

Feminist theorizing about familial patriarchy as a source of violence against wives suggest that abusive husbands' male peers provide ideological support for such violence. This study was an exploratory examination of the peer support theses 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.

Male Peer Support of Wife Abuse: An Exploratory Study

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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, drew 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 speculated 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 conjuncture, Bowker reported 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 provides no evidence however, that these friends actually approved of wife beating. This remains a hypotheses to be tested.

Employing quantitative and qualitative data from a survey of Toronto women, the present study sought answers to the following questions. (a) Are the male friends of abusive husband's more likely to approve of violence against wives than are the male friends of nonabusive husbands? and (b) To

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what extent and how does male peer approval of wife abuse reflect an ideology of familial patriarchy?

METHODS

Samples and Interview

Using random digit dialing, a sample of telephone numbers were generated from a list of all telephone exchanges in the census metropolitan area of Toronto. Over 99 per cent of Toronto households have at least one phone (Statistics Canada; 1986). Working from these numbers, female interviewers employed by the Institute for Social Research 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%. Details regarding the calculation of this rate and other technical aspects of the study have been reported elsewhere (Smith 1987).

Measurement

Wife abuse was measured using the Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS; 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 close questions about the respondents' husband.

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 husbands' male friends would approve?")

The responses to the question were coded 0 = would not approve, 1 = would approve. The later 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 response reflects 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. 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.

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 didn't know. The majority of women said that their husbands' friends would not approve ($n = 377$), but a sizable 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" responses in the analysis that follow. 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 husbands' friends, not necessarily all of them.

The results in Table 1 indicate that husbands with male friends who would, in the eye 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 non-abused (77%) women said that their husbands' male

TABLE 1. Peer Approval of Slapping by Wife Abuse

Peer Approval	Never Abused			
	Yes		No	
	Number of Cases	(%)	Number of Cases	(%)
Would not approve	81	(6.43)	296	(77.5)
Would approve	45	(35.7)	86	(22.5)
Total	126	(100.0)	382	(100.0)

Note: Chi-square = 7.95, *df* = 1, significance = .00; gamma = -.31; 24 missing cases. 72 "don't know" not included

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, through direct observation of their husbands' friends, conversation with other wives, and so on.) 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 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.

The explanation shown in Table 2 fell roughly into five categories. Row A, which contains 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:

Some might, the macho ones. It's just a feeling I have about a couple of them.

To show he is in control of every situation.

I've seen his friends do it, the macho ones.

They have to keep women down by acting macho.

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.

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

<i>Explanation</i>	<i>Number of Cases</i>	<i>(%)</i>
A. Masculinity, dominance, control	50	(45.9)
B. Ethnicity, culture	10	(9.2)
C. Loss of self control	13	(1.17)
D. Negative attitudes toward women	8	(7.3)
E. Miscellaneous	28	(25.7)
Total	109 ^a	(100.0)

a. 22 "don't knows" not included.

These are fundamental themes in the literature on patriarchy and violence against wives, and mirror an ideology of familiar patriarchy. As Dobash and Dobase (1979) has 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 with her submission to his authority and control. In the same vein, Borgad (1988) found that 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.

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

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

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.

He has a violent temper.

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

They like to drink and get upset about women.

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

When men drink they have a completely different personality.

The out-of-control hypotheses 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 at face value the notion that batterers cannot control their violence (see Ptacek, 1988); feminists treat the notion as an "account," more specifically, as an "excuse", a verbal strategy that is intended to litigate the wrong doer's responsibility for his actions (Scott & Lyman; 1968). Studies of wife battering from a accounts perspective shows 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' male friends would approve of wife abuse because they have negative attitudes toward women (row D).

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

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 theories have constructed elaborate psychiatric explanations, such as those focussing 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 that there is a much simpler explanation for mens' 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' male friends' 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 (eg., "Some of his friends are real bums." "Its just a feeling I have. I don't trust them.")

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

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

reflects an ideology of familial patriarchy. The result of this study support these hypothesis. The results should be regarded as tentative however, mainly because of the questionable validity of the measures of peer approval.

What are the implications of this research for social policy and treatment programs for abusers? Regarding policy, the results suggests 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 implimented. As for treatment programs, the results support a feminst model, whose basic assumption is that women abuse serves to create and maintain male power in the domestic sphere. Theraputic invention involves challenging the patriarchal expectations and attitudes (including excuses based on loss of self-control) that lay 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.

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