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Factors Affecting Tolerance of Abuse in Abused & Non-Abused Women

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Factors Affecting Tolerance of Abuse

in Abused and Non-Abused Women

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Psychology

Western Kentucky University

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Karen L. Wright

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FACTORS AFFECTING TOLERANCE OF ABUSE

IN ABUSED AND NON-ABUSED WOMEN

Recommended _December 11, 1987_

(Date)

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FACTORS AFFECTING TOLERANCE OF ABUSE
IN ABUSED AND NON-ABUSED WOMEN

Karen L. Wright   December 1987   62 pages

Directed by: Lois Layne, Karlene Ball, and Clint Layne

Department of Psychology   Western Kentucky University

A review of theory and research on spouse abuse identified sex-role socialization and past experiences with abuse as possible factors contributing to women's tolerance of abusive relationships. The current study of 151 college women attempted to identify factors predictive of tolerance of abuse which could identify women at risk of becoming abused. It was hypothesized that significantly more abused than non-abused women would be classified as feminine on the Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1974) and that previous experiences with abuse would be related to greater tolerance of abuse as measured by the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS); (Straus, 1979). Neither hypothesis was supported. The study failed to identify possible predictors of tolerance of abuse. However, the study provided a description of abusive experiences in college women. Fifty-two percent of the subjects were classified as abused on the CTS.

Brothers were the most frequent abusers. Abused women reported a much higher frequency of experiences with all forms of conflict. Care must be taken in generalizing the findings from this study to the general population due to the fact that the entire subject population was enrolled in college, and that most of the women classified as abused were so due to abuse by brothers and not by a mate in a long-term relationship.

Factors Affecting Tolerance of Abuse
in Abused and Non-Abused Women

Wife abuse is a frequently occurring phenomenon
which has only recently become a focus of study. During
the past decade studies have reviewed the history of wife
beating, reported profiles of abusing men and abused
women, described the pattern of the abusive relationship,
and formulated theoretical explanations for these
occurrences. Studies of the abusive couple have been
descriptive rather than experimental and the explanations
for the abuse have been based on interpretations of
clinical interviews or case studies. The present study
exployed an experimental method to examine factors that
may predict levels of tolerance of abuse among abused and
non-abused women.

One theoretical framework for conceptualizing abuse
is the social learning theory (Goode, 1971). The social
learning theory provides a framework to explain ways in
which a woman might have learned to be the victim of
abuse. First, it is theorized that women who have been
socialized in the traditional female gender role tend to

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be passive, submissive, helpless and dependent (Bem, 1974) and therefore may be more vulnerable to abuse. However, no studies have looked at the relationship between sex-role self-concept and tolerance of abuse. Second, the social learning theory also suggests that exposure to family models of domestic violence and other experiences of abuse are related to acceptance or tolerance of abuse. However, there is little empirical evidence which bears on the relationship between previous experience with abuse and acceptance levels of abuse later in life.

The present study attempted to identify factors in college women which could predict levels of acceptance or tolerance of abuse. Factors examined include sex-role self-concept as measured by the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI; Bem, 1974), and previous experiences with abuse as measured by the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS); (Straus, 1979).

Historical background of the social aspects of abuse

Acts of violence against women have recently been receiving more attention from professional and lay persons. In the past, spouse abuse has been difficult to study because it has been hidden. With the emergence of the feminist movement, battered women received public attention.

The term "battered woman" has typically not referred to a female who has been hit once or twice (Kemp, 1975), but rather to one who has been systematically beaten over a considerable length of time. Martin (1976) defined a battered woman as one who has received deliberate, severe and repeated beatings by her husband or lover and has suffered severe physical damage as a result. In the present study the terms abused and battered women were used interchangeably. Since women who are not legally married are also abused and beaten, "wife" and "husband" referred to both married and unmarried couples. The present study focused on physical types of abuse excluding forms of psychological coercion such as intimidation and harrassment.

Moore (1979) maintained that there have been two obstacles in attempting to determine the true number of abusive incidents in any given situation. First, it has been a grossly underreported crime (Martin, 1976; Roy, 1982; Walker, 1979), and second, since it occurs in the home, there usually have been no witnesses to the crime. The Federal Bureau of Investigation in 1972 (Dobash, 1979) estimated that wife abuse was three times more frequent than sexual assault, and that less than 10% of the occurrences were reported. Dobash and Dobash (1977) reported that in a study of 100 abused women there were

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collectively 32,000 assaults of which only 517 (2%) were reported.

Statistics have been cited which indicate that the home is the most violent location for abuse against both women and children (Dobash and Dobash, 1977). This attitude can be demonstrated outside of the family unit, too. In an experiment conducted by Borofsky, Stollak, and Messe (1971) cohorts simulated a physical assault on other participants. Bystanders intervened when assaults were made on men by men, women on women, and women on men. However, no one intervened when a man assaulted a woman.

In 1973 the FBI reported that 25% of all murders were domestic and that 50% of these were husband/wife murders. The Kansas City Police Department in 1972 (Dobash, 1979) reported that in 85% of their domestic homicides there had been police intervention at least one time prior to the killing. In 50% of the cases there had been at least five police interventions. Fleming's study on divorce (1979) showed 37% of the marriages under study indicated physical abuse as one of their complaints. In regard to female suicides, 25% of these women had a history of battering (Gayford, 1975).

While wife abuse has been scrutinized more carefully in the past decade, it has occurred throughout history. Its beginning lies in the subjection of women

to male control and authority. Married women have been subjected to abuse as far back as the Romans in 753 B.C. Romulus, who proclaimed the first law of marriage, argued that married women were "to conform themselves entirely to the temper of their husbands and the husbands were to rule their wives as necessary and inseparable possessions" (O'Faolain and Martines, 1974). Quoting from the Hindu Code of Manu No. 5, circa 100 A.D., "In childhood, woman must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, and when her husband is dead, to her sons. A woman must never be free of subjugation."

The structure of the Roman society further promulgated the social rightness of physical assault. Abuse was seen not as the result of thwarted love, but as a response to the oversight of property. In Roman society, the male was the head of the family, which generally was a three generation household. Males were given three names designating the individual, the clan, and the family. Women were only given two names with the individual identification being deleted.

The Punic Wars changed the status of women both in the family and in the Empire. Men were absent from home for long periods of time and the dramatic change in the ratio between males and females produced a group of emancipated women. Females gained independence and an improved educational opportunity with a corresponding

modification of the sexual code. Even with these changes men were still allowed to inflict corporal restraint upon their wives. It was, however, illegal to beat a woman of the upper class (Dobash and Dobash, 1977).

Many of the lower classes became Christians and had an impact on maintaining its traditional attitude toward patriarchy (Dobash and Dobash, 1977). Although certain texts in the scriptures espoused equality between the sexes, these were not embraced as readily as those writings which subjected women to an inferior status under the rule of their husbands. Consequently, religious teachings tended to exacerbate the belief in the superiority of the male and the inferiority of the female. The church provided both the ideology and support for the concept of woman as property. It has been argued that the church condoned domestic violence by espousing these principles so that both men and women incorporated these convictions into their belief systems. A moral obligation was established for women to obey their husbands, and for men to oversee their wives.

The concept of male control was supported outside the church by state laws which legitimized the abusive authority of men over women. European standards were introduced into the United States when laws were passed legalizing the practice of wife abuse. Limits, however,

were imposed. The Common Law Doctrine, also known as the rule of thumb, made it necessary for men to use switches no bigger than their thumb when beating their wives. An 1824 law in Mississippi permitted men to abuse their wives, but only in cases of emergency. This law was overturned in 1894. It was illegal in England to physically strike a wife as early as 1829. The Act for Better Prevention and Punishment of Aggravated Assaults upon Women and Children (1853) protected women who were treated cruelly. Around 1886 in many states, courts agreed to interfere only in cases where the woman was permanently injured or when the abuse went beyond reasonable bounds. North Carolina in 1890 became the first state to outlaw wife abuse. Finally, with the passage of the Married Woman's Property Act, in 1895, did assault become grounds for divorce in certain states.

Internalizing Societal Norms: Males

Despite legal sanctions which now prohibit wife abuse, the problem still exists. Because of the frequency and persistence of wife abuse, it can be assumed that variables other than historical and legal precedents perpetuate these violent practices. One approach to the identification of variables associated with abuse has been to study the background and characteristics of the abusing husband and the abused wife.

Studies of abusive males generally have obtained descriptions of these men from their battered wives. The husbands generally have refused to be interviewed except during the contrite stage and at this juncture they often could not or would not admit to the abusive behaviors (Walker, 1979). According to Wetzel and Ross (1983), the men maintained their innocence through the mechanisms of projection and denial. It has been noted that since many batterers do not seek treatment, the available information is based on relatively small sample sizes.

The literature has linked abuse from the male to a variety of factors, including childhood experiences, personality characteristics, and pressures from the environment. Since the family is the primary socializing factor in the child's life, early family experiences have a profound impact on adult attitudes. Abusive men tend to come from abusive homes, in which parents modeled this behavior as the primary problem solving strategy. Either the father abused the mother and/or the child experienced the abuse. In either case, the child learned to believe that violence was an effective tool for resolving conflict (Ponzetti, Cate, and Koval, 1982).

Research has identified a set of characteristics often associated with wife abusers. First, many abusers used alcohol and drugs. Ponzetti et al. (1982) suggested that substance abuse did not cause the family violence,

but rather was used as an excuse. The batterer used alcohol and abuse to deal with life problems with which he was ill-equipped to cope.

A second trait the batterers possessed was verbal inexpressiveness. This had far reaching effects on the abusive situation. Bardwick (1979) maintained that the inexpressiveness was a facet of the abusive male's identification with the stereotypical masculine role. The inexpressiveness was used to maintain male dominance and when this authority failed he resorted to violence. In 1981, the Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence conducted a survey of abusive men. According to the statistics, 56% of the men in their sample had previous problems with the law due to their violent behavior. In summary, the abuser has been socialized to view violence as a solution to conflict.

Straus (1979) suggested there were three modes of dealing with conflict. These included the use of reasoning, the use of threats to hurt the other, and the use of physical force against another person. The abusive male's lack of expressive skills added another dimension to the personality of the abuser. Often, he was a loner who strove to keep his wife in isolation which emanated from his need to exercise control over her.

Although abusive men are seen as being overly aggressive, Ponzetti et al. (1982) found that the abusive male was less assertive with his wife than non-abusive husbands. This nonassertiveness coupled with the aggressiveness resulted in the wives frequently describing their husbands as a "Jekyll and Hyde". They were first abusive and then affectionate and extravagant in gift giving. This metamorphosis could be traced back to the abuser's emotional dependence on his partner. Typically, the abuser has a very low self-esteem. While he intensely needs his partner, a healthy intimacy is blocked by a pathological jealousy and possessiveness (Star 1980). The abuser is in constant need of reassurance and gratification which may explain why physical violence often begins when the wife is pregnant. The husband feels out of control, jealous and insecure.

Several environmental factors have been identified with abuse. Economic stress is one example. Abusers were often unemployed, underemployed, or expressed intense job dissatisfaction (Carlson, 1971). These conditions may be particularly stressful to the male with stereotypical masculine beliefs about his role. Because the male feels that he must be competent and secure to be masculine, he becomes frustrated and angry over his inability to exert dominance. The weakness triggers

feelings of insecurity which lead him to deal with problems in a violent manner. By such an outburst he reasserts his position of authority in the family.

Internalizing Societal Norms: Females

Just as there have been many studies which identify variables which contribute to the occurrence and continuance of physical abuse in the male, there have been a number of studies of variables which influenced the woman's decision to stay in the abusive relationship. The research has identified personality traits and characteristics of the abused woman. Descriptions of battered women are far more abundant than descriptions of abusive men.

Studies have described battered women as socialized in the traditional feminine gender role (Morgan, 1982) with respect to their self-concept and their place in society. Abused wives have been described as overly submissive (Wetzel and Ross, 1983) and dependent on their husband for their emotional and financial support (Bowen, 1982). Other authors reported that battered women were characterized by passivity and severe stress reactions with psychophysiological complaints (Walker, 1979), feelings of helplessness (Wetzel and Ross, 1983; Bowen, 1982) and fear (Bowen, 1982; Walker, 1979).

In another study that compared abused to non-abused women (Morgan, 1982) the former were less educated,

repressed their anger, had lower coping abilities, and were passive rather than submissive. Fleming's study (1979) revealed that abused women suffered from guilt, low self-esteem, anger, ambivalence, fear of insanity, physical illness and learned helplessness. Abused women were reported to tend to withdraw from interpersonal contacts (Star, Goetz, and O'Malia, 1978). These females were described as acting as buffers between their mates and the world (Wetzel and Ross, 1983) and as tending to underestimate and downplay the seriousness of their situation (Wetzel and Ross, 1983; Walker, 1979). They also were described as having poor self-esteem and low self-confidence (Bowen, 1982; Star et al., 1978; Walker, 1979).

A recent study by Gellen, Hoffman, Jones and Stone (1984) focused on the differences between abused and non-abused women using the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI). Abused women were found to score significantly higher on eight of the ten clinical scales. These were: Hypochondriasis, Depression, Hysteria, Psychopathic Deviancy, Paranoia, Psychasthenia, Schizophrenia and Social Introversion. Other researchers have found similar MMPI scale elevations for abused women (Rosewater, Knappenberger, and Smith, 1985). For women who have experienced the greatest degree of abuse the

most elevated scales are Psychopathic Deviancy, Paranoia, Schizophrenia and Depression.

Rosewater, Knappenberger, and Smith (1985) note that the clinical scales should not be interpreted to mean the women's pathology has caused the abuse, but rather the abuse may have caused the pathology. Other studies have reported that abused women suffer from psychophysiological problems. They complain of headaches, depression, anxiety, backaches, and insomnia (Walker, 1979).

A study by Gayford (1977) revealed a wide degree of violence inflicted upon women by their mates. Of the 100 abused women studied, 100 had bruises, 59 had been kicked repeatedly, 44 had lacerations, 42 had weapons used against them, 24 had fractures, 19 had been strangled, 11 had been hit with a clenched fist, 9 had been rendered unconscious, 7 had been bitten, 4 had shoulder and/or jaw dislocations, and 2 had epilepsy as a result of their beatings.

Researchers have studied the reasons why women stay in abusive relationships. Morgan (1982) reported that many of the reasons may be grouped under the headings of political (the husbands kept them isolated thereby diminishing their chances of developing potential resources), cultural (the implication is that abuse must be tolerated if one was to have a man to take care of

her), and psychological (due to earlier childhood
experiences it was learned that beating equals
affection). Similarly, Martin (1976) reported that women
stayed because the failure of their marriage was seen as
their failure as women. Roy's (1982) study of 150 abused
women indicated that they remained in these marriages
because they hoped their husband would change, they had
no place to go, they feared retaliation from their
husband, the children made it difficult to find a place
to stay, they had no financial resources, they were
afraid of living alone and they viewed divorce as
shameful.

The literature identifies a number of
characteristics common to both the abuser and the
abused. The primary one is that both abusive men and
abused women typically come from abusive households.
Once again the violence may be experienced directly or
indirectly. Gelles (1974) hypothesized that women who
were exposed to violence in the family setting come to
view violence in the family as acceptable. A study of
100 abused women revealed that 23 had experienced
violence in their families (Martin, 1976).

Studies which looked at the development of the
abusive relationship showed that the relationship of
husband and wife most often parallelled that of a parent
and child. The husband's position was perceived as one

of authority which permitted the use of physical force. The physical abuse reflected a family power struggle and a vicious dysfunctional cycle within the family system.

Morgan (1982) described the cycle as consisting of an initial tension building phase followed by a violent temper outburst by the husband. In the tension building phase the male becomes verbally and physically aggressive. The woman sees this as failure on her part to please him so she withdraws. The husband views her withdrawal as an admission of guilt. Following the tension building stage the acute battering incident occurs. This phase usually lasts no longer than twenty-four hours. During this time the woman oftentimes can dissociate herself from the pain. The first attack differs from subsequent attacks in that it is seen as an isolated event. It is generally a blow that does not result in an injury. The final stage is the reconciliation stage. The male exhibits an exaggerated amount of affection which provides encouragement and reinforcement needed to keep the woman in the relationship. At this point, experts contend that the woman is trapped.

Morgan's studies (1982) indicated that the violence usually occurred during the first year of marriage. Dobash (1979) reported that 23% of the abused women in the study were beaten while dating, 41% experienced abuse

six months after the wedding, 18% within the first year,
25% during the first two years, and 8% after five years.
In a study of 109 abused women (Heller, Ehrlich and
Lester, 1983) 23% were abused before marriage. This was
seen as a response to sexual jealousy or in response to
the woman's threat to terminate the relationship.
Fifty-nine percent experienced violence by the end of the
first year and 92% within the first five years. In a
study of 4000 cases in which violence occurred (Roy,
1982) it was determined that in 70% of the cases the acts
occurred immediately or shortly after the relationship
began. Further studies (Cate, Henton, Koval, Christopher
and Lloyd, 1982; Makepeace, 1981) on abused women
revealed that 20% of their participants had been involved
in one or more violent premarital relationships.

In a study (Faulk, 1974) of 23 couples in which the
male partner was abusive there were five types of abusive
relationships observed. In the passive-dependent
relationship the female was seen as being too demanding
which caused frustration in the male. He became abusive
to reduce the tension. In the dependent-suspicious
relationship the male doubted the female's fidelity. The
tension was reduced through violence. In the
violent-bully relationship the male used violence to
achieve his demands. It was found that alcoholism was
high in this group. In the dominating relationship the

male used violence in order to re-establish the authority position. In the stable and affectionate relationship the male became abusive during a mental disturbance, usually a depressive episode.

Theories of Abuse

There are a number of psychological and sociological theories which have attempted to explain why violence between intimates occurs. The earlier theories of violence proposed by Wolfgang (1967) and O'Brien (1971), have for the most part been discarded due to a lack of data to support them. These theories explained violence as resulting from resource deficits in the male such as lack of friendships, money, prestige and power. The lack of resources made him unable to handle tension and conflict which arose in marriage. Researchers have preferred not to refer to batterers as people with developmental personality problems which make them unable to control their aggressive tendencies, but have chosen to focus on the situational factors which cause the violence.

There are a number of theories whose basic premise is that abusive behavior is learned. These include the social learning theory proposed by Goode (1971), and the systems analysis of family violence proposed by Straus (1976). The social learning theory maintains that all behavior is learned through modeling and reinforcement.

If during the early years of socialization the child is exposed to violence, she or he may learn this violent response as an acceptable mechanism to employ when confronted with threatening situations. These early life experiences include the observation of the parents' marital conflict, including physical violence. The socialization and acceptance of violence is a part of the normative process in many facets of human culture.

Other research has demonstrated the socialization of abused women in the stereotyped female role. During childhood abused women were taught to be quiet, and unassuming. They had few friends, and were taught very traditional ideas of women's place in society (Morgan, 1982). Walker (1979) presented a theory that may explain why women who were not abused as children were abused by their mates. She proposed that their fathers were traditionalists who raised them into stereotyped sex-roles, taught them that they were unable to take care of themselves and to be dependent on men.

Researchers have studied the question of why in some cases the abuse must go to such extremes in order for the woman to take steps toward effecting change. Due to the trauma that she has experienced by males in both childhood and in her marriage she suffers from low self-esteem. In order to cope with her reality she overcompensates by cultivating societal values of the

stereotypical female role. In so doing she becomes
passively accepting and sees the mistreatment as deserved
(Morgan, 1982).

Numerous studies and articles have focused on
Seligman's (1976) theory of learned helplessness as it
relates to wife abuse (Walker, 1979; Ball and Wyman,
1978; Fleming, 1979; Bowker, 1983; Giles-Sims, 1983;
Abramson, Seligman and Teasdale, 1978). Research
demonstrated that this feeling of learned helplessness
had far reaching effects on human behavior (Maier and
Seligman, 1976). It produced passivity in traumatic
situations, the belief that responding was ineffective,
stress and depression. These feelings were generalized
as a feeling of learned helplessness.

Bowker (1983) and Fleming's (1979) studies reported
that the repeated batterings took an emotional toll on
the victim and produced passivity and a lowered
self-confidence. This caused the abused woman's
self-esteem to drop and she developed a negative
self-image. This was the result of her feeling that she
was not doing anything to get herself out of the
situation. These ideas permeated every aspect of her
life and she felt ineffectual in causing any change.
Walker's findings (1979) coincided with those of Bowker
and Fleming. She viewed the learned helplessness as
resulting when women's voluntary responses did not have a

positive effect on their mate's behavior. The woman then suffered from motivational deficits in behavioral, cognitive and emotional areas. This brought about a fatalistic approach to both present and future problems (Ball and Wyman, 1978) and eventually caused a cessation of reacting (Giles-Sims, 1983).

The literature on spouse abuse has approached the topic in several ways. First, there has been a long history and tradition of spouse abuse which may help explain its existence. Earlier laws sanctioned various forms of spouse abuse. It has only been within the last 100 years that such incidents have become illegal.

Second, studies have looked at the background and the personality characteristics of male abusers and women who are abused in an attempt to identify causes of abuse. Out of this research has emerged a number of commonalties between the abuser and the victim. Both typically came from an abusive household where they experienced the abuse directly or saw abuse used as a way of dealing with anger and frustration. They both tended to suffer from poor self-esteem which made them emotionally dependent on each other. They also tended to strictly adhere to the stereotyped sex-role characteristics that society perpetuates. For the woman this included learning to be submissive, passive, helpless and dependent.

Third, attempts have been made to describe the typical pattern of development of the abusive relationship. Due to family experiences and early background, abused women tended to be predisposed to abuse. Women are often physically assaulted during the dating stage of the relationship. The first incident of abuse was seen as an isolated event, but this pattern of abuse continued into the marriage.

Fourth, theories have attempted to account for the known facts on spouse abuse. The social learning theory and learned helplessness seemed to be the most applicable. Because abused women often experienced mistreatment as children, they learned that violence was an acceptable way of dealing with conflict. After repeated batterings abused women began to feel that they were ineffectual in causing change and ceased reacting.

The review of the literature suggests that sex-role socialization and previous experiences with abuse help women learn to accept abusive relationships. This study examined the relationship between acceptance of abuse, sex-role socialization as measured by the Bem Sex Role Inventory and exposure to conflict as measured by the Conflict Tactics Scale. It was hypothesized that significantly more abused women would be classified as feminine and non-abused women would be more often be classified as masculine or androgynous as measured by the

BSRI. It was also expected that women's previous experiences with abuse would be predictive of their acceptance level of abuse and that these earlier experiences would identify women at risk of becoming victims.

Method

Subjects. The subjects included 151 female
students enrolled at Western Kentucky University during
the Fall Session, 1986. The students were enrolled in
psychology and child development courses on campus.
Subjects participated voluntarily as part of a classroom
activity. Only female subjects' data were analyzed
although male data were collected. The subjects' ages
ranged between 16 and 46 years, with an average of 21
years. The study included 80 freshmen, 26 sophomores, 14
juniors, 27 seniors and 4 graduate students. One hundred
twenty-four of the subjects were single, 19 were married,
2 were remarried, 6 were divorced and none were widowed.
One hundred forty-nine subjects identified their
occupation as student and two as housewife. Twenty-five
of the subjects had a major either in or related to
psychology; the other 126 were in other fields not
related to the behavioral sciences. The subjects
included 140 whites, 9 blacks and 2 of other racial
descent.

Instrumentation. The Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI;
Bem, 1974) (Appendix B) was used to assess sex-role
self-concept. The BSRI consists of a list of 60
personality characteristics. These descriptors were
chosen on the basis of sex-typed social desirability. Of

the 60 adjectives, 20 are on the Masculinity scale, 20 on
the Femininity scale and 20 are filler items. The
subjects were asked to rate themselves on a scale of one
to seven (never or almost never true to always or almost
always true). On the basis of their responses on the
BSRI each subject received two scores, a Masculinity raw
score and a Femininity raw score, each of which could
range from 20 to 140. Raw scores were converted to
Masculinity and Feminity scores using the median split
method (Bem, 1974).

The Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS; Straus, 1979)
(Appendix F) was used to assess both length and level of
abuse experienced (Appendix D) and acceptance level of
abuse (Appendix C). The CTS consists of a list of 18
descriptions of how to handle confrontations. There is
evidence of both concurrent and construct validity for
this scale (Straus, 1979; Gelles, 1974). In order to
provide data on previous experiences with abuse, subjects
were asked to identify methods most often used to handle
conflicts. These choices included the use of reasoning,
verbal aggression and violence. Subjects identified
people with whom they had experienced these conflicts,
their own age at the time and how long this particular
form of problem solving behavior persisted.

As a means of providing data for tolerance levels
of abuse, subjects were asked to rate items on the CTS on

a five point likert scale as to whether they found the
conflict tactic solutions to be acceptable (strongly
agree) or unacceptable (strongly disagree) ways of
handling anger. On the basis of their responses,
subjects received a score which ranged from 23-50, which
served as an index of tolerance levels.

As a result of their responses on the CTS each
subject received four scores; a verbal reasoning score
(range 0-4), a threatening score (range 0-5), an
aggression score (range 0-6) and an abuse score (range
0-5). Items n-r (Appendix F) indicated physical abuse
that had a risk of serious injury and subjects who
endorsed an item in this category were classified as
abused. All other women were classified as non-abused.

Procedure. The study was identified as research
for a master's thesis, and subjects were assured of their
anonymity. Subjects who wanted the results of the study
were asked to fill out a card with their name and address
after finishing the questionnaire. Care was taken to
insure that students did not participate in the study
more than once. Instructions were read by the author
(Appendix A). Students were asked to read the
instructions on the cover sheet and to complete the Bem
Sex Role Inventory (Appendix B), the Conflict Tactics
Scales (Appendix C and D) and the Personal Information
form (Appendix E). The inventories were administered to

each class as a group. To control for order of testing, the scales were presented in a random order.

Results

Of the 151 women included in this study, 79 were classified as abused and 72 as non-abused. The classification was based on their score on the Conflict Tactics Scale. Women classified as abused endorsed at least one item (items n-r, Appendix F) which indicated physical abuse that had a high risk of serious injury. Subjects who did not endorse an item in this category were classified as non-abused.

Several hypotheses were tested. First, it was hypothesized that more abused women than non-abused women would be classified as feminine by the BSRI. A chi-square analysis was performed to compare the frequency distribution of subjects in each abuse category (abused or non-abused) and sex-role classification (masculine, feminine, androgynous or undifferentiated). Frequencies are presented in Table 1. The results did not support the hypothesis. Abused women were just as likely to be classified as feminine, masculine, androgynous or undifferentiated as non-abused women $(x^2=6.2$, df=7, p>.05).

Second, it was hypothesized that previous experiences with abuse would be predictive of higher

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levels of tolerance of abuse as an adult. A stepwise multiple regression was performed in order to identify variables that would predict tolerance of abuse. The variables evaluated as possible predictors included: age; education; marital status; occupation; major; race; masculinity score; femininity score; experiences with verbal reasoning, threatening, aggression, abuse; and acceptance of abuse scores. Age and education were found to be the best predictors. Age accounted for 3% of the variance (F=4.43, df=1, p<.05); education accounted for an additional 3% of the variance (F=4.56, df=2, p<.05). Older women found lower levels of conflict tactics acceptable ways of handling conflict. Education may have been included as a predictor predominantly due to its high correlation with age (r=.4337).

In order to clarify the relationships between variables studied, correlations between age, education, masculinity, femininity, verbal reasoning, threatening, aggression, abuse, and acceptance were computed (refer to Table 2). Age was significantly correlated (p<.05) with education, verbal reasoning, aggression, abuse, and acceptance; education was significantly correlated with masculinity, femininity and verbal reasoning; femininity was significantly correlated with threatening and acceptance of abuse; verbal reasoning was significantly correlated with threatening, aggression, and abuse;

threatening was significantly correlated with aggression and abuse; aggression was significantly corrlelated with abuse.

A quartimax factor analysis was performed in order to identify variables associated with either abuse or non-abuse. The variables that were analyzed included the masculine and feminine items on the BSRI, and verbal reasoning, threatening, agression, abuse and acceptance scores. These variables were evaluated in order to determine whether any of them were related to, or loaded on the acceptance variable. The factor analysis would also reveal whether specific items on the BSRI were endorsed more by abused than non-abused women. Eight factors were identified which accounted for 82.9% of the variance. The eight factors were confident, nurturant, independent, active responses to conflict, athletic, sensitive and naive (refer to Table 3). None of the factors included acceptance. All conflict tactic variables, including abuse, were loaded on the factor labeled active responses to conflict.

An additional chi-square analysis was performed to compare the frequency with which subjects identified people (schoolmates, fathers, brothers, husbands, boyfriends, dates, mothers, and sisters) as having used the four different conflict techniques with them (verbal reasoning, threatening, aggression and abuse).

Frequencies are presented in Table 4. The analysis
revealed that the women in this study were significantly
more likely to have experienced threatening by their
boyfriends and abuse by their brothers (x^2=32.67, df=31,
p>.05).

T-test comparisons of abused and non-abused women
were made on conflict tactic experiences reported on the
Conflict Tactics scale and acceptance scores. The
t-tests revealed that abused women had significantly more
verbal reasoning used with them than non-abused women
(t=2.046, df=149, p<.05), had experienced significantly
more threatening (t=6.989, df=149, p<.05) and aggression
(t=16.940, df=149, p<.05).

Table 1

Frequency Distribution

of Abused and Non-abused Women

in Four Classification Groups of BSRI

	M	F	A	U	Total
Abused	10	31	33	5	79
Non-abused	3	30	28	11	72
	13	61	61	16	151

Table 2

Correlation Matrix

of Demographic, Conflict Tactics,

and Acceptance Scores

	Educ	Bem M	Bem F	V R	Th	Agg	Abuse	Acc
Age	.4337			-.2424				
Educ		.1409	-.1395	-.2111				
Bem M								
Bem F					.1391			-.1572
V R					.5799	.4529	.3371	
Th						.6511	.4823	
Agg							.7946	
Abuse								
Acc								

p<.05

Table 3

Factor Analysis

	Factors	Loading	Percentage of Variance
Factor I	<u>Confident</u>		
	Defends own beliefs	.40817	28.9
	Assertive	.67829	
	Strong Personality	.59280	
	Forceful	.47932	
	Has Leadership abilities	.72675	
	Willing to take risks	.046822	
	Dominant	.72267	
	Willing to take a stand	.62397	
	Aggressive	.64773	
	Acts as a leader	.68946	
	Individualistic	.44211	
Factor II	<u>Nurturant</u>		
	Affectionate	.46844	16.2
	Feminine	.48242	
	Sympathetic	.58267	
	Sensitive to the needs of others	.75896	
	Understanding	.68028	
	Compassionate	.61802	
	Eager to soothe hurt feelings	.52560	
	Warm	.69134	
	Tender	.47443	
	Loves children	.43429	
	Gentle	.44229	
Factor III	<u>Independent</u>		
	Self reliant	.73068	10.7
	Independent	.58786	
	Self sufficient	.57265	
Factor IV	<u>Active Responses to Conflict</u>		
	Verbal reasoning	.42423	7.4
	Threatening	.68378	
	Aggression	.86771	
	Abuse	.61889	
Factor V	<u>Athletic</u>		
	Athletic	.63852	6.0

	Factors	Loading	Percentage of Variance
Factor VI	Passive		
	Shy	.53269	4.9
	Soft spoken	.70394	
Factor VII	Sensitive		
	Cheerful	.57482	4.5
	Tender	.44444	
Factor VIII	Naive		
	Gullible	.51138	4.2
	Childlike	.63367	
	Cumulative Total		82.9%

Table 4

Frequency Distribution

of Conflict Resolution

Techniques Employed

	Verbal Reasoning	Threatening	Aggression	Abuse	Total
Schoolmates	8	18	8	8	39
Father	181	119	149	18	467
Brother	106	139	104	80	429
Husband	36	66	35	22	159
Boyfriend	67	215	93	14	389
Dates	16	12	6	1	35
Mother	69	78	75	9	231
Sister	31	47	51	29	158
	514	691	521	181	1907

Table 5

Mean Comparisons between Abused and Non-abused Women

	Abused	Non-Abused
Age	21	22
Education	1.9	2.1
Marital Status	1.3	1.3
Occupation	2	2
Major	1.7	1.7
Race	1.1	1.1
Bem M	4.8	5.0
Bem F	5.4	5.4
Verbal Reasoning	2.7	2.3
Threatening	4.0	2.7
Aggression	4.7	1.6
Abuse	2.1	0
Acceptance	31	30

Discussion

The literature suggests that sex-role socialization and previous experiences with abuse contribute to women learning to accept abusive relationships. In this study, fifty-two percent of the college women studied were classified as abused based on self-reports. Women were identified as abused if they reported experiencing the highest and most life threatening forms of abuse. These women endorsed items on the conflict tactics scale indicating that they had been kicked, bitten, hit, shot at or stabbed. Possible perpetrators of abuse included schoolmates, fathers, brothers, husbands, boyfriends, dates, mothers and sisters. Analysis revealed that abused women were most likely to have been abused by their brothers (38%), fathers (16%) and boyfriends (14%).

Several authors described battered women in terms that suggested that significantly more abused than non-abused women would be classified as feminine. Studies have described battered women as being socialized in the traditional feminine gender role with respect to their self-concept and their place in society (Morgan, 1982). Abused women have been described as being overly submissive (Wetzel and Ross, 1983),

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dependent on their mates for emotional and financial
support (Bowen, 1982), and having poor self-esteem and
low self-confidence (Bowen, 1982; Star et al., 1978;
Walker, 1979). Using the BSRI as a measure of
femininity the findings of this study did not support
the hypothesis that abused women are more feminine. The
chi-square (Table 1) did not reveal significant
differences in the distribution of abused and non-abused
women within the four gender role classifications of the
BSRI.

There are several possible explanations as to why a
relationship between femininity and abuse was not
found. One is that most of the abuse experienced in
this study was by siblings, not from a husband in a
long-term abusive relationship. Another is that the
previous descriptions of battered women were based on
self-reports and clinical interviews with battered
women. No previous research based its descriptions on
an objective, validated, clinical measure. When the
BSRI was used in this study, it did not support the
hypothesis that more abused women are feminine.

Another explanation as to why the hypothesis was
not supported may be the operational definition of
femininity. The earlier research which based
descriptions of the abused woman on self-reports and

clinical interviews reported what was perceived to be a long standing personality trait, such as femininity. What was measured and reported may have been learned helplessness, not femininity. Although learned helplessness and femininity share some of the same characteristics, for example, passivity, they are very different concepts.

Research has reported a relationship between learned helplessness and spousal abuse (Walker, 1979; Ball and Wyman, 1978; Fleming, 1979; Bowker, 1983; Giles-Sims, 1983; Abramson, Seligman and Teasdale, 1978). In these studies repeated batterings were related to passivity and low self-esteem. Seligman's (1976) animal research supports the interpretation of a causal relationship between abuse and passivity, with abuse leading to learned helplessness.

Another possible explanation for why a relationship between sex-role self-concept and abuse was not found is derived from the social learning theories proposed by Goode (1971) and Straus (1976). Their theories maintained that in abusive relationships behavior is learned, and does not result in personality traits such as femininity. They also suggested that although women do not seek out abusive relationships, they may be

predisposed to maintaining an abusive relationship with men as a result of childhood experiences with abuse.

If social learning plays a major role in the acquisition and maintenance of abusive behavior patterns, a relationship should exist between past experiences with abuse and tolerance or acceptance levels of abuse. It was hypothesized that previous experiences with abuse would be predictive of tolerance of abusive behavior or acceptance of higher levels of conflict tactics as measured by responses on the CTS. This hypothesis was not supported. A stepwise multiple regression revealed that only age and education were predictive of tolerance of abuse. Older women and less educated women found only the lower levels of conflict tactics acceptable ways of handling anger. The average tolerance score for the abused woman was 31; for non-abused woman it was 30. Closer inspection suggests that the entire subject population (older and younger women, more educated and less educated) found only lower levels of conflict resolution acceptable.

A limited range of responses to tolerance made it difficult to identify variables that predicted tolerance of abuse. There are three possible explanations for the lack of variability in responses. Tolerance may not vary across life experiences; socially desirable responses

were given; or the conflict tactics measure, as employed in this study, is not a valid measure of tolerance of abuse.

The relationship between age and education has already been discussed. Although education does not seem to relate to acceptance levels it does, as expected, correlate with age at a significant level. As age increases so does the education level. Other significant correlations (Table 2) revealed that in this study older women had achieved higher education levels, did not report verbal reasoning being used with them, and were less accepting of abuse.

Other significant correlations revealed that women with higher education levels had higher masculinity scores and lower femininity scores, and they reported experiencing less use of verbal reasoning as a conflict resolution tactic. Further correlations revealed that women with high femininity scores reported being threatened earlier in life, and they were less accepting of abuse as adults.

The factor analysis failed to identify items that were associated with either abuse or non-abuse. The abuse variable loaded on the active responses to conflict variable which is consistent with the finding

of significant correlations between verbal reasoning, threatening, aggression and abuse.

The demographic characteristics of age, education, marital status, occupation, major, race, and BSRI scores were very similar for abused and non-abused women (Table 5). T-tests revealed, however, that these two groups differed significantly on the conflict tactics reported. Abused women reported experiencing significantly more verbal reasoning, threatening, and aggression. Acceptance of abuse, however, did not differ between these two groups.

The data revealed that abused women reported eight times as many conflict situations than non-abused women. This finding suggests that abused women have more conflict in all areas of their life and tend to have lifestyles characterized by high levels of conflict and abuse.

While the progression through the hierarchy of tactics cannot be assessed in this study, the high levels of all types reported may suggest a progression, as in Morgan's (1982) tension building or the violence cycle described in some studies. Alternatively, the high levels of all types reported could reflect a variety of people representing different relationships using different conflict resolution tactics with women

during different developmental stages in their lives. A chi-square analysis was done in order to determine whether specific conflict tactics were likely to be reported as used more in some relationships than in others. Boyfriends used threatening more often as a means of conflict resolution; and brothers were most likely to use abusive approaches to resolve conflict.

The finding that brothers use abuse as a conflict resolution technique seems to suggest that what is often referred to as normal sibling conflict may be much more pervasive and violent than thought. Items endorsed included being kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, hit with an object, beaten up, threatened with a knife or gun and actually having been shot at or stabbed. Further research needs to be done to determine the relationship between sibling abuse and other subsequent abusive relationships.

Only limited conclusions can be drawn from the comparison of perpetrators because choices on the scale included only father, brother, husband, boyfriend, date, and other. Under "other", subjects added mother, sister and schoolmates. It would be anticipated that had these additional categories been specifically listed they might have been endorsed even more often by the subjects.

Several of the possible limitations and problems of the present study have been suggested. There was a lack of variability in acceptance levels. This narrow range of responses may have been due to a response bias to give socially acceptable responses. Another major limitation of this study was that the subjects were relatively young (average age 21.5), single, and that all were enrolled in college. Most previous research has been done with older, less educated, married women who were abused by their spouse. Caution must be used in generalizing the present findings to other populations.

In summary, based on previous research it was hypothesized that significantly more abused women would be classified as feminine according to the BSRI and that previous experiences with abuse would lead to greater tolerance of abuse. Neither hypothesis was supported. There was no difference in sex-role classification, nor was there a difference in levels of acceptance of abuse between abused and non-abused women. This study failed to identify variables which could be possible predictors of tolerance of abuse or which might have identified women at risk for spousal abuse.

The study does provide information about college women's experiences with abuse and conflict. Fifty-two

percent of the women who participated were classified as abused. The majority of abuse experienced was by brothers, fathers, and boyfriends. Further research needs to examine the relationship between brother abuse and subsequent abuse by others.

An additional finding of this study was the high frequency of all forms of conflict resolution techniques reported by abused women. These women may be involved in lifestyles that are characterized by frequent conflict and violence. The high frequency of conflict situations reported may reflect poor conflict avoidance decisions on the women's part or may indicate learned helplessness, whereby the abused women have ceased reacting due to the perceived ineffectiveness of their actions. Further research needs to investigate the possible relationship between tolerance and learned helplessness.

Other research possibilities include further clarification of how childhood experiences with abuse are related to adult experiences with abuse. Does experiencing abuse directly or indirectly as a child influence the probability of becoming abusive or abused as an adult? The relationship between the abuser and abused needs closer inspection. In this study the frequency of brother abuse reported was high. Since a

brother is seen as an equal, rather than an authority figure, does abuse by brothers have less impact than abuse by fathers? Also, further research needs to examine the similarities and differences between abusive men and women, and abused men and women.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Oral Instructions

I am conducting research for a master's thesis in Psychology, and would like you to take some short tests which can be completed in about twenty minutes. Briefly, what I am interested in is certain personality traits in abults. I am not looking at individual responses, but rather at averages. Your name will not be attached to the tests and all test materials will be kept strictly confidential.

Please do not put your name on the inventories so that you may remain anonymous. Read the instructions and see if you have any questions. If you have participated in this study before please do not do so again.

Do not leave any items blank and try to describe yourself as accurately as possible. After you have finished, please complete the brief questionnaire on the last page.

If you would like a copy of the results of this study, fill out a card with your name and address after you have finished.

Appendix B

The Bem Sex Role Inventory

Instructions:

On another page you will be shown a large number of personality characteristics. We would like for you to use those characteristics in order to describe yourself. That is, we would like you to indicate, on a scale of 1 to 7, how true of you these various characteristics are. Please do not leave any characteristic unmarked.

Example: sly

Mark a 1 if it is NEVER OR ALMOST NEVER TRUE that you are sly.

Mark a 2 if it is USUALLY NOT TRUE that you are sly.

Mark a 3 if it is SOMETIMES BUT INFREQUENTLY TRUE that you are sly.

Mark a 4 if it is OCCASIONALLY TRUE that you are sly.

Mark a 5 if it is OFTEN TRUE that you are sly.

Mark a 6 if it is USUALLY TRUE that you are sly.

Mark a 7 if it is ALWAYS OR ALMOST ALWAYS TRUE that you are sly.
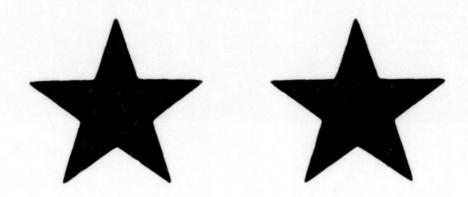
Thus, if you feel it is sometimes but infrequently true that you are "sly," never or almost never true that you are "malicious," always or almost always true that you are "irresponsible," and often true that you are

"carefree," then you would rate these characteristics as follows:

Sly	3	Irresponsible	7
Malicious	1	Carefree	5

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
NEVER OR ALMOST NEVER TRUE	USUALLY NOT TRUE	SOMETIMES BUT INFREQUENTLY TRUE	OCCASION- ALLY TRUE	OFTEN TRUE	USUALLY TRUE	ALWAYS OR ALMOST ALWAYS TRUE

Self reliant	Reliable	Warm	
Yielding	Analytical	Solemn	
Helpful	Sympathetic	Willing to take a stand	
Defends own beliefs	Jealous	Tender	
Cheerful	Has leadership abilities	Friendly	
Moody	Sensitive to the needs of others	Aggressive	
Independent	Truthful	Gullible	
Shy	Willing to take risks	Inefficient	
Conscientious	Understanding	Acts as a leader	
Athletic	Secretive	Childlike	
Affectionate	Makes decisions easily	Adaptable	
Theatrical	Compassionate	Individualistic	
Assertive	Sincere	Does not use harsh language	
Flatterable	Self-sufficient	Unsystematic	
Happy	Eager to soothe hurt feelings	Competitive	
Strong personality	Conceited	Loves children	
Loyal	Dominant	Tactful	
Unpredictable	Soft-spoken	Ambitious	
Forceful	Likable	Gentle	
Feminine	Masculine	Conventional	

CORRECTION

★ ★

*PRECEDING IMAGE HAS BEEN
REFILMED
TO ASSURE LEGIBILITY OR TO
CORRECT A POSSIBLE ERROR*

Appendix C

Conflict Tactics Scale

Disagreements involving physical force between family members are not uncommon. Please circle how strongly you agree or disagree as to whether the following are acceptable ways for one's mate to deal with his or her anger.

SD - Strongly Disagree (Unacceptable) D - Disagree N - No response
A - Agree SA - Strongly Agree (Acceptable)

a. Discuss an issue calmly	SA	A	N	D	SD
b. Insult or swear at you	SD	D	N	A	SA
c. Stomp out of the room, house or yard	SA	A	N	D	SD
d. Throw something at you	SD	D	N	A	SA
e. Beat you up	SA	A	N	D	SD
f. Push, grab or shove you	SD	D	N	A	SA
g. Get information to back up their side	SD	D	N	A	SA
h. Cry	SA	A	N	D	SD
i. Slap or spank you	SA	A	N	D	SD
j. Do or say something to spite you	SD	D	N	A	SD
k. Kick, bite or hit you with a fist	SA	A	N	D	SD
l. Bring in or try to bring in someone to help settle things	SD	D	N	A	SA

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m. Use a knife or fire a gun	SD	D	N	A	SA
n. Sulk or refuse to talk about the issue	SA	A	N	D	SD
o. Throw, smash or hit you with something	SA	A	N	D	SD
p. Threaten to hit or throw something at you	SA	A	N	D	SD
q. Hit or try to hit you with something	SD	D	N	A	SA
r. Threaten you with a knife or gun	SD	D	N	A	SA

Appendix D

Conflict Tactics Scale

Think back to when you were growing up and you had a dispute with one of the following people. Check for each method of dealing with the problem the person/people involved, your age at the time, and the length of time the behavior persisted.

	Father	Brother	Husband	Boyfriend	Date	Other
a. Discuss an issue calmly						
Your age at the time	___	___	___	___	___	___
Length of time the behavior persisted	___	___	___	___	___	___
b. Insult you or swear at you						
Your age at the time	___	___	___	___	___	___
Length of time the behavior persisted	___	___	___	___	___	___
c. Stomp out of the room or house or yard						
Your age at the time	___	___	___	___	___	___
Length of time the behavior persisted	___	___	___	___	___	___
d. Throw something at you						
Your age at the time	___	___	___	___	___	___
Length of time the behavior persisted	___	___	___	___	___	___
e. Beat you up						
Your age at the time	___	___	___	___	___	___
Length of time the behavior persisted	___	___	___	___	___	___
f. Push, grab, or shove you						
Your age at the time	___	___	___	___	___	___
Length of time the behavior persisted	___	___	___	___	___	___
g. Get information to back up their side of things						
Your age at the time	___	___	___	___	___	___
Length of time the behavior persisted	___	___	___	___	___	___

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	Father	Brother	Husband	Boyfriend	Date	Other
h. Cry						
Your age at the time						
Length of time the behavior persisted						
i. Slap or spank you						
Your age at the time						
Length of time the behavior persisted						
j. Do or say something to spite you						
Your age at the time						
Length of time the behavior persisted						
k. Kick, bite, or hit you with a fist						
Your age at the time						
Length of time the behavior persisted						
l. Bring in or try to bring in someone to help settle things						
Your age at the time						
Length of time the behavior persisted						
m. Use a knife or fire a gun						
Your age at the time						
Length of time the behavior persisted						
n. Sulk or refuse to talk about the issue						
Your age at the time						
Length of time the behavior persisted						
o. Throw or smash or hit or kick something						
Your age at the time						
Length of time the behavior persisted						

	Father	Brother	Husband	Boyfriend	Date	Other

p. Threaten to hit you or throw something at you
   Your age at the time
   Length of time the behavior persisted

q. Hit or try to hit you with something
   Your age at the time
   Length of time the behavior persisted

r. Threaten you with a knife or gun
   Your age at the time
   Length of time the behavior persisted

Appendix E

Personal Information

Check appropriate response

Age:_____

Sex: Male_____Female_____

Education level:

Freshman_____

Sophomore_____

Junior_____

Senior_____

Marital Status:

Never married_____Single_____

Married_____Divorced_____

Remarried_____Widowed_____

Occupation:_____

Major:_____

Race:

White_____Black_____Other_____

Appendix F

Conflict Tactics Scale

a. Discuss an issue calmly
b. Get information to back up their side
c. Bring in or try to bring in someone to help
    settle things
d. Insult or swear at you
e. Sulk or refuse to talk about the issue
f. Stomp out of the room, house or yard
g. Cry
h. Do or say something to spite you
i. Threaten to hit or throw something at you
j. Throw, smash or hit you with something
k. Throw something at you
l. Push, grab or shove you
m. Slap or spank you
n. Kick, bite or hit you with a fist
o. Hit or try to hit you with something
p. Beat you up
q. Threaten you with a knife or gun
r. Use a knife or fire a gun

Verbal reasoning scale - items a-d
Threatening scale - items e-i
Aggression scale - items j-o
Abuse scale - items n-r