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Spousal Violence Among Anglos, Blacks, and Mexican Americans: The Role of Demographic Variables, Psychosocial Predictors, and Alcohol Consumption

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Racial/ethnic differences in the prevalence and correlates of self-reported spousal violence in a community sample of Anglo, Black, and Mexican American adults are examined. Females, the formerly married, and Black females in particular (up to 60% of formerly married) were most likely to report both being beaten by and beating a spouse. Multivariate analyses controlling for demographic variables, financial stress, social desirability, sex role traditionalism and drinking quantity (and spouse's drinking among the currently married) did not eliminate the greater likelihood of reports of both beating and being beaten among married Black females. There was little consistent evidence to suggest greater violence propensity among Mexican American than Anglo respondents. The findings raise questions about simplistic socioeconomic status or financial stress explanations of observed racial/ethnic differences in spousal violence. Further, curvilinear effects of alcohol quantity and spouse drinking upon reported violence question simple "disinhibition" arguments and suggest the need for data regarding couple dynamics.

KEY WORDS: spousal violence; Anglos; Blacks; Mexican Americans.

INTRODUCTION

Since Straus' (1980) 1975 national survey of family violence, both public and scientific interest in the subject have increased dramatically. How-

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ever, very little empirical data is available regarding family violence in different racial or ethnic groups (Hotaling and Sugarman, 1986). Existing studies consistently indicate higher rates of both husband and wife abuse among Blacks than Whites (Straus *et al.*, 1980; Hampton *et al.*, 1989), though data on the prevalence and determinants of violence in other racial and ethnic minority groups are needed (Straus, 1980; Cazenave and Straus, 1979). Systematic data on groups such as Hispanics is particularly needed, as a high potential for family violence in this group has been suggested (Carroll, 1980).

The present paper examines the prevalence and predictors of self-reported spousal violence among Whites, Blacks, and Mexican-Americans interviewed in a recent community survey. Reports of hitting and/or being hit by the *current* spouse (among the married) or by the *former* spouse (among the formerly married), are examined. Analyses of the formerly married are of interest both because violence may be related to divorce propensity (Neff *et al.*, 1991), as well as because divorce rates may vary by race/ethnicity (Norton and Moorman, 1987). Analyses seek to identify racial/ethnic differences in prevalence of violence and to determine the relative influences of demographic variables such as age, education, and income, along with financial stress, sex roles, and alcohol consumption with regard to spousal violence in these groups.

BACKGROUND

The failure of research to address racial/ethnic (hereafter referred to as "ethnic" for brevity) differences is noted by Hampton *et al.* (1989). Most comparative research to date has examined Black-White differences in family violence, with Cazenave and Straus (1979) finding Blacks more likely than Whites to approve of couple-slapping, for husbands to report slapping their wives in the last year, and for husbands to report severe violence toward their wives. Differences in reported wife-to-husband violence were less pronounced, though Black wives were twice as likely as White wives to report both slapping and severe violence to their husbands. In a national follow-up study conducted in 1985, Hampton *et al.* (1989) reported a significant decline (43%) in the rate of severe violence by Black husbands toward Black women from 1975 rates. However, no decrease was observed in the rate of overall violence by Black husbands toward their wives between 1975 and 1985 (Hampton *et al.*, 1989). By 1985, the rate of severe spousal violence toward Black women had dropped substantially to slightly more than twice the rate reported for White women, while the rate of se-

vere spousal violence toward Black men increased to nearly three times the rate for Whites.

Socioeconomic differences (lower levels of education, occupation, income, and higher rates of unemployment found among Blacks) have been implicated in observed higher levels of spousal violence among Blacks (Straus *et al.*, 1980; Fagan *et al.*, 1983). However, evidence presented by Cazanave and Straus (1979) that Black-White differences in reported violence persist in the lowest income groups suggests that racial differences may involve more than simple socioeconomic differences (cf. Hampton *et al.*, 1989). The relative influence of sociodemographic vs. cultural factors with regard to spousal violence among Blacks has yet to be determined.

Little research exists regarding family violence among Hispanics. Lyndholm and Willey (1986), presenting data from a sample of child abuse cases reported to the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, found that Hispanics had the highest likelihood of sexual abuse and the lowest likelihood of physical abuse. However, physical abuse toward children was more likely to be perpetrated by White and Hispanic men, while Black women were more likely to be suspects in physical abuse (Lyndholm and Willey, 1986). While not directly relevant to spousal violence, these differences suggest potential ethnic differences in the nature or prevalence of family violence. Conceptual and anecdotal discussions of rigid sex roles and "machismo" among Hispanics emphasize violence potential in this group (Carroll, 1980), though empirical evidence of greater violence propensity among Hispanics is not available.

The present paper seeks to empirically evaluate ethnic and gender differences in self-reported spousal violence in a recent community study of Anglos, Blacks, and Mexican Americans. Statistical controls will be introduced for both sociodemographic factors (e.g. income) and for sociocultural dimensions (financial stress, social desirability, sex role orientation), and alcohol consumption to help explain observed ethnic differences.

METHODOLOGY

Sampling Procedure

Standardized household interviews were conducted with 1286 regular drinkers (i.e., those drinking at least two to three times per month) and 498 nondrinkers, aged 20–60, residing in the community. Multi-stage area probability sampling techniques were used, stratifying census tracts in urban San Antonio by median household income and by percent Black/Spanish origin. These two stratification factors were imposed to reflect socioeconomic status variation within and between ethnic groups and to reflect eth-

nic heterogeneity of census tracts. Within strata, tracts and blocks were randomly drawn for study and interviews were allocated to tracts and blocks, proportional to the population of the respective ethnic groups in those areas. Randomly drawn blocks within tracts were assigned to enumerators who contacted each residence, listing eligible drinkers and nondrinkers within each. Random samples of male and female drinkers and non-drinkers were drawn from these household enumerations. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents. Fieldwork was conducted during 1988 and refusal rates were approximately 32% among drinkers and 40% among nondrinkers. Widowed and never married respondents were eliminated and the present analyses focus upon comparisons between 1374 married, separated, and divorced respondents. Divorced and separated subgroups were combined for analytic purposes.

Measurement Considerations

Social Desirability

As Mexican Americans may report more socially desirable responses in interview studies than Anglos (Ross and Mirowsky, 1984), controls were included for possible confounding effects of response bias factors (i.e., underreporting of spousal violence). A 29-item social desirability measure was used here, using items drawn from the original Crowne-Marlowe (1964) scale. This measure had an internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of .77 for Anglos, .74 for Blacks, and .76 for Mexican Americans in this data set.

Financial Stress

Because limited financial resources along with unemployment and low occupational status have been suggested as a possible contributor to spousal violence (Allen and Straus, 1980; Fagan *et al.*, 1983), items used by Pearlin and Schooler (1978) were used to assess the respondents' perception of financial stress. The reliability of this measure was .84 for Anglos, .82 for Blacks, and .82 for Mexican Americans.

Sex-Role Traditionalism

Traditional sex-role orientations have been said to encourage victimization of women and male dominance has been viewed as having a high

degree of conflict potential (Straus, 1977). However, as data presented by Rouse (1984) have challenged such arguments, the role of sex role orientation requires empirical evaluation. A 12-item measure tapping marital decision-making, division of labor and a woman's rights to pursue interests outside the home, developed from items used by Markides and Vernon (1984), was used to assess traditional sex-role orientations. The reliability of this measure was .83, .87, and .85 for Anglos, Blacks, and Mexican Americans, respectively.

Alcohol Consumption

Alcohol abuse in general has been posited in numerous studies as a factor in spousal aggression and victimization (Gerson, 1978; Miller *et al.*, 1989; Kantor and Straus, 1987), though research has suggested that alcohol consumption in and of itself may not be a probable cause for wife beating (Kantor and Straus, 1987). Three self-report measures of the respondents' alcohol consumption were examined here. These include:

1. *Quantity of alcohol consumption.* Self-reported number of drinks usually consumed in a typical drinking episode was assessed.
2. *Frequency of alcohol consumption.* The typical number of days per week the respondent reported drinking.
3. *Total weekly alcohol consumption.* A summary index measuring the total number of drinks consumed per week (typical frequency × typical quantity).

In our data, quantity was correlated .70 ($p < .001$) with frequency and .79 ($p < .001$) with total consumption; frequency was correlated .87 ($p < .001$) with total consumption.

Because propensity for violence is also likely a function of the *spouse's* consumption pattern, an additional single-item measure of the spouse's drinking was included which ranged from 0 (never drinks) to 8 (drinks every day). Spouse's alcohol consumption was significantly, though moderately, associated with the respondent's reported quantity ($r = .10, p < .002$), frequency ($r = .18, p < .001$), and total consumption ($r = .12, p < .001$). Unfortunately, comparable data on consumption patterns of *former* spouses are not available.

Spousal Violence

An item modified from Straus' Conflict Tactics Scale (1979) was used to assess spousal violence. Specifically, currently married respondents were asked: "Have you ever been slapped, hit, kicked, or pushed by your hus-

band/wife/partner?" and "Have you ever slapped, hit, kicked, or pushed your husband/wife/partner?" If respondents were currently divorced, separated, or widowed the questions were phrased: "Have you ever been slapped, hit, kicked, or pushed by your former husband/wife/partner?" and "Have you ever slapped, hit, kicked, or pushed your former husband/wife/partner?" Response categories for all violence items were: 0 = No; 1 = Yes.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The analysis will proceed in the following order. First, sample distributions of demographic and psychosocial variables are examined. These analyses serve to assess the need to control for these variables in examining ethnic differences. More specifically, the analyses assess the extent to which ethnic differences in violence propensity might be expected on the basis of pre-existing ethnic differences in socio-economic status, financial stress, sex role traditionalism, or alcohol consumption. Second, ethnic differences in the prevalence of reported spousal violence are examined without statistical controls for background variables considered in the first set of analyses. Finally, logistic regression analyses are presented to show the effects of statistical controls on observed ethnic differences.

Characteristics of the Sample

Demographic and psychosocial characteristics of sample respondents by ethnicity, sex, and marital status are presented in Table I. Demographically, Mexican Americans and females were younger on average than Anglos and males. Blacks and Mexican Americans had significantly fewer years of education and lower household incomes than Anglos. Household income was also lower among females and among the formerly married. Interactions of marital status with ethnicity and sex approached significance, with greater income differentials between the currently and formerly married among minorities and females, relative to Anglos and males.

Social desirability was significantly greater among Blacks and Mexican Americans than among Anglos. Financial stress was unrelated to ethnicity or sex, though the formerly married had significantly higher levels of financial stress than did the currently married. More traditional sex role orientations were endorsed by minority individuals and males and a sex by marital status interaction approached significance, with larger marital status differences in sex role traditionalism found among females than among males.

Table I. Demographic and Psychosocial Characteristics and Spousal Violence by Ethnicity, Sex, and Marital Status[a]

	Currently Married						Formerly Married						
	Male			Female			Male			Female			
	A	B	MA	A	B	MA	A	B	MA	A	B	MA	
N =	152	63	262	189	72	245	33	45	47	77	72	117	Significant Effects
Age	43.00	40.30	38.53	40.19	42.50	37.27	40.36	41.36	39.19	41.08	37.76	35.50	(E) (S) (ESM)
Education	14.56	13.16	11.63	13.87	12.82	11.26	14.39	12.36	11.58	13.36	12.70	11.82	(E)
Income	3,417	23,066	23,786	31,442	21,866	22,061	25,773	16,636	19,826	20,546	13,326	15,404	(E)(S)(M)(EM+)(SM+)
Social desirability	16.81	18.29	19.07	15.95	19.81	19.21	15.82	20.00	18.00	16.12	18.65	18.41	(E) (ESM)
Financial stress	16.07	16.86	17.28	15.79	16.57	17.35	17.33	18.42	18.13	19.03	19.42	18.66	(M)
Sex role traditionalism	23.59	25.06	25.20	21.66	23.99	23.80	23.61	25.80	25.66	22.25	22.86	22.57	(E) (S) (SM+)
Alcohol use—self													
Quantity	3.84	4.13	6.14	2.52	2.36	3.60	9.36	4.56	6.06	4.28	1.92	4.46	(E)(S)(M)(EM)(SM)(ESM)
Frequency	3.16	2.73	2.58	1.77	1.47	1.12	4.52	3.31	2.26	1.81	1.39	1.76	(E)(S)(M)(ES)(ESM)
Total consumption	10.61	10.37	13.68	4.01	4.44	4.34	29.58	14.96	13.32	6.64	3.50	7.39	(E)(S)(M)(ES)(EM)(ESM)
Alcohol use-spouse	2.18	2.58	3.01	4.22	4.09	4.45	—	—	—	—	—	—	(E)(S)(ES+)

[a]Note: E = significant race/ethnicity main effects; S = significant sex main effects; M = significant marital status effect; ES = significant E × S interaction effect; + denotes main or interaction effect approaching significance at $p < .10$.

Alcohol consumption findings were complex. Significant ethnicity, sex, and marital status main effects were observed with regard to all three consumption measures. Overall, Mexican Americans tended to be higher quantity and less frequent drinkers than were Anglos and Blacks. Females were generally lower quantity, less frequent, and lower total consumption drinkers than males. Married respondents generally had lower consumption scores than did the formerly married. For all three measures, however, a significant ethnicity × sex × marital status interaction was obtained, suggesting greater marital status differentials in alcohol consumption among Anglos (particularly males) than among Blacks or Mexican Americans. Among Blacks and Mexican Americans, consumption levels among the formerly married in some subgroups did not appear higher than levels among the married. Among married respondents, alcohol consumption by the spouse was significantly higher among spouses of females than of males and higher among spouses of Mexican Americans than among Anglos or Blacks.

Unadjusted Differences in Reported Spousal Violence

Unadjusted data in Table II indicate a greater prevalence of reports of *being beaten* among females than males and among the formerly married than the currently married, with interactions of ethnicity × sex, ethnicity × marital status, and sex × marital status approaching significance. Generally, the highest prevalence of being beaten was observed among both married and unmarried (61%) Black females. Being beaten was reported somewhat more frequently among married Black and Mexican American males, though among the formerly married, minority males reported being beaten somewhat less commonly than did Anglos. The prevalence of reports of *beating* a current or former spouse was greater among minorities, among females, and among the formerly married. Generally, the highest prevalence of beating a spouse was found among Black females (particularly the formerly married, 57%). Among males, both Blacks and Mexican Americans reported a somewhat higher prevalence of spouse beating than did Anglos.

Multivariate Analysis of Spousal Violence

Multivariate analyses were conducted to evaluate the influence of each demographic and psychosocial predictor upon spousal violence, controlling for the effects of all other predictors. Given dichotomous measures of spousal violence, logistic regression techniques (Hosmer and Lemeshow,

Table II. Unadjusted Differences in Reported Spousal Violence by Ethnicity, Sex, and Marital Status[a]

	Currently Married						Formerly Married						
	Male			Female			Male			Female			
	A	B	MA	A	B	MA	A	B	MA	A	B	MA	
N =	152	63	262	189	72	245	33	45	47	77	72	117	Significant Effects
Beaten by spouse	12.5	14.3	17.6	13.2	26.4	17.0	48.5	26.7	36.2	57.1	61.1	55.6	(S)(M)(ES+)(EM+)(SM+)
Beating spouse	11.2	22.2	23.7	20.0	29.2	19.1	30.3	37.8	36.2	41.6	56.9	41.9	(E)(S)(M)

[a]Note: E = significant race/ethnicity main effects; S = significant sex main effects; M = significant marital status effect; ES = significant E × S interaction effect; + denotes main or interaction effect approaching significance at $p < .10$.

1989) were used to predict the likelihood of being *beaten* or of *beating* a current or former spouse. Analyses were conducted within sex and marital status subgroups to allow identification of differing predictors across groups.

To simplify the analysis and its interpretation, continuous predictor variables were collapsed into categorical variables as follows: age (<40 years = 0; ≥40 years = 1), education (<13 years = 0; ≥13 years = 1), income (<$23,717 = 0; ≥$23,717 = 1), social desirability [<18 = 0 (low); ≥18 = 1 (high)], financial stress [<17.3 = 0 (low); ≥17.3 = 1 (high)], sex role orientation [<23.7 = 0 (non-traditional); ≥23.7 = 1 (traditional)], quantity (abstainer = 0; 1-5 drinks/occasion = 1; >5 drinks/occasion = 2), frequency (abstainer = 1; 1-2 drinking occasions/week = 1; 3+ occasions/week = 2), total consumption (abstainer = 0; 1-7 drinks/week = 1; 8+ drinks/week = 3), and spouse's drinking (never = 0; up to once/month = 1; more than once/month = 2). While the use of categorical rather than continuous variables is admittedly crude, the approach has the advantage of allowing odds ratio interpretation of effect coefficients and allows examination of possibly curvilinear relationships.

Preliminary logistic regression analyses were conducted with SAS software (Statistical Analysis System, 1988) using maximum likelihood estimation on cumulative logits of the dependent variables. An initial series of runs was conducted to test for higher order interactions between ethnicity, sex, marital status, and alcohol use dimensions. These interactions were non-significant and, thus, we focus upon more parsimonious models. Additionally, based upon earlier analyses and the results of preliminary logistic regressions including the main effects of all predictors, education, age, sex role orientation, and both drinking frequency and total consumption were eliminated from the model. These variables were non-significant in preliminary analyses and, in the case of the alcohol consumption measures, multi-collinearity was sufficient that only drinking *quantity* was consistently related to spousal violence outcomes. Final regressions are presented in Table III. Note that analyses for the currently married are presented both including and excluding spouse's drinking as a predictor.

Table III presents logistic regression coefficients, standard errors, and odds ratios for each predictor. Considering being *beaten*, ethnic differences were specific to married females, with Black females having roughly 3.60 times the odds of being beaten than Anglos. These differences remained significant after the inclusion of controls for spouses' drinking. There were no significant ethnic differences among males or among the formerly married. Financial strain was associated with greater odds of being beaten only among married males and females. Alcohol quantity differences were specific to married females — abstainers were roughly 64% less likely to report

Table III. Logistic Regression Coefficients and Odds Ratios for the Prediction of Spousal Violence by Ethnicity, Sex, and Marital Status

	Currently Married															
	Prob (Beating Spouse)								Prob (Beaten by Spouse)							
	Male				Female				Male				Female			
	B	OR	B	OR	B	OR	B	OR	B	OR	B	OR	B	OR	B	OR
Ethnicity																
Anglo vs. MA	0.26	1.68	0.31+	1.86	−.41*	.44	−.43*	.42	.17	1.41	.18	1.43	−.22	.64	−.24	.62
Anglo vs. Black	.30	1.35	.28	1.75	.49*	2.67	.49*	2.67	−.03	.94	.01	1.02	.64*	3.60	.69*	3.98
Income	.11	1.12	.03	1.03	−.78	.45	−.79*	.45	−.08	.92	−.15	.86	−.31	.73	−.28	.76
Social Desirability	−.40	.67	−.37	.69	−.31	.73	−.28	.76	−.28	.76	−.26	.77	−.45+	.64	−.46	.63
Financial Stress	.83*	2.29	.77*	2.16	1.08	2.95	1.12*	3.07	.56*	1.75	.52+	1.68	1.12*	3.07	1.12*	3.06
Quantity																
> 5 vs. Abs	−.48+	.38	−.35	.50	−.73*	.23	−.62*	.29	−.33	.52	−.22	.64	−.64*	.28	−.62*	.29
> 5 vs. 5 or less	−.06	.89	−.09	.84	.21	1.52	.16	1.38	.04	1.08	−.01	.98	.23	1.58	.20	1.49
Spouse Drink																
Hi vs. Abs	—	—	−.44*	.42	—	—	−.35	.50	—	—	−.36+	.49	—	—	.06	1.13
Hi vs. Low	—	—	.36*	2.05	—	—	.14	1.32	—	—	.23	1.58	—	—	−.14	.76
Intercept	−1.92		−1.88		−1.26		−1.41		1.94		−1.87		−1.68		−1.71	

Table III. Continued

	Formerly Married															
	Prob (Beating Spouse)								Prob (Beaten by Spouse)							
	Male				Female				Male				Female			
	B	OR	B	OR	B	OR	B	OR	B	OR	B	OR	B	OR	B	OR
Ethnicity																
Anglo vs. MA	.03	1.06	—	—	-.33+	.52	—	—	-.05	.91	—	—	-.19	.68	—	—
Anglo vs. Black	.24	1.62	—	—	.57*	3.12	—	—	-.54	.34	—	—	.14	1.32	—	—
Income	-.61	.54	—	—	-.73*	.48	—	—	-.29	.75	—	—	-1.10*	.33	—	—
Social Desirability	-.21	.81	—	—	-.15	.86	—	—	.01	1.01	—	—	-.22	.80	—	—
Financial Stress	-.32	.73	—	—	.44	1.55	—	—	.59	1.80	—	—	-.14	.27	—	—
Quantity																
> 5 vs. Abs	-.66	.27	—	—	-.62*	.29	—	—	.04	1.08	—	—	-.36+	.49	—	—
> 5 vs. 5 or less	.33	1.93	—	—	-.04	.92	—	—	-.08	.85	—	—	.12	1.27	—	—
Intercept	-.36		—	—	-.10		—	—	-.74		—	—	.75		—	—

[a]Note: B = logistic regression coefficient. OR = odds ratio. * Denotes logistic regression coefficient significant at $p < .05$. + Denotes logistic regression coefficient approaching significance at $p < 0.10$.

being beaten than did high quantity drinkers. In several groups there was an interesting, though nonsignificant, tendency for somewhat higher rates of violence among those drinking one to five drinks than among those in the highest drinking category. Among married males, high levels of spouse's drinking were associated with significantly increased odds of the male being beaten, compared to spouses who did not drink. While not significant, males married to frequent drinkers actually had somewhat lower odds of being beaten than those married to less frequent drinkers.

With regard to spouse *beating*, among both married and formerly married, Mexican American females had significantly lower odds of beating their spouse than did Anglos, while Black females had significantly greater odds (roughly three times greater) of spouse beating than did Anglos. Married Mexican American males had greater odds of spouse beating compared to Anglos, though this contrast approached significance ($p < .08$) only after inclusion of controls for spouse's drinking. Financial stress differences were specific to the married, males and females, with financial stress significantly associated with greater odds of spouse beating. For both currently and formerly married, female, high quantity drinkers had significantly greater odds of having beaten their former spouse than did abstainers. Suggestions of curvilinearity in relationships between drinking quantity and reported spouse beating were observed, similar to the finding for being beaten by the spouse.

For spouse's drinking among married males, those married to frequent drinkers had greater odds of wife beating than did those married to abstainers. Similar to the findings for being beaten, those married to frequent drinkers had *lower* odds of wife beating than those whose wife drank less frequently. Controls for wives' alcohol use attenuated quantity differences among married males, but not among females.

Predictors of Spousal Violence by Ethnicity

A final issue concerns whether predictors of spousal violence may be different for Anglo, Black, and Mexican American subgroups. To this end, logistic regression analyses were conducted, predicting the probability of being beaten and of beating one's spouse by income, social desirability, financial stress, quantity of alcohol consumption, and spouse's drinking frequency (married only) within marital, sex, and ethnic subgroups. To conserve space, the results of these analyses are summarized in the text.

Significant predictors of being *beaten* by a spouse were largely specific to the currently married. Before controlling for frequency of spouse's drinking, financial stress was associated with significantly greater odds of being

beaten among married Mexican American males (ß = 2.50, $p < .05$) and both Mexican American (ß = 1.61, $p < .05$) and Anglo (ß = 1.62, $p < .05$) females. Controls for spouses drinking, however, eliminated the effect of financial stress among Mexican American males (ß = .03, ns). Financial stress effects were unchanged among Anglo and Mexican American females and significant stress effects emerged among Anglo males (ß = 2.34, $p < .05$).

Social desirability was related to the odds of being beaten only among married Anglo males (high social desirability associated with lower odds). Income was negatively related to being beaten, though only among formerly married Mexican American (ß = −1.65, $p < .05$) and Black females (ß = −3.24, $p < .05$).

The general trend for somewhat greater odds of being beaten among high quantity drinkers than abstainers and lower odds of being beaten among high quantity than low quantity was observed only among married Anglo males (High vs. Abstainers ß = −.94, $p < .07$; High vs. Low ß = .58, $p < .06$) and among married Mexican American females (High vs. Abstainers ß = −1.31, $p < .01$; High vs. Low ß = .88), though controls for spouse's drinking eliminated these differences. In contrast, controls for spouse's drinking strengthened the magnitude of quantity effects among both married Mexican American males (High vs. Abstainers ß = −.86, $p < .07$; High vs. Low ß = .57, $p < .07$) and Anglo females (High vs. Abstainers ß = −1.44, $p < .05$; High vs. Low ß = .93, $p < .05$).

The effects of spouse's drinking frequency upon being beaten approached significance only among married males, with Anglo males married to frequent drinkers more likely to report being beaten than those married to abstainers (frequent drinkers vs. non-drinkers ß = −1.28, $p < .07$). Among married Mexican American males, those married to frequent drinkers also had significantly lower odds of being beaten than did those married to less frequent drinkers (ß = .41, $p < .07$).

Financial stress was consistently associated with greater odds of *beating* a spouse, both before and after controls for spouse's drinking among married Mexican Americans (ß = 1.29, $p < .05$ males; ß = 1.12, $p < .05$ females) and Anglos (ß = .76, $p < .05$ males; ß = 1.15 females) and among the formerly married Anglo females (ß = .69, $p < .07$). In contrast, among formerly married Black males, financial stress was associated with *lower* odds of spouse beating (ß = −1.34, $p < .07$). Higher income was associated with lower odds of spouse beating (before controls for spouse's drinking) among married Mexican American (ß = 1.15, $p < .05$) and Black (ß = 1.55, $p < .05$) females and among formerly married Black males (ß = −2.08, $p < .05$). Controls for spouse's drinking attenuated the effect of income among married Mexican American females (ß = −.29, ns), however.

Alcohol consumption effects were less dramatic with regard to beating than with regard to being beaten. Before controls for spouse's drinking, high quantity drinkers had significantly greater odds of spouse beating among married females in all ethnic subgroups (ß = −1.31 Mexican Americans, ß = −.61 Blacks, ß = −.44 Anglos, $p < .05$ for all subgroups) and among formerly married Mexican American females (ß = −.97, $p < .05$). Differences among married females were attenuated somewhat by controls for spouse's drinking, though these effects remained significant (ß = −.46 Mexican Americans, ß = −.96 Blacks, ß = −.85 Anglos, $p < .05$ for all subgroups). Similar trends were observed among males in all subgroups, though these were not significant.

The effects of spouse's drinking frequency approached significance only among married Mexican American males, where those married to frequent drinkers had greater odds of spouse beating than those married to abstainers (frequent vs. non-drinkers ß = −.41, $p < .07$) while, at the same time, those married to frequent drinkers had *lower* odds of spouse beating than those married to less frequent drinkers (frequent vs. infrequent ß = .48, $p < .05$).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The present study has examined predictors of self-reported spousal violence in a tri-ethnic community sample. Specifically, we have examined sociodemographic factors, perceived financial stress, sex role traditionalism, and alcohol use by self and spouse as determinants of self-reports of being beaten by a spouse or of beating a spouse. Also, as self-reported spousal violence may be subject to under-reporting biases which may vary by sex, social class and/or ethnicity, we have included statistical controls for social desirability. Ethnic differences have been a major focus of the present analyses because of a general lack of comparative data on ethnic minorities other than Blacks. Finally, we have examined predictors of violence both among the currently *and* formerly married, acknowledging that studies of ethnicity and spousal violence among the currently married may be biased by differentials in divorce propensity (i.e., high divorce rates among Blacks in contrast to low divorce rates among Hispanics; Norton and Moorman, 1987).

Observed ethnic differences on factors likely related to spousal violence were striking. Minority respondents — particularly Blacks — in our sample were socioeconomically disadvantaged (in terms of income and education) and had significantly more traditional sex role orientations than were Anglos. Anglos and Blacks were more frequent, though lower quan-

tity, drinkers than were Mexican Americans, who were somewhat less frequent though higher quantity drinkers. Females had less traditional sex role orientations than males, and were generally lighter drinkers. Among married respondents, females reported more frequent drinking by spouse than did males, and Mexican Americans reported more frequent drinking by spouse than did Anglos or Blacks.

Multivariate analyses indicated that married Black females were significantly more likely to report having been beaten than Anglos and, as well, were more likely than Anglos to report beating a current or former spouse. Mexican American females, both currently and formerly married, were less likely than Anglos to report spouse beating, while married Mexican American males were somewhat more likely to report spouse beating, though this latter effect approached significance only after statistical controls for spouse's drinking. Generally, ethnic differences in reports of beating and of being beaten were less pronounced among males than females.

The persistence of these ethnic differences has important implications regarding differing conceptual explanations of spousal violence. Thus, ethnic — particularly Anglo-Black differences — were not accounted for by simple socioeconomic or "stress" differences. Indeed, Blacks and Mexican Americans in our data were both relatively disadvantaged, though the prevalence of being beaten and beating were most pronounced among Black females — *not* among Mexican Americans. Financial stress was a relatively consistent predictor of violence, though it did not account for observed ethnic differences. In contrast, while the failure of sociodemographic variables to explain ethnic differences would suggest the importance of *cultural* variables, our principal sociocultural predictor, sex role traditionalism, did not emerge as a significant predictor of spousal violence. Consistent with Rouse (1984), our findings challenge the stereotype that spousal violence is necessarily associated with traditional sex role orientations. It should also be noted that our statistical controls for underreporting biases did not significantly alter the ethnicity findings. Other cultural dimensions, such as approval of violence in differing relational settings, might be more relevant as a predictor of violence.

Of particular interest are our findings regarding alcohol use. At least three points are worth noting here. First, *quantity* consumption rather than frequency or total volume of consumption, appears to be the best predictor of violence, whether being beaten by or beating a spouse. Conceptually, this might be consistent with a "disinhibition" model of the effects of alcohol use (Bushman and Cooper, 1990) — i.e., that a high quantity of alcohol use is prerequisite to acts of spousal violence. While intuitively appealing, Mexican Americans in our data (being infrequent, yet high quantity drinkers) might be expected to have a higher prevalence of violence.

In contrast, Blacks in our data (more frequent, lower quantity drinkers) had the highest prevalence of violence — at least among females. More appears to be involved than simple disinhibition.

A second point is the suggestion of curvilinearity of the effects of alcohol use by self and spouse. While violence was generally greater among high quantity drinkers (particularly females) than among abstainers (as well as among those married to frequent drinkers rather than abstainers), violence was actually somewhat *greater* among lighter drinkers than among high quantity drinkers. Increasing quantity may increase the potential for violence up to a certain threshold, beyond which either or both parties may be simply "too drunk" to fight. Such a view is perhaps more intuitive than "disinhibition" per se, and it highlights the hazards of oversimplifying the effect of alcohol use. Similar curvilinear patterns have been reported by Coleman and Straus (1979).

The third point concerns the *role of self vs. spouse's drinking*. That is, high rates of being beaten among high quantity drinkers may reflect either drinking as a stimulus for victimization or as a consequence of abuse. High quantity drinking among those reporting spouse beating may be less problematic, though our findings highlight both the interdependence of self and spouse consumption as well as suggesting ethnic differences in the implications of alcohol for spousal violence. Our analyses found no evidence of possible interaction effects between self and spouse drinking, though it is interesting to consider the specific ethnic subgroups in which self and spouse's drinking were related to violence.

Specifically, it appears that self and spouse's drinking were most strongly linked with violence among Mexican Americans. Thus, for both beating and being beaten, apparent quantity effects upon violence among Mexican American married females were statistically explained by their husbands' drinking, even though husband drinking was not directly related to the wife beating or being beaten in this group. This would suggest that, for married Mexican American females, quantity of alcohol use is not a direct cause of violence — either to or from their spouse — but rather, may simply reflect the similarity of the drinking patterns of both spouses. The lack of a direct effect of the husband's drinking upon spousal violence argues against a causal role of spouses' drinking (as in heavy drinking on the part of the male having "disinhibitory" functions). Among Mexican American males, quantity of alcohol use was not related to spouse beating, though their wives' drinking frequency was associated with likelihood of wife beating. Here, husbands were most likely to beat less frequent drinking wives, though frequent drinkers were more likely beaten than abstainers. Further, the husband's drinking quantity was related to likelihood of being beaten by their spouse, *only* after controls for the wives' drinking, and only among

Mexican American males was the wife's drinking directly related to being beaten. The findings for males being beaten may suggest either disinhibitory effects of their wives' moderate drinking (up to a point) upon likelihood of husband beating and/or may suggest that wife's drinking may provide a stimulus for conflict, resulting in an increased likelihood of wife beating. Of course, in the highest consumption categories, "inhibiting" effects are observed. While we cannot specify the causal linkages with the present data, the interdependence of Mexican American male and female drinking patterns with regard to violence appear complex. In some respects, these findings are similar to those of Dibble and Straus (1980), who found that spouse's attitudes toward violence were more predictive of respondent's violence than were the respondent attitudes.

In contrast, among Anglos, effects of alcohol quantity among females likelihood of spouse beating and being beaten are *not* explained by the husband's drinking, and the husband's drinking is not related directly to spouse beating or being beaten. Again, this may suggest either disinhibitory effects of alcohol on the female's propensity to beat her husband, potentiating effects of female drinking upon interpersonal conflict, and/or possible effects of drinking (at least moderately) upon the likelihood of the wives' victimization. Among Anglo males, quantity was not related to wife beating, and apparent quantity effects upon being beaten were statistically explained by controls for the wife's drinking. Similarly, the wife's drinking was directly associated with the likelihood of being beaten among married Anglo males. In short, among Anglos, it appears to be the wife's drinking, rather than the husbands, that determines the likelihood of violence, though the exact mechanisms are not clear.

Perhaps most interesting are the findings for Blacks. While Blacks report the most spousal violence (particularly Black females), self and spousal drinking patterns appear least relevant in this group. While it is possible that factors other than "disinhibition" or "provocation" effects of alcohol are involved here — e.g., normative acceptance of violence — it is difficult to rule out alcohol effects. Given the extremely high prevalence of reported violence among formerly married Black females, and lacking data on drinking patterns of former spouses, it is possible that drinking may have been implicated in spousal violence, but that Blacks may be more prone to divorce under these circumstances. This possibility merits further examination. At the very least, our comparisons suggest that violence may be "driven" by different factors and different combinations of self and spouse drinking patterns in different ethnic groups.

Before concluding, a comment on marital status effect is in order. The fact that Black females were consistently more likely to report being beaten and beating a spouse, regardless of current marital status, is likely indicative

of a real difference in the prevalence of spousal violence — not an artifact of differential divorce likelihood. Further, the high prevalence of reported violence among formerly married females (Blacks in particular) at least suggests, as noted above, that violence may be a major factor underlying likelihood of divorce. Further, it is of interest that predictors of spousal violence were most consistent among the currently married. This may, in part, reflect the fact that predictors among the currently married are more likely *concurrent* or *proximal* measures than among the formerly married, where we are relating measures of current income, financial stress, and alcohol use to violence taking place in the context of a previous relationship. Indeed, lower income, higher financial stress, and higher alcohol consumption among the formerly married may well be consequences of the divorce process. Another possible explanation might involve selective memory or recall biases among the formerly married — the consistency of reports of being beaten among formerly married females may reflect a negative halo effect wherein one paints a consistent negative picture of an ex-spouse.

A few caveats and suggestions for further research should also be noted at this point. First, the present study is limited in the use of a rather crude measure of spousal violence which does not differentiate the severity, frequency, or specific nature of spousal conflict or violence. More detail on such dimensions, along with more information regarding contextual factors associated with incidents of violence, are needed to clarify the nature and dynamics of the process. Despite measurement limitations, however, the present data are important in pointing to the need for future research on minority violence.

A second, and related, issue concerns the general absence of data regarding characteristics of the spouse or couple (Szinovacz, 1983) Thus, our analyses have highlighted the importance of spouse's drinking among the currently married. Unfortunately, similar data are not available for drinking behavior of *former* spouses. Similarly, while sex role orientations did not emerge as a significant predictor of violence, only the *respondent's* sex role orientation was assessed in the data set. It may well be, that the critical determinant of spousal violence is not the individual's sex role orientation, per se, but rather the specific combination (consistency or inconsistency) of the orientations of the respondent and his/her spouse. It may be premature to rule out the influence of sex role orientations, in the absence of *couple* data (Hotaling and Sugarman, 1986).

Third, while we have regarded being beaten and beating one's spouse as separate outcomes, the cross-tabulation of these two violence measures within ethnicity, sex, and marital status subgroups indicates considerable consistency. In all subgroups except Mexican American males, those reporting being beaten were also likely to report beating their spouse. While

this is not terribly surprising, it is dramatic to note that, among formerly married females who reported having been beaten, over 80% of all ethnic subgroups also reported beating their former spouse. This reached a high of 91% among formerly married Black females. Given such overlap, it is difficult to view spousal violence simply in terms of victimization. Indeed, it was more surprising to find women more likely than men to report beating their spouse. More attention to the contexts and dynamics involved in violence is needed.

Finally, it is acknowledged that the analyses presented here are largely descriptive and do not address the processual nature of relationships between variables. That is, we have examined only the question of whether how well these variables predict reported spousal violence. More elaborate analyses examining possible mediating or moderating variable relationships have not been considered. While potentially interesting hypotheses such as whether financial stress relationships with spousal violence may be mediated by alcohol consumption could be considered, these are left for subsequent analyses.

In sum, the present secondary analyses do not resolve all questions regarding ethnicity and spousal violence. Despite certain limitations, our data begin to address a major gap in the literature, providing some of the first available data on spousal violence among non-Black-minority individuals. Our data provide little evidence of a minority stress argument wherein spousal violence may be viewed as a result of stresses associated with minority status—while Anglo-Black differences are clear, Mexican Americans do not appear particularly prone to spousal violence in our sample. Socioeconomic factors do not explain our observed differences and the role of sociocultural determinants requires further study. While the present paper may raise more questions than it answers, our goal has been to provide preliminary data from a tri-ethnic sample emphasizing the complexity of factors underlying ethnic differences in spousal violence. Simple explanations of violence in terms of poverty, stress, or alcohol abuse are intuitively appealing, though careful analyses addressing the role of such factors vis-à-vis relational dynamics in differing subgroups are clearly needed in future research.

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