
How Novice and Experienced Officers Interpret Wife Assaults: Normative and Efficiency Frames

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Prior research has speculated about, but has not provided systematic empirical data on, how officers use their prior knowledge to interpret wife assault situations and how these interpretations shape their responses. Our findings challenge claims that officers' reluctance to pursue formal arrest stems primarily from their proclivity to blame victims. By manipulating whether or not a wife exhibited abnormal behavior, we show that experienced officers do not focus on whether wives can control their "provoking" actions and are to blame; instead they consider the relative credibility and dangerousness of the husband. Prior experience with handling wife assault situations thus shifts the focus of decisionmaking from normative considerations such as blameworthiness to efficiency considerations such as substantiating claims for successful prosecution. However, both novice and experienced officers base their arrest decisions on prior beliefs about whether wives provoke their husbands when wives have alcohol problems. Our findings indicate that future research can profitably examine how prior knowledge shapes interpretations to gain a better understanding of police decisionmaking.

Police calls about violence in domestic situations generally have been handled through informal mediation and separation of disputants (e.g., Berk & Loseke 1981; Dobash & Dobash 1979; Muir 1977; Worden 1989) and overwhelmingly involve men who have physically attacked women (Bell & Bell 1991). Academic researchers (e.g., Sherman & Berk 1984), feminist groups, and civil liability suits filed for failure to provide equal protection in the 1980s challenged the informal handling of wife assaults.¹ (See

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¹ We use the more specific term "wife assault" to highlight the criminal and gender-based nature of the offense. Wife assault also limits the issue to married females; many

Hanmer, Radford, & Stanko 1989a for a history of the movement to bring policy reforms to the handling of wife assaults.) These sources catalyzed changes in state laws to allow and encourage police officers to use arrest when probable cause existed without obtaining the victim's consent or preference (Hirschel & Hutchinson 1991; Law Enforcement News 1987).

Officers, however, still have much choice about when evidence meets the standard of probable cause (Baumgartner 1992; Ferraro 1993). Also, some states have enacted primary aggressor provisions to handle situations where disputants provide conflicting stories. These provisions further increase the complexity and discretionary nature of officers' decisionmaking. Georgia's statute, for example (Family Violence Act of Georgia 1991), instructs officers to determine who is the primary aggressor based on normative considerations such as blameworthiness (i.e., whether injuries were inflicted in self-defense), dangerousness considerations such as the likelihood of future violence, and evidentiary considerations such as the visibility and severity of injuries.² These statutes, however, provide little guidance on the relative importance of normative, dangerousness, and evidentiary considerations.

How do officers interpret potential wife assault situations when husbands and wives provide conflicting testimony and both claim self-defense? Some observational field research suggests that officers make decisions based on beliefs about gender roles, battered women, social class, and the sanctity of the family (Black 1980; Ferraro 1989a, 1989b; Martin 1976), and on role orientations, which are formed from general attitudes about people and from departmental training and experience (e.g., Muir 1977; White 1972). Research that systematically measures officers' role orientations and attitudes, however, indicates that situational features predict officers' decisions much better than do officers' attitudes (for a review and empirical support see Riksheim & Chermak 1993; Worden 1989). A more complete understanding of police decisionmaking requires empirical data on how officers use their prior knowledge and the disputants' actions to interpret the conflicting testimony, and how these interpretations de-

laws cover only domestic violence for married couples and fail to recognize the rights of cohabiting couples.

² Georgia's primary aggressor statute states:

Where complaints of family violence are received from two or more opposing parties, the officer shall evaluate each complaint separately to attempt to determine who was the primary aggressor. If the officer determines that one of the parties was the primary physical aggressor, the officer shall not be required to arrest any other person believed to have committed an act of family violence during the incident. In determining whether a person is a primary physical aggressor, an officer shall consider: (1) prior family violence involving either party; (2) the relative severity of the injuries inflicted on each person; (3) the potential for future injury; and (4) whether one of the parties acted in self-defense.

termine their decisions (Mastrofski & Parks 1990 and Worden 1989 make similar arguments for police decisionmaking in general).

We demonstrate how novice and experienced officers' prior knowledge and the appropriateness of wives' actions interact to shape interpretations and responses to wife assaults. Much prior research finds that officers consider the victims' actions and characteristics and are less likely to take formal action when wives' actions deviate from what they consider to be appropriate behavior (e.g., Black 1980; Ferraro 1989a, 1989b; Muir 1977; Waaland & Keely 1985). We use signs of mental illness to operationalize instances when wives' actions deviate from social norms, because this operationalization allows us to show how stereotyped images of mentally ill persons affect decisions and to test competing claims about how officers make decisions. Some scholars claim that officers blame women because they believe women can control their provoking actions or can leave the situation (e.g., Ferraro 1989b; Hilton 1993a; Jaffe et al. 1993), whereas other scholars claim that officers make decisions based more on efficiency concerns such as credibility and dangerousness (e.g., Berk & Loseke 1981; Black 1980; Smith 1987). The atypical situation of a hallucinating wife provides a situation in which normative and efficiency considerations conflict. Officers perceive hallucinating wives as unable to understand that violence is wrong and as unable to control their actions, which are two normative considerations suggesting that men unjustifiably inflicted physical injuries on women even if the women provoked them. On the other hand, officers also perceive hallucinating wives as untruthful and dangerous, which results in a low probability of husbands being successfully prosecuted. This atypical situation thus allows a more controlled test of the relative importance novice and experienced officers generally place on normative and efficiency concerns across situations. Moreover, we show that both novice and experienced officers in situations involving alcohol abuse use beliefs about women's proclivity to provoke men because they see this situation as representing the typical wife assault.

We first outline a conceptual framework and its associated hypotheses that explains how officers interpret wife assault situations. We then provide a description of the sample, hypothetical scripts, and measures of officers' responses and inferences. Finally, we present the results and reflect on their implications.

I. Conceptual Framework

Schema theory describes how people form knowledge systems and how the context determines which knowledge structures are used to interpret a situation. Schema theory has re-

ceived much empirical support in laboratory studies in psychology (for reviews see Black, Galambos, & Read 1984; Fiske & Neuberg 1990; Fiske & Taylor 1991; Rumlehart 1984) and has been used to examine how laypersons and legal officials make decisions (e.g., Carroll et al. 1982; Lurigio & Carroll 1985; Chi, Glaser, & Farr 1988; Stalans & Lurigio 1990). We provide a brief discussion of its assumptions and demonstrate the connection between schema theory and ideas in sociolegal research about how officers make decisions.

Schema theory delineates two types of knowledge that people have in memory. One is “content knowledge”—knowledge about categories or groups of people and events (Rumlehart 1984; Fiske & Taylor 1991). Many studies on how officials make decisions suggest that they use prior knowledge about the different categories of people and events (Black 1980; Emerson 1969, 1983; Drass & Spencer 1987; Ferraro 1989a; Gilboy 1991; Hawkins 1992a; Lurigio & Carroll 1985; Muir 1977; Smith 1987; Stalans & Lurigio 1990; Sudnow 1965). The other knowledge system—“procedural knowledge” or “frames”—holds rules about the relevant information and inferences needed to arrive at a decision (Hawkins 1992a; Lurigio & Stalans 1990; Manning & Hawkins 1990). Frames are connected to individuals’ worldviews, values, and concerns that help define the meaning of different situations, and are content-free knowledge structures that contain rules about what questions are relevant to ask and what criteria are relevant to consider in making a decision.

A. Officers’ Knowledge about Categories

When officers can categorize a specific wife assault situation as an example of a category, they use their prior knowledge about the category to interpret the conflicting stories and assign less relevance to the presented physical evidence (e.g., Fiske & Neuberg 1990; Stalans & Lurigio 1990; Sudnow 1965). Both novice and experienced officers acquire beliefs about mentally ill persons, social classes, race, and battered wives from earlier socialization and media stories. Drawing on schema theory and prior research, we can make several predictions about how knowledge about mentally ill persons, typical wife assaults, and social class differences shape interpretations of conflicting stories. Table 1 provides a summary of these hypotheses. Hypotheses 1–4 describe the expected effects of this categorical knowledge on officers’ interpretations and responses to specific wife assault situations. For example, officers may conclude from their stereotyped images of mentally ill persons that a wife who is hallucinating usually is violent, unpredictable, and untruthful even though she has bruises and lacerations to the face and neck (Desforges et al. 1993; Scheff 1984). Schema theory suggests that

officers will use beliefs about whether wives typically provoke their husbands into violence when characteristics of a specific situation indicate that the situation is representative of the typical battered wife (Black 1980; Drass & Spencer 1987; Ferraro 1989a; Stalans 1988). Often these beliefs are centered on normative concerns about how people should behave. For example, Ferraro and Pope (1993:105) concluded: "Police stereotypes of battered women are related to their assumptions of 'rational' human action and deserving victims."

Table 1. Hypotheses about the Relationship among Experience, Prior Knowledge, and Interpretations of Specific Situations

Hypothesis 1:	Both novice and experienced officers will perceive wives who have hallucinations or alcoholism as less truthful and more dangerous than wives who do not. Officers will perceive wives having hallucinations as less in control of their actions. Officers will perceive wives with unusual startled responses compared with normal wives as more credible, less dangerous, and more in control of their actions.
Hypothesis 2:	Officers' inferences about credibility and dangerousness will shape their decisions to recommend mental health treatment and to recommend shelters. Experienced officers share common knowledge about when these recommendations should be made; hence, experienced officers' decisions should be more predictable than novice officers' decisions.
Hypothesis 3:	Both novice and experienced officers will use their prior knowledge about whether women in typical wife assault situations provoke men's violence toward them when situational features allow officers to categorize the situation as "typical." We explore whether a wife's alcoholism, unusual startled responses, or no deviant behavior serve as cues that allow officers to classify the situation as typical.
Hypothesis 4:	Officers hold beliefs that couples in poverty are more mutually habitually violent than are middle-class couples. Based on this belief, officers will be less likely to use wives' actions to predict the dangerousness of a poverty-stricken husband than the dangerousness of a middle-class husband.
Hypothesis 5:	Experienced officers will place more importance on whether claims can be substantiated and successfully prosecuted and less importance on blameworthiness in selecting responses to handle wife assaults than will novice officers. These different frames also will define effectiveness of arrest. Novice officers will perceive arrest to be more effective when the husband understands violence is wrong, whereas experienced officers will perceive the opposite.
Hypothesis 6:	Experienced officers will be less likely to arrest when the wife is hallucinating than will novice officers. This difference occurs because experienced officers conclude that the wife is relatively less credible and more dangerous than the husband whereas novice officers are more likely to conclude the husband acted unjustifiably when he injured his wife, who could not control her provoking behavior.

Some categories such as social class, gender, and race are chronically accessible and may automatically inform inferences (Fiske & Taylor 1991). Prior research (Black 1980; Ferraro 1989a, 1989b; Smith 1987) suggests that officers believe couples in poverty are more habitually violent than are middle-income couples. This knowledge leads them to arrest poverty-stricken

husbands less often than middle-income husbands. Social and economic characteristics also allow officers to classify cases as normal or deviant (Black 1980; Ferraro 1989a, 1989b; Manning 1977; Muir 1977). Ferraro (1989a:67) concludes: "Deviants serve as the 'other' for police officers; they are publicly intoxicated or high, homeless, involved in crime, live in run-down houses, have atypical family structures, and/or speak foreign languages."

B. Two Frames: Normative and Efficiency

Officers sometimes are faced with situations that cannot be easily categorized or typified into their specific knowledge about wife assault cases. In these situations, they rely more on their frames to organize and interpret testimonial and physical evidence. Drawing on prior research on officers' decisionmaking, we describe two ideal frames that officers may bring to wife assault situations. Individual officers may give different weight to these two frames. In describing these frames, we cite research that has speculated about what inferences officers make but has not provided direct empirical support for these speculations.

Normative Frame

Some research claims that officers often blame women for the violence (e.g., Ferraro & Pope 1993; Hatty 1989; Jaffe et al. 1993; Saunders & Size 1986; Stith 1990; for a review see Hilton 1993a). Ferraro (1993:169) highlights the central issue officers with a normative frame focus on: "When officers arrive at a 'family fight,' they decide who is most to blame for the problem. If they view each partner as equally liable, both parties will be arrested." Officers employing a normative frame attend more to the appropriateness of each disputant's actions based on societal norms (e.g., Ferraro 1989a; Smith 1987; Hawkins 1992a). Officers assess the moral character of the disputants (Hawkins 1992a), whether the husband or wife *should* have acted differently. They base their decision on a moral or normative basis more than on a practical basis of whether either disputant *could* have acted differently. They will arrest a husband when he should have acted otherwise and a wife acted justifiably, and will not arrest a husband when a wife committed a more unjustified action that was within her control. Officers may see inflicted injuries as deserved when husbands acted in self-defense or were provoked into anger by wives who committed unjustifiable actions such as adultery (e.g., Saunders & Size 1986). Officers may see inflicted injuries as undeserved when husbands inflict injuries on wives who have mental illnesses that make them unable to control their actions or are physically ill (e.g., Dobash & Dobash 1979).

Officers may claim that they usually either try to mete out justice or usually try to provide help. Prior research, for example, has identified two types of officers—tough cops and problem solvers—who use normative framing but claim to strive toward meting out justice or providing help, respectively (White 1972; Worden & Pollitz 1984). Whereas previous research has assumed that officers respond consistently across situations to achieve their stated objective (Black 1980; Smith 1987; Worden & Pollitz 1984), we argue that objectives serve to rationalize, not guide, decisions (see also Hawkins 1992a). Muir (1977:88–91) provides an example of how a problem solver uses a normative frame and can become a “tough cop” in certain situations:

Officer Frank Carpasso . . . “was out there to help people.” . . . In a situation where information was so elusive, helter-skelter, and subjective, asking “Who’s to blame for hurting the kids?” centered the matter. . . . Carpasso tended to approach situations, looking for favorites to pamper. If the boy played his cards right, he could get Carpasso to . . . go to bat with the Youth Authority to divert him from jail. . . . But if there were favorites, there were also heels, against whom Carpasso carried out his moral mandate to be forceful.

Both tough cops and problem solvers base decisions on an assessment of blameworthiness from the presented evidence and their prior beliefs about categories of people and events. An important feature of our research, which distinguishes it from much previous research on police decisionmaking, is that we examine consistency in the ways officers ask questions, interpret information, and form responses.³

Efficiency Frame

Whereas officers with a normative frame unravel the past to determine whether the person primarily responsible for the occurrence of the injuries should be blamed, officers with an efficiency frame consider the immediate present and near future situation. (For a detailed discussion of the conceptual difference between responsibility and blame, see Shaver 1985.) Officers with an efficiency frame are pragmatic thinkers who are concerned with job security and material rewards and recognition the limited resources in the criminal justice system (Berk & Loseke 1981) and in the community (Bittner 1990; Teplin 1984b; Teplin & Pruett 1992). To minimize the likelihood of glaring errors and bad media publicity, officers assess the likeli-

³ Drawing on schema theory and naturalistic research (e.g., Manning & Hawkins 1990; Hawkins 1992a), we adopt an approach where a frame can lead to quite divergent responses depending on the situation. Some prior research (Black 1980; Smith 1987; Worden & Pollitz 1984), which has used the terms “role orientations” and “styles of control,” connects how officers interpret situations to one and only one outcome (e.g., Black’s penal style is manifested by arrest and focuses on blameworthiness). Officers, however, can arrive at the same response by interpreting situations variously.

hood that the husband or wife will inflict severe harm in the near future (e.g., Berk & Loseke 1981; Bittner 1967; Teplin 1984b) and determine whether claims can be substantiated and successfully prosecuted in court (e.g., Ferraro & Pope 1993; Worden 1989).

C. How Professional Socialization Changes Framing

From earlier socialization, both novice and experienced officers have acquired both normative framing and certain aspects of efficiency framing such as concern about dangerousness. However, from their socialization into the profession, experienced officers also have acquired other aspects of efficiency framing such as the need to use arrests sparingly and to substantiate claims. For example, novice officers quickly learn from conversations with experienced officers that “gung-ho” attitudes make them the object of fellow officers’ jokes because their eagerness violates the informal norm to “lay low and avoid trouble” (Van Maanen 1974). Rookie officers learn through direct and vicarious experiences that they must use arrest sparingly and as last resorts (Berk & Loseke 1981; Bittner 1967, 1990; Muir 1977; Teplin 1984b), because an arrest takes much time to process and takes them away from backing up fellow officers, from handling their share of calls, from helping other citizens, and from being available for “big pinches” (Van Maanen 1974). Novice officers also learn what it takes to establish probable cause and “how to . . . avoid unnecessary or fruitless effort, and write reports that will reduce the risks of a negative response from the police hierarchy” (Mastrofski, Ritti, & Snipes 1994:126–27).

Schema theory proposes that the priority placed on each of these frames will depend on the frequency of use in the officers’ daily and professional lives, on the salience of characteristics associated with future dangerousness (e.g., a weapon), on the officers’ attitudes toward their job, and on the salience of normative and instrumental framing in recent high-profile wife assault cases (e.g., Stalans & Lurigio 1990). Most police departments base raises and promotions on efficiency concerns and place more emphasis both in informal and formal training on efficiency concerns such as substantiating claims and protecting society than on normative concerns about the wrongfulness of an action. Experienced officers, then, receive much exposure to efficiency framing. Through the salience of efficiency framing, experienced officers consider the broader administrative and professional context in making decisions about how to handle specific wife assaults (e.g., Gilboy 1991; Simon 1976; Worden 1989).

Given this organizational context, it is understandable that the shift toward holding attitudes that place more importance on

self-interested and efficiency concerns than on a pursuit of justice is relatively swift, occurring within one year of job experience (Fielding 1986, 1988). Compared with novice officers, those with one or more years of experience more often take no action and see their inaction as deriving from a more realistic view of the criminal justice system and their perception of police work as a job with instrumental benefits (Van Maanen 1975; Fielding & Fielding 1991). Novice police officers, perhaps because of their normative concerns, are more likely to arrest suspects including special groups such as fellow officers and elderly individuals than are officers with at least one year of experience (Tuohy et al. 1993).

This previous research provides only indirect support for how professionalization changes the way officers interpret and handle specific cases. From this research and schema theory, we propose hypotheses 5 and 6 (see Table 1). Compared with novice officers, experienced officers will place more emphasis on efficiency because of its connection to instrumental benefit and widespread use in organizational matters, whereas novice officers, underexposed to organizational concerns, frame decisions based on earlier socialization. Contrary to prior feminist research (e.g., Hammer et al. 1989a), hypothesis 6 suggests that experienced officers do not distinguish between wives who can and cannot control their provoking behavior.

II. Data Collection

A. Respondents' Training and Experience

Officers ($N = 128$) serving the North Georgia area received credit toward their mandatory in-service or mandated training hours for participating in this study. Most officers were male (82.8%) and Caucasian (57.3%). The age of officers ranged from 19 to 55 ($M = 36.14$; $SD = 19.87$). Officers were classified into one of three groups based on their answers to questions about experience and training: untrained novice officers ($N = 34$), trained novice officers ($N = 45$), and trained experienced officers ($N = 49$). Novice officers are those with less than a year of actual policing experience and who have handled fewer than 10 domestic violence calls. Experienced officers usually had handled more than 100 domestic violence calls and had between 1 and 33 years of experience; over half had 9 or more years; we defined "experienced" as at least 1 year of experience because prior research suggested that officers' shift toward placing more importance on efficiency framing occurs within a year (Fielding & Fielding 1991). The untrained officers had not received any formal training on domestic violence from the police academy. The trained officers had received formal training on domestic violence. Most

experienced officers had acquired their formal academy training in domestic violence an average of 8 months prior to the data collection. Conversely, trained novice officers had received their formal academy training in domestic violence an average of 2 weeks prior to data collection.

Formal training at the police academy consisted of a four-hour lecture course on the Family Violence Act of Georgia. The lectures covered both general substantive matters and specific concerns. On general matters, officers learned about the content of the law, including the primary aggressor clause; they were told that the primary goals are to establish order and protect the life, liberty, and property of others; and they were reminded of the need to establish the facts in a situation. They were also told about various categories of disputants, including information about the battered wife syndrome. On the specific side, they received step-by-step instructions on how to complete necessary reports and how to protect their own safety by, for example, checking the dwelling for other occupants and keeping disputants in view. They were also warned of the increased danger in domestic violence situations involving a disputant with alcoholism.

B. Research Design and Scripts

Respondents were each randomly assigned to read one of the eight scripts. Respondents were told that the study was examining how officers made decisions about domestic violence situations. Officers were assured that there were no right or wrong answers and that their responses would be confidential and anonymous. Each one then read the assigned script and wrote down their thoughts as they came to mind. They then answered open-ended questions about how they would handle the situation and closed-ended questions assessing the mediating inferences to their decisions.

We attempted to simulate as much as possible the actual interview process that police officers use to investigate a domestic violence call. We believe our simulation allowed officers to project themselves into the script and to respond to it as if they were handling a real call.⁴ Two features of the script varied across subjects. Subjects either received a script describing a lower-income couple or a middle-income couple, which was conveyed through language and employment (see appendix). There were also four

⁴ The generalizability of our results is an empirical issue; supporting the possible robustness of our findings is the fact that they buttress claims and extend themes in observational field research. To prepare our instrument, we interviewed experienced officers ($N = 80$) about the typical questions and procedures in domestic disputes. From the coding of the officers' responses to open-ended questions, we then incorporated the questions and procedures that were used by many officers or are part of the standard police report form. This procedure ensures that the questions officers usually ask have been covered in the scripts.

versions of the wife's actions that were indicative of her mental state; these versions will be described later. This 2×4 between-subjects design thus resulted in eight scripts varying by the couple's social class and the wife's mental state.

The scripts shared several features, which are set out in Table 2. We focused exclusively on situations where wives displayed moderately severe injuries because most police calls involve injured wives, not injured husbands (Bell & Bell 1991). The values of the other features were chosen to create an ambiguous situation where neither arrest nor an informal method is an obvious response. For example, we examined situations where a weapon is not present because the presence of a weapon is less frequent and often leads to arrest (e.g., Worden 1989). The blameworthiness of each disputant also is not clear because the two disputants give conflicting stories about how the argument and violence occurred. Because these two versions of the stories are central to officers' inferences about credibility and blame, we provide in the appendix a detailed description using the script of the low-income couple.

Table 2. Common Features in the Hypothetical Scripts

Operationalization	Situational Category
1. Wife has bruises to face and neck	Injury
2. No weapon is present or used	Weapon
3. Disputants neither request an arrest nor request no intervention	Citizens' request
4. Both disputants are present	Suspect present
5. Both display respectful attitudes toward officers	Attitude toward police
6. There is no property damage	Property damage
7. Neighbor phones the police	Complainant
8. Disputants are antagonistic toward each other	Antagonism between disputants
9. Conflicting stories about how the injuries occurred	Whether disputants agree about how injuries occurred

The manipulations of the wife's actions that are associated with a mental disorder were inserted throughout the script.⁵ The

⁵ To provide construct validity to our manipulations of mental state, two advanced clinical psychology students assisted in the development of the manipulations. Five other advanced clinical psychology students, who were unaware of the study, independently rated the husband and wife on the presence and type of mental illness after being instructed on the definition of mental illness. Using Teplin's (1984b) criteria for the presence of mental illness, we defined mental illness as having one symptom of a severe mental disorder when this symptom cannot be attributed to the current social context. Teplin (1984b) found that there was 93.4% agreement on the presence of severe mental illness between this definition and the NIMH Diagnostic Interview Schedule. All five raters agreed on the presence/absence of signs of mental illness and the type of mental illness signs for each of our manipulations. Officers rated the wife as more mentally ill when she had hallucinations ($M = 6.53$) or unusual startled responses ($M = 3.02$) or alcoholism ($M = 2.56$) than when she was normal ($M = 1.90$; $t_s(122) = 12.55, 3.02, 1.65, p_s < .01, .05$, respectively). Most officers spontaneously wrote that a wife was mentally ill when she was hallucinating (78.8%) but not when she had unusual startled responses (6.3%) or alcoholism (0%). Officers' experience and the couple's social class did not affect officers' perceptions of mental illness.

script described in the appendix is labeled the normal condition because the wife shows no signs of severe thought or perceptual disturbances, delusions, alcoholism, or extreme inappropriate expressions of emotions. Many domestic violence situations, however, involve wives who act inconsistently with societal norms for appropriate behavior and thoughts. Because a domestic violence victim may be perceived differently when her behavior violates societal norms for appropriate behavior, we focused on three kinds of mental disorders.

One of the most frequent occurrences in wife assault is the intoxication of the wife and/or the husband (Barnett & Fagan 1993; Roy 1988). We manipulated whether the wife showed signs of alcohol dependence such as impaired functioning, denial of problem, and use of alcohol on a daily basis. The husband described the wife's drinking problem: "She was already drinking heavily when I got home. Her drinking is really getting out of control again. It used to just be weekends, but now it seems she drinks all the time." The wife responded with slightly slurred speech, and beer cans were visible. When asked how often she drinks, the wife replied, "Only a little every day."

Are officers able to recognize signs of repeat abuse? The battered spouse syndrome is a mental disorder that develops after one or more traumatic stressful events (American Psychiatric Association 1987; Walker 1984). One central feature of battered spouse syndrome is an overreaction to nonthreatening stimuli; this reaction is called "unusual startled response." We manipulated whether the wife displayed unusual startled responses. The wife was described as displaying jerking motions and appearing startled in response to nonthreatening stimuli. For example, Officer Johnson drops a piece of paper on the floor and Mrs. Jones jumps and curls her feet under her on the couch.

Sometimes women who are victims of domestic violence have perceptual and thought disorders. Research on police handling of mentally ill persons has usually focused on the handling of suspects rather than the handling of victims (e.g., Bittner 1967, 1990; Teplin 1984a, 1984b; Teplin & Pruett 1992). Samples of psychiatric patients, however, reveal that a substantial percentage of these patients have been victims of wife assault (Carlile 1991; Yellowlees & Kaushik 1992). We chose an obvious sign of severe perceptual disorder: "hearing voice." In the perceptual disorder condition, the wife turned from others and engaged in conversation with a person who is not present (a dead mother). For example, "She suddenly stops pacing and turns away from Officer Kelly and whispers, 'I know. I know. I know. Please be quiet.'"

III. Data Analysis Strategy

We employed measures from both open-ended and closed-ended questions to assess the relevant inferences associated with the two frames. We first describe how we coded the thought protocols and then briefly describe the measures associated with each frame and those that assessed officers' content knowledge.

A. Coding of Thought Protocols

As they were reading the script, respondents wrote down their thoughts, opinions, and decisions as they came to mind. After reading the script, respondents answered three other open-ended questions which provided additional measures of spontaneous thoughts.⁶ To code the thought protocols, we developed a coding scheme containing 14 concepts such as the blameworthiness of each disputant, pattern of physical abuse in the home, and future dangerousness.⁷ The coding scheme was both reliable⁸ and exhaustive (99% of the statements could be coded into at least one category).

⁶ Because the officers' open-ended responses as they were reading the script probably captured only the most central thoughts, we used three open-ended questions to probe for additional information about how they made their decisions. These questions were:

- a) How would you handle this domestic violence call?
- b) Did you consider any alternative response(s)? What were these responses and why did you decide not to use them?
- c) Did you need either additional information or questions asked? If yes, what additional information did you need or what additional questions did you want the police officers to ask?

Open-ended questions do not impose concepts on respondents, whereas closed-ended questions (e.g., ratings of the husband's truthfulness) impose concepts that respondents may have not considered before we posed the question.

⁷ The conceptual categories are: (1) helping couple to find way to resolve their problems; (2) mentioned one or more causes of the couple's problem; (3) blameworthiness of husband or wife; (4) mentioned alcohol or drug problems; (5) mental illness; (6) injured party's actions are typical of battered spouse; (7) pattern of physical abuse in settling disagreements; (8) credibility of disputants; (9) likelihood of future violence; (10) disputant's capability of handling disputes; (11) seriousness of injury; (12) cited family violence act as a reason for arrest; (13) conditional dispositions; and (14) demographic, physical, and social characteristics. Each category captured both the absence or presence of a concept (e.g., credibility) and the evaluative and descriptive nature of the inferences (e.g., husband is lying). Under some categories, e.g., causes of the couple's problems, coders could check more than one options; the options included financial difficulties, alcohol problem of wife or couple, poor communication, use of drugs, mental illness of wife, stressful environment, husband's attitude toward wife, and wife's attitude toward husband.

⁸ Two coders separately read and coded 70 of the thought protocols. Coders used the context surrounding a phrase to interpret its meaning. The kappa coefficients ranged from .72 to 1.00 and measured the amount of agreement between the two coders. Kappas can range from 0 to 1.00, and coefficients above .70 indicate adequate reliability.

B. Measurement of Inferences and Prior Knowledge

Normative Frame

The normative frame proposes that officers judge whether each disputant's actions were justifiable or unjustifiable, which is the essence of placing blame. From the open-ended responses, we coded whether the officer indicated the husband acted unjustifiably in resorting to violence and should have taken a different course.⁹ To assess blameworthiness, officers may assess how much the husband and the wife understand that violence is wrong, which was measured with a closed-ended question. To be considered blameworthy, individuals must be able to understand the wrongfulness of their actions from a moral and legal perspective. In the legal system, for example, juveniles who do not understand the consequences of their actions are less blameworthy than adults who do. Officers may determine blameworthiness in part by inferring whether the wife has hit the husband in the past (measured here with a closed-ended question) and whether the husband has repeatedly abused the wife (assessed here from open-ended responses).

Efficiency Frame

To determine blameworthiness and to determine whether the disputants can handle the wife assault themselves, officers must assess whether each disputant has the ability to control his/her own actions; we measured these inferences with closed-ended questions. Because officers employing an efficiency frame are pragmatic thinkers, they use arrest sparingly when it can be effective at reducing the likelihood of further violence (measured using the difference between two closed-ended questions).¹⁰ Officers also must judge the "dangerousness" of the wife

⁹ Statements that the husband *should have* or *ought to have* done something differently or foreseen the consequences were coded as blaming the husband. Examples of statements placing blame on the husband are:

As for Mr. Jones' contention that she attacked him first, there are no marks on Mr. Jones to support this. And even if she had attacked first, the extent of her injuries well exceeds any force he may have used in self-defense.

No matter how mad you get it does not justify you to beat someone as bad as it seemed from the looks of her.

He knows his wife is having a hard time with her mother's death so he should be very patient with her. He had no right to hit her.

No one deserves to be beaten in an argument, especially your spouse.

A dichotomous measure represented inferences about husband's blameworthiness: 0 = did not mention (82.0%); 1 = blamed husband (18.0%).

¹⁰ Officers were asked to assess the likelihood of future violence without intervention and with arrest ("If the husband [is arrested; remains in the home], how likely is it that he will in the future inflict severe harm on his wife?"). Respondents provided their answers using 1–7 Likert scales where 1 is "not at all likely" and 7 is "extremely likely." To create a measure of perceived effectiveness of arrest, we subtracted the likelihood without

and the husband, and were asked to rate the husband and the wife separately on aggressiveness and dangerousness to family and other people.¹¹ To obtain a successful prosecution, officers also must infer who is telling the truth and whether enough hard evidence exists to support probable cause. In the closed-ended questions, respondents rated the husband and wife separately on their responsibility for the violence, their truthfulness, and their believability; we created a scale of the wife's credibility relative to the husband's credibility.¹² From the open-ended measures, we created a dichotomous measure of whether the respondent mentioned credibility or visible injuries to substantiate claims with mentioning coded as 1 (44.5%) and not mentioning coded as 0 (54.7%). This open-ended measure is related to inferences about credibility and the wife's dangerousness. Wives who are perceived as dangerous are seen as creating the violence and as having less credibility to substantiate claims.¹³

Content Knowledge about Domestic Disputes

Other research (for a review see Hilton 1993a) suggests that some officers blame women for provoking the violence. We used a set of attitudinal items to assess officers' general beliefs about

intervention from the likelihood with intervention with higher positive numbers, indicating that arrest will be more effective at reducing further violence.

¹¹ The mean of three items formed a reliable scale of husband's dangerousness ($\alpha = .71$; $M = 5.01$; $SD = 1.37$): dangerous to family, dangerous to other people, and aggressive. Ratings were made on a 7-point scale with 1 = "not at all" and 7 = "completely." The mean of the same three items and the ratings on how likely it is that the wife will inflict severe harm on her husband if she remains in the home formed a reliable scale of the wife's dangerousness ($\alpha = .81$; $M = 3.00$; $SD = 1.42$).

¹² Officers separately rated each disputant on several adjectives using a 1–7 scale with 1 = "not at all" and 7 = "completely." The mean ratings of two adjectives (believable, truthful) formed a reliable scales of credibility (for ratings of husband, Cronbach's $\alpha = .84$; $M = 3.12$; $SD = 1.44$, and for ratings of wife, $\alpha = .80$; $M = 4.81$; $SD = 1.40$). Because the husband's and wife's credibility were negatively correlated ($r = -.37$) and the legal statute requires an assessment of relative credibility, we created a scale of relative believability by subtracting the husband's perceived credibility from the wife's perceived credibility; the scale ranged from -4.5 to 6 with positive numbers indicating that the wife was more credible and negative numbers indicating that the husband was more credible ($M = 1.68$; $SD = 2.35$). Cronbach's α indicates the amount of consistency between the items, with values of $.70$ or greater indicating that the measurement of credibility is reliable (consistent) across the items.

¹³ Correlations were performed within each level of experience. For untrained novice officers, the open-ended measure of substantiating claims was related to closed-ended measures of the wife's credibility ($r = .37$, $p < .05$), the wife's dangerousness ($r = -.37$, $p < .04$), and the wife's control over her actions ($r = .45$, $p < .01$). For experienced officers, the open-ended measure was related to closed-ended measures of relative credibility ($r = .37$, $p < .01$), the dangerousness of the wife ($r = -.50$, $p < .001$), and her responsibility for the occurrence of the violence ($r = -.44$, $p < .001$). Credibility, dangerousness, and responsibility for the violence are all moderately correlated. For trained novice officers, the open-ended measure did not correlate with the closed-ended measure; this suggests that trained novice officers have not thought about the closed-ended measures before the questions were posed, and are using simple heuristics such as "when injuries are present, arrest."

whether battered wives provoked their husbands.¹⁴ We also assessed officers' beliefs about the amount of habitual violence within social class.¹⁵ Because direct questions about officers' views of persons with mental illness have social desirability problems, we assessed officers' views of types of mental illness indirectly by examining how they interpret situations involving wives with mental illness compared with wives without signs of mental illness.

IV. Results and Discussion

Our research examines why officers interpret and respond differently to wife assault situations involving victims who fit societal norms of appropriate conduct and those who deviate from them. We first present data suggesting that irrespective of their experience, officers perceive wives who abuse alcohol or hallucinate as more untruthful and dangerous than normal wives or wives who show signs of battered spouse syndrome. We then show how these perceptions of wives' actions affect officers' referral and arrest decisions, and use a comparison between the normal wife and the hallucinating wife to test whether experienced officers make decisions based on efficiency considerations more than blame, whereas novice officers are more inclined to consider blameworthiness.

A. How Officers Perceive Wives' Actions

Table 3 reports the mean ratings for inferences about normative and efficiency considerations within each of the four mental state conditions.¹⁶ People have acquired stereotyped images of

¹⁴ Respondents were told: "Below are several possible explanations for why women are physically injured in domestic disputes. Based on your experiences and what you know about domestic violence situations, please indicate how much you agree with each statement using the scale below." Respondents rated each item using a 1-7 scale where 1 is "strongly disagree" and 7 is "strongly agree." Four items formed a reliable scale ($\alpha = .70$; $M = 3.03$; $SD = 1.15$) of knowledge that wives provoke violence: (a) wives are beaten because they have personality problems; (b) wives are beaten because they often point out the husband's weaknesses; (c) wives are beaten because they are mentally disturbed; and (d) wives are beaten because they provoke anger from their husbands.

¹⁵ Respondents were asked, "What percentage of domestic violence calls in poverty areas are: ___ situations where disputants have resorted to physical violence for the first time and ___ situations where disputants habitually resort to physical violence." They were told to assign percentages so that they added to 100%. The same question was asked for middle-class neighborhoods.

¹⁶ Separate multivariate analysis of variances (MANOVAs) were employed for correlated and conceptually related inferences. Each MANOVA tested the direct and two-way interactive effects of three factors: (a) officers' experience (untrained novice, trained novice, experienced); (b) couple's social class; and (c) wife's mental state. No direct or interactive effects for officers' experience or couple's social class were significant. The mental illness variable significantly affected perceptions of all variables listed in Table 1. One MANOVA tested the effects of three inferences about the wife (MANOVA Wilks $F(9, 229) = 17.41$, $p < .001$): (a) mental illness contributed to violence (ANOVA $F(3, 96) = 64.46$, $p < .001$); (b) control over actions (ANOVA $F(3, 96) = 8.23$, $p < .001$); and (c)

mentally ill persons as dangerous, unpredictable, and untruthful (Desforges et al. 1993; Scheff 1984). Consistent with these stereotyped images, officers indicated that compared with normal wives, wives with hallucinations or alcoholism were less credible and more dangerous. Officers also believed husbands were less dangerous when wives were hallucinating or had alcoholism than when they were normal.

Table 3. Officers' Perceptions of Victims with and without Mental Illness

	Normal	Perceptual Disorder	Alcoholism	Unusual Startled Response
<i>Efficiency Considerations</i>				
Wife is more credible than husband	2.78	-.14****	1.26*	3.01
Wife is more responsible	2.63	3.40****	3.23	2.12
Wife is more dangerous	2.44	4.35****	3.20**	2.05
Husband is more dangerous	5.35	4.31****	4.71*	5.42
<i>Normative Considerations</i>				
Wife has more control over actions	4.02	2.35****	3.29	4.18
Wife's mental illness ^a contributed more to the violence	2.03	5.49****	2.03	1.97
Wife has more ability to understand violence is wrong	5.04	3.03****	5.06	4.98
Husband has more ability to understand violence is wrong	3.74	5.37****	4.53	3.39

^a The row label indicates the direction of the variable has the value of the mean increases. For example, a higher positive mean indicates that wife is more credible than the husband.

One-tailed probability: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .025$; *** $p < .01$; **** $p < .001$.

The ability to control one's own actions and to understand that violence is wrong is crucial in assessing blameworthiness. Officers perceived wives who were hallucinating as having less ability to control their actions and to understand that violence is wrong than wives who were normal, showed signs of alcoholism, or unusual startled responses. Officers also were more likely to infer that the wife had hit her husband before when she had hallucinations (75.5% of those with hallucinations) than when she had alcoholism (35.5%), unusual startled responses (21.9%), or was normal (24.1%), $\chi^2(3) = 25.26$, $p < .001$. Officers believed the wife's mental illness contributed more to the violence when she

ability to understand violence is wrong (ANOVA $F(3, 96) = 11.99$, $p < .001$). Another MANOVA tested the effects of four correlated inferences about credibility, dangerousness, and responsibility (MANOVA $F(12, 249) = 5.99$, $p < .001$): (a) scale of wife's dangerousness (ANOVA $F(3, 97) = 20.94$, $p < .001$); (b) scale of relative credibility (ANOVA $F(3, 97) = 13.70$, $p < .001$); (c) wife's responsibility for violence (ANOVA $F(3, 97) = 3.54$, $p < .02$); and (d) scale of husband's dangerousness (ANOVA $F(3, 97) = 3.95$, $p < .02$). The last MANOVA tested effects of three inferences about the husband (MANOVA $F(9, 231) = 3.95$, $p < .001$): (a) perception of husband's mental state (ANOVA $F(3, 97) = 7.98$, $p < .001$); (b) ability to understand violence is wrong (ANOVA $F(3, 97) = 5.17$, $p < .001$); and (c) ability to control action (ANOVA for mental state is not significant, $p > .29$).

was hallucinating (due to her perceived propensity toward violence) than when she was not.

While situations involving alcohol abuse and perceptual disorders are interpreted differently from those without these signs, officers perceive situations involving unusual startled responses to be like normal situations. This overall lack of difference is due in part to the fact that 59% of the officers failed to associate this sign with repeat abuse. When officers who recognized the signs as indicators of repeat abuse were compared with officers who did not, differences in perceptions did occur. Officers who inferred repeat abuse indicated that the wife was more in control of her actions ($M = 5.38$) than did officers who did not infer repeat abuse ($M = 3.18$), $t(28) = 4.30$, $p < .001$; this finding supports prior findings from observational research which suggest that officers have stereotypes of battered women as being in control of their actions (Ferraro & Pope 1993). Officers who inferred repeat abuse indicated that wives were less dangerous ($M = 1.58$), more credible ($M = 3.92$), and less responsible for the occurrence of the violence ($M = 1.62$) than did officers who failed to recognize signs of repeat abuse (M for dangerous = 2.61; M for credibility = 1.31; M for responsibility = 2.69) ($t(30) = 28.15, 19.56, 21.50$, $p < .01$). When officers recognized signs of repeat abuse, wives with battered spouse syndrome were seen as having more control over their actions, as less dangerous, and as less responsible.

B. How Officers' Perceptions Determine Their Referral Decisions

Given that officers have more negative perceptions of women who suffer from hallucinations and alcoholism, how do officers' beliefs affect their decisions to make referrals to shelters and outpatient mental health treatment programs?¹⁷ We first examine what beliefs led officers to recommend outpatient mental health treatment. Officers recommended such treatment when wives were perceived as dangerous (change in odds = 1.64, $p < .01$) and as less able to understand that violence is wrong (change in odds = .57, $p < .01$). Officers also were more likely to recommend outpatient services for wives when they believed that husbands understood that violence is wrong (change in odds = 1.65, $p < .01$), perhaps because officers believed mental health treatment for wives would be more effective when husbands already understood the wrongfulness of their violence.

Because novice officers often do not know when to recommend mental health treatment, we expected that these inferences would predict experienced officers' decisions better than

¹⁷ Dichotomous measures represented decisions about referrals to outpatient mental health treatment (28.9% referred, coded as 1) and decisions about referrals to shelters (50.0% referred victim to shelter, coded as 1).

novice officers' decisions. An analysis indicates that this is in fact the case.¹⁸ The model for experienced officers has substantial accuracy at predicting decisions to not recommend (91.43% accuracy) and decisions to recommend (100% accuracy), monte carlo $p < .001$. These estimates are stable in that UniODA only misclassifies 3 people and the LOO analysis misclassifies 5 people. In contrast, these same beliefs are less predictive of novice officers' decisions to recommend treatment. The UniODA misclassifies 20 of the 76 novice officers, which is not a significant improvement over chance (monte carlo $p < .07$). Moreover, the model for novices is quite inaccurate when it predicts recommended treatment (31.58% accuracy). Consistent with prior research (Bittner 1990; Teplin 1984b), these findings suggest that experienced officers may develop common frames in which they reserve referrals for those who are obviously mentally ill and are seen as dangerous and incapable of understanding the wrongfulness of violence.

In addition to making decisions about referrals to mental health treatment, officers must decide whether to refer a wife to a battered spouse shelter (Belknap & McCall 1994). Consistent with prior observational field research (Ferraro 1989a), we find that officers who noticed a pattern of repeat abuse or perceived that the husband as dangerous were more likely to refer victims to shelters than officers who did not infer repeat abuse or perceived less danger (for repeat abuse change in odds = 2.90, for husband's dangerousness change in odds = 1.28, one-tailed $p < .05$). Officers who perceived a wife as more credible than the husband were more likely to recommend shelters (change in odds = 1.28, one-tailed $p < .008$).¹⁹

¹⁸ Predictive accuracy provides an index of how well a set of interpretations applies to the sample and can predict the responses of new samples. Because logistic regression employs suboptimal heuristics to classify cases, we used univariate optimal discriminant analysis (UniODA) to find the theoretical maximum possible level of percentage accuracy in classification because it makes no assumptions about the underlying configuration of the data. UniODA classifies cases based on the response function scores from the logistic regression equation (for more detailed information, see Soltysik & Yarnold 1993; Yarnold & Soltysik 1991). Based on a meta-analysis of 15 data sets, Yarnold, Hart, & Soltysik (1994) found that UniODA obtained a mean increase of 5.8% in overall percentage of accurate classification compared to the suboptimal procedures of logistic regression and Fisher's discriminant analysis. In addition, using Optimal Data Analysis Software (Soltysik & Yarnold 1993), a leave-one-out (LOO) validity jackknife analysis was performed to evaluate the stability of the optimized logistic regression model. In this analysis, each observation is classified using a model created on the basis of the entire sample except for the observation being classified. The results serve as an upper-bound estimate of the classification performance that is expected were the optimized model to be used to classify an independent sample of observations. Separate analyses were performed for novice and experienced officers.

¹⁹ These beliefs had similar predictive accuracy for novice and experienced officers' decisions, though the model was more stable for experienced officers than for novice officers. The UniODA analysis for the overall sample correctly classified 76.67% of the nonreferrals and 56.45% of the referrals and correctly predicted 63.01% of the nonreferrals and 71.43% of the referrals (monte carlo $p < .01$).

By using these beliefs to guide their decisions, officers deny some women knowledge about these services. Table 4 shows that officers primarily recommended mental health treatment for wives with hallucinations or with alcoholism, which are associated with danger and an inability to understand that violence is wrong.²⁰ Officers, however, rarely refer women with unusual startled responses (6.3% were referred) because they perceive them as not dangerous and as understanding that violence is wrong.

Table 4. Relationship between Wife's Mental State and Officers' Recommendations about Mental Health Treatment and Shelters

	Wife's Mental State			
	Normal	Perceptual Disorder	Alcoholism	Unusual Startled Response
% recommended to outpatient ^a mental health treatment	3.1% ^b	65.6%	21.9%	6.3%
Standardized residual	-2.4 ^c	4.8	-0.3	-2.1
% recommended to battered ^d spouse shelters	59.4%	21.9%	43.8%	75.0%
Standardized residual	0.8	-2.3	-0.5	2.0

^a The relationship between wife's mental state and referrals to outpatient mental health treatment is significant, $\chi^2(3; N = 128) = 43.38, p < .001$.

^b These numbers represent the percentage of wives with this mental state who were referred to outpatient treatment or were referred to battered spouse shelters.

^c These numbers are standardized residuals. Negative and positive numbers that are greater than 1.0 indicate that the cell is significantly different from the other cells.

^d The relationship between wife's mental state and referrals to battered spouse shelters is significant, $\chi^2(3; N = 128) = 19.75, p < .001$.

While officers often recommend battered spouse shelters for women displaying unusual startled responses (75% were referred), they refer fewer women with alcoholism or hallucinations to shelters. These disparate decisions occur because officers perceive men as less dangerous when they beat women who have hallucinations and alcoholism (see Table 3).

C. Officers' Use of Prior Knowledge in Their Decisions to Arrest

Prior studies examining broad attitudinal statements about officers' role orientations find that these attitudes are weakly related to their arrest decisions (Worden 1989). Our findings suggest that a more promising approach is to examine specific knowledge about the domain. Our findings, moreover, emphasize that officers do not interpret every situation based on their general beliefs about typical domestic disputes or about the wife's provocation. The application of beliefs, as suggested by

²⁰ Social class and officers' experience did not have either significant direct or interactive effects with mental illness on officers' recommendations about shelters or mental health treatment.

schema theory, is contingent on the situation. We tested whether officers categorized wives as typical battered wives when they abused alcohol or had unusual startled responses, and based decisions on prior beliefs about provocation in these situations. We also tested whether experienced officers place more importance on efficiency considerations than do novice officers.²¹ Table 5 shows that the situation defined whether officers use their general beliefs about wives' provocation of violence to form their decisions. Only when wives showed signs of alcoholism did officers' beliefs about provocation in a typical domestic dispute guide their decisions about arrest. In situations where wives were abusing alcohol, officers who believed that wives usually provoke their husbands were less likely to arrest than were officers who did not believe that wives provoke their husbands. Alcohol abuse may have served as a cue that allowed officers to classify the case as a typical domestic dispute and to use their content specific knowledge about wife assaults.²²

In situations where officers cannot easily categorize the dispute into their prior content knowledge about wife assaults, they must use frames to organize and interpret the conflicting stories and use these interpretations to form decisions.²³ Table 5 also supports the hypothesis that experience partly determines the importance of normative and efficiency framing. Both novice and experienced officers considered efficiency concerns about

²¹ Because few officers chose mediation as the only response to handling the situation (11.7%), we employed a dichotomous measure of how the wife assault was handled: 0 = informal mediation or ask one disputant to leave (41.4%); 1 = arrest the husband or arrest both (59.4%). Only five respondents decided to arrest both spouses; we included these respondents with "arrest the husband" to assess when officers use formal intervention methods.

We created two dummy-coded variables for officers' experience and training with untrained novice officers serving as the baseline: (a) 1 = experienced officers and 0 = novice; and (b) 1 = trained novice officers and 0 = other. To create interaction term for officers' experience and substantiating claims, we assigned a value of 1 to experienced officers who mentioned evidence to substantiate claims and a value of 0 to all other officers. We treated wife's mental state as a grouping variable and tested the overall effect of officers' general beliefs across situations, the effect within the normal condition, the unusual started response condition, and the alcoholism condition. We tested the effect within the normal condition because officers may have developed a category for situations where wives' actions are consistent with societal norms. We did not test the effect within the hallucinating condition because officers have fewer experiences from which to create a category of this type of battered wife.

²² Some research suggests wives who are drinking are held more responsible for the violence (Ferraro 1989a; Richardson & Campbell 1980; Waaland & Keeley 1985). Officers more often spontaneously attributed the cause of the violence to the wife's behavior when she showed signs of alcoholism (53.3%) than when she was normal (20.0%), hallucinating (20.0%), or had unusual startled responses (3.1%) ($\chi^2(3) = 8.62, p < .03$). Women with alcoholism were seen as provoking the violence perhaps because officers believe they were more dangerous and often hit their husbands.

²³ Based on these predictors, UniODA was correct 68.63% of the time when it predicted informal measures and 84.29% of the time when it predicted arrest. It correctly classified 76.09% of the informal responses and 78.67% of the arrest responses. LOO analysis showed no shrinkage in classification or predictive accuracy, indicating that the model should generalize to other samples.

Table 5. Inferences Related to Officers' Decision to Arrest: Logistic Coefficients and Change in Odds

Predictors	<i>b</i>	Change in Odds
Constant	-2.35*	
Officers' experience		
Trained novice officers	1.38**	3.98**
Experienced officers	-.24	.786
Officers' beliefs about wives provoke		
Overall wives provoke beating	-.14	.87
Effect within normal condition	-.21	.81
Effect within unusual startled	-.16	.85
Effect within alcoholism	-.38*	.68*
Officers' inferences		
Husband is blamed	1.38**	4.00**
Substantiating claims	.16	1.17
Husband is dangerous	.51***	1.67***
Effectiveness of arrest	.44**	1.56**
Effect of substantiating claims for experienced officers	1.98**	7.25**
-2 log likelihood		112.45
Model χ^2		48.27***

NOTE: Numbers in the "*b*" column are unstandardized logistic estimates. Numbers under the "Odds" column are the change in odds of choosing arrest. Higher odds indicate that as the predictor variable increases the odds of arresting the man or both disputants increases. For example, when the man is seen as more dangerous, officers are 1.67 times more likely to arrest compared with when the man is seen as less dangerous.

One-tailed probability: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .025$; *** $p < .01$; **** $p < .001$.

the effectiveness of arrest at reducing violence and about the perceived dangerousness of the husband. Novice and experienced officers, however, placed a different emphasis on substantiating claims for successful prosecution. As expected, experienced officers with their pragmatic and self-interested concerns were 7.25 times more likely to arrest if they mentioned evidence to substantiate claims than if they did not. Experienced officers then spontaneously framed decisions in terms of whether claims could be supported and successfully prosecuted—when the woman was seen as more dangerous or as causing the violence to occur, officers were less likely to take formal action. In contrast, novice officers did not frame the decision based on evidence to substantiate claims (change in odds = 1.17, $p < .34$).²⁴

Table 5 provides support that officers also use blameworthiness to frame situations. Officers who blamed the husband were four times more likely to arrest than were officers who did not blame the husband. Novice and experienced officers, as expected, also differ on their propensity to frame situations in terms of blame. Novice officers more often spontaneously mentioned that the husband should have acted otherwise (23.7%)

²⁴ Untrained novice officers did not differ from trained novice officers as supported by the zero-ordered correlations between substantiating claims and arrest (for untrained novice officers, $r = .21$, $p < .28$; for trained novices, $r = .14$, $p < .34$).

than did experienced officers (10.4%;, $\chi^2(1; N = 128) = 3.66$, one-tailed $p < .03$).²⁵

Novice officers place more priority on normative framing, whereas experienced officers place more importance on efficiency framing. This differential framing shapes how they define the effectiveness of arrest at reducing future violence. Table 6, which supports this conclusion, presents the correlations between inferences about the husband's ability to understand the wrongfulness of violence and inferences about the effectiveness of arrest within the officers' experience.

Table 6. Novice and Experienced Officers' Definitions of Effectiveness of Arrest (Correlations Within Experience/Training)

Correlations of Husband's Ability to Understand Wrongfulness with: ^a	Officers' Experience and Training		
	Untrained Novice (N=32)	Trained Novice (N=42)	Trained Experienced (N=45)
Arrest reduces likelihood husband†† will severely harm wife again	.41**	.28*	-.30**
Husband will inflict severe harm on†† wife if he remains in the home	.34*	-.10	-.47***
Believes husband should have† acted otherwise	.30*	-.29*	-.14

NOTE: The negative sign by a correlation indicates that as the value of the row variable increases, the perceived dangerousness of the husband decreases. E.g., experienced officers believe that arrest is less effective if husbands have more ability to understand that violence is wrong ($r = -.30$).

One-tailed probability: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .025$; *** $p < .01$.

^a Z-tests for differences between correlations from independent samples were performed to assess differences between untrained novice officers and experienced officers.

Two-tailed probability that correlation for untrained novice officers differs from that for experienced officers: † $p < .05$; †† $p < .01$.

Novice officers with their normative perspective define the effectiveness of arrest based on their belief that individuals who understand right from wrong choose whether to commit wrongful acts such as violence, and arrest serves as punishment or an opportunity to correct their choice to commit violence either through deterrence or rehabilitation. Untrained novice officers ($r = .41$) and trained novice officers ($r = .29$) believed that arrest

²⁵ When an interaction term between untrained novice officers and their perceptions of the husband's ability to understand wrongfulness is substituted for overtly blaming the husband in the equation on arrest decisions, it is significant and in the expected direction. As the ability to understand wrongfulness increases, untrained novice officers are more likely to arrest (change in odds = 1.69, $p < .05$). We found, however, that when we controlled for the other inferences, trained novice officers and experienced officers do not consider husband's ability to understand wrongfulness. Further supporting the idea that untrained novice officers think about blame, untrained novice officers are more likely to blame the husband when he understands the wrongfulness of violence ($r = .30$, $p < .05$). Such novices do not consider a pattern of repeat abuse in placing blame, whereas trained novice officers do; this may explain why untrained officers are more likely to blame the husband when the husband has less understanding of the wrongfulness of his actions ($r = -.30$, $p < .05$).

would be more effective when the husband understood that violence is wrong. Recent formal training then appears to have little effect on shifting novice officers' focus away from normative considerations toward efficiency considerations; this is consistent with ethnographic research that indicates that experience is more important than formal academy training (Van Maanen 1974).

Conversely, experienced officers define the effectiveness of arrest for reducing future violence based on the current situational contingencies and such practical considerations as time and limited resources (e.g., Berk & Loseke 1981; Bittner 1967; Ferraro & Pope 1993) rather than the personality style of the disputants. With this efficiency framing, experienced officers believed husbands who understood that violence is wrong were *less* likely to harm the wife if they remained in the home than were husband who lacked this understanding ($r = -.47$). Experienced officers, then, believed that arrest was unnecessary for those who understood that violence was wrong because informal mediation or a "cooling-off" period could remove the environmental stress that caused the violence, but that arrest became necessary to protect a wife when a husband was less able to understand the wrongfulness of his actions.

C. Consequences of Different Frames

When injured wives violate behavioral norms and cannot control their actions, normative framing suggests that the husband acted unjustifiably and should be arrested, whereas efficiency framing suggests that these wives will be seen as less credible and more dangerous than the husband, characteristics which make arrest a less effective technique. Both novice and experienced officers perceive wives who are hallucinating as less able to control their actions and understand that violence is wrong. Because novice officers more often use normative framing, they will be more likely to arrest the husband when a wife is hallucinating than will experienced officers. Table 7 supports this hypothesis: Novice officers were 3.10 times more likely to arrest a husband when he injured a hallucinating wife than were experienced officers (one-tailed $p < .01$). Some research suggests that women are blamed because officers see them as choosing to violate norms (e.g., Ferraro 1989b; Hatty 1989; Hilton 1993a; Saunders & Size 1986). Experienced officers with an efficiency frame offer less protection to wives who violate norms about appropriate thoughts and behavior, irrespective of whether the officers perceive these wives as being able to control their actions. This finding suggests that broader concerns such as substantiating claims for successful prosecution and conserving time for other cases may be more

central to officers' decisions than whether wives have control over their actions.

Table 7. Novice and Experienced Officers' Decisions to Arrest When the Wife is Hallucinating

Predictors	<i>b</i>	Change in Odds
Constant	-.64	
Couple's social class	-.17	.84
Trained, novice officers	1.17***	3.22
Experienced officers	.99*	2.68
Hallucinating wife	.12	1.13
Alcoholism	.28	1.32
Unusual startled response	.60	1.81
Response to hallucinating wife: Increase for novice officers compared with that for experienced officers	1.13***	3.10
-2 log likelihood		160.28***
Model χ^2		12.62*

NOTE: Numbers in the "b" column are unstandardized logistic estimates. Numbers under the "Odds" column are the change in odds of choosing arrest. Higher odds indicate that as the predictor variable increases the odds of arresting the man or both disputants increases.

One-tailed probability levels: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .025$; *** $p < .01$; **** $p < .001$.

Moreover, the significant direct effect of trained novice officers compared with other officers suggests that trained novice officers are more likely to arrest than either untrained novice or trained experienced officers because their recent training sensitizes them to do something. The difference between trained novice officers and trained experienced officers suggests that the sensitizing effects of formal training fade with time.

Prior observational studies find that officers are less likely to arrest in wife assault situations involving lower-income couples than in those involving middle-income couples because they infer habitual violence among lower-income couples (Black 1980; Ferraro 1989a; Smith 1987). Officers, irrespective of experience, believed 71.30% of couples in poverty habitually resort to violence compared with 57.45% of middle-income couples (pairwise t -test (116) = 8.03, $p < .003$). Social class of the couple, contrary to prior observational studies, did not have direct effects on officers' decisions to arrest as shown in Table 6. Social class, however, did have indirect effects through officers' assessment of the husband's dangerousness. Officers relied on their prior knowledge about social class differences to assess dangerousness. Because of these different schemata for low-income and middle-income couples, officers perceived low-income husbands as dangerous irrespective of their perceptions about whether a wife had hit her husband in the past ($M = 5.4$). Conversely, middle-income husbands are seen as more dangerous when officers infer that a wife has not hit her husband in the past ($M = 5.46$) than

when they infer she has hit him ($M = 3.91$; $p < .05$). This finding suggests that inferences about wives' past actions may have more influence on officers' judgments of dangerousness in situations with middle-income couples than in situations with lower-income couples.

V. Conclusions

Prior research has produced mixed claims about how much officers frame situations in terms of blameworthiness and how wives' actions shape their interpretations. Some feminist scholars make the strongest argument that officers focus on blameworthiness but provide weak systematic data on how officers interpret situations. For example, Hanmer et al. (1989a:6) have asserted:

The police are making a distinction between attacks they deem to be justifiable and those that are not—that is, those that require police attention. This decision-making process demonstrates that police do not offer unconditional protection to all women against forms of men's violence. Rather any protection they offer is conditional upon women meeting police notions of "deservedness" and the circumstances of the attack meeting their definition of "crime." These notions are inevitably informed by the misogyny, racism, classism, and heterosexism of dominant social ideologies.

Feminists criticize police use of the victim's deservedness because they believe that it determines officers' reluctance to use formal arrest and to listen to victims' preferences. Conversely, other researchers find that officers often remain neutral (Black 1980) and base arrest on efficiency considerations of time needed to process an arrest, the likelihood of severe harm in the future, and substantiating claims for successful prosecution (Ferraro & Pope 1993).

Prior research derives claims about the decisionmaking process from retrospective data and from weak indirect observational data without asking officers follow-up summary questions (Mastrofski & Parks 1990). We collected data on officers' spontaneous inferences to address more directly whether officers frame situations more in terms of blameworthiness or of efficiency concerns about substantiating claims and devoting time to those situations which may result in severe harm in the future. Our findings address two important theoretical issues: (a) how officers make decisions when women's actions deviate from societal norms due to mental illness; and (b) the priority novice and experienced officers place on normative and efficiency considerations when women conform to or deviate from societal norms.

Hallucinating wives who have moderately severe injuries present dilemmas for officers. On the one hand, officers perceive difficulty in successfully prosecuting husbands because they believe

these wives are less credible and more dangerous than their husbands. On the other hand, they see hallucinating wives compared with normal wives as less able to control their provoking actions and as less able to understand that violence is wrong, which suggests that the husbands acted unjustifiably even if their hallucinating wives provoked them. Novice officers, consistent with using blameworthiness as a decision criteria, more often blamed the husband and arrested him when the wives were hallucinating than when they were normal. By contrast, when experienced officers must assign different importance to normative and efficiency considerations because the situation creates conflict between these concerns, they place priority on efficiency considerations. Experienced officers arrested husbands less often when wives were hallucinating than when they were normal because they perceived the hallucinating wives as relatively less credible and more dangerous than the husbands. Indeed, when the wives were normal, experienced officers were more likely to arrest the husbands than were novice officers. These findings suggest that experienced officers do not use informal methods because they see women as capable of controlling their actions but because they perceive women who conform to societal norms as more believable, less dangerous, and more able to facilitate successful prosecution. In doing so, experienced officers think more about irreparable harm and substantiated claims, which supports much prior research on police decisionmaking (e.g., Berk & Loseke 1981; Ferraro & Pope 1993; Kerstetter & Van Winkle 1990; Manning 1977; Van Maanen 1974) but challenges claims that officers often blame women (Ferraro 1989b; Hanmer et al. 1989a; Hawkins 1992; Hilton 1993a; Jaffe et al. 1993). Experienced officers base decisions on the appropriateness of a wife's action primarily when it is pragmatically feasible—when they can defend their decision based on disinterested objectivity, and such decisions will not increase their time on undervalued tasks or threaten their job status.

Though officers try in good faith to be disinterested and impartial decisionmakers, categorical knowledge systems often shape their interpretations and lead them to use informal methods when wives violate societal norms. Our findings, consistent with schema theory (Fiske & Taylor 1991; Stalans & Lurigio 1990), indicate that content knowledge about mental illness and wife assaults shapes interpretations when a specific case shares features with the exemplar or typical member. Stereotyped images of mentally ill persons, for example, informed officers' neutral assessments and produced a systematic bias toward a reluctance to use arrest and shelters for injured hallucinating wives. Our findings also suggest that officers have and use prior beliefs about whether wives typically provoke their husbands' violence when wives are abusing alcohol. Alcohol abuse is a salient

cue within our society (e.g., Kantor & Straus 1987; Waaland & Keeley 1985) and is seen as a common occurrence in domestic violence situations (Ferraro 1989a); this feature allows officers to conclude that the situation exemplifies a typical case. Thus, strong claims about police officers making decisions based on the victim's deservedness or blameworthiness should be softened and reframed to highlight how prior categorical knowledge such as mental illness and social class shapes neutral assessments.

Similarly, officers use their prior knowledge to interpret situations, and these interpretations determine which battered wives will receive information about shelters and mental health treatment. We found that officers referred very few women with unusual startled responses and alcoholism to outpatient mental health treatment centers. Because officers serve as primary referral sources (Gilboy & Schmidt 1971; Sheridan & Teplin 1981) and are less likely to provide these women with information about the availability of outpatient mental health treatment, these women have less opportunity to seek possibly beneficial outpatient mental health treatment. Although some research suggests that mental health treatment can benefit women who suffer from battered spouse syndrome (for a review see Barnett & LaViolette 1993), additional research could determine the benefits and costs associated with officers' selective referrals to outpatient mental health treatment. We also found that officers refer very few women who have alcoholism or hallucinations to battered spouse shelters, even though officers regard these situations as highly prone to violence. Several possible consequences of withholding information about battered spouse shelters could be explored in future research. For example, does lack of knowledge about battered spouse shelters perpetuate violence against women who suffer from mental illnesses such as alcoholism or perceptual disorders?

Schema theory predicts that people can more easily recall and may automatically use frames that are often employed in other decisionmaking tasks or have been recently employed. This prediction and our research findings imply that organizations can influence the priority officers place on normative framing compared with efficiency framing. We, however, do not provide direct empirical support for this implication. Based on the assumed connection between organizational socialization and framing, our findings for experienced officers should generalize to departments that emphasize efficiency considerations of time and quantity of service but should not generalize to departments that emphasize the normative basis of criminal law and the enforcement of laws for the sake of reinforcing societal and individual understanding of the wrongfulness associated with violations of these laws. While prior research makes clear that individual officers may find ways to avoid organizational policies that re-

quire certain response styles (Brown 1981), research needs to examine how organizational culture relates to how officers think about situations. We suggest that officers within an organization after similar socialization may think more like each other than would a randomly selected group of officers from different organizations.²⁶ To examine this proposition, future studies should employ additional measures of the nature of officers' prior experience with domestic violence cases, measures of the departmental policies for handling wife assaults, and measures of the incentives to either arrest or not arrest in wife assault situations. Future studies also should compare novice officers' decisionmaking with laypersons' decisionmaking to assess whether the propensity to use normative framing derives from common earlier socialization or from conservative political philosophies.

Our approach highlights the pitfalls of preferred and mandatory arrest policies. These policies attempt to constrain officers' responses to situations without considering how officers make decisions. Given the complexity and inherent ambiguity in most domestic violence situations, telling officers what to do without understanding how they do their job opens the door to resentment and to decisions that provide unequal protection. Officers may respond better to a cooperative and collaborative effort at improving a grave social problem. To take this approach with officers requires an understanding that many officers often do not employ biased attitudes that blame women for their abuse but operate based on self-interest and job demands. On an organizational level, departments can increase personal incentives for arresting husbands when wives have moderately severe injuries, which sends a normative message that violence in the home is wrong; of course, research should examine whether this policy leaves women at more risk of future physical harm and creates more community support for the wrongfulness of wife assaults. Without changes in how prosecutors and courts handle these cases, however, such departmental policies may not lead to greater numbers of arrests of batterers or greater protection of battered victims. In addition, officers must be made aware of the fallacies in the categories that they use to interpret credibility and dangerousness; without such instructions, efficiency framing will still lead to unequal application of arrest to handle wife as-

²⁶ This statement, however, should not be taken to mean complete homogeneity among officers in the same office; it implies that organizational culture does influence how officers frame situations. The same frame, as our results clearly demonstrate, can lead to quite divergent responses depending on the situation. Individuality, moreover, can occur due to differences in the kinds of domestic disputes experienced, the nature of the beat, and the nature of informal socialization. Muir (1977) provides a clear example of how an officer who always had to work the third shift had little contact with fellow officers and developed inadequate skills to handle domestic violence situations. Brown (1981) also suggests that police officers' attitudes about bureaucratic control may determine in part their susceptibility to organizational incentives and policies.

saults involving women who deviate from societal norms, which leaves departments open to civil liability suits based on unequal protection claims. Some research shows that instructions about how beliefs about certain categories should be ignored reduces the biasing nature of these categories (see Fiske & Taylor 1991) and may reduce disparity in officers' decisions about wife assault situations involving similar evidence of harm but dissimilar victims.

Appendix

Scripts Using Normal, Low-Income Couple

The script begins with the dispatcher reporting that a caller reports hearing shouting and screaming coming from the dwelling. Officers go to the scene. After informing the husband why they are there and receiving permission to enter, the officers begin with simple questions they were taught in academy training. They ask for his name, whether he lives alone, whether the couple is legally married, and whether they have any children. Bob and Sally Jones, the disputants, are legally married and have no children. The officers note Bob's height and weight (5 feet 7 inches tall, weighing about 150 pounds) and then ask to see Mrs. Jones.

Bob, like many batterers, tries to convince the police officers that everything is fine before they see the wife: "Where is your wife, Mr. Jones?" asks Officer Kelley. "She's layin' in the livingroom. She ain't feelin' too good," says Mr. Jones. "Do you mind if we speak to her?" asks Officer Kelly. "Well, she ain't feeling good, like I told ya. I don't think she wants to see nobody," replies Mr. Jones. "I must insist that we see her, Mr. Jones," replies the officer. "Okay, she's in the first room on the left," pointing down the hall. "Why don't we all go to the livingroom?" replies Officer Kelly, motioning with his arm.

The officers enter the livingroom and see Mrs. Jones sitting in a chair. "She looks to be about 5 feet 4 inches tall and weighing about 120 pounds. Her right eye and neck are bruised and swollen. The right sleeve of her shirt is torn and the shirt is twisted across her chest. She looks at the officers, her eyes are red and swollen, and her lip is cut and bleeding." The two officers decide to split up and interview each disputant separately. The respondent first reads the exchange between Officer Kelley and the husband, Bob Jones.

Officer Jones begins with a less threatening question: "Have you lived here long, Mr. Jones?" (Here Mr. Jones provides information about the couple's social class.) He replies, "We moved into this dump about six months ago after Sal and I lost our cleanin' jobs at the hotel down the street. Place just up and closed like that. Left us with nothin' out there." Officer Kelly asks, "We heard the two of you yelling as we came to the door, what was that all about?" "Oh, was no big deal. My wife didn't pick me up at the welfare office and it took me an extra hour to get home cuz the bus is so slow." [For the middle-income disputants, Mr. Jones replies, "We moved in here about six months ago after Sally and I got our teaching jobs. I teach at the high school and she teaches at the middle school." Officer Kelly asks, "We heard the two of

you yelling as we came to the door, what was that all about?" Mr. Jones replies, "Oh, it was no big deal. My wife didn't pick me up at school and it took me an extra hour to get home because the bus is so slow.]"

When Officer Kelly suggests that the noise sounded like a big deal, Mr. Jones volunteers to tell him the whole story: "Like I said, Sal didn't pick me up from welfare. I told her to be there at 3:30, but today she didn't show. So I decided I would take the bus and I hate taking the bus. . . ." Officer Kelly interjects, "What happened when you got home, Mr. Jones?" "Well, I open the door and Sal starts yellin' at me about somethin'. I didn't even get the door closed before she attacked me. All she wants to do is pick fights for somethin' minor. I think she's really mad cuz I went out last night with some friends. We argued yesterday morning about something. . . . When she starts yellin' I stay clear of her. I usually ignore her hopin' she will quiet down, but usually, she keeps rantin' until finally I lost it. I tell her to shut up, that I had a long day and that she didn't pick me up and I'm really mad. She started hittin' me. I shoved her off me. I think she fell pretty hard. Man, she can't even fall right," says Mr. Jones, shaking his head." [Batterers often blame the victim as Mr. Jones does here (Barnett & LaViolette 1993).] Officer Kelly then asks, "Do your arguments often come to blows?" Mr Jones replies, "I usually ignore her by walking away when she starts yelling. This time, when I walked away, I had to push her off me."

The script then turns to Officer Johnson's interview with Mrs. Jones. After introducing himself and the purpose of his visit, Officer Johnson asks, "Are you okay, Mrs. Jones?" She responds, "These bruises and cuts will heal, I guess." Officer Johnson asks, "How did this happen to you?" Mrs. Jones states, "Oh, there's ain't much I remember. It's been a long day and I ain't thinkin' too good. I guess my husband was mad cuz I didn't pick him up at the welfare office. Damn car ran out of gas and I had to walk about a mile to get some. It took me about half an hour or so, so I was late gettin' to welfare. Bob wasn't there on the corner, so I figured he found another way to get home. The minute he got home we started yellin' back and forth at each other." Officer Johnson asks, "You said we started yelling, were you also angry about something?" Mrs. Jones replies, "No, I wasn't angry 'til he screamed at me as soon as he came through the door. It didn't kill him to take the bus. He is so lazy. I told him two days ago we were out of milk and cigarettes and he ain't picked that stuff up yet. Tonight when I asked him about it, he flew off the handle. . . . Things got so bad, I decided to leave and let him cool off, but before I could make it out the door, he jumped me." Officer Johnson asks, "Has this ever happened before?" Mrs. Jones replies, "Every now and then, I guess."

When Officer Johnson finishes interviewing Mrs. Jones, the two disputants are brought together and begin to argue. The script ends with their argument: Mr. Jones asks his wife, "What did you tell him?" Sally remains silent. Mr. Jones continues, "Did you tell him that you started this fight by yellin at me after you didn't pick me up from welfare when you were supposed to? No, I suppose you told him it was all my fault." Mrs. Jones states, "I told him the truth, Bob. That you came in the door angry and we started yellin'. You wouldn't let me go over to Carol's place and I. . . ." Mr. Jones interrupts, "That's a lie. I ain't never stopped you from visitin' your friends. I only asked you to tell me where you

were goin' and when you'd be back. I don't mind when you visit your friends. Actually, I wish you had gone over to Carol's place when you first got home, maybe talking to her would have cooled you off some. I'd rather you complain to her than bite my head off when I come in the door." Mrs. Jones replies, "You're always sayin' I'm attackin' you. I don't like to argue. I'm stinkin' tired of it. I'm tired of your constant nagging. I'm tired of being angry." Mr. Jones replies in a sharp tone, "I'm tired of your demands. I'm tired of you puttin' me down and shovin' me around."

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Statute

Family Violence Act of Georgia, 1991 Ga. Laws sec. 17-4-21.