting to change stereotyped views of other groups, including the elderly and drug addicts. Galinsky and Moskowitz (2000) examined perspective taking and judgements of the elderly. Compared to the control groups, participants who were instructed to take the perspective of an elderly gentleman showed greater

overlap of the representations of the self and of the elderly. A different approach was taken by Batson, Chang, Orr and Rowland (2002). They examined whether the positive attitudes created by perspective taking would translate into action on behalf of the target group of drug addicts. When asked to allocate Student Senate funds to an agency to help drug addicts, participants in the perspective taking condition allocated more funds to the agency and reported more positive attitudes toward other hard-drug addicts than did the control group.

Past studies of perspective taking (e.g., Vescio et al., 2003; Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000; Batson et al., 2002) have examined and succeeded in changing stereotypes of racial groups, the elderly, and drug addicts. Individuals develop more favourable attitudes toward others compared to those who do not take perspective of that individual. It would be interesting to see whether the perspective-taking method could work in other situations that are marked by a lack of knowledge of the situation among the general public. Male victims of abuse are seen as belonging to an out-group because they are not usually seen as domestic abuse victims. This in turn creates a false stereotype of who the victims are of domestic abuse. I proposed to apply perspective taking to the situation of domestic abuse against men to see whether perspective taking could increase feelings of empathy towards male victims, and whether these feelings would result in changing the stereotype of domestic abuse victims.

## Method

### *Participants*

For the purposes of this study, participants had to be 50 years of age or older. First year psychology students from Algoma University College volunteered to get one person in the required age range to complete the study. Male and female parents, grandparents, or friends of first year psychology students from Algoma University College, and residents at the Ontario

Finnish Resthome participated in this study. The students received course credit for participation of any family member or friend.

### *Materials and Apparatus*

A Domestic Abuse Survey was created by the experimenter to assess participants' basic attitudes of domestic abuse (e.g., who the victims are of domestic abuse, whether an individual would end the relationship if a partner were to hit them). The statements for the survey were taken from a report on myths and facts about domestic abuse (Moles, K., 2001). This was the pre-treatment measure which was used to get an understanding of participants' levels of empathy for male victims of abuse prior to any treatment. Prior to the experiment, the questionnaire was given to ten people to test its effectiveness. The questionnaire consisted of four sections: the first section consisted of demographic information questions; the second section consisted of 19 statements; the third section consisted of 3 multiple-choice questions; the final section consisted of one open-ended question.

Scoring for the statements was on a scale from 0-4 and depended on whether the answer to the statement was true or false. If a statement were true, then 'strongly agree' was assigned a value of 4 and 'strongly disagree' was assigned a value of 0. If a statement were false, then 'strongly agree' was assigned a value of 0 and 'strongly disagree' was assigned a value of 4. Every option away from the correct answer decreased by a score of 1. Therefore, if the statement were true, participants' scoring would look as follows:

Strongly Agree (4)    Agree (3)    Unsure (2)    Disagree (1)    Strongly Disagree (0)

If the statement were false, participants' scoring would look as follows:

Strongly Agree (0)    Agree (1)    Unsure (2)    Disagree (3)    Strongly Disagree (4)

The closer the participants got to the correct answer on the posttest, the more their scores increased compared to their scores on the pre-treatment measure. The scores obtained on the survey represented the participant's level of empathy for male victims of abuse (e.g., a high score represented a high level of empathy; a low score represented a low level of empathy). Possible scores ranged from 0 to 36. Answers for the multiple-choice questions had one correct answer. If a participant got the answer wrong, that person received a score of 0. If a participant got the answer right, that person received a score of 1. The open-ended question was for insight only. It did not directly relate to domestic abuse attitudes and levels of empathy for male victims, therefore it was not scored.

### *Procedure*

Prior to the commencement of the study, a consent form was given to all participants informing them that the study would be entirely confidential and anonymous. It also stated that the study might cause emotional discomfort to those sensitive to domestic abuse issues and that anyone may drop out of the study at any time.

This study is a 1x3 design; participants were randomly assigned to the three conditions; *perspective taking*, *no perspective taking*, and *unrelated scenario*.

A number of precautions were taken to ensure participants knew their answers would be anonymous. Envelopes were given to participants containing the Domestic Abuse Survey and two copies of their identification code on a business card. Upon completion of the questionnaire, participants were asked to re-place the survey in the envelope to be submitted to the researcher. The researcher instructed and ensured that participants kept one copy of the business card labelled with their assigned identification code for the following week's session. Participants were instructed to put the second copy in a second envelope provided for them, to seal it, and

to write their name on it. This was for purposes of identification in case the participant loses the copy. The envelope containing the survey and the second envelope containing the identification code were submitted to the researcher separately.

The following week, new envelopes containing the scenarios for each condition were randomly handed out to participants. The *perspective taking* group and the *no perspective taking* group were given scenarios describing male victims' experiences of domestic abuse from the victims' point of view, which were taken from an overview of husband abuse by *The National Clearinghouse on Family Violence* (1999). The *unrelated scenario* group was given scenarios of people with obsessive-compulsive disorder and asthma from the persons' points of view, which were taken from the website for the *Better Health Channel*.

Instructions were included at the beginning of the scenario page determining the condition of perspective taking each participant was in. Instructions for all participants included 'Please read the following scenarios'. However, instructions for those in the *perspective taking* group also included:

'If you are a male, try to picture yourself in any of these situations. If you are a female, try to picture your father, brother, male cousin, or male friend in any of these situations. Once you have read the scenarios, please take a couple of minutes to reflect on them'.

Participants had as much time as needed to read the scenarios.

Participants were then given the second Domestic Abuse Survey and were also asked to write their identification code at the top of the survey in the space provided. Participants were instructed to complete the survey. After completing the final survey, they were asked to fill out a manipulation check asking whether and to what extent they identified with the victims.



They were then instructed that upon completion of the survey and manipulation check, to put the survey, scenario page and manipulation check into the envelope and return it to the researcher. Upon submission, participants were returned the envelope containing their identification code with their name written on it.

### *Results*

Of the 58 respondents, 57% were women ( $n = 33$ ) and 43% were men ( $n = 25$ ). The mean age of women and men was 55 years, the majority were Caucasian, had been or are married, and had received post-high school education.

The mean scores on the Domestic Abuse Survey between the pretest and posttest for participants in all three perspective taking groups remained roughly the same; meaning levels of empathy did not change (see Table 1. and Figure 1.). There was also no difference between males and females on the pre-treatment measure and posttest. There was more variation in females at posttest than in males; however the means were not different (see Table 2. and Figure 2.). The manipulation check showed that only 50% of males and females actually identified with or imagined a close male family member in the victims' positions.

An ANOVA was conducted and the perspective taking manipulation did not result in a significant difference ( $F(2,52) = 2.904, p = .064$ ). There was no difference between males and females in changing levels of empathy ( $F(1,52) = .005, p = .945$ ). An interaction was not found between the perspective taking manipulation and gender ( $F(2, 52) = .876, p = .422$ ). There were also no differences between the three perspective taking groups by a Student-Newman-Keuls analysis ( $p = .093$ ).

Table 1.

*Average Empathy Scores Across All Three Perspective Taking Conditions at Pre-treatment and Posttest*

Condition	<i>n</i>	DV – Pre-treatment	DV - Posttest
Perspective Taking	23	26.87	26.34
No Perspective Taking	18	27.06	29.00
Unrelated Scenario	17	27.77	28.53

Figure 1.

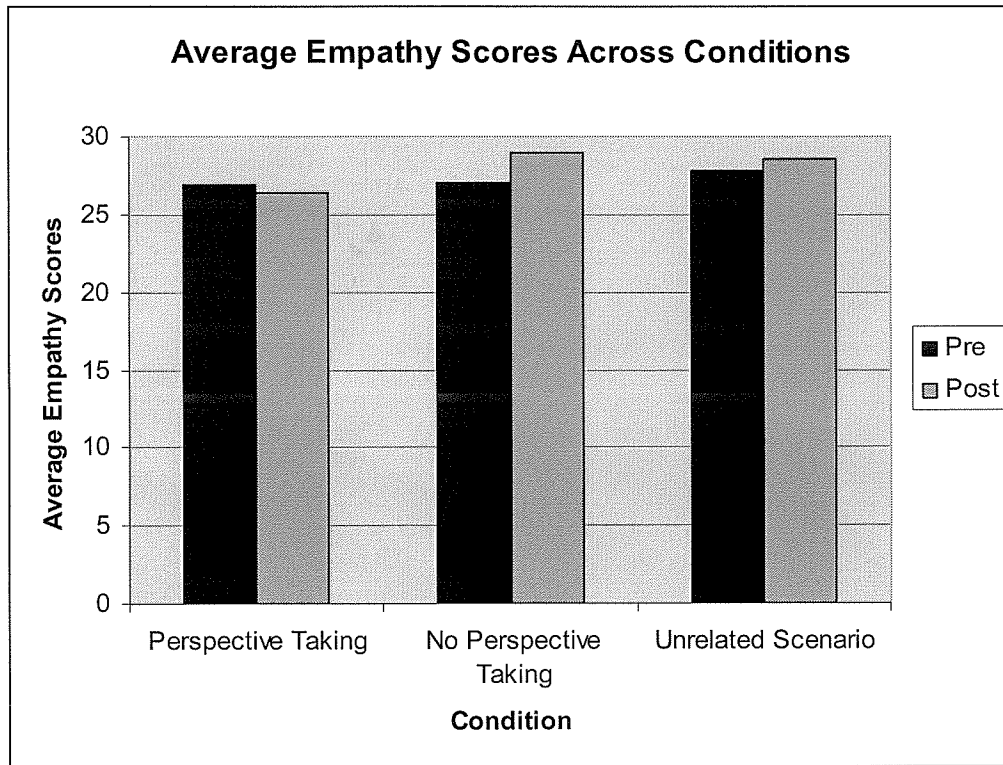
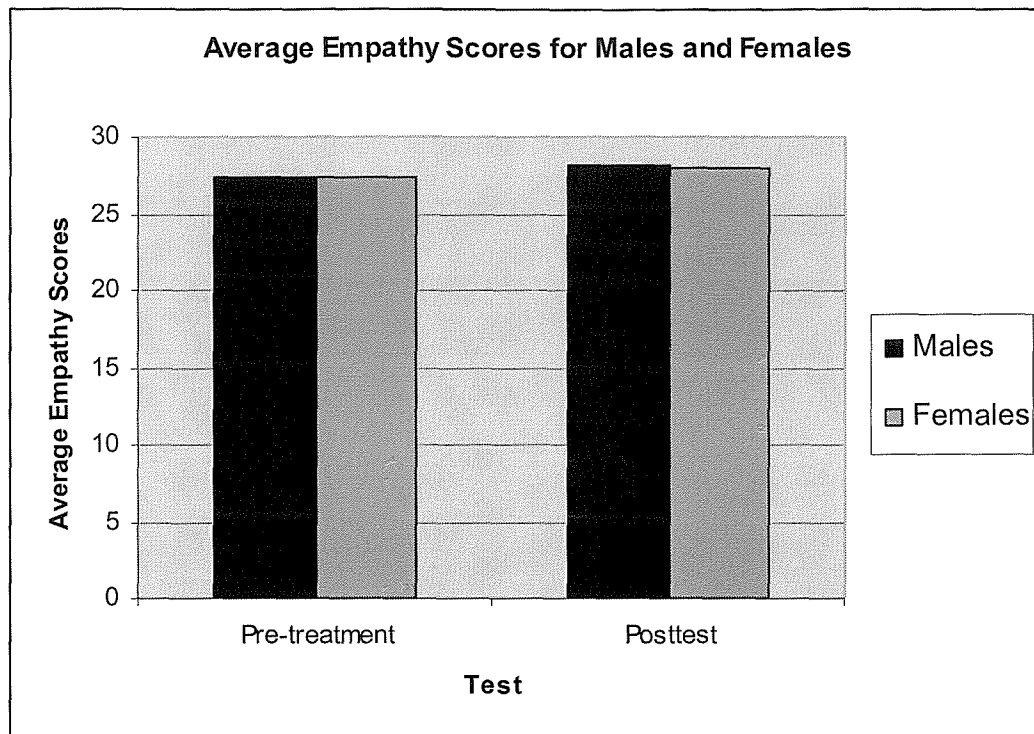


Table 2.

*Average Empathy Scores for Males and Females*

Gender	<i>n</i>	DV – Pre-treatment	DV - Posttest
Male	25	27.44	28.23
Female	33	27.38	27.93

Figure 2.



### *Discussion*

The objective of this study was to determine the effects of perspective taking on changing levels of empathy for male victims of domestic abuse. The perspective taking manipulation did not work as hypothesized. In the population studied, there were high levels of empathy for male victims of domestic abuse to begin with. A ceiling effect in the results showed this; both male and female participants scored quite high on the initial Domestic Abuse Survey, meaning they had quite high levels of empathy. Therefore, a perspective taking manipulation may not have been needed for the topic of male victims of domestic abuse. Other possible limitations of this study and implications of these findings are discussed below.

As mentioned, adults 50 years of age or older were needed. Originally, students from Algoma University College were going to participate. However, after some preliminary tests it

was found that the students were knowledgeable about domestic abuse issues; there were no differences in levels of empathy for male and female victims of domestic abuse. This could be that the younger generation is more open and informed about societal issues. It was indicative, since the younger population was not appropriate, that an older population may be more suitable. After some preliminary tests, it was found that the older population had differences in levels of empathy for male and female victims of domestic abuse. Due to the difficulties in obtaining participants in the required age range, students from Algoma University College were asked to take the study home to someone they knew who is 50 years old or older.

Since participants completed the study on their own and in their home, this study was not systematically controlled. Participants were not supervised and the researcher was not present while participants completed the survey and read the scenarios. It is possible that participants did not pay close attention to the survey, scenarios, or instructions. Had participants completed the survey and read the scenarios in a controlled environment, ensuring no noise and no discussion, results may have been different. Participants may have paid closer attention to the study, resulting in more identification with the victims in the scenarios, and more changes in levels of empathy.

As previously mentioned, only 50% of participants in the *perspective taking* group actually took perspective of the male victims. Therefore, it is also possible that the scenarios themselves may not have been sensitive enough, meaning the scenarios may not have elicited feelings of empathy and arousal. However, this effect could have also been due to an uncontrolled environment. Another possible reason for the findings is the fact that the survey had to be created and has never been used before. The questions may not have been measuring what they intended to. Had the survey been tested, improved, and proved to be reliable and valid, the

measure of levels of empathy for male victims of domestic abuse may have been more accurate. There is also the probability that measuring participants' attitudes on domestic abuse is not a successful way of measuring empathy. Therefore, a more accurate measure of empathy is needed, such as one that measures empathy for male victims directly rather than through general attitudes of domestic abuse.

Further research could attempt to replicate this study using a larger population in a controlled environment. More time could be taken to test the Domestic Abuse Survey and scenarios of male victims of abuse to improve them and make them more effective. Although it is quite possible that society does not lack empathy for male victims of abuse, further study is needed to get a better idea of empathy levels in society for male victims of abuse. Domestic abuse is a serious issue that needs to be addressed fairly. Domestic abuse against men does not receive as much attention as does domestic abuse against women, and there are not as many services and shelters for abused men as there are for women. Therefore, there is a need to study this area further.

References

- Baron, R.A., Byrne, D. (2004). Interpersonal Attraction. In J. Jordan and K. Perkins. *Social Psychology: Tenth Edition* (pp. 283-285). Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Batson, C.D., Polycarpou, M.P., Harmon-Jones, E., Imhoff, H.J., Mitchener, E.C., Bednar, L.L., Klein, T.R., & Highberger, L. (1997). Empathy and attitudes: Can feeling for a member of a stigmatized group improve feelings toward the group? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 72, 105-118.
- Batson, C.D., Chang, J., Orr, R., & Rowland, J. (2002). Empathy, attitudes, and action: Can feeling for a member of a stigmatized group motivate one to help the group? *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 28, 1656-1666.
- Better Health Channel: Healthier Living Online. (n.a.)(n.d.) Retrieved February 23, 2007, from <http://www.betterhealthchannel.com.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pspages/>
- Davis, M.H., Conklin, L., Smith, A., & Luce, C. (1996). Effect of perspective taking on the cognitive representation of persons: a merging of self and other. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 70, 713-726.
- Galinsky, A.D., & Moskowitz, G.B. (2000). Perspective-Taking: Decreasing stereotype expression, stereotype accessibility, and in-group favouritism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 78, 708-724.
- Harwell, T.S., & Spence, M.R. (2000). Population surveillance for physical violence among adult men and women, Montana 1998. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 19, 321-324.

- Heckert, D.A., & Gondolf, E.W. (2000). Predictors of underreporting of male violence by batterer program participants and their partners. *Journal of Family Violence, 15*, 423-443.
- Krahe, B. (1983). Self-serving biases in perceived similarity and causal attributions of other people's performance. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 46*, 318-329.
- Levy, S.R., Freitas, A.L., & Salovey, P. (2002). Construing action abstractly and blurring social distinctions: Implications for perceiving homogeneity among, but also empathizing with and helping, others. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 83*, 1224-1238.
- Locke, L.M., & Richman, C.L. (1999). Attitudes toward domestic violence: race and gender issues. *Sex Roles, 40*, 227-241.
- Lowry, D.T. (1973). Demographic similarity, attitudinal similarity, and attitude change. *The Public Opinion Quarterly, 73*, 192-208.
- McNeel, S.P., & Reid, E.C. (1975). Attitude similarity, social goals, and cooperation. *The Journal of Conflict Resolution, 19*, 665-681.
- Mills, L.D., Mills, T.J., Taliaferro, E., Zimble, A., & Smith, D. (2003). The prevalence of female-to-male intimate partner violence in an urban emergency department. *Journal of Emergency Medicine, 25*, 215-218.
- Moles, K. (2001). The teen relationship workbook: For professionals helping teens to develop healthy relationships and prevent domestic violence. Wellness Reproductions and Publishing, Inc.
- Pettigrew, T.F. (1997). Generalized intergroup contact effects on prejudice. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 23*, 173-185.

Roberts, G.L., O'Toole, B.I., Taphael, B., Lawrence, J.M., & Ashby, R.

(1996). Prevalence study of domestic violence victims in an emergency department.

*Annals of Emergency Medicine*, 27, 747-753.

Touhey, J.C. (1974). Situated identities, attitude similarity, and interpersonal attraction.

*Sociometry*, 37, 363-374.

Tutty, L. (1999). Husband Abuse: An Overview of Research and Perspectives. National

Clearinghouse on Family Violence, Minister of Public Works and Government Services

Canada.

Vescio, T.K., Sechrist, G.B., & Paolucci, M.P. (2003). Perspective taking

and prejudice reduction: the mediational role of empathy arousal and situational

attributions. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 33, 455-472.



RUNNING HEAD: PERSPECTIVE TAKING AND ATTITUDE CHANGE

The Effects of Perspective Taking On Stereotype Attitude Change: A Review of the Literature.

Carey LeClair

Algoma University College

PSYC 4105

(030593680)

April 05, 2007

### Abstract

Perspective taking is the active consideration of another individual's point of view and the situation that individual faces. This can create feelings of empathy (identification with and understanding of another's feelings), distress, and motivation to help the individual and the group they represent. Perspective taking has the power to resolve many interpersonal conflicts and has been applied in many contexts and situations to change attitudes toward individuals of various out-groups. This review will examine the theory of perspective taking, its purpose, method, and function. Perspective taking applied in various studies and implications for further research in applying the theory of perspective taking will also be discussed.

### *Context*

Taking perspective of another individual produces feelings of empathy. Empathy involves understanding and entering into another's feelings and it is the key to perspective taking's effects on perceptions. Social categorization reduces the complexity of the social world. Therefore, we create preconceived conceptions about the members of our society. However, categorizing people we do not know personally can lead to false perceptions. These false perceptions can be made about common out-groups. An individual from an in-group (the group an individual belongs to) often views the opposing group (the out-group) as being less good as the group that individual belongs to. This creates bias, resulting in more favorable attitudes toward the in-group and less favorable attitudes toward the out-group. Lack of empathy and understanding of various out-groups may explain the persistence of preconceived attitudes. Perspective taking causes one to feel empathy for an individual from an out-group; therefore perspective taking has the power to change negative preconceived attitudes.

Male victims of domestic abuse can be seen as an out-group since men are categorized by society as strong and independent. Although it occurs more often than people think, many people do not consider the fact that a man could be abused by his female partner. Lack of empathy for abused men may explain the different responses society has of male and female domestic abuse. Female domestic abuse receives much deserved attention, however male domestic abuse does not. By taking perspective of male victims, attitudes toward domestic abuse against men and levels of empathy for male victims could be changed.

### *Perspective Taking*

Perspective taking is the active consideration of another individual's point of view and the situation that individual faces. Both Mead (1934) and Piaget (1932) argued that possessing

and using the ability to take another's perspective is responsible for much of human social capacity (as cited in Davis et al., 1996). Galinsky and Moskowitz (2000) explain that perspective taking is a critical ingredient in proper social functioning because it elicits gestures of altruism by producing feelings of empathy and reducing the accessibility to stereotypes. In contrast, the absence of perspective taking elicits further social aggression and negative attitudes toward out-groups. It has been suggested that even without deliberate perspective taking, reading or hearing about someone's story will produce a degree of overlap between the feelings of one's self and another individual; with deliberate perspective taking, this overlap increases (Davis, Conklin, Smith, & Luce, 1996).

#### *Current Studies*

Early perspective taking studies focused on the emotional reactions of those taking the perspective of someone in need. These led researchers to conclude that perspective takers' emotional experiences come to resemble those of the person in need. Current research is focusing on the cognitive processes underlying perspective taking, as there is little currently known about these processes (Davis et al., 1996). Researchers are also applying the theory of perspective taking to reduce prejudice and conflicts. This is done by creating emotions (mainly empathy) that produce altruistic motivation in people of in-groups towards various out-groups.

#### *Methods of Studying and Producing Perspective Taking*

Many researchers have been studying why perspective taking is useful (its role) and how perspective taking works (its mode). Perspective taking provides a more favorable status towards the person whose perspective is being taken. The observer explains the target's behavior in a way that the observer would explain their own behavior, causing the observer to feel similar emotions as the target person (Davis et al., 1996). Perspective taking involves two cognitive structures (the

self and the target), and perspective taking causes a merge of these two structures (Davis et al., 1996). Pettigrew (1997) (as cited in Vescio, Sechrist, & Paolucci, 2003), along with Batson, Early, and Salvarani (1997) concluded that perspective taking inspires affective cognitive mechanisms that might provide a direct path to more positive attitudes by increasing identification with, or knowledge about, the out-group or view you are trying to change. These affective mechanisms take precedence over the cognitive barriers that are prohibiting favorable attitudes toward the out-group. Further examination of this suggestion has shown consistent results that perspective taking promotes empathy arousal and improved inter-group attitudes (Vescio et al., 2003).

Vescio et al. (2003) examined whether perspective taking promotes improved inter-group attitudes even when stereotypes are strongly endorsed, and whether situational attributions contribute to the relation between perspective taking and inter-group attitudes. Sixty-six students participated in this study, 51 of whom were females, 15 of whom were males. Participants were assigned to one of two conditions of perspective taking and one of the two conditions of target stereotypicality. The two conditions of perspective taking were *other focused* and *objective focused* (other focused meaning to imagine how the target feels; objective focused meaning to remain objective and detached) The two conditions of target stereotypicality were *stereotype confirming* and *stereotype disconfirming* (stereotype confirming meaning the target represented the stereotyped view; stereotype disconfirming meaning the target did not represent the stereotyped view). After being assigned to the conditions, participants listened to an interview segment in which Jamal Johnson, an African American student at Pennsylvania State University, discussed his experiences adjusting to college life. Participants who heard the interview of a stereotype disconfirming target were introduced to Jamal as a first generation college student

from Brooklyn, NY, who had lived in an apartment with his mom and three brothers, near his close extended family, and was the star of his high school football team and a scholarship athlete.

Immediately following the interview segment, participants completed an emotional response questionnaire, an attribution task, a manipulation check, a stereotype endorsement task, and an attitude questionnaire. The emotional response questionnaire was given to assess participant's empathy level and emotions experienced during the segment. The attribution task was given to assess participant's attributions of situational causal factors to several issues of Jamal's experiences presented in the segment. The manipulation check asked participants to rate Jamal along a series of dimensions to ensure the effectiveness of target stereotypicality. A stereotype endorsement task was given for participants to rate African Americans along 15 dimensions, 8 of which were stereotype relevant. Finally, the attitude questionnaire was given which included pro-black and anti-black scales to assess participants' attitudes toward African Americans.

There were significant effects of both target stereotypicality and perspective taking for measures of stereotypic perceptions, dispositional and situational attributions, empathy arousal, and pro- vs. anti-black attitudes. Jamal was described in more stereotypic terms by those in the stereotype confirming condition; those in the stereotype disconfirming condition endorsed less stereotypic perceptions of African Americans as a group. Participants in the other focused condition displayed higher empathy arousal and greater importance ascribed to situational rather than dispositional causes as opposed to the objective focused condition. Overall, participants endorsed more pro-black attitudes than anti-black attitudes, but they did this even more so in the other focused condition. This suggests that when a target represents the stereotypical view of a group, perspective taking and empathy arousal is more difficult than if they do not represent the

group. Perspective taking occurred in both conditions but its effects were greater with those who were deliberately asked to take perspective.

### *Changing Attitudes*

The strategy of producing empathic feelings through perspective taking can be applied in studies to investigate its effects on different stereotypes. As demonstrated by Vescio et al. (2003) perspective taking increased empathy and self-other overlap, producing positive attitudes towards others and minority groups. Perspective taking was also shown to increase the likelihood of attributing situational factors to a member of a minority group's experience. Many other studies (which will now be discussed) have also examined perspective taking and the role of empathy on changing stereotypes and reducing prejudice. Dovidio et al. (2004) studied prejudice toward African Americans by creating feelings of shared injustices, threat, and fate among different groups.

Dovidio et al. (2004) examined mechanisms by which White Americans' prejudice toward African Americans could be reduced. Following this first study, a second study was conducted that explored how creating a common in-group identity could reduce prejudice by promoting these processes. For the first study, the three conditions used were *remain objective*, *imagine how the person feels*, and *no instruction*.

Participants were 66 undergraduate White American students, 26 of which were male and 40 of which were female. Participants were pre-tested at the beginning of the semester on an Attitudes Toward Blacks Scale. Between 2-6 weeks after the pretest, the study began. Under the three conditions, participants observed a video of a documentary that presented a series of examples of racial discrimination as an African American man and a White American man were videotaped while performing daily activities (shopping in a store, attempting to rent an

apartment, etc.). Immediately following the video, participants completed a series of questionnaires. The first two questionnaires were measures of participants' reactions to the documentary. The next questionnaire asked participants to rate the African American man from the documentary on a collection of personal characteristics. The last two questionnaires were given to measure participants' social decision making about groups. Dovidio et al. found that imagining how the person felt (perspective taking) and feelings associated with recognizing injustice after viewing acts of racial discrimination are key mediators of decreases in prejudice.

Dovidio et al. (2004) conducted another study immediately following their first. This next study explored how creating a common in-group identity could reduce prejudice. The two conditions used were the *Exclusive Threat* condition and the *Inclusive Threat* condition.

Participants were 100 undergraduate White American students (45 males, 55 females), who were also pre-tested at the beginning of the semester on the Attitudes Toward Blacks Scale. Participants were informed they were being examined on their "views about the war on terror" and were asked to read a newspaper article. The *Exclusive Threat* condition was an article emphasizing White Americans as the target of the terrorist threat. The *Inclusive Threat* condition was an article emphasizing all Americans as the target of the terrorist threat. Following the article, participants answered a series of questions about how much the terrorist threat is directed at African Americans, White Americans, and all Americans. Next, half the participants watched the video clip used in Study 1, whereas the other half of participants watched a new video clip. This new clip demonstrated the 1979 beating death of an African American man by policemen and focuses on the reaction of a close African American friend who expresses sadness and despair. Participants were given the same two questionnaires first used in Study 1 (measures of



participants reactions to the video), then given a set of questionnaires that included the stereotype trait attribution task for “African Americans in general”.

Results showed that participants in the *Inclusive Threat* condition perceived greater terrorist threat to African Americans and all Americans than did those in the *Exclusive Threat* condition but saw equivalent threat to White Americans. Those in the *Inclusive Threat* condition rated the African American on the video segment as more strongly a member of their own group and less strongly as a member of a different group. The *Inclusive Threat* condition also imagined the other person’s feelings during the video segment to a greater degree than did those in the *Exclusive Threat* condition. This research extends the line of knowledge on perspective taking to include the mediational role of feelings of injustice in particular the experience of shared threat and fate. This supports the idea that perspective taking is a useful tool for changing stereotypic perceptions.

Galinsky and Moskowitz (2000) examined perspective taking and judgments of the elderly. Three conditions were used; perspective taking, suppression (denying thoughts from entering into consciousness) and a control condition (no additional instructions). Participants were 37 undergraduate students who were asked to first describe a) themselves, b) an in-group, and c) an out-group according to 90 heterogeneous traits. Participants then completed a narrative essay task in which each participant in each condition wrote a narrative essay about an elderly man. Those in the perspective taking condition were asked to imagine themselves in the elderly man’s shoes while writing the narrative. Those in the suppression condition were asked to actively try to avoid putting themselves in the man’s shoes as research shows that thoughts and impressions are consistently influenced by stereotypic preconceptions. Those in the control condition were given no additional instructions aside from writing the narrative essay. Following

some filler tasks, participants were shown the same 90 traits they had used to rate themselves and others and were asked to use these traits to rate general characteristics of the elderly.

Galinsky and Moskowitz predicted that perspective takers would show greater overlap of the representations of the self and of the elderly compared to the other two groups. For the perspective taking group, results of an ANOVA were significant for the degree of overlap of the representations of the self and the elderly. This suggests that not only do perspective takers ascribe self-descriptive traits to a target, but this ascription extends to the target's social group as well. These results are similar to those of Vescio et al. (2003).

A different approach was taken by Batson, Chang, Orr, and Rowland (2002). They examined whether the positive attitudes, created by perspective taking and empathy, would translate into action on behalf of the target group. They manipulated empathy (induce vs. not induce), and target (real vs. fictional drug addict). Participants in each condition listened to an interview of a convicted heroin addict dealer and were then given a chance to recommend allocation of Student Senate funds to an agency to help drug addicts (the agency would not be helping the drug addict in the interview segment).

Those in the condition to feel empathy for the drug abuser allocated more funds to the agency and reported more positive attitudes toward other hard-drug addicts. Also, compared to participants in the condition of induced empathy for a real addict, participants in the condition of induced empathy for a fictional addict increased allocation of funds, and reported more positive attitudes towards drug addicts. Just as Galinsky and Moskowitz (2000) succeeded in changing perspectives toward the elderly, Batson et al. succeeded in changing perspectives toward drug addicts. Perspective taking has been shown so far to succeed in many cases and can be considered an effective and consistent way of changing attitudes in a variety of situations.

### *Nature of Perspective Taking*

Davis et al. (1996) used three perspective taking strategies to study the nature of perspective taking. These were *imagine self* which involved observers explicitly imagining how they would feel in the target person's situation, *imagine target* which involved observers imagining what the target person is thinking and feeling, and *watch target* which involved observers to focus attention on relatively superficial aspects of the target and to not imagine the target person's thoughts and feelings. The researchers tested the hypotheses that relative to control instructions, role-taking instructions would affect observers' representations of the target.

They asked 80 undergraduate students to complete a pretest that involved two tasks to measure their self-representations (an adjective checklist and an open-ended trait generation procedure). Several weeks later, participants returned and were assigned to one of the three conditions. All participants watched a videotape of a student who discussed his or her academic and social experiences in college and were then asked to describe the target person using the same two measures as in the pretest. The degree of merging self and others was measured by computing the degree to which self and other's representations overlapped (i.e., shared common elements). There were no significant differences between the *imagine self* and *imagine target* groups but there was a greater self-target overlap among role-taking participants. However, it was questioned to what degree perspective taking is a controlled and effortful process.

Although perspective taking may appear to be an automatic process, it has been agreed by many researchers (Hoffman, 1984; Eisenberg, Shea, Carlo, & Knight, 1991) that perspective taking is in fact a deliberate and effortful activity. This led the authors to conduct a second experiment, the results of which are crucial to the understanding of the mode of perspective taking.

In the second experiment by Davis et al. (1996) only the *imagine self* strategy was used as it was previously shown to have no greater effect than the *imagine target* strategy. Also, the variable of cognitive load was used to examine whether or not role taking is an effortful activity. To manipulate cognitive load, one condition was provided with material that caused interference during the exposure to the target (rehearsing and memorizing a nine-digit number), while the other condition was not provided with interference material. The researchers hypothesized that if perspective taking is an effortful task, cognitive interference would cause less perspective taking and therefore less self-target overlap; if perspective taking is an automatic task, cognitive interference would not affect self-target overlap and the overlap would be similar to those in the groups without cognitive interference.

Seventy-nine undergraduate students were randomly assigned to the three conditions; *watch target*, *imagine self*, and *imagine self/busy* (with interference material). The procedure was identical to that of the first experiment except for the addition of the interference material, which involved the participant to rehearse and memorize a nine-digit number while watching the videotape. Following the video, participants in the interference condition were to write down the number and were then given the questionnaire. Participants in the other two conditions were given the questionnaire directly following the video.

The interference material did not hinder any understanding of the factual events in the video. Also, minor errors in the recall of the nine-digit number suggested that participants trying to be engaged in the video were not entirely engaged in the video (otherwise recall of the number would be extremely poor). However, there was evidence of some engagement (otherwise recall of the number would be extremely good). The researchers concluded that cognitive load did have

an effect, as the overlap of self and target representations were higher than those of the *watch target* condition, and poorer than those of the *imagine self* condition.

Davis et al. (1996) suggested that even without deliberate perspective taking, a natural overlap of self and target would occur. This idea was supported by these findings as well as those of Vescio et al. (2003). In summary, it appears that while there is some automatic processing, deliberately taking the perspective of a target person has more of an effect on one's attitudes towards another than not deliberately taking perspective.

Batson et al. (1997) examined two different modes of perspective taking to explore the nature of perspective taking. Perspective taking was looked at in two ways: imagine target and imagine self (as introduced in Davis et al., 1996). One third of participants were asked to remain objective, one third were asked to imagine how the person felt (imagine target), and one third were asked to imagine how they would feel if they were in the same position as the person in the radio interview (imagine self). The radio interview described a young woman in serious need. The researchers predicted that those asked to imagine how the person felt would feel empathy, and those asked to imagine how they would feel in the same situation would feel empathy and distress. This is exactly what was found.

Results were consistent with those of Davis et al. (1996). Both perspectives created empathy and improved attitudes, however there was one difference between the two perspectives. While taking the perspective of the person by simply imagining how they would feel produced altruistic motivation towards the person (motivation to help due to an unselfish concern for the welfare of others), taking perspective by imagining how one would feel if they were in the same situation produced egoistic motivation (motivation to gratify one's own desires). This distinction is a useful finding that can take studies in perspective taking in different

directions. This knowledge allows a researcher to decide whether they want to induce altruistic motivation, or egoistic motivation. Further research may focus on the effects of each type of motivation on behavior.

In the research discussed, it has been consistently shown that perspective taking improves intergroup attitudes and the mode of perspective taking is quite consistent. Presently, it is known that there are two ways to take another's perspective; imagining one's self in another's situation and imagining how another feels. Each way produces a slightly different result; empathy and altruistic motivation (concern for others), and empathy as well as distress and egoistic motivation (self-interest). It has also been shown that perspective taking produces an overlap of representations of another person and one's self, causing a sharing of experience. Perspective taking is an effortful activity, therefore although non-deliberate perspective taking naturally occurs, deliberate perspective taking has a much larger effect. Perspective taking allows for situational rather than dispositional attribution of individuals' experiences as well. Perspective taking can be used in many contexts to aid in improving intergroup relationships, in decreasing prejudice, as well as many other social problems.

### *Summary*

Research in applying the theory of perspective taking (such as with African Americans, the elderly and drug addicts) has shown that perspective taking improves attitudes towards out-groups. Perspective taking has a greater effect when the individual does not represent the stereotype because it allows one to gain insight into the falsity of prejudice. Research has also shown that perspective taking has a great effect when one recognizes injustices of others and when individuals of different groups share the same injustices and threats. While perspective taking can be used in many situations, the process and results are universal. Increased application

of perspective taking in other contexts is valuable in determining methods to address social issues, methods to resolve social issues, overall aiding in giving society a direction towards positive interracial interactions, attitudes, and willingness to solve differences.

### *Similarities/Contrasts of Studies*

Many of the studies of perspective taking have shared similar methodology. Manipulations of perspective taking often involved taking perspective of a target individual, remaining objective from the target, and/or are given no instruction. Often video segments, articles, interviews, stories, and scenarios are used to illustrate a situation of an individual from an out-group that allow for one to take perspective on it. However, not all studies included pretests to measure the attitudes of participants prior to the study (Vescio et al., 2003; Batson et al., 1997). Pretests should be required for studies on perspective taking as it allows the researcher to see whether the attitude did in fact change. Common dependent measures involve attitudes on generalizations to the whole group that the individual belongs to, situational versus dispositional attributions, increased empathy, increased positive attitudes toward out-groups, and decreased prejudice.

### *Future Implications*

Currently, there has been some research on the process of perspective taking, what aspects of it have the greatest influences on attitude change, and how it is applied in many contexts for several out-groups. Further research could, however, include participants of other racial/ethnic groups. In the current research, it is rarely specified whether a combination of racial and ethnic groups were included as the participants. When the racial group of participants was specified, it included White Americans (such as in Dovidio et al., 2004). More knowledge could be gained if the focus of studies were aimed at the attitudes of other racial groups toward White

Americans. Also, some studies focus on changing attitudes of White Americans toward African Americans. As pointed out by Graves (1999), Latino, Asian, and Native Americans are also often stigmatized and are less represented on television. Therefore, studies using perspective taking addressing attitudes toward Latino, Asian, and Native Americans could also offer valuable information.

Further knowledge of perspective taking can have implications in society to improve the understanding of others. This could create more optimistic individuals who are willing to solve conflicts and differences. Perspective taking can cause individuals to realize that individuals of different groups can share similar experiences as they do.

While perspective taking has succeeded in changing attitudes toward racial/ethnic groups, the elderly, and drug addicts, it may also be applied in many other contexts. Research could focus on applying perspective taking to examine its effects on other out-groups and social conflicts, such as changing attitudes and stereotypes toward other racial and ethnic groups, homosexuals, bullying in schools, and male victims of domestic abuse. Stereotypes are embedded in many aspects of human society. Further research should focus on determining as many situations as possible where perspective taking succeeds. This could lead to the development of interventions and programs to reduce overall occurrences of stereotyped attitudes, emotions, and behaviors.

#### *Domestic Abuse Against Men*

As mentioned earlier, the topic of domestic abuse against men could be tested with the perspective taking method, as the stereotype is that domestic abuse does not happen to men. This could be due to males' gender roles in society, which decide at an early age that males are to be strong and able to care for themselves. However, domestic abuse occurs quite often to men; its



prevalence has increased in the past decade, therefore increased interventions are needed (Harwell & Spence, 2000; Mills, Mills, Taliaferro, Zimbler, & Smith, 2003; Roberts, O'Toole, Raphael, Lawrence, & Ashby, 1996). Research could focus on perspective taking in changing society's attitudes toward the issue of domestic abuse against men in order to increase the amount of support, empathy, and understanding for male victims. If domestic abuse against men has not been appropriately addressed due to preconceived conceptions, then perspective taking may change the lack of empathy and understanding for male victims.

Perspective taking has been repeatedly shown to create empathy to transform stereotypic attitudes into more positive, understanding, helpful, and optimistic ones. One could hypothesize that, as with other stigmatized groups, perspective taking could increase levels of empathy in society for male victims of domestic abuse and in turn change preconceived attitudes of who the victims are of domestic abuse.

## References

- Batson, C.D., Early, S., Salvarani, G. (1997). Perspective taking: Imagining how another feels vs. imagining how you would feel. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 23, 751-758.
- Batson, C.D., Chang, J., Orr, R., & Rowland, J. (2002). Empathy, attitudes, and action: Can feeling for a member of a stigmatized group motivate one to help the group? *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 28, 1656-1666.
- Davis, M.H., Conklin, L., Smith, A., & Luce, C. (1996). Effect of perspective taking on the cognitive representation of persons: a merging of self and other. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 70, 713-726.
- Dovidio, J.F., ten Vergert, M., Stewart, T.L., Gaertner, S.L., Johnson, .D., Esses, V.M., Riek, B.M., & Pearson, A.R. (2004). Perspective and prejudice: Antecedents and mediating mechanisms. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 30, 1537-1549.
- Eisenberg, N., Shea, C.L., Carlo, G., & Knight, G.P. (1991). *Empathy-related responding and cognition: A "chicken and the egg" dilemma*. In W. Kurtines & J. Gerwitz. Handbook of moral behavior and development: Volume 2. Research (pp. 63-88). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Galinsky, A.D., & Moskowitz, G.B. (2000). Perspective-Taking: Decreasing stereotype expression, stereotype accessibility, and in-group favoritism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 78, 708-724.
- Harwell, T.S., & Spence, M.R. (2000). Population surveillance for physical violence among adult men and women, Montana 1998. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 19, 321-324.

- Hoffman, M.L. (1984). *Interaction of affect and cognition in empathy*. In C.E. Izard, J. Kagan, & R.B. Zajonc. *Emotions, Cognitions, and Behavior* (pp. 103-131). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Mills, L.D., Mills, T.J., Taliaferro, E., Zimble, A., & Smith, D. (2003). The prevalence of female-to-male intimate partner violence in an urban emergency department. *Journal of Emergency Medicine, 25*, 215-218.
- Noel, J.R. (2004). Self, community, and the overcoming of prejudice. *Studies in Philosophy and Education, 15*, 131-137.
- Roberts, G.L., O'Toole, B.I., Taphael, B., Lawrence, J.M., & Ashby, R. (1996). Prevalence study of domestic violence victims in an emergency department. *Annals of Emergency Medicine, 27*, 747-753.
- Vescio, T.K., Sechrist, G.B., & Paolucci, M.P. (2003). Perspective taking and prejudice reduction: the mediational role of empathy arousal and situational attributions. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 33*, 455-472.