

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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There has been much interest generated recently regarding the nature and cause of dating violence. The purpose of this study was to determine what factors affected individuals' attitudes toward dating violence. A sample of 403 college volunteers completed questionnaires which were designed to assess their attitudes toward abuse as it occurred in three separate vignettes depicting situations of emotional dependency, stress, and severity of abuse. Two variables, sex of the initiator and intensity of the situation, were manipulated in each vignette to determine the extent of their influence on attitudes toward the abuse. The research design required that four forms of the survey be developed for each vignette to reflect all possible combinations of the intensity (high and low) and sex of initiator (male and female) variables. The vignettes were counterbalanced to prevent ordering effects and the surveys

were randomly distributed while controlling for sex of the respondent to ensure that equal numbers of males and equal numbers of females received each form of the survey.

Separate 2 (sex of initiator) x 2 (intensity) x 2 (sex of the respondent) MANOVA's were conducted for each of the three precipitating circumstances with "necessary" and "normal" responses as dependent variables and sex of initiator, intensity, and sex of respondent as independent variables. Then three separate ANOVA's were conducted with the sum of the previous two responses as a "total" acceptance score or dependent variable and the same independent variables.

Results indicate that it is more acceptable for females to initiate abuse than for males to do so. With respect to intensity, it was found that respondents are more lenient in their assessment of abuse which occurs in high-intensity stress situations and low-intensity severity of abuse situations. No significant results were reported for emotional dependency. In terms of sex of the respondent, it was found that male respondents were more accepting of abuse in the severity situation than were females.

Factors Affecting Attitudes
Toward Premarital Violence

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Beth C. Emery

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Assistant Professor of Human Development and Family Studies
in charge of major

Redacted for Privacy

Head of department of Human Development and Family Studies

Redacted for Privacy

Dean of Graduate School

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Factors Affecting Attitudes Toward Premarital Violence

I. INTRODUCTION

Relationship violence has become a popular topic in both research and the media. Perhaps the general public is most aware of child and spouse abuse, but these are not the only kinds of violence occurring between individuals in intimate relationships. For this reason the term "relationship violence" is used in this research because it denotes not only marital and child abuse but premarital violence as well. Courtship violence is a relatively new area of concern for those involved in the study of families and relationships. One of the ways to further understand this phenomenon is to examine the perceptions we hold regarding the nature of close relationships. In doing so our understanding of dating, marital and familial relationships, especially where violence is a factor, will increase.

According to family studies researchers, marriage and the family constitute those relationships in our society in which one receives affection, economic and emotional support, and protection (Nye, 1974). In marriages, husbands and wives provide each other with love, companionship, and emotional support (Nye, 1974). Families nurture their young and provide for children's physical needs and protection. At the same time, children are socialized in the ways of

their society and culture with respect to family and intimate relationships (Belsky, Lerner & Spanier, 1984). In addition to the functions of marriage and family, we also have certain opinions about the dating relationship and the function it serves for society and individuals. Eshleman (1985), for example, suggests that dating exists for a variety of reasons which range from a form of recreation and socialization (i.e., learning about persons of the opposite sex and developing appropriate techniques of interaction) to a form of courtship.

From these descriptions, it becomes apparent that there are some basic similarities between the marital and the dating relationships. Both provide individuals with the opportunity to share experiences and intimacy and to develop close relationships with a person of the opposite sex. Unfortunately, however, we have come to realize that individuals do not always receive the kinds of support, the nurturance and the protection that they may need or expect in these relationships. Often times, family members abuse and neglect one another (Straus, Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980) and dating partners frequently use physical violence in their premarital relationships (Cate, Henton, Koval, Christopher & Lloyd 1982; Lane & Gwartney-Gibbs, 1985; Makepeace, 1981; Seigelman, Berry & Wiles, 1984).

In the face of such a basic contradiction to our perceptions of the family and dating relationships, several questions come to mind. First, what kinds of abusive

behaviors are occurring in these intimate relationships, and then, perhaps more importantly, why is this violence occurring in the first place? The latter question is essential to our understanding of relationship violence. It is, however, particularly difficult to determine "why" abuse occurs due to the complex nature of relationship violence. While it is known that there are factors which are associated with the use of abuse, there also seem to be certain circumstances or situations which legitimize its use as well.

It is apparent from the abuse literature that "violence" is a concept which is defined differently depending on the relationship, the circumstances of the precipitating events, and the types of behaviors that occur. The definition of abuse must be clarified before continuing a study of premarital violence. For the purposes of this research, "violence" and "abuse" will be used to denote only physical acts of violence. This is in accordance with Gelles and Straus's (1979) definition of violence as "an act carried out having the intention of physically hurting another person" (pg. 554). These behaviors may range from the less extreme acts of pushing and shoving to the act of murder, but do not include verbal and/or psychological abuse.

There is much literature detailing the variety of factors which have been found to be associated with relationship violence. Emotional dependency, stress, the

severity of the abuse, sex of the initiator of the abuse, comparison level for alternatives, the use of drugs and/or alcohol, level of self concept, and the commitment level of the relationship are but a few of these factors. There seems, however, to be a noticable absence of research and information regarding a systematic examination of individuals' attitudes toward the use of violence.

Attitudes are an important source of information regarding certain types of human behavior. In fact, some social psychologists state that behavior is shaped by attitudes (Oppenheim, 1968). Therefore, determining individuals' attitudes as affected by various relationship conditions would add significantly to our understanding of violence and its use.

With the complexities of relationship violence in mind, the results of a study on attitudes toward premarital violence would be strengthened by a design which allowed specific factors to be examined within various precipitating circumstances. A "precipitating circumstance" refers to the conditions or setting in which abuse occurs. Emotional dependency, stress and severity of the abuse are the three precipitating circumstances which have been selected to be developed into the vignettes or scenerios in which the dating violence occurs. Vignettes in this case are short descriptions of relationship events which allow the researcher to manipulate factors thought to be influential in determining attitudes toward premarital violence. Based

on a review of the literature, the factors which were selected to be manipulated or varied within each of the precipitating circumstances or vignettes include sex of the initiator of the abuse, intensity level of the precipitating circumstance and sex of the respondent. Such a design should yield significant results regarding attitudes toward premarital violence. The implications would be numerous with respect to the effects which attitudes have on behavior, while the application of such information would be particularly important for educators and counselors.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

With the increased attention focused on the issue of relationship violence has come an increase in the various types of abusive relationships being reported. There is evidence that child and marital abuse, sibling violence, elder abuse and premarital violence all occur on a regular basis in our society (Gelles, Straus, & Steinmetz, 1980; Makepeace, 1981). These relationships are generally considered "intimate" relationships in which love, support, and protection are usually taken for granted. This does not seem to be the case with many individuals, however, who instead experience physical, emotional, psychological and/or verbal abuse. When confronted with this "myth" of the American family as a nonviolent unit, individuals and researchers alike seek answers and solutions on a variety of levels. Personality characteristics, relationship issues, and cultural and societal factors and influences have all been studied in conjunction with relationship violence.

Although there are obviously many ways to approach the complex issue of why violence occurs in families and between dating partners, it may be useful to start at the societal level with an historical perspective of relationship violence. Steinmetz (1978) recounts a 1646 law from Colonial Massachusetts which helped parents to control

their rebellious children. She describes the law as such:

"...that unless the parents have been very unchristianly negligent in the education of such children or so provoked them by extreme and cruel correction, any child over 16 years of age and of sufficient understanding who cursed, smited, and would not obey his natural mother or father would be put to death."
(pg. 1).

In 1874, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children was established in response to public reaction over the case of a nine-year-old child who was eventually taken away from her physically abusive parents through an appeal to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Steinmetz, 1978). While wife beating was also seen as a problem at this time, husband abuse did not go unnoticed either. Turn-of-the-century comic strips such as "Katzenjammer Kids" featured themes in which the husband was the target of both verbal and physical abuse from his wife. Steinmetz (1978) reasons that the popularity of these themes was due to the fact that they represented, in a humorous manner, common family situations.

In a comprehensive study, Straus et al. (1980) describe the "marriage license as a hitting license", giving numerous instances of situations where husbands abuse their wives based on the assumption that "a man's home is his castle". In other words, what a man does in his own home is his own business, an attitude which seems to be quite common in many

cultures. The former mistress of Aristotle Onassis describes him "...beating her until he was forced to quit from exhaustion. 'It is what every Greek husband does, it's good for the wife,' he told her." (Straus et al., 1980; pg.31).

In some cases, the couple does not even have to be married yet for abuse to occur. Straus et al. (1980) tell of an engaged couple in England who broke up on their wedding day because the groom punched his fiancée's mother. "If he'd hit me instead of my mother, I probably would have married him all the same...But I'm not having any man hitting my mum."(pg. 46).

Examples such as these provide us with evidence that family and probably even dating violence have existed since colonial days and before. More importantly, they clearly suggest that there are cultural norms which support the use of violence in the marital, parent-child, and the dating relationship. With this in mind, it seems that over the years, we have come to view abuse as a somewhat normal part of our lives. It is logical to assume, then, that these attitudes and norms must be important in determining why violence occurs in any intimate relationship.

In addition to historical accounts of relationship abuse and its prevalence, current research provides us with insight into the prevalence of abuse, particularly as it applies to the premarital relationship. An examination of the literature reveals that research in this area began to

emerge with Kempe, Silverman, Steele, Droegemueller, & Silver (1962) and their work on child abuse. This stimulated interest in and recognition of other types of family violence including spouse abuse (see: the Journal of Marriage and the Family, Vol. 33, November 1971, for an entire issue on "Violence in the Family"), sibling violence (Gulley, Dengerink, Pepping & Berstrom, 1981) and elder abuse (Block & Sinnot, 1980). As stated previously, family researchers have most recently begun to study the area of premarital violence. While it is comparatively new with respect to the overall study of relationship violence and abuse (i.e., spouse and child abuse), studies published within the last four years indicate that dating abuse occurs in significant enough numbers to warrant further investigation. Incidence rates among college students range from a low of 14% (Emery, Henton & Cate, note 1) to a high of approximately 53% (Seigelman et al., 1984). The most common rate is approximately 22%, having been reported by both Cate, Henton, Koval, Christopher & Lloyd (1982) and Makepeace (1981). In addition, a study of dating abuse among high school students reports that 12% of that sample had experienced some type of physical violence in their dating relationships (Henton, Cate, Koval, Lloyd & Christopher, 1983).

With few exceptions, these early studies have been exploratory in nature, describing characteristics of the individuals involved, the relationship, and the abuse

itself. For example, research has shown that those who experience an abusive dating relationship tend to have low self concepts (Bernard & Bernard, 1983), with the abusers reporting even lower scores on self concept than the victims (Emery, 1983). They also tend to have more positive attitudes toward dating and marital violence (Cate et al., 1982), and have been involved in more than one physically violent relationship (Emery, 1983). In addition, individuals who have been involved in an abusive dating relationship are also more likely to have witnessed their parents' direct violence toward one another or to have been abused as a child themselves (Bernard et al., 1983; Emery, 1983). This lends further support for the cycle of violence theory which purports that violence is transmitted from one generation to the next (Gelles & Straus, 1979).

In terms of the relationship, we know that violence tends to occur at more serious stages of the relationship rather than during casual dating (Cate et al., 1982; Laner & Thompson, 1982), and that in many cases the violence is not seen as a reason to break up (Cate et al., 1982; Makepeace, 1981). In fact, according to the Cate et al. (1982) study, over 75% of the college students indicated that after the abuse had occurred, their relationship either improved or stayed the same. Among a sample of high school students, 50% reported the abuse to have a similar impact on their relationships (Henton et al., 1983).

Characteristics and effects of the abuse itself have

also been issues of concern in the literature to date. As one might expect, the less severe types of abuse such as slapping, pushing and shoving, etc., are far more common than those which are more severe, such as beatings or the use of a gun or knife (Cate et al., 1983; Emery et al., note 1; Makepeace, 1981). In addition, the use of violence in these relationships tends to be mainly reciprocal (Cate et al., 1982; Henton et al., 1983). However, it has been found that males have a greater tendency to inflict more severe types of violence (Lane & Gwartney-Gibbs, 1985) with the rates for the use of severe violent acts being 2.5 times greater for males than females (Makepeace, 1983). This leads to speculation that the effects of the abuse may be more pervasive for females since they are the objects of more severe kinds of violent acts. A recent study which looked at the effects of abuse found that the more severe the physical violence, the greater the perceived psychological or emotional impact it had on the victim and the abuser (Emery et al., note 1). The fact that there seem to be lasting effects of premarital violence indicates that there is a need for further research in this area.

Importance of the Study of Premarital Violence

While the findings reviewed above are important to our basic understanding of premarital violence, they do not adequately explain the reasons why abuse occurs during the courtship process. Understanding the motivation for the use of violence is a critical issue at this point in the study

of premarital abuse, particularly when examining the nature of the dating relationship itself. If we accept the assertion of Eshleman (1985) and others who describe the dating relationship as a forum for socialization, a place where individuals learn to interact with others for whom they care, then the issue of premarital violence takes on profound and far-reaching implications. The effects of the abuse, we know, have definite psychological ramifications for both abusers and victims. If individuals begin to use violence with their dating partners, it may not be illogical to assume that they will continue to behave abusively in other close relationships, such as marital and/or parent-child relationships. Knowledge of the development of abusive behavioral patterns should be beneficial to those who study relationship development as well as being of interest to proponents of the cycle of violence theory.

In addition, the study of premarital violence may help us to further understand the complex nature of relationship violence itself. For example, it seems safe to assume that the use of violence is not a particularly positive type of behavior by any definition. However, it remains a prominent aspect of many relationships. Therefore, even though abuse is a negative concept, there must be a variety of reasons or factors that support its use. With respect to the importance of this issue, one would expect that these factors must be strongly entrenched in our cultural norms and attitudes in order to at least partially neutralize the

negativism of the issue. Once these factors have been identified, counselors, therapists and educators can begin to deal with the individual and societal processes that perpetuate the use of violence in all intimate relationships.

In an effort to delineate exactly what these factors are and how they legitimize the use of violence in relationships, it becomes necessary to address the attitudes that individuals and society maintain with regard to that violence. If we believe that attitudes influence behavior as some social psychologists purport (Oppenheim, 1966), then the study of these attitudes is imperative if we are to understand why abuse occurs within the courtship process.

As we know, previous studies have described the phenomenon of premarital violence and in some instances have attempted to explain what precipitates the use of violence in dating relationships. No study to date, however, has dealt with attitudes toward dating violence as a contributing factor to that abuse. It is the purpose of this study to determine what factors influence attitudes to make the use of violence, an admittedly negative concept, a legitimate and acceptable form of behavior in premarital relationships.

Utilizing a concept of relationship analysis developed by Kelley, Berscheid, Christensen, Harvey, Huston, Levinger, McClintock, Peplau and Peterson (1983), the present study will examine factors at the personal and relational levels

in order to determine their impact on the legitimization of abuse in dating relationships. This perspective points out that there are many interactions, or causal conditions, in close relationships which combine to explain specific regularities and differences about those relationships. In other words, these levels or conditions interact with one another to produce the unique characteristics of a relationship, and as such, none can be overlooked in an attempt to analyze behavioral aspects of relationships. The first of these conditions is classified as personal causes which are relatively enduring characteristics of individuals such as personality traits or abilities. The second condition, or relational causes, imply that there is a pattern of activity resulting from the interaction between two individuals. Finally, environmental causes are described as features of the social and physical environment within which the relationship takes place. These environmental factors, however, will not be examined in this research.

Using this organizational approach, then, those factors which will be examined at the personal level will include: (a) initiator of the abuse, (b) individual's stress level, and (c) individual's level of emotional dependence. The relational level will consist of: severity of the abuse. Stress, emotional dependency and severity of abuse will be referred to as precipitating circumstances in this study as they will provide the "condition" or the circumstances under

which the abusive behavior occurs. The initiator of abuse and the intensity of the precipitating circumstance (i.e., much stress or very little stress, very dependent on one's partner or independent, more severe or less severe types of violent behavior used) will be examined to determine the impact of each on the acceptance of abuse.

Conceptual Framework

As it has been stated previously, this is a study of premarital abusive behavior. Symbolic interactionists would suggest that the best way to understand this behavior--or any human behavior--is to first deal with the mentalistic meanings or "symbols" and values that occur in the minds of individuals (Burr, Leigh, Day, & Constantine, 1979). As such, the essence of this particular research question lies in the attitudes and statuses of individuals (i.e., abused and nonabused) as they relate to various levels of premarital violence. In order to assess attitudes, one must have an understanding of the mental processes by which individuals perceive themselves and others, by which they define certain situations and, hence, make decisions. While interactionists do not deal with all mentalistic variables, they do emphasize two processes: the definitional process, the meaning that something holds for an individual, and the valuing process (i.e., how salient something or some concept is to an individual).

Both processes are of importance to the research question at hand (i.e., the perpetuation of premarital

abuse). A symbolic interaction framework would suggest that the repetition of a particular behavior occurs because that act or behavior has both meaning and value for the individual or individuals involved. Therefore, the violence that occurs within the dating relationship holds some importance for individuals. The extent to which this meaning affects one's feelings and attitudes toward violence is a critical dimension to explore.

Of initial interest is the manner in which individuals come to define relationship violence. This is the basis upon which decisions and reactions regarding premarital violence are made. One of the basic assumptions of symbolic interaction is that what goes on in the mind is in large measure a function of what occurs in intimate relationships (i.e., primary groups or the family). In other words, just as a child may learn how to eat at the dinner table by observing other members of the family, he or she also learns how to interact with others in the same way. If members of the family are playful with one another, the child will learn to be playful and if the family is physically abusive with one another, then the child will most likely grow up to use abuse in his or her intimate relationships.

In addition to learning certain types of behavior in primary groups, individuals also receive sanctions regarding that behavior from their families and those who are close to them. Based on these sanctions, individuals evaluate their behavior and beliefs. This is primarily a redefining

process and serves to support or eliminate certain types of behavior. As in the case of abuse, individuals not only learn to use violence, but come to view it as a normal and acceptable type of behavior. This is part of the socialization process and one of the reasons why it is so difficult to break the cycle of violence.

In accordance with these concepts of definition and valuing, symbolic interactionists also discuss the impact of society on individuals. The social milieu in which people live determines, to a large extent, the type of people they become. The interactionist framework asserts that "societies precede individuals" (Burr et al., 1979), meaning essentially that societies are made up of cultures which are in turn made up of integrated sets of meanings and values. People are born into a structure or a culture which provides many rules about appropriate types of behavior and interaction. So, with respect to abuse, if it were not for some kind of acceptance or favorable attitude on the part of society toward abusive behavior, an interaction perspective would contend that relationship violence would not exist.

Interactionists go further to suggest that a certain harmony exists between man and society. Individuals learn a culture and become the society (Burr et al., 1979). They take on and maintain the values and customs of their society for a variety of reasons. There may be conflict between the individual and society over some particular issue or belief, but Burr et al. (1979) state that this is not a natural

condition. The views of man and society are, for the most part, very similar. Logically, then, this seems to support speculation that even though premarital violence is a negative concept, there are sanctions for its use in our society. Granted, there may not be an overt acceptance of premarital violence, but there is proof that some sanctions for abusive behavior do exist. Take, for example, statistics which show that criminal violence and abuse between family members occur more frequently in the U.S. than in any other industrialized nation (Star, 1980; Zinn & Eitzen, 1987). Based on such information, researchers describe our society as being highly tolerant of violence (Gelles & Straus, 1979; Star, 1980). If this is the case, then from an interaction standpoint, some degree of premarital violence would be regarded as normative.

Emotional Dependency. Research in the areas of both premarital and marital violence have shown that an individual's level of dependency on his or her partner and on the relationship itself is strongly associated with abusive interactions (Cate et al., 1982; Gelles, 1976). Many times individuals who are involved in violent relationships do not perceive that they have any alternatives. As a result they choose to stay in that relationship or become violent toward their partners for a variety of reasons. Individuals may be afraid of being alone; therefore, any relationship--even a violent one--is better than no relationship at all. Other dependency issues

related to the victim include financial dependence on the abuser and, emotional dependence (i.e., love and affection for a partner as well as dependency for one's feelings of self worth) (Gelles, 1976). In the case of the initiator of the abuse, jealousy and/or the fear of losing a partner may lead to attempts at controlling that partner's behavior through the use of physical force.

A symbolic interaction perspective would focus on the definitional and valuing processes which operate in precipitating circumstances such as emotional dependency. In doing so, two concepts become important in the interactionist's approach. First, it may be that there exists a predisposition for the use or acceptance of violent behavior on the part of one or both partners. This can be viewed as a result of the socialization process where individuals learn how to behave in certain relationships and situations. In addition, the interactionist may also see the use of violence to be a result of the societal attitudes and expectations which sanction that use of violence. Secondly, individuals' perceptions of themselves and their relationships are an integral factor involved in explaining the use and acceptance of abuse in dating relationships. If the victim or the abuser perceives himself or herself to be dependent upon the partner for whatever reason, that dependence may be adequate justification for the use of violence. Therefore, the use of physical force based on emotional dependence has both meaning and importance from

the interactionist point of view.

Level of Stress. The effect of stress on relationships has been an issue of concern for family violence researchers for some time (Carlson, 1984; Steinmetz & Straus, 1974; Straus et al., 1980). Recent research has found that stress is related to the use of violence in many different types of relationships. For example, the stress of unemployment or underemployment of males has been associated with child abuse (Parke & Collmer, 1975), the stress of pregnancy has been related to spouse abuse (Gelles, 1975), and the strain of financial problems has been associated with both child and spouse abuse (Straus et al., 1980).

In addition to family violence, it has been discovered that life events stress is also associated with abuse in the dating relationship. Makepeace (1983) studied the effects of a variety of stressors on college students and found that only undesirable, nonhealth related events could be directly associated with violence in the dating relationship. These include events such as financial or legal problems, academic or sports difficulties, the break-up of a friendship or romantic relationship, family health problems, divorce and the death of a relative or close friend (Makepeace, 1983). While these stress events differ somewhat from those associated with other types of relationship violence mentioned previously, so does the dating relationship differ from family relationships. Therefore, these undesirable, nonhealth related life event stressors are more salient to

this particular type of relationship than are problems with children, in-laws, and family finances.

From an interactionist perspective, the relationship between stress and dating violence is complex. Again, the definitional and valuing processes are important in examining this relationship. For the symbolic interactionist, it is essential to understand individuals' perceptions of their particular situations. Some people experience several stressful life events yet do not use violence in their relationships. Others may be abusive while reporting few stressful events in their lives. Perhaps, however, those who indicate experiencing these types of stressful events and who are abusive in their dating relationships view their situations differently. For example, certain events such as the break-up of a relationship or academic problems may affect individuals in different ways. Some may identify these as extremely stressful events while others may describe such situations in much less severe terms. It would be expected, however, that the more intense or severe the stress in terms of numbers or types of stressors that accumulate, the more likely a person would be to resort to violence. In accordance with the symbolic interaction framework, then, an individual's definition and perception of a particular situation dictate his or her behavior. If the circumstances are perceived to be stressful enough, then an individual may resort to violence as a means of coping.

In addition, it may seem to individuals who are experiencing high levels of stress that they have little control over their lives. This perception may lead some individuals to try to regain direction in their lives by controlling others who are close to them. This could lead to several types of behavior. From the symbolic interaction perspective, if abuse is used, then this behavior must have some value for the initiator or recipient of that abuse. As mentioned previously, individuals may be predisposed to use violence through experience with similar interactions in their families (i.e., the socialization process) and in conjunction with a certain level of societal acceptance of or sanctions for abusive behavior in intimate relationships. Taking an interactionist perspective, then, abuse serves an important purpose in the lives of certain individuals as a source of external control and release of frustration and tension precipitated by stress.

Severity of Abuse. It seems logical that the severity of the abuse would be an important factor in determining attitudes toward premarital violence. Studies on dating abuse have shown that the less severe forms of abuse such as slapping and hitting, and pushing and shoving, are more common than the more severe kinds of abuse such as beatings and the use of a knife or gun (Cate et al., 1983; Emery, 1983; Makepeace, 1981). The same trend has been found to be true for marital violence as well. Straus et al. (1980) found in their study of marital violence that one out of

four couples reported having pushed, shoved or grabbed his or her partner while almost 20% had slapped or thrown something at each other. At the other extreme, less than 4% of those couples interviewed had ever used a gun or knife on one another, while approximately 4.5% reported having been involved in beatings (Straus et al., 1980).

Given these kinds of incidence rates, then, it would seem reasonable to assume that people are more likely to have seen or heard about someone slapping or hitting their dating partner (or spouse) than they are to have seen or heard about someone beating or shooting their partner. This observation does not imply that the incidence rate alone accounts for individuals' tendency to be more accepting of the less severe types of abuse. Of equal importance is the nature of the abuse with regard to the negativism of the phenomenon. The less severe or less intense types of abuse are more acceptable due to the less severe impact or results of those behaviors. Using the symbolic interaction framework, the less severe types of dating violence would appear to be more acceptable because they are more commonly reported and result in less harmful consequences. Hence, the less severe the violence in a dating relationship, the more acceptable the situation or precipitating circumstance.

Initiator of Abuse. The issue of who starts the violence in a premarital relationship is important in determining attitudes toward that violence for two reasons. First, many studies of spouse abuse have attended to whether

the husband or the wife starts the violent interaction (Gelles, 1974; Straus et al., 1980) and have found that often it is reciprocal. Some studies of premarital abuse have described similar findings (Cate et al., 1982; Henton et al., 1983). What becomes interesting, then, is the rate and type of the violence used by men and women. As previously mentioned, Makepeace (1983) reported findings indicating that the males in his study of premarital abuse were much more likely to use violence than were the females. Similar findings emerge from the marital violence literature. It has been discovered that men are more abusive more often and tend to inflict more injuries than do women. Females, when they are abusive, seem to be resorting to violence as a form of self defense (Straus et al., 1980). If this is the case, then the use of a symbolic interaction perspective, along with attention to the negative aspect of the issue, could provide some insight into attitudes toward abuse. As mentioned previously, the infliction of abuse on and injury to a partner is not seen as a particularly positive act, but it may be viewed from a symbolic interaction perspective as a normative pattern of behavior under certain conditions. Further, since females tend to use less severe types of violence and are abusive less often, it is rationalized that females inflict less harm when they resort to the use of violence. Therefore, a symbolic interactionist perspective would maintain that in the case of abuse, female-initiated violence would be more

acceptable due to its nature and infrequency than male-initiated violence.

Sex of the Respondent. As mentioned previously, recent research has indicated that there are differences between males and females regarding the use of violence. Specifically, it was reported that in dating relationships males are abusive more frequently and use more severe types of violence than do females (Makepeace, 1983). In addition to the previous discussion, this research can also be applied to the issue of the possible differences between males and females and their attitudes toward dating violence.

With respect to this issue, research has also found that individuals who had been abusive previously were more accepting of violence in both dating and marital relationships (Cate et al., 1982). In other words, they seem to be able to rationalize the use of violence more easily than individuals who have not experienced violence. Take into account the research regarding differences in the sexes as it relates to the use of violence. When this is considered, plus the fact that human beings tend to try to rationalize their behavior, sex of the respondent becomes an important factor in explaining attitudes toward premarital violence. Considering the fact that more males reportedly use violence in intimate relationships, it would seem that males as a group would be more likely to rationalize the use of abuse under a variety of conditions and, hence, view

abuse in a more acceptable light.

In addition to types of behaviors and frequency, there also seem to be differences between males and females in their perceptions of abuse and its consequences. A recent study on premarital violence revealed that females reported having been the recipients of more mild, moderate and severe injuries than did males (Makepeace, 1986). In fact, the males did not perceive that their partners had sustained any injuries as a result of the abuse. Not only does this indicate that males and females differ in the amount and types of abuse used, but the discrepancies in their descriptions of the injuries sustained point out that they also differ in their perceptions of the results of that abuse. If this is indeed the case, then males do not perceive abuse to have the same serious consequences as do females. The abuse, then, would be more acceptable to males than to females based on their perceptions that the abuse did not result in injury.

These two concepts regarding males' more frequent use of violence as well as their perceptions that it is, in general, less injurious are supported by the symbolic interactionist perspective which discusses the importance of understanding the meaning and value of behavior. Since the sexes differ in their descriptions of the results of violence which occurs, they must therefore attach different meanings to that behavior. In addition, the abuse may seem more normative and more acceptable to males as it is a form

of behavior which they use more often than females.

According to the conceptual framework being used, then, it would seem that males could more easily justify the use of violence based on the familiarity and meaning of their own behavior.

Hypotheses

Based on the preceding rationale, the following hypotheses were tested:

1. It is more acceptable in all precipitating circumstances for females to initiate abuse than it is for males to initiate abuse.

2. Acceptance of abuse differs significantly by intensity level of the precipitating factors with:

a) subjects more accepting of abuse under conditions of high rather than low emotional dependency.

b) subjects more accepting of abuse under conditions of high rather than low levels of stress.

c) subjects more accepting of abuse under conditions of low rather than high severity.

3. Male respondents find abuse to be more acceptable in all precipitating circumstances than female respondents.

III. METHOD

Respondents

The individuals participating in this study were a group of college students from two southeastern universities. One university was located in a relatively large urban area with an enrollment of approximately 25,000 and the second university was situated in a smaller, more rural town with an enrollment of approximately 11,000 students. The decision to use college students was based on their representativeness of young adults in general. In addition, these subjects also represent a segment of the population which has had a considerable amount of dating experience. The sample consisted of 403 volunteers (111 males and 292 females) from a variety of courses (i.e., health, introductory psychology, and family studies) with enrollments which are representative of the overall campus populations. The variety of the respondents' majors was also representative with 24.8% listing home economics as their major and 74.7% listing a variety of other majors including psychology, education, engineering, business, health and recreation, sociology, criminal justice, hotel/restaurant management, biology or mass communications. Class standing was predominantly sophomore (28.5%) and junior (39.2%) with freshmen and seniors comprising 18.6%

and 12.7% of the sample, respectively. Respondents' ages ranged from 18 to 43 years with a mean age of 21.7 years.

Procedure

Pilot Project. Initially, a pilot study was conducted to determine the nature of the vignettes which assessed individuals' attitudes toward premarital violence. Vignettes were used to depict the factors which precipitate abuse in dating relationships. In general, these are short descriptions of a personal or a social situation which contain precise references to what are thought to be the most important factors in the decision-making process of the respondents (Alexander & Becker, 1978). It was decided that vignettes be used for this study because this method allows for an increased ability to control a variety of factors which may affect a given attitude by systematically manipulating the details provided in the vignettes. This results in more accurate responses which, in turn, increases the strength of the results of the study. Specific to this study, the vignettes are descriptions of dating relationship events which lead up to an abusive interaction.

Nine vignettes were developed for the preliminary study. Their inclusion was based on two criteria. First, a review of the violence literature was conducted. Several factors which have been found to be associated with the use of violence in relationships were selected as the basis for the vignettes. These factors included: a) comparison level for alternatives, b) emotional dependency, c) severity of

the abuse, d) commitment level, e) stress level, f) environment, g) use of drugs and/or alcohol, h) gender of the initiator, and i) sexual violence. Dating situations were then developed depicting these factors at two levels of intensity. For example, the high intensity stress vignette contains many stressful events which represent the precipitating factors while the low intensity stress vignette contains only two somewhat stressful events (see Appendix A). Secondly, content validity was assessed by experts in the field who examined the vignettes to determine whether or not they accurately described the intended factors. They also assessed whether or not there were adequate differences between the levels of intensity in each vignette.

These nine vignettes (with two levels of intensity each) were then pilot tested in an effort to determine whether or not participants' responses to the vignettes would reflect a sufficient range in scores. Respondents' scores were analyzed through the use of a series of t-tests. Preliminary results showed that significant differences emerged based on the scores of the severity and initiator variables while the stress and emotional dependency variables approached but did not reach the acceptable significance level. Based on these results, it was determined that the vignettes should be developed to reflect emotional dependency, level of stress and severity of the abuse as precipitating circumstances. The other vignettes

depicting comparison level for alternatives, commitment level, environment (the situation in which the abuse occurred), use of drugs and/or alcohol and sexual violence were deleted from the study due to the lack of variance in subjects' responses. It was decided that the initiator variable be applied to each vignette (i.e., female initiator; high intensity, male initiator; high intensity, etc.) due to the magnitude of the effect of the sex of the initiator variable in the preliminary results.

Respondents' reactions to the vignettes were measured through the use of a 7-point semantic differential scale originally developed by Straus et al. (1980). This scale assessed abusive behavior on the basis of the following dimensions: "necessary/unnecessary"; "normal/ not normal", and; "good/bad". Descriptive analysis of the data showed that variation in scores occurred primarily on the "necessary/ unnecessary" and the "normal/not normal" scale items. Since the responses to the "good/bad" item showed very little variance, some modification was necessary. In order to improve the capability of the scale to differentiate between attitudes toward a negative concept, the "good/bad" dimension was omitted from the final scale. This action was taken based on the assumption that few people believe that physical abuse is actually good. Since this research is assessing attitudes toward an admittedly negative concept, the "good/bad" dimension of the scale did not seem applicable.

In an additional effort to increase the range in responses further, the anchors (necessary/unnecessary and normal/not normal) on the first two items were also modified to accommodate the negativism of the violence issue as well as to reflect more extreme ends of the continuum.

"Unnecessary" was changed to "totally unnecessary"; "necessary" to "somewhat necessary", and; "normal" was changed to "somewhat normal".

Data Collection. As indicated previously, respondents' attitudes toward premarital abuse were assessed through the use of a questionnaire. The beginning of the questionnaire contained a brief and very general description of the topic of study and its importance to the survey participants. The remainder of the survey consisted of the three vignettes depicting emotional dependency, stress and severity of the abuse, demographic questions and two additional scales assessing interpersonal orientation and self-consciousness. These last two instruments acted as "fillers" and were positioned between the vignettes. They were added to prevent response fatigue or a desensitization to the abusive behavior being depicted in the vignettes but had no bearing on the research proposed. In addition, the vignettes themselves were counterbalanced in order to prevent response bias.

The survey was distributed to the participants who were randomly selected to receive one of the versions of the questionnaire. The only control during this assignment

process was for gender so that approximately equal numbers of males and equal numbers of females responded to each form or version of the questionnaire.

The questionnaire took approximately 20 minutes to complete. In order to ensure the accuracy of the responses and to guard against the possibility of individuals responding in a socially desirable manner (i.e., answering in such a way as to reflect the attitudes that they perceived to be appropriate), participants were asked not to discuss the questionnaire with persons seated near them or to ask questions of anyone other than the proctor during the data collection time period. Upon completion, the questionnaires were collected from the group by the proctor.

Design

The preceding procedure resulted in three separate 2 (sex of the initiator) x 2 (intensity of the precipitating circumstance) x 2 (sex of the respondent) independent variables with "necessary", "normal" responses to the event and the sum of those two responses becoming a "total" response as the dependent variables, acceptance of abuse. The first design included high and low intensity levels of emotional dependency, male and female initiators of the abuse, and male and female respondents as independent variables with "necessary", "normal" and "total" as dependent variables. The second design was composed of high and low intensity levels of stress, male and female initiators of the abuse, and male and female respondents as

independent variables and, again, "necessary", "normal", and "total" as the dependent variables. The third design included high and low intensity levels of severity of the abuse, male and female initiators of the abuse, and male and female respondents with "necessary", "normal" and "total" as the dependent variables.

In order to assess respondents' attitudes regarding premarital violence with respect to the independent variables, it was necessary to develop four different forms of the questionnaire based on the 2 levels of sex of the initiator (male and female) and the 2 levels of intensity (high and low). This allowed for the analysis of attitudes under different conditions of intensity and sex of the abuser for each of the precipitating circumstances. The subjects responded to each format or design three separate times corresponding to each of the three circumstances of emotional dependency, stress and severity of the abuse. For example, form A of the questionnaire (see Appendix A) consisted of the high-intensity, male-initiated abuse vignettes; form B of the questionnaire (see Appendix B) consisted of the low-intensity, male-initiated abuse vignettes; form C (see Appendix C) consisted of the high-intensity, female-initiated abuse vignettes, and; form D (see Appendix D) consisted of the low-intensity, female-initiated abuse vignettes.

Nature of Precipitating Circumstances

Respondents' acceptance of abuse was measured by their

responses to a series of vignettes. These vignettes depicted three different dating events or situations which precipitate some form of abuse. The following three vignettes were selected for inclusion in this study based on the findings of the pilot study. In addition, the decision to use a small number of vignettes resulted from comments by subjects completing the pilot (which used nine vignettes) and a literature search, both of which indicated that responding to large numbers of vignettes becomes repetitious and causes fatigue (Nosanchuk, 1972).

Emotional Dependency. The degree to which individuals within relationships are dependent on one another and the relationship is a complex issue. The vignette developed to represent an individual's level of emotional dependency within a dating relationship included some or all of the following characteristics:

- shyness
- lack of social contacts and interaction
- low self concept
- jealousy of partner

Stress. An individual's level of stress has been shown to precipitate abuse in many types of relationships. Specific to the premarital relationship, certain kinds of stress have been found to be more salient than others. Therefore, the stress vignette was written to reflect those types of stressors. Respondents were faced with situations

or vignettes in which individuals were experiencing all or some of the following events:

- divorce of his or her parents
- unemployment
- pregnancy
- possible break up of the relationship

Severity of Abuse. The level of abuse which occurs in the dating relationship has been found to cover a wide range of behaviors from slapping to the use of a gun or knife. This vignette depicts the more common types of abuse in an effort to present the most realistic dating scenerio possible. Responses were elicited from the subjects regarding vignettes which contained all or some of the following behaviors:

- shoving
- pushing
- hitting shoulder against the wall
- hitting with fists
- striking head against the wall

Dependent Measure

Acceptance of Abuse. The respondents' acceptance of abuse was measured by a 7-point scale in a semantic differential format containing the two items "totally unnecessary and somewhat necessary" and "not normal and somewhat normal". As previously mentioned, the scale was originally developed by Straus et al. (1980) and consisted

of three items: "necessary, unnecessary"; "normal, not normal"; and "good, bad". Justification for the use of the scale's semantic differential format comes from previous research which has shown that the original scale does differentiate between attitudes toward abuse (Cate et al., 1982; Emery et al., note 1; Straus et al., 1980). For example, Cate et al. (1982) found that individuals who had experienced a premaritally abusive relationship reported having more accepting or positive attitudes toward both dating and marital violence than did those individuals who had not been involved in premaritally abusive relationships. Similarly, Straus et al. (1980) found that one-third of the husbands and one-quarter of the wives they surveyed felt that slapping their spouse was somewhat necessary, normal and good.

In the present study, respondents recorded their acceptance of abuse by indicating their reactions on the two item scale presented after each vignette. Answers on these items ranged from (1) "totally unnecessary" to (7) "somewhat necessary", and from (1) "not normal" to (7) "somewhat normal". Their scores on these two items were also added together to provide a total score for each of the vignettes to which they responded. This score ranged from a low of two to a high of fourteen. A low score would indicate a negative attitude toward the variable in question and a high score would indicate a positive, accepting attitude.

Independent Measures

Intensity of the Precipitating Circumstance. In an effort to determine respondents' attitudes toward the precipitating circumstances of abuse, each vignette was developed with two levels of intensity. In other words, there are two versions of each vignette based on the intensity of the dating event. This was accomplished by manipulating the independent variable of interest. For example, the high stress vignette includes all of the stressors mentioned above (i.e., unemployment, divorce of one's parents, pregnancy and the potential break-up of the relationship), while in the low stress vignette, only unemployment and potential break up are represented as stressors. In the high severity abuse vignette, all of the behaviors discussed above were represented (pushing, shoving, hitting shoulder against wall, hitting with fists, striking head against wall), while in the low intensity severity vignette, only pushing, shoving and hitting against the wall are depicted. Finally, in the high emotional dependence vignette, all previously mentioned characteristics were present (shyness, lack of social contacts and interactions, low self concept and jealousy) and in the low intensity version, only jealousy is a factor.

Respondents were assigned vignettes based on intensity level. Therefore, as mentioned previously, some groups

received three different high intensity vignettes, while other groups received three different low intensity vignettes.

Sex of the Initiator. As well as assessing responses to high and low intensity situations, the present study also assessed attitudes toward male and female initiated abuse. This was accomplished by developing two versions of each vignette based on the gender of the initiator. For example, one version of the emotional dependency vignette depicts the male as the more dependent and abusive individual and the female as the victim, while another represents the female as the more emotionally dependent and abusive individual and the male as the victim.

Respondents were assigned vignettes based on the gender of the initiator of the abuse. Some groups received vignettes in which the female was the initiator of the abuse and some received vignettes with the male as the initiator of the abuse.

Sex of Respondent. Finally, attitudes toward premarital violence were assessed by the sex of the respondent. Although individuals were randomly assigned to each of the four versions of the questionnaire, distribution was controlled by sex of the respondent. As stated previously, approximately equal numbers of males and of females received each version of the questionnaire.

Demographic Information

In an effort to broaden the descriptive quality of the

study, background information was collected on all participants regarding gender, age, class standing, ethnic background and socioeconomic status (see Appendix E).

IV. RESULTS

The data regarding the subjects' acceptance of abuse were subjected to two separate analyses for each of the precipitating circumstances (i.e., emotional dependency, stress and severity of abuse) in the study. First, separate 2 x 2 x 2 multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) were conducted for each of the three precipitating circumstances (i.e., emotional dependency, stress, and severity of the abuse) with the "Necessary" and "Normal" responses as dependent variables and Sex of the Initiator (of the abuse), Intensity (of the precipitating circumstance), and Sex of the Respondent as independent variables. Sex of the respondent was included as an independent variable because there is reason to believe that males and females perceive relationship abuse differently (Makepeace, 1986). Secondly, a 2 x 2 x 2 analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed for each of the precipitating circumstances with the sum of the "Necessary" and "Normal" responses as the dependent variable and Sex of the Initiator, Intensity, and Sex of the Respondent as independent variables. In total, six separate analyses were conducted: three MANOVA's (one for each of the precipitating circumstances) and three ANOVA's (again, one for each of the precipitating circumstances).

Acceptance of Abuse

Emotional Dependency. The data regarding acceptance of abuse with emotional dependency as a precipitating factor

was analyzed in two ways, as mentioned previously.

Initially, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with the results indicating a significant multivariate main effect for Sex of the Initiator (Wilks lambda = .96, approximate $F = 8.99$, $p < .0001$). Subsequent inspection of the univariate F tests indicated that the sex effect was significant for both the "Necessary" and "Normal" responses ["Necessary" response, $F(1,389) = 9.27$, $p < .01$. and; "Normal" response, $F(1,389) = 15.23$, $p < .0001$]. In those vignettes in which the male was the initiator of the abuse, the mean score of the Necessary response was lower ($M = 1.13$) than that for the female-initiator vignettes ($M = 1.35$).

Similarly, in the male-initiated abuse vignettes the Normal response mean score was significantly lower ($M = 2.31$) than the mean of the Normal response for vignettes in which abuse was initiated by females ($M = 3.0$). This indicates that abuse initiated by females was perceived by the respondents as being more acceptable as evidenced by the higher mean scores for the Necessary and Normal responses in the female-initiated vignettes. (See Table 1 for a comparison of the mean "Necessary", "Normal", and "Total" acceptance scores for all significant analyses within the three precipitating circumstances.) No other main effects or interactions were found to be significant. All findings from this analysis are reported in Table 2.

Secondly, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed on the emotional dependency data using the sum of the

Table 1
Mean "Acceptance of Abuse" Scores for Significant
Multivariate and Univariate Analyses

Main Effects	Precipitating Factor								
	Emotional Dependency			Severity of Abuse			Stress		
	Nec /	Nor /	Total	Nec /	Nor /	Total	Nec /	Nor /	Total
Sex of Initiator									
Male	1.13	2.31	3.40	--	--	4.05	1.09	2.39	3.42
Female	1.35	3.00	4.31	--	--	4.57	1.47	3.24	4.70
Intensity									
High				1.29	2.73	3.96	--	3.03	4.32
Low				1.49	3.20	4.67	--	2.57	3.80
Sex of Respondent									
Male				1.60	3.39	4.91			
Female				1.31	2.80	4.08			

Note. Range for "Necessary" and "Normal" scores = 1 to 7.
Range for "Total" score = 2 to 14.

Table 2
Multivariate and Univariate Effects for Acceptance of Abuse
with Emotional Dependency as the Precipitating Circumstance

Source of Variation	Univariate $F(1,389)$		
	Multivariate $F(2,388)$	Necessary	Normal
<u>Main Effects</u>			
Sex of Initiator	8.99***	9.27**	15.23***
Intensity	.21	.33	.24
Sex of Respondent	2.08	2.63	3.13
<u>First-Order Interactions</u>			
Sex of Respondent x Intensity	.43	.60	.60
Sex of Respondent x Sex of Initiator	.12	.000	.20
Intensity x Sex of Initiator	1.35	2.60	.88
<u>Second-Order Interactions</u>			
Sex of Initiator x Intensity x Sex of Respondent	.04	.07	.005

* $p < .05$
 ** $p < .01$
 *** $p < .001$

"Necessary" and "Normal" scores as a single, total score of acceptance. The results showed the main effect, Sex of the Initiator, to be significant [$F(1,394) = 18.77, p < .0001$]. The mean "Total" acceptance score in the emotional dependency vignettes where females initiated abuse was found to be higher ($M = 4.31$) than the mean for the male-initiated abuse vignettes ($M = 3.4$). Overall, then, the data show that in the emotional dependency vignette it is more acceptable for females to initiate abuse than for males to initiate abuse. No other main effects or interactions proved significant. These results are reported in Table 3.

Stress. The MANOVA for the precipitating circumstance for stress showed multivariate main effects to be significant for Sex of the Initiator (Wilks lambda = .91, approximate $F = 19.63, p = .0001$), and Intensity, (Wilks lambda = .98, approximate $F = 3.81, p = .02$). Examination of the univariate F tests revealed significant main effects for the Sex of the Initiator as well as for Intensity (of the stress). The Sex of the Initiator effect was significant for both response items [Necessary, $F(1,388) = 26.07, p < .0001$; and Normal, $F(1,388) = 25.48, p < .0001$]. The fact that the mean scores of both responses for the female-initiated violence were higher than those for the male-initiated violence vignettes implies that respondents found it more acceptable for females than males to initiate abuse in the stress precipitating circumstance. Again, see Table 1 for a comparison of significant mean Necessary and

Table 3
Analysis of Variance Effects for Acceptance of Abuse with
Emotional Dependency as the Precipitating Circumstance

Source of Variation	d.f.	Mean Square	<u>F</u>
Within Cells	394	4.28	
Sex of Initiator	1	80.27	18.77***
Intensity	1	1.59	.37
Sex of Respondent	1	12.15	2.85
Sex of Respondent x Intensity	1	4.23	.99
Sex of Respondent x Sex of Initiator	1	.36	.08
Intensity x Sex of Initiator	1	9.59	2.24
Sex of Initiator x Intensity x Sex of Respondent	1	1.13	.26

* $p < .05$
 ** $p < .01$
 *** $p < .001$

Normal scores for the stress circumstance.

While the Intensity variable for the stress precipitating circumstance was found to be significant overall, there were differences in the significance of the response items [Necessary, $F(1,388) = 1.25$, $p = .27$, and; Normal, $F(1,388) = 7.56$, $p < .01$]. The mean score for the "Normal" response was greater ($M = 3.03$) for the high-intensity stress situation than for the low-intensity stress situation ($M = 2.57$). Therefore, the responses indicated that it may have seemed more "normal" for abuse to occur in high-stress circumstances rather than in low-stress circumstances. There were no differences between the levels of intensity in terms of the abuse being perceived as a "necessary" or "unnecessary" form of behavior. No other main effects were found, nor were there any significant interaction effects. All findings from this analysis are reported in Table 4.

When the analysis of variance was conducted it revealed that main effects existed for Sex of the Initiator, $F(1,394) = 38.44$, $p < .0001$, and; Intensity, $F(1,394) = 6.73$, $p < .01$. The Sex of the Initiator variable was shown to be significant in that the mean "total" score for the female-initiated stress vignettes was significantly higher than that for the male-initiated stress situation. This means that when females were violent in stressful situations, the respondents were more lenient in their assessment of that abusive behavior than if males had

Table 4
Multivariate and Univariate Effects for Acceptance of Abuse
with Stress as the Precipitating Circumstance

Source of Variation	Univariate $F(1,388)$		
	Multivariate $F(2,387)$	Necessary	Normal
<u>Main Effects</u>			
Sex of Initiator	19.63***	26.07***	25.48***
Intensity	3.81*	1.25	7.56**
Sex of Respondent	1.07	.01	2.03
<u>First-Order Interactions</u>			
Sex of Respondent x Intensity	.54	.04	1.06
Sex of Respondent x Sex of Initiator	1.05	.004	1.84
Intensity x Sex of Initiator	.24	.34	.03
<u>Second-Order Interactions</u>			
Sex of Initiator x Intensity x Sex of Respondent	.15	.22	.01

* $p < .05$
 ** $p < .01$
 *** $p < .001$

initiated abuse. With regard to the Intensity of the stress situation, the mean was higher for the high-intensity stress vignettes than for the low-intensity stress vignettes which indicates that the respondents were more likely to perceive the abuse which occurred under highly stressful conditions to be more justified than that which occurred under less stressful conditions. No other main effects proved significant. These results are reported in Table 5.

Severity of Abuse. The MANOVA for the severity of abuse precipitating circumstance showed two multivariate main effects to be significant. The Intensity of the abuse effect (Wilks lambda = .98, approximate $F = 3.93$, $p < .02$) and the Sex of the Respondent effect (Wilks lambda = .97, approximate $F = 6.00$, $p = .003$) were both significant. An examination of the univariate F tests revealed significant effects for the Intensity of the abuse with the "Necessary", $F(1,388) = 4.72$, $p < .05$ and; "Normal", $F(1, 388) = 6.10$, $p < .05$. There were significant differences between the mean scores of both responses with the mean of responses to the low-intensity vignettes being higher than those of the high-intensity vignettes. This would indicate that respondents perceived the low-intensity situations or those circumstances in which less severe types of abuse were used to be more acceptable than those situations in which the abuse was more severe. (See Table 1 for a comparison of means.)

With regard to the Sex of the Respondent variable,

Table 5
 Analysis of Variance Effects for Acceptance of Abuse
 with Stress as the Precipitating Circumstance

Source of Variation	d.f.	Mean Square	F
Within Cells	394	4.21	
Sex of Initiator	1	161.71	38.44***
Intensity	1	28.30	6.73**
Sex of Respondent	1	3.88	.92
Sex of Respondent x Intensity	1	3.31	.79
Sex of Respondent x Sex of Initiator	1	6.53	1.55
Intensity x Sex of Initiator	1	.01	.003
Sex of Initiator x Intensity x Sex of Respondent	1	.42	.10

* $p < .05$
 ** $p < .01$
 *** $p < .001$

significance was found with "Necessary", $F(1,388) = 8.31$, $p < .01$, and; "Normal", $F(1, 388) = 8.29$, $p < .01$. The mean scores of both responses for male subjects were significantly higher than those of the female subjects. This means that the males in the study perceived the violence in the severity of abuse vignettes to be more justifiable or acceptable than did the females in the study. No other main effects or interactions were significant. (See Table 6.)

The analysis of variance for the severity of abuse precipitating circumstance revealed that several main effects were significant. Sex of the Initiator, [$F(1,393) = 4.57$, $p = .03$]; Intensity, [$F(1,393) = 8.74$, $p = .003$], and; Sex of the Respondent, [$F(1,393) = 10.44$, $p = .001$] were all significant. With respect to the Sex of the Initiator variable, the mean of the "total" scores showed that respondents were more accepting of the abuse which was initiated by females than they were of that conducted by males. The mean scores of the Intensity of the abuse variable reflect a more favorable attitude for the low-intensity or less severe violence than for the high-intensity or more severe violence. Finally, the Sex of the Respondent variable indicated that differences exist between the attitudes of the subjects with males interpreting the violence which occurred in the severity of abuse vignettes as more justifiable and acceptable than did the female subjects. No interactions proved to be

Table 6
Multivariate and Univariate Effects for Acceptance of Abuse
with Severity of Abuse as the Precipitating Circumstance

Source of Variation	Univariate $F(1,388)$		
	Multivariate $F(2,387)$	Necessary	Normal
<u>Main Effects</u>			
Sex of Initiator	2.31	1.05	4.58*
Intensity	3.93*	4.72*	6.10*
Sex of Respondent	6.00**	8.31**	8.29**
<u>First-Order Interactions</u>			
Sex of Respondent x Intensity	1.40	.05	2.63
Sex of Respondent x Sex of Initiator	.48	.96	.14
Intensity x Sex of Initiator	1.15	2.15	.85
<u>Second-Order Interactions</u>			
Sex of Initiator x Intensity x Sex of Respondent	.30	.56	.01

* $p < .05$
 ** $p < .01$
 *** $p < .001$

significant. (See Table 7.)

Table 7
 Analysis of Variance Effects for Acceptance of Abuse with
 Severity of Abuse as the Precipitating Circumstance

Source of Variation	d.f.	Mean Square	F
Within Cells	393	5.26	
Sex of Initiator	1	24.04	4.57*
Intensity	1	45.98	8.74**
Sex of Respondent	1	54.92	10.44***
Sex of Respondent x Intensity	1	10.96	2.08
Sex of Respondent x Sex of Initiator	1	2.12	.40
Intensity x Sex of Initiator	1	10.45	1.97
Sex of Initiator x Intensity x Sex of Respondent	1	2.28	.43

* $p < .05$
 ** $p < .01$
 *** $p < .001$

V. DISCUSSION

Several hypotheses were postulated at the onset of this research regarding the differences between the levels of the intensity, the sex of the initiator of the abuse, and sex of the respondent with respect to each of the precipitating circumstances. The results of this study will be discussed in terms of these hypotheses.

Sex of the Initiator

The original hypothesis stated that in all three precipitating circumstances it would be more acceptable for females to initiate the abuse than it would be for males. This hypothesis is supported by data which reveal significant differences between the respondents' acceptance scores regarding male- vs. female-initiated abuse. The fact that more accepting attitudes were expressed toward the abusive behavior when the initiator was female indicates that sex of the initiator is an important factor to consider in determining why abuse occurs in intimate relationships. It is also a complex issue with regard to relationship violence and, as a result, several factors may contribute to the explanation of this finding. First, issues relating in a general sense to the sex of the initiator factor will be discussed and then any issues specific to a particular condition or circumstance will be explored.

The first concept addresses the importance of the respondents' perceptions and the fact that these perceptions

may color their attitudes regarding the violence. The manner in which the abusive behaviors in this study were interpreted may have been reflective of the perceived consequences of male-initiated vs. female-initiated violence. With regard to these perceptions, it seems plausible to assume that the female-initiated abuse was rationalized as being more acceptable based on the perception that females are not able to inflict as much harm or injury as are males. This idea may be based on the obvious differences between males and females. Simple observation is enough to validate the fact that females are physically smaller and less powerful than males. Therefore, even though both males and females may use the same type of violent behavior (e.g., pushing or shoving, shoving the other up against the wall, etc.) the results of the behavior may differ in severity with males being perceived as inflicting more injuries on their partners than females. Therefore, since the perceived consequences are less severe or harmful, the abusive behavior which was initiated by females was more easily accepted by the respondents in this study.

This conceptualization of the acceptability of the abuse based on the sex of the initiator and the consequences of the violence can be supported by several studies which have examined differences in males' and females' use of violence. Research has been cited earlier which states that males and females do, in fact, differ by the type and

frequency of abusive behavior in which they engage. Males are violent more frequently than are women and they use more severe forms of violence than women (Straus et al., 1980; Makepeace, 1983). It is logical to assume, then, that if males abuse more often, and they use more severe forms of violence, then they will inflict more injury on their partners. When this reasoning is applied to the present study, it may be concluded that the respondents' perceptions of the violent behavior perpetrated by males rather than females (although it is the very same act), is no longer acceptable because the likelihood of the occurrence of severe injury or injuries is greater.

In further support of this concept, another study of premarital violence by Makepeace (1986) reveals that females reported sustaining 3 times as much mild injury as their male partners, 2 times as much moderate injury and all of the severe injuries. Not only does this as well as other research provide evidence typifying the differences between the results of male and female initiated abuse, but so do more accessible medias such as television, magazines, movies and textbooks. For example, it is estimated that by the time children reach the age of 14, they will have witnessed 11,000 acts of violence on television (Zin & Eitzen, 1987). If we project the results of the previous studies to these statistics, then we can safely say that most of that violence will have been perpetrated by males. Their victims tend to be vulnerable and, for the most part, female. Since

the research literature and the media clearly agree about the use of violence by the sexes and the subsequent results of that violence, it is not difficult for individuals to substantiate for themselves that males are more abusive and injurious than females.

It should be noted at this point that there was no discussion of the consequences of the violence in the vignettes. The respondents were to interpret the behavior and rationalize its use within the given context by themselves. By reporting more accepting attitudes of the abuse initiated by females, the respondents could have actually interpreted the abuse which occurred as being relatively harmless, thereby resulting in very little injury. It would seem that the respondents, then, made their decision about the acceptability of the abusive behavior based on some bias or schema of their own. That schema may have something to do with the way in which they view the sexes and what may be appropriate behavior for males and females.

Perceptions may play yet another role in explaining the significance of the sex of the initiator factor. In addition to certain assumptions regarding the results of female-initiated abuse, the respondents might also be projecting their own values and experiences onto the vignettes in terms of alternative or underlying reasons for the occurrence of the abuse. In other words, they may be influenced by another gender-based perception about the

sexes' use of violence in intimate relationships. It may be that respondents see the female-initiated abuse as occurring not only for the specific reasons stated in a particular vignette, but for purposes of self defense as well. The use of self defense as a motive for violence is frequently associated with females' abusive behavior (Emery, 1983; Makepeace, 1986; Straus et al., 1980). In fact, it is not uncommon to hear that in an abusive relationship the woman resorted to using violence herself as a form of self defense. Therefore, the fact that female-initiated abuse is more acceptable than male-initiated abuse may be due in part to the perception that self defense was an underlying cause of the violence.

Just as the consequences of the abuse were not discussed in any of the vignettes, neither was the motive of self defense. The respondents, however, may have "unconsciously" considered it to be a factor. Females are not usually seen as the aggressors in abusive situations and, therefore, it may have been more reasonable to assume self defense as an issue even though it was not stated as such in the study. The possible use of self defense as a motive for the violent behavior depicted in the vignettes indicates that individuals seek to rationalize or find some logical excuse for the use of violence whenever possible. Self defense is just such an excuse in that it allows the respondent to justify the violent behavior using "common knowledge" or even personal experience as a guide.

A final concept which may be useful in understanding the significance of the sex of the initiator factor involves power. It is a complex and intriguing issue with respect to relationship violence, especially when gender differences are involved. Power has been defined in many ways by many researchers, but for our purposes it can be viewed as a perception of influence. Huston (1983) discusses power in essentially the same terms when he refers to it as the ability to influence attitudes and behavior. He further cautions that power is not a characteristic attributable to an individual but instead is a concept which may vary depending on the conditions of the relationship. Power as influence, then, becomes important when partners have incompatible goals or different ideas and contrary preferences about how to attain them. It becomes a critical factor in explaining the motivation of individuals who use violence in intimate relationships.

In one sense, the use of violence can be considered to be "coercive" power, one of five types of power (French & Raven, 1959). It is a type of power which uses punishment or negative behaviors such as physical abuse to alter the partner's behavior or intentions. It may be used when individuals feel that they have little control or influence over their partners or a situation. It can be speculated that with respect to the acceptability of the female-initiated abuse, the respondents may have perceived that the female had little control in the relationship. The

female was motivated to use violence in order to maintain the relationship or to obtain desired results which, in the eyes of the respondents, legitimized the use of violence.

This can be seen in the emotional dependency vignette, for example, which portrayed the abusive partner as shy, dependent on the other, and in general, lacking alternatives to the relationship. This was a situation where the abuser was most likely perceived to have had little control in the relationship. When this factor was reinforced with the traditional view of the female as powerless, the female was perceived as being at least somewhat justified in using coercion or force to gain a degree of influence.

If the issue of power is approached from the male perspective, there is again support for the acceptability of the female-initiated violence over that of the male. Since women are perceived to have little power in relationships, then the reverse must be true for males. They would be perceived as possessing more power than females. Males' source of power is multi-faceted with one type being identified as "legitimate" (French & Raven, 1959). Legitimate power is that which is given or attributed to an individual due to his or her status or role in life (i.e., provider and/or "head" of the family, employer, foreman, etc.). Since males have a significant amount of power already afforded them by the fact that they are male, the respondents of this study may have perceived that the use of violence on the part of the male was unwarranted. Men

should be able to get what they want or need in relationships by means other than hitting or slapping. Hence, the use of violence by males could be viewed as a negative type of behavior.

The concept of power explains much in terms of the significance of the sex of the initiator factor as it applies to the acceptability of abuse. As with the concepts of the consequences of the abuse and self defense, the major contribution of the concept of power seems to lie in the exploration of the perceptions of the respondents.

Emotional Dependency. With regard to the emotional dependency vignette, there was a significant effect with regard to the Sex of the Initiator variable with differences in scores reported for both the "Necessary" and "Normal" responses as well as the "Total" score (the sum of both of these responses). In other words, it was somewhat more "necessary" and "normal" for females to initiate abuse (and hence, the "total" scores or overall acceptance were higher as well) than it was for males. In addition to the factors discussed previously, the respondents may have regarded female-initiated abuse to be more acceptable based on sex role attitudes. Dependency is commonly described as a feminine trait (Bem, 1974; Parsons & Bales, 1955). In such a situation involving emotional dependency, then, the respondents could have found abusive behavior on the part of the female to be more easily justified.

Stress. As stated previously, female-initiated abuse

was reported as more acceptable in all precipitating circumstances including that of stress. The respondents reported more favorable or accepting attitudes toward the abuse which was inflicted by females. This finding supported by a recent study on premarital violence which revealed that females are more likely than males to use abuse under negatively stressful conditions (Mason & Blankenship, 1987). These "negative stress" conditions refer to similar types of events as depicted in the stress vignette which included financial difficulties, unemployment, divorce of one's parents and pregnancy. In addition, Mason and Blankenship (1987) reported that not only are females more "stress sensitive" or, in other words, are more susceptible to stress, but that negative stress is a predicting factor in the use of violence in dating relationships. Therefore, these two findings provide evidence which explains and supports the accepting attitudes of the respondents in this study. Not only are the respondents implying that it is more "normal" for females to abuse in stressful situations, but it may have been perceived that females are more likely to be affected by the negative stressors than are males.

Severity of Abuse. Finally, the data provided support for the first hypothesis with respect to the severity of abuse circumstance. The only significant differences occurred between the "total" acceptance scores or the sums of the "necessary" and "normal" responses. This indicates

that while the differences between the separate responses were not great enough to be significant by themselves, when combined or totaled, they did indeed prove to be significant. The respondents did find justification for the female-initiated violence, though. Their rationalization was most likely based on the factors which have been discussed previously (i.e., perceptions that female-initiated abuse is less injurious, that it is used in self defense, and that power imbalances may influence the use of violence).

Intensity

The second hypothesis was concerned with the acceptance of abusive behavior based on the intensity of the precipitating circumstances. Intensity as used in this research refers to the amount or level of a particular factor as it relates to the precipitating circumstances (i.e., the degree of emotional dependency, the number of stressor events, and the severity or types of the abusive acts). The hypothesis was divided into three statements which pertain to each circumstance, individually, due to the differences in the nature of the three circumstances. For example, it was originally postulated that the use of abuse would be perceived as more acceptable under conditions of high- rather than low-intensity for both the emotional dependency and stress circumstances. In other words, the more intense the situation (i.e., the more emotionally

dependent the abuser or the more stressful the life of the abuser) the more lenient the respondents would be in their assessment of the abuse. A high level of intensity would provide what might be perceived to be extenuating circumstances which would legitimize the abuser's use of violence. With respect to severity of abuse, it was hypothesized that attitudes would be more favorable in situations of low-intensity rather than high-intensity. This was due to the fact that low-intensity circumstances correspond to the less severe types of abuse, while high-intensity circumstances refer to the more severe forms of violence.

Significantly more accepting or favorable attitudes were reported for high-intensity stress and low-intensity severity situations, while no significant differences in attitudes were found regarding the high-intensity emotional dependency circumstance. The results of the emotional dependency circumstance will be discussed first.

Emotional Dependency. As the hypothesis applies to this situation, it proposed that there would be a distinction between the responses to abuse initiated by very emotionally dependent individuals (those who were shy, jealous, had a low self concept, and who had few other social contacts besides their partners) and less emotionally dependent individuals (those who were jealous). The use of violence in the high intensity (very emotionally dependent) situation would be more acceptable than in the low intensity

(less emotionally dependent) situation. Since the data did not support this hypothesis, the intensity of the emotional dependency does not appear to be a discriminating factor when it came to rationalizing the use of abuse.

The reason for this may be that emotional dependency is not perceived to be a good enough excuse to abuse one's partner. Although it may be well documented in the literature that emotional dependency is associated with the occurrence of abuse in both marital and premarital relationships (Gelles, 1976; Emery, 1983; Makepeace, 1983), it has never been associated with the acceptability of abusive behavior. By not detecting any differences in the acceptance responses based on intensity, this research has identified an attitude which is just as significant as a positive result. The fact that there are no conditions under which abuse is acceptable with regard to emotional dependency has definite and important implications for educators and counselors alike.

Stress. As stated previously, the data supported the intensity hypothesis as it applied to the stress circumstance. Respondents reported more favorable attitudes toward the abuse which occurred in the high-intensity situations as opposed to the low-intensity situations. In other words, there were higher "normal" and "total" scores ("necessary" mean scores were nonsignificant) in response to the high intensity vignettes which depicted unemployment, financial difficulties, the divorce of a parent and

premarital pregnancy than there were in response to the low intensity vignettes which portrayed unemployment and financial difficulties.

There are two explanations for this finding. First, abuse seems to be legitimized by the accumulation of stressor events (i.e., a high-intensity stress situation) which could have been viewed as the extenuating circumstance mentioned previously. While one or two negative stressors or events may be manageable, the addition of more stressors represents an overload situation. Under such conditions, the use of violence could be tolerated, understood and might even be expected. In other words, if a person is predisposed to using violence in intimate relationships, then the accumulation of negative stressor events could be perceived by that person as a legitimate reason for the use of violence. There is support for this relationship between the intensity level of stress and violence evidenced in studies of premarital abuse which identify stress as a predictor of violence (Makepeace, 1983; Mason & Blankenship, 1987). The respondents who expressed an accepting attitude toward the high-intensity stress vignette may have perceived the abusive behavior to be justified using this type of reasoning.

The second factor regarding the intensity level and the acceptability of abuse may pertain to the respondents' ability to empathize with the abusive individuals. The respondents might have been able to put themselves in the

highly stressful situation since practically everyone has experienced some accumulation of negative stressors. This experience could have given the respondent the ability to understand the abuser's motivation in directing violence toward his or her dating partner. The realization that these stressors can cause at the very least a loss of temper enables one to view the use of violence in a different and perhaps more acceptable light. Therefore, it is understandable that the respondents would project a more acceptable attitude toward the use of the abuse under high-intensity or stressful conditions.

Severity of Abuse. In contrast to the previous hypotheses which proposed that attitudes regarding dating violence would be more acceptable in high-intensity situations, the hypothesis pertaining to the intensity of severity of abuse was stated in the opposite direction. Individuals would be more accepting of abuse under conditions of low- rather than high-intensity with regard to the severity of the abuse. The results indicate that this assumption was correct. The low-intensity mean scores for the "necessary", "normal" and the "total" responses were all significantly higher than the high-intensity scores, revealing a more acceptable attitude, for the low-intensity (less severe) abuse situations. (See Table 1 for a comparison of significant means of acceptance scores for "Necessary", "Normal", and "Total" responses.)

The results specific to the intensity of the severity

can be approached from a symbolic interaction perspective. It is only logical that respondents find the less intense types of abuse to be more acceptable forms of behavior. A symbolic interaction perspective proposes that the more severe behaviors are less acceptable because they are less common. In other words, if individuals have not been exposed to certain kinds of behaviors, the chances are that they will not perceive them to be "normal". Research has shown that the less severe types of behaviors depicted in the severity vignette such as pushing and shoving, as well as the less severe consequences of these acts, are much more common, especially in dating relationships (Cate et al., 1983; Emery, 1983; Makepeace, 1981, 1986; Straus et al., 1980). Pushing and shoving and pushing into an object, therefore, seem to be the types of behaviors observed more often in intimate relationships. Lunging, striking the head, etc. are seen less frequently and, according to this research, are less acceptable forms of behavior in dating relationships. It would seem, then, that the more common the behavior, the more easily accepted it is.

In conjunction with the issue of "common" or familiar behaviors, it is important to note the possible influence of a response item concept. The somewhat accepting attitude reported by the respondents regarding intensity may have been detected due in part to the use of the concept "normal" (which in this case denotes a range of perceptions from "not normal" to "somewhat normal"). It implies a frequency of

occurrence, something which is common or uncommon, unusual or not unusual. This most likely had an impact on the respondents' rationalization of the abuse. This is neither positive or negative but rather further support for the relationship between low-intensity or less severe behaviors and the acceptability of abuse.

It is also important to mention here that individuals view the less severe violence to be more acceptable because of the perceived consequences of those types of behaviors. As in the case of sex of the initiator, it should be noted that less severe types of abuse inflict less injury. Therefore, the result of the violence is an extremely salient issue in explaining the intensity factor as well. Respondents may have perceived certain behaviors to be more acceptable because there did not appear to be any serious consequences or injuries as a result. It would seem logical, then, that the less severe or intense the violence, the fewer the injuries and, hence, the more acceptable the behavior.

Sex of the Respondent

It was originally hypothesized that differences in attitudes toward premarital violence would exist based on the sex of the respondents. It was stated that males would be more accepting of violence than would females. The data supported this assumption in part by revealing that males did indeed report more favorable attitudes in the severity circumstance, but no differences between male and female

respondents were found to exist with respect to the circumstances of emotional dependency and stress.

Since sex of the respondent proved to be a non-contributing factor in determining subjects' acceptance of the abuse in these two precipitating circumstances, it seems that the important factor in explaining the differences in attitudes of males and females lies in their perceptions of abuse itself and not in the precipitating circumstances portrayed in the research. In both the emotional dependency and stress circumstances, the abuse which occurred was of a milder or less severe form than that of the severity of abuse circumstance. Perhaps the significant difference between the sexes is in their perceptions of the abuse, not how the abuse relates to other factors such as emotional dependency and stress. This, in conjunction with the milder abusive behaviors portrayed in the vignettes, may help to account for the lack of differences between male and female respondents in these circumstances.

Severity of Abuse. The data supported the assumption that males would be more accepting of violence than females with respect to the severity of the abuse. The males reported higher acceptance scores for all three responses of "necessary", "normal", and "total".

This is an interesting and important finding in that the difference in males' and females' acceptance responses pertains directly to the issue of violence in this

situation. There were no other extenuating circumstances to affect the perceptions regarding the abusive behavior which occurred. The responses were based completely on the violence itself. These results are supported by research which offers an explanation for the fact that males perceive abuse differently from females (Makepeace, 1983; 1986). It has been reported that not only do males use violence more frequently, but that they do not perceive the results of that violence to be as severe as do females. In contrast, females abuse less frequently, use less severe forms of abuse, and report more injuries from the abuse than are perceived by their partners. These differences between the sexes regarding the use of violence may be explained, in part, by examining the experiences and rationalization process of the abuser. The abuser is male, in many cases, and this perspective has been discussed previously. In order to approach even a basic understanding of males' and females' attitudes toward violence it is necessary to explore the process by which females develop a different perception of violence.

It would seem that perhaps females have come to view themselves as victims of abuse. As such, they may be more sensitized to the whole issue of relationship violence and since they perceive themselves as "victims", regard violence in more negative terms than do males. Research in the area of relationship violence has rather consistently reported gender differences in the use of violence. Edleson &

Brygger (1986) reveal that women reported more instances of violence and threats than did men, even after their partners had been through batterers' treatment programs. Even though it has been reported in some studies of premarital violence that the abuse tends to be reciprocal (Cate et al., 1982; Emery, 1983; Henton et al., 1983), there is evidence that females are or perceive themselves to be the objects of more severe and injurious types of violent behavior than do males (Makepeace, 1983, 1986; Roscoe & Callahan, 1985).

The circumstance of the abused female is well known to the public due to the national and local publicity reporting domestic violence. Most individuals are aware of the need for shelters for battered women and their children. In addition to this awareness in our society regarding the problems of domestic violence, the college students who comprised this sample may be even more sensitive to the issue of premarital violence since much of that research has been conducted on college campuses. Information obtained from these studies and the issue of relationship violence have become part of many university courses. As a result, female respondents may very well view any type of violence as a personal issue which has significant consequences for them as females. This, then, would most definitely influence the female respondent to have a negative perception of any abusive behavior.

Overall, this research has provided us with new insights regarding the factors which affect individuals'

attitudes toward the violence which occurs in dating relationships. For example, it has been found that it is more acceptable for females to direct abuse toward their dating partners than for males to do so. In addition, the use of abuse is more acceptable in highly stressful situations (high intensity) and when the violence is less severe in nature (low intensity) and finally, that males are more accepting of violence than are females in situations in which abuse is the primary factor. These findings have importance for family life educators, counselors, therapists and especially for family studies researchers.

Limitations of the Study

Although the findings of this study represent an important addition to our knowledge base regarding premarital violence, there are limitations which must be addressed. First, the sample consisted solely of college students from two universities in the southeast. This would tend to reduce the generalizability of the findings to some extent. A more ideal sample would have included individuals from more varied backgrounds with different kinds of dating and life experiences. A sample with noncollege students, individuals from urban areas and a greater representation of various ethnic groups would have produced a better and more generalizable sample.

Secondly, and also related to the sample selection, is a fact that the southeast is a relatively conservative region of the country. The conservatism of the sample may

account, in part, for the nature of the findings reported in this study. The data reported by the respondents is consistent with that of other studies conducted in the southeast. However, in order to be able to generalize with more confidence, the sample might have included subjects from other areas of the country.

A third limitation involves the content of the vignettes. It might be possible that in some situations the factors chosen to exemplify a particular precipitating circumstance may not have accurately portrayed that circumstance. The vignette may not have elicited the perception or response which was originally intended. This may account for the lack of findings regarding certain variables (i.e., no significant differences in attitudes regarding the intensity of emotional dependency). On the other hand, it may have been that a particular circumstance was not an appropriate setting in which to examine the effect of intensity. This is by no means criticism of the use of vignettes, for this design is seen as a strength of the study. Rather, this is speculation regarding the inclusion and nature of the vignette as it was developed and is meant to be a constructive comment regarding the use of vignettes in future research. In general, these limitations are relatively minor and should not minimize the significance of the findings.

VI. IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This research has brought to light several important factors regarding attitudes about the use of violence in premarital relationships. It has been found that it is more acceptable for females to use violence than it is for males to do so. It has also been discovered that the intensity of the precipitating circumstance or "extenuating" circumstance is related to how lenient individuals are in their perceptions of the abuse in most situations. In instances of stress and severity, respondents were more accepting if the circumstance was highly stressful and if the severity of the abuse was of low-intensity or lesser severity. Finally, differences were reported between attitudes of the respondents with males being more accepting of violence than females.

One of the most important contributions this research has made to the study of relationship violence lies in the design of the study. Vignettes have not previously been used to examine the attitudes of individuals with respect to dating violence or any type of violence for that matter. In doing so, the most frequent criticism regarding the study of human attitudes and behaviors has been circumvented.

The unreliability and the biased and vague responses which have often been associated with the use of questionnaires and self-report measurements is avoided, or at the least greatly diminished by the use of vignettes

(Alexander & Becker, 1978). For example, in many instances questions about concepts such as attitudes are vague, which results in rather abstract judgments on the part of the respondents. In an effort to clarify such questions, the respondents must rely on their own mental images of the tasks or situations to which they are responding.

Obviously, the researcher has no control over this process. The solution, then, is to make the stimulus or situation presented to all respondents as clear, consistent and detailed as possible. The "vignette" is a viable and proven method of doing so (Alexander & Becker, 1978; Nosanchuk, 1972; Rossi, Sampson, Bose, Jasso, & Passel, 1974). Rather than allowing individual respondents to clarify questions for themselves, the additional detail is provided by the researcher in the form of the vignette and is thereby standardized across respondents (Alexander & Becker, 1978).

This additional control enables the researcher to assess the influence of various factors which affect attitudes by systematically varying the details depicted in the vignette. In doing so, the amount of information obtainable increases dramatically as do the strength of the results and conclusions which can be derived from the data. Therefore, as a result of the use of vignettes in this research, the strength and implications of these findings are considerable. With this in mind, the application of the information generated by this study regarding the attitudes toward premarital violence is of significant importance to

the helping professions and also helps to determine the direction of future research.

Implications for the Helping Professions

According to the conceptual framework of this study, the attitudes described previously are considered to be influential in determining behavior. In essence, then, they serve to condone and perpetuate dating violence. The relationship between the attitudes regarding premarital abuse expressed in this study and the role of professionals who can benefit from such information (i.e., educators and counselors of young adults and families) will be addressed in the following discussion of the results.

It is essential in attempting to educate young adults, or to provide counseling for individuals who have experienced premarital abuse, that professionals understand there is a legitimization process which provides justification for the use of premarital violence. This study has indicated that the degree of acceptability regarding abusive behaviors is based largely upon the influence of the values, experiences, and the biases of the respondents themselves. In discussing these influences, there seem to be two systems at work with respect to the issue of the acceptability of abuse. One concerns the conceptual framework of the study and the other pertains to sex role orientations.

First, let us examine the impact of individuals' environment on their behavior. The term "environment" used

in this context denotes societal influences. This approach validates certain assumptions of the conceptual framework, symbolic interaction, one of which asserts that individuals reflect the attitudes of the society in which they live. In other words, society influences and shapes the attitudes of the individual. A particular behavior may be acceptable because it has meaning or value for the individual. This acceptance or "valuing" comes from exposure to abuse in the home and/or by society (i.e., the media, television, news casts, peer groups, etc.). As a result, abuse becomes a "normal" or common type of behavior.

This is a view of relationship violence which has been expressed by researchers for some time (Garbarino, 1977; Straus et al., 1980). Based on the findings of this study in addition to previous research, it is concluded that society does indeed condone and legitimize the use of violence in intimate relationships. If this were not the case, (i.e., if the use of abuse were not condoned by society at least to some extent) then it would not continue to occur. According to symbolic interactionists, strong sanctions exist which limit the occurrence of unacceptable behavior (Burr et al., 1975). Since the reported rate of premarital abuse seems to have increased in recent years, it seems logical to reason that abuse must be viewed in a positive manner by society. Therefore, data which provide evidence of any degree of acceptance of abuse is extremely important in helping both researchers and helping

professionals to understand why that abuse occurs in the first place.

The second issue for consideration involves the influence of individuals' sex role orientation on attitudes toward abuse. It became apparent in the examination of the findings that the respondents may have been reporting reactions to abuse based on what they perceived to be appropriate behaviors for men and women. It is speculated that individuals are not only influenced by societal views of violence, but by their attitudes regarding the sexes as well. The sex role orientations of the respondents seemed to color their perceptions of abuse. For example, the findings indicated that abuse initiated by women was more acceptable than that initiated by men and, with regard to the abuse circumstance, males perceived abuse to be more acceptable than did females. In addition, emotional dependency may have been perceived as a feminine characteristic influencing the respondents to view the abuse which occurred in a particular manner. The differences in male and female perceptions of abuse have been discussed, but further support for the importance of sex role orientation comes from Bernard, Bernard & Bernard (1985) who found that there was disparity between males and females who were involved in abusive relationships in terms of their views of appropriate sex typed behavior. It would seem that the schemas that individuals set up for themselves, whether based on sex roles or environmental influences, have a

definite impact in shaping their view of the world and, as a result, their perceptions of relationship behavior.

The findings of this study underscore the relationship between individuals' attitudes regarding violence, sex roles and the occurrence of premarital violence. They also represent an important perspective for educators and counselors. The implication that violence is condoned, and in a sense, then, generated at a societal or environmental level as well as the relational and individual levels, must be addressed by helping professionals. In addition, one's sex role orientation has been shown to affect one's perceptions of abuse. These two concepts, then, should be considered central to any program which deals with the issue of premarital abuse.

With respect to these findings, it is important first of all for educators and counselors to understand that individuals who abuse or were abused are not "sick" or deviant, but may in fact be exhibiting "normal" behavior based on the orientation of their culture or environment. Secondly, it is important to recognize that they may also be operating under certain assumptions which create conditions in which particular types of behavior are appropriate for one sex or the other. With this increased knowledge and understanding of premarital violence, helping professionals who come in contact with young adults can begin to develop curricula and programs which will address the complexities of relationship violence more effectively.

It is suggested that the focus of these programs be comprehensive in nature including topics dealing with individuals' motivation for the use of violence and the various sources of support it receives, in addition to descriptive information regarding abusive individuals and their relationships. Both educators and counselors should provide young adults with the information, support and opportunity necessary to explore their own values and attitudes regarding appropriate kinds of behavior in intimate relationships. The structure for implementing this type of curriculum in the schools already exists in the family life courses which are presently being taught in most junior and senior high schools. It would be a simple process to incorporate information on premarital violence and decision-making skills into these existing courses.

It is also important when examining the issue of dating violence that one be aware of the existence of two competing cultural norms. On one hand there is a society which legitimizes the use of violence in intimate relationships and on the other there exists an idyllic perception of the dating relationship as romantic, caring and affectionate. These two concepts are competing with one another in the sense that while they are relationship extremes, they co-exist in the dating system. The romantic model is characterized by physical attraction and emotional attachment as well as a tendency to idealize one's partner (Kephart, 1981) and has been studied in conjunction with

premarital violence by Henton et al. (1983). It appears that romanticism may in fact perpetuate violent relationships through unrealistic perceptions of the abuse (viz., that it is motivated by love), of love itself (i.e., that love will conquer all) and of relationships in general (any relationship, even an abusive one, is better than none at all. These perceptions of dating violence and "love" have serious implications for researchers, educators and counselors alike.

Since it has been pointed out that attitudes have much to do with the occurrence of premarital violence, it should be noted that romanticism is also a factor worthy of attention when discussing the antecedents of violence in dating relationships. This idea of competing cultural norms is one that educators and therapists should address if they expect to be successful in decreasing the incidence rate of dating violence and/or assisting those who have been involved in abusive relationships to cope with their experiences. Professionals must help teenagers and young adults to change their perceptions of abusive interactions. This can be accomplished through the development of educational programs and counseling procedures which do not negate the perceptions which perpetuate abuse, but which explore and contrast these and other more functional attitudes and decision-making processes. In this way, helping professionals may be successful in keeping young adults out of abusive relationships.

Implications for Future Research

The implications for research which this study provides are numerous. First, there exists a need to study the differences between the attitudes of abused and nonabused individuals. Based on the findings of previous research (Cate et al., 1982; Emery, 1983), it is assumed that there would be differences between the two groups. Speculation is that individuals who had been involved in an abusive relationship would find abuse more acceptable than those who had not previously experienced abuse. While examining individuals' history of violence, it would also be helpful to look at the family environment for instances of child or spouse abuse. These types of violence could provide support for the cycle of violence theory as well as providing further information regarding attitudes toward abuse in dating relationships.

Secondly, since the issue of sex role orientation has arisen in the discussion of these findings, it would be a logical progression to study attitudes in conjunction with sex roles. Although previous data collected by this researcher did not provide significant information regarding differences between respondents' attitudes toward women (Emery, 1983), subsequent research has shown that differences do exist with regard to the use of abuse (Bernard et al., 1985; Makepeace, 1986). Based on these findings, and with respect to attitudes, sex role orientation is an important variable to examine. The

differences which are expected to exist may be related more to the concept of androgyny rather than "attitudes toward women". This would require the use of Bem's Sex Role Inventory as a measure of androgyny.

This study also indicates a great need to utilize different data collection methods. Research should be conducted with premarital couples in an effort to determine the importance of certain relationship factors. For example, do discrepancies in sex role orientation of partners exist? Is there a pattern of behavioral reactions to conflict and/or abuse? What are their expectations for the relationship or for future relationships? In addition to the information provided by these kinds of questions, research utilizing interview techniques would provide more detailed information as well.

Another alternative methodological approach incorporates video taping. In essence, this technique takes the use of vignettes one step farther and uses video-taped, role play situations to represent abusive circumstances. Respondents view relationship situations and report their reactions and attitudes as they relate to the "video vignettes" they have just observed. This method of studying relationship abuse has been proposed previously but not for the examination of attitudes and/or premarital violence. The use of video-taped, role play situations would be most beneficial in that the role play would eliminate discrepancies in the respondents' interpretations of the

behaviors portrayed in the "vignettes".

In summary, this study has produced significant findings in the area of attitudes toward premarital violence. The results with respect to male and female-initiated abuse, intensity levels of precipitating circumstances and differences between the attitudes of male and female respondents have been discussed. These findings also provide an important basis for future research and for the development of more effective intervention and educational programs. The implications of the resulting information have importance not only for the area of premarital abuse but for all aspects of relationship violence.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A:
(Questionnaire Form A)

Jan has dated Scott for about a year and loves him very much. They are happy together and are very much alike in terms of their likes and dislikes, values and interests. They think of their relationship as serious and are committed to one another. Jan is very outgoing and makes friends easily, however, Scott is shy and relies on Jan as the central person in his life. She is the source of all his social contacts. In fact, Scott begins to feel jealous and sometimes even a little desperate when she goes out with other friends or works after hours. He thinks it happens so often that he doesn't trust her when she tells him she is working late. At times he becomes so angry that he hits her when he thinks she is lying.

The use of physical force in this situation was:

Totally		Somewhat
Unnecessary	____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____	Necessary

		Somewhat
Not Normal	____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____	Normal

Sam and Ellen are dating partners and have agreed to go to the movies. Since he is short on funds this month, Sam asked Ellen if she would mind paying for her own ticket. Ellen thinks Sam should pay for the date since he asked her to go, and felt hurt that he would even suggest that she pay. Sam thinks that after dating for a year and considering themselves to have a serious relationship, she should chip in once in a while and share the expenses. He was really peeved at the way Ellen acted. It started out as a calm discussion, but eventually tempers began to flare. As he reached over to touch her, Ellen sharply pushed him away, which angered Sam even more. He turned back quickly and shoved her, harder than he intended, causing her shoulder to hit against the wall. Ellen pushed him away again, which made him so furious that he lunged at her, shoving her with such force that she fell backwards and struck her head against the wall.

The use of physical force in this situation was:

Totally		Somewhat
Unnecessary	___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___	Necessary
Not Normal	___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___	Somewhat Normal

Dave and Sandy are dating partners. They enjoy each other, share similar interests and hobbies, and have compatible goals and values. They feel their relationship growing stronger every day. Both of them know they are falling in love, but are concerned about getting too serious, considering they both have two years of college to complete. Each has ambitious career goals requiring intensive study, and they know that involvement in a serious, committed relationship would not be good for either one of them right now. Concern over this issue has led them to consider breaking up and discussions about the topic have been heated. Recently, Dave was laid off from his part-time job which he depended on for his tuition and school expenses. A short while later he learned that his parents were divorcing and it was about this time that Sandy learned she was pregnant. The accumulation of these events was stressful enough, but this was the last straw for Dave, and news about the pregnancy brought on violent reactions. Since then Dave has become physically abusive to Sandy, often hitting her hard. Sandy tries not to upset him but it seems that everything she does makes him angry.

The use of physical force in this situation was:

Totally Unnecessary | | | | | | | Somewhat Necessary

Not Normal | | | | | Somewhat Normal

Appendix B:
(Questionnaire Form B)

Jan has dated Scott for about a year and loves him very much. They are happy together and are very much alike in terms of their likes and dislikes, values and interests. They think of their relationship as serious and are committed to one another. Both are outgoing, make friends easily and have their own social contacts outside the relationship. In recent months, however, Scott has begun to feel jealous and sometimes even a little desperate when she goes out with other friends or works after hours. He thinks it happens so often that he doesn't trust her when she tells him she is working late. At times he becomes so angry that he hits her when he thinks she is lying.

The use of physical force in this situation was:

Totally		Somewhat
Unnecessary	____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____	Necessary
		Somewhat
Not Normal	____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____	Normal

Sam and Ellen are dating partners and have agreed to go to the movies. Since he is short on funds this month, Sam asked Ellen if she would mind paying for her own ticket. Ellen thinks Sam should pay for the date since he asked her to go, and felt hurt that he would even suggest that she pay. Sam thinks that after dating for a year and considering themselves to have a serious relationship, she should chip in once in a while and share the expenses. He was really peeved at the way Ellen acted. It started out as a calm discussion, but eventually tempers began to flare. As he reached over to touch her, Ellen sharply pushed him away, which angered Sam even more. He turned back quickly and shoved her, harder than he intended, causing her shoulder to hit against the wall.

The use of physical force in this situation was:

Totally Unnecessary | | | | | Somewhat Necessary

Not Normal | | | | | | | Somewhat Normal

Dave and Sandy are dating partners. They enjoy each other, share similar interests and hobbies, and have compatible goals and values. They feel their relationship growing stronger every day. Both of them know they are falling in love, but are concerned about getting too serious, considering they both have two years of college to complete. Each has ambitious career goals requiring intensive study, and they know that involvement in a serious, committed relationship would not be good for either one of them right now. Concern over this issue has led them to consider breaking up and discussions about the topic have been heated. Recently, Dave was laid off from his part-time job which he depended on for his tuition and school expenses. As he was already feeling stressed, this was the last straw, and the loss of his job brought on violent reactions. Since then Dave has become physically abusive to Sandy, often hitting her hard. Sandy tries not to upset him but it seems that everything she does makes him angry.

The use of physical force in this situation was:

Totally Unnecessary | | | | | | | Somewhat Necessary

Not Normal | | | | | | | Somewhat Normal

Appendix C:
(Questionnaire Form C)

Jan has dated Scott for about a year and loves him very much. They are happy together and are very much alike in terms of their likes and dislikes, values and interests. They think of their relationship as serious and are committed to one another. Scott is very outgoing and makes friends easily, however, Jan is shy and relies on Scott as the central person in her life. He is the source of all her social contacts. In fact, Jan begins to feel jealous and sometimes even a little desperate when he goes out with friends or works after hours. She thinks it happens so often that she doesn't trust him when he tells her he is working late. At times she becomes so angry that she hits him when she thinks he is lying.

The use of physical force in this situation was:

Totally		Somewhat
Unnecessary	___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___	Necessary
Not Normal	___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___	Somewhat Normal

Sam and Ellen are dating partners and have agreed to go to the movies. Since he is short on funds this month, Sam asked Ellen if she would mind paying for her own ticket. Ellen thinks Sam should pay for the date since he asked her to go, and felt hurt that he would even suggest that she pay. Sam thinks that after dating for a year and considering themselves to have a serious relationship, she should chip in once in a while and share the expenses. Ellen was really peeved at the way Sam acted. It started out as a calm discussion, but eventually tempers began to flare. As she reached over to touch him, Sam sharply pushed her away, which angered Ellen even more. She turned back quickly and shoved him, harder than she intended, causing his shoulder to hit against the wall. Sam pushed her away again, which made her so furious that she lunged at him, shoving him with such force that he fell backwards and struck his head against the wall.

The use of physical force in this situation was:

Totally Unnecessary | | | | | | | Somewhat Necessary

Not Normal | | | | | | | Somewhat Normal

Dave and Sandy are dating partners. They enjoy each other, share similar interests and hobbies, and have compatible goals and values. They feel their relationship growing stronger every day. Both of them know they are falling in love, but are concerned about getting too serious, considering they both have two years of college to complete. Each has ambitious career goals requiring intensive study, and they know that involvement in a serious, committed relationship would not be good for either one of them right now. Concern over this issue has led them to consider breaking up and discussions about the topic have been heated. Recently, Sandy was laid off from her part-time job which she depended on for her tuition and school expenses. A short while later she learned that her parents were divorcing and it was about this time that Sandy learned she was pregnant as well. The accumulation of these events was stressful enough, but this was the last straw for Sandy, and news about the pregnancy brought on violent reactions. Since then Sandy has become physically abusive to Dave, often hitting him hard. Dave tries not to upset her but it seems that everything he does makes her angry.

The use of physical force in this situation was:

Totally		Somewhat
Unnecessary	____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____	Necessary

		Somewhat
Not Normal	____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____	Normal

Appendix D:
(Questionnaire Form D)

Jan has dated Scott for about a year and loves him very much. They are happy together and are very much alike in terms of their likes and dislikes, values and interests. They think of their relationship as serious and are committed to one another. Both are outgoing, make friends easily and have their own social contacts outside the relationship. In recent months, however, Jan has begun to feel jealous and sometimes even a little desperate when he goes out with other friends or works after hours. She thinks it happens so often that she doesn't trust him when he tells her he is working late. At times she becomes so angry that she hits him when she thinks he is lying.

The use of physical force in this situation was:

Totally		Somewhat
Unnecessary	____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____	Necessary

		Somewhat
Not Normal	____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____ ____	Normal

Sam and Ellen are dating partners and have agreed to go to the movies. Since he is short on funds this month, Sam asked Ellen if she would mind paying for her own ticket. Ellen thinks Sam should pay for the date since he asked her to go, and felt hurt that he would even suggest that she pay. Sam thinks that after dating for a year and considering themselves to have a serious relationship, she should chip in once in a while and share the expenses. Ellen was really peeved at the way Sam acted. It started out as a calm discussion, but eventually tempers began to flare. As she reached over to touch him, Sam sharply pushed her away, which angered Ellen even more. She turned back quickly and shoved him, harder than she intended, causing his shoulder to hit against the wall.

The use of physical force in this situation was:

Totally Unnecessary | | | | | Somewhat Necessary

Not Normal : : : : : Somewhat Normal

Dave and Sandy are dating partners. They enjoy each other, share similar interests and hobbies, and have compatible goals and values. They feel their relationship growing stronger every day. Both of them know they are falling in love, but are concerned about getting too serious, considering they both have two years of college to complete. Each has ambitious career goals requiring intensive study, and they know that involvement in a serious, committed relationship would not be good for either one of them right now. Concern over this issue has led them to consider breaking up and discussions about the topic have been heated. Recently, Sandy was laid off from her part-time job which she depended on for her tuition and school expenses. As she was already feeling stressed, this was the last straw, and the loss of her job brought on violent reactions. Since then Sandy has become physically abusive to Dave, often hitting him hard. Dave tries not to upset her but it seems that everything he does makes her angry.

The use of physical force in this situation was:

Totally		Somewhat
Unnecessary	_____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	Necessary

		Somewhat
Not Normal	_____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	Normal

Appendix E:
(Demographic Information)

Gender: Male____ Female____

Age:____

Class standing: Freshman____ Sophomore____ Junior____
Senior____ Graduate____ Other (specify)_____

Ethnic background: Asian____ Black____ Caucasion____
Hispanic____ Native American____ Other (specify)_____

Father's occupation_____

Mother's occupation_____

Father's employment status: Full-time____ Part-time____
Not at all____

Mother's employment status: Full-time____ Part-time____
Not at all____

Father's education: highest level achieved

____none	____grade 12
____grades 1-6	____college, non-graduate or post high school job training
____grades 7-8	____grades 9-11
____college graduation	____graduate work in college

Mother's education: highest level achieved

____none	____grade 12
____grades 1-6	____college, non-graduate or post high school job training
____grades 7-8	____grades 9-11
____college graduation	____graduate work in college