

## **Attribution of Blame to Victim and Attitudes toward Partner Violence: Cross-National Comparisons across the United States, South Africa, and Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

Although knowledge about attribution of blame and partner violence has increased over the past decades, comparative knowledge across countries is sparse. This cross-sectional survey examined cross-national differences in attribution of blame and attitudes toward partner violence among 363 respondents in the United States, South Africa, and Nigeria. Results suggest that female respondents were less likely than male respondents to attribute blame to the female victim or endorse partner violence. Respondents in Nigeria were more likely than respondents in the other countries to attribute blame to the female victim. Similarly, respondents in the United States or South Africa were less likely than respondents in Nigeria to endorse partner violence. Age, gender, race, and attitudes toward partner violence were associated with attribution of blame. Country moderated the relation between attitudes toward partner violence and attribution of blame. For respondents in South Africa, high attitudes toward partner violence were related to greater attribution of blame; however, for respondents in the United States there was a much smaller difference in blame attribution between low and high attitudes toward partner violence. In general, findings suggest that differences in gender and country are relevant to understanding blame attribution to female victim and attitudes toward partner violence.

**Keywords:** Attribution of blame; attitudes toward partner violence; partner violence; cross-national comparisons

### **Introduction**

Individuals perceive partner violence differently and they differ in attribution of blame for partner violence. Research on partner violence in the United States and across countries such as Japan, China, and the United States suggests that perception and attribution of blame differ across sociodemographic characteristics (Ewoldt, Monson, & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2000; Gamache, 2006; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Shlien-Dellinger, Huss, & Kramer, 2004; Nguyen et al., 2013; Yamawaki, Ochoa-Shipp, Pulsipher, Harlos, & Swindler, 2012; Yamawaki, Ostenson, & Brown, 2009; Yu, 2011). However, most of what is currently known about perception and attribution of blame for partner violence is informed by data derived from individual countries, especially the United States.

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Cross-cultural studies on partner violence are few and comparative knowledge is primarily shaped by synthesis of studies conducted in various countries. Many cross-cultural studies report only descriptive analysis of prevalence of partner violence (García-Moreno, Jansen, Ellsberg, Heise, & Watts, 2005). Although few cross-cultural studies have examined perception and attribution of blame among countries/nationalities such as Australia, Canada, China, India, Japan, Mexico, Taiwan, United Kingdom, and the United States (Frías & Angel, 2012; Grandin & Lupri, 1997; Kumagai & Straus, 1983; Nguyen et al., 2013; Scott, Rajakaruna, Sheridan, & Sleath, 2013; Yamawaki et al., 2009; Yu, 2011), cross-cultural knowledge of developing countries such as Africa is sparse, despite the significance of relevant knowledge to policy and practice about gender-based violence. This Internet cross-sectional survey examined men's and women's attribution of blame to the female victim and attitudes toward partner violence to determine whether attribution and attitudes vary across three countries: United States, South Africa, and Nigeria. The survey also examined the relationship between socio-demographic factors, attitudes toward partner violence, and attribution of blame to the female victim.

## 1.2 Rationale for Cross-National Comparisons and Examined Countries

The rationale for examining attribution of blame to the female victim and attitudes toward partner violence across national boundaries rests on assumptions of their implications for theory, causal perceptions, and transferability of measures about partner violence across countries. In discussing rationale for cross-cultural comparisons, we do not assume that a single cross-cultural study suffices to address the rationale to be discussed; instead, we merely suggest that our study be considered as one in the body of cross-cultural studies on attribution of blame to the female victim and attitudes toward partner violence in relation to rationale to be discussed.

First, cross-national comparisons can provide insight on how exposures to various social structures and traditional norms about intimate relationship across a racially diverse egalitarian society (United States), a racially diverse patriarchal society (South Africa), and a racially homogenous society (Nigeria) can enhance understanding of attribution of blame to the female victim and attitudes toward partner violence.

Second, findings regarding gender symmetry or differences in perpetration and victimization of partner violence have engendered theoretical and empirical controversies among researchers in family violence and in violence against women that have spilled over to discourses on attribution of blame for partner violence (Dobash & Dobash 2004; Straus 2006). Because diverse sociocultural experiences may influence differences in perception and attribution of blame, findings from cross-cultural investigations can offer fresh perspectives on cross-cultural applicability of competing theoretical discourses about gender and gender-based violence.

Third, Pierotti (2013) stated that endorsement of gender-based violence is declining globally and global norms through cultural diffusion are gradually replacing traditional norms such that violence is gradually being evaluated from the perspective of violation of human rights rather than through increasingly fading patriarchal lenses. Cross-cultural comparisons would provide more clarification on the effects of increasingly fading patriarchal lenses on perception and attribution of blame for partner violence.

Fourth, it is generally believed that successful approaches to combating partner violence in the United States may be useful in addressing domestic violence in Africa (Bowman, 2003). However, comparative data to anchor international transferability of measures are sparse. Cross-national comparisons can provide some backdrops of underlying cultural beliefs associated with perception and attribution of blame for partner violence upon which the relevance of transferability of approaches across international boundaries may be evaluated or anchored.

In examining cross-cultural differences in perceptions and attribution of blame for partner violence, we chose the three countries because of similarities and differences in societal structures (e.g., individualistic/egalitarian versus collectivistic/patriarchal) and developmental stages (developed versus developing). Specifically, the selection of South Africa and Nigeria provided an opportunity to examine similarities and differences between a racially diverse patriarchal society (South Africa) and a racially homogeneous patriarchal society (Nigeria) in comparison with a racially diverse egalitarian society (United States). However, our reference to the United States as "egalitarian" is informed by its *pursuit* rather than *realization* of gender egalitarianism. Similarly, our categorization of patriarchal and egalitarian system does not presume that the societies or gender roles in the societies are static.

In fact, they are constantly changing in consonance with global interdependence as the norms of human rights are integrated across societies. South Africa and Nigeria were also chosen because of the shared cultural experience, although programmatic efforts at changing attitudes and curbing violence against women appear to be more pronounced in South Africa than Nigeria, despite the shared cultural experience. Thus, cross-national comparisons will highlight possible similarities or differences in blame attribution and attitudes toward partner violence across the countries. For example, countries with similar cultural experience may differ in endorsement of partner violence and attribution of blame to female victim. Similarly, different levels in attitudes toward partner violence may have different effects on attribution of blame to female victim among countries.

### **1.3 Theoretical Framework**

The current study draws from defensive attribution and feminist perspectives to describe the rationale for gender and cross-national similarities or differences in attribution of blame and attitudes toward partner violence.

#### **1.3.1 Defensive Attribution Theory**

In describing attribution of blame, defensive attribution hypothesis (Shaver 1970) posits that “people increase or reduce blame depending on their perceived similarity with the victim and the perceived likelihood of similar future victimization befalling them” (Anderson, Beattie, & Spencer, 2001, p. 447). By virtue of sharing similar characteristics (e.g., personal or personality characteristics) with the perpetrator or victim, an observer or evaluator is predisposed to activating defensive attribution bias in making judgment of the observed or perceived event. For example, individuals are less likely to attribute blame to the victim of sexual violence whom they perceive to be similar to them (Amacker & Littleton, 2013). Thus, defensive attribution hypothesis presupposes that men compared to women are more likely to attribute blame for partner violence to female victim (and vice versa) with the realization that a similar event could happen to them.

#### **1.3.2 Feminist Theory**

With its reference to social structure, feminist theory provides a broader framework for understanding partner violence. According to feminist theory, gender-based violence results from power imbalance and institutionalized inequality in patriarchal societies where men are equipped with the ability to subjugate women through socialization and gender roles (Bowman 2003; Mauricio & Gormley, 2001). For example, in describing the influence of patriarchy on violent men in Africa, Partab (2011) identified “respect, domestic devotion, economic power, headship, and justification of privilege” (p. 96) as privileges that patriarchy affords to men. The same privileges afford men the temerity to justify abusive behaviors and attribute blame to vulnerable women. In general, gender socialization in patriarchal society has significant effects on beliefs, perception, and perpetration of partner violence (Bowman, 2003). By attributing partner violence to power and economic differences engendered by patriarchal system, feminist theory thus induces the expectations that endorsement of partner violence and attribution of blame for partner violence will vary across gender and social structures.

### **1.4 Prevalence of Partner Violence in the United States, South Africa, and Nigeria**

Partner violence—a physical, psychological, or sexual act that has a propensity to cause physical or psychological pain to victims in intimate relationships—persists in every society, although women appear to be victimized more frequently than men. From a comprehensive review of the literature, it was determined that “approximately 1 in 4 women (23.1%) and 1 in 5 men (19.3%) experienced physical violence in an intimate relationship” (Desmarais, Reeves, Nicholls, Telford, & Fiebert, 2012, p. 140). From 1994 to 2010 in the United States, 80% of victims of domestic violence were women, although the rate of victimization declined by about 64% during the period (Catalano, 2012).

In South Africa as almost half of all women are victimized by their intimate partners (Boonzaier & de La Rey, 2003). A recent report revealed that the percentage of women killed *between 1999 and 2009* by intimate partners has increased—from 50% to 57%. Half the women were killed by partners they were living with, 30 percent by men they were dating and 18% by their husbands (Faul, 2013, emphasis added). One cross-sectional study (Jewkes, Levin, & Penn-Kekana, 2002) put the prevalence rate for gender-based physical violence at 24.6%, although rates of perpetration by men (26.5%) were reported to be similar to those by women (25.2%; Gass, Stein, Williams, & Seedat, 2011). From a random sample of 402 doctors, results indicated that a doctor treated an average of 11.4 patients per month for partner violence (Peltzer, Mashego, & Mabeba, 2003).

In Nigeria, a prevalence rate of violence against women as high as 40% has been reported (Ilika, Okonkwo, & Adogu, 2002). Violence against men is generally believed to be rare, although a recent report put the incidence rate at 0.022% (22 male victims per 100,000 patients), with “scratches, bruises, welts, and scalds” being the injuries sustained (Dienye &Gbeneol, 2009, p. 333). However, a recent study put the prevalence rate of victimization for physical violence at 15.1% for women and 11.8% for men, with victimization more likely among married women than among single women (Yusuf &Arulogun, 2011).

### **1.5 Effects of Culture on Attitudes toward Partner Violence and Attribution of Blame to Women**

Across societies, attitudes toward partner violence are shrouded in myths, beliefs, and gender roles and attitudes (traditional sex-roles versus egalitarian attitudes), which have implications for pervasiveness of gender-based violence and attribution of blame for partner violence (Berkel, Vandiver, & Bahner, 2004; Bryant & Spencer, 2003; Davis, 2013). Regrettably, instead of the perceived perpetrator being blamed, the female victim is generally blamed for partner violence (Ewoldt et al., 2000; Gamache, 2006), although the extent of this between men and women vary across societies. For example, up to 64.4% of women in Nigeria supported the notion that a husband is culturally justified to be physically violent to his wife (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2005; Oyediran & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2005), unlike in United States, where women are reportedly less likely to hold beliefs supportive of physical violence than men (Nabors, Tracy, & Jasinski, 2006; Simon et al., 2001).

In Nigeria and South Africa, traditional norms place heavy responsibility on women with significant implications for their experience in domestic relationship. In certain communities in South Africa, for example, women are prohibited from leaving their “in-laws homestead under any circumstances” and may be blamed for provoking violence if they are considered to have transgressed gender expectations such as, “answering their husbands back, being ‘cheeky’ or disrespectful, and/or raising their voices to their husbands, especially in public” (Hargreaves, Vetten, Schneider, Malepe, & Fuller, 2006, pp. 15, 20). A recent report attributed violence to “chauvinistic, macho culture that cuts across all races and social classes” (Ghosh, 2013, n.p.). “South African men think women should be under their control. There is an idea that violence is justifiable as a means to keep women in their place . . . . Aggression and machismo seem like supplements men take on a daily basis; being tough is seen as required to cope in a society with high unemployment, rampant crime and a 50-a-day murder rate. . . . Indeed, resorting to violence has become a default button for many South African men” (Ghosh 2013, n.p.).

Regrettably, violence against women in South Africa is also rooted in beliefs related to objectification of women. Although South Africa has a distinct historical experience (apartheid) from Nigeria (colonization), objectification of women and endorsement of patriarchal beliefs has distinct effects on gender-based violence in both countries. For example, “jack rolling” (i.e., gang-rape of women as payback for perceived misdeeds or disreputable pleasures), “virgin cleansing” (i.e., belief that a man will be cured of his HIV/AIDS by having sex with a virgin girl), and “corrective rape” (i.e., a practice in which lesbians are raped in the guise of curing them of lesbianism) in South Africa is reinforced not only by perpetrators’ underlying beliefs of its cultural appropriateness but also by perpetrators’ attribution of blame to female victims. Similarly, in many regions in South Africa and Nigeria, the expectation that women submit physically and sexually to their husbands presumes blameworthiness of women for relationship conflict regardless of their physical, psychological, or sexual victimization experience (Hargreaves et al., 2006; Oyediran & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2005).

### **1.6 Effect of Personal Characteristics on Attribution of Blame to the Female Victim and Attitudes toward Partner Violence**

A considerable body of empirical evidence in the United States suggests that perceiver and victim characteristics have effects on judgment about and attribution of blame for violence (Koon-Magnin & Ruback, 2012; Sinclair, 2012; Wakelin & Long, 2003; White & Kurpius, 2002; Workman & Freeburg, 1999). For example, men are more likely than women to blame the victim (Ewoldt et al., 2000; Funk, Elliott, Bechtoldt, Pasold, & Tsavoussis, 2003; Gamache, 2006; Yamawaki et al., 2012), although “male victims were more likely to be blamed than female victims” (Stewart & Maddren, 1997, p. 2; Whatley & Riggio, 1993). While men tend to blame the victim, women tend to attribute blame to perpetrators (Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al. 2004; Strömwall, Landström, & Alfredsson, 2014) and “males and females attributed less blame . . . to female perpetrators than male perpetrators” (Stewart et al. 2012, p. 3739).

Recent findings from a cross-cultural study comparing the United States, Japan, and China indicated that men were more likely than women to blame female victims of domestic violence in all of those countries (Nguyen et al., 2013). Specifically, Chinese and United States female respondents were more likely than their male respondents or all Japanese respondents to endorse egalitarian attitudes toward women and less likely to attribute blame to female victims of violence (Nguyen et al., 2013). Similar to gender, race (particularly being Black/non-Caucasian) has been associated with perception, perpetration, victimization, and attribution of blame for partner violence (Barrick, Krebs, & Lindquist, 2013; Davis, 2013; Funk et al., 2003; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Selwyn, & Rohling, 2012; Locke & Richman, 1999; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Age has equally been associated with blame attribution (Wilke & Vinton, 2005), such that those who are older attributed blame to victims than those who are younger (Adams-Price, Dalton III, & Sumrall, 2004). Because differential exposure and victimization experiences influence causal perceptions of violence, cross-cultural comparisons can offer fresh perspectives conducive for cross-cultural transfer of knowledge about gender differences in perception and blame attribution for partner violence.

### **1.7 Effects of Country on Attribution of Blame to the Female Victim and Attitudes toward Partner Violence**

By virtue of cultural and structural differences across countries, it is reasonable to examine differences in attitudes toward partner violence and attribution of blame to the female victim of partner violence across countries. For example, a recent study examined perceptions of partner violence across three countries (Japan, China, and the United States) and found regarding attribution of blame to the victim that "American respondents scored significantly lower than Japanese and Chinese respondents" (Nguyen et al., 2013, p. 268). The same study found that "Japanese respondents scored significantly higher than American and Chinese respondents" in attitudes toward women (p. 268).

Few cross-cultural studies have examined attribution of blame to the victim and attitudes toward partner violence. One study found that Japanese students were more likely than American students to "minimize, blame, and excuse" partner violence (Yamawaki et al., 2009, p. 1126). Another study found that Australians and respondents from the United Kingdom did not differ from respondents in the United States in attributing blame to the perpetrator of stalking when the stalker was a stranger (Scott et al., 2013).

Many studies have examined attitudes toward partner violence but only a few cross-cultural studies have been conducted to date. Some cross-cultural studies comparing the United States with other countries have reported that (a) university students from Taiwan were more sensitive to partner violence than students from the United States (Yu, 2011); (b) Canadians tended to use severe violence in intimate relationships more often than residents of the United States (Grandin & Lupri, 1997); (c) U.S. participants used physical aggression in intimate relationships more than did Japanese or Indians (Kumagai & Straus, 1983); and (d) prevalence of violence among Mexican women in Mexico was far lower than among Mexican women in the United States (Frias & Angel, 2012). Altogether, these findings suggest that attitudes toward partner violence vary across countries.

### **1.8 Present Study**

The present study examined attribution of blame to female victim and attitudes toward partner violence across three countries namely, the United States, South Africa, and Nigeria. Based on the above review and discussions, we therefore hypothesized as follows:

*Hypothesis 1:* Women will be less likely than men to attribute blame for partner violence to the female victim.

*Hypothesis 2:* Respondents in Nigeria will be more likely than respondents in the United States or South Africa to attribute blame for partner violence to the female victim. Similarly, respondents in the United States will be less likely than respondents in South Africa to attribute blame for partner violence to the female victim.

*Hypothesis 3:* Women will be less likely than men to endorse partner violence.

*Hypothesis 4:* Respondents in the United States and South Africa will be less likely than respondents in Nigeria to endorse partner violence.

*Hypothesis 5:* Age, gender, race, country, and attitude towards partner violence will be related to attribution of blame to female victim. Country will moderate the relationship between attitudes toward partner violence and attribution of blame to the female victim of partner violence.

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Design

The cross-sectional survey was conducted online using SurveyMonkey.com™ to collect data from a convenience sample of respondents across the United States, South Africa, and Nigeria. The survey was described as a study aimed at measuring attitudes and beliefs about partner violence and completed online in the United States and South Africa and in paper-and-pencil format in Nigeria. To ensure wide coverage, diverse recruitment methods including verbal and email solicitation were utilized in the countries. In the United States the link to the survey was shared with persons on an email list of a public high school and posted on an online instructional platform of a university. The link was also sent to respondents in the address lists of one of the authors; the respondents were encouraged to share the link with others in their address lists. In South Africa, the link was shared with persons in the investigators' address books. Verbal and electronic solicitation of university students and nonstudents were equally sought. Respondents were also encouraged to share the link with persons in their address books. To reach additional respondents, the link was advertised in the social media outlet Facebook. Given the limited access to the internet in Nigeria and to reach the population that might not have access to the Internet in Nigeria, a paper version of the survey was administered to a convenience sample of respondents in that country. The survey was advertised in elementary and high schools, Internet cafes, and other places of work where research assistants visited respondents to administer the survey.

In addition to ensuring wide coverage, the diverse recruitment methods are consistent with available means of recruitment in each of the country. For example, in the United States the list-serve is frequently used for research purposes but in Nigeria access to list-serve is generally limited for research purposes. In addition, access to the internet is generally limited in Nigeria compared to the United States and South Africa. Nevertheless, despite differences in methodology of data collection, research clearly suggests that "paper-and-pencil and Internet data collection methods are generally equivalent" (Gosling, Vazire, Srivastava, & John, 2004; Lewis, Watson, & White, 2009; Weigold, Weigold, & Russell, 2013, p. 53). Some studies have utilized these dual approaches to collect data (Buchanan & Smith, 1999; Olatunji, Ebesutani, & Kim, 2015; Stanton, 1998). The Institutional Review Board of Westfield State University approved the study. A total of 404 respondents (United States = 127 or 31.40%, South Africa = 122 or 30.20%, Nigeria = 155 or 38.40%) participated in the survey. Ipsative mean imputation (Schafer & Graham, 2002) was used to address missing data, after which listwise deletion was applied to the data. Four outlier cases were thereafter removed with 363 cases remaining.

### 2.2 Participants

Respondents ( $N = 363$ ) comprised females ( $n = 272, 74.9\%$ ) and males ( $n = 91, 25.1\%$ ) from the United States ( $n = 117, 32.2\%$ ), South Africa ( $n = 101, 27.8\%$ ), and Nigeria ( $n = 145, 39.9\%$ ). The majority were Blacks/non-Caucasians ( $n = 260, 71.6\%$ ) versus Whites/Caucasians ( $n = 103, 28.4\%$ ), with an average age of 35.69 years ( $SD = 10.50$  years, range 20–67). More than half of the respondents reported having a Bachelor's degree or Higher National/Advanced Diploma (HND;  $n = 210, 57.9\%$ ) and a majority were gainfully employed ( $n = 293, 80.7\%$ ). Across countries there were more female respondents than male respondents. Detailed distribution of demographic characteristics across countries by gender is reported in Table 1.

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

Sample characteristics	United States (USA) n = 117		South Africa (SA) n = 101		Nigeria (NG) n = 145		Total N = 363		
	Female (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)	
Agea	Mean = 35.69 years, SD = 10.50, range 20-67								
Marital Status									
Single (never married)	64 (61.5)	7 (53.8)	41 (54.7)	10 (38.5)	30 (32.3)	16 (30.8)	135 (49.6)	33 (36.3)	
Married and othersb	40 (38.5)	6 (46.2)	34 (43.3)	16 (61.5)	63 (67.7)	36 (69.2)	137 (50.4)	58 (63.7)	
Race									
White/Caucasian (Non-Hispanic)	71 (68.3)	7 (53.8)	19 (25.3)	6 (23.1)	-	-	90 (33.1)	13 (14.3)	
Black (African), African American (Non-Hispanic) and othersc	33 (31.7%)	6 (46.2)	56 (74.7)	20 (76.9)	93 (100)	52 (100)	182 (66.9)	78 (85.7)	
Education background completed									
Less than bachelor	15 (14.4)	3 (23.1)	14 (18.7)	4 (15.4)	17 (18.3)	3 (5.8)	46 (16.9)	10 (11)	
Bachelor	71 (68.3)	6 (46.2)	22 (29.3)	13 (50)	64 (68.8)	34 (65.4)	157 (57.7)	53 (58.2)	
Master and above	18 (17.3)	4 (30.8)	39 (52)	9 (34.6)	12 (12.9)	15 (28.8)	69 (25.4)	28 (30.8)	
Employment status									
Employed	59 (56.7)	10 (76.9)	60 (80)	22 (84.6)	92 (98.9)	50 (96.2)	214 (77.8)	83 (90.2)	
Unemployed	45 (43.3)	3 (23.1)	15 (20)	4 (15.4)	1 (1.1)	2 (3.8)	61 (22.2)	9 (9.8)	
Student status									
Student	43 (41.3)	3 (23.1)	13 (17.3)	3 (11.5)	-	-	56 (20.6)	6 (6.6)	
Nonstudent	61 (58.7)	10 (76.9)	62 (82.7)	23 (88.5)	93 (100)	52 (100)	216 (79.4)	85 (93.4)	

<sup>a</sup>USA (Mean = 34.16 years, SD = 11.53, range 20-62), SA (Mean = 36.76 years, SD = 11.81, range 20-67), NG (Mean = 36.17 years, SD = 8.39, range 22-55). <sup>b</sup>Others (married but separated = 9, divorced = 15, widowed = 4). <sup>c</sup>Asian or Indian (n = 10), Hispanic/Latino (n = 9), Biracial/Multiracial/Colored (Bruinmense, Kleurlinge, or Bruin Afrikaners) (n = 6), Other (n = 1).

## 2.3 Materials

In addition to providing demographic information, participants responded to questions regarding the following variables and measures in the online survey: (a) attribution of blame to female victim, and (b) attitudes toward domestic partner violence.

**2.3.1 Attribution of blame to victim.** Attribution of blame to victim of domestic violence was operationalized by the Domestic Violence Blame Scale (Bryant & Spencer, 2003; Petretic-Jackson, Sandberg, & Jackson, 1994). Attribution of blame to the female "victim" was a subscale of the Domestic Violence Blame Scale.

The subscale comprises seven items that describe the wife as the victim of domestic violence. Examples include: 1. "wife provokes domestic violence" and 3. "domestic violence can be avoided by the wife trying harder to please husband." Response choices to the statements are on a 6-point Likert-type scale: *Strongly disagree* = 1, *Moderately disagree* = 2, *Slightly disagree* = 3, *Slightly agree* = 4, *Moderately agree* = 5, and *Strongly agree* = 6. Internal consistency estimates as high as .80 (Golden, 2009) have been reported for the subscale. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .77. Overall score for the subscale was summed for analysis. Higher scores indicate higher attribution of blame to female victim and lower scores indicate lower attribution of blame to female victim.

**2.3.2 Attitudes toward partner violence.** The subscale Attitudes Toward Partner Violence (PV) in the General Attitudes Toward Violence (ATV; Davidson & Canivez, 2012; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995) was used to measure attitudes toward partner violence. The subscale comprises four items describing physical violence in intimate relationships in the form of hitting and slapping. Examples are of the items are: 1. "It is all right for a partner to hit the other if they are unfaithful" and 2. "It is all right for a partner to slap the other if insulted or ridiculed."

Response choices are as follows: *Very much disagree* = 1, *Mostly disagree* = 2, *Slightly disagree* = 3, *Neither agree nor disagree* = 4, *Slightly agree* = 5, *Mostly agree* = 6, and *Very much agree* = 7. A recent study (Davidson & Canivez, 2012) reported a Cronbach's alpha of .88. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .80. Overall score for the subscale was summed for analysis. Higher scores indicate higher endorsement of physical violence against partner and lower scores indicate lower endorsement of physical violence against partner.

## 2.4 Data Analysis

In analyzing the data, preliminary efforts were made to identify possible duplication by cross-checking the Internet Protocol (IP) address with survey responses to determine possible identical responses. Following the cross-checking, no identical responses or duplication of data were identified. Demographic variables were dichotomized and categorized for descriptive analyses (Table 1). A 3 (country: United States, South Africa, and Nigeria) x 2 (gender: female and male) between-subjects MANOVA with two independent variables (i.e., attribution of blame to female victim and attitudes toward partner violence) was used to determine whether attribution of blame to the female victim and attitudes toward partner violence differed by gender and across countries (Hypothesis 1–4). To control for type I error, Bonferroni correction was used to test each univariate ANOVA at the .025 level (for country). Similarly, Bonferroni method was used to control for type I error for the examined pairwise comparisons in follow-up analyses with the alpha level set at .008.

Attribution of blame to the female victim and attitudes toward partner violence were examined for skewness and kurtosis. Attribution of blame approximated normal distribution. However, attitudes toward partner violence did not approximate normal distribution and base-10 logarithm transformation (log transformation) technique was used for normalization. The log-transformed variable was used in testing the hypotheses. However, to ensure consistency with literature in reporting "means," we report "arithmetic means" of untransformed variables rather than "geometric means" of transformed variables for analysis regarding multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) (see Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

Multiple regression analysis (simultaneous entry) was used to determine the relationships between age, gender, race, country, and attitudes toward partner violence and attribution of blame to the female victim (hypothesis 5). For the analysis, the country variable was dummy-coded into dichotomous variables: A1 (United States = 1 vs. Nigeria = 0 and South Africa = 0) and A2 (Nigeria = 1 vs. United States = 0 and South Africa = 0). As a result, South Africa became the reference group for analysis. The covariates (i.e., age, gender, marital status, educational background - coded as less than bachelor degree versus bachelor degree or above, employment status, race/ethnicity, and country), independent variable (i.e., attitudes toward partner violence), and interaction terms (i.e., attitudes toward partner violence x A1, attitudes toward partner violence x A2, and attitudes toward partner violence x gender) entered the analysis using simultaneous entry. All variables were mean-centered for analysis (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). There was no serious violation of assumptions for conducting multiple regression analysis, including linearity and homoscedasticity (Cohen et al., 2003). Data were analyzed using SPSS 20™ (IBM Corp. 2011).

## 3. Results

A preliminary analysis indicated that attribution of blame to female victim and attitudes toward partner violence were moderately, significantly correlated,  $r = .42$  ( $p < .0005$ ). Using Pillai's Trace, there was a statistically significant multivariate main effect of attribution of blame to female victim and attitudes toward partner violence for gender  $V = .022$ ,  $F(2, 356) = 4.06$ ,  $p = .018$ , partial eta squared = .022 and country  $V = .411$ ,  $F(4, 714) = 46.21$ ,  $p < .0005$ , partial eta squared = .21. The interaction effects of gender and country were nonsignificant. Results of univariate ANOVA using Bonferroni correction further suggest that gender and country have effects on attribution of blame to female victim, ( $F(1, 357) = 5.04$ ;  $p = .025$ ) and ( $F(2, 357) = 116.27$ ;  $p < .0005$ ), respectively and attitudes toward partner violence, ( $F(1, 357) = 4.84$ ;  $p = .028$ ) and ( $F(2, 357) = 24.73$ ;  $p < .0005$ ), respectively.

### 3.1 Effects of Gender and Country on Attribution of Blame to Victim

Consistent with Hypothesis 1, the average scores of female respondents on attribution of blame to female victim were significantly lower than the average scores of male respondents (Table 2).



Follow-up analyses to the univariate ANOVA using the Bonferroni post hoc adjustments suggested that respondents differed on the dependent variable comprising attribution of blame for partner violence to female victim. Specifically, respondents in Nigeria scored significantly higher in attribution of blame for partner violence to female victim than respondents in the United States or South Africa ( $p < .0005$ ) (Hypothesis 2). Similarly, respondents in the United States scored significantly lower in attribution of blame for partner violence to female victim than respondents in South Africa ( $p < .0005$ ).

### 3.2 Effects of Gender and Country on Attitudes toward Partner Violence

Consistent with Hypothesis 3, the average scores of female respondents on attitudes toward partner violence were significantly lower than the average scores of male respondents (Table 2). Follow-up analyses to the univariate ANOVA using the Bonferroni post hoc adjustments suggested that respondents differed on the dependent variable comprising attitudes toward partner violence (Hypothesis 4). Specifically, respondents in the United States and South Africa scored significantly lower on attitudes toward partner violence than respondents in Nigeria ( $p < .0005$ ). However, respondents in the United States and South Africa did not significantly differ in their scores on attitudes toward partner violence ( $p > .05$ ).

**Table 2: Means and Standard Deviations on Attribution of Blame for Domestic Violence and Attitudes toward Partner Violence for Gender and Countries**

Variable	Attribution of blame to female victim M(SD)		Attitudes toward partner violence M(SD)	
<b>Gender</b>				
Female	1.96	(.90)	1.31	(.68)
Male	2.51	(1.02)	1.65	(.93)
<b>Country</b>				
United States	1.39	(.52)	1.12	(.38)
South Africa	1.75	(.64)	1.19	(.52)
Nigeria	2.91	(.81)	1.74	(.95)

*Note.* Because Nigeria is racially homogeneous (only Blacks/non-Caucasians) compared to the United States and South Africa that is racially diverse, race/ethnic variable was not examined in the model.

### 3.3 Relationship between personal characteristics, attitudes toward partner violence, and attribution of blame to female victim of partner violence

The overall model describing the relationship between personal characteristics, country, attitudes toward partner violence, and attribution of blame to female victim of partner violence was significant [ $F(12, 362) = 39.58, p < .0005$ ]. As indicated in Table 3, *age* ( $\beta = -.115, p = .010$ ), *gender* ( $\beta = .074, p = .046$ ), *race* ( $\beta = .206, p < .0005$ ), *country* ( $\beta = -.473, p < .0005$ ), and *attitudes toward partner violence* ( $\beta = .278, p < .0005$ ) were related to attribution of blame to female victim. Specifically, lower age, being male, being Black/non-Caucasian, and being from Nigeria were related to attribution of blame to female victim (hypothesis 5). Country moderated the relation between attitudes toward partner violence and blame attribution to female victim ( $\beta = -.148, p = .031$ ). For respondents in South Africa, high attitudes toward partner violence (i.e., high endorsement of partner violence) was related to greater attribution of blame to female victim of partner violence; however, for respondents in the United States there was a much smaller difference in blame attribution to female victim between low and high attitudes toward partner violence (hypothesis 5, Figure 1). The model accounted for approximately 58 percent (adjusted  $R^2 = .56$ ) of the variance in attribution of blame to the female victim of partner violence.

**Table 3: Multiple Regression Analysis of the Relationships Between Demographic Covariates, Country, and Attitudes Toward Partner Violence and Attribution of Blame to Female Victim of Partner Violence**

Variable	$\beta$	t	p	95.0% Confidence Interval		VIF
				LB	UB	
Age	-.115	-2.59	.010	-.018	-.003	1.62
Gender	.074	2.00	.046	.001	.163	1.14
Marital status	.071	1.61	.107	-.015	.152	1.61
Education	-.001	-.02	.988	-.094	.092	1.05
Employment status	.039	.96	.337	-.050	.145	1.36
Race/ethnicity	.206	4.53	<.0005	.124	.315	1.71
A1 (United States vs. South Africa)	.035	.67	.506	-.071	.143	2.32
A2 (Nigeria vs. South Africa)	-.473	-9.69	<.0005	-.557	-.369	1.96
Attitudes toward partner violence	.278	4.65	<.0005	.886	2.185	2.95
A1 x Attitudes toward partner violence	-.148	-2.17	.031	-1.595	-.078	3.82
A2 x Attitudes toward partner violence	-.034	-.74	.460	-.756	.343	1.77
Gender x Attitudes toward partner violence	.067	1.83	.068	-.028	.788	1.12

*Note.* LB = Lower bound; UB = Upper bound; VIF = Variance inflation factor.

Categorized variables centered as follows:

Gender = Male (1), Female (-1)

Marital status = Married and others (married but separated, divorced, and widowed) (1), Single (-1)

Education completed = Bachelor and above (1), Lower than bachelor degree (-1)

Race/ethnicity = Black/non-Caucasian and others (1), White/Caucasian (-1)

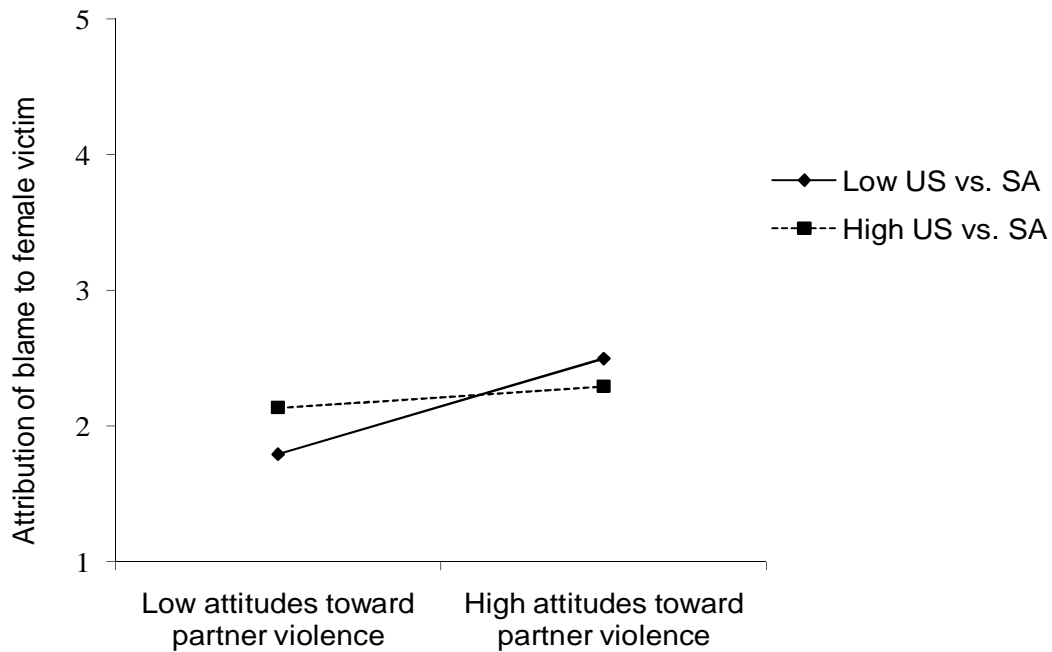
A1 = South Africa (1), United States (-1)

A2 = South Africa (1), Nigeria (-1)

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1 Gender and Country Differences in Attribution of Blame to the Female Victim

The cross-national analysis in this study identified gender and country differences in attribution of blame for partner violence and attitudes toward partner violence. Regarding gender differences, it was found that men were more likely than women to attribute blame to the female victim of partner violence. This prediction of gender differences is consistent with recent cross-cultural findings from Japan, China, and the United States (Nguyen et al., 2013), as well as data from previous studies in individual countries, especially the United States (Bryant & Spencer, 2003; Ewoldt et al., 2000; Gamache, 2006; Sinclair, 2012; White & Kurpius, 2002; Workman & Freeburg, 1999; Yamawaki et al., 2012). Two possible explanations may be offered for why men were more likely than women to attribute blame to the female victim of partner violence. The first relates to the defensive attribution hypothesis (Anderson et al., 2001; Shaver, 1970), which presupposes that women are less likely to attribute blame to the female victim "in order to reduce the threat that they too could be victims of domestic violence" (Peters, 2008, p. 16).



**Figure 1:** Country as moderator of the relationship between attitudes toward partner violence and attribution of blame to the female victim of domestic violence. US = United States, SA = South Africa. *Note:* High US vs. SA = United States; Low US vs. SA = South Africa

The second possible explanation may be attributed to traditional roles, behavioral expectations, and restrictions placed on women. Across societies, particularly patriarchal societies, certain behavioral expectations are placed on women, and any behavior falling short of these expectations may result in negative consequences for women, including violence and attribution of blame. For example, items in the scale used to operationalize attribution of blame clearly mirror traditional expectations of submissiveness and obedience by women, as well as stereotypical responses vociferated to suppress a woman's attempt to assert herself or resist behavioral norms and expectations. It is therefore reasonable to expect men to be more likely to agree with the notion that the wife provokes and encourages domestic violence as well as with the notion that domestic violence can be avoided by the wives doing more to please their husbands (Bryant & Spencer, 2003; Petretic-Jackson et al., 1994).

In addition to the main effect of gender, we found a main effect of country on attribution of blame to the female victim, such that respondents in Nigeria were more likely than respondents in the United States or South Africa to attribute blame for partner violence to the female victim. Similarly, respondents in the United States were less likely to attribute blame for partner violence to the female victim than were respondents in South Africa. These findings bear some semblance to recent cross-cultural differences in attribution of blame to the victim among Japanese, Chinese, and U.S. students (Nguyen et al., 2013; Yamawaki et al., 2009). It is not surprising that respondents in the United States were least likely to attribute blame to the female victim of partner violence given the effects of the patriarchal system on perceptions and expectations for women in Nigeria and South Africa. In patriarchal societies where subjugation of women prevails, where men have unbridled authority over women, where submissiveness of women is culturally sanctioned, and where responsibility for family preservation rests on the shoulders of women (Fawole, Aderonmu, & Fawole, 2005; Hargreaves et al., 2006; Oyediran & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2005), it is easy to speculate why relationship expectations for women could be high and blame for relationship crisis could be easily apportioned to women more so than in societies committed to ideals of egalitarianism.

As emphasized by the feminist perspective, oppressive patriarchal structure is disempowering to women but empowering to men in ways that predispose men to evaluate women through traditional values and beliefs and attribute blame for violence to women by virtue of their vulnerability in the social system (Bowman, 2003; R. P. Dobash & Dobash, 2004; Kishor & Johnson, 2004).

#### **4.2 Gender and Country Differences in Attitudes toward Partner Violence**

In addition to gender and country differences in attribution of blame to the female victim, we found gender and country differences in endorsement of partner violence. Regarding gender differences, women were less likely than men to endorse partner violence. This finding is consistent with past findings in the United States regarding the lower tendency of women to hold beliefs that are supportive of physical violence in comparison to men (Bryant & Spencer, 2003; Nabors et al., 2006; Simon et al., 2001). A possible explanation for why women were less likely than men to endorse partner violence may be derived from gender differences in socialization. Because socialization experiences of women are framed by deprivation, devaluation, subjugation, and inequality, it is reasonable to expect women to be less inclined to endorse partner violence than men, whose socialization experiences are framed by empowerment, masculinity, privilege, and domination of women (see Bowman, 2003; Partab, 2011).

In addition to a main effect of gender, we found a main effect of country on endorsement of partner violence, such that respondents in the United States and South Africa were less likely than respondents in Nigeria to endorse partner violence. This finding is consistent with previous findings regarding cross-cultural differences in sensitivity to partner violence between U.S. and Taiwanese students (Yu, 2011). A cursory review of cultural values and beliefs in Nigeria may help in understanding the higher propensity to endorse partner violence than in either the United States or South Africa. In Nigeria, many aspects of cultural and religious beliefs encourage partner violence. For example, in some tribes in Nigeria (and South Africa), women are required to be faithful to their husbands, who are permitted by tradition or religion to marry more than one woman. Any actual or perceived infidelity on the part of a woman may result in physical harm or even death. Similarly, to marry a woman, men are required to pay "bride price," which some men misconstrue as outright purchase of a woman, with the liberty to do whatever he pleases with her. This is particularly compounded by the fact that women are forbidden to disobey or question the authority of their husbands, who, consonant with cultural or religious beliefs, are permitted to discipline their wives physically (Hargreaves et al., 2006; Oyediran & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2005). These practices have implications for why respondents in Nigeria may be more inclined to endorse partner violence.

However, despite a history of apartheid and prevalence of partner violence in South Africa, it was particularly encouraging that respondents in South Africa were less likely to endorse partner violence than were respondents in Nigeria. Also interesting was that respondents in the United States and South Africa did not differ in endorsement of partner violence. Several factors may be attributed to this finding for South Africa. It is possible that prioritization of violence against women by South African government, proliferation of education campaigns by stakeholders to change attitudes toward violence, and increasing coverage of violence by media are having positive effects on perception of partner violence. However, the findings lend credence to recent reports that gender-based violence is most problematic in Nigeria, such that 81% of wives reported being physically or verbally abused by their husbands in Nigeria, despite the recent decline in supportive attitudes toward partner violence (Kigotho, 2013; Pierotti, 2013).

#### **4.3 Relationship between personal characteristics, country, attitudes toward partner violence, and attribution of blame to female victim**

Findings from multiple regressions suggest that lower age, being male, being Black/non-Caucasian, being from Nigeria, and attitudes toward partner violence were related to attribution of blame to the female victim. Although the socio-cultural mechanisms instrumental to these findings may be different across societies as previously discussed, being male and being Black have been found to be related to victim blaming (Ewoldt et al., 2000; Funk et al., 2003; Gamache, 2006; Locke & Richman, 1999). The effects of age on blame for domestic violence have also been found, such that more Baby Boomers (67.3 percent) attributed blame for domestic violence to their partners more so than did Millennials (57.8 percent) (Wilke & Vinton, 2005).

Although being from Nigeria was associated with attribution of blame to female victim, country moderated the relationship between attitudes toward partner violence and attribution of blame to female victim. For respondents in South Africa, high attitudes toward partner violence had greater effects on attribution of blame to female victim of partner violence, whereas for respondents in the United States there was little difference between the effects of low and high attitudes toward partner violence on blame attribution to female victim. Interestingly, the propensity to blame women for violence in South Africa has been established in previous studies (Hargreaves et al., 2006; Heaven, Connors, & Pretorius, 1998). The hitherto described patriarchal values and beliefs guiding intimate relationships in South Africa may engender high pro-violence beliefs against women thereby heightening the tendency to apportion blame to women following victimization in intimate relationships, unlike societies, such as the United States, where patriarchal values and beliefs are in part tamed by egalitarian ideals and legal policies and practices that are enforced to prevent abuse and exploitation in intimate relationships.

In general, misconceptualization of masculinity, gender inequality, and normalization of violence as an integral part of socialization and acculturation, and propensity to keep domestic violence a family secret remain potent factors to consider in understanding men's tendency to attribute blame for domestic violence to the female victim. Moreover, in light of the differences in attitudes toward partner violence and attribution of blame between South Africa and Nigeria despite similar cultural experience and social structures and given the similarities in attitudes toward partner violence between South Africa and the United States despite differences in development and social structures, it is possible that exposure to patriarchal values and beliefs have differential effects on attribution of blame to female victim and attitudes toward partner violence between racially diverse and racially homogenous societies. That is, patriarchal values may have effects on attribution of blame to female victim and attitudes toward partner violence in racially homogenous societies in ways that are different from racially diverse societies.

#### **4.4 Strengths and Limitations**

This study has both strengths and limitations. Although they are preliminary, the findings provide insight on cross-cultural differences in attribution of blame for partner violence and attitudes toward partner violence with implications for theory, research, education, and international transfer of knowledge about partner violence. By drawing attention to the pervasiveness of cross-cultural differences, some clarity is provided on differential perspectives and controversies in research on violence against women. Findings also provide some insight into policy guidance for integrating different approaches for addressing partner violence across societies. Moreover, the use of online survey methodology enabled broad-based participation across regions of the countries investigated rather than being restricted to a specific locality.

Despite the above strengths, there are limitations. Because this cross-sectional study was conducted via the Internet, it is unknown whether respondents with Internet access differed from respondents without Internet access. As a result, findings may not be generalizable to broader populations. Moreover, findings cannot be put in the proper perspective due to lack of knowledge about respondents' childhood history or current exposure to relationship violence.

However, as important as social context is to understanding endorsement and attribution of blame for partner violence, we remain cautious in using cultural norms to explain cross-cultural differences in this study because individual perceptions may be influenced by global norms of human rights more than by mere compliance with cultural expectations. Such endorsement of global norms of human rights may influence attribution of blame to factors (e.g., perpetrator, situation, society) other than the female victim.

#### **4.5 Implications for Policy, Practice, Education, and Research**

Understanding similarities and differences in attribution of blame for partner violence and attitudes toward partner violence across cultures has implications for international transfer of effective measures and policies for combating relationship violence. For example, in comparing responses of Chinese and American university students, Li, Wu, and Sun (2013) found that Chinese students endorsed a "parochial" approach to addressing partner violence, in contrast to endorsement of a "criminal justice system" approach by students in the United States. By drawing attention to pervasive cross-cultural differences, the current findings enhance understanding of these differences in perceived causes of partner violence across cultures.

Findings also have implications for interventions in partner violence. The fact that respondents in Nigeria were more likely to attribute blame to the victim than were respondents in South Africa and the United States and that respondents in the United States and South Africa were less likely than respondents in Nigeria to endorse partner violence suggests that multiple approaches may be suitable for addressing partner violence in Nigeria. Multiple, broad-based measures with enforcement mechanisms may achieve better outcomes in addressing partner violence than would piecemeal approaches (Bowman, 2003).

Findings also have implications for integration of cross-cultural knowledge about partner violence into educational curriculums across countries. Such integration has the potential of enhancing the sensitivity needed for changing attitudes toward and ameliorating partner violence, particularly violence against women. Education may help to decrease attitudes and beliefs associated with blaming of victims or of endorsing myths about partner violence (Postmus, McMahon, Warrener, & Macro, 2011). Future cross-cultural studies may consider the moderating effects of childhood exposure to domestic violence on attribution of blame and attitudes toward partner violence.

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