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PART 1

(AT) MALE PEER SUPPORT OF WIFE ABUSE;
(AS) AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

by

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Author's Note (#)

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~~ABSTRACT~~

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Feminist theorizing about familial patriarchy as a source of violence against wives suggests that abusive husbands' male peers provide ideological support for such violence. This study was an exploratory examination of the peer support thesis using quantitative and qualitative data from a survey of Toronto women. The results indicate that the male friends of abusive husbands were more likely to approve of violence against wives than ^{were} the male friends of nonabusive husbands and that such approval tends to reflect an ideology supportive of patriarchy in the familial sphere.

AB

~~MALE PEER SUPPORT OF WIFE ABUSE~~

OP Theorizing about familial patriarchy as the root cause of violence against wives suggests that abusive husbands' male peers provide ideological support for such violence. Bowker (1983), for example, ^{rew}~~draws~~ from Wolfgang and Ferracuti's (1967) subculture of violence thesis, with its emphasis on peer relations as a source of male status and identity, to posit the existence of a "male patriarchal" subculture of wife beaters. Bowker ^{ad}speculates that members socialize their married peers into the ideology of male dominance, including the importance of keeping wives in line, by force if necessary. In support of this conjecture, Bowker ^{red}reports positive correlations from his research on battered wives between the frequency and severity of beatings and the amount of time the batterer spent with his male friends. ^{he}~~Bowker~~ provides no evidence, however, that these friends actually approved of wife beating. This remains a hypothesis to be tested.

Employing quantitative and qualitative data from a survey of Toronto women, the present study sought answers to these ^a following questions: (A) Are the male friends of abusive husbands more likely to approve of violence against wives than ^{are} the male friends of nonabusive husbands? ^b and (B) To what extent and how does male peer approval of wife abuse reflect an ideology of familial patriarchy?

H1 Method

H2 Sample and Interviews

Using random-digit dialing, a sample of telephone numbers was generated from a list of all telephone exchanges in the ~~Metropolitan~~ Metropolitan Area of Toronto. Over 99 ⁹⁰~~percent~~ of Toronto households

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have at least one phone (Statistics Canada, 1986). Working from these numbers, female interviewers employed by the Institute for Social Research, ~~located~~ at York University, conducted telephone interviews, averaging 23 minutes, with 604 women between the ages of 18 and 50 who were currently or formerly married to, or living with, a male partner. The interviews took place in January and February ^{of} 1987.

The survey response rate, defined as the number of completed interviews divided by the number of estimated eligible respondents, was 56.4% ~~percent~~. Details regarding the calculation of this rate and other technical aspects of the study have been reported elsewhere (Smith, 1987).

(H2) Measurement

CTS₁ Wife abuse was measured using the Conflict Tactics Scales (Straus, 1990). The last nine CTS ^{items} describe acts of physical violence ranging in severity from throwing something at the other person to attacking the other person with a gun or knife. In this study, the interviewer asked the respondent if her husband, or former husband, had ever physically assaulted her in any of these ways during "the whole time you've been (were) together?" A respondent was considered to have been abused if she said yes to one or more of the nine CTS violence items.

Peer approval of wife abuse was measured using the following open question. This question followed a series of closed questions about the respondent's husband.

EX What about your husband's/partner's (former husband/partner's) male friends? I'd like your opinion about whether you think they would approve of a husband slapping his wife in any of the situations I've just mentioned. (Interviewer: This is an exploratory question. Probe as necessary. If the answer is yes, ask: "Why do you think your husband's male friends would

(EX)

approve?")

(FL)

The responses to this question were coded 0 = would not approve, 1 = would approve. The latter category also includes "some would, some would not" responses. An exploratory content analysis was then carried out of the extent to which and the ways in which the latter responses reflect an ideology supportive of patriarchy in the familial sphere.

How valid is a measure of peer approval that is based on women's perceptions of their husbands' male friends' approval of abuse? Unfortunately, no independent confirmations of the responses elicited were obtained from either husbands or their male friends. Respondents' perceptions of the reasons for this approval, however, did fall into a relatively small number of categories, the contents of which are congruent with those found in similar studies, ~~as we shall see.~~ There is also some evidence that abused wives' reports of their husbands' behavior are more accurate measures of that behavior than husbands' reports of their own behavior (Arias and Beach, 1987). This lends support to the use of the perceptual measure employed here. Nevertheless, the validity of this measure is open to question, and the results based on it should be regarded cautiously.

(HI)

Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the relationship between peer approval of wife abuse, as perceived by the respondents, and abuse, as measured by the CTS. Surprisingly, given the exploratory nature of the research, most respondents had a firm opinion about whether or not their husbands' male friends would approve of a husband slapping his wife; only 72 respondents said that they did not know. The majority of women said that their husbands' friends would not approve (n=377), but a sizeable minority furnished either a yes (n=98) or a "some would, some would not" (n=33) response. The

"some would, some would not" responses are included with the "yes" response in the analyses that follow. ⁹ It was apparent from their follow-up comments that even respondents who initially gave an unequivocal yes were referring to one or a few of their husband's friends, not necessarily all of them.

Table 1 about here

The results in Table 1 indicate that husbands with male friends who would, in the eyes of the respondents, approve of a husband slapping his wife were significantly more likely than ~~were~~ husbands without such friends to have physically abused their wives at least once during the marriage. This relationship, though only moderately strong ($\gamma = .31$), provides tentative support for the hypothesis that male peers exert an influence on whether or not a husband abuses his wife. Although it is true that the majority of both abused (64%) and nonabused (77%) women said that their husband's male friends would not approve of such behavior, it is also true that the majority of husbands do not abuse their wives, at least according to most surveys (Smith, 1987).

Of the 131 respondents who indicated that at least some of their husbands' male friends would approve of a husband slapping his wife, 109 respondents provided a reason why they thought their husbands' friends would approve. Table 2 summarizes the responses to this open question. (Unfortunately, only a small number of respondents revealed how they came to form their views, ^{for example,} ~~e.g.,~~ through direct observation of their husbands' friends, conversation with other wives, and ^{so on} ~~the like~~.) It should be noted that many of the responses are as much an explanation of why the respondent thinks that her husband's friends either do abuse, or would abuse, their own wives as ^{they are} ~~it is~~ of why her husband's friends would approve

in general of a husband slapping his wife. It seems that these respondents made inferences about approval generally based on their understanding of how their husbands' male friends treated their own wives.

Table 2 about here

The explanations shown in Table 2 fell roughly into five categories. Row A, which contains ~~by far~~ the largest number of items ($n=50$), has to do with male machismo, dominance, and control or, conversely, female obedience, loyalty, and respect, in the context of marriage or a marriage-like relationship. Some typical responses:

- EX Some might, the macho ones. It's just a feeling I have about a couple of them.
- EX To show he is in control of every situation.
- EX I've seen his friends do it, the macho ones.
- EX They have to keep women down by acting macho.
- EX They want to show they have total control. A good smack or a knock, for staying out too late and not doing what they are told. I've seen his friend slap his wife for a smart remark she made in public.

These are fundamental themes in the literature on patriarchy and violence against wives, and mirror an ideology of familial patriarchy. As Dobash and Dobash (1979) have shown, based on interviews with battered women in Scottish shelters, the primary source of the violence was a husband's feelings about his wife's alleged failure to live up to his "ideals" and "expectations" about what it means to be a "good wife." These ideals and expectations usually had to do ~~in some way~~ with her submission to his authority and control. In the same vein, Bograd (1988) found that

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approximately half of 38 accounts of violent incidents provided by 15 battered women focused on the batterer's use of force as a means of controlling or dominating his victim. The items in row B of Table 2 are closely related to those in row A. For these 10 respondents, particular ethnic or cultural backgrounds are the source of male peer approval of wife abuse, presumably because of the emphasis on male dominance and female subordination in those cultures.

♀ [EX He beat his wife. She's a close friend of mine. He's European. Sometimes men think this is the thing you should do.

♀ [EX Most of his friends are Italian. Slapping their wives around is important to them.

♀ [EX They're typical Chinese guys.

Thirteen women (row C) cited partial or total loss of self control, due to an ungovernable temper, alcohol consumption, or a combination of the two, as an explanation of why their husbands' male friends would approve of a husband slapping his wife.

♀ [EX He has a violent temper.

♀ [EX I've seen him slap his wife when he lost his temper.

♀ [EX They like to drink and get upset about women.

♀ [EX They lash out when they are drunk. They don't mean to.

[EX When men drink they have a completely different personality.

The out-of-control hypothesis is a familiar one in both the nonfeminist and feminist literature on wife battering, but the hypothesis is treated quite differently in these two bodies of work. Nonfeminists tend to accept the notion that batterers cannot control their violence at face value (see Ptacek, 1988); feminists treat the notion as an "account," more specifically, as an "excuse," a verbal strategy that is intended to mitigate the wrongdoer's responsibility for his actions (Scott and Lyman, 1968).

Studies of wife battering from an accounts perspective show that claiming loss of self-control serves to obscure the batterer's rational motives, which, more often than not, are to exercise control over his spouse or punish her for failing to be a "good wife" (Bograd, 1988; Ptacek, 1988).

Eight respondents stated that their husbands^{US} male friends would approve of wife abuse because they have negative attitudes toward women (row D^f)_e.

EX The way they talk and the attitude they have about women.

EX Their attitude about women and the way they speak to their wives. They don't respect women.

This too is a familiar theme in both nonfeminist and feminist research on male batterers, and again tends to be dealt with differently in these two bodies of work. For example, nonfeminist theorists have constructed elaborate psychiatric explanations, such as those focusing on problems of male sex[#]role identity, that blame females, especially mothers, for misogyny and, ultimately, violence against women (see Check, 1988). Feminists demur. Pleck (1981), for one, concluded^d that there is a much simpler explanation for men's negative attitudes toward women; namely, such attitudes are part of the culture. They are also in men's self-interest because they justify male dominance.

Twenty-eight women offered explanations of their husbands^{US} male friends^v approval of wife abuse that fell into a miscellaneous category (row E). Most of these explanations were simply not explicit enough for inclusion in the other categories (e.g., "Some of his friends are real bums." "Its just a feeling I have. I don't trust them⁸").

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Summary and Conclusion

Feminist theory suggests that husbands who physically abuse their wives get social support for this behavior from male peers

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and that such support reflects an ideology of familial patriarchy. The results of this study support these hypotheses. The results should be regarded as tentative, however, mainly because of the questionable validity of the measure of peer approval.

What are the implications of this research for social policy and treatment programs for abusers? Regarding policy, the results suggest that educational programs that foster an understanding of the relationship between wife abuse and the ideology of familial patriarchy, including the role of male peers in transmitting this ideology, ^{should} be developed and implemented. As for treatment programs, the results support a feminist model, whose basic assumption is that woman abuse serves to create and maintain male power in the domestic sphere. Therapeutic intervention involves challenging the patriarchal expectations and attitudes (including excuses based on loss of self-control) that lie at the core of the abusive behavior. These challenges should include the part played by male peers in the generation and support of abusive husbands' patriarchal beliefs and attitudes.

(RH)

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RT

January 7, 1991

Dear Dr. Conte:

Enclosed is a revised version of my paper, "Male Peer Support for Wife Abuse" together with the other materials you requested. I look forward to seeing the article in print.

My responses to the reviewer's suggestions are as follows:

1. I have deleted all the material on low income (pp. 2,4,7,8,14, old table 2). This shortens the paper and hopefully solves the "chopped up" problem.
2. I comment on the fact that the majority of peers do not approve on p. 7.
3. I changed the row to column percentages in Table 1.
4. I shortened the discussion of the results in Table 2. (old Table 3.).

Sincerely,



Michael D. Smith, Ph.D

Michael D. Smith is ^a Professor in the Department of Sociology and ~~co~~ordinator of the LaMarsh Research Program on Violence and Conflict Resolution, ~~both~~ ^{at} York University in Toronto. He has published recent articles on violence against women in ^{the} Journal of Interpersonal Violence, Journal of Family Violence, Violence and Victims, and Canadian Journal of Sociology. He is the author of Violence and Sport (Butterworths, 1983).

BG

Address & phone on ms. cover page

Table 1: Peer Approval of Slapping by Wife Abuse

Peer# Approval	Ever Abused			
	Yes		No	
	Number of# Cases (%)		Number of# Cases (%)	
Would Not approve	81	(64.3)	296	(77.5)
Would Approve	45	(35.7)	86	(22.5)
Total	126	(100.0)	382	(100.0)

NOTE: Chi-square = 7.95, ^{nificance#}df = 1, sigA = .00; gamma = .31; #
 24 missing cases. #
 72 "don't knows" not included

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Table 2 Why Do You Think Your Husband's Male Friends Would # Approve of a Husband Slapping His Wife?

CH

Explanations	Number of Cases	(%)
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rule

TT

A. Masculinity, Dominance, Control	50	(45.9)
B. Ethnicity, Culture	10	(9.2)
C. Loss of Self-Control	13	(11.9)
D. Negative Attitudes # Toward Women	8	(7.3)
E. Miscellaneous	28	(25.7)

add 1/2 line #

Total	109 ^a	(100.0)
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rule

SO

a₂₂ "don't knows" not included