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# THE STATUS OF WOMEN AND WIFE- BEATING IN THE U S: A MULTI-LEVEL ANALYSIS

KERSTI ALICE YLLO

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THE STATUS OF WOMEN AND WIFE-BEATING IN THE U.S.:  
A MULTI-LEVEL ANALYSIS

BY

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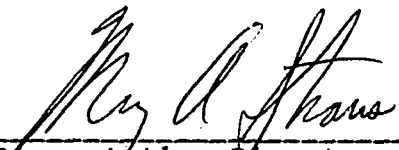
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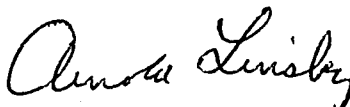
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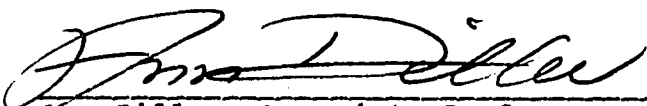
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 1980  
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ABSTRACT

THE STATUS OF WOMEN AND WIFE-BEATING IN THE U.S.:

A MULTI-LEVEL ANALYSIS

by

Kersti A. Yllo

University of New Hampshire, September, 1980

The relationship between status of women and wife-beating has been the subject of some debate. It has been argued that sexual inequality is one of the central causes of wife abuse (Dobash and Dobash, 1980; Martin, 1976). On the other hand, some claim that the charges being brought about by the Women's Movement are resulting in an increase in wife-beating. Researchers in the field of family violence have speculated on the connection between the two phenomena (Whitehurst, 1974; Straus, 1976; Dobash and Dobash, 1977). To date, the relationship between the status of women on the societal level and wife-beating has not been investigated empirically.

This study, which addresses this issue, is composed of three major parts. The first is a systems theoretical analysis of the status of women based on a "meta-power" model and historical and cross-cultural evidence. This analysis provides a foundation for the general understanding

of sexual stratification and women's current status.

The second part of the study deals specifically with the concept of the status of women, the development of an index of women's status, and the ranking of U.S. states according to that index. The status of women is defined as the position of women as a group relative to the position of men as a group in the different spheres of society (Hommes, 1978). The Status of Women Index is based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau, statistical almanacs, and national surveys. It is composed of economic, educational, political, and legal items, such as the ratio of male to female income for full-time workers. The index allows for a comparison of American states on individual items, the four dimensions just mentioned, and on the overall index. Two important functions are served by the Status of Women Index. First, it is a valuable social indicator and can be used to describe and monitor the changing status of women in the U.S. Second, it provides an empirical measure for a concept of theoretical importance for feminist social science research.

The third part of the study builds upon the theoretical examination of the status of women elaborated in the first part, and utilizes the empirical measurement of that status, which was the focus of the second part. Specifically, the impact of the status of women in American states on the levels of wife-beating in those states is taken into consideration. The additional data for this portion of the

research come from the Violence in American Families Survey, in which a nationally representative sample of 2143 husbands and wives were interviewed regarding their family life in general and domestic violence in particular.

The major finding of the research is that there is evidence of a curvilinear relationship between the status of women and violence against wives. Wives are most likely to be physically assaulted by their husbands in those states where the status of women is lowest. Violence then decreases as women's status increases -- to a point. In those states where the status of women is highest, the level of violence against wives is also quite high. It was suggested that the high level of violence in low status states might be due to the need to use greater amounts of physical force to keep women "in their place". In addition, the more limited options to violent marriages in these states may serve to keep battered women in their marriages. The high level of violence in high status states, in contrast, is likely to be the result of other factors. Where the general status of women is high, husbands may feel threatened by the rapid social change and the break-down of traditional husband-wife roles. Increased domestic conflict and violence may be a short-term consequence of women's move toward equality.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Objectives of the Study

The relationship between the status of women and wife-beating has been the subject of some debate. It has been argued that sexual inequality is one of the central causes of wife abuse (Dobash and Dobash, 1980; Martin, 1976). On the other hand, some claim that the charges being brought about by the Women's Movement are resulting in an increase in wife-beating. Researchers in the field of family violence have speculated as to the interconnection between the two phenomena (Whitehurst, 1974; Straus, 1976; Dobash and Dobash, 1977). To date, the relationship between the status of women on the societal level and wife-beating has not been investigated empirically.

For the most part, research has focused on inequalities between husbands and wives within the family. The idea that violence serves as the ultimate power resource has been explored (Gocde, 1971). The effect of conjugal resources and power on spousal violence has been investigated empirically (Allen and Straus, 1980; Titterud, 1980). Some support for the Ultimate Resource Theory, which proposes

that that husbands use violence as a last resort to maintain control has been provided.

This approach to marital power and inequality focuses on the interpersonal relationship. In the tradition of Max Weber, power is defined as the ability to carry out one's will despite resistance. A problem with this approach is that the social context within which interpersonal power relations and inequalities occur is not taken into consideration.

Approaching this issue from a systems perspective, Tom Baumgartner, Walter Buckley, and Tom R. Burns (1975) contend that examining power and inequality on this level captures only part of the power activities of groups, organizations, or states. A large, and historically more important part involves the attempts to structure and restructure the social and cultural matrix within which interpersonal and intergroup power activities are played out (1975:49). They refer to the exercise of power oriented toward the shaping of the structure of social relationships as "meta-power" or relational control.

The first objective of this study is to examine sexual inequality on the macro-sociological level and to try to formulate a theory of sexual stratification with a systems framework and the concept of meta-power as its foundation. The second objective is to clarify the concept "status of women" and to operationalize it in the form of a Status of Women Index. The third objective is to empirically



investigate the impact of women's status on the amount of wife-beating. Sexual equality at the societal level and inequality within marriage are both seen as influencing the amount of wife abuse. This research focuses first on the sex stratified social structure and its effect on the rates of wife-beating on the aggregate level. Then, through contextual analysis, the interaction of the macro and micro levels of inequality are investigated. The degree and direction in which each separately, and the two together, are related to the amount of wife-beating are examined. (These research issues are outlined in greater detail in Chapter III).

In this research, societal status of women (including economic, legal, educational, and political dimensions) is seen as shaped by the exercise of meta-power by the dominant groups in society. Using their power and resource advantage, which the anthropological evidence indicates was initially quite minimal, males have been able to develop, perpetuate, and change social structures to their own benefit. The historic application of meta-power has molded our institutions and the status of women within them. The systems analysis of the amplification of sexual stratification is taken up in detail in the next chapter

The degree to which the social system and the institutions within it have been structured to the advantage of men varies from country to country and from region to region within countries. A comparison of the status of

women in Sweden as opposed to Iran illustrates this point. This research, however, does not examine this issue on the basis of cross-cultural evidence. The focus, instead is on regional differences in the United States.

How does the status of women in the different states affect rates of wife-beating? This is the key question of the research. In attempting to answer this question our approach turns to a multi-level structural model. Unfortunately, the longitudinal data which would be necessary to examine feedback loops between the macro and micro levels, characteristic of a true systems model, are not currently available.

The answer to the relatively simple question posed above is quite complex. The multi-level analysis undertaken in this study results in an intricate set of findings. As Baumgartner, Burns, and DeVille (1979) point out, as sociological research moves toward multi-level (as well as multivariate) analysis, simple causal propositions such as "when X, then Y" become less useful. The X/Y relationship may be expected to vary in a number of ways, depending on particular interactions with variables at other levels.

The interrelations between structured status of women, marital inequality, and wife-beating are examined in detail in this study. However, no formal hypotheses are tested. The possibilities that the relationship between structured inequality and level of wife abuse may be a positive one, or a negative one, or one which is characterized by a number of

interaction effects, are all considered.

#### Methodology

The data for this research come from a number of sources. The data on wife abuse are from the national survey conducted by the Family Violence Research Program of the University of New Hampshire. These rates of wife-beating are the most accurate figures currently available. They are a more reliable indicator of wife abuse than any police or hospital records because they are not limited by problems such as varying record-keeping systems and do not simply reflect information on those segments of the population who come to the attention of the authorities. These violence rates are based on information obtained through confidential interviews with a national, representative sample of 2143 husbands and wives. The data on inequality within marriages also come from this survey.

Information regarding the status of women or the degree of sexual equality in each state comes from a number of different sources. For the most part, these are government statistics from the Census Bureau and other agencies. Data from other compendia, such as Alexander's The Legal Rights of Women (1975), and other national surveys are also included in the Status of Women Index. (See Chapters V and Appendices C and D).

There are several steps in the data analysis procedure. First, how the states rank in terms of women's status is described in some detail. Then, the impact of sexual

inequality on aggregate rates of wife-beating is examined through visual displays of the data and correlational analysis. The third major step in the data analysis process involves linking the macro and micro levels through contextual analysis. The relationship of marital inequality and wife-beating is examined within the context of state status. Essentially, state status will be introduced as a control variable in an analysis of the marital inequality-violence relationship.

#### Significance of the Study

The study has significance on a number of levels. The theoretical chapter goes beyond an assessment of the current status of women to an examination of the nature of sexual inequality. The development of a theory of sexual stratification, based on systems theory and previous elaborations of a meta-power model, is of interest to two audiences. First, those concerned with the concept of meta-power and the study of stratification from a systems perspective will find an application of this approach to a different phenomenon. Baumgartner et al. (1975, 1977, 1979) have utilized this framework to analyze structured inequality in a number of contexts. Through their use of historic and contemporary illustrations, they attempt to demonstrate the broad applicability and usefulness of the model. Yet, they overlook what may be the clearest example of the exercise of meta-power in history - the pervasive structuring of sexual inequality into every component in the

social system. This study takes a step toward filling this gap in the development of a systems model of stratification.

Second, this attempt to explain sexual stratification by elucidating the interrelated structuring processes that have brought it about will be of interest to feminists (both academic and non-academic). Although much research has demonstrated the existence of inequality, the development of theory to explain this inequality is still ongoing. For the most part, biological vs. cultural explanations have been debated. The biological determinists have ignored the plasticity of human nature, stressing biological differences and findings from animal studies. The cultural determinists have tended to overlook biological factors and have disputed whether material or ideological factors are at the root of inequality. While the present model certainly will not end the controversy, it does attempt to synthesize elements of each of these approaches, although it does align most closely with earlier materialist formulations.

This research also makes a contribution to our understanding of family violence. The question of how sexual inequality affects the level of violence against wives is addressed in detail. At least some empirical answers to the theoretical debate on this issue are provided. The focus on the impact of socially structured factors on wife-beating can be important because it has practical implications.

The information on women's status in each state can be used by policy-makers in the public and private sectors. Decisions regarding the allocation of federal funds for various services such as job training programs for women, for instance, might be influenced by more comprehensive information on existing sexual inequalities. In addition, the findings of this research may be of interest to various feminist groups for the purpose of better assessing problem areas and planning action.

The central questions of this study were chosen, in part, because of the practical implications their answers may have. In a recent address to the Massachusetts Sociological Association, James Davis (1978) considered why so little sociological research is taken into consideration in the development of social policy. One of the reasons, he maintains, is that sociologists tend to investigate variables which are difficult, if not impossible, to alter. Factors such as social class, race, sex, and stage in the life cycle, for example, are not easily changed. Davis concluded that only when sociologists focus on variables which can be influenced effectively, will their research make an impact on public policy. Many of the factors investigated in this research, particularly a number of the dimensions of the status of women, are of this sort. They have been structured largely by human action, and can be restructured by it.

## CHAPTER II

### META-POWER AND SEXUAL INEQUALITY : TOWARD A THEORY OF SEXUAL STRATIFICATION

#### Sexual Inequality and Sociology

The purpose of this chapter is to overview the current approaches to sexual inequality and to develop a more adequate theoretical understanding of it. While a number of the issues discussed in this chapter are not of direct relevance to the empirical research, they do lay an important foundation for that research. The current status of women can best be examined when the factors which have molded it are understood.

Sociologists have focused on sexual inequality primarily in two ways. One approach has documented sex differences on social-psychological variables and sexual inequality on structural variables. Evidence on sex role socialization, sex differences in achievement motivation, and discrimination in education and the economy has been amassed fairly quickly (see Astin's, 1975 Bibliography of Sex Role Research). The vast majority of this research has documented sex differences and inequalities but has not contributed to the theoretical understanding of the nature

or development of this inequality historically or cross-culturally.

A second approach to understanding status of women and male-female power differences can be found in the field of family sociology. There the focus has been on division of labor in families and on marital power relations. The studies of the division of labor have been largely descriptive, or, if theoretical in nature, functionally oriented (Parsons and Bales, 1955). The subject of marital power, in contrast, has been the subject of much theoretical work and analytic research.

Studies dealing with family power have been numerous (see Safilios-Rothschild, 1970 and Cromwell and Olson, 1976 for reviews of this literature). Their focus has been almost entirely on the interpersonal power relations between husbands and wives. The effect of various resources on the balance of power between spouses has received much attention. While the studies often operationalize power differently, their conceptualization is generally similar to that of Max Weber (1947) and Peter Blau (1964), who has elaborated Weber's definition in terms of resources and exchange. Power is regarded as the probability that an actor will be in a position to carry out his or her will despite resistance. It is seen as arising from exchange processes when a person has some goods or services deemed necessary or desirable by others. Typically, the studies utilizing this approach are concerned with the effects of



resources such as spouses' incomes, education, and occupational status on the balance of power between them. Studies on the effects of status of women, and power on violence against wives have also fit into this general framework.

Daire Gillespie (1971) has taken issue with this micro-sociological approach to marital power and inequality. Her main argument is that focusing only upon personal resources and their effect on interpersonal relations would be methodologically justified only in a truly egalitarian society within which structural factors had no inequitable impact. She points out that, currently, society is structured in such a way that males have an advantage completely unrelated to personal competencies.

Our institutions are structured so as to assure that males, as a group, gain greater personal resources than females. The structures which serve to make husbands more "resourceful" marriage partners than wives, and therefore the more powerful ones, have been ignored. Gillespie contends that the relationship between males and females cannot be fully or properly understood when the focus is simply on interpersonal relations because power can be a class affair. It is necessary to consider the social context within which the interpersonal relations occur.

The documentation of inequalities and the study of family power, while valuable work, are limited in terms of their significance for a comprehensive theory of sexual

stratification. The first documents inequalities but does little to explain or interconnect them. The second, which deals with marital inequalities, is theoretically better developed, but does not take into account sexual inequality on the societal level and how this inegalitarian context affects interpersonal relations. In contrast, the theoretical work on sexual inequality is somewhat better developed in the field of anthropology, and the model formulated below draws heavily from this literature.

#### Stratification: A Systems Perspective

The approach to sexual inequality developed in this chapter involves more than an analysis of existing inequalities. It attempts to explain the development of the contemporary system of sexual stratification.

Stratification is the institutionalization of power arrangements that perpetuate patterns of economic, political, and prestige inequalities between groups over generations (Pease et al. 1970:128). Sexual stratification is the structurally patterned inequality between the sexes that is perpetuated through time. The focus of the present model is on this structured inequality and its historical evolution rather than on sex differences per se or interpersonal power relations and inequalities.

The model of sexual stratification formulated here is based on modern systems theory and the concept of meta-power. Systems analysis has been applied to the study of power structures and stratification previously (Alker et

al., 1978; Baumgartner et al. 1976; Burns, 1976). However, the focus of these studies has been on class stratification and male power relations, such as labor-management conflicts. This approach has not been used to examine sexual stratification and power relations between men and women.

The purpose of the application of this approach to male-female relations is two-fold. First, an additional form of stratification will be explained through systems analysis. The breadth and fruitfulness of this sort of approach will be demonstrated. Second, this model will enable us to come to a more thorough and adequate understanding of sexual stratification as a phenomenon of importance in and of itself. By developing a better conception of the nature of this inequality, the possibility of changing it is enhanced.

A central contention of the systems approach to stratification is that examining power and inequality on the interpersonal level captures only part of the power activities occurring in a society. A transcending and historically more important part involves attempts to structure and restructure the social and cultural matrix within which interpersonal and intergroup power activities are played out (Baumgartner, Buckley, and Burns, 1975:49). The exercise of power oriented toward the shaping of the structure of social relationships is "meta-power" or relational control.

Underlying the analysis of meta-power is a recognition of the important relationship between power and resources. Differential control over resources is the basis of meta-power. However, their relationship is studied at the macro-system level rather than on the interpersonal level. Those persons or groups who lack control over essential material and social resources are generally unable to initiate and carry out collective action, including the ability to affect the structure of the system in their own interest. Those in control of important resources, on the other hand, have greater action possibilities and are able to structure the action and interaction possibilities of others to their own benefit (Baumgartner et al. 1976:241).

A basic principle of this model is that the unequal distribution of power resources, in conjunction with geographical and/or social constraints which limit emigration or withdrawal from the social system of those in less favorable positions, facilitates the development of highly stratified systems (Baumgartner et al. 1976:218).

A key to understanding how a highly stratified system can emerge from one in which initial differences in control over resources and power are minimal is the notion of deviation amplifying or positive feedback process (Maruyama, 1963). Initial power differences enable differential accumulation of power resources which feed the cycle of power amplification. Advantaged groups are able to gain resources disproportionately and to use these to

structure activities so as to maintain or develop the system of inequality. Concurrently, constraints on withdrawal from the social system compel the disadvantaged to accept their inferior positions. Power differences which may be quite small initially can be amplified through such a positive feedback loop into major hierarchical structures (Baumgartner et al. 1976:218-219).

The present model attempts to specify the particular structuring factors (i.e. those conditions or processes through which institutional arrangements are formed or transformed) which affect the system of sexual stratification. The one factor which has been stressed thus far is the exercise of meta-power or relational control, which entails the human manipulation of the conditions of interaction, distribution of resources, and ideology. The degree to which a power elite can exercise relational control varies greatly, however, and is never complete.

A structuring factor which operates simultaneously with meta-power is the physical environment which makes some actions possible and excludes others. Ecological factors, for example, strongly influence the nature of a society's subsistence activities and therefore its pattern of social relations.

Technology is another material factor which structures social relations by altering ecological conditions. Baumgartner, Burns, and DeVille write that

A new technology makes possible new ways of acting in relation to the physical and social environment that simply did not exist

previously. Technology not only creates new options, but in its implementation, may operate to remove options, at least for certain actors or classes of actors in a social system (1977:8)

In addition to human actor and material factors, cultural and ideological factors (e.g. socialization, education, religion, and the media) can act as structuring forces. These mold human perceptions, evaluations, and decisions and therefore structure human activities. While ideational factors do serve to mold social structures, their independent impact should not be overemphasized. As Karl Marx first pointed out, the dominant ideology of any society is the ideology of its ruling class and justifies the position of that class. Manipulation of ideology, through control of the schools, for example, by those in advantaged positions can serve to reinforce their power.

Finally, structuring may occur as the unintended consequence of human action. The goals and interests of an elite group may lead it to structure conditions in a certain way. The new pattern of relations may have unforeseen consequences. For example, the genesis of working class organizations hinged on the increased density and resulting interaction of workers brought together in the factory context (Baumgartner, Burns, and DeVille, 1977:9-10).

So, material and cultural factors as well as human action in the form of relational control and the unintended consequences of such action can all serve to form or transform the structure of social relationships. Our institutions and the system of stratification have been

structured by the interplay of these factors. The next step, now, is to examine specifically how these structuring forces have contributed to our system of sexual stratification. Particular attention is paid to the role of meta-power in the amplification of inequality.

#### Male-Female Relations in Subsistence Society

In order to clarify the initial social differentiation between males and females and to assess the initial power differences, it is necessary to investigate sex differences at the beginning of humanity.

At the most basic level, superior male size can be considered the most important determinant of the historical pattern of male dominance. Randall Collins (1975) provides support for this explanation. He compares species in which males are relatively smaller or bigger than females. Among primates, in those species in which males are considerably larger than females (such as the macaques and gorillas), the group is dominated by a small number of powerful males. Male and female orangutans, howler monkeys, and chimpanzees, on the other hand, are of similar size and are characterized by little male dominance (1975:233).

Human females, in addition to being physically smaller than males, are also vulnerable because of childbearing. Just how much this vulnerability contributes to female subordination is a matter of debate, however. Because it is probable that prolonged pregnancy and infant dependency evolved together with superior male size, it is impossible

to assess their independent effects. Nevertheless, Collins argues that size differences seem more important because they makes physical coercion possible.

Theories of sexual stratification which begin by emphasizing physiological differences between the sexes have come under criticism. However, the criticism tends to be focused on those approaches which see biological factors as the key to explaining sexual stratification. These approaches (Ardrey, 1966; Morris, 1968; Lorenz, 1966; Tiger, 1969) portray female subordination as physiologically inherent and therefore a universal characteristic of human societies past, present, and future.

This is not the perspective taken here. The present model takes physiological differences into consideration insofar as these differences account for initial social differentiation between the sexes and any related power inequalities. A biological determinist stand is not a necessary concomitant of investigating biological factors. Cultural adaptation to these biological differences is the key to understanding sexual inequality. (See Blumberg, 1978 for a discussion of how even non-human primate sex roles are adapted to environmental factors and are not simply determined by dimorphism).

Clearly, it is necessary to consider the consequences of sexual dimorphism for primitive social structure. Anthropologist Peggy R. Sanday (1973) discusses human social organization at its most basic level. She explains



that to meet the goal of survival, humans will expend energy in three component tasks : reproduction, defense, and subsistence. The assignment of these tasks is somewhat determined by biological factors. That means, of course, that reproduction will always fall to the female. A constraint is therefore imposed on the proportion of female energy which can be devoted to other activities. Consequently, the probability increases that the tasks of subsistence and defense will draw more heavily on the energy of males. There is no reason to posit the existence of a maternal instinct in women or a killer instinct in men to explain the initial division of labor.

While the anthropological evidence does not support the claim of some feminists that matriarchal societies preceded patriarchal ones, it does support the idea that, initially, male-female relations were quite egalitarian. There is evidence that early in the development of human society sex differences in power and control were minimal.

At the early stages of social development the economy, whether hunting and gathering or horticultural, involved production for use by the family group itself. The contribution of all members to the three survival tasks was important. The significant point for women's status was that the household was communal and the division of labor between the sexes was reciprocal. The economy did not involve the dependence of the wife and children on the husband. All who were able made a contribution to the

survival task to which they were best suited. When a large portion of male energy was drawn into defense or where subsistence activities were compatible with child care, as was often the case, female participation in the subsistence sphere increased. Often it was substantial. The evidence indicates that women contributed up to 70% of the food in primitive societies through their gathering activities (Ember and Ember, 1977:81).

In fact, steps were taken to insure that child care would not interfere with the vital subsistence activities of women. Fertility rates among hunting and gathering groups are among the lowest of all human societies. Births spaced about every four years and a low total number of children were achieved through a number of methods including late weaning, abortion, and infanticide (Blumberg, 1978:8).

Despite the important contributions of women, male status tended to be higher in the economic and political spheres. Men's activities in hunting and defense provided them with more knowledge of distant areas and peoples as well as control over strategic resources such as weapons. Further, because of the importance of cooperative male combat teams for survival, warfare generally promoted the organization of communities around a core of permanent male residents consisting of fathers, brothers, and sons. This solidarity of males based on blood ties enhanced their control in the political and economic spheres (Harris:1977).

An important point, though, is that because social organization in subsistence societies was quite egalitarian overall, the importance of differential control in these spheres was minimal. Subsistence societies, lacking any surplus wealth, were organized to share the food and resources to insure the survival of the group. Material advantages do not accrue even to those with greater influence, nor are they transmitted from generation to generation. Stratification is generally absent.

The relevance of the above evidence for our systems model of sexual stratification becomes clear when we recall the basic proposition that power differences, no matter how minimal initially, enable relational control which can be used to amplify those power differences. Relational control, or meta-power, is based on resources, however. When there are few social and material resources under the control of a single group relational control is low. When resources forming the foundation of meta-power increase, the opportunity for relational control increases and the positive feedback cycle begins. Power differences are increasingly amplified. The result of this process is that a more highly differentiated system, in which the previously advantaged group is even more dominant, emerges.

Beyond Subsistence:  
Agricultural Development and Population Growth

On the basis of anthropological research and theory it is possible to identify the processes and conditions by which the initial male advantage has been amplified into a highly differentiated structure in which the power and the rights of men over women cannot be explained merely on the basis of their size or because of childbearing.

In her monograph Woman's Role in Economic Development (1970) Ester Boserup stresses that female labor was important in the initial phases of agricultural development. Women had been largely responsible for providing vegetables, roots, and berries as gatherers and they played a large part in providing these foods through horticulture (i.e. hoe cultivation). In the horticultural system of extensive land use, women were involved in simple farming activities. In horticultural societies the energy of males was expended to a greater extent on defense and activities which required greater strength, such as clearing land. Women combined basic cultivation with child care.

This basic cultivation involved a system of shifting land use, and was predominant when land was widely available. Boserup explains that under this system the cultivation of a strip of land in a tribal region did not establish ownership of that land. The user had rights to the land as long as he or she continued to cultivate it. After a few years, the plot of land was usually abandoned and replaced with a new, more fertile one nearby.

The emergence of the digging stick and hoe technology proved to have an enormous impact on the structure of primitive societies. One important consequence of the shift from gathering to horticulture was that women no longer had to wander long distances to obtain the day's food - it was grown in plots nearby. Blumberg (1978) suggests that this increased sedentism was responsible for the world's first and greatest population explosion. Small children were no longer as great a burden as when wandering was required, and they were also useful helpers in production. Population size among newly sedentary food-raisers could have doubled every generation, with tremendous consequences in a fairly short time (1978:18).

There is a positive feedback loop between intensification of food production and population growth such that development and growth escalate. Advancing cultivation technology typically concentrated the increasing population on smaller portions of their habitat's land area. The more advanced the technology, the smaller the proportion of land area suitable for its use (Blumberg, 1978:19). Much of the land suitable for gathering, for example, is inadequate for cultivation.

Increasing population density, in turn, created pressures which resulted in even more intensive systems of land use. The intensification of cultivation necessitated more labor input per unit of agricultural output. While more labor and strength were needed in plow cultivation and

the domestication of large animals, women's energies were increasingly being expended on bearing and rearing greater numbers of children. Sanday (1973) argues that this necessary increase in labor for cultivation resulted in a greater contribution of males to the subsistence sector.

The same factors which contributed to males becoming predominantly involved in agriculture were responsible for the increased scarcity of arable land. The dearth of usable land ended the sharing and loose rotation of land plots. De facto user rights to land became permanent as plots began to be passed down through generations within kin groups. These kin groups, as we mentioned earlier, tended to be organized around male relatives.

The discussion thus far has focused on the sexual division of labor in subsistence societies and on how this division had minimal consequences for power relations and material well-being. Further, the consequences of technological development and environmental constraints for human population and property relations were considered. The following section elaborates on the influence of these structuring factors and also takes into account the impact of human action, particularly the exercise of meta-power, on male-female relations and the growing stratification between the sexes.

Beyond Subsistence:  
The Emergence of Sexual Stratification

At the level of economic development where production is directly for subsistence, the division of labor by sex is based on reciprocity rather than domination. What inequalities exist tend to be prestige differences due to individual abilities such as toolmaking or storytelling. Such inequalities are not transmitted intergenerationally. The crucial transformation occurs when the economy develops beyond the subsistence level. Karl Marx and Max Weber both observed that stratification emerges only when there are surpluses above subsistence which can come under private control. Lenski (1966) explicates this process in his analysis of class stratification.

This understanding of stratification was first brought to bear on male-female relations by Friedrich Engels (1884). He argued that the absence of privately owned property made the work of men and women of equal social significance. They were simply involved in different stages of production for subsistence. The transformation of women's status and the emergence of sexual stratification occurred with the development of private property.

With the intensification of agriculture and the domestication of large animals, surplus goods became available for the first time. Production for exchange began to eclipse production for use. Concurrently, permanent user rights to land became outright private ownership. The men who controlled the land and crops were now able to exchange

them in an emerging market economy.

For Engels, the new surplus of wealth available for exchange between productive units overshadowed the household production for use. This was a critical transformation in that it changed the nature of the household, the significance of women's work within it, and, as a result, women's position in society at large (Sacks, 1975:217). In an article entitled "Engels Revisited", Karen Sacks summarizes his conception of the change in the position of women as a result of the shift to production for exchange.

Women worked for their husbands and families instead of society as a whole. Private property made its owner the ruler of the household. Women and other propertyless dependents worked to maintain and augment the household head's property, for he was now engaged in competitive production and exchange with other heads of households. Women's labor was a necessary and socially subordinate part of producing an exchangeable surplus. Women became wards, wives, and daughters instead of adult members of the society (1975:217).

Not only were women no longer considered adult members of society, but they came to be treated like all other property under male control. Family patriarchs in ancient societies (and some societies today) had the power of life and death over their women and children. Wives were bought and sold and marriage was essentially an economic transaction between male heads of families (and continues to be in many parts of the world). The history of the institution of the family is reflected in its root word "familia", the Roman term signifying the totality of slaves belonging to an individual.



Sacks acknowledges that, in terms of specifics, Engels made a number of ethnographic errors. However, she argues that his main ideas are sound and remain the best explanation of the shift in the status of women to date. The thrust of Engel's analysis is that initial power differences between men and women became amplified with the growth of male-owned surplus wealth. The more resources men were able to accumulate, the more firmly established became their power base.

Baumgartner et al. discuss several ways in which such a positive feedback loop can become established. Several of these apply to our analysis of the solidification of sexual stratification. They point out that ecological or social constraints on emigration or other withdrawal action by subordinates typically reinforce differentiation and hierarchical development (1976:239). While their proposition is elaborated in terms of the establishment of national frontiers and boundary control, it is applicable to our concerns. Emigration may be an option for some groups of oppressed peoples, but it is not an option for women. The species cannot survive without the coexistence of males and females. Thus, the constraints on their withdrawal from exploitative social systems is virtually complete.

Other means of amplifying power differentials involve direct relation control. Baumgartner et al. write,

The development of ownership rules and rights... sustains control over strategic resources. An elite A may use what might be an initial power advantage to strengthen ownership and inheritance concepts and practices which in turn

structure distributinal processes assuring maintenance and reproduction of the stratification system benefiting A (1976:238).

The establishment of the ownership of land and surplus wealth by men was, as Engels pointed out, a transformation with profound consequences for the relations between the sexes. The establishment of inheritance rights was a necessary

corollary to ownership and worked to perpetuate male dominance.

Engels asserts that inheritance resulted in a changed definition of children. Instead of being new members of the group, they became either heirs or subordinate dependent workers. This meant, he contends, that women's reproductive, like their productive, labor underwent a transformation from social to private. "People and property became intertwined, and each became part of the definition of the other" (Sacks, 1975:217).

Along with the establishment of property and inheritance rights so as to restrict women's access to resources, other legal rights were also limited to men. Women were barred from the increasingly complex political sphere and allowed no voice in legislative bodies, juries and voting systems. They were not allowed to make binding agreements or contracts. In some societies they were even legally confined to certain areas of their homes. Essentially, women were reduced to the status of perpetual minors. If they were unmarried they were their father's

wards; if married they became part of their husband's chattels without the right to own any resources at all. A woman's very being was considered to be merged into her husband's. Moreover, the husband was accorded the legal right to beat her to keep her in subjection. In the United States, for example, wife-beating was legal in most states until the mid-1800's (Scanzoni and Scanzoni, 1976).

Another means by which meta-power is used to amplify power differentials is through the manipulation of ideology. Ideology is used (although not always consciously) to legitimize beliefs stressing subordination and the rightness of the status quo.

In their discussion of relational control and the manipulation of value orientations, Baumgartner, Buckley, and Burns (1975) write that a transparent case of a power group propagating ideologies to support its domination is that of slavery. The propagation of the ideology of male superiority is equally transparent. The following is an excerpt from Baumgartner, Buckley, and Burns with reference to slavery. Their comments are equally applicable to male-female relations. The terms "slave masters" and "slaves" have been replaced by "men" and "women".

[Men]... succeeded in instilling their paternalistic ethos and values in the minds and behavior of their subjects. Using propaganda, laws and customs, and ritual patterns of dominance and "courtesy", they drummed into their subjects the concept of their dependent but "mutually considerate" ties with their [men] year after year, generation after generation. These patterns ultimately served both [men] and [women], the [men's] objective to stabilize domination and the [women's] desire for

protection from abuse of power and brutalization... Paternalism undermined the solidarity of the [women] by linking individuals to oppressors. The [women] looked to their rulers rather than to one another...for protection, economic amenities, and solutions to various problems requiring resources. By accepting the ethos and values of paternalism, they helped to legitimize and stabilize class domination (1975:56).

The perpetuation of the ideology of male dominance has been so pervasive and successful historically and cross-culturally that the differential statuses of the sexes, based on the differential control over resources, has come to be seen as "natural". In fact, an important part of the ideology is that male domination is natural. The family, the school, the church, and now the media all continue to perpetuate this ideology in subtle but effective ways.

Diminishing Sexual Stratification:  
Continued Mergogenesis

The processes of power amplification and maintenance discussed above have served to expand a relatively small initial power difference between men and women into a rigidly stratified social structure (more rigid in some societies than others), in which sexual inequality is institutionalized in law, custom, and ideology. A theory of sexual stratification is incomplete, however, if its analysis ends at this point. A central premise of the systems approach is that social systems are dynamic and that merpogenic tendencies are inherent in their organization. Buckley writes that "social systems are characterized

primarily by their propensity to change their structure" (1967:31).

Although those in dominant positions attempt to perpetuate the social structures most advantageous to them, there are a number of morphogenic processes by which the structures of a system may again change and become reorganized. Baumgartner et al. (1976) write that although those enjoying hegemony typically try to use their meta-power to maintain the existing social structure, they lack control over all the structuring processes that act upon it. So while sexual stratification is currently a deeply embedded characteristic of our social system, it need not be viewed as a permanent one.

Baumgartner et al. argue that shifts in power distribution may come about through conflict, demographic changes, technological developments, shifts in the relative importance of resources and capabilities, and coalition and group formation (1977:15). With industrialization, a number of these factors have had morphogenic consequences for the structure of male-female relation.

A number of technological advances have had an unintended impact on relations between the sexes. Gough (1973) points out that automation and cybernation remove most of the heavy work for which women are not as well equipped as men. As a result the relative importance of brute strength as a capability and as a largely male-controlled resource has been diminished.

The significance of land, another male-controlled resource, has also declined with industrialization. The inheritance of land is no longer the main means by which class position is passed on to the next generation. Educational achievement has become the more important means by which social position is gained. Although educational achievement is still closely related to father's social class, it is a more amorphous variable than land ownership. It is also an area in which women have been able to make tremendous gains.

The decline in fertility rates is a development which has had profound consequences. Improved public health (including sanitation, nutrition, and medical care) has lowered the infant mortality rate which, in turn, which resulted in fewer children needed by a couple for replacement. The development of reliable contraceptives has allowed women in developed countries to gain greater control over the number of children they will have, if any, and how they will be spaced. This increased control over reproduction has, along with other factors, resulted in the fertility rates of industrialized countries dropping drastically. As a result of this and the increased life span, only a small portion of women's lives need be involved primarily in childbearing and caring.

The majority of women's energies, as a result, are being directed toward other activities. This is evidenced by the growing number of women entering the paid labor

force. In 1900, only 6% of married women worked outside the home. By 1978, this proportion had risen to over 50%.

In addition to technological factors, ideological factors have had an impact in changing the system of sexual stratification. As Blau (1964) has pointed out, the legitimized authority of dominant groups rests on the institutionalized and internalized social norms which are accepted by subordinates. The exercise of meta-power to insure that norms and beliefs of female subordination are internalized (through socialization by the family, schools, churches, and the media) has been an important factor insuring the legitimacy of male dominance.

Blau (1964) also takes up the possibility that what was once consensual authority can become "de-legitimized". He develops the principle that the cultural values serving to legitimize certain structures can also contain the seeds of their destruction and reorganization.

Buckley (1967) contends that "opposition ideals" may form around accepted values which are unrealized and unrealizable under given institutional arrangements. In the United States and other democratic countries the growing awareness of women and their opposition to the existing structure have formed around accepted values of equality "for all" which have not been realized for them. In the U.S., for example, the first feminist wave, the suffrage movement, was an outgrowth of the abolitionist movement. The second wave of the past decade grew out of the anti-war

and civil rights movements of the 1960's. Women who were working to extend the accepted values of "liberty and justice for all" to Blacks, in both periods, became aware that these values were not extended to them, as a group, either. In addition, it became clear that these values were unrealizable for women under the given institutional arrangements.

The professed American value that all are equal has become an "oppositional ideal" which provides legitimacy to the questioning of the existing structure of sexual stratification. The ideology of male superiority is being questioned from this vantage. Action is being taken to change the subsystems which mold our orientations to truly reflect the ideology of equality for all.

Increased economic power, control over their reproductive lives, and growing awareness of oppression have all served to improve the status of women in industrialized countries. The resources that women have gained, while relatively minimal, do provide a base for some relational control. As our earlier discussion of the amplification of male power illustrated, even a small power difference can result in great institutional change in the long run.

How positive feedback processes may increase the status of disadvantaged groups is also a topic included in Baumgartner et al.'s systems model of stratification. They write,

morphogenesis of an institution is likely to occur when the meta-power to maintain or change the institutional order shifts, and those



enjoying a relative gain in meta-power have a different image or conception of an appropriate or effective institutional arrangement (1977:13).

The structuring processes we have discussed previously, resulting from material and ideological forces, and human action (including its unintended consequences), continue to form and transform our institutions. However, now, at least in developed countries, the morphogenesis is in the direction of a de-amplification of male power.

Certainly, even a relatively egalitarian society such as the U.S. is far from true sexual equality. When women college graduates earn the same income, on average, as male high school dropouts (Blumberg, 1978:102), it is clear that the amount of restructuring which must occur before sexual stratification is eliminated is enormous. Although the process of growing equality is underway, there is no reason to assume that this growth will proceed on its own. Relational control continues to be an important structuring factor. For example, efforts to change the rules of the game by passing the Equal Rights Amendment have not yet been successful. Relational control for the purpose of maintaining the existing structure continues to be exercised.

#### Conclusions and Implications of the Model

The purpose of this chapter has been to formulate a theory of sexual stratification which has a systems perspective and the concept of meta-power as its foundation.

The systems model of stratification, developed primarily by Tom Baumgartner, Walter Buckley, and Tom Burns, has been applied here to male-female relations. In this application, we do not claim to add to the sum of historical or ethnographic knowledge. Rather the purpose has been to demonstrate the breadth of this theoretical framework by showing that it is not limited to the analysis of class hierarchies and male power relations.

The macrosociological focus of this theory of sexual stratification is not intended to imply that the structural context engulfs or entirely determines interpersonal processes and individual actions. Nor is it suggested that conceptualizations of interpersonal power are invalid. The systems approach assumes a dialectical relationship between social action on the micro-level and social structure on the macro-level. Analysis of how these levels interlink is the direction in which the systems approach to stratification is going (Baumgartner et al., 1978) and is a goal for future elaborations of the present model with regard to male-female relations.

A further objective has been to formulate a theory of sexual stratification which overcomes the limitations of some earlier attempts. This theory goes beyond the explanation of specific sex differences or inequalities and it is not limited to the study of inequality within families. It takes biological sex differences into account, but does not take a biological determinist stance with

regard to the meaning and consequences of these differences. The present model also incorporates much of the important anthropological work which has been done to explain sexual inequality. The anthropological analyses (see Schlegel, 1977, for a review of these), are excellent as far as the investigation of the origination of sexual stratification is concerned. However, their conceptualizations are, generally, not abstract or comprehensive enough to explain the ongoing processes of institutional formation and transformation which are vitally important if the whole system of sexual stratification, as a constantly changing structure, is to be more thoroughly understood.

Furthermore, as Schlegel (1977) points out, another weakness of these theories is that they ignore ideology as an important element in social systems. The systems model of sexual stratification, while placing greater emphasis on material factors, does not overlook ideology as an influence on human behavior. It also focuses on another factor which other formulations tend to ignore: human action, in particular the exercise of meta-power by those actors in control of key resources.

Another contribution which the present approach makes is that it allows us to look at the current structure of inequality in historical and cultural context. Sociologists have generally examined and analyzed sex differences and inequalities without consideration of their origins. They have theorized about marital inequality, usually without

reflecting on the cultural context of marriages. Even those who have taken context into account (Rodman, 1967) have regarded it as an important explanatory variable only in non-industrialized countries. The assumption has been that individualistic, achievement oriented norms take precedence over patriarchal ones in developed western countries, and that the latter have a negligible impact on marital power.

The model of sexual stratification outlined in this chapter encompasses the historical forces underlying current institutional structures. The historical relations between the sexes, while not necessarily limiting the future of these relations, are of importance for understanding them presently. We have seen that the structuring forces which were significant in the past, continue to mold our institutions and also underlie the dynamics of new institutional forms continually struggling to emerge (Baumgartner et al. 1976:216)..

Because it identifies forces which continually structure our institutions, this model can serve as a tool for the assessment, initiation and, ultimately, this model can serve as a tool for the initiation as well as assessment of changes in the pattern of male-female relations. Particular attention has been paid to human action as a structuring force. The significance of relational control in the development of sexual stratification has been illustrated. The implication is that human action can also be oriented toward the elimination of stratification. Indeed, this is

just what is happening currently. Legal, social, and economic policy decisions bear directly on institutionalized inequality. It is possible, therefore, to change that structured inequality.

Finally, this model of sexual stratification helps to put the empirical research, discussed in later chapters, into context. We begin the empirical analysis with a more thorough understanding of the major variable of the study - the status of women. In particular, this model is useful in elucidating macro-level, structural inequality. In later chapters, we will see how factors at this system-level impact upon relationships at the micro-level.

## CHAPTER III

### SEXUAL INEQUALITY AND WIFE-BEATING: THE RESEARCH ISSUES

Within the past decade theoretical formulations and empirical evidence regarding wife abuse have proliferated. At first, the approach to family violence tended to be individually oriented. Wife and child abuse were seen as abnormal and growing out of some personal pathology (see Gelles, 1973 and Gil, 1973 for critiques of this perspective). The focus on the individual has also characterized some of the counselling provided to battered women. Here, though, the concentration has not been so much on the husband's "pathology" as on how the wife's behavior contributed to her assault and how it might be changed to prevent further attacks (Dobash and Dobash, 1977).

These approaches are now giving way to a more sociological perspective which holds that intrafamily violence is a common and culturally approved part of family life in most societies and American society in particular (Gelles and Straus, 1977).

Marsden (1978) suggests that sociologists are so preoccupied with the "workings of wider society and the normal" that they have been hindered from paying attention to family violence. On the contrary, the application of this sociological perspective to family violence has done much to increase our understanding of it. Social and cultural determinants and consequences of family violence are the focus of a growing body of research. The impact of such factors as social class, integration into kin network, personal resources and attitudes, and parental role models have been and continue to be issues for investigation.

#### Sexual Equality and Decreasing or Increasing Violence?

The growing focus on social and cultural determinants of family violence, in combination with the efforts of feminists, has resulted in increasing attention being paid to the relationship between sexual inequality and wife-beating. This relationship has been considered in historical perspective by a number of authors (Dobash and Dobash, 1977; Martin, 1976), who point out that wife abuse is not a new social problem. In their analyses these authors discuss the traditional position of women as property and offer horror stories of their abuse through the centuries and across cultures. The right to physically chastise one's wife is regarded as part of the historic foundation of patriarchy within the family and in society at large. The authors suggest that this right varies with the

status of women. For example, in most industrial societies, where the status of women is relatively high, wife-beating is no longer legal (although it may still be condoned by the legal system). Nevertheless, there are no data as to changes in the actual incidence of wife-beating over time. So, while the historical analyses suggest links between the status of women and levels of wife abuse, they offer little conclusive evidence.

The current relationship between the status of women and wife-beating has been the subject of some debate. It has been readily assumed by many authors that a reduction in sexual inequality would serve to reduce violence against wives. Schuyler contends that

heading the list of cultural variables accounting for the phenomenon of wife abuse is the tradition of male subjection of females (1976:489).

She argues that the reduction of sexual inequality will lower the incidence of conjugal violence by making it less socially acceptable and more likely to come to the attention of the authorities. In addition, as the status of women in society improves, wives have more options and greater freedom to leave abusive husbands.

Pogrebin (1974) takes the same position as Schuyler. She maintains that many women have been "tied to a violent man by economic dependency..." She blames this dependency on the inability of women to obtain equal wages, advancements, and educational opportunities within a sexist society.



The question of equality and marital assault has also been taken up by Straus in an article entitled "Sexual Inequality, Cultural Norms, and Wife-Beating" (1976). In this piece he begins to show that wife-beating is not a personal abnormality but rather has its roots in the cultural norms and sexist organization of society and the family. Straus suggests that one way to reduce the amount of force necessary to maintain a viable pattern of family life is to reduce the degree of inequality between the sexes. He writes that

the goals of the women's liberation movement are centered on eliminating...violence producing inequalities... Since these are fundamental factors accounting for the high level of physical assaults on women by their husbands, it is clear that the achievement of the goals of the feminist movement is tremendously important for any reduction in the level of marital victimization (1976:555).

On the basis of the discussion to this point it would seem that sexual equality and marital violence are negatively related. As wider educational and economic opportunities, greater legal rights, and more egalitarian norms take hold, we would expect fewer women to feel "trapped" in violent marriages and less likely to stay in them. Greater sexual equality could, in this way, be related to decreased levels of wife abuse.

However, there are also persuasive arguments which suggest that violence against wives may increase as the general status of women improves. It may be that where the status of women is lowest, women are more likely to tolerate

their subordinate position. Acceptance of a male dominant ideology and recognition of limited options by wives may lessen the need for husbands to maintain control through violence. Where women's subordination is questioned and more alternatives to marriage are available, conflicts and violence between spouses may be greater.

Toby's (1974) treatment of the "compulsive masculinity" theory of violence is relevant here. He suggests that one cause of violence in males is the desire to prove their masculinity. Toby argues that violence as an expression of masculinity will be highest where men cannot prove their masculinity symbolically (for example, by being the primary wage-earner and having authority over others both within the family and at work). It may be, then, that as the traditional symbols of masculinity diminish and the status of women increases, males may turn to violence to assure themselves and others of their masculinity.

Whitehurst (1974) and Marsden (1978) consider the possibility of more violence as society becomes more egalitarian from a somewhat different angle. Rather than simply regarding violence as a symbol of masculinity, they focus on the issue of control. Changes such as greater legal rights, economic opportunities, and physical mobility are seen as creating strain and frustration for males attempting to retain their dominant position. Violence against wives may be a response to moves by women to question and reduce the degree of sexual domination. It may

be a means by which males attempt to maintain control.

Steinmetz and Straus comment on Whitehurst's analysis.

They write that if it is correct

it will not be until a generation of men and women reared under egalitarian conditions and subscribing to egalitarian rather than male-superiority norms takes over that we can expect to see a reduction in violent encounters between spouses. In the meantime, the conflict between the emerging egalitarian social structure and the continuing male superiority norms will tend to increase rather than decrease conflict and violence between husbands and wives (1974:76).

How increasing sexual equality affects rates of wife-beating is not at all clear. Both sides of the debate offer strong arguments as to what the effects on family violence are and will be. It may be, as Straus suggests, that the long-run consequences may be to lessen the frequency of wife abuse. But, the short-run impact may be the opposite because a sizeable number of men will not easily give up their traditional dominant roles (1976:556).

#### Marital Inequality and Violence: The Research Issues

Plausible as the above arguments as to the impact of inequality are, they are essentially speculation. The discussion has no basis in empirical evidence, but rather proceeds from a number of assumptions. The only research which has considered the connection between sexual inequality and wife-beating has focused not on structural inequality on the societal level, but on inequality and the balance of power within the family.

Empirical research has been conducted to test the Ultimate Resource Theory of family violence. This theory holds that violence may be used by husbands as a final resource to maintain control when other resources are insufficient or lacking (Goode, 1971). The underlying assumption of this theory is that in achievement-oriented, industrialized countries, such as the United States, the traditional norms legitimizing male superiority are inadequate as a sole basis of power. The premise is that, under egalitarian norms, husbands dominate family decision-making because they possess certain material goods or personal attributes which legitimize their power in the eyes of their wives. It is postulated that when husbands feel entitled to dominate, yet lack the resources to do so "legitimately", they will turn to violence as the ultimate resource.

Allen and Straus (1980) and Titterud and Straus (1980) have tested the propositions of the Ultimate Resource Theory and found limited support for it. Both studies found that male power was associated with violence only when the husband lacked other validating resources. This finding held only for working class families, however. Allen and Straus suggest that this relationship does not hold in middle class families for two possible reasons. First, few middle class husbands attempt to claim traditional male authority because of an egalitarian ideology. Second, and more plausible, the use of instrumental violence is less

legitimate and therefore more costly in the middle class, and that this may restrict its use.

While this research does provide some valuable evidence on the relationship between male dominance and violence, its relevance to our earlier discussion is limited. Its major shortcoming is common to all analyses which consider male-female power and inequality within the confines of the family unit. The larger social and cultural context within which family power relations are played out is dismissed too easily. The notion that patriarchal norms have, to a large degree, been replaced by egalitarian ones is accepted too readily. The inequitable social structure from which husbands derive their power legitimizing resources is not taken into account. Gillespie's (1971) critique of family power research, discussed in Chapter II, is applicable to the Ultimate Resource Theory as well. Her criticisms are consistent with the central principle of the systems model of inequality and stratification. That is, that a large and historically more important exercise of power occurs on the macro-level and molds the structure within which interpersonal relations occur.

#### Sexual Inequality and Violence: A Multi-Level Analysis

The importance of examining inequality on the interpersonal level is not denied here. However, the central argument is, to reiterate, that structured social inequality must be taken into account empirically at some point. A number of writers in the field of family violence

have urged such an approach to understanding wife abuse.

Marsden argues that "the whole focus of research should shift away from violent acts to look at all the institutional forces which define the status of women" (1978:116). He maintains that

wife-beating...is a complex problem that involves much more than the act itself or the personal interaction between a husband and a wife. It has its roots in historical attitudes toward women, the institution of marriage, the economy, the intricacies of criminal and civil law, and the delivery system of social service agencies (1976:xvi).

The Dobashes concur that we need to go beyond research which focuses solely on individuals and couples involved in violent marriages and seek explanations that are firmly embedded in a wider socio-historical context (1977:435).

It is the central objective of this research to do exactly that. In this study the link between the status of women on the macro-level and wife-beating, an issue which has been debated at some length, is investigated empirically. Further, how the context of structured sexual inequality impacts upon the power relations and level of violence in individual couples is considered.

Our theoretical approach for examining these interrelationships is consistent with the systems perspective outlined in Chapter II. Specifically, the framework used here is a limited version of the multi-level model of social systems set forth by Baumgartner, Burns, and DeVille in "Actors, Games, and Systems: the Dialectics of Social Action and System Structuring" (1979). They write

that

structure-level factors shape...the opportunities and constraints, incentives and meanings within which social activity...as understood in traditional interaction analysis, takes place. Our approach entails specifying the higher order structuring processes and variables...and their relation to lower level relationships and processes in a social system...In other words, we try to formulate a multi-level model of social system stability and change (1979:32).

This multi-level model conceptualizes the relationship between human actors and the social and cultural world as a dialectical one. Institutions which may appear objective and overwhelming are humanly produced and open to frequent reappraisal and reconstruction. Concurrently, the institutions structure interaction patterns and social relationships. To the degree that they shape action possibilities and consequences, they become an impersonal power - much like the natural environment - although they have been created and are maintained through human activity (1979:46).

Baumgartner, Burns, and DeVillie suggest that contextual analysis is an appropriate approach for analyzing such multi-level interrelations, in which relations between factors can be expected to change from one context to another. They write that

on the basis of such an approach, one is interested not only in propositions such as 'when X, then Y' but in stating and utilizing propositions such as the following: 'because of the operation of a structuring... system, process, or variable Z - which may itself depend on the processes within the system - the relationship X/Y can be expected to be maintained or to be changed significantly in

such and such a way or to vanish altogether  
(1979:48).

While Baumgartner et al.'s comments are a useful guide, their work does not provide an adequate methodological model for this research because it remains on the level of qualitative theoretical analysis. They do not elaborate on a specific methodology appropriate for quantitative research.

In the present research, structured sexual inequality is viewed as the contextual variable which may affect the amount of violence against wives directly or through interaction with the form of inequality within particular marriages. The focus is on the effect of macro-level structure on micro-level relations. The emphasis on this effect is not meant to imply that micro-processes do not have a reciprocal effect on macro-structures. That there is a dialectic between these levels is a basic premise of systems analysis. The major limitation of this research is that it is unable to capture the feedback processes of social structure and social action as they affect and continually change one another. Due to the nature of the available data, our analysis will have to be confined to only half of this dialectic.



Systems Approach, Structural Model:  
Previous Formulations

While the multi-level model used here is consistent with the systems perspective discussed so far, it is important to indicate how this approach is different from other applications of general systems theory to the family in general and family violence in particular. The main difference has to do with level of analysis. Previous analyses have taken the family as the system with members as units and community as environment (Broderick and Smith, 1979:114). Such systems analyses of the family have been concerned with issues such as boundary maintenance (Kantor and Lehr, 1975), family rules of transformation (Jackson, 1967), and communication and control (Watzlawick et al., 1967).

Systems theory has been applied to family violence to describe the cybernetic and morphogenic processes which characterize the use of violence in family interaction. Violence is treated as a system output and feedback processes which serve to spiral violence or to maintain or dampen given levels of violence are specified (Straus, 1973; Giles-Sims, 1979).

This systems perspective for understanding violent interaction within the family unit is quite valuable. Thus far, though, the application of systems theory has been unnecessarily narrow. Gelles and Straus (1979), in their review chapter on theories of family violence, conclude that

the key contribution of systems theory is that it explains the way in which violence is maintained and stabilized. There is no need to limit its applicability to this issue.

The present application of a systems perspective to the family and the violence within it is distinctive in that it focuses on the family as a sub-system within the larger social system. Attention is directed toward the effect of larger institutional arrangements on the family, rather than on the interaction within the family unit. In this study we are merely specifying a level of analysis which is different from that of previous studies. Certainly there is room within a systems approach to family violence for analysis at many levels of the strata hierarchy.

In that the multi-level model of inequality and violence used here is a structural (rather than processual) one, a distinction must also be made between this approach and the "structural theory of violence" elaborated by Gelles (1974).

Social structure can be defined as "the patterns discernible in social life, the regularities observed, the configurations detected" (Blau, 1975:3). The theme of the 1974 American Sociological Association meeting was "Focus on Social Structure". Explicating the theme, the meeting's program stated

whatever the specific orientation, the structural approach is designed to explain, not the behavior of individuals, but the structure of relations among groups and individuals that find expression in this behavior (in Blau, 1975:2).

The anthology entitled Approaches to the Study of Social Structure (1975) is replete with widely differing views of structural theory. For example, Lenski adopts a long-range, macrosociological perspective of patterns that underlie the entire sweep of human history. Hcmans, in contrast, focuses on the elementary social behavior of individuals in their daily relations and on the group structures to which it gives rise (1975:4). The perspectives of the other theorists included in the collection fall somewhere between these extremes.

Given the breadth of the concept of social structure and the general theoretical approaches which have been applied to it, Gelles and Straus's (1979) view of the "structural theory of violence" is surprisingly restricted. According to their view of the theory, it explains why different sectors of society or different families are more violent than others : because they combine high stress with low resources.

As with the systems approach to family violence, there is no inherent reason to limit structural analysis to such a narrow issue. This particular explanation is only one of many which can grow out of a focus on structural factors. This research, which seeks explanations of the impact of the sexist structure of society on wife-beating, might be regarded as part of a "structural theory of violence". Its relevance to such a theory would only be possible if the theory were expanded to include a number of structural

factors, rather than the constricted range taken into account by Gelles (1974).

Sexual Inequality, Marital Inequality, and Wife-Beating :

The Research Questions

The review of literature has suggested a number of ways in which the status of women on the societal level, inequality within marriage, and wife-beating may be interrelated. The possibility has been posed that increasing equality may result in increased violence in the short-run, but may serve to decrease it in the long-run. This may, eventually, be the case. Unfortunately, this study cannot address this issue. Our analysis is, by necessity, limited to the short-run consequences of increasing equality. The study of the long-run consequences of sexual equality will have to wait until the next generation or beyond.

Given this limitation, a number of possibilities are still open. It may be that the rising status of women has immediate positive consequences for the reduction of marital violence. The level of violence may be lower in states in which institutionalized sexual inequality is low. As a number of the authors cited earlier argued, reduced violence may be the consequence of increased economic and educational opportunities, greater legal rights, and more equalitarian norms. Women may be less likely to remain in abusive relationships because of increased alternatives to marriage and because abuse may be more likely to come to the

attention of authorities. In addition, husbands may be less inclined to use violence if they recognize that their wives have other options than suffering in silence.

Another possible answer to the question of how these factors are related is that the level of wife abuse is higher in states where the status of women, on the societal level, is relatively high. Increased options and clashing attitudes may result in more conflicts and violence among married couples. The context of relative sexual equality in the larger society may have a disruptive effect on families in which issues of equality and traditional roles are very personal ones. Husbands in such contexts may be more likely to turn to violence to maintain control. For example, a woman who has been a homemaker since she married may want to take advantage of the increasing employment opportunities she sees opening up around her. Her husband may feel threatened and oppose her plan to join the labor force. The increased opportunities available to this wife may result in greater conflicts and perhaps even violence in the marriage.

On the aggregate level, women's status and wife-beating may be positively, negatively, or even minimally related. The question of its true impact cannot fully be answered unless we bring the interpersonal relations between husbands and wives into the analysis as well. As the multi-level model suggests, we are unlikely to find simple 'when X, then Y' relationships. There may be a number of interaction effects between the structural context of inequality, power

relations between the spouses, and the amount of wife abuse which occurs. It may be, for example, that husbands' power within marriages is associated with low violence in states where the status of women is fairly low. However, their power may be related to higher levels of violence in contexts of greater sexual equality. In such states inequalitarian marriages may be less acceptable to women and may result in more conflicts and greater violence.

Clearly, the interrelationships between these factors is quite complex. It is unnecessary to list numerable alternative hypotheses to clearly conceptualize the possible interconnections, however. The goal of the analysis is to show how the social context of structured sexual inequality affects inequality and violence within marriage. The diagram below summarizes the key variables and the interconnections between them. The lines represent the relationships upon which the research focuses.

## CHAPTER IV

### METHODOLOGY: KEY VARIABLES AND STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the methods used in obtaining the macro-level and micro-level data. First, the rationale for using the state as the macrosociological unit of analysis is given. Then, the key variables, the rate of violence against wives, the status of women, and marital equality are defined. The measurement of wife-beating and marital equality are described in some detail. The measurement of the status of women in each state is a central part of this research, and is considered in depth in the next chapter. There, the construction of the Status of Women Index and the ranking of the states on the index are thoroughly discussed.

The present chapter also includes a brief discussion of the statistical procedures used in the data analysis. Finally, the limitations of a structurally oriented methodology within a systems approach are considered.

#### States as Units of Analysis

The macro-level analysis of this research focuses on the states. While the state is often the unit of analysis in other social sciences (political science in particular), it is rarely used as such in sociology. Although there is

less precedent for this approach within our discipline, it appears most appropriate for the purposes of this research for a number of reasons.

First, the states are theoretically appropriate units for the comparative study of the status of women. Despite the sense that America is becoming increasingly "nationalized" due to the growth of centrally-controlled media, corporations, and the federal government, states are still more than different colored areas on the map. They are often the initiators of legislation and programs and are frequently the unit of implementation of federal policies.

In The Maligned States (1972), Ira Sharkansky takes up the issue of state and regional diversity. He writes that states continue to influence the lives of the people within them. Not only were the states founded by peoples of diverse national backgrounds and values, but the timing of their settlement and development have influenced their individual characteristics.

Sharkansky argues that distance had much to do with the establishment of a federal system in which states maintained some independence. However, diversity appears to be more important than distance as a continuing explanation for American federalism, now that transportation and communication over long distances are no longer problematic. Further, although regional differences are most well known, regions are not uniform within their



boundaries (1972:22). There can be sharp differences from one neighbor to another. Perhaps no clearer example of such differences can be offered than those between contiguous Massachusetts and New Hampshire.

Thomas Dye (1977) agrees that despite a basically common institutional and cultural background, American states can be quite different in their social and economic environments, the nature of their political system, and their public policies. He writes that "these differences... are an important asset in comparative study because they enable us to search for relationships between different socio-economic environments, political system characteristics, and policy outcomes" (1977:3).

Sharkansky also maintains that "state differences go back to the beginning of this country, and account for basic features of our society and government. These differences do produce some problems in unequal citizen opportunities from one state to another..." (1972:20). The degree of such inequalities, as they concern women, is a major focus of the present study.

The second reason that this research takes the state as its unit of analysis is a practical one. Many of the variables of interest here are gathered by the census bureau on a state by state basis. In addition, a number of other agencies gather state-level data (for example the Eagleton Institute's data on women in politics and N.C.W.'s information on women and education). The uniformity of data

from state to state make it most useful for comparative purposes. Variables from different sources can easily be related to one another.

The Dependent Variable: The Rate of Violence Against Wives

Definitions

The concept of violence can be very broadly defined to include a wide range of of abuses. It is possible to conceive of verbal aggression and psychological torment as types of "violence" which family members suffer. For the purposes of this research, however, the term violence will refer only to physical aggression. This restriction is not meant to imply that non-physical abuse is unimportant. However, it is physical violence which presents the greatest danger to life and health. (For a thorough discussion of these conceptual distinctions see Gelles and Straus, 1979).

Violence is defined here as an act carried out with the knowledge that the likely consequence of it will be physical injury or pain to another person. This definition, then, excludes those acts which result in physical harm but which were not intended to do so, i.e. accidents. It includes acts which were intended to cause harm but which were not successful and caused no injury (for example, attempting to shoot one's wife but missing). Throughout this research, the focus is on violence against wives as defined above. However, the terms wife-beating, wife abuse, and violence against wives will be used interchangeably simply to limit

redundancy. It is recognized that these terms, especially wife abuse, could be defined differently.

#### Source of Data

The data on rates of violence were obtained from a major national survey entitled "Physical Violence in American Families". The study was funded by the National Institute of Mental Health and the sampling design and interviewing were carried out by Response Analysis Corporation of Princeton, N.J.

In order to select families which are representative of the 46 million intact families in the U.S. in 1976, the "Response Analysis Probability Sample" was used to locate potential interviewees. The procedure relied on prior specification of locations, households, and specific individual to be interviewed. The interviewers had no discretion in the selection of the subjects. The sequence of steps used included:

Selection of a national sample of 103 primary areas (counties or groups of counties) stratified by geographic region, type of community, and other population characteristics. Selection of 300 interviewing locations... (census enumeration districts or block groups) from the national sample for use in this study.

Field counts by trained interviewers to divide interviewing locations into sample segments of 10 to 25 housing units.

Selection of specific sample segments in each interviewing location for field administration of the survey.

Random selection of the eligible person to be interviewed using a specific scheme assigned for each sample household. (Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz, 1980:251)

To be eligible for inclusion in the sample, respondents had to be living with a member of the opposite sex as a "couple", but did not have to be legally married to them. A random half of the respondents were male and half were female.

Interviews with the respondents lasted approximately one hour and were completely anonymous. Interviewers were of the language or racial group which was predominant in the sampling segment for which they were responsible. Up to four call-backs were made to respondents who could not be reached with the initial contact. The completion rate for the survey was 65%. Since the average completion rate for national opinion surveys is 70%, the 2/3 rate for this survey, on such a sensitive topic, is quite respectable. Interviews were ultimately completed with 2143 people: 960 males and 1183 females. All but forty respondents were legally married to their partner.

The data on family violence based on this survey are the best national figures currently available, despite certain limitations. The clear advantage of wife-beating rates drawn from this survey is that they are based on information from a representative sample of the general public. Police and hospital records of abuse are severely limited in contrast because they provide information only on those cases that come to the attention of the authorities. These cases are not representative of all abuse cases in the same sense that imprisoned criminals are not representative

of all persons who committed crimes.

Nevertheless, the figures on violence from the survey are almost certainly underestimates of the true rate of wife abuse. It is likely that respondents didn't "tell all" in the interviews, although many were quite candid (e.g. a number admitted to using a knife or gun). Also, the survey sample included only those couples who were cohabiting at the time of the interview. It is likely that a number of the most violent relationships were terminated and were therefore excluded from the study. Despite the possibility that the actual rate of wife-beating may be double the survey estimates (see Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz, 1980 for additional details), these estimates remain superior to any others available.

#### Representativeness of State Violence Rates

As stated earlier, the violence rates are based on data gathered from a national area-probability sample. The individual state samples could be assumed to be representative as well in that, initially, every person in every state had an equal probability of being included in the sample. This assumption is not wholly justified, however. Since only certain areas of states were included after the first stage of sampling, the concern arose that the areas might not be representative of the whole state, particularly in those states in which only one or two areas were selected.

Rather than proceed on a shaky assumption, it was decided that the representativeness of the state data be checked. This was done by comparing key variables from the survey data with parallel variables from census data, which we know to be representative. The variables which were considered were men's/husband's income; men's/husband's employment rate; men's/husband's education; women's/wife's education. These sets of variables are not exactly comparable since the census includes all men and women and the survey includes only husbands and wives who were living together at the time of the interview. Nevertheless, the two sets are closely connected. In general, the values for the survey variables were somewhat higher than for the census variables. This was not unexpected, as currently married people tend to have higher incomes and educational levels than the general population. What was important was that the values generally parallel one another despite some absolute differences.

Generally, such parallels were evident. States with high income, education, and employment levels according to the census ranked similarly on the survey data, in most cases. There were a few exceptions to the trends, however. All but two of the states (Oregon with 14 cases and Mississippi with 13) having sample sizes of twenty or fewer cases appeared to be unrepresentative. In particular, their values on income and employment fluctuated greatly and were most scattered from the regression line. On these grounds,

the decision was made to drop the states of Arizona (17 cases), Connecticut (4), Montana (5), Nevada (9), Oklahoma (3), and Wisconsin (9) from the sample. Table 4.1 below gives the correlation for the pairs of census-survey variables for all 36 states and then for the reduced sample of 30.

TABLE 4.1  
Correlation Coefficients of  
Key Census and Survey Variables

Variables	Original Sample (N=36)	Representative Sample (N=30)
INCOME		
Median Income of Males X Median Income of Husbands	.48	.56
EMPLOYMENT		
% Males Employed Full-Time X % Husbands Employed Full-Time	.13	.24
EDUCATION		
% Males, Age 17+, who are High School Graduates X % Husbands who are High School Graduates	.56	.76
% Females, Age 17+, who are High School Graduates X % Wives who are High School Graduates	.68	.77

The concern regarding state-level data from those states with few sampling areas and small numbers of cases proved to be generally well-founded. The elimination of the six small-sample states which turned out to be unrepresentative allows us to have greater confidence in the results which are based on the reduced sample of thirty states. Fortunately, the number of states which had to be

excluded was small, so that the original goal of the research, that is to investigate variations in the status of women-wife abuse relationship on the state level, is not jeopardized.

In most of the analyses, states are grouped into quartiles or quintiles by the status of women. The mean violence rate for a group of states is more reliable than individual state rates because it is based on a larger number of cases. The states that have been dropped are excluded only in analyses where state rates based on the survey data are utilized. Where data are drawn from other sources or the analysis is based on individual cases, all states are included.

#### Measurement of Wife-Beating

The rate of wife-beating was determined through the use of the Conflict Tactics Scale. Discussed in detail in Straus, 1979 and presented in full in Appendix B).

The Conflict Tactics Scale is composed of three main parts, each made up of a number of tactics which can be used within the course of family conflicts. The first part, the "Reasoning Scale", focuses on reasoning and discussion. The second, the "Verbal Aggression Scale", includes non-physical acts intended to hurt the other. The third, the "Violence Scale" deals with tactics involving the use of physical force. This third section of the scale is the basis for calculating the rate of wife abuse.



The rate of wife-beating is the proportion of couples who indicated that the husband had used any of the following tactics against his wife in the year prior to the interview: kicked, bit, or hit with a fist; hit or tried to hit with something; beat up; threatened with a knife or gun; used a knife or gun. A state violence rate of 10%, for example, indicates that ten percent of the husbands perpetrated serious acts of violence against their wives within the past year. Note that more "minor" forms of violence, such as pushing, shoving, or slapping are not included in the calculation of the rate. This is not because such acts are condoned here, but that they are so common an element of family conflict that they would weaken the discriminating power of the index.

#### Reliability and Validity

According to Straus (1979:82) the alpha coefficient of reliability for the violence scale is quite high: .83 for the husband to wife violence. Further, the internal consistency reliability of the scale, as assessed through item-total correlations, is .87 for husbands and .88 for wives.

The CI Scale, like the majority of scales used in social science research, has not been validated in a definitive way. A case can be made for the validity of the measure on a number of grounds, however. Most obviously, the scale has content validity in that the items do describe

acts of actual physical force. Further evidence of validity is available as well.

Bulcroft and Straus (1975) conducted a study to assess the concurrent validity of the scale. They compared the college students' scores on the CI Scales (with reference to parents' behavior) with parents' own scores. The results indicate high validity (relative to usual concurrent validity results on social measures) for the violence portion of the scale. In addition, the results of a number of analyses which have used the CTS measure of violence provide some evidence of construct validity. (See Straus, 1979 for a thorough discussion of these findings).

The Independent Variables:  
The Status of Women and Marital Equality

The Status of Women

The empirical assessment of the status of women has little meaning unless we first come to grips with the concept of "the status of women". Therefore, the concept will be given detailed attention in the next chapter. Its definition can be stated concisely here as "the position women have as a group, compared with the position of men as a group, in different fields of society" (Hombres, 1978:26). This is the definition developed and used by the Second European Population Seminar to consider the demographic aspects of the changing status of women in Europe. It seems equally appropriate for the present research, and is

discussed in some detail in the next chapter.

The status of women relative to men in several major institutional spheres is assessed through a Status of Women Index (SWX). Each sphere is considered a distinct dimension of women's status and makes up a separate part of the index. The specific dimensions which are included are the Economic, Educational, Legal, and the Political. The particular indicators in each of these areas are described in the next chapter which also includes a discussion of the reliability and validity of the index as well as the findings on how the states rank.

#### Marital Equality

Definition. Marital equality can be conceptualized as the micro-level parallel of the macro-level "status of women". It concerns the status of the wife relative to her husband in the marriage. Specifically, it is an interpersonal-level variable while the status of women is a social structural variable.

There are a number of approaches to defining this relative status. The functionalists took a "separate but equal" perspective. The husband and wife were regarded as partners, each with a very different role to play. The husband, of course, was responsible for the instrumental (economic and decision-making) tasks, and the wife for the expressive or emotional functions (Parsons and Bales, 1955). To the sociologists of the era this arrangement was

equitable by definition.

Critiques from other theoretical perspectives (i.e. exchange, conflict, and feminist) argue that "separate but equal" has no more validity in marriage than it does in public schooling. The separation of women from the world of options and income serves to insure their dependence on and subordination to their husbands. Studies of family power, despite their conflicting findings on other issues, have consistently and cross-culturally established that wives who work outside the home have greater say in family decisions than those who do not (Cromwell and Olson, 1977).

Still, the question remains as to how to assess marital equality, given the latter perspective. The employment or non-employment of the wife or the involvement of the husband in household tasks might be considered indirect indicators of equality (Scanzoni, 1972).

For the purposes of this research, marital equality will be assessed on the basis of the relative decision-making power of the husband and wife. By determining the degree to which either has the final say on family decisions, the relative position of the spouses can be appraised. The impact of decision-making power on family violence has been examined in previous research, and violence was found to be lowest among couples whose balance of power is fairly egalitarian (Allen and Straus, 1980 and Titterud and Straus, 1980). The relationship on the micro-level can now be considered in the context of sexual

equality on the macro-level, and can be understood more thoroughly as a result.

Measurement. The marital equality variable will be used in this study for the purpose of a contextual analysis. The purpose is to find out what, if any, impact the state context has on the relationship between interpersonal equality and violence.

The data on marital equality come from the same source as the figures on wife-beating. The 2,143 husbands and wives who were interviewed regarding their conflicts and violence also answered questions about who has the final say on key family decisions. Specifically, they responded to a modified version of the decision power index developed by Blood and Wolfe (1960).

The index used in the national survey included six decision items: (1) having children, (2) which job the husband should take, (3) whether the wife should work, (4) food money, (5) housing, and (6) buying a car. The exact wording of the item can be found in Appendix B. The response categories regarding who has the final say on each of these decisions ranged from "Wife Only" to "Husband Only". These categories were coded from one to five, with increasing score indicating increased power of the husband. The addition of the items resulted in a six to thirty range for the total score. As this range was somewhat awkward, it was transformed into a more manageable and understandable zero to one-hundred range by means of a direct percent

transformation. This range allows for a clearer conception of the Marital Equality Index as indicating the relative position conception of the spouses.

For purposes of the contextual analysis and the visual display of the data, couples were divided into four types according to their scores on the Marital Equality Index. These types are the Wife-Dominant, in which the wife has the final say on most family decisions; the Autonomic, in which each spouse is responsible for a separate set of decisions; the Syncretic, in which spouses share decision-making; and Husband-Dominant, in which the husband has final say on most family decisions. While the autonomic and syncretic patterns of decision-making are quite different from one another, both are considered fairly egalitarian.

A thorough analysis of the reliability and validity of this index was conducted by Allen (1980). Just a few of his findings are summarized here. Allen examined the index's internal consistency using the same sample of 2,143 and found a moderate .41 alpha coefficient of reliability. Further, he discovered that the simple, direct decision index used in the present research had greater internal consistency than more sophisticated weighted versions which have been suggested by some (Safilios-Rothschild, 1970; Cromwell and Olson, 1977). He maintains, after having analyzed similar indices in other survey samples, that the decision-type instrument is reliable across U.S. and non-U.S. samples.

Allen also takes up the construct validity of the index in some detail. He found that the validity coefficients for the decision items fell in the predicted direction for the majority of the criterion variables. He concludes that the measure is valid for both husbands and wives, but that it cannot be considered robust.

During the two decades that family researchers have been using Blood and Wolfe Index, this approach has come under increasing scrutiny and criticism. Therefore, the use of this type of measure requires some justification. The index has been criticized as being simplistic in that all decisions are counted equally in the score despite the fact that some may be more important or cause more conflict than others. Allen (1980), as mentioned above, found that weighting the index did not improve its reliability or validity. Another criticism which has been leveled against the "final say"-type measures is that it probably measures the respondent's conception of a desirable power structure rather than the real one in his/her family. This problem was dealt with in the national survey by preceding the question on "who has the final say" with questions of "should have the final say", thus lessening the chance of confounded results. A final justification for the use of this measure is that despite its shortcomings, it is still the best available measure of spousal power which is useful in survey research. No research to date has produced evidence showing the superiority of an alternative method of

measuring the balance of power between husband and wife.

#### Methods of Analysis

Because multiple-level, as well as multivariate, data analysis is at the heart of this research, a number of different statistical procedures are used. The general approach to the data analysis is not the usual hypothesis testing route, however. As the discussion of multi-level analysis in Chapter II pointed out, the central questions of this research are unlikely to have straight-forward "if x then y" answers. The goal of the analysis is to examine how the social context of structured sexual inequality affects inequality and violence within marriage. Numerous main and interaction effects are plausible. A variety of techniques are used in the attempt to tease out these effects.

#### Analysis of State Status of Women

The first step after the collection of data from the census and other sources is the development of the Status of Women Index (SWX) and its specific dimensions. The construction of the index, which is detailed in the next chapter, involves correlational analysis to assess its reliability and interrelations among the dimensions.

The statistics used in the next portion of the research are fairly simple, but quite important given the substantive issue. The SWX allows us to look closely at women's status



in each of the United States. The bare presentation of how the states rank on each indicator, the dimension indicators, and the index as a whole provides valuable information on how women fare relative to men in different parts of the country. For example, the descriptive statistics present state rankings on such items as proportion of women in the labor force, and female representation in political office (see Chapter V for greater details).

#### Data Analysis on the Aggregate Level

Beyond serving a descriptive function as a social indicator, the SWX is an important independent variable on the macro-level. The assessment of macro-level effects follows along the lines of what Matilda White Riley (1964) describes as "structural analysis" involving segmental comparisons. That is, different segments, in this study states grouped according to women's status, are compared as to the amount of wife-beating within them.

As the discussion in Chapter III emphasized, this research is not designed to test rigid hypotheses. Rather it investigates variables which may be related in a number of plausible ways. Therefore, an exploratory rather than a confirmatory mode of data analysis is used here.

In a monograph entitled Exploratory Data Analysis, Hartwig and Dearing (1979) describe such an approach. They write that the underlying assumption of this mode is that the more one knows about the data, the more effectively data

can be used to develop, test, and refine theory. They argue that adherence to two basic principles, skepticism and openness, is required to maximize what is learned from the data. They are skeptical of total reliance on statistics which summarize data since they can sometimes conceal or even misrepresent what may be the most informative aspects of the data. Further, they encourage openness to unanticipated patterns in the data since these can be the most revealing outcomes of the analysis. Therefore, they emphasize the importance of visual displays of data over statistical summaries.

In addition, Hartwig and Dearing (1979) stress the limitations of the confirmatory mode which only considers two alternative explanations for the data (i.e. the hypothesis and its null). The exploratory mode is more open to a range of alternative explanations. While these methodologists certainly do not reject the testing of hypotheses as an important approach in the social sciences, they point out that it is not the only approach, nor the best one with certain research issues and types of data.

The exploratory approach is appropriate to this research for two major reasons. First, a wide range of relationships between the focal variables of this research is possible. There is no previous empirical research or theoretical consensus from which to deduce specific hypotheses to be tested. To be maximally open to the possible interrelationships, visual displays of the data

need to be emphasized. Second, the nature of the data (specifically, being limited to an N of thirty states in the aggregate level analysis) limits the number and complexity of statistical techniques that are useful. In particular, the assessment of the statistical significance of the findings is difficult.

One important note must be added here with regard to the analysis of aggregate data. William Robinson (1950) was the first to alert us to the danger inherent in dealing with aggregate rather than individual-level data. He coined the term "ecological fallacy" to indicate that an aggregate level coefficient need not equal the corresponding individual level coefficient. It is important, therefore, to be quite careful in interpreting the meaning of results at this level. For example, a finding that wife-beating is low in states where women's economic participation is high, cannot automatically be translated to mean that individual women who work outside the home experience less violence than housewives, although this may be the case.

#### Contextual Analysis

To probe further into the impact of the status of women, a multi-level analysis is conducted. Through contextual analysis the focus turns to the individual rather than the state as the unit of analysis. Riley explains the distinction between structural analysis and contextual analysis:

In structural analysis, groups are the research case, and properties of individual refer to homogeneous segments of individuals within each group. In contextual analysis, on the other hand, individuals aggregated from many groups are the research case, and the properties of groups are treated as contextual characteristics of discrete individuals (1964:1019).

Through contextual analysis the interpersonal power relations and violence of husbands and wives can be understood in terms of the structural context within which it occurs. Thus, this

study takes an important step forward in the research on these issues: it does not view inequality and violence within marriage as if husbands and wives lived in a social vacuum.

James Coleman (1972) and Lazarsfeld et al. (1972) comment on the value of contextual analysis for bridging the gap between the different sociological levels - the individual and the social context - which tend to be studied separately in the discipline. This approach will be put into practice here through an analysis of variance of the marital inequality-violence relationship using state status of women as the control variable.

#### Limitations of the Methodology

The methods and procedures of this research suffer from some important limitations which have already been discussed. For example, because of the small number of cases in each state, individual state violence rates must be approached with caution. These are the sorts of practical

problems common to most empirical research in the social sciences.

The major methodological limitation of the present study is not of this nature, however. The problem is that there is an inherent inconsistency between a systems theoretical approach and the type of structural analysis that is necessitated by currently available data. The dynamic nature of the changing status of women and its interrelationship with marital equality on the interpersonal level and wife-beating cannot adequately be captured given data collected at only one point in time. The direct multi-level relationship between these variables can be examined quite successfully in this research. But the feedback loops and more complex, changing interconnections must, unfortunately, await further research when more appropriate longitudinal data can be gathered.

This discussion of limitations is not meant to imply that the gap between the theoretical orientation and the methodology is so vast that it necessarily invalidates the entire project. It points out, though that the fit is not ideal. That means that to proceed with what empirical evidence is available one must keep in mind that the structural relations being investigated are just a part of an ongoing, constantly changing system.

## CHAPTER V

### THE STATUS OF WOMEN: THE CONCEPT, THE INDEX, AND HOW THE STATES RANK

The past decade has witnessed a growth in concern over the status of women in American society; the position of women relative to men in all areas of society has come into question. Much has been written in recent years on what can very broadly be termed "the status of women". Most of this literature argues the justice of feminist goals or describes how women feel or should feel about them (Murphy, 1973). On the academic side, sex differences, prejudice, and discrimination have been documented (see Astin's (1975) annotated bibliography and Women's Studies Abstracts). Causes and consequences of women's low status have been debated. In Chapter II of this study, a synthesis of some earlier sociological and anthropological works was made, in order to come to a more adequate theoretical understanding of the factors which have molded the status of women.

Despite all of the discussion of the status of women, few efforts have been made to adequately assess it empirically. The purpose of this chapter is to make such an assessment with regard to each of the United States. To do so, a number of issues are taken up. First, the concept of "the status of women" is defined. Second, the idea that the

empirical assessment of the status of women constitutes a social indicator is considered. Third, the operationalization and measurement of the concept is discussed in some detail. Finally, the findings about how the states rank with regard to the status of women are presented.

#### Defining the Status of Women

For the most part, the notion "the status of women" is used as a label for almost any discussion of women in society. However, a handful of works do consider a more specific meaning of the concept.

Regina Hommes' paper in a volume entitled Demographic Aspects of the Changing Status of Women in Europe not be the same for different groups currently. The issue of the legal status of women, which was the focal concern of the "first wave" feminist movement, became defused when women gained the right to vote in many western countries. Hommes contends that this period was followed by one in which the idea of "equality of position" gave way to "equivalence of position". That is, the status of women was defined in terms of the family and the wife-mother role. The equivalence idea parallels that of the "separate but equal" spheres for men and women. The status of women was defined as high (up on the pedestal) although quite different from that of men. The third phase in the changing meaning of the status of women, according to Hommes, began in the 1960's in

many western countries. Women no longer asked just for legal rights or for an equivalent position in the family, but for "real" emancipation, covering all fields where human beings act (1978:24).

In addition to the changing meaning of women's status over time, Hommes gives some attention to a recent movement in which some regard the psychological make-up and values of women (involving greater sensitivity, regard for human life, etc.) as superior to that of men. From this standpoint, total social change which emphasizes these "female" values is the goal rather than the simple improvement of the position of women relative to men, within the present value system (Donovan, 1980). Hommes regards this view as implying that the status of women is actually superior to that of men.

Unfortunately, Hommes seems to create a straw woman with her argument that the proponents of "female" values view women's status as superior. There is little evidence that there is a movement which takes this position. Those who argue the value of some female traits do not regard all female traits as positive. The positive nature of some typically "feminine" characteristics is an important consideration in that it emphasizes that equality of position for women does not mean that women want to become men, i.e. that men in our society embody all that is good or desirable.



Basically, the movement to improve the status of women in all social institutions and action for a more humane society, embodying more "female" values, are not the separate phenomena that Hommes suggests. The two are quite compatible, and to a large degree, part of the same thing. The latter, however, is primarily an effort to change the values and priorities of society. The nature of social values, though related to the status of women, cannot be regarded as part of its definition, and in this respect I agree with Hommes.

#### Definition

Having reviewed the various approaches to the concept, Hommes develops a definition of the status of women which seems useful for a range of purposes including this research. "The status of women is the position women have as a group, compared with the position of men as a group, in different fields of society" (1978:27-28). While this definition is a helpful starting point, it is quite general. The following discussion is intended to elucidate this definition more concretely.

#### Relative Position

First, the phrase "position of women relative to men" requires more substantive specification. Rae Lesser Blumberg (1975) and Geile and Smock (1977) are quite clear on this issue. The way in which they see the positions of

men and women differing is in terms of life options, that is the freedom to make decisions and the opportunity to act upon them. The options women have to participate in different social spheres are a key indicator of their status in any society.

### Separate Groups

Second, the definition's emphasis on the relative position of men and women as separate groups in society is important. The stratification literature has, with few exceptions, ignored women as a distinct group (Acker, 1980). Women are regarded as appendages of their husbands or fathers, sharing their status in the class system. (This view coincides with the "equivalence of position" definition of the status of women). The assessment of women's status cannot be achieved through such an approach, for it overlooks the structural and cultural blockages which affect women and not men.

This element of Hommes' definition is particularly appropriate for the present study because of its consistency with the model of sexual stratification developed in Chapter II. There the changing status of women was considered in historical context. The foundation was laid for understanding their status currently. In that analysis, men and women were considered as separate groups with different characteristics and unequal control over resources. Male control over key resources and their ability to structure

the system is the reason to consider the sexes as separate groups rather than as individual men and women. The life options of the two groups have been structured differently and are unequal. This perspective seems to underlie Hommes' definition, and points to the differentially structured statuses of the two groups as the central issue.

The focus on males and females as groups does obscure the heterogeneity within groups. Certainly, an upper middle class woman is better off than a man living in poverty. Nevertheless, the existence of such variability within groups does not invalidate the concept. We are interested in overall differences because there is reason to believe that women as a group are disadvantaged. The fact that there are Black millionaires as well as poor Blacks does not rule out Black-white comparisons to assess the impact of race on life options.

#### Fields of Society

The phrase "in different fields of society" is also an important element of this definition. It is virtually impossible to identify one distinguishing factor which would allow us to assess the relative status of males and females. We must look at a number of institutional spheres because the status of women is complex and has a number of components or dimensions. To complicate matters further, there is not always agreement as to which are the most important components.

For the purposes of this research, four major "fields of society" are identified. They are the economic, educational, political, and legal dimensions of the status of women. These are taken as the key dimensions of the Status of Women Index which will be described in a later section.

Although the labels may be different, these include most of the key indicators identified in previous work on the status of women. There is little debate that the status of women in the economy and in education is critical (Boulding et al., 1976; Ferriss, 1971; Geile and Smock, 1977; Hommes, 1978; Murphy, 1973; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1978).

However, there is less agreement on the other dimensions. For example, Murphy devotes considerable attention to legal status. Boulding et al. and Geile and Smock also identify the legal-political sphere as an important component of the status of women. In contrast, Ferris' volume on indicators of the status of women and the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights' report do not deal with legal or political status.

#### Other Indicators

In addition, some of the other attempts at delimiting the status of women have included indicators which are not feasible or appropriate to this research. Hommes (1978) suggests that socio-psychological relations of domination-subordination need to be considered. Her focus

is on personal traits within interpersonal interaction rather than on dominance with regard to the structuring of the system. While the nature of these traits and relations is interesting, their assessment on a national scale is beyond the scope of this research. Moreover, they are the sort of cultural pattern which is not easily influenced by public policy or governmental action.

The Civil Rights Commission (1978) includes indicators of housing (i.e. home ownership, crowding, etc.). Boulding et al. (1976) and Geile and Smock (1977) also suggest additional dimensions of women's status. To economic, educational, and political indicators, the former add migration, marital status, reproduction, and mortality and the latter add health, sexual control, and cultural expression. Ferriss (1971) goes even further to include such areas as participation in organizations and outdoor recreation.

The range of dimensions of the status of women seems as broad as the number of fields of society we might identify. The authors just cited suggest a number of excellent indicators. Some, such as mortality and migration, are more appropriate to the international comparisons which the authors make. Others, such as home ownership or sexual control, would be useful for this research. Unfortunately, the gathering of state-level data on these items is a project requiring more time and resources than the present research allows.

This discussion of "different fields of society" illustrates that the relative status of men and women can be examined within a wide spectrum of social spheres. While there is some consensus that the economic, educational, and political-legal dimensions of women's status are central, there is less agreement on a number of other areas. The range of possibilities demands that the choice of indicators to be included reflect the purposes of the research at hand. For this study, the relative position of women in the key institutions is central not because I am interested in measuring the relative superiority of the sexes. Rather, the relative status is important because it represents the nature of opportunities available to women. Where women participate in the central social institutions, their life options are greater than where they do not. This is an important concern when we turn to the issue of wife-beating and the question of in what contexts do women endure the most violence.

#### Summary

In sum, then, the status of women is not as simple or clear-cut a concept as the popular usage of the term implies. Women's status has been regarded quite differently at different points in time. The present approach is to regard the status of women as the position of women as a group relative to men as a group in the different areas of society. The specific areas to be included in the Status of

Women Index are the economic, educational, political, and legal dimensions. While other dimensions could be included, these are central and most appropriate to the present research.

#### The Status of Women as a Social Indicator

In this section, our discussion turns from the definition of the status of women to the purpose of its empirical assessment. In this study, a major reason for the construction of an index of women's status is to develop a measurable variable for use in testing important theoretical questions. How does women's current position in society, which is the result of generations of structuring, impact upon the level of violence against wives? Does a more equitable social structure, offering more options to wives, reduce the level of violence? Or does such structure threaten the traditional position of men, resulting in greater violence?

These are important issues to be resolved. But, before considering the actual construction of the Status of Women Index, an additional purpose for the construction of the index requires attention. The index developed here can be a useful social indicator which describes the current status of women in society and can in the future be revised to assess changes in that condition.

In the next sections, the general growth of and uses for social indicators are discussed. The assumptions and values underlying social indicators are considered. Finally, the need for a specific social indicator regarding the relative position of the sexes is addressed.

### The Growth of Social Indicators

Since the mid-sixties interest in social indicators has grown rapidly. The amount of attention and work directed toward the development of such indicators has been so great that the authors of an annotated bibliography on the subject go so far as to term it "the social indicator movement" (Wilcox et al., 1972). While this may be an exaggeration, there is no question that there has been a florescence in this area. One reason for this may be the fact that if attempts are to be made to improve social conditions through the political process, then some means of assessing those conditions is essential (Tipps:1979).

The term "social indicator" was coined through analogy to the term "economic indicator". Social indicators are a special type of statistic which measure and describe social conditions for three primary purposes. According to Brook (1972), these are, first, they provide reliable information on the current state of affairs in society. That is, they serve a descriptive function. Second, they aid in assessing the effectiveness of policies and programs, i.e. their evaluative function. Third, social indicators can provide



the requisite knowledge for planned social change. Changes in social indicators could be monitored in the same manner as economic indicators to warn of particular problems. Brooks grants that, at present, social indicators are not nearly sophisticated enough to serve all these functions. However, their potential is being developed, and social indicators do currently provide some assessments of the condition of various aspects of society (Tipps:1979).

The assessment of social conditions is not an easy task. It is more complex than the analysis of the economy alone, which is now monitored quite closely. And from recent economic developments we see that even precise indicators are not the solutions to the problems, but just signals that problems exist. Despite, or perhaps because of, the enormity of the challenge, the development of social indicators is a valuable pursuit. Sound social policy depends on this development.

#### Values and the Development of Social Indicators

Social indicators have been described as a type of statistic which measures the "health" of society and different components of it (Tipps, 1979; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1978). The assessment of social "health" is necessarily connected with some notion of what a "healthy" society look like.

There are serious problems with the idea that social indicators measure social "health". There is no reason to turn to this medical analogy and the related concepts that it conjures up - disease, pathology, etc. The idea that there is an objective state of health for society obscures the real issue, which is that social indicators reflect assumptions about "the good society". Social indicators cannot be approached with the "value-free" orientation which has been heralded in the social sciences in the past. These indicators reflect the assumptions and values of those who develop them. The term "health" disguises these values as some sort of objectively positive condition.

Ferriss (1971) maintains that social norms play an important part in the selection and evaluation of indicators. Mortality, for example, may be viewed as a general social indicator of significance because death (particularly premature death) is evaluated negatively. Economic well-being is generally desired, so income becomes an important social indicator. The values underlying indicators become more apparent when there is less consensus on those values. For example, the growing number of women in the paid labor force can be taken as an indicator of the improving status of women. Others may argue that the same indicator reflects their declining status because they are being forced to go out to work instead of staying safely at home being provided for by their husbands. These opposed interpretations illustrate that social values are central to

the construction and use of social indicators. A value-free social indicator is an impossibility.

The Status of Women Index developed here is not a value-free social indicator, nor can it be for reasons I have discussed above. It is based on the assumption that both sexes are inherently competent to participate fully in all social institutions. Further it is assumed that the limited involvement of women in these spheres is a consequence of social factors. These social factors, particularly the exercise of meta-power by males so as to restrict women's life options, were discussed in some detail in Chapter II.

The basic value underlying this index is that the freedom to choose among a range of life options is positive and that limitation of opportunities is negative. Thus it is designed to assess the range of life options which are currently available to women relative to men.

#### The Need for a Social Indicator of Women's Status

As mentioned above, work on a variety of social indicators has proliferated in the last few years. With the publication of Social Indicators, 1973, the U.S. government joined the expanding group of nations that are reporting statistical measures of social conditions. A subsequent report issued in 1976 expanded upon the earlier volume. Within the areas considered (which ranged from population, public safety, and income to social mobility, welfare, and

the family) specific concerns were defined and selected to reveal the general status of the entire population (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1978).

As Tipps (1979) points out, missing from the social indicator field was any focus upon the issue of social equality among the various groups that make up the nations population. General social indicators can be misleading because they tend to obscure the very real inequalities between different social groups. As the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights reports,

to the extent that the hardships are concentrated among certain groups, national figures can lead to false inferences and counterproductive policies and actions. The unemployment rate, which is probably the most widely used social indicator at this time, provides a striking example of this situation. Even when unemployment is low, the rate for minorities is typically twice that of the white population. (1978:2)

In the past decade, even within the social indicator field, new values have gained in importance. No longer is the general assessment of the social conditions regarded as adequate. The issue of equality, or lack thereof, between different groups in society is being taken into account.

The construction of an index of the status of women in this research, is a step in this direction. Although the report of the Civil Rights Commission is entitled Social Indicators of Equality for Minorities and Women (1978), and does contain much valuable information, it has a major shortcoming. It is clear that the authors of that work were more concerned with minorities than with women as a group in

and of themselves. Even though copious data are presented, the figures are broken down in the tables so that direct comparison of all males as opposed to all females is impossible. One can compare specific minority groups of males and females (i.e. Mexican-American females vs males or majority females or males) but not the sexes as two separate groups. The Commission's approach in presenting the data is telling and reveals that male-female differences were not their main interest.

The Status of Women Index (SWX) is designed to begin to fill the gap in our knowledge in this area. It is straight-forward and specific enough to be recalculated as new census and other data become available. It can be a useful indicator of social change in the status of American women. Further, it is concise enough to be easily used as a variable in research projects on numerous other topics besides family violence.

#### Measuring the Status of Women

As mentioned above, there is a two-fold purpose for developing an empirical measure of the status of women in the U.S., one purpose being the formulation of a social indicator of women's status and the other being the operationalization of a concept theoretically significant to this research. In this section, the indicators making up the status of women are presented, the construction of the index is discussed, and its reliability and validity are examined.

### Indicators of Women's Status

There were two main considerations in the selection of indicators: first, that they be of theoretical relevance and second, that state-level data be available on them. Listed below are the original items which met these general criteria. The items are worded so that the higher the percentage score for each item, the higher the status of women. While this makes for somewhat awkward phrasing for some items, it facilitates the mathematical construction of the index. The sources for the data are listed in Appendix D.

#### Economic Dimension

- EC1, % of women in the labor force
- EC2, % female in professional and technical occupations
- EC3, % female in managerial, administrative occupations
- EC4, Unemployment: Male rate as % of female rate
- EC5, Median income: female as % of male,  
for full-time workers
- EC6, Median income: female as % of male,  
for full-time, college graduated workers
- EC7, Percent of families under poverty line  
not female-headed
- ECX, Economic status of women index

### Educational Dimension

- ED1, High school graduation: Female rate as % of male rate
- ED2, Post-secondary enrollment: % female
- ED3, High school interscholastic athletes: % female
- ED4, High School Administrators: % female
- ED5, Students in traditional male voc-ed courses: % female
- EX, Educational status of women index

### Political Dimension

- PCL1, Members in U.S. Congress: % female
- PCL2, Members of state senate: % female
- PCL3, Members of state house: % female
- PCL4, Judges on major appellate and trial courts: % female
- PCLX, Political status of women index

### Legal Dimension

- L1, No occupations barred to women
- L2, Equal pay laws
- L3, Fair employment practices act
- L4, No max. hours restrictions for females
- L5, Proof of resistance not req. for rape conviction
- L6, Corrob. testimony not req. for rape conviction
- L7, Husband and wife jointly resp. for family support
- L8, Husband and wife have equal right to sue for pers. injury

- L9, Hus. and wife have eq. right to sue for loss of consortium
- L10, Wife's property rights unrestricted
- L11, Wife's right to use maiden name unrestricted
- L12, Wife's right to maintain sep. domicile unrestr.
- L13, Ratified federal Equal Rights Amendment
- L14, Passed a state Equal Rights Amendment
- LEGX, Legal status of women index

Certainly, the indicators listed above are not the sum total of all possible indicators. However, they do cover these four fields of society quite adequately. There is some question about whether EC1, the total percent of women in the labor force, is an appropriate measure of women's status because it does not necessarily indicate freedom of opportunity to choose paid employment. It is true that for many women seeking employment outside the home is a matter of necessity. Nevertheless, it has been included because employment, for whatever reason, does provide women with some advantages. Most importantly, they are not totally dependent on their husbands income and therefore gain some measure of independence. Further, they are not isolated in their homes. By going out to work, wives gain a number of new contacts in the outside world. Therefore, this item is considered an important general indicator. Whether a woman chooses to go into real estate or has to take a job at a factory out of financial necessity, does not diminish this figure as an indicator of women's status.



### Standardizing the Index

Gathering the data on these items and computing these indicators from the raw data (by forming a percentage score out of two variables, for example, females in Congress and total of members in Congress) was the first step in the index construction process. The second step was to transform these items into a form in which they could legitimately be added into dimension indicators and, ultimately, into the combined SWX. In their raw form the items had quite different means and degrees of variance. In other words, these indicators needed to be standardized.

The most common approach to standardizing raw scores or indicators is through a Z-score transformation. A Z transformation standardizes items to a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one, but, it does have some disadvantages. It is expressed in terms of positive and negative numbers which can be awkward to deal with. Further, the meaning of Z-scores is difficult to understand for those not trained in statistics. A Z-score of -1.5 has no inherent meaning. Since one of the purposes of the SWX is to be a widely-available descriptor of women's status, this is an important consideration.

It was decided that a percentaged Z-score or "ZP" scaling was the best method in this circumstance. The ZP approach combines the advantage that percentages are widely understood and easily interpreted with the valuable measurement characteristics of the Z-score. The desirable

characteristics of ZP-scores are more specifically outlined in Straus (1980t)

(1) Zp scores have a range of 0 (Z score of  $<-.25$ ) to 100 (Z of 2.5), with a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 20. (2) For the non-statistically trained public it will usually be sufficient to understand that a score of 50 is half of the maximum possible score, 26 means 26% of the possible score, 70 is 70% of the maximum, 100 is the highest score, etc. (3) The research analyst using ZP scores has the advantages of a score which retains the distribution and measurement unit characteristics of the original Z score, with the exception of grouping outliers (1980:10??)

The ZP score is calculated from the raw score by means of the following formula:

$$ZP = (50 + (20 * ((X - M) / SD)))$$

where X=raw score

M=indicator mean

SD=indicator standard deviation

The extreme tails of the distribution are then collapsed by recoding the ZP score as follows: (Low thru 0=0) (100 thru High=100).

Having performed the ZP transformation on all separate items, they are added into dimension indicators by means of the following formula, exemplified by the political dimension index:  $POLXZP = (POLZF1 + POLZP2 + POLZP3 + POLZP4) / 4$ . The total SWX score is obtained as follows:  $SWX = (ECXZP + EDXZP + PCLXZP + LEGXZP) / 4$ .

### Reliability

Reliability is the accuracy or precision of a measuring instrument. Specifically, it refers to how accurate, on average, the estimate of the true score is in a population of objects to be measured. It assumes that errors of measurement are independent of the true scores and that the observed score is the sum of the true score and the error (Hull and Nie, 1979:111).

The reliability of the SWX and its dimensions was assessed using the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) subprogram "Reliability". The initial analysis indicated that a few of the items detracted from the reliability of the index. They had very low or negative item-total correlations and lowered the alpha coefficient of reliability for the whole index. These items were then considered in terms of their theoretical significance to the index and the concept of the status of women in order to determine if they should be dropped.

The following items were deleted: EC6, EC7, and ED5. It should be noted here that originally, a social service dimension, including such items as availability of battered wives shelters, contraceptives, and day care, was to be included in the SWX. However, the data available on these items seemed shaky from the start. Reliability analysis confirmed that impression, and the entire dimension was dropped.

Another problem emerged with the political items. Item-total correlations revealed that POL1 and POL4, indicators of women's involvement in federal-level politics were slightly negatively related to POL2 and POL3, indicators of state-level involvement. The decision was made to keep the dimension intact despite this difficulty. The reason for this is that these are not abstract items attempting to tap a vague concept such as authoritarianism or I.Q. These are the actual measures of women's representation in political office. Women's involvement on state and federal levels are not necessarily comparable. These indicators show that, in fact, they are not connected. The negative correlation between the two levels simply reflects reality. These political indicators cannot be dropped and replaced by others, because there are no others of equal significance. In this way these indicators are quite different from those used in personality or intelligence measures, where the universe of possible items is huge.

Table 5.1, below, presents the alpha coefficients of reliability for the dimension indicators and the SWX as a whole.

TABLE 5.1

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Reliability of the Status of Women Index (SWX)  
and Its Dimensions

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Index	# of items	ALPHA
Economic status	5	.40
Educational status	4	.30
Political status	4	.27
Legal status	14	.19
Status of Women Index	4	.54

Considering the range of indicators included in the Status of Women Index, the alpha coefficient of .54 is quite a bit higher than expected and allows me to proceed with some confidence that the index is reliable relative to most measures used in the social sciences.

#### Validity

While techniques for assessing a measure's reliability are fairly well developed, determining the validity of a measure is more difficult. In the social sciences two main types of validity, content and construct, are usually taken into consideration.

According to Kerlinger (1973), content validity is the representativeness or sampling adequacy of the content- the substance, the matter, the topics- of a measuring instrument. The guiding question is, is the content of this measure representative of the universe of content of the property being measured? Clearly, content validity is basically judgemental (1973:458-459).

Some universes of content are more obvious and easier to assess than others. The content of the status of women is fairly easy to judge (compared to such measures as the I.Q.) given the definition developed earlier. The indicators are not simply a small, hopefully representative, sample of the possible items. They are direct measures of the relative involvement of women in the economy, education, and politics, and the degree of legal equality. Kerlinger suggests that competent judges judge the content of the items in order to validate them. In this study, the dimensions and items were chosen because experts on the status of women are in some consensus as to their importance (see Definition section of this Chapter). For these reasons, the content or "face" validity of the SWX seems reasonably high.

The construct validity of the SWX, on the other hand, cannot be assessed at present. Construct validation is not simply a question of validating a measure; it requires validation of the theories behind the measure (Kerlinger, 1973). The construct validity of an index cannot

be established until the index has been used in a number of studies which consider various theoretical propositions using the index. If the theoretical propositions are supported, the index is said to have construct validity. A problem with construct validation, however, is that unexpected results may be due to incorrect theoretical assumptions rather than the invalidity of the measure. At any rate, the construct validation of the SWX awaits further research.

#### How the States Rank on the Status of Women

The descriptive statistics regarding state rankings on the various indicators and dimensions of the Status of Women Index, as well as on the index as a whole, are presented in this section. Specifically, the listing of states from highest to lowest on women's status, along with their raw scores, are given for the economic, educational, and political items. For example, in Table 5.2, Alaska ranks first on EC1, % of women in the labor force, with a score of 70. This indicates that 70% of Alaskan women are employed. This figure can then be compared with all other state scores, down to West Virginia at 42%.

On some of the items the top score is over 100. For example, South Dakota's score on ED1 is 122. This figure indicates that for every one-hundred males who graduated from secondary school, one-hundred and twenty-two females graduated. Note that it would be possible for the scores on

TABLE 5.2

.7. Women in Labor Force		State Rankings on the Economic Status of Women Items				Unemp.: Male Rate as % of Female Rate		Median Income: Female as % of Male	
		% Women in Prof./Tech.Occ.	% Women in Manag./Admin.Occ.						
70.	ALAS	54.	ARK	34.	D.C.	102.	ALAS	78.	D.C.
62.	D.C.	50.	N.C.	29.	W.VA	99.	D.C.	56.	N.J.
62.	WY	49.	NEBR	28.	ALA	98.	PA	65.	VT
61.	CCLC	49.	MISS	28.	HAWA	97.	HAWA	65.	N.Y.
61.	MINN	48.	FLA	27.	MISS	88.	S.C.	64.	TENN
60.	NEV	48.	KY	26.	KY	88.	N.Y.	62.	MD
60.	HAWA	48.	MO	26.	WYO	83.	CAL	62.	GA
59.	WIS	47.	S.C.	26.	MD	82.	NEV	61.	N.C.
59.	N.C.	47.	D.C.	26.	CAL	79.	CCNN	61.	N.C.
58.	NEBR	46.	IDWA	26.	ALAS	79.	FLA	61.	MICH
58.	ICWA	46.	GA	25.	N.M.	79.	N.H.	61.	S.C.
57.	VA	46.	KANS	25.	ARIZ	79.	MINN	61.	MASS
57.	N.H.	46.	N.D.	24.	NEV	79.	WIS	61.	ARK
57.	VT	46.	S.D.	24.	CULC	78.	N.C.	60.	FLA
57.	MCNT	46.	ME	24.	DREG	78.	VT	60.	MISS
57.	OREG	45.	TENN	24.	VT	78.	ARIZ	60.	VA
57.	KANS	45.	N.Y.	24.	ARK	77.	MASS	60.	PA
57.	IDA	45.	R.I.	24.	TEX	76.	R.I.	59.	N.H.
57.	MD	43.	WIS	24.	TENN	76.	MO	59.	ALA
57.	S.D.	43.	VT	24.	NEBR	75.	ILL	59.	ME
56.	UTAH	43.	GHIO	23.	N.C.	75.	CCLC	59.	OKLA
56.	TEX	43.	ALA	22.	N.Y.	74.	WASH	58.	CAL
56.	CAL	42.	OKLA	22.	S.D.	74.	ARK	58.	KY
56.	S.C.	42.	W.VA	22.	WIS	74.	KY	58.	MINN
55.	N.D.	42.	MINN	21.	S.C.	71.	N.M.	58.	NEV
55.	MASS	42.	PA	21.	ILL	71.	OREG	58.	N.M.
55.	ME	42.	N.H.	21.	MICH	70.	MICH	58.	OHIO
55.	R.I.	42.	MASS	21.	OKLA	70.	ICWA	58.	CCLC
55.	CCNN	42.	INDI	21.	LA	70.	TENN	58.	KANS
55.	GA	41.	N.J.	21.	MONT	70.	GA	58.	HAWA
55.	MC	41.	VA	21.	MO	69.	NEBR	58.	ARIZ
55.	INDI	41.	MICH	20.	DEL	68.	DEL	58.	CCNN
54.	OKLA	41.	LA	20.	GA	67.	MD	58.	INDI
54.	ILL	41.	NEV	20.	N.H.	67.	UTAH	58.	WIS
54.	DEL	41.	TEX	20.	IDA	66.	VA	57.	NEBR
54.	WASH	41.	MCNT	20.	KANS	66.	N.J.	57.	S.D.
53.	N.M.	41.	CCLC	20.	WASH	65.	CHIC	57.	TEX
52.	ARIZ	41.	ILL	20.	VA	64.	W.VA	57.	R.I.
52.	MICH	40.	CAL	20.	N.D.	62.	IDA	57.	MC
52.	TENN	40.	ALAS	20.	ME	61.	ME	56.	N.C.
52.	N.J.	40.	CFEG	19.	FLA	59.	MUNT	56.	ICWA
52.	MISS	40.	CCNN	19.	CHIC	59.	LA	56.	IDA
51.	ARK	40.	HAWA	19.	PA	56.	INDI	55.	MCNT
51.	N.Y.	39.	MD	19.	MASS	55.	TEX	55.	CFEG
50.	CHIC	39.	WASH	19.	MINN	53.	ALA	55.	ALAS
50.	FLA	39.	WYO	18.	ICWA	51.	WYO	55.	DEL
50.	ALA	37.	IDA	18.	INDI	48.	N.D.	55.	W.VA
49.	PA	37.	UTAH	17.	R.I.	47.	KANS	55.	WASH
48.	LA	35.	DEL	17.	UTAH	46.	OKLA	54.	ILL
46.	KY	35.	N.M.	16.	N.J.	45.	MISS	54.	WY
42.	W.VA	33.	ARIZ	16.	CCNN	43.	S.D.	53.	UTAH
								50.	LA



TABLE 5.3

## State Rankings on the Educational Status of Women Items

High school grads.: Female rate as % of M.		Post-Secondary Enr.: % Female		H.S. Inter-schol. Athletes: % Female		H.S. Administrators: % Female	
122.	S.D.	119.	ALAS	49.	ICWA	20.	MICH
120.	N.D.	103.	VT	44.	KANS	20.	WASH
112.	VT	96.	MO	42.	VT	18.	CCNN
111.	MONT	95.	VA	42.	ME	16.	CAL
111.	MINN	91.	N.Y.	41.	D.C.	16.	COLU
111.	ICWA	90.	MISS	41.	N.M.	15.	MD
110.	NEBR	90.	N.J.	40.	TEX	14.	OREG
110.	NE	90.	NEV	40.	S.D.	13.	ARIZ
109.	WY	90.	CCNN	40.	MONT	13.	FLA
108.	WIS	89.	MINN	39.	ALAS	12.	ALAS
107.	ALAS	88.	ILL	38.	CCLC	12.	N.C.
107.	OREG	87.	WASH	37.	N.H.	12.	WYO
107.	IDA	87.	KY	37.	MINN	12.	N.M.
106.	N.C.	86.	ARK	37.	N.Y.	11.	UTAH
106.	MICH	85.	KANS	35.	WASH	11.	OKLA
106.	N.H.	85.	DEL	35.	OKLA	11.	TEX
105.	KY	85.	W.VA	35.	N.D.	10.	TENN
105.	VA	84.	LA	34.	MD	10.	MINN
105.	W.VA	84.	GA	34.	MASS	10.	N.J.
104.	KANS	84.	MASS	34.	KY	10.	GA
104.	CCNN	83.	WY	34.	CCNN	10.	H.Y.
104.	D.C.	83.	OREG	34.	IDA	10.	KANS
104.	MASS	83.	MICH	34.	PA	10.	S.C.
103.	WASH	82.	N.H.	33.	ILL	9.	VT
103.	CHIC	82.	CAL	33.	MO	9.	NEV
103.	COLD	82.	IDA	33.	WIS	9.	INDI
103.	MISS	82.	PA	33.	KYC	9.	MASS
103.	TENN	82.	N.M.	32.	FLA	9.	CHIC
103.	ARK	81.	N.D.	32.	INDI	9.	MISS
102.	PA	81.	TENN	32.	DEL	9.	R.I.
102.	DEL	80.	MCNT	32.	MICH	8.	WIS
102.	NEV	80.	OHIC	32.	GA	8.	VA
102.	FLA	79.	WIS	31.	R.I.	8.	MO
101.	HAWA	79.	INDI	30.	HAWA	8.	MCNT
101.	ARIZ	78.	HAWA	29.	CHIC	8.	N.D.
101.	MU	78.	ME	29.	TENN	8.	ICWA
101.	R.I.	78.	FLA	29.	ARIZ	7.	N.H.
100.	OKLA	77.	ICWA	28.	CREG	7.	ME
100.	INDI	76.	MC	28.	UTAH	7.	ILL
100.	UTAH	76.	NEBR	27.	NEV	7.	W.VA
100.	MD	76.	S.C.	27.	N.C.	7.	D.C.
99.	N.Y.	75.	CCLC	27.	MISS	7.	ALA
99.	CAL	75.	TEX	26.	N.J.	6.	LA
99.	S.C.	75.	ALA	26.	CAL	6.	NEBR
99.	ILL	75.	ARIZ	26.	VA	6.	PA
99.	N.M.	74.	N.C.	25.	ARK	6.	S.D.
99.	N.J.	74.	D.C.	24.	S.C.	6.	IDA
99.	LA	73.	OKLA	24.	LA	5.	KY
99.	ALA	73.	S.D.	20.	W.VA	5.	ARK
98.	TEX	73.	F.I.	20.	ALA	5.	HAWA
95.	GA	68.	UTAH	15.		2.	DEL

TABLE 5.4

## State Rankings on the Political Status of Women Items

U.S. Congress: % Female		State Senate: % Female		State House: % Female		Judges on Mjr. Appel. and Trial Cts.: % Female	
30.	MD	20.	ARIZ	27.	H.P.	10.	R.I.
20.	NEBR	17.	N.H.	21.	CONN	7.	ARIZ
14.	KANS	16.	HAWA	18.	COLOR	6.	ARK
14.	CCLC	14.	WASH	17.	VT	4.	OREG
13.	N.J.	14.	CGNN	17.	ARIZ	4.	PA
10.	TENN	10.	MASS	17.	ME	4.	D.C.
10.	LA	10.	OREG	16.	WASH	3.	MICH
7.	MASS	10.	NEV	16.	N.D.	3.	NC
5.	N.Y.	10.	DEL	16.	N.C.	3.	FLA
4.	CAL	8.	N.C.	15.	OREG	3.	INDI
4.	OHIO	8.	R.I.	15.	N.J.	3.	WASH
4.	ILL	8.	ICWA	15.	ILL	2.	S.D.
4.	TEX	7.	VT	13.	FLA	2.	TENN
0.	UTAH	6.	MD	13.	ICWA	2.	N.Y.
0.	HAWA	6.	ME	13.	MD	2.	N.C.
0.	ICWA	6.	WIS	13.	NEV	2.	CAL
0.	ARIZ	6.	N.D.	12.	MONT	2.	MISS
0.	CONN	6.	INDI	12.	W.VA	2.	OHIO
0.	KY	6.	MC	11.	IDA	1.	OKLA
0.	ME	6.	IDA	10.	ILL	1.	N.J.
0.	ALAS	6.	S.D.	10.	WIS	1.	MINN
0.	INDI	6.	COLOR	10.	HAWA	1.	ILL
0.	IDA	5.	ILL	9.	WY	1.	GA
0.	MINN	5.	ALAS	9.	MC	1.	KY
0.	MISS	5.	N.Y.	9.	S.D.	1.	CCLC
0.	DEL	5.	FLA	8.	S.C.	1.	CONN
0.	MONT	4.	NEBR	8.	KANS	1.	ALA
0.	ARK	4.	MONT	8.	ALAS	1.	WIS
0.	ALA	3.	UTAH	7.	MINN	0.	KANS
0.	N.H.	3.	WY	7.	MICH	0.	ICWA
0.	NEV	3.	TEX	7.	OHIO	0.	TEX
0.	N.M.	3.	TENN	7.	KY	0.	MC
0.	MC	3.	OHIO	7.	R.I.	0.	ALAS
0.	N.C.	3.	MINN	7.	UTAH	0.	HAWA
0.	N.D.	3.	ARK	7.	TX	0.	WYO
0.	MICH	3.	KY	7.	MASS	0.	VA
0.	OKLA	3.	LA	7.	CAL	0.	MASS
0.	OREG	3.	CAL	6.	INDI	0.	S.C.
0.	PA	3.	KANS	6.	OKLA	0.	IDA
0.	R.I.	3.	N.J.	6.	N.M.	0.	W.VA
0.	S.C.	2.	N.M.	6.	CA	0.	N.M.
0.	S.D.	2.	OKLA	5.	PA	0.	MONT
0.	GA	2.	PA	4.	NEBR	0.	NEV
0.	FLA	2.	GA	4.	N.Y.	0.	NEBR
0.	WASH	0.	S.C.	2.	ALA	0.	UTAH
0.	VT	0.	ALA	2.	TENN	0.	DEL
0.	VA	0.	VA	2.	ARK	0.	N.D.
0.	WY	0.	MICH	2.	MISS	0.	ME
0.	W.VA	0.	W.VA	2.	LA	0.	VT
0.	WIS	0.	MISS	1.		0.	LA
						0.	N.H.

TABLE 5.5

State Rankings on the Dimensions and on  
the Overall Status of Women Index

Economic Status of Women	Educational Status of Women	Political Status of Women	Legal Status of Women	Status of Women Index (SWX)
89. D.C.	77. VT	75. ARIZ	100. ALAS	70. ALAS
68. N.C.	74. ALAS	71. MD	85. N.J.	62. COGN
67. VI	67. WASH	69. N.H.	78. DEL	61. ME
64. ALAS	66. COGN	67. WASH	73. WIS	61. VT
64. ARK	64. MICH	66. CCLC	72. CLAN	61. CCLC
63. HAWA	63. MICH	66. COGN	66. CCLC	60. N.J.
63. S.C.	62. ICWA	65. CREG	66. WASH	60. N.H.
63. N.Y.	62. MD	61. R.I.	66. N.H.	59. WASH
60. TENN	61. KANS	60. N.J.	66. CAL	57. WIS
59. MD	60. N.D.	58. N.C.	66. S.D.	57. NEBR
58. NEBR	59. MONT	56. HAWA	66. HAWA	55. HAWA
57. NEV	58. WYO	55. FLA	66. INDI	55. ORLG
57. GA	57. S.D.	53. DEL	66. MASS	55. ARIZ
56. CAL	57. CCLC	52. NEBR	66. NEBR	55. MASS
55. CCLC	56. ME	52. MASS	62. WYO	55. N.Y.
54. MISS	55. CREG	52. KANS	55. N.Y.	55. D.C.
54. WIS	54. N.Y.	52. NEV	55. MD	54. CAL
53. N.H.	53. N.Y.	52. VT	55. ARIZ	54. S.D.
52. KY	52. N.H.	51. ME	55. IOWA	53. IOWA
52. MINN	51. VA	50. IOWA	55. MINN	53. MINN
52. FLA	51. NEBR	50. N.D.	55. ORLG	53. KANS
52. MASS	50. WIS	49. D.C.	55. PA	53. FLA
51. PA	50. MASS	49. ILL	55. FLA	52. MICH
50. MC	47. FLA	49. S.D.	55. KANS	51. WYO
49. VA	45. KY	48. TENN	55. R.I.	50. DILL
49. MICH	48. CAL	48. ARK	50. MICH	50. ME
48. ME	48. D.C.	48. INDI	50. VT	49. TENN
46. N.J.	48. IDA	48. N.Y.	44. ARK	49. R.I.
47. ALA	47. TEX	48. OHIC	44. KY	49. ARK
46. ICWA	47. MISS	47. CAL	44. TENN	49. INDI
45. ORLG	47. NEV	46. WIS	44. N.D.	49. PA
44. KANS	45. N.C.	46. IDA	44. IDA	48. N.D.
43. R.I.	45. TENN	46. PA	44. OHIC	48. N.C.
43. TEX	45. OKLA	45. MICH	44. GA	47. MONT
43. S.D.	44. N.J.	45. MONT	44. MONT	46. KY
43. N.H.	44. ILL	44. NEV	44. NJ	45. GA
42. WYO	44. ARIZ	42. MD	44. TEX	45. NJ
41. ARIZ	43. CHIC	42. TEX	44. ME	44. NEV
41. COGN	43. PA	42. MINN	44. UTAH	44. TEX
40. OKLA	42. INDI	41. WYO	33. UTAH	44. OFIC
40. N.D.	42. GA	41. ALAS	33. ILL	43. ICA
39. CHIC	42. MO	41. LA	33. MISS	43. MISS
39. ILL	39. ARK	41. KY	33. D.C.	42. VA
39. MONT	39. DEL	40. CKLA	33. VA	41. N.M.
39. W.VA	38. W.VA	40. W.VA	33. N.M.	41. N.M.
38. INDI	37. R.I.	39. UTAH	21. NEV	41. ILL
36. WASH	37. N.I.	39. GA	21. N.C.	39. S.C.
36. IDA	36. UTAH	37. VA	21. OKLA	36. CKLA
32. UEL	36. HAWA	37. N.H.	21. W.VA	34. W.VA
29. UTAH	34. LA	36. S.C.	21. S.C.	34. UTAH
27. LA	24. ALA	36. MISS	10. LA	28. ALA
		33. ALA	10. I	28. LA

all items to exceed 100 if the relative position of women were superior to that of men. Such scores are highly unlikely, however.

The ranking on the legal dimension cannot be interpreted in terms of raw scores, however. The individual legal items were scored simply in terms of whether the specific laws discriminated by sex. In order to summarize this mass of information, the total dimension index is quite useful. It ranks the states by their ZP scores on the combined items. The state of Michigan, with its score of 50, had the average of discriminatory laws. Alaska's score of 100 does not mean that all of its laws were sex equal, but that it had the highest portion of egalitarian laws.

Similar state rankings are given for the economic, educational, and political dimension indicators. The 0 to 100 rankings on these indices are the ZP scores. A score of 100 means that that state had the highest combination of values on the separate items, not that that state's status of women is 100% of what it might be. Finally, the state rankings on the Status of Women Index are also presented in terms of ZP scores.

The tables which follow present the state rankings on the individual items as well as the dimension indicators and the total Status of Women Index. The descriptive statistics and rankings are fairly self-explanatory. The scores on the individual items provide concrete figures for states which

will be of general interest to the public as well as to professionals concerned with patterns of sexual inequality.

In the economic sphere, for example, there has been much publicity about the fact that there is a national gap in the earning of male and female full-time workers. Table 5.2 presents this gap by state and shows that states vary greatly in earning equality between the sexes. Washington, D.C. ranks highest at 78%. That is, full-time working women there earn 78 cents for every dollar earned by men working full-time. The District of Columbia also ranks high on the percentage of professional, technical, and administrative employees who are female. Perhaps the high proportion of the population there employed by the federal government accounts for this narrowed gap.

In contrast, women in Louisiana earn only half as much as men in that state when they are employed full-time. Yet, Louisiana's proportion of women in professional, technical, or administrative jobs, while low, does not rank in the bottom third. This implies that the male-female earnings gap is not simply explainable in terms of the types of jobs women there obtain.

The analysis of state patterns is fascinating. However, the investigation of particular patterns is not a central aim of this research, and will not be pursued further here. The consequences of sexual inequality in states, documented in these tables, for the level of violence against wives is our main concern and will be

explored in the next two chapters.

#### Summary

In this chapter, the status of women was defined as the position women have as a group, compared with the position of men as a group, in different fields of society (Hommes, 1978). The precise meaning of the definition was discussed in some detail, and the variety of indicators which have been used to measure women's status were considered.

The development of an index of women's status as an important social indicator was also discussed. Despite the enormous growth of social indicators in the last decade, indicators of social equality (especially for the sexes) have been largely overlooked. The notion that social indicators cannot be value-free and the implications of this were also considered.

Indicators of the status of women, falling into economic, educational, political, and legal dimensions were presented. The method of constructing the index was explained in some detail and the issues of reliability and validity were examined.

The final section of the chapter included the rankings of the states on individual items and the overall Status of Women Index. How the status of women is related to wife-beating is the subject of the remainder of the study.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE STATUS OF WOMEN AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: THE AGGREGATE LEVEL ANALYSIS

In this chapter the focus turns from a description of the status of women to an analysis of the relationship between that status and the amount of violence against wives. In part, the exploratory mode of data analysis detailed by Hartwig and Dearing (1979), is utilized here. The salient characteristic of this approach is that it allows for a wide range of alternative explanations. It is not intended to test rigid hypotheses, but rather to uncover as much about the relationship between the variables as possible. Visual display of data is an important tool for this purpose. This does not mean that statistical analysis is ignored, but that statistics alone are not equated with data analysis. Multivariate statistical techniques are used where appropriate and results are reported in conjunction with graphs. Through a combination of exploratory techniques and statistical analysis, the complex interrelationship between the various dimensions of the status of women, violence, and several control variables such as urbanization and state per capita income can best be deciphered.

The issue of violence against husbands is also taken up in this chapter. Findings regarding violence by wives are reported where they help make sense of the data on violence against them.

#### Violence Against Wives: How the States Rank

Before turning to the relationship between women's status and violence it is important to examine state differences in rates of violence against wives. Wife-beating, it turns out, is not a homogeneous facet of American life. Rather, it varies in amount from state to state.

One assumption on which this research is based, and one which has been questioned, is the idea that there is still clear diversity among American states. It has been suggested that because of factors such as the mass media, efficient transportation, instant communication, and centralized government, state differences are of minimal importance: a minor hang-over from an earlier era.

The results of this research offer evidence to the contrary. As Chapter V illustrated, states vary greatly as to the economic, educational, political, and legal dimensions of the status of women. Here, we find that violence rates, also, are not uniform. For a complex of reasons, states are still diverse and can serve as meaningful units of analysis.



In turning to the state rankings on violence against wives, a note of caution must be introduced. The violence rates, which indicate the percent of respondents in a state who admitted to severe violence directed at the wife in the previous year, should be used only as a guide to the ranking of the states. There are reasons to refrain from drawing conclusions about the actual amount of violence in a particular state.

These rates are based on a relatively small number of cases within each state. Although tests for representativeness of state samples (discussed in Chapter IV) provide some assurance, the individual state violence rates must be taken as tentative indicators. Therefore, statements such as 3% more wives are severely assaulted in South Carolina than in Massachusetts, cannot be made with any confidence.

It should be noted that in later analyses, individual state rates of violence are grouped according to the status of women. For example, the 20% of states with the lowest status of women are compared with the 20% with the highest status. The mean violence rates for these groupings are much more reliable indicators than the individual rates, and are used most often in the data analysis. For reasons discussed previously (see Chapter IV), however, these should also be considered underestimates of the true rate.

Nevertheless, the individual state violence rates are useful for the relative ranking of the states. Table 6.1 presents such a ranking for the thirty states for which we have data.

TABLE 6.1

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State Ranking by Level of  
Violence against Wives

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<u>State</u>	<u>Violence Rate -% (N)</u>
West Virginia	13.5 (38)
Oregon	7.7 (13)
Vermont	7.1 (28)
Utah	6.8 (45)
South Carolina	6.3 (49)
Florida	6.3 (32)
Mississippi	6.3 (16)
Michigan	5.5 (74)
Georgia	5.3 (39)
Idaho	5.0 (21)
Ohio	5.0 (142)
Illinois	4.7 (107)
Washington	4.6 (90)
New Jersey	4.5 (115)
North Carolina	4.1 (126)
Kansas	4.0 (50)
Colorado	3.6 (28)
Alabama	3.4 (65)
Virginia	3.4 (58)
Massachusetts	2.9 (107)
Texas	2.8 (110)
Maryland	2.7 (37)
California	2.7 (151)
Louisiana	2.5 (80)
Pennsylvania	2.5 (82)
Indiana	2.4 (42)
Tennessee	2.0 (50)
Minnesota	2.0 (50)
Missouri	1.2 (87)
New York	0.0 (167)

### Womens' Status and Spousal Violence

In this section the bivariate relationship between women's status and spousal violence is taken up. The first step in analyzing this relationship is to examine visual displays of the data. Figure 6.1 presents a scattergram with state names indicated. This graph allows us to identify unique states as well as to consider the overall pattern.

It is difficult to discern a clear pattern in Figure 6.1. A few states do stand out, however. West Virginia has the highest rate of violence against wives and ranks quite low on the status of women. Alabama and Louisiana, in contrast, are very low on the status of women and have low levels of wife abuse as well. Oregon and Vermont, on the other hand, rank quite high on women's status and also in amount of violence against wives.

The next figure, 6.2, gives a better picture of the overall pattern. In this graph, the economic, educational, political, and legal dimensions of women's status, as well as the overall Status of Women Index (SWX), are identified. Each indicator is divided into quintiles (20% of states in each group), and then the relationship between status and violence is graphed. In Figure 6.2 a curvilinear pattern emerges. Figure 6.2 shows that the level of violence is highest in those states where the overall status of women is lowest and then drops as status improves. This pattern then reverses as we consider the quintile of states in which the

FIGURE 6.1

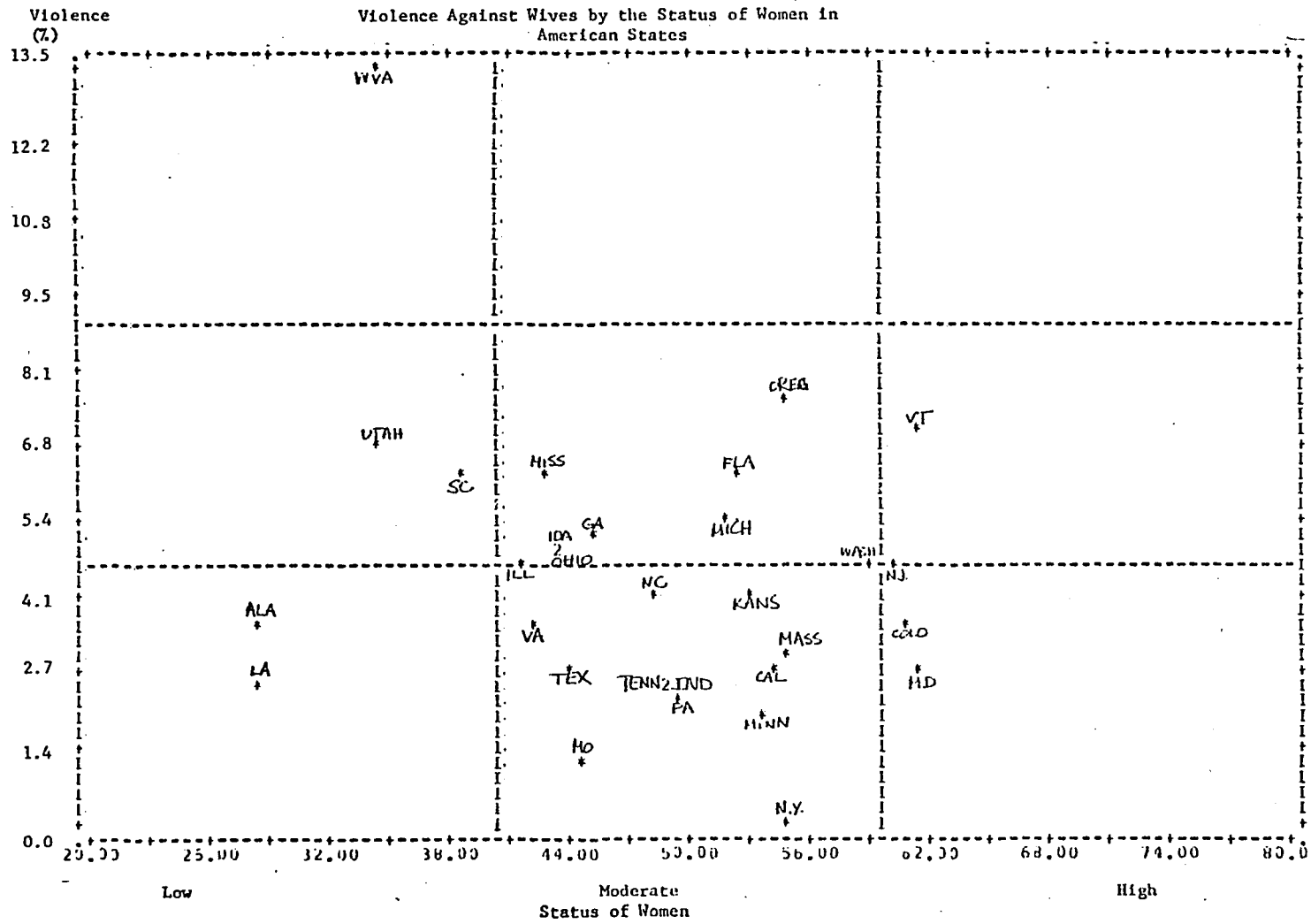
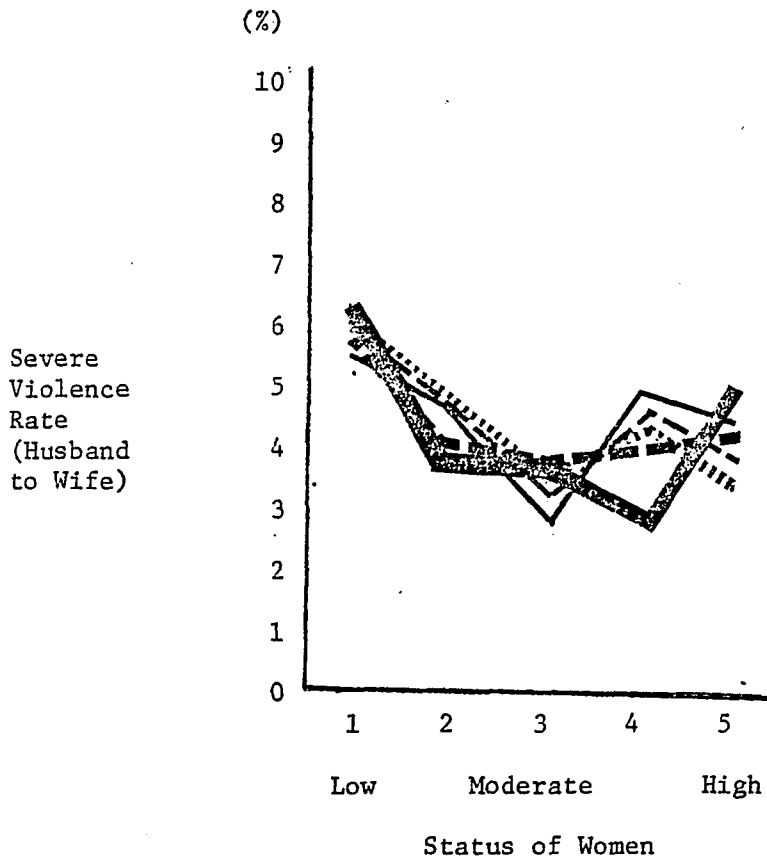


FIGURE 6.2  
 Violence Against Wives By  
 the Status of Women



- Economic Status of Women
- . - Educational Status of Women
- Political Status of Women
- ||||| Legal Status of Women
- ▬ Overall Status of Women

status of women is highest. In those states the level of violence is almost as high as in the lowest status states.

Moreover, we find that the pattern for the combined index of the status of women is clearer than for any of the dimension indicators. Of particular interest is the fact that combining dimension indicators results in more than an additive effect. States that fall in the lowest or highest quintiles on the total indicator have higher violence rates than any of the dimension indicators alone predict.

The graph of the violence rate for overall status is not simply the average of the dimension rates for a particular quintile group. For example, the quintile of states scoring highest on a particular dimension are not necessarily the same states which score highest on the overall SWX. A state that is high on economic status may be moderate on educational status and consequently end up in the moderately high quintile on overall status. The fact that the violence rate graphed for the SWX differs from that graphed for any particular dimension is a reflection of the interaction of the dimensions.

The Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) for the bivariate relationship between overall status and violence is  $-.21$  ( $p < .13$ ). The correlations between the dimension indicators and violence are as follows: economic status,  $-.19$  ( $p < .16$ ); educational status  $-.04$  ( $p < .42$ ); political status  $-.07$  ( $p < .35$ ); and legal status,  $-.26$  ( $p < .08$ ). Due to the small number of cases (30 states), these correlations

are not statistically significant at levels regarded as standard, such as .05 or .01, in the social sciences. However, these are standards generally applied to individual-level research based on a large number of cases. Aggregate level analyses such as this one are necessarily limited to smaller  $N$ s because each case represents some larger unit rather than an individual respondent. Significance levels are reported here for information sake. However, they should be considered with the nature of the data in mind.

The Pearson  $r$  statistic expresses how well a linear regression line explains the variation in the dependent variable. Since our graph of the data (Figure 6.2) indicates that the bivariate relationship is not linear, it is understandable that  $r$  fails to reach significance.

An alternative to  $r$  is the Eta statistic, which is basically the same type of measure as  $r$  except that the mean within categories of the independent variable, rather than the regression equation, is used to predict the dependent variable score (Loether and McTavish, 1974). Eta and  $r$  are identical where subcategory means fall along the regression line; that is, when the relationship is linear. When eta is greater than  $r$  in magnitude (not in direction, as Eta is always positive), we can infer that the nature of the relationship is curvilinear. For the status of women-wife abuse relationship, Eta is .46, more than double the  $r$  statistic. Thus, the curvilinear pattern explains 21% (eta

squared) of the variance between these variables as compared with 4% (r squared) explained by the linear pattern.

The graph and statistical analysis indicate that where the status of women is lowest, wives are most likely to be physically assaulted by their husbands and that violence decreases as status increases - to a point. In those states where the overall status of women is highest, violence against wives is also high. The analysis of variance for between groups differences was significant at the .19 level ( $F=1.67$ ,  $df=4$ ).

The fact that violence against wives is greatest in states which fall at the two extremes of women's status requires closer examination. Chapter III, which considered the possible interrelationships between these variables on theoretical grounds, outlined several plausible explanations. It was suggested that low status states might have the most wife-beating because greater force may be necessary to keep women "in their place" and because women in these states have fewer alternatives to violent marriages. On the other hand, the possibility was considered that violence could be greater in high status states because these were the states which had undergone the most rapid social change and in which husbands may feel most threatened. It seems plausible that domestic conflict may increase in those areas where women are achieving equality most quickly. While the traditional formula and norms for the relationship between husbands and wives disappears, new



patterns or guidelines are not yet institutionalized. As Moore states in Social Change, the probability of conflict is related to rapid social change (even if it is favorable change) and to the decreased predictability of interpersonal relations (1974:68). It seems likely that changes of this sort would also result in increased conflict in marriages.

The empirical evidence suggests that both of these processes may be at work. Women in states where their economic, educational, political, and legal status is low are the victims of the greatest violence at the hands of their husbands. Yet, at the same time, wives in states where women have achieved the greatest equality also suffer high levels of physical aggression from their husbands.

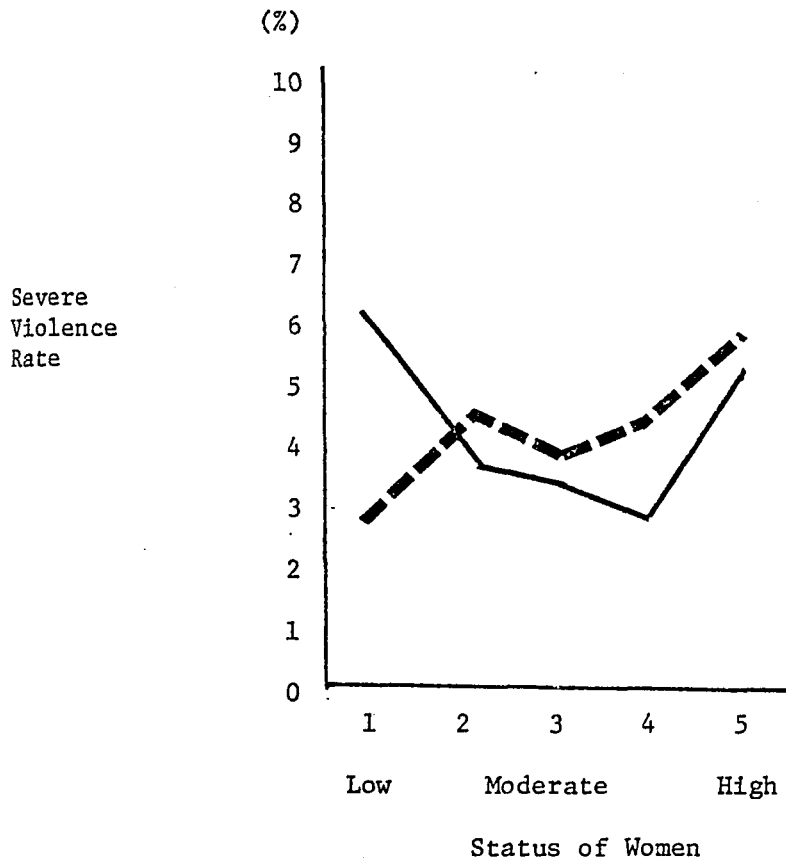
#### Reciprocity of Violence: The Issue of Legitimacy

Considering the large discrepancy between these two groups of women with regard to the status of women in the areas in which they live, it seems likely that the violence they endure results from somewhat different factors and may be dealt with differently. In order to investigate this latter possibility, violence by wives against husbands was taken into consideration.

Figure 6.3 presents the rates of violence against husbands by the status of women as well as rates of violence against wives. The graph of violence against husbands shows a fairly clear positive relationship to women's status. The rate in highest status states is double that in the lowest quintile of states (5.9% vs. 2.9%). The Pearson  $r$  for this

FIGURE 6.3

Violence Against Wives and  
Violence Against Husbands by  
the Status of Women



— Violence Against Wives  
- - - Violence Against Husbands

relation is  $+.42$  and is significant at the  $.01$  level.

By comparing the rate of violence against wives with that against husbands, a striking pattern becomes evident. In those states where the status of women is lowest, the rate of violence against wives is double the rate of violence by them (6.2% vs. 2.9%). In sharp contrast, the amount of violence by husbands and wives is comparable in those states in which the status of women is highest (5.1% vs. 5.9%).

The findings presented in Figure 6.3 help to clarify how the status of women influences spousal violence. In low status states, wife-beating is high and physical aggression is generally not reciprocated by wives. That is, the wives in these states appear to take the beatings without fighting back. Perhaps because alternatives for these wives are so limited, they are forced to tolerate abuse from their husbands. On the other hand, wives who live in states where their economic, educational, political, and legal status is relatively high, seem to react to violence by their husbands quite differently. They fight back.

It would constitute an ecological fallacy to directly conclude that the equivalence of husband and wife violence rates is due to reciprocal violence in all individual relationships in the high status states. It is, however, a plausible explanation for the findings. It is almost certain that there are some marriages in these states in which only the husband is violent and some in which only the

wife is violent. However, it is quite unlikely, based on previous research (Straus, 1980c), that a majority of these violent relationships are of this sort.

It appears, then, that the general status of women has some influence on wives' acceptance of unilateral physical aggression. It may be that in states where women have achieved some measure of equality in society at large, that violence by husbands is no longer regarded as legitimate behavior and that illegitimate acts are reciprocated in kind.

In addition, there may also be other factors at work which result in the dramatic increase in violence by wives in higher status states. Perhaps because wives perceive themselves as less dependent on their husbands, a larger portion than previously will directly attack their spouse when conflict or hostility occurs. In a sense, greater societal status may free some women, who would not otherwise strike out due to a greater sense of dependence, to respond with physical aggression. It may be that more wives turn to violence first. This violence may then be reciprocated by husbands who may not have turned to physical aggression otherwise.

As women gain equality in more and more spheres of life, sex differences in various behaviors previously associated with one sex or the other are likely to diminish. A review of the research on human aggression by Robert Baron (1977) indicates that there has been a reduction of

clear-cut sex differences in aggression in both laboratory and field studies in the last fifteen years. He suggests that this disappearance may be related to changes in sexual roles and stereotypes. These changes may serve to render women less inhibited about responding physically to direct provocation. "In short," he concludes, "the two sexes may gradually become equal in their propensity for violence, as well as their tendencies toward more desirable forms of behavior" (1977:221).

It is likely that a number of factors combine to push up rates of violence by wives as the status of women increases. Basically, two alternative explanations are suggested here. First, wives may be more violent because they no longer accept the legitimacy of their husbands' assaults, and fight back. Second, it may be that this is just an example of the convergence of behaviors by the sexes as general sexual inequality diminishes. Whether the findings are best explained by the legitimacy hypothesis or the convergence hypothesis, or perhaps by a combination of the two, is an important issue to take up in future research.

#### The Impact of Other State Factors

In order to more thoroughly examine the interrelationship between state status of women and spousal violence, a number of control variables were introduced. Specifically, urbanization, per capita income, educational level, and overall level of violent crime were taken into

consideration.

Before reporting on the analysis, the measurement of these variables needs to be clarified. Urbanization is indicated by the proportion of a state's population which resides in large urban areas. State educational level is the proportion of adult residents who have completed high school. State per capita income is drawn from the 1976 Census Bureau survey, as are the urbanization and education variables. The violent crime rate, an indicator of "violent climate", is the number of reported violent crimes per 100,000 population in 1976. (See Appendices C and D for specific items and source references for these variables.)

In order to get a sense of how these control variables and our focal variables are interconnected, zero-order correlations between them were calculated. These correlations are presented in Table 6.2.

A brief examination of Table 6.2 reveals that a number of these variables are, not surprisingly, intercorrelated. We find that the higher the per capita income and educational level of a state, the higher the status of women in that state. While this relationship is not unexpected, this research is the first (based on this review of the literature) which empirically documents this for the United States.

TABLE 6.2

Zero-Order Correlations Between  
Control Variables, the Status of Women,  
and the Level of Violence Against Wives

(1) Violence against Wives	(2) Status of Women	(3) Urba- niza- tion	(4) Educa- tion	(5) Violent Crime	(6) Per Capita Income
(1) 1.00					
(2) -.21	1.00				
(3) -.40*	.19	1.00			
(4) -.07	.50**	.18	1.00		
(5) -.37*	.01	.52**	-.03	1.00	
(6) -.34*	.55**	.54**	.52**	.36**	1.00

\*  $p < .05$ \*\*  $p < .01$ 

Also expected, and previously documented, are the high positive correlations between urbanization and violent crime, and between urbanization, per capita income, and education. However, the purpose of considering these control variables is not to determine how they are interrelated with one another, but how they impact upon the status of women-wife abuse relationship. Since urbanization, violent crime, and income are all significantly negatively correlated with violence against wives, these variables were considered more closely.

Table 6.3 presents first-order partial correlation coefficients. The status of women-wife abuse relationship is controlled for each of these three variables. These

correlations should be compared to the zero-order  $r$  between the status of women and violence, which is  $-.21$ .

TABLE 6.3

Correlations of Status of Women With  
Violence Against Wives, Controlling  
for Violent Crime, Urbanization  
and State Per Capita Income

<u>Control Variable</u>	<u>r</u>
Violent Crime	$-.22$
Urbanization	$-.15$
Per Capita Income	$-.03$

#### Violent Climate

The state rate of reported violent crime was taken into account because of the possibility that it is the "violent climate" or culture of violence of particular states that explain the women's status-wife relationship. That is, the possibility that low status states may have more overall violence and therefore more violence against wives, needed to be considered. The data indicate that this is not the case. For one thing, reported violent crime and the rate of wife abuse are negatively related. Further, the partial correlation analysis indicates that controlling for this factor does not affect our focal relationship.



### Urbanization

Urbanization was introduced as a control variable because of the possibility that it might be antecedent to both women's status and domestic violence. Again, the control variable proved unimportant with regard to the focal relationship of the research. Controlling for degree of urbanization does diminish the women's status-wife abuse correlation slightly from  $-.21$  to  $-.15$ . However, since the level of urbanization of a state and the status of women are not significantly correlated, there is little reason to pursue the effect of this variable any further.

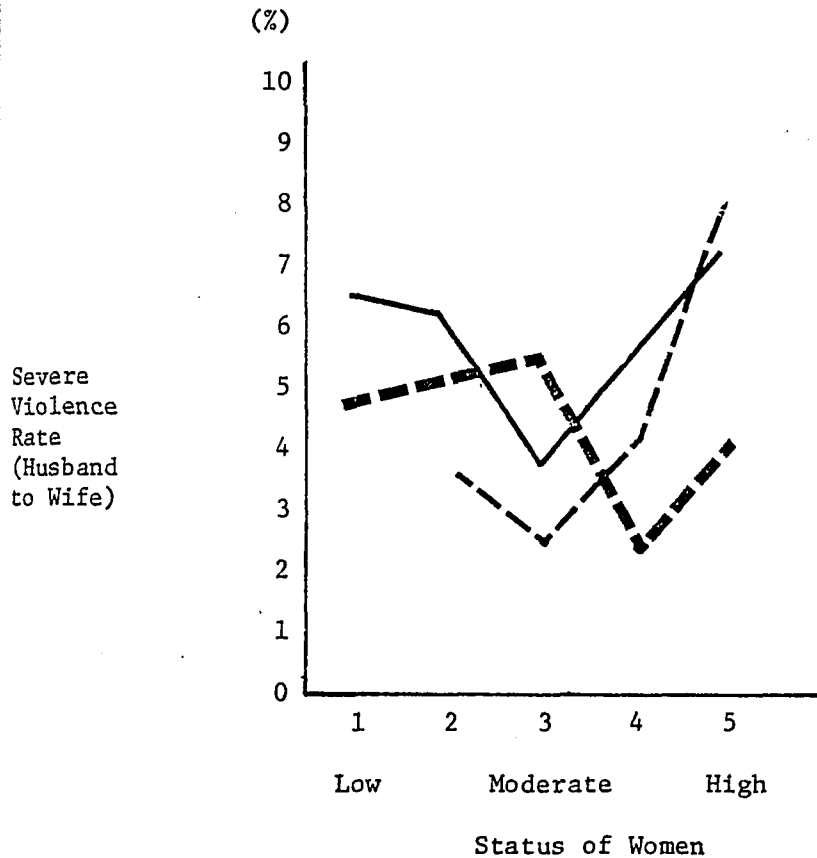
### State Per Capita Income

The most critical control variable, it turns out, is state per capita income. This control was introduced on the grounds that the status of women and violence against wives may both depend on state income level. As Table 6.2 shows, there is a significant positive relationship between state income level and women's status and a significant negative relationship between income and violence against wives. When the status-violence relationship is controlled for state per capita income, the correlation drops to  $-.03$ , as indicated in Table 6.3.

The dramatic effect of per capita income brings into question the very existence of any real relationship between women's status and wife abuse. One might conclude that the original correlation between the two is spurious; entirely

FIGURE 6.4

Violence Against Wives by the  
Status of Women, Controlling for  
State Per Capita Income



- Low Income States  
(Lowest third, less than \$5571)
- - - Moderate Income States  
(Middle third, \$5572 to \$6466)
- · - High Income States  
(Highest third, over \$6467)

attributable to the impact of state income. There is no denying that income is strongly related to both variables, and does explain a large portion of the linear covariance between them. However, the analysis cannot simply be considered closed at this point.

The partial correlation analysis conducted thus far assumes linearity. As our original visual analysis of the bivariate status of women-violence relationship showed, their interconnection is not linear. The issue of whether state per capita income influences the curvilinear relation between these two variables has not been adequately assessed through this statistical technique.

Although the small number of states precludes any complex breakdown of the data, it is possible to consider the impact of income by means of the graph presented in Figure 6.4.

In this figure, the relation between women's status and violence against wives is graphed separately for high, medium, and low per capita income states. The pattern that is evidenced is somewhat consistent with that presented in Figure 6.2. For low income states the pattern is quite similar to the overall curvilinear relation between women's status and violence against wives. For middle income states, there is a stronger tendency for wife-beating to increase as status increases. In contrast, the rate of wife abuse is a bit lower where status is high in the high income states. Nevertheless, the relationship does retain a

curvilinear shape within income groups. So, while per capita income is an important variable and is closely entwined in this complex of relationships, it does not negate the curvilinear relationship between women's status and wife-beating.

#### Summary

In this chapter, the relationship between the status of women in American states and the level of violence against wives was examined. Visual displays of the data and statistical analysis indicate that there is a curvilinear relationship between these two variables. In states where the status of women is lowest, wives are most likely to be physically assaulted by their husbands. Violence does decrease as women's status increases - to a point. In those states where the status of women is highest, the level of violence against wives is also quite high.

It was suggested that the high level of violence in low-status states might be due to the need to use greater amounts of force to keep women "in their place". In addition, the more limited options to violent marriage in these states may serve to keep battered women in their marriages. The high level of violence against wives in high status states, in contrast, is likely to be a result of other factors. In states where the general status of women is relatively high, husbands may feel threatened by the rapid social change and the breakdown of traditional

husband-wife roles. Increased domestic conflict may be a consequence of women's move toward equality.

Further, it was found that violence against wives is not directly paralleled by violence against husbands. In states where women's status is relatively low, wives are twice as likely as husbands to be the victims of severe violence at the hands of their spouse. In contrast, the rates of violence by wives is comparable to that against them in states where women's status is high. It is suggested that a context of relative equality may result in husbands' violence being seen as illegitimate, and being reciprocated in kind. Moreover, the decline of sexual inequality in all spheres may be related to a reduction in sex differences in various types of behaviors, including violence. As women's status rises, women may feel less inhibited about the use of physical aggression and may feel they have less to lose by striking out at their husbands.

Finally, a number of control variables were introduced in an attempt to determine if the findings regarding the relationship between women's status and wife abuse are confounded by other factors. State educational level, urbanization, and "violent climate" proved to have no significant impact on the original relationship. Per capita income turned out to be the only salient control variable. When income was controlled, the correlation between status and violence dropped from  $-.21$  to  $-.03$ . Clearly, this factor explains much of the linear variance between these

two variables.

Since the relationship between the status of women and wife-beating is curvilinear, rather than linear, further analysis into the effect of state per capita income was conducted. Graphing the status-violence relationship within high, medium and low categories of income provided evidence of the independent existence of a curvilinear relationship. The pattern is less pronounced within income categories (except for the low income states). Nevertheless, the status of women does show an impact on levels of wife-beating separate from income effects.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE STATUS OF WOMEN, MARITAL EQUALITY AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WIVES: A CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

This chapter presents a multi-level analysis of the interrelationship between the status of women, marital equality, and violence against wives. Essentially, the interaction of two system levels, the macro-structural and the interpersonal, are considered. Women's status is the macro-level structural variable. It is part of the social context within which interpersonal relations are played out. While state women's status represents the social inequality between the sexes in society at large, the marital equality variable denotes the balance of power between spouses within their marriage. In this sense, marital equality is the micro-level variable.

Previous research on the male-female balance of power and violence against wives has examined the relationship between the two only on the interpersonal level (Allen and Straus, 1980; Titterud and Straus, 1980). These studies were conducted to test the "ultimate resource" theory of family violence, which was discussed in Chapter III. Basically, this theory holds that violence is used by husbands to maintain control when other resources are lacking (Goode, 1971). Resource theory (Blood and Wolfe,

1960) maintains that given fairly egalitarian norms, husbands dominate family decision-making because they possess material resources which legitimize their power in the eyes of their wives. Goode's elaboration of resource theory postulates that when husbands feel entitled to dominate, yet lack the resources to do so "legitimately" they will turn to violence as the ultimate resource.

The studies mentioned above provide some support for this explanation. Husbands' domination tends to be associated with greater violence when his resources are lacking. In addition, they show that regardless of level of resources, marital inequality is related to higher levels of wife-beating. Violence against wives tends to be high where the wife dominates decision-making and higher still where the husband is dominant.

These studies provide some valuable evidence on the relationship between marital inequality and violence. They are limited, however, in that they consider male-female power only within the confines of the family. The larger social and cultural context within which these family power relations occur are overlooked entirely. This type of approach has come under criticism from those (Gillespie, 1971; Baumgartner, Buckley and Burns, 1976) who argue that interpersonal power relations are only part of the power activities in any society. These critics regard structured inequalities, resulting in part from the exercise of meta-power at the macro-level, as an important factor to



take into account.

The focus of the following analysis is on the interconnection between sexual inequality at the social structural level, marital equality at the interpersonal level and violence against wives. In the previous chapter it was established that the status of women at the societal level does have an impact on aggregate rates of wife-beating. The central question here is: what impact does the context of structured sexual inequality have on the relationship between marital inequality and wife-beating among individual couples?

#### The Status of Women and Marital Equality

Before turning to the dependant variable, violence against wife, the issue of how sexual inequality at the societal level affects marital equality on the interpersonal level must be considered. Does the status of women in a state affect the balance of power between husbands and wives who live in it?

In order to answer this question the distribution of marital equality types was examined within categories of the status of women. The individual level data from the Violence in American Families survey indicate that 7.5% of families in this sample were wife dominant in decision power and 9.4% were husband-dominant. The remaining group had relative equality in marital power, although not all couples achieved the balance in the same way. Fifty-four percent of the sample had an "autonomic" form of decision-making. That

is, the husband had final say in some areas and the wife in others. Twenty-nine percent followed the "syncratic" pattern, with husband and wife sharing in all decisions.

When the breakdown of power-types was considered within quintiles of women's status, no significant differences from the overall pattern emerged. Regardless of whether their state ranked in the lowest or highest 20% on women's status, the distribution of decision power types remained basically the same. The only clear difference that was evidenced emerged when marital equality was broken down by the economic status of women. In the lowest status states only 4.4% of subjects reported a wife-dominant balance of power, whereas the comparable proportion in the highest status states was 10.3% (Chi-square=22.74, df=12, p<.05). While the rate of wife-dominance is more than double in high status states than in low, the pattern of other decision types remained quite stable.

Except for the one relation with economic status, marital equality does not seem to be related to state status of women. This finding, in conjunction with results from previous research (see Safilios-Rothschild, 1970 and Cromwell and Olson, 1976), indicates that individual resources have a stronger, more direct impact on marital equality than structural inequality at the macro-level in the U.S.

In considering the connection between women's social status and marital equality, Rodman (1967) contends that American society is individual-achievement oriented and

holds fairly egalitarian norms. Therefore, he argues, the balance of power in marriage is primarily affected by personal resources in the U.S., whereas in non-industrialized countries husbands dominate because of their status as men regardless of personal resources. Rodman's explanation has been criticized (Gillespie, 1971) for failing to account for structural inequality in the United States and other western countries. The present analysis, which does take the inequitable context into account, provides support for Rodman's approach for explaining cross-cultural differences. The degree of sexual inequality structured into non-industrialized countries is a much stronger factor in explaining marital inequality in those countries than the structured inequalities at the state level are in affecting marital equality in the U.S.

However, the present findings cannot be taken as evidence that women's social status and the balance of power in marriages are unrelated. Certainly, a woman's power relative to her husband is affected when she is legally considered his property, as is still the case in some societies. Even the lowest status state in the U.S. is fairly egalitarian by cross-cultural standards. The differences between American states on women's status are not strong enough to show differential impact on marital power. It is still the case, however, that American husbands as males have structural advantages for the purpose of obtaining valued personal resources which then influence

the balance of marital power.

Marital Inequality and Violence Against Wives

The bivariate relationship between marital inequality and wife-beating is examined here, again using only the individual level data from the national survey. Those respondents who reported relative equality in marital decision power also reported low use of violence in the resolution of family conflicts. In contrast, violence by husbands is high where wives dominate decision-making and higher yet where husbands are dominant.

Figure 7.1 illustrates the relationship between marital equality by means of a bar graph. Fewer than 3% of couples who followed a pattern of egalitarian decision-making had had a severe violent episode in the previous year. In contrast, more than double that percent (7.1%) of the wife dominant couples reported such violence. The rate of wife-beating in couples where the husband dominates is 10.7%. That is 50% higher than for the wife dominant couples and more than 300% greater than for egalitarian couples. An analysis of variance with decision-making type as the independent variable showed significant differences in violence rates for the types. ( $F=11.82, df=3, p<.001$ ).

Evidently, wife dominance in decision-making is met with physical aggression by some husbands. Among these couples, violence is not a successful ultimate resource which allows the husband to retain control. Perhaps it is a response to loss of control which he believes should be his.

FIGURE 7.1

Violence Against Wives  
by Marital Equality

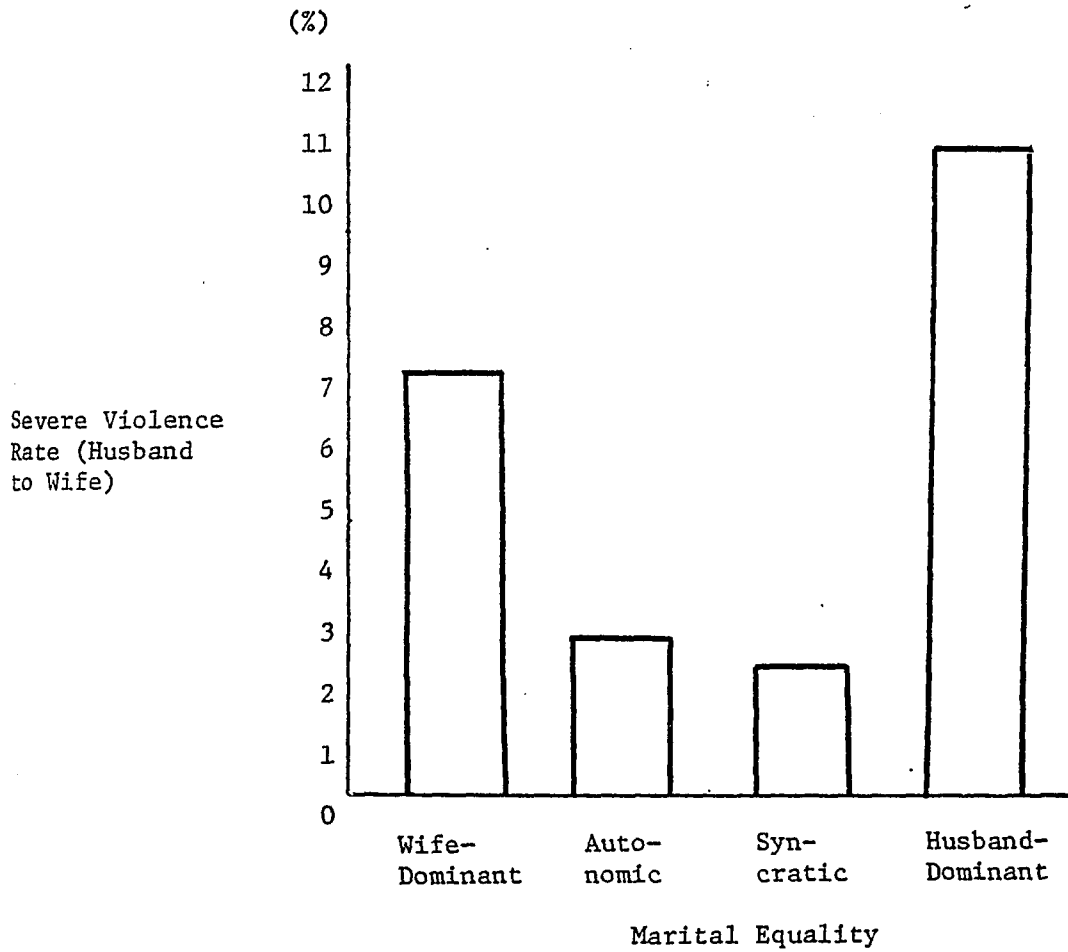
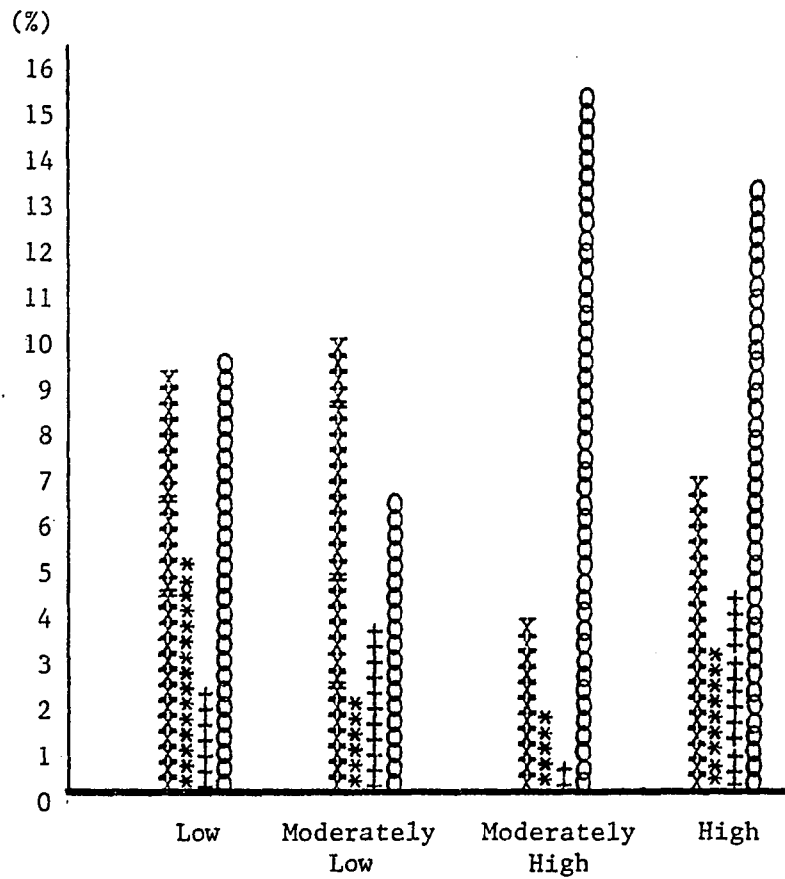


FIGURE 7.2

Violence Against Wives  
By Marital Equality Controlling For  
The Status of Women



Status of Women

Marital Equality	N for Status of Women Groups			
	Low	M-Low	M-High	High
XXX Wife-Dominant	32	40	54	29
*** Autonomic	225	332	388	178
+++ Syncratic	148	164	209	83
000 Husband-Dominant	42	62	54	38
Total N	447	598	705	328

Toby (1974) has suggested that some men will react with violence to assure themselves of their masculinity when other symbols of masculinity are lacking.

This analysis is not meant to imply that we should bolster traditional symbols of husbands' masculinity (such as domination of wives) in order to reduce violence. Rather, this analysis suggests that the very definition of masculinity requires reformulation so that men's self-worth is not based on their domination of others and, further, so that violence is not positively regarded as the ultimate expression of manhood.

Physical violence may serve as a symbol of masculinity when other symbols are lacking for some husbands, however, this is not an explanation for the high level of violence by husbands who do dominate family decision-making. It appears that for many of these husbands, exercise of control in marriage requires resorting to the use of severe violence against their wives. This situation is consistent with the conflict theory proposition that the more inequitable the power distribution, the more force is required to maintain it.

Sexual Equality, Marital Equality,  
and Violence Against Wives

In this section our focus turns from the bivariate relationships between sexual and marital equality and between marital equality and violence to an investigation of the interrelationship between all three variables.

Specifically, the multi-level, multivariate analysis looks at the relationship between marital power and wife-beating within various structural contexts. In this study, the contextual units are states grouped according to their rankings on the Status of Women Index (SWI).

In order to make the graph of the multi-level relationships comprehensible, the states were divided into quartiles: low, moderately low, moderately high, and high on the SWI. The rates of violence for the different marital equality types within status of women quartiles are presented in Figure 7.2. This figure is a summary of the contextual analysis and presents a wealth of information on the relation of macro-level inequality, micro-level inequality, and wife-beating.

The first issue that can be addressed on the basis of the data presented in Figure 7.2 is whether the structural context changes the pattern of the link between inequality and violence on the interpersonal level. In the most basic sense it does not. Each of the four sets of bars represents the same essential pattern as was evidenced in Figure 7.1. Regardless of context, violence against wives is lower among couples where there is a relative balance of power. When one spouse dominates decision-making, wife-beating is more common. We found no evidence of interaction effects which, for example, may have shown that marital equality is an important factor in explaining violence in high status states, but not in low. The basic relationship between



interpersonal power and violence appears fairly stable. Marital equality is generally associated with low rates of wife-beating.

However, this finding does not mean that the structural status of women has no influence at all on the marital equality-violence relationship. Although the basic pattern of the micro-level relationship holds across contexts, the state status of women seems to amplify the rate of wife-beating for certain couples.

#### Structural Impact on Husband-Dominant Couples

Specifically, the couples for whom the structural context seems to have the greatest impact are those in which the husband dominates decision-making and who reside in moderately high and high status states. Approximately 14% of the wives in these couples were severely physically assaulted by their husbands in the year prior to the interview. Putting it another way: husbands' use of physical force to maintain control is most extreme in contexts where the status of women is relatively high.

This result of the contextual analysis is consistent with our previous findings and discussions of the relationship between equality and violence at both the macro and micro levels. The aggregate analysis, discussed in the previous chapter, showed there to be a fairly high level of violence in high status states. One explanation for this finding is that the rapid social change in relations between

the sexes there resulted in the high levels of conflict and violence between spouses.

The analysis on the interpersonal level revealed that, in general, domination of decision-making by husbands is associated with the highest levels of violence against wives. In Figure 7.2 we see both of these factors at work. We find that women in husband-dominant families in the higher status states are most vulnerable to severe physical violence at the hands of their husbands.

The conflict theory explanation that the more inequitable the situation, the more force is required to maintain it remains a plausible one here. In fact, it seems to be illustrated even more clearly. It may be that domination by the husband seems even more inequitable to wives in states where women's status on the societal level is relatively high. In these states, the marital inequality seems more likely to be a conflict issue because it is more incompatible with the emerging sexual equality at the societal level.

It is interesting to note that there is no appreciable difference in the proportion of husband-dominated couples in the different states. The difference seems to lie in the amount of physical force required to maintain this pattern.

### Structural Impact on Wife-Dominant Couples

The structural context also has an impact upon wife-dominant couples. Figure 7.2 shows that violence is appreciably higher in wife-dominated couples residing in low and moderately low status states than in the moderately high and high status states. In the lower status states, nearly 10% of wives who dominate family decisions have been physically abused in the course of the year. In contrast, only about half of that proportion are the targets of severe violence in the higher status states.

These data suggest that the exercise of interpersonal power by wives is more threatening to husbands where the context is one of sexual inequality. Again, the structural impact seems to be greatest for those couples whose interpersonal pattern is less consistent with the status of women at the societal level. In states where women's status is low, domination by wives may be regarded as more illegitimate by many husbands, whose response is to turn to violence.

This pattern is consistent with our earlier discussion of wife-beating in wife-dominant families. Toky's (1974) explanation that this violence results, in part, from husbands being threatened by the loss of traditional symbols of masculinity is a plausible one here. Violence is exacerbated when wives dominate in a social context where their general status is low. It appears that husbands are most threatened by wives' control when the milieu is one of

sexual inequality. Thus, they turn to the ultimate symbol of masculinity - violence. Further, it may be that husbands in low status states find domination by their wives particularly frustrating and that many respond with physical aggression. In addition, some husbands may be turning to violence as an ultimate resource in an attempt to gain control from their wives.

#### Summary

In this chapter, the multi-level, multivariate relationship between sexual equality, marital equality, and violence against wives was taken up.

Preliminary bivariate analysis indicated that structured sexual inequality, at least to the degree that it varies from state to state, does not directly impact upon marital equality. The distribution of decision-making types (wife-dominant, autonomic, syncretic, husband-dominant) does not vary significantly according to social context. It was suggested that while structural inequality between the sexes has a direct impact on marital equality in cross-cultural comparisons (Rodman, 1967), the U.S. is fairly egalitarian overall and that individual resources are a more significant influence on marital power here. Although American males enjoy structural advantages which allow them to gain resources disproportionately which then provide a power base, the state differences on structural inequality as measured by the SWX were not strong enough to have a

significant direct effect.

The bivariate analysis of the relationship between marital equality and violence indicated that wife-beating is associated with inequality. Violence against wives is much higher in wife-dominated and husband-dominated families than in families where decisions are made in a fairly egalitarian way.

The contextual analysis revealed an important relationship between macro level and micro level inequality and violence against wives. The basic pattern that egalitarian marriages are generally less violent than ones in which one spouse dominates persists across categories of women's status. However, the data showed that the degree to which the balance of power is associated with violence is affected by the context of sexual equality. It was found that wives who dominate marital decisions in the lower status states and wives whose husbands dominate in the higher status states are most likely to be victims of severe physical assaults by their husbands.

It was suggested that in lower status states, wife-dominance, contrasting with the milieu of inequality, is threatening to husbands. For many of them, violence may then be the ultimate symbol of masculinity within the family. It may also be a response to frustration and/or a tactic to regain control. In higher status states, the domination by husbands contrasts with the context of an emerging sexual equality. There, wives may see husbands'

control as inequitable. The use of more physical force may therefore be required by husbands to maintain control.

## CHAPTER VIII

### A MULTI-LEVEL ANALYSIS OF THE STATUS OF WOMEN AND WIFE-BEATING: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

The relationship between the status of women in society and violence against wives has been the subject of some controversy in the past decade. The major purpose of this research has been to clarify some of the concepts which have been at issue and to provide empirical evidence to inform the debate. Providing ultimate answers which would resolve such a controversy is a task greater than any one research project can encompass. However, it is hoped that this study is a step toward that end.

This study is composed of three major parts. The first is a systems theoretical analysis of the status of women based on historical and cross-cultural evidence. This analysis provides a foundation for a general understanding of sexual stratification and women's current status. The second part deals specifically with the concept of the status of women, the development of an index of women's status, and the ranking of U.S. states according to that index. The third is the empirical analysis in which the impact of the status of women on marital equality and violence against wives is investigated. The work in each of

these three parts is reviewed in the following sections.

Meta-Power and Sexual Inequality:  
A Theoretical Analysis

The model of sexual stratification formulated in this section of the study is based on modern systems theory and the concept of meta-power. A central contention of this approach is that examining power and inequality on the interpersonal level captures only part of the power activities ongoing in society. A transcending part of greater historical importance involves attempts to structure and restructure the social context within which interpersonal relations occur. Power oriented toward the shaping of the structure of social relationships, that is the context, is "meta-power" or "relational control" (Baumgartner, Buckley, and Burns, 1975).

Meta-power is based on social and material resources. In general, those who have some control over such resources can exercise meta-power to structure the system to their own advantage, thereby gaining further resources. Through such a positive feedback process, a highly stratified system can emerge out of one in which initial power and resource differences were minimal.

The model developed here applies these principles in examining the position of women in society. It attempts to specify the structuring factors, particularly the exercise of meta-power by men, which have resulted in the current



system of sexual stratification. Historical and anthropological research and theory are drawn upon for evidence. Changes in womens' status resulting from the transition of human society from hunting and gathering to agricultural to industrial are examined.

The purpose of this theoretical analysis is to provide a fuller understanding of the social structural factors which have molded the current status of women. The status of women is, in large part, the result of the historical exercise of meta-power and continues to be shaped by human action. This conception of the status of women underlies the approach taken in other sections of the research where the concept is operationalized and related to other variables.

The Status of Women:  
Definition, Measurement, and State Rankings

The concept "status of women" is not as simple or clear-cut as the popular usage of the term implies. What is regarded as "high" status has changed historically and is currently viewed differently by different groups. For the purposes of this study, the status of women is defined as the position of women as a group relative to men as a group in the different spheres of society (Hommes, 1978).

The development of a measure of womens' status is a central focus of this second portion of the study. The gathering of data on womens' status from diverse sources

(U.S. Census Bureau, statistical almanacs, national surveys, etc.) and the construction of the Status of Women Index (SWX) have a two fold purpose. The first is the formulation of a social indicator of womens' status. Despite the florescence of social indicators in the past decade, indicators of social equality, particularly for the sexes, have been largely cverlocked. The SWX is designed to begin to fill this gap. Currently, it provides a descriptive picture of womens' relative status in American states. As new data become available, it can be recalculated and can serve as an indicator of change (or lack thereof) in the position of women in the U.S. The second pupose of developing the SWX is to operationalize a ccncept of theoretical impcrtance in feminist sociological research in general and this study in particular.

The SWX, in its final form, is made up of four dimensions: economic status, educational status, political status, and legal status. Examples of specific items within these dimensicns are %cf women in the labor force; % female receiving post-secondary education; and % female in state senate. The legal dimension is a measure of sex-biased state laws. The dimension indicators were standardized and combined into a total SWX score.

Another important aspect of this part of the study is the ranking of the states cn the specific items, the dimension indicators, and the total index. Interesting patterns for specific states can be traced by examining

rankings on particular items. The rankings on the total index, in contrast, are a useful summary of womens' status in the U.S. This overall ranking on the SWX placed Alaska at the top and Louisiana at the bottom regarding sexual equality.

Sexual Equality, Marital Equality, and Wife-Beating:  
The Multi-Level Analysis

The third part of the study takes up the question of how structured sexual inequality affects the level of violence against wives. A multi-level structural approach is used in attempting to answer this question.

The additional data for this part of the research come from the Violence in American Families Survey in which a nationally representative sample of 2143 husbands and wives were interviewed with regard to their family life in general and domestic violence in particular.

The marital equality variable is based on a modified Blood-Wolfe decision power scale. The violence rates are based on responses to the Conflict Tactics Scale. Violence rates for particular states are treated with caution because of the small number of cases in many states. Greater confidence can be placed in rates reported for groups of states at certain status levels, as the larger combined Ns serve to improve reliability.

### Aggregate-Level Analysis

The review of the literature on the central question of the research suggests a number of possible interrelationships between the aggregate-level variables. The issue of whether increased sexual equality will result in a reduced or an increased level of wife-beating has been discussed. The possibility that the relationship would not fit a linear pattern was also considered. An exploratory mode of data analysis was used. The exploratory approach, with its emphasis on visual displays of data, was considered best suited for this research because it is open to a range of alternative explanations and because the nature of the data (specifically the small N at the aggregate level) limits the usefulness of several more rigorous statistical techniques.

The aggregate level analysis between women's status and spousal violence indicated that there is a curvilinear relationship between these two variables. Wives are most likely to be physically assaulted by their husbands in states where the status of women is lowest. Wife-beating then decreases as status increases, but only to a point. Where the status of women is highest, the level of violence against wives is also quite high.

There are a number of possible explanations for these results. They may be a reflection of the need to use greater physical force to maintain an inequitable status quo in the low status states. Violence may be one means of

keeping women "in their place". In addition, the more limited economic and educational options outside the home in these states may serve to keep women in abusive marriages.

In contrast, the finding of high violence in high status states is likely to be the result of other factors. Rapid social change and the breakdown of institutionalized roles are generally accompanied by increased conflict. It is likely that change toward sexual equality is also related to conflict. In this case the conflict may be on the societal level, as in the struggle over the Equal Rights Amendment. Or, it may be on the interpersonal level. As traditional husband-wife roles breakdown, marital conflict is likely to increase for a time until new patterns become established. That conflict apparently erupts into violence for many couples.

Another variable which helps shed light on the different nature of violence against wives in the high and low status states is violence against husbands. In states where women's status is relatively low, wives are twice as likely as husbands to be victims of severe violence. In high status states, in contrast, the rates of violence by husbands and wives are comparable. Women are achieving equality in violence along with equality in the economic, educational, political, and legal arenas. It appears that in contexts of relative equality, wives do not suffer violence by their husbands passively. The decline of sexual inequality in all spheres seems to be related to a reduction

of sex differences in various behaviors including violence. Where women's status is higher and their options greater, women may feel less inhibited about the use of physical aggression and may feel they have less to lose by striking out against their husbands.

The final phase of the aggregate level analysis involved controlling the status of women-wife abuse relationship for a number of state variables which were regarded as potentially confounding. State educational level, degree of urbanization, and "violent climate" proved to have no significant impact on the original relationship. State per capita income turned out to be the only salient control variable, explaining much of the linear covariance between women's status and wife abuse. However, because the status-violence relationship is curvilinear, further analysis was conducted. Within categories of high, medium, and low state per capita income, the curvilinear relationship holds although it is less pronounced. The status of women does have an impact separate from income effects.

#### Contextual Analysis

Through contextual analysis the investigation shifted from the macro level to a consideration of multi-level effects. The focus turns to the interaction of the structural and interpersonal factors. Specifically, the interrelationship between the status of women, denoting

structured sexual inequality, marital inequality, as indicated by the balance of power between spouses on decision-making, and violence against wives was investigated.

Preliminary bivariate analysis indicated that structured sexual inequality, at least to the degree that it varies from state to state, does not directly impact upon marital equality. The distribution of decision-making types (wife-dominant, autonomic, syncretic, husband-dominant) does not vary significantly according to social context. It was suggested that while structural inequality between the sexes has a direct impact on marital equality in cross-cultural comparisons (Rodman, 1967), the U.S. is fairly egalitarian overall and that individual resources are a more significant influence on marital power here. Although American males enjoy structural advantages which allow them to gain resources disproportionately which then provide a power base, the state differences on structural inequality as measured by the SWX were not strong enough to have a significant direct effect.

The bivariate analysis of the relationship between marital equality and violence indicated that wife-beating is associated with inequality. Violence against wives is much higher in wife-dominated and husband-dominated families than in families where decisions are made in a fairly egalitarian way.

The contextual analysis revealed an important interaction between macro level and micro level inequality. The basic pattern that egalitarian marriages are generally less violent than ones in which one spouse dominates persists across categories of women's status. However, the data showed that the context of sexual equality affects the degree to which the balance of power within families is associated with violence. It was found that wives who dominate marital decisions in the lower status states and wives whose husbands dominate in the higher status states are most likely to be victims of severe physical assaults by their husbands.

It was suggested that in lower status states, wife-dominance, contrasting with the milieu of male superiority, may be threatening to husbands. For many of them, violence may then be the ultimate symbol of masculinity within the family. It may also be a response to frustration or an ultimate resource upon which to draw to attempt to gain or regain control. In higher status states, the domination by husbands contrasts with the context of an emerging sexual equality. There, wives may see husbands' control as illegitimate. The use of more physical force may therefore be required by husbands to maintain control.



### Limitations of the Study

The major limitation of this study is not one that brings the specific findings into question. Rather, the problem is one of an inherent inconsistency between a systems theoretical perspective and the type of structural analysis that is necessitated by the currently available data. The dynamic nature of the changing status of women and its interrelationship with marital equality and wife-beating cannot be fully captured given data collected at only one point in time.

In this study, structured sexual inequality is viewed as a contextual variable which affects the amount of violence against wives directly and through interaction with forms of inequality within particular marriages. The focus is on the effect of macro-level structure on micro-level relations. The emphasis on this effect is not meant to imply that micro-processes do not have a reciprocal effect on macro-structures. That there is a dialectic between these levels is a basic premise of systems analysis. Unfortunately, this study could not include an examination of the feedback processes of social structure and social action as they affect and continually change one another. The possibility of extending this research to investigate this interaction is an exciting prospect. However, it is dependent on the availability of national longitudinal data on marital violence, which is currently unavailable.

The other limitations of this research which must be kept in mind are of a more technical nature. As was discussed in previous chapters, the reliability of individual state violence rates is not certain because of the small number of subjects in some states. Moreover, the fact that the random sample was not stratified by state also brings the reliability of data about particular, individual states into question. In contrast, violence rates for groups of states, for example the highest quintile, can be accepted with greater assurance and were used for all analyses.

Another problem which was unavoidable in the aggregate level analysis was the small N of thirty states. Small Ns are common in aggregate research, as each aggregate case represents a large group of individuals. Nevertheless, the small N does set limits on the complexity of statistical techniques that are applicable. In particular, determining the statistical significance of the results is difficult.

While these problems were not insurmountable, they are important enough that the results of the empirical research must be considered tentative and exploratory. Real confidence in the conclusions of the study can only come when additional studies confirm the present findings.

### Conclusions

#### The Status of Women and Violence Against Wives

The central theme of this research is that the status of women is related to the level of violence against wives. However, that relationship is much more complex than the theoretical discussions of it to date have lead us to believe.

On the one hand are the authors and social scientists who have argued that a reduction of sexual inequality will result in a reduction of wife-beating (Dobash and Dobash, 1980; Martin, 1976; Schuyler, 1976). On the other are those who contend that violence against wives will increase as the general status of women improves as men attempt to retain control (Whitehurst, 1974; Marsden, 1978).

The problem common to both of these formulations is oversimplification. For one thing, the impact of increased equality between the sexes on marital violence is not of the magnitude implied by those who have debated this issue. As the research on family violence mounts, it becomes increasingly clear that there is no single cause of such abuse. A complicated web of factors are at work. Some of these factors are embedded in the social structure and culture; others grow out of socialization experiences or day-to-day stresses (Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz, 1980).

While the status of women is an important consideration, changing that status alone will not eradicate wife-beating. The uni-causal assumptions which underlie the

discussions of women's status and violence in the literature are unfounded and have resulted in simplistic causal claims.

Another oversimplification in discussions to date is the assumption of a linear relationship between sexual equality and wife-beating. Whether they argue that the relationship is positive or negative, commentators generally regard it as linear.

In a brief commentary, Steinmetz and Straus (1974) do consider the possibility that the short-run and long-run effects of increasing equality may not be identical. They suggest that the transition period in which patriarchal and egalitarian structures and norms clash may be characterized by increased marital conflict and violence. This particular discussion of theirs (they do revert to linear explanations in some other works) comes closest to the empirical evidence uncovered in this research.

The finding of a curvilinear relationship between the status of women and wife-beating must be regarded as evidence of the short-run effects of increasing equality. Those states where the status of women is relatively high can by no means be seen as egalitarian. They are just somewhat closer to sexual equality than are the other states. The investigation of the long-run consequences of sexual equality must await future generations.

The curvilinear relationship which was discovered cannot be as simply explained as a linear relation might have been. It is possible that greater physical force is

required to keep women "in their place" in low status states and that rapid social change in sex roles results in greater domestic conflict and violence in high status states. However, the data are not available in this research to confirm these explanations of the empirical results. That confirmation will have to come through additional research.

#### Multi-Level Analysis

A second central theme of this study is that interpersonal interaction does not occur in a social vacuum. The structural context within which these interactions occur is regarded as an important factor to take into account.

The amplification of structured sexual inequality is analyzed through a systems theoretical framework in Chapter II. The current status of women is shown to be molded by the exercise of meta-power by men over the centuries. The impact of this structured inequality between men and women on interpersonal interaction is examined empirically in Chapter VII. It was found that the general pattern that marital inequality in decision-making is related to higher rates of violence against wives holds across contexts of women's status in the U.S. However, the data show that the degree to which the balance of power is associated with violence is affected by the context of sexual inequality.

The multi-level analysis provides evidence that the social context within which interpersonal relations occur is important to take into consideration. Previous studies

which have examined the link between marital power and violence provided valuable information on the micro-level relationship. This study examines that relationship as it is affected by the context of sexual inequality, and in doing so provides a fuller understanding.

While this study has focused on the effect of macro-structures on interpersonal relations, a systems perspective holds that this is only half of the interaction between levels. Certainly, the changing patterns within marriages serve to mold the status of women at the societal level. The impact of social action at the micro-level on macro-structures is an important issue to take up in future research.

#### Implications of the Study

It would have been quite easy to outline the social policy implications of this study had the findings confirmed the uni-causal, linear assumptions of those who have discussed the connection between the status of women and wife-beating over the last decade. A significant negative correlation between the two variables could have been translated into the simple recommendation that we improve the economic, educational, political, and legal status of women and thereby directly reduce the amount of wife abuse.

Unfortunately, social reality is not so clear cut. Wife-beating is the result of a complex of factors, and is affected by the status of women in a complex way.

Nevertheless, the findings of this research do provide important information which can inform policy discussions.

This study has several implications. First, it provides evidence that maintaining a system of inequality between the sexes is not related to low levels of wife abuse, as was suggested by the New Hampshire Commission on the Status of Women under Governor Meldrim Thompson (Portsmouth Herald, September 13, 1977). Low status for women is accompanied by high levels of violence against wives.

In low status states where options for women outside of marriage are limited, there is the most serious need for alternatives to violent marriages. The need for battered wives shelters and employment and educational programs for women is most acute in the states where the status of women is lowest. According to the rankings on the Status of Women Index, these states are: Mississippi, Virginia, New Mexico, Illinois, South Carolina, Oklahoma, West Virginia, Utah, Alabama, and Louisiana. While shelters and programs in other states are certainly important, the results of this research suggest that they would have their greatest impact in those states where the status of women is currently lowest.

The finding of high rates of marital violence in states where women's status is relatively high has other implications. It suggests that more must be done to help couples cope with the social changes taking place. As

traditional husband-wife roles breakdown for a variety of reasons including the feminist movement and economic necessity, adjustment to new marital patterns will be difficult. For previous generations of husbands and wives, the patterns of decision-making and the division of labor were a given. As women gain greater social equality, these patterns are no longer taken for granted. However, decisions still need to be made and work still needs to be done. Without some guidelines these can easily become issues of conflict, and for many couples violence.

The implication is that couples are required to do more negotiating over everyday affairs when women have relative equality. There is a need for family life education courses to deal more directly with communication skills and conflict management techniques. There is an urgent need for these courses to include more young men, both at the high school and college levels. Moreover, there is a need for seminars and workshops for couples already married. These couples could apply the skills they learn immediately, and perhaps reduce the level of violence in their own relationships.

The finding that violence by wives increases with the status of women is cause for some concern. This result is further evidence that sex differences in various behaviors do diminish as societal sexual inequality declines. While the possibility that men are becoming more nurturant and women less dependent is encouraging, convergence between the sexes on other behaviors such as physical violence is not.



The implication is that both husbands and wives are capable of violence and need help in conflict management to avoid resorting to violence as the status of women improves and marital roles change.

A final implication is that factors which promote violence in our society (such as violence in the media and the proliferation of hand guns) must be dealt with directly. Whether the status of women is high or low, physical violence is a part of our culture. When husbands feel the need to control their wives or when marital conflicts become unmanageable, this part of our culture becomes part of family life as well.

#### Significance of the Study

This study is of significance on a number of levels. The theoretical analysis of sexual stratification is valuable for two reasons. The general meta-power model of stratification developed by Baumgartner et al. does not include sexual stratification in its purview. This elaboration of their formulation to include sexual inequality illustrates the the fruitfulness and breadth of that theoretical model for explaining the underlying forces of a range of social inequalities.

In addition, this application of systems theory and the concept of meta-power to the study of sexual inequality is a contribution to feminist theory on this issue. To date, much evidence of sexual inequality has been accumulated, but

theoretical models which synthesize that evidence have been quite limited.

This research also makes a contribution to the literature on the current status of women in the United States. The development of the Status of Women Index as a social indicator is a first step toward a more adequate monitoring of change or absence of change in that status. Moreover, the SWX will be a valuable tool in other social science research as the impact of women's status on a series of other variables (for example rape, women's mental and physical health, female crime rates) can now be investigated more readily.

Finally, the results of the empirical research in the third major part of the study are of importance. The study provides new insights into factors which affect the level of wife abuse in this country. The social status of women is related to the degree of violence within the family.

This study shows that the intimate interactions that take place in the privacy of the home are influenced by social structural factors which, at first glance, seem quite far removed from individual families. The analysis which provides evidence to this effect is a valuable example of a multi-level approach applied to the study of the family. Through such research the gap between macro and microsociological investigations of families can begin to be bridged and a fuller understanding of the structural and interpersonal factors can emerge.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

MARITAL EQUALITY INDEX

Every family has decisions to make -- such as where to live, whether or not to buy a car, and so on. We would like to find out how you and your (wife/partner) make some of these kinds of decisions.

HAND RESPONDENT CARD C

65. Let's start with buying a car. Who do you think should have the final say on buying a car? → Q. 65 Q. 66 Q. 67

	RESPONDENT OPINION						WIFE/PARTNER OPINION						WHO HAS FINAL SAY				
	WIFE ONLY	WIFE MORE	HUSBAND & WIFE SAME	HUSBAND MORE	HUSBAND ONLY	DON'T KNOW	WIFE ONLY	WIFE MORE	HUSBAND & WIFE SAME	HUSBAND MORE	HUSBAND ONLY	DON'T KNOW	WIFE ONLY	WIFE MORE	HUSBAND & WIFE SAME	HUSBAND MORE	HUSBAND ONLY
1. Buying a car	1	2	3	4	5	X	1	2	3	4	5	X	1	2	3	4	5
2. Having children	1	2	3	4	5	X	1	2	3	4	5	X	1	2	3	4	5
3. What house or apartment to take	1	2	3	4	5	X	1	2	3	4	5	X	1	2	3	4	5
4. What job you should take	1	2	3	4	5	X	1	2	3	4	5	X	1	2	3	4	5
5. Whether your wife should go to work or quit work	1	2	3	4	5	X	1	2	3	4	5	X	1	2	3	4	5
6. How much money to spend on food per week	1	2	3	4	5	X	1	2	3	4	5	X	1	2	3	4	5

66. How about your (wife/partner)? Who does she think should have the final say on buying a car? ↑

67. Now, in your family, who actually does have the final say? ↑

APPENDIX B

CONFLICT TACTICS SCALE

HAND RESPONDENT CARD A

78. No matter how well a couple gets along, there are times when they disagree on major decisions, get annoyed about something the other person does, or just have spats or fights because they're in a bad mood or tired or for some other reason. They also use many different ways of trying to settle their differences. I'm going to read a list of some things that you and your (wife/partner) might have done when you had a dispute, and would first like you to tell me for each one how often you did it in the past year.

	Q. 78								Q. 79								Q. 80			
	RESPONDENT-IN PAST YEAR								WIFE/PARTNER-IN PAST YEAR								EVER HAPPENED			
	NEVER	ONCE	TWICE	3-5 TIMES	6-10 TIMES	11-20 TIMES	MORE THAN 20 TIMES	DON'T KNOW	NEVER	ONCE	TWICE	3-5 TIMES	6-10 TIMES	11-20 TIMES	MORE THAN 20 TIMES	DON'T KNOW	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW	
a. Discussed the issue calmly	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X	555-57
b. Got information to back up (your/her) side of things	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X	558-60
c. Brought in or tried to bring in someone to help settle things	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X	561-63
d. Insulted or swore at the other one	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X	564-58
e. Sulked and/or refused to talk about it	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X	567-69
f. Stomped out of the room or house (or yard)	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X	570-72
g. Cried	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X	573-75
h. Did or said something to spite the other one	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X	576-78
i. Threatened to hit or throw something at the other one	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X	605-07
j. Threw or smashed or hit or kicked something	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X	608-10
k. Threw something at the other one	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X	611-13
l. Pushed, grabbed, or shoved the other one	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X	614-16
m. Slapped the other one	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X	617-19
n. Kicked, bit, or hit with a fist	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X	620-22
o. Hit or tried to hit with something	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X	623-25
p. Beat up the other one	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X	626-28
q. Threatened with a knife or gun	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X	629-31
r. Used a knife or gun	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X	632-34
s. Other (PROBE): _____	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X	635-37

79. And what about your (wife/partner)? Tell me how often she (ITEM) in the past year.

FOR EACH ITEM CIRCLED EITHER "NEVER" OR "DON'T KNOW" FOR BOTH RESPONDENT AND PARTNER, ASK:

80. Did you or your (wife/partner) ever (ITEM)?

IF ANY BRACKETED ITEMS HAPPENED IN PAST YEAR, GO TO NEXT PAGE. IF NO BRACKETED ITEMS IN PAST YEAR, SKIP TO Q. 82.

## APPENDIX C

ITEMS COMPRISING THE STATUS OF WOMEN INDEX  
AND STATE CONTROL VARIABLESStatus of Women Index

## Economic Dimension

- EC1, % Female, age 17+ Who Worked, 1976  
 EC2, % Female of Professional, Technical  
 and Kindred Workers, 1976  
 EC3, % Female of Managerial and Administrative  
 (Non-Farm) Workers, 1976  
 EC4, % Unemployed in Male Civilian Labor Force, 1976/  
 % Unemployed in Female Civilian Labor Force, 1976  
 EC5, Median Income for Female Full-Time Workers, 1976/  
 Median Income for Male Full-Time Workers, 1976

## Educational Dimension

- ED1, % of Females, Age 25+, Who are High School Graduates, 1970/  
 % of Males, Age 25+, Who are High School Graduates, 1970  
 ED2, # of Females Enrolled in Post-Secondary School, 1975/  
 # of Males Enrolled in Post-Secondary School, 1975  
 ED3, % Female of High School Interscholastic Athletes, 1978  
 ED4, % Female of High School Administrators, 1978

## Political Dimension

- POL1, # of Females in U.S. Congress, 1970-1979/  
 Total # of Members  
 POL2, # of Females in State Senate, 1970-1979/  
 Total # of Members  
 POL3, # of Female Members in State House, 1970-1979/  
 Total # of Members  
 POL4, # of Female Appellate and Major Trial Court Judges, 1977/  
 Total # of these Judges, 1977

## Legal Dimension

All items listed in Chapter V.

State Control Variables

State Educational Level, % of population, age 25+,  
Who are High School Graduates, 1970

Urbanization, % of Population Living in  
Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas, 1976

Violent Crime, Violent Crimes per 100,000  
Population, 1976

State Per Capita Income, Median Per Capita Income, 1976

## APPENDIX D

SOURCES OF DATA FOR THE STATUS OF WOMEN INDEX  
AND STATE CONTROL VARIABLES

Items from Source are listed in parentheses.

Acker, Joan

1980 "Women and stratification: a review of the recent literature." Contemporary Sociology 9:25-34.

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1975 Women's Legal Rights. Los Angeles:  
Wollenstonecraft, Inc. (L1 - L14)

Council of State Governments

1975 Book of the States. Lexington, Ky.: The Council of  
State Governments. (FC11 - POL4)

Johnson, Marilyn and Kathy Stanwick 1978 Profile of Women  
Holding Office. New Brunswick, N.J.: Eagleton  
Institute of Politics. (POL1 - POL4)

Project on Equal Education Rights

1979 "Back to School Line-up: Where Girls and Women  
Stand in Education Today". Washington,  
D.C.: National Organization for Women. (Ed3 -ED4)

U.S. Bureau of the Census

1977 Statistical Abstract of the U.S. Washington, D.C.  
(ED1 - ED2)

U.S. Department of Labor

1978 Survey of Income and Education, Spring, 1976.  
Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Labor Statistics,  
Report 536. (EC1 - EC5)

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